



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

## Taylor

Her early years

## Swift

by the people who knew her

### FREE EUROS WALL CHART

### Sport

Magazine



## British gangs moving cocaine cash millions to Dubai in suitcases

David Collins and Will Roe

Dubai is being exploited by organised criminals who are taking millions of pounds in cash from cocaine deals into the country in suitcases.

British mules are openly declaring the money at customs in Dubai international airport and are given forms which can be used to make deposits at banks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The money is then invested in gold or property.

At least 34 criminals have been caught moving £200 million in cash hidden in suitcases on passenger jets out of UK airports destined for Dubai in the past five years. Many have posed as employees of a gold company.

There are no restrictions on the amount of cash which can be brought into the UAE but any sum

above 60,000 dirhams (£12,000) should be declared at customs. The rules are similar at European borders. The difference, according to UK-based officials, is the level of rigour applied at the UAE border to determine the source of the money.

One organised crime gang alone made 83 separate UK-to-Dubai trips in 2019 and 2020, transporting up to £110 million in drugs money. The trips were made by “cash mules” – people willing to travel with money in their suitcases from illegal operations.

Investigators for the UK’s National Crime Agency said the cash would have been recorded by the UAE but no investigation followed.

Ian Truby, a senior investigator for the agency, which is responsible for tackling organised crime, said: “I don’t know why that

wouldn’t necessarily generate some kind of investigation [by the UAE], but it doesn’t and it hasn’t.”

“In the UK we would look at that declaration to determine where the money has come from and does it look legitimate?”

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international body which tackles money laundering, removed the UAE from its “grey list” of countries requiring closer monitoring in February. The force was satisfied the UAE had boosted its international co-operation in money-laundering investigations, as well as increasing the number of investigations and prosecutions within the country. However, in April, the European parliament voted against the FATF move, meaning the UAE has remained on the EU’s high-risk list.

An investigation by The Sunday



**COCAINE INC:**  
NOW LISTEN TO  
OUR EIGHT-PART  
PODCAST THAT  
LAUNCHES TODAY

Times as part of a new eight-part podcast series, *Cocaine Inc.*, raises serious questions about the UAE’s security around money laundering, as criminals exploit weakness on the country’s border and in its gold trade.

A convicted cash mule, a woman in her forties who worked for an organised crime group, said criminals regard Dubai as a safe place to bring cash. “I was always told that once we got on the flight [from the UK], it was going to be absolutely fine,” she said.

At UK airports any cash over £10,000 should be declared on departure but scanning technology is set up for counterterrorism purposes, identifying substances which might be a risk to the flight itself, rather than cash.

Posing as drug dealers, two undercover reporters were told by

a gold trader based in Dubai’s world-famous Gold Souk they could buy up to three kilos of gold a time, worth £180,000, without any checks on the source of the cash.

“Above four to five kilos, then we would require the source of funds. Below that – two to three kilos – there is no problem. I can assure you,” the trader said. One kilo of gold is worth roughly £60,000 in today’s prices. The dealer said the precious metal could be fashioned into gold chains in a workshop to be smuggled back to the UK.

When asked for a response to the investigation, he said he could only trade the equivalent of £10,000 without checks and knew nothing about British criminals buying gold.

The UAE would not comment on

why the money declarations through its international airport by organised criminals did not raise suspicions.

An official said: “The UAE takes its role in protecting the integrity of the global financial system extremely seriously. In February, the FATF ... praised the UAE’s significant progress.”

“In its continuing pursuit of global criminals, the UAE works closely with international partners to disrupt and deter all forms of illicit finance.”

“The UAE is committed to continuing these efforts and actions more than ever today and over the longer term.”

**MAGAZINE**  
Turning dirty cash into gold  
Pages 18-28

## Starmer’s ‘triple lock’ pledge on not hiking tax

### Manifesto will set out five-year freeze on ‘big three’ taxes after Tory claim of £2,000 rise

Caroline Wheeler and Gabriel Pogrund

Sir Keir Starmer will launch the Labour manifesto this week with a cast-iron pledge not to put up income tax, national insurance or VAT.

The plan, which will be revealed by the party’s leader and his shadow cabinet on Thursday, will include a “triple lock” vow that a Labour government will not raise the “big three” taxes for five years.

The commitment is the same as the pledge made by Boris Johnson in the Conservative Party manifesto in 2019, which he later broke by raising national insurance to pay for social care and clearing the NHS backlog.

It means that Rachel Reeves, if she becomes chancellor, will have to make spending cuts or find other tax rises. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has repeatedly warned that whichever party wins on July 4 will have to find tens of billions to meet the fiscal rules and ensure debt is falling as a share of national income.

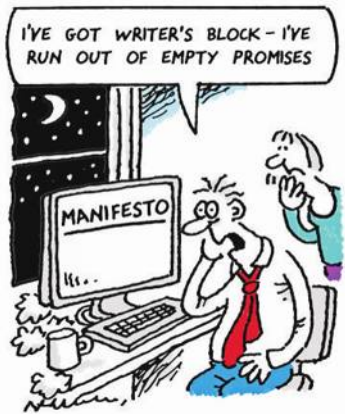
Other developments:

- Labour manifesto will also include a commitment to ban

bonuses for the bosses of water companies that pump sewage into rivers, and one to oppose new oil and gas licences for the North Sea.

- Gary Smith, general secretary of the GMB union, told Labour that “change can’t be just a snappy election slogan”.
- Rishi Sunak cancelled interviews as the row over his early D-Day exit continued.

### NEWMAN’S VIEW



- Labour announced plans to fix the prisons crisis by unblocking the planning process and classifying prisons as being of “national importance” to deliver an extra 20,000 prison places.
- A new Opinion poll gave Labour an 18-point lead, putting the party on 42 per cent and the Conservatives on 24 per cent. Nigel Farage’s Reform UK was on 12 per cent.

Tax has been one of the most fiercely contested battlegrounds in the election campaign. Last week Starmer accused Sunak of lying with his claim that Labour’s plans would cost families more than £2,000. The Conservatives launch a new campaign video today explaining the maths behind their £2,094 figure.

While Starmer and Reeves have long insisted they would not raise taxes on working people, the decision to commit themselves to a formal tax lock is an attempt to neutralise Sunak’s most potent attack line. The plans echo the dramatic moment when Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, in the run-up to New Labour’s 1997 landslide victory, pledged not to raise tax rates and to stick by the Conservatives’

**Continued on page 2 →**

## Daring raid returns Gaza motorcycle hostage

ISRAELI ARMY VIA REUTERS



Noa Argamani, 26, is reunited with her father after eight months in captivity. She was abducted by Hamas from the Nova festival on October 7, and is one of four who were rescued from Gaza yesterday

**Gabrielle Weiniger and Anshel Pfeffer** Tel Aviv

Holding a plastic bottle of Coca-Cola, her father putting his arms around her, Noa Argamani smiled for a photograph that restored hope to a nation – a picture that granted a mother’s dying wish.

Eight months ago on October 7, Argamani, 26, was filmed screaming on the back of a motorcycle as Hamas gunmen ripped her away from the life that she knew, shots echoing about her as the killings at the Nova music festival raged on.

Now she and three other hostages – Almog Meir Jan, 22, Andrey Kozlov, 27, and Shlomi Ziv, 41 – are safe at last, after a daring operation carried out by Israeli special forces. It has given Israel – an increasingly isolated and despairing nation – its greatest morale boost in months.

It was broad daylight when vehicles full of undercover operatives from Yamam, the secretive anti-terrorism unit of the Israeli police, and Shin Bet, the Israeli equivalent of MI5, smuggled themselves into one of the most overcrowded refugee camps in the world. It was a mission the Israeli military described as “the ultimate surprise”.

In one building in the camp Argamani was held; in a second 200 metres away the men – Meir, Kozlov and Ziv. The hostages, according to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), were held in rooms heavily guarded by armed militants but still inhabited by Gazan civilian families.

“The tension in the command room was very, very high. When [IDF chief of staff] Herzi Halevi said the approval word, when he said go, at 11.25am, the raid started simultaneously in both buildings,” Rear-Admiral Daniel Hagari told journalists in a briefing yesterday

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## Hunt: Six-figure earners need help

Harry Yorke and Caroline Wheeler

Jeremy Hunt has suggested he wants people earning more than £100,000 to keep more of their money, arguing that removing tax “cliff edges” would help boost Britain’s productivity.

The chancellor said the tapered removal of the tax-free personal allowance and the end of free childcare entitlement when people began earning six figures were “things I think we definitely want to make progress on” if re-elected.

Separately, the Conservatives have set out a plan to save up to

£12 billion of welfare spending, amid projections showing the cost of working-age disability and health benefits will surge from £69 billion to £90 billion by the end of the decade. Some of these savings could be spent on tax cuts.

Mel Stride, the work and pensions secretary, said: “You have got to be fair to the taxpayer across the entire welfare system. If the welfare system is going to command the support of the public it has to be seen to be fair and sustainable.”

People earning between £100,000 and £125,140 are caught in what is known as the “60 per cent tax trap”. The personal

allowance, which allows you to earn up to £12,570 tax-free, is gradually tapered down by £1 for every £2 earned over the £100,000 threshold.

The taper was announced in 2009 by Labour following the financial crash. However, due to fiscal drag, the number of taxpayers losing at least some of their tax-free allowance has tripled since then to an estimated 1.8 million.

The government’s free childcare offer is also capped so that families where one parent earns more than £100,000 cannot access it, but a household where both parents

**Continued on page 7 →**

## Volunteer army search for missing TV doctor

Katie Tarrant and David Brown Symi

An army of volunteers has joined the search for the missing television doctor Michael Mosley after his family have said they will “not lose hope”.

Greek authorities appeared to rule out the possibility that the 67-year-old had fallen into the water after he disappeared on the island of Symi, near Rhodes, on Wednesday. All sea-based search operations have ceased, the Hellenic police confirmed yesterday.

It is expected that efforts to find

the missing doctor will resume today, concentrating on the area between the port and coastal town of PEDI towards Agia Marina beach.

Manolis Tsioubakas, the co-ordinator of civil alerts in Greece, said that more than 100 police and rescuers had been involved in the search mission since Mosley was reported missing when he did not return from a walk.

Jan, 68, and Sue, 70, both British tourists, joined the rescue operation yesterday, having come to the island on a walking holiday with a group of seven friends.

The women set off from their accommodation in Symi town at

9am and walked for several hours over the rocky mountain path towards PEDI. “When we heard [the news], we thought, ‘Let’s go and do the walk again’. If you think you can be of any help, it’s the right thing to do,” Jan said.

There is a main path through the rocky hills from PEDI towards Agia Marina, part of which a Sunday Times reporter walked yesterday morning. There is also a separate lower ridge, which could act as a shortcut, explained Sue, an experienced walker and avid listener to Mosley’s programme *Just One Thing*, on BBC Radio 4.

“It’s uneven underfoot but it’s

not treacherous,” Jan said. “We did this exact walk in reverse on Tuesday and it’s not particularly difficult.”

Trisha from Sheffield, a member of the same walking group, also joined the search yesterday. “This morning [a friend] came into

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Almog Meir Jan embraces his mother after his release; Noa Argamani talks to the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog; Andrey Kozlov is escorted to safety; and an embrace for Shlomi Ziv from his sister Revital Nasi, left, and his cousin Liat Ariel

# A surgical strike, a vicious gunfight, and celebrations broke the sabbath’s quiet

→ Continued from page 1  
afternoon. “It was an operation like Entebbe,” Hagari said, referring to the Israeli hostage rescue in a Ugandan airport in 1976.

Israeli intelligence had learnt of the hostages’ whereabouts a fortnight earlier. Models were built to simulate the mission, but there was always a chance the hostages would be moved before they could be reached, or that they would die in the process.

“We decided to do both of them together. If we’d have chosen only one, there was a risk to the other one. The killing of our hostages was a huge risk – they would have known we were preparing for another raid,” Hagari added.

The captors holding Argamani were taken by surprise and killed swiftly by Israeli forces, who took her to the beach, where a first helicopter awaited.

In the second flat, where the three other hostages were held, a fierce gunfight ensued as the special forces tried to leave, and Chief Inspector Arnon Zmora was critically wounded.

One of the vehicles was disabled by the firefight and had to be left behind as the convoy raced to the beach and the second waiting helicopter.

“When we started to go out from the buildings [with the hostages], a lot of fire – a lot of fire – was around us: terrorists running in the streets with RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], into cars, at the warriors [IDF troops], many, many of them,” Hagari said.

“It needed to be like a surgical brain operation. So accurate. Imagine that in a civilian street, with a lot of people around, trucks and cars and people.” The mission was conducted as thousands roamed the camp.

Meir, Kzolv and Ziv were flown out of the strip by the second helicopter on the beach near the camp.

Hamas left 364 civilians dead at the festival where the four were captured. Argamani was seen in one of the first videos from that day on the back of a motorbike, her hands outstretched, reaching for her boyfriend as she begged not to be murdered. He is still in Gaza.

All four of the rescued hostages are said to be in good medical condition and have been transferred to a hospital in central Israel for checks.

The rescue came at a moment of national despair for Israel. Benny Gantz, seen as a more level-headed member of Israel’s intimate four-member war cabinet, was about to resign in a scheduled address last night over Benjamin Netanyahu’s lack of postwar planning, leaving war decisions to the whim of Israel’s far-right coalition government.

Gantz postponed his announcement as news of the raid captured the hearts of Israelis, who stopped what they were doing, breaking the quiet of the sabbath to celebrate the hostages’ return.

A lifeguard on one of Tel Aviv’s most popular beaches announced the news on the loudspeakers in his hut. It was met with cheers and loud applause, as everyone reached for their phone to share the moment the public had been waiting for in the war. The rescue of live hostages was a triumph in its fight against Hamas.

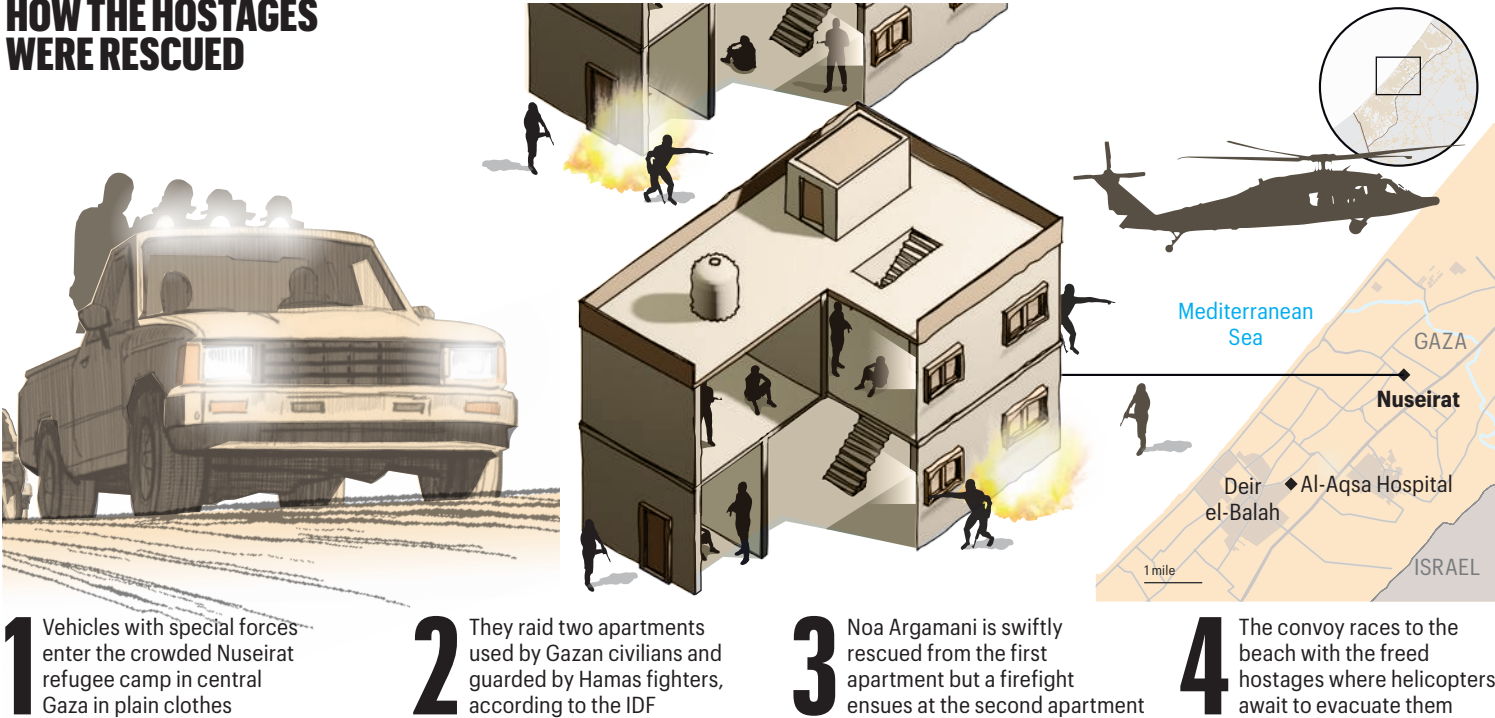
Netanyahu said: “Yet again you have proven that Israel does not surrender to terrorism, and acts with boundless valour and resourcefulness to return home our hostages.

“We are obligated to do the same in the future. We will not relent until we com-



EYAD BABA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; ISMAEL ABU DAYYAH/AP

## HOW THE HOSTAGES WERE RESCUED



**Top, buildings destroyed in the Israeli raid; right, Palestinians mourn relatives killed in the bombing of al-Aqsa hospital, below, Noa Argamani on a motorcycle during kidnapping**



plete the mission and return all our hostages home, both the living and the deceased.”

World leaders welcomed an operation that has raised the hopes of the Israeli people.

Speaking in Paris at the end of a week commemorating the D-Day landings, President Biden promised that America “won’t stop working until all the hostages are home and a ceasefire is reached. That’s essential to happen.”

President Macron also congratulated Israel on the release of the hostages, while the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, called the rescue “an important sign of hope”.

Israel’s defence minister, Yoav Gallant, said: “This is one of the most heroic and extraordinary operations I have witnessed over the course of 47 years serving in Israel’s defence establishment.”

The rescue operation came amid heavy strikes on central Gaza over the

past few days, intensifying yesterday. The Hamas media office said 210 people were killed and more than 400 wounded.

Earlier last week an Israeli airstrike on a school in Nuseirat camp, central Gaza – where the IDF claimed Hamas fighters were sheltering – killed at least 35 people, among them children. Hamas accused Israel of engaging in “brutal and savage aggression”.

Residents there said the dead and injured victims of the intense Israeli bombardment were overflowing from the corridors of the al-Aqsa hospital. Al-Aqsa is said to be the only functioning medical facility in central Gaza after Israel’s all-out offensive over the past several days.

Previous rescue operations have been costly to Israel, which has brought home the bodies of an estimated 19 hostages, including three who were killed by their would-be rescuers as they waved a makeshift white flag.

Ori Megidish, an observer soldier who

was kidnapped while serving on the Gaza border on October 7, was rescued in an operation early in the war, and two kibbutz-dwellers, Louis Har and Fernando Marman, were rescued in Rafah in February.

Argamani was held on her own, under the watchful guard of Hamas fighters, until an Israeli helicopter flew her back to Israel. She was received at the Sheba medical centre, whose doctors have a strict protocol for receiving hostages that includes sexual trauma and abuse in captivity. Argamani had been last seen alive in January in a video published by Hamas, in which she was forced to announce the death of two other Israeli hostages.

At least 43 of the 120 hostages still in Gaza are no longer thought to be alive, according to Israel. Negotiations for the



“It had to be like brain surgery – so accurate

release of the remaining captives are continuing as part of a ceasefire plan proposed by Israel and heavily backed by the US administration, after more than 100 Israeli and foreign nationals were released during a week-long ceasefire in November last year.

Argamani’s mother, Liora, has stage 4 brain cancer and has previously appealed to world leaders to grant her dying wish to see her daughter one last time. On the day of her rescue, the emotional scenes have changed the mood for four families and for the Israeli public.

Liora pleaded in March: “I am asking you, President Joe Biden. I don’t have a lot of time left in this world. It may be my last wish. I’m really begging you. Please help me.”

The mother and daughter were reunited last night. For one family in this war, their wish has been granted.

For others on both sides of this conflict, the torment continues.

## Today’s highlights

- 7.30am** Israel Defence Forces spokesman **Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner**
- 8.15am** **Matthew Taylor**, chief executive of the NHS Confederation
- 10.05am** Shadow justice secretary **Shabana Mahmood**, right
- 10.20am** Work and pensions secretary **Mel Stride**
- 2.30pm** Taxation expert **Dan Neidle** busts the parties’ tax plan myths

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## Starmer’s ‘triple lock’ pledge on not hiking tax

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day-to-day public spending plans for the first two years.

On the campaign trail in London yesterday Starmer said there “won’t be any surprises on tax”. He added:

“All of our plans are fully costed, fully funded, none of them involving tax rises over and above those that we have already set out.” Labour has said it would introduce VAT on private school fees and a windfall tax on energy companies and would make non-doms pay tax on their overseas income.

At a campaign event in Farnborough, Reeves said: “I would like to reduce taxes on working people, but you have to be able to say where the

money is going to come from if you make a pledge.”

Starmer is expected to resist calls to make new spending commitments when he unveils the manifesto. Senior Labour sources say he wants a mandate for change built on “fundamental reform, not tax and spend”.

Labour insiders believe the Tories have walked into a trap by announcing a raft of unfunded policies, which they are comparing to Jeremy Corbyn’s 2019 manifesto, in

which individually popular policies were shoehorned in, leaving the party looking “desperate and chaotic”.

Labour finalised its manifesto at a secret “Clause V” meeting on Friday afternoon, even though Unite refused to endorse it. The union has reservations about Labour’s position on fire-and-rehire practices, zero-hours contracts and the halt to new oil and gas licences.

Editorial, page 20

# Felicity Kendal’s good life threatened by Battersea tower proposal

William Turvill

At first, Felicity Kendal assumed it must be “some kind of silly joke”. But the plan for a 34-storey residential tower block on the bank of the Thames, near her home in Chelsea, southwest London, is entirely serious. Kendal, 77, who became a household name playing Barbara in the 1970s sitcom *The Good Life*, said the development, called One Battersea Bridge, must not get planning permission. “Who on earth would think that building such a massive tower by this bridge was a good idea?” she said. She is not the only local celebrity appalled by the plans for the development. The guitarist and singer Eric Clapton, who has a house in Chelsea, has also objected. Perched on the Thames,

next to Battersea Bridge, the tower would measure up to 119 metres tall, making it higher than St Paul’s Cathedral, Centre Point and the nearby Battersea Power Station. A vacant office block on the site, known as the Glassmill, would be demolished. The company behind the scheme is Promontoria Battersea, a subsidiary of Cerberus Capital Management, a US investment giant with \$60 billion (£47 billion) of assets which shares its name with the monstrous three-headed hound that guards the gates of the underworld in Greek mythology. It is run by Stephen Feinberg, a billionaire ally of the former president Donald Trump. Kendal, who has lived in Chelsea since 1991, said: “When I first saw the plan for

this development I thought that it must be some kind of silly joke . . . But it is clearly not a joke, so I am backing the campaign. I have loved this stretch of the river for decades. It is beautiful and relatively untouched by high-rise property compared to elsewhere. So much of the river in London has been ruined by great tower blocks of apartments. “This section must be protected and not just handed over to foreign investors to make a pile of money for themselves. This whole plan is totally wrong and must be dismissed. It simply cannot be allowed to happen.” London’s skyline has been transformed by a proliferation of high-rise buildings and towers over the past 20 or so years, with the 310m tall Shard near London



Felicity Kendal says the 34-floor tower will ruin the stretch of the Thames “that I have loved for decades”



Bridge station the most prominent. Last month, a report by the New London Architecture think tank found that 270 tall buildings, measuring 20 storeys or over, were built in the capital between 2013 and 2023, and that a further 583 are in various stages of planning. The capital’s financial centres, the City and Canary Wharf, both in the east of the capital, are notably dense with shiny towers, but more tall buildings have started to emerge to the west. Near the site of the latest proposed tower is One Nine Elms, a 58-floor, 199m tall pair of residential towers, a project that began in 2015 and finished last year. Promontoria has enlisted developer Rockwell Property and the architect Farrells to work on the scheme. It

requires approval from Wandsworth council, which is consulting on the development until June 20. Rob McGibbon, 58, a Chelsea resident and freelance journalist, is leading the campaign to prevent the project from taking place. More than 1,000 petitioners have signed an online campaign against the construction that he set up on Change.org. McGibbon, who specialises in celebrity interviews, hopes to rouse the interests of several more well-known locals, who include Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger and *Summer of ’69* singer Bryan Adams. He previously claimed victory with a campaign urging Transport for London to install a pedestrian crossing on Battersea Bridge after he witnessed the death of a

jogger, Jack Ryan, 29, a marketing professional, who was hit by a car. On his latest campaign, McGibbon said: “One Battersea Bridge is a monstrous development. It is a monument to avarice and arrogance and simply must not go ahead. The strength of feeling against it locally is very strong and united.” A spokesman for the development said the project would create 142 homes, 45 of which would be “affordable, including 20 family homes, tackling an urgent need for new, high-quality housing in Wandsworth”. He added: “Designed by the world-renowned architect, Farrells, the scheme includes 100 per cent affordable office space, a new community hub for local charities, and public realm improvements to regenerate this under-utilised location.”

# She made my daughter so happy she cried – now I’m a Swiftie for life

The 600-mile round trip, the extortionate tickets and, yes, the feather boa were worth it to make our foreign editor’s two girls’ dreams come true at the star’s opening UK gig

Ben Hoyle

It’s 9.45 on a Friday night in a Scottish sports stadium. I have just run out of wine and I’m daydreaming about the battered sausage and chips I saw a woman eating on the way to the ground. About 100 metres away, Taylor Swift, who must be on her tenth costume change by now, shows no sign whatsoever of slowing down. Instead, this Amazonian billionaire, in a billowing cream dress, is embarking on a run of songs from her new album, which I have been slightly dreading. For much of April and May, *The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology* was impossible to escape in our house. You would hear it playing in the bathroom before school and when our daughters were supposed to be doing their homework in the evening. I didn’t like it as much as I had hoped to. Now, at Murrayfield, on the first night of Swift’s UK tour, it looks and sounds incredible. The coloured lights of 73,000 illuminated wristbands shimmer in the gathering darkness and the crowd knows more or less every single lyric, just as they have done for everything she has played over the past two and a half hours. They don’t just sing along – they roar the words and act them out, performing these complex, emotional narratives to their phones, to each other and to Taylor. I’m with my wife and kids listening to a song I don’t love and I realise I couldn’t be happier. Like everybody here, we have our Taylor Swift story. The Hoyles moved to Los Angeles in 2015, about nine months after Swift’s fifth album, *1989*, turned her from a crossover country-music star into a global pop supernova. I bought the CD because I thought Mollie, 8, and Rosie, 6, would enjoy it. It quickly became a favourite on long road trips and over the next six years we must have driven thousands of miles listening to *1989* and all the Taylor albums that followed. By the time we moved back to the UK in 2021, we were all well versed in her musical evolution, her romantic history and her emerging political activism. The most Taylor-focused wing of the

family started thinking about this tour in October 2022, when Mollie, now 17, bought her new album, *Midnights*, on vinyl, locking in a pre-sale booking slot for the world tour. We then spent the first morning of our summer holiday last year ignoring the many deservedly world-famous sights of Barcelona and huddling around multiple screens in our room so we could maximise our chances of getting Taylor tickets when they went on sale. But a mishap with a Ticketmaster password meant we got booted out of the queue for the London dates and ended up panic-buying Edinburgh tickets instead. Minutes later, I found out that even the Holiday Inn Express was charging more per night than I think I’ve ever spent on a hotel room before. We booked a one-bedroom studio with a sofa bed in a serviced apartment block for similar money. With flights, it brought the cost of the concert to the price of a decent family holiday. We arrive in Edinburgh from London on Friday afternoon. Taking the tram, we see a huge scrum of people trying to get into Murrayfield at 3.45pm – three and a half hours before Taylor is due on stage, and before the stadium has even opened. Disembarking in the city centre, it is clear that the city of Adam Smith, Dame Muriel Spark and Irvine Welsh has lost its collective mind over Taylor Swift. Carts selling brightly coloured cowboy hats and feather boas are stationed along the main thoroughfares. A never-ending column of people in sequins, miniskirts, Taylor T-shirts and homemade Eras Tour jackets is marching towards the stadium. Cafés and restaurants are offering themed “Taylor’s version” menus. Record shops have entire walls of Taylor Swift vinyls and CDs. Waterstones has piles of Taylor books in the window. Starbucks riffs on a classic lyric about Taylor’s “long list of ex-lovers” that my wife, and many many other people, always hear as “Starbucks lovers”. There is a life-sized Taylor cut-out in the foyer of our apartment block and Taylor songs playing on the sound system. There are Taylor lyrics written on the bathroom mirror in our room. An hour later, with stress levels

Taylor Swift on stage in Edinburgh and, below right, some of her costume changes. Top right, Ben Hoyle (with boa) and daughters Rosie and Mollie were among the fans in Murrayfield



mounting and the room strewn with glitter, make-up products and abandoned outfit choices, we step out into a blustery wind and join the moving column of Swifties. My children insist I stop to buy one of those feather boas. Other men stand outside pubs wearing the Kansas City Chiefs shirt of Swift’s boyfriend, the American football player Travis Kelce. At Haymarket, a sign outside the Platform 5 bar says “Going to see Taylor? Nip in for a Swiftie.” The mood is cheerful and expectant. In front of us, several small children are chanting “Teel-er SWUFT! Teel-er SWUFT!” over and over. Inside the stadium, the sequin-clad crowd glints in the early evening sunlight like a medieval army lining up for battle. Shortly before 7.15pm, a giant clock appears on the screen, counting down the minutes. The crowd scream every one of the last ten seconds. Mollie cries with joy when Taylor appears. Despite Swift’s world-conquering fame and vast wealth, she has kept an intensely personal bond with her fanbase. When

3½	Number of hours Taylor Swift spent on stage in Edinburgh
46	Number of songs performed
12	Number of outfit changes

you put tens of thousands of people united by that bond together in one place, and when those fans have in most cases already spent hours raking over gig footage on social media and watched the film of the Eras tour, you get a concert that feels like an encore from the start. Afterwards, it’s the sensory impact of the show that stays with you: the heat you can feel coming off the giant flamethrowers, the sheer volume and passion of the crowd. Or at least the whole of the crowd except for the woman in silver-sequined jacket in front of me, who, astoundingly, spends nearly the entire concert sitting down and reading a novel on her Kindle. The other thing I feel is relief. It was worth it after all. I won’t soon forget the moment Taylor strikes up the first bars of *Betty* and Rosie, 15, claps her hands to her face and breaks into a grin the size of Murrayfield. She looks almost shocked, even though Taylor plays it at every show. “This is my favourite song,” Rosie says. Afterwards, both girls are profusely grateful. I get the sort of hugs from them that you miss when your daughters turn into older teenagers. The walk home is as good as the concert. It looks as if there are a thousand hen parties marching up the main road into Edinburgh city centre. There are cowboy hats and sequins as far as the eye can see. Quite a lot of women are in socks, or bare feet by now. It’s close to midnight and people are tired but happy. A mile from the stadium, near the top of Princes Street, a man has flung his window open and pointed his speakers to the road. *Blank Space* from 1989 is pumping out at nightclub volume. “Got a long list of ex-lovers/they’ll tell you I’m insane/ ‘cause you know I love the players” ... it goes. And half the street shouts back: “And you LOVE THE GAME!”

Early years of a pop phenomenon, Magazine, pages 8-17

# Actor’s key tip for success in the role of Mr Emma Thompson: regular therapy

Audrey Ward

For some couples, it’s a regular date night. For others, the key to a happy marriage is never letting the sun set on an argument. For Greg Wise and Dame Emma Thompson – married for 21 years – it’s therapy. “I think, honestly, for everyone it is sort of essential,” Wise said. “Whether it saved our marriage ... I don’t know if

we were ever going to rush off and start new lives elsewhere, but it’s definitely enhanced our marriage.” Wise, 58, started having therapy in his early forties, after the death of his parents and long after he had met Thompson, 65, on the set of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1995. “Em was already doing therapy when I met her 30 years ago,” he said. “I was a little bit more reticent of getting into it.”

He now has therapy every week, but never with Thompson. “I’m treating it now just as you would treat your car running smoothly,” he said, “make sure you keep topping the oil up and you fill [it with] petrol.” Therapy also helped him deal with the grief after his only sibling, Clare, died from bone cancer at the age of 51 in 2016. Wise said that the experience of becoming her full-time carer made him “a

more compassionate, more considerate, empathic person”. Wise moved into her flat in West Hampstead, north London, just down the street from his house, in her final months. The exhaustion and isolation took its toll and after her death, he struggled to resume his roles as husband, father and member of society during an “exquisitely painful” period. Wise, an ambassador for

the Carers Trust, said: “I couldn’t deal with anything. ‘And then, God bless her, Em said, ‘Go away, go to Scotland’. We’ve got a cottage on the west coast. I went up there on my own ... and howled and howled and howled.” Two days after Clare was cremated, Wise was on set playing Lord Mountbatten in *The Crown*. He told only the producer and director. Wise is writing a book



Wise and Thompson in 2019

about his experience of grief and wants bereavement to be taught as part of the school curriculum. “There are two days in your life that are shorter than 24 hours: birth and death. We concentrate on the first one and completely ignore the second,” he said. He is pulling together a “death team” and is meeting Dame Rachel de Souza, the children’s commissioner. His book will also include

instructions on making a death box, which would include passwords, codes and key documents such as a will. He is in awe of the role played by the UK’s seven million carers, he said, and believes the £81.90 carer’s allowance falls far short of what they deserve. “I was doing it for a matter of weeks,” he said. “There are people who do this year after year after year, and I don’t know how they can do it.”

# King and William’s D-Day display of a rivalry in retreat

## Love and unity at last in Westminster

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER/BENJAMIN WHEELER/PA WIRE

The way the two worked in unison last week shows Charles’s irritation at being overshadowed lies firmly in the past

Roya Nikkiah Royal Editor

Once upon a time, not so long ago, the sight of the Prince of Wales rubbing shoulders with more world leaders than the monarch would have induced a wave of anxiety in the court of King Charles. For years, those close to the King and his heir experienced the sensitivities about William and Kate’s profile sometimes overshadowing Charles and Camilla. Royal insiders have spoken of Charles’s “green-eyed monster” displays of frustration when the younger couple received more prominent media coverage.

William’s friends observe that the prince, who regularly beats his father in polls charting the royal family’s popularity, has always been conscious of not “queering his father’s pitch”.

But something has changed. It was visible in the royal choreography on the beaches of Normandy last week where William attended two high-profile events marking the 80th anniversary of D-Day. Without the Princess of Wales by his side, because she is still undergoing preventive chemotherapy, William was front and centre at the commemorations.

On Friday morning he joined Justin Trudeau and Gabriel Attal, the Canadian and French prime ministers, at Juno beach for a ceremony honouring veterans. In the afternoon he took his place next to three presidents – Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron and Volodymyr Zelenskyy – with more than 25 heads of state at Omaha beach.

Mindful that he is still receiving cancer treatment, the King, 75, is “adapting” his

KIN CHEUNG/PA WIRE



William joins the King and Queen at the British D-Day commemorations in Portsmouth on Wednesday

programme and attended the Royal British Legion’s ceremony at the British Normandy Memorial, Ver-sur-Mer, with the Queen on Friday morning alongside Macron and his wife, Brigitte. Charles flew home that day, content to let his heir deputise for him at the main event.

### KATE’S APOLOGY FOR MISSING REHEARSAL

The Princess of Wales apologised for her absence yesterday at a military event in London. Kate, a colonel in the Irish Guards, wrote a note that was read to the regiment at a rehearsal for Trooping the Colour, which takes place on Saturday. “I am very sorry that I’m unable to take the salute at this year’s colonel’s review,” wrote Kate, who has cancer. “I do hope that I am able to represent you all once again very soon.”

The Irish Guards said on X/Twitter that they were “deeply touched” to receive the letter. “We continue to wish Her Royal Highness well in her recovery and send her our very best wishes.”

A friend of the King says that in recent years, Charles’s tendency to consult William on tricky family issues involving the Duke of York and the Duke and Duchess of Sussex has helped to ease anxieties of the past and boosted their personal and working relationships.

“If there was ever a green-eyed monster or a sense of rivalry between the two, that is a chapter of the past,” the friend said. “The King sees his son as a useful ally on family matters and increasingly in discharging the duties of nation and state. When you are monarch, you’re not counting the column inches. You’re thinking about performing your role for your country, not just as King Charles but as ‘the family’.”

William was in his element in Normandy, detouring from his schedule for a surprise stop in the town of Arromanches to meet British veterans. His Army Air Corps tie carried a subtle message, a nod to the military role handed from father to son last month, when William took over from Charles as colonel-in-chief of the corps.

To many royal watchers, Harry’s absence from D-Day events where, had he been a working royal, he would have played a significant role only highlights the importance of the strengthening bond between Charles and William.

The King left Normandy on Friday before the main international event to pace himself as he recovers from cancer. A friend of his observed: “The King did the heavy lifting in the morning, his heir was there to honour veterans later in his absence. Those decisions are very carefully made, they’re not done without consideration about the optics.”

In his speech, Charles invoked the memory of George VI: “United, they fought together for what my grandfather ... described as ‘a world in which goodness and honour may be the foundation of the life of men in every land’.”

Having William as his stand-in for part of the event shows that Charles also has an eye on the future.



Olivia Henson became the new duchess of Westminster when she married the duke, Hugh Grosvenor, in the society wedding of the year at Chester Cathedral on Friday. The photographs were released yesterday. Prince William was one of the ushers but Prince Harry was absent — he is said to have agreed with the duke that he would miss the event to avoid a media scrum

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FAREWELL TO MAN WHO CHANGED OUR WORLD VIEW

**Rosamund Urwin**

On Christmas Eve 1968, as the crew of Apollo 8 orbited the moon, they were suddenly struck by the most extraordinary image.

“Oh my God, look at that picture over there! There’s the Earth coming up. Wow, is that pretty!” William Anders shouted to his fellow astronauts, Jim Lovell and Frank Borman.

“You got a colour film, Jim? Hand me a roll of colour, quick, would you?”

The result was a photograph of the Earth peeking out behind from the lunar landscape and surrounded by black space that would help to boost the global environmental movement, a reminder of the fragility of life on our planet.

William Anders took the Earthrise photo in 1968 from on board Apollo 8. He died in a plane crash on Friday, aged 90

Anders, who died on Friday morning at the age of 90, later said that the photograph, which came to be known as Earthrise, was his most significant contribution to the space programme, along with making sure the Apollo 8 command module and service module worked.

He said of the photograph: “We came all the way to the moon to discover Earth.”

Anders was killed when a small plane he was piloting alone dived into the water near Roche Harbour, in Washington state, northwest of Seattle.

According to the US Coast Guard, a search crew recovered a body on Friday, and the causes of the crash are being investigated.

Anders and his wife, Valerie, had six children.



WILLIAM ANDERS/NASA

MISSING DOCTOR

‘We won’t lose hope,’ says wife as hunt in heat grows

→ Continued from page 1

my room and said, ‘Let’s go search for Michael,’ she told the BBC. “We were feeling kind of helpless, so the least we could do is go along the path again.”

Near the resort of Agia Marina, the search included a coastal area that is known locally as “the Abyss”. A group of three firefighters climbed over rocks around a water-filled “bottomless” cave and a network of tunnels.

A local resident said: “The tunnels go on for kilometres in every direction. There is water in them. There is one hole which ‘breathes’ when the waves come in and out. The old men used to catch pigeons there because it is where they nest.”

The firefighters spent about an hour searching the area. “We have looked but it is a lot of rocks,” one of the searchers said. “There [are] a lot of areas to look at.”

Mosley’s four adult children arrived on Symi on Friday night, planning to join the search effort alongside firefighters and volunteers on the island. “They are stressing so much for their father. They want to find him as soon as possible,” Tsioubkas said.

The mayor of Symi, Eleftherios Papakaloudouka, said yesterday morning that the search effort had shifted from Pedi and expanded into the mountains on the north coast of the island.

“We are searching an area of around 6.5km, which is in the mountains, and it’s very difficult to pass,” the mayor said. “There are only rocks, no shade, no trees. With 37C heat you can’t survive.”

Mosley’s wife, Clare Bailey Mosley, who reported him missing on Wednesday, has been helping to identify her husband on CCTV, Papakaloudouka said. “Until they find him, it is agony,” he added.

The mayor said he believed that Mosley did not have any water with him. Authorities also believe that he could have sustained an injury on the walk, such as being bitten by a snake. Five species of snake can be found on Symi – the black whip snake, European worm snake, coin-marked snake, cat snake and dwarf snake. Only the black whip snake can deliver a venom that is dangerous to humans.

“He was wearing shorts. A grass snake could have bitten him. They can be dangerous,” the Symi mayor said. Two locals in the Pedi beach area said that residents who had been bitten by snakes had been hospitalised.

Constantina Dimoglidou, a senior spokeswoman for the Greek police, reinforced this theory. “He may have slipped, tripped, fallen, even been bitten by a snake, remaining injured somewhere,” she said.

There is some concern that Mosley could have fallen ill during his walk in the sweltering heat. He was walking



at the hottest part of the day, leaving the beach about 1.30pm. Mosley was wearing a baseball cap and carrying an umbrella as a sun shade.

There are a number of sheep huts on the barren and exposed route from Pedi to the town of Symi, which are being searched. He might have sought shelter and become too unwell to move.

A yellow weather warning was in place on Wednesday, with temperatures reaching 35C, much higher than the average temperature in June of about 26C. The Hellenic National Meteorological Service issued a weather warning for extreme heat last week.

Bailey Mosley, who is also a doctor, said: “It has been three days since Michael left the beach to go for a walk. The longest and most unbearable days for myself and my children. The search is ongoing and our family are so incredibly grateful to the people of Symi, the Greek authorities and the British consulate, who are working tirelessly to help find Michael. We will not lose hope.”

CCTV footage from a house in Pedi at about 2pm on Wednesday appeared to show the presenter near a marina at the

far end of the village joining a mountain path that leads inland.

One of the rescuers said that this decision was “inexplicable”, adding: “The path is not easy to follow. If he took a wrong turn, he would be lost. He could be anywhere. It is a race against time.”

The presenter is well known for BBC shows including *Trust Me, I’m a Doctor* and *The One Show*, in addition to ITV’s *This Morning*. He is also a columnist for the Daily Mail and has written several books promoting intermittent fasting diets, including the 5:2 diet.

**Volunteers are retracing possible routes taken by Michael Mosley, left, and with his wife, Clare, below**



IOANNIS ALEXOPOULOS FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



- 1 June 5, morning: Michael Mosley and his wife arrive at St Nicholas beach by boat from Symi town
- 2 1pm: After leaving a restaurant, Mosley – carrying an umbrella to protect against the sun – decides to return to the town
- 3 2pm: Mosley is seen on CCTV taking a mountain path that leads inland
- 4 7.30pm: Mosley doesn’t return and the alarm is raised by his wife



Expert whose simple messages on diet make him a household name

**SHAUN LINTERN**

Health Editor



For a nation of snackers, Michael Mosley has a simple prescription: stop eating so much and so often.

While it might not be revolutionary health advice, his genius is to be the best advertisement for his own method, demonstrating to a public keen to unlock the secret to a healthier life that there is hope.

If it works for him, it could work for you too.

His popularity for millions across television and radio lies in connecting with audiences by being their guinea-pig-in-chief.

Mosley, 67, is one of the most prominent examples of “gonzo” health journalism. In the past two decades it has made him a household name, a bestselling author and a regular on our TV screens.

His huge popularity explains how the country – with all the busyness of last week’s news agenda from the commemorations for the 80th anniversary of D-Day to Taylor Swift’s Eras tour landing in Britain – is worried by his disappearance.

Everybody wants their favourite doctor to be found safe and well.

His exploits include severely restricting his food intake, documenting the effects on biomarkers in his blood and overall health and even reversing his type 2 diabetes.

Mosley has had his blood sucked by leeches, injected himself with snake venom and in one memorable BBC documentary he knowingly infected himself with tapeworms.

He has also tried magic mushrooms and took the truth serum sodium thiopental. All while being filmed, scanned and subjected to repeated, often invasive scientific tests.

His methods might lack the scientific rigour of modern medical trials but his light, personal style on camera, with an emphasis on a show rather than tell approach, makes compelling watching and has earned him the trust

of his audience. When he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 2012, it was the trigger for a dramatic experiment by Mosley who spoke to scientists about the theory of fasting and whether it could be possible to reverse his disease.

He researched the 5:2 diet, a type of intermittent fasting where calories are restricted for two days of the week to 600 per day for a man, and 500 for a woman, with normal calorie intake for the other five days. Mosley convinced editors at the BBC to film his journey.

By the end, he had lost 9kg and his blood sugar levels were healthy.

In 2013 he published his book *The Fast Diet*, co-authored with Mimi Spencer, which kick-started a diet revolution. It has since been published in 42 countries and sold millions of copies.

The NHS has even followed his approach, rolling out a diabetes diet programme aimed at reversing the disease.

Research has shown that a three-month regime, including soups and shakes alongside lifestyle advice, can mean that people lose more than 10kg and reverse or significantly reduce the effects of their diabetes.

Mosley’s skill in getting ahead of where medicine might be heading continues to earn him a legion of fans who devour his Daily Mail column and advice.

In 2019 Mosley told *Essence Magazine*: “The medical world’s understanding of diet and fitness is changing very fast, and that’s what I want to tell people about.”

The interview was to promote his theatre tour *Trust Fast Health* but gave a hint about his motivation.

While he might never have dedicated his life to helping patients as a doctor, he is nevertheless driven to help people improve their lives.

“People are confused because there is an awful lot of nonsense out there,” he said, adding: “I want to cut through all that and show people where the truth really lies behind all those bewildering headlines. I’m 100 per cent evangelical about this. I’m on a mission.”

Passengers wait three years for a fast train despite £1bn upgrade arriving on time

**Nicholas Hellen**  
Transport Editor

The completion of a £1.2 billion upgrade of the east coast main line was supposed to slash journey times from London to Edinburgh to four hours, add an extra hourly train to Newcastle, and provide direct links to the capital from “left behind” cities, such as Bradford.

But, more than two years after the engineering works were finished, there is no

confirmed date for the start of improved services.

Introduction of a new timetable for intercity and long-distance services has been postponed from December to June 2025 and may be further delayed. Tim Shoveller, chief executive of Freightliner Group and a former executive at Network Rail, said: “There is not sufficient capacity. The line is full up before it even starts.”

In contrast with the cost overruns, delays and cutbacks on the HS2 line from

London to Manchester, the upgrade on the east coast main line has been relatively straightforward since the project was approved in 2014.

It included improvements to the track layout at London King’s Cross, new platforms at Stevenage and Doncaster, digital signalling and enhanced power supply, which were finished by December 2021. To complete the programme, the taxpayer funded a fleet of Azuma trains, costing £2.7 billion.

These improvements

should have meant that passengers could travel in style on more and faster services from 2022. The 331-mile journey from London to Edinburgh was to be cut to four hours and five minutes, with the hope that the change would encourage people to stop taking flights.

At present, it takes up to four hours and 46 minutes.

But the start date for a new timetable in 2022 came and went, and negotiations overseen by Network Rail became fractious. There

were not enough slots for the passenger operators, which include Grand Central, GTR, LNER, Lumo and TransPennine Express, as well as the freight operators.

Forecasts underestimated demand as passenger numbers bounced back after the pandemic and freight switched to the railways from the road. Scheduling faster services also uses up capacity because it means that trains cannot stop at intermediate stations, and slower trains have to be kept out of the

way. At one point, Network Rail and an industry committee considered cancelling the freight train used by Coca-Cola to make deliveries to Scotland from its factory in Wakefield to free up space for passenger trains.

Asked about the talks co-ordinated by Network Rail, John Smith, chief executive of GB Railfreight, said: “They tried to squeeze a quart into a pint pot. We started to object, saying, ‘You can’t do this because we are going to lose these trains’,

and that seems to have been almost ignored.”

One reason for the deadlock is that railways have no “Fat Controller” with the power to decide which operator will receive the plum slots, because ministers failed to establish Great British Railways, the controlling body promised in 2021. The impasse risks choking economic growth on one of the most important transport arteries in the UK. A third of the nation’s population live within 20

minutes of a station on the east coast main line.

Shoveller said: “We need to run our freight trains when customers need them ... We can’t take loads off the roads and on to rail if there is no capacity.” Network Rail said there had been “significant investment to enable better and more frequent services to run”. It blamed “industry processes” but said: “A way will be found and more benefits for rail users will come.”

Rishi Sunak’s aides realised immediately that his interview with ITV’s Paul Brand on Thursday afternoon was going to be a problem hanging over them for the better part of a week. In a 25-minute grilling, to be broadcast on Wednesday, the prime minister endured a torrid time over his personal wealth, leading to “frank exchanges” with his interviewer.

“That was what they were worried about,” said a political source. “That he was beaten up over the money and for being out of touch.” While they focused on the incoming shelling, no one seemed to notice that Sunak had already stepped on a landmine.

By returning home early from the D-Day commemorations that day, the prime minister made what may be the defining mistake of the campaign, a blunder that could detonate any chance of turning around Tory fortunes. It came after a week in which the Tories had been stunned by the entry into the race on Monday of Nigel Farage – but then heartened by a robust performance by Sunak in his first head-to-head debate with Sir Keir Starmer on Tuesday.

The real story of what happened around the D-Day debacle, in which Starmer was able to upstage the prime minister by meeting presidents Zelensky and Macron, reveals a Conservative campaign cracking under extreme pressure and a Labour operation becoming more adept at seizing opportunities.

The decision that Sunak would attend the British parts of the D-Day commemorations but dodge an international event later was made weeks ago. James Forsyth, Sunak’s best friend and political secretary, was point man with the “major events team” in the Cabinet Office throughout this period.

“The official advice was the second bit was optional,” a senior political source said. “We were told Starmer wouldn’t be there.” At that point, it seemed like the second half would be little more than a social gathering for world leaders.

“It was billed as a lunch and that even Biden wouldn’t be there,” a second source said. In the event, it was one of the most moving ceremonies of the two-day gathering, with Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton, the foreign secretary, substituting for Sunak and standing with the American and French presidents.

However, civil servants are clear that it was a political decision to cut things short. One of Cameron’s closest allies also let it be known that they had advised Sunak to “do” the full schedule.

Another ally pointed out that in his 2014 party conference speech as leader, Cameron talked about how the then 70th anniversary of D-Day had been “the best moment of my year”, and that when he was prepping for the speech he told aides “there’s a risk I may start crying here, because it gets me so emotional”.

While the Tories are this weekend engaged in a circular firing squad to identify who to blame, the truth is, as one insider put it, everyone’s hands are covered in blood. The issue of what to do was debated in the three-day look-ahead meeting in Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) at 1pm on Monday at which all Sunak’s key aides were present, including Isaac Levido, his campaign director, Liam Booth-Smith, the Downing Street chief of staff, and Forsyth.

Sunak, who is due to see most of the same world leaders at the G7 summit in Italy this week, was keen to get home and carry on with the campaign.

The decision to stick to the plan was then confirmed in a 6.30am daily campaign meeting on Thursday. It is untrue that Sunak raced home to do the ITV



ILLUSTRATION: TONY BELL

Tim Shipman Chief Political Commentator

## The PM’s early return from the D-Day commemorations may be the defining mistake of this election campaign — and has left the Tories reeling with despair



event; the interview was slotted in because he was already coming back for a 6pm meeting on Thursday to sign off the Conservative election manifesto.

While the Tories were dropping the ball, Labour’s foreign affairs team was playing a blinder. David Lammy, the shadow foreign secretary, has spent months developing relations with the Macron administration, tweeting in French and writing essays for intellectual Parisian magazines. He became aware of diplomatic rumblings that the Elysée Palace was upset by Sunak’s decision to avoid the French-led part of the commemoration.

A diplomatic source, summarising the French view, said: “Doesn’t Sunak realise there’s a war on and that Zelensky was attending? President Macron was going to use the occasion to make announce-

ments about support for Ukraine. The idea of skipping something ceremonial like this is so alien to French culture.”

Neither Lammy nor Starmer was originally invited to the international event. But Lammy used his contacts to get them both admitted, and his connections with Zelensky’s team to ensure there would be a Starmer handshake and photograph with the Ukrainian president.

The French then played a double diplomatic game. One of Macron’s aides contacted Labour to say how pleased they were by the Macron-Starmer meeting, saying the French president “really liked” the Labour leader and was “fascinated by men like him who can suddenly achieve stunning results”. Another called a member of Sunak’s team to commiserate, telling them: “This is all completely confected nonsense. How can we help?”

However, the decision for the prime minister to abandon the D-Day commemoration, after the Tories made security and national service cornerstones of their campaign, left MPs incredulous. Cabinet ministers responded with impotent rage, criticising Sunak’s political judgment and appetite for the job. The PM has repeatedly complained privately that foreign affairs take up too much of his time and he has little interest in the ceremonial aspects of his job.

One Tory, no fan of Boris Johnson, said: “There is no way that if you presented this to Boris or indeed to Theresa [May], telling them it was a waste of time, they would not have overruled that advice. This is the worst operation I’ve ever seen. From the prime minister down there is a combination of arrogance and sheer incompetence.”

The irony is that personal diplomacy has been one of the successes of Sunak’s premiership. His willingness to get in a room with his EU counterparts paved the way for the Windsor Framework on Brexit in February 2023. He signed the Aukus defence deal with the US and Australia and has kept Britain at the forefront of western support for Ukraine.

In the 6.30am morning meeting on Friday, Levido insisted that Sunak make a public apology. The now “despondent” prime minister agreed. Aides say he was particularly upset because he and his wife, Akshata Murty, give both time and money to veterans’ charities. Murty is a regular at the Royal Hospital Chelsea in London, where she works with veterans.

The D-Day fiasco stopped dead what had been a relatively encouraging 48 hours for the Conservatives, in which

Sunak successfully shaped the agenda of the campaign with a combative performance against Starmer in Tuesday’s ITV debate in Manchester. The prime minister seemed markedly better prepared than Starmer as he sought to pin on Labour the claim that a black hole in their finances would cost households £2,000.

In the past few months, Sunak’s aides have privately voiced the fear that, just as they lost to Liz Truss in 2022, they are on course to go down to another opponent they think has the wrong solutions but has largely escaped media scrutiny.

In a bid to change that, Sunak sharpened his act in a debate camp last Sunday at a studio in Soho led by Brett O’Donnell, an American who prepared Johnson for his debates during the EU referendum campaign in 2016 and the 2019 leadership election. O’Donnell also helped Tom

## FARAGE’S POSSIBLE PATH TO TAKING OVER TORIES



**1** Convinces voters of Clacton to overturn a Conservative majority of 24,702. Farage has failed to become an MP seven times since 1994, but Clacton was a Ukip seat in 2014-17



**2** Enters the Commons, then defects to the Conservatives. He would need permission from the party’s leader or chairman to become a Conservative member



**3** Throws his hat into the ring to become leader and wins support from enough MPs to get on to the ballot paper, a figure that is decided by the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers



**4** Wins or comes second in the parliamentary leadership contest voted for by Tory MPs and goes through to a ballot of party members

## Reform’s TikTok target: aiming for the youth vote with ‘angry’ banter

**Tom Calver** Data Editor

Guess the party from the TikTok video. “For millions of young people across the country, owning a home is simply not possible,” says a woman in her late twenties. Labour? The Lib Dems? Greens? Twenty seconds in, here comes the kicker. “We must freeze non-essential immigration to catch up with the deficit we face.”

Welcome to the strange world of Reform UK social media. In one video, Nigel Farage crouches by a war grave in Normandy. “Many of you on TikTok are the same age as this lad was,” he says.

In another, at a fruit counter: “Cor! Lovely melons.”

Since the election was called on May 22, Farage, with his 630,000 TikTok followers, has had his videos viewed 10 million times, with his party’s official account garnering 3 million.

Labour may have stronger support overall on this app, whose user base is mostly Gen Z and millennial. But across the rest of the internet, Reform is punching. Farage’s YouTube videos have been played 691,000 times since the start of the campaign, more than Labour and the Conservatives combined.

On Facebook – whose core

user base has matured over two decades from students to middle-aged adults – posts by Farage and his party have been shared 53,000 times, leaving Sunak and the Tories (31,000) and Starmer and Labour (20,000) in the dust. Their most successful post of the week, a picture of Sunak and Starmer captioned “They’re both the same”, was liked more than 7,000 times.

Parties spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on digital campaigning. What is Reform’s strategy? “We don’t have one,” insists Gawain Towler, the party’s press officer. “We’re not doing it with a 27-person committee

that decides on the messaging six months before time. If we see something that’s funny, we say so. If we see something that makes us angry, we’ll say so.”

Social media is the “perfect medium” for Farage, says Mark Borkowski, one of Britain’s leading PR gurus. “He goes direct, he’s fearless about some of the topics that become taboo, and he doesn’t have to worry about how he comes across.”

The impression of authenticity, unbound by “woke” restraint, is a common populist play.

For most people in their late twenties, thirties and

forties, Farage is the architect of the Brexit project they loathed. Sure enough, Reform does not get much love between the ages of 26 and 45. Generation Z was too young to vote in 2016 – and data suggests they are surprisingly open to the idea of voting for the party.

According to figures analysed by Professor Paula Surridge, deputy director of the UK in a Changing Europe think tank, men aged 25 or under are more likely than those in their 40s or 50s to consider voting for Reform. Young women, less so.

Messaging for these voters, says Surridge, is not being

framed around Brexit. “It’s about economic inequality and a lack of opportunity – but coupled with someone saying we’re different, and neither of the other parties have worked for you.”

Why men? Researchers such as Alice Evans, a visiting fellow at Stanford University, have highlighted the growing ideological gender gap between men and women under 30. This is an international phenomenon, sparked by the Metoo movement – indeed, the gap appears to be wider in the US – and may help explain the party’s gender split.

While studies have shown

Tugendhat emerge victorious from the first leader’s debate in 2022. He was assisted by senior figures including Adam Atashzai, a former Cameron aide and veteran of 15 debates since 2010. Sunak had two more, shorter, sessions in Manchester, honing the tax attack. As he left for the studio, the prime minister said: “Well at least Keir Starmer’s got to answer questions now and it’s not like PMQs.”

Starmer, who had his own debate camp but spent the afternoon before the show alone in his hotel room, took 45 minutes to even rebut the £2,000 claim and left the stage dissatisfied with his performance. Sunak returned to the Tory green room unsure how he had performed, to be greeted with applause from his aides. A message from a usually hostile MP told an aide: “Can you give Rishi a big hug from me, that was excellent.”

In the Labour HQ the next morning, with the papers running with the £2,000 tax claim, Starmer’s chief strategist Morgan McSweeney smelled a trap. He knew that to engage with the tax argument would elevate it further, just as the row over Vote Leave’s claim that Brexit would lead to £350 million a week for the NHS put that issue at the top of the agenda. For an hour he thought it best to sit things out. Then he changed his mind, deciding to play into another Labour narrative, that Sunak was peddling “Tory lies”.

While the £2,000 claim remains slightly ahead in terms of salience, pollsters More in Common found by a margin of 42 per cent to 29 per cent that voters say they believe Labour, not the Tories. Sunak’s team was also left reeling by Farage’s decision to take over the leadership of Reform, which is eating into Tory support, and announce that he will stand in Clacton, in Essex, where he is tipped to finally become an MP at the eighth attempt. Farage had previously said he would not run. One of the few rationales that Tory MPs accepted for a snap election was that it had caught out Reform.

Farage had been contemplating lucrative offers from US broadcasters. One friend even suggested he would take a job working for Donald Trump should Trump win in November’s election.

Farage’s entry into the race led to Reform closing to within two points of the Tories, putting them on course to win fewer than 100 seats on July 4 – their worst performance in two centuries.

In a second debate on BBC1 on Friday, Penny Mordaunt, who represented a naval seat in Portsmouth, slid the knife into Sunak’s ribs, declaring his decision to return early from D-Day “very wrong”. Cabinet ministers are now privately demanding that Sunak takes a step back to allow other senior Tories to become faces of the campaign.

There are other problems, too. On Friday it was announced that the Conservatives were suspending social media campaigning. “There is no money,” a senior source said. Tory grandees have been asked to help with fundraising but are struggling. Morale is also at rock bottom. CCHQ was said to be largely deserted on Friday, with senior aides laid low with illness.

Farage is now the focus of Tory leadership manoeuvring. Kemi Badenoch, the business and trade secretary, has told colleagues that if she becomes leader, she will not admit him to the party.

However, Dame Priti Patel, the former home secretary, has made clear that she would invite Farage to return – a view shared by others on the right such as Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, who predicted he might even become Tory leader. “I’m a huge admirer of Nigel’s and I think he should hold high office within the Conservative Party,” Rees-Mogg said. “If the



“

## Skipping an event like this is alien to French culture



Leaders line up on Omaha Beach sans Sunak, while back in the UK Jacob Rees-Mogg praised the Reform leader

“

## I’m a huge admirer of Nigel Farage and think he should hold high office

ball would come out of the scrum, Nigel would be more than willing to catch it.”

He added: “Nigel is a Tory ... he says things that resonate with voters. I think the Tory party has too often been trying to appeal to the liberal and green vote that isn’t coming to us anyway.”

Sunak will try to boost support with a manifesto launch on Tuesday at somewhere “symbolic of boldness and speed” – understood to be a Formula One location. The manifesto will not include a plan to scrap inheritance tax or an explicit pledge to leave the European Convention on Human Rights, but there will be language that “goes further” than before in saying a Tory government would ignore the European courts if they try to block flights to Rwanda – unlikely to go far enough for the right.

Labour’s manifesto, expected to be unveiled on Thursday, will focus on reform of the public services. “Labour used to make the argument that the pie ought to be more equitably distributed. But the Tories have eaten all of the pie and burned down the kitchen.”

The problem for Sunak is that a large number of Tories now share that view.

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Camilla Long, page 23



5 Once he is in the final two, the Tory grassroots get to vote. Polls last year showed 70 per cent of members wanted him admitted to the party. It will be the membership that decides the next leader

that digital adverts have a negligible impact on voter outcomes, there are some signs that organic digital campaigns influence votes. A study by the Oxford Internet Institute in 2019 found the use of Twitter to organise campaigns did have an impact on the 2015 and 2017 elections, albeit a small one.

Yet while a surprisingly large chunk of 18-25-year-olds may be open to the idea of voting Reform, most will not. In the 2019 general election, turnout in this age group was barely over 50 per cent. The problem with trying to attract disengaged voters is that they are, well, disengaged.

In this election, Reform’s campaign is designed to cause as much damage to the Conservatives as possible; indeed, they appear to have specifically picked candidates in seats where the Tories have the best hope of winning, and ignored ones where Labour is comfortably ahead. The seats where they will do the most damage tend to be “older” – in other words, their Facebook warriors.

Not that any of this seems to bother Towler. “This isn’t a four-week project,” he says. “Nigel’s not just going to stop being who he is.”

Matthew Syed, page 21

ILLUSTRATIONS: RUSSEL HERNEMAN

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# That’s the chancellor at the door, shrugging off fears his ‘Portillo moment’ will soon come knocking

Harry Yorke  
Deputy Political Editor

It is a sunny Wednesday afternoon in the village of Bramley, Surrey, and Jeremy Hunt is pounding the pavement in search of voters. Here, in one of the most affluent areas of Britain, the chancellor’s political future hangs by a thread.

Across Godalming & Ash, the front lawns are punctuated with bright orange posters that read: “Liberal Democrats winning here.” Hunt is the second most senior politician in the country, but is clinging on to an 8,800 majority in a constituency that had, before it was renamed and reconfigured, been in Conservative hands since its creation in 1983.

Yet as he begins canvassing along one cul-de-sac, it does not take long to discover why this once-safe Tory seat could, on July 4, become the epicentre of the biggest political earthquake in modern history.

Knocking on his first door, Hunt is greeted by Martin, 65, a retired IT professional, and asks whether he has anything to “bend my ear” about.

“Oh, gosh,” Martin replies. “Where do I start?” Like many people across the country, Martin feels things are “not in a good place” and is worried about the future. People are still struggling with the cost of living crisis, climate change is not being taken seriously enough and the government has failed to invest in public services “effectively”.

I ask what he has made of the Tories over the past five years. “I think it has been chaotic,” Martin responds. “I can’t remember how many prime ministers we’ve had, I’ve lost track, to be honest.”

Hunt concedes defeat. “I imagine he’s a Liberal Democrat,” he says, as we vacate Martin’s doorstep.

The chancellor explains that in this seat, a 20-minute drive from his childhood home in Shere, a third of voters have always voted Tory and a third Lib Dems, with the final third “in the middle” set to decide whether he survives. The constituency is populated with what Hunt describes as the “concerned middle classes” – much like the rest of the “blue wall” – the belt of southern English seats that have always tended to be a two-way fight between the Tories and Lib Dems.

The constituents we speak to here are London commuters, senior professionals and retirees, with median salaries of £57,000 – way above the national average – and many earning six figures. Crime rates in Godalming are far lower than in other parts of Surrey and the wider country, and the average house price is £670,000.

While it has all the hallmarks of an impenetrable Tory seat, the latest YouGov MRP poll of 50,000 people suggests Hunt is odds-on to lose it, along with blue-wall cabinet colleagues Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) and Michelle Donelan (Chippenhams).

Hunt has at every opportunity attempted to present himself as a devoted local MP, and personally writes a weekly newsletter to 8,000 subscribers. Since the election was called, he has spent the vast majority of his time in the constituency, clocking up at least 15,000 steps a day. As chancellor, he has also made a point of referring to his constituency at every fiscal event and has been forced to repeatedly

JULIAN BENJAMIN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Jeremy Hunt finds support from a constituent in Godalming & Ash. Jo says she will vote for him because of Labour’s plan to add VAT to school fees

butt heads with Thames Water: the first issue he raises with residents in Bramley is a fuel leak from a nearby petrol station that is wreaking havoc with the local water supply.

Later, I ask Hunt whether he is being forced to fight a hyper-local campaign and is avoiding discussing national Conservative policies due to the toxicity of the Tory brand. “I am fighting a very local campaign here, but that is not because I am ignoring the national, it’s just because people will make up their mind about the national picture irrespective of what I say in my local leaflets,” he says.

But is he – someone who has held four cabinet posts since 2010, including being the longest-serving health secretary – trying to dodge talking about the scandals of the Boris Johnson era and the meltdown of the Liz Truss mini-budget? “I’m not just proud of our record over the past 18 months, I’m proud of our record over 14 years,” he responds, citing the UK’s recovery from the financial crash, the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

What Hunt is happy for his constituents to believe is that a vote for Labour means big problems for their children’s independent schools.

The issue comes up towards the end of Martin’s street, where Hunt is greeted by Jo, a leadership consultant with a young boy and girl at a local preparatory school also attended by the chancellor’s nephew. She raises unprompted Labour’s plan to abolish tax exemptions for private schools (“That worries us enormously”) and confirms that she and her mother, hovering at the door – will back Hunt on July 4.

Moving to a road a few hundred yards away, Hunt receives his third and fourth thumbs-up from Duncan, 80, and Margaret, 78, retirees who moved to Bramley two years ago from West Sussex.

After Hunt details his plan for tackling the fuel leak, I ask why they are voting for him. “He’s done an awful lot for the village,” they say.

Finished with canvassing for the evening, we head to Hunt’s local watering hole, the White Horse in Hascombe. As he tucks into a goat’s cheese salad, we finally turn to national issues – which that day are being dominated by Rishi Sunak’s claim that Labour would raise every household’s taxes by

£2,000. The claim has been roundly criticised, particularly Sunak’s insistence that the figures were calculated by independent Treasury officials. Starmer has accused Sunak of lying.

When challenged, Hunt not only denies this but stokes the row further. “It is far more likely to be an underestimate,” he says. “We’ve been incredibly cautious in the costings we’ve used. Over 90 per cent of them are based on independent Treasury costings, which are the briefings Rachel Reeves will get put in front of her if she becomes chancellor.”

The Tories have clearly decided to make tax a dividing line with Labour. I ask Hunt about his pledge to abolish national insurance – something Starmer says amounts to a £46 billion unfunded spending commitment – and whether the party will set a deadline for delivering it.

“We won’t have a timeframe on when we intend to abolish employee NICs,” he replies, taking a swipe at the opposition’s big spending promises: “That is the difference between us and Labour: their commitments are all for the next parliament.”

Another area under the microscope is inheritance tax, a levy that only a few weeks ago Hunt described as “pernicious”. A former chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, says it should be abolished to sharpen the divide with Labour, at a cost of £7.2 billion. The Treasury has looked at both abolition and raising the individual thresholds to £1 million. “The case in favour of reducing, abolishing inheritance tax is that if we want more investment in the economy, we need more saving,” Hunt says. However, while refusing to be drawn on the manifesto, he points out that reducing national insurance has “a more direct impact on the economy” by helping to boost “labour supply”.

One of the biggest impediments to growth is the number of parents unable to return to full-time work due to the costs of childcare. Last year Hunt announced a £4 billion package to expand free childcare – widely welcomed but since beset by rollout problems – and last Thursday the Tories announced they would

reform child benefit so households earning less than £120,000 would keep their full entitlement, up from £60,000 now, based on an individual’s income.

Yet he strongly suggests his party could go further to reduce “cliff edges” for higher earners. One area Tory MPs have been pushing is to expand free childcare, which is available for 15 hours a week for two-year-olds – and for nine-month-olds from September – but cannot be claimed if one person in a household earns more than £100,000. This means a family where one parent earns £101,000 cannot claim but one where two parents each earns £99,000 can.

Even more significantly, Hunt suggests he wants to chip away at the 60 per cent marginal tax rate for people earning six-figures. Under the personal-allowance taper rate, people lose £1 for every £2 they earn over £100,000.

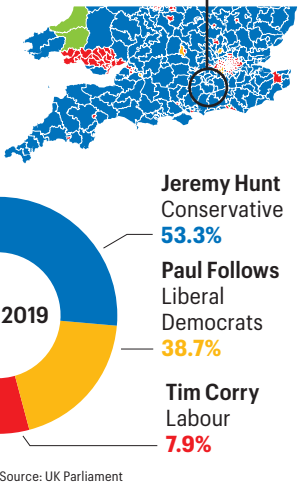
“I’ve always said that if you want to be economically productive, we have to get rid of the cliff edges in the tax system,” Hunt says. “The removal of the personal allowance, the fact childcare support stops when one person in a household is earning over £100,000 – if you speak to economists, they will say the most damaging things in the tax system are when you have things with a high marginal rate. So it is absolutely on our list as something we would like to do more on.”

As Hunt finishes his salad and the interview winds up, I ask why he appears almost stoic, given the media focus on his seat and the comparisons to the totemic ousting in 1997 of the defence secretary, Michael Portillo. Is it not more painful, as chancellor, to face being toppled from a greater height? “I have mixed feelings about it,” he says. “Part of me would like to be out on the national campaign trail talking about big national issues as I have been doing as chancellor for the last 18 months.”

However, he also thinks it is a “fantastic thing” about British democracy that “when the chancellor does knock on doors in this patch, people aren’t surprised, they don’t go, ‘Oh my God, it’s the chancellor’.” They say, “Too bloody right, I’m very cross about this, about that, what are you going to do about it?”

### CHALLENGE FOR THE CHANCELLOR

South West Surrey is a former constituency held by Jeremy Hunt. It ceased to exist following the boundary change this year. The new constituency is called Godalming & Ash



→ Continued from page 1  
earn £99,999 – a total of £199,998 – can. In March, Hunt argued that £100,000 is “not a huge salary” for people in his constituency.

Speaking on the campaign trail last week, he said while his £4 billion childcare reforms had been “pretty popular” with his constituents, “people also do raise the fact that one person earning over £100,000 means you don’t get access to them and that creates a cliff edge”.

He added: “There are also a lot of cliff edges for higher earners: the removal of the

personal allowance, the fact that childcare support stops when one person in a household is earning over £100,000.

“If you speak to economists, they will say the most damaging things in the tax system are when you have things with a high marginal rate. So it is absolutely on our list as something we would like to do more on.”

The Treasury looked at changes to the personal allowance taper and the level at which free childcare is withdrawn earlier this year as part of a proposed offer to Middle England. The plans

were abandoned because they were unaffordable.

Last night a party source also said the proposals would not be in the party’s manifesto, due to be published later this week.

Speaking ahead of the welfare announcement, Stride refused to rule out using the billions identified in savings for cut taxes. He said £700 million would go on boosting the uptake of NHS mental health treatments, with more than 500,000 people a year given access to talking therapies by 2030 and support teams being placed in every school.

Of the 2.8 million people economically inactive due to long-term sickness, 53 per cent reported suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety or depression.

Stride argued that getting people back into work was often “really instrumental in helping people to improve” their mental health and there needed to be a “grown-up debate” on “people that are going through the normal ups and downs of life being labelled as having mental health issues, when in fact with a bit of encouragement and support they needn’t be labelled like that”.

# The Gaza geezer

ADRIAN SHERRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Akhmed Yakoob, a solicitor with a love of flash cars and jewellery, is fighting on a pro-Palestinian independent ticket. In his Birmingham constituency, which is 43% Muslim, his fervent support is a big threat to the shadow justice secretary



If there is one man in Britain who embodies the way our politics have changed, and continue to change after October 7, it is Akhmed Yakoob, the independent candidate for Birmingham Ladywood. Yakoob is a 36-year-old defence solicitor who wears black Prada trainers, a glittering diamond watch, tinted gold-framed sunglasses and Gareth Southgate-like waistcoats. He has 195,000 followers on Tik-Tok, a platform he understands more intuitively than 99 per cent of the politicians in this country. He speaks in clipped, brutal epigrams that sound as if they are seconds away from going viral on social media. He calls Muhammad his biggest political influence. Offline he campaigns on the street, inside takeaways and from the cream leather seat of a shining black Mercedes S-class saloon. The word “genocide” is never far from Yakoob’s mouth. This year, standing on a pro-Gaza, anti-Labour platform, he racked up almost 70,000 votes in the West Midlands mayoral election, mainly from deprived inner city wards in the Birmingham Ladywood constituency he is now trying to wrest from Shabana Mahmood, the shadow justice secretary. Labour’s Richard Parker narrowly won the mayoral election, taking 225,590 votes, 1,508 more than the Conservatives’ Andy Street. Yakoob’s presence in the race made it much closer. Though he came third, securing 20 per cent of the vote gave him substance and a political base. Yakoob is furious about the war in Gaza. He prints “For Gaza” on all his leaflets. He says the war is why he entered politics. He knows it represents a key dividing line with Labour, even as the party prepares to make new commitments to a peace process, if not unilateral support for a Palestinian state, in its manifesto

next week. But there is nothing Labour can say or promise to bring back some Muslim voters now. The same fury Yakoob feels is the basis for other independent challenges to Labour across Birmingham. In Edgbaston, Dr Ammar Waraich, a neurologist and former Harvard Fulbright scholar, is trying to topple Preet Kaur Gill, the Labour candidate. Waraich says he quit the party, as many other Muslims did, when Sir Keir Starmer told LBC on October 11 that Israel “had the right” to withhold water and power from Gaza. In Selly Oak, Kamel Hawwash, a civil engineering professor at the University of Birmingham and a former head of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, is running against the shadow veterans minister, Steve McCabe. Both seats, like those in former mill towns (Rochdale, Blackburn) and inner city areas (Ilford North, Leicester East) across the country where independents believe they have a chance of embarrassing the Labour Party, have significant Muslim populations. At May’s local elections, an analysis by Sky News found that in areas with a Muslim population above 20 per cent Starmer’s party lost 17.9 points from their vote share. A targeted Labour fightback in Muslim areas, including focus groups and internal polling, began in January. This week *LabourList* published a list of the party’s “battleground areas”, 250 constituencies where the party is funnelling resources, as part of a campaign to win a healthy parliamentary majority. But the party is also directing activists to 22 seats where the party already has a healthy majority. It looks like a rearguard action. Several of these areas have a higher-than-average Muslim population. Muslims make up 43 per cent of the electorate in Birmingham Ladywood, according to the Muslim Vote, a group which is trying to cohere Muslim voters behind pro-Gaza candidates. Mahmood has been the MP here since 2010, taking the seat from Clare Short, the former New Labour minister who resigned two months after the Iraq war began in March 2003. Short, as Yakoob is today, was a persistent critic of Labour’s foreign policy in the Middle East. After refusing to serve in the shadow cabinet under Jeremy Corbyn, Mahmood

“Labour can spend millions but they can’t take the love of the people for me out of their hearts

Akhmed Yakoob is channelling disaffection with Labour in his campaign, which also emphasises his rise from poverty to owning high-performance cars



became an early backer of the Starmerite think tank Labour Together and a key figure in Starmer’s plans for government. Based on the results of the 2019 general election, when Mahmood won 79 per cent of the vote, Ladywood should be one of the safest Labour seats in the country. Boundary changes introduced this year complicate that picture. Alum Rock, an inner-city area that has a 93.6 per cent ethnic minority population, will become part of Ladywood. When you spend a day canvassing with Yakoob you begin to see why this might be a much trickier contest for Labour than anyone would have predicted a year ago. Ladywood is now one of the party’s “battleground areas”. Yakoob’s team believes that activists are being brought into the constituency because locals are refusing to campaign for Mahmood because of her abstention on a motion calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war last November. Labour call this claim “absolute nonsense”. The independent candidates share ideas and strategies. They often campaign together. “Everybody was saying to me ‘Labour machinery this, Labour machinery that,’” Yakoob says from the front seat of the Mercedes, which is being tailed by two black German saloons filled with his volunteers, mostly young men in Asos suits. “So what? I don’t really care about the machinery. Can they buy the love of people? No.” Yakoob smiles broadly. He jabs a hand out, as if he were standing at a podium addressing the entire city. “They

can spend millions but they can’t take the love of the people for me out of their hearts. That’s what they can’t take. His family are from Azad Kashmir, a region in the disputed territory controlled by Pakistan. His father came to Britain in the 1970s, worked as a milk salesman, then retired to Pakistan. Yakoob was born in the City Hospital on Dudley Road in 1988. He has four brothers, four sisters and four children. He tells his life story and gritty local anecdotes on podcasts and through his 30-second, self-consciously aspirational social media videos. Rags to riches is the vibe. He used to own a fleet of supercars, including a Rolls-Royce and a Lamborghini. The cars have since been jettisoned; Yakoob says he has “grown out of them”. Politics is taking over his life. His flashy, brash populist style makes Yakoob the closest thing politically adrift British Muslims have to Nigel Farage. He has been endorsed by George Galloway. Yakoob is under investigation from the Solicitors Regulation Authority, after he used social media to promote a false claim of racism against a teacher last month. Yakoob deleted the posts and said he would not make any comment until the outcome of the investigation. Yakoob disrupts things wherever he goes. Handing out leaflets near a primary school on Wednesday afternoon, crowds swirl around him. Women in hijabs tell

him they love him. Countless pictures are taken. People practically throw their children at him. Yakoob switches between Urdu and drawing, lispy Brummie English. “Inshallah,” he says whenever these parents tell him “next time you will win”. The previous afternoon, Yakoob was campaigning at the gates of the nearby Rockwood Academy. In 2014 it was known as Park View School and was at the heart of an inquiry into discredited allegations of a plot to oust some Birmingham head teachers and make their schools adhere to more conservative Islamic principles. The so-called Trojan Horse scandal remains a sore issue locally. By campaigning outside the school, Yakoob is picking at a scab. “I don’t know why he does it,” said one teacher who didn’t want to be named. “Why kids?” When Yakoob appeared outside the school, hundreds of children tried to take selfies with him. That evening at a packed meeting at a Bangladeshi restaurant, Yakoob calls for a public inquiry into the Trojan Horse affair. The room shakes with applause. Along Green Lane, a squeezed road on a dumpy street where cars are parked at every angle and Palestinian flags are tied to the lampposts, Yakoob literally stops traffic. Drivers slow down to yell and shout their support at him. He runs haphazardly towards them brandishing leaflets coloured with the black, green and red of the Palestinian flag. It’s a total macho circus act, pure street politics. “Everyone knows me,” he says. A little girl walks up to Yakoob with her mother, who doesn’t speak English very well, and says: “Give us a good reason to vote for you.” Yakoob gets down on his haunches. He is face to face with the girl. He calls her “little sister”. “None of our MPs spoke about Gaza.” He says this slowly and patiently so she understands him. “There was a vote in the House of Commons and our MP for Ladywood ... she actually abstained from voting.” The girl is satisfied with this. She leads her mother away, taking a leaflet. There are local issues here. The roads sweat with traffic and pollution. Uncollected rubbish, stinking in the mild June weather, is piled up near abandoned, shattered pubs. People complain about potholes and rat infestations. More than half the children in the constituency, 54.6 per cent, are living in poverty, according to End Child Poverty, the highest rate of any constituency in the country. Later one man, an elderly solicitor, tells me Alum Rock is a ghetto, and Mahmood should be ashamed of it. Yakoob’s team claims Mahmood cannot campaign there, such is the anger towards her. They also say a senior figure from one of Mahmood’s previous campaigns has defected to Yakoob. Both claims are, again, “absolute nonsense”, a Labour spokesperson says. Mahmood says she is “delighted” to be Labour’s candidate in Birmingham Ladywood, “the city my family has called home since my parents first arrived from rural Kashmir”. That evening, senior figures from the Bengali community gather to address Yakoob in the upstairs room of a Bangladeshi restaurant on Coventry Road. The room looks like it has been decorated for a wedding reception, which is somewhat eerie, because no women are present. A succession of bigwigs are introduced to the room: this brother runs a printing business, that brother is a mufti, an Islamic jurist. They are serious men, and they feel deeply betrayed by the Labour Party that their families have voted for since they came to Britain. One man recalls his father’s friendship with Roy Hattersley, who was MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook from 1964 to 1997. He says he will never vote for Labour again after Gaza. “They have hurt us so much.” His voice is grave. I watch as speaker after speaker effectively pledges allegiance to Yakoob. They are planning for the long term: “We are all here until we die,” says one. “So we need to make sure we make a playing field for our next generation.” Is Yakoob that next generation? Victory over Mahmood would probably be the biggest shock of the election. It is unlikely but not unthinkable. His campaign is more fascinating for what it represents than what it might achieve. It is amateurish and built on charisma not data. He wants the approval of TikTok, not the BBC. Akhmed Yakoob might just be a curiosity. Or he could be the first sign of a truly new sectarian politics in Britain.

## Posh George, the fraudster who went from Arizona jail to Farage’s aide

**Gabriel Poggrund**  
Senior Editor

A white-collar adviser and fundraiser to Nigel Farage is a convicted criminal who was named in connection with a police investigation into cryptocurrency in Montenegro. George Cottrell, 30, is an aristocrat nicknamed “Posh George”, whose father went to school with Prince Andrew and whose mother, a former glamour model, was romantically linked to the King in the 1970s. He has accompanied Farage, whom he described as a father figure, throughout the first fortnight of the general election campaign. Last week he was photographed alongside the Reform leader during a campaign visit to Clacton when he was doused with a milkshake. The pair became close when Cottrell ran Farage’s private office at the Mayfair headquarters of Ukip, a precursor to the Brexit Party

that then morphed into Reform, and raised millions of pounds for the party before the EU referendum. In 2016, Cottrell, then 22, was arrested by federal agents after attending the Republican National Convention in Ohio at which Donald Trump was nominated as the presidential candidate. He pleaded guilty to a charge of wire fraud after offering undercover agents in Las Vegas – who were posing as drug traffickers – advice on “ways criminal proceeds could be laundered” on the dark web. He served eight months in maximum security prisons in Arizona and Illinois. After being released and returning to London, Cottrell began a four-year on-off relationship with Georgia Toffolo, the *Made in Chelsea* star and *I’m A Celebrity* winner, and established himself as a poker player and cryptocurrency entrepreneur. Cottrell, who was privately educated in Mustique, the

Caribbean island, and later Malvern College, the Worcestershire boarding school, started placing bets at bookmakers at the age of 12. He once admitted he was so addicted to gambling on horse racing that he walked into William Hill with a Harvey Nichols bag stuffed with £50,000 and spent it all. In recent years, he has divided his time between London and Montenegro, the Balkan state that has sought to position itself as a haven for digital currency but whose accession to the European Union has been complicated by concerns about money-laundering and financial crime. He flies to the Balkans on a private jet and is said to have visited the country on at least 100 occasions. Last June, Cottrell was caught up in a police inquiry into an allegedly illicit “cryptomat”: a machine that allows crypto to be converted into cash or other digital currencies. Friends of Cottrell say the investigation

George Cottrell, on right next to Nigel Farage in 2016, on the day of the EU referendum. The same year Cottrell was arrested in an FBI sting in Las Vegas



amounted to a politically motivated attack by the outgoing administration against Europe Now!, the main party of the government of Montenegro, which he has advised. The same month, detectives conducted a raid of Salon Privé, a private members’ club and casino in the coastal resort of Tivat that is alleged to be connected to him. This allegation has been denied by sources close to Cottrell and a lawyer for the casino. Days after the raid, Cottrell left the territory on a private jet. Local media reported that he showed border authorities a passport bearing the name “George Co”: the same as the one he used when incorporating a company, Private Family Office, in the territory. It is said that the use of this alternative name has been sanctioned by local authorities after Cottrell cited personal safety concerns. A source said Cottrell had made or offered payments to right-wing causes in the UK

through the same entity. The casino’s lawyer said Cottrell was innocent of any wrongdoing and said the cryptomat at the heart of the inquiry was owned by somebody else, noting that a number of warrants were refused by the court. Cottrell points out that the inquiry coincided with elections in Montenegro last summer. Those led to the appointment of a new prime minister representing the Europe Now! party, which he has advised. The Ministry of the Interior of Montenegro declined to comment, forwarding questions to the special prosecutor’s office, which did not respond. It is unclear if the inquiry is still live or if anybody has been charged. This year, Cottrell has travelled to the country repeatedly. Last month, he was reported to have lost £16 million in a single poker game coinciding with the Triton poker series, a high-stakes tournament held in the five-star Maestral casino in Budva

on the Adriatic coast. The disclosures pose questions of Farage, who last week made the shock announcement that he had assumed the leadership of Reform UK and would run as a parliamentary candidate in Clacton in Essex. He has never sought to distance himself from Cottrell and was pictured eating with him at Scott’s restaurant in Mayfair, central London, in April. A spokesman for Reform said Cottrell had not funded Farage or Reform UK through his Montenegro entity, Private Family Office. “Mr Cottrell has accompanied [Farage] on visits over the course of the last fortnight, he has no formal role, but is an unpaid volunteer,” he added. Cottrell, whose mother Fiona Cottrell was the *Penthouse* magazine “pet of the month” in October 1973, is the nephew of Lord Hesketh, a hereditary peer and former Conservative Party treasurer who defected to Ukup in 2011.

# Streeting roasts KFC for ‘pumping out’ junk food near the school gates

**Shaun Lintern** Health Editor

Fast-food outlets such as KFC could be banned from opening near schools under a Labour government, Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, has said.

Warning that the country had to start taking the obesity crisis more seriously, he said one of his main priorities if Labour won the election would be to tackle the growing burden of disease and ill-health, which was putting unsustainable pressure on hospitals.

“I want to achieve a country where people don’t just live longer, but live well for longer,” he said.

Streeting is also taking aim at the ultra-processed food industry, alongside a wider effort to realign NHS services to focus more on preventive health and better support for patients with more than one condition.

“We have seen KFC taking the mick and dragging councils through the courts so that they can pump fried chicken out by school gates. That doesn’t tell me this is a nation that’s taking obesity seriously,” he said.

In December, an investigation by The Times found 43 councils had their anti-obesity policies challenged by KFC in the last five years. In more than half

the cases, council leaders abandoned their plans or watered them down.

Obesity alone costs the NHS about £6.5 billion a year and is the second-biggest preventable cause of cancer. One in four adults and almost a quarter of children aged 10-11 in England are obese.

If Labour wins the election, Streeting will clarify the powers for local councils that allow them to put restrictions on fast-food outlets opening in their area.

The national planning policy framework says councils should promote healthier lifestyles through their planning rules. But fast-food companies, including

KFC, have mounted a determined effort, including bringing legal action, to derail proposals in some areas, arguing the rules are being misinterpreted or going further than intended.

Labour says it will end the “lawfare” route by making clearer the expectations on councils, allowing them to make their argument more forcefully and have fast-

KFC has “dragged councils through the courts”



food companies’ cases thrown out. “I’ve got quite big ambitions on public health,” the candidate for Ilford North, in Essex, said. “We’ve already committed to a junk-food ban and an advertising ban to stop junk food being targeted at kids, not just on broadcast media, but crucially on digital platforms,” he added. “I’m

also following the debate around ultra-processed food very closely, and I’m having quiet conversations to try to build a coalition of the willing within the food and drink industry so that we can deliver real improvements ... so that we can say that the healthy option is the affordable option.”

KFC said: “We support the idea of national guidance to councils. There should be consistent rules across the country on where takeaways can be opened if there is a school in the area.”

Streeting said the UK also faced serious challenges from an ageing society, chronic disease and rising healthcare

costs. Part of the solution, he believes, is shifting the focus of the NHS away from treating illness to trying to prevent it.

“The answer to fixing the NHS is to fix the front door to the NHS. We need more primary care, but also we need to think how it can do things differently,” he added.

“We’ve got to turn the NHS on its head. It is a late diagnosis, sickness service, that still looks far too much like the one that Nye Bevan gave birth to in 1948. We need to shift the centre of gravity of the NHS out of hospitals, into the community, with better primary care, community services and social care.”

Labour’s manifesto will be

published in days and is expected to include an emphasis on public health.

The party has already committed itself to putting the abandoned smoking-ban legislation through parliament and is planning to double the number of district nurses in training. The numbers working in the NHS halved since 2010.

Jo Bibby, director of health at the Health Foundation think tank, said that to arrest the decline in the nation’s health, it had to be valued as being as important as GDP.

“There are 2.6 million people of working age who are not in work because of health issues,” she said.

VICKI COUCHMAN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Ed Davey and his wife Emily with their 16-year-old son John, who will need care for the rest of his life

# I worry about my son when I’m gone. Who’ll make sure he’s never abused or hurt?

In his Surbiton home, Sir Ed Davey tells *James Coney* of the joy and struggle of caring for a child who needs constant support

When I first meet John, the 16-year-old son of Sir Ed Davey, he insists on shaking my hand three times. His smile gives away the fact he seems to secretly be delighted to be the centre of attention.

We’re in the front room of Davey’s house in Surbiton, southwest London, but this is very much the lair of John, who is learning disabled.

His artwork is everywhere. He’s been playing with an electronic keyboard and on my arrival is keen to show off his guitar, which I hand him. He strums it and grins at his dad. “Well done, my darling,” says Davey and they gently rub their foreheads together.

On the wall is a papier-mâché lion mask. “What noise do lions make, my lovely?” asks Davey. John roars – a huge achievement – and an even bigger smile crosses his face. “Excellent, my darling,” says Davey and again they rub foreheads.

Though Davey was first elected as an MP in 1997 it is only now that he has decided to talk about this part of his life, his role as a carer.

In a party political broadcast last week, he spoke briefly about raising a disabled child, and also about how his father John died when Davey was four, and of caring for his mother Nina before she died only 11 years later. He has come to realise that this world has shaped his thinking as Liberal Democrat leader, and the party’s policies for this election.

John is very similar to my 11-year-old son Charlie, who is also learning disabled. Both are non-verbal, not toilet trained and need constant support – and will do so for the rest of their lives.

John was four months old when Davey and his wife Emily started to worry. Their happy first baby, named after Davey’s father, was missing little milestones – rolling over, lifting himself up. When they raised it with social workers and doctors they got the same response: “It’s okay, he’ll catch up. Boys are always a bit slower.”

Five or six months passed and one landmark after another slipped by and finally they convinced doctors to do some tests, giving them a diagnosis, of

“It’s a fight every step of the way

sorts. John was learning disabled with an undiagnosed condition. He needed urgent support, but Davey was told that there were waiting lists of up to a year for speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy.

He says: “We all know that children’s brains develop hugely at that age and he needed help then. We just thought, this baby needs these things now.”

At the time Emily was planning to return to work as a lawyer, and they had hired an au pair, who suggested speaking to her father, a GP at home in Hungary. In a Skype call he said that while he could not make a diagnosis, he could recommend a clinic in Budapest which specialised in helping children like John. So Davey and Emily began taking John to the Peto Institute in Budapest for treatment.

Back home, Emily would spend four or five hours a day manipulating John’s arms and legs, helping him to crawl. They also ended up paying for private physiotherapy. Davey says: “When you first become a parent, have your child, you have this dream like you’re on a plane to the Mediterranean and it’s sunny and wonderful. But instead the plane diverts to some town in northern Europe and it’s grey and rainy.”

For those in his situation this is a popular analogy. Davey continues: “It’s not

“There was a wait of a year for help

what we were expecting, but after a while you realise that maybe actually the architecture here is quite nice. You play the hand you are dealt with, it’s tough, but you develop this relationship with this wonderful child.”

As a constituency MP, Davey had helped many families with disabled children fight for access to care, particularly with education, health and care plans, and so when it came to getting support for John he assumed his experience, and Emily’s background as a lawyer, would make it easier.

“I thought we would be able to navigate it,” he says. “But it’s a total fight every step of the way. It really should not be so hard.”

I give him a weary nod and explain how my wife and I had just had an unnecessary battle with the council over transport to school for Charlie, and how the number of hours of care we received was cut for no obvious good reason when we moved from London to Surrey.

Davey says: “My wonderful wife gets so angry because she’s fighting for her son and these people are saying she cannot have something which is reasonable. The system is hostile and confrontational. I want to think of ways that we can remove hostility so that everyone is working together for the best outcome.”

They have decided to home-school John, with a teacher paid for by the council. He had tried two specialist schools but they had not been able to provide the care he needed. “It’s actually cheaper for the council to do it this way,” says Davey.

When the election was called they had to think about who would look after John. Emily, who is a Lib Dem councillor, has multiple sclerosis and, as John has got bigger, has become less able to do every task. Davey often gets up at 5.30am to change his son’s nappy. Being non-verbal means John can sometimes become frustrated when he wants to communicate, scratching or hitting.

Like many learning disabled children, John can become easily overwhelmed. “You can often see large scratches on the back of my hand,” says Davey. “He’s often worse with Emily, though.”

Being the parents of a disabled child influences almost every decision they

make: from the house they bought (it needed a large downstairs lavatory), to the car they drive (big enough so John can easily get in).

They’ve had to sort out a new live-in carer for the election campaign – only possible thanks to funding from a Lib Dem donor and Davey’s brother-in-law – because Davey will have to travel so much.

I admit to feeling guilty when I work late or go away, when my wife is at home looking after Charlie on her own, not knowing whether he is having a good or bad day.

“Yes!” he agrees. “That really resonates. You can’t do any of this without support of family and a strong relationship. Emily and I discuss everything.”

Davey’s great fear is what will happen to John after he and Emily are gone. John has a younger sister who is ten. Siblings are often the forgotten carers in families.

“They do want to look after their brothers and sisters. But you don’t want to put that responsibility on them, they will love their sibling but you want them to be free to live their own lives. The issues are who’s going to look after him, who’s going to pay for it and who is going to make sure he is never abused or hurt? You just have to make as many provisions the best you can.”

What is the solution? Davey wants to create a culture of care, by making carer’s allowance, £81.90 a week, simpler and easier to claim and more widely available. He believes state support for family carers will help reduce NHS waiting lists and allow carers back to the workplace, which would boost the economy.

And he wants to change the way social care is funded, so that the most expensive care needs are paid for by central government rather than councils.

Just as the photographer arrives, John appears from his classroom wearing one of his father’s old blue shirts as an overall and covered in glue. He looks delighted.

On the floor is a mountain of ripped-up newspapers. After he’s been cleaned up he goes back in to his room for a quick picture with his parents.

“Well done, my darling,” Davey says to him. John pulls both his parents close and rubs his forehead against theirs.

# Peter Kellner

## Death swing could hand Tories a 1945 humiliation



Rishi Sunak’s one glimmer of hope in an election where his party is widely expected to be annihilated is that many of the voters who have turned their backs on the Tories have not yet transferred their allegiance to another party. Instead they tell pollsters they don’t know how they will vote, and there are up to three million of them. Another two to three million say they will vote for Reform UK, the upstart right-wing party led by Nigel Farage. If the Conservatives can woo the ex-Tory undecideds and counter Farage’s appeal, then maybe they will see their vote share rise.

Unfortunately for Sunak, the chance of this saving grace occurring relies heavily on the fact that for decades, pollsters have tracked uniform national swing (UNS) based on the assumption that most constituencies have broadly similar numbers of floating voters. This has meant that the swing in any particular seat is unaffected by whether

it was safe Labour, safe Tory or marginal. But thanks to new large-scale multilevel regression and post-stratification (MRP) polls, which seek to project seat-by-seat results, this election looks set to defy seven decades of political science. The veteran psephologist Sir John Curtice predicts that better understanding of the relationship between votes and seats means that the Tories are on course to lose 60 more seats than would be expected if using traditional methods – potentially turning a bad defeat into an existential catastrophe. This would be more on the scale of Winston Churchill’s humiliation in 1945, when the Tories lost more than 200 seats, than Tony Blair’s 1997 Labour landslide.

To understand how MRP works, imagine for a moment that you are Penny Mordaunt. You hope to become Tory leader, but first, you must hold your own Portsmouth North seat. You may have been relieved that when YouGov published its poll last week, it

reported a national swing to Labour of 15 per cent, not quite the 17 per cent they would need to turf you out.

But then you look at the seat-specific figure, and things look less rosy. For Portsmouth North, YouGov projects a 20 per cent swing to Labour. Instead of becoming party leader, you would be out of parliament.

MRP suggests that UNS no longer works. It’s not just that Tory support is low, and that Reform UK is likely to eat further into their votes from the right, but that voters appear determined to punish MPs such as Mordaunt who are defending apparently safe seats.

The maths behind this analysis are complex, but the principle is simple. MRP polls build up a detailed picture of the electorate, and apply it to the demographic profile of each constituency. In this election, they find that the more votes the Conservatives won in each seat last time, the more they will lose this time. Typically, pollsters reckon that a Tory candidate defending

a normally safe seat is suffering a 3,000-vote penalty, on top of the votes they are on course to lose from the nationwide swing. Sunak, Mordaunt and their colleagues must hope that the MRP algorithms are wrong, and UNS will triumph once again.

Is that possible? By its nature, MRP tends to predict bigger swings in safer seats anyway. But real votes from last month’s local elections and non-MRP polling data confirm that UNS has stopped working.

This adds to the Tories’ woes. Even in 1997 the Conservative base held firm. Calculating figures for that election at the time in line with the principles of UNS, Curtice at the time found “little difference between those seats where the Conservatives started off with just one third of the vote, and those where they had previously won two thirds”. This is not what is happening in this year’s election.

Nor is it what happened in 1945. Like 1997, but unlike any other post-war

election, it saw the Conservatives lose more than half their seats. I had not seen an analysis of the pattern of swing in that election, and so I so decided to check the numbers. I was surprised by what I found. As the chart shows, the 1945 pattern was nothing like 1997, but uncannily close to current MRP polling.

Sunak should be terrified by the 1945 precedent. The Tories suffered badly from losing most votes in their strongest areas. Clement Attlee’s Labour Party won a majority of 146 with a 10 per cent lead in the popular vote. On a uniform swing, its majority would have been halved.

Labour was destined to win the 1945 election anyway. It was because of the pattern of the swing that the Conservatives were unable to prevent a landslide. This year, they need to break that pattern. Can Sunak succeed where Churchill failed?

It’s just possible that UNS will revive and Tory candidates will avoid the MRP penalty that many of them now face.

Sunak should be warned, however, that although UNS has generally worked in postwar general elections, there are two recent exceptions. In 2015 Labour’s support in Scotland fell from 42 to 24 per cent – similar to the current polling story for the Tories. Seat by seat, the more votes Labour won in 2010, the more it shed in 2015. The party lost all but one of its 41 MPs.

In the same election, the Liberal Democrats’ Britain-wide vote slumped from 24 per cent to 8 per cent. Again, the more votes they had won locally in 2010, the more they lost in 2015. They held only eight of their 57 seats.

Like the Lib Dems and Scottish Labour in 2015, the Tories are now suffering not just an adverse swing of the electoral pendulum, but an existential haemorrhage of support. They are losing core supporters, not just floating voters. Their urgent need is to win back the undecideds and defectors to Reform. Otherwise their prospects are indeed bleak.

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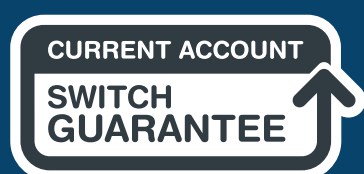
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# Rod Liddle

## You may think the Greens are about bees and hedgehogs, but now it’s all bile and venom



I spent most of last week trying to order giant posters of myself to place in the gardens and windows of the constituency in which I’m standing, in order to frighten the local children. It is the ultimate in narcissistic activity and thus hugely enjoyable. It is also futile, since nobody has asked me for one, not even my close friends.

The problem, I tell myself, is that placards and the like have become the means by which people signal their standing in society. A Labour poster says: “Look, plebs, I am compassionate, decent and a fully paid-up member of the liberal elite. In short, I am considerably more affluent than yow.” A pro-Tory placard says: “I am an avid supporter of cruelty and arrogance.” A poster of me in your front garden, meanwhile, suggests despair and self-abnegation. I’m not even sure my wife would let me put one up. Brings down the tone of the neighbourhood.

There will be plenty of Green placards to be seen across the country. You can out-virtue-signal your Labour-supporting neighbours with one of those, even though the Greens are rapidly becoming the country’s least virtuous party. Apparently almost 20 Green candidates were being investigated by their party for posting foul antisemitic statements on social media, and a further four have already stood down or been removed. The party has rather been dragging its feet over the issue, given that the deadline for nominations was Friday.

It is a bit strange that hating Jewish people now seems to be good for the environment, which is what I thought the Greens were meant to believe in. The Campaign Against Antisemitism said of the party: “There appears to be an obsession with Israel and Gaza, comparing the Jewish state to Nazis, justifying the barbaric October 7 attacks carried out by Hamas, an antisemitic terror organisation, labelling Zionism as “cancer” and antisemitism-denial. How

is this fostering good communal relations?” I don’t think the Greens give a monkey’s about good communal relations. They have profited from Sir Keir Starmer’s laudable stance on antisemitism and opened their organic, nuclear-free doors to any and every Hamas groupie they can get their hands on. A colleague suggested that they have ceased to be a political party and have instead “become a bin”. For those who, like me, have voted Green in the past, it is all a little perplexing. In the late 1980s they were a very attractive proposition, campaigning on what they now regard, a little

derisively, as “soft Green” issues such as being nice to animals, not paving over the entire country to build millions of Barratt homes and keeping the rivers clean. However, as I have mentioned many times before, it is a golden rule that all organisations end up campaigning against the very things they once believed in.

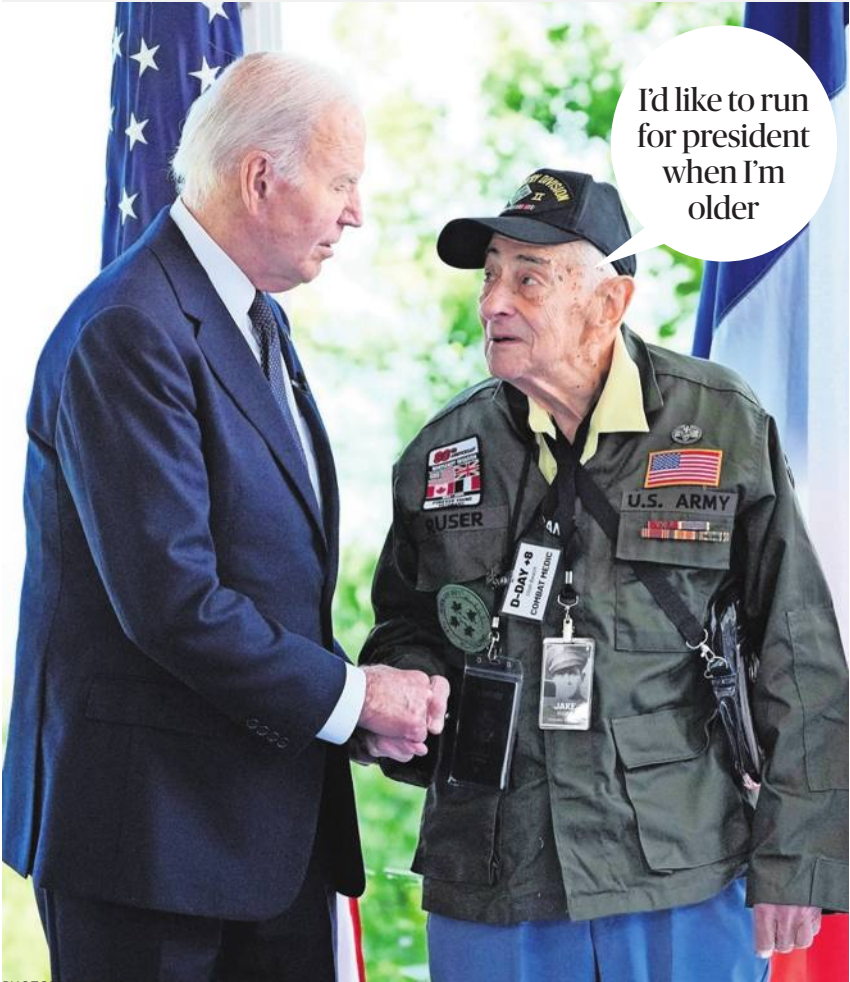
This is certainly true of Labour, and it seems to be the same with the Greenies. The environment has been ditched and the party is now the chief receptacle for every laughable manifestation of corrosive post-rational identity politics, with a concomitant loathing for the heteronormative, the nation state, the nuclear family and so on.

Quite how this – alongside hating Jewish people – fits into a coherent ideology may puzzle normal people, but not the Greens. It is all about intersectionality. The Greens take the view that all those people “oppressed” by the patriarchal, colonialist, white-supremacist nation state have common cause. The trouble with that is there is no such thing as intersectionality, as the campaigning group Queers for Palestine will quickly discover if it holds one of its colourful parades in Hebron (or Bradford West). Islamists are not hugely keen on homosexuality, gender-critical lesbians not noticeably at one with the trans lobby and so on ad infinitum. This stuff does not intersect; instead it jars.

In short, the Greens have drifted to the very far left of British politics and swallowed all the necessary delusions while doing so. It is all a little ironic, given that the roots of the Green movement lie in fin-de-siècle proto-fascism, the blood-and-soil notions of purity that so commended themselves to Adolf Hitler and became, in the end, a stirring Nazi slogan. I suppose one might argue, then, that at least the Greens are remaining true to one plank of the ideology that was most definitely present when the movement was created. Not every vestige has quite been jettisoned.

“They have drifted to the very far left of British politics and swallowed all necessary delusions

### Veteran meets veteran



PHOTOBUBBLE: NICK NEWMAN

● Apparently, JRR Tolkien was furious that publishers did not take *The Lord of the Rings* terribly seriously. Especially regarding elves. This has emerged from the discovery of previously unseen letters between the author and the comedian Donald Swann. Listen, John, old chap, if you can

hear me up there. The real tragedy is that your pompous pillaging of Norse folklore has been taken way too seriously for at least half a century and was a grim intrusion into my childhood, my precious. You are at best a long-winded, less charming, jumped-up Beatrix Potter for perpetual adolescents.

### Polls low, voters high as a kite

How are the Conservative-supporting morning newspapers advising their readers to cope with the trauma of Tory annihilation at the polls and the terrible advent of a Labour government? It seems the answer is to turn to recreational drugs. A Daily Mail columnist suggested exploring the consoling effects of magic mushrooms, although she admitted that “the walls started glowing”. Meanwhile, The Daily Telegraph went one step further, giving Shaun Ryder of the Happy Mondays an opportunity to explain to its readers the many therapeutic benefits of heroin. They may both be a little too late. Given the number of Tory voters switching to Ed Davey’s Liberal Democrats, I reckon a significant proportion must already be skagged out of their skulls.

### This’ll reform your fortunes, Rishi

A leaked email from Downing Street has appeared in my inbox. Here it is in full. “Well, I did as you advised and left the D-Day commemorations early to take part in an interview nobody will see. But I forgot to moon at the veterans as you suggested – sorry, it’s all been so hectic. “I really liked your idea of setting fire to a tramp while on my way to the Duke of Westminster’s wedding and laying it on the line to the lazy bloody nurses when I do my hospital visit next week. “Once again, I can’t thank you enough for your brilliant campaign tips — I’m indebted, Nigel. Best wishes Rishi.”

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The boy who murdered Charlie Cosser at a party was convicted last week. The victim's family now warn youngsters of the danger of carrying a knife

Hugo Daniel

Shortly before 17-year-old Charlie Cosser's life-support machine was turned off, his older brother Adam held his hand and whispered to him a secret: "You're going to be an uncle."

Adam and his fiancée, Jade Avery, are haunted by not knowing for sure if he heard them. They had hoped to break the news they were expecting their first child at a family celebration a few weeks later. Instead they had to do it in a hospital while Charlie lay after being stabbed by a stranger at a party. Last week a boy, also 17, was convicted of his murder. He will be sentenced on June 19.

Adam said: "While Jade was holding his hand and I was holding his hand the other side ... I whispered into Charlie's ear, 'Me and Jade have got some news for you – you're going to be an uncle'. We believe Charlie knew, but the fact we don't necessarily know, that hurts us a lot."

He had gone to an end-of-term summer party in the field of a £1.5 million farmhouse in a West Sussex village on July 23 last year. He did not know the teenage triplets having the party but had gone with a mutual friend.

In court, blurry video filmed by another teenager was played showing the moment, just before midnight, when Charlie was stabbed three times in the chest as the Britney Spears song *Toxic* played. Earlier, a fight had broken out and he had been among those who had asked his murderer, then 16, to leave.

When the attacker, who had been drinking vodka, stabbed Charlie on a dark and crowded dancefloor, no one noticed. He knew only two people at the party and one of them had already left. His friend Wiktor Mlynarski, 22, who had known him for only a few months, found him sitting on a pallet. Initially Mlynarski thought Charlie had spilt cider on himself because his T-shirt was "covered in red".

Charlie complained "my chest and my back really hurts" and lifted his T-shirt revealing his wounds. An ambulance was called to the estate in Warnham.

Police arrived at 12.30am and Charlie was able to give his name, address and date of birth. But on the way to hospital he suffered a cardiac arrest caused by internal bleeding from a cut to his aorta, the main artery from the heart. He died two days later.

"What's really hard for us all is the fact



# As he lay dying, I had to tell my stabbed brother he would be an uncle

Charlie Cosser, top right, was killed last July in the village of Warnham. Above right, his brother Adam with Albie

“There’s been no remorse. He didn’t even flinch when he heard Charlie had died

that when Charlie was attacked and going through those incredibly awful moments he didn't have a close friend with him," said his father, Martin. "We haven't been able to even start grieving for Charlie. None of us wanted to hear those things in court – the only reason we had to was because that monster was allowed to change his plea." He and Charlie's mother, Tara, from Milford, Surrey, attended every day of the three-week trial with Adam and his sister, Eloise, 16.

Often Jade could be seen outside the courthouse in Brighton with Albie Charlie Michael Cosser, the son Adam had told Charlie about in hospital and who is now 3½ months old. They were regularly joined by Charlie's grandparents and a large group of family friends.

The killer, who cannot be named because of his age, had pleaded guilty to murder but withdrew the plea months later, forcing police to restart their investigation and interview witnesses. At trial he gave no evidence and showed no emotion when the verdict was read.

The court heard that the morning after the stabbing, the killer went for lunch with his parents. He had burnt his clothes

in a fire pit at a friend's house. His phone and the weapon have never been found.

"He went for a carvery 11 hours after, while we're in hospital – Charlie's got 15 tubes coming out of him, he's lost every milligram of blood in his body and he's in an induced coma," Martin said.

"It's beyond words for us, there's been no remorse. The police told us he didn't even flinch when he was told Charlie had died."

Charlie, known as Cheeks for his smile as a baby, dreamt of being on the ground staff at Chelsea Football Club and was an apprentice groundsman at Charterhouse, the co-educational private school in Godalming, Surrey. He was booked to go on a first "boys" holiday to Zante in Greece the week he died. Returning from hospital, his family found his suitcase packed with clothes, euros and a first-aid kit made by his mother.

"I still open Charlie's bedroom door to see if he's there," Martin said. "I still have those moments where you're driving along in a car, and suddenly you just burst into tears, it just hits you, you have those flashback moments. Whether it's just driving down the road and I see a cou-



## Speed limit emojis backfire

Nicholas Hellen  
Transport Editor

At accident hot spots, emoji-style smiley faces flash up on road signs to praise responsible drivers, and grimace at those who exceed the limit – often displaying their speed to shame them.

But now some of the signs have stopped showing the speed of the worst offenders because of concerns that the psychological tactics have backfired. Instead of slowing down, the culprits try to rack up the highest speed.

Chris Spinks, managing director of Westcotec, a Norfolk company whose signs stop displaying the speed when 15mph above the limit, said: "There are a small minority of extremely irresponsible drivers who will seek to go quicker in built-up areas. If the sign displays that higher speed, it would prove they have done that."

Another sign maker, Truvelo (UK), compiled figures for one of its sites in a 30mph zone between November and February.

Of 44,916 vehicles, 5,220 were travelling at 31mph or faster, and 172 of those accelerated after they were



detected by the cameras. Its devices hide motorists' speed if they exceed the limit by 3mph.

Dr Lisa Dorn, associate professor of driver behaviour at Cranfield University, Bedford, pointed out that unlike other classic nudge policies, the road signs made the driver feel singled out – and some reacted by seeing how fast they could go.

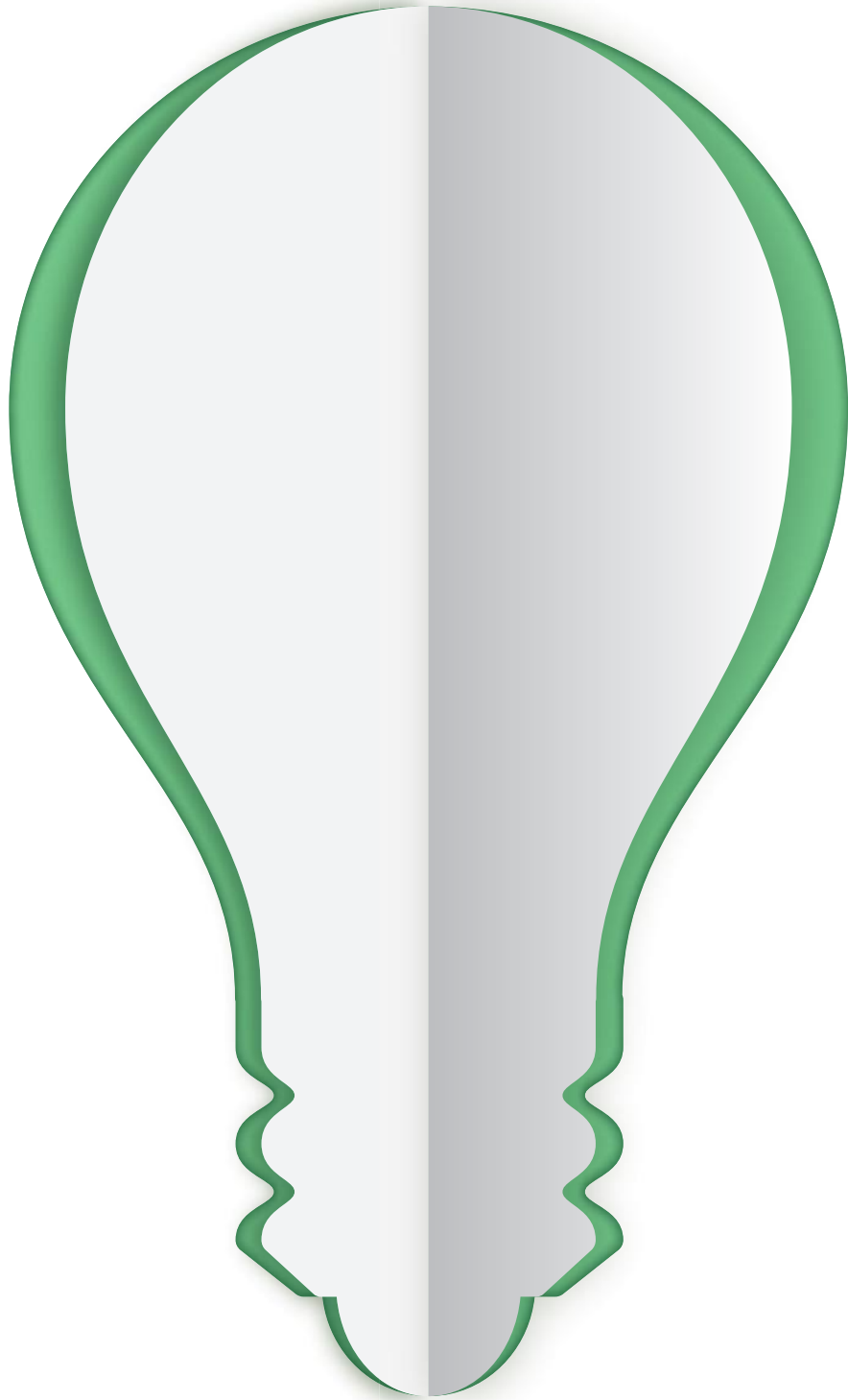
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# Forza Meloni

The Italian leader once said she wanted to bring down the EU, yet her influence within it is growing. Now she aims to shift the Brussels balance of power to the right

Peter Conradi Florence

Since taking power almost 18 months ago, Giorgia Meloni, Italy's first female leader and perhaps the most right-wing since the Second World War, has made her mark on her homeland. Now she is trying to do the same in Europe.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy, a party with post-Fascist roots, looks set to emerge victorious from elections to the European parliament, which culminate today. Polls predict the party will win 25-27 per cent of the vote, four or five points ahead of the main opposition, the centre-left Democratic Party.

"Meloni has campaigned very hard, but not because she's interested in the dynamics of the European parliament," said Valerio Alfonso Bruno, a senior fellow at Polidemos, the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Political Change at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. "She wants to show that hers is Italy's leading party and that she is going to stay as prime minister for her full five-year term."

Yet the result will undoubtedly help shift the balance of power in Europe – Meloni's MEPs will form one of the largest contingents among a record number of representatives from radical and hard-right parties expected to win seats. Including France's National Rally, the Dutch Party of Freedom and the Alternative for Germany, they are likely to push for a tougher line on immigration and a weakening of Europe's "green deal".

It will also enhance Meloni's own standing in Europe – putting her into an unusually strong position for an Italian leader at a time when the three-party coalition of the German chancellor Olaf Scholz is struggling and President Macron of France is hobbled by the lack of a parliamentary majority.

"She is in firm control of Italian domestic politics and is looking to wield extra influence at EU level, where Italy has historically punched below its weight," said Jacob Kirkegaard, a Brussels-based senior fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States think tank.

"She's a great politician – and also ruthless – and she is positioning herself as someone who is prepared to play ball with the traditional parties in Europe."

This Wednesday will also see Meloni advancing on the world stage when she hosts President Biden and other G7 leaders at a summit at Borgo Egnazia, a resort on the Puglian coast beloved of international celebrities. Almost uniquely among EU leaders, she has been assiduously courting Donald Trump.

"If Biden wins in November her relations will be great, but if Trump wins they will be great too," said Teresa Coratella, of the European Council on Foreign Relations in Rome. "If you look at Scholz and Macron, that is absolutely not the case."

A highly skilled political operator, Meloni, 47, has come a long way since the last European election in 2019, when her

party managed only a lowly fifth place, with less than 7 per cent of the vote.

In opposition at home at the time, she was a strident Eurosceptic. "Bring down this EU!" she declared during that year's meeting of America's Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

Since becoming prime minister, however, Meloni has adopted a far more conciliatory tone and developed a close working relationship with Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president. Von der Leyen's German Christian Democrats sit in the European parliament within the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), while the Brothers of Italy are part of the Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), once home to the Tory party.

Meloni has been rewarded by von der Leyen with support for her government's tougher line on immigration, which has included a controversial deal that as many as 36,000 migrants picked up in the Mediterranean each year on their way to Italy will be processed in Albania.

The Italian leader's ideas helped inspire a recent toughening of EU migration policy, while the two women have also made trips to Egypt and Tunisia to conclude deals to curb the numbers trying to reach Europe.

This softer stance was reflected in Brothers of Italy's relatively innocuous slogan for this year's campaign: "With Giorgia, Italy will change Europe." It is in sharp contrast to that of the League, headed by Matteo Salvini, Meloni's junior coalition partner and political rival, which is trying to restore flagging fortunes with a more confrontational: "More Italy and less Europe."

Meloni's continued popularity at home – her approval ratings are still above 30 per cent – has been driven in part by her skill as a communicator, but also by the strength of the Italian economy, which has grown by 4.2 per cent since the eve of the Covid pandemic, far more than those of Britain, Germany and France. Overall debt, however, is an alarming 140 per cent of GDP.

Meloni's relationship with von der Leyen will be key to what happens next for the EU, which will be plunged into weeks of wrangling over the choice of the next presidents of the European Commission, the European Council and the European parliament, as well as the EU's next foreign policy chief. Von der Leyen, 65, wants a second five-year term and hopes to be endorsed by EU leaders. Italian backing



RICCARDO ANTIMIANI/EPA



Giorgia Meloni has a good relationship with Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president

would be useful, especially in the unlikely event another rival emerges.

More unpredictable will be the next stage of the process – probably in September – when von der Leyen has to win the backing of a simple majority of the 720 newly elected members of the European parliament.

She secured her first term after scraping home with a majority of just nine votes, having drawn support largely from the mainstream parties. They will be weaker this time, with a predicted surge of the nationalist right – making the backing of Meloni's MEPs crucial. Meloni has yet to confirm her intentions, but the idea of von der Leyen doing a deal with the far right is anathema to leaders of Europe's left, especially Elly Schlein, who heads Italy's Democratic Party and is no fan of Meloni.

"It's a slippery slope towards the right wing," Schlein told me last week after an election rally in Flor-

ence. "In the past five years, we have seen Ursula von der Leyen and the EPP and Liberals running towards the extreme right and the nationalist right. There is a risk they will work together with the nationalist forces that want to weaken the European Union."

For that reason, Scholz, a Social Democrat, and others in the "socialist family" warned last month they would withdraw backing for von der Leyen if she does a deal with the far right, Schlein said. But Kirkegaard doubts they will follow through. "Would the Socialists really be ready to take the blame for the EU to be paralysed for six months?" he asked.

Giving overt backing to von der Leyen could come at a cost for Meloni too, by undermining relations with other leaders to her right, who remain implacably opposed to the commission president.

This might complicate attempts to increase the right's influence in Europe to form a "supergroup", uniting its members, who are at present divided: some are in the ECR and others in the more radical Identity and Democracy group, while the remainder sit as independents.

Meloni looks unlikely to let that bother her. Such is her newfound power, they may need her more than she needs them.

## Grieving French parents unite to sue TikTok over 'how-to' suicide videos

Matthew Campbell Nice

Charlize Dapui Parkiet was a happy, loving child. She liked Harry Potter and synchronised swimming and lived with an elder sister, her parents and two cats in a comfortable home on a hill with a goldfish pond and a view of Nice below, on the French Riviera.

One afternoon last November, she took her own life. She was 15.

"We'll carry the pain for the rest of our lives," Delphine Dapui, her mother, said. J  r  my Parkiet, her father, who found her body in her bedroom, said: "I've replayed the scene in my head so many times, living it over and over. Would it have changed something if we had acted differently?"

The question torments them.

Charlize's friends told her parents that on the eve of her death she had reposted a video online in which a woman gives instructions on a method of suicide.

The parents were barely aware of TikTok, the video-sharing app, or the fact that Charlize spent hours every week on it. Now they have joined six other families in what is thought to be the first joint legal action in Europe against the Chinese-owned company which they blame for the death.

"TikTok say 'we just circulate the videos', that they are not responsible for what's in them, but they can't carry on like that; they must take responsibility," Laure Boutron-Marmion, the group's lawyer in Paris, said. She expects other families to join the case for which she is gathering evidence before filing a lawsuit this summer.

"There are medical studies showing the link between these self-harm videos and the poor state of mental health among adolescents," she said, adding that she will demand "significant" compensation for the plaintiffs.

These include the parents of seven adolescents. Three,

among them Charlize and 15-year-old Marie from nearby Cassis, killed themselves. Others suffer from mental illness or have survived suicide attempts. One is in hospital and refusing care.

TikTok would not comment on the lawsuit but said it had "clear and strict" guidelines on content. "We don't allow anything that depicts self harm or anything in that realm," a spokeswoman said. "Anything that slips through is removed as quickly as possible. It's an area we take really seriously."

The stories of these French teenagers are similar to that of Molly Russell, 14, from Harrow, northwest London, who took her own life in 2017 after viewing harmful content on social media.

A coroner at her 2022 inquest concluded that material she viewed online had "affected her mental health in a negative way and contributed to her death in a more than minimal way".

Charlize Dapui Parkiet, who took her own life last November aged 15, with her mother, Delphine Dapui



Charlize's parents believe she suffered the same fate, as much a victim of a powerful algorithm bombarding her with videos about suicide as she was of her depression.

She was named after the Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron, "but our girl was even prettier", said Dapui, 47. Parkiet, 44, who runs a body jewellery and piercing business in Nice, said Charlize had been a "smiley and joyful" child as well as "hypersensitive" to the extent that she had "agonised about stepping on ants".

On a bookshelf in her bedroom were several volumes of *Heartstopper*, the romantic coming-of-age series by the British author Alice Oseman, but the telephone Charlize was given when she was 12 ended up claiming more of her attention than books. "We really had no idea what she was looking at on the phone," said her mother. "When we found out, it was too late."

At first Charlize seemed happy enough at her private

school down the road. "She took up synchronised swimming, which she really liked; she was doing judo too," said Dapui. "Her grades were good," added Parkiet.

At one point she started complaining about harassment by a classmate. Then came the first suicide attempt. "She came into our room in the middle of the night," recalled Parkiet. "We rushed her to emergency. She spent a week in the hospital."

Charlize's mental health deteriorated. By now she was seeing a psychiatrist who told her parents that she was self-harming and had an eating disorder. She made a second and third attempt on her life.

She was taken off antidepressants in favour of a form of psychotherapy known as EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing), used to process trauma such as the loss of her grandfather with whom she had a close relationship.

The new therapy seemed

to work. "We felt a difference," Parkiet said. "She took up swimming again," Dapui said.

On the afternoon of November 22, Parkiet took Ylana, Charlize's elder sibling, to an appointment, telling Charlize they would not be gone long. Returning just over an hour later, Parkiet found her dead.

Dapui and her husband torture themselves with thoughts of what they could have done or said to save her.

Most of all, though, they regret not having been aware, until it was too late, of the self-harming videos that their daughter was watching online. "It's the same with looking up recipes and things like that; if you look at one video about something you're soon bombarded with the stuff," Dapui said. "That's what was happening to our daughter."

If you are affected by any of the issues raised in this article, call the Samaritans on 116 123 or visit [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

# Show goes on (and on) for Sin City’s dancers still doing splits in their seventies

**Louise Callaghan** Las Vegas

Under a display of ostrich feather fans, Lovey Goldmine perched on a desk at the Las Vegas Showgirl Museum, her long legs ending with five-inch stilettos folded neatly, ankle to ankle. After five decades in showbusiness, it had become physically impossible for her to slouch.

Now, at 78½, she was dressed in a glittering transparent bodysuit, red hair piled on her head, ready to get back on stage. “I have a show tonight. I can’t break anything,” she said, as she hopped down onto the floor. “A broken hip, and my career is done.”

A few hours later and she would be under the bright lights of a Las Vegas theatre with ladies she had known for a long time: Tiffany Carter, Miss Nude Universe 1975, now a grandmother of seven at 75; Georgette Dante, 76, who was born in a circus and killed three men; and the Empress Yee, 78, and her Grant Avenue Follies troupe, out of

San Francisco’s Chinatown. All of them are legends of burlesque and showbusiness. None of them is ready to quit yet. One weekend every year, they get together to perform in Sin City at the Orleans Hotel for the Burlesque Hall of Fame Legends showcase. And every year, they send an electric shock into those who would rather they stayed home, stayed quiet.

“It keeps you younger than most,” said Goldmine, who credits yoga with helping her to keep doing high kicks and the splits.

Though their numbers might be falling, and every year brings more tributes to those who have died – Tempest Storm, a sultry redhead who grew up picking cotton in the fields of Georgia and who claimed she had affairs with Frank Sinatra and a young Massachusetts senator called John F Kennedy, died three years ago at 93 – they are a sizzling, shimmying reminder of the golden age of Vegas past.

They are on a mission to

tell the new generation of burlesque dancers about the dos and don’ts of taking one’s clothes off for money. “It’s supposed to be sensual,” Goldmine said. She was appalled, when she first saw a new generation of burlesque performers on stage ten years ago, to see that they just tore off their stockings and threw them away.

To show them how it was done, she stepped up onto the stage, did a “really syrupy slow stocking peel . . . and did a little back bend over the chair”. “People lost their minds,” she said.

What is today called burlesque was born in the music halls of London during the Victorian era. In 1868, Lydia Thompson, a publican’s daughter from Covent Garden, stepped onto an ocean liner with her troupe of “British Blondes” and took their show transatlantic.

“They were making fun of high culture and politics, and a lot of times they did burlesque of Greek or Roman

AMANDA MUSTARD FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Lovey Goldmine, 78, prepares for her performance at the Las Vegas Showgirl Museum. Right, Georgette Dante, 76



epics and they would play all the roles in skimpy costumes,” said Jo Weldon, headmistress of the New York School of Burlesque.

Audiences were hooked; polite society was horrified. The New York Times waged a campaign to chase out the newcomers.

Yet it was too late, burlesque had caught on. After the end of the Second World War, Las Vegas, a city in the desert built largely by the mafia, began to boom. Casinos opened and money flowed in with the gamblers. Big stars came to Vegas: the Rat Pack held court at the Sands Hotel. Strippers, who usually came from poor backgrounds, drank champagne and danced with America’s most powerful men.

The burlesque of today is highly camp, open to all body sizes, genders and sexualities. Performers, who mostly have other jobs, perform for the sheer fun of it. “Now it’s about getting in touch with your sensuality,” said Goldmine, who started

as a burlesque dancer in Sacramento, California, at 21.

“Vegas has cleaned up their act. Now it’s on the up and up,” said Patricia Chin, 88, who performs with the Grant Avenue Follies.

When Georgette Dante was dancing there, it was nothing like as respectable. The city was run by the mob, and it was a violent place. Dante, however, was more than equal to the challenge. She was born in 1945, the fifth generation in a circus family. By the age of six, she was pickpocketing the punters, using a razor blade to slit open their pockets and bags from below.

When she was seven, she killed her first man. She had been hunting for change under the circus seats with the other kids when a man tried to molest her. She called for help, and the circus folk caught him. When her dad came, he gave her his switchblade and told her to stab him. “I wouldn’t do it,” she said. “So he grabbed the guy, grabbed my hand, and

jabbed him and jabbed him.”

By the age of 12, she danced with flaming nipple tassels, sold bootleg alcohol and became so strong from putting the tents up and down all day that she could lift 400lb and became a circus strongwoman. As an adult, she performed on stage at legendary burlesque joints.

By 9pm on Friday at the Orleans Hotel in Las Vegas, the show was in full swing. Carter inched off a blue sequinned dress to *Me and Mrs Jones*. The Empress Yee and the Grant Avenue Follies turned out a perfectly synchronised rumba number, white feather headdresses swaying. And in the finale, Goldmine sang and danced the *Cell Block Tango* from the musical *Chicago*, before unclipping the brassiere of her black corset with a snap of her fingers.

“Holy shit,” yelled a young performer sitting next to me at the back of the theatre, as the crowd rose up in a wave. “They don’t make them like that any more.”

# In Bidenville they’re rallying round Hunter, local boy in ‘a bit of trouble’

Days after Trump’s conviction, the president’s son is in court on drug and gun charges — and he’s not short of family support

**Megan Agnew** Wilmington, Delaware

The secret service officers sitting at the end of the courtroom benches swapped over like clockwork: every 30 minutes. Outside, the corridors were teeming with them too, agents appearing from doorways and disappearing around corners. On the street, and in the city beyond, they were everywhere.

Because at the centre of it all, sitting on a swivel chair in a courtroom in Wilmington, Delaware, was Hunter Biden, 54, charged with making false statements on a form when purchasing a weapon and illegally possessing a gun while abusing or being addicted to drugs, violations of federal law. It is the first time the child of a sitting president has been on trial.

Each morning a parade of political power suits, sunglasses and blacked-out SUVs arrived at the courthouse. Inside, Biden sat in front of the judge, his shoulders tense, his face drawn. Behind him was a bench packed tightly with perfectly coiffed and immaculately styled Bidens, the women often in colour-blocked outfits more suitable for the campaign trail.

Jill Biden, 73, the first lady and Hunter’s stepmother, sat next to his second wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, 38, who early in the week had confronted Garrett Ziegler, a former aide to Donald Trump, in the corridor, pointing at him and saying: “You have no right to be here, you Nazi piece of shit.” Also on the front row was the president’s sister, Valerie Owens, dressed one day entirely in Barbie pink, followed by a collection of the president’s brothers-in-law, daughters-in-laws, nieces and nephews. “That’s how we roll,” said Cuffe Owens, a Biden nephew who was once married to Meghan King, the *Real Housewives of Orange County* star, gesturing to the family group.

Taking the stand was a Wilmington mix: from Biden’s eldest daughter, Naomi, 30, to a gun shop owner with a grey beard down to his chest, officers from the Virginia-based FBI and local drug enforcement agencies, and Biden’s ex-wife and two ex-girlfriends — one of whom was a stripper and the other his sister-in-law. Much of the evidence exposed the dark reality of Biden’s years-long addictions, smoking crack in five-star hotels and picking up drugs on street corners in Washington DC, a tragic mess of rehabs, women, cash and drug binges.

It was a week-long spectacle with high stakes, happening just days after Trump was found guilty in a Manhattan criminal court on 34 counts of falsifying business records, watched by members of his own family — sons Eric and Donald Junior.

Wilmington is known, almost entirely, for the sprawling Biden family. It is where the president moved in 1953 and where he still has a family home. During the trial the town was determinedly tight-lipped. “I have nothing but good things to say about the Bidens,” said one former neighbour of Hunter Biden. None of the other dozens approached wanted to talk.

The Charcoal Pit restaurant is where “Joe has been coming for thirty something years”, said Lupe Avilez, the manager. Does he ever see the younger Biden? “To be honest with you,” he paused, lowering his voice, “people don’t see Hunter so much. He’s in a bit of trouble.”

Because, on across the street from the diner is StarQuest Shooters and Survival Supply, the shop where, on October 12, 2018, Biden went to buy a Colt Cobra 38SPL revolver.

The crux of the trial comes down to



KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES



Hunter Biden was joined by his wife, Melissa Cohen, in court, above. He was also supported by his stepmother, Jill Biden, far left, his aunt, Valerie Owens, left, and his uncle, James Biden, and his wife, Sara Jones, right



whether Biden was using illegal drugs when he owned the gun. He pleaded not guilty on all three counts (the maximum sentence is 25 years), two of which allege that he lied about being a drug user on the federal application he filled out to get the weapon; and a third count relating to firearm possession while using narcotics. He has also been charged separately over unpaid taxes in California, a case that will be heard in September.

Last week he was also referred with James Biden, the president’s brother and also in the courtroom on Friday, to the Department of Justice by the House of Representatives, recommending the pair be criminally charged with making false statements to Congress.

Just 11 days after Biden bought the gun, it was discovered. Hallie Biden, his lover

and his brother Beau’s widow, said she went to clean out his truck while he slept. She saw the revolver, bullets and “some remnants” of crack cocaine. “I panicked and wanted to get rid of [the gun],” she told the jury.

She hid it in a leather pouch belonging to Biden, which later tested positive for cocaine, and drove to Janssen’s Market in Greenville, Wilmington, a neighbourhood supermarket where she dumped the gun in a bin.

Biden found out — and was angry. “The f\*\*\*ing FBI, Hallie, it’s hard to believe anyone is that stupid,” he texted — suggesting he understood the seriousness of the situation. The call log showed a flurry of calls that day, but she could not recall their details. She returned to the car park, looking through the bins, eventu-

ally reporting it to the police. After an investigation, officers tracked down an 80-year-old who collected recyclables from bins as a hobby. He took the police to his home, opened a cabinet, reached for a sock — and pulled out Biden’s gun, the pouch, a speed loader and bullets.

Hunter is the second son of Joe and Neilia Biden, born just over a year after his brother, Beau, and nine months before their sister, Naomi. In 1972, Neilia’s car collided with a truck, killing her and Naomi on impact. Hunter and Beau survived, bound to their father forever by grief.

Where Joe and Beau abstained from alcohol, due to family history, Hunter reportedly enjoyed collapsing into inebriation. When he later struggled with addiction, Beau took him to meetings

and booked him into rehab facilities on numerous occasions.

Hunter trained as a lawyer and started his own consultancy firm, while Beau followed their father into politics, serving as attorney-general of Delaware. He died of a brain tumour in 2015. Biden, he wrote in his memoir, *Beautiful Things*, was “at sea” after his death, the brothers more like twins. He started drinking again — and taking drugs.

Kathleen Buhle, his ex-wife with whom he has three children, testified last week. She told the jury that she was first made aware of Biden’s addiction in 2015, the day after their 22nd wedding anniversary, when she found a crack pipe at their home.

Around that time he began a relationship with Beau’s widow, Hallie Biden, 50,

spiralling into further addiction to crack cocaine, which he smoked during business meetings, according to his memoir. In 2017, while still seemingly with Hallie, he met a stripper in a gentleman’s club in New York — Zoe Kestan, 30, told the jury she later went his room at the Soho Grand hotel. She didn’t leave for five days.

In the following months they bounced between high-end hotels in New York and Los Angeles, filling his suites, according to his memoir, with a crew of “thieves, junkies, petty dealers, over-the-hill strippers, con artists, and assorted hangers-on”. In this period Kestan said she saw him smoking crack as soon as he woke up and then “every 20 minutes, except when he slept”.

In June 2018, he asked Kestan to leave their suite at the Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles, because Hallie was coming to visit. She told court that this is when he “introduced” her to crack cocaine. “It was a terrible experience I went through and I’m embarrassed and I’m ashamed,” she said.

The spiral continued. He withdrew \$151,640 in cash, between September and November that year. On October 12, he went to the gun shop. Gordon Cleveland, the salesman, said he saw Biden answer “no” to the question: “Are you an unlawful user of, or addicted to, marijuana or any depressant, stimulant, narcotic drug, or any other controlled substance?” The defence maintains that he did not fill out the form at the gun store knowingly and that he only relapsed in the period after the gun was found.

His daughter Naomi Biden walked into the courtroom on Friday. “Sorry, I’m nervous,” she said softly, looking down at her hands. She knew her father had struggled with addiction. “After my uncle died things got bad,” she said. “We didn’t see him whenever he was using.”

She said she saw her father over the summer in LA, looking sober. In mid-October, she was in New York where her father said he wanted to swap cars with her, so he could have the truck and she the Cadillac. The prosecution brought out a 20-page document of text messages between father and daughter. It was a surprise bundle.

“When are you getting the car,” she texted at 2.45pm on October 18. At 2am, he asked her to bring it to him. She was asleep. After messages to and fro they finally swapped cars, but then Naomi tried to set up a meeting without success. “So no see you?” she asked, followed by a sad face emoji. Then: “I’m really sorry dad I can’t take this. I don’t know what to say, I just miss you so much.” She left the stand close to tears, hugging her father, and followed out by the first lady, also wiping away tears.

Evidence heard in court pointed to Biden’s erratic behaviour following the discovery of the gun, texting Hallie that he was “sleeping on a car smoking crack”. She said she had called him 520 times in 24 hours. “I am afraid you are going to die,” she said. Minutes later she added: “And I can’t live without you.” He gave up drugs in May, 2019 — the day he met Melissa Cohen in LA. They were married six days later and had a child the following year.

On Friday night, Jill Biden flew back to France, after 24 hours in Wilmington, Delaware. The president, who she will rejoice, has reiterated his “boundless love” for his son. The trial continues, and will resume tomorrow. The child of the President of the United States of America versus the United States of America.

YAN NAING



Recruits in football shorts report to the Karenni defence force, which has about 10,000 fighters. One unit customises drones, fitting them with explosives, below



# Rebels who fight junta using printers

Myanmar’s Generation Z demand democracy, taking on the might of the military regime with drones and homemade weapons

**Secunder Kermani** Loikaw, Myanmar

With his only tool a knife, welded on to the empty casing of a bullet, Phoe Zaw, a wiry man with a mischievous smile, is about to set foot in a minefield. “It doesn’t matter if I lose my life doing this,” he says matter-of-factly. “My priority is to stop civilians getting hurt.”

He has no protective equipment, no professional training, and the nearest hospital in this part of eastern Myanmar is well over an hour’s drive away, but if Phoe Zaw has any nerves as he heads out, they are not showing.

“When I first started, I didn’t even know how to defuse them, I would pick them up with a bamboo stick and drop them in an empty plot of land,” he says, with a slight grin.

Phoe Zaw, 45, used to be a carpenter but now clears landmines laid by soldiers. Nicknamed the “Mine Hunter” (he has collected more than 100 in the past few months) he dedicated himself to the cause after seeing friends and neighbours maimed and killed as they returned home to districts such as this small rural town of Nanmekhon in eastern Myanmar, which was captured by resistance fighters from the junta at the end of last year.

The movement began with peaceful protests against a military coup in 2021 which ended a brief period of democratic rule in Myanmar under the Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. The army shot hundreds of the young demonstrators. Many fled to the jungles along the country’s borders, forming armed resistance groups and teamed up with the ethnic militias who had long waged insurgencies against the Myanmar government.

This loose coalition of resistance forces, who vow to establish a “federal democracy”, now control vast swathes of Myanmar – and despite being outgunned, is forcing the junta into retreat. A lightning offensive late last year saw

dozens of towns and border posts captured. In Karenni State, bordering Thailand, about 90 per cent of the territory is now held by the rebels.

Loikaw, the largest city in the state, lies largely abandoned, many of its buildings reduced to rubble by airstrikes. The resistance fighters, though, have managed to pin the military back to a handful of locations. In the urban battlefield the enemy is at times just 100m away. “We hear them swearing at us when they open fire,” a teenage rebel fighter tells me, peering out of the window of a villa being used as a forward outpost. Much of the fighting takes place within the jungle.

If the rebels are to take full control of the city, they need more bullets and more ammunition, says a young commander known as Cobra. “They have jet fighters, tanks – we only have [our] spirit.”

The regime is backed by Russia and China, while the resistance buy most of their weapons on the black market, largely relying on donations.

The leaders of this rebel army highlight they are fighting for western values, yet receive no support. “We are just like the people in America, the people in Europe,” says Maui, 30, a former organic farmer, who is now the deputy commander of the Karenni Nationalities



Defence Force, leading about 10,000 men and women. “We’re fighting for the same values: democracy ... they’ve forgotten us.”

The revolution is driven by a mix of idealism and innovation. At a secret base south of Loikaw, we meet a rebel unit customising commercial drones, fitting them with explosives. In their makeshift workshop a 3D printer whirs into action, producing weapon parts.

The resistance has no fighter jets, but they are building their own air force. They’ve studied the war in Ukraine, where drones have also become key in the fight against Russia, and drones are now one of the rebel’s most effective weapons in Myanmar too.

Helping to repair one of the unit’s most

powerful models, normally used for spraying crops, is Ko Khant. He’s covered in tattoos, his body a tribute to his struggle, with the word “revolution” carved across his fingers and an image of the jailed politician Aung San Suu Kyi on his chest. Suu Kyi was heavily criticised internationally for not speaking out against the military’s abuses of the Rohingya minority while in power, but domestically she’s still seen by many as a symbol of democratic hope.

Ko Khant, 31, used to work in digital marketing in Yangon, Myanmar’s largest city, before joining protests against the coup. Like many of Myanmar’s Generation Z, he grew up with a glimpse of greater democratic freedoms and connectivity to the outside world, only to see it snatched away as the military reasserted its dominance. “We just requested them to give us back our future but they didn’t listen ... we want freedom.”

The regime labels fighters like Ko Khant “terrorists”, but it’s clear that the movement has widespread support. On his arm he has a tattoo of a flower emerging from the barrel of a gun. One day, he hopes, he will not have to fight any more.

For now, however, the war shows no sign of ending. The regime has been lashing out at areas it no longer controls –

often, it seems, deliberately targeting civilians, though it denies this. Clinics, schools, camps for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people have all been struck. Thousands of civilians have been killed and more than two million forced to flee their homes.

In February, a military jet attacked a school in the village of Daw Si Ei. Four schoolchildren were killed. Textbooks still lie amidst the debris and a child’s drawing hangs off a badly damaged wall.

Despite its atrocities, the junta remains in control of Myanmar’s largest cities. It is bolstering its forces with unpopular conscription order, and preparing a counteroffensive around Loikaw.

Back with Phoe Zaw, the “Mine Hunter”, it becomes clear how much the rebels are willing to sacrifice. He returns from the field carrying a defused device. “I often imagine what it will be like to step on a landmine,” he says. “I think about the pain I will feel. But even if I lose a leg, I’ll continue doing this for my people until I die.”

Secunder Kermani is a foreign correspondent for Channel 4 News. His special reports from Myanmar with film-maker Katie Arnold will air from Monday at 7pm

# Kapil Komireddi

## New India is dead, the surprise is that Modi survived

The redeeming power of democracy was on shimmering display last week in India.

On Tuesday morning, Narendra Modi awoke as the father of what his followers call “New India” – a Hindu-first state built on the remains of the secular ideals that had been the basis of India’s national identity for more than six decades. By the time he retired to bed, New India was dead and Modi’s aura of invincibility was in shreds.

If Modi looked like a loser despite winning more seats than any of his rivals, the fault was entirely his. He had launched the election campaign by asserting that he was going to return with a supermajority, portrayed his critics as stooges of an international conspiracy and deployed rhetoric steeped in anti-Muslim hysteria.

He mythologised himself as India’s saviour only to become captive to his own conceit. By the end of the contest, Modi showed signs of having lost touch with reality. He claimed to be a divine agent, guided by supernatural forces.

“When my mother was alive, I used to believe that I was born biologically,” he told a journalist. “After she passed away, upon reflecting on all my experiences, I was convinced that God has sent me.”

Indian voters felt otherwise. They left his party nearly two dozen seats short of a majority, the result an extraordinary affirmation of Indian ecumenicalism.

In Uttar Pradesh, the populous Hindu-nationalist stronghold and the most consequential state by numbers, Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) went from 62 seats to 35. It was defeated even in Ayodhya, where, in January, Modi had inaugurated a Hindu temple on the site of a razed mosque and held it up as the emblem of his New India. The message was clear. Even televangelists who had cheered on Modi saw the result as a repudiation of his sectarian ideology.

It also reflected the deepening rage against India’s transformation into an oligarchy. Modi cast himself as a tribune of the left-behinds, yet on his watch India has degenerated into one of the world’s most unequal nations. Disparity of wealth and income in Modi’s India, a

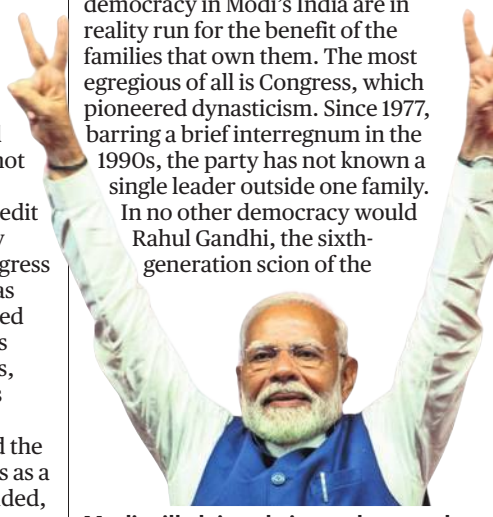
recent study by the World Inequality Lab noted, is worse than it was under the British Raj. Modi promised to create 20 million jobs a year, but unemployment is so rife that, when the Indian railways advertised 35,000 vacancies in 2022, more than 10 million people showed up for the recruitment exam. Worse, according to the International Labour Organisation, India’s youth account for 83 per cent of the unemployed. Given this record, the surprising thing is not that Modi did not win a majority. It is that he has not become extinct.

If Modi continues in office, the credit has to go the opposition, principally Congress – the Indian National Congress Party. Its argument that the deck was stacked against it by Modi, who seized control of almost every autonomous institution and set them on his rivals, obscures the fact that none of this is novel. In 1975, Indira Gandhi went further than Modi when she shelved the constitution and ruled for 21 months as a dictator. Habeas corpus was suspended, the press was censored and her

opponents jailed. When elections were called in 1977, the opposition for once united against the government. Gandhi did not merely lose the election: she lost her own seat.

In 2024, many of the opposition parties pretending to be martyrs for democracy in Modi’s India are in reality run for the benefit of the families that own them. The most egregious of all is Congress, which pioneered dynasticism. Since 1977, barring a brief interregnum in the 1990s, the party has not known a single leader outside one family.

In no other democracy would Rahul Gandhi, the sixth-generation scion of the



Modi still claimed victory last week

Nehru-Gandhi clan, survive after losing three general elections. In India, he is being exalted by sycophants for inflicting a “moral” defeat on Modi.

Modi’s problem is not the opposition; it is his allies, and his own party. He has never known what it is like to work without unconstrained authority. From his appointment as chief minister of Gujarat in 2001 to his election as prime minister in 2014, his reputation as a strongman who gets things done was contingent on comfortable majorities. Now he must co-operate with coalition partners in order to keep his job. He must bargain, barter and compromise.

Modi is not entirely unprepared for this moment. His party has mastered the craft of poaching MPs from other parties through coercion or enticement. But his past ability to direct government agencies allegedly to intimidate his rivals was a sordid perk that came with his party’s omnipotence in parliament. That dominance gone, bureaucrats will feel less inclined to act as his henchmen.

Modi is also vulnerable within his own party and the wider Hindu nationalist

movement, which abhors cults of personality. Now his star is fading, ambitious young competitors more radical than him can smell blood. At least two state elections are due. Modi will have to lead his party to resounding re-elections to solidify his position.

If everything fails, Modi will be left with the nuclear option: another general election, as early as next year. But even dissolving parliament will not be easy, because his coalition partners could simply switch sides and bring the opposition into government.

Last week, Modi was the most powerful Indian leader in decades. Now he is trapped in a position that he is not equipped by temperament to endure. No one should underestimate Modi’s flair for staging comebacks. But after ten years of wailing untrammelled power, he now looks raddled and cornered.

This is the beginning of his end.

Kapil Komireddi is the author of *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India* now published in a revised and expanded paperback edition by Hurst

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# NEWS REVIEW

A small group's protest against a sponsor's links to fossil fuels and Israel led it to withdraw from all book festivals. Insiders fear 'cultural arson', writes *Rosamund Urwin*

It was a pretty brutal break-up. After an eight-year relationship, the Hay Festival gave its main sponsor Baillie Gifford just ten minutes to digest its dumping, before Hay started spreading news of their separation. That was two weeks ago and organisers of the literary festival – dubbed “the Woodstock of the mind” by Bill Clinton – had panicked as a succession of authors pulled out and their programme disintegrated. The threat was “existential”, a Hay source says, so the “only” option was to suspend its sponsor on the second day of the festival – and then get the word out, fast.

A wedge had been driven in this partnership by the campaign group Fossil Free Books (FFB). Its activists had attacked Baillie Gifford, an Edinburgh-based fund manager usually praised as a paragon of corporate responsibility and for its funding of the arts, demanding it divest from oil and gas companies and businesses with ties to Israel.

FFB, a collective of more than 800 authors and book workers, is not a slick operation. Its website is perfunctory, its founders little-known writers with modest book sales. Yet it managed to cause a crisis not just for Hay, but across the arts world. Under similar pressure, the Edinburgh International Book Festival and Baillie Gifford mutually agreed to end their partnership. Then last week the firm told the rest of the literary festivals it supports that it would stop funding them after this year, leaving a £1 million funding black hole.

Many in publishing are deeply frustrated at FFB. “The campaign seems very misguided,” says Adrian Turpin, artistic director of the Wigtown Books Festival in Scotland. “What really sticks in the throat is that FFB keep saying this is not about [moral] purity, it’s about strategy. If it’s about strategy, it’s a very bad strategy – it has asked Baillie Gifford to divest in two areas: Israel and fossil fuels and instead it has made Baillie Gifford divest from book festivals.”

Wigtown received £35,000 annually from the firm, just under a tenth of its funding. “None of us is starting from a very secure base,” adds Turpin.

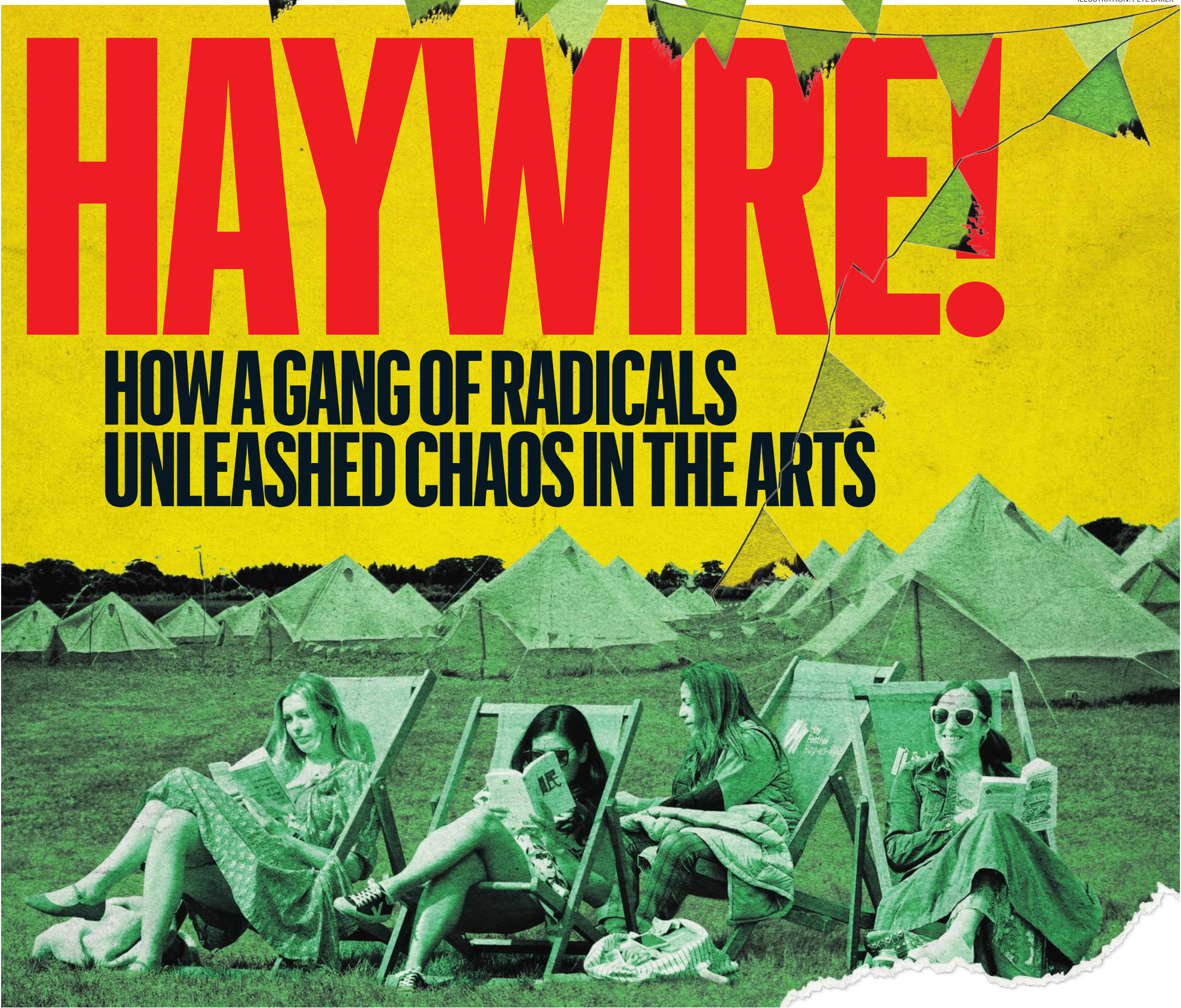
This is not the end of this row. Hay – which had armed police on site in part because of a perceived risk from protesters – has handed a dossier of threats and social media abuse to Dyfed-Powys police. Hay’s trustees have also filed a serious incident report to the Charity Commission, which is now considering whether it should intervene.

FFB says that it does not condone threats, that it is “entirely peaceful” and that its activists never engaged in a “remotely hostile” way with anyone at Hay. However, a speaker at the festival noted that the same may not apply to all those who follow them: “The difficulty of starting a fight on social media is that you can’t control who joins the brawl and what weapons they bring.”

Organisers at FFB will now meet the chief executive of Hay, Julie Finch, this week. Among its founders are the novelist Yara Rodrigues Fowler, 31, and the writer Mikaela Loach, 26, who walked out of her event at Edinburgh last year over Baillie Gifford’s involvement. Rodrigues Fowler was shortlisted for The Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year award in 2019.

Those who pulled out of Hay in support of FFB include Grace Blakeley, the economics writer, the singer Charlotte Church, Labour politician Dawn Butler and Labour peer Baroness Chakrabarti.

The campaign against Baillie Gifford really began last August, when the Swedish cli-



**Despite festival organisers' fears, footfall was up at Hay. The author Mikaela Loach, below left, is a founder of Fossil Free Books and Greta Thunberg accused Baillie Gifford of "greenwashing"**

mate activist Greta Thunberg cancelled plans to speak at Edinburgh, accusing the firm of “greenwashing”. Baillie Gifford, a major investor in green technology, responded by emphasising that only 2 per cent of the £225 billion in assets it manages are invested in companies with business related to fossil fuels, which includes supermarkets that sell petrol. This compares with an industry average of 11 per cent.

The firm also sponsors an annual prize for non-fiction, which was awarded last year to a book about climate change – John Vaillant’s *Fire Weather*. At the prize dinner in November, Nick Thomas, a Baillie Gifford partner, set out the firm’s commitment to the environment and added: “If asset managers like us who take the climate crisis seriously sell our shares, the ownership will go into the hands of less transparent shareholders and perhaps those that have less palatable motives.”

The deal for the non-fiction prize runs until 2025 and both Baillie Gifford and the board stress a desire to continue the partnership past that.

“We have always found them a brilliant sponsor,” says Dotti Irving, a literary agent who co-founded the prize. “I wonder if FFB has shot itself in the foot – festivals are a place for open debate, and they’re destroying a venue for plurality of thought.”

Sources at Hay say they believe they could have

weathered the situation if it were only about climate change, but some speakers felt they were being accused of “complicity in genocide”. After Israel’s invasion of Gaza last year, FFB appeared to blend its cause with pro-Palestinian activists in publishing.

Baillie Gifford disputes that it is a large investor in the region. Philippe Sands, a lawyer fighting for Palestinians at the International Court of Justice, has said that criticism of the firm is based on “tenuous” evidence.

FFB sent two letters to speakers at Hay, which was in close communication with Baillie Gifford about the concerns. The first, sent before the festival, asked them to use their events to call on Baillie Gifford to divest “from companies complicit in Israeli apartheid, occupation, and genocide”, to read a poem by a Palestinian author and hold a minute’s silence, or to “withdraw their labour” by cancelling their attendance. It was a second letter that spooked many more authors, arriving just as the festival started, telling them when protesters would be there.

As authors pulled out, Hay’s organisers felt hemmed in. Sources say they could see about £500,000 in ticketing revenues disappearing. “Our only option was to suspend the funding, get a short-term solution and deliver the festival,” a Hay source says. “Footfall was actually up in the end – and we don’t believe that would have been the case if we’d tried to plough on.”

Edinburgh was facing a similar pattern of authors pulling out and there were fears that they would not be allowed to use their new university-owned site, one source says.

Many in publishing feel that organisers made mistakes, though. This was Finch’s first Hay, and Jenny Niven’s first running Edinburgh. “It’s no accident that Edinburgh and Hay caved quickly,” says one publishing boss. “They have new directors so are naturally nervous and they haven’t yet got the leather hide they need.”

Partners at Baillie Gifford initially wanted to battle on, but felt after Hay that festivals were being put in impossible positions. Organisers of the Cheltenham Literature Festival in October, which is sponsored by The Times and The Sunday Times, told Baillie Gifford that they had been prepared to weather the storm, but by then minds at the firm had been made up. Nicola Tuxworth, Cheltenham’s head of programming, says: “We felt we had time to get our ducks in a row and rally some support.”

There is a widespread view that the campaigners have picked on the wrong firm, recasting the nice guys of financial services as bogeymen. Every festival I spoke to praised Baillie Gifford as partners. “They were a great partner,” adds Tuxworth. “And what makes me sad is that the very issues that the activists are concerned about are debated regularly at Cheltenham.”

Others suggested that focusing on Baillie Gifford is misguided: Waterstones is owned by Elliott Investment Management, a major investor in fossil fuels, and authors involved in FFB still have their books on Amazon, which operates in Israel. “They’ve applied this moral purity to Baillie Gifford but no one else, including themselves,” says the head of a publishing imprint.

A well-known literary agent, who referred to the activists as “Brain Free Books”, adds: “They have cut off funding which benefited a lot of writers, schools and libraries – with nothing to go in its place. That’s cultural arson.”

All is not lost, though. In the past, partners at Baillie Gifford tended to support causes as individuals, often anonymously. It is now considering returning to that approach. “We’re not giving up on the idea that we can support things like the Edinburgh children’s programme – it’s just that we might do it in a more covert way,” says a source at the firm.

Many in publishing feel they need to take a collective stand against the activists. Noting the impossibility of creating “fossil free books” – turning wood into paper is energy-intensive; pages are bleached; glue and ink are derived from petrochemicals – one literary agent added: “All they might succeed in is creating funding-free festivals.”

**Baillie Gifford is not the protesters’ real enemy, Hadley Freeman, page 20**

“They’ve applied this moral purity to Baillie Gifford but no one else”

# Sharper and more focused – why we play better on our period

Athletes tell *Katie Gatens* that their experiences back up a study last week that showed women’s accuracy, mental agility and reaction times are heightened while they are menstruating

Once a month for a few days, the West Bromwich Albion defender Ashlee Brown feels tired, has migraines, cramps and feels sick. In other words – she gets her period. Playing a game of football might be the last thing she wants to do, but she says, “I don’t want my period to define me, it’s just part of natural life.” Ever the pro, she pushes through anyway.

“When I reflect back after the game, often I think I performed a lot better than I thought I would,” says Brown, 27, who is a PE teacher and used to “that time of the month” sick notes from her pupils.

It turns out, it’s not all in her head. Last week, a study published by the UCL Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health found that women’s accuracy, mental agility, attention to detail and reaction times were heightened while having their period, despite them reporting being in more pain. Does getting your period finally have a silver lining? And should women resist the urge to cuddle up with a hot water bottle and just go with the flow?

Periods and sport have always sat together uneasily. It’s only recently that women have begun to speak up about the realities of competing at a high level while

menstruating. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, the Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui said she swam badly because her period had started the evening before. And in 2022 the British runner Dina Asher-Smith pulled up with cramp in the women’s 100m final at the Munich European Championships, and blamed her period.

Even the academics who conducted the study admit they were surprised by its results. Dr Flaminia Ronca, an associate professor at UCL, set out to prove that sportswomen do indeed sustain more injuries in the luteal phase of their menstruation – about two weeks before bleeding – and they should adjust their training accordingly. The study confirmed this, but it also found that there were previously unknown cognitive advantages. “It is a really positive



**Ashlee Brown says she often plays through the pain**

finding that challenges the fact that female athletes are often a bit nervous if they’re on their period,” says Ronca, “They think they are not going to perform well, so hopefully this challenges the stereotype a bit.” She adds

that the margins of improvement are small.

The study was conducted with sportswomen in mind, but others who need high cognitive function think there might be something in it, too. As a teenage chess prodigy in

Poland, Katarzyna Toma paid attention to every detail that would affect her performance. There was something else she noticed: in the games where she performed better, she was having her period.

“To be honest, my mum noticed it before I did,” says Toma, 38, who is now a chess grandmaster living in Birmingham. “It was a funny correlation.”

Over the years, Toma started recognising subtle changes in her game. “When I prepare for the tournaments and I’m on my period I feel like my memory is more sharp,” she says. “Paradoxically I feel like the pain gives you the ability to get in the zone and focus on one thing.”

Though Ronca says that the cognitive processes needed for chess are different from the split-second reactions in football or

“I feel like the pain gives you the ability to get in the zone and focus”

athletics, she believes more research is needed and suggests that studies into women’s health are chronically underfunded. But some remain unconvinced. Christine Harrison-Bloomfield is a former athlete and Team GB coach. “When I was working with [Team GB sprinters] Jodie Williams and Asha

Philip, doctors were prescribing injections to bring on their periods or stop it until after the championships,” she says. Harrison-Bloomfield says that even in the elite echelons of competitive sports, the finding that menstruating women perform better are unlikely to convince more women to bring on their periods during competitions. “At the end of the day it’s about control, and periods are unpredictable – you don’t know how you’re going to bleed.”

The study also has limitations. The sample size was small, testing just 105 women, but Ronca says that this initial study is just “proof of principle”. She says the results aren’t intended to downplay or minimise the discomfort that women feel from periods. “At the end of the day you have to listen to your own body.”



# The foundling detective who reunites lost families

After three abandoned brothers and sisters were connected by DNA analysis last week, a social worker tells *Rosie Kinchen* how she joins the genetic dots – and why even today new parents still leave their babies

Abandoned babies or foundlings are an emotive subject, conjuring images of Victorian London and destitute mothers driven to desperation. Today, stories like this are thankfully rare, which is why the case of baby Elsa, who was left in a park in Newham, east London, in January, on one of the coldest nights of the year, had such an impact when new details were revealed last week.

DNA evidence presented to the East London family court established that Elsa, who was found by a dog-walker in sub-zero temperatures, and was named after the character from *Frozen*, is the full biological sibling of two other babies, named Harry and Roman, who had also been left shortly after birth in the same part of London in 2017 and 2019. The boy and a girl, who were found nearby, were also wrapped in towels; one was also found in a bag. Permission was granted by the court to report the sibling link. Judge Carol Atkinson said the story was “of great public interest” as babies are rarely abandoned in modern Britain.

To find groups of siblings who have all been left is rare but not unheard of, says Ariel Bruce, a social worker renowned for searching for family members for ITV’s *Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace*.

For many of those whose lives have been affected by abandonment, the case also raises questions about how society views those who are driven to such a des-

perate act, breaching one of society’s most enduring taboos.

“The more you read about foundling cases, there are sometimes patterns where it happens more than once. I think in those cases there must be something going on, like it isn’t a safe environment,” says Susanne Barrow, 48, from Essex. Barrow was raised by an adoptive family and grew up around the corner from where Elsa was found. “I know where the baby was left. It is all very familiar and it brings up a lot of things,” she says.

Barrow discovered at the age of 12 that she was a foundling, when she accidentally stumbled across paperwork about adoption. Alongside it was an article with a picture of an infant headlined: “Claim your baby or lose her.” She had been left in a telephone box in Forest Gate, also in east London, with a note from her birth mother saying that her husband had left her when she was eight-and-a-half months pregnant and she had no one to help her. She wrote that she wanted her baby to be called Maria and to carry her maiden name, Roberts.

Barrow was so shocked by the discovery that she didn’t speak about it to anyone until she was 16, when she confided in a friend. But she didn’t have the emotional strength to start researching her background until after she was married and had children.

Foundlings have been seeking out Bruce for decades but until fairly recently there wasn’t much she could do to help. That changed about seven years ago,



Baby Roman was abandoned in London in January. Top, Ariel Bruce

“He was 15 when he learnt he was left in a car as a baby

when she realised enough people had loaded their genetic information on to DNA websites to make it possible to trace people without any other information. She works by following traces of shared DNA, which is supplemented by conventional genealogy and on-the-ground investigation.

Bruce is the closest thing we have to an expert on this issue. She has identified at least one parent in each of the 25 foundling cases she has handled. In most cases, she has identified both sides of the genetic history. In eight cases so far she has found a living parent. She is often the one breaking the news to the parent, and has seen the impact first-hand. “The public idea is that children are left by very young girls,” she says. “That may be the case in some instances, but quite often they are left by someone who already has a family and cannot cope for one reason or another.”

One of the first cases she worked on has a striking similarity to last week’s Newham case, in that it involved three full siblings who were all left by the same parents. David McBride, an employment lawyer in the Midlands, contacted Bruce in the 1990s for help tracking down his origins. He was 15 when his adoptive parents told him that he had been left in an unlocked car in Belfast in 1962. The discovery “turned my life upside down”, he recalls. For a long time there was nothing Bruce could do to help, but in 2019 she took his DNA for testing. A few months later she asked him to take a second test; because she couldn’t believe her discovery: not only had she tracked down his genetic heritage, she had found a full sibling match.

Helen Ward, who had also been adopted, was given a DNA test for her birthday and had just uploaded the results. She had been left in a telephone box in Dundalk, Ireland, in 1968. The siblings met on the first, Bafta-winning series of the show and have since become very close. Ward was the first person McBride called when he heard about Elsa last week. The final twist in their story came in 2022, however, when a woman watching *Without a Trace* in Australia saw a striking physical resemblance between her father, John Dowling, who had been born in Ireland and put up for adoption, and McBride. She got in touch with the production team, and DNA testing confirmed that Dowling, too, was a full sibling. He had been left in a phone box in Drogheda, 30 miles away, in 1965.

The act of leaving a child can seem like an affront to nature. For Bruce, the most important thing when you read these stories is to remain empathetic. “It is helpful to remember that a woman does not do this unless she is in extremis,” she says.

McBride’s mother is a good example. She was a young Catholic from Kerry who fell in love with an older Protestant man, who was already married with 14 children. Their relationship lasted for 40

years, but raising a child as an unmarried Catholic woman would have been impossible at the time. He thinks this goes some way to explaining why they left the children, which she had between the ages of 34 and 41. “They had committed every sin in the eyes of Irish culture,” McBride says.

He thinks his mother did care about him and his siblings; the babies were each over a week old, well dressed and found with a warm bottle when they were left. McBride, the eldest, was found in the driveway of a gynaecologist’s house. Witnesses reported that when both his younger siblings were found, a car was waiting nearby and drove away rapidly when someone approached the infant. This is why Bruce prefers not to use the word “abandoned”. “I think that children are often left to be found, that is a key distinction,” she says.

Elsa was not left with the same level of care – wrapped in a towel in a plastic bag, her umbilical cord still attached. Her parents’ circumstances are unknown. In one case Bruce worked on, the baby was conceived when the mother was 15, the father much older. He would have been charged with statutory rape. “We call that coercion,” Bruce says. In another, the baby was left by a woman in a violent relationship.

The vulnerability of those who leave infants in this way also raises questions about how society should respond. Bruce is not in favour of baby hatches, heated boxes in the walls of hospitals or churches that exist in China, parts of Eastern Europe and even Germany. “I worry that normalises it,” she says. But she does question whether parents should still face prosecution as they currently do. Not only can it prevent parents from coming forward, she argues, but “there must be a social reason why a woman has been driven to do this”.

McBride goes further still. “The law is archaic when it comes to this,” he says. Neither he nor his siblings hold any ill will towards their mother. They know from wider family that their mother visited their father on his deathbed and that towards the end of her life, in a care home, she would cradle a doll like a baby, not letting anyone take it away. “Giving up a child is a life sentence,” McBride says.

Barrow is still searching for information about her mother, motivated largely by concern. She’d like to reassure her. “I’d like her to know that although the decision was hard, the outcome was good. I have had a good life.”

Bruce has managed to track down Barrow’s half-brother and the meeting between them will feature on the new series of the programme. She thinks the fact that Elsa and her brothers will at least have each other is a blessing. “It’s so important that they know each other growing up,” she says. “That they know they aren’t alone.”

Long Lost Family: Born Without Trace is on ITV1 at 9pm on Monday June 10, Tuesday June 11 and Wednesday June 12

# I was burnt out, then a Korean monk answered my prayers

At first, *Matt Rudd* was exasperated by the fridge-magnet clichés of a Harvard-educated guru whose self-help books sell in their millions ... until enlightenment dawned

Near the end of our morning together, I ask Haemin Sunim a question and he falls silent for almost 20 seconds. I had spent an hour trying to pick holes in his recipe for a happier life – it might work for a childless 50-year-old South Korean monk with three bestselling books to his name, I’d complained, but it’s harder if you’re a heavily mortgaged 49-year-old father of three.

Unfazed, Sunim said it was a sunny morning, we’d had a lovely walk in “beautiful” London and he was getting to know an interesting person (me). Exasperated, I pointed out that millions of us buy self-help books like his yet millions are still miserable.

“What got you on the path to where you are today?” is what I demand to know. “And how did you manage to stay on that path?” After his very long pause, he smiles and says: “Doing things rather than thinking about things.”

If you’re rolling your eyes right now, I understand. Another week, another guru. They all say the same things – follow my simple guide to breathing/tidying/ice-bathing/forest crying and your worries shall be over. Sunim is different. Well, he’s not different, he’s exactly the same, only more so. Nothing he writes is difficult to grasp. Most of it is fridge-magnet pithy. His first book stating the bleeding obvious, *The Things You Can Only See When You Slow Down*, made him a household name in South Korea in 2012. It has been translated into 38 languages and sold in the millions.

I read it then and followed his advice (slow down, be mindful, pursue happiness rather than success) for about a week then got on with my stressful life. This spring he published his third book, *When Things Don’t Go Your Way* (slow down, be mindful, treat moments of difficulty as stepping stones to greater things). I read it. Same result.

Except this time, I get to spend a sunny morning with him and a month later I will still be practising what Sunim

preached. Something has shifted. Something is working. Weird.

Growing up in the long shadow of the Korean War, Sunim’s generation were taught to excel academically. Unsurprisingly, the result of this obsession is a whopping great mental health crisis. They’re even worse than us: a third of South Korean men and a fifth of women have mental disorders such as depression or anxiety.

The older of two brothers, Sunim was on the path to success: top grades at school in Seoul, then on to the University of California. But at 25, with a master’s from Harvard and a doctorate from Princeton, he stepped off the hamster wheel and became a Zen Buddhist monk in the South Korean capital.

His life sounds blissful: quiet contemplation in exotic gardens, slow conversation with wise Vodas. When did Sunim last feel stress? His flight from Seoul to Frankfurt took off late and it looked as if he’d miss his connection to London. “That was a little stressful,” he says, smiling. I tell him I would have spent the 13-hour flight checking my watch every five minutes. This is down to a mentality of deficiency, he says. Sunim let his stress be and watched a movie. He trusted everything would be fine, and it was.

I think this is where something shifts. He asks if I’ve tried forest-bathing – time doing nothing in the woods. I have, I tell him, but I always end up worrying about all the things I should be doing instead.

“It sounds as if you are burnt out,” he concludes, and I try not to burst into tears. “Take an hour each evening to go for a walk, away from your responsibilities. If bad thoughts come, don’t resist them. Let them be.” Then he tells me to exercise more and write a daily gratitude list.

I find myself writing a gratitude list in a forest that evening. And the next. And the next. Weeks later, these small tweaks are routine and, astonishingly, I think it’s working.



Matt Rudd tries to live in the moment with Haemin Sunim

# Sober, savvy and out of the spotlight: what happened to the wild Wags?

The Three Lions social scene is a lot quieter since the days when Coleen and Posh tore up Baden-Baden. *Charlotte Ivers* explains what today’s footballers’ wives tell us about modern celebrity

Dom Perignon. Veuve Clicquot. Oversized Chanel handbags. £50,000 shopping sprees. Cheryl Cole and Victoria Beckham. Countless cocktails by the pool. Massive Gucci sunglasses. Truly, massive Gucci sunglasses.

When the England football team headed to Germany for the 2006 World Cup, it was for a tournament we mainly remember not for sporting greatness, but as the high point of Noughties celebrity culture, and of the national fascination with the wives

and girlfriends of the players, who were based in Baden-Baden. “It was like the Beatles had come to town. It was like, here are the new rock stars,” says one of the Baden-Baden Wags. “You couldn’t go to the loo without there being a reporter there.”

Back home, a prurient public lapped it up. Victoria Beckham had brought 60 pairs of sunglasses, the newspapers breathlessly announced. Industrious reporters established the group had racked up £1 million in bills over the course of the trip, with Stephen Gerrard’s then fiancée Alex Curran putting £25,000 on her room service bill, including 60 bottles of pink champagne.

But as England and company head back to Germany for the Euros this week, for the present generation of Wags it’s a different story. The days of catfights and falling out of nightclubs are over. Harry Kane’s wife Katie’s Instagram paints a picture of idyllic middle-class family life.

Raheem Sterling’s fiancé Paige Milian is that most glamorous of things, an accountant with a property development company.

The women making their way to Germany on Friday are a more serious, sober, homely bunch. In the ritzier parts of Alderley Edge, Wags can be seen on the school run, at the local soft play area, or hanging out in cafés. One resident recalls watching a social media savvy Wag ordering a large, elaborate cocktail, photographing it, then returning it undrunk – a story that tells us much about how footballing culture has changed, how celebrity has changed, and how the rest of us have too.

The Baden-Baden bonanza was the high watermark of Noughties celeb culture, the era of FHM, Loaded and the ladette. That golden generation still provides us with the occasional spark of drama – think of Coleen Rooney and Rebekah Vardy’s Wagatha Christie court case, but this is really a relic of a more rambunctious age.

MARG LARGE/ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS/REX FEATURES



The Wags who burst on to the scene in 2006 were by and large young, working-class girls with – as one of them described it to me last week – “no idea what to expect”. “There weren’t PRs looking after the wives or the footballers, they were much more vulnerable,” says Maureen Chadwick, co-creator of *Footballers’ Wives*, the Noughties TV show that she has recently turned into a musical.

Those who marry footballers today know what they are getting themselves

into, and protect themselves accordingly with PR support. Their social circles tend to be small, to avoid the risk of gossip or betrayal. “There’s always someone who is going to jump into your shoes if you make a mistake,” one Wag tells me. “The girls don’t want to put a foot out of place.”

Players, including Declan Rice, Jordan Pickford, and Kane, often end up with their childhood sweethearts: partners they feel safe with, and who have grown up understanding the pressure they are under. Kane met

Victoria Beckham, far left, Coleen Rooney, centre, and other Wags head out for dinner in Baden-Baden in 2006

Kate – a fitness instructor and sport science graduate who is about to launch her own jewellery brand – when they were 16.

Today, Wags have much more control over their public image: they can use social media to give fans just enough insight into their lives to sate their curiosity, without constantly being at their mercy. “They define a brand for themselves without need for tabloid exposure, crafting a narrative in a controlled manner,” says Kelly Hogarth, a brand

specialist who has represented Sterling and Marcus Rashford.

Gone too are the days of conspicuous consumption. Yes, Wags wear luxury sportswear – PE Nation, Lululemon – and a Cartier love bangle. But it’s not ostentatious like it used to be. “Given the heightened cost of living, I don’t see there being the tabloid appetite for such content any more,” Hogarth says.

Celebrities today, says the PR man Alan Edwards, whose memoir of the decadent Nineties and Noughties came out last week, are “a little bit more thoughtful, a bit more careful. It’s not so out of control”.

Like the rest of us, celebs spend more time at home, online. “We live in more conservative times,” says Edwards. “People are more careful. Especially post-Covid, people go to bed earlier, drink less.” Wags have changed. They aren’t falling out of nightclubs as much anymore. But neither are the rest of us.

BIG DEBATE

Q Should the NHS charge for care?

Every Sunday until polling day, two writers are going head to head on the issues shaping Britain. Today, *Matthew Syed* and *Rachel Clarke* discuss the future of the health service

IS THE 'FREE AT THE POINT OF USE' MODEL FIT FOR PURPOSE?

**Matthew Syed** “Free at the point of use” has become a kind of religious incantation, uttered by politicians who worship at the altar of the NHS, hoping to curry favour with voters for whom the institution has become a national religion. It is for this reason that I have come to regard the phrase with suspicion, particularly when spoken by a politician contorting his face into an expression of fake piety.

I won’t detain you overlong with my overall conception of what a reformed healthcare system should look like except to say that we should move in the direction of a social insurance model, removing politicians from day-to-day management, reducing short-termism, and driving up standards through choice. Such models have better outcomes than the NHS, a system which, despite incessantly being called “world-beating”, has never been fully copied anywhere.

And if we don’t move to such a system, which is largely free at the point of use, I’d have no problem with the NHS charging for GP visits and some other services for those who can afford it, just as there are already charges for dentistry, eye tests and prescriptions. For these things are never really “free”, are they?

**Rachel Clarke** Yes. This is a version of the “bottomless money pit” question. It suggests the NHS is doomed by design, uniquely destined to fail because the more money you throw at it, the more patients want from it. Superficially seductive, the argument assumes that a lack of

financial incentives for patients to be prudent leads to unnecessary demand and misuse of NHS services. Yet the evidence shows otherwise. International comparisons suggest people in the UK generally use less, not more, healthcare than those in other similarly wealthy countries, so no, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the NHS’s lack of charges.

Deterring patients from seeing a doctor exacerbates costs. We know, for example, that the UK’s poor cancer survival rates are in part due to a British desire not to “bother” the doctor. Worse, as the Health Foundation points out, up-front charges deter the poorest and sickest the most, exacerbating health inequalities. What our universal NHS gives us is the security of knowing that the misfortune of illness won’t also bankrupt us – and that, mercifully, we still inhabit a society that’s decent and principled enough to try and ensure this for all. That’s worth fighting for.

WES STREETING SAYS THE NHS HAS BECOME A 'SHRINE, NOT A SERVICE'. DO YOU AGREE?

**Syed** This is perhaps our greatest problem when it comes to healthcare – a point that struck me with particular force during the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony. Danny Boyle is a genius but his cloying portrayal of the NHS as some kind of deific institution revealed the scale of our national delusion and why this vast, monolithic, expanding institution is sucking ever more funds into its vortex without being properly reformed.

This is unsustainable given that patient satisfaction is plummeting, despite record spending by the outgoing Tories. But let’s be honest: nothing will change until we become “healthcare secularists”. What I mean by this is that reform requires a willingness to look at the evidence rationally rather than through a quasi-religious lens that says: “Don’t mess with ‘our’ NHS!” This might even help us to reach a cross-party consensus on the future of healthcare – or am I dreaming?

**Clarke** As someone working in the wretched NHS doom loop, I couldn’t agree with Streeting more on one point: the NHS is in need of serious reform. You’d have to inhabit the Mariana Trench not to know about the horrors being inflicted daily on patients by those eye-watering 7.5 million-strong waiting lists, the overstuffed A&Es, the hellish dying on trolleys in corridors. But they’re the product of political choices. Pretending, as Thatcher’s chancellor Nigel Lawson once did, that the root cause of NHS failings is some bizarre quasi-religious public devotion is hackneyed nonsense. The causes are intricate, deep-rooted, financial and structural. They include the most

savage funding squeeze in NHS history every year from 2010-19 and, undeniably, a sclerotic resistance to change among some in the health service. Let’s not gloss over these facts with glib rhetoric. Let’s address them.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE NHS AND HOW HAS THAT SHAPED YOUR VIEW?

**Syed** I’ve had mixed experiences. Many (perhaps even most) doctors and nurses are wonderful. But I would say the same of the brilliant teachers who changed my life and, indeed, other public servants. I say this because we tend to put healthcare workers on a pedestal in a way that can inadvertently downgrade the value of others who make huge contributions but who are not, typically, called “angels”.

I have also had some pretty troubling moments: a mistaken diagnosis for my sister that caused severe pain, interminable waits at A&E and other experiences that will probably be familiar to most readers. During one of my father’s hospital visits, a routine test was missed, he was mistakenly moved wards; part of a litany of errors over the course of a single

week. I don’t mind mistakes, by the way – we all make them – but there was little desire to either report these mistakes or learn from them.

**Clarke** Like many, I’ve seen the best and worst of the NHS. Spectacularly brilliant care when my newborn son was rushed into neonatal intensive care, astonishing skill and compassion from so many staff going the extra mile. It’s taught me that the lifeblood of the NHS is the dedication of its staff. Mistreat them for too long and you squander that.

Conversely, the notorious culture of gunning for whistleblowers is something I’ve experienced personally. Threats, intimidation, attempts to silence. Too often, the supposed duty of candour doesn’t exist at the top. That tendency to obfuscate, spin, cover up and lie invariably starts with secretaries of state and pervades into the civil service, NHS England and even the regulators. (The General Medical Council in its current form isn’t fit for purpose.) I loathe this aspect of NHS politics.

IF YOU RAN THE NHS, WHAT THREE THINGS WOULD YOU CHANGE AND WHY?

**Syed** 1 In aviation, all errors and near misses are openly reported, helping the system to learn so that the same mistake never happens again. In this way, the accident rate has dropped to historic lows. The NHS has sought to adopt a similar system under reforms pioneered by Jeremy Hunt but they are still not being properly implemented. This is why avoidable errors still harm thousands each year.

2 We need to recognise that doctors, who often feature prominently in debates on the future of healthcare, are not impartial observers but form a powerful trade union whose interests often diverge from those of patients and taxpayers. Kenneth Clarke describes the BMA as “the most ruthless and deter-

READERS' POLL

This week’s question: **Should the NHS start charging for care?**  
Have your say at [sundaytimes.co.uk/poll](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk/poll)

mined opponent I ever faced in my whole career”.

3 We need a conceptual shift from cure to prevention. We should be focused on healthspan: ensuring that people live healthier lives for longer, an approach for which exciting new strategies – both medical and technological – are emerging. Isn’t this something all political parties should be able to unite around?

**Clarke**

1 Address the unforgivable political failure to tackle the crisis in social care. It’s a national scandal that one in seven hospital patients who are fit for discharge cannot be released due to lack of social care. When the flow of patients through hospital is blocked, patients start dying at the front door – at least 250 avoidable deaths every week. Shame on every politician who’s broken a promise to fix this.

2 Redress the funding deficit. If we want world-class health care, we have to pay for it. If, instead of austerity budgets, we’d matched the EU14 average from 2010-19, the UK’s annual health spending per person would have been £30 billion higher. We have to invest more.

3 The NHS alone cannot possibly fix the tsunami of ill health caused by soaring obesity, lack of exercise, loss of green spaces and school playing fields, clean air, decent homes and in-work poverty. Start by reining in the sugar, alcohol and gambling lobbies.

*What election topic should our writers debate next? Let us know at [sundaytimes.co.uk](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk)*

Literature feels aimless without Amis. Writers now are too timid

The author, who died a year ago, wrote with no fear. As friends gather to remember him, who has the guts to take up his mantle, asks chief literary critic *Johanna Thomas-Corr*

‘Who gives a shit once you’re dead?’ Martin Amis said in one of his last interviews. “Your death is going to be more or less unpleasant, but when it’s over, repercussions cease.”

We might take the statement to mean that Amis doesn’t give a damn what we’re saying about him, one year after his death from oesophageal cancer. He’s dead. He expects to stay dead, rather as the books reviewed by Richard Tull in his novel *The Information* “stayed reviewed”.

Amis was always a writer more given to wordplay than spiritual meandering. “If God existed, and if He cared for humankind, He would never have given us religion,” he once said. Which leaves his friends, family and readers to contemplate his long shadow. Tomorrow hundreds will gather at the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London for his memorial service, where his friends Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, Tina Brown and Andrew O’Hagan will be among those speaking. Many younger writers have also been invited, though an obvious successor to Amis’s position as the leading name in literature has yet to emerge.

It’s fair to say Amis dominated the literary scene in his lifetime, particularly during his roost-ruling run from *Money* (1984) to his memoir *Experience* (2000). But if anything, Amis’s antipresence has loomed even

larger since his death. His particular constellation of qualities – his stentorian swagger, his comic spirit, his ability to move from the high-minded and literary to the foetid and brash – feels somehow representative of a wider loss in the culture. It might be as simple as this: no one else made writing seem quite so *fun*.

For many readers who had found the English novel since 1945 boring, antique and arid, Amis’s 1970s fiction had the impact of punk. Here was an author who was up for grappling with modernity and emulating the American Big Beasts (Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer) to capture a comically grotesque Britain more familiar from Viz comics.

Rose Tremain, part of the same Granta Best of Young Novelists 1983 cohort as Amis, notes his similarity to his hero, Bellow, the “Mozart of gab”: “Martin echoed Bellow in his ability to take any subject and kick it around with wonderful bravura, agility, grace and wit.”

He played language like a top athlete, lobbing words like “clang” and “zugzwang” around the page. He was desperate to dazzle, sometimes too desperate. But as Craig Raine, his friend and one-time tutor at Oxford University, says, he “wanted to crack you up”.

O’Hagan, the novelist and journalist, used to edit Amis’s pieces for the London Review of Books. “You can nominate other writers for other things, but Martin could *go there*,” he

says. For better or for worse, Amis had the conviction he could, indeed should, go there: the Holocaust, Stalinist terror and 9/11. This courage can’t be disentangled from the competitive confidence that came from being part of a gang, a scene, a dynasty.

He grew up with two novelists in his father Kingsley Amis and stepmother Elizabeth Jane Howard, making Martin a hereditary peer of literature. Or, as he preferred, a barman “taking over the family pub”. Into Amis’s smoke-filled pub came Christopher Hitchens, McEwan, Julian Barnes, Salman Rushdie, Raine and many other writers and girlfriends.

Nevertheless, for all his range, a certain predictability crept into Amis’s novels. You just know there will be repulsive lowlifes, writer figures, violence, body horror, latterly Jewishness and the Holocaust, and usually some kind of Madonna figure to contrast with the whore (for all Amis’s horror of clichés, his female characters tend to revert to type). Much of his fiction can be summed up by two words: Keith and teeth.

My own feeling is that in his novels, the hyperbole, the burlesque, the show-off aphorisms, the over-revving prose usually wears thin. His journalism and his criticism, on the other hand, I authentically love. As a book reviewer, Amis was sui generis. You wish you could tune your own mind to his frequency. I still smile at his description of Cyril Connolly’s “anti-knack for catching human speech”. Or his description of John Updike as a “psychotic Santa of volubility”.



MATTHEW SYED

THE DEBATERS



RACHEL CLARKE

**Age:** 53  
**Job:** Author and Sunday Times columnist  
**Argument in a sentence:** Yes, because this might dent the British belief that healthcare is free (it isn’t) and get us to realise that unless we reform the NHS it will continue to grow to a size that may one day swallow our entire GDP.

**Age:** 51  
**Job:** Author and palliative care doctor  
**Argument in a sentence:** No, the NHS should not start charging for care because this would deter people from seeking the care they need, making them sicker – and ultimately costlier to treat.



Martin Amis with his wife, Isabel Fonseca. He had a rock star attitude that has gone missing from publishing

Amis often prompted more envy and gossip in his lifetime than he did sincere praise (what he described as “an eisteddfod of hostility”). But the mood has changed in the last year. “One of the wonderful things since he died is how generous the obituaries have been about him as a writer because – bloody hell – they weren’t saying it at the time,” recalls Franklin.

As for his literary legacy, buoyant print sales of Amis’s books – up 666 per cent in the past 12 months, according

to Nielsen – speak of his wide appeal, helped by Jonathan Glazer’s Oscar-winning adaptation of *The Zone of Interest*. In November his three London novels will be republished by Vintage classics with forewords by O’Hagan (*Money*), Rachel Cusk (*London Fields*) and James Wood (*The Information*).

As for Amis’s heirs, the question is more vexed. We have our literary stars but none with his billboard status or his swagger. This was always a double-edged

Amis’s 1970s fiction had the impact of punk, capturing a comically grotesque Britain

attribute and yet his willingness to *go there* feels sorely absent from today’s rather more introverted and humourless literary scene, where many of our most feted writers seem to be scared of their own shadow. Franklin feels publishing could do with some of Amis’s rock-star attitude: “Zadie [Smith]’s got a bit of that but Sally Rooney? I mean, she is so quiet and shy. It’s a completely different ball game.”

In fiction, the Irish writer Rob Doyle is producing what he describes as “gloves-off, messy” explorations of damaged men and masculinity itself. But in the past decade, the zeitgeist has certainly shifted towards female novelists such as Cusk, Rooney, Ali Smith and Maggie O’Farrell, which leads some to wonder if it is just less cool to be a male novelist these days. Doyle has complained that male novelists can’t be cool and edgy when #MeToo has made it almost impossible for a man to write honestly about male sexuality. And if men can’t publish gloves-off

accounts of their sexual urges – as today’s female authors are being encouraged to – then male readers will feel disenfranchised and disengaged by fiction.

The truth is that Amis was a product of his time and, to use a 21st-century term, his privilege. His fearlessness is, perhaps, irreplicable in our hyper-scrutinised era. The media landscape has changed too. There aren’t too many places that will publish 5,000-word essays on Nabokov. Now most of us write with one eye on how our words may be used against us by our enemies. It’s left a lot of contemporary authors feeling cramped, fearful, guarded. Even writers as forthright in their opinions as Cusk or the critic Lauren Oyler write in prose as well defended as Stalingrad.

“Amis didn’t suffer that sense that he was not worthy to comment on any particular subject,” says Jack Aldane, 36, a journalist and fan, who launched his podcast series, *My Martin Amis*, a month after his death.

The podcast is something of an Amis love-in and it can leave you wondering if a certain type of British literary male (velvet jacket, drawled vowels, smoking rollys with trembling hands) will ever get over him. But Aldane’s contributors have their criticisms. Most of his novels don’t work, contends the critic Leo Robson. Style is *not* the same thing as morality as Amis claimed, suggests the Times columnist James Marriott.

But that’s the thing about Amis. Even when he failed, he failed interestingly. As an anti-example, he is still terrifically enabling. He made you want to do it too.

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



## The four vital issues that should be in the manifestos

You do not have to be a political junkie to think there is something very odd about this election campaign. The leaders of the two main parties take part in staged, closed meetings, often at non-league football grounds, rather than risk unscripted encounters with voters. Rishi Sunak has generated many more headlines from not attending something – his terrible and inexplicable blunder in returning early from the D-Day commemorations – than from brushes with the public. When somebody breaks through the cordon, like the Wiltshire doctor who complained about the “disintegration” of the NHS, the prime minister seems to lack the ability to respond. Past masters at dealing with hecklers and critics, like Harold Wilson, could teach today’s leaders a trick or two. One present-day politician who actively enjoys contact with the public, Nigel Farage, got a milkshake for his troubles in Clacton, but has transformed the campaign and spells only trouble for the listing Tories.

The focus will now shift to the parties’ election manifestos this week. There is much we would wish to see, indeed need to see, if the next government is serious about tackling this country’s problems. But here, to start, are four priority areas.

1) Defence. Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, chief of the defence staff, conceded in a BBC radio interview yesterday that Russia was making tactical advances in Ukraine, though it had a smaller share of Ukrainian territory (11 per cent) than two years ago (17 per cent). Continued support for Ukraine will be vital. There are other challenges too. President Putin, attending Russia’s equivalent of Davos in St Petersburg, described Europe as defenceless. With war raging again on the continent of Europe, as well as in Gaza, and the missile and drone attacks raining down on citizens, one priority will be to protect ourselves. Options, according to Radakin, include a “super dome” for Europe or protection for big cities. Doing nothing is not an option. So far the main parties have done little more than offer commitments to raise UK defence spending, over time, to 2.5 per cent of GDP. The military threat demands more urgency than that.

2) Social care. Theresa May was damaged by unveiling a “nothing has changed” social care plan in 2017, and Boris Johnson promised to fix the prob-

lem in 2019. Even without the pandemic that was probably never going to happen. Read our piece today on Sir Ed Davey and his 16-year-old son John, who has learning disabilities, and you will understand why the Liberal Democrat leader has made care such a key issue. So it should be – but it has been placed by the two main parties in the “too difficult” box. It is now 13 years since the Dilnot commission concluded that the funding of social care was “confusing, unfair and unsustainable” and came up with workable proposals. The lack of reform has increased the strain on the NHS. Ignoring it again would be a dereliction of duty.

3) A dynamic business environment. Business people have watched with incredulity how the Tory party, once the party of enterprise, has made life harder for firms. There is more red tape and more tax, and the City of London, which has long vied with New York as the world’s financial capital, has seen its stock fall. These days businesses seeking to float, including tech firms vital for our future, increasingly choose New York. Some of it is arguably down to Brexit, but the problem runs deeper. In 14 years in power the Tories have squandered their Thatcherite inheritance. Labour’s offer is greater stability and a welcome wrecking ball for an ossified planning system, but both parties need to speed up the digitisation of the economy to stop Britain being left behind.

4) Education. The debate should be about more than VAT on private school fees, which, while painful for some, is not the key issue. Britain’s universities are slipping down international league tables, and Labour already thinks universities will go bust. Some, heavily dependent on foreign students, are being hit by changes in migration rules. All are hit by high inflation at a time of frozen tuition fees. A sector once a UK strength is struggling. Are our graduates match-fit for the global talent contest? Are they doing the right degrees? Schools are under even greater pressure: funding per pupil is the same now in real terms as in 2010, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Investment in maintaining school buildings is down sharply. Today we report on the “flood” of teachers who are leaving for jobs abroad, tempted by higher pay.

Can we expect the manifestos to address these matters seriously? Experience so far in this tetchy campaign would suggest not. We can but hope.

## Biden and Trump should have left this battle to others

There is a lot wrong with our general election, but at least the choice facing UK voters is not as troublesome as that in America. Donald Trump, the former president, is only part of the way through his legal battles but is already a convicted felon, on the unanimous vote of a New York jury. And, just when President Biden might have gained some advantage from his opponent’s woes, doubts have been growing about his physical fitness and mental acuity.

Those watching the president, 81, at the D-Day commemorations saw an elderly man often struggling almost as much as the veterans. Credible reports from inside the White House suggest that Biden is showing distinct “signs of slipping”, though there has been pushback against this from the administration. Trump at 77 is no spring chicken, fell asleep repeatedly

during his New York trial and in recent speeches has made bizarre detours that have puzzled even his super-loyal fans.

Ronald Reagan turned the age question on its head in 1984 by saying he would not make his opponent’s youth and inexperience an issue. Reagan, though, was only 73 then. Biden, who at 78 was the oldest man to become president, would be 82 at the start of a second term. Trump would be 78.

Biden is on a punishing schedule that will bring him back to Europe soon for a G7 summit in Italy. Legal problems – his son Hunter’s trial on gun offences – occupy him too. On June 27 he and Trump will square up in the first TV debate of the campaign. It will be a bout between two tired and elderly fighters who, for the sake of America, should both be thinking of retiring, not running for highest office.

## East coast train pain

Attention all passengers. The rail industry regrets to announce that trains on the east coast main line will be delayed until next June. This is due to a delay. We are sorry if your journey will take longer than planned.

Attention all passengers who are demanding an explanation and getting a bit snarky about this. Yes, the rail industry is aware that £1.2 billion was spent on upgrading the line and that the work was finished two years ago. But all our com-

peting companies are engaged in an endless wrangle about who gets to use it, so as well as routinely delaying our trains, we are now delaying our timetables too. We are not really sorry if your journey will take longer than planned. Suck it up.

Attention all passengers. If you see something incompetent, or an entire industry acting incompetently, please report it to a member of parliament, the next time there is one. In the meantime, just seethe. See it. Say it. Not sorted.

# Dominic Lawson

## Starmer might just tax private healthcare too



VAT on medical fees would be in keeping with the Labour leader’s credo

Private health, like private education, has long been a neuralgic issue for Labour politicians, at a personal level. In public they never cease to acclaim the moral superiority of a universal service “free at the point of use”; in private they may take a less collectivist approach.

This can erupt during a general election campaign. In that of 1987, Margaret Thatcher provoked Labour’s scorn (and anxiety on her own side) when, asked if she used the NHS, she responded that she had private health insurance: “I pay my dues to the NHS; I do not add to the queue ... I exercise my right as a free citizen to spend my own money in my own way, so that I can go in on the day, at the time, with the doctor I choose and get out fast.”

Labour’s attack on this was blunted when it was revealed that the wife of the shadow foreign secretary, Denis Healey, had recently had an operation performed privately. When asked about this on *TV-am*, Healey angrily refused to discuss it. My friend Adam Boulton tells me that after they then went to a commercial break, Healey shouted at his interviewer, Anne Diamond: “You’re a shit.” He offered the same pithy critique to Adam, who was standing by, before punching him in the chest.

No such violence occurred during last week’s ITV debate between the PM, Rishi Sunak, and his would-be replacement, Sir Keir Starmer, when the same topic came up. But it was still the most riveting section of the entire hour. The moderator, Julie Etchingham, asked both men: “If you had loved ones on a long waiting list for surgery, would you, if you felt that was the only way forward, use private healthcare?” Sunak immediately answered yes. Sir Keir was equally clear: “No.” Etchingham asked him again: “Absolutely no, if your loved ones were on a waiting list for surgery?” Starmer: “No, I don’t use private health. I use the NHS.”

That, of course, was the answer to a different question. Etchingham was not asking what he would do about his own medical needs, but how he would act if someone in his family, presumably dependent on him, was suffering the torment of interminably delayed surgery: would he end that agony by paying for them to have the operation privately?

It is a reflection of the uncertainty about who exactly Keir Starmer is that it is impossible

to know if he would not pay to have his suffering “loved one” treated because of some sort of deep socialist conviction (chilling), or if this was merely what he felt to be the most politically advantageous response. If the latter, it is an odd sort of virtue-signalling.

For, as Mrs Thatcher implied in her response to a similar question nine general elections ago, the effect of leaving the queue is to make it shorter, promoting the person behind you (quite probably someone who could not afford to have the procedure – for example a hip replacement – done privately). Thus the relatively wealthy man – Sir Keir in this case – would actually be more of a good citizen by paying for his suffering relative to go private.

When he sought the vote of Labour members in his leadership campaign, Starmer enthused the Corbynistas by declaring that as prime minister he would “end outsourcing in our NHS”. That is, it would be prevented from utilising the private sector. This was one of many “pledges” that he has, perhaps fortunately, abandoned. In January last year Starmer enthusiastically embraced the idea, declaring: “A number of people do go as NHS patients to the private sector. Our research shows that that’s been underused and we could do more of it, and that would clear 230,000 people off the waiting list every year.”

So, he would use taxpayers’ money to increase the number of people being treated in the private sector, to reduce the waiting list, but he would never – on principle – do it with any of his own retained income.

In later remarks last week, to try to justify why he gave the answer he did to Etchingham, Starmer told GB News: “I am 100 per cent confident in the NHS, and that is why I wouldn’t use anything other than the NHS and I wouldn’t with my relatives.” The implication that the private sector somehow offers an

“**Denis Healey swore at my friend and punched him**”

# Hadley Freeman

## A shortage of work turns graduates into activists



‘Elite overproduction’ at universities is fuelling book festival protests and more

Recently I learnt – from the always enlightening podcast *Blocked and Reported* – about a new term, elite overproduction, and now I see examples of it everywhere. Elite overproduction refers to when there are more highly educated people than there are jobs available for them. This has been a particular problem for those who left university in the decade after 2008, because many of them got degrees in humanities subjects just when the traditional career paths for humanities graduates – publishing, media, academia – crumbled away, reduced by the financial crash and the internet. Suddenly people who had worked hard to get the right grades found that their promised rewards – which they had every right to expect – had vanished. Few would blame them for feeling frustrated. But even fewer predicted how this frustration would express itself.

If you’ve wondered why there is so much angry activism around these days, the kind that is more focused on tearing things down than building better things, and why it is largely happening in liberal sectors run by the middle class – literary festivals, say – then look no further than elite overproduction. Social justice activism of the past decade has largely consisted of not actually improving anyone’s lives but chiding and ostracising anyone assumed to be impure in thought or deed. This is “at least partly an expression of frustration [by the university-educated] with the stagnant hierarchies of elite society”, as the American journalist Noah Smith has put it. The young people who graduated in, say, 2014 and found they couldn’t make a living wage in a publishing house or journalism reacted by raging against those industries as a whole, insisting everyone within them was an oppressor, probably even a fascist.

The young often revolt against their elders, but, as Smith writes, it is striking that the young people who protested and rioted in America in the 1960s were generally the urban working class, whereas in 2020 the Black Lives Matter protesters were disproportionately white university-educated kids. Sometimes rage

against one injustice can be a proxy protest against another.

The campaign by Fossil Free Books against book festivals that accept funding from Baillie Gifford fits perfectly into this pattern. Many, such as my colleague Alex Massie, have written about the pointlessness of FFB’s gesture, showing how little Baillie Gifford’s assets actually have to do with fossil fuel companies or “the Israeli occupation, apartheid and genocide”, as FFB puts it. But the pointlessness was the point.

As an almost paradoxically posh woman from Fossil Free Books explained on BBC Radio 4’s *Front Row* programme on Wednesday, the group targeted literary festivals because “we’ve seen we have leverage there as workers in the sector” – meaning they work in the arts so they went after the arts. (Truly, hearing a posh person describe themselves as a “worker”, as if they were in a Soviet factory, is my favourite genre of comedy.) All Fossil Free Books has achieved is scaring some big literary festivals into rejecting funding from Baillie Gifford, which then withdrew its funding from *all* book festivals. Hurrah for the big showy gesture that may well topple arts events in this country like dominoes, as those in charge reject all funding lest someone, somewhere, denounce it as “problematic”.

Other examples of the impact of elite overproduction have abounded in the past week. The US journalist Michael Moynihan published a fantastic article about how Vice – the magazine he used to write for – went from being a £5 billion behemoth to a bankrupt

“**The alleged ‘grown-ups’ in the room gave them this power**”

inferior service is not borne out by the facts. The latest figures from the Care Quality Commission record that 93 per cent of acute services at private hospitals are rated from good to outstanding, compared with 73 per cent at hospitals within the NHS.

And, given that more than two thirds of NHS consultants also operate within the private sector, it’s not as if you are dealing with a different sort of surgeon. Indeed those consultants who took the unprecedented decision to strike for more pay last year were able to carry on with their private work while downing scalpels in the NHS.

Actually, from a doctrinaire socialist point of view, it is not the individual citizens going private who should be accused of selfishness (by taking opportunities not affordable for the less well-off) but the doctors who, by working also in the private sector, reduce the medical resources available in the public sector.

That is not the view within the British Medical Association, the doctors’ trade union. This goes back a long way. The BMA opposed the National Health Service Act 1946, which came into effect two years later. The Labour health secretary behind that legislation, Aneurin Bevan, eventually succeeded in persuading the BMA to accept the creation of the NHS by agreeing to their demand that they be allowed to retain their private practices. Or, as Bevan later described his strategy: “I stuffed their mouths with gold.”

I mentioned education along with medicine – and Starmer, who himself benefited from a bursary-funded education in a private school, has said he will raise funds for the state educational sector by imposing VAT on private school fees. He has, of course, no idea how many parents will as a result move their children into the state sector, adding to the pressures there.

Traditionally – and not just in this country – education has never attracted such a tax. Neither has private medicine, outside procedures deemed purely cosmetic.

Which makes me wonder. If Labour’s majority after July 4 is as colossal as the opinion polls are now predicting, will Keir Starmer use his newly acquired political hegemony to raise more money for the NHS he reveres by applying to private sector medical fees what he has already pledged to do with school fees?

As with so much about the Labour leader’s real intentions, we simply don’t know.

The answer partly lay in an influx of new employees in the 2010s, who jettisoned Vice’s very successful USP as a gleefully offensive magazine and turned it into a social justice scold, shifting from articles such as “How to suck your own dick” to “Decolonising my desire”, about the problem with only fancying white people. Instead of focusing on readers, Moynihan writes, Vice “became obsessed with fixing racism”, sacking most of its editorial staff while encouraging the few who were left to write articles about whether – for example – facial recognition software misgendered non-binary people.

The most obvious images of elite overproduction come from where the elite are produced: universities. The question of what to do with the students at Oxford, Columbia and elsewhere disrupting teaching with their anti-Israel protests has yet to be resolved, and as Jeannie Suk Gersen, a professor at Harvard law school, wrote last week, the focus of protest at Harvard has “shifted from Gaza to the fate of Harvard undergraduates”. Gersen quotes one student activist saying, in reference to students who have been suspended for protesting, “They’re making it so that 14 students can’t graduate. And on top of all that, Palestine is going through a genocide.” Liberal students insist it is their free-speech right to shout about Israeli genocide yet, Gersen writes, they have spent the past decade arguing that “offensive statements may harm marginalised and vulnerable people”. In other words, it’s a bit rich to insist you can equate Zionists with Nazis when you also demand preferred pronouns.

I feel huge sympathy for these angry young people and understand their frustration. What I cannot understand is why those in charge keep caving in to them, so fearful of social media pile-ons, empty threats and disapproval from twentysomethings. Giving in to bullies never works, and these groups have power only because the alleged grown-ups in the room have given it to them. This is unfair on young people – who need guidance, not enabling – and all we’ve helped them to create is more destruction, more loss of jobs and, ultimately, more elite overproduction.

COMMENT

REMEMBERING AN INTERVIEW...



# Matthew Syed

## Farage is a snake, but if we were honest about migration he'd have no fangs



PMs from Blair onwards have ushered in cheap labour while vowing to stop it. That's why trust has gone

On Tuesday to the end-of-the-pier show in Clacton, where the newly crowned leader of Reform, Nigel Farage, did a passing impression of a vaudevillian seaside act of yore (Max Bygraves did one of his first sets at the now demolished local theatre) as he announced he was standing for parliament again. “Do you want me?” he said, flashing his trademark grin and gesturing in a pantomime kind of way. “Oh yes we do!”

Hordes of journalists, camera crews and podcasters (including Emily Maitlis and Jon Sopel from *The News Agents*) were there to witness Farage and analyse his appeal. For many in the centre ground the answer is obvious: he draws his success from the bigotry, racism and gullibility on the fringes of polite society. Alastair Campbell has called him a “dangerous demagogue”, and on the radio last week a former adviser to David Cameron contrasted the “superficial showman” with the statesmanship of his own former boss. In *The Times* Daniel Finkelstein said Farage promised “chaos”, unlike the sensible Sunak.

Permit me to offer a different interpretation of the man who has arguably exerted more influence on British politics than anyone else over the past two decades, despite not winning a seat, and who is set to be a protagonist in the fight for the soul of the Tory party after the election, regardless of whether he wins in Clacton. Farage draws his power not principally from racism (as the son of an immigrant, I can testify that Britain has made great strides on bigotry) or gullibility. Rather, he draws it from deceit.

I am not talking about his own deceit,

mind you, although he is more than capable of it. I am talking about the duplicity of the very people who now castigate him: the acolytes and promoters of Tony Blair, Cameron and the others who have held power these past few decades. I say this having gone back to the main party manifestos during the period of Farage's rise and what they said about the issue he has made his own: immigration. And, as you might expect, and as Farage has consistently claimed, I saw lie after lie.

Don't, for the moment, consider whether mass immigration is a good or bad thing; instead focus on a point that I hope we can all – left, right, rich, poor, black, white – agree on: the importance of truth-telling. It was Aristotle, after all, who intimated that without some minimum level of candour a polity cannot survive.

Now, consider that Blair said in 1997 said that he would ensure “firm control ... properly enforced” – and then presided over an intake of 633,000 between 1998 and 2001. In 2005 he said that “only skilled workers will be allowed to settle long term” and promised “an end to chain migration” – and then net migration reached over quarter of a million despite a deep recession, not least because of movement from the new EU states. The government claimed this would be a trickle of 13,000 migrants a year; it turned out to be 1,500 per cent higher.

But if this was merely deceitful, it is difficult to locate the term for what followed. In 2010, 2015 and 2017 the Tories promised to cut immigration to the tens of thousands. In every manifesto. In ink. What happened? Immigration rose to an average of 300,000 a year over the period, totalling

over 1.4 million for 2022-23 – a period in which free movement had ended and a high proportion of the intake were dependants of low-wage workers from non-European nations.

People often wave such figures away, saying: “Oh, Britain has always been a nation of immigrants”, which is perfectly true. But if you look at a graph of inflows over the past thousand years, let alone the past hundred, this represents a spike of an unprecedented kind, something that will echo decades – perhaps centuries – into the future. Again, whether or not you think this inflow is overall a good or bad thing, you can't deny that it has altered the complexion of the UK in ways both subtle and profound.

Now consider another trend over roughly the same period: trust in politics has plummeted to lows that are, again, unprecedented. This may sound a minor issue but it is anything but. Advanced social science tells us trust was the secret to the rise of the West, the invisible

forcefield that incubates a healthy, prosperous society. But now we in the UK are living through an age in which trust is slowly – almost imperceptibly – dissipating from public life.

And this, let me suggest, is the only way to understand Farage – whose tiny party is now just a few points behind the Tories. Like all populists, he draws his power from deep failures in the political consensus. Just as fascists and proto-fascists in the 1930s rose out of the hyperinflation that debased paper currency, figures like Farage – and, for that matter, Donald Trump – have gained potency from the duplicity that has debased the currency of political discourse. It is why I'd gently suggest to Campbell and the advisers of former Tory PMs that Farage is not the cause of our political chaos but a symptom of it.

For the lies that have been told about immigration are not the familiar evasions of everyday politics or manifesto breaches that will always occur when circumstances change. No, they were premeditated lies about one of the central issues of our age, offered by both main parties at successive elections. For those involved in frontline politics to talk about Farage without noting that they cynically created the endemic distrust in which a populist like him can thrive seems to me a dereliction of responsibility of a rather profound kind.

And what's worse is that the continuing crisis of candour (look at the tissue of half-truths from both main parties on legal and illegal immigration at this election) ensures that Farage-like figures will keep emerging, keep pushing centre-right parties to the fringes, keep stoking the polarisation in western nations, which is the greatest gift to the

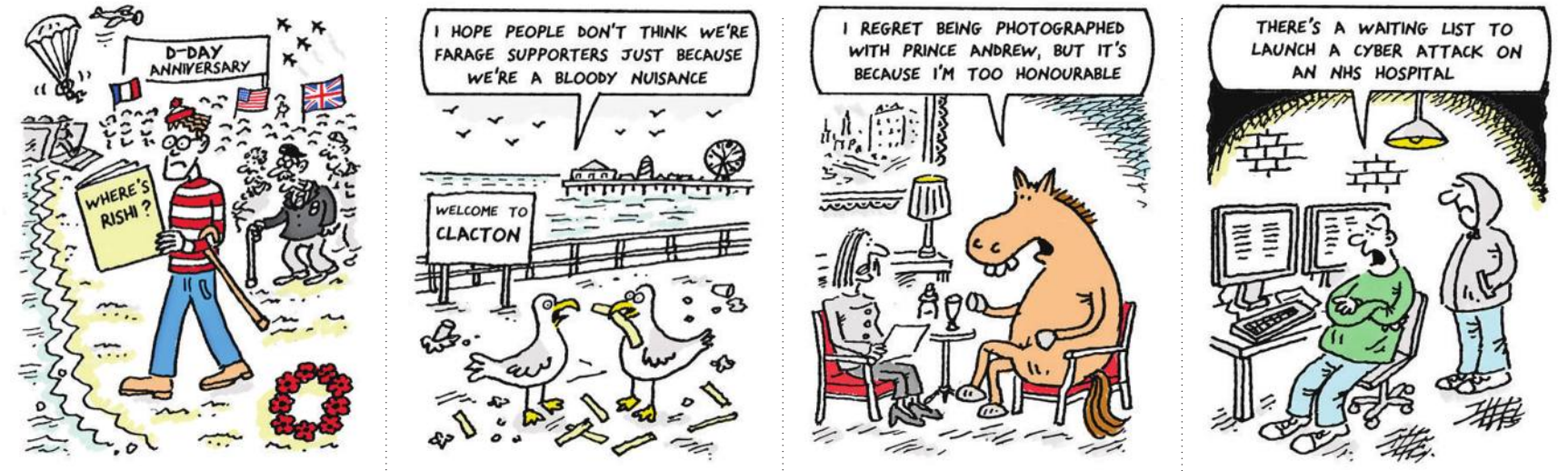
China-led totalitarian axis we face. Look at how the failure to control borders sits at the heart of the appeal of Le Pen, Wilders, Trump, the Sweden Democrats and on and on. This is not going away and will come to haunt Keir Starmer, too.

So how, in brief, would a rational immigration policy look? I'd invite you to look at the solutions proposed by the Tory backbencher Neil O'Brien and the left-leaning academic Michael Muthukrishna, who note that the key is to accept short-term pain for long-term gain. This means ending our addiction to low-wage labour, which saves money in the here and now but stores up vast liabilities because such workers are net recipients of tax funds – a classic Ponzi scheme. Instead we should pay higher wages to attract British workers, while focusing immigration policy on high-skilled individuals, who tend to integrate superbly and whose enterprise and ideas will not just boost GDP per capita but enrich our society, as immigrants so often do.

But let me finish with my dominant thought as I left Clacton, walking back along the pier and up to the station. Farage is a dangerous figure, a man who stirs division and dogwhistles to base instincts. He's a menace. But perhaps the greater menace is the advocates of the “liberal” consensus who created the conditions for the rise of populism (along with the fiscal indebtedness and cultural fractures on which it feeds) but still now, after all these years, lack even a modicum of self-awareness. It is why I suspect that future historians will not regard them as liberals at all, but as arsonists who took a match to the collective trust on which we all rely. And who never acknowledged culpability.

**The failure to control borders empowers Le Pen, Wilders and Trump**

NEWMAN'S WEEK



## What's Appening



Harry checks in on the second most loved duke and duchess\*

**Prince Harry** How did it go, guys?

**Hugh Grosvenor, the 7th Duke of Westminster** Top notch. There was quite a lot of booing as we left the cathedral and I thought it was something to do with inheritance tax again. Turns out they were angry at the Just Stop Oil protesters who'd set off a fire extinguisher

**Harry** I saw that on my Insta. Don't these protesters know you were an account manager at Bio-bean, a sustainability company that turns coffee waste into logs?

**Hugh** And Olivia is an account manager at Belazu, an ethical food production company that aims to bring natural ingredients to shoppers through collaborations with farmers

**Harry** Just Stop Olive Oil. Ridiculous. But other than that, all well?

**Hugh** Super. Off on hunners tomorrow

**Harry** Woof! The Maldives?

**Hugh** My hunting estate outside Seville

**Harry** The one where my two-faced baldy brother went shortly before launching a campaign against illegal hunting?

**Hugh** The very same

**Meghan** Have you asked yet?

**Harry** I was about to, my darling

**Meghan** Hi guys, it's the Duchess of Sussex here. Again, soz we missed your big day. You know I love a royal wedding. Or even a non-royal one like yours. Harry said we would take all the limelight if we came but he still didn't want to go. Such a shame

**Olivia, the Duchess of Westminster** I thought you didn't want to come either?

**Meghan** Whoever said I didn't want to go to Chester because it's even more cold and miserable and full of English people than London was lying. My main concern, as always, was for the environment. You've got your Belazu thing, Liv, and I've got my ethical and diverse jam, candle and tablewear company. We can't very well jet around the world when we're the ones trying to save it, can we?

**Olivia** We completely understand

**Meghan** And you can't expect my husband to be in the same cathedral as his probably subconsciously racist brother, can you? Anyway, has our gift arrived?

**Hugh** We said no gifts

**Meghan** I know, but this is the gift of knowledge

**Olivia** Nothing has come from California

**Meghan** It's an email

**Hugh** I didn't receive anything. I can check my spam later

**Meghan** No need. I'll paste it in here. Just imagine it in a calligraphy font

**Hugh** OK

**Meghan** Be Like Me – your ethical, bespoke guide to conscious coupling by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Sussex and husband

1 What I always say when people ask how I have the perfect marriage is, “Guys, I work at it.” Each and every day, I am his lighthouse and he is a ship. Without me, he is a wreck. Without him, my light will guide other ships. Be like me. Be the lighthouse to a ship or other ships

2 There will be good days and difficult days. The good days are because of me. The difficult days are not. As a working mother, CEO, entrepreneur, actor-producer, environmentalist, humanitarian and podcaster, I owe it to myself and the world to focus on my success. That way, I lift up those around me and beneath me such as my husband and other ships. Be like me. Focus on your own success to help others

**Olivia** Oh thanks Meghan. That's so useful

**Meghan** There are 28 more

**Hugh** I'm losing signal ... email them again and we'll cherish them for ever

**Olivia** Bye guys!

**Harry** We've also sent you some jam

\*As imagined by Matt Rudd

COMMENT

# Robert Colville

## Labour is in danger of developing a serious problem — too much power



There all kinds of explanations for what’s happening at this election. But I’m increasingly convinced that the only one that fits the facts is the genie theory. This is the idea, put forward by the journalist James O’Malley, that at some point in autumn 2021 Keir Starmer found a magic lamp, and the genie forgot to specify that he couldn’t wish for more wishes.

Starmer’s genie has become the meme of the day because it perfectly encapsulates how lucky Labour has had it recently, as its enemies take it in turns to commit some barely believable act of self-harm. Partygate? Genie! Nicola Sturgeon’s husband charged with embezzling from the SNP? Genie! Liz Truss giving yet another interview? Genie! Rishi Sunak leaving the D-Day commemorations early? Very definitely the genie. In fact, the internet is awash with people begging Sir Keir to give the poor thing a day off.

It’s understandable that the story of the election so far has been the Tories. They’re the ones who’ve been in government; whose performance over the past 14 years is being judged – and, according to poll after poll, found wanting. Whatever Sunak tries, the voters are pretty clearly determined to give the Tories a punishment beating.

But what’s happening at the moment goes beyond that. YouGov’s recent mega-poll projected that the Conservatives would take 140 seats, their worst result in more than a century. Labour would have 422, more than three times as many.

That projection, however, is enormously volatile. As Anthony Wells of YouGov explains, there is an unusually large number of seats where the numbers are tight: a small swing nationally in either direction could hugely affect the outcome. And YouGov’s modelling was done before Nigel Farage stormed back onto the scene, jolting Reform’s poll numbers upwards – and before Sunak’s D-Day debacle.

The result is that many people are suddenly talking about the “Canada scenario” – a reference to the apocalyptic election of 1993, in which the ruling Progressive Conservatives went from 156 seats to just two. Reform isn’t in a position to win many seats. But it can cost the Tories their majority in constituency after constituency – on top of the existing pattern of tactical voting, in which Lib Dem and Labour voters are coalescing around whoever is best placed to beat the Tories.

The central forecast from the consultancy Electoral Calculus is now

that the Conservatives win just 75 seats – but it could go as low as 42. As Wells says, with Farage in the race, the Tories find themselves squeezed from all sides, losing voters to both right and left in every constituency going.

For the Conservatives’ enemies, such a scenario would be enormously satisfying. Just picture it! Portillo moment after Portillo moment, as all those smug Tory cabinet members are booted into the wilderness. Ed Davey enthroned as leader of the opposition. Farage and a new Tory leader fighting over the scraps on the right, while Labour settles in for a decade of domination. The remnants of the Conservatives suddenly deciding that they actually like proportional representation after all.

But it’s high time we looked at the other side of the coin.

The Tories are going to lose this election, and lose it badly. The question is: what happens next? And the answer is that Labour, and Keir Starmer, will have more power than any one party has had for more than a century. More seats than Tony Blair in 1997. No checks. No balances.

Which prompts another question: even if you think the Tories deserve to lose that badly, does Labour deserve to win that convincingly?

“Starmer’s magic genie is an internet meme because it encapsulates how lucky he has been

I turned 17 in 1997. I can still remember the excitement, the energy around Blair. He genuinely seemed to be Britain’s Kennedy.

But Starmer? Forget the drab, stolid performance in last week’s debates. Ignore the adenoidal voice that will surely come to grate on the nation’s soul. Just look at how he’s been campaigning. There was a row last week over warring dossiers from the parties. Lots of people criticised Sunak for claiming that Starmer would raise taxes by £2,000 for every household. But by any standard Labour’s lies were bigger and their numbers worse. Their alleged “black

hole” relied on multibillion-pound tax cuts in the first year of the parliament, which the Tories hadn’t even mentioned, let alone promised.

Similarly, in last week’s election debate Starmer claimed that his energy plans would be cheaper than Sunak’s. But the report he cited explicitly said that the Labour policy was impossible to deliver. And then there are all the other nonsense numbers from Labour that I ranted about last week, plus all the left-wing policies on tax, education, welfare, wokery and union rights that the party would suddenly have complete freedom to implement.

Yet there’s a bigger point here. Despite my issues with his maths, I fully accept that Starmer is a decent man, with some genuinely talented people beside and behind him. Labour has many bad ideas, but also some good ones, not least on housing and the green belt. There is none of the terror that so many of us felt when faced with a Corbyn premiership – which is precisely why Starmer has been able to make Labour a respectable option.

But would it be good for democracy for Starmer – or anyone – to have such untrammelled power? Obviously not. Governments always need to be held to account. Particularly when they are as raw and untested as this one.

In an interview on the campaign trail in Clacton, Farage insisted that he wasn’t standing to destroy the Tories: they’d already done that to themselves. “The positive thing that I’m trying to do is provide a voice of opposition to a Labour government” – which, he predicted, would be “stuffed with incompetents”.

But the higher the Reform vote goes, the quieter that voice of opposition will be, on the floor of the Commons, in the councils of state and crucially within parliament’s select committees, one of the few sources of scrutiny during the long years of the Blair hegemony, whose memberships are weighted according to the make-up of the Commons.

Parliament, and the country, will be Labour’s laboratory in a way that has not been true for any party for decades. Meanwhile the shattered remnants of the right will take years to regroup – in, if other countries are anything to go by, a far more populist form.

So far, the story of the election campaign has been about the Conservatives. That is exactly what Starmer and his genie would have wished for. But voters who aren’t fully sold on Labour need to start thinking about what exactly a Starmer supermajority would mean – because they are about to deliver one almost entirely by accident.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Ban private schools? No: subsidise them

Further to “The big debate: should private schools be abolished?” (News Review, last week), perhaps I can give an international perspective.

In Denmark – the country of equality – the state subsidises private schools through a voucher system. The school receives 75 per cent of what it would cost the state to educate each child. The state does this because it is already saving money when parents send their children to these schools; and thereby it makes it possible for the children of less wealthy parents to go private too.

The English expression “Bob’s your uncle” springs to mind.

*Elsebeth Larsen, Bedford*

standard VAT on bought privilege? It seems that the sometimes harsh outcomes of free market economics are all well and good – until they affect the comfortably off.

*Rebecca Shaw, Nottingham*

**Falling short**

If private schools wanted to avoid paying VAT and keep their charitable status, they should have done more to justify it by working for the wider public good.

Public services have been stripped to the bone; now the private schools must play their part. I say this as a former public school boy and a centre-right voter.

*Simon Beasley, Worcester*

**VAT error**

Terri White refers to private schools having a VAT “exemption” and – to paraphrase – says it is a bung to the private sector. It is nothing of the sort.

VAT has only ever applied to certain sectors. It doesn’t apply to education anywhere in Europe. It doesn’t apply to property, insurance or wages either. If we decide to make private primary and secondary schools subject to VAT, so be it: we are extending the tax to a new sector. But rationally it should then apply equally to nursery education and university fees.

*Benedict Williams, London*

**Doubly unfair**

So will Labour put VAT on private medical bills to fund the NHS? The logic is no different from private school fees.

People should be thanked for paying their taxes and then not claiming the services they are entitled to. But no: Labour wants to tax them further – for the privilege of saving the state money.

*Richard Evans Dallas, Texas, USA*

**Tax on elitism**

I have many misgivings about Keir Starmer’s Labour, but this is my favourite tax initiative for years. Why on earth shouldn’t people pay

**Gigantic loss**

The independent education sector brings in billions of pounds from foreigners sending their children to school here. This is a huge financial gain and a powerful way of projecting Britain’s soft power.

If our schools are made 20 per cent dearer, numbers of them may close and those overseas parents will send their kids elsewhere. The loss to Britain would be gigantic.

*Trevor Leigh, London*

**Affordable increase**

Private school fees have increased by 55 per cent in real terms in the past 20 years, while demand has hardly changed, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. I’d wager that most private school parents can “afford” to pay VAT on fees. It’s just that they don’t like it.

*Ken Busey, Cambridge*

**Special needs**

The idea that state education means equality is a delusion. Wealthier parents pay for more expensive houses to ensure their children can get into the best schools. Over 100,000 children in the private education sector have some kind of special need. Their parents are making big sacrifices to pay for small classes and extra support.

*Katy Cook Radstock, Somerset*

GETTY IMAGES



Spanish slugs are devastating veg borders across Britain

### A life or death battle with slugs

The Royal Horticultural Society says we should welcome slugs into our gardens as visitors, not pests (News, last week). I think not.

A handful of indigenous garden slugs would perhaps be tolerable, but the invasive Spanish slugs – *Arion vulgaris* – have been

destroying our gardens in recent years. Nothing in nature predates them – the mucus they excrete makes it impossible for birds or hedgehogs to eat them – and if we welcome them as the RHS advises, their population will increase exponentially.

Over the past four weeks I have dispatched more than 2,000. No, thank you: they are not welcome here.

*Jo Jones, Norwich*

### Idle nation must get back to work

Rod Liddle’s comments on the employment crisis were apposite (“Here’s a job for you: convincing millions to swap daytime TV for the workplace”, Comment, last week). The “can’t work, won’t work” attitude fills me with despair and puzzlement.

As someone who came from India to work in the NHS 25 years ago, I have never before seen this level of entitlement, abdication of personal responsibility and dependence on government for every problem, real or perceived, exhibited by a large proportion of our population.

This is despite the existence of free schools, a free NHS, council-funded housing and the safety net of a benefits system. All these are vestigial in India, which has largely relied on individual responsibility and graft to get to where it is now.

Successful governments, and the opposition, have perpetuated these problems by failing to be honest with the public and using them blatantly for electoral gain. They need to be honest now. The magic money tree has

disappeared, and the sooner we realise it, the better.

*Krish Somasekar, Cardiff*

**Raised to be hopeless**

There is certainly some truth in Liddle’s column. However, I am an advice worker and have a different perspective. The fact is there is a huge number of people in this country who are utterly unemployable through ill health of various kinds (most notably terrible mental health). There are also many who are so poorly educated that they would be a liability to any business.

Many of these problems are caused by poor upbringing, which is at the very heart of all that is wrong in our country. The root cause is an inadequate education system and dysfunctional families. It is a mess, and we need a radical rethink to sort it out.

*Bernice Groom, Bath*

**Actively unpaid**

Liddle fulminates against those of working age who are “economically inactive”. I worked hard, saved money and retired eight years early. I claimed no benefits as I had enough money to live on. Thus I was counted as one of those “economically

The Sunday Times,  
1 London Bridge Street,  
London SE1 9GF  
Email: letters@  
sunday-times.co.uk

### Labour leaps into Lords cronyism

You report that “Labour offers MPs peerages to step down” (News, last week). A second, revising chamber should be accountable, transparent and operated with a degree of economy. It should not be a place where prime ministers pension off awkward squads of MPs; or, come to that, a reward for party cronies and funders.

We need a constitutional convention to reform the Lords. Party leaders will not do it: they are too addicted to their powers of patronage.

*Chris Lamb, Bristol*

**Red tide**

If I had a pound for every time someone in the Labour Party threatened to flood the House of Lords with new Labour peers, I would be able to afford the tax hike its election will inevitably bring.

*David Miller, Chigwell*

### BIRTHDAYS

**Paul Beatty**, novelist, 62  
**Matt Bellamy**, musician, 46  
**Patricia Cornwell**, crime writer, 68  
**Johnny Depp**, actor, 61  
**Michael J Fox**, actor, 63  
**Natalie Portman**, actress, 43  
**Aaron Sorkin**, screenwriter and director, 63  
**Dame Emma Walmsley**, chief executive, GSK, 55



Natalie Portman is 43 today

### ANNIVERSARIES

**1934 Donald Duck makes his screen debut in The Wise Little Hen**  
**1970 Gunmen open fire on motorcade of King Hussein of Jordan**  
**2014 Supercomputer fools a third of people into thinking it is a 13-year-old boy, passing the Turing test**  
**2022 Two British men captured by Russian forces while fighting in Ukraine are sentenced to death**

### Alcohol need not ruin rugby

Writing of the loutish behaviour of fellow spectators at Twickenham, David Walsh says: “Where fans are allowed to take alcohol to their seats, they can’t be blamed for the inconvenience inflicted on others” (Sport, last week).

Oh yes, they can. Walsh’s logic is akin to saying that if you give the average person a gun, you can’t blame them for shooting someone. The problem is not alcohol itself but a decline in general standards of behaviour.

*Martynd Beardsley Mere, Wiltshire*

**Drinking game**

I thank Walsh for highlighting irritating behaviour in rugby stadiums. I stopped going to matches because of the number of times my focus on the game was interrupted by a fan who could not wait 40 minutes for their next pint. If drinking is their priority, why do they bother to pay for a ticket in the stand?

*Harinder Pattar, Hitchin*

**Your comments from**  
**thesundaytimes.co.uk**

### POINTS

**Sunak: the musical**

Have any political pundits considered the following scenario (offered with apologies to Mel Brooks and *The Producers*)? A prime minister wishes to lose an election to pursue a far more lucrative career elsewhere. The PM contrives an unelectable case for his or her party; MPs refuse to stand in droves; a dreadful campaign ensues; a totally unacceptable manifesto is announced. But just as a triumphant disaster is inevitable, the electorate warms to the appalling scenario. A landslide victory follows, as the PM laments: “Where did we go right?”

*Lord Lloyd Webber London WC2*

**Dutch lesson**

Ray Philpott remarks on the shorter waiting times for a hip replacement in the Netherlands and suggests the NHS look across the Channel for solutions (Letters, last week). Data from the OECD shows that UK government spending on health is \$4,479 per capita; Dutch government spending is \$5,672 per capita, 26 per cent more. Might that have something to do with it?

*Geoff Paterson, Horsham*

**American exception**

Matthew Syed’s excellent article on the decline of the US (Comment, last week) brings to mind the words of a

French newspaper in 1932: “Americans are the only race that passed directly from barbarism to decadence without knowing civilisation.”

*Patricia Scott, Oxshott, Surrey*

**Berry silly**

It would be hard to think of a better example of the folly of Brexit than this: we have now developed an export market in unripe strawberries to Japan, on the far side of the world, rather than selling them to our European next-door neighbours (News, last week). Aside from the economics, what about the carbon cost of this trade? It’s a win-win for lunacy.

*Henry Middleton, Maidstone*

**Rail nuisance**

It’s not only loud phone calls on public transport that irritate (Letters, last week). Equally annoying, if not more so, is the “See it. Say it. Sorted” repeated several times during a short train journey. The impact of these messages must surely now be minimal; indeed, it would be interesting to know how many responses the police receive that are of any value.

*David Lamming Boxford, Suffolk*

Letters should arrive by midday on Thursday and include the full address and a phone number. We may edit letters, which must be exclusive to The Sunday Times

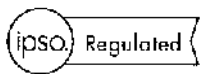
### Disconnected from real world

Labour proposes a “right to switch off” for employees to prevent companies from contacting them outside working hours (Business, last week). We have staff in India,

North America and Africa. If communications were allowed in working hours only, it would be impossible to operate. I wonder if the Labour Party itself operates this policy. I am sure it does not. This stinks of hypocrisy.

*Steven Katirai, chief executive Proforecast, Sunderland*

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS



The documentary *The Greatest Love Story Never Told* was financed by Artists Equity, not Jennifer Lopez as we wrongly said (News, last week). Ms Lopez says the \$20 million she invested in her film *This Is Me... Now: A Love Story* was not “wasted”, as our online headline said, as she made a profit. We are happy to make this clear.

Complaints concerning inaccuracies should be sent to [complaints@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:complaints@sunday-times.co.uk) or *Complaints, The Sunday Times*, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF.

In addition, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) will examine formal complaints about the editorial content of UK newspapers and magazines. Please go to our website for full details of how to lodge a complaint.

### READERS’ POLL

Last week we asked: **Should employers be banned from contacting staff outside working hours?**

**YES 48%** **NO 52%**

From a poll of 4,786 Times and Sunday Times readers

This week’s question: **Should the NHS start charging for care?**

Have your say at [sundaytimes.co.uk/poll](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk/poll)

**Rob Nash**

### JOIN THE CONVERSATION ONLINE

Do you wear sunscreen every day, we asked. Alarming accounts followed. **Dr B Reay** recalled: “My generation of boomers spent every summer playing outdoors without sunscreen as children. Our parents feared rickets and exposed us to as much sun as possible. We used to compete to see who could peel off the

biggest piece of burnt skin.” “Same here,” said **Wendy Gough** – “it wasn’t thought a good holiday unless we came home bright pink and peeling.” **K Cotterill** was proof of the damage done: “It’s the reason I’ve recently been through surgery for melanoma. My specialist said it would have been caused in

childhood. He says it’s essential I wear factor 50 daily on my face.”

Travel had a summer holiday suggestion for sun sceptics: a coalocation. **Daniel Brown** “holidayed for two weeks in Denmark last summer – beautiful, near empty and fantastic value. The only thing pricier than at

home was eating out. With excellent ingredients available in even small shops, we were happy to cook in our £80-a-night beach house for four, eating on the deck with a beautiful view of the sea.” **M Nash** also thought the “Med is too hot and too expensive. We’re going to a resort in the German Alps that is all-

inclusive and has tons of activities for children and adults – and not a lobster body or red football shirt in sight.” **A Thomas** wasn’t convinced: “Nice try, but no. Hot, sunny weather, please.”

We reported the latest hot trend for TikTokers: walking. Predictable mockery ensued from **Steve Procter** – “Young

people have invented walking! Hold the front page!” – and **Mick Ellison**: “Somebody’s definitely going to invent running soon.” **M Carlsson** scoffed: “Wait until they discover the wheel – TikTok will explode.” Some might say we walked right into that one.

# Camilla Long

## After his disaster day in Normandy, the right thing for Sunak to do now is just go



Well, that went well, D-Day-wise. Three days of screaming anger, frail, 98-year-old veterans shaking their heads. Rishi Sunak surfaced on Friday to say sorry for leaving the 80th anniversary ceremony early. “That was a mistake, and I apologise.” He added: “I think it’s important, though, given the enormity of the sacrifice made, that we don’t politicise this.”

Hmmm. It’s funny, isn’t it, when suddenly the penny drops. When you cut through the patronising, focus-grouped, disingenuous management-speak and see people for who they are. Sure, we’ve heard the accusation: Sunak isn’t much of a Conservative. I’ve often wondered if this was racism: a way of saying, he’s not one of us. But after what happened last week, I began to wonder: is he even a *politician*?

What politician doesn’t politicise D-Day? It’s an entirely political event. Can he not see that? You only needed to look at the footage of Emmanuel Macron, barely able to stop himself oiling all over Joe Biden. Or Keir Starmer – he’s a politician, sure, not the one he’d really like to be, but still, a politician – limping onto President Zelensky.

How is it that a Labour leader is giving a Tory prime minister lessons on how to be patriotic? Even now, days after the disaster, I suspect Sunak is probably still bewildered by how a simple diary clash turned into a Gillian Duffy-level event.

I don’t speak as a particular flag-shagger, or Reform-lover, or someone who reflects, sobbingly, on “the realm”. But I do know – to put it in terms that Sunak might understand – if Kirsty Young’s doing the live coverage, you’d better be there, and not leave early to do some poxy, minor interview with ITV, subbing in Lord Cameron. Just what was he thinking? I simply do not understand the mindset of a Tory prime minister – any politician – who looks at a row of D-Day heroes and Joe Biden and doesn’t at least think “photo op”. Is his head full of bricks? The right thing to do now would be to go. Just go, taking the Forsyth gollum with you. Even Liz Truss would be doing better.

As for the rest of the politicians, well,

God, they’re loving it. Standing around with six other politicians, arranged like a cataclysmically weird steel band, Nigel Farage could barely contain his excitement at Friday’s election debate.

The veterans, he howled, “were deserted by the prime minister in Normandy yesterday, which I think was a complete and utter disgrace.”

“What happened was completely wrong,” boomed Penny Mordaunt, hair steeped into an iron dome.

Angela Rayner, in a killer red dress, said less – Labour’s tactic is not to interrupt the Tories on this. She did snigger, though, when Farage boomed, “I have to say I think this has been one of the worst general election campaigns ... It isn’t just that their leaders are dull, well, very dull in the case of Labour – sort of Blair without the flair.”

I watched it and thought, why are so many good politicians in such stupid parties, or standing in for tedious people like Ed Davey? Are we truly this broken? Even the pansexual nontheist Quaker vegan for the Greens had sparkle.

As for ideas – well, it was kind of lightweight. We can gloss over Rayner’s “triple lock nuclear deterrent” and Farage droning on about shares of “the national cake”. But there was something that did catch my eye. At the end, Farage recited a shopping list of policies. Protecting small businesses; securing our borders.

For Farage, for any Conservative, these issues are a matter of pure instinct. Why aren’t they for Sunak? He preferred to get bogged down in some sterile caper about Labour’s tax promises in his debate: he is, as someone once said of Hillary Clinton, “all math and no poetry”. Farage has declared this the “immigration election”, which is bollocks – the past five elections have been the immigration election – but it cuts through.

The total collapse of the Conservatives this election is the biggest political story of our generation. At first it seems funny – they’re awful, they lied, they deserved it; watch their beetroot-coloured jowls wobble, as Stephen Fry might say. But it should be a matter of national horror. I don’t share Farage’s relish over the idea of “political revolt”, in which all the parties fragment into



Rishi Sunak and his wife, Akshata Murty, met 98-year-old veteran Keith Whiting in Normandy ... before the PM left early

tiny, screeching coalition bricks. But the fact that we have a prime minister who could not pick out a Conservative policy if it killed him, or perform a simple Conservative act with the world watching, is catastrophic. It means not only he is toast, but the party is toast – and perhaps our entire political system.

What hope does the next generation have, when Sunak, Cameron et al have lost control not only of what the voters think, but what *they* think? None of them behave like politicians – just bankers. Look down the execrable list of chancers put on Tory shortlists last week. Cameron’s socialite sister-in-law – really? Carrie Johnson’s best friend – for services to what? As for Richard Holden, the actual Conservative Party chairman, I have no words. Facing the abolition of his seat in Durham, he got himself on the shortlist for an ultra-safe seat 300 miles away. And how many

“If Kirsty Young’s doing the live coverage, you’d better be there, and not leave early

others were on the shortlist for Basildon? Zero.

Who are these grasping, hideous acolytes? They put the whiny, “engorged breasts” woman deselected by Labour in Chingford in the shade. If you look at the CV of Will Tanner, Sunak’s deputy chief of staff, who’s been handed the safe seat of Bury St Edmunds, you will see a legacy of mediocrity, greed and corruption. Having failed to crater the country while working for Theresa May, he came back to finish the job as part of Sunak’s team, architecting – as he no doubt would say – the plan for national service. How can the party – our democracy – survive with these people still anywhere near power? Someone, please, clear them out and start again.

As for Sunak, he shares their sneering, their looking-down on little people. To them, to him, Britain isn’t a culture, but a bald economic bloc.

### The true story of Baby Reindeer – everyone loses

Fiona Harvey, the 58-year-old lawyer who inspired *Baby Reindeer*, is suing Netflix for \$170 million. Good.

Anyone reading details of her life, or watching her gripping interview with Piers Morgan, could see the show for what it was: a monstrosity. Harvey isn’t perfect – she’s eccentric, rolls her eyes and, to this day, leaves truly mad Facebook messages. But is she really the venomous horror Martha, a deranged, angry stalker who sexually assaulted Gadd’s character, Donny, and then went to prison?

“This is a true story,” is what the show tried to claim, but it isn’t. Her true story is that of a strange, awkward, marginalised woman to whom life has not been kind. Such women are easy pickings for comedians like Gadd, who made money out of her by claiming it was actually him who was the victim. They’re just nobodies to a vast, toxic television conglomerate like Netflix, which thinks nothing of sexing up its programmes in whatever way it can.

Netflix made every effort to protect the real people in it, said some flunky to a select committee. Well, it didn’t – Harvey is living proof of this.

I’m not sure it’s even protected Gadd: for want of two words, “based on”, he’ll now for ever be linked not to an incredible, breakout show but Netflix’s grasping sloppiness. He told The Sunday Times that originally he hadn’t wanted to “throw someone who was that level of mentally unwell in prison”. So why shame her on global television?

# Tomiwa Owolade

## Week ending



### A message for Labour: don’t worry about ‘black voters’. Just voters

Labour is losing the black vote with the way the party handled the Diane Abbott situation. Labour is losing the Muslim vote with its stance on Gaza. Labour is losing ... you get the picture. But, for whoever keeps repeating these trite formulations, I have a simple question: what is the black vote? What is the Muslim vote?

There are black voters – and not all of them are the same. The same is true of Muslims. Some are liberal, some conservative. Some are rich, some poor. Some care

passionately about Diane Abbott; others care more about kicking the Tories out. Just like any other voter.

These categorisations imply a sense of entitlement over a group of voters merely on the basis of their identity. Labour may be losing some black voters, but so what? They don’t belong to the Labour Party by law.

Another problem, and a more serious one, is the idea that Labour should be appealing to voters simply on the basis of their race or religion. This is nonsense and

politically toxic. Labour should create a policy platform that appeals to as wide a range of the British population as possible.

Those who talk about the “black vote” and the “Muslim vote” may claim to be tolerant. But they are using the language of sectarianism. Our political discourse needs less of that and more genuine inclusivity: the invoking of shared values rather than shared identities, affirming the things that unite us as a nation instead of dwelling on those that divide us.

● When Roman Polanski was acquitted of defamation by a French court last month, all the arguments about separating the art from the artist resurfaced. Is it acceptable to watch the films of a man who has admitted having sex with a 13-year-old girl?

I have another question: are his films still watchable anyway? This month marks 50 years since the release of *Chinatown*, and I wanted to see if it still holds up.

It certainly does. What a fine combination of cast and crew: Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway and John Huston are all at the top of their acting games; the script by Robert Towne provides a sophisticated plot and great characterisation; and it is tightly directed by Polanski. No scene is wasted; no piece of dialogue is indulgent.

What I admire most about it is that it’s a film for grown-ups. It doesn’t condescend to its viewers. It doesn’t have an ideological agenda. Rather, it is an exploration of themes that are still of great concern to us: cruelty and greed. I wish we could have more films like *Chinatown*, rather than the omnipresent superhero and video-game movies.

### Put the knives away and just enjoy the music

Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead has been denounced by some pro-Palestinian activists for working with an Israeli musician. Greenwood and Dudu Tassa have performed together since 2008, but in light of the Gaza war, some have called for Greenwood to cease this collaboration. It is whitewashing genocide, they claim.

This viewpoint is wrong for so many reasons. One of them is that it conflates citizens of Israel with the Israeli government. Another reason is provided by Greenwood himself in an excellent open letter: “I think an artistic project that combines Arab and Jewish musicians is worthwhile.

And one that reminds everyone that the Jewish cultural roots in countries like Iraq and Yemen go back for thousands of years is also important.”

As Greenwood says, Arab and Jewish culture cannot really be separated, and he is not the first to bridge the divide with music. In 1999 the Argentine-Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim and the late Palestinian-American academic Edward Said founded the brilliant West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, with members from Israel, the Middle East and beyond.

Like his classical counterparts, Greenwood is not only a terrific musician. He is also a wise man.



### No escape from Eminem

Guess who’s back. Back again. Eminem’s new song *Houdini* is No 1 in the UK and the fastest-selling single of the year – beating even the omnipotent Taylor Swift. To my ears it sounds like a reprise of Eminem’s song *Without Me*, and one critic wrote that “it plays to an ongoing vogue for early 2000s musical nostalgia”.

Nostalgia is a potent force. And it most powerfully expresses itself through music. But nostalgia can sometimes bleed into kitsch, and I think it does so here. Some of *Houdini*’s lyrics are very on the nose, though, so perhaps Eminem is simply giving fans what they want: a taste of the past, steeped in his trademark bad taste.

# TIMES RADIO

## THE ELECTION STATION

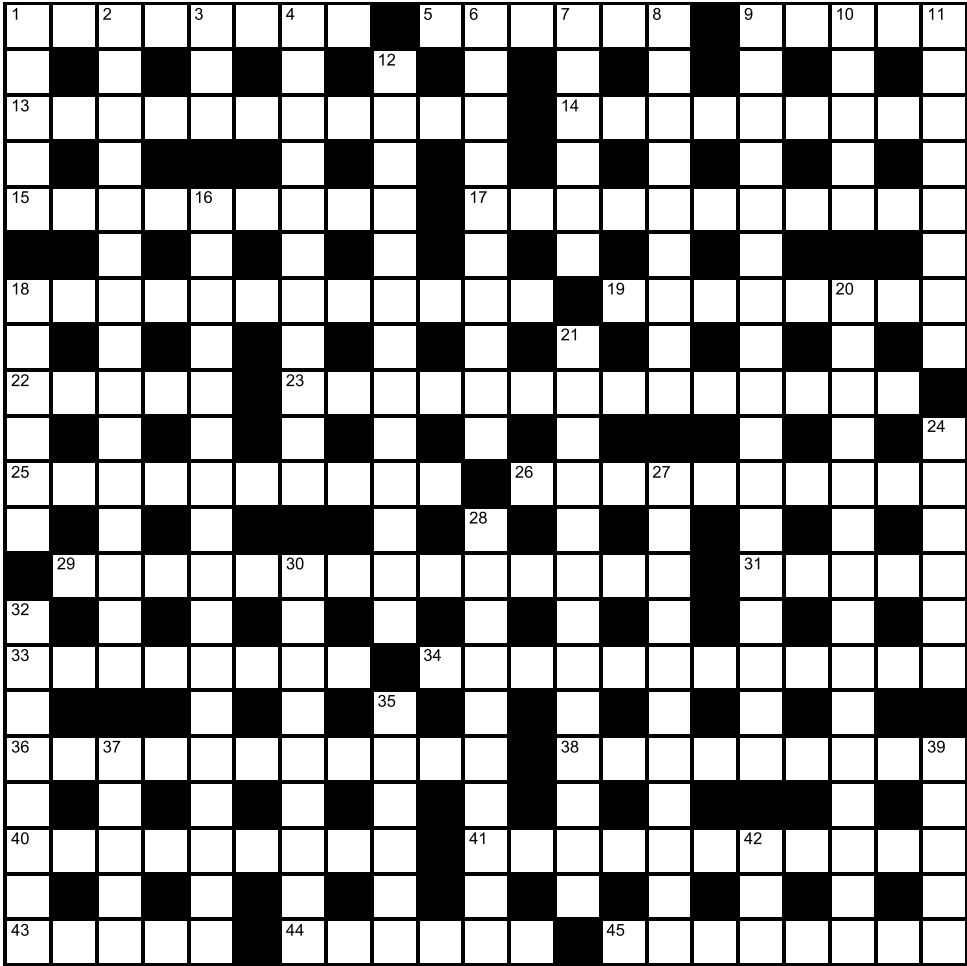
# ON TOUR

### BRINGING YOU THE LATEST ELECTION NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

DAB RADIO • ONLINE • SMART SPEAKER • APP

PUZZLES

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE JUMBO CROSSWORD 426



Across

- 1 Dagger in the stocking of full Highland dress (5-3)  
5 That which one magpie may represent (6)  
9 Large-leaved type of beet, often with red or yellow stalks (5)  
13 German love song popular during World War II, as spelt on a 1945 recording (4,7)  
14 With little benefit (2,2,5)  
15 “I am become death, the \_\_\_ of worlds” (Bhagavad Gita, quoted by Robert Oppenheimer) (9)  
17 “Dozens of drivers stranded on the A30 in Devon took \_\_\_ in a school overnight” (Times “Weather Eye”, March 2023) (4,7)  
18 \_\_\_ played Nasser Ali in My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) (5,7)  
19 David Bowie persona described as “a junkie, strung out in heaven’s high, hitting an all-time low” (5,3)  
22 Pronunciation sign over a short vowel (5)  
23 Novel whose antagonist is Jack Merridew (4,2,3,5)  
25 “Greatly inferior in size and splendour to the country \_\_\_ of most of the [British] nobility” (Martin Van Buren on the White House) (10)  
26 Relative often seen as prim or old-fashioned (6,4)  
29 “The best female voice in the world” (Paul McCartney) (5,9) (pictured)  
31 Modern pagan religion, venerating a Triple Goddess and Horned God (5)  
33 1963 Roy Orbison rock ballad about lost love (2,6)  
34 Singer with five No 1 albums in the UK (6,6)  
36 “He is the very pineapple of politeness!” for example (11)  
38 “Prose is spoken aloud; poetry \_\_\_” (Joyce Carol Oates) (9)  
40 1941 Hitchcock film starring Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine (9)  
41 Gilbert & Sullivan operetta about a “breach of promise” suit (5,2,4)  
43 Vegetable used by Hannah Arendt as a metaphor for the organisational structure of totalitarianism (5)  
44 Nottinghamshire town where Fosse Way crosses the Trent (6)  
45 Language spoken in north-eastern India (8)





Down

- 1 “Sooner or later a false belief bumps up against \_\_\_ reality, usually on a battlefield” (George Orwell) (5)  
2 Northernmost part of Canada’s Nunavut territory (9,6)  
3 Old game played with matchsticks (3)  
4 Portrayer of Perseus in a 1981 film and a 2007 video game (5,6)  
6 First World War painting by John Nash, housed at the Imperial War Museum in London (4,3,3)  
7 Mary Lou \_\_\_ won all-around gymnastics gold at the 1984 Olympics (6)  
8 Former name of the Sellafield nuclear site (9)  
9 Journalist whose “scoop of the century” was the outbreak of World War II (5,12)  
10 Nautical equivalent of “stop!” (5)  
11 What sailors call the Intertropical Convergence Zone (8)  
12 Band whose first UK hit was Mad World in 1982 (5,3,5)  
16 John Marston is the main character in this 2010 video game (3,4,10)  
18 Japanese car maker, its name meaning “Seven Sisters” (the star cluster) (6)  
20 “Live long and prosper” normally follows \_\_\_ (3,6,6)  
21 Mark Radcliffe’s co-presenter on BBC Radio 6 Music’s weekend breakfast show (6,7)  
24 An odourless component of natural gas and petroleum (6)  
27 The \_\_\_ is a strait known in antiquity as the Hellespont (11)  
28 “Mother Earth” in ancient Roman mythology (5,5)  
30 A \_\_\_ red curry includes toasted baguette bread (9)  
32 In musical instructions, “quicker” (3,5)  
35 A small fish called “pinkieen” in Ireland (6)  
37 Harold \_\_\_ (pictured) was a prominent intellectual in the Labour party until his death in 1950 (5)  
39 Mrs \_\_\_ is the housekeeper in Father Ted (5)  
42 Word used to emphasise a more appropriate word than one just used (3)



SUDOKU

Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain digits 1-9. Winner receives The Times Mindset Puzzles Book 1 and The Sunday Times Teasers Book 2.



To enter, complete the Very Hard puzzle and call 0901 292 5275 (UK only) (ROI 1516 303 500), leaving your answer (the numbers in the three shaded squares) and contact details. Or text SUNDAY2, followed by a space, then your answer (three numbers) and contact details — eg SUNDAY2 123 John Smith, etc — to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI £1.50) plus your telephone company’s network access charge. Winners will be picked at random from all correct answers received. When entering by phone or text, please provide your FULL name and address details, as incomplete entries may be charged but not entered.

WARM-UP

		6			2	
4			8		5	
	3	9	5	4		7
8	9					3
			3			
6	7					1
	5	1	4	6		8
1			9		2	
		2			5	

VERY HARD — PRIZE 1591

			3			1		
		5	2					
9				1			5	8
	5	1						
	4	8				5	9	
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			1		3	9		
		7			2			

KILLER SUDOKU HARD

8				12			9			16	
21				8		22					9
19							20	25	10		
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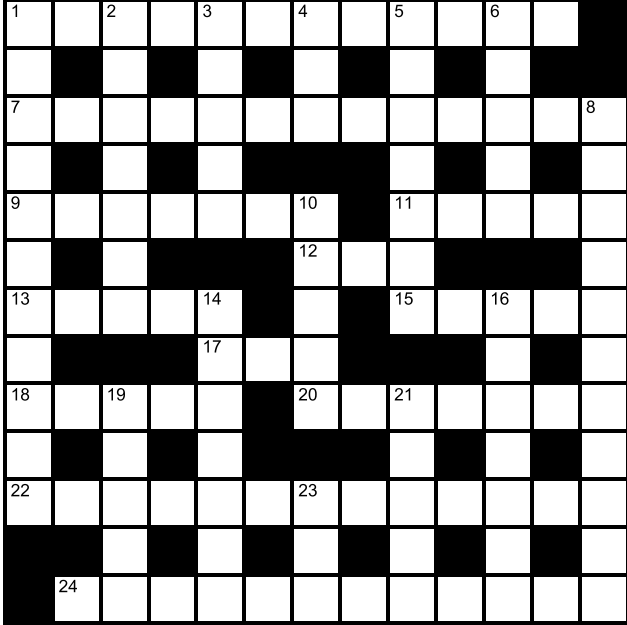
Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. The digits within each group of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the figure in the top-left-hand corner of each group. Within each dotted-line group, a digit cannot be repeated.

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**  
24 words, average; 32, good; 40, very good; 48, excellent.

CONCISE CROSSWORD 1890



Across

- 1 Ghostly lookalike (12)  
7 Extinct elephant (6,7)  
9 Clue (7)  
11 Varnish resin (5)  
12 Broadcast (3)  
13 Relinquish (5)  
15 Church council (5)  
17 Syrup (3)  
18 Bit player (5)  
20 Breadth (7)  
22 Reverse positions (4,3,6)  
24 Seller (12)

Down

- 1 Deposit (4,7)  
2 Side view (7)  
3 Razzle-dazzle (5)  
4 Adhesive (3)  
5 Digits (7)  
6 Call to mind (5)  
8 Coiffeur (11)  
10 Variety (5)  
14 Extreme (7)  
16 Dumbfound (7)  
19 Abrupt (5)  
21 Tartan cloth (5)  
23 Notable time (3)

TETONOR EASY

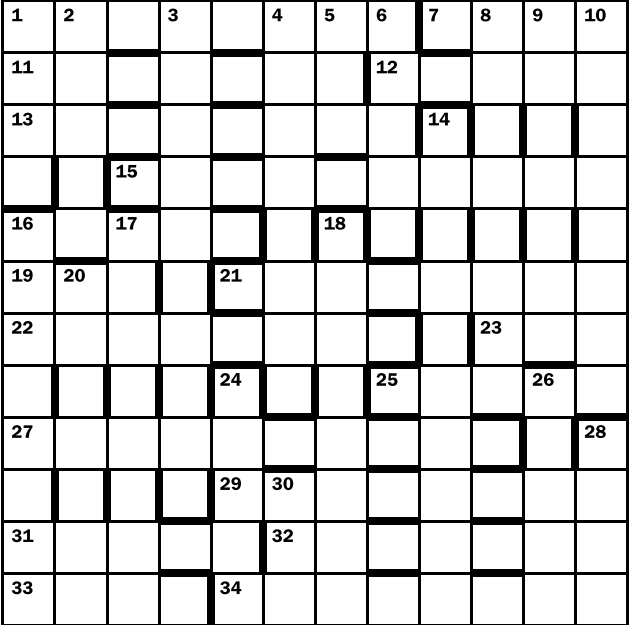
13	360	36	84
150	30	390	41
43	310	25	224
77	49	468	20

Each number in the main grid can be formed by adding or multiplying a pair of numbers in the strip below the grid. Each pair of numbers should be used twice: once as part of an addition and once as part of a multiplication. For example, a 10 and 24 in the main grid may be solved by the sums, 4 + 6 and 4 x 6, respectively. Enter each sum in the boxes below its answer. Any blanks in the strip must be deduced, bearing in mind the numbers are listed in ascending order.

	5	6		10	10	13	13	14				30	31	36
--	---	---	--	----	----	----	----	----	--	--	--	----	----	----

MEPHISTO 3328

John Grimshaw



NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

Post your solution to The Sunday Times Mephisto 3328, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ, or email [puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk)

The first correct solution picked at random after next Saturday wins Collins World Atlas: Complete Edition, worth £30. The next four will receive £20 Waterstones gift vouchers. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

The Chambers Dictionary 13th edition is the primary reference. Readers may email comments or queries to [puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk)



Across

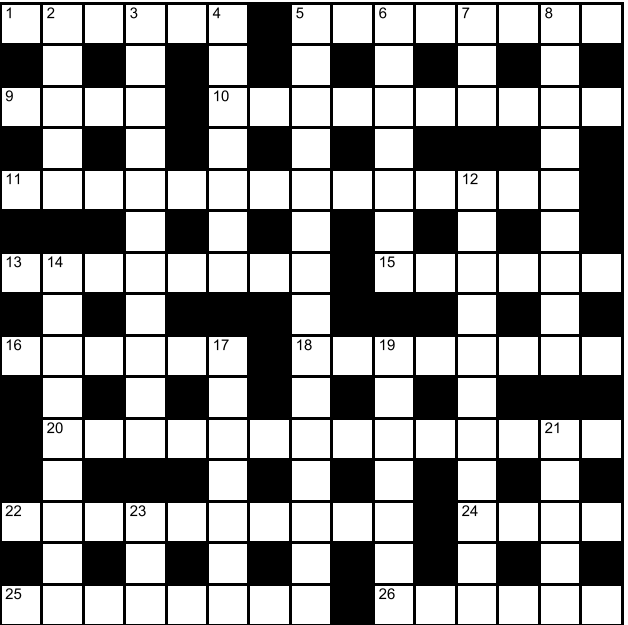
- 1 Insect head and wing (8)  
7 Refuse cataloguing system for books (4)  
11 Obliging spirit of Brussels girl? (7)  
12 Wise Man without a bit of myrrh or gold representative of another land (5)  
13 Gannet flying about with river bird (8)  
15 Grower’s skill entering them half cut in local prize stupefied (10, two words)  
16 Core community’s fine for fifty (5)  
19 Dirty old skate (3)  
21 Military rule rose before Wellington perhaps (8)  
22 Corporal, one picking up speaker at defence meeting? (8)  
23 Press time cut by hour (3)  
25 Heroin from the US with Ecstasy in pouches (5)  
27 Rapture you can develop with Jesu (10)  
29 With little ready I will certainly get something to chew (8)  
31 Rust – treat after earlier operation (5)  
32 Synagogue regularly plundered in the middle city (7)  
33 Hindu custom turning back palms (4)  
34 Potential killer close to US city? One must leave (8, two words)

Down

- 1 Truly local fruit – one being English (4)  
2 Be able to manage number going around tense after game (5, two words)  
3 Model T they alter as lead compound is in fuel (10)  
4 Sacked absent politician? Mine might have a problem with that (8)  
5 Old river sediment spades removed (3)  
6 Gossip craving thanks (5)  
8 Look into a principle without support (8)  
9 Those involved in racket reported traveller lad (7)  
10 Type of bread Italian company felt advanced (8)  
14 Horse cloth, it covers middle of the pair carrying queen (10)  
16 Surpassing a jewel, one stolen in French society (8)  
17 Wild century which might be poisonous (8)  
18 Very pointed rule by supreme commander in hall (8)  
20 Mountainous land even if worthless in the Highlands (7)  
24 Particle involving zero spin (5)  
26 Dog perhaps dropping a part of jellyfish (5)  
28 Plans to spend a day in Rome (4)  
30 Feature of Early English branch line (3)

CROSSWORD 5115

Dean Mayer



NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

Across

- 1 Ingredient of fine Guinness, perhaps (6)  
5 Pieces match, but not on paper (8)  
9 Feel divide, left out (4)  
10 Good offices will stock cold remedy (10)  
11 Four quarts of fluid in large oil lamp (8,6)  
13 Name is given to Greek nymph (8)  
15 Some retaliate as well as others (2,4)  
16 Biological material sent out to Mars (6)  
18 Old model stuck, cut by old kind of sword (3-5)  
20 Look here, it says “X marks the spot” (5-9)  
22 Terrible female novelist in Italian town (10)  
24 Sick? Not very, miss (4)  
25 Elaborate action parts for chase (8)  
26 Female can notice inside information that’s false (6)

Down

- 2 Startle with a large member (5)  
3 Rich people fell into order before song and dance (3,4-2-2)  
4 Bones for stays (7)  
5 Ordinary wordplay for 9 Across? (6-2-3-4)  
6 Bat welcome to devour rubbish (7)  
7 Fitting a soft type of shirt (3)  
8 Insanely difficult to eat duck cooked with onions (9)  
12 See dame boarding sub last (2,3,6)  
14 Lorry that man used to carry fine plant (9)  
17 Soccer club stadium incorporates small lake (7)  
19 Loose coat used for sweeping (7)  
21 “X” – author on strike (5)  
23 State proposal that’s realistic when delivered (3)

CODEWORD

11	2	12	12	2		6			14	13	9	12	2
15		16			14	5	18	21	2		16		6
11	16	21	18	9		10		8	16	14	22	16	
8		20			16	26	16	12	13				14
10	2	24	16		2			13		19	14	16	24
	22			26	16		21	19	13	16	15		21
3	16	11	26			7		21		6	13	21	12
	8			13	11	18	14	16	12	13			13
4	18	1	24			14		20		12	13	23	12
16		16			10	13	4	13	14		17		18
9	2	14	20	18			16		16	26	15	25	25
22		20			1	2	20	18	9		18		25
24	18	13	1	19			13			13	11	8	12

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

14	15	16		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
R		A											

In the grid, each number represents a letter of the alphabet – all 26 letters are used. Use the initial clues in the code table to work out the rest of the code.  
**STUCK?** To get four random extra letter clues, call 0901 293 6266 (ROI 1514 415128) or text STCLUE to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI 75c) plus your telephone company’s network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (ROI 0818 205 403) (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

KENKEN

5+	12x				90x	
			1-			2-
12x	4-			2÷	6x	
			11+			
18+				5-	8+	
	1-				4	

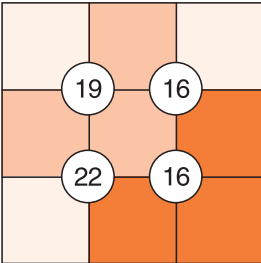
All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line “block”, the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

CLUE WRITING CONTEST 2024: NUMBERING

You are invited to write a clue for the word above, in our cryptic crossword style. The best entry selected after next Saturday wins a £25 Waterstones voucher. Email your entry to [puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk).

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SUKO



Place the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the number in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding spaces, and each colour total is correct.

CELL BLOCKS

				7
2			3	
2	5			3
		8	2	4
3		4		
	4			2

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.

**Winner 2021:** Elizabeth Manning, Malvern, Worcestershire  
**Lumberjack:** Labour leader is supported by Brown and Straw – he’ll make cuts

For a full report, visit [thesundaytimes.co.uk/cluewriting](http://thesundaytimes.co.uk/cluewriting)



# YOUR CHANCE TO NAME LONDON ZOO'S LION CUBS

London Zoo recently welcomed three lion cubs, born as part of the conservation breeding programme for endangered Asiatic lions. Specialist asset manager Liontrust has teamed up with London Zoo to offer listeners of Times Radio and readers of The Times the chance to name the three cubs.

London Zoo is home to a pride of Asiatic lions. An endangered species, there are fewer than 700 Asiatic lions remaining in the wild, and their dependency on one singular habitat in north-west India means the big cats are particularly vulnerable to natural disaster or a disease outbreak. The three cubs at London Zoo are not only a huge boost to the conservation breeding programme, which ensures a healthy population of lions are cared for in zoos to provide a vital safety net for the vulnerable wild

population, but they will also inspire millions of people to care and take action for wildlife.

Listeners of Times Radio and readers of The Times are invited to vote on their favourite names for the three cubs, from a shortlist created by primary school pupils from around the UK. Each vote will count as an entry into a prize draw to win a Gold Membership – giving unlimited visits to London and Whipsnade Zoos and a host of other benefits!

Through a partnership with 10Ticks – an organisation devoted to increasing financial literacy among children – Liontrust worked with primary schools across the UK to ask for submissions for names for the lion cubs.

Liontrust's partnership with London Zoo – run by global conservation charity ZSL – for more than a decade supports the conservation zoo's mission to educate millions of people about wildlife and inspire them to act.



**VOTE NOW**  
[thetimes.co.uk/static/win/zoo](https://thetimes.co.uk/static/win/zoo)  
Deadline to enter 23.59 on Thursday 13 June 2024

**WIN**  
GOLD FAMILY  
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**LONDON ZOO**  
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COURAGE • POWER • PRIDE

SPORT

25

21

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS

BATH



Captain Courtney Lawes, left, lifts the Gallagher Premiership trophy after his final game for Northampton

# Saints and sinner

## Glorious Premiership farewell for Lawes after Bath's Obano sees red, pages 2-3

### Premier League officials told to disclose texts and emails about Man City

Exclusive

**Matt Lawton**  
Chief Sports Correspondent

Senior figures at the Premier League have had to hand over emails, WhatsApp messages and texts that mention Manchester City before the hearing into the 115 charges against the club.

The English champions are due to appear before an independent commission in November, having been accused by the league of concealing payments through third parties by disguising them as sponsorship revenue. City have denied any wrongdoing.

Richard Masters, the Premier League chief executive, and his predecessor, Richard Scudamore, are among those who have been required to hand over messages, with officials told to disclose all communications referencing City dating back to 2009.

The move is a further escalation of what is becoming an existential crisis for the English game, with City having also launched a separate legal action against the Premier League.

The City claim, revealed this week by The Times, argues that rules designed to limit how much companies related to club owners can pay in sponsorship are unlawful. In a hearing that begins on Monday they will attempt to have those regulations scrapped before pursuing a second hearing for damages.

It is a move that has sparked civil war among Premier League clubs, with City claiming their Abu Dhabi owners are victims of “discrimination” and the rules around associated party transactions (APT), which were introduced in December 2021, amount to a “tyranny of the majority”. They also say the rules are

designed to stifle their future success on the pitch.

While about 10 to 12 Premier League clubs are supporting the league, arguing that the regulations need to remain in place to ensure any such sponsorship deals are of a “fair market value”, others are more sympathetic to City.

One club has submitted a witness statement in support of City, who recently celebrated a record fourth consecutive Premier League title.

The Sunday Times can reveal how the most recent voting on the APT rules was divided, with clubs funded by Middle East investment – and one club who are part of a multi-club ownership structure – also opposed to what was the most recent revision

Continued on page 5 →



### Unrivalled Euros coverage



• Wayne Rooney: My three tournaments Under VAR I'd have been sent off in 2004, pages 8-9



• David Walsh on Gareth Southgate England manager by the journalist who knows him best, pages 10-12



• Jonathan Northcroft on Iceland shock The serious issues England have a week to fix, pages 6-7



### Plus

• England humbled Butler's men thrashed by Australia in World T20, pages 4-5



# SAINTS HOLD ON TO EDGE FINAL FOR THE AGES


**25-21**

**Northampton Saints**
**Bath**
**STEPHEN JONES**

**Rugby Correspondent**  
At Twickenham

**T**his was one of the greatest finals – and I am including in that reckoning any final, of any event, wherever it was staged. Northampton Saints are champions – but before they went up to collect the Gallagher Premiership trophy there was a slight delay while their knees stopped knocking.

It is perhaps appropriate that the best team in the whole league campaign takes the title, but whatever Northampton have achieved down the stretch, they were, on the run of play at a packed Twickenham, decidedly fortunate.

They overhauled Bath – heroic, dogged, outstanding Bath – only after they brought on George Hendy, the tall, red-haired wing, in the second half. In what was practically Northampton's only convincing attack of the whole half, and with Saints by now in desperation, Hendy went bursting away and carved up the Bath wide defence. Alex Mitchell came up inside him for the scoring pass and followers in green must have almost collapsed with relief.

Even after that, in the dying moments, there was drama piled on drama. Bath's rather unrated pack had taken Northampton to the cleaners in almost every department and now they drove on des-

perately with the clock approaching its final tick. They ran the ball to the left and right, and looked to be creating space around Will Muir down the left, but eventually Northampton managed to turn the ball over and that was that.

It was a wonderful way to bid farewell to the great Courtney Lawes, who will now move to Brive, and no doubt the celebrations in one of the most fervent of rugby cities will go on for days.

But it would be the hardest of hearts that did not feel sympathy for Bath – they were reduced to 14 men when Beno Obano was sent off for what the referee judged to be a high hit on Juanro Augustus.

A team who have to play with one player short for two thirds of the match will almost always lose, but Bath completely refused to bow to such conventional wisdom. Their pack came ranting and roaring at Northampton with both locks, Charlie Ewels and Quinn Roux, and both flankers, Ted Hill and Sam Underhill, performing heroics upon heroics.

Bath were the superior team for

well over half

the match – it was a joy to watch Finn Russell and Ben Spencer conjuring at half back, and they had the better of their personal contests against the promising pair of Fin Smith and Alex Mitchell opposite them. Bath absolutely refused to lie down and fade away, and on the run of play they most certainly had the better of it.

And once again, a game has been turned by the actions of the authorities, looking to show their most safe and caring side to avoid serious injury. Obano produced a tackle that would never have even been remarked upon, let alone

penalised, four or five years ago. It also seemed to me that his hit was legal, but that he rode up on Augustus and contacted him higher just as the No8 began to tilt forward and downwards, as the ball-carrier always does.

Christophe Ridley, the referee, had a superb game, but it was always likely that the new strictures would tilt a match that was never unsafe.

Northampton have been marvellous, although their famous back play and the thunder of their forwards faded more than a little under the Bath pressure. Bath had a definite edge in the 21 minutes that Obano was on the field – and the poor man was clearly distraught as he had to leave.

But Saints did not let anyone's grief grow on them. They were upset by huge double hits from Bath but kept their resolve long enough to score two tries in the first half for a 15-10 lead at the break.

Tommy Freeman and Ollie Sleightholme were the scorers – the outstanding Freeman on the end of a splendid move involving an inside pass from the great Lawes; and Sleightholme scored when he came roaring out of defence down the left wing, kicked ahead and reached the ball to score just before the inter-

section of the touchline and the dead-ball line. Even then, Bath refused to take a backward step, with Thomas du Toit going over to reduce the deficit, but the second half loomed as a potentially gruelling passage of play for them.

If anything, Bath lifted themselves even higher. Du Toit scrummaged almost like a superhuman to keep them going. Their seven-man pack kept on moving forward, and although Lawes and Trevor Davison were conspicuous in the resistance, there was no sign of Bath easing off.

And the try that they needed to draw level came after Spencer took a tap penalty. Bath ran the ball through the splendid Russell, and after Spencer chipped again for the corner, Hendy could only tap it with his outstretched fingers as Will Muir came up to touch down.

Russell missed the conversion, but it was well into the final quarter when he kicked a penalty to give Bath a 21-18 lead, after Northampton were penalised in a scrum. A brilliant 50:22 by the Scotland fly half set up another attacking position and the knocking knees were on the point of becoming dislocated.

But then came Hendy, on the charge. It was not the first time that

“

**In the dying moments there was drama piled on drama as Bath's pack drove on**

some bursts from him had rescued Saints at the end of a big match and, in the end, not even Bath and their mountainous morale and courage could do anything about it.

What a day for the battered old sport. The Premiership has been wonderful since Christmas, and almost magical in its final few laps. The darkness on the edge of town lies in the blithering attempts by the top-flight clubs, the teams in the Championship and the RFU to set up something as simple as a Premiership and the Premiership Two.



DENNIS GOODWIN/PROSPORTS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



Freeman scores the first Saints try, main image. Left, Obano's tackle leaves Bath with ten men and Russell downbeat



The division must incorporate more teams. If and when it does, it will resume its position as the top league in club rugby – the most passionate and, at least on yesterday's evidence, the activity most likely to shred your nerves to pieces.

Two magnificent sporting institutions split by one whistle, albeit from an outstanding referee. Somehow, at the end of a season almost without end, you are almost looking forward to it all beginning again.

**Scorers: Northampton: Tries** Freeman (23min), Sleightholme (27), Mitchell (72). **Cons** Smith, Furbank. **Pen** Smith 47. **Drop goal** Furbank 20. **Bath: Try** Du Toit (30), Muir (50). **Con** Russell. **Pens** Russell 3 (8, 42, 66). **Northampton Saints** G Furbank; T Freeman, B Odendaal (G Hendy 44), F Dingwall, O Sleightholme; F Smith (T James 70), A Mitchell; A Waller (E Iyogun 52), C Langdon (S Matavesi 57), T Davison (E Millar Mills 57, A Moon (T Mayanavanua 70), A Coles, C Lawes, T Pearson (L Ludlam 60), J Augustus (S Graham 66). **Bath** M Gallagher; J Cokanasiga (M Reid 78), O Lawrence, C Redpath (O Bailey 78), W Muir; F Russell, B Spencer; B Obano (sent off, 22), T Dunn (N Annett 52), T du Toit, Q Roux (E Stooke 66), C Ewels, T Hill (J Bayliss 66), S Underhill (M Reid 64 (S Underhill 75), A Barbeary (J Schoeman 21 (W Stuart 52)). **Referee** C Ridley. **Attendance** 81,000.

# Mitchell's glory grab papers over the cracks in his game

STUART BARNES



The laws of unintended consequences struck with a vengeance in what was a thrilling Twickenham experience. It was early in the second half and Bath had kicked a penalty to cut the Northampton Saints lead to a mere two points. Whereas Bath had taken the three-point option in what was shaping into a tight affair, Saints kicked to the corner from their own penalty, going for a hammer-blow seven points. But Bath resisted the Northampton pack; when Burger Odendaal sprinted into the heart of the West Country defence, who was there to scythe the South African, but a steely-eyed Finn Russell.

The centre was forced from the field with the weight of the tackle. Tommy Freeman, a tryscoring threat throughout the game, shifted from the right wing. George Hendy filled the spot out wide.

In the end, Hendy, on the field for all of 35 minutes, was adjudged man of the match, for a single elusive run that turned the course of a game of which Bath had bravely taken, if not control, then an edge. He stepped through a few tackles to find Alex Mitchell with little more than seven remaining minutes. The scrum half is a superb support player. On the inside arm of Hendy, he took the tryscoring pass to snatch the trophy from Bath, who went down in glory.

Had Odendaal not been injured, had the red-haired winger not been on the field, we could have had a very different ending. The judgment different.

Decision-making is more important than any aspect of the game for half backs. They can have all the skill in the world but if they make poor decisions their pack's work is in vain.

Mitchell made a diabolical decision in the 67th minute. A penalty was awarded 22 metres out, as kickable as they come in such a pressurised environment. Bath were in front, 21-18. A penalty levelled the game with 12 minutes to play. Mitchell, reverting to his early days, tapped the ball and charged alone towards the Bath tryline. Had he garnered an extra ten metres, the kick would have been no easier. But the opposition held their nerve and eventually turned over possession.

Steve Borthwick, the England head coach, would have despaired at this decision. Northampton won the game but in this instance the present England scrum half lost his head. The result could easily have ended up 21-18 if not for the power of the Russell tackle that forced a change in the Saints back line.

Hendy was the hero of the hour according to the broadcasters, but his cameo was not all positive from the perspective of his team. He had been on the field for only six minutes when Bath launched a forward-based drive towards the Saints tryline. Ben



Mitchell touches down for the decisive try for Saints in the 72nd minute



## The England scrum half is deadly on the front foot; a dubious decision-maker on the back foot

Spencer jockeyed his big men into position before making the decision to send a cross-kick in the direction of his lanky winger, Will Muir. Hendy, watching the assault from his wide berth on the right wing, understandably drifted infield a metre or so. That was all the Bath scrum half needed. Hendy realised the threat too late. He jumped backwards and got a hand to the ball, but only to knock it in-goal, where Muir touched down to level the scores.

Hendy's try assist balanced out the pluses and minuses in his game. He produced the match-winning memory but was caught out for the leveller. Still, the Saints star was hugely influential in the outcome. Had Bath held out, the man-of-the-match award could easily have gone to Spencer, who controlled the game in a way Mitchell failed to do.

Bath targeted Mitchell around the breakdown and made a mess of the link between backs and forwards. This was just as well for them because when George Furbank entered into the equation, here was the game advantage for the East Midlands side. After this display of consummate quality, no one will be questioning his hold on the England No 15 shirt.

But what about the No 9 jersey? On Thursday Russell said he would be leaning on Spencer as the game went into its deep phase. The Scot produced a memorable 50:22 but it was the length of the Spencer clearance kick, the accuracy of his

box-kicks and his management of his pack that stood out – as Russell had predicted.

Mitchell was distinctly second-best to the Bath man. On the front foot the England scrum half is deadly; on the back foot, he is frenetic and a dubious decision-maker. Spencer is a better scrum half than he was at the start of the season. Russell is demanding. He wants quick ball. Spencer is quicker to get that ball away than he was when the primary expectation of his game was to kick in his days at Saracens.

I'd take him to New Zealand for the hard times when the team want to close out a Test match. Mitchell is exciting, but there are doubts about the balance of his game. Hendy was yesterday's hero and Mitchell the man, but it took Odendaal's bad luck to bring about the change in fortune to save their scrum half's day.

Had the Saints lost, influential voices would have said: "Why did he run that penalty?" The Saints won but the question remains unanswered.

## LAWES: I'M LIVID – WE WERE AWFUL

Courtney Lawes, the Northampton captain, said his team had been "awful" during his last game in English rugby (Chris Jones writes).

"I am actually still livid from the game – we were awful, but we found a way to win," Lawes, 35, said. "I don't think we could have played worse. But what a way to go out – I'm over the moon and couldn't have asked for more."

"I think we've deserved it throughout the season and seeing these lads grow up has been really special. We didn't fire on all cylinders and didn't get our game on to the pitch."

# England left with no room for error after feeble defeat

SIMON WILDE



Cricket Correspondent Barbados

England are really sweating now. Good wins over Oman next Thursday and Namibia two days later can still mean they qualify for the super eights but they need no more trouble from the weather or upsets elsewhere in their group. Come what may, they need to up their game if they are to mount a serious title defence.

They were always chasing this game against an Australia side who got off to a flyer and never let up. The sizeable margin of defeat – 36 runs – means they will spend days cogitating net run rate tables, because that is the only likely way forward.

Worryingly, they are starting to look an ageing side, especially in a middle order that succumbed feebly in response to Australia's 201 for seven, the highest total of the World Cup so far.

Jonny Bairstow chewed up 13 balls scoring seven, and his position ahead of Harry Brook in the order now looks untenable, if not his place in the side when Ben Duckett waits in the wings. It was a mercy when he finally holed out attempting to clear the short boundary, which England never exploited to the same extent as their opponents.

Moeen Ali also began slowly but recovered to hit three sixes off a Glenn Maxwell over that cost 20, but it raised

false hope. Ali soon carved to deep cover and it left Brook and Liam Livingstone chasing an unattainable 74 off 27 balls. Will Jacks also made a laborious ten off ten at No 3.

The chase was always a tall order – particularly for a line-up that did not get an outing against Scotland – but Jos Buttler and Phil Salt gave England the sort of start they needed if they were going to get close, plundering 73 off seven overs.

They were not quite as destructive as their counterparts had been, but Mitchell Starc was handed some harsh treatment as the left-armer sought to take the ball across the right-handers and away from the shorter leg-side boundary. In vain. Salt deposited him on to the top tier of the Hall & Griffith Stand and carved him over third man, where Travis Head stepped on the rope trying to complete the catch; Buttler fetched him for an extraordinary one-handed six over wide long on.

Josh Hazlewood was three times lashed to the short point boundary and England's fifty came up in 5.2 overs, keeping them in the contest.

The initiative shifted with the arrival of Adam Zampa's leg spin. With his first ball, Salt, attempting a cut, was bowled and in his second over Buttler, having just put him over long off for six, again tried to take on the short boundary with a reverse-sweep and was caught at backward point. Buttler was gone for 42 off 28. England ended the first ten on 93 for two, ten behind Australia at the same stage. From there the innings drifted.

England had found it tough going in the field, Jofra Archer excepted, as they struggled to come to terms with testing circumstances. There was

100

Marcus Stoinis was Chris Jordan's 100th T20 wicket for England

7

Sixes in 20 balls for Australia between the second and fifth overs



some sloppy fielding, and tardy time-keeping meant they were compelled to have an extra fielder in the ring for the final over.

Australia's powerplay provided high drama as they surged to 74 for two, easily the most productive first six overs we have seen here. This was more like the kind of cricket that was expected, as Travis Head and David Warner made full use of a strong cross-breeze and a boundary under 60 metres to one side to hit seven sixes. Ten of Australia's 13 sixes would be struck down this Kensington wind tunnel.

England were always going to use Ali early against two left-handed openers but they doubled down by also deploying Jacks, the first time they had opened a T20 innings with spin at both ends.

Ali got some grip and went for only three but the Jacks move backfired, Head twice swinging him high and handsomely to leg, the second time



on to the roof of the Greenidge & Haynes Stand. A thick edge gave Head three, then Warner picked a ball off his hip over square leg. The over cost 22.

Archer restored order in a third over but the entry of Mark Wood – questionably preferred to Reece

## Big boys spooked as underdogs show gap isn't so wide after all

Simon Wilde

Afghanistan's stunning performance against New Zealand on Friday night in Guyana, where they bowled out for 75 a team famed for their strong showing at global tournaments, sent a warning to other teams that they could be a serious threat at the T20 World Cup.

They have cricketers seasoned in this format and possess one of the most potent bowling attacks in the competition – led by Fazalhaq Farooqi with the new ball (his tournament haul stands at nine for 26) and Rashid Khan, right, the great champion spinner in T20s, with

Dwayne Bravo in the background as the bowling consultant on Jonathan Trott's coaching staff. The game also fitted the pattern of the first week of group fixtures, with established teams being pushed hard, or even seen off, by the up-and-comers.

Apart from Afghanistan beating New Zealand for the first time in any international format, the United States conquered the former champions Pakistan, Canada got the better of Ireland, another Test-ranked side, and South Africa yesterday only just got past the Netherlands. At one point South Africa had been reduced to 12 for four in pursuit of 104 for victory in New York before eventually

getting home with seven balls to spare. Papua New Guinea pushed West Indies, Scotland made England sweat before the rain came and Oman went toe-to-toe with Australia for the first 14 overs.

T20 has come to be regarded as a democratising force because it narrows the gap between rich and poor, the best resourced versus the under-resourced, and this is what we are witnessing in the broadest World Cup cricket has staged, involving 20 teams, most of whom feel they are here to do more than simply make up the numbers.

The other thing that has narrowed the gap between sides has been the

itches. These have not been to the liking of those who think cricket is merely a means for batsmen to bludgeon fours and sixes from start to finish – which is what the IPL served up with its distorting "impact sub" rule – and, yes, the surfaces at the Nassau Stadium in New York have been poor, but they have brought bowlers back into the contest, and things are much the richer for that.

There have also been a lot of competitive contests, which engage spectators and fans far more than TV commentators hyperventilating over another "maximum". The Providence Stadium in Guyana is averaging only six sixes a game.



GARETH COPLEY/GETTY IMAGES

Salt is bowled by Zampa, main. Stoinis, far left, claims the wicket of Jacks, leaving Buttler, left, and his side in trouble



They were always chasing this game against an Australia side who got off to a flyer and never let up

Topley – further played into the openers’ hands. Warner twice flicked him off his legs to take 12 off two balls and when he added a third six later in the over Australia had recorded the fastest 50 of the tournament, off 23 balls. England’s heads must have been spinning at 55 for none off four, but they mounted a good recovery as Ali bowled Warner, stepping back to cut, and then Archer, in another fine over in which he hit 92mph, outwitted the dangerous Head with a slower ball. This left Australia with two new batsmen yet to face a ball, but they had a great platform. England battled to regain control through the middle, Buttler shuffling his pack in search of a breakthrough. Anything marginally off target was put away but Wood bowled a strong second over and Chris Jordan, who would later have a rough time amid claiming his 100th wicket in T20 internationals, began by conceding five singles.

There have been two Super Over finishes and in Friday evening’s second game in Dallas, Bangladesh crept past what appeared a sub-par score of 124 by Sri Lanka, led by another English coach in Chris Silverwood, with their ninth-wicket pair at the crease. Canada defended 137 to beat Ireland by 12 runs. In the first 17 matches, only three teams batting first managed to score 165 or more: Canada in the opening game against the USA, when they made 194 for five (and still lost), Afghanistan, scoring 183 for five against Uganda (and winning easily) and Australia becoming the first team



Scoreboard

Group B: Australia v England

Bridgetown, Barbados (England won toss):

Australia (2pts) beat England by 36 runs

Australia	(balls)
T M Head b Archer	34 (18)
D A Warner b Ali	39 (16)
*M R Marsh st Buttler b Livingstone	35 (25)
G J Maxwell c Salt b Rashid	28 (25)
M P Stoinis c Brook b Jordan	30 (17)
T H David c Livingstone b Jordan	11 (8)
†M S Wade not out	17 (10)
P J Cummins run out	0 (1)
M A Starc not out	0 (0)
Extras (lb 1, w 6)	7
Total (7 wkts, 20 overs)	201

A Zampa and J R Hazlewood did not bat.

Fall of wickets 1-70, 2-74, 3-139, 4-141, 5-168, 6-200, 7-200.

Bowling Ali 2-0-18-1; Jacks 1-0-22-0; Archer 4-0-28-1; Wood 3-0-32-0; Rashid 4-0-41-1; Jordan 4-0-44-2; Livingstone 2-0-15-1.

England	(balls)
P D Salt b Zampa	37 (23)
*†J C Buttler c Cummins b Zampa	42 (28)
W G Jacks c Starc b Stoinis	10 (10)
J M Bairstow c Maxwell b Hazlewood	7 (13)
M M Ali c Warner b Cummins	25 (15)
H C Brook not out	20 (16)
L S Livingstone c Starc b Cummins	15 (12)
C J Jordan not out	1 (3)
Extras (lb 3, w 5)	8
Total (6 wkts, 20 overs)	165

J C Archer, A U Rashid and M A Wood did not bat.

Fall of wickets 1-73, 2-92, 3-96, 4-124, 5-128, 6-152.

Bowling 3-0-37-0; Hazlewood 4-0-28-1; Cummins 4-0-23-2; Stoinis 3-0-24-1; Zampa 4-0-28-2; Maxwell 2-0-22-0.

	P	W	L	T	NR	Pts	RR
Australia	2	2	0	0	0	4	1.87
Scotland	2	1	0	0	1	3	0.74
Namibia	2	1	1	0	0	2	-0.31
England	2	0	1	0	1	1	-1.80
Oman	2	0	2	0	0	0	-0.97

Maxwell’s recent struggles showed as he searched for rhythm. If Bairstow had reacted more quickly, he would have been caught for 21; instead he rubbed salt into the wound by carving Jordan for six over third man, the first six against the wind, in an eight-ball over costing 18. Livingstone, the seventh bowler used, brought some respite by having Mitchell Marsh stumped off a leg break and Maxwell followed, holing out off Adil Rashid. Tim David hit sumptuously over extra cover for six and was then caught on the cover boundary, but Australia kept coming and Marcus Stoinis and Matthew Wade were chiefly responsible for 52 being engineered from the last five overs.

to pass 200 last night. What was striking about New Zealand on Friday was that despite being a hugely experienced team, containing eight players aged 32 or over, they looked ring-rusty. They played a five-match series in Pakistan in April but a few seniors who were at the IPL were absent. They also had no warm-up matches. It is early days. Teams are searching for the right chemistry, hoping things fall into place. But this is the most fickle of formats and, though one of the big boys may eventually carry off the main prize, making predictions is starting to feel like a mug’s game.

Forest, Newcastle and Chelsea among those on City’s side

→ Continued from page 1

of the rules. Premier League clubs voted on February 9 to bring in sanctions against clubs who try to secure inflated sponsorship or transfer deals with companies, organisations or other teams connected to their owners. This toughening of the regulations was aimed at blocking clubs from bypassing financial rules. City filed their legal claim against the Premier League seven days later. At that vote City opposed the toughening up of the rules, along with Newcastle United (Saudi majority owned), Chelsea (co-owners Clearlake Capital, who manage billions of pounds of Saudi money), Sheffield United (Saudi owner), Nottingham Forest (part of a multi-club ownership structure) and Everton. Aston Villa and Crystal Palace abstained, with Liverpool, Manchester United, Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur, Bournemouth, Brentford, Brighton & Hove Albion, Burnley, Fulham, Luton, West Ham United and Wolverhampton Wanderers forming a 12-club majority. Clubs on both sides of the divide may be called as witnesses when the two-week hearing for City’s claim against the Premier League starts tomorrow. CASE AT HEART OF FOOTBALL’S CIVIL WAR What are the 115 charges against City? The charges are related to Premier League and European financial regulations, which restrict how much money clubs can lose and are designed to prevent rich owners from pumping money in without growing a club’s revenue. Fifty-four of the charges concern a failure to provide accurate financial information from 2009-10 to 2017-18. Fourteen are related to a failure to provide accurate details for player and manager payments from 2009-10 to 2017-18. Five concern a failure to comply with Uefa’s rules, including Financial Fair Play regulations, from 2013-14 to 2017-18. Seven are for breaching the Premier League’s Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR) from 2015-16 to 2017-18. Thirty-five are for a failure to cooperate with Premier League investigations between December 2018 and February 2023. The allegations first surfaced because of leaked correspondence published by the German newspaper, Der Spiegel. City have always argued that the material was obtained illegally. And why are City taking action against the Premier League? They want Premier League rules for associated party transactions (APT) scrapped, claiming they are unlawful. APT rules, which were introduced in December 2021 and tightened this year, cover

sponsorship and commercial deals with companies connected to the clubs, as well as any player transfers between clubs in the same ownership group, to ensure they are of “fair market value”. If City succeed, any constraints over inflated sponsorship deals would be removed. Why are APT rules important? In England there are several examples of APTs. Newcastle have secured a £25 million-a-year shirt sponsorship deal with the Saudi events company Sela since their Saudi-led takeover, while Chelsea have a shirt deal with Infinite Athlete, a leisure company that counts joint-Chelsea owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali among its investors. Four of City’s ten main sponsors have links to Abu Dhabi. Until December 2021, the Premier League viewed commercial deals as “related party transactions” only if they were described as such in clubs’ accounts – Manchester City did not declare sponsorship deals such as Etihad’s as related party transactions. The 2021 rules stated that if the Premier League’s board had reasonable grounds to suspect that it was an associated party deal then an independent firm would determine whether it was of fair market value. From this January, the Premier League made clubs liable to be charged with a breach of the rules if they do not “use all reasonable care” to ensure deals are of fair market value, with the burden of proof on the clubs to show they are. If constraints over APTs are removed, it could be used as a backdoor route for owners to fund clubs through inflated sponsorship deals from other companies they own, without running up prohibited losses on the club’s books. There are concerns that deals similar to the €200million-a-year deal between the Qatar Tourism Authority and Qatari-owned Paris Saint-Germain announced in 2012 – which Uefa later judged to be not of fair market value – could be replicated in England. What does this mean for City’s charges? Significantly, tomorrow’s private arbitration hearing comes before the independent hearing for City’s charges, which is due to start in November. Rival clubs are concerned that a successful claim against APT rules could strengthen City’s defence. It has been alleged that City concealed payments made by their owner Sheikh Mansour’s Abu Dhabi United Group through third parties and disguised them as sponsorship revenue. If the tribunal concludes that Premier League rules around fair market value are unlawful – and such regulations existed even before more robust rules were introduced in 2021 – it could open the way for City to launch fresh challenges against the legality of the rules concerning the 115 charges.

# The Euros Germany 2024

JONATHAN  
NORTHCROFT



Football Correspondent

**T**he previous time England went to a tournament in Germany, their send-off game was a 6-0 romp against Jamaica at Old Trafford. Peter Crouch scored a hat-trick and brought out the robot, and there was a scuffle in the press box – the journalists seemed as up for the fight as the players.

Wembley on Friday, against Iceland, was very different. It was the team's flattest, meekest, worst performance since 2022 and one that dazed even seasoned, seen-it-all England reporters. "It gives us a chance to really focus the mind," Gareth Southgate said, clutching at a pretty big straw, in his post-match press conference.

Pre-tournament friendlies are less about results than performances and the physicals. But in terms of the two latter categories, the 1-0 defeat by Iceland was as grim as the first one. Did anyone in Southgate's starting XI play well individually? Not really. Did the units play well collectively? Not at all.

And from a fitness point of view there were worries, with John Stones hurting an ankle and neither Bukayo Saka nor Harry Kane looking close to peak sharpness. Southgate leaves for Euro 2024 with much thinking to do.

If there is hope, it's in three things. One, that wake-up calls are no bad thing. In 2006, after smashing Jamaica, England travelled to Germany complacent about their abilities and were shocked when, right from the first game – a grim struggle against Paraguay – the reality dawned that tournament football is always a little more difficult than you expect.

Two, that Southgate's calmness and his gift for psychology and culture work gives him the right skillset to get his players' heads in a much better place by the time they kick off against Serbia in Gelsenkirchen next Sunday.

Three, Jude Bellingham. For that game he'll be back. Here are four of the issues Southgate must address between then and now.

# The four issues England have seven days to fix

## RICE WITH WHO?

The Iceland match took Southgate further from, not closer to, answering the question most bothering him. The signals were that he was leaning towards partnering Declan Rice with Kobbie Mainoo in midfield, but the chemistry between the pair was lacking.

Mainoo was not – as some critics said – at fault for Iceland's goal. It was actually Rice who got caught upfield, leaving the 19-year-old too big a space to defend, and both Stones and Aaron Ramsdale were beaten easily by Jon Dagur Thorsteinsson.

However, the moment suggested that, with no other natural holding player in the squad, Rice needs to focus on protecting the defence and be blended with a partner who takes the attacking responsibilities.

That could still be Mainoo, who showed what he can do in Manchester United's FA Cup final victory over City when Sofyan Amrabat sat in and gave him freedom to go forward, but a worry is that on the ball the skillsets of



Rice and Mainoo are too similar. Both like to drive with it and neither opens up opponents with passing.

We keep hearing about what Trent Alexander-Arnold can't do – but how about what he can? Against Bosnia-Herzegovina, who play in a similar 3-5-2 shape to Serbia, he demonstrated how to stretch and penetrate low-block opposition with variety and unorthodoxy of passing. And maybe Adam Wharton starts to come into it. The kid is special.

## THE FODEN PARADOX

At the squad announcement on Thursday, an upbeat Rice revealed that a hot topic of conversation among players was how damn brilliant Foden was looking in training. The stage seemed set for the Footballer of the Year to finally become England's main creative force. Southgate did all he could to aid Foden by handing him his favourite

**Foden started off looking a million dollars, but grew discouraged**

## Shaw says Ten Hag rushed him back from injury to face Luton

Paul Joyce

Luke Shaw has said that he was rushed back to first-team action by Manchester United, exacerbating the injury issues that brought his domestic season to a premature end and threatened his Euro 2024 hopes.

The England left back revealed he was asked by the United manager, Erik ten Hag, to play against Luton Town on February 18, having only trained the day before the fixture after suffering a hamstring injury against Aston Villa the previous weekend.

Shaw was then substituted after 47 minutes of the Luton match and has not played for United since. He aggravated the injury again three

weeks before the FA Cup final, which has forced England to take a gamble on his fitness for Euro 2024.

"I felt something against Aston Villa and came off," Shaw said. "It's kind of everyone's fault. Partly my fault, partly medical staff – I think everyone would admit that. The scan came back and there wasn't too much there. But I didn't train all week, then trained the day before the game. If the manager asks me to play, I'm never going to say no. I shouldn't have played."

Shaw, 28, outlined the extent of his torment as a rebuttal to suggestions that he has placed country before club in flying out to Germany tomorrow for the finals. He insisted that perception was totally wrong

and said he was close to a return in the final weeks of the season. His United team-mate Harry Maguire also suffered complications in his rehabilitation from the calf injury which ended his campaign and, ultimately, cost him a place in England's 26-man party.

"I got a few people coming up to me, saying, 'How can you not be fit for United but fit for England?'" Shaw said. "But the circumstances were that I did push to do everything I can to be fit for United, and that's been really my whole season."

"I was actually very close to returning to team training. I was, of course, pushing to try and get back for the games and the final, and I think I pushed too hard. I came back too quickly and I actually ended up getting another injury in my hamstring. I honestly wasn't thinking about the Euros. I was thinking about the final. It's better for me to come



Shaw has been pencilled in to play in England's second group match

out and say what happened, because I think there were a lot of questions over how I could be here and not [there for] United. That's been playing on my mind a little bit."

Shaw is not yet in full team training with England. Gareth Southgate, the manager, has optimistically pencilled in the second group C game, against Denmark on June 20, for his comeback. In the meantime, Kieran Trippier is set to start in the opening group game against Serbia next Sunday, although the limitations of having a right-footed defender at left back were evident in Friday's alarming 1-0 friendly defeat by Iceland. Southgate took his team to task after an insipid performance and Shaw said: "Gareth made that very clear in the changing room. We know we need to be better."

"I'm very grateful for Gareth picking me and showing the faith that he has in me."

Grealish may not be going to Euros, but, clockwise, Foden, Trippier and Rice offer conundrums



No10 role against Iceland. What followed was a microcosm of Foden's senior England career. He started off looking a million dollars, but grew strangely discouraged when his initial burst of fine touches and passes did not lead to a goal. Soon, pressure weighed on him. You were left perplexed.

So, how to unlock Foden? Quicker, better ball to him from midfield may help but, above all, he is a player who plays best in combination with others. Pep Guardiola rarely started Foden and Cole Palmer together while Palmer was at City and maybe, like Mainoo-Rice, they do not quite balance each other.

Playing a 4-1-4-1 sounds lovely, but also a little theoretical at this stage given Southgate has never really tried it. Back to a trio of Saka, Bellingham and Foden behind Kane, with Foden coming in off his best City position, the right?

### CASE FOR THE DEFENCE REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Things Southgate hoped would happen in the warm-up games that did not materialise: Marc Guéhi emerging as a proper first-choice centre back; Kieran Trippier showing England are fine without Luke Shaw at left back; Stones and Kyle Walker finding form; and Ramsdale proving he's a convincing understudy for Jordan Pickford.

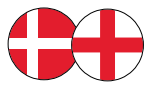
That's it really, but if you want to break it down: Guéhi, the lovely, ball-playing defender that he is, has yet to look ruthless and rugged enough to be relied on at international level. He can get there – his displays for Crystal Palace and a stellar junior England career suggest he has the class – but time is running out.

Meanwhile, Trippier's right-footedness inhibited England's attempts to go forward on the left in both warm-up games; Stones and Walker, who both ended the club season off-key, looked rusty. And Ramsdale's confidence has clearly been knocked by his regressive season with Arsenal.

### England's Group fixtures



**Serbia v England**  
Sunday June 16, Kick-off 8pm



**Denmark v England**  
Thursday June 20, Kick-off 5pm



**England v Slovenia**  
Tuesday June 25, Kick-off 8pm

### QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER

Southgate has been going along making individual meritocratic decisions on selection. Jack Grealish or Anthony Gordon? Gordon, because of his form and pace. Harry Maguire or Lewis Dunk? Dunk, because he is fitter. An extra striker, or squeeze in Grealish or James Maddison? Play safe with the striker. Jordan Henderson, Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling, or younger players who have had better seasons? Go with the in-form youngsters.

All the decisions make sense in isolation, but has the cumulative effect been to leave the squad too light on experience, self-confidence and big characters, those to whom others in the group look for reassurance and a sense that being with England is fun?

Time will tell. It was certainly interesting hearing Southgate admit, at his squad announcement, that "boys have gone who are big characters" and "the group will have to form a little bit". It was certainly concerning seeing how much heads dropped when Iceland scored and then proved difficult to break down.

On Thursday, losing Grealish felt OK, but 24 hours later you looked at it again – could one of the other attackers (perhaps a back-up striker) not have been left out in favour of him?

## Rod Liddle



### When you're left longing for Maguire you know England are in a bad way

Well, that was dignified. To be beaten by a nation with a population which is about 180th the size of our own is demeaning at any time – even when it is a comparatively decent Iceland side, as in 2016. This, however, was an Iceland side 70-odd places below us in the undoubtedly deluding Fifa rankings and they beat England, at Wembley, at a canter: they could and should have won by more.

One shot on target in the entire game from England, none at all in the second half. I don't think I have seen a worse performance from our national side in the 58 years I have been – rather forlornly – watching them, although some of this gilded team's efforts in the past couple of years have come quite close (Hungary, for example, springs to mind). What has Gareth Southgate done to these players, supposedly the best we have had for countless generations? Picked the wrong ones is only the first answer.

There are caveats to that woeful performance, but they do not bring much cheer. Jude Bellingham, probably our finest player, was rested after his Champions League exertions. But then, the strength of this England team was supposed to be in its depth. What depth, exactly? OK, it was merely a friendly and it has been a long time since England players took friendlies with even a soupçon of commitment.

Sure – but then you might have expected them to play with unshackled abandon and they did that only, er, in defence. It is early summer, a time when England teams are traditionally at their weakest – well yes, but then the Euros are in early summer. None of this gives us grounds for very much optimism.

The brutal truth is that England were desperately lacking in every area of the pitch, beginning with Aaron Ramsdale in goal who could have at least made an attempt to save Jon Dagur Thorsteinsson's shot which nestled some distance from the corner of his net. Before then, Kyle Walker had gone missing, Declan Rice was upfield and Kobbie Mainoo was left to defend a vast swathe of the Wembley sward as Iceland ventured forward. He did not do so: 0-1.

The same lackadaisical defending, the astonishing open spaces, cropped up again and again, especially in the second half. When you start yearning for Harry Maguire, you know things are in a bad way. Meanwhile, the injury to John Stones may be the nail in the coffin. Mainoo and Rice do not work as a midfield twin: they played with seemingly no

understanding of each other, nor of what they were meant to be doing.

Then there is poor Phil Foden. He has been an England international for very nearly four years, and Southgate still doesn't know how or where to play him – his games of genuine quality in an England shirt have been few and far between, and yet he has been wondrously consistent for his club.

Why? Up front, England were devoid of wit, pace (Anthony Gordon excepted), guile and crucially grit. Faced with a team defending in depth, England once again were at a loss. Oh, those epicene flicks, the misplaced passes, the crosses overstruck time and again, the failure to get in behind a League One level defence, packed though it was. The sheer bloodlessness of it.

All of this was dealt with in rather greater, harrowing, detail by the football writers in yesterday's papers. But what they largely failed to mention is that this was very far from a one-off. The same faults were there to be seen in those friendlies against Belgium and,

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### Against Iceland, the brutal truth is that England were desperately lacking in every area of the pitch

even more so, Brazil. Not to mention earlier games against North Macedonia and Australia.

England's defence as it stands could not repel the sort of moderate attack likely to be forthcoming from Serbia, even with Luke Shaw back. It is too early to place the burden of being one of two principal midfielders on a lad as young as Mainoo – hell, I even wished Jordan Henderson was on the pitch at one point.

It was a miscalculation not to include the admittedly inconsistent Jack Grealish in the squad (as the Serbs gleefully commented): at least he adds difference.

But there is something more fundamental lacking: a sense of purpose, for one, and the crucial ability to change a game when it is drifting horribly away. These have been the chief flaws of Southgate's management for a long time and it is surely too late to expect him to change. The way things are going his last game as manager could well be against Slovenia on June 25. How dispiriting that would be.

## Bellingham return no silver bullet, warns Southgate

Paul Joyce

Gareth Southgate has said that England cannot rely solely on Jude Bellingham to solve their problems as he described the friendly defeat by Iceland as a "jolt" to the system.

Bellingham was given a week off after his stellar season with Real Madrid ended with Champions League success, missing the warm-up win over Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as Friday's 1-0 loss at Wembley.

The 20-year-old midfielder, right, will join up today for the first time – with his importance to England's cause emphasised in his absence.

Southgate has been utilising Bellingham as a No10 this season, but said the responsibility for realising England's Euro 2024 hopes must be

shared throughout the party. "We are not putting everything on Jude," the England manager said. "If we are relying on one person, that isn't going to be a team that wins. I'm sure he will [give everyone a lift] but it is not his responsibility to do that."

Southgate added that the shock defeat against Iceland had sharpened his focus on what his side needed to do before their game against Serbia on June 16. "I understand some of the reasons for it but, equally, it is a jolt at a good time for us because we'll have to get that preparation next week spot on," he said. "It means we'll have an edge to things, which we need."

England head to Germany tomorrow with plenty for Southgate to ponder about the make-up of his team and, especially, who plays alongside Declan Rice in midfield.

Asked what qualities he is looking for in Rice's partner, Southgate said: "It depends on the opposition, really. We have to get the balance of the whole team right. It's not necessarily just about that one player."

Southgate does not appear likely to rip up his blueprint and revert to three at the back. "It's not something we have talked about," he added. "It's not a route we have been looking to go for sure."



# The Euros Germany 2024

## Wayne Rooney

FORMER ENGLAND  
CAPTAIN



### 2004 I TRULY BELIEVED I WAS THE BEST PLAYER IN THE WORLD

Life was simple at the age of 18. I felt no pressure, just excitement, about my first tournament. And I was clear in my head about something – that I was the best player in the world. It wasn't arrogance, more fearlessness. It was a feeling that was almost naive: that nothing, and no one, could stop me on a football pitch. Euro 2004? I couldn't wait.

In our final warm-up, at the Etihad against Iceland, I played 45 minutes and cracked in two goals. Easy. We went to London to be fitted for our tournament suits and that kind of stuff was all new to me. It was exciting. When we got to the hotel there were goody bags filled with laptops, headphones, video recorders and other gifts from sponsors. By the way, the suit! Let's put it this way, it was more David Beckham's style than mine. Baggy with big flares. Definitely not one I've kept.

The FA gave us phones to use in Portugal, which we abused the whole tournament, and on the plane I was like a kid. Everyone was trying to relax and I was going up and down the aisle doing card tricks on all the players.

The hotel in Lisbon was great. It had a huge games room with all kinds in there: pool, snooker, table tennis, darts. A motorbike game. There was a football manager game – I've never seen it before or since – where there were cards of different players, you picked a team and then put them in the machine and then it simulated matches.

Training was brilliant. You go from playing for Everton to training with Paul Scholes, Beckham, Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, John Terry, Ashley Cole. Michael Owen. Sessions were unbelievably competitive. Tackles flying in. Steve McClaren and Sammy Lee did most of the coaching while Sven-Goran Eriksson, the manager, and his right-hand man, Tord Grip, watched from the sides.

I loved Sven. In a way, he was very similar to Sir Alex Ferguson – a great man-manager. The difference was how calm he was. He gave me the No 9 shirt, which signalled I was going to play and I appreciated how much trust he had in me. Every player respected Sven and he was just unlucky he didn't bring England that trophy.

The first game was against France and before the match one of the press lads showed me an article where Lilian Thuram said I was too young to make an impact at the finals. In my head I was 'OK, we'll see...' I didn't lose sleep about it but I decided that, if I got the chance, I'd smash him.

And I did. If there was VAR I'd have been sent off.

In the game, I had the feeling Thuram was intimidated by me. He certainly got to know who I was, that's for sure. Instead of worrying about all France's great players I just went into

it thinking about what I'd do when I got on the ball, and early on I nutmegged Zinedine Zidane.

At the time I didn't think much of it. It was only after the game when your mates are sending you messages: 'YOU JUST MEGGED ZIDANE!' We played really well but Becks missed a penalty when we were 1-0 up and Zidane scored twice late on after I was substituted. I said to Sven the next day: "If you left me on we wouldn't have lost." Sven just laughed. I think he liked my confidence.

Despite losing 2-1 the game showed we could compete with anyone. Against Switzerland I settled us by scoring after 23 minutes with only my second headed goal in senior football, which made me the youngest ever scorer in a Euros. The record lasted four days, before Johan Vonlanthen broke it again.

We won 3-0 after I scored again and Gerrard added a third, and if you look



# 'I smashed Thuram on my Euros debut – VAR would have sent me off'

From freescoring 18-year-old tyro to press scapegoat to captain, Rooney looks back on his three Euros experiences

at the tournament, Stevie, Lampard and Scholes all scored. Sven was criticised for not finding the right way to use them all in the same midfield – and maybe he should have played Scholes in the middle rather than left – but I think the XI worked okay.

Our best performance, and my best performance, was the 4-2 win in our final group match against Croatia. I put one in from 25 yards – the goalkeeper could have done better – but I preferred my second goal. I ran through, opened my body to go left, gave the 'keeper the eyes, and put it to his right. One-v-ones are always more

difficult than they look. So many things run through your head when you go through: do I chip the goalkeeper, go round him, go left, go right? When you make the right decision and score it's satisfying.

I'm certain we'd have beaten Portugal if I hadn't broken my foot after 27 minutes. Running for a ball, I heard a crack, and when I took the boot off I quickly realised it was my fifth metatarsal. I watched a lot of programmes about the body and knew it's the worst one to break.

I watched the end of the game in a hospital room, on a little TV, still in my

kit, and I felt for Darius Vassell when he missed that penalty. It was a high-pressure situation and as I watched him walk up, I knew he didn't want to be there, that he wasn't comfortable. He had been the same when we practised spot kicks in training the day before. He wasn't helped, either, by the state of the pitch, especially around the penalty spots, and I think he may have caught the floor before connecting with the ball.

Out on penalties. Had we gone through, we'd have played Czech Republic in the semi-finals and Greece in the final – that's why I say that with more luck we would have won under Sven. It was my first experience of going out of a tournament and how sudden it feels. When we got home, I had Everton on the phone, clubs coming in for me, and I went to Barbados with Coleen to get away from it all. During the tournament I'd shut myself off from the hype.

The FA put English channels on the TVs in your room but I kept mine off. I didn't like looking at all the stories about me, to be honest. Instead I watched box sets – I can't remember what it was that year, but I know at one tournament I watched *Glee*.

### 2012 I WATCHED PIRLO'S PANENKA THINKING, 'I WISH I HAD THE BALLS TO DO THAT'

In our last qualifier against Montenegro I kicked an opponent and was sent off. Uefa gave me a three-match ban, which meant I was going to miss the entire group stage at Euro 2012.

But the FA appealed, I attended a Uefa hearing and the outcome was a bizarre one. They offered to reduce the penalty by one game if I put on a coaching clinic for local children. In other words, they gave me community service. I thought it was crazy, but was just happy to get the ban down to two games.

I went to their HQ in Switzerland with Michael Carrick's brother, Graeme, and did the session. The children spoke French and I had to get a translator. It was all really strange.

So was the fare in the Uefa canteen. I just couldn't eat it. Not only had I got community service, I also had a good idea what prison food in Switzerland must taste like.

Then, that night, we ate in the hotel and I asked what the special was. "Sheep's head". So I had that. It was alright, actually.

Knowing I wouldn't be playing until the final group game, and after a hard



Rooney valued how Eriksson, left, treated him

“

In a way, Sven was very similar to Sir Alex Ferguson – he was a great man-manager

MARK LEECH/OFFSIDE/GETTY IMAGES



Rooney's opening goal against Switzerland at Euro 2004 made him the youngest scorer in the competition's history — but the record only stood for four days

end to the season with Manchester United where we lost the title to City in the final game, I went on holiday to Las Vegas. That was a mistake. I was with Coleen and Kai, who was two, and Coleen's parents, so it wasn't some Vegas stag trip or anything, but sometimes these things are all about how they look.

We spent most evenings as a family or going to shows. We saw Elton John, a Beatles show and Cirque Du Soleil and I literally had only one night out — with Wes Brown, who was also holidaying there. Wes, my father-in-law and I were pictured in a bar and the photos were in the papers. That, plus the travelling distance, is why I probably should have just gone to Portugal or Spain.

Our base for the Euros was Krakow. Roy Hodgson had just taken over as manager and he put on a brilliant camp. The training pitch, at a little stadium belonging to a local club, was good and we were in an old hotel in the middle of town. Coleen and I were able to stroll round the streets and go for coffee. It was relaxed.

The FA organised a trip to Auschwitz. A few lads pulled out because press were invited but I went and found it incredibly moving. Avram Grant came along. He had family that had been in Auschwitz and walked round with the players, giving us his thoughts and it was very, very sad.

Very powerful. Football seemed irrelevant.

Our first two games — a draw with France and victory over Sweden where Andy Carroll scored a fantastic header — were tight and I watched from behind the bench with the kit men. That was horrible. I hated having to sit there, unable to get on the pitch and help the team. But we played well and, after the Fabio Capello era, having Roy — with Gary Neville and Ray Lewington assisting him — was refreshing.

Against Ukraine, I scored to take us to the knockout rounds. I can picture most of my goals clearly, but that's one I don't remember too much about, only the ball bouncing up and heading in it. Afterwards, I was buzzing. It was my first goal for England at a major tournament since 2004 and a relief.

In the quarter-finals, against Italy, came another defeat on penalties. The game had a weird feeling. A lot was made of Mario Balotelli in the build-up and Italy were a better side than us, but we kept it to 0-0 and went ahead in the shoot-out.

Then up stepped Andrea Pirlo. Watching his body language as he walked to the spot, don't ask me how, but I just knew what was coming. Joe Hart tried putting him off but he just dinked home a Panenka. I remember thinking "f\*\*\*ing hell".

I remember thinking I wish I had

the balls to do that. But, also, that if any English player ever tried one and missed they would have to leave the country.

Before I took my penalty, Gianluigi Buffon was pointing to where I would put it. I thought, "Oh f\*\*\*, he knows where I'm going", but that's why you practise. I decided to just stick to my penalty. I stuck it in the corner and he dived the wrong way. It had all been a bluff.

Ashley Young and Ashley Cole missed and we were out and on the way back to England. I remember speaking to Young and saying: "You might get a bit of stick for missing the penalty, so just get away and get on with your holiday." But when the papers did their pieces, the person getting most of the blame was... me. Again!

I'm thinking, "F\*\*\*ing hell, I scored my penalty! And only played two games." Ash was texting me with smiles. "I'm alright here. How are you?"

## 2016 I WAS SO FED UP OF DRUG-TESTING I SMASHED THE TV IN THE ROOM

For the first time, I went to a finals as England captain and you have more responsibilities, especially media ones, but that was fine. I enjoyed that side of things. It's strange that Euro 2016 ended in disaster because the atmosphere in camp was the best of my six tournaments. There was a fresh feeling about the squad. The previous generation had gone, leaving me as one of the oldest lads, and there were new players: Raheem Sterling, Harry Kane, Dele Alli, Ross Barkley, Eric Dier. The chemistry was really good.

We'll get to Iceland, but apart from in that game our performances were good. We were excellent against Russia and it was one of those freak things that they scored a late equaliser to draw 1-1. We needed a comeback to beat Wales but they were a very good team, inspired by Gareth Bale, and there was a lot of pressure on that game — so, by digging out a victory thanks to late goals from Jamie Vardy and Daniel Sturridge, we did well.

A weird thing was that at every game in that tournament I was selected for the drugs test. I was fuming. They say it's a random process but somehow every single time it was me.

Maybe those Uefa kiddies hadn't liked my coaching session. I was so annoyed after the

Wales game that I smashed the testing room up. One of the Welsh lads was in there — Aaron Ramsey I think — and I just went "sod this" and the TV went. Everything. I smashed the lot. I got a bill for it. And another Uefa warning.

Our relationship with the press still needed some work. At our hotel in Chantilly, a lovely place near the racecourse, we had a long-running darts competition and the journalists kept asking and asking about that. It quickly became



Rooney enjoyed facing Zidane

boring. I was, like, "What's this got to do with anything? What difference does it make if I've beaten James Milner at darts or whatever?"

When Sam Allardyce succeeded Roy, I told him there had to be changes in our relations with the media, and I had the same conversation with Gareth Southgate when he succeeded Sam. At a Football Writers' dinner the following January, I made a speech on the same theme — my view was that we had to build more trust with the press and let them get to know us properly.

By far the criticism I hated most during my time was that England players don't care. There could be no worse — or more unfair — accusation. Let the journalists in, let them see how much we want to win, and once they're on the inside they'll do positive pieces rather than guess what's going on — that was my take.

When, during the 2018 World Cup, Gareth established a new dynamic with the media, I loved it — and smiled when, in a reference to 2016, journalists were invited to play darts against the players.

Training in 2016 was good. Although I did snap at Neville. Borrowing an idea from rugby, we had a stuffed lion that was presented to the worst player in practice, and that player had to carry the lion out — the photographers would get the picture and the public would know who it was.

A great bit of fun, which sharpened competitiveness, but one day Neville got everyone to vote for me. A stitch up! I went at him. I had been bad in the "boxes" (our version of the rondo) but the worst overall? No way.

Iceland? What everyone forgets is that they'd had a great qualifying campaign, did well in the group stage, and came into their round-of-16 match against us in Nice with a lot of momentum. Back



**6**  
Euros goals for Rooney — only four players have more (Ronaldo, Platini, Shearer and Griezmann)

home, they were being featured on the BBC. They didn't just hop off a fishing boat and stick their boots on.

But, of course, losing to them was a national disaster. It was a freak game. I scored early from the spot but they scored two quick goals and we panicked. I hold my hands up for their equaliser. We prepared for their long throws but the man I was marking — Kari Arnason — got the run on me, was a lot taller, and beat me in a header, allowing Ragnar Sigurdsson to score from the knockdown.

Only 18 minutes were gone when Kolbeinn Sigthorsson put them ahead. We had plenty of time to turn the game around but panic took over, especially in the last 20 to 25 minutes. Maybe Roy gambled too quickly. He brought on a lot of attacking players and I was sitting in midfield on my own thinking, "Where's everyone going?" They were all running up to join the front line, and when that happens it closes the space down and you're playing into the hands of a team like Iceland, who want to play in a low block and counterattack.

I tried to get the message to other players, "calm down, keep playing, keep moving the ball" and we should have kept two players wide and kept going side to side, putting the ball back in their box if they cleared it, until we suffocated them. With so many of our players in the front line, it meant that when they cleared the ball they could actually break on us. It's one of the only times in my life when I've been on a pitch thinking, "We're just never going to score here."

I knew the backlash would be brutal. Before the Iceland game, they were talking in the press about me playing like Pirlo in midfield — and then afterwards I was the worst player to play for England. But that stuff, I was well used to. I'd been round the block enough to know that, when you get beaten by Iceland in a knockout game you take your medicine. You say nothing back.

But the young lads didn't know what was coming. I spoke to them in the dressing room. I said remember this moment, I've had many of these — but this is your first time and it's not going to be nice. We knew it was Roy's last game. He told us. Came into the dressing room. "Well, that's me f\*\*\*ing done," he said. And then, "Wayne, you do the press." Then he walked out. Cheers, Roy.

It was a shame for him, he's such a good man, and he was hurting. He didn't want to do any press the next day either and initially refused to attend a press conference the FA arranged. We were on the team bus on the way to the airport and I called Neville to the back of the bus. "Gaz, he's got to do it. For himself. If not, he's going to get killed."

Gary was thinking exactly the same and spoke to Roy, eventually persuading him to change his mind. A car had to come and pick him up off the bus and take him back to the press centre.

My Euros as a whole? I always felt it was a harder tournament than the World Cup in some ways. The group stages are generally more difficult. If you look at us: 2004, tough group. 2012, tough group. 2016 wasn't easy either.

And yet I had some of my very best moments for England at the Euros. In all three, England were not far away. Two defeats on penalties and a freak one against Iceland. It could have all been different with a bit more luck. That's football, I suppose.

# Southgate must show all his finest qualities to avoid scars of predecessors

‘Wally with a brolly’ and resignations in the toilets: the journalist who knows him best believes that this England manager deserves better

DAVID WALSH



Chief Sports Writer

Any idea where Sir Alf Ramsey’s grave is?” The woman weaving the ride-on mower round weathered headstones removes her ear muffs. “I know he’s in here somewhere,” she says, as her eyes flash left and then right, “but don’t know where.” The Old Cemetery in Ipswich is little more than a mile from the centre of town. It is here that England’s greatest football manager was laid to rest.

Memories fade. Twenty-five years have passed. The stream of visitors down to a trickle.

“You hear the sound of the strimmers down there, see the two guys,

they’ll know. They’re grave diggers.”

“Alf Ramsey,” one of the men says. “Further on. Follow the path as it rises, and you’ll find his grave in the cremation plot to your left. Come on, I’ll take you to it.” As we walk, he talks. He knows the Ramsey plot because a few years ago, 2018, he dug Lady Ramsey’s grave. Most people, he adds, now choose cremation over a traditional burial.

“Here, it’s four or five cremations to every traditional burial,” he adds. “A lot of it is to do with cost.”

It takes 20 minutes to dig the small grave into which the urn is placed. Much longer for the old style grave. “If it’s being dug manually, it will take two of us one full day. We’re not allowed to do it on our own any more. Health and safety. Ah, there it is. See the small grey headstone, between the two black ones. That’s it.”

A bouquet of blue and white roses, the colours of his beloved Ipswich



Town, sits by the headstone. The inscription says: “Although you have gone before me, the memories and love we shared will always be with me until we are together again where parting is no more.” Seven members of the 1966 team were present for his memorial service, held at the St Mary-le-Tower church in Ipswich, the day after his funeral.

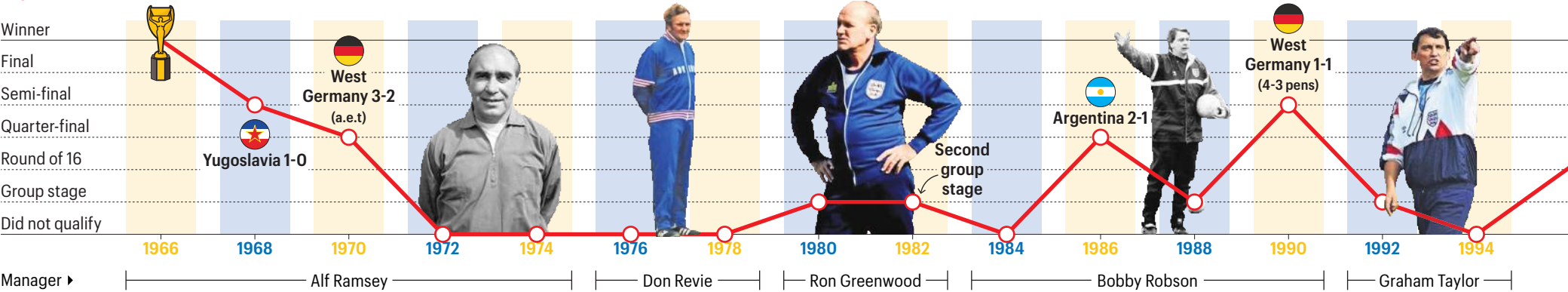
At the time newspapers reported the decision to hold the service in Ipswich was a snub to the FA who may have wanted a grander, London occasion. Lady Ramsey felt her husband was badly let down by the authorities. “I really do think it [being sacked in June 1974] broke him,” she told The Daily Mail two years before her death. “He was never the same man afterwards ... The FA treated him very shabbily. It was quite disgraceful and I do feel it contributed to the ill-health he suffered afterwards.”

If that’s how it was for England’s finest manager, what of the others?

How can we recall Graham Taylor’s time in the early 1990s without hearing the voice of brokenness. That October evening in Rotterdam, 1993, remonstrating with

## THE MEN WHO HAVE TRIED (AND FAILED) TO MATCH SIR ALF

England’s record in the World Cup and Euros since 1966



a linesman. "I'm just saying to your colleague, the referee's got me the sack. Thank him ever so much for that, won't you."

Or Glenn Hoddle without reference to his Times interview with Matt Dickinson where he said something that sounded to readers like he believed disabled people were paying for sins in a previous life. Or poor Kevin Keegan, deciding in a Wembley toilet minutes after a 1-0 defeat by Germany that he couldn't take any more. Or Steve McClaren, standing under that umbrella.

How can you remember dour sergeant-major Fabio Capello without thinking of the mayhem at the 2010 World Cup. There, while failing to beat the US and then Algeria in group games, the players, led by John Terry, publicly rebelling against the management. Captain Bligh maintained control but the 4-1 knockout loss to Germany was England's worst at a World Cup.

Frank Lampard is one of 14 to have been at three World Cups with England. After it all passed, what Lampard hated was the thought that he'd gone to those finals and not enjoyed them. What should have been the time of his life is just a bad memory.

During his career at Liverpool Steven Gerrard couldn't help noticing the excitement in overseas players as they left to join up with their national teams. Why wasn't it like that with England? On the evening of the abject loss to Iceland, Gerrard was two years into international retirement but he knew. "There is no environment of calm around the national team," he wrote in the Daily Telegraph. "There never has been. It is always hysteria. There is a culture of fear within and it has not been addressed."

On a Wednesday morning, late in November 2016, Gareth Southgate got the job. There had been a four-match audition as interim manager; two wins, two draws. Nothing earth-shattering, nothing disastrous. To the job he would bring enthusiasm, a keen intelligence, a strong work ethic and, to protect himself, some realism.

From the start he understood that he got the job partly because the FA didn't have much of a choice after Roy Hodgson had resigned and poor Sam Allardyce had departed after a meeting with undercover journalists posing as businessmen. Allardyce lasted all of two months. Southgate took over a team fallen on hard times but if there was one job in football that he wanted, this was it.

In the ten years from 2006 to 2016, the team won four out of 15 tourna-

ment games at the Euros and World Cup. In that period, England didn't win a single knockout match. Through the last five years of this underachievement, Southgate had worked for the FA, first as academy manager and then as manager of the under-21s.

He knew the FA was finally about to enter football's 21st century.

The national football centre was near completion at St George's Park in Staffordshire and Southgate had been working to change the way young English players learnt the game. Under-12s would no longer play into full-size goals, smaller pitches were created to accommodate 7v7 and 9v9 games, changes that ensured young players spent more time on the ball, less time chasing it.

He was central to the appointment of bright young coaches such as Steve Cooper and Dan Micciche and worked well with the technical director, Dan Ashworth. Almost immediately, the results and the football improved. England's age-level teams began to win tournaments. So when Allardyce blotted his copybook, while still trying to write his foreword, the FA thought it a no-brainer.

Southgate was their man. This was good and bad. He got the job but would be seen as the teacher's pet.

Over the years I've spoken to Southgate about what constitutes suc-

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**This was good and bad — Southgate got the job but would be seen as teacher's pet**

**Ramsey's headstone in an Ipswich churchyard. Below, Southgate with his players before the last Euros**



cess for an England manager. He knows his England teams have done well. The win-percentage is second only to Capello, whose record is based on 42 games, 53 games fewer than Southgate's 95. Capello's one shot at a major tournament, the 2010 World Cup, ended at the round of 16.

"I've got to win the World Cup for this to be the most successful period in England's history," Southgate said more than a year ago. "But it's the second-most successful period for the team. Could we have done better at different moments during a semi-final or a final? Well, yeah, I expect so."

At the post-match press conference on Friday evening at Wembley, he couldn't hide how low he felt about the performance in the 1-0 loss to Iceland. This was not where they wanted to be nine days before the first group match, against Serbia. The team had played poorly. Though they hadn't scored against Iceland, he was more concerned about the team's performance out of possession. For a team that didn't have a lot of possession, Iceland created too many chances.

Someone asked if he was concerned about England's recent run; one win from five games? He felt the results were, in part, explained by the need to manage the involvement of players at the

EDDIE KEOGH/THE FA/GETTY IMAGES



95

**Matches as England manager for Southgate, level with Robson. Only Ramsey (113) and Winterbottom (139) have managed more games**

most intense period of the season. Too much significance can be attributed to friendlies and qualifying matches after qualification has been secured. England played well at the 2022 World Cup, having lost three and drawn three in their six pre-tournament games.

Last week was difficult for two particular reasons. Two of the team's most important defenders, Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw, were dealing with worrisome injuries while Southgate had to reduce his 33-man squad to 26. Many players would have spent the week in turmoil while the manager consulted with the medical team and then thought through every conversation he would have with those discarded.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can ask if it was a surprise that players and their manager should have been emotionally drained after that? Iceland could not have caught England at a better moment.

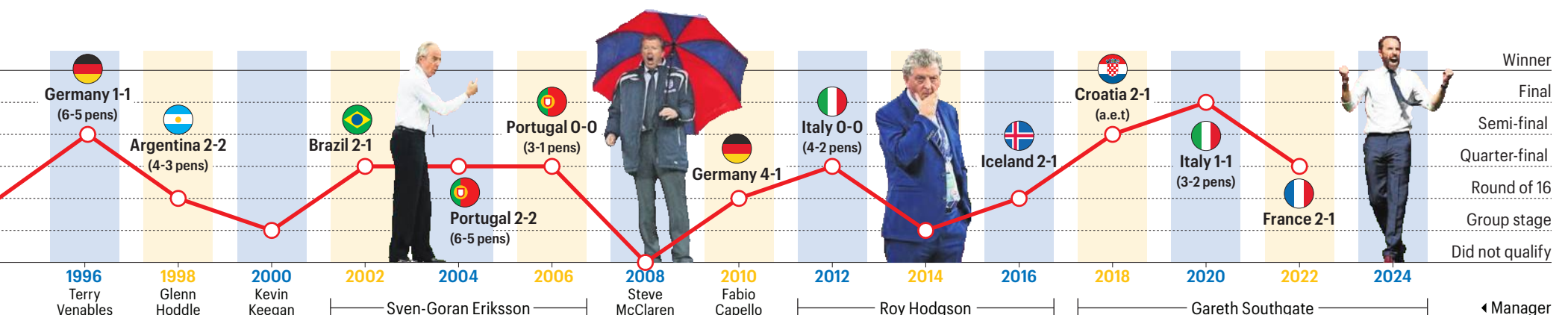
The team will be better in Germany because they are a good team. According to Fifa's rankings, England are fourth-best in the world. During Southgate's eight years in charge, the team have been mostly fourth or fifth in the rankings which is far better than they used to be (the ranking system was introduced in 1992). A good team but with limitations.

A stranger to Wembley on Friday evening might have wondered why England would play the naturally right-footed Kieran Trippier at left back? Shaw is injured, though he may be available for the second or third group game. Is there not another left-footed full back? At a push, Ben Chilwell, but his season has been destroyed by injury. After Chilwell? Not one other realistic contender.

This, though, is no sad story. Trippier has been terrific for England, even when playing out of position. He will do his job at left back and not complain if Shaw takes his place later in the tournament. Teams need selfless players and Trippier is one of those.

To understand the closeness of his relationship with the manager, consider how supportive Southgate was during the crisis caused by the player

**Continued on page 10 →**



# The Euros Germany 2024

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**Unless England can win in Germany, the likelihood is this will be the end of the road**

→ Continued from page 11

receiving a ten-week ban for telling his mates he was joining Atletico Madrid in 2020. Some placed bets on the move taking place and because Trippier was aware of that, he was banned. Players remember who support them through these moments.

The bond, of course, is greater with the senior players. Jordan Pickford, Kyle Walker, John Stones and Harry Kane have all worked with the manager since the beginning. Declan Rice has also become a central figure. Southgate has enjoyed watching the group develop and they have thoroughly enjoyed working with him. When in the distant future the time comes, quite a few of the present squad will want to be at his memorial service.

He has given them the joys of team sport, the freedom to grow. A story is told about a camp before the 2022 World Cup and some players questioning the way the team were playing. Kane thought the best thing would be to have a players-only meeting to talk this through. He asked Southgate if that would be OK and was told to crack on. The players met and went with Kane's view that they should continue to believe in what they were doing.

In an interview with Gary Neville last month, Wayne Rooney said he believed Kane was the best ever English footballer. Southgate is more understated. "He's our best finisher and our best passer. We are lucky to have him."

England are lucky to have had Southgate, though that's not how it may seem in the aftermath of the loss to Iceland. They go to Germany as contenders, though Maguire's loss

hurts the team because it breaks up a defence that has served England well in tournament football.

The failure to find a replacement for the out-of-form Calvin Phillipps also lessens the team. With so many attacking talents, Southgate is encouraged to pick attacking players alongside Rice in midfield. Better to be shot for a sheep as a lamb. Play it as Pep Guardiola did in the 2021 Champions League final.

That evening in Porto, the City manager started with six attacking players; Ilkay Gundogan, Bernardo Silva, Phil Foden, Riyad Mahrez, Kevin De Bruyne and Raheem Sterling. Rodri and Fernandinho, his defensive midfielders, were on the bench. With a back five and two defensive midfielders, Chelsea won decisively.

Before the World Cup finals in Qatar, Southgate talked about how things generally end for the England manager. It was, he joked, the Tower of London or an open-top bus through Trafalgar Square. The thing, he said, he wanted to do was to know which, not to die wondering. Who can blame him for taking the philosophical view.

After Ron Greenwood's time in the England job had passed someone asked him to whom he had been answerable. "Nobody," Greenwood replied, "except the nation. I was my own boss and everyone's Aunt Sally." In England's case, the nation has always been the toughest boss.

Southgate believes that, generally, those who manage England are to some degree scarred by the experience. Eventually it heals and the manager can go again. Unless England can win in Germany, the likelihood is that this will be the end of the road. There will be no talk of this or consideration of the future until England's Euro journey has ended.

From previous conversations, I know he would one day like to manage an overseas club because that would take him out of his comfort zone, which is where he would choose to be. The overseas move would depend on the offer and the view of his wife, Alison, though not necessarily in that order. Before that, he's got to get a performance from the team in Germany and try to become the first Euros-winning England manager.

Just as well he likes being out of his comfort zone.



Kane has been a key figure for Southgate from the start of his tenure



## Penalty pain and the professor who helped end England hoodoo

In an extract from a new book, Jonathan Northcroft and Rob Draper look at how years of painstaking analysis culminated in triumph over Colombia at 2018 World Cup

Jordan Henderson looked so calm, in his bubble, going through his rehearsed routine. To the penalty spot he strolled, doing keepy-uppies, head down, looking at the ball and not the mass of enemy supporters behind the goal. He put down the ball, stepped back, waited for the whistle and breathed. Up he came: a sweet strike just like in practice, in the corner and to the goalkeeper's left. This wasn't Henderson's day.

David Ospina, Colombia's goalkeeper, had faced a Henderson penalty playing for Arsenal against Liverpool in 2015. He had very nearly saved it and now, even before Henderson reached the ball, was on the move, springing in the right direction. He shot out his left arm and with a granite wrist was able to keep his hand stiff enough to push the powerful shot away. Fine margins. Henderson's kick had been perfect save for one thing – it was two feet off the ground, at the ideal height for Ospina to save. In 2015, when Ospina got a hand on the ball but could not stop it squirming over the line, Henderson had gone lower. So, there he was: Southgate's vice-captain, England's most vocal player on the pitch – a totem of the

team, failing at the very moment his country needed him to succeed.

Penalty traumas from down the decades whirled through England supporters' minds. You thought of England's shoot-out record in tournaments – won one, lost six. They were the only nation on the planet to have taken part in three World Cup shoot-outs and lost them all. So, Henderson turned and began walking back to the centre circle.

It was then that something unprecedented happened. Henderson straightened his back, raised his chin and stared straight ahead, walking calmly – almost proudly – to where his team-mates stood. Kieran Trippier shook his hand, then Harry Kane. "You wouldn't know that his penalty had been saved," Ben Lyttleton, author of the seminal *Twelve Yards: The Art & Psychology of the Perfect Penalty*, said. So many things went into a shoot-out finally going right for England in the Spartak Stadium on July 3, 2018 – and one of the biggest was what Henderson did at exactly the moment it was going wrong.

Southgate hugs  
Dier, whose spot  
kick sealed the win





Jesse Lingard and Danny Rose, centre, lead the shoot-out celebrations in 2018

## EVERY DETAIL ANALYSED

Penalties had been England's curse stretching back to 1990, when in their very first tournament shoot-out the team, managed at that point by Bobby Robson, lost to West Germany in a World Cup semi-final. The only English triumph on penalties was against Spain in the quarter-finals of Euro '96. Four days later, in the semi-finals, came the defeat by Germany that hinged on Southgate's infamous miss.

The accidental way Southgate ended up as a penalty taker that day – volunteering only through a sense of duty after being approached by manager Terry Venables and his assistant Bryan Robson a few seconds before the shoot-out began – encapsulated England's lack of rigour, down the years, regarding penalties.

When Dan Ashworth became the FA's technical director, he knew all the projects to improve England would be seen to count for nothing if the senior team could not change its fortunes from 12 yards. Ashworth commissioned a study into shoot-outs led by England's lead analyst, Steve O'Brien, and overseen by lead data scientist, Rhys Long. It dug into every detail. The elements of a successful penalty, from where a shot is placed to how long is taken between the whistle and striking the ball.

The preparation and information goalkeepers need. Behaviours, like the long walk to the spot or how and where the takers should stand while waiting before and after their kicks. Other aspects such as what the coaching staff should do while the shoot-out is under way and what the manager should do before it starts.

There were some striking findings, like the extent to which England tended to rush their spot kicks compared to more successful nations. In tournament shoot-outs, English players started their run-ups an average 0.28 seconds after the referee's whistle, not far off the time of a sprinter leaving the blocks. No country's tak-

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## Trippier scored with the stakes at their highest – that is when the momentum flipped

ers were hastier. Entering the picture here is a perhaps surprising figure – a Basque professor of managerial economics and strategy at the London School of Economics called Ignacio Palacios-Huerta. The pioneer of penalties research, Palacios-Huerta, an Athletic Bilbao fan, started analysing shoot-outs as a way to verify the Nash Equilibrium – proposed by the Nobel laureate economist and mathematician John Forbes Nash, immortalised by Russell Crowe in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. According to Nash, in a zero-sum game – where a win for one player means a loss for the other – the

best approach is to vary moves unpredictably, but his theory is so complex, economists have found it hard to test in the real world.

Palacios-Huerta figured a football shoot-out was an ideal scenario for proving Nash: a zero-sum game for two players with simple rules and easily observable outcomes. His first paper on shoot-outs was published in 1999. He followed in 2003 by examining more than 1,000 penalty kicks in major national and international competitions then in 2010, with a colleague, conducted a further study into almost 3,000 penalties from games between 1970 and 2008. His data verified the Nash Equilibrium. By 2014 he had updated his analysis to include more than 9,000 penalty kicks.

His work was used by Barcelona and Holland and its first significant use in English football was by Chelsea in the 2008 Champions League final. He and Avram Grant had a mutual friend and Palacios-Huerta's vast database revealed a glaring fact about Manchester United's goalkeeper, Edwin van der Sar: for penalties, Van der Sar usually dived to his right. In the shoot-out, Chelsea's players kept putting the ball to van der Sar's left and scoring, and had John Terry not slipped and put his kick against the post, Palacios-Huerta would have been the backroom hero of a Chelsea victory. Then came sudden death and Van der Sar, realising what Chelsea were doing, pointed to his left as Nicolas Anelka stepped up for his kick. Spooked, Anelka became the first to ignore Palacios-Huerta's advice and sent his shot the other way, and Van der Sar saved.

Palacios-Huerta is even able to use regression analysis to detect trends in the habits of takers and goalkeepers, helping predict when a particular player is going to shoot right, left or down the middle and doing similar with keepers' movements. England's analysis team contracted him to help with preparation for tournaments but his involvement remains so secretive that until a request was made to speak to him for this book, members of England's communications department had never heard of him. The request was declined by the FA, who are protective of his data, which was once again part of Southgate's armoury at Euro 2024.

## PERSONALISED ROUTINES

At the 2018 World Cup penalties were the responsibility of England's goalkeeping coach, Martyn Margetson, and attacking coach, Allan Russell. They had players practise their techniques so much that each morning at the Spartak Zelenogorsk stadium, the groundsman had to lay out a new penalty spot because the previous day's spot was worn out. Used in the prac-



Even Henderson's calm walk back after missing his penalty was planned

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

England's penalty shoot-out record  
⚽ Scored ❌ Missed/Saved

World Cup 1990 SF vs W Germany	3	LOSS
Euro 1996 QF vs Spain	4	WIN
Euro 1996 SF vs Germany	5	LOSS
World Cup 1998 QF vs Argentina	3	LOSS
Euro 2004 QF vs Portugal	5	LOSS
World Cup 2006 QF vs Portugal	1	LOSS
Euro 2012 QF vs Italy	2	LOSS
World Cup 2018 R16 vs Colombia	4	WIN
Euro 2020 Final vs Italy	2	LOSS

tice was a special penalty-taking net, with target areas marked for takers to hit, brought from St George's Park. Russell and Margetson oversaw the rehearsal of all aspects of a taker's routine, from leaving their teammates on the halfway line to striking their kick. Each player's routine was personal to them – what was important was that it was honed and stuck to. Before every kick, Jordan Pickford was to walk from the box and hand the taker the ball. Not only was it psychologically important to receive the ball from someone friendly, the ritual would also break up that dreaded long walk to the spot. In the analysis room at the team hotel on the eve of the Colombia clash, Margetson sat painstakingly writing out notes on every potential Colombian penalty taker and taped these to a water bottle.

He went through the list with Pickford, who would take the bottle on to the field and keep it near him during the shoot-out. England were superb in the match.

England's last-16 game against Colombia finished 1-1 after extra time and went to penalties

## RELAX, AND TAKE YOUR TIME

Southgate moved calmly between his players with the list. Individually, he

went to each taker, putting his arm round their shoulder, showing them the piece of paper, reassuring them of the plan. He gathered his players and staff for a huddle, crouching in the middle of it and going round the circle, making eye contact, as once again he reinforced what had been talked about in preparation. One of the cardinal rules: "Relax, take a breath, and as soon as you hear the whistle, don't go immediately."

Then Southgate went back to the touchline and put his arm round Holland, who put his arm round Margetson, who put his arm round Russell and so it went until there was a long line of England, stretching from manager to unused substitutes, standing on the side. England's takers stood on the halfway line as near as possible to them – knowing the data showed that such proximity was also linked to being successful.

Kane scored, firing a low, unerring shot to Ospina's right. Marcus Rashford scored, striking his penalty so crisply it sounded like Tiger Woods thwacking a driver. But Radamel Falcao, Juan Cuadrado and Luis Muriel had rammed in Colombia's first three penalties without giving Pickford a chance. And then up stepped Henderson. And missed. Henderson's purposeful, proud walk back to the halfway line was as planned as every other element of England's shoot-out. It told the rest that things were still OK, that there was nothing to fear, not even missing.

After Henderson's miss, Mateus Uribe stepped up for Colombia and crashed his shot against the bar. Next for England was Trippier. Striking the sweetest strike, he found the top corner.

"He did something that we rarely see players do for England. Score, in a penalty shoot-out, when the pressure is on, when the chips are down, when the stakes are at their highest," Lyttleton said. "And that is the moment the momentum of this shoot-out flipped."

Colombia's next taker was Carlos Bacca. Pickford looked at his bottle. Bacca struck his shot hard and centrally, slightly to Pickford's right, at a difficult height. But as the Colombian's boot met the ball, Pickford was already springing, forward and decisively to his right, and he shot up a ramrod left arm to palm it away.

And so it was left to Eric Dier. The plan had been for Jamie Vardy to take the fifth penalty but Vardy had tweaked his groin, meaning Dier was suddenly promoted from reserve. You would not have known it. Dier sauntered up and, as if it were just another moment in training, stroked England into the quarter-finals. And it was gone. The ghost of penalties. Russell, a Scot, initially did not comprehend what winning a tournament shoot-out meant to England. Then he walked into the coaches' room. There was Ashworth, in tears.

As Dier's penalty hit the back of Ospina's net, players charged across the pitch, the coaching staff hollered and hugged like World Cup winners – and Ashworth jumped to his feet in the stand. "It was emotional," he said. "I remember sitting there during the game. I've never sweated so much in my life."

● *Dear England: The Real Story of the Three Lions Rebirth* by Jonathan Northcroft and Rob Draper, published by Blink is out now, priced at £22



# The Euros Germany 2024

**TOM ALLNUTT**



**B**y the end of the night, Germany had tried four of their five strikers but still the ball wouldn't go in. Kai Havertz, Thomas Müller, Deniz Undav and the young Maximilian Beier all had a go in their goalless draw against Ukraine last week, but none of them could find a way through.

A day later, Italy were held by Turkey. The defending European champions mustered only two shots on target in Bologna as Mateo Retegui and then his replacement, Giacomo Raspadori, each took turns to fire blanks. "Up front, *non eravamo brillantissimi*," Italy's coach, Luciano Spalletti, said. "We weren't brilliant."

Elsewhere, the floodgates opened but it wasn't strikers pulling the levers. Spain and Portugal plundered nine goals between them but none were scored by their first-choice No 9s. Álvaro Morata went off without a goal against Andorra and was replaced by Mikel Oyarzabal, the Real Sociedad winger, who duly scored a hat-trick. In the absence of Cristiano Ronaldo, Bruno Fernandes and Diogo Jota claimed three goals as Portugal put four past Finland.

If Germany long for the days of their most lethal marksmen, such as Gerd Müller and Miroslav Klose, with their two World Cup Golden Boots and more than 100 international goals between them, Italy must wonder where their own fated line of finishers got broken, from Paolo Rossi to Alessandro Del Piero and Filippo Inzaghi.

But Germany and Italy are not alone. Among the eight favourites for Euro 2024, France and England – with Kylian Mbappé and Harry Kane – are perhaps the only teams to have a truly elite solution up front. For Portugal and Belgium, Ronaldo and Romelu Lukaku now come with hefty compromises to balance and style, while Spain and Holland persist with Morata and Memphis Depay respectively, primarily due to a lack of alternatives. Italy are likely to plump for Gianluca Scamacca, revived at Atlanta after struggling at West Ham United, while Germany may settle on

## Will this generation of wingers kill off the classic No 9?

Pure strikers are dying breed and this Euros is set to confirm that wide players are firmly in vogue due to modern tactical trends

Havertz, the striker Arsenal once hoped to turn into a midfielder.

The 25-year-old Mbappé, aside, it is possible that for all of this tournament's most distinguished strikers – Ronaldo, 39, Kane, 30, Lukaku, 31, Depay, 30, Morata, 31, and Robert Lewandowski, 35 – this Euros may even be their last. Instead, the names that really quicken the pulse at Euro 2024 are the wingers. In the absence of a new generation of poachers, these dribblers, runners and creators are now the premium assets on the market. Scouts are desperate to find the next Vinicius Jr, Bukayo Saka or Mohamed Salah, while youngsters want to emulate them.

"You see kids now are more into skills and tricks," Ben Wilkinson, a youth coach at Manchester City, says.

**OUSMANE DEMBÉLÉ**  
**FRANCE**

**JÉRÉMY DOKU**  
**BELGIUM**

## Mills makes his mark in Rome by surpassing proud father

**Athletics**

**Rick Broadbent**

George Mills did what his footballing father never managed to do by playing a blinder in the Stadio Olimpico in Rome last night. A gutsy, bold effort to draw the sting out of Jakob Ingebrigtsen fell just short, but he gained his first major medal in only his third 5,000m.

Danny, the former England defender who sat on the bench for Leeds United on European nights in this vast arena, was there to see his son win silver and GB's first medal of the European Championships. And it was impressive. Mills, 25, had previewed the race by saying "Jakob is bloody good", but he strained nerve and sinew to at least try to sow a seed of doubt.

"It's just my third race but it's reassurance I'm on the right track,"

he said. "I expect myself to be winning medals on this stage now."

Ingebrigtsen, whose wife is due to give birth any day, stormed to the front at the end of the penultimate lap. Mills, though, refused to be intimidated and accelerated too. He tracked the Norwegian all the way to the same 250m mark, where his fellow Britons Josh Kerr and Jake Wightman had overhauled him in the last two world 1,500m finals.

Mills did not have enough to replicate that, but was secure in second. Ingebrigtsen clocked 13min 20.11sec for a modest time but a fifth European title. Mills was 1.27 behind and confirmed he plans to double up and face Ingebrigtsen over both the 1,500m and 5,000m in Paris.

The big crowd had come to see Marcell Jacobs, and whether he could recapture some of the form that

shook up the sprint world at the past Olympics. He clocked 9.80 in Tokyo, but he had not dipped under 10 seconds since winning the European title in Munich 22 months ago. He managed to retain the title, but had to be satisfied with 10.02.

Chituru Ali made it an Italian one-two, with Britain's Romell Glave taking bronze for GB in 10.06. Glave, 24, grew up in Jamaica but runs for Britain after coming to Croydon as a teenager in 2015. It has not been an easy rise to the top. A broken back suffered during the pandemic was the nadir, and transitioning from being the world's fastest 17-year-old and "next Bolt" to the seniors proved a toil.

It has been an interesting two days for British sprinting. Last night's final came after Carl Lewis had warned Louie Hinchliffe to prepare for "the

"They get impressed by players doing something unbelievable with the ball, more than a header or a finish."

Spain, Germany and Holland will all be relying on creators to make up for mediocrity up front. Spain's Lamine Yamal, a darting, dancing left winger, looks a potential star of the tournament. The 16-year-old has enjoyed a scintillating season for Barcelona and was given a standing ovation from fans at the Bernabéu after he ripped Brazil to shreds in March. Germany will hope Havertz brings the best out of Jamal Musiala and Florian Wirtz, their two mesmeric No 10s, both aged only 21. Liverpool's Cody Gakpo, 25, and, in particular, the 21-year-old Xavi Simons are the big hopes for Holland, with Simons arriving on the back of an excellent season for RB Leipzig.

madness" after the Sheffield sprinter became the first European to win the prestigious NCAA 100m title in the USA. Hinchliffe, 21, clocked 9.95 to win the coveted collegiate crown in Oregon with Lewis, his head coach at the University of Houston, watching. The run made him the sixth fastest British sprinter over 100m and the ninth fastest in the world this year. Even after last night's 100m final in Rome, he remains the fastest European of this Olympic year.

After his watching brief, Lewis, the winner of nine Olympic gold medals, immediately predicted that Hinchliffe would make the GB team for Paris. He said he will travel with him to the trials later this month, when Hinchliffe will need to finish in the top two to be assured of a place.

"It was outstanding," Lewis said. "Louie has had an incredible year. I

“ Kids are impressed by tricks and flicks more than a finish or a header

If elite strikers are increasingly scarce, talent out wide is everywhere. The pace and power of Ousmane Dembélé, Rafael Leão and Jérémy Doku will be crucial to the threat of France, Portugal and Belgium while England have an abundance of options out wide, such as Saka, Phil Foden and Cole Palmer. The slalom-ing Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, labelled “Kvaradona” by his Napoli fans, will have to make the most of his attacking opportunities with Georgia, while Premier League scouts plan to watch Albania’s Nedim Bajrami, Romania’s Florinel Coman and Turkey’s Kenan Yildiz, the 19-year-old turning heads at Juventus.

Many in the game believe the resurgence of these dribblers and creators is a direct counter to the era of possession and control, that the intricate systems designed by the likes of Pep Guardiola and Mikel Arteta are more vulnerable to players who bring spontaneity and chaos.

Ironically, Guardiola has been key to that shift, not least with his use of Doku on the wing at Manchester City, where the Belgian’s ability to glide past defenders has proven invaluable, especially against opponents determined to sit deep. “All the managers say, ‘don’t lose the ball, don’t dribble, pass the ball, don’t dribble’ – but the wingers have to dribble,”

JAMAL MUSIALA GERMANY



Guardiola said in February. “I don’t like them to dribble 60 metres from goal but near their box? Take a risk, have a dribble, it’s your talent.”

Wingers have also been integral to the prevailing tactical trends of the past decade, with the move to 4-2-3-1 and then 4-3-3 putting more emphasis on speedy wide players and surging full backs. Of the favourites at Euro 2024, only the more pragmatic Dutch are expected to deviate from a version of 4-3-3, while the pressing sides rely on their strikers for more than just goals. “What even is a No9 any more?” Alex Clapham, a Uefa Pro Licence coach, who has worked across Europe, says. “You think of Brazilian Ronaldo, Alan Shearer; scorers that stay in the box. The game has evolved past that. Not many teams can afford just to have a scorer anymore. You have to press, lead the line, move defenders to create space. It’s a different mentality.”

Academies are putting less emphasis on developing out-and-out strikers, especially as the instinctive skills required are so difficult to coach. Even in South America, where Brazil and Argentina were once renowned for producing the world’s deadliest No9s, clubs are now churning out No11s and No7s to fit 4-3-3 and who can be sold at huge profit to Europe’s elite. “Brazilian clubs see how Vinícius and Rodrygo were sold to Real Madrid,” Bruno Freitas, a football agent who works with South American players, says. “They all want to do the same thing.”

The question is where the game goes next. Will the target man return as teams go more direct to beat the press? Even the Euros could prove influential, if Ronaldo helps Portugal lift the trophy or if Benjamin Sesko, the 21-year-old Slovenian striker being watched by Arsenal and Chelsea, lives up to the hype. A breakout star up front would shake up the market, even if the biggest deal of the summer is already done, with Mbappé joining Vinícius and Rodrygo at Real Madrid. The only problem? They all want to play on the wing.



Hinchliffe’s target is the GB team after going sixth on Britain’s all-time 100m list

ON TV TODAY

European Athletics Championships BBC iPlayer, red button

said, ‘The goal is to get you on the Olympic team’ and he’s going to make it. It wasn’t a shock. I knew he was going to break ten seconds. He’s got to go to the Olympic trials now and I will go with him there [Manchester].

“It’s one day, two races, you’re out of there, so basically stay away from all the madness because that’s what it’s going to be back there. He’s the new sensation but he’s the kind of guy who can handle it.”

An older sensation at 29, Jacobs’ winning time is not going to bother the world’s best, but he will likely improve in the next two months. These days he trains with Rana Reider, the American who was last year sanctioned by the US Center for SafeSport because of a relationship with an athlete that “presented a power imbalance”.

Russell claims sublime pole over Verstappen to set up Montreal thriller

Formula 1

MOLLY HUDSON



Motor Racing Reporter

In Formula 1, the promise of rain guarantees excitement. This was a qualifying session so competitive and nail-biting that the absence of Montreal’s usual intermittent downpours was welcomed.

There has been a desire for closer contenders to the three-times world champion Max Verstappen this season, and there could be no one closer than George Russell here, claiming a sublime pole with an identically timed lap to Verstappen. That the Briton registered his first means he will line up ahead on the grid. Lando Norris, in third, was only 0.021sec behind.

The most exciting, and closest, qualifying session in recent memory came hours after the FIA, motor racing’s world governing body, announced new regulations that will be introduced in 2026 and are expected to widen the gap between teams again.

That is a worry for another day, though, as Russell basked in the unfamiliar feeling of a Mercedes with genuine pace. This was his first pole since Hungary in 2022, and only the second of his career. “It feels so good,” Russell said. “So much hard work back in the factory has gone into this. In Monaco we hoped this was the start of something for our season and we think it is. I have missed this feeling. First step done, but obviously now we’ve got our eyes on that win.”

Mercedes have had a torrid run since their most recent race victory in November 2022, consistently off the pace and struggling to extract the most from the set of regulations that have seen Red Bull dominate. They feel they have reached a turning point, with a steadier gradient of progress, rather than swinging from one extreme to another.

An upgrade to their front wing has helped both Mercedes drivers, and a disappointed Lewis Hamilton eventually qualified seventh fastest, with the wind picking up on his crucial final lap. “The car was feeling great all weekend, and then as soon we got to qualifying that vanished for me. The grip just disappeared,” he said, frustrated, given he is something of a specialist on this track, level with Michael Schumacher on seven wins.

Verstappen was in the unfamiliar position of being pleasantly surprised to finish second. His weekend had been disrupted by an energy recovery system leak in the second practice session, which caused his engine to be replaced overnight. “Going into qualifying, I would have definitely taken that [second]. That it was that close at the end makes it really exciting for tomorrow,” he added.

Ferrari had a disastrous session,

having arrived in Canada believing they could challenge for victory, but instead both cars were out in Q2. In an odd strategy call they chose used tyres for their final runs, with Charles Leclerc 11th and Carlos Sainz 12th. Oliver Bearman, the Ferrari reserve driver who is expected to join Haas next season, was seen open-mouthed in shock in the garage as they were eliminated. “I won’t comment here,” an angry Leclerc, who claimed victory in Monaco last time out, said on team radio.

In a sport of fine margins and remarkable engineering, this is the sort of weekend that requires the leading minds in Formula 1 to reach a hand into the pitlane to judge the weather. Radars had suggested a wet qualifying, but other than a brief spell between sessions it held off.

Daniel Ricciardo secured an impressive fifth, after the Sky Sports pundit and former world champion

Grid for Canadian Grand Prix

	Driver	Team	Time
1	George Russell	Mercedes	1min 12.000sec
2	Max Verstappen	Red Bull	1:12.000
3	Lando Norris	McLaren	1:12.021
4	Oscar Piastri	McLaren	1:12.103
5	Daniel Ricciardo	RB	1:12.178
6	Fernando Alonso	Aston Martin	1:12.228
7	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	1:12.280
8	Yuki Tsunoda	RB	1:12.414
9	Lance Stroll	Aston Martin	1:12.701
10	Alexander Albon	Williams	1:12.796
11	Charles Leclerc	Ferrari	1:12.691
12	Carlos Sainz	Ferrari	1:12.728
13	Logan Sargeant	Williams	1:12.736
14	Kevin Magnussen	Haas	1:12.916
15	Pierre Gasly	Alpine	1:12.940
16	Sergio Pérez	Red Bull	1:13.326
17	Valtteri Bottas	Sauber	1:13.366
18	Nico Hulkenberg	Haas	1:13.978
19	Zhou Guanyu	Sauber	1:14.292
20	Esteban Ocon*	Alpine	1:13.435

\* Ocon is serving a five-place grid penalty

Jacques Villeneuve had questioned what he was still doing in F1 given his recent struggles.

His team-mate Yuki Tsunoda qualified eighth, having announced yesterday that he would remain with Visa Cash App Red Bull for a further year. The Japanese driver had hoped his impressive form would have earned him a place in the senior Red Bull team, but this week they announced that Sergio Pérez would remain until 2026. Christian Horner, the Red Bull team principal, had backed Pérez to bounce back from his first-lap crash in Monaco, but instead he delivered another poor qualifying showing, eventually finishing in 16th. He delivered an expletive on team radio before accurately summing up the session as a “total disaster”.

He will be hoping the changeable Montreal weather returns, with more rain forecast for the race.

ON TV TODAY

Canadian Grand Prix 6pm Sky Sports F1, race start 7pm

# Ruthless Swiatek confirms status as queen of clay

## Women's final

STUART FRASER



Tennis Correspondent  
Paris

Like the football minnows who score an early goal against the giants, Jasmine Paolini may regret rousing the great Iga Swiatek with an early break in yesterday's French Open final. From 2-1 up in the first set, the unheralded Italian lost 11 of the next 12 games as the so-called "queen of clay" cruised to her fourth Roland Garros title.

Only the very early stages of this 68-minute final were competitive. After a brief blip, Swiatek produced a performance that underlined how dominant she can be on this surface. Her 6-2, 6-1 victory in 68 minutes over the No 12 seed was the most one-sided women's singles final here since Justine Henin beat Ana Ivanovic 6-1, 6-2 in 2007.

Swiatek's level of consistency is something that has rarely been seen in Paris. The 23-year-old from Poland is only the third woman to win three consecutive French Open titles in the open era, joining Monica Seles (1990-1992) and Henin (2005-2007). Few would bet against her becoming the first to win four in a row next year.

"I'm really proud of myself because the expectations obviously have been pretty high from the outside, and the pressure as well," Swiatek said. "I'm happy that I just went for it and I was ready to deal

with all of this. Obviously I got broken at the beginning, so it wasn't maybe perfect, but I think the level was pretty high. It wasn't so easy as the score says. I think I played pretty well considering all these facts and the pressure."

It is too early to start pondering whether she could reach Rafael Nadal-esque levels of supremacy here given that she requires another ten titles to match his haul of 14 singles titles at Roland Garros. But she is by far the best of her era on clay, this year becoming the first female player since Serena Williams in 2013 to win the trio of events in Madrid, Rome and Paris.

When it matters most, Swiatek delivers. She has won all five grand-slam finals she has contested; the only one outside Roland Garros being the 2022 US Open final. Despite still being a shy character at times – her slightly awkward post-match speech was a reminder of this – she is effortlessly composed when it comes to playing tennis on the biggest of stages.

The next question is: will she win Wimbledon? Despite winning the junior title in 2018 – defeating Emma Raducanu 6-0, 6-1 en route in the quarter-finals – she has not quite found her feet at the All England Club in the professional championships. Her best result there so far is a run to the quarter-finals in 2023.

Swiatek has the intelligent style required to do well on grass, but has struggled to fully adapt her movement to the necessary softer steps. Once she cracks this – she also worked hard last year on defending against the low slice – a deeper run at Wimbledon surely beckons.

"I feel like every year it's easier for



Swiatek has now won all five grand-slam finals she has contested, four at Roland Garros

me to adapt to grass," Swiatek said. "I just need to continue the work that I've been doing."

"I think the biggest progress I can make on grass right now is using my serves better, but also I don't expect a lot. Overall, tennis is different on grass. I'll just see and I'll work hard to play better there."

It is easy to forget now that

Swiatek was on the brink of being knocked out in the second round when she saved match point against Naomi Osaka, the four-times grand-slam champion from Japan, in a three-hour thriller. The contrast between that contest and the rest of her run is shown by the fact she lost the same number of games against Osaka (17) as she did against her five



other opponents combined on the way the final.

Paolini briefly raised hopes that the final against Swiatek could be more in line with the Osaka match than the others. The 28-year-old, who had not progressed beyond the second round of a grand-slam before this year, made a bright start by breaking the Swiatek serve for a 2-1 lead.

The opportunity to build up some momentum was swiftly snuffed out, however. Swiatek remained calm and immediately broke back to love for 2-2 before taking control of the rallies. Paolini boasts a powerful forehand but she struggled to make any headway against Swiatek, who barely gave her a chance to pull the trigger on this side.

Paolini claimed the penultimate game of the second set to avoid the humiliation of a 6-0 bagel, and there was a loud cheer from the crowd of 15,000 in response. They knew as well as anyone, though, that there were no hopes of a comeback, and Swiatek quickly served out the match before falling to her knees in celebration.

"I have to say congratulations to you, Iga," Paolini said afterwards. "Playing you here is the toughest challenge in the sport."

Meanwhile, Great Britain's Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid won a fifth consecutive French Open men's wheelchair singles title and a 20th grand slam trophy overall. The pair comfortably saw off Japan's Takuya Miki and Tokito Oda 6-1, 6-4 in yesterday's final.

# Records tumble for Alcaraz – now for most elite club of all

## Men's final



Stuart Fraser

Carlos Alcaraz departed the court on Friday after defeating Jannik Sinner in the French Open semi-final, had a look at his phone and discovered he had made history before even contesting the final.

The 21-year-old Spaniard has claimed several feats in his rapid rise but his latest is arguably the most impressive of all. He is the youngest male player in history to reach grand-slam finals across the three surfaces of clay, grass and hard, replacing the previous record-holder, Andre Agassi, who completed the set aged 22 at Wimbledon in 1992. "It's something great," Alcaraz said. "Honestly, before the final it is something that I really

don't want to think about it, but obviously that means I'm playing good tennis on every surface."

Alcaraz now has the opportunity to join a small club of male players to have won grand-slam titles on each surface. If he defeats Alexander Zverev in today's final to add the French Open to his triumphs at the 2022 US Open and Wimbledon in 2023, he will stand alongside the likes of Jimmy Connors, Mats Wilander, Agassi, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

All those hours on YouTube during his teenage years have paid off. Alcaraz revealed last year that he watched videos of Nadal on clay, Djokovic on hard and Federer and Murray on grass to pick up the specific technical traits that are required on each surface. His top-spin forehand speeds off the clay, his movement means he can cover a hard court with ease and his variety

works so well on the grass. "I always wanted to be one of the best players in the world," Alcaraz said. "If I want to be one of the best players in the world, I have to be a good player in every surface."

"I grew up playing on clay but I feel more comfortable playing on hard court, for example. I think my game suits the clay very well."

His opponent today, Zverev, can also play well on both clay and hard, though he is yet to crack the grass having failed to progress beyond the fourth round in seven appearances at Wimbledon. The French Open is his most consistent slam, having been knocked out in the semi-finals three years in a row before finally taking the next step to this year's final.

Zverev, ranked No 4 in the world at the age of 27, is the best active player not to have won a grand-slam title. The German came close in the 2020 US Open final, losing

from two sets up against Dominic Thiem, before claiming the biggest victory of his career a year later at the Tokyo Olympics. He has done well to recover from a painful memory on the main arena at Roland Garros, Court Philippe Chatrier, in 2022, when he tore ligaments in his right ankle during a semi-final against Nadal.

"There was one of two ways to come back from two situations," Zverev said. "You either come back stronger and hungrier, you come back wanting to win more, which I feel like I did in 2021 when I had my best year on tour so far."

"Or you kind of go into yourself and you drop mentally a bit. I'm happy that I was the sort of person who took the first path."

**ON TV TODAY**  
Alexander Zverev v Carlos Alcaraz  
1.30pm, Eurosport UK

## Boxing

TOM  
KERSHAW

**B**oxing has always conjured up stories that defy imagination, but a script about a boyhood Crystal Palace fan modelling for Burberry and allegedly dating Madonna before fighting for the world title at Selhurst Park stretches the realms of reason.

Richard Riakporhe will address that particular rumour later on with a disbelieving smile of his own, but, as he finishes his training session at Loughborough University, it is impossible not first to be drawn to the gruesome six-inch scar that runs down his chest, a reminder of how a remarkable life was so nearly cut short.

It is also a testament to one theme that runs the gamut of boxing's surreal tales; of a life accelerating towards catastrophe being saved – quite literally – by such a brutal sport. Riakporhe was 15 and becoming enamoured of the illusory glamour of gang culture when he was stabbed during an attempted mugging outside a party in southeast London.

“This guy started asking people for their phones and I said no because of my ego,” Riakporhe, 34, says. “I remember lifting up my top and there was just blood trickling down everywhere. It wouldn't stop for about two minutes and then I collapsed. My friends were slapping me trying to wake me up. I was only semi-conscious when the ambulance arrived. They took me straight into surgery and the doctor had to open up my sternum [to stem the internal bleeding]. I was lucky to survive.”

That near-death experience prompted an arduous search for purpose that led Riakporhe to the boxing gym and an undefeated 17-fight professional career going into his contest against an old foe in Chris Billam-Smith, of Bournemouth, for the WBO cruiserweight title next Saturday.

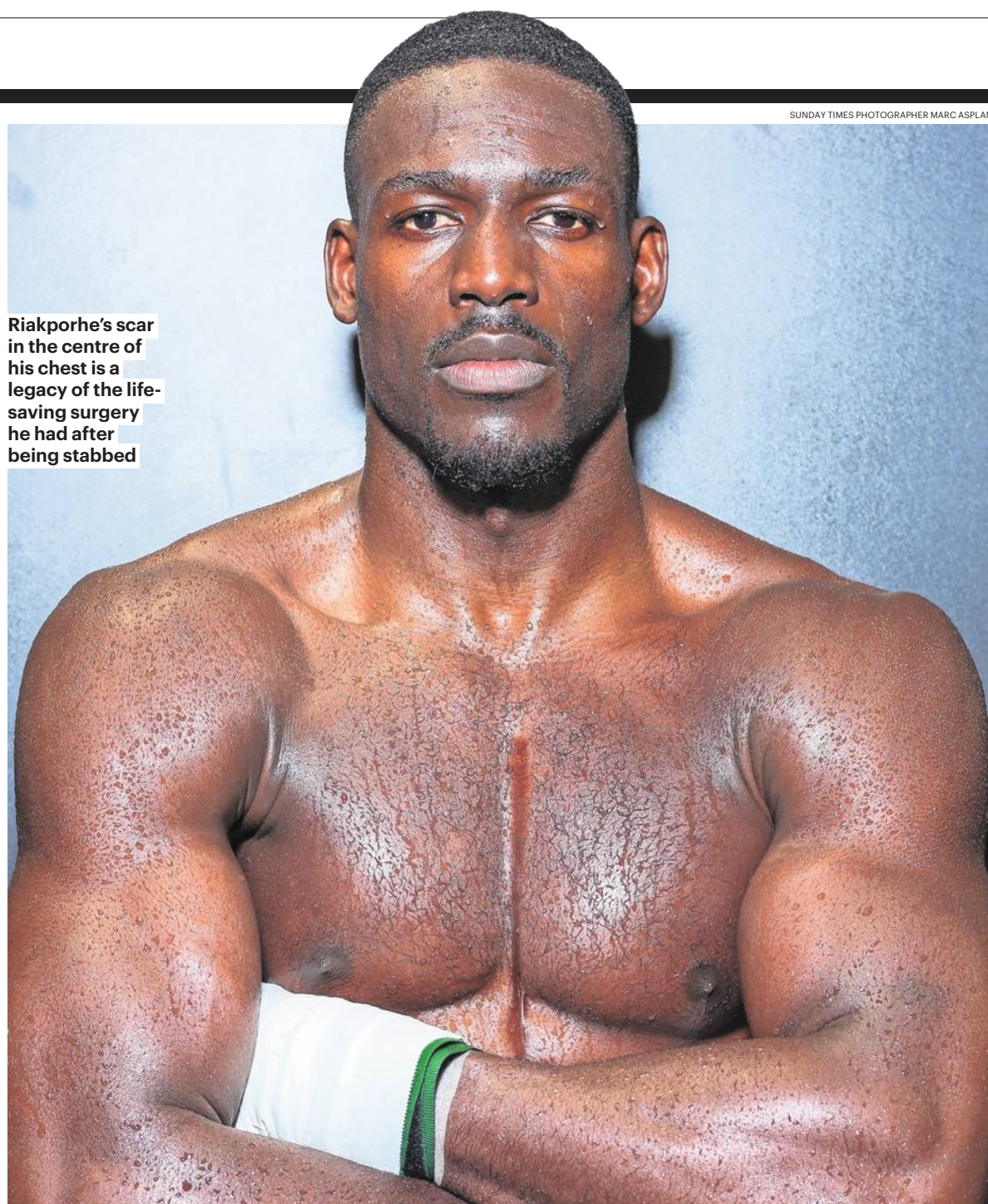
Riakporhe is the slight favourite after winning their first gruelling bout by a split decision in 2019, but Billam-Smith is the champion now and has improved markedly. It should be a terrific career-defining bout, but Riakporhe's story will remain life-affirming whatever the result. “Winning a world title is one thing, and it would be great, but I think influencing people in a positive way that stops them from getting lost in crime and deviance transcends boxing,” he says.

Riakporhe has visited numerous schools and exclusion units over the past decade in the hope of inspiring children to avoid the fate he almost succumbed to, while his foundation has partnered with the Prince's Trust and Lambeth Council to provide mentoring sessions and boxing camps.

“I'd say less than 1 per cent of people made it out from the type of area I was from,” he says. “Some of the people I knew back then are dead or they're in jail for life. They didn't have the discipline or the guidance. All of that talent went to waste.”

Hope was scarce on the crime-riven Aylesbury Estate. It was where Tony Blair made his first speech as prime minister, promising residents that the poorest people in the country would no longer be forgotten. Riakporhe was only seven then but dreamt of

Riakporhe's scar in the centre of his chest is a legacy of the life-saving surgery he had after being stabbed



SUNDAY TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER MARC ASPLAND

# ‘I was stabbed at 15. Lots of kids I grew up with are dead’

Cruiserweight Richard Riakporhe on his journey from a south London estate to becoming friends with Madonna

playing for Crystal Palace and asked Blair if he would build a new astroturf football pitch on the estate.

“It was a really tough area to grow up in,” he says. “We used to wear two pairs of tracksuit bottoms and hide our phones in the inside pocket in case anyone was going on a robbery spree around the schools or the bus stops. It sounds crazy now, but I was just accustomed to seeing drug addicts, robberies, all different kinds of crime, hearing sirens every day. It conditioned me to think it was normal because I didn't know anything else.”

Riakporhe's parents were loving, strict and desperate to dissuade him from falling into that pattern, but the prospect of fast money proved difficult to resist. “I was interested in all



Riakporhe says Madonna is a friend

the perks that come with that lifestyle: the attention from women, the power, the street cred,” he says.

The night Riakporhe almost died was a harrowing reality check. “That's when I realised that you can be a good

person but still find yourself in bad circumstances because of your environment. I didn't want to embarrass my parents. I didn't look for trouble, but I ended up getting hurt.”

It is far harder to break a cycle than follow one. “People don't understand that when you come from that kind of environment, everything else feels alien. I was scared to have conversations with people from a different kind of background,” he says. “It takes a lot of confidence to change.”

Riakporhe's first visit to the boxing gym, at 18, was a turning point. The training brought structure and he resolved to return to education, but the camaraderie also helped him feel more comfortable around other people. “Everyone has a perception of boxers being unintelligent and inartic-

“

**The bleeding would not stop. My friends were slapping me to try to wake me up. I was lucky to survive**

ulate but I was surprised at how everybody in the gym was so well spoken. I could only speak slang. I couldn't string a decent sentence together,” he says. To accelerate that learning curve, Riakporhe put LBC on his radio every day for almost two years. “I'd listen to James O'Brien and write down the words, get the definitions and try and put them into sentences,” he says, laughing.

After Riakporhe had won the prestigious Haringey Box Cup in 2011, he realised he possessed a rare knockout punch – he has stopped 13 of his 17 opponents as a professional – but he resisted joining the paid ranks until he had completed his degree in marketing communications and advertising at Kingston University in 2015.

Riakporhe, who used to sell tickets on the door at York Hall in Bethnal Green before his fights, was finally on the verge of stardom after his breakthrough win against Billam-Smith at the O2 arena, but injuries and a dispute with his former management team meant he spent the next two years out of the ring. Billam-Smith capitalised and clinched the world title against the 2016 Olympic bronze-medal winner, Lawrence Okolie.

Riakporhe was hardly idle during his spell of inactivity, though. He relocated to Loughborough University, where he sparred with Anthony Joshua and now trains alongside Frazer Clarke, the heavyweight, while Olympic champion swimmer Adam Peaty has also become a friend and source of inspiration. Then Riakporhe was scouted by a modelling agent in 2022, who asked if she could pitch him to Burberry. Within a few days he was asked to do a practice catwalk and hired for a global campaign. “I thought it was a joke, but it actually happened,” he says, laughing.

That career avenue thrust Riakporhe into an echelon of society so far removed from the Aylesbury Estate it was hard for anyone to comprehend last week when a picture surfaced online of Madonna sitting on his lap, sparking rumours that the pair are in a relationship. Riakporhe confirms they are not, describing the pop icon as “a friend”, but claims she may attend his fight. “She's a lovely human being. We met at a fashion party and I became close to her,” he says. “Every time she came to London for a show, she'd invite me and I'd go and support her. That's it really. She's such a down-to-earth person. I was getting messages from [her fans] all over the world.”

Riakporhe is keen to move on to the messages he truly treasures. There are dozens on his phone from concerned parents, thanking him for being a role model to their sons.

“Some of the youth at exclusion units I've been to have turned their lives around because of the talks I gave them and they are completely different people now,” he says. “It makes me realise that my life has a purpose and to keep on this path.”

# EAT.DRINK.LOVE

## MARK POUGATCH

The TV presenter on not drinking tea until he was 22 and baking sourdough



### EAT MY FAVOURITE MEAL

Sunday roast. Roast lamb, cranberry jelly which I’ve made, roast potatoes I’ve grown and kale, although it was designed for cows. I love a carrot too. The others in the family like cauliflower cheese, so I’m happy to wave that through. For starters, prawns or tuna. A crème brûlée or a pavlova to finish. A bloody Mary to drink, followed by a very nice red. A 25-mile run afterwards.

### MY FAVOURITE RESTAURANT

Thai Shire in Chipping Norton. It’s a great seam of family get-togethers and important moments. It does what it says on the tin. They’re incredibly friendly and they know who we are, but only because people don’t forget a weird surname.

### MY DREAM DINNER PARTY

Shane Warne. I knew him a little bit. My late dad, Michael. He was enormous fun, very gregarious, but

Warne and Pougatch’s dad were both leg spinners



he missed so much of my life, my sister’s life and all our kids. He was a cricket nut who died not knowing who Warne was. He was a leg spinner, albeit of a different class. They’d have so much to talk about. Anne Boleyn. I’m so fascinated about the machinations of her family and how they used her to get into the court, before Henry VIII used her to produce a male heir and split with Rome. She was quite bright, but she was a pawn. Vincent van Gogh. Every time I go to Amsterdam I visit the Van Gogh Museum. His paintings are unbelievable. My favourite is *The Potato Eaters*: it’s so moving, poignant and wonderful. Eric Morecambe, after watching him on Saturday nights before *Match of the Day* with my dad. Even looking at him makes me laugh.

### DRINK MY FAVOURITE TIPPLE

Alcoholic: vodka and tonic. My grandfather was a Ukrainian-Jewish immigrant who came to this country aged 15/16 and we’re still the only UK Pougatches. So it’s Ukrainian, Finnish or Scandinavian vodka — never Russian after Putin’s thuggery — with a slice of lemon and lots of ice. Non-alcoholic: builder’s tea. I had never drunk tea or coffee until I joined my first newsroom, aged 22. Now I drink far too much. Nobody bothers asking me if I want one, they just give it to me.

### MY WORST HANGOVER

After England beat Denmark 3-0 in Niigata at the 2002 World Cup. I went to a bar with Terry Butcher, one of the greatest men on the planet. Two England fans emerged from the loo with toilet roll wrapped around

their heads in homage and it went on until Terry phoned my wife to say I was in a ditch. The next day was spent lying in one of those very small baths Japanese hotels have.

### LOVE MY FAVOURITE FILM

*Arthur*. The first 20 minutes are the funniest 20 minutes of any film. Dudley Moore is on sensational form. He’s drunk, his date’s eating fish: “I’m having another drink, do you want another fish?”

### MY FAVOURITE TV SERIES

*Mr Bates Vs The Post Office* gripped me in a way I hadn’t anticipated. I watched it twice because I couldn’t believe what I was seeing.

### MY FAVOURITE POP GROUP

Oasis. I know it’s incredibly middle of the road, but I love listening to them with my youngest daughter. I’ve promised her we’ll see them when they re-form. And they will.

### MY FAVOURITE ALBUM

AC/DC’s *Back in Black*. *You Shook Me All Night Long* is my favourite song of all time and every time I play it, I think of my late mum shouting upstairs “will you turn that bloody row off”. I’ve been to AC/DC Lane in Melbourne.

### MY FAVOURITE BOOK

Tim Marshall’s *Prisoners of Geography*. He’s a brilliant journalist. I love him on foreign affairs, I love geography and I love accumulating knowledge.

### MY GUILTY PLEASURE

Since lockdown I’ve been baking sourdough bread. Making it takes 24 hours and I love shifting my brain into a completely different sphere. John Aizlewood

# Today’s racecards

## Goodwood

Going: good-good to firm in places Racing TV

Thunderer’s tips: 2.10 Toimy Son 2.45 Principality 3.20 Hettie Jack 3.55 Sea Just In Time 4.30 Hedonista (nap) 5.05 Aimeric 5.40 Change Sings

**2.10 WILLIAM HILL EPIC BOOST HANDICAP** £12,885: 7F (9)  
1 (3)040-60 **FINN’S CHARM** 9 (D) C Johnston 4-10-2 J Fanning  
2 (9)00-302 **TOIMY SON** 16 (D) D Menuisier 5-9-13 Kyle Strydom  
3 (7)15-304 **SIR WINSTON** 114 (D) G Baker 5-9-11 P Cosgrave  
4 (4) 21114 **CEPHALUS** 57 (B,D) G & J Moore 5-9-11 T P Queally  
5 (8)5-0650 **DARKNESS** 9 (V,D) D O’Meara 6-9-8 D Tudhope  
6 (1) 1035-0 **SON OF MAN** 15 J Chapple-Hyam 3-9-6 David Egan  
7 (6)60-004 **RACINGBREAKS RYDER** 16 (D) C Hills 4-9-6 W Buick  
8 (2) 5314-0 **SPEEDING BULLET** 9 (D) R Hannan 3-8-9 A Voikhansky (3)  
9 (5) 243 **FARENHEIT SEVEN** 19 M Usher 3-8-2 T Heard (3)  
Betting: 9-2 Toimy Son, 5-1 Racingbreaks Ryder, 11-2 Finn’s Charm, Son Of Man, 6-1 Speeding Bullet, 7-1 Darkness, Cephalus, 12-1 others

**2.45 HALLGARTEN & NOVUM WINES / BRITISH EBF NOVICE STAKES** £10,468: 6F (8)  
1 (8) **ABSTRACT ART** G Boughey 9-7 W Buick  
2 (3) **BILLBOARD STAR** E J-Houghton 9-7 C Bishop  
3 (4) 3 **CARRADOS** 12 (BF) A Watson 9-7 James Doyle  
4 (7) 6 **MYTHICAL COMPOSER** 24 C Cox 9-7 Rossa Ryan  
5 (1) 2 **PRINCIPALITY** 21 R Hannan 9-7 O Murphy  
6 (6) 0 **RARE CHANGE** 24 R Hughes 9-7 F Marsh  
7 (5) 0 **THE OUTLAW** 24 R Beckett 9-7 H Crouch  
8 (2) **VICTORY SOUND** C Hills 9-7 T Marquand  
Betting: 7-4 Principality, 4-1 Carrados, 5-1 Abstract Art, 6-1 The Outlaw, 10-1 Billboard Star, Victory Sound, 16-1 Mythical Composer, 20-1 others

**3.20 WILLIAM HILL LENGTHEN YOUR ODDS SELLING STAKES** £10,468: 5F (8)  
1 (2) 042 **CLAY SHOVELER** 55 (H) P Evans 9-1 O Murphy  
2 (8) 333 **COILED** 39 (BF) E J-Houghton 9-1 C Bishop  
3 (4) 1 **I LOVE DAD** J Osborne 9-1 D Muscett  
4 (5) 044 **ROYSDelight** 15 P Evans 9-1 Rossa Ryan  
5 (1) 240 **ASHEN GLOW** 27 (P) A Watson 8-10 H Doyle  
6 (7) 0 **BRIGHT ERA** 51 J S Moore 8-10 Georgia Dobie (3)  
7 (6) 52 **DOUBLE O ONE** 12 (BF) J Channon 8-10 D Probert  
8 (3) 4 **HETTIE JACK** 22 G Scott 8-10 D Keenan  
Betting: 2-1 Double O One, 10-3 Coiled, 5-1 Clay Shoveler, 6-1 Roydelight, Hettie Jack, 10-1 Ashen Glow, 25-1 others

**3.55 WEATHERBYS / BRITISH EBF AGNES KEYSER FILLIES’ STAKES (LISTED)** £39,697: 1M 2F (9)  
1 (2) 110-04 **AMBIENTE AMIGO** 15 (H) James Owen 9-2 O Murphy  
2 (8) 2-25 **BEELEY** 32 (B) J & T Gosden 9-2 K Shoemark

3 (9) 25-513 **BOLSENA** 23 K Ryan 9-2 James Doyle  
4 (7) 4051-1 **LAVA STREAM** 38 (H) D O’Meara 9-2 D Tudhope  
5 (6) 245-21 **LOVE YOU DARLING** 16 (D) B Brookhouse 9-2 A Rawlinson  
6 (5) 6-1 **NAKHEEL** 30 (T,D) Owen Burrows 9-2 W Buick  
7 (1) 1 **SEA JUST IN TIME** 37 (D) W Haggas 9-2 T Marquand  
8 (3)410-30 **SEAWARD** 9 R Beckett 9-2 H Crouch  
9 (4) 621-45 **STRUTTING** 16 J & T Gosden 9-2 S Foley  
Betting: 4-5 Sea Just In Time, 6-1 Bolsena, 13-2 Nakheel, 8-1 Beeley, 10-1 Seaward, 12-1 Ambiente Amigo, 33-1 others

**4.30 ROD GASKIN GARDEN MACHINERY HANDICAP** £12,885: 2M (11)  
1 (1)20-405 **FLEURMAN** 59 (B,D) O Murphy 6-9-11 K Shoemark  
2 (3)0-000 **SPIRIT MIXER** 30 (P) A Balding 6-9-10 O Murphy  
3 (1)63RR-0 **ALRIGHT SUNSHINE** 24 (V) M Murphy & M Keady 9-9-6 D Keenan  
4 (4)4053-4 **VINO VICTRIX** 16 (CD) H Morrison 6-9-6 B Sayette  
5 (5) 114-40 **YORKINDNESS** 15 (D) C Johnston 5-9-1 J Fanning  
6 (6)0-0033 **CRESCENT LAKE** 15 (C) G & J Moore 7-9-1 T P Queally  
7 (9)32453 **TENERIFE SUNSHINE** 19 (P) C Johnston 4-9-1 James Doyle  
8 (7)6-0000 **SIR CHAUVELIN** 72 (C,D) J Goldie 12-9-0 David Egan  
9 (8) /6130- **TRONADOR** J28 D Murphy 8-8-12 S D Bowen (5)  
10 (10)3041-2 **HEDONISTA** 30 (T,D) E Walker 4-8-11 T Marquand  
11 (2) 12-225 **TRADESMAN** 21 (B,D) D M Simcock 5-8-9 H Turner  
Betting: 10-3 Hedonista, 4-1 Tronador, 11-2 Crescent Lake, 6-1 Vino Victrix, 13-2 Tenerife Sunshine, 10-1 Spirit Mixer, Yorkindness, 14-1 others

**5.05 WILLIAM HILL TAPSTER STAKES (LISTED)** £39,697: 1M 4F (5)  
1 (2) 1001-1 **AIMERIC** 29 (D) R Varian 5-9-3 James Doyle  
2 (3) /404-4 **DEAUVILLE LEGEND** 31 (B,D) J Ferguson 5-9-3 D Muscett  
3 (4)23-452 **KING OF CONQUEST** 22 (P,C) C Appleby 5-9-3 W Buick  
4 (1)660003 **PASSION AND GLORY** 16 (CD) S bin Suroor 8-9-3 O Murphy  
5 (5) 1/204- **THREE PRIESTS** 350 (D) R Varian 5-8-12 J Mitchell  
Betting: 6-4 King Of Conquest, 7-4 Aimeric, 7-2 Deauville Legend, 10-1 Passion And Glory, 33-1 Three Priests

**5.40 RACEHORSE SHARES FROM 45 AT RACINGCLUB.COM HANDICAP** £10,808: 6F (8)  
1 (5)0-0051 **RHYTHM N HOOVES** 9 (B,D) A Watson 4-10-1 H Doyle  
2 (4) 15-611 **CHANGE SINGS** 11 (D) E J-Houghton 4-9-12 G Downing  
3 (2) /420-5 **INGRA TOR** 42 (D) J Channon 5-9-11 D Probert  
4 (3)005-21 **HAYMAKER** 29 (D) H Morrison 5-9-9 R Hornby  
5 (6)00-604 **DANGER ALERT** 114 (V,D) G Baker 4-9-8 P Cosgrave  
6 (7)340-06 **EMINENCY** 8 (T,D) S C Williams 4-9-7 Rossa Ryan  
7 (1)000-40 **MISTER BLUEBIRD** 29 (P,C,D) H Main 6-9-1 J Mitchell  
8 (8)40-010 **TEMPLE BRUER** 29 (P,T,D) M Murphy & M Keady 6-9-10 Murphy  
Betting: 3-1 Haymaker, 7-2 Change Sings, 9-2 Rhythm N Hooves, 5-1 Ingra Tor, Eminency, 14-1 others

## Perth

Going: good Racing TV

Thunderer’s tips: 1.27 Bishop Hill 1.57 Dapper Gent 2.32 Malangen (nb) 3.07 God’s Own Getaway 3.42 Ballygriffin Cottage 4.17 Giovanni Change 4.52 Euchan Falls 5.27 Paddy Elvis

**1.27 BET365 NOVICES’ HURDLE** £4,225: 2M 4F (9)  
1 /03-13 **CLODDERS DREAM** 7 G Elliott (Ire) 6-11-8 S Ewing  
2 PPT-12 **BUY SOME TIME** 13 (P) R M Smith 6-11-1 C Bewley  
3 5/5-2 **HIGHLAND FASHION** 321 Duncan 5-11-1 C O’Farrell  
4 /643-6 **THE JEWELLER’S PET** 241 Duncan 5-11-1 Sean Quinlan

5 6522-3 **BISHOP HILL** 25 (H,BF) L Russell 5-10-8 P W Wadge (3)  
6 6F- **KIMJOY** 46 S Crawford (Ire) 5-10-8 B Hughes  
7 /2100- **MONGIBELLO** 59 S Crawford (Ire) 6-10-8 J J Slevin  
8 0/46-0 **TREAD SOFTLY NOW** 25 I Duncan 5-10-8 D R Fox  
9 0 **BLEU LAGUNE** 25 S Crawford (Ire) 4-10-2 S Bowen  
Betting: 2-1 Clodders Dream, 11-4 Bishop Hill, 4-1 Kimjoy, 6-1 Mongibello, 10-1 Highland Fashion, 14-1 Bleu Lagune, 16-1 Buy Some Time, 50-1 others

**1.57 BET365 NOVICES’ LIMITED HANDICAP HURDLE** £4,225: 2M (10)  
1 /4500- **LEMOINE** 65 J Ewart 5-11-12 B Hughes  
2 0200-4 **MARTY MCFLY** 22 (BF) A M Thomson 6-11-8 R Mania  
3 52/PP- **BLUE CLOVER** 51 (P,T) Lizzie Quinlan 6-11-7 Sean Quinlan  
4 00502- **NORTHERN CARDINAL** 45 L Russell 5-11-4 D R Fox  
5 6P600- **ONE STEP UP** 44 W Coltherd 6-11-4 S Coltherd  
6 /60-22 **DAPPER GENT** 22 (T) M Barnes 7-11-1 D McMenamin  
7 2000-0 **HEART ABOVE** 30 (BF) D Sayer 6-10-10 H Brooke  
8 5430-5 **DON’T LOOK BACK** 24 W Young Jnr 6-10-6 A Doyle (5)  
9 00453- **FOXWOOD** 174 (P) G Bewley 6-10-5 P J Kavanagh (3)  
10 FP/P-0 **STAR OF MARKINCH** 30 H Graham & G Rutherford 8-10-5 B Lynn (3)  
Betting: 11-4 Northern Cardinal, 7-2 Marty Mcfly, 5-1 Dapper Gent, 6-1 Lemoine, 8-1 Foxwood, Heart Above, 12-1 others

**2.32 BET365 HANDICAP HURDLE** £5,281: 2M (13)  
1 3P30-0 **INFERNO SACREE** 24 (B,C,D) N Hawke 6-12-0Miss E Herbinson (7)  
2 143P0- **BELLE OF ANNANDALE** 51 (P,CD) A Keatley 5-11-13 B Hughes  
3 15000- **CARRAREA** 99 (T,D) H McMahon 7-11-12 E Austin (5)  
4 /2416- **KILBRAINY** 234 (BF) A M Thomson 8-11-12 R Mania  
5 /500-3 **KINBARA FIRSTDRAFT** 234 S Crawford (Ire) 5-11-9 J J Slevin  
6 10F06- **BIX BEIDERBECKE** 92 (H,CD) L Russell 6-11-7 P W Wadge (3)  
7 00U34- **BURGUNDY MAN** 1094 R M Smith 7-11-2 Ben Smith (7)  
8 640-0 **MUHTALUZA** 74 (C) G Elliott (Ire) 5-11-2 S Ewing  
9 660- **ALDBOURNE** 73 L Russell 5-11-2 Craig Nichol  
10 4543-4 **MALANGEN** 8 (CD) Miss L Harrison 9-10-10 P J Kavanagh (3)  
11 25030- **THATS JET** 44 (P,T) D Bourke 4-10-12 C Bewley  
12 0660-0 **DARKEST DAY** 19 (P,T,D) W Young Jnr 9-10-6 D R Fox  
13 P126P- **SOLWAY MOLLY** 200 (D) Miss L Harrison 9-10-6 Conor Rabbitt (5)  
Betting: 7-2 Kinbara Firstdraft, 4-1 Kilbrainy, 5-1 Muhtaluza, 7-1 Solway Molly, Aldbourne, 12-1 Burgundy Man, Belle Of Annandale, 14-1 others

**3.07 BET365 PERTH SILVER CUP HANDICAP CHASE** £10,562: 2M 4F (9)  
1 04250- **FRANCY DU BERLAIS** 58 (P,T,D) P & M Bowen 11-12-21 Bowen  
2 21500- **PRESENTANDCOUNTING** 30 (CD) D McCain 10-12-28 Hughes  
3 4416/0 **MOTOWIN MAGGIE** 23 (P,D) G Elliott (Ire) 7-12-0 S Ewing  
4 P220-5 **PARISENCORE** 32 N Richards 8-11-11 D McMenamin  
5 0042-1 **FIX AT ALL** 27 (D) N Mulholland 8-11-10 R McLennan  
6 P1414- **FINDTHETIME** 46 W Coltherd 8-11-6 S Coltherd  
7 3330-0 **GANAPATHI** 22 (T,D) A M Thomson 8-11-4 R Mania  
8 431-21 **GOD’S OWN GETAWAY** 17 (D) D Skelton 6-11-0 H Skelton  
9 P505-2 **PLANNED PARADISE** 33 (P,B,F,D) Christian Williams 8-10-6 J Tudor  
Betting: 11-4 God’s Own Getaway, 9-2 Fix At All, 6-1 Planned Paradise, 13-2 Pariscore, 10-1 Motowin Maggie, Presentandcounting, 12-1 others

**3.42 BET365 PERTH GOLD CUP HANDICAP CHASE** £17,690: 3M (8)  
1 31152- **HANG IN THERE** 53 E Lavelle 10-12-0 J A Anderson (3)  
2 22-421 **DUFFLE COAT** 13 (P) G Elliott (Ire) 7-11-5 S Ewing  
3 3P03-1 **KARL PHILIPPE** 34 (T,D) F O’Brien 9-11-4 J Hogan (3)

4 P520-3 **BALLYGRIFINCOTTAGE** 36 (P,T,BF) D Skelton 9-11-3H Skelton  
5 40/P-3 **GOLD CUP BAILLY** 34 (P,T,D) S Crawford (Ire) 8-11-2J J Slevin  
6 325P-U **DEFINITE PLAN** 13 (B) G Elliott (Ire) 12-10-12 J Bowen  
7 242P-2 **SAINT ARVANS** 22 (T,CD) M Barnes 10-10-5Conor Rabbitt (5)  
8 1/P4-1 **STATUARIO** 24 (CD) P & M Bowen 9-10-4 S Bowen  
Betting: 7-2 Hang In There, 4-1 Ballygriffin Cottage, Karl Philippe, 5-1 Duffie Coat, 7-1 Statuario, 8-1 Saint Arvans, 12-1 others

**4.17 BET BOOST AT BET365 HANDICAP CHASE** £6,337: 3M (12)  
1 122PP- **UNIVERSAL FOLLY** 44 (D) W Coltherd 9-12-2 S Coltherd  
2 34P4-0 **HALF SHOT** 17 (D) J Jardine 10-12-2 D Johnston (5)  
3 PP22-3 **GIOVANNI CHANGE** 30 M Walford 9-12-1 T Midgley (3)  
4 60061- **CAP DU NORD** 70 (P,D) Christian Williams 11-12-1 J Tudor  
5 11220- **WASDELL DUNDALK** 197 (CD) Miss L Harrison 9-11-13 D McMenamin  
6 1320-1 **NO REGRETS** 32 (V,D) N Richards 10-11-8 Sean Quinlan  
7 0P40-6 **BRANDY MCQUEEN** 32 (T) H Graham & G Rutherford 7-11-7 Craig Nichol  
8 3112P- **VICTORY ECHO** 123 (T,CD) M Barnes 11-10-13Conor Rabbitt (5)  
9 04042- **GENERAL PROBUS** 569 Christian Williams 10-10-11R T Dunne  
10 1440-2 **EVERYDAY CHAMPAGNE** 32 (P,D) N Alexander 8-10-11 B Lynn (3)  
11 P030-6 **CARDAMON HILL** 13 (P) D Sayer 7-10-7 H Brooke  
12 3-3223 **TOUCAN SAM** 14 (T) A B Hamilton 6-10-7 A Doyle (5)  
Betting: 4-1 No Regrets, 6-1 Everyday Champagne, Cap Du Nord, 7-1 General Probus, 10-1 others

**4.52 EACH WAY EXTRA AT BET365 HANDICAP HURDLE (DIV 1)** £4,225: 3M (11)  
1 250-0P **HAVEYOUGOTMONEY** 19 (P,D) Paul Robson 6-12-0D Johnston (5)

# Results

## CRICKET

**T20 World Cup: Group C: Providence, Guyana** Afghanistan 159-6 (R Gurbaz 80); New Zealand 75 (15.2 overs: F Farooqi 4-17, R Khan 4-17). Afghanistan (2pts) won by 84 runs. **Group D: Long Island, New York** Netherlands 103-9 (SA Engelbrecht 40; O Baartman 4-11), South Africa 106-6 (18.5 overs: D Miller 59 no). South Africa (2pts) won by four wickets. **Dallas Sri Lanka** 124-9 (P Nissanka 47); Bangladesh 125-8 (18 overs: T Hridoy 40; N Thushara 4-18). Bangladesh (2pts) won by two wickets. **Vitality Blast: North group: Edgbaston** Durham 194-9 (D Bedlingham 63); Birmingham Bears 168 (18.4 overs: J Berrill 50; B A Raine 5-21). Durham (2pts) won by 26 runs. **Charlotte Edwards Cup: Edgbaston** Northern Diamonds 137-7 (H Armistage 62; H Baker 3-24); Central Sparks 124-8. Diamonds (4pts) won by 13 runs.

# Sport in brief

## SINFIELD DEDICATES WIN TO BURROW

### Sports book of the year

Kevin Sinfield dedicated his double victory in the Charles Tyrwhitt Sports Book Awards to his best friend Rob Burrow, after his death this week at the age of 41. Sinfield’s autobiography, *The Extra Mile*, picked up the sports bestseller award and overall sports book of the year prize. The awards are in association with The Sunday Times.

The Sunday Times columnist and former England captain Lawrence Dallaglio won the rugby book of the year award for *The Boys of Winter*, which he co-wrote with the Times chief sports writer Owen Slot. Simon Wilde, the Sunday Times cricket correspondent, won the Heartaches’ cricket book of the year for *The Tour*.

Other winners included Chris Kamara, in the autobiography of the year category.

## SODERBERG EIGHT SHOTS CLEAR

### Golf

Home favourite Sebastian Soderberg heads into the final round of the Volvo Car Scandinavian Mixed with a commanding eight-shot lead as he looks to convert his fine recent form into a first DP World Tour win since 2019. The 33-year-old Swede came into his home event having recorded three top-three finishes and made the cut at the US PGA Championship in his past four starts.

2 65/42- **FEVER DREAM** 86 (T,BF) Christian Williams 6-11-9 J Tudor  
3 4242-2 **EUCHAN FALLS** 25 (V,BF) R M Smith 7-11-8 D McMenamin  
4 P46-3P **WARRIORS STORY** 19 (P,T,BF) N Alexander 8-11-5 B Lynn (3)  
5 1/PP-0 **THE BLAME GAME** 32 J Ewart 10-11-3 B Hughes  
6 2P30-P **SPUTNIK** 25 Mrs J Stephen 9-11-2 J Hamilton  
7 6435-5 **REAGROVE LORD** 19 (T) G Bewley 6-11-0 E Austin (5)  
8 0060-2 **DEQUALL** 198 (C) Miss L Harrison 8-10-6 P J Kavanagh (3)  
9 45/PO- **MRINDEPENDANT** 225 (T) M Barnes 7-10-4 Conor Rabbitt (5)  
10 40/OP **BOLT MAN** 19 (P) J Duncan 6-10-3 C Maggs (7)  
11 PP0P-6 **MIDNIGHT ALNICKY** 25 (P) A Nichol 6-10-2 D R Fox  
Betting: 9-4 Fever Dream, 7-2 Dequall, 5-1 Euchan Falls, 6-1 Warriors Story, 12-1 Haveyoutgotmoney, 14-1 The Blame Game, 16-1 others

**5.27 EACH WAY EXTRA AT BET365 HANDICAP HURDLE (DIV 2)** £4,225: 3M (10)  
1 /P00-3 **DIAMOND STATE** 25 (P,T) L Russell 8-12-0 A Doyle (5)  
2 030-52 **PADDY ELVIS** 16 (P) S Crawford (Ire) 5-11-12 J J Slevin  
3 4104-6 **PAMMI** 24 (B,CD) J Goldie 9-11-8 H Reed  
4 64244- **DALILEO** 198 (C) Miss L Harrison 9-11-8 P J Kavanagh (3)  
5 6505-4 **RIVER Ayr** 25 (BF) R M Smith 6-11-6 Ben Smith (7)  
6 5/36-4 **MAURA JEANNE** 25 (BF) J Duncan 7-11-3 C O’Farrell  
7 3/06-6 **BULLION BOSS** 32 (V,D) N Richards 8-10-13 Sean Quinlan  
8 6PP-65 **METHUSALAR** 11 (P,BF) P & M Bowen 8-10-9 S Bowen  
9 2435-3 **WATCHOUTTITSCOOKIE** 25 (BF) N Hawke 6-10-6 Miss E Herbinson (7)  
10 P/50-0 **JOANNA I’M FINE** 25 (D) Mrs J Stephen 7-10-6 D Johnston (5)  
Betting: 9-4 Paddy Elvis, 9-2 River Ayr, 6-1 Diamond State, 8-1 Methusalar, 10-1 Watchouttitcookie, Dalileo, 12-1 others

## Football

**International matches** Hungary 3 Israel 0; Sweden 0 Serbia 3; Switzerland 1 Austria 1.

## GOLF

**US PGA Memorial Tournament** (Dublin, Ohio): **Leaders after two rounds** (US unless stated): **135 S** Scheffler 67 68. **138 A** Hadwin (Can) 66 72, V Hovland (Nor) 69 69. **139 C** Bezuidenhout (SA) 72 67, K Bradley 70 69. **140 L** Aaberg (Swe) 68 72. **LIV Golf Houston: Leading first-round scores** (US unless stated): **65 A** Meronk (Pol), M Kaymer (Ger), C Surratt. **66 K** Na, C Ortiz (Mex). **67 M** Leishman (Aus), J Niemann (China), D Johnson, S Garcia (Sp), P Reed, P Casey (Eng), I Poulter (Eng). **68 D** Puig (Sp), M Jones (Aus). **Volvo Car Scandinavian Mixed Open** (Helsingborg): **Leaders after three rounds** (GB and Ire unless stated): **195 S** Soederberg (Swe) 63 66 66. **203 C** Hill 69 67 67. **204** -A Hewson 69 68 67, A Bjork (Swe) 69 67 68, S Tarrío (Sp) 71 68 65. **ShopRite LPGA Classic** (Galloway, New Jersey): **Leading first-round scores** (US unless stated): **61 A**

Yubai (Thai). **63 N** Shin (S Kor). **64** An Na-rin (S Kor). **65 N** Hataoka (Japan), M Khang, S Kyriacou (Aus), A Valenzuela (Switz), Hsu Wei-ling (Tai), B Lincicome, Lee Jeong-eun (S Kor).

## RUGBY LEAGUE

**Betfred Challenge Cup final** Warrington 8 Wigan 18. **AB Sundicks 1895 Cup final** Sheffield 6 Wakefield 50. **Women’s Betfred Challenge Cup final** Leeds 0 St Helens 22.

## RUGBY UNION

**Gallagher Premiership final** Northampton 25 Bath 21. **United Rugby Championship: Play-off quarter-finals** Bulls 30 Benetton 23; Leinster 43 Ulster 20.

## TENNIS

**French Open** (Roland Garros, Paris; seeds in brackets): **Finals: Men:** **Doubles** (9) M Arevalo (El Salvador) and M Pavic (Cro) bt (11) S Bollelli (It) and A Vavassori (It) 7-5 6-3. **Women: Singles** (1) I Swiatek (Pol) bt (12) J Paolini (It) 6-2 6-1.

## Rugby League Challenge Cup final

## Wigan claim full set at tearful Wembley



Warrington Wolves

8



Wigan Warriors

18

Ross Heppenstall

A record-extending 21st Challenge Cup for Wigan Warriors ensured that all four pieces of silverware are now under lock and key in their bulging trophy cabinet.

Matt Peet's men won the League Leaders' Shield and Super League last autumn before beating the NRL champions Penrith Panthers in the World Club Challenge in February.

Now rugby league's oldest and most famous trophy is back in their possession after a dominant victory over Sam Burgess's Warrington Wolves at an emotionally fraught Wembley.

Bevan French, typically, took centre stage with a superb display that earned him the Lance Todd Trophy as man of the match. That felt apt on a day when rugby league united to pay tribute to Rob Burrow, the former Leeds Rhinos, Great Britain and England scrum half, who died on Sunday after a 4½-year battle with motor neurone disease (MND).

French, the Australian playmaker, lost his mother to the same illness in January 2022 but was at his mercurial best to inspire Wigan to yet another trophy.

Draped in the Aboriginal flag after the game, he said: "A couple of years ago I lost my mum to the same thing, so, with what happened with Rob, it's been an emotional week.

"We were sitting down at the start of the week talking about what we could accomplish as a group. Not too many teams have gone Grand Final, League Leaders, World Club and then this. It was a main focus for us and a bit of motivation. It's going to take a bit to sink in – all the trophies, so let's



Wigan lifted their fourth trophy of the campaign on an emotional day at Wembley, where tributes were paid to Burrow, right



sit back and enjoy it for a few days."

Peet, who is presiding over a renaissance at Wigan, said: "Today is special because it's at Wembley. Winning it at Tottenham [two years ago] was special because it was at Tottenham, but we'll enjoy this and keep trying to get better – it never feels like we're done.

"I just like working with this lot. I love them to bits and I'm very proud of them. We don't worry about even the trophies, it's great but it's just another day to try and be our best."

Wembley united to honour the memory of Burrow and Peet added: "It's impossible to make a fitting tribute; one try won't do it, one game won't do it. Our thoughts are with his family. I've never known a more respected man in this sport or any other."

There was no fairytale for former dual-code England international Burgess, who put the performance down to a "bad day at the office".

Burgess, who lost his father Mark to MND in 2007 at the age of 45, said: "We've a young squad with 12 players who had never played in finals. It's experience for us as a group with a new coach and you'd like to think we'll do better next time.

"I wouldn't say we froze, but probably the occasion got to us a bit. We didn't perform like we had all year. Bevan French is a great player and Wigan are a champion team."

There was a minute's silence before kick-off, which was moved to 3.07pm, and a minute's applause in the seventh minute of the game, in recognition of the No 7 jersey that Burrow wore with such distinction.

The Wigan prop Mike Cooper and the Warrington full back Matt Dufty were both sent to the sin-bin early on, before the Warriors took the lead when French sent a teasing grubber-kick behind the Wolves defence.

Zach Eckersley, a 6ft 3in homegrown centre with only a handful of senior appearance to his name, arrived at pace to ground the ball. A second try came in the 23rd minute when French collected a short pass from his half-back partner Harry Smith and more fine footwork took him over the line.

In the 56th minute Wigan's victory was assured when their long-serving captain, Liam Farrell, showed impressive pace to break Warrington's line and cross inside the left channel. Smith added his third conversion, but Warrington

briefly threatened a comeback when Dufty touched down to cap a period of pressure.

Wigan, though, were not to be denied Challenge Cup glory once again as they ran out worthy victors. ● St Helens women's team won the Challenge Cup for a fourth successive season after beating Leeds Rhinos 22-0.

**Warrington Wolves** M Dufty (sin-bin 4-14); J Thewlis, T King, R Tai, M Ashton; G Williams, J Drinkwater; J Harrison, D Walker, P Vaughan, M Nicholson, L Fitzgibbon, B Currie. **Interchange** Z Musgrove, J Bullock, J Crowther, S Powell. **Wigan Warriors** J Field; A Miski, Z Eckersley, J Wardle, L Marshall; B French, H Smith; M Cooper (sin-bin 2-12, B O'Neill, L Thompson, J Nsemba, L Farrell, K Ellis. **Interchange** E Havard, L Byrne, P Mago, K Leeming. **Referee** C Kendall. **Attendance** 64,485.

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## Sport

## David Walsh

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER



# Ignoring biological realities is dishonest and dangerous

Last week I began reading Doriane Coleman's recently published book *On Sex and Gender – A Commonsense Approach*. I was drawn to the book because Coleman was once an elite-level 800m runner, a Swiss national champion and is now a professor of law at Duke University in the US. In the early 1980s, when Coleman was at the peak of her running career, it was hard for clean female athletes to beat doped rivals.

Coleman and her clean contemporaries may as well have been banging their heads against a stone wall. The East Germans were dominant. Don't spend too long wondering why females benefited more from doping than males: male hormones such as testosterone and anabolic steroids have a greater impact on the performances of females. The former German Democratic Republic ran the most sophisticated doping programme in the history of sport and, for a time, its women dominated.

More recently, Russia discovered the same phenomenon. Doped females delivered more medals.

Coleman had some experience of the difficulties. On a July afternoon in Munich in 1983, she competed in an international 800m race. Lined up against her was the 32-year-old Jarmila Kratochvilova. Long before they reached the 400m mark, the bell had tolled for every other runner in the race, including Coleman, who eventually finished third.

By then the Czech athlete was disappearing into the distance. Her winning time, 1min 53.28sec, was a world record. Forty-one years on, Kratochvilova's record still stands. Some athletics people believe it will endure for decades to come. It is the oldest record in her sport. Coleman's memory of the race? "We knew it was two races in one race. All of us started with the same dream but it was only available to half the competitors. The rest of us had to change our goals from medals and titles to personal bests. The anti-doping culture wasn't robust back then. You'd be asked, 'Are you OK to be tested?' We assumed others were doping."

Evidence has shown the Czech authorities ran a doping programme and Kratochvilova's name shows up in a list of athletes pre-tested before competing internationally, which was standard practice in countries that systematically doped. Kratochvilova

“

**The IOC asks us to refer to DSD athletes simply as women. It is thought police gone mad**

has always insisted that she never did so and says she is being judged guilty by association.

Coleman received an athletics scholarship to study at Villanova University and that was the path that has taken her to Duke. She became involved in the debate surrounding the participation of transgender athletes in sport, especially trans women competing in the female category. What struck me about *On Sex and Gender* is the clarity she brings to what can seem a complex conversation.

For example: "Caster Semenya's chromosomal complement is XY; she has testicles, they produce bioavailable testosterone in the normal male range; and her body masculinised through puberty – which is why, for a decade, she dominated the women's 800m on the global stage.

"Neither her particular DSD [differences of sex development] nor the decision to 'assign' her the female sex at birth changes any of this male biology. They also don't change the fact that she is a valuable human exactly as she is." Some in the transgender com-



**Kratochvilova leaves Coleman in the distance in an 800m race in 1985. The Swiss is now a professor of law, left**

munity see her as the enemy. "Coleman is a sex segregationist whose primary concern is maintaining segregationism that keeps women and girls in inferior roles in society. Of particular interest is maintaining women's subordinate place via sex-segregated competitive sport, primarily by attacking transgender athletes," is one example on the website of a transgender rights activist. This is nonsense but it is also part of the world we live in.

Last week the International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued its latest guidelines on how journalists, broadcasters and national federations should portray and refer to male, female, transgender and DSD athletes. First, though, the IOC wants us to understand that "women, like men, are not a homogeneous group, nor are they solely defined by their gender identity. Indeed, women are as different from each other as they are from men." Really!

An annex has been provided "to promote a more accurate, responsible, respectful, and inclusive coverage and communication" of any transgender athletes and athletes "with sex variations" who will be competing in the female competition category in Paris.

The IOC also asks us not to refer to DSD athletes as "biological males" but simply as women. This is the IOC's thought police gone mad. While respect for gender identity is important, this guidance makes no sense. Not only are they conflating sex and gender, they ignore the scientific facts, set out by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in the Caster Semenya case, that from puberty onwards DSD athletes produce testosterone levels in the male range (7.7 to 29.4 nmol/L) rather than the much lower female range (0.06 to 1.68 nmol/L) because they have male chromosomes and male gonads (testes, not ovaries).

Those testosterone levels give them clear physiological advantages, including bigger and stronger bones and muscles and higher levels of haemoglobin in the blood that significantly affect sports performance. Hence the need for separate male and female competition categories. This is also why World Athletics says that for purposes of sports competition it is biological sex, not gender identity, that counts, and why for the purpose of competition, it treats DSD athletes as biological males.

Failing to acknowledge biological realities, which is what the IOC is doing with its guidelines, is dishonest and dangerous. There is a section in the guidance on what the IOC calls "problematic language". They tell us we are never to say "born male", "born female", "biologically male", "biologically female" "genetically male", "genetically female", "male-to-female" and "female-to-male". Someone at the IOC has lost their senses.

Like a practised politician, the IOC hasn't taken a position on the participation of transgender and DSD athletes in its Games. That's for individual federations to determine, it says. Why get involved in what is divisive when you can simply issue guidelines promoting diversity and inclusivity? Instead of guidelines, it should just try to keep women's sport strictly for women.

# BUSINESS & MONEY

MY PLAN TO KEEP THE GREGGS 'MAGIC' INTERVIEW PAGE 4



LEGAL EAGLES HIT THE US PAGES 6



THE EARL AND THE MISSING MILLIONS MONEY PAGE 10

## Labour to close tax loophole for private equity

Caroline Wheeler and Jill Treanor

Labour is signalling that it intends to clamp down on a loophole that allows thousands of investors in private equity deals to avoid paying income tax.

The party, which is ahead in the polls, intends to spell out in its general election manifesto this week that it wants to put a halt to the current arrangement in which money made in private

equity deals is taxed as capital gains, at a rate of 28 per cent, rather than at the higher rate of income tax of 45 per cent.

Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, has estimated that she could raise up to £440 million to fund public services by changing the tax system for what is known as “carried interest” – a share of profits made by a private equity fund. It is regarded as a return on investment rather than income, so is taxed at

the capital gains rate. According to the Resolution Foundation think tank, carried interest amounts to £2 billion a year – an average gain of £1 million for the roughly 2,000 people who receive it. The Financial Times has reported a higher figure of 3,000 people involved in deal-making sharing £5 billion in carried interest in the 2022 tax year.

Labour first raised the idea of changing the tax system for carried interest in 2021. The

private equity industry has been trying to convince the party that such a move could deter big international private equity houses from investing in Britain.

But a Labour source said: “We’re going to close the tax loophole that allows private equity fund managers to pay capital gains tax on their bonuses, and tax it as income instead. This will help pay for crucial investment in our public services.”

While the industry has

been braced for a clampdown on the tax, it will be waiting for the details of any changes.

For example, the reforms could be targeted at individuals who receive carried interest even if they have not invested directly in a fund but are just part of a wider fund management team. There have also been suggestions that the tax rate on carried interest would not change for individuals who have used their own money to invest in a fund rather than

borrowed to make their investments.

The situation has caused controversy for years – and not just in Britain. Donald Trump had pledged to change the practice in America when he was running for president, but did not do so after taking office.

Other countries also treat “carried interest” as capital gains. France has a higher-end tax rate of 34 per cent, while in Italy it is 26 per cent. In Germany it is 28.5 per cent.

## Hussain ‘thrilled’ at Lynch acquittal

Laith Al-Khalaf

Mike Lynch’s former right-hand man has spoken for the first time since being released from a US prison about his ex-boss’s acquittal on fraud charges.

Sushovan Hussain, who was the chief financial officer of the software firm Autonomy, was convicted on 16 counts of securities fraud, wire fraud and conspiracy in 2018. The charges related to his role in the lead-up to the \$11 billion purchase of Autonomy by the IT giant HP in 2011.

“The world now finally knows the truth that there was no conspiracy at Autonomy,” Hussain said. “It is unfortunate that the lies and untruths told over the last 12 years prevailed for me, but at least today the travesty was not compounded.”

Lynch, once dubbed “Britain’s Bill Gates”, was accused of manipulating the company’s finances in the run-up to the deal in the hope of drawing out a larger bid. He was extradited to the US last year, but on Thursday, was acquitted on all charges, along with the company’s

former vice-president of finance, Stephen Chamberlain, after an 11-week trial. The verdict marks the end of a 12-year legal wrangle that alleged one of the largest frauds in tech history.

Hussain said: “I’m thrilled for Mike and Steve’s acquittal on all charges and for their complete vindication at the hands of the US justice system.”

In addition to his jail sentence, Hussain was fined \$4 million. At his sentencing, Judge Charles Breyer said that Hussain was a “decent person” but had “corrupted a number of innocent people”.

In 2022, after a lengthy civil fraud trial, a UK High Court judge found that Lynch and his chief financial officer had misled several parties about the health of Autonomy prior to its takeover.

Despite being cleared of the criminal charges, Lynch is still on the hook for billions in damages to be paid to HP in the civil case, although the judge has suggested that the final settlement will be much lower than first thought.

How Mike Lynch walked free, pages 2-3

## Shein set to miss out on FTSE 100

### Fast-fashion giant will not sell enough shares to enter the index

Sam Chambers and Jill Treanor

Shein is set to miss out on a place in the UK’s benchmark FTSE 100 index as City investors begin scrutinising one of the biggest and most controversial floats to hit the London market in years.

The number of shares being sold by the Singapore-based fast-fashion giant will fall short of the minimum required to qualify for inclusion in FTSE indices, according to City sources.

Stock exchange rules say that companies incorporated outside the UK must have a minimum free float of 25 per cent.

Sky News reported that Shein will file its initial public offering prospectus with the Financial Conduct Authority this month. However, a source close to the process said that the float was unlikely to take place until after August.

Shein’s ability to produce an ever-changing range of ultra-cheap clothes has taken the fashion industry by storm. The company, founded in China in 2012, has opted to pursue a float in London after its hopes of a New York listing ran aground in the face of political hostility.

Shein’s latest fundraise, which put its valuation at \$66 billion (£52 billion), implied that the fast-growing online giant may have become one of the ten largest companies in the FTSE 100. The retailer’s profits surpassed \$2 billion on sales of \$45 billion last year.

Shein is expected to raise more than £1 billion from the sale of new shares. A source close to the co-founder Sky Xu, who is estimated to own about a third of the company’s shares, said he did not intend to sell down his stake at the float.

Index tracker funds, which invest a substantial chunk of the nation’s pension savings, would not be required to hold shares in Shein should it fail to meet the criteria for index inclusion. However, investors are beginning to scrutinise Shein’s controversial business model.

Shein flies individually packaged orders directly from Chinese warehouses to consumers’ homes, which means the value of the consignments falls below the £135 threshold for import duty, levied at 12 per cent on clothes.

The Analyst, an independent researcher that shot to prominence after successful short calls on ecommerce flops such as THG and Deliveroo, warned clients that there was a “real risk” that Shein’s “unfair” tax advantages may get regulated out of existence. The firm has yet to issue a recommendation on Shein.

Shein’s opaque supply chain – it sources from about 12,000 factories in China – will be a key focus for investors.

“We need to understand how they make it economic for suppliers to produce goods for Shein,” said Kunal Kothari, a fund manager at Aviva.

“Views towards the company are probably tilted towards the negative. There will be a healthy dose of scepticism – but often the best [investment] opportunities come out of that.”

A leading City investor said that the size of the float was exciting for the UK market but the number of ESG-related controversies was “way too large”.

Shein declined to comment. In April, it said that it pays suppliers competitive rates and was committed to providing a safe and fair working environment.

## START-UP’S NOT SO TINIE



Star attraction: British rapper Tinie Tempah is one of the backers of browser start-up Gener8

A tech start-up whose investors include former Premier League manager Harry Redknapp and rapper Tinie Tempah has raised £2 million, giving it a valuation of £39 million, writes Laith Al-Khalaf.

Gener8 has built an internet browser that allows users to cash in on the data they create while browsing online.

The six-year-old company’s program gives users “points” for the data they generate while surfing the web, and these can then be exchanged

for vouchers at high street shops, such as Tesco or Greggs, or donated to charity. Gener8 collects user data, makes it anonymous, and then sells it to companies to fund these rewards.

Sam Jones, the company’s founder, came up with the concept when he was part of the advertising team at Red Bull, the energy drinks firm, and realised that large tech companies were all trading their customers’ data without compensating them.

“Ultimately, our data is

being hoovered up and sold many times every day, sometimes by companies you have never heard of. It seems like everyone is making money from your data except you,” said Jones, 32.

The average user redeems between £5 and £25 in rewards through Gener8 every month.

Alongside its own browser, the company also has software that allows its service to be used inside another browser, such as Chrome.

## ‘Third Heathrow runway is dead’

Oliver Gill in Dubai and John Arlidge in New York

Heathrow’s third runway is dead and buried because the airport’s expansion plans face unassailable challenges such as noise pollution, according to the former boss of British Airways.

Willie Walsh said the UK should focus on expansion at Gatwick instead – the airport where, it can be revealed, Sir Richard Branson is plotting a return on the 40th anniversary of Virgin Atlantic’s maiden flight.

Now head of the International Air Transport Association (Iata), the global airlines body, Walsh said: “Do I see a third runway being built at Heathrow? No, I don’t, because I think there are significant challenges for expanding Heathrow that maybe don’t exist in other hubs – its location, the issue of noise flying over London.”

He added: “You could and probably should see a second runway at Gatwick.”

Walsh, the chief executive of BA and its parent, International Airlines Group, between 2005 and 2020, also criticised Heathrow’s security screening process. “I travel all around the world,” he said. “The security check at Heathrow is the worst in the world in my experience – there is zero customer focus. You go to other airports ... you go through an efficient screening process and feel like the airport wants you.

“Or you can go through Heathrow, where it feels like they want to keep you out of the airport.”

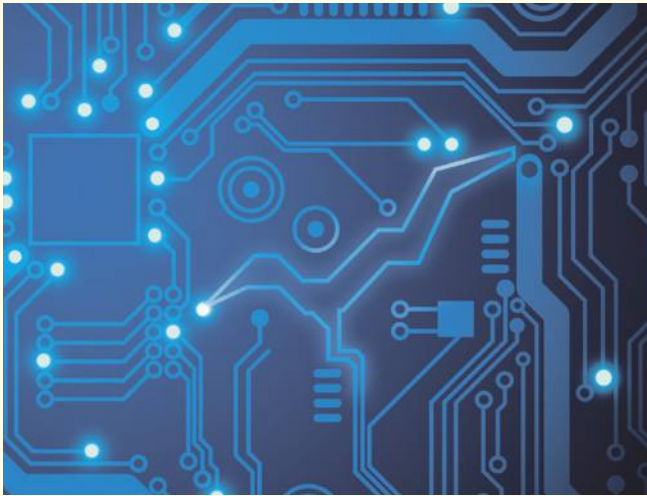
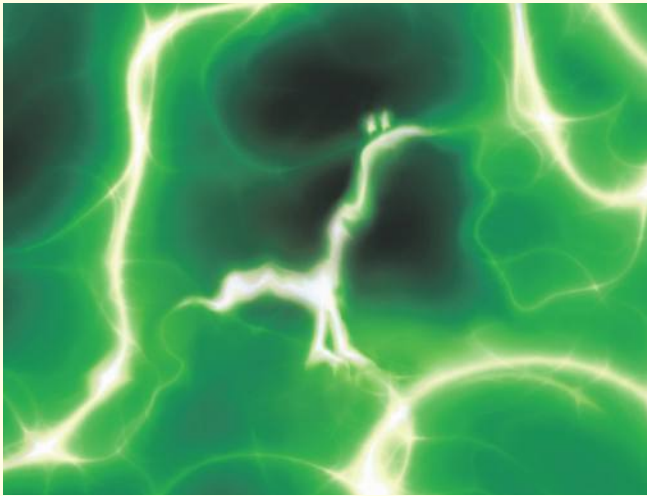
Walsh’s remarks come as Branson, 73, says in today’s Sunday Times Magazine that Virgin Atlantic will return to Gatwick four years after pulling out during Covid: “Screw it, we should do it. It matters – it’s where we started. I will twist arms.”

Virgin Atlantic moved all its services to Heathrow after the pandemic.

Magazine, pages 30-35

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# MONEY TALKS AT THE TOP

As shareholders vote on bosses’ pay, *Jill Treanor* and *Laith Al-Khalaf* look at the likely winners and losers

## THE \$56BN MAN

● **Elon Musk** will find out this week whether Tesla investors think he is worth a \$56 billion payday. His wage package is the biggest in the history of corporate America — where vast pay deals usually seem to cause little controversy.

Yet Thursday’s vote on Musk’s pay is far from straightforward. The deal was approved by investors in the pioneering electric carmaker in 2018, but overturned in January when a judge in the state of Delaware sided with a shareholder who argued that the package was too much. So it now has to be put to another vote, ahead of which the key proxy advisers are recommending blocking the deal.

Tesla chairman Robyn Denholm has warned investors that if they turn down the package, Musk could turn his attention to other ventures.



## BOOHOO FOR BOSSES

● Even before shareholders voted on pay deals at Boohoo, the company that owns Dorothy Perkins and Pretty Little Thing, the directors knew the game was up. Chief executive John Lyttle and the company’s two founders, Mahmud Kamani and **Carol Kane**, were due to receive £1 million each — but were forced to give up bonuses even before the official vote next week.

Last month, Boohoo not only pulled the bumper pay deals for the trio in the face of a mounting shareholder revolt, but also abandoned plans for an entirely new bonus scheme.

Boohoo’s full-year results last month showed that losses had widened to £160 million, compared to £90 million the year prior.



# How did Mike Lynch walk free?

The ex-Autonomy boss beat incredible odds to be acquitted of fraud. *Danny Fortson* in San Francisco explains how Lynch’s folksy testimony trumped a US prosecutor’s spreadsheets

### TYCOON'S TIMELINE

**1996** Mike Lynch launches software company Autonomy. This is a spinout from another business he had set up, Cambridge Neurodynamics. The company stores and collates vast amounts of data

**2000** Autonomy is floated on the tech-heavy Nasdaq exchange in America at \$124 a share, and then, just six months later, on the FTSE 100

**2011** Léo Apotheker, chief executive of HP, buys Autonomy for \$11 billion


**2012** HP, now led by Meg Whitman, left, writes down the value of Autonomy by \$8.8 billion and accuses its leaders of “serious accounting improprieties, disclosure failures and outright misrepresentations”

**2013** The Serious Fraud office launches an investigation into Lynch but closes it after two years, claiming that there was not enough evidence to

reasonably expect a conviction

**2018** Sushovan Hussain, left, Autonomy’s former chief financial officer (CFO) is sentenced to five years in jail in America after a jury found him guilty of fraud

**2020** Deloitte, Autonomy’s auditor, is slapped with a record £15 million fine for failings in the company’s audit



**M**ike Lynch sat in a packed, wood-panelled court, staring holes into the back of a US prosecutor who, standing only ten feet in front of him, called him a criminal. It was Monday and time for closing arguments in the 11-week fraud trial of the British tech tycoon, held at a court in downtown San Francisco on a street peppered with cheap sandwich shops, cafés, and fentanyl addicts. This was the last chance for the Justice Department to make its case that the 58-year-old was, in fact, a fraudster of the highest order.

Lynch was a bully, the prosecutor argued. He forced underlings to help him cook the books of Autonomy, the British software giant he founded, and thus trick American tech giant HP into paying billions of dollars more than it was worth when it bought the company in 2011.

Into the bargain, Lynch walked away with \$516 million in ill-gotten gains, the prosecutor said, and for that he argued, the entrepreneur should be convicted on 15 fraud counts — one count of conspiracy to commit fraud, and 14 individual counts in service of that scheme.

A guilty verdict would send him to

prison for much of the rest of his natural life. “Dr Lynch had more than 500 million reasons to lie to HP,” the prosecutor told the jurors. “There’s an old saying in our line of work: follow the money. And that’s easy in this case. The vast majority of it goes to Dr Lynch. He had 500 million reasons to do this.”

Three days later, the jury found Lynch not guilty on all counts. After being extradited and living more than a year under house arrest, fitted with an ankle monitor and kept under 24-hour watch by a security detail he was forced to pay for, Lynch was a free man.

He wiped tears from his eyes. His wife, Angela Bacares, who was sitting in her customary spot in the right corner of the front bench of the gallery, rushed to hug her husband. His decade-long campaign to prove his innocence was over. He could go home.

To say that Lynch beat the odds is an understatement. Fewer than one half of one per cent of defendants in federal criminal cases get acquitted. Sushovan Hussain, Autonomy’s former finance director, had been convicted in a separate case for his role in the alleged conspiracy.

Hussain spent five years in federal prison before his release in January. He

has since returned to his home in Britain. In 2022 a High Court judge found that Lynch had defrauded HPE, as it is now known, by inflating Autonomy’s value. The American tech giant has asked for more than \$4 billion in damages, although the judge in that case has indicated that any sum Lynch was forced to pay would be far lower.

How did Lynch, a former adviser to Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton when he was prime minister, a recipient of an OBE for his services to enterprise, and a titan of the tech scene once seen as Britain’s answer to Bill Gates, win the argument?

It is hard to predict how jury trials will decide when 12 strangers are thrown together with a mandate to make a unanimous decision that will alter the course of a defendant’s life. The complicated (and boring) nature of the alleged crime, and how the government chose to prosecute it, also helped. So did Lynch’s defence, which, for more than a decade, has not wavered. He has always denied all the charges.

In his telling, he was scapegoated for HP’s ineptitude. HP was a fading giant known for selling printers. It was desperate to transform itself into a software powerhouse. In Autonomy, which spe-

cialised in processing data for companies, it found its ideal target.

HP offered \$11.7 billion for the company in August 2011, a 60 per cent premium that was twice the market average — too rich to pass up. “That would be like trying to stop a herd of elephants,” Lynch told the court. But the board fired Léo Apotheker, HP’s chief executive and the architect of the deal, before the takeover even closed. He was replaced by Meg Whitman and the former eBay chief, in Lynch’s telling, bungled the integration. Within a year, she publicly accused the Autonomy chief of masterminding a fraud that led HP to pay \$5 billion more than it should have, thus beginning his 12-year legal odyssey.

Part of the problem for the Justice Department lawyers was that their story — Lynch was a crook — had to be laid out in a very complex way. They produced thousands of documents: emails



## Volvo braces for EU crackdown

**Oliver Gill**

Volvo has started to divert production of Chinese-made electric vehicles to Belgium in the expectation that the European Union will drive ahead with a crackdown on Beijing-subsidised imports.

The Sweden-based company is seen as the most exposed among western carmakers to controversial plans to impose tariffs on a flood of cheap EVs that are heading to Europe from Chinese factories.

Company insiders said that Volvo, itself owned by the Chinese carmaker Geely, was considering plans to halt sales of Chinese-built EVs bound for Europe if tariffs were introduced. Diverting production of Volvo’s EX30 and EX90 models from China to Belgium is expected to

negate the need for the company to do so. The manufacturing of certain Volvo models bound for the UK could also be moved to Belgium. Sources close to the company insisted that suspending sales of EVs made in China was no longer being considered.

The EU currently places a 10 per cent tariff on Chinese-made EVs. Experts said that could increase to between 25 per cent and 30 per cent, with a decision due this week. Analysts have warned China could retaliate with measures on European-made cars. They also said Chinese carmakers may not be deterred by the EU’s action.

“We are monitoring the EC investigation and cannot comment further until a decision... is made,” a Volvo spokesman said.

## Middle East buyers miss out as Caring prepares to exit The Ivy

**Oliver Gill**

Sovereign wealth funds from Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia have been outgunned in their pursuit of The Ivy as the restaurant’s billionaire owner, Richard Caring, makes the surprise decision to bow out completely from the London celebrity haunt.

The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, where Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour is a director, is understood to have bid £700 million for Caring’s Troia restaurant group, say City sources.

Saudi Arabia’s \$700 billion (£550 billion) Public Investment Fund, which owns fellow Premier League football club Newcastle United, was also in the running — but has since dropped out, they added.

Troia includes The Ivy restaurant in West Street, central London, and The Ivy Asia and Ivy Café brands, as well as the Brasserie of Light at Selfridges. Caring has a controlling shareholding, but his financial interest in the group is split 50/50 with Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the former Qatar prime minister.

The former rag trader, who celebrated his 76th birthday last week, had planned to retain a residual stake of about 25 per cent when the sale process began at the start of the year. However, it is now understood that he intends to cash out completely.

A preferred bidder has now been selected and is expected to be granted

**Richard Caring is walking away from The Ivy group**



exclusivity this week, with a view to completing the sale by July, City sources said. However, mystery surrounds the name of the suitor. Sources ruled out big sovereign wealth funds from Singapore and China.

Eyebrows were raised when it emerged at the end of last year that Caring had hired HSBC to explore a sale of Troia. Generating £55 million of annual earnings, the £1 billion price sought by the restaurateur looked expensive to many outside observers. Sources close to the sale pointed, however, to the strength of the Ivy brand and the potential to open 30 more Ivy concept restaurants in the UK and more overseas.

A spokesman for Troia and Caring declined to comment.

## Legal & General readies buybacks

**Jill Treanor**

Legal & General will this week open the door to its first share buybacks in at least a decade when its new chief executive, Antonio Simoes, sets out his strategy for the FTSE 100 insurance giant.

Simoes joined at the start of the year, replacing long-standing boss Sir Nigel Wilson, who had shunned buybacks in favour of investing to grow the business. The Portuguese-born Simoes, in his first chief executive role, is expected to set out ambitious growth plans, but acknowledges that shareholders want him to deploy excess capital in repurchasing the company’s own shares in the market.

Analysts made a wide range of estimates for how much the insurer is able to

generate in excess capital over different time frames, with figures including £11 billion of capital generation over five years. Quite how much of this would be used to fund share buybacks, on top of dividends, is also a hot topic. Some City analysts have said the excess could amount to about £200 million in buybacks. L&G’s website says its last share buyback was in 2007, before Wilson joined in 2009, first as finance director. He became chief executive in 2012.

Simoes has spent his first few months at L&G meeting shareholders and potential investors. The insurer employs 11,500 people, 10,300 of them in Britain.

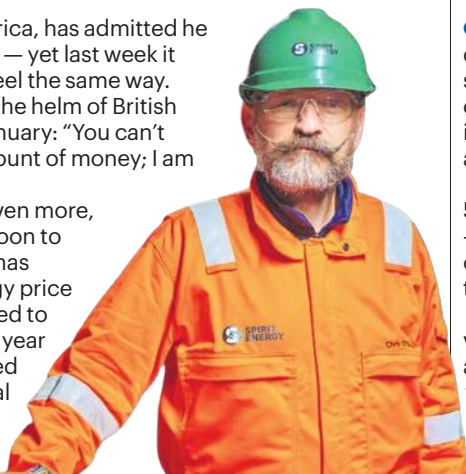
He has acknowledged that he needs to set out a “clear strategy” and “simpler investment case”.

IT'S A GAS, GAS, GAS

● **Chris O'Shea**, chief executive of Centrica, has admitted he cannot justify his £4.5 million pay packet — yet last week it became clear that shareholders do not feel the same way.

The moustachioed chief executive at the helm of British Gas's parent company told the BBC in January: "You can't justify a salary of that size. It's a huge amount of money; I am incredibly fortunate."

Now the company wants to pay him even more, arguing in March that his pay should balloon to £8.2 million. The company's share price has increased over the past year as the energy price cap has been lifted; profits in 2023 jumped to £751 million compared to £72 million the year before. Centrica shareholders duly waived through the increase at last week's annual meeting with only 7 per cent dissenting.



TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD POHLE

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

● **Philip Jansen** made headlines again last week, despite having left BT in January after a five-year stint running one of Britain's most important companies. He was paid £3.7 million for his last year in the job, thanks to a £2.6 million bonus for achieving his financial targets.

Jansen had announced plans to cut as many as 55,000 staff — about 40 per cent of the workforce — by 2030 just before he quit, although the company insisted this was not a factor in the boost to his pay last year.

Investors will get an opportunity to give their verdict on his departing pay deal at next month's annual meeting. He will hope to avoid the fate of his predecessor, Gavin Patterson, whose final pay deal in 2018, worth £2.3 million, was rejected by a third of shareholders. They protested after the company's shares fell and it was hit by an accounting scandal in Italy.



GARFIELD IN HOT WATER

● **Liv Garfield**, the chief executive of Severn Trent, will also have to wait until next month to discover what shareholders think of her pay, after a year in which the water industry has been under fire for its record of sewage spills and poor river quality.

Details of her latest pay deal are due to be released any day, ahead of the annual meeting scheduled for July 11. But she has already been feeling the heat.

Last month when she appeared on the BBC's *Today* programme, she was asked about the £3.2 million she was paid last year — taking her tally over four years to almost £13 million. Her answer was that her deals were "performance related".

"We've not had a great year in the last 12 months, accepted," Garfield said. "But if you looked at that four-year period over time — dramatic, dramatic progress," she added.



“It takes an exponential leap to conclude that Mike committed fraud

**2022** After a lengthy civil fraud trial, a UK judge finds that Lynch and his CFO misled several parties about Autonomy's health prior to its sale to HP

**2023** Lynch is extradited the US to stand trial on charges of fraud

**2024** Lynch is cleared of all charges

work of closing deals and checking that the numbers were in order.

"You can't infer that Mike Lynch is guilty as charged of these offences merely from the fact that he was the CEO of Autonomy," argued Brian Heberlig, Lynch's lawyer. "You can't convict because you think the CEO should have known about everything happening there. That's not the law."

If anything untoward happened, they added, it was inconsequential, not on Lynch's radar, or both. Those finer details, Lynch said, fell to Hussain. "There's that saying about seeing the wood for the trees. Mr Hussain loved looking at the bark on the trees," Lynch said. "He was very much a detail person."

With regard to Hussain, however, they had to tread carefully. Judge Charles Breyer, the brother of the former US Supreme Court justice Stephen Breyer, barred either side from telling jurors that Hussain had been convicted.

Lynch's high-risk decision to testify in his own defence — a move few criminal defendants make — also paid off. He spoke about his upbringing in east London, his early love of computers and launching Autonomy. He rhapsodised about his farm and the robustness of medieval pig breeds, which the judge swiftly put a stop to. "I think it's a good idea to be a little bit more focused," he admonished Lynch's team.

Lynch was the last witness to be called. After weeks of being painted as a pantomime villain, the gambit humanised him. Heberlig also hammered the government for not making more of its opportunity to question him directly on many of the most damning facts on which it built its case.

"The magic moment of this trial came at 3pm last Tuesday," he said in his closing argument. "That's when [we] turned over Mike to the prosecutor for cross examination. That is the moment that prosecutors live for. Cross examination is the ultimate crucible. It is a form of combat. This was the prosecutor's moment to go right for the jugular with the best evidence he had to prove that Mike Lynch was guilty. What happened? You witnessed it. He reviewed a chronology of documents, with no probing questions." He added: "It takes an exponential leap, not justified by the evidence, to conclude that Mike committed fraud."

The jury, clearly, agreed.

Lynch's exoneration leaves many questions unanswered. What effect, if any, will it have on the High Court's decision on the \$4 billion HP has demanded. Lynch is wealthy — he and Bacares share a £500 million fortune according to The Sunday Times Rich List — but not that wealthy.

In a statement last week, Lynch said he looked forward to "returning to the UK and getting back to what I love most: my family and innovating in my field".

One wonders what his next act will be. In his testimony, Lynch compared Autonomy to a record company. "We were happy to try things. We'd do experiments, where for every nine failures we get a success," he explained. "It's a bit like being a record producer, you only have the one hit. It's fine to fail a lot."

Thirteen years ago, he bet on what seemed like a sure thing and it derailed his life. You couldn't blame him for just retiring to his farm rather than entering business again. But that doesn't seem likely.

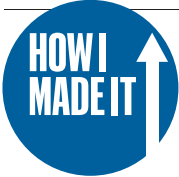
Mike Lynch was acquitted on 15 counts in a trial in San Francisco

chock full of jargon, financial reports and spreadsheets where single cells would be the subject of lengthy interrogation. Their goal was to show how Lynch used "every accounting trick in the book" to artificially boost Autonomy's numbers.

And yet throughout the trial, the government often seemed to be overreaching, overlaying a tale of financial skull-duggery on a sea of spreadsheets. The jurors often seemed glassy-eyed. One was dismissed because he repeatedly fell asleep. And, critically, the burden lay entirely on the government to prove that Lynch orchestrated the "largest fraud" in the history of tech. They struggled to land a knockout punch.

Lynch's lawyers had a lower bar. They had only to sow reasonable doubt. Lynch's team portrayed him as a visionary chief executive who was either not involved or not interested in the mucky

I make airports nicer places to be – and business has taken off



SALLY ALINGTON, FOUNDER OF ETHOS FARM

**Hannah Prevett**  
Deputy Editor, Times Enterprise Network

Sally Alington remembers the terror when she left her well-paid corporate job in 2017 to start her own business. "My husband turned to me and said, 'Congratulations, we're both unemployed.'"

Giving up her role as the managing director of a company supplying retail staff to airports — in order to start Ethos Farm, a customer service training consultancy — was "absolutely terrifying", said Alington, 45. Her husband, Toby, is a freelance sound engineer with his own studio in Cobham, Surrey.

"I was leaving a really good job to jump off a cliff. From that first day, you've still got your mortgage coming out at the end of the month, and you've still got to pay your bills and buy food. I didn't know where the money was going to come from."

Alington needn't have worried. In 2018, its first full year of trading, Ethos Farm hit sales of £850,000, and it has continued to grow fast. Last year, the firm, based in Hampton Court Palace, hit revenues of £24.9 million and a £1.8 million pre-tax profit, and it now has 1,300 staff.

Ethos Farm focuses on helping airports improve the experience of travellers, with clients including Stansted, Edinburgh and New York's LaGuardia. With New York, Alington and her team created a strategy for better customer service and devised a training plan for everyone working at the airport. Ethos Farm also works with shopping centres, train operators and retailers.

It's no coincidence that Alington ended up spending so much of her career working in and around airports. "I'm from an airline-obsessed family," she laughed. Her parents met at British Airways predecessor BOAC and her father spent the latter part of his career at BA in a senior customer service role. Alington would earn "pocket money" helping

him fill in compensatory vouchers to send out to disgruntled passengers.

Aged 14, she did work experience with BA at Heathrow's terminal four, and later, as a graduate, she had designs on being a pilot. "But then 9/11 happened and changed the aviation world for ever. There were no more [company sponsored] cadet schemes [for flight training] ... and I couldn't afford the £100,000 to pay for the training myself."

Instead she went back to a job at Blackjack Promotions, a firm she had worked for at Heathrow in university holidays. "Some days I was working in the duty-free shops... then another day I'd be in high-vis directing queues." She climbed the ranks, making it to managing director by the age of 29, when she said the company had an £18 million turnover.

Alington steered it through being acquired by a larger US rival

and stayed with it until she had the idea for Ethos Farm. "I wanted to start up on my own in customer-experience consulting, and I felt my aviation background would help me zone in specifically on this sector as a specialist."

Friends and family weren't sure it was the right move. "A lot of people said to me, 'What is that? Is there a market for it?' And I would explain that I wanted to help clients understand what their customer-experience vision is, or help them craft it if they didn't have one."

She invited three co-founders to join her — former colleagues

Mathew Garner,

TOBY ALINGTON



HIGH FIVE

**My hero ...** Jacinda Ardern, the former prime minister of New Zealand, below. Whatever your political persuasion, it is hard to deny she showed the world that you can deal with the biggest global issues with human empathy.

**My best decision ...** building a team who are like family. It's so important as you bounce off each other's energy every day, and that is something I truly cherish.

**My worst decision ...** Some decisions you make don't



quite work out the way you want, but that is all part of the learning journey.

**Funniest moment ...** I have some hilarious photos of myself and Josie [Barton], equipped with mops and vacuum cleaners during the renovation of our 18th-century office in Hampton Court. We became like Kim and Aggie from the TV show *How Clean is Your House?*

**Best business tip ...** Treat people well. That goes for everyone you engage with in business — colleagues, clients or suppliers.

Applying genuine care is not only a nice way to conduct your work, it also builds your reputation as being a great organisation to work with.

Lauren Walsh and Josie Barton — but said the early days before they won their first client were tough. "We all struggled with explaining what we did ... We would go in and say, 'We do consulting and training.' Then they'd say, 'Cool, who works with you?' And of course that's when you get stuck, as you don't have any clients yet."

But on winning their first client, Stansted Express, Ethos Farm had the endorsement it needed. And the timing was good. With the advance of social media and the proliferation of online reviews, companies were increasingly being forced to think more carefully about how customers felt, said Alington. "People's expectations are so much higher these days... and will rate and review their experience instantaneously. So you can't afford, as any brand, to have an off-day."

With almost all of Ethos Farm's clients operating in the retail and travel sectors, Covid was a huge challenge. "When it first happened, I cried in front of my team and I honestly couldn't put my hand on my heart and say we would come through it." But using the government's furlough scheme and borrowing £250,000 through the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme staved off the threat of ruin.

After this, Alington and her co-founders decided to focus on growing a new part of the business that helped to improve employee engagement and retention. "My mantra has always been that you can't deliver great customer experience without great employee experience."

She said that following the mass exodus of staff from the travel, retail and hospitality industries during Covid, many firms had to rebuild their teams. "How do you attract talent to do jobs where you're going to start work at 5am, where you're standing on your feet for nine hours a day, and where you're going to get some people who are upset or angry."

The new focus on employee engagement resulted in huge growth for Ethos Farm — from 20 staff to 650, and a £1.5 million turnover to £11.5 million, in the 2021-22 financial year.

Alington said one of the secrets to her success is being "incredibly focused on the numbers. My granny used to have these little brown envelopes in her handbag, and when she got her pension, she put £5 in the envelope that said 'electric', £5 in the one that said 'gas' and so on. I've always done the same — but digitally."

Martha Lane Fox  
We can all learn from the election campaign – yes, really

I couldn't stop myself — I watched the party leaders' TV debate on Tuesday. I spent some of it wondering if this would be an effective way of choosing FTSE 100 bosses. It is easy to knock our politicians when they are in campaign mode, isn't it?

Missing a moment of national importance to do an interview? What was he thinking? A photo opportunity on a windsurfing board? Of course they were going to fall in.

But as the UK general election campaign kicks into high gear, I want to suggest something surprising: maybe there are valuable lessons that businesses can take from how political parties operate and market themselves? And not just from the inevitable gaffes, but from the parts that go right. In the spirit of consensus building and bi-partisanship, here are three lessons that I have learnt watching the campaigns.

First, they are speedy. I have never

met a business leader who actively wants their important projects to go more slowly — so the pace with which a campaign has to get going, and then keep the momentum, is impressive. For any politician, a surprise early election means you have to ramp up the funding, support network, on-the-ground organising, messaging and media presence at immensely short notice.

And before you scream, it is not lost on me how we cannot seem to deliver big infrastructure projects in any reasonable timeframe or on budget, and yet many of the same personalities responsible can gear up so effectively for their own election. Still, having a finite timeline and very clear expectation of the project goal really does help, even if it can be tricky to achieve.

Second, campaigns work hard on their clear, concise messaging. If you're anything like me, you never want to hear "take back control", "build back better"

or "stop the boats" again — but there is no denying consistency works. There is a real discipline needed to ensure this, especially in our complex landscape of social media soundbites and constant surveillance of an MP's every move.

Strict messaging keeps everyone aligned and resonates more powerfully. Whether you are raising finance, taking a company public, restructuring, acquiring something or rebranding, it is essential to both stay on-message and to over-communicate. In my experience, even if you feel you have said something 50 times, your team might have heard it only once.

Third, campaigns use data in a more sophisticated way than many firms. We witnessed the power of putting data analytics centre stage in the leave campaign before Brexit. And during this election, we know all the parties are spending a lot of time and money on data science. Yet many businesses still

“Political parties use data in a more sophisticated way than many firms

find it tough to get positive results from their data strategies. What is so different about the two environments?

Campaigns often segment their audience more precisely than businesses. They use data to understand voter preferences, behaviours and demographics, enabling highly targeted and personalised messaging that resonates with specific voter groups.

This is partly due to the quality of data they use, or pay for, and the analytics and tools that campaigns invest in. It is striking that in 2024, non cloud-based software investment by companies in the UK is flat, and yet modern tools have never had such a strong impact.

But it's not just about the tools they use; campaigns typically have a centralised command structure. This hierarchy allows for more cohesive data-driven decision-making, and quicker implementation of data insights, compared to many businesses with more complex organisational structures. The campaigns also build real-world feedback loops — obsessively polling to test narratives, gauge sentiments and course-correct strategies. This is resonant of the best digital start-ups, which are built from the beginning to react and iterate in a similar way.

There are of course stark differences as well. Political campaigns are time-

limited events with binary outcomes, while businesses operate on more open-ended cycles. And the ethics are very different, too. As we saw last week with the £2,000 tax claim debacle, deception and personal attacks are increasingly common. Neither types of behaviour should ever have a place in business.

We have four weeks of wall-to-wall election coverage to look forward to, so rather than becoming infuriated by it, perhaps observing the mechanics of the election could provide some ideas for how to sharpen your competitive edge. At the very least, it reminds me how lucky I am to be in a job where a photo with a collapsing bacon sandwich is unlikely to be my undoing.

Baroness (Martha) Lane-Fox co-founded lastminute.com and Lucky Voice. She is president of the British Chambers of Commerce, chancellor of the Open University and sits on multiple boards



BUSINESS

# I didn’t think I could be the boss until my kids told me to be brave

Roisin Currie, chief executive of Greggs, was brought up in ‘the rough part of Glasgow’ and spent 12 years learning the ropes. She wants to grow the chain by extending hours and opening at airports

INTERVIEW  
SAM CHAMBERS

On the morning of August 5, 2022, a small queue formed outside Primark on London’s Oxford Street for the latest drop from a hot new label. That label was Greggs. New chief executive Roisin Currie, then three months into the job, was among the first to cross the threshold and get her hands on Greggs-branded bucket hats, sliders and Grocs. Grocs, in case you’re wondering – and you probably are – are Greggs-branded Grocs shoes. Since the limited-edition range at Primark sold out, they have been changing hands on eBay for upwards of £30 – five times their original price. “My boys still wear their Grocs – they are the comfiest shoes they’ve got,” says Currie, 52. “The range is tongue in cheek and we are having a bit of a laugh at ourselves, but it allowed people to buy into the Greggs story.”

And what a story it is. Over the past decade, with the high street crumbling around it, Greggs has opened almost 1,000 outlets. Along the way, the nation has warmed to its cheeky northern spirit and become hooked on its £2 lattes and trademark sausage rolls, a million of which are sold every day.

Its cheap-and-cheerful brand has attracted a cult-like following and celebrity fans including rapper Stormzy, singer-songwriter Sam Fender, and American actor Jake Gyllenhaal, who confessed in 2015: “I eat Greggs, Greggs baguettes – that’s what I eat when I’m in London.”

If you could channel Greggs’s unpretentious, light-hearted ethos into a human being, you would end up with someone a lot like Roisin Currie. The chain’s cheerful chief executive has turned up to our interview wearing a bright green cardigan, black tracksuit bottoms and gleaming white trainers. Her name badge hangs from a lanyard around her neck.

“We are a really humble brand and it is not about the ego of the person who happens to have the title of CEO. It really is about the sum of the team,” says Currie in her Glaswegian accent.

Nevertheless, she has big plans, setting her sights on expanding Greggs to significantly more than 3,000 outlets, up from 2,500 today. To underpin that, Greggs is opening two new warehouses, including an automated facility on a 23-acre site in Derby that will create up to 600 jobs. The company’s heritage as a baker means it, in effect, supplies itself and uses those savings to undercut rivals.

The Greggs empire we see today is a far cry from when John Gregg opened his first shop in Gosforth, Newcastle, in 1951. His sons, Ian and Colin, expanded the business around the country and floated it in 1984.

“The vegan sausage roll opened up the brand to people who’d previously dismissed us

Progress as a public company was steady, perhaps a little underwhelming, until the appointment of charismatic chief executive Roger Whiteside in 2013. Whiteside transformed Greggs from a traditional “take-home” bakery into an operation producing food ready to eat right away. Loaves of bread made way for more sandwiches. Salads, soups and vegan sausage rolls followed.

Currie’s own route to the top began with a modest upbringing in what she describes as “the rough part” of Glasgow. As a teenager she juggled part-time jobs in a shoe shop, a bookmaker and working at the cigarette kiosk in an Asda supermarket close to Celtic’s football stadium.

When she graduated from Strathclyde University with a degree in business administration, Currie was confronted with a “sliding doors” moment: move to London and join the graduate scheme at accountancy firm Arthur Andersen, or join the graduate scheme at Asda.

“I chose Asda because I got to stay in Glasgow; I didn’t have the confidence to move away from Scotland. But I ended up being in the right place at the right time.”

Currie worked her way up through Asda’s human resources department and, in 1996 at the age of 25, took charge of HR for the whole of Scotland as maternity cover. Her confidence grew and she was offered the opportunity to run HR for other regions. She is one of many future retail leaders to have learnt their trade during the supermarket’s revival in the 1990s.

“At Asda you had Archie [Norman], Allan [Leighton], Judith McKenna, Justin King ... I watched how they treated people in shops and the humility they showed ended up in my DNA,” she recalls. “When I do my shop visits now, I carry a case of cards so I can write a little handwritten thank-you note to the manager with a couple of things I noticed that day.”

After 19 years with Asda, Currie joined Greggs as group people director in 2010. Whiteside handed her an expanded role in 2017, giving her responsibility for the chain’s outlets. She added property to her remit in 2021, but she still didn’t consider herself a potential chief executive.

“My youngest [child] had asked if I would become the CEO of Greggs when Roger left, and I said no. My kids all looked at me completely horrified. My daughter said to me: ‘Mum, you’ve always said that when a door opens, you’ve got to be brave and take the opportunity!’ When the role came up, their words were ringing in my ears,” Currie says.

During Covid, after the decision had been taken to mothball the business, she drove around her local area leaving bags of unsold sausage rolls outside the doors of care homes.

Former Greggs chairman Ian Durant, who was involved in promoting Currie to chief executive, says she “really established herself” during the pandemic. “She’s a team player with little regard for ego and played a great role promoting those values at Greggs,” he says.

Still, she has big shoes to fill. By the time Whiteside stepped down in 2022, the share price of Greggs had risen more than sixfold to £31. If Currie is to build on that – the stock currently trades at £28.50 – she will need more growth. Part of that will come from new openings, principally in the south of England and on petrol forecourts – two areas where, Currie believes, Greggs is under-represented. The recent investments in logistics will give the company capacity to supply up to 3,500 shops.

Currie is also sweating Greggs’s exist-

LUCY YOUNG FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES; FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS; ASHLEY COOPER/GETTY IMAGES



“She’s a team player with little regard for ego

Roisin Currie’s wants Greggs to be “part of the improvement on the health agenda”

## THE LIFE OF ROISIN CURRIE

**Born:** November 3, 1971  
**Status:** married with a 19-year-old daughter and two sons, aged 15 and 16  
**School:** Our Lady and St Francis school in Glasgow  
**University:** studied business administration and business law at Strathclyde  
**First job:** Leonards shoe shop on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow  
**Pay:** £1.7 million last year  
**Home:** Harrogate, North Yorkshire  
**Car:** Currie drives a Fiat 500 she won in a charity raffle  
**Favourite film:** *Cry Freedom*  
**Music:** Eighties pop like Duran Duran and U2  
**Book:** *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus  
**Watch:** Apple  
**Drink:** black coffee  
**Gadget:** iPhone  
**Charity:** Stroke Association and Macmillan Cancer Support

**Last holiday:** walking the dogs on the beach and visiting pubs with her family in Craster, Northumberland

**WORKING DAY**  
Roisin Currie begins her working week with a Pilates workout at 7am on Monday. She then gets in her Fiat 500 for the near two-hour drive to Greggs’s headquarters in Newcastle, where she bases herself for the first



**Beloved:** Pop stars Duran Duran and Northumberland



three days of the week. She typically starts between 6.30am and 7am and works until 6pm or 7pm. On Thursday and Friday, she is in London meeting investors or visiting Greggs outlets around the country.

**DOWNTIME**  
The chief executive of Greggs walks her two dogs: a cocker spaniel and a three-year-old Hungarian vizsla she refers to as her “pandemic mistake”. She also enjoys going for runs and reading.

# ‘Nerdville’ college with a pipeline of star students

Imperial College London is outranking Oxbridge. But its driven graduates have long been catnip to hungry employers, writes William Turvill

With its white, windowless corridors and plain, well-stocked laboratories, Scale Space White City in west London has the appearance of an ordinary, if well-funded, science facility. In fact, the building, co-funded by the venture capital firm Blenheim Chalcot, is a shared office for dozens of tech start-ups, many of them run by recent graduates of Imperial College London.

Among them are Alex Bond and John Simpson. In 2015 they used £500 of university grant funding to start FreshCheck, a firm that has created a speedy swab test for food-processing companies to detect microbial contamination. The business has since raised more than £2 million and counts Sir Richard Branson’s children, Holly and Sam, among its investors.

Imperial’s status as a source of tech innovators is one of the key factors that led the institution to overtake Oxbridge in the latest Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings, trailing

only the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the global tables announced on June 4. Like MIT, Imperial is known for specialising in Stem subjects – science, technology, engineering and maths. It ranked particularly well for research performance, student employability and commitment to sustainability.

Imperial says that 284 start-ups have been formed there in the past five years, collectively raising about £800 million. Some are based at the Scale Space Incubator, many more are dotted across desks around the university, while others have graduated beyond Imperial’s facilities.

Other recent Imperial hits include Charco Neurotech, co-founded by Lucy Jung, which has created a device that relieves symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, and Recycleye, set up by former students Victor Dewulf and Peter Hedley, which uses robotics to sort waste and raised £13.7 million last year. Imperial’s new bragging rights will have been music to

the ears of many alumni. Former students include the record-breaking athlete Sir Roger Bannister, the author HG Wells and the astrophysicist and Queen guitarist Sir Brian May.

Alex Mahon, the chief executive of Channel 4, who studied physics before forging a career in business, proudly describes her alma mater as “Nerdville”. She recalls that the Imperial of the 1990s was populated by “extremely focused” and “passionate”

Alex Mahon, the chief executive of Channel 4, studied physics at Imperial



students, the majority of whom attended 40 hours of lectures and seminars a week. “It was 90 per cent men,” says Mahon, perhaps a little unscientifically. “And it was worse in the physics department.”

These days, Imperial is notably international – 48 per cent of its 21,000 full-time undergraduates and postgraduates came from overseas last year – and its female population is now 43 per cent.

About a third of Imperial’s students went to independent schools, according to last year’s The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide, ranking it fourth in the country on that measure.

It also regularly ranks among the most competitive for entrants, offering

roughly one place for every eight applications.

So, how do you get in? Kristoff Ahlner, 23, who studied aeronautical engineering from 2019 to 2023, said he had to attend a half-hour interview and sit a maths exam after completing the application forms. His course leaders were also looking for candidates who had done extracurricular activities that demonstrated a passion for their subjects. In his case, Ahlner impressed with flying and gliding experience he had gained while at school.

Florence Seaton, 23, who recently completed a master’s in biomedical engineering, described Imperial as an “inspiring” place. “Everybody’s there to be the best, and you can only be the best if you’re better than somebody else.”

As well as working hard, Imperial students have to contend with some of the nation’s priciest student accommodation. And while undergraduate tuition fees are capped at £9,250 for

domestic students, overseas peers can face annual bills of up to £53,700.

However, according to the recruitment firm Adzuna, Imperial alumni can expect to earn an average salary of £46,305 five years after graduation, third only behind Bayes Business School (£51,921) and the University of Oxford (£49,086). Asked what an employer can expect from an Imperial graduate Dawn Pitchford, the client operations director for early careers at recruitment giant AMS, said: “They are bright, they know what they want to do, and they’re driven.”

However, Imperial, like many British universities, is facing financial challenges. Mary Ryan, the vice-provost for research and enterprise at the university, said it made a loss on domestic undergraduate students, as well as its grant-funded work. “It is going to need a lot of work, and I guess a bit of bravery on behalf of politicians, to look at the sector and move it to a sustainable footing,” she said.



# BOODLES

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# Magic circle firm sinking its claws into America

The mega-merger between Allen & Overy and US firm Shearman has ruffled feathers in the legal world, writes *Laith Al-Khalaf*

The Tivoli conference centre in Copenhagen was the venue last week for 800 lawyers letting their hair down. Partners from across the world turned up to celebrate one of the largest mergers in the history of the legal sector: the tie-up between “magic circle” firm Allen & Overy and Manhattan-based Shearman & Sterling.

The gala dinner for the month-old A&O Shearman was billed as its first partner conference but for Adam Hakki, one of the firm’s co-chairs and until recently the US chairman at Shearman & Sterling, it was more like a wedding breakfast. “We’re finishing each other’s sentences,” he gushed of his new partners. “It is like we grew up in the same firm.”

For all the fine words, the jury is still out on the mega merger. The deal has created the fourth-largest legal firm in the world, with 4,000 employees across 29 countries generating about \$3.5 billion (£2.8 billion) in revenue – but it has not come easy. “A&O will regret doing this deal... there is definitely a question of whether it is worth all the risk,” said one adviser to the sector.

So can the legal eagles of the newly minted firm prove the naysayers wrong?

The merger is the most ambitious attempt yet by a British firm to break into the US legal market, which hovers up almost half the money spent on corporate legal fees globally. While five prestigious firms, known as the magic circle, dominate London’s legal market, their equivalents in the US are far more profitable. For decades, British firms have strug-

“There’s no one who looks like us. No one in the world at the moment really looks like a threat

gled to make inroads in the US – often finding that they are unable to compete for staff with their American counterparts – some of which pay partners as much as \$20 million in their first year.

A&O, which made more than £2.1 billion in revenues last year, has long held US ambitions. Founded in 1930, one of its first clients was Edward VIII, who sought the advice of co-founder George Allen when he decided to abdicate and marry Wallis Simpson. While it dominates the UK’s corporate law market, advising the country’s biggest companies, its US operations have struggled to make money: it is understood that, in recent years, its offices across the pond were losing as much as £20 million a year. Sources close to A&O disputed this said that its US firm had accounted for half of the firm’s worldwide revenue growth pre-merger.

Khalid Garousha, the merged firm’s co-chair and previously a senior partner at A&O, accepted that building a practice in America from the bottom up was demanding. “That strategy of organic growth and lateral hires meant that it would take a very, very long time to really achieve our ambition of significant scale in the US. The merger provides that scale overnight,” he said.

It is not A&O’s first attempt to get hitched across the pond. Belgian Wim Dejonghe, a softly spoken A&O senior partner, almost led the firm into a tie-up with California-based O’Melveny & Myers in 2019 before negotiations were shelved after neither side could agree on a valuation. Then came an approach from Shearman & Sterling, a 150-year-old firm that’s advised most Wall



Street banks and overseen some of the biggest deals in US corporate history.

In recent years, however, Shearman & Sterling had failed to scoop up private equity clients, had amassed large liabilities and become a target for staff poaching. Dejonghe believed a tie-up would open doors to Shearman & Sterling’s relationships in corporate America, but some partners feared that A&O was merging with a firm on the decline.

Shearman & Sterling’s approach came soon after it had abandoned talks with another possible suitor, Hogan Lovells, prompting industry gossip that it was running out of options to do a deal. But an A&O Shearman partner denied this, saying: “The core of their US practice is strong and stable and continues to be.”

In negotiating the A&O Shearman deal, Dejonghe went head-to-head with Hakki, a hard-nosed negotiator who won “litigator of the year” in 2023. Both sides camped out around the clock on the 64th floor of New York’s Lazard building in April 2023 to hash out a merger. “It is an interesting dynamic to be negotiating against your future partners. But it was the first time that I sensed we were both thinking about the interest of the new partnership rather than defending our own corners,” said one person involved in the talks.

In May 2023, the firms agreed to merge, subject to a partner vote, and spent the next year discussing issues like partner pay, board composition and which practice areas the new firm would branch into. But some lawyers have chosen to vote with their feet. Figures from Pirical, the legal data website, show that since the deal was announced both firms have had a higher rate of attrition than peers. While A&O’s has been slightly above its magic circle competitors, at 16 per cent, Shearman’s attrition rate has been 32 per cent, far above the pack.

A&O Shearman disputed the figures and said attrition was much lower.

Some senior partners have also gone. In March, Ward McKimm, Shearman & Sterling’s head of Europe, left. Damian Carolan, a senior financial services partner, quit A&O in April after 15 years. A&O’s managing partner, Gareth Price, left abruptly last year, though the firm said this was for personal reasons.

Garousha pointed out that the merger had received overwhelming support from partners, and that it was not only A&O Shearman trying to hold on to staff. “It’s the market right now – it is very, very frothy,” he said. Another source close to the firm said that all its core leaders had remained and that it was common for people to move during mergers.

A&O Shearman has acted to stem the bleed. It is understood that a number of partners are earning \$4 million before bonuses while some top lawyers are earning as much as \$6 million.

Speaking from Copenhagen, Hervé Ekué, A&O Shearman’s managing partner, said that the firm was focused on the task ahead. “There’s no one who looks like us. No one in the world at the moment really looks like a threat,” he said.

## Can British workers rise to the challenge?

*Jill Treanor* looks at the claim that cutting immigration will boost wages and skills

Immigration and the need to boost the skills of British workers burst to the fore in the general election campaign last week.

Sir Keir Starmer started the week pledging to bring down immigration and “make sure British businesses are helped to hire Brits first”.

Rishi Sunak pledged to axe degrees with high drop-out rates or that fail to open the door to higher-paid jobs, and to create 100,000 additional

vocational training opportunities.

Nigel Farage told the BBC that if Britain reduced the number of people coming into the country to fill vacant positions, “wages will go up and we’d start to encourage people to learn skills rather than heading off to university and doing social sciences”.

So what are the key issues? And can the UK solve its skills shortage by retraining British workers?

**What is net migration?** Farage said his aim is to achieve “zero net migration” – where the number of people arriving in Britain is the same as the number who go abroad. Net migration settled at about 200,000 to 300,000 annually until the past three years when, said Madeleine Sumption, director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, it has been “unusually high”. In 2023, net migration was 685,000.

The increase was initially due to a rise in arrivals from Ukraine and Hong Kong. But Sumption said the latest immigration figures were driven by applications for work visas, particularly among those working in health and social care.

**How much of the UK workforce is foreign born?** Britain is not an outlier for immigration when compared with other countries. The proportion of foreign-born people in the overall population (about 14 per cent in 2019) is similar to that of other major economies, such as the US and Spain, but smaller than that of Austria (19 per cent) and Canada (21 per cent), according to the Migration Observatory. But its data does show that when measured as a proportion of the workforce, the impact of foreign-born workers has become more significant in the past two decades. Its data shows those born abroad make up 19 per cent of the workforce – double the 9 per cent in 2004.

According to Gregory Thwaites, research director at the Resolution Foundation, “about 90 per cent of job growth in the last 20 years has been among people who weren’t born in the UK”.

To Stephen Evans, chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute (LWI), an independent research organisation, this disproves the “lump of labour” economic theory – “the idea there is a fixed number of jobs in an economy so if a migrant comes in and takes a job, that’s one less job for a Brit”. Evans said the lack of training of British workers is

separate to immigration. He points out that the first report on skills shortages in Britain was published in 1882.

Economists looking for links between the arrival of immigrant workers and a rise in domestic unemployment have found only small effects. The issue was a hot topic when the EU’s freedom of movement rules expanded to countries such as Poland. The Centre for European Studies estimated that between 2004 and 2015, there was a rise in the unemployment rate of 0.27 per cent among British workers.

**Which industries have a shortage of workers?**

Job vacancies hit a record high of more than 1.3 million in the middle of 2022 and, while that number came down to 898,000 in the three months to this April, it is still more than the 796,000 positions open before the lockdowns in March 2020.

The sectors with the most vacancies, according to data from the Office for National Statistics, are hospitality, social care and the motor industry. Until April, the government published a

“shortage occupation list”, which is now called the “immigration salary list”. It includes 21 occupations as diverse as laboratory technicians, bricklayers, roofers, welders, care workers and musicians.

**What training is available?**

Some businesses are determined to train their existing workforce. One is Brandauer, a specialist in metal pressing and stamping in Birmingham.

Rowan Crozier, 49, the managing director, is looking for five staff to add to the company’s 64-strong team. For the first time, Crozier resorted to hiring two staff from India to fill the gaps left when EU workers returned home after Brexit. He is running a 20-week training course for toolmakers “but I can’t always wait 20 weeks”.

Apprenticeships have been the traditional way to learn skills but the number of them in England has fallen 36 per cent since the apprenticeship levy was introduced. Only one in two apprentices complete the training, according to a report from the LWI last week.

But tackling worker shortages is only part of the problem. Britain must also get ready for the jobs of the future, which may need to embrace artificial intelligence and green technology.

And crucially, according to Matthew Percival, a director at the CBI, Britain needs to think about the implications of an ageing population.

“Skills alone will not be sufficient because we have a shortage of people,” he said. By 2040, more people will be retiring than joining the workforce. That could signal a need for more migrant workers – or robots.

among younger people and those who are long-term sick.

In theory, higher wages should make jobs more attractive, but Raj Sehgal, who runs five care homes in Norfolk, says his industry relies on overseas staff because domestic workers do not apply for roles. He said he had raised wages to more than the national living wage figure.

“This idea that we need to do better to employ domestic staff is a myth. If we could, we would, and we’ve been trying for decades,” he said.

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# Jon Yeomans

## If we still want to make things, we must steel ourselves for hard choices



At Chatham quayside in Kent, there’s no shortage of entertainment on offer. You can visit the historic docks, shop for T-shirts, or let your children jump off giant inflatable objects at the Ninja Warrior experience. Outside, boats bob in the marina, overlooked by fancy flats.

It’s a very 21st-century scene. Yet a stone’s throw away, holed up in a dirty, grimy corner of the quay, a bunch of metal bashers are digging in for a fight. ArcelorMittal, one of the world’s biggest steelmakers, is battling the loss of its Chatham factory in a planning row with developer Peel Group. It’s a tussle that poses a difficult question for the next government: just what sort of industry do we want?

The nuts and bolts of the case are this: Peel, owner of many of Britain’s biggest ports, wants to redevelop one of the last working bits of Chatham Dockyard and create “employment space” for new businesses, including media companies. It says the gates on the dock are too ancient to repair and ArcelorMittal is just

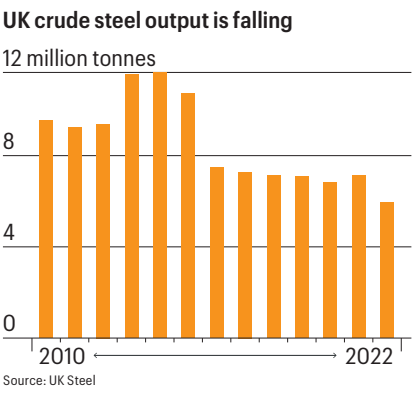
about the last tenant that does anything so old fashioned as bringing stuff in and out by boat.

Arcelor is having none of it. The company’s Kent Wire business makes the steel wires that brace concrete. It supplies big projects across the south of the UK, claiming to have about 30 per cent of the market. Upcoming work is likely to include the Lower Thames Crossing and Sizewell C power station. In short, it’s an integral, British-based part of the supply chain feeding those projects that we need to ungunm the economy and keep the lights on.

The company, 38 per cent owned by billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, says the loss of the site would mean it being likely to pull out of the UK altogether. The result? Prices of wire steel will go up, Britain will need to import more, and a corner of Kent will lose high-skilled jobs.

“Peel have not engaged with us,” says Phil Taylor, former boss of Kent Wire and now advising the company. “There’s been an arrogance to them. They would sooner we go away quietly.”

Not so, says Peel. James Whittaker, chief executive of developer Peel Waters,



says his plan would treble the number of jobs on the site. “We can open up the entire river by unblocking this development, and we’re working closely with the three universities in the area [to meet their needs].” He is scornful of Arcelor’s threat to quit the UK.

Last month, Michael Gove’s Levelling Up, Housing and Communities department put a freeze on the development – although this did not stop Medway Council subsequently voting in favour of it. Now it will fall into

the lap of a likely Labour government to resolve whether Peel gets its way.

It’s far from the only industrial dilemma facing ministers. Steelmaking in the UK has been in long-term decline, in large part due to high energy costs here. The new government will most probably have to decide whether to sign off on multibillion-pound bailouts of Tata Steel and British Steel to help them convert to cleaner, electric arc production – a move that could keep some domestic steelmaking but cost thousands of jobs. Sir Keir Starmer has already indicated his resistance to Tata’s own rescue plan.

The battle for Chatham highlights the perils ahead for Labour should it win power. The party professes to have an industrial strategy, but just how much manufacturing do we wish to retain?

In Medway, despite voting for the Peel plan, the council officially has made no declaration on whether it wants to keep a working dock at Chatham. The north side of the site, which is still an operating port, could deliver much-needed homes. And why should a port be kept open on the whim of one tenant, which could

relocate in the future? It’s a stark illustration of how local need can clash with national interest.

Many would argue we should simply embrace a future where our docks are home to M&S outlet stores, Ninja Warrior palaces and two-bed flats that cost a small nation’s GDP to buy. Alternatively, it’s not unreasonable to say that if, like Peel, you own a dock, you should expect that tenants may want to sail a barge into it from time to time.

The nation is facing extraordinary demands on its infrastructure. We need to build power stations and lay cables at pace. Labour wants to slash red tape in order to do so and says “steel is integral to a modern economy”. If this is truly its conviction, it should steel itself to chuck this redevelopment back in the water.

**Let the light Shein in**

Fast-fashion giant Shein wants to bring its £50 billion listing to London. The Singapore-based retailer, which sources its incredibly cheap products from factories in China, flies its clothes long distances and sells them individually to avoid paying import duties.

Some in the City believe that Shein, already chased away from New York, should be barred from the London market for its questionable practices – including allegations of forced labour. London, they argue, would become a “listing place of last resort for companies with poor human rights records”. Shein says it has a “zero-tolerance policy for forced labour”.

Let Shein come, I say. It may quickly find that the endless scrutiny from fund managers and journalists will make life very uncomfortable. It may even push the company to improve standards.

In the meantime, I encourage you to read a 2019 Commons select committee report on fast fashion that declared: “The way we make, use and throw away our clothes is unsustainable.” It listed a series of recommendations to tackle the problem, all rejected by the government. Five years on, with the rise of Shein, which made \$2 billion in profits last year, the situation seems as dire as ever. MPs were due to produce a follow-up to the report before parliament was dissolved. Let us hope the matter does not lie.

*Oliver Shah is away*

## Can Labour finally lift the UK’s sluggish growth rate?



### David Smith Economic Outlook

The UK has a growth problem, indeed a crisis of low growth, though you would not necessarily know it from the election campaign. During this parliament, there has been negligible economic expansion, for several reasons, and a rare fall in gross domestic product (GDP) per head. It is not, though just a story of the past four and a half years. Over the more than 15 years since the eve of the financial crisis in 2008, the economy has grown by an average of only 1.1 per cent a year, compared with 2.8 per cent over the previous 50 years.

If we take GDP per head, a better measure of prosperity, it is up by a cumulative 11 per cent since the Tories came to power in 2010. That compares with 35 per cent over the previous 14 years, 38 per cent over the 14 before that, then 30 per cent and finally 38 per cent from the mid 1950s to the late 1960s. We used to take rising prosperity for granted. Not now.

The risk with prolonged weak growth is of a doom loop in which ever-higher taxes are needed to pay for public services, because growth is not delivering revenues, and those higher taxes further bear down on growth.

In a government obsessed with plans, I would struggle to define a Tory plan for growth. Labour thinks that replacing chaos with stability will produce a “dullness dividend” (they don’t use that term) to enable the economy to grow faster. It might help, but the economy needs more than that.

Goldman Sachs, the prime minister’s alma mater, suggests growth would be slightly faster under Labour than with the Tories. But the bank suggests the effect would be modest, of the order of 0.1 to 0.15 per cent a year, which would not be enough to give Britain the fastest sustained growth in the G7, one of Labour’s stated goals.

So could a Labour government lift growth? Momentum may be on its side. Interest rates may not be coming down as fast as borrowers would like but they are falling, and both the Bank of Canada and the European Central Bank have broken the ice with rate reductions.

Barring accidents and new shocks, growth over the coming five years should be a lot better than over the past four and a half. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) sees growth over the 2025-28 period averaging nearly 2 per cent a year (1.85 per cent), three times its average of the past few years.

Business surveys are more upbeat, though the OBR’s own stronger growth forecast is partly a function of the way it does these predictions: when there is a significant growth undershoot, as over the past four to five years, it assumes there will be a catch-up to get back on trend. Most forecasters, I should say, are less optimistic than the OBR.

More needs to be done to get back to anything like the growth that we used to have, and the question is whether a Labour government can do it.

There are levers that the party says it will pull. These include planning reform, as well as Sir Keir Starmer’s pledge, not heard so much recently, to “bulldoze” through planning laws and deliver

**“If they were to deliver on planning reform, it would be welcomed by many**

1.5 million new homes in Labour’s first term. There is also the promise of an industrial strategy, focused on green investment and net zero, which has been welcomed by business.

Labour says it will borrow to invest, rather than for day-to-day government spending, implying a much-needed boost to infrastructure spending. HS2 was always problematic but many saw Rishi Sunak’s pulling of the plug on its northern leg as marking the end of the Tories’ infrastructure ambitions.

Then there is the elephant in the room – reversing the negative economic effects of Brexit. The referendum in 2016 snuffed out the business investment recovery from the financial crisis, leaving the UK locked into low investment and low productivity.

A survey of its clients by Nomura, the investment bank, showed that 89 per cent think it is either likely or very likely that a future Labour government would

pursue closer relations with the EU. None of this will be easy. A recent assessment by the Social Market Foundation think tank, “Labour Economics: Thinking through Labour’s economic agenda”, which assembled an impressive list of authors, concluded that Labour will have to be a lot bolder in government than it has in opposition.

EU experts are sceptical about whether meaningfully closer relations with the bloc are possible, or even whether the thin and unsatisfactory trade and co-operation agreement with the EU can be improved, given that Brussels will be suspicious of a permanent change in UK attitudes.

If Labour were to deliver on planning reform, which has implications for both housebuilding and the UK’s abject record in delivering infrastructure projects on time and within budget, this would be warmly welcomed by housebuilders and many others.

It will not immediately solve the problem, however. Capacity in the building industry is enough to deliver 200,000 new homes a year, not 300,000, while the number of construction workers is at its lowest since 2001 and there are 40 per cent more vacancies in the sector than in 2018 and 2019. That can be fixed, but it will take time.

Stronger growth is by no means guaranteed, but we should not give up hope. In a presentation to clients, the economic consultancy Fathom asks the question, “The UK’s economic malaise –

would a new government help?”. It finds some evidence that governments with large majorities, which is what election polls suggest, deliver stronger growth. That was the case after the 1997 Labour landslide, when, admittedly in a friendlier global environment, the UK economy averaged 3.1 per cent growth for ten years. Fathom does not see the UK getting to that level, but in one scenario it has growth topping 2.5 per cent by the second half of 2026.

As the consultancy puts it: “Our initial premise is that there is scope for more and better investment. Greater government support for [research and development] spending could help ... and according to recent research, every additional pound of publicly funded R&D may call forth as much as £8 of additional privately funded R&D.

Fathom sees growth from the shift to net zero, and government action to improve economic and national security. It also argues that “higher for longer” interest rates will boost productivity by winnowing out weak firms. We need optimism. Let’s hope it is not misplaced.

**PS**

There is so much wrong with the Conservative claim that every household faces a £2,000 tax rise if Labour is elected – a line strongly promoted by Rishi Sunak. The Treasury has rightly disowned these calculations.

There were at least four errors in this exercise. One was to use made-up political costings for some potential Labour proposals. The second was to count the supposed tax cost of these proposals, add them up for each year over four years, and claim that is the additional tax cost. On this basis, the government’s tax rises over the past three years go into the stratosphere. The proper way to estimate a tax rise is the annual increase in, in this case, the fourth year of the exercise.

Another crime was to divide that extra tax by the number of working households, about 18.5 million, leaving out the additional 10 million households who, even though they don’t work, still pay plenty in taxes such as VAT. And then there was the false attribution of the estimates to the Treasury.

You can have a lot of the fun with this methodology. The Spectator has calculated that the projected rise in the tax burden from 36.5 per cent of GDP this year to 37.1 per cent in 2028-29, under Tory plans, is equivalent to a rise of £3,000 per (working) household.

I can get to a bigger number. Total taxes in real terms – adjusted for inflation – are due to increase from £1,003 billion this year to £1,104 billion in 2028-29, only slightly less than the rise over the past four to five years, though some of it reflects the effect of the economy on revenues, not deliberate tax hikes. That coming increase alone is equivalent to more than £5,200 per working household, properly measured. Using the Tory method takes that up to nearly £13,000.

I wouldn’t do this, of course, because like the original calculation, it would be silly.

*david.smith@sunday-times.co.uk*

## Inflation remains a sticky problem

### Irwin Stelzer American Account

The American economy is certainly slowing, perhaps. The GDP annual growth rate has slowed to 1.3 per cent and the manufacturing sector has contracted for the 18th time in the past 19 months, with new orders down sharply and order backlogs dwindling. But Americans continue to spend, although less on stuff and more on “experiences” such as concerts and cruises. Which is why goods prices have risen by only 0.1 per cent in the past year, while service-sector inflation remains a problem.

To continue spending, better-off consumers can draw on income from dividends and interest, running at an annual rate of \$3.7 trillion (£2.9 trillion) in the first quarter. Others save less – about half the 7 per cent of income considered normal. More spending, less put by, and spenders must bid up the price of the scarce savings on which they draw – meaning interest rates should rise. Cheers from Federal Reserve policymakers, boos from consumers paying 22 per cent interest on their credit-card balances.

No longer flush with Covid relief cash, consumers have increased those credit card balances to 13.1 per cent above a year ago in order to wine, dine, fly, pack Vegas casinos and hop hither and yon to enjoy concert performances of what some call music. Lower-income people can’t join in the fun; they are among the almost one in five borrowers who are contributing to rising delinquency rates – the late payments on card debt that, warns Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, are “often a leading indicator that things are about to get worse.”

The rate of inflation is definitely slowing, perhaps. The consumer prices index has increased by 3.2 per cent over the past year. That beats the 9.1 per cent it reached 18 months after the presidency passed to Joe Biden, whose inheritance was the 1.4 per cent inflation rate of Donald Trump’s final month.

The Fed, of course, has its own measure of inflation, which it uses to determine if its 2 per cent target is met. Its “Core Personal Consumption Expenditure” index excludes food and petrol and has a model for determining rent that leads the bank’s forecasters to predict a decline in house prices that will help drive rents down. Small problem: house prices are up 54 per cent since before the pandemic and have increased almost 6 per cent in the past year, with 31 per cent of urban markets recording double-digit increases.

Because it excludes non-core items such as food and petrol, and fiddles with rent, the Fed’s index is of little direct interest to people who eat, drive and want a roof over their heads. It does, however, have a big effect on their lives because it is the measure that guides Fed policy, which affects the interest rate on their mortgages and vehicle loans. That indicator rose at an annual rate of 2.4 per cent in May, unchanged from April but well below the faster rise of 4.7 per cent a year ago. Progress, but still sufficiently above the Fed’s 2 per cent target giving chairman Jerome Powell a reason to keep rates higher for longer.

Add some straws in the wind. Discounts are back at car lots and showrooms, reducing the price of the average used car by 7 per cent. Walmart, Target and other retailers have announced some price cuts, which aren’t good enough for voters whose lodestar is pre-pandemic prices.

Against that, Powell must weigh continued strength in the labour market. It is not as tight as it was two years ago, but last month the economy added 272,000 jobs, about 100,000 more than in April and more than the average for the past 12 months. Average hourly earnings continued to rise at an annual rate of 4.1 per cent. This puts paid to any idea that the Fed will cut its benchmark interest rate at its meeting this week.

The Fed is not the only player in the anti-inflation game; other forces are lined up against it.

- While Powell hoses down the inflation flames, Biden pours a spending fuel on the fires.
- Tariffs are up and headed higher. That



**“Higher for longer interest rates might prove too high for too long**

will eventually push up prices – on all imports, with a 10 per cent tariff imposed, if Trump gets his wish.

- Government agencies are churning out costly regulations that exceed any reasonable measure, inevitably pushing prices up.
- Mandated increases in minimum wages and new entitlements add to higher labour costs and larger fiscal deficits, both of which fuel inflation.
- Powell & co will continue to hold interest rates at a level that they believe will ease the upward pull of demand on prices. They can’t do as much to reduce the upward push of costs on prices. No help will come from the White House, no matter which improvident candidate most Americans find the least appalling. Neither has an inner scrooge on which to rely when making budgets.

It might turn out that we will end up talking about whether to stay with a 2 per cent inflation target if the cost of reaching it takes too great a toll on employment and economic growth. Interest rates that are higher for longer might prove too high for too long

*irwin@irwinstelzer.com*

*Irwin Stelzer is a business adviser*

BUSINESS

Prufrock

William Turvill

Lawyers lose big in battle of the bands

It is 23 years since Enrique Iglesias, the heart-throb Spanish songster, claimed the affection of millions with the words: “I can be your hero, baby.”

What is Iglesias, 49, up to these days? Well, last Sunday night he was being wheeled out by airline bosses at Emirates to entertain guests at the industry conference, IATA, in the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Prufrock was not alone in feeling rather underwhelmed by the performance – in fact, in the crowd were a couple of members of the Riverdance theatre show, who’d just come off stage themselves, looking rather nonplussed.

Iglesias was not the only musician of former renown to rake in some corporate cash last week. Over in Germany, the barons of the private equity world were entertained by 90s fave Fatboy Slim and rapper Flo Rida at the SuperReturn conference in Berlin.

Still, it could have been worse. The entertainment on offer for attendees of the London International Disputes Week last Thursday night? “Law Rocks” – a “battle of the bands” competition between rival law firms.

Surely even lawyers aren’t paid well enough to endure that?

• City of London views don’t get much better than those offered from the roof of 120 Fenchurch Street, the home of M&G. The fund management giant invited a selection of lowly journalists for drinks and canapés in The Garden, as it is known, last Wednesday evening. Unfortunately, it was not quite the summer’s eve that M&G’s social secretaries might have desired, with a notable nip in the air.

While Prufrock was building up an alcohol jacket of warmth, M&G’s half-Swedish boss, Andrea Rossi, did his best to put on a brave face in his smart suit and tie. But before long, he was forced to seek out his navy blue trenchcoat. As well as being half-Swedish, Rossi is of course half-Italian – hence, perhaps, his inability to deal with a chilly evening in the City.



Enrique Iglesias failed to wow the crowd in Dubai

JUST SAYING ...

If it were as simple as more data or the best algorithms, we'd have no flops. But we do



Greg Peters, Netflix's co-chief executive, admits its algorithms for deciding what shows to feature aren't perfect

Nothing to see at Fujitsu

With their goodie-two-shoes approach to corporate governance, pesky shareholder advisory groups such as Glass Lewis regularly irk chief executives around this time of year by recommending that the investors vote against their pay packages.

So, when Glass Lewis’s voting advice for Fujitsu’s annual meeting landed in Prufrock’s inbox, we were anticipating some harsh words for the Japanese tech giant behind the Post Office IT system – a scandal that led to hundreds of sub-postmasters being wrongly accused of fraud.

The number of corporate governance red flags in its report? Zilch.

Yes, Glass Lewis was “concerned” about the Horizon scandal, but the good news was that Fujitsu had assured the proxy firm that “multiple preventative measures” are already in place.

“As for the UK postal accounting system deficiencies,” Glass Lewis added, “due to the ongoing nature of the matter, we do not feel that any such action

is necessary at this time.” So that’s all right, then.

Moulding barks back at critics

There is a whiff of revolution in the air over at Matt Moulding’s beauty and

nutrition conglomerate, THG. First we had activist investor Kelso making a nuisance of itself by declaring that it will vote against the re-election of THG chairman Lord (Charles) Allen at the forthcoming shareholder meeting.

The investor bemoaned a failure to close the gap between the company’s lowly valuation and the higher valuation it supposedly deserves.

Kelso has now received the backing of MyProtein founder Oliver Cookson, who still owns 1.6 per cent of THG shares after selling his business to Moulding in 2011. Cookson said it was “crucial” that shareholders take decisive action because of the “strategic stagnation” engulfing Moulding and his merry men.

One of the proposals activists have made is that THG should sell off its nutrition arm. Moulding is dismissive of this small group of investors, saying: “My dogs have got more shares and you’ve met them.”

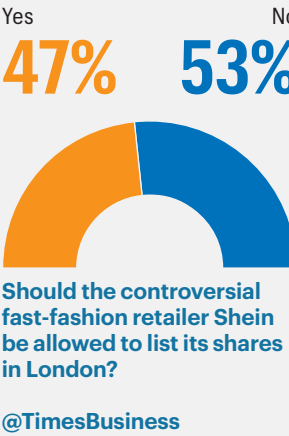
That comment has not been met with universal acclaim.

“Let’s hope Matt treats his dogs better than his shareholders,” says one observer. Woof.

FUNNY BUSINESS



TWITTER POLL



THE TIPSTER

LUCY TOBIN

This prized pet set to make a full recovery

Pets at Home has lost about a quarter of its value since the competition watchdog began sniffing around the vet industry last September.

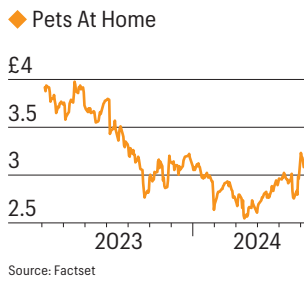
The Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) has since launched a full review into the £5 billion sector over concerns that corporate consolidation has weakened competition. Shares in Pets at Home now stand at £3.07, down from about £4 last summer.

This, however, is a vet, grooming and retail empire, and the first of these is just one facet of Pets at Home – albeit a highly profitable one. Last year, the company’s 457 stores and grooming salons made revenues of £1.3 billion, and a £100 million operating profit. Its vet arm (444 practices, two-thirds of which are in stores), brought in £132 million in revenues and a

£52 million profit. The vet side has huge margins, but it runs a franchise-style model that gives individual practices price-setting power. Vets stump up for sites and capital expenditure, then set their own treatment prices. That a gerbil’s tooth removal may cost one price at Vets4Pets in Friern Barnet, north London, and another in Edinburgh’s Fort Kinnaird may placate the CMA.

It also means Pets at Home benefits from a capital-light division: 40 per cent of vet revenues are converted into free cashflow. “The power of the vet business is really under-appreciated by the market,” said Wayne Brown, an analyst at the investment bank Liberum.

More than half of its vet practices are less than ten years old, meaning there is



further potential growth ahead as mature practices tend to be more lucrative.

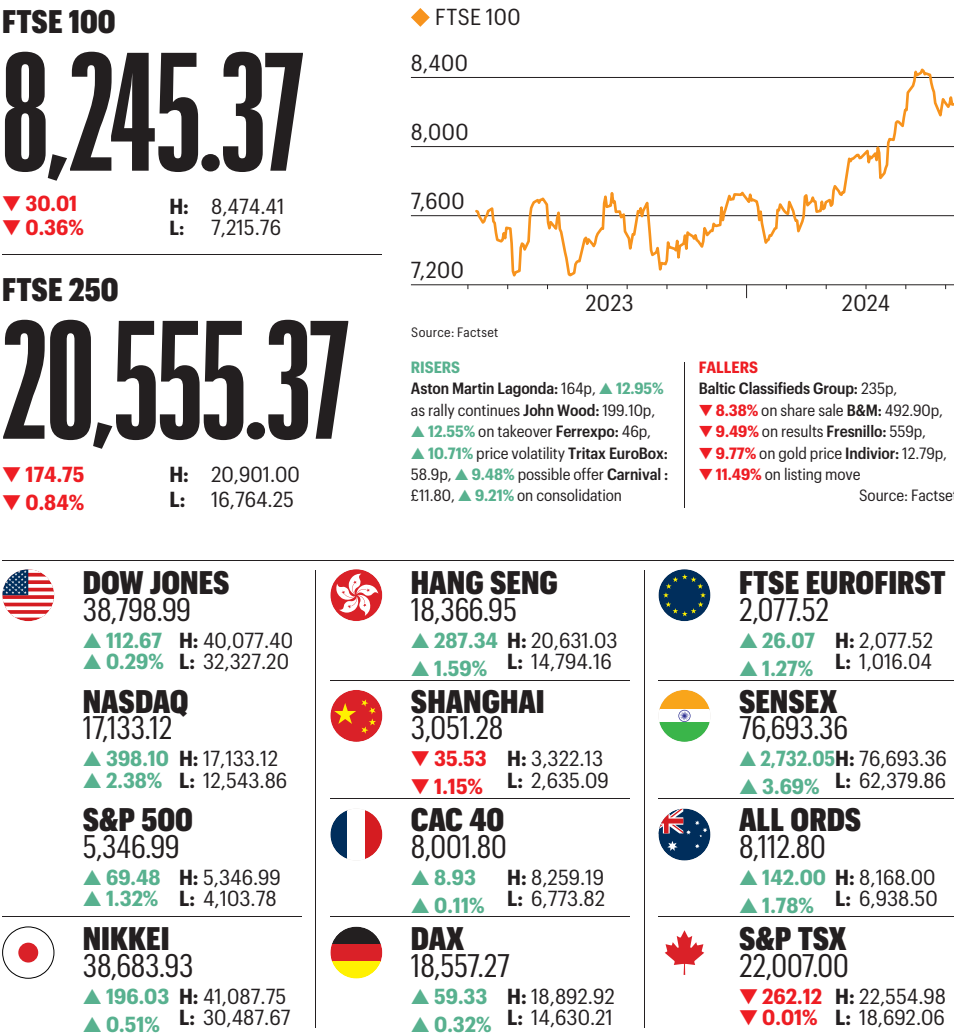
It’s true that Pets at Home’s prescriptions business does benefit from centralised sourcing and could be stymied by the CMA, but this brings in only about £26 million in revenues.

Cheshire-based Pets at Home has also spent more than £50 million on a new single distribution centre that will bring significant cost savings, and has launched a new app that analysts are drooling over. “It’s like Amazon Prime for every pet,” Brown said. “Owners can buy food, book grooming, vets, medicines – it should hugely drive Pets at Home’s share of the wallet, and its access to customers’ data will exponentially rise. The shares look alarmingly cheap.”

The company’s valuation, of 13 times forward earnings, is down from a historic level of 18.

In the first six weeks of this year, Pets at Home’s retail sales fell by 2 per cent. But the CMA is unlikely to cause serious injury to this business, which has significant growth potential. Buy.

THE WEEK IN THE MARKETS



TOP 200 COMPANIES

Market cap ranking	Price	Change on week	52-week high	52-week low	Mkt Cap (£m)
1 Abnrdn	152.3	-2.8	1920.0	136.2	2714.6
2 Admiral	2730.0	+16.0	2801.0	0.3	8091.9
52 Airtel Africa	120.2	-1.7	214.0	103.3	4496.4
163 AJ Bell	377.5	-7.5	403.0	249.0	1556.5
179 Allianz Technology Trust	366.0	+20.0	366.0	175.0	1407.7
22 Anglo American	2382.5	-131.0	2750.0	253.0	28883.8
27 Antofagasta	2145.0	-58.0	2410.0	60.4	2146.6
199 Ashmore	186.6	-8.4	230.0	6.0	1238.2
25 Ashtead	5558.0	-130.0	6104.0	326.5	24255.1
31 Associated British Foods	2560.0	+10.0	2738.0	190.0	19191.8
186 Aston Martin Lagonda	164.0	+18.8	395.4	0.7	1352.4
1 AstraZeneca	12556.0	+366.0	12556.0	2.8	194650.2
54 Auto Trader	819.0	+2.8	827.4	567.0	7353.4
38 Aviva	477.9	-2.0	487.0	128.2	12841.8
124 Babcock International	545.0	-20.5	565.5	16.0	2755.5
13 BAE	1395.0	+3.0	1397.0	78.8	4233.7
145 Balfour Beatty	360.4	-11.0	385.4	295.4	1869.4
157 Bank of Georgia	3740.0	+30.0	5380.0	7.8	1686.6
19 Barclays	217.2	-2.8	220.0	2.8	32363.2
79 Barratt Developments	501.0	-2.2	566.4	392.3	2424.9
86 Beazley	682.5	-7.5	690.0	176.0	4440.4
106 Bellway	2764.0	+86.0	2802.0	35.0	3279.4
70 Berkeley	5195.0	-45.0	5320.0	3773.0	5502.9
133 Big Yellow Group	1208.0	-40.0	1264.0	247.6	2371.4
17 B&M European	492.9	-51.7	612.4	34.0	4942.8
185 Bodycote	730.0	-24.0	768.0	444.2	1390.2
6 BP	462.7	-25.5	558.0	134.0	77192.1
190 Brexton	384.5	-1.0	403.0	3.8	1320.9
156 Bridgepoint	213.0	-10.6	1403.0	166.9	1689.2
11 British American Tobacco	2437.0	+22.0	2735.0	7.0	54166.2
97 British Land	429.2	-8.6	444.6	0.8	3980.9
131 Britvic	981.0	+15.5	1018.0	52.0	2442.9
36 BT	132.1	+1.5	149.4	102.4	13142.4
44 Bunzl	2946.0	+10.0	3223.0	292.0	9899.9
100 Burberry	1032.0	-3.0	2289.0	52.3	3700.6
193 Bytes Technology	541.0	-17.5	612.0	0.2	1300.5
142 Caledonia Investments	3525.0	+95.0	3700.0	2593.6	1921.8
34 Carnival	1179.5	+99.5	1377.0	118.5	14953.7
189 Centamin	115.1	-4.2	805.0	78.2	1335.7
56 Centrica	133.4	-8.1	172.5	79.0	7066.6
194 Clarkson	4230.0	+115.0	4230.0	18.5	1297.0
91 Coats	82.4	-3.3	88.7	0.9	1311.6
45 Coca Cola HBC	2704.0	+56.0	2804.0	175.0	9863.6
16 Compass	2240.0	+48.0	2321.0	8.0	38132.0
11 Computacenter	2742.0	-72.0	2842.0	59.5	3129.8
74 Convatec	251.8	+3.2	293.4	67.5	5161.4
134 Cranswick	4345.0	-100.0	4465.0	134.2	2348.9
66 Croda	4319.0	-221.0	6118.0	3.2	6030.0
93 Drake	582.2	-5.8	603.4	286.0	4077.7
69 DCC	5635.0	-55.0	6035.0	4.5	5531.6
129 Derwent London	2294.0	-34.0	2402.0	1779.0	2575.9
9 Diageo	2670.0	+39.5	3457.0	136.7	59357.1

Market cap ranking	Price	Change on week	52-week high	52-week low	Mkt Cap (£m)
68 Diploma	4210.0	+118.0	4252.0	9.3	5642.4
126 Direct Line Insurance	210.0	-4.4	2338.0	133.9	2725.2
192 Domino's Pizza	324.0	-9.0	424.6	73.4	1300.7
143 Drax	494.2	-24.3	784.0	401.5	1911.2
75 DS Smith	370.4	-10.6	413.0	78.6	5109.6
137 Dunelm	1079.0	-22.0	1191.0	41.5	2181.7
101 EasyJet	463.1	+3.1	577.8	2.8	3487.6
95 Endeavour	1652.0	-65.0	2082.0	6.4	4043.1
41 Energen	1053.0	-140.0	1204.0	12.1	1932.1
86 Entain	716.4	+41.2	1403.5	12.1	4577.5
18 Experian	3663.0	+56.0	3752.0	1.9	33424.3
198 Fever-Tree Drinks	1076.0	-5.0	1412.0	153.5	1256.0
155 Alimprint	6050.0	-440.0	6540.0	4255.0	1703.8
96 Frasers Group	880.0	-1.5	938.0	440.3	3962.8
92 Fresnillo	559.0	-60.5	677.2	3.1	4719.2
196 Future	1109.0	+49.0	1411.0	27.0	1272.9
107 Games Workshop	9935.0	-50.0	11700.0	259.2	3273.8
10 Glencore	469.8	-11.0	501.5	0.9	57096.1
140 Grafton	982.7	-10.3	1023.0	5.8	1966.2
150 Grainger	244.5	-5.5	274.8	41.5	1804.7
182 Great Portland Estates	339.5	-6.0	416.0	162.3	1376.0
119 Grepps	2850.0	-90.0	2940.0	249.2	2892.2
7 GSK	1629.0	-137.5	1812.5	4.0	66431.7
21 Haleon	330.3	+5.2	341.0	308.5	30164.0
48 Halma	2296.0	+70.0	2473.0	312.0	8673.0
180 Hammonson	27.9	159.0	20.9	1393.0	
76 Hargreaves Lansdown	1058.5	+3.0	1120.0	185.0	5016.0
158 Hays	106.0	-1.8	440.0	88.5	1679.9
98 Helios Towers	127.4	+2.6	129.4	2.3	1339.2
90 Hikma Pharmaceuticals	1949.0	+19.0	2205.0	1722.0	4324.5
162 Hill & Smith	1970.0	-70.0	2100.0	154.5	1582.1
200 Hippgnosis Songs Fund	101.8	+1.2	104.2	11.8	1231.0
99 Hiscox	1153.0	+11.0	1234.0	938.0	3948.2
83 Howden Joinery	876.0	-31.5	930.5	118.0	4813.7
3 HSBC	694.6	-1.8	706.4	191.6	1429932.4
109 IDS	334.6	-1.6	402.5	47.1	3206.4
116 IG Group	795.0	-15.0	822.5	93.0	2964.9
81 IMI	1856.0	+1.0	1901.0	0.9	4820.9
33 Imperial Brands	1987.0	+46.0	1994.0	1.1	17044.9
108 Inchcape	789.0	-7.0	847.0	8.1	3250.7
153 Indivior	1279.0	-166.0	1885.0	731.0	1721.2
41 Informa	832.8	-15.0	852.0	148.5	11241.3
37 InterContinental Hotels	7938.0	+38.0	8132.0	267.0	12857.2
61 Intermediate Capital	2230.0	-80.0	2394.0	0.3	6481.1
49 International Airlines	170.6	-0.9	327.0	138.0	8388.8
132 International Public Partnerships	124.8	-0.2	139.8	115.4	2374.2
53 Intertek	4840.0	+64.0	5025.0	375.0	7798.0
103 Investec	517.0	-1.5	565.0	429.6	3335.5
110 ITV	79.1	-0.6	263.0	59.5	3143.5
149 IWK	181.2	-1.4	207.0	14.2	1833.8
59 JD Sports	125.5	-2.0	12000.0	115.6	6504.8
113 Johnson Matthey	1640.0	-118.0	1865.0	898.0	3008.6

Market cap ranking		Price	Change on week	52-week high	52-week low	Mkt Cap (£m)
174	Jtc	889.0	-12.0	942.0	73.5	1453.9
170	Kainos	1196.0	+44.0	1417.0	0.3	1504.8
80	Kingfisher	261.9	-2.2	270.4	11.5	4835.2
173	Lancashire Holdings	610.0	-23.0	689.0	1.6	1458.1
82	Land Securities	647.0	-5.5	725.2	8.5	4819.5
35	Legal & General	249.1	-0.9	268.0	192.0	14895.6
17	Lloyds Banking Group	54.8	-0.7	139.8	39.8	34406.6
12	London Stock Exchange	9432.0	+270.0	9432.0	232.0	51009.9
94	Londometric Property	199.1	-5.1	210.2	17.4	4062.8
117	Man	253.6	-10.0	277.8	12.5	2946.3
63	Marks & Spencer	309.3	+7.3	311.6	185.1	6333.4
51	Melrose	620.0	+4.2	1005.0	446.8	8230.7
84	M&G	198.3	-0.8	1182.0	183.1	4720.0
146	Mitchells & Butlers	309.0	+1.0	912.0	199.3	1834.7
168	Mitie	119.0	-2.2	124.2	91.9	1517.2
58	Mondie	1504.5	-56.5	1706.1	197.9	6632.6
14	National Grid	869.2	-13.2	1050.1	3.6	4782.3
24	NatWest	316.9	+1.9	326.4	13.6	26387.0
138	Network International	393.0		395.2	360.0	2093.7
40	Next	9246.0	-92.0	9426.0	6434.0	11720.0
177	Ninety One	158.9	-11.3	186.2	60.5	1441.8
155	Ocado	362.3	-11.3	976.4	342.0	2971.1
151	Onesavings Bank	458.6	-5.4	528.0	45.8	1777.4
176	Orange Instruments	2490.0	-10.0	2770.0	347.0	1442.2
181	PageGroup	440.0	-17.0	498.4	2.6	1380.4
164	Paragon Banking	747.5	-17.0	779.5	435.8	1552.2
26	Pearson	961.8	+13.8	1025.0	42.0	6441.1
154	Pennon	596.5	-25.5	794.0	551.0	1706.5
85	Persimmon	1441.5	-3.5	1484.5	932.4	4609.9
36	Petershill Partners	207.0	-1.0	522.6	143.0	2317.5
178	Pets at Home	308.0	+11.8	397.6	10.1	1441.7
78	Phoenix	491.4	-4.8	563.6	88.5	4921.1
172	Playtech	479.5	+1.5	615.0	370.0	1461.0
159	Premier Foods	2178.0	-58.0	2298.0	1286.0	1676.5
175	Premier Foods	166.8	-4.4	176.2	113.2	1449.4
28	Prudential	71.6	-15.4	1136.0	608.0	2072.2
160	Quilter	458.2	+9.0	528.0	115.0	2807.2
160	Quilter	71.9	+0.1	376.4	71.5	1636.6
24	Rathbone	1740.0	+12.0	1996.0	0.1	1883.1
100	Reckitt Benckiser	4506.0	+54.0	6226.0	201.0	31671.8
335	Redrow	703.0	-9.0	739.0	64.2	2325.5
8	Rexel	353.0	+115.0	353.0	3.4	6586.6
118	Renshaw	4040.0	+40.0	4350.0	60.0	2937.5
43	Renitolis	421.4	+7.1	655.2	2.0	10583.3
167	Rhi Magnesia	3205.0	-205.0	3760.0	2492.0	1512.4
89	Rightmove	553.8	+20.6	594.8	41.0	4393.2
5	Rio Tinto	5352.0	-124.0	5860.0	10.3	86905.5
15	Rolls-Royce	456.9	+3.5	460.9	0.1	38455.5
120	Rotor	335.2	-3.2	343.8	281.0	2867.7
104	RS Group	702.0	-1.5	839.4	106.5	3327.8
147	Safestore	846.5	-53.5	968.5	873.0	1849.3
42	Sage	1060.0	+37.5	1249.0	859.6	10589.9



CHRISTOPHER JONES

When Nicola Chan's father died in November 2021, she got his house – and a £40,000 inheritance tax bill.

Chan, who lives in Liverpool, can't keep the three-bedroom home in northwest London, worth about £475,000, because the only way she can pay the tax is to sell it. And until she does, the bill is growing, thanks to the interest charged by HM Revenue & Customs.

"I am stuck in a loop where I have to sell the house to get the money, but you need to pay the tax bill before selling the house," said Chan, 41, a body confidence coach. "The worst thing is inheritance tax accrues interest if you can't pay it."

Inheritance tax (IHT) is levied at 40 per cent. Everyone gets a £325,000 allowance, which means you can leave assets and property worth up to that amount without your beneficiaries having to pay any tax. If you leave your main property to a direct descendant, you get another £175,000 allowance, giving you a total of £500,000 that you can leave tax-free.

Anything left to a spouse or civil partner is tax-free and they can also inherit any unused allowances from each other, which means a couple can leave a total of £1 million IHT-free.

Chan's father had been due to inherit a share of his late mother's house, valued at £123,500. The house has still not been sold, but his share has been added to the value of his estate, making it almost £600,000. He was divorced so he had not inherited any allowances from a spouse, and could pass on £500,000 to his children tax-free. The remaining £100,000 was liable for tax at 40 per cent.

IHT bills have to be paid within six months of the person's death; after that HMRC can charge interest at 2.5 per cent above the Bank of England's base rate – 7.75 per cent. For assets that are hard to sell HMRC may allow you to pay the IHT in annual instalments over ten years. Chan owes about £11,900 for her first three instalments and about £5,100 of interest has been added to the overall bill.

Chan is caught in a common tax trap: to sell a property held solely in the name of someone who has died you first need to get a grant of probate, the legal document that allows you to distribute their assets. But to get the grant of probate you normally need to pay some or all the IHT. It can be a huge problem for those who inherit a large estate, but are not wealthy.

It is possible to get a "grant on credit", where probate can be granted before the tax is paid, as long as you make a legally binding promise to pay the bill before a fixed date.

Chan would need to secure a buyer for the house before she can apply for this. "We would need a buyer who is willing to wait for the paperwork to go through," she said.

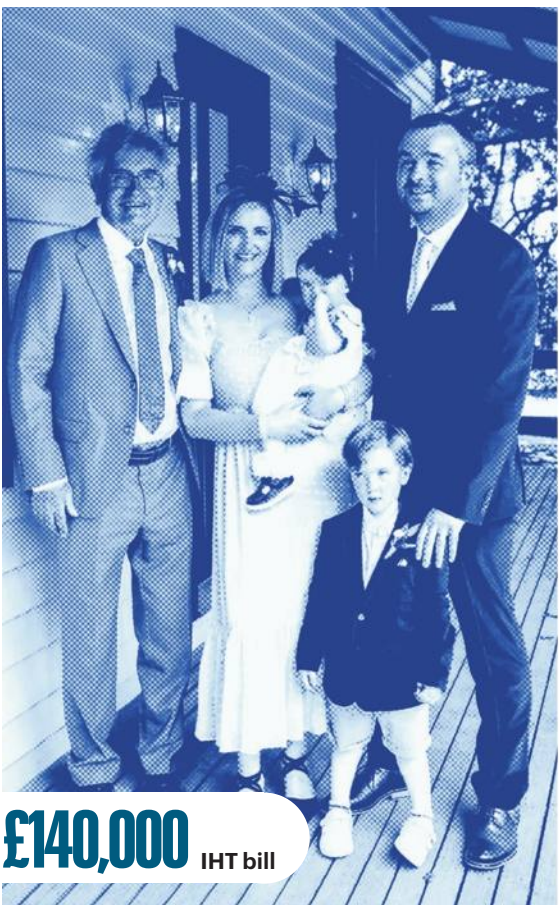
"It seems really unfair that Dad can't leave something to his family that he worked his whole life for. To add interest on top seems really unethical."

A HMRC spokesperson said: "The inheritance tax calculations in this case are based on information supplied to us by the executor of the estate."

THE DEATH TAX

IHT raised a record £7.5 billion in 2023-24, up 41 per cent from £5.3 billion three years earlier. It is expected to raise £9.7 billion in 2028-29, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Darwin Friend from the Taxpayers' Alliance, which campaigns for low taxes, said: "A tax that was designed to only affect the wealthiest is now hitting hard-working households who are already



Blair Hilton, left, with his family. His three children will inherit his estate, but he is worried about how much tax they may have to pay



Nicola Chan has been left her dad's £475,000 house, but she has to pay tax on the £100,000 of his estate that is over the £500,000 allowance



Rayner and Carol Peett had to sell their home and another flat they owned when Carol's mum died in 2011 and they inherited her farmhouse

£140,000 IHT bill

£40,000 IHT bill

£160,000 IHT bill

'We can't keep Dad's house – we have no way to pay the £40k tax'

The Tories may pledge to abolish inheritance tax in their manifesto. For some families the reform would be too late to save them from a hefty bill, writes *Lily Russell-Jones*

mourning the loss of loved ones. The next government needs to scrap the death duty before more grieving families are hammered by HMRC."

The £325,000 IHT allowance has not increased since 2009 (the £175,000 main residence allowance was added in 2017) and the government has said that it will remain frozen until 2028.

Some analysts expect the Conservative Party to include a pledge to overhaul the system in its election manifesto. They suggest that the tax could be abolished, or that the rate could be cut from 40 per cent to 20 per cent.

About 27,000 estates incurred IHT in 2020-21, according to the estate agent Savills, up from 17,900 in 2013. The average value of estates that were liable for the tax was £1.3 million and the average tax bill was £213,485.

About 200,000 homes are inherited each year, according to the estate agency Hamptons. It said 9.4 per cent of estates that included property incurred IHT in 2020-21, up from 6.9 per cent in 2009.

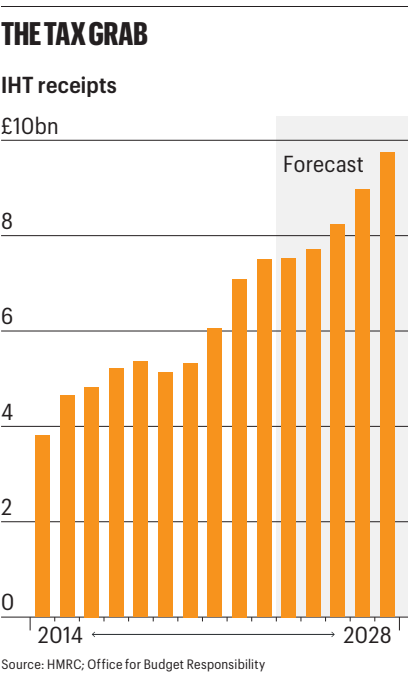
'I HAD TO SELL MY HOME TO PAY INHERITANCE TAX'

Carol Peett was forced to sell her own home and another flat to pay a £160,000 IHT bill after her mother died in April 2011. Peett, 66, and her husband, Rayner, 60, inherited the £400,000 farmhouse in Pembrokeshire that had been her childhood home. To cover the tax bill the couple sold their three-bedroom home worth £300,000, which left them with £50,000 after paying off their mortgage. They also sold a one-bedroom flat they owned in Reading for £105,000.

Selling both properties and drawing on their savings freed up about £200,000, which they used to pay the IHT and renovate the four-bedroom, 16th-century farmhouse.

Peett said: "We were lucky and managed to sell the house and flat within two weeks. It would be an absolute nightmare for someone who couldn't sell quickly."

Her parents had a £650,000 allowance between them – they died before the



extra residential allowance was introduced – but this was used up on other assets that were left to her siblings, so a 40 per cent charge was applied to the value of the farmhouse.

"There was no cash left to cover the tax bill," said Peett, who runs a business called West Wales Property Finders. "It's unfair. People who have worked hard to own their property want their children to have it, not to have to sell it to pay tax."

HOW THE SUPER-WEALTHY AVOID IHT

One of the main criticisms of IHT is that ordinary families end up paying it, while the super-wealthy can avoid it.

There are exemptions that allow people to shield their wealth from tax. For example, money saved in your pension does not normally count towards the value of your estate for IHT purposes. You can also get agricultural relief when passing on land or property used for

7.75%  
The interest that HMRC can charge on IHT bills not paid within six months

41%  
The increase IHT revenue from £5.3bn in 2020-21 to £7.5bn in 2023-24

farming, and business relief for eligible property, machinery and shares.

Experts say these reliefs disproportionately benefit the wealthiest. In 2020, 68 estates with business assets worth more than £5 million each benefited from inheritance tax relief on £1.8 billion of assets, according to a freedom of information request by the public policy think tank Demos.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that estates worth between £1 million and £2 million pay an effective IHT rate of 14 per cent. This increases to 28 per cent for estates worth between £2 million and £5 million, but falls to 19 per cent for those with more than £5 million. "Inheritance tax is a mess. Wealthy estates can get away with paying very little and there are problems with the way it's administered," said Robert Palmer from Tax Justice UK, which campaigns for a tax system that redistributes wealth. "It is important that people who inherit large amounts contribute to help fund crumbling public services."

You can give away up to £3,000 as gifts each tax year without the money later counting towards the value of your estate for IHT purposes. If you live for seven years after making gifts, they will usually be tax-free. You can also give regular gifts of any amount (such as paying into a child's savings account or covering their rent) without incurring tax, as long as this money comes from your surplus income, – what you have left after living costs.

'MY HOUSE PRICE HAS DOUBLED. I'M WORRIED FOR MY CHILDREN'

Blair Hilton, 79, never thought his family would have to worry about inheritance tax, but the value of his house has more than doubled over the past 20 years.

"I have a will that divides things equally between my three children. It would leave a tax bill of about £140,000 to pay upfront, which is a fair bit of cash," Hilton said. "I wasn't expecting to be affected, but the allowance hasn't changed for a long time."

Hilton, a former engineer and civil servant, is divorced so will be able to leave £500,000 tax-free, including his home in Merseyside, which he bought 20 years ago for £130,000 and is now worth £400,000. He also has about £450,000 of savings and investments, most of which is in an Isa held with the platform Bestinvest. He saves £250 a month for each of his five grandchildren, which costs him £15,000 a year. He puts the money in trusts, which they will be able to access when they are 18. This money is a regular gift from his surplus income, which means it should be exempt from IHT.

"I could spend my cash to try to get back below £325,000, but that seems crazy. Most of it would go on holidays," he said. "Inheritance tax planning is a long-term issue, but you have short-term political decisions affecting it."

Johanna Noble Money Editor

Welcome to the hypocrisy economy



Probate, the tax office, child benefit ... The list goes on. All we hear about are constant delays at various government departments.

Getting a grant of probate used to take about four to six weeks. But since going "digital" and centralising the probate office, which led to a loss of experienced staff, the system has been suffering chronic delays. A surge in deaths during the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't helped. The latest figures show that the average waiting time for probate applications is about 14 weeks, but many families are waiting for more than a year. While the bereaved are stuck in limbo, interest owed on inheritance tax bills mounts up.

There is a real issue with delays for tax refunds too. Whether that is for income tax, VAT or inheritance tax overpayments. Sometimes it can even be a matter of life and death. An HM Revenue & Customs insider told us last year that a terminally ill woman

waited more than six months to get her money back.

Now, about half a million families have not received their child benefit payments on time. Money due in bank accounts on June 3 did not arrive because of a technical glitch affecting HMRC. Parents took to social media to complain, with some saying that they have been left unable to buy food or pay for their child's bus fare. While most should have their payments now, it's just another example of the delays.

Why do we have to pay for the inept failures of these organisations? If a taxpayer files their tax return even a day after the deadline, they face a fine. Yet there is nothing we can do about the multiple delays that civil servants are responsible for. Welcome to the hypocrisy economy where there is one rule for them and one rule for us. It's time someone was held accountable and it shouldn't be normal people.

It is ridiculous that one government body (HMRC) can rake in money because

“HMRC should face the same late penalties as taxpayers”

of another government body's (the probate office) failure to deal with delays. HMRC needs to scrap the interest charge until the probate delays have been sorted out.

HMRC should also face the same penalties for paying taxpayers late that they charge people for filing late. It charges 7.75 per cent for late payment, but only pays 4.25 per cent on overpayments.

Its excuse? That it is "in line with the policy of other tax authorities worldwide". And that "it compares favourably with commercial practice for interest charged on loans or overdrafts and interest paid on deposits".

But hey, HMRC, you're not a bank, are you? And do customers face the same delays in other countries?

And while the families who did not get their child benefit on time will be able to get redress, it won't take away the stress many must have felt last week. Enough of the double standards. One rule for all. @JohannaMNoble

Big banks under pressure for failing to raise savings rates

Ali Hussain

Britain's five biggest banks risk breaching financial regulations for not passing interest rate rises on to customers, a leading savings analyst has warned.

Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, NatWest and Santander pay 1.69 per cent on average on their most accessible no-notice accounts, compared with an average rate of 3.12 per cent for the market as a whole, according to the data analytics firm Moneyfacts.

HSBC does not offer an easy-access Isa to new customers, but the average rate paid across the accounts by the other big four banks is 1.62 per cent, compared with 3.31 per cent for the market as a whole.

The best rate on an easy-access non-Isa account is 5.2 per cent from Ulster Bank (part of NatWest), if you have a linked current account. Chase pays 5.1 per cent but this includes a 1 percentage point bonus until January 16.

Many of the newer challenger savings firms offer rates around 5 per cent.

The leading banks have been criticised for not passing on increases to the Bank of England base rate, which affects savings and lending rates across the market. Bank rate has gone up 14 times since its record low of 0.1 per cent in December 2021 but

has been held at 5.25 per cent since August.

Failing to pass on rate rises to ordinary savers may breach Consumer Duty rules that were introduced by the Financial Conduct Authority, the City regulator, last year. These require financial firms to ensure "good outcomes" for customers.

James Hyde at Moneyfacts said: "Companies have had almost a year now to review any previously uncompetitive products, and bring them into compliance with the Consumer Duty rules. Unfortunately, the big five banks are still paying significantly sub-par variable savings rates."

UK Finance, a banking trade body, said: "The industry is committed to providing fair value and savings rates have increased across all account types. There is a wide range of savings products available. We would encourage savers to shop around for the best one for their needs."

5.2%  
The best rate on an easy-access account

1.69%  
The average easy-access rate paid by the big five

# The earl, his chalet and the missing millions...

A £134 million scheme run by a descendant of the Duke of Wellington has yet to repay thousands who bought risky mini-bonds, reports *Ali Hussain*

Thousands of investors who put money into a firm owned by an earl have been told that they won't get the millions of pounds they were expecting.

The investors in Wellesley Finance Limited, a company ultimately owned by Graham Wellesley, the 8th Earl Cowley and a descendant of the Duke of Wellington, have waited three years for payment and some now fear that they won't see any money at all after the firm missed a target to pay £5 million in December.

The earl and his wife, Claire, Countess Cowley, lost a High Court battle in April over a loan secured against Chalet Valentine, their six-bedroom, five-bathroom property on the Mont d'Arbois in France, close to the Swiss border.

The High Court ordered the couple to pay €2.747 million (£2.35 million) plus £104,061 in costs to Banque Havilland, a private bank, after they missed a repayment due in October 2022.

A representative of the earl said his relationship with the bank was entirely separate from his investment business.

Cowley has tried to rebuild his business empire after it almost collapsed in 2020, leaving thousands of ordinary investors to worry about a large part of their life savings. Between 2014 and 2019 the Wellesley Finance group encouraged savers to put millions of pounds into property development projects.

At a time when rates on savings accounts were close to record lows, Wellesley used slick TV adverts to promote itself as an alternative to banks, promising to pay interest as well as offering iPads and iPhones. You could invest with as little as £100.

The company, which has since admitted that some of its early advertising was "wrong", held about £134 million from 11,700 investors in 2020.

**WHAT WAS IT ALL ABOUT?**

Wellesley Finance offered peer-to-peer loans and mini-bonds – types of investment where you lend money to businesses that may struggle to get finance from banks.

Investors were told that their money would be used to fund building projects such as the conversion of a factory in Bristol into 44 houses and 96 flats, a 144-home project in Felixstowe, Suffolk,



Neil Taylor and his mother invested in Wellesley mini-bonds between 2015 and 2019.



## 'My grandad applied for a mortgage in 1939. He had to wait 12 years'

**Lucy Alderson**

Thursday marked the 80th anniversary of D-Day, a chance for the nation to reflect on the sacrifices that millions of men and women made during the war effort.

D-Day, the invasion of German-occupied Normandy, was considered a tipping point in the Second World War, paving the way for the Allied forces to secure victory in 1945.

One of the lesser known consequences of the war was that many families had to put their dreams of home ownership on hold for years because banks stopped approving mortgages, as discovered by Myra Gravett

from Hertfordshire this week. She stumbled across her late grandfather James Windsor's mortgage paperwork from 1939 while rummaging through old boxes.

Windsor, who worked at a furniture factory, had been looking to buy a three-bedroom home in Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire, for him, his wife, Alice, and children, Joan and Doreen. His application was rejected on October 11, 1939 – a month after Germany invaded Poland.

"It is with great regret I have to inform you I am unable, owing to the war, to arrange the mortgage on the house you proposed purchasing," reads the



**James Windsor had his mortgage application rejected at the outbreak of the Second World War. "All building societies have, for the time being, withdrawn their offers" he was told**

rejection letter from the estate agent FR St John. "All building societies have, for the time being, withdrawn their offers."

In the 1930s about 60 per cent of the population rented, but home ownership was starting to get easier. Building societies had loosened lending restrictions which meant households on lower incomes were more likely to get a mortgage – until war broke out.

"My grandfather would have been upset that he couldn't buy a home, but it was understandable under the circumstances," said Gravett, 74. "Banks didn't want to lend money. Everything was put on hold.

You didn't know whether you'd even be alive at the end of the war, let alone paying the mortgage."

In 1942 Windsor joined the RAF, aged 37. He and his eight brothers all served and all survived the war.

In February 1951, six years after the war ended, Windsor managed to finally buy the same house, which had made it through the bombings. His mortgage application for £890 (£23,490 in today's money) was approved by Magnet Building Society.

"I'm proud my grandparents came through the war and managed to buy their own house," Gravett said. "It took a lot to do that in those days."

Finance insists that all risks were highlighted before investments were made

However, by late 2019 many of Wellesley Group's development projects had stalled, then Covid lockdowns affected the construction industry. Wellesley Finance stopped paying money to investors shortly after.

Funding for further projects dried up after the FCA temporarily banned the sale of mini-bonds to ordinary investors in November 2019 amid fears that people did not fully understand the risks. This ban became permanent in 2020.

The Times highlighted concerns about Wellesley Finance in February 2020, pointing out that losses had ballooned from £1.2 million in 2017 to £10.2 million in 2018, based on the latest published accounts at the time. Accounting errors meant that the company had to restate its December 2017 net asset value from £3.37 million to £140,000. Its total net asset value was minus £9.2 million as of December 2018.

By September 2020 Wellesley Finance was heading for a so-called disorderly insolvency, which would mean that investors would get back 1p for every £1 invested.

Investors were given the option instead to vote on a group restructure. This would mean that, depending on their investment, they would get back between 25p and 84p per £1 invested under a company voluntary arrangement (CVA) outlined in a 220-page document. This would allow Wellesley Finance to continue operating.

Most investors who voted were in favour of this. A large number of investors did not vote.

Under the CVA about 3,500 bondholders agreed to become shareholders in Wellesley Finance Limited on the understanding that they would start to get payments when the company was profitable again. They understood they would get £5 million between them in December 2023 and another £5 million at the end of this year.

The first payment was missed.

On January 23 investors were sent letters, seen by The Sunday Times, saying: "We regret to advise that the scheduled target redemption dates set out previously will need to be revised."

The letter said the loans had become "non-performing and impaired" and that the resumption of payments would depend on the loans' recovery, which the company "reasonably estimates to occur over a two-year period from the date of this letter".

### 'WE WERE INFLUENCED BY THE SNAPPY TV ADVERTS'

Neil Taylor invested in Wellesley mini-bonds for himself and his mother between 2015 and 2019, when iPads were being offered as incentives.

"The commentary and publications by Wellesley early on were mainly positive. They claimed a lot of early success and we were influenced by the snappy TV



## Graham has suffered significant personal financial losses as a result of the failure of the business

promotions," said Taylor, 66, from Lincoln. "With hindsight it was a mistake."

Taylor, a retired finance director, now heads the Wellesley Investor Action Group, which represents 650 investors.

In total he and his mother, who died in 2019, invested £98,000, but got back £13,015 in loan repayments. He and his mother's estate were expecting to get about £10,000 in December under the terms of the CVA.

Taylor has written to Wellesley raising concerns that the firm is not making efforts to rebuild the business and says

that his questions are not being answered.

He said: "I have spent a huge part of my retirement trying to understand some of the vagaries and nuances of what has happened. Getting to the facts has been a struggle."

Taylor said: "We kept all the problems from our mother to not add to her stress during the final months of her life, but it certainly added to our stress. We were hoping to use some of the money from the investments for her care, but it wasn't needed in the end."

Taylor has lodged a complaint with the FCA that has been signed by more than half the members of the action group.

Another investor in his fifties, who did not want to be identified, estimates that he has lost £110,000.

"Losing that amount for what was described as a modest risk investment feels wretched," he said. "This money was intended to be my plan for early retirement. This has been pushed back five years at least."

Another investor, a woman in her seventies, said: "I trusted the good name of Graham Wellesley's family and aristocratic background. What a fool. I estimate I've lost £96,450 to date."

According to the accounts of Wellesley Group, its directors were paid £7.1 million in salary and pension between 2014 and 2022. The highest-paid director received £2.8 million over the same period. Accounts show that Earl Cowley was the highest paid director in 2016.

The FCA began an investigation into Wellesley & Co Limited in 2020, which continues. It declined to comment.

Cowley is understood to have suffered in the collapse of the firm. He owns a £7 million townhouse in Chelsea (bought in 2015) and the Villa Kerida in the exclusive Port d'Andratx in Mallorca, worth between £15 million and £21 million, which has recently been advertised as for sale. According to a CVA document, Villa Kerida acted as security for a £2.6 million loan by Cowley to a subsidiary of the Wellesley Group. It was valued at €18.2 million in January 2020. This loan has been repaid.

Andrew Turnbull, a director of Wellesley Finance Limited, said: "Graham's personal financial affairs are private. However, he is willing to disclose that his purchase of the properties was funded by the proceeds of the sale of two successful businesses prior to Wellesley Group and not by his involvement in Wellesley Group."

"Indeed, Graham has suffered significant personal financial losses as a result of the failure of the business."

Turnbull added that his company has been in a long-running dialogue with Taylor and had responded to some of his concerns in a letter in April. He disputes allegations that the company is not doing enough to become profitable to repay investors.

He said his company made clear that the investments carried a risk of loss and investors had to answer a suitability questionnaire in which they had to demonstrate their understanding of the key risks involved.

In a statement he said: "Seventy-six per cent of all investors in Wellesley Group's subsidiaries have received more than 90 per cent of their original investment back. Fewer than 3 per cent of all investors received less than 30 per cent of their original investment because they chose to solely invest in a higher risk/reward investment where they confirmed they would not invest more than 10 per cent of their disposable net wealth excluding their home".

Wellesley said its shares do not have a "due date" because they are equity as opposed to debt. The terms of the CVA made clear that payment dates were not fixed and were subject to the performance of the business.

It said the action group's understanding of what they would get under the CVA was wrong. It said the amounts they thought they would receive were based on a technical snapshot of the remaining liabilities at the point of the CVA.

**WHAT IS A MINI-BOND?**

A mini-bond investment is essentially an IOU that is issued by a company that might otherwise find it difficult to raise money from banks. Investors get an annual return, then their original investment back at the end of the loan term, assuming that the company does not go bust.

Crucially, however, mini-bonds are not regulated by the FCA and there is also no protection from the FSCS, which means that investors' cash is not covered if the company does collapse. Mini-bonds are also illiquid, which means investors may not be able to get their money out before the bonds mature.

Mini-bonds became popular after the financial crisis. For investors they offered high rates of return at a time when interest rates were close to zero, and for companies they offered a way to raise capital to invest in their business that they might not have been able to raise through traditional means such as from a bank or institutional investors.

Sam Benstead at the wealth manager Interactive Investor said: "Don't invest if you can't afford to lose all your money and always do your own research on the bond issuer."

"Investors should not be lured in by high yields alone and must make sure they understand the risks."

Rising interest rates mean that investors can get good returns from bonds that are issued by larger companies or governments without the high risks.

Gilts, which are bonds issued by the UK government, yield between 4 and 4.6 per cent, while corporate bonds yield about 5.5 per cent.

Another less risky way to invest is through a managed fund that invests in dozens of bonds. Benstead suggested Royal London Global Bond Opportunities, which yields 6.35 per cent.

# Ian Cowie Personal Account

## These European retail champions are more than a match for the Americans



Uefa European Championship football, which begins on Friday when Germany play Scotland in Munich, might remind international investors that America is not the only game in town. Yankee stocks account for more than two thirds of all the shares by value on this planet, but continental companies can still score.

Step forward Adidas (stock market ticker ADS), the German sports goods giant that made the kit for both teams playing on Friday. It was red-carded by Mr Market after an embarrassing row with a rapper but continues to gain from rising awareness about the importance of taking exercise and keeping fit.

Less obviously, this business is also boosted by more folk working from home, wearing comfy trackie bottoms and trainers, rather than skirts and heels, or suits and ties. Adidas shares I bought for €64 in July 2014, as reported here at that time, cost €231 and sit just outside my top ten holdings by value.

You could be forgiven for never having heard of EssilorLuxottica (EL), but it is the biggest optical business in the world. If you are reading this with glasses, there is a one-in-three chance you are looking through lenses made by this Franco-Italian firm.

Founded by a man who grew up in a Milan orphanage, EssilorLuxottica benefits from more of us spending much of our lives looking at computer screens. Poor sight that used to be regarded as unavoidable with age is no longer acceptable.

Leonardo Del Vecchio also understood the

**Scotland's Andy Robertson and Ilkay Gundogan of Germany Kick off the Euros on Saturday**



value of luxury goods and Essilor makes glasses sold under the Armani, Burberry and Chanel brands among many others. Most excitingly, it recently launched glasses that discreetly double up as hearing aids but it seems reluctant to let me try them, so I have no idea if they work. However, I have few complaints about the shares, which I bought for €96 in March 2019. They cost €210 on Friday and are my sixth most valuable holding.

Heineken (HEIO), the Dutch brewer best known for its eponymous lager, has long been a Uefa sponsor. More importantly, this global business owns 165 breweries in more than 70 countries with Amstel, Birra Moretti and Tiger among its biggest beers. Its British estate includes 2,400 pubs with ales including Brixton, John Smith's and Newcastle Brown. Shares I bought for €45 in January 2014 now cost €78.

What's that I hear from the back of the crowd? When's he going to mention Novo-Nordisk (NOVO)? The Danish maker of the weight-loss and diabetes wonder drugs Wegovy and Ozempic is my biggest winner of recent years, so I hope you won't mind me reminding you that I told you all about them in February 2021, long before the features and fashion pages got interested.

That's when I paid the equivalent of \$36 for American Depository Receipts (ADRs), allowing for a subsequent two-for-one share

**€231**

The price now of Adidas shares that Cowie bought for €64 each in July 2014

**ST DIGITAL**  
Read a breakdown of Ian Cowie's "forever fund"  
thesundaytimes.co.uk/cowieholdings

## Family lose out on £3m inheritance after final deathbed text message

Ali Hussain

A man legally changed his will by text message just hours before his death, the High Court has ruled.

Al-Hasib Mian Muhammad Abdullah al-Mahmood, who was born in Bangladesh but lived in the UK from the 1970s, had no children. He had a will drawn up in 2015 leaving his assets to his late wife's brother and his three daughters who all lived in America. The estate, which was worth about £3 million, included property, land, investments and cash.

However, Mahmood had become detached from these relatives and complained that they did not visit him, the court heard.

In about 2011 another relative, Masudur Rahman, also from Bangladesh, came to study in the UK. Rahman regularly visited Mahmood and his wife at their home in Mitcham, south London, and they struck up a close relationship. The Mahmoods gave lavish gifts to Rahman, including jewellery and saris for his wife.

When Rahman finished university in 2015 Mahmood

went to his graduation, and also referred to Rahman as his son, the court heard.

Mahmood's wife died in 2020, aged 75, and her entire estate transferred to her husband. Mahmood gave Rahman £25,000 to pay Mahmood's wife's debts and cover her funeral. When friends visited to pay their condolences. Mahmood told them that Rahman (who was present during the visits) would be organising the funeral. He told some of them that, figuratively speaking, Rahman was his son, who would benefit after his death, the court heard.

Shortly after, Mahmood instructed Rahman to his house to go through paperwork that listed all his assets and details of how to access them, including account numbers and passwords.

He also got in contact with a professional will writer, Jonathan Amponsah, to write a new will that would leave everything to Rahman. But the process was never completed. On October 22, 2023, a text message was sent from Mahmood's phone to the will writer saying:

"Jonathan, I am Al-Mahmood.

I agreed that Masudur Rahman will be the absolute own [sic] of all my assets and the executor of my new and last will. This is my final word. I revoked all my previous will done by me and my wife. It's a difficult time for me. Please help Masud."

During the early hours of October 23, another text message was sent to a family friend called Sayam Bin Hafiz. It read: "Sayam, pray for me. Masud is my son. He is the absolute owner of all my assets. This my final word."

Mahmood died shortly after, aged 82.

The original beneficiaries of Mahmood's will disputed

**“He changed his will after complaining his relatives never visited**

the validity of the texts and voiced suspicions about the circumstances in which they were sent. The judge, Paul Matthews, dismissed these concerns and found that the texts were genuine.

The judge said: "In my judgment, after his wife's death and until very shortly before his own death, Mr Al-Mahmood's intention was to make a new will in favour of the claimant, whereby the claimant [Rahman] would inherit all the testator's UK-situated property, the defendants [the beneficiaries of the 2015 will] receiving nothing."

Joseph Adunse from the accountant Moore Kingston Smith said: "As far as the deceased was concerned, his will would not be finalised before he died so he sent a text message to the will writer emphasising his intention that the new beneficiary should inherit his assets."

"Based on events that had unfolded in the days leading to his death, including the text message shortly before his death, the High Court found that valid gifts in contemplation of his death had been made."

## Ebay bids to put Amex in its place

George Nixon

Shoppers will not be able to pay with American Express on the auction site eBay from August 17.

The ecommerce company said Amex charged "unacceptably high fees for processing transactions" and so eBay has stopped accepting its credit cards

worldwide. Shoppers can still pay with Mastercard and Visa credit and debit cards.

Credit card companies do not reveal exactly how much they charge retailers because they say that information is "commercially sensitive", but Amex's fees are believed to be higher than Mastercard or Visa. Some shops do not allow you to pay with Amex for this reason.

The British Retail Consortium, a trade body, said that retailers spent £1.26 billion processing card payments in 2022, up from £1.09 billion in 2021. The consortium said that credit cards, which made up about 21 per cent of payments, cost retailers an average of

0.62 per cent per transaction to process. The average transaction cost for debit cards was 0.28 per cent. The consortium said: "Retailers have no choice but to accept card payments, regardless of the additional cost burden, which places card schemes in a position of power."

American Express has always defended its fees,

**0.62%**

The average cost to retailers of a credit card transaction

saying its customers tend to spend more than those with other credit and debit cards.

Some 140 million Amex cards are used worldwide. They are popular with bigger spenders because of their rewards, including cashback, air miles and hotel points. Amex said that its customers spend 3.2 times more a year than other card holders.

The online giant Amazon was involved in a similar fight with Visa over its fees in 2021, when it threatened to ban UK customers from using Visa credit cards to pay. The two firms' spat ended in a deal in February 2022.

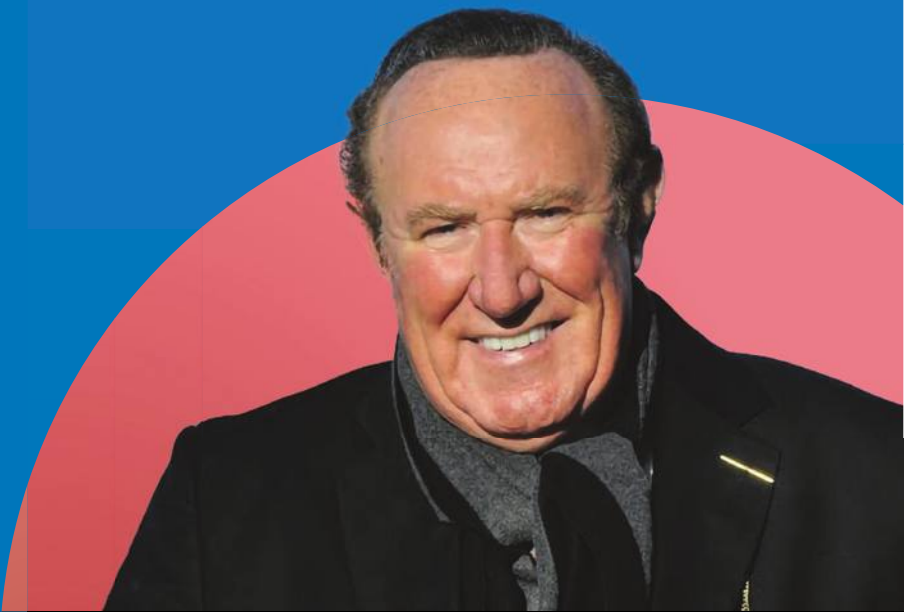
American Express said it was disappointed in eBay's decision.

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## Why I'm cool on this hot tech stock

A senior colleague asks if I would invest in the new technology hot stock, Nvidia (stock market ticker NVDA), whose market value soared above \$3 trillion last week, making it the second-biggest business on this planet. The honest, if complicated, answer is yes and no.

Let's start with the negatives. Nvidia shares are priced at an eye-stretching 64 times their corporate earnings, which is a very expensive entry point.

That's more than double the valuation of the hardware tech firm it overtook, Apple (AAPL), which has a price/earnings ratio of 30, and the software giant that remains the world's most valuable company, Microsoft (MSFT), which has a P/E ratio of 36.

From a purely personal point of view, there's another problem. While I have a fairly good idea of what Apple and Microsoft do, I have only a vague notion of why Nvidia is prospering from the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution.

By contrast, I have been an Apple customer for 34 years and a shareholder since 2016, when I paid \$23.75 for stock that costs \$196 on Friday. Similarly, in January last year, when the AI boom began, I paid \$233 for Microsoft shares, as reported here at that time, which traded at \$425 on Friday.

So, no, I am not buying Nvidia now. But I am delighted to report that it is the biggest underlying holding in Polar Capital Technology (PCT), comprising a tenth of this investment trust in which I have been a shareholder for more than a decade. PCT shares traded at £4.33 when I began writing about them here in 2013, but are now £31.55. That fund remains the best way into the new tech hot stock for this old boy.

**\$3.01trn**

Nvidia's valuation on Wednesday

# Married with children: meet the new first-time buyers

Rising costs mean many couples are having kids before they can afford to get on the property ladder, reports *Rachel Mortimer*

Katie Marshall was 26 when she bought her first home, a one-bedroom flat in Wimbledon, southwest London, for £220,000. It was 2006 and she and her boyfriend Tom, now her husband, put down a 10 per cent deposit on the 500 sq ft property where they lived for three years. Nearly two decades later, Danielle McMullen, 38, and her husband, Neil, 55, who live with their 13-year-old son in Cardiff, are hoping to finally get on the property ladder and buy a three-bedroom house. The average sold price in their area in the last year was £438,865, according to Zoopla.

They are not atypical of first-time buyers today, since the rising cost of properties and mortgages means that aspiring buyers have to save for longer. Many are now more likely to have a family by the time they can buy, something that, in itself, makes it harder to save.

Marshall knows how lucky they were. Today, she said, getting on the property ladder in the same area with £22,000 would be impossible. “It was perfect and had everything we needed. So much has changed since then, I don’t know what we could buy with that these days. We used our savings and my dad gave us a small sum too, but we would never have been able to save that if half of our salary went on rent like it does for first-time buyers today.”

The Marshalls, both now 43, were also able to get a foot on the ladder because they were searching for a one-bedroom property – an option that is increasingly

limited for anyone looking for their first home. The share of first-time buyers with at least one dependant increased from 10 per cent in 2009 to 20 per cent in 2023, according to the mortgage lender Santander. It comes as buyers make their first purchase later in life and are more likely to have started a family with children.

Graham Sellar from Santander said: “With the average age of first-time buyers increasing in the past decade, more are reaching other life milestones, such as having children first.

“This fundamentally changes the land-



ILLUSTRATION: NINA KRAUSE

scape for first-time buyers who have a family, as they try to juggle the increasing prices of a larger property in an area with access to good local schools, against additional costs, such as childcare fees, which will impact the amount they can borrow.”

When Katie was pregnant with their first child, she and Tom bought a bigger one-bedroom property that they converted into two bedrooms. In 2011 they upgraded to a house, where they still live with their daughter, 14, and son, 11, in southwest London. “I worry for my children and how they will possibly get on the ladder. It was so much easier for us,” said Katie, who owns the PR company Luxley Communications.

**BYE BYE TWENTYSOMETHING HOMEOWNERS**

Almost one in five first-time buyers are 40 or over, according to Santander. It completed almost 6,000 agreements in principle – the first step to getting a mortgage – for borrowers over 40 in 2024. The oldest first-time buyer to borrow from the bank this year was 67.

This follows decades of house price growth that has outpaced wages, buoyed by low interest rates in the wake of the financial crisis. In 2004 the age at which the majority of people owned their own home was 32. By 2022, the latest year for which official data is available, it had risen to 36.

The number of first-time buyers fell 22.4 per cent to 287,430 last year, the lowest since 2013, according to the trade

body UK Finance. Mark Harris from the mortgage broker SPF Private Clients said: “Many first-time buyers have children because not every life decision can be put on hold. Starting a family is one of those things that people don’t want to, or perhaps can’t, put off.

“It also exacerbates the issue of affordability because buyers will then need a bigger home that will accommodate a growing family, rather than a starter one or two-bedroom flat. Such family homes are also more rare and carry a price premium.”

**HELLO HIGH HOUSE PRICES**

Over the past 20 years the average price of a terraced house has jumped 104 per cent, outpacing all other property types. The typical price of a flat has increased 76 per cent in that time, while semi-detached homes are up 98 per cent and detached properties 94 per cent, according to the estate agency Hamptons.

“With the cost of childcare factored into affordability calculations, this can make getting a big enough mortgage to purchase a larger property harder than ever,” Harris said.

The average price of a property bought by a first-time buyer has risen 50 per cent in less than ten years, according to the mortgage platform Twenty7tec. In June 2015 a typical first-time buyer borrowed £150,923 to buy an average first home

worth £193,728. Last month the average loan for a first-time buyer was £221,792 and the average first property price was £289,207.

Harris said: “Getting on the housing ladder is virtually impossible unless buyers have some assistance from parents or other family due to the big gap between income and property prices.

“The majority of first-time buyers we see have some help in the form of cash deposit, a parent acting as a guarantor or buying together via a joint borrower sole proprietor mortgage.”

The McMullens run an outdoor experience company called Blue Ocean Activities and Events in Cardiff, where they have been trying to buy a three-bedroom property since 2019.

Between them they have been saving for almost 20 years but when the pandemic hit house price growth went into overdrive and made buying impossible.

“All of the properties we’ve seen in our price range are much smaller than the two-bedroom flat we currently rent and we feel like it’s pointless investing all that money and paying off a mortgage for 30 years for a property that is smaller than where we live now.

“Wages and house prices are not in proportion at all. House prices in our area were half the price 20 years ago than they are now, but I am still earning the same as I was back then,” McMullen said.

# Best buys

## CURRENT ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Interest rate	Balance (for reward)	Contact
Nationwide BS	FlexDirect	None	5% <sup>1</sup>	–	0800 302 010
Kroo Bank	Current Account	None	4.35%	–	via app
Santander	Edge Up	£5pm	3.5%	–	03309 123 123

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Interest rate <sup>2</sup>	0% overdraft limit	Contact
Starling Bank	Current Account	None	15%	£0	0207 930 4450
Triodos Bank	Current Account	£3pm	18%	£0	0330 355 0355
First Direct	1st Account	None	39.9%	£250	0345 600 2424

<sup>1</sup>Introductory rate for a limited period. <sup>2</sup> Equivalent annual rate. \* Based on the lowest cost of an overdraft of £500 over 30 days. Some accounts require minimum funding/direct debits to open or get rates shown

## CREDIT CARDS

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	APR <sup>1</sup>	Reward	Contact
Barclaycard	Platinum Balance Transfer	0% for 21 months	24.9%	No	0800 151 0900
MBNA	Dual 0% Transfer & Purchase	0% for 21 months	24.94%	No	0345 606 2062
Sainsbury’s Bank	Dual Offer	0% for 20 months	23.95%	No	0800 030 4429

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	Transfer fee <sup>2</sup>	APR <sup>1</sup>	Contact
Tesco Bank	Balance Transfer	0% for 29 months	3.49%	24.9%	0345 300 4278
Virgin Money	Balance Transfer	0% for 28 months	3.25%	24.9%	0800 328 3579
Barclaycard	Platinum Balance Transfer	0% for 28 months	3.45%	24.9%	0800 151 0900

Provider	Card type	APR <sup>1</sup>	Cashback	Contact
American Express	Cashback Everyday	31%	0.5%-1%. Intro 5% for 3 months (max £100)	0800 917 8047
MBNA	Platinum	13.94%	0.25% on spend in first 36 months	0345 606 2062
Halifax	Cashback	22.94%	0.25% on spend over £1 a year	0345 944 4555

<sup>1</sup> APR = annual percentage rate, dependent on credit rating. <sup>2</sup> Fee charged on the amount of each balance transfer during the introductory period. Borrowing rates and availability of products are subject to individual credit ratings. Terms apply to all cashback.

## SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Oxbury	Easy Access Ltd Edition	£20,000	5.02%	oxbury.com
Monument Bank	Easy Access Savings	£25,000	5.01%	monument.co
Kent Reliance	Easy Access Account	£1,000	4.96%	kentreliance.co.uk

Provider	Account name	Notice period	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Prosper	365 Day Notice Tracker (Santander)	1 year	£15,000	5.78%	prosper.co.uk
Monument Bank	60 Day Notice Account	60 days	£25,000	5.27%	monument.co
Vanquis Bank Ltd	90 Day Notice Account (Issue 5)	90 days	£1,000	5.25%	vanquissavings.co.uk

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Raisin UK	Isbank UK - 5 Year Fixed Term Deposit	5 years	£1,000	4.75%	raisin.co.uk
Raisin UK	Isbank UK - 7 Year Fixed Term Deposit	7 years	£1,000	4.75%	raisin.co.uk
Atom Bank	5 Year Fixed Saver	5 years	£50	4.6%	atombank.co.uk

DEALS ARE LISTED ONLY IF THEY ARE COVERED BY THE UK FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPENSATION SCHEME (FSCS) OR A EUROPEAN EQUIVALENT \*MUST HOLD A CURRENT ACCOUNT WITH THE PROVIDER

## FOREIGN CURRENCY

Interbank rates at 5pm on Friday, which show where the market is trading. They are not indicative of the rate you could get.

EURO  
GBP>EUR

1.18

USA  
GBP>USD

1.27

TURKEY  
GBP>TRY

41.13

AUSTRALIA  
GBP>AUD

1.93

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## MORTGAGES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
First Direct	4.83%	Fixed for 2 years	60%	£490	PV	0800 482 448
First Direct	5.08%	Fixed for 2 years	80%	£490	PV	0800 482 448
First Direct	5.23%	Fixed for 2 years	90%	£499	PV	0800 482 448

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
Barclays	4.32%	Fixed to 30.09.29	60%	£999	LSV	0333 202 7580
First Direct	4.73%	Fixed for 5 years	80%	£0	PV	0800 482 448
First Direct	4.78%	Fixed for 5 years	90%	£490	PV	0800 482 448

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
First Direct	4.64%	Fixed for 10 years	60%	£490	PV	0800 482 448
First Direct	4.79%	Fixed for 10 years	80%	£490	PV	0800 482 448
Nationwide BS	5.4%	Fixed for 10 years	90%	£999	PV	0800 302 010

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
Nationwide BS	5.39%	Tracker + 0.14% for 2 years	60%	£999	PV	0800 302 010
Leek BS	4.99%	3.25% discount for 2 years	80%	£995	V	0808 169 6680
Hanley BS	5%	3.49% discount for 2 years	90%	£750	STV	01782 255 000

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
Hanley BS	5.59%	2.9% discount for 2 years	95%	£0	BV	01782 255 000
West Bromwich BS	5.64%	Fixed to 30.09.27	95%	£499	V	0800 298 0008
Melton BS	5.29%	Fixed to 31.10.29	95%	£0	V	01664 414 141

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Max LTV	Fee	Notes	Contact
The Mortgage Works	4.99%	Fixed to 31.07.26	75%	£1,495		0345 607 3021
The Mortgage Works	5.39%	Fixed to 31.07.26	75%	£0		0345 607 3021
HSBC	4.33%	Fixed to 31.07.29	75%	£3,999	LSV	0800 494 999

Early repayment charge applies unless otherwise stated. \* Most deals track Bank of England base rate. A = £500 cashback; B = £250 cashback; C = £300 cashback; D = £350 cashback; E= No early repayment charge; F = First-time buyers only; G = £150 cashback; H = £400 cashback; I = £1,000 cashback; L= Free legal work for remortgages ; P = Purchases only; R = Free legal work and valuation for remortgages; S = Remortgage only; T = £250 towards legal fees; V = Free valuation

## CASH ISAs

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest	Transfers in	Contact
Charter Savings Bank	Easy Access Cash Isa	£5,000	4.97%	Yes	chartersavingsbank.co.uk
Kent Reliance	Easy Access Cash Isa	£1,000	4.86%	Yes	kentreliance.co.uk

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Rate	Transfers in	Contact
Paragon	1 Year Fixed Rate Isa	1 year	£500	4.83%	Yes	paragonbank.co.uk
State Bank of India	5 Yr Cash Isa Fixed Deposit	5 years	£1,000	4.15%	Yes	branch only

## CHILDREN’S ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Rate type	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Saffron BS	Children’s Regular Saver	Variable	£5	5.8%	branch only
Halifax	Kids’ Monthly Saver	Fixed	£10	5.5%	halifax.co.uk
Coventry BS	Young Saver	Variable	£1	5.25%	branch only

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Rate	Contact
Coventry BS	Junior Cash Isa	£1	4.95%	Variable	coventrybuildingsociety.co.uk
Nottingham BS	Junior Isa	£1	4.85%	Variable	branch only
Loughborough BS	Junior Isa	£1	4.8%	Variable	branch only



## THE TOP FIVE ARTICLES ON TIMES MONEY MENTOR THIS WEEK

Our sister website, Times Money Mentor, has guides, tools and best buys to help you to manage your finances. Here’s what you have been looking at:

**1 Is expensive wine worth it?**  
Our guide on vinonomics — the factors that decide the price we pay for wine — shows how, in some cases, only 21p of the price of a £5.50 bottle goes on the wine itself.

**2 What a Labour win would mean for your money**  
We look at the implications of Labour’s plan to help with the cost of living, cut household bills, build 1.5 million homes, add VAT to school fees, and tax private equity bonuses.

**3 What are junk bonds and are they worth investing in?**  
Junk bonds sound like something you’d want to avoid, but many financial firms like them. We explain everything.

**4 Best basic bank accounts**  
Basic accounts offer most of the services of a standard account but without overdrafts. Some don’t even require a credit check — we have the list.

**5 What are the costs of buying a house?**  
It’s an expensive time, with surveys, energy performance certificates, solicitors and valuation fees. We spell out the costs you might face.

thetimes.com/  
money-mentor

MONEY

# DWP forgot my birthday. It cost me £12.5k of my pension



QUESTION OF MONEY  
JILL INSLEY

Four months ago I read an article about the extra pension some people over the age of 80 should get. When I checked the details, I realised that I should have been getting this extra pension for the past eight years. I applied in March and the Pension Service confirmed it had my application, but I couldn't get any information about when to expect the payout.

I am 88 and my husband is 76 and we are both disabled. We cannot walk without aids and have been privately renting a bungalow on a monthly contract for the past seven years. We have applied to rent a house which would be cheaper and give us long-term security, but it would need a stair lift, at significant cost. So this money, which I believe the government owes me, would make a huge difference.

I can't get any more information from the Pension Service and I feel let down that I haven't had my rightful pension for the past eight years. It also seems impossible to contact the department which deals with these applications.

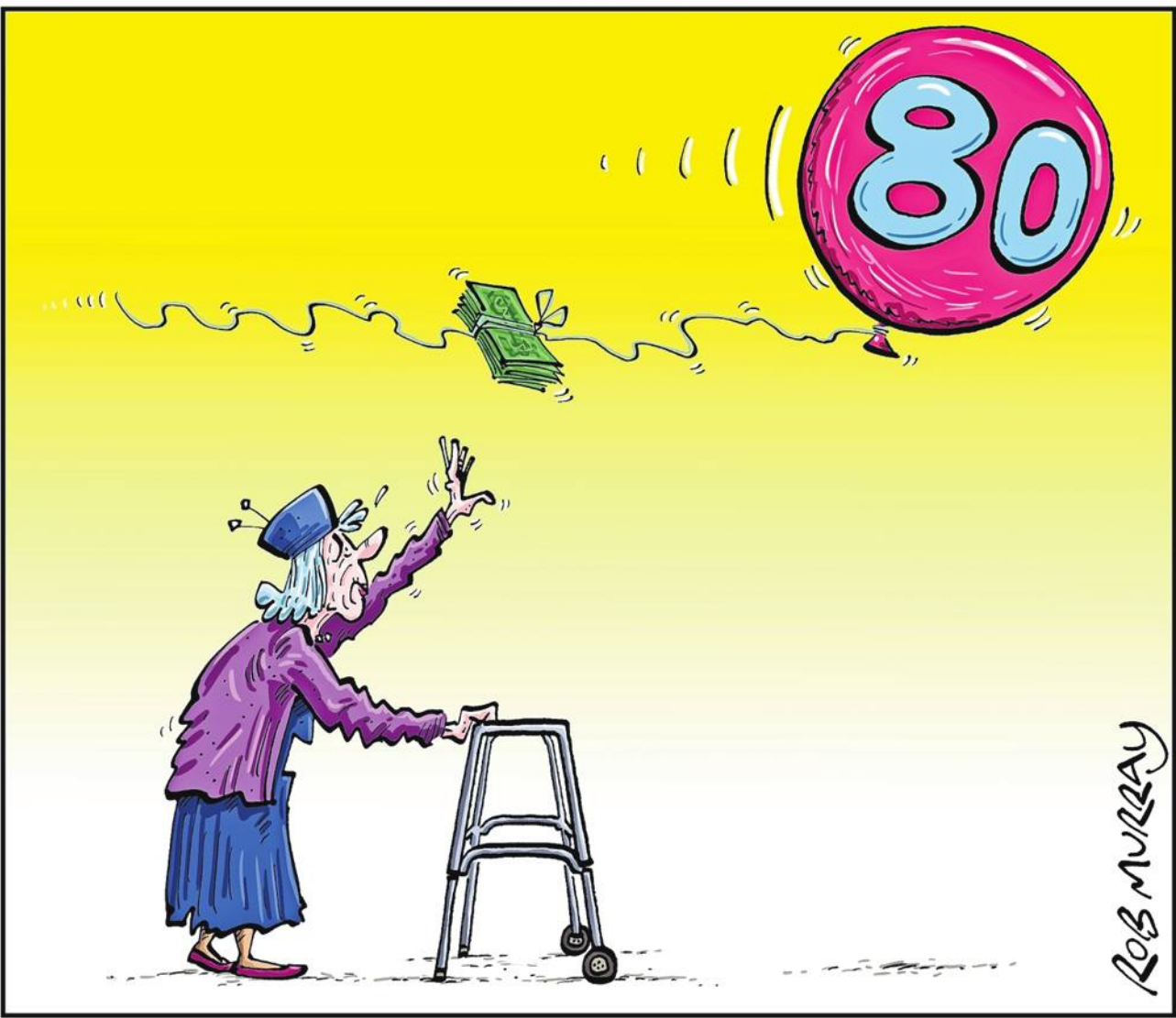
**Jill replies**  
The extra pension you refer to, sometimes called a category D pension, is for people aged 80 or over. To be eligible you must get either a basic state pension of less than £101.55 a week, or no basic state pension at all. If you qualify, it will give you £101.55 a week in the 2024-25 tax year.

You told me that you have been getting £76.27 a week in state pension during the current tax year, indicating that for the last eight years you have indeed been paid less than you were due. I asked the Department for Work and Pensions to review your payments and pay you what you were owed, as well as increasing your future payments to the correct level.

Six days later it told me that it had issued an arrears payment for £12,580 dating back to your 80th birthday in February 2016. It has also increased your state pension to £113.64 a week, the extra amount covers some national insurance contributions that you made while working in Germany. It has apologised for any distress caused to you over the past eight years by its failure to review your claim on your 80th birthday, but refused to comment any further when I asked about compensation.

Nevertheless you were delighted with the outcome: "What a morning we had. When my husband checked our bank account there it was – £12,580.

"We still can't believe how it all came about so quickly with your wonderful help. This money will make a massive change in our life."



## A memorable trip to Motherwell ... for the wrong reasons

In January we booked accommodation for a trip to Scotland, including a place near my childhood home and high school. We booked and paid for one night at 4 Jerviston Court, Motherwell, via Booking.com.

When we got there it was a dump. We called the number provided but the girl who answered told us there would be no one waiting to meet us as it was a scam. We checked Google and there were many people who had a similar

experience. My wife and I managed to find somewhere else to stay three miles away but we lost our £72 payment to Booking.com. I hope other travellers will avoid Booking.com as well as 4 Jerviston Court, Motherwell, from now on.

**Jill replies**  
The photos for 4 Jerviston Court, Motherwell, didn't look at all encouraging and incredibly it was still being advertised on Booking.com even though all the reviews declared it to be a scam. You hadn't contacted Booking.com about this situation so I asked it to refund you and take down the details so that no other unsuspecting travellers were caught out.

The next day it told me that it had refunded you. It said that the property had previously welcomed guests and had a "number of successful reservations", but it believed the property may have been sold and the owner did not tell Booking.com or remove the listing from the website.

Number 4 Jerviston Court, Motherwell, has now been taken off the site, but your experience is a good reminder to other readers searching for accommodation online: make sure to look at the reviews before booking.

## I've run out of energy with Scottish Power

Scottish Power has £386.33 of my money and won't return it, even though I closed my account at the end of January.

I run a small business and I have been paying Scottish Power a daily standing charge of 160p, and 77.7p per unit of electricity, plus VAT. This has meant that more than half my income, about £2,000 a month, has gone on electricity. I have paid every month by direct debit, in full and on time. As I got to the end of the one-year contract I found a new one with British Gas Lite (BGL) with a 60p daily standing charge and 27p per unit, more than halving my electricity costs. The new contract started on February 1.

I gave Scottish Power all the correct information, including final meter readings, on January 28. It told me to keep my direct debit open so that any money I was owed could be refunded quickly. I was £386.33 in credit at the end of my contract. On March 1 BGL took a payment of £750 as expected, but Scottish Power also took £1,609 with no explanation. I called customer service which confirmed that the company had made some mistakes – the reading on January 28 had not been accurately

recorded, neither had the reading on January 31 (the last day of my contract) and the account hadn't been closed, so another payment was taken. Customer service acknowledged I was due a refund of £1,995, that my case was a priority, and that the issues would be fixed and the money refunded within 14 days.

After two weeks, the account had been closed but my money had still not been refunded. When I called customer service again I was told: "You're not going to like what I have to say, but it will take about 40 to 50 days for your refund to be processed as you are no longer a customer of Scottish Power."

I was offered £30 as a gesture of goodwill, but rejected it as offensive and not commensurate with the stress and upset this situation was causing.

Yesterday a complaints handler said my account had not been closed (even though I had a screenshot from the previous day showing that it was) and that was why the money hadn't been repaid. He suggested that, as there was no way for Scottish Power to refund the money any time soon, I should try to get my bank to reimburse the £1,609 under the direct debit guarantee.

I did, and my bank reversed the direct debit payment, meaning I am now owed £386 by Scottish Power. My bank recommended that I cancel the direct debit as their experience was that Scottish Power would probably take another payment on April 1.

Today the complaints handler called to say he was going to refund me there and then. I explained I had already got the £1,609 back from my bank and I only wanted £386, but he wouldn't listen, saying that Scottish Power has not been asked for any money so he was going to process my full refund of £1,995.

He put me on hold. When he came back he said: "I can't seem to process the refund. Just wait there on the line while I sort it." I told him to call me back when the refund was in my bank. I hung up and, so far, nothing. No money. No apology. No compensation.

**Jill replies**  
I'm rather glad the complaints handler wasn't able to process the refund, as that would have just meant more mess to untangle. I asked Scottish Power to confirm that your account was closed and to refund and compensate you for this debacle.

It confirmed that it had incorrectly recorded one of the final readings that you provided, which meant it was unable to close your account. It said: "The account continued to be billed for energy use at the property while it remained open. Once this was corrected, we updated the account's billing record and issued final invoices using the correct meter readings."

It has now closed the account but charged you an extra £57 for the final month, which you dispute but are too fed up to pursue any further. You have been sent a cheque for £329, plus £100 in compensation.

## Ask the experts Where can we earn 5% interest without locking up our money?



ANNA BOWES  
FROM THE COMPARISON  
WEBSITE SAVINGS CHAMPION



My wife and I are keen to cash in on the high interest rates on offer, but are a bit nervous about locking away our savings for too long. A house renovation may be on the cards in the next couple of years so we don't want to risk paying a penalty for withdrawing our money early. We keep hearing that savings rates will fall soon and don't want to miss out on the good deals. We have about £23,000 in savings. Are there any accounts that would guarantee a decent return but not penalise us if we needed to access the money?  
Roger, 61, Dorset

comes with a hefty penalty in the form of lost interest.

One suggestion would be to build a balanced cash portfolio that includes easy-access and fixed-term accounts. You could lock some of the capital away for perhaps a year or two and leave what you think you would need initially in the best easy-access accounts available.

At the time of writing, if you were to put all your savings into the easy-access account that pays the best rate – Ulster Bank's 5.2 per cent – you would earn more over the next 12 months than if you split it into one-year and two-year fixed accounts. This is because the top one-year bond is paying about the same as the Ulster Bank account, while the top two-year bond pays 5.05 per cent. But that assumes of course that the variable rate would not fall, which is unlikely. And you also need to hold or open a current account with Ulster Bank to qualify for the easy-access account.

If you would prefer not to jump through that hoop, the

next best easy-access accounts are paying just over 5 per cent. The Flagstone savings platform pays 5.07 per cent, with a minimum deposit of £10,000, or you can get 4.96 per cent directly with Kent Reliance on a minimum deposit of £1,000.

With interest rates expected to come down over the next few months it's likely that variable rates will fall, so it could still pay to lock some of your money away to hedge against this.

Something else to consider is whether you are likely to pay tax on the interest you earn. If you are a basic-rate taxpayer you have a tax-free personal savings allowance of £1,000 – the amount you can earn in interest without handing any of it to the taxman. Higher-rate taxpayers get £500 and additional-rate taxpayers get no tax-free allowance.

It is frustrating that these thresholds have not been increased since they were introduced in 2016. If you are basic-rate taxpayers and the money is deposited in both your names, and you do not have other cash savings, it's unlikely that you will breach the limit. But if you are higher-rate taxpayers or are keeping the money in one name only, it may be a good idea to use a cash Isa to avoid a tax bill. Bear in mind, though, that fixed-term Isa rates are lower than the equivalent fixed bond rates.

Anna Bowes started out at Chase de Vere Investments and has worked in financial services for more than 30 years. In 2011 she helped to set up the consumer website Savings Champion



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# FAME AND FORTUNE ADRIAN EDMONDSON

## ‘I blew my first wages at a Berni Inn. I ate everything’

The comedian tells *Holly Mead* that he’s just as happy now as when he earned £11.43 a day on BBC’s *The Young Ones*

The comedian and actor Adrian Edmondson, 67, was born in Bradford, went to Pocklington boarding school from age 11 then studied drama at the University of Manchester, where he met his comedy partner Rik Mayall. The pair appeared in *The Young Ones*, (Edmondson as the student punk Vyvyan Basterd), *Bottom* and *The Comic Strip Presents*. Away from comedy he has appeared in *Star Wars: Episode VIII – The Last Jedi* (2017), hosted the *Out to Lunch* podcast and is a children’s author. He has been married to the *Absolutely Fabulous* comedian Jennifer Saunders since 1985 and they have three grown-up daughters – Ella, Beattie and Freya – and live between Devon and London.

**How much is in your wallet?** I always leave the house with a minimum of twenty quid on me. It’s my emergency money – enough to get me home if the cashless systems I use suddenly stop working. If I’m going slightly further afield I’ll bump it up. I feel nervous if I haven’t got my “getting home” money on me. I don’t have an actual wallet any more, I just stick it in my trouser pocket, which is why I like the new, smaller, more durable notes. They also survive the washing machine much better. But I generally pay for everything with my phone, so you could say I carry all my money in my wallet.

**What cards do you use?** I’ve never used a credit card for actual credit. I’ve always paid them off by direct debit every month. I hate the idea of someone charging me an extra 25 per cent for buying a loaf of bread or some underpants. I mostly use the debit card from my bank, but I also have Amex and a Barclaycard. They’re just back-ups really. My bank stops my debit card if there are more than five transactions in an hour – it’s an antifraud thing – so at Christmas, or at the fair, or in a pub, I can suddenly end up needing a back-up. In the past I used the Amex card most because it used to have a good rewards system. The Barclaycard is a back-up to the Amex card – I feel rather guilty about having it because as students we boycotted Barclays for propping up apartheid in South Africa.

**Are you a saver or a spender?** I do spend money, quite a lot of it, but at heart I’m a saver. I fell into debt as a teenager and it scarred me for life. I tricked the bank into letting me withdraw more than I had in my account. They wrote to my mum but I intercepted the letter and wrote back as her. Things spiralled out of control and ended with me feeling humiliated and considerably poorer. The pressure was unbearable and I’ve avoided debt ever since. So I’ll only spend what I have. And not even that – I set aside 50 per cent of anything that comes in to cover tax, national insurance and that gubbins.

**What was your first job?** At 16 I worked changing gas bottles on caravans at a holiday camp near Scarborough and in the evening I’d man the booth in the penny arcade. This was around 1974 and I think my first week’s wages amounted to nearly three quid. I blew it all at a Berni Inn; I had everything – the steak, the Black Forest gateau, and the Irish coffee – and spent what was left on vodka and limes at the pub next door. I got home late to find my dad had called the police.

**Do you own a property?** We own two. We think of Devon as home, but have a place in London where we stay when we’re working. As a kid, because of my dad’s wanderlust, we moved house nearly every year. Perhaps as a reaction to that I like to stay put. We’ve had the Devon place since the early Nineties. It’s a granite long house, about 400 years old, that used to be part-barn, part-house. It’s quite modest really, three bedrooms. It’s just me and Jennifer now, the kids are all in their thirties. I don’t think it’s increased in value in any kind of sensational way, but that doesn’t really bother me as it’s where I live and I love it.

I love the London house too, we’ve had it 15 years, but it’s never been a family home – the kids had all left home before we got it – so the emotional tie isn’t as strong. It’s fair to say that it has increased in value. It’s the buffer of all buffers. When the time comes we’re going to flog it and piss it up the wall.

**Are you better off than your parents?** My dad was a teacher who taught in England, Cyprus, Bahrain and Uganda, sometimes teaching forces kids or as part of some kind of foreign aid package. I have an abiding image of Dad getting his papers out every evening and sitting at the dining table, working out all his various bits of pension from here and there, looking at the day’s interest rates in the newspaper, and working out when he could retire. To the day. He hated his job. But when I told him I wanted to be an actor he stopped the car in a lay-by and gently rocked back and forth with his head in his hands. When he finally emerged from his torment he wailed, “Adrian – you’ll never get a mortgage!” But I did. In fact only 15 years later I had



Adrian Edmondson and Jennifer Saunders have been married since 1985. Below: the Vitality sausage dog and the cast of *The Young Ones* in 1982

one for a quarter of a million quid, which was quite a big one for the late Eighties. When my parents retired I gave them a sizeable wedge of cash to help them buy a bungalow.

**How much did you earn last year?** My earnings fluctuate, but since Covid – when I thought I might never work again – I’ve been on a bit of a winning streak. My autobiography’s been doing the heavy lifting this year and looks set to clear its advance if the paperback sells well. I had a play on last year at the Park Theatre in Finsbury Park, north London – it was the culmination of many months’ work and earned me the princely sum of £2,000. On the other hand, voicing the Vitality sausage dog over the last few years has earned me tens of thousands a year – although they’ve now moved to a puppy, and apparently my persona isn’t “puppy” enough. So earnings are sometimes very good, sometimes very poor. Playing Scrooge at the RSC wasn’t a big earner, but it was a fantastic job. To be frank, I’m very comfortable financially, I don’t exactly need the money, but I do need to be excited by what I’m doing.

**Have you ever worried about making ends meet?** There was a time in 1987 when Jennifer and I had just bought our first flat in the Fulham Road – I can’t remember how much, about £57,000 is coming to mind. It was above Luigi’s Delicatessen, close to the ABC cinema and lots of great shops and fashionable eateries. It had been a bit of a stretch, but we talked to someone who persuaded us we could

afford it. Then Black Monday happened. Interest rates kept climbing and suddenly our mortgage was at 16 per cent. I thought we’d get reposessed. It was weird, because we were in work and earning, but the rate just zoomed past our ability to pay. We stopped shopping at Luigi’s, going to the cinema and eating out, and basically stopped spending altogether. Luckily within a few months the rate started to come back down again. But it was squeaky-bum time and goes to show that we are all at the mercy of those gamblers in the City.

**When did you first feel wealthy?** I distinctly remember thinking in about 1980 that I could have a happy life if I managed to clear £10 a day. That it would keep me happily in the life I was accustomed to – a life of not doing much really, not going on big holidays, or buying a big house, or a flash car, but enough to rub along with my mates and buy a few beers of an evening. *The Young Ones* and *The Comic Strip* both started production in 1981 and in that year I cleared £11.43 a day. Life was pretty good – I was a full-time actor/comic/writer type person, no longer doing motorcycle messenger work, or filling car batteries with acid, or working in a pork pie factory. The next year my earnings doubled and the year after they tripled to around £30,000. That’s the first time I felt wealthy. I bought a BMW motorbike – a new one – and drove it down to the south of Spain to make *Fistful of Travellers’ Cheques* for *The Comic Strip*.

**What’s best for retirement – property or pension?** I’m already collecting my state pension; that’s drinking money but not much more. The thing about pensions is that you get the unmistakable feeling that someone is screwing you over, but they’re so clever at jargon, and changing their names, or being bought out by some other conglomerate that are even better at inventing spurious charges, that you can never find out how. My feeling is that a house will still be a house after a financial crash. The value might go up or down, but it’s still an actual thing. I’ve been advising my grandson to buy an investment property rather than get a pension.

**What was your best investment?** The London house. I think we’ve doubled our money.

**And your worst?** I once bought a boat. Just before I bought it a friend said to me, “Buying a boat is like standing in the shower tearing up £20 notes,” and he was right. In the end I practically gave it away, but that’s when I stopped haemorrhaging money. I now feel smug about the amount of money I’m not spending on the upkeep of that boat. Over the last 15 years that’s a net gain of £150,000! Is this how money works? Nothing really went wrong with it, that’s just what a boat costs, the upkeep and mooring.

**What is your money weakness?** I think I’m pretty good with money. I have a fondness for musical instruments, but have managed to curb that over the last few years. I’d like to have fewer things. Since Covid – and who knows if this is related – but I’ve given more away than I’ve brought into the house. We splash out on big family holidays in Italy with all the kids and grandkids, but I wouldn’t call that a weakness, I’d call that the whole point of money in the first place.

**Your most extravagant purchase?** The boat. I’d just earned a shedload of money touring *Bottom* and spent £150,000 buying the boat. I had it made in America – a Friendship sloop – beautiful wooden boat, gaff-rigged, a work of art. I named it Acadia because that’s where it was built, in Maine. But it was designed on an old lobster boat and had few refinements. To be exact, there was no toilet. My wife and two of my three daughters hated it. I’m a good sailor but I didn’t get out on it enough to warrant having it.

**What is the most important thing you’ve learnt about money?** To paraphrase Dickens: keep within your means and you’ll be happy, spend more than you’ve got and you’ll be sad. I don’t think I’m any happier now, financially, than the year I earned £11.43 a day.

Adrian Edmondson’s autobiography *Berserker!* is out now (Pan £10.99). Buy it from [timesbookshop.co.uk](https://www.timesbookshop.co.uk) or call 020 3176 2935. There is a discount for Times+ members

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### CHART OF THE WEEK YOUR CHANCE OF FINDING CHILDCARE

Places available per 100 children aged 0-7	
TOP	BOTTOM
St Albans	Torridge
43	12
Cambridge	Walsall
42	12
Rushcliffe	Great Yarmouth
41	13
Hart	Sunderland
40	14
Winchester	Bassetlaw
40	14

Source: Ofsted and the Office for National Statistics

June 9, 2024

THE SUNDAY TIMES  
**Home**

Renovation tips  
for nervous  
doer-uppers **8**

# How we fixed it

**Plus** Spray foam nightmares **6** Arthur Parkinson's dahlias **10** Inside the Poundland mansion **12**



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# Making moves

## House of the week

**DERBYSHIRE £3.75M**

Lea Hurst in the Derwent Valley village of Holloway was originally a 17th-century farmhouse. It became a manor house that was home to Florence Nightingale — the Nightingale family lived there for more than a century, until 1946, when the property became a retirement home before being converted back into a private residence in 2004. Peacocks patrol its 19 acres of grounds. [bluebookagency.com](https://www.bluebookagency.com)



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# The best of this week's property for sale



COVER: VICKI COUCHMAN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES. THIS PAGE: XPOSURE



## NORTH YORKSHIRE £1.5M

Built in 1815, the last working windmill in the county was converted in the 1970s. You get five bedrooms and four bathrooms, plus a south-facing garden, nine miles from the city of York. [savills.com](https://www.savills.com)



## MIDLOTHIAN 0/0 £1.05M

D'Arcy House is a four-bedroom converted farmhouse tucked away in Dalkeith, a 30-minute drive from Edinburgh. It has four reception rooms and a kitchen with an electric Aga. [rettie.co.uk](https://www.rettie.co.uk)



## DEVON £645,000

Four-bedroom Oak Tree Cottage is in the village of Talaton, 11 miles from Exeter. Rebuilt 15 years ago after a fire, it has exposed beams, a wood-burning stove and underfloor heating. [humberts.com](https://www.humberts.com)



## LONDON NW8 £12.95M

A six-bedroom gothic villa in the St John's Wood Conservation Area. It has a grand entrance hall, a secluded 84ft back garden and secure off-street parking for three cars. [arlingtonresidential.com](https://www.arlingtonresidential.com)



## WEST SUSSEX £4.25M

This grade II listed waterside property in Bosham dates from 1694 (it used to be the town hall). Now a home with six bedrooms and five bathrooms, it has a south-facing walled garden and a double garage. [struttandparker.com](https://www.struttandparker.com)

There's one thing that property agents are talking about. And it's not the upcoming election. It's *Buying London*.

For those without a Netflix subscription, *Buying London* is the British version of the US property reality show *Selling Sunset*.

I'm a committed *Sunset* fan and follow the dramas of its star agents, among them the improbably named Chrishell. After a divorce from a chiselled actor, Crishell went on to date one of her bosses, then fell in love with and married her nonbinary partner, the musician G Flip. She handled all this with perfectly blow-dried hair while also dealing with a level of internal politics that make the daytime soaps she started her acting career in look like child's play.

## THE SECRET AGENT



## 'The reality show *Buying London* made me squeamish'

There's plenty of property porn too: Hockney swimming pools, sweeping vistas across downtown LA and exuberant displays of wealth.

So I wonder why *Buying London* made me a little squeamish. I think it's because the London super-prime property world is one I know well, so there are just

too many of those "that would never happen" moments. No estate agent I know dresses as if they're about to attend a £5,000-a-plate charity dinner. No agency thrives on female conflict. The portrayals are not doing women in my industry any justice.

When I lived in LA it was a one-industry town: entertainment. So it makes sense that you'd want to put your property for sale on a streaming platform — it's all about exposure.

When I've been asked to do TV, I've always been concerned that the broadcaster mainly wanted to splash big sale-price numbers across the screen (as *Buying London* does) and request celebrity names (we see an agent whisper that the actress Salma Hayek had rented the property they're

showing). While the show is clearly a form of escapism, in the cost of living crisis we're going through it seems tone-deaf. The Guardian called it "probably the most hateable TV show ever made".

The truth is, yes, our clients are wealthy, but they're also subject to the sort of personal troubles that are universal. Death and divorce, heartache and lost love: the agonies of the human condition that take no notice of your bank balance. That's the realistic show I'd like to see, along with glorious properties.

Danny Daggers, *Buying London*'s star, has always been an advocate of social media. But it's almost the opposite of my office's approach. We're all about being what the French call "caché" (hidden, ie discreet), while still reaching the best, most discerning buyers. My prediction is that the next

wave of luxury will be all about *disconnecting*. The priciest spas and resorts have already cut the digital cord: no internet to distract their guests. I see the personal and private gaining more value, not less. And there's the key psychological factor: top-end buyers want things that not everyone knows about.

So is *Buying London* an accurate picture of the super-prime world? No. Is it good entertainment? I binged the entire season with a gripped curiosity. Is that a mixed message? Probably. To each their own. Or, to quote the French again, "à chacun son goût".

*The Secret Agent is the author of Highly Desirable: Tales of London's Super-Prime Property (Headline £12.99). Buy from timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Discount for Times+ members*

Home

# THE TWO ROBS

Your questions on being a landlord and investing in property answered

CAN I FIX MY MORTGAGE RATE FOR LONGER THAN FIVE YEARS?

I'm from the US but I've lived in the UK for a long time and have the right to stay here permanently. I've been looking into investing in property here but it seems that, in the UK, you can only fix your mortgage rate for five years. Is there any way to fix for longer, even if it means paying a higher interest rate? *Stephanie, Cambridge*



You're right that the inability to fix your cost of debt for the lifetime of the investment is a risk factor, and we often look with envy towards US property investors who can fix for longer and operate within a tax system that's more advantaged towards them.

To manage this risk in the UK the obvious first step is to fix for as long as you can. In most cases this is five years – and it's counterintuitively cheaper to fix for five years rather than two at the moment, so this certainty comes at no extra cost.

Of course, you won't know what your mortgage rate will be after the end of this term. However, you can monitor the market during the fixed period and build up some cash reserves to protect you, and can also anticipate that rents are likely to be higher in five years, which will go some way to offset any increase in rates.

It's worth noting that as you haven't yet started investing, you'll benefit from the fact that interest rates have corrected sharply upwards over the past couple of years. This has caused obvious problems for existing owners, but from

your perspective it means that if a deal works based on today's mortgage rates you can be more confident that it will continue to work in the future. While you can't rule out the possibility of another move upwards from here, another shift of the same magnitude is far less likely.

Depending on your goals and personal situation, it may make more sense to invest in the US or a different asset class entirely. But if you do choose to buy in the UK with a mortgage, your extra caution and awareness around this risk will probably serve you well.

WHAT ARE THE TAX IMPLICATIONS OF BUY-TO-LET PROPERTIES?

My partner and I unexpectedly became landlords last year: we saw a great deal nearby and were able to remortgage and take out money for a deposit. However, we didn't get enough advice at the time, so we purchased it in our names rather than through a company. This means we are now paying high rates of personal tax on the rent, and the mortgage payments aren't deductible. It's all

been a bit of a sobering experience, and we wish we had taken more in-depth advice. Could you offer some advice on the tax implications of buy-to-let property for us first-timers? *Dave, London*

You're right that tax is a major consideration when it comes to buy-to-let investment. It used to be straightforward – but changes to the deduction of finance costs that were announced in 2015 put an end to this, and the result is that many more investors are choosing to buy within limited companies.

According to Land Registry data analysed by the estate agency Hamptons, in 2015 (before the changes were introduced) 41 per cent of properties were purchased via a company structure. By 2023 this had risen to 74 per cent.

It's important to bear in mind that this isn't an easy decision – there are always trade-offs. It's true that when owning a property via a limited company you can deduct your finance costs in full while individuals can only claim a limited relief, and companies are taxed at corporation tax rates that are significantly less than the

higher rate of income tax. However, companies have higher accountancy costs, and in some cases higher mortgage costs. But the most important consideration is that extracting cash from a limited company to spend personally incurs a significant tax charge for higher or additional-rate taxpayers. Purchasing through a company is therefore generally more suitable for people who want to allow the rental profits to accumulate within the company – perhaps putting them towards future purchases and only withdrawing them much later when their other sources of income have ceased.

This only scratches the surface, however, and there's no one-size-fits-all answer. So, whether you're just buying one property or intending to build a portfolio, it's imperative to take professional tax advice based on your own circumstances before making any firm decisions.

*Rob Dix and Rob Bence are the presenters of The Property Podcast*

*Submit your questions for the two Robs at [propertyhub.net/sundaytimes](https://propertyhub.net/sundaytimes)*

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**M**andy Hutson thought she was doing her bit for the planet. In 2021, the customer operations manager, 53, installed spray-foam insulation in the loft of her four-bedroom 1980s house in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire. She had never heard of spray foam, but saw it as an option in the government's Green Homes Grant. "The proviso was that I had to use an approved TrustMark supplier. I found an approved company who sent a surveyor to check it could be installed safely. I sent in the quotes and the government issued me a voucher. I had the foam installed in May 2021. I paid £1,843 and the government paid £3,686."

She was pleased when her heating bills decreased, and recommended the product to her mother, Sue, 74, who lives nearby in a two-bedroom 1970s bungalow, and also had it installed.

But the family had a rude awakening in February, when Mandy tried to sell her property. "I had an interested buyer. But their mortgage company told them they would not lend against the house because I had spray foam in the loft. I provided the warranty for the foam, but they wouldn't accept that."

Mandy's estate agent recommended she have the foam removed, but Mandy was quoted £8,000. "I don't have that kind of money knocking around," she says. "But if I don't have it removed, I've heard horror stories about possible damage to the roof."

So Mandy took her home off the market. Her mum, a retired events organiser who is thinking of downsizing, feels similarly stuck. "We had the house valued. The estate agent was horrified when they heard I had the foam in the loft."

Mandy and Sue are not alone. An estimated 250,000 homeowners in Britain have spray-foam insulation in their loft, according to the Property Care Association (PCA), a trade body for building specialists. However, the industry has been plagued by cowboy installers whose poor quality installations can leave moisture trapped behind the foam and rot the roof timbers.

Even if the roof is not damaged, it can be difficult for surveyors to declare it safe because they can't see the timbers behind the foam. As a result of this uncertainty, lenders may refuse to provide mortgages, leaving some homeowners unable to sell or remortgage their homes.

The industry and surveyors have been trying to break the



# My spray foam nightmare

Homeowners are finding they can't sell or remortgage their properties because cowboy insulation work has scared off lenders – they tell us their horror stories

impasse. In March 2023, the PCA introduced the Sprayed Foam Insulation Inspection Protocol, an attempt to establish uniform standards for surveyors to assess whether roofs with foam are at risk. Since then the PCA has been providing specialist training for surveyors to inspect foam-lined roofs. There are presently nine professionals trained to provide risk assessments for homeowners, with more on

the way, according to James Berry, the deputy chief executive of the PCA. "I haven't got any doubt that some lenders will provide finance if the foam was installed correctly," says Stephen Hodgson, a building consultant and former chief executive of the PCA who inspects spray-foamed roofs for homeowners and trains surveyors. "But the vast majority of installations that my colleagues and I are

looking at are problematic and never should have been done. There are defects."

Of the 45 inspections Hodgson estimates he's done in the past year, he reckons only three were done properly and would pass muster with lenders.

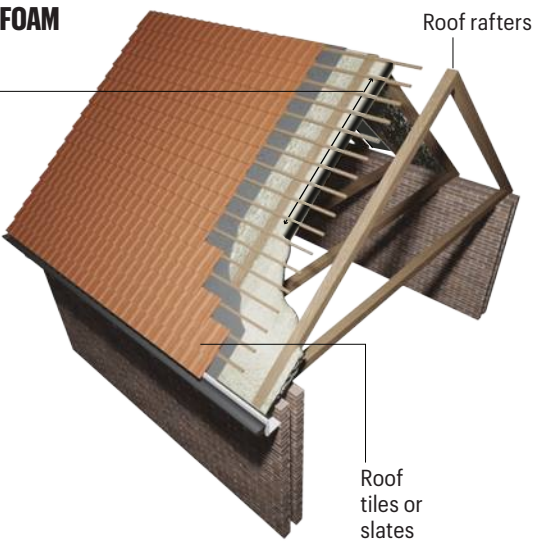
Hodgson is finding three common problems. One, lofts that already had insulation on the floor now also have spray foam on the underside of the roof. Having both poses a



Mandy Hutson has been unable to sell her home in Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire, because it has spray foam insulation, below right

THE PERILS OF SPRAY FOAM

- 1 Foam sprayed on the underside of the roof
- 2 If not installed correctly, trapped moisture can cause the rafters to rot
- 3 Surveyors can't always detect if there is a problem behind the foam so may not declare the roof safe to lenders



where water builds up.” New research echoes surveyors’ concerns. In April, the government’s Health and Safety Executive released a report on the moisture risk of spray foam applied to timber roofs. Its modelling predicted that the risks are “high” when open-cell spray foam is applied directly onto the underside of the roof. And it predicted that 25 per cent of the timber would decay over a five-year period in roofs where open-cell spray foam is applied to a high-resistance underlay such as a bitumen felt.

Risks were deemed low when open-cell foam is applied in line with official guidance – for example with a breathable underlay or an air gap behind it. The problem, Hodgson says, is that for a long time “the industry has ignored its own guidance”.

That said, homeowners should not panic and rush to have their spray foam insulation removed, Hodgson cautions. Many of the cowboy companies that installed such insulation have dissolved and reinvented themselves as removal companies, charging £5,000 to £10,000. Some do shoddy jobs that leave you no better off. He advises to wait until the panic – and prices – die down. “In some circumstances you can leave it alone: if it’s a newer house and foam is built into the roof with a vapour barrier on the warm side, for instance.” If, however, your house was built before the 1960s, with foam sprayed directly onto the roof, or on to a bitumen felt, “you should be thinking about taking that out at some point”, Hodgson adds. If you need to sell imminently, assemble your paperwork and call the PCA for advice and a possible risk assessment survey to show lenders. If you opt to have it removed, first research the history of the removal company on Companies House. If they were previously

an installation company, they may not be trustworthy. You may have no choice but to remove it if you want equity release on your house, says Andy Wilson, the director of Andy Wilson Financial Services, an equity release specialist in Lincolnshire. “All lifetime mortgage lenders still will not lend on properties with foam in place,” he says. “One lender, LiveMore, has introduced a lifetime

mortgage that can be taken out even if the foam is installed on the condition that it is removed within 90 days of completion of the loan. This product will help those who are unable to finance removal up front. But it has higher interest rates than alternative providers.” Wilson has been able to obtain equity release for clients who had their spray foam removed using the

extraction companies Vac-Xtract and Britt & Co. One of Wilson’s clients was Geoff Shaw, a retired oil distribution director, 81, who in 2021 paid a cold caller £7,250 to have foam installed on his 1990s bungalow in North Yorkshire, but was later refused equity release. So he paid £9,960 to have it removed, and in 2022 sought compensation from Hydrogard Legal Services on a no-win, no-fee basis. “Last week £17,210 was refunded to my credit card account. Hydrogard will shortly get a well-earned 30 per cent of the recovery figure. I am grateful for their efforts.” Simon Baker, the president of Huntsman Building Solutions, a global manufacturer of spray foam insulation based in Texas,

“Be aware that some cowboy installers rebranded as spray foam removers”



warns against using cold callers. “There are a number of unscrupulous installers, and not all installs are the same ... We only sell to authorised contractors and we make sure they have been through our Huntsman Building Solutions University.” (The company runs five-day installation courses in the UK, in Norfolk.) Baker disagrees with some of the findings of the Health and Safety Executive’s report and insists that open-cell spray foam applied to non-breathable membranes is approved in certain scenarios, for instance if moisture surveys are performed. “The UK needs more insulation, and spray foam is one of the best solutions,” he says. “We have been operating in North America for over 40 years.” Can he guarantee his customers will receive a mortgage if they have spray foam? “It’s impossible to guarantee. But we’ll work with the lender and the surveyor to make sure that the foam is correctly understood. We’ve found a huge lack of understanding of spray foam in the surveyor community ... It’s not as difficult to get mortgages as it’s portrayed to be. We find 999 out of 1,000 times homeowners can get a mortgage, once the documentation is explained.” Hodgson concedes that foam can be a great insulator, but doesn’t believe that installing it in a cold, uninhabited loft space is worth the risk. He believes traditional loft floor insulation is cheaper, just as efficient and keeps lofts ventilated and timbers dry. And he says UK homes are built differently to North American ones. Paula Higgins, the chief executive of the HomeOwners Alliance, says the industry needs better regulation. “The installation companies should be up front with customers that if you have foam installed you may not be able to get a mortgage.” The installation of spray foam in uninhabited loft spaces is not supported in the government’s latest green retrofit project, the Great British Insulation Scheme. But that’s too late for Mandy Hutson. “I think it’s disgusting that the government recommended something and walked away,” she says. A Department for Energy Security and Net Zero spokesperson said: “All spray foam insulation funded by any government grant must be installed by a Trustmark registered company. It is the certified installer’s responsibility to recommend an appropriate product that meets the standards required. The government consulted installers, lenders and surveyors, who have now published protocols to allow an assessment of spray foam installations to provide reassurance to lenders.”

“My estate agent was horrified when they found out I had spray foam in the loft”

condensation risk, he says. The second issue is that the “vast majority” of installations he sees are sprayed onto roofs already lined with bitumen felt membranes (non-breathable or “high-resistance underlays”), typical of most UK houses built between 1900 and 1960. “If you install something that allows vapour through – ‘breathable’ open-cell foam – and then back it with something that isn’t breathable, like bitumen, the vapour goes through the foam, stops and gets wet,” says Hodgson, who is also a fellow of the Chartered Association of Building Engineers. “That’s when the risk of decay occurs.” The third problem is the quality of installations. “Many have holes and inconsistencies in the foam. That creates cold patches

## Home



# Can we fix it? Yes we can!

If you want value, don't overlook properties in need of an upgrade. First-time fixer-uppers and experts share their best renovation tips with *Melissa York*

**F**rightened of a fixer-upper? You can't afford to be in this market. Average mortgage interest rates are still stubbornly hovering at about 5 per cent, which means that buyers can't afford to borrow as much as they could a couple of years ago.

Home hunters who are looking for a "turnkey" property that is ready to move into are restricting themselves to between 10 and 20 per cent of the market, says Will Watson, the London head for the Buying Solution agency.

"We are seeing 80 per cent of buyers start their search not wanting to do any work," he says. "Six months or so later the majority are happy to do work, as by then they realise it allows them to get a better house and have more choice."

Taking on a property in need of repair, especially when the buyer has never embarked on a renovation, can still be a scary prospect. So here is some practical advice from experts and first-time fixer-uppers who share what they wish they had known from the outset.

#### FIRST-TIME FIXER-UPPER NO 1: OLIVER CODRINGTON

If Codrington, a 44-year-old barrister and financial adviser, could give one piece of advice to first-time fixer-uppers like himself, it would be to take their time.

In 2021 he bought his dream family

home, a 3,200 sq ft detached house built in the 1960s, in Cherwell, Oxfordshire, to live in with his wife, Joanna, a doctor, and their two children.

He stretched himself to get a £525,000 mortgage and borrowed money from family and friends to refurbish it. However, a series of unfortunate events meant that he ran over budget and borrowed £90,000 on credit cards to cover the shortfall.

The house was in far worse shape than he thought. Snap decisions came back to haunt him, such as the electric combi boiler that turned out to be prohibitively expensive to run, and not putting enough money aside for exterior works. He says: "You know that the kitchen and bathrooms are going to cost, but there's quite a lot of competition for your business for those. When you go outside, it's a sellers' market – if you're selling labour. Finding people who were good enough to render the house with availability during the summer months was like pulling hen's teeth."

Some setbacks could not have been avoided. The Suez Canal closed halfway through the build, which sent the cost of timber and plasterboard soaring, and

he had to hire another tiler because his first disappeared after realising he had put the tiles on upside down.

"We got to the stage where we couldn't finish the work, but we were past the point of no return," Codrington says. "Once you take the roof off something you've devalued it so much that you have to finish it in order to even recoup what you spent on it, let alone clear the mortgage."

He approached his bank again, but he was on a low 1.4 per cent interest mortgage rate so it was unable to offer a further advance at a higher rate or remortgage to consolidate the unsecured debt, leaving him trapped. He turned to his broker, Central Loans, and found the specialist lender Together, which lent him a £250,000 second-charge loan on a two-year fixed rate to finish the works.

"What you want is a product and a lender that understands that position," Codrington says. "They charge for it, it's a healthy interest rate, but it's far preferable to credit cards and we couldn't have borrowed that amount any other way."

The property is now worth £1.3 million thanks to the new roof, solar panels, batteries, vaulted ceilings and a remodelled interior complete with new wiring and replastered walls.

#### FIRST-TIME FIXER-UPPER NO 2: ROB SMYTH

"There's no way we could have afforded what we have now four years ago, but we desperately wanted a whole house, not a flat," says Smyth, 41, who works in sponsorship sales.

In 2019 he was looking for a family home in central London with his pregnant wife, Sarah, who is a lawyer, and their dog, Maggie.

When he came upon the mid-terrace period townhouse in Islington, north London, whole sections were derelict because the woman who owned it for 50 years was elderly and living on one floor.

"You couldn't even open the back door to get out to the garden, which was so overgrown that you couldn't see to the end of it," Smyth says.

They could see it had potential, though, so they borrowed money from their parents to add to their savings, negotiated money off the asking price and bought the house for £1.09 million.

They had never renovated a house before, but a property on the same terrace was being restored so they asked the builders if they could look round it to see what was possible. They asked an architect friend to help with drawing up plans and applying for planning permission, then ran a tender for a building contractor once they had approval.

Smyth says: "We went with our gut feeling; we invited them over and just chose them because we liked them." He spent nine months doing minor repairs and painting, then lived on the top floor for two and a half months while the building work was carried out below.

Two more children later, they are ready to move to pastures new. The value of the house has almost doubled. It's now on sale for £1.95 million with the estate agency Strutt & Parker.

**“**  
You couldn't even open the back door to get to the garden it was so overgrown  
**”**  
Rob Smyth, 41



#### THE PROPERTY DEVELOPER: SAIF DERZI

Derzi, the owner of SDGB Properties, has been fixing up properties for more than a decade. Aged 32, he has a portfolio of 110 refurbished properties that he sells and lets out as affordable housing. He works from the outside in, first determining whether the essential structure of the property – the walls, the foundation, the roof and the windows – is sound.

Nasty surprises, like subsidence, Japanese knotweed, woodworm or dry rot, are likely to make the property difficult to mortgage and insure. He is also suspicious of postwar concrete properties for the same reason.

If the bones are good then it's time to look inwards. "If I was fixing up a property for the first time I would look for easy wins: things like kitchens and bathrooms that need replacing, straightforward flooring, painting, decorating and new carpets," he says.

When working out a renovation budget he searches property portals for sold prices over the past two to three years for comparable properties – roughly the same size and age, with the same number of bedrooms – within a quarter of a mile, then he calculates the mean average sold price.

Derzi avoids properties where he needs to spend more than 20 per cent of the value to bring it up to the average sold price for a similar property in that area.

"Sometimes you find a unique property. You can't be looking at a grade II listed cottage, for example, in an area where there aren't a lot of them."

When it comes to dealing with builders and decorators, be specific and clear about your expectations, down to how



VICKI COUCHMAN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES; MARK BASSETT



**Above: Sarah and Rob Smyth with Sadie, their daughter, and Maggie the cockapoo. This page: the family's revamped home is now for sale at £1.95 million, almost twice what they bought it for in 2019. Far left: Oliver Codrington also fixed up a home for the first time**

many coats of paint you'd like on the wall. Derzi comes up with a schedule of works and a payment plan so the workmen get paid on completion of each stage of the renovation.

"If you're upfront about what you want and you detail how and when you will pay them then builders are great to work with. If I'd known this in the early days things would have been much easier for me," he says.

Investors in property will negotiate a discount with the seller that corresponds with how much they will spend on work to make sure they are adding as much value as possible. If this isn't possible, Derzi thinks it's still worth buying a fixer-upper if you could see yourself living in it for a long time.

### THE ARCHITECT: TIM TASKER

Timothy Tasker Architects has overseen more than 100 renovation projects in London and the Cotswolds. Tasker says that when looking for properties to fix up, Victorian houses are popular because they are much more flexible than postwar housing and modern homes because you can easily open them up at the back to create an open-plan layout.

This can be costly because extensions often have to be reinforced with steelwork, and, post-Grenfell, tightened fire restrictions mean you have to have a door in between the kitchen and the hallway so the occupants can use the latter to escape if they are in the bedrooms upstairs when a fire breaks out.

To create a truly open-plan entrance

with a bespoke staircase you would have to install a sprinkler or mist system. A cheaper option is a fire curtain that drops down from the ceiling to separate the kitchen from the escape route.

Listed properties can come with strict planning rules attached that make replacing single glazed windows and putting in insulation extremely expensive or even impossible. Without such restrictions replacing all the windows in a four-bedroom Victorian house will cost between £25,000 to £40,000, Tasker says, depending on the quality.

Aesthetically, refurbishment options also depend on the age of what you're buying. Tasker says. "The big thing with late-Victorian buildings is contrasting the modern with the old so you can have the slick slimline glazing out back, knock it about a bit there, and retain the period features and fireplaces to the more formal rooms at the front of the house.

"Nineteenth-century homes might have Arts and Crafts stuff that can be celebrated and enhanced, but once you get into the 1930s you can redo everything in a modern style quite easily."

A WC under the stairs is the most common plumbing addition Tasker is asked for, but he warns that there needs to be a minimum width of 180 millimetres to achieve this.

Boutique hotels have seduced many buyers into a fantasy of having a bedroom suite with a freestanding bathtub – again, it's not as simple as it looks. He says, "If you imagine a bath full of water, with the weight of a person, it weighs as much as a car, so you have to double up the joist and sips and plywood on top of the roof of the room below; it's really embarrassing to have a bath fall through it."

A detailed schedule of work, with building regulations and planning restrictions taken into account, is essential to ensure a smooth renovation. Tasker says: "The only way to understand what you're buying from a builder is to have a really detailed set of information: schedules, specifications, detailed drawings. If you give a builder a set of planning drawings of

structure information, they probably couldn't even give you 60 per cent cost certainty.

"Give them a really big set of information and say, 'Give me a fixed price to deliver this,' and it will be much more accurate and the client is more protected because they understand exactly what they are entering into."

### THE LENDER: GLENHAWK

Homeowners often use personal savings to finance renovations, but investors are more likely to explore short-term financing options. Jamie Pritchard, a managing sales director at the specialist lender Glenhawk, estimates that 10 per cent of its customers are owner-occupiers (the rest are buy-to-let landlords).

He calls the bridging loans it offers "transitional finance". He says some homeowners think short-term finance is "really expensive, but the market has grown up a lot in the last few years".

A high street lender generally would not offer a loan for a derelict property or one that was bought at auction, but a specialist lender would, Pritchard says. Its underwriters would draw the line at a property with severe structural problems like subsidence, however.

Buyers should talk to brokers before they start looking for a home so they have a realistic idea of the finance available. The average loan amount that Glenhawk provides for a residential property is £500,000 on a typical interest rate of 0.7 to 0.94 per cent (because the loan-to-value is lower than for a traditional mortgage), but buyers can borrow up to 75 per cent of the property's value.

Renovators will need to keep a close eye on timescales, though, because most of these loans are fixed for 12 months, then charges can be incurred for late repayment. There is, however, no exit or early repayment fee.

Pritchard says: "I think people got very used to remortgaging because they got comfortable in a low-interest rate environment, but now people are having to look at other options.

"If you can't quite afford the leap to a bigger property that's turnkey, buying a fixer-upper is a good way of climbing up the property ladder."

The most common scenario Pritchard sees is homeowners borrowing for three to four-month periods to rip out threadbare kitchens and avocado bathroom suites or put in home offices and garden rooms.

Downsizers also find short-term finance helpful – they can buy the property they want to move to, do it up in the 12-month period in which they are selling their present home, then once their new home has been finished move into it mortgage-free.

However, buyers should be aware that they may need to pay more for a specialist broker that deals with renovation finance as well as mortgages, and a specialist lawyer for the conveyancing.

Pritchard says: "I tell people that when they are looking online they should look for the properties that don't have many photos because they often aren't as bad as you imagine they are."

**“If you're clear about what you want and when you'll pay, builders are great to work with**  
Saif Derzi, 32

Home

These prolific and dazzling blooms are enjoying their moment in the sun, says the gardener *Arthur Parkinson*

For decades, dahlias have been relegated to agricultural show tents and allotment plots – but these dazzling blooms are firmly in fashion once more. While Dutch growers compete to bring us new varieties to fall in love with, the writer and flower expert Sarah Raven has long been a dahlia champion, celebrating their virtues before their popularity on Instagram. She brought back a ‘Rip City’ dahlia plant from Monet’s garden in Giverny about 20 years ago and today this dark burgundy variety is one of the bestsellers in her prestigious dahlia range. Later, the Land Gardeners helped to popularise dahlia varieties favoured in America, notably the creamy-coloured ‘Café au Lait’ and red-and-white-striped ‘Santa Claus’.

The best group to concern oneself with, certainly for pots and to attract pollinators with gusto, are bishops. This group includes the well-known ‘Bishop of Llandaff’, with postbox-red petals and almost-black laced foliage, and ‘Bishop’s Children’, a variety resulting in a jammy dodger tapestry of deep oranges and clarets that is quick to grow from seed and flowers in the same year (usually by the end of June). ‘Waltzing Mathilda’ and ‘Totally Tangerine’ are my other top pot picks – they’re prolific flowerers that are neither too tall nor too dumpy. For scene-stealing single-stem vases, I’m growing several varieties this year that have much in common with Animal, the fiery-haired puppet from Jim Henson’s Muppet ensemble cast. These include ‘Tartan’, ‘Lady Darlene’ and ‘Hans Auinger’.





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DEBORAH PAINES FOR CREATE ACADEMY; ARTHUR PARKINSON

Hailing originally from Mexico, dahlias need full sun to flourish. They are relatively pest-free but earwigs can be a problem. To limit these insects munching on the dahlia's delicate petals, encourage them into upturned small terracotta pots on canes. Thread the cane through the pot's hole and use Blu Tack to hold in place. Stuff the terracotta pot with straw and place it in the dahlia bed to invite earwigs in. Don't fear them – earwigs are voracious aphid eaters so empty the pot once a week onto another area of the garden where aphids are causing a nuisance.

Dahlias' heavy buds mean they will need to be staked well, ideally by mid-June. Without support, a summer storm will break their relatively delicate stems mercilessly.

Birch and hazel stakes can be used to create a sturdy, horizontal support grid for a bed of dahlias to grow up. If you are foraging them, seek out a traditionally coppiced local woodland. Birch and hazel stakes that have been stored outside and cut over the winter months will remain pliable. Twiggy, upright stems of sapling birch can be woven like a nest to entirely surround your potted dahlias.

As an alternative, bamboo canes can be layered over one another to create a horizontal supporting grid, a foot off the floor, for a whole dahlia bed to grow through safely supported. Be careful not to push a stake too closely into the base of a dahlia – a

harpooned tuber can be fatal to a growing plant.

Dahlias grow well in rich soil. Dig in manure and give them ample space: 12 inches between plants. Water them weekly in a dry summer. On hot days, their leaves may look limp; by evening time they should have perked up again – if not, you'll know that they require a good drink.

In pots, dahlias require watering often, regardless of rain – their dense leaves let few raindrops penetrate. Water them every couple of days by midsummer and feed weekly for plenty of flowers and healthy-looking foliage. Lining the insides of pots completely with sheep fleece (or with old socks) will help to insulate the tubers against the summer heat and also help the compost to retain moisture.

The best dahlia feed is a homemade brew of nitrogen and potassium-rich fermented comfrey leaves diluted into a watering can. Cut a clump of comfrey down to its base with garden shears then stuff the cut foliage into a bucket filled with water, ideally with a dustbin lid placed on top. Within a fortnight the leaves will have rotted, and feeding can begin, but the smell is not for the faint-hearted.

Shop-bought seaweed tonic is just as good (and suitable for those with sensitive nostrils) along with wool pellets. The latter are best mixed into the compost when your pots or flowerbeds are being prepped for planting.

The tuber is the dahlia's powerhouse, a tender root that resembles an octopus-like potato. If you are potting up freshly bought tubers, use two-litre pots, filling them with compost and dangling the tuber in once the pot is filled more than halfway.



Cover the tuber with a further few inches of compost and place the pots in the greenhouse, on a sunny windowsill or – if the ground is warm enough – directly into the ground (with slug protection). Water sparingly until they begin to grow. A mug of water per freshly potted tuber suffices, especially if the compost is already damp to the touch.

Cold and damp conditions cause the tuber to rot, which is why many gardeners dig up their dahlias after winter's first frost to preserve them. To overwinter successfully, tubers should be stored somewhere dry (crucial) and neither too cold nor too hot. Spare the bother of digging tubers up with a generous mulching of either leaf mould or spent compost to prevent frost from penetrating the soil. Here, the slumbering tubers can store up all their flower power for another year.

Pot up newly bought tubers using a good peat-free

multipurpose compost mix. Quality varies but Melcourt is a reliable brand used by many growers.

Encourage natural slug and snail control by digging a small pond close to a dahlia bed to provide a home for frogs, newts and toads. Ensure garden fences and gates give hedgehogs access too so they can patrol your flowerbeds. Ducks, especially the Indian Runner variety, are the greatest of snail and slug grubbers. Freshly planted-out dahlias can be protected from slugs with a generous dressing of wood ashes. Protect potted dahlias by smearing Vaseline generously around the rim.

Once young dahlias have between three and six pairs of leaves their growth tips should be pinched out. You are especially wise to do this if your dahlias have sprouted

and have only sent up one or two growing stems as this will encourage strong, bushy plants. When picking the flowers, don't leave stumps! Cut stems above a pair of leaves to encourage your plants to quickly replenish.

With dahlias, the more you pick, the more they'll flower – so be greedy. Pick fully opened dahlias either in the morning or evening and put cut flowers straight into water, stripping off as many leaves from the stems as possible. Although note that dahlia buds won't continue to open once they have been cut.

“  
Originally from Mexico, dahlias need full sun to flourish

Arthur Parkinson's online video course, *How to Grow a Spectacular Garden in Pots*, is available from Create Academy priced £127 for lifetime access; [createacademy.com](https://createacademy.com)



Steve Smith, the working-class tycoon whose Poundland empire transformed the face of the British high street, is trying to explain to me how his late father, Keith, helped to revolutionise mansion ballrooms.

At the flick of a switch, a rectangular slab of flooring in the ballroom in his grade I listed Shropshire manor descends, and water pours through the slits that are carved within it. In less than 30 seconds what was a dancefloor has transformed into a swimming pool. Music pipes through the stereo system, and Steve offers me a can of Vimto from the bar.

“British Aerospace designed it for Dad – he was the first one in the country to do it,” says Steve, 61, watched on all sides by curious statues of Roman centurions in the alcoves.

“When he was building this in 1997, I remember him saying, ‘When the millennium happens we’re going to have the biggest parties you’ve ever seen.’ And he built this pool for the millennium.”

As we watch the floor descend – eyed from above by a chandelier of cherubs – Steve fondly remembers the seemingly endless opportunities for pranks provided by this room.

“We used to put my nan in a wheelchair in the middle and just lower her down. She used to scream as we lowered her,” he chuckles.

He also remembers a time when Keith was throwing a party and “everybody was in their dinner suits”, when the band started playing the Celine Dion classic *My Heart Will Go On* from *Titanic*. “I thought, let’s lower the floor down, and the water started coming through.”

Amid the frivolities, the sad reality is that the party at Ludstone Hall, near Wolverhampton – one of the most historically important manor houses in the West Midlands – is now over.

Keith, with whom Steve jointly made the family’s fortune by co-founding Poundland in 1990, died almost two years ago of lung cancer, aged 79, followed months later by his beloved wife, Maureen. Now Steve has been put in charge of selling this nine-bedroom, seven-bathroom pile, which was built in 1607 and comes with an estate of almost 200 acres, including a lake, a moat and manicured parkland.

The Smiths’ family story is as amazing, at times unlikely and eccentric, as Ludstone Hall itself.

When Steve was growing up in the early 1960s, Keith, a former draughtsman, was working on a stall at Bilston Market in Wolverhampton. His mother, meanwhile, spent her early working years soldering the tops on to batteries at the Ever Ready factory. “Mum and Dad couldn’t afford a babysitter, so they used to load up the van and pack all the stock around me,” he says. “Then, at night, they would take me in my pushchair around the houses selling items door-to-door.”

They first thought of setting up a discount store when, working on his father’s stall at the age of 14, Steve noticed that they made more money from items in the “10p to £1” box than everything else in the stall combined. At 17 Steve set up his first shop and then, at 27, the first branch of Poundland in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire, after his father lent him the money to get started. It made £13,000 in its first day.

With brightly lit, modern shops that were placed strategically on high streets, the business mushroomed in working-class neighbourhoods at lightning pace. “We went from one shop to two shops to ten shops to two hundred,” Steve says. He worked hand-in-hand with his wife, Tracy, now 60, who ran the company’s human resources operation. Steve and

# At home with Mr Poundland



Steve Smith is – reluctantly – selling his quirky Shropshire pile, which has a hidden swimming pool and a museum dedicated to the company that made him his fortune. *David Byers* takes a tour

Keith sold it for more than £70 million in 2002. Today its Polish owner, Pepco Group, is worth £5 billion.

When its growth was at its height, in 1997, Keith and Maureen bought Ludstone Hall, having lived for a few years in Mallorca beforehand, paying £2.5 million for a sprawling plot that included the house, gardens and outhouses. However, since purchasing it Keith has spent much more than this on an exhaustive programme of work and maintenance, along with recently repainting a clock tower, refurbishing greenhouses, an estate office, its vast gardens and – most exorbitantly – maintaining and improving a house stuffed to the brim with original panelling, sculptures, carving and furniture. Three full-time gardeners and two cleaners are also retained.

As we walk around, one thing that is abundantly made clear is how much Steve doesn’t want to sell the home that has served as a headquarters to his wider family – including his three siblings and their children.

“I would live here, but my wife ... you know what they say, happy wife, happy life. It is a shame, but it’s too big really for just the two of us,” he says. As a result, after his parents’ death, he has reluctantly

put the mansion on the market with the estate agency Fisher German for £7.775 million, including the manor house, gardens, coach house and two fields of pasture land, plus eight rental houses with no guide price but a valuation of £3 million. These components can be bought together or separately.

Steve and Tracy don’t exactly live modestly themselves, having recently “downsized” to a £6 million mansion ten minutes away. “We had 18 great big lorryloads of stuff when we moved,” he tells me. But despite having made his mind up, as we walk around he frequently becomes emotional – at one point saying he can almost imagine his mother greeting him at the front door. Ludstone Hall’s Jacobean features include enormous original wooden external doors, still with their 400-year-old keys, and original fireplaces clad in family crests and busts that depict the first owners, the Whitmores, who lived there for 250 years. Intriguingly the house has several false walls, scattered around the upper floors, which can be pulled back to reveal alcoves in which people and possessions could be hidden. There are also rumours of a tunnel to a nearby church that they have never found.

There’s a 400-year-old solid wood table in the dining room, which contains bay windows from which you can sit and admire the lake and parkland beyond – the house is full of these vast rooms with jaw-dropping dimensions and pleasing views of the Shropshire countryside. And there are numerous wooden four-poster beds, majestically carved with cherubs protruding from the corners.

There are also many things that look historic on the surface, but that are – shall we say – decidedly more modern. On top of one fireplace is an illustration of a semi-dressed medieval cherubic character seemingly appearing to try to pull another fully clothed medieval figure into a four-poster bed.

There are also statues hidden in passageways, including a lifesize elderly butler with a silver platter – which made one of our party “jump out of his skin” – and a jolly lady who looks like Mrs Miggins, the *Blackadder* pie shop owner.

In the garden there’s a lake that looks as if it might have come out of the 18th-century English landscape movement and which can be observed from a nook carved into a tree. There’s also a maze and a large vegetable garden. “The sprinkler system costs about £200,000,” Steve says, pointing out that it pops up from almost every flowerbed. Every lawn is edged in metal, to stop it growing onto the paths, something that Steve jokes his dad took

“  
The vast estate has a £200,000 sprinkler system and a maze





**Main: Steve Smith outside Ludstone Hall. Above: the ballroom has a floor that can be turned into a swimming pool. Left: the home has a lifesize model of a butler. Below: the main house, gardens and maze**



“about seven years” to do and was his “pride and joy”.

However, no trip to Ludstone Hall would be complete without visiting the coach house, which Keith and Maureen turned into the Poundland museum. There are posters from some of the first stores, plaques from boardrooms, rosettes, brochures for customers and clients, books praising Poundland’s corporate governance – and even boxes of the first items sold on Keith’s first market stall.

As we look around the museum and the memorabilia, which will be donated to Poundland after the property is sold, Steve recounts insider stories.

“All the sweets and crisps they sold in the stores where the packaging had broken open, I used to send them here – and dad used to feed the cows and the ducks,” he says.

“And he had a lot of cows on site, which he would sell to Morrisons, and they always said that we had the sweetest cows in the country.”

Steve’s sentences frequently tail off with emotion as he considers the lives lived here by his parents, whose absence from the house echoes. The Poundland museum also contains shrines to his father, complete with large smiling photographs.

“My mum doesn’t like moving. But when this house became available, Dad loved it. He would have paid any money for this property, he loved it so much,” Steve says.

“The work he has done here has cost a lot of money but it kept him busy. He always said to me, ‘This is the place where I want to die – I don’t want to ever leave.’”

Soon, however, it will be time to say goodbye.

## POSH GARAGES FOR PAMPERED PETROLHEADS

**W**hy invest in a gem like a Ferrari or any high-performance car and not showcase it in a glorious setting?” Philippa Thorp, an interior designer, asks.

Thorp is a petrolhead with a passion for classic and luxury cars.

“Luxury garages are a trend and certainly something I’m seeing in most of our projects now,” the founder of Thorp Design, an architecture and interior design studio, says.

“We recently designed a garage for a client who has a passion for exquisite motors. The garage isn’t just a storage space, but somewhere he can immerse himself in the beauty of his prized possessions from the desk in his home office [there is a glass wall between the garage and the office],” she adds.

“The garage features a concealed kitchen and toilet behind custom bookcases designed to display a wonderful collection of car literature. It’s also eco-friendly with solar panels on the roof and Tesla battery packs concealed in the joinery.”

Other designers and developers are experiencing similar demand from their most discerning clients. Laurence Holder, bespoke director at the property developer Octagon, says: “We worked with a client recently who had a fleet of 12 classic cars. They were his absolute pride and joy. His home ‘showroom’ was filled with fibreglass pods for each individual car, and was housed next to the leisure suite with glass walls so the collection could be viewed from the pool, spa, sauna or games room.”

“In the realm of home design, garages are seldom the focal point, but we were tasked with doing just that for a current project,” Natascha Dartnall, director of the design practice ND Studios, says. “The garage encircles a games room with windows, transforming the client’s car collection into an art display. The garage itself is a

spectacle, with an illuminated ceiling, dynamic turntables and a wall of TVs.”

At No 1 Grosvenor Square, a luxury development in Mayfair, the owners of the 44 apartments can store their cars in the Vault, an automated parking system straight out of a James Bond film. David Lampe, general manager of No 1, explains: “The Vault’s intelligent design works by moving and storing vehicles on an innovative pallet system, learning the patterns of usage for different cars. For example, if a resident retrieves their vehicle every Tuesday at 9am, the Vault will send it back to the top the night before, reducing the waiting time for the driver.”

Janine Stone & Co, a luxury residential property specialist, has just completed work on a 2,000 sq ft property in London. “We designed a large subterranean swimming pool with a garage system that extends below the property,” explains Gideon Stone, the company’s co-founder. “The garage has an automated stacking system designed to take up to 14 cars and store them below ground. The system allows the owner to select the car he wants to be brought up and automatically shuffles the vehicles until the correct one is sent up in the lift. And the set-up allows one of the cars to be displayed in a glass box in the basement pool area.”

It doesn’t stop at smart lifts, gallery-like spaces and structural glass walls for those with the space and means. Also on the wish list are velvet-lined walls to protect pricey paintwork and custom cabinetry to organise tools and accessories in style.

Holder says luxury garages now command as much interior design work as the homes they’re attached to: “Good lighting is key, well as weather-sealed, roller-shutter doors to control the temperature of the garage. Electric charging points are gaining popularity, with extraction systems for exhaust fumes and ventilation systems becoming more energy-efficient.”

All of which is sure to rev up any self-respecting petrolhead.

**Nicky Rampley-Clarke**

**Below: a Rolls-Royce at No 1 Grosvenor Square. Right: a games room and garage complex with illuminated ceiling by ND Studios**



Home

TIME AND SPACE KEN HOM  
'I live in Paris's red light district'

The chef on his tiny kitchen and why he'd never run a restaurant – or shoplift again

I have a tiny 40 sq m, two-bed place in Quartier Pigalle, five minutes from the Moulin Rouge in the heart of the Parisian red light district. It's in a quiet cul-de-sac, which has the feel of a small village, even if it's just off the tourist trail. I moved here back in 1991 when it was an inexpensive neighbourhood compared to what I could have found elsewhere. I mean, for £100,000 you couldn't get anything near central London, but here I could. It's become very gentrified over the years. For example, there used to be an old doss-house across from me – now it's an amazing five-floor apartment complex.

**What's your kitchen like?**  
It's very small but you're more efficient in a small kitchen because you must be more organised and careful. It may be tiny but I cook dinners for charity here. I recently sold a meal for two for £20,000, with all the money going to the Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity. I've cooked six-course meals for six in my tiny kitchen, although dining is pretty squashed. I imagine people turn up and think, "Poor Ken, his woks and his books can't be selling well."

**Do you have any other properties?**  
I have a small, two-bed apartment on the 19th floor of a condominium in central Bangkok. I bought it at the bottom of the

market with money I made on my home in the States. I'll be 80 in five years, 85 in ten, and I can see myself retiring there.

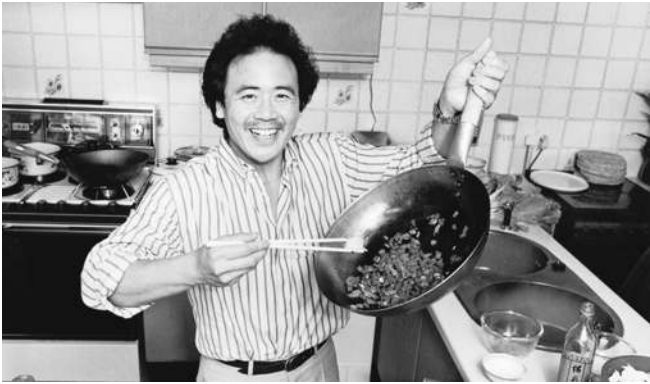
**Where was your first property?**  
The first property I owned was in California, which I bought in 1972 for \$25,000. It was in a very dodgy neighbourhood, but I sold it in the early 1990s for \$337,000. I had my cooking school there, so I was able to use it to make a living rather than paying rent in another place.

**Where did you grow up?**  
I grew up in Chinatown, Chicago. We were really poor – it was just me and my mum because my dad died when I was eight months old. Mum was an immigrant who never spoke English, so you can imagine how tough it was for her. We were lucky we lived in Chinatown and it became my family. Of course, this meant you couldn't misbehave because they all knew what was going on.

**Did you misbehave much?**  
When I was about ten I'd go into the big department stores to just marvel at all the stuff they had there. One day I took something, got away with it and concluded that shoplifting was cool. After that, I'd bring my empty paper bag and fill it up. Of course, I got caught. My mum felt humiliated and she punished me by



From top: Ken Hom; Bangkok, where he owns an apartment; promoting his BBC cookery series in 1984



coming back from work, cooking my meal and then sitting in the corner, facing the wall, weeping. She did that for two weeks and I felt so guilty. It was resolved when a neighbour said I had to crawl on my knees and offer my mum a cup of hot tea. If she accepted it, it meant I was forgiven. This happened in front of all the neighbours, but she took it and it wasn't mentioned from then on. I never stole again.

**How did you become a chef?**  
After that incident, one of my uncles said if I wanted to earn a little money I could go and work in his restaurant. So that's how I learnt to cook. I'd work on weekends and school holidays, and I learnt that earning money is empowering, even if I had to give it all to my mum. It also helped me to focus my energy on something productive.

**Were you ever interested in becoming a restaurateur?**  
I'm sane because I have never wanted to run a restaurant. People think it's so glamorous, but the pressure is relentless and the hours are insanely long. You don't have a social life, you have broken relationships and your kids hate you. What's not to love?

**How does it feel to be celebrating 40 years in broadcasting?**  
I've always been careful to avoid overexposure on TV. I do a programme or series, then go away to write books, consult for hotels and airlines or do my roadshow. This means TV audiences don't have time to get sick of me. Also I do demonstrations around the UK, meeting people and answering their questions. This gives me material for my books, what they don't know or need to make clearer. Word of mouth is better than any PR. If a friend recommends a film you listen to that more intently than what you hear from a critic, right? If someone says I cooked this at home, I learnt it from Ken and it works, that's cool.

**You have two grandsons, what advice have you given them?**  
You'd better not work in a restaurant. Interview by Dan Moore

To find out more about the charities Ken Hom supports, as well as his books and cookware range, visit [kenhom.com](http://kenhom.com)

**WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE NOISY HMO NEXT DOOR?**  
The house next door has been turned into an HMO [house in multiple occupation] by a housing association and has been divided into eight or nine bedrooms. There is a lot of loud music, often late at night, lots of shouting and banging doors, cigarette butts in the garden and a smell of weed. It has become unbearable. I've tried complaining to the housing association but they have not replied. If it's noisy after 11pm I can call the council, but they

require you to be available for a home visit, which means one of us has to stay up for several more hours on what is usually a work or school night. Is there a requirement for HMOs to have soundproofing? Is there anything we can do when its HMO licence is renewed next year? Anne Cullinane



That sounds like a really miserable situation. The purpose of HMO licensing is to improve safety standards for tenants, but it is possible that the licence was granted subject to conditions that required steps to be taken to prevent or reduce

antisocial behaviour. You should contact the council to try to obtain a copy of the licence. I do not know whether the council is likely to let you see it – however, you may need to make a Freedom of Information Act request (which the council may reject). If the conditions have been breached, you may be able to convince the council to take legal action against the housing association. Separately you may be able to make a legal claim against the housing association in the law of nuisance. You would need to prove to a court that the behaviour of the tenants is an unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of your property. You should keep a detailed record of all the times the behaviour has affected you. A formal letter from solicitors may be enough to convince the housing association to

act but, if not, court proceedings – which can be expensive and risky – would be required. Returning to the council, you should check whether the planning permission for the property contains any relevant conditions. The council may be able to take enforcement action. You could also make a complaint to the council that the noise is a statutory nuisance. Local authorities have a general duty to inspect their areas to detect any such nuisances and take reasonably practicable steps to investigate a complaint under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Unfortunately, as you acknowledge, this may involve waiting up late for an environmental health officer. Ed Cracknell, partner, Russell Cooke

Readers' clinic

**What can I do with leftover bits of a soap bar that are too grubby to leave out in the dish?**  
G Young, Southampton

When the old soap bar becomes too small and thin, buy a new bar, moisten both and press firmly together. No soap is ever wasted. Carol Gould

I keep a pop sock in the bathroom and add soap ends to it as they get too small to handle. Tie the sock and use as a soap-filled body scrub. Irene

I let the bits dissolve in my water butt (or a bucket of water) and then use it to water my non-edible plants. Keeps the bugs down. Jennykenny, West Sussex

My grandma made small knitted or crocheted pockets from cotton yarn and pushed the remains of soap bars inside to use as a wash cloth. Janet Edgar, Cockermouth

Mix the pieces with a little water and warm gently in a small saucepan, stirring for a few minutes, until you get a solid ball of soap. Jenny Drewe, London

I keep them in a small mesh bag – ideal for scrubbing collars and cuffs on shirts before they go in the wash. Val

**FUTURE QUESTION**  
How do I remove underarm deodorant residue from shirts and T-shirts?

Send tips and questions to [homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk). Advice given without responsibility

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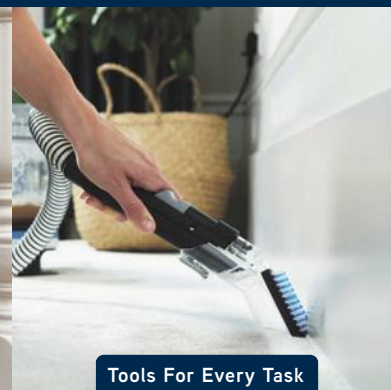
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Complete with a selection of tools for multiple tasks, the VAX SpotWash Home Duo is equipped to help you clean anywhere in the home and car. For those particularly unsightly messes, there is also a dedicated messy tool, so you'll not need to worry about any cross contamination of cleaning tasks.

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June 9, 2024

THE SUNDAY TIMES  
**Travel**  
TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR

# Head for the hills

Anita Rani writes for the first time  
about ending her marriage — and  
the trip that helped her heal **10**



**Plus** Christina Lamb in Sri Lanka **12** Affordable Albania **16** Meet the Race Across the World winners **29**

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## Travel

Clockwise from right: Coed y Bleiddiau, in Snowdonia, has its own stop; Avon Signal Box, in Devon; the Balmoral, Edinburgh; the cocktail bar at St Pancras Renaissance



COVER COMPOSITE: ANTHONY HATLEY/ALAMY; ANTHONY HARVEY/SHUTTERSTOCK; TOP SEVEN: JOHN MILLER/LANDMARK TRUST; ANDY SCOTT PHOTOGRAPHY



# Seven great UK stays for train

These rail-inspired overnights will delight the inner trainspotter in all of us

**T**rainspotters, rail enthusiasts, even anoraks – call us what you will, but you can't deny we know how to holiday. If we're not taking the train we're sleeping near one. Or in one. That's because fellow train fans have converted and restored everything from carriages and signal boxes into hotels and cottages. Here's our pick of the stays worth getting on board with.

## ST PANCRAS RENAISSANCE, KING'S CROSS, LONDON

Short of dressing up staff as station masters, the majestic St Pancras Renaissance hotel couldn't really make more of its illustrious rail heritage. First, it was a railway coal store before becoming a top hotel in the 1870s, designed by George Gilbert Scott, for the Victorian passengers who travelled through King's Cross. After closing in 1935, the hotel became railway offices before its glorious rebirth in 2011. The former control room is now

the Gallery event space and the old ticket booths form part of the Booking Office cocktail bar. Even standard rooms have brilliant views of Eurostar platforms, while the swanky Sir John Betjeman suite is named after the poet and rail enthusiast who saved St Pancras from demolition in the 1960s. The indie restaurants and shops of Coal Drops Yard are a five-minute walk away and Harry Potter fans will find themselves within wand-throwing distance of photo opportunities at platform nine-and-three-quarters.

**Details** Room-only doubles from £321 (marriott.com)

## THE OLD STATION, HEACHAM, NORFOLK

We have the comedians Paul Whitehouse and Bob Mortimer to thank for sharing this place – the duo stayed

here in series one of BBC's *Gone Fishing*. A first-class railway carriage (sleeping four) and waiting rooms (sleeping two) have been converted into accommodation at the Old Station. The conversions are self-catered but you should treat yourself to dinner at the West Norfolk hotel next door at least once – its restaurant was once the rail goods shed at Heacham Station. Heacham beach is a five-minute walk away.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering in the Waiting Rooms from £267; the Carriage from £412 (oldstationheacham.com)

## COED Y BLEIDDIAU, NEAR BLAENAU FFESTINIOG, GWYNEDD

Yes, you're in the heart of Snowdonia National Park (Eryri) here, with world-famous walking trails right

outside your door, but the train is still the star of this stay. That's because Coed y Bleiddiau – a pretty 1863 slate-and-granite cottage – was once the home of rail superintendent T Henry Hovenden and his family, and is now a two-bedroom holiday rental owned by the Landmark Trust. It's also a request-only stop on the line from Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog, which means the steam train will stop – just for you – so you get the thrill of alighting on your own private platform. There's a garden, wood-burning stove and children are welcome. The Oakeley Arms pub is a mile on foot.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for four from £375 (landmarktrust.org.uk)

## THE ENGINE SHED, WHITBY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

You might recognise the Engine Shed from its 15 minutes of fame – when the Hairy Bikers stayed here as part of their *Go North* food and

travel series. The 1847 Engine Shed was designed by George Townsend Andrews, one of the great Victorian architects of railway buildings; originally, it housed horse-drawn train carriages but later was extended for steam trains. That means there's enough room for 11 apartments within (sleeping two to five), all of which overlook the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. Fortune's Kippers – a smokehouse serving takeaway kippers beloved by the Hairy Bikers – is 15 minutes' walk away, as is Whitby beach. **Details** Three nights' self-catering from £537 (whitbyengineshed.net)

## THE BALMORAL, EDINBURGH

The North British Station Hotel opened in 1902 with great fanfare. Its grand clock is set three minutes fast so that Waverley Station passengers never miss their trains and that remains the case, even now that the hotel has been sold by British Rail and





# ain lovers



renamed the Balmoral. Past guests include Laurel and Hardy, Paul McCartney and JK Rowling (who checked in to finish writing *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; a suite is named in her in honour). If you don't have their starry spending power, you can always take afternoon tea in the Palm Court instead (£65pp), as passengers did 120 years ago, to refuel before a stroll up Arthur's Seat. **Details** Room-only doubles from £325 (roccofortehotels.com)

## SEABANK, SELSEY, WEST SUSSEX

Seabank – right by the sea at Selsey – is made up of two linked 19th-century railway carriages and is perfect for groups or big families, sleeping eight in its four bedrooms. The “Stroudley” passenger train used to run from London to Brighton before being retired after the Second World War and its original signage and some features remain, such as the brass door handles. You're literally a stone's throw from the pebble beach, which is often empty – holidaymakers

are drawn to the sandy beaches around Bognor. You're not far from Arundel, Chichester and Portsmouth for day trips.

**Details** Two nights' self-catering for eight from £185 (oneoffplaces.co.uk)

## AVON SIGNAL BOX, KINGSBRIDGE, DEVON

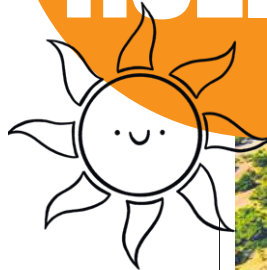
This signal box gives you bags of room – two double bedrooms, in fact, over two floors, with an upside-down configuration so that the top-storey lounge provides cracking views over the Avon Valley. You're in a National Landscape here, so pack your wellies, whether that be simply to explore your own four acres of riverside grounds, or further afield over a stretch of the South West Coast Path. What was once the railway track is now a walking route through forest and fields, via the Avon Mill Café and Garden Centre, if you wish.

**Details** Seven nights' self-catering for four from £575 (hostunusual.com)

**Katie Bowman**

*Any we've missed? Let us know in the comments online*

# THE £400 HOLIDAY



JOHN BELITSKY/GETTY IMAGES

Coastal **Oludeniz** offers a dazzling lagoon, mountain walks and – for the brave – paragliding

One of Turkey's best-loved resorts, the low-rise village of Oludeniz in the Fethiye district, offers a mix of spectacular scenery, lively nightlife and a beach to die for.

Oludeniz was one of the first places in Turkey to open up to tourism in the late 1980s (its beach has launched a thousand holiday brochures) and although the town has grown over the years, the beach is still unspoilt. An 11-mile curve of soft sand is backed by dunes that fall down to a shimmering lagoon behind. While the beach in front of the town is often busy, the crowds thin out as you walk further along the sands and there's a clutch of beach clubs set beside the lagoon.

There are numerous hotels in Oludeniz so prices are often more competitive than at other resorts – the trick is to choose a base that's set back from the main street, Carsi Caddesi, which gets lively at night. The Tower Hotel is a five-minute walk from all the action – a cluster of simple but comfortable rooms, fanning out from a large pool terrace with a children's pool alongside the main one. A week here will cost you £384 with breakfast, luggage and transfers included, departing on June 22.

Although it's tempting not to roam further than the beach, the mountains that surround Oludeniz are worth your time. The ruined Greek village of Kayakoy – featured in Louis de Bernieres' novel *Birds Without Wings* about the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – is tucked into the mountainside. It's an atmospheric tangle of crumbling houses, deserted since the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1923 forced more than a million people

from their homes. The Lebossos restaurant makes a great lunch stop, with excellent Turkish meze (lebossos.com).

Boat trips offer a lazy way to discover the coastline with gulets sailing every morning to quiet coves and islands, usually with lunch included and plenty of swim stops. The highlight is Butterfly Valley, a slice of land that is home to about 100 species of butterfly, sandwiched between two cliffs that open out on to a beach. The valley can be accessed on foot from the Lycian Way, although it's a winding, vertiginous route that is not for the faint-hearted. Boat is the best way to get there.

To explore on land, Turkey's dolmus (public minibus) runs down to the port city of Fethiye, where the harbour and the old town are lovely places to wander around. Drop into Nefis Pide Salonu for the best flatbread in town (41 Sokak, No 9).

For the adventurous, there is one Oludeniz experience that shouldn't be missed: a tandem paraglide off Babadag mountain. It takes 40 minutes to drive up to the peak, which is at an elevation of 6,460ft, and 30 minutes to glide down, with landings on the beach.

Alternatively, you can sit in the terrace bar of the Tower Hotel and watch others swoop and circle down. I know which I'd choose.

**Annabelle Thorpe**

“**Oludeniz's beach has launched a thousand holiday brochures**”

## WHAT YOU GET FOR £384PP

- Return Gatwick-Dalaman flights
- 23kg hold luggage
- Shared transfers
- Seven nights' B&B at the Tower Hotel departing on June 22 (easyjet.com)

## Feeling flush?

If you're inspired but you've got more cash to flash you could try:

### THE £800 HOLIDAY

With a pool terrace dotted with olive trees and hammocks, charming rooms and gardens, the Oyster Residences is a cut above many similarly priced Oludeniz hotels. Its adults-only policy keeps it quieter, while the restaurant terrace overlooking the beach is a great spot for dinner. Rooms have a rustic-chic feel. Book a higher-grade room for an alfresco hot tub or private terrace.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £814pp, including flights and transfers, departing on June 22 (jet2holidays.com).

### THE £1,500 HOLIDAY

Ideal if you want to dip in and out of Oludeniz's bright lights and beachy charms, the Liberty Likya hotel is a great family choice ten minutes' drive out of town. This isn't a place you'll get bored in, with a daily activity programme offering everything from archery and beach volleyball to scuba diving. Ten restaurants mean a different cuisine every night and the new waterpark will keep the kids happy.

**Details** Seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,491pp, including flights and transfers, departing on June 23 (tui.co.uk).



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San Jose	<b>£703<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>£2,567<sup>+</sup></b>
Mauritius	<b>£487<sup>0</sup></b>	<b>£2,241<sup>#</sup></b>
Sydney	<b>£820<sup>0</sup></b>	<b>£2,860<sup>0</sup></b>
Cape Town	<b>£496<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>£2,067<sup>0</sup></b>
Vancouver	<b>£645<sup>0</sup></b>	<b>£2,462<sup>+</sup></b>
Barbados	<b>£620<sup>#</sup></b>	<b>£2,263<sup>^</sup></b>
New York	<b>£453<sup>0</sup></b>	<b>£2,038<sup>#</sup></b>
Auckland	<b>£1,074<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>£4,968<sup>+</sup></b>

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‡20 Jul - 31 Aug †1 Sep - 31 Oct ‡1 Nov - 15 Dec ‡4 Jan - 28 Feb ‡1 Mar - 30 May ‡25. All information correct at time of going to print on 6 June 24.

**A**ristocratic weddings rarely cross my radar, but the recent nuptials of Hugh Grosvenor, the 7th Duke of Westminster, to Olivia Henson, did. Not so much for the royal ties (the duke is godfather to Prince George and Prince Archie) but the fact that it was taking place in Chester.

Why did he pick Chester? Sure, the duke's gigantic Eaton Estate is nearby, but the man owns vast swathes of London, choice corners of the rest of the UK and riches beyond your wildest dreams – he could have got married anywhere. And he hasn't just chosen it for the wedding. The couple have declared their intention to settle at Eaton. On a recent trip Henson said they were: "Transitioning to move up from London ... really putting roots down."

Yes, Chester offers millennia of history, picturesque medieval architecture and city walls, but I live in York which has all of that, and the fanciest wedding we've had was Ellie Goulding's. There's a polite but real rivalry between the cities, and I admit it, I'm piqued. What makes Chester so special that the 14th richest man in Britain wants to wed and live there? I went to investigate.

I started with the wedding venue: Chester's ruddy sandstone cathedral was surrounded on my pre-wedding visit last week by police officers in high-vis jackets, sniffer spaniels and a palpable air of tension, broken only by nosy local pensioners quizzing officials about the guest list with the intensity of tabloid hacks, plus the odd confused tourist. Inside the cathedral is lovelier than out, especially the spectacular filigree gothic quire stalls and vaulted cloister surrounding a serene garden.

The duke has talked about the family's "long association" with the cathedral, and long is an understatement. In the 11th century his ancestor Hugh d'Avranches, one of William the Conqueror's squires, developed the existing church into a Benedictine abbey. A euphemistically "colourful" character (great cruelty, many children), he was extremely fat and fond of hunting: "fat hunter" (or self-proclaimed "great hunter", probably both) – *gros veneur* – became Grosvenor.

Walking Chester's pretty streets of richly decorated, half-timbered houses I saw that name everywhere, from ancient St John's church to the 1960s shopping centre. No surprise – the family owns parts of the city centre and the duke's foundation supports various local charities.

Before the Grosvenors came the Romans. Deva Victrix fortress, as Chester was known, covered 60 acres, with an amphitheatre seating 10,000 and baths bigger than Bath's. I learnt this on the Roman Soldier Tour (£9.50; [romantoursuk.com](http://romantoursuk.com)) with Scipio ("You can call me Rob"). In tunic and helmet, sword in scabbard, Rob took us back through time, visiting Deva's archaeological sites, including one chunk improbably in the basement of Pret.

The tour gives a real feel for the harsh,



# Chester unveiled

The Duke of Westminster married his new bride in the historic city – but it's just as good for a weekend break as a wedding, says *Emma Beddington*



**Top: Chester Cathedral. Top right: the Duke and Duchess of Westminster. Left: the Lady Diana cruising along the the River Dee**

sometimes gory life of soldiers in Deva's 20th Legion: Rob regaled us with tales of Roman haemorrhoid cures and amputation techniques as we walked, and explained the brutal reality of gladiatorial combat as we stood in the amphitheatre.

I recovered in more serene surroundings: the Jaunty Goat, which unlike the Romans is vegan, and does delicious mushrooms on sourdough, home-roasted Costa Rican cortado and coffee cake (mains from £8; [jauntygoat.co.uk](http://jauntygoat.co.uk)). Chester is surprisingly good for the plant-based like me, who would go down like a lead-filled pheasant at a ducal shooting party. There are veggie burgers and cocktails at Shrub (mains from £9.50; [shrubchester.co.uk](http://shrubchester.co.uk)) and Insta-ready indulgence at Pink Lettuce (platters from £10; [pinklettuce.co.uk](http://pinklettuce.co.uk)). No clues had been dropped in advance about who would be catering the

wedding but I'm sure the guests were well fed – the city's food scene generally feels buzzy, with plenty of independents, including Twenty Eight, which conjures farm-to-table small plate magic from its own produce (plates from £8; [restaurant28.com](http://restaurant28.com)).

Chester's two-tiered Rows – medieval galleries along the city's main streets – are perfect for afternoon pottering. Watergate Row was my favourite: Pars Kahve serves Turkish mezze, and vintage kilims and homeware; Morgan has laid-back fashion for grown-ups; and there are several antique shops to poke around. Beyond the Rows, fortified with bergamot and blood orange sorbets from Krum gelateria, I discovered the makers' collective Oh, admiring Uprooted's delicate cups made from storm-felled local oak and sniffing made-in-Cheshire candles.

Accommodation-wise, the duke has his own hotel, the elegant, if unimaginatively named Chester Grosvenor (B&B doubles from £153; [chestergrosvenor.com](http://chestergrosvenor.com)). The restaurant La Brasserie offers plates of perfect British early summer: tomatoes in a basil and ajo blanco sauce so good I demanded a spoon, then tiny Jersey royals with pea shoots, broad beans and charred little gem. Nearby omnivores looked similarly delighted with sea bream and pork tomahawk (mains from £21).

Barely a minute away, the Macdonald New Blossoms Hotel lacks ducal bells and whistles, but my room is huge and peaceful (room-only doubles from £62; [macdonaldhotels.co.uk](http://macdonaldhotels.co.uk)). I woke to watch swallows darting around the eaves of the

half-timbered houses opposite, then I hit the city walls. The circuit takes less than an hour – this is truly a pocket-sized city – with views over the River Dee, the racecourse and the four gateways marking the medieval entrance points. By now I could understand what the duke sees in Chester.

Aboard the Lady Diana it's a different story. I took this aristocratic riverboat for a cruise along the River Dee through part of the Eaton Estate (cruises from £8; [chesterboat.co.uk](http://chesterboat.co.uk)). Our skipper Mike, 85, was born within the city walls, and there's

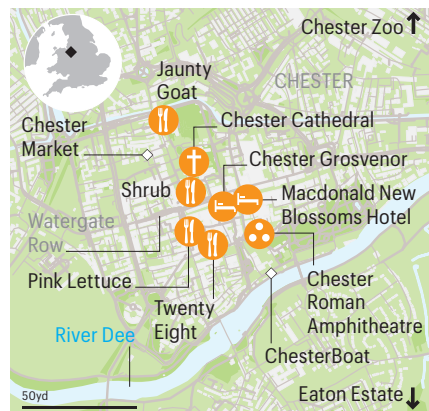
not much he doesn't know about the local lords, from the Norman conquest to last week's ceremony. We got a lively potted history, plus plenty of other Chester snippets. The tour is fun whatever your take on inherited peerages.

There are Georgian riverfront mansions to covet, paddleboarders and kayakers to admire and herons hunting along the willow-lined bank – no need to hit Chester Zoo for a wildlife fix (a 15-minute bus ride from the railway station, from £35; [chesterzoo.org](http://chesterzoo.org)). Better still, a sparkling blue streak flashed past us: a kingfisher, then another and another.

I warmed up in the food court of Chester Market with a lip-tingling hit of pepper and red chilli stir-fry from Thai by Thai. Even at 3pm on a rainy Wednesday the market was packed with locals and tourists chatting, laughing and tucking into oysters and prosecco.

This city doesn't need a posh wedding to have a party.

*Emma Beddington was a guest of Visit Cheshire ([chester.com](http://chester.com))*



Swap Sin City for Sun City – outdoorsy, cultural and good for the soul, says *Jonathan Dean*

Everyone loves the Grand Canyon. Visiting it is, somehow, even better than imagined – an awe-inspiring sight of rock and distance where you wonder how it all began.

The problem, though, is the Grand Canyon is miles away from anything. Wherever you’re starting from, you drive for hours and queue up. Sure, you can stay a night in the Arizona city of Flagstaff but as there are no direct flights from the UK to Flagstaff, most nip into Las Vegas, stay one night, gawp at the tourists, then get out as fast as they can for the half-day trek to the canyon.

But what if there were an alternative to Vegas? A glimmering city that is also in the desert, and also four hours from the Grand Canyon, but cultural, wholesome, beautiful and designed to keep both residents and tourists outdoors, not cooped up in a casino, gambling away the inheritance. Well, step

forward Phoenix, a city so hot that it has a neighbourhood called Sun City, but is now getting hotter in that other way too. Between 2020 and 2023, its population grew by 4 per cent compared with the US national average of 1 per cent. It seems this is because a lot of people have left pricey California, but it’s easy to see why they feel settled here in Arizona. Driving around the Phoenix sprawl, especially at sunset, smells and feels like some planning genius once said, “How about LA – but with less traffic?”

I start in the Hilton Phoenix Tapatio Cliffs Resort – a 20-minute drive from the airport, which has direct flights from London. It is night when I arrive and the hotel’s mountaintop position reveals the twinkling city lights, like stars in an upside-down sky.

Mountains surround and pop up in Phoenix, and the Hilton rises high: a vast complex. With seven pools, a water slide, cabanas,

waterfalls, spa and golf ranges around 450 hilly acres, it’s a city within a city that also has access to many desert trails.

You cannot move for the cacti in Arizona and hiking among them is easy and enriching. The tallest cacti seem to have been there for centuries. Makes you think. There are wild animals – snakes, wild pigs, coyotes – but hiking is a common pastime here and the trails are safe for the sensible. The best time to use them is spring. In the summer, an average temperature in the forties makes it less of a hike and more of a “Hoo, boy!”

The highlight of the Hilton, though, is the Different Pointe of View restaurant – up the top of the resort’s steepest hill (I should know, I walked it). My waiter, Ian, guides me through a bold and inventive menu, the highlights of which include a duck breast with pomegranate caviar and parmesan gnocchi. It is not cheap – £38 – but the presentation is beautiful and it



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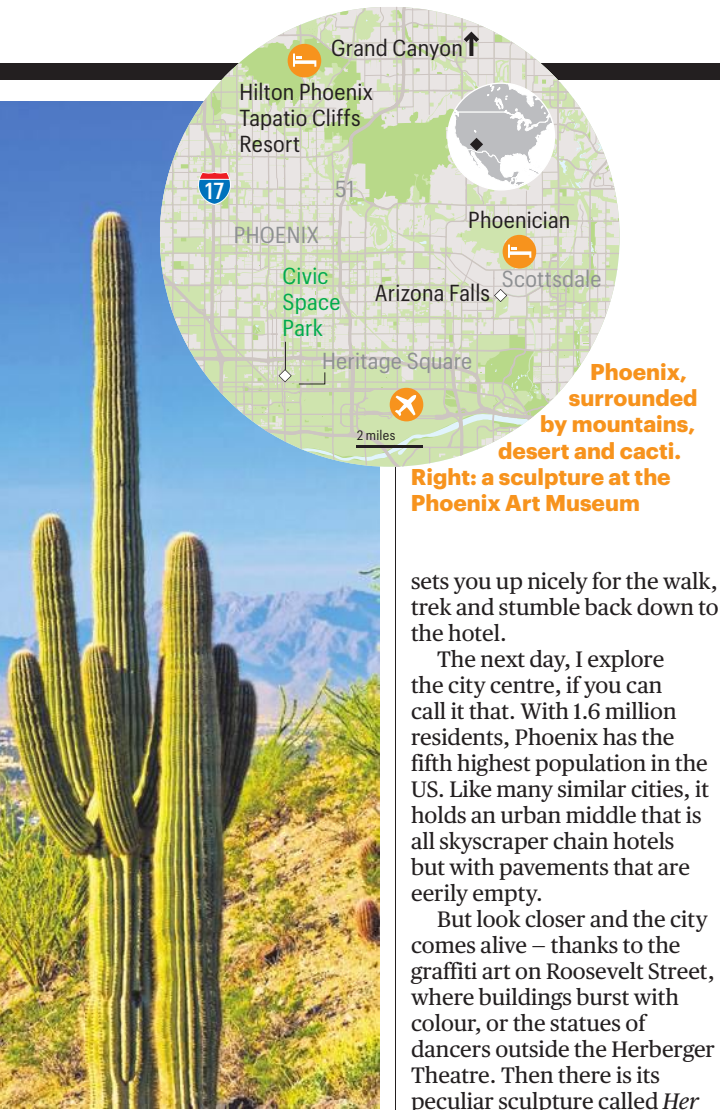
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Right: a sculpture at the Phoenix Art Museum

sets you up nicely for the walk, trek and stumble back down to the hotel.

The next day, I explore the city centre, if you can call it that. With 1.6 million residents, Phoenix has the fifth highest population in the US. Like many similar cities, it holds an urban middle that is all skyscraper chain hotels but with pavements that are eerily empty.

But look closer and the city comes alive – thanks to the graffiti art on Roosevelt Street, where buildings burst with colour, or the statues of dancers outside the Herberger Theatre. Then there is its peculiar sculpture called *Her*

*Secret Is Patience*, which is a sweeping conical net that is suspended above the Civic Space Park and lit up at night. Who knows why it's there but, like Anish Kapoor's shiny bean in Chicago, you'd miss it if it were gone.

Just north of the downtown, meanwhile, sits the Phoenix Art Museum – a large gallery with more than 18,000 works in its collection. European masters include Monet and Picasso, while the outdoor sculpture garden is lined with prim, Parisian-style rows of trees and walkways. It has artworks old and modern, big and small, conventional and odd (£22; phxart.org).

The pick of the spots for enjoying the sun and local history is Heritage Square – a collection of pedestrianised streets that houses the Arizona Science Centre (£23; azscience.org). It also, via the well-preserved architecture, shows what the city was like in the 1800s. You take history where you can in some American cities

and the restored Rosson House Museum recreates the bedrooms and dining rooms of a time when most of this was still desert (£12; heritagesquarephx.org).

Yet learning about the past only takes you so far and, frankly, the best thing about Heritage Square is Pizzeria Bianco, which takes no reservations and where the wait for a table frequently exceeds an hour, possibly because it was named the best pizza in America on the Netflix show *Chef's Table: Pizza*.

Now, I have not eaten every pizza in America, but the pizza here is extraordinary. When I finally make it into Pizzeria Bianco, I go for the Rosa – onion, parmesan, rosemary and pistachios with fennel sausage – and I don't know what they do there but I haven't even bothered to eat pizza since (pizzas from £14; pizzeriabianco.com).

My final stop, for two nights, is the Phoenician, a resort in Scottsdale. Some people – probably people

“It's like some planning genius said, ‘How about LA, but without the traffic?’”



from Scottsdale – claim this as a different city, within the metropolitan area of Phoenix. However, it's impossible to visit Scottsdale without visiting Phoenix and there is nothing separating them – they are part of the same urban spread. The bonus of the Phoenician is that it is towards the north

of the city and the Grand Canyon – it is on the way to where you are going.

In many ways, it is the Hilton for people with more cash. Tucked into a cliff with spindly cacti up to the summit, it's the desert does luxury. I stay in a sizeable lodge away from the main

Continued on page 8 →

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→ Continued from page 7  
hotel, with a huge bathroom. It has tennis and pickleball courts, swimming pools and a cactus garden.

Phoenix feels restful, unlike Vegas. And that's the selling point. The drive out to the Grand Canyon is long, and then you just slog back to Vegas, whereas Phoenix is a place you want to come back to, or at least gives you a calm start before driving elsewhere.

On my last morning, I take in one more sight: the Arizona Falls, a hydroelectric plant that has been reimagined as a picnic area. Birds chill and people read – it's peaceful: a symbol of a city using its history, geography and even power stations to keep its people outdoors and engaged.

Jonathan Dean was a guest of the Hilton Phoenix Tapatio Cliffs Resort, which has room-only doubles from £100 (tapatio cliffshilton.com); the Phoenician, which has room-only doubles from £327 (thephoenician.com); and British Airways Holidays, which has five nights' room only – three at the Hilton Phoenix and two at the Phoenician – from £1,349pp, including flights (ba.com)



Top: the Phoenician hotel in Scottsdale. Below: the Rosson House Museum in the Heritage Square district of Phoenix

# See the sights from Phoenix

## THE GRAND CANYON

Your drive from Phoenix to the “Big Ditch” — as the Americans lovingly nickname the Grand Canyon — is about three and a half hours north, but it's a scenic stint, passing through the red rocks of Sedona and even tackling some of Route 66 through Flagstaff (don't miss the retro road signage). You'll arrive at the South Rim Grand Canyon entrance, which is much quieter than the busy West Rim from Vegas. If you want someone else to drive, Detours American West takes up to 13 guests in a minibus and includes a Sedona stop. The price includes park entry and about three hours of free time to explore (£184pp; detoursamericanwest.com).

## SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

Saguaro is the name of the almost comically typical cactus that grows in Arizona — giant-sized with prickly bent arms — as seen in the Road Runner cartoons and westerns. You'll recognise

Saguaro National Park as the backdrop for films such as *Three Amigos*. It's less than two hours' drive south from Phoenix so, armed with comfy boots and a lot of water, you can hike the park independently. Alternatively, sign up for a day's hiking with a medically trained naturalist guide — you may see a gila monster (a slow-moving venomous lizard), or desert tortoise under their expert eye. The cost includes park entry, guide, transport and lunch (from £126pp; goodtripadventures.com).

## HOT-AIR BALLOON OVER THE SONORAN DESERT

It's the image that has made a million screensavers: dozens of colourful hot-air balloons at sunrise over the desert. The real-life scene happens on a site 20 minutes north from Phoenix downtown, on the fringes of the Sonoran Preserve. Once up in the air, you'll be served a tasty breakfast of mimosas, pastries and fruit. If you

prefer to fly at sunset you can, but only between November and March. You'll get about an hour in the air (from £132pp; rainbowryders.com).

## JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

It's amazing where you can reach from Phoenix in under five hours by road — Palm Springs, Hoover Dam, the Mojave Desert, Las Vegas. But for epic scenery meets Instagram style, the best big trip to take is to Joshua Tree (three and a half hours to the east). It's one of the smaller US national parks and its tarmac loop makes for a great mini road trip, and still gives enough time to stop and hike when the moment strikes. The Indian Cove Nature Trail is just 0.6 miles long and showcases the best of the prickly plants, while the famous Arch Rock and Skull Rock geological formations are easy to reach too. Download a self-drive tour (from £13; getyourguide.com).


Katie Bowman



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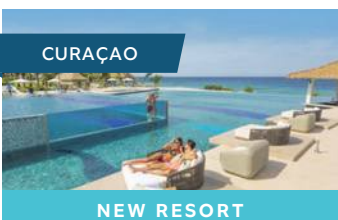


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# How I took the plunge – alone

## Mountains, soothing spas and fabulous food helped the newly single broadcaster *Anita Rani* to begin a new chapter in her life

Chapter one done. Entering chapter two.

I'm sweating. I think I'm wearing too many layers, but presenting *Countryfile* has taught me that standing on a mountain will freeze your extremities and then there's no going back.

There's no going back. This, however, is not a *Countryfile* shoot. I'm in Pinzolo in the Dolomites, on my first snowboarding trip in years. And my first as a single woman. It feels poignant, a decision to hurl myself down a mountain and feel that sense of freedom and fear I first felt 15 years ago. A metaphor. I am in uncharted territory, at least for my family. I have committed a cardinal sin, done something that

was never to be thought of, let alone attempted: I got divorced.

So here I am at what I'm calling chapter two. It's not easy to talk about and it's private, so I won't, but what I will tell you is how I feel about my life going forward now that I am answerable to no one.

Beginning single in my mid-forties has made me re-evaluate everything. It has made me see how much I have been conditioned to be a dutiful woman, rather than a free woman. I was raised to be a high achiever, to make my parents and family proud, but I was also raised never to bring shame. This is where it gets problematic, especially if you are born with a vagina. I've lived in extreme conflict. I've done my "duty" but resented

that I had to do it. Until now. Now I feel as if I'm beginning to breathe for the first time, do what I truly want to. And now hitting my mid-forties has given me a sense of urgency.

So I am in the mountains, ready to throw myself off and see what happens.

It's why I love snowboarding – the sense of utter freedom, the adrenaline, the fun, the mindfulness and the mild constant hum of fear.

I came to it late. It was always expensive, a holiday that my wealthy white friends would do annually. And here I am, a woman who has created her own destiny and is ready to throw herself into the adventures of chapter two. But first, back to the last few pages of



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my chapter one, in 2023. I wrote and published a novel, became the chancellor of the University of Bradford, gained an honorary doctorate, did my day job as a broadcaster, moved house, redid the kitchen and ended my marriage. And throughout it all I paid little attention to my emotional state. I was just focused.

I'm great at pushing forward. I love to be busy. I don't stop, I go. I motor in perpetual motion. But something wasn't quite right. My ability to ping out of bed disappeared. I knew my life was changing – the great unravel. And I was, for a time, sad. So in spring 2023 I took myself on a solo holiday, for perspective. It's a privilege, I know.

I also realised what a privilege choice is when I made my *Who Do You Think You Are?* and understood that I come from a long line of women who had zero choice, their lives ruled by men. I decided to exercise my choice and went away – out of London and my life. A safe option seemed like a spa retreat on a cliff above Lake Garda, the Lefay Resort & Spa Lago di Garda ([lagodigarda.lefayresorts.com](https://lagodigarda.lefayresorts.com)).

What I needed was space, somewhere where I would be cocooned and not have to think much at all.

I'm used to staying in hotels alone. I have written two books and have been most productive holed up in a hotel with massages on tap. An ayurvedic retreat in a converted Worcestershire mill (the Clover Mill), a five-star hotel in central London (the Corinthia). But this time my motivation was just to be. Turns out I'm pretty good at sitting in a hot tub drinking champagne solo. And waking up at sunrise to sit on my balcony overlooking Lake Garda. At ordering room service and watching a movie.

I had a variety of treatments. Cupping left me with alien bruising on my back, the stress of which probably negated any relaxing work it had done. And then there was the salt pool, an underground lagoon to be experienced alone. I descended the warm, damp salt-encrusted staircase. The lagoon water was as warm as the womb.

I floated in the salt water, thinking of absolutely nothing, the outside world and life as I knew it melting away. It was pure



bliss – addictive bliss, because when my allocated 25 minutes was up I was desperate to get back in. Like some kind of drug fiend, I paced around the spa desk sweating and twitching until they could confirm my slot for the next day.

We all have our happy place, don't we? For me, it's mountains. It's the peace, their overpowering nature, their ability to make you feel tiny and yet getting to a peak gives you such a sense of serenity and achievement. The world fades away and it's just you and the magnificence of it all.

Fast forward a year and so much has changed. Chapter two has begun.

I made a few promises to myself about how I want to live my life now.

Authentically, not being afraid of my vulnerability, being more compassionate to myself, opening my heart more and travelling. Maybe through travel I can achieve the others. So it made sense to take myself off to another mountain spa hotel. (Told you they were addictive.)

I first visited the Dolomites in springtime a few years earlier and fell madly in love with the dramatic, jagged range. I vowed I'd go back in the winter, so for this trip I booked the Lefay Dolomiti in Pinzolo, a gorgeous wooden mountain lodge that's a smooth two-and-a-half-hour drive from



Verona ([dolomiti.lefayresorts.com](https://dolomiti.lefayresorts.com)).

The hotel has its own ski shop and offers one of the slickest ski experiences I've ever had. The assigned locker area is heated and staffed, so all you need do is take a seat. Your boots, gloves and helmet are handed over and minivans are waiting to take you to the slopes.

I decide a snowboarding refresher would be wise and my lovely instructor is waiting to greet me off the bus. Not only does he have me carving down the slope in no time (yes, I do fall and, yes, I get straight back up), but he also shares wonderful conversation, about his life as an instructor and his plans to open a restaurant.

The hotel makes R and R easy. Some suites have their own wellness areas and even the smallest are 57 sq m, overlooking the pool and woods and with a fireplace and freestanding tub. The bathroom was the main event in my room – I had my own giant shower, hot tub and sauna. Then there's the delicious food. There's high-end dining at Grual – marinated trout, tuber salad and mountain pine, and saddle of roe deer and cherries were my favourite dishes – and there's a bar that serves excellent negronis. Italy is not the place to deny yourself.

Snowboarding in the day and wine and pasta at night is my idea of heaven. As is the spa, with its steam rooms and saunas, and the indoor-outdoor heated pool looking down the valley, protected by



**Clockwise from main: Anita Rani at Lefay Lago di Garda; a bedroom and the Dolomia restaurant at Lefay Dolomiti; Lake Garda**

mountains on either side.

I try to let go and think about nothing. Often I go on holiday to relax, think and make plans, but on this break my only plan is to be in the moment and think of nothing.

But the thoughts come nonetheless. It dawns on me that I have been clinging on so tight for so long that control is all I know. I've been in fight-or-flight mode for what feels like my entire life, wound up like a tight little bobbin, working hard, playing hard, never letting up, never forgiving myself, get up and do, do, do. And this is my energy, my drive, my gusto and zest for life, my special gift I have always treasured and felt safe with because this was the only me I knew.

Things began to change. Maybe it was lockdown. Maybe it was writing a memoir. I realised I'm flawed, deeply wounded, confused and unsatisfied. Panic set in. Who the hell am I? How have I been living my life? I woke up feeling I had lived a half-life, thinking about a lot of people but somehow leaving myself out of the equation. I've been closed to my own self and therefore closed to everything.

How do you start? Maybe by giving yourself a break – jump off the hamster wheel and speed down a mountain. I am so dedicated to work that I see holidays as a privilege, not a right, and I definitely don't take them as regularly as my mates seem to. All that is going to change.

I am not afraid of solo adventures or being alone. It took me a while, but I am able to do whatever I want without having to think about anyone else. I am not planning on this being a permanent state – I like the idea of love and sharing my life – but one step at a time.

So here I am at the beginning of chapter two, passport in hand, ready to jump on whatever adventure awaits me. The little lass from Bradford who always loved to travel cannot believe she has the world at her feet. It is time she lived a full life.

*Anita Rani was a guest of Lefay Resorts, which has B&B doubles from £332 at Lago di Garda and from £362 at Dolomiti ([lefayresorts.com](https://lefayresorts.com)), and of Kuoni, which has three nights' B&B at Lago di Garda from £1,199pp, including flights ([kuoni.co.uk](https://kuoni.co.uk))*



# Sri Lanka's wild side

Christina Lamb is no stranger to danger – but it doesn't usually come in the form of sloth bears and leopards, which are among the natural thrills of Yala National Park



The first time I heard of a sloth bear, I imagined something slow-moving and cuddly slung dopyly between branches, perhaps sucking on some honeycomb. Then I ran into the historian Simon Schama at the Galle Literary Festival, in Sri Lanka, where we were both speaking. He had just come from Yala, the country's national park in the southeast, to which I was heading in search of them. "You really don't want to meet a sloth bear," he said. "They will rip your face off."

I thought he was mad. Admittedly they look a bit strange, with their long, hairless white snouts, but my main reference for them was Baloo, the easy-going bear who brings up Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*. Then I googled. Immediately a series of alarming reports popped up from India – the only country apart from Sri Lanka where sloth bears are native. In November 2022 a sloth bear in Tamil Nadu had attacked three men including a vegetable seller, "furiously trying to bite off his face". Another report described a couple "mauled to death" on their way home from a temple. Then there was the notorious sloth bear of Mysore that killed 12 people. Under the video someone had posted the comment: "Happy New Year everyone! What is your New Year's resolution? Mine is to stay away from sloth bears."

So I was rather relieved when I arrived at the Hilton Yala Resort and Sajith (Saj) Withanage, the head ranger, told me it was the wrong time of year for sloth bears. The

best months to see them are May and June, when the palu berries fruit and the bears get high on sugar.

This park's main claim to fame is leopards. Yala has the world's highest density of leopards, the most elegant of big cats and a species I had never seen in the wild. There are also quite a few elephants, creatures that never fail to make me smile.

I had already spent a week in Sri Lanka and was smitten. I don't think I have ever been to a friendlier country or one of such lush greenery and mouthwatering food.

The hotel, which opened last August, was so nice I wasn't sure I wanted to go anywhere. To start with I thought it was a little too Hilton, the main building a vast concrete and glass box resembling an airport terminal. This was a shock having come from the old walled town of Galle in the southwest, where I had stayed in the stylish Fort Printers boutique hotel (B&B doubles from £200; thefortprinters.com) and then Amba Estate in the island's tea country, in a little cottage overlooking the lush green Ella hills, which had left me feeling quite Zen (room-only doubles from £140; ambaestate.com).



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KANWAL SANDHU/GETTY IMAGES; ADAM BRUZZONE

**Clockwise from main: elephants in Yala National Park; a spa room at Hilton Yala Resort; a sloth bear**

Not only had we sampled delicious hand-picked teas, we had also walked up to Ella Rock via the nearby Forest Monastery, where after admiring the views, a monk invited us into the temple and told me they recently had a Ukrainian sniper staying who had come for some calm. I could see why, though I wondered if he, like us, was taken aback by the number of Russian tourists in Sri Lanka – one of the few places they are welcome.

Calm is also the order of the day at Yala Resort, where any qualms about its modern architecture were soon dispelled when we sat on the terrace, eating delicious prawns and looking out over the stunning pool, cleverly landscaped to flow around the trees. Bright yellow orioles flew between the branches and families of monkeys chattered on the rooftops of the villas round the edge, built in grey stone to blend in. Beyond lay the Indian Ocean.

The hotel being right on the edge of the park attracts some unusual guests. A crocodile had taken up residence in a small brook, while the buckled doors of a store room marked where an elephant recently tried to enter. An elephant trail

passes right through the grounds. Guests like us, staying in villas beyond the pool, were instructed not to walk through the grounds, but to hail a golf buggy by dialling a button marked “Magic” on the room phone.

Our comfy premium villa had electric curtains that opened to reveal a sunken plunge pool, but we managed to drag ourselves away for an afternoon bush walk with Saj. He has been coming to Yala with his father since he was two and is one of the most experienced guides here, having trained in South Africa after a stint as a designer for Topshop in London.

A Sri Lankan version of Indiana Jones, complete with felt fedora, he was full of useful skills such as how to distinguish between male and female leopard paw prints, as well as buffalo and elephant poo. Elephants eat the whole time but have small intestines, so their deposits are less digested and more grassy than a buffalo's, which has four stomachs.

We spotted a giant monitor lizard and a peacock, which for some reason are everywhere, then scrambled up granite boulders to look out over the spectacular

vegetation, with the ocean at the edge of the park.

“All I need now is a gin and tonic,” I said. “I have a surprise for you,” Saj said. As we walked back towards the hotel in the falling dusk, we were greeted by a line of lanterns leading up a rock where the barman was rattling his cocktail shaker to make tuk-tuks, a tangy mix of arrack, the local coconut liquor, with mango chutney, passionfruit and lime. I made my husband get the recipe but, like most cocktails that seem delicious

when sampled in exotic settings, it probably would not work so well in south London.

The walk and the cocktails had heightened our anticipation for the next day's safari drive. It did not start well. The park is divided into five blocks that stretch north from the Indian Ocean. Though the hotel was just five minutes away from Block 1, which has the most leopards (as many as 100, depending on who you talk to), Saj warned us that it was overcrowded and

**Continued on page 14 →**



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Travel Sri Lanka

→ Continued from page 13

suggested we drove an hour north instead, to Block 5.

We set off in a safari vehicle, driving through the lush greenery, weaving between tuk-tuks and passing people selling mangos, bananas and colourful roadside Buddhas, large gold ones garlanded with flowers and disco Buddhas strung with flashing lights.

On the way conversation turned to sloth bears. Saj explained the “sloth” part of the name is because of their long claws (used for face

ripping) and that despite their lumbering gait, they are super fast. “They might seem like a teddy, but if you hug them you won’t survive,” he said.

He started to tell us a gruesome story when our driver suddenly slowed. An elephant was blocking the road and waving its trunk expectantly. Saj told us these were known as “toll gate elephants”, who demand food from motorists to let them pass. Apparently they know safari vehicles do not give, so let us through.

At the park entrance we picked up a local ranger and drove down a track into a clearing to see a family of water buffaloes forest bathing in the afternoon light, almost as if posing for photos. Sri Lanka had had record rain in December and when we tried to drive out of the clearing, we got stuck in the mud. The more the driver tried, the deeper we sank. The local ranger managed to hail a safari vehicle, which tried to pull us out, but to no avail. Then he came back with a tractor,

which got stuck too. By the time we eventually got out, the park was closing. Poor Saj was mortified. But that wasn’t our only chance.

Next day we were up early to head to Block 1 for opening time at 7am. Fortunately Saj had some kind of express pass, because we could not believe the queue – more than 100 vehicles headed in.

Not far into the park, our driver, Mali, pointed out a pair of buffalo hoofs hanging from a tree – the remains of a leopard kill. He turned down a



THILANKA PERERA/GETTY IMAGES

sandy road where Saj showed us recent footprints of a sloth bear and a leopard.

Then Mali got a call and we headed back to the main road. Several vehicles had gathered, tourists were craning their necks at an elephant standing resplendent high up on a rock, trumpeting to the skies. Soon there was a traffic jam and everyone was hanging out of their vehicles trying to take selfies with the elephant.

Mali spotted something. Saj passed over his binoculars. There was a leopard in the tree beyond the elephant on the rock. As we watched, it licked its paws then slowly, elegantly, padded away.

Later, standing in a pool of water near the roadside was a painted stork with a distinctive pink bottom. We stopped for a photo and as we did, a mongoose suddenly darted along the bank and a frog jumped out. The stork swooped and grabbed it with its long beak as the mongoose yelped in annoyance at missing out. Animal theatre at its best – all it needed was a David Attenborough voiceover.

It had been a great start to the morning and, as always with a safari, we were excited by everything at the beginning. A spotted deer! A peacock! After a while, however, you become blasé because what you really want is another leopard. Or even a sloth bear, at a safe distance.

So we were happy to stop for our breakfast boxes by a beautiful lake of pink and

**Yala National Park has the world’s highest density of leopards**

white water lilies, on a back route far from the other cars. It was so quiet we could hear the birdsong. Yala is truly paradise for bird nerds, with a stunning array of blue-winged and chestnut-headed bee-eaters, sunbirds and fish eagles. The flash of brilliant turquoise of the kingfisher was something even David Hockney might envy but Saj explained that it’s an optical illusion and they are not blue at all.

Eventually, a crunching of twigs broke the spell and heralded the passing by of a group of elephants, which made for a fitting farewell. “Yala elephants are very chill,” Saj said.

Chill sounded good, so back at the hotel we decided to reward ourselves with a spa session. Lying on the massage beds looking out across the wilderness while being rubbed with king coconut oil is truly heaven. We may not have seen a sloth bear but were totally in love with Sri Lanka – and who knows? We could always dial Magic.

*Christina Lamb was a guest of Hilton Yala Resort, which has B&B doubles from £392 (hilton.com), and Sri Lankan Airlines (srilankan.com), which has Heathrow-Colombo returns from £700*



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# Colombo: the underrated Sri Lankan city you won't want to miss

Sri Lanka is too often described as “little India”, but on arrival in Colombo, I had to disagree. Compared with India’s capital, Delhi, and the chaotic cities of Hyderabad, Bangalore and Mumbai, Colombo feels dreamlike, an oasis of candyfloss-pink skies, intimate establishments and abundant nature. It lacks the crowds and crush of Indian cities and is a wonderful, relaxed place to wander.

Each district has a distinct feel. There’s Kompagnna Veediya (a suburb previously known as Slave Island), sandwiched between Beira Lake and the ocean, which has mildewed pastel façades, retro signage, abandoned cinemas and cafés celebrating Jaffna cuisine. Or Colombo 7, further inland, with wide boulevards where winding roots anchor colossal ancient trees into the ground, upending pavements with the sheer power of nature. Too many visitors land at Colombo airport and move on immediately. Here’s why you should linger in the city.

### WHERE TO STAY

Overlooking Galle Face Green and the Indian Ocean is the newest addition to Colombo’s skyline: the flawlessly shiny ITC Ratnadipa hotel. It opened in April and is fast becoming the place to be seen on account of its slick restaurants, including Avartana, which has creative tasting menus, and the award-winning Peshawri, where authentic northwest Indian cuisine impresses with delicious seekh kebabs and warm breads.

It is the first ITC hotel outside India and its design has been inspired by the nil manel (blue water lily), Sri Lanka’s national flower. Bedrooms are just as serene with plush fabrics and deep jewel tones, and include everything you would expect of a five-star hotel: epic complimentary minibar housed in a grand wooden chest, iPad-controlled fixtures and the most efficient laundry service I’ve ever used. But it was Vonisha, the butler assigned to me at check-in, who was the highlight of my stay (mains from £9, B&B doubles from £147; marriott.com).

### WHERE TO WALK

Galle Face Green, Colombo’s oceanside promenade, is the place to head for seaside strolls and shopping. You can expect hawkers and after-dusk weekend stalls selling kites, balloons and isso vade, a popular street food of spicy lentil patties and fresh prawns.

Away from the crowds, my favourite neighbourhood to get lost in is the leafy area known as Colombo 7. With a high concentration of perfectly manicured cricket grounds and immense banyan and ficus trees, this part of the city is one of the greenest. Put your phone away and follow your instincts.

### WHAT TO SEE

I chanced upon the uplifting art of Minal Wickrematunge during a walk from Independence Square to Horton Place when I passed a street emblazoned with her art. Her bold creations are on display around the city, often splashed across walls, café interiors and art spaces, and showcase misrepresented Sri Lankan women with the aim of “reclaiming and decolonising the way women are depicted”, she says. She is part of the Fearless Collective, a growing art movement of female artists from Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and her newest piece, designed and executed in conjunction with the activist Vicky Shahjahan, can be viewed in

Kompagnna Veediya (fearlesscollective.org).

Sri Lanka’s best-known architect is Geoffrey Bawa. His tropical modernism style can be seen all over Colombo, from private residences and parliament buildings to a Buddhist temple complex on Beira Lake, below. But it is his home, No 11, 33rd Lane, in the upmarket district of Kollupitiya, that is really worth visiting. Bawa lived in this beautifully designed property for about 30 years after its completion in the late 1960s. Today it is still brimming with his art and it is possible to take a tour, or even stay in the property (guided tour £13, B&B doubles from £225; geoffreybawa.com).

### WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

The chef Dharshan Munidasa has been at the forefront of Colombo’s culinary scene since 1995 and is known for fusing Japanese techniques with Sri Lankan produce. His latest restaurant, Nihonbashi by Dharshan, has now opened at Port City with a menu that features many of the specialities for which he is so well known. Ten sabi temaki (wasabi mayo rice and tempura prawn wrapped in seaweed), olive oil kake tai cha (rice topped with sashimi and egg) and garlic rice maki can be enjoyed in one of the eight private dining spaces that are an ode to Japanese design (small plates from £4; nihonbashi.lk).

For something a little more Sri Lankan, Palmyrah in Renuka City Hotel is a low-key restaurant that specialises in north Sri Lankan cuisine. The crab curry and light-as-air milk hoppers should not be missed (mains from £6; renukacityhotel.com).

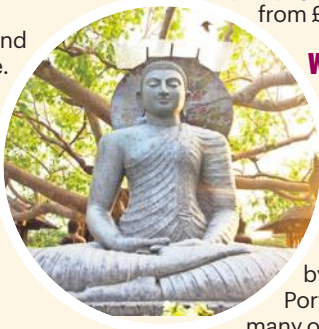
I had heard much about Uncle’s bar and just a quick scroll of its Instagram feed was enough to make me cancel all plans and head straight there. Celebrating Sri Lankan flavours (cinnamon, pandan, cardamom), Uncle’s cocktails are hands down the best in the city. Look out for Perera’s Problem, inspired by Mr Perera, an enigmatic Colombo resident and former customs officer, and the pomegranate-infused Auntie Agnes.

Meanwhile, the bar’s small plates play with the idea of street food but have been transformed with quality ingredients and exacting execution. Must-tries include mutton rolls served with tamarind and cumin ketchup, isso badum (deep-fried prawns) and the sublimely moreish pillu chicken. Uncle’s interiors match the wow-factor menu, emblazoned with golden-era cinema poster murals handpainted by the signwriters of yesteryear (small plates £3, cocktails from £5; instagram.com/uncles\_colombo).

### WHERE TO SHOP

A storyteller with a passion for Sri Lankan arts, culture and history, Annika Fernando champions up-and-coming Sri Lankan designers at her concept store, PR, in the affluent Cinnamon Gardens neighbourhood. It features a rota of sustainably created collections, one of the most exciting of which comes from the designer Aadithya Jayaseelan. She uses digital prints, inspired by her ancestors’ homeland, on linen (instagram.com/art\_kayamai). Each piece is a one-off and tells the story of the Malaiyaha Tamils, many of whom endure poor living and working conditions on tea plantations. The families, who live predominantly in the central provinces, are among Sri Lanka’s poorest. Jayaseelan’s collection, called From the Hills, sits alongside PR’s in-house label Maus, which uses fabric offcuts to create wardrobe staples in neutral, wearable tones (shoppr.lk).

Lydia Swinscoe



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## Smart new resorts, intriguing inland adventures and ice cream for £1 – affordable Albania is this summer’s most exciting family option, says *Johanna Thomas-Corr*

**M**rizi i Zanaze, an agriturismo-style farm restaurant in the north of Albania, is exactly the kind of place you long to find on holiday but somehow rarely do. There are gaggles of geese and excitable goats; there are pomegranate orchards and olive groves stretching into distant mountains; there is the most inviting little shop selling raki and preserves, and two wooden dining rooms that combine feelings of warm festivity with a serene efficiency.

Arriving after a two-hour drive, my family of four felt as if we had pitched up at a 19th-century country wedding. As the children (Teddy, ten, and Aubrey, three) fed the goats, my husband and I sipped fresh pomegranate juice and congratulated ourselves on our intrepidity. The place is nationally famous – Albanians apparently think nothing of an eight-hour round trip for lunch here – but on our visit I’m pretty sure we were the only western Europeans in sight.

When we asked to see the menu we were told that there wasn’t one. Instead, we were simply asked a few



questions about dietary restrictions and appetite, and then settled in as dishes were paraded before us: leek pastries, pickled okra, stuffed courgette flowers, soft cheeses, hard cheeses, a hot cheese dip, cured meats, various pomegranate inventions, and a centrepiece of chicken roasted in a woodfired oven over an apple and raisin-studded pastry, gooey in the middle, crispy on the outside. Everything was a delightful surprise, including the bill: £37.26 for four. And OK, the children mostly had chips ... but they were extremely good chips. If this place were in Tuscany or Catalonia, we agreed, it would be eight times the price and rammed full of influencers (mains from £5; mrizizanave.al).

We had come to Albania for a family holiday on the premise that the small Balkan nation might just be the “new Greece” or perhaps the “next Croatia” – a not-too-distant, reliably sunny, relatively inexpensive destination for a family beach holiday. It’s not an absurd idea. Greek

salad is widely available, only they call it sallate fshati, village salad. The climate is indeed lovely (we went over Easter; I suspect it might get a little steamier in high summer). And Albania has a lot going for it in terms of location: just up from Corfu, across the water from Puglia, with Montenegro on the other side of its northern border.

Still, a few hours after landing in Tirana, the capital, it was clear that the premise had been totally wrong. You should come to Albania because it is the new Albania, a country with a unique history, culture and language, extremely friendly people and some of the best place names in the world. For example, should you wish to hike in the Alpine north you are advised to head to a town called Theth in a range known as the Accursed mountains – which are, as it turns out, extremely beautiful.

Nevertheless, Albania’s geography has often seemed cursed. The local population have struggled with invading

“  
We sipped fresh pomegranate juice as the children fed the goats



Romans, Slavs, Visigoths, Ottomans and Fascist Italians. Postwar, the Stalinist dictator Enver Hoxha turned Albania into Europe's own North Korea, imposing a form of communism so severe that he somehow alienated the USSR and China. The immediate post-communist years were marked by economic chaos and civil unrest.

But there's a palpable feeling of optimism in the air now, with Albania's latest prime minister, Edi Rama, exemplifying the country's new-found self-confidence. A former basketball player and modern artist, fluent in five languages, Rama is open, urbane and cosmopolitan. While mayor of Tirana, one of his first acts was to have the city's grey Stalinist façades repainted in bright colours.

As an introduction to this tumultuous recent history, you could do a lot worse than read *Free: Coming of Age at the End of History*, a wonderful memoir about the 1990s by the Albanian-born philosopher Lea Ypi. At least four people were reading it on our Ryanair flight, much like everyone reading *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* on flights to Cephalonia.

You can still see evidence of the rapid turns of recent Albanian history as you drive through the gently undulating hills: lots of half-built buildings, taxi drivers lamenting the state of the road, but also newly built mosques and villas and hoardings advertising luxury properties

**Clockwise from top: an Ottoman bridge in Berat; Albania has beaches to rival Greece; a street in Shkoder in the north of the country**



and hotel complexes. We were staying at the Melia Durres, a new five-star resort by the Spanish hotel chain that is opening at least three more Melias in Albania. The complex is actually about 45 minutes' drive from Durres (Albania's second city and major port) and it is vast: 455 rooms, ten villas, six swimming pools and six restaurants.

We were staying in a couple of interlinked rooms on a half-board basis, which included breakfast and dinner as well as access to an "exclusive" lounge area called the Level where our children were excited to discover they could get free drinks. My husband was less impressed that the selection of spirits disappeared on the second day, putting paid to his negroni ambitions.

To enjoy a resort like this, you must make your peace with its rhythms. Some of the communal areas felt a little shopping centre-like. The dinner buffets were an education in pan-European dining habits ("Octopuses! Thank you!" cried a huge Russian man, before piling his plate high with the things). We had one or two frustrations: there were no lifeguards at the beach; there was a football pitch but no balls to be seen. But, overall, the place was clean, tasteful and run with efficiency and friendliness – the à la carte restaurants were mostly great. As was the spa, where the signature Turkish hammam treatment was incredibly soothing. My husband said he has rarely had a better massage.

And it was hard not to relax when there was an epic 138m pool outside our sliding doors. Our three-year-old, however, had other ideas, gravitating to the warmer indoor pool and the playground.

Nevertheless, the best part of the holiday was the second half, when we hired a car and made some day trips, away from generic hotel-land and into Albania proper. My husband is the driver

**Continued on page 18 →**

## Where's cool in Albania

Albania seems to have broken through as the coolest destination of the summer. The coastline — with its sapphire-clear water and rustic-chic beach bars — is being dubbed the Maldives of Europe and the country has catapulted on to stylish young people's travel radar. It's all over Instagram, with those who normally go to Ibiza, Mykonos and the Croatian party town of Hvar booking trips.

These are the happening places to head to ...

### WHERE THE FASHIONABLE SET GOES

Trendy young things have been ditching Mykonos and Ibiza for Ksamil. This town on Albania's southern tip has bars overlooking ivory beaches and uninhabited islands.

"The coolest people will stay and party at Kep Merli but you need to have celebrity-levels of money to do that," says Elton Caushi of the boutique tour operator Albanian Trip ([albaniantrip.com](http://albaniantrip.com)).

The resort has angular, white villas with private infinity pools. At present, these are only for sale but a hotel should be launching there soon, along with a private marina ([kepmerli.com](http://kepmerli.com)).

Popping destinations in Ksamil include the Poda beach bar — where the cocktails come in pineapples, drunk on swing seats in the sea — and the Mulino beach club.

However, these can descend towards the trashier end of the spectrum in the early hours. Discerning partygoers are heading further north to the Folie Marine hotel, which has its own beach and nightclub (room-only doubles from £204; [foliemarine.com](http://foliemarine.com)). Sarande, where the British-Albanian pop singer Dua Lipa is having a mansion built, is another hotspot. The city's premier beach club is the Demi Lounge where international DJs often play until dawn ([facebook.com/demilounge](http://facebook.com/demilounge)).

Revellers like to fuel up for the evening at the Nam restaurant, with its steel-grey interiors and waterfront views. Prices are about £10 for a main and £15 for plates of fish carpaccio ([restaurantnam.com](http://restaurantnam.com)).

Music is a big part of the appeal and festivals have been popping up along the coast. The seaside town of Dhermi hosts two electronic music festivals — Kala (June 5-12, from £299pp; [kala.al](http://kala.al)), this year featuring Jeff Mills and Horse Meat Disco among others, and ION (September 4-11, £269pp,

although you also have to book accommodation through the festival, which costs from £210 based on two sharing; [ionalbania.com](http://ionalbania.com)), where this year's line-up includes Sherelle and Shaqdi.

Matthew Boyd, 30, and his friend would usually spend their summers at festivals such as Benicassim in Spain, or Glastonbury, but this year they are going to Kala. "The line-up is great and the drinks are cheap," he says.

### THE LAID-BACK OPTION

For chilled travellers, the Manta Resort in Ksamil is the place to be — at least for a cocktail at sunset on the deck of the beach bar before gorging on prawns and calamari at the restaurant. It also has rooms (B&B doubles from £110; [mantahotel.com](http://mantahotel.com)).

If you're not hungover from partying, a trip to the Blue Eye — a one-hour drive from Ksamil — is an obligatory stop. This natural spring bubbles up from an underwater cave and the turquoise pool looks like a giant eye.

### THE COOL CAPITAL

Cool Tirana has been pegged as the next Berlin and those in the know stay at the Faces and Places Boutique Hotel. It oozes "Japandi" (Japanese meets Scandi chic), with low beds, a creamy-grey colour palette, exposed brickwork and floating staircases (B&B doubles from £77; [booking.com](http://booking.com)).

The crowd here will have spent their day drifting about the hip Blloku neighbourhood, perusing abstract art at the Fab gallery, and discussing socialism over craft ales at the Taproom by Pan's Microbrewery, which usually has 15 beers on draught and juicy burgers ([instagram.com/taproombypan](http://instagram.com/taproombypan)).

For drinks, the best spot is the kitschy Nouvelle Vague, which made it on to the world's 50 Best Bars list last year ([nouvellevaguetirana.com](http://nouvellevaguetirana.com)).

### WHERE ELSE TO EAT

The four-star Eter hotel, outside the resort town of Durres, balances fun and relaxation. "It's got the best roof terrace in the area, high-quality modern food and great music that's very chill," Caushi says.

There's a buzzy bar, plus a spa with a whirlpool bath, Turkish bath, sauna and fitness area. Relax by the pool, or on one of the four-poster beachside beds (room-only doubles from £87; [eter.al](http://eter.al)).

**Marianna Hunt**



EDUARDO FONSECA ABRAES/GETTY IMAGES; IOHANNA THOMAS-CORR

Another favourite excursion was to Shkoder, right up in the north near the Montenegrin border – and the gateway to the aforementioned Accursed mountains. It's a sedate resort town with a pedestrianised centre that makes for a lovely walk with plenty of stops for extremely good coffee, as is the case everywhere we



*Johanna Thomas-Corr was a guest of Melia resorts, which has B&B doubles from £180 (melia.com). Fly to Tirana*

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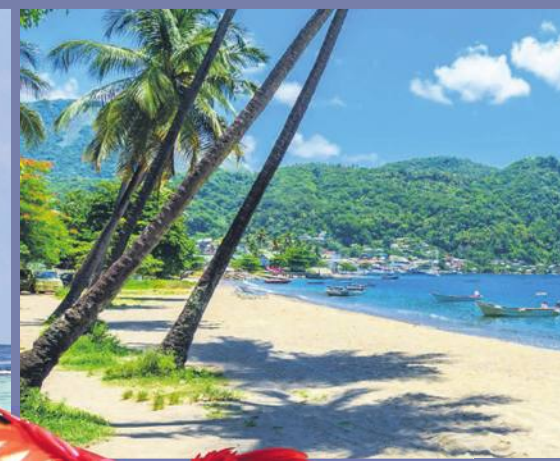
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**Day 2 Panama City to Colon.** After breakfast in the hotel we take a scenic tour of the historic old town, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, visiting the colonial mansions and 17th century churches and convents. Continue to the Panama Canal Observation Centre to learn about the expansion of the canal before visiting the Miraflores Locks Visitor Centre where you can see the history of the canal and watch the ships as they pass through. Continue to Colon where we will embark the MS Island Sky and sail this evening.

**Day 3 San Blas Islands.** We awake in the stunning San Blas archipelago. The archipelago is made up of over 400 islands that line the north coast of Panama with white sandy beaches set in a turquoise sea. The islands are home to the indigenous Kuna Indians who gained self-rule from the government of Panama in the 1920s. We will have time to take a nature walk or perhaps enjoy a swim from the beach. Spend the afternoon at sea as we cross to Colombia.

**Day 4 Cartagena, Colombia.** Cartagena is one of the most fascinating cities in South America and this morning we will enjoy a walking tour of the colonial walled city which is virtually surrounded by water and steeped in history, with a wealth of 16th and 17th century buildings and churches. Our guides will bring the history of the city to life as we walk its streets and ramparts. We will visit the 16th century Fort of San Felipe, Monastery of San Pedro Claver, the Plaza de la Aduana and Iglesia de Santo Domingo. The afternoon is free to explore further at your own pace.

**Day 5 Santa Marta.** We continue our exploration of Colombia in the Santa Marta area which is renowned for the eco-diversity and dramatic beauty of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. From our berth we will travel slightly inland to the Tayrona National Park this morning. Covered in large part by virgin tropical forest, the park is home to many varied species of mammals, birds and reptiles. On a walk through this semi-tropical jungle we will be joined by a local guide who will offer insights into the park's vegetation, animals and eco-system. Alternatively, explore the town of Santa Marta, see Bolivar Plaza and the bustling streets with their eclectic mix of Spanish Colonial, Republican and contemporary architecture to the 17th century Cathedral, Colombia's oldest church. Also visit the small Gold Museum which houses some interesting gold and pottery objects from the indigenous cultures that inhabit the Sierra Nevada Mountains which rise up behind the city.

**Day 6 Cabo de la Vela.** Our final call in Colombia will be in the far northwestern region of La Guajira an area of wild desert, beautiful landscapes and stunning beaches that border the Caribbean Sea. The early risers will enjoy a desert walk to the Pilon de Azucar hill that offers fantastic 360 degree views of the area. This is an area sacred to the indigenous Wayuu people who have lived in the region for over 2,000 years since relocating from the Amazon rainforest. Visiting a community, our local guides will teach us about their culture and we will see some of the crafts, including the famous Mochila bags. Return to the ship for lunch and an afternoon at sea.

**Day 7 Curacao, Netherlands.** Moor this morning at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Willemstad. The city has a rich history dating back to the 16th century and the island's colonial Dutch heritage sets a genteel tone amid markets, museums and cafes. Enjoy an excursion to explore the historic downtown district including Fort Amsterdam. The afternoon is free to either explore at your own pace or join an island drive which will include The Old Labour, the dramatic Boca Table National Park and the Salt Pans plantation where, if lucky we may see some flamingos.

**Day 8 At Sea.** Spend a relaxing day at sea.

**Day 9 Port of Spain, Trinidad.** Due to its location close to the South American mainland, Trinidad has a unique diversity of plant and animal species which we will discover today. From our berth at Port of Spain we will drive inland to the Asa Wright Nature Centre which comprises 1500 acres of forest providing habitat for a range of wildlife. On a series of guided walks we will explore the area searching for the 166 species of birds. Return to the MS Island Sky for lunch and later this afternoon we head to the Caroni Nature Sanctuary, a mangrove swamp covering an area of 40 square miles. On arrival at the sanctuary we will board a flat-bottomed boat and slowly travel along the peaceful waterways and lagoons admiring the beauty of the landscape and a variety of birds including the scarlet ibis.

**Day 10 Grenada.** Explore this wonderful Windward Island which many regard as the most beautiful in the Caribbean. It is a lush and verdant island with spice plantations, rum distilleries, tropical forests, secluded coves, nature trails and select hotels which cling to the hillsides overlooking the ocean. We will moor in the picturesque capital of St George's before heading to Fort George. We will continue to a spice garden where we learn about the herbs that grow here before we end at one of the island's rum distilleries.

**Day 11 St Lucia.** St Lucia is a splendidly rugged island of towering mountains, lush green valleys and acres of banana plantations. Due to its strategic position, the island was fought over repeatedly by the French and British and changed hands fourteen times. We will anchor in sight of St Lucia's best-known feature, the twin peaks of the Pitons,

which rise dramatically from the sea to more than 2400 feet. In the nearby town of Soufriere we can visit the bubbling sulphur springs. Our tour will also include the splendid botanical gardens.

**Day 12 Dominica.** The island of Dominica is an area of tropical rainforests, there are flowers of incredible beauty and animals that exist nowhere else in the world. We arrive this morning in the small port of Cabrits, just below the national park and the former British garrison of Fort Shirley. Here you can climb to the fort to explore the ruins, visit the small museum or perhaps simply wander the surrounding trails on the lookout for birds, hermit crabs and lizards. For the keen birders we will offer a tour to the Morne Diablotin National Park where from the viewpoint we hope to see the two endemic parrots of Dominica.

**Day 13 Montserrat.** Ask any Caribbean connoisseur about their favourite places and Montserrat will always be high on the list. We will discover some of the indigenous flora and fauna at the botanical gardens before we continue to the volcano observatory where we will learn how the islanders coped with the devastation which the volcanic eruptions of 1995 and 2010 caused. From Richmond Hill we can see the impact of the eruptions before walking through the buried city of Plymouth itself. We will also see some of the untouched areas which are as beautiful as ever.

**Day 14 Antigua to London.** Disembark this morning and on an island tour we will enjoy the views from Shirley Heights before heading to Nelson's Dockyard, beautifully located in English Harbour. After lunch we transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight to London.

**Day 15 London.** Arrive this morning.

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*NB. Please note that we will be at anchor in San Blas, Cabo de La Vela, St Lucia and Montserrat where Zodiacs will be used to shuttle guests ashore. Travel insurance is not included in the price. Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations. All special offers are subject to availability.*

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**7 nights fr £1,459pp** Inc flights

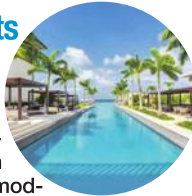


## Grenada

**2 free nights**

Escape to the irresistible appeal of stunning Grand Anse Beach and revel in a world where modern luxury and blissful nature combine with a stay at the 5\* Silver-sands Grenada.

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**Save 30% AI**

The 5\* Secrets Wild Orchid is an adult-only hotel, set on a peninsula with over a mile of designated beach leading into the bright blue waters of Montego Bay with signature Unlimited-Luxury experience.

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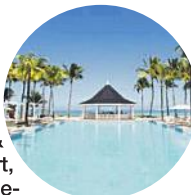


## Mauritius

**Save 20%**

For a magical getaway, choose the 5\* Heritage Le Telfair Golf & Wellness Resort, where unique delights and unforgettable experiences await, plus the best golf course in the Indian Ocean.

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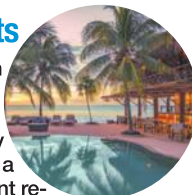


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This isn't just an escape, it's the definition of seclusion. 5\* Viceroy Riviera Maya is a luxury beachfront resort nestled in the rainforest of the Riviera Maya near Playa del Carmen, with just 41 private villas.

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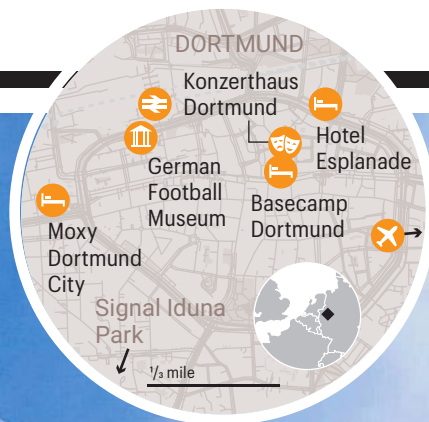
## Travel City breaks

No city rocks the colour yellow like Dortmund. Every fortnight or so during the football season its centre swarms with Bumblebees, the raucous Borussia Dortmund fans. The German team's supporters have had a lot to shout about recently, of course, having reached the Champions League final last Saturday, though losing to Real Madrid.

After that the European Football Championship moves in, with Dortmund among the ten German cities hosting the tournament. Six games, including a semi-final, will take place at Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park between June 15 and July 10. The main square will serve as a fan zone.

However, there's plenty to explore beyond the realms of the beautiful game: churches destroyed during the Second World War then rebuilt hide early modern masterpieces; steelworks and breweries have been turned into art galleries; former industrial areas have become sprawling parkland ideal for summer lounging.

**Clockwise from right: the U-Tower; Huw Oliver in the city; the Moxy hotel**



## 48 HOURS IN... DORTMUND

Come for the football, stay for the German city's art and culture, says *Huw Oliver*

### DAY ONE MORNING

One clue to the city's greatest love is the German Football Museum, opposite the main train station. Not familiar with the Bundesliga and can't name a player in the Germany team? You'll still enjoy the interactive exhibits at this temple to *Fussball*. The 1966 World Cup final display, laid out like a crime scene, is a highlight (£16; fussballmuseum.de).

#### Eat at Phoenix West

Take the ten-minute subway south to Dortmund-Hörde station and in the shadow of the disused Phoenix West blast furnace you'll find a small, unnamed kiosk. It's run by the chef Michael Dyllong – whose nearby restaurant the Stage has a Michelin star – and serves the best currywurst and fries in the city (from £6).

### AFTERNOON

Immersive art is everywhere right now, even in the suburbs of Dortmund. Culturespaces, which also runs galleries in

Paris, New York and Seoul, has transformed a former steel mill in Phoenix West into a venue for animated shows based on works by artists including Salvador Dalí and Gustav Klimt (£14; phoenix-lumieres.com).

#### Drink at Bergmann Brauerei

In the 1970s the city's beer industry was the second biggest in the world. These days most local breweries have been swallowed up by conglomerates, but one exception is the Bergmann Brauerei, which was revived as a craft microbrewery in the mid-2000s. You can sample its hoppy PILS and lighter export at several locations, but its beer hall at Phoenix West is buzzing every night (drinks from £3; harte-arbeit-ehrlicher-lohn.de).

### EVENING

Dortmund has a cutting-edge music venue for every mood. For touring orchestras and chamber recitals head to the glass-and-steel Konzerthaus, which has some of the finest

acoustics in Germany (konzerthaus-dortmund.de). Domicil, in a grand former cinema, puts on a superb programme of jazz and world music (domicil-dortmund.de). Clubbers should hit up Tresor West, the second opening from the Berlin techno institution (tresorwest.com).

#### Eat at Labsal

This candlelit, wildflower-adorned restaurant in the Unionviertel area offers the most sumptuous of introductions to Swabian cuisine, the food of southwest Germany. Order the spätzle (egg noodles) with pine nuts, lemon and parmesan alongside a glass of white vermouth – it's a pairing made in creamy, citrusy heaven (mains from £19; labsal-dortmund.de).

### DAY TWO MORNING

Climb up the U-Tower, the most recognisable landmark in Dortmund. This former brewery building, built in the



ROLAND BAEGE/PHILIPPIANS

## Where to stay

### MOXY DORTMUND CITY For cocktails and U-Tower views

The table football, the fruity, gin-based “welcome cocktail”. The Moxy, on the right side of the city centre to be a base for Signal Iduna Park, is a lot of fun. The disco records and coffee-table books in the breakfast area lend an artsy edge. The rooms are stylishly done out in greys and browns. Ask for one at the back for views of the U-Tower (room-only doubles from £62; moxy-hotels.marriott.com).

### BASECAMP DORTMUND A lively central base with nightlife on tap

Don't be put off by this super-central hotel doubling up as student accommodation — guests stay on separate floors and rooms are supremely good value, as long as you can bear the excess of pink and ceramic cacti. Book a room on the sixth floor and you're a 15-second walk from the buzzy rooftop bar Baseology — thankfully, the bedroom walls are soundproofed (room-only doubles from £68; basecampstudent.com).

### HOTEL ESPLANADE For a warm welcome

Flora, the resident labrador, sets the tone at this charming, family-run hotel. The 96 guest rooms are comfy and affordable, but it's the quirky touches — from jazz nights to the lift decked out like a mine shaft — that make it stand out. The Phoenix Suite, with its wraparound windows overlooking St Reinold's Church, is the one to book (room-only doubles from £78; esplanade-dortmund.de).

## Need to know

● **Getting there** Ryanair has flights to Dortmund from Stansted, taking an hour and 20 minutes; the city centre is about 20 minutes by bus from the airport. Alternatively fly to Düsseldorf from Heathrow, Manchester or Birmingham in about an hour and 20 minutes then hop on a 50-minute train to Dortmund.

● **Getting around** The city centre is walkable, and if you're in town for a Borussia Dortmund game you'll want to experience the 40-minute march to Signal Iduna Park, with stops for beers along the way. For Phoenix West take the U41 subway line.

1920s and topped with a huge illuminated U, was the city's first skyscraper. Now it houses cultural institutions including the Museum Ostwall, on the fourth and fifth floors and is home to paintings and sculptures by Joan Miró, Hans Arp and Paula Modersohn-Becker. The views from the rooftop terrace are next-level (free; dortmunder-u.de).

### Eat at Tatis Café

With its handmade crockery, lilting jazz soundtrack and pretty courtyard with hanging chairs, this restaurant just north of the main rail station must be the most wholesome brunch spot in Dortmund. It's known for its cupcakes, but we'd recommend its Nordstadt Moment, a croissant stuffed with sucuk (fermented sausage) and cheese that is inspired by the Turkish restaurants of the surrounding neighbourhood (mains from £6; tatiscafe.de).

### AFTERNOON

In the unassuming St Peter's Church — rebuilt in high gothic style after it was bombed during the Second World War — is the *Golden Wonder of Westphalia* altarpiece. Dating from 1521, this double-winged Flemish masterpiece has different layers that are displayed throughout the year — in summer the 36 painted panels are revealed; from October visitors can marvel at the carved golden figures,

numbering more than 600 (free; sankt-petri-do.de).

### Drink at Wenkers am Markt

There's only one place to go before a football match — Wenkers, on the old town square. The drink of choice is a buttery, caramelly Urtrüb, brewed in house, while the decor comprises vintage footie shirts from around the world (drinks from £3; wenkers.de).

### EVENING

Visiting during the Bundesliga season? (That's early August to late May, with a break from mid-December to the end of January.) If you think that Premier League games have atmosphere, wait until you witness the roar of 24,000 Borussia Dortmund fans in the south stand at Signal Iduna Park. The sheer noise of the largest standing terrace in Europe — nicknamed the Yellow Wall — makes

for one of the most enrapturing sporting experiences there is. Book a seat and look on in awe; the footie will be pretty good too (from £30; bvb.de).

### Eat at De Rosa

The cocktails are as meaty as the pizzas at this homely Neapolitan restaurant, across the road from the U-Tower. Opt for a hopfen spritz (Aperol, Pilsner beer and mint) and take your pick of the pizzas — the indulgent fleischfresser, with salsiccia, salami and prosciutto di parma, comes highly recommended (mains from £7; derosa.de).

*Huw Oliver was a guest of the tourist boards of Germany (germany.travel) and Dortmund (dortmund.de)*

“The 1966 World Cup final is laid out like a crime scene”

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## Travel As seen on screen

# ‘For the love of God, fly!’

Race Across the World winners Alfie and Owen tell *Katie Bowman* what they learnt crossing Asia overland for the TV challenge

**A**lfie, a trainee air traffic controller, and Owen, a trainee pilot, 21-year-old friends from St Albans in Hertfordshire, are this year's winners of *Race Across the World*. In case you have been living under a rock for the past few years, this is a BBC1 show in which contestants race overland for a prize of £20,000. In series four – the most watched race so far – the teams travelled from Sapporo in Japan to the Gili Islands in Indonesia, without smartphones and without taking any flights. Their budget for the epic 9,320-mile journey was a mere £1,390 per person, the equivalent of the air fare. We spoke to them just after the final episode aired last week.

## You're training to be a pilot, Owen – has travelling overland changed your perspective?

The race taught me that you don't just have to fly from one place to another. When you're somewhere like southeast Asia you can get a bus to anywhere for only £15 or £20. It might take you 20 hours, but you can reach absolutely anywhere. It's made me want to try that sort of travel more often in the future.

## Which countries would you like to return to and see in style?

**Alfie** I really want to go back and do Thailand again. Properly.

**Owen** Me too. I'm already planning to do the whole trip again, but at my own pace. I'm most excited about Thailand. Japan as well. Because it's quite expensive and we were on a budget, we had to miss so many things. Japan's top of my list.

## When did you find out where you were going? Did you have any time to prepare?

**Alfie** You have no idea where you're going until the airport. We got shipped off to Heathrow in a taxi and they couldn't even tell us in the car. Then, once your phones are taken away at the airport, they reveal the destination. Also, every team gets flown separately because otherwise we'd know who was competing.

## What one piece of advice would you give to somebody about to go backpacking through Asia?

**Owen** Ask people for help. Don't just rely on your phone. Even though I will

have my phone with me when I go back to Asia, I'll still ask local people for help, because half the time they know a lot more than Tripadvisor or Google.

**Alfie** This might sound like bad advice from someone who's just been on *Race Across the World*, but I would say, for the love of God, fly, because it's so cheap to fly in Asia. And the buses are awful – really bad – and sometimes it's just an extra £20 to fly on AirAsia. When I go back I will definitely fly.

## What would you tell someone who is applying to compete in the next series of Race Across the World?

**Owen** Don't underestimate it. It all looks good on TV. And fun. But there are low points where you are really stuck in the mud. Sometimes you're so low and think, right, that's it, I'm done, or I can't do this, I just want to go home. So, as fun as it looks on screen, you're not seeing a lot of the bad moments.

## What was your lowest point?

**Alfie** There was a job on the final leg where we went to work in a kitchen. It was a bit confused and I think they weren't expecting us. Plus, we'd just come off a 17-hour train trip. We sat down at this restaurant and were done for. I felt like it was over. I actually didn't know if I had the mental strength to do those final three days. I think because we knew we were so close to the finish, and the pressure was so great because Eugenie and Isabel were on our tails, we just knew that if someone had offered us a flight home then, we would absolutely have taken it. Thankfully it didn't make the final cut, because we were miserable.

## Which of the racers did you get on best with and have you seen them since?

**Alfie** We get along really well with Betty and James. To be fair, we get along really well with all of them. We've got a group chat. [Superfans, it's called RATW4 Squad.] We all went to the Big Weekend music festival together. There was no drama. Stephen and Viv will always have a special place in my heart. He's the funniest bloke on the planet.

## The legs are split up by checkpoint stays at lovely hotels. Did you go nuts?

**Alfie** Well, we definitely got our washing done, but we didn't go nuts anywhere,



except in Phnom Penh, where it was 24-hour room service. We had a three-tiered trolley full of food delivered to us. It was about 2am and I was on top of the world.

**Owen** That was ridiculous. We absolutely rinsed the budget.

## What was your best moment of the race?

**Owen** For me it was surfing in Indonesia. It was the second-to-last leg, so we knew it was going to be the last time we could properly enjoy stuff before we'd be thinking about getting to the end of the race. Surfing gave me the chance to switch off.

**Alfie** My best moment was at one of the checkpoint hotels in Sokcho, South Korea, after we'd budgeted hard on food. We spotted this Korean fried chicken sitting on the side. I didn't know if it had been ordered for us, but if it wasn't it was too late – we ate it anyway. I have never seen two human beings eat like it. It was on our faces. It was everywhere. I felt like such a king.

## Had you travelled together before the show?

**Alfie** Yeah, we've been to quite a few countries together. We applied to be on the show while we were on holiday in Brazil together. We've been to Spain about six times, Poland, Germany, Bulgaria and Albania. Loads, to be fair.

## So, where next? Have you spent some of your winnings on travel?

**Alfie** Since the show, which we filmed eight months ago, I've travelled a lot, to Sweden, Norway, Mexico, Australia, Fiji, Poland, Malta, Samoa and New Zealand. My next trip is to Spain. We're off to



Top: Owen (left) and Alfie have been best friends since school. Below: the Race Across the World teams

Mallorca together with a group of friends. And in fact, literally five minutes before this interview, I found a deal to Buenos Aires in August, which I'm going to book afterwards. The fare from Oslo gives me the chance to go to a 747, plus I've wanted to go to Argentina for years.

## What a travel pro! Can you reveal your favourite travel website?

**Alfie** I've got a couple of close travel-mad friends and we constantly debate Skyscanner versus Google Flights. Skyscanner is superior, for sure, though I prefer to book with airlines directly because I've had a few dodgy experiences with online check-ins with third-party websites. I pay a little bit extra nowadays to book with airlines direct.

*Race Across the World series 4 is available on BBC iPlayer*

## RATW, behind the scenes

### ON RACE ACROSS THE WORLD

"Neither of us had seen it before. We applied completely blind. I later watched a couple of past episodes, but Owen's still never seen it."

### ON KEEPING THE RESULT SECRET

"We had to keep the news to ourselves for eight months, until the programme aired. I told my parents, but they were literally the only people. I had to let it out to someone otherwise I would have exploded."

### ON BEING FILMED

"The crew will happily stand there and watch you go down the wrong road or get on the wrong train. They can't interfere in any way that would change the outcome of the trip. They are there literally just to film and for safety."

### ON CHECKPOINT RUNNING RACES

"First place is a matter of pride, isn't it? It would make rubbish TV if we were like, you know what? Let Stephen have it. We'll get there two minutes after, anyway. I think it's just human instinct to try to get there first. Even if it makes no difference."

Travel

# He's a cheat – and coming on our trip

Kathy Lette on delicate group-holiday dynamics and going child-free to a Tuscan wedding



Tuscany is one of the most glamorous wedding destinations in Europe

**Q** With four friends I've known since school, I have planned a big villa holiday for this summer. Our partners are coming too, as well as our children, who are all secondary-school age. The problem is that one of my friends' husbands has cheated on her and, although she has forgiven him, the rest of us can't forget it. I've barely said a word to my pal's husband since he moved back in with her, and I'm a bit cross at her for allowing it. I'm worried that the children are old enough to pick up on hostile feelings among the adults too. How can we make sure that it's a harmonious holiday?

**A** The realisation that life hasn't quite turned out the way we thought it would is prompted by many things – the kids flying the nest, other people's gazebo extensions ... discovering your spouse lying face down on your nanny/best friend/pool boy. If your girlfriend was on a plane it would be a "Please

return to your seats and put on your life jackets" emergency moment. Clearly her husband's marriage vows should have said "till death us do part ... or till someone hotter comes along". To any blokes hellbent on having a midlife crisis, would it not be easier if you just bought an impractical car? Crossed the Atlantic on a homemade raft? Got a tattoo? I mean, isn't that ridiculous motorbike enough? Infidelity is the most painful, soul-destroying ordeal. But lust is life's banana skin, and sometimes people slip. No doubt your friend's guilty spouse descended into the usual snivelling repertoire of "I didn't mean to hurt you" and "I was obviously having some kind of breakdown"s. One would have to have a heart of stone to listen to an adulterer's apologies – without laughing your head off. Your magnanimous pal,

**“Lust is life's banana skin, and sometimes people slip”**

however, has found it in her big, beautiful heart to forgive her treacherous spouse, so you must respect her choice. Don't be angry with her, as she'll now be suffering from chronic husband-uncertainty syndrome, symptoms of which include constantly checking his WhatsApp and incessant clock-watching – is he coming home late? Or worse, coming home cleaner than when he went out? Stunned and humiliated, she'll be staring wide-eyed at the ceiling all night, forensically raking over the past: the time she asked for a hug and he draped his arm limply across her shoulders with all the passion of a beach towel; the last time they tongue-kissed – when she had spent too long underneath a wave in Ibiza. Just support the poor woman as she tortures herself about not having questioned why he appeared happier than usual. Nothing gives away

a partner's affair faster than frequent smiling for no ostensible reason. The same goes for a beaming PA – is she on something ... your husband's face, for example? These are all subtle ways of realising that you're married to a two-timing rat. If your girlfriend hasn't called the council to issue a fumigation order, though, nor should you. Yes, her husband has behaved like an animal – when travelling to Europe he'll now be required to go through quarantine – so do feel free to let the creep know that if he so much as looks at another woman again you'll wash his eyes out with soap. Otherwise, concentrate on her, not him. And don't worry about your teenagers feeling the tension – you grown-ups aren't even on their radar. If you do discover that your pal's repentant husband is actually a sexual kleptomaniac and has cheated again, be sure to choose a deadly destination for your next holiday: perhaps Brazil, where you can weigh him down in a pool of piranhas; or an Icelandic retreat on the lip of an erupting volcano –

how appropriate it would be to bring his life to an end in a giant geological ejaculation. **Q** My friend is getting married in Tuscany and the hotel is very expensive. We can't really afford it, but my husband has said that if we leave the kids behind (with relatives) we can just about do it. I don't think it's fair for the kids to miss out on a trip abroad. What should I do? **A** How wedded are you to this wedding? If you really want to go then enjoy the child-free break – laugh at the bridesmaids' hideous meringue dresses while necking a bottle of Bolly then kick off your shoes and dance badly to Abba as you wolf down prawn cocktails with one hand and swing from a chandelier with the other, before falling face down into the cake. With no kids to worry about you can behave as badly as you like ... though it's considered a teeny-weeny breach of wedding etiquette to have a threesome with the best man.

**MAKE IT HAPPEN** Infuriatingly, destination weddings tend to be held at the most glamorous locations – particularly in Europe, where the cost of staying in a Tuscan castle or a clifftop hotel in Santorini, say, can be eye-watering. If you do fancy the destination (and cherish the friendship, of course), look into stays a taxi journey away from the venue that will be a fraction of the price. After all, what matters most is that you attend the wedding. You don't tell me exactly where the bash is being held, but one of the top venues in Tuscany is Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, where room-only doubles cost from £1,150 this summer. But you could stay 25 minutes' drive north, at Bosco della Spina, a cluster of apartments with a pool from just £93 room only (boscodellaspina.it). And skip the gifts: once you surpass £200pp for flights and accommodation their present really is your presence. *Do you need Kathy's help with a travel problem? Email us at [travel@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:travel@sunday-times.co.uk)*

## COMPETITION

### WIN A SEASIDE BREAK FOR TWO WORTH UP TO £1,688 AT THE NICI IN BOURNEMOUTH

**WHERE WAS I?** My friend's mad at me. We argued just the other night – after I told him we wouldn't have time to see his favourite sports ground on this trip. So to sweeten the deal I'm providing a constant supply of treats. It's a good job we've been snacking, because our pace is frenetic. So far we've seen some oversized egg cups, a former turntable engine shed and an iron man on a roof. Now we're chalking up another landmark: the entrance to a station opened in 1907 that appeared on the cover of an album by a local band. Here I offer a Snickers bar. "Where are you storing all these snacks?" Friend asks. "Baggy trousers," I explain, patting my own pair. "They've got very deep pockets." Then we're off again, heading a little more than a mile east of the station, to look for the entrance to three

railway tunnels that starred in a murderous film of the mid-1950s. Second stop, 1,000 yards south-southeast of the station, is a pub that honours a fortress in another city, 286 miles northwest. The local band played in the pub at the start of their career. We have a quick half before heading to the site of the lead singer's school. It's just a bit more than a mile west of the pub. And guess what? Only 1,000 yards south-southeast of the school stands Friend's favourite sports ground, which opened more than 200 years ago. "If we run, we can make the last guided tour," I tell Friend. "Lord above, this is madness," he says. "Let's do it." **Sean Newsom**

**THE QUESTIONS**

- 1 What is the name of the station?
- 2 What is the name of the sports ground?



**THE PRIZE** The winner and a guest will stay for two nights, B&B, in a Sea View Suite at the Nici, the five-star beachfront hotel on Bournemouth's West Cliff. Opened in 2022, the Nici brings a taste of Florida to the south coast with fabulous art deco architecture, poolside cabanas and palm-print fabrics from Christian Lacroix. Last year the hotel added a state-of-the-art spa, complete with an 18m indoor pool. In mid June it opens Old Harry Rocks – its second restaurant, where the menu will be centred on sharing dishes, packed with flavour (try Harry's Combo, with steak, lobster and mussels or bresaola carpaccio). One dinner for two at Old Harry Rocks (excluding drinks) to a total value of £170 is included

in the prize, alongside full use of the spa and one 60-minute treatment each. For more on the hotel, visit [thenici.com](http://thenici.com). The prize must be taken before December 20, 2024, subject to availability and excluding public holidays.

**HOW TO ENTER** Answer the questions and complete the entry form at [thetimes.com/travel/where-was-i](http://thetimes.com/travel/where-was-i) by the end of Thursday, June 13. One entry per person. Full terms and conditions apply, and your information will be used in accordance with our privacy policy at [newsprivacy.com](http://newsprivacy.com).

**LAST WEEK'S PRIZE** The answers are **Aberystwyth and Egerton**. Jane Maloney from North Yorkshire wins a stay for four nights, B&B, at Shangri-La Rasa Ria in Malaysia.

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**★Recommended COMPLIMENTARY Excursion\*: Mave Mai Traditional Welcome**



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Sat 4 **Bora Bora, French Polynesia**  
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#### APRIL 2026

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EXCLUSIVE LAUNCH SAVINGS OF UP TO £4,400<sup>±</sup>

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RECEIVE AN EXTRA DISCOUNT  
OF UP TO £450 PER BOOKING<sup>±</sup>

- **FREE TWO NIGHT** pre-cruise luxury hotel stay in Santiago, Chile, including breakfast<sup>‡</sup>
- 21 night all-inclusive voyage on board the ultra-luxurious *Silver Whisper* including:
  - **COMPLIMENTARY** shore excursions\*
  - Unlimited Wi-Fi & Gratuities\*\*
  - Butler Service for all suites
  - Drinks in-suite and throughout the ship, including Champagne, selected wines and spirits, plus your own tailored mini-bar replenished daily\*\*
  - In-suite dining and 24-hour room service
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- Return flights from London (regional and premium class flights may be available on request\*) and all overseas transfers
- **EARN EXCLUSIVE CRUISE MILES\***  
Up to 25,798 Cruise Miles®, worth £257 off your next booking with Reader Offers Ltd††



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SUITE	GRADE	FULL FARE (PP)	NOW FARE (PP)
Vista Suite	VI	£11,499	£9,399
Classic Veranda Suite	CV	£12,999	£10,799
Superior Veranda Suite	SV	£13,999	£11,799
Deluxe Veranda Suite	DX	£14,999	£12,899

**Solo fares** are available from £16,399

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Fares are per person based on two adults sharing, may increase or be withdrawn at any time. Offer applies to new bookings only. Ports may require a tender. >Will incur supplementary costs and may require an additional overnight stay. Flights are subject to schedule changes and may be based on indirect services with flights arriving same day or overnight. Flights will be confirmed closer to departure which may affect your overall holiday duration and an additional overnight hotel stay may be required. †Ratings are ROL Cruise classified. \*\*Subject to the cruise line's T&Cs. †Savings are based on two adults sharing. Extra discount is per booking to be taken off advertised fares. \*Tours are subject to availability and change. ††Cruise Miles® T&Cs apply. For full ROL Cruise T&Cs visit www.rolcruise.co.uk. E&OE.

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Fully protected



Amazing value



Exceptional service and expertise



Trustpilot



Excellent



**TIMES** Travel Offers



## Ultimate All-Inclusive Celebrity Australia and New Zealand Luxury Voyage

27 - 28 NIGHTS | MARCH, 2025 | PRICES FROM £4,199PP\*

**COMPLIMENTARY  
FLIGHTS AND HOTELS**

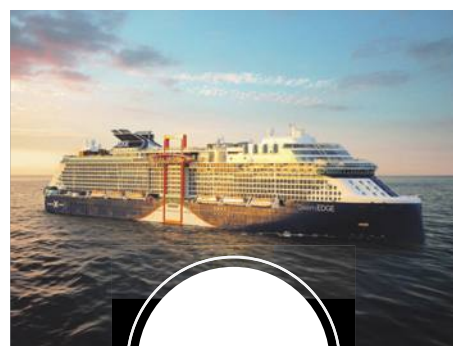
**COMPLIMENTARY  
CLASSIC DRINKS  
PACKAGE AND WI-FI**

**SELLING FAST**

Embark on a voyage around New Zealand's glorious coastline and witness the highlights of Australia, paired with a hotel stay in Sydney.

Your vacation begins in Sydney, where you'll enjoy a two-night hotel stay before embarking the stunning Celebrity Edge®, a pioneering cruise ship unlike any other. Get comfortable in your stateroom or suite as you set sail for the sunny Queensland Coast to visit Brisbane, Airlie Beach and Cairns, gateway to the Great Barrier Reef.

Explore Port Douglas and witness Willis Island before your ship cruises to New Zealand, where you'll visit the hypnotic Milford Sound, tranquil Dunedin and laidback Christchurch. Embrace a slower pace of life in Wellington, Napier and Tauranga before cruising through the beautiful Bay of Islands. Relish your last moments on board Celebrity Edge® as you sail into Sydney's iconic harbour and disembark.



### Celebrity Edge®

With her unique outward-facing design, Celebrity Edge® is a shining light of the Celebrity fleet. Discover her airy, reimagined staterooms and Magic Carpet® – a cantilevered deck that floats 13 stories above sea level.

### Your holiday includes

#### All-Inclusive Cruise

- 23 night all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Edge®
- **Visiting\***: Sydney, Brisbane, Airlie Beach, Cairns (overnight in port), Port Douglas, Willis Island, Sydney, Milford Sound (scenic cruising), Dunedin, Christchurch, Napier, Tauranga, Auckland, Bay of Islands, Sydney

#### Complimentary Classic Drinks Package and Wi-Fi

#### Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-night four-star hotel stay in Sydney at the Mercure Sydney with breakfast

#### Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available
- Overnight flights



### Discover Sydney

The vibrant capital of New South Wales captivates with its iconic landmarks, stunning harbour, and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The Sydney Opera House stands as a symbol of architectural brilliance, while the Sydney Harbour Bridge offers breathtaking views. Bondi Beach beckons with its golden sands and surf culture, while the Royal Botanic Garden provides a serene escape in the heart of the city.

INSIDE  
FROM\*

£4,199PP

OCEAN VIEW  
FROM\*

£4,799PP

VERANDA  
FROM\*

£5,899PP

CONCIERGE CLASS  
FROM\*

£6,499PP



**ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AUS2294**

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**TIMES** Travel Offers



# Ultimate South America with Iguazu Falls and Machu Picchu

34 NIGHTS | FEBRUARY 24, 2025 | PRICES FROM £5,699PP

INCLUDES TOURS  
OF RIO DE JANEIRO  
AND IGUAZU FALLS

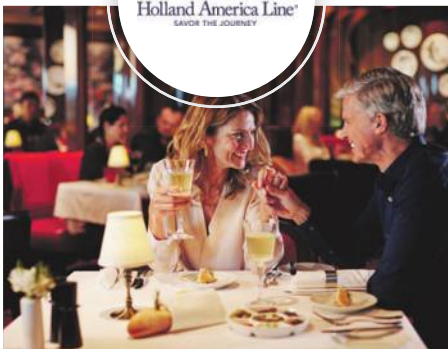
INCLUDES  
RIO DE JANEIRO  
SAMBA CITY TOUR

INCLUDES  
MACHU PICCHU  
TRAIN JOURNEY

Experience the best of South America on this all-encompassing cruise holiday encountering some of the world's most iconic wonders.

Your holiday begins in Rio de Janeiro with a three-night stay to breathe in its vivacious atmosphere and relish a breathtaking Christ the Redeemer tour. Iguazu then awaits, where you'll embrace Iguazu Falls' majesty on both Brazilian and Argentinian sides with accompanying hotel stays.

Flying next to Buenos Aires, you'll have a two-night city stay before joining the illustrious Oosterdam for your luxurious 14-night cruise. Highlights include an overnight in port in Buenos Aires and scenic cruising around Cape Horn, through the Strait of Magellan and into the striking Chilean fjords. Disembarking in Santiago, you'll spend three nights in a four-star hotel before flying to Cusco for thrilling tours of the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.



## Oosterdam

Holland America Line's Oosterdam is a luxurious cruise ship that offers elegant accommodations, exceptional service and a variety of entertainment and fine dining options, promising a truly memorable vacation at sea.

## Your holiday includes

- Full-Board Cruise**
  - 14 night full-board cruise on board Oosterdam
  - Visiting:** Buenos Aires\*, Montevideo, Port Stanley, Cape Horn^, Glacier Alley^, Strait of Magellan, Punta Arenas, Cockburn Channel, Strait of Magellan, Puerto Montt, Santiago
  - Why not add on Holland America Line's Have It All package from £60pppd?** Includes Shore Excursion Credit, Beverage Package, Specialty Dining and Wi-Fi
- Fully Escorted Tours**
  - Christ the Redeemer, Iguazu Falls, Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and more
- Hotel Stays**
  - Five-star hotel stay in Buenos Aires
  - Four-star hotel stays in Rio de Janeiro, Iguazu, Santiago, Cusco and Lima
  - Two-night stay in Sacred Valley
  - All hotel stays include breakfast
- All Flights and Transfers**
  - London departure - regional flights available
  - Overnight flights



## Explore Iguazu Falls

Marvel at the world's largest waterfall system, Iguazu Falls. Bordered by lush vegetation, looped with walking trails and with 275 waterfalls stretching over a mile and a half and spanning two countries - Iguazu Falls is a true spectacle.

Experience this extraordinary display of nature during a fully escorted tour exploring the Argentinian and Brazilian sides through a network of accessible catwalks - the perfect complement to your South American cruise.

INSIDE FROM	OCEAN VIEW FROM	VERANDAH FROM	SUITE FROM
£5,699PP	£6,199PP	£7,199PP	£8,199PP



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AME7888**

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**TIMES** TravelOffers



# Luxury All-Inclusive Silversea Alaska Voyage and Rocky Mountaineer Rail Journey

14 NIGHTS | MAY 14, 2025 | PRICES FROM £6,499PP

COMPLIMENTARY  
ROCKY MOUNTAINEER  
RAIL JOURNEY

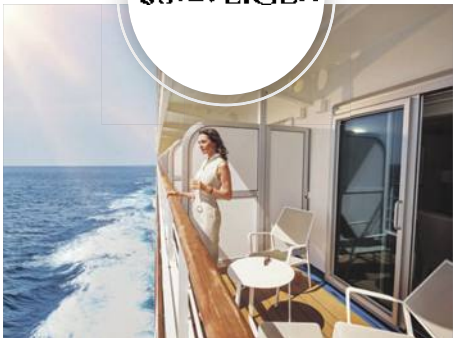
COMPLIMENTARY FULLY  
ESCORTED CANADIAN  
ROCKIES TOUR

JUST LAUNCHED  
FOR 2025

Uncover the splendour of Alaska and Canada with a luxury cruise on board *Silver Moon* paired with a Rocky Mountaineer rail journey and tours of Banff and Lake Louise.

Your holiday begins with a night in Anchorage, nestled between the Chugach Mountains and Cook Inlet. Next, embark the luxurious *Silver Moon* to begin your cruise of Alaska. Marvel at the vast Hubbard Glacier, catch glimpses of bald eagles, delve into the indigenous heritage of Ketchikan, and take a scenic voyage through the Inside Passage.

Disembark in Vancouver for a hotel stay ahead of your spectacular rail journey on board the Rocky Mountaineer. Witness spectacular landscapes from panoramic coaches on the way to Banff National Park for a two-night stay and fully escorted tour of Lake Louise. Your adventure then concludes with a one-night stay in charming Calgary.



## Silver Moon

With sleek lines and impeccable taste, Silversea's *Silver Moon* made her debut in August 2020. Built by cruise lovers, for cruise lovers, this vessel is the epitome of 21st-century luxury travel.

## Your holiday includes

### All-Inclusive Luxury Cruise

- Seven-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Moon*
- **Visiting:** Anchorage, Hubbard Glacier\*, Juneau, Skagway, Sitka, Ketchikan, Inside Passage\*, Vancouver
- **Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port\***

### Complimentary Luxury Rail Journey

- Two-day luxury Rocky Mountaineer rail journey with SilverLeaf service

### Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Banff National Park tour including a visit to Lake Louise

### Hotel Stays

- One-night hotel stay in Anchorage
- **Complimentary** hotel stays in Vancouver, Kamloops, Banff and Calgary

### All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available
- Overnight flight



## Rail journey on board Rocky Mountaineer

This inspiring all-daylight rail escapade is the key to unlocking a hidden world of beauty. As you carve through otherwise inaccessible terrain in the Canadian Rockies, look out for grizzly bears or majestic elks from the comfort of your plush seat.

Glass-dome coach ensure that you are, quite literally, surrounded by panoramic views of the Rockies, from emerald forests to icy blue rivers that snake through dramatic gorges.

VISTA SUITE  
FROM

£6,499PP

CLASSIC VERANDA  
SUITE FROM

£7,499PP

SUPERIOR VERANDA  
SUITE FROM

£7,799PP

DELUXE VERANDA  
SUITE FROM

£7,999PP



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AME7882**

\*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. +Scenic cruising.

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TIMES TravelOffers



# Cloud Forests, Costa Rica and Luxury Silversea Caribbean Cruise

17 - 18 NIGHTS | NOVEMBER, 2025 | PRICES FROM £6,299PP\*

COMPLIMENTARY FLIGHTS AND HOTEL STAYS

COMPLIMENTARY SIX-NIGHT COSTA RICA TOUR

COMPLIMENTARY PREMIUM SHORE EXCURSIONS\*\*



Set sail on a nine-night all-inclusive Caribbean cruise on board *Silver Shadow*, followed by an immersive tour of Costa Rica's volcanoes, rainforests and wildlife.

In Barbados, your holiday begins with a two-night, five-star hotel stay in preparation for your luxury nine-night cruise on board *Silver Shadow*. Embark your ship in Bridgetown and set sail on a cruise of idyllic islands and paradise beaches, from beautiful Bequia to Willemstad's colourful colonial architecture.

Disembarking in Cartagena, you'll begin an immersive six-night tour of Costa Rica, experiencing first-hand one of the most biodiverse regions on earth. Witness the active craters of Poás and Arenal Volcanoes, hike through the foliage of Caño Negro rainforest, embark on a Rio Frio river safari, swim beneath La Fortuna waterfall, and walk amidst the cloud forest of El Silencio de Los Angeles on this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.



## Silver Shadow

The award-winning *Silver Shadow* offers a wonderfully luxurious experience at sea, with spacious suites and your own personal butler to enjoy while on board. With ultra-luxury dining and relaxation, cruising never felt so good.

## Your holiday includes

- All-Inclusive Cruise
- Nine-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Shadow*
  - Visiting\*: Bridgetown, St. Lucia, Bequia, Kralendijk, Willemstad, Oranjestad\*, Santa Marta, Cartagena
  - Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port\*\*
- Complimentary Hotel Stays
- Two-night all-inclusive five-star hotel stay in Barbados at the Wyndham Grand Barbados Sam Lords Castle Resort
  - Two-nights hotel stay in San José
  - Four-night five-star stay in La Fortuna
- Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours
- Doka Estate Coffee Plantation, Poás Volcano, Arenal Volcano Walk, Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge visit^, Rio Frio Rainforest Safari River cruise^, La Fortuna Waterfall and Cloud Forest Walk
- Complimentary Flights and Transfers
- London departure – regional flights available

## Discover Barbados

Barbados promises a perfect blend of relaxation and adventure. Indulge in delicious local Bajan cuisine and immerse yourself in the vibrant culture of this beloved island paradise.

Discover natural wonders with a visit to iconic Harrison's Cave or the breathtaking Barbados Wildlife Reserve. Sink your toes into powdery white sands and swim in turquoise waters or explore the Unesco-listed capital, Bridgetown, where colonial architecture blends with vibrant markets and rum distilleries.

VISTA SUITE FROM*	CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE FROM*	SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE FROM*	DELUXE VERANDA SUITE FROM*
£6,299PP	£7,299PP	£7,599PP	£7,899PP

 ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AME7885**

+Overnight in port. ^Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. \*Prices, duration and itinerary based on November 20, 2025 departure date. \*\*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge.



# Luxury All-Inclusive Silversea Japan Voyage and Mount Fuji's Cosmos Flowers

14 NIGHTS | SEPTEMBER 29, 2025 | PRICES FROM £5,499PP

COMPLIMENTARY  
FLIGHTS

COMPLIMENTARY  
HOTEL STAY IN TOKYO  
AND MOUNT FUJI TOUR

SAVE UP TO £5,200  
PER COUPLE^

Embrace the enchanting beauty of Japan during the cosmos flower season with a luxury all-inclusive Silversea cruise, paired with an unforgettable Mount Fuji tour.

Your adventure begins with a flight to Tokyo, known for its neon-lit streets and ornate Shinto temples. During a two-night hotel stay, you'll relish a fully escorted tour of Mount Fuji. Take the Hakone Ropeway Cable Car and enjoy a boat cruise on the placid waters of nearby Lake Ashi before the bullet train whisks you back to Tokyo.

Following your stay, you'll embark the spectacular *Silver Moon* for a spellbinding, all-inclusive cruise around the captivating coastlines of Japan and South Korea. Admire Osaka's blend of heritage and modernity. Delve into the haunting history of Hiroshima. Bask in the beauty of Korea's Busan, and explore the coastal charms of Nagasaki and Kagoshima.



## Silver Moon

With sleek lines and impeccable taste, Silversea's *Silver Moon* made her debut in August 2020. Built by cruise lovers, for cruise lovers, this vessel is the epitome of 21st-century luxury travel.

## Your holiday includes

- All-Inclusive Cruise
- Ten-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Moon*
  - **Visiting:** Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Busan, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Tokyo
  - **Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port\***
- Complimentary Hotel Stays
- Two-night four-star hotel stay in Tokyo at the Grand Nikko Tokyo Daiba
- Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours
- Tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway cable car
  - Boat trip across Lake Ashi
  - High-speed bullet train to Tokyo
- Complimentary Flights and Transfers
- London departure – regional flights available
  - Overnight flights



## Discover Tokyo

Japan's scintillating capital boasts an incredible blend of modernity and tradition as soaring neon skyscrapers gather next to ancient temples and gleaming shrines.

Embrace the best of both worlds as you explore the famous Meiji Shrine and the Imperial Palace, home to Japanese royalty, before being whisked back to the present. Wander Golden Gai, home to an array of tiny bars, or lose yourself in the district of Ginza. Here you'll find upmarket boutiques, lavish cocktail bars and traditional sushi restaurants.

VISTA SUITE FROM	CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE FROM	SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE FROM	DELUXE VERANDA SUITE FROM
£5,499PP	£6,499PP	£6,799PP	£6,999PP

 **ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA8233**

\*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing, booking directly with Imagine Cruising.



# Luxury Cunard Eastern Med Voyage, Trio of Italian Lakes and Charms of Florence

14 NIGHTS | MAY - SEPTEMBER, 2025 | PRICES FROM £2,999PP\*

INCLUDES FIVE-NIGHT  
ITALIAN LAKES ESCAPE

FLORENCE HOTEL  
STAY AND FULLY  
ESCORTED TOUR

INCLUDES SCENIC  
RAIL JOURNEY

Lose yourself in the beauty of Lake Maggiore, Lake Como, and Lake Garda ahead of a luxury eastern Mediterranean cruise on board Queen Victoria.

Your holiday begins amidst the glamour of the Italian Lakes. Spend three nights in Lake Maggiore and embark on a thrilling alpine rail journey on board the Centovalli Railway. This stunning alpine pass negotiates dramatic mountains between Switzerland and Italy. Next, you'll transfer to Lake Garda for a further two-night hotel stay, including a full-day tour of Lake Como.

Enjoy two nights in Florence, the birthplace of the Renaissance, before embarking the regal Queen Victoria for a seven-night full-board cruise of the eastern Mediterranean. Sail to Cephalonia and Corfu in Greece, then cross the glistening Adriatic Sea to Montenegro's Bay of Kotor and the otherworldly beauty of Dubrovnik in Croatia.



## Queen Victoria

From her elegantly decorated public rooms and opulent lounge venues to her gourmet fine dining and luxurious, spacious cabins, Cunard's illustrious vessel exudes class with the splendour evocative of great cruise liners past.

## Your holiday includes

### Full-Board Cruise

- Seven-night full-board cruise on board Queen Victoria
- **Visiting\***: Civitavecchia, Cephalonia, Corfu, Kotor, Dubrovnik, Trieste

### Hotel Stays

- Three-night four-star stay in Lake Maggiore at the Hotel Regina Palace
- Two-night four-star stay in Lake Garda at the Du Lac et Du Parc Grand Resort
- Two-night four-star stay in Florence at the Grand Hotel Baglioni
- All hotel stays include breakfast

### Fully Escorted Tours

- Full day trip to Lake Como
- Florence walking tour

### Rail Journey

- Scenic rail journey on board the Centovalli Railway

### All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available



## Scenic rail journey Centovalli Railway

Experience the breathtaking beauty and engineering marvels of central Europe on board the Centovalli Express train. Traverse through the "One Hundred Valleys" of Centovalli, where vivid blue lakes, cascading waterfalls, and rugged valleys create an awe-inspiring panorama.

Marvel at the intricate network of bridges and viaducts that adorn the landscape. Embark on a journey of discovery as you immerse yourself in the splendour of alpine scenery on board this unforgettable train adventure.

INSIDE FROM*	OCEANVIEW FROM*	BALCONY FROM*	GRILL SUITE FROM*
£2,999PP	£3,399PP	£3,899PP	£5,399PP
ONLINE CRUISE CODE: <b>MED7886</b>			

\*Prices and itinerary shown are based on July 21, 2025 departure date.

**12 - 13 NIGHTS  
FROM ONLY  
£1,699PP\***



## Luxury Eastern Mediterranean Voyage with Athens Retreat

12 - 13 NIGHTS | SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER, 2024

**COMPLIMENTARY HOTEL  
STAY IN ATHENS**

**COMPLIMENTARY  
CLASSIC DRINKS  
PACKAGE AND WI-FI^**

**JUST LAUNCHED  
FOR 2024**

Fly to Athens for a two-night hotel stay ahead of a ten-night luxury cruise on board Celebrity Silhouette® through the glistening Mediterranean.

Your voyage begins in ancient Athens with a two-night stay at the luxury Meliá Athens. Embark on a journey of discovery as you encounter awe-inspiring historic wonders such as the legendary Acropolis, home to the majestic Parthenon, and immerse yourself in the birthplace of democracy.

Next, greet the regal Celebrity Silhouette® in Athens to begin a ten-night cruise through the eastern Mediterranean. Sail to Mykonos and Santorini for the quintessential Greek island experience. Spend a night in port in Istanbul, where Europe and Asia converge, explore the ancient remains of Ephesus and relax on Rhodes' sun-kissed shores.



### Celebrity Silhouette®

Celebrity Silhouette® stands out, from its innovative design to its top-notch cuisine. Savour its palpable atmosphere with elegant lawns and magnificent staterooms so luxurious that you'll be reluctant to leave.

### Your holiday includes

#### Full-Board Cruise

- Ten-night full-board cruise on board Celebrity Silhouette®
- **Visiting\***: Athens, Mykonos, Santorini, Istanbul (overnight in port), Kuşadası, Rhodes, Athens
- **^Book an Ocean View cabin or above and receive a complimentary Classic Drinks Package and Wi-Fi**
- Grab a cocktail in the Passport Bar, or sample some of the finest gourmet food at The Lawn Club Grill – either way, you will be wining and dining like a true celebrity

#### Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-night four-star hotel stay in Athens at the Meliá Athens with breakfast

#### All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available



### Embrace Santorini

The result of a volcanic eruption, the caldera of Santorini's dramatic cliffs and sunsets are unparalleled. History comes alive in ancient ruins like Akrotiri, preserved by volcanic ash. Wander through charming villages, such as Oia and Fira, with narrow alleys and stunning vistas.

Whether basking on unique black sand beaches or exploring its unique geology, Santorini's blend of natural wonder, cultural heritage, and idyllic tranquillity leaves an indelible mark.

INSIDE  
FROM\*

**£1,699PP**

OCEAN VIEW  
FROM\*

**£2,199PP**

VERANDA  
FROM\*

**£2,699PP**

CONCIERGE CLASS  
FROM\*

**£2,899PP**



**ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7862**

\*Prices, duration and Itinerary shown are based on September 29, 2024 departure.

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**TIMES TravelOffers**



# Luxury All-Inclusive Canada to Japan Silversea Voyage and Mount Fuji Discovery

22 NIGHTS | SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 | PRICES FROM £6,999PP

COMPLIMENTARY  
FLIGHTS AND HOTEL STAYS

COMPLIMENTARY TOUR  
OF MOUNT FUJI

COMPLIMENTARY  
PREMIUM SHORE  
EXCURSIONS\*

Experience wild Alaska with a front-row seat to nature's grandeur, explore Tokyo and marvel at Mount Fuji in Cosmos season.

Vancouver is the stunning setting for an overnight hotel stay ahead of your Alaskan adventure. Embark the pioneering *Silver Nova* and settle into your stateroom as you cruise towards the pristine wilderness of Inside Passage, past towering fjords and sparkling glaciers. Explore Gold Rush boomtown Skagway, historic Sitka, Kodiak Island with its brown bears and sea otters, and the wartime legacy of Dutch Harbor.

Next, you'll sail across the Pacific to Tokyo, where you'll disembark to enjoy a three-night hotel stay. During a tour of the sacred Mount Fuji, you'll marvel at fields of cosmos flowers and join a boat trip along the serene Lake Ashi before boarding the world-famous bullet train back to Tokyo.



## Silver Nova

*Silver Nova* is more than Silversea's latest ship to grace the seas: she offers a Nova way of unparalleled luxury travel. Its innovative asymmetrical design introduces the world to you like never before.

## Your holiday includes

### All-Inclusive Luxury Cruise

- 18 night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board the BRAND-NEW *Silver Nova*
- **Visiting:** Vancouver, Inside Passage (scenic cruising), Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Sitka, Kodiak Island, Dutch Harbor, Kushiro, Miyako, Tokyo
- **Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port\***

### Complimentary Hotel Stays

- One-night four-star hotel stay in Vancouver at the Hilton Vancouver Downtown
- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Tokyo at the Grand Nikko Tokyo Daiba

### Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway cable car
- Boat trip across Lake Ashi
- High-speed bullet train to Tokyo

### Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available



## Explore Inside Passage

Towering fjords, sparkling glaciers, and dense forests create a breathtaking panorama. Cruise ships glide through this pristine wilderness, offering a front-row seat to nature's grandeur.

Whales breach, eagles soar, and seals bask on icebergs. Charming coastal towns, like Juneau and Ketchikan, showcase Alaska's rich heritage and culture. Inside Passage's serene beauty, teeming wildlife, and tranquil waters make it a quintessential Alaskan experience, an exploration of untamed beauty and pristine landscapes.

CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE FROM	SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE FROM	DELUXE VERANDA SUITE FROM
£6,999PP	£7,499PP	£7,999PP

 **ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA8239**

\*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge.



# Ultimate Australia and New Zealand Voyage with All-Inclusive Indian Pacific Rail

26 NIGHTS | FEBRUARY 5, 2025 | PRICES FROM £4,999PP

EXCLUSIVE TO  
IMAGINE CRUISING

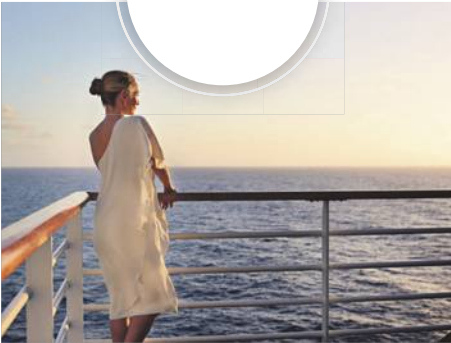
INCLUDES ALL-INCLUSIVE  
INDIAN PACIFIC  
RAIL JOURNEY

INCLUDES HOTEL STAYS  
IN SYDNEY AND PERTH

Embark Crown Princess® for a 14-night New Zealand cruise before a four-night hotel stay in sunny Sydney, where you'll board the iconic Indian Pacific for the three-night all-inclusive journey to Perth.

Fly overnight to Sydney, where you'll have a two-night hotel stay before joining the stunning Crown Princess® to begin your cruise of the New Zealand coast. Witness the towering peaks and majestic lakes of Fiordland National Park. Travel to Scottish-influenced Dunedin, Wellington, New Zealand's charming capital, and Auckland, where white-sand beaches sit alongside modern architecture.

Disembarking back in Sydney, you'll check in for a four-night hotel stay ahead of your journey on board the iconic Indian Pacific. During a three-night rail adventure, witness the majestic Blue Mountains and vast Nullarbor Plain while enjoying all-inclusive dining. Arriving in Perth, you'll enjoy a hotel stay before flying home.



## Crown Princess®

Crown Princess® offers a luxurious and enriching cruise experience with world-class amenities, captivating destinations, and a variety of onboard activities, ensuring a memorable vacation at sea.

## Your holiday includes

- Full-Board Cruise**
- 14 night full-board cruise on board Crown Princess®
  - **Visiting:** Sydney, Fiordland National Park (scenic cruising), Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Napier, Tauranga, Auckland, Bay of Islands, Sydney
  - **Book a Mini-Suite and receive a complimentary upgrade to Platinum Service** on board the Indian Pacific
- Rail Journey**
- Three-night all-inclusive Gold Service rail journey on board the Indian Pacific from Sydney to Perth
  - Off Train Experiences and short stops in Adelaide and surrounds, Cook, Rawlinna and Perth
- Hotel Stays**
- Six-nights four-star hotel stay in Sydney at the Mercure Sydney
  - One-nights four-star hotel stay in Perth at the Crowne Plaza Perth
  - All hotel stays include breakfast
- All Flights and Transfers**
- London departure - regional flights available
  - Overnight flights



## Discover Sydney

Sydney, the vibrant capital of New South Wales, Australia, captivates with its iconic landmarks, stunning harbour, and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The Sydney Opera House stands as a symbol of architectural brilliance, while the Sydney Harbour Bridge offers breathtaking views. Bondi Beach beckons with its golden sands and surf culture, while the Royal Botanic Garden provides a serene escape in the heart of the city.

INTERIOR FROM	OCEANVIEW FROM	BALCONY FROM	MINI-SUITE FROM
£4,999PP	£5,499PP	£5,999PP	£8,299PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AUS2299**



# Luxury Far East Voyage: Singapore, Bali and Great Barrier Reef

31 NIGHTS | JANUARY 2, 2025 | PRICES FROM £3,699PP

COMPLIMENTARY  
FLIGHTS

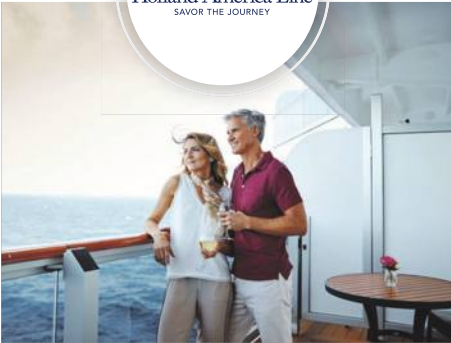
COMPLIMENTARY HOTEL  
STAY IN SINGAPORE

EXPERIENCE MOUNT  
BATU TARA AND  
KRAKATAU VOLCANOES

Witness Singapore’s modern marvels, the tribes of Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia’s smoking volcanoes during a Holland America Line cruise.

Enjoy a night in Singapore before embarking the illustrious Noordam for an immersive 28-night cruise through the paradise islands at the convergence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Witness the limestone karst of Puerto Princesa in the Philippines. Delve into the ancient tribal customs of Papua New Guinea’s Kiriwina and Conflict Islands. Sail to Australia and the Great Barrier Reef, where you’ll enjoy two days exploring the vastest living organism on Earth.

Marvel at nature’s raw energy during days of scenic cruising past the smoking craters of Batu Tara and Krakatau volcanoes. Witness Komodo dragons up close on their namesake island and bask on the beaches of Bali before disembarking back in Singapore, where your voyage ends with a hotel stay.



## Noordam

Noordam is an award-winning ship offering excellent hospitality, luxurious amenities, and world-class restaurants. With state-of-the-art entertainment and extensive spa treatments, you won’t be short of luxuries on board.

## Your holiday includes

### Full-Board Cruise

- 28 night full-board cruise on board Noordam
- Visiting: Singapore, Puerto Princesa, Bitung, Jayapura, Rabaul, Kiriwina Island, Conflict Islands, Cairns, Great Barrier Reef (scenic cruising), Darwin, Dili, Batu Tara Volcano (scenic cruising), Komodo Island, Benoa, Tanjung Priok, Krakatau Volcano (scenic cruising), Singapore

### Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-nights four-star stay in Singapore at the Oasia Hotel Novena with breakfast

### Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available
- Overnight flight



## Discover The Great Barrier Reef

Surrounded by the Unesco-listed wonders of the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest, Cairns a haven for adventurers. The city’s lively Esplanade buzzes with markets, waterfront eateries, and cultural events, while nearby Kuranda offers an enchanting rainforest retreat.

From adrenaline-pumping activities to serene moments at Palm Cove’s pristine beaches, Cairns is a harmonious blend of natural beauty and thrilling escapades.

INSIDE FROM	OCEAN VIEW FROM	VERANDAH FROM	SIGNATURE SUITE FROM
£3,699PP	£4,299PP	£5,299PP	£7,999PP

 **ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA8237**

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 [thetimes.co.uk/imaginecruising](https://thetimes.co.uk/imaginecruising)



# RIVER CRUISE SALE

**EXCLUSIVE BALCONY  
PROMOTION FROM ONLY  
£1,799<sup>PP</sup>**

## Danube Delights

**SEVEN NIGHTS | JUNE - OCTOBER, 2024**

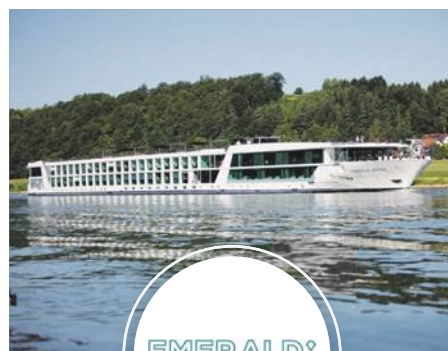
**SAVINGS OF UP TO 45%  
PER COUPLE<sup>^</sup>**

**PREMIUM DRINKS PACKAGE  
FROM £99<sup>PP</sup>**

Discover the cultural, historical, and natural delights of the Danube during an enchanting river cruise on board a stunning Emerald Star-Ship.

Your European adventure begins in history-steeped Munich, where you'll embark a state-of-the-art Star-Ship. Brimming with innovative features that bring your journey to life, these floating boutique hotels boast a front-row seat to the wonders of Europe. Revel in the beauty and heritage of the Wachau Valley's ancient towns, from Regensburg's melting pot of cultures to the Gothic architecture of Passau.

Unravel Vienna's treasure trove of imperial palaces, museums, and musical legacy. Marvel at Bratislava's hilltop castle and lavish Episcopal Summer Palace. Your cruise ends with a night in port in beautiful Budapest, where you'll discover centuries of thermal spa culture and a wealth of grand architectural attractions.



### Emerald Destiny\*

The Emerald Destiny provides an entertaining experience without even stepping ashore. You can explore a world of culinary delights, engage in a variety of activities, or just relax and savour your favourite beverage while admiring the passing landscapes.

### Your holiday includes

#### Full-Board River Cruise

- Seven-night full-board Danube river cruise on board Emerald Destiny\*
- Visiting\*: Munich, Regensburg, Passau, Engelhartszell an der Donau, Dürnstein, Krems, Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest\*\*
- The services of an Emerald Cruises Cruise Director
- 20 meals including: Seven breakfasts, six lunches and seven dinners
- Complimentary unlimited wine, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner, sparkling wine and fresh-squeezed juices during breakfast
- Welcome and farewell reception and dinner
- Add a Premium Drinks Package for £99<sup>pp</sup>

#### Excursions

- A guided tour of Passau, Guided tour of Göttweig Abbey, Vienna art tour with a visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, walking tour of Bratislava, Guided coach tour of Budapest

#### All Flights and Transfers<sup>^^</sup>

- London departure – regional flights available



### Explore Bratislava

The capital of Slovakia exudes a unique blend of old-world charm and modern vibrancy. Stroll through the cobblestone streets of the historic Old Town, marvel at the iconic Bratislava Castle, and admire the elegant architecture of St. Martin's Cathedral.

Immerse yourself in the local culture, savour a variety of flavourful traditional cuisines, and experience the warm hospitality of this captivating city nestled along the banks of the Danube River.

EMERALD PANORAMA BALCONY SUITE FROM\*

**£1,799<sup>PP</sup>**



**ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: EUR2232**

\*Prices, ship and itinerary shown based on June 28, 2024 departure. +Subject to availability. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing, booking directly with Imagine Cruising. ++Overnight in port. ^^Transfers to and from your star-ship included.

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**TIMES Travel Offers**



# Select Price Cruise Benefits

**Select Price** is P&O Cruises' leading choice for its range of premium benefits. Discover the benefits today and book your next holiday with a great deal.

When you book the **Select Price**, you can enjoy the **greatest range of choice and flexibility**, with a range of **amazing perks**:

  
On-board spending money

or

  
Return coach travel to Southampton

or

  
Car parking

**10% OFF**  
**Classic Drinks Package**  
plus extra on-board  
spending money\*

## Choose your Cabin

With Select Price, you'll get to choose your cabin number at time of booking (subject to availability).

## Flexible Dining Arrangements

With Select Price, you'll get first priority for dining style on ships offering both freedom and Club Dining.

## Shuttle buses

With Select Price, you'll get complimentary use of our shuttle buses in port (where provided by P&O Cruises).

## Flexibility on your bookings

With Select Price, you can benefit from flexibility to change your booking (subject to our booking conditions).

## Priority Upgrades

With Select Price, you'll be eligible for complimentary upgrades (where and if available).

## On-board Spending Money

On-board spending money offers so many options to tailor your holiday.



Cruise deals from **only £533<sup>PP</sup>**  
On board spending money  
**Enjoy up to £200 to spend on board\***



**Canary Islands**  
7 nights | Oct, 2024 - Feb, 2025  
Itinerary: Tenerife, Madeira, Gran Canaria, Arrecife de Lanzarote, Tenerife\*

Prices and itinerary based on November 16, 2024 departure.

	P&O CRUISES SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£533 <sup>PP</sup>	£639 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£707 <sup>PP</sup>	£824 <sup>PP</sup>
*£80 additional on board spending money		
^Fly Cruise   Azura		



**Caribbean**  
14 nights | Nov, 2024 - Feb, 2025  
Itinerary: Bridgetown, Oranjestad, Curaçao, Kingstown, Grenada, Castries\*, Antigua, Sint Maarten, Bridgetown\*

Prices and itinerary based on November 30, 2024 departure.

	P&O CRUISES EARLY SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£1,357 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,561 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£1,551 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,881 <sup>PP</sup>
*£120 additional on board spending money		
^Fly Cruise   Britannia		



**Mediterranean**  
13-14 nights | Jul - Sep, 2024  
Itinerary: Southampton, La Coruña, Valencia, Marseille, Barcelona, Cádiz, Southampton

Prices and itinerary based on September 29, 2024 departure.

	P&O CRUISES EARLY SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£921 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,018 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£1,357 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,454 <sup>PP</sup>
*£120 additional on board spending money		
No-Fly Cruise   Arvia		

**Caribbean**  
24 nights | November 2, 2025  
Itinerary: Southampton, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Sint Maarten, Guadeloupe, Saint Vincent, Castries, Bridgetown, Ponta Delgada (Azores), Southampton

	P&O CRUISES EARLY SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£1,842 <sup>PP</sup>	£2,085 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£3,200 <sup>PP</sup>	£3,782 <sup>PP</sup>
*£200 additional on board spending money		
No-Fly Cruise   Aurora		

**Canary Islands**  
12 nights | November 23, 2024  
Itinerary: Southampton, Funchal (Madeira), Santa Cruz de La Palma, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Lisbon, Southampton

	P&O CRUISES SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£678 <sup>PP</sup>	£824 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£969 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,104 <sup>PP</sup>
*£110 additional on board spending money		
No-Fly Cruise   Ventura		

**Norwegian Fjords**  
7 nights | August 31, 2024  
Itinerary: Southampton, Stavanger, Olden, Nordfjord (scenic cruising), Haugesund, Kristiansand, Southampton

	P&O CRUISES SAVER FARE	P&O CRUISES SELECT FARE
INSIDE	£727 <sup>PP</sup>	£775 <sup>PP</sup>
BALCONY	£1,115 <sup>PP</sup>	£1,212 <sup>PP</sup>
*£80 additional on board spending money		
No-Fly Cruise   Iona		

\*On-board credit is awarded per cabin and based on two people sharing a Balcony cabin. Amount will vary. ^Flights based on London departure (regional flights available at a supplement). +Overnight in port.