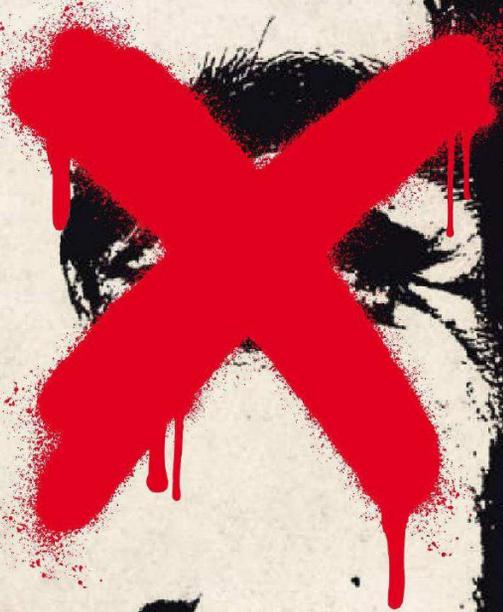


**THE SUNDAY TIMES** *magazine*

June 16 2024

# GENERATION

**The voters that  
politics forgot**





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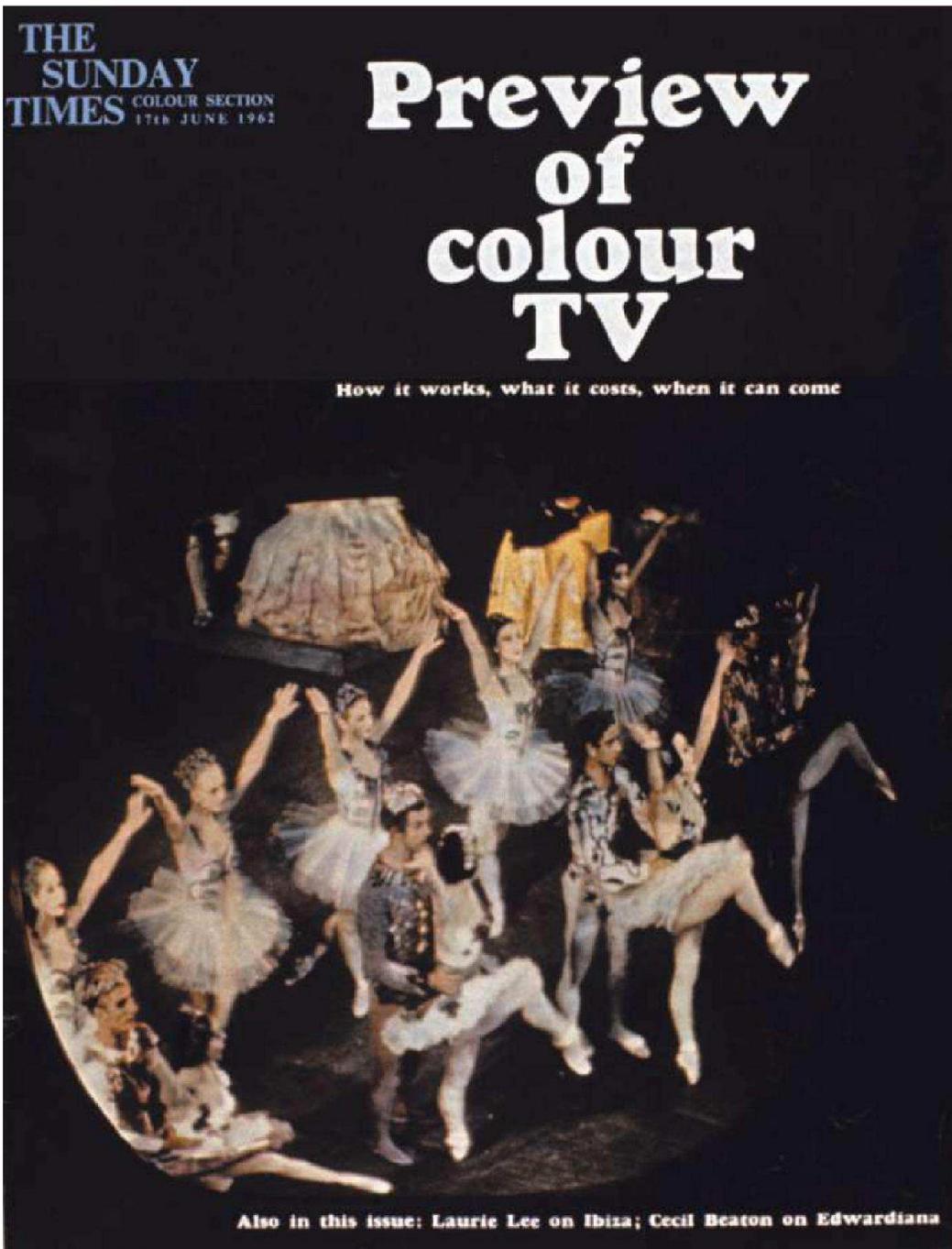


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## THIS WEEK IN 1962

The front cover of The Sunday Times Magazine on June 17 previews the arrival of colour television. The BBC tested colour with the transmission of a ballet, but the British public would have to wait until July 1, 1967, for the full launch of the service with coverage from Wimbledon on BBC2, presented by David Vine. At the time a colour TV set would have cost at least £250 — almost £4,000 today. Photograph by Roger Wood.

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MATT RUDD

## The big shop is now robotically efficient — until the dreaded rescan



It's 21 years since the first robot told the first Tesco customer that the item in their bagging area was unexpected. This one small step for the robot quickly turned into one giant pain in the neck for mankind. Have self-checkouts made our lives any easier? Of course not. As Sod's Universal Law of Technology says, the number of robots involved in any process is equal and opposite to the amount of time they save.

Back in the old days the checkout humans could just whizz items through the till without delay.

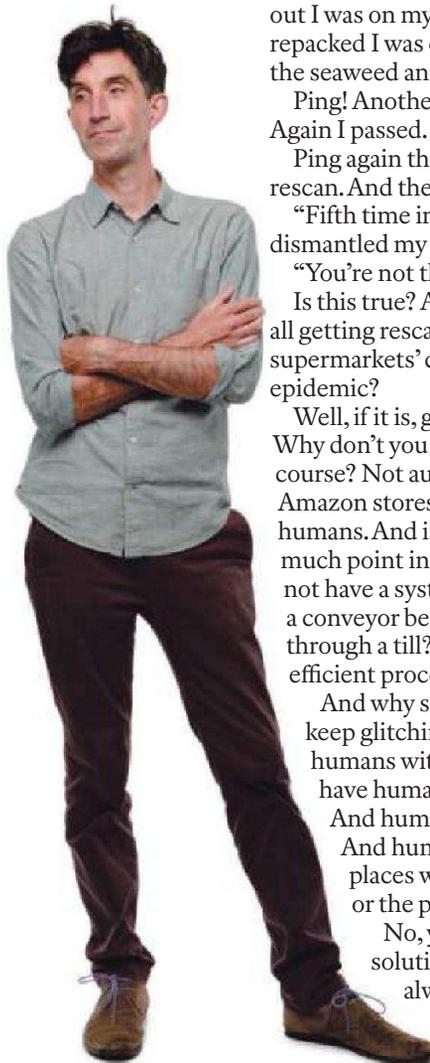
Beep beep beep. The robots do not allow whizzing. They are paranoid androids quick to suspect that a scanned bag of flour might be a bagged bottle of Moët. So they make us jump through another hoop — we scan the item, we put the item in the bagging area, we wait. If the robot is happy and if enough of our day has been wasted, we may continue. If it isn't and it hasn't been? That dread phrase: an assistant will be with you shortly.

Trying to buy coriander? Beep! Too light. An assistant will be with you shortly.

Trying to move a bag out of the bagging area to make room for another bag? Beep! Unexpected debagging in the bagging area. An assistant will be with you shortly. They won't be, though, will they? The one employee to have survived the great checkout cull already has nine other customers to help first and one of them is an old lady who has posted her parking coupon in the receipt slot. As a great philosopher once said, mo' robots, mo' problems.

At first I tried to adapt. I stopped buying light things and became adept at balancing a big shop in a small bagging area. After one too many assistants being with me shortly, I gave up. I broke my solemn vow never to sign up for a loyalty card (my data, my choice) and signed up for all of them. I am now one of those infuriating people who scan as they shop. I don't have the fancy colour-coded holdalls to line my trolley but it's only a matter of time.

For a while this worked very well. Each week I'd scan as I went round Sainsbury's and then, when they didn't have all the niche ingredients the health-conscious love of my life demands, I'd scan as I went round Waitrose. I even started buying coriander again.



"Did everything scan?" the robot always asked.

"Why, yes it did and thank you for asking," I'd reply, because I'm still a human even if the robot isn't.

Then, a month ago in Sainsbury's, I got pinged for a rescan. After only a couple of hours waiting for the one surviving assistant, I watched as his training kicked in and he went ferreting for unscanned prosciutto. It was stressful — I wouldn't do well in prison — but it turns out I was on my scanning A-game that day. Once I'd repacked I was on my way to Waitrose for the kimchi, the seaweed and the organic almond milk.

Ping! Another rescan. Again, I prepared for jail. Again I passed.

Ping again the following week! Another double rescan. And then, a week later, in Sainsbury's again.

"Fifth time in a row," I told the assistant as she dismantled my shopping. "I feel like I'm being profiled."

"You're not the only one," she replied.

Is this true? Am I not the only one? Are you also all getting rescanned all the time? Is this the supermarkets' cunning plan to stop the shoplifting epidemic?

Well, if it is, great — but I have a small suggestion. Why don't you just scan everything as a matter of course? Not automatically, like they do in those weird Amazon stores. Far too high-tech. Just manually using humans. And if you're doing that, there doesn't seem much point in us scanning everything as well. Why not have a system where we load our stuff on to, say, a conveyor belt and your human assistant puts it all through a till? That could be quite a simple and efficient process, couldn't it?

And why stop there? Those passport e-gates that keep glitching? We could replace them with some humans with some passport stamps. We could have humans selling train tickets at train stations. And humans helping us do our banking in banks. And humans answering phones in the sort of places we might call for help, like the council or the police station or my GP.

No, you're right. That's crazy. The solution to problems caused by robots is always more robots. It's called progress.

Beep beep beep ■

**GOOD NEWS!**

Wales has been named as the second-best country in the world for recycling. The nation, which recycles 58.6 per cent of its municipal waste, was pipped

to the post by Austria at 59 per cent in the global rankings. Wales sets statutory recycling targets for local councils and provides homes with multiple

containers to separate their waste. Northern Ireland made the top ten, in ninth place. England just missed out at 11, and Scotland was placed 15th.

## RELATIVE VALUES

# Janet Ellis and Sonny Jones

Sophie Ellis-Bextor's son on living with his grandmother, the former *Blue Peter* presenter

### Janet

I had been married to my husband, John, for 32 years. When he died from cancer in 2020, I suddenly had the house to myself. Five bedrooms. It felt very empty. I've always been very close to my children — Sophie, 45, Jackson, 36, a drummer, and Martha, 33, who works with an art dealer — and to my five grandchildren, all boys, all Sophie's. I'm so glad we are close; it would be weird to have a child as well known as Sophie is and the only way I found out about them was via Facebook. We also live very near to one another. I'm in Hammersmith, in west London, they're in Chiswick.

I've had lodgers in the past — it helped with the mortgage — but a couple of years ago Sophie suggested that Sonny, her oldest, move in. Not because there was any sort of rift at home, because there wasn't, but because their house is always so full and Sonny was coming to the end of school. He's 20 now and his littlest brother, Mickey, is five. The default of the house always goes to the smaller people, because they are the ones with the necessary routine and timetable. I think perhaps Sonny needed his own space.

I made very sure he was happy with the move before he came. I cleared out one of the spare rooms and encouraged him to make it his own. I said to him at the outset, "You've got to feel in favour of this, it has to be 50-50. I don't want either of us to feel awkward." And I wanted to make it clear to him that he didn't have to answer to me — I'm his grandmother, not his parent. Anyway, he finished school and then started a foundation course in graphic design, so it seemed like a good time to come over.

This new chapter for him was also a new chapter for me. I hadn't been a single person for a long time. Before John, I was married to Sophie's dad, Robin. John died during Covid, so we couldn't have a proper funeral. I think you were allowed 15 people or something, and there were already quite a lot of us — and we took the dog too, of course. Since he died I've been incredibly lucky with good friends who have supported me, who invite me out to parties and events. I miss him very much, so keeping busy has been good for me. No one has tried to matchmake me yet, but sometimes I do think, maybe?

In many ways we live separate lives here, Sonny and I. I'm out way more than he is. As someone who has always been freelance, I've maintained a habit of saying yes to opportunities. I do a podcast now, interviewing celebrities about their favourite childhood books, and I've just finished the first draft of my third novel. Sonny spends a lot of time at college in south London, or in his room, online. I love having him here. He always

plays music and often it sounds amazing. Occasionally I'll walk past his room and say, "Who's this?" And then I'll try to remember the answer.

There aren't many rules in the house apart from don't overload the washing machine. Who cleans? I do. I'm also much more aware of where the dishwasher is. But I do like cooking for him. We both love to eat, especially Japanese food, and we hang out together a lot. We go clothes shopping or to the cinema. Both of us love animé.

I'm aware that, with Sonny here, I'm probably setting a precedent. His younger brother Jesse came over recently, saw Sonny's room and thought it was very cool. He asked if he could have it when he was 19. I said yes, of course, but he's only eight, so it's a way off yet.

On a scale of one to ten, I think my grandchildren's interest in my *Blue Peter* years is probably zero. I showed them one of my *Blue Peter* annuals from when I was one of the presenters in the Eighties, but I don't think they could match up the enthusiastic young person in the book with me, their grandmother.

Meanwhile Sophie has always been incredibly smart with her music career. Her stamina is amazing. I think her boys are completely aware of how extraordinarily famous and successful their mother is, but she is also just their mum. That's the most important thing.

**Keeping busy has been good for me. No one has tried to matchmake me, but sometimes I do think, maybe?**



**Main: Janet, 68, with Sonny, 20, at home in London. Right: Janet with her daughter Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Sonny in May 2004, a few weeks after he was born**



It's lovely being surrounded by youth. My mum used to say to me that the definition of old age was that your whole world was safe and that nothing challenged you any more. Having Sonny here challenges me. I see the world through his eyes now. It's more porous than I imagined and I don't mind having that revealed.

His stay here is open-ended, naturally. There's no contract. If he did leave, it would be hard for me, I think. But the family live just ten minutes away, so I can always pop over and say hello. By prior arrangement, of course.

### Sonny

I think it got to the point, back home, where I needed more space. Three of my brothers shared a room. The only time the house got quiet was when everyone was in bed. So when I was coming to the end of school, my grandmother asked if I wanted to move in. I've been coming here all my life, so it's always felt like a second home anyway. It hasn't been that much of a change, really. Plus, my parents and brothers visit all the time.

There are no house rules, nothing like that. Just the normal things you'd expect, like doing the laundry or the washing-up. But nothing is enforced. We eat together often, but I don't cook. My grandmother is a great cook. Mostly, though, we just do our own thing.

## STRANGE HABITS

**Janet on Sonny**  
When we eat together, we often have bread with it. Fresh French white bread — we love it. But he always eats his immediately. He never waits

**Sonny on Janet**  
She watches television with Angela, the dog, and Angela really does watch it — especially programmes with horses

I think I've always been aware that my mum and my grandmother have had these amazing jobs, but it's never been a big deal, to be honest. My parents never made it a big deal. Whenever Mum was doing her kitchen disco thing during lockdown I looked after my brothers, helping out — the youngest wasn't able to walk yet. But then I've always helped out with my brothers, and I'm happy to do so.

No, I haven't watched my grandmother on *Blue Peter* online. Why? I don't know, really. Maybe I will one day. But I do like hanging out with her. We talk about everything — news, culture — and we often go to the cinema together and to clothes shops. She lets me have friends over whenever I want, so that's nice. Nothing ever gets out of hand, though. But then, you know, I'm on a graphic design course — it's hardly a rowdy crowd.

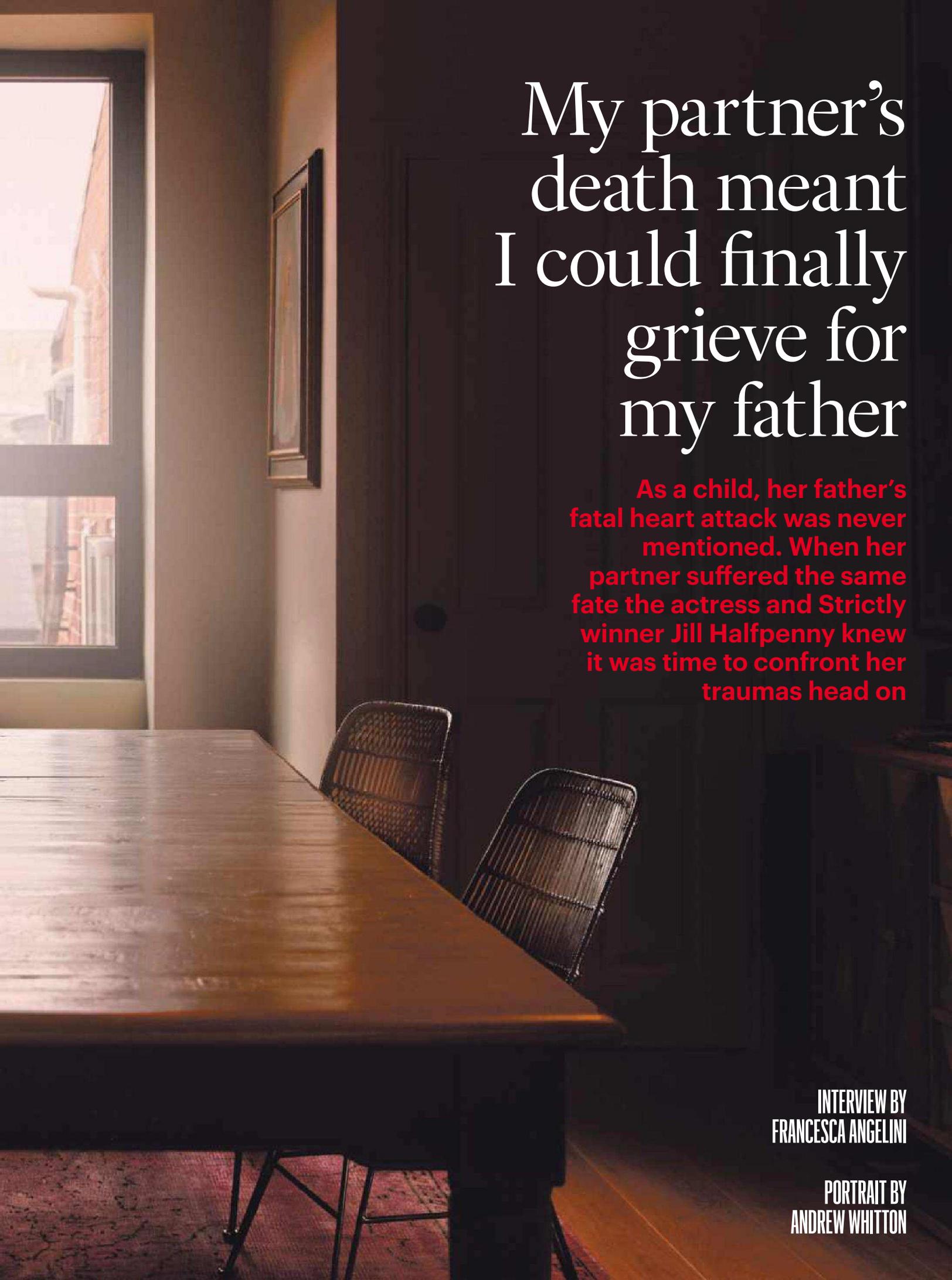
To be honest, I'm not sure how long I'll stay here.

If I did move out, I would want it to be somewhere nice, and that would be expensive. But I think if I did leave, I'd miss the home comforts. I would also miss my grandmother. We've always been close but we're closer than ever now ■

**Interviews by Nick Duerden.**

**Janet Ellis's podcast, *Twice Upon a Time*, is available to stream now**





# My partner's death meant I could finally grieve for my father

**As a child, her father's fatal heart attack was never mentioned. When her partner suffered the same fate the actress and Strictly winner Jill Halfpenny knew it was time to confront her traumas head on**

**INTERVIEW BY  
FRANCESCA ANGELINI**

**PORTRAIT BY  
ANDREW WHITTON**

# E

arly one morning in January 2017, Jill Halfpenny was woken up by her partner, Matt, getting ready to leave for a spin class. They were trying for a baby and she shuffled to the loo to pee on an ovulation stick. He looked at her with a peaceful, loving gaze, and then she went back to bed.

Forty-five minutes later the actress was woken up by a stranger banging on the front door. Her phone had 17 missed calls. Matt has had an accident, the man told her. She ran to the gym near their home in Crouch End, north London, to find Matt lying on the studio floor, his eyes half open, flickering. He had suffered a heart attack. She helped the paramedics carry him to an ambulance. Attempts to resuscitate him with a defibrillator failed.

“The first person I called was my mam,” Halfpenny recalls, her voice faltering before she has to break off for a moment. “I could hear the fear in my mam’s voice. I was ringing her with the news about Matt, but I was still thinking about her, that she knows exactly how this feels. And I could hear it in her voice, I could hear that she knew I was about to go on that same journey.”

That same journey began for Maureen Halfpenny almost four decades earlier, in August 1979. One morning her husband, Colin, a sales rep for the gas company BOC, had gone off to play for his local league team, Blue Bell Felling, in Gateshead. He went in for a tackle, collided with another player and then collapsed on the pitch, in front of his brother Derek. He, too, died of a heart attack, aged 36. Matt was 43.

The trauma of losing her father when she was four had dogged Halfpenny ever since. She had, she says, never addressed her grief. Now life was repeating itself. For it to happen once might have been terrible luck; twice felt like a horrendous punishment.



“I could hear the fear in my mam’s voice. I was ringing her with the news about Matt. She knew I was about to go on that same journey”

**Above: Halfpenny with her late partner, Matt, in New York, 2016**

“It just felt so eerily similar. I pushed back against the world. I just thought, f\*\*\* you, f\*\*\* everything. Why should I bother?”

There was a point when she might have shut down completely. “But that is such a miserable way to live. I thought, I am not going to walk that same path. If I am to accept it, I am not going to repeat history, I am not going to bury my grief again. And I knew I had to grieve my dad. This was the time. ‘It’s happening,’ I told myself. ‘Let’s do the double,’” she says, opening her arms with a mock grin.

Since Matt’s death, Halfpenny, 48, has spent a lot of time unpicking grief — the way society tells us to handle it, the unspoken impact of bereavement, the long-lasting ripples it sends out. Now she has channelled all this into a memoir-cum-grief-manual that examines how she was finally “able to accept myself by facing my grief and allowing myself to die a little”.

Much of *A Life Reimagined* unfolds around the brutal question of whether she would ever feel happiness again, of whether it is possible to thrive after loss. The answer is yes, but the path to get there is not an easy one. People don’t know how to talk about death or bereavement, nor do they like to, Halfpenny says. “I just thought that maybe a normal person saying, ‘This is what I did,’ would be helpful.”

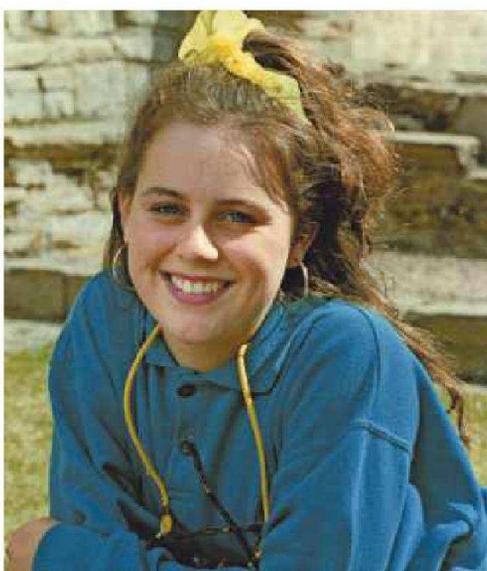
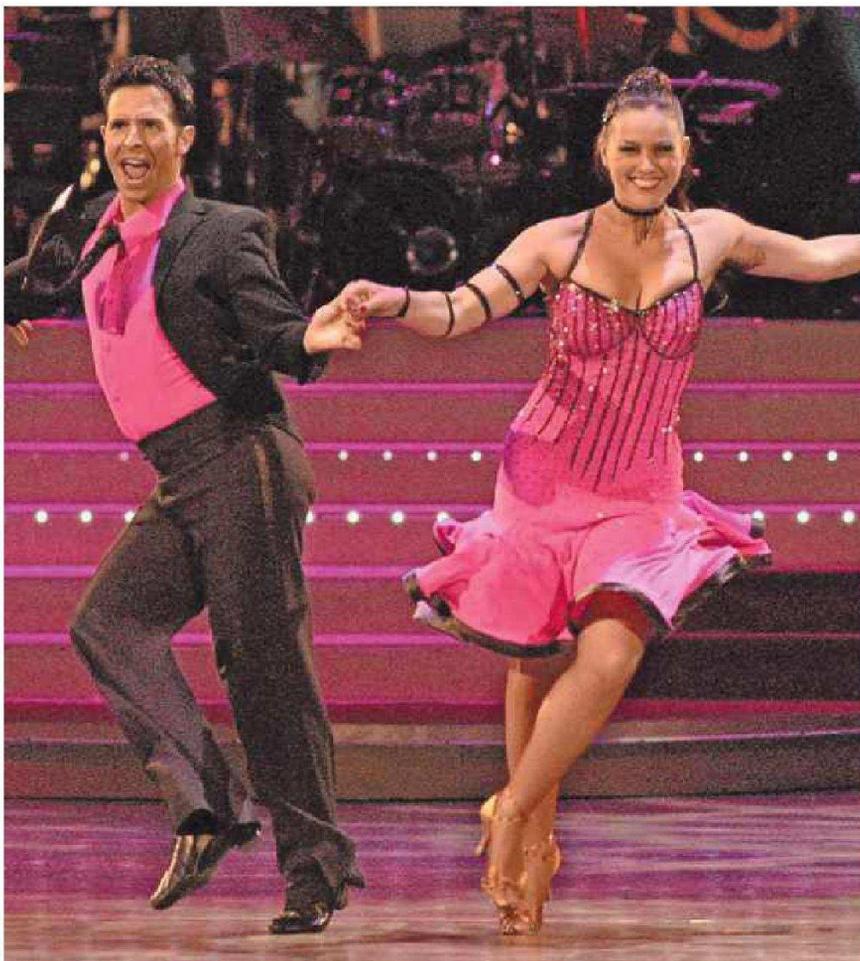
We are sitting at the kitchen table of her trendily decorated house in Tynemouth, a Victorian seaside town outside Newcastle with dramatic beaches and prized fish restaurants. She grew up close by, in Gateshead, and her family often came here when she was a girl. Three years ago, after the final Covid lockdown, she moved here from London with her son, Harvey, 16, whom she had with her former husband, the actor Craig Conway. "There's something about being next to water that calms me," she says while making tea, wearing a red cardigan and dark jeans.

Halfpenny is a strong, warm presence with a quick laugh. People used to tell her she was hard, she says, but "I'm actually a softie, I just had a lot of armour". She has been a fixture on our screens and stage since she was cast in *Byker Grove* as a teenager. Since then she has been in all sorts, including *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *Humans* and *Three Girls*. In 2011 she won an Olivier for her West End role in *Legally Blonde the Musical*. For many, though, it's her series-winning 2004 *Strictly Come Dancing* performance, with her dance partner Darren Bennett, that is her greatest accolade — their jive earned them full marks. What the camera doesn't tell you, however, is that for most of her career Halfpenny was a vulnerable mess.

After her father died, the family policy was not to mention his name. No birthdays, no anniversaries. There was one photo of him on their mother's bedside table and that was it. Halfpenny shared a room with her two older sisters, who were seven and ten when their father died, but they never talked about him. The only time they all cried together, she recalls, was when they would watch *Champ*, the 1979 film in which a boy is inconsolable at the death of his boxer father. "That was our permission to cry because we were crying at the movie, weren't we?" she says.

Two years after her husband died, Maureen married his brother Derek. He made a promise to look after the girls as his own and was a good stepdad, Halfpenny says. But no one openly grieved or spoke about their loss. Still, she doesn't blame her mother. "She was trying to protect us. She felt if we weren't reminded of him then it would be easier to live without him." It was also the only approach that Maureen knew to take. "It's the working-class attitude, something she told me that she received from her mam too. 'Pull yourself together, Maureen, and get on with it.'"

But the pain that was never discussed knitted into Halfpenny's bones. She felt isolated at school and hated going, always worried that her mother wouldn't be there to pick her up. Often she'd feel overcome by shameful thoughts, "one of which was, if I was OK in my life I can't have really loved my dad". She threw herself into dance school and acting, both of which gave ▶



**From top: performing the jive with Darren Bennett on *Strictly Come Dancing*, 2004; on *EastEnders* as Kate Mitchell, with Steve McFadden as Phil Mitchell, 2003; on *Byker Grove* as Nicola, 1989**

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Halfpenny as a baby with her father, Colin, and her sisters, Paula, left, and Nicola, at their home in Gateshead, 1975. Below: with her Olivier award for *Legally Blonde the Musical* in 2011

“It wasn’t a picturebook relationship with Matt but it was a real relationship. It was everything I had ever wanted”

her the release she craved. “I knew I had to survive the pain, and kids are brilliant at intuitively knowing what they need to do to survive,” she writes.

Her career took off but success wasn’t enough. Every time she felt joy or a sense of achievement it was hollowed out by a gnawing sensation of emptiness, of not being good enough.

By the time she was in her late teens, Halfpenny had moved to London to attend the Webber Douglas drama school and was acting in plays and getting minor roles in TV series including *The Bill*, *Dangerfield* and *Heartbeat*. She was also drinking a lot. “Nights would end with me blacking out asleep at parties. I’d always be the one on the sofa.” Relationships didn’t work out. She divorced Conway in 2010, three years after they married, when Harvey was two. “I was trying to hold down a relationship without knowing who I really was. I was capable of having relationships but I was always searching, always looking,” she says.

In March 2013, when she was single and had no one else to blame for her behaviour, she decided to join AA. It was a revelation. She had no idea people could talk about their feelings in that way. And it was the first step to understanding that all her issues stemmed from trying to bury her grief, which was getting only louder and stronger.

Two years later she was sober, had started therapy and was feeling good. Which is when a friend set her up with Matt, who ran a dating website. From the moment they met, that was it: they were together. “I realised

this was what it was meant to be like. This was what I’ve been waiting for. That isn’t to say it was a picturebook relationship, it was a real relationship, but it was everything I had ever wanted,” she says quietly.

And then the floor fell away. But with Matt’s death came a realisation. “I needed to do what I had not been able to with Dad. I wanted to tackle the grief, to feel it all.” That didn’t stop her being sucked into an abyss of despair. She couldn’t sleep and was suffering from PTSD. Diary entries from her lowest days are pure agony: “Where are you? Have you left me altogether? Why can’t I dream of you? Are there others who need you more? How?”

She kept circling back to a premonition, when Matt had grasped her one evening and said earnestly, “Jill, if I die, promise me you will meet someone else and find love again.” Was this the signal that she should have sent him to a doctor, she kept asking herself.

Gradually, with therapy and a lot of support, she has found ways to live with her grief. Some friends got it right, many didn’t. One evening not long after Matt died she had dinner with a friend who was complaining that her family wouldn’t be able to have the two holidays they usually have that year.

“Moments like that told me exactly where I needed to be, and it wasn’t there or with her,” Halfpenny writes.

Grief counsellors such as Julia Samuel who tackle the subject head on have made strides in encouraging frank conversations, she says, but society still doesn’t know what to do with someone in the throes of suffering. “The idea is, when it’s appropriate and we can all deal with you, you can come back into the room,” Halfpenny says.

She was also determined not to repeat the family cycle of silence, but to be open with her son, Harvey, who was nine when Matt died. “I’d try, without overwhelming him, to be honest about how I felt. I find it strange when people say they won’t cry in front of their children. Are you a robot?” Be honest and say, “Granny died,” is her message. “I can’t bear it when they say, ‘Oh, they’ve gone to the angels,’ or ‘Oh, they’re resting.’ No, they have died. Why is that word so taboo? It’s the truth. It happens all the time.”

Halfpenny knows it took Matt’s death for her and her family to look at what they had been avoiding. “It is easier to sit with the pain because we are used to it. I’ve carried this sack for 30 years, I can carry it for another 30,” ran the logic. But you can’t bury grief, she says, nor simply get over it. She also realised that it is not a betrayal if you feel happy again.

She has been in a new relationship for nearly a year now. “I always thought: if I meet someone else, I wonder how they will feel about me saying, ‘I really miss Matt,’ or ‘God, I loved him so much,’ or having pictures in the house. Ian is so comfortable about it,” she says.

Emblazoned on the steps leading out of the basement gym where Matt died were the Elton John lyrics “I’m still standing” — the song to which Halfpenny danced her *Strictly* jive. As she helped the paramedics carry Matt up the stairs, she knew the song

would now always hold a very different meaning. “It just spun around at that moment,” she says. “But the other night it came on the radio and I found I have mixed feelings. I can feel the pain but I can also remember it is associated with something really joyful. Maybe it’s a sign that I am healing a bit more.” ■



**A Life Reimagined: My Journey of Hope in the Midst of Loss** by Jill Halfpenny (Macmillan £22). To order a copy go to [timesbookshop.co.uk](http://timesbookshop.co.uk). Discount available for Times+ members

#1  
GENERATION X

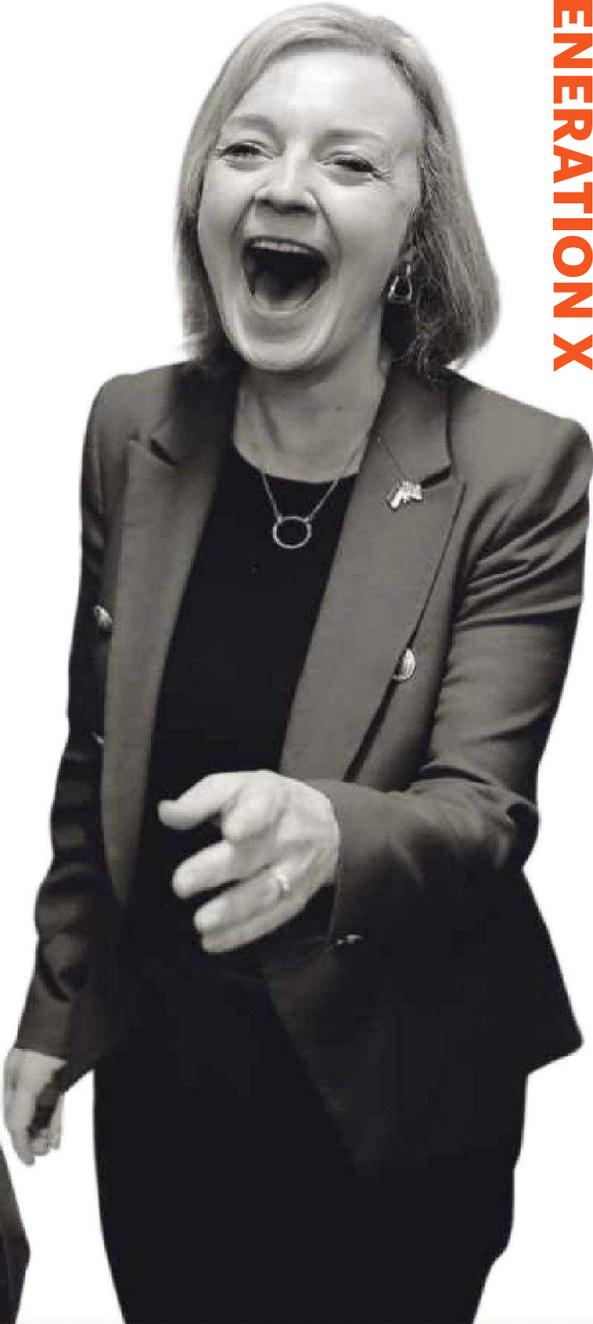
#2  
BOOMER



# Gen Xs

Why are the Conservatives heading for electoral disaster? They forgot

#3 BOOMER



#4 GENERATION X



#5 MILLENNIAL

# potting

about us middle-aged 45 to 58-year-olds, says *Professor Bobby Duffy*



# it

all started so well for my generation, Generation X. We got our name from Douglas Coupland's hip 1991 novel, which defined the supposed "slacker" lifestyle of the twentysomethings of the day, who were "impelled by insolence, intelligence, irony and spirit". We had Kurt Cobain, *Trainspotting*, *The Day Today* and sparked an explosion in rock, rave and rap music cultures that makes today's feel stuck and samey. We were definitely the coolest generation.

But look how we've ended up in middle age: at best ignored, or more often mocked for our pitifully low profile. As a fellow Gen Xer tweeted, we are "from a generation so irrelevant that people can't even be bothered to hate us".

Nowhere is Gen X's collective insignificance clearer than in political analysis. We're barely ever mentioned. Instead the nation's politics have been set up as a battle between old and young. There are endless pieces speculating whether millennials (born 1980-96) will finally usurp baby boomers (born 1945-65) as the driving political force in the UK, and how this is the key electoral battle of our time. The current campaign seems to prove the point, with Conservatives promising more protection

## Gen when?

- Generation Z born 1997-2012
- Millennials born 1980-96
- Generation X born 1966-79
- Baby boomers born 1945-65

for pensioners and national service for the young. Gen X (born 1966-79) get notice only for being embarrassingly absent.

The reality is we're the political middle ground no party can win without holding. We're the ones who have really killed Conservative chances at next month's general election, if current polling holds.

We've always been more electorally powerful than our "forgotten middle child" status makes us out to be. As analysis by the Resolution Foundation think tank shows, we make up 28 per cent of the electorate,

versus 31 per cent each for baby boomers and millennials. Boomers get a bump at the ballot box because they are more likely to vote, but millennials turn out less, so there's barely one percentage point difference between them and Gen X in the proportion of the electorate who say they'll vote.

### The squeezed middle

We were also up for grabs. A third of Gen X say there's no political party they feel particularly close to. It's unusual to get to our stage of life without fixed loyalties: only one in five baby boomers feels the same. So our priorities should matter — and, believe it or not, they are interesting. Ipsos UK data on which issues will shape votes shows Gen X care more than other generations about most things (see chart, below). And it's a collection of concerns on which the Conservatives have failed to convince us.

Gen X are most of all focused on health services — 37 per cent say these are very

## Ignore them at your peril

The issues that voters say are important to them when deciding which party to back — by percentage of each generation

SOURCE: IPSOS UK POLITICAL MONITOR. THE RESPONDENTS COULD SELECT MORE THAN ONE CATEGORY EACH

	GENERATION Z	MILLENNIALS	GENERATION X	BOOMERS
Healthcare/NHS	24	33	37	32
Managing the economy	22	26	29	20
Inflation/cost of living	30	27	20	15
Asylum and immigration	10	14	19	29
Education/schools	13	17	15	9
Housing	12	12	8	9
Environment/climate change	10	11	12	7
Taxation	9	12	9	8



important to their vote. This should have been a key pointer for all parties: there is no route to convincing Gen X without a compelling vision for the NHS.

We're not single-issue voters, however — we also top the table on managing the economy and the environment. This makes sense given the multiple directions in which we're pulled: we're a "squeezed middle", battling with our own health, careers and finances, alongside concern about our children's future and our elderly parents. Our concerns reflect our status as a "hinge" generation.

Generation X were the group most affected by John Major's higher education reforms, with polytechnics morphing into universities, and the tail end of the generation was caught in Tony Blair's 1999 pledge to get 50 per cent of young people into higher education. This meant that about a third of Gen Xers ended up with a university degree — significantly more than baby boomers (one in five) and less than younger generations, who now meet the 50 per cent target.

We also missed the headiest days of the housing boom. Eight in ten of both the baby boomer and pre-1945 generation ended up owning their own home — and, in their twenties and early thirties, it looked as though Gen X were heading for a similar level of ownership. But the house price bubble of the mid-2000s and the financial crisis in 2008 put paid to that for many, and they've levelled out at about 60 per cent home ownership. That's still more fortunate than millennials, who have only recently edged above 50 per cent.

#### The culture war peacemakers

We're also a middle ground in that other generation-defining force — technology.

## Gen X are the middle ground no party can win without holding — the ones who have really killed Conservative chances

Eight in ten millennials are on social media every day, compared with just three in ten baby boomers. Again, nestled between the two is Gen X, of which about half are daily users. There has been talk about whether this could be the "first TikTok election", but the fact that the main parties set up their accounts only in the past few weeks suggests they're aware of the limitations of the platform's demographic reach.

Gen X's very average use of social media is reflected in their cultural views. The Policy Institute at King's College London, where I work, has run a series of studies on "culture war" issues that show there is a huge gap between the youngest and oldest in society when it comes to their views on topics including the Empire, trans rights, immigration and gender identity. Based on these opinions, 38 per cent of Gen X (born since 1997) can be categorised as

"progressive", compared with only 5 per cent of the pre-1945 generation. Half of that oldest generation are "traditionalists", compared with only 15 per cent of Gen Z or millennials (see chart, page 20).

Gen X, in contrast, are a balanced blend of these different outlooks. It's perhaps no surprise that we're so median, given that our formative years were moulded by something called "the Great Moderation" — a long, relatively uneventful period of reduced economic volatility from the mid-1980s to the financial crisis in 2007.

This points to an electoral strategy to avoid: there is no majority to be gained in Gen X — and therefore the electorate as a whole — by fighting a "culture war". The Conservative focus on immigration and "anti-woke" messaging plays well with the older base, but splits Gen X or just leaves them cold.

#### The forgotten sibling

So, if Gen X are such a clear core to the electorate, why have we been ignored, particularly by the Conservatives? The reasons fall into two main groups.

First, our noisy generational neighbours have grabbed more attention and influence. Baby boomers have bent political and economic outcomes to their will for decades, driven by a self-sustaining cycle of cultural, political and economic power. They benefited most from the long run of growth after the Second World War, particularly in private wealth, which not only ballooned but concentrated in one cohort: they own 59 per cent of all private wealth despite making up a quarter of the population.

Their concerns also shape national conversations and decisions, and have had a particular hold over the Conservative Party. For example, boomers are, by some ►



distance, the generation most likely to say immigration will be a key issue to their vote in the next election, which reflects their broader concern about cultural change in the UK. Baby boomers (55 per cent) and the pre-1945 generation (61 per cent) were the only generations where a majority actually voted for Brexit, compared with 45 per cent of Gen X and just 28 per cent of millennials.

Gen X's younger generational neighbours, the millennials, have a lot less money but make up for it with an extraordinary cultural profile. This was partly driven by new technological forces, which resulted in them being the first generation of young people who did the dumb things of youth under the forensic glare of social media. Their love of topknots, pumpkin-spiced drinks and avocados — so the clichés go — would have passed without much comment if it wasn't captured in endless memes.

Millennial and Gen Z priorities reflect the more difficult economic circumstances they have faced, with housing and the cost of living the issues they are most likely to say are key voting issues for them compared with other generations. For example, 30 per cent of Gen Z pick out cost of living, which is markedly different from the comfortably off baby boomers — with their wealth, final salary pensions and triple lock protecting them from the worst of the financial squeeze. Only 15 per cent of them say cost of living will shape their vote.

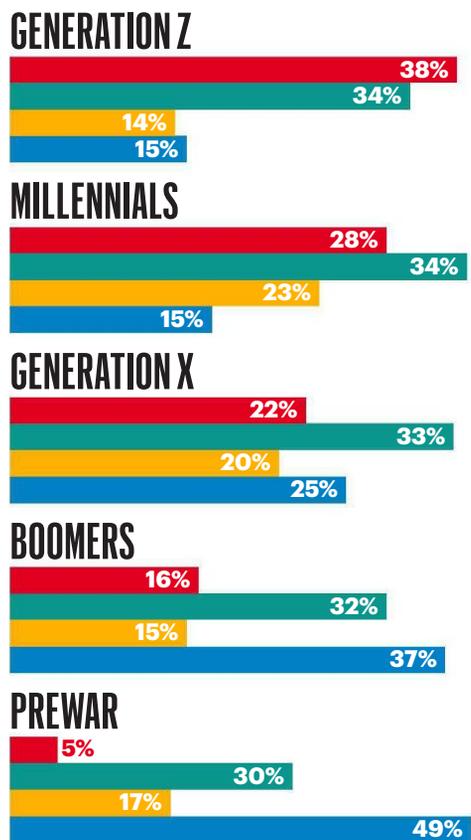
All of this points to the real reason Gen X was the forgotten sibling in the run-up to the election: these age divides defined our politics for much of the past decade in a way we hadn't seen before. At the last two general elections there was an extraordinary gap in party support at each end of the age spectrum: in 2019 just one in five young people voted Conservative, while three in

## Everything in moderation

How the generations compare when asked about their views on cultural issues from trans rights to the Empire

- Progressives
- Moderates
- Disengaged
- Traditionalists

SOURCE: POLICY INSTITUTE/IPSON UK



five voted Labour, and the older vote was a near perfect mirror opposite. Gen X were ignored because they more or less matched the national average.

These remarkable patterns inevitably led to our politics being framed as purely about “old versus young” — and in that something vital was missed: a collapse in Gen X support for the Conservatives over the past couple of years.

### The real political centre ground

We've had endless analysis of how millennials were bucking one of the key accepted trends in political science — that we tend to get more conservative as we age. This “political life cycle” effect — captured in the multi-attributed quip that “if you are not a liberal at 25 you have no heart, but if you are not a conservative at 35 you have no brain” — seemed to be breaking down. Another thing that millennials have “killed”, along with, supposedly, marriage, the napkin industry, the Olympics and marmalade.

As so often, this story of millennial exceptionalism isn't the full picture. The real threat to the Tories is that Gen X are also not following the pattern of growing more conservative as they age. It looked as though they were going to, up to 2021 — but then their support for the Conservatives collapsed and the gap between them and the young closed (see graph, right). The Tories lost the country when they lost Gen X.

Our middle-ground status has seen us likened to Switzerland in this intergenerational war — but that's not an epithet I expect many Gen Xers would approve of, with its suggestion of staying out of it for our own quiet gains. Instead, Gen X should be seen as a bellwether



constituency. Over the decades countless column inches have been dedicated to “Mondeo man” and “Worcester woman”. In the run-up to this election we’ve had a quick succession of Stevenage, Whitby and even Waitrose women — when Gen X is the real political centre that parties should be aiming for. Gen X is not a label for a tiny sliver of the population, but a real, meaningful middle.

This isn’t just because the average potential voter age in 2024 will be about 49 (prime Gen X). Much more important, our lived experience and electoral concerns are a bridge between two behemoths that have been driven in very different directions by huge economic, cultural and technological shifts. We blend a bit of both.

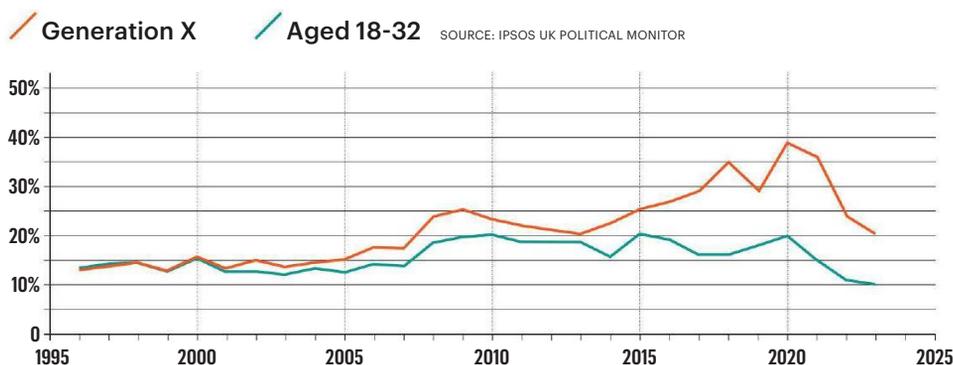
### How Labour (almost) got it right

In stark contrast to the Conservatives, Labour seems to have reached a similar conclusion with its “median voter” strategy. The party’s refusal to promote anything that could be seen as radical is not an accident. It has also been characterised as a “Ming vase strategy”, stepping carefully and, above all else, avoiding danger. This has been described as an attempt to woo “middle-aged mortgage man”, which is not just sexist but misleading; just call it what it is — a Gen X strategy. Keir Starmer is pitching “a politics that treats a little lighter on all of our lives”, which could barely be more Gen X-friendly. And it seems to be working, with polls showing a bump in early-middle-age support for Labour during the campaign.

But while this generational pattern has very likely done for the Conservatives in 2024, we should avoid thinking it is locked in for good. It will move again. I’ve been sorting generational myths from realities

## Support for the Tory party by age group

Gen X were growing more conservative over time — until recently, when the gap started to close with the younger generation



for decades now, and our tendency to draw stricter lines than justified between generations or make too bold claims about their distinctive characters can be a trap. Yes, we’re shaped by when we were born and our formative experiences are important, but generational analysis too easily trips into something closer to astrology and ends up with all the predictive power of a horoscope.

The reality is that generational differences are just one of three forces shaping our politics and societies: age, period and cohort effects. That is, how people vote can be related to what stage they are in their life cycle (age), what’s happening right now in politics (period) and what generation they were born into and so what was happening in their formative years (cohort). All change is explained by a mix of these three effects and understanding the balance between them is the real key to understanding the future, not obsessing about only one.

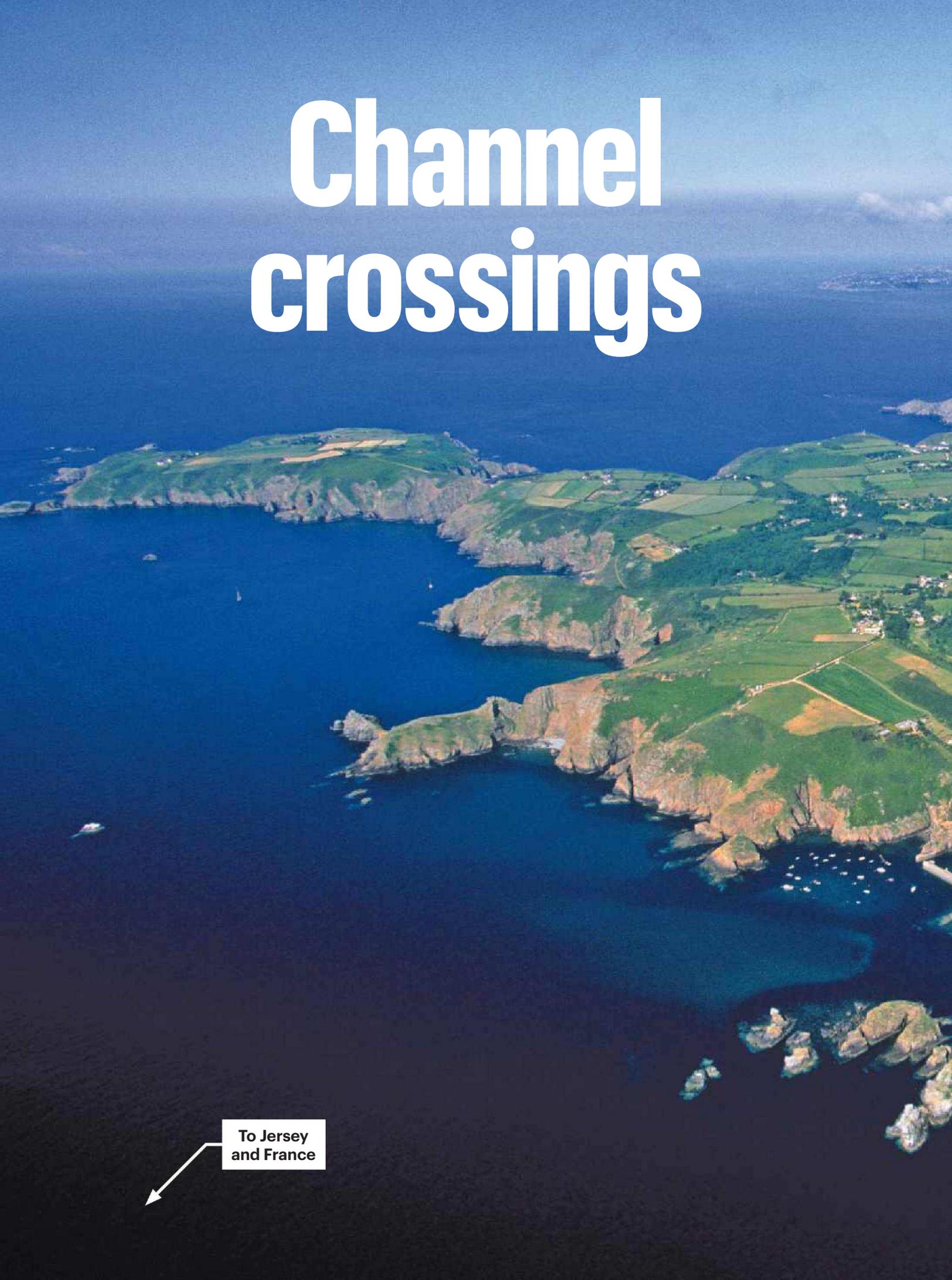
Politics is replete with gnomish sayings about change. “Events, dear boy, events” from Harold Macmillan and “A week is a long time in politics” (supposedly) from Harold Wilson are just as overused as the political life cycle quote for a reason: period effects matter in politics. Things will shift again and new circumstances and patterns will assert themselves.

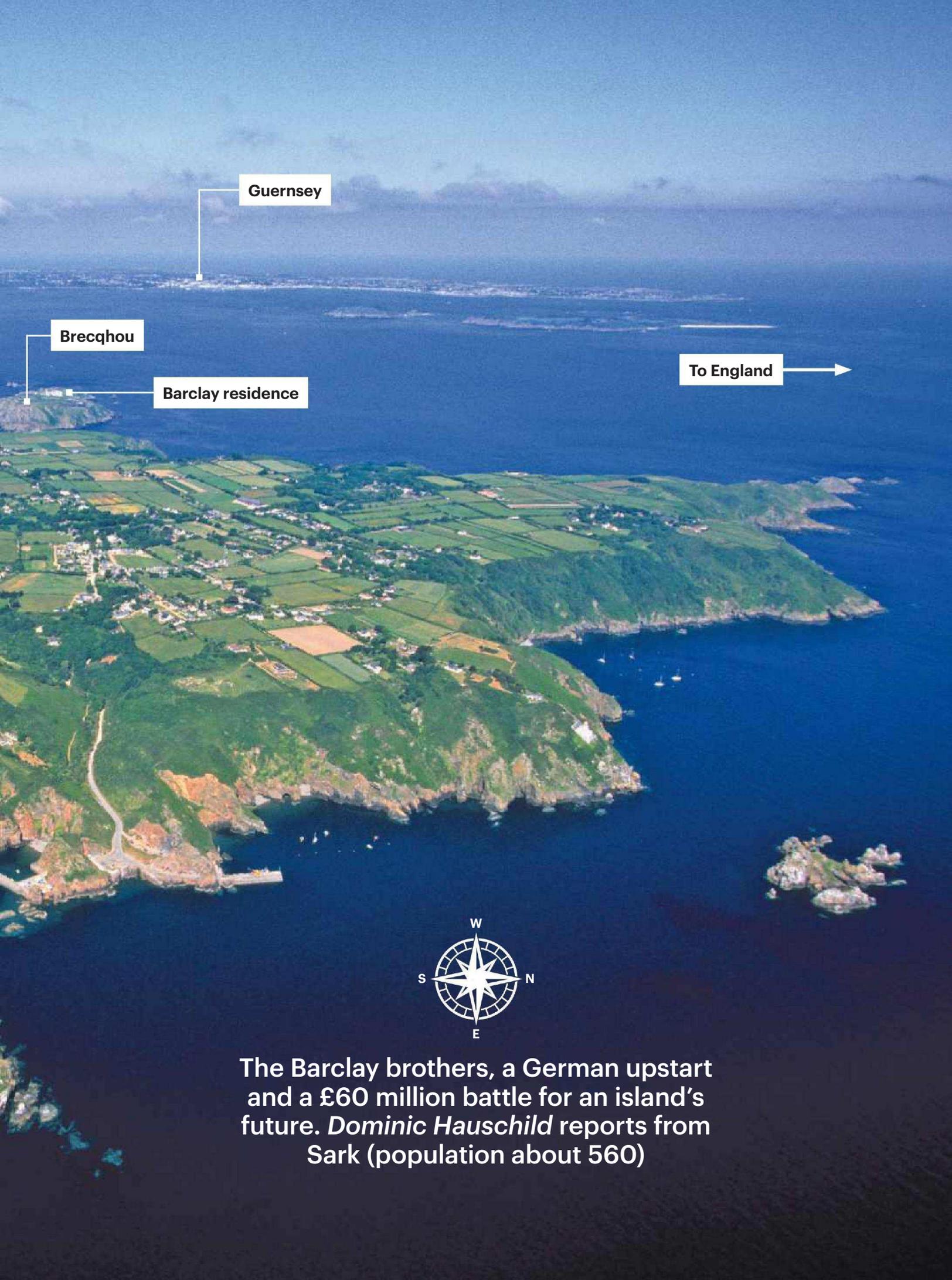
For now, though, whether we like it or not, Gen X are the key to understanding why the Conservatives look set to lose the UK election in 2024. And for those Gen Xers who’ve studiously avoided the limelight, don’t worry — another eye-catching trend will be along soon enough and we can go back to our natural state, providing our intelligent, insolent and ironic commentary from the sidelines ■

**Bobby Duffy is professor of public policy and director of the Policy Institute, King’s College London**

# Channel crossings

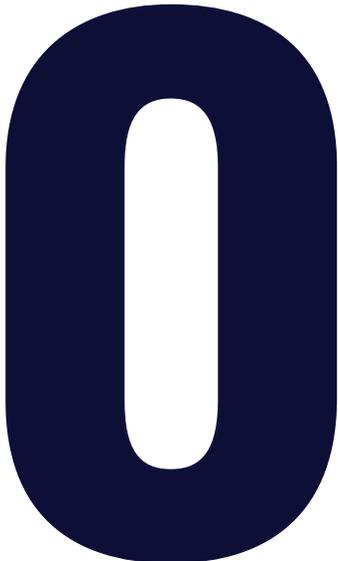
To Jersey  
and France

An aerial photograph of a coastal region, likely in the Channel Islands. The landscape features rolling green hills, patchwork fields, and rugged, rocky cliffs that meet a deep blue bay. Several small white boats are visible in the water. In the bottom left corner, a white arrow points from a text box towards the sea.



The Barclay brothers, a German upstart and a £60 million battle for an island's future. *Dominic Hauschild* reports from Sark (population about 560)

Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip enjoy a horse-drawn tour of Sark in 1949; the restaurateurs Margita Kalniete and Scott Sullivan have seen the number of visitors to the island dwindle



On Friday, May 10, Christopher Beaumont stood outside St Peter's Church in a navy suit and panama hat, turning crimson in the midday sun. His head was bowed in reverence as the church bells pealed and two men in military uniform slowly lowered their ceremonial flags. The air smelt of the wild garlic that lined the unpaved streets. Over the road about a dozen people had gathered to pay their respects. It was Liberation Day on Sark, the small Channel Island ten miles east of Guernsey.

Beaumont's family is relatively new to Sark, having provided the island's ruling "seigneur" for just six generations. The first seigneur was anointed by Queen Elizabeth I in 1563, and the title has changed hands many times since. But Beaumont, 67, enjoys far less power than any who came before him. The reasons for this are tied up with the billionaire twin brothers David and Frederick Barclay, who bought Brecqhou, a rocky 70-acre outcrop next to Sark, in 1993. Over the following decades, they acquired about a quarter of the property and land on its larger neighbour.

After the bells finished tolling Beaumont delivered a short speech, describing the day in 1940 that the German military invaded the archipelago. Last month an official inquiry led by Lord Eric Pickles found as many as 1,000 people may have been killed in concentration camps on the nearby island of Alderney.

Now, nearly 80 years after Hitler's troops were ejected from Sark, the seigneur has become the face of a bid to do the same thing to the Barclay family. Beaumont has joined forces with Swen Lorenz, an eccentric German entrepreneur who first moved to the island in 2004, and formed a company that they hope will seize control of the Barclays' vast portfolio of disused land and property. They say they want to drag the island into the 21st century by investing in new housing, green energy and modern entertainment facilities. An offer of about £60 million is set to be made to the Barclay family within weeks.

It should be a time of jubilation. But in the quiet streets of Sark suspicion is mounting over the true intentions of

Beaumont and Lorenz. While some people speak with fondness about their plummy-voiced seigneur, who careers about the island waving cheerfully at the locals and greeting them by name, others resent him as an outsider who didn't move to Sark until he was 59, after a long career in the armed forces and as a military contractor.

The island was Europe's last feudal state until 2008, when, with pressure from the British government, it voted to adopt democracy. Some islanders now fear that their newly won democratic rights are under threat, and wonder whether they are swapping the devils they know — the Barclay family — for a new beast entirely.

### "SOMETHING HAS TO CHANGE"

Sark, like the other Channel Islands, is not part of the United Kingdom in the ordinary sense. It is a self-governing jurisdiction within the Crown Dependency of Guernsey, and King Charles is the head of state only in his capacity as the Duke of Normandy. While the UK sets foreign policy and provides military support, nearly

everything else is left up to the Sarkese. The island has its own parliament, the Chief Pleas, and its parliamentarians are called conseillers. Its people will not vote in the UK's upcoming general election.

Its population is about 560, although no official records are kept of exact numbers. The island is a little over three miles in length and would take about an hour to walk from one end to the other. By law there are no cars on Sark, so locals get around by foot, bike or horse-drawn carriage. The only motorised vehicles are the tractors that are used to trundle tourists up the hill from the harbour. Geographically it is closer to France than it is to England, reflected in the fact that Sercquiais — the dialect spoken by a tiny number of locals — descends from an archaic Norman language.

As for most island communities, the sea plays a large part in the lives of Sark's people. Unless they own a private boat, the only way on or off the island is by buying passage on a ferry such as the Corsaire de Sercq, a double-decker boat that shuttles between Sark and Guernsey three to five times a day. For many years seafood was Sark's primary export, with crab and mussels common on restaurant menus. The ormer — a meaty oyster-like mollusc that has suffered from overfishing — is considered a delicacy.

Today, Sark's main industry is tourism. At Hathaways restaurant in the north of the island I tuck into a fresh crab sandwich, locally caught and rich in flavour, and a pint of Sark's own Royal Fief lager. Opposite me sit Margita Kalniete, 39, and Scott Sullivan, 47, who own the restaurant as well as Hugo's, a nearby pub. Kalniete is eating a Sark lobster, caught this morning. Between mouthfuls she shows me a mock-up on her phone of a portable cocktail bar she plans to build for weddings and parties.

The concern for people like Sullivan and Kalniete is that tourist numbers are down. In 1985 the island would regularly host up to 2,000 holidaymakers a day, filling their lungs with fresh sea air and eating ice cream made from the milk of its dairy cows. At one point, Sark even considered capping visitor numbers. But now just 350 come on a good day. In the era of cheap flights, people go further afield on holiday. Sark, the locals say, is decaying. "You walk around the island and you can see the place is in such a poor state," Kalniete says. Sullivan agrees: "Something has to change. Lots of tourists are interested in spending a week or more here, but aside from looking at the incredible views there isn't much to entertain them."

"I think we need a spa, a gym and a beautician," says Kalniete, who often travels to Portsmouth in Hampshire to get her nails done. For Sullivan, it is a matter of simple amenities. "I would like to see more people on the island so we can open hotels in the winter. It's a massive problem in the winter when people actually want to come but they don't have anywhere



## "YOU CAN SEE THE PLACE IS IN SUCH A POOR STATE. ASIDE FROM THE INCREDIBLE VIEWS, THERE ISN'T MUCH TO ENTERTAIN VISITORS"

**Below: David, left, and Frederick Barclay are knighted in 2000. Above: the castle they built on Brecqhou, their private island off the west coast of Sark**



to stay because hotels just close for three, four or five months."

### THE BARCLAY BROTHERS' EMPIRE

Unlocking the island's potential means releasing properties tied up in the troubled Barclays' estate. How did it come to this? David and Frederick Barclay were not born into money. Their father was a travelling salesman, and the twins, born in 1934, grew up in a two-bedroom flat in west London, where they lived with their parents and six siblings. They began to invest in property when land was cheap. Over six decades the twins built an empire consisting of hotels including the Ritz and Claridge's, the Telegraph newspaper and the Spectator magazine, and in retail. By 2020 The Sunday Times Rich List estimated their wealth to be £7 billion.

Nearly three decades earlier the reclusive twins had bought the island of Brecqhou, on which they built an enormous mock-gothic castle for a rumoured £90 million. The Sarkese, at first hopeful, were affronted when floodlights were set up so builders could work around the clock. With no street lights and little light pollution, Sark is a designated dark sky zone.

After their Sark property land grab, the Barclays began to throw their weight around. They demanded Brecqhou's independence from Sark and launched an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the title of seigneur from Beaumont's father, Michael.

Relations reached a nadir after Sark adopted democracy, in part due to pressure from the Barclays. It was they who led the campaign to scrap feudalism on the island — primarily because they disagreed with Sark's outdated primogeniture inheritance laws. In January 2008 the justice secretary and lord chancellor, Jack Straw, told Sark that it must adopt a democratic legislature, by way of a referendum. There was no option to keep the existing arrangement but a slim majority of residents voted for a fully elected chamber, rather than a mix of elected and ►

inherited seats like the UK's House of Lords. At the time, the presiding officer of the Chief Pleas, Reginald Guille, called it a "momentous day".

The following December, when Sark held the first elections in the island's history, the Barclays fielded nine hand-picked candidates for the 18 possible seats on the Chief Pleas. Locals recalled threats of severe repercussions if their slate was unsuccessful; the next day, when not a single one of their favoured candidates were elected, they sacked the 140 islanders working in their hotels, restaurants and pubs, many of which remain closed to this day. Guille exploded, telling the BBC that the last time the islanders had been told how to vote was during the German occupation. "We got our independence back in 1945 at the point of a bayonet."

Gordon Dawes, the Barclays' lawyer on Guernsey, lamented that Sark would now "go back to what it was before the Barclays came and invested... The true sadness of it all is that the real loser will be Sark."

In latter years the twins were torn apart by a rift over money and succession plans, as David insisted that his four sons inherit more of their joint fortune than his brother's one daughter. The situation was made worse after it was revealed David's son Alistair planted a bugging device in the family's private residence at the Ritz hotel.

When David died three years ago, Frederick did not attend his funeral. Alistair, now 34, became the presumptive owner of the Sark portfolio through the trustees of his late father's estate. Since then, the family has been racked by financial woes resulting in a contentious attempt to sell the Telegraph newspaper. In February Alistair was issued with a bankruptcy petition that alleged he was in default of borrowings of almost £1 million. The same month it was reported that the estate agent Knight Frank had been invited to assess the value of the land and property on Sark.

## THE GERMAN INVESTOR

On the day I make the crossing from Guernsey to Sark, the wind is calm and the sea is smooth. The Corsaire de Sercq makes record time, just 45 minutes, and as I look out towards the island from the upper deck I spot half a dozen leaping dolphins.

Eschewing the tractor, I choose to walk up the hill into town. At its top I am met by Swen Lorenz, 49, the German entrepreneur with a plan to reinvigorate the island. Originally from a village near Frankfurt, he first moved to Sark in 2004, having read about it in a book called *218 Tax Havens*. Bald, and dressed in a smart shirt open at the neck, he hasn't shed his soft German accent.

He gained more experience with far-flung outcrops when he worked as executive director of the Charles Darwin Foundation, a conservation organisation for the Galapagos Islands. He lived there

for four years, he says, "which gave me a lot of experience, both good and bad". After falling out with the board, he was sacked from that role in 2015, and eventually moved back to Sark in 2017.

Lorenz gained notoriety for launching an international campaign to increase the population of Sark. To do so, he wrote a 300-page book — sold to foreign businessmen for the surprisingly high price of £1,000 — which highlighted, among other things, the island's extraordinarily low taxes. There is no income or inheritance tax, no capital gains or VAT. The average annual tax bill is just £2,000 — primarily made up of property tax.

His plan worked for a time. "Swathes of properties in Sark didn't have a tenant. Basically, I filled up the empty space," he

## ORIGINALLY FROM A VILLAGE NEAR FRANKFURT, LORENZ MOVED TO SARK IN 2004 HAVING READ ABOUT IT IN A BOOK CALLED 218 TAX HAVENS

**Swen Lorenz, a Sark resident from Germany, plans to use £60 million in investor money to buy the Barclay family's stake on the island and spark regeneration**



says. By 2021 a few hundred people immigrated, many from Germany, increasing the island's population by about 40 per cent. The newcomers were dubbed by residents and local media as "Swen's people". Since then about half have left, many having found that this quirky island with few mod cons was not the libertarian paradise they hoped it would be.

Some of those who stayed have caused controversy, including a Swede named Gal Fridman. Earlier this year Fridman was jailed for exporting military goods — namely, bulletproof shields and body armour — to Macau, a special administrative region of China, from the Channel Islands, and without a licence. He claimed they were "float boards" intended for boating purposes.

Last year Lorenz set up the Sark Property Company, of which he is chief executive. Beaumont is a director, as is a Switzerland-based investor named Richard Johnson. The trio intend to use it to purchase the Barclay family's entire stake in the island after the company's board signs off on a £60 million bid at a meeting on June 24.

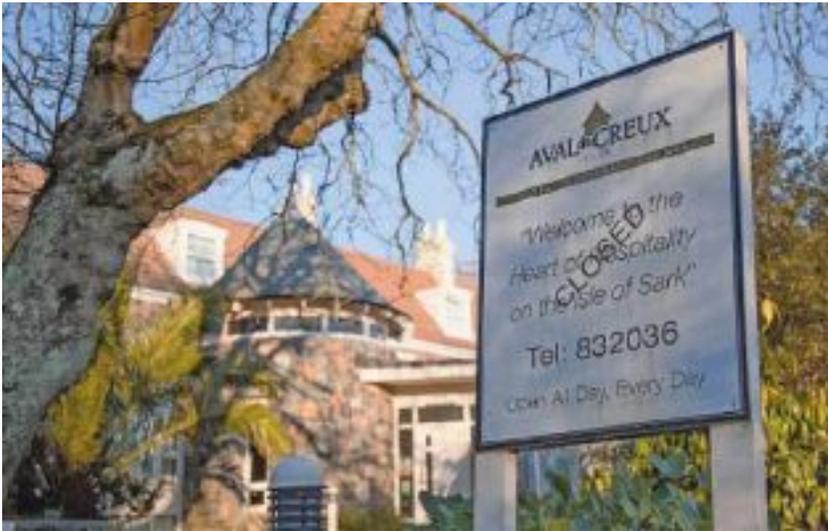
Sitting in the trendy living room of the home he shares with his girlfriend, an interior designer, Lorenz says he has a number of investors — "entrepreneurial high net-worth individuals" — already lined up, including an "anchor investor" who he says is prepared to stump up 10 per cent of the investment package. Lorenz is confident, although over email Alistair Barclay says the future of the Sark estate is not up to "the Barclay family, as it rests with the trustees of the late Sir David Barclay's estate."

Part of the portfolio is the Aval du Creux, a formerly stately hotel that once had a heated outdoor swimming pool and a high-end restaurant. It shut in 2014 and has remained uninhabited. Inside, black mould creeps along the ceilings and the bare concrete floor is damp with rainwater. A sorry-looking sign at the entrance reads: "The Heart of Hospitality on the Isle of Sark."

Despite its prime location, many have balked at the decrepit nature of the building. The financier and hotelier Guy Hands was at one point interested in taking charge, but pulled out after visiting and realising the scale of work needed. "The Aval du Creux needs about £1 million of investment," Lorenz sighs.

His plans don't stop at hotels. Lorenz hopes to bring in about £200 million of further investments to "take over and improve" Sark's infrastructure. Proposals include putting renewable energy projects on the island, providing more regular ferry services and building affordable housing.

Near Lorenz's home is a small parcel of land I initially assume is a scrapyard. Off to one side, a large green tank sits opposite a stone shed with a corrugated roof. A small forklift idles stationary in the unpaved lot. "This," Lorenz says with a sweep of his arm, "is Sark's energy company." Somehow, it



provides energy for the entire island. “This place is falling apart,” Lorenz says. “But the Barclay estate owns the freehold, and there are only six years left on the lease, so the landlord is refusing to invest.”

Later Alan Witney-Price, the managing director of Sark Electricity, tells me he is in negotiations to extend the lease. He says that he is “desperate” to invest in the site, but every plan he submitted to the island authorities has been “turned down”. For Lorenz the island is the ideal location for new solar, wind and tidal energy instead of the diesel generators currently in use.

His ambitions for the Sark Property Company go further still. Intriguingly, he suggests the company could become Sark’s de facto border force. “Sark has virtually no background checks on anyone who moves here,” he explains. “And there have been in the past a not insignificant number of criminals who moved here. We as a company could run all our new tenants or property owners through background checks.”

Infrastructure, transport, housing, energy, immigration — does Lorenz want to become the next feudal lord of Sark? “Absolutely not,” he replies. “It’s actually the opposite. We would not allow any investor to hold more than 10 per cent of the company because we want to create the maximum possible transparency.” He has also pledged to step down as CEO after two years, and has mooted the possibility of taking the Sark Property Company public, giving shares to “every bona fide resident of Sark”.

So, what does Lorenz get out of this? “First of all, I live here and I would really like it to become a better place to live,” he says,

adding: “Yeah, I’m also doing this because it’s a commercially interesting project and I will be making money out of that.”

## THE CHIEF PLEAS

The Speaker of the Chief Pleas is a man named Paul Armorgie. Tall and with a deep, jolly voice, there is no doubt that he could control a room full of rowdy conseillers. He meets me outside the island’s parliament, which doubles as its sole courtroom. The squat, one-storey building used to be Sark’s schoolhouse. Armorgie, 68, explains that before the school moved, the island’s 18 conseillers had to push back the children’s desks when they met in the evenings.

Above Armorgie’s head hangs a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. “We’ve applied for a new one of the King,” he says, “but they haven’t got round to us yet.”

As the man responsible for upholding the rule of democracy in Sark, Armorgie has been less than impressed with Beaumont and Lorenz: the pair behind the Sark Property Company, he says, have failed to properly ►

**Above: the Aval du Creux hotel, left, and other properties in the Barclay portfolio such as La Rondellerie, right, are in disrepair. Below: Sark’s seigneur, Christopher Beaumont; the Speaker Paul Armorgie in the Chief Pleas**



# Luxury residences available across 5-star resorts in the UK



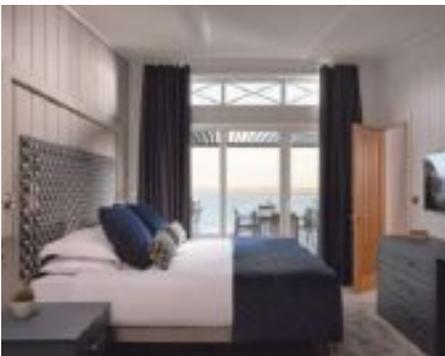
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consult on their plans with the people of Sark or the Chief Pleas. “Our democracy is very young, very vulnerable and very fragile. Therefore, there is a concern that a quarter of the island is effectively up for sale to commercial purchasers. Who is lined up to take the place of the Barclays? Are we going to be better off or worse off?” It is a sentiment repeated by one of his conseiller colleagues, who asks not to be named. “Engagement has been shocking,” they rage.

For his part, Lorenz claims that he has repeatedly asked the conseillers for meetings to discuss his plans. He says the Sark Property Company has engaged the King’s Foundation to help create an architectural design code for the island, as it did for Poundbury, King Charles’s urban planning project in Dorset, and that he has asked members of the Chief Pleas to meet them. But the conseiller tells me: “Sven has never asked for a proper meeting between him and any of the committees.”

For Armorgie, it is also a matter of principle. “To have undue power and control rested in too few people is not good for our democracy,” he says, tapping the desk to emphasise his point. “It comes back to this thing about power and control, which I am sure was the Barclays’ ambition. If that is put in the hands of too few people, they have the ability to unduly influence the democratic principles of the island.”

Beaumont doesn’t appear fazed by the criticism when I meet him for a half pint of Royal Fief back at Hathaways, which sits next door to his palatial residence, La Seigneurie. Instead, he doubles down on his irritation that the role of the seigneur was defanged a decade and a half ago. His ire towards

**Helen Plummer at the century-old Mon Plaisir Stores, decked with bunting for Sark’s Liberation Day**

**“I KNOW SARK WILL CHANGE — WE’VE GOT TELEVISIONS AND PHONES THESE DAYS. IF THEY TIDY IT ALL UP AND BRING IN NEW LIFE, THAT’S GOOD”**

Sark’s parliamentarians is apparent. “They simply do not have the experience, the education, the knowledge that you need to do the job we require them to do as a government,” he says, rolling his eyes.

Would he say democracy doesn’t work on Sark? “Yes,” he replies. “Exactly. I think it would probably be better run by a sort of pseudo-corporate entity, or a not-for-profit community interest company,” he says, sounding suspiciously as if he is referring to his own Sark Property Company.

He rails against what he calls “democratic fundamentalism — you know, we’re forced

down this line, “You must be democratic. You can’t be anything else.” Instead, Beaumont says: “One of our key tests is to be transparent. Rather than telling people what we’re going to do to them, we will hire experts to ask people what they want and then we’ll do that.”

In a democracy, politicians can be voted out. What’s to stop Beaumont and Lorenz doing whatever they want? “Well...” he says, pausing thoughtfully. “Nothing. Except that we said we would be transparent.”

For now, the seigneur is focused on nuts and bolts. He becomes particularly excited by the island’s mortgage market — which is, by convention, nonexistent, and which he and Lorenz are seeking to establish. “In 1611 the seigneur of the day persuaded the Crown to issue a charter banning people from taking out mortgages on a property, so they had to buy their homes outright.” That law was overturned four years ago, but no banks have started offering mortgages yet. “The banks are incredibly risk averse,” Beaumont says. “When it comes to doing a refurb you have to physically have cash in the bank.”

## THIS IS SARK

When I raise the prospect of grand infrastructure projects, wind turbines and new housing with Helen Plummer, who owns the century-old food shop Mon Plaisir Stores, she wrinkles her nose. Sitting in the sun in the shop’s picturesque garden, we are surrounded by Union Jack bunting hung up for Liberation Day.

“I worry about overpopulating the island,” she says softly as her husband potters around the flowerbeds. “I also worry about water, because in the summer when there is a drought we have to be very careful with it.”

Plummer, 74, says her family has lived on Sark since the 1700s. The night before the annual Liberation Day celebrations Esther Perrée, Plummer’s 95-year-old aunt who lived through the Second World War and the occupation of the Channel Islands, died. Perrée was one of the last three people on the island who could speak Sercquiais.

Plummer is highly conscious of the past yet not averse to progress. As she waves to a young girl riding a pony past her shop, she says: “I know Sark will change. We’ve got televisions and phones these days. If they’re going to upgrade the buildings that are falling down, tidying it all up and bringing in new life, then that’s good.”

Although Lorenz and Beaumont are confident they are poised to strike a deal with Alistair Barclay, the trustees of the late Sir David could take a different route, chopping up the portfolio and selling it off piecemeal to the highest bidder.

Plummer has a simple message to whoever ends up with the controlling stake on the island: “Just don’t go mad. We are different. OK, our roads are dusty in the summer and muddy in the winter but,” she declares proudly, “this is Sark.” ■

Mehtab as a newly qualified Met Police officer with her mother, who worked in an east London factory, c1988

# FEMALE, MUSLIM AND IN THE MET

**Nusrit Mehtab rose to be the highest-ranked Asian woman in London's police — but quit after decades of racism and misogyny. Is the force beyond change? Interview by *Phoebe Luckhurst***





ne evening in 1988, a few months after she qualified as a police officer, Nusrit Mehtab presented for night duty at Leman Street police station in Whitechapel, east London. Usually at this time her colleagues would be scattered around the station, but tonight, in the stuffy room where staff filled out their paperwork, her male colleagues had congregated as if waiting for a meeting to start. As she crossed the room, a hush fell.

Her in-tray contained a brown envelope, addressed with her police number and name — 269 Mehtab. She opened it as the room watched. Inside was a thick rubber contraption, about six or seven inches long, with an on-off switch on the side: a sex toy.

“There’s this roar of laughter,” she says. “Maximum impact, maximum humiliation, a power play — we’re all men, and we’re going to do this to a 5ft 4in Asian woman who we know is a Muslim. ‘Who does she think she is? Bit defiant. Let’s teach her a lesson.’” Later one of the men sidled up to offer advice. “You should have just made a joke of it. Said, ‘Oh thanks, I’ll use it later.’”

This was not the only time in her 30-year career in the Metropolitan Police that Mehtab’s colleagues taught her a “lesson”. On her first day at Leman Street a senior colleague asked for her “English name” before informing her he would be calling her “Nidgit”. Colleagues wanted to know whether she ate only curry. In one job at a police station in northeast London in 2019, an Asian colleague’s picture was defaced with graffiti and, shortly after, Mehtab discovered a swastika daubed on a wall. She asked for an investigation, but says she was told she was being overdramatic.

That was just the racism. She watched male officers put their hands up female colleagues’ skirts to check if they were wearing stockings and suspenders. After she told another senior colleague in the undercover unit that she was frustrated that

women weren’t getting better undercover roles, he told her to leave the room. On night shifts she’d sit uncomfortably in patrol cars parked outside nightclubs with men who gleefully called this slot “going to see the crumpet”.

Despite this Mehtab rose up the ranks to superintendent and was at one point the most senior Asian woman in the Met. But promotions, she says, became increasingly protracted battles with hostile superiors who closed ranks to mentor and elevate their “golden boys”. In 2017, after questioning the integrity of the Met’s promotion process, she consulted an employment lawyer and instigated an employment tribunal against the force claiming racism and misogyny. In late 2019 a report in *The Sun* revealed the Met had been hit by racism allegations by senior black and Asian officers, including the former chief superintendent Parm Sandhu — and Mehtab. It cited her tribunal. She found herself ostracised by colleagues, comparing the way they appeared to talk about her in the office to the catty teens in the film *Mean Girls*.

In January 2020, burnt out, she resigned. Her tribunal was going on, but when Covid arrived the Met said it didn’t have the manpower to investigate her claims. Finally, in May 2022, the Met — which denied all of her claims — agreed to settle the case out of court. Now she is publishing *Off the Beat*, a memoir about her career and what she sees as a rotten culture inside the UK’s largest police force, a view shared by last year’s Casey review into the Met’s standards of behaviour and internal culture, which found sexism and bullying to be endemic.

Mehtab’s memoir could be another reckoning for the Met, which has been beset by scandals over the past few years. In 2020 officers at Charing Cross police station used WhatsApp groups to share images of the dead bodies of the sisters

Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, who had been murdered in a London park. In 2021 Wayne Couzens, a serving police officer, kidnapped, raped and murdered Sarah Everard after using his warrant card to lure her into his police car. Two years later David Carrick, like Couzens a firearms officer with the Met, was unmasked as a serial rapist and imprisoned after a 17-year campaign of violence against women.

Mehtab meets me in London. In her fifties, she is dressed in a sky-blue suit and heels, with trainers stuffed into her handbag. For her there is no doubt the institution is broken. “It has been in crisis for a long, long time. They’re very good at changing technical things but they haven’t tackled the culture.” New recruits, she says, still enter a closed world of boozy, puerile jokes that is “resistant to difference”. “It’s ‘banter’, isn’t it?” she says. “‘Oh, it’s only a joke, you can’t take a joke.’ Everyone else finds it funny but you don’t. Things like that divide you.”

She wasn’t surprised, she says, when it was revealed that two officers had shared WhatsApp messages describing the murdered sisters Henry and Smallman as “dead birds”. “It says something about how you view black women in the community. You just don’t value them as people.”

Mehtab grew up in east London, the daughter of immigrant Pakistanis who moved to the capital in the 1970s, and describes herself as a “true East Ender”. She politely closes down questions about her family but will say that her mother, who took a job as a machinist in an East End factory when she moved to London, was an important influence. “I always describe her as a real feminist. One thing she said to me is to get an education because nobody can take that away from you. And that stood with me. The strength, the resilience — it came from her.” Her mother died in 2021 and *Off the Beat* is dedicated to her.

After Mehtab graduated with a degree in sociology and psychology from the University of London, she wanted to be an air hostess. A careers adviser concluded she was “too short and too big” and should aspire to more than being a “waitress in the sky”, adding that the Met was recruiting. Inspired to get fit, Mehtab started running at a local track and passed the entry interview and physical test in autumn 1987.

Growing up in London in the 1970s and 1980s, when the National Front stomped the streets with impunity, Mehtab had not regarded the police as her protectors. She recalls cowering in a phone box with her mother and siblings, surrounded by a gang of skinheads who kicked the door and spat slurs at them. Yet she was hopeful she could “make things better for people like me”.

She didn’t tell her mother she’d applied for the force until she’d been accepted. When she read the letter aloud, her mother was clearly “concerned, but kept the specifics of those doubts to herself”.

**ONE WOMAN'S APPLICATION WAS REJECTED AFTER SHE ASKED TO MOVE THE INTERVIEW SO SHE COULD PICK UP HER CHILDREN**



As Mehtab's career progressed she worked in counterterrorism at Heathrow in the wake of 9/11. On one operation, wearing a niqab that concealed a recording device, she posed as a prospective gun buyer. She spent months infiltrating a gang in the northwest of England, going for dinner with drug dealers and their girlfriends to convince them she was one of them. She set up a domestic violence unit serving vulnerable women in east London. She received a commendation for her undercover work on a Soho cocaine sting.

Mehtab kept her work and home life separate — although occasionally her two worlds collided. One evening her mother invited over a friend and her son, and he was edgy around Mehtab. She couldn't work out where she knew him from. Later she twigged that she'd caught him kerb-crawling. It must have been isolating, dealing with the hostility of work and being unable to share her anxieties with her family. "It felt really lonely. You become this insular person. But what kept me going was my job.

"I always say I've done things I could never have done in a different organisation. I had such a fantastic career in terms of things I've done. It makes me proud." Still, her feelings about her career are bittersweet. "You realise that the system failed you. It didn't protect me when it had a duty of care towards me, and it didn't step in when things went wrong."

When she had risen to superintendent Mehtab organised a crisis group to raise concerns about the disproportionate number of misconduct charges levelled against black and Asian officers. She says the Met commissioner Cressida Dick, who sent only a representative to attend the meeting, never got in touch to discuss any of the issues raised by the group.

The 2023 Casey review reported that black officers were 81 per cent more likely than white colleagues to be in the misconduct system. The Met says its target is for 40 per cent of its staff to be of black, Asian and multiple ethnic heritage and 50 per cent female. Currently those figures are 17 and 31 per cent.

The review also confirmed that humiliating initiations — like the sex toy incident — still take place: female recruits have been made to eat whole cheesecakes until they were sick, and a male officer was allegedly sexually assaulted in the showers. "People look at me and they think, yeah, but your experience was decades ago," Mehtab says. "But what happened to me is being mirrored today with new recruits: black, Asian, minority ethnic, women, recruits from the LGBTQ+ community." For Mehtab, the Met is an environment where predators don't just lurk but "flourish". "I think it attracts predators, it attracts monsters. Because you've got a group of people that will have access to vulnerable people, to vulnerable women. And they're given a warrant card, they're given a uniform, they have power and authority over people. That lends itself to abuse."

How could predators have been allowed on the beat in the first place? Mehtab points to parts of the vetting process for new officers, which have taken place online, and says there has been scant monitoring of recruits, with too few supervisors and inadequate management training.

She says she found herself fighting against the institution — and her colleagues — for advancement, what the Casey review identified as "who you know culture". While working in the Protective Security Command unit, she says, she informed a senior colleague with whom she thought she had a good working relationship that she wanted to apply for promotion, to become the same rank as him. He told her it took him six years to reach that rank and asked her what made her "so special". The collegiate conversation stopped abruptly — until, one day, she alleges, he flew into a rage over what he said were errors in a crime figures document, shouting at her in front of other staff. She says he then stopped inviting her to meetings, and refused to credit her for work she'd done, which she'd used to support a job application. She says she saw one very senior male colleague dismiss a female candidate's application because she'd requested a different interview time so she could make the school pick-up.

When Mehtab was working as an inspector at Leman Street she asked to be considered for a role as acting DCI and was told they already had a candidate in mind. She complained about the lack of due process and got the temporary job. When a long-term DCI role came around she applied, providing examples of work she'd done to support her application. Three male superiors confirmed they'd vouch for her. She didn't make it past the next round — and says she later found out they'd refused to confirm she'd done the work. She successfully appealed this decision and did eventually get the promotion.

In spring 2019 Mehtab was diagnosed with PTSD and signed off work. When ►

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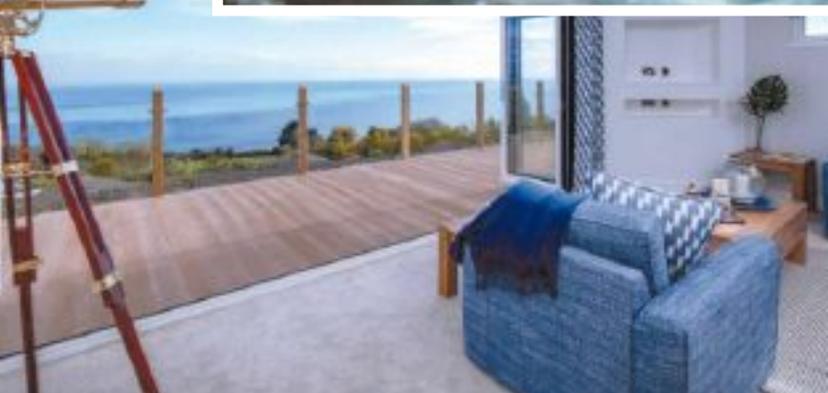


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**Being pranked by a male colleague at Hendon Police College c1990**

she returned in December that year she transferred to New Scotland Yard for a project on professionalism and found herself working alongside colleagues involved in her 2017 employment tribunal, including the officer responsible for chairing the crisis group formed in response. She says there were stares as she went to use the photocopier and lifts would fall silent when she got in. She stuck out the awkwardness in the name of her work: a paper about how to create better career paths for black and Asian officers in the Met. After Mehtab submitted it she says she never received any feedback. She isn't certain it was ever read. She found herself doing administrative tasks far beneath her rank. She left the force soon afterwards. "In my own way I was trying to initiate cultural change. But it was a very lonely place."

How was she able to persevere for so long? "I'd think, I love what I'm doing, so you're not going to get in my way." Today she teaches criminology and criminal justice at the University of East London, where many of her undergraduates want to join the force. She encourages them to question the status quo. "Let's talk about Wayne Couzens. Let's talk about the red flags."

She adds that the total cultural overhaul the Met needs will require a royal commission to enforce it. "Nothing short of that, because that's statutory." She also urges the Met commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, to accept the Casey review's labels of institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia. "If you don't do that, you can't have real, transformative change."

Mehtab has been abused online for speaking out. People tell her she's "anti police". "They say, 'You had it good for 30 years, how come you didn't speak up then?' I always say, you don't know what I've gone through. Battling. I've never been silent and I never will. Policing is far too important for us to take our eyes off it. But it needs to change. We can't wait another 30 years." ■

## Undercover in Soho

**Nusrit Mehtab on how she helped to smash a drugs ring**

I loved the rush I got from completing a successful sting. On a Friday or Saturday night our job was to go out in pairs to clubs in Soho, following up on intelligence we had received — for

example, that drugs were being dealt on the premises.

Months down the line, intelligence-gathering by myself and my colleague Suzanne was starting to pay off. We had been visiting the same clubs in the West End week after week, earning the trust of the barman and throwing away the shots he gifted us when his head was turned. In one club we had heard the landlord, Tony, was dealing. We just needed to catch him in the act.

We'd made sure he'd seen us chatting to his barman, whom we'd befriended, so in his eyes we were trusted regulars. One night Tony came behind the bar and his barman introduced us.

"You girls up for a big night then?" Tony asked, passing us a couple of free drinks.

"Why? What you thinking?" Suzanne said, laughing.

Tony reached into his pocket and produced a tiny plastic bag with a little bit of white powder inside.

"Here, have this on me," he said. "Go and powder your nose, ladies."

"I can't, I'm driving tonight," I said, sadly.

"And I've got to work tomorrow," Suzanne lied.

"Shame," Tony said. "Another time."

We left that night feeling confident: now it was just a matter of getting him to offer to sell drugs to us. A week or two later we returned. Tony came out and the conversation turned to drugs very quickly.

"Come out the back with me."

We followed him, leaving the bass of the nightclub thumping behind us. In his office he locked the door and poured us both drinks. I noticed there was a plant in the corner, so I went over and pretended to take a look at it, tipping bits of my drink into the soil when Tony turned his back.

From a drawer in his desk he took a fat bag filled with white powder.

Cocaine. There was a lot there: he was obviously showing off. He opened one of the bags and tapped a little of the powder onto the desk and took some of the drugs himself.

"Go on," he said, indicating the powder, "help yourself."

Tony was drunk and high, so it wasn't too difficult to distract him. After a while he had some more drugs and then offered them to us again.

"Oh, we've just scored," Suzanne lied, refusing his offer.

"Suit yourself," he said, "but take some for later."

He took a small bag from his desk filled with the same white powder. Suzanne and I looked at each other. Now we had evidence that he was dealing drugs — it had become blindingly obvious that Tony was supplying the drugs to the bartender, who in turn was selling to punters.

"We'll see you next week," we said, unlocking the door and leaving him to his cocaine. In reality we would never see Tony again.

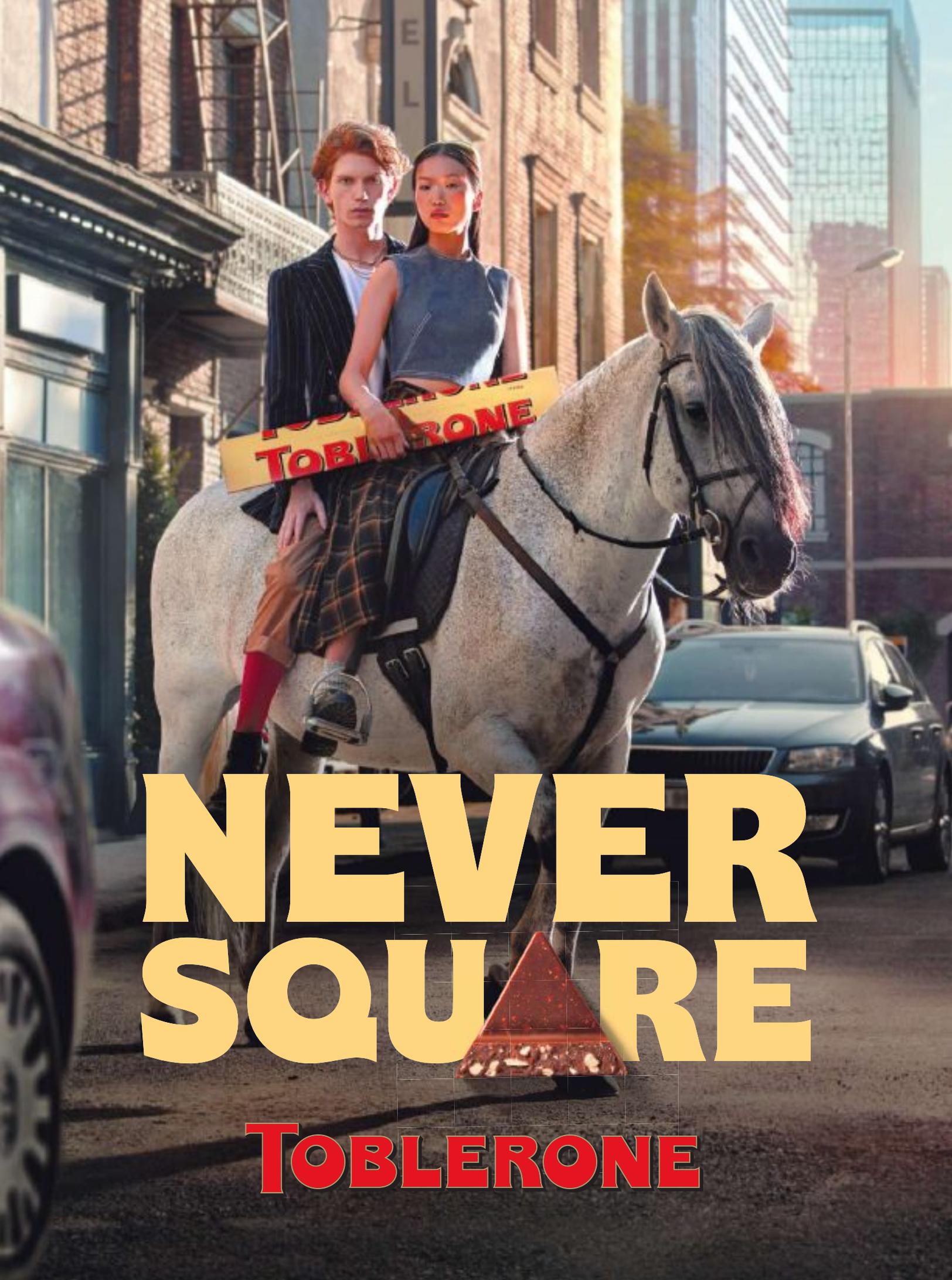
We wound our way back through the streets of revellers towards Charing Cross police station. We were now technically in possession of class A drugs. We needed to get back to the station and gain retrospective authority to be involved in criminal activity as part of our intelligence gathering — in other words, we needed to gain permission to possess those drugs.

The club was raided the following weekend, with us in it.

"Everybody stop! Stay where you are, don't move!" an officer shouted.

Tony was arrested and the club was closed down. It turned out he was connected to a much larger supply chain than we had realised. Detectives were able to take the whole chain down as a result of our work. Tony went to prison. Suzanne and I both received commendations.

© Nusrit Mehtab 2024. Extracted from *Off the Beat: My Life as a Brown, Muslim Woman in the Met* by Nusrit Mehtab (Torva £20), published on June 20. To order a copy go to [timesbookshop.co.uk](https://www.timesbookshop.co.uk). Discount for Times+ members

A young man and woman are riding a white horse down a city street. The man is in the back, wearing a dark jacket and a white shirt. The woman is in the front, wearing a grey sleeveless top and a plaid skirt. They are both looking forward with serious expressions. The horse is white and has a black harness. They are holding a large yellow Toblerone box. The background shows brick buildings and a modern glass skyscraper. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. A car is visible in the background on the right.

**TOBLERONE**

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# TABLE TALK



## Summer tomatoes

Mark Diacono's tomato and cherry quinoa with pistachios

**PLUS** Burgers in Bushey — with a side order of litigation ● English white wine comes of age ● Tasted: supermarket pasta bakes ➔



**MARK  
DIACONO**

**Tomato and cherry quinoa with pistachios**

This simple recipe — a seriously good celebration of high summer — deserves the very best tomatoes you can find. A mix of size, colour and flavour works really well, but if you have a bowlful of one excellent variety, don't hesitate.

The quick-pickled shallots are a wonderful thing: make them once and you'll find any number of uses for them.

**Ingredients**

(Serves 4)

- 150g quinoa
- 2 shallots, thinly sliced
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 400g ripe tomatoes, sliced
- 200g ripe cherries, pitted and halved
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 80g shelled pistachios
- A small bunch of mint, leaves shredded

**1** Boil the quinoa in a large pan of salted water for 12-15 min until tender, then drain well. Meanwhile, mix the shallots with the lemon juice and leave for 5 min.

**2** Spread the quinoa over a large serving platter and drizzle with half of the olive oil. Arrange the tomatoes and cherries on top then sprinkle over the lemon zest. Season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper.

**3** Scatter with the shallots and drizzle over the lemon juice. Scatter the pistachios and mint. Drizzle the remaining oil over the salad and serve.



**Pepper, tomato and olive galette**

This is as informal a coming-together of pastry and topping as it gets. Once you've got it under your belt, you can play with the toppings: treat it with the same creativity as you would a pizza.

**Ingredients**

(Serves 4)

**For the topping**

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced
- 1 yellow pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 80g pitted black olives, roughly chopped
- 400g cherry tomatoes, halved
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- A few generous sprigs of thyme, leaves picked

**For the pastry**

- 1 sheet of shop-bought ready-rolled puff or shortcrust pastry
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tbsp milk

**1** Heat the oven to 180C fan/gas 6. Heat the olive oil in a medium pan over a medium heat, then add the onion and peppers and cook for about 10 min until soft. Stir in the vinegar and garlic and cook for 1 min, then remove from the heat.

**2** Unroll the pastry sheet. Place on a baking tray lined with parchment.

**3** Spread the pepper mix over the dough, leaving a small border around the edges. Scatter the olives over the peppers, followed by the cherry tomatoes, then season with salt and pepper.

**4** In a cup, combine the beaten egg and milk to make an egg wash, then use this to brush over the edges of the dough. Put in the centre of the oven and bake for 25-30 min, until the crust is golden and the topping is bubbling.

**5** Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a few minutes before serving, sprinkled with the thyme leaves.

**Summer frittata**

I am very happy eating this at any hour of the day. It works as a lazy leftover breakfast, easy lunch or substantial supper, especially after a game that has run into extra time when an extra beer requires a little savoury accompaniment.

As marvellous as this is — and do make it as is, to make a friend of it — take it as a template for what each season has to offer. It even comes up trumps when



you have a bowlful of leftover roast vegetables in the fridge looking for a delicious home. If you have eight eggs, the chances are your fridge will see you right for the rest in some form or other.

### Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 8 large eggs
- 80ml whole milk
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and finely chopped
- 1 courgette, finely chopped
- 250g cherry tomatoes, halved
- A small bunch of basil, leaves torn
- 50g finely grated fresh parmesan

**1** Heat the oven to 160C fan/gas 4. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and milk

with some salt and pepper until well combined.

**2** Heat the olive oil in an ovenproof frying pan over a medium heat. Add the sliced red onion and cook for 5 min until it begins to soften. Add the red pepper and courgette and cook for another 4-5 min, stirring occasionally, until tender.

**3** Stir in the cherry tomatoes, cooking for 1-2 min until they start to soften. Tip the vegetables out of the pan into a large bowl and add the basil leaves. Return the pan to the stove.

**4** Pour the egg mixture into the pan and spoon in the vegetables, then sprinkle the cheese on top. Cook over a medium heat for 3-4 min, then when the edges start to set, transfer to the oven

and bake for 10-15 min, until golden and set on top.

**5** Allow to cool for a few minutes before slicing into wedges. Serve warm or at room temperature ■



**Extracted from *Vegetables: Easy and Inventive Vegetarian Suppers* by Mark Diacono (Quadrille £27). To order a copy go to [timesbookshop.co.uk](http://timesbookshop.co.uk). Discount available for Times+ members**

## Tasted! The best supermarket CHEESY PASTA BAKES



**Crosta & Mollica Gnocchi alla Sorrentina**  
Waitrose, 400g, £4  
Cloudlike gnocchi in a thick sauce and lots of stringy, melty cheese. Comfort food turned up to the max **5/5**

**Cook Halloumi & Arrabbiata Pasta Bake**  
Budgens, 365g, £5.50  
Big tick for the halloumi chunks and lots of veg. It's low on pasta, though, and I'd like more of a cheesy crust **4/5**

**Tomato & Mozzarella Pasta Bake**  
Tesco, 400g, £3.25  
Looks like school-dinner slop, but close your eyes and it's not so bad. Needs more salt **3/5**

**Tomato & Mozzarella Pasta Bake**  
Sainsbury's, 400g, £3.30  
A pasta bake in its most basic form: penne, mozzarella and tomato sauce. It reminds me of my student days **2/5**

**Meal For One Tomato & Mozzarella Pasta Bake**  
Asda, 400g, £3.25  
Surprisingly uncheesy. I suggest adding some grated cheddar before you cook it **2/5**

**Penne Mozzarella**  
Morrisons, 400g, £3.75  
This is just too watery — drain off some of the liquid before putting it in the microwave **1/5**

Hannah Evans



## Smashing burgers by the little guy — but for how long?

### SMASH & WINGS BUSHEY, HERTFORDSHIRE



**T**hese are hopes and dreams they are crushing... we are real people, running small businesses, just trying to get by in this world. These corporations, they don't think about their actions or the repercussions."

I am sitting with Haroon Khan, a 41-year-old father of three from St Albans, in Smash & Wings, the restaurant he runs with his wife, Jessica, in Bushey. It's a pretty innocuous place — black and white decor, pitched between late-night takeaway and cocktail bar. In front of me is a plate of chips, some dips and something Haroon and I would describe as a "smash burger". And therein lies the source of his problems, and the reason he has asked me to come here today.

The pair set up Smash & Wings a couple of years ago. "I've always had this idea of 'I want to run a restaurant and feed people,'" Haroon says. "When you give people something great that you've created with passion and effort, that's a good feeling."

But about nine months after they launched, Smash & Wings received a legal letter from an American fast-food giant, Smashburger, demanding they change their name. Founded in 2007, Smashburger has more than two hundred branches in the US and seven in the UK.



"We're coming to a city near you soon," reads the UK website. "Watch this space."

It's the scenario that launched a thousand films: family-run business fights corporate giant. In the Hollywood version we all know who wins. In real life it doesn't always turn out that way.

Smash & Wings isn't the only place that has been on the receiving end of Big Smash's ire. A pub in Plymouth had to change the name of its burger in 2020, and Smashed Preston revised its identity after a similar battle. Now it's called All Hope No Promises, the definition of taking a wallop in good humour. McDonald's, remember, used to go around menacing any business with

"Mc" or "Mac" in its name — including a Scottish sandwich shop in Buckinghamshire.

Haroon can't afford to go to court to defend his business. Come August, it looks as if the name will have to go. That'll be expensive — all the signage, the menus. He also worries about losing the reputation built up over the past few years.

Haroon argues that a "smash burger" is just a style of cooking, not a brand to be protected.

The case he makes is that smash burgers — far from being a new invention — are the original burgers. The street vendors of early 20th-century New York, largely German immigrants, would make them by crushing a meatball onto a heated metal

\*\*\*\*\*

#### THE DAMAGE

\*\*\*\*\*

BBQ burger	£9.50
Honey BBQ wings	£7
Skin-on fries	£3
San Pellegrino Lemon	£2

\*\*\*\*\*

Total for 1 £21.50

\*\*\*\*\*

surface. It was mass production that led to burgers being made in their preformed disc shape. To claim it's new is a bit like Silicon Valley firms excitedly announcing an innovative ride-sharing app where a van

stops at regular points in a city, and you realise they have actually just invented “the bus”.

Which brings me to the plot twist. “We are unable to comment on any specific cases, but we will only take legal action where it is necessary to do so in order to protect our trademarks,” Smashburger says. Now it has the trademark, it has to enforce it. Otherwise it will lose it. It isn’t doing it for fun or spite. My question is whether it should have been granted the trademark in the first place. I started this article thinking the enemy would be Big Burger. Now I think it might be Big Trademark.

There’s a reason everyone is smashing their burgers, by the way. Applying pressure on top of the meat triggers a stronger Maillard reaction — the activity between the sugars and amino acids that causes the meat to brown. That’s why you get a crunchier, crispier burger crust. The compromise is it’s going to be pretty well done in the middle — it’s a thinner burger, so pretty tricky to cook rare or medium rare. At Smash & Wings they don’t season the meat at all beyond salt and pepper: the smashing creates enough flavour by itself.

I have the BBQ Smash: two Angus beef patties, barbecue sauce, cheese and turkey rashers — Haroon is a Muslim and all the food is halal — with grilled onions. It’s a joyous festival of umami, crispy and viscerally meaty — which I’d attribute to the smashing technique. Rustic and nostalgic — which I’d attribute to the onions, carrying memories of a childhood burger van. It’s £9.50, which these days feels cheap for a burger, though it would probably astonish the owners of that childhood van.

The thin McDonald’s-style chips are less salty and more potatoey than those of their litigious rivals. Honey barbecue chicken wings are sweet and sticky, picked from an extensive array of glaze options ranging from mango habanero chilli or Korean hot to buffalo sauce. Good, celebratory food. Head down and show your support for the little guy ■



ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX GREEN/FOLIO ART FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE, JASON ALDEN, SANE SEVEN

W I N E • Will Lyons

## Local heroes: six great English whites

**T**he galloping pace of change for English wine shows no sign of abating. After just a few decades, with the help of warmer summers, serious financial investment and an improved understanding of how to ripen grapes in our marginal climate, there are now more than 200 wineries and nearly 1,000 vineyards in England and Wales.

If that sounds big, it isn’t. The industry is still a somewhat niche affair (we produce 10 to 12 million bottles a year, compared with more than 5 billion in France), but it makes a lot of noise and attracts visitors to our shores. About 80 per cent of English and Welsh producers offer some kind of cellar experience, enabling you to create your own *Sideways* road trip, albeit largely around the home counties rather than sunny California. You can also in most cases buy direct from the vineyard.

The UK has already established itself as a producer of world-class fizz but about 30 per cent of all English wine is still, of which the largest proportion is white — and it’s these that have impressed me most. A clutch of producers such as Woodchester Valley in the Cotswolds, Sharpam in Devon, Flint Vineyard in Norfolk and Riverview Crouch Valley in Essex make reliably crisp, aromatic, refreshing wines from grape varieties such as bacchus, pinot gris, madeleine angevine and chardonnay. They are well worth sampling, especially at this time of year, as they are lighter than many whites from the southern hemisphere and have glorious springlike notes. Try Chapel Down’s 2023

Bacchus from Kent (Waitrose, £14.99) and you will see what I mean.

Be warned, they are not cheap — volumes are small and costs are high — but

I’ve tried to look for value where I can.

Perhaps it’s a small price to pay to appreciate the remarkable rise of English wines ■

**2023 The Society’s English White (11%) The Wine Society, £9.95** Made by Three Choirs in Gloucestershire, this is full of gooseberry and grapefruit, with a classic tangy English finish.

**2020 Redbeard Bacchus (11%) Laithwaites, £14.99** Light and refreshing, this is like summer in a glass, with lively citrus, elderflower and abundant sappy white fruit.

**2023 Lyme Bay Bacchus (11.5%) M&S, £15** Produced by Sarah Massey in Devon, this zesty bacchus has terrific intensity and inviting flavours of fresh green fruit.

**2023 Stopham Pinot Gris (11.3%) Majestic, £22.99** This off-dry pinot gris from West Sussex delivers vibrant aromas of peach and pear, with a rich, almost sweet texture.

**2021 Chapel Down Kit’s Coty Chardonnay (12.5%) The Whisky Exchange, £37.25** One of our finest chardonnays from Kent, this is delicate and nutty, backed by apple and citrus.

**2020 Danbury Ridge Octagon Block Chardonnay (13.5%) The Finest Bubble, £64** An outstanding Essex white with bright acidity and a rich, oaky, creamy palate.



### Bargain of the week

**NV Taste the Difference Crémant de Loire France (12.5%) Sainsbury’s, £10.50 (down from £12)** It’s time for crémant and this blend is crisp, bright and fruity.





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F A R M I N G • Jeremy Clarkson

## We need our young people in labs — not superglued to roads



**W**hen you look back over the past 14 years of Conservative rule, it's hard to pick out the single biggest mistake. Truss and the Brexit referendum are certainly up there, but I'm going to have a stab and suggest it was the moment they decided that strong economic growth and net zero weren't mutually exclusive.

They are. If you have to go through life producing no carbon dioxide, it means

you will be cold, lonely, poor, unhappy and covered in weeping sores. The sun and the tide and the wind sound like a triple-headed nirvana, but to harness them properly you need an army of bright young things to work out how. And we don't have that because our army of bright young things are either glued to the road or arguing about the meaning of a penis or rushing about with a keffiyeh on their head. No one is sitting in a lab playing with pipettes and thermodynamics.

You get a sense that the current leadership understands this, which is why they pushed the target date for net zero back

and allowed oil companies to do more drilling in the North Sea. It's also why Mr Rishi has been talking recently about the importance of food security. He's dead right. It's very important that we have the ability to feed ourselves, but we simply cannot do that when the main mission is to achieve net zero.

It's like smoking, drinking and partying. You can do that or you can live to be a hundred. It's either/or. You can't do both.

Ever since I bought my farm back in 2008 we have used weedkillers to keep the weeds at bay. But weedkiller is now extremely expensive and



It's better and cheaper, therefore, to use cow muck. But that means keeping cows and that, again, is a global warming no-no apparently because of their endless burping and farting.

I know I've written about these dilemmas before, and I will do again because it's important the people who need food understand that farming is either kind to the sky or kind to the soil. You choose. I have, and the sky can eff off.

So let's get back to the food security issue. Because this country signed up to an international agreement to achieve net zero at some point in the future — point located just after the last person who signed it has died — I've been told that I can have government subsidies only if I do environmental work.

There are pages and pages and pages of rules and regulations on this, and I'll be honest I haven't read many (any) of them because that's Cheerful Charlie's job. But what I do know is that this

all of this is tremendous if you are a global warming enthusiast. It frees you up to go on more marches. But what if you want a sandwich?

Ah well, the ingredients for that will have to be imported from a country where they either haven't heard of Greta Thunberg or they have but they realise it's silly to take scientific advice from someone who has barely been to school.

And what's the point of that? Climate change is a planetary problem, and it won't make any difference if a small rock in the North Atlantic simply exports its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to Peru. Actually, it will. Because we will have to ship all our food over here and that will actually increase global emissions.

And that's before we address the security issues. Yes, we can reduce farming in the UK and import our food. That's what happened in the 1930s. The government of the time said they wanted workers in the factories, not the fields, and we'd get our food from abroad. Then the U-boats came and

possibly not that good for us, so this year we ploughed some of the fields. This old-fashioned system means the soil is turned over, so the weeds are buried and, owing to a lack of sunshine, die.

That sounds rustic and bucolic and lovely, but I did some maths the other day and worked out that when it was pulling an eight-farrow plough, my tractor was using a gallon of diesel to cover 100 yards. You read that right. A gallon for 100 yards. That's a lot of carbon. Plus, the soil is a huge carbon sink and when I turn it over some of that carbon escapes.

So in one day I produced more greenhouse gases than India, Brazil and China combined. Greta Thunberg would have been furious with me, were she not in a cell for protesting about Palestine. It seems she has decided that that's more important than climate change these days.

Whatever, there is then the question of fertiliser. I could use chemicals but they are bad for the soil and, we are told, bad for the nation's streams and rivers.

## All of this is tremendous if you are a global warming enthusiast. But what if you want a sandwich?

year the biggest field on the farm is being used to grow a herbal ley called GS4. And all you need to know about this is: you can't eat it.

The second biggest field has been given over to rye grass and you can't eat that either. But the government pays me to do this because less farming is needed, which means I'm producing less carbon dioxide. And I'm helping to replenish the nitrogen content of the soil. Which I approve of.

It's why, in the regen field I handed over to Andy Cato from Groove Armada's Wildfarmed project last year, we are growing a beige plant with a Latin name. Naturally you can't eat it, but power stations can.

All this means that perhaps 20 per cent of my farm is not producing any food this year. I know of other farmers who've put 60 per cent into environmental schemes. And

we all nearly starved to death. So what if there's another war, or another pandemic, and all I'm growing is nitrogen and electricity?

It's the same story on the roads. Net zero means people are being herded into cars that don't really work as cars. Lisa's new Range Rover, for instance, has an air-conditioning system that's pretty much useless, and while I accept this is possibly because it's broken, I'm more inclined to think it's operating on reduced power because of net zero-inspired rules.

So here's what I'd do. Accept that human beings need to produce carbon dioxide and use the money saved on funding research into technology. Lure all our bright young things back into the lab to work on ways we can deal with the problem, rather than going backwards in a vague, King Canute-like hope that the problem will go away ■



## HEALTH

# An uptick in our relationship

Measuring glucose spikes is all the rage, with men and women seeing different results. What happened when *Rosamund Dean* and her husband, Jonathan, took the test?

**N**ormally at Dean family mealtimes there's a strict "no screens at the table" rule. But today my husband, Jonathan, and I are hunched over our iPhones watching a dot on a graph rise and fall. No, we haven't got into crypto. We're analysing our blood glucose responses.

Initially designed for diabetics, continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) — small devices painlessly inserted into the upper arm — have become the latest word in wellness, with personal nutrition brands such as Zoe and Levels encouraging non-diabetics to monitor their blood glucose after every meal. The aim is to better understand how different foods uniquely affect you (and — according to some critics — to give the worried well something else to check besides their Apple Watches and Strava stats).

As with most things in life, there are gender differences in how our bodies manage glucose. Tired of bickering over ordering a bread basket, I've talked Jonathan into trialling Lingo — a new tracker — to see how differently our bodies ride out the spikes. Regular large spikes can lead to oxidative stress and inflammation, which is associated with chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

We eat pretty healthily at home, with vegetables the main ingredient of our family dinners, which include chickpea curry, beetroot burgers and veggie bolognese.



Our CGMs show our bodies' responses to carbohydrates, so it will be the rice, bread and pasta that comes with these meals that cause the spikes.

Now for the science bit. The graph on the Lingo app, which connects to your CGM via Bluetooth to show real-time blood glucose levels, has a section marked with dotted lines: between 3.9 mmol/l and 7.8 mmol/l (millimoles per litre).

Ideally, your levels stay in that range. My results show that I barely ever break the top line, whereas Jonathan crashes through it several times a day.

So I'm feeling pretty smug as we schedule a call with Lingo's global nutritionist, Pam Bede. She soon disabuses me of that notion by explaining that it's not only about the severity of the spikes, but also how quickly they come back down.

Jonathan perks up: his come down fast. "That tells me your pancreas is working," Bede says. "Insulin is responding, bringing it back down quickly." So... my steadier graph isn't better? "Spikes, even significant ones, that return quickly to baseline are better than spikes that stay elevated for hours on end," Bede says. While I don't have mega spikes, my levels do stay raised for a couple of hours.

## The implants in the Deans' arms sent data about their blood glucose levels to an app

But my overall average of 5.2 mmol/l is still slightly better than Jonathan's (5.7 mmol/l). In this respect, Bede says, our graphs buck the trend. "Usually, when comparing men and women, it would be the other way around. Women are more likely to have those big spikes."

Body composition is a factor here. Generally speaking, men have a better ratio of muscle to fat, so the average healthy man will have better blood glucose control than the average healthy woman. I consider Jonathan and myself to be averagely healthy, so I'm surprised we're going against the grain. Particularly since hormones play a role, and I went through early menopause three years ago after treatment for breast cancer. Now, aged 43, I'm postmenopausal.

Dr Federica Amati, the head nutritionist at Zoe and author of *Every Body Should Know This*, worked on the world's largest study of nutrition and menopause. "We found that postmenopausal women's metabolisms are not as flexible, and their insulin response is



elevated," she tells me. "Your pancreas is having to work harder, and that can lead to a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, weight gain and heart disease."

Bede and Amati are keen to stress this is only one part of the puzzle: the bigger impact comes from diet and lifestyle. The advice is lots of fibre, protein and good fats, so vegetables, beans, eggs, fish, nuts and olive oil. It's just as important to move your body every day, ensure you're getting enough sleep and manage stress in a healthy way.

Ever since the cancer diagnosis, I've been trying to live healthily to reduce my risk of having to go through that again. I used to think that Jonathan and I eat alike, but I've realised that

what he considers a healthy lunch is different from my idea of one. He seems baffled that a cheese and onion sandwich and a bag of Popchips ("But they're not fried!") causes a huge spike.

"People are often surprised about their Pret sandwich," Bede says with a laugh. "They think it's healthy because they're not eating a chocolate bar, but there are hidden sugars and carbohydrates in sandwiches."

My cheddar baguette days are over: now I'll choose a beany soup or salmon salad. Even the order in which we eat makes a difference. Starting a meal with a simple carbohydrate causes a bigger spike, whereas eating veg and protein first will help flatten the curve. Jonathan and I have the same meals at home, but he'll snarf a chunk of bread as the shakshuka is cooking. I avoid bread on an empty stomach, hence the bread basket debate. I also do more exercise than him, drink less alcohol and usually go to bed earlier (I'm fun, honest).

While Jonathan's spikes come down quickly, it's not ideal to have so many of them. Dr Casey Means, the co-founder of Levels and author of *Good Energy: The Surprising Connection Between Glucose, Metabolism and Limitless Health*, tells me that dramatic zigzags should be avoided. "Long-term erratic glucose levels that swing up and down are a predictor for future cardiometabolic diseases, even if fasting glucose is normal," she says. "But it's not complicated to stabilise glucose spikes. Pair carbs with protein, fat and fibre, go for a walk after meals, and don't eat close to bedtime."

Bede describes Lingo as "a peek behind the scenes of what's going on in your body". I love it, especially when the app makes practical suggestions: "You're spiking — go for a 20-minute walk." But I'm not sure if Jonathan enjoys it so much. I'm the one with the medical history (and gender) that sets me at a metabolic disadvantage, but complacency about what he puts in his body could impact his long-term health.

The behaviour-change expert and author of *The Last Diet*, Shahroo Izadi, tells me this is

## JONATHAN'S TAKE

When it comes to living well, I tend to think that I'm not an idiot and also not that into puddings. So I'm fine. Rosamund is different. When she started tracking glucose levels I went all libertarian, wailing, "No thanks — get the police out of my arml!" But I agreed to this sugar-off and, for a few weeks, technology was judging everything I ate.

It was interesting: one day a banana caused a spike, the next day it didn't. The reason? The first banana was overripe, so it had more sugar. Lesson learnt — bin brown bananas.

Sometimes, though, I felt harassed. One way to offset a glucose spike is to exercise. So I'd be enjoying a cup of tea in bed, only for my Lingo app to say, "You're spiking! Why not do 15 squats?" I told it to pipe down, but it didn't listen so I caved and did the squats. And, you know, perhaps this is a good idea after all. There's no harm in being reminded to exercise. No harm in not snacking on bread. No harm in health.

Jonathan Dean

## I'm at a metabolic disadvantage but his complacency could impact his long-term health



common. "It's broadly fair to say men have more confidence in their good health, while women prepare for the worst," she says. "This can mean that, even though men have a head start, women tend to win the race."

I know exactly what "winning the race" means in this context. Women live an average of five years longer than men, and I'd prefer Jonathan to be around for as long as me. I'm encouraged when he tells me one day that he had a salad for lunch and noticed his levels staying in the healthy range. Will he keep it up? I wonder if this experiment has been the nudge he needs to ditch the Popchips for good ■ [hellolingo.com](https://hellolingo.com)



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## FITNESS

# Work out when there's pollen about

How to stop hay fever ruining outdoor exercise. By Kate Wills

It's nature's cruel joke: from May to July, just when we're eager to exercise outside, grass pollen counts peak, making exercise sneezy, wheezy work for the one in four adults who experience hay fever.

It might be tempting to lock yourself in a gym or medicate yourself up to the eyeballs, but there are other options. In fact, taking meds might interfere with your workout: a 2021 study found that antihistamines slashed the exercise-induced increase in blood flow to muscles by 35 per cent, which impacted performance and recovery.

No wonder a study by Allergy UK found that 49 per cent of people with hay fever spend less time outside because of their symptoms — causing about a third of them to gain weight.

And yet regular exercise has been found to reduce the symptoms of hay fever. This is how to make sure a pollen bomb doesn't get in the way of your PB.

### Schedule your workout wisely ...

"The pollen count is generally higher first thing in the morning and, on sunny days, early evening, so the best time to work out if you have hay fever symptoms is late morning and early afternoon," says Penny Weston, a fitness expert and spa director from Staffordshire. "Avoid grassy surfaces, or opt for recently cut grass so there are fewer plants and flowers." Apps such as My Pollen Forecast enable you to track the pollen count for up to five days.

### ... especially if you're female

"Hormonal fluctuations can significantly impact hay fever



## "The best time to work out if you have hay fever symptoms is later morning and early afternoon"

symptoms, particularly in women," says Mike Kocsis at the hormone treatment specialist Balance My Hormones. "When oestrogen levels rise, the body produces more histamine, which can trigger severe allergic reactions and worsen symptoms such as runny noses and itchy eyes. Progesterone increases around ovulation and can cause the cells in your airways to be more sensitive to allergens, so even a small amount of pollen can produce a reaction."

### Wash the pollen off

"When you get home, take a shower and put your gym kit straight in the wash to remove any pollen particles," Weston advises. And don't dry your kit outside. "More pollen could get onto your clothes."

### Try yoga

The "bridge pose" could help alleviate the misery. "Lie with your arms on the floor and knees bent, then lift your hips," Kocsis says. "It'll open up your chest and lungs, which should reduce the symptoms of a hay fever flare-up."

### Dress for battle

"Wraparound sunglasses can shield your eyes from pollen, while applying a thin layer of Vaseline around your nostrils and eyes can help trap pollen before it enters your body," Kocsis says. Take care not to get the product in your eyes. You could also try a cloth mask over your mouth and nose. "They act as a partial barrier to pollen particles and warm the air you're breathing, making airways less reactive," he says.

### Eat wisely

Diets high in some antioxidants may reduce the nasal symptoms of hay fever. "Vitamin C has been shown to reduce tissue inflammation, acting like a natural antihistamine," Weston says. "Red bell peppers, citrus fruits and broccoli are good sources." Stay away from dairy and refined sugar as much as you can. The former increases the production of mucus, the latter raises cortisol, both of which worsen inflammation, according to Weston.

### Avoid HIIT

Going really hard when the pollen count is high is a bad idea. "High-intensity workouts can increase histamines and exacerbate your symptoms," says Claire Floquet, a personal trainer, triathlete and outdoor enthusiast. Instead, try yoga, light strength training and brisk walking.

### Avoid main roads

Pollution and pollen together can be a double whammy. Pollution irritates your nose, lungs and eyes, which means pollen will have a much bigger impact on you. If you're running or cycling through the city, take a more scenic route and avoid arterial roads.

### Try a different kind of workout

Researchers have found that the reproductive system is linked to the nasal system — suggesting that sex constricts blood vessels in the nose and eyes, which could cause eyes to stop streaming and help unblock stuffy noses. You should probably go indoors for that one ■



**DRIVING** • Nick Rufford

## A raucous throwback for weekend action heroes



### REVIEW FORD MUSTANG

**T**he Ford Mustang got off to a rip-roaring start in the Sixties, when it became the fastest-selling car of all time — a record it still holds — before losing its way in the Eighties and for a while becoming another glum American “compact”. In 2015 Ford woke up and had the sense to fit a growly 5.0-litre V8 engine, called the Coyote, and reshape the car to look more like its muscular ancestor.

The Mustang got its mojo back and Ford started selling it worldwide, including right-hand drive models in the UK.

Now Ford has updated it again. There are tripled-banked LED headlights to go with the distinctive three-bar tail lights, giving it a racier look. The press release claims there is “a new 5-litre V8”, but when I checked under the bonnet it’s still the Coyote engine. This has been tweaked to deliver more oomph in the North American market, but sadly in Europe it’s been slightly detuned. A cynic might say the car has been updated less for improvement’s sake and more to stay ahead of safety and emissions regulations.

To check, I took it for a spin: the essential bits are still there. A dab on the throttle in Sport mode opens a flap in the

exhaust so the Mustang sounds less like a pony and more like a flatulent rhino. Above 4000rpm the car wakes up and gallops towards a 7500rpm red line — at a starting price of £55,725 this must surely be the cheapest way to experience genuine V8 thrills, especially in the convertible, where you get the full soundtrack.

So what has changed? I experimented with what the PR blurb calls an “immersive digital experience”, wondering if the windscreen would turn into a giant augmented-reality display on which I could re-create cinema’s most famous car chase — from the film *Bullitt*, featuring the Mustang’s 1968 ancestor. But no, the tiny head-up display showed only speed and speed-limit signs, and told me I was going too fast.

The PR bumf also trumpets a “digital cockpit”, for which read “big screen” incorporating a 12.3in instrument cluster and a 13.2in panel for infotainment. One neat trick is that if you don’t like modern instrument graphics you can switch to a re-creation of the dials from the classic 1979 “Fox body” Mustang and, with a free over-the-air update, a 1967 Fastback. The climate control buttons are on a permanent bar at the bottom of the central screen so you don’t have to hunt for them in menus and for stereo volume there’s — hallelujah — a physical knob.

Sadly Ford has replaced the handbrake with an electronic substitute called a “drift brake”, which sounds sporty but essentially is bowing to the trend among manufacturers to do away with conventional

## Its five-litre engine is not what you'd call frugal – it's a Big Mac and fries in a world of salads



handbrakes altogether — they will probably be extinct by the end of the decade.

The all-new Mustang, then, complies with tighter regulations but doesn't break new ground. And that's good. It's still a big, brash throwback to a bygone age — a relic from the days of films such as *Vanishing Point* (1971, Dodge Challenger), *Gone in 60 Seconds* (1974, Ford Mustang) and *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977, Pontiac Trans Am) — when cars were fast and loud and, of course, ran on flammable liquid to ensure cinema car chases ended as they should with a crash and a huge fireball.

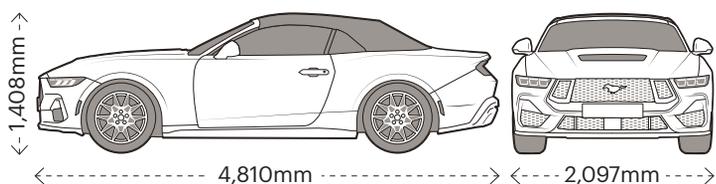
That's why Ford parked a 1968 GT Fastback — like the one Steve McQueen used to pursue a Dodge Charger down the hills of San Francisco in *Bullitt* — at the end of a line of modern Mustangs at the launch of the new version. It is as close as the company has come to admitting that, were it not for its cinematic heritage, the Mustang would probably have followed cars such as the Falcon and Thunderbird into extinction. As it is, this car is the keeper of the eternal flame, not just for Ford but perhaps for combustion cars as we know them.

Can it survive in an age of fuel economy, ultra-low emissions

zones, 20mph speed limits and the government's Marxist showroom tax on new cars costing more than £40,000? It's a Big Mac and fries in a world of healthy garden salads. Its five-litre engine is not what you'd call frugal — albeit having better fuel economy than the outgoing model — and there is no electrification. Its excellent ten-speed auto or six-speed manual gearbox with rev-matching on downshifts is a welcome change from the continuously variable transmission that has become standard on so many hybrids. The car's grip is impressive and you can throw it into corners, perhaps not with abandon, but certainly with confidence that everything won't go sideways.

It's as rowdy, fast and noisy as it can be under EU rules that have made driving a cacophony of bongs and klaxons when you stray even 1mph over the speed limit. The great age of the automobile is coming to an end and soon there will be no more like this. Now may be the time to buy one and lock it in your garage. Then, on a clear day, find an open road and ride for the horizon like Kowalski in *Vanishing Point* ■

### The Ruffometer Ford Mustang GT Convertible



**Engine** 5038cc, V8, petrol **Power** 440bhp @ 7250rpm  
**Torque** 398 lb ft @ 5100rpm **Acceleration** 0-62mph: 5.0sec  
**Top speed** 155mph **Fuel** 27.4mpg **CO<sub>2</sub>** 282g/km **Weight** 1,876kg  
**Price** £61,225 **Release date** On sale now

**Nick's rating** ★★★★★☆

## COLLECTORS' CLASSICS

### Peugeot 403 convertible



Asked why he never cleaned his car, the mac-wearing TV detective Lieutenant Columbo said: "I would, but the roof leaks if I take it through the car wash. Same when it rains. That's why I wear this coat."

When the crime drama began in 1971, producers wanted an old car to match Columbo's shabbiness — and a 1959 Peugeot 403 convertible seemed ideal. Yet when it was launched in 1956 the 403 drop-top was the bee's knees, immaculately styled and with a hand-crafted leather interior. There's a beauty in red advertised online for £70,000 in Portugal.

By the way, Columbo's catchphrase — "Just one more thing" — started by accident when the show's scriptwriters needed to lengthen a scene and tacked on a few more hastily written lines.

Just one more thing. Battered though Columbo's Peugeot was, he kept it until the series ended in 2003, which makes it greener than most modern cars, according to figures from a research company called CNW. It claims 80 per cent of the energy a car uses in its lifetime is during manufacture and 20 per cent during use, hence the more miles a car does, the more its carbon footprint shrinks. So by holding on to your car rather than regularly upgrading it you're probably doing the planet a favour. If you want to go green, go Columbo ■  
**By Nick Rufford**

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**Brian G** ★★★★★

### “Brilliant Hedge Trimmer”

Excellent Hedge Trimmer. Makes job of trimming and shaping hedges fast, accurate and enjoyable. I love this tool.

**Louise W** ★★★★★

### “Excellent purchase”

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## A LIFE IN THE DAY

# Moby

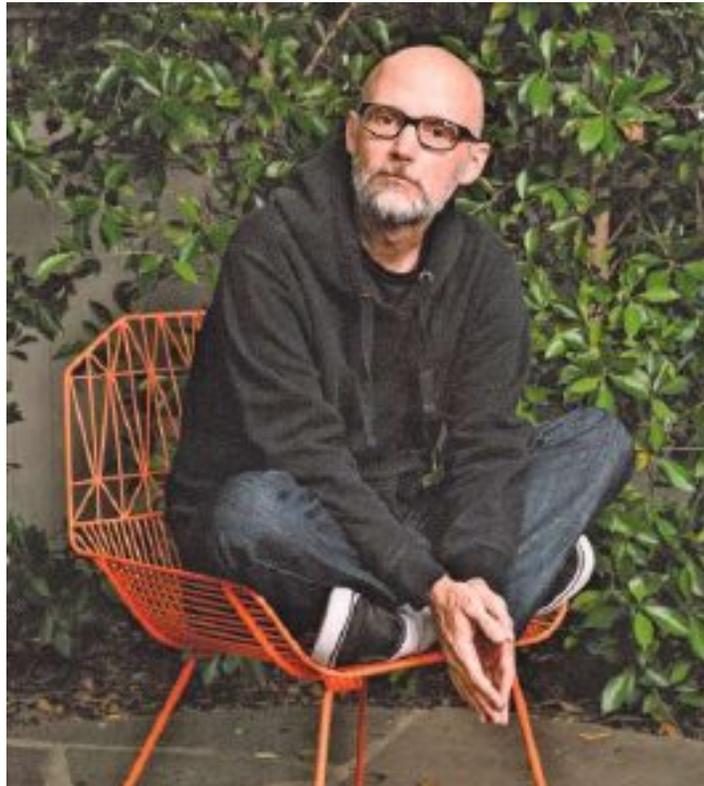
Musician, 58

**Moby, born Richard Melville Hall, grew up in Darien, Connecticut. He played in punk bands in the 1980s before becoming a DJ and moving to New York City. His breakthrough came in 1991 with the single *Go*, and he has since sold more than 20 million records, including *Play*, his biggest-selling album, in 1999. He is also known for his work as a producer as well as an animal rights activist. He lives in Los Angeles.**

I'm a hyperlark and wake up at 4am before the birds start chirping. I live right by the wilderness of Griffith Park, so it's completely quiet. Every now and then someone stumbles up the hill and you hear them screaming, out of their mind — the Hollywood equivalent of a rooster.

Without fail I make the world's healthiest smoothie that will make your readers both horrified and annoyed, being what you'd expect a middle-aged vegan in Los Angeles to have for breakfast: red cabbage, red chard, carrots, mixed berries, fresh turmeric, ginger, orange, orange peel, nigella seed and chia seed. Sometimes I might add broccoli.

While I'm drinking it I compulsively read *The Sunday Times*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *The Washington Post*, the *LA Times* and *The Atlantic* on my laptop. It's compulsive doom-scrolling of the news, which can be depressing, so I remind myself there's nothing I can do about most of what's happening and I try not to let it affect me too much. Then



I make myself a pot of organic white tea and read a fiction book. I'm reading one of Lee Child's Jack Reacher potboilers, which is light-hearted and surprisingly well written.

I start work around 6am and send out a bunch of emails and texts about the music I'm making. But I also have a strange little film and TV production company, Little Walnut, that's pretty busy and there are a lot of things we're working on.

At 8am I usually do some exercise, like hiking or lifting weights. I like the idea of being healthy and there's no better way to wake up than by moving around — anything that doesn't involve sitting in front of my laptop.

### WORDS OF WISDOM

#### Best advice I was given

Accept disgrace willingly, a lesson from Taoist philosophy

#### Advice I'd give

No amount of wealth, fame, vitamin supplements or Botox exempts us from the human condition

#### What I wish I'd known

To worry less, especially as regards the opinions of strangers

At 9am I put on my trainers and walk 20 minutes over the hill to the house where my production company is. We order in vegan lunch and have five hours of work with meetings and calls. That's when I see my best friend, an 11lb dog named Bagel that belongs to the woman who runs Little Walnut. Bagel likes to run, so I take her outside somewhere safe. This neighbourhood is dangerous for little dogs because there are coyotes, bobcats, hawks and falcons.

At 3pm I walk back over the hill and maybe do more exercise to stave off the ravages of being elderly. Every now and then a wave of exhaustion hits me. A friend of mine said, "Oh yes, I love lying down for an hour." I need three minutes.

And because I wake up so early — here's where it gets sad — I have dinner at 5pm. Usually I cook: my favourite thing to make at present is conchiglie pasta with sautéed tempeh, ginger, spring onions, black sesame seeds, olive oil and kimchi. This early evening meal is only strange in summer, when it's still hot and sunny outside.

At 6pm I go into my home studio and spend three hours working on music. I'm almost always in bed asleep by 9pm. I sleep like a restless baby. I don't know why — sometimes it's anxieties. I find it almost inconceivable that some people can sleep through the entire night because I have never done that. On average I get up 15 times, which I'm sure sleep scientists would say is a precursor to health problems.

There's nothing I can do about it. I wake up, maybe put on some music, sleep for an hour, wake up for ten minutes, sleep for half an hour, wake up for ten minutes. To me it's not disconcerting, just normal. I think of my musician friends who stay up until 2am and sleep for nine hours. Maybe I should have been a potato farmer ■

**Interview by John Wright. Moby's new album, *Always Centred at Night*, is out now. He performs at the O2, London SE10, on September 19**



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