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THE SUNDAY TIMES

MAGAZINE

I made my teens ditch their phones for a month

By Decca Aitkenhead



SPORT

From Parkrun to podium

‘Ukraine controls this town now’ … Kyiv cheers troops’ invasion of Russia

Tom Ball Kyiv

On Friday night, a video began circulating on social media that had drinkers at the Drunken Cherry in Kyiv reaching for their phones.

Small cheers went up around the bar as Ukrainians watched confirmation that for the first time in the ten years since Russia brought war to their land, they had captured a piece of Russian soil.

“This town is controlled by the armed forces of Ukraine,” declared the soldier in the video, flanked by comrades and a blue and yellow flag. “All is calm, all the buildings are intact.”

The video was shot in Sudzha, a town in the region of Kursk where earlier last week Ukrainian forces launched a highly co-ordinated surprise attack. Having advanced as far as 13 miles inside the border – while seizing a number of villages, downing a helicopter and capturing dozens of soldiers – it is by far Ukraine’s most significant cross-border foray of the war so far.

As the operation continues to play out its objectives are unclear, and President Zelensky’s administration has maintained a policy of silence, making only oblique references to events across the border.

But after months of steady Russian gains along the front lines of Donbas, the move appears designed to relieve some of the pressure on Ukraine’s beleaguered brigades by diverting Russian forces away from the east.

As the buoyant mood showed in the Drunken Cherry – where conversation frequently reverted to the many videos that have emerged from the assault, showing destroyed Russian columns and capitulating soldiers – the raid has also lifted national morale in a year in which there have been few victories to celebrate.

“It’s been so depressing recently, reading every day about how many of our guys are dying on the front line, about children being killed in missile strikes on hospitals,” said Katya Kurochka, 33, while out celebrating her cousin’s birthday at the bar. “I don’t know if this will have any real effect in the war. But at least it gives us something to feel good about.”

Given how thinly spread Ukraine’s army is along the front lines, the commitment of a substantial force outside the country is fraught with risk.

But if Kyiv’s thinking is to force President Putin into a much larger redeployment of his own frontline forces, there are some signs already that the gamble is paying off.

The Ukrainian army yesterday reported a reduction in the number of “combat engagements” on Ukrainian soil.

Nikolaevsky Vanek, an influential Ukrainian military blogger with close links to the army, said that Moscow had withdrawn several

Continued on page 4 ➔

Rioters face ten-year terms, warns CPS boss

Chief prosecutor says ‘it’s not about revenge, it’s justice’ — and hundreds more will go to court

Dipesh Gadher and Harry Yorke

Britain’s top prosecutor has said that hundreds more people involved in the riots will be hauled before the courts in the coming days, with the worst offenders facing up to ten years in jail.

Stephen Parkinson, the director of public prosecutions, said the number of charging decisions was expected to soar with a “new phase” of cases set to include “more serious charges with stiffer penalties”.

Many of those charged so far have been prosecuted for violent disorder, which carries a maximum sentence of five years. However, Parkinson said the more serious offence of rioting – which carries up to a ten-year penalty – was now under consideration.

“We warned of the consequences and we will deliver those consequences,” he said. “It’s not about exacting revenge, it’s about delivering justice.”

Parkinson, the head of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), also said that Elon Musk’s interventions on the disorder, including the claim that the UK was heading towards civil war, were “deeply unhelpful”.

However, Musk, the US-based billionaire owner of Twitter/X, is not thought to be under investigation by police over his comments on social media.

STARMER V MUSK

NEWS, PAGES 6-7



In other developments:

- David Lammy, the foreign secretary, claimed far-right rioters have “forgotten about what it means to be English” and need to be integrated back into society;
- Companies House filings showed Tommy Robinson, the former English Defence League leader, and his associates created a web of companies which have made profits exceeding £1.6 million without paying tax before filing for insolvency;
- Further violence was largely averted amid the start of the new football season, as 6,000 riot police remained on standby;
- Thousands of anti-racism protesters gathered in towns and cities across the UK, including a mass “stop the far-right, stop Farage” rally outside the Westminster offices of his Reform party;
- A petrol bomb was thrown at a mosque in Newtownards in County Down, Northern Ireland. About 15,000 later joined an anti-racism rally in Belfast;
- Neil Basu, the former head of UK counterterror policing, criticised Dame Priti Patel, the Tory leadership candidate and former home secretary, after she claimed there was a “perception” of two-tier policing;
- A force-by-force analysis found at least 200 police officers have been assaulted or injured during the disorder, including 93 from Merseyside alone.

Police have arrested 779 people in connection with the riots, with at least 349 suspects charged for a variety of offences.

Yesterday Lucy Connolly, 41, the wife of a Tory councillor, appeared in court charged with publishing material intending to stir up racial hatred. It is alleged that hours after the Southport stabbings the childminder posted on Twitter/X: “Mass deportation now, set fire to all the f***ing hotels full of the bastards for all I care … if that makes me a racist, so be it.” The post followed

Continued on page 2 ➔

MERSEYSIDE POLICE/PA



Ben and Lauren King with Bebe and Genie, right, “who has shown incredible strength and courage”

Big sister escaped Southport attack

David Collins Northern Editor

The older sister of Bebe King, who was killed in Southport, witnessed the attack, her parents said yesterday in an emotional tribute.

Bebe, six, died with nine-year-old Alice Dasilva Aguiar and Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, when a knifeman attacked a children’s Taylor Swift-themed dance class in the Merseyside town on July 29. In their first public statement, Bebe’s parents, Lauren and Ben King, said their younger daughter had been taken from them in “an unimaginable act of violence that has left our hearts broken beyond repair”. They said she will always be their “shimmering star”. They went on to describe how Genie, nine, had “witnessed the attack and managed to escape. She has shown such incredible strength and courage, and we are so proud of her. Her resilience is a testament to the love and bond she shared with her little sister, and we will continue to support her as we

Continued on page 2 ➔

Hours and pay put off doctors of tomorrow

Sian Griffiths Education Editor

Teenagers are turning their backs on training as a doctor amid fears that they are being deterred by low starting salaries and gruelling working conditions, highlighted by strikes, memoirs and TV dramas.

In two years, the number of 18-year-olds applying to study medicine has dropped by 12 per cent, from 13,850 in 2022 to 12,100 this year, according to official figures.

More than 50 universities will be advertising vacancies for medicine and other healthcare courses in the clearing system, which will step up a gear on Thursday when A-level results are published.

Vivienne Stern, chief executive of Universities UK, said: “Demand for healthcare courses has been declining in recent years – that’s the exact opposite of the direction we should be heading in, but probably has to do with perceptions of careers in these fields.”

Dr Rachel Clarke, whose book *Breathtaking* revealed the brutal reality of working on Covid wards, has said it is “wild” that junior doctors earn a starting salary of “£15 an hour” and nurses could earn more “working in Aldi”.

Junior doctors who become NHS consultants, however, will earn a starting salary of £99,532 and can earn up to £132,000 depending on length of service. They can significantly boost their salary by also undertaking private work.

Full story, page 9



FINDING INNOVATIVE COMPANIES WITH A SPRING IN THEIR STEP

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GUINNESS GLOBAL INVESTORS

NEWS

‘I sat on my knees and screamed’ … dozens killed in strike on Gaza school

Israel says it was targeting terrorists but Hamas claims more than 90 people died. The West has condemned the attack

Amal Helles

Rajab Al-Gafri was late for morning prayers at dawn yesterday. The delay may have saved his life.

The 36-year-old was still performing his ablutions at the school in Gaza City where he had sought shelter from the war when three Israeli missiles struck the section of the compound used as a mosque.

“The sound was very, very loud,” he said. “I was screaming from the horror of the scene in front of me and the fire was eating people’s bodies and the place was on fire. All the bodies I saw were charred and many of the bodies were in pieces. I sat on my knees and screamed. I could not move from my place.”

The airstrike, which has drawn condemnation from Britain and the European Union, killed more than 90 people, according to the authorities in Gaza, and may now increase mounting international pressure for a ceasefire.

Israel contested the casualty figures and said the target was about 20 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters, including commanders, who had gathered at the al-Tabeen school in Gaza City, which has largely been cleared of its inhabitants over the past ten months of war.

David Lammy, the foreign secretary, said he was “appalled” by the loss of life.

“Hamas must stop endangering civilians. Israel must comply with international humanitarian law. We need an immediate ceasefire to protect civilians, free all hostages, and end restrictions on aid,” he wrote on Twitter/X.

The White House said it was “deeply concerned” about civilian casualties and awaiting more details from Israel. The National Security Council said: “We know Hamas has been using schools as locations to gather and operate out of, but we have also said repeatedly and consistently that Israel must take measures to minimise civilian harm.”

Video from the scene and at a nearby hospital showed dozens of burnt and mangled bodies. A journalist was filmed pulling out a severed hand from under rubble, while a young girl stood over the bodies and flesh strewn on the ground. She screamed: “Where’s my father?”

“A cruel and painful scene that I will never forget throughout my life,” said Mohammed Al-Waghali, 42, who witnessed the airstrike. “The voices and screams of men and children. Everyone came to search for what they had among the corpses.”

The Hamas-run government media office said more than 93 people were killed in the airstrike, including 11 children and six women.

Fadel Naeem, the director of Gaza City’s al-Ahli Arab Hospital, told the Associated Press that it had received 70 bodies so far, along with the body parts of at least ten others. Among the dozens wounded were people with severe burns and in need of amputations.

“We received some of the most serious injuries we encountered during the war,” he said.

Israel disputed the casualty figures. “According to an initial review, the numbers published by the Hamas-run Government Information Office in Gaza do not align with the information held by the Israel Defence Forces, the precise munitions used, and the accuracy of the strike,” the military spokesman Nadav Shoshani tweeted.

About 6,000 displaced people were sheltering at the school, according to Mahmoud Bassal, of the civil defence first responders operating under the Hamas-run administration.

The Israeli military has struck numerous schools and hospitals over the past ten months since the October 7 attacks in which about 1,200 Israelis were killed, and more than 200 kidnapped. At least 21 school compounds in Gaza have been hit since the beginning of July, leaving hundreds dead, according to the UN. Gazans have sought refuge in them from the “indescribable horror” of the war “including multiple forced displacements, the rapid spread of diseases, and ongoing denial of access to the basic necessities of life”, the UN Human Rights Office said. “For many, schools are the last resort to find some shelter and possible access to food and water.”

MAHMOUD ZAKI/EPA



Israeli strikes hit the al-Tabeen school, which is next to a mosque where Gazans have been sheltering. More than 90 people are said to have been killed in the attack

Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign policy chief, said he was “horrified” by the images of the scene from the school. “There’s no justification for these massacres,” he wrote on Twitter/X.

The latest strike may add pressure on both Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire. The US, which had suspended a shipment of large bombs to Israel over concerns about civilian deaths in Gaza, has insisted that they should be able to reach a ceasefire in the next round of negotiations, which are due to start on Thursday in either Cairo or Doha.

Almost 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. The figure does not distinguish between civilians and militants, but a quarter of the casualties were under 18 years old.

Previous negotiation rounds mediated by Qatar and Egypt have unravelled at the last minute, with both sides accusing the other of obstructing a deal that would bring at least six weeks of calm, and the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Hamas may harden its position after last month’s assassination of its political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, while he visited Tehran. Haniyeh has been replaced by Yahya Sinwar, a zealot now in hiding in Gaza who is believed to have masterminded the October 7 attacks on Israel. Hamas insists it will only sign off on a permanent end to the war rather than a temporary ceasefire. Israel, which has vowed to eradicate the group, has refused to contemplate this.

Haniyeh had been based in Qatar, along with other Hamas political leaders, and was seen as more susceptible to pressure from his Qatari hosts, Egypt, and other countries pushing for a ceasefire.

In Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, has faced resistance to a truce with Hamas from his far-right coalition ministers including Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister, who said on Friday that a deal would be tantamount to “surrender”.

His remarks, posted on Twitter/X, promoted an angry riposte from the White House last night.

“His arguments are dead wrong,” said John Kirby, the National Security Council spokesman, adding that the US would not allow “extremists”, including in Israel, to obstruct the deal.

Rioters could face ten-year terms, says Britain’s top prosecutor

➔ **Continued from page 1**

false claims on social media that the chief suspect was a Muslim asylum-seeker. Connolly, who did not enter a plea, was remanded in custody until tomorrow for a hearing at Northampton crown court.

Parkinson, 67, said the CPS was likely to authorise “hundreds” more charges in the coming days and weeks. This is because the majority of suspects who have been arrested were released on bail while police gather further evidence against them.

Future cases will potentially involve more serious offences, including the act of rioting, which requires proof that 12 or more people were involved in a joint endeavour.

Parkinson said: “There’s inevitably going to be more police work involved to put those cases together, but the maximum sentence is ten years, rather than five years.

“We’re expecting a lot of work to come in next week as a result of those cases that have been bailed.”

Parkinson said he hoped that last Wednesday, when thousands of people took to the streets to show their disgust at the rioting, was a “watershed” moment.

He pointed out that it was also the day that the courts handed out their first three-year sentence for the Southport riot, to a man who punched a police officer in the face.

“Our response has been to send out a very strong message that this criminality will be dealt with,” he said.

He did not rule out bringing terrorism charges, which can carry a life sentence, against some of those stoking the disorder. This could potentially apply to the far-right activist who last week posted a “hit-list” of immigration lawyers’ offices.

In an apparent rebuke to Nigel Farage, the Reform leader, and other politicians who have accused the police of being more lenient on masked Asian protesters, Parkinson said: “I really don’t think there’s two-tier policing or two-tier justice.”

Musk has also made the two-tier policing claim, branding Sir Keir Starmer, the prime minister, “Two-Tier Keir”. Musk described Parkinson as part of the “Woke Stasi” after the prosecutor said the CPS would go after those inciting violence and hatred online.

“Obviously, some of what he has said has been deeply unhelpful,” said Parkinson.

Riots fallout, pages 6-7

Sister got away from Southport attacker

➔ **Continued from page 1**

navigate this painful journey together as a family.”

The couple also said the “love and support” they had received from the community “has been a source of incredible comfort during this unimaginably difficult time”. They said: “From the pink lights illuminating Sefton and Liverpool, to the pink bows, flowers, balloons, cards, and candles left in her memory, we have been overwhelmed by the kindness and compassion shown to our family.

“The response from Southport, the whole of Liverpool, and even further afield has deeply touched our hearts, and we are so grateful to everyone who has reached out to us.”

Releasing a family photograph showing Bebe grinning as she hugs her father, they said their thoughts were “with everyone else involved in this tragedy and all those who were injured. We hope that they find strength and healing in the days ahead”.

The Kings added: “Our hearts are broken, but we find some comfort in knowing that Bebe was so deeply loved by all who knew her. She will forever be our shimmering star, and we will carry her with us in everything we do.”

The funeral for Alice Dasilva Aguiar is due to take place today at a Catholic church in Southport.

Axel Rudakubana, 18, from Banks, Lancashire, appeared in court earlier this month charged with three murders and ten counts of attempted murder. He has been remanded into youth detention accommodation.

David Lammy

It is the far-right that needs to integrate in Britain



Shop windows smashed. Stones and bottles thrown at the police. Cars in flames. Social media provoking and inciting more destruction. Instant messaging apps facilitating disorder. A summer turned to smoke. The ashes it leaves behind. This familiar scene isn’t Rotherham or Sunderland today. This was Tottenham, my home and my constituency, in 2011.

Then, as now, unacceptable violence grew rapidly. Chaos spread from Tottenham to much of London, and then some other cities too.

Then, as now, this told us something about the threats facing our society. The risk of becoming more atomised. The fraying of society’s common thread.

Then as now, the criminals who saw violent disorder as an enormous grab-and-go party to loot family businesses needed to receive a message loud and clear: stop – the full force of the law is coming for you. Only when they were named and shamed, when they were checked and confronted, did the mob put their balaclavas away. The thugs need to be unmasked.

The 2011 riots only lost momentum when arrests increased and those responsible were jailed. Keir Starmer’s work as director of public prosecutions to have courts sit all night was pivotal. People quickly saw the consequences of joining the rioters, and the chaos faded almost as fast as it had begun.

It is right to draw parallels, but we must not equate the two moments. The riots that started in my constituency were in response to the death of Mark Duggan following police contact. What followed across the country was opportunistic and criminal, with people joining in along the way, but unlike the disorder we are witnessing today it was not encouraged and escalated by followers of a hateful far-right ideology that is forcing minorities to live in fear.

The government’s response has been different, too. Back in 2011, Britain’s leaders were criticised for their absence. The prime minister, David Cameron, was initially in Italy. The home secretary, Theresa May, was forced to return from holiday. The mayor of London, Boris Johnson, was booed in Clapham for his painfully slow return from holiday. Today, we are seeing the results of a changed leadership.

The police have made more than 700 arrests. More than 300 people have been charged. Cases have already been heard at crown courts across the country, from Leeds to London, Newcastle to Liverpool, Teesside to Sheffield. The first thugs have already been sentenced, with warnings that punishment could mean up to ten years behind bars. Keir Starmer and Yvette Cooper have shown this government will not let up in our backing for the police and criminal justice system as they keep pursuing those involved. While the violence and disorder so far this year has been frightening, fortunately it has not yet matched the 2011 riots in either scale or damage caused. We must all be grateful for this. The police today have been responding with fewer officers at their disposal, a direct result of the cuts they faced under 14 years of Tory government. We must all commend their service in restoring order.

In 2011, we could follow the destruction in real time. Social media was not as ubiquitous, but groups had formed on BlackBerry Messenger to spread information, and disinformation, providing the infrastructure for individuals to join the mob. Today, more advanced smartphones combined with algorithms that reward extreme behaviour have accelerated these challenges. Those using social media to organise crime have been warned by the home secretary they will also face the full force of the law.

> **The message to these criminals is clear – the full force of the law is coming for you**

All parts of government are monitoring any attempts by foreign powers to exploit disorder or accelerate the spread of disinformation, and making clear to social media companies their responsibility to prevent crimes taking place on their platforms. We must all pay attention to this hybrid threat, far greater now than it was 13 years ago.

Out of the ashes of 2011, we did not witness only the worst of human nature. We saw the best. Then, as now, I saw the overwhelming majority of people coming together in the face of violent disorder. Sweeping the streets. Rebuilding broken buildings. Standing up for their communities. It is this Britain, of hard-working families, of order and respect, of charity and community, that we will work together to protect.

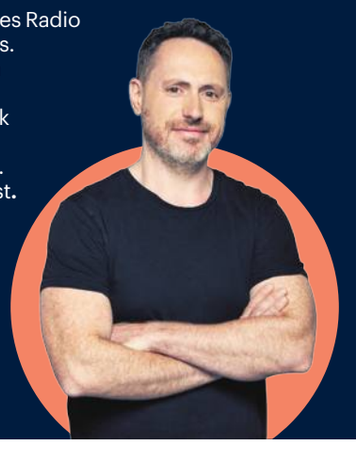
People often ask me, as the black MP for Tottenham, one of the world’s most diverse constituencies, about the question of integration. I believe passionately that people of all backgrounds need to integrate and need to live with their neighbours. The far right has shown it has forgotten this need to integrate. It has forgotten about what it means to be English: the north star of our values is tolerance and our beautiful country is held together by a constellation of values it has rejected. Respect for your neighbours. Respect for private property. Respect for the police. Those swept up in this disorder need to integrate back into Britishness – and out of this loathsome trending online hate.

David Lammy is the foreign secretary and MP for Tottenham

Today’s highlights

6am **Chloe Tilley and Calum Macdonald** with Times Radio Breakfast A fresh take on the morning’s stories.
10am **Hugo Rifkind** An entertaining canter through the week’s news and culture.
1pm **Alexis Conran** A deeper look back at the week
4pm **Ayesha Hazarika with Times Radio Drive** Informed coverage of the day’s big headlines.
8pm **Stories of our times** The Times’s daily podcast.

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Former Scottish Tory leader backs Cleverly to head party

Harry Yorke
Deputy Political Editor

Ruth Davidson, the former Scottish Conservative leader, has backed James Cleverly to become the next leader of the party, in one of the most high-profile endorsements of the contest.

Describing Cleverly as the “standout choice”, Davidson, now a Tory peer, said he was the candidate whose appeal was broad enough to win back voters the Tories lost to Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Reform. Writing for The Sunday Times online, the 45-year-old, once touted as the next Conservative Party leader, highlighted Cleverly’s position as a moderate who would keep the party a “broad church”.

In what some will interpret as a veiled swipe at some of the more right-wing candidates, she described him as a “pragmatist who can unite all sections of the party”, adding: “He knows that we must look outward to rebuild, not turn in on ourselves.” Highlighting Cleverly’s professional background and experience, she continued: “A military man who understands duty and service. A businessman who knows how to run organisations. A big hitter, holding two of the great offices of state at the Home Office and Foreign Office.”



Davidson: intervention

Addressing why the Tories suffered their worst election defeat, Davidson said a combination of the No 10 parties scandal and mini-budget meant the party did not get credit for “the world’s fastest vaccine rollout” during the pandemic or the fact the UK was the fastest-growing economy in the G7 in the first quarter.

Her endorsement is a boost for Cleverly as the candidates jostle for support. With most MPs away on holiday, the candidates are largely confining their activities to hustings held by local Tory associations.

MPs are due to begin whittling down the six candidates to four in September before the party conference in Birmingham at the end of that month.

Tories on tour, page 8
To read Ruth Davidson’s article go to thetimes.com

NEWS

IT worker on leave of absence sets British record at her first Games

Glen Keogh, Tom Kershaw and David Bates

On the penultimate day of the Olympics yesterday, three of the most heartwarming stories – and medals for Team GB – emerged from Paris.

The runner, Georgia Bell, 30, came third in the 1500m final, setting a new British record of 3:52.61 for good measure, in a career that she had abandoned only a few years ago.

She was one of the most promising middle-distance runners in the country as a teenager but gave up the sport because of injuries suffered when she was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. In February 2022, while working full-time in cybersecurity, she decided to test herself in her local Parkrun at Bushy Park in southwest London and completed the 5km in 16 minutes and 14 seconds.

A few weeks later, Bell – who grew up in Chiswick, west London, attending Catholic secondary schools, the daughter of a Channel 5's political editor and a PE teacher – ran it even quicker, at 16 minutes and 8 seconds.

After her success at Parkrun, she texted her former coach Trevor Painter, who also coaches Keely Hodgkinson, and suggested they resumed their relationship. "I just ran this on my own without following a plan," she said. "What do you think about working together?" Just two years later, Bell, who still works in cybersecurity but took a leave of absence for four months from her role at Abnormal Security before the Olympics, was on the podium in Paris. Her father, Andy Bell, hailed the "unbelievable run" on Twitter/X with the hashtag #ProudDad.

In some ways, yesterday's victory was a return home for Bell, as she was born in Paris when her father worked in the French capital as Paris correspondent for the BBC. "I don't think I have ever been so happy," she told the broadcaster last night.

Another bronze came from the diver Noah Williams, who was a 12-year-old in the crowd watching Tom Daley win bronze in the 10m platform diving at the London 2012 Games. Yesterday Williams, now 24, who is now Daley's diving partner, got his first individual bronze with a stunning final-round dive in the same event. Earlier in the Games, Williams and Davey won silver together in the men's 10m synchronised diving.

Williams will no doubt be inspiring a new generation of divers himself – perhaps also in yesterday's audience – after his four-and-a-half somersault dive meant he became only the third Briton to win a medal in this event, following Daley in 2012 and 2020 and Brian Phelps in 1960. Britain also secured a first medal in 40 years of artistic swimming at the Games, thanks to childhood friends Izzy Thorpe and Kate Shortman, who took silver. Their mothers also competed in the 1980s and 1990s, but never reached the Olympics.

Team GB also took bronze in both the men's and women's 4x100m relay on the track. Caden Cunningham reached the taekwondo final but had to settle for silver.

Olympics reports, Sport pullout

MATTHIAS SCHRADER/AP



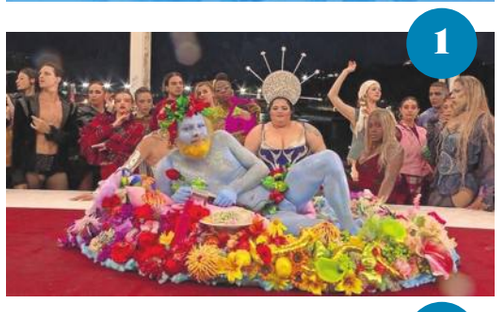
Georgia Bell, who works in cybersecurity, was lured back to athletics by Parkrun. Noah Williams, right, also won bronze



My golden moments

From a rad dad to a mighty pole and a very casually dressed sharpshooter, the Olympics — which ends tonight — produced unforgettable memories. *Matt Rudd* picks his top ten



















The Americans like to rank the Olympics by total medals so they win. The Australians like to do it per capita so they win. Everyone else counts the number of golds, which is no good either.

Using my much fairer system – three points for gold, two for silver, one for bronze, per capita but requiring a minimum of 50 medals and penalising the host country by 12 per cent for home advantage – it is clear that Britain won the Olympics. Again.

As Paris prepares for Sunday night's closing ceremony, in which "French superstars" Tom Cruise and the rapper Snoop Dogg are rumoured to be appearing, we can celebrate another fabulous fortnight of ridiculous human endeavour. This was the Games where (some of) the weird new events eclipsed (some of) the classics – did you watch the bouldering? And the kitesurfing? And the kayak cross? Nuts.

There were world records, there were epic fails. There were highs, there was the women's boxing. How does my top ten compare with yours?

1 The opening ceremony... was a mess.
The first hour or so of the metal horse galloping down the Seine was good but a testicle at a gender-fluid *Last Supper*? Zut alors! How kind of the French to remind us just how well we did with our curtain-raiser in London 12 years ago. As damp athletes trudged around the Louvre and Céline Dion, that other French star, did Édith Piaf karaoke, we remembered Mr Bean's one-note *Chariots of Fire*, Her Majesty skydiving and ... Sir Tim Berners-Lee sending an email. Thank you, Paris, for the London nostalgia fest.

2 The comeback king ... again
But let's focus on the positives. Sir Andy Murray and his doubles partner Dan Evans were 4-9 down to the Japanese in a 10-point tie-break in the opening round at Roland-Garros. Despite 15 hip replacements and extensive back surgery, the 37-year-old octogenarian did not give up. Surviving five match points in a row, the Brits went on to win the match. Murray's career ended with a comprehensive defeat two rounds later but who cares? "Never even liked tennis anyway," he tweeted afterwards, winning the gold medal for pithy retirement speeches.

3 Michael Johnson ... again
Every four years, I wonder why one of the greatest US Olympians of all time is on the BBC and not NBC. The answer is probably to do with money but I prefer to think that Johnson is a huge tea-drinking, cucumber sandwich-eating Anglophile. He came over, fell in love with our roundabouts and now spends all his time off air discussing the weather and the cricket (and, of course, writing for us). Whatever the reason, his ability to sound enthused when a British sprinter comes third in the semi-final makes him my top pundit in Paris. Top commentator continues to be Andrew Cotter, whose combination of dry wit and passion was great even before his Olive and Mabel dog videos.

4 Is that Jesus?
Poor Jerome Brouillet, a French photographer, pulled the short straw and had to go all the way to Tahiti to cover the Olympic surf competition. His sacrifice was rewarded when he captured the celebrations of Brazil's Gabriel Medina. A picture says a thousand words, the first of which is "how"?

5 Big vaulting energy
There has been much discussion about how to make pole-vaulting more appealing to Generation TikTok. Suggestions include making them all jump at the same time (call it pole-vault cross) and making them jump over a castle wall rather than a bar (call it classic pole-vault). Clearly, no modifications are necessary. Who wasn't astonished by the physics of Armand Duplantis pinging himself up, up and over a world-record height that would give a giraffe vertigo? And then there was the Frenchman, Anthony Ammirati, who managed to clear the bar with every part of his body except his genitals. "Unlucky but also good flex," TikTok'd a young person – so job done.

6 The moonwaterwalk
Synchronised swimming? It's not a sport. It's just cheerleading in a bathing cap. It shouldn't be in the Olym ... oh wait. The US team just did the moonwalk to Michael Jackson's *Smooth Criminal*. They did it upside down underwater. And nobody drowned. Please carry on.

7 Boing boing
It's not easy being a cameraman at the Olympics, as anyone who watched the steadycam guy trying to keep up with pre-Covid Noah Lyles on his 100-metre victory jog will know. But it's when you get to the weirder disciplines that the real skill emerges. Sadly, the camera that drops into the pool with the 10m divers is remotely operated but the trampoline is still filmed by humans. Up, down, up, down, up down – it's a skill. And the gymnasts weren't bad either.

8 The name's Dikec, Yusuf Dikec
Some of these Olympians take themselves so seriously. Step forward Dikec, a retired policeman and one half of Turkey's mixed 10m air pistol team. All the other competitors had clearly done the safety-at-work module – goggles, ear protection, special eye patches, the works. Dikec rocked up in a T-shirt and trackie-bums with none of the kit and won silver shooting with one hand in his pocket. It is the 51-year-old's fifth Olympics and, presuming he survives another four years of health-and-safety ambivalence, he plans to make Los Angeles his sixth.

9 It's the taking part
Everyone except the judges enjoyed watching rad dad Andy Macdonald, also 51, shred and ollie his way around the Place de la Concorde but it was the women's skateboard competition that stole the show. Neck and neck until the very end, Australia's Arisa Trew, 14, beat Japan's Cocona Hiraki, 15, and Team GB's Sky Brown, 16, but it was all hugs and support. Studies have found that bronze medallists (glad to have made it onto the podium) are much happier than silver medallists (gutted to have just missed gold). But in the world of teen skating, everyone is delighted for everyone else. For us parents watching, it was just nice to see teenagers not on their phones.

10 No, it's the winning
The build-up to Matthew Hudson-Smith's 400m was extensive. Exactly a century after Eric Liddell won in Paris, surely gold was his destiny? Same with Josh Kerr in the 1500m – he always beats Jakob Ingebrigtsen when there aren't any pacemakers. Gold guaranteed. No and nope.

So when Dame Kelly Holmes, who won the 800m in Athens, interviewed Keely Hodgkinson, and the BBC graphics team had the temerity to outline their parting hug in gold, I assumed Hodgkinson would come 11th. No and nope. She won! She won from the front! Then she hugged her parents and "half of Wigan", rang the bell like Quasimodo on three espressos and that was the race of the Olympics.

Editorial, page 18

Mishal Husain tipped for bigger BBC role

William Turvill and Rosamund Urwin

Mishal Husain is one of a handful of prominent female BBC presenters in line to rise through the ranks of the broadcaster in the post-Huw Edwards era.

After more than a decade on the *Today* programme, Husain, 51, is thought to be on the lookout for a new role and impressed bosses with her "stunning" performance during the general election.

In W1A, there is even speculation that Husain could challenge Clive Myrie for the lead anchor role on *News at Ten*. One presenter said: "Before the election everyone thought that it was going to be Clive." Since then, they added, there had been "rumours" that Husain was "back in the running".

However, a BBC insider stressed that Myrie remained in pole position. He is popular among bosses and television viewers.

The departure of Edwards, who pleaded guilty last month to three charges of making indecent images of children, has opened up some significant gaps in the BBC's on-screen roster. Before his suspension in July last year, Edwards was the undisputed frontman of BBC News – the face of *News at Ten* and the biggest political and royal events.

As the broadcaster's best-paid news presenter, his salary last year totalled £475,000. The BBC revealed last week that it had asked him to return the £200,000 he was paid since his arrest in November.

Myrie, 59, has been seen as a natural successor to Edwards as the BBC's most prominent on-screen face. But some insiders believe the corporation will probably favour promoting several figures to the top.

This would match the BBC's approach to the general election. Its election night coverage was fronted by Myrie and Laura Kuenssberg, its former political editor, with prominent roles given to others including Reeta Chakrabarti, Jeremy Vine and Nick Robinson.

Husain presented the morning coverage and hosted a head-to-head debate between Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer. An insider praised her for her "stunning election" performance. Other presenters thought to have made an impression on bosses recently include Chakrabarti, Jane Hill and Sophie Raworth.

It is not clear what role the BBC could offer for Husain outside *News at Ten*. She has previously been tipped as the new face of the corporation's coverage of significant royal events, but these can be few and far between.

One colleague on the Radio 4 flagship programme said it was an "open secret" that she was "looking for her next challenge", adding: "We'd all love her to stay."



Husain impressed BBC bosses with her work hosting a leaders' debate

Rare shark plucked from the deep, decades after it was lost to a gale (and it's made of Lego)

Shaun Lintern

Twenty-seven years ago a cargo ship carrying 62 shipping containers, including one filled with Lego, was battered by a gale off the Cornish coast.

One of the containers on the Tokio Express, which was en route to America, was filled with 4.75 million pieces of Lego, with a largely nautical theme, including 352,000 pairs of flippers, 26,600 life jackets and 54,000 pieces of sea grass. While thousands of the pieces have been found over the years, nobody had ever found one of the Lego sharks – until now.

Last week, Richard West, a fisherman from Devon, hauled in an unusual catch, one of the 51,800 sharks. West, 35, from Plymouth, was sailing on board the FY848 Defiant, 20 miles south of Penzance, on Tuesday when he discovered the shark on top of his fishing nets. He contacted the Lego Lost at Sea Facebook group saying: "I'm so happy about it – it's way better than any fish I've caught all week."

West told the BBC that the boat's skipper, Andrew Shaw, thinks he is "insane for how excited I got about finding it".

He added: "I could tell straight away what it was because I had Lego sharks in the pirate ship set when I was little. I loved them. It's been 25 years since I've seen that face."



Richard West's Lego shark is the first of 51,800 that went missing 27 years ago to have been found

The Lego sharks featured in several Lego sets from 1997, including Shark Cage Cove, Shark Attack and Deep Sea Bounty.

"Only another 51,799 to find," said Lego Lost at Sea founder and beachcomber Tracey Williams, whose book, *Adrift: The Curious Tale of the Lego Lost at Sea* was published in 2022.

Williams was among those finding Lego pieces on beaches after the 1997 incident and she became fascinated by the world of beachcombing.

> **I'm so happy — it's better than any fish I caught all week**

No sooner had the shark been landed than the group learned of another find – this time a Lego dragon.

This was discovered at Whitsand Bay in Cornwall by Ian Ellis, who lives nearby. "The Lego dragons are few and far between these days, so I was chuffed to find it," he told the Facebook group.

This is even rarer than the shark, making up one of only 33,941 pieces.

NEWS

Michael Clarke

This is Zelensky's boldest and riskiest gamble



Ukraine's incursion into Russian territory in the Kursk region last week took Moscow by surprise. It took Kyiv's western supporters, even in Washington, by surprise as well.

When it began on Tuesday it looked like another display of noisy military bravado by one of the anti-Putin militia groups. By Thursday it was clear that Kyiv itself was trying to land a strategic counterpunch against Russia.

President Zelensky's personal fingerprints are all over it. It's been an open secret in Kyiv for many months that the president was pressing his military chiefs to launch a summer offensive.

Given Ukraine's manpower and resources problems, they were hesitant. But Zelensky is desperate to reverse the narrative that Ukraine is losing its war. Successes in the Black Sea and against Russian forces in Crimea don't get the world's attention when his country's army is being pushed slowly but relentlessly out of more territory in eastern Ukraine.

Zelensky is trying to find a way to halt or reverse that dynamic. This strategic military choice is very much his style: bold and risky.

It's certainly bold: Moscow hasn't seen a metre of its own territory invaded by anybody since 1941. The images coming out of Kursk will shock the Russian public and the effect may be difficult for the Kremlin to manage.

It will also make some western leaders queasy as items of Nato ground equipment are now being used inside Russia – another threshold crossed. If Ukrainian leaders had asked for western permission in advance they wouldn't have got it, so they went ahead anyway.

And the plan is risky, as Moscow has no choice but to do whatever it will take to snuff out this incursion.

Only the 1950 US Inchon landings during the Korean War offer a counterpunch strategy that was quite as risky. But whereas Inchon was designed to turn a whole offensive around – getting in behind the enemy with more than a corps of US and allied forces – this Kursk counterpunch can achieve only limited objectives.

In addition to making its political point to Moscow and the rest of the world, Ukrainian chiefs will be hoping this attack has the effect of drawing high-quality Russian forces away from other fronts. That includes Russia's "second invasion" against Ukraine in Vovchansk, 90 miles to the southeast, but more importantly from its ongoing Donbas offensive around the critical Chasiv Yar and on the road to Pokrovsk, where the Ukrainian army is clearly struggling.

At a maximum, Ukrainian forces around Kursk might hope to extend their reach as far as occupying the nuclear power plant – a quid pro quo for Russia's destructive occupation of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia plant in 2022. But all these objectives will depend on how long, and in what way, the Ukrainians hold on inside the Kursk pocket.

The indications so far are that Kyiv is serious. This is no light infantry raid – go in, go hard, go home, within 72 hours. Forces seen operating inside the pocket indicate that significant elements of Ukraine's 22nd and 88th mechanised brigades and its 80th Air Assault Brigade are on the Russian side of the border along with units from other brigades. These are experienced forces which probably amount to between 6,000 and 10,000 troops.

Their operation was preceded by an impressive electronic warfare assault that blinded Russian border defences and blunted their drone power. The equipment confirmed to be operating in this incursion includes US Stryker armoured fighting vehicles and German Marder armoured infantry vehicles. American M2 Bradleys – the stars of the war this year – are plausibly claimed by the Kremlin to be involved.

Even more eye-catching, they have entered Russian territory with a significant number of engineering vehicles, with mine-clearance equipment, Himars multiple rocket launchers, long-range mortars and ground-based air defence units.



"This is no light infantry raid – up to 10,000 troops are involved

The Ukrainian army evidently intends to stand and fight in the pocket it has created and may yet be reinforced.

Russia's northern group along the border would normally amount to around 50,000 men, but most of them have been concentrated towards Belgorod to feed into Russia's stalled Vovchansk offensive.

They have been slow in redeploying westwards towards Kursk and have reportedly run into Ukrainian minefields that are blocking their route. By Saturday, the fighting on the eastern side of the pocket was fierce and the Russian air force was flying intense – and very hazardous – combat air support sorties around and within it. Still enjoying the benefit of surprise, bordering on astonishment, Ukrainian forces seem to have won the opening rounds of this battle.

But sheer numbers will eventually tell in the fighting to come, and the continued existence of this incursion inside Russian territory will be simply intolerable to President Putin.

Kyiv is evidently prepared to risk valuable soldiers and equipment to make some sort of stand here. Zelensky's critics will argue that this is a misuse both of the lives of the troops and the heavy metal that Ukraine desperately needs further south in the Donbas.

Unlike the Inchon landings in Korea, this counterpunch cannot turn the war around. Instead, its military success will be measured by how dearly the Ukrainians can make Moscow pay for the eventual recovery of their territory.

If the struggle is long and the price is high, Ukrainian forces may feel a disproportionate benefit elsewhere.

Its political success will depend on how it plays on Moscow's psychology; whether it creates some genuine doubt within Putin's circle that the war really is worth its ever-increasing cost. The Kremlin's initial reaction is to pass this attack off as only a "provocation"; a "terrorist attack". But even to Russia's state-controlled media, this looks like straightforward war.

Political leaders, often with no military experience, have to take big strategic decisions and military chiefs do their best to make them work.

When Zelensky, the comedian turned politician, appeared on a Kyiv street just hours into the 2022 Russian invasion to declare that he was going nowhere and Ukraine would fight, he took the biggest strategic decision of his life. This week he took the second biggest – and probably the more risky.

Michael Clarke is visiting professor in defence studies at King's College London and distinguished fellow at the Royal United Services Institute







Video footage appears to show Ukrainian soldiers at a Gazprom office in Sudzha, Kursk region, and a building on fire in the town

Kyiv cheers troops' invasion of Russia

➜ Continued from page 1

brigades from various points along the 600-mile front, including an assault battalion positioned near Pokrovsk, a town in Donetsk region that is currently the focus of Russia's advance.

Crimean Wind, a partisan group operating on the occupied peninsula, also reported that a troop carrier belonging to Russia's 810th brigade had left its base in Sevastopol on August 6. The same vehicle was photographed as one of more than a dozen vehicles destroyed by a Ukrainian strike in the Kursk region on Friday.

The Sunday Times could not independently verify these claims.

Andriy Zagorodnyuk, a former Ukrainian defence minister who advises the government, said that the incursion had already exposed "massive gaps" in Russia's military planning and capabilities.

Evidence he had seen of Moscow diverting its frontline troops was indicative of how overstretched the Russians were, too.

"Russians have been under the impression that they can do whatever they want because they can spare any amount of people," said Zagorodnyuk, who was not involved in the planning of the highly secret operation.

"And from that they projected a control of the situation. Right now, it's clear they're not in control of the situation. They are not even in control of their own territory."

In an attempt to reassure its citizens, Russian state media has aired footage of convoys of military hardware, including rocket-launchers, artillery and tanks, heading to the border to shore up its defences.

Moscow has also mounted what it described as a "counter-terror operation" in three border regions abutting Ukraine and has evacuated more than 76,000 people from the western Kursk region. Security forces and the military assume sweeping emergency powers during "counter-terror operations", enabling them to seize vehicles and restrict people's movements.

Ukraine has also evacuated dozens of villages in its border region of Sumy in response to a barrage of retaliatory attacks from Russia.

The local military administration said that within the space of 24 hours on Thursday, Russia dropped 56 glide bombs onto the region.

These mostly Soviet-era projectiles, retrofitted with wings and navigation systems, are difficult to intercept, highly destructive and have been deployed by Moscow to devastating effect this year.

But last week, in the village of Pysarivka, 15 miles from the Russian border, a handful of residents explained that they had chosen to stay, either for lack of somewhere to go or in defiance of Russian aggression.

Although a bomb had landed near the village that morning, one man rejoiced that the war was finally being waged on Russian soil.

"If only the West would let us, we'd be in Moscow by the end of the year," he said.

Additional reporting: Vika Sybir

Family of doctor missing in Pyrenees believe Apple account may hold vital clues

Peter Conradi Paris

The family of a retired British doctor who has gone missing while walking alone in the French Pyrenees have appealed for help in getting into his Apple account in the hope of revealing his precise location.

Tom Doherty, 67, from St Albans, Hertfordshire, sent a flurry of messages to his family on different WhatsApp groups on Tuesday evening, including one just after 7pm in which he said he had fallen and could not move.

Doherty, a former tropical medicine consultant specialising in malaria, did not reveal his precise location, however, and shortly afterwards ceased communicating.

Another message sent two-and-a-half hours earlier had shown clouds over a mountain ridge, captioned with the word "bugger", which raised fears he had been caught in bad weather. Doherty was reportedly hiking in the Ariège region near France's border with Spain and Andorra, where there have been thunderstorms in recent days.

In a post on social media, a woman who said Doherty was her uncle wrote: "We desperately need to access his Mac laptop which has been locked as we have tried his password too many times. We need to get into it … so that we can look at the last location of his last photos on iCloud and try and get into his Find My."

French gendarmes and mountain rescue teams, equipped with sniffer dogs and a helicopter, continued the search for Doherty yesterday in an area near the Col d'Escots. His car, a grey Renault Clio, was found near Pouech de Gèrac, a few miles from the Chalet de Beauregard. He was reportedly last seen at 12.30pm on Tuesday, a few miles from that, near Étang de la Pièdе.

Doherty's wife, Anne Lyons, and their eldest daughter, Rachel, flew to France on Wednesday to take part in the search. They are thought to have been joined by Rachel's siblings, Emma, Mickey and Meg, and one or more of their partners.



Tom Doherty, with his wife Anne Lyons. The retired doctor left the family's second home in Bergerac for a four-day solo trip

His first grandchild, Rachel's daughter, Martha, was born three months ago. Rachel said: "We obviously think he is hurt and we will keep searching. But there isn't really much to add at this point."

Some clues to Doherty's whereabouts have been provided by photographs that he had sent earlier. One looked down on the Chalet de Beauregard, apparently an hour's walk uphill from the refuge, a woman who works there said. It was not clear how much further he walked before his accident.

Doherty was based abroad for his work in countries including Jamaica, Zimbabwe and the Gambia, before moving back to the UK about 20 years ago.

He set out last Saturday on a four-day solo walking and camping trip from the family's second home near Bergerac, 280 miles to the north. His family believe he had been camping somewhere in the Col d'Escots area.

Lyons said her husband was an experienced walker, who often went on hikes of up to three hours in the area around their holiday home. "But he doesn't know the mountains very well," she told a local French television station. "He's not someone with full equipment and the necessary gear.

"So he would have left the car before setting off for a few hours to pick it up and return to his campsite. But that afternoon, something happened."

Rachel said her father had "always loved an adventure and been very independent".

Neil Stone, a friend and infectious disease doctor, posted on Twitter/X: "Dr Tom Doherty is a legend in the world of tropical medicine and infectious diseases and inspired me to go into the field.

"Desperately hope he is found safe and sound."

NEWS

Beating arthritis from a '72 camper van

A 'maverick' scientist spent his redundancy money in search of a revolutionary drug. It could be available on the NHS in three years

Glen Keogh

When Simon Westbrook was made redundant by Pfizer in 2011, it would have been simpler to seek lucrative employment overseas and forget all about an "idea on a piece of paper" that he had been developing.

Except he believed that that idea could lead to "one of the most important drugs ever".

"Being the maverick I was, I said to my wife, 'Shall we just start our own biotech company?" he recalled. With the support of Dominique, who had also been made redundant by the pharmaceutical giant's research and development facility in Sandwich, Kent, Westbrook got started.

It was not easy. He burnt through the couple's savings, struggled to pay the mortgage and slept in his orange 1972 VW camper van to save money while attending biotech conferences at which he was trying to attract investors.

Finally, in March, after a 14-year mission to develop a game-changing drug to treat osteoarthritis, Westbrook, now 54, was in Italy when he received the news he longed for. The effectiveness of his medication had exceeded all expectations.

"We saw the data [from human trials on osteoarthritic patients] and thought, 'Oh my gosh, it's actually worked,'" he said. "We did have a bit of a bender for a few days to celebrate. How many people can say they have actually discovered something?"

Westbrook, who moved from Melbourne for postdoctoral study in physiology endocrinology at Cambridge University aged 26, is behind the drug known as LEVI-04, produced by his company, Levicept, which could revolutionise the treatment of osteoarthritis for an estimated 600 million sufferers worldwide.



Short of cash to develop his groundbreaking drug, Simon Westbrook slept in a classic VW camper van like the one below



> **If you can get people able to move, they can improve their life**

The drug is based on a molecule he discovered while working at Pfizer, and can be delivered via a once-a-month EpiPen-style injection, where it restores protective processes to diseased joints and enables the regeneration of affected tissues. It works by blocking a compound that supports the nerve cells involved in transmitting pain signals to the brain.

It will also be an improvement on current treatments, such as anti-inflammatory pills which can cause painful gastrointestinal side-effects and increase the risk of heart attack or stroke, or powerful opioids which can be highly addictive.

In the recently completed phase-two trial of 510 patients, sufferers reported huge reductions in pain, increased mobility and better mental health as they found themselves unencumbered by their illness for the first time in years.

"I think it's going to be one of the most important drugs ever," Westbrook said. "I know that sounds silly to say. But the population is getting older, it's getting heavier. And if you can get people able to move for the first time in ten years, they'll be able to improve their life as well.

"I think it's going to be a groundbreaking medicine."

More than ten million people in the UK suffer from osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis in the country. Symptoms include pain and stiffness, often in the knees, hips and hands.

It is hoped the drug – which is not a cure but will make the condition much less painful – could also be used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and chemotherapy-induced pain in future.

Westbrook had been at Pfizer for 17 years when he was one of 2,000 staff laid off. He discovered the protein which would lead to LEVI-04 "on my own in the corner of the lab". "It was just an idea on a piece of paper when I was working there," he said. "No more than that. And they [Pfizer] weren't interested."

On leaving the company, he acquired the intellectual property [IP] rights and embarked on a fundraising campaign.

During the first 18 months, he said: "We went through our savings to the point we couldn't make mortgage payments. I remember well, my wife and I were walking down Oxford Street [in London] from one pitch to another, and she broke down saying, 'We can't do this any more.'

"An hour later, Westbrook was told he would be receiving an initial £500,000 investment from Kevin Johnson, an entrepreneur and biotech investor.

At a conference, Johnson had spotted the VW alongside the BMWs in the car park. Johnson said: "I thought, 'What crazy sod brings a camper van to a conference? It turns out it was this silly bugger who was running out of cash and trying to eke it out as long as he could. That was the moment I decided we were going to back this guy."

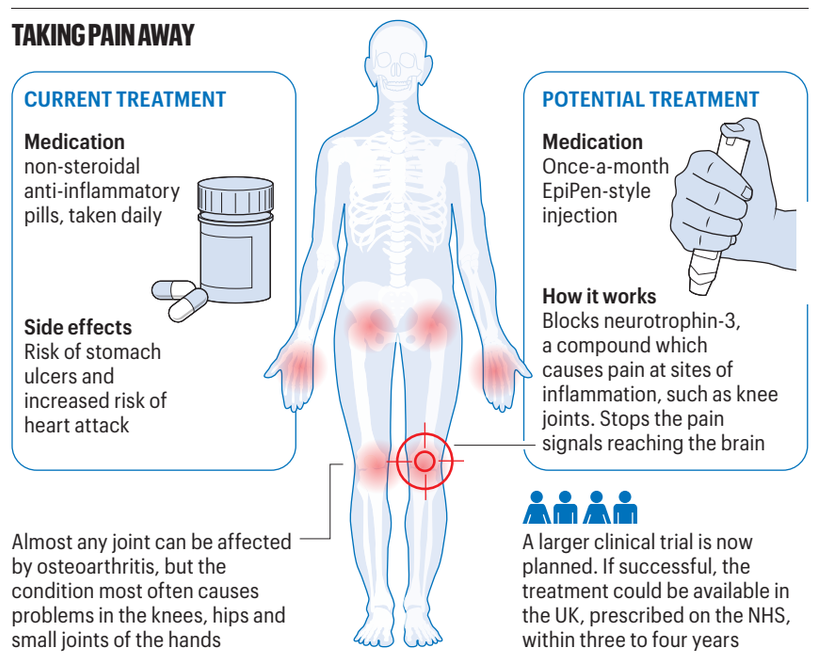
The first time Westbrook tried to create the molecule needed for the drug at scale, it "fell apart. You need to ferment my molecule, it's a protein. So, basically, it's like making beer. But it didn't work and I wasted a ton of money. That was a pretty low point. But we worked out what was wrong and made another batch".

Westbrook and his team have accrued £45 million of investment from a number of firms – including Pfizer, which has a small stake through the IP deal.

A larger clinical trial is now planned which will treat patients in the UK and US. If successful, the treatment could be available in the UK, prescribed on the NHS, within three to four years.

Westbrook added: "It's been a long and at times tortuous journey, and I want to thank everyone who has taken part in trials, believed in this project and supported us along the way."

TAKING PAIN AWAY



Grouching at the Groucho . . . has Soho's coolest club gone corporate?

William Turvill Chief Business Correspondent

For 39 years the Groucho Club has boasted a reputation as a home for hedonism and a magnet for A-listers: George Michael, Bono, Rita Ora, Noel Gallagher and Cara Delevingne to name a few.

Governed by a loose set of rules drafted by Stephen Fry – no phones, no drugs, no string vests and please leave quietly – the private members' club in Soho, central London, has witnessed bicycles ridden down staircases, hairy chests set alight, and infamous bathroom trysts.

Now, however, a letter circulating among members, and shared with The Sunday Times, has declared the club "almost dead".

It accuses the owners of having "destroyed nearly 40 years of culture". Processes and high prices, it says, have replaced passion.



The management of the club, owned since 2022 by the art gallery investors Iwan and Manuela Wirth, who are married, is whispering that it was probably written by a former employee, but several members privately agree with the sentiment of the letter, titled "RIP Groucho".

In the words of some of the Groucho's grumbling regulars, their beloved Dean Street institution, which was founded in 1985 by a group of media types as an antidote to stuffy gentlemen's clubs, is suffering a "creep to corporatism" and is "much less fun".

There is also a feeling among dissenters that the calibre of members has been allowed to slip and that the club plays host to too many non-member events, taking away from the "magic of the Groucho".

One said: "Fewer celebrities want to come in when there are lots of muggles around."

Other members remain supportive. Hunter Davies, the writer who was a founding member, said that it was not new for the Groucho's artsy clientele to criticise new owners. The club had passed between successive private equity firms. Davies, 88, visits once a year and remains a happy member. As for the suggestion that it has become "corporate", he compared the Groucho with its local rival, Soho House, which has become an international chain. "If you think the Groucho Club has become commercialised, that's bollocks," he said.

The Wirths own the Groucho through Artfarm, their hospitality and development company, which runs hotels and restaurants across England and Scotland.

Ewan Venters, the chief executive of Artfarm, who is a former boss of Fortnum & Mason, has not shied away from change. Elli Jafari, a former hotel boss, was appointed the Groucho's first female chief executive in February and there are also plans to open the club's first outpost near Wakefield in West Yorkshire.

Inside its townhouse headquarters, there has been a sizeable staff turnover, with more than a dozen popular employees having left in recent months, some after more than a decade of service.

SIMON WALKER FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES; SMART PICTURES; NIKI NIKOLOVA/GC IMAGES



The Groucho Club's informality and reputation for hedonism made it popular with celebrities such as Lenny Henry, Stephen Fry, who wrote the club's rules, Lily Allen and Noel Gallagher

Former staff speak of a "spreadsheet culture" infiltrating the club. Groucho staff once prided themselves on showing "individuality" to suit the tastes of members, but under Artfarm they've been instructed to smarten up, with black shirts expected to be tucked in and hair to be tied back in the kitchen.

Shortly after ArtFarm's acquisition, the new management irked some members by disbanding the old committee.

Venters makes no apology for the changes that Artfarm has introduced, pointing out that his business needs to change with the times. He is considering introducing a uniform for staff, adding: "I don't think it would be unreasonable to expect people to be presentable."

A common complaint among members is that the Groucho has become overrun by laptops since the pandemic. "It's turned into a WeWork," said one, referring to the provider of co-working spaces.

The rule is laptops and tablets are permitted in the Groucho's upstairs bar and terrace until 5pm.

Some of the Groucho's 5,000 members have been irked by rising prices. Annual membership costs £1,250 for new joiners, up from £1,000 when Artfarm came on the scene, although existing members pay less; some pay under £1,000 and under-35s are offered a heavily discounted rate. Meanwhile, the price of a shepherd's pie has risen from £15 to £25, although many members recognise that the quality of the food has improved and Venters points out that inflation has been high.

Inside the Groucho, there are signs of an institution being dragged into the future. Members can scan themselves into the club using a QR code on their phone and several sections have been refurbished. One critic conceded: "It was quite Miss Havisham before: quite decayed, crumbly."

More change is afoot. For years, visitors to the Groucho's lavatory cubicles have been greeted with signs telling them that the club "operates a strict zero-tolerance policy towards drugs. No more than one person in a cubicle at any time."

Venters said that these signs would soon be removed, not because the Groucho now condones drug-taking, but because he feels members no longer need reminding that this would be unacceptable.

As for members' gripes with the Groucho's perceived loss of fun since its hell-raising heyday, he showed little sympathy.

"It's members' responsibility to keep the fun," he said. "It's not the management that changes that."

Ivy's grouchy summer, Business, page 8



Blinders creator's tough rise to peak

Nicholas Hellen

Steven Knight, the *Peaky Blinders* creator, drew on memories of a tough childhood when writing the hit drama, but he fears his working-class background set his career back by 20 years.

His father worked as a blacksmith around Birmingham. His mother – when she was aged just nine – had been a bookies' runner at a time when off-track betting was illegal, but was too young to be arrested.

The youngest of seven children, Knight, 65, shared a bed with two brothers.

The castaway in today's edition of BBC Radio 4's *Desert Islands Discs*, Knight said he started his career in the entertainment industry after reading English at University College London, at a disadvantage to his peers.

"I just wanted a job where you didn't get wet or a job where you were indoors," he said. "Everybody else when you go to university knows more than you do. It takes a hell of a long time to finally come to the conclusion that actually, I am good at this, and actually better."

Knight said it was not until he was about 35 that he thought: "I can do this."

Peaky Blinders became Knight's calling card in Hollywood, with fans including Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. He was once befriended by Snoop Dogg in a West End hotel – where the rapper told him the show reminded him of how he got into gang culture.

Alongside the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, Knight chose to take *The Greek Myths*, a compendium of Greek mythology by Robert Graves on to his hypothetical island. His luxury was a laptop.

Big Tech mourns woman who helped build Google from her garage

Will Lloyd

When Susan Wojcicki bought a quiet suburban home in Menlo Park, California, in 1998 she knew she would struggle to pay the mortgage unless she sub-let some of its rooms.

In what must be the most fortunate meeting of landlord and tenant in business history, Wojcicki and her husband rented their garage to Larry Page and Sergey Brin for $1,700 a month.

It sounds pricey for a garage but it was not too bad for California at the time. The deal would become even sweeter. Google, a company that few of us can imagine life without, was born over the following five months. Wojcicki spent the next 25 years at the company and became a pioneering chief executive in Silicon Valley – as well as one of the few women to reach the top of the industry.

She died on Friday aged 56 after living with lung cancer for two years. In February her son Marco Troper had been found dead aged 19 after an accidental drug overdose in his university dormitory.

Wojcicki's husband, Dennis Troper, said in a Facebook post: "Susan was not just my best friend and partner in life, but a brilliant mind, a loving mother, and a dear friend to many . . . her impact on our family and the world was immeasurable."

In 1998 Wojcicki was so excited by the potential of Brin and Page's plans for a search engine that she quit her marketing job at the chipmaker Intel to join them.

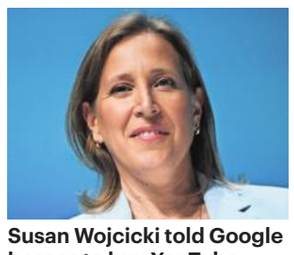
"It seemed like a perfect arrangement and Larry and Sergey were obviously up to something super interesting," Wojcicki's mother Esther wrote in her 2019 book, *How to Raise Successful People*. "But Susan had no clue that they'd be there all the time, hunched over dozens of computers in the garage."

Wojcicki became Google's 16th employee and took on pioneering roles in Google image search and its AdSense advertising network.

Her subsequent nine-year stint as the chief executive of YouTube, a company she urged Page and Brin to buy for $1.65 billion in 2006, made her one of the foremost women in tech. Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Google and its parent company Alphabet, said Wojcicki was "as core to the history of Google as anyone, and it's hard to imagine the world without her".

Recalling his interview to work at the company, he said: "She took me out for an ice cream and a walk around campus. I was sold – on Google and Susan."

Wojcicki had seen that Google's video-streaming service was being outflanked by YouTube. She quickly wrote the business model to make the case for the purchase. "I probably spent an hour on it," she said later.



Susan Wojcicki told Google bosses to buy YouTube

Few saw the case to buy YouTube as clearly as Wojcicki. At the time the move was described as "moronic" by Mark Cuban, a dotcom veteran entrepreneur. When Wojcicki stepped down as YouTube CEO last year it had grown to more than 2.5 billion monthly active users and nearly $30 billion in annual advertising revenue. Its power, reach and profits dwarf those of traditional media entities and more than 500 hours of content are uploaded every minute. She later oversaw Google Books, Google Images and, from 2011, all the company's advertising products, by then a business worth more than $28 billion.

"The founders trust Susan maybe more than anybody on the planet," Patrick Keane, an early Google sales director, said two years ago.

A mother of five, Wojcicki was a powerful advocate for women's education – especially in Stem, science, technology engineering and mathematics – and equal pay as well as paternity leave. In Vanity Fair in 2017 she lamented that the valley, while "so quick to embrace and change the future" also could not "break free of its regrettable past" when it came to misogyny.

Social media platforms were filled with tributes to Wojcicki. Sheryl Sandberg, the former chief operating officer of Meta, the company behind Facebook and Instagram, wrote: "As one of the most important women leaders in tech – the first to lead a major company– she was committed to expanding opportunities for women throughout Silicon Valley," Sandberg wrote. "I don't believe my career would be what it is today without her unwavering support."

Starmer's armour holds up



…for now

The PM has fended off Musk's brickbats and swift justice seems to have quelled the riots. But unless he can fix deep-seated problems, further trouble looms, write *Gabriel Pogrund* and *Harry Yorke*

Since violence erupted across England this month, Sir Keir Starmer has sought to channel an unlikely predecessor: David Cameron.

The former prime minister led the response to the 2011 London riots, giving the Crown Prosecution Service, then led by Starmer, his backing to seek maximum jail time for those behind the violence.

But it was also Cameron who once said: "Britain and Twitter are not the same thing."

Starmer has adopted this view in response to a week of being ridiculed and subjected to conspiracy theories by Elon Musk, the tech billionaire behind the social media giant which he has since rebranded as X.

Having claimed "civil war [in Britain] is inevitable", Musk then accused the Labour leader of cracking down on the far right more harshly than other groups and likened British policing of social media to the Soviet Union. No 10 rejected the first remark but has declined to be drawn on his comments since.

Rather than give oxygen to Musk, the PM has directed his energy to matters he can actually influence: the immediate response and approach of law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary.

To nobody in No 10's surprise, Starmer rejected suggestions to recall parliament or pass emergency legislation. He sees those as distractions, like Musk's tweets, and has put his faith in making the existing system work better – and faster.

As in 2011, he thinks tight co-ordination between the different arms of the state, and making an example of offenders, is the best way of quelling violence. "The parallel is really important," one Starmer ally said, adding that the previous riots had impressed on him the "importance of speed" between arresting and charging offenders and convicting them.

"No grandstanding, no gesture politics," added a Downing Street source, summarising Starmer's philosophy. "Far from promising needless law changes, he wanted to get to the crux of the issue immediately. It's a practical and pragmatic approach to governing."

The strategy has been on show in recent days, with the judiciary and government dusting off contingency plans for 24/7 court sessions (which have so far not been needed) and offenders being swiftly convicted and handed down exemplary sentences. At Liverpool Crown Court, the rare decision was made to televise the sentencing of a number of rioters charged with violent disorder.

By the middle of last week, the approach appeared to have borne fruit, as further unrest in London and other cities failed to materialise.

Yet Starmer has cautioned against complacency. On Thursday, during a meeting of Cobra, he told ministers gathered in the Cabinet Office: "Don't take your foot off the pedal." He delivered a similar message when, the next day, he visited the control room at Scotland Yard, stating that it was "really important that we maintain high alert".

The Labour leader is also conscious that the start of the football season this weekend could be another flashpoint, even if potentially a beneficial one: the police will be scouring stadiums across the country in search of suspects from recent riots that they are yet to apprehend.

At a private briefing of Labour peers earlier this week, Diana Johnson, the policing minister, and fellow Home Office minister Lord Hanson of Flint said they were fully alive to the risks associated with football and were drawing up plans accordingly. "You may find this weekend that some of the chanting going on at football grounds will show that the triumph of good over evil is not yet complete," said one attendee.

Up to 6,000 riot police have been mobilised in preparation, with 100 additional prosecutors also drafted in. Describing the past fortnight as a "baptism of fire", a government source said the crisis had nevertheless helped many ministers and their advisers transition faster from an opposition mindset to one necessary to govern Britain. "It might be a fire you don't want, but it very quickly helped to shift a newly elected government from a victory celebration to governing."

If it transpires that the worst of the violence has subsided by Sunday evening, police chiefs are confident the far-right agitators will lose momentum and they can begin to gradually wind down their resources.

Starmer's political team is likely to switch its focus from immediate crisis management to longer-term politics, in an approach described by one aide, this time channelling Tony Blair, as "tough on populism, tough on the causes of populism".

Translating that maxim into reality is not straightforward. But it is revealing as to No 10's intentions. The PM's political team believes he has to be zealous in tackling racist violence in the here and now – and the forces that have led to marginalisation and decline of places such as Manvers in South Yorkshire, where a Holiday Inn housing asylum seekers was attacked by arsonists. The suburb forms part of Wath upon Dearne, a town of 11,000 people just outside Rotherham once dominated by the coal industry. There, in some wards, almost 40 per cent of children live in poverty. Over the past fortnight, seven of the ten most deprived areas in England have witnessed rioting.

Morgan McSweeney, Starmer's chief aide, has told colleagues there is no clever strategy for dealing with the far right that does not require dealing with the nation's deeper problems after 14 years of what he describes as failure and false promises.

He earned his spurs working for the London Borough of Dagenham and Barking in the late Noughties, when the British

MUSK'S TWEETS

Why aren't all communities protected in Britain? @Keir_Starmer
12.53pm, August 6
67.1 million views

#TwoTierKeir
1.54 PM, Aug 6
6.9 million views

Arrested for making comments on Facebook! Is this Britain or the Soviet Union? Is this accurate @CommunityNotes?
12.31pm, Aug 6
47.6 million views

It's 2030 in the UK & you're being executed for posting a meme …
1.50pm, Aug 10
22.6 million views

Support freedom of speech in the UK!
6.27pm, Aug 9
71.8 million views

'I don't feel as safe, it seems everything has changed' — life in an asylum seekers' hotel

Will Lloyd and Harry Yorke

"One day you have everything, one day you have nothing. Everything is destroyed in Sudan. Everything is gone. You have to start from zero here."

Tariq, a 48-year-old Sudanese asylum seeker who came to Britain from Saudi Arabia on October 17, 2023, explained how much his life had changed since he arrived at an asylum hotel on the south coast ten months ago.

Last year, asylum seekers like Tariq accounted for 11 per cent of immigrants to the UK. Previously, asylum seekers waiting for their claims to be processed by the Home Office were usually placed in homes and flats managed by outsourcing companies such as Serco. But as the number of arrivals increased, hotel use began in earnest in September 2019. By February 2021 there were around 10,000 people in asylum hotels.The policy was expensive then and continues to be costly: the government spent £3.1 billion on hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in 2022-23 – the equivalent of about £8 million a day - making up a significant proportion of the total £4.7 billion spent on the asylum system.

It often caused significant unrest in the areas where asylum seekers were housed. Seven men were jailed after "racially aggravated" violence outside a hotel in Merseyside in 2023. A large crowd was recorded chanting "get them out" outside the hotel in Knowsley. Rocks, fireworks and other missiles were thrown at a police cordon around the building.

Last July the Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli was taken over by the Home Office to house asylum seekers. The hotel became the site of an anti-immigration protest camp that lasted for weeks and only stopped when the Home Office U-turned on its decision.

Since the killing of three girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport in July, asylum hotels have once again been the target of far-right demonstrations.

In Rotherham on August 4 rioters attempted to burn down a Holiday Inn Express that housed asylum seekers. According to an analysis by the Financial Times, areas affected by anti-migrant riots across Britain this month had a higher-than-average proportion of asylum seekers in taxpayer-funded accommodation.

Tariq is a short, careful, greying man who speaks fluent English in a quiet voice. He left three children, two boys and a girl, in Saudi Arabia, where he took his family after Sudan spiralled into a renewed civil war in 2023. His family cannot stay there for good, as Saudi Arabia is a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. There is no codified system for those seeking asylum in the kingdom. So he flew to Britain to claim asylum, the first step in bringing his wife, his mother and his children.

Every 20 minutes he checks the email on his smartphone. He is waiting for an update from the Home Office on his asylum application: "I had a good job, my own trading business, now I am tortured and suffering."

We met in a walk-in centre for asylum seekers in the same town as the hotel. For security reasons, the charity which organises the weekly services here, which include the provision of fresh food, phones, and bicycles does not want to be named. The centre also helps asylum seekers who have been given the right to work after spending the required 12 months in the system to find jobs. The volunteers at the centre felt like they – and the asylum seekers – are still a target for the far right.

In nearby Aldershot, a garrison town that prides itself on being the home of the British Army, there were violent scenes outside the Potters International Hotel on July 31, as riots spread across the UK. Police described the evening as a "mob-style protest". Seven people have been arrested.

Potters International has held asylum seekers since January 2022. A faded Union Jack flies outside the main entrance to the hotel, which was being patrolled by private security on Thursday. A poster stuck outside said: "Stop the boats! Stop the stabbings!"

Two young Kurdish men picked blackberries outside the hotel. They were too frightened to talk about what happened. Google reviews of Potters International give a glimpse into the anger swirling around the hotel: "I hope they wreck the place so much that it can't be rebuilt" read a typical comment.

At the walk-in centre, men and women from Sudan, Chad, Trinidad, Kuwait and Iran described conditions in their hotels. Some of them had been there for almost two years. There were rarely less than 50 housed in these hotels and sometimes up to 100. Following the closure of a separate asylum hotel in the town, they claimed they often had to share rooms with mentally unstable people.

What united these interviewees was worries for their safety, anxiety for the family they had left behind and a hatred of the food.

"Milk, eggs, porridge. Milk, eggs, porridge. Milk, eggs, porridge," said one Sudanese asylum seeker who didn't want to give his name, when asked what life in his hotel was like. He had eaten the same breakfast every day for one year and five months. Another man showed me a picture of a recent dinner: a chicken curry and rice garnished with a small snail.

The asylum seekers fixate on food because that is what their lives have narrowed down to. Under Section 95 of the Asylum Support Act, asylum seekers are also given "subsistence support".

If you are in full-board accommodation like the asylum seekers at this centre, "subsistence support" is £8.50 a week, loaded on to a government-issued debit card every Monday. Most of the

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES



Riots outside a Holiday Inn Express in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, which is being used as an asylum hotel, last week

ILLUSTRATION: TONY BELL



National Party was on the march. After a campaign based on conspiracy theories about African migrants being paid to live there, Nick Griffin's party came within touching distance of taking over the council. Locally, Labour was split between validating people's fears – Margaret Hodge, then the MP for Barking, spoke about the "legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family" – and focusing on improving services, which McSweeney favoured.

Today, he is determined not to ratchet up the rhetoric, but focus on delivery. He knows the electorate will not forgive Starmer if he falls short in two areas particularly: the economy and immigration. Neither can be fixed quickly. Starmer's plan to tackle immigration is two-fold: to "smash" the small boat smuggling gangs bringing migrants across the Channel, and to speedily process the 90,000 asylum seekers in the backlog, of whom more than a third are in hotels, costing the taxpayer millions of pounds a day.

Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, is trying to reduce the use of hotels by procuring alternative accommodation such as empty homes or former university student blocks that have self-catering facilities. But clearing the backlog will take up to a year, according to experts. And with as many 70 per cent of asylum seekers likely to be given leave to remain, there are concerns that the costs of the system will merely shift from the Home Office to local authorities, which will have to find more permanent homes for them.

> **The approach will be: tough on populism … tough on the causes of populism**

Some Labour allies would like Starmer to go further; last month Blair suggested he should revive New Labour's digital ID cards policy as a means of controlling immigration numbers. Starmer also dabbled in tough rhetoric on migration during the election, but after getting into hot water over a returns agreement with Bangladesh, he has since dialled it down.

The party is braced for a tough set of local elections in May, although Starmer's team believes that making good on promises will pay off in the medium and long term. Starmer does not have the benefit of the doubt as Boris Johnson did among certain sections of the electorate, and does not attempt to win people over through rhetoric and storytelling.

The Labour leader is an unpopular prime minister. After a post-election fillip, when his net favourability rating was zero, he has fallen to -16, according to YouGov. Aides know Starmer is not naturally interested in, or capable of, masking failings through tub-thumping oratory – which is why quietly making good on his commitments is the only way to re-election.

One person with the leader's ear ruefully remarked: "Keir could have said, 'We hear you, things are broken, we're going to fix them, but immigrants are not to blame. We won't stand for it, but we'll work day and night to make things better for you and for everyone who calls or makes Britain home and who contributes to our wonderful country.' Instead, he offered pure Starmerism, telling the cabinet the emphasis was to focus on using existing laws and procedures to deliver results."

Some question whether there are limits to this approach, particularly when it comes to the grappling with the rampant disinformation that has spread rapidly across social media networks, which have also served allowed the far right to organise many of the demonstrations of the past fortnight.

On Friday Starmer said his government would look "more broadly" at social media, amid calls from Sadiq Khan, the London mayor, for the new Online Safety Act to be beefed up and implemented faster.

The legislation, passed last October, gives Ofcom the power to fine social media companies up to £18 million or 10 per cent of their global turnover if they fail to take robust action against illegal content inciting violence or terrorism. However, the regulator is consulting on how it is implemented and it is not due to come into force until the end of the year.

While there are suggestions this could be accelerated, officials privately believe radical changes are unlikely and rushing it through could have unforeseen consequences. They point out that drafting watertight definitions of the content that falls foul of the legislation – and therefore must be removed by social media platforms – is time-consuming and highly complex.

One source said "messing that up" could potentially create "legal loopholes" that could be exploited by the platforms or malign entities, or alternatively leave the government open to legal challenge. Senior ministers are also alive to the delicate balancing act between cracking down on illegal content and encroaching on legitimate free speech.

"These are always the hardest issues," one cabinet member said. "The strong commitment to freedom and liberty collides with security, law and order. This is the classic progressive dilemma – not just for the centre left but also the centre right."

As for Musk, the strategy appears to be do nothing – for now. Despite his highly provocative attacks on Starmer, the message has gone out to aides and ministers to refrain from any public or private criticism that would risk sustaining the spat.

Summarising the approach, one adviser said: "It's a bit like being in a pub and someone spills your pint – you either decide whether to push back or go with the flow."

Editorial, page 18
My home town split down the middle, Rod Liddle, News Review, page 17
Kathleen Stock, page 21

READERS' POLL

Should asylum seekers be permitted to work?
Have your say at thetimes.com/poll

asylum seekers said they either spent this money on food they liked, or sent it to their families.

"The food is not good. The security is not good. The assistance is not good." The speaker was a fast-talking Trinidadian in a flat cap who said he was being driven mad by life in his hotel. "I feel like I'm imprisoned, you know, there's jail vibes in this hotel."

Labour's plan for those who have already crossed into the UK illegally like these men is to process their asylum claims as quickly as possible. The home secretary, Yvette Cooper, is seeking to reduce the use of hotels by procuring more alternative temporary ("dispersal") accommodation such as empty homes or former university student blocks that have self-catering facilities.

But clearing this backlog will take time. With individual claims likely to take anywhere between two and six months to process, the Refugee Council, which provides support and advice to refugees and asylum seekers, estimates it could take up to a year.

Even when cleared, the question will be where to put everyone. The Refugee Council believes about 70 per cent of those in the backlog will be granted leave to remain, meaning they can look for work and housing. However, many will be single young men, meaning they will probably fall short of the eligibility requirements set for social housing. There are fears that large numbers could become homeless.

At the centre, some asylum seekers had been given the right to work. MJ was one of them, a 29-year-old from Iran now planning to become a plumber, and balancing his job with passing exams. The riots troubled him: "I don't feel as safe as I did even two weeks ago. It feels like everything has changed."

The centre operates one morning a week. The complex needs – including physical and psychological injuries – of some here are not adequately provided for elsewhere.

Anis arrived in 2018 as a 16-year-old from Darfur. The centre helped him build a life. He was granted leave to remain two years ago. He returns here each week to help others build a life for themselves. Next month his two teenage brothers will visit him. They have not seen each other for eight years. What's he going to say to them?

"I don't even know. I just have to hug them first."

Tommy Robinson Inc 'made £1.6m' without paying tax — then folded

Gabriel Pogrund

Tommy Robinson and his associates have created a web of secretive companies which have made profits of more than £1.6 million without paying tax before filing for insolvency, according to corporate filings.

The far-right leader has spent six years conducting his anti-migrant activism and fundraising through entities whose directors have failed to file annual accounts on a single occasion. The companies owe £328,000 in corporation tax and employer contributions to HMRC, documents state.

Any director who fails to file accounts is committing a criminal offence, is at risk of an prosecution and may have to declare a conviction when travelling overseas. They also face having their company forcibly dissolved and having any assets handed to the Crown.

However, Robinson and those close to him have never been subject to any enforcement action. Instead they appointed an insolvency practitioner to wind up the companies at the 11th hour.

In each instance, they have appointed Ninos Koumettou, a British-Cypriot community leader, or his son, Yiannis, who was recently fined £10,000 for unrelated regulatory failures. Both are chartered accountants based in London and partners at Begbies Traynor, a professional services firm with revenue of £120 million a year.

Their work with Robinson, real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, 41, started in November 2018, when he met Ninos Koumettou, 71, to discuss the liquidation of Lennon Consultancy, a company of which he was director. Days later, he resigned, leaving Jenna Vowles, his then wife, as its sole representative. Robinson had only recently been released from prison after his broadcasting outside of court and remarks about "jihad rape gangs" almost collapsed the Huddersfield grooming gang trial, in which 29 men were charged for abusing girls aged 11 to 17.

He was also spreading conspiracy theories about a Syrian refugee, Jamal Hijazi, who was filmed being attacked at school. Robinson was later sued and ordered to pay £100,000 in libel damages but filed for bankruptcy and divorced his wife, meaning he never paid a fraction of the amount owed.

In relation to three separate companies, Robinson or his associates have triggered what is called a creditors' voluntary liquidation, meaning that a firm's shareholders believe it can no longer pay its debts. Anyone owed money must be consulted at the outset, but if they fail to intervene the process can go ahead unchallenged. It means Robinson's associates would have been able to spend money from the companies or withdraw it before winding them up.

MIKE RUANE/STORY PICTURE AGENCY



Tax disclosures show the complexity of Robinson's finances as well as how hard it is to track his income

The disclosures reveal legal and regulatory weaknesses which have spared Robinson and his associates any enforcement action. Neither HMRC nor Companies House have used the full powers available to them.

Over the period in which the companies have been formed, Robinson has become ever more prominent and well resourced. He is banned on Facebook and Instagram, but has used Twitter/X, where he has almost one million followers, and Telegram, the Russia-founded messaging app based in Dubai. He appears to derive some of his income from donations from conservative US think tanks and supporters online and also sells books.

He has repeatedly been accused of stoking the far-right violence of the last fortnight, with Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, calling him an "armchair thug". He spent much of the last fortnight in a luxury resort in Cyprus, but has since relocated with his family to Athens, and denies being on the run. He is due for a High Court appearance for contempt of court in October after repeating lies about the Syrian refugee.

Hope Not Hate, the anti-fascist group, has conducted some of the only detailed investigations into the financial network that sustains Robinson. Much of it remains shrouded in mystery, however.

> **Robinson has been accused of stoking violence as an 'armchair thug'**

The company with the greatest debts is Hope and Pride Ltd, which was created by Vowles in spring 2019, and which was the ultimate destination for donations and appeals promoted by TR News, Robinson's news organisation. Last October, Vowles held an emergency meeting at Robinson's parents' house near Luton where she resolved to dissolve the company. She appointed Koumettou to carry out the process.

The firm has since published filings stating that it owes £317,423.01 in corporation tax. According to experts, based on the corporation tax rate of 19 per cent, and a reasonable assumption the figure relates to profits made before March 2023, that indicates profits of roughly £1.67 million.

Weeks later, Robinson's associates wound up another company connected to him: Freestyle Freelance Ltd. It is the trading name of Urban Scoop, Robinson's "independent journalism" website through which he sells copies of his books and solicits donations through cryptocurrency. The company, set up by Adam Geary, a confidante of Robinson since his involvement with the English Defence League (EDL) had reportedly employed Robinson as a consultant. It owes HMRC £10,750.

Geary also owns the company's successor, Thinking Independent Media. Other companies founded by Robinson, Vowles or Geary include: Bubba Media, which was dissolved less than a year after being set up in June 2019; Square FT Limited, which has long been dormant and now faces being struck off; and AKS Accounting Ltd, an accountancy firm which has advised him and has itself gone into liquidation.

All of the firms list or have listed their address as Bramingham Business Park, near Luton, where Robinson was born. There is no evidence that the companies have any operations on the site. The connection appears to stem from the fact that the accountancy firm was registered there.

The disclosures shed light on the complexity of Robinson's finances since he declared himself bankrupt and show the difficulty of tracking his income.

Companies House has powers to investigate and prosecute individual directors who fail to fulfil their obligations under the Companies Act. The latest figures, relating to the financial year 2021-22, show the agency charged 1,467 individual directors, of whom 761, or 52 per cent, were convicted. Those convicted are liable to an unlimited fine which increases daily due to non-payment. Several convictions can lead a director to be disqualified from running a company for up to five years.

Companies House has been criticised for failing to prosecute offenders due to a lack of resources in the past, but post-Covid it has sought to ramp up enforcement. Campaigners still argue the number of prosecutions is inadequate.

If told a company has filed for insolvency but owes it money, HMRC can either approve the appointed insolvency practitioner or propose that its own expert is put in place. It is thought that it declined to involve itself in the dissolution of any of Robinson or his associates' companies. A source close to the Koumettous said HMRC generally abstains from voting in liquidation arrangements of this size and nature.

Insolvency practitioners must submit a report to the business secretary after liquidating a company and can suggest banning a person from serving as a company director. It appears that Ninos and Yiannis Koumettou declined to do so for any of the companies linked to Robinson. When Ninos wound up Lennon Consultancy, he wrote: "There were no matters that justified further investigation in the circumstances of this appointment."

Begbies Traynor said it was "wholly inaccurate" to claim it was associated with the far-right leader. A spokeswoman said: "Insolvency practitioners are appointed under legislation and their duties are to the creditors of a company. They do not act for or advise the company that is being liquidated or the directors and shareholders of that company."

Greary, Robinson's right-hand man, said: "There is a co-ordinated effort to attack citizen journalism, there is a false narrative perpetuated by mainstream media and politicians as I type this." In response to questions, he referred to inaccuracies but failed to specify which and threatened legal consequences.

HMRC declined to answer detailed questions, citing confidentiality.

Have the riots stopped — and what happens next?

What happened yesterday?
Thousands of anti-racism demonstrators gathered around the UK but the unrest that began almost two weeks ago appeared to have abated. About 15,000 people gathered in Belfast, while hundreds came together in Newcastle, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stoke-on-Trent. Thousands of protesters also gathered outside Reform UK's HQ in London. Sir Keir Starmer had urged police to remain on "high alert" over the weekend to prevent the resurgence of the violence.

Where have there been riots?
Rioters targeted the mosque in Southport after three girls were killed, and eight others and two adults injured, at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in the town on July 29. The chief suspect in the stabbings, a British-born teenager of Rwandan heritage, was falsely rumoured to be a Muslim asylum seeker who had arrived in the UK on a small boat, disinformation that spread rapidly on Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp and Telegram.

PA



Thousands of people in Belfast took part in a United Against Racism rally yesterday

Mosques in other cities were then targeted, as were hotels housing asylum seekers in Rotherham, Tamworth and Aldershot. In total, riots have broken out in more than 20 towns and cities across England, from Sunderland and Manchester in the north to Plymouth in the south. There have also been incidents in Belfast.

Have the rioters been caught?
There have been 779 arrests and 349 charges across the UK since July 30 in relation to the continuing disorder, according to figures released by the National Police Chiefs' Council yesterday. Thirty-two arrests relate to online offences such as incitement. Police said further cases should be expected against "rioters and those spreading online hate".

How have they been punished?
Of those sentenced, the majority have been sent to prison, with the average sentence length being just under two years. The longest sentence so far – 38 months – is believed to have been handed to Tyler Kay, a 26-year-old IT worker who pleaded guilty at Northampton crown court to the offence of publishing abusive, threatening, or insulting material intending to stir up racial hatred, which he admitted "made me look like an idiot". A boy of 13 became the youngest convicted rioter when he pleaded guilty to violent disorder at Manchester youth court. He was granted bail until next month.

Are there fears of further riots?
Police chiefs believe that a "turning point" was reached last Wednesday when threats of more than 100 far-right protests failed to materialise and thousands of ordinary people came out on to the streets instead to show their disgust. Although the authorities hope that they may be over the worst of the disorder, this weekend 6,000 riot police remained on standby. Gavin Stephens, the chairman of the National Police Chiefs' Council, warned: "Those intent on violence and destruction have not necessarily gone away."

POLITICS

1 Grand Tory tour









As the leadership rivals cross the country to make their pitches to the grassroots, what do party members really think of them?



Tim Shipman
Chief Political Commentator

In 1643 Cirencester became a key battleground in the English Civil War when Cavaliers stormed the town to seize it from the Roundheads. This weekend it was the first skirmish of a new conflict, the battle for the Conservative Party leadership; the first showdown that will see the six candidates storm the country to make their case. The main candidates addressed members in Cirencester yesterday as they began a "Tories on tour" blitz of events, crisscrossing the country before MPs return from their summer break and begin to start whittling down the contenders to four, who will make their case to party conference at the end of September.



More than 40 MPs, described as "careerists" by one camp, have yet to decide who to support, with another 20 MPs in play from the right of the party, meaning fully half of the parliamentary party has yet to commit.

KEMI BADENOCH

The former business secretary finished a dominant first in a poll of grassroots supporters by the Conservative Home website last week, on 33 per cent of the vote, 14 points clear of her nearest rival but has faced criticism for a low-key start to her campaign.

Badenoch hit the road on a "listening tour" last week, which led to a series of social media posts with her looking earnest and quizzical. Rivals were struck by the small numbers of people attending these events and by the lack of boards with slogans.

In two focus groups, run by consultancy Public First, party members in the south of England described Badenoch as fresh-faced but inexperienced. "The first group mentioned her lack of presence while the second group talked of how she lacked experience and drew conflict," a summary by the researchers recounted.

"I think she makes conflict for effect," one man said. "If you put her in a room on her own she's the only woman who could start a fight." Another added: "Not enough experience. She just seems too young. And she just doesn't seem a worthy leader."

Badenoch was the only candidate not to weigh in on the riots last week, but her team made a virtue of it. "There's no need to rush out and become the next chief commentator for the party," an aide said. "We're electing the next leader."

Badenoch's campaign manager, the former MP Lee Rowley, chaired a conference call for supporters on Thursday evening, in which grassroots allies expressed concern about her low profile so far and her campaign. A Badenoch ally said the call was actually positive and that 180 people had tuned in as evidence of her support.

At the Cirencester hustings, Badenoch defended herself against being vague on policy, saying: "My top priorities are actually not policy priorities, because we're not going to be in government, and it doesn't matter how amazing our policies are going to be, we need the time to look in and fix ourselves." She said it would be "the final thing" to work on a policy platform. "We are no longer governing for 2019 or 2024; we need to be looking at what's going to be happening in 2030." She also denied being controlled by Michael Gove: "Nobody controls me and nobody puts anything in my head," she said.

ROBERT JENRICK

The former immigration minister seems to be the one with the momentum. Last week he edged ahead of Badenoch in the betting markets – something that provoked cynicism from his rivals. "We all know you can shift the odds by investing a few thousand pounds," one said.

The Conservative Home poll put him in second place on 19 per cent, nearly double the 10 per cent for Tom Tugendhat and James Cleverly. But a somewhat rash intervention over the riots last week, saying anyone who shouts "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) should be arrested led to complaints to both the Tory whips and CCHQ, party headquarters.

Rivals point to Jenrick's "Damascene conversion" from a centrist to a right-winger on immigration when he worked at the Home Office, and suggest supporters are telling MPs he will "tack left" if elected – something denied by his team.

The focus groups found members aware of his resignation from the Sunak government but also scepticism from more centrist members about his move to the right of the party. One man said: "I'm not sure you can see him as a uniting figure."

However, the groups loved Jenrick's video in which he explained how mistakes were made under the previous government on immigration. A woman commented: "It's nice to hear a politician admit to mistakes made by the party. It's nice to hear some truth from their lips. And he was passionate and hard-hitting and I was probably swayed towards him."

TOM TUGENDHAT

The former security minister is due to attend 100 constituency events over the next three weeks. Everyone agrees he is "bullish" about numbers and is the frontrunner to sew up majority support from the One Nation group of moderate Tories. Last week it was reported that his team was pushing for a higher campaign spending cap, the result of healthier fundraising than some rivals.

Tugendhat was the first candidate to urge Sir Keir Starmer to chair Cobra emergency meetings about the riots last weekend, something the prime minister then did. His approach, an aide said, was "tough on law and order but also making sure the rhetoric is responsible", a coded criticism of Jenrick's Allahu Akbar intervention.

Tugendhat's pitch, summarised by a key ally, is based on unity and values rather than specific policies: "We need to put an end to the factionalism and we return to core Conservative values that actually deliver for people. We've got four years to think about what that specifically means in terms of policies."

In the focus groups, "he came across well but both groups criticised him for not explaining how he was going to do things differently", Public First reported.

"I thought it sounded promising," one man said. "Most of the evening everyone [in this group] talked about bringing the party back together and its division. And he spoke on that exactly to the point."

However a woman added: "It all sounds great. Like oh my god, brilliant. You're gonna stop all this. You're gonna sort it. But it's like how? Give us some actual tangible actions."

JAMES CLEVERLY

The former home secretary and foreign secretary has the highest-level cabinet experience and is popular with MPs who want a good media performer who can tease and rough up Starmer at prime minister's questions.

He was the first to demand unity, a message that others have all echoed. However, some critics think he has not been specific enough about his policy intentions.

Cleverly responded to that yesterday when he wrote on Twitter/X: "Lower taxes. Smaller state. Higher military spending. And a free and safe society. That's what I believe in."

Earlier in the week, he pointed to legislation that he helped pilot through parliament to crack down on protests – though rivals say it was drawn up before he became home secretary. "His name is on the bill but it wasn't his thing," one said.

DAME PRITI PATEL

The former home secretary has made the most extravagant pitch to party members, vowing that if she becomes leader she will give them much more power. In the past week she has taken part in about 20 events, including visits to Staffordshire, Birmingham and Essex.

Her pitch, in summary, is this: "I can bring people together. I've got a lot of experience. I know opposition because I worked for William Hague in 1997 and I've seen the party come back to government with George [Osborne] and David [Cameron] in 2010. I'm of the party and I get the grassroots and I'll rebuild the connection with the members."

Rivals see this as a pitch to be chairman again, but a Patel ally pointed to her willingness to tackle Nigel Farage last week as evidence she is the one leader who can close down the Reform Party threat. "She was open that they have been friends but she wasn't afraid to critique his comments on social media," the ally said. "The others all backed away because they're scared of him."

However, the focus group associated her with "the old guard". One man said: "Priti Patel and all these people who have been trying to be prime minister or leader of the party for the last three or four years and they don't get anywhere. They should be disregarded otherwise the Tories will end up like they have been for the last four years."



MEL STRIDE

Stride, the former work and pensions secretary, is the rank outsider but he is arguing that his work cutting benefits in the last parliament "gave the fiscal room for the cuts in national insurance that the last government was making", an ally said.

Before he entered politics, Stride set up and ran Venture Marketing Group, a successful business specialising in trade exhibitions, conferences and publishing.

"Our illustrious party, throughout history, has been led by lawyers, bankers and journalists. But the party of business has never actually been led by an entrepreneur," a supporter said. Rivals, however, were surprised that Stride used his one free email to members, paid for by the party, to invite the ageing membership to "Join the revolution!"

From running country in Covid to mineral mines: what Raab did next

Jon Yeomans

Sitting in the boardroom of a swanky Mayfair office, Dominic Raab looks every bit at home. He is no longer a cabinet minister and, as of the end of May, not an MP. He has joined the high-flying and well-remunerated world of private equity.

But the former deputy prime minister and Brexit secretary is not cutting City deals. He has plumped for the unglamorous world of mining. As head of global affairs at the private equity firm Appian, he is on a mission: helping the West lay its hands on the critical minerals it needs to hit net zero.

How did all this come about? "I did the typical lawyer's sweating over all of the different possibilities," Raab, 50, says of his career switch. "But I was always interested in private equity and critical minerals because of the green transition and the geopolitical dimension."

He was connected with Appian, led by the former JP Morgan banker Michael Scherb, by a recruiter. Now Raab is devoting a quarter of his time to Appian, in exchange for £118,000 a year. He is also entitled to 0.1 per cent of the profits from two of the firm's funds.

Raab says his role is to help raise awareness of the "urgency" on critical minerals. "If we want to hit net zero – if we're going to supply the lithium, the graphite, the cobalt, the copper to provide the solar panels, the wind turbines, the EV batteries – [we need critical minerals]. It's going to be essential for our prosperity."

The big "wake-up call", as Raab describes it, is China's stranglehold on many of these minerals. Even if the country does not mine all of them, it dominates their refining and processing.

"We're way behind China," says Raab, who was foreign secretary between 2019 and 2021. "They've been doing this for 20 years."

Raab says he was aware of the topic during his years as a corporate lawyer at Linklaters, and later as a Foreign Office legal adviser. It took on new significance during Covid-19, when Raab chaired a project called "Defend", which looked at where Britain's supply chains were vulnerable. "It seemed to me, and to the prime minister at the time, that critical minerals were going to be a big, big challenge."

At Appian, Raab is a sort of global ambassador for the firm's interests. One of his tasks is to chair a partnership on critical minerals with an American think tank called SAFE, which is advising the US state department.

Appian, set up in 2012, makes money by raising funds from investors to put into mid-sized mining projects. It brings these into production and typically sells them on after five years. Its operations range from a graphite mine in Brazil to a zinc project in Namibia. "I like private equity because they deal in five-year terms – it's quite like being a politician," says Raab. He was not "interested in just sitting on a board for the sake of it, or being hired out to clients. You want to look for where you add some value."

At Appian, he says, he has a "mission and a team". Has he had to get his head around geology? Does he know his cobalt (Co) from his copper (Cu)? Raab grimaces a little. It's a small criticism compared with what he used to face as foreign secretary.



Dominic Raab, who is working for a private equity firm, says China has "a stranglehold' on many vital minerals

CLARA MOLDEN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Anyway, geology sounds less fearsome than the Taliban. "We've got great people here who can unpack it for me. I know what I know and I know what I don't know. There's no point in me trying to give advice on the technical aspects of it. But certainly I've been getting my head around some of that."

While the UK might once have been a mining economy, today there is little activity, apart from a few start-ups attempting to extract tin and lithium in places such as Cornwall. How can we bend global supply chains to our will, and ensure we have the minerals we require?

"We need to expand the cluster of like-minded countries, high-trust countries, who can supply enough volume and range to effectively 'friend shore'," Raab says. By which he means shift the refining and processing of critical minerals to friendlier nations. He says Japan is an example to follow, as it has been canny in investing abroad and striking agreements to ensure its manufacturers have the supplies they need. "The UK has got to find a way to do something similar."

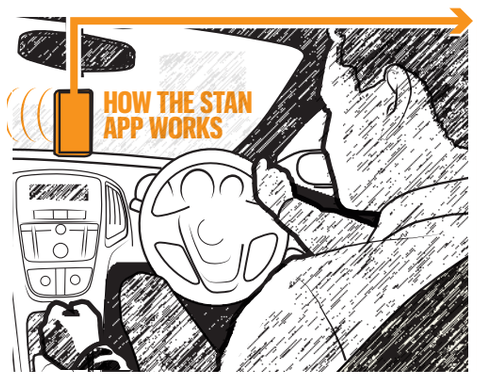
Raab did not stand in his former seat of Esher & Walton – which he had represented since 2010 and won with a majority of 2,743 in 2019 – in this summer's election. His majority would probably have been swept away but he says he made the decision to leave politics "a long time ago". The last straw came in April last year when he resigned as justice minister and deputy prime minister after being accused of bullying. He denied the allegations, but he also promised to resign if any complaints were upheld against him. The inquiry that followed did so, forcing his resignation. He was cleared of shouting and swearing at civil servants. Yet the report from the senior lawyer Adam Tolley KC said that Raab's style of working as a minister was "inquisitorial, direct, impatient and fastidious".

Appian will at least get value for their money. Tolley's report describes a man who worked relentlessly from 7.30am until late at night, and on weekends. Raab was found to have described the work of officials as "utterly useless" and "woeful" while he was justice secretary.

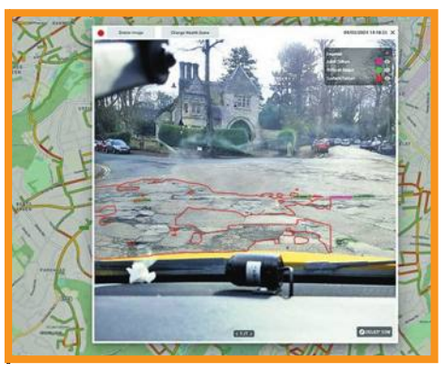
As Brexit dragged on and Theresa May resigned in 2019, Raab stood to replace her as prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party. He failed to get the 33 MPs' votes he needed to progress to the third round. The pinnacle of his power in politics was also a kind of nadir. Raab in effect governed the country for a few weeks when Boris Johnson was hospitalised with Covid in April 2020.

Raab has been following the latest leadership contest "peripherally", he says. He stays in contact with his old colleagues and friends, and wishes them well. "With any career change, there's a slight degree of trepidation," he adds. "I think the insecurity of politics prepares you for that quite well. It's fascinating and great fun working out how you put your expertise to some use in the private sector."

NEWS



1 The Stan App spots defects by automatically taking photos of the road every 0.5 seconds on a smartphone



2 It compiles a report on potholes, cracks and surface erosion, providing an exact location and time stamp. This is sent to local authorities

10,000-strong pothole army use an app to map Britain's rubbish roads

CIARAN MCCRICKARD FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Parents painted around potholes before a cycling event organised by Gemma Aellah, above, to ensure the safety of riders including her own children Lui, 11, and Eunita, 7

Nicholas Hellen Transport Editor

Four times in the past six months Alan Wild, a driving instructor, has had to buy tyres or have the suspension on his car repaired after hitting potholes. One of his pupils had the sidewall of a tyre torn while taking a test.

Wild's learners complained to the local council but nothing was done, and so he is fighting back. Wild has now joined a volunteer army of 10,000 pothole busters using an app to reveal the true state of the roads. The technology, using AI, is set to produce the first pothole map of Britain and may end the stand-off with some councils who fail to act on reports, campaigners claim, to avoid legal liability and repair costs.

Members of the public have submitted seven million photographs and maps since January, covering a seventh of the road network. In Worthing, West Sussex, about 40 per cent of roads have been surveyed. In Eastbourne, East Sussex, 27 per cent are covered. Only 3 per cent of Yorkshire's roads are charted. One driver reported 4,753 potholes in 31 days. Both the previous and present governments have said they want to solve the blight of potholes. The Department for Transport is due to announce shortly whether it will certify AI technology for surveys.

The cost of rutted and run-down roads to the economy is estimated at £14.4 billion a year, according to the Centre for Economics and Business Research. The author of its report, who had completed the Beijing to Paris car rally, concluded that Britain's roads were in a worse state than those of Russia and Kazakhstan.

KwikFit, the car repair chain, estimates that the annual cost in damage to vehicles is £1.49 billion.

Last month the National Audit Office found that although the Department for Transport spent £1.1 billion on local road maintenance in 2022-3, it did not know the full cost because almost two thirds of the network was not monitored. Traditional methods of checking the state of the roads are slow and expensive, typically involving inspections by council workers driving slowly and manually noting defects. Drivers can report potholes to the council, but this usually involves filling out an application form on a website.

The new app, Stan – short for Safer Travel Around Neighbourhoods – seeks to solve this. Wild, 58, downloaded it three months ago, and every time he sets out from his home in Corby, Northamptonshire, for a lesson, his phone is mounted on the windscreen of his Dacia Duster and records imagery of the road ahead.

> **The annual cost of rutted and run-down highways is estimated at £14.4bn**

Stan identifies potholes and various other defects, measuring their size and depth and then grading them from good to bad. It also notes the precise location of the pothole and logs it on a map. It has about 80 per cent accuracy because cameras find it hard to distinguish between shadows and standing water. The app can generate reports of the roads covered, with a map showing where defects are in order of seriousness, and short written explanations, photographs and video of what it has spotted.

Wild has logged 64 reports, covering 655 miles of road. The app can compile these and send them on to councils.

Tom Staniland, managing director of Metricell, the tech company that devised Stan, thought councils and National Highways, which are responsible for fixing roads, would welcome the information when the firm started sending it. He was wrong. He said: "The first reaction from the authorities to our offer to provide data has been, 'This is too much risk for us, it will open the floodgates to compensation claims. We couldn't afford to go out and fix all the potholes that your systems are able to tell us about'."

Research by the RAC found wildly varying approaches to reports of potholes by councils that replied to a survey. While 54 fixed a pothole of 4cm deep, six waited until they were 5cm deep and 13 stipulated that only those at least 30cm wide and 4cm deep would be fixed. The RAC is working with Stan and encouraging members to join it.

Mark Morrell, 63, a campaigner with a long career in road maintenance, who goes under the name of Mr Pothole, claims that a system created to protect councils from unreasonable compensation claims is having perverse consequences. Under section 58 of the Highways Act 1980, the local highway authority can defend itself from compensation claims by demonstrating that it has a reasonable system of inspection and repair.

Morrell said: "The intention was fair enough because councils can't know everything that is happening on their network, and then they should not be held liable. But I think they have been abusing section 58 by playing around with the intervention criteria – the size and the depth of the pothole."

Last year the government announced £8.3 billion of extra funding for potholes, using funds saved by scrapping the northern leg of HS2. Before the election Labour committed itself to fixing an additional one million potholes in England each year, but has not said whether it will stick to the Tory pledge, despite being urged to do so by the RAC, which wrote to Louise Haigh, the transport secretary, on July 12. Sources say it will consider what to do "in the coming months".

Meanwhile, some areas continue to be blighted by potholes. In the seaside resort of Eastbourne, parents had to spray-paint more than 100 in lurid pink before a mass cycle ride for young children could go ahead on May 19.

Gemma Aellah, 43, chairs Bespoke, the group which organised the event, and took her children Lui, 11, and Eunita, 7. "The roads have deteriorated since we started this event four years ago," she said. Ten weeks after the ride, she does not think the holes have been filled.

Morrell said that where he lives in Northamptonshire the council can take up to 26 weeks to fix a pothole. "If there's an incident during that 26-week period, they are protected under the law. That is a complete nonsense."

A Department for Transport spokesman said: "Rebuilding Britain means modernising our transport infrastructure, and we are absolutely committed to tackling the poor state of our roads. This includes supporting local authorities to fix up to one million more potholes in England a year."

Peter Thornton, transport spokesman for the County Councils Network, said Hertfordshire and Staffordshire were using AI and robots to repair potholes and councils would welcome a national policy. The Local Government Association said there was a £16.3 billion backlog of repairs.

Editorial, page 18

Hours and pay turning teens off medical careers

The number of 18-year-olds applying to study medicine is down by 12 per cent in two years

Sian Griffiths Education Editor

The number of teenagers applying to study medicine has dropped by 12 per cent in just two years, amid fears they are being put off by pay levels, highlighted by a series of strikes, and the gruelling depiction of doctors' working lives in memoirs and TV dramas.

In 2022, official figures showed that 13,850 British 18-year-olds applied to study medicine, which has long been one of the most competitive courses, typically requiring an A* or A in three A-levels. They must also get a high score in a separate exam called the University Clinical Aptitude Test.

Only 12,100 applied this year, according to figures from Ucas (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), though it is above the 11,170 who applied in 2020. This number excludes foreign and mature students. There has been an even sharper drop in the number applying to study nursing, down 30 per cent since 2020 from 58,550 to 41,250 this year. It has been mandatory to have a nursing degree to work as a nurse for the NHS since 2013.

More than 50 universities will be advertising vacancies for medicine and other healthcare courses in the clearing system, which will step up a gear on Thursday when A-level results will be published. There are also 100 universities with vacancies in nursing degrees.

Vivienne Stern, chief executive of Universities UK, said: "Demand for healthcare courses has been declining in recent years – that's the exact opposite of the direction we should be heading in, but probably has [partly] to do with perceptions of careers in these fields."

The government has committed itself to expanding medical school places as part of its long-term workforce plan. This will see medical school places grow each year from 7,500 to 15,000 by 2031.

It comes amid a critical shortage of NHS staff and record waiting lists. Some universities with medical schools, which depend heavily on student fees, are also already in severe financial difficulties.

Adam Kay wrote a bestselling book, *This is Going to Hurt*, about his experience as a junior doctor, which includes traumatic moments such as performing a caesarean on a woman with undiagnosed placenta praevia in which the baby died.

"I am still hearing on Twitter from people [working in the NHS] who were not given the full day off for their own wedding," he said. "I know someone who was not given compassionate leave when their fiancée was in intensive care as a patient because protocol said they had to be married. Treating people well is more than just paying them well. Doctors are rightly being vocal about the issues they face at work and people have heard."

Parents regularly complain to him that his book has put off their children from studying medicine, but he responds: "If that book is going to put you off medicine, medicine is really going to put you off medicine. I believe it is a job you have to do with your eyes wide open. At the moment, medicine is an unattractive proposition, which is a huge shame."

ALAMY



£35,000

Salary for a junior doctor starting out

Graduation day at St Andrews. More than 50 universities will have places for medicine and other healthcare courses at clearing

> **NHS staff were not given the full day off for their own wedding**

It is a big change from the pandemic when doctors and nurses were heroes who inspired a flood of teenagers to sign up to NHS careers.

Medicine, which used to be seen as a well-paid profession, is not even in the top ten of degree courses paying the highest salaries, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency. The data, which looks at salaries six months after graduation, found the biggest winners were computer science graduates from Imperial College London in 2022, the latest year for which data is available. They were typically paid £64,000 in the first year after graduating, compared with £35,000 for a junior doctor at the start of their career, although this can rise quickly. Those who become consultants will earn a starting salary of £99,532 and can earn up to £132,000.

Dr Rachel Clarke, whose book *Breathtaking* revealed the brutal reality of working on Covid wards, has said it is "wild" that junior doctors earn a starting salary of "£15 an hour", and that nurses could earn more "working in Aldi".

Dame Clare Marchant, vice-chancellor at the University of Gloucestershire, said applications for nursing were 20-25 per cent down on last year and that she feared recent riots would deter overseas students from applying to all universities.

Professor Graham Baldwin, vice-chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire, confirmed the university, which is running a financial deficit, was in clearing for most courses, including medicine. Other universities with medical school vacancies in clearing include St George's medical school in south London, Bangor University and Buckingham University, which is asking for ABB. More are expected to advertise on Thursday.

The number of lucrative overseas students applying to UK medical schools has also fallen, according to Ucas. Overseas students pay fees of up to £67,000 a year compared with £9,250 a year for a UK student. The government caps the number of overseas students medical schools can accept at a total of around 750.

The overall total applying to start this autumn – including 18-year-olds, mature students and overseas students – is down from 31,940 in 2022 to 26,610.

The Department of Health said "the NHS has been facing chronic workforce shortages for years" and it was committed to "training the staff we need to get patients seen on time, including more doctors. It added that it would "deliver the NHS long-term workforce plan".

Additional reporting: Nicole Gibbons

APPLICATIONS TO STUDY MEDICINE

Year	UK applicants aged 18	Total*
2024	12,100	26,610
2023	13,040	29,290
2022	13,850	31,940
2021	13,190	30,810
2020	11,170	25,020

*Total includes overseas students and UK students including 18-year-olds and mature students

Source: Ucas

Pioneering test finally told us what was wrong with our boy

Shaun Lintern Health Editor

Walking through the children's ward at Stoke Mandeville Hospital last December, Amanda Cole held back tears. She didn't want to alarm her seven-year-old daughter, Georgia, over the devastating diagnosis doctors had just given her younger brother Ben.

Cole, 37, and her husband Rich, of Tring, Hertfordshire, had never been able to understand why Ben, five, had trouble with his strength, co-ordination and speech.

Last year they were told for certain that he would never improve: a genetic test had shown why he hadn't reached developmental milestones. "It was a mixture of shock and grief," Cole said. "There was relief to have an explanation but that was followed by just a lot of sadness."

The NHS is building a unique genetic database to help researchers and doctors understand a greater range of conditions. By June this year, the equivalent of 100,000 whole genomes – the entire genetic information of an individual – had been sequenced.

Ben is one of the patients who have had their genomes sequenced by the groundbreaking NHS Genomic Medicine Service. By comparing Ben's DNA with that of his parents, scientists identified that he has an ultra-rare mutation on one gene, known as the NFIX gene, which affects production of a vital protein for brain and muscle development. Ben's condition is known as Malan syndrome, which affects about 350 people worldwide. Until last year's test results, his parents could not know why he was different.

"There had always been a little hope that because he is relatively young he might catch up, he might grow out of it," Cole continued. "But now we know there is a biological reason: he will never change because it is literally in his DNA."

Cole, who works as a health economics researcher, now knows more about what to expect as Ben grows up. "It gives you the language to explain to people why Ben finds things difficult," she said.

Cole is part of a WhatsApp group of about 150 families affected by the condition, and has travelled to a medical conference organised by the Malan Syndrome Foundation. "We are learning more from each other than we are from the medical teams," she said.

Ben has been welcomed by his fellow pupils at Grove Road Primary School, in Tring, and because he is non-verbal he signs using the Makaton system.

The NHS became the first health system in the world to use a whole genome sequencing service as part of routine care in 2020. "A lot of other countries are looking to replicate what we are doing," said Professor Dame Sue Hill, England's chief scientific officer. "It's most definitely the future of healthcare."

New gene therapies for conditions such as spinal muscular atrophy and sickle cell disease are already being used by the NHS. These target faulty genes to reverse the symptoms to allow people to live normal lives. The number of these kinds of treatments is expected to rise dramatically, partly as a result of greater genome testing and research by drug companies using specific drugs to target particular genes.

JOSHUA BRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Amanda Cole with Ben, whose condition affects 350 people

COMMENT

Rod Liddle



One wallaby escapes and it's a quick hop to wanting all the non-natives sent home

A wallaby has been spotted mooching around a golf course in Nottinghamshire, poking its little nose out of the rough, playing off a handicap of 12. It had been seen a few days before, investigating the pleasant former coal-mining town of Calverton, perhaps with a view to settling down or maybe just to take in the Roman ruins, who knows.

Locals reckoned it must have escaped from someone's private collection, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it had hopped its way southeast from the Peak District, where there was once a large population of the creatures. They had escaped from the private zoo at Roaches Hall, between Buxton and Leek, during the Second World War and while some consider this pioneering colony extinct, a beguiling photograph was taken of one of them only seven years ago.

There are quite a few settlements of these kangaroo-lite marsupials in the UK – around Loch Lomond, for example, and especially on the Isle of Man, where there are even more wallabies than scousers on the lam.

What do you suppose was the reaction of the local wildlife trusts to these sightings in what was once Sherwood Forest? "Oh wow! A wallaby? Brilliant. They're so cute!" No, that wasn't the response. Instead the Nottingham Wildlife Trust's "head of communications" said: "If numbers of wallabies are present and establish a breeding population this would be a concern as our native UK wildlife is already under threat."

What wildlife seven miles from Nottingham city centre would be under threat, exactly? Rabbits? Mice? Or is this particular tranche of the East Midlands festooned with mammalian exotica – herds of wild yaks, ferocious sun bears and shy pangolin?

But the wildlife trust was sadly bang on message, because all our wildlife charities these days take an approach to nature that would ring a bell with members of the British National Party. If it's foreign, kick it out. Or shoot it.

You may wonder why I am rabbiting on about wallabies when our town centres are being razed by coked-up thugs. Well, the truth is this stuff really irks me. You look at that statement from the trust and the obvious riposte is: "Listen, mate. It's not a few wallabies that pose a threat to our native wildlife. It's housing developments, pesticides, the fragmentation of habitats and people paving over their front gardens so they can park their hideous Nissan Jukes. In other words, it's us."

But as I say, the trust is only toeing the same old line that you will hear from, for example, the RSPB. Periodically our most loved charity contemplates how to do in all the parakeets that give people so much pleasure in the south of England and especially London. They come over here, taking our British nests, and so on. As a consequence in 2009 Natural England added parakeets to a list of birds landowners are allowed to shoot, despite the fact that the bird's main contribution to the environment has been to provide a colourful source of food for sparrowhawks and peregrines, which find them tasty – a kind of Indian takeaway. The numbers of these raptors is consequently soaring. But then, the eco charities work themselves into a proper lather about any animal which suddenly, for some reason (but usually via the hand of a human), finds itself in the United Kingdom.

"The RSPB talks of doing in all the parakeets. They come over here, taking our British nests . . ."

In the 1980s trappers were dispatched to the Norfolk Broads to send the delightful coypu to extinction, after some escaped from a fur farm, when its only real crime was to annoy sugar beet farmers. The poor mink is pursued relentlessly, despite the fact that it easily loses in any competition with native otters and that evidence for it eating water voles is thin on the ground. Stoats get culled when they make it to islands they have not been before. The wild boar of the Forest of Dean are just about the only creatures in that neck of the woods, aside from some of the humans, which are not afforded protection from being shot.

This all galls me for two reasons, one of them a bunny-hugging reason, the other philosophical. First, I think it unjust. It is not the mink's fault it is here, is it? I dislike the needless killing of any animal and the death of a mink upsets me no less than the death of a "British" water vole, a parakeet no less than a "British" blue tit.

The more substantial argument, however, is about the delusion of the biodiversity lobby. Once, we took the biblical view that all the animals were under our dominion, ours to do what we like with. Animal welfare organisations kid themselves that we no longer subscribe to that dictum, but of course we do: it's just that the criteria have changed. Our new bible is biodiversity and every animal must therefore be in its rightful place or it gets done away with, sharpish. It is every bit as arrogant and indeed cruel a principle as the one of old. So, free the Calverton One. Je Suis un Wallaby.

New cruise liners 'eight times bigger than Titanic'



PHOTOBUBBLE: ROLAND WHITE

● I've just spent a very enjoyable and productive couple of days with my godson, on the occasion of his second birthday.

He now knows exactly where to place a Lego brick so that his barefooted brother will step on it. He has become familiar with the terms "bumhole", "libtard" and "Millwaaaaaall". And the look of delight on his face was matched only by those of his parents as he played with my birthday gift to him, a drum kit.

My work here is not yet done, but it is progressing apace.

A dog perfume for £83? That's mutts

Dolce & Gabbana have brought out a new fragrance — for dogs. Inspired by Domenico Dolce's "unconditional love for his loyal dog", Fefé is a blend of ylang ylang, musk and sandalwood and is a snip at only £83.

Hurry, hurry, while stocks last. Spray it on your dog and then sit back and watch as it growls at you and then runs outside to roll in the first chunk of fox poo it can find.

Fefé, my sweet, if you're reading this — bite Domenico on the shin, or take a crap in his handbag. Whichever you prefer. I'll leave the choice to you, but both would be good.

Unexpected human in the bagging area

Asda is to employ more people on its checkouts. This is because it had noticed a drop in revenue after foisting self-service tills on its benighted customers. The tills were an innovation which, we were told, would save us time. Instead they made us wait for ages while some poor overworked sap came to authorise a payment or reboot the bloody screen.

Well done, Asda. The more we atomised people get the chance to interact with another human, the better. Unless that other human is Ed Davey, I suppose.

T BOOKS

Did your favourite book make the list?



We're celebrating 50 years of the Sunday Times Bestsellers List by revealing the top 100 titles. From beloved novels to groundbreaking non-fiction, find out if your favourite book made the list in a special edition of *Culture* on August 18.

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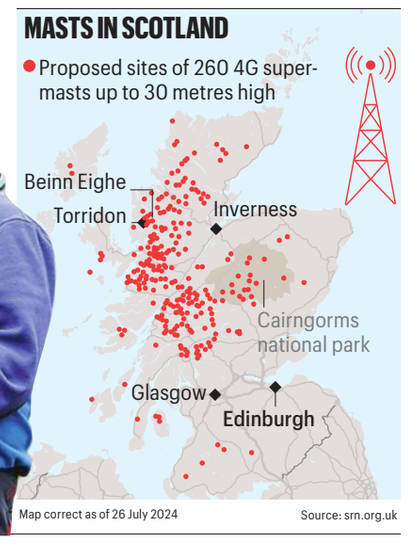
Signal failure

PETER JOLLY/NORTHPIX



Loch Torridon is in danger of being ruined by masts, says Caroline Hamilton, below with Matt Rudd





A £1bn plan to end phone blackspots means mega-masts are springing up across the Highlands. But in an unspoilt — and largely uninhabited — paradise, what's the point of them? *Matt Rudd* investigates

A mile up the glen from the road out of Torridon, the complex ridge of Beinn Eighe comes into view – and if my old geography teacher were here, he would barely be able to contain his excitement.

I am in the textbook U-shaped valley, hemmed in on both sides by a faceful of mountain. Behind and below me is Loch Torridon. Ahead and above is the forbidding 3,000ft ridge of Liathach. It is the sort of landscape that makes you feel very small and very happy.

"And that's where they want to build one of the masts," says Caroline Hamilton, interrupting my ode to joy. "This footpath would become an access track."

Hamilton, 61, was part of the only all-women expedition team to walk to both the North and South Poles. She is used to triumphing over adversity. But now, in her role as the chairwoman of the Torridon and Kinlochewe community council, she finds herself facing a different kind of challenge. She is trying to stop her beautiful part of the Scottish Highlands being "ruined" by mobile phone masts.

In 2019 Boris Johnson announced a £1 billion programme to eradicate mobile phone blackspots in rural areas by 2025. The mobile phone operators would contribute up to £530 million to upgrade areas with only limited signal (what they call "partial not-spots") and the taxpayer would chip in another £500 million to build infrastructure in areas not commercially viable ("total not-spots"). "We will," Johnson declared, "make poor mobile signal a thing of the past."

It sounded great – who doesn't want a better phone signal? – but five years on, the reality of the shared rural network is becoming apparent. The vast majority of total not-spots are in the Scottish Highlands. In order to create a 4G network across 95 per cent of these remote hills, the mobile phone operators want to erect up to 261 mega-masts, as high as 100ft. Many of them are far from roads, requiring engineered access tracks and generators. The most remote of them will need to be serviced by helicopter. It is quite the effort to keep a few sheep on WhatsApp.

On the path above Torridon, Hamilton is shaking her head. "It doesn't make any sense," she says. "No one lives or works up here. Walkers come here because it's remote and it's off the grid. Why would we ruin it with masts?"

Because you need a better signal, I suggest. "There are 350 people living in the Torridon area and we already have ten masts. We have a good signal thanks to the Scottish government's infill programme. Now they want to build 11 more, and nine of them are away from the roads." Then my phone rings … my youngest child is at the bus stop back in Kent. "Call Mum," I say and hang up.

This, locals say, is the most infuriating part of the scheme. In 2018, the Scottish government launched its infill programme to upgrade the rural mobile network. Costing tens of millions rather than hundreds of millions, it improved the signal in 55 not-spots across the Highlands, where EE put up many of the masts. Every local I spoke to last week is on EE, a practical response to the operator's effective monopoly.

"They told us it's not fair if you have to be on EE to call 999 if you have an accident," says Hamilton. "We asked why they couldn't share the existing masts and they said EE was charging too much. We asked why they couldn't stick their masts up in the same locations as the EE ones, and they said, 'No, it needs to be where there aren't any masts to qualify'."

Since 2009 it has been possible to make an emergency call on any network, regardless of which network you are on.

Neil Reid, 66, has been walking in the Cairngorms for more than half a century. He says the masts proposed in the national park will have a devastating impact. The application for a 65ft mast at Luibeg Bridge was withdrawn after objections but the contractor expects it to be resubmitted, "even though there is already mobile signal up there", according to Reid.

"When you're standing on the path nearest to the proposed mast, you're looking up the glen to a line of cliffs which top out at about 4,000ft. It really is an iconic view. And in the foreground, you're going to have this great mast and a tennis court-sized compound. If you look at the map of the masts, and you can look at a map of designated wild land areas, they're almost identical. There is, or should be, a presumption in favour of protecting these areas."

Thomas Widrow of the John Muir Trust, a conservation charity and one of a dozen organisations asking for a pause to the project, says: "The approach of the UK government is seriously flawed. Instead of consulting with communities in sparsely populated areas, ministers are imposing top-down targets whose prime objective seems to be filling in dots on maps rather than providing 4G cover for households and businesses who need to be connected."

For months, campaigners called for a meeting with Julia Lopez, the Conservative minister for data and digital infrastructure. She finally agreed but Rishi Sunak, the former prime minister, called a general election before a meeting could be scheduled. In the meantime, applications for masts are being submitted at a rate of about six per week, and Highland councils are struggling to keep up. "They're paid, we're volunteers," says Hamilton. A Facebook group lists all the proposed masts, and word of the threat is spreading through the hills.

"I had no idea," says Abby Popplestone, 35, when she stops for a chat by a stream. She is on her way to meet 14 American tourists on a day trek – her company Backroads Travel specialises in "off-the-beaten-track" tours – and she is appalled at the thought of a mast on Sail Mhor, a peak in the Beinn Eighe range. "We'll have to change our routes," she says. "It's a terrible idea."

Ben Roome, chief executive of Digital Mobile Spectrum and the man responsible for the rollout, does not agree. "Shared sites providing coverage from all four operators are far more beneficial than partial coverage from any one operator," he says. "It maximises the benefits of any new infrastructure." When I ask if the project is outdated given the infill programme, he says: "The purpose … is to provide 4G coverage irrespective of operator on 4G devices. Areas with no 4G coverage remain in Scotland, which significantly lags behind other nations."

The sun comes out as Hamilton and I walk back down the glen and distant peaks emerge from the clouds. Three more applications have been submitted during my time in the Highlands and the deadline to erect the masts comes closer. They will be built or the phone companies will get fined. Or perhaps the new government will think again?

Mrs Hairy Biker had new meal every day

Will Lloyd

The widow of Dave Myers, the Hairy Biker who died of cancer in February, has revealed that he never cooked her the same meal during their 17 years together.

Liliana Myers said her husband did all the cooking at home and "his passion for life came through particularly when he was cooking … My husband served up love on a plate." She told the Daily Mail in an interview: "We were together for 17 years and in that time we never ate the same meal twice. In the cupboard I still have hundreds of jars of ingredients I don't use."

They met in 2005 when Myers was filming the first series of *The Hairy Bikers' Cookbook* in Romania, where Liliana is from. At the time she was managing a hotel and she showed him to his bedroom when he came to stay. Myers and Liliana married in 2011. They initially planned to have 40 guests at their wedding but ended up with 400.

Myers considered Iza and Sergiu, his wife's children from her first marriage, as his own. "For many years my biggest regret was the fact I hadn't had children," Myers once said. "But when I married Lil I had this ready-made family with two stepchildren and it brought me such joy."

An outpouring of support for the family followed Myers's death. On "Dave Day" in June, 46,000 bikers rode from London to Cumbria.



Dave and Liliana Myers were together for 17 years

Infrared saunas — a trick of the light that leaves A-listers glowing

Katie Tarrant

Daisy Ridley's *Star Wars* character Rey might rely on the curative power of the Force, but when the actress revealed that in real life she uses infrared saunas, she joined a growing number of Brits who are also hooked on their restorative powers.

Ridley, who spoke last week for the first time about being diagnosed with the autoimmune disorder Graves' disease, said she swears by the saunas' beneficial qualities.

Unlike a traditional sauna, which heats the air, infrared saunas have panels that emit red light and electromagnetic radiation, part of the infrared spectrum. Red LED light travels deeper into the skin and muscle than blue LED light, which is sometimes used to treat superficial skin conditions such as acne.

Lower temperatures mean people can comfortably sit in the saunas for longer, and proponents of red-light therapy claim it can help skin, muscle tissue and cells within the body heal. Celebrities including the actresses Gwyneth Paltrow and Selena Gomez love them, as does the singer Lady Gaga.

Paltrow has said she walks out "feeling much more relaxed – and glowy, too", while Gaga gets in regular sessions to ease her fibromyalgia muscle spasms.

Athletes also use infrared saunas, which are believed to help deliver oxygen to muscle cells for faster repair and pain relief.

Now high-end gyms and spas including the members' club Soho House and LondonCryo centre in Belgravia, central London, have installed the saunas, which can cost tens of thousands of pounds.

JK Health & Beauty Technologies Group, which supplies infrared technology in the UK, said sales of red-light and near-infrared products have doubled in the past year.

Kate Ellis, 46, the manager of Serenity Poynton beauty clinic in Stockport, said that since the business invested in an infrared spa during lockdown, client numbers have tripled.

"It started off with the odd person, but we've seen interest grow from people across the country," she said. "Now, we don't have a day where someone doesn't come in to use it."

Ellis said the demographic of customers varies from young women interested in holistic therapies to older clients who use it for aches and pains. The clinic offers one-time sessions for £35 or an unlimited month-long course for £199.

Earlier this year, an elderly woman with fibromyalgia used the infrared sauna every day for a month and "couldn't believe the difference in her pain", Ellis said. "People use it for depression, eczema, pain relief and lowering blood sugar. It's been really good for business," she added.



Gwyneth Paltrow says she's "glowy"

Andrea Pfeffer, 47, the founder of Salon C Stellar in central London, which uses infrared technology in facial treatments, believes the trend is indicative of the increased popularity of "biohacking", which claims that using technology for wellness procedures can help people live longer.

"One of the most popular biohacking tools is light therapy," she said. Pfeffer herself started having regular courses of infrared sessions in 2015 and said she instantly noticed her skin was smoother, and that the heat and moisture levels felt less suffocating than in a traditional sauna.

"We all want to live for longer and we want to live well," she said. "I think over the next few years you'll see luxury homes and gyms move fully into this space, building infrared panels into showers."

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WORLD NEWS

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Trump's lost control of the war for the White House. Can he find an attack that works?

Kamala Harris and her running-mate Tim Walz have turned the tables on the former president with a message of pure optimism. But they may be vulnerable on migration and the economy

Louise Callaghan New York

When Donald Trump fantasised on social media last week that the president might try to steal back the Democratic nomination from Kamala Harris, he sounded almost wistful. Trump knew how to beat President Biden.

For years he battered his rival as a senile, doddering old man. Three weeks ago Biden stepped down. Trump won. But in winning the battle he changed the war. Now he faces an energetic opponent almost 20 years younger. He appears uncertain how to engage with her and is lashing out.

"I think he's having a crackup," said Mike Murphy, a Republican political consultant who has long been critical of Trump. "He was waltzing through an easy campaign and now he's a little behind, it's going to be a very tough campaign, and he's not handling it well."

The election began in earnest last week. The frenzy that followed the attempted assassination of Trump and Biden's resignation has subsided. Harris, riding a wave of relieved enthusiasm among Democrats, picked her running mate: Tim Walz, the governor of Minnesota, who brings progressive policies with a heavy dose of "Midwestern dad" cosiness to the ticket.

After years of floundering, the Democrats have found a message that seems to be working: they're the party of normal people. The Maga Republicans are, in Walz's words, "weird" – the kind of people who "ruin Thanksgiving" and are trying to drag America into the past. Harris and Walz are instead projecting optimism. Republicans are hitting back by painting them as extreme leftwingers.

Yet, while Trump's acolytes hammer away, the boss is having trouble staying on message. Polls provide a clue to why he might be unsettled. A Marquette University Law School survey showed Harris winning 50 per cent of likely voters to Trump's 42 per cent when third party candidates are included. Three months ago the same poll had Trump three percentage points ahead of Biden.

As Trump's camp tries to regroup and regain the initiative, here are the attacks that Harris and Walz can expect to face.

LEFT-WING 'THREAT'

Whit Ayres, a Republican pollster, said by choosing Walz, Harris had missed an opportunity to bring in disaffected Republicans who might have voted for her to bring down Trump.

A concerted effort, led by JD Vance, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, to depict Walz as soft on crime because of his handling of riots in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in 2020 foundered when a recording appeared of Trump, as president, praising the governor's approach. But there is plenty in Walz's record to anger conservatives.

"This is a ticket that would want this country to go communist immediately," Trump claimed last week on a call with the TV chat show *Fox and Friends*.

As governor Walz granted driving licences to migrants who had entered the US illegally, made free school meals compulsory for all pupils, provided trans patients with access to medical care as part of their gender transition and ordered schools to place free menstrual products in their lavatories.

The problem for Republicans is that Walz's folksy demeanour undermines suggestions that he is a dangerous radical. Trump seems unable to avoid hyperbole in his attacks.

"Everything is overkill," Murphy said. "The key to a negative campaign is to be credible and subtle and relentless, with a message based in truth."

UNNECESSARY RACE ROW

The inroads that Republicans were making with non-white voters were among the Democrats' biggest concerns when Biden was the candidate. Trump's on-stage interview at a meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists last month was an opportunity to renew his pitch to black voters. Instead he tried to convince them that Harris wasn't really black. "She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indian heritage," he said. "I didn't know she was black until a number of years ago when she happened to turn black."



Harris and Walz campaigned in Minnesota, while Trump was at a rally in Montana

As Rachel Scott, a senior congressional correspondent for ABC News, pointed out that Harris is biracial, he mused: "I don't know, is she Indian or is she black?"

Trump appeared to be reaching for an old formula. He first made an impact in US politics by questioning whether Barack Obama had been born outside America, and was thus ineligible to be president. Harris's mother is Indian and her father is Jamaican. She joined a historically black sorority while at university and was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and has spoken often of her pride in her heritage. "I'm black, and I'm proud of being black, and I was born black, I will die black," she said on radio in 2019.

Darrell Scott, a Pentecostal minister and informal adviser to Trump, said the former president faced "constraints on dialogue" because he was a white man facing off against a biracial woman. "She has a number of victim cards," said Scott, who is black. "She can retreat behind the race card. So if he says anything negative about her, he's a racist." He added that Harris hadn't, in his view, had the "cultural black experience" of being an "American descendant of slaves".

"Here's the thing," he said. "She's not an African American."

One Republican donor, who is reluctantly supporting Trump, said there were concerns in the party over Trump's insistence on attacking Harris's ethnicity.

"It's exasperating. This is the most left-wing ticket of all time and he [Trump] is out there saying she isn't black? That is insulting people we don't need to be insulting, when there's a perfectly great argument we could be using instead."

WAR OF WORDS

Before running for Congress, Walz spent 24 years in the Army National Guard, serving primarily in Nebraska and Minnesota. He retired from his unit a few months before they were deployed for a brutal 22-month stint in Iraq. Walz's supporters point out that he submitted his retirement papers months before they were told they'd be going.

Yet in a nation that venerates the armed forces, a suggestion that a candidate has inflated their military record, known as "stolen valour", can prove devastating. Twenty years ago the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth political advocacy group accused John Kerry, the Democratic presidential nominee and a decorated Vietnam war hero, of lying about his service record. One of the architects of those attacks, which neutralised a key Kerry strength, was Chris LaCivita, who is now Trump's campaign manager.

Vance, a former US marine who served in Iraq – as a public affairs officer, not in combat – mocked an advert from the Harris campaign, where Walz talks about gun control by proposing restrictions on "weapons of war, that I carried in war".

Vance responded: "Well, I wonder, Tim Walz, when were you ever in war? When was this?"

Walz's team later said he "misspoke".

Trump avoided serving in the Vietnam War, saying he had bone spurs in his feet.

> **He's insulting people we don't need to be insulting**

ECONOMIC NOSTALGIA

Stephen Moore, an economist close to Trump, expects enthusiasm for Harris and Walz to tail off after the Democratic National Convention this month. Soon, he said, voters will return to "kitchen table" issues such as inflation under Biden and Harris's leadership.

"They want the election to be about social issues and abortion, and we want it to be about the economy," he said. "A lot of it will depend on how the economy shapes up over the course of the next two and a half months ... if the economy starts to sink, then it's going to be almost impossible for Kamala to win."

Biden and Harris are proud of their economic record, particularly the Inflation Reduction Act and the Chips and Science Act, which created incentives to produce semiconductors – huge investments in clean energy that have sent hundreds of billions of dollars pouring into moribund manufacturing industries.

Yet polls and focus groups suggest that many Americans are nostalgic for the pre-pandemic economy of the Trump presidency. Under Biden inflation peaked in 2022 at 9.1 per cent. Now it has cooled to just under 3 per cent, but Democrats are struggling to persuade voters that "Bidenomics", a term repeatedly emphasised by Biden himself and now weaponised by Republicans, was anything but a disaster.

BORDER WEAKNESS

Even Harris's allies concede that her biggest personal weakness lies on the US-Mexico border.

Early in her vice-presidency, as she was struggling to find a role, Biden asked Harris to look at root causes of migration to the United States. Though she was never put in charge of enforcement, Republicans have relished the chance to paint her as Biden's "border tsar" who let hundreds of thousands of people flow into the country unchecked.

In an interview with Lester Holt on NBC News in 2021, Harris mangled an answer over whether she'd visited the border as vice-president. After claiming, "We've been to the border", Holt pointed out that she hadn't. Harris laughed, and said: "And I haven't been to Europe". It has become a clip that she can't escape.

In December "encounters" on the southwestern border, a rough measure of the number of people trying to cross, hit a record 302,000, according to the US Border Patrol. By June they had fallen to 130,000, still more than four times the monthly average from 2013 to 2019.

Harris has received support from mayors in border cities and at a rally in Arizona on Friday she accused Trump of being more interested in exploiting the problems at the border than resolving them. But she is not close to shaking off the "border tsar" tag.

Concern over immigration powered Trump's first presidential run in 2016 and the issue has only become more potent since then.

It may yet offer him his best route back to the White House.

Our high school team was getting trounced. Coach Walz made us winners

Megan Agnew

It was halfway through the American football season and Tim Walz was standing in front of a chalkboard.

He was assistant coach of the struggling 1999 Mankato West High School varsity team in Minnesota, which had just been trounced by Owatonna High. Walz was persuading the head coach that they should change the team's defensive alignment. He agreed. The team, the Scarlets, then had to learn the formation in a week.

"We all bought into it," said John Considine, 43, who played right tackle, one of the players who protects the quarterback. "He told us we could resurrect the season. And we did. That was the turning point." From the next game, the team went on a winning streak then were crowned state champions, the first time in the school's history.

The Democrats will be hoping that Walz, 60, can do the same part-way through their own election season as they call him off the subs' bench and on to the field as their new vice-presidential candidate.

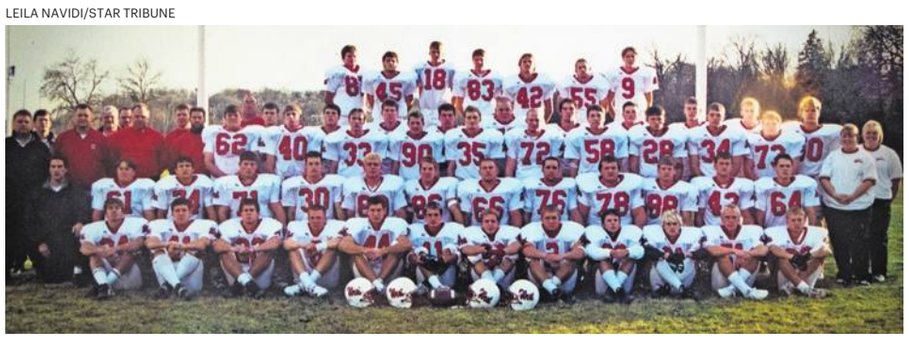
Now the governor of Minnesota, Walz spent more than a decade of his career as a geography, history and government teacher, mostly in Mankato, then a town of about 40,000 people with a big farming community. Former students remember a man with bouncing enthusiasm who couldn't stop socialising, who acted as a fatherly figure and set high standards for others. While Republicans are saying that his Midwestern niceties and charm are an act that disguises dangerous left-wing policies, his own team is pushing the football persona hard, with his running mate Kamala Harris calling him loudly, proudly and often: "Coach Walz".

The Scarlets' former head coach Rick Sutton, 62, met Walz when the future politician first moved to the town with his wife, Gwen, from Nebraska, helping them unpack the removal van.

"Very early on in that conversation I knew I wanted him on my staff [on the football team]," he said. "You could tell immediately he cared." Where Sutton was the "disciplinarian", Walz brought "energy and enthusiasm' as the team's defensive co-ordinator.

The football team, at that point, was a little ropey. They lost 27 games straight when the two coaches started their first season together in 1996. "What was so frustrating for us was that expectations were so low," Sutton said. "We had to fight through that. Then we had to convince our players to be more dedicated."

LEILA NAVIDI/STAR TRIBUNE



The 1999 Mankato West High School team became state champions for the first time with Tim Walz as assistant coach



Tim Walz

The team trained every night after school for two hours until about 6pm. After their Friday night game there would be a debrief on Saturday morning, back at school. "It is two full-time jobs," said Sutton, who also taught English.

It wasn't until the 1999-2000 season that things started going right for the team. One of the players, Considine, remembers the motivational pre-game speeches from Walz: "He had high standards for us and did a great job motivating young men to do their absolute best." Their state victory was "pure jubilation", Considine said. "It was unheard of."

Bryce Tillman, 40, then offensive guard, now an engineer, remembers Walz's "integrity". At school, Walz was relentlessly sociable, standing in the middle of the corridor outside his classroom to chat to students between lessons. Some would cut their lunch break short to go to his room. When he taught government, he created a class project in which students had to pitch a new bill – and took his class to rallies supporting John Kerry and George W Bush during the 2004 presidential election.

Walz was born in West Point, Nebraska, a town of about 4,000 people, where he played football through high school. After joining the Army National Guard, though Republicans point out that he never served in a combat zone, he went to Chadron State College and then became a high school teacher, where he met his wife and began his football coaching career. They have two children, Hope, 23, and Gus, 17. In 2006 he was elected to the House of Representatives for Minnesota and re-elected five times, before becoming governor in 2018.

Dan Clement, 43, a linebacker with the Scarlets, said that Walz was the first father figure he ever had. "Other folks had written me off because I'd been skipping school, getting suspended, getting detentions, drinking and drugging," he said.

He believes the politician was "critical" to his eventual graduation. Clement now owns his own logistics business. "Mankato was stoic, keep it to yourself, don't get out of line," he said. "So Walz was kind of a fish out of water: big personality, outgoing, interested. He just pulls you in whether you like it or not."

Cup of coffee saved passenger from boarding doomed Brazilian aircraft

Investigation begins amid theory that a build-up of ice caused crash that killed all 62 passengers and crew

Stephen Gibbs Caracas

As passengers arrived at the Cascavel airport in Brazil for the short flight to Sao Paulo, none would know the consequences of their last-minute decisions.

Adriano Assis, a hospital worker from Rio de Janeiro, decided to grab a coffee while he waited for the check-in counter to open. Laiana Vasatta, a lawyer, had intended to travel with her husband, Fabio Bigolin, on an earlier flight but was delayed, so she bought one of the last seats available on Voepass flight 2283.

Daniela Schulz and Hiales Fodra, who were heading on to America to celebrate her birthday, made sure that they were ready to board early for the 1-hour 40-minute flight.

"We will soon be at our destination" an excited Schulz had told her social media followers that morning.

She and her husband, both fitness enthusiasts, were among the 62 passengers and crew killed in Brazil's worst air crash since 2007 when an aircraft crashed and burst into flames at Congonhas airport in Sao Paulo, killing 199 people.

Victims of the crash on Friday, which killed everyone on board, included Vasatta, 32, who had gathered a loyal following on social media owing to her advice and posts on how to avoid hidden charges by airlines.

As the ATR 72-500 twin-engine turboprop began its initial approach to Guarulhos international airport, something, possibly a buildup of ice, caused it to enter into a slow flat spin, bringing the aircraft hard into the ground in the town of Vinhedo, about 40 miles from its destination.

Assis had missed the flight, having inadvertently given himself too little time to check in. He had an angry exchange with a Voepass attendant, when he had pleaded in vain to be allowed to board.

Visibly shocked, he re-assessed the encounter once he realised that sheer luck, and the airline official's diligence, had spared him. "He ended up saving my life", the tearful hospital worker said.

All of the passengers that died had Brazilian travel documents, according to the airline. Portugal's foreign ministry said that one Portuguese citizen was among the victims.

The cause of the crash remains unknown. Several residents in Vinhedo posted picture of the aircraft spiralling down from the sky, with the sound of at least one engine roar clearly heard. The aircraft broke up and burst into flames on impact in the garden of a small apartment block. All the victims were badly burnt.



The twin-engine turboprop aircraft went into a flat spin as it began its approach to Guarulhos airport, Sao Paulo

> **The man who didn't let me on saved my life**

"We can identify them by the rows where they were sitting, from the cockpit to the tail," one of the firefighters at the scene told local media. "All the bodies are as if they were sitting in the seats," he added.

Yesterday, forensic teams were still working to gather evidence from the site.

The Sao Paulo public security secretary, Guilherme Derrite, said that the aircraft's black box had been recovered and a detailed investigation had begun into the cause of the crash.

Flight tracking data showed that the twin-engine turboprop aircraft dropped 17,000 feet in just one minute.

"We can see a plane with loss of support, no horizontal speed. In this flat spin condition, there's no way to reclaim control of the plane," Lito Sousa, a Brazilian aviation expert, told the Associated Press.

Although some military and aerobatics pilots train for recovery from "flat spins", it is not part of the training for pilots of large commercial aircraft, with the focus being on avoidance. A severe and unexpected buildup of ice on the wings or tail of the aircraft is being considered as one possible cause of the accident.

Marcel Moura, director of operations for Voepass, told reporters that while there were forecasts for ice, they were "within acceptable levels" for the aircraft.

"We are waiting for access to all communications between the pilot and the control tower to have a broader understanding of what happened," Eduardo Busch, the airline's chief executive, told a press conference.

The Brazilian air force's centre for the investigation and prevention of air accidents, which is leading the inquiry, said that the aircraft's crew did not call for help or say that they were operating under adverse weather conditions.

The pilot has been named as Danilo Santos Romano, 35, who had at least ten years' experience as a commercial pilot. He had been with the Voepass airline since 2022. The co-pilot was Humberto de Campos Alencar e Silva, 61.

Among the victims, there were several doctors who had been flying to a seminar in Sao Paulo.

The widow, the art student and a row over a €500m Côte d'Azur hotel

Peter Conradi Nice

It is cocktail hour at the Negresco hotel in Nice and the last rays of sunshine are falling on its pink cupola, high above the Mediterranean.

On the terrace, guests sip the special – the Legend Royal Negresco, a €35-a-pop champagne cocktail. A sign lists the hotel's rates, capping out at €5,700 a night.

All seems calm but behind the scenes a fight is raging over this jewel of the Côte d'Azur – said to be worth £300 million to €500 million – to be resolved next month by France's highest court.

Jeanne Augier, the hotel's eccentric owner, died childless aged 95 in 2019. The case centres on Pierre Couette, almost six decades her junior, and relatives who claim they are being denied their inheritance.

On September 25 the Cour de Cassation is due to rule on a final appeal against the decisions of two lower courts that found Couette not guilty of *abus de faiblesse* – taking advantage of Augier's incapacity for his advantage.

If it rules in Couette's favour he will effectively take control of the Negresco as the chairman for life of a private foundation into which the hotel and Augier's other assets have been placed.

The validity of her 2009 will has long been contested by her family – chief among them her cousin Madeleine Marie, who herself died in 2021, leaving her descendants to continue her battle.

"Jeanne Augier was an old lady and was losing her mind a bit. We have testimony from people who said she was being manipulated," said Olivia Marie, Marie's granddaughter.

Such accusations have been denied by Couette since they surfaced almost a decade ago – by which time Augier had retreated into her sixth floor apartment at the Negresco accompanied by her dogs: Lili, a shar-pei, and Lilou, a Yorkshire terrier.

"While it's true that Madame Jeanne Augier showed me the affection she might have shown to the son she never had, I have never claimed anything, either in her estate or in any future inheritance," Couette wrote in 2016. His lawyer did not respond to a request from The Sunday Times to comment.

The hotel was built in 1913 by Henri Negresco, a Romanian-born violinist who worked his way up to be the maître d'hôtel of various establishments on the Riviera. He counted the Rockefellers, the Singer sewing machine dynasty and the Aga Khan as his friends.

The last word in luxury, it had 128 rooms, a royal salon with a stained-glass ceiling by Gustave Eiffel and a 16,000-piece chandelier originally ordered by Russia's last tsar.

By the late 1950s however the hotel was in disrepair. Salvation came in the form of Augier's parents who had made a fortune with *hôtels de passe* used by couples for discreet trysts.

GETTY IMAGES



The pink dome of the Negresco is said to have been inspired by the bust of Henri Negresco's mistress

Their daughter had grander plans for the Negresco. The result was an extraordinary hotel-museum that reflected Augier's love of pre-Revolutionary art and more kitsch modern works, many of which are still on its walls today.

Among Augier's guests – and friends – were Princess Grace of Monaco and Salvador Dalí who walked around with an ocelot on a leash. In 1967 Paul McCartney wrote *The Fool on the Hill* on the hotel notepaper.

The origins of the dispute lie in 2005 when Couette, a 25-year-old student, pitched up to write a thesis on its art collection.

Augier, then 80, quickly warmed to the young man. "He seduced her but in a friendly rather than an amorous way," claims Jean-Philippe Hugot, a lawyer who represents Marie's family.

Couette was soon staying at the hotel, on the payroll as a "cultural adviser".

For the family, the extent of his influence was shown by Augier's will, which created the foundation to ensure the hotel was not sold.

Cousin Madeleine, her children and grandchildren were not convinced, however, and their suspicions grew after 2012 when Augier, then 88, was diagnosed with dementia and placed under financial guardianship.

"The issue was whether she was already suffering from this condition when she wrote her will," Hugot said.

Then in 2016, Jean-Michel Prêtre, Nice's public prosecutor, became involved, telling a newspaper that "a certain number of close friends and acquaintances may have profited".

Among such alleged profiteers was Couette.

What was already a tangled tale then became even more complicated when in 2019 it emerged that Prêtre himself was being investigated by anti-corruption police on suspicion of planning to profit from a sale by favouring a potential buyer. The case against him has still to come to court but other officials have since also become implicated in the affair.

The family meanwhile is bracing itself for next month's judgment, which Hugot expects will vindicate Couette. "The hotel will never become his private property," he said.

"But as the sole member for life of the foundation, he will be the hotel's real boss."

Ambassador without a country who's defying the Taliban from London limbo

Christina Lamb
Chief Foreign Correspondent

During the past two months the Afghan ambassador has attended diplomatic receptions, the state opening of parliament and a garden party at Buckingham Palace where he chatted with the King.

Zalmai Rassoul receives visitors in a grand room of an imposing embassy building opposite Hyde Park from which flies his country's flag, as an assistant brings a tray of tea and ginger snaps. He still has a cook and driver. But the government that sent him has not existed for three years.

When the Taliban seized Kabul in August 2021 and declared their Islamic emirate, President Ashraf Ghani jumped in a helicopter with much of his cabinet and fled. His man in London, however, stayed on in his embassy.

"It's a very unique situation," he says with a rueful smile. "I'm an ambassador without a country. I think in the diplomatic world this has never happened. Usually when a country doesn't recognise a regime, there's a government in exile – but here, there's nothing. When people ask, 'Who do you represent?' I say, 'I represent Afghan people'."

JOSHUA BRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Zalmai Rassoul at the embassy: his situation is 'unique'

At the recent state opening of parliament he found himself in the second row, as he now ranks 32nd in protocol based on length of service in London. But over time many countries have dropped him off their invitation list, including some that had troops in Afghanistan. India has cut him from its list; most recently, Turkey did. Around a dozen European nations still invite him, and there are British government receptions, so there is usually something each week. "It's difficult for me to go to these receptions," he says. "If you don't have a country or government, it's to say what?"

Once a month he meets someone from the Foreign Office for lunch, alternating between King Charles Street and his embassy. Almost no one drops by. "It's a bit lonely," he says with a shrug.

Rassoul is not the only Afghan ambassador in diplomatic limbo. The situation is the same all over Europe, Canada, Japan and Australia: 17 in total. After the Taliban took over, their foreign ministry spokesman sent messages to all Afghan ambassadors requesting a Zoom meeting. None agreed; some fled. The ambassador in Washington moved out when Citibank froze her embassy's account.

Those remaining created a WhatsApp support group and a *shura*, or council, which Rassoul heads, at the age of 81 the most senior and a former foreign minister. They meet twice a month by Zoom as well as gathering in person every six months, most recently in Warsaw. "We are trying to keep the Afghan name and flag flying and provide consular services to those who need them," he says.

They did number 21 but in the past year four European-based Afghan diplomats have surrendered their premises to the Taliban: the ambassadors in Holland and the Czech Republic, the chargé d'affaires in Spain and the consul-general in Munich.

Although not a single country has recognised the Taliban, their foreign affairs spokesman Suhail Shaheen – himself ambassador-in-waiting for the United Nations – claims they now have diplomatic representation in 38 countries. They include Pakistan, Iran, Russia, the UAE, Qatar, Indonesia and Malaysia. Earlier this year China's President Xi accepted the credentials of the Taliban's ambassador in a ceremony in Beijing's Great Hall.

> **He walks in Hyde Park but has a panic button from the Met**

The ambassadors still representing the ancien régime receive no funding from Kabul. Rassoul was fortunate that his embassy had recently completed extensive renovation. "We operate modestly," he says. "We reduced expenditure and staff and now have just four diplomats on reduced salaries and six local employees."

They finance their operations by charging for the consular services they provide to the large Afghan diaspora. "We have 250,000 Afghans living in the UK and we survive by issuing them birth, death and marriage certificates and extending their passports as well as visas," Rassoul says.

Diplomats in countries with few Afghan residents are struggling to keep the lights on. Rassoul's group has created a fund to support ambassadors in places such as Greece, Poland, Kuwait and Norway. Last month the Taliban said they would no longer recognise visas or paperwork from what they see as rogue embassies. Shaheen told The Sunday Times: "They are attesting documents and issuing visas on a daily basis but they don't send reports to the ministry and the fees received only line their private pockets."

Though the announcement prompted panic among diplomats and Afghans in the UK, Rassoul was quick to calm things, saying: "We did a quick calculation and found 90 per cent of our income comes from paperwork for Afghans living here needed by the UK authorities, so we don't think it will affect us too much."

For some time they have been asking people to sign disclaimers when they hand over £340 for single entry visas. However, it is clear the embassies are in the Taliban's crosshairs. "I know this situation cannot go on for ever," Rassoul admits.

Rassoul, who has never married, lives alone in the upper floors of the four-storey building. He comes down every morning around 9.30am to read the latest reports from his homeland, despairing over a situation the UN describes as "gender apartheid", where women are not allowed to work or even go to parks and hair salons, and where girls are banned from high school. "It's horrible," he sighs.

To him, the only way forward is through intra-Afghan dialogue. As a former national security adviser, he is still plugged in to many on the ground and is respected for his royal lineage: he is nephew of the late King Amanullah, who bought the UK embassy building in the 1920s before being driven out of power and fleeing Kabul in a Rolls-Royce. On his wall is a photograph of Afghanistan's last king, the late Zahir Shah, whom he served as an adviser in exile in Rome during the previous Taliban regime.

Once he has caught up on news, Rassoul checks in on the consular section in the basement, which is always busy. Then it is upstairs for lunch, after which he reads and writes (he is working on a memoir). Every afternoon he walks in Hyde Park. Three times a week he plays golf. Life in limbo could be worse.

While the Tory government assured him he could remain, he is yet to meet anyone from Sir Keir Starmer's government. "So far, there is no change," he says. "And I think this government gives more importance to human rights and democracy."

He has a panic button from the Metropolitan Police in case the Taliban try anything forcibly. "I'm stuck here," he says. "Actually, I would prefer to be free – but to who would I leave the embassy?"

WORLD NEWS

Kapil Komireddi

A new dawn for Bangladesh means a neighbour from hell for Modi



Prime minister Sheikh Hasina, an ally of India, has been ousted in a revolution. It leaves Delhi looking increasingly friendless

ANADOLU/GETTY IMAGES



Sheikh Hasina has still not reconciled herself to reality. Until last week she was Bangladesh's omnipotent prime minister, a position she retained for 15 years, making her the longest reigning female head of government in the world. Today, she is effectively a refugee in Delhi.

India's foreign minister, who received an emergency request from her at "very short notice" on August 5 to enter India, has apparently told colleagues that Hasina is in a "state of shock". So is everyone who watched events in Bangladesh. It is easy now, with hindsight, to state that her downfall was inevitable. In truth, nobody could have foreseen the swiftness with which Hasina's rule – reinforced by a third consecutive victory at the polls only weeks ago – collapsed.

It all started with a relatively mild protest in July by students against a quota system that favoured job applicants who could prove descent from those who fought for Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971. The scheme, which had been discarded by Hasina in 2018, was reinstated by a court in June. The decision was appealed, and the Supreme Court scrapped it a month later. But in between the protests intensified. Rather than restore order, the government's severe response – combined with Hasina casting demonstrators as "razakars" (pro-Pakistan collaborators from the 1971 war) and the violent counter-demonstrations by the student wing of her Awami League party – provoked chaos.

As the bodies piled up – some 450 people, including dozens of children, were reportedly killed by the authorities – the grievances of the people expanded. A protest that began with a limited demand culminated in an uprising against the regime. On the morning of August 5, the head of the armed forces, related to Hasina by marriage, informed the prime minister that the mob was poised to storm her palace. The army was helpless. She had an hour to leave.

Hasina's exit is one of the most significant events in the history of her country. Bangladesh, born as East Pakistan, was the eastern half of the Islamic republic partitioned from India in 1947. A majority of Pakistanis lived in this Eastern wing of their new country. But East Pakistan was exploited, its resources expropriated to meet the western wing's needs.

The 1971 war was brought to the world's consciousness by Sunday Times reports. Half a million Bengalis were slaughtered by some estimates and ten million more displaced. The US, reliant on Pakistan in its overtures to China, supported the aggressor. The USSR backed India, which intervened on the side of Bengali freedom fighters and helped them liberate their country in days, a memory that partly sustains India's enduring affection for Russia.

Within Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, founder of the Awami League and the father of the new nation, sought to punish Islamists who had collaborated with Pakistan. Before he could make progress, he was gunned down along with his family in a military coup in 1975. The only survivors were his daughter Hasina, who was living in Germany, and her sister. Islamists re-entered political life. It was Hasina who, allowed back in the 1990s and first elected prime minister in 1996, banished them. She is now the object of contempt at home and abroad. But the resolve with which she combated the religious right makes her the most formidable female leader in recent history. She overcame exile, survived assassination attempts and rebuilt the Awami League.

Her party, the secular alternative in Bangladesh, has provided a modicum of protection to religious minorities. It is hardly surprising that her exit was accompanied by co-ordinated attacks on Bangladesh's religious minorities. Hasina also turned around the country's economy. Women became the key pillars of growth, and by 2021 Bangladesh's per capita income surpassed India's. These successes were braided together with inequality, soaring inflation and a chilling intolerance for dissent. As she matured in power, the jails filled up with her critics. The tag of "Islamist" began being applied to anyone who displeased her.

Bangladesh's young revolutionaries have achieved their goal but the country now faces a period of uncertainty

If India cannot win new friends, it may be tempted to intervene

Hasina's autocratic lurch was underwritten by a feeling of invincibility that was bred by the assurances of support she received from India. In his book *India's Near East*, the author Avinash Paliwal reveals that, in 2009, New Delhi drew up elaborate plans to come to Hasina's rescue if the army, accustomed to instigating coups, ever rebelled against her. Narendra Modi went further, equating Hasina with Bangladesh. She was his first foreign guest after his own third consecutive election win earlier this year.

Delhi's engagement with and patronage of Hasina came at the expense of an almost total exclusion of other political forces in the country. As protests against Hasina escalated, India said and did nothing. It did not intervene decisively in her support, nor did it press her to make concessions before things got out of hand. The result: Delhi has no partners in what until days ago was regarded as the most reliably pro-Indian state in south Asia.

India's reputation is in tatters. Many Bangladeshis see it as complicit in the crimes of the Hasina government against its own people. Its pleas for the safety of Bangladesh's minorities are bereft of credibility given the treatment of its own minorities. Modi has isolated India in south Asia. Bangladesh joins Afghanistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Mauritius and Sri Lanka in states unfriendly to Delhi. India will of course recover: it is too immense for any government in Dhaka to ignore.

But what of Bangladesh? The revolution, having achieved its goal of defenestrating Hasina, has inherited a country in turmoil. The military has formed an interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel-winning banker who was persecuted by Hasina and lived in exile in Paris. Will he be able to rein in the khakis, unite Bangladesh, and create the conditions for an elected civilian government to take control – or will he, at 84, be reduced to an ineffectual figurehead?

Hasina's party, the Awami League, is enormous: its members and sympathisers number in the tens of millions. Their deposed leader never planned a succession but the party cannot simply dissolve. Hasina will sooner or later take stock. The army claims she resigned but no one has seen her letter of resignation and she has not confirmed it. Her son rejects the claim and rumours abound she wants to return to Bangladesh. If India cannot win new friends, it may be tempted to intervene to help its old friends. For all who were exposed to the rough edges of Hasina's power, this will feel like a promising new dawn. But the truth is that Bangladesh has entered a period of grave instability. The path to stability will be long and arduous.

Kapil Komireddi is the author of Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India, which was recently published in an updated paperback edition by Hurst



After brush with death, Fico steers Slovakia into autocracy

Tim Gosling Prague
and Peter Conradi

ROBERT FICO/REUTERS



Robert Fico cast his vote in a hospital in Bratislava in June

After Robert Fico, the Slovakian prime minister, narrowly survived an assassination attempt this spring, he said that he forgave the confused 71-year-old man accused of shooting him at close range with three of the shots seriously wounding him. "I feel no hatred towards the stranger who shot me," he declared.

Any hopes that the strongman's brush with death would lead him to adopt a more conciliatory stance towards his political opponents have proved unfounded, however. In the past few days, his nationalist populist government has instead passed a flurry of measures that critics say are accelerating the country's lurch down the "illiberal" path trod by Fico's ally, Viktor Orban, leader of neighbouring Hungary.

Chief among them was a plan to scrap the National Crime Agency (Naka), an agency investigating corruption cases – some of which involve the prime minister's own associates.

The move followed a crackdown on a number of those within the agency who have been looking into corruption linked to Fico, 59, and his Smer (Direction – Social Democracy) party: some of the investigators are now themselves being investigated for "abuse of power", while others are being moved to lower-level police departments across the country.

Boris Susko, Fico's justice minister, also made use last week of a legal loophole to order the release of Dusan Kovacik, a former state prosecutor close to the prime minister, who was serving an eight-year sentence for corruption and revealing classified information. Fico claimed that Kovacik's conviction was "a textbook example of a manipulated judicial process".

The culture minister, Martina Simkovicova, a member of the small right-wing Slovak National Party, a junior member of Fico's three-party coalition, has also been busy, sacking the widely respected directors of the National Theatre and National Gallery. They had both accused Simkovicova of declaring war on the arts after she slashed funding to many institutions that she held were adulterating Slovak culture with foreign or "liberal" elements.

Alarm about last week's measures was sounded by Anton Spisak of the Centre for European Reform. "This is just the latest move in [the] Fico government's systematic assault on Slovakia's democratic and state institutions," he wrote on Twitter/X. "Their message is clear: dissenters will be removed. Such totalitarian tactics should have no place in a democratic country – let alone an EU member state."

Fico's previous stint as prime minister ended in 2018, when he was forced to step down by mass protests over the fatal shooting of Jan Kuciak, an investigative journalist, and his fiancée, Martina Kusnirova.

Kuciak had been looking into links between top politicians and the 'NDrangheta, a branch of the Italian mafia. In his final article he alleged advisers to Fico were close to an Italian businessman connected to the criminals' activities.

Fico's narrow victory in the elections last September, which paved the way for his return to power, was helped by pumping out a plethora of conspiracy theories regarding the Covid pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine to an electorate on the edge as a result of the cost of living crisis.

Once in office, his government quickly went to work: the criminal code was changed, reducing punishments for corruption, while the process was begun of dismantling police units set up to investigate the criminal networks said to have flourished during his previous stint in power. Fico was also in the midst of dismantling Slovakia's public media and replacing it with a government-controlled state organ, as well as clamping down on foreign-funded NGOs, when the failed assassination enforced a hiatus.

Some are fighting back against the government's attempts to resume where it left off: a new petition calling for Simkovicova's dismissal gathered more than 150,000 signatures in less than two days, noted Grigorij Meseznikov, who is the president of the Slovak Institute for Public Affairs. "People are furious at the actions of these arrogant and illiterate people," he said.

The opposition is also planning to revive monthly rallies. "The next three years will see fights over every inch of democracy, but I fear that these fights are likely to be lost unless we see a million out on the streets in protest," warned Andrej Matisak, an editor at Pravda, a major centre-left daily.

With Slovakia's opposition weak and fragmented, some are looking to the European Commission, which, in turn, is watching with dismay what is happening in Slovakia. Its 2024 report on the rule of law describes the country as one of the bloc's biggest worries, noting the changes to the justice system and media.

The implicit threat behind such scrutiny is that Slovakia could lose its substantial EU funding, which Fico needs if he is to fulfil the populist promises that brought him back to power.

Yet the prime minister's latest actions appear to be going down well with his own supporters. "I believe most supporters of the coalition parties are happy with events this week," said Matisak. "Fico promised during the election campaign to clamp down on the political prosecutions that he accuses the previous government of arranging. You could say he's now delivering on his manifesto."

NEWS REVIEW



Searching for answers to why riots swept Britain, *Rod Liddle* returns to his home town of Middlesbrough. He finds a divided community where residents feel like no one's listening

ILLUSTRATION: CHARLOTTE HOLLAND

The march was predicated upon a falsehood which everyone taking part knew was a falsehood. But that didn't seem to matter, so long as they got a dust-up with the Old Bill and the chance to put through the windows of a few "Muslim" houses. Such as the front window belonging to Theophilus Abiagom, who isn't a Muslim. He'd been dozing on the sofa with his little son when the rock came hurtling through the glass, not long after lunchtime last Sunday in Middlesbrough.

So a march to punish Muslims for the killing of three little girls in Southport, in which the subject is not a Muslim but a youth born in Cardiff to Rwandan parents, chose as one of its first victims a bloke who also wasn't a Muslim. You get the feeling the demonstrators weren't hugely picky about who got a bloody nose, or their car torched, or their front door kicked down. Religious affiliation was not copiously vetted: just skin colour.

In the end 400 or so inchoate yobbos, or yobbo fellow travellers, caused mayhem in my home town for reasons which, before the march, were never openly articulated. The total number of arrests for this fun-packed afternoon stands at 43, so far, with more to come. How did this happen in a town which has always been proud of the fact that it was built by immigrant labour (largely Irish, hence our fine Roman Catholic cathedral) and, as a port, was long accustomed to living cheek by jowl with people from beyond our continent?

The grammatically remiss call to arms, festooned with emojis, came to a select group of likely adherents via Facebook, as indeed it had done at Hartlepool and Sunderland and Southport. These riots, or protests, were choreographed – one day Hartlepool, the next Sunderland and then Middlesbrough (which drew the short straw of Sunday afternoon). Durham was meant to be next but nobody turned up – a very different demographic.

The post was, of course, all in block capitals: "MORE AND MORE ATROCITIES HAPPENING EVERY WEEK ... IT IS ABOUT TIME TO SHOW WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH AND WE WILL NOT ROLL OVER AND LET OUR COUNTRY BECOME A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY ... STAND UP AND BE COUNTED ... TIME TO PUT THE GREAT BACK IN BRITAIN."

And yet in this long, self-pitying screed, what exactly the writer was complaining about was never actually explained: you want bad things to stop happening? Is that it? Maybe the writer didn't actually know what they wanted, or simply feared his post would be spiked by Facebook if he wrote "Come on, let's beat up some foreigners."

The local sender was a man who, according to his previous Facebook posts, had recently received a 150-hour community service order and a ban from all football grounds in England and Wales for three to five years. "Looks like I will be at a few more [Glasgow] Rangers games this season," he added, with some pride.

You cannot overstate the involvement of football hooligans with these riots – and remember, the English Defence League was originally a convocation of balding, overweight football "supporters" clad in Stone Island jackets and bearing a grudge. So it was in Middlesbrough, as the crew stamped its way up Linthorpe Road singing "Tees, Tees, Teessiders" as if they were still in the Red Faction (Boro Ultras) quadrant of the Riverside stadium cheering on Middlesbrough FC.

It did not take long to get nasty, not least when they turned into frowsy, down-at-heel Parliament Road, which is home to a large Muslim community. Bricks were thrown, cars were trashed, windows broken. There was a battle with the local coppers and about one tenth of the crowd was arrested. They met with resistance from the local Muslims, too, who were also guilty of a certain vicious overreach. Gangs of young Asian lads armed with crowbars and the like went searching for anyone who looked a bit white and when they found them, beat them up. One elderly white bloke, "Andy", who had not been on the march, chose the wrong moment to nip out of the Intrepid Explorer public house for a fag and got a good beating. In the ineluctable narcissistic spirit of our times, the Asians filmed themselves setting light to stuff and shouting the Allahu Akbar business and perhaps as a consequence at least five of them were also arrested.

Meanwhile the white marchers – and, it has to be said, they were all white – were bricking windows, vandalising cars and smashing up local Asian groceries, such as the corner shop owned by 54-year-old Parvez Akhtar, who works a 72-hour week. There are reports too that the peaceful marchers (as that original Facebook post insisted they would surely be) also looted that not notably Islamic institution, Tesco.

The reaction of most Middlesbrough folk was one of revulsion at the mayhem, which was put down to sheer thuggery, but also a certain realisation that this sort of confrontation had been brewing for an awfully long time – perhaps as far back as 2001 when, after the riots in Oldham and Bradford, a government inquiry suggested that Middlesbrough was named as a "future tension point".

Andy Preston, the leftish, independent former mayor of Middlesbrough, told me that he thought "90 per cent of the damage is being done by white British youths seeking thrills and adrenaline ... they were indiscriminately smashing windows and causing chaos, not driven by ideology or genuine rage, but by a desire for excitement". Preston added that he thought the far right had been "emboldened" and conceded that "normal people" felt they were not listened to when they raised concerns about immigration.

This last point was raised by every single white person to whom I spoke. They were all universal in their condemnation of the chaos and the attacks upon innocent people and their homes, but they always added that the population felt ignored when they raised what they believed were entirely legitimate objections both to the high levels of immigration and the degree to which such immigration had transformed the nature of their town – and not in a good way.

Sarah Barody owns one of Middlesbrough top restaurants. She's a local lass, born above a chip shop down the road in Redcar. "Misguided thugs were blaming first and second generation hard-working immigrants," she said. "It was just an excuse to release racial tension. But our levels of immigration need attention, fast. I think most people feel this way – it's just that they don't set cars alight."

Or take the case of Stefan Walker. He is not your obvious candidate for violent far-right carnage and bricking people. I've enjoyed a good night or two with Stefan, down the Southern Cross pub in Marton, debating politics, and found him a thoughtful – if agreeably spiky – individual. Far right? He is a former member of the Labour Party and town councillor who later stood for the independents in the sprawling new town of Coulby Newham.

And on Sunday he almost – almost – joined that horrible march, but changed his mind at the last minute because of the violence seen in Sunderland and Hartlepool. He told me: "Both the politically engaged and the generally apathetic have been told that any honest concerns they've had about the numbers of legal and illegal immigrants, as well as the propensity of those coming to properly integrate, is racist. Over time this has slowly and incrementally pushed these people to feeling powerless and angry."

I heard that sentiment, less eloquently expressed maybe, countless times. Stefan added: "How is it that I have gone from being a strong Labour supporter to attending Tommy Robinson events?"

Meanwhile, Yasmin Khan is working from home right now and maybe for the foreseeable future. The charity she runs for victims of domestic violence is closed. She says she dare not go outside. She is frightened to park her car in case it gets set alight. Her young niece was spat at in the street.

"I don't feel safe," she told me. "I am absolutely on edge. People have been racially abused, women and girls. And I think this has been festering for a really long time. I never thought in my lifetime we would see this again." She blames the rise of the far right and the incendiary language used by "mainstream politicians" – I think she means the Tories and Nigel Farage. We need to use a different language, she says, and we ought to be part of the conversation.

There was never much racial discord in Middlesbrough. Not when I was growing up. But there has been an influx which has unbalanced the town, much as it has unbalanced similarly impoverished northern post-industrial redoubts. Its cheap housing – you can still buy a four-bed terrace in Middlesbrough for around £60,000 – has made it a useful dumping ground for successive governments.

A big local landlord with useful Home Office contacts hasn't hurt, either. And so the Boro became the only town in the country where the number of resettled asylum seekers make up more than one in 200 of the population. At the same time, the Pakistani and Bangladeshi population has grown enormously and within many wards easily outnumbers the indigenous inhabitants.

The whites have dispersed – the better off to pleasant suburbs such as Nunthorpe and Marton, the impoverished to the often drug-ridden estates such as Pallister Park, Grove Hill, Easterside. In a sense then, it is a town where all the people are deracinated and as such brings to mind Detroit, except without the nice cars. In those white estates the locals cling to that old notion that being British is something to be proud of and some, perhaps many, feel usurped and sold down the river. It is no coincidence that these riots have been at their most venomous in constituencies which voted heavily to leave the EU. Hartlepool was one of the most pro-leave seats in the country, while benighted Thorntree, in Middlesbrough, the most pro-Brexit ward.

But it is not all about racial identity and nationalism, or even perhaps mainly. While parts of Teesside thrive, Middlesbrough has been left behind. Its once bustling centre is close to moribund: nobody goes there any more.

It still suffers from the appalling depredations of the recession occasioned by the Conservative government in the 1980s – and by the architectural vandalism of the Labour councils at the same time. Ugly concrete flyovers to carry the A66 westward brutally bisect Middlesbrough and the giant out-of-town shopping centres have ripped the heart out of the commercial district.

The centre cannot hold because there is no longer a centre, no sense of a Middlesbrough community. Just two groups of people from different cultures. The impoverished whites who believe in a vision of our country which the British establishment now disdains and feels embarrassed about, and the Asians who cling to their own culture because in truth nobody ever tried to persuade them to adopt our own.

They're no longer just for the super-rich: why everyday couples love prenups

Once seen as unromantic, the financial agreements are gaining popularity as partners — especially those marrying later in life — seek to protect their assets, finds *Katie Gatens*

Tom and Jess* couldn't agree on anything before their wedding: the flowers, venue and colour scheme were all points of contention. The one area they were both in agreement? They were getting a prenup.

"I was the less well-off party," says Tom, 37. "But I'd started a company and spent a significant amount of time getting it off the ground." Jess's parents had been through an acrimonious divorce when she was younger. "She had seen how a divorce affects a couple's finances when there isn't an agreement in place and she wanted to protect us," he says.

Tom and Jess, who have been happily married for six years, are far from alone. With this year's wedding season well under way, a growing number of Britons will be asking their other half: "Darling, have you sorted the prenup?"

In the past, prenups tended to bring to mind thrice-married plutocrats and American legal dramas, but such agreements are rapidly gaining popularity on British shores. Last week the ink was said to be drying on Lady Gaga and her fiancé Michael Polansky's rumoured $900 million prenup ahead of their wedding later this year.

A study published by JMW Solicitors last month found that 66 per cent of 2,500 British adults surveyed agreed that a prenup was beneficial. Co-op Legal Services also reported that prenup requests have risen by 70 per cent in the past year. Some services are now also offering "postnups" for couples who are already married but want to retrospectively set some financial parameters.

British prenups – unlike American ones – are not legally binding, however. Courts are not obligated to follow them, although they often take them into account. So what's driving this trend?

The earliest known record of marriage contracts dates back 2,000 years and the premise has largely stayed the same. Because in many cultures a woman was often the most disenfranchised party, a dowry from the bride's father was meant to ensure that she would be provided for after the death of her husband or divorce. Dowries were often exploitative, however, and in 1882 the Married Women's Property Act made them illegal.



Lady Gaga and fiancé Michael Polansky are said to have a $900m prenup

With the rise of the Hollywood-infused ideal of modern romance, prenups came to be seen as unromantic. But a string of expensive, high-profile, prenup-free divorces in recent years has increased their allure – think Heather Mills and Paul McCartney's legal dramas; or Jeff Bezos's $38 billion split from his wife MacKenzie Scott.

These celebrity divorces are part of the reason behind the prenup's rising popularity, explains Joanna Newton, a partner at Stowe Family Law, who says that millennials tend to be more practical when it comes to financial planning. "They've definitely increased over the past couple of years, despite the fact that they're not the most romantic thing," Newton says.

A shift in society's view of marriage is also driving the change: while both parties might enter a marriage with the best intentions, it may not necessarily be for life. Divorce rates remain above 40 per cent and many people now getting married have seen their own parents split up.

Newton also attributes the popularity of prenups to couples marrying later in life, often well into their thirties, meaning many newlyweds already own a house or successful business.

To draw up a prenup, each party must take independent legal advice and the agreement is usually established between the solicitors and their clients. Newton says that to keep them relevant in court they need updating regularly – ideally every five years.

Whereas once you would have had to enlist a lawyer or solicitor to draw them up, there are now various start-ups aimed at streamlining the process. Wenup started offering the service in February last year and has already produced 250 prenups. James Brookner, the founder, says although prenups are common with the very wealthy, most of his clients have assets of roughly £500,000.

Almost a fifth of Wenup's clients have been same-sex couples, although the national average for same-sex unions is only 3 per cent of all marriages. "People from same-sex couples have already had to navigate complex discussions around identity," says Brookner. "They might be better prepared to have the kind of complex discussion that you need when entering into a prenup."

Ultimately this trend reflects a more pragmatic era, when joining one's assets in eternal matrimony feels like too much of a gamble. "There is an element of realism among younger generations," Newton says. "Whereas couples would have worked through difficult times, people realise you don't have to stick in a situation where you're unhappy."

**Names have been changed*

GERARD SOURY/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREA MEROLA/EPA

Eco-pirate or saviour of the seas?





A criminal to his critics, a hero to his celebrity fans, 'Captain' Paul Watson faces 15 years in a Japanese jail. Are his dangerous methods to protect marine life justified, asks *Katie Gatens*

We're many miles from the ocean, but Jolly Roger flags are hoisted at full mast by protesters outside the Danish embassy in southwest London, alongside banners with dolphins and whales. One man's face adorns them all. "Free Captain Paul Watson!" a crowd chants, as black cabs crawl past. A Japanese television crew is filming the whole thing: "This is a big issue in Japan," the cameraman tells me.

Who is this big-in-Japan man that inspires such fierce emotions? With his Santa Claus beard and shaggy hair, "Captain" Watson is the fiercest marine activist on the high seas. To some, not least the Japanese, who want to put him in jail, he's a menace, an eco-pirate who endangers shipping and sailors. To others, he's a hero, a pioneer, saviour of whales and dolphins from Torshavn to Tokyo.

Watson has lived a rollicking life at sea worthy of Blackbeard. Aside from being married four times – most recently to a glamorous Russian opera singer – the 73-year-old Canadian has risked his life to stop whaling ships by whatever means necessary. Charismatic, divisive and radical, he is a Julian Assange or Roger Hallam of the seas. He's been accused of ecoterrorism: ramming and sinking vessels, scuttling ships in harbour, violently confronting seal-clubbers and evading Interpol warrants by living at sea. In 2009, he achieved the ultimate badge of notoriety: a *South Park* parody.

But Watson's buccaneering days could soon be coming to an end. Last month, he was arrested by Danish police in Nuuk, Greenland, and faces extradition to Japan on criminal charges over his alleged involvement in action against the whaling vessel Shonan Maru 2 in 2010 – including "accomplice to assault" and ship trespass. The charges carry a maximum sentence of 15 years in jail.

Watson was nowhere near the ship but is being arrested as an accomplice after Peter Bethune, an activist with the Sea Shepherd environmental organisation, attempted to detain the ship's captain. Bethune was given a two-year suspended prison term and an Interpol arrest warrant was issued for Watson.

His fate will be decided at a custody hearing in Nuuk this week. President Macron of France has pleaded with the Danes to release Watson to France, where he was granted asylum in 2009 and lives with his wife, Yana, and two young sons, Tiger and Murtagh, on a houseboat on the Seine.

While many will feel that whaling has no place in the 21st century, Watson's divisive tactics over the years have led to him being ostracised from mainstream environmental groups, including those he has founded. He has many enemies and not just in the whaling industry. He claims to be a founding member of Greenpeace (something it disputes), but was jettisoned in the 1970s after clashing with board members who described him as an overly vocal "mutineer".

In 1977 the exiled Watson went on to found Sea Shepherd, which grew into a global movement. Its methods included intercepting whaling fleets. In 1986 it sank two whaling ships in a Reykjavik harbour and in 2009 the Sea Shepherd flagship, the Steve Irwin, was damaged when it positioned itself on the slipway of Yushin Maru No 2 (which was also damaged) so that whales could not be loaded on to deck and butchered.

Then two years ago Watson was removed from the Sea Shepherd board in what he calls a "betrayal". He then set up the Captain Paul Watson Foundation, putting himself front and centre (and also presumably ensuring he could not be ousted a third time). Neither Greenpeace nor Sea Shepherd wanted to comment.

Despite Japan and Norway's whaling industries being unprofitable, relying in part on government subsidies, the battle between Watson and the whalers has intensified. After 1986, when commercial whaling was outlawed globally, Japan was allowed to kill 1,000 whales a year for scientific purposes, but in 2019 it withdrew from the International Whaling Commission and resumed commercial whaling.

Japan launched a new $47 million whaling megaship and new vessels are equipped with water cannon to fire at protesters. The Japanese government expanded the lists of species it allowed commercial whalers to hunt and on August 2 it confirmed that the first fin whale (considered to be a vulnerable species) had been killed. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation organisation estimates that whaling ships have killed about 40,000 whales since 1986.

Watson is in choppy legal waters but his loyal supporters will seemingly follow him anywhere. At the London protest I find "Elks", who is here on a day trip from Wales for the protest. He's read all of Captain Paul's books. "All the main conservationists in the world – Jane Goodall and Sylvia Earle – are all inspired by him," he gushes. "He's beyond Attenborough. This guy actually put his body in front of a whale. He's a modern-day hero."

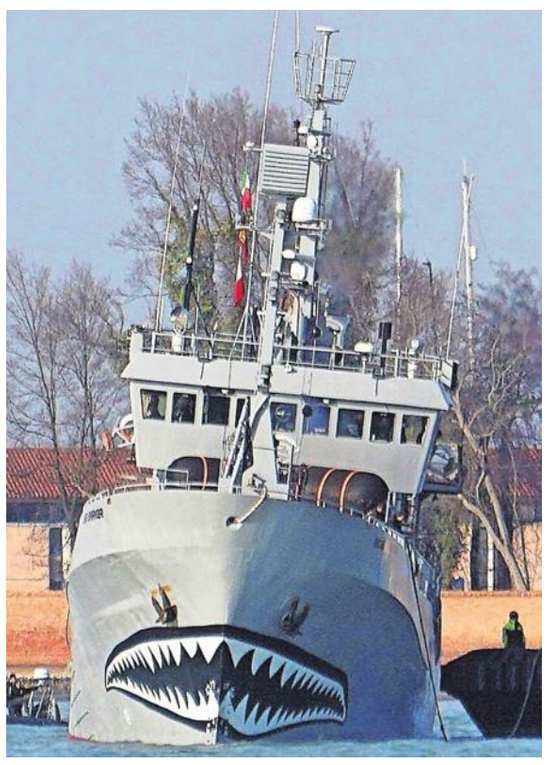
Watson's vast following is in part due to his extreme methods. "He would be prepared to die for the animals and that's what resonated with me," says Jasmine Alexander on the Captain Watson Foundation advisory board, who is concerned that Watson might spend the rest of his life in a Japanese prison.

Watson has celebrities in his corner. The *Baywatch* actress and animal rights campaigner Pamela Anderson backs him. He has had endorsements from the actors Martin Sheen, Brigitte Bardot and the late Sean Connery and starred in the *Whale Wars* documentary that ran for seven series on the Animal Planet channel.

Another backer is Dale Vince, the green energy businessman and Just Stop Oil donor, who first heard of Watson in 2010. "I read about his exploits in the South Atlantic and I sent an email to his organisation in America saying can I send you some money," Vince says. "I'm just a big fan of his work." Vince makes this former fugitive wanted by Interpol sound like a cuddly grandpa. In 2011, Watson visited Stroud, Gloucestershire, where Vince's company, Ecotricity, is based. "He's a very peaceful person," Vince says. "He's big on history." Vince later made Sea Shepherd a charity partner at his football club, Forest Green Rovers, putting the logo on the kit. Last year he donated a boat to Watson's fleet.

Vince insists that Watson has never hurt anybody in his exploits. "But he absolutely puts himself, his crew, his ships in harm's way – in between the harpoons and the whales," he says. "I can understand why he's got a bit of a cult following. He's got all the ingredients of a cult leader, including a big white beard."

A Sea Shepherd anti-whaling ship and, above, Paul Watson with Pamela Anderson, one of a number of famous supporters



> **In 2009 he earned the ultimate badge of notoriety: a South Park parody**



The Sky's the limit: after bronzes at 16, she wants a surfing medal

Sky Brown, fresh from grinding her way on to the Paris podium, tells *Charlotte Ivers* what her parents think about the dangers of skateboarding – and her plans for the LA Olympics in 2028

Sky Brown is 16. She likes getting her nails done, and making TikTok videos with her mates. Her least favourite subject at school is maths. She is also a two-time Olympic medallist.

Brown's sport is skateboarding, which became an Olympic sport at Tokyo 2020. She won her first medal – a bronze – at those Games (held in 2021 because of Covid delays) when she was just 13, the youngest British summer Olympian. Last week, in Paris, she added a second bronze.

When we meet the next day, in a café just off the Champs-Élysées, Brown says that she nearly didn't make it this far. The day before she was due to get on the plane to Paris, she dislocated her shoulder. "So that was, like, very scary. 'Oh, am I going to make it?' I was having a lot of thoughts in my head like 'Oh my gosh'."

Soon after she arrived in Paris, Brown received the sign off from Team GB's doctors to compete. "So I was like, 'OK, sick. I'm gonna do the best I can here'." But the injury meant Brown "couldn't put out 100 per cent. I had to take it a little safe." She will have surgery when she gets home.

Home is Los Angeles, where Brown spends half the year. She spends the other half in Japan, where she was born in 2008, to a British father (Stuart) and a Japanese mother (Mieko), qualifying her to represent both countries. She chose Team GB because she preferred the "more relaxed approach" of Skateboard GB, the governing body for the sport here.

It was Brown's father who got her into skateboarding. She saw him skateboarding with his friends and thought, "That looks so fun, so cool. I just want to do it." She was just two or three. The skateboard "was just a toy to me", she says. "It was my favourite toy. Still now, it's my favourite toy."

At seven, she begged her parents to take her to her first competition. They were resistant. "They just wanted me to have fun with it," she says. But Brown won her parents over and came third. She was hooked. "I felt the crowd, the adrenaline. It felt good and I just wanted to get more medals." She competed in the US Open at eight, the youngest competitor ever. At ten, she became a professional athlete. She has featured in a Nike advertising campaign, and is an ambassador for Samsung (fitting, since she constantly has one hand on her phone).

Despite her achievements, she is remarkably casual about her schedule. "I try to do as much as I can" when it comes to training, she says. "Honestly, whenever I feel like it or whenever there's a session or people I want to skate with – same with surfing. When there's a crew out, waves are pumping, I'll be there."

How long does she think she will be able to keep going for, given the toll the sport is taking on her body? "I believe that age doesn't matter, I really do think that," Brown says, pointing out that her GB team-mate Andy Macdonald is 51. "I want to do it for as long as I can, until my body ... until I probably can't walk," she laughs slightly.

It's not really a joke. In May Brown tore a ligament in her knee. In 2020 she fell from a ramp, broke her wrist and fractured her skull. At the time, her father said she was lucky to be alive.

Do her parents worry about her? "It's definitely not easy watching your girl skate," she says. "That's very scary." Sometimes, they worry so much that they say to her "don't skate, go dance" instead. But "they know I love it. They're really supportive."

Brown is optimistic about her upcoming shoulder surgery. "I think it should fix [the dislocation] completely," she says. "I might have to take a little break, stay away from skating, but I'm definitely going to come back." She has her heart set on competing again at the next Olympics in her home city, aiming to qualify for surfing as well, something she narrowly missed out on this year.

For now, she is enjoying the moment. As we are discussing this, two small boys and an even smaller girl approach our table and ask for a photograph with Brown. The girl hangs back, too shy to approach. But Brown beckons her over. "I just always wanted to inspire the girls and show that I'm little, but I'm here. You can do it too," she had told me earlier. As we get up to leave, I glance round and see the shy little girl still peering out from behind a pillar, looking at Brown with awe. It seems to be working.

The truth about dating in Paris: men don't smile back (or they're married)

The new series of Emily in Paris starts this week, with Gallic hunks aplenty falling at the heroine's feet. *Roxana Rotila* – who moved to the French capital last year – found a rather different story

Usually when your phone buzzes two hours before a date, it's a message from a friend asking about your outfit, or a "see you soon" text from the man you're meeting. On one particular occasion, a few months after I'd fulfilled my lifelong dream of moving to Paris to work as a singer, the message was somewhat different.

"Looking forward to seeing you later," typed the suavely suited handsome Frenchman I'd met in a bar a few nights before. "Just to let you know, I have a wife and kids. Let me know if you're OK with that."

Needless to say, I wasn't OK with it.

It's an extreme example, but gives a glimpse into my life as a 32-year-old woman attempting to navigate the Paris dating scene after moving there from London. I expected to be swooning on evening strolls along the Seine, or to lock eyes with a man over the last croissant at the local boulangerie.

Perhaps my expectations were too big. On Thursday, the fourth season of *Emily in Paris* begins on Netflix. The comedy – starring Lily Collins as Emily Cooper, a peppy American marketing executive who moves to the French capital – fulfils almost every stereotype going. There are 10.30am office starts, long liquid lunches of chenin blanc and multiple moments of passion with a hunky French chef among a backdrop of berets, bistros and slim cigarettes.

While many Parisians have dismissed the show as a caricature, viewers across the globe have delighted in its fizzy homage. The first series of *Emily In Paris* in 2020 was watched by 58 million people in less than a month and the show has been nominated for awards including Emmys and Golden Globes and inspired an influx of tourists.

Parisians have a point about the show, but it doesn't get everything wrong. As someone who grew up in Romania and lived in London for 11 years, I don't like to stereotype people. That said, many of the men I've dated in Paris since I moved here last April have lived up to their reputation, especially when it comes to lust and infidelity.

A few months ago I finally had a chance encounter with a stranger as I sipped my espresso in a café near Montmartre. I asked if he was single, he said yes. What followed was a whirlwind romance before he casually mentioned that, actually, he was seeing someone else. He thought it would be OK to see both of us.

These chance encounters are scarce. In the show, Parisian men happily strike up conversations with Emily in the street or approach her in Café de Flore. I've found the opposite. My attempts at eye contact, friendly smiles and polite hellos with handsome men have generally met with stony indifference.

A friend once told me that if you're too smiley in Paris, people think you're either stupid or mad and I think that might be right. London has a reputation for men failing to approach women in real life, but it's even rarer here. A male friend said it's a fear of being perceived as lecherous.



Roxana Rotila sings in a jazz club but romance is elusive

I think it's a shame – and appears to be a problem with dating in 2024 that stretches beyond Paris.

Parisians seem to use dating apps less than Londoners. I've tried using Bumble, Tinder and Happn but found them just as bad here as everywhere else. I went on two uneventful dates and on my third I got stood up. I don't want to be on apps though; I want to meet someone in real life.

There have been good dates, like the man who picked me up from my apartment with a motorcycle, taking me for a moonlit ride. It was the type of date I'd dreamt of.

It didn't last, though. Like Emily, I can only speak a small amount of French. The language barrier can make conversation feel forced and it's difficult to be funny and flirty when you don't understand each other's cultural references. I don't try to speak French to men any more because I don't want them to know just how bad I am at it. In the past, they've judged me on the way I pronounce things: correcting the way I conjugate a verb is a serious turn-off.

I work as a jazz singer in high-end bars, restaurants and clubs, which people think would make it easy to meet potential dates, but it doesn't. In Paris, I feel like there's a much greater division when it comes to class and society so when I perform somewhere very exclusive, men don't approach me. I think they see me as the staff, not an equal that they want to take out for dinner.

French men are known for being romantic, but don't expect the handwritten love letters and red roses depicted in films. In my experience it's long, romantic text messages that can feel quite intense. And tread carefully: there have been times that I've reciprocated with the same energy and all of a sudden they lose interest.

The biggest lesson I've learnt is that romance is just how French men express themselves. An encounter may seem magical at the time, but that doesn't mean it's deep or going to turn into anything – just like dating anywhere else in the world.

As told to Roisin Kelly

PAUL HARTNETT/PYMCA /REX; ALAMY; DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES







Banksy's policemen appeared on a Brighton pub in 2004. His girl with a balloon has appeared at various spots in London since 2002 as well as on the West Bank barrier between Israel and the Palestinian territory. A cat was one of six animal murals to appear in as many days. The girl on a swing was stencilled in Los Angeles

From Nineties graffiti to shredding his own masterpieces, the artist — who unveiled a new series of stencilled animals last week — has a talent that will echo down the ages, says museum director *Will Gompertz*

Banksy's not just a great self-publicist — he's one of our greatest artists



Art is not a subject that gets the blood racing on most news desks. The usual response to an enthusiastic and compelling pitch is a stifled yawn. Unless the story is about money. That's different. But in my experience, the only other sure-fire way of having a piece about art commissioned by a news editor is if it is about a certain, secretive street artist from Bristol (allegedly) called Banksy.

Banksy is a banker. Newsrooms love him. He has the lot: celebrity status, anti-establishment notoriety, and politically charged opinions rooted in current affairs. All of which he delivers with his trademark dark humour hidden behind an alluring cloak of mystery.

Just look at the running story of his stencilled animals popping up across London – a stretching cat on a disused (and then dismantled) billboard in Cricklewood followed a precarious goat near Kew Bridge; pelicans catching fish above a chippy in Walthamstow; three monkeys hanging from a bridge in Brick Lane; two elephants reaching their trunks towards each other in Chelsea, which was vandalised on Friday; and a howling wolf on a satellite dish in Peckham, which has unsurprisingly already been nicked. Banksy knows how to work the system.

A good central idea is essential, of course (two coppers kissing, for example). As is its execution, which normally means the choice of location with Banksy. Surprise is also a major factor. Intrigue, too – although the whole incognito thing is overplayed. I've conducted several straw polls over the years, and nobody seems to want to know who he is, although a quick internet search provides plenty of clues.

There's been plenty of media speculation over the years, with names including former public schoolboy Robin Gunningham and Massive Attack's Robert Del Naja put forward. But most people appreciate he can't operate if identified because some of his work is placed without permission of the landlord and could therefore be illegal (although most landlords would toast the day a Banksy artwork appeared on their property).

Anyway, it's not his fabled elusiveness that really gets everyone hopping. The knack he has for catching the public eye goes beyond a hoodie, some black spray paint, and a stencil appearing overnight. That's not his ace in the pack. Banksy's winning card is his instinctive and brilliant nose for PR.

When it comes to understanding the media, Banksy is on a par with Charles Saatchi, the prominent 1980s ad man who became the cheerleader-in-chief for the notorious Young British Artists (YBAs), cementing their fame forever in his highly controversial Sensation exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997.

Banksy has taken on the YBAs' mischievous mantle, as well as Saatchi's crown as the king of art PR. Like all good publicists, Banksy will often ask a member of his close team to let the media know about an imminent work. Sometimes it is to give a vague location (travel might be required) or to simply say keep a close eye on his social media for a message posted to his 12.7 million Instagram followers.

That's part one – the set-up. Part two, which is much harder, is about producing an image that gets people talking. He does this with remarkable consistency.

Banksy's shrewd nose for PR, both in terms of media management and his ability to produce attention-grabbing work, is beyond question. But what about Banksy as an artist? Is he a one-trick pony whose stunts are beginning to wear thin, as some think (notably James Cleverly, the previous home secretary, who took exception to Banksy's inflated migrant boat crowd-surfing at Glastonbury this summer, and whose criticism the artist angrily rebuffed)? Or, is he a brilliant image-maker who captures the imagination of millions?

I think the latter. Banksy is an important artist who will become canonical in due course. He is the latest in a long line of British social satirists, such as William Hogarth, the great Georgian chronicler. I am lucky enough to see Hogarth's satirical masterpieces – *A Rake's Progress* and *Humours of an Election* – almost every day at the Sir John Soane's Museum where they hang, as I am the director. It is clear both artists come from the same tradition of speaking truth to power with caustic commentary delivered through biting humour. The difference is how they go about it.

Hogarth operated largely within London's art establishment. He was an enthusiastic freemason. His father-in-law was the artist Sir James Thornhill, court painter to George I. Banksy resides firmly outside the art establishment. So much so, he made perhaps his best work to date critiquing the avaricious nature of the art world.

Love is in the Bin, or the "shredded" Banksy as it is better known, started life as a largely unheralded sale item in a 2018 Sotheby's auction in London. All was not as it seemed, though. Without anybody knowing, Banksy had hidden a shredding machine inside the picture frame which outwardly contained his well-known *Girl with Balloon* image.

Everything appeared completely normal until the hammer came down at £860,000 for the picture, at which point Banksy or an accomplice, pressed the remote control that started the concealed internal machine going, which then partially shredded the picture (it was supposed to shred the lot and drop it into a wastepaper basket below – hence the title *Love is in the Bin* – but the machine broke half way through, resulting in a different work from the one envisaged by Banksy). Everybody was aghast.

The purchaser was offered her money back. She said she'd think about it overnight. By the next morning it must have dawned on her she had significantly underpaid for what had instantly become one of the most notorious and memorable contemporary artworks produced this century. She wisely decided to keep the self-destructed artwork. Three years later *Love is in the Bin* was back at Sotheby's where it sold for £18.5 million (including auction fees).

I am not surprised. It is one of the most exceptional works of conceptual art produced since Marcel Duchamp started the whole "art can be anything" trend with his urinal back in 1917. Like all good ideas, *Love is in the Bin* was deceptively simple but said a great deal. It was not just a send-up of the artworld and the wafer-thin line between art and commerce, but also a comment on how we attribute value in a western society driven by a market economy.

No artist makes consistently excellent work, but the very best remain restless and curious enough to continue to produce pieces of note. Louise Bourgeois seemed to get better and better with each passing year all the way through her nineties. Octogenarian David Hockney continues to produce work that moves us, such as the much needed and perfectly timed Covid lockdown series of daffodils and blossom paintings in 2020, which he playfully called *Spring Cannot be Cancelled*.

The fact that Banksy has kept going from the early days as an *enfant terrible* in the Nineties, when he started to produce his large-scale stencilled street art, to the middle-aged success story he is today, is a notable achievement, particularly as he has done it without the backing of a major West End gallery. I have no idea how much money he has made from his exploits, but I'm fairly sure others have made a great deal more from buying and selling his work.

His longevity is a testament to his qualities as an artist and satirist. Agree with him or not, he recognises the capacity art has to challenge, provoke, and, on occasion, to celebrate, such as his fundraising picture, *Game Changer*, which raised £16.75 million for charities supporting the NHS during the pandemic.

When all is said and done, Banksy is just a man with a stencil who says what he has to say without resorting to violence or intimidation. That is the power of art.



Banksy's girl in the rain appeared in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Monkeys have been a recurring motif in Banksy's work

After losing Mum, I persuaded Dad to record his life story

Laura Pullman found herself desperate to hear her late mother's voice again. So she hired a firm that could turn her father's memories into an audio archive for her to treasure

Since my mum died in September, I have longed to hear her voice again. I have two saved voicemails from "Mum mobile". In one, she is confused about her phone. I now know it by heart. "Hello, darling. I don't know if you were trying to call me but I picked up the phone to phone the dispensary and I've got your message coming up or something. I wasn't calling you. Right, bye," she says, flustered. The other is a six-minute pocket dial. Unsurprisingly, neither have provided much comfort.

I am on the other side of those ocean roller waves of early grief but also determined to build a sturdier raft for next time. That means creating an audio archive of my dad, Nigel Pullman, who is 77 and in relatively good health – though, as he cheerily puts it, he "could get hit by a bus tomorrow".

So, on a bright summer morning Dave Creasey arrives at my dad's flat in west London clutching his recording kit. Creasey's company, Life Story Recordings, does what it says on the tin: it records people's life stories. For £995, the former BBC radio producer comes to your home, interviews you about your life, records hours of audio, edits it down and weaves it together with music and timely news clips. Imagine *Desert Island Discs* with fewer listeners but more heart.

These "get them before they're gone" services have mushroomed in recent years. There are now myriad outfits that create books detailing Granny Pat's adventures, such as LifeBook Memoirs. Naturally, the grief AI industry is booming too, but the idea of one day creating an imitation bot or hologram of my father leaves me cold. "I truly believe in the power of audio," says Creasey, an affable and unashamed radio nerd. "If somebody finds any level of joy and relief in any of the new things that will be out in the next few years then, absolutely, go for it, but it's not a direction that I'll be going in."

I worry that the morning will feel horribly macabre. The Baz Luhrmann lyric "Get to know your parents, you never know when they'll be gone for good", from *Everybody's Free (to Wear Sunscreen)*, is stuck in my head. But one of Nigel's favourite quips is: "Anyway, enough about you, let's get on to me." So he will happily natter about himself for the next three hours.

The recording starts. I am convinced I will have heard all my dad's stories before, but I am immediately proved wrong. Asked about his earliest memory, he smiles wistfully and describes how, while being driven to school aged five, his father crashed the family's new car, a maroon Wolseley 4/44. He was dropped off in a police car – high drama!

He talks about his own parents (golf, vegetable patch, suburban respectability), Surrey childhood ("I was always a bit ashamed of Surbiton") and his boarding school days in Dorset. "I just cruised along in the middle, as I have done most of my life, which is not something I can say with much pride," he says. The line hits me somewhat. Dad may not be particularly academic or sporty but he has always been more brilliant than he gives himself credit for.

Creasey, 32, has completed more than 100 "life recordings" since he started his one-man business in 2019. The idea came to him after a grieving friend lamented that she could no longer remember the sound of her son's voice. Since then, Creasey has recorded Katri, a 100-year-old from Brentwood who flew on the first commercial aeroplane; Jenny, a mother of nine from Margate who has fostered more than 50 children; and Philip, 68, from Edinburgh, who spoke about relatives that perished in the Holocaust.

In Ladbroke Grove, Nigel, immediately happy in the hot seat, is now on to his army days in the Royal Signals, recounting the summer 50 years ago when he was commanding a troop in Cyprus after Turkey invaded and triggered war. "It was very exciting, very tragic and, by a country mile, the most worthwhile part of my military service," he says.

Inevitably, there are stories I have heard countless times. On the subject of my mum walking out when I was four to run off with someone else, my dad, who raised me alone, is gloriously matter-of-fact. "You just get on with these things. Lots of people have had far worse brickbats thrown at them," he says. "You do your best and usually your best is about good enough." I imagine future generations of our family listening to great-grandpa Nigel's tape and smiling at such stiff-upper-lipness.



Laura Pullman with her father, Nigel, in 2019

It is a strange thing hearing a parent whom you know better than anyone else recount their successes, disappointments and roads not taken to an unbiased stranger. Ah yes, you belatedly realise, their life did not suddenly start the minute you arrived. I see flashes of Dad's past selves: the unsporty schoolboy who got by with quick wit; the Jack-the-lad delighted with his BMW 2002; the frazzled fortysomething single father.

There are some "recollections may vary" moments – for example, on the topic of Dad's girlfriends when I was a small child. "There was another woman who, spectacularly, Laura did not approve of at all and made it pretty bloody obvious. I think Laura was in the wrong on that one," he says. I hold my tongue.

At the end, Creasey asks quickfire questions: what career would you have wanted to do, favourite sound, favourite place and so on. Asked when he was happiest, Dad booms, "Today!" and lights up talking about getting engaged to his girlfriend, Sophie.

As the session reaches its final part, recording personalised messages to loved ones, I head off. Days later, the 65-minute recording lands in my inbox; I head to Regent's Park to listen. There's that voice I love and those tales I treasure, interspersed with dad's favourite music: Verdi, Abba and, oh dear, Demis Roussos.

At the end, there is a message addressed to my 18-month-old son, Reggie. "I don't know when you're going to listen to this but when I'm recording it, you're a little toddler just learning to walk and talk," Dad begins. Suddenly I am sobbing, aware of how precious this tape will one day be.

COMMENT

THE SUNDAY TIMES
ESTABLISHED 1822

Starmer quelled the riots, but now comes the hard part

The tide of anarchy that swept Britain after the killing of three girls in Southport has receded, leaving ugly wreckage behind it. More than 700 people have been arrested and 300 charged over the disgraceful rampage in which mobs attacked hotels housing asylum seekers and brawled with the police.

Sir Keir Starmer has been surefooted in his handling of the crisis, drawing on his experience of the 2011 riots, when he was director of public prosecutions. Backing the police and the judiciary to deal with miscreants quickly, while resisting calls for gimmicky measures such as recalling parliament or passing emergency legislation, was the right thing to do.

But the outbreak of violent disorder is a visceral reminder of what we already knew. The UK has become more economically unequal since the 2008 financial crisis and the 2016 Brexit vote, with a layer of people who feel increasingly alienated and left behind by globalisation. They, and politicians such as the Reform UK leader, Nigel Farage, find it tempting to conflate fears about immigration with deindustrialisation and the shift towards a services-based economy. At the same time, the failure to control legal and illegal immigration has damaged trust in the political mainstream.

Having been tough on the rioting, Starmer and Labour need to get tough on the causes of the rioting. That means finding ways to begin the revival of areas that were promised "levelling up" by Boris Johnson's government but never received it; balancing the economic need for legal migration with the pressures it can put on society and infrastructure; and finally getting to grips with illegal migration.

It is no coincidence that unrest broke out in seven of England's ten most deprived areas: Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Liverpool, Hartlepool, Hull, Manchester and Blackburn. Rod Liddle's dispatch today for News Review describes how, in his home town of Middlesbrough, the centre cannot hold "because there is no longer a centre". Many of the areas that were hit hardest by Margaret Thatcher's reforms of the 1980s were hit again after 2008 and again by the rise of the digital economy, which ravaged high streets.

Successive governments have struggled to come up with an answer to a strong southeast and a weak post-industrial belt, veering between the urge to spend taxpayers' cash and the belief that market forces should be allowed to take effect. Labour must champion London, in particular the City, which remains Britain's crown jewel. But the government should also be bold in how it encourages the private sector to invest in less overtly attractive areas. The creation of metro mayoralties, notably in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, has been hugely positive because would-be investors can negotiate with a single point of contact who has genuine power. Strengthening regional devolution, possibly allowing needy areas to dangle meaningful tax incentives to lure in employers, would be a good start.

It is an uncomfortable truth that those seven parts of England where rioting and high levels of deprivation intersected are also home to some of the greatest numbers of asylum seekers receiving support and accommodation from taxpayers. Given the annual cost of more than £3 billion, it has naturally suited government to house the 35,700 or so asylum seekers who are in hotels in cheaper areas. Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, wants to cut the use of hotels and speed up the processing of about 90,000 cases in the system. The Refugee Council estimates that about 70 per cent will be granted leave to remain in the UK. Ministers will need to be careful about the strain that could place on social housing, and the danger that many will simply become homeless.

Starmer and Cooper inherit legal net immigration numbers that are falling from an annual record of 764,000 under Johnson in 2022. Last year's figure was considerably smaller, at 685,000. Oxford University's Migration Observatory estimates that inflows will slide to about 350,000 by 2030 as more people leave and fewer students arrive. There will be a trade-off between economic growth and the staffing of public services on one hand, and a desire to lower overall numbers on the other. For example, at a time of widespread NHS job vacancies, the number of people obtaining health and social care visas was more than 80 per cent lower last month than a year earlier.

Illegal migration will be the bigger challenge as small boat crossings continue. As well as getting through the asylum backlog, Starmer plans to work more closely with Europe to stop the gangs smuggling migrants. He will need to demonstrate that these are more than theoretical ideas.

The government, the police and the judiciary should be commended for their uncompromising response to the riots. Having won the battle, ministers must now turn their attention to the long war ahead.

Once again, Britain's athletes bring us something to cheer

Quickly, none of it mattered. The political strife in France, the arson attacks on its railway network, the drizzly opening ceremony, the pungent state of the Seine – all were swept away. Despite controversy about the boxing, Paris has hosted a spectacular Olympic Games that has reminded us of the joy and unifying power of sport.

The decision to host the four-yearly festival in the heart of the capital, with a stretch of the city centre from the Eiffel Tower to the Place de la Concorde closed, has given it a spectacular backdrop and helped ferment a feverish atmosphere.

Even insouciant Parisians, not known for their love of monarchy, broke into screams of excitement each time King Léon – as France's 22-year-old swimmer Léon Marchand is now known – won one of his astonishing five medals, including four individual golds.

Britain might not have topped the table but there has been beauty and brilliance. The women's quadruple sculls crew snatching gold by 0.15 seconds, the runner Keely Hodgkinson winning the women's 800m, the 19-year-old climber Toby "the Terminator" Roberts seeing off the favourite to take the men's boulder and lead – these are achievements for the nation to savour. At a time of geopolitical turbulence, the glory of the Olympics is something we can all celebrate.

Road to ruin

With the help of artificial intelligence, road users are attempting to map every pothole in Britain. Rather than showing gratitude for this Sisyphean endeavour, councils have reacted defensively. Our roads have been left to deteriorate to a standard that would upset a Kazakh and the cost to the economy is £14.4 billion a year. What can be done?

The government's pledge to "fix the front door to the NHS" is a sound one. Why not apply the same logic to our roads? The cost of fixing a pothole is much smaller than the cost of fixing however many cars are damaged by that pothole and then having to fix it anyway.

Rod Stewart, armed with a bucket, once repaired holes in the road near his Essex home so his Ferrari could pass along it – but solving the wider problem is going to take thousands of Rod Stewarts, a rethink of priorities and a very large bucket indeed.

However, if Sir Keir Starmer is serious about fixing broken Britain, it would help if we could get around it in one piece.

Christina Lamb

Married at nine: law that adds to child bride agony



A million girls are forcibly wed each month; now Iraq is worsening the pain

I will never forget the butterfly dress. A frothy white wedding gown embroidered with a train of colourful butterflies, made by women in a secret workshop in Taliban-controlled Kabul. Initially I was struck by its beauty. On closer inspection, however, the mannequin seemed rather short and, as the butterflies fluttered down the dress, they faded to white.

"It represents a child bride, and the fading colours are her fading dreams," its designer, the women's activist Laila Haidari, explained. She lifted the skirt to reveal a petticoat hemmed with coloured pencils. "That's what a girl of nine or 12 should be doing," she said. "Drawing pictures, not getting married and having babies." For her it was personal – her family married her off to a mullah at 12 and she was a mother of three by 18.

I thought about that dress last week after the news that conservative politicians in Iraq are trying to lower the legal marriage age to nine. The justice ministry introduced a bill that passed its first reading last Sunday. The bill will allow people to choose between the religious authorities or the civil judiciary for decisions on family affairs. If passed, it would allow girls to wed at nine and boys at 15. The move prompted protests in Baghdad and other cities as well as international outrage on social media. Women's rights activists said it would legalise child rape.

"This is a catastrophe for women," said Raya Faiq, the co-ordinator of a coalition of groups opposing the law change. A bloc of 25 female Iraqi MPs is trying to stop the draft law being put to a second vote, but face strong opposition. Supporters of the bill argue it aims to align with Islamic law and protect young girls from "immoral relationships".

It's not the first time Iraqi lawmakers have tried this – previous attempts were blocked. But the country's political system is dominated by conservative Shia Muslim parties who form the largest coalition in parliament and have been pushing to erode women's and LGBT rights. In April they made same-sex relationships punishable with up to 15 years' imprisonment. Initially they were trying to impose the death penalty. The law also criminalised transgender people and what it called "intentional practice of effeminacy".

In the past year in Iraq three female social media influencers have been mysteriously shot dead, most recently Ghufran Sawadi, 30, who posted videos of herself dancing to pop music.

I was in Iraq last month and the young women I spoke to were worried. It was jarring to go through a checkpoint outside Mosul and see it decorated with Iranian flags and photos of the recently assassinated commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It was manned by Iranian-backed Hashed al-Shaabi militia – yes, this is what the 2003 war to overthrow Saddam Hussein has resulted in.

It would be easy to cast the new bill as yet another attempt to push back women's rights. But it's not so straightforward. The minimum age for marriage in Iraq has been 18 since 1959, but, over the past 20 years, rates of child marriage have been increasing. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), 28 per cent of women in Iraq are married by 18.

Because these marriages, authorised by religious leaders, have no legal force, the girls – and their children – are denied all sorts of other rights. Hospitals in Iraq refuse to admit women for childbirth without proof of marriage. Women without a civil marriage contract have no claims on inheritance or maintenance and cannot apply for divorce.

Girls of nine belong in a playground not in a wedding dress. Study after study tell us girls who marry early are more likely to suffer sexual and physical violence, death in childbirth and mental health problems, and are less likely to complete secondary education, leading to reduced opportunities for employment and financial independence.

Yet every day, girls around the world are forced to leave their families, marry against their will, endure sexual and physical abuse, and bear children while still children themselves. Every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18, according to Unicef. We are living in a time of much conflict which uproots and wrecks families, frequently leaving girls unprotected. Often child marriage is for economic reasons – one less mouth to feed. One of the saddest stories I covered in recent years was a girl called Fatima, eight years old in a tattered emerald dress, being sold to a much older man in Kabul. Her extended family of 30 were living on eight pieces of bread a day. "I am having to choose between selling my daughters or all starving," her father said.

Young girls belong in a playground not in a wedding dress

Fatima had different ideas. "I would like to go to school," she told me.

"Girls should be child students and not child brides," said Yasmine Sherif, executive director of the UN's Education Cannot Wait. "As a global community, we must say no to forced child marriage." The US State Department has pledged to outlaw the practice internationally by 2030. Numbers have gone down, says the organisation Girls not Brides, largely because of a campaign in India, but too slowly. At current rates, it estimates it would take 300 years to eliminate child marriage.

Yet here's a thing. Did you know that 37 American states allow child marriage? Minors can marry, with parental consent, before they can vote, drink or buy lottery tickets in the majority of the country. The minimum legal marriage age in England and Wales was raised from 16 to 18 only last year.

Sixteen is of course a lot different from nine but in my view still too young. The saddest part of my job as a war correspondent is seeing children not allowed to be children. In Gaza, a friend sends me "before and after" photographs of his six-year-old daughter Razan, in pink dress and tiara clutching her white cat and living among ruins. They have been forced to move 15 times by Israeli bombardment. In Tel Aviv a three-year-old boy asks every day for his parents, who never came home from the Nova music festival – his mother killed and his father among the hostages taken by Hamas. Last month in Ukraine I was at a camp for children who had been abducted by Russians. "They have the eyes of an adult," the camp director said.

In a time of division surely one thing we can agree on is that children must be protected, whether from bombs or predators.

Before I left Laila Haidari and her butterfly dress, the designer pointed out a final detail. The bride was holding a puppet bride with its mouth sewn up. By forcing a child into marriage, she said, "You're taking away her doll and giving her a monster."

Dominic Lawson is away

Hadley Freeman

Is it so wrong to want to hit the IOC in the face?



It's not just boxing — Olympics bosses have been failing women for years

Should women ever trust the Olympics again? This is what many will be asking themselves tonight as the closing ceremony plays out. But this is the wrong question. The correct one is, how much longer will women put up with the International Olympics Committee punching them in the face? Photos of female boxers making protest "x" signs above their heads after their matches – emphasising that they have XX chromosomes and are therefore female, and implying that their opponents, Algeria's welterweight Imane Khelif and Taiwan's featherweight Lin Yu-ting are XY and therefore not – will be the emblematic images of women's sport from the 2024 Olympics.

Well, we had four good years, gals! Four years when women were granted – and please forgive the inevitable sporting cliché here – a level playing field at the Olympics. It's only since 2012 – yes, ye olde 2012 – that women have been allowed to compete in every Olympics event. Women were at last graciously granted permission by the IOC to take part in the ski jump, because previously there was concern their uteruses would fall out – gosh, I hate it when that happens! It was also the first year there was women's boxing at the Games.

Alas, that sweet taste of sporting equality endured only until 2016, when all three medals in the women's 800m were won by athletes with XY chromosomes, meaning they are biologically male: Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba, Kenya's Margaret Wambui and – famously – South Africa's Caster Semanya. These athletes all had a difference of sexual development (DSD), meaning they appeared to be girls at birth but were actually males with internal testes. Thus, after puberty they had the superior strength and speed that males have over females, which is the sole reason women's sport exists as a separate category. "Being born with internal testicles doesn't make me less of a woman," Semanya later said, to which the response is: Well, it does mean you shouldn't compete against women.

When GB's Lynsey Sharp complained in 2016 about being denied a medal because of the three DSD runners, she was barraged with death threats. "Lynsey is a good runner. She would've been even better if she'd just bit her lip and trained," Semanya sniped bitchily (and so, some might say, gender conforming-ly).

By failing to deal with the DSD issue then, the IOC left Semanya, Wambui and Niyonsaba open to intrusive speculation, and denied women athletes their deserved medals.

Their tactic this time was to tell journalists not to use "harmful" (aka factual) terms, such as "biological male" when referring to trans or DSD athletes. Yes, far more important to prevent harmful words than harmful punches! Because unlike the 2016 Olympics, the problem here is not speed but violence, and male boxers have on average 162 per cent greater punching power than female ones. The IOC knows this, and it also clearly believes Khelif and Lin have a DSD. This month the IOC president, Thomas Bach, huffily insisted, "This is not a DSD case", only for the IOC to issue a hasty correction that Bach had meant to say, "This is not a transgender case", ie, it is a DSD case.

And still they let women (the irrelevant XX kind) be pummelled by them and then insisted that anyone who objected was engaging in "hate speech", as Bach put it. Gold medal to the IOC for gaslighting! On Friday Bach made like a Labour MP circa 2019 and pretended there is no way of knowing what a woman is.

He said: "If someone is presenting us with a scientifically solid system how to identify men and women ... we would be more than pleased." Well, he could push them down a ski slope and see if their uterus falls out? Or the IOC could take a swab from inside their cheeks, which is all a sex test involves.

Women were banned from ski-jumps in case their uterus fell out

The International Boxing Association (IBA) did sex testing on Khelif and Lin and then banned them from the 2023 World Boxing Championships. The IBA shared these results with the IOC in June, although the IOC didn't admit that until last week, and then insisted the IBA's testing is not credible. It declined to do any of its own, preferring instead to look at Khelif and Lin's passports (fact: women did not exist until the invention of passports.) But it's interesting that Bach now thinks being born and raised as a woman qualifies someone to be a female athlete, given that in the 2020 Olympics Laurel Hubbard – a trans woman who was born and raised as a male – was allowed to compete in women's weightlifting.

Some wave these facts away as transphobia, even though Khelif and Lin aren't trans. Yet a trans man (ie, a biological woman), the Filipino boxer Hergie Bacyadan, competed in the women's category and no one complained, because there was no male physical advantage, which is such a disproportionate advantage over women it needs its own category. Similarly, the argument that if Khelif, Lin and so on were Caucasian there wouldn't be any suspicions about their success is nonsense, as white athletes from 1970s and 1980s Eastern Europe could tell them. I feel sorry for anyone subjected to the brutal East German doping regime, just as I feel sorry for anyone with a DSD, discovering they are the opposite sex to what they believed.

But letting them compete – and inevitably win – is not fair on women, and anyone who insists the matter is too complicated to fix, as Bach did, is ducking the obvious. The IOC is threatening to chuck boxing out of the Olympics altogether, which would solve the problem for them, if not any woman. But then, all you need to know about the IOC is that it gave medals to two biological males for punching a bunch of women in the face.

COMMENT



Matthew Syed

Instead of sniping, we should salute the police heroes who saw off thugs



Politicians and others debased themselves by spreading conspiracy theories aimed at undermining the force

In Liverpool, police officers – men and women – stood firm as a baying mob pelted them with fireworks, petrol bombs and rocks. Footage later emerged from a helmet-cam and it was like something out of a war zone – frankly, I'd have understood if they had all fled. But these people feel an acute sense of duty, a recognition that public safety sometimes requires that they confront danger. Listen carefully and you can hear them encouraging each other as the missiles fly: "Stay strong!" and "We can do this!"

In Rotherham, police officers faced attacks with concrete slabs, fire extinguishers and a makeshift battering ram as they stood shoulder to shoulder against a crowd hellbent on entering a hotel to commit mass murder. Split-second decisions during scenes of utter chaos are the only thing that prevented an atrocity of an unprecedented kind. Officers were bloodied, one knocked unconscious, but they didn't buckle. One asylum seeker was in tears as he paid tribute to those who prevented his lynching.

I could go on because from Southport to Plymouth, London to Hull, it has been the same story: police officers putting themselves in harm's way to defend the thin line between civilisation and carnage. As the riot officers were holding firm, their colleagues were scanning CCTV and gathering intelligence to fast-track the culprits into courts, helping to deliver a message of deterrence and defiance (prison sentences have already been handed down) on behalf of the public and which helped quell what some agitators were hoping would descend into anarchy.

But as these events were unfolding, something else was happening in the parallel universe known as "public debate". That's right: politicians, pundits and even social media platform owners were lining up to condemn the police and impugn their integrity. During the very period these heroes were being attacked by mobs, Jacob Rees-Mogg was pouring fuel on the flames with the release of a video stating that the police had "lost its sense of purpose". Nigel Farage, who had already insinuated that the authorities were withholding information about the suspect who killed three young girls in Merseyside, was stoking the idea that the police do not care about white communities. "There's a massive perception of two-tier policing," he said. Indeed he said it so often that one might have drawn the conclusion that he was seeking to inflame this "perception".

It used to be the hard left that sought to undermine public faith in the institutions that defend our way of life. Allegations of "institutional racism" are still thrown around like confetti, not just at the police, but the security services and even the royal family. Indeed, some elements are so hellbent on this narrative that when Lord Sewell of Sanderstead published a report in 2021 showing that poor Bangladeshi and black African kids do better at school than white kids – so obliterating the claim that our educational system is institutionally racist – he was cancelled and his doctorate revoked. It was in many ways the perfect illustration that the left's objective is not to sincerely critique our institutions but rather to find a pretext to weaken them, because their ultimate goal is to destroy them, thereby ushering in the egalitarian utopia of which they dream – just as Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot once dreamt.

What is remarkable today, though, is that those most gleefully taking a wrecking ball to the struts of our civilisation are not socialists, not those wearing donkey jackets and waving the Little Red Book, but well spoken, often highly privileged jackals. Farage posted a video on Twitter/X last year insinuating that a protester had been arrested for carrying the Union Jack, so inflaming the notion that the police hate British values – an utterly absurd claim – and it was viewed 4.4 million times. It turned out that the arrest had nothing to do with the flag and everything to do with acts that preceded the edited clip that appeared on Farage's feed and which he greedily leveraged for hits.

I wish I could say that it was only the likes of Farage, Rees-Mogg and Suella Braverman who are indulging this nonsense but in a febrile week, when I hoped that my journalistic colleagues would show judgment, I have read dozens of commentaries condemning the police. If you doubt this, google "two-tier policing". Cherry-picked examples are bought together to defend this risible narrative. Why are they not shutting down pro-Palestine marches? Why are they defending ethnic minorities and not white British people? Why, why, why?

Officers are being spat at by those who've bought into this Faragist nonsense

The tiniest reflection might answer these questions. The law (formulated by people such as Rees-Mogg) sets a high threshold for stopping marches and the police must enforce the laws as they are. I say this as someone who is pro-Israel and abhors the rise in antisemitic attacks since October 7. I also, for the avoidance of doubt, abhor the escalation in Islamophobic attacks, which have risen fourfold. These crimes reflect growing divisions in society, which I worry about very much. But we should blame criminals for hate crimes, not the police.

I am not, heaven forbid, saying we should never criticise our institutions. The Post Office scandal reveals what happens when these are placed on a pedestal while ordinary people suffer. And let me say that I felt it was a mistake, among other things, for a small minority of police officers to take the knee during the Black Lives Matter protests, a point also made by an authoritative police report. Yet during periods of high tension of the kind we have just endured, shouldn't we temper criticism with acknowledgment of the difficult judgments that frontline officers have to make, juggling complex trade-offs in febrile conditions, often while surrounded by "citizen journalists" wielding smartphones hellbent on posting edited highlights to incite algorithmically generated stampedes? I wasn't surprised to learn that officers who have gone viral on Twitter/X for doing their job have faced death threats.

But there's another tendency I think we should resist, which is to blame all this on social media and its overlords such as the hideous Elon Musk. These toxic platforms certainly sit behind many of our dysfunctions but it's vital to call out other culprits, too. In particular, I think we should acknowledge that elements of the British right are transmogrifying into a grotesque imitation of Make America Great Again insurgents, with Donald Trump having been endorsed for the presidency by two of the past three Tory leaders. This is a man who has not only impugned law-enforcement agencies but also the humble officials who count ballots and certify elections. The result is that their integrity is now questioned by millions and they have faced attacks, just as hard-working police officers here are spat at by those who have bought into the Faragist nonsense of two-tier policing.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting the police are perfect or denying that there are bad apples. But I merely ask that we reflect on what it must be like to be among the decent majority: condemned by the left for being antiblack and the right for being antiwhite. It can't be easy, can it, sitting between these two echo chambers (constantly inflamed by Russian bots)? So let me finish by saying to any police officer reading these words: I salute you. You make me proud to be British. And to those who attacked them – politicians, pundits, agitators – I say: you may have increased your follower counts but you debased your integrity. You are nothing compared with the heroes who defended our streets last week. Nothing at all.

What's Appening

The Reform leader continues his fight for western values*

Nigel Farage Welcome to my constituency surgery. How can I help?

Constituent Geoff Why is the surgery on WhatsApp?

Farage I've just got back from a long-planned and important overseas trip

Geoff Mar-a-Lago again?

Farage No, Geoff. President Trump, a great friend who was nearly assassinated, does need my help in this desperate battle for western values but I was actually in Hong Kong visiting my son

Geoff Why is your son in Hong Kong?

Farage He's a partner at Ernst & Young

Geoff Going over there, stealing their jobs

Farage Do you have a constituency inquiry, Geoff?

Geoff It's my neighbour's cypress leylandii. It's coming over here and the council won't do anything about it

Farage Borders are important, Geoff, and it's typical of this government to stand by and do nothing. It's one rule for them and quite another for us

Geoff You could come and have a word with him. He has a Ukip sticker in his car

Farage I'm at home at the moment

Geoff In Clacton?

Farage God, no

Geoff Sorry?

Farage I mean, no. I'm 80 miles away in Kent

Geoff What about next week?

Farage I have an important and long-planned overseas trip

Geoff To Hong Kong again?

Farage No. To assist in the fight for democracy, freedom and the rights of honest, hard-working people

Geoff In Mar-a-Lago?

Farage For security reasons, I can't be specific but I will raise your issue when I'm next in Clacton

Geoff When are you next in Clacton?

Farage Next!

Constituent Linda Why is this surgery on WhatsApp, dear? I'm not very good with technology

Farage I'm afraid work commitments make it impossible for me to be in Clacton every week

Linda You're a busy man what with all your riots

Farage They're not my riots

Linda I thought they were called the Farage Riots

Farage While I condemn the violence, we need to understand it's a reaction to fear, to discomfort, to unease that is shared by tens of millions of people. Do you have a constituent issue?

Linda Well, dear, I've watched all your videos of asylum seekers in hotels and on beaches and dinghies and I agree that enough is enough. I just wondered if you were planning any riots in Clacton?

Farage Next!

Councillor Talbot I'm contacting you on behalf of Tendring council. We're getting a lot of calls from people saying they've tried to contact their local MP to no avail

Farage Typical. Unaccountable Westminster elites. Who is the local MP?

Talbot It's you. Your constituency is in Tendring. Is your inbox full?

Farage No, but I've been very busy reporting from the frontline of the war for western values and my Cameo account. Only £70 for a birthday

Talbot Isn't being an MP a full-time job?

Farage I'm in the middle of a constituency surgery right now

Talbot Why is it on WhatsApp?

Farage I told you, I'm busy. And I need a hand with a dispute

Talbot I'm not going to smash up a Greggs

Farage No, it's about a cypress leylandii

**As imagined by Matt Rudd*

WHO SAID WHAT?

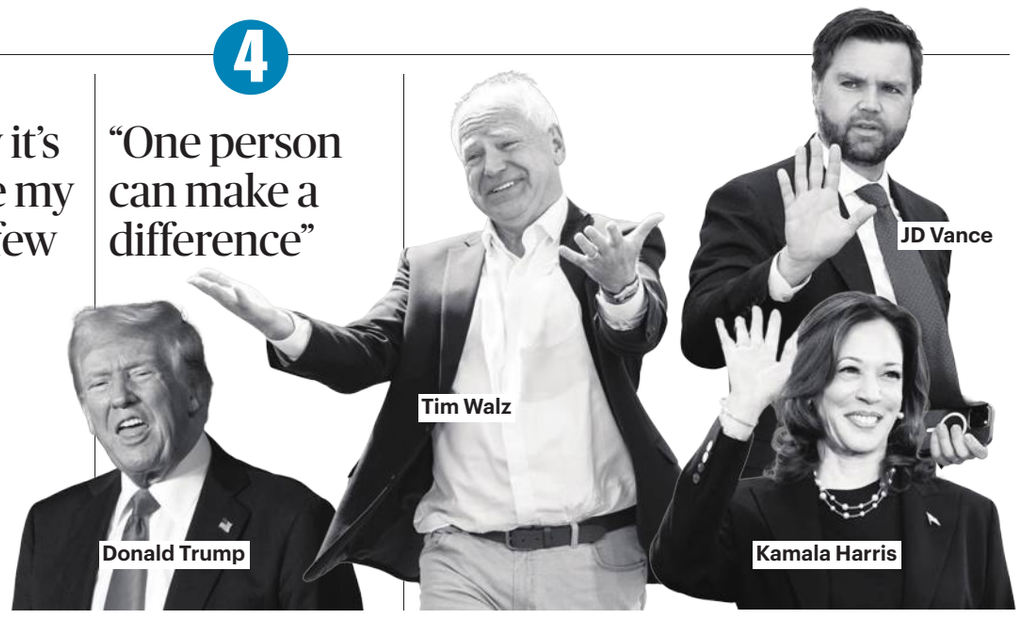
On the US campaign trail

1 "Everyone's voice matters ... Otherwise I'm speaking"

2 "We're very close to a world war"

3 "Hopefully it's going to be my plane in a few months"

4 "One person can make a difference"



ANSWERS
1. KAMALA HARRIS (SPEAKING A RALLY IN MICHIGAN ON WEDNESDAY)
2. DONALD TRUMP (AT A NEWS CONFERENCE AT MAR-A-LAGO ON THURSDAY)
3. J.D VANCE (REPUBLICAN VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN FRONT OF HARRIS'S AIR FORCE TWO AIRCRAFT ON WEDNESDAY)
4. TIM WALZ (DEMOCRATIC VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AT HIS FIRST RALLY ON TUESDAY)

COMMENT

Lucy Frazer

Let the voters decide, not the pollsters — I've seen how forecasts can be self-fulfilling



As a candidate in the recent general election, I was transfixed by the polls. Every week, sometimes several times a week, sometimes twice in the same day, I would get a crystal ball assessment as to my future. The crystal balls said I would lose my seat in South East Cambridgeshire, which I had held since 2015. And in the end, they were right and I did.

As the Conservative Party leadership election kicks off I suspect the leadership candidates will be similarly glued to the pollsters' projections. The latest from the Conservative Home website shows Kemi Badenoch, the former business secretary, in the lead, and Robert Jenrick, the former housing secretary, surging as Tom Tugendhat, the shadow security minister, falls.

But I am concerned that the pollsters and the polls, as well as identifying what people think, are actually making their own predictions a reality. They are not just reporting the truth, they are making it.

Why? I say this because before the general election, week after week, for almost two years we were told that the public thought the Conservative Party was finished. Day in, day out, the polls told us that the Labour Party was 20 points ahead of the Conservatives. In fact, Labour won by ten points. Indeed, Labour's national vote share was less than two points more than in 2019, despite the fact it gained more than 200 seats compared with that election.

Of course people changed their minds as the election approached but it seems impossible that Labour was 20 points ahead for two years. So what was the effect of this two-year narrative? Is it possible that because poll after poll predicted that the gulf between the two main parties was so enormous, that the Conservatives were so far behind, that the country had entirely lost faith in them and that recovery was impossible, that this became the reality?

We know that many people did not make up their minds about how to vote until late into the election period. Is it possible that those who were wavering did not in the end go and vote, or voted in protest for Reform and resigned themselves to a Labour government, comforted by the fact that this was a position almost half the population were content with?

Being persuaded by the views of the masses is a well accepted psychological phenomenon. In his book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini writes, "Whether the question is what to do with an empty popcorn box in a movie theatre, how fast to drive on a certain stretch of highway, or how to eat the chicken at a dinner party, the actions of those around us will be important in defining the answer."

It is why we are comfortable with the views of the many. It is why signs in hotel rooms say things such as, "Before you decide whether you want a new towel every day, we wanted you to know that 80 per cent of people don't ask for new bath towels every day, to help us save the environment." Because they know that that decreases their laundry bill.

Of course the polls may also have had the opposite effect. The fear of a super-majority may have persuaded some to stick with the Conservatives. About a week before the election I was canvassing in Swaffham Bulbeck, a tiny village in Cambridgeshire, and an elderly gentleman said to me, "I haven't voted in years, but you need all the help you can get, so I am going to vote this time." It is definitely the case that the polls had this effect on some. But the impact of a Labour message about 14 years of decline, reinforced day in day out over two years by the polls, cannot be underestimated.

And now we have regular polls on the Conservative leadership contest. Will they also have an effect in addition to reporting the results of their surveys?

"I am concerned that as well as identifying what people think, polls are making their own predictions a reality

Just think back to the Liz Truss/ Rishi Sunak leadership battle. At the time, I backed Rishi.

At the beginning he had significantly more support in the parliamentary party than Liz. At one stage it was looking like Penny Mordaunt, not Liz, would be in the final two. But then what happened once Liz was through? Poll after poll said she would win the membership vote over Rishi.

I saw the tsunami of support that followed. Suddenly everyone wanted to back the winner and her winning became inevitable. Parliamentarian after parliamentarian who had supported neither Liz nor Rishi opted for Liz. In fact, during the campaign itself, a few staunch Rishi supporters swapped sides, desperate to back the winner the polls had crowned.

Polls are an important tool for many reasons. Government after government uses polls and focus groups to determine policy and direction. But predicting how people will vote is an inherently tricky business. To be accurate, not only do pollsters have to identify how people will vote but also whether they will vote at all. A Pew Centre study in America reported that in a recent survey three quarters of adults polled (77 per cent) said that they had voted in the previous US election when in fact the turnout rate was just two thirds (66 per cent).

If the polls can't even accurately report who did vote, how can they accurately report who will vote?

Turnout affects outcome; and the low turnout of 59.8 per cent in last month's election also had an effect on the result. Given the very real and significant potential consequences of inaccurate voter polls, pollsters now need to realise their role and responsibility, and review their recent work. More broadly, we should consider a polling blackout or purdah as we reach an election.

The forthcoming election of the leader of the Conservative Party may shape our country's future. I am conscious that there are those who will be interested in securing a particular outcome. I am conscious that the answers to a poll depend on the questions that are asked and the people who are selected to give the answers. We have some first-rate candidates. We have given parliamentarians and members the right to choose them. Let's leave it to them and not the pollsters.

Lucy Frazer is the former Conservative MP for South East Cambridgeshire and a former secretary of state for culture, media and sport.
Robert Colvile is away

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sunday Times,
1 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9GF
Email: letters@sunday-times.co.uk

Pylons despoiling rural landscape

In its rush to introduce the benefits of green energy, the government is despoiling our countryside ("'Would you want to live next to one?' Inside the rural pylon row", Home, last week).

There is an alternative to the planned 99-mile array of 50m pylons between Norwich and Tilbury: route the cables offshore. Compared with the overall cost of developing the wind farms whose electricity they will transmit, the additional spending involved would be, as they say, a drop in the ocean.
Ken Herbert,
Radlett, Hertfordshire

Flawed argument
The National Grid claims that burying the cables underground would cost about five times as much as using pylons. These figures have been challenged, but even if they were accurate, the huge environmental and social costs should also be taken into account. Taken together, these outweigh any alleged financial advantage of pylons.

There is also the strategic security issue: buried cables are less vulnerable to attack by terrorist or enemy action.

National Grid's position is profoundly flawed. Insisting on an alternative to pylons – underground or offshore – will be a test of the new government's commitment to thinking long term and rejecting short-sighted policies.
Paul Kelly
East Bergholt, Suffolk

As vital as railways
We live next to a pylon. The high-voltage cables run over our driveway. It is unsightly but not really intrusive and, after more than 20 years, there is no observable loss of our marbles.

Pylons are required to connect the sources of energy to the users. They are essential infrastructure, just as were canals and railways. There is too much selfishness on this issue.
Tony Ericson, Warwick

Broader view
I can see a pylon from my living room, about 200 yards away. You can't use the electricity grid and expect all the equipment it requires to be somewhere else.
Ian Crompton, Derby

Power play
We have the new Hinckley pylons at the bottom of our garden. They are massive. But we do want to be able to power our electric cars and so on, so have just had to suck it up.
Madeleine Bashforth
Tickenham, Somerset

Price of progress
National Grid says pylons are the cheapest option. One reason for this is that it is paying virtually nothing for the pylon sites.

About 60 years ago a line of pylons was put through our farm. The payment was £3,000 per pylon, a sum which would buy a house at the time. These new pylons are nearly twice the size – and we are getting £8,000. If the payment was in line with inflation (prices have risen about 17-fold in that time), it would be far cheaper to put the cables offshore.
Tim Edwards, Ipswich

Noise generator
Your report doesn't mention the noise impact of these new pylons. Pylons of any kind generate a whistling in high winds and a buzzing in damp conditions: because the new pylon cables are likely to be closer to the ground, their noise could be worse.

Twenty years ago when onshore wind turbines began to appear, the government and the wind industry insisted noise would not be a problem. They were proved wrong. History must not be allowed to repeat itself.
John Stewart, Chair, UK Noise Association, London SW9

Unwanted buzz
There is a string of pylons about half a mile from me. They buzz and crackle loudly the whole time. Some houses are incredibly close to them. The noise would drive me to distraction if I lived closer; and I would be concerned about living in a powerful electromagnetic field.
Fiona Carroll
Preston, Lancashire

How green was my valley
Your piece focuses on Waveney Valley in Suffolk. Didn't Waveney Valley elect a Green MP? Welcome to Green policies in action.
Jonathon Dee, Nottingham

Old story
This debate is not new. A piece in The Sunday Times of April 29, 1973, headlined "Stop the motorways right now", lamented the desecration of the British countryside by yet more huge roads. Now it is pylons. Humankind has a propensity for habitually ruining its own nest for no good reason.
Anthony G Phillips
Salisbury, Wiltshire

MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES



Drivers may find they spend far too long at Stonehenge

Solution dawns for Cornwall jams

Your article on getting to Cornwall paints the A303 as the road to perdition ("The Stonehenge tunnel is dead. So how else can you get to Cornwall?", News Review, last week). In fact, the once-a-year journey is a joy. The obvious solution to beating the queues is to leave early and clear Exeter by dawn. What traffic there is will be free flowing and you will be on the beach by 11am.
James Bishop
Wincanton, Somerset

Sorry sight
Returning from the West Country last Saturday, the A303 was flowing well … until Stonehenge, where a few drivers slowing down to view the stones caused a concertina effect, with traffic coming to a standstill.

A much cheaper alternative to a tunnel would be to erect a screen just high enough to obscure the view from the road, so traffic does not slow down. It would have the added benefit of shielding the visitors from a view of the road and some of the accompanying noise.
Philip Lever, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire

Tunnel vision
The fuss about the Stonehenge tunnel's impact on the monument was misguided. It has survived much worse. In 1901, the 1920s and 1960s, stones were reset, some in concrete, and not all in their original positions. In 1920 there was an air corps airfield yards from the stones: it was eventually replaced by a pig farm.

The proposed tunnel was more than 200m south of the henge, and would have done a service to the views of the site. The same cannot be said for the ugly visitor centre and car park a small way to the north.
Peter Orchard
Gittisham, Devon

Land is for food not solar panels

You report on plans to build Europe's largest solar farm on Oxfordshire land owned by the Blenheim estate (News, last week). In a time of growing conflict, food security is important. These thousands of acres of good farmland should be growing our food.

Otherwise, we may reach net zero and find we have nothing to eat.
Deryck Hedley
Steyning, West Sussex

Car park answer
This latest grab of valuable agricultural land is counterproductive, particularly at a time when growing our own food is starting to look like a strategic necessity. An alternative is the thousands of council and supermarket car parks. Together, these make a sizeable chunk of real estate which could quite easily host solar panels.

An additional advantage is that car parks tend to be where people gather, so connection to the national grid is usually simpler that with isolated rural land.
Douglas McArthur
Abergavenny, Monmouthshire

Spare space
We have vast areas of potential solar availability on motorway slopes and A roads. Why waste good agricultural land first?
Matt Hankin, Manchester

Rules needed
Will Angela Rayner's housebuilding push include measures to mandate solar panels on all new homes? If not, then not one solar farm should be built on agricultural land.
Stephen Chappell
Malvern, Herefordshire

China profits
I was interested in your analysis of who will benefit from the dash to renewable energy. However, there was a glaring omission: China, which produces more than 80 per cent of the world's solar panels.

According to Professor Sir Dieter Helm, the energy to do this is provided by coal-fired power stations. Unsurprisingly, other countries have slapped significant tariffs on the panels – but not the UK.
Andrew Lyons
Chichester, West Sussex

Doctors have a right to pensions

Dominic Lawson makes statements that cannot be left unchallenged ("We suffer the side-effects of doctors' gold pensions", Comment, last week).

The only reason there is a hole blown in the state balance sheet is that the Tories recklessly used public sector pay as a tool of economic management. And yes, public sector pensions may be generous, but this is offset by lower pay compared with the private sector.

Rather than reducing public sector pensions, the government should be taking steps to ensure that the private sector offers pensions that will enable people to afford a reasonably comfortable retirement, something that the statutory contribution rate of auto-enrolment schemes does not provide.
Gary Rawlinson
Marlborough, Wiltshire

A deal devalued
Pensions are part of a package of terms and conditions. They are not some sort of perk. The NHS scheme is generous compared with many private schemes – but that was the deal that doctors signed up for. It is not their fault that private pensions have been devalued over the past few decades.

For the government to reduce the value of doctors' pensions (for the third time in my working life) is rather like me saying that I'm getting fatigued as I get older and no longer want to work on Fridays but will expect the same pay.
Lewis Vickers, consultant cardiologist, Hamilton, Lanarkshire

BIRTHDAYS

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, psychology professor and author, 50
Chris Hemsworth, actor, 41
Hulk Hogan, wrestler and actor, 71
Joe Jackson, musician, 70
Sophie Okonedo, actress, 56
Richard Scudamore, Premier League chairman, 65
Masayoshi Son, investor and businessman, 67
Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple, 74



Sophie Okonedo is 56 today

ANNIVERSARIES

1965 Six days of rioting begin in Watts area of Los Angeles
1979 Storm strikes Fastnet yacht race, killing 15 competitors and six other people
1984 President Reagan, facing a microphone he wrongly believed was not working, jokes that the US is about to bomb the Soviet Union

Tax media giants that enabled riots

Matthew Syed highlights the role of social media as a contributor to the recent riots (News, last week). When products have social costs, the conventional solution is a consumption tax. Given that users of social media are generally not paying customers, the tax could be levied on the companies based on the number of active users they have in the UK. They could choose whether to pass it on to customers.

The platforms might threaten to pull out of the UK but, provided the tax was less than their average revenue per user, they would be unlikely to go through with it. Such a tax would have the added bonus of incentivising the platforms to crack down harder on bots.
Alfie Pearce-Higgins
London SW1

Flagging a problem
In a prominent news photograph of the riots, I note that the thugs assaulting the police sported a Union Jack. There is no place at such disorder for our national flag. And anyway, they had it upside down.
Andrew S Douglas-Bate, Buckinghamshire

POINTS

Crunch time for fitness
The advice you published recently on maintaining a healthy waistline while watching summer sporting events on the television has been invaluable during the Olympics. My own sofa aerobic regime involves jumping up and down when Britain wins another medal, before awarding myself another crisp or biscuit.
Bernard Kingston
Biddenden, Kent

Who's Huw?
You report that Huw Edwards is being "expunged from the BBC archive" (News, last week). This puts the BBC is a somewhat Orwellian light. It embodies precisely the party slogan that O'Brien forces Winston Smith to repeat in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."
Colin Jordan, London W4

Falling into step
You are right: there is definitely a lack of people wearing high heels ("Women give high heels the boot and step into flat shoes", News, last week). We were recently in Milan. While having coffee in the style parade that is Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, we saw one person wearing any type of heel. Nearly everyone was in trainers.
Yvonne Bailey
Chippenham, Wiltshire

Flat-out madness
Your review of Kwajo Tweneboa's book on Britain's housing crisis (Culture, last week) rightly highlights the folly of Margaret Thatcher's "right to buy" policy. Our relatives have experienced no-fault evictions from three London flats. With help from grandparents for a year's rent in advance, they have moved to an ex-council flat. Their rent will eventually be covered by housing benefit: thus the council will be paying £21,000 a year to a private landlord for a flat on which it used to earn rent itself, but sold for a pittance. You couldn't make it up.
Jeremy Walker, London WC1

Towers of power
Yes, the cooling towers of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station will be very much missed when they are demolished – and not just by passengers flying into East Midlands airport (Magazine, last week). We have known them as the "coming home towers" for years. Returning from our annual holiday in St Ives will never be the same again when they've gone.
Peter Sergeant
Loughborough, Leicestershire

Israeli restraint
Rabbis from Anglo Jewry's minority Progressive movement imply that Israel flouts the laws of war in its existential, defensive war against Hamas (Letters, last week). Colonel Richard Kemp, a battalion commander of British forces in Afghanistan, disagrees. He said: "Based on my experience and observations the IDF does more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare."
Roslyn Pine, London N3

On a roll
I was interested in your article on the UK's most popular baker. On a recent flight back to Gatwick, I found myself chatting with a charming young American couple, both officers in the US navy. "Have you been to the UK before?" I inquired. "Oh no, first time," they said. "Where do you hope to visit?" I asked. "Greggs!" they replied in unison.
Peter Meer
Pulborough, West Sussex

Letters should arrive by midday on Thursday and include the full address and a phone number. We may edit letters, which must be exclusive to The Sunday Times

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

Complaints concerning inaccuracies should be sent to complaints@sunday-times.co.uk or Complaints, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF.

In addition, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ipso) will examine formal complaints about the editorial content of UK newspapers and magazines. Please go to our website for full details of how to lodge a complaint.

READERS' POLL

Last week we asked: **Do you believe Rachel Reeves over the state of the public finances?**

YES 25% — NO 75%

From a poll of 26,289 Times and Sunday Times readers

This week's question:
Should asylum seekers be permitted to work?
Have your say at thesundaytimes.com/poll

COMMENT

Kathleen Stock

Why is calling someone a 'phobe' such a toxic accusation? Because you can never disprove it



In the face of disturbing and obvious anti-Muslim and racist hatred on our streets and television screens, it has been tempting to many to reach for the term "Islamophobia" to describe what they are seeing. The home secretary, Yvette Cooper, has cited it as a cause of rioters attacking mosques, and the Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Ed Davey, demanded that the Labour Party adopt "a formal working definition of Islamophobia" to make clear it "will not be tolerated".

Labour is considering whether to formally adopt the definition codified by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims in 2018, which defined it as "rooted in racism and … a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness". If this goes ahead, there will be a strong incentive for other public institutions to follow suit. But the phrase has not just been reserved for rioters. After the Conservative leadership candidate Robert Jenrick said last week that people shouting *Allahu akbar* in the street should be "immediately arrested", the Labour MP Naz Shah, now vice-chairwoman of the British Muslim parliamentary group, called his comments "complete ignorance and textbook Islamophobia". And in doing so, to my mind she demonstrated a big problem with the accusation.

Jenrick's bright idea that the police should arrest people simply for shouting "God is greater" in Arabic is an oppressive overreaction to present tensions, infringing hard-won and valuable general rights to freedom of expression and religious belief, whatever you think about the specifics. The claim deserves robust resistance. But calling it a case of Islamophobia obscures that particular problem.

It seems unlikely that Shah would have felt comfortable on such a basis calling the former Home Office minister intentionally racist, or even guilty of "anti-Muslim hatred", but "Islamophobia" is sufficiently vague and directed towards a person's unconscious motivations that it can be wheeled out at the drop of a hat.

Although it may seem strange for a lesbian to point it out, I think the same thing applies to the most prominent and successful co-option of the "phobia" suffix: "homophobia". Strictly speaking, phobias in their original sense – of heights, dogs, spiders and so on – are irrational feelings of fear and aversion over which one has no control, and which one may not even admit to oneself. They occupy parts of the mind largely immune to conscious correction and historically have been treated as mental illnesses.

When the term "homophobia" was coined in the 1960s – reportedly first appearing in a pornographic magazine, to refer to heterosexual men's fear of being seen as gay – it drew on these associations with what can lurk in the unconscious mind.

Over decades of use, the concept has expanded to cover cases of explicit and intentional anti-gay hatred and bigotry, with nothing fearful or unconscious about them. But at the same time it has retained a penumbra of vagueness, allowing it to be applied even to cases where it seems clear that no explicit bigotry need be present, but where it is still possible to insinuate irrational fear buried deep in the psyche.

So, for instance, when the Christian actress Seyi Omooba was sacked from the stage show of *The Colour Purple* in 2019, for what were widely reported as "homophobic" social media comments, including "I do not believe you can be born gay" and "I do not believe homosexuality is right", it would surely have been a stretch to claim that such words established conclusively she hated gay people. Such beliefs are a standard consequence of many versions of Christianity, and the people who hold them tend to do so because they are Christians first and foremost, not because they are bigoted. But luckily for Omooba's critics, the word "homophobia" was available, casting a grim and unfalsifiable pall over her deep motives.

I admit in this matter I am personally affected. For years I've had to put up with automatic accusations of "transphobia" every time I've attempted to raise reasonable questions about the policy of accepting that every male who says he feels like a woman gets to count as one. This has been useful in that it has allowed me to see at first hand how accusations like this work.

JOEL GOODMAN/LNP



A lone man is kept apart from counter-protesters at a hotel in Crawley, West Sussex, where asylum seekers are staying

In my experience, you can explain that you are not badly disposed towards trans people until you are blue in the face, giving concrete examples of the opposite. You can sincerely protest that you are concerned only with a range of grave social problems caused by transactivist-inspired policies, and it will make no difference whatsoever: you're still a transphobe, and quite possibly a homophobe too. Becoming synonymous with the charge has taught me how easy it is for some people to apply it, and how scared other people are of the consequences of having it applied to them, meaning that they no longer feel safe to speak out.

Freedom of expression has been the loser, along with all those people harmed by the relative silence, and the result is the toxic, polarised battlefield we all now plainly see.

Phobia used to refer to an irrational fear. Now it casts an unfalsifiable, grim pall over one's motives

Should "Islamophobia" be further codified in law and policy, I anticipate similar problems there too. It is just too easy to call someone an Islamophobe, insinuating something vaguely awful about a person whilst costing nothing to the speaker. And it doesn't matter how carefully drafted the wording is in any future law or policy, or whether it attempts to home in on clear examples of stirring up anti-Muslim or anti-Asian hatred – misdeeds for which, incidentally, we have criminal law – the presence of "phobia" in the title will make the discourse more oppressive and ultimately toxic.

If – big "if" – we really want policies specifically outlawing expressions of anti-Muslim hatred or anti-Asian racism, we should at least have the courage to clearly and unambiguously name the accusation.

Kathleen Stock is a contributing writer at UnHerd.
Camilla Long is away

Jail gives the crypto king a chance to be philosophical

In another good case for nominative determinism, the cryptocurrency exchange founder Sam Bankman-Fried was jailed in March for fraud and conspiracy and told to repay $11 billion. Last week a regulator ordered his bankrupt company FTX to pay clients an additional $12.7 billion, for orchestrating a "massive fraudulent scheme" against them.

Though traumatic for victims, FTX's downfall has at least provided amusement to critics of the holier-than-thou "effective altruism" movement. This is an online community of nerdy types signed up to the ethical theory known as utilitarianism.

Until his arrest, Bankman-Fried was their most famous member, commonly supposed to be earning billions only because he wanted to make the world a better place. At his trial, it became evident this was a cover, as was his generally scruffy image. His former chief executive testified that he kept his hair "unkempt" because he believed it got him "higher bonuses".

Famously, utilitarianism doesn't distinguish between unintended and intended consequences: if the accidentally good ones outweigh the bad, then it's a praiseworthy action overall. So perhaps Bankman-Fried shouldn't lose too much sleep in prison. He's taught millions of onlookers a valuable lesson: never trust a scruffy bloke elaborately virtue-signalling, and especially when he is taking your money.

Terri White

Week ending



Think anyone will look beyond Winslet's belly rolls? Fat chance

Last week, as a woman closer to 50 than 40, something I had long suspected was confirmed – that there's nothing quite so brave, radical (or just damn likeable) as a middle-aged woman wearing no make-up, and/or clothes in a size with two digits not one.

This wisdom was delivered by two women unlikely to be mentioned in the same breath: Kate Winslet (48) and Pamela Anderson (57). Both are a force: Anderson, with her years of activism; and Winslet is not shy about saying what she think needs saying in an industry that would rather women said nothing.

And yet the headlines talked of things of far greater importance. Anderson said that since she stopped wearing make-up people say, "I never liked you before, but I do now." Winslet spoke of refusing to hide her "belly rolls" while making the film *Lee*. Small anecdotes became big headlines. Praise rained down. So brave! So beautiful! Sorry, "beautiful" in a "real" way! (Euphemisms a-go-go).

But I interviewed Winslet about playing the (actually brave) war photographer Lee Miller for Empire magazine and she wasn't having any of it. "When people say, 'Oh, no make-up, looking like shit, looking fat and blah blah, so brave.' That's not brave, that's just playing a part."

Maybe it's because these representations are still rare. Or perhaps it's because we like it when women talk more about trivial things like rejecting 4am workouts and make-up, rather than more important things. But as both women have much to say for themselves, perhaps *we* should have more of substance to say in return.

A suggestion, from this middle-aged women.

Starting a new chapter in my library story

With councils in a deep financial hole, services such as libraries are under threat. Dozens of Birmingham writers have pledged support to their libraries, and money has come flooding in from donors after rioters burnt down one in Liverpool.

If you come from a book-lined home with heating at full whack you'll probably not realise that libraries' power is far from soft. Not only do they offer vital support – internet access, resources, warmth – but education, imagination and hope, especially for our poorest children.

Since the days I was one of them, I've kept up the habit for work (writing part of my book in a New York library) and pleasure (watching Jesse Armstrong give a talk in a Manchester one). More recently, I've shown my son our library in Oldham: the building that contains the world, a world that can now be his.

Spout hatred and you're not part of my working class

It's been wild to see people tripping over themselves to defend the "working class" over the past weeks.

A cynic might say that these politicians, presenters and academics don't really care about the working class and are far more interested in browsing beach retreats for their comfortable holidays.

But here's a spoiler: the working class aren't a monolith. And those taking to the streets, setting fire to hotels, putting fear into people because of their race, religion or asylum status, have absolutely nowt to do with the working class that I'm part of.

A working class that is built on solidarity, that extends beyond the white working class; recognises the possibility that comes with unity.

There'll be those reading this who reckon I don't know what it's like, can't understand deprivation, violence, hunger, disappointment (or any of the things they're blaming migrants for).

The thing is: I do. But my understanding doesn't stretch to understanding your violence, your hatred. Not only do I not understand, but I don't want to. Not a bit. If you've crossed that line, you don't stand with us. Because we stand with our true working-class brothers and sisters.



Simone Biles survived abuse to claim gold again

● Watching the ever-remarkable Simone Biles triumph at the Olympics after being forced to take a break from gymnastics because of mental health problems, was a bang-the-table thrill.

Not so great: the wave of capitalist girl-bossing in response to what she called a "trauma response" at the 2020 Games. Articles such as "What CEOs can learn about mental health" and "5 ways to be like Simone in your job!"

What they missed was what made it even more remarkable: the sexual abuse that led to many of her mental health difficulties; the trauma that can haunt survivors; the work she has done in just four years to be able to regain her top spot in a sport that also protected her abuser.

I know, I know: bit of a tougher sell for an Instagram square, right?

T ANNUAL GUIDES

Piece together the path to university

Navigate university clearing and get the most out of student life with our exclusive guide. Explore how student loans work, how to make the most of Freshers Week and boost your employability whilst you study.

Available in the paper and online this Thursday

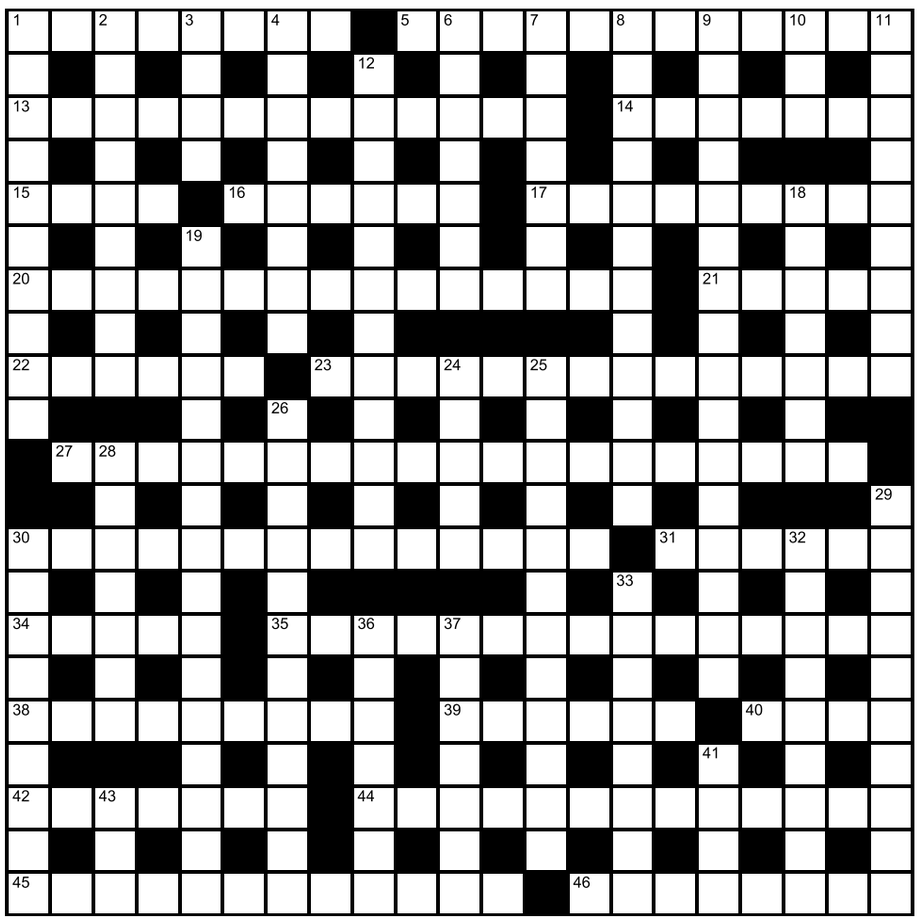


THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

PUZZLES

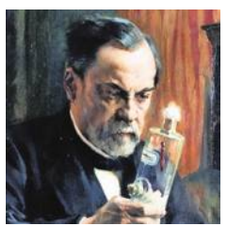
FEEDBACK Comments about our puzzles can be sent to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk or Puzzles Editor, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE JUMBO CROSSWORD 435



Across

1 1980s ITV sitcom starring Keith Barron and Gwen Taylor as holidaymakers David and Amy Pearce (4,4)
5 Bacteriologist (pictured) who helped to finally discredit the theory of spontaneous generation (of living things) (5,7)
13 Medieval Latin verse anthology found in a monastery in 1803, partly used in the most famous 20th-century cantata (7,6)
14 Tropical fruit-eating birds of the Rhamphastidae family (7)
15 Three, in cards and dice (4)
16 First sea area in 27A (6)
17 Costume designer ___ won eight Oscars, the highest number awarded to any woman (5,4)
20 Eponymous humanoid feline and robot in a video game series with nine main instalments, 2002-21 (7,3,5)
21 The Forest of ___ is the main setting in *As You Like It* (5)
22 To enter a place forcibly or suddenly (6)
23 ___ is often needed by a PC to operate an attached device (6,8)
27 Service started in 1861 by Robert FitzRoy (formerly HMS Beagle's captain), aired by the BBC since 1925 (3,8,8)
30 Author of the 1999 novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (5,9)
31 A graduate of, for example, Bryn Mawr (6)
34 An antelope of southern Africa and a city in Sudan (5)
35 Partner of Desmond Hayes in a very successful West Indies opening partnership (6,9)
38 "These are my ___ / Slowly being eaten away" (Spandau Ballet, *Gold*) (5,4)
39 Kool and the Gang single between *Ladies' Night* and *Celebration* (3,3)
40 Pacific island nation, a British colony from 1874 to 1970 (4)
42 Biblical betrayer played by Hedy Lamarr in a 1949 film (7)
44 *Old Curiosity Shop* character who educates and later marries "the Marchioness" (4,9)
45 Stella Artois was once advertised as "___ expensive" (12)
46 Term coined in 1970 for very short shorts (3,5)

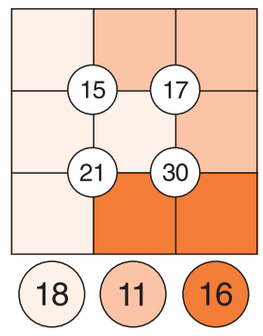


Down

1 Famous highwayman hanged in York in 1739 (4,6)
2 "Let his ___ conscience find him out" (Milton, *Paradise Regained*) (9)
3 The only weapon in women's Olympic fencing events before 1996 (4)
4 Cause to be abnormally thin (8)
6 Relating to earache (7)
7 Rio de Janeiro neighbourhood made famous in a 1962 song (7)
8 Presenter of *The Sky at Night* 1957-2012 (7,5)
9 Last sea area in 27A (9,7)
10 Greek letter which can appear as H (3)
11 "Their ___ both in reputation and profit was better both ways" (*Hamlet*) (9)
12 Leonid Brezhnev, ___, Konstantin Chernenko (4,8)
18 Not side on (7)
19 Girl group who had a 2005 hit with *Don't Cha* (3,8,5)
24 Gramophone records, informally (5)
25 North America's most widely distributed game bird (6,6)
26 Printer who uses a process involving ink being repelled (12)
28 Name for medicinal plants such as Prunella vulgaris (4-3)
29 Llyn Cau (pictured) is the lake at the foot of this mountain near Dolgellau (5,5)
30 A Geordie (9)
32 On a French menu, a roughly rounded flat cut of meat (9)
33 Apache military leader whose third surrender to an American general was his last (8)
36 Northamptonshire town in which author HE Bates was born (7)
37 Pertaining to sight or light (7)
41 Informally, a criminal identified by Kojak or Columbo (4)
43 *Linden* ___ is a Vaughan Williams setting of a poem by William Barnes (3)

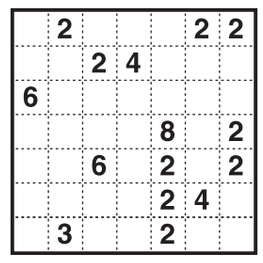


SUKO



Place the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the number in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding spaces, and each colour total is correct.

CELL BLOCKS



Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

SUDOKU

Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain digits 1-9. Winner receives The Times Mindset Puzzles Book 1 and The Sunday Times Teasers Book 2.



To enter, complete the Very Hard puzzle and call 0901 292 5275 (UK only) (ROI 1516 303 500), leaving your answer (the numbers in the three shaded squares) and contact details. Or text SUNDAY2, followed by a space, then your answer (three numbers) and contact details — eg SUNDAY2 123 John Smith, etc — to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI €1.50) plus your telephone company's network access charge. Winners will be picked at random from all correct answers received. When entering by phone or text, please provide your FULL name and address details, as incomplete entries may be charged but not entered.

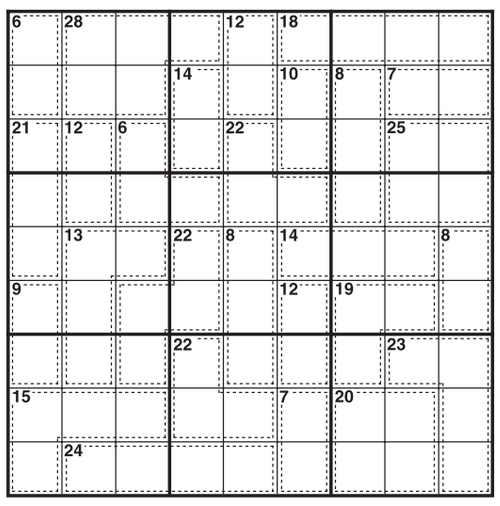
WARM-UP

		8						
4	6	9			2	1		
1			5				6	
8		5	6				1	
	9		7			2		4
	7					9	5	2
		3				7		8
			2	1			7	9	3
							2	

VERY HARD — PRIZE 1600

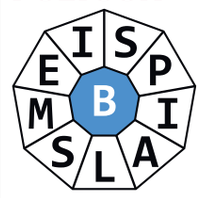
8								5
		7				2		
	4	9				1	3	
		1				5		
		8	4		2	6		
			9		8			
	9						6	
5			3		4			2
		4	1		6	8		

KILLER SUDOKU HARD



Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. The digits within each group of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the figure in the top-left-hand corner of each group. Within each dotted-line group, a digit cannot be repeated.

POLYGON

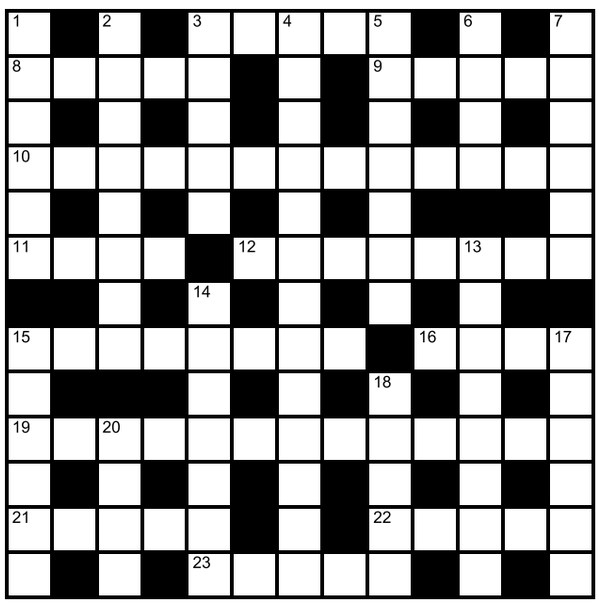


From these letters, make words of four or more letters, always including the central letter. Answers must be in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, excluding capitalised words, plurals, conjugated verbs (past tense etc), adverbs ending in LY, comparatives and superlatives.

How you rate
18 words, average; 25, good; 29, very good; 33, excellent.

STUCK? Call our clue line to get four clues for the Very Hard puzzle on 0901 293 6265 (ROI 1514 515 120). Calls cost £1 (ROI 76c) plus your telephone company's network access charge. For full terms and conditions, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/comprules. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (ROI 0818 205 403) Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm

CONCISE CROSSWORD 1899



Across

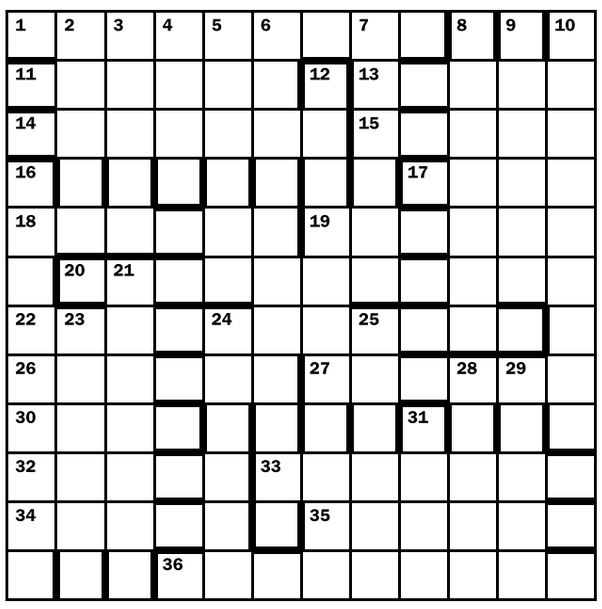
3 Pause mark (5)
8 Flooded (5)
9 Siberian forest (5)
10 Notional acclaim (7,6)
11 Reluctant (4)
12 Riding breeches (8)
15 Glance (8)
16 Attire (4)
19 Catch-22 (7,6)
21 Peer (5)
22 Lens types (5)
23 Squalid (5)

Down

1 Frolic (6)
2 Viewing all aspects (8)
3 Lump (5)
4 Bespoke (4-2-7)
5 Waste away (7)
6 Claim on property (4)
7 Topeka's state (6)
13 Ready to sail (2-6)
14 Educates (7)
15 Critique (6)
17 Bosom (6)
18 Sparkling (5)
20 Key point (4)

MEPHISTO 3337

Robert Teuton



NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

Post your solution to The Sunday Times Mephisto 3337, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ, or email puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk

The first correct solution picked at random after next Saturday wins Collins World Atlas: Complete Edition, worth £30.The next four will receive £20 Waterstones gift vouchers. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

The Chambers Dictionary 13th edition is the primary reference. Readers may email comments or queries to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk



Across

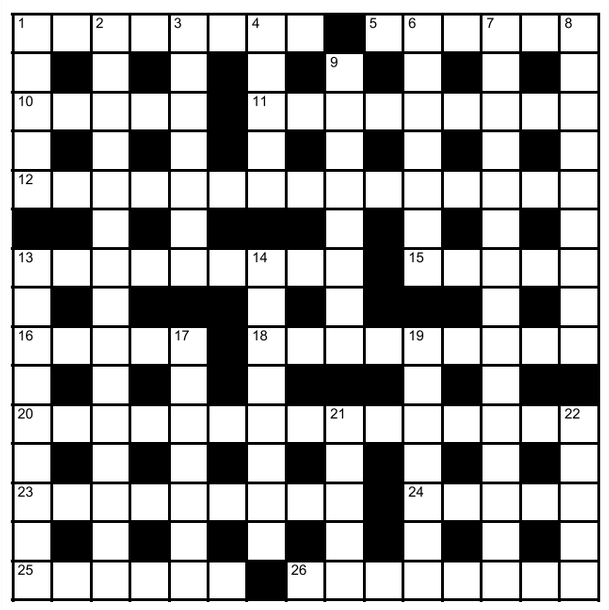
1 Barking canine hassling boxer's vulnerability (9, two words)
11 Spotted animal can briefly turn docile after scratching flanks (6)
13 Resources low indeed! (5)
14 Avatar perhaps ranks No 1 in Hollywood I suspect (7)
15 Public notices hint of hesitation here (5)
17 Mock almost completed – with Q 17 what's 16, 4x4? (4)
18 What's essential to indulge with grand afternoon meal? (6)
19 Meagre sputtering summer period? (6)
20 Cryptic games isn't it for such? (11)
22 Icy terrain? Throw in grit then slippery character's receding (11, three words)
26 Strategy switching first two pieces in Xs and Os? (6)
27 Me? I'd unwind with an occasional Scotch (6)
30 International corporation backing traditional medicine in SA (4)
32 Holiday company boarding European with small cases (5)
33 Turning right nearly miss glimpse of Santa's sleigh (7)
34 River dweller's fate after returning home (5)
35 Such fruitfulness takes pressure off teens? (6)
36 Mature woman removing half of wine jugs (9)

Down

2 Ghost once seen in cellar vault (5)
3 Tabloids regularly featuring it? (5, two words)
4 Family member lives in outskirts of St Louis (4)
5 Grass on school truant (6)
6 Resistance about amount wasted on urban area (11)
7 Traveller's inn, the very thing to stall horse (6)
8 Chambers English work affected person (7)
9 Solvent removing all traces of faeces in sewage outflow (6)
10 Companies dealt with peasant farmer (9)
12 Self-important official to criticise judge plus a suspect (11)
16 Caring and feeding of cattle is leaving 20 suffering (9)
21 Returning on court with rubber bat (7)
23 Wick's tangled tight in tip of taper (6)
24 Nap from a tipster is failing, not getting trip unfortunately (6)
25 Tope and traipse around to a degree ... (6)
28 ... I idly walk about like an aborigine (5)
29 Cream cake's last thing that's good for slimmers (5)
31 Vacuum clearing house throughout (4)

CROSSWORD 5124

Dean Mayer



NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

Across

1 All new flag adopted by diocese (8)
5 Break down fences behind hyrax (6)
10 Polar worker following pipe down underwater bank (5)
11 Put one out of school schedule (9)
12 Lecture on servant's informal period of work (5-4,6)
13 Great Britain's fancy clothing lines (9)
15 Duck about to eat wrong plant (5)
16 See non-clergy turning faithful (5)
18 Material set on fire by husband (9)
20 Liquid runs – it's the worst consistency? (15)
23 Working on a big new motorhome (9)
24 Small ice art (5)
25 Henley activity, outstanding on river (6)
26 Now then, previously (3,5)

Down

1 Relieved to have stopped short of a century (5)
2 If bad, they would invoke something better (3,5,3,4)
3 No trouble dropping base in concrete (7)
4 Latin name for German game (5)
6 Southern state, but not Iowa (7)
7 Rivers, eg, hold water and guide over channels? (7,8)
8 Totally all in? (5,4)
9 Trapper in wonderful drawing (8)
13 One shouts about heading for The Belfry (4,5)
14 Once framed by Picasso on a shoestring (2,4,2)
17 Wiping memory of article in list (7)
19 Red skirts – rip off skirts (7)
21 Sound horn on top of Harley chopper? (5)
22 Very stuck in one crack (5)

TETONOR EASY

32	192	12	38
306	26	300	29
28	369	35	312
50	27	105	37

1			8		9	12		17	18		24	25	26	28

Each number in the main grid can be formed by adding or multiplying a pair of numbers in the strip below the grid. Each pair of numbers should be used twice: once as part of an addition and once as part of a multiplication. For example, a 10 and 24 in the main grid may be solved by the sums, 4 + 6 and 4 x 6, respectively. Enter each sum in the boxes below its answer. Any blanks in the strip must be deduced, bearing in mind the numbers are listed in ascending order.

CODEWORD

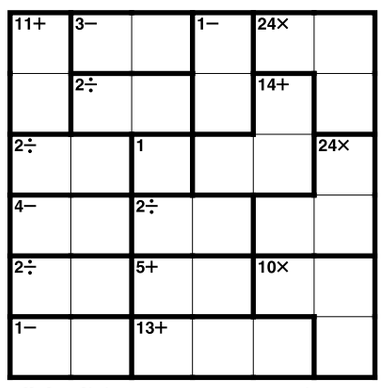
17	26	18	17	24	14	26	5	■	15	18	18	4
21	■	26	■	23	■	21	■	12	■	24	■	1
16	12	7	20	14	■	17	21	23	6	21	3	3
21	■	21	■	14	■	1	■	14	■	2	■	15
20	5	23	8	■	15	21	1	9	12	1	26	1
■	■	1	■	10	■	20	■	12	■	■	■	21
6	1 I	17	11	18	26	■	11	21	26	3	21	20 L
14	■	■	■	26	■	22	■	20	■	11	■	■
23	12	4	3	24	12	20	20	■	4	1	20	24
1	■	21	■	18	■	1	■	11	■	26	■	14
3	18	13	18	12	26	23	■	14	7	26	14	11
18	■	18	■	11	■	17	■	8	■	12	■	17
23	14	26	15	■	17	25	12	11	19	2	21	25

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1 I	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20 L	21	22	23	24	25	26

In the grid, each number represents a letter of the alphabet – all 26 letters are used. Use the initial clues in the code table to work out the rest of the code.
STUCK? To get four random extra letter clues, call 0901 293 6266 (ROI 1514 415128) or text STCLUE to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI 75c) plus your telephone company's network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (ROI 0818 205 403) (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

KENKEN



All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line "block", the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

The first correct solution opened after next Saturday wins a collection of reference books — The Times Reference Atlas of the World, Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus, and Bradford's Crossword Solver's Dictionary, published by HarperCollins. Three runners-up win the Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus. Post solutions to: The Sunday Times Crossword 5124, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex , CO2 8GZ, or email: puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.



CLUE WRITING CONTEST 2033: TACKLE

You are invited to write a clue for the word above, in our cryptic crossword style. The best entry selected after next Saturday wins a £25 Waterstones voucher. Email your entry to puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk.

Winner 2030: Lynne Davis, London NW7
Second hand: Type of shop it doesn't take long to go round

For a full report, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/cluewriting

Stephen Bleach

Space, the final frontier … of utter boredom



It's a quiet place, space. You don't get riots and nobody tries to pole vault. Now the astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore are stuck up there, and I suspect that some of us down on Earth have one overriding reaction: envy.

They aren't in any danger, according to Nasa. It's just that the galactobus thing that took them to the International Space Station has a flat tyre or a dodgy carburettor or something, and there's going to be a bit of a delay before they can send a replacement service out from the garage. Eight months, probably. They apologise if your journey will take longer than planned, listen out for announcements on the public address system. You know the sort of thing.

God, that sounds nice. It's the peace that beckons: the licensed, guilt-free idleness of it. Us mere terrestrials used to get a taste of this on long-haul flights. Away from the office and the phone and live TV, the duty to join in the collective worries and joys of the earthbound was suspended. There was nothing to do but watch rubbish rom-coms with Jennifer Aniston or rubbish action films with Jason Statham, and snooze.

You couldn't answer awkward calls from the office about the second-quarter sales figures, or query the gas bill like you'd promised. You simply frittered your time away, and nobody could blame you for it, because you were on a plane. It was lovely. But then they connected planes to the internet and ruined it all.

Sunita and Butch certainly look pretty cheerful about the whole thing, and there may be a scientific reason for that. Sunita is 58; Butch is 61, as am I. When you hit our time of life, being marooned has its attractions. Several recent studies of our fellow mammals – deer, sheep and macaques, to be precise – have shown that they become more and more antisocial in their later years. The deer and sheep head off to less frequented pastures, and even the grooming-obsessed macaques reduce their social circle as much as they can.

NASA/AP



Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore could be stuck on the International Space Station until next year

We're no different from our hairier cousins: we want a little peace. It's often said that loneliness is a terrible scourge among the old, and I'm sure that's true for some: but equally, there are plenty of us who lean into the natural misanthropy of age, and are perfectly happy for the world to keep its distance. If that distance is 460km straight down, so much the better.

On Earth, the old are constantly being nagged to stay young, to be daring, to try new things and meet new people. But we've spent six decades doing that, thanks very much, and by now we've decided what we like to do and who we like to do it with. I have no wish to make a profile on Hinge or take up competitive origami, and I suspect the two astronauts feel the same. They're both space veterans: Williams had spent 320 days up there before this mission, so she presumably likes it, and this way she gets to do loads more of it while whoever's left back on the ground has to make the small talk at parties and walk the dog and do the washing up. No wonder she's smiling.

The whole idea sounded so attractive I started wondering if I could apply, and that's where things started to go awry. Because from the misanthrope's standpoint, they've done the ISS all wrong. On closer examination, it sounds less like glorious isolation and more like the flatshare from hell.

Problem one: Sunita and Butch aren't alone. There are seven other people already up there. They'll all have already nabbed the best bedrooms and stuck passive-aggressive Post-it notes on their milk in the fridge, and they probably leave their underwear floating around messing up the place.

Problem two: the loo. There's a whole video on the Kennedy Space Center website about how the "orbital outhouse" works. Gravity is "replaced by air flow", apparently. This sounds uncomfortable. Worse: urine is "recycled" into drinking water. Everybody's urine. All together. Drink up.

Problem three: what space does to you. Without gravity to work against, your body jettisons bone and muscle mass as fast as it can, reducing you to a floppy organ-filled blob. Stay too long, and there's a danger that when you come home, they'll open the door of the landing module and find you're just a splodge on the floor. To prevent this, you have to spend two hours a day working out, if you can fight off the others for your turn in the tiny gym. This sounds like hard work.

A potential compensation: Einstein's theory of relativity predicts that because you're whizzing around the Earth at 17,500mph, you'll age more slowly than people on the ground. If you have a twin, you'll come back younger than them. This sounds satisfying, but you'll only undercut them by a few thousandths of a second, which won't fix that hair loss or make up for being a blob.

> **Everyone's urine is 'recycled' into drinking water on the ISS. Drink up …**

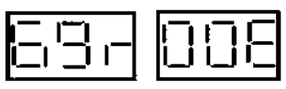
Problem four: what will you actually do up there? Because being crammed in with eight people for eight months is not the same as sitting with passing strangers on a holiday flight. If you dedicate it to catching up on the impressively extensive Jason Statham canon, they're bound to get judgey, and snoozing is only fun for a week or two. You might do something improving: read all of Dostoevsky, or learn Finnish, or master the oboe. But you know you won't, because Dostoevsky is really hard going, and the Finns aren't that talkative anyway, and getting them to rocket up an oboe sounds like a bit of an ask.

Nasa says, a little defensively, that ISS astronauts are there to conduct important scientific experiments, so you'll have to fall back on that. They proudly cite their trial to find out how microgravity affects the growth of tomatoes. Result: it doesn't. It is hard to see how this knowledge has advanced the cause of humanity.

So, good luck to Sunita and Butch. May their bones stay strong and their tomatoes flourish. But most of us misanthropes would be better off staying down here. Until they launch an ISS for one, anyway.

TEASER 3229

Stephen Hogg
Fishy Scales



For loads under 99.5kg, my scales have three 7-segment digits. The left and centre digits show the weight; the right digit shows "r" for rounded to whole kg or "E" for exact kg. The examples show 69kg rounded, and 0kg exactly. Overload displays "888".

The scales are accurate, but one of the segments in one of the digits is faulty and is always illuminated. For example, two fish boxes were recently loaded together and 68E appeared. A fish slid off and 62E appeared. A third box was added and 99E appeared. The fallen fish was then put back in its box. Curiously, the display didn't change. Then the first two boxes were removed. A new reading appeared, with right digit "E".

Give the reading for the third box alone.

Send your solution to: The Sunday Times Teaser 3229, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ or email puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk. The first two correct solutions opened after next Saturday each win a £20 Waterstones voucher. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

CHESS

David Howell

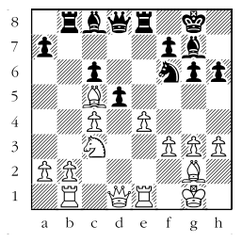
What is the best way to rise above a lack of match practice?

I was asking myself that question ahead of the British Championship, my return to competition after almost nine months.

These days I focus on coaching and broadcasting so preparation was haphazard.

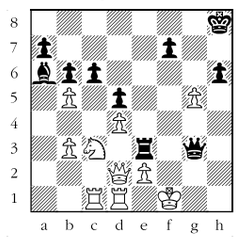
My inactivity was both a blessing and a curse. Rust affected my speed of thought but freshness led to a new creativity. Gawain Jones pipped me to the title but I was pleased with the level of my play. Commentary duo GM Danny Gormally and IM Adam Hunt even awarded me the Best Game prize.

White: David Howell
Black: Ameet Ghasi
British Championship, Hull 2024



We join a tense middlegame that threatens to erupt. **16…Nh5** Black seeks chaos. **17 Bf2** Loyal to my strategy of keeping control. 17 exd5 Nxg3 is messy. **17…Rxb2** My opponent's hidden trick. **18 Rxb2 Bxc3 19 Rd2 Bxd2 20 Qxd2 dxe4 21 Qxh6 exf3 22 Rxe8+ Qxe8 23 Bxf3 Qe5** The dust has settled after a tactical skirmish. I now faced a crossroads. **24 Qe3!** A calculated practical decision. White bets everything on the bishop pair. **24…Qxe3 25 Bxe3 Nxg3 26 Bxa7 Be6 27 a4 Bxc4 28 Bxc6 Nf5 29 Bc5 Ng7 30 Bb7 Ne6 31 Bb6 g5** 31…Nf4 32 Kh2 Nd5 is more resilient. **32 a5 Nf4 33 Kh2 Kg7 34 a6 Bxa6 35 Bxa6** A fascinating endgame has arisen. Without pawns, White has decent winning chances. The presence of the h-pawn means Black can be tortured for longer. **35…Kg6 36 Bc8 f5 37 Bd7 Nd5 38 Be8+ Kg7 39 Bd4+ Kh6 40 Kg3 Nf4 41 Bc5 Ne2+ 42 Kf2 Nf4 43 Bf8+ Kh7 44 Kg3 Ne2+ 45 Kh2 Nf4 46 Bf7 Nd3 47 Bd6 Kh6 48 Be8 Kg7 49 Kg3 Kf6 50 Bc7 Ke7** 50…Nc5! was the last hope, since 51 Bd8+ Kg7 52 Bxg5? Ne4+ leads to a theoretical draw. **51 Bg6 Kf6 52 Bh7 Nf4 53 Bd8+ Black resigns.** The roving bishops finally plunder the black pawns.

Spot the Move 1440:
Black to Play.



Variation from Boswell-Howell, Hull 2024. What is Black's quickest path to victory?

Send your solution (first move only), to Sunday Times Spot the Move 1440, The Sunday Times, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ, or email to puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk. The first correct answer drawn after next Saturday wins a £20 Waterstones voucher. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

BRIDGE

Sally Brock

There is a new convention in the tournament world. First, we had the Michaels cue-bid: an opponent opens, say, one spade, and a two spade cue-bid by me shows five cards in the other major and five in a minor.

Then we had Leaping Michaels: an opponent opens a weak two bid in a major; now a cue-bid of the major is needed to ask for a stopper, so a jump in a minor is used to show that minor plus five cards in the other major.

These two-suiters have such great playing strength and the cue-bids have been so useful that people started to ask if a similar convention could be used when opponents open at the three level. And so non-Leaping Michaels was born. Using this method an overcall in a minor after a pre-empt of three of a major shows a strong hand with at least five in that minor along with five in the other major. While this might seem to leave you with a lot of unbiddable hands where you cannot overcall naturally in a minor, in my view you are usually pleased that you could not make such a natural overcall. After all, most of the time you won't want to bid above three no-trumps anyway. And if you are unsuitable for double or three no-trumps, sometimes you just have to bid five of your minor.

Today's deal shows the usefulness of non-Leaping Michaels.

EW vulnerable, Dealer South

	♠ 952 ♥ A ♦ AK965 ♣ Q842	
♠ – ♥ KQ1087 ♦ Q4 ♣ AKJ765	N W E S	♠ AJ74 ♥ J5432 ♦ J107 ♣ 9
	♠ KQ10863 ♥ 96 ♦ 832 ♣ 103	

At both tables South opened with a sporting three spades. It seems to have become fashionable to open two spades with a five-card suit in first seat at favourable vulnerability, so that when you have a normal two spade opening, you have to open three spades.

At one table West bid four clubs, non-Leaping Michaels, North raised to four spades, and East bid five hearts which made after South led a spade.

At the other table, East-West were not playing this convention, so West overcalled a natural four clubs. Again, North raised to four spades. When this was passed back to West he tried to convey the message that he had another suit by bidding four no-trumps. North doubled and when this was passed back to West he bid five clubs. North doubled and East did not know which red suit his partner held, and so passed, leaving North-South to collect an 800 penalty.

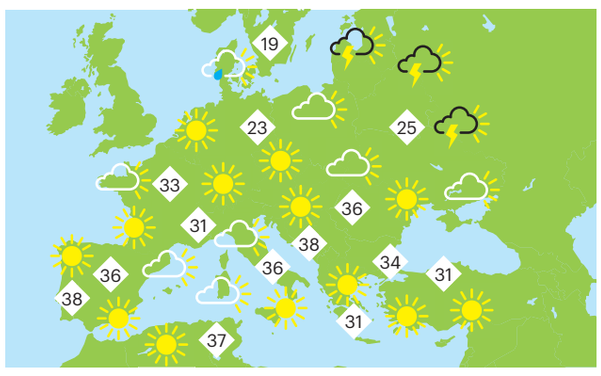
WEATHER

AROUND THE WORLD

Amsterdam	26C	f
Athens	32	s
Auckland	15	sh
Bangkok	37	f
Barcelona	30	s
Beijing	32	f
Belgrade	38	s
Berlin	26	f
Bogota	18	sh
Boston	28	f
Brussels	29	f
Budapest	35	s
Buenos Aires	15	f
Cairo	40	s
Calgary	27	th
Cape Town	15	sh
Caracas	27	th
Casablanca	32	s
Chicago	26	f
Dubai	38	f
Dublin	23	f
Geneva	33	f
Gibraltar	31	f
Guatemala	25	th
Helsinki	20	th
Hong Kong	31	th
Istanbul	31	s
Jersey	26	f
Johannesburg	26	f
La Paz	14	f
Lagos	26	f
Lima	19	f
Lisbon	32	s
London	27C	f
Los Angeles	33	s
Madrid	38	s
Mexico City	21	sh
Miami	32	s
Moscow	21	th
Nairobi	21	f
New Delhi	32	th
New Orleans	38	th
New York	29	f
Oslo	21	s
Panama	29	th
Paris	33	s
Prague	29	f
Rio de Janeiro	21	s
Rome	38	s
San Francisco	16	f
Santiago	19	f
Seoul	34	th
Seychelles	26	th
Singapore	30	th
Stockholm	22	f
Sydney	17	f
Tel Aviv	30	s
Tenerife	28	s
Tokyo	38	sh
Toronto	21	sh
Trinidad	29	th
Tunis	40	s
Venice	34	s
Vienna	33	s
Warsaw	25	f
Washington DC	28	f

Key c=cloud, dr=drizzle, ds=dust storm, f=fair, fg=fog, g=gales, h=hail, m=mist, r=rain, sh=showers, sl=sleet, sn=snow, s=sun, th=thunder, w=windy

EUROPE



● Spain, Portugal, France, the Balearics, and Corsica will be hot and mostly dry but isolated showers will develop in northern Spain and the Pyrenees in the afternoon
● Hot, sunny and dry in Italy, Sicily and Sardinia with any showers confined to the Alps
● Remaining dry with strong sunshine and high temperatures in Greece, the Balkans and Turkey
● Germany, the Low Countries, Poland and the Czech Republic will stay dry. It will be less hot and a bit cloudier in the north
● More unsettled towards the Baltic states where heavy showers and thunderstorms are likely to develop
● Patchy cloud and some light rain in Scandinavia

SUN, STREET LIGHTS & MOON

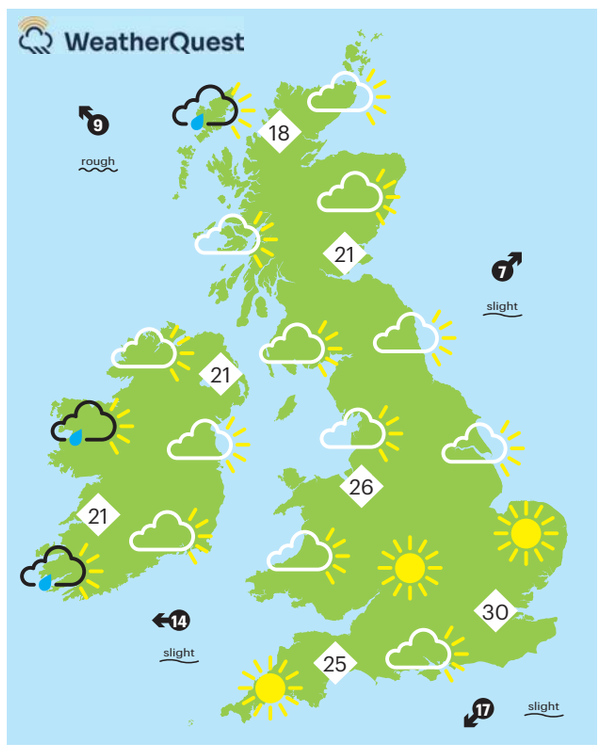
	Sun rises	Sun sets/ lights on	Lights off	Moon rises	Moon sets
Aberdeen	05:28	20:58	05:30	13:51	22:15
Belfast	05:53	21:04	05:55	13:56	22:43
Birmingham	05:44	20:40	05:46	13:30	22:36
Bristol	05:50	20:40	05:52	13:30	22:42
Cardiff	05:53	20:42	05:54	13:32	22:45
Cork	06:12	21:05	06:14	13:56	23:04
Dublin	05:59	21:01	06:01	13:52	22:50
Glasgow	05:42	21:02	05:44	13:54	22:31
London	05:40	20:30	05:42	13:19	22:32
Manchester	05:42	20:45	05:44	13:35	22:33
Newcastle	05:34	20:48	05:36	13:39	22:24
Norwich	05:31	20:28	05:33	13:17	22:22
Plymouth	06:00	20:43	06:01	13:33	22:52

NIGHT SKY



The **Perseids meteor shower** peaks tomorrow as its swift meteors, some leaving glowing trains in their wake, stream away from the constellation **Perseus** which climbs through the NE during the evening to lie almost overhead as the night ends. **Mars** passes only 0.3° N of the more prominent **Jupiter** on Wednesday. The pair lie to the left of **Aldebaran** in the E before dawn. *Alan Pickup*

TODAY'S WEATHER



UK and Ireland forecast
Early mist and fog patches will clear to leave a mostly dry and sunny day across England, Wales and Scotland. Increasingly cloudy in Ireland with a few showers developing later. Winds will be light and variable in the south to start the day, but a southeasterly breeze will develop by noon. Gentle southeasterly winds elsewhere will increase to moderate, locally fresh towards Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland

REGIONAL FORECASTS

London, SE England
Hot and dry with plenty of sunshine and a light southeasterly breeze. Max 30C. Warm and humid tonight. Min 15C

Midlands, E England
A dry day with sunny spells. Feeling hot in the sunshine. Gentle winds. Max 28C. Turning cloudier overnight. Min 14C

Channel Is, SW and Cent S England, S Wales
Misty at first, but soon developing into a hot and sunny day. Moderate breeze. Max 30C. Very warm overnight. Min 16C

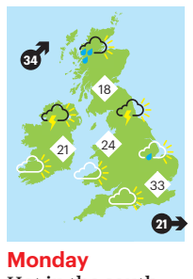
N Wales, NW England, Isle of Man
Staying dry. Locally hot with sunny spells. Gentle to moderate southeasterly breeze. Max 26C. Showers overnight. Min 12C

Cent N and NE England
A dry day with the sunshine turning hazy at times. Gentle southerly winds. Max 25C. Clear and dry tonight. Min 11C

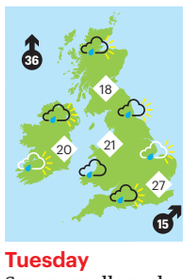
Scotland
Mainly dry and sunny. A few showers in the far west later. Fresh winds in the west. Max 22C. Cloudier overnight. Min 9C

N Ireland, Republic of Ireland
Dry and sunny at first. Cloudier later with showers pushing in. Fresh breeze. Max 23C. Heavy showers tonight. Min 13C

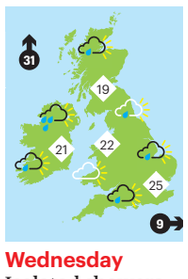
THE WEEK AHEAD



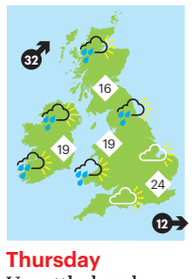
Monday
Hot in the south. Risk of thunder in some areas.
Max 33C



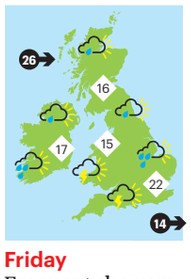
Tuesday
Sunny spells and showers in many areas.
Max 27C



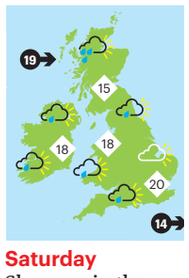
Wednesday
Isolated showers in the east but rainier elsewhere.
Max 25C



Thursday
Unsettled and breezy, especially in the north.
Max 24C



Friday
Frequent showers ease to leave a drier evening.
Max 22C



Saturday
Showery in the west but mostly dry in the east.
Max 20C

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

SUDOKU WARM-UP

4	1	5	6	2	7	8	9	3
8	2	9	3	4	5	7	1	6
6	7	3	8	9	1	4	2	5
5	3	7	2	1	6	9	4	8
1	4	6	9	7	8	3	5	2
9	8	2	4	5	3	1	6	7
2	6	4	7	3	9	5	8	1
3	5	8	1	6	4	2	7	9
7	9	1	5	8	2	6	3	4

CODEWORD

S	H	A	R	D	■	K	■	V	O	T	E	R		
I	■	N	■	A	L	I	B	I	■	O	■	U		
N	I	G	H	T	■	L	■	N	E	X	U	S		
U	■	E	■	A	N	O	D	E	■	I	■	T		
S	O	R	E	■	O	■	R	■	S	C	R	Y		
■	N	■	J	U	S	T	I	F	Y	■	A	■		
S	I	Z	E	■	T	■	B	■	R	U	B	Y		
■	O	■	C	A	R	I	B	O	U	■	B	■		
K	N	I	T	■	I	■	L	■	P	A	I	R		
N	■	N	■	A	L	D	E	R	■	D	■	I		
E	N	T	E	R	■	R	■	E	Q	U	I	P		
A	■	E	■	U	S	A	G	E	■	L	■	E		
D	U	R	U	M	■	W	■	F	U	T	O	N		

SUDOKU 1599

4	5	9	1	6	3	7	2	8
6	2	7	8	5	9	3	1	4
3	1	8	2	7	4	9	6	5
9	8	5	3	2	1	6	4	7
7	6	3	4	9	5	2	8	1
2	4	1	6	8	7	5	3	9
5	3	2	9	1	8	4	7	6
1	9	6	7	4	2	8	5	3
8	7	4	5	3	6	1	9	2

KENKEN

6× 6	1	1– 4	5	5+ 3	2
30× 3	2	5	5– 6	1	15+ 4
7+ 2	4	3÷ 1	3	5	6
1	15+ 5	6	4	3÷ 2	15× 3
1– 4	12+ 3	1– 2	1	6	5
5	6	3	8× 2	4	1

KILLER SUDOKU

3	1	6	9	7	8	2	4	5
2	8	4	5	1	6	9	3	7
7	9	5	4	3	2	6	8	1
6	5	2	3	8	4	7	1	9
8	3	9	7	6	1	5	2	4
4	7	1	2	5	9	8	6	3
5	6	8	1	4	7	3	9	2
9	4	3	6	2	5	1	7	8
1	2	7	8	9	3	4	5	6

TETONOR

10	23	42	39
6 + 4	2 + 21	2 × 21	3 × 13
17	11	36	15
2 + 15	2 + 9	3 × 12	3 + 12
40	35	12	24
8 × 5	5 × 7	7 + 5	6 × 4
30	16	18	13
2 × 15	13 + 3	9 × 2	8 + 5

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE JUMBO CROSSWORD 434

Across: 1 We Go Together, **7** Stopover, **12** Langouste, **13** Peter Simple, **15** Grumpy, **16** Girdle, **17** Deneuve, **19** Our Friends in the North, **22** Erté, **23** Nosebleeds, **24** Slate, **26** Heathcliff, **28** The Red Flag, **31** Sunda, **32** Abhorrence, **33** Ossa, **36** He who hesitates is lost, **38** Arabica, **40** Napery, **41** Nikkei, **43** Solution set, **44** Fire irons, **45** Royal oak, **46** Alex Kingston
Down: 1 Wild goose chase, **2** Gun turret, **3** Troopers, **4** Goss, **5** The Riddle of the Sands, **6** Espadrille, **8** Tiredness, **9** Prion, **10** Vapour trail, **11** Reefer, **14** Twentieth Century Fox, **18** Retool, **20** Onside, **21** Sergeant Wilson, **25** Thrash, **27** Annie Oakley, **29** Recess, **30** Priti Patel, **32** Akhmatova, **34** Stockport, **35** Aspiring, **37** Kaiser, **39** Intel, **42** Orbi

MEPHISTO 3336

Across: 1 Whelk, **5** Coombes, **11** Rus in urbe, **13** Yakka, **14** Niobean, **16** Rank, **17** Eland, **18** Risotto, **19** Surgeonfish, **23** Mail-catcher, **24** Pedicel, **27** Items, **28** Ulex, **30** Reversi, **31** Deeve, **32** Bien élevé, **33** Estrade, **34** Xenon **Down: 1** Wryness, **2** Eskuara, **3** Like, **4** Knaidel, **6** Original sin, **7** Oboes, **8** Bleat, **9** Exanthema, **10** Sanko, **12** Unprocessed, **15** Plumelets, **20** FT Index, **21** Shebeen, **22** Arsheen, **24** Purse, **25** Dévot, **26** Curia, **29** Pelé

CROSSWORD 5123

Across: 1 Good, **3** Backgammon, **10** Extractor, **11** About, **12** Tango, **13** Slapdash, **15** Abandon, **17** Sailing, **19** Address, **21** Secrete, **22** Brisbane, **24** Nicks, **27** Achar, **28** Number two, **29** Out of shape, **30** Thus
Down: 1 Great Satan, **2** Often, **4** Artisan, **5** Koreans, **6** Award, **7** Moonshine, **8** Note, **9** Canoodle, **14** Egressions, **16** Aldershot, **18** Incenses, **20** Staunch, **21** Steam up, **23** Serif, **25** Catch, **26** Halo

SPOT THE MOVE 1439

1 dxe6! wins: **1…fxe6** (1…exd2 2 Rxf7+ Ke8 3 Rg8+, or 1…Rc7 2 Qd5 Re8 3 e7+! with mate next move) **2 Qd7.**

TEASER 3228

7, 23, 31, 37

CONCISE CROSSWORD 1898

Across: 1 Kindergarten, **9** Nouns, **10** Village, **11** Overrule, **12** Spry, **14** Man, **16** Bites, **17** Dog, **19** Bomb, **20** Conclave, **23** Addenda, **24** Scold, **25** Lickety-split
Down: 2 Inure, **3** Describe, **4** Revolutionary, **5** Ally, **6** Trapped, **7** Needy, **8** Inform, **13** Psychs up, **15** Nomadic, **18** Greedy, **19** Brawl, **21** Aioli, **22** Once

TODAY'S SOLUTIONS

SUKO

4	2 (15)	1 (17)
3	6 (21)	8 (30)
5	7	9

CELL BLOCKS

2				2	2
	2	4			
6					
			8		2
		6		2	2
			2	4	
	3			2	

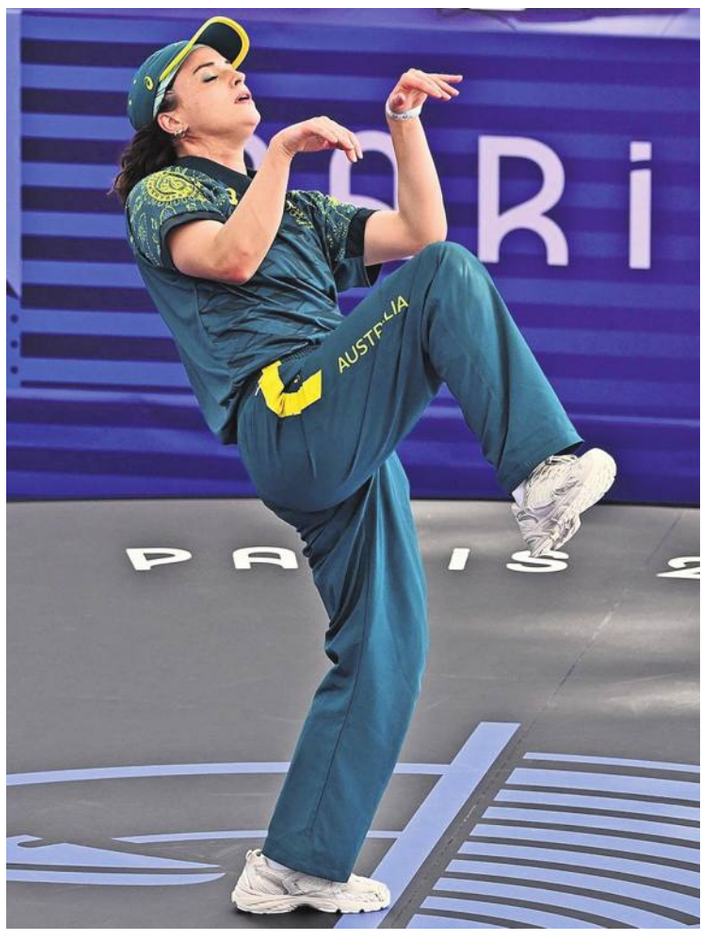
POLYGON

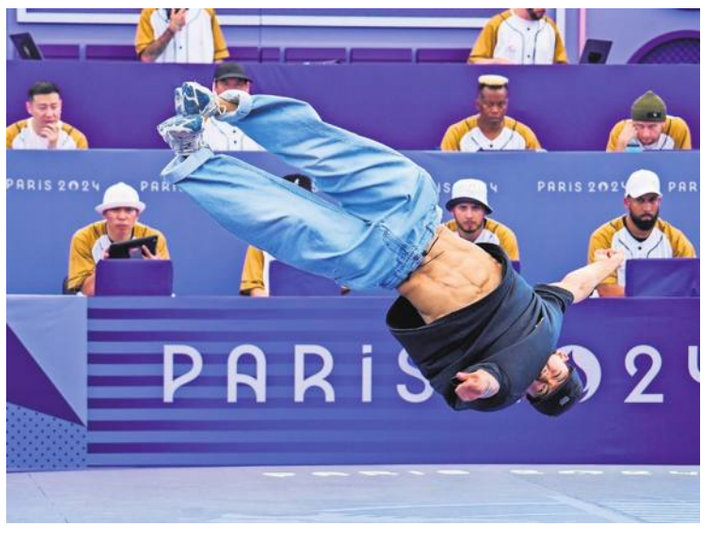
able, abseil, alibi, amble, bail, bailie, bale, balm, base, basil, basis, bass, beam, bema, bias, bile, blame, blasé, bless, blimp, blip, bliss, iamb, ibis, **impassible**, lamb, limb, missable, passible, pleb, sable, slab, sleb

Winners Crossword 5121 D Morgan, Bethesda, Gwynedd, J Day, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, D Liddell, Newton Mearns, Glasgow, F Lindsey-Clark, Bristol. **Mephisto 3334** R Thompson, Woking, Surrey, K Long, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, J Randle, Lymm, Cheshire, P Berridge, Gosberton, Lincolnshire, G Watson, Saffron Walden, Essex **Teaser 3226** M Crapper, Whitchurch, Hampshire, J Whiteley, Harrogate, North Yorkshire **Chess 1437** G Anthony, Forest Row, East Sussex **Sudoku 1597** Geraint Cooper, Newport, Essex

MATSUO K/SHUTTERS;ALAMY;JARI PESTELACCI/EURASIA SPORT IMAGES







SPIN CITY

The first Olympic gold medal for breaking went to Japan's Ami, above, at La Concorde in Paris. She took all three rounds of the final with a series of dynamic breakdancing sequences against Lithuania's Nicka, the reigning world champion. Bronze went to China's 671, who beat India of the Netherlands 2-1.

Although breaking has possibly the most opportunity for creativity of all Olympic sports, some have questioned its inclusion — and it has already been dropped for the next Games in Los Angeles in 2028. Fans have praised the gravity-defying physical and technical ability of the participants — although Rachael Gunn of Australia, also known as Raygun, top right, did little to win over the discipline's detractors with kangaroo-hopping.

In the men's competition yesterday, Lithe-ing of China, bottom right, battled to a hard-fought draw against Shigekix of Japan.

TUI
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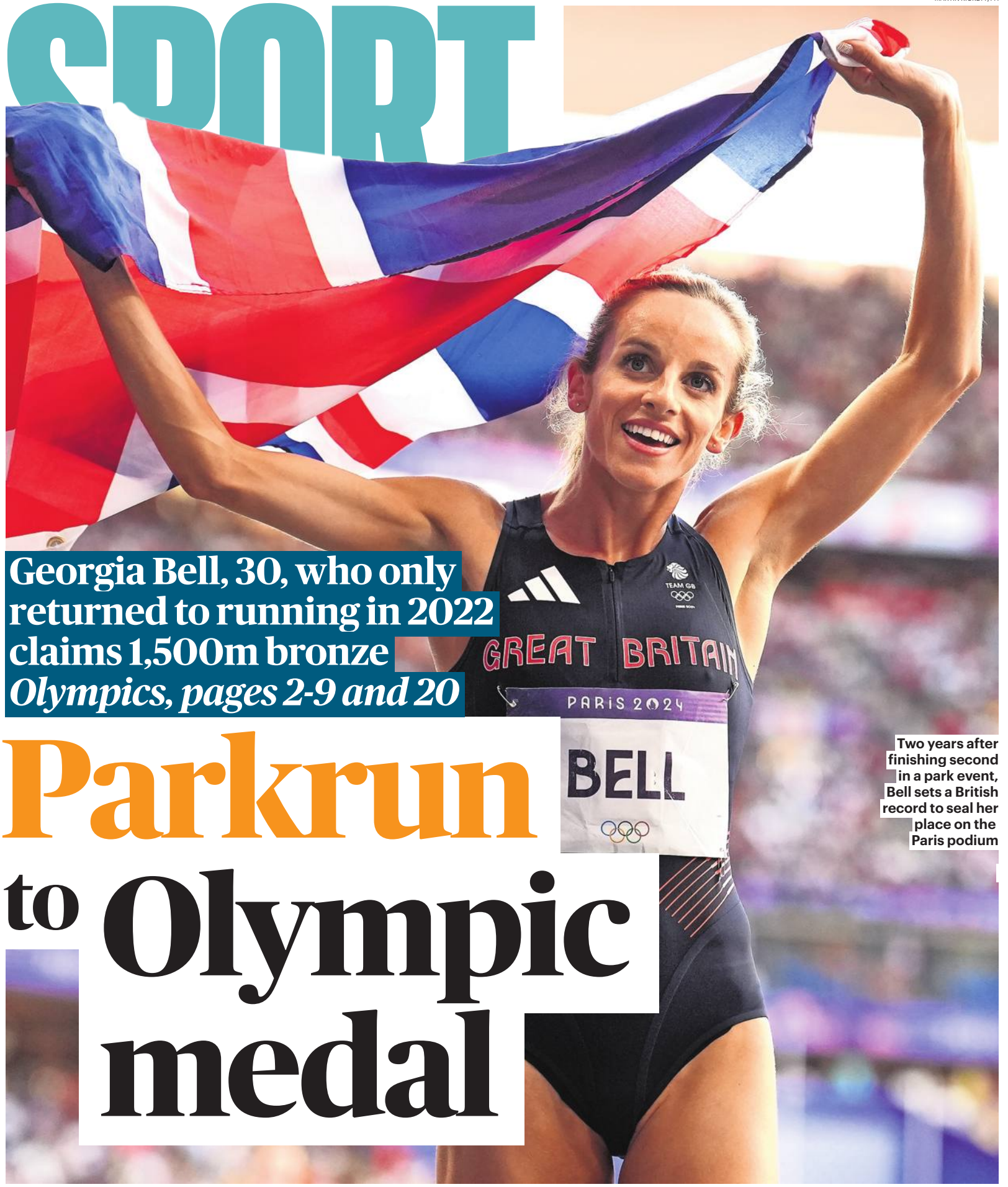


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SPORT

MARTIN RICKETT/PA



Two years after finishing second in a park event, Bell sets a British record to seal her place on the Paris podium

Georgia Bell, 30, who only returned to running in 2022 claims 1,500m bronze
Olympics, pages 2-9 and 20

Parkrun to Olympic medal

Inside



• Graham Thorpe
Adam Hollioake remembers a friend and team-mate
pages 10-11



• In perfect harmony
Daughters of GB synchronised swimmers win silver
pages 4-5



• Buying a title team
Liverpool data guru on how they assembled Klopp's champions
pages 14-15



• First blood to City
Guardiola's men beat Manchester United on penalties to win the Community Shield
pages 12-13

United agree £60m deal for Bayern pair De Ligt and Mazraoui

Paul Hirst, Gary Jacob, Constantin Eckner

Manchester United are closing in on the double signing of Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui from Bayern Munich for a combined fee of about £60 million.

After weeks of haggling, United have finally met Bayern's demands for both players by agreeing an initial £38.6 million fee for De Ligt, with a further £4.3 million in performance-based add-ons.

Personal terms are now being discussed with the 24-year-old Holland international, who has been on United's radar for more than five years. Mazraoui, 26, will cost £12.9 million and United will pay another £4.3 million in add-ons.

United have agreed personal terms with Mazraoui, the Morocco full back, but his move to Old Trafford is not expected to go through until Aaron Wan-Bissaka completes his transfer to West Ham United.

The right back had wanted a £7 million pay-off to complete the deal. It is understood personal terms have been agreed with Wan-Bissaka, 26, and he is set to undertake his medical today. The former Crystal Palace defender was left out of the United squad for the Community Shield at Wembley, which United drew 1-1 with Manchester City yesterday before losing 7-6 on penalties.

Wan-Bissaka, who had entered the final year of his contract, joined United from Palace for £50 million in 2019. He is expected to cost West Ham up to £20 million and will be part of a new-look defence that will include the newly signed centre backs Max Kilman and Jean-Clair Todibo. Todibo's initial loan from Nice will turn into a permanent deal worth £26.8 million next summer if he starts five Premier League matches. Erik

Continued on page 12 ➔

Olympics Athletics

A brilliant run… but now work expect her back



MATT LAWTON



Paris

From Parkrun to the Olympic podium, Georgia Bell has delivered a performance inside the Stade de France that will inspire a movement, never mind a sport.

It is quite a story; the tale of a middle-distance runner who had to take a sabbatical from her job in cybersecurity to prepare for the Games and, more remarkable still, had given up on her dream of ever becoming an elite track star seven years ago.

By the time many of the athletes she encountered at this Olympic 1,500m final were competing at the last Games in Tokyo, a 30-year-old born here in Paris, the daughter of a television reporter, had stopped running altogether. "I watched the last Olympics like everyone else, on the couch," she said.

She insisted the bronze medal she claimed, setting a new British record for good measure, was not a modern couch-to-5k twist on the Alf Tupper comic strip. She was a national schools champion as a teenager; an athlete of enormous promise with a smooth, flowing stride that could make running fast seem effortless.

But Bell suffered a series of career-threatening injuries when she moved to California to study and it was only when she tentatively started running again during lockdown that she rediscovered her passion for the sport.

Indeed, it was when she then turned out for a Parkrun in Bushy Park in March 2022 that something inside her was reignited. She finished second overall in a little over 16 minutes – "to a man" – and realised that the raw ability she was blessed with remained.

By November that year, after a few months of steady training, she had reached out to her former coach, asking him if he would take her back on.

That happened to be Trevor Painter, a Wigan-based middle distance guru who works in tandem with his wife, Jenny Meadows, and by the end of the final session of this Olympic track and field programme was celebrating three medals for his training group.

First came Keely Hodgkinson on Monday, followed yesterday within the space of an hour by Bell and then Lewis Davey in the men's 4x400m relay. The kind of return that might trouble the contenders for coach of the year.

In Bell, like Hodgkinson, Painter has unearthed another superstar. He had long viewed her as "the one who got away" but he has rebuilt her quite brilliantly, combining running training with cycling to protect the bones and joints that all too frequently suffered stress fractures when she did too much running.

So good is she now at both disciplines that she won the Duathlon World Championships in her age category in Ibiza last year.

But it is as a track runner that Bell really excels, as she has demonstrated this season. She might have only lowered her 1,500m best to 4:06 last year, after just a few months back with Painter, but in 2024 she has made massive progress, beating Laura Muir to win the British Olympic trials and claiming a silver medal in the European Championships in June. With a new time of 3:56 for 1,500m she was also now in elite company, even if the 1:56 she clocked for 800m was the performance that convinced her she could threaten at the Games. Given

BACH TO STEP DOWN AS IOC PRESIDENT

Thomas Bach has said he will not seek a third term as president of the IOC and will step down as planned next June (Matt Lawton writes). There had been calls for the German, who has been in the post since 2013, to stay for another two years because of the time lost to the Covid pandemic, despite a mandatory limit of 12 years.

The 70-year-old, an Olympic fencing champion in 1976, has said that a new president will be elected next year, with Lord Coe, 67, his counterpart at World Athletics, likely to be among the leading candidates.

It remains to be seen if Bach's allies respond by calling for him to reconsider. Were Bach, 70, to stay on, it would essentially stop Coe, who turns 68 in September, from standing in the future because he would have passed his 70th birthday — the age limit for IOC members. Bach said that he had been "one of the promoters" of term limits in an institution hit by scandals. "This mantra also applies to me," he said.







HANNAH PETERS/GETTY IMAGES



Bell and the Australian silver medallist Jess Hull congratulate each other after crossing the line — a result that left the British runner in disbelief, having previously given up on her athletics career

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Bell had not run under four minutes for the 1,500m before last month. She won bronze in 3min 52.61sec

Medal table

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	38	27	24	89
US	37	42	42	121
Australia	18	18	14	50
Japan	18	12	13	43
France	16	23	22	61
Great Britain	14	22	27	63
South Korea	13	8	9	30
Netherlands	13	7	12	32
Germany	12	10	8	30
Italy	11	13	15	39

*Correct as of 9.30pm last night

how fast the final was, it was as well that she had that kind of muscle memory. The first 400m was run at sub-four-minute-mile pace, with Muir losing contact after 200m and then having to fight to rejoin the leaders with only a lap remaining.

Bell was tactically perfect, sitting at the back of a leading group of eight but always in touch with the race. When the great Faith Kipyegon finally hit the accelerator with some 250m to go, Bell was in a position to follow with Australia's Jess Hull and Ethiopia's Diribe Welteji.

Fourth coming into the home straight, there was a moment when it seemed Bell might get run out of the medals. A gap briefly opened, and Bell actually started to look vulnerable to a chasing Muir. But from the part-time Parkrun predator came one more push, taking her beyond Welteji and into third.

While Kipyegon claimed a third consecutive 1,500m gold with a time of 3:51.29, Bell had shaved another four seconds off her best to clock 3.52.61. Muir, in fifth, was also inside her previous British record, crossing in 3:53.37. As Muir, the silver medallist in Tokyo, said afterwards, she did not expect to finish outside the medals with a time like that.

"Only this week in the heat did I start to believe I could do it," said Bell. "But I do think people need to remember that I started running when I was 11. It's not like I did a couch to 5k and then did Parkrun.

"I was off the track for five years, so it is a very unconventional route. In America, I was doing about 60 miles per week of running and I had a lot of stress fractures. I was in California for two years and I'd say probably about a year of that I was in a boot.

"So I was just never track fit. Now I've cut that in half. I do 30 miles of running a week and then 100 miles of cycling, and that has allowed me to stay injury free. And then I obviously have a great track program with Trev and Jen with all that speed stuff."

She is due to return to work in three weeks. Will she? "Work were like, 'if you go to the Olympics and get a medal, we still want you back'. And when they said that on May 1, when the laptop got slammed shut, I thought there's no way I'll win a medal. I'll probably have a chat with them now things have changed slightly."

She remains a strong advocate of Parkrun. "It's just such a good thing for everyone," she said. "So accessible. Like every year, I'll be doing one somewhere with my family on Christmas Day."

Relay teams' perfect pay-off with five medals from five

Rick Broadbent Paris

Matthew Hudson-Smith had not been holding back in his pre-race analysis of the men's 4x400m relay. "This team can do anything," he said. "We can get the British record, European record and, if we dig deep, the world record." Even the power of positive thinking could not get the last of those but they did the rest as they left with a bronze medal.

For Hudson-Smith it is two medals after he was 0.04sec from gold three nights earlier, which is a brilliant return given all the physical and mental problems he has been through.

Soon after, the women's team also took bronze, anchored by Amber Anning who also departed with two relay medals along with Laviai Nielsen. For the GB team overall, that is a tally of ten medals, which is the best since 1984. For all the criticism of taking a small squad to Paris, that is a hugely impressive return that is topped off by the imperious 800m gold from Keely Hodgkinson.

The relays provided the perfect pay-off to a lustrous week at the Stade de France. The men's race for gold became a two-horse race and it took an Olympic record of 2min 54.43sec for the USA to win it as Rai Benjamin, the 400m hurdles champion, fended off Botswana and the magnificent Letsile Tebogo, the 200m gold medallist. The GB quartet of Alex Haydock-Wilson, Hudson-Smith, Lewis Davey and Charlie Dobson finished in 2:55.83. All in all six national records went, with the fastest legs scorched by Hudson-Smith and Tebogo in 43 seconds.

American men may be utterly useless at getting the baton round in the 4x100m but the 4x400m offers a bigger margin for error and they can rely on their sheer speed and pedigree. They had won eight of the past ten finals, but there was no Quincy Hall, who suffered an injury becoming the individual champion.



Haydock-Wilson, Davey and Dobson surround team-mate Hudson-Smith

> **The emotions probably won't hit us until we get home and realise what we've achieved**

Having won a gold medal less than 24 hours earlier, Benjamin was given the task of seeing them home.

Great Britain last made the podium in 2008 and had not won this race since 1936. Those were different times, one team member Godfrey Rampling later recalling: "I remember saying one day, 'Look here, chaps, we really ought to practise some baton-changing,' but we soon got bored and packed it in."

The women followed quickly and refused to pack it in. There was never any doubt about the winner as the USA clocked 3:15.27 to romp home with a margin of more than four seconds. The top five broke national records this time, with the US a tenth of a second away from the USSR's 1988 world record.

Femke Bol, devastated after the 400m hurdles on Thursday, did what she does in relays and bridged another gap for the Netherlands to get the silver. Even Anning, fifth for GB in the 400m flat, could not prevent her from coming by in the last ten metres, but it was another podium for the Londoner and team-mates Victoria Ohuruogu, Nielsen and Nicole Yeargin.

The women on the second leg must have been groaning inwardly when they saw the US line-up. Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone had given the Olympics one of its greatest moments in the 400m hurdles. In these pages Michael Johnson said Thursday's world-record run was the best he had ever seen, better even than David Rudisha's front-foot 800m record and Usain Bolt's 9.58 seconds of sporting gold.

She had demolished her rival, Bol, and the Dutchwoman did not peddle the "positives" after that bronze medal, knowing that McLaughlin-Levrone's genius got to her. Last night the American star turn returned and clocked 47.7 seconds for her lap, which is staggeringly tasty icing on the cake. Rhasidat Adeleke, crushed by her fourth place in the 400m final, put Ireland into second place, but Yeargin made up ground for GB on the third leg.

So five relay medals in all. A day earlier the men's 4x100m team had won another bronze. The team on the track included Zharnel Hughes and Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake who had lost their Tokyo silver medals when CJ Ujah failed a drugs test. Richard Kilty also made the podium having run in the earlier rounds. Emotions were swirling afterwards and he has been describing them: "The other one's gone, it doesn't exist in history. That was an amazing moment then, but what a journey it has been to now have this one for ever. Emotions probably won't hit us until we get home and realise what we have come out here and achieved."

INGEBRIGTSEN CLAIMS 5,000M GOLD TO MAKE UP FOR AGONISING DEFEAT IN 1,500M DUEL

Jakob Ingebrigtsen released a song before the Olympic Games which extolled the virtues of being Norwegian (Rick Broadbent writes). *Ingen Gjor Det Bedre* means "nobody does it better" and if something got lost in translation in the 1,500m, he ended the Olympics with a prized 5,000m gold.

Ingebrigtsen, who has won the past two 5,000m world titles, was trying to save face after the devastation of losing out in his rivalry with Josh Kerr over the shorter distance. To add insult to ignominy, Kerr beat him in the 1,500m final but did not win, with Cole Hocker securing the gold.

So to the 5,000m and a chance to win a second Olympic gold to go with the one he won in the 1,500m in Tokyo. It was a tall order. Beyond the bickering that dominated the build-up to his so-called "duel" with Kerr, Ingebrigtsen had a serious achilles injury that meant he was reduced to working away in the shed in his garden well into Olympic year.

For all the criticism he received in the wake of the 1,500m, he is now a two-times Olympic and world champion at the age of just 23. His time of 13min 13.66sec was nothing special, but he had almost toyed with a high-class field.

Tamirat Tola of Ethiopia won the marathon in 2:06.26 but Eliud Kipchoge, the two-time champion and Kenyan icon, failed to finish the hilly course and dropped out for the first time in his career after around 30km.

Olympics Swimming

Artistic duo fulfil mothers' dreams



OWEN SLOT



This medal was a very long time coming; in fact it goes right back to the 1980s when two British pioneers of synchronised swimming – as it was known then – made a bid to compete in the Olympic Games but never quite got there. Four decades later, the work they started was finally completed with their two daughters standing together on the podium.

Izzy Thorpe and Kate Shortman thus achieved a very special first in becoming the first Britons ever to win a medal in this sport. In the stands sat Shortman's mother, Maria, who coached them in their youth. At the poolside stood Thorpe's mother, Karen, who effectively took over the job and is now head of performance for their sport in the UK.

Both mothers were overcome with the way their daughters had finally finished the job. Overnight, Thorpe, 23, and Shortman, 22, were lying in fourth place with China, the Netherlands and Austria in front of them and a huge task to reel them in.

Their response was immediate and smart. Rather than return to the athletes' village to recover, they were back in the pool almost immediately. They knew they had to change their routine for the following evening. They had to raise the stakes and up the difficulty.

They added an extra 360 spin, a brave decision richly rewarded because they won day two. Their performance in the free routine reeled in the Austrians and the Dutch, leaving only the Chinese ahead of them.

"I just want to go and celebrate," Maria Shortman said.

"My sister wouldn't be where she is without my mum," said Kate's emotional sister, Chloe. "My mum's incredible."

"I'm feeling great," Karen Thorpe said. "It's absolutely incredible. This is their journey, their story. I am super happy that they were able to achieve what they did today and that I was able to be there with them for it."

Thus did they bring to a close a long family saga, a story about the enduring bonds of sport.

It was back in the Eighties that their mothers were competing in the nascent world of synchro swimming, their ambitions set on reaching the Atlanta Olympics as a pair.

These hopes were ended when the pairs competition for Atlanta was ditched and synchro teams were transformed to eights. Karen and Maria persevered but their GB eight never qualified and it appeared that their Olympic dreams had been snuffled out. By the time the duets were back in fashion, four years later, Karen Thorpe was already pregnant.



That was Izzy. Kate Shortman appeared later the same year. As their mothers remained friends, the two families stayed close too, both based in Bristol, both soon taking their daughters down to the same pool.

The Thorpe-Shortman Olympic story then restarted when the girls were eight. The venue: Filton Leisure Centre. The action: their first synchro routine together. It was, apparently, greeted by all-round astonishment. They have been working together on and off ever since.

It is not as if the two mothers then exited the scene and left the story to the next generation. Both became coaches. Both mums have coached the girls at different times. Both have experienced the kind of challenges that



Williams the bronze bomber hurtles out of Daley's shadow

Diving

Noah Williams was a wide-eyed 12-year-old in the crowd when Tom Daley won bronze in the 10m platform at London 2012. From an inspiration to a silver-medal-winning partner here in Paris a fortnight ago, he completed a heartening narrative arc and hurtled out of his idol's shadow with an individual bronze of his own in a breathtaking final. This time it was his mentor Daley, 30, watching with bated breath in the stands before ditching his knitting needles and bundling down to the poolside at the Aquatics Centre to congratulate Williams.

The rest of Team GB's divers were not far behind. They had already enjoyed a record-breaking Games, winning three more bronzes in synchro events, but a first individual medal was a crowning achievement as two impeccable dives clinched a place on the podium after hope had seemingly splashed and sunk.

"Tom just said, 'Well done, do you believe it?' And I said, 'No, not really, it feels like a dream,'" Williams said. "I'm pretty shocked. I came fourth at the World Championships last year and I was seventh this year, so it was not crazy [to be in the final], but to medal was a whole different thing.

"I wouldn't say it's more special because I really enjoyed the synchro, especially doing it with Tom, but it's maybe a bigger achievement [to win an individual medal]. He's obviously done this a few times so now I can kind of get a bit closer to him."

It was all the more remarkable given how Williams had barely scraped into this final after qualifying 12th in the semi-finals – the last spot available. "I did bad earlier," he said bluntly. But that meant Williams was first, which removed the pressure that builds over six rounds.

Williams was well poised in fourth when disaster struck. A back 3½ somersaults in pike caused a mighty splash and a score of 63.00 felt for all the world fatal.

"I knew I messed up. I was just like, 'That's it, it's over,' " Williams, who avoided looking at the looming leaderboard, said.

Those final two dives were not only the best in Williams's repertoire but also perhaps of his life. The first, a back 2½ somersaults with 2½ twists, scored 96.30 points and he led the standings that round.

Williams won his second medal of the Paris Games



SUNDAY TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER MARC ASPLAND



Shortman and Thorpe were up against four sets of twins in the top five, but came away with a silver medal, much to the delight of Shortman's mother Maria, left centre

accompany that double-act of mixing coaching with parenting.

It can't have gone too badly, especially when you consider the field that they were competing against here in Paris these past two days.

Artistic swimming – as it is now called – is a sport where, to use the old terminology, it is all about synchronicity. If you are roughly the same look and shape as your duet partner, you have an obvious head start. If you have trained together a long time, that is a further competitive advantage. The better you know and understand your team-mate, the more you two are in tune, then the better synchronised you will be.

On these terms, you would have thought that Thorpe and Shortman were ahead of the game. They have been friends since they were babies; they have been competing together since they were seven years old. Their two families live near each other in Bristol and are lifelong friends. They both even have the same dog breed (cockapoo). They finish each other's sentences. People say they are just like sisters.

However, the raw facts clearly demonstrate how circumstances were stacked against them because while they went into day two of the competition here in fourth place, the pairs in first place (the Wangs of China), second (the Alexandris of Austria), third (the De Brouwers of Netherlands) and fifth (the Aleksiivas of Ukraine) were all twins.

The answer that Thorpe and Shortman came up with was to stay at the pool and raise the difficulty level of their routine. They thus proved that friends for life are a match for anyone, no matter the DNA involved.

Thorpe and Shortman afterwards were ecstatic with their achievement, announcing their hope that others would now follow them into their sport.

That would be one considerable achievement. Another knock-on effect of this silver was revealed within minutes of their triumph when the news from the Sea Life London Aquarium landed: that two of their favourite inhabitants are to be named after them.

There is now a Caribbean nurse shark called Izzy and a tawny nurse shark called Kate.

There are also two families celebrating at a long Olympic campaign that is finally complete.

Grand Palais gold is kicked out of Cunningham's hands

Taekwondo

James Gheerbrant, Paris

Caden Cunningham fell agonisingly short in his quest to become Great Britain's second Olympic champion in taekwondo, losing in a deciding round to Iran's Arian Salimi under the cupola of the Grand Palais.

The 21-year-old from Huddersfield fought his way through three rounds with distinction, serving notice of a new British talent in this sport, and though he will not return as an Olympic champion, it is significant nonetheless that he has extended Britain's record of having won a medal in taekwondo at every Olympics since 2008.

British Taekwondo came into these Games under something of a cloud after the revelation of Jade Jones's refused drugs test and her early exit, coupled with the injury that deprived Bradly Sinden of the chance to fight for bronze, meant there was a desperate need for a positive finish to the Olympic competition. After the blur of unanswered questions, Cunningham's emergence provided a blaze of unquestionable talent.

He is an engaging figure, not short on confidence. He indulged in a little light showboating at one point in his semi-final against Ivory Coast's Cheick Sallah Cissé and after that match declared that he intended to "come out victorious" in the final. But he also conducted himself with sportsmanship and humility in that contest, touching fists with Salimi, exchanging a hug with his opponent before the final round and raising the Iranian's hand in acknowledgment of his triumph at the end.

"It was very good, very fun," Cunningham said. "I've got a lot of respect for that athlete; once that match started, similar to myself, he wanted to kill.

"Outside of that, [he is a] very nice guy, a genuine fighter, I've got no problem losing if the man is better than me on the day, and that's what he was.

"I'm gutted I didn't get the gold for myself, my coach and my family and for Britain. However, I'm very proud to be here today."

Still, Cunningham's silver will be Britain's only taekwondo medal of these Games, their most meagre haul since Beijing. Rebecca McGowan, in the women's heavyweight category, was comprehensively defeated by Svetlana Osipova of Uzbekistan, conceding 28 points in two rounds, and was left in tears, but she got another chance through the repechage.

Her bronze-medal bout went the same way as Cunningham's: she won the first round convincingly against Turkey's Nafia Kus but was edged out in the next two.

Cunningham's progress through the earlier rounds had been impressive. He had to beat three former Olympic medallists: Abdoul Issoufou Alfaga of Niger, the 2016 silver medallist, Rafael Alba of Cuba, who won bronze in Tokyo, and Cissé, the champion in 2016, when he beat Britain's Lutalo Muhammad with a last-second head kick.

The bout against Alba was a desperately cagey affair, with Cunningham often on the defensive, but the challenge of facing Cissé seemed to fire him up and he landed two spinning head kicks in a much more expansive first round, which he won 11-6.

The Ivorian came back to win the second, before a dramatic final round in which Cunningham found himself 2-0 down when the British coaches played their video review card on another Cunningham head kick. It proved crucial: the Briton was awarded three points, and though the round finished 5-5, he was awarded the round, and the victory, due to being judged to have made more hits, the tie-breaker at these Olympics.



Cunningham was left "gutted"

He emerged for his final radiating assurance, and was the superior fighter in the first round, fighting smartly and scoring with two body shots.

But then the contest began to get away from him. Salimi dominated the second round, and suddenly the head kicks that Cunningham had previously been swaying out of the way of were proving more difficult to avoid. The Iranian twice scored via that method, and took the round 6-1, setting up a decider.

The embrace they shared before that round testified to the great spirit in which the fight was contested. It was a desperately closely fought round, with the stakes bringing out the sharpest defensive reactions in both men.

But it was Salimi who landed the crucial first blow, striking to the body with about 30 seconds remaining. Cunningham had to respond, but he wasn't able to land a scoring blow and, as he desperately sought it, Salimi picked him off with a head kick to clinch the gold medal.

"You've got to be positive," Cunningham said. "I'm 21, I tore my ACL not long ago and I've got the best physio in the world. I came back very quickly. So to come and beat three world champions, three Olympic medallists, and then [to face] such an amazing fighter like that, it's a blooming good day.

"It's the start of whatever I want. I work very hard, if I choose something else I choose something else and I'll master it. If I stay with this, I'll be the king of taekwondo for the next four years, no problem."

Mexico's Randal Willars then caved and Williams, still unaware of the stakes, crossed the threshold from heir apparent to heir.

A forward 4½ somersaults – the most difficult of all Williams's dives – barely caused a ripple in the pool. The jubilant screams of Team GB's coach, Jane Figueiredo, filled the arena. An agonising wait followed, and Japan's Rikuto Tamai knocked Williams down into third, but Willars's final dive had reserved heartache only for himself.

"Before the last dive I was basically thinking that I don't think I'll get this chance again. Obviously there will be another Olympics but being in the position where I was close to medalling, I thought it was now or never – and luckily it was now," he said.

Williams wept after the synchro final when discussing the sudden death of his coach, Dave Jenkins, aged 31, months after leaving Tokyo empty-handed, and the grief almost caused him to quit. "I miss him so much and I love him; he was gone far too early and I'm so glad that I could do this for him," he said.

A path out of that tragedy has never been straightforward. Williams admitted he has "struggled with mental health for a long time" and revealed that he has been on antidepressants for the past few years. "One of the only times I'm not sad is when I'm competing.

"It's probably just the adrenaline rush. Diving is my form of therapy."

Here in Saint-Denis, it also made the nine-year-old that chanced upon a flyer for Crystal Palace Diving Club a two-times Olympic medallist. "The hardest one is left," Williams said, laughing.

SECOND GENDER-ROW BOXER WINS GOLD

Boxing

The Olympic boxing competition ended in controversy last night when Lin Yu-ting secured a second gold medal for the two athletes caught up in the gender row that has overshadowed these Games (Ben Bloom writes).

Lin, from Taiwan, left Julia Szeremeta of Poland with a face smeared in blood as she dominated her final bout to earn a 57kg victory by unanimous decision.



Lin, right, and Algeria's Imane Khelif, competed despite it emerging that they were disqualified from last year's world championships for failing gender eligibility tests. Khelif, won 66kg gold a day earlier.

Lin largely avoided the same personal vitriol levelled at the Algerian. While Khelif made bold public statements, Lin, 28, largely kept her counsel.

However, previous bouts were mired in controversy, with earlier vanquished opponents protesting her inclusion by crossing their fingers in "XX" sign, in reference to female chromosomes.

She towered over her Szeremeta, exploiting her height advantage to keep Szeremeta at bay with her longer reach. Unlike Khelif, who relied on power, Lin's triumph was built on agility and technique, jabbing away with aplomb.

Victory came courtesy of five perfect scorecards from the judges. Szeremeta accepted defeat graciously, and embraced Lin before showing a love heart shape with her hands.

Hadley Freeman: IOC has been failing women for years, news p18

Olympics

Rowers shine but sailors sink – GB's Olympics rated

Two medals for £22.8 million at sea, but diving packs a punch – how did each sport do relative to their funding?



Pidcock's comeback after a puncture in the mountain biking is one of Team GB's stories of the Games, while Johnson-Thompson, left, finally won an Olympic medal

ATHLETICS

Lottery funding: £22.7m

GB went in with five big-hitters. Keely Hodgkinson won a brilliant gold in the 800m, and three of the others took good silver medals. Josh Kerr broke the British record when finishing second to fast-finishing Cole Hocker in the 1,500m, while Matthew Hudson-Smith broke the European record and became the fifth-fastest man in history in the 400m.

You would have to be a miserablist to find fault with that, and then Katarina Johnson-Thompson gave it absolutely everything and achieved her second-best heptathlon score on the back of a 800m personal best. The only golden shot to really disappoint was Molly Caudery, who would have won pole vault gold had she replicated her season's best, but failed to register a mark. She will be back.



Relays bolstered the medal tally – ultimately GB won more medals in athletics than at any Games since 1984 – although the women's 4x100m blew a chance of gold with two subpar changeovers. There were plenty of fourth and fifth places too, from the likes of Daryll Neita, Dina Asher-Smith and Emile Cairess, and a possible breakout star in 1,500m bronze medallist Georgia Bell.

8/10

CYCLING

Lottery funding: £29.3m

The controversial bronze that Jack Carlin won in the individual sprint ensured the cyclists would hit their target of ten medals. To date, though, there have been two golds, with Tom Pidcock retaining his mountain bike title and the women's team sprint in the velodrome. While Britain are on track to exceed their Tokyo haul of 12 medals, they are unlikely to match the tally of six golds from three years ago, even with a flourish today.

The principal feature of British cycling in Tokyo was success away from the velodrome: golds in BMX for Bethany Shriever and Charlotte Worthington, and Pidcock on the mountain bike. In Paris, the BMX produced only a silver for Kieran Reilly, leaving a reliance on the track again. Team GB featured on seven of the first eight podiums in the velodrome but there is less gold in their medal haul than other Olympic cycles.

6/10

SWIMMING

Lottery funding: £18.9m

Britain's swimming team did not match its record-breaking campaign from Tokyo three years ago, when they won four golds and eight medals in total. In Paris, it was one gold – in the 4x200m relay – and four silvers. Not bad, but Britain wanted more.

Three of the golds were missed by fine margins – 0.02sec, 0.02 and 0.04 – and Britain also finished fourth on three occasions by margins of 0.1 or less. But the alchemy of silver to gold and fourth to bronze often comes down to building as big a margin as possible, which Britain managed only in the 4x200m, won by James Guy, Tom Dean, Matt Richards and Duncan Scott, the first quartet to retain a relay crown without change to the line-up. What happens when that great generation moves on? Some rigorous talent spotting is required before Los Angeles 2028.

7/10

ROWING

Lottery funding: £23.8m

After the horror show of Tokyo when there were only two medals, no golds and plenty of disgruntled voices, this was a stellar return to form and the best medal haul from an overseas Games. Eight of the ten boats won medals and there were gold ones for the women's quad, the men's eight and the lightweight double sculls. There was no little drama either, with the women's quad winning with literally the last stroke.

It might have been even better. Helen Glover could not mask her disappointment after the women's four were narrowly beaten into second place and Tom George and Ollie Wynne-Griffith missed out on pairs gold by a small margin too.

You can't win them all, though, and this was a resounding success for the performance director Louise Kingsley and the main coaches Andrew Randell and Paul Stannard. How did they do it? Kingsley explained: "We came off the back of Tokyo and there was a lot of change. It was putting the pieces of jigsaw back in, shuffling things around, year on year, to build on this. Change the staff, change the morale, change the budget, change the structure and reshape the whole thing."

Margin of victory over the Netherlands by the British women's rowing quad. A day later the women's four lost to the Dutch by 0.18 seconds

0.15s

9/10

GYMNASTICS

Lottery funding: £13.4m

There might be a slight tinge of regret after both the men and women finished fourth in the team finals, but a long-awaited gold for Bryony Page on

THE ROLL OF HONOUR
GB'S MEDALS... SO FAR

DAY ONE

Silver
Anna Henderson (cycling, women's road time-trial)
Bronze
Yasmin Harper, Scarlett Mew Jensen (diving, women's 3m synchro springboard)

DAY TWO

Silver
Adam Peaty (swimming, men's 100m breaststoke)
Bronze
Kimberley Woods (canoeing, women's slalom K1)

DAY THREE

Gold
Ros Canter, Laura Collett, Tom McEwen (equestrianism, team eventing)
Tom Pidcock (cycling, men's cross-country)
Silver
Tom Daley, Noah Williams (diving, men's synchro 10m platform)
Matt Richards (swimming, men's 200m freestyle)
Adam Burgess (canoeing, men's slalom C1)
Bronze
Laura Collett (equestrianism, individual eventing)

DAY FOUR

Gold
Nathan Hales (shoot-ing, men's trap)
Matt Richards, Duncan Scott, Tom Dean, James Guy, Kieran Bird, Jack McMillan (swimming, men's 4x200m freestyle relay)

DAY FIVE

Gold
Lauren Henry, Hannah Scott, Lola Anderson, Georgie Brayshaw (rowing, women's quadruple sculls)
Alex Yee (triathlon, men's triathlon)
Silver
Kieran Reilly (cycling, men's BMX freestyle)
Bronze
Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix, Lois Toulson (diving, women's 10m synchro platform)

DAY SIX

Silver
Esme Booth, Helen Glover, Sam Redgrave, Rebecca Shorten (rowing, women's four)
Bronze
Matt Aldridge, David Ambler, Freddie Davidson, Oliver Wilkes (rowing, men's four)
Mathilda Hodgkins-Byrne, Rebecca Wilde (rowing, women's double sculls)

DAY SEVEN

Gold
Emily Craig, Imogen Grant (rowing, women's lightweight double sculls)
Ben Maher, Harry Charles, Scott Brash (equestrianism, team jumping)
Bryony Page (gymnastics, women's trampoline)
Silver
Duncan Scott (swimming, men's 200m individual medley)
Ben Proud (swimming, men's 50m freestyle)
Oliver Wynne-Griffith, Tom George (rowing, men's pair)
Bronze
Anthony Harding, Jack Laugher (diving, men's 3m synchronised springboard)

DAY EIGHT

Gold
Sholto Carnegie, Rory Gibbs, Morgan Bolding, Jacob Dawson, Charlie Elwes, Thomas Digby, James Rudkin, Tom Ford, Harry Brightmore (rowing, men's eight)
Bronze
Samuel Reardon, Laviai Nielsen, Alex Haydock-Wilson, Amber Anning (athletics, mixed 4x400m relay)
Jake Jarman (gymnastics, men's floor)
Becky Moody, Carl Hester, Charlotte Fry (equestrianism, team dressage)
Emma Wilson (sailing, women's IQ foil)
Heidi Long, Rowan McKellar, Holly Dunford, Emily Ford, Lauren Irwin,

PANORAMIC/SIPA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



the trampoline ensured she is the most decorated British female gymnast in history.

Her male equivalent, Max Whitlock, was left heartbroken after falling agonisingly short of a medal in the final pommel horse routine of his own illustrious career, but his legacy was already evident in the form of Jake Jarman, 22, and Harry Hepworth, 20. The pair both took bronze at their maiden Games here in Paris, which was no small feat given the dominance of China and Japan, and they can be stars of the sport for years to come.

7/10

DIVING

Lottery funding: £8.9m

It has been a tremendous Games for Team GB's divers, who claimed five medals. Tom Daley's decision to cut short retirement and return for the 10m synchro final was validated with a silver medal, extending an already remarkable legacy alongside his successor, Noah Williams.

The 24-year-old's individual bronze yesterday was an unexpectedly triumphant send-off, while the partnerships of Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix and Lois Toulson, Jack Laugher and Anthony Harding, and Yasmin Harper and Scarlett Mew Jensen all took bronze in their synchro finals.

Spendolini-Sirieix and Laugher were both bitterly disappointed after falling short in their individual finals, but this was a record medal haul. All that was missing was a gold, but breaking the hegemony of China's extraordinary divers, who won all eight finals in Paris, is a nigh on impossible task.

9/10

BOXING

Lottery funding: £12.1m

There is no escaping the fact that it has been a disappointing Olympics for Team GB boxing. Eleven boxers qualified for Tokyo three years ago and left with a record haul of six medals, including two golds. In Paris, only six British boxers qualified and one, Lewis Richardson, made it past the first round.

His bronze salvaged a little pride for a sport that received over £12 million in funding for this Olympics cycle, but controversial split-decision defeats for Delicious Orie, Charley Davison, Rosie Eccles and Chantelle Reid all left a sour taste. After such a rich history, this was largely a Games to forget.

5/10

EQUESTRIAN

Lottery funding: £12.3m

The equestrian programme started with scandal and ended with five medals, two of them gold.

The suspension of Charlotte Dujardin, the squad's most famous and garlanded individual, after a video emerged of her whipping a horse could have derailed everything. Paris was all going to be about her quest to become the nation's most decorated female Olympian.

So the British team can look back with pride at finishing on the podium in all but the final event – it would have been the first time they had taken a medal across the board – showing that it does not always have to be the Dujardin show.

Germany were the outstanding squad in Versailles, winning four golds, but the other two went to Great Britain in the team eventing and team jumping. Dujardin may return in four years but she would not be the only departure if not; Carl Hester, who made his debut at Barcelona 1992, has bowed out.

8/10



SAILING

Lottery funding: £22.8m

Timing is everything. If Ellie Aldridge had won gold on the first day of the sailing programme, the afterglow would have dulled by now and the British haul in Marseille – a gold and a bronze – would be viewed coldly as being short of the three-to-five target. Coming on the final day, the last emotion was joy. Sailing medals are very spread around (30 between 19 nations here). As such GB were sixth in the final standings, but as the historic, and recent, best nation at sea, that must be viewed as a disappointment.

The sailing programme's UK Sport funding was third only to cycling and rowing. The latter has recovered from its blip three years ago, and it may well be that four more years of familiarity with new classes, and a Los Angeles competition in 2028 that isn't hindered by lack of wind like Marseille, will return Britain to the top.

3/10

THE OTHER SPORTS

Nathan Hales (gold) and Amber Rutter (silver) made it a good Games for the shooters, Toby Roberts won gold at climbing, Sky Brown equalled her skateboarding bronze from Tokyo, and Alex Yee (gold), Beth Potter (bronze) and the mixed team (bronze) did sterling work in the triathlon. But elsewhere, there were failures. Jade Jones disappointed in the taekwondo (but Caden Cunningham shone), none of the judokas made it beyond the round of 16, the women's rugby sevens team were well off the pace and other than some glorious fightbacks from Andy Murray and Dan Evans, it was an underwhelming showing from the tennis players. The men's hockey team promised much, but neither they nor the women got past the quarters.

Words by Rick Broadbent, Tom Kershaw, Elgan Alderman, John Westerby and Craig Lord.





Roberts took gold after a spirited effort, left, but the women's four, above, could not match the elation felt by both the climber and the 4x200m men's relay team in the pool, top right

1

Gold medal won by Britain in swimming at Paris, compared with four at Tokyo, with their total down from eight to five

Eve Stewart, Harriet Taylor, Annie Campbell-Orde, Henry Fieldman, cox (rowing, women's eights)

DAY NINE

Silver Tommy Fleetwood (golf, men's individual)
Amber Rutter (shooting, women's skeet)

Bronze Harry Hepworth (gymnastics, men's vault)
Charlotte Fry (equestrianism, individual dressage)

DAY TEN

Gold Keely Hodgkinson (athletics, women's 800m) Katy Marchant, Sophie Capewell, Emma Finucane (track cycling, women's team sprint)

Silver Joe Clarke (canoeing, men's kayak cross)

Bronze Kimberley Woods (kayak cross, women) Alex Yee, Georgia Taylor-Brown, Sam Dickinson, Beth Potter (triathlon, mixed relay)

DAY ELEVEN

Silver Josh Kerr (athletics, men's 1,500m)
Jack Carlin, Ed Lowe, Hamish Turnbull (track cycling, men's team sprint)

Bronze Lewis Richardson (boxing, men's welterweight)
Sky Brown (skateboarding, women's park)

DAY TWELVE

Silver Matthew Hudson-Smith (athletics, men's 400m)
Ethan Hayter, Charlie Tanfield, Ethan Vernon, Daniel Bigham, Oliver Wood (track cycling, men's team pursuit)

Bronze Elinor Barker, Josie Knight, Anna Morris, Jess Roberts (track cycling, women's team pursuit)

DAY THIRTEEN

Gold Ellie Aldridge (sailing, women's kite)

Bronze Emma Finucane (track cycling, women's keirin)

DAY FOURTEEN

Gold Toby Roberts (sport climbing, men's combined)

Silver Neah Evans, Elinor Barker (track cycling, women's madison)
Katarina Johnson-Thompson (athletics, heptathlon)

Bronze Jack Carlin (track cycling, men's sprint)
Jeremiah Azu, Louie Hinchliffe, Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake, Zharnel Hughes, Richard Kilty (athletics, men's 4x100m relay)

DAY FIFTEEN

Silver Kate Shortman and Izzy Thorpe (artistic swimming, Dina Asher-Smith, Imani Lansiquot, Amy Hunt, Daryll Neita (athletics, women's 4x100m relay)

Bronze Noah Williams (diving, men's 10m platform), Georgia Bell (athletics, women's 1,500m), Victoria Ohuruogu, Laviai Nielsen, Nicole Yeargin, Amber Anning (athletics, women's 4x400m), Alex Haydock-Wilson, Matt Hudson-Smith, Lewis Davey, Charlie Dobson (athletics, men's 4x400m).



duel), Caden Cunningham (taekwondo, men's +80kg).

Olympics Athletics

‘We were told she’d never run 800m before’

Hodgkinson now setting sights on Kratochvilova’s blisteringly fast but controversial record set in 1983

Tom Kershaw, Paris

In the giddy aftermath of Keely Hodgkinson’s 800m gold, her coaches, Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows, declared that the oldest and most controversial world record in outdoor athletics could soon be broken.

It has been more than four decades since Jarmila Kratochvilova, a then 32-year-old Czechoslovakian, stormed to victory in a disbelieving, blisteringly fast 1min 53.28sec at the Munich Olympic Stadium. Even with the advancements in training methods, diet, technology, tracks and spikes, only two athletes this century have even come within a second of that mark: Caster Semenya and Pamela Jelimo, about both of whom there are questions and caveats. Hodgkinson’s personal best, which stands at 1:54.61, is still trailing a way back in the relative distance.

A raft of women’s track records remain stuck in the Eighties under overwhelming clouds of suspicion – Florence Griffith Joyner in the 100m (10.49) and 200m (21.34), Marta Koch in the 400m (47.60), Kratochvilova in the 800m. It has been a long-held grievance for the sport and the athletes, who are denied the chance to earn lucrative bonuses in shoe contracts for breaking world records – so much so that European Athletics once proposed to void all records set before 2005, the year when blood and urine samples began to be stored for future testing. Kratochvilova has always adamantly denied using anabolic steroids, branding the suggestion “complete nonsense”, but arguably no record sent shockwaves through the sport quite like hers.

For one, Kratochvilova was not even supposed to run in the 800m at one of the final meets in preparation for the 1983 World Championships. She was meant to enter the 200m and resume her great rivalry with Koch but apparently felt a twinge in her calf during the warm-up. The head of the Czechoslovakian federation asked the race organiser if Kratochvilova could switch to the 800m instead and a deal was allegedly struck that she would not pass the pacemaker until the 400m mark. “We were told she had never run an 800m before,” says Doriane Coleman, a Swiss-American professor, who finished fifth, yet more than nine seconds behind Kratochvilova. “We don’t know if that’s true, we don’t know if any of it was true, but that’s what we were told.”

Coleman was one of four athletes from outside the Eastern Bloc hoping to prove their form to national selectors, but Kratochvilova pushed the pacemaker so hard on the first lap that the rest of the field were barely in camera shot. “Once we hit 400m, I felt like I was a spectator in a really surreal situation,” Coleman says. “I had been competing that summer on the international circuit and won a race in Lausanne. I was also beaten several times, but everyone was kind of together. The idea that somebody could be 15 metres ahead by 500m was crazy.”

Coleman was so awestruck afterwards that she asked Kratochvilova to sign a copy of the start sheet. “All of us were shocked. And it wasn’t just us, everyone was,” she says. But while Kratochvilova embraced her coach and received a standing ovation from the crowd, scrutiny quickly overshadowed the sense of celebration. Footage of the race is still available on YouTube and Kratochvilova’s musclebound physique is striking. One American newspaper headlined a report about her breaking the 400m world record that same year: “Is Czech star really a she?”

Kratochvilova attributed her physique to growing up on her uncle’s farm in the rural Czech village of Golcuv Jenikov, a relentless training regime, and large quantities of vitamin B12. “When you work as hard as I did, you have to sacrifice some of your looks. The women of the West don’t work as hard as I did,” she said.

Stories about her work ethic have been written into folklore, from tossing pitchforks of hay at 12 years old to sprinting in spikes across a frozen pond and running in a swimming pool while wearing a weighted vest and a gas mark. Kratochvilova claimed she could lift up a seemingly preposterous 25 tons during a single hour’s weightlifting session. That might all be true, but many believe being subject to a state-sponsored doping programme, as the countries behind the Iron Curtain used sport as an expression of communist power, was the decisive factor in propelling her to such an astonishing milestone.

“What I do know, and this ended up being really important in my own life, is that I was tested after the race and she wasn’t,” says Coleman, a professor of law at Duke University, who helped to establish random out of competition testing in American athletics after retiring from running. “Part of [getting involved with anti-doping] was just having been beaten up so much, psychologically as well as physically. Unless you were someone like Mary Decker, you could not imagine being on the podium if you weren’t doping as a female in the middle distance.

“Sometimes I’d get asked in advance if it was OK to test me. The rumour in general – not about Jarmila in particular – was that federations of Eastern Bloc countries would make a deal with meet promoters in western Europe that if they came out from behind the Iron Curtain, they would not be tested. They would be tested at World Championships but not at main meets. I don’t say that with formal authority, but my anecdotal, personal experience is consistent with that.”

Kratochvilova never failed a drugs test and said that if someone had tried to force her to dope, she would have refused. Few athletes until now have even considered her record a realistic target but after the peerless running of Paris, it could, finally, be within reach. “Over the next couple of years [Hodgkinson] can get down towards it if she stays healthy, motivated and still enjoys it,” Meadows said.

For Coleman it would be a cathartic breakthrough, too. “If you had asked me two or three years ago if someone could progress like Keely and be clean, which I believe she is, I would have thought it was impossible, but I don’t think that any more,” she says. “I think Keely has a unique talent for the 800m.”



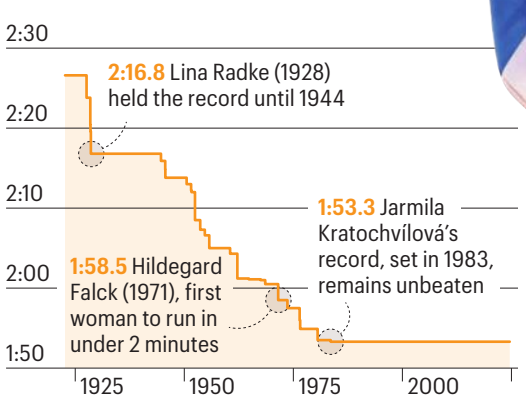
Kratochvilova put her physique down to her training. Below, Hodgkinson after her gold medal run



HOW THE 800M FINISHED IN ’83

1. Kratochvilova (Cz) 1min 53.28sec
2. Jolanta Januchta (Pol) 2:00.45
3. Martina Krott (Ger) 2:01.76
4. Margrit Klinger (Ger) 2:02.04
5. Doriane Coleman (Lambelet-McClive) (Swiss) 2:02.86
6. Maureen Coaken (Aus) 2:03.05
7. Lynn Williams (Can) 2:05.00
8. Angela Kommeter (Ger) 2:05.58

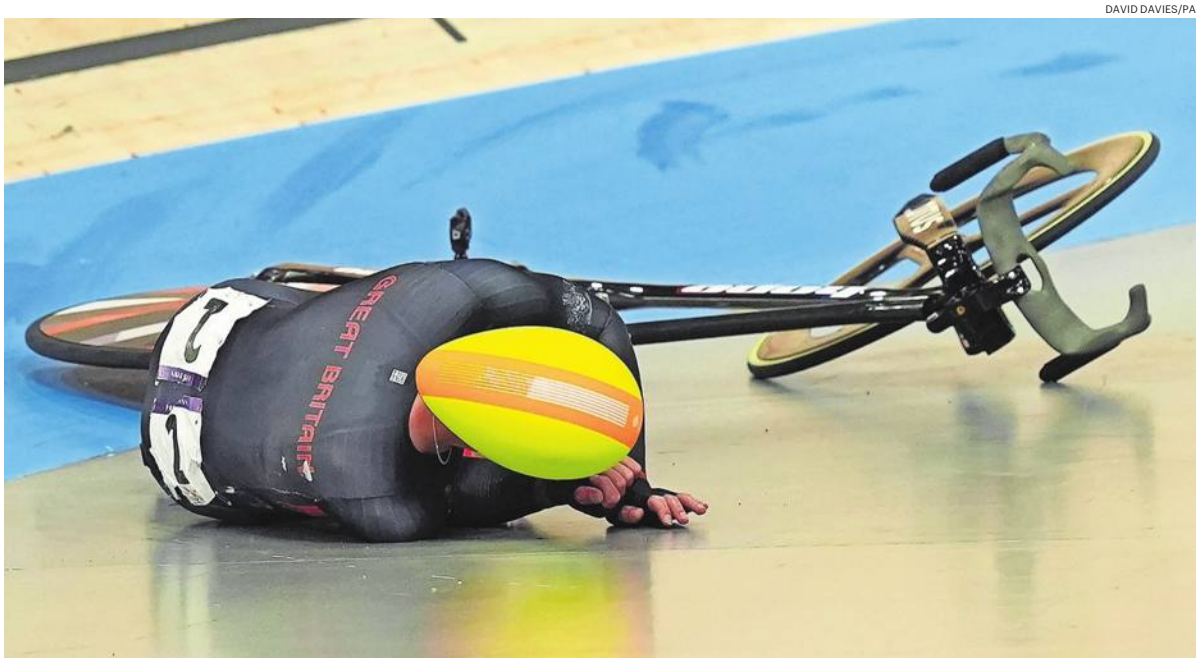
EVOLUTION OF THE 800M WORLD RECORD



> A raft of women’s track records remain stuck in the Eighties under clouds of suspicion

Olympics Cycling

DAVID DAVIES/PA



‘He hit me so hard I felt like crash test dummy’

John Westerby Paris

There was disappointment for Great Britain in the men’s madison, with a tenth-placed finish for Ollie Wood and Mark Stewart and more conflict on the track with their rivals from the Netherlands. The day after Jack Carlin’s sprinting style had been described as “rugby on wheels” by a Dutch coach, Wood was knocked from his bike during the madison by a shoulder to the head from Jan-Willem van Schip.

Wood hit the track hard and afterwards was sporting injuries to his right knee and his backside and had also taken a hefty blow to the head. “It’s a bit different when you get hit from behind, you don’t see it coming,” Wood said. “I’ve not a clue [what happened]. All I know is I got hit really hard from behind by possibly the biggest bloke on the track. He hit me so hard I felt like a crash test dummy.”

It took a while for Wood to get back up to speed and there was no way back into the race after that, although in truth the British pair had been struggling to make an impression from the start. Stewart had found out only on the morning of the race that he would be riding alongside Wood when Ethan Hayter confirmed he would not be riding owing to injury.

Hayter had slipped from his saddle in dramatic circumstances during the final lap of the team pursuit on Wednesday, finding his physical limit at an inopportune time as the British quartet attempted to chase down Australia in the gold medal race. There was a further consequence, because Hayter injured his thigh in the process. He rode the omnium – four more endurance races – the next day, but missed out on a medal in an event in which he has twice been world champion.

Yesterday, having warned Stewart the night before that he needed to be ready, he missed out on the madison as well. Hayter, 25, was expected to be Britain’s leading light in the men’s endurance races here and his travails have now had an effect in three different events. After nine of the 12 events on the track, Britain have won medals in seven, but still only one gold – from the women’s team sprint on the opening day in the velodrome.

Hayter’s misfortune, though, created an unexpected opportunity for Stewart, the 28-year-old from Dundee, to make his Olympic debut. He and Wood are far from strangers in the Madison, having won silver in the World Championships in Glasgow last year.

But in a race strewn with crashes, they were unable to gain ground in the early sprints, conserving energy for later on.



Any chance they had of battling back into the race was blown when Van Schip came around the outside of Wood and appeared to drop his shoulder towards him, catching the British rider as he was turning his head to assess the danger.

Wood battled back and the British duo took points in the 15th of 20 sprints, but had never looked serious medal contenders. Whether Hayter, fit and firing, would have made a crucial difference, was immaterial. “I knew that Ethan wasn’t right, so I was ready,” Stewart said. “But we struggled to make an impression.”

There was a more serious crash in the repechage round of the men’s keirin, when Kwesi Browne, the sprinter from Trinidad and Tobago, was knocked off his bike and slid down the steep slope of the track, apparently unconscious. Medical assistance came quickly and a cheer rang out around the velodrome when, as he was being wheeled off on a stretcher, Browne lifted his arms to remove his gloves.



Wood was left bruised and shaken after being sent crashing by a shoulder to the head from behind by his Dutch rival Van Schip

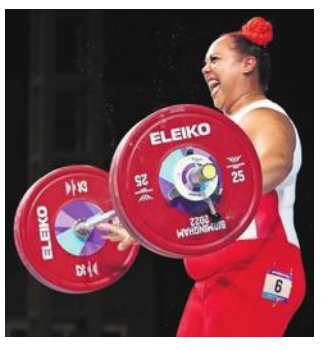


Finucane wins her quarter-final to stay in the hunt for her third medal

Carlin was back on the track yesterday, having been the focus of some combative action the previous evening, when he drew the ire of the Netherlands team after beating Jeffrey Hoogland to a bronze medal in the individual sprint. This time, in the keirin first round, he stayed out of trouble to qualify for the quarter-finals, which will be held on the last day of velodrome action today.

Emma Finucane will also be in the hunt for another medal after she came through her quarter-final of the individual sprint with some comfort, beating Martha Bayona Pineda, from Colombia, 2-0 in the best-of-three contest. Finucane, 21, has already won a gold in the team sprint and a bronze in the keirin and will be one of the leading contenders for gold today in an event in which she is world champion. A golden finish to Britain’s week in the velodrome would be most welcome after the disappointments of recent days.

From weightlifting to the closing ceremony: your guide to the final day



GOLDS UP FOR GRABS 13

BEST MEDAL HOPES

Emma Finucane in the women’s sprint. She’s got a gold (in the women’s team sprint) and a bronze (in the keirin) already, but could become the cycling star of the Games for Great Britain with victory today.

Emily Campbell, above, the first British woman to win an Olympic weightlifting medal with a silver in Tokyo, will be in action in the 81kg+ final from 10.30am and has a decent chance.

GLOBAL STARS

The United States women’s basketball players will be attempting to win an eighth successive gold medal

BEST OF THE REST

The women’s marathon is the first to start on the final day at 7am; Rose Harvey, Charlotte Purdue and Calli Hauger-Thackery will line up for Team GB.

The gold-medal match for the women’s volleyball (USA v Italy) begins at midday followed by the men’s water polo gold-medal match (Serbia v Croatia)

GLAMOUR EVENT

The Games of the XXXIII Olympiad conclude with the closing ceremony at the Stade de France, and it will be titled “Records”. Thomas Jolly is the artistic director, overseeing a show that will involve hundreds of dancers, acrobats and circus acts. The handover of the Olympic flag will be made to the Los Angeles 2028 organising committee, before a cultural presentation by the Americans that will be produced by Ben Winston, a British producer and director with 13 Emmy Awards, and his studio Fulwell 73. Winston has previously been the executive producer on *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, *The Kardashians* and *The X Factor* in the UK as well as for the Grammy Awards.

Team GB involvement in blue

Athletics
7am Women’s marathon.

Basketball
10.30 Women’s bronze-medal game.
2.30 Women’s gold-medal game.

Cycling — track
10am Women’s omnium scratch race. **10.22** Women’s sprint semi-finals race 1. **10.29** Men’s keirin quarter-finals. **10.50** Women’s sprint semi-finals race 2. **10.57** Women’s omnium tempo race. **11.18** Women’s sprint semi-finals decider. **11.25** Women’s sprint final for 5th-8th places. **11.29** Men’s keirin semi-finals. **11.45** Women’s sprint finals race 1. **11.53** Women’s omnium elimination race. **12.15pm** Women’s sprint finals race 2. **12.23** Men’s keirin final for places 7-12.
12.32 Men’s Keirin final for gold.
12.44 Women’s sprint finals decider.
12.56 Women’s omnium points race.

Handball
8am Men’s bronze-medal match.
12.30pm gold medal match.

Modern pentathlon
Women’s final:
10am Riding: Show jumping. **10.40** Fencing: Bonus round. **11.10** Swimming: 200m freestyle. **11.40** Laser run.

Volleyball
Midday Women’s gold-medal match.

Water polo
8am Men’s classification 5th-6th. **9.35** Bronze-medal match.
1.0 Gold-medal match.

Weightlifting
10.30am Women’s +81kg.

Wrestling
Repechages **10am** Men’s freestyle 65kg; Women’s freestyle 76kg; MFS 97kg. **11.0** MFS 65kg Bronze medal match.
11.25 MFS 65kg final.
11.35 MFS 97kg bronze medal match.
Midday MFS 97kg final.
12.20 WFS 76kg bronze medal match.
12.45 WFS 76kg final.

Cricket

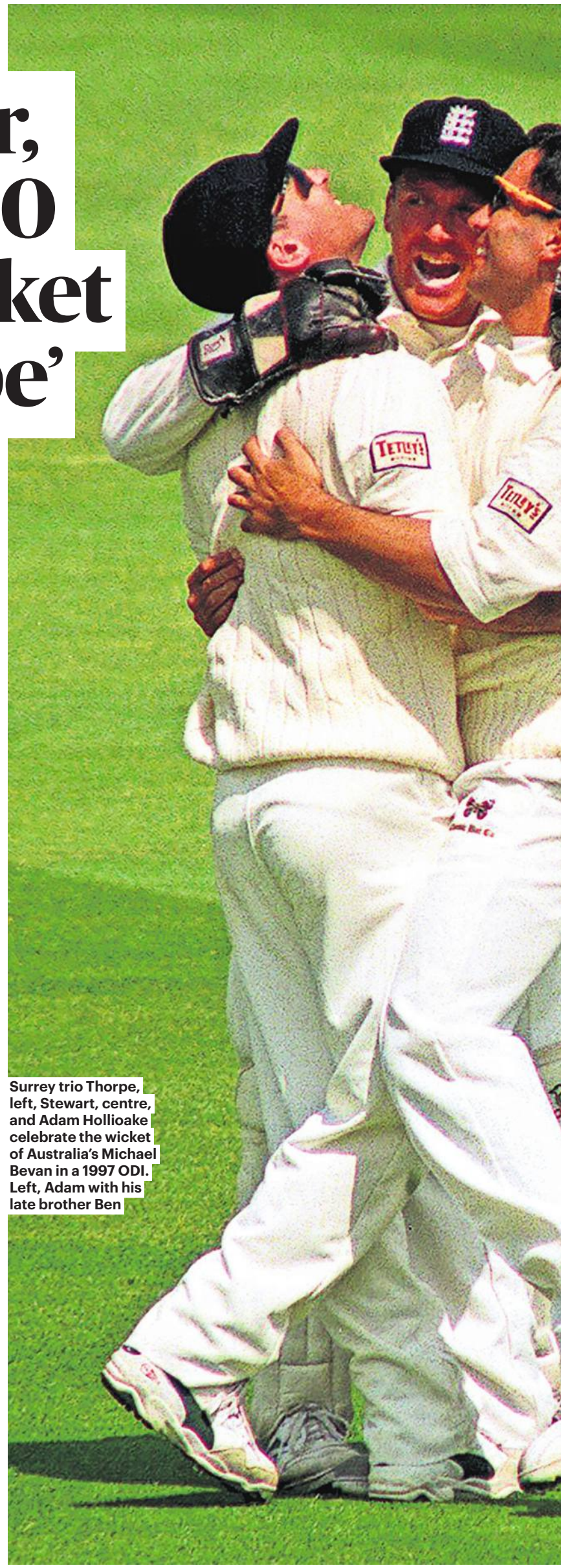
SIMON WILDE



Cricket Correspondent

‘Graham was a deep thinker, we bonded 100 per cent – cricket was our escape’

Former Surrey captain Adam Hollioake reflects on a dressing room full of big personalities and the tragic deaths that have hit the club, including his brother Ben and Thorpe, who died last week



Surrey trio Thorpe, left, Stewart, centre, and Adam Hollioake celebrate the wicket of Australia’s Michael Bevan in a 1997 ODI. Left, Adam with his late brother Ben

Usually, if an interview with a cricketer is in any way cathartic, it is the interviewee who feels better for having talked through something – the joy of a great performance perhaps, or the disappointment at a slump in form or a bad result. But listening to Adam Hollioake reminisce about his former Surrey and England team-mate Graham Thorpe, it felt like the benefit was all mine.

It was evident that since Thorpe’s death last weekend, Hollioake had spent time conversing with old colleagues about the friend they had so suddenly lost, a batsman of high quality and person of rare depth. But this was my first chance since the shocking news of his demise to hear from someone who knew him best about the things that made this complex character, whom I had collaborated with on his autobiography in 2005, tick. Hollioake perhaps did not need to go over it again, but – thank you, Adam – I did.

Hollioake and Thorpe were both on Surrey’s books by the late 1980s, although Hollioake – the younger by two years – had to wait to make his championship debut until 1993 because, having been born in Melbourne, he was required to serve a qualification period. Many of his best performances for club and country came with Thorpe at his side.

By the time they finished their careers at the Oval, 12 months apart in the mid-2000s, they had shared in many stands and much silverware, mainly with Hollioake as captain. Surrey won a remarkable eight trophies in as many seasons but, for all that, theirs has proved a tragically ill-starred generation.

“He was my favourite person to bat with,” Hollioake said. “He and Azhar Mahmood were the guys I had some incredible partnerships with, albeit they might not be in the record books as massive ones. My first one-day [international] versus Australia, we were chasing 170-odd and we both got 60 or 70 not out and won the game. We did a lot of finishing together. He’d be batting four and I’d bat six, so we’d often be the ones there at the end trying to mastermind a victory.

“He was crucial to the trophy wins, especially the one-day stuff, which sounds funny because he was such a good first-class player. We had a lot of good players but we didn’t have many good finishers.”

Indeed Thorpe averaged nearly 38 in his 82 ODIs for England and Hollioake added that for Surrey: “He was our best one-day batsman. He had that balance of being able to manoeuvre the ball around, exchange the strike and finish games. He could play pace and spin. He was a unique player.

“He was like that for England as well. When I was captaining England [in ODI cricket] between 1997 and 1999, he went home from the West Indies with a sore back. We’d just won a tournament in Sharjah and the side just didn’t work without him in it. His ability in the middle overs was ahead of its time – he did it better than anyone else in English cricket.”

Their relationship was further cemented by the death of Adam’s younger brother Ben in a car crash in March 2002 at the age of only 24. Ben, a talented and popular figure, was central to the Surrey team and starting to establish himself in England’s one-day side and Thorpe had been close to him despite their eight-year age-gap. Thorpe would take an interest in his development, passing on advice that Adam wanted relayed without coming across as the heavy-handed big brother.



Adam consequently dropped out of cricket for a while, at around the same time that Thorpe had withdrawn from the game because of the break-up of his first marriage. When they returned, both played strikingly well: cricket was suddenly less important, and also less difficult.

> **His ability in the middle overs was ahead of its time. He was my favourite person to bat with**

“At that time we bonded, 100 per cent,” Hollioake said. “Cricket became an escape from what was going on in our private lives. One day we were down at the Rose Bowl and he said, ‘Mate, I want to chat to you about how you’re dealing with things off the field, let’s go for a run and do a couple of laps of the boundary’. We did about 20, after which I said we’re going to have to sit down to finish this. We had some pretty in-depth conversations.

“Away from cricket he was quite a big thinker and his mind would jump from topic to topic. The one time he was focused was when he was batting.

“We had many tough guys in our [Surrey] side, but he was different in that he was quietly tough. He came to the fore when there was a challenge. We’d meet in the middle of the wicket, often with ten overs left and 70-80 runs to get, and there’d never be any chest-beating.





Hollioake toasts the 2002 Championship success as Thorpe, left, looks on

IN ELITE COMPANY

Most Test runs during the time Thorpe played for England from July 1993 to June 2005

	Runs	Ave
Brian Lara (WI)	10,006	54.67
Sachin Tendulkar (Ind)	8,612	60.22
Steve Waugh (Aus)	8,330	57.84
Rahul Dravid (Ind)	7,696	57.86
Jacques Kallis (SA)	7,337	56.87
Gary Kirsten (SA)	7,289	45.27
Inzamam-ul-Haq (Pak)	7,284	52.78
Ricky Ponting (Aus)	6,950	56.5
Mark Waugh (Aus)	6,797	43.29
Graham Thorpe (Eng)	6,744	44.66

He'd just be eyes focused, quietly spoken, with that little lisp of his, 'Come on mate, come on Smokes,' – I always felt sorry that my nickname had an 'S' at the beginning and end – 'let's make sure we're here at the end.' "

Hollioake and Thorpe saw things much the same way, particularly that the environment at Surrey – a club which had won only three trophies in almost 40 years before the glory days arrived – needed to change.

"When I came into the first team we connected straight away," Hollioake said. "There were first-team and second-team changing rooms and you had to knock to go into the first-team room. As soon as you said anything semi-authoritative you got sent out. Our generation decided when I became captain that we couldn't have that. We needed to hear what the young players had to say.

"In those situations, there's those who feel, 'That happened to me, I'm going to do it to someone else,' or, 'It happened to me, it wasn't very good, so let's change it'. Thorpey fell into the second bracket."

They were kindred spirits but different personality types, with Hollioake the more demonstrative and vocal. "Thorpey was a one-on-one guy. You didn't get a lot out of him in team meetings. He wouldn't pipe up in front of the team like me, Mark Butcher or Alec Stewart. He was one for a conversation in the corner.

"He was a really good analyser of the game. Early on, he had worked out what he needed to do to be successful individually, not necessarily the team – he needed to play pace bowling and big spin bowling. A lot of county cricketers then were very good at destroying medium-pace bowling but up against someone who was really fast or spun it a lot they were at a loss. He was quite strategic in planning his own career.

"That's what transferred into him being such a good coach. He was really good at knowing how someone's skills would transfer into the international game – he told me early on how good Jason Roy would be, long before he played for England."

Hollioake now lives in Australia, where post-retirement he developed a second career as boxer and trainer, but is currently working in a short-term mentoring role at Surrey, helping them in their push for a third championship title in three seasons that would trump the three in four they won under him in 1999, 2000 and 2002.

Inevitably, in recent days the thoughts of those who played for the county in the 1990s have dwelt on the untimely deaths of so many of their team-mates – apart from Adam's brother Ben, and Thorpe, there was also wicketkeeper Graham Kersey, another victim of a car crash aged 25, and second XI player Danny Kelleher aged 29. Others have also passed away: Nick Peters and Joey Benjamin. (A Surrey player of later vintage, Tom Maynard, also died in tragic circumstances in his early twenties, in 2012.)

"We had a bunch of strong characters," Hollioake says. "I captained a team of big personalities but that's what you need to win games of cricket. Give me 11 accountants who do everything I say, we ain't going to win much. You need people who are a bit left-field, a bit rogue. 'Butch' [Mark Butcher] used to live a pretty fast life. Chris Lewis did what he did.

"The very nature of what made people good cricketers was the very thing that led us to take risks. I'm not excluding myself from that – they probably needed someone to be the most edgy of all to run the side. I couldn't imagine many of us were going to die peacefully in our sleep."

Hit and miss for Aaronson after Portsmouth scare

Championship

Leeds United	Struijk 10 (p), Gnonto 46, Aaronson 90+5	**3**
Portsmouth	Sørensen 23, Lang 41, 90+2	**3**

Peter Game

Leeds United were give an opening-day fright by Portsmouth, last season's League One champions, and needed a Brenden Aaronson goal deep into stoppage time for a draw at Elland Road. The American's low strike came soon after Callum Lang, right, looked to have won the game from the penalty spot with his second goal of the game.



Indeed, Aaronson should have won it for the hosts even after his equaliser but with the goal gaping he dragged his shot wide of the post.

Daniel Farke's side, who are favourites to win promotion as champions after losing the play-off final to Southampton in May, went ahead after ten minutes when Pascal Struijk converted from the spot after Dan James had been brought down by Connor Ogilvie's clumsy challenge.

Elias Sorensen equalised at the near post before Lang's first goal of the game put Portsmouth, playing in the second tier for the first time since 2012, in front. It was against the run of play, but the celebrating supporters did not mind that.

Wilfried Gnonto brought Leeds level at the start of the second half with a run inside from the left wing and a low shot past Will Norris in the Portsmouth goal.

Farke will be hoping that Gnonto is still at Elland Road at the end of the transfer window, having already lost Archie Gray to Tottenham Hotspur, and Crysencio Summerville to West Ham United.

The stoppage-time drama gave both sides opportunities to win the game. Jayden Bogle brought down Christian Saydee in the Leeds box – "a doubtful penalty," Farke said – for Lang to give them a 3-2 lead with his penalty having the Leeds goalkeeper, Illan Meslier, well beaten.

Then Aaronson, back from a season's loan at Union Berlin, fired in a precise equaliser before imprecisely missing an easier chance soon after.

"He just got a hug from myself because no words are needed. It's more like I told him to hold his head up," Farke said.

"He was probably the most disappointed lad in the dressing room, but he doesn't have to be because coming back after a difficult season, out on loan, he wants to prove his worth."

He added: "We missed an unbelievable amount of chances."

John Mousinho, the Portsmouth head coach, added: "Both sides will come off disappointed with the result."

He said: "Leeds have some really good athletes, multimillion pound players who may go in the next few weeks. If I'm a Premier League manager, I'm definitely snapping up one or two of them after today."

FOOTBALL RESULTS, PAGE 18

Clarke is chief tormentor as Sunderland get new manager off to a flier

Cardiff City		**0**
Sunderland	O'Nien 18, Clarke 89	**2**

Graham Thomas

Few French managers can have arrived in English football with a lower profile than Régis Le Bris, but this victory for Sunderland will do much to help shake off that anonymity.

Especially if Le Bris – who took over in late June after a spell in charge of Lorient – can back up his club's first victory in an opening day fixture in the top two divisions in 11 attempts.

Luke O'Nien's 18th-minute goal gave Sunderland a platform on which to build an essentially comfortable victory over a blunted and pedestrian Cardiff.

The visiting team had to wait until the 89th minute for the second, scored by their best player, Jack Clarke, who had teased and tormented the home side for much of the game. Just as Sunderland thought they might be about to endure six nervy minutes of added time, Clarke – released by the impressive 18-year-old Jobe Bellingham – cut in from the left and steered a low shot inside the far corner to put the outcome beyond doubt.

O'Nien headed home the opening goal in the 18th minute when a long free kick was directed into his path by Dennis Cirkin.

Both these clubs have gone through chaotic periods of managerial churn and last season was the first since 2019 when Cardiff have ended the campaign with the same manager in charge at the start.

Erol Bulut has brought stability to the club and Le Bris looks as if he might so the same at Sunderland.

"It wasn't easy to start away, especially here at Cardiff," Le Bris, 48, said.

Football Community Shield

‘Unique’ Bobb shows Guardiola he can step up to the big time

SUNDAY TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER BRADLEY ORMESHER



1-1

Manchester City	Manchester United
Silva 89	Garnacho 82

Manchester City win 7-6 on penalties



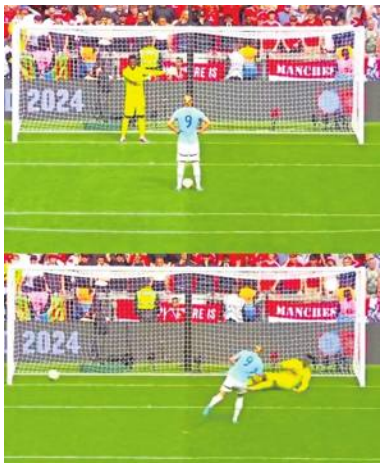
PAUL HIRST

Wembley



Silva celebrates his headed equaliser in the dying minutes of the match. He then had the first penalty in the shoot-out saved by Onana, but City still prevailed

NOT QUITE SO CLEVER FROM ONANA...



Onana, the Manchester United goalkeeper, stood to one side of the goal, offering Haaland a clear shot at the other, but dashing to his left. Haaland was not caught out by the trick and slotted his penalty home in the side that Onana had vacated.

buried the hatchet with his manager after they fell out last season.

"He's a very good penalty taker," Ten Hag said. "I had no doubts about him and still have no doubts. In the future he will take penalties."

United had the best of the second half and should have gone ahead when Marcus Rashford ran through on goal but he hit a post.

Garnacho, Amad Diallo, Diogo Dalot and Toby Collyer, the ankle-biting 20-year-old substitute, all impressed. United lacked the quality and stardust that was provided to City in the main by Oscar Bobb, who was aided by his young midfield lieutenant James McAtee.

Bobb, his confidence boosted by an excellent pre-season campaign, drove at the United defence all afternoon and set up Silva for his 89th-minute equaliser. "Sometimes he is a bit passive but he has something unique," Guardiola said of the 21-year-old Norway winger. "The first one or two steps of his movement, either right or left, are unbelievable."

As the United supporters walked down Wembley Way before kick-off, news started filtering through that their club had agreed a £60 million deal with Bayern Munich for Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui. When the teams were announced, it was clear to see why they are both needed. Lisandro Martínez, the lionhearted centre back who kept Erling Haaland quiet in the FA Cup final, was deployed at left back while Harry Maguire and Evans started in the heart of the defence.

United's tactics in the first half mirrored those of the FA Cup final. Rather than try to pass through City – a thankless task even with Kevin De Bruyne and Silva starting on the bench – United played directly.

The plan was to hit long diagonal passes to Rashford and Diallo, who would try to bring the two false nines, Bruno Fernandes and Mason Mount, into play. Guardiola had anticipated the move. Every time United had the ball at the back, City's defenders prepared for the long ball. When Onana aimed for Rashford, Akanji came across to intercept.

City looked the more likely team to take the lead in the opening half hour. Jérémy Doku nutmegged a red-faced Dalot, but his cutback could not find Bobb or Nico O'Reilly.

Bobb tiptoed through the United midfield and fed O'Reilly but the 19-year-old could not tee up Haaland.

United reverted to plan B, trying to pass through their opponents. Their first attempt failed spectacularly. Under pressure from the City press, Martínez tried to return a pass to Onana, but rolled the ball to Bobb who found McAtee. The midfielder held off Evans and sent a shot spiralling towards the far corner, but it struck a post and Guardiola buried his head in his hands.

United's first shot came in the 29th minute. Diallo turned Josko Gvardiol before aiming a shot towards the far corner but he could not wrap his left foot around the ball and it flew wide.

United increased the pressure at the start of the second half and had Fernandes slightly delayed his run on to Martínez's through ball, the Portuguese would have scored an incredible goal. He lifted a jaw-dropping effort from 20 yards over a backpedalling Ederson but the assistant referee raised his flag and the celebrations in the United end subsided.

Bobb was at the heart of every City move. He jinked one way, then the other, throwing his markers off the scent, as the game started to open up.

City over-extended themselves in attack, leaving huge gaps behind their midfield. United took advantage. Garnacho latched on to a through ball and squared to Rashford, but he scuffed his shot on to the post.

Garnacho showed him how to do it, slotting the ball past Ederson with an angled shot from 12 yards after a counterattack that began with Collyer winning the ball in the United half. Silva then headed in Bobb's cross, sending the game to penalties, and the momentum carried City through.

BRENTFORD TO SIGN CARVALHO FROM LIVERPOOL FOR £27.5M

Brentford have agreed a £27.5 million deal to sign Liverpool's Fábio Carvalho (Paul Joyce writes).

The 21-year-old had impressed in pre-season but will move for greater first-team opportunities. The overall fee of £22 million includes £5 million in add-ons and Liverpool have negotiated a 17.5 per cent sell-on fee.

Fulham are due 20 per cent of the profit Liverpool make on the £5 million spent on signing Carvalho in 2020. The attacking midfielder, who represented England at youth levels before switching his allegiance to Portugal, had previously spent time on loan at RB Leipzig and Hull City.

Bournemouth have agreed an £8 million fee with Barcelona for Julián Araujo. The Mexico defender, 22, will have a medical tomorrow. He was on loan at Las Palmas last season, making 28 appearances in the league and cup.

Leicester City have signed Facundo Buonanotte on loan from Brighton & Hove Albion. The 19-year-old attacking midfielder scored three league goals last season. He joined Brighton from Rosario Centra in 2022, and has earned two caps for Argentina.

Rashford should go to Van Nistelrooy for finishing tips

Gary Jacob

UNITED'S MISSED CHANCES

Marcus Rashford and Amad Diallo showed they both need a little finishing practice, which might come through working in training with Ruud van Nistelrooy, the club's former striker who joined the coaching staff this summer. Although Erik ten Hag's pre-match prediction was that Rashford could recapture his goalscoring form this season, after managing only seven in the previous Premier League campaign, he wasted two clear chances. Diallo was hugely impressive and his driving runs helped United to get a foothold in the first half, with the 22-year-old offering glimpses of the form he showed on loan at Sunderland two years ago. But the winger might have made more of his two opportunities in the first half. He pushed the ball wide after he cut inside from the right to get the better of Josko Gvardiol and Jérémy Doku, before opting not to shoot for what would have been a tap-in – instead playing a wayward pass for Mason Mount.

DEFENDER PROBLEMS

Manchester United's need for a left back was evident after Luke Shaw was ruled out through injury, joining Tyrell Malacia, who will be sidelined for a couple of months with a knee problem. United are craving stability in defence, having used 33 different combinations at the back last season. Lisandro Martínez, arguably the club's best centre back, did not look fully comfortable as a makeshift left back and was outdone too easily by Oscar Bobb, who crossed for Bernardo Silva to score Manchester City's equaliser. Martínez did, however, play a beautiful pass to release Bruno Fernandes for a disallowed goal after the break. Harry Amass, the 17-year-old left back who impressed on tour, would count himself unfortunate not to have been on the bench. Ten Hag, the United manager, has suggested Amass will need a few more months to get up to speed as he was not even playing for the academy this time last year.

MCATEE SHARP FOR CITY

By James McAtee's own admission, his second season on loan at Sheffield United was something of a struggle. The midfielder, 21, managed five goals and four assists across all competitions but was in and out of a poor side that were relegated from the Premier League. Fast forward a few months and McAtee was one of the standout players on City's tour to the United States and he added more evidence that he is ready to be on the fringes of Pep Guardiola's first team here. He was sharp and confident in his passing and curled an effort against the post after a mix up in defence. He created more chances, three, and provided more assists, two, than any other player when they beat Chelsea 4-2 in a friendly last week. Leicester City have been considering a loan move for him.



Rashford with young pitch invader

O'REILLY READY TO STEP UP

Nico O'Reilly made his competitive bow and could be another of the players whose position might be reinvented by Guardiola, following the likes of Gvardiol and Fabian Delph, who were converted into left backs. Although O'Reilly, 19, came through the City academy from the age of six as an attacking midfielder, Guardiola thinks he has the physicality and stature to play deeper, as he did here. He was composed in possession and his passing was good, but he will need to learn better positioning and when to release the ball. O'Reilly, who emerged on the club's tour to the US, was City's under-18s captain and has been training with the senior squad for some time. City are looking for a midfielder to give Rodri an occasional break as he has played more than 8,000 minutes of football for club and country over the past two seasons.

RISE OF UNWELCOME GUESTS

After incidents at Euro 2024, the Copa América and Champions League in recent months, there was more concern over the rise of pitch invaders here. A child tried to get on the pitch to join in United's celebrations after Fernandes's disallowed goal in the second half. He sent the ball towards Rashford and was quickly ushered away by stewards. Uefa tried to deal with the problem at Euro 2024, after a young boy took a selfie with Cristiano Ronaldo during Portugal's 3-0 win over Turkey in Dortmund. Ronaldo let the youngster take the photo before he was caught by stewards and removed from the stadium. At the Champions League final in June – again held at Wembley – a pitch invader went on to the playing surface within ten seconds of the kick off to try to secure a selfie with Vinícius Júnior, the Brazil and Real Madrid forward.

Football

How Liverpool bought a team to win the title

In an extract from his new book, *Ian Graham* – head of research during the club's most successful Premier League era – explains how Salah, Mané and co were signed



With Jürgen Klopp installed as manager in 2015, our evidence-based strategy for running a club finally had a chance to succeed. In Germany, the culture of elite clubs was for managers to work collaboratively with a sporting director, a culture Jürgen was happy to continue at Liverpool.

Jürgen's brand of "heavy metal football" and his charisma meant he appealed to players. I was very surprised and very happy that some of Jürgen's transfer priorities were also highly rated in our statistical models. It was music to my ears that he highly regarded the Senegalese forward Sadio Mané.

In the summer of 2016 Jürgen was very keen on signing Mario Götze, who had been one of the stars of his Borussia Dortmund side in their Bundesliga title-winning seasons. Jürgen, like many managers, seemed to have a penchant for players who had played for him previously. The difference in Jürgen's case was that some of the best young players in Europe had played for him. But Götze decided he didn't want to come.

Meanwhile, Mané had continued to play very well at Southampton and scored twice against us in March 2016 after Southampton had been 2-0 down at half-time. Mané's introduction at half-time changed the game, and Southampton won 3-2.

Eddy [Michael Edwards, who was Liverpool sporting director] did some due diligence on Mané's character. We were dismayed to find the opinion was negative. At Southampton he was apparently unprofessional, late for training, and a "difficult character". Michael's job is to weigh up these character references against the ability and fit of a player, and the finances of the transfer. He decided that the poor character reference was not important enough to stop the transfer. It was a lesson that canvassing opinion about a player can lead to unreliable information. Completely contrary to the character references Eddy received, Mané was one of the most intelligent, decent and hard-working players we ever signed.

He could have chosen to sign for Manchester United instead. Playing in the Champions League is a huge draw for any player, so it was imperative that we qualified, otherwise Manchester would be the more attractive destination. We had reached the final of the Europa League in 2015-16: if we won it we would qualify for the Champions League. We lost the final to Sevilla but Mané still chose Liverpool over United. Years later, Eddy asked why Mané and his agent had made this decision. The reason was that they believed in Jürgen's ability, in his enthusiasm for Mané, and they believed that something special was going to happen at Liverpool.

My delight was about to increase further. One week when Jürgen came in and started talking to Eddy and some of the scouts: "What about this Joël Matip? He's available on a free transfer. Maybe we should think about it." Matip had made very some high-profile mistakes and was caricatured by the phrase "mistake every game". And now Jürgen was suggesting we might sign him! Eddy had also disliked Matip from some video analysis that had been done years before.

Jürgen's interest gave us the impetus to look at Matip again. He had huge experience for his age, and our Possession Value model [analysing positive and negative contributions on the ball] insisted that since 2012 he'd been easily above the level of the average Premier League centre back. Eddy ordered the video work to be done on Matip and, on reviewing it, changed his mind.

At the Melwood training ground, Eddy bumped into Jürgen and said: "Matip – I had a look, he's good!" To which Jürgen replied: "Yes. I told you so." Eddy's response? "Great, let's f***ing sign him then." The second brick of the rebuild was in place.

After agreeing to sign Matip, Eddy visited Germany to watch him play against Borussia Mönchengladbach. Matip slipped over on the halfway line, a mistake that led to an immediate Gladbach goal. Bayern Munich's scouts were also watching and their reaction left Eddy in no doubt that they'd also placed Matip in the "mistake every game" category.



How to Win the Premier League by Ian Graham is published by Century, Penguin Random House and is available for £22 from 15 August.

The third big signing of the summer was Georginio Wijnaldum. Jürgen and his coaches were huge fans of Wijnaldum and he had just been relegated with Newcastle United. Our data analysis indicated he was a very good player. In hindsight, it seems inevitable that Mané, Matip and Wijnaldum would become stars. But at the time, they were not stars. Each was perceived to be flawed in some way by the rest of the football world. This limited their attractiveness and meant we did not have to compete as hard as we might have to secure their services.

OPERATION GET MO

Back in January 2014, in the middle of Liverpool's first title challenge in five years, we attempted to sign a little-known winger from the Swiss team Basel. Just 21 years old, he'd produced some brilliant performances in the Europa League and Champions League. Statistically he looked excellent and Eddy thought he would become a superstar. But the proposed transfer fee kept on increasing. It looked like we'd have to break the Swiss transfer record by 50 per cent to secure the services of one Mohamed Salah. In the end my nervousness didn't matter. Basel stopped taking our calls. Chelsea had been offered £40 million by Manchester United for Juan Mata. With money to burn, they offered Basel £20 million. Another failure to chalk up to experience.

In summer 2017, Liverpool again had the opportunity to sign Mo, this time from Roma. We had little competition from within the Premier League: he'd "failed" at Chelsea and our English rivals did not want to risk repeating Chelsea's mistake. But we knew something that other clubs seemed to be ignorant of, despite abundant evidence: lots of transfers fail, for many different reasons.

At Chelsea, Mo competed for game time with Eden Hazard, who was then a global superstar. Mo wasn't the only exceptional young talent to find minutes difficult to come by – Kevin De Bruyne played so little for Chelsea in 2013-14 that he was loaned to Wolfsburg just before Salah arrived.

We signed Mo for £37 million in 2017. In the same summer Arsenal signed Alexandre Lacazette for £46.5million, Chelsea signed Álvaro Morata for £58 million and Manchester United signed Romelu Lukaku – another Chelsea "failure" – for £75 million plus £15 million in add-ons. It was incredible to me that there was so little competition from any other big Premier League club. When I asked Eddy if a Premier League rival might sign Salah, he told me that they were interested but was sure none would put their reputation on the line, because of that so-called failure. Subjective opinion trumped hard data, and this bias among our competitors gave us an edge that persists to this day.

Mo was not Jürgen's first choice in 2017. He was a fan of Julian Brandt, a talented young German at Bayer Leverkusen. But among the many players we considered – Brandt included – Mo was an outlier. His ability to increase a team's chance of scoring a goal, through shooting and through creating opportunities, was much greater than any player on our shortlist. Jürgen was convinced to sign Salah by my colleagues. He later said: "We were sure he [Salah] can help us. Michael Edwards, Dave Fallows [head of recruitment] and Barry [Hunter, chief scout], they were really in my ear and were on it: 'Come on, come on. Mo Salah, he's the solution!'"

ROBERTSON'S ARRIVAL

We needed squad depth at left back. In summer 2017 we had a shortlist of five targets. Andy Robertson, the



30

Years since Liverpool's previous title win when they won it in 2019-20

player we signed, was not top of the list. The standout left back that summer was Benjamin Mendy. He was top of my data-driven list but he wasn't top of Eddy's: he guessed, correctly, that Manchester City would try to sign Mendy, automatically putting him outside our financial range. He also attached significant weight to the bad character references he'd received about Mendy: this was a judgment call – the previous summer he had not attached very much weight to Mané's poor references.

Our second choice was Roma's Emerson Palmieri but Emerson tore his ACL on the last day of the season – we would have to look elsewhere.

Robertson was also 23. He had looked excellent over 1,500 minutes in Hull City's 2014-15 Premier League relegation season, then had been the standout young full back in the Championship in 2015-16. But in 2016-17 Hull conceded 80 goals in the Premier League, with Robertson starting the majority of games in defence, and were relegated again. Robertson's defensive ratings suffered. It was difficult to analyse him: Hull had changed manager and tactical style upon promotion, and did so again halfway through the season.

Again, Jürgen proved critical. When warned of our uncertainty about Robertson's defending, he replied that he didn't care if he could defend or not; he needed his left back to attack. He could solve any defensive problems by giving Robertson more cover. I was impressed by Jürgen's practical approach. Rather than demanding the perfect player, he was willing to find creative solutions to maximise each player's strengths and minimise their weaknesses. He often talked of his preference for players with one or two "extreme characteristics" – game changers. If and when those game changers had weaknesses, he was willing to use other players to compensate for them.

> **Jürgen wanted players with 'extreme characteristics', not perfect players**

Robertson was an excellent value signing – Emerson and Mendy's transfer fees and wages were much, much higher. But if it wasn't for Manchester City's pursuit of Mendy and Emerson's injury, Robertson may never have ended up at Liverpool.

SPENDING WISELY

In January 2018, it was finally agreed that Barcelona would sign Philippe Coutinho by paying Liverpool a fee of £105 million up front, plus £37 million in easily achievable bonuses. The old adage says you should always sell when someone offers you more than something is worth, and Coutinho's contract was simply not worth £142 million.

In summer 2017 we had been annoying Southampton in much the same way that Barcelona were annoying us. We wanted to sign their central defender Virgil van Dijk. He was the best young defender in Europe, and somehow he wasn't already playing for a European giant. Van Dijk looked brilliant in our analysis, but you didn't need fancy analysis to see that: his brilliance was obvious to everyone.

Unfortunately, we'd signed Mané, [Adam] Lallana, [Rickie] Lambert, [Dejan] Lovren and Nathaniel Clyne from Southampton in the past few seasons. To say our approach for Van Dijk was unwelcome is an understatement. After Coutinho's departure, we had money to spend and could pay the price that Southampton felt compensated for the loss of Van Dijk – a then world-record for a centre back of £70 million plus £4 million in add-ons.

Summer 2018. Funded by the Coutinho money, we signed Alisson Becker from Roma for a world-record fee for a goalkeeper. Alisson is one of the few players that Eddy watched live before signing. He decided to do that because he freely admits he is no expert on goalkeepers. Data analysis showed that Alisson and Jan Oblak at Atletico Madrid were the best goalkeepers in Europe. Jürgen wanted a goalkeeper used to playing with his feet and that made Alisson the preferred choice.

Fabinho also joined from Monaco. A defensive midfielder who could also play as right back, he had been weirdly overlooked by the European giants in 2017 when they had raided Monaco's title-winning team. Fabinho had played for three seasons as a right back for Monaco before moving to central midfield, and had been a Liverpool target before. In 2016 Jürgen was keen to upgrade our options at right back so we analysed every promising young right back in Europe. After training one day, Jürgen walked into Eddy's office and told him: "We don't need a young right back any more. Trent Alexander-Arnold looks fantastic!"

The players who contributed most to our title win were nearly all recent arrivals. The 2018 signings Van Dijk, Alisson, Fabinho and Naby Keita made 38, 29, 22 and nine starts, with Van Dijk playing every minute. The 2017 signings Robertson, Salah and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain made 35, 33 and 17 starts. The 2016 arrivals Wijnaldum, Mané and Matip started 35, 31 and eight times. And the 2015 signings Roberto Firmino, Joe Gomez, James Milner and Divock Origi made 34, 22, nine and seven starts.

The team was unrecognisable from the one that was ridiculed in our disastrous 2014-15 season. Since then, nearly every new signing had met with the approval of our data analysis, of Eddy's new scouting process, and of the manager. We'd finally demonstrated that our approach to squad building worked, and we'd achieved it with a net transfer spend much lower than most of our big six rivals.

The Modric problem

In further extracts from Ian Graham's book, he explains how data didn't capture the midfielder's genius

IN THE TIMES TOMORROW

High bar and Mbappé – Bellingham's testing second season at Real

England star has the task of handling expectations and playing in a team now led by the Frenchman

Tom Allnutt

Not for the first time, Carlo Ancelotti found a way to get through. Ancelotti was calling round the Real Madrid players still away on holiday and Jude Bellingham was next on his list. When his call went to voicemail, Ancelotti turned to Vinícius Jr and told him to call Bellingham instead. Bellingham answered, Vinícius passed the phone over and Ancelotti, eyebrow presumably raised, finally got the answers he needed.

And so began 2024-25 for Bellingham at Real Madrid, the challenging second album that can often lack the thrill of the first. As newcomers go, there have probably been none better. Bellingham won the league and Champions League and was named La Liga player of the season. He scored 23 goals in 42 games, including ten in his first ten, equalling the start of Cristiano Ronaldo. He scored injury-time winners in both Clásicos, at the Santiago Bernabéu and Camp Nou, and then with a memorable bicycle-kick for England at the Euros.

At the end of that tournament, Bellingham admitted to feeling "mentally and physically exhausted". After the semi-final, when Ollie Watkins sank the Netherlands, Bellingham said he would have struggled to make it through extra time. The defeat by Spain in the final was his 54th match in 11 months, with Bellingham among the growing band of youngsters playing more games earlier than ever before. "It's so tough with the crazy schedules," he said.

For Bellingham, it has been as much about the sharp inclines as distance covered. In one season, he absorbed the hype of joining the biggest club in the world, the surge to superstardom, the relentlessness needed to win the biggest trophies, and the responsibility of leading an England side expected to win. During his time off this summer, Real's doctors gave Bellingham exercises to coax the tiredness from his muscles, but there is a certain kind of fatigue that can take longer to fully shake off.

Returning to his club, away from the glare of an England summer, should be restorative, although this will be a different Real Madrid to the one Bellingham left in June. That team belonged to Bellingham and Vinícius, the two shining lights in an unpretentious squad. This Real Madrid will belong to Kylian Mbappé, the new face of the game post-Lionel Messi and the club's most glamorous signing since Ronaldo.

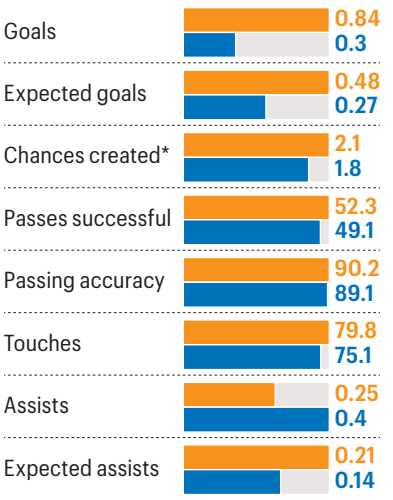
Last month, Mbappé packed out the Santiago Bernabéu with 80,000 fans to watch him do kick-ups. Outside, a boy told Marca he expected 280 goals in his first season

Continued on page 16 ➔

> **This side belongs to the new face of game, their most glamorous signing since Ronaldo**

A SEASON OF TWO HALVES

Across most key metrics, Bellingham dipped slightly after his stellar start to last season



* including assists. All stats per game.



Bellingham scored 23 goals in his first season at Real Madrid

Rugby union

Cheika is man to stir Tigers' blood

The Australian coach has a reputation for fiery energy and an ability to turn teams around — it would be staggering if he does not take his Leicester side thundering up the table



STEPHEN JONES



Rugby Correspondent

Was it the most spectacular interception made by Leicester Tigers in their long history? One moment, the celebrated Michael Cheika, of Lebanese descent but Australian, was packed and ready to leave France – where he had lived for some years and where he had coached Argentina to the semi-finals of the 2023 World Cup – to head home to Australia with his wife and family, for whatever the capricious future would bring.

Almost literally as Cheika packed, the Tigers chief executive, Andrea Pinchen, lost her coach – Dan McKellar decided after a grim 2023-2024 season, that he did not want to carry on. To be blunt, not everyone believed that he should, anyway, but the Tigers no longer had a coach.

Pinchen had established some previous contact with Cheika, beyond any doubt one of the best coaches of the past 20 years, but without persuading him that he would love to coach in the Premiership, something he had never considered.

It was not as if she dragged Cheika off the plane, but while his family of Stephanie, his wife, and children Symon, Mattias, Carlos and Lucia carried on to Australia, Cheika headed for the East Midlands.

"I haven't unpacked my bags as I'm still staying in a hotel and the priority was to get on the ground with the footie," he says. "I had made the decision to go back to Australia – but a club like Leicester made an approach and [gave me] an opportunity. It was impossible not to take it and the way it worked out, the nature, the speed of it all, suited me at the time."

One minute, the Tigers seemed to be sagging horribly. They finished last season in a catastrophic eighth out of ten, lost way too many games and had long lost that teeth-bared edge that characterised their home form for decades. They lost a game to Bristol when they fell apart in the last minutes. And for the coming season, it is at least arguable that their new signings are not as good as the players who left – notably the thunderbolt ball-carrier, Jasper Wiese.



But now, without even playing a game, they are flying. Cheika is one of those men who stirs the blood, whose undoubted technical expertise comes wedged in with a passion and occasionally an edge of anger. He is one of a grand line of coaches from the remarkable Randwick club in Sydney, who also produced the great Bob Dwyer and Eddie Jones.

It would be staggering if Leicester did not come thundering up the table, Cheika is that good. He is also a character, humorous but tough as the oldest of old boots, prone to outbursts.

When we met at Leicester's training ground Oval Park last week, he spoke so quietly that one had to crane forward and turn up the recorders. I had to point out to him gently that there were occasions in his career when he looked fit to burst with anger at officialdom and produced some memorable table-thumping.

Perhaps bizarrely, he does indeed seem to have poor decisions against his teams following him around – his Stade Français team lost out on a European title with a highly questionable call in the final at the Cardiff City Stadium.

And after England beat his Argentina in the bronze medal match at the World Cup last year, Cheika sat there clearly steaming as Julián Montoya, his captain, delivered a wise but long and pointed list of refereeing gripes from the evening. The forthcoming season will be lively.

How does he get over the bad times? "I have a process," he says. "If you put everything into things, you are going to feel the pain of losing and so you should – a lot of people are counting on me and the players to get everything right. I go through a process of mourning, then what it gives you is the passion to come straight back." It is a strength inherited from his Lebanese parents.

''It's not a great place to be in my house after a loss – with Argentina I was so emotionally connected with them and it would have been huge for them to get a World Cup medal. But the downer gives you the impetus to come back even harder. That's always been my way of dealing with things."

Frankly, he will boost the Premiership as well as his new club. He is a character, a very clever man-manager and humorous. Last week he upbraided Ben Youngs – poor Youngs collapsed because of irregular heart rhythms several months ago and needed an operation. It is the way of things with professional players at the moment that the eternal Youngs still hopes to be fit to start the season. However, Cheika told him that his heart excuse was the worst he had heard to get out of pre-season training.

He has rarely entered soft ground. "I think I have traditionally been involved in big turnarounds," he said. "That would be part of my skillset but I think that cohesion and consideration and excellence comes from habit-building; this group of players

➜ Continued from page 15

while AS, another Madrid newspaper, said Mbappé's arrival had generated "five times the impact of Bellingham".

Those comparisons are just tittle-tattle for now but that they are there already is a sign of things to come. Mbappé may be the *galactico*, a throwback to a previous era, and the best-paid player in the squad, with his salary of around €15 million net (about £13 million), not to mention his €125 million bonus. But Bellingham is a VIP now too, a mega-brand athlete who has been holidaying in Los Angeles and Miami, swapping shirts with Dolphins quarterbacks and launching his own '"JB" clothes line with Adidas. Some in Madrid believe Bellingham may benefit from a reduced share of the limelight, the pressure and scrutiny being placed elsewhere. But, like Mbappé, there is little to suggest he wants to retreat. Part of the brilliance of Bellingham is his instinct to lead.

These are all good things when channelled in the right direction. Ancelotti said during his first spell at Real Madrid he had different types of leaders, from technical geniuses like Ronaldo to personality giants like Sergio Ramos. It shouldn't faze Bellingham, who is an intelligent and mature character, or Mbappé, who seems to recognise that he needs Real right now more than Real need him. Mbappé's No 9 shirt even felt like a concession, with Luka Modric keeping the No 10 that Mbappé wears for France and Vinícius holding on to the No 7 Mbappé had at PSG. How could he argue? Real Madrid won the Champions League twice after Mbappé opted for Paris. Vinícius could win the Ballon d'Or after dazzling in Mbappé's position.

> "Mbappé seems to recognise he needs Real more than they need him



Real Madrid president Florentino Peréz welcomes Mbappé to the Bernabéu

Yet there are expectations to be met, even hierarchies to adhere to. Bellingham and Vinícius are both admired but Mbappé has an emotional hold over Real, as the boy who idolised Zinédine Zidane and the teenager who slept under posters of Ronaldo. He was coveted for the best part of a decade, which raised the stakes: everyone is now invested in his success, from the club to the coach to the fans. There is something more fundamental too. Real Madrid may have found a winning formula in shrewd young signings and savvy free

RORYJACKSON/LEICESTERTIGERS



Cheika, one of the great coaches of the past 20 years, has already got Leicester flying

need to work hard to improve their habits around preparation, around consistency, but I do believe that the quality of player is here."

As a tyro in the Premiership, he faces an abrupt change in the rhythms of life with the massive focus on the next game. It was also irresistible not to remind him of one of the great truisms of the fantastic Leicester support, which almost always amounts to more than 20,000 per match. Given a choice between a glorious attacking game which entertained and ended in a narrow victory for the opposition and a 3-0 bore-fest won by Leicester, I suspect a certain percentage would choose the latter – to be exact, around 99.9 per cent.

"I'm very conscious about the rotation of the weeks but more about the length of the season," he says. "How can I manage the blocks together? And I'm quite conscious of good planning and the different turnaround. How do you manage if there are only six days or seven days between games, while keeping the players fresh so they can be at their absolute best?"

He expresses admiration for the promising international forwards such as George Martin and Ollie Chessum. But behind it all for him, it is more than just a shot at revival.

"When you play for a club like this, you can feel like you are living up to the reputation that's been set," he says. "The real objective is to build it even greater, to see things that can inspire you from the traditions but to see more. The club may have an identity around gritty forward play and that suits me down to the ground but to win at the top level you need to be good at everything."

His instincts are sound. You would assume that he has been chatting endlessly to Montoya, a leader and hero at Leicester, from the time that Pinchen contacted him. But he has not, as it would have been unfair to the great hooker.

"I love him and respect him a lot, but once the contact was made with Leicester, I made a conscious decision not to speak to him because I don't think it's right to put him in that situation. And I don't need to sound out things that are going OK or not going OK; that's for me to discover and learn. I can assess the playing roster from the outside."

The Tigers have signed a man of fierce force and communal passion but also sympathy for individuals. The old Midlands giant, seizing on the intercept, is stirring.

HIS CAREER IN COACHING

Padua 1999-2001
Randwick 2001-05
Leinster 2005-10
Stade Francais 2010-12
Waratahs 2013-15
Australia 2014-19
Green Rockets (Japan) 2020-21
Argentina 2022-23
Leicester 2024-

The worst minute I've seen of All Blacks rugby in 50 years

My ingrained awe of men in black vanished watching two of the most dire passes imaginable as they were outwitted by the Pumas in a 38-30 defeat

STUART BARNES



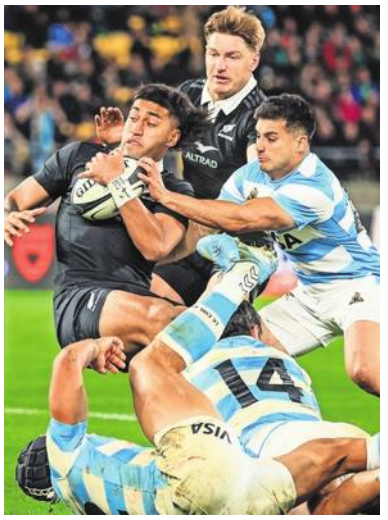
Fifty years ago an 11-year-old rugby fanatic was given a Wednesday afternoon off school to make the trip to Cardiff to watch the legendary All Blacks. Wales were a wonderful team in 1974 but hopes were dashed, as they always were against their nemesis. Fifty years on that schoolboy was stunned to see New Zealand lose to Argentina in Wellington. He was even more shocked to witness the worst few seconds of rugby he has ever seen from the men in black.

My deeply ingrained awe gave way to a different sort of wonder in the 67th minute of the Rugby Championship encounter: wondering how New Zealand could lose all of 50 metres with two of the most terrible passes imaginable. To compound the cock-up, it started with them stealing a lineout. Agustín Creevy, the 39-year-old Puma who was to play such a pivotal role for Argentina from the bench, was picked off by the Kiwi set piece.

The stolen possession was safely snuggled behind the New Zealand lines. The replacement scrum half, Cortez Ratima, was in position. Asafo Aumua, the Hurricanes hooker, ignored the half back and slung a pass to nobody. Damian McKenzie, the fly half, worsened the error by throwing another pass neither here nor there. In panicked retreat the All Blacks touched down in goal. From a stolen lineout they had conceded 50 metres while holding a narrow lead at 30-28.

There had not been a scrum for an hour. New Zealand pressured the Pumas into a mistake with the first scrum but Argentina quickly corrected their problems. From their gifted five-metre scrum they hammered away at the opposing tryline until Creevy crossed for his sixth try in 109 internationals.

As New Zealand and their bench lost all control, the experienced South American pack grew in confidence. By the time New Zealand conceded a penalty to give Argentina a 38-30 lead, the control of the one side was in stark contrast with the calamitous state of the other. New Zealand cannot win in Wellington but the rematch next week is in Auckland – where they never lose.



The Pumas stop Rieko Ioane's run

As for Argentina, there was a massive amount to admire as they won their third match against New Zealand. The back row was bruising and brilliant. Juan Martin González, the Saracens No 8, was superb but that was nothing compared with the granite presence of Marcos Kremer at open-side. And he will be a historical footnote next to the utterly inspiring captain, Pablo Matera.

> **The control of the one side was in stark contrast with the calamitous state of the other team**

It was Matera's subtle lateral running line from a turnover that pulled the New Zealand midfield out of position for the first Pumas try. The outside centre Anton Lienert-Brown rushed nine metres ahead of Dalton Papali'i, the flanker, and Mark Telea, the wing. The skipper waited for Santiago Chocobares, the Toulouse No 12, to carve open the home defence with Lucio Cinti sprinting in for a crucial score. New Zealand had led 10-0 courtesy of a fine counterattacking try from Sam Darry.

Lienert-Brown's 34th-minute try did give the hosts a 12-point lead but – again – unable to clear from their own half, a high Kiwi cross-kick was knocked back by Sevu Reece, only for Mateo Carreras to dazzle his way over for a try that kept the Pumas within five points at half-time.

It was quick wits which enabled Argentina to take the lead for the first time with a perfect Santiago Carreras penalty kick to the corner turned into a try with Franco Molina taking the ball at the lineout and being driven over. New Zealand briefly regained the lead but Argentina had the momentum in the final quarter, despite a typical Telea try. They were the smarter team. The 50-metre two-pass fiasco was the craziest, clumsiest passage of rugby I have ever seen from this destabilised New Zealand side.

What does this result tell us about the state of international rugby in the northern hemisphere? Well, two narrow defeats for England in New Zealand still don't read badly. But they no longer read well after yesterday. The exclamation marks after the performances against Ireland and France in the Six Nations are replaced with question marks. The jury remains out.

That's for the future. This rugby weekend belongs to men like Creevy and Tomás Lavanini, who are too old for the next World Cup but ready for a crack at history in Eden Park on Saturday.

transfers but at its heart this is still a club that defines itself by its stars, the big names carrying almost as much weight as European Cups.

Ancelotti will be crucial to the Bellingham-Mbappé transition, as the coach who blends talent and egos better than anyone. He knows the problems that can arise. When Gareth Bale moved to Real Madrid in 2013, Bale saw himself more as Ronaldo's successor than supplier, perhaps understandably for a player who had just commanded a world-record fee. But after an impressive first season, results drifted in the second and cracks started to appear.

Ancelotti's job now is to stir all his key ingredients into the same attack, with Mbappé, Vinícius and Rodrygo all preferring to play off the left of a front three, while Bellingham has thrived centrally, behind a front two. Something has to give, but Bellingham's role is unlikely to change significantly under Ancelotti, with Mbappé and Vinícius expected to start together up front. A deeper role may follow, especially after the retirement of Toni Kroos, but nothing will be decided without consensus. Bellingham trusts Ancelotti and Ancelotti has extracted the best from Bellingham. "He is the coach who has gotten the best out of me, made me believe I am better," Bellingham said. "It is the first time I have played as a No 10 and that was his decision, something I must thank him for. He has convinced me of my potential."

Unlike many modern coaches, Ancelotti believes systems should revolve around players, not the other way round. At Juventus 20 years ago, he ditched his preferred 4-4-2 and created a 3-4-1-2 formation to allow a young Zidane to play No 10. A few years later at AC Milan, he told Andrea Pirlo, Clarence Seedorf, Rui Costa and Kaká to come up with a shape that included all of them, giving the players buy-in for a way that worked.

10

Goals for Bellingham in his first ten La Liga games — more than Zidane ever scored in an entire league season for Real Madrid

The priority for Bellingham will be to recharge his own performances and to handle the expectations set by those sensational first few months of last season. A drop-off was inevitable and while Bellingham looked heavy-legged at the Euros, his form for Real Madrid in the second half of the season had already been patchier than the first. From January, his goals per game (0.8 to 0.3), touches per game (80 to 75) and pass success (52 to 49 per cent) all dipped. Ankle and shoulder injuries, a stomach virus and a red card against Valencia, which brought a three-match suspension, disrupted his rhythm. There was frustration, as there was with England this summer, but it was released by moments of brilliance.

When Bale was asked about Bellingham's first season, his response gave an insight into the ups and downs of playing for a club like Real Madrid, and how the good times can be important for building up enough credit to survive the bad.

"It's important that he had a great start [because of] the intensity and the pressure that you can feel under," Bale said. "For him to win a Champions League in his first season, that really settles the pressure."

Bale started well but tailed off. Eden Hazard started slowly and never recovered. Ronaldo exploded and then kept going and going. That is the challenge now for Bellingham: to scale the heights again, in a changed team, with raised expectations and a new talisman. If anyone can pull it off, he can.

Sport

FOOTBALL RESULTS

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP

Josh Maja scored a hat-trick as Queens Park Rangers fans were left feeling "here we go again" after West Bromwich Albion came from a goal down to win 3-1 at Loftus Road (Peter Wilson writes). It was the third-successive season QPR had lost their opening match.

Lucas Andersen's header put the hosts in front but the optimism of the QPR supporters soon faded as two headers from Maja and an acrobatic strike for his third made him the first West Bromwich player to score a hat-trick in their opening game since Alf Bentley in 1913-14.

League One play-off winners Oxford United shocked Norwich City 2-0 in their first second-tier match for 25 years.

Mark Harris, the top goalscorer in Oxford's promotion season, fired them in front before Cameron Brannagan sidefooted the second from just inside the penalty area.

Middlesbrough's slow start in recent seasons has seen them playing catch-up before the campaign has got into its stride, but they got off to a winning start this time, 1-0 against Swansea City, with goal machine Emmanuel Latte Lath striking from the penalty spot.

Millwall remembered their goalkeeper, Matija Sarkic, who died in June, before a thrilling 3-2 home defeat by Watford. Substitute Mileta Rajović headed the winner after two Duncan Watmore goals looked to have salvaged a draw for Millwall.

Stoke City started the way they ended the last campaign with a win and a clean sheet. Stephen Schumacher's side beat Coventry City 1-0, through Lewis Baker's late strike, for a fourth straight league win and a fourth consecutive clean sheet.

Óscar Estupiñán's stoppage-time penalty secured Hull City a 1-1 home draw with Bristol City, who might have thought they had stolen the points when their substitute, Fally Mayulu, a £2.5million signing from Rapid Vienna, fired them in front with six minutes remaining.



Maja hit a hat-trick at Queens Park Rangers

5 **Watford have won their opening game in the past five league seasons**

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Blackburn	1	1	0	0	4	2	2	3
2	West Brom	1	1	0	0	3	1	2	3
3	Oxford Utd	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
4	Sunderland	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
5	Watford	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	3
6	Middlesbro	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
7	Stoke	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
8	*Sheff Utd	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	1
9	Portsmouth	1	0	1	0	3	3	0	1
10	Leeds	1	0	1	0	3	3	0	1
11	Bristol City	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
12	Hull	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
13	Burnley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Luton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	Plymouth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	Sheff Wed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	Millwall	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
18	Coventry	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
19	Swansea	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
20	Derby	1	0	0	1	2	4	-2	0
21	QPR	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
22	Cardiff	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
23	Norwich	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
24	Preston	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0

* deducted 2pts for breach of league rules

NEXT FIXTURES

Today Sheff Wed v Plymouth (4.0). **Tomorrow** Luton v Burnley (8.0). **Friday** Coventry v Oxford Utd (8.0). **Saturday** (3.0 unless stated): Bristol City v Millwall; Burnley v Cardiff; Derby v Middlesbrough (12.30); Norwich v Blackburn; Plymouth v Hull; Portsmouth v Luton (12.30); Sheff Utd v QPR; Swansea v Preston; Watford v Stoke; West Brom v Leeds (12.30).

CARDIFF 0 **SUNDERLAND 2**
O'Nien 18
Clarke 89
HT: 0-1 **Att**: 21,401

HULL 1 **BRISTOL CITY 1**
Estupinan 90+1 (pen) Mayulu 84
HT: 0-0 **Att**: 21,011

LEEDS 3 **PORTSMOUTH 3**
Struijk 10 (pen) Sorensen 23
Gnonto 46 Lang 41, 90+2 (pen)
Aaronson 90+5
HT: 1-2 **Att**: 36,432

MIDDLESBROUGH 1 **SWANSEA 0**
Latte Lath 25 (pen)
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 26,610

MILLWALL 2 **WATFORD 3**
Watmore 74, 88 Kayembe 22
Chakvetadze 55
Rajovic 90
HT: 0-1 **Att**: 16,456

OXFORD UTD 2 **NORWICH 0**
Harris 28
Brannagan 58
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 11,333

QPR 1 **WEST BROM 3**
Andersen 16 Maja 26, 51, 65
HT: 1-1

STOKE 1 **COVENTRY 0**
Baker 78
HT: 0-0 **Att**: 25,037

LEAGUE ONE

Alfie May, last season's leading scorer in League One, opened his account for this term on his debut for Birmingham City in their 1-1 home draw with Reading. The 31-year-old, who cost about £800,000 from Charlton Athletic, stroked in his late penalty with his usual confidence after Kelvin Ehibhatiomhan had put Reading in front before half-time.

The Aston Villa midfielder, Louie Barry, played a big part in Stockport County's League Two championship-winning season, so was happy to go back on loan to Edgeley Park. He wasted no time in proving his worth, scoring with a 30-yard half-volley after only five minutes in their 2-0 defeat of Cambridge United. Kyle Wootton headed a late second.

Wrexham are back in the third tier after a 19-year gap and edged past Wycombe Wanderers 3-2 in front of their Hollwood owners, Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney.

Crawley Town crept into the League Two play-offs last season and then produced their best performances of the season. They continued their classy football with a 2-1 win against Blackpool. With Mansfield Town winning at Barnsley on Friday, it was only the third time four newly promoted sides have won their opening game in a third-tier season in the Football League.

If recent history is anything to go by the promotion mix will be Rotherham United and two other teams. The South Yorkshire club have immediately gone back up the last three times after relegation from the Championship. They did not not look like promotion candidates, though, losing to Caleb Watt's close-range effort 1-0 away at Exeter City.

The past four meetings between Leyton Orient and Bolton Wanderers had gone to the home side but that changed with last season's play-off finalist winning 2-1 at Brisbane Road.



May equalised for Birmingham City

NEXT FIXTURES

Saturday (3.0 unless stated): Blackpool v Stockport County; Cambridge Utd v Crawley; Charlton v Leyton Orient (12.30); Huddersfield v Stevenage; Lincoln City v Barnsley; Mansfield v Burton; Northampton v Exeter; Reading v Wigan; Rotherham v Bristol Rovers; Shrewsbury v Peterborough (12.30); Wycombe v Birmingham.

BIRMINGHAM 1 **READING 1**
May 87 (pen) Ehibhatiomhan 42
HT: 0-1 **Att**: 27,985

BRISTOL ROVERS 1 **NORTHAMPTON 0**
Akono Bilongo 90+2
HT: 0-0 **Att**: 8,529

BURTON ALBION 2 **LINCOLN CITY 3**
Godwin-Malife 5 O'Connor 9, 86
Bodin 41 Darikwa 22
HT: 2-2

CRAWLEY TOWN 2 **BLACKPOOL 1**
Hepburn-Murphy 16 Fletcher 74
Quitirna 33
HT: 2-0 **Att**: 2,718

EXETER 1 **ROTHERHAM 0**
Watts 71
HT: 0-0

LEYTON ORIENT 1 **BOLTON 2**
Kelman 38 Charles 8
Adeboyejo 75
HT: 1-1 **Att**: 7,835

PETERBOROUGH 0 **HUDDERSFIELD 2**
Evans 36
Wiles 45+1
HT: 0-2

STEVENAGE 1 **SHREWSBURY 0**
List 58
HT: 0-0 **Att**: 3,357

STOCKPORT 2 **CAMBRIDGE UTD 0**
Barry 5, Wootton 76
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 9,457

WIGAN 0 **CHARLTON 1**
Jones 81
HT: 0-0

WREXHAM 3 **WYCOMBE 2**
Cleworth 9, Marriott 29 Kone 58
Fletcher 83 Vokes 89
HT: 2-0 **Att**: 13,214

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Huddersfield	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
2	Stockport	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
3	Lincoln City	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	3
4	Wrexham	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	3
5	Bolton	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
6	Crawley	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
7	Mansfield	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
8	Bristol Rovers	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
9	Charlton	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
10	Exeter	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
11	Stevenage	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
12	Birmingham	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
13	Reading	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
14	Burton Albion	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
15	Wycombe	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
16	Barnsley	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
17	Blackpool	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
18	Leyton Orient	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
19	Northampton	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
20	Rotherham	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
21	Shrewsbury	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
22	Wigan	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
23	Cambridge Utd	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
24	Peterborough	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0

LEAGUE TWO



7 **Middlesbrough's Emmanuel Latte Lath has scored in his past seven Championship games**

Bromley waited 132 years to get into the Football League but it took only one day to notch up their first victory, 2-0 at Harrogate Town.

The National League play-off winners went in front when Michael Cheek put his chest in the way of Idris Odutayo's drilled strike. Kamarl Grant headed their second past the Harrogate goalkeeper, Mark Oxley, who had to replace the injured James Belshaw before half-time.

Salford City lost an opening-day EFL match for the first time, 2-0 at home to relegated Port Vale. Ben Garrity struck twice for the visitors, who lost on the opening day last term 7-0 at Barnsley.

Another relegated side, Cheltenham Town, failed to score in their first 11 league games last season. They also did better yesterday, beating Newport County 3-2 thanks to Cardiff City loanee Joel Colwill's strike deep in stoppage time, his second of the game.

Charlie Adams's Fleetwood Town also won, 1-0 against Grimsby Town, but Carlisle United were unable to make it a clean sweep for the relegated teams — they were beaten 4-1 away at Gillingham.

Milton Keynes Dons's new chairman, Fahad Al Ghanim, sat a few rows in front of the former owner, Pete Winkelman, only 24 hours after his Kuwait-based consortium had taken over the club. There was no immediate dividends, with Bradford City winning 2-1.

Danny Cowley said this season was "a new beginning" for Colchester United. It looked that way when they raced into a two-goal lead courtesy of Ben Goodliffe away at AFC Wimbledon, but the Dons battled back to win 4-2.

Billy Sharp scored his 250th goal in English league football in Doncaster Rovers's 4-1 defeat of Accrington Stanley.



Cheek, left, scores the first goal for Bromley

NEXT FIXTURES

Saturday (3.0 unless stated): Accrington Stanley v Harrogate Town; Bradford City v Salford; Bromley v AFC Wimbledon (12.30); Carlisle v Barrow (12.30); Colchester v MK Dons; Crewe v Chesterfield; Grimsby v Cheltenham; Morecambe v Gillingham; Newport County v Doncaster; Port Vale v Tranmere; Swindon v Walsall.

AFC WIMBLEDON 4 **COLCHESTER 2**
Ball 13, Reeves 30 Goodliffe 1, 9
Stevens 38 (pen), Bugiel 54
HT: 3-2 **Att**: 7,924

BARROW 1 **CREWE 0**
Vassell 22
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 3,585

CHELTENHAM 3 **NEWPORT CO 2**
Colwill 22, 90+6 Baker-Richardson 31 (pen)
Dulson 27 Greaves 43
HT: 2-2 **Att**: 4,613

DONCASTER 4 **ACCRINGTON 1**
Molyneux 43, 62 Walton 47
Gibson 68, Sharp 87
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 6,423

FLEETWOOD TOWN 1 **GRIMSBY 0**
Helm 18
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 3,525

GILLINGHAM 4 **CARLISLE 1**
Dieng 2, Wakeling 48 Mellish 65
Nolan 77, Williams 87
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 7,037

HARROGATE TOWN 0 **BROMLEY 2**
Cheek 62
Grant 71
HT: 0-0

MK DONS 1 **BRADFORD CITY 2**
Gilbey 20 Pattison 3
Sherring 5 (og)
HT: 1-2 **Att**: 7,561

SALFORD 0 **PORT VALE 2**
Garrity 45+3, 69
HT: 0-1 **Att**: 3,318

TRANMERE 0 **NOTTS CO 0**
HT: 0-0 **Att**: 8,198

WALSALL 1 **MORECAMBE 0**
Allen 20
HT: 1-0 **Att**: 5,226

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Doncaster	1	1	0	0	4	1	3	3
2	Gillingham	1	1	0	0	4	1	3	3
3	AFC Wimbledon	1	1	0	0	4	2	2	3
4	Bromley	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
5	Port Vale	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
6	Cheltenham	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	3
7	Bradford City	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
8	Barrow	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
9	Fleetwood	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
10	Walsall	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
11	Swindon	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
12	Chesterfield	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
13	Notts Co	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
14	Tranmere	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
15	Newport Co	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
16	MK Dons	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
17	Crewe	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
18	Grimsby	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
19	Morecambe	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
20	Colchester	1	0	0	1	2	4	-2	0
21	Harrogate	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
22	Salford	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
23	Accrington	1	0	0	1	1	4	-3	0
24	Carlisle	1	0	0	1	1	4	-3	0

SCOTTISH FOOTBALL

William Hill Premiership

DUNDEE 3 — **HEARTS 1**
Tiffoney 23, Taylor 45+2 (og)
McCowan 45+5 (pen), Cameron 51
Kent 61
HT: 3-0

RANGERS 2 — **MOTHERWELL 1**
Dessers 13
Cerny 24
Propper 17 (og)
HT: 2-1 — **Att**: 48,529

ROSS CO 1 — **DUNDEE UTD 1**
Hale 90+5
Babunski 48
HT: 0-0 — **Att**: 4,169

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dundee	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Rangers	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Celtic	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
St Mirren	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Aberdeen	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Dundee Utd	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Ross County	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Motherwell	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Hearts	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
St Johnstone	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Hibernian	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Kilmarnock	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

William Hill Championship

DUNFERMLINE 0 — **FALKIRK 2**
MacIver 6
Morrison 87 (pen)
HT: 0-1 — **Att**: 7,595

MORTON 0 — **HAMILTON 0**
HT: 0-0 — **Att**: 1,866

RAITH 1 — **PARTICK 0**
Easton 27 (pen)
HT: 1-0 — **Att**: 4,002
Sent off: S Robinson (Partick) 76

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ayr	2	2	0	0	7	0	6
Falkirk	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Livingston	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Raith	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Airdrieonians	2	1	0	1	1	5	3
Morton	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Queen's Park	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Partick	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Hamilton	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Dunfermline	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

League One Annan Athletic 1 Inverness CT 0; Arbroath 0 Montrose 0; Dumbarton 3 Alloa 3; Kelty Hearts 2 Stenhousemuir 0; Queen of the South 2 Cove Rangers 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Annan Athletic	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Kelty Hearts	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Queen of South	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Stenhousemuir	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Dumbarton	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Alloa	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Montrose	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Arbroath	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Inverness CT	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Cove Rangers	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

League Two Clyde 1 Stranraer 0; East Fife 2 Edinburgh City 0; Peterhead 2 Forfar 1; Spartans 2 Bonnyrigg Rose 0; Stirling Albion 0 Elgin 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elgin	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Peterhead	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Spartans	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Clyde	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
East Fife	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Stirling	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Stranraer	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Forfar	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Edinburgh City	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Bonnyrigg Rose	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

NATIONAL LEAGUE

AFC FYLDE 3 — **SOLIHULL MOORS 2**
Haughton 10, 57, 83
Evans 28 (og), Stevens 39
HT: 1-2 — **Sent off**: J Labadie (Solihull) 58

ALDERSHOT 3 — **FOREST GREEN 3**
Ghandour 7, 11
Inniss 22
Henry 80
McAllister 48, Doidge 57
HT: 2-1

ALTRINCHAM 1 — **WOKING 0**
Golden 27
HT: 1-0
Sent off: E Jones (Altrincham) 12; D Gorman (Woking) 53

BOSTON UTD 0 — **ROCHDALE 3**
Rodney 14, 40, Henderson 90+2
HT: 0-2 — **Att**: 2,578

DAGENHAM & R 2 — **WEALDSTONE 1**
Rees 55, Pereira 81
Ashford 71
HT: 0-0

HALIFAX 2 — **BARNET 1**
Cooke 49, Alimi-Adetoro 59
Coker 55
HT: 0-0 — Att: 1,634

GATESHEAD 5 — **EBBSFLEET 1**
Whelan 11, Oseni 33, Olley 45+3, 48, 59
Poleon 90+5
HT: 3-0

MAIDENHEAD UTD 0 — **EASTLEIGH 2**
De Havilland 34 (og), Vokins 39
HT: 0-2

OLDHAM 3 — **BRAINTREE TOWN 0**
Uchegbulam 8, Charsley 29
Fondop-Talom 59
HT: 2-0 — **Att**: 5,552

SOUTHEND 1 — **YORK 1**
Scott-Morriss 16
John-Lewis 84
HT: 1-0 — **Att**: 7,962

TAMWORTH 1 — **SUTTON UTD 1**
Tshikuna 84
Coley 90+1
HT: 0-0 — **Att**: 1,676

YEOVIL 0 — **HARTLEPOOL 1**
Hunter 65
HT: 0-0 — **Att**: 3,646

NEXT FIXTURES

Saturday (3.0 unless stated): Boston v Forest Green; Braintree v Yeovil; Eastleigh v AFC Fylde; Ebbsfleet v Barnet; Halifax v Aldershot; Hartlepool v Southend; Rochdale v Dagenham & R; Solihull Moors v Maidenhead; Sutton Utd v Altrincham; Wealdstone v Oldham; Woking v Gateshead; York v Tamworth.

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Gateshead	1	1	0	0	5	1	4	3
2	Oldham	1	1	0	0	3	0	3	3
3	Rochdale	1	1	0	0	3	0	3	3
4	Eastleigh	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	3
5	AFC Fylde	1	1	0	0	3	2	1	3
6	Dagenham & R	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
7	Halifax	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	3
8	Hartlepool	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
9	Altrincham	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
10	Aldershot	1	0	1	0	3	3	0	1
11	Forest Green	1	0	1	0	3	3	0	1
12	Southend	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
13	Sutton Utd	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
14	Tamworth	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
15	York	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
16	Solihull Moors	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
17	Barnet	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
18	Wealdstone	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
19	Woking	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
20	Yeovil	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
21	Maidenhead	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
22	Boston Utd	1	0	0	1	0	3	-3	0
23	Braintree	1	0	0	1	0	3	-3	0
24	Ebbsfleet	1	0	0	1	1	5	-4	0

EAT.DRINK.LOVE

JEANETTE KWAKYE

The BBC Olympics presenter on old West Ham shirts, vintage rum and Winston Churchill



EAT

MY FAVOURITE MEAL

My mum's jollof rice. It's tomato-based with spices, beef stock and herbs, plus home-made coleslaw and fried plantains. It's a West African meal so we wouldn't have starters, but if I did, it would be prawn tempura: the bigger the prawn the happier I am. Back to childhood for dessert: apple crumble with more crumble than apple. Pinot grigio or merlot to drink.

MY FAVOURITE RESTAURANT

Praticità Olegário Maciel, by the coast in Rio. You pick your piece of meat from a massive freezer. They season it and cook it in front of you.

MY DREAM DINNER PARTY

Oprah Winfrey: I've looked up to her since the beginning of time. A phenomenal broadcaster and her back story is incredible.

LeBron James: he's all presence and his son's just signed to the same basketball team as him, so I'd have him tell me everything I need to know for parenting skills.

Winston Churchill: I'm a politics graduate so I'd like an understanding of what the UK was like in his time and how someone so charismatic governed a country in wartime with no social media or rolling news.

Tokunbo Ajasa-Oluwa: when you're with really famous people, you need someone who's a leveller, someone you can kick under the table. That's my husband: we've been married nine years.

Beyoncé: a megastar who's amazing and a mother of three. Someone to talk to while kicking my husband under the table.

DRINK

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLE

Alcoholic: rum punch. When I met my husband I was drinking standard rum. Now I'm into Cuban rum and



Reign from Ghana. If we find a three, seven or especially 15-year-old one, we're in dreamland.

Non-alcoholic: fresh juices, anything blendable, ideally apples, pineapples and really ripe mangoes.

MY WORST HANGOVER

My 21st birthday. I was at a club in London, mixing my drinks. My best friend still has the photos and reminds me. When you're 21 you're supposed to be able to get up the next morning. I was in bed for two days. Luckily I'm so, so blessed to have the most amazing parents.

LOVE

MY FAVOURITE FILM

Coming To America. I've watched it so many times and know all the lines.

MY FAVOURITE TV SERIES

Succession. I was so late to it, but everybody was talking about it. I binged it.

MY FAVOURITE POP STAR

Ghetts. The east London grime artist who's so clever and so expressive.

MY FAVOURITE ALBUM

Kano's *Hoodies All Summer*. It's a masterpiece. I love it, love it, love it.

MY FAVOURITE BOOK

Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi. It's a brilliant, beautiful intergenerational tale of West African sisters during slave time.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

Cheeky bargain hunting. You might catch me, cap on low, in an east London market trying to haggle down. I'll always get the best price, only for my husband to say, "Why have you come back with a 1980s West Ham shirt?"

John Aizlewood
Check out @jeanettekwakye on Instagram to go behind the scenes from the Olympics, where she anchored the morning show with JJ Chalmers for BBC Sport

Today's racecards

Leicester

Going: good to firm-good in places — **Racing TV**

Thunderer's tips: 2.00 Power Of Twins **2.30** Matauri Bay **3.00** Silent Flame **3.30** Livinthelife **4.00** Available Angel **4.30** City Escape

2.00 WELCOME TO FAMILY DAY NURSERY £4,187: 7F (9)

1 (8) 0622 **POWER OF TWINS** 9 R Hannon 9-11 — S M Levey
2 (4) 355 **WASHINGTON DANCER** 78 P Evans 9-11 — D Probert
3 (6) 05015 **LIBERTY BIRD** 36 (D) C Johnston 9-10 — Billy Loughnane
4 (1) 40514 **LAW DEGREE** 7 (P,D) T Easterby 9-9 — S B Kirrane
5 (9) 6440 **OFF THE BENCH** 33 E Smyth-Osbourne 9-8 — T Fisher (3)
6 (7) 050 **CORRIAMO** 31 M Tregoning 9-7 — T Whelan
7 (2) 3005 **UNDER THE SEA** 30 (B) Alice Haynes 9-2 — D Keenan
8 (3) 460 **MAJESTIC HEIGHTS** 97 R Hannon 9-1 — J Leavy (5)
9 (5) 006 **AL WASEELA** 13 (P) W Haggas 8-9 — C Fallon

Betting: 9-4 Power Of Twins, 4-1 Al Waseela, 6-1 Washington Dancer, 7-1 Law Degree, 8-1 Under The Sea, 10-1 Liberty Bird, Corriamo, 12-1 Majestic Heights, 25-1 Off The Bench

2.30 IRISH STALLION FARMS EBF NOVICE STAKES £4,860: 7F (6)

1 (6) **MARCHOGION** A Balding 9-7 — D Probert
2 (1) **MATAURI BAY** R Beckett 9-7 — H Crouch
3 (5) **NIGHTWALKER** Sir M Stoute 9-7 — R Kingscote
4 (4) **SHAH** G Boughey 9-7 — B Loughnane
5 (2) **SPECTACULAR VIEW** C Appleby 9-7 — P Dobbs
6 (3) 0 **SICK NOTE BRITAIN** 13 P Evans 9-2 — P J McDonald

Betting: 7-4 Spectacular View, 3-1 Matauri Bay, 4-1 Nightwalker, 5-1 Marchogion, 7-1 Shah, 50-1 Sick Note Britain

3.00 LEICESTER RACECOURSE IDEAL SELF-HIRE WEDDING VENUE HANDICAP £5,234: 6F (11)

1 (5)540263 **LIHOU** 7 (D) P Evans 8-9-13 — D Probert
2 (3)0-0641 **SOVEREIGN SLIPPER** 30 (D) H Candy 6-9-12 — T Whelan
3 (8)020-65 **GOLDEN DUKE** 8 (CD) N Tinkler 5-9-12 — H Turner
4 (7)-00241 **HIGH VIOLET** 18 (T,CD) D Loughnane 3-9-10 — T Eaves
5 (4)000050 **ULTRAMARINE** 8 (D) P Evans 5-9-10 — Alexandra McDonnell (7)
6 (11)400-00 **TOUSSAROK** 20 (D) A Carroll 6-9-8 — W Carson
7 (9)421023 **NOISY MUSIC** 23 (D) M Appleby 3-9-8 — B Loughnane
8 (1)056413 **SILENT FLAME** 17 (B,D) B Millman 6-9-7 — L Edmunds
9 (6)3-6166 **PERIANTH** 36 (P,CD) Mrs P Sly 3-9-4 — S W Kelly
10(10)-01662 **CRAFTY SPIRIT** 26 (V,BF,D) C Cox 3-9-2 — R Kingscote
11 (2)6006-0 **TIGER TRAP** 17 T Tate 4-8-9 — A Elliott

Betting: 4-1 Sovereign Slipper, 9-2 High Violet, 5-1 Lihou, Crafty Spirit, 6-1 Silent Flame, 7-1 Noisy Music, 14-1 Perianth, Golden Duke

3.30 KUBE - LEICESTER'S PREMIER EVENTS VENUE HANDICAP £4,187: 1M 4F (12)

1 (4)011223 **LASER FOCUS** J16 (T,BF,D) J Owen 6-10-4 — C Maggs (7)
2 (5)1260-0 **BLUENOSE BELLE** 95 (P) R Phillips 6-10-2 — D Probert
3 (11)-616P5 **QUEENSLAND BOY** 31 (P) I Williams 4-10-1 — R Kingscote
4 (2)630355 **REBEL ANGEL** 24 (P,T,D) D Pipe 4-10-0 — C Fallon
5 (6)053123 **BOBACIOUS** 16 (BF) G Nicholls 4-9-13 — J Bryan
6 (7)350110 **TROJAN TRUTH** 17 (B,CD) E De Giles 5-9-13 — L Morris
7 (12)-03005 **THE PUG** 19 (P) S Kirk 4-9-12 — S Mohd (7)
8 (10)-31633 **PAPAGEI** 22 J Ferguson 3-9-8 — D Muscutt
9 (3)53-142 **DUBAWI TIME** 18 (BF,D) W Knight 3-9-7 — D Egan
10(8)662342 **LIVINTHELIFE** 23 (H) Alice Haynes 3-9-5 — D Keenan
11 (1)30-505 **WAR DIRECTOR** 17 D Menuisier 3-9-5 — S M Levey
12(9)-00254 **SQUEAKER** 36 (T) C Hobson 3-9-4 — M Ghiani

Betting: 7-2 Laser Focus, 4-1 Bobacious, 6-1 Livinthelife, 7-1 Dubawi Time, 8-1 Papagei, 10-1 Rebel Angel, 12-1 The Pug, 14-1 Queensland Boy, Squeaker

4.00 LEICESTER RACECOURSE IDEAL PARTY VENUE HANDICAP £4,187: 7F (11)

1 (1)154030 **DION BAKER** 17 (P,D) M Wigham 5-10-0 — D Keenan
2 (8)066400 **YOSHIMI** 17 (P,CD) M Herrington 7-9-12 — T Eaves
3 (10)422213 **LADY WINGALONG** 13 (BF,D) P Evans 5-9-12 — D Probert
4 (3)-30530 **TOO MUCH TREVOR** 24 (B) Alice Haynes 3-9-8 — D Egan
5 (11) 6-460 **BEGUILING** 55 T Easterby 3-9-7 — S B Kirrane
6 (6)000306 **AUTUMN ANGEL** 97 (D) A Carroll 5-9-7 — L Morris
7 (2)05640- **BAULAC** 242 A Carroll 4-9-5 — W Carson
8 (4)440010 **ASMUND** 14 (B,BF,C,D) D Carroll 7-9-4 — B Loughnane
9 (7)022000 **STORM ASSET** 12 (D) D Shaw 5-8-12 — A Rawlinson
10(9)100604 **AJRAD** 18 (D) B Millman 6-8-12 — L Edmunds
11 (5)-66002 **AVAILABLE ANGEL** 12 (P) J Mackie 6-8-12 — P J McDonald

Betting: 5-2 Lady Wingalong, 5-1 Available Angel, 6-1 Asmund, 7-1 Dion Baker, 8-1 Ajrad, 10-1 Too Much Trevor, 12-1 Autumn Angel, 14-1 Baulac

4.30 BEST TICKET DEALS ONLINE AT LEICESTER-RACECOURSE.CO.UK HANDICAP £4,187: 1M 2F (9)

1 (1)165024 **ROSE LIGHT** 24 A Forbes 5-9-9 — J Leavy (5)
2 (6)340533 **CITY ESCAPE** 32 (B,E,D) M Loughnane 7-9-8 — B Loughnane
3 (3)444430 **BAY DREAM BELIEVER** 11 (H) M Walford 5-9-8 — P J McDonald
4 (5)202545 **HIGH COURT JUDGE** 13 (P,T,BF) D Dennis 4-9-6 — L Morris
5 (9)-06343 **KHANGAI** 25 (B,T,D) M Rimell 4-9-5 — D Probert
6 (8)050053 **CERULEAN SUMMER** 19 (B,T) D Cunha 3-9-1 — D Egan
7 (4)000-46 **BREAK THE SPELL** 14 (P) D J Jeffreys 4-9-0 — W Carson
8 (2)/00-00 **GAAZOOO** 12 (B) S A Harris 5-9-0 — Laura Pearson
9 (7)-22041 **FIRST ENCOUNTER** 18 (P,C) J Gallagher 3-8-7 — W Cox

Betting: 100-30 First Encounter, 4-1 City Escape, 9-2 High Court Judge, 5-1 Cerulean Summer, 6-1 Khangai, 8-1 Bay Dream Believer, 12-1 Rose Light, 16-1 Break The Spell, 50-1 Gaazooo

Ripon

Going: good — **Sky Sports Racing**

Thunderer's tips: 2.10 Makalu (nap) **2.40** We Dare To Dream **3.10 Lesley's Boy** (nb) **3.40** Cool Legend **4.10** Hurstwood **4.40** Degale **5.10** Jez Bomb

2.10 DINE&STAY AT THE OLD DEANERY RIPON APPRENTICE HANDICAP £5,234: 1M (12)

1 (11)060401 **BOWOOD** 17 (D) I Furtado 4-10-0 — Elle-May Croot (5)
2 (10)432454 **PINBALL WIZARD** 12 (V,D) James Owen 6-9-13 — S D Bowen
3 (8)040043 **MOUNT KING** 20 (P,T,D) T Easterby 4-9-12 — Amie Waugh (3)
4 (9) 2101-0 **STYLE OF LIFE** 23 (T,D) H Bethell 4-9-11 — E Jones (5)
5 (2) 101213 **MAKALU** 23 (CD) R Carr 5-9-9 — M Winn
6 (4) 011154 **JUMEIRA VISION** 13 (BF,D) K Scott 4-9-9 — B Wilkie (3)
7 (1) 10-010 **ISLAND OF SKYE** 27 (H,D) M Walford 5-9-8 — J Peate
8 (5)000-00 **RIEVAULX RAVER** 89 (P,CD) R Fell & S Murray 4-9-8 — B Sanderson
9 (12)530124 **LITTLE TED** 6 (P,C,D) T Easterby 7-9-4 — A Fielding (5)
10(3) 4-5146 **GOING UNDERGROUND** 27 (B,D) W Storey 7-8-13 — Paula Muir
11 (7)465/0- **WITCHFORD** 411 Sara Ender 4-8-13 — A Brookes
12(6)00050- **VOLENTI** 342 B Haslam 5-8-7 — A Breslin

Betting: 7-2 Bowood, 11-2 Pinball Wizard, Little Ted, 6-1 Makalu, 7-1 Mount King, 15-2 Jumeira Vision, 12-1 Style Of Life, Island Of Skye, Going Underground

2.40 KARL BUDGE 60TH BIRTHDAY EBF NOVICE STAKES £5,234: 6F (7)

1 (1) 55 **CALLOUT** 11 E Bethell 9-7 — C Rodriguez
2 (3) 0 **CAPRICORN KING** 16 J & S Quinn 9-7 — G Sanna (5)
3 (4) 00 **FOCUS ON ZAAM** 12 I Furtado 9-7 — K O'Neill
4 (5) **GALTEE** G Tuer 9-7 — S James
5 (6) **MEARALL** R Fahey 9-7 — Oisin Orr
6 (7) 2 **WE DARE TO DREAM** 27 D O'Meara 9-7 — D Nolan
7 (2) 35 **ANN TERRY** 25 (BF) J & S Quinn 9-2 — J Hart

Betting: 7-4 We Dare To Dream, 5-2 Ann Terry, 9-2 Mearall, 11-2 Callout, 10-1 Capricorn King, 16-1 Galtee, 50-1 Focus On Zaam

3.10 PAULA BUDGE SURPRISE BIRTHDAY NURSERY £5,234: 6F (7)

1 (4) 01 **LESLEY'S BOY** 61 (D) R Fahey 9-11 — Oisin Orr
2 (3) 163 **SONIC BLUE** 50 (P) T Dascombe 9-9 — P-L Jamin
3 (1) 21 **EASY PEELER** 18 (D) J & S Quinn 9-7 — J Hart
4 (2) 3623 **ART DESIGN** 8 (P) W Haggas 9-5 — T Marquand
5 (7) 0244 **STIRRUP CUP** 20 (B) T Easterby 9-3 — D Allan
6 (5) 0342 **DARK THUNDERSTORM** 23 Alice Haynes 9-2 — K O'Neill
7 (6) 546 **MARRY THE NIGHT** 83 T Easterby 8-11 — D Fentiman

Betting: 5-2 Lesley's Boy, 7-2 Easy Peeler, 4-1 Art Design, Sonic Blue, 8-1 Dark Thunderstorm, 14-1 Stirrup Cup, 16-1 Marry The Night

3.40 RIPON-RACES.CO.UK BOOK NOW FOR SATURDAY 17TH AUGUST HANDICAP £7,731: 1M 4F (6)

1 (1)42-245 **HUXLEY** 91 M Attwater 9-11 — Kaiya Fraser (5)
2 (6)1-5624 **COOL LEGEND** 23 (P,BF) W Haggas 9-9 — T Marquand
3 (3) 0351 **ST PANCRAS** 23 (D) M Meade 9-9 — H Davies
4 (2)651433 **MONSIEUR MELEE** 8 (BF,D) J O'Keeffe 9-1 — F Marsh
5 (4) 650 **OOSTERPARK** 24 E Bethell 9-1 — C Rodriguez
6 (5)-52456 **WINTER LIFE** 17 C Johnston 8-10 — J Fanning

Betting: 2-1 St Pancras, 9-4 Cool Legend, 7-2 Monsieur Melee, 15-2 Huxley, 10-1 Winter Life, 14-1 Oosterpark

4.10 DAVID CHAPMAN MEMORIAL HANDICAP £5,234: 5F (9)

1 (2) 131100 **GOLDEN RAINBOW** 15 (T,V,D) R Menzies 5-9-10 — C Rodriguez
2 (3)424421 **PROTEST RALLY** 2 (P,D) L Bailey 4-9-12(5ex) — B Garritty
3 (5)420503 **LATIN FIVE** 26 (CD) P Midgley 7-9-6 — D Nolan
4 (9)001026 **GUNNERSIDE** 11 (D) G Tuer 7-9-5 — H Shaw
5 (8)002502 **HURSTWOOD** 11 (BF,C,D) P Niven 7-9-4 — M Winn (3)
6 (4)015604 **DUNNINGTON LAD** 5 (BF,CD) P Winks 4-9-2 — E Jones (5)
7 (1)250404 **SPANISH ANGEL** 13 (D) R Carr 7-8-13 — JP Sullivan
8 (7)0-5060 **ISHE WORTH AGAMBLE** 39 (T) T Easterby 3-8-12 — D Allan
9 (6)03400- **TAKANA** 298 (B,D) Stephanie Ocsko-Moore 5-8-12 — Siobhan Rutledge (3)

Betting: 7-2 Protest Rally, 4-1 Spanish Angel, Latin Five, 9-2 Hurstwood, 7-1 Dunnington Lad, 10-1 Gunnerside, 12-1 Golden Rainbow, 16-1 Ishe Worth Agamble, 25-1 Takana

4.40 GBR OWNERSHIP DAY MONDAY 26TH AUGUST NOVICE STAKES £5,400: 1M (6)

1 (5) 40 **HARTUR D'OUDAIRIES** 8 B Ellison 7-9-11 — B Robinson
2 (3) 6344 **BURSINEL** 41 (B) W Haggas 3-9-4 — T Marquand
3 (1) 03 **DEGALE** 8 D & N Barron 3-9-4 — C Rodriguez
4 (2) 06 **NOGRADI** 14 K Ryan 3-9-4 — S James
5 (4) 4-650 **VERSATILE** 55 M Attwater 3-9-4 — Kaiya Fraser (5)
6 (6) 45 **COOKIE QUEEN** 34 T Coyle & K Wood 3-8-13 — C Hardie

Betting: 11-10 Bursinel, 9-4 Degale, 4-1 Versatile, 14-1 Hartur D'oudairies, 20-1 Nogradi, 25-1 Cookie Queen

5.10 TED MYERS 90 ON 29TH AUGUST HANDICAP £5,234: 1M 2F (7)

1 (6)242144 **EVELYN'S PHOENIX** 6 (P) T Easterby 9-10 — D Allan
2 (5)306263 **BITS AND BOBS** 19 (P,BF) M Walford 9-9 — B Wilkie (5)
3 (3) 0-565 **SEA LA VENUS** 34 (BF) W Haggas 9-8 — T Marquand
4 (2) 056 **STAR DELTA** 54 D O'Meara 9-8 — D Nolan
5 (7)50-506 **POP NOODLE** 24 M Loughnane 9-6 — R Dawson
6 (1)654231 **JEZ BOMB** 21 (P) S England 9-5 — Oisin Orr
7 (4)215633 **PATRONAGE** 13 (P,D) N Tinkler 9-4 — R Scott

Betting: 3-1 Sea La Venus, 100-30 Jez Bomb, 9-2 Evelyn's Phoenix, 5-1 Bits And Bobs, 7-1 Patronage, 8-1 Star Delta, 12-1 Pop Noodle

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Olympics Athletics

Alyson Rudd



Mesmeric 1,500m should be blue-riband event, not blink-and-miss-it 100m

The people who compile highlights reels for sporting events will have been bouncing on their ergonomic stools during the Paris Games. We have had it all. A bizarre opening ceremony, the glittering return of Simone Biles allied to her photogenic humility, the showmanship of Armand Duplantis in breaking his own world record in the pole vault, a down and out Alex Yee defying all the commentators to clinch gold in the triathlon.

But how very dare I have not yet mentioned the men's 100m final. It is always labelled the blue-riband event, the one we have all been waiting for, the chance to crown the fastest man in the world, the one race you will make sure you watch live.

And yet. You can dunk an all-butter biscuit and miss it. We can give it all the hype, make our predictions, but once the starting pistol cracks there is little to commend it really. A burst of speed and, because Usain Bolt has retired, no theatrics and scant personality.

Instead, we were treated this time around to a very tight photo finish which contains some drama, of course, but also underlines how little there is to choose between the competitors. They can all run very fast over a short distance and one of them will find that extra tiny slice of oomph at the right moment.

No one expected Bolt's world record time of 9.58sec to be beaten and no one will expect it to be broken in Los Angeles in four years' time, nor in Brisbane in 2032. When you think about it, the men's 100m is a diluted version of the Olympics of yesteryear.

The athletics event that was truly magical, tense, mesmeric and potentially unforgettable was the men's 1,500m. We lack watercooler moments in these binge-watch days but here was one for everyone to share. Whether sitting in the stadium, in a pub, on the sofa with the dog and the kids or at the bus stop on your phone, we all shouted much the same thing: "What on earth does that American think he is doing?"



A race that was billed as a battle of wits between Britain's Josh Kerr and Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen did not disappoint and had one of either Kerr or Ingebrigtsen triumphed, it would have provided much to ponder and analyse. Either the Norwegian was being hubristic in setting a fast pace or extremely cunning.

In the end he was merely reckless, possibly even deluded. He pushed himself so hard that he hit the wall all runners fear. He gambled but left a space on the inside for Cole Hocker to steam past not only Ingebrigtsen but also Kerr.

"The Olympic champion is from the USA," Steve Cram said, commenting on the BBC, echoing how stunned we all felt at the way Hocker had rather cleverly clinched gold.

It was like watching a clip from *Zelig*, the mock documentary film in which Woody Allen's character pops up at big moments in history in a desire to be noticed and popular. What was Hocker doing there, looking for all the world like the obvious candidate for victory even though no one had mentioned him beforehand?

JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Hocker's reeling in of Kerr in the 1,500m trumped the 100m victory of Lyles, below, for drama

There was nothing that Kerr could do. He had monitored his great rival and overtaken him but his mind and body had nothing left to give as the American glided past them both. It was as if Kerr had held out a champagne flute in expectation of sparkling wine only to be expected to contain a pint of beer without spilling any.

Kerr broke the British record in taking silver and proceeded to high five practically everyone in the front rows at Stade de France.

He said later that it was important for him to smile in spite of the outcome so as not to show anything other than respect for Hocker's moment of glory. He did not need to see a photograph, he never will. The way the race unfolded was all too blisteringly clear. Yes, in the 100m Noah Lyles grasped a narrow victory from Jamaica's Kishane Thompson, but a margin of five-thousandths of a second has no great personality. It speaks of a certain element of good fortune, of the right breath at the right time, of a glimpse of a competitor's arm, of a front foot not yet over the line but of it not mattering one jot. And what do you have left to picture in your mind's eye but a line of bodies in a cluster straining forward after ten seconds of action?

The images of a broken Ingebrigtsen crossing the line in fourth, of two relatively unheralded Americans in first and third, and of Kerr winning but not winning are the stuff of real legend.



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BT's relief as billionaire 'dials down' huge stake

William Turvill

The debt-laden media tycoon Patrick Drahi is thought to have quietly sold part of his near-25 per cent ownership of BT in recent months, according to a new analysis that has set tongues wagging in the City.

The French-Israeli billionaire is the FTSE 100 company's largest shareholder, with a declared stake of 24.5 per cent. But research suggests that Drahi may now directly own as little as 10 per cent of the company, with the rest held on his behalf by banks as borrowed shares.

It comes as Drahi's Altice group, which holds telecoms assets across the world, faces growing pressure from bondholders. Altice is reported to have racked up debts of $60 billion and is in talks with bondholders over debt restructuring plans. Drahi has sold off several assets to raise cash.

The suggestion of the research into BT is that Drahi has been selling directly-owned shares in the company to raise cash, while ordering bankers to borrow the equivalent number on his behalf to retain his aggregate stake in BT. Borrowing shares like this is commonly used as a cheap way of obtaining an interest in a business.

Analysis by New Street Research – disputed by allies of Drahi – suggests that while the tycoon retains a hold over 24.5 per cent of BT's voting rights, much of his stake may now be made up of borrowed shares held by banks, Morgan Stanley among them.

This could be good news for BT, whose share price has come under pressure amid concerns Drahi may suddenly need to sell his stake, flooding the market with shares.

In a research note that has pricked ears within the company, the New Street partner James Ratzer wrote: "We have heard people say there is a potential 24.5 per cent overhang on BT's share price because of Drahi's holding and potential debt issues he might have, and therefore he could be a forced seller. However, we now believe that this is materially overstated."

New Street's research was prompted by figures showing an unusually high proportion – about 17 per cent – of BT's shares are on loan. New Street believes that between 10 per cent and 14 per cent of this relates to Drahi.

The report speculates that Altice's shake-up may have been prompted by the need to pay down debt taken on to invest in BT. The FT reported last month that Altice had taken on loans of £1 billion against its stake in BT. Ratzer estimates that Drahi would have raised £980 million in cash since February by exchanging direct shares for borrowed shares.

BT, Altice and Morgan Stanley declined to comment.

Railways on red alert over health of software firm

Oliver Gill

Rail chiefs have wargamed the collapse of Atos, the embattled French company whose software underpins Britain's train services.

Atos, listed in Paris, was recently forced to negotiate a €4.8 billion (£4.1 billion) restructuring of its debts with its lenders. Figures for the first half of the year showed its losses had ballooned from €434 million to €1.7 billion.

Whitehall officials have concluded the railways are at a heightened risk due to their exposure to the French giant.

Contingency planning has been conducted by train operators amid fears that a potential collapse of the company could spark travel chaos across the network.

Among the slew of services provided by Atos are automated announcements at stations up and down the country. With 95,000 staff globally, it is one of the UK's most important software contractors – but its shares have fallen 88 per cent over the last year and the firm is now worth less than €100 million.

It burnt through €1.9 billion of cash in the past half of this year, a figure that analysts at the research firm CreditSights called "extraordinary".

A spokesperson for Atos commented: "Our delivery of services to our clients in the UK has not, and will not, experience any disruption with regards to the financial restructuring."

Details of the contingency planning emerged in recent corporate filings from the Operator of Last Resort, the state-owned parent of LNER, Southeastern, Northern and TransPennine Express.

"While [train operators] do not have any material direct relationship with Atos ... a number of industry systems have a reliance on it," the company's annual report stated.

"Contingency planning" had been conducted by all train operators and Network Rail, the state-backed owner of stations, tracks and signals, it said. "[The] risk rating has been increased following the review of reliance ... on Atos systems," the Operator of Last Resort concluded.

A spokesperson for the government said: "We undertake regular reviews of suppliers to ensure public services can be maintained in a variety of scenarios."

British Steel closes in on £600m state rescue deal

Labour edges towards bailout for controversial Chinese-owned operator

Oliver Gill

The government is closing in on a bailout of British Steel in which the taxpayer would inject £600 million into the group.

Labour this weekend signalled a new intent to break an impasse in talks with British Steel's Chinese owner, Jingye, that has clouded the future of its vast works in Scunthorpe for more than four years.

Now, Jingye has helped hone in on a compromise by committing to bankroll the hugely loss-making operations until the second half of 2025 at least.

British Steel is one of only two manufacturers of strategically important "virgin steel" in the UK, alongside Tata Steel at Port Talbot in Wales. Tata is in more advanced talks of its own with the government over a similar bailout.

Jingye acquired British Steel in March 2020 after it collapsed into bankruptcy a year earlier. The company operates two blast furnaces and employs 4,000 people at its Lincolnshire steel plant.

Bosses want to switch from the company's loss-making blast furnaces to cleaner electric arc furnace (EAF) production, at a cost of £1.25 billion. Doing so would reduce carbon emissions by 75 per cent, British Steel has claimed.

But Jingye is not prepared to make the switch without significant public subsidy and is in talks to gain access to £600 million of taxpayer aid.

Unions warn that even if the deal is approved about 2,000 jobs would be lost, because EAF is far less labour-intensive than traditional production methods.

Some of the Scunthorpe production would also be moved to British Steel's Teesside plant, where a new EAF facility is scheduled to be built.

Talks dragged on under successive Conservative administrations, with officials wary of the commitment of British Steel's Chinese backer and concerned about a slew of red flags raised by the company's auditors.

However, the change of government has injected new impetus into negotiations, with a number of options now under consideration, according to sources close to discussions. These are thought to include plans to invest in carbon capture and storage and to continue running blast furnaces until the new EAFs are in operation.

"We're working in partnership with trade unions and business, including British Steel, to secure a green steel transition that's right for the workforce and safeguards the future of the industry in Britain," a government spokesman said.

Meanwhile, recently filed accounts will allay some of the fears within Whitehall over British Steel's finances. The accounts show that Jingye injected £100 million of equity into the business last October and confirmed to the British Steel board that it "will provide financial support, should it be required" until at least July 2025. British Steel has received over £200 million in loans from Jingye.

The delayed accounts related to the year to December 2021, but were signed off on July 18, 2024 – after Labour came to power.

Commentary in the financial statements said the new government "understands" the cost pressures facing British Steel. "Formal funding" talks with Sir Keir Starmer's administration are taking place, the company added.

A government spokesman said: "Decarbonisation does not mean de-industrialisation, which is why we've committed to £2.5 billion of investment to rebuild the steel industry and support communities for generations to come."

Sources close to the talks said that a deal to rescue British Steel is unlikely to pre-date a similar bailout of Tata Steel.

British Steel declined to comment.

PROFITS IN PARIS

CURRENTBODY



A beauty technology company whose products include a mask that shines lights at the skin to reduce wrinkles has doubled its underlying profits to £14 million after featuring in the TV show *Emily in Paris*.

CurrentBody, whose anti-ageing LED facemask range has been extended to include a product for the scalp aimed at stimulating hair growth, reported a 29 per cent increase in turnover to £85 million last year and doubled its earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation to £14 million.

The Cheshire-based business, co-founded by the beauty clinic entrepreneur Laurence Newman in 2009 to create and sell consumer versions of professional clinicians' equipment, has grown rapidly around the world; its biggest markets are the US, Asia-Pacific, the UK and Europe in that order.

CurrentBody went through two rounds of funding from private equity companies. It was then backed in 2021 by two former executives at Matthew Moulding's THG beauty company to fund an expansion and acquisition strategy.

"Beauty technology is still a small market in terms of awareness and penetration, so there is a lot to go for," Newman said.

CurrentBody's improved financial results came weeks after the high street plastic surgery chain Sk:n, which operated more than 70 branches across the UK, collapsed into administration.

Wall Street giant drops bonus cap amid stampede

Jill Treanor

The American bank Citi is set to ditch the bonus cap for hundreds of its London investment bankers after the last Conservative government got rid of EU-imposed pay curbs in a post-Brexit decision last year.

Citi's move comes days after Barclays told staff it would be scrapping the cap, which was imposed by Brussels after the financial crisis in the hope of curbing excessive risk-taking.

UK employees at Citi have been eager for news on its stance after JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs opted to remove their bonus limits.

Introduced in 2014, the cap restricted bonuses to one times salary, or double if shareholders have given their approval. It does not apply to all staff – mainly to those who are deemed to be taking risks for the banks.

Although meant to restrict pay, the cap had been blamed for actually pushing up the salaries of some bankers, as employers simply replaced the bonus element of their staff's pay with higher fixed earnings instead.

Britain's financial regulators were concerned that this made it harder for banks to control their costs during downturns and to "claw back" pay when errors were made.

In May, Goldman Sachs became the first bank to implement plans to scrap the cap, warning staff that it would be reducing their fixed pay as it was now able to award a higher multiple in bonuses.

JP Morgan has told its staff that bonuses could now be up to ten times their salaries – the same stance that has been taken by Barclays.

Morgan Stanley has not revealed how it has changed its approach.

Britain's banks had to put their intention to end the cap to a vote at this year's annual general meetings. HSBC won approval to remove the cap but has not yet disclosed what this will mean in practice.

Citi declined to comment.

TalkTalk bonds hit as debt deadlines loom

Laith Al-Khalaf and William Turvill

TalkTalk's bond price has fallen to a new low as the embattled telecoms company races to secure a new deal with debt-holders by the end of this month.

One of the broadband provider's bonds was trading at 66.25p in the pound on Friday, down nearly 9 per cent in a week.

TalkTalk is in the process of negotiating a refinancing of its debts, which amount to more than £1 billion. Last night it said it was making "good progress" in its talks within bondholders.

A key concern for TalkTalk, which was taken private by its founder Sir Charles Dunstone in 2021, is a £330 million revolving credit facility due to expire in November.

The company faces breaching its covenants without fresh investment by the end of this month. It has a further £685 million loan that falls due next February. It is the bonds connected to this loan that declined last week.

Salford-based TalkTalk had intended to raise money by selling a stake in its wholesale business, PlatformX, to the Australian bank Macquarie, but it emerged last week that negotiations had stalled.

The company is instead focused on agreeing a debt deal with lenders. Dunstone has come up with a £400 million package to win support for a plan to extend repayment to 2027. This would be made up of a £200 million capital injection from existing shareholders and a further £200 million of assets pledged to the lenders.

James Smith, TalkTalk's chief financial officer, said: "Good progress has been made in recent days in discussions with our shareholders and lenders on refinancing the balance sheet and strengthening the group's funding position.

"We are working towards a near-term agreement with those parties and expect to provide an update shortly."

Studios recover after 'horrific' actors' strike

William Turvill

The boss of Pinewood Studios believes Britain's film production industry is "starting to rebuild" after suffering "horrific" effects from the US actors' strike.

David Conway said, however, that the sector should not expect a return to the heady post-pandemic years, when the so-called streaming wars involved the likes of Netflix, Disney and Amazon commissioning large amounts of new film and television programming to draw in subscribers.

The UK is a major hub for international film and TV production. When the Hollywood strikes hit in July 2023, much of the work halted – meaning tens of thousands of people, many of them freelancers, lost work.

Unlike many in the sector, Pinewood, which owns Shepperton Studios, proved resilient, because streamers and film companies were committed to long-term contracts on its premises.

Last week the company reported to bondholders that it had made revenues of £49 million in the three months to June 30, an annual rise of 38 per cent. The growth was driven by a planned expansion of its studio space. Over the year to March, its turnover totalled £146 million and its earnings grew by £10 million to £86 million.

Conway said Shepperton, which has recently expanded from 14 stages to 31, was "brimming – we've got ten-plus productions going on there for Netflix". On the wider British film production sector he said work was returning, but added: "We're going to have more normalised growth going forward, inflation-like growth. We're not going to have the hockey-stick growth that we had ... in 2022."

The company is owned by Aermont Capital, the real estate investor. It runs dozens of film studios and sound stages across Pinewood and Shepperton, both to the west of London, and in Toronto.

ROLLERCOASTER INDUSTRY

After post-Covid highs, theme park bosses have felt their stomachs lurch as a downturn hits. By *Sharin Hussain*

DISNEY LOSES MAGIC TOUCH



● Theme parks were among the biggest post-Covid bounceback industries as families liberated from lockdowns rushed to enjoy the rollercoasters and big dippers. But Disney surprised Wall Street last week with the admission that its parks had suffered a slowdown, with a 3 per cent fall in profits in the April-June quarter.

Disney chief executive **Bob Iger** pointed to a "moderation of consumer demand" beyond expectations, saying this would be met with an aggressive effort to keep down costs over the summer season.

The US parks seem to be the main concern, with Disney being seen as a potential indicator of a wider consumer slowdown in the world's biggest economy. Shares in Disney fell sharply — but rivals also felt the jitters.

JURASSIC PARK

● Universal Destinations & Experiences, owned by the US media giant Comcast, had already acknowledged that it was feeling a consumer chill. It also recently reported a revenue dip in the spring months at its theme parks. The fall was partly put down to a tailing off of the post-pandemic surge, but a lack of new attractions in its Orlando flagship was cited as another cause for concern by Comcast president Michael Cavanagh. He said rival options for people's leisure time, such as cruises and international travel, had also tempted his customers away.

Theme parks rely on new rides to keep customers coming back, and Universal's Orlando site has not had a big, new attention-grabber since launch of its *Jurassic World*-themed **VelociCoaster** in 2021.

Last month, UK planning officials approved Universal's plans to build a flagship European park in Bedfordshire. The company says construction will create 20,000 jobs.



The stock market flash crash with a silver lining

It started with panic — but turmoil in share prices has given way to hopes of a US rate cut and a fresh boost to the global economy. By *Jill Treanor*

Even before he started work on Monday morning, Joe Little sensed that trouble was afoot in global markets.

Like others, HSBC Asset Management's chief global strategist had spent the weekend scrutinising data published the previous Friday showing a weaker than expected jobs market in America. That triggered what is known as the Sahm rule – an early indicator of US recession based on the rate of change in unemployment, a cause of concern given the country's status as the world's biggest economy.

The data came as sentiment was already weakening, with big technology stocks falling and a rise in the Japanese yen wrong-footing investors. "You got the weekend to stew on the data. It was a case of taking advantage of every market being closed just to reflect on the news," Little recalled. "It's the red flag."

Asia heeded the warning as soon as its markets opened on Monday morning, with Japan's Nikkei index crashing 12 per cent in its biggest one-day fall since the 1987 stock market crash. As the day progressed, the FTSE 100 slid by 2 per cent and Wall Street's S&P 500 benchmark tumbled by 3 per cent.

Yet by Tuesday, the mayhem seemed to be over, and as the week drew to a close the City was awash with talk that by the time traders, investors and dealmakers returned from their summer holidays in September, good times would roll – leaving last week's temporary crash a distant memory.

Many are saying that the financial markets are ripe for a wave of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) – and, some reckon, those much-sought after initial public offerings (IPOs). "There's a flashing green light for the UK," said Steven Fine, chief executive of the broker Peel Hunt. "Sentiment has definitely improved."

Ironically, the underlying factor behind Monday's flash crash – signs of a US economic slowdown – was precisely the reason for the newly upbeat mood. Why? Because the flipside of a cooling of the American economy is that the Federal Reserve, America's central bank, will almost certainly bring down interest rates next month. That would be for the first time since it embarked on its rate-rising spree in March 2022 to combat the inflation spiral.

The so-called Fed Funds Rate currently stands at 5.25-5.5 per cent, after 11 increases.

Jerome Powell, chairman of the Fed, has already said a rate reduction "could be on the table" next month, and the market is now pricing in up to five cuts by the end of this year. In Britain, the cutting cycle began at the start of this month, when the Bank of England reduced rates from 5.25 to 5 per cent.

Lower interest rates matter, said Fine, as they "totally transform confidence".

He added: "That's what markets are about. It's not so much about the magnitude, it's the trajectory."

> **There's a big green light for the UK — sentiment's definitely improved**

So, what would a rate cut in the planet's biggest economy do to boost businesses everywhere?

PRIVATE EQUITY

The dealmakers in the world's private equity firms have been struggling more than most since central banks started aggressively increasing interest rates. Private equity companies finance their takeovers largely with borrowed money – and the cheaper the debt, the more profit they stand to make. When borrowing costs were at, or near, zero during the Covid era, they were tempted to pay top dollar for a flurry of deals, only to find their interest repayments surging when central banks suddenly put up rates.

That has been causing huge strains on companies such as the supermarket chain Morrisons, bought for £7 billion by private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice (CD&R) in a deal clinched in 2021, just before rates started to rocket.

It soon faced annual interest costs of £400 million on its £1.7 billion of debt – partly why it sold its petrol forecourt business to CD&R's sister company, Motor Fuel Group. The proceeds went towards paying down some of its debts, shaving £160 million from its interest bill.

While Morrisons has hedged its interest rate position and is unlikely to benefit from any further central bank cuts, hopes are mounting that lower borrowing costs will throw a lifeline to other private equity deals, and encourage the private equity houses behind them to start buying and selling companies again.

Jeanine Arnold, an expert in leveraged finance at credit ratings agency Moody's, said interest cuts had started to be priced in: "Private equity has been waiting for interest rates to fall. It's going to really ramp up in terms of new M&A – whether it's a private equity company selling to another private equity company, or a carve-out of a [division of a] business."

Senior bankers can see signs of activity coming after the summer. Anthony Zammit, co-head of UK and Ireland investment banking at Morgan Stanley, said he was receiving what are known as RFPs – requests for proposals – from potential clients seeking advice on deals. "It looks like it could be busy in private equity as we move into 2025," he said.

Zammit made the point that even the expectation of cheaper borrowing is fuelling deals: "We are seeing a lot of activity ahead of anticipated rate cuts."

STOCK MARKET FLOATS

While the City awaits a wave of private equity deals, mergers and acquisitions between stock market-listed companies have already been taking place. Recent deals have included the £2.5 billion tie-up between housebuilders Barratt and Redrow, Virgin Money's £2.9 billion takeover by Nationwide Building Society, and the takeover of the logistics firm Wincanton by America's GXO for £760 million.

"There's been a lot of M&A activity already," said Matthew Ponsonby, head of global banking in the UK at French bank BNP Paribas. He thinks big companies that had been mulling over deals might now be ready to act – despite the fragile state of geopolitics amid wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, and the upcoming election in America.

"Any corporate looking to drive growth is re-looking at situations they've

Oil and gas giant needs to engineer new future after failed bids

Jill Treanor

When two bidders back down from making a formal offer for a business in a little over a year, questions start to be asked about what hidden nasties are lurking inside.

That was the situation at John Wood Group last Monday, when the FTSE 250 oil and gas engineering company was left at the altar by Sidara, a Dubai-based buyer. Just over a year ago, the New York-based private equity house Apollo stepped back from making a formal offer that would have valued the Aberdeen-based company at £1.7 billion.

The collapsed bid left Wood valued at £900 million. The once-proud business, with the likes of Shell and BP as clients, now faces questions about whether it can find a way back to the £5 billion valuation it held at its peak seven years ago.

Mick Pickup, an analyst at Barclays, summed up the views: "We can understand if investors are questioning if there is anything untoward under the Wood hood."

Those looking for answers take the story back ten years, when a deal was hammered out to create Amec Foster Wheeler – with what turned out to be damaging repercussions for Wood.

Run by the charismatic Samir Brikho, Amec bought the Swiss-based, New York-listed Foster Wheeler in 2014 for £1.9 billion, with the aim of diversifying into new countries and businesses.

The deal was hampered by a fall in the oil price, and two years later Brikho was out after a profit warning and a dividend cut – replaced by the outsider Jon Lewis. Wood swept in to buy the business in 2017, just as Lewis faced having to ask shareholders to cough up £500 million to bolster the balance sheet and take a dividend suspension.

For Wood, the acquisition seemed an opportunity to diversify beyond its roots in oil and gas and get into new energy markets such as shale gas. According to Iain Pyle, portfolio manager at Abrdn, which owns 2.3 per cent of Wood, it also came with "a lot of historic costs that impacted free cashflow generation for years".

One of the issues was that Amec had signed up to fixed-term contracts, rather than ones that allowed it to charge more as costs rose, leaving it locked into loss-making arrangements. Another was a £103 million bill in 2021 for a deferred prosecution for a division for "brazenly and calculatedly" paying bribes to foreign officials over an 18-year period until 2014.

"It has left Wood's shares at a low level and vulnerable to a takeover," Pyle said.



John Wood is down 80 per cent on its peak valuation

In which case, why did two suitors walk away? Apollo, which had been considering an offer of 240p a share in cash (almost twice its current 131.5p level), did not give a reason. A squabble over price seems the most likely factor, despite some wondering if the private equity house had balked at the nature of the contracts, or whether financing was an issue.

Sidara told the market on Monday it had pulled out due to "rising geopolitical risk and ... market uncertainty".

All eyes are now on Ken Gilmartin, Wood's chief executive since 2022. Hired as chief operating officer a year earlier, the Irishman is halfway through a three-year plan to overhaul the business, which employs 36,500 people around the world.

Despite its problems, Wood remains a big business, with a $6 billion (£4.5 billion) order book in 60 countries and only a handful of competitors on its scale. Gilmartin has pledged to focus less on "higher-risk project work", which has failed to generate enough profit, and instead focus on "reimbursable" work.

Since 2019, cash generation has not been strong enough to cover Wood's expenditure; Gilmartin's goal is to generate positive "free cashflow" – a key measure of financial health – by 2025. That would help allow the resumption of the dividend, suspended since the pandemic.

Gilmartin faces a tough audience with the City on Tuesday week, when he will report half-year financial figures. Beside him will be Arvind Balan, the finance director, who arrived in April from Rolls-Royce, where he was finance director of the civil aerospace division. Investors hope Balan's arrival will signal a turnaround on the scale of his former firm.

Some in the City reckon a turnaround of Wood would be more likely to succeed in private hands and believe that some investors were urging the board, led by chairman Roy Franklin, to engage in talks with a fresh round of bidders. Barclays' Pickup noted that half of the top-20 investors in the group had been selling their shares during the bid process. "With the second possible offer, we sense that many investors had switched off," he said.

Others questioned the price offered by the bidders and urged patience. Pyle at Abrdn regarded the 230p a share proposed by Sidara as "by no means a knockout" and described Gilmartin as doing a "good job".

Alessandro Dicorrado at investment manager Ninety One, which holds shares in Wood through its UK Special Situations fund, reckoned the firm would offer better returns to investors as an independent operation, rather than selling out to a bidder. "The problem is that if you have been a long-suffering shareholder of Wood, that may not be the way you approach it," he said.

While the heat is on, Schroders' Mark Lacey – who is supportive of the management – reckons nasties are not lurking. "If a company pulls out of a bid, the first question is whether something is wrong. Are they looking at a Ferrari, lifting up the bonnet and finding a Reliant Robin engine? That is definitely not the case here."

BAD TIME TO SPLASH OUT

● The slowdown afflicting the giants of the industry will be unwelcome news for bankers at JP Morgan, who are trying to find a buyer for US theme parks owned by Spain's Parques Reunidos. The owner of **Blackpool Zoo** and the Bournemouth Aquarium is putting its North American division up for a strategic review, which could result in a €1 billion (£850 million) sale, it emerged last week. The company is best known for its huge Spanish waterparks, which attract a million visitors every summer.

American theme parks have been consolidating recently, with last year's $8 billion merger of two of the largest operators, Cedar Fair and Six Flags Entertainment, drawing attention to the sector.

Parques Reunidos came off the stock market in 2019 in a deal led by private equity group EQT, which has since funded a string of takeovers of parks in Europe and the US.



MERLIN'S LEARNING

● Britain's champion in the theme park world is the Legoland-to-Sea Life giant Merlin Entertainments. Now privately owned by Kirkbi, the investment vehicle of Danish Lego-founding billionaire Ole Kirk Kristiansen, it does not have to declare its quarterly profits publicly. However, last year it posted an 8 per cent increase in revenues to £2.1 billion.

It has been investing in new projects this year, including £90 million set aside for UK projects. These include a Woodland Village at Legoland outside Windsor, and a new ride at **Cadbury World** in Birmingham.

In March, Merlin said it would shift to an easyJet-style "dynamic pricing" model, where customers pay more at peak times and get a better deal in quiet periods.



RIDING THE CHINESE WAVE

● In the past decade, China has become a hunting ground for western theme park giants seeking new audiences. Universal, Disney — with its **Shanghai Disneyland** — and Merlin have all opened big attractions there. But the country also has its own enormous home-grown operators, led by Overseas Chinese Town Enterprises, whose assets include eight Happy Valley-branded parks, and the 24-strong Fantawild group.

Theme park takings collapsed during Covid as China instigated some of the world's toughest lockdowns but have bounced back since, although the country's prolonged economic problems are likely to subdue demand at the country's 80 major theme parks.

Across the world, the most successful parks are generally those with the strongest intellectual property, such as Universal's Harry Potter rides. While western brands have successfully rolled out blockbuster movie franchises at Chinese parks, Fantawild has focused on the country's myths and legends for its themes.



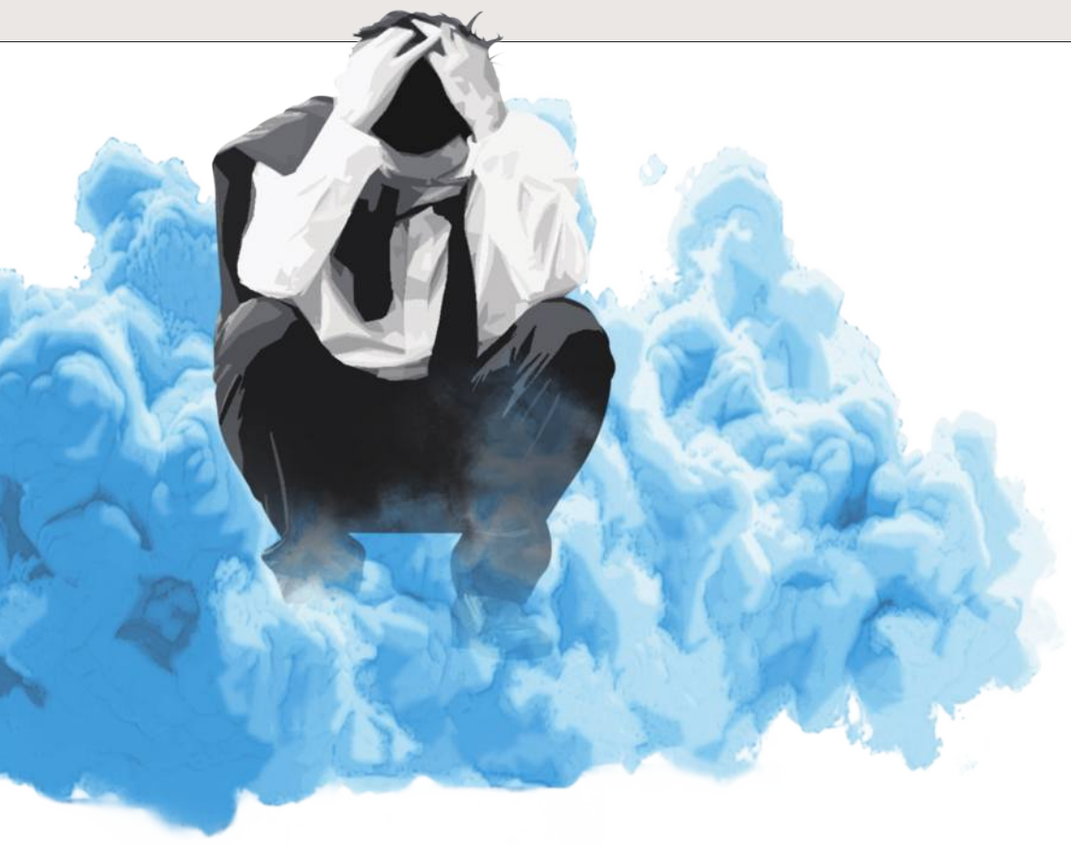


ILLUSTRATION: PETE BAKER



been thinking about for years and questioning, 'You know, why not now?' "

The hope is that more companies will also choose to embark on IPOs as stock markets begin to stabilise, and even rally, if rates fall. The theory goes that lower interest rates will drive investors back into equities to seek better returns.

One City source said that despite a shortage of IPOs in London this year, those that have taken place – such as computer maker Raspberry Pi – have been a success.

PROPERTY

Property purchases – both commercial and residential – are also generally largely funded through debt. And high interest rates have caused a dramatic slowdown in activity across the world.

Blackstone, the giant of the private equity sector with $1 trillion of assets, has admitted that higher rates have led to cuts in its returns to investors, particularly in its property deals, where it is the biggest investor in the world. In the UK, it owns swathes of commercial property, from the arches under Britain's railways to the country's biggest warehouses.

But Jonathan Gray, president of the American firm, recently made it clear that the expected Federal Reserve rate cuts would fuel its deal activity.

David Hudson, a partner in the restructuring team at the professional services firm FRP, said the impact on market sentiment of lower rates to come was already clear. "There is a bit of a feel-good factor, thinking that with a bit of relief in interest rates, it will create a bit of supply and demand which has been missing recently," said Hudson. "We're hearing positive news out there." Still, some restructurings might come first.

Housebuilders started to reflect that last week, with the FTSE 100's Persimmon reporting that the fall in mortgage rates was already encouraging more people to buy new homes.

A WORD OF CAUTION

However, there are still plenty of risks in the global economy, including in the US, which has been powering ahead even as the UK and Europe remain sluggish.

When the Federal Reserve does eventually cut rates it may be, as HSBC's Little put it, the "silver lining" of last week's market mayhem – but it depended on the central bank's reasoning. Will it be for the "good news" reason that inflation is coming under control, or because the Fed fears that recession is on the way?

Signs of a US slowdown are growing. Only last week, Airbnb warned that Americans were booking fewer holidays amid weaker consumer spending.

Wei Li, global chief investment strategist at the fund management behemoth BlackRock, cited the economist John Maynard Keynes's metaphor of "animal spirits" – the ways in which human emotion drives people's financial decision-making in uncertain times.

"If rate cuts take place because inflation has fallen, which is our expectation, then it could be good for animal spirits. But if they're because of recession, then that's not going to be supportive of animal spirits, because we will have bigger challenges to deal with."

Seema Shah, page 8

12%

Nikkei's fall was the biggest one-day decline since 1987

5.25%

America's benchmark rate could be on the way down



Housebuilders hope falling mortgage rates will fuel a revival in property deals

PLANTMADE



Ama Amo-Agyei researched natural ingredients to treat her hair loss: "It actually worked"

Stress of getting fired gave me the recipe for a haircare start-up

HOW I MADE IT

AMA AMO-AGYEI, FOUNDER OF PLANTMADE

Hannah Prevett
Deputy Editor,
Times Enterprise Network

Ama Amo-Agyei was celebrating £1 million of sales in her firm's first year of trading by signing a five-year lease on a 6,000 sq ft warehouse ... when she got the "cease and desist" legal letter that ruined her day.

It became evident that another company owned the "Planted" trademark she had taken as the name of her range of skincare products, which use natural ingredients including rosemary and lavender oil to help tackle problems such as thinning hair and hair loss.

After consulting with lawyers, she found she had no choice but to rebrand. This meant stopping trading for three months from August 2021 while changing the name to Plantmade. Amo-Agyei said that pausing when momentum was so strong was devastating, with "hundreds of thousands of pounds" in lost sales. It cost a further £25,000 in legal fees.

Since then, Amo-Agyei, 27, has rebuilt the business with her 18-strong team, which includes her fiancé Travis Hill, who is chief operations officer, and older brother Fred, chief financial officer. Sales of Plantmade's range of 12 products nearly doubled to £5.3 million in the year to February, generating a slim pre-tax profit, helped by the popularity of "Inches", its flagship hair and beard oil.

The entrepreneur said her willingness to work hard comes from her parents, who moved to Bracknell in Berkshire from Ghana in the 1990s. When they found that their teaching degrees did not make the grade in England, her mother and father juggled several part-time jobs alongside their studies to gain UK qualifications.

Amo-Agyei said her parents were "always helping someone" – buying gifts for newborns for young families and offering people a place to stay. Inspired by that, she set her sights on a career helping others as a psychologist, eventually taking the subject at university. But with her parents unable to support her financially, she had to mix her studies with working long hours in hospitality.

By her final year, the juggle was taking its toll – until reading a book, *Rich Dad Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki, introduced her to the idea of entrepreneurship. "It was built into our culture that you go to school, go to university, get a good job and build a family. So discovering you can be a business owner, an entrepreneur, an investor ... It suddenly clicked that there were options."

When Amo-Agyei graduated in 2018, she started work as a social media and marketing consultant for small businesses. However, she found the feast or famine of freelance life stressful and, after moving back to Bracknell, took a recruitment job nearby in Reading.

But the role was difficult and, despite trying her best, Amo-Agyei struggled to hit her targets. She started having panic attacks and was signed off work by a doctor for a week. When she returned, she was fired. "Honestly, it was a relief," she recalls.

Two weeks later, the country went into lockdown – and the idea for Plantmade was born. The stress of the recruitment job had made her hair fall out, so she researched natural remedies online and mixed them up. "It actually worked ... I was documenting it on my Instagram Stories and people asked what I was using."

The first batch of 50 bottles was quickly sold to her followers, priced at £9.99 each. The second batch she sold for £15.99. The pricing was one of the hardest things to get right, she admitted. The same 100ml bottle now costs £35.

Encouraged by the demand for the first couple of batches, and the popularity of wellness brands during Covid, in June 2020 she decided "to take a leap" and launch the business. She used the £1,000 profit from the first 100 bottles to invest in more ingredients, packaging and basic branding, and initially the business "soared" – until that legal letter.

After the rebrand, Plantmade rebounded strongly, even if trading has since become tougher as consumer spending online has slowed. She has had to find new ways to reach customers, experimenting with pop-up shops, and is now considering taking on retail partnerships.

So how has a psychology graduate managed to formulate hair products?

"I'm just a nerd, really," Amo-Agyei laughed. "I read science papers for breakfast."

HIGH FIVE

My heroes ... are Ben Francis [co-founder of Gymshark] and George Heaton from [the clothing brand] Represent. I love founders who are documenting growing their businesses; I just sit and watch for hours and hours, to learn but also to be inspired. Ben is such a light for UK entrepreneurship.

My best decision ... was to work with my brother and fiancé. I know people say "don't work with family" but the firm has been the best thing ever to build together, and I've had them to lean on in good times and bad.

My worst decision ... was not to be on top of trademark law. I should have checked that no one had the Planted trademark at the very beginning, but I just didn't know. We lost so much momentum when we had to rebrand.

Funniest moment ... was having to go on jury duty for two weeks just as we were in the middle of rebranding. The timing couldn't have been worse and I tried to contest it, but was told I had to do it. I came up with Plantmade one morning as I was waiting to go into court.

Best business tip ... would be to not hire too fast or too slow. Your team is your business. Hiring too many people just burns money; hiring too late means you're burning yourself out.

Karen Jones
Collaboration in business gets my gold medal



Have you been hooked by the Olympics? If the extraordinary cornucopia of the opening ceremony was not enough, the range of sporting disciplines and the talent and dedication of the athletes are enthralling – and moving.

I found myself gripped by the women's lightweight double sculls last week (not a sentence I have often written). It was won by two young Brits – Emily Craig and Imogen Grant – in a display of "calm synchronicity", to quote British Rowing. Their interview following the medal ceremony was remarkable for its warmth, genuine friendship and mutual support, encapsulated by the way in which each talked only of the other's remarkable qualities. Their unaffected sentiment and joint appreciation of the "give and get" of their journey to winning shone brighter than their gold medal.

It seems to me to offer a parallel for how good (in every sense of the word) companies do business today – not only in the display of exemplary teamwork but also in knowing that a partner's success is also your own. Many of us have witnessed unsavoury episodes, generally in deals, where each party wants to extract an uncompromising "win" from the other, with insufficient regard for the companies in play or the people who work in them.

There are also those situations (listings come to mind) where businesses are "ramped" – talked up beyond any reasonable expectation of performance.

And perhaps the saddest outcome is when a good, established company, needing new money to compete or new owners to succeed a family leader, gets sold too cheaply because the buyers fail to understand its real worth – which often is the care and dedication of the people who work there.

Confrontation versus collaboration – which feels right to you? What is going to achieve the optimal result for all stakeholders? What brings out the best in people? Confrontation feels such an old-fashioned, short-term way of doing things. The resentment of the losing party rarely fades and will continue to simmer.

Courtesy, respect and fairness through collaborative ways of working can – and, in my view, generally do – bring the long-term win. For all parties.

I am often asked to come in as chair when a founder takes their first private equity cheque. The first phase of this new partnership throws up some interesting challenges, generally confrontational and with the glow of deal love receding fast.

Founder: "This enterprise is my creation – only I understand it and never tell me what to make or do."

Private equity house: "Your margins are too low, your labour costs are too high and you spend too much."

> **In deals, too often each side wants an uncompromising win from the other**

These are exaggerated stereotypes, but a truth is there. Resolution requires finding the widest possible crossover in the Venn diagram of the two positions, where collaboration and mutual understanding will flourish, allowing the enterprise to grow purposefully and prosperously. As the definition says: "A Venn diagram uses overlapping circles ... highlighting how the items are similar and different."

That's the power of collaboration: seeing and appreciating both similarities and differences, learning from each other and reducing friction and barriers to understanding. "My way or the highway" never achieves that end. This isn't world peace (but maybe a step towards that); it's a productive, challenging and interesting way of working to get the best out of each individual and the team as a whole.

It allows an unhindered focus on what the enterprise is trying to achieve, looking up and out, not down and into disagreements or ego-driven demands, which waste so much energy. It requires the ability to listen, to reflect and to understand and move past failures.

It also requires the smart use of data to back up a position and to remove reliance on "I think ..." rather than "the evidence shows ...". Both attitude and content have to be present: "The argument/discussion point I am evidencing is clear and I will present it calmly and knowledgeably, and genuinely invite input. On such collaborative ways of working, winning well is created.

Emily and Imogen won well. Imogen: "The loss in Tokyo [the host for the last Olympics, where the pair missed out on gold by 0.5 seconds and on bronze by 0.01 seconds] was part of our story ... We've put so much work into this and we are such different and better people this time around that there was a certain inevitability to the racing." Collaboration and content. Bravo.

Dame Karen Jones co-founded Café Rouge and was CEO of the Spirit pub group. She is a non-executive director at Deliveroo, Whitbread, the Crown Estate and Mowgli Street Food, and chair of Hawksmoor

BUSINESS



EV nation? We'll still drive petrol cars in 2045

Labour wants to step on the accelerator for electric cars. But experts warn the timeframe for the transition is wildly unrealistic, writes *Jim Armitage*

Elon Musk and Sir Keir Starmer may be doing battle over riots and the involvement of social media companies such as Twitter/X, but in the coming weeks it will be another part of the tech tycoon's empire – electric vehicles – that arrives on the prime minister's worry list.

Labour's manifesto committed to forcing carmakers to stop selling new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030.

It was a bold intervention after the previous government's repeated U-turns on the target. Boris Johnson first set a 2030 goal when he was prime minister, only for Rishi Sunak to relax the phase-out to 2035 when he took the top job, bringing it into line with the European Union – on the surface, at least.

The industry has howled that the targets are unachievable, particularly given the lack of charging points across the UK for longer journeys and the difficulty of plugging in at home for people who do not have their own garage or driveway.

Now, the chief executive of one of the most important providers of components to the auto industry, Dowlais – better known by its old name of GKN – has predicted that we will be lucky if we get global new car production to 50 per cent electric vehicles (EVs) by 2045.

Industry veteran Liam Butterworth is the boss of a company that supplies the drivelines that make the wheels turn for four in every ten cars in the world, and also supplies 95 per cent of the world's carmakers. He said: "We will reach fully electrified mobility at some point in the future, but it will be much further out than where the forecasts are today.

"I think by the mid-2040s we'll still see probably around 50 per cent of new passenger cars with an internal combustion engine of some form or another."

His predictions go far further than any other major figure in the industry has dared predict in public, but they elicit quiet nods of approval from many who complain about the previous government's confusing rules – which, they say, are forcing carmakers to build more EVs than the public wants to buy.

Sunak's relaxation of the 100 per cent target from 2030 to 2035 was a case in point. While he made great fanfare of telling the public that he was letting them off the hook, he left manufacturers with pretty much the same targets as before. They still have to get up to a position where 80 per cent of their UK sales are EVs by 2030, and there is an annual target to meet that ratchets up every year from 2024.

Missing those targets carries huge penalties. If carmakers do not hit them, they will have to pay a fine of £15,000 for each non-EV sold – albeit there are some get-outs for those that miss the deadline.

The policy creates a paradox: carmakers must ramp up EV sales at a time when demand is falling. Classic economics dictates the only way to square this circle would be for firms to cut their EV prices to tempt customers – but they cannot produce them cheaply enough to do that.

Companies such as Stellantis, manufacturer of brands from Vauxhall and Citroën to Maserati and Fiat, have declared the targets unacceptable and are in talks with Labour to push for an alternative plan. Stellantis's chief, Carlos Tavares, said last week that he had been in "an intensive and productive dialogue" with the new administration, but added: "So far, we don't have the answers we need."

He even warned that he could halt the company's UK production of vans at its Luton and Ellesmere Port plants if a compromise cannot be reached.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that Britain is out of kilter with its far bigger neighbour, the EU. Not only will the deadline be five years later there under Labour's plans, but carmakers can include hybrids – cars that use a mix of electric plus petrol or diesel – to comply.

The EU is also said to be looking at extending its deadline.

Vehicle manufacturers say the issue needs fixing quickly because those £15,000 fines in the UK under the so-called ZEV [zero-emission vehicle] Mandate begin later this year. If, by the end of December, fewer than 22 per cent of cars sold are EVs, the penalty kicks in. Currently, only 16 per cent to 19 per cent of new vehicles are EVs, with brands such as Ford far lower than that.

Firms will be allowed to buy credits from those way above target, such as Tesla, or defer payment if they feel they will beat it in future years. But Stellantis and others have ruled those options out. Some have suggested they might deliberately scale back their non-EV sales in the UK to massage the ratio.

Whatever happens, Butterworth at Dowlais said: "The overall industry is seeing an EV slowdown this year. You're looking at about minus 2 per cent. What we're seeing is a pause in the overall EV transition."

With sales of electric vehicles stuttering, some carmakers are putting their EV investment push into reverse. Stellantis is ploughing money into adapting its Italian-built Fiat 500e electric-only chassis – or "platform", in the industry jargon – so it can take a hybrid engine.

Other companies, such as Jaguar Land Rover, are ensuring that their new platforms are similarly agnostic. Meanwhile, Mercedes-Benz is redirecting more funds into upgrading its combustion-engine S-Class.

Sir Jim Ratcliffe, the billionaire behind the chemicals and auto conglomerate Ineos, pulled the launch of his Fusilier electric SUV altogether because its small, petrol-powered "range extender", used to recharge the battery when no charging points are available, would fall foul of the EV classification rules.

> **The government has given no consideration to what consumers actually want**

The head of Ineos Automotive, Lynn Calder, said: "The government has said [the 2030 target] is 'what we want to do', but there is just no plan. And there's no consideration of what the consumer actually wants. EVs are more expensive and have lower residual [resale] value. It's little wonder that drivers don't want to buy them and are voting with their feet. Oh, and by the way, people don't like being told what to do."

The issue of residual values is a big worry for buyers of new cars. EVs on the forecourts can be up to a third more expensive than their combustion-engine equivalents but their resale values are broadly the same, said Ian Plummer, commercial director of the Auto Trader automotive marketplace. "That depreciation gap is because the new EVs are too expensive to produce," he added.

Worries over value for money and charging are not the only factors affecting sales. Insurance is also more expensive for EVs, Butterworth said, reflecting the fact that damaged batteries are costly and heavy, so their replacement is a big expense in the event of a crash.

Falling government subsidies are another key factor, and not just in the UK, where tax breaks such as the plug-in car grant have been removed – albeit that company-car and salary-sacrifice schemes are still generous for EVs. Butterworth said: "These changes have had a very big impact on demand, particularly in Germany, where they cut all EV subsidies at the end of last year. Italy also made changes earlier in the year."

Will the UK government listen to the industry, and at least allow certain petrol-electric hybrids to be counted as EVs? Calder is not convinced: "The quest to get to a net-zero position in the UK is going to fail, and it's going to fail because there's no plan behind it."



Ineos's Lynn Calder says the government has no plan on how to reach its 2030 EV target

She said she was calling on the government to allow for a "stepped transition", with new technology such as plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, known as PHEVs. "That's the message we want to get across, but I'm very aware that the people we're talking to there have a very, very strong green agenda – specifically, [energy secretary] Ed Miliband – and I'm not really expecting them to be super-receptive to what we've got to say."



TWO NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROLES

UNIVERSITIES SUPERANNUATION SCHEME (USS) BOARD

UCU University and College Union

USS

Fee: Available on request. London based (with occasional travel to USS's Liverpool office and other locations in the UK)

Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) is the principal pension scheme for universities and higher education institutions in the UK. We work with around 330 employers to help build a secure financial future for c.550,000 members and their families. We are one of the largest pension schemes in the UK, with total assets of around £78bn (at 31 March 2024). Universities Superannuation Scheme Limited (USSL) is the trustee that runs and manages USS in line with the trust deed and rules and legal duties.

USSL is led by a Board of directors comprised of 3 directors appointed by the University and College Union (UCU), 4 directors appointed by The Universities & Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), and 5 independent directors. The Board has significant responsibilities for the governance and oversight of a business providing complex operational and advisory functions within a heavily regulated environment and Board members need experience, expertise and capabilities proportionate to this. Therefore, all Board members require exceptional strategic thinking, leadership, communication, influencing, teamwork and decision-making skills.

USS is an equal opportunity organisation. We celebrate diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees, non-executive directors and contractors and would welcome applications from a wide range of candidates.

Non-Executive Director role

UCU invites applications for a director to join the Board of USSL as one of the three directors appointed to the Board by UCU.

Full information on the requirements for the role are set out in the role profile, available on request. The requirements include experience in the areas below (the examples alongside each requirement are illustrative, and candidates should refer to the role profile for full details):

- **Stakeholder engagement and experience in industrial relations,** e.g. experience managing complex stakeholder relationships and building buy-in on difficult topics; understanding of industrial relations and collective bargaining arrangements; understanding of the role of UCU in representing the views of members in relation to USS; understanding the perspectives of scheme members and presenting those views coherently.
- **Pension industry experience,** e.g. as a pension trustee, member of the management team of a DB/DC pension fund or a member of Company/University committee responsible for pensions matters.
- **Pensions Administration oversight and scheme member engagement**, e.g. experience of scheme member and employer engagement; education and communication strategies for DB and DC services, experience working with outsourced providers of pensions administration services.
- **Corporate Governance expertise/board management knowledge,** e.g. experience as a board and/or committee member or individual operating at board level (preferably within a large, complex business or regulated firm); knowledge/understanding of corporate governance best practice and the Pension Regulator's codes of practice and guidance in relation to effective trusteeship of pension funds.

Time Commitment: At least 35 days per annum.

Duration: A four-year term of office, with the possibility of the term being extended by one year (i.e. max. five-year term). At the end of the term of office there may be an opportunity to apply for reappointment (we permit directors to have a maximum tenure of nine years, formed of two or more terms of office).

For more information, and to request the role profile and an application form, please contact D Harte at trusteeappointments@ucu.org.uk. CVS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Interested candidates should COMPLETE THEIR APPLICATION AND SEND THESE DETAILS BY EMAIL to trusteeappointments@ucu.org.uk. The closing date for applications is 15 September 2024.

Non-Executive Director – Independent Deputy Chair role

The Board of USSL invites applications for the role of Independent Deputy Chair to join the Board of USSL as one of the five independent directors appointed to the Board by USSL.

Full information on the requirements for the role are set out in the role profile, available on request. The requirements include experience in the areas below (the examples alongside each requirement are illustrative, and candidates should refer to the role profile for full details):

- **Investment**, e.g. significant experience as a senior manager, non-executive director or consultant of an investment or fund management firm or consultancy; member or chair of a pension scheme investment committee; deep understanding of investments in a pensions context (DB and DC).
- **Responsible Asset Ownership**, e.g. Knowledge/understanding of global sustainability and ESG Standards and the risks and opportunities with different ESG factors including climate change; Experience in overseeing and driving responsible investment through engagement activities and of overseeing responsible, long term value creation.
- **Senior Management Experience in a Financial Services context,** e.g. experience as a senior manager of a large, financial services organisation.
- **Corporate Governance expertise/board management knowledge,** e.g. experience as a board and/or committee member or individual operating at board level (preferably within a large, complex business or regulated firm); knowledge/understanding of corporate governance best practice and the Pension Regulator's codes of practice and guidance in relation to effective trusteeship of pension funds.

Time Commitment: At least 55 days per annum.

Duration: A four-year term of office, with the possibility of the term being extended by one year (i.e. max. five-year term). At the end of the term of office there may be an opportunity to apply for reappointment (we permit directors to have a maximum tenure of nine years, formed of two or more terms of office).

For more information please contact Jane Paton at jpaton@uss.co.uk. Interested candidates should SUBMIT A LETTER OF APPLICATION – ACCOMPANIED BY THEIR CV – and send these details by email to jpaton@uss.co.uk. The closing date for applications is 15 September 2024.

BUSINESS

We changed our name — now we're coming to London

Evangelos Mytilineos wants a spot in the FTSE 100 so badly he's rebranded his family energy firm

INTERVIEW
LAITH AL-KHALAF



Evangelos Mytilineos could sense something was up. The Greek energy and metals magnate had assembled a team of 25 investment bankers to advise on listing his family's eponymous conglomerate, Mytilineos Holdings, on the London Stock Exchange. But at the end of the meeting, the financiers looked sheepish.

"Mr chairman, can we go upstairs and have a chat about a more personal issue?" asked one, nervously.

"A personal issue? With investment bankers?" laughed a confused Mytilineos.

They traipsed awkwardly up to his handsome personal office, a vast open space with abstract sculptures, flashing television screens and a private veranda canopied by pomegranate trees, looking out onto the imposing Athenian mountains. Gathering by a polished oak table, one banker tiptoed around the issue.

"You have a great name. And we know that in Greece it is a famous name," he said. "But this name in English is difficult to pronounce; you cannot be a FTSE 100 company with this name. People will have difficulty telling their brokers what stock they want to buy."

In June, Mytilineos grudgingly decided to change the family firm's name to Metlen, a portmanteau of metal and energy. Old habits die hard, though: throughout our hour-long interview, Mytilineos mistakenly refers to the company as "Melten" and his business cards are still debossed with its old name. "I need to get those changed, I suppose," he grins.

Sparking the interest of UK investors is top of Mytilineos's priorities as he tries to pull off one of the biggest floats on the London market in recent years. The Athens-listed Metlen Energy & Metals is the largest home-grown company in Greece and generates €6.35 billion (£5.44 billion) a year, mainly from building energy infrastructure, such as solar and wind farms, and mining for aluminium. The relisting would be a boost for the FTSE, which has faced a famine of floats and a US exodus over the past year.

> **It's now an international company, so it should get listed in a much bigger market**

We meet at Metlen's headquarters – a grey, sprawling complex that looks more like a military base than a corporate office – in the northeastern Maroussi district of Athens. The site has been the company's home since 2019 but will be replaced next year with a London headquarters.

The chief executive and chairman is wearing a crisply ironed pale blue shirt stitched with his initials on the left of the midriff. In the sweltering summer, his sleeves are rolled up. As the largest shareholder in the £4.2 billion company, his personal stake is worth £850 million.

A cerebral type with the air of an ageing academic or diplomat, Mytilineos pauses before answering each question, looking into the middle distance to conjure up an answer. "My hobby is geopolitics; I could talk about it for hours," he says.

The company he runs employs 6,500 people in 40 countries including Britain, Australia, Chile and Canada. Its energy business, accounting for two thirds of revenues, builds sub-sea energy cables, solar parks, wind farms and grid connections. It also operates an energy trading business. Metlen's metals arm is among the world's biggest producers and exporters of aluminium and alumina, which is mined in Greece, and is working on producing rare earth metals used in semiconductors.

The UK, where the company has £2.15 billion worth of contracts, is one of its biggest markets. Last December it struck a £1 billion deal to build parts of a sub-sea cable link from East Lothian in Scotland to Co Durham that will carry enough renewable energy to power more than two million homes. It is also building gas power plants for the energy companies Vitol and Drax in England and Wales, and is constructing what will be the largest solar farm in the UK in Kent, providing enough power for 100,000 homes.

Metlen is the second-largest retail energy provider in Greece, behind the state-owned incumbent, and now it wants to grow its UK operations after the London float. Mytilineos, 70, hints that it may one day try to disrupt the UK market, including Octopus Energy. "We have the know-how. We can do the business."

The relisting will also require Metlen to be squeaky clean with the regulators. In 2018, Mytilineos was accused of corruption over allegations that his company had paid authorities to secure a contract. He was acquitted in 2019.

The plan – under which 90 per cent of Metlen's shares would trade in London and 10 per cent would remain in Athens – comes at a tough time for the London Stock Exchange. It has endured a dearth of new corporate listings, while several firms have floated in the United States in a quest for higher valuations.

Why join a market deserted by others? The Anglophile raises his voice and starts to bang the oak table. "The question is, 'Do you believe in London as a financial hub or not?' I do. 'Do you believe that the City of London, after Brexit, has seen the worst?' Yes, I do. 'Do you think our presence there as Metlen will help the LSE, together with other companies, to find its previous glory?' Yes, I do!" he roars.

The family firm traces its roots to 1908 when his grandfather, also Evangelos Mytilineos, founded a metals business to forge consumer goods. It grew to have several hundred staff. With the outbreak of the Second World War and the German occupation of Greece in 1941, it was requisitioned by the Nazis. Three of his four sons took to the mountains to try to repel the invaders, while Mytilineos's father headed to Egypt to fight alongside British troops against the Italian invasion there.

ILLUSTRATION: TONY BELL; PICTURE: CHRIS RATCLIFFE/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES



> **Do I think our presence will help the stock market find its previous glory? Yes, I do**

Evangelos Mytilineos shares the name of his grandfather, who founded Metlen

Mytilineos was born at a tumultuous time for Greece. His family had moved to Argentina in the aftermath of Greece's civil war of 1944 to 1949, but his mother's homesickness forced the family to return to Athens, where he was born. After a degree from the University of Athens, he headed to London for a master's in economics. "I didn't have a lot of time to spend outside of the library," he laughs.

He took over the family business in 1978, when it was a modest metal trader, and sought to transform it into a metals and mining conglomerate, relaunching it as Mytilineos Holdings in 1990 and buying copper, zinc and lead mines across Europe. Mytilineos listed the company in the Athens in 1995 and three years later hatched Greece's first hostile takeover, buying a formerly state-owned construction business named Metka.

The metals business was energy intensive, so Mytilineos ventured into the energy trade in the early 2000s, setting up power-generation and wind companies. Energy is now the company's main moneyspinner, with the surge in global energy prices causing its revenues to soar.

Yannis Stournaras, the governor of the Bank of Greece, has a lot in common with Mytilineos; both are around the same age and were educated in the UK. Is Stournaras concerned Greece's biggest homegrown company is about to up sticks to the UK? "It's now an international company, anyway. So I think he should move away from the Greek borders and get listed in a much bigger market. I don't think he will abandon Greece," Stournaras says.

Mytilineos's prized asset is Aluminium of Greece, Metlen's metals-processing plant, 110 miles from the Athens HQ, which extracts aluminium from bauxite, a reddish-brown rock dug up from the company's mines, several hours' travel away. Nestled in a valley looking out onto the Mediterranean, it is the size of a small town – a rollercoaster of pipes, smoke-belching chimneys and cooling towers. Attached is a port where ships moor up to load with tonnes of aluminium for export.

Mytilineos has a model-village version of the site mounted on the right-hand side of his plush Athens offices. "I am very much sentimentally attached to the place – there are thousands of people working there and I'm very close to them, like first among equals," he says, gazing out over the toy town. He has bought a bougainvillea-clad house nearby.

Metlen is using its sites to manufacture gallium, a byproduct of bauxite that can be used to make semiconductors and solar cells. The European Union drafted in Metlen to start manufacturing gallium after China, which dominates the trade in many rare earth metals, shut down its exports last year. "When the Chinese stopped the exports, it was using gallium and other metals like germanium ... as a tool, as a foreign-policy tool."

The company's shares tanked after the sovereign debt crisis early in the last decade, when international investors pulled money out of Greek equities. "We started to export most of our goods, because in Greece people didn't have money to pay ... That was probably one of the most difficult business periods of my life."

A relisting looks simple in comparison; but the hardest part has been tearing the family name down from the shop. "Sentimentally speaking, the most important issue in the relisting exercise ... was the change of the name," he says. "That is the toughest part because it's an old name. I made sure I keep the name intact as I found it, so that I can give it to my kids."

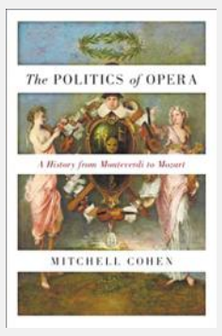
THE LIFE OF EVANGELOS MYTILINEOS

Born: In Athens in 1954
Status: Divorced. Two adult children
School: Moraitis School, Athens
University: MSc in Economics from the London School of Economics; BSc in Economics from the University of Athens in 2019; honorary doctorate from the University of Piraeus, Greece
First job: Family business General Representations SA, which was engaged in the representation and trade of metals, iron and related products
Pay: Annual remuneration of €3 million (£2.6 million), of which 51 per cent is variable
Home: Athens
Car: Audi A8
Favourite book: *The Politics of Opera: A History from Monteverdi to Mozart*, right, by Mitchell Cohen



The Godfather, with Marlon Brando, is his No 1 film; his last holiday was in Aegina





Film: *The Godfather* parts I and II
Music: R&B and electronic, opera and Greek art music
Drink: Dry martini
Watch: Polar
Gadget: Samsung phone
Last holiday: The Greek Island of Aegina
Charity: "Four fully-crewed Bell 214 B1 helicopters from Erickson Incorporated, donated to the Greek public to assist in extinguishing the fires in our country, an act of charity I remember with pride and emotion."

WORKING DAY
Unless travelling for business, working at the office in Athens or visiting Metlen sites around the world, the day starts at 6am and he will probably go home at 11pm, after a business-related dinner or event.

DOWNTIME
He likes reading, spending time with his family and watching the German football team Borussia Dortmund.

Start-ups face the chop as lab-grown meat loses its appeal

Health fears and high prices are taking heat out of an industry that was flavour of the month, writes *Danny Fortson*

When the time came to shut down his lab-grown meat start-up for good, British entrepreneur Joshua March took his team out for lunch. Pointedly, they did not opt for the company's burgers, which are brewed in a steel vat. "You know, I think we'd had enough of our own burgers," March said.

After more than five years, $40 million (£30 million) in venture capital funding and many, many taste tests, SciFi Foods, March's California firm, closed its doors in June.

Potentially, March reckons, SciFi may soon be joined by dozens of other start-ups that, only a few years ago, were being showered with billions of dollars by investors amid predictions that "cultivated meat" factories would replace slaughterhouses and lighten the load that large-scale livestock has on the planet. How times change.

"I wouldn't be surprised if none of the current crop of companies are able to make it," March said. "The alternative meat market has been decimated."

More than 80 companies producing lab-grown meat and fish have been funded in the past five years. Now, though, once high flyers are struggling. Upside Foods, which reeled in $600 million from investors including Bill Gates and Sir Richard Branson, last year won approval to become the first company to sell cultivated chicken breast in America. But a partnership with a high-end San Francisco restaurant ended after just a few months, and it has since been through two rounds of layoffs. Nine years on from its founding, it does not have any products on the market.

So what has happened? SciFi's core science for lab-grown meat is broadly similar to that of the rest of the sector. From a single cow biopsy, stem cells are extracted. These are put in a petri dish with nutrients that help the cells divide and grow. This concoction is then moved to a bioreactor with a batch of minerals, sugars, hormones and growth factors – and eventually becomes meat.

From the cells in the original biopsy, thousands or even millions of tonnes of "meat" can be cultivated. More than a third of the planet's arable land is dedicated to growing food for livestock animals that are often raised in horrendous conditions before being slaughtered. Cultivated meat offered a climate and animal-friendly alternative for meat lovers. A key obstacle, however, has been price.

SciFi's first prototype beef patty in 2020 cost $20,000. By the time the company closed, it had brought the price down to $15. That is still multiples of the going rate for beef mince, but March reckoned SciFi was on track to reach price parity.

80
Lab-grown meat firms that have received funding

$15
The price of SciFi Foods's prototype beef patty



Amid that progress, enthusiasm for meat alternatives soured. Beyond Meat, a maker of plant-based sausages and burgers, floated in 2019 to great fanfare – only to lose 96 per cent of its market value as sales plunged and worries grew about the health impact of its sodium-rich, heavily processed pea protein-based products.

Cultured meat was tarred with that same brush, despite still not having any products for sale. The industry was also drawn into the culture wars. In May, Florida outlawed lab-grown meat. Governor Ron DeSantis pitched the ban as a fightback "against the global elite's plan to force the world to eat meat grown in a petri dish, or bugs". Alabama followed suit; Italy banned it last year.

But Jim Mellon, the Scottish billionaire, is still upbeat. His London-listed Agronomics, an investment company specialising in "cellular agriculture", has participated in six of the seven largest financings in the sector in the past year. "People are still raising money, if you've got a good enough story," he said.

Mellon pointed to Mosa Meat, a Dutch firm set up by Mark Post, who created the first lab-grown burger in 2013. It raised €40 million (£34 million) in April.

What is occurring, though, is a brutal shakeout where only a select few start-ups can secure the funding they need. Indeed, accountants say Agronomics' portfolio of stakes in private firms should give it a market value of 18p per share, but that price has plunged to 5.5p.

Mellon said he thought "the cycle will turn again". The question is: how many companies will be left standing when it does?

BUSINESS

Sultans of spin

City PR has gone from a cottage industry to a multi-billion global business — and Brits are calling the tune, write *Oliver Shah* and *Laith Al-Khalaf*

As journalists at the Financial Times in the late 1990s, Robert Peston and Roland Rudd were dubbed "the Pest" and "the Rat". The Pest went on to become a household name as the BBC's business editor and ITV's political editor, known for his quirky delivery as much as his scoops. The Rat, named after TV character Roland Rat, built an empire of influence in the City – and a multimillion-pound fortune – through the public relations firm Finsbury, adding a board seat at the Royal Opera House and chairmanship of the Tate art galleries along the way.

That fortune is about to get bigger. Last week, private equity giant KKR said it was buying a majority stake in FGS Global, which includes the old Finsbury business, at an equity valuation of nearly $1.6 billion (£1.3 billion). Rudd and his senior colleagues will keep a 26 per cent stake worth more than $400 million.

The deal, which should be completed in November, will release FGS from the arms of the media holding company WPP, which has owned Finsbury since 2001. It will give FGS – whose clients include Daniel Kretinsky, the "Czech Sphinx" trying to take over Royal Mail – aggressive backing to expand from one of the world's biggest private equity firms. It also stands as a milestone in the evolution of corporate PR from cottage industry to global concern led by a handful of diversified businesses.

As opposed to their cousins on the fluffier "consumer" side of PR, corporate operators have long had hotlines to chairs and chief executives. But the biggest of them now increasingly compete with cybersecurity specialists, restructuring firms and even top management consultancies such as McKinsey to provide the commodity most boards need at some point: advice.

The industry's global revenues were $15.4 billion last year, according to PR Week. Although that was up from $7.8 billion a decade ago, it is still "a smudge at the foot of the page compared to investment banking", one agency boss said. Edelman was the only firm in PR Week's table to turn over more than $1 billion.

The big four in the UK, in terms of their share of FTSE 100 accounts, are Brunswick (29), Teneo (22), FTI Consulting (9) and FGS (8). Powerscourt, set up by the former Sunday Times business editor Rory Godson and acquired last year by shareholder advisory business Sodali & Co, also had eight FTSE 100 clients as of May, according to the Corporate Advisers Rankings Guide. The next on the list, H/Advisors – the group of firms owned by the French communications giant Havas, including Maitland in the UK – had four.



Money for something: Roland Rudd, far left, and Sir Alan Parker have made fortunes from the expanding public relations sector

FTI, listed in New York and run by the former Boston Consulting Group executive Steven Gunby, generated revenues of almost $3.5 billion last year – although just $329.2 million came from PR. It made the bulk, $1.4 billion, in corporate finance and restructuring. Andrew Nicholas, senior analyst at the investment bank William Blair, said FTI should really be considered "a diversified consulting firm".

Teneo turned over $600 million-plus, split roughly 50:50 between PR and activities such as restructuring (it bought Deloitte's UK restructuring business in 2021). Brunswick had revenues of $528 million, FGS $465 million.

As their clients become bigger and more global – and financial markets, politics and regulation get more complex – firms are racing to achieve scale. They are also trying to smooth out margin-rich but lumpy revenues from advising on M&A with more predictable income streams favoured by stock market investors.

"What's happening to PR happens in every industry, which is that you get consolidation and a bifurcation between global market leaders and niche players," said the same agency boss. "It happened in investment banking 30 years ago and you can still see it today – you've got the Goldman Sachses at the top of the world and then the niche players like Robey Warshaw. Both of them do very well. It's the guys in the middle that get killed, because they carry most of the cost base of the big boys yet don't have the nimbleness or flexibility of the boutiques."

Private equity is playing a key role in this transformation. Buyout firms have dabbled in the industry before: Advent International, now known for its deals in the defence sector, scooped up Financial Dynamics in 2003 and then sold it to FTI. But KKR's swoop on FGS is the latest in a wave of deals that show how private equity money has entered the sector in a more comprehensive way.

The New York-based Sard Verbinnen, which later merged with Finsbury, sold shares to Golden Gate Capital in 2016; CVC bought Teneo in 2019; BDT Capital Partners, run by Warren Buffett's banker, Byron Trott, took a 10 per cent stake in Brunswick in 2021; KKR first acquired a minority position in FGS last year; and Sodali, the new owner of Powerscourt, is backed by TPG.

The infusion of capital and institutional management will rev up companies. In some cases, this is already seen as having had a counterproductive effect. Teneo, which lost co-founders Declan Kelly and Doug Band in scandalous circumstances shortly after CVC arrived, took over Unilever adviser Tulchan for a headline price of £65 million last year – only to see Tulchan's founder, Andrew Grant, leave after personality clashes.

In other cases, it may help firms grow and become more professional. And it will bring "liquidity" – the polite term for windfalls of lucre – for founders and staff. A senior source at Brunswick said the main purpose of its deal with BDT was to give the partnership a new outside perspective. It also triggered a £140 million payout to partners, of which £70 million went to the chairman.

In the history of PR, 1994 was a significant year. Rudd started Finsbury and John Addey died. Addey, who was 63, was regarded as the godfather of financial PR. A former barrister who lived at the prestigious Albany block of flats in Mayfair and drove to meetings in a Bentley convertible, he advised tycoons including Rupert Murdoch, emeritus chairman of News Corp, parent company of The Sunday .

> **The guys in the middle carry the costs of the big boys yet don't have the nimbleness of the boutiques**

Addey's protégé was Brian Basham, a former financial journalist. Basham launched the PR firm Broad Street and – along with the likes of Tim Bell, Roddy Dewe and Nico Rogerson – rode the boom in privatisations and takeovers unleashed by Margaret Thatcher's Big Bang reforms in the 1980s.

George Pitcher, who co-founded the communications agency Luther Pendragon in 1992, summed up the way in which PR people worked in that era. "My capacity for good claret and late nights in the American Bar at the Savoy Grill were the top skills required," he said.

Basham claims to have pioneered the tilting of PR towards M&A transactions. "I focused on takeover bids, and within a year I was earning £50,000 a week instead of £50,000 a year," he said.

He also claims to have discovered one Alan Parker, a former rock'n'roll band manager and son of Sir Peter Parker, who chaired British Rail. "Alan just fell into his niche," Basham said. "I said, 'Look, I can't pay you for a bit until I get more fee income,' and he sat there, answering the phone for a month with no payment."

Parker – now Sir Alan – left to establish Brunswick in 1987. He made his ambitions clear by hiring the City editor of The Times, David Brewerton, and leading the vigorous defence of chemicals giant ICI against a takeover by Hanson. The revelation that Hanson was paying for racehorses supposedly owned by Lord (Gordon) White, who ran its American operations, helped scupper the bid.

Parker and Rudd are Britain's undisputed sultans of spin. But Brunswick and Parker are in many ways the inverse image of FGS and Rudd.

FGS has grown by acquisition, merging with American rival Robinson Lerer & Montgomery in 2011 and Washington-based Glover Park Group and Germany's Hering Schuppener in 2021. Alex Geiser, previously Hering Schuppener's managing partner, is now FGS's chief executive, with Rudd, 63, as chairman. Rudd enjoys a high profile, having campaigned for the alternative vote in 2011 and chaired the People's Vote pressure group for a second EU referendum.

Brunswick has been studiously organic in its growth, even though that meant struggling to break through in New York for years until it hired Steve Lipin, a former Wall Street Journal M&A reporter. It has preferred to pursue individuals rather than companies – poaching the likes of Steve Cooke, the former senior partner of law firm Slaughter and May, and Trelawny Williams, previously head of corporate governance at the funds giant Fidelity.

In terms of personal profile, Parker, 68, who comes from a thespian family, lives by the motto: "Don't get between the client and the footlights."

Unlike at FGS, where shares have been distributed widely among senior staff, Parker continues to hold onto the equity at Brunswick tightly.

At about 17 times last year's earnings, the KKR deal values FGS on a racy multiple, albeit a similar one to FTI's stock market rating. That is despite the fact that FGS's profitability fell last year even as its revenues rose.

The private equity firm is understood to be backing FGS's present strategy of consolidating communications firms around the world – exemplified by its purchase last year of a mining-focused PR firm in Canada, Longview – rather than branching out into radically different services. KKR also wants to help FGS improve its back-office systems.

So far, corporate PR has been a rare British export success story. The fizz and internationalism of the City in the 1980s and 1990s, combined with the tough media environment of Fleet Street, produced firms that were more entrepreneurial and wily than many of their US counterparts.

"Americans are shit at it," was the blunt assessment of one founder here. "Basically, PR in America is, 'Can you get it on CNBC?' "

Most informed observers believe there is another big round of dealmaking looming – possibly involving an attempted sale of Teneo by CVC, or a deal by the private-equity backed investor relations company ICR, which bought the healthcare-focused UK PR firm Consilium last year. "There's a ton of money coming into this industry and the pieces will get moved again," predicted one.

The question is: which firms will emerge winners from the potent confluence of American capital and British PR nous?

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AMD	BY	DN 3	FAC	GRF	JCG	KG	LHB	MLF	40 NU	RDT	8 SEC	TS 90	WCB
AN	450 C	DNM	FAK	GTP	JCN	KGB	LHH	MLO	OAA	REE	SEJ	3I TV	WCC
AP	CAB	DPW	FAW	GWD	55 JD	KGM	LJT	MMA	55 OE	REP	SEK	TWG	WCS
APE	CAG	70 DU	39 FC	GWJ	JDC	KGP	LK	MMO	99 OL	RFA	SFH	TWM	WE
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BAE	CDW	EAW	80 FL	HCT	JGL	48 KM	95 LO	MVW	PDA	39 RJ	SKW	VAL	WJG
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59 BC	CFD	EC 2	48 FP	HDB	JHE	KMT	LPS	MWG	46 PE	RKG	SPK	VAP	WMT
BCP	CKM	ECB	24 FR	67 HE	JHR	KMW	LPW	MWT	PEB	RKM	SRJ	VAW	WN II
BDD	CKS	ECD	FRS	HED	JJA	76 KN	LRG	NCR	PEG	RLA	SRR	VCM	WR
BDG	CL	ECF	FS 4	HEJ	JJE	KNS	LRJ	NDB	PEH	RLF	SSF	VD	WRM
BDR	CMJ	ECL	88 FT	HET	JKF	96 KP	LSF	NDH	PES	RLK	STG	VE	WS 34
BDS	CMS	ECS	76 FW	85 HF	JKW	KRB	LSR	NDM	PEW	RLL	STL	VEB	WTB
6I BF	CNH	EDP	90 FY	HGM	JLA	KRD	LSW	NDP	PFH	9 RLM	STW	VEW	WY
BFM	85 CO	86 EE	GAJ	HJA	JLN	KRJ	LVS	74 NE	PFM	RLO	70 SU	22 VF	X 6
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BKC	DCF	EJE	GEB	HMF	JVL	998 L	MEW	NL	PMT	RTD	TG 2	VLC	YW
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Longer journeys, more fuel — why BA bailed out of flying to Beijing

Oliver Gill

British Airways' decision last week to scale back flights to Beijing was surprising and not surprising in equal measure.

On one hand, China, the world's second-largest economy, is a vital market for the UK flag carrier. On the other, the withdrawal was down to simple maths: economically, the numbers simply did not stack up.

Like many other major airlines BA has been forced, primarily by western sanctions, to avoid Russian airspace since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

For BA, flights between London and Beijing take an additional three hours as a result – from 10 before to nearly 13. But that's not the case for Chinese airlines; these carriers are not subject to the same flying restrictions and can continue to cut across Russian airspace to complete the journey in the fastest way possible.

BA's longer journey is not just bad for customers. The more miles covered means additional fuel is required.

Analysis by the consultancy RDC Aviation reveals that fuel costs for BA on the China route have increased by 20 per cent as a result, although this has been partially offset by a reduction in air navigation costs.

Russia is the most expensive country to fly across: prior to the pandemic, it was raking in $1.7 billion a year from carriers using its airspace.

All in all, RDC found that BA's average single economy fares, to and from China, would need to increase by £85 – about a quarter – to balance the books.

Observers say the timing of BA's decision is no coincidence. In May, it announced a partnership – or "codeshare" in airline jargon – with China Southern Airlines, so travellers can still book through BA to fly daily to Beijing from Heathrow.

It is worth noting that BA's suspension is envisaged to be temporary. It begins in October and will conclude in November 2025.

BA's decision – added to a move to cut flights to Hong Kong last month – is also likely to have been made because demand for air travel is far stronger elsewhere.

"There's more [profitable] business to be had flying transatlantic or to Bangkok, and less demand for China," said one industry figure.

Perhaps, too, the move was a function of BA finally giving up on flying over Russia for the foreseeable future. Luis Gallego, boss of British Airways' parent, IAG, has complained cryptically about the situation for some time.

While he has not directly called for a return to using Russian airspace, he has demanded a "level playing field" with Chinese, Indian and other airlines still overflying the country.

His predecessor Willie Walsh has been more explicit. Walsh, now the boss of trade body Iata, said in 2023: "I would fly through Russian airspace if I could. So the idea that people won't fly through Russian airspace doesn't make sense. What we want to see is Russian airspace open to everybody."

BUSINESS

Oliver Shah



The everything companies: meet the new breed of conglomerates

Conglomerates. The dinosaurs of the corporate world, aren't they? Their ancient bones – in the form of stories about Lord Hanson, the raider who was briefly engaged to Audrey Hepburn, and Greg Hutchings, a lover of company flats and private jets – preserved in the glass cases of newspaper cuttings, to be marvelled at by future generations?

Today's article on the PR industry (page 6) mentions Hanson's failed attempt to take over ICI in 1991, seen as a turning point in the former's fortunes. Five years later, the company that had been one of the stock market's most feared predators – swallowing prey including Imperial Tobacco – was itself broken into four. Other conglomerates followed: BTR, Williams Holdings and Tomkins – the last known as the "buns-to-guns" group because it owned both Smith & Wesson and Hovis. In the US, the unravelling has taken longer. Johnson & Johnson, Kellogg and General Electric have spent the past couple of years splitting themselves up.

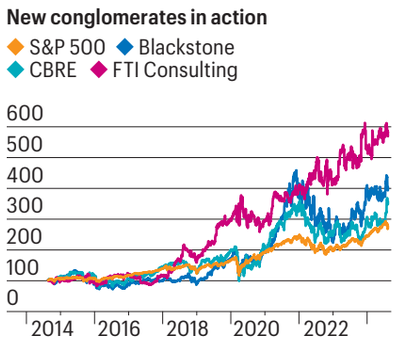
The asteroid that toppled this breed was a fusion of sharper focus by institutional shareholders and the rise of private equity, with its higher tolerance for debt and turbocharged operating model. So there is an amusing rhyme to the fact that private equity firms are now becoming conglomerates themselves.

Giants such as Blackstone have long since stopped wanting to be known purely for buyouts: the leveraged taking over, re-engineering and selling of firms. They also want to be known as insurers, infrastructure specialists and providers of private credit. Blackstone floated in 2007 and soon after purchased GSO, a sophisticated lending business. In recent years, the trend has accelerated: Canadian giant Brookfield has bought distressed debt outfit Oaktree, Apollo has bought the life and annuities business Athene, and BlackRock has bought Global Infrastructure Partners, which does what it sounds like. The list could go on for a long time.

Three things have been driving this.

The people who run these firms will tell you that their clients – who oversee big university endowments and the like – increasingly want one-stop shops,

New conglomerates in action



Source: FactSet

where they can choose between a range of products under a single brand. Globalisation may be on the back foot in the halls of Washington and Beijing, but it is still very much alive in the skyscrapers of New York and Hong Kong.

Then there's the fact that stock markets, where many of these companies are now traded, no longer like the sugar highs and lows of lumpy, transactional income; they want steady, "recurring" revenue. Diversifying is a good way of smoothing it out.

The third factor is paranoia. It takes a brave person to stand still when all around them are rushing to get bigger. Other than the desire to crystallise trouserings for the founders, this was the main motivation for CVC's listing in Amsterdam in April.

"Everythingisation" has fuelled the creation of the new conglomerates – and not just in private equity. With the same three forces behind it, the advisory world is going a similar way. CBRE used to be known primarily as a broker for buying, selling and leasing commercial buildings. Now, four fifths of its turnover comes from disparate activities such as engineering consultancy and facilities management. PR, too, is in the early stages of everythingisation, with communications firms trying to expand into other areas. FTI Consulting, the big quoted player, has done the reverse, starting out as an arbitration business and expanding into PR through the 2006 acquisition of Financial Dynamics.

A glance at the share prices of three leading new conglomerates in different sectors versus the S&P index shows you how much the stock market has lapped up this strategy. In full swing, trends always feel irresistible – as both the rise and the fall of the old conglomerates did in the 1980s and 1990s.

But it is worth pausing and looking at two industries, banking and accounting, which have been doing the opposite. Under post-financial crisis regulatory pressure, banks have mostly got out of activities such as proprietary trading and racier lending – hence the explosion in hedge funds and private equity. Accountants, under pressure to improve audit quality and minimise conflicts of interest, have been quitting business lines such as restructuring – and, in EY's case, looking at breaking themselves up.

Momentum usually turns in the end. For now, the acquisition stampede in private equity and advisory services will continue. But watch out for the birth of nimbler competitors and client complaints over conflicts. They might constitute the next asteroid – or at least a few meteorites.

HL: a very private takeover

Hargreaves Lansdown was set up to channel retail investors' money into the stock market. Now, some 17 years after it floated, the platform is itself leaving the market in a £5.4 billion deal led by CVC.

HL has been ailing for some time and needs a revival. But there is something unsatisfying about this takeover. The price, £11.40 a share, is less than half 2019's peak of £24. CVC and friends have been shy about their plans, speaking broadly about investing in technology and hinting at cutting charges (almost double those offered by AJ Bell).

There is an option for investors to roll over their stakes, as co-founder Peter Hargreaves is doing with half of his. But the absence of real information about what they would be rolling over into doesn't help. And it's technically not very easy. If you are an HL customer who happens to hold shares in HL, you will be able to stay invested in its private incarnation, provided you move them out of an Isa and into a Sipp.

I suspect most will follow Hargreaves' co-founder, Stephen Lansdown, and take the money – even at a price that would have had them channelling their money in, not out, just a few years ago.

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Tinkering with the rules won't stop debt from rising



David Smith Economic Outlook

Rachel Reeves's first budget, on October 30, is more than 11 weeks away. By then, the leaves will be falling and this summer will be but a distant memory. Yet it is already attracting more attention than is probably healthy, in which spirit let me add a little to it.

On a visit to America in recent days, the chancellor refused to quell speculation that she will use a different definition of debt to measure whether she is meeting her "non-negotiable" fiscal rules. I have been asked quite a lot about this, so a brief explanation is necessary. The measure of debt with which most people will be familiar is the one announced every month by the Office for National Statistics (ONS): public sector net debt. At the end of June it stood at £2.74 trillion (£2,740 billion), equivalent to 99.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

It has been on an extraordinary journey. In the early 2000s, debt was just over £300 billion – less than 28 per cent of GDP. Immediately before the pandemic, it was below 80 per cent of GDP. It has risen by £1 trillion in six years and £2 trillion over the past 15½.

There is another measure of debt, though, which is the one that Reeves has inherited from the Tories for the purpose of the fiscal rules. This is net debt excluding the Bank of England, which at the end of June was £2.52 trillion, or 91.6 per cent of GDP.

The suggestion is that the chancellor will switch from this measure, sometimes called underlying debt, to the more familiar figure. Why would anybody switch from a lower to a higher measure of debt? Having written here some time ago that this might happen, I should explain.

The latest forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the economic and fiscal watchdog, had the underlying measure of debt rising further to 93.2 per cent of GDP, before slipping to 92.9 per cent in the fifth year of its forecasting period, 2028-29, as required by the fiscal rule. The government scraped home, by just £8.9 billion.

The raw debt figure, including the Bank, in contrast, shows a fall starting in 2025-26 and continuing throughout the period. In 2028-29 alone, switching the debt target would release an additional £16 billion-plus of headroom, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). Tempting. It might be possible to release a lot more, if the aim was simply to have debt edging slightly lower each year from next year's temporary peak.

The difference between the two debt measures is due to the unwinding of the Bank's term funding scheme and losses on its quantitative easing (QE) programme. But any gains are temporary. Early in the next parliament, the two debt measures converge.

The IFS, in a briefing note, takes a dim view of changing the debt measure to make it easier to meet the rule. Describing this as "moving the fiscal goalposts", it suggests that it is hard to see "a principled case" for a change, which "would almost certainly be motivated by the impact on so-called

> **In 2028-29 alone, switching the debt target would release £16 billion-plus of headroom**

'fiscal headroom' and the fact that additional borrowing would be possible without breaching the letter of the rule, at least in the short term. If the government wants to borrow more and spend more, it would ideally make the case for doing so on its own terms, rather than hide behind fiscal jiggery-pokery." Harsh but probably fair.

For many economists, a change in the debt definition is like rearranging the deckchairs, if not on the Titanic, at least on an ocean liner that is not entirely seaworthy.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (Niesr), our oldest economic think tank, argues in its latest review that the Labour government, constrained by fiscal rules, is unlikely to meet its objective of raising the economy's growth rate by enough.

The UK needs more investment, it says, including raising public investment to 5 per cent of GDP from 2.5 per cent now. That is equivalent to an extra £50 billion a year, with "targeted public investment projects in key areas such as housing, transport connectivity, education and skills, [and] close co-ordination of a national growth strategy with local and regional growth plans". The only way the government will be able to do that under the current fiscal rules will be to raise taxes, it says, which will itself bear down on growth.

Jagjit Chadha, Niesr's director, puts it well in the review: "At first glance, our fiscal rules would seem to make a lot of sense. And yet a poorly formulated rule may not only distort decision-making but may stand in the way of achieving social and economic progress.

"The current rules target the instrument, public debt, rather than the objective of policy, and we do not have a fully established set of analyses that allow us to trace the best … path for debt, or mix of debt and tax, following shocks … The current rule of expecting debt as a share of output to fall in the fifth year of a forecast does not even guarantee debt sustainability, because debt in year five could still be above where it is in year one and the rule would be met."

That's a lot for a new chancellor to think about. Having made her commitment to fiscal responsibility clear, she probably has no choice but to follow something similar to the last government's fiscal rules. Those rules, which tend to be broken when the going gets tough, have not prevented the sharp rise in government debt described above, nor are likely to do so in the future.

The OBR had to postpone this year's report on long-term fiscal risks because of the election. Last year's, however, had a baseline forecast of a rise in government debt to 300 per cent of GDP over the next 50 years – nearly 450 per cent, assuming the coming decades bring more of the kind of shocks seen so far this century. Sustainable it is not.

PS

Whenever I hear of Elon Musk, I always think it sounds like a great name for a cheap men's fragrance. Otherwise, the silly clickbaiter is better ignored. Talking of clickbait, though, our very own ONS engaged in an unintentional episode nearly a year ago. Without warning, it released new "Blue Book" figures for economic growth showing that the UK was no longer bottom of the class for its performance since the start of the pandemic, as had been thought.

Well, the ONS has been at it again, though not so dramatically this time. Thanks to new estimates and changes in methodology, it has revised up 2022's growth rate from 4.3 per cent to 4.8 per cent. That remains a strange year – one in which most of the growth reflected the fact that GDP in the first quarter was 11.5 per cent up on the lockdown-affected first quarter of 2021.

But 2022, which is as far as the revisions go, was a slightly different year than previously reported. We had thought the economy had flatlined from early 2022 to the end of 2023, when it entered a mild "technical" recession. Now there's a smidgeon more growth through 2022 than we knew about, and in time I am sure that technical recession of late 2023 will be revised away.

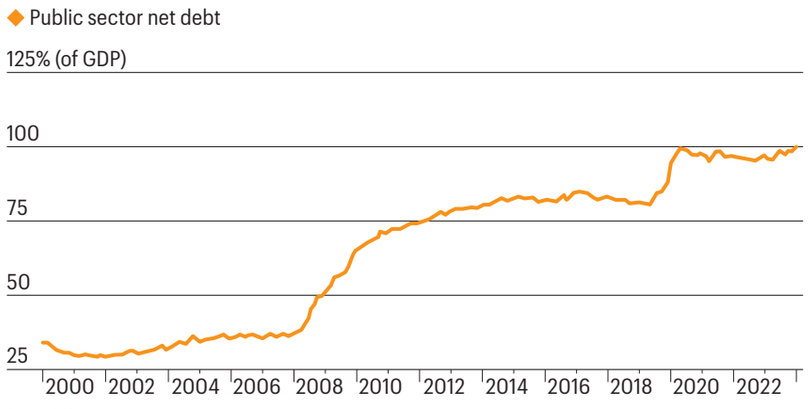
Had Rishi Sunak been able to delay the election for a lot longer, probably longer than was legally possible, he might have been able to claim that the economy was in better shape. GDP per head, instead of being slightly down on pre-pandemic levels at the end of 2022, was slightly up in the new figures. We will have to wait until other countries have completed their revisions to see where all this places us.

The figures do not in any way rescue the reputation of Liz Truss's premiership, as some suggest. She crashed the pound, created a crisis in the gilt market and caused misery for millions of people with mortgages. She was not there long enough to drive the economy into recession and her mini-budget was quickly reversed.

Meanwhile, these revisions, while necessary, change other narratives. One of those was that households had been very cautious about spending, particularly when the cost of living crisis hit, and had been slow to reduce pandemic saving to buy goods and services. The new estimates suggest instead that the saving ratio fell to a "normal" 6 per cent in 2022, rather than the 8 per cent previously estimated, and that consumer spending was £34 billion more than thought. As always, we are chasing a moving target.

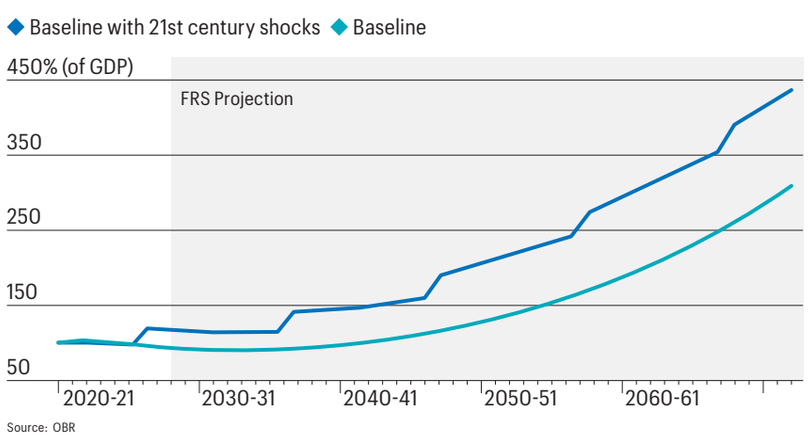
david.smith@sunday-times.co.uk

GOVERNMENT DEBT HAS RISEN A LOT …



Source: ONS

… AND HAS MUCH FURTHER TO GO UP



Source: OBR

RIP America's middle ground

Irwin Stelzer American Account

More often than not, a presidential candidate's choice of running mate has little effect on the outcome of an election. There are exceptions. Had Lyndon Johnson not been John F Kennedy's choice of vice-president, the Democratic ticket would not have carried Texas in 1960 and *Camelot* would never have become a smash Broadway musical.

This is another year when choices of running mates matter. Not because Donald Trump needs help from JD Vance to carry the senator's home state of Ohio, or because Kamala Harris must rely on Minnesota's governor, Tim Walz, to win there. Both won their home state electoral college votes by large margins in 2020. In more ways than one, these states are not for swinging.

The importance of this year's choices by Trump and Harris is proof that the centre of American politics cannot hold. There is no longer a home for moderate Democrats who believe in preserving market capitalism by reforming it, or for moderate Republicans who believe free markets should be allowed to allocate the nation's resources.

Vance is Trump on steroids, and has no use for the free-trading, fiscally responsible, militarily robust party of Trump's "Rinos" – Republicans in name only. Vance believes in what he calls post-liberalism, which includes opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage and gun control, and an end to military support for Ukraine and Taiwan. Childless women have no stake in America's future. Free trade is for sissies. Government should raise the minimum wage. Lina Kahn, Joe Biden's chair of the Federal Trade Commission, is right to drag Big Tech into court for violating antitrust laws. "Economics is fake", as his ancient fridge did a better job preserving lettuce than do new refrigerators. More will develop as the 40-year-old shapes nostalgia for a day he never knew into policy suggestions.

Walz was selected because the anti-Israel, pro-Hamas, antisemitic, anti-school-choice wing of the Democratic Party could not abide Pennsylvania governor Josh Shapiro, a Jew, and the trade unions opposed Arizona senator Mark Kelly because of his opposition to some of their legislative demands. Harris risked Pennsylvania's 19 electoral votes, or Arizona's 11, to please the party's effectively dominant progressive wing.

Which Walz does. He believes in legal protection for abortion and "gender-affirming care", tighter control on guns and looser control on marijuana use, child tax credits, free school lunches, and high taxes that have seen a flight of high-earners from Minnesota. He shut down schools in the pandemic, to the enduring gratitude of teachers' unions.

He provides generous benefits to illegal border-crossers, including free college. *Pace* Sigmund Freud, who said jokes satisfy our unconscious desires, Walz promises to invest in a factory to make 30ft ladders for any illegal migrant unable to scale Trump's 25ft wall.

The demise of a moderate centre in both parties has one big advantage: it offers voters what 1964 Republican candidate Barry Goldwater called "a choice, not an echo". But describing today's choice is no easy chore, given the nature of the two candidates.

Neither is a model of consistency. Trump discovered hitherto unrevealed virtues in electric vehicles when Tesla's Elon Musk made a massive campaign contribution. But by comparison, Harris is like a chameleon on plaid issues such as fracking, government gun buybacks and the Green New Deal.

On others, she is more consistent. Harris supports open borders, which will keep wages down and increase taxes to cover the social costs associated with massive immigration, while Trump plans sweeping deportations that would constrict the labour supply and raise wages. Harris's plan to expand the welfare state will increase deficits, as will Trump's ever-lengthening tax-cut list.



> **The centre cannot hold: there is no longer a home for moderates**

Both candidates plan to raise tariffs, Harris more selectively than Trump, who says he will levy 10 per cent on all imports, even higher if from China.

Neither Trump nor Harris has expressed concern about a hollowed-out military, a national debt past $35 trillion, or threats to the dollar's place as the world's reserve currency.

Most important are their different plans for the future of the US economy. Neither Democrat has ever worked in the private sector, both trained in high-tax states with activist governments, both believe the government is and should be the dominant player in the economy. By contrast, both Republican candidates have private-sector experience that has taught them how wealth and jobs are created.

Harris and Walz believe government, using regulations and the tax system, can produce a better and fairer use of the nation's resources than can a free market. Trump would be no laissez-faire president, but he and Vance recognise the advantages of capitalism that allows entrepreneurs to practice the art of the deal and consumers to drive markets.

If this much-maligned election has a virtue, it is that it gives voters a choice, not an echo. As we say in New York, "That ain't chopped liver."

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BUSINESS

Prufrock

William Turvill



American media wolf finds solace in Paris

Has anybody enjoyed the Paris Olympics more than David Zaslav, the boss of Warner Bros Discovery? By Prufrock's estimation, probably not. The New Yorker, whose company has played a key role in the broadcasting of Paris 2024, has apparently spent much of the Games staying at Hôtel de Crillon, where a glass of champagne in the bar can set you back €95. (Or, if you're feeling virtuous, a bottle of Heineken 0.0 comes to €17.)

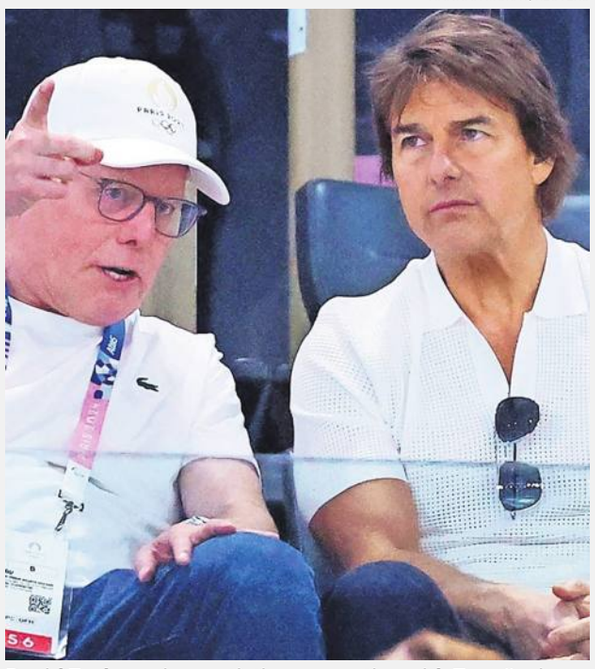
Zaslav, a prolific media dealmaker who made an appearance in the Time100 list of the most influential people on Earth a couple of years back, has been spotted in the company of *Barbie* star Margot Robbie and Natalie Portman. He's also been pictured at sporting events with Tom Cruise and the *Grease* heartthrob John Travolta.

The Warner chief executive came down to earth last week upon returning to the Big Apple to present his company's latest results. On Thursday, it was forced to write down the value of its television networks, which include CNN and the Food Network, by $9 billion, sending the shares plunging 10 per cent over the week. Bad times. At least Zaz and the Cruiser will always have Paris.

● The football transfer season is very much in full swing, with hundreds of millions of pounds being exchanged between some of Europe's biggest clubs ahead of the start of the season. It's the same story in the City of London, where firms are gearing up for a return to activity in September.

One major move has involved Matthew Jarman, a star dealmaker at Morgan Stanley, who is moving to Citigroup, where he'll be vice-chairman of UK investment banking. Jarman will join Citi in October. Morgan Stanley, though, has already beefed up its own operations through the signing of Jonathan Gold, who was formerly a managing partner at Deloitte. The transfer fees are undisclosed, but expect this pair to be on footballer-level wages.

HANNAH MCKAY/REUTERS



David Zaslav enjoys artistic gymnastics with Tom Cruise

JUST SAYING . . .

"I was shocked ... that a group of companies organised a systematic illegal boycott of X. It is just wrong"



Linda Yaccarino, chief executive of the platform previously known as Twitter, went to war with advertisers by filing a lawsuit against firms such as Unilever

Ivy members' grouchy summer

It's going to be a long old August for any regulars of The Ivy Club who aren't off enjoying themselves on holiday somewhere outside the capital. The West End establishment, which restaurateur Richard Caring has cannily spawned into a midmarket chain, closed its doors for the summer last weekend and won't be up and running again until September.

Members in pursuit of a good time this month are being directed to slightly less glamorous "reciprocal clubs" like the Groucho. Perish the thought.

Telegraph sale turns tetchy

The long, drawn-out auction of the Telegraph newspapers and The Spectator magazine is showing signs of turning a bit feisty.

Last week Lord Saatchi pulled out of the running and declared that RedBird IMI, the sellers, had overpaid for the titles. RedBird responded by labelling Saatchi not serious.

In response to that, Saatchi, who had teamed up with his friend Lady Lynn Forester de Rothschild for his bid, tells Prufrock: "RedBird IMI seem to believe that the only thing that matters is getting their money back. The truth is that what matters is the view of the British government, the British people and Telegraph readers.

"This great national asset must be put in a safe pair of hands, no matter the cost to RedBird IMI."

Meanwhile, Spectator chairman Andrew Neil is making little secret of his contempt for Sir Paul Marshall, the hedge fund tycoon and frontrunner to land his magazine.

In a tweet last week, Neil declared: "Hedge funds should not own media." This story is far from over.

BESTSELLING BOOKS

1	**The Psychology of Money**	Morgan Housel *Hamman House* (7,695)
2	**The Diary of a CEO (paperback)**	Steven Bartlett *Ebury Edge* (4,036)
3	**The Diary of a CEO (hardback)**	Steven Bartlett *Ebury Edge* (3,093)
4	**The Green Budget Guide**	Nancy Birtwhistle *One Boat* (2,783)
5	**Never Split the Difference**	Chris Voz with Tahl Raz *Random House Business* (2,179)
6	**The Personal MBA**	Josh Kaufman *Viking* (2,025)
7	**Technofeudalism**	Yanis Varoufakis *Vintage* (1,782)
8	**Rich Dad Poor Dad**	Robert T Kiyosaki *Plata* (1,743)
9	**Start With Why**	Simon Sinek *Penguin* (1,527)
10	**Radical Candor**	Kim Scott *Pan* (1,388)

Bestseller List prepared by Nielsen using data supplied by and copyright to Nielsen BookScan, taken from the TCM for the four-week period ending August 3

Joe Lewis's yacht darts to Devon

A couple of weeks ago, we brought you news that the megayacht of Joe Lewis, the Bahamas-based billionaire trader who recently pleaded guilty to insider trading in the United States, had been spotted off the coast of Scotland. Apparently in pursuit of some (slightly) warmer climes, the 98-metre Aviva has now sailed south and is currently drawing jealous looks from locals and tourists in Dartmouth harbour, south Devon. Where next for Lewis's yacht on its UK tour? Prufrock will keep you posted.

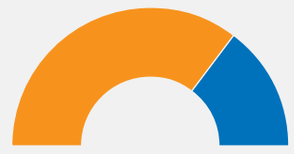
FUNNY BUSINESS



RUSSEL HERNEMAN

TWITTER POLL

Yes	No
71%	29%



Asda has announced it will put more staff on checkouts in its stores. Should other supermarkets follow suit? @ST_Business

VIEWPOINT

SEEMA SHAH



In volatile times, UK's dullness is a virtue

Recency bias – the trick of the brain that places greater importance on current events than earlier ones – causes many misapprehensions. Sports teams on winning streaks are "unbeatable". A Marvel movie is guaranteed box-office success. Both are examples of a sustained trend based purely on it being true at the time rather than on underlying fundamentals.

Markets are not immune from recency bias. When they turn suddenly, it's natural for investors to question whether this is the beginning of something systemic. Trusting the fundamentals rather than being swayed by what can seem like unstoppable momentum can be difficult, but the latter usually leads to bad investment decisions, panic and volatility.

We saw some of that last week. On Monday, we heard of a stock market "collapse". I read several calls for the Fed to cut rates before its next meeting, a measure it would only contemplate in a crisis. This on the strength of two trading sessions.

Post-financial crisis and Covid, the actions of central banks – the easy and cheap availability of debt – dampened a lot of turbulence that, historically, had been part and parcel of normal markets. Effectively, we've had a 15-year safety net under the financial markets. As central banks step back from supporting economies and turn off the quantitative easing taps, we should expect to see more volatility.

Last week saw not a collapse but a pullback – and these are far more frequent than people may imagine, especially those prone to recency bias. Since 1980, we have seen S&P 500 pullbacks of more than 5 per cent on average five times a year.

I'm not saying the economic data that prompted the sell-off – specifically the slowdown in US jobs growth – is irrelevant. Clearly, it underlines that the US economy faces challenges. But perspective is required.

Although we are seeing signs of a rebound in the United States and Asia, last week's tumbles also highlighted that the UK – the ugly duckling for investors in recent years – may be more resilient than many to these sorts of pullbacks.

Britain is reassuringly boring : quite an attractive quality in volatile periods. Moreover, our dullness is pretty wide-ranging. While the tech stocks of the Nasdaq plunged, the FTSE 100 – weighted towards less-cyclical sectors like pharma, consumer staples, telecoms and utilities – held up relatively well. Also, rather than being geared towards growth, investors look to UK businesses to pay them a steady income via dividends.

Even our politics is unexciting. "Fiscal discipline with Rachel Reeves" is unlikely to make it to Netflix but, unlike the soap opera of recent years, won't actively repel global investors.

The UK – the cheapest developed market – could emerge as an unlikely winner from last week's wreckage.

Seema Shah is chief global strategist at Principal Asset Management

THE WEEK IN THE MARKETS

FTSE 100

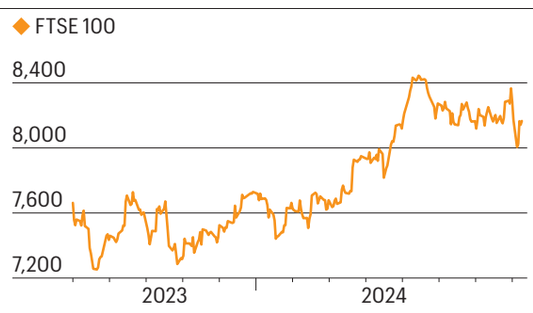
8,168.10

▼ 6.61
▼ 0.08%
H: 8,474.41
L: 7,215.76

FTSE 250

20,625.18

▼ 201.17
▼ 0.97%
H: 21,786.21
L: 16,764.25



Source: Factset

RISERS

Beazley: 723p, ▲ 12.5% on profits **Keller Group:** £15.80, ▲ 11.7% beats expectations **Hikma Pharmaceuticals:** £20.38, ▲ 8.0% on results **Quilter:** 140.5p, ▲ 7.3% on inflows surge

FALLERS

John Wood Group: 131.4p, ▼ 33.3% bid craters **Clarkson:** £37.85, ▼ 13.4% sales fall **Spirax Group:** £76.60, ▼ 10.1% on results **Abrdn:** 149.2p, ▼ 8.9% extends losses

Source: FactSet

DOW JONES 39,497.54
▼ 239.72 ▼ 0.60% H: 41,376.00 L: 32,327.20

NASDAQ 16,745.30
▼ 30.86 ▼ 0.18% H: 18,671.07 L: 12,543.86

S&P 500 5,344.16
▼ 2.40 ▼ 0.04% H: 5,669.67 L: 4,103.78

NIKKEI 35,025.00
▼ 884.70 ▼ 2.46% H: 42,426.77 L: 30,487.67

HANG SENG 17,090.23
▲ 144.72 ▲ 0.85% H: 19,706.12 L: 14,794.16

SHANGHAI 2,862.19
▼ 43.15 ▼ 1.49% H: 3,254.48 L: 2,635.09

CAC 40 7,269.71
▲ 17.91 ▲ 0.25% H: 8,259.19 L: 6,773.82

DAX 17,722.88
▲ 61.66 ▲ 0.35% H: 18,892.92 L: 14,630.21

FTSE EUROFIRST 1,979.89
▲ 6.92 ▲ 0.35% H: 2,084.19 L: 1,703.71

SENSEX 79,705.91
▼ 1,276.04 ▼ 1.58% H: 82,129.49 L: 63,092.98

ALL ORDS 7,990.70
▼ 179.70 ▼ 2.20% H: 8,375.80 L: 6,938.50

S&P TSX 22,311.30
▲ 83.67 ▲ 0.38% H: 23,209.68 L: 18,692.06

DOLLAR USD > GBP
1.2759
▼ 0.0045
12-month high: $1.3045 low: $1.2037

EURO EUR > GBP
€1.1684
▼ 0.0051
12-month high: €1.1937 low: €1.1405

YEN YEN > USD
¥146.69
▲ 0.14
12-month high: ¥162.01 low: ¥140.26

OIL DOLLARS/BARREL
$79.39
▲ 1.83
12-month high: $94.43 low: $73.24

GOLD DOLLARS/TROY OZ
$2,468.00
▼ 18.10
12-month high: $2,522.50 low: $1,823.50

BITCOIN DOLLARS
$60,812
▼ 713
12-month high: $73,750 low: $24,930
Price at midday Saturday

THE ECONOMY

		current rate	prev. month
Consumer prices index		2.0%	2.0%
CPI including housing		2.8%	2.8%
Retail price index		2.9%	3.0%
Average weekly earnings	£689	on prev. month ▲0.3%	on last year ▲5.1%
Unemployment	1.53m	4.4%	4.4%
Manufacturing output		on the year ▲0.6%	on last month ▲0.4%
Retail sales		on the year ▼0.2%	on last month ▼1.2%

	latest 3 mths	prev. 3 mths	latest 12 mths
UK trade balance (£bn)	-9.18	-7.55	-39.21

	latest quarter	prev. quarter	annual change
Gross domestic product	▲0.7%	▼0.3%	▲0.3%

	last month	prev. month	year to date
Budget deficit (PSNB) in £bn	-14.5	-16.5	-49.8

10-YEAR BOND YIELDS %

		variation	12 months high	12 months low
UK	3.949	▲0.111	4.760	3.433
US	3.948	▲0.155	5.022	3.669
JAPAN	0.858	▼0.101	1.109	0.550
GERMANY	2.230	▲0.049	3.027	1.894

TOP 200 COMPANIES

Market cap ranking		Price	Change on week	52-week high	52-week low	Mkt Cap (£m)
122	Abrdn	149.2	–14.6	194.6	136.2	2659.3
90	Airtel Africa	110.7	–0.8	131.6	90.7	4113.9
153	AJ Bell	424.0	–16.0	459.0	249.0	1748.3
181	Allianz Technology	354.0	+6.0	410.5	246.0	1359.4
24	Anglo American	2226.0	–17.5	2773.5	1670.2	26986.5
29	Antofagasta	1846.5	–41.5	2410.0	1293.0	18203.8
25	Ashtead	5174.0	+12.0	6104.0	4667.0	22577.0
30	Associated British Foods	2457.0	–7.0	2738.0	1929.5	18179.5
191	Assura	41.1	–1.2	48.9	39.1	1230.5
1	AstraZeneca	12700.0	+90.0	12700.0	9501.0	196884.0
53	Auto Trader	791.4	–0.2	829.6	587.0	7075.1
36	Aviva	482.5	+4.7	500.2	369.2	12814.5
124	Babcock International	518.5	+7.0	565.5	368.6	2621.5
16	BAE	1277.5	–4.5	1400.0	955.8	38680.4
138	Balfour Beatty	407.2	+2.6	426.8	295.4	2089.6
187	Baltic Classifieds	262.0	–5.0	277.0	183.6	1260.2
150	Bank of Georgia	3995.0	–155.0	5420.0	3115.0	1790.8
19	Barclays	218.2	+9.1	234.1	129.2	32098.1
73	Barratt Developments	523.8	+0.2	566.4	392.3	5104.9
84	Beazley	723.0	+80.5	723.0	503.0	4594.4
107	Bellway	2748.0	–22.0	2866.0	2008.0	3260.6
71	Berkeley	5020.0	–10.0	5320.0	3860.0	5306.6
135	Big Yellow	1208.0	–8.0	1264.0	910.0	2359.4
85	B&M European	454.7	+0.3	612.4	434.5	4559.7
196	Bodycote	634.0	–8.0	768.0	555.0	1170.4
6	BP	433.8	–11.1	558.0	430.7	71384.0
179	Breedon	398.5	–12.0	431.5	304.5	1369.2
137	Bridgepoint	274.6	–8.4	293.0	166.9	2176.2
9	British American Tobacco	2801.0	+13.0	2801.0	2267.0	61943.7
100	British Land	396.6	–9.2	444.6	291.8	3680.0
111	Britvic	1265.0	–3.0	1269.0	785.5	3121.2
37	BT	130.5	–7.7	145.1	102.3	12765.2
42	Bunzl	3186.0	+20.0	3306.0	2687.0	10707.3
132	Burberry	684.8	–45.4	2257.0	684.8	2455.6
144	Caledonia Investments	3560.0	+130.0	3700.0	2593.6	1940.8
34	Carnival	1054.0	–6.5	1377.0	811.6	13355.5
177	Centamin	120.0	–2.8	133.2	78.2	1392.5
57	Centrica	123.2	–4.0	172.5	121.2	6438.0
199	Clarkson	3785.0	–585.0	4570.0	2550.0	1160.6
163	Coats	99.3	+1.9	101.0	66.0	1581.5
46	Coca Cola HBC	2684.0	–150.0	2852.0	2065.0	9765.7
15	Compass	2333.0	–28.0	2396.0	1945.5	39653.2
115	Computacenter	2580.0	–24.0	2962.0	2026.0	2929.7
81	Convatec	232.0		293.4	196.2	4746.3
129	Cranswick	4600.0	–35.0	4765.0	3170.0	2469.3
70	Croda	3831.0	–141.0	5640.0	3831.0	5349.4
95	Darktrace	595.6	+1.8	603.4	321.3	3808.6
75	DCC	5150.0	–5.0	6035.0	4171.0	5092.1
123	Derwent London	2340.0	+42.0	2402.0	1779.0	2627.6
10	Diageo	2426.5	+46.5	3406.5	2359.0	53872.3
67	Diploma	4124.0	+50.0	4448.0	2804.0	5527.2
136	Direct Line Insurance	174.2	–4.2	225.8	150.1	2260.6
198	Domino's Pizza	294.4	–22.0	424.6	282.4	1169.1
127	Drax	640.5	–1.5	648.5	401.5	2479.0
49	Admiral	2675.0	–22.0	2837.0	2177.0	7928.9
134	Dunelm	1178.0	–25.0	1241.0	967.0	2381.9
105	EasyJet	436.7	+7.7	577.8	359.9	3288.8
98	Endeavour	1538.0	–136.0	1891.0	1250.0	3755.1
157	Energean	922.5	–15.0	1204.0	808.0	1692.6
102	Entain	558.2	+18.6	1380.0	503.6	3568.6
20	Experian	3483.0	–9.0	3779.0	2390.0	31821.2
166	4imprint	5490.0	–220.0	6540.0	4255.0	1546.0
97	Frasers	842.0	–25.5	938.0	776.0	3791.7
94	Fresnillo	535.0	–38.0	639.5	440.3	3942.4
194	Future	1040.0	–9.0	1145.0	577.0	1178.3
104	Games Workshop	10030.0	+40.0	11490.0	9125.0	3305.1
195	Genuit	470.0	–18.5	512.0	261.5	1171.1
12	Glencore	405.1	+0.1	501.5	369.0	49248.5
140	Grafton	1006.8	–10.2	1080.0	751.0	2014.5
151	Grainger	241.0	–2.0	274.8	218.4	1778.9
176	Great Portland	345.0	+1.0	369.7	295.8	1398.3
109	Greggs	3122.0	+44.0	3140.0	2282.0	3168.2
8	GSK	1565.5	+3.0	1812.5	1347.4	63855.9
18	Haleon	377.0	+9.2	377.0	312.0	34377.6
47	Halma	2526.0	–1.0	2721.0	1810.5	9527.8
182	Hammerson	27.1	–1.5	30.5	20.9	1350.1
72	Hargreaves Lansdown	1102.0	+2.0	1153.0	690.4	5222.1
172	Hays	91.9	+0.6	110.6	88.5	1456.6
188	Helios Towers	119.6	–2.2	131.0	59.0	1257.2
86	Hikma Pharmaceuticals	2038.0	+151.0	2205.0	1722.0	4522.0
160	Hill & Smith	2040.0	–140.0	2300.0	1608.0	1638.6
93	Hiscox	1167.0	–43.0	1271.0	938.0	3970.6
79	Howden Joinery	882.5	–3.0	947.5	624.0	4849.5
3	HSBC	642.5	+6.2	720.8	575.8	118545.2
108	IDS	337.4	–7.2	347.0	213.0	3229.2
103	IG Group	916.5	+1.0	939.5	611.0	3379.2
87	IMI	1736.0	–19.0	1901.0	1445.0	4501.2
31	Imperial Brands	2126.0	–16.0	2161.0	1580.0	18090.4
106	Inchcape	797.5	–35.5	859.5	624.5	3280.2
43	Informa	799.6	–34.2	878.2	685.8	10615.1
192	Integrafin	366.5	+1.0	387.0	211.6	1214.3
40	InterContinental Hotels	7272.0	–94.0	8752.0	5746.0	11658.2
64	Intermediate Capital	1991.0	+11.0	2394.0	1255.5	5786.5
48	International Airlines	166.6	–0.9	186.4	138.0	8159.2
133	International Public P'ship	127.0	–0.8	139.2	115.4	2410.1
51	Intertek	4652.0	–232.0	5075.0	3755.0	7495.0
99	Investec	576.5	–5.5	615.5	439.0	3719.4
114	ITV	78.1		84.5	55.8	3063.1
155	IWG	168.3	+3.9	207.0	127.4	1703.2
56	JD Sports	125.4	+1.7	175.1	104.0	6502.2
117	Johnson Matthey	1576.0	–16.0	1870.0	1446.5	2843.2
158	Jtc	1034.0	+12.0	1072.0	627.5	1691.1
193	Just Group	114.8	–0.2	120.8	68.2	1192.4
185	Kainos	1052.0	+10.0	1294.0	914.0	1323.8
77	Kingfisher	270.9	+2.2	281.4	201.2	4954.0
168	Lancashire Holdings	624.0	+9.0	689.0	540.5	1497.9
82	Land Securities	620.0	–16.0	725.2	559.4	4618.3
35	Legal & General	224.4	+4.4	256.3	205.8	13188.9
17	Lloyds Banking Group	57.0	+1.6	61.1	39.8	35298.6
11	London Stock Exchange	9828.0	+88.0	9852.0	8038.0	52213.7
91	Londonmetric Property	198.6	–5.6	210.2	156.4	4050.7
130	Man	213.4	–17.6	277.8	202.0	2467.4
58	Marks & Spencer	318.8	+1.7	331.3	202.3	6434.1
59	Melrose	485.8	+3.2	677.6	446.8	6346.9
80	M&G	201.7	+0.7	238.8	183.6	4801.2
148	Mitchells & Butlers	303.0	+1.0	317.0	199.3	1800.0
169	Mitie	118.6	–0.2	124.2	91.9	1488.1
60	Mondi	1429.0	–27.0	1706.1	1311.5	6299.7
200	Moneysupermarket	215.2	–2.2	283.8	208.0	1156.5
180	Morgan Sindall	2920.0	+130.0	2920.0	1816.0	1365.1
13	National Grid	978.8	–18.2	1050.1	838.4	47822.5
23	NatWest	333.0	+7.4	371.4	176.1	27727.6
139	Network International	390.0	–1.4	395.2	382.4	2077.7
41	Next	9520.0	+44.0	9830.0	6750.0	11403.9
171	Ninety One	164.4	–0.5	186.2	156.7	1460.5
113	Ocado	374.0	–19.7	878.8	281.0	3069.4
146	Onesavings Bank	481.4	–8.6	527.5	280.8	1857.4
184	Oxford Inst	2295.0	–50.0	2660.0	1712.0	1330.6
189	PageGroup	400.0	–10.8	498.4	365.0	1254.9
164	Paragon Banking Group	759.5	+1.0	807.5	443.6	1571.2
54	Pearson	1042.0	–7.5	1062.0	812.0	6927.8
156	Pennon	592.5	–38.0	767.0	551.0	1694.8
76	Persimmon	1577.0	+20.5	1588.5	960.4	5044.2
128	Petershill Partners	221.0	+2.5	222.5	143.0	2474.3
183	Pets at Home	290.4	+1.4	380.0	254.4	1330.7
69	Phoenix	535.5	+6.5	555.5	441.6	5363.4
162	Playtech	521.0	–19.0	565.0	370.0	1587.4
147	Plus500	2396.0	+84.0	2396.0	1286.0	1814.1
170	Premier Foods	170.0	–3.4	180.0	113.2	1465.5
190	Primary Health Properties	93.6	+0.1	106.3	85.5	1250.2
33	Prudential	632.8	–12.6	1038.5	628.8	17289.3
121	QinetiQ	468.4	+5.2	483.2	292.8	2668.0
143	Quilter	140.5	+9.5	140.5	76.7	1950.6
141	Rathbone	1848.0	–36.0	1984.0	1458.0	2001.4
22	Reckitt Benckiser	4180.0	+30.0	5960.0	4093.0	29148.2
131	Redrow	745.0	+11.5	754.5	445.4	2464.2
7	Relx	3511.0	–56.0	3688.0	2473.0	65348.9
125	Renishaw	3495.0	+50.0	4370.0	2950.0	2541.6
39	Rentokil	464.3	+3.1	621.4	392.5	11661.1
159	Rhi Magnesita	3570.0	+20.0	3785.0	2492.0	1684.7
89	Rightmove	537.0	–21.6	594.8	462.9	4250.7
5	Rio Tinto	4914.5	–35.0	5891.0	4559.0	79806.5
14	Rolls-Royce	485.0	+21.1	485.5	198.9	41248.8
120	Rotork	326.0	–10.6	361.8	281.0	2775.2
101	RS Group	757.0	+14.0	839.4	660.4	3585.8
149	Safestore	820.0	–3.0	913.0	653.0	1791.6
45	Sage	995.2	–50.3	1282.0	938.4	9942.9
61	Sainsbury's	267.8	–6.0	310.4	245.8	6235.2
161	Savills	1192.0	–70.0	1276.0	763.5	1614.3
68	Schroders	337.6	–7.4	443.6	335.6	5442.5
38	Segro	893.2	–32.2	946.2	679.2	12079.3
152	Serco	168.5	–4.9	194.0	139.0	1773.9
50	Severn Trent	2530.0	–123.0	2728.0	2265.0	7593.2
118	Shaftesbury Capital	145.7	–2.1	152.3	102.5	2841.2
2	Shell	2776.0	–1.0	2946.0	2353.0	173405.3
173	Sirius Real Estate	96.2	+0.7	101.2	78.7	1446.6
44	Smith & Nephew	1166.0	–20.5	1199.0	896.2	10167.0
63	Smiths	1734.0	+23.0	1786.0	1526.0	5952.8
142	Smithson Investment Trust	1404.0	+4.0	1478.0	1170.0	1990.3
112	Softcat	1561.0	+8.0	1855.0	1212.0	3109.3
116	Spectris	2874.0	–8.0	3807.0	2762.0	2890.4
65	Spirax-Sarco	7660.0	–860.0	10835.0	7660.0	5640.5
27	SSE	1862.0	–46.0	1908.0	1508.0	20232.1
186	SSP	163.5	–1.3	244.6	144.5	1305.5
96	St James's Place Capital	699.5	+11.5	914.8	402.0	3808.0
32	Standard Chartered	715.4	+26.4	785.8	573.8	17993.7
126	Tate & Lyle	640.0	–1.0	727.5	591.0	2511.3
66	Taylor Wimpey	157.1	+2.5	159.6	104.6	5563.0
167	TBC Bank	2800.0	–5.0	3465.0	2350.0	1540.5
178	Telecom Plus	1760.0	–52.0	1900.0	1362.0	1390.6
26	Tesco	330.5	+3.8	331.7	246.5	22550.4
21	3i Group	3011.0	+182.0	3180.0	1858.5	29308.1
110	3i Infrastructure	339.0	+12.0	360.0	289.0	3126.8
154	Tp Icap	225.5	+8.0	227.5	156.3	1725.4
175	Trainline	315.2	–0.6	386.4	216.4	1407.9
145	Travis Perkins	886.0	–7.0	959.5	692.2	1868.1
92	Tritax Big Box	161.8	–4.4	170.3	130.5	4013.7
4	Unilever	4730.0	–116.0	4846.0	3694.0	117834.5
83	Unite	944.5	–20.0	1057.0	851.0	4613.7
55	United Utilities	990.0	–69.0	1125.0	900.8	6750.7
119	Virgin Money	215.0		216.2	142.8	2787.4
88	Vistry	1293.0	–20.0	1384.0	682.0	4337.8
28	Vodafone	73.8	+1.5	81.1	63.0	19615.1
78	Weir	1889.0	–20.0	2200.0	1675.5	4904.1
165	WH Smith	1198.0	–50.0	1484.0	1083.0	1568.3
74	Whitbread	2855.0	+48.0	3678.0	2799.0	5097.0
174	Wizz Air	1377.0	–71.0	2536.0	1377.0	1423.3
197	Workspace	609.0	–4.0	645.0	458.0	1169.3
52	WPP	678.8	–36.2	855.0	678.8	7321.2

52-week highs and lows are intra-day figures, not end of day.
Excludes exchange-traded funds. nc = no change. — = not applicable.
Source: Morningstar

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Here's where to work if you want a £1.5m pension pot



Hoping to retire in luxury? Be careful which jobs you apply for. Our analysis of FTSE 100 companies reveals a big gap between the most and least generous schemes, writes *Lily Russell-Jones*

You could be £1 million better off at retirement if you pick the right company to work for, a Money investigation has shown.

Money contacted every firm in the FTSE 100, the index of the biggest companies listed on the UK stock market, and compared the pension schemes for UK-based staff.

While under auto-enrolment companies are legally obliged to pay only the equivalent of 3 per cent of an employee's salary into their pension pot (on top of 5 per cent from the employee), our investigation found that some firms contribute as much as 25 per cent. Companies including the consumer goods company Unilever and the oil giants Shell and BP are the most generous to their staff, we found, and working for them could have a huge impact on the size of your savings.

"One of the easiest ways to make sure you retire in luxury is to get a job with an employer offering a generous pension scheme," said Tom McPhail from the Lang Cat, a consultancy. "The difference between the best and worst employer contributions can be huge."

Recruitment firms suggested that with people finding it harder to save during the cost of living crisis, better pension schemes are becoming an important way of attracting and retaining staff.

90%
of firms that responded pay more than the minimum

Throw in years of subdued wage growth and people may be more likely to join a company and stay there if it's offering a bigger investment into their future.

Of the 51 companies that responded to our request, 46 said new employees were automatically enrolled into a pension scheme where the default employer contribution rate was higher than the statutory 3 per cent.

One of the most generous schemes was from Unilever. Its staff get an allowance equivalent to 25 per cent of their salary and can use the entire amount as a pension contribution or take some as salary. Employees don't have to contribute any of their salary to get the allowance. Unilever said employees get a default 15 per cent employer pension contribution and the remainder of their allowance as a salary increase unless adjusted.



Top of the pots

Company	Default employer contribution	Default employee contribution	Max employer contribution	Employee contribution to get employer max
BP	20%	0%	20%	0%
Unilever	15%	0%	25%	0%
Anglo American	15%	0%	15%	0%
British American Tobacco	15%	5%	15%	5%
Shell	15%	5%	20%	7.5%

Notes: BP and Unilever offer staff a flexible allowance (worth 20% and 25% of salary respectively) and employees choose how much to put in their pension and take as extra pay. The average employer contribution is 20% at Croda. It is excluded because staff join a defined benefit scheme which is not directly comparable.

If a 30-year-old earning £50,000 a year contributed the equivalent of 25 per cent of their salary to a pension every year they could have saved about £1.5 million by the age of 65, according to the trading platform Interactive Investor. It assumed their salary would increase 2 per cent a year and their investments would grow by 5 per cent a year after fees. Someone on the same salary who contributed the equivalent of 8 per cent, the minimum under auto-enrolment, of their salary to a pension each year would have £479,081 by retirement – about £1 million less.



RUSSEL HERNEMAN

Staff at BP get a flexible allowance worth 20 per cent of their base pay and can choose how much to add to their pension or take as extra pay. Someone earning £50,000 at the age of 30 who contributed 20 per cent of their salary to a pension until age 65 could expect to have £1.2 million, Interactive Investor said.

Staff at Shell get a default employer contribution worth 15 per cent of their salary if they contribute 5 per cent of their pay. The employer contribution increases to 20 per cent if the employee saves 7.5 per cent of their salary. Putting the equivalent of 27.5 per cent of your salary into a pension could leave you with £1.79 million by 65, Interactive Investor said.

Staff are automatically enrolled in a defined benefit pension scheme at just one of the 51 companies – the chemicals company Croda. This increasingly rare type of pension is highly sought after because it pays a guaranteed income in retirement. They are common in the public sector, but have mostly been phased out in the private sector because they are so expensive for firms to maintain.

Croda said employees build up an entitlement to a retirement income worth an 80th of their salary for every year they work at the firm.

25%
The most generous employer contribuion we found

Employees contribute 6 per cent of their salary and their employer makes a variable contribution that ensures they are on track for their guaranteed retirement income. Croda said the employer contribution was equivalent to 20 per cent of an employee's salary on average.

Habiba Khatoon from the recruitment firm Robert Walters said: "FTSE 100 companies offer generous employer contributions to encourage loyalty in their staff. The high cost of living means that people are finding it harder to save and are more likely to join and keep working for a company that's offering a bigger investment into their future."

Under auto-enrolment, a policy introduced in 2012, all employees join a company pension scheme if they earn more than £10,000 a year and are 22 or older.

Most people in the private sector have a defined contribution pension scheme, where the amount you get in retirement depends on how much you have saved and how your investments perform.

Auto-enrolment rules mean a minimum of 8 per cent of an employee's salary is paid into their pension pot each year, but experts say this is nowhere near enough for a comfortable retirement. The Sunday Times has been calling for the minimum employer contribution rate to be raised from 3 per cent to 5 per cent.

"There is widespread recognition that automatic enrolment minimum contributions are inadequate. They are a good start, but we need to do more. Employers have a role to play in this process and getting their minimum contributions up to 5 per cent would be an excellent step in this direction," McPhail said.

The median default contribution rate for a company pension scheme is 10 per cent, according to the pensions firm Aon, with 6 per cent coming from the employer and 4 per cent from the employee. It surveyed 214 defined contribution schemes, which collectively have one million members and £60 billion of assets.

A survey of 5,000 people carried out by the recruitment firm Michael Page last month and shared exclusively with The Sunday Times found that 46 per cent of job applicants look at pension benefits before applying for a new job. Some 51 per cent of respondents said they considered holiday allowances before applying for a new role and 33 per cent looked at sick pay.

Jessica Timelin from Michael Page said: "Pensions have become much more important to job applicants. With the cost of living crisis still looming large, candidates have a mentality where every penny counts – they want to know what their pension will be worth as well as other benefits like health insurance. Beyond the money, it shows a business has put effort into making sure it is offering comprehensive benefits."

Money found that staff working for the retailers B&M, JD Sports and Next, the food services company Compass Group and the property company Barratt Development get a default employer contribution of 3 per cent.

Staff at Barratt Development can apply to join an enhanced company pension scheme where the employer contribution goes up to 10 per cent of salary if employees pay in 5 per cent.

Those who have worked at Compass Group for two years are able to join a pension scheme where the employer contribution rate goes up to 6 per cent if the employee also pays in 6 per cent of their salary. Employees at JD Sports can get a maximum employer contribution rate of 4 per cent.

David Thomas, chief executive of Barratt Developments, said: "We encourage all our employees to save for the future, providing access to independent advice and offering a generous 10 per cent employer contribution pension to all employees with no qualifying criteria, alongside the auto-enrolment pension for those employees who may prefer that scheme."



'It would be great to retire earlier than the state pension age'

When Melroy D'Souza, 39, left university he didn't give much thought to his pension. "It wasn't on the top of my list when I was looking for a job," said D'Souza, who lives in Southampton with his wife, Joanna, 37, and daughters Faye, eight, and Rachel, five. "But that changed when I started a family and began thinking more seriously about my future."

For the past 17 years D'Souza has worked for the FTSE 100 company Kingfisher, a home improvement company that owns B&Q. The firm pays a default contribution of 5 per cent of employees' salary into their pension, but will increase this to 14 per cent if the employee contributes 8 per cent.

After D'Souza got married 11 years ago he increased his contributions to get the maximum available employer contribution. He now has £130,000 saved in his workplace pension.

"It would be great to retire earlier than the state pension age and be able to live comfortably. That's my goal," D'Souza said. "Having a generous pension scheme is definitely important. I know Kingfisher offers a better pension than a lot of other firms which are local to me."

Rachel Mortimer
Assistant Money Editor

Two-year delays at the Land Registry — I need to move house



In May 2022 Boris Johnson was still prime minister and Liverpool won the FA Cup on penalties. It was also the month we bought the shared freehold of our home in London.

We had lived in one of three flats in a converted terraced house for six years and, with the other leaseholders, bought the freehold in a bid to cut our chronically useless managing agent out of the picture.

But two years later the new freehold had still not been updated on the Land Registry – something that causes big problems when you come to sell a property, as we did this summer.

A lot can change in two years. We have had three more prime ministers since, yet our application was still pending on a desk at the Land Registry exactly 24 months after we had bought the freehold.

A blog on the government website states that as long as the application has been submitted to the Land Registry, "any delays in registering the property aren't anything to worry about". I beg to differ. Cue panicked emails between us and lawyers to expedite the application – which the Land Registry will do at no cost if a delay puts a sale at risk.

It adds extra stress to an already protracted home-buying process in the UK and our situation is not unique. For the most basic changes to property titles – such as updating mortgages against a property or changing names – it takes the Land Registry more than a month in 40 per cent of cases, according to its own data.

It takes more than a year to process applications in 64 per cent of complex cases. This includes registering a property for the first time, dividing existing titles, lodging a new lease or multiple applications – it means developers and social housing providers often face the longest waits. It also raises the risk of fraud if property or land is unregistered and title deeds have gone awry.

"It refuses to pick up the phone on a Friday"

The delays began during the pandemic when the stamp duty holiday triggered a surge in applications. But the tax break ended in 2021 and the Land Registry is still catching up. It has hired hundreds more caseworkers to tackle the backlog, but solicitors say they can lack consistency. The Land Registry has been known to point the finger at conveyancers for mistakes on applications that hold up the process.

Parts of the Land Registry are largely unchanged since its inception in 1862, including its fee structure, which is now being reformed. It says it is committed to going digital, although less than 30 per cent of applications to change the register are automated. It aims to increase this to 70 per cent, but not until 2027.

Here lies the problem. The Land Registry receives about 20,000 requests a day to change the register or create a title, yet it has less than 7,000 employees. We move more frequently and in greater numbers than ever before, but still rely on an antiquated system of manual checks to register ownership.

To rub salt into the wound the Land Registry has temporarily closed its phone lines on a Friday, the busiest day of the week for completing property purchases. It says this will allow it to make a dent in its casework, and that you can use its online form and still get a response the same day.

It's a tactic popular with government departments battling customer service backlogs – HM Courts & Tribunal Service now closes its probate helpline in the afternoons and HM Revenue & Customs has a penchant for shutting its self-assessment line for months at a time.

Anyone who is completing on a Friday will have to reach the Land Registry on its online form if their priority application has not materialised. Just what you need when the removal van is outside. One lawyer suitably dubbed this "panic day".

If the Land Registry wanted a quick win to spare homebuyers, sellers and their lawyers unnecessary stress, it could do worse than to reopen its phone line on a Friday. I'm grateful we complete on a Wednesday.

... and it's getting easier to compare pensions

Lily Russell-Jones

Savers could soon be able to compare the performance of workplace pension schemes.

The Financial Conduct Authority, the City watchdog, is consulting on rules that would rank pension schemes based on their costs, charges, investment performance and customer service.

A traffic-light system would give schemes a red, amber or green rating. Poor performers could be closed down or forced to transfer savers to better schemes.

If the investment performance of your pension scheme is poor or its charges are high this affects your savings and could have a big impact on how much money you have at retirement.

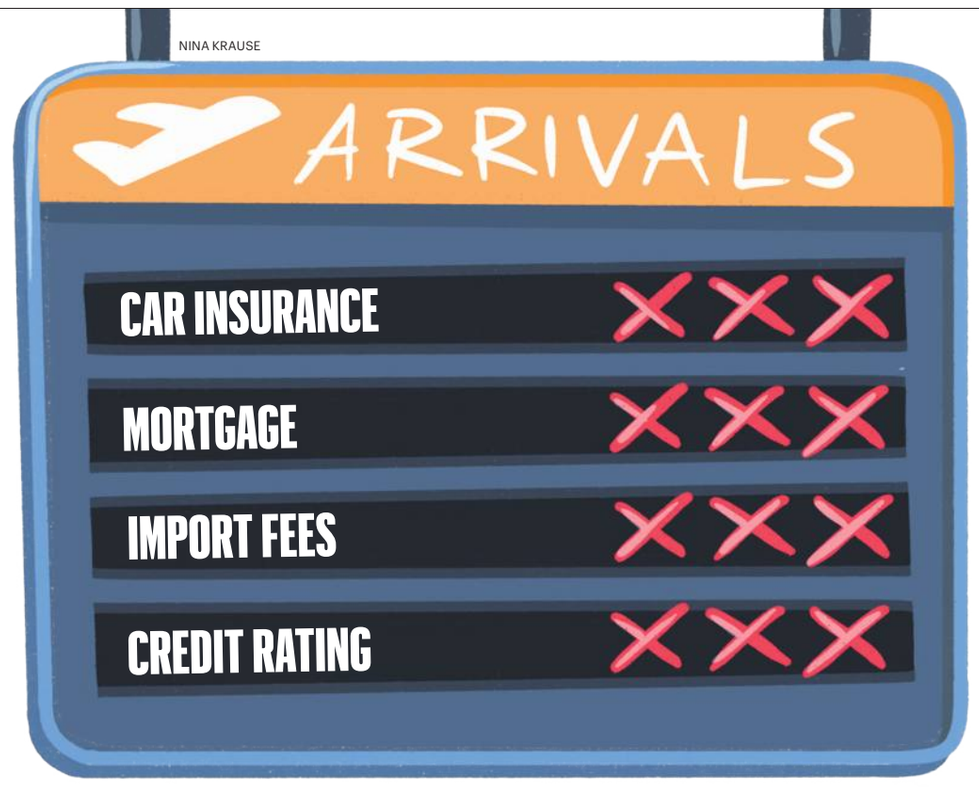
Emma Reynolds, a pensions minister, said: "Last year over £130 billion was saved into workplace pension schemes – money we want to see working hard for future pensioners to give them better retirement incomes."

Rather than running their own pension scheme, many employers choose a pensions company, such as Scottish Widows, Aviva or the government-baked Nest, to do it for them.

Under the new rules, firms rated amber will have to come up with an improvement plan and may be unable to set up pension schemes on behalf of new employers. A red rating could mean customers are transferred to a better performing scheme.

"Savers who are automatically enrolled into a pension scheme don't get any control over which firm is managing their money. I'm sure lots of people would be interested to know how their pension measures up," said Rachel Vahey from the investment platform AJ Bell. "If you knew your pension scheme was rated red or amber you could talk to your employer about it."

The consultation, due to close next month, will decide how firms should calculate and publish data.



7 hurdles for expats moving back (and how to clear them)

Coming home can be hard. *Gillian Harvey* looks at the obstacles you might face when returning to the UK and the best ways to get around them

Many people who have moved abroad will consider coming back to the UK at some point. About 99,000 Britons moved overseas last year and 61,000 returned, according to estimates by the Office for National Statistics. While the process may seem straightforward for those with residence rights, there can be bumps in the road. We look at seven issues faced by expats and explore potential solutions.

1. Import fees

Bringing back all your belongings may require more planning than coming back from a holiday. Be careful you don't accrue charges such as import VAT and duties. You are allowed to transfer personal possessions into the UK without charge if you're making a permanent move, but you must complete the paperwork to prove it.

Solution: Complete a ToR1 form to claim relief on customs duties. This form can be done online and should list all belongings being imported, from clothing and furniture to vehicles and even the family pet. The form is valid from up to six months before your move to a year afterwards.

2. Opening a UK bank account

Opening a bank account might not be as easy as you think. Many banks require proof of address, making it impossible to open an account before moving. And even when you're in situ, you may not get exactly what you want. "Lack of proper proof of address may cause problems," Amy Morton, an expat coach at AIM Coaching, said. "Some banks may also require quite a high initial deposit or charge additional fees."

Solution: Shop around to find out what banks are offering. Some banks may look more favourably on expats than others or make exceptions in certain cases, Morton said. "I know of one high street bank that let a client open an account using an Airbnb address." You may find that some app- based banks have a simpler application process and that proof of address is not always necessary. Some of Morton's clients choose Wise and Starling.

3. Low (or no) credit rating

Buying a car or arranging a mobile phone contract might be difficult if you have lived away for several years. It is likely that you'll have a low – or no – UK credit rating, meaning most institutions will not want to lend to you. "Even if you've kept a UK bank account, it's usually not enough information to build a healthy credit score," said John Webb from the credit reference agency Experian.

Solution: While there's no easy fix, there are ways to improve your credit score more quickly. Register on the electoral roll, Webb said, and get a basic bank account and manage it well. "It's also worth opening a credit card account – keep it active and pay off in full each month," he said. But it may take up to a year to notice a significant difference. "When you have a year of history behind you, that's when you'll start to feel the positive impact," he added.

4. Securing a rental property

Finding and securing a home to rent can be hard at the best of times. Letting agents carry out credit and affordability checks, which might be harder to pass for expats. Some agencies will also not let people approve a rental "sight unseen", meaning you need to conduct viewings when you are in the UK.

Solution: Speak to a variety of different agencies – you may find some more willing to rent sight unseen than others or may offer virtual viewings. Alternatively, ask a local friend to view on your behalf. Once you've found a property, if you fail the affordability or credit checks, there are solutions. "If you are unable to pass these checks, you could pay for the rent in full in advance," said Bola Ranson, founder of the estate agency Ranson. "Alternatively, you can seek a UK tax-paying guarantor."

5. Taking out a mortgage

Buying a property in the UK should be no problem, provided that you can pay outright. But if, like most, you need a mortgage, you may well come unstuck. Typically mortgage lenders require two years' residence before lending, said Claire Sweet, a financial adviser.

Solution: It's worth contacting a "whole of market" mortgage adviser, who may be able to get deals from smaller institutions. Often these have a higher rate, but some people decide to take these on for a period of time to get on the property ladder. "When you are ready to apply, it helps to have as big a deposit as possible. Having a permanent contract of employment and stable address history will also help," Sweet said.

6. Arranging car insurance

Even careful drivers who have maintained their no-claims status overseas may struggle to get car insurance back home. Although some insurers say they accept no-claims proof from overseas, it can be challenging to prove eligibility. Some only accept the proof in English, for example, something you may struggle to obtain.

Solution: A lack of no-claims or driving history shouldn't prevent you from obtaining insurance, but it could be more expensive, and you may have to forgo your no-claims discount. Shop around using comparison sites and speak to your present insurer about getting suitable proof to satisfy your UK insurer.

7. Getting connected

A low credit score or absence from the electoral roll may make it harder to take out a mobile phone or broadband contract. It can also be difficult to engage some suppliers without an all-important UK mobile number – rather a Catch-22 situation.

Solution: Shop around and be prepared to pay a deposit on a new contract. After a short time, certain restrictions will lift and more options will open up. Pay-as-you-go Sim cards can also be a way to bridge the gap until you have a more permanent solution.

> **Shop around. Some banks like expats more than others**

... and the rest

Many people returning to the UK will be coming back to retire closer to friends and family. But if you have been away for years, does that affect your state pension or healthcare?

As a British citizen, you are entitled to use the NHS, although you will need to provide proof that you have returned to the UK to live. Visit your local GP practice to register and complete the necessary paperwork.

When it comes to pension income, if you are already in receipt of your state pension this should continue as normal, and you may be entitled to claim for pension credit once in the UK.

If you have not yet reached retirement age, it's important to check your eligibility for a state pension in the UK – which will depend on national insurance contributions. You could also be entitled to claim a pension from your former country of residence, so you may need to seek expert financial advice to ensure you receive the correct amount when the time comes.

If you have taken citizenship of the country you've been living in, it is likely that you have retained your British citizenship and now have "dual citizenship". This will not affect your entitlement to live in the UK. If you had to renounce your British citizenship to obtain citizenship for another country, you have the right to resume your British citizenship, provided that this is the first time you have applied to do so. Visit gov.uk for more information.

'THE TIMING OF YOUR MOVE CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE'

As a financial adviser, Andrew Lumley-Holmes thought he had spotted most of the potential problems when he moved back to England in 2021. Lumley-Holmes, 43, had been living in Cyprus for 14 years with his wife and two young children.

"We decided to rent at first but several estate agents refused to deal with us because we were non-resident. With a saturated rental market, they were not willing to put in the additional effort involved in settling someone from abroad," he said. The family got around this by contacting smaller agencies that would do digital viewings.

Lumley-Holmes, who now lives in York, was also unable to carry over his no-claims discount from his Cypriot car insurance policy. "Apparently, Cyprus does not register data on the EU system, so we weren't able to use our no-claims," he said.

Because he wanted to buy a property eventually, Lumley-Holmes quickly worked on building up his credit score after moving.

"I took out a credit card and paid it off in full each month. I also registered my rental payments with a credit agency using the Rental Exchange Initiative," he said. The initiative, which is the brainchild of the credit agency Experian and the Big Issue newspaper, enables renters to have their payment history incorporated into their credit records, which may help to support an application for credit at a later stage.

His biggest tip to anyone looking to return to the UK from overseas is to seek tax advice. "The timing of your move can make a great deal of difference to the taxes you pay both in the UK and the country you are moving from," he said. "Good financial planning advice is essential."


Andrew Lumley-Holmes and his family

Savers suffer: 164 rates already cut — time to grab a deal

George Nixon

Savings rates have started to tumble as banks and building societies react to the Bank of England's decision to cut its base rate from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent.

Since the announcement on August 1, 164 savings accounts have been cut or replaced by newer versions paying up to 0.86 percentage points less, the comparison site Savings Champion said.

A week ago the best easy-access account paid 5.04 per cent from Oxbury Bank, but the top paying account is now 5 per cent from Principality Building Society. Meanwhile, the best one-year bond has fallen from 5.4 per cent to 5.25 per cent after Union Bank of India cut its rate.

The best two-year deal has dropped from 5 per cent with RCI Bank to 4.91 per cent with Birmingham Bank. The best five-year deal is now 4.51 per cent with Birmingham Bank, down from 4.56 per cent with Hodge Bank.

The biggest cuts came from Shawbrook Bank, which dropped the rate on its two-year cash Isa by 0.86 percentage points, from 4.64 per cent to 3.78 per cent last Tuesday. It also reduced the rate on its three-year cash Isa by 0.79 percentage points from 4.48 per cent to 3.69 per cent on Wednesday.

GB Bank has cut the rate on its two-year bond, which is available through the savings platform Raisin UK, by 0.55 percentage points from 5 per cent to 4.45 per cent over the past week.

More cuts are sure to follow. Banks are already contacting customers to tell them their rates will be reduced this month. The challenger bank Monzo, for example, is reducing the interest it pays on its easy-access account and cash Isa by 0.25 percentage points to 3.85 per cent from August 20.

Anna Bowes, a co-founder of Savings Champion, said: "Banks are usually quick to follow a base rate cut by reducing savings rates so I shouldn't be surprised, but I am gobsmacked by just how many savings rate cuts there have already been.

"It really feels like the banks have been waiting all year for an opportunity to cut rates to the extent they have done, and there is likely to be more to come."

Easy-access accounts and cash Isas typically follow the Bank rate so savers with these accounts are usually the first to be affected by a rate cut – your bank should be in touch if this is the case. But just 28 of the reductions so far have been to these accounts.

Most cuts have instead been focused on fixed-rate deals. If you are already locked into a fixed rate, however, this will not change for the agreed term.

Kevin Mountford, the co-founder of Raisin UK, said some banks may have been caught out by the surprise cut. Many had expected the first base rate cut to come in September.

Now there are predictions that the base rate could fall lower in the future than had previously been expected and this could have a further effect on savings deals as banks start to price this in.

"There are still one-year bonds paying more than 5 per cent and these are still great value to savers," Mountford said.

But with the top deals unlikely to last, those who want to secure a fixed rate are best advised to act quickly.

What about mortgages?

It has been a better week for borrowers. So far, 32 lenders have reduced fixed mortgage rates since the Bank's decision, according to the broker L&C. A combination of fierce competition in the market and expectations that the base rate will be cut further in the future has driven more rates below 4 per cent.

The lowest five-year fixed rate is now 3.84 per cent from Barclays, beating a 3.97 per cent deal from NatWest a week ago – the lowest rates since the end of January.

The Barclays deal, which has a £899 fee and is available for homebuyers at up to 60 per cent loan-to-value, would save someone with a £200,000, 25-year mortgage £14 a month compared with the NatWest rate. HSBC also released a 3.95 per cent five-year fix last Wednesday.

The cheapest two-year deal is now 4.22 per cent from Barclays, down from 4.42 per cent last week from the same bank. The reduction in the deal, which also has a £899 fee, would cut repayments on a £200,000 25-year loan by £23 a month.

Those on their lender's standard variable rate (SVR) will be the first to feel the positive effects of rate cuts. Banks including Halifax, Nationwide Building Society, NatWest and Virgin Money have announced they will cut their SVR by 0.25 percentage points.

However, the SVR, which is the rate to which you are automatically moved when your deal ends, is usually the most expensive so it is rarely advisable to stick with it. The most expensive SVR is 9.73 per cent from Aldermore.

Aaron Strutt from the mortgage broker Trinity Financial said: "It is good news for borrowers that the banks and building societies are lowering their rates. Five-year fixed rates in particular are looking much better value for money. Lenders are still fighting it out for business. So if you are on the hunt for a mortgage it really does pay to shop around at the moment."

Experts say that mortgage rates could fall further from here – the market has been relatively quiet this year as high rates have priced out some borrowers. However, it may be best to hedge your bets by locking in a deal early. Mortgage offers usually last for six months, so secure a rate now and swap it for a cheaper deal in the future if rates do continue to fall.

THE BIGGEST RATE CUTS

Savings changes since the Bank of England base rate cut

Bank	Account	Old rate	New rate	Reduction
Shawbrook Bank	2-year fixed-rate Isa	4.64%	3.78%	−0.86%
Shawbrook Bank	3-year fixed-rate Isa	4.48%	3.69%	−0.79%
GB Bank	2-year fixed-rate bond	5%	4.45%	−0.55%
Shawbrook Bank	5-year fixed-rate Isa	4.14%	3.61%	−0.53%
Shawbrook Bank	3-year fixed-rate bond	4.73%	4.2%	−0.53%
Tandem Bank	18-month fixed-rate bond	4.80%	4.4%	−0.4%
Castle Trust Bank	120-day notice account	4.90%	4.5%	−0.4%
Shawbrook Bank	7-year fixed-rate bond	4%	3.62%	−0.38%
Flagstone	Easy-access account (Provided by SmartSave)	5.07%	4.7%	−0.37%
RCI Bank	3-year fixed-rate bond	4.76%	4.4%	−0.36%

Source: Savings Champion

Cherry Reynard

Small is beautiful: why I think Mighty Mouse shares could make a big noise



Not so long ago, smaller companies were the natural choice for an investor in pursuit of growth. Fast-growing, dynamic, they were petite but packed a punch – the investment equivalent of Mighty Mouse.

The astonishing performance of a handful of mega-cap technology stocks has derailed that view, while economic and financial market conditions have tended to conspire against the little guy. However, after a couple of false starts, small may be mighty once again.

Over the long term, smaller companies have tended to be a good place to invest. Since 1955, small caps have outperformed larger UK companies by almost 3 per cent a year on average, according to the investment advice firm Deutsche Numis. Through the magic power of compounding, a small cap investment would now be worth 400 times its original investment, while a larger company investment would be worth a meagre 60 times.

However, not all of us have 70 years to invest, and more recently, the performance of UK small caps has been grim. Investors in the average small-cap fund have seen a £10,000 investment dwindle to £8,550. Over the past three years, the amount invested in UK small-cap funds has gone from £19.2 billion to £10.7 billion. The stockbroker Peel Hunt warned that the FTSE Small Cap index could cease to exist by 2028 if the present levels of takeovers and buybacks persist and there is no revival in the initial public offering market.

So why take the risk on small caps today? Well, several factors that have left UK smaller companies in the doldrums may be about to change. And when smaller companies turn, they tend to turn quickly and with feeling. The MSCI UK Small Cap index lost about 12 per cent in 2011, but delivered 30 per cent and 37 per cent in the subsequent two years. In 2018 it dropped 15 per cent, only to rise 30 per cent in 2019. Recently, UK small cap has taken a hit, but the bounce hasn't happened … yet.

Three factors have knocked smaller companies. First, they have been hurt by rising interest rates. There is a lingering assumption that higher borrowing costs equals bad news for the UK's smaller business
es. It isn't necessarily true – many listed companies don't have a lot of debt and fund managers tend to pick the ones with good balance sheets – but nevertheless, the impression remains and the sector tends to sell down.



Then there's the fact that the fortunes of smaller UK companies are viewed as having closer ties to the UK's economy than larger ones. Again, it's not necessarily true – there are plenty of small companies that generate their revenues abroad, but investors haven't really cared, particularly when there was some juicy AI stock to get stuck into.

Finally, there's the thorny issue of sentiment. Smaller companies have been the whipping boy for a broader disgruntlement with the UK stock market. This means investors have overlooked their charms and focused heavily on their faults.

In the meantime, the small companies haven't had that bad a time at all. The sector is full of examples of businesses doing great things. Stuart Widdowson, the co-manager of Odyssean Investment Trust, points to the distributor Essentra, where the management team has done a great job of re-engineering the business. Other small-caps firing on all cylinders include the respiratory equipment maker Avon Protection, the utilities company Telecom Plus and the energy business Yu Group. There are, of course, pockets of weakness, but with 1,300 or so to choose from, they are easily avoided.

Small-cap fund managers have been telling anyone who'll listen that the sector is a bargain and there is a yawning gap between the market's view and the reality for small-cap businesses. This seems to stand up to independent scrutiny. As earnings have improved and share prices have stayed the same, the sector has looked cheaper and cheaper. Not only are they cheap on measures such as price to earnings, but they also pay a decent income. Companies in the FTSE SmallCap index yield an average of 4 per cent – that's higher than you get in the average stodgy old FTSE 100 company (3.7 per cent), with stronger growth on top.

Naysayers might argue that they've been cheap for a while, but add in an interest rate cut, an improvement in the economic climate, and better sentiment towards the UK after a decisive election result, and it's a potent brew for stronger performance from smaller companies. Merger and acquisition activity may also be a factor as international companies swoop in to pick up small caps.

The sector has battled with persistent outflows, but this also appears to be changing. Widdowson said: "The latest data we have seen suggests that net flows into UK Smaller Company funds were neutral in May and potentially June. What is notable is the significant increase in flows into Vanguard's FTSE 250 passive fund since the end of March." This shows growing investor comfort with non-FTSE 100 investments.

Graham Ashby, the UK All Cap fund manager at Schroders, agrees: "Sentiment towards UK mid- and small-cap stocks has markedly improved in recent weeks, boosted by the result in the election and a continued rally in sterling against the US dollar and euro. Total returns over the past three months from the FTSE Mid-250 Index and FTSE Small Cap Index are more than twice that of the FTSE 100 Index."

It is early days, but any reversal of sentiment could make a meaningful difference. Fewer small-cap shares are traded, which exaggerates share price movements in both directions. James Klempster from the fund group Liontrust said: "Small caps were sold off significantly during the interest rate-rising cycle and are therefore likely to be notable beneficiaries as that trend starts to reverse. However, at a simple level, if buyers and sellers are evenly matched, all you need is one additional buyer for a company's fortunes to improve."

But where to buy? Not all small companies funds are created equal. Investors can choose small, very small or extremely small; they can go for growth or income, safe or punchy. Equally, the right option for the past three years may not be the best option for the recovery.

As for "safe" options, I've held the Aberforth Smaller Companies trust for more than a decade. It's paid a decent dividend (2.6 per cent at present) and has spared me some of the sector's heart-stopping volatility. In 2022, the worst year for UK small-cap performance, it dropped 10 per cent, compared with 25.2 per cent for the IA UK Smaller Companies sector. I'd rather it hadn't dropped at all, of course, but I can live with it. Odyssean, which invests in larger, but still small companies, has a similar return profile.

Aberforth tends to invest in well-established businesses such as the legal publisher Wilmington, the retirement specialist Just Group, and the trading platform CMC Markets, while Odyssean invests in the chemicals group Elementis, the printing company Xaar, and the electrical engineer XP Power. These are steadier options.

Adrenaline junkies might want to look at bombed-out micro caps, which are usually defined as companies with a market value from £20 million up to £250 million. They are volatile, of course, but also interesting, exciting and coming from a position of significant weakness. Premier Miton, Liontrust, Octopus, Marlborough and Gresham House all have funds in this area, with Liontrust's leading the pack over one and three years.

The investment trust sector is also ripe for re-examination, with many trusts trading on a discount, where their share price is less than the underlying value of their assets. If a recovery materialises, investors can get the double whammy of a narrowing of the discount and an improvement in the share prices of the underlying assets. Abrdn UK Smaller Companies Growth, Montanaro UK Smaller Companies and BlackRock Throgmorton trusts may be worth a look.

A final thought. An investment in small caps may be an act of patriotism. Gervais Williams, the fund manager on the Premier Miton UK MicroCap trust, said: "There has been a move to encourage local investors to invest more in UK companies. That pattern is likely to accelerate with Labour in power. That's good news because I think there are some good returns to be made, but also because you help generate more employment, more productivity, more tax take, so it's socially useful."

There: you can make money and do your bit for the UK economy all in one go.

Ian Cowie is away

> **If you think about it, investment in small caps may be an act of patriotism**

ST DIGITAL

Read a breakdown of Ian Cowie's "forever fund"
thesundaytimes.com/cowieholdings

My state pension was being underpaid by £2,400 a year

Lily Russell-Jones

Frances Kerr spent six months fighting for about £2,400 a year to be added to her state pension.

Kerr, 66, started receiving the new state pension in December and got the full amount of £221.20 a week. But because her husband died in 2011 aged 72, she knew she might be entitled to inherit part of his state pension too.

"My mum got some extra money after my dad died and my sister did after her husband died, so I thought I might be entitled to something extra too," Kerr said. "But the system is awful to deal with. I would phone up and get passed between different departments. It felt like I was going round in circles."

Kerr, a former carer from Harrow in northwest London, contacted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January and was told to send a copy of her marriage certificate. It took six weeks for this to be uploaded to the DWP system. In March, Kerr was told she was not entitled to inherit any of her husband's state pension.

But Kerr suspected this was wrong. She contacted Steve Webb, a former pensions minister and a partner at the consultancy Lane, Clark and Peacock (LCP), who spoke to the DWP on her behalf. In June she was told her state pension payments would go up to £268 a week – £47 of which had been inherited from her husband, Nathaniel.

"I'm glad I'm getting the extra money, but it was so confusing. They said I wasn't entitled to inherit anything and then suddenly I was. I still don't know how they worked it out," Kerr said.

Thousands of people who have lost a spouse could be in the same position, according to LCP. About 68,000 widows and widowers start getting the state pension each year and Webb said the DWP should investigate how many are being underpaid. "I've seen multiple cases in the past few months where the DWP has failed to automatically add any inherited state pension," he said.

Hundreds of thousands of people are thought to have been underpaid their state pension. The DWP estimates that 210,000 people were underpaid by £1.3 billion because of gaps in their national insurance record from time spent caring or looking after children. An additional 165,000 people were underpaid by about £1.2 billion because of DWP errors.

Married women, widows and those over the age of 80 who get the old state pension are most likely to be affected. The DWP is in the process of identifying people who were underpaid and most should get what they are owed automatically. About £572 million was paid out between January 2021 and February 2024.



Frances Kerr should have inherited some of her husband's pension automatically, but it took months to sort out

You may be able to inherit some of your spouse or civil partner's state pension – even if they died before they started to claim it. If they reached state pension age before April 2016, when the new state pension was introduced, or would have done so had they lived longer, then you can normally inherit some of their additional state pension. You may also qualify if your partner died before April 2016 even if they would have reached state pension age later.

The old state pension was made up of two parts. The basic state pension, which pays up to £169.50 a week for the 2024-25 tax year, and the additional state pension, which is based on your earnings and national insurance contributions.

You can inherit some or all of this additional part – the amount you can get will depend on when your partner died and their date of birth.

If your partner died before October 6, 2002, you can inherit all of their additional state pension. If they died on or after this date you can still get all of it if they were a man born on October 5, 1937, or before, or a woman born on October 5, 1942, or before. If they were born later you get less – with the amount falling gradually to 50 per cent if they were a man born after October 6, 1945, or woman born after July 6, 1950.

If your partner reached state pension age after April 2016 you may still be able to inherit part of their pension. People who would have been entitled to a large additional state pension under the old pension system can get a "protected payment", which is paid on top of their new state pension. You can inherit half of a protected payment.

You cannot normally inherit your late partner's state pension if you remarry or form a new civil partnership before you reach state pension age.

You can call the Pensions Service to check whether you are entitled to an inherited pension on 0800 731 0469. LCP has created an online tool at lcp.com to help you check if you are due to inherit anything from a deceased partner's state pension.

The DWP said: We want to ensure pensioners receive all the support to which they are entitled and we have a tool to help them understand what state pension they can inherit. Delays can occur to a customer's state pension award when not all the information we need is provided. In these cases, we will make an award based on the customer's own national insurance record until we have the required information. Once we have the necessary documentation, we will revise the customer's claim as soon as possible."

The DWP's tool for assessing your eligibility to inherit a state pension is at gov.uk/state-pension-through-partner.

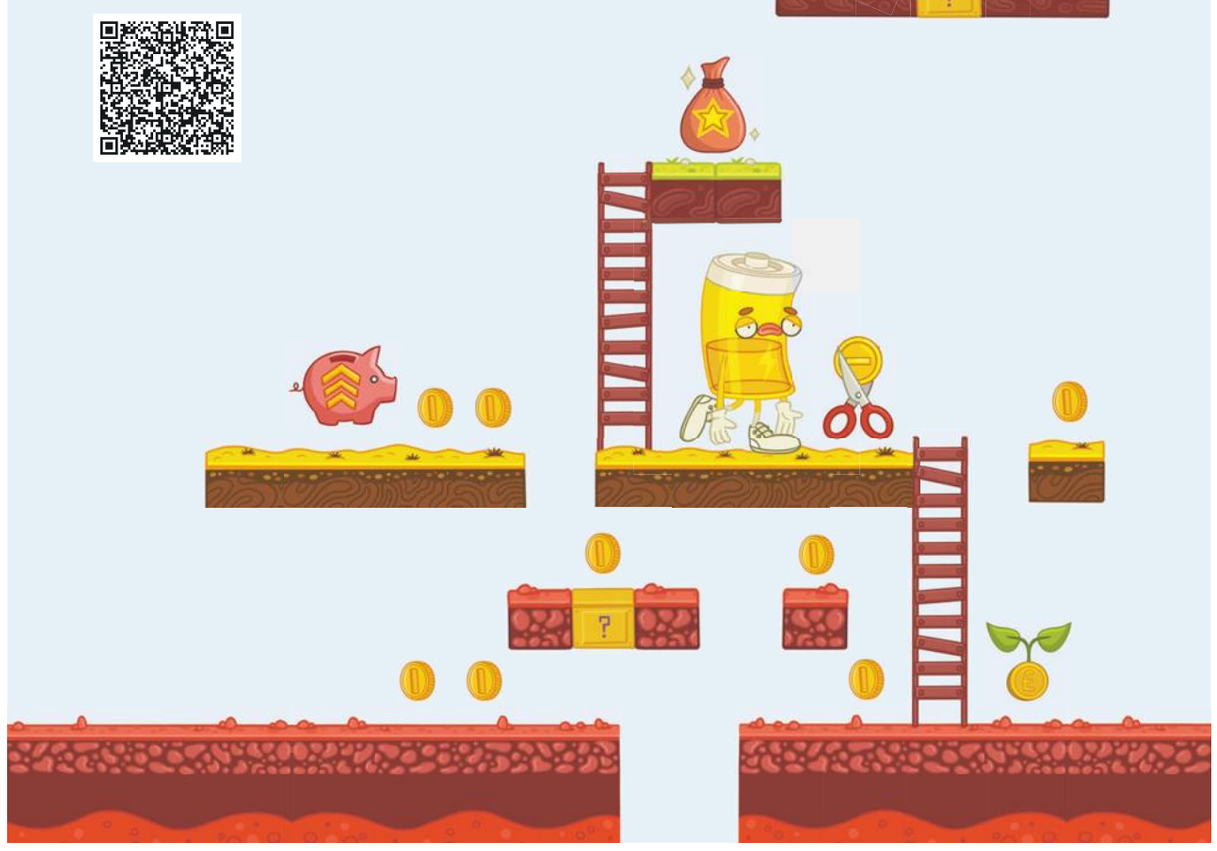
THE TIMES money mentor

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MONEY

Eddie Jordan sues HSBC over £5m loss

The former F1 owner says the bank encouraged him to invest a £47 million loan in a fund it called 'low risk', says *Ali Hussain*

The former Formula 1 boss Eddie Jordan is suing HSBC for allegedly encouraging him to borrow £47 million to invest in a "low-risk" fund that lost him £5 million.

Jordan's investment company, Pendragon Investment Holdings, claims that advisers at HSBC's private bank put pressure on it to invest in the HSBC GIF Global Credit Floating Rate bond fund between 2019 and 2023. The fund was presented as having only a 1 per cent chance of loss in the worst-case scenario.

Jordan did not realise that the fund invested in high-risk sectors including the Chinese property market as well as in Zimbabwe, Russia and Turkey.

The fund lost about 10 per cent of its value when it matured at the end of last year. Meanwhile, HSBC made £4.2 million in management fees and interest on Jordan's loan, which was used to make the investment.

The case, which was brought to the High Court in London last month, exposes the problem of financial advisers recommending complex products that are marketed as low risk but can be much more volatile than expected.

Complaints regarding mis-selling and the suitability of financial advice increased from 570 in the 2021-22 financial year to 884 in 2022-23, according to analysis of data from the Financial Ombudsman Service by the firm Oxford Risk. The ombudsman found in favour of the complainant in 62 per cent of cases in 2022-23, up from 49 per cent the previous year.

Oxford Risk expects the number of complaints to have reached a record high in the past tax year after tougher rules protecting consumers were introduced by the regulator, known as the "consumer duty".

The Jordan case also highlights the problem of investing in products recommended by an adviser tied to a particular firm. It is best to use an independent financial adviser who can consider products from a wide range of companies.

Jordan's claim

Jordan has been a customer of HSBC Private Bank since 2009. In May 2019 the bank provided a presentation to Pendragon, recommending an investment in the HSBC GIF Global Credit Floating Rate bond fund. It invested in bonds issued by companies around the world – these bonds are effectively IOUs, where a company borrows money from investors for a set period, paying them a regular income and returning their money at the end. They are generally regarded as being less risky to invest in than company shares.

The HSBC fund had a minimum investment of £5,000 and was presented as "low risk", according to court papers seen by Money. The four-year investment would pay an annual income of about 5.25 per cent with charges of 0.33 per cent a year, with the original investment returned on maturity.

Before agreeing to invest, Pendragon emphasised that it would tolerate a loss of only 1 per cent. HSBC said the primary objective of the fund was "capital preservation". In conversations and emails to Pendragon around June 2019, HSBC said the fund could "theoretically lose 0.35 per cent" and in a "stressed scenario", such as the 2008 financial crisis, this could increase to 0.98 per cent. Losses beyond 1 per cent would not occur, it said.

Pendragon had a so-called Lombard loans facility with HSBC's private bank. This is a type of loan offered to wealthy people, which is secured against their liquid assets – typically shares and bonds.

Warning that the investment was at risk of being "oversubscribed", HSBC recommended that Pendragon borrow £66.7 million to make the investment.

Jordan's company ended up investing £46.9 million. HSBC would earn £1.3 million in management fees on this investment over four years plus £2.9 million in interest on the loan it provided to make the investment.

It later turned out the investment was not oversubscribed. While the fund was open to all investors, the last factsheet from October 2023 shows it had $261.7 million (£206.2 million) invested, suggesting Jordan's investment made up almost a quarter of its assets.

Pendragon claims that HSBC's presentation and emails, which did not mention the fund's exposure to markets such as Russia, Turkey and Zimbabwe, provided "false" statements and the bank had "no reasonable grounds for believing them and/or was negligent in making them".

As the fund started to lose value, Pendragon made repeated inquiries about its performance, particularly during the Covid outbreak in 2020.

HSBC provided assurances, including saying that the losses were due to a "mathematical" error that would be rectified. It urged Pendragon to stick with the investment until maturity and warned that an early exit would result in a 0.35 per cent penalty.

According to court papers, the fund was down 10 per cent between June 2019 and June 2023. By contrast, a "higher risk" emerging market fund, the Blackrock Emerging Bond ETF, was down 2 per cent over the same period, according to a submission by Pendragon in court.

Pendragon argues that if HSBC had acted with "reasonable care and skill", it would have advised Pendragon to close the investment around September 2019, when there was some significant loss of capital, or again in February 2020, when the risks of Covid became clear. Had the investment been closed at that point, its losses would have been about 1 per cent.

Jordan is seeking £4.94 million from the bank, which is the difference between what the bond was worth at maturity and what he invested. The claim discounts the income Jordan made from the bond, which was more than offset by the interest and charges he paid to HSBC.

HSBC declined to comment. It has 14 days to respond to the claims lodged in court. A request for comment was also made to lawyers representing Pendragon as well as to Jordan.

Paul Angell from the investment platform AJ Bell said: "While most investors are unlikely to be solicited into a fund such as this, it is a good warning that you should never feel pressured to make an investment, especially ones you do not understand. Recommended buy lists provided by reputable investment firms can be a good way for investors to narrow the field. These lists typically account for the calibre of management teams, past performance, price and fund size."

A good financial adviser will never pressure you to make an investment decision quickly. Always ask about the details of a product, its charges and the risks. You should also agree the fee the adviser will take before investing.

Your adviser should also provide you with a suitability letter, which is a regulatory requirement. This sets out the advice you received and the reasons for the recommendations made. If you disagree with the reasoning or do not understand, ask more questions.

If you use a discretionary fund management service, where an adviser makes investment decisions on your behalf, make sure you are happy with the level of risk you have asked them to take. This is normally determined through questionnaires and interviews.



Eddie Jordan was told his investment would not lose more than 1 per cent even in a worst-case scenario

Best Buys

THE TIMES money mentor

CURRENT ACCOUNTS

CREDIT INTEREST

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Reward	Balance (for reward)	Contact
Nationwide	FlexDirect	None	5%	–	0800 30 20 10
Kroo Bank	Current Account	None	4.1%	–	via app
Santander	Edge Up	£5 a month	3.5%	–	0330 9 123 123

OVERDRAFTS *

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Interest rate[1]	0% overdraft limit	Contact
Starling Bank	Current Account	None	15%	£0	0207 930 4450
First Direct	1st Account	None	39.9%	£250	0345 600 2424
Virgin Money	M Plus Account	None	19.9%	£0	0800 678 3654

[1] Equivalent annual rate.
* Based on overdraft of £500 for 7 days a month.
Some accounts require minimum funding/direct debits to open or receive rates shown.
Source: moneyfacts.co.uk

CREDIT CARDS

INTRODUCTORY RATES

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	APR[1]	Contact
Barclaycard	Platinum Balance Transfer	0% for 21 months	24.9%	0800 151 0900
MBNA	Dual 0% Transfer and Purc	0% for 21 months	24.94%	0345 606 2062
HSBC	Purchase Plus	0% for 20 months	24.9%	0800 328 1370

BALANCE TRANSFERS

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	Transfer fee[2]	APR[1]	Contact
Barclaycard	Platinum Balance Transfer	0% for 28 months	3.45%	24.9%	0800 151 0900
Tesco Bank	Balance Transfer	0% for 27 months	2.95%	24.9%	0345 300 4278
Lloyds Bank	Long 0% Balance Transfer	0% for 27 months	3.2%	24.9%	0345 606 2172

CASHBACK CARDS

Provider	Card type	APR[1]	Cashback	Contact
American Express	Cashback Everyday Card	31.0%	0.5%-1%. Intro 5% for 3 months	0800 917 8047
Bank of Scotland	Credit Card	10.94%	0.25%	0800 328 5984
MBNA	Platinum	13.94%	0.25%	0345 606 2062

[1] APR = annual percentage rate, dependent on credit rating. [2] Fee charged on the amount of each balance transfer during the introductory period.
Source: moneyfacts.co.uk

FOREIGN CURRENCY

Interbank rates at 5pm on Friday, which show where the market is trading. They are not indicative of the rate you could get.

EURO GBP>EUR **1.17**

USA GBP>USD **1.28**

TURKEY GBP>TRY **42.76**

AUSTRALIA GBP>AUD **1.94**

MORTGAGES

2-YEAR FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
First Direct	4.29%	Fixed for 2 years	40%	£490	PV	0800 48 24 48
Coventry BS	4.93%	Fixed to 28.02.27	20%	£0	PV	0800 121 8899
First Direct	5.33%	Fixed for 2 years	10%	£490	PV	0800 48 24 48

3-YEAR FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Barclays	3.84%	Fixed to 30.09.29	40%	£899	PV	0333 202 7580
Coventry BS	4.44%	Fixed to 28.02.30	20%	£0	PV	0800 121 8899
Virgin Money	4.76%	Fixed to 01.12.29	10%	£995	PA	0345 605 0500

LONG-TERM FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
First Direct	4.64%	Fixed for 10 years	40%	£490	PV	0800 48 24 48
First Direct	4.79%	Fixed for 10 years	20%	£490	PV	0800 48 24 48
Nationwide BS	5.40%	Fixed for 10 years	10%	£499	PV	0333 060 03 25

TRACKERS*/DISCOUNTS

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Barclays	5.15%	Tracker + 0.15% for 2 years	40%	£999	PV	0333 202 7580
Leek BS	4.99%	3.25% disc for 2 years	20%	£995	PV	0808 169 6680
Loughborough	5.45%	2.49% disc for 2 years	10%	£0	V	01509 610707

FIRST-TIME BUYER

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Hanley BS	5.59%	2.9% disc for 2 years	5%	£0	BV	01782 255000
West Bromwich BS	5.49%	Fixed to 31.12.27	5%	£499	PV	0800 298 0008
Monmouthshire BS	5.15%	Fixed for 5 years	5%	£1,149	P	0845 888 8000

BUY TO LET

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
The Mortgage Works	5.09%	Fixed to 30.09.26	25%	£0		0345 607 3021
The Mortgage Works	3.59%	Fixed to 30.09.26	25%	3%		0345 607 3021
The Mortgage Works	3.84%	Fixed to 30.09.29	25%	3%		0345 607 3021

Early repayment charge applies unless otherwise stated. * Most deals track Bank of England base rate.
C = £500 cashback for purchases; E = No early repayment charge; F = £500 cashback for first-time buyers; H = Help to Buy;
L = Free legal work for remortgages; M = £300 cashback for purchases; N = £250 cash back for purchases; O = £250 cash back;
P = Purchases only; R - Free legal work and valuation for remortgages; S = Remortgage only; V = Free valuation
Source: landc.co.uk — 0800 373 300

SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

INSTANT ACCESS

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Prosper	Hampshire Trust - Easy Access	£20,000	4.91%	prosper.co.uk
Close Brothers	Easy Access	£10,000	4.9%	closesavings.co.uk
Raisin UK	UBL UK - High Saver Easy Access	£10,000	4.87%	raisin.co.uk

NOTICE ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Notice period	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Prosper	Santander Int - 365 Day Notice Tracker	365 days	£20,000	5.5%	prosper.co.uk
Prosper	Santander Int - 185 Day Notice Tracker	185 days	£20,000	5.35%	prosper.co.uk
Hinckley & Rugby BS	180 Day Notice	180 days	£2,500	5.25%	hrbs.co.uk

FIXED-RATE BONDS

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Prosper	Hampshire Trust - 5 Year Fixed Term	5 years	£20,000	4.49%	prosper.co.uk
Secure Trust Bank	5 Year Fixed Rate Bond	5 years	£1,000	4.4%	securetrustbank.com
United Trust Bank	5 Year Personal Deposit Bond	5 years	£5,000	4.35%	utbank.co.uk

DEALS ARE LISTED ONLY IF THEY ARE COVERED BY THE UK FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPENSATION SCHEME (FSCS) OR A EUROPEAN EQUIVALENT
*MUST HOLD A CURRENT ACCOUNT WITH THE PROVIDER
Source: savingschampion.co.uk — 0808 178 5354

CASH ISAs

INSTANT ACCESS

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest	Transfers in	Contact
Marsden	Online Cash ISA	£5,000	5.05%	Yes	themarsden.co.uk
Cynergy Bank	Online ISA	£1	4.82%	Yes	cynergybank.co.uk

FIXED RATE

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Rate	Transfers in	Contact
Cynergy Bank	1 Year Fixed Rate Isa	1 year	£500	4.85%	Yes	cynergybank.co.uk
UBL UK	5 Year Fixed Rate Cash ISA	2 years	£2,000	4.26%	Yes	ukbluk.com

CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Rate type	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Saffron BS	Children's Regular Saver V	Variable	£5	5.8%	branch only
Halifax	Kid's Monthly Saver F	Fixed	£10	5.5%	halifax.co.uk
Coventry BS	Young Saver V	Variable	£1	5.25%	branch only

[1] Interest paid on balances between £1,500 and £2,000

JUNIOR ISAs

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Rate	Contact
Coventry BS	Junior Cash Isa	£1	4.95%	Variable	coventrybuildingsociety.co.uk
Nottingham BS	Junior Isa	£1	4.85%	Variable	branch only
Loughborough	Junior Isa	£1	4.80%	Variable	branch only

WHAT'S TRENDING

THE TOP FIVE ARTICLES ON TIMES MONEY MENTOR THIS WEEK

Our sister website Times Money Mentor has guides, tools and best buys to help you to manage your finances. Here's what you have been looking at:

1 Why are petrol prices so high?
A new report into petrol prices has confirmed motorists' suspicions that they're being ripped off. The consumer rights expert Martyn James explains how to compare prices and tackles the urban myth that supermarket fuel is bad for your car.

2 How to find your lost money
About £82 billion of unclaimed assets lie in forgotten pensions and bank and investment accounts, affecting 20 million people in the UK. We help you find lost savings.

3 Best switching bonuses
Looking for a new account? One switching deal pays you up to £190 while another high street name gives a £175 cash incentive to entice new customers. We've rounded up the details, plus found bank accounts with ongoing rewards.

4 Cyber insurance explained
Half the businesses in the UK have had a cyber-attack in the last 12 months. We look at a new type of insurance that covers them.

5 How can I invest in London property?
Office, retail and industrial buildings across the capital offer the twin benefit of capital appreciation and an income — if you know how to go about it.

thetimes.co.uk/money-mentor

MONEY

British Gas left my 94-year-old neighbour in tears over a bill she had already paid

QUESTION OF MONEY
JILL INSLEY



I dropped in to visit my 94-year-old neighbour two weeks ago to find her in floods of tears and at a loss as to what to do about a threatening letter she had received from British Gas. The letter said that if the company didn't hear from her soon about her outstanding bill it would pass her details to a debt-collection agency.

My neighbour had posted a cheque to British Gas on June 13 for full payment of the amount due and received a letter back saying the date was wrong on it, so she sent another one on June 26 by post. On July 9 she received the threatening letter, which is dated July 4.

At 94, my neighbour does not use the internet and she is very deaf so cannot use the phone to explain complex situations. She was going to write another cheque on the assumption that the second cheque also had something wrong with it. I decided to try to help and phoned the British Gas number on the letter while I was with her. On getting through I had to explain everything to my neighbour in a very loud voice so she could hear me and confirm I had her authority to deal directly with British Gas on her behalf.

I quickly discovered that British Gas had indeed processed her second cheque. It received payment in full on July 2 – a full two days before it sent the threatening letter.

I explained the negative effect the letter was having on my neighbour and that I could not understand how British Gas's systems allowed the threatening letter to be sent. The reasons I was given were anything but reassuring, so I requested that an official complaint be raised on her behalf. I was told I would receive a call on the number I was phoning from, my mobile, within three working days to discuss the case. I haven't received a call and it's now nearly the end of July.

Are you able to do something that will make British Gas management sit up and urgently change the company's processes so this threatening behaviour to our non-internet-using elderly generation is stopped?

Another reader writes

I'm writing to ask if you can help to resolve a long-running issue I have with British Gas.

The problem is that British Gas has the wrong serial number for the energy meter on my account. The consequence of this is that I'm being billed for someone else's energy use, not mine. So far, this has cost me £109.74, which I have paid under threat of debt collection. I'm now in receipt of a further bill for £821.78 (with payment due by July 1, 2024) that is not mine and fully expect the threat of debt collection to be repeated.

The problem started a year ago, when I bought a newly completed barn conversion in June 2023. I knew at that time the energy supplier was British Gas. For a long time, there was no contact from British Gas until the first bill arrived in April 2024 showing the wrong serial number for the installed energy meter. I have a meter reading taken on the day I moved into the property and have taken readings at the end of each month since then.

Over several weeks, I have made repeated attempts (by phone, email and web chat) to get British Gas to correct the meter serial number on my account, all without success. I have also provided several photographs of my energy meter to British Gas but still the issue persists.

Jill replies

I am getting a lot of complaints about British Gas and in several cases it has been quick to send threatening letters about debt collectors. In both the cases above it was clear the readers were aware of a problem and were trying to correct it – in the case of the second reader, repeatedly – so it was completely unnecessary to issue such warnings.

The first reader was lucky to have such a good friend and neighbour who could sort out this mess on her behalf. He set up a direct debit to ensure her energy bills would be paid on time in future. I contacted British Gas and asked for the customer to be put on the priority services register so any further problems could be resolved more easily and sympathetically.

British Gas said that it would write to the customer to apologise for causing her distress and that it was adding a £50 goodwill credit on her account "in recognition of the above, but also that we appreciate she is a longstanding customer and we very much value her".

British Gas's incompetence in sorting out the second problem has cost it a year's worth of electricity. It told me that the reader's problem started when the developer who converted the barn registered an incorrect meter serial number against the reader's new-build property on the national database. British Gas then exacerbated the problem by failing to send the reader any bills for nine months.

When it finally did send a bill to the property in April 2024 for £109.74, it was addressed to "the occupier", even though British Gas admits the reader informed it he had moved in during June 2023.

It has finally arranged for the industry database of meters to be updated with the correct details. The recent bill for £821.78 has been cancelled and it has adjusted the reader's account so that he starts being billed from June 27 this year. British Gas has wiped out a whole year's worth of electricity bills, worth £827.

The reader thought this was generous and more than he expected, but said: "I still think British Gas could have done more sooner to resolve my complaint, so it won't surprise you to learn that I'm considering switching my energy supplier."



> **It sent a threatening letter two days after she had paid her energy bill**

CAN WE HELP YOU?

Please email your questions to Jill Insley at questionofmoney@sunday-times.co.uk or write to Question of Money, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF. Please send only copies of original documents. Letters should be exclusive to The Sunday Times. Advice is offered without legal responsibility. We regret Jill cannot reply to everyone who contacts her.

My pension shrank by £15k and Phoenix won't tell me why

I started a pension with Britannic Assurance in approximately 1985. After various takeovers and mergers, it is now administered by Phoenix Life. As I have now retired, with advice from an independent financial adviser, I decided to move this pension into one that facilitated drawdown.

Phoenix told me on January 10, the day I requested the transfer, that the pension was valued at £185,766. Six weeks later (the transfer was expected to take two weeks) on February 23 it said the value was £170,052. During this time markets and pension funds increased about 4 per cent.

I have asked Phoenix for an explanation of why my fund had been devalued along with its calculations. It has repeatedly ignored this request. As my financial adviser said in an email to me: "I do find it incredible that Phoenix has not been able to construct a technical response to quite basic questions over the last six months."

Phoenix has been very difficult to contact and many of the numbers it sends me are either discontinued or never answered. At no time during any communications has it complied with its stated time pledges, whether it be the acknowledgment of my letters, complaint responses or calls.

Phoenix has sent further valuations, but these come from a different department, which gives options for receiving the pension along with the suggestion of consulting an independent financial adviser. This I had done nearly a year ago, as Phoenix knows from his communications with the company and the form that he completed.

As far as I know, the transfer value is still £170,052. At least that is the sum my new investment platform at Aviva is expecting to receive.

I am now 75 years old and have contacted the Financial Ombudsman, but it tells me that its investigations won't commence for two months. In the meantime, my pension pot i with Phoenix as cash. I am getting really troubled by this delay as, at my age, I need to get my financial affairs in order.

Jill replies

Phoenix told me you have a deferred annuity pension contract designed to provide a guaranteed minimum annuity on a set date. As such, it does not have a fund value, but because you had arranged to draw your pension many years after the original pension maturity date, the guaranteed minimum annuity had increased from £2,000 to £13,748 a year. As you wanted to transfer your pension to Aviva, Phoenix had to calculate how much the annuity – worth £13,748 a year – would have cost to provide, even though you prefer the idea of pension drawdown.

The cost of providing an annuity can be impacted by fluctuating interest rates – the higher the interest rate, the lower the fund value, and vice versa. However, the Bank of England base rate was 5.25 per cent in January and stayed at that level until last month, when it dropped by 0.25 per cent, so it clearly wasn't fluctuating interest rates that were causing your problem.

Phoenix told me the value of £185,766 you were given in January was incorrect and inflated, for which it apologised. It had not been aware of the initial error, and it admitted that its responses to further queries were not "as timely as they should have been".

Phoenix is still investigating how the original error happened and is awaiting information from Aviva to enable it to make good any shortfall you have suffered as a result of the delay. But it has now transferred £184,000 to Aviva on your behalf and is also paying you £1,300 in compensation – not far short of the figure it told you that you were due back in January.

Ask the experts
I have a small pension, how can I boost it?



TOM SELBY FROM THE INVESTMENT PLATFORM AJ BELL GIVES HIS OPINION

Q I have a county council pension that is due to pay out in August 2025 when I reach 60. I have poor pension provision due to being a carer from the age of 26 and working part time for most of my working life. It is not a big amount of money and I need to maximise my pension income as best I can. Should I leave it with the council (if that is an option) until I retire at 67 or should I take it out and look to get as good a return on it as possible — and if you recommend the latter, what would you suggest are good options?

A The company you work for will have a big effect on the size of your pension pot (as revealed on page 9). As the pension you have built up was while working for the council, it is likely to be a local government defined benefit (DB) pension. This means your employer promises to pay you a set income from your normal retirement age, in your case age 60, based on your salary – either your career average or final salary – and the number of years you were a member of the scheme.

Someone in a career average DB scheme that offers 1/60th accrual would be promised 1/60th of their career average salary as a pension for life from their normal retirement age. If their career average salary was £20,000 and they were in the scheme for 30 years, they would be entitled to an inflation-protected pension worth £10,000 a year in retirement (1/60th of £20,000, which is £333.33, multiplied by 30).

You may be able to take your DB pension out directly as a lump sum, but only if it is worth £30,000 or less. You can find out how much it is worth by requesting something called a cash equivalent transfer value from your scheme. This places a pounds and pence value on your promised pension, with the option to then transfer to a defined contribution (DC) arrangement, where you manage your pension pot yourself and what you get is based on what you pay in plus investment growth.

If it is worth more than £30,000 you may still have the option of transferring to a DC arrangement. However, the law says you will need to take regulated financial advice before transferring a fund of this size. And if your adviser thinks transferring is a bad idea and doesn't provide a positive recommendation, you may struggle to find a DC provider willing to accept the transfer.



It's important to remember that transferring a DB pension, even a relatively small one, is a significant financial decision and one you should consider very carefully. These types of pensions have all but vanished in the private sector, in part because of the cost to employers – meaning they are very valuable to those lucky enough to benefit from them. If you transfer to a DC scheme, you will need to take responsibility for investing your money and withdrawing your pot sustainably.

Some DB schemes will allow you to delay taking your promised income and may even provide an uplift in that income in return. This could then help your retirement income, so it's worth speaking to your scheme as soon as possible to find out whether this is an option.

You should also make sure that your state pension affairs are in order. Because you've worked part-time since you were 26 and have spent time caring during that period, you should check your national insurance record to make sure there aren't any gaps. You need a 35-year national insurance record to get the full state pension and at least a ten-year record to get anything from the state, with the amount reduced for every missing year.

Crucially, you are entitled to national insurance credits for caring for loved ones. If you think there are national insurance years missing from your record, you can write to the Carer's Allowance Unit – details available here gov.uk/carers-credit/how-to-claim – including any evidence of the years you think are missing.

You can request a printed national insurance statement from the Department for Work and Pensions by post or phone. You can also do this at gov.uk/check-national-insurance-record.

It is also possible to pay voluntary national contributions to boost your state pension entitlement, although you need to make sure the sums add up to benefit you. Visit gov.uk/voluntary-national-insurance-contributions for lots of useful information that could help.

Tom Selby is director of public policy at the investment platform AJ Bell. He has successfully campaigned for a number of reforms, including banning pension cold-calling.

Now even renters earning £75k need a guarantor

Rachel Mortimer

Even tenants earning more than £75,000 a year are being asked to provide a guarantor who could pay their rent in an emergency as landlords struggle to balance the books.

Requiring a guarantor has historically been reserved for students or tenants with a low income or poor credit history. But some higher earners are having to nominate one as risk-averse landlords come under financial strain from higher mortgage rates and taxes.

A guarantor is a person, usually a relative, who promises to pay your rent if you are unable to. A landlord is able to take them to court if they fail to pay.

The share of renters earning between £75,000 and £100,000 a year who were asked to provide a guarantor at the beginning of a tenancy tripled between January and April 2020 and the same period this year, according to the lettings platform Goodlord. It found that 1.81 per cent of tenants in this income bracket required a guarantor in the first four months of the year, up from just 0.61 per cent in 2020.

The share of tenants earning between £50,000 and £75,000 who were asked for a guarantor jumped from 1.6 per cent to 2.47 per cent in the same period, a rise of 54 per cent.

Oli Sherlock from Goodlord said: "Asking for a guarantor used to be very concentrated among student tenants and those who looked like they may be renting outside of their means.

"But the practice has trickled out beyond these traditional groups, meaning higher earners are increasingly likely to find themselves providing guarantor details."

Landlords used to be able to deduct borrowing costs from their income before paying tax, but since 2020 have instead received a 20 per cent tax credit on mortgage expenses. This is a worse deal for landlords who are higher or additional-rate taxpayers. The change has coincided with rising interest rates, which have pushed many buy-to-let investors into loss-making territory.

"Being asked to provide a guarantor may feel galling for tenants who easily meet affordability thresholds. But landlords have faced a litany of headwinds over recent years – the pandemic, increases in tenant arrears, rising mortgage rates, a large number of regulatory changes – meaning their caution is understandable," Sherlock said.

The average rent in England rose 8.6 per cent to £1,310 in the year to June, jumped 8.2 per cent to £743



It used to just be students who needed a guarantor

in Wales and 8.4 per cent to £959 in Scotland, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Anna Ambrose from the estate agency Strutt & Parker said it was common for high earners to pay six months or a year's rent upfront to nervous landlords. "If you are competing against other tenants offering this sort of lump sum upfront can certainly swing in your favour," Ambrose said.

"Often higher earners have a mix of income from investments, dividends or are self-employed so don't have the traditional sources like a payslip to prove their income. So it happens regularly that they pay rent in advance."

Most landlords can ask for a deposit only equal to five weeks' rent, or six weeks if the annual rent is more than £50,000, but there is no cap on how much rent you can pay in advance.

8.6%

Rise in average rents in England in the year to June

MONEY

FAME AND FORTUNE DANA GILLESPIE

In association with Standard Life
Part of Phoenix Group

I never felt wealthy. Not even swanning around with Bowie

The singer went out with the rock star, but still lives in her childhood home and claims her state pension just about covers her coffee habit, she tells *York Membery*

Dana Gillespie is an actress and singer-songwriter also known for her decade-long personal and professional relationship with the young David Bowie, who wrote the song *Andy Warhol* for her.

The 75-year-old, a descendant of the Quaker prison reformer Elizabeth Fry – "who was on the back of the £5 note before Winston Churchill" – has recorded more than 70 albums and sang on *It Ain't Easy* on Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972).

"I met David when we were both teenagers exploring the music business. He was very kind and helpful to me, and we remained friends, though we rather lost touch when he moved to America," Gillespie said. "A photographer friend and I were the first people to hear *Space Oddity* after he'd recorded it, though neither of us realised what an iconic song it would become."

Gillespie, who was the British junior water-skiing champion for four years in her teens in the 1960s, lives in South Kensington, London.

How much do you have in your wallet?
About 100 euros because I'm in Vienna. I prefer to use cash for everything because I'm so old school. I prefer to be paid in cash too.

What credit cards do you use?
I've never liked bank cards of any sort and only use them when absolutely necessary. I think the increasingly plastic world we live in is another example of ageism. The other day I went to a South Kensington cafeteria to buy a coffee and croissant but, on learning that they wouldn't accept cash, I told them, "I will not be darkening this door ever again!" and sashayed out.

Are you a saver or a spender?
I'm probably more of a saver. What do I need to spend money on at my age? I've got everything I need. And besides, I was brought up not to be frivolous with money, and would never buy something that I couldn't afford. How could I go to sleep at night otherwise? I don't spend a fortune on fancy meals because I'm a boring vegetarian. I used to make David [Bowie] brown rice and vegetables in the Sixties when we were both broke musicians.

Do you own a property?
Yes, I live in the tiny one-bedroom South Kensington house where I grew up and have lived all my life. It's a period property but that suits me because I hate anything modern – I like old cars, old clothes, old people, old music and old houses. I've always been happy living in my smallish house and would like to die there too. I want to be carried out in a coffin, if they can lift the thing up. I don't think I could afford to move there now, because I know how expensive South Ken has become – although it wasn't a particularly smart area when I was a kid in the 1950s.



Right: Gillespie in 1971 with David Bowie, around the time they recorded It Ain't Easy together. Bottom right: in 1984

MICHAEL STROUD/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTINA JANSEN



Are you better off than your parents?
My father, Hans, was a successful radiologist and my mother, Anne, was the happy mother of me and my sister. My mother was very English and one of her ancestors was Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, a leading light in the anti-slavery movement alongside William Wilberforce, in the early 19th century. My father was descended from Austrian nobility, but that side of the family is a bit hazy. Yes, we were comfortable but money was never discussed – I just coasted along.

How much did you earn last year?
Good question. I have very little interest in money – I'd much rather talk about chocolate and teddy bears.

What was your first job?
Delivering newspapers for 12 shillings and sixpence a week, and I'd work part-time at a record store after school. I started doing gigs as a folk singer when I was 15 and was paid £25 a week to do summer concerts in Great Yarmouth with Tom Jones, the Hollies and the Who in 1964 – good money in those days.

Have you ever worried about how you were going to make ends meet?
Not really, but I'm not shy and if I got to that point I'd have gone out and worked as a waitress. That would be preferable to sitting around and doing nothing. You've got to make things happen.

When did you first feel wealthy?
I've never felt wealthy but I've always felt happy. Even when I was in *Jesus Christ Superstar* or swanning around in New York with Bowie, I never felt wealthy because I never thought about it. My parents thought it vulgar to talk of money.

What has been your most lucrative work?
Writing my songs. I get song royalties from my music publisher, BMG, but I have very little interest in that kind of thing, so long as I've got enough to eat and somewhere to lay my head. Do I ever get paid vast amounts of money to perform private gigs in Dubai like Rihanna? Sadly not.

Do you invest in shares?
No, the only risk-taking I'm prepared to do is cross the road.

What's best for retirement — property or pension?
A combination of both. My father used to say that it was best to live off the interest of your interest, but I've never been able to do that. Yes, I get the state pension, but it's a piddling amount and probably just about covers the coffees I buy. Musicians don't retire so long as their instruments work, and thankfully my voice still works fine. When it does go, I'll get a cat and sit at home.

What has been your best business decision?
I haven't really made any business decisions – things have just happened and I've gone along with them. But you could say that making my new album with [the Soft Cell singer] Marc Almond was perhaps my best business decision.

And your best investment?
Having two acoustic guitars – a six-string and a 12-string, with my name hand-carved into them – handmade in the Sixties by John Bailey, the top guitar-maker of the day. They cost about £500 each, a lot of money back then, but they will be with me until I die.

What about your worst investment?
Some people might think it's the money I've spent in the studio creating my own albums, some of which have sold well and some of which haven't – but it's not a bad investment to me because I love making music.

What's your money weakness?
Collecting black Steiff teddy bears, which are quite hard to find – I've got 18. I snapped up one for £120 after seeing it in a second-hand shop in Norwich. What I really want is one of the original 1912 black "mourning" bears, with red-rimmed eyes to show they'd been crying, which Steiff made for people who'd lost family or children on the Titanic. I believe one turned up in Australia some years ago and sold for a six-figure sum.

> **At 15 I got £25 a week to play with Tom Jones – good money in 1964**

I used to love buying suede boots too – I remember Angie Bowie, when she was married to David, buying me ten pairs, in lots of different colours. But I only wear flat shoes these days.

What's your most extravagant purchase?
I've been known to pop into Fortnum & Mason from time to time and buy myself some violet cream chocolates – a packet of 12 costs £24, I believe – which the Queen Mother used to be rather fond of.



What's your financial priority in the years ahead?
To keep on living where I am for as long as I can. I'm close to my doctor and dentist and I can hobble around the corner to the shops.

What would you do if you won the lottery?
I'd buy some of my friends' houses for them, and book into a spa and have myself massaged to a pulp.

What is the most important lesson you've learnt about money?
Not to judge someone by what they're worth – I've met a lot of wealthy people who've been very boring.

Dana Gillespie's new album, First Love, is out on Fretsore Records; dana-gillespie.com

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Three hikes bills by up to £18 a year

George Nixon

Bills for customers with the mobile phone provider Three will rise by between £12 and £18 a year after the telecoms regulator Ofcom cracked down on unclear inflation-linked price rises.

The hikes will affect those who take out new phone contracts from September and the increase will depend on how much data a deal includes.

Three is the latest telecoms firm to change its pricing in line with new Ofcom rules requiring mid-contract rises to be fixed and specified in advance in pounds and pence. Those who take out a contract with 4GB of data or less will pay an extra £1 a month from April, those with 5GB to 99GB will pay £1.25 more, and those with 100GB or more will pay £1.50 extra.

Like most of its rivals, Three used to increase bills each April by the previous December's inflation figure plus 3.9 percentage points. This meant bills went up 7.9 per cent this year.

100GB

The size of data plan that comes with the biggest rise

EE and Vodafone have also moved to a new pricing system. EE customers who have signed up to new contracts since April will pay £1.50 more a month for their mobile phone from next year, and Vodafone customers who signed up since July will pay £1 more a month.

O2 is the last of the big four telecom companies to make pricing changes.

While the new rules will mean some customers on lower tariffs will end up with a bigger percentage rise than they would have had under the old system, Ofcom has said the change will give customers greater certainty over their bills.

30,426

The number of complaints received by HM Revenue & Customs in the three months to June.

CHART OF THE WEEK ARSENAL FINALLY TOP THE LEAGUE

Football club	How much people earned from renting out nearby parking spaces
Arsenal, Emirates Stadium	£191,977
Chelsea, Stamford Bridge	£161,412
West Ham, London Stadium	£150,030
Liverpool, Anfield	£131,299
Everton, Goodison Park	£127,789

Source: YourParkingSpace

YourParkingSpace, an online marketplace where users can rent parking spaces, analysed how much its customers made by renting out a parking space within a ten minute walk of a football stadium last season. Customers near stadiums made £1.3 million between August 11, 2023 and May 19, 2024. Arsenal may have missed out on the title, but those with a driveway near the Emirates made the most cash.

THE SUNDAY TIMES
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Three cheers

Raise a glass to the can-doers breathing new life into their towns **6**

Plus The Secret Agent **3** How to create the dream bachelor pad **8** Interview: Jenny Colgan **10**



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Home

Making moves

House of the week

CORNWALL £1.75M

On the south Cornish coast, 61 Sea Road is a four-bedroom house in Carlyon Bay, near St Austell and seven miles from Fowey. Although it looks art deco it was built in 2012. Modern features include a lift and a wheelchair-accessible bedroom suite. The main bedroom has a balcony with sea views; the garden has a patio that also overlooks the water. It's a five-minute walk to the beach. **lillicrapchilcott.com**









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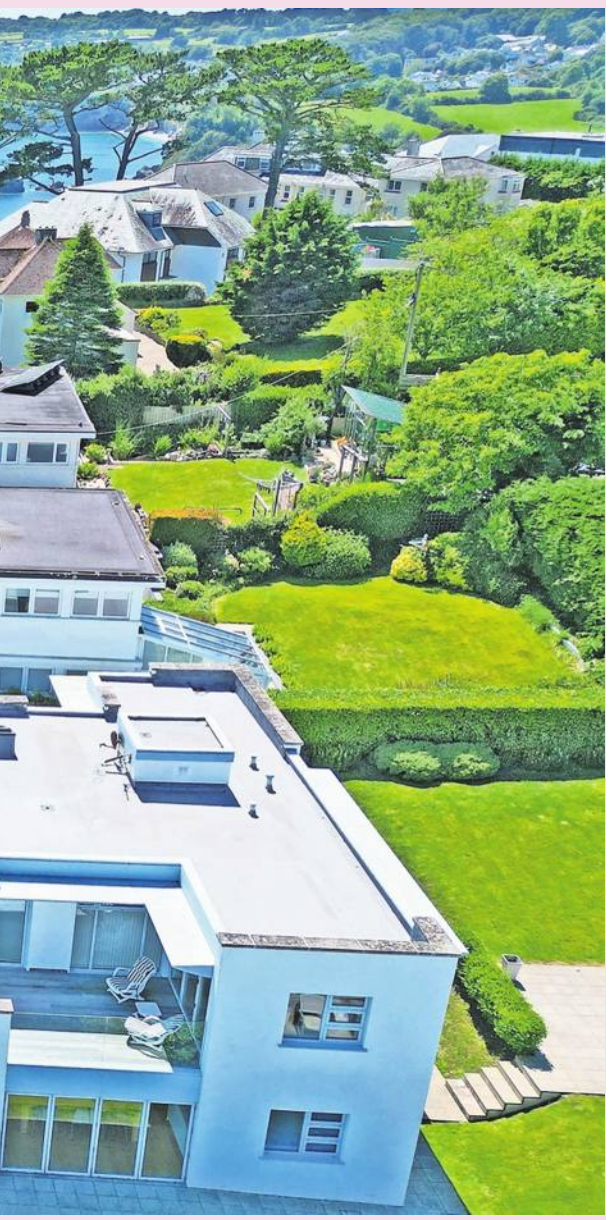
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The best of this week's property for sale

COVER: ADRIAN SHERRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES





WILTSHIRE £600,000
Admire views of the River Nadder from this pretty-in-pink grade II listed house in Salisbury. The waterside home's 2,000 sq ft includes four bedrooms and two bathrooms. **hamptons.co.uk**



NORTHUMBERLAND £550,000
West Cottage is set in 2.35 leafy acres planted with more than 800 trees. The 18th-century four-bedroom house is a 20-minute drive from Hexham. **finestproperties.co.us**



NORTH YORKSHIRE £1.495M
Moments from Valley Gardens (17 acres of parkland in Harrogate), this five-bedroom townhouse has five floors of living space. Period perks include parquet flooring and ceiling roses. **beadnallcopley.co.uk**



STIRLING O/O £995,000
On a hill with views of nearby Stirling Castle, 125 Henderson Street is in Bridge of Allan, a spa town. It has four bedrooms, a modern open-plan kitchen/family room and south-facing garden. **savills.com**



GLOUCESTERSHIRE £1M
A pretty stone house in Daglingworth village, three miles northwest of Cirencester. The three-bedroom home has been renovated and has a modern kitchen with French doors on to the garden. **butlersherborn.co.uk**

THE SECRET AGENT



'Then the buyer called ... he was having a wobble'

'Remember, my darling, life can turn on a sixpence," my friend Dr Deborah said, placing a reassuring hand on the wrist of the recipient of this wisdom.

"Yes, things can get worse," he responded.

"No, no, that's not what I meant at all," protested Dr Deborah, ever the optimist. But of course it's true — the twist of fate can turn either way.

I'm feeling the hubris of last week's column, almost as if I was tempting fate. Film stars, mega-million sales, deals tossed around liberally as if they happen just like that. If only that were true.

The biggie that I've been working on this quarter, that I foolishly thought was in the bag, has come undone. I'm representing the seller on his fabulous house in Kensington, which was suited to a particular buyer who had been looking at properties for more than a year.

It was a perfect match. The house has a lift, the required layout, the right square footage, enough parking, the ideal location: everything he wanted. We negotiated for eight weeks and though my client was taking a loss, we finally agreed.

He had bought a new place and wanted to move on for emotional reasons. The time was right. He's pragmatic, a dream to deal with, never blames the agent for the state of the market, and is blessed with that rare quality of being able to take advice. We knew nothing in the survey would pop up, so we presumed it would sail to a smooth conclusion.

Then came the call from the buyer's representative. His client was feeling "wobbly". I insisted on speaking to the wobbler. Was it simply a case of him needing to hear soothing words? A reassurance that this is a gold-star house? A pep talk that he's buying a home for his family rather than a mere investment? A suggestion that putting money into bricks and mortar on one of the best streets in London is the smartest of long-term plans?

I pushed as hard as civility allowed on these points, but they fell on deaf ears. When I heard a slight pitch creeping into my tone, I stopped myself. The balm of reassurance had failed. I had to face what I'd been hoping to avoid and call the seller.

He didn't pick up so I left a message. He called back just as the heavens opened. I was walking my puppy through Hyde Park and had to sprint for shelter under a tree. Water trickled on to my head as I relayed the news. My client was bewildered. He wanted to understand why this was happening at the 11th hour and 59th minute, but I had no answer.

Fortunately, he has the means to weather the storm, but it was a body blow. The house he's selling is terrific, so we will find another buyer. The bad news is, it will have to be furnished at great expense (he had moved everything out), and we will have to wait for the September market to try again. And then we will be facing buyers fretting and anxious about what's in the autumn budget on October 30.

It felt as if we had found the right partner and could happily settle, and now we have to get back out there on to the dating market again. And while that can be invigorating, it can just feel like hard work.

The Secret Agent is the author of Highly Desirable: Tales of London's Super-Prime Property (Headline £12.99). Buy from timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Discount for Times+ members

Home

THE TWO ROBS



Your questions on being a landlord and investing in property answered

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO FIND A GOOD RENOVATOR?

Q My plan is to do up any buy-to-let properties I might purchase, to add value. How can I source reliable tradespeople who offer fair prices?
Olufemi, Surrey



A There's no easy answer or one-stop resource for this: the process of sourcing the right renovation team requires building up your local knowledge and network. You could start by joining local property investor groups or landlord associations. Luck and charm might determine how willing other investors are to share details – some gatekeep reliable and well-priced builders for obvious reasons. Local estate agents are also usually well connected.

Online platforms such as Checkatrade and MyBuilder are another option, and help you to find local tradespeople, verify their insurance details and certifications, and read reviews from other customers.

These methods should help you build a shortlist. From there, you'll need to do some digging and check references in detail – ideally by meeting them on site to see first-hand how they operate.

Standard practice is to get a few detailed quotes to ensure you're comparing like with like. Then, once you engage someone, you should draw up an agreement with clearly defined timelines, payment milestones and specifications. We'd always prefer to have something clear and simple that everyone understands to prevent misunderstandings.

Once you've found a team that you're happy with, it's your job to keep them happy, which largely comes down to paying on time, responding to requests promptly and being clear about what you want. However, if refurbs are a big part of your strategy, you should continually be looking around for other options – contractors often get busy, or their quality or responsiveness may drop over time.

WILL LABOUR GIVE TENANTS MORE RIGHTS TO BUY THEIR HOME?

Q I've heard rumours that the government might introduce a law giving tenants the right to buy their rented property at below market value if the landlord decides to sell. Is there any truth to this, and how likely is it to happen?

As a landlord, I'm concerned about the potential impact of this and other Labour policies.
John, Bristol

A There's been a lot of speculation about what Labour might do when it comes to the rental sector, but forcing landlords to sell to tenants at below market value isn't something we've heard about since they were elected. We don't think it's something that's likely to be introduced.

That said, many landlords exiting the market at the moment are already choosing to sell to their tenants at a slight discount, recognising the marketing fees and hassle this will save them.

We do know for sure that Labour will reintroduce a version of the Renters (Reform) Bill, now known as the Renters' Rights Bill. Based on the notes accompanying the King's Speech, it seems that this will be a very similar package of measures, including an end to "no fault" evictions and the introduction of open-ended tenancies.

Labour has also talked about capping upfront rental payments and preventing bidding wars, so this might find its way into the bill. But in practice this will only prevent landlords and agents from actively encouraging bids over the asking rent rather than prohibiting them from accepting them, so it's unlikely to have much of an impact. They have also revived the policy, floated then dropped by the Conservative Party, that all rented properties need an energy performance certificate rating of at least C.

Separately, it seems likely that there will be changes to capital gains tax in Labour's first budget, on October 30, which will result in higher tax bills for property owners who choose to sell.

Our view is that property investors have seen far more dramatic changes since 2015 than what's being proposed now – and while the overall effect has been negative for landlords, it hasn't changed the fundamental drivers that make property attractive to us.

In general, we can't see Labour deliberately killing off the private rented sector. While they want to reduce reliance on it, evidence from Scotland (where more stringent anti-landlord measures have increased rents and reduced supply) shows that nobody will be helped unless there's a viable alternative. This isn't going to happen overnight.

You may disagree about what a Labour government might do and how serious the consequences will be – if you did choose to exit the market, you wouldn't be alone.

Rob Dix and Rob Bence are the presenters of The Property Podcast

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Home

Pulling together

Meet the people buying pubs and shops to bring their communities to life. By *Melissa York* and *Arabella Youens*

New towns are set to appear all over the country as the Labour government attempts to build 1.5 million homes in the next five years. So how do we make sure they are bustling communities instead of bland, identikit housing estates?

This is a puzzle Robert Boughton, the founder of the housing developer Thakeham, has been trying to solve for a decade. In 2014, Boughton worked with the charity Shelter to survey 80,000 people about new housing. "We found that people accept that we need more housing, but what they are worried about is the strain it puts on facilities," he says.

In a recent conversation with a councillor, he says they complained about a new development that had no facilities, "just loads of housing, and how the impact was a higher-than-usual suicide rate and social problems".

> **"The only place we had nearby was the motorway services"**

Then one morning, while reading The Sunday Times, Boughton discovered Plunkett UK. The charity helps communities to set up locally owned and managed businesses, and it has a high long-term survival rate: more than 92 per cent of the shops it has set up are still trading, compared with 44 per cent of new commercial businesses.

Boughton asked Plunkett to set up a community shop on his newest housing estate, Woodgate in Pease Pottage, West Sussex.

Typically commercial premises are let once the residents have moved in, but Boughton wanted a community-led business there from the outset.

Thakeham built the shop premises, fitted it out and gifted it to Plunkett, then the developer spent £4 million building a primary school, £7 million on road improvements and built a hospice and café that is rented to St Catherine's Hospice for a peppercorn rent of £1 a year.

About 16 months later, Woodgate is a thriving village with 619 homes. And it paid off for Thakeham too. Boughton believes the revenue and sales rate was far stronger at Woodgate than for comparable developments as a consequence.

Nick Harris, 71, has run the community shop in Woodgate since it opened in May. He moved with his wife from Horley, ten miles north of Pease Pottage, for a quieter life during retirement, but he was drawn into volunteering after attending the AGM of the community shop's management committee. "The only place [the residents] had nearby was the motorway services, which are horrendously expensive, so it's been a huge help to the estate," he says.

Like most of the businesses Plunkett advises, the shop is run as a community benefit society, a type of co-operative. Residents are invited to buy a share in the business, set at a minimum price of £1. Shareholders have an equal vote and then elect a management committee that is changed annually. Any profits can be used to pay off debt, pay interest to shareholders, or it can be reinvested into the business or donated to a local cause.

There are about 60 shareholders in the Woodgate community shop, but Harris hopes to add more at its summer fête next Sunday. He hopes the community will be able to take over the soon-to-be-vacant development sales office too.

He says: "We get so many people coming from nearby estates saying, 'We were promised this service or this community centre and it's

ADRIAN SHERRATT FOR SUNDAY TIMES HOME







Below and right: the reopened Alhampton Inn in Somerset is thriving. Far right: Nick Harris, top, runs the community shop in Woodgate, West Sussex; Mel Cooper manages a similar shop in Westbury, Bucks

MY URBAN ALLOTMENT BRINGS ME PEACE AND JOY

A green plot calms *Natalie Fernbach* and means she can spend screen-free time with her children

Today it smells of strawberries. We haven't been on the allotment for long, but each day it feels different, smells different, is different. I grew up in the countryside, so having this space at the end of our road — Uxbridge Road in west London — where the lullaby sounds day and night are the constant sirens, is heavenly.

The moment I open the gate, it seems as if the birds are singing twice as loud, the greens are greener and the relaxed atmosphere of people quietly working on the land, growing, chatting and sharing ideas, instantly soothes my nervous system.

When we moved to Ealing 11 years ago, the first thing I did was join the waiting list for an allotment. These allotments are the oldest in London; once they stretched across Northfields Avenue, but those that remain lie in the shadow of housing blocks that have since been built on the land. They are a constant reminder of the threat to green spaces in London. The size of each allotment is half what it was in the past, when they were large enough to grow all that was required to feed a family — something one could only dream of today.

We were lucky — we had been on the list for so long that we were offered a half plot. Usually you have a gardener's plot at first, a starter size, and at some point you are moved to a half plot as they become available.

When we were first offered it after a few years of waiting, we declined. Juggling young children and work was already more than we were able to handle well. To look after something else would have pushed us to the edge.

Seven years later when the call came again, we went for it. And I'm so glad we did — it has already brought so much to our lives. Our neighbour, who has been waiting for three years for a spot, recently asked where he was on the list and was told 298. It's a long queue. According to figures from Greenpeace, waiting lists for allotments have more than doubled in the past 12 years.

Land is scarce and the threat of building acute. In West Ealing, recent applications for building on the allotments have been fiercely fought by residents and plot-holders.

The first task for us to tackle in our patch was to weed the area that was fully overgrown. It doesn't take long for the weeds to reign, and the previous custodian had not visited for a while. I don't know much about them other

ALAMY









never happened. We've got nothing.' And they are usually bigger estates than us. It's imperative that the new towns have the right infrastructure."

Boughton wants to put a community shop in all his new developments, but admits he is usually met with scepticism. "Our industry's good at making promises but not delivering," he says.

Plunkett, which has supported more than 800 community businesses to set up, is talking to developers, planners and land promoters about embedding its services earlier in the planning process. This is a departure for the charity, which is usually contacted by rural communities to save or replace a valued local asset.

Key to the success of its businesses are their adaptability. Without profit-driven targets, or a central strategy to hold them back, the premises quickly evolve into community hubs that are shaped by local need. A Plunkett-backed pub in Lancashire is home to a community allotment and hosts church services upstairs.

A former hospital in Suffolk advised by Plunkett is now a community centre, garden, café and shop.

Since the Covid pandemic, Plunkett's services have been "in enormous demand, with more than 500 starts a year", , says James Alcock, the chief executive of Plunkett. "By May this year, we had delivered the same amount of business support as we did in the whole of 2023."

The loss of businesses during the pandemic, the isolation that followed and the rise of home-working explain the increase in community businesses. Alcock says: "The high street is not what it was and people are looking for ways of interacting."

One of those people is Mel Cooper, 54, the shop manager of Westbury community shop in Buckinghamshire, who started working there after she was furloughed during the pandemic. "It feels like I was meant to do it," she says.

The shop champions local businesses, selling local beer, wine, honey and bread, and the café is renowned for its quirky menu that includes Cadbury Creme Egg toasties and sausage roll panini. Community businesses can also provide employment training and life skills for people who are typically excluded from the workforce.

Westbury community shop offers two work experience shifts twice a week during term-time for the students at Furze Down, a special educational needs school in nearby Winslow. Cooper says: "It started through a conversation with a mum who wanted somewhere for her son, Thomas, to learn how to pay with his [bank] card in a safe place."

There are also outdoor theatre shows, a cinema night for the over-50s and a social event every Friday. "We want people to feel that, if they're not doing anything on a Friday night, there's always something going on with us at the shop," Cooper says.

This community-led approach is transformative for isolated and low-income communities and people living with disabilities, or those with caring responsibilities.

In the village of Alhampton, Somerset, there are just 67 houses. In November 2022, the Alhampton Inn closed having struggled with rising costs and energy prices. "It was almost like a black hole sucking energy out of the village. Something had to be done," says Jeremy Burks, who has lived in the village for 15 years.

Burks, along with three others, recruited 130 shareholders and raised £120,000 to save the pub. It's run by a general manager and paid staff, but volunteers do much of the office work and step in to help behind the bar when needed.

After the pandemic, one fifth of the houses in the village changed hands and the average age decreased as young people left cities and moved to the countryside for a better life. Now the pub hosts dining events, a "boozy book club" and, importantly, it makes a profit.

The British Beer and Pub Association warns that 2,000 pubs could call time by December, most of them in rural communities. There are 150 community-owned pubs and that number is growing. Burks says: "There's something powerful about people realising they can't rely on others to do things for them. We need to step up."



Left: Natalie Fernbach on her allotment in Ealing, west London. Below: waiting lists for allotments have doubled in the past 12 years



than that they liked daisies and berries and had a flower section, which we've kept.

Otherwise, we were starting at the beginning. So of course we planted seeds, of which only the potatoes worked. It's a steep learning curve, like having your first child, and books only help so much. It is in chatting to people — fellow allotment growers — that you find out the interesting things that are game-changers. What works on this soil? What websites can you trust to tell you when to plant? How to stop the slugs? Do we keep the pond or not? There is a wealth of knowledge that we are tapping in to, though everyone starts with, "I don't know, but ..." and it seems they know a lot more than we do.

Our youngest is really into food and cooking. It is partly for him that we said yes to the plot — though if he had it his way, we'd plant only strawberries — as well as for the boys to understand how hard it is to grow, compared with how much one consumes, and to see the difference in fresh produce grown without chemicals versus imported goods. Already we are reaping the rewards of the strawberries and raspberries, more delicious than any bought at the supermarket — we are enjoying them on our morning bircher muesli.

As the boys get older [they're now 10 and 14] and the fight with technology becomes more of a war than a battle, we hope that this space will provide some wellbeing for them. A space where we don't bring our phones or talk too loudly, but just quietly be. There is a feeling of monastic spirituality to the allotment; an energy of stillness and beauty. It is a place where, for once, nature has the chance to dictate the pace of life, where colours change from moment to moment — one day the poppies are in full bloom with bees all around, the next the petals have fallen to the ground, an imperfect beauty that reminds us of all things passing.

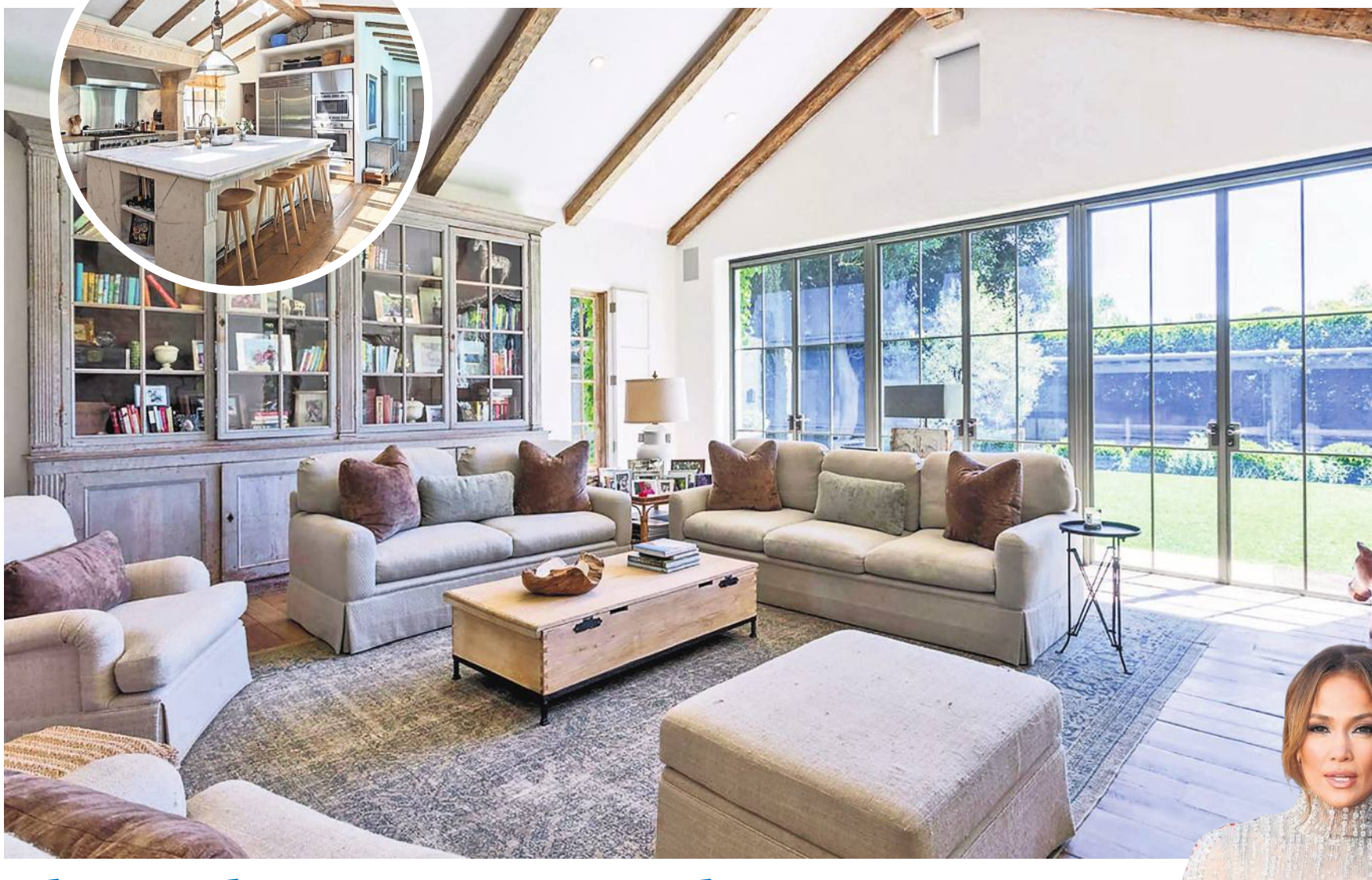
For now, it's about watering, and a visit early in the morning is the best start to the day. When, for a moment, I can just be, listen to the birds, see the colours that are inspiring my interiors work, enjoy the shade of the walnut tree and marvel at how every day it changes, before rejoining the fast-paced London life of a working mother running her own business.

Natalie Fernbach is creative director of Cullum Design

National Allotments Week runs from August 12-18, thenas.org.uk

Home





Bachelor pad, not Batcave

KATRINA BURROUGHS
@Kat_Burroughs



Do single men really crave leather sofas and gadgets at home? Yes, say designers – but here's how to do it in style

It turns out The Greatest Love Story Never Told (to lift the title of the Bennifer rom-doc) could be between a man and his leather couch. Ben Affleck has bought a $20 million five-bedroom house in Los Angeles, to start his new life without Jennifer Lopez.

I wondered how the Batman actor might decorate his new bachelor pad. I started by considering what he is leaving behind. Bennifer's former marital home, a 24-bathroom mansion in Beverly Hills, is for sale at $68 million. Going by the agent's photos the decor is classic rich Hollywood: white upholstery, white paintwork, white bed linen, white lampshades … just very, very white.

JLo's taste for pretty vintage-style decor is well known. The couple's wedding was styled by her friend Rachel Ashwell, the British designer behind "shabby chic", who also decorated the singer's house in Savannah, Georgia, which Affleck may take over. Indeed, Jenny from the Block has said on Instagram that shabby chic is her favourite "cosy style" in which to decorate her homes. So there will have been a host of frilled pillows, sheers and vintage-style throws in Ben's eyeline when they were living together. The subterranean lair at Wayne Manor it was not.

So, faced with a blank slate and unencumbered by anyone's aesthetic choices but his own, it could be that Affleck, who reportedly bought his new property on his wife's 55th birthday (real estate as revenge?), will go the established route of the single male of the species, and create a functional scheme, featuring black and grey decor, dark wood, sports memorabilia and improbable quantities of leather.

Sexist stereotyping? British interior designer Martyn Lawrence Bullard, decorator to LA's A-list, says the clichés are correct … mostly.

While we might imagine Affleck would be a dystopian minimalist, with a love of gadgetry, Bullard has a surprising insight into his taste. "Weirdly, he used to rent a little house that I owned years ago, up on Woodrow Wilson Drive [in Los Angeles], which was very country-style. I do know, when he was with his last wife [the actress Jennifer Garner], they had a very English-looking country house with slip covers and boutiquey fabrics.

"I have a feeling he has a tendency to lean towards the kind of English country comfort look. That's not necessarily what one would

BACHELOR DECOR DO'S AND DON'TS

Do Get the leather sofa. "They always want leather sofas," says Rayman Boozer, a New York interior designer. "It's like a rite of passage." Just avoid the Chesterfield — the seating equivalent of pub carpet.

Don't Put your gadgets on show. Tech ages faster than milk, and what looked sci-fi when you bought it will soon appear old hat.

Do Lean into the masculine, but keep it light. Nobody wants to come back for coffee at the Batcave.

Don't "I wouldn't spend a fortune on a status stove like a La Cornue or a Wolf. They look great, but they're just for display in most bachelor homes," Boozer says.

Do Install dimmer switches. "Men want very, very lit rooms," the award-winning interior designer Alidad says. "They say they want to see things, which is practical. But you've got to persuade them to do it in a way that lights can also be dimmed."

Don't Display every award you've won since Bikeability on the mantelpiece, or your football shirts above the bed. Alexandria Dauley, an interior designer, says, "If they've competed and won anything at all, my bachelor clients like to display them. They may not sit at all in the aesthetic, but they don't care."

Do Consider cushions, maybe even on the bed. "It comes back to practicality," Dauley says. "[Men think] Why is it there if it doesn't have a purpose? ." But the hard surfaces and shiny finishes beloved of the bachelor make for bad acoustics and discomfort, so add in some soft furnishings. See also: curtains and rugs.

Don't Forget your mum. Jane Landino, design director of Taylor Howes, says: "The single men we design for aren't just bachelors — they do have families. A lot of them want lovely rooms for their mothers."



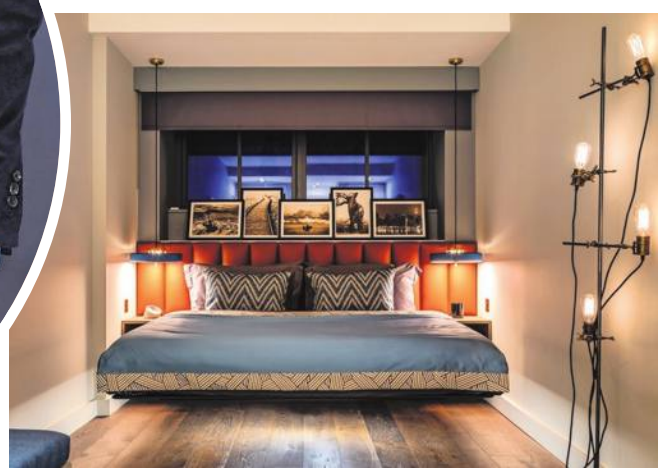


THE MEGA AGENCY; GETTY IMAGES

Left: Ben Affleck's $20m bachelor pad in LA. Below: his marital home in Beverly Hills, bought with Jennifer Lopez, is for sale at $68m. Right: Folding Ribbon rug, Nordic Knots x Campbell-Rey, from £681, nordicknots.com. Below right: don't buy a top-of-the-line range oven unless you cook a lot; a room with mood lighting by Daniel Hopwood









think of for a movie star like Affleck, but remember, he comes from the east coast. And Boston's quite close in vibe and style to England. You know, it gets very cold there, so they love cosiness and rooms with fireplaces."

So the leather-with-everything cliché is actually baseless? Au contraire. Over three decades in the Hollywood cribs game, Bullard reckons he has designed more than 20 bachelor pads, and they divide into two types: playboy and divorced dad, both featuring an abattoir's worth of luxury hide.

"I recently did one for a young bachelor that was very much a play pad," Bullard says. "Very modern. Very low-slung leather furniture. Several bars. As the lights go down, it creates a party zone, with a dark screening room, all clad in velvet.

And, of course, the requisite sex room."

> **"We put in a black cashmere floor and ultra-suede bed**

Yes, some clients do want to create a sex room.

"The last one that we did, you entered via a mirror in the dressing room. It had a touchpad that electronically scanned the client's finger and opened the door. The room was clad in black patent leather with a mirrored ceiling and a black cashmere floor. There was a bed wrapped in ultra-suede with mink handcuffs and gold-plated sex toys."

One of Bullard's favourite bachelor pad anecdotes starts when he was, in effect, Pamela Anderson's wedding present. Anderson and the musician Kid Rock were tying the knot, and Rock hired Bullard to create his beloved's dream home. The marriage lasted four months – Rock reclaimed the wedding gift and Bullard created the ultimate playboy pad for him. "It was a Balinese pavilion in Malibu, complete with a recording studio. I had a piano stencilled with the tattoo that was on his back. We also added a stripper pole in the living room. I'm not sure that that would have gone down too well in the marital home, but it worked for the bachelor pad."

What about the Hollywood divorced dad? He's slightly older and saggier than our playboy but equally in need of help with the decor of his bachelor pad. "Funnily enough, I recently did a 56-year-old divorced guy's apartment," Bullard says. "Again, it was very modern. Lots of deep sofas, lots of spaces for lounging. The brief for that one was, he didn't want anything that felt too precious, too uncomfortable or that he couldn't have sex on. So sex seems to be one of a bachelor's primal instincts for decor." He adds: "I don't want to give all the bachelors a bad name as sex fiends."

For the divorced dad, the bachelor pad may also need to be a family home. Affleck, for instance, will want to host his own three children, who he had with Garner, and possibly JLo's twins. He will need comfortable bedrooms for the kids, and perhaps accommodation for a nanny. And he may need to tailor his decor with pets in mind; he and Lopez shared eight dogs and a cat, although apparently his aversion to poop-scooping ticked off his wife.

"Usually the dogs end up ruling the roost," Bullard says. "So one of the things that I suggest in that case is to use performance fabrics. Things that look like leather and linen and silk, but that are actually made out of material that is water-repellent and stain-repellent. We will quite often use those kinds of fabrics for the upholstery.

"Rather than spending vast amounts of money on antique rugs, I'll maybe use a Ruggable carpet – I have my own collection with them coming out soon. They are amazing, because you can literally throw them in the washing machine if your dog has an accident or is shedding everywhere."

In Bullard's book, the most disastrous deco gaffe a single man can make is overlighting. His advice for Hollywood bachelors with pads to decorate? "They need to call me, or at least invest 25 quid in a dimmer switch."

THE MOST STYLISH WAYS TO HIDE YOUR TV

Is that big black box dominating the living room? Here's how to discreetly screen your screens. By *Olivia Lidbury*

With the Euros serving up football fever, followed by a fortnight of Wimbledon and now two weeks of Olympics broadcast from Paris, this summer's big TV binge has been a sporting delight.

Some prepared in advance: in the last week of May, sales of supersize, 75in-wide TVs were up 32 per cent at John Lewis. Yet in many homes you'd be hard-pressed to actually locate the telly. Concealed behind wall coverings or discreetly lurking inside wooden cabinets, the box is no longer the living room's star attraction, but a mod con to be artfully disguised.

So why the sudden coyness? It seems it's down to our desire for size. "Now they're so huge. Everybody wants a big TV, but it's nice to walk into a room and see something other than the screen," Severine Lammoglia says. As Soho House's principal designer, creatively disguising vacant black rectangles forms part of her day job. In palatial bedrooms she pulls this off by fashioning intricate tapestries into covers.

The designer Angelica Squire, of Studio Squire, has a similar approach to Lammoglia. "The desire for bigger screens means a TV can dominate a space too much," she laments. In a recent project, Squire fashioned a suzani (a richly ornamental textile from central Asia) into a remote-controlled blind to disguise an imposing screen.

Emma Sims-Hilditch, the creative founder of Wiltshire-based design practice Sims Hilditch, goes as far to say: "There is no reason why you need to have it [the TV] on show." The only place she would leave what she calls "the offending object" exposed is in a cinema room.

It's not all down to snobbery, though. For the broadcaster Laura Jackson, covering her screen with a large canvas in her east London home killed two birds with one stone. "It's not that I'm ashamed of the telly, but the biggest wall in my living room is the one I wanted to put some art on, as well as the TV," she says.

When you start digging, it turns out there are myriad ways to mask a glossy black monitor. In homes where the living room's fireplace is defunct, interior designer Isabella Worsley will recess the screen into the wall cavity and cover it with a diptych of framed artworks or prints, which slide open on runners. She's also had success with bifold cabinetry.

But bespoke joinery doesn't come cheap: design studio Hutley & Humm's Now You See Me, Now You Don't unit costs £3,500 to house a 40in screen. Neptune's Lynton TV mirror (which lives on top of a flatscreen contained within a frame) starts from a more digestible £795 for a 43in screen. Sims-Hilditch regularly uses Overmantels, which produces all styles of mirrors, which are then installed over screens.

More straightforward is an art TV. Samsung's popular The Frame acts as a dupe for a framed artwork, and with a starting price of under £500, plus an image library from galleries around the world (available as a separate subscription), it's a happy middle ground.



A suzani textile by Studio Squire hides a TV

Home

TIME AND SPACE JENNY COLGAN

‘My home has armour and cannons’

The Scottish author on life in a Second World War castle with river views



LISA FERGUSON; ALAMY

When the estate agent sent us the details for a castle, perched high on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Firth of Forth towards Edinburgh, I laughed. It seemed utterly fantastical. But my brother said, “Surely you’ll go and see it?” So I drove over the Forth Road Bridge from Edinburgh – it’s only half an hour from town – and quickly realised that the property was weirdly practical. There were two reception rooms, an office, a nice separate kitchen, five tiny bedrooms that wouldn’t be too hard to heat and a stunning garden. It was exactly what we wanted, only in very unusual packaging.

How old is the castle?

It was built with reclaimed stone just after the Second World War by two men called John Rhodes and William Thomas, who lived here all their lives. It was subsequently owned by the artist Jack Vettriano in the 1980s. He was responsible for the vivid duck-egg blue cupboards in the kitchen.

The castle is a glorious hodgepodge: the front is flat but the back looks like a tower house. Our spiral staircase balustrade was reclaimed from the nearby Rossend Castle – which means Mary, Queen of Scots may have used it – but the stairs are poured concrete.

Have you made many changes?

It needed a lot of work to get it warm, but my New Zealander husband, Andrew, who is very practical, has been amazing. He installed new doors, log-burners, radiators and windows. Now it’s cosy.

What’s your look?

We’ve embraced the castle vibe. We have a balcony with replica cannons and a suit of armour on the upstairs landing, which used to terrify Delphine, my youngest. We’ve changed the drawing room from white to dark blue, but kept the traditional furniture inherited from previous occupants. My grand piano lives where the original owners kept their harpsichords.

The tiny cinema is now a games room for our two boys, Wallace, 19, and Michael-Francis, 16, and we’re renovating Vettriano’s old studio to make it a cool space for the teens. I wanted a library in the turret and painted it Schiaparelli pink, but it’s more useful as a spare room (with lots of books in it).

Do you have extensive grounds?

We have a beautiful two-acre garden, although it has been overhauled by Andrew and Dave, our gardeners. It would be quite magical if our stupid dogs would stop trying to eat the bees. A path leads down to the Firth. There’s a secluded cove at low tide which nobody uses except us.







Left: Jenny Colgan’s drawing room. Below left: Middelburg in the Netherlands, where she once lived. Below: the suit of armour at the top of her stairs

Have you moved around a lot?

My husband is a marine engineer who tends the superyachts of the French Riviera set. His job has necessitated several moves. In the Netherlands we rented a traditional apartment in Middelburg, up nearly vertical steps. Our eldest fell down them continually.

In the south of France we had a little villa next to our children’s school. French real estate is mad, though. They post two tiny pictures of the house and won’t tell you the exact location. We ended up selling privately. We left France nine years ago when my mum was unwell. I thought we’d end up in the centre of Edinburgh, but there was so much damp and the kitchens were tiny.

Do you own a second home?

We have a flat near the Caledonian hotel in Edinburgh, which we use when the kids are at school. Scotland is full of writers and I love meeting up and trading gossip.

Interview by Angela Wintle

Close Knit by Jenny Colgan is published on August 15 by Hodder & Stoughton at £16. Buy from timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount for Times+ members

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HOME HELP

WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT THE HOARDER NEXT DOOR?

Q When we bought our house, our neighbour, who is a hoarder, had some rubbish in her front garden. Over the past nine years she has acquired a mountain of rubbish in both the front and back gardens. She ventures out daily for bin-diving expeditions. When she is not doing this she sleeps in her car. At a recent visit by the gas company, the engineer declared the house a fire hazard. I have repeatedly requested action from our council and their adult services department, and I have asked for an Asbo only to be told that my neighbour is improving. They are doing nothing about it. What are our rights? Can we get an Asbo, or an injunction?
John, Darlington

A My thoughts are not to go down the Asbo route as hoarding is considered a mental health disorder. A good way to help someone with hoarding behaviours is to approach the situation with the safety aspect as the point of view. I would recommend that the reader contact his local fire and rescue services to alert them to the fact that the property is deemed a fire hazard. The role of the fire services is key — they provide safe and well visits and will make recommendations.

Additionally, I would contact the local environmental health department. Environmental health has a duty to investigate and can make recommendations. Hoarding is often an environmental health concern and it is important to address any potential vermin issues. Each local authority has a hoarding protocol and it may be useful to read the guidance and learn of any agencies that could assist.

Quite often, social services will be able to allocate an occupational therapist to assess the situation in addition to providing a care needs assessment by a social worker. After an assessment, the next steps may include anything from consulting with specialist hoarding practitioners to providing decluttering and arranging specialist clearing and potential deep cleaning.

The role of a social prescriber is another element to support someone with hoarding behaviours in terms of signposting for support and guidance. Social prescribers often work in hoarded homes. It is important to establish a multi-agency approach and co-ordinate support so as not to overwhelm the person with hoarding behaviours. The reader is also welcome to reach out to Hoarding Disorders UK.

Jo Cooke, director at Hoarding Disorders UK; hoardingdisordersuk.org

Readers’ clinic

Q Do any readers have a solution to storing plastic boxes and lids? They never seem keen to stay with their mate.
Judy Cahusac, London SW6

Get a Sharpie pen and label box A and lid A, box B and lid B and so on. If you have several containers the same size, you may end up with several of the same letter.
Imogen Crees, Somerset

I was so fed up with trying to match lids we now store containers with their lids on. You need more space but we just got rid of what was not needed.
Aubrey Smith, Salt Spring Island, BC

A thick rubber band.
Jennykenny, West Sussex

Ditch all the random boxes and lids. Buy as many new boxes as you really need from the same range and in the same size. Buy an open-top storage bin that fits in your cupboard/drawer. Stash the lids in this in size groups. Keeping sizes together, stack the bottom sections in piles. When storing cleaned boxes, put the bottoms on top of the pile and tops at the front. That way the top box will always fit the front lid.
Karen Pemberton

FUTURE QUESTION

I can’t get rid of the orange-red chilli/bolognese stains on my Tupperware. Is there anything that works? Also, how can I prevent this from happening in the future?

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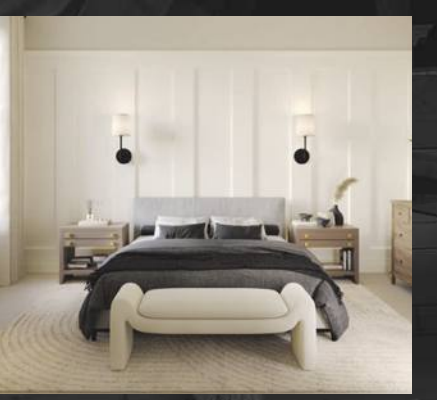
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August 11, 2024

THE SUNDAY TIMES
Travel
TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR



Make the most of this year's brilliant aurora borealis with a cruise up Norway's coast **12**

Beautiful north

Plus The best new adults-only hotels **6** Active family fun in Greece **16** Our expert guide to Chicago **21**



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Travel





Clockwise from above: takeaway at the Rhug Estate in Denbighshire; produce for sale and a bike tour at Darts Farm in Devon; Fordhall in Shropshire; Craigies in West Lothian



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: SERGIO FORMOSO/GETTY IMAGES. TOP SEVEN: MATT AUSTIN; VISITSCOTLAND/GRANT PATERSON; OCA ALLAN

Best destination farm sho

Grab your wallet and wellies and stock up on great local produce on your break

Yes, there's Jeremy Clarkson's Diddly Squat and the celebrity favourite Daylesford, but not all swanky farm shops are in the Cotswolds. We've found some that stand out from the herd and offer fun activities, insight into the real field-to-fork process and, most importantly, have plenty of goodies to pile into your basket – and each has a lovely place to stay nearby.

BROUGHGAMMON FARM, BALLYCASTLE, CO ANTRIM

Farm-to-fork tours, supper clubs and cheesemaking classes are among the extras you can try at this eco-friendly farm near the Giant's Causeway and Ballintoy harbour. On the shelves you'll find quirky options such as goat bacon and veal salami alongside homemade ketchup and Wild Irish Foragers' small-batch syrups and preserves. Guests can join tours through the fields to meet the goats, sheep, pigs and cattle and learn about the farm's fertiliser-free practices before tasting its ethical charcuterie and sampling homemade, foraged elderflower cordial (tours from £50; broughgammon.com). The Salthouse Hotel in nearby Ballycastle has stonking sea views and makes a good base for exploring the dramatic Causeway Coastal Route and Bushmills whiskey distillery. **Details** B&B doubles from £170 (thesalthousehotel.com)

DARTS FARM, TOPSHAM, DEVON

The farmer Ronald Dart was a pick-your-own pioneer in the Seventies and his three sons have continued his legacy. There's plenty of fruit and wonky veg in their shop, which overlooks the Clyst Valley, as well as bottles of homemade cider and wine from the farm's vineyard. Look out for the Ruby Red Devon cattle grazing on the banks of the river as you follow the farm trail – or meet them and the Dorset ewes at Animal Corner (dartsfarm.co.uk). The Turks Head microbrewery has chic rooms and is a 20-minute drive away, near Exeter's gothic cathedral and eight miles from the 14th-century Powderham Castle on the Exe estuary. **Details** Room-only doubles from £65 (turksheadexeter.com)

> "Sample ethical charcuterie and foraged cordial

GOAT SHED, HONINGHAM, NORFOLK

Fifteen years ago Sam Steggles bought ten goats and started making what would become the award-winning Norfolk mardler and Wensum white cheeses in his kitchen sink. They were stocked by supermarkets, pub chains and airlines until the pandemic struck and paused operations, so he decided to set up a shop in a shed with an honesty box. Today Goat Shed offers more than just cheese: come to collect goat's-milk soap, hand and body lotion and have lunch at the café – try the WLT with Wensum white goat's cheese, lettuce, marinated baby tomatoes and chilli jam. Afterwards meet the goats or try a one-day cheesemaking course (sandwiches from £11; goat-shed.co.uk). Ten miles away in Norwich, 38 St Giles is a grand 18th-century house that was once home to the city's lord mayor and is now a chic B&B. It's close to lots of independent stores and the city's huge covered market. **Details** B&B doubles from £150 (38stgiles.co.uk)

FORDHALL ORGANIC FARM, MARKET DRAYTON, SHROPSHIRE

At England's first community-owned farm, in the bucolic Tern Valley, you'll meet the farmer Ben Hollins, who rears cattle, sheep and pigs over 140 acres of land. Three brilliant trails weave through woodlands, wetlands and pasture before you reach the bakery to refuel with pasties, pork pies and sausage rolls. Then swing by the shop; the meat parcels and hampers are perfect if you want to try a bit of everything. Later, get cosy in the farm's Mongolian yurts surrounded by damson trees – you're welcome to pick the fruit for breakfast. Children can go bug hunting and learn bushcraft skills (£12). Nearby is the town of Market Drayton, granted the charter for its Wednesday market in 1245 and full of impressive half-timbered Georgian and Victorian architecture. **Details** Two nights' self-catering for six from £100 (fordhallfarm.com)

LAKELAND FARM VISITOR CENTRE, NR WINDERMERE, CUMBRIA

Kendal mint cake liqueur and Lakes Brew Co beers are among the must-buy drinks at this Windermere farm shop, though most people come for the purpose-built farm arena, where you can see sheep in the ring, watch a fleece-clipping or a sheepdog demo and meet Isaac the farmer. There's also a chance to try wool spinning, lamb feeding and drystone walling (activities from £10; lakelandfarmvisitorcentre.co.uk). A few miles down the road is your base, Rum Doodle B&B, which puts you in prime position for boat trips on the lake and visits to the Windermere Jetty Museum,







ps in the UK



which has a collection of old steamboats. It's also a half-an-hour drive to Beatrix Potter's old home, Hill Top, in the village of Near Sawrey.
Details B&B doubles from £90 (rumdoodlewindermere.com)

CRAIGIES FARM, QUEENSFERRY, WEST LOTHIAN

When Craigies farm shop opened on the edge of Edinburgh in 1988 it was a single table in an old barn. So popular was the produce that the business quickly morphed into an artisan butcher selling pork, lamb and grass-fed Highland beef from the neighbouring Dalmeny Estate, and a deli counter brimming with Scottish cheeses and homemade oven-ready meals. Between June and October visitors wander the fields filling punnets with strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants, gooseberries and cherries; you can pick apples in the orchard from September and later in the season there are pumpkins in the field. Children can try the jam-making class that starts with a fruit-picking walk (£13; craigies.co.uk). Close by are Cramond beach, Dalmeny House and Dundas Castle to explore. Stay at the canalside Bridge Inn, a cosy gastropub with rooms that's a 15-minute drive away.
Details B&B doubles from £125 (bridgeinn.com)

RHUG ESTATE, CORWEN, DENBIGHSHIRE

The organic farm on this estate spreads over 6,700 acres, so it should be no surprise that the adjoining shop and café are so well stocked. You'll find 3,000 Welsh products, including the farm's organic meat and Snowdonia Cheese Company's beechwood-smoked cheddar and Tregroes cheese crackers. Better understand the working estate by hiking the two designated trails around the farm (rhug.co.uk). A five-minute drive away, in the little market town of Corwen at the foot of the Berwyn mountains, is Bron Y Graig, a Victorian guesthouse with views over the Dee Valley. It's a good jumping-off point for exploring Snowdonia National Park (Eryri) and riding the Llangollen Heritage Railway.
Details B&B doubles from £90 (bronygraig.com)
Lucy Gillmore

Where are your favourite farm shops? Let us know in the comments online

THE £400 HOLIDAY

Chill out in the under-the-radar beachside town of **Turunc** on Turkey's Turquoise Coast



NEJDET DUZEN/GETTY IMAGES

Not only does this holiday take you to Turkey in the canniest month, it also visits one of the country's secret treasures, involves a stay at a terrific hotel and costs remarkably little.

Let's start with the time of year. By mid-September, the Mediterranean off southern Turkey has spent all summer warming up. Air temperatures, however, decline from regular averages in the mid-thirties to the mid-twenties; much more comfortable for holidaymaking Brits.

That rather suits Turunc, where you'll be staying. On the northeastern flank of Turkey's Bozburun peninsula – west of Dalaman and east of Bodrum – this is a classic example of a fishing village turned hotel-happy resort town, yet one where much of the original soul has survived. With a photogenic backdrop of the Taurus mountains' fertile slopes, Turunc is a compact place focused on its horseshoe of gently shelving sand, *above*. You could saunter across the whole town in half an hour, passing bakeries selling the regional staple of gozleme (a stuffed flatbread).

In Turunc, you won't find the banging bars that pop up in other Turkish seaside spots. Instead, much of its promenade is given over to regional-cuisine restaurants, or low-key beach bars. You can also hire jet skis or try a sunset cruise.

Near the top of town stands the superbly run Loryma Resort. A multiple award-winner for its environmental efforts, this 164-room affair spreads uphill in a series of low-rise buildings. Inside are air-conditioned, self-catering apartments, so you get kitchenettes as well as a lounge and a balcony or terrace. An on-site basic grocery shop is handy for essentials.

Despite this, the Loryma has distinctly hotel-style facilities, along with soul-lifting sea views. By the good-sized freshwater pool you'll find loungers and a bar. There's also a spa, tennis court and thrice-weekly hatha yoga classes. Its two restaurants – one buffet and the other à la carte – offer dishes from Turkey and the wider Med.

> **"You could saunter across the whole town in half an hour"**

Turunc's main beach is a 30-minute trot downhill, but don't fret: the hotel lays on regular free shuttles. The team can also arrange guided hikes nearby, along the pine-forested Carian Trail, plus rock-climbing in those Taurus peaks.

There is one catch to this package – some rather suboptimal flight times. You'll arrive at Dalaman airport just before midnight, then land back at Stansted at a wholly un-ideal 3am. A pre-booked taxi home will almost certainly be worth it.
Richard Mellor

WHAT YOU GET FOR YOUR £407PP

- Return Stansted-Dalaman flights, departing on September 19
- 20kg hold luggage
- Coach transfers
- Seven nights' self-catering for two at the Loryma Resort (tui.co.uk)

Feeling flush?

If you're inspired but have more cash to splash, you could try:

THE £800 HOLIDAY

Here's a Turunc alternative right on the seafront. There's a semi-circular pool and six bars to enjoy at the 209-room Turunc Premium Hotel, but the best bit is its private stretch of beach. A choice of two restaurants keeps things easy-access, while archery, table tennis and aqua aerobics offer some action, as do a spa and local DJs playing as darkness descends. This package includes a sea-view balcony and flights at more civilised times than the holiday above.
Details Seven nights' all-inclusive from £784pp, including flights and transfers, departing on September 29 (thomascook.com)

THE £1,500 HOLIDAY

A little further out into the Bozburun peninsula is pretty Sogut, a seaside village with half a dozen unpretentious tavernas. Just above is Bademli Bahce, a brilliant five-star boutique hotel. In scented gardens of olive, almond, sage and lavender, this romantic adults-only hideaway has a generous pool and various terraces shared between six tasteful suites. Extensive breakfasts are served, sea views dazzle at every turn, and the sunsets are wondrous.
Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,500pp, including flights and car hire, departing on September 22 (simpsontravel.com)

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Why are families still back of the queue?



Strict family pool times can bring holiday fun to an abrupt end

THOMAS BARWICK/GETTY IMAGES; DAMIAN SHIELDS/VISIT SCOTLAND

THE TRAVEL EDITOR'S TAKE

CLAIRE IRVIN



Sigh. Travel used to be so much easier ... gap-year adventures, singleton sojourns, coupled-up city breaks. As our writer Lucy Thackray explores on page 6, child-free holidays are their own particular escapist fantasy. Now that I holiday in a four, I'm happy to swap freedom for family time. But as the cost of living meets a seemingly ever-increasing stealth tax on travelling with your children, it's not lost on me that travel used to be an awful lot cheaper too.

This tax isn't official or declared and doesn't benefit anyone other than the airlines, tour operators and hotels that charge it. Who it certainly doesn't benefit are the family travellers who make up 30 per cent of the global tourism market.

Most parents and carers – and school staff – take their breaks during school holidays. For state schools this adds up to 14 weeks a year – during which a getaway can cost twice the amount of a similar break during term time. Last year 350,000 parents were fined by local councils for unauthorised school absences – at £60 per adult per child (or £120 if not paid within 21 days), this adds at least £240 to the cost of a getaway for a family of four. But with the average family holiday costing £4,792, research from Evolution Money shows, taking breaks during term time to offset peak prices starts to add up.

Just over half of UK families plan to go abroad this year, and to all those air passengers who eye-roll and huff as they see small people pile in around a window seat, count yourself lucky: their parents have had to pay for the pleasure – £6 to £10 for the charmingly named "family seating fee" on Ryanair and Wizz Air, effectively for parents to sit with small children, and up to £33 for parents and older children to sit together. The airlines should take note of President Biden's insistence that American carriers seat families together for no extra charge.

The pain and penalties continue at your destination. Fire regulations are often cited for a four-person limit on bedrooms, so if you have a larger family you will have to fork out for an additional room, a suite or adjoining rooms. Child-free restaurants in resorts or on cruise ships limit families to the buffet, and often late breakfasts and dinners; a colleague was once asked to sign a "toddler disclaimer" promising that her two-year-old would behave in their high chair – talk about being set up for failure.

Many hotels and resorts restrict parents to children's pools. Elsewhere, "family pool times" at unreasonable hours may mean swims free of splashes and screams for child-free guests, but parents potentially have to miss breakfast then haul kids out of the water while they're still having fun – or, as with one reader, rush back from a day trip before the cut-off. At a family spa hotel in the Cotswolds recently I sat by the pool enjoying the early-morning sun as parents glanced edgily at me and the poolside clock, no doubt assuming that I was counting the minutes until they kept to their curfew and exited so that I could bob around.

There are ways to game the system. Fly midweek and early in the day, as these times are likely to be cheaper, with less chance of your journey being delayed – keeping a child entertained during a long-haul day flight may be tiring, but not as exhausting as having a sleepless night flight; Sundays can be quieter and less expensive too. Also, look for kids-go-free offers and last-minute deals. The same applies to trains, which also offer savings with family travel cards and seasonal deals (if only they could be counted on for reliability).

But, travel industry, take note – there aren't many businesses that put valued customers last. You shouldn't either.

Have you been penalised for travelling as a family? Share your experiences in the comments online

IT'S 'SCOTLAND'S WORST SEASIDE TOWN' BUT I'LL ALWAYS LOVE IT



Robert Burns knew as much as anyone about nostalgia for his home town. Scotland's national poet wrote some of his best and strangest work about Ayr, but the line locals cling to most keenly comes from his spooky epic *Tam o' Shanter*: "Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses, For honest men and bonny lasses".

Last week a survey by Which? rated Ayr as the worst seaside town in Scotland, calling to mind not Burns, but the words of Daniel Defoe, who in the early 1700s lamented that it had "not only decay'd and declin'd, but is decaying and declining every day ... What the reason of the decay of trade here was, or when it first began to decay, is hard to determine." In other words, the Which? report — which ranked 126 seaside towns in the UK, finding Bangor, in Gwynedd, the worst overall — is about 300 years out of date.

I spent the first 18 years of my life in Ayr, and while I don't live there now, friends and family still do. It was there I went to school, got expelled, then went to another school. I drank cider in its parks, watched sunsets torch the sky, saw beauty in the windswept condoms on its golden beach.

Today much of it is unrecognisable to me. The centre of Ayr is finally undergoing some kind of regeneration, even if it's so far mostly in the form of bulldozers at the bottom of the high street. Yet Ayr's atrophy mirrors much of Britain's: squabbling, unimaginative local authorities made a series of bad or selfish decisions, watched retail disappear online, then shipped the rest out to soulless industrial parks. So much has gone since I was a kid, and what comes next feels yet to be decided.

Still, while many of the permanent fixtures have shuttered (where are the nightclubs?) Ayr remains a pretty good place for events. Ayr Racecourse is still the biggest in Scotland, home to the Scottish Grand National and the Ayr Gold Cup. The Royal Troon golf course, home of the recent Open Championship, is a 15-minute drive away; Old Prestwick, home of the first Open, is closer. For golf tourists, the popularity of places such as the grand old Brig o' Doon hotel remains evergreen.

The strangest thing about the town is its relationship with the beach itself. For decades, Glaswegians would travel the 40 miles to its shore to look out across the Firth of Clyde and breathe the free air. Yet I can think of no other seaside town that so avowedly avoids its own beach. There is a promenade, but no shops beyond an ice-cream kiosk or two. The town centre isn't a block or two back from this, but a half-mile walk. It may as well be in another town altogether.

And so the beach becomes an afterthought, far from cafés and reliable public loos. The Low Green is an undulating field immediately behind the beach that could be used to give people reasons to visit, but instead it spends most of the year doing nothing. In summer it's used for picnics, but mostly it's a waste of space.

Or at least it was — in May the local DJ and producer Ewan McVicar brought the Low Green a flicker of life with the Pavilion Festival, a two-day dance music event.

When I visit home now, I mostly think about what I did there — past tense. Nostalgia clings to many streets and even more pubs. But trying to look at it objectively, I can still see there are reasons to visit. The beach is a pretty, gilded two-mile sweep, topped at the north end by the old harbour, and in the south by the ruins of Greenan Castle, a 16th-century clifftop tower, *left*, that for my whole life has looked like it's about to tumble into the sea. The beach below isn't some far-flung Highland fantasy. The sunsets here — when the sun dips over the Isle of Arran, ignites the sky and ricochets off the sea — will always be my favourite anywhere in the world.

Ayr has declined; lots of places have declined. And yet I can't possibly agree with the idea that it's the worst seaside town in Scotland — I mean, did no one go up the coast to Ardrossan?

Jamie Lafferty

Is Ayr really the worst seaside town in Scotland? Let us know in the comments online

The best hotels for grown-ups



Mother-to-be *Lucy Thackray* on why she'll miss adults-only hotels. Plus her pick of new openings

There are many enormous, life-changing things to get your head around when you're pregnant – enjoying your last weeks with an intact pelvic floor, engaging with the idea of a "snot sucker" as an essential purchase and figuring out what you'll need to remortgage in the name of nursery fees.

But for me, I know that those won't be the biggest shifts of all. As a frequent traveller who's visited some of the world's best hotels, I'm currently on a reluctant farewell tour of my favourite kind. The pristine, glossy kind. The kind with sharp, architect-honed edges and glass-edged infinity pools. The kind that has never even heard of a chicken nugget. The adults-only hotel.

I'm 36, and have long been happy to pay a little extra for the guaranteed peace and sophistication of a child-free hotel. But as the clock ticks down to my due date, and however happy I am about the forthcoming arrival, I know how much I'll miss the peaceful, predictable bubble of an 18-plus holiday environment.

Children can make or break a holiday (my instinct is to say "other people's children", but I think we all know mine will be no exception). When you envisage a week away, your hard-earned escape from work, the break you really need in order to avert full-blown burnout, you usually have a certain atmosphere in mind. For me, it's reading an untaxing novel on a poolside lounger, unbothered for hours, while the sun gently caresses my back. It might involve a morning yoga session, or paddleboarding across a bay.

At a hotel where groups with kids dominate – something you often can't determine from booking websites alone – the serenity you pictured is instantly shattered by the spirited yells, splashy games and noisy tantrums of the younger guests. And there is nothing at all you can do. They have every right to be there. This is your fault for not checking the small print; for not ticking the tiny box specifying "adults only".

Of course kids are kids, and should be able to have the best, most freeing time possible on holiday. But I do believe that my being in the same place as that freeing time should be optional. Via an opt-in system, like organ donation or sitting in an exit row.

As a connoisseur of the genre, I've even learnt to look for the small print on what first appear to be "adults-only hotels". Some actually allow children over 13 (so you still risk shrill squawking beach games) or 16 (danger of being blasted by their headphones-free TikTok feed on perpetual loop). Worst of all is what they call "adults-focused" and I call "adults-phoney": the hotel that's marketed as romantic and tranquil, with pictures of



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TIBERIO SORVILLO

Oblu Select Lobigili in the Maldives, left; Engel Ayurpura in the Dolomites, Italy, right



model couples and overwater villas suggesting grown-up heaven. Yet when you get there, they've packed in the under tens like it's Peppa Pig World. At one recent stay in the Middle East, I couldn't swim a length of the only pool without an eight-year-old lobbing a heavy goggle mask across my path, summoning a swarm of madly paddling primary schoolers to retrieve it.

Clarity serves everyone. The other week I spotted "NO DOGS NO KIDS" emblazoned on the website of a Yorkshire B&B. As a dog owner who loves bringing hers on UK breaks, I admire this move. The hoteliers make no bones about their policy: your muddy-pawed hound and sticky-palmed four-year-old will not enjoy our property. And we and our patrons will not enjoy them.

I may be at the end of my adults-only era – banned for the next 16 years or so unless I sort some serious babysitting – but I heartily defend this category of hotel and its right to exist, proudly and with no tiptoeing about. Just as LGBT resorts and cruises have a place in the travelscape do, and even rarer "families only" hotels, such as Sonnwies in Italy.

At least glam family-friendly resorts are on the up. But I'll still have a nostalgic browse of the AOs, now and again. Here's my pick of the world's best new ones – let's hope they wait for me.

KING JASON ZANTE, GREECE

Best for foodie classes and sharp design

With swim-up suites among the olive groves and earthy, limewashed interiors, this is one of Europe's newest newcomers. Part of the recent wave of classier, upmarket all-inclusives, it has two à la carte restaurants, as well as tons of complimentary perks you must pre-book (picnic baskets, cheese and olive oil tastings, bread-making classes, Pilates and yoga sessions). Boxy, sharply designed suites with generous terraces appear to float on lagoon-style pools, with Tsilivi beach a 20-minute walk away – the north coast of the island is famous for dazzling aquamarine bays.
Minimum age 17
Details All-inclusive doubles from £535 (kingjasonzante.com). Fly to Zante (Zakynthos)

OBLU SELECT LOBIGILI, MALDIVES

Best for overwater romance and diving

With a name meaning "the island of love" in Maldivian, this 2022 opening is all about couples. Another all-inclusive, it's a sophisticated one – with just 68 villas, it has an intimate feel to it, with overwater villas branching off from a long, slender sand spit and a trendy food truck as well as two restaurants – the classic underwater restaurant and the more relaxed all-day spot. You can take your Padi exam with the island dive school, soak in the lush spa or tick off complimentary sunset fishing and guided snorkel trips. A low-maintenance, 15-minute speedboat transfer from Malé means no sweltering wait for a seaplane, either.
Minimum age 18
Details Seven nights' all-inclusive from £2,999pp, including flights (kenwoodtravel.co.uk)

ENGEL AYURPURA, DOLOMITES, ITALY

Best for ayurveda and silence

An ayurvedic retreat in the unlikely location of the Italian mountains, Engel Ayurpura opened in November 2023, a striking, slatted-wood design high on a slope above idyllic evergreens. It has just 15 rooms and suites – you're part of an exclusive set here – as well as 12 treatment rooms catering for guests who've signed up to programmes from two to 21 days long. You might undergo massages with warmed herbal pouches, shirodhara (where oil is therapeutically dripped onto your forehead's "third eye"), sampling ayurvedic menus and taking yoga or meditation sessions in between. The Wellbeing Concierge is also a psychologist, and guests can choose to go entirely silent for their time here.

Continued on page 8 →



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Travel Inspiration

➔ Continued from page 7

Minimum age 16
Details Room-only doubles from £195 (ayurpura.hotel-engel.com). Fly to Bolzano

SANCTUARY CAP CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Best for white sand and private pools
This Dominican Republic classic had a huge refurb before reopening as a Marriott all-inclusive in September 2022. A vast Spanish-colonial complex with swanky private villas alongside more traditional guest rooms, it's in a plot of 30,000 acres that includes a swathe of blinding white Caribbean beach and five pools – so there's room to roam, even before you get onto the golf course and adjoining marina. The Blue Marlin restaurant on stilts is a romantic highlight, as is the pan-Asian hangout Wok. Book your slot in the spa if you don't plan to stay in your room – those with private plunge pools and butler service are hugely popular with honeymooners.
Minimum age 18
Details Seven nights' all-inclusive from £1,983pp, including flights (thomascook.com)

THE AGORA HOTEL, CYPRUS

Best for exploration and stylish digi nomads
This 2024 newcomer has caught lots of attention with its must-copy decor, pizza pop-up and yoga or Pilates brunches – a bit of Soho House-style exclusivity in remote Cyprus. There are also top-spec bikes to rent for exploring the surrounding hills and countryside, and a hip co-working space should you want a little work with your play. The formerly crumbling building used to be the "Agora" or central market and gathering place of its village, Pano Lefkara, inland and west from Larnaca, so it's fitting that it's now a gathering place for Cyprus-based entrepreneurs, digital nomads and style hunters from all over the world.
Minimum age 18
Details Room-only doubles from £159 (theagorahotel.com). Fly to Larnaca

ELEVATE BALI

Best for temples and breathtaking views
An offshoot of Bali's much-photographed Hanging Gardens hotel, this secret-feeling, remote number in northern Munduk opened at the end of 2022. Large private villas have traditional Balinese charm, while a wow-factor main pool has "floating" seating overlooking a frankly unbelievable view of this peaceful part of the island, all cloud-frosted peaks and jungly terrain. Tamblingan Lake is nearby, as are off-the-beaten-track temples and waterfalls largely unbothered by tourists. It's a bit further from the airport than most (about two hours by car) but absolutely worth it for the total seclusion and spacious, high-end rooms.
Minimum age 18
Details Seven nights' B&B from £2,450pp (fleewinter.com). Fly to Denpasar



The chic Agora Hotel near Larnaca in Cyprus

PARADISUS LAS SALINAS, LANZAROTE

Best for design and sightseeing
A striking white heritage building designed by the Canarian architect Fernando Higueras, with gardens and lagoon-style pool by the local hero César Manrique, this place is a landmark. Inside, it's all creamy-toned, minimalist luxury set against tropical foliage bursting through the semi-alfresco lobby; join in with floating yoga or Pilates at the main pool, get on the (excellent) all-inclusive cocktails at Ginger bar, or book ahead for Middle Eastern, Italian or Canarian dinners, including fab à la carte menus. The building sits to the east of the chilled-out, sandy Costa Teguise beach, and some room categories come with cultural sightseeing tickets thrown in, encouraging you to get out and about.
Minimum age 16
Details All-inclusive doubles from £294 (melia.com). Fly to Lanzarote

SANDALS ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Best for activities and rum
Another hot 2024 newcomer, the new Sandals resort on Saint Vincent has a naturally spectacular setting on a bright aquamarine bay, sheltered either side by unspoilt, forested hills. Two-storey overwater villas and two-bedroom beachfront villas with butlers and private pools are among the new-to-Sandals features that crop up here; some suites also come with their own fitness rooms with exercise bikes, workout ideas and yoga mats (great for a DIY boot camp). You've plenty of choice on the food and drink front: 11 restaurants and 32 types of rum in the Three Jewels bar. Close by, you could hike up a volcano or paddleboard to nearby caves.
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Details Seven nights' all-inclusive from £2,469pp, including flights and transfers (sandals.co.uk)

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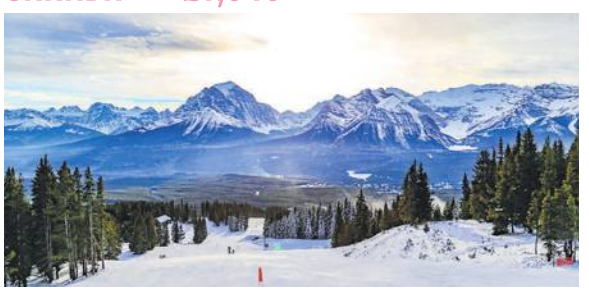
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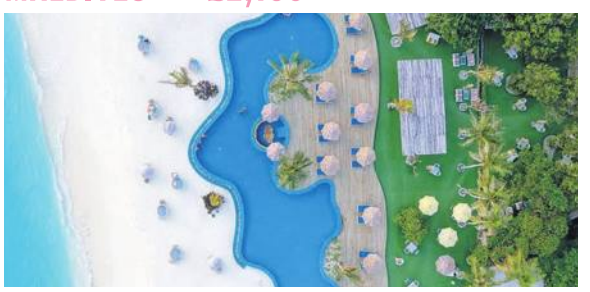
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Mauritius	£759†	£2,461#
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Min Sett Hein explores ancient crafts in the little-known coastal region beyond the city

Kyoto on Sea



SEAN PAVONE/GETTY IMAGES; MIRKO KUZMANOVIC; OLIVER FÖRSTNER/ALAMY; MIN SETT HEIN

Settling into our seats on the bullet train bound for Tokyo, a wave of melancholy hit us. Our holiday exploring the Tango peninsula had come to an end and we were reluctant to leave behind the warm hospitality and rich cultural experiences we had encountered there. Just as the shinkansen doors were about to close, a familiar figure came dashing down the platform. It was Shinji-san, our guide and friend, with my girlfriend's sweater. Having waved us off he had noticed it in his car and legged it to the station to catch us just before our departure.

With a smile and a bow we thanked Shinji-san as the doors closed. And as the sleek train glided off I couldn't help but reflect on the incredible journey that had brought us to this moment.

Our trip to Japan was long-awaited. I grew up watching anime and love Japanese food; I had been captivated by the country for years. We spent a thrilling week exploring the neon-lit streets of Tokyo before leaving for Kyoto, the ancient capital, and its namesake prefecture. A textile artist, my girlfriend, Lucy, was especially eager to delve into the rich history of Japanese craftsmanship.

The city of Kyoto is known for its temples and traditional culture, but it also teems with visitors in rented kimonos posing for snaps at every shrine. Even on a rain-soaked March day the crowds were staggering, with too many bumbag-wearing sightseers (myself included) for my taste.

Even so, we couldn't resist the Fushimi Inari Taisha shrine, with its 10,000 red torii gates winding up the mountainside. The complex is open 24 hours a day, allowing visitors to wander the gate-lined tunnels at their leisure – and at length.

Our quest for textile heritage led us to the city



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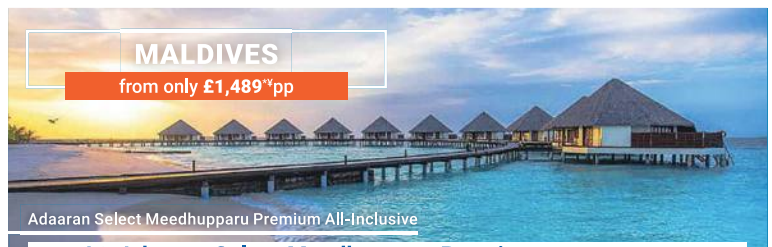
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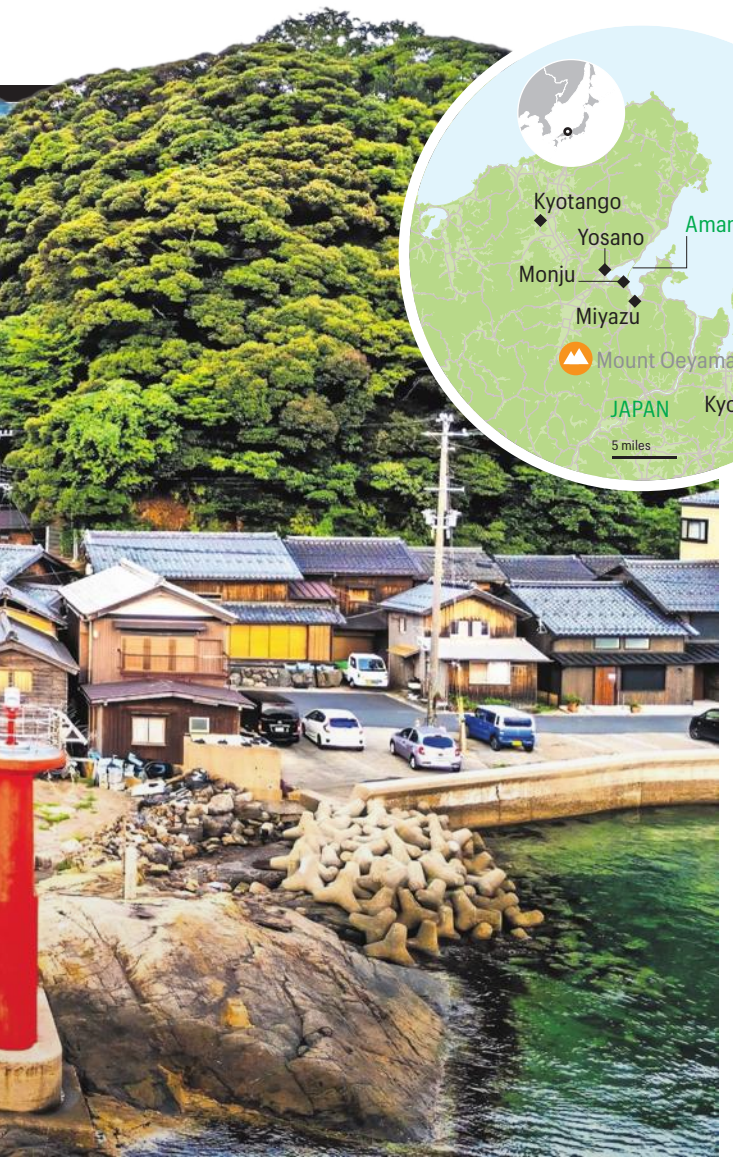
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Clockwise from left: a village in Ine Bay, on the Tango peninsula; a view of the Amanohashidate sandbar; the Fushimi Inari Taisha shrine; Min and Lucy with Hiroko Sakane at the wisteria-weaving workshop; Shiro Nishihara at the the Yosamusume saké brewery

centre and the workshop at Roketsu Dyeing Studio Yamamoto. The technique of *roketsu*, dating from the 12th century, involves applying wax to cotton fabric with bamboo brushes before dyeing with natural indigo. The waxed areas resist the dye, leaving beautiful patterns.

The old master who gives his name to the studio guided us through the process while his mother filled the room with laughter; I felt a little self-conscious about my attempts at sketching the ancient dog motif Inu Hariko, but her giggles put me at ease. And the dyeing process proved forgiving – it's almost impossible to make an unattractive piece, even if it's more abstract expressionism than photorealism (from £15 for a 90-minute session; roketsu.com).

However, the true magic unfolded when we ventured northwest of Kyoto to the Tango peninsula, a part of 1he country often overlooked by first-time visitors, though it's known as "Kyoto by the Sea".

Two hours on a bullet train took us to Amanohashidate, where we were greeted by our guides, Keiji Nagase and Shinji Inomoto. Amanohashidate, or Heaven's Bridge, is a sandbar across the Asoumi Sea with thousands of pine trees, and despite the overcast weather its beauty shone through. We took the monorail up Mount Monju to the viewing point, where many visitors bend over to observe the scenery upside down – it's said to resemble a dragon flying through the sky, but I can't say that I was entirely convinced.

Fabric is a significant aspect of Tango culture and our next stop was Miyazu, just across from Monju, for a wisteria-weaving workshop. It is run by Hiroko Sakane, who left Osaka to pursue her passion for the craft. *Fujifu*, made from the fibres of wisteria vines, is believed to be one of the oldest fabrics in Japan, dating from the prehistoric Jomon period. The craft has been kept alive by a group of women in the nearby village of Kamiseya. I may not have mastered the intricate knotting technique, but I couldn't help feel envious of Sakane-san's tranquil bayside existence.

A few miles west of Miyazu, in the village of Yosano, we met Tokizo and Asako Sakitsu, who make silk for kimonos by hand, each one taking at least 300 hours. Rather than dyeing the threads, they colour the silk cocoons using plants before spinning them. The couple pour their essence into the work and I felt a deep respect for the craft but worried who would carry it on after they are gone.

Shibata Orimono, also in Yosano, offers a tantalising alternative. As I ran my fingers over his silken bolts – some William Morris-like, others traditional florals – he shared his secret: using Adobe Photoshop and digital weaving machines he creates the mesmerising textiles with breathtaking speed and precision, though I wondered whether something intangible might be lost in translation.

Even more revelatory was Kaya Yama no Ie, a hostel perched halfway up the lush slopes of Mount Oeyama – though "hostel" doesn't do it justice. Originally a forestry school, this spacious hotel offered a level of comfort that rivalled even the swanky Hyatt Regency Kyoto, albeit with a distinctly different charm.

Part of that charm came from the seven-course *kaiseki* feast prepared by the owner. Each dish here is made with mountain produce. I loved the tender grilled wild boar with crispy roast potatoes and the silky soy-milk crème brûlée topped with strawberries, each morsel singing with authenticity and passion.

A stone's throw from the hostel was another gem: the Yosamusume saké brewery run by Shiro Nishihara. Here, water drawn from the depths of Oeyama is transformed into a drink that embodies *ikigai*, the concept of passion, purpose and dedication to one's craft. As I sipped the saké it danced on my tongue; delightfully fruity with an aroma of sweet toasted rice.

While Kyoto also has its charms, the true heart and soul of Japan lies in places such as the Tango peninsula, where artisans dedicate their lives to preserving traditions and flavours are born from a profound connection to the land. These experiences linger in the memory long after the fleeting thrills of social-media likes have faded.

This reminded me of the true purpose of travel – not merely ticking off sights, but forging deep, meaningful connections with people and places. If you find yourself on the Tango peninsula, be sure to give Shinji-san my regards.

Min Sett Hein was a guest of Inside Japan, which has 14 nights' B&B – two on the Tango peninsula – from £5,396pp, including transfers, guides and some experiences (insidejapantours.com). Fly to Tokyo





Three of the best places to stay in Kyoto



NODE, TOROYAMACHO
Part gallery, part hotel, Node offers something different in the heart of Kyoto. Its rooms are sleek and modern, with art throughout the hotel. Guests could forget they are in Japan, let alone Kyoto, so handily there are reminders nearby — walk 15 minutes north to Nijo Castle or east to Nishiki Market.
Details Room-only doubles from £87 (nodehotel.com)

HYATT REGENCY KYOTO, HIGASHIYAMA
A five-minute drive from Kyoto station and a 25-minute walk from the historic Gion district, this all-rounder has soothing rooms with lots of pine panels and texture prints, plus windows filled with views of greenery. Its excellent Touzan restaurant offers a tempting, multicourse *kaiseki* menu and the hotel can organise experiences such as a *kintsugi* workshop (in which broken ceramics are repaired with gold detailing), a tour of Kiyomizu-dera Temple or a history-focused rickshaw ride around town.
Details Room-only doubles from £260 (hyatt.com)

SHIRAUME RYOKAN, GION
With its kabuki theatres, geishas and tea ceremonies in Zen gardens, the Gion neighbourhood is the reason that many visitors come to Kyoto, and few hotels here offer better service or value than Shiraume, *left*. With more than 140 years of history, plum trees and weeping willows in its ornamental garden, tatami mats, paper doors and flawlessly turned-out staff, the traditional guesthouse fits perfectly with the very specific aesthetic of the district.
Details Half-board doubles from £478 (shiraume-kyoto.jp)
Lucy Thackray

Is it safe to travel to Japan?

It is largely business as usual in Japan despite the 7.1-magnitude earthquake off the southwestern coast of the country last week and its meteorological agency advising that there was a greater probability of a more powerful earthquake. Japan is one of the most quake-prone countries in the world and is well prepared, and on alert, for this type of event.

"Unfortunately, earthquakes are not unusual," the specialist operator Inside Japan says. "It is a threat that has always been there, which is why we have a 24-hour support team monitoring the situation and ready to assist clients when minor or major incidents occur."

Travel Norway

Northern sky



The aurora borealis are expected to be especially spectacular this year. A cruise is the only way to go, and now is the time to book, says *Ben Aitken*

At one point during my two-week cruise of Norway on board Ambition – a ship from the British line Ambassador – I found myself in a hot tub gazing up at the northern lights while being lectured on Norse mythology by a retired PE teacher from Wales. What's more, it didn't even feel odd to find myself in such a position, which gives you some idea how delightfully peculiar a fortnight within the Arctic Circle can be.

That day I'd been dragged around a frozen trout lake by eight Alaskan huskies. Two days before that I'd donned a pair of snowshoes and plodded around the northernmost 18-hole golf course in the world. Two days earlier still I'd witnessed my partner pretending to be Forrest Gump in front of an audience of several hundred. And two days before that I'd whizzed around the most powerful maelstrom in the world on a high-speed inflatable. And in roughly 16 hours I'd find myself in the thick of a relatively heated dispute with Gloria from Hartlepool about a questionable bingo claim – within four metres of a moose.

They say that travel can broaden you, and I fancy they weren't just thinking about the lunch buffet ramping up your midriff. Our ship had a resident lecturer who gradually acquired cult status on board by providing pithy overviews of Bergen and the Vikings and the size of Norway's sovereign wealth fund, which at £1.2 trillion is roughly £1.2 trillion bigger than that of the UK.

I learnt that 40 per cent of Norway is for the herding of reindeer; that Norwegians generally can't believe Brits continue to accept the big tree they send us every December; that the indigenous Sami people have 300 words for snow (which is impressive until you realise that the British have 546 words for drunk, including "car-parked"); and that the aurora borealis – the solar-powered light show we'd travelled thousands of nautical miles to see – had just been spotted in Cornwall.

> **My gym time was improved by the sight of a killer whale**

Further education was provided by the ports of call. Alesund introduced us to an ambitious Viking called Rollo who persuaded France to give up a patch of its northern coast (that would later become Normandy) in return for being left alone. Trondheim presented a world-



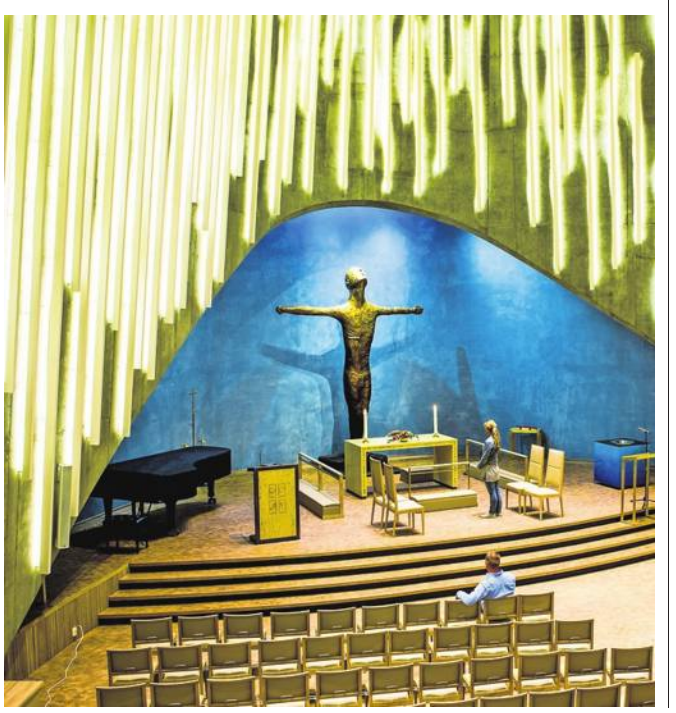
CHUNYIP WONG, JUAN VERGARA/GETTY IMAGES; BEN AITKEN; CH / VISITNORWAY





Clockwise from left: Alesund, one of the port towns on the cruise; the northern lights dazzle over Tromso; Ben Aitken aboard Ambition; inside the Northern Lights Cathedral in Alta





champion cheese (Nidelven Bla) and an ancient fort erected to frighten off Swedes. Tromso delivered a troll museum, a harbourside setting and an encounter with Roald Amundsen, who pipped Captain Scott to the pole that time; Alta, right at the top of the country, delivered a gentleman called Nils who on his first day as a snowmobile salesman had the misfortune of ending up beneath one of his bestsellers, a state of affairs that occasioned a three-week coma and his immediate dismissal. Bodo, an EU capital of culture this year, supplied the almighty maelstrom previously mentioned, while Bergen issued a lot of gusty drizzle, the paintings of Edvard Munch and a gorgeous undulating old town.

By the end of the cruise I was broadened to the point of bursting – which was why the ship's gym and sauna were an absolute godsend. I'd head up to the spa whenever I needed to process all the Nordic intel, Viking trivia and Sami vocab I was consuming, or whenever the buffet-bulge was threatening to get a bit over the top. On account of the toing-and-froing on the waves I often felt absolutely car-parked when running on the treadmill. On the plus side the gym's location at the fore of deck 12 meant that my power-walking was occasionally improved by the sight of a killer whale frolicking in an apparently endless sea.

The sauna, meanwhile, was the best in which I'd perspired. Its chief virtue was the huge starboard window that offered ongoing views of sea, sky and mountain, and (if you were lucky) even old aurora herself. The phrase "to be all at sea" often felt inappropriate aboard Ambition. The expansive views and celestial spreads encouraged periods of reflection and reckoning, the outcome of which, more often than not, was a more settled mental state; a more shipshape sense of self – not to be sniffed at.

Meaningful reflection wasn't only prompted by the vast, mind-bending vistas; it was also prompted by the likes of Nelly from Rotherham, who informed me halfway through an omelette that she was struggling with a complicated and incurable affliction. I laid down my fork, gave it a second then asked what her condition was exactly. "I'm a Chelsea fan," she said, leaving the table with a wink.

There was also Kelvin from Somerset, who won the bingo six times and wouldn't be seen in public without a tripod twice his height. There was Jac, the cruise director from Liverpool who managed to remain endearing despite coming through the Tannoy system 19 times an hour. There was Eddie from Bali, who could turn a bath towel into a monkey while replenishing a fridge and fluffing a pillow. There was Fanny from the Philippines, who took time out of her shift to delight those in the Cavern bar with her take on *Hey Jude*. There was Jamie the idiosyncratic pianist and there was Kyle the idiosyncratic vocalist, whose Frankie Valli cabaret would grace any stage in the land. There were Nick and Barbara, Leslie and Jean, Joan and Ray and roughly four million Ians, the name having trended in the second half of the 1950s.

For me, it's people who elevate experiences. I'm essentially a philanthrope – only without the money, which isn't as much of a barrier to Ambition as you might think. You can get a cabin for as little as £50 per person per night, which is why some people – having banished the children and sold the dalmatian – practically move in. Cabins for this winter are going even faster than hot cakes, since the northern lights are expected to be bigger and better than ever.

But you wouldn't catch me selling the dalmatian, even if I had one. When it comes to cruising, once in a blue moon is enough. While it's nice now and again to surrender to a plan, submit to a schedule and concede to a fortnight of geological wonders and high-grade wedding food, I wouldn't want a life of it. Special things need to be rationed if they are to retain their magic, which is why I only visit my nan on a quarterly basis.

As we sailed into Tilbury, our no-fly cruise coming to a close, an Ian sidled up to me on the back of deck 10. He told me that the Windrush generation landed at Tilbury Docks, and that the fort over there, just beyond the Hyundai plant, is ever so historic and worth seeing if I get the chance. Looking at the latter and considering Ian's remarks I was happily reminded that one reason we go away is to gain a new understanding of home.

Despite Ian's friendliness he seemed a bit crestfallen, and I wondered whether it was his name getting him down or that the cruise was through and the real world beckoned. In the event it wasn't the sense of an ending that had caused Ian's upset, but rather a falling-out with his partner. It turns out that Ian had somehow managed to delete all the northern lights pictures off his phone, with the result that his wife hadn't spoken to him for days. I offered my condolences. Ian waved them away. "We'll get another chance next week," he said. "We're back on for the Iceland cruise."

Ben Aitken was a guest speaker with Ambassador Cruise Line, which has 14 nights' full board from £1,202pp on the Norway's Land of the Northern Lights itinerary, departing on November 1, round trip from Tilbury (ambassador cruiseline.com). Sunday Times readers can benefit from a discount of 5 per cent using the code Times5 when booking before August 25

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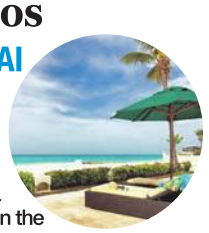


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Tennis, sailing, hiking, biking – wall-to-wall activities and low-key living make this resort a family favourite, says *Juliet Bates*

A farewell to boredom



When you have one family holiday a year there can be a lot of pressure to get it right. This was especially true last year for my husband and I – we realised that we could not risk a repeat of the previous summer in the Algarve. Our son, who was then ten, suffered a double ear infection that took him out of the swimming pool and into the apartment, where he and his older brother spent much of the rest of the holiday either bickering or glued to a device.

This was why we decided that activities – as many of them as possible – would be key to holiday harmony. So we turned to Mark Warner, specialists in activity holidays, and its new resort on the island of Lesbos, its fourth in Greece.

> We swerved the 'tipsy tennis' competition

In 2015 Lesbos was on the front line of the Syrian refugee crisis, with thousands making the eight-mile journey across the sea from Turkey. But the number of arrivals has dwindled and holidaymakers are back, including many from Athens.

Mark Warner took over the Aeolian Village from Neilson last year and spent £1 million on new water-sports kit, including 58 sailing boats, 87 windsurfing boards, 27 paddleboards, 14 kayaks and six rowing boats. It also built a new padel tennis court next to the three existing tennis courts. It's a family-friendly affair, in 12 acres full of palms and bougainvillea, with a private stretch of beach and 150 rooms, split between the "village" (up 64 steps) and the main hotel. The large pool has a separate area for children; there are also mountain and road bikes, kids' clubs, table tennis, volleyball, fitness classes, a gym and spa. For 2024 they've added wing-surfing and wing-foiling.

It's exhausting just writing the list, but friends told us that the kids would love it, so we booked.

Despite a sweaty 90-minute coach transfer from Mytilene, the island capital, our first impressions were good. Sue Thomas, the resort manager, is a Mark Warner veteran of almost 40 years (she's since moved to the Lemnos resort). Her team of 50 were incredibly friendly and professional, with a marvellous ability to remember guests' names. All they wanted, Sue said, was for us all to have a fantastic holiday so that we would come back and they would all keep their jobs.

Dinner that evening was pleasingly full of chatter about the activities to come ("Can we try padel? Can I do sailing? Do I have to go to kids' club?" – "Yes, yes and we'll see"). As well as the sports programme, there was the separate kids' club schedule to get our heads around, though spontaneity is possible; our 13-year-old signed up last minute for an excellent eight-mile mountain bike ride that we hadn't spotted earlier. Sue reassured us that it was also perfectly OK to ignore it all, saying: "No one is going to bully you off your sunlounger."

The next morning, the 13-year-old and I ushered in this new era of Bates family holidays by trying paddleboarding. "Mum, Mum, this is so much fun!" he said. I silently congratulated myself that our trip had got off to the best possible start as we wobbled out into the Aegean.

The island of Chios was just visible in the distance, the sea a clear shade of jade green and deliciously cooling each time we took a dunk to escape the brutal July heat. One evening our taxi clocked an alarming 40C at 6.58pm and I heard rumours of melting sunglasses



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IOANNIS MANTAS/ALAMY; SOPHIA CONDON/LIME PHOTOGRAPHY

Clockwise from left: Skala Eressos and the Aegean coast; mastering Fusion dingy sailing; Juliet and her elder son on a guided mountain bike ride

from other guests, though fortunately there were no wildfires.

The waterfront manager, Justin Apps, told me that the wind on this beach is excellent, as was all the new kit, suitable for seasoned sailors as well as beginners. My 11-year-old turned it to his advantage, completing two kids' sailing courses; by the end of our fortnight he was taking out dinghies solo.

We largely left the water sports to him. I had a go at windsurfing but found it just as tricky as I did on my previous attempt in 1993, despite my instructor Sam's heroic efforts.

Maybe padel would be easier. My husband had been playing the increasingly popular sport for a few years and the rest of us were keen to give it a try. An introductory course taught the 13-year-old and me the basics. Did I master the technique? Possibly not ("Dad, can I be on your team?"), but it was great fun and we could play en famille with few arguments – a win in my book, if not on the court.

The buffet of activities was seemingly endless. We swerved the "tipsy tennis" competition but enjoyed a morning hike to a tiny hilltop chapel and loved the four-mile wildlife mountain-bike ride with our knowledgeable guide, James (who knew that swifts spend their first two years in constant flight?).

We wondered how the Aeolian Village compared with other Mark Warner resorts. A quick poll among some holiday friends who'd Mark Warnered before suggested that the vibe here was more chilled and that its compact size made it easier to keep tabs on your children. We certainly felt comfortable letting the boys roam as long as they had their phones. And everyone liked that it wasn't just Brits staying; a third of the rooms are reserved for other guests, mainly Greek. Perhaps this explains the prawns cooked in ouzo we had one night.





The resort's surroundings are charming too. In the southwest corner of the island, it is the only large-scale hotel for miles around. In one direction are scrubby hills as bare as the handful of nudists who congregate down that end of the beach ("Dad, did you see the naked people? Three on a paddleboard!"); in the other is surely the resort's trump card – the bohemian village of Skala Eressos, the poet Sappho's birthplace, a 15-minute walk.

Reached via Turtle Bridge (where you will in fact see terrapins), Skala Eressos felt very Greek and idyllic, with a stretch of stilted restaurants inches from the sea. Stays at the resort are half-board, so we had some tasty lunches here.

On our last evening, as we left the disco, we spotted a shooting star shimmering overhead: another first. "Should we come back here?" I asked. "Yeah!" the kids said with conviction. Sue, I think your jobs are safe.

Juliet Bates was a guest of Mark Warner, which has seven nights' half-board at Aeolian Village Beach Resort from £749pp, including flights, transfers and activities (markwarner.co.uk)



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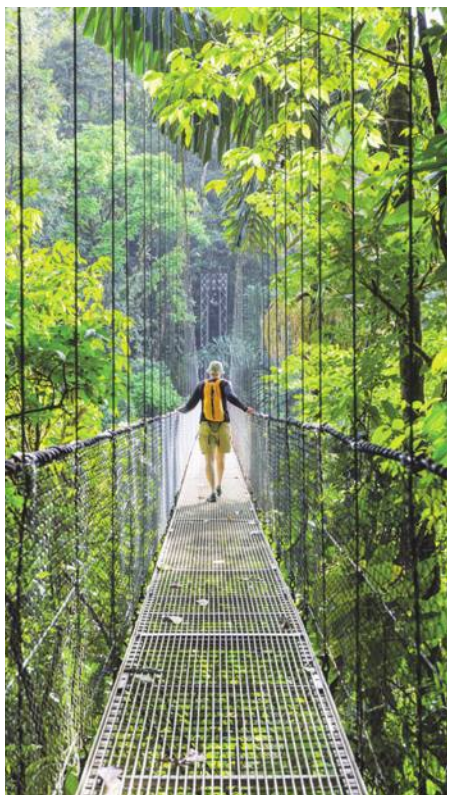
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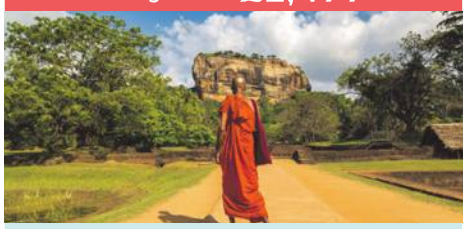
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48 HOURS IN... CHICAGO

Kick back and enjoy the jazz, laze on an urban beach or see the city from above, says *Jacqui Agate*



Clockwise from right: a cruise through the downtown area; Jacqui in the city; the Skydeck at Willis Tower

IAN DAGNALL IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY



Chicago is always on the up. The biggest, buzziest city in the American Midwest, it was home to the world's first skyscraper (the Home Insurance Building, completed in 1885, now demolished) and the skyline has been shapeshifting since then. It has ended up a patchwork of art deco marvels, brutalist hulks and modern, glassy showstoppers, making no trip to the Windy City complete without tour of its architecture.

Beyond the impressive buildings this is a place defined by water. Chicago skirts Lake Michigan, trimmed with lakeside trails and sandy urban beaches, while its namesake river is plied by boat tours. Then there are the neighbourhoods – more than 70 of them, from a still-growing Chinatown to trendy hangouts such as Logan Square and Fulton Market. The result is a richly diverse city that is more approachable than New York yet more fast-paced than Boston.



DAY ONE

MORNING

The city is one of America's artistic heavyweights, with the Art Institute of Chicago holding one of the world's largest collections of impressionist art – brave the crowds to see big-hitters such as Monet's *Water Lily Pond* (adults £25; artic.edu). A morning here will land you close to some of the best-loved public art in the city; seek out Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* sculpture (aka "the Bean") and the Jaume Plensa-designed *Crown Fountain*, both in Millennium Park.

Eat at the Gage

Straight-shooting comfort food is on offer at this restaurant, in a landmark 1800s building in a downtown area known as the Loop. Sink into a brown-leather booth and order dishes such as fish and chips or rigatoni with wild mushroom ragu (mains from £18; thegagechicago.com).

AFTERNOON

By now your neck may ache from gazing upwards, so shift your perspective at one of the city's observation decks. At 360 Chicago, Tilt eases visitors out over the city in a glass box, until they're looking directly down on the Magnificent Mile district (£34; 360chicago.com). The glass Skydeck at Willis Tower is equally hair-raising (£25; theskydeck.com).

Drink at Cindy's Rooftop

Keep things on a high with a sundowner at Cindy's Rooftop. The popular cocktail spot tops the swish Chicago Athletic Association hotel and offers views over Lake Michigan and Millennium Park (cocktails from £14; cindysrooftop.com).

Need to know

● Getting there and around

Fly direct to Chicago O'Hare from Heathrow with carriers including British Airways, American Airlines and United Airlines. Unlike many American cities, Chicago is well served by public transport, with an extensive bus network and the city's eight "L" train lines — the Blue line links the airport with the centre.

The city is also where you'd start the classic Route 66 road trip. America As You Like it has 20 nights' self-catering plus two nights in a hotel from £1,485pp, including flights and RV rental (americaasyoulikeit.com).

● Visit responsibly

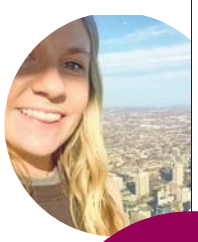
Chicago is the starting point for signature long-distance Amtrak routes, including the California Zephyr and the City of New Orleans.

EVENING

Chicago has a revered improv scene and its Second City club has nurtured some of the finest names in comedy, including Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. The snug, no-frills joint hosts stellar acts from political satire to side-splitting musical ensembles (from £8; secondcity.com).

Eat at Avec River North

Mediterranean meets New American cuisine at this trendy spot filled with hanging plants and pendant lights. The focaccia with taleggio cheese and truffle oil is the pick of the menu – order a side of honey for drizzling (mains from £19; avecrestaurant.com).



> "The city is one of America's artistic heavyweights"

DAY 2

MORNING

Combine a leisurely trip on the river with a deep dive into city history on an architecture tour with Shoreline. Guides will point out sights such as the beaux-arts Wrigley Building and the St Regis hotel, a wavy, glass confection that is the world's tallest building designed by a female architect, Jeanne Gang (from £40; shorelinesightseeing.com).

Eat at Chinatown

Make lunch a tour of one of the few Chinese districts in the US that is still expanding. It is spread over 30 blocks and foodie highlights include Triple Crown Restaurant for dim sum (from £3; triplecrownchicago.com), Lao Sze Chuan for Sichuan cuisine (mains from £11; laoszechuantogo.com) and Chiu Quon Bakery for sweets including egg tarts (from £1; cqbakery.com).

AFTERNOON

The Windy City provides ample opportunity to get active. On the Northwest Side, the 606 is its answer to the High Line in New York City – an elevated greenway born of an abandoned railway. Or there's the Lakefront Trail, which spools out for 18 miles, revealing highlights such as the sandy Oak Street beach. The Lakefront Neighborhoods tour whisks visitors along the water's edge and explores districts including the historic Gold Coast area and the old town (from £36; bobbysbikehike.com).

Drink at Federales Fulton

Be sure to explore the happening Fulton Market district, a former industrial area that is home to Federales Fulton. The open-air Mexican-inspired spot is known for its tequila concoctions – try the blood-orange margarita (cocktails from £7; federalesfulton.com).

EVENING

The city's jazz and blues heritage is a product of the Great Migration, in which African-Americans travelled north through the 20th century to urban hubs such as Chicago. Modern yet intimate, Winter's Jazz Club is a hot ticket for live sets (from £8; wintersjazzclub.com).

Eat at Bronzeville Winery

Though the wine list here is robust, it is also a full-service restaurant. Expect dishes such as duck breast with white cheddar grits or sea bass with salsa verde, plus DJ sets from Thursdays to Sundays (mains from £19; bronzevillewinery.com).

Jacqui Agate was a guest of Choose Chicago (choosechicago.com) and Enjoy Illinois (enjoyillinois.co.uk)

Where to stay

FREEHAND CHICAGO

Affordable mid-century chic

This fashionable hotel punches above its rate, offering artfully designed rooms in the River North neighbourhood — a gallery-packed art and design hub. Well-executed craft cocktails are served at the hotel's Broken Shaker bar, which has a cool speakeasy atmosphere (room-only doubles from £127; freehandhotels.com).

21C MUSEUM HOTEL

Urban art fix

The discerning 21c brand is quickly becoming a marker of a city's artistic clout. This offering in the downtown area doesn't disappoint, with sprawling gallery space, smart rooms and colourful penguin sculptures that appear to move of their own volition — now a trademark of the chain (room-only doubles from £222; 21cmuseumhotels.com).

PENDRY CHICAGO

Understated luxury

The first thing you'll notice about the Pendry is that it's housed in a building that resembles a gilded champagne bottle — the art deco landmark was built as a defiant response to Prohibition rules in the 1920s. The hotel's stylishly minimalist accommodation places you in the heart of the attraction-packed Loop neighbourhood. Venteux, its European-style brasserie, will see you through from breakfast to dinner too (room-only doubles from £330; pendry.com).

Travel

I don't want pals' dog to ruin our trip

LETTE'S BE HONEST



Kathy Lette advises on friends who refuse to leave their animals and how to cope with noisy eaters



TRAVELLINGLIGHT/ALAMY

Exmouth beach, the two ends of which are dog-friendly year-round

Q We are planning a holiday with our close friends, probably to Devon. They've just told me they intend to bring their dog even though I've expressed doubts about that. My husband and I don't have pets and I am worried that this will restrict what we can do during the holiday. How do I discuss this without my friends getting defensive?

A The reason I don't like animals is that I went out with so many as a teenager. Plus I shared a bedroom with my Steve Irwin-esque sister and there was always a lizard, snake or large rodent in a shoebox beneath her bed. At night I couldn't sleep, fearing that something might escape, intent on sinking venomous fangs into my flesh.

Moving from Australia to England made matters worse. Many of my English friends love their dogs more than their children; they keep their dogs at home and send their kids to high-class kennels such as Eton and Harrow. They're also in denial about the true nature of their pets.

An author pal of mine rented a Dorset manor for her 60th birthday. Another guest asked in our WhatsApp group whether she could bring her loveable little pooch – she made the dog sound so well-behaved that I suspected it had been toilet trained using pages from The New York Review of Books. Well, what she turned up with was a giant German shepherd dog. It resembled the kind of creature that could drag you into the underworld. The salivating beast looked at me as though I were a chew toy. When it then growled menacingly the owner giggled: "He's just playing. Satan's so fun-loving!"

"Satan?!" I gasped. "Um, the fact that all German shepherds are invariably called Lucifer, Damien or Satan belies the notion they're 'fun loving', don't you think?"

> **Your friends' canine request is a major bone of contention**

But I was in the minority. When Satan decided that my leopard-skin shoe would look good between his foaming incisors, even my boyfriend ignored my shrieks, giving Satan the kind of indulgent look he used to give me when we first got together.

When I told him and the other guests that it was either me or the dog, they only took a moment to reply: "Gee, Kath, we're really going to miss you. Drive safely."

Not wanting to wreck my girlfriend's birthday I gritted my teeth, but the dog ruined the weekend as far as I'm concerned. Walks were brought to an abrupt halt every five seconds while it sniffed something. It cleared rooms with its gassy explosions. At pubs we could only eat outside, in the freezing cold. So yes, I understand why your friends' canine request is a major bone of contention – one they'll gnaw with more ferocity as the holiday approaches.

Many dog-loving Brits are going to want to have me put down for saying this, but nowhere does it state in your friendship vows that you have to cough up hair balls. You can't just roll over and play dead – it's time to address the issue.

Why not fake a dog-fur allergy? That way your friends can't "get defensive". Or try reverse psychology: agree that they can bring their dog as long as you can also bring your pet. Then go on to explain that snakes have had a rotten press since that whole business in the Garden of Eden. You just have to hope the rats you buy to feed your python don't escape – the *pregnant* rats.

Then point out that there's nothing like roaming your holiday cottage with a net and tranquilliser dart to put the fun into getting your deposit back. I predict a pet-free zone will be declared pronto.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Better than a cottage rental – where your friend's hound will be able to leap all over you, steal your slippers and bark at passers-by – go for a hotel that welcomes dogs in select rooms and areas only. Booking two rooms in this kind of place means that your indulgence of your friend's dog stops at your door. Typically these hotels allow dogs in communal areas such as bar lounges, but not in the restaurant – and certainly nowhere near the spa – and have rules about them having to be on leads in the grounds. Lympstone Manor, north of Exmouth and overlooking the River Exe, allows furry pals in its shepherd's huts and two dedicated suites, as well as the Pool House Restaurant. The two ends of Exmouth beach are dog-friendly year-round (pooches aren't welcome in the central section from May to September) or head inland to the heaths of Woodbury Common. B&B shepherd's huts cost from £440 a night (lympstonemanor.co.uk).

Q I've got misophonia and can't stand people eating noisily. One of my friends is a noisy eater and we are going on an all-inclusive holiday, so there will be lots of meals together. How do I ask her to eat without chomping?

A To be honest I'd never come across the word "misophonia" – at first I thought that it meant misplacing your handset. But seriously your condition must be so challenging. Is your holiday chum really a super-loud chomper or are you overly sensitive? My son is autistic so I know people have got much better at thinking outside the neurotypical box. Once you explain I'm sure your pal will sympathise – then maybe opt for restaurants with loud music to drown out her noshing. When it comes to the crunch, don't lose a friend over a munch.

Do you need Kathy's help with a travel problem? Email us at travel@sunday-times.co.uk

COMPETITION

WIN A LUXURY BREAK IN THE DOLOMITES WORTH UP TO £2,640 AT HOTEL SASSONGHER

WHERE WAS I?

My friend and I have made a sweetheart deal. Today, Friend says, I will see the ruins of an abbey, founded in the 13th century by the mother of a future king. But first he insists we start with a queen, six miles further north — even though round here they call it the south.

While we're there he wants to meet an old acquaintance. "I almost forgot he lived there," he tells me. Apparently he's an ardent supporter of the local football club (formed in 1919) and he'll show Friend their ground. So we will both be happy.

I'm assuming that we'll also see the house where a poet spent his final years. But when we reach the town in question we are distracted by its many river crossings, especially its 19th-century suspension bridge. It is, we agree, a thing of beauty.

The problem is, no man can tether time, and soon we're out of it. So we run to meet Friend's acquaintance at the football club, half a mile northwest of the bridge. We shouldn't have bothered — a match is about to start and there's no way Friend will get his stadium tour.

"I didn't say anything about a tour," he tells me. "We're going to see the match."

"No we're not," I tell him.

"Not you — us," he says, pointing to himself and his acquaintance. They show me their tickets.

"Now that," Friend tells me, "is what I call a sweetheart deal."

"And you two are what I call a parcel of rogues," I growl before going in search of a taxi.

Sean Newsom

THE QUESTIONS

1 What is the modern name of the abbey?
2 What is the name of the football club?



THE PRIZE

The winner and guest will stay for three nights, B&B, in a deluxe room at Hotel Sassongher, a chalet-style hotel in South Tyrol, Italy. In the mountain resort of Corvara, this family-owned property offers a blend of classic and contemporary style amid spectacular Dolomites scenery. The hotel's restaurant celebrates regional food and wine, while the spa is equipped with an indoor pool, as well as a rooftop sauna and hot tub.

On the doorstep a whole summer's worth of beautiful hikes and bike rides await. For more see sassongher.it.

The prize includes one spa treatment each for the winner and guest, as well as one dinner for two (excluding drinks), plus a flight budget of £200pp and return transfers to the hotel. It must be taken in the hotel's summer season in either 2024 or 2025, subject to availability and excluding public holidays.

HOW TO ENTER

Answer the questions and complete the entry form at **thetimes.com/travel/where-was-i** by the end of Thursday, August 15. One entry per person. Full terms and conditions apply, and your information will be used in accordance with our privacy policy at newsprivacy.co.uk.

LAST WEEK'S PRIZE

The answers are Reid and Beauvais. Michelle Powell from Yorkshire wins a luxury London break for two worth up to £2,490 at One Aldwych.

BOOK BY 8PM 16TH AUGUST 2024 FOR EXTRA DISCOUNT OF UP TO £425±

ROL CRUISE

SILVERSEA

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE 2025

Seychelles & South Africa

ULTRA LUXURY SALE EVENT



BUSINESS CLASS FLIGHTS *Included*»

Complimentary PRIVATE UK CHAUFFEUR SERVICE

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Free 5★ HOTEL STAYS IN THE SEYCHELLES & CAPE TOWN‡

DRINKS, SHORE EXCURSIONS×, WI-FI & GRATUITIES *Included*++

23 NIGHTS DEPARTING 20TH FEBRUARY 2025

FEBRUARY 2025

Your EXCLUSIVE COMPLIMENTARY Private UK Chauffeur Service will transfer you to the airport in style

Thu 20 **Fly overnight from London to the Mahé, Seychelles**

Fri 21 **Mahé, Seychelles**
Upon arrival, transfer to a 5★ hotel for your three night stay, on a half board basis‡

Sat 22 - Sun 23 **Mahé, Seychelles**
Spend the days relaxing at your leisure. With cerulean seas, miles and miles of beach, lush, tropical jungle and surreal, natural beauty as far as the eye can see, few places on Earth can claim to have been as blessed by nature as Mahé

Mon 24 **Mahé, Seychelles**
After breakfast, transfer to the port and embark the ultra-luxurious ***Silver Dawn*** for your 15 night all-inclusive voyage to Cape Town, beginning with an overnight stay on board

Fri 28 **Port Louis, Mauritius**
★INCLUDED Shore Excursion×: Sugar Museum & Chateau Labourdonnais
The former Beau Plan sugar Factory, now known as L'Aventure du Sucre, houses one of the best museums in Mauritius. Experience live cane cutting where a local field worker will explain the particularities of the plant in the fields. Enjoy the sugarcane crushing and make your own tropical cocktail



MARCH 2025

Sat 1 **Pointe des Galets, Reunion**

Wed 5 **Richards Bay, South Africa**

Thu 6 **Durban, South Africa**
Durban, South Africa's sultry subtropical jewel, stretches along the sun-kissed beaches of the Indian Ocean. Seamlessly fusing Africa's pulsating energy with an eclectic colonial and Zulu heritage, Durban offers a mosaic of vibrant cultures, exotic cuisines and buzzing nightlife

Sat 8 - Sun 9 **Port Elizabeth, South Africa** (overnight)
★INCLUDED Shore Excursion×: Township Exploration - South Africa's Past & Present
Explore South Africa's turbulent past, and how its citizens are working to help overcome it

Tue 11 **Cape Town, South Africa**
Disembark and transfer to a 5★ hotel for your three night stay, including breakfast‡

Wed 12 - Thu 13 **Cape Town, South Africa**
★INCLUDED Big 5 Safari excursion×★
Enjoy a two-hour safari tour across the 10 000-ha reserve in an open air 4x4 discovering the Big Five. If luck is with you you'll be amazed by the majestic sight of the male Cape Barbary lion which is a rare find! From thereon you will encounter an endless variety of species, from the beautifully marked oryx to herds of zebras

Fri 14 **Cape Town, South Africa**
After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your overnight flight to London›

Sat 15 **Arrive in London**

Your EXCLUSIVE COMPLIMENTARY Private UK Chauffeur Service will be waiting to transfer you home in style

Dates not mentioned are spent relaxing at sea.

WHAT'S INCLUDED
IN YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD LAUNCH PROMOTION

LIMITED SUITES AVAILABLE AT THESE EXCLUSIVE FARES

- **INCLUDED** Business Class flights when you book a Superior Veranda Suite (SV) or above»
- **EXCLUSIVE COMPLIMENTARY** Private UK Chauffeur Service, up to 100 miles each way, for all bookings
- **THREE NIGHT** pre-cruise stay at a 5★ hotel in the Seychelles on a half board basis‡
- 15 nights all-inclusive cruising on board the ultra-luxurious ***Silver Dawn***, including:
  - **COMPLIMENTARY** shore excursions×
  - **INCLUDED** unlimited Wi-Fi++
  - Butler service for all suites
  - Premium drinks in-suite and throughout the ship++
  - All on board gratuities included
  - Spacious suites – over 80% with private veranda
  - **INCLUDED** in-suite dining, 24 hour room service and open seating dining in multiple restaurants
- **THREE NIGHT** post-cruise stay at a 5★ hotel in Cape Town, South Africa, including breakfast‡
- **FREE** safari game drive excursion×

Flights (regional and premium class flights may be available on request›) and overseas transfers

EARN EXCLUSIVE CRUISE MILES®
Worth up to **£279** towards your next cruise with Reader Offers Ltd††

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD SALE FARES

SUITE	GRADE	FULL FARE (PP)	NOW FARE (PP)
Vista Suite	VI	~~£8,599~~	**£6,999**
Classic Veranda	CV	~~£10,099~~	**£8,599**
Superior Veranda	SV	~~£15,499~~	**£13,499**
Deluxe Veranda	DX	~~£15,999~~	**£13,999**
Silver Suite	SL	**– SOLD OUT –**	

Solo fares are available from **£12,699**

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AS SEEN ON TV

Join Cruise Miles® for FREE by 31st August 2024 to enjoy £50 off your first booking††

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Jennie Bond - TV Presenter, Journalist and Cruise Miles® Ambassador



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ANTARCTICA & FALKLAND ISLANDS



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EXCLUSIVE FREE PRIVATE UK CHAUFFEUR SERVICE**

ALL-INCLUSIVE DRINKS, WI-FI & GRATUITIES INCLUDED++

EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS OF UP TO **£5,000**±

BOOK BY 8PM 16TH AUGUST 2024 FOR AN EXTRA LAUNCH DISCOUNT OF UP TO **£975**±

19 NIGHTS DEPARTING 12TH NOVEMBER 2025

NOVEMBER 2025

Wed 12 **Fly from London to Buenos Aires, Argentina**

Thu 13 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Upon arrival transfer to a 5★ hotel for your two night stay‡, including breakfast

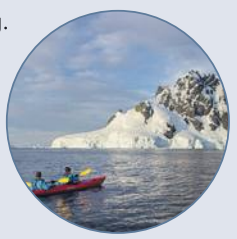
Fri 14 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Explore this exciting destination at your leisure. Plus, enjoy a **FREE** Tango & dinner Excursion for all bookings× (B)



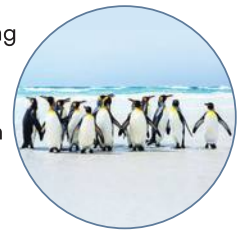
Sat 15 **Buenos Aires - Ushuaia, Argentina**
Transfer to the airport for your flight to Ushuaia. Upon arrival, transfer to the port and embark ***MS Roald Amundsen*** for your 15 night voyage of Antarctica (B)

Sun 16 - Mon 17 ***Crossing the Drake Passage***
Relax on board as your ship makes its way to Antarctica. Partake in a series of insightful lectures led by the Expedition Team

Tue 18 - Sat 22 **Antarctica ★5 DAYS OF EXPLORATION★**
Antarctica will fill you with wonder as you spend five magical days exploring. Surrounded by looming glaciers and icebergs, Antarctica will fill you with wonder. In the Antarctic summer, there might be penguins tending to their chicks, or even orcas and humpback whales feeding on the krill-rich waters. You'll join the Expedition Team on landings and ice cruises. You may even get a chance to go kayaking among the icebergs



Tue 25 - Thu 27 **Falkland Islands ★3 DAYS OF EXPLORATION★**
The Falkland archipelago is filled with seamless horizons and white sands teeming with birdlife. Along with the Expedition Team, you'll have the chance to visit albatross and penguin colonies, which are often found sharing space with seals. Enjoy a community walk around Stanley, taking in the Jubilee Villas gardens, Christ Church Cathedral, and the Historic Dockyard Museum



Sat 29 **Ushuaia - Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Disembark and transfer to the airport for your flight to Buenos Aires. Upon arrival, transfer to a 5★ hotel for your overnight stay‡

Sun 30 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Transfer to the airport for your overnight flight to London (B)

DECEMBER 2025

Mon 1 **Arrive in London**

Dates not mentioned are spent relaxing at sea. Please note – weather, wind and ice conditions have a great influence on the itinerary and the ship's Captain will decide the final sailing schedule. Therefore, the itinerary is subject to change. Meals are included on the tour as stated: B = Breakfast. All meals are included on the cruise

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD **SALE** FARES

CABIN	GRADE	FULL FARE (PP)	NOW FARE (PP)
Polar Outside	RR	~~£9,899~~	**£7,999**
Arctic Superior with Balcony	XT	~~£12,299~~	**£10,399**
Expedition Suite with Balcony	ME	~~£14,099~~	**£12,299**
Expedition Suite with Large Balcony	MC	~~£20,999~~	**£19,199**
Expedition XL Suite with Balcony	MA	~~£25,999~~	**£23,499**

Solo fares are available from **£10,999**

JUST A DEPOSIT REQUIRED THEN NOTHING TO PAY UNTIL 2025

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS **SALE**

- ✓ **EXCLUSIVE FREE** UK Chauffeur Service, up to 100 miles each way, for all bookings**
- ✓ **TWO NIGHT** 5★ pre-cruise hotel stay in Buenos Aires, Argentina‡, including breakfast
- ✓ **FREE** Dinner & Tango Excursion for all bookings×
- ✓ 15 night all-inclusive voyage on board ***MS Roald Amundsen*** including:
  - **ALL-INCLUSIVE DRINKS** throughout your expedition voyage for all bookings++
  - Book a Suite (ME) or above and dine in the à la carte Lindstrom for **FREE**++
  - Wi-Fi and Gratuities **INCLUDED** for all bookings++
  - A Polar Expedition jacket **OR** backpack **OR** other HX kit
  - A rich programme of activities including exploration and lectures
  - Escorted landings with small expedition boats
  - Professional photos from your trip taken by the on board photographer
- ✓ **OVERNIGHT** post-cruise 5★ hotel stay in Buenos Aires, Argentina‡
- ✓ Return flights from London (regional and premium class flights may be available on request>) and overseas transfers

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30 NIGHTS
FROM ONLY
£2,999PP

Luxury Cunard Voyage from Southampton to South America with Rio Discovery

30 NIGHTS | JANUARY 9, 2025

SAVE UP TO £1,300 PER COUPLE*

COMPLIMENTARY FLIGHTS AND HOTEL STAY

During a Cunard cruise from Southampton to Rio de Janeiro, explore Florida and the sun-drenched Caribbean before enjoying a two-night city break in Rio de Janeiro.

Your journey on board Queen Victoria encompasses the scenic Azores, Port Canaveral, and the sunny beaches of Fort Lauderdale. Explore the idyllic Turks and Caicos Islands, and the history of Barbados before tracing the Brazilian coast from Fortaleza to Salvador and Armação dos Búzios. Revel in the legendary Cunard service and refinement, enjoying gourmet dining, gala evenings in the grand ballroom, and quality entertainment.

Upon reaching Rio de Janeiro, disembark to enjoy a two-night hotel stay. The vibrant neighbourhoods of Copacabana and Ipanema beckon with their lively atmosphere and inviting shores. Here you'll also find the iconic Christ the Redeemer statue, standing tall against a backdrop of golden beaches and verdant mountains.





Queen Victoria

From her elegantly decorated public rooms and opulent lounge venues to her gourmet fine dining and luxurious, spacious cabins, Cunard's illustrious vessel exudes class with the splendour evocative of great cruise liners past.

Your holiday includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 28 night full-board cruise on board Queen Victoria
- **Visiting:** Southampton, Praia da Vitória, Port Canaveral, Fort Lauderdale, Grand Turk Island, Bridgetown, Fortaleza, Salvador de Bahia, Armação dos Búzios, Rio de Janeiro (overnight in port)
- Enjoy sleek musical shows in the Royal Court Theatre
- Waltz the night away in the Queens Room at a themed ball
- Choose from four main gourmet restaurants on board

Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-night five-star hotel stay in Rio de Janeiro at the Hilton Rio de Janeiro Copacabana with breakfast

Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure



Explore
Rio de Janeiro

Experience the infectious energy of Rio during a two-night hotel stay. Stroll the sands of Ipanema Beach and gaze out upon Two Brothers Mountain.

Stop for cocktails in the Copacabana Palace hotel, whose past guests have included everyone from Princess Diana to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Ride the tram through Santa Teresa, a lively hilltop neighbourhood where colourful home peek out from jungle foliage.

INSIDE FROM	OCEANVIEW FROM	BALCONY FROM	GRILL SUITE FROM
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ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7827

*Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Balcony, booking directly with Imagine Cruising.

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Luxury Victoria Falls, Pilanesberg Safari and All-Inclusive South Africa Voyage

22 NIGHTS | NOVEMBER, 2024 - JANUARY, 2025 | PRICES FROM £3,999PP+

LIMITED TO ONLY 50 GUESTS

COMPLIMENTARY VICTORIA FALLS TOUR AND SAFARI GAME DRIVES*

SAVE UP TO £1,400 PER COUPLE^

Embark on an African adventure with an all-inclusive cruise, enchanting tours of Victoria Falls and a stay in Pilanesberg National Park.

After a hotel stay in Johannesburg, you'll transfer to a safari lodge on the banks of the magnificent Zambezi River. Savour a scenic walking tour of Victoria Falls, a river safari on board the Lady Livingstone, and a journey back in time on the 1930s Royal Livingstone Express.

Travel to Pilanesberg National Park for three nights on an African safari, waking each morning to game drives in search of the Big Five*. Heading to Cape Town, you'll have a one-night hotel stay in this vibrant coastal city that sits at the foot of Table Mountain before embarking Azamara Quest to take a roundtrip cruise in search of elusive wildlife and sun-drenched beaches. Highlights include magical Richards Bay, eclectic Durban, and the quaint Mossel Bay.



Azamara Quest

Azamara Quest, a boutique cruise ship, offers immersive voyages with enriching experiences, intimate ambiance, and personalised service, catering to travellers seeking authentic and unique destinations.

Your holiday includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 12 night all-inclusive cruise on board Azamara Quest
- **Visiting+:** Cape Town, Gqeberha (ex Port Elizabeth), Richards Bay, Durban, Mossel Bay, Cape Town (overnight in port)

Fully Escorted Tours

- **Complimentary** walking tour of Victoria Falls and Pilanesberg National Park Game Drives*
- Lady Livingstone river safari and Royal Livingstone Express Train

Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Johannesburg and Pilanesberg National Park
- Four-star hotel stays in Livingstone and Cape Town
- **Upgrade to a five-star stay in Livingstone at The Royal Livingstone Victoria Falls Zambia Hotel by Anantara with breakfast from £135pppn**

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available
- Overnight flights



Discover
Pilanesberg National Park

Experience a three-night stay within Pilanesberg National Park to set out in the early morning light on game drives on search of the Big Five: lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants and Cape buffalo*.

As you quietly trundle across the calm landscape, you could spot a lion cub tumbling with its littermates, an elephant enjoying its morning ablutions with a river shower and drink, or even a leopard enjoying a morning lie-in up in a tree's branches.

PRICES FROM:	CLUB INTERIOR	CLUB OCEANVIEW	CLUB VERANDA	CLUB CONTINENT SUITE
NOV 29, 2024	£3,999PP	£4,599PP	£4,999PP	£6,699PP
JAN 7, 2025	£5,599PP	£6,199PP	£6,699PP	£8,199PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AFR7337

+Prices and itinerary shown based on November 29, 2024 departure. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing, booking directly with Imagine Cruising. *Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed.

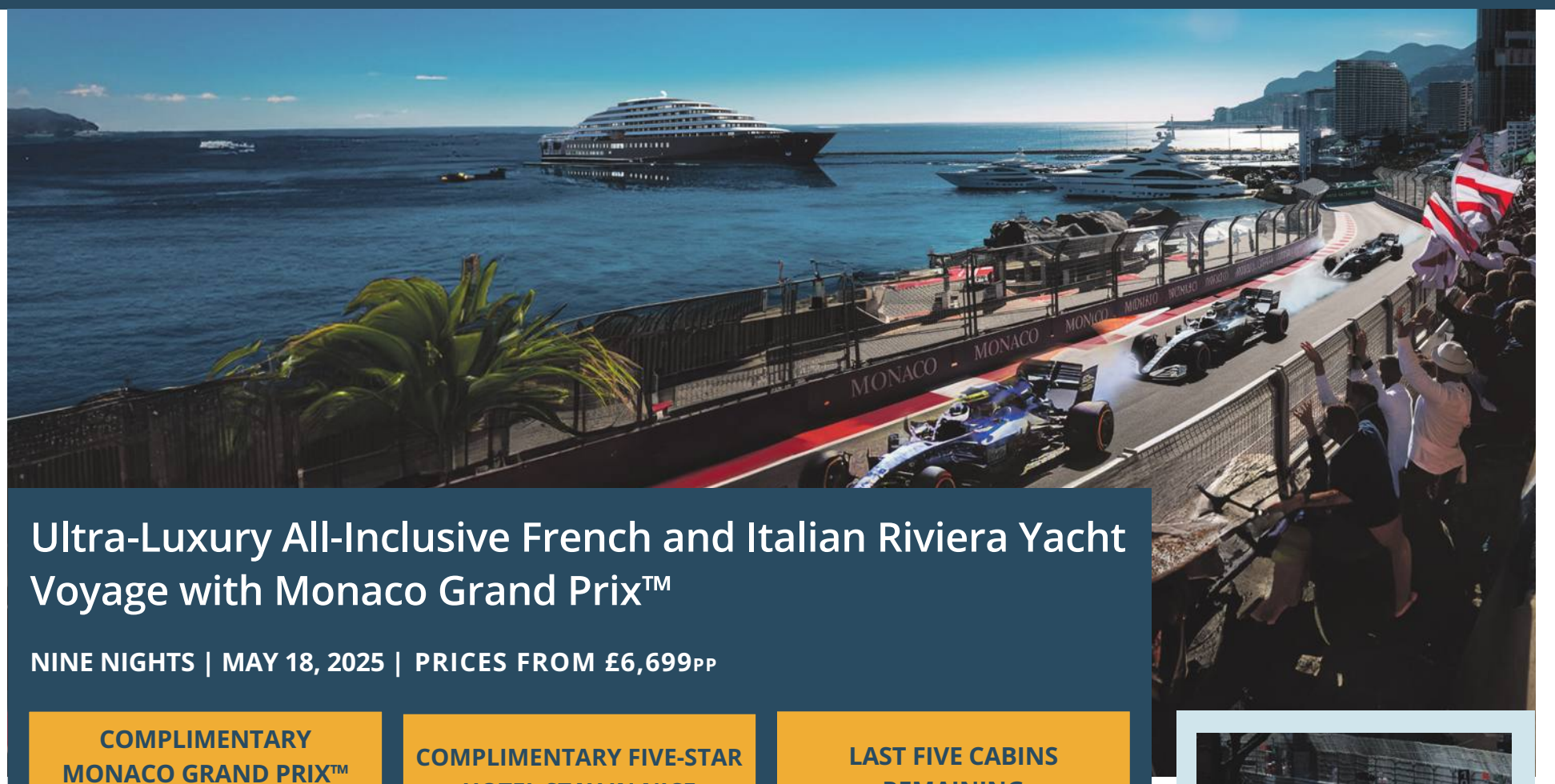
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Ultra-Luxury All-Inclusive French and Italian Riviera Yacht Voyage with Monaco Grand Prix™

NINE NIGHTS | MAY 18, 2025 | PRICES FROM £6,699PP

COMPLIMENTARY MONACO GRAND PRIX™ GRANDSTAND TICKET

COMPLIMENTARY FIVE-STAR HOTEL STAY IN NICE

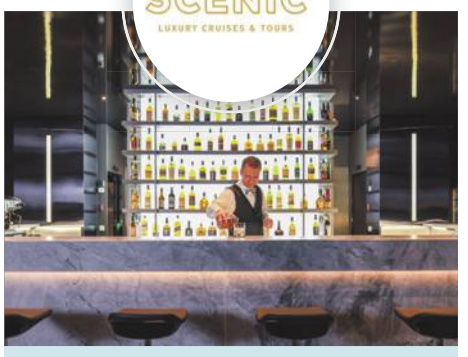
LAST FIVE CABINS REMAINING

Experience bliss on this once-in-a-lifetime holiday, indulging in an ultra-luxury yacht cruise and witnessing the prestigious Monaco Grand Prix™.

Embark on an extraordinary journey on board Scenic Eclipse, the world's first Discovery Yacht™. Discover a handful of destinations only a few have seen on an intimate voyage, embracing the jewels of the French and Italian Rivieras. Experience luxury as you explore captivating destinations, indulge in exquisite cuisine, and witness breathtaking landscapes both above and beneath the surface.

A highlight of your beautiful cruise will be a stop in Villefranche-sur-Mer where you'll escape into the glamorous and vivid atmosphere of Monte Carlo for the prestigious Monaco Grand Prix™ with a Grandstand K Ticket to this iconic event's race day. Feel the roar of Formula One® cars beneath your feet battling for pole position on the competition's most challenging track.





Scenic Eclipse

This luxury mega-yacht brings six-star luxury to ocean cruising with all-suite accommodation, personal butler service, elevated all-inclusive fine dining, and unique expeditions on Zodiacs, helicopters and even a private submarine.

Your holiday includes

All-Inclusive Luxury Cruise

- Seven-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board Scenic Eclipse
- **Visiting:** Nice, Portofino, Marina di Carrara, Livorno, Saint-Tropez, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Cannes, Monaco

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay

- Two-night five-star stay in Nice at the Boscolo Nice Hotel and Spa with breakfast

Event Experience

- **Complimentary** Grandstand K ticket to the Monaco Grand Prix™
- Sunday, May 25, 2025 (Race Day)

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available



Experience

Monaco Grand Prix™

Arriving in glamorous Monte Carlo, enjoy the luxurious surroundings and get a taste of the thrills and excitement to come during the pinnacle of your voyage – the Monaco Grand Prix™.

With Grandstand Bay Tickets for Race Day, soak up the exhilarating atmosphere of one of Formula 1®'s best-loved circuits – set out on the very streets of the city – and watch the world's elite drivers roar past as they compete for glory.

VERANDAH SUITE FROM	DELUXE VERANDAH SUITE FROM
£6,699PP	£7,399PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: GPX7267

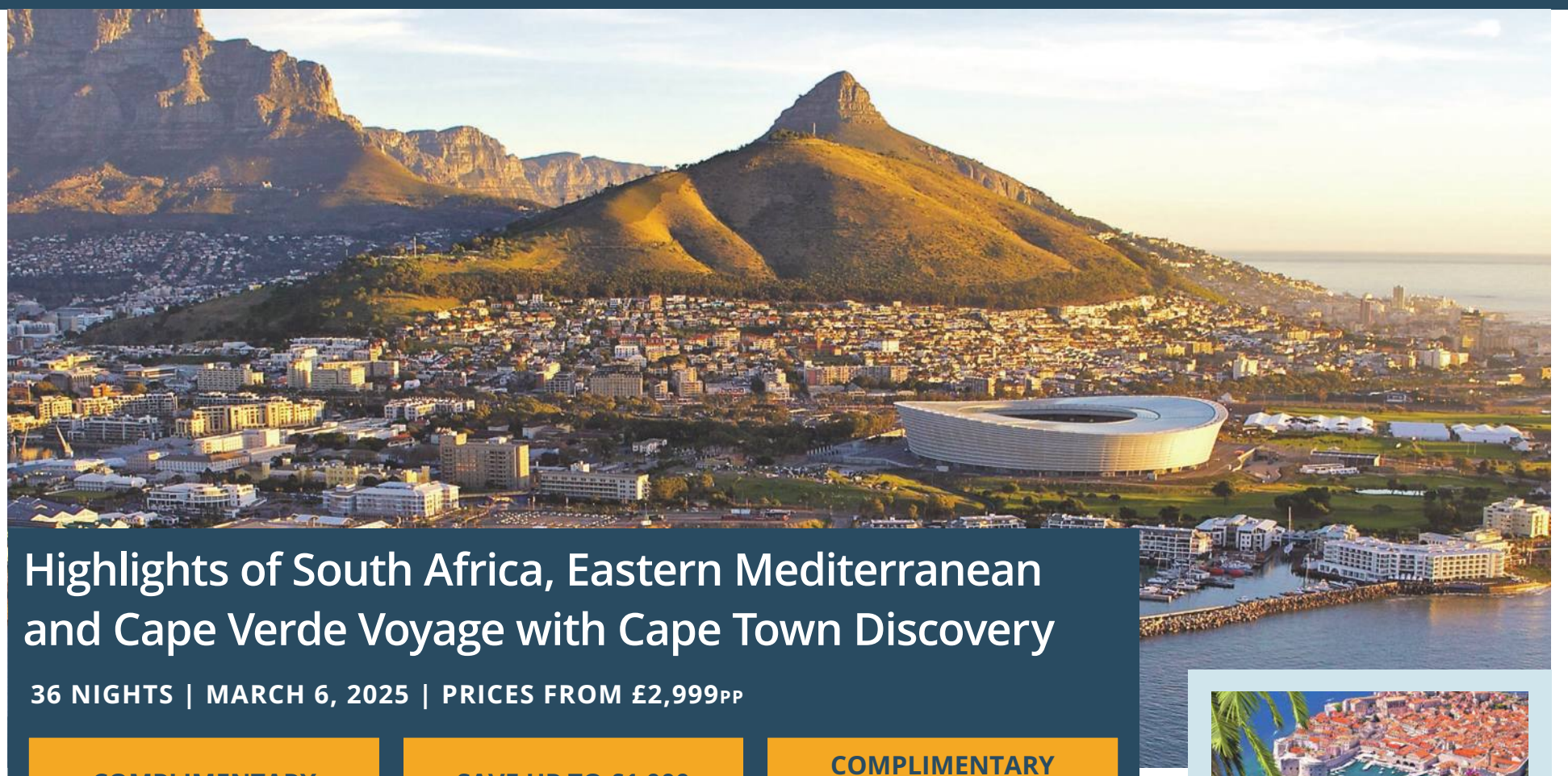
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Highlights of South Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and Cape Verde Voyage with Cape Town Discovery

36 NIGHTS | MARCH 6, 2025 | PRICES FROM £2,999PP

COMPLIMENTARY FLIGHTS

SAVE UP TO £1,000 PER COUPLE^

COMPLIMENTARY HOTEL STAY IN CAPE TOWN

Discover the jewels of the Atlantic Ocean and the Eastern Mediterranean on board Island Princess®, combined with a hotel stay in Cape Town.

Your holiday begins in Cape Town. From the iconic Table Mountain to the scenic V&A Waterfront and historic Robben Island; this is a destination celebrated for its natural beauty, vibrant culture, and historical significance. At the end of your stay, you'll embark Island Princess® for your cruise to Rome. Setting sail, discover the shores of Walvis Bay and the landscapes of Cape Verde before you reach the warm waters of the Mediterranean.

Explore the allure of Syracuse, wander through Athens' historic streets, and marvel at Volos' scenic beauty. Kuşadası reveals Ephesus' timeless wonders, Rhodes enchants with medieval charm and Montenegro's mountains and pristine waters are simply stunning.



Island Princess®

Journey to the most thrilling regions on Earth in complete comfort with Princess Cruises' Island Princess®. The ship's intimate feel, together with carefully designed dining rooms, means every evening feels like a special occasion.

Your holiday includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 33 night full-board cruise on board Island Princess®
- **Visiting:** Cape Town (overnight in port), Walvis Bay, Mindelo, Madeira, Gibraltar, Syracuse, Athens, Volos, Patmos, Kuşadası, Rhodes, Crete, Dubrovnik, Bar, Taranto, Valletta, Civitavecchia
- Unwind in the tranquil spa and wellness centre, take a dip in the refreshing pools, or bask in the sun on the spacious deck

Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-night four-star hotel stay in Cape Town at the Southern Sun The Cullinan with breakfast

Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available
- Overnight flight



Explore
Dubrovnik

For fans of history, culture and Game of Thrones, Croatia's ruggedly romantic capital of Dubrovnik is pure paradise.

Many visitors to choose to uncover the hidden corners of the city with a walk around the ancient fortress walls, shop in the gleaming limestone centre of Stradun or hike to the top of Mount Srd. Whatever you do, you'll be rewarded with endless views of the turquoise harbour and terracotta-tiled rooftops.

INTERIOR FROM	OCEANVIEW FROM	BALCONY FROM	MINI-SUITE FROM
£2,999PP	£3,599PP	£4,199PP	£5,999PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7995

^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing, booking directly with Imagine Cruising.

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MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

20 nights from
£2,999
per person

Luxury All-Inclusive Celebrity Southeast Asia Voyage and Exclusive Singapore Event

20 nights | February 24, 2025

Highlights:

Singapore | Ko Samui | Bangkok* | Phú My | Nha Trang | Chan May | Ha Long Bay* | John Cleese | Celebrity Solstice® | Raffles Hotel Singapore

Complimentary Inside to Veranda upgrade

Exclusive event with comic legend John Cleese



What's Included:

All-Inclusive Cruise

13 night all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Solstice®
Classic Drinks Package and Wi-Fi
Complimentary Inside to Veranda upgrade
*Overnight in port in Bangkok and Hanoi

Hotel Stay with Breakfast

Five-night four-star hotel stay in Singapore at the Oasia Hotel Novena

Exclusive Event

Exclusive event "Audience with..." style interview with comic legend John Cleese at the Raffles Singapore

All Flights and Transfers

London departure - regional flights available
Overnight flights

singapore
Passion Made Possible

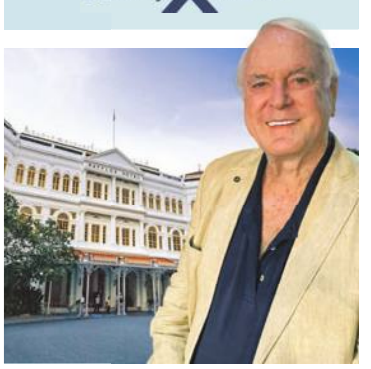
Prices

Prices per person from

Inside	£2,999
Ocean View	£2,999
Veranda	£2,999

Online Cruise Code **ASA8245**

Celebrity Cruises®



Out of this world holiday.

Few names in comedy resonate like John Cleese. A titan of British humour, Cleese's career spans decades, leaving an indelible mark on television, film, and the stage. Enjoy an exclusive evening with Cleese at the historic Raffles Singapore hotel, featuring a live chat and Q&A session.

An evening with John Cleese is just the start of what this sensational, 20-night holiday has to offer. Set sail on the Celebrity Solstice®, and embrace a hotel stay in Singapore on this one-of-a-kind experience!

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Luxury All-Inclusive Eastern Mediterranean Silversea Voyage and Crete Escape

13 NIGHTS | MAY - OCTOBER, 2025 | PRICES FROM £4,699PP+

COMPLIMENTARY FIVE-STAR ALL-INCLUSIVE HOTEL STAY IN CRETE

JUST LAUNCHED FOR 2025

Embark on an unparalleled journey through the Greek islands on board the all-inclusive *Silver Whisper*, beginning with a five-star all-inclusive escape in Crete.

Embrace a five-star, all-inclusive beach escape at the Mitsis Royal Mare. Immerse yourself in luxury, unwind on pristine beaches, and relish an array of incredible dining experiences. Discover the island's sun-kissed charms before flying to Athens for a one-night hotel stay ahead of your cruise.

In Athens, embark *Silver Whisper*, a vessel renowned for its opulence and all-inclusive amenities, and acquaint yourself with Silversea's white-glove butler service and stunning facilities. Witness Santorini's cliffside vistas then explore the serene charms of Bodrum and Patmos. Marvel at the beautiful architecture of Syros, the sun-bleached landscapes of Milos, and the historical charms of Rethymnon.





Silver Whisper

Opulent yet intimate, the elegant *Silver Whisper* sports a relaxing, sophisticated, and genuinely elegant atmosphere. With all the amenities of a grand resort and the charm of a boutique hotel, *Silver Whisper* offers something for every passenger.

Your holiday includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- Seven-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Whisper*+
- **Visiting+:** Athens, Santorini, Bodrum, Patmos, Syros, Milos, Rethymnon, Athens
- **Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port***
- All-inclusive beverages including fine wines, beers and premium spirits

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stays

- Five-night five-star all-inclusive hotel stay in Crete at the Mitsis Royal Mare
- One-night five-star stay in Athens at the NJV Athens Plaza Hotel with breakfast

Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available



Discover Athens

Uncover the captivating allure of ancient Athens, a city drenched in history and overflowing with cultural treasures.

While here, embark on a journey of discovery as you encounter awe-inspiring historic wonders such as the legendary Acropolis, home to the majestic Parthenon, and immerse yourself in the birthplace of democracy. Wander through the lively streets of Plaka, adorned with quaint shops and charming tavernas, savouring the tantalising flavours of Greek cuisine.

PRICES FROM:	VISTA SUITE	CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE	SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE	DELUXE VERANDA SUITE
MAY, 2025	£4,699PP	£5,699PP	£5,999PP	£6,199PP
OCT, 2025	£4,999PP	£6,099PP	£6,299PP	£6,599PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7878

*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. +Prices, ship and itinerary based on May 25, 2025 departure date.

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A Magical Voyage: Exclusive Mediterranean Sailcation

NO-FLY CRUISE | 14 NIGHTS | MAY 3, 2025

COMPLIMENTARY OCEANVIEW TO BALCONY UPGRADE^

EXCLUSIVE TO IMAGINE CRUISING

EXCLUSIVE PERFORMANCES FROM A STAR-STUDDED LINE-UP

Discover our brand-new Sailcation for 2025, featuring an exclusive and glamorous line up of celebrities including ballroom dancing legends, Anton Du Beke, and Erin Boag, 80's icon Tony Hadley, and legendary entertainer Brian Conley.

Featuring sensational performances from:

Tony Hadley: Rose to fame as the lead singer of 80s band Spandau Ballet. Post-split, he carved a successful solo career, receiving accolades and an MBE for charity work.

Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag: Household names, national treasures and true stars of the stage, Anton and Erin are the most recognisable and respected couple in today's ballroom dancing world.

Brian Conley: A legendary entertainer, television presenter and theatre star. He's won numerous awards including a British Comedy Award, and still remains one of the UK's most loved entertainers.





Sky Princess®

This sensational vessel is the newest addition to the Princess fleet and elevates the distinctive design and luxurious attractions of the renowned Royal-class ships to brand new heights.

Your holiday includes

Full-Board No-Fly Cruise

- 14 night full-board cruise on board Sky Princess®
- **Visiting:** Southampton, Vigo, Barcelona, Toulon, Livorno, Civitavecchia, Sardinia, Southampton
- **Upgrade to Princess Plus for £50 per person per day and receive:**
  - Plus Beverage Package*
  - Unlimited Wi-Fi
  - Gratuities included

Enhanced Entertainment

Exclusive events featuring ballroom superstars **Anton Du Beke** and **Erin Boag**, 80's icon **Tony Hadley**, and British Entertainer, **Brian Conley.**



Discover
Rome's Timeless Beauty

Rome seamlessly blends ancient history with modern vibrancy. Steeped in rich heritage, the iconic Colosseum and Pantheon will transport you back in time, while Vatican City, an independent city-state within Rome, is home to St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, showcasing magnificent art and religious significance.

From charming streets adorned with picturesque piazzas to bustling cafés and gelaterias, the 'eternal city' of Rome also promises an indulgent dining scene.

	INTERIOR	PREMIUM OCEANVIEW	OBSTRUCTED BALCONY	CLEARVIEW BALCONY	DELUXE BALCONY	MINI-SUITE	SUITE
TWIN SHARE FROM	£1,199PP	£1,749PP	£1,749PP	£1,849PP	£2,069PP	£2,499PP	£4,099PP
SOLO FROM	£2,399	£3,399	£3,399	£3,599	£4,149	£4,899	£8,199

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7846

Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only. ^Based on an Obstructed View Balcony cabin. *The Plus Beverage Package includes cocktails, wine, beer, spirits, fountain soda, specialty coffees, bottled water, teas and other individual beverages up to $15 USD each. Must be applied to your booking seven days prior to the sailing date. Offer applies to new bookings only.

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India's Iconic Golden Triangle, China's Ancient Treasures and Luxury Cunard Voyage

21 NIGHTS | MARCH 5, 2025 | PRICES FROM £3,999PP

PRICE REDUCTION: SAVE UP TO £1,400 PER COUPLE*

COMPLIMENTARY OCEANVIEW TO BALCONY UPGRADE

LAST FIVE CABINS REMAINING

From India's gleaming delights and China's ancient wonders to the decadence of a Cunard cruise, embark on this unforgettable holiday.

With your phenomenal tour of India's Golden Triangle, discover colourful streets and multi-layered history in Delhi, travel to Agra to wonder at the world-famous Taj Mahal, and seek out architectural splendour in Jaipur.

Flying to Singapore, you'll enjoy a hotel stay before joining Cunard's Queen Elizabeth for a sophisticated voyage to Hong Kong. Explore Vietnam's Chan May and enjoy an overnight in port in vibrant Hong Kong. From there, you'll fly to Xi'an for two nights and visit the haunting Terracotta Army, before travelling by rail to Beijing for three nights. From the colossal Great Wall of China to exploring the Summer Palace and Forbidden City, your time here will inspire.



Queen Elizabeth

Queen Elizabeth is one of the finest cruise liners sailing the five oceans. A ship exuding style and refinement, you'll enjoy the finer things in life on board, including themed balls and Afternoon Tea served by white-gloved waiters.

Your holiday includes

Full-Board Cruise

- Six-night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
- **Visiting:** Singapore, Chan May, Hong Kong (overnight in port)
- **Complimentary Oceanview to Balcony upgrade**

Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of India's Golden Triangle
- Terracotta Warriors, Great Wall of China, Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square and more

Luxury Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Hong Kong, Xi'an and Beijing
- Four-star stay in Singapore
- All hotel stays include breakfast
- **All Flights and Transfers**
- London departure - regional flights available
- Overnight flights



Discover

The Terracotta Warriors

Xi'an is world-renowned for its remarkable Terracotta Army, which is considered one of the most mysterious and awe-inspiring creations on the planet.

This incredible archaeological discovery was made when farmers were digging a well, and upon further investigation, an astonishing number of life-sized soldiers were found. Each statue has their own unique feature, including hairstyles, expressions, and armour, and they encircle the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China.

INSIDE FROM	OCEANVIEW FROM	BALCONY FROM	GRILL SUITE FROM
£3,999PP	£4,699PP	£4,699PP	£5,999PP

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7857

Main image is for illustrative purposes only. *Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Balcony, booking directly with Imagine Cruising.

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Barbados Escape and Intimate Royal Clipper Voyage

15 NIGHTS | DECEMBER, 2024 - MARCH, 2025 | PRICES FROM £2,999PP+

BOOK AN OUTSIDE CABIN AND RECEIVE A HOTEL UPGRADE*

DIRECT FLIGHTS WITH VIRGIN ATLANTIC

SALE EXTENDED: SAVE UP TO £1,000 PER COUPLE - ENDS AUGUST 21, 2024^

Experience the ultimate Caribbean getaway with a cruise on the world's largest fully rigged sailing ship, Royal Clipper, and seven all-inclusive* nights in Barbados.

Your Caribbean adventure begins with a resort stay in Barbados. Spend seven blissful nights soaking in the sun amidst swaying palms. Enjoy delicious dining, snorkel across tranquil coral reefs, and explore the island's idyllic Platinum Coast and the charming parish of St Peter.

Next, you'll embark Royal Clipper, an elegant five-masted sailing ship complete with three swimming pools, luxurious cabins and exceptional service. As you're propelled along by billowing sails, discover the beauty of Rodney Bay in St. Lucia, the historic charm of Cabrits in Dominica, and the nautical allure of Falmouth Harbour in Antigua. Immerse yourself in the rich history of St. Kitts and Iles de Saintes, and unwind on Martinique's pristine beaches.





Royal Clipper

The Royal Clipper is a majestic sail-driven ship and the world's largest square-rigged vessel. The colossal Royal Clipper proudly demonstrates nautical excellence for all her lucky passengers.

Your holiday includes

Full-Board Cruise

- Seven-night full-board cruise on board Royal Clipper
- **Visiting+:** Barbados, Rodney Bay (St. Lucia), Cabrits (Dominica), Falmouth Harbour (Antigua), Basseterre (St. Kitts), Terre de Haut (Iles des Saintes), Beach (Martinique), Barbados
- ***Book an Outside cabin or above and receive a complimentary upgrade to an all-inclusive hotel stay at the Sugar Cane Club Hotel and Spa**

Hotel Stay

- Seven-night four-star stay in Barbados at the Sugar Cane Club Hotel and Spa with breakfast

All Virgin Atlantic Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available



Barbados Hotel Stay

Sugar Cane Club Hotel and Spa

Sitting near Barbados's ritzy Platinum West Coast, the Sugar Cane Club Hotel and Spa is a tropical oasis offering tranquillity and luxury.

The property exudes Caribbean charm with lush gardens and colonial-style architecture. Accommodations range from well-appointed suites to private villas. The spa beckons with rejuvenating treatments, while the pool, surrounded by swaying palm trees, invites relaxation. The hotel's hillside location provides stunning ocean views, ensuring a serene escape.

PRICES FROM:	INSIDE	OUTSIDE	SUPERIOR OUTSIDE	OWNER'S SUITE
DEC, 2024+	£2,999PP	£3,799PP	£3,999PP	£5,499PP
JAN, 2025	£3,699PP	£4,299PP	Sold out	£5,999PP
MAR, 2025	£3,699PP	£4,599PP	£4,799PP	Sold out

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7786

+Prices and itinerary shown are based on December 7, 2024 departure date. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing an Owner's Suite, booking directly with Imagine Cruising.

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13 NIGHTS
FROM ONLY
£1,899PP*



Shimla Express and India's Golden Triangle

13 NIGHTS | OCTOBER, 2024 - MARCH, 2025

COMPLIMENTARY FLIGHTS - ENDS AUGUST 20, 2024

SAVE UP TO £1,600 PER COUPLE+

INCLUDES SCENIC RAIL JOURNEY THROUGH THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS

Experience the vibrant colours, sights and sounds of India during an iconic rail journey and a series of immersive tours, as you explore the gleaming Golden Triangle.

Embark the Himalayan Queen Toy Train through 103 tunnels and over 800 bridges to spend three nights in the quaint Himalaya city of Shimla. Explore its fascinating history, and venture into the wilderness with a captivating walking trail through the Himalayas. Next, explore the incredible sights of Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur on your Golden Triangle tour. Discover the many layers to Delhi, visit the world-famous Taj Mahal in Agra, and delve into the time-worn majesty of Jaipur's palaces and forts.

Your Golden Triangle tour will also take you into the wilderness of Ranthambore National Park for a two-night hotel stay. Here you'll enjoy close encounters with India's wildlife, comprising of tigers, leopards, jackals, sloth bears and Indian wild boar^.





India's Golden Triangle

Discover the epic hilltop Amber Fort in Jaipur. See Delhi's Red Fort with its luminous orange walls and verdant gardens. And take in Agra, where lies the ivory-white Taj Mahal: a 240-foot mausoleum that exemplifies India's artistry.

Your holiday includes

Rail Journey
- Scenic rail journey from Kalka to Shimla on board the Himalayan Queen

Fully Escorted Tours
- Tour of Jama Masjid Mosque, Raj Ghat, Humayun's Tomb, Qutub Minar, Tour of the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Tour of Amber Fort, Hawa Mahal, the City Palace, Jantar Mantar Observatory and more
- Trail walk through the Himalayas, Game drives through Ranthambore National Park and Shimla sightseeing city tour

Hotel Stays
- Five-star hotel stays in Delhi, Shimla, Agra and Jaipur with breakfast
- Five-star hotel stay in Ranthambore with breakfast, lunch and dinner

Complimentary Flights and Transfers
- London depature – regional flights available
- Overnight flight



Rail Journey on board
Himalayan Queen

Following a Shatabdi Express journey to Kalka, you'll embark the Himalayan Queen for a journey along a spellbinding railway track. Built in 1903, you'll feel like you're stepping back in time as you whizz over intricate Gothic bridges and experience tight twists and curves on this iconic track.

As the Himalayan Queen winds its way upwards, you'll delight in breathtaking vistas of mountains, waterfalls, pine forests, and wildflowers.

TWIN SHARE FROM

OCT, 2024	£1,999PP	NOV, 2024	£2,199PP	DEC, 2024	£2,199PP
JAN, 2025	£1,899PP	FEB, 2025	£2,199PP	MAR, 2025	£2,699PP

ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: ASA2228

^Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. *Price shown is based on January 28, 2025 departure date. +Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing, booking directly with Imagine Holidays.

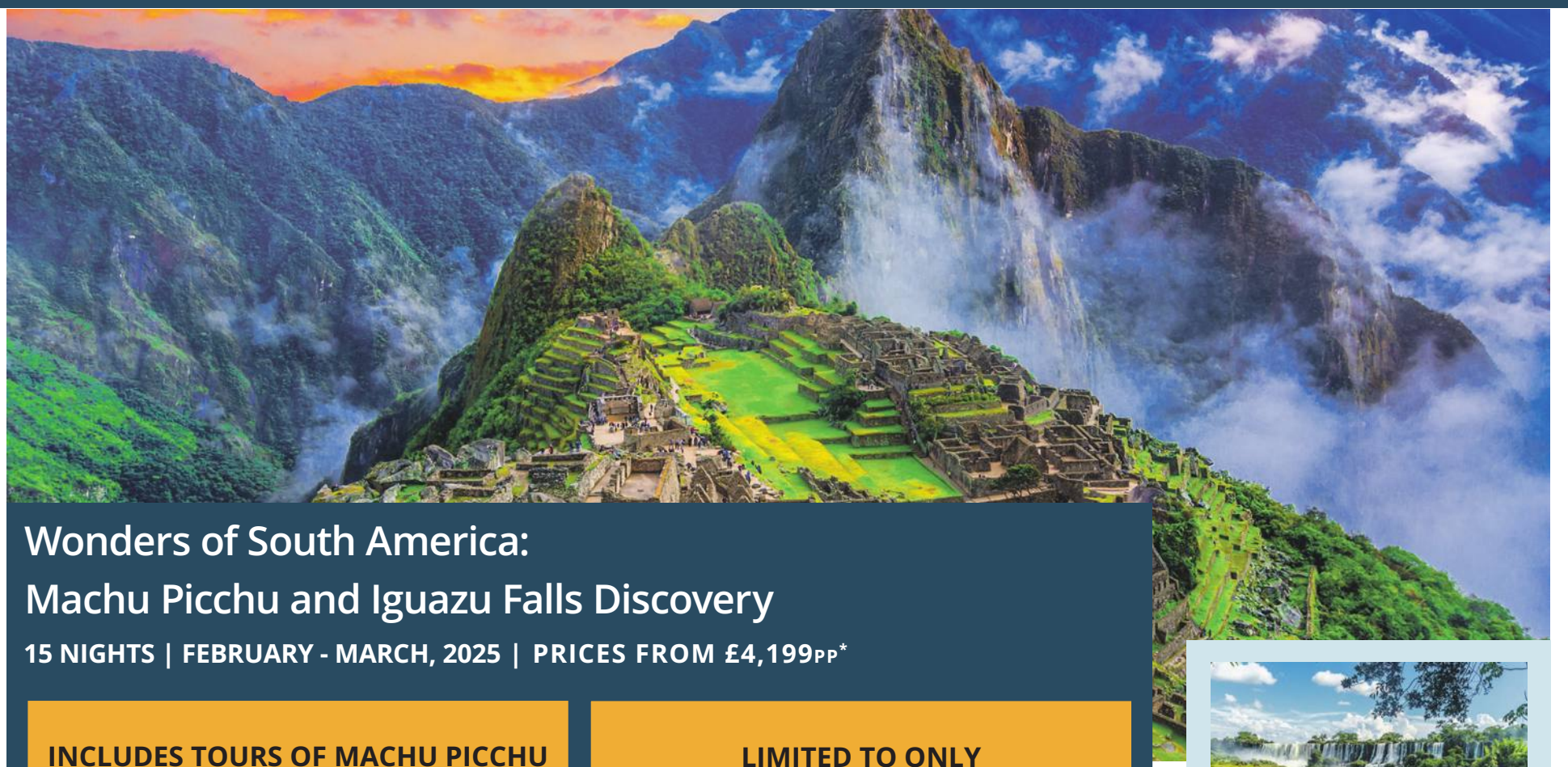
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Wonders of South America: Machu Picchu and Iguazu Falls Discovery

15 NIGHTS | FEBRUARY - MARCH, 2025 | PRICES FROM £4,199PP*

INCLUDES TOURS OF MACHU PICCHU AND IGUAZU

LIMITED TO ONLY 40 GUESTS

Experience an unforgettable South American adventure, touring the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and Iguazu Falls, with hotel stays in Lima, Buenos Aires and Rio.

Your holiday begins in Lima, where you'll enjoy a city tour and two-night hotel stay before flying into the Sacred Valley of the Incas. Delve into the history of Incan civilisation before travelling by train through the Andes to the revered Machu Picchu. Embark on a tour of Cusco then fly to Buenos Aires for a two-night hotel stay.

Feel the rhythm of the tango in the streets of San Telmo and La Boca ahead of a two-day tour of the mighty Iguazu Falls. Witness the greatest curtain of water on Earth from both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides. Travel to Rio de Janeiro and ascend Corcovado Mountain to stand at the feet of Christ the Redeemer.





Discover
Machu Picchu

Set against a heavenly backdrop of lush green mountains, Machu Picchu guards an ancient past through its impressive temples, terraces, and living quarters. Discover this amazing site as the morning lifts off the mountains.

Your holiday includes

Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Sacred Valley, Cusco and Buenos Aires
- Four-star hotel stays in Lima, Iguazu and Rio de Janeiro
- All hotel stays include breakfast

Fully Escorted Tours

- Lima city tour
- Sacred Valley tour including: Salt Mines of Maras and Moray and Ollantaytambo Ruins
- Machu Picchu tour
- Cusco walking city tour
- Buenos Aires city tour
- Walking tour of Iguazu Falls including both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides of the falls
- Christ the Redeemer tour

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure
- Overnight flight



Embrace
Iguazu Falls

Marvel at the largest waterfall system in the world, bordered by lush vegetation, looped with walking trails. Surrounded by tropical rainforest where colourful toucans reside, you'll be accompanied by the distant roar of one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world.

You'll get to experience the Iguazu Falls from both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides and get right up close to this magnificent spectacle, comprised of more than 275 falls, the tallest of which towers more than 82 metres high.

TWIN SHARE FROM*	SOLO PASSENGER FROM*
£4,199PP	£5,699

ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: AME2225

*Prices shown are based on February 10, 2025 departure.

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RIVER CRUISE SALE

SEP - DEC, 2024

NOW FROM £1,599PP INCLUDING ALL GRATUITIES



SAVE UP TO £7,310 PER COUPLE*

Romantic Danube

SEVEN NIGHTS | NOV - DEC, 2024

Your holiday includes

Full-Board River Cruise

- Seven-night full-board Danube river cruise
- **Visiting:** Vilshofen an der Donau, Passau, Linz, Dürnstein, Weißenkirchen in der Wachau, Vienna^, Bratislava, Budapest^
- Including complimentary unlimited wine, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner, sparkling wine and fresh-squeezed juices during breakfast

Included Excursions

- Vilshofen Exclusive Oktoberfest Celebration, Passau City of Three Rivers walking tour, full-day Salzburg excursion, Dürnstein walking tour and Melk Benedictine Abbey, Weissenkirchen Evening Wine tasting at local winery, Imperial Vienna tour, Bratislava Coronation City walking tour, Buda city tour and Pest city tour
- Other optional tours are available

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

RIVERVIEW FROM	FRENCH BALCONY FROM
£1,599PP	£1,999PP

Prices and itinerary shown based on November 18, 2024 departure.

ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: RVR2225



SAVE UP TO £6,930 PER COUPLE*

Taste of Bordeaux

SEVEN NIGHTS | SEP - OCT, 2024

Your holiday includes

Full-Board River Cruise

- Seven-night full-board river cruise
- **Visiting:** Bordeaux^, Libourne^, Blaye^, Bourg-Sur-Gironde^, Cussac-Fort-Médoc^, Cadillac, Bordeaux^
- Including complimentary unlimited wine, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner, sparkling wine and fresh-squeezed juices during breakfast

Included Excursions

- Saint-Émilion excursion and Grand Cru Classé wine tasting, Bastide town and market visit, Blaye citadel visit, Blaye to Bourg bike tour, exclusive Bourg wine festival, Medoc Grand Cru Classé wine tasting and scenic vineyard tour, Margaux Vineyard hike and local specialties tasting, Roquetaillade Castle with Sauternes wine tasting, Bordeaux Unesco city tour, market tasting and Bordeaux Cité du Vin (wine museum) visit
- Other optional tours included

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

RIVERVIEW FROM	FRENCH BALCONY FROM
£1,599PP	£1,999PP

Prices and itinerary shown based on October 31, 2024 departure.

ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: RVR2223



SAVE UP TO £6,780 PER COUPLE*

Paris and Normandy

SEVEN NIGHTS | SEP - NOV, 2024

Your holiday includes

Full-Board River Cruise

- Seven-night full-board river cruise
- **Visiting:** Paris, Les Andelys, Rouen, Le Havre^, Caudebec-en-Caux, Rouen^, Vernon, Paris^
- Including complimentary unlimited wine, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner, sparkling wine and fresh-squeezed juices during breakfast

Included Excursions

- Château Gaillard, Honfleur excursion, Le Havre city tour, Normandy US Landing Beaches, Seine Museum, Medieval Rouen walking tour, Bonnemare Castle visit, Monet's home and gardens in Giverny+, Artist's walk of Auvers-sur-Oise and Bateaux Parisiens
- Other optional tours included

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

RIVERVIEW FROM	FRENCH BALCONY FROM
£1,599PP	£1,999PP

Prices and itinerary shown based on November 2, 2024 departure. +If unavailable, an alternative tour will be offered.

ONLINE HOLIDAY CODE: RVR2226

Itinerary and ship may vary depending on departure date. Ship image is for illustrative purposes only. Regional flights available at a supplement. *Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a French Balcony, booking directly with Imagine Holidays. ^Overnight in port.

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