

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

FT Weekend Magazine

JULY 13/14 2024

He killed four of his high-school classmates with a gun.

His parents were convicted.

By Matthew Bremner





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FEATURES

14.

Between the acts

What Virginia Woolf's domestic notebooks reveal. By *Harriet Baker*

16.

Swords in the attic

The dilemmas posed by a surprise discovery in my grandfather's stash. By *Francesca Carington*

20.

Complicity

Inside the historic trial of the parents of a school shooter. By *Matthew Bremner*

28.

Philosophy in the boardroom

How an expert on the ethics of warfare found his way into some of the world's leading blue-chip companies. By *Andrew Hill*

41.

Consider the shipworm

Some unappealing foods just need a rebrand. By *Kitty Drake*



INTELLECT

- 7 **Tim Harford**
Accidentally selling \$444bn in shares, and other typos
- 8 **Departments**
Curios from FT bureaux

- 10 **Gallery**
Abdulhamid Kircher in Berlin and Turkey
- 12 **Simon Kuper**
What Starmer can learn from Blair

APPETITES

- 35 **Tim Hayward**
Why I'm moving to Morchella
- 36 **Recipe Club**
Remarkable ratatouille
- 39 **Jancis Robinson**
Turkey's growing problems

WIT & WISDOM

- 44 **Games**
- 46 **Robert Shrimmsley**
How do I make sure that everyone knows I was promoted?

CARL GODFREY

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Marginalia by *Nadine Redlich*

ON THE COVER

Ethan Crumbley's mugshot
OAKLAND COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE/GETTY IMAGES

Letters



I know what you did last summit

by Henry Foy

Henry Foy's account of that Nato meeting six years ago is surprising solely because those Nato members seemed so shocked and surprised to be reminded of their long-standing responsibilities in such a direct fashion. They knew this president shoots from the hip at every turn, and they should have been ready for undiplomatic language and Trump's preparedness to throw protocol to the wind.

For too long after the second world war, Nato has basked in the knowledge that America would bear the principal responsibility for the costs. As long as US presidents didn't ask Nato members to increase their respective contributions, those Nato members were happy to keep quiet. Now that security is uppermost in European minds, Nato members should not shirk, indeed they should increase, their contributions in line with the present dangers posed to European security and welfare.

For far too long, diplomatic language was respected and everyone played the game. No longer. Diplomats should understand the landscape has changed, and so should they. No longer the byzantine, 19th-century niceties.

You sometimes just have to tell it how it is, respectful yes, but no dodging the question, particularly when we're possibly on the brink of a widening of the war on the continent of Europe.

Alastair Conan, Coulsdon, Surrey

As regards Henry Foy's article on Trump at Nato, he alights on two truths. The first being that Trump's uncontrollable ego and propensity to aggressively focus on issues in terms of money, or in his mind "business", rather than attempting to see the whole picture, is a danger to world order and western security in general. The second is that he has a point as regards Nato military budgets. Germany was

compromised in its relationship with Russian oil and gas. European nations were lazily relying on the US to underwrite their security. Loathe as I am to admit it, Trump has galvanised a reaction in various areas for our mutual benefit. Just not for the reasons he thinks.

Neil Hardman, Edinburgh, Scotland

I greatly enjoyed Henry Foy's piece and Barry Blitt's illustration. I'd like to know how much the increased spending by Nato countries is on American weapons or in other ways ends up in the US.

Elizabeth Smith, Lewes, Sussex

Doll world

by Lou Stoppard

Dolls are sometimes not what they seem. Collecting dolls "for my mother" in the late 1930s and early '40s, my grandmother was a customer of Velvalee Dickinson, a dealer with a shop on Madison Avenue in New York. It transpired that Dickinson was traitor spying for the Japanese who had developed a code using descriptions of dolls to pass on information about the movement of US Navy ships.

Dickinson was caught after letters sent using her doll code to a contact in Buenos Aires were picked up by censors and fell into the hands of the FBI, whose initially baffled cryptographers decoded phrases such as "three Old English dolls at a doll hospital for repairs" to mean warships being repaired at a naval shipyard. I remember being shown my grandmother's address book in which Dickinson's address was overwritten "Sing Sing" to reflect her subsequent incarceration.

Jamie Berger, London SE14

Who owns Africa?

by David Pilling

As someone who has been involved in conservation, this is the only way to ensure that there will be anything left in the future. The local communities are largely in favour



▲ JULY 6/7

How Trump ambushed Nato

of this approach as it assures them of involvement, protects their land from the pillage of foreign markets and keeps them safe. Let us not be distracted by ideology from the day-to-day battle to save the animals and communities remaining. African Parks, the Peace Parks Foundation, Akashinga and others are making a huge contribution to the future of the planet.

WPBBFT via [FT.com](https://www.ft.com)

A life of service (June 29/30)

by Madison Darbyshire

I am Milton's wife. I am incredibly proud of his hard work and commitment to Puppies Behind Bars' mission. What this article does not say is that my husband was wrongfully convicted, and that his case has been under review with the Legal Aid Wrongful Conviction Unit for several years. Also, he confirmed he was never asked about his hopes when interviewed, as he would have stated his hope is to have his conviction vacated, so he can continue his work with PBB on this side of the wall.

I understand the attempt to humanise the incarcerated individuals, but when you highlight their convictions it does the opposite, you villainise them. My husband and I have known each other for 37 years, he is a loving husband, father and grandfather. We have not stopped fighting for his conviction to be vacated and we will never lose hope.

Mrs M via [FT.com](https://www.ft.com)

Not believing, but hoping (June 29/30)

by Patrick Freyne

A question came to mind after reading your recent piece by Patrick Freyne, "an Irish Times feature writer". Are Irish Catholic lapsers alone among creed lapsers in continually bad-mouthing their inherited creed and never detailing what their replacements do for them?

Joseph Foyle, Dublin, Ireland

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TIM HARFORD

How much should we pay for 'fat finger' errors?

Receiving a demand for a parking fine is always annoying. Even more so when you know you paid for a ticket. But there it was, the letter from Euro Car Parks demanded payment, and they had photographs to prove it. It took 10 minutes for me to send evidence showing that at the time and place in question, the ticket machine had charged the price of an evening's parking to my debit card. After pondering this for a while, Euro Car Parks took a different tack: it withdrew the demand for payment of a fine, and, instead, demanded a £20 administrative fee for all the trouble I had caused it.

My crime, it turns out, was that I had only entered the first four characters of my vehicle registration. This "major keying error" violated the car park's terms and conditions. But such mishaps merely spark curiosity. Why do "major keying errors" occur and is there anything we can do to prevent them?

In May, a pair of UK regulators fined Citigroup more than £60mn for several failures of risk control, most spectacularly when a trader planned to sell \$58mn of shares but, in a major keying error, issued an order to sell \$444,000mn of shares instead. Some of this order was blocked, but the remainder was more than enough to fleetingly crash stock markets across Europe.

The system made such an error unnervingly easy: the trader typed a number into the wrong box, asking the system to sell 58 million units instead of \$58mn worth of units. Each unit was



worth thousands of dollars, and there's the problem. It is a bad idea to have a share trading system that lets you accidentally sell nearly half a trillion dollars worth of shares - which goes some way to explaining the £62mn fine. (How I wish regulators could be persuaded to levy such a magnificent fine on Euro Car Parks.)

What can be done to prevent such horrors? One possibility is to tell a system's users not to make any mistakes. This seems to be the position of Euro Car Parks, and it is not wholly satisfactory. Nobody plans to enter the wrong registration number when paying for parking and, no doubt, Citigroup traders endeavour not to accidentally sell half a trillion dollars worth of shares. But mistakes will be made.

An alternative is to program the software to notice the mistake. Euro Car Parks could have flashed up a message saying "you have only entered four digits, are you sure that's right?" or even "LOL sucker you'll hear from our lawyers" would serve as a warning.

Citi's system did flash up 711 warnings, of which only the first 18 lines were visible. That is only slightly better than no warnings at all, because trigger-happy warnings tend to be ignored as a matter of habit. And the Citi warnings must have been somewhat obscured by the fact that the system sometimes defaulted to assuming that shares had a unit price of -1, which means that if you mistakenly type 58 million units instead of \$58mn, the system might tell you you're selling -\$58mn rather than the more obviously unnerving figure of, ahem, \$444,000mn.

We can take comfort that this is not the most costly keying error in history. In fact it is not even Citigroup's most costly keying error this decade. In 2020, the bank accidentally transferred \$900mn of its own money to some creditors of Revlon, the cosmetics firm, again because of a software system that made such a slip all too easy. Some of those creditors decided to keep the money, on the grounds that Revlon did indeed owe it to them. US regulators fined Citi \$400mn for having deficient systems.

We may laugh, but when a system requires perfection from operators, the consequences can be tragic. Nancy Leveson, an MIT professor who specialises in software safety, has documented an infamous case: the Therac-25. The Therac-25 was a radiation-therapy device in the 1980s that could fire high-energy beams either of electrons or X-rays into patients. The type of beam matters. The X-ray beam was fired through a "flattener" to spread the treatment to the right area, but which also absorbed much of the energy. If the X-ray beam was somehow fired with the flattener out of position, disaster would result.

Disaster resulted. In one case, in a Texas hospital in 1986, the operator entered an "e" for the electron beam, then realised she had meant to type "x" for the X-ray, and swiftly moved the cursor back to correct the entry. The hidden flaw in the system was that rapid edits could bewilder it. If such an edit was made during the eight seconds it took to set everything up, the flattener would not be rotated into place and the software would be confused about the machine's configuration.

The upshot? The X-ray beam was fired without the flattener, delivering an extreme dose of radiation. The computer then told the operator that only a low dose had been administered, and invited her to press "P" to proceed with a second attempt.

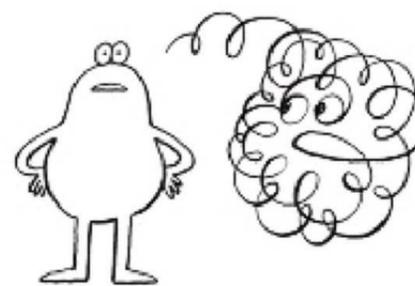
The patient, suffering burning pains, was already trying to get off the treatment table when he was hit by the second beam. It was later estimated that he had received around 100 times the intended dose. He lost the use of his arm, was paralysed by radiation burns to his spine, and died five months later from numerous complications. It was not the only fatal accident involving the Therac-25. A major keying error, indeed.

There is no such thing as a foolproof computer system, but software can be designed to fail gracefully or disgracefully. On reflection, perhaps £20 wasn't such an extortionate fee for a lesson in life. **FT**

It is a bad idea to have a trading system that lets you accidentally sell nearly half a trillion dollars worth of shares

DEPARTMENTS

Reports from lesser-known FT bureaux



Timelines

Unlikely historical occurrences that technically could have happened

- Frederick Douglass, Queen Victoria and Alfred Lord Tennyson were all alive to attend the founding of Nintendo
- Picasso had one month and seven days before he died to listen to Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*
- University of Oxford could have influenced Aztec civilisation
- Archduke Franz Ferdinand could have taken MDMA

Aphorism

Outlandish proverbs collected by George Herbert

- "Trees eat but once"
- "Castles are forests of stones"
- "You cannot hide an eel in a sack"
- "Call me not an olive, till thou see me gathered"
- "Bells call others, but themselves enter not into the Church"

Source: George Herbert, "Outlandish Proverbs" (1640)

Literature

Frankenstein's monster's reading list

In Mary Shelley's epic, Frankenstein's monster finds himself in a small dwelling connected to the De Lacey family's cottage and comes across the following books in a discarded satchel: 1. *Paradise Lost* by John Milton; 2. *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch; 3. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Source: Mary Shelley, "Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus" (1818)

Last week's theme: Afflictions

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GALLERY

*Photographs by***ABDULHAMID
KIRCHER**

Abdulhamid Kircher's early years were filled with trauma. He and his mother fled Berlin and his father Sedat's violence, changed their names and settled in Hanover before Sedat was imprisoned for drug dealing and attempted murder. By the time Sedat was released from prison in Germany, Kircher and his mother were living more than 6,000km away in Queens, New York. Now, after 15 years behind bars, Sedat was back on the scene in Berlin.

It was 2014 and Kircher, aged 17, was starting to get into photography. It was a way of engaging with the world and with his father. *Rotting from Within*, a body of work he made over the 10 years since then, stems from his desire to reconnect with his father, to better understand not just Sedat but also himself. The images, taken in Berlin and Sedat's native Turkey, are deeply personal, diaristic explorations that span various styles and formats. "It was always difficult for me to make this work without thinking about my mother's feelings, and her thinking that I may be glorifying [my father]," Kircher tells me. "But over time, she realised that that's not what this body of work is about."

The project was a way of observing his father and his world - still riddled with drugs and crime - from a distance. The camera provided protection, a physical and emotional buffer that allowed Kircher to be at once present and removed. 

.....
Words by Josh Lustig.

"Rotting from Within" is at carlier | gebauer, Berlin, until August 31 and published as a book by Loose Joints, loosejoints.biz



'Untitled', 2023



'Untitled', 2023

World View

SIMON KUPER

Blair's lessons for Labour



Tony Blair's Labour government was elected on Thursday May 1 1997. The next Monday, a bank holiday, I was on duty in the FT's economics room. Nothing happened on bank holidays, so I showed up at 11am, to be greeted by a colleague shouting: "They've made the Bank of England independent!"

This sounded insane. All British economics wonks back then agreed that the bank should be independent to set interest rates, and all agreed it would never happen. Chancellors liked cutting rates before elections. There were no votes in renouncing that power. Then Labour did it, a non-partisan act that lastingly improved British governance.

Keir Starmer's Labour should take Blair's Labour as its model. True, political issues have changed. True, New Labour was terribly flawed, but less than any other modern British government. Its basic assumptions still work. Listen to experts. Try to grow the economic pie. Give more of it to the worst-off people and public services. Don't worry about ideological purity. These would be banalities except that the outgoing Conservatives rejected all of them. British real wages haven't risen since 2006.

New Labour did get lots wrong. Most spectacularly, Blair joined the American invasion of Iraq. But in the scheme of things, his blunder scarcely mattered. Without him, the US would have wrecked the Middle East alone. It's also true that New Labour's "light-touch regulation" of the City worsened the damage of the 2008 financial crisis. Later Blair tarnished his own legacy by his money-grubbing after Downing Street, including for brutal autocracies.

But so much *did* work. New Labour instituted the minimum wage. It shovelled fortunes into public

services. If you think it was all wasted, watch the clip of audience members in a TV programme in 2005 complaining to Blair that their doctors' appointments were scheduled too soon. NHS waiting lists tumbled under New Labour before rising under the Conservatives. If you see a magnificent public building in a rundown British town, it was probably built by the Victorians or New Labour.

The list could go on. New Labour slashed homelessness, largely because it prioritised the unpopular issue. Policies such as Sure Start to help children under five were modelled on international best practice. In 2005, a friend told me he knew the UK had peaked when his postman bought a second home in South Africa.

New Labour was also reasonably competent. "Say what you like about us, but we had some very clever people," says a veteran of that era who has just joined Starmer's government. Days after London's 7/7 terrorist attacks in 2005, I interviewed a senior Tory who professed relief Blair was running things. "Frankly, we're pretty well governed," he said. Blair left office in 2007 to a standing ovation from the Commons. True, he benefited from Britain's longest unbroken period of economic growth from 1992 until 2008. But growth was unbroken partly because Labour mostly obeyed Barack Obama's edict: "Don't do stupid shit."

Then came the Tories, bearing evidence-free ideology. They gave us David Cameron's scorched-earth austerity, Brexit and Liz Truss's uncensored "mini-Budget". Rishi Sunak's fruitless signature project of sending asylum-seekers to Rwanda at maximum expense ended last week.

The electorate values competence. Surveys suggest the Tories were voted out chiefly because they lacked it

Most British voters aren't very ideological. Fascism, communism and libertarianism never took off here. Instead, the electorate values competence. Surveys suggest the Tories were voted out chiefly because they lacked it.

Starmer's early appointments show a Blairite appreciation for expertise. His prisons minister has experience rehabilitating prisoners. The attorney-general is a barrister, a King's Counsel. The science minister was previously government chief scientific adviser. Ideally, as under Blair, ministers will stay in post long enough to learn what their departments do, instead of being constantly reshuffled for party management purposes.

Starmer's right-hand man, Morgan McSweeney (or perhaps Starmer is his right-hand man), came up under New Labour and absorbed the notion that government should clean up rubbish before dreaming big. Starmer rarely mentions Blair, who is toxic in Labour circles, but he speaks to him often. That will continue in government. The Tony Blair Institute, funded partly by Blair's money-grubbing, has become probably Britain's biggest ever think-tank. Last year it employed 850 staffers, more than Blair commanded in Downing Street. He has said he'll put these resources at the government's disposal, "in the sense of advising and introducing and all of that".

Critics dismiss Blairism as simplistic "deliverology". Perhaps, but today's UK could do with a spot of deliverology. **FT**

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Essay

Virginia Woolf, list-maker

How keeping track of day-to-day minutiae paved the way for her more famous literary experiments. By *Harriet Baker*



What can a list of sheets and pillow cases, tablecloths and bath towels tell us about Virginia Woolf? Quite a lot, I think. I have spent a long time thinking about one particular list. It is written in Woolf's neat, graceful hand inside the back cover of a small notebook, beneath the heading "Linen at Asheham". The date is January 1918. There are enough cotton sheets for a house party (and when the beds ran out, we know that Duncan Grant was content to sleep in the bath). Next, she lists "Linen left to be washed". She did not do the washing herself - her servants Lottie and Nellie took care of that - yet the list remains the most quietly engaged example of her housekeeperliness I have been able to find. It is a record of how, in this period of her life from 1912 to 1919, a time of prolonged recovery

from mental illness, of war and isolation in the country, Woolf's mind turned to domestic things. And in shifting her attention, she was able to emerge out of illness into everyday life.

The list is both intimate and ordinary. It is an accumulation of material details, but also an emotional life, compressed. And it can provide a key to those years and the literary experiments that came out of them. In 1918, Woolf was 35 and the author of one novel, *The Voyage Out*. Since her marriage to Leonard Woolf in 1912, she had been ill. Following a series of breakdowns and a suicide attempt, he brought her to Asheham, a large-ish house nestled beneath the South Downs in East Sussex, in

1915. Her recovery was slow. She was permitted a walk and a page of letter-writing each day and encouraged to drink glasses of milk. Leonard presided over this routine, which she described to a friend as, “bed-walk-bed-walk-bed-sleep”.

By the summer of 1917, Woolf was in the final phase of her recovery. Her nurse had long since left, and she moved easily between Asheham and Hogarth House in Richmond, London. On August 3, she resumed her diary-keeping after a two-year hiatus. Her Asheham diary, as it has become known, is unlike those that precede or follow it. Part nature notes, part kitchen memorandum, the small notebook documents Woolf’s rural hours in a style that is economical, poetic and precise.

Each day followed a pattern. Woolf noted the weather; any insects or birds seen on her walk (“3 perfect peacock butterflies”); her daily tally of mushrooms or blackberries (“A record find”, “Enough for a dish”); gardening or domestic activities (“Made chair cover after tea”); what was happening in the fields (“German prisoners cutting wheat with hooks”); what she had for supper (“Eating our own broad beans – delicious”); and the price of rationed goods (“Eggs 2/9 doz. from Mrs Attfield”). Adhering to a structure in her diary gave shape to her convalescence. Woolf rarely used “I” and yet we catch sight of her out walking, or sewing on the terrace in a straw hat.

It’s not by chance that she wrote the laundry list on the inside cover of this notebook. During this period, listmaking and diary-keeping became part of the same practice of paying attention to small things and of setting down her experience, sparsely and without flourish, on the page. To biographers, this slender diary has appeared inconsequential compared with the weightier stuff of her later longhand diaries and letters. (Until last year, when *Granta* reissued Woolf’s collected diaries, the Asheham notebook hadn’t been published in full.) It reveals nothing of her thoughts or literary ambitions, her anxieties following the publication of her difficult first novel. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those biographers have largely seen the years 1912-19, covering the lease of Asheham, as years diminished by illness and war.

But look again. Woolf was experimenting. In her domestic life, she was attempting a freer, more bohemian version of living, epitomised in her instruction to visitors to the country to “bring no clothes” (evenings at Asheham were informal affairs). In her writing, she was on the brink of a new style, ready to abandon novelistic tradition for something more fluid. And in conversations with her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, who lived nearby at Charleston, she was developing her painterly eye.

In July 1918, Woolf asked Bell to illustrate “Kew Gardens”, her burbling, murmuring story of disembodied voices drifting over the flowerbed, of teeming insect life. The woodcuts Bell produced, depicting two hatted women against a leafy background with flowers, and a tailpiece of a butterfly and a caterpillar, united the kingdoms of words and pictures in a way Woolf found profoundly satisfying. And their collaboration was important. Having been ill, Woolf felt she was always catching up with her sister. “I think the book will be a great success – owing to you,” she wrote. “I suppose, in

spite of everything, God made our brains upon the same lines, only leaving out 2 or 3 pieces in mine.”

Though set in London, “Kew Gardens” owes its imagery of the natural world to Asheham, along with its depiction of domestic life. As the snail moves among the “vast green spaces” of the flowerbed, the women’s incidental talk – “sugar, flour, kippers, greens” – contributes to the general, wavering tissue of sound. Woolf was snobbish in her imitation of working-class voices, and yet the story was an attempt to show all life, both human and animal. It was one of many “short things” she wrote during the period, agile pieces that hailed a radical change in her style and set her on her way to books like *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*. In many ways, the latter is a domestic novel. A woman walks through London on an errand, planning her party, a list forming in her head.

Woolf’s years at Asheham were years of humdrum pleasures, of looking and noticing, of creative experimenting and renewal. I see all of it there in her laundry list. Here was a writer attempting to maintain order over her emotions, to tether herself to the physical world, line by line. “Haddock & sausage meat,” she would write in her diary many years later, in 1941, when she feared the onset of another breakdown. “I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage & haddock by writing them down.”

Recently, in a friend’s kitchen in her new house in the country, I noticed a slip of paper on which was written the opening times of the fishmongers and the local market days. It was written so neatly. My friend had suffered a profound loss almost as soon as she’d moved in. Living is a perilous business. We make lists to steady ourselves, to hold a moment in place when life threatens to overwhelm. There was such fortitude to this list. It read as a statement of intent, a letter to a future self. Years from now, if it survives, it will stand for an interval in a life, of making a home in an unfamiliar place, of recovering, of trying to move on.

This year, I published a group biography of three writers crafted around lists and other homely texts, including recipe books, gardening notebooks and household inventories. These writers had in common a move to the country, followed by a quiet period of making home and making do. In 1930, 12 years after Woolf counted her bed linen, the writer Sylvia Townsend Warner took a notebook and inventoried the entire contents of her Dorset cottage. Moving from room to room, she recorded the candlesticks and coal scuttle, the lustre jugs and aluminium saucepans, crockery and cutlery.

It reads like the wedding list of any middle-class couple of the time. Yet it is more heartfelt, more precarious, when one learns Warner’s household was a queer one. The new love of her life, the female poet Valentine Ackland, arrived at a moment of personal crisis, when Warner’s relationship with an older, married man was floundering and, after the success of her first novel, *Lolly Willowes*, she was at a sticking point

in her work. After an unhappy spell in London, in the inventory she was stocktaking her new life, taking the measure of her gold.

One more list – this time, typed. On August 4 1954, the novelist Rosamond Lehmann’s possessions were catalogued for auction on Friar Street in Reading. A pair of fawn velvet curtains, three damask tablecloths, two bedspreads, sundry kitchen crockery, a dog basket and its contents, a patterned carpet (worn). After the end of her nine-year affair with the poet Cecil Day Lewis, Lehmann was packing up her house in rural Oxfordshire. When she arrived in 1941, her most famous books and two marriages were behind her. She was an unlikely countrywoman, a mother of two young children, on the cusp of middle age. But she dug in and began to write short stories, some of her finest work. In “A Dream of Winter”,

a woman chastises herself for self-delusion and past mistakes: “Life doesn’t arrange stories with happy endings any more, see?” Lehmann might have known. The catalogue listing her possessions shows the dismantling of a life, an inventory in reverse.

A list is both much and little. It allows the biographer a glimpse of a life in scraps and fragments.

Like Woolf’s tenure at Asheham, Warner’s first years in Dorset have often been glanced over, her story seeming to pick up with her communist politics in 1935. But reading Warner’s inventory in the archive, her cottage came colourfully to life, with its mischievous juxtaposition of Regency and rustic, coupling Chippendale with cross-stitch, rococo mirrors with patchwork quilts. I felt as if I were pacing round, rummaging through her cupboards and drawers. And reading Woolf’s Asheham diary in the New York Public Library, the small marbled notebook in my hands, I had the sense of peering over her shoulder as she tallied her pillowcases and sheets.

For all three writers, their country interludes represent the spaces between the big events, between the landmarks that might dominate a traditional biography. In the archives, I studied the materials, but looked closer still. And I followed the line of their looking. Reading their notes, lists and plans, I discovered those spaces to be lived-in, hopeful, fruitful.

And so I allowed myself to glimpse the writers themselves, to see Sylvia coming in from the garden, dirt beneath her fingernails, Rosamond trailed by dogs or Virginia kneeling to count the household linen, feeling the draught along the landing, a current of cold air. In feeling myself into my subject as a novelist would a character, I felt closer to the grain and texture of her life at Asheham. Biography is so often about the public triumphs, but it can be about the quiet, private ones too. *I am mistress of my own home*, Woolf seems to be saying to herself as she sifts and sorts, turning to her notebook. *I am managing. I am well.* **FT**

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Harriet Baker is the author of “Rural Hours: The Country Lives of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rosamond Lehmann” (Allen Lane)

Essay

Swords in the attic

Repatriation is a hot topic for museums – and for families sheltering mysterious artefacts in grand houses.

By Francesca Carington



We found them in the attic. It was the hot, dry summer of 2018, when, after my grandfather's death, we began the long process of clearing out the house in Buckinghamshire where he'd lived since 1945. Lying under the water tank was a wide, black tin trunk filled with old weapons. Buried beneath scraps of newspaper were empty scabbards, ceremonial sabres with elaborate hilts and what looked like a first world war helmet. Underneath them were four stranger weapons: long, flat, medieval-looking swords, sketched brown with rust. Their blades were still sharp. Unsure of their origin, and overwhelmed by the task at hand, my father and I decided to move them temporarily into storage.

In September 2022, we returned to the trunk. This time, we noticed a maker's mark on one of the swords: the lines of a wolf, etched like an ancient chalk outline on an English hill. We checked the other three swords again and, sure enough, each of them bore a maker's mark: a crown, a "P" and a faint indecipherable squiggle. My father contacted the Wallace Collection in London, known for its impressive galleries of arms. They passed him on to Clive Thomas, an expert in medieval swords. Thomas knew exactly what they were. "I've been searching for these for years," he said.

There's a photograph from 1889, taken inside the Ottoman Arsenal in Istanbul. Swords,

revolvers and spears are criss-crossed in a panoply of arms on a white pillar flanked by hanging suits of armour. At the top, Thomas confirmed, were two of the swords from the trunk.

My great-grandfather, Rupert Victor Carrington, 5th Lord Carrington, had been posted to Istanbul, then Constantinople, from 1922 to 1923 during its occupation by the Allied forces. An inventory made by his wife after his death in 1938 indicated he'd returned with souvenirs: "Relics from Turkey brought by Rupert." But how had he acquired them? And what should we do with them now?

Curators, lawyers, academics and politicians across the west have been grappling with increasing intensity with the imperial roots of their museum collections. The revelation last summer of the alleged decade-long theft of thousands of poorly catalogued items from the British Museum by one of its own curators reignited calls for the return of the Parthenon marbles to Greece. The Metropolitan Museum in New York created a new provenance team in 2023, and returned looted items to Cambodia, Nepal, Thailand, Yemen and India. Benin Bronzes from institutions as far-flung as the Smithsonian, the Horniman Museum, the University of Aberdeen, Jesus College, Cambridge and several German museums are in various - and in some cases contested - stages of repatriation to Nigeria or the Kingdom of Benin, now part of the Nigerian republic.

Questions of restitution are usually fraught. For many Britons, a pride in their country's past and an attachment to the historic art and artefacts held in public collections is hard to shake. It might mean unpicking attitudes and assumptions, examining deeply held convictions. But what about the treasures picked up by individual soldiers over centuries of conflict and colonial expansion? How should families across Britain handle the smaller, scattered fruits of conquest in attics or stately homes, their origins unknown? And what light might these objects shed on a family's own history?

Iwanted to piece together the history of the swords in the attic. If they came from Istanbul, I wondered, why did they look so... western? I turned to Thomas for help. As he explained, they are not Turkish at all, but rather 14th- or 15th-century European swords. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the city's new Ottoman rulers converted a Byzantine church, the Hagia Eirene, into a military depot, filling it with equipment as well as arms and armour taken as battle trophies. Late 19th-century photographs show the church's interior walls strung with flags, swords and spears, the suits of armour its only congregants.

The four swords from our attic bore the arsenal's distinctive patina, Thomas told me, a brown feathering along their blades in reaction to its air conditions. Three of them are engraved with a "Y" flanked by two dots, the mark of the Ottoman Arsenal. The fourth sword, the one with the wolf, has no arsenal mark. Instead, it has an Arabic inscription that betrays its different route from Christian knightly weapon to Ottoman booty.

The inscription "*hubs al-khizana*" ("pious donation to the storehouse") indicates that the sword resided in the Alexandria Arsenal

during the Mamluk sultanate, Thomas said. Between 1367 and 1437, emirs of the sultanate placed European swords in the arsenal as pious donations to the empire. These came into Mamluk possession during wars and skirmishes, or as diplomatic gifts from the Kingdom of Cyprus. The act of inscription was highly symbolic. The text, sometimes etched over a European maker's mark, converted a Christian weapon into a sacred Islamic one.

In 1517, the Ottomans defeated the Mamluks, I learnt, as I leafed through academic papers and histories of the Ottoman Empire at the Brooklyn Library in New York. They cleared out the Alexandria Arsenal, placing the swords in their own arsenal in Constantinople as spoils of war. There are some 200 known "Alexandrian swords". Around half are now in museums or private collections. The rest remain in Istanbul; the arsenal went through its own transformations over the centuries, from the old royal collections of the Hagia Eirene to what is now the Istanbul Military Museum (in the 19th century, its contents were split between the former church and a new location in the Maçka neighbourhood of Istanbul where the panoply featuring our two swords was photographed).

After the first world war, in which the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany, the Allies partitioned Constantinople between the British, French and Italians. Its de facto occupation after the war in 1918 was formalised in 1920. My great-grandfather, Rupert Victor, arrived two years later, as a captain and transport officer for the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadier Guards. Having established where the swords were from, I needed to know how - and why - he got his hands on them. It was here that the histories of these well-travelled swords became entangled with my family's own history. If I wanted to keep piecing them together, it was time to delve into our past.

I knew little about Rupert Victor. He'd always seemed a somewhat sad figure. We had a few boxes of papers containing his war record, his passport, some letters. Born in 1891, he'd had a colonial upbringing in Australia, I learnt, his renegade father having been brought there by his brother, the governor of New South Wales, to stop him from racking up gambling debts and illegitimate children. It was a time of economic turmoil in the British colony, and of continued oppression and displacement of the indigenous population. Rupert Victor left Australia in 1914 and fought in the first world war, where was wounded both physically and mentally. He died at 46, when my grandfather was just 19.

Rupert Victor took hundreds of photographs when he was in Constantinople, many of which he sent home to his wife, Sybil. They depict strikingly young-looking soldiers boating, water-skiing, playing football, camping and picnicking in their swimsuits. Modern Turkey was never a colony, but the British forces were an occupying power there and my great-grandfather and his fellow officers seem to have treated the city as their playground. He sent home snapshots of der-

ring-do. "Nationalists on guard in Yildiz Palace grounds the afternoon of the Sultan's departure," he labelled a picture of two armed soldiers in long coats. "The one on the right at first threatened to bayonet me but thought better of it."

Another of his photographs shows modern Turkish swords and pistols hanging on the wall of his bedroom. A note to Sybil on the back reads, "Revolvers etc taken from Turks." Those words made me uneasy, as did my relief when there was no evidence the items came from the Ottoman Arsenal, nor any sign of the medieval swords in the photograph. How would I feel if I discovered he'd stolen them? Would it change anything?

A contemporary westerner in Constantinople provides some clue as to how Rupert Victor might have got the swords. In 1920, Bashford Dean, the Metropolitan Museum's first curator of arms

and armour, visited the Ottoman Arsenal on a collecting trip. His photographs show it in a state of disarray, crates overflowing with armour, swords under cabinets on the floor. He bought five helmets for the Met and two Alexandrian swords for himself, one of which he bequeathed to his employer.

Did Rupert Victor buy his swords in the same way? It's unlikely we'll ever know. Thomas suspects the authorities had been selling items such as these from the Ottoman Arsenal for some time, but there's no record of a purchase. Even if their acquisitions were above board, it's hard not to see both Rupert Victor and Bashford Dean as having taken advantage of the sorry state of affairs in Constantinople, the once magnificent capital of an empire, now overrun by foreign soldiers and convulsed by political unrest. It's possible Rupert Victor simply wanted the swords as souvenirs. That we discovered them languishing in a trunk, mixed up with rusty helmets and modern Turkish arms, reveals a lack of reverence that is of its time, representative of a class of people who saw no reason why they couldn't take whatever they wanted. To him, the swords were probably Oriental curiosities of little monetary value.

The swords, however, are valuable. This is in part because of their rarity, but also their condition. (Excavated medieval swords tend not to be in top nick.) The one from the Alexandria Arsenal is particularly valuable. One of the two Bashford Dean bought in 1920 went for £386,500 at auction in 2015.

As I read about the provenance of other Alexandrian swords in museum guides and auction catalogues, I was struck by how little interest there seemed to be in identifying how they'd left the Ottoman Arsenal. It was often as though they didn't exist before whichever westerner bought, sold or donated them in the 20th century. (At least one other sword was owned by another Grenadier, Major J A Prescott, who appears in my great-grandfather's photographs.) In general, these swords were simply "acquired", if there's a mention of transfer at all.

The records are slight, both on the departure of swords from the arsenal and on the 400 or so

A note on the back of the photograph reads, 'Revolvers etc taken from Turks.' These words made me uneasy

years they spent there. When Filiz Çakir Phillip, a scholar of Islamic art who has studied the arsenal extensively, told me the Ottomans may have given my great-grandfather the swords as a gift, I felt a small jolt of hope. I wanted to find the answer in which he came out best, I realised. In the absence of reliable historical document, bias creeps in. “You want to deal with the facts,” Phillip said, “but human emotions are always involved.”

In restitution debates I’m often drawn to the idea that the place an object was made, revered and beloved is in some way part of its essence. A few individuals have returned ill-gotten antiquities to the cultures in which they originated. In 2014, Mark Walker, a retired doctor from Wales whose grandfather took part in the British army’s bloody looting of Benin City in 1897, returned two items to the Kingdom of Benin’s present oba. The artefacts, a bird and a ceremonial bell, had been used as door stops before they came into Walker’s possession.

In 2019, upon discovering that two more pieces he’d inherited were also from Benin, Walker loaned them to Oxford’s Pitt Rivers Museum on the condition they be returned to the royal court of Benin. But even the seemingly straightforward transfer of Benin Bronzes has been fraught. The return of the Smithsonian’s artefacts, for instance, provoked anger among the descendants of those

enslaved by the oba’s predecessors at having been left out of discussions.

The swords from our attic wear their history in layers. The hundreds of years spent in the Ottoman Arsenal are there in their rusted patina. The Alexandrian sword’s Arabic inscription speaks to its revered station in Egypt. And the makers’ marks on all four blades point to the unknown European swordsmiths who forged them centuries ago. To which fallen empire, each of which long predates today’s nation states, do they truly belong?

Edward Said wrote, “Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.”

The swords have moved through cultures and empires. They are both instruments and symbols of conquest, and whether or not they saw combat, their paths would have been paved with violence. They have been sacred and profane, Christian and Muslim, spoils of war, nationalist trophies and mementos of a time of occupation. They’re polyphonic, and difficult. So is history.

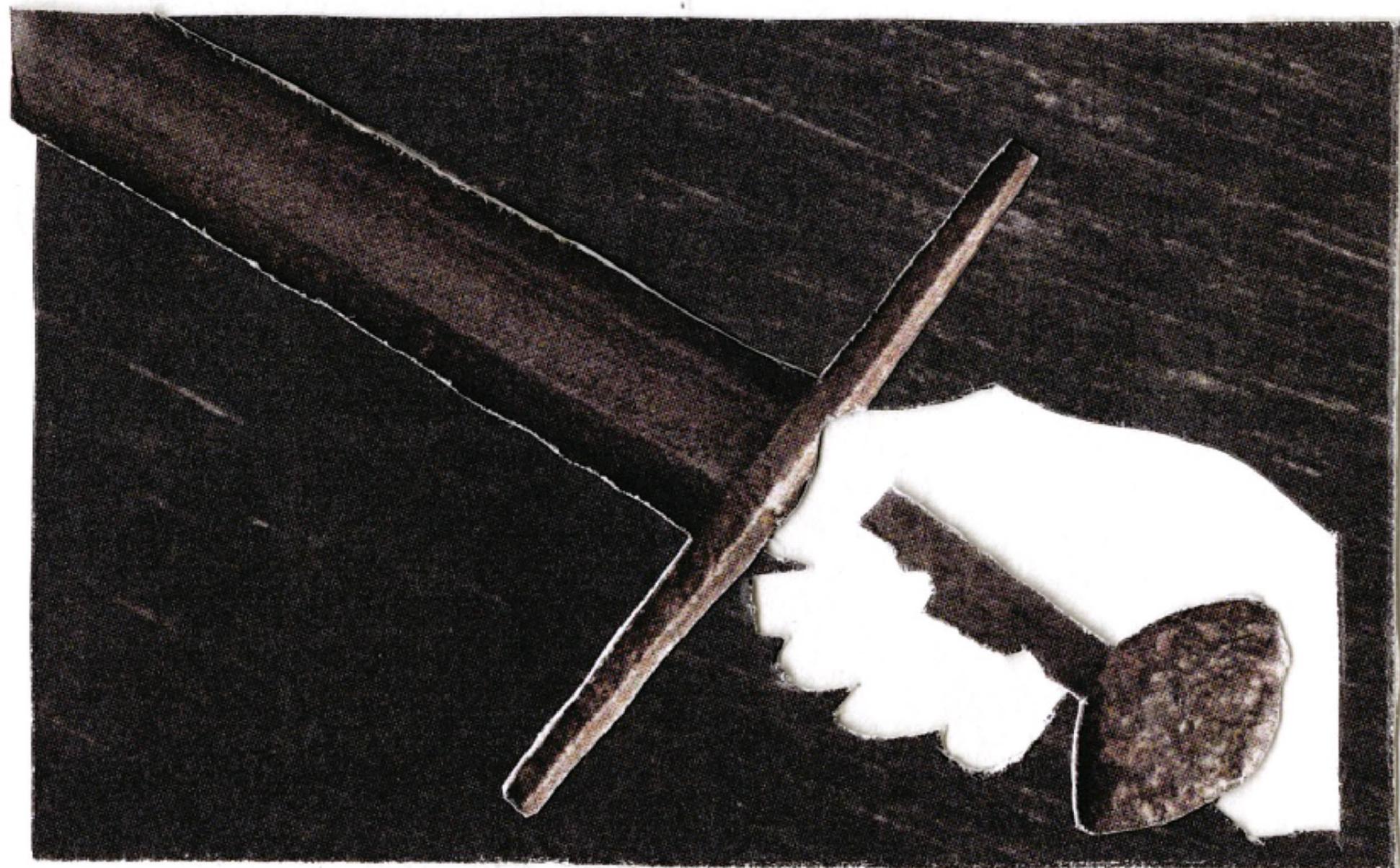
Since the swords are European, my father never considered sending them back to Turkey. But more than anything, he wants them to be seen, not stashed away. “Otherwise what’s the point?” he asked. “They might as well sit in the trunk

again.” (Of the roughly 100 Alexandrian swords owned by the Istanbul Military Museum, Thomas identified only 19 on display in 2022.) Thomas is writing an academic paper about the swords from our attic and, armed with this research, my father plans to approach UK museums in the hope of loaning or donating them.

But why a museum? While sorting through the attic some years ago, my father also found papers belonging to another of my great-grandfathers, the aviator Frank McClean. A chance encounter with an air marshal revealed McClean’s role in the history of naval aviation (he was taught to fly by the pioneering Wright brothers, and founded the Fleet Air Arm), so my father decided to send the papers to the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Somerset. “Some things are of great interest to parts of the general public,” he said.

The swords have been cleaned, ready and they glint like the dark sea at sunset. But the deceit of the word “acquired”, neatly printed beneath so many museum artefacts, still vexes me. It shouldn’t be so hard for visitors to find out where the items on display come from. I hope that one day the swords will be exhibited as fine examples of crusader weapons, Ottoman plunder and imperial arrogance. And that a new label will point to the sticky parts of their provenance, the way they trace the contours of conquest over 600 years. I hope the people who see them will keep asking questions about them and about themselves, especially when there’s no clear answer. **FT**

The swords have been sacred and profane, Christian and Muslim, spoils of war, nationalist trophies and mementos of a time of occupation





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A





A N U N P R E C E D E

UNFINISHED TRAGEDY

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AMERICAN HISTORY, THE PARENTS OF A SCHOOL SHOOTER HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF COMPLICITY IN THEIR CHILD'S CRIMES. IS THAT REALLY A STEP FORWARD?

By MATTHEW BREMNER



THE STUDENTS
AT OXFORD
HIGH SCHOOL
WERE TRUDGING
BETWEEN
ROOMS DURING
PASSING
TIME, THE
SHORT RECESS
BETWEEN
CLASSES. IT
WAS LATE
NOVEMBER 2021,
A MID-DAY LIKE
ANY OTHER.

Oxford is located just outside Detroit, Michigan, so it was cold, about minus 1C, and snow covered the ground. At 12.46pm, 15-year-old Ethan Crumbley ambled to the south end of one of the school's hallways.

Ethan, wearing a grey hoodie, jeans and a backpack, moved easily among the other students. He was lanky, with hunched shoulders. Squinting through his glasses, dark hair falling messily in front of his eyes, he looked somewhat like a ruffled hatchling. He was a quiet boy, an average student and, according to some of the staff at Oxford High School, no trouble at all.

Ethan entered a bathroom around 12.50pm, walked into one of the stalls and put down his pack. He took out a black notebook, pens, a juice bottle and his laptop. At the bottom of the bag, a jet-black Sig Sauer 9mm handgun jostled among rounds of ammunition. As Ethan fed the gun chamber with bullets, several other kids heard the rhythmic sound of metal on metal, like the tick of a grandfather clock. Then, *click-clack*, the sound of the gun cocking.

He had been planning this for months. He had Googled police response times. He'd looked up the difference between 22mm and 9mm ammunition, the latter being more destructive, searched if Michigan had the death sentence, and he'd thought about who he wanted to kill. "The first victim," he wrote in his journal, "has to be a pretty girl with a future so she can suffer just like me."

Ethan slipped out of the stall, leaving his backpack and notebook behind. His hand was clenched around the butt of the pistol inside the front pocket of his hoodie, but his demeanour was calm as he emerged into the hallway crowded with students. Then he yanked his right hand from his pocket, raised his arm 90 degrees, held it there, straight and rigid, and began to fire into the crowd.

In seven seconds, he shot seven students, fatally wounding Hana St Juliana, 14, and Madisyn Baldwin, 17. The hallway erupted in screams, the frantic squeaking of rubber soles on linoleum, the sounds of backpacks and textbooks slapping to the floor. Ethan moved towards a classroom, where students hid behind desks, some recording the attack on their phones, some leaping out of the ground-floor windows. "Please don't let this be real, please don't let this be real," one teenage girl pleaded into her cellphone's camera, over the crack of gunshots.

Oxford's assistant principal, Kristy Gibson-Marshall, saw the kids running down the hallway towards her. She was in her fifties, with longish, wavy dark hair. At first, she thought the students were laughing but as more of them passed by, she realised they were panicking. Then Gibson-Marshall heard her boss's voice over the PA: "We're on lockdown. This is not a drill."

Gibson-Marshall knew remaining in the corridor would break protocol, but something drove her down the hallway anyway. The smell of burnt gunpowder grew stronger. So did the sound of screaming and gunfire. Outside classroom 225, she saw Tate Myre, 16, slumped in a pool of blood. He had been shot twice. Then she saw Ethan. Gibson-Marshall wondered why he was there alone and not running away. She asked the boy if he was okay. "I didn't believe it could be him," she later testified. But Ethan didn't respond. He stared straight ahead and walked back down the hallway.

A few minutes later, Ethan reached another bathroom. Keegan Gregory, 15, and Justin Shilling, 17, were inside. The two boys did not know one another but, hearing gunshots, Shilling told Gregory to come into the stall to hide with him. Gregory squatted on the toilet seat so that the shooter wouldn't see his feet and texted his family, "Help! Gunshots, I'm hiding in the bathroom." Shilling tried to hide behind the cubicle door.

Ethan, possibly alerted by Gregory's tapping, kicked the stall door open. He hesitated, then shouted at Shilling to come out but told Gregory to stay put. Both boys complied. As Gregory resumed texting his parents, Ethan shot Shilling. "He killed him," Gregory wrote. "OMG." Ethan turned back to Gregory and asked him to lean against the wall. Instead, Gregory ran past him. Ethan hurried out of the bathroom around 1pm.

Further down the hall, he saw police officers who had arrived at the scene. At first, they ran straight past. But when one noticed he was carrying a pistol, they began shouting at him to get on his knees. Ethan did as he was instructed, raising his hands up in the air.

He had always planned to comply. He wasn't going to kill himself. He was too curious for that. "I know that rarely shootings have happened in Michigan," he'd written in his journal. "Which means I will be the cause of the largest school shooting ever in the state." Ethan wanted America to hear what he'd done, and he wanted to be incarcerated for life.

O

ver two years later, in an austere courtroom some 17 miles south of Oxford, prosecutors recounted the day of the shooting in minute detail. Reporters from all over the country were crammed on narrow, church-like pews in a cordoned press section. But Ethan Crumbley wasn't on trial. He'd pleaded guilty in 2022 to the murder of four people and injuring seven more and was later sentenced to life in prison. Today, it was his mother, Jennifer, who stood accused of involuntary manslaughter. His father, James, was scheduled to be tried on the same charge separately.

The Crumbley case was an unprecedented moment in the grim saga of mass shootings in America. In a famously litigious country, victims of gun violence have had little recourse to courts. The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, signed by president George W Bush in 2005, shields firearm manufacturers and dealers from civil lawsuits. The number of parents of school shooters who have been put on trial in the US is vanishingly small. In 1999, the parents of the Columbine shooters faced civil lawsuits but were not criminally charged. Last year, the father of the Highland Park Fourth of July shooter pleaded guilty to reckless conduct, and the mother of a six-year-old who shot his teacher in Virginia was sentenced to 21 months for child neglect.

But Oakland County's District Attorney, Karen McDonald, had decided to go further. Depending on its outcome, the trial was being heralded as a milestone. McDonald, a Democrat and mother of five, charged Ethan's parents with involuntary manslaughter. She'd told a press conference that Jennifer and James knew their son had access to an unsecured firearm at home, that Ethan had been searching for ammunition online and that a teacher had discovered a disturbing drawing he had made, depicting his planned actions.

In the courtroom, McDonald sat at a wooden table to the judge's left, dressed in a checked blazer, her bright blonde hair falling to her shoulders. She looked on as the Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor told the jury that Jennifer and James's trials weren't about lousy parenting but preventable mass murder. "The state [isn't] trying to prove that the parents knew what was going to happen that day," he said. "If that were the case, the charges would be murder." Instead, the state aimed to prove that the Crumbleys had been grossly negligent parents and that they showed a wilful disregard for the danger their son's behaviour had presented. (McDonald declined an interview request.)

Involuntary manslaughter involves less culpability than murder, but it can still be difficult to prove. Nobody had ever been tried for it in a mass shooting case before. For the prosecution to win a guilty verdict, it would have to prove that the Crumbley parents' "wilful disregard" directly contributed to the events of November 30 2021.

There was another complication. When Ethan pleaded guilty in 2022, McDonald insisted he be sentenced as an adult. Now, prosecutors seemed to be arguing that Ethan was a child who might never have killed four people had his parents been paying closer attention. The prosecution had no legal obligation to be coherent with their accusations. From a legal point of view, these were



PREVIOUS PAGES: POLICE MUGSHOTS OF JENNIFER AND JAMES CRUMBLEY
 ABOVE: AN AMBULANCE WAITS AT A POLICE ROAD BLOCK OUTSIDE OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL ON THE DAY OF THE SHOOTING

two separate cases, on two separate tracks. The effect, though, was to suggest some sort of quantum morality, in which the prosecution claimed that Ethan was a victim of circumstance and an evil mastermind at the same time.

Behind a line of sheriff's deputies, Jennifer Crumbley sat huddled at a desk next to her lawyer. She wore a grey turtleneck, her hair swept back in a greasy ponytail. She kept removing her thick black glasses to dab tears from her eyes, occasionally letting out a hoarse sob. Her attorney, Shannon Smith, rose to make her opening statement.

Smith, tall, red-headed, wearing purple high-heeled shoes and a matching jacket, told the jury she had been nervous on the way to the courthouse that morning. To calm her nerves, she had put on Taylor Swift. As she drove, she said, one line in the song stood out: Band-Aids don't fix bullet holes. This case, Smith told the court, was just a show to make the public feel better. It was a distraction from pain. Jennifer, she insisted, was a good mother who had suffered. She'd lost her son, too.

I spotted Steve St Juliana sitting in the courtroom one row ahead. His daughter Hana, a pretty girl with a future, had been shot and killed in the first few seconds of the attack. Steve and I had communicated by text and phone in the weeks leading up to the trial, but hadn't met in person until that day. As I watched him slump deeper into his pew, I didn't dare wonder what he was thinking or feeling, or what hearing all this

was doing to him. Steve would later tell me that these trials were parts of a broader struggle for justice. On that cold January morning, though, he was in the courtroom for the same reason as everyone else. He wanted to know if Ethan's parents could have prevented the death of his daughter and three other kids.

J

ennifer Crumbley grew up in Clarkston, a Detroit suburb, where she skied with the junior varsity team. According to friends, she had a brash, sarcastic streak. She could also be self-indulgent and "talk for hours", one former neighbour told me. Her young adulthood was marked by several misdemeanours, including a DUI. As she grew up, she traded her love of skiing for horses. She bought two and showered them with attention.

James Crumbley, two years her senior, was from Jacksonville, Florida. Some people who knew him said he was charming and happy-go-lucky; others told me he was stand-offish and shy. Like Jennifer's, his record wasn't spotless. There was a DUI conviction in 2005, the year he and Jennifer got married on a Florida beach. Ethan, their only child, was born in 2006. The couple moved to Michigan when he was in elementary school, eventually settling in a modest three-bedroom house with a

menagerie of pets: dogs, cats, a chinchilla. There were early indications Ethan was being neglected. One neighbour, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity, said they'd had a big argument with Jennifer for leaving Ethan home without a phone while she and James went bar-hopping when their son was around six years old. "When I confronted her, Jenn just raged, there was a whole list of expletives," the neighbour told me. The person said Ethan was always timid and struggled to interact with other children and adults.

By early 2021, Ethan was a teenager exhibiting signs of mental illness. Text messages revealed during the trial suggested he might have suffered from hallucinations. One text to his mother in March of that year read, "Can you get home now? I think someone is in the house and I thought it was you, but when will you get home?" In another, the boy texted a picture of what he described as a demon, claiming the house was haunted. When his mother did not respond, Ethan pleaded, "CAN YOU AT LEAST TEXT BACK?" Jennifer, who was at a horse farm with her husband, phoned him back an hour later. The call lasted 19 seconds.

By April, Ethan's isolation and anxiety seemed to worsen. In a message to a friend, he wrote, "Like I hear people talking to me, and I see someone in the distance. I actually asked my dad to take me to the doctor. He gave me some pills and told me to suck it up. My mom laughed when I told her."

Equally worrying was Ethan's interest in violence. In mid-April, he told the same friend about his wish "to take an axe and chop a baby bird in half". Several weeks later, he fulfilled his desire. In two short videos, described to the jury by investigators, he burned a hatchling with a butane lighter while speaking to it like a child. "Hey, little buddy," he kept saying, before impaling it with a drywall screw. About a month later, he texted his friend: "I'm getting that feeling I need to kill again."

Ethan liked guns too, video-taping himself with a .22-caliber KelTec pistol his parents had left around the house. "Now it's time to shoot up the school," he wrote to his friend, "joke joke joke joke."

In late October 2021, Ethan's friend, with whom he had exchanged over 20,000 messages, was taken out of state for mental health treatment. This seemed to affect Ethan deeply. In the weeks that followed, he spent hours online, looking up mass shootings and googling questions like, "What is the worst prison sentence in Michigan?"

"Loss, or impending loss, is often a key precipitant in such cases," Dr Greg Saathoff, a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia and an FBI contractor who helps coordinate threat-assessment programmes in schools across the US, told me. In the preceding months, Ethan had lost his dog and his grandmother. Now his best friend, his only friend, had disappeared too. "When we identify a child as vulnerable to destructive behaviour," Saathoff said, "we look to establish a support network in this child's environment." In other words, parents, relatives, friends.

But, according to Ethan, he had no such support. "One call and that can save a lot of lives," reads one of his journal entries from that time. "My evil has fully taken over in me, and I used to like it, but now I don't want to be evil. I want help, but my parents don't listen to me, so I can't get any help. I feel like I'm in a tiny loop of sadness."

Ethan's parents denied they saw these texts and videos or knew what he was searching for online. Dr Karie Gibson, chief of behavioral analysis unit-1 with the FBI, told me that people close to a potential mass attacker often show "an inability to recognise the significance of what is happening to a person". There can be many reasons. People are preoccupied with everyday life and don't have the bandwidth to notice or deal with worrying behaviours. Even if they notice, they can't necessarily predict what it could lead to. (Saathoff and Gibson declined to comment on the Crumbley case specifically.)

The prosecution emphasised at trial that the Crumbleys knew their son was unhappy and still did nothing. In a text presented in court, Jennifer wrote to another parent: "Ethan isn't bowling tonight. Recently, he's been depressed."

The state argued they always put their needs before their son's. Whether it was their financial struggles (James was between permanent jobs) or marital problems (Jennifer was having an affair), these issues overshadowed their son's welfare.

The one thing Ethan's parents did indulge was their son's love of guns, regularly taking him to a shooting range. On November 26, James took Ethan to a gun shop in Oxford to buy him an early Christmas present. In CCTV footage, father and son walk to a counter and examine an array of pistols. The shop clerk testified that the pair didn't browse for long. They knew exactly what they

wanted, the Sig Sauer. James paid \$519.35, using his credit card. Before he left, he signed a form acknowledging it was illegal to buy a minor a gun.

O

ne Saturday morning, midway through Jennifer's trial, I drove to Oxford from the nearby town where I was staying. The central street is lined with chocolate-brown houses, with front windows shaded by striped awnings. It is a quiet, middle-class town that, like much of Michigan, swings Republican and Democrat. Like much of Michigan, it is also gun country. Hunting and sport shooting are traditions in this state with some 10 million acres of land open to the public.

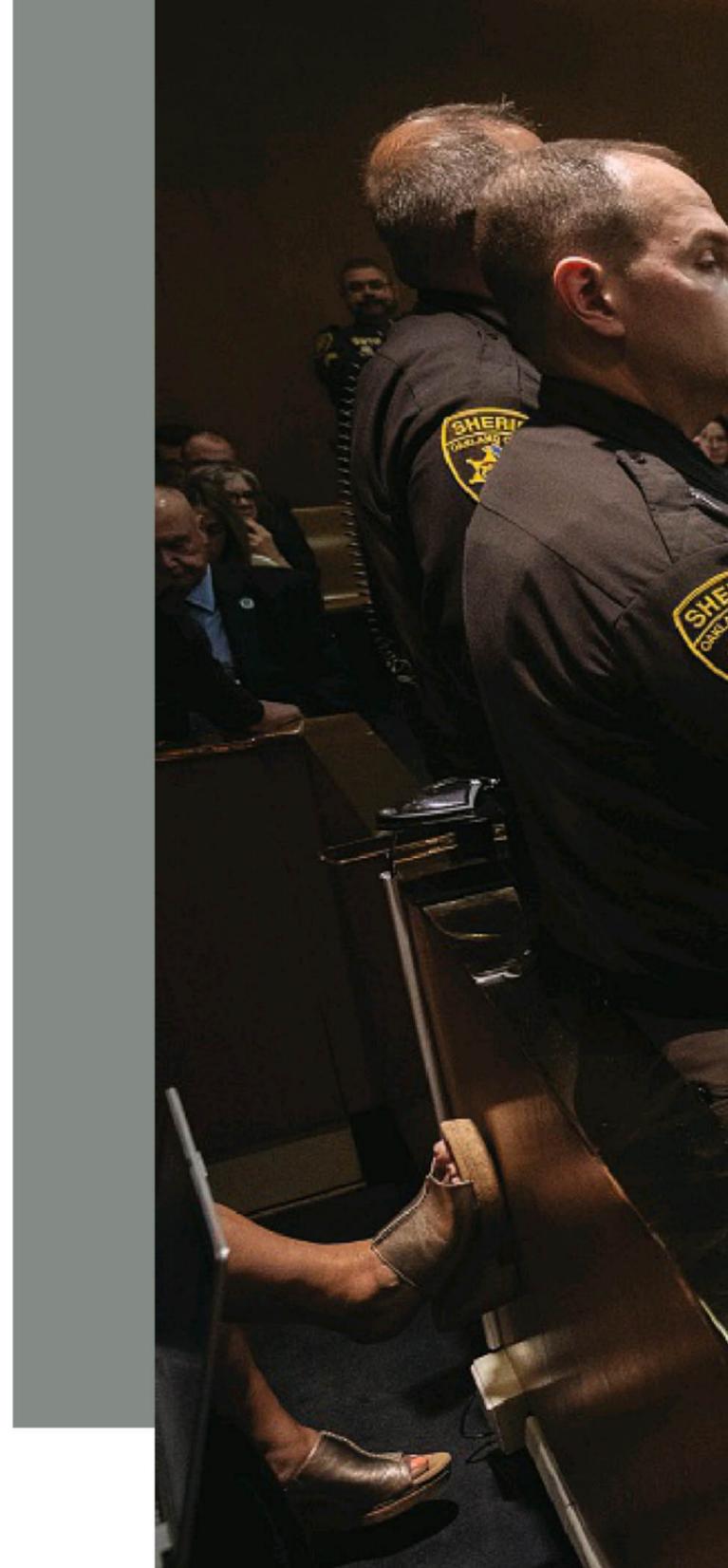
That led to conflicted feelings among locals about the prospect of a guilty verdict for Jennifer and James. "Holding parents accountable for their inaction to provide ordinary care is necessary for the safety of all children," Meghan Gregory wrote to me. Her son, Keegan, was the boy who ran away from Ethan in the bathroom.

But some academics and lawyers worried a guilty verdict might have unintended consequences. "Hard cases don't make for good law," Evan Bernick, a lecturer at Northern Illinois University, told me. The legal system is built on precedent. Once a precedent is established, regardless of how specific it is to a particular case, prosecutors can freely use it in other ostensibly similar cases. Bernick's primary point was that a guilty verdict might be used as leverage in lower-profile cases that were not so unique or egregious. He was specifically worried about law enforcement pressuring suspects into taking plea bargains. "There are innate racial prejudices in our legal system and this type of precedent might help execute such a prejudice in law more easily," he said.

On East Street, just off the main drag, I stopped by the green, box-shaped house where the Crumbleys had lived. A silver pickup was parked outside, and a lurching pine tree invaded the front lawn. The prosecution had shown pictures from inside taken on the day of the shooting. Beds were unmade, clothes and cushions were strewn about the floor, an empty Canada House whiskey bottle was in Ethan's room, and cardboard boxes were piled up in the living room. But the mess wasn't the point, the prosecution argued. The chaos of the Crumbley family home was.

Sitting across the road, occasionally looking down to reread bits of trial transcript, I tried to recreate what had happened there in the days and hours before the shooting. By late November 2021, two disparate worlds were crammed under that roof. In one, two parents were wrapped up in their own problems and, in the other, a young man was descending into madness. I pictured the moment Ethan started taking videos of himself loading and unloading his pistol at the kitchen table. I saw James and Jennifer swigging from the bottles of Canada House whiskey, squabbling over money, her affair, their son.

Then, I imagined the night of November 29, when Ethan fought with them about his poor academic performance. As a punishment, they locked him in the freezing backyard for several hours. The final thing I read in the court files was that Ethan, presumably in his room, scribbled in his



STAFF DIDN'T RECOGNISE THE SHOOTER AS A THREAT EVEN THOUGH HE SHOWED CLEAR SIGNS OF DANGEROUS BEHAVIOUR. THEY HAD NO IDEA WHAT TO REPORT AS SUSPICIOUS



JAMES CRUMBLEY (SEATED LEFT), JENNIFER CRUMBLEY (THIRD LEFT) AND THEIR ATTORNEYS ATTEND COURT FOR SENTENCING

spidery handwriting the following sentence: “First off, I got my gun. It’s a Sig Sauer 9mm. Second, the shooting is tomorrow. I’m fully committed to this now. So yeah... I’m going to prison for life, and many people have about one day left.”

A

t around 9.25am on November 30, Jennifer was on the phone with Oxford High School’s front desk. In class, Ethan had been caught drawing guns on a worksheet, as well as pictures of a man bleeding. He’d written, “The thoughts won’t stop,” “Blood everywhere,” and “My life is useless.” School administrators told Jennifer they were deeply concerned, especially since Ethan had been caught looking up bullets on his phone the day before. Jennifer texted her husband a picture of the maths worksheet as she spoke to the school staff. James responded “WTF”, and she told him he needed to come in for an urgent meeting.

Around 10.37am, Jennifer and James got to the school. School counsellor Shawn Hopkins was

waiting for them with Ethan and Nick Ejak, the dean of students. “Something had to be done,” Hopkins told them, after reviewing the disturbing findings. This wasn’t the first time Ethan had come to the attention of Hopkins, one of four counselors for a student body of roughly 1,600. In May 2021, he received an email in which a teacher told him that Ethan frequently fell asleep and was failing her class. In September of that year, another teacher wrote to him that “Ethan [felt] terrible and that his family was a mistake.”

In addition to the protocols, metal detectors and police officers that have become a feature of American schools in the past two decades, the burden of shooting prevention has fallen on guidance counsellors and teachers, who are usually not qualified as mental-health professionals.

Saathoff, the threat-assessment expert, said that for shooters to be successfully identified, there must be good communication between staff members to ensure that students get the help they need. “Staff must know what is a threat and what is not before they report it.” He said that one has to imagine a potential shooter as being on the highway to violence: “There are exit ramps that

can get [them] off such a path, then our job is to provide billboards that encourage the person to take these exits.”

An independent investigation commissioned by the district found that these billboards did not exist at Oxford High School. The report stated that staff didn’t recognise the shooter as a threat even though he showed clear signs of dangerous behaviour. This was because they hadn’t followed the district’s guidelines for identifying potential threats, guidelines that hadn’t been properly implemented by school administrators. In other words, school staff had no idea what to report as suspicious to a higher authority. (Oxford High School did not respond to interview requests.)

Instead, Ethan’s behaviour was only reported to Hopkins, who failed to meet with the teenager on the first two occasions. (In court, he testified that he was overloaded with casework.) When Hopkins was informed a third time about Ethan’s conduct, he finally approached him. They met briefly in a school hallway, and Hopkins told Ethan he was available if he needed to talk.

Now, on the morning of November 30, Hopkins was explaining to the Crumbleys that their son

needed urgent psychiatric attention. He handed the parents a list of therapy options. According to his testimony, Hopkins hoped the Crumbleys would take their son home and get him help.

Instead, Hopkins said the parents seemed annoyed at having been called to the school. According to Ejak, Jennifer said taking Ethan out of school that day wouldn't be possible because the couple had to return to work. Hopkins told the court that he had no choice but to write Ethan a pass to return to class. "I can't keep a student from class if there isn't a valid reason," he testified.

When Ethan got up to leave the meeting around 10.52am, Ejak handed him his backpack. "That's heavy," he said, as the boy headed towards the door. "What have you got in there?"

Ethan demurred, but a psychiatrist testified that the teenager later told him that, at that moment, he had desperately wanted the dean of students to open his pack. He'd wanted Ejak to find the gun. He'd wanted someone to stop him because he could no longer stop himself. Ejak, though, told the court he had no "reasonable suspicion to search the bag". Ethan's behaviour conveyed no signs of nervousness. "He didn't appear even to care that I was holding his backpack," he said.

Several minutes after the meeting ended, Jennifer texted a friend to complain about having to meet with her son's counsellor and then asked about her horses. She wrote to the same friend, "He'll be coming with me tonight," referring to bringing Ethan to the horse stables. "He can't be left alone."

At 12.21pm, Jennifer texted Ethan: "You okay? You know you can talk to us, we won't judge."

Twenty-two minutes later, Ethan replied: "Thank you, I'm sorry for that. I love you."

At 1.09pm, Oxford High School sent all parents an active emergency email. Ten minutes later, James, heading home and realising what was unfolding, made a frantic call to his wife.

By 1.20pm, he was back on East 57th. He hung up and called 911, reporting, "I have a missing gun at my house. And my son is at school. We had to meet with his counsellor. I think my son took the gun."

Two minutes later, gripped by dread, Jennifer texted Ethan: "I love you, too."

There was no response, so she tried again: "You okay?" And finally, "Ethan don't do it."

When detectives searched the Crumbleys' house later, they discovered that the Sig Sauer had not been stored securely. The safe in which it was supposed to be kept still had the default code of 000. A cable lock intended to stop it from firing, which James bought at the same time as the gun, was still in its packaging.

D

uring his sentencing hearing, Ethan told the court that he was a really bad person and had done "things that no one should ever do". He said that no one would have been able to stop him. That he'd hidden his plans from everyone, especially his parents. Several months later, his mother seemed to agree.

As I watched Jennifer take the stand, I noticed she showed little remorse or contrition. She seemed strangely confident as she said she didn't believe Ethan had mental health issues, merely anxiety about taking tests. She seemed to want to cast the blame more on her husband, who she claimed was responsible for storing the gun. She also said, emphatically, that she didn't see herself as a failure of a parent. And though she couldn't quite believe that her child had killed other people, she said she did not have any regrets.

"I've asked myself what I would have done differently and, well, I wouldn't have done anything differently," she said.

Jennifer wouldn't have done anything differently because, her attorney argued during closing arguments, she was a "vigilant mother" who could not have foreseen her son's actions. She claimed the prosecution charged her to create a media spectacle and that Jennifer's actions, such as going to the shooting range, were attempts to bond with her son. Ethan, she said, had deceived his parents.

He was a master manipulator, and Smith urged the jury to consider reasonable doubt.

I looked over at Hana's dad, Steve, who was sitting next to Justin Shilling's father, gazing down at his feet. Several days before, I'd met him at a local coffee shop. He looked tired and jaded. He told me that his life now moves in fits and starts. "Spurts" was the word he used. Sometimes, he had no energy and time was hazy. Other times, he felt so enraged that he had to speak to the press.

This isn't uncommon. Over the years, many American parents of school shooting victims have channelled grief into advocacy. The Sandy Hook Promise, founded by parents from a 2012 primary school massacre, pushed for more rigorous gun storage and background check regulations. Fred Guttenberg, who lost his daughter in the 2018 Parkland shooting, campaigned for increasing the gun purchase age and instituting waiting periods between the sale and delivery of guns. Likewise, the Everytown for Gun Safety campaign, supported by parents from multiple shootings, lobbied successfully for red flag laws and closing sales loopholes.

Steve was also focused on instituting this kind of systemic change. But he found the media's fixation on the Crumbley trials somewhat worrying. Journalists knew a historic conviction would make a good story. But Steve said that wouldn't necessarily be the most important thing in advancing the objective of making the school safer for children. Even if they were convicted, "It's likely that it will be appealed from here to eternity."

More problematic than any of that, he added, was the lack of state investigation into the shooting. In this, his views coincided with most of the other parents I spoke to. "It's what the government wants us to focus on. The real story is our state is hiding behind unconstitutional legislation called governmental immunity," another parent, Buck Meyer, wrote to me, referring to the immunity school employees have from prosecution. Justin Shilling's mother, Jill Soave, reiterated this when we met at the offices of her lawyer in Detroit.

Ethan's parents were one thing, an important thing, the parents seemed to agree, but many others were guilty, too. The school's employees, for example, were not being disciplined or thoroughly investigated. Ejak and Hopkins were both moved to other schools in the district.

Even during the shooting, things were mishandled. According to the independent investigation, the surveillance camera system was unmonitored, so nobody was tracking Ethan's whereabouts. The PA wasn't working correctly either, hindering communication between staff and students. "No one is calling that out, and no one is doing anything about it," Steve said angrily. To him, there had been too many missed opportunities to stop what happened and, even now, he said, the authorities were missing opportunities to prevent future tragedies. As he spoke, sirens wailed loudly. They screamed down the road as they would have done that day in 2021. Steve opened his mouth and then closed it without saying a word.

B

y the time the jury was due to deliver its verdict, I was back home in Madrid, sitting in my kitchen late at night, watching a live stream. I had been



OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ATTEND A VIGIL AT A LOCAL CHURCH AFTER THE SHOOTING



ETHAN CRUMBLEY LEAVES A HEARING AT OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT IN FEBRUARY 2022

JAMES CRUMBLEY CALLED 911, REPORTING, 'I HAVE A MISSING GUN AT MY HOUSE. AND MY SON IS AT SCHOOL. WE HAD TO MEET WITH HIS COUNSELLOR. I THINK MY SON TOOK THE GUN'

following a lot of social media. YouTubers and Tik-Tokers were commenting on live feeds from the courtroom, dissecting testimony and going back over Ethan's sentencing hearing. Every piece of available evidence was being studied. This is, in part, just what high-profile trials have become: content. But there was something else in the coverage, a yearning, a hope for a verdict that might change something about a seemingly unchangeable condition.

I wondered if this hope might instruct the jury. The trial had been gruelling. The 12 jurors had screened CCTV footage from the day of the shooting, watched various witnesses break down on the stand and seen the parents of the four dead children stare into blank space in court. They hadn't been sequestered and had to return home each night. Although they were prohibited from watching or reading news about the case, I wondered how faithfully they'd adhered.

At 7.23pm Madrid time on February 6, my phone vibrated. "The jury has come to a decision," Meghan Gregory texted me. I returned to my computer. The live-stream camera was focused on Jennifer

and her attorney. The cacophony of murmurs and squeaky wooden pews in the courtroom was interrupted by the voice of the lead juror speaking into a microphone: "We find the defendant guilty of involuntary manslaughter."

The court hushed. Jennifer's lawyer's face sank into a frown. Her client bowed slightly and kept her eyes firmly shut. Several weeks later, James was also found guilty. In April this year, Ethan's parents were each sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison.

In the days after the sentencing, the story made national and international news. Some coverage reported that the verdict and sentencing were a significant step in accountability for gun safety. Others argued the broader implications of criminally charging parents for their children's crimes weren't properly understood yet. Any hope that the novelty of the case might offer a signal in the noise of American mass violence quickly dissipated.

Hana's dad, Steve, probably put it best. "I'm content with the conviction, I am," he told me over the phone from his home outside Oxford. His voice was quiet, deflated. "But we're still a long way from the justice and change we need." **FT**

What happens when David Rodin, an Oxford-trained philosopher with expertise in the ethics of war, gets called in to help some of the world's top executives

By Andrew Hill

Illustration by Carl Godfrey

Roll Over Aristotle



In spring 1994, the governor-general of New Zealand was welcomed to Oxford university with a traditional Māori ceremony known as a *pōwhiri*. On the croquet lawn of St John's College, a semi-naked warrior laid down a ritual challenge before placing a fern on the ground for her to pick up in order to show she came in peace.

The challenger was not a Māori, but a red-haired, pale-skinned 23-year-old philosophy student called David Rodin. This ritual had a special significance for Rodin, who had grown up practising Māori martial arts in New Zealand with his brother, the only white boys in a friendship group of Māori teenagers. When he performed the ceremony at Oxford, Rodin was at the start of a philosophical journey into the ethics of warfare that would bring him, eventually, into the boardrooms of Wall Street and the City of London. There, he attempts to teach business executives how moral philosophy can help them at work.

"There's a part of me that [thinks] if it wasn't for the killing, I would have loved to have been a soldier," Rodin told me earlier this year, when I asked him about the Oxford *pōwhiri* 30 years ago. There's a reminder of the passionate young student in his Kiwi-accented response. "With something like [that ceremony] you get all of that. You get the discipline and you get the beauty of the craft, you get the tradition... But it's been defanged."

A day earlier, in a glass-walled office near St Paul's Cathedral, I had watched as Rodin again laid down a challenge. This time his tribal dress was jeans, an open-necked shirt and a blazer, and his weapon was PowerPoint.

Rodin was addressing Rain Newton-Smith, chief executive of the Confederation of British Industry, the UK business association known as the CBI, and the rest of her executive committee. "If you were making a financial decision, it would be mad to do it without a basic familiarity with economics," the philosopher told the group. "But when it comes to ethics, a lot of people do exactly that... What I'm here to tell you is that there's a huge component of ethical decision-making that's like capital allocation, economics or fiscal decision-making. There are important ethical tools. If you don't understand them, the odds are you aren't going to end up in a good place."

Newton-Smith and her colleagues were indeed emerging from a very bad place. The CBI once had a blue-chip corporate membership and a direct line to ministers and government officials to discuss policy. But, in spring 2023, media reports of sexual misconduct, including allegations of the rape of two women working there, triggered a crisis. The scandal shattered trust in the organisation and threatened its survival. Prominent corporate members such as Aviva, Tesco and NatWest quit or distanced themselves, and the government temporarily broke off relations with the group.

Newton-Smith took over just after the scandal broke, seeking to repair the damage to the institution. She turned to Rodin and his advisory firm. Rodin's review of CBI culture found a strong purpose and some "pockets of good practice", but it also revealed weaknesses.

What got the CBI into trouble, according to his diagnosis, was neglect of the ethical basics. Now Rodin's goal was to take the team all the way to the other end of the spectrum of moral philosophy. He sought to make them "think like philosophers" about leadership and judgment, drawing on insights he had acquired applying ethical principles to the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Libya.

'Doing the right thing matters intrinsically. It's a function of our being human'

David Rodin

According to Rodin, business ethics has focused too much on risk management, controls and enforcement, while neglecting how people interact and behave. Ethical culture is not only "about enforcing rules and structures", he told me. "It's the social component: do I have a group of people around me who I trust enough and they trust me that we will hold each other to account?"

At the CBI, Rodin displayed a slide with a triangular diagram showing the interlocking insights of a trio of philosophers: Jeremy Bentham and the utilitarians, who promote actions that achieve the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people; Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics, emphasising duty; and Aristotle's virtue ethics or "doing the right thing". He described the thinking of the three schools as, respectively, the Good, the Right and the Fitting. "I know this sounds rather theoretical," he told the CBI team. "But it's most relevant when it's anchored in a question that's live to you."

The executives were serious, attentive and apparently receptive to Rodin's ideas. He invited them to interject, and they confronted him with live dilemmas about CBI member relations, staff engagement and the tension between confidentiality and transparency. Shortly after that March meeting, the CBI admitted it had used non-disclosure agreements to prevent staff from speaking publicly about their workplace experiences, an illustration of exactly the sort of complex situation Rodin was training them to handle.

AS A RHODES SCHOLAR AT OXFORD IN THE EARLY 1990S, Rodin became interested in the field of "just war theory", which explores how wars ought to be waged.

Traditional principles of ethical warfare, found in the work of Augustine and Aquinas, are based on the Latin terms *jus ad bellum*, the right to wage war, and *jus in bello*, proper conduct in war. Just war theory's foremost contemporary proponent is the American philosopher Michael Walzer, who argued that soldiers had an equal moral right to fight and kill, whether they wore the uniform of Nazi Germany or, say, Poland, provided they observed the rules of war, such as not attacking non-combatants.

The field of "just war theory" was "ripe for reinvention", Rodin told me. He became one of the proponents of what is now known as "revisionist just war theory". Instead of focusing on the rights and responsibilities of warring states, Rodin's work put the moral responsibility of individual combatants front and centre of the ethical debate. Once you do that, he told me, "it turns out, everything kind of changes".

Rodin was partly inspired by his parents' unconventional love story. His father, Sam, was a third-generation Jewish immigrant. Hitch-hiking in Cornwall after the end of the second world war, he met and fell for a beautiful blonde German visitor, Rose. Her background was obscured by a story she'd concocted. In fact, she had been raised Catholic and her father had fought for the Nazis before being taken prisoner by the Soviets. To escape Sam's parents' disapproval, the couple emigrated to New Zealand.

But the marriage broke down and Rodin felt thrust into the role of primary provider for his mother and brother.

Instead of pursuing a conventional academic path to tenured professorship after Oxford, Rodin independently raised funds for research projects. After 9/11, he talked to "the captains, the majors, the lieutenant colonels who are the real fighting, thinking heart of the army" as they returned from tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. They told Rodin "the old architecture isn't working."

In 2002, Rodin turned his research into a book, titled *War and Self-Defense*. Richard Schoonhoven, who has taught philosophy at the US military academy at West Point for more than 20 years, describes it as "one of the founding documents in the field". Bob Underwood, a colonel and chief of staff of the US Army Training Directorate, came across Rodin's book in 2007 while studying for a masters thesis in philosophy. Underwood had taken part in difficult counter-insurgency operations in Baghdad against a Sunni militant group, and Rodin's book "connected with my experience of battle in the way that the [just war] literature I was familiar with never had", he said. Applying Rodin's theory would have given soldiers on the ground the freedom to "engage in moral reasoning" and base "the choices we make to kill some and save others accord with the demands of justice, as opposed to the demands of the operation".

Meanwhile Rodin was moving further and further from academia. He had learnt an important lesson from his work with the military: high-minded principles and bayonet-sharp thinking take you nowhere if you have not forged a coalition to put them into effect. When “you get inside an organisation like the US Army... you realise, holy crap, it’s not just about getting the argument right. It’s about understanding how the machinery of this organisation works,” he said. His next move was to apply that insight to the corporate world.

BUSINESS ETHICS HAVE ROOTS ALMOST AS DEEP AS MILITARY ethics. Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* was published after his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which sought to explain how people make moral decisions. Later on, thinkers on management and economics recognised the ethical basis and boundaries of business. Management writer Peter Drucker saw ethics and integrity as the foundation of healthy enterprise. Milton Friedman, the great proponent of the supremacy of “shareholder value”, wrote that “ethical custom” was one of the “basic rules of society” that constrained business owner’s desire to “make as much money as possible”.

As a business journalist, I know the overriding majority of businesses are run legally and ethically, but I have also seen how business leaders can be tempted over the line into unethical behaviour. In 1988, I flew to interview the media baron Robert Maxwell on the yacht from which he fell to his death three years afterwards. It was later discovered

he had stolen more than £400mn from his employees’ pension fund. In Milan in the 1990s, I wrote about the fallout from the Tangentopoli (“Bribesville”) political and business corruption scandals. And as the FT’s New York bureau chief, I covered the shockwaves from the collapse of Enron in 2001. The transgression that triggered the energy trader’s eventual demise took place in 1999, when the group’s blue-chip board agreed to waive its code of ethics, allowing its finance director to run independent off-balance-sheet entities in what looked like a blatant conflict of interest and turned out to be fraud.

I thought Enron would be a landmark, after which serious corporate malfeasance would surely decline. The following year, President George W Bush put his weight behind the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which introduced heavy criminal penalties and mandated that senior executives should certify their accounts personally. Business schools scrambled to institute, or beef up, ethics classes for MBA students. The compliance industry, ideas about stakeholder capitalism and corporate purpose and values took off.

But unethical behaviour continued, whether in the mis-selling of subprime mortgages that triggered the 2008 financial crisis; or the cross-selling at US bank Wells Fargo in 2016, when staff were found to have created fake accounts for customers to meet aggressive internal sales goals. Earlier this year, Sam Bankman-Fried, founder of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for stealing money from customers to make risky bets. “He knew it was wrong. He knew it was criminal,” the judge said.

Often it feels as though advocates for ethical business are trying to push water uphill. In 2012, British lawyer Anthony Salz was appointed by Barclays to investigate the bank’s culture in the wake of its involvement in the rigging of the Libor interest rate benchmark. His review drew an important distinction between legal compliance and ethical behaviour. “Barclays was sometimes perceived as being within the letter of the law but not within its spirit,” he wrote, urging the bank to embed the values necessary to build a strong ethical culture.

“I used to think [business ethics] went in cycles: people behaving very badly for a bit and then something goes badly wrong, people clear it up and then it goes back to normal ethical behaviour,” Salz told me. “I think the answer is you need leadership that believes in it, without which you have no hope.”

Academics continue to try to direct students towards the core principles of moral leadership and here, occasionally, the echoes of the ethics of war can be heard. Sandra Sucher drew directly on military ethics for her elective course on ethics at Harvard Business School, titled “The Moral Leader”, notably Michael Walzer’s dictum that “War is the hardest place: if comprehensive and consistent moral judgments are possible there, they are possible everywhere.”

IN THE EARLY 2010S, RODIN BECAME INCREASINGLY interested in the connection between the application of ethics on the battlefield and ethics in business. Between stints at Oxford, he had spent two years with Boston Consulting Group. Despite his self-assessment that he was “a lousy junior consultant”, he had seen a need for “proper rigorous ethics advisory” service that would charge BCG- and McKinsey-level fees.

The spark was struck in Davos, where corporate high-mindedness and virtue-signalling, raw dealmaking and basic networking collide. At the World Economic Forum’s 2014 summit in the Swiss Alps, Rodin met Citigroup chief executive Mike Corbat, who was two years into an attempt to rehabilitate the bank following a series of fines from regulators.





Within months of the Davos meeting, Corbat asked the philosopher to work with the board to examine the ethical foundation of its business practices.

Rodin had an instinct for a method that might work but no business model for Principia, the consultancy he had founded that year. (Principia is Latin for first principles.) He called on contacts in the military and academia to help. One executive compared the team Rodin gathered for these early assignments to the Marvel superheroes “the Guardians of the Galaxy”. They included Anthony Salz; Ian Fishback, an Iraq veteran whose whistleblowing letter to Senator John McCain about US abuse of Iraqi prisoners triggered landmark anti-torture legislation; philosophers Bradley Strawser from the US Naval Postgraduate School and Marco Meyer from the University of Hamburg; and business ethics specialist Nien-hê Hsieh from Harvard Business School.

With Citi as their guinea pig, they developed the tools that Principia now uses to assess the ethical culture of new clients. Rodin analyses responsibility (do individuals understand what they should be providing?), capability (do they have the capacity to make the right decisions?) and motivation (are they encouraged to make the right decisions?). The outcome at Citi included the framing of a “social value proposition”, still in place, about the purpose of a global bank.

These days, Principia has about 10 full-time staff, including non-philosophers such as data analysts and behavioural scientists; 10 contributors, from academia and beyond, who offer a couple of days a week of their time; and a broader network of 30 or so academics and people with business experience. “It’s quite an odd bunch: [the challenge is] how do you keep the oddness and uniqueness but still be organised,” said Sarah Miller, a non-philosopher, who joined Principia from the international aid world in 2020. She is now chief executive, tasked with managing the firm’s thinkers.

Together, they have driven moral philosophy deep into the culture of a number of big companies and organisations worldwide. Janti Soeripto, chief executive of Save the Children US, says Rodin and Principia have given the charity “the language and the practical tools to make things discussable”. At pan-African bank Ecobank, Rodin’s address to leaders of its subsidiaries across the continent was so convincing that a number of its regional offices include the two-day meeting as a landmark in their official corporate histories. Principia’s work with Salesforce, the US software group, helped it frame a policy not to work with retail clients that sold military-style firearms.

“[David] can listen to a problem in a very, very deep way and almost play it back to you,” says Adrian Gore, chief executive of the South African healthcare group Discovery, where the boardroom was particularly receptive to the triangle of the Good, the Right and the Fitting and the philosophical principles behind it. In 2021, Principia worked with Gore and his team on the delicate issue of how Discovery should bring in a vaccine mandate for South African workers during the pandemic, in a country with a record of vaccine hesitancy.

The question was how to balance the utilitarian need to implement a mandate with what Rodin describes as “the deeply personal right to control your body”. Some staff had legitimate religious and health objections. Principia and Discovery categorised these exceptions and worked out how to recognise and remedy what philosophers call “the moral remainder” – those rights that would be infringed by any compromise. Discovery eventually vaccinated 98 per cent of its staff, reaching a “reasonable accommodation” with those who held out. “I’m very proud of the outcomes,” says Gore.

Before Principia’s involvement, Gore reckoned his board “had a handle” on the complex ethical issues it sometimes had to grapple with. “That was a cognitive error,” he told me, uncovered by Rodin in his interaction with directors. “The board suddenly realise they are in a higher thinking process. They have an epiphany. Suddenly, ‘Shit, this is deeper than I thought. This guy is more intelligent [than me].’ David lifts it up to a godly level. You’re talking to god, we need to listen with respect.”

OTHER CLIENTS START WITH MORE DOWN TO EARTH expectations. The CBI’s Rain Newton-Smith admitted that one concern about hiring Principia last year was that they

might end up like the players in the Monty Python football sketch in which Germany takes on Greece at “International Philosophy” and the thinkers “just wander about and it’s a terrible game”. The principles she wanted laid out “had to be something we could practically do and not just theoretical thought experiments”.

Principia ran a culture review, interviewing nearly half the staff at the CBI, before producing a report that found the organisation had “under-attended to developing a strong, values-based organisational culture and [had] under-prioritised people management skills”. A year on, Newton-Smith credits Rodin’s team with helping build a list of values including integrity, respect, brilliance and courage.

Until a few years ago, Rodin would insist clients sign a commitment not to talk about their work with Principia, which also took a vow of confidentiality. The message, he said, was that “the only value” to a client of deploying his crack team of thinkers was “the difference we make in your organisation. You’re not going to get a PR win from this”.

That has changed. Rodin says he realised it could be valuable for other organisations to see what Principia clients had learnt from successful assignments – and that invisibility could be a commercial disadvantage. (As a private company, Principia does not publish its accounts but Rodin says it has annual revenue of about \$5mn.) When the CBI published a press release explaining the steps it had taken, it cited the consultancy’s critical conclusions, but also its judgment that the consultancy did “not find that blanket descriptions such as ‘toxic’ or ‘misogynistic’ [were] accurate or useful descriptions”.

Harvard Law School professor Jesse Fried remains unconvinced. He believes business leaders act primarily in their own self-interest. Sometimes they move from unethical behaviour to outright fraud, punishable by law. “If the threat of jail isn’t enough to incentivise you, bringing in a consultant isn’t going to make much difference,” he said. “PR advisers make a difference... Risk management consultants – they make a difference.” Ethics consultancies, by implication, do not.

“Are businesses more ethical now? Probably,” said Fried. “But it isn’t because they’re trying to be more ethical, but because they’re operating under certain constraints in the labour market and the immediate environment that have made it more costly to engage in ‘morally bad’ behaviour.”

Addressing the CBI executive team, Rodin had said: “A lot of people ask me: are you guaranteed to do well by doing the right thing? The answer is complicated but in the long run you’re much more likely to have a healthy, robust, sustainable business by thinking seriously about it.”

Whether you are a military officer or a business leader, however, thinking seriously about the ethical framework behind your behaviour can only take you so far. “Consultants don’t sit at your desk to enact change,” Newton-Smith pointed out. “That comes down to what you do as an executive.”

My post-Enron optimism about a permanent sea-change in business ethics was misplaced. Each new generation of executives feels the tug of temptation to behave unethically. Some are bound to succumb. But that is no reason not to try to teach them how not to. **FT**

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Andrew Hill is the FT’s senior business writer and a member of the advisory council of the Institute of Business Ethics

‘Consultants don’t sit at your desk to enact change. That comes down to what you do as an executive’

Rain Newton-Smith

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The Gastronome

Tim Hayward

Welcome to my forever restaurant

Morchella is a new restaurant from the team at Perilla, a restaurant in Newington Green that I reviewed about six years ago and have been watching ever since. Actually, “watching” is too passive a term. I thought at the time that chef Ben Marks was a notable talent, and I’ve been hiding behind the bins opposite his house ever since with a pair of binoculars and a notebook. Now they’ve opened a new restaurant/wine bar just off Exmouth Market in the surprisingly beautiful hall of a Victorian bank.

There is something amazing about buildings that were created way back when people thought things would last forever. Banking halls, huge pubs out at what used to be the end of the tram line, masonic halls, seamen’s missions. The Victorians built them as timeless reminders of

human achievement and aspiration. Now time has rendered high street banks redundant, I love it when we repurpose them for hospitality, the only pure human virtue of any note that persists. I just pray I never have to write about a promising noodle shop in what used to be a school, or a natural wine bar in a public library. A hundred metres from Morchella is a health centre designed by Berthold Lubetkin in the glaring optimism of the 1930s. Every time I walk past it, I’m nearly sick with trepidation.

Morchella is worthy of an inspiring space. More, in fact. Morchella is one of the very few restaurants where you know within seconds of walking in that this is going to be a good one.

There are lots of intangibles, like the vibe (simple, scrubbed, mid-century modern meets

Hackney craft carpentry), and the warmth of the welcome. But the bread, a seaweed-flavoured focaccia, is very tangible indeed. The open, bubbly texture of a high-hydration sour-dough, shaped as a boule rather than the traditional flat slab, bespeaking of a baker who can coax a bucket of wet dough to hold shape. It tastes sublime. It reminds you why we use the term “to break bread”. And it tells you with the first mouthful that this is going to be a good evening.

I’m so unable to resist vitello tonnato that I feel I should either issue a blanket apology or just write a sensitive monograph called something like “Nourish Me with Tonnato” in which I compare and contrast every one I’ve eaten. This one was a conceptual gear change. There’s still a wafer-thin sheet of poached veal, but it’s wrapped around a bunch of leaves and a large dollop of tuna salad, and it’s sublime.

Prawn pil pil is a common enough bar snack throughout the Basque region, in which the crustacea are poached in a garlicky oil which is then emulsified. It’s a fascinating little niche of Mediterranean cookery with elements of bouillabaisse boiling and aioli pounding, resulting in a uniquely greasy ointment of a sauce. Here, Marks has done it with mussels, which obviously ups the fishy flavour, thus enabling him to heave in smoked paprika. It’s a balancing act, but he carries it off. That in itself is an achievement, but what happens next, as they say on the internet, “will shock you”. The poached mussel is laid on a cube of that amazing focaccia and drenched in the sauce. It’s all over the bivalve, drizzling into a pool on the plate and soaking back up into the bread. It is breathtaking. I think that’s the right word, given I was stuffing it in so eagerly I forgot to breathe.

It was at the spicier end of things legally served in restaurants, so I followed it with a bowl of cool stracciatella only marginally more set than a yoghurt, topped with Vesuvian tomato and a very seasonal peach. Once again, Marks shows balletic balance. There’s quite a lot of sweet in the bowl and the “cheese” is pretty neutral. Keeping this savoury displays a consummate palate.

By this point, I’m on a roll. They’ve got fresh ingredients sorted, they’re concentrating on a kind of pan-Mediterranean cuisine I instinctively love, and the kitchen is absolutely aflame with creativity. I note with joy that they feature an “extensive old world wine list” so shift up to a fresh spider crab. What’s most noticeable here is not purely the flavour, but superb physical engineering. It’s served in the scrubbed upturned carapace, which is particularly beautiful. The top is a thick layer of white meat, carefully flaked and strewn and concealing a cream of the darker meat, intense and brooding. But the cucumber isn’t shredded like some mimsy garniture. It’s peeled, deseeded and then stirred through the dark meat in cubes, about a centimetre in size. Those chunks, cool and crunchy, attenuate the fish funk, leaven the richness, add texture and infinite variety. Across the top there’s a loose tracery of thin chilli slices, chosen for fruitiness beyond simple heat.

Space forbids me to wax as purple as I might over a cazuela of spinach and chickpeas, stewed in oil and then topped with egg, a small but perfect spaghetti vongole, hake in a sobrasada sauce that could strip paint, and a triangle of slow-cooked pork jowl topped with a shard of crackling and a veil of membrillo. All that must be rushed so I can tell you instead about a thin square of gorgonzola dolce served with a layer of finely sliced kumquats “mostarda”, quite the best thing as a sort of cheese/pre-dessert. And then a lemon verbena panna cotta, topped with new season apricots that taste precisely like the time you had apricot jam on a baguette, the very first time you went to France.

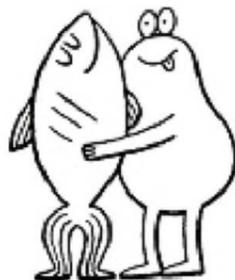
I think my mission is complete. This is how I want to eat forever. I’m leaving the dustbins and moving into Morchella. **FT**

@timhayward

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STYLING BY KITTY COLES



Recipe Club

Ratatouille, but not as you know it

I came across this recipe when Helen Graham cooked it for Bracia and Friends, a pop-up whose USP is that chefs must cook a single dish. No multicourse menus, no selection of small plates, just one brilliant dish of food – which is the same thing home cooks are mostly after. Graham, formerly executive chef of the Middle East-ish restaurant Bubala, chose to bet the farm on this extravagant ratatouille. You'll learn a few tricks making it: how to make a truly excellent ratatouille, of course, but also a new salsa recipe and a tahini sauce you could use as the base for all sorts of dishes (see also, last week's tonnato). And it just happens to be vegan.

– Harriet Fitch Little

DRINK

Helen suggests a juicy chilled red wine such as beaujolais.

SUBSTITUTIONS

Pomegranate molasses can be substituted for a 50/50 mix of balsamic vinegar and honey. Baharat can be substituted for ¼ tsp black pepper, 1 tsp smoked paprika, ½ tsp ground cinnamon and ½ tsp ground cumin.

TIP

If you're making this for two rather than four, turn the leftovers into a shakshuka. Add the ratatouille mix into a medium non-stick frying pan, for which you have a lid. Add 150ml water, stir and bring to a low simmer. Crack in four eggs, season and shake the pan gently. Place the lid on the pan and cook until the whites are set but the yolks are still soft.

HELEN GRAHAM'S RATATOUILLE WITH PRESERVED LEMON SALSA AND TAHINI SAUCE

TO SERVE FOUR

For the ratatouille

- 1 aubergine, stem removed, cut into quarters vertically and then sliced into 2cm pieces
- 3 courgettes, topped and tailed, cut in half vertically and then cut into 2cm pieces
- 90ml olive oil
- 1 tbs sea salt
- 1 medium white onion, peeled and finely diced
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and finely sliced
- 1 carrot, peeled, trimmed, halved and cut into 1cm pieces
- 30g basil, leaves picked and stalks finely chopped (set aside leaves for salsa)
- 1 tbs baharat
- 3 tbs pomegranate molasses
- 400g chopped tomatoes
- ½ tsp dried rosemary
- 1 tbs caster sugar

For the salsa

- 25g preserved lemon, seeds removed and finely chopped
- 35g jarred roasted red peppers, finely chopped
- Basil leaves (see above), finely chopped
- 4 tbs olive oil
- ½ tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp agave syrup/honey
- 1 tsp red wine vinegar

For the tahini sauce

- 75g tahini paste
- 50ml cold water
- 1 tbs lemon juice
- ¼ tsp sea salt

- Pita bread to serve

1. Preheat the oven to 180C with fan. Put the aubergine and courgette in a single layer in a large roasting tin or two, toss with half the olive oil and half a tablespoon of salt and place in the oven for 45 minutes. Toss occasionally to ensure they colour evenly. Set aside while you make the sauce.

2. Heat the remaining olive oil in a medium-sized saucepan set on a medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, carrot and remaining salt and sweat gently for 15 minutes, stirring regularly. Add the basil stalks, baharat and pomegranate molasses and sweat for a further 10 minutes.

3. Add the chopped tomatoes, rosemary, sugar, roasted vegetables and 150ml water, and simmer for a further 25 minutes.

4. To make the salsa, place all the ingredients in a small mixing bowl and stir to combine.

5. To make the tahini, place all the ingredients in a small mixing bowl and whisk to combine.

6. To serve, split the tahini sauce between four serving bowls and smooth across the bottom. Add a heaped spoon of ratatouille and garnish with the salsa. Serve with warm pita bread on the side.

Next week: a Honey & Co flatbread special



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Wine

Jancis Robinson

Great vines. But who'd be a Turkish wine producer?

It had been 15 years since I'd been to Turkey, or Türkiye as it is now officially known, to study its wines. Much had changed, for good and bad.

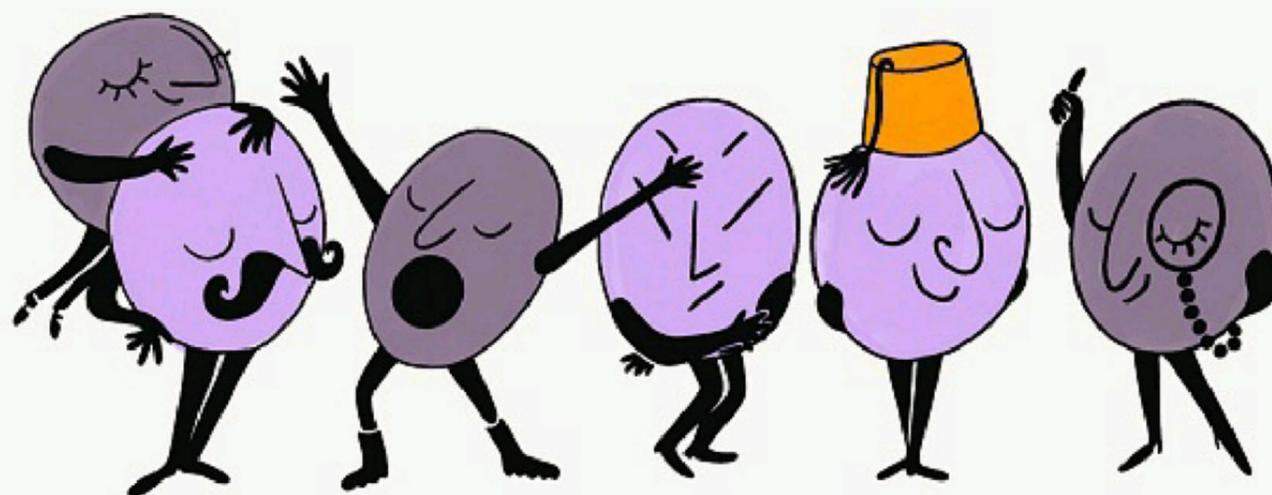
In 2009 the country was still feeling the effects of a 1990s renaissance in Turkish wine. Boutique wineries were popping up all over the place, focusing largely on Turkish versions of international grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay.

But President Erdoğan's regime has been no friend of wine production. Today, there are strict controls on where and how wine can be sold. It's a crime for anyone to mention wine on social media. And from May this year, those who make wine for sale, on however small a scale, have been required by law to set aside millions of Turkish lira as collateral in anticipation of future taxes and fines.

The result is that there is a culture of fear among the country's 191 wine producers. Inspectors can turn up at random and make what seem to wine professionals crazy demands. It's illegal to trade used barrels, for instance.

I visited one producer in Cappadocia who shall remain nameless. Like producers all over the world, it makes its wine in clay jars, deemed unhygienic by the local inspector. Now it must pretend to make its wine in a small stainless steel tank, which the inspector comes every month to check. Another Spanish winemaker had to be talked out of returning to his home country after a particularly heavy-handed inspection.

Foreign visitors can be affected too. My wine writer colleagues Oz Clarke and Caro Maurer were due to attend a big wine fair in Istanbul in May, but it was cancelled at a moment's notice when the organiser failed to get permission for an event that would involve actually serving wine.



Jancis recommends...

BEST-KNOWN TURKISH GRAPE VARIETIES

The big producers are still managing to export wine to the UK

WHITES

- **Emir**
Mineral, crisp Anatolian
- **Narince**
Widely planted friend of oak used for both wine and dolmades
- **Yapincak**
Highly distinctive, recently rescued Thracian

REDS

- **Boğazkere**
Traditional blending partner of Öküzgözü, providing structure
- **Kalecik Karasi**
Lots of sour cherry flavour from near Ankara. Possibly a Hittite legacy

• Öküzgözü

Provides the juicy fruit for blends with Boğazkere

UK importers of Turkish wines are Berkmann, Gama Wines, Graft Wine Co, Hallgarten & Novum, N'Joy Catering, Taste Turkey and The Wine House Warwick

The Root Origin Soil conference that I was invited to address last month had been carefully designed not to ruffle any official feathers. The only wine served was a solo tasting of an array of truly exciting wines made almost exclusively from indigenous grape varieties. This was organised for me by wine-mad Ankara architect Umay Çeviker, one of the four founders of Heritage Vines of Turkey, an organisation devoted to keeping these promising vines in the ground.

Between 2018 and 2022, Turkey lost more than 38,000 hectares of vineyards (for comparison, New Zealand has roughly the same amount of vineyards in total), although many of those lost were destined for dried fruit or distillation, with farmers switching to more profitable crops such as

apples and nectarines. And there is little respect for old vines, which should be viewed as one of the country's richest wine-related resources given they tend to make better wine, and can withstand the vagaries of climate better than young ones.

The 84 wines I'd tasted in Istanbul back in 2009 featured a grand total of six Turkish grape varieties, mainly only as minor components in blends with international varieties. But producers are now far prouder of their indigenous grapes. Çeviker managed to field 31 different Turkish grape specialities in the 64 wines he showed me, and told me that there are now as many as 68 featured in wines in commercial circulation, many of them advertised proudly on the front label as single-variety wines.

The national grapevine collection at Tekirdağ includes at least 854 different varieties. Not all of these are wine grapes, however. Despite recent

shrinkage, Turkey still has the world's fifth-biggest area of grapevines and is still the biggest producer of raisins, while only 3 per cent of the country's vines produce grapes destined for wine.

But what wines! There is such a panoply of distinctive flavours and styles, partly thanks to the creativity of the winemakers. I tasted wines made from arboreal vines (grown up trees), wines in concrete, egg-shaped fermentation vessels, wines aged in egg-shaped barrels to encourage the circulation of lees, a rather Riesling-like wine made in oak from the grape responsible for sultanas, a fashionable pét-nat and a white wine fermented with grape skins left from making red wine.

Thanks to the country's geography and geopolitics, there are many non-Turkish influences too. Turkey borders, in a clockwise direction, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria. I tasted a wine grown on the Armenian border at 1,780 metres (higher than any European vineyard); wines made from Georgian, Syrian and Cretan grape varieties; and wines from the Kurdish zone that was a no-go area not so long ago.

Then there was the infamous "population exchange" of a century ago when Greeks were expelled from Turkey and Turkish nationals resident in Greece forcibly repatriated. Many of the Greeks were skilled and enthusiastic wine-growers. Their exodus considerably diminished such wine culture as Turkey had

Between 2018 and 2022, Turkey lost more than 38,000 hectares of vineyards (New Zealand has roughly the same amount in total), with farmers switching to more profitable crops such as apples

after centuries of Ottoman rule. It would be no surprise if some of the grape varieties thought to be Turkish turned out to have Greek origins.

Having seen, indeed encouraged, a global increase in the appreciation of Greek wines, with their similar wide range of grapes and terroirs, I would love to see Turkish wine more widely appreciated outside Turkey. (There's also a parallel with another wine-producing country that can offer a stimulating range of indigenous wine styles and flavours, Portugal.)

But for the moment, in the US for instance, the offers for "Turkey" on Wine-searcher are dominated by Wild Turkey whiskey. Only a handful of Turkish wines are available in the UK, and even Turkish Master Sommelier Isa Bal, ex-Fat Duck and now with his own Michelin-starred restaurant

Trivet in London, has remarkably few Turkish producers on his exceptionally eclectic wine list. Turkish wine exports currently represent just 3 per cent of the country's production, and are worth only £8.5mn, about one-tenth as much as a single release from a Bordeaux first growth.

During my speech to the Istanbul gathering of wine lovers, winemakers and wine professionals, the hall erupted into knowing laughter when I suggested that the only way they would make headway exporting their wine was to work together.

However, when we were all sipping wine beside the Bosphorus at the reception after the conference, Yiannis Paraskevopoulos, another speaker and head of the Greek wine producer Gaia Wines, agreed with me, and added, "If we Greeks can co-operate with each other, then surely the Turks can." He also pointed out that "one company managing to sell abroad means nothing. You need a generic body."

Wines of Greece somehow manages to navigate a path between individual producers and government, but Wines of Turkey has shrivelled to a shadow of what it was between 2008 and 2014. So, for the moment, it's probably best to try to find wines from the country's biggest producers, Doluca, Kavaklıdere, Kayra, Pamukkale and Sevilen, who are most likely to have taken the trouble to export. **FT**

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MORE TASTING NOTES

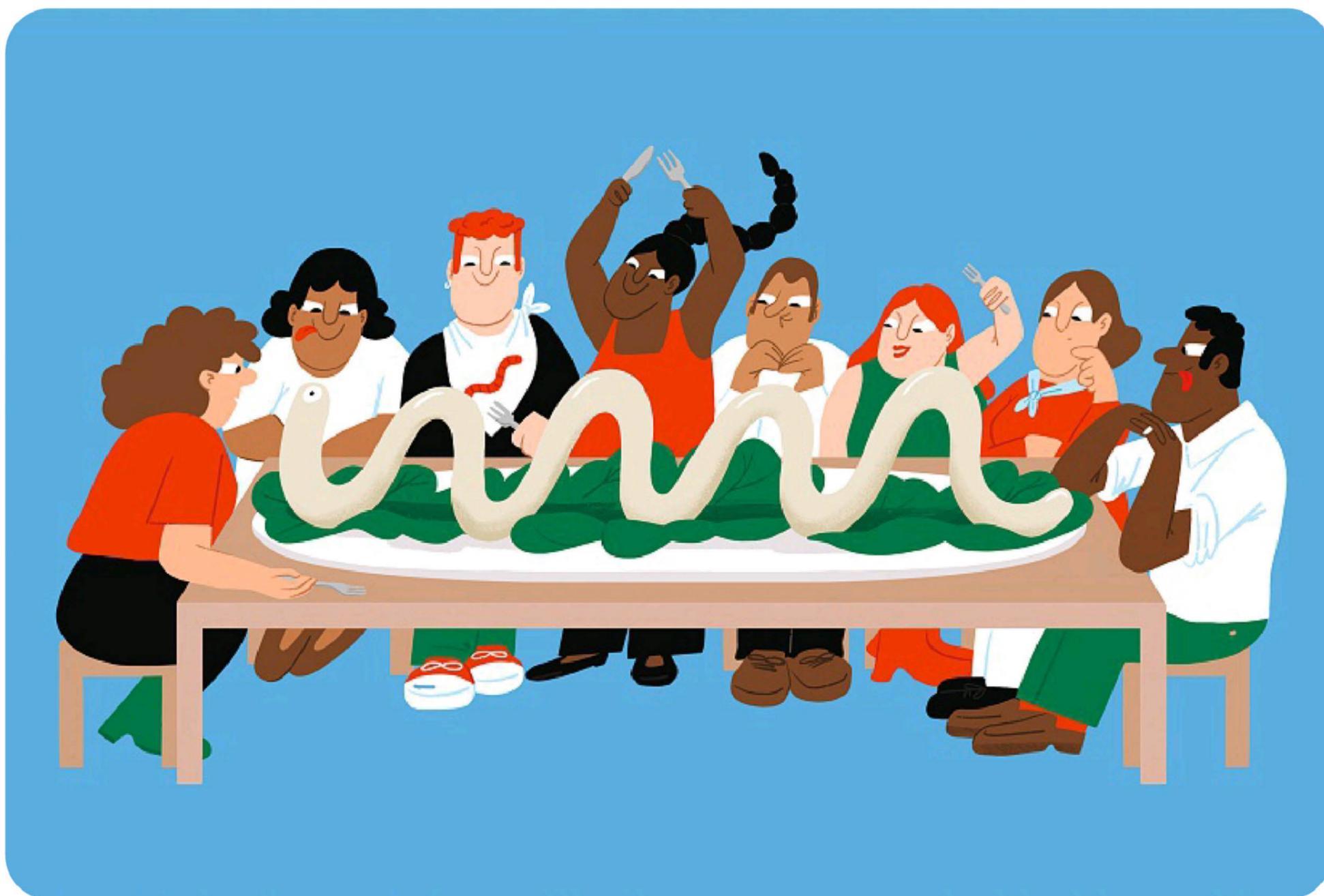
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FT Weekend





Snacks

Rehabbing the shipworm

Could a rebrand make 'naked
clams' as sexy as oysters?
Five chefs take on the challenge.

By Kitty Drake

In a laboratory in Cambridge, scientists are breeding a new fishy snack: long, white, slippery molluscs. These creatures, called shipworms, could help solve the fishing crisis. Unlike farmed salmon and cod, which are typically fed on other fish, shipworms eat wood, so you can breed them without sacrificing other marine life.

There's one problem: the thought of actually putting a shipworm in your mouth is not terribly appealing. Pale to the point of translucence, the shipworm has no facial features, giving it the blind, vulnerable look of an earthworm. A type of clam, rather than a worm, shipworms have shells, but they are relatively shrunken things, about the shape of two toenail clippings. Notorious in the 1500s for sinking two of Christopher Columbus's ships, the worm uses these tiny toenails like a set of teeth to bore through wood. Most unsettling of all is its extraordinary length. Online, you can watch the dissection of a two-metre-long shipworm, which has grown its own protective casing, called a "crypt". To get at the worm's juicy meat, you have to crack open the top of its crypt, like a monstrous crème brûlée.

Luckily, the shipworms being farmed in Cambridge are less intimidating, with a planned “harvest size” of 30cm. In an effort to rid the creatures of their wormlike associations, the lead scientist on the project, David Willer, has renamed them “naked clams”. Over the phone last week he told me emphatically that they “are not wiggly or squiggly”. Willer is also keen to stress the naked clam’s health benefits: they contain twice the vitamin B12 of mussels. The clams are fed on waste wood chips from the forestry industry, so the project is sustainable. The plan is to market naked-clam fish fingers and nuggets for mass consumption, supplying all the nutritional benefits of traditional meat and fish at a fraction of the environmental cost. One appealing aspect of the farming process is that it is cruelty-free. Willer insists that the naked clam is incapable of forming thoughts or experiencing pain.

There are barely any recipes for shipworms, which is rather extraordinary when you consider the glut of cooking ideas that are readily available for other unphotogenic ingredients. One cursory online search for woodlice, for example, pulls up seven separate recipes, including “woodlice sushi”, “woodlice fritters” and “woodlice scones”.

Currently, there are very few places where shipworms are eaten, Palawan and Aklan in the Philippines being the main two. (They are served raw or battered like calamari.) In most of the rest of the world the mollusc has been ignored, or maligned, its potential untapped.

Naked clams could hit British supermarkets as early as 2029, and while the current focus is on providing white meat for use in mass-produced food, Willer is open to selling them to restaurants too. A good recipe can turn even the most gruesome ingredient into a staple. A case in point is black pudding. To prove the point, I approached five chefs with a question: *What recipe would you use to transform the naked clam into the most covetable delicacy in food?* (See right for results.)

Early on in the planning stages of this article, I sent Margot Henderson’s recipe off to the Philippines, to be cooked with real shipworms on the island of Palawan. Willer had organised for a friend of his to recreate Henderson’s recipe at home and film the results. In the video, a home-cook forks live shipworms out of a silver bowl, dips them in flour and then lifts her fork high in the air so the shipworms dangle at full-length, for the camera to inspect. I have watched this video about 15 times, and with every rewatch my perspective shifts slightly. The creatures still look wormlike to me, but I have begun to find this worminess luscious and rather decadent. After one month of being immersed in the world of the shipworm, I have started to lust after it. I imagine rubbing it in oil and slurping it down like a noodle. If my tastes are anything to go by, human beings are uniquely adaptable. By 2030, the shipworm could be more covetable than the oyster or the lobster. Lately, I have started to fantasise about eating a whole worm, raw.



MARGOT HENDERSON

Naked clams on toast with brown butter, capers and monks beard

In May, I travelled to meet Margot Henderson at her Shoreditch restaurant, Rochelle Canteen, so she could feed me worms on toast. The real shipworms in Cambridge are not yet full-grown, and Willer had warned me I couldn’t taste them without derailing his experiment, so I sent Henderson an outline of the naked clam’s flavour profile, which is apparently sweet and delicate, like oyster flesh. Henderson had agreed to mock up her recipe for me with herring’s sperm (literally the semen of a male herring). She chose the sperm because it looked slightly wormlike when cooked. In person, Henderson is warm and a little eccentric. When I showed her a photo of a shipworm burrowing into a plank of wood, she zoomed in delightedly, gazing at it in the way you might gaze at a new baby.

I wanted to approach Henderson because, alongside her husband Fergus, she popularised the practice of serving up discarded parts of the animal in the UK: brains, trotters and ears. As I ate her dish, which was rich and very soft, Henderson talked me through the recipe, explaining that she would toss the molluscs in flour, then fry them gently in browned butter, so the flesh would collapse and become jiggly. “I prefer things when they are wobbly, and weird,” she said. When I told her about the existence of two-metre-long shipworms, she told me she would serve a worm like that whole, in all its glory, stretched out across the length of a trestle table “as a sharing platter! With knives and forks!”



ALVIN LEUNG

Naked clams in wood-smoked Coca-Cola jelly, fermented daikon cream and caviar

Next I called Alvin Leung, who has made a career out of playing with unusual ingredients. At Bo Innovation, his Michelin-starred Hong Kong restaurant, Leung serves up “X-treme Chinese cuisine”, food pushed so far out of the box that it becomes a kind of performance art. Leung’s most famous dish is an “edible condom”. Eerily lifelike, his condom is made out of tapioca and yams and comes filled with creamy white sauce.

Leung’s fantasy recipe is elaborate. He would serve shipworms in jelly as a tribute to the Fujian province in China, where a different marine worm is regularly eaten in cold gelatin. He planned to infuse his jellied shipworms with Coca-Cola, then top with caviar and fermented daikon ice cream. The whole thing would come served in a cocktail glass, balanced like a statue on a plinth of wood. Leung wants this plinth to be riddled with shipworm holes, as a cheeky nod to the sinking of Columbus’s ship.

Leung is a judge on Canadian MasterChef, where he always wears sunglasses and has occasional fits of rage. A YouTube clip of him throwing a contestant’s croquette on the floor has been viewed more than 40,000 times. Over the phone, he was funny and blunt. “I’ll be really honest with you,” he said, “It’s not hard to make something taste good.” But to elevate a dish to the status of a delicacy, a chef has to do more than just deliver on flavour. “You have to visually and mentally wow the diner.”



JOSEPH YOON

Naked clam rolls

A couple of days later, I called Joseph Yoon. A self-styled “edible insect ambassador”, Yoon aims to persuade people to see bugs as a sustainable alternative to meat and has developed a following in the US. In 2023, he appeared on Tucker Carlson’s talk show, and fed the right-wing commentator insects in chocolate sauce. For his shipworm recipe, Yoon has dreamt up something more savoury: deep-fried worms served in a buttered roll. He would add crushed crickets to the batter, to give it “a little buggy twist”.

I spoke to Yoon via video-link, and he immediately apologised for not wearing his “bug outfit”. He usually dresses up for interviews in an insect-spangled tie. Softly spoken, Yoon’s approach is playful and non-confrontational. He told me “flavour is subjective” and that it is possible to alter the way an ingredient tastes by gently tweaking perceptions, pointing out that we eat mould because we call it cheese and fungus because we call it mushrooms. A Korean American, he is intimately acquainted with the way that in two countries, a single ingredient can be seen entirely differently. To the average American, a grasshopper is deeply unappetising, but in Korea, barbecued grasshopper is a traditional snack.

Yoon designed his recipe with a lobster roll in mind, because he sees the history of the lobster as offering one possible trajectory for the shipworm. Up until the mid-1800s in America, lobster was considered a revolting sea bug. Over the course of the century it was rebranded, partly by canny chefs.

One luxury recipe was the lobster newberg, a casserole thickened with booze and cream. As the historian Elisabeth Townsend has pointed out, it is likely that this dish was rather disgusting. Chefs would braise a single lobster for several hours, so its flesh probably tasted like a craggy pulp. Still, the newberg was the most popular dish in New York’s resort hotels in the 1880s because diners were seduced by its associations with glamour and riches.



JACKSON BOXER

Naked clam broth

After I got off the phone to Leung, I decided to approach Jackson Boxer, whose dishes are also visually stunning but less ostentatious. Boxer specialises in seafood at his London restaurant Orasay, and his Instagram feed looks like a collection of tiny fishy oil paintings. He told me he was initially “somewhat startled” by the wormy nature of the shipworm, but he was certain he could make it look beautiful. He would serve them in a concentrated broth, infused with garlic, lemon and peas. “The olive oil in the broth will give it a lovely glossy finish, and the green of the peas will pop against the pearlescent clams.”

Boxer told me he would design his recipe to resemble razor clam broth, a dish already popular on his menus. He said he would be “open about the fact that these were shipworms”, but that he would chop them up so they were less “wormlike”. “You can expand people’s palettes that way, by presenting something new in the form of something old and familiar.”

Boxer insisted he would only ever serve a shipworm if he was confident it tasted “genuinely delicious”. He said a chef can’t simply manufacture a delicacy and that “some ingredients are objectively nicer than others”. But our conversation made me think differently. Perhaps there’s no such thing as objective deliciousness? Our taste buds are fickle and vulnerable to the power of suggestion.



CHANTELLE NICHOLSON

Crispy naked clams, black garlic, fennel and makrut lime aioli

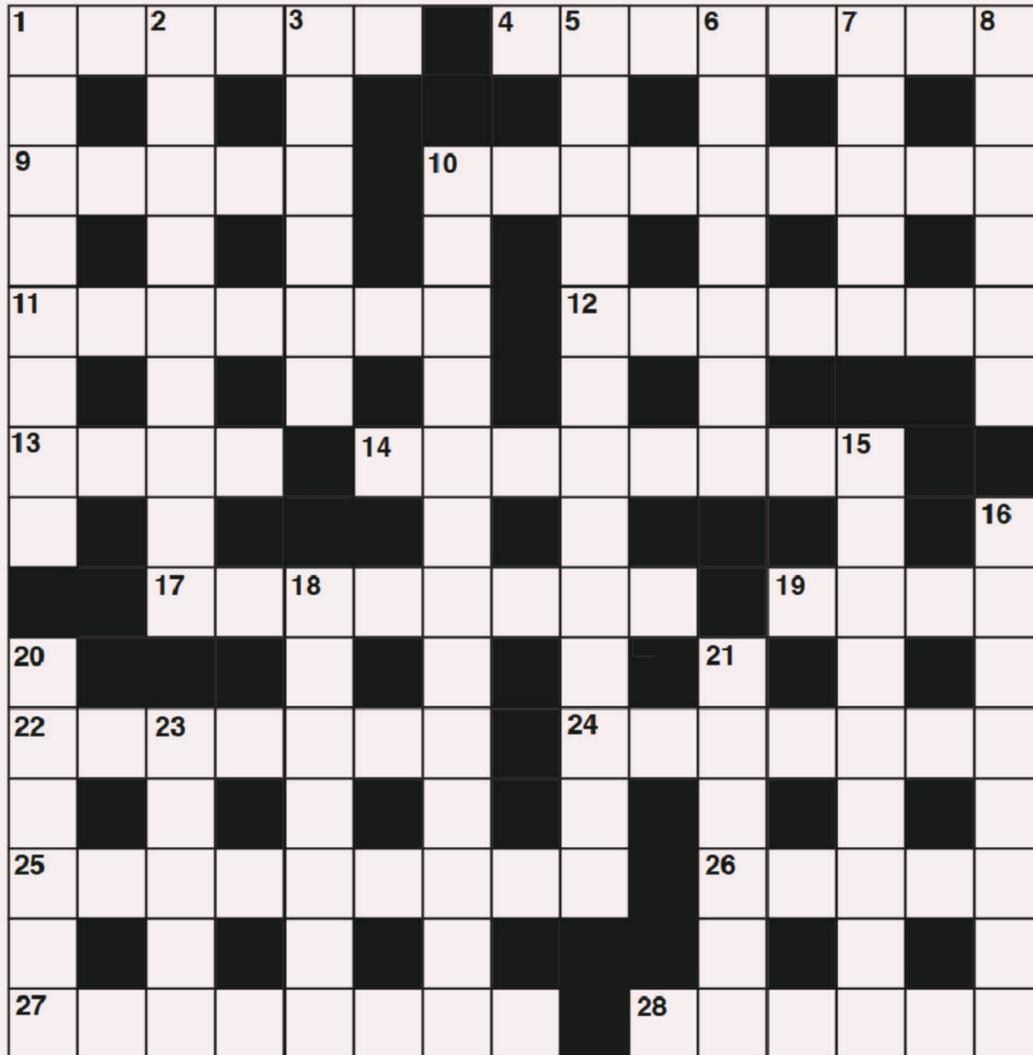
Finally, I called Chantelle Nicholson, who was excited by the prospect of serving shipworms as an environmentally friendly fish substitute. At Apricity, her London restaurant, Nicholson has banned farmed salmon from the menu, and she operates a rigorous low-waste policy. She had actually arranged a call with Willer before agreeing to take part in the feature, to equip herself with the finer details of the naked-clam farming process. Of all the chefs I interviewed, Nicholson expressed the most concrete interest in serving shipworms to her diners. She had even come up with a tentative plan to avoid wasting its tiny toenail shell: she would roast them and then whizz in the food processor to make fish sauce.

Nicholson would fry her molluscs in tempura, so the meat could steam inside its batter and remain tender, and then top with black garlic purée and shaved fennel, and serve with lime-leaf aioli. Her recipe is rooted in the materiality of her ingredient, but she also recognised it might be easier to sell a shipworm if you disguised it a bit to conceal its wormy essence. She told me she would chop the meat up, because “If you have something long and skinny that you are trying to chew, it’s not particularly palatable.” We spoke on Zoom, and as Nicholson said this she mimed trying to stuff a long, skinny worm into her mouth to illustrate the point.

Towards the end of our conversation, we talked about oysters and whether they are really significantly nicer than other foods. Nicholson agreed with me that the appeal of the oyster is partly just good PR and expressed slight fatigue at the faddishness of our tastes. “I know people who are trying to train themselves to like oysters or martinis because they’re ‘cool’. It’s like, why?” You can view this human tendency to slavishly follow fashion as one of our more embarrassing qualities, evidence of mindlessness and pretension, but it might also be possible to see it as a strength. If we can train ourselves to like martinis, we can also train ourselves to like shipworms and dislike farmed fish. Wooed by the right chefs and the right recipes we can eat our way to a more sustainable future. **FT**

THE CROSSWORD

No 699 Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1. Dirty, unclean (6)
- 4. Tombstone tributes (8)
- 9. Aristocratic (5)
- 10. Musical embellishment (5, 4)
- 11. In the distant past (4, 3)
- 12. Tempestuous person (7)
- 13. 'No' votes (4)
- 14. Bald (8)
- 17. Enclosed in this (8)
- 19. Region, zone (4)
- 22. Electrical plug attachment (7)
- 24. Adult (5-2)
- 25. Self-discipline, moderation (9)
- 26. Turned to ice (5)
- 27. Hunt around for scraps (8)
- 28. Population survey (6)

DOWN

- 1. Sing about fish and drink (3, 5)
- 2. Yarn with thumb broken's a tall tale (5, 4)
- 3. Local rule we lay out after Brexit started (6)
- 5. Show little enthusiasm for drama he'd got with art that's complicated (4, 4, 2, 3)
- 6. Time to relax with the French support (7)
- 7. Check top of party dress (5)
- 8. See around rising Cheshire river's fleet (6)
- 10. Worldwide threat of armed conflict with old dynasty following ball - go mad (6, 7)
- 15. It's difficult to use urns when damaged (9)
- 16. Moisture from sap - mend top of siphon, perhaps (8)
- 18. Former worker getting about Scottish island (7)
- 20. Cooking drama with a bit of specialist curry style (6)
- 21. Starts to call out for charge for refreshment (6)
- 23. Confused by a chair with the back moved almost to the front (2, 3)

A ROUND ON THE LINKS

by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the connection, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

- 1. What's the only US National Park in Arkansas?
 - 2. Which Gilbert and Sullivan opera is set in 16th-century London?
 - 3. In the titles of films what connects "the Killer Tomatoes" and "the 50 Ft. Woman"?
 - 4. Which British band - at the time widely referred to as the biggest band in the world - played to 70,000 people in Shea Stadium, New York, in 1983?
 - 5. Which Hackney-based drama beat *Happy Valley*, *Gold* and *Slow Horses* to this year's Bafta for best British TV drama?
 - 6. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote which best-selling series of children's books?
 - 7. What's the common name for the animal disease BSE?
 - 8. What's the first word of the hymn known as "Bread of Heaven"?
 - 9. What's the best-selling item at the British bakery chain Greggs?
 - 10. Last year, for the first time since records began in the 1850s, the number of which animal in New Zealand was less than five times the number of people?
- Answers below left*

THE PICTURE ROUND

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



James Walton is co-host of "The Booker Prize Podcast"

How do I make sure that everyone knows I was promoted?

Work, life and family dilemmas
solved by *Robert Shrimley*



OK, how can I put this? Are you really sure you have, in fact, been promoted? I ask because, in my experience, people tend to notice real promotions. So, to the reader who asked this, I must very gently observe that if you are asking how to get your elevation recognised, then perhaps you are stumbling towards the uncomfortable truth that you have been duped.

There are lots of non-promotion promotions. The most obvious is a title bump. You've had the word "senior" added to your handle. Or maybe you've gone from executive to manager. Perhaps you hit the jackpot and are now a vice-president of something. It's not nothing, especially if all your peers do not have the title. Mind you, many industries are experiencing title inflation, which sees the same job rebadged, perhaps to prevent someone leaving, or as an alternative to paying them more.

So before we get into how to disseminate the message of your success, let's just check you have actually been successful. Ask yourself these questions. Are you being paid more? Do you have extra responsibilities? Do more people report to you? Are more people likely to defer to you or respect your autonomy? Are you now invited to a higher stratum of executive meetings? Did your "promotion" come with any of the visible boosts: a bigger office, a better desk, an assistant?

If the answer to most of these is no, the bad news is you haven't been promoted. However, if you got a pay rise, at least you know you are valued, so that's something. If all you got was the title, well knock yourself out updating your LinkedIn profile, but it's probably best to approach this with the humility you would only be feigning were it real.

The general dynamic of organisations is that people pay attention to where power lies, so if you've just got more of it, word will get around. In many industries, word will also get around your rivals. In ultra-competitive areas such as investment banking, a promotion in one company will be common knowledge in all the others pretty swiftly.

But perhaps your promotion is real, and you are seeking advice on how to break the good news to those beyond the immediate world that recognises it. Possibly you are in a small, self-contained unit of a larger business. Maybe the people you wish to inform are your circle of friends, acquaintances and wider family. If this is the case, then there are a few options available.

The first, already mentioned, is to update your LinkedIn profile. This will notify your entire network. Updating your profile is a double-edged sword though. I once noticed my own profile was several years out of date and amended it to the job I'd had for three years at least. Everyone was immediately told I had changed roles when I hadn't, and almost all assumed I was updating the profile as a prelude to looking for a new job.

Frankly, you could just go for a "Just Promoted" lapel badge. It's a trifle gauche, but it has an essential honesty. Updating your LinkedIn profile is essentially the same thing but somehow feels less egregious.

The second step is to start including your new title on the footer of your emails. The good news here is that people will notice. The bad news is that they may notice and conclude you are a self-aggrandising, attention-seeking self-promoter.

Finally, there is the social media humblebrag in which you write posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, or whatever, letting people know that you are thrilled to have been elevated to the position of whatever. You might begin this with the phrase "Some personal news...", which alerts readers to the fact that you are about to tell them something they may not care about.

An even more refined version of this is the one I noticed when people are shortlisted for awards, where the brag runs something like, "So excited and humbled to be nominated alongside these amazing people." A more honest version of this might run, "Look how great I am, everybody. These are the bastards standing between me and the lucite."

Anyway, may I be the first to congratulate you on your well-deserved advancement. Although judging by the question, it sounds like I am. **ET**

Email Robert at magazineletters@ft.com

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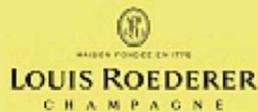
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