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## THE SUNDAY TIMES *magazine*



## THIS WEEK IN 1964

A supporter of the US senator Barry Goldwater's presidential bid made the cover of *The Sunday Times Magazine* on August 9. The photo feature looked behind the scenes at the Republican nominee's home life in Phoenix, Arizona. On November 3 he would be defeated by the incumbent president, Lyndon B Johnson, in a landslide victory for the Democrats.



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MATT RUDD

## The Olympics are in full swing. Where are the sports for tired dads?

Imagine being an Olympic hammer thrower. You've spent every minute of the past four years working towards one day this summer. You have breakfast, you throw a hammer. You have lunch, you throw a hammer. You have dinner, you watch videos of yourself throwing hammers. Then you go to Paris and throw a hammer. Then someone else throws a hammer a bit further and that's it for four more years.

I can see the point in the classics — running, swimming, rowing, rhythmic gymnastics — but as soon as you get into the weirder events it feels a huge waste of time. Would it not be more constructive if we ditched the pole vault, the triple jump and whatever Charlotte Dujardin was trying to get her horse to do, and replace them with more useful, inclusive events? Events at which middle-aged dads like me would excel?

No, dad skateboarding doesn't count (though, of course, good luck to Team GB's Andy Macdonald, 50). But what about Olympic baby catch? Each competitor is snoozing on a sofa next to a baby (supplied by competitor). At a time to be decided by the baby, the baby will throw itself suddenly from the sofa. Points will be awarded for level of difficulty and competence of catch but also style. Was the baby jolted or jarred? How far from the (concrete) floor was its head? As the sport develops I imagine there will be refinements. Perhaps the competitors will have to stay awake for the previous 72 hours. Perhaps they'll have to watch *Pingu* during the event. However it develops, I have no doubt that televised baby-catching would be a huge hit.

As would Olympic barefoot-Lego-floor dash, in which competitors who are late for the (imaginary) school run must run across an (imaginary) bedroom floor covered in (real) bits of Lego. In the group stages the floor will be well lit. In the finals it will be dark and the competitors will have to carry a large basket of washing. Yelps and/or swearing result in instant disqualification.

What about the bake-a-birthday-cake-while-keeping-a-toddler-happy-while-feeding-a-baby competition? What about the packed-lunch-when-you-forgot-to-go-shopping race? What about a whole nappy tournament? You could have women's nappy changing, men's nappy changing (it's fine if it's back to front) and speed-nappy-



changing-in-very-confined-public-spaces. Penalties for smearing.

Instead of synchronised diving (go Tom), let's have synchronised "Where are the car keys?" Competitors must work in matrimonial pairs to find the car keys. One of them must say, "Where did you last have them?" and the other must not say, "If I knew that, they wouldn't be lost, would they?" The clock stops when all the children have been strapped into their car seats without injury.

Rather than breakdancing, let's have crazy dad taxi. Entrants must manage to drop off and/or pick up three teenage boys based solely on the random and limited information texted to them by those teenagers. Marks, get set...

"Dad, I need picking up from Sam's."

"Which Sam? Where? When?"

Fifteen minutes of silence.

"My friend Sam. I'm at his house."

"Where is his house?"

Fifteen more minutes of silence.

"Dad, I'm late for football."

"Is it near your brother's friend Sam's house?"

"I don't know. Have you washed my kit?"

If these events go down well we could have more fiendish ones such as Olympic get a GP appointment, Olympic speak to an actual human in customer services and Olympic book a Ryanair flight. If you think it might be boring to watch athletes trying to print boarding passes, you'd be wrong. We'd hook them up to blood pressure monitors — 130 over 90 and they're out.

In 1900, two Paris Olympics ago, they had a croquet event. Eight people entered. Seven were French and one was thought to be Belgian but later also turned out to be French. The French won all the medals and, by 1904, croquet had been ditched. This is where the Games started to become the preserve of young, fit, healthy people. If they really want to widen their appeal, forget the BMX and the hip-hop. Go old-school. I suspect my suggestions will be too radical but can we at least have croquet back? I'm quite good at croquet. Better, certainly, than I am at throwing hammers ■



**GOOD NEWS!**

A new law in Sweden allows parents to transfer some of their paid parental leave to grandparents during their child's first year. Couples can

now reallocate 45 days of their joint 480-day allowance; single parents can pass on 90 days. The legislation recognises that many grandparents are still in

work too. Sweden pioneered paid parental leave that can be split between parents 50 years ago — a benefit since replicated around the world.

## RELATIVE VALUES

# Anthea and Wendy Turner

The presenter and her sister, who didn't talk to each other for four years

### Wendy

Anthea is seven years older than me, so I learnt from her mistakes. She pushed the boundaries, causing all kinds of trouble when she was a teenager. I stayed within the boundaries and had an easier life.

I remember staring into our bedroom mirror when I was young, trying to understand why I was here. That is my earliest memory of the quite severe existential depression I've suffered all my life. Our middle sister, Ruth, was born with spina bifida. She died from kidney failure when she was 15; I was 11, Anthea was 18. For a long time, if anyone asked how my sister was, I'd say, "She's fine." I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't cry until I was 17. I went to stay with Anthea in London and it hit me like a tidal wave.

Anthea has so many qualities I admire and wish I had; her energy, drive and ambition. It was incredibly painful to watch her fall from the mainstream at the end of the Nineties. I'd read the headlines and have a private cry. She had fallen in love with Grant Bovey, a property developer who was married. It happens the world over but it was as if she had murdered someone. She was one of the highest-paid women on TV and she went from hero to zero. She was cancelled on the spot.

Then Grant's infidelity wrecked his marriage to Anthea and she had to deal with it publicly. They separated in 2013. When he left her for the last time his PA phoned me to say, "Can you come over? Anthea is really hurting." There were a lot of incidents like that. Talking it all through, having a few G&Ts and shouting at the world. It was heartbreaking: she'd had a lot of IVF and we had talked about donating my eggs at one point. But there was never resentment when I had my sons: she loved Jack and Freddie and babysat often.

Just as she was recovering from her trauma, my husband, the actor Gary Webster, and I were unlucky on a few projects and our financial situation took a nosedive. We lost our home and lived with the boys in a Travelodge for ten months. I was suicidal. I just couldn't see how we were going to be OK. And Anthea was also hurting, so we were in a place where we were so embroiled in our own pain we couldn't help each other.

We didn't speak for about four years and I missed her. But I was too depressed to make rational sense of anything. I was in survival mode, just trying to protect Jack and Freddie. Antidepressants and counselling helped, but Gary and I still haven't fully got over it. If I'd taken on one more thing it would have killed me.

Anthea and I have no interest in talking about the years we didn't speak, and this isn't shovelling stuff under the carpet. My drive has to be moving forward and I know that's her philosophy too. Through absolute

grit and determination she has proved herself to be unsinkable. She has a lovely new man and, to me, she has changed completely since she has been with him. I see a person I haven't met before. She was always a coiled spring, a little bit fiery and never fully relaxed. The change in her has been phenomenal. She's happier in her own skin, more chilled and fun.

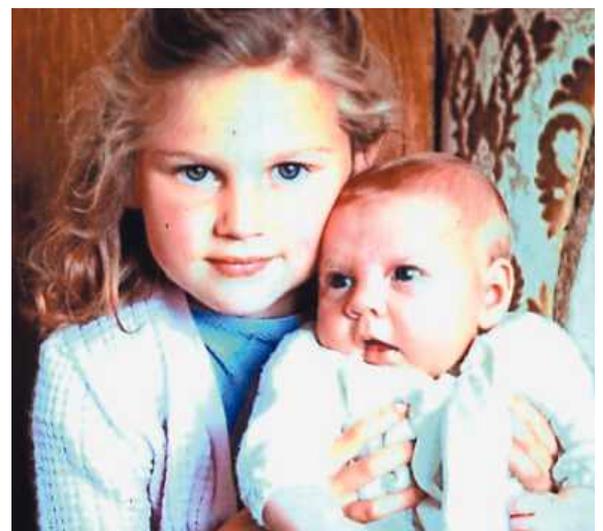
After Mum died in 2022, Dad moved to London to be closer to us. He's 91 and has a new lease of life. We're all closer than ever. It shows you don't need to dissect the past to move into the future. I love the new Anthea. Having her in my life is one of my greatest joys.

### Anthea

Wendy and I were the products of a Sixties and Seventies upbringing where you didn't talk about difficult things, especially not death. After Ruth died we didn't go to the funeral: we went to school as usual the next day. I remember aunts whispering and crying, but you didn't discuss how you felt. My teenage grief manifested itself in avoidance and escape. It's only later in life that you re-enter the room in terms of how you feel — there will always be one of us missing.

After starting out at BBC Radio Stoke I came to London to work in PR. All of a sudden I was doing

**Anthea fell in love with a married man but it was as if she had murdered someone. She went from hero to zero**



**Main: Wendy, 57, and Anthea, 64, at Anthea's house in southwest London. Right: Anthea with her baby sister at home in Stoke-on-Trent in 1967**



Saturday morning TV, *Top of the Pops* and *Blue Peter*, then *GMTV* and *The National Lottery*, which pulled in up to 22 million viewers. OK! magazine needed filling and Carol Smillie, Ulrika Jonsson, Anneka Rice and I were the telly tarts of the day.

Wendy is passionate about the things she believes in. Her niche interest has always been animals — she presented Channel 4’s *Pet Rescue* for nearly seven years. Although we are very different people, there are huge similarities between us because our reference points are all the same. Our mum was great at raising strong girls and giving us the tools to deal with life. I never saw Mum without her hair done and her make-up on — she was always “front door-ready”.

The world we ended up in tested her but she was massively supportive. For years I never took down my own Christmas decorations because Mum would come and whisk everything away. When Wendy met Gary and had her two boys she was a real asset. I was never in that position. My girls [Grant Bovey’s daughters] arrived in my life aged two, five and six. I absolutely adore them: after Grant and I split up, they chose to stay in my life and I chose to be in theirs.

Wendy and I never lived in each other’s pockets, but even so it was tough when we didn’t speak for a couple

## STRANGE HABITS

### Wendy on Anthea

She rubs the edge of her right eyebrow, usually when she is deep in thought

### Anthea on Wendy

She is a secret hoarder. From her children’s milk teeth to keys with no known locks

of years. I’d just got divorced. I’d had all my eggs in one basket with Grant and I was not expecting it to blow up. Wendy and Gary were having problems but it was their life and there was only so much I could do. Gary and Wendy have a great relationship — they are completely solid. They sorted things out and Wendy and I found our way back to each other. We picked up where we left off because she’s my sister. It’s family, it’s blood.

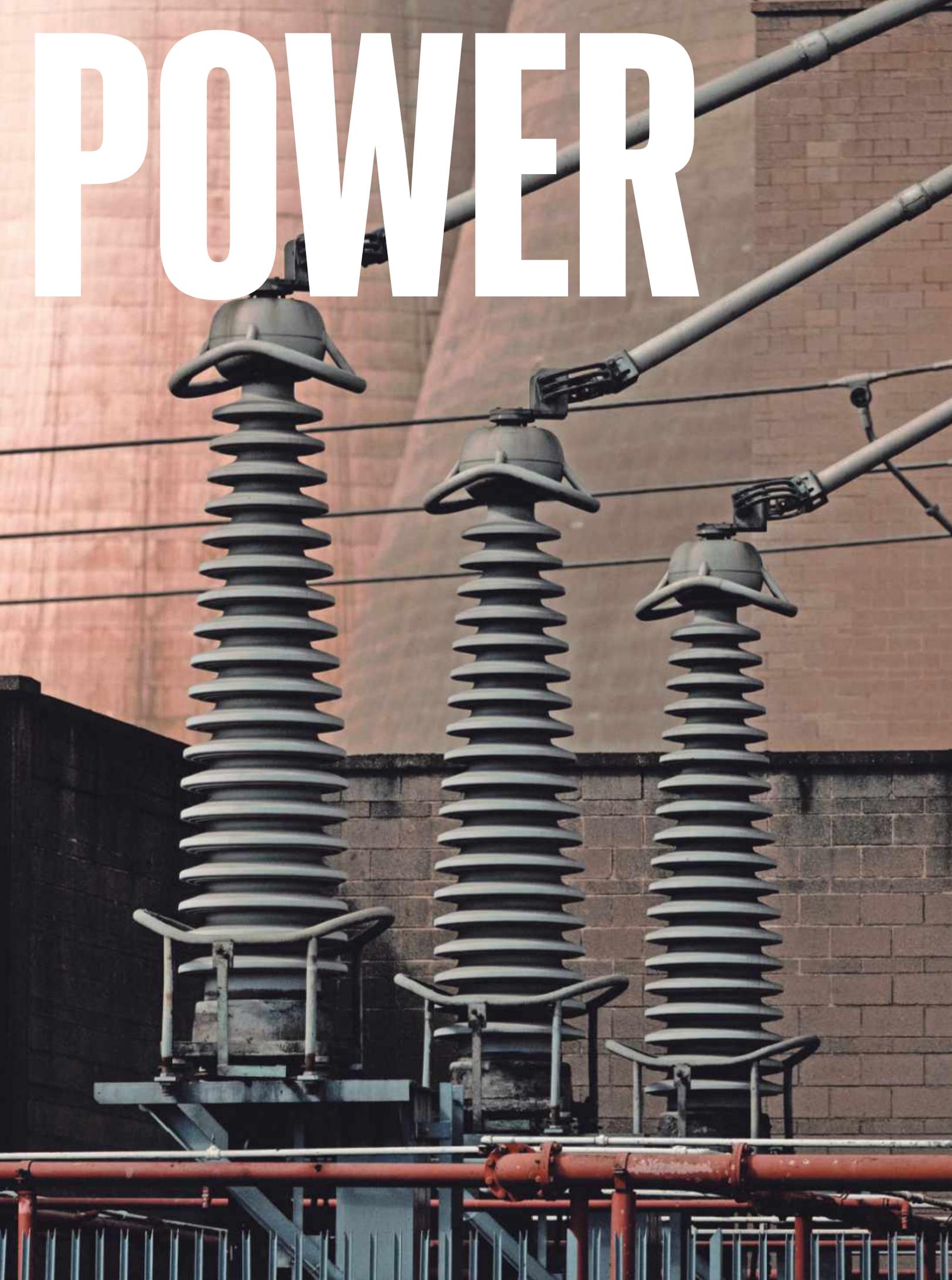
Mum getting ill was the catalyst for Wendy and me talking again. But we haven’t discussed what happened and we never will. In the same way, I wouldn’t sit down with Grant and pick fluff out of my belly button. What’s the point? What’s done is done. Delving into the back pages of our lives to re-traumatise ourselves is not the Turner way. I earn my living by not falling apart.

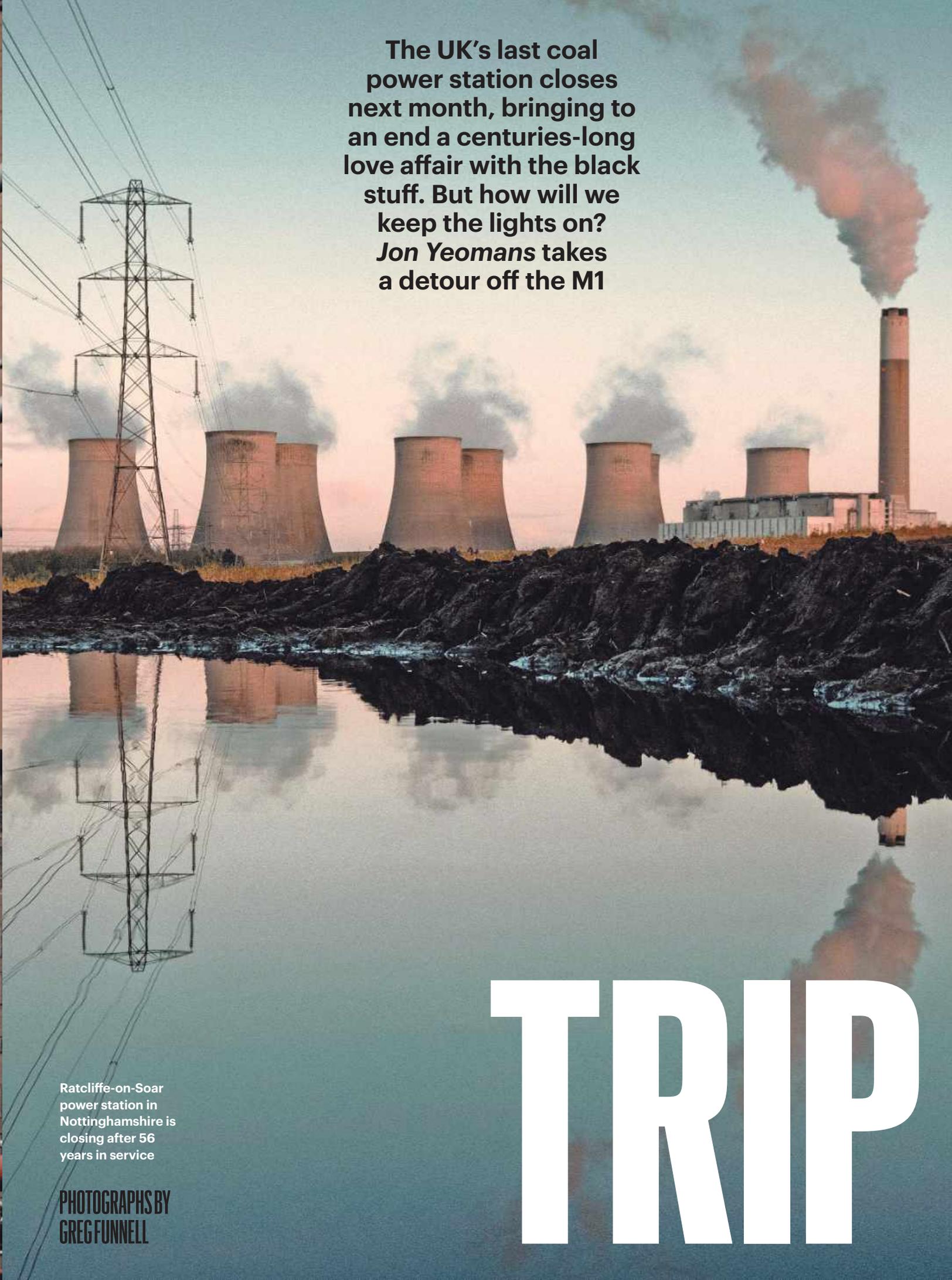
We’re at a good age, Wendy and I. We speak every other day. I don’t have to ask if she’s OK — if she isn’t she’ll let me know. We’re really enjoying each other’s company and, you know what, it turns out there’s a lot of work out there for scrubbed-up over-fifties ■

Interviews by Caroline Scott.

**Raining Strawberries at Wimbledon by Anthea Turner and Wendy Turner (Splendid Publications £8.99). To order go to [timesbookshop.co.uk](http://timesbookshop.co.uk). Discount for Times+ members**

# POWER





**The UK's last coal  
power station closes  
next month, bringing to  
an end a centuries-long  
love affair with the black  
stuff. But how will we  
keep the lights on?  
*Jon Yeomans* takes  
a detour off the M1**

Ratcliffe-on-Soar  
power station in  
Nottinghamshire is  
closing after 56  
years in service

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
GREG FUNNELL**

# TRIP

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# A



t the bottom of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, a man in grey overalls, ear defenders and an orange helmet brandishes a very long stick. He sinks to his knees and opens a metal door to what looks like an oven. The stick goes in and out as Mark Williams, the “ashing operator”, begins scraping away at the ash inside.

I am in the bowels of Britain’s last coal-fired power plant, a sprawling industrial beast that thrums with noise and heat that opened in 1968. Above me are 61m (200ft) of twisted metal, gantries, furnaces and pipes. The ash hoppers that Williams is attending to contain the remains of the coal that is funnelled into the furnaces above. These are heated to about 1,000C, boiling water to produce steam that turns the generators in the turbine hall. The electricity they produce is fed through to the neighbouring transformer — large enough to occupy its own building — then transmitted through pylons to boil the kettles and power the TVs of surrounding Nottinghamshire.

“It’s like a big Meccano set and I love it,” says John Roberts, an electrical engineer whose first shift at Ratcliffe was 44 years ago. “She’s an old lady now and she needs a lot of looking after.”

These days Roberts is a supervisor but his face is still smudged with grease above the collar of his lurid orange and grey overalls. When he started at Ratcliffe in

1980 the power station was just 12 years into its operational life. Now it is hurtling towards its end. Next month the furnaces will belch their last and the power station will close. It will bring down the curtain not just on its own 56-year history but on centuries of coal power in the UK as, under the new energy secretary Ed Miliband, we push towards a future of wind and solar power, plus the odd nuclear power station.

Ratcliffe-on-Soar rises from the flat skyline. Its eight cooling towers, each 114m high, are visible from the M1 motorway. Passengers flying into nearby East Midlands airport “know they’re home when they see the cooling towers”, says Chris Stenson, another lifer at the company. He is running a quiet one-man campaign to save the towers, whose concrete walls are only 15cm thick. “I would love to see at least one cooling tower stay, because they are iconic.”

That isn’t in the plan, however. Once Ratcliffe closes, its German owner, Uniper, will begin the six-year-long process of decommissioning the plant and demolishing the site, towers and all. Its 180 staff — including Williams, Roberts and Stenson — plus about 120 contractors will either retire, move to other jobs in the company or be let go. Forty-four staff have accepted voluntary redundancy.

The race is now on to find a new purpose for the land, which is encircled to the west and north by the rivers Soar and Trent,

**John Roberts, an electrical engineer who has worked at Ratcliffe-on-Soar since 1980**

hemmed in by the A453 to the south and surrounded on all sides by fields and villages. Not far away are the cities of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham, which have suckled on the energy of Ratcliffe throughout its smoggy life.

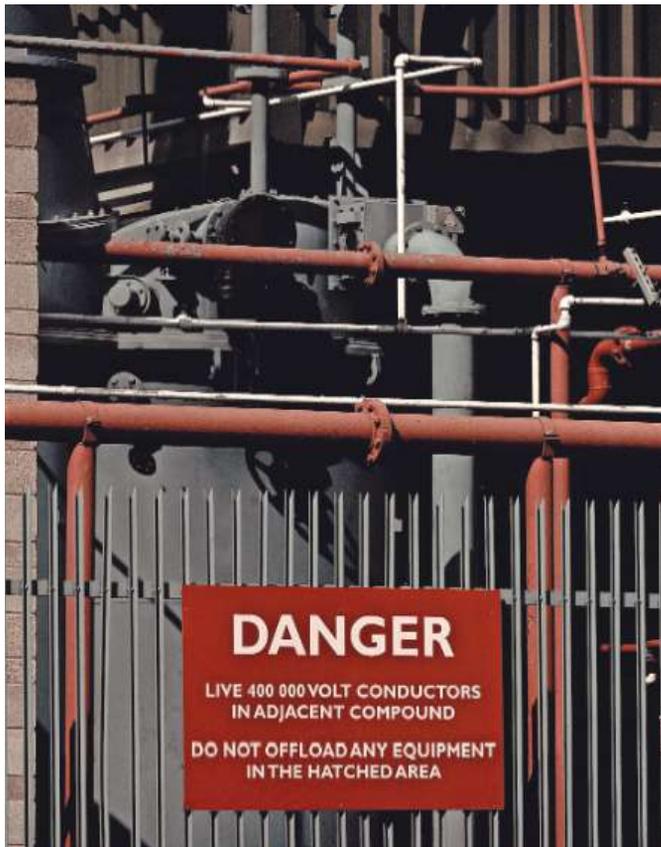
Ratcliffe was built at a time when coal was king. It survived the turmoil of privatisation in 1990 only to witness the breakneck phasing out of the fuel as governments recognised its dire effect on the environment and gradually throttled it with legislation, promoting renewable energy instead. Coal’s share of the UK’s energy mix has plummeted from 30 per cent as recently as 2014 to less than 1 per cent now. “When I started with the company 35 years ago, 80 per cent of the UK’s electricity was powered by coal,” says Peter O’Grady, plant manager for Ratcliffe, with a note of wonder in his voice. “By the end of this year, that will be zero.”

Ratcliffe’s closure doesn’t just end a chapter in British industrial history. It marks a tipping point in how we fuel the nation. And its closure leaves a gap: in the East Midlands, where locals hope new jobs will appear, but also in our energy system. It poses difficult questions about how our insatiable need for power will be met. ►

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## MEGAWATT VALLEY

The power station's cooling towers aren't even visible in the village of Ratcliffe-on-Soar, a cluster of pretty cottages leading to an ancient church that may be the very definition of "sleepy". Ray State, 82, a retired railway worker and local resident, says the plant has been little bother for the village in its 56 years. "We don't want to see it become derelict because it is strategically well placed," he notes.

Ratcliffe is representative of the villages that dot the vicinity: quiet settlements with mostly retired people and little in the way of amenities. Locals are concerned about plans to redevelop the green belt land south of the power station, part of which was the dumping ground for the plant's ash.

Over the hill in the village of Thrumpton, Bob Webb, 74, recalls that his father and uncle helped to build Ratcliffe-on-Soar. "It's mixed feelings," he says. "From a climate change standpoint it's a good thing. But then other countries are still building coal power stations."

Indeed, the Far East has shown little sign of giving up on the dirty fuel: China added 47.4 gigawatts of coal power capacity in 2023, according to Global Energy Monitor — equivalent to 24 Ratcliffes. This came even as China ramped up its renewable and nuclear plants.

Ratcliffe-on-Soar became the last man standing of the British coal industry partly through design and partly through luck. It was conceived in the 1960s as one of a fleet of "super stations" that drew their fuel from



**The station can produce 2000MW of electricity; ash hoppers collect the waste. Below: full steam ahead from the A453**

the coalfields of Nottinghamshire. Fifteen plants were built along a U-shaped bend of the River Trent. This conglomeration of power became "Megawatt Valley" and at one time it generated a quarter of the UK's electricity. The plants sucked in water for cooling and returned it to the river several degrees warmer; this encouraged fish to congregate in the balmy waters. Work on Ratcliffe began in 1963 and at full tilt it can produce 2,000 megawatts — enough to power two million homes.

Yet even as Megawatt Valley began operating, the seeds of the industry's decline were being sowed. Coal grew more uneconomical and industrial strife descended, culminating in the miners' strike of 1984. By the 1990s cheap and plentiful North Sea reserves sparked the "dash for gas" in the energy industry, with the construction of new gas-fired plants.

After privatisation Ratcliffe transferred to Powergen — later Eon — which split off the part of its business that dealt in fossil fuels into Uniper in 2016. The Ukraine war pushed Uniper to the brink of collapse after it was unable to import gas from Russia, and it had to be bailed out by the German government in 2022 to the tune of €50 billion. As a result, the last vestige of Britain's coal industry is owned by German taxpayers. ➤

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Among the nasties belched out by coal are sulphur dioxide — linked to acid rain — and nitrogen oxide and particulates, which contribute to smog. All of them have been blamed for respiratory illnesses. It is also a large producer of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas blamed for warming the atmosphere. Over the past decade Eon and Uniper have invested millions in systems to remove some of Ratcliffe’s harmful emissions. Thus it became the only coal plant in the UK with catalytic reduction technology, which can reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by about 80 per cent. That has extended Ratcliffe’s life beyond some of its peers, but it is still burning a fossil fuel. “Clearly we can’t do much about the carbon dioxide, that’s why we’re closing,” O’Grady says.

For years coal was delivered to Ratcliffe by rail, on a spur that curls around a giant coal heap. As British pits closed, Ratcliffe turned to coal from South Africa, Australia and Russia. The Ukraine war threw up new complications in 2022, when the plant had to spurn Russian supply. At peak times the coal heap blotted out the view of the power station from the nearby A453. But the pile is depleting fast. Ratcliffe is now used only to supply top-up energy to the grid as and when required; it just needs four hours’ notice from the grid to fire up its boilers.

The plant wasn’t designed to fire up so quickly; it used to take 12 hours. Coal was always meant to supply “baseload” power for the grid, O’Grady explains. Turning plants on and off was seen as cumbersome and costly, but that changed as gas, with more flexible output, entered the power market. Coal had to become more reactive.

I enter the control room, where the boilers are turned on and off. Desks in concentric circles face banks of screens and switches. There are 13 people on duty for each 12-hour shift, monitoring feeds across the power station. Staff in the control room

## DURING THE 1984 STRIKE SOME POWER PLANTS WERE CONVERTED TO BURN OIL INSTEAD OF COAL, HELPING TO BREAK THE MINERS’ GRIP

work a gruelling cycle of two days and two nights on, followed by six days off. “Twelve hours is a slog at the deep end of it, no matter whether it’s days or nights,” says Jon Winfield, a control engineer. To alleviate the monotony of a long shift, a tea urn on a trolley supplies workers with much-needed refreshment. “There might be a few biscuits too,” Winfield says.

### A COMMUNITY UNDERMINED

“You’d got electricians, engineers, joiners, painters, chippies,” recalls Roberts, the electrical engineer, of Ratcliffe’s pre-privatisation heyday when it employed more than 1,000 workers, each of them categorised rigidly by their trade. Privatisation “made us more commercially focused”, says Nigel Bates, an engineering manager. “Now we cross over lines a bit more,” Roberts adds; staff need to have more than one skill up their sleeve.

Ratcliffe’s cooling towers go up in 1966; boys join a 1984 march in Nottingham

Roberts joined as an apprentice after being rebuffed in his attempt to become a household “spark”. “I had the choice of here, the pit, or Rolls-Royce in Derby. I didn’t want to go to Rolls because it was a machinist job. So I went down the pit.” A brief visit to the pit at Hucknall changed his mind. “I didn’t want to work down there. So my dad said, ‘Start at the place that makes electricity.’ And I came here.”

Back in the 1970s and 1980s Ratcliffe’s well-kept grounds included a nine-hole golf course, a fishing pond, a cricket pitch and a bowling green. The social club was demolished to make way for a car park.

“We still have a golf society and fishing club,” says Angela Millward, who has 30 years’ service at Ratcliffe and now works in the compliance department. She recalls the company throwing an annual dinner dance and a summer barbecue on the grounds during planned outages. Bates, the engineering manager with 42 years of service, has fond memories of the “friendly rivalry” between Ratcliffe and the other Trent Valley power stations. A “power challenge” competition in the 1990s had teams compete in problem-solving tasks, raft building and orienteering. “We got the bragging rights, that was the main thing,” he says. Trophies from this era stand in glass cases in the reception of Ratcliffe’s stolid, 1960s-era office block.

“People went through a whole career just moving around those different power stations,” Bates says. “But as the smaller ones shut, then the larger ones, that’s changed how people’s careers have developed. So more people have stayed put here.”

Roberts has taken it upon himself to be the unofficial social secretary of Ratcliffe, holding meet-ups of staff past and present ▶

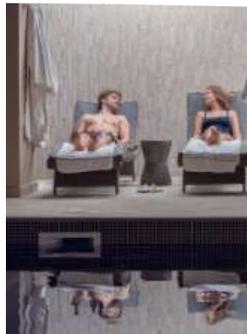


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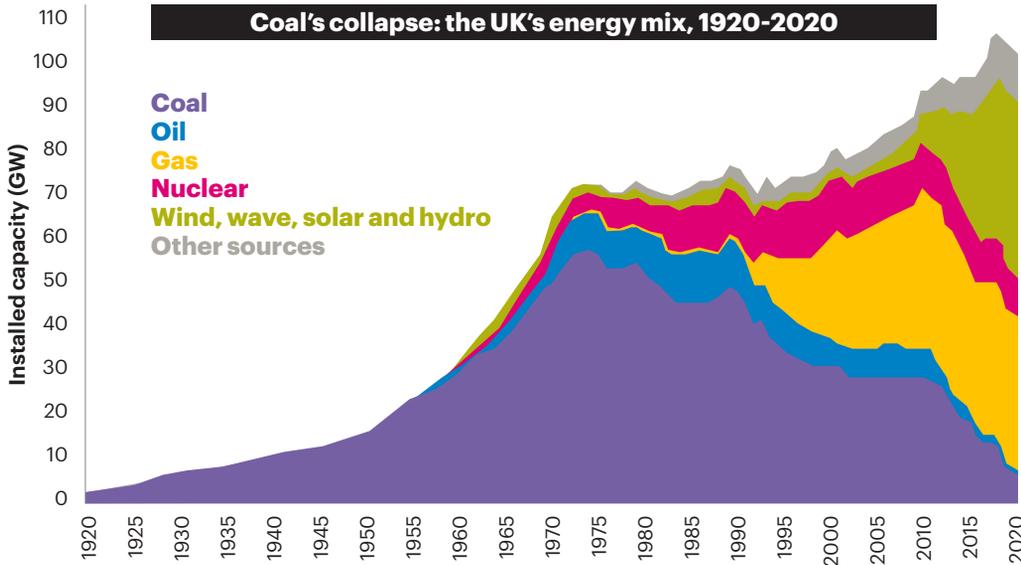


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at the Victoria Hotel pub in Beeston, near Nottingham. “A lot of people have stayed in touch as they’ve left, so you kind of never really leave Ratcliffe,” Millward says.

It takes four years to train up an operator and, with the plant nearing the end of its life, no new staff have been added to the roster. Millward’s teenage daughter is on site doing work experience. She will be one of the last young people through its doors.

Once the plant stops generating it will enter a roughly two-year decommissioning process, which involves stripping out equipment for reuse or for scrap. Hazardous materials will be removed and buildings surveyed for substances such as asbestos. Uniper hopes that some demolition can happen in parallel with decommissioning. It is targeting the demolition of the main building, including the turbine hall, and the cooling towers by the end of the decade.

### COAL'S SLOW BURNOUT

It was the industrial revolution that lit a fire under coal production in the UK. By the late 19th century, it was being used to generate electricity and, by the turn of the 20th, Britain had become one of the foremost exporters of coal.

Many parts of the country, from south Wales to Northumberland, were built on coalmining. Output peaked at 292 million metric tonnes in 1913 and employment reached a high of 1.2 million workers in 1920. The amount of coal supplied for electricity generation hit its peak in 1980, at 89.5 million tonnes.

By the time the Central Electricity Generating Board was planning its super stations of the 1960s, coal was competing with newer fuels such as oil and nuclear. During the miners’ strike of 1984, some power plants were converted to burn oil instead of coal, helping to break the grip of the miners. It also raised for the first time

**FORMER STAFF MEET UP IN A PUB IN BEESTON. “A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE STAYED IN TOUCH. SO YOU KIND OF NEVER REALLY LEAVE RATCLIFFE”**

the prospect of life without coal, says Huw Beynon, co-author of the book *The Shadow of the Mine*. Ratcliffe will close on the 40th anniversary of the miners’ strike.

By the 2000s environmental concerns could no longer be ignored. Ratcliffe-on-Soar found itself on the climate front line in 2007, when twelve activists broke into the plant and six of them chained themselves to its coal chute. In 2009 police arrested more than a hundred protesters who planned to occupy the site. Twenty were convicted of conspiracy to commit aggravated trespass, but when it emerged that police had withheld evidence, Keir Starmer — then the director of public prosecutions — encouraged the activists to appeal. The convictions were quashed in 2011.

At Ratcliffe the climate protests resulted in tighter security. But it marked a shift in how the plant’s work was perceived. Coal

**Akhil Moonukandathil, an electrical engineer, will stay on to help decommission the site**

was now an enemy to be demonised and disparaged. “You’d never have envisaged that [shift] in terms of the public outlook when we joined the industry decades ago,” says O’Grady, the plant manager.

In 2005 the European Union launched a carbon emissions trading scheme that forced power companies to buy credits to allow them to emit carbon. Coal emits about twice as much carbon dioxide as gas, and by 2014 it had become “uneconomical to run coal because of the carbon pricing”, says Tom Edwards, senior modeller at the researcher Cornwall Insight.

In 2015 the energy secretary Amber Rudd announced that all of the UK’s coal-fired plants would close by 2025; the date later moved forward a year. In April 2017 the UK had its first full day without any coal power since the industrial revolution. In 2020 the country achieved its longest spell yet without coal: 67 days straight. Coal was out in the cold.

The energy crisis sparked by the Ukraine war in 2022 prompted a renewed focus on security of supply. The Labour government has a highly ambitious plan for all our electricity to be produced from green sources by 2030, chiefly by encouraging a massive ramp-up of onshore and offshore wind and solar power.

Which is all well and good. But where will we find top-up power when renewable output dips and the system can no longer call on the likes of Ratcliffe at short notice? In the short term the answer is more gas plants, batteries and interconnectors — undersea cables that feed power from neighbouring countries.

“It could come from nuclear and rotating gas plants, with carbon capture, ➤

# Go with the slow



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and it could come from hydrogen,” says John Pettigrew, chief executive of National Grid. “The broader your network is and the more interconnected it is, the more resilience it has.”

Edwards, of Cornwall Insight, says the challenge will be even more acute in the 2030s. “With more electric vehicles and heat pumps we will need to be more flexible, as we don’t necessarily know when electricity demand is going to spike.”

#### LIGHTS OUT

Ratcliffe’s staff still have a tangible pride in keeping the country’s lights on. “You can’t have a duvet day here,” Roberts says. I detect a trace of bewilderment, if not sadness, at how coal has fallen out of favour. Bates, the engineering manager, speaks for many of his colleagues when he says: “We’ve been providing a public service here, which sometimes doesn’t get the recognition or the headlines.”

But Ratcliffe won’t be saved. What will happen to it next? Many of Britain’s power stations linger on long after they come to the end of their lives; not all are converted into modern art galleries or expensive London flats. They haunt the landscape, hulking and empty. Even Megawatt Valley lives on in spirit: between the cooling towers of Ratcliffe another set is visible, 14 miles away — those of Willington, which was switched off in 1999. Its five cooling

**“WE’VE BEEN PROVIDING A PUBLIC SERVICE HERE, WHICH SOMETIMES DOESN’T GET THE RECOGNITION OR THE HEADLINES”**

towers still stand after repeated attempts to redevelop the site have fallen through.

To spare Ratcliffe a similar fate, local authorities have granted a consent order that paves the way for rapid redevelopment. Uniper has plans to build a small energy-from-waste plant and there are hopes that the site can attract new green energy jobs. Ratcliffe’s grid connections make it an ideal spot for hydrogen production, for example.

#### Ratcliffe-on-Soar’s cooling towers will be demolished before the end of the decade

The site falls within the East Midlands Freeport, one of several low-tax investment zones championed by Rishi Sunak. Tom Newman-Taylor, the chief executive of the East Midlands Freeport, wants the area to attract advanced manufacturing and aerospace, automotive and energy firms.

“About 10 per cent of the East Midlands workforce is in a job that will be ‘sunsetting’ in the next decade,” says Newman-Taylor, by which he means “ending”. “If we do our job well, we will be creating tens of thousands of new roles and about £9 billion worth of uplift for the region.”

As the freeport takes shape, a handful of staff will begin to take Ratcliffe-on-Soar apart. They include Akhil Moonukandathil, an electrical engineer who started with the company in 2011. He is confident that his experience will stand him in good stead. “There will be some new challenges but when the time comes to leave I’m not going to worry because our skills are transferable,” he says.

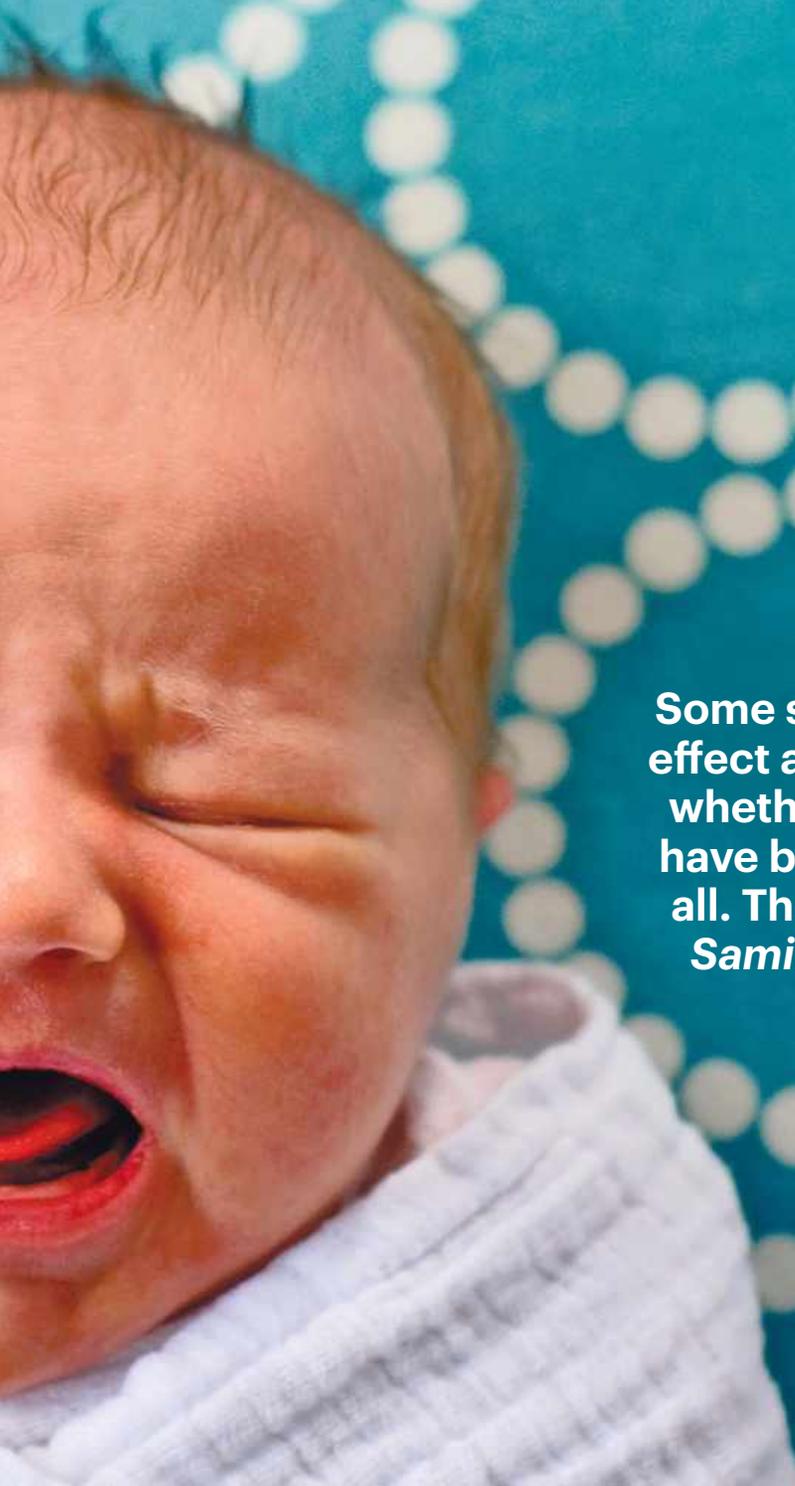
Sitting next to him, John Roberts nods firmly. He will retire when Ratcliffe closes. “The timing is right for me,” he says. “I don’t really want to stay and see it being took to bits, it’s quite emotional. It’s a place I’ve put a lot of pride into.” ■

# A SNIP OF T

Desperate mothers who struggled to breastfeed say they were pressured into having “tongue-tie release” procedures on their newborns



# THE TONGUE



Some say it had no effect and question whether it should have been done at all. They speak to *Samira Shackle*

**T**

he first time Sarinah Johnson heard about tongue-tie was at her antenatal class. It was a common cause of breastfeeding problems, the co-ordinator told the assembled soon-to-be mothers and fathers, and warned that doctors and midwives didn't always spot it. Johnson, 36, was one of the last in the group to give birth. As she entered the final weeks of her pregnancy, the class WhatsApp group lit up with chat

about breastfeeding issues. There were panicked messages about tongue-tie; one new mother talked about her baby getting conflicting diagnoses, another mentioned long waiting times for NHS treatment.

So when Johnson gave birth at a private hospital, tongue-tie was already at the forefront of her mind. She had spent months preparing for birth but felt completely ill-equipped for a new challenge: when she put her daughter, Aulia, to her breast, she couldn't latch. "Throughout pregnancy the midwives' line was that breastfeeding is best. But we received no guidance for what to do if we couldn't establish breastfeeding at all," she says. Immediately she and her husband asked hospital staff about tongue-tie, a condition characterised by an unusually short, thick or tight lingual frenulum — the thin band of tissue that tethers the tongue to the floor of the mouth. A doctor said Aulia did have a tongue-tie and he could release it, although the procedure wasn't always effective. "We were so exhausted and we weren't really thinking straight," Johnson says. "We thought, 'He's here now, let's just do it.' She wasn't even a day old."

When the doctor came back, he swaddled Aulia to keep her still and cut the frenulum with a pair of blunt-ended sterile scissors, a simple surgical procedure called a frenotomy, or a tongue-tie release or division. It took five minutes and cost £200. Johnson immediately tried to breastfeed Aulia (this is the advice as breastmilk has antiseptic properties), but still Aulia wouldn't latch.

Johnson hoped things would change in the comfort of their own home. She badly wanted to phase out the formula-bottle feeds she'd introduced. But there was no improvement. Aulia had no problems bottle feeding, but every time Johnson tried to breastfeed her, she screamed. And with



**Tongue-tie release explained**

Left: the frenulum — the thin band of tissue that "ties" the tongue at its centre to the floor of the mouth — is intact. Below left: the wound heals 3-4 days after the frenulum is cut. Below: the tongue is now untethered



each bottle feed Johnson panicked that her milk supply would dry up altogether. She put herself on a schedule of "triple-feeding", which involves breastfeeding, pumping and bottle-feeding in every session. Sleep barely figured. It was so punishing she could keep it up for only a couple of days.

"It was extremely distressing," she says. "I felt like a failure." Over the next weeks she saw multiple lactation consultants — one through the council, who said she wouldn't have advised such an early tongue-tie release, and one privately, who said the tongue-tie had reattached. An NHS tongue-tie clinic confirmed this but said treatment wasn't necessary since Aulia was healthy and gaining weight through bottle-feeding.

Since the first frenotomy had not helped, Johnson and her husband decided against another. And after two months of desperate

tears, anxiety and medical appointments Johnson finally gave up trying to breastfeed. "I felt real grief over it and had to go through my own healing process," she says. "But it was counterproductive to keep trying. It took away the special moments you should have with your baby in the early weeks."

Looking back, she feels she was pressurised into the first procedure. "I actually think her not latching was nothing to do with tongue-tie," she says. "We made a decision that was premature. There was a time where I was quite angry."

Johnson is not alone. Each year in the exhausting newborn haze of relentless, difficult feeds, thousands of new parents treat their babies for tongue-tie and later question whether their child actually needed it. So what is going on? Does the pressure to breastfeed mean that babies are having their tongues cut unnecessarily? Is this a physical manifestation of parental guilt when breastfeeding doesn't work out?

**"WE WERE SO EXHAUSTED AND WE WEREN'T REALLY THINKING STRAIGHT. WE THOUGHT, 'THE DOCTOR IS HERE, LET'S JUST DO IT'"**

#### A frenzy for frenotomies

Anyone who has had a baby in recent years will have heard of tongue-tie. Online parenting forums are filled with anxious posts from parents asking if they should get it done, if it will fix all their breastfeeding and sleeping woes. Rate of diagnosis and treatment appear to have soared. One US study in 2017 found an increase of more than 800 per cent in tongue-tie releases from 1997 to 2012 — and that looked only at in-patients. According to NHS England, 22,000 babies were diagnosed in hospitals in 2023, up from about 19,000 in 2017.

And this tells only part of the story, since the vast majority of treatments happen in the private sector. "I did about 500 releases last year, and that's just me," says Sarah Oakley, a private lactation consultant and

former chair of the Association of Tongue-Tie Practitioners. “We don’t have accurate data to say if the numbers have gone up, but my sense is they definitely have.”

Estimated to occur in 4 to 11 per cent of newborns, tongue-tie can affect the way a child eats, speaks and swallows. It can interfere with breastfeeding because babies need to create a vacuum over the breast; when they have limited tongue mobility, they squeeze rather than suck the milk out with each compression. This isn’t as effective and can lead to dehydration or problems gaining weight — and can be extremely painful for mothers. And that’s before you consider that hungry babies tend to cry more and sleep less.

Infant formula might seem the obvious, life-saving answer, but it’s not such a straightforward solution: many mothers feel an immense pressure to breastfeed, having had it drummed into them that it’s the best thing they can do for their child. But breastfeeding is often not the easy, bonding experience they expect it to be. And faced with cracked nipples, agonisingly painful feeds or low milk supply, many are desperate for a fast fix. Which is where tongue-tie release comes in.

Tongue-tie, and the idea that it can interfere with breastfeeding, is not new. “People have been doing this procedure on babies for 400 years, and it was routine practice up until the 1950s,” Oakley says. Every lactation specialist I speak to mentions that midwives used to keep one fingernail long and sharp, so they could slice the tissue below the tongue. The idea is to give the tongue a greater range of motion. But as long as the procedure has been around it has been contentious. One study exploring “two millennia of controversy



**In America tongue-tie release is often performed with a laser. Below: Kathleen Cassidy is unsure that a release made any difference to her baby boy, Omari**

about tongue-tie” quotes a German obstetrician writing in 1791: “Frequently the parents are deceived, for profit, greed and ignorance. This aid is abused and one unties where nothing is tied.”

Now, more than ever, the popular understanding is that a tongue-tie snip can be a rapid panacea to breastfeeding issues. “I found the breastfeeding pain unbearable — I was crying while feeding,” says Kathleen Cassidy, a 38-year-old therapist based in Belfast, who had her first child in 2019. When her son, Omari, was a few weeks old, he had a tongue-tie release. “I was hoping for a quick improvement, but

I basically didn’t notice any difference,” Cassidy says.

After a few weeks she saw the same practitioner, who repeated the procedure.

Again, Cassidy didn’t notice a difference straightaway and was on the verge of giving up breastfeeding altogether. But over a few weeks the pain improved. “It got better. But he was also growing and I wondered, is his mouth just bigger and more able

to latch?” She still doesn’t know if this improvement would have happened naturally with the passage of time.

### Disputed evidence

“It’s treated as a magic fix, and people do the procedure in a blink of an eye,” says Alastair Sutcliffe, professor of general paediatrics at the University College London’s Institute of Child Health. But the key question is whether frenotomies actually address the issues they’re meant to. While there have been a number of small studies on the impact of tongue-tie release on breastfeeding, most have been inconclusive. For Sutcliffe this lack of evidence is really concerning: “If the aim is to get the infant to breastfeed and it doesn’t achieve that aim, then what are you doing?”

In her bestselling 2019 book *Cribsheet*, the American data scientist Emily Oster decoded a mountain of studies on infants and childcare — including research on tongue-tie. She concluded the evidence was so limited that division “shouldn’t be a first-line defence, even in cases where tongue-tie is present”. Diagnoses can also be contradictory and inconsistent. “There’s no uniformity across services. You could see two tongue-tie practitioners with equal experience and have one say there’s a tie and another say there isn’t,” says Olivia Hinge, a lactation consultant and midwife who gives advice on breastfeeding to more than 50,000 Instagram followers.

In fact, almost everything about the condition is contested — from the impact it has on feeding to which babies will be helped, to the tools used to diagnose it and who is qualified to spot it. In the UK anyone can become a practitioner, but midwives and health visitors, for instance, are not routinely trained in tongue-tie, and nor are all lactation consultants. To diagnose it and perform a frenotomy, someone needs to complete specific training. The Universities of Hull and Wolverhampton offer accredited master’s level courses for NHS staff and private practitioners, while some private tongue-tie practitioners offer ▶



**TONGUE-TIE IS NOT NEW. “PARENTS ARE DECEIVED FOR PROFIT, GREED AND IGNORANCE,” A GERMAN OBSTETRICIAN WROTE IN 1791**



their own training. While all these courses must be registered with the Care Quality Commission in England, or similar bodies in other parts of the UK, there is a huge variation in training, with some courses lasting a few days and others running for weeks, as well as different requirements for clinical experience. The procedure itself is simple and does not require anaesthesia for young babies, but risks (generally low) include damage to the tongue or salivary glands, scarring, reattachment or restricted breathing. It's not a zero-risk procedure. "There's always a risk of bleeding, infection or damaging good, healthy tissue if it's not done properly," Hinge says. "Occasionally you'll have a child that won't return to the breast — they develop an oral aversion as their mouth is such an intimate area."

Part of the reason that diagnosis and treatment are so inconsistent is that the science behind tongue-tie is still developing. "The normal human anatomy of the tongue has not been studied in adequate detail in healthy newborns," Sutcliffe says. "My theory is that there's a variety of degree of the frenulum under the tongue, and a lot of these treatments are done on children with normal anatomy."

A group of British scientists recently tried to carry out the first large study to assess how effective frenotomies are in improving breastfeeding outcomes. They randomly allocated mothers and infants who were having trouble feeding, and had been judged to have tongue-tie, either to breastfeeding support on its own, or breastfeeding support and a frenotomy. But the pandemic meant they struggled to recruit enough mothers, and more than half didn't want to be allocated to the non-frenotomy group. This in itself says a lot about how strong is the current belief in the power of tongue-tie releases.

### Is breast really best?

Much of the new craze for frenotomies is fuelled by a push for more women to breastfeed, which is rooted in the idea that it is better for both babies and mothers. Possible benefits range from reduced infection or risk of sudden infant death syndrome to higher IQ and lower risk of obesity in adulthood. Some studies appear to support these long-term benefits, but it is hard to disentangle correlation and causality: most mothers who breastfeed are more affluent and educated, which explains many of the differences.

In *Cribsheet*, Oster concluded that the evidence actually supports only a small reduction in stomach infections and allergies in infants, and a reduction in the risk of breast cancer in mothers.

"When people hear the phrase 'breast is best', what they hear is not 'there's a small reduction in gastrointestinal illnesses in the



Lucy Knight with her daughter, Darcey, who had an operation to release her tongue

first six months," says Oster, whose latest book is *The Unexpected: Navigating Pregnancy During and After Complications* (with Dr Nathan Fox). "The way it comes across is 'breast is best, and if you don't do it you are not giving your kid a good start'. This is the first thing you'll do, and you're going to fail at it? That's crushing, when it's something you've been told is the most important thing you can do. There are some benefits to breastfeeding, but they're small. Yet the pressure is really there."

Still, in the UK the NHS recommends exclusive breastfeeding — meaning no top-ups with formula — for six months, then breastfeeding alongside food into the child's second year. This wasn't always the case. In the 1950s mass-produced formula arrived. Breastfeeding was no longer the norm and tongue-ties were not a big concern, since extracting milk from a bottle is generally easier than from a breast. Over the following decades the benefits of breastfeeding were extolled and there were many initiatives to promote it.

Now the force of the messaging to breastfeed no matter what can be utterly overwhelming. While I was pregnant in 2021, a midwife told me that even expressed milk was forbidden for the first six months, as bottles are a "slippery slope". At my National Childbirth Trust (NCT) antenatal class, the lactation expert said that any bottle-feeding would confuse the baby into refusing the breast. (Oster found no compelling evidence that nipple confusion exists.) The need for a mother to sleep, the pain of feeding, issues of low milk supply weren't mentioned. I didn't follow this advice, knowing that it would drive me to breaking point to be solely responsible for every single

**"THE WAY FEEDING MESSAGING COMES ACROSS IS 'BREAST IS BEST, AND IF YOU DON'T DO IT YOU ARE NOT GIVING YOUR KID A GOOD START'"**

night-feed. But many mothers do follow this advice and never give a bottle.

Most of my friends have similar stories, or worse. One, struggling with a low milk supply, was told to avoid supplementing with bottles lest her supply drop further, even as her baby terrifyingly lost weight. Another felt humiliated when a health visitor told her she just needed to "try harder". And another ended up in hospital with a severely dehydrated baby after an adviser on a support line told her to stop bottle-feeding even though her milk had not come in after a traumatic delivery.

Yet breastfeeding rates in the UK remain extremely low: while 81 per cent of women try to initiate it, just 12 per cent are still exclusively breastfeeding at four months. Many feel pressured to do so without support: they are bombarded with the message that their babies need breastmilk, then feel abandoned and overwhelmed by guilt if it doesn't work. "Not achieving your breastfeeding goals is crushing," Hinge says. "We sell the dream to women and then provide no services to support them."

### Put down the scissors

Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why parents turn to frenotomies, even if they're unnecessary. And even when they do seem necessary, it isn't always straightforward. When Lucy Knight, a 37-year-old opera singer who creates classical nursery rhymes as Treble & Trumpet, gave birth in 2019, it was obvious that her daughter, Darcey, had tongue-tie. She struggled to move her tongue even to meet her lips, and the condition was diagnosed before they had left hospital. When Darcey was three days old, the tongue-tie was released by a private practitioner (NHS waiting times were too long). It helped with what Knight said were "shocking" levels of pain while feeding, and



she was able to continue. But as the months went on Knight noticed that Darcey wasn't starting to babble, and that she was again struggling to meet her lips with her tongue. Although there is no guarantee it will do so, tongue-tie can cause speech problems later in life, which Knight was worried about. "You can hear if the tongue is restricted and it can really affect vocal quality," she says. "The frenulum can stretch with time, but you don't know if it will."

When Darcey was six months old Knight took her to see an ear, nose and throat surgeon, who said the tongue-tie had not been fully divided in the first procedure and had grown back. Darcey had a full surgical division, a more intrusive procedure. The next day she started babbling.

Knight is glad she had it treated. She does, however, wish she hadn't had to do it twice. Repeated divisions are common, but not without risk. "Scar tissue restriction can end up being worse than the original tie," explains Carmelle Gentle, an independent midwife and lactation consultant who runs the Tongue Tie Clinic in south London.

People often come to her clinic as a "last resort", she says, so she sees some extreme cases, including babies struggling to eat solid food due to scar tissue after "multiple divisions", or who don't want to drink even from a bottle after the release. More serious complications are more common in the US,



**The lactation consultant Carmelle Gentle at her Tongue Tie Clinic in south London**

where the procedure is often carried out with lasers, and where practitioners also divide cheek and lip ties: riskier procedures with very limited evidence behind them.

At her clinic Gentle focuses on oral exercises to help the baby use their tongue differently, before considering a frenotomy. "We don't want to rush into doing it

because it's often cut too early, which affects how it heals. A tongue-tie division isn't an emergency procedure," she says.

This was not always how she worked. "The way we were trained was a bit of a conveyor belt," she says. "You see people for ten or fifteen minutes, you assess, cut, see the baby feeding, make sure the bleeding's stopped and off you go. You don't know if issues show up later." Now she works with families over the course of weeks or months.

"I do think the more experience you get, the less divisions you tend to do, as you get better at working out which ones are going to give you the best results," Oakley says. "If you have a low milk supply, simply cutting the tongue-tie is not going to fix that."

In the sleep-deprived, wired state of early motherhood, you are not in any fit state to look at clinical evidence, or work out why five different professionals are giving five different bits of advice. The sharp rise in tongue-tie diagnoses, despite the lack of clarity about its effectiveness, seems symptomatic of a wider inconsistency in services. "People want a quick fix, and I think we'd have a lot fewer tongue-tie releases if there was more high-quality lactation support available to everyone," says the lactation consultant Hinge. "That would be a wonderful thing." ■

**Some names have been changed**

# *The Financial Times* THRILLER OF THE YEAR

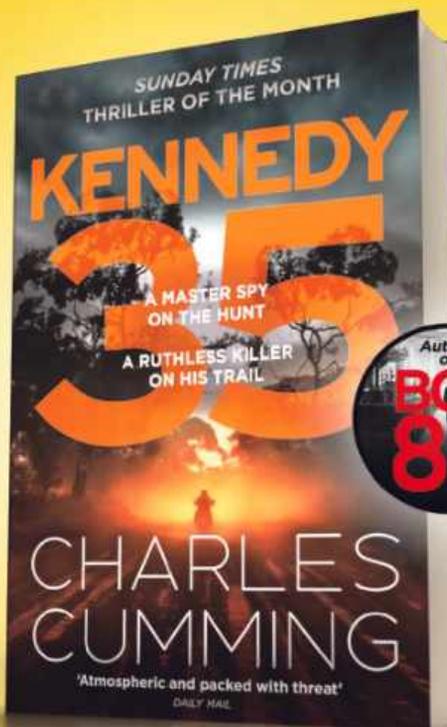
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**Kenton Cool, a 51-year-old climbing guide from Slough, has scaled Everest more times than any non-Nepalese. Has the mountain that made his name become too easy?**

**INTERVIEW BY MATTHEW CAMPBELL**

**F**



Cool's climbing helmet adorned with a Tibetan Buddhist mantra, the eyes of Buddha and the colours of prayer flags

resh from the Himalayas, Kenton Cool stands in his Cotswolds garage stowing away climbing gear: a bright yellow down onesie with his name patched on one of the arms, various coiled ropes, his helmet. That helmet has been painted with blue, white, red, green, yellow — the colours of Nepalese prayer flags — and the eyes of Buddha. “They’re all-seeing,” he says.

He has done his daily 10k run and seems relaxed and happy — with good reason. On May 12 the wiry 51-year-old British climber and high-altitude mountain guide broke his own record, having reached the top of Mount Everest for the 18th time, more than any other non-Nepalese. “A friend sent me a message saying, ‘You may have to see a therapist about your Everest addiction,’” Cool says with a grin.

He has become a rock star of the mountaineering world, taking the non-Nepalese Everest crown in 2022 from Dave Hahn, an American who had summited for the 15th time in 2013 and then retired from the mountain. At 29 summits, the Nepalese Kami Rita Sherpa has the most notches on his ice axe.

Cool made his latest trek to the top of the 8,849m (29,032ft) peak as the hired guide of London businessmen Graham and Chris Parrot: “They’re the first British twins to reach the summit,” he says in the kitchen in his glass-fronted home, a converted piggery in Gloucestershire, where he lives with his wife, Jazz, a personal coach, and their children, Saffron, 14, Willoughby, 11.

“When I came back from Nepal I sat outside with my wife having a cup of tea and said, ‘I think that just cements it. I’m the most successful Everest guide there has ever been.’ Not that I’m crowing from the rooftops. I don’t do that.”

Cool, whose name was anglicised from Kuhle by his half-German grandfather

during the Second World War, is one of a dynamic cast of characters helping businessmen, celebrities and other high-paying thrill-seekers get to the highest point on the planet. He charges up to a quarter of a million pounds for the service.

“If it wasn’t my job, I wouldn’t want to climb Everest every year,” he says. But it does help pay the school fees: Saffron is at Marlborough College; Willoughby at nearby Hatherop Castle. “If Labour puts 20 per cent on the school fees, I’ll have to work 20 per cent longer,” he says, laughing, referring to the party’s plan to apply VAT to private school fees.

Much as guiding is also his passion, he sometimes wonders how much longer he can do it. “I’m not getting any younger,” he reflects at the kitchen island, a vast slab of marble. Horror of horrors, this year’s clients, the Parrots, in their mid-thirties, were fitter than him — a first. “That’s a worry,” he admits while Otis, his black lab, sits peering up at him, tail drumming on the floor.

**GUIDES FIRST BEGAN  
TAKING PAYING  
CUSTOMERS UP  
EVEREST IN 1992.  
SINCE THEN 11,500  
PEOPLE HAVE  
REACHED THE TOP**

Another issue is how sustainable the industry is. For some critics, the trophy baggers have turned Everest into a litter and body-strewn dump. They believe it is now less a mountaineering challenge than a polluted extreme tourism resort made all the more hazardous by overcrowding, greedy adventure companies and climbers with big bank balances but little climbing experience. Allegations of sexual assault on female clients and Sherpa exploitation have added to the dark cloud hanging over the mountain along with tales of a new breed of climbers trooping past people dying of oxygen starvation near the summit without stopping to help.

For the Nepalese government, which charges thousands of pounds for a licence to climb the mountain, the growing business is a windfall. “I don’t think they will limit the number of climbers,” Cool predicts. “It’s a cash cow for them, not just from the permits but also the trickle-down for hotels and porters.” This brings to mind the now famous photograph taken on May 22, 2019, which showed a crammed conga line of climbers queuing to reach the summit in bright sunshine. During a brief window of good weather that season about five hundred climbers reached the top but ten died trying. Cool believes Everest can manage the multitude. “If the industry is sensible, numbers should be workable.”

Nor does he sound overly worried about a once pristine environment being poisoned by rubbish and helicopter traffic ferrying VIP clients on and off the slopes. “Yes, it does have an impact on the mountain, but if we had one year off from climbing Everest it would quickly bounce back, so I don’t have any long-term fears for it. Most operators are conscious about the footprints of their expeditions. I think we are in a relatively good place.”

For detractors, the mountain named in 1865 after George Everest, a British surveyor, has become a circus: the main base camp on the Nepalese side, a mile-long warren of high-spec domed tents, now offers every luxury to climbers as they acclimatise for their trek to the top of the world. The best accommodation comes with Tibetan carpets, padded lavatory seats and solar-powered showers. The highest-paying climbers can also expect fast internet and fresh coffee and croissants for breakfast. They can attend art exhibitions, gin and tonic happy hours or rock-climbing classes. One company, Seven Summit Treks, has a \$300,000 VVIP package where clients waiting for a window in the weather are whisked away from base camp by helicopter for some mid-expedition R&R in a Kathmandu spa hotel.

For years old-school purists have been decrying the trend. “It’s becoming so you can go to the beach for your holiday or climb Everest,” said Edmund Hillary, the New Zealander who became the first climber,



**Above: Cool, 51, with his labrador, Otis, photographed at his home in the Cotswolds for The Sunday Times Magazine**

**Below: "Green Boots", thought to be the Indian climber Tsewang Paljor who died in 1996, is one of many frozen bodies on Everest**



with Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, to reach the summit in 1953. "Sitting around in a big base camp, knocking back cans of beer, I don't particularly regard as mountaineering."

Yvon Chouinard, the 85-year-old founder of the Patagonia outdoor clothing company, has a blunt view of even using guides to get to the top. "If you compromise the process that much you're an asshole when you start out and you're still an asshole when you come back," he is quoted as saying in *Everest, Inc*, a brilliant new book by Will Cockrell about the "renegades and rogues who built an industry at the top of the world".

The book notes that, in the four decades after Hillary's ascent, only 394 people reached the summit. When guides began taking paying customers up the mountain in 1992 it opened the floodgates. Some 11,500 people have reached the top since then.

Cockrell points out that the mountain's safety record is actually pretty good. The percentage of deaths to successful attempts is just 2.7 per cent compared with 23 deaths per 100 successful summits for K2, the world's second-highest and much more difficult mountain, in Pakistan.

Some claim it is no longer a true climbing challenge, merely a very difficult walk. Indeed, few technical climbing skills are required, with the roped route set by teams of Sherpas at the start of each season. The infamous Hillary Step, a 12m-high near-vertical section of rock just 60m below the summit was once considered the technically challenging crux of the last push, but it collapsed after an earthquake in 2015 and is now just "an easy set of giant stairs", according to Cockrell. As Chris Bonington, 89, Britain's best-known mountaineer, puts it: "You don't really need much climbing experience on Everest."

**T**hough not a technical climb like K2, that doesn't mean Everest is a walk in the park. An expedition typically lasts from six to nine weeks. After reaching base camp at 5,364m, several weeks are spent making return trips to the higher camps to move equipment and acclimatise.

The final ascent to the summit can take about five or six days. It typically takes two to three days to descend back to base camp.

Any mountain above 8,000m involves navigating the death zone, where there is not enough oxygen to sustain human life for long. Camp 4, where climbers often sleep before and after the summit, is at 8,001m. "The deterioration of the body is pretty rapid," says Peter Hackett in *Everest, Inc*, an American expert in high-altitude physiology. "'Wasting away' is another good term. Or 'dying'."

The 2023 Everest climbing season, when Cool guided Richard Walker, the chairman of Iceland Foods, to the summit, was the deadliest on record in absolute terms, with 18 climbers lost. Five climbers have ➤



**The New Zealander Edmund Hillary, left, and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, the first climbers to conquer Everest, approach the summit in 1953**



**The notorious photograph taken by the guide Nirmal Purja of the "conga line" of people waiting to summit on May 22, 2019**

died and three have gone missing so far this year, including a British climber, Daniel Paul Paterson, 40, and his 23-year-old guide, Pas Tenji Sherpa, who disappeared on May 21 after reaching the summit. They join the more than 200 bodies thought to lie on the mountain.

One of those bodies belongs to the German climber Hannelore Schmatz, who was making her descent from the summit in 1979 when she sat down exhausted in the snow and never got up. "Her frozen body sat in its final resting place for nearly 20 years, her eyes wide open and dark hair eerily blowing in the wind for passing climbers to see on their way to the summit before she was finally extricated from the ice, either by unknown climbers or the elements," Cockrell writes in *Everest, Inc.*

The latest body to be found was that of Cherruyot Kirui, a Kenyan climber who went missing in May. Because of the difficulties involved in bringing the bodies down, the majority of the dead are left on the mountain. "The bodies reinforce the heroism of climbing Everest as the stakes are literally staring you in the face," says Heather McDonald, an American guide.

"You see bodies every year, new ones and old ones," Cool says. "We saw three this year. The highest one is from 2019. He's stuck on the rope. I'm surprised somebody hasn't cut him loose. You almost end up standing on his head to get past him. It's quite an awkward situation, quite graphic. Not very nice at all."

**ONE \$300,000 PACKAGE WHISKS CLIENTS AWAY FROM BASE CAMP BY HELICOPTER FOR SOME R&R IN A KATHMANDU SPA**

While climbing in 2022 he forgot to forewarn his client Rebecca Louise Smith, a California-based fitness influencer originally from Eastbourne, who "came merrily round the corner and face to face with this body. She got quite a shock."

The remains of George Mallory, the British climber who disappeared on the northeast ridge in 1924, were discovered only after a search effort in 1999, though recent reports claim his corpse has mysteriously disappeared.

One of the most famous corpses is "Green Boots", believed to be Tsewang Paljor, an Indian climber who died along with seven others when a blizzard engulfed the summit in 1996, a disaster recounted by the American journalist Jon Krakauer in his book *Into Thin Air*. "His boots have faded in the sun," Cool says. "He's used almost as a waymarker. 'Are you past old Green Boots yet?' Which is a little macabre but people are getting security from knowing that they can report where they are. So even in his demise that individual is giving back to the community."

In 2006 David Sharp, a 34-year-old Englishman, took shelter in the rocky overhang next to Green Boots and succumbed to the elements. According to Nick Heil, an American journalist who was on the mountain that year, as many as 40 climbers may have passed him without offering to help. It's an ethical quandary that dogs high-altitude mountaineering.

Cool says he would try to "do the right thing" in such a situation while bearing in mind his "first responsibility": the safety of his clients. He once encountered an unconscious climber high in the death zone of Lhotse, Everest's neighbour, the world's fourth-highest mountain. As dusk fell and the temperature plummeted, he shared his oxygen with the man instead of continuing his descent, staying by his side throughout the night. "He passed away in my arms," Cool says. "It was shocking."

**C**ool has proved his remarkable resilience in the death zone not only by climbing but also skiing down some of the world's highest Himalayan mountain slopes. He thinks an ability to engage in physical activity in an oxygen-light environment has more to do with mental strength than living at high altitude or being able to produce extra blood cells.

"I was born in Slough," he says with a chuckle about his home town, 33m above sea level. "I don't mind suffering, I don't mind holding my head in my hands and going, 'This is hard.'"

His father was a photographer, his mother a florist. His first climbing experience was with the Boy Scouts in south Wales. It soon became his passion. Having graduated in geological sciences at Leeds University, he fell from a rock face ▶

# THE SOUTH COL ROUTE

**EVEREST Summit**  
8,849m

Hillary Step 8,790m

South Summit 8,748m

The Balcony 8,400m

**LHOTSE Summit**  
8,516m

**NUPTSE Summit**  
7,861m

Camp 4, South Col 8,016m

Camp 3 7,163m

## SUMMITS BY NATIONALITY

Nepal	5,995
USA	1,004
China	874
India	594
UK	518

Camp 2 6,400m

Camp 1 6,065m

Khumbu Icefall

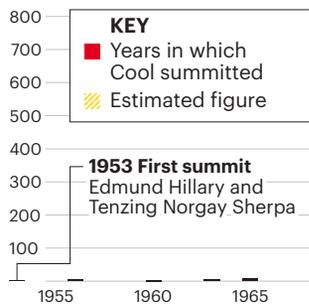
Base camp 5,364m

## DEATH ZONE

How 340 climbers have died since the first expeditions in 1921

Avalanche	78
Fall	75
Acute Mountain Sickness	47
Illness (Non-AMS)	28
Exhaustion	28
Exposure/Frostbite	26
Icefall collapse	21
Disappearance	12
Crevasse	12
Other	5
Unknown	5
Falling rock	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>340</b>

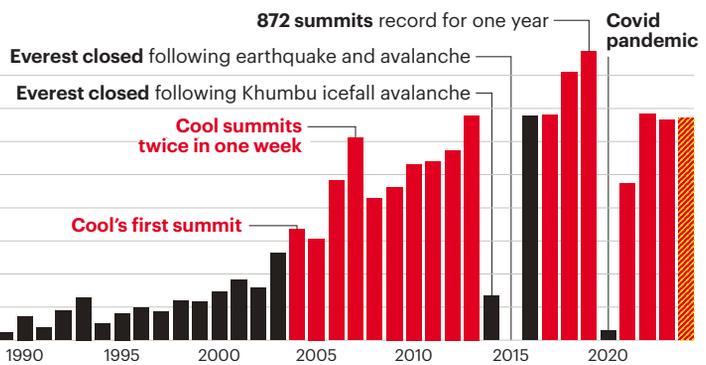
## THE EVEREST INDUSTRY Successful climbs by year



1953 First summit  
Edmund Hillary and  
Tenzing Norgay Sherpa

First woman  
to summit  
Junko Tabei

First without  
supplemental  
oxygen  
Peter Habeler



in north Wales in 1996. “I did a proper job of smashing myself up,” he says. “I broke my heel bones. I pulverised both of them. I was told I wouldn’t walk without a stick, that I certainly wouldn’t be able to run or climb.”

He proved the doctors wrong but his feet still hurt him at times: “I’ve got metal plates and pins in there.”

Cool’s climbing career took off in 2004 when he was offered a job on Everest as an expedition guide by Simon Lowe of the trekking company Jagged Globe. When another expedition leader dropped out, he was promoted to lead guide. “I loved it and kept going back,” he says. His renown grew in 2006 when he became the first Briton to ski down an 8,000m mountain: Cho Oyu in Nepal, the sixth-highest in the world. In 2008 he guided the explorer Ranulph Fiennes up Everest, turning back 300m from the summit. They were luckier the following year when, at 65, Fiennes, became the oldest Brit to reach the top. “He went like a steam train that year. I could hardly keep up with him,” Cool recalls.

Cool, of course, has a podcast, *Cool Conversations*, and a gig as a motivational speaker. He does not advertise his services

as a guide. “It’s generally word of mouth,” he says. “A lot of my clients come out of the City, for want of a better word. When you’re at that level, it’s a fairly small circle.”

He likes to meet prospective customers over a glass of wine or a coffee before deciding whether to take them on. If that goes well, he will propose a climb in the Alps. Is this a chance to assess their climbing skills? “More than that,” he says. “I want to see how we get on. I want to see what the relationship is going to be like. If you push someone in those first three or four days, if they’re tired, or thirsty or hungry, you get to see most of their character traits. So you push them a little bit. But you don’t want to break them, to make them totally miserable.”

He will never forget one job interview with a potential client from America.

**From top: tents at Everest base camp in 2022; climbers cross the Khumbu icefall, one of the mountain’s most dangerous sections**



“We had lunch and I was outlining how the next two years might work. Maybe we would go to the Alps, maybe to Bolivia, Nepal, do a 6,000m mountain. He stopped me right there and said, ‘I don’t think you understand. I want Everest to be the first and only mountain I ever climb.’” Cool turned the job down.

Some of his fellow climbers suspect he guides his rich clients primarily to finance his Everest “addiction”, not to help others to the top. He denies it: “As my power to do my own climbing starts to diminish, I get a greater rate of joy out of helping my clients to fulfil their ambition.” He adds: “My love of the mountain prevails whether I am climbing for myself or guiding a client. I do get equal joy out of both.”

**T**he ringmasters of Everest’s sometimes deadly circus — the guiding company impresarios and Everest entrepreneurs — are generally a colourful bunch. Besides a reputation for supplying cut-price oxygen cylinders, Henry Todd, a 79-year-old Scottish mountaineer and the founder of Himalayan Guides, is a former convict who spent seven and a half years in prison for dealing in LSD. Garrett Madison of Madison Mountaineering, a 45-year-old American with 14 Everest summits is “popular with the ladies, which is astonishing because he doesn’t say very much”, Cool says. “He looks like an American superhero,” says Mary Broster, a 40-year-old British lawyer who climbed Everest in 2019.

One Austrian guide, Lukas Furtenbach, founder of Furtenbach Adventures, insists his money-rich, time-poor clients take delivery of a low-oxygen “hypoxia tent” to place over their beds six to eight weeks before going to the Himalayas to help them acclimatise. Cool is not a believer. “You wake up in the morning feeling slightly hungover,” he says. “And it’s going to ruin your sex life. What is your wife going to do? Sleep outside? And there’s no medical evidence for it working.”

However, in the still predominantly masculine world of mountaineering, shocking allegations have recently swirled. One guide has been accused of making unwelcome sexual advances towards his A-list clients at a hotel in Kathmandu and in a tent on an expedition to K2. Cool is reluctant to comment on the allegations, which the guide has strongly denied. “The whole thing is very unsavoury and doesn’t do the industry any favours at all,” he says.

Broster, who paid about £40,000 to climb Everest with Jagged Globe, said it was a “strange world” largely dominated by men of a similar age to Cool. She saw Cool at work on Everest on her 2019 climb and found him to be a “Mr Shouty”, adding: “He was literally dragging his client through the Western Cwm.



**Ranulph Fiennes, left, with Cool in Zermatt, Switzerland, in 2010. They summited Everest the year before**

Some people love it and probably respond well to being shouted at to get a move on and to stop being pathetic. I suppose it's tough love, and he's very charming, but I wouldn't like it."

Asked about this, Cool says: "I've definitely developed as a guide. I used to be more shouty than I am now." He adds that there are times when, for safety reasons, things "needs to be communicated very well and very clearly in the moment", but acknowledges that not all his clients have liked the shouting. "Ranulph Fiennes used to respond extremely well to being shouted at, I think it's partly down to his military background. Other clients, if you shout at them, will dissolve into tears and melt away. So you have to be super careful how you encourage or communicate."

He does admit to the occasional bit of queue-jumping, unclipping him and his client from the communal guide rope to get ahead: "In order to avoid getting dead you've got to do something about it, which means getting off the rope and climbing past people going more slowly."

None of Cool's clients have died on the mountain, though not all have made it to the top, particularly in the early years when he guided larger groups. He claims a success rate of 85 per cent compared with an industry average of about 65 per cent. The closest he has come to serious trouble on Everest was in 2018 when he

guided the TV presenter Ben Fogle and Victoria Pendleton, the Olympic cyclist. Pendleton suffered a severe attack of altitude sickness at Camp 2 and had to withdraw. Cool and Fogle pressed on without her but ran into difficulty when their oxygen equipment failed twice. "I ended up doing the final bit without oxygen," Cool says. "But we got to the summit and down safely."

Rob Owen, the former chairman of the St Giles Trust, a charity that helps to rehabilitate inner-city gang members, bailed out in 2017 after an "epiphany", as

**"IT'S WHAT HE DOES, BUT WHEN HE LEAVES BASE CAMP I STOMACH A LOT OF ANXIETY FOR THE CHILDREN," SAYS JAZZ, COOL'S WIFE**

Cool puts it: "We were putting on our boots at camp 3. He said, 'I've really enjoyed it up to this point. I've done what I wanted. Let's go home.'"

**B**ack at Cool's low-altitude home in Gloucestershire, his family is used to him disappearing each spring. The last year he did not climb Everest was 2015, when he was working instead in Bolivia — it may have been a narrow escape: an earthquake struck Nepal that year killing 9,000 people, including 22 in an avalanche on Everest. "It's what he does, to us it's just normal," says Jazz, his wife, whom he met in a bar in Chamonix. "But when he leaves base camp I stomach quite a lot of anxiety for the children. There's no return in them being anxious."

"If the shoe was on the other foot I'd be petrified," Cool says, "but it's a lot safer me being away with work than it was when I used to do a lot more trips for myself, when you're not looking after a client and willing to push the boundaries more."

He has spent more time on Everest than any other mountain but that does not make it his favourite. It is "work", he says bluntly, referring to his job as a guide. He is dismissive of the Patagonia founder Chouinard's suggestion that Everest is not real mountaineering: "I think it's a bit unfair to say it's not an achievement any more. Rich or poor, they're going to say for them it's an achievement. If it's a first for you, it's an adventure and an achievement."

He is reluctant to name any mountain he likes better. "It's like with children, you can't pick out a favourite. I just love expeditions, the simplicity of them."

When not on Everest he is just as happy to "go for a hike in the Brecon Beacons or the Malvern Hills, which are even smaller, or the Black Mountains. I also go rock climbing for fun."

The Cools have visited Nepal as a family but Jazz has "zero interest" in climbing Everest. "She gets cold stepping out of the front door," her husband says. "She wears my Everest mitts while skiing — and that's at Easter."

If Everest becomes too much of a challenge he will not be left idle. "I could branch out doing unclimbed peaks. There would be clientele for that. I could get more active on the speaking circuit."

For the moment, though, he has no plans to hang up his helmet: he has signed up Everest clients — he won't say who — for next year and the year after. Despite "all the bad stuff that goes on", he finds he cannot resist the allure of the world's highest peak.

"Everest has been super kind to me," he says. "I like hanging out at base camp. When I left in May I wondered what it would feel like if it were farewell for good. I thought to myself, God, if it's the last time, I'm going to really miss it." ■

# Quiet on set!



Slain extras in *Spartacus* (1960) hold numbered cards so the director, Stanley Kubrick, can tell them exactly how to pose. Photograph by JR Eyerman





**Left: a special effects team enact a bombing raid on a Japanese target in a colossal water tank at MGM Studios for the 1943 Second World War film *A Guy Named Joe*. Photograph by Walter Sanders**

**Right: Tippi Hedren relaxes at her LA home with her pet lion, Neil, in 1971. The 28st animal loved to sleep on the bed of Hedren's teenage daughter, Melanie Griffith. Photograph by Michael Rougier**

In 1936 the American media baron Henry Luce, the founder of Time magazine, acquired another title for his empire: Life magazine. He set about shaking things up, turning it from a light-entertainment rag to the home of some of the world's best

photojournalism, covering war, politics and historic events — in black-and-white and, from the mid-1950s, glorious colour.

Life did not give up on Hollywood, though, which was fortunate for Luce as this was its golden age. The magazine brought its readers portraits of the days' brightest stars, as well as taking them behind the scenes of the epics being made in the big studios, long before CGI let you conjure a crowd scene of thousands on a computer screen. At its peak Life sold 13.5 million copies, but it closed as a weekly magazine in 1972. A new book brings together the best of Life's filmic photographs. Stretching to two giant volumes, its editors clearly had trouble whittling them down ■

**Life. Hollywood (Taschen £200). Order a copy from [timesbookshop.co.uk](http://timesbookshop.co.uk)**

**Far left: Marilyn Monroe chats to Winthrop Aldrich, the US ambassador to the United Kingdom, as her husband, Arthur Miller, looks on at the 1957 April in Paris ball in New York. Photograph by Peter Stackpole**

**Left: Tallulah Bankhead is doused in water for a scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 1944 film *Lifeboat*, about the survivors of a torpedoed passenger ship. Photograph by Peter Stackpole**

**Right: Orson Welles, the star and director of *Citizen Kane*, steps out of a New York taxi in 1941. Photograph by W Eugene Smith**

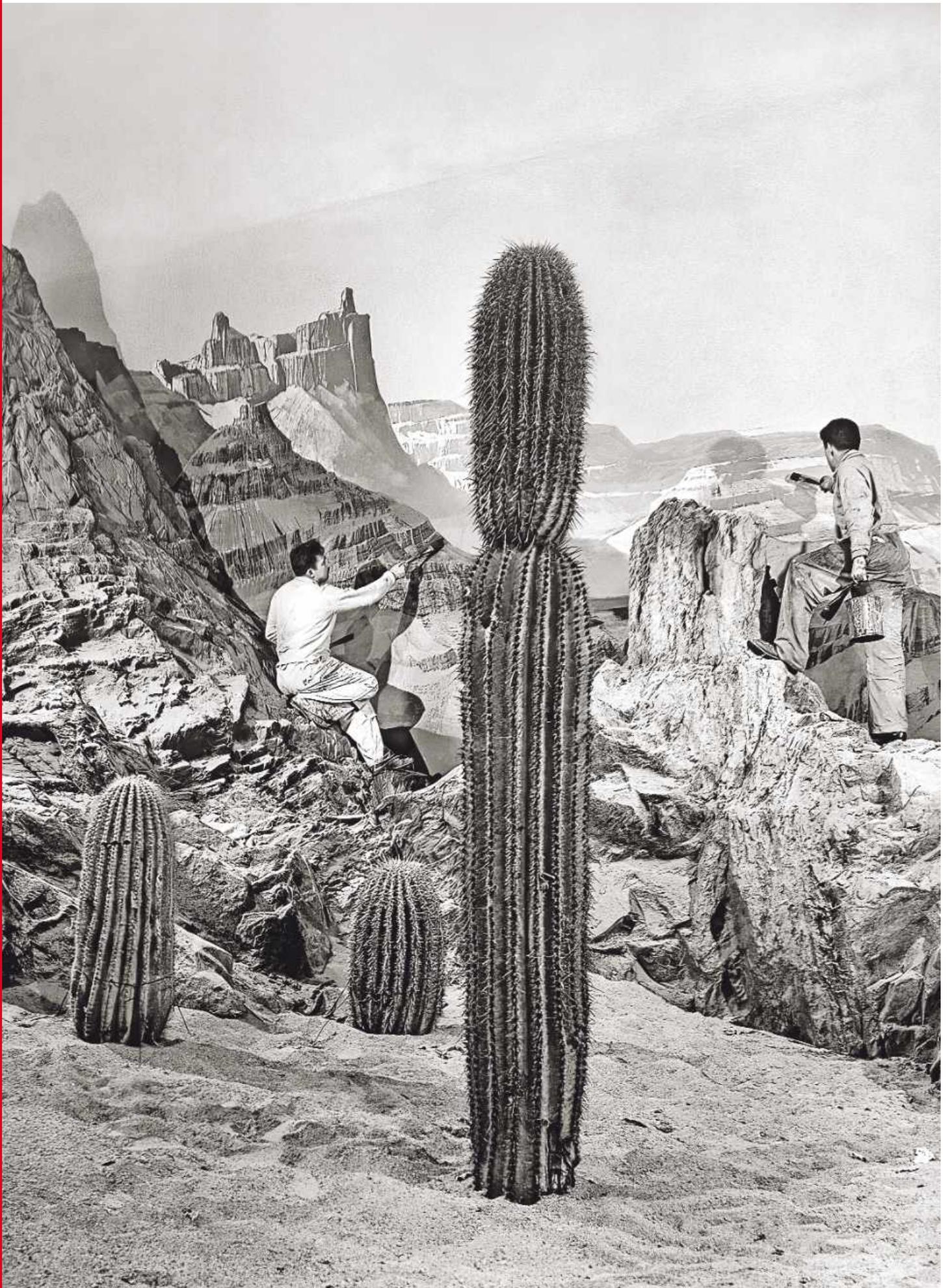


Right: Jayne Mansfield lathers up in a heart-shaped tub at her kitsch "pink palace" in Hollywood, 1960. Photograph by Allan Grant

Below: Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn on location in the Belgian Congo for John Huston's 1951 romantic adventure *The African Queen*. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon

Opposite page: scenic painters at Warner Bros create a desert backdrop on set. Photograph by Ralph Crane





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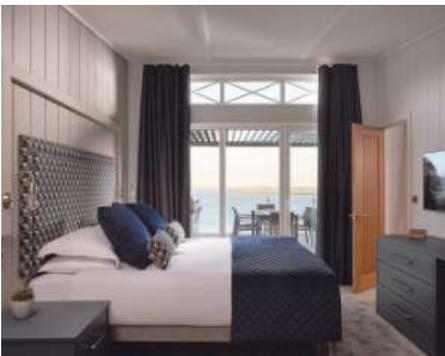
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Above: Grace Kelly smiles for the press in New York as she retires from acting to marry Prince Rainier III of Monaco in 1956. Photograph by Lisa Larsen

Right: charioteers assemble on a vast set built in Egypt for Cecil B DeMille's 1956 epic The Ten Commandments. Photograph by Ralph Crane



# An insider guide to royal life

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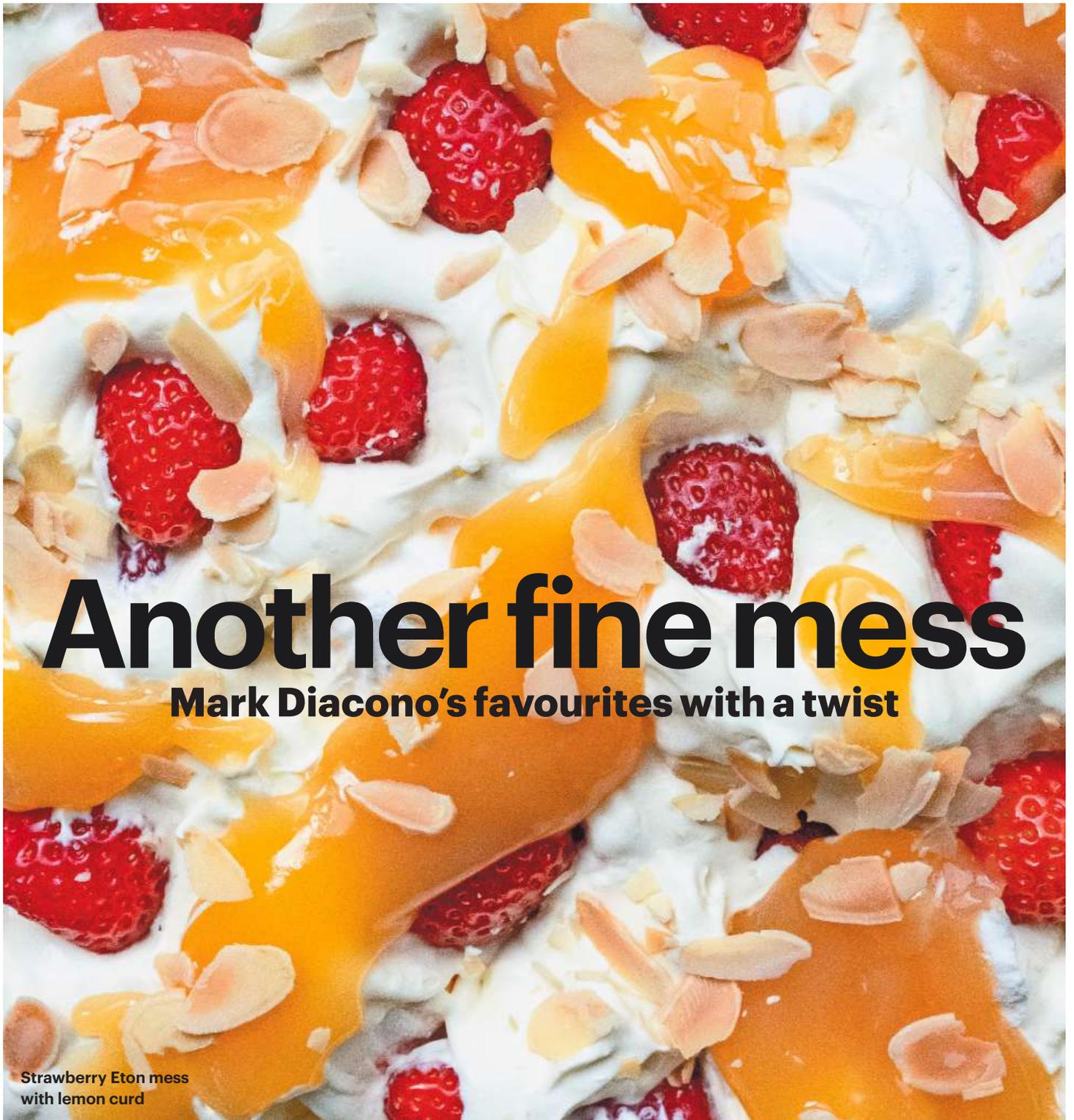
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# TABLE TALK

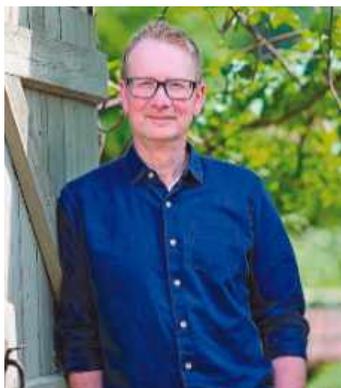


## Another fine mess

Mark Diacono's favourites with a twist

Strawberry Eton mess  
with lemon curd

**PLUS** A boozy British lunch at Boisdale ● Bordeaux wine — also available in white ● Total bangers — supermarket sausages ranked ➔



MARK DIACONO

**E**ven good cooks need a helping hand sometimes, and never more so than when we become stuck in our ways. It happens to all of us. There we are, knocking out our favourite dishes with such regularity we could almost make them in our sleep, when suddenly one day we wonder if all that familiarity hasn't bred a certain amount of contempt. So what I want to do is to show how a series of simple twists — adding an unexpected ingredient here, an additional layer of flavour there — can breathe new life into your repertoire.



### Strawberry Eton mess with lemon curd

A tumble of in-season fruit half-buried in meringue and cream is neither hard to love nor to make. Here, a few generous spoonfuls of sweet and sharp lemon curd elevate it so well, with flaked almonds adding crunch. Make it just ahead of eating, as the meringue dissolves into the cream without much encouragement.

#### Ingredients

(Serves 6)

- 440ml double cream
- 450g strawberries, whole, halved or quartered, depending on their size
- 12 small meringues
- 160g lemon curd
- 20g flaked almonds

**1** In a good-sized bowl, whip the cream until it holds a floppy quiff.

**2** Put the strawberries in a large bowl. Break the meringues into pieces and fold them into the cream, then stir this into the strawberries until semi-incorporated. Spoon over the lemon curd and sprinkle with the almonds. Serve immediately.

### Mackerel with raisins, orange and picada

Grilled mackerel is one of the pleasures of summer and, while simple barbecuing or frying works so well, adding a Catalonian picada takes it to new heights. This is quick, delicious and perfect for sunny days.

**For the picada** Fry four crustless slices of white bread that have been torn into pieces in 2 tsp olive oil until crisp and golden, then blitz them in a food processor with 75g toasted skinned almonds, two

garlic cloves and a small bunch of chopped parsley, to form a rough crumb. Season with salt and black pepper to taste.

#### Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 4 mackerel, butterflied or filleted
- Chilli flakes (optional)
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1 quantity picada (see above)
- 50g raisins, plumped in warm water for 10 min, drained and patted dry
- ½ tsp fennel seeds, crushed
- Juice and finely grated zest of ½ a small orange (use lemon if you prefer)
- A small handful of thyme
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- A small handful of parsley

**1** Heat the oven to 200C fan/gas 7 and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Lay the fish fillets skin side up on the

paper, season with sea salt, freshly ground black pepper and chilli flakes (if using), then drizzle with half of the olive oil.

**2** Mix together the picada, raisins, fennel seeds and orange zest. Flip the fish to be flesh side up and lay the thyme across it. Scatter the picada mix over and bake in the oven until the fish is cooked, about 10 min. The topping should be crisp and golden.

**3** Meanwhile whisk together the orange juice, vinegar and the rest of the olive oil. Remove the fish from the oven, drizzle with the dressing, sprinkle with the parsley and serve.

### Aubergine curry

This delightfully fragrant curry is one of my favourites but, good as it is without it, the addition of peanut butter really



sets it apart, bringing nuttiness, creaminess and — if you choose crunchy — a little texture. By all means roast the aubergine pieces in a moderate oven if you prefer, but deep-frying brings something so good. You can finish this with chopped coriander if you prefer, but I like the freshness mint brings.

### Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 500g aubergine, cut into thin wedges or bite-sized pieces
- 1½ tsp turmeric
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil, plus more for deep-frying
- 4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp finely grated fresh ginger
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 tbsp ground coriander
- Chilli powder, to taste (about ½ to 1 tsp)
- 1 tsp sugar

- Juice of 1 lime, plus 1 lime cut into wedges, to serve
- 4 makrut lime leaf, thinly sliced (or crushed if dried)
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 2 star anise
- 50g peanut butter
- 1 tsp fish sauce (or soy sauce if preferred), plus extra to taste
- A small handful of mint leaves, thinly sliced
- 1-2 chillies, thinly sliced (remove the seeds if you want less heat)

**1** Rub the aubergine with a generous pinch of sea salt and half the turmeric. Deep-fry in 3cm oil until golden brown (you might need to do this in batches), then put to one side in a colander or sieve lined with kitchen paper.

**2** Meanwhile blend the garlic and ginger with the rest of the

turmeric and the other ground spices, the sugar, half the lime juice and half the lime leaf until you have a rough paste.

**3** Fry the onion and the whole spices in 2 tablespoons of oil for 7-8 min, until softened. Add the paste and cook for 2 min until it just begins to stick, then whisk in the peanut butter, fish (or soy) sauce and 450ml water. Bring to a simmer and season with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, adding a little more fish sauce. Cook for about 5 min until it has thickened.

**4** Reduce the heat, add the aubergine and simmer for 5 min until the sauce is rich and thick. Stir through the remaining lime juice and lime leaf and top with the mint and chilli slices. Serve with rice and lime wedges on the side ■

Tasted! The best supermarket

## PORK SAUSAGES



OUR PICK

### M&S Outdoor Bred Ocado, 400g, £4.25

You can taste the spices at first bite — nutmeg gives these a slight sweetness **4/5**

### Finest Gluten Free Tesco, 400g, £3.25

There is no gristle in the meat and the seasoning is balanced, with sage and coriander **4/5**

### Duchy Organic Waitrose, 400g, £5.25

Succulent with 86 per cent pork, but mine had far too much gristle **3/5**

### The Jolly Hog Proper Porker Sausages

Sainsbury's, 400g, £4

Very herby, which not everyone will like. They are let down by the tough, chewy skins **3/5**

### Specially Selected Aldi, 400g, £2.49

Quite fatty but they'd be a solid crowd-pleaser at a big barbecue **3/5**

### Taste the Difference Sainsbury's, 400g, £3.25

These plump up under the grill but the skins go leathery, so you can almost peel them off like an eggshell **2/5**

### Heck 97% Gluten Free Ocado, 400g, £2.70

The meat is pretty tasteless and the skins disintegrated in some places **1/5**

Hannah Evans

# Lunch at a Farage fave — haggis, cigars and more wine please



## BOISDALE LONDON SW1



**W**hen social conservatives dream of Britain's past glories, instead, they are actually dreaming of Boisdale. Tucked behind London's Victoria station, this Scottish restaurant is a parcel of an imagined past. The dark red walls and panelling of an old-school gentlemen's club, tartan carpets, a miniature pub in a side room, a cigar terrace where you'll find the waft of carbon monoxide and freedom at any hour of the day.

The menu is "British", says the website — indeed, it's so British it comes printed on a Union flag. I'd probably call it Scottish: heavy on the haggis, cullen skink and seafood dredged up from around various isles — from pickled Orkney herring to roast Isle of Uist scallop. It's all marvellously traditional: no small plates or modern twists on a classic here. Good honest food for good honest Brits.

No wonder this place is so popular with a certain type. Nigel Farage had his 60th birthday party at the Canary Wharf offshoot earlier this year. I don't think I've ever set foot here and not bumped into some Tory grandee or another frothing with merlot, tie slopping into the soup.



It's part of the fun. Like going to the zoo. Or Jurassic Park. They just won't make restaurants like this in Starmer's Britain, I'm sure. Today I've brought Mike Graham, a titan of old Fleet Street who now finds himself cheering and riling the nation on TalkRadio. Mike, with his joie de vivre and tendency to rant about The Way Things Are Now, seems to be the perfect companion for this place. Sure enough, by the time I arrive he has already got a bottle of Whispering Angel to the table — a perfectly decent wine that's been overpriced for a while thanks to its sudden popularity with the hen do/Henley set. Here it's £69.50,

which is a little silly. "I asked for something light and Provençal and they brought this," Mike says, looking embarrassed. Nothing to be embarrassed about. And nothing to be embarrassed about drinking on a Wednesday lunchtime either. Not here, at least. Outside these walls, nobody drinks at lunch any more. Hell, people barely eat lunch. The smartest places don't even open before dinner on Thursday. Such is the modern world. But we are not in the modern world now. We are in Boisdale. So pour me a glass of the girlie-pink plonk and bring us a ménage à quatre. Sorry, what? Yes, it's the name the menu gives to its combination of four different

***** THE DAMAGE *****	
3 x Oysters	£14
Bread & butter	£5.50
Ménage à quatre	£26
Haggis	£24.50
Mussels	£25
Broccoli	£6.50
Whispering Angel	£69.50
Mount Brown pinot noir	£59
Subtotal	£230
Service (13.5%)	£31.05
*****	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£261.05</b>
*****	

fishes. I hate it when restaurants do this type of thing — I am far too British to look a stranger in the eye and ask for a sexual innuendo. It's why I've got no idea what a sex on the beach tastes like. Surely a place as trad as this is above such nonsense?

"We'll take the four fish thing," I mutter furiously, which turns out to be one deeply peaty smoked salmon, another more classic and salty. A dash of that Orkney herring and a flaky smoked eel as well. Just a bite or two of each, but there's more than enough flavour here to be getting on with — most of all from the peat-smoked salmon, which tastes like a waft of cigarette smoke across a pub garden on a sunny day. That's a good thing. If that doesn't sound appealing, Boisdale probably isn't the place for you.

For the main, as Mike makes his way through a vat of Shetland mussels in a classic white wine and cream sauce, I take receipt of a fat roast haggis, plonked like a cannonball on top of its traditional neeps and tatties, still in its pork fat skin. I'm sure there are 50 restaurants in east London right now serving "modern takes" on this dish: the haggis as a bonbon and the neeps in a tutu. No such fripperies here: just crumbly, peppery goodness, a big pile of innards so much greater than the sum of its hideous parts and a lovely smooth mash.

I like to think of myself as having a pretty infinite appetite. In fact I make a living based on it. But I defy anyone to make it through this beast — much as you'll desperately want to. By halfway through I'm toying with it pathetically like a Victorian invalid.

Mike sits back and looks at the menu (sticky toffee, crumble and custard) with mild contempt. "I've never been much of a dessert person. Shall we just get another bottle?"

And so we do. We take a New Zealand pinot noir up to the cigar terrace, where Mike immediately bumps into at least two people he knows. At 5pm I totter unsteadily out into the light, into the 21st century ■



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

WINE • Will Lyons

# For great value whites, buy bordeaux

**L**anguishing under the radar on the cooler soils of France's largest fine wine region is a style that is often overlooked, some say forgotten: dry white bordeaux. This wasn't always the case — in the 1950s and 1960s Bordeaux produced more white wine than red, while back in the Middle Ages some of the region's most famous wine-producing villages, now famous for their reds, were making nearly all whites.

Now white bordeaux accounts for barely 10 per cent of the region's production. Which is a shame because, at their best, estates such as Domaine de Chevalier, Châteaux Smith-Haut Lafitte and Pape Clément make a style that is rich, nutty and creamy and rivals some of the world's finest dry whites. And it pairs beautifully with crab, terrine de poisson and meaty fish such as sea bream. At the other end of the spectrum, at under £10 a bottle, you'll find zesty, easy-drinking examples — some of the best value French wines.

Another surprise is that many white bordeaux are made with one of the world's most popular white grape varieties — sauvignon blanc — although they are far more interesting if blended with semillon. It's a marriage made in heaven: the semillon provides heavy texture and waxy character, the sauvignon adds zip, citrus and grassy notes. Sometimes a dash of muscadelle spices up the aroma and there are also small plantings of sauvignon gris.

Above all, these are gastronomic wines that will go well with half a dozen oysters from the Arcachon Bay, a plate of poulet à la Bordelaise, some sushi or any pan-fried dish ■

**2022 Taste the Difference Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc (12.5%) Sainsbury's, £8**  
Intense gooseberry fruit aromas and zippy citrus notes make this an ideal aperitif.

**2022 Le Sablou Bergerac Sauvignon Blanc (13%) Waitrose, £8.99**  
A lively, zesty sauvignon with grassy notes and an attractive kick of lime on the finish.

**2021 The Wine Society's Generation Series Graves Blanc (12.5%) The Wine Society, £14.95**  
A citrusy, silky-textured wine made in a mid-20th-century style.

**2023 Château Argadens Blanc (12%) Tanners, £14.40**  
This is a glorious drop. A blend of sauvignon and semillon, it has tropical fruit notes and a creamy, nutty texture.

**2022 G de Château Guiraud, Sandrine Garbay (13%) Co-op, £17.50**  
An exquisite dry white brimming with tropical fruit and attractive citrus zest — plus there's a spritzy finish.

**2021 Château Larrivet Haut-Brion Blanc, Pessac-Léognan (13%) Lay & Wheeler, £28.50**  
Its aromatics flood the room, but it's the creamy texture that makes this a real stand-out.



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**2022 Château Le Coin Sauvignon Gris (14%) The Sunday Times Wine Club, £14.99**  
A summery citrus style with a lovely peachy character. Enjoy as an aperitif with a handful of crisps.

## HEALTH

# Morning sickness? This is much worse

Emily Clarkson on hyperemesis gravidarum, which has made her pregnancies hell

Last Sunday morning, as I looked up from the sandwich bag I'd just emptied of my daughter's apple slices in time to vomit in, I caught eyes with the young man in the car next to me. I was pale and dishevelled, tears rolling down my face, and I wondered what he thought of me. Perhaps that I was battling my way through the first trimester of a pregnancy and the morning sickness this brings with it.

He'd have been close. I am pregnant. But I'm no longer in my first trimester and this isn't just morning sickness. I have something called hyperemesis gravidarum. You may not have heard of it and that's not really surprising, given that it is relatively rare, thought to affect 1-3 per cent of pregnancies, and — as with so many women's health issues — shrouded in taboo, with many suffering through it in silence.

Hyperemesis gravidarum (HG) is an extreme condition that causes prolonged and severe sickness in pregnancy and results in dehydration, weight loss and, in many cases, hospitalisation. Often women are sick as many as 30 times a day. Last year a breakthrough study published in the journal *Nature* identified the hormone GDF15 as the likely culprit, and found that how much nausea and vomiting a pregnant woman endures is directly related to both the amount of GDF15 created by the placenta and sent into her bloodstream and how sensitive she is to its effect.

The Princess of Wales had it with her pregnancies, as did

the actress Amy Schumer, who shared candid videos of herself after being hospitalised.

With the GDF15 breakthrough, scientists hope we're one step closer to a cure. At the moment treatment includes anti-emetic (anti-sickness) drugs — climbing in strength depending on the severity of the illness — plus steroids and IV fluids. All that and rest, which is what I'm told I need over and over again.

Yet despite the extremity of the symptoms, HG is often dismissed by many as “just bad morning sickness”. In truth it can be so debilitating it can lead to much-wanted pregnancies being terminated. HG is not something that can be helped by a ginger biscuit — it's a devastating illness that leaves people isolated and desperate. A US study in 2008 found more than 82 per cent of sufferers reported that the condition led to depression, job losses and reluctance to get pregnant again.

Women are told that pregnancy is supposed to feel like “the most natural thing in the world” — which we roughly translate to mean “the easiest”. I acknowledge how very lucky I am: my work as a writer and podcaster is flexible. My work as a mother is not, but I have childcare three days a week and a husband without whom I couldn't get through this. For those with unsympathetic bosses, unsupportive partners, unavailable friends, HG must be impossible. This is why attitudes towards it urgently need to change.

So I vowed that once the 12 weeks in which you are meant to stay silent about your pregnancy were over — another taboo — I'd talk about it. I am terrified to talk about it, actually, not least because the conversation comes with the colossal caveat that I could not be happier to be pregnant again with a very much planned and wanted little girl. I fear my words

will be taken out of context and misunderstood. But here goes.

I had HG during my first pregnancy in 2022. A study by the charity Pregnancy Sickness Support found an 89 per cent chance of it reoccurring. My husband and I discussed this many times before trying for our second: how will I cope if I get HG again? In the end we said we just would. A lot of families decide it isn't worth the risk.

Initially I was OK — I ran the London Marathon a day before I found out I was pregnant. But within a couple of weeks the symptoms started. And no amount of foresight could have prepared me for the difficulty of balancing an HG pregnancy with parenting a toddler.

Despite my condition being taken seriously early on by my doctor, who put me on three types of anti-sickness drugs — one of them chemo-grade, called Ondansetron — which I take three times a day, I've spent most of the past three months in bed, in tears, in hospital, and at times all three at once.

Physically, this pregnancy has been harder than the last one. I lost a lot of weight in the first trimester that I'm yet to put back on. I still cannot keep down water and instead have to rot my teeth with Coke and orange squash. The only food I can manage consistently is a Huel meal replacement shake. I haven't eaten a vegetable in months, and despite all the pills I'm still sick every day. Sometimes I just need to look at the sun and I'm hurling. Other times all it takes is to picture an avocado.

TV, computer and phone screens can be too much, so can perfume and scented candles.



**The Princess of Wales has suffered from hyperemesis gravidarum during all three of her pregnancies. As has Emily Clarkson, above right, for both of hers**



EMILY WEARS PREGNANCY OUTFIT BY BUMPSUIT. LAURA PANNAK FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. REX

In fact I'm generally much too scared to breathe through my nose at all. My husband rolling over in bed gives me motion sickness. I get car sick even when I'm driving. I've been hospitalised so that liquids could be administered intravenously and had anti-emetics injected into my legs.

Mentally, though, this time has been a little easier.

There is of course the excruciating guilt that comes from being the mother of a child you are too sick to look after. My mind goes to some dark places when I lie upstairs in bed hearing my family move on without me. I have struggled with feelings of failure and shame and — stripped for now of so much of what makes me who I am — I am sad. The agony

## Despite all the pills, I'm sick every day. Sometimes all it takes is to picture an avocado

of missing so much of my first daughter's life has broken my heart. I haven't been able to show up for her in the way that I should, and then even when I am able to I'm not who I want to be: I'm exhausted and sick and not so quick to laugh or able to play. I know she won't remember this, but it's so hard to believe that in the moment.

When I got pregnant the first time all I knew of my baby was how she made me feel. And that was terrible. I felt that this new person had stolen me from

myself and that I would never find the way back. When my daughter was eventually born (via an emergency C-section throughout which I threw up), I'd never been as happy, in part because I had just met the best person I had ever known but also because it marked the moment I came back to life. Knowing that feeling is coming this time makes this pregnancy possible. Knowing that my first daughter will get me back, and my second will get to know me, that we'll laugh, eat, run and

play together, is the light that pulls me through these days.

This internal conflict is hard to vocalise, because to suggest that I have an ounce of regret for the little girl I am lucky enough to carry is unthinkable. Perhaps it's that contradiction that leaves those of us who suffer from HG feeling so lost. I am so happy to be pregnant, but have also felt so hopeless and lonely.

That is why I wanted to share my experience. When I talked about this on Instagram I heard from thousands of women who are where I am. Like me, they desperately needed to know they weren't alone. And so if you are there and that is you, then we are here ■

[pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk](https://www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk); @em\_clarkson



D R I V I N G • Adam Hay-Nicholls

## Roaring off into the sunset, the last of the genuine Jags



### REVIEW JAGUAR F-TYPE

**Y**ou'd be forgiven for wondering why your attention is being drawn to this, the Jaguar F-Type, which slid sideways on to the sports car scene over a decade ago, received a facelift five years ago and hasn't been worked on since.

Well, what you're looking at is the last of the line. Jaguar is pulling the curtains down on its growly two-seater and we shall never see its like again.

Jags, back in the Eighties and before, carried an air of roguishness even on the right side of the tracks. Said in a Leslie Phillips voice, "Jaag" conjures up everything louche and rakish. Cut a traditional Jag driver and they'll bleed bordeaux. On the parcel shelf you may find strewn Racing Posts and, in the boot, antiques of dubious authenticity or ownership.

All of which flies in the face of where Jaguar Land Rover's (JLR) marketing honchos have been trying to position the brand in the 21st century. Modern Jags are aimed at millennials with two-day stubble who work in IT, human resources or management consulting and live in Bauhaus houses. Problem is, these people would much rather

have a Tesla or stick to Ubers. Which is why Jaguar is bugged and why, for the past few years, JLR has focused solely on Land Rover, which succeeds in appealing to its target audience of yuppies and yummy mummies.

F-Type production, as well as that of the XE and XF, has halted. The E-Pace and the pioneering fully electric I-Pace will be axed in December. Only the F-Pace SUV — Jaguar's sole profitable car — will continue. Taking a leaf out of Lotus's book, three new — and reputedly more upmarket models — are heading our way and they're all electric, starting next year with a 600bhp four-door GT that's targeting the Porsche Taycan.

In 2026 we can expect a Bentley Bentayga-style SUV,

pushing the brand firmly into six-figure sticker price territory, and shortly after that a new large saloon designed to prise the prime minister out of his Audi A8.

The F-Type I've driven this week is badged the "75", marking three quarters of a century of Jaguar building sports cars, starting with the XK120 (its owners included Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart and Gary Cooper). This, it seems likely, will be the last to use internal combustion. It has been "curated" in a very lovely Giola green, has tan leather, gloss-black rims and an aluminium finish to the instrument panel, and all the options have been thrown at it as standard. Under the bonnet is a 5.0 supercharged V8. At just under £85,000 it seems very reasonable.

# It feels like an old-school muscle car, with a rear end that's liable to go all Shakira on cold tyres



The styling inside and out remains fresh. The designer Ian Callum's cars tend to age gracefully, like Frank Gehry's buildings. In 2013, when the F-Type came out, it was the first Jag in 40 years that didn't make its owners look as though they couldn't afford an Aston Martin. It remains, 11 years later, one of the best-looking cars on the road. That rear three-quarter view with the top down is among the best in the business.

It remains a joy to drive too. Cars these days are mostly iPhone 15s with wheels. The F-Type, though, is analogue. It's a classic Nokia 3310, with

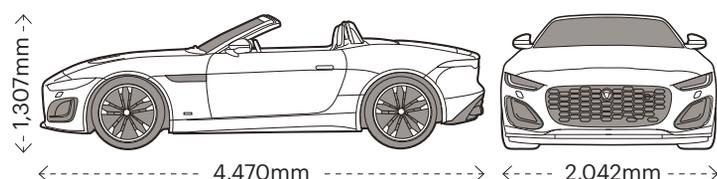
a V8 instead of a Sim card. And, like a burner phone, you can use it to get up to all sorts of naughty things. It feels like an old-school muscle car, with a rear end that's liable to go all Shakira on cold tyres, and a rasping exhaust note like Tom Baker stepping into a scalding hot bath. The F-Type is no country club convertible, all polished manners and hairspray. Unlike the nannying electro-wizardry of most modern sports cars, this lets you make mistakes. At the first sign of disrespect it will put you in a hedge, hinting, perhaps, what the F in its name stands for.

If I'm being picky: the steering feel could be better and heavier, the brake pedal less soggy, and the infotainment screen is sometimes unreadable in the glare of the sun. But it has a very comfortable and top-quality cabin, and I like the way the central air vents puff out of the top of the console like an accordion. In this elegant spec it has never looked better.

As with cheese, wine and decision-making, Jags improve with age. That's why I'm a bit uneasy about this prestige all-electric future. I know that Jaguar was incredibly innovative with its racing cars in the Fifties, and the Noughties' retrospective S-Type was a dog's dinner, but JLR shouldn't throw tradition — and traditional customers — in the bin. It reminds me of the ancient college in Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue*, where the new modernising master threatens to introduce women, replace feasts of swan with a self-service canteen and install prophylactic machines. Jaguar seems to be on a similar journey.

So here is your last chance to own, brand new, a genuinely desirable sporty Jaguar with a proud petrol bloodline. And you don't need to be Leslie Phillips to buy it. Ding dong! ■

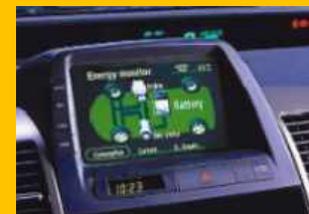
## The Hayometer Jaguar F-Type 75 Convertible Plus



**Engine** 5000cc, V8, supercharged, petrol **Power** 444bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 428 lb ft @ 2500rpm **Acceleration** 0-62mph: 4.6sec **Top speed** 177mph **Fuel** 27mpg **CO<sub>2</sub>** 239g/km **Weight** 1,718kg **Price** £89,240 **Release date** On sale now

**Adam's rating** ★★★★★

## CAR CLINIC Our experts answer your questions



**Q** Can I really trust the figures quoted for electric car range?

**JC, Stevenage**

**A** Claimed EV range or WLTP (worldwide harmonised light vehicle test procedure) is a lab-based test. Real world driving can be different, with driving style and outside temperature having the greatest impact on EV range. It is possible to achieve WLTP levels in perfect conditions, but in colder weather and at sustained motorway speeds range may be reduced by a third or even more.

As with combustion vehicles, it's important to drive in a way that ekes out the available energy. Go easy on the pedals and limit your speed. Also, use regen braking — the system common to EVs that returns energy to the battery when you slow down — in cities when in stop-start traffic, but turn it off on motorways, where each time you slow down you may end up using more energy as you get back up to speed.

Try using active cruise control to stay a steady distance from the vehicle in front. Choose an EV with a heat pump to heat the cabin more efficiently. Using preconditioning to heat or cool the car while plugged in also extends its range ■



**Greg Carter,**  
technical specialist, the AA

Send questions to [carclinic@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:carclinic@sunday-times.co.uk)

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**Patricia B** ★★★★★

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Millions of British drivers stand on the brink of massive payouts which has been described as 'PPI scale'.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) launched an investigation into claims of overpriced car finance.

It means the car finance scandal could reach over £16 billion.

The new enquiry centres on allegations that car dealers, incentivised by higher commissions, manipulated interest rates, potentially fleecing consumers by driving up costs on their vehicle loans for cars, vans, motorbikes and motorhomes.

The average claim is **£5,318.25\***

This controversial commission model, which was banned by the FCA in 2021, is said to have unjustly enriched dealers at the expense of millions of consumers, costing drivers an estimated £165 million annually.

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\*This is our average claim value as of 29/05/2024.

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## A LIFE IN THE DAY

# Richard Hawley

Musician, 57

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**Hawley was born in Sheffield, where he still lives, and started his first band at school. During the Nineties he joined the Longpigs and, in 2000, Pulp, before launching his solo career in 2001. He has released nine studio albums and twice been nominated for the Mercury prize. Hawley has collaborated with Arctic Monkeys, Paul Weller and Nancy Sinatra, and his songs provide the setting for the Olivier-winning musical *Standing at the Sky's Edge*. He is married to Helen, a therapist, and they have three grown-up children.**

I'm up early. I have tried sleeping late, but the dogs start shitting in the kitchen and shouting upstairs, "Oi, come and clean this up!"

I'm not a big eater; banana and a cup of coffee will do me. As a young man it was always a BEST sarnie (bacon, egg, sausage and tomato) — the breakfast of kings. At my age, though, I have to be careful. Cholesterol and all that.

Even if I'm out walking the dogs I try to look presentable. My grandad was brought up in the slums in Sheffield, but he'd always shine his shoes and put on his best shirt when he was going out. If those men — shellshocked after the war and brutalised by heavy industry — could make an effort, so can I.

If I'm not touring or recording, I try and do as close to f\*\*\*-all as possible. Not sitting on the sofa counting my feet but pottering: loading the dishwasher or chopping wood. I find solace in the beautiful



monotony of chopping wood, knowing that, come winter, I'll be keeping my family warm.

When my head is completely empty the idea for a song will suddenly appear. For better or for worse I was born with a creative brain and my greatest tool is repetition. A melody or something I heard in the pub will get me going.

Being married to a musician isn't easy. There were times when I was away in America for nine months at a time. Helen was at home doing the real graft, bringing up the kids. Why she stayed with me I don't know. There were long periods where we had no money or prospects. I realised a long time ago that my wife is hard as nails.

We've been together for over 30 years now, so even when we are both at home for the day there's that lovely feeling of quiet comfort. She likes to explore international cuisine at lunchtime; I like a jacket potato. She enjoys ironing. I like to get a decent rhythm going with the Hoover — it always reminds me of early-Seventies Krautrock.

I'm not a big drinker but sitting in a pub with my mates is one of my favourite afternoon pursuits. There are times when I'm more than happy on my own in some old pub, watching the dust in the sunlight and listening to the ticking of the clock. I was born with a cleft lip and palate, which I viewed as an asset because it was a great way of working out which kids were all right. The ones who took the piss marked themselves out as dickheads. I still bump into some of those people. It's amazing how a bit of fame changes things. "Remember me? Any chance of a couple of tickets?" Yes, I do remember you and you can do one! I've never been any good at pretending. I'll leave that to politicians.

I don't do social media, so my kids keep me informed. When I said in an interview that rock had gone all middle class, my son was immediately on the phone. "Hey Dad, there's a pile-on." What was the problem? Rock music has been sanitised. Rebellious music is no longer made with guitars, it's made on laptops. It'll be back. Another year or so and a bunch of kids in a garage will be the new Oasis.

The telly is on in the evening but I hate it. My grandad called it the lunatics' lantern. I'd rather binge-listen to Duane Eddy.

I can be in bed by 10. What do I think about? Family history; mining and steelworks. That environment stops you getting your head stuck up your arse. And I carry on that eternal quest of trying to be the best version of myself without being a complete c\*\*\*. I'm sure I'll get there eventually ■

**Interview by Danny Scott. Hawley's new album, *In This City They Call You Love*, is out now. He headlines Don Valley Bowl, Sheffield, on August 29**

### WORDS OF WISDOM

#### Best advice I was given

My grandad taught me how to shine a pair of shoes

#### Advice I'd give

Nothing happens unless you get off your arse and do it

#### What I wish I'd known

Don't chase around for ideas. Let them come to you



# Win tickets to Barbie: The Exhibition

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# The Bel Canto: what all the noise is about



On its launch day, the C1 Bel Canto sold out immediately. A second version, released days later, went in under three hours. (Or just three chimes.) Never before has a watchmaker launched a 'Sonnerie au Passage' to such a clamour. Never before has a 60-minute chiming mechanism (a 60-part adaptation of an already-modified movement) resembled a songbird. Cometh the hour, cometh the hammer (the bird's tail) striking the titanium case – resulting in a crystal-clear, 'D' note. Since launching in November 2022, it's somewhat appropriately attracted a number of industry gongs. And a cacophany of ringing endorsements, like Hodinkee's "Shockingly affordable".

Can we look forward to hearing from you?

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