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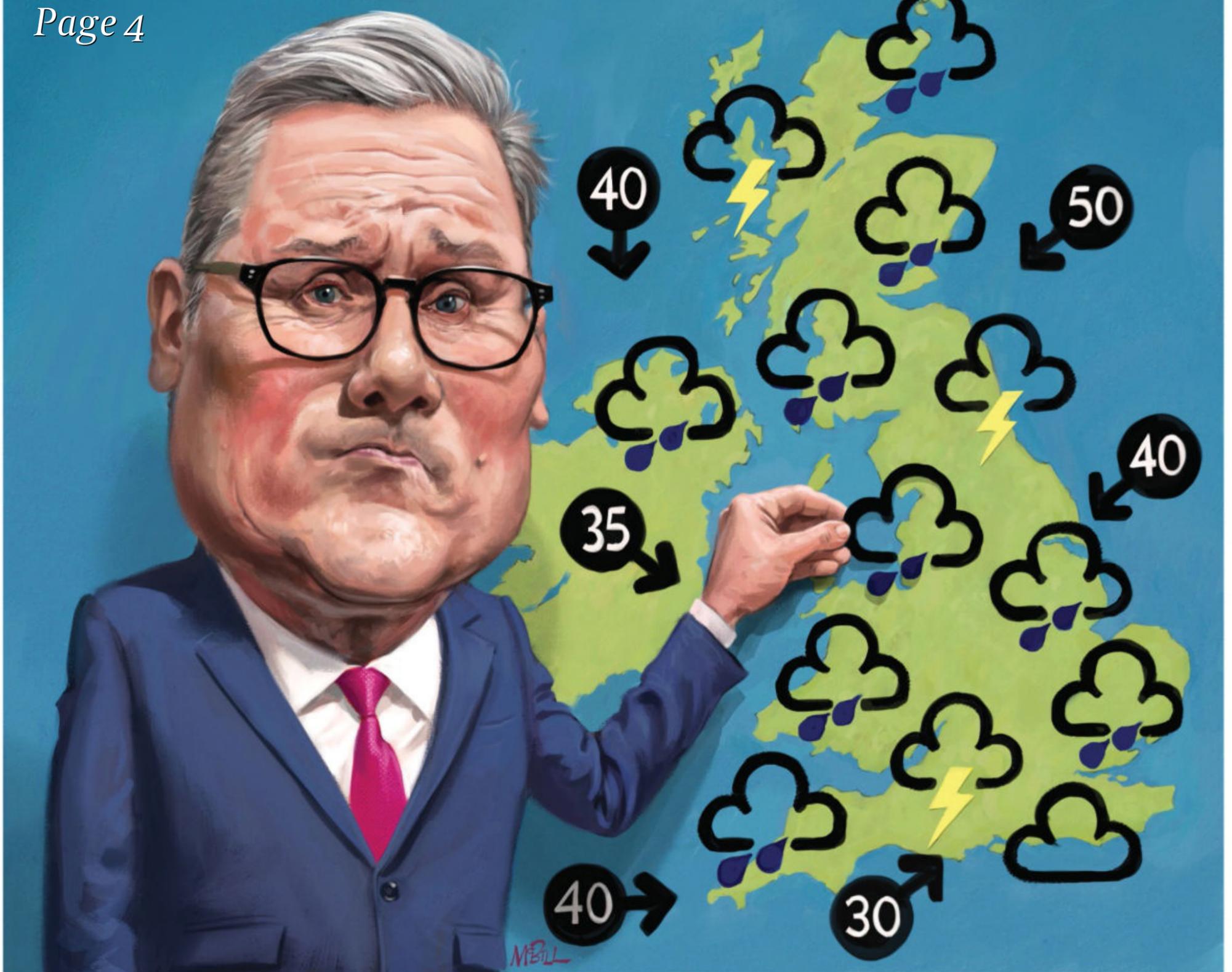
THE WEEK

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

A gloomy outlook The row over the winter fuel cut

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OMEGA

What happened

The winter fuel row

Keir Starmer faced down a significant rebellion this week over his plans to remove winter fuel payments from all but the country's poorest pensioners. Many Labour MPs have expressed serious disquiet about the move, which will deprive around ten million pensioners of up to £300 a year. Union leaders have also criticised the decision. In a Commons vote on Tuesday, only one Labour MP – Jon Trickett – voted against the cut. But 52 others didn't vote. No. 10 insisted that only a dozen of these MPs formally abstained in protest; the rest had specific reasons to be away from Parliament, although critics said some were likely confected. The Government won the vote with a majority of 120.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced the winter fuel payment cut in July, as part of a series of measures to fill what she called a "£22bn black hole" in the public finances. The policy will save the Exchequer around £1.3bn this year. Before the vote, Reeves had urged MPs to support "difficult decisions". Starmer had also defended the policy, saying that the Government must be "prepared to be unpopular".



Starmer: too much gloom?

What the editorials said

Only 72 hours before polling day, Starmer promised that pensioners had "a lot to gain" from a Labour victory and lamented that many "can't afford to put the heating on", said *The Times*. Yet now he's summarily axing their winter fuel payment. No wonder many Labour voters and backbenchers are unhappy. The move is a "grievous mistake", said *The Sun*. Labour warned that 4,000 pensioners might die from the cold when the Tories suggested a similar cut in 2017. But now it's shamelessly depriving old folk of a winter subsidy and spending the savings on "bribing unions one by one not to strike".

With a majority of more than 160, the Government was never at much risk of losing this week's vote, said *The Guardian*. The victory was a "pyrrhic" one that has left ministers looking "mean, unjust and politically inept". The timing and presentation of this cut could certainly have been handled better, said *The Independent*. But Starmer has proved admirably steady under fire. His refusal to be "bullied by the Left" into reversing course suggests that, unlike his recent predecessors as PM, he is "not going to become a prisoner of his parliamentary factions".

What happened

The Grenfell inquiry

MPs and relatives of victims of the 2017 Grenfell Tower disaster demanded that the people and firms responsible for the litany of failings that led to the fire face criminal prosecution. Last week, Martin Moore-Bick's seven-year inquiry into the tragedy published its findings in a damning 1,700-page report. It concluded that all 72 deaths had been avoidable, and that the fire had been preceded by "decades of failure" by central and local government, the building industry, regulators and other bodies (see page 13).

The Metropolitan Police, which has been examining the case for seven years, pleaded for patience. It said that 180 of its officers were investigating 58 people and 19 companies in connection with the tragedy, and that it would now need to examine the inquiry report "line by line". Potential charges include corporate manslaughter, gross negligence manslaughter, misconduct in public office and fraud. However, none are expected to be brought until 2026 at the earliest.



Protests on the fire's anniversary

What the editorials said

The report took hundreds of witness statements and thousands of hours of testimony to compile, said *The Evening Standard*.

When it was finally released, it was "ferocious" in its criticism of successive governments, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and various firms involved in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower, including those that supplied the flammable cladding that caused the fire to spread rapidly. Taken as a whole, it painted a picture of "a very British disaster", said *The Sunday Times* – one in which an "incompetent and underfunded public sector" combined with "rapacious elements" of the private sector, to lethal effect. Ministers failed to ban dangerous cladding materials; and firms exploited a lax regulatory regime to boost their own profits.

Keir Starmer has rightly backed calls to bar the firms in question from public contracts, said *The FT*. But more needs to be done. He should consider the inquiry's recommendation to create a construction regulator that reports to a single minister for fire safety. The 4,630 residential buildings over 11 metres tall that still have unsafe cladding must be made safe. And those responsible for the tragedy must be brought to justice.

It wasn't all bad

A moth that is officially extinct in Britain has been spotted in the wild in Norfolk. The Norfolk snout, a small beige moth with a big "nose", was declared extinct in 1971. But a couple recently found an unusual specimen in a moth trap they had set in their garden near Norwich, and identified it as a Norfolk snout by the curled "horns" on its palps. The species may have recolonised the area from mainland Europe; or could possibly simply have clung on, unobserved.

One of the world's "deadliest chicks" has hatched in a bird park in Gloucestershire. The southern cassowary, which is native to New Guinea and Northern Australia, is renowned as one of the largest and most lethal flightless birds.

Resembling an emu, it grows up to six foot tall, weighs up to 130lbs (59kg) and has dagger-like talons that can slice open flesh. Nevertheless, Birdland in Bourton-on-the-Water had been trying to hatch a chick for 25 years. The parents of the chick were imported from the Netherlands and Germany, and have been at Birdland since 2012, where they are the only birds to have their own risk assessment.



The American playwright and lifelong Shakespeare devotee Ken Ludwig has given £1m to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT), the largest donation in its 177-year history. Ludwig told *The Guardian* that, on a visit to Stratford, he had been struck by the state of Hall's Croft, the home of the Bard's daughter, Susanna, and her husband John Hall, a doctor. He was told the building was "falling over" – and the cost of saving it. "So I just said, I'll do it." The SBT described Ludwig as "an angel" who had made crucial restoration works possible.

What the commentators said

They've got a lot to answer for, all those well-heeled retirees who boasted about giving their winter fuel payment to charity or spending it on a case of good wine, said Mary Dejevsky in *The Spectator*. "Their interventions reinforced the cliché that your average pensioner is a feather-bedded 'boomer' sponging off 'hard-pressed' working-age families." The reality is that many pensioners will feel this cut all too keenly, said Fleet Street Fox in the *Daily Mirror*. To qualify for pension tax credit – and thus be eligible for the fuel payment – you have to be on an income so low that the state tops it up to £218.15 a week. That's only £11,343 a year.

This cut will impact pensioners, said Daniel Finkelstein in *The Times*, but we've got to make savings somewhere. The public finances are unsustainable, which means the state has to tax people more or give them less. Better the latter. This cut is hardly savage in any case, said Fraser Nelson in *The Daily Telegraph*. At most, pensioners stand to lose £300, but the triple lock meant that the state pension rose by almost £700 this year and will rise by £350 next year.

Tough choices are part of governing, said Isabel Hardman in *The i Paper*, but it doesn't help if leaders accompany them with relentlessly downbeat rhetoric. Starmer keeps going on about how much devastation the Tories wrought and how much tougher things are going to get in the months ahead. This is dispiriting and has created an "impression of drift". The PM needs to leaven his realism with some more positive messages about how reforms can improve the country. Voters need to "feel as though things are going to gradually get better, and have something to look forward to". Starmer's "miserabilist message" is a "monumental strategic error", agreed Jenni Russell in *The Times*. Voters accepted George Osborne's austerity agenda in 2010 because it was presented as a short-term, "plausible fix" to the recent financial crash. But after 15 years of wage stagnation, morale today is low. "We need action, not passivity and blame. This weary country will never flourish on a diet of gloom alone."

What the commentators said

Grenfell was Britain's deadliest residential fire since the Second World War; and no one is spared blame in this report, said Will Hutton in *The Observer*. Tony Blair's government failed to heed warnings about the dangers of some cladding systems; contractors "systematically lied" about the safety of their products; regulators were "asleep on the job"; the local authority ignored the concerns of tenants; and the London Fire Brigade was underprepared. Some of the most damning criticism was reserved for Studio E, the architect which led the refurbishment, said Oliver Wainwright in *The Guardian*. It was blamed for "very significant" failings, from its lack of knowledge of building regulations, to its over-reliance on subcontractors. But Studio E was not exceptional. The report concludes that such ineptitude is widespread in the profession. The fact is that trainee architects spend far too little time studying practical matters such as fire safety, meaning that few understand the complex materials used in modern buildings. That leaves them serving as "ineffectual middlemen", their expertise usurped by specialist "subconsultants".

Of all the governments blamed, none came in for heavier criticism than that of David Cameron, said George Eaton in *The New Statesman* – the PM who prided himself on his "crusade against red tape". In 2013, his government introduced a "one in, two out" rule on regulations; in 2016, it became "one in, three out". As a result, calls for stronger fire regulations were ignored – even after the government was warned about flammable cladding. But more regulation isn't the solution, said Matthew Syed in *The Sunday Times*. The Grenfell tragedy has exposed a corrupt culture – one in which regulators are too close to the industry they're supposed to be overseeing. When you have this kind of "regulatory capture", more rules just create more opportunities for the system to be gamed, and for their drafters, as the only people who really understand them, to get lucrative jobs in the private sector. So rules are not enough; we must also shut the revolving door, and smash the networks of patronage behind this "legalised corruption".

What next?

From this winter, only those claiming pension credit will receive the winter fuel allowance. About 1.4 million pensioners currently claim that credit, but an estimated 880,000 eligible households are not doing so. Some may have been deterred by the paperwork involved (to apply, you have to fill out a 243-question form).

As part of their defence of the cut to fuel allowance, ministers have highlighted a new campaign to increase take-up of pension credit. But if many more people do sign up, says *The Independent*, the extra costs of pension credit – worth some £3,900 a year on average – might actually outweigh the savings from cutting the fuel allowance.

What next?

The report made a total of 58 recommendations to prevent such a tragedy from happening again. Among them were the appointment of a new chief construction adviser; changes to official fire-safety guidance; a review of the legal definition of a "higher risk building"; the creation of a new college for firefighters; and improvements to the training of architects.

The recommendations are not legally binding: it is up to relevant organisations to consider implementing them. All promised to do so in full. The three companies that supplied flammable materials all denied significant wrongdoing.

THE WEEK

What does Keir Starmer's decision to get a Siberian kitten say about him? It's a question that has exercised certain commentators since the PM disclosed that a new cat would be joining his family in

Downing Street. His children had wanted a German shepherd dog, and Starmer would have us believe that his compromise deal shows him to be a master negotiator. "This is an agreement after long negotiations – I said we'd get in the room and sort it out," he told the BBC. To his critics, however, the choice is in line with his cautious style: typical of him to opt for the compromise kitten, they suggested, rather than the full-blooded hound. Still, it's hard to blame him for using pets to try to drum up some positive press: the media has a voracious appetite for stories about the animals in Downing Street. In 1995, Fleet Street lapped up the story of John Major's "sunburnt goldfish", after it was revealed that occupants of the then-PM's pond had been given sun cream to recover from a summer heatwave. The *Sunday Times* recently carried a piece billed as having been written by none other than Larry the Cat, Downing Street's chief mouser; Boris Johnson's badly-behaved dog, Dilyn, was widely taken as symbolic of his chaotic administration. Not all PMs are defined by their pets, though. Churchill was likened to a bulldog, but his beloved dog Rufus was a poodle. When it was run over in 1947, he was so heartbroken that he got another – and called it Rufus II. "His name is Rufus II," he would tell people, "but the II is silent."

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Controversy of the week

The final four

“And then there were four,” said The Daily Telegraph. Mel Stride was eliminated from the Conservative leadership race in the second round of voting by MPs on Tuesday. That left two contenders from the right of the party leading the field – Robert Jenrick, with 33 votes, and Kemi Badenoch, with 28 – and two from the centrist wing: James Cleverly, and Tom Tugendhat, both on 21. Priti Patel had been eliminated last week. The final four “will make their pitch” at the Tory conference in Birmingham at the end of the month; MPs will then whittle them down to two, before members get the final vote. Badenoch has long been the favourite, said Noah Keate in Politico, but Jenrick has emerged as a serious challenger. Once dubbed “Robert Generic”, for representing a “flavourless brand of centrist Toryism” – he voted to stay in the EU – the 42-year-old has tacked to the Right, particularly on immigration. In retrospect, the signs that he was mulling a leadership bid “were all there”: “assisted by Ozempic, he shed the pounds”, got a “snazzy” new haircut, and wooed influential right-wing backbenchers.



Jenrick: a “snazzy” new look

The Conservative Party, reduced to a rump of 121 MPs, is “far from power and drained of relevance”, said The Guardian. Observing this race, you’d be hard pushed to find any “candour about the scale and causes of July’s rout”. The whole exercise looks “more like collaborative denial than healthy competition”. It’s quite extraordinary that Jenrick is leading the race, said Ian Dunt in The i Paper. He is fixated on the votes lost to Reform, and has nothing at all to say about the many more lost to Labour and the Lib Dems. “Naturally, he wants to leave the European Convention on Human Rights.” He has argued that people who say “*Allahu akbar*” in public should be arrested. For her part, Badenoch believes that the Tories lost because “we talked Right but governed Left”. There is “no respectable political analyst on the face of the earth who would share that assessment”. She says she wants to challenge what she calls “destructive identity politics” and “a postmodernism that can best be described as joyless decadence”. “An election-winning motto it is not.”

The Tories are in no hurry, said Charles Moore in The Daily Telegraph. “The one luxury” total defeat has bought them is time – not least to decide whether to tack to the Right, or back to the “One Nation” ideal. My feeling is that Badenoch, Jenrick and Tugendhat are the best bets. Cleverly, though affable and experienced, lacks “the vision thing”. Tugendhat has recovered well after a shaky first round, adding four votes in the second, said Katy Balls in The Spectator. There is a path for him or Cleverly to get to the final two, if they can unite centrist MPs around them. The race is still Badenoch’s to win: polls suggest she’d beat any of the remaining candidates in a vote of the members. But, of course, that also means “all camps have an incentive to try to keep her off the ballot”.

Prisoners released

More than 1,700 inmates were released from prisons in England and Wales this week as part of the Government’s scheme to ease prison overcrowding. Announced in July, the scheme allows for the release on licence of prisoners sentenced to less than five years once they’ve served 40% of their term, instead of 50%. Those convicted of sex crimes, or who were jailed for more than four years for violent offences, are not eligible. However, some of the eligible prisoners may be sex offenders who were serving additional terms – and their victims may not have been warned of their early release. There have also been concerns that the probation service has not been well enough prepared for the extra workload.

Water regulations

Water company bosses could be jailed for up to two years as part of proposed new measures to tackle sewage pollution. As well as making obstructing an Environment Agency inquiry an imprisonable offence, the new laws would give regulators the power to issue automatic fines; and to ban bonuses for CEOs of firms that have failed to protect the environment, or that are in poor financial shape.

Spirit of the age

Users of the running app Strava are paying “mules” to do their jogging for them, the Telegraph reports. The app allows amateur runners to post their routes and times, which may win them “kudos” (the equivalent of “likes”) from other users. But on TikTok, people are now offering to run races for other people. In a video, a runner explains that he can either take a Strava user’s phone on the run, or access their Strava account. Often, he says he will be asked to run the race slowly, so that when the real user speeds up, everyone is impressed.

For the first time, online has overtaken TV in Ofcom’s annual survey of the nation’s news habits. 71% of adults now say they consume news on the web, while 70% say they watch TV news bulletins.

Good week for:

The Princess of Wales, who revealed that she has completed her chemotherapy treatment, and is planning a limited return to public engagements in the coming months. In a video released by Kensington Palace, she said that the past nine months had been “tough” and “scary”, and she was relieved the treatment was over.

Dwayne Fields, the first black Briton to reach the North Pole, who was named as the UK’s new Chief Scout, taking over from Bear Grylls. Fields – an explorer, TV presenter and naturalist who grew up without access to nature in inner-city London – said that joining the Scouts as a boy had “shaped who I am today”.

1990s nostalgia, with reports that sales of crisps that were popular in that era are soaring again. Supermarket sales data reveals that sales of Frazzles have risen 48% year-on-year, while those of salt and vinegar Chipsticks are up 42%.

Never Knowingly Undersold, the John Lewis price promise, which is being revived. The retailer says it will use AI to match its prices across those of 25 competitors, in-store and online.

Bad week for:

Bedbugs, with the discovery of what is claimed to be a quick and easy way of eradicating the biting insects. Scientists in France recommend thoroughly cleaning the affected area, then spreading a thin layer of a powdered clay called Terre de Sommières, which apparently dehydrates bedbugs, killing them in 24 hours.

Letter-writing, after Royal Mail announced that the price of a first-class stamp will go up to £1.65 next month. It blamed the 30p increase on “urgent” financial challenges.

Poll watch

A New York Times poll of likely voters taken before the US presidential debate on Tuesday gave a slight lead to Donald Trump for the first time since Kamala Harris secured the Democrat nomination. 47% of respondents said they would vote for Harris in the election in November; 48% said they’d opt for Trump. This reduced her lead in the average of all polls to 2.5%.

Three-quarters of members of Gen Z (born after 1996) aim to be their own boss. 39% think they could launch and run a business from their smartphone. 45% reckon they could make money from social media. By contrast, only 57% of millennials (born between 1980 and 1996) have become entrepreneurs or plan to. *Santander/Daily Telegraph*



Dublin
Stereotyping row: A school textbook presenting a “traditional” Irish family as potato-eating

xenophobes has been withdrawn from schools in Ireland. In the new edition of *Health and Wellbeing SPHE 1*, the “traditional” family (who are white, red-headed and wearing Aran jumpers) eat potatoes every day, only listen to Irish music, never mix with people of other religions and dislike “change or difference”. Set against them is a “progressive” family who are mixed race, find other cultures “exciting” and are open to new experiences. The depiction caused a furore on social media, where it was described as offensive and degrading.

Berlin

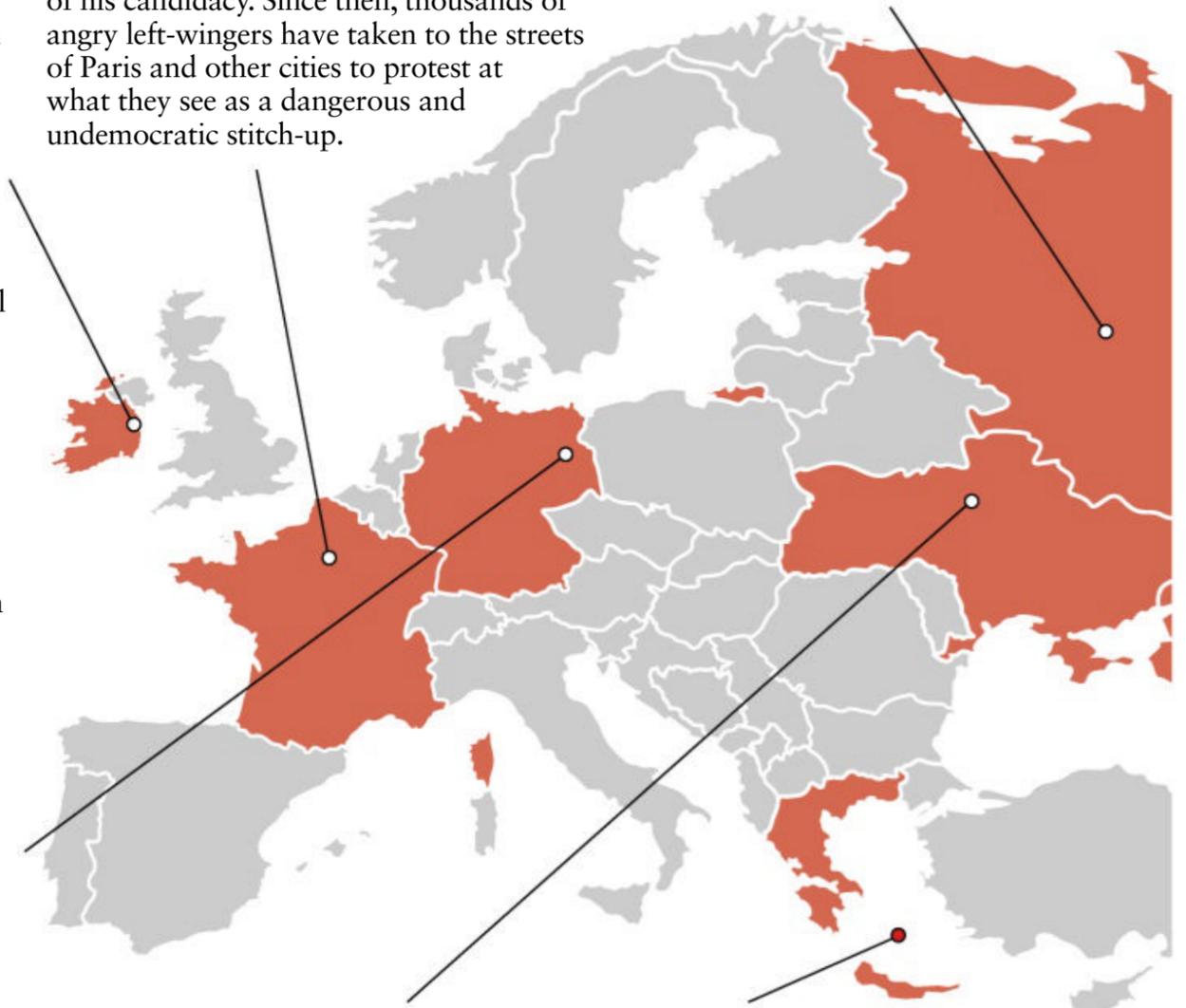
Border controls: Germany has announced plans to introduce temporary controls at all its land borders, a move that threatens to undermine the EU principle of free movement within the bloc. The interior minister, Nancy Faeser, said that the controls were needed to tackle irregular migration and protect Germany against “the acute dangers posed by Islamist terrorism and serious crime”. A series of fatal attacks in which suspects were asylum seekers has put Berlin under intense pressure. Immigration has been cited as a major factor in the success of far-right parties in recent regional elections, and another election, in Brandenburg, is just a week away. Under EU rules, countries in the border-free Schengen Area can only impose temporary controls as a “last resort”. Polish PM Donald Tusk described Germany’s decision as “unacceptable”.

Paris

New PM: President Macron has appointed the former EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier as prime minister, two months after his snap election resulted in a hung parliament and political deadlock. After July’s poll, the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP) formed the largest of three roughly equal blocs in the French parliament. The NFP subsequently put forward various candidates to be PM, but Macron rejected them all on the grounds that they would be immediately ousted by parliamentary votes of no confidence. He finally settled on Barnier – a conservative who has said he’ll work with centrists from Macron’s own party (the second-largest bloc) – after Marine Le Pen, of the far-right National Rally (the third) – signalled her acceptance of his candidacy. Since then, thousands of angry left-wingers have taken to the streets of Paris and other cities to protest at what they see as a dangerous and undemocratic stitch-up.

Moscow

“Secret sons”: Vladimir Putin has two young sons who live in a heavily guarded mansion near Lake Valdai, northwest of Moscow, it has been claimed. Ivan, nine, and Vladimir Jr, five, are said to have little contact with other children of their own age. Instead, they play alone or with the various nannies, governesses, security guards and personal chefs who surround them, according to the Dossier Centre, an investigative news website founded by the opposition activist Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Their mother is said to be Alina Kabaeva, the former Olympic gymnast whose relationship with Putin has been an open secret in Russia for more than a decade. Allegedly, their father is annoyed that they love Disney cartoons, not Russian ones.



Kyiv

Cabinet shake-up: President Zelensky has dismissed his foreign affairs chief, Dmytro Kuleba (pictured), along with eight other ministers, in the biggest shake-up of Ukraine’s government since the Russian invasion of 2022. One of Ukraine’s longest-serving foreign ministers, Kuleba was widely seen as having played a crucial role in securing Western support for Ukraine’s war effort. He has been replaced by Andrii Sybiha, his former deputy. Zelensky said that “new energy” was needed to take the country forward into a difficult autumn. However, most of the appointees are familiar faces in government, and some MPs have questioned whether the reshuffle will have a revitalising effect.



As Russia continued its long-range missile campaign against Ukrainian cities, seven people were killed in a strike on Lviv last week, including four members of the same family. Yaroslav Bazylevych lost his wife, Yevheniia, and their three daughters, aged 21, 18 and seven, when their apartment block in the western city was struck by a Russian hypersonic missile. He reportedly survived only because he had left to collect water. Days later, Ukraine carried out one of its biggest drone attacks on Russia to date. Russia said it had shot down 20 drones over Moscow, where one hit a residential building, killing one person and wounding 12, two of whom are in critical condition.

Santorini, Greece

Cruise charges: Greece is planning to introduce a €20 levy on cruise-ship passengers who visit the popular Aegean islands of Santorini and Mykonos, in an effort to tackle “overtourism”. Tourists contributed roughly €20bn to the Greek economy last year, and the prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, stressed as he announced the measure that Greece is not “hostile” to the tourism industry. He said that overtourism, however, was causing problems in specific places, at particular times. The €20 charge will be levied in peak season, when multiple cruise liners visit Mykonos and Santorini each day, sometimes almost doubling their populations. He said some of the money raised would be spent on infrastructure to benefit local residents. Athens is also considering measures to combat the problem, including restricting the number of cruise ships that dock in some ports.

Washington DC

Russian meddling: The US Justice Department is in the process of seizing 32 Russian-controlled internet domains, which it alleges form part of a major state-run disinformation campaign known as Doppelganger, it was revealed last week. The unsealed indictment accuses various Russian companies of spreading propaganda aimed at weakening international support for Ukraine, bolstering Russian interests and subverting American elections. It says that, among other things, Kremlin-directed companies have used cyber-squatting, fabricated influencers and fake profiles to “covertly promote AI-generated false narratives on social media”. US prosecutors have also indicted two employees of the Russian state-controlled broadcaster RT, whom they accuse of overseeing a \$10m scheme to pump out propaganda on social media designed to sow “discord and division” in the US.

Washington DC

Iran sanctions: The US has joined the UK, France and Germany (the E3 group) in imposing fresh sanctions on Iran, in response to confirmation that it has sent ballistic missiles to Russia for use in Ukraine. Speaking in London, ahead of a trip to Kyiv, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the missiles could be deployed against Ukrainians “within weeks”. He also hit out at Iran’s new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, who was elected in July on a promise to rebalance relations with the West. “They want to receive sanctions relief,” he said. “Destabilising actions like these will achieve exactly the opposite.” The E3 described the deployment as a “further escalation of Iran’s military support... and will see Iranian missiles reaching European soil”. Their sanctions include a ban on Iran Air, the country’s flag carrier.

Winder, Georgia

Father charged: The father of a boy who shot dead four people at his school in Georgia last week has been charged with involuntary manslaughter and second-degree murder for allegedly allowing his son to have a gun. Fourteen-year-old Colt Gray killed two pupils and two teachers when he opened fire at Apalachee High School with an AR-15-type assault rifle. He has been charged as an adult with four counts of murder. Prosecutors suspect that he was given the rifle by his father for Christmas last year, months after the FBI visited their home in response to a tip-off that Colt had made threats against his school online. At that time, Colin Gray insisted that Colt had no unsupervised access to guns in the house.

**Philadelphia**

TV showdown: Kamala Harris and Donald Trump traded insults this week in a fiery TV debate in Philadelphia. Though pundits were divided as to who had “won” the head-to-head match, Harris scored notable

hits by pursuing her tactic of making Trump seem ridiculous. She laughed when he repeated a rumour that Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio, had been eating people’s pet dogs. (The moderators, who often interrupted Trump, said that there had been no verified reports of pet eating.) She successfully goaded Trump into veering angrily off-message by claiming that his supporters found his rallies boring and exhausting; and baited him further by telling him that world leaders laugh at him and can manipulate him (Vladimir Putin would “eat you for lunch”). However, Harris was criticised for not presenting a clear policy platform, and Trump made much of her various policy shifts.

Minutes after the ABC debate, which Trump’s supporters said had been biased against him, pop star Taylor Swift told her tens of millions of followers that she was backing Harris. CNN and Fox News polls of voters who had watched the debate found that more than 60% considered Harris the winner. Earlier this week, Dick Cheney, the senior Republican who served as George W. Bush’s vice-president, announced that he was backing Harris, as did his daughter, former congresswoman Liz Cheney.

**Toronto**

Tycoon jailed: The Finnish-Canadian fashion mogul Peter Nygård has been jailed for 11 years for sexual assault. Nygård, 83, was once one of Canada’s most successful tycoons. His star-studded parties were attended by the likes of Oprah Winfrey and President George Bush Sr, and he was estimated to be worth nearly \$1bn. But, in 2020, he was arrested on suspicion of assaulting a number of women and girls whom he had lured into a “secret” bedroom in his Toronto HQ. He was convicted on four counts in November, and is now fighting extradition to the US on sex-trafficking charges.

**Caracas**

“Winner” flees: Edmundo González Urrutia – the opposition candidate widely viewed as the legitimate winner of Venezuela’s recent presidential election – has fled to Spain. Though Nicolás Maduro was declared the winner of the poll in July, the result was contested by González’s supporters, who produced tallies from electronic voting machines suggesting that he had won by a two-to-one margin. A former diplomat, González had only joined the race in March, when the opposition leader María Corina Machado was banned from running. He went into hiding after the election; last week, a prosecutor ordered his arrest on conspiracy charges. Machado said González, 75, had been obliged to leave, to “preserve his freedom, his integrity and his life”.

Al-Mawasi, Gaza Strip

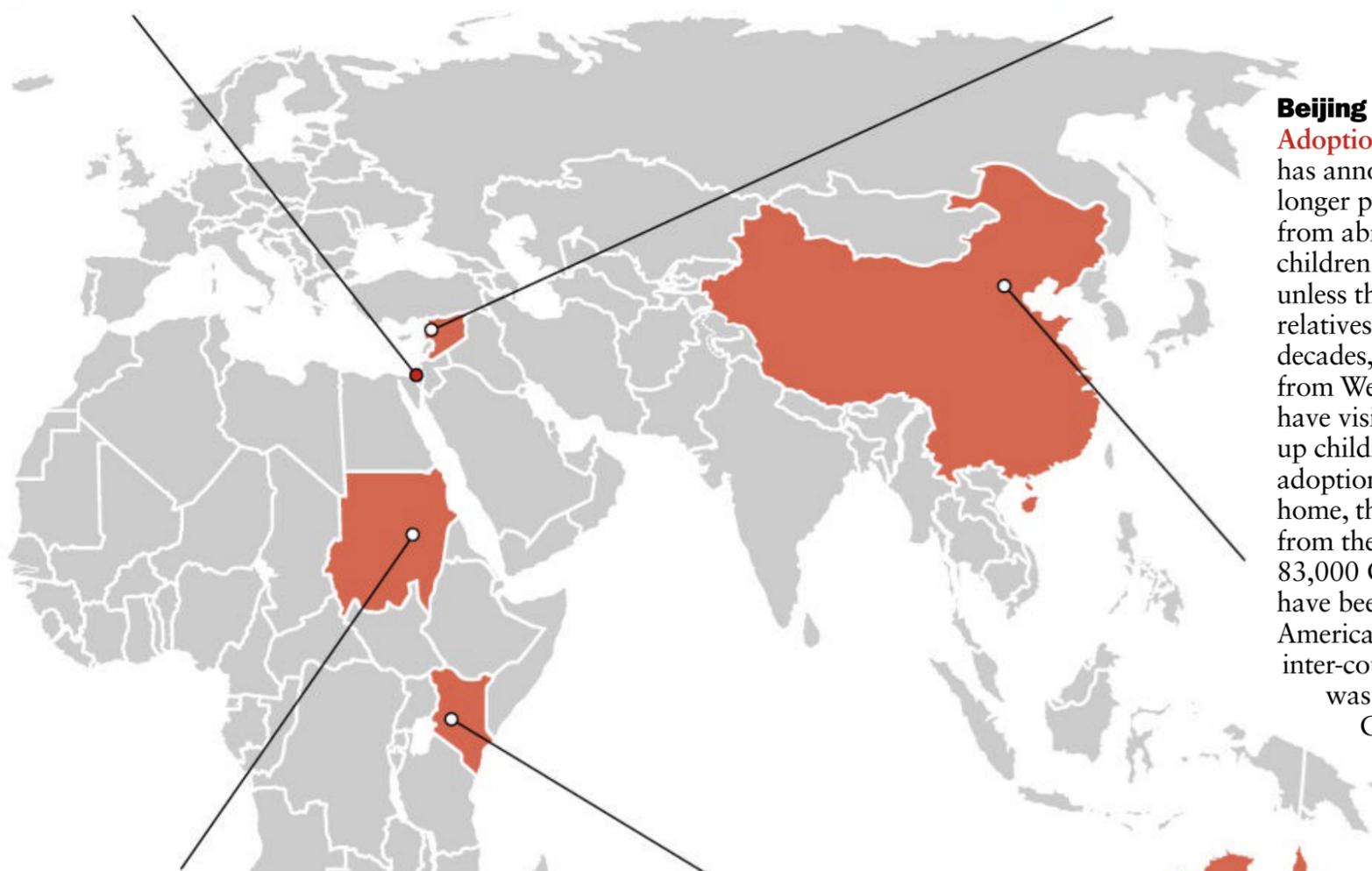
Safe zone bombed: At least 19 people have been killed and 65 wounded in an Israeli air strike on al-Mawasi in Gaza, a tent encampment Israel had designated a humanitarian safe zone in December. Four missiles struck the camp, causing dozens of tents to catch fire. Israel said it was targeting Hamas militants hidden among the civilian population. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have sought shelter in al-Mawasi, after being ordered to move there by Israeli forces, but Israeli planes have often targeted the camp, a strike in July killing at least 90 people.

Two days earlier, in the West Bank, three Israeli workers were killed in an apparent terror attack by a Jordanian truck driver at the Allenby Bridge border crossing. And in a separate incident, a Turkish-American dual citizen was shot dead by Israeli troops during a protest against settler expansion in the occupied territory. Aysenur Ezgi Eygi was demonstrating alongside Palestinians in Beita, a town near the illegal settlement of Evytar, established by Israeli settlers in 2021. The Israeli military said she was shot “unintentionally”, but the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said Israeli security forces need to make “fundamental changes to the way they operate in the West Bank”.



Masyaf, Syria

Israeli strikes: Israel has launched air strikes on military facilities in Syria, killing at least 25 people, in one of its biggest attacks on its war-torn neighbour in years. The main target was a military research centre in Masyaf involved in developing chemical weapons and ballistic missiles, and thought to be run by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. Targets associated with Iran-backed militias in Damascus, Homs and Tartus have also, reportedly, been hit. In its bid to stop Iran expanding its influence through proxies, Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in Syria in recent years. They reached a peak after the war with Hamas began last October, but had dwindled following April’s air strike on Iran’s embassy in Damascus, which killed three senior commanders and provoked a large-scale Iranian missile attack on Israel.



Beijing

Adoption ban: Beijing has announced it will no longer permit families from abroad to adopt children from China unless they are blood relatives. For many decades, would-be parents from Western countries have visited China to pick up children selected for adoption and take them home, the large majority from the US: close to 83,000 Chinese children have been adopted by American families. But inter-country adoption was halted during the Covid pandemic and is now to be ended altogether.

Khartoum

Looting fears: Tens of thousands of artefacts are thought to have been looted from the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum, one of the most important archaeological collections in Africa. Satellite images from last year show trucks loaded with artefacts leaving the museum and heading for Sudan’s borders. The museum houses more than 100,000 items, including treasures from ancient Nubia, whose kingdoms rivalled and occasionally ruled over ancient Egypt. But museum staff have not had access to it since civil war broke out last year. The museum is located in an area controlled by the Rapid Support Forces: videos on social media show the rebel group’s fighters swarming inside the museum and opening storage containers in its laboratories.



Eldoret, Kenya

Athlete killed: The Ugandan athlete, Rebecca Cheptegei, who ran the marathon at the Paris Olympics, has died in hospital, four days after being doused in petrol and set on fire by a former boyfriend. He attacked her in front of her two small daughters, outside the house that she’d bought in Eldoret, a town famed for its high-altitude training camps. Violence against women is rife in Kenya, and female athletes – many of whom travel from abroad to train there – are often targeted for their prize money. Cheptegei is the fourth female runner killed by male partners or ex-partners in recent years.



Canberra

Social media ban: Australia is set to impose the world’s strictest clampdown on social media, by banning children under 16 from using it. Under its proposed law, the Labor government intends to establish a strict age-verification test and to set up a regulator to penalise social media companies that allow it to be flouted. We need to get children off phones and back “onto the footy fields and tennis courts”, said PM Anthony Albanese. Other governments have also introduced bans: phones are banned in Italy’s primary schools; Florida is banning under-14s from opening social media accounts.

Lessons from Grand Designs

As the presenter of Channel 4's *Grand Designs*, Kevin McCloud has spent a lot of the past 25 years in the company of couples who are in the midst of ambitious – and often highly stressful – house-building projects, says Andrew Billen in *The Times*. A former trainee opera singer turned designer, he comes into these people's lives as the expert, but he has also learnt from them. Early on, he scoffed when a woman said she meditated with a spiritual companion; but she also told him that the key was to focus on the things that make you happy. When designing a home, he says, people often think that a "tap that produces sparkling water" or a walk-in fridge are the things that will bring them happiness, when in fact it is a nice view, or a place where they can read a book in the sunshine. His role on the show is to hold people's hands, and draw out their stories. He can get to know them well, but it's a peculiar relationship. "Occasionally I think, 'These are lovely people. It would be nice to see them again.' And then you do see them again and you realise all they want to talk about is their kitchen. It's like the therapist taking their client out to the pub: the session doesn't stop."

Petit's high-wire adventure

It's 50 years since the French high-wire artist Philippe Petit walked across a cable strung between the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. The unauthorised feat was the result of months of planning with a collaborator, whose task it was to sneak up to the roof of one of the towers in the early hours of 7 August 1974, and fire an arrow attached to a fishing line onto the adjacent one. That made it possible for the crew to hoist the 200kg steel cable between the two buildings. Then, at 8am, Petit headed out onto the wire. He

spent 45 minutes on the cable, 1,350ft above the streets of New York. He walked its 121-foot length six times. He danced, knelt to salute the crowd gathering below, and even lay down at one point, in a feat that made the front pages across the world. Now 75, Petit lives in the Catskill Mountains and is still wirewalking. But he doubts anyone would risk a stunt like that again. "I think it would not happen now," he told Tom Teodorczuk in *The Daily Telegraph*. "At midnight, if you see a group of human beings on a roof with tons of equipment, you'd shoot them first and ask questions later!"

An Olympic backlash

The Australian breakdancer Rachael Gunn, aka "Raygun", became a global sensation after her performance at the Paris Olympics – for all the wrong reasons. Her routine, in which she flailed around on the floor and hopped like a kangaroo, caused widespread bafflement and was awarded zero points. Gunn (below) wasn't very surprised that the judges didn't rate her. "I knew I was going to get beaten, and that people weren't going to understand my style," she told *The Project*. But she was caught off guard by the scale of the public backlash. She became aware that something was amiss moments after her round, when a media adviser suggested that she might want to avoid social media; she dipped in even so, and her stomach lurched. "The energy and vitriol that people had was pretty alarming." But although

she feels remorse that her performance led to claims that breakdancing doesn't belong in the Games, she insists that she did deserve her place on the Australian team: she has won several other competitions. As for the abuse, she has tried to remain philosophical about that. After all, she says, "I can't control how people react."



These days, Michael Sheen refers to himself as "a not-for-profit actor", says Simon Hattenstone in *The Guardian*. Now 55, he has left Los Angeles, and moved back to a village next to his home town of Port Talbot, where he uses his earnings to support community projects. When he was growing up there, in a comfortably-off home, he had no interest in social justice: his focus was on acting, and in his teens he went off to Rada, where he aimed to become "the greatest actor of all time". It was only years later, when he revisited Port Talbot, that he got a sense of the realities of life in the town. He met one group, for instance, who supported young carers. He didn't even know what that meant. He was told that these were children who supported a family member, and that the group offered them a bit of respite by taking them bowling or to the cinema once a week. He went along, and met a child of eight who looked after their mother and siblings. Next time he visited, the group was gone, its funding cut. But his altruism was also spurred by a reassessment of his own life. He'd thought, he said, that his success had been down to his own talent; that he'd made his own luck. But as he got older, "I became more aware of the opportunity I'd had in an area where there wasn't much opportunity. At a certain point you go, Oh, people are having to *volunteer* to make that youth theatre happen..."

Viewpoint:**The rise of the backpack**

"Yes, of course it is practical, but the now-ubiquitous mini-backpack is hideous. Once the preserve of hippies and gap-year students, backpacks have infiltrated modern Britain, with hardly a nod in direction of style or decorum. The market in the UK is worth around £90m a year, presumably as a result of an explosion in sales of what's described variously as a 'day bag' or 'office bag'. And they have largely confined the briefcase to oblivion. So rarely does one see a proper leather briefcase on a bus or train that, if you do, the bearer comes across as some sort of demented P.G. Wodehouse character or a member of the Rees-Mogg family." *Mark Palmer in The Spectator*

Farewell

Derek Boshier, British artist who designed for David Bowie, died 5 September, aged 87.

Herbie Flowers, bassist best known for *Walk on the Wild Side*, died 5 September, aged 86.

James Earl Jones, actor and voice of Darth Vader, died 9 September, aged 93.

Sérgio Mendes, Brazilian jazz supremo, died 6 September, aged 93.

Jeffrey Titford, retired undertaker who became leader of UKIP, died 9 September, aged 90.

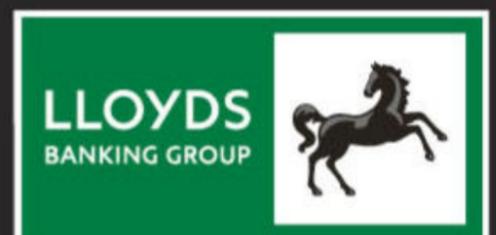


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The Grenfell report

The inquiry into Britain's worst residential fire since the Blitz has taken seven years, and uncovered an extraordinary range of failings

What was the inquiry's main finding?

"The simple truth," said the inquiry chair, retired judge Martin Moore-Bick, is that the deaths of 54 adults and 18 children in Grenfell Tower in west London "were all avoidable, and those who lived in the tower were badly failed over a number of years, and in a number of different ways, by those who were responsible for ensuring the safety of the building and its occupants." At 00.54 on 14 June 2017, Behailu Kebede called the London Fire Brigade, because a fire had broken out in his kitchen in Flat 16, on the fourth floor of the tower – caused by a malfunctioning fridge-freezer. The first fire engine was on the scene by 00.59; a "relatively modest" kitchen fire had been put out by 01.21. But by then the fire had broken out of the kitchen window, where it spread shockingly fast: by 01.27 it had reached the roof of the 24-storey building. By around 04.00, it had reached all sides of the tower.



The tower's cladding burned "fiercely"

Why did the fire spread so fast?

The "principal" reason is that, during renovations in 2015-2016, Grenfell's fireproof concrete shell was clad in combustible aluminium composite material (ACM): Reynobond 55 PE, made by Arconic out of two thin sheets of aluminium with a flammable polyethylene core. Particularly when used not as flat panels but folded into "cassette form" so it could be hung from rails, the polyethylene core "burns fiercely". Playing a smaller but still crucial part was combustible insulation – installed between the cladding and the concrete wall. The insulation mostly used was RS5000, a polyisocyanurate foam made by Celotex (which releases toxic gas when it burns), with some made by Kingspan. Because of all this, "compartmentation" – the principle that fires should not be able to spread from flat to flat – failed catastrophically.

Why were combustible materials used on a tower block?

Initially, the architects, Studio E, wanted to use non-combustible zinc panels, but they chose ACM under pressure over costs from the Tenant Management Organisation, part of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), which owned Grenfell; it saved £293,368 on a £9.2m refurbishment. As to why it was possible to use dangerous cladding at all, the inquiry found that "one very significant reason" was "systematic dishonesty on the part of those who made and sold the rainscreen cladding panels and insulation products": Arconic, Celotex and Kingspan "engaged in deliberate and sustained strategies to manipulate the testing processes, misrepresent test data and mislead the market" (see box).

Why wasn't this stopped?

The regulators weren't good enough. The Arconic and Kingspan products were certified by the BBA, a privatised certification body. The BBA was found both "incompetent" and willing to accommodate clients instead of insisting on rigorous standards. Other building-product regulators and government bodies were similarly incompetent. It was an extraordinary

chain of regulatory failure, running all the way to Whitehall. The building-control section of RBKC, the council, "did not properly scrutinise the design or choice of materials", and waved through cladding that did not comply with building regulations on fire safety. The council's Tenant Management Organisation, which ran the building, never completed an approved fire-safety strategy. Key fire-protection measures, such as working fire doors, were lacking.

How did central government fail?

On numerous occasions before the fire, the then Department for Communities and Local Government was given clear warnings about the dangers of ACM cladding and other combustible materials being used in high-rise blocks: there had been a series of cladding fires, dating back to 1991, notably one that killed six at Lakanal House in London in 2009, which led to a public warning from the coroner. The department failed to act; failures reached back decades, but under David Cameron's coalition it was understaffed, and ministers' "deregulatory agenda" meant that "even matters affecting the safety of life were ignored, delayed or disregarded". One relatively junior civil servant, Brian Martin, was given overall responsibility for fire-safety measures, with little supervision. "I ended up being the single point of failure in the department," he tearfully told the inquiry.

What about the architects and the builders?

The inquiry found that the architect Studio E, which led the renovations, bore a "very significant responsibility" for the disaster. It was "cavalier" and in many respects did not "meet the standards of a reasonably competent architect". The two main contractors, Rydon and Harley Facades, were also culpable. "Everyone involved in the choice of the materials to be used in the external wall thought that responsibility for their suitability and safety lay with someone else." Studio E instructed a consultant, Exova, to prepare a fire-safety strategy for the refurbished building. It was never finished, and Studio E failed to ensure that it was completed.

And the fire brigade?

On 14 June, firefighters of the London Fire Brigade "displayed extraordinary courage and selfless devotion to duty", the inquiry found, but they were "faced with a situation for which they had not been properly prepared". It issued a "stay put" order, on the basis that compartmentation of the fire would work: residents were told to stay in their flats. This wasn't reversed until 02.47, about an hour after it should have been. There was also no coherent evacuation strategy. In addition, on the night, firefighters' radio systems failed and the control room was overwhelmed. Behind all this were "serious" and "systematic" failings on the part of management. The Lakanal House fire had already exposed shortcomings in the service's ability to fight fires in high-rises; it was aware of the potential dangers of cladding fires; but it failed to prepare.

"Someone who gives a damn"

From 2005, Arconic, the French wing of a US metals conglomerate, had clear test results showing that its Reynobond 55 PE cladding, in cassette form, "reacted to fire in a very dangerous way", and could not be classified as meeting EU safety standards. Senior officials discussed this issue in emails marked "confidential". Despite this, and despite being aware of a series of cladding fires, it continued to sell its product in places with "weak regulatory regimes", such as the UK. After further tests in 2013, Arconic downgraded the product's EU safety classification. But its UK sales team did not pass this on to its customers, and sold it using fire-performance claims it "knew to be false".

For its part, the insulation company Celotex knowingly gamed the fire tests – using fire-resistant boards – and marketed its RS5000 foam for use in buildings above 18 metres high, despite knowing of the dangers: an earlier test created an "inferno". Celotex was following the example of the market leader, the Irish company Kingspan, which falsely claimed that its product was safe, despite "disastrous" tests for its Kooltherm K15 insulation. When asked about safety issues by a client, a technical manager wrote: "I think they are getting me confused with someone who gives a dam [sic]."

Don't let them out of jail, try to get them in

Robert Colvile

The Sunday Times

We need to release prisoners early – not just to relieve pressure on an overloaded system, but because we're locking up too many people in the first place. That's the view of Britain's most senior judges, set out in a new penal-reform paper. And they do make some strong points about how expensive our prisons have become and how bad they are at rehabilitation, says Robert Colvile. But the idea we're locking people up too much is hard to credit when you consider just how hard it is to get jailed today. Since 2007, there have apparently been more than 50,000 occasions on which offenders have been spared jail despite having more than 50 previous convictions. Last year, those with more than 75 previous convictions had no more than a 42% likelihood of receiving a custodial sentence. And, weirdly, prolific offenders tend to get less prison time as their record lengthens. Yet these are the very people we most need to keep off the streets. One Italian study came to the conclusion that each prison year served prevents between 14 and 46 reported crimes. In short, there's a strong case for arguing "Britain is not locking up too many people but too few".

A lesson in economics from Oasis

Larry Elliott

The Guardian

There are a lot of furious Oasis fans out there, says Larry Elliott. Many waited online for hours last month in the hope of securing tickets to the band's reunion concerts, only to find at the moment of paying that the price had shot up from £135 to £350. Cue a flood of complaints and the launch of an official review into "dynamic pricing" – the adjusting of price by a service provider in response to fluctuations in demand. But do the Oasis fans really have a legitimate grievance? Yes and no. If businesses use "surge pricing" (as it's also called), they have a duty to make it clear that they're doing so, to ensure that customers unwilling to pay over the odds don't waste hours on the phone. And in the case of the Oasis reunion, upfront warnings don't appear to have been given. But there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the system itself. When demand outstrips supply, some people will always miss out: expensive half-term flights, cheap midweek holiday stays – it's all the same thing. That's just capitalism, folks.

Turning a blind eye to the evil of apartheid

Janice Turner

The Times

We impose sanctions on Russia over Ukraine; and we imposed sporting boycotts on South Africa in protest at its white supremacist rule; so why do we see fit to play test cricket against Afghanistan, asks Janice Turner. Since the Taliban seized back power three years ago, their hideous regime has been systematically stripping freedoms from Afghan women. First it stopped them going to school and university or working outside the home. Then it barred them from gyms, beauty salons, hairdressers and some public parks, and decreed they only go on shopping trips with a male chaperone. At least those corralled into black townships in South Africa's apartheid era retained the basic human freedom to sing, dance, chat with friends or "simply feel the breeze in their hair". But the Taliban has now banned women from singing or even speaking in public. This is "codified, systemic abuse" – gender apartheid is every bit as pernicious as racial apartheid. Taliban leaders love cricket and a boycott would really hurt. How shameful that we still haven't imposed one.

Physicians, thy union needs to heal itself

Jacky Davis

The Observer

Drama; recriminations; outrage – not things one associates with the British Medical Association (BMA), says Jacky Davis. But the august organisation has witnessed plenty of these ever since it rejected the recommendations of the Cass Review. Dr Hilary Cass and her team, tasked with reviewing NHS gender-identity services for young people in England, concluded this April, after four years of painstaking evidence-based analysis, that children had been subjected to potentially life-altering treatment without scientific justification. This conclusion was accepted in full by ministers and welcomed by most doctors. But to the fury of many BMA members, their own governing body, the BMA council, voted to reject it without consulting them. This occurred because the BMA has become a victim of "entryism": its council has been hijacked by a pressure group called DoctorsVote, a group of young doctors who initially gained control to advance their demand for a pay rise (fair enough, given the BMA is a trade union), but have now used their muscle to assert their controversial transgender views. The rift this has caused could prove fatal to the BMA. "A union that doesn't represent its members' interests is a union in trouble."

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

Japanese workers who fear their employers' fury when they quit their jobs, are increasingly turning to companies that quit for them, The Times reports. Aya Sato, 24, paid £120 to employ a "proxy resignation" agent when her first attempt to resign from her job at a bank was met with sighs of exasperation from her boss, who then started shouting and desk-thumping, and eventually threw a pencil case. "For Westerners, changing job is something positive," explains one resignation agent. "For Japanese, it's wicked to quit."



A new statue of Elizabeth II, in Antrim Castle Gardens in Northern Ireland, has received a mixed reception. The bronze sculpture, which shows the late Queen flanked by her husband, Prince Philip, and two corgis, was unveiled last weekend. "Looks more like Mrs Doubtfire than our late Queen," one critic lamented online. "Whoever signed that off needs their eyes tested. It's not good," said another. "Could not be more delighted with these new Wallace and Gromit characters," said a third.

Wine connoisseurs have been appalled by a video that shows revellers at a Cannes restaurant tipping dozens of €3,000 bottles of vintage Pétus into a bowl to make a sangria worth €120,000. The unnamed customers mixed two Pétus vintages – a 2006 and a 2011 – with ice cubes, orange juice and other ingredients, while cheering and whistling. Sommelier Philippe Faure-Brac said it was "like using a Picasso or van Gogh to make a fire".

Drugs and death threats: Venezuelan gangs in Colorado

Is Latin American-style gangsterism gaining a foothold in the US? There are troubling signs of it, said Collin Pruett in [The American Conservative](#). Visiting Texas's border with Mexico last year, I found a "population under siege, overstretched police", and Mexican cartels smuggling migrants and drugs with impunity. And the problem seems to be spreading. In April, a Native American tribal leader from Montana cancelled his plans to testify before Congress, citing death threats from the Sinaloa cartel. And the past fortnight has brought reports of a Venezuelan gang seizing control of an apartment complex in Aurora, a suburb of Denver, Colorado.



Armed gang members invading flats in Aurora

"The brazen nature of the takeover, common in Latin America but unprecedented in the US, alarmed local citizens." Videos from residents showed men with semi-automatic weapons barging into apartments. There have been reports of violent assaults, threats of murder, extortion, and child prostitution.

Back in April, the US Border Patrol chief, Jason Owens, warned Americans to "watch out" for the Tren de Aragua gang, said Luige del Puerto in [The Denver Gazette](#). Venezuela's most powerful criminal organisation, it began life as a prison

gang a decade ago but has since spread to other countries in South and Central America, and now to the US. Officials acknowledge that the gang is operating in the Denver region, but they claim it isn't a major threat. They've dismissed reports of gangsters seizing control of the apartments as wild exaggerations, insisting there have merely been isolated crimes.

A lot of nonsense has been spouted about this, said [The Denver Post](#). Donald Trump claimed that Venezuelans were "taking over the whole town"; Colorado Republicans claimed their state was "under violent attack". Baloney. The fuss

was instigated by the owners of the apartment complex, who are using gangs as "a scapegoat for the unsanitary, unsafe and unhealthy" conditions – a source of bitter complaint among residents. Others have blown the story out of proportion for political reasons, or out of simple anti-immigrant prejudice. The fact is, the Denver region has always had some gang activity. According to the US Justice Department, prominent local gangs include the Bloods, Crips, Sureños 13, North Side Mafia and Gangster Disciples. "The addition of the Tren de Aragua gang to the mix is a dangerous complication, but not a cause for panic."

How to end the trade in US hostages

Danielle Pletka

The Washington Post

There were tears of relief last month when three Americans, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, were released by Russia as part of a prisoner swap with the West. The exchange reduced the number of US hostages held abroad, says Danielle Pletka, but dozens more still languish in Russia, Iran, Syria, Nigeria, and elsewhere. The roster of those released from wrongful captivity is still longer – and their freedom has often come at a steep price. The US basketball star Brittney Griner, for instance, was freed by the Putin regime in exchange for the notorious arms dealer Viktor Bout. To secure the freedom of five citizens from Iran last year, President Biden had to release \$6bn in frozen Iranian assets. The accelerating rate of kidnappings of Americans in recent decades is "a vicious cycle – quite literally". We need to break it, and history shows how. In 1987, in response to a spate of hijackings, secretary of state George Shultz banned US citizens from travelling to Lebanon. The ban, which lasted for more than ten years, largely ended the hostage-taking spree. We should place a similar travel ban today on any country that systematically kidnaps Americans. Would that hinder US journalists? Yes. But it would be "a price worth paying to end the trade in US hostages".

Trump is stuck on abortion

Jamelle Bouie

The New York Times

Donald Trump is a master of evasion, says Jamelle Bouie. He promises the world to get what he wants, and when he fails to deliver he always finds a way to escape responsibility. But he has met his match, on the issue of abortion. As president, he delighted conservatives by appointing "pro-life" supporters to the Department of Health and to the Supreme Court, which duly overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending the constitutional right to abortion. "All of this, especially the end of *Roe*, is deeply unpopular, and Trump knows it." Yet he can't afford to alienate conservatives by completely renouncing their agenda. So he's attempting to have it both ways, celebrating his appointments to the court while distancing himself from the consequences of its ruling. Even the most gifted rhetorician would struggle to thread this needle, and Trump is floundering. Last month he gave an interview in which he appeared to support a ballot measure in his home state of Florida that would protect abortion rights. This prompted an angry backlash from conservatives, forcing him to swiftly reverse his position. The former president is "stuck". Having spent a lifetime evading accountability, he has finally run up against "a problem he can't solve by talking out of both sides of his mouth".

Let's burn down the Burning Man

Corinne Loperfido

San Francisco Chronicle

In the summer of 1986, a group of friends set fire to an effigy of a man during a San Francisco beach party, says Corinne Loperfido. Nearly 40 years later, that impromptu event has grown into a vast gathering in the Nevada desert – the Burning Man festival. It has been a remarkable cultural phenomenon, but the event is in "desperate need of reinvention", to reclaim its original spirit. The larger it has grown, the further it has strayed from its much-touted principle of "radical self-reliance", and its commitment to "leave no trace". This year's Burning Man was nearly denied a permit owing to the damage caused to the land by the 2023 event, when flooding led thousands of attendees to get stuck in the mud. Every year, towns near the event are inundated with discarded packaging, clothes, tents and sleeping bags. In 2019, organisers estimated that the festival accounted for more than 100,000 metric tonnes of carbon emissions, the result of transporting 80,000 people and their equipment into and out of the desert. The fleets of huge recreational vehicles, the temporary airport, the air-conditioned orgy domes – it all just feels wasteful and wrong in today's climate. Burning Man used to be inspiring, but "the old ways" are no longer working. Time to "burn them down".

The left-wing populist: Germany's new kingmaker

A new populist force is shaking up German politics, says Ben Knight in [Deutsche Welle \(Bonn\)](#). No, not the hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which had such spectacular successes in regional elections in the eastern states of Thuringia and Saxony earlier this month. The force I'm referring to is Sahra Wagenknecht, the glamorous and divisive enigma who has emerged as kingmaker while the mainstream parties try to keep the AfD out of coalition governments there. Wagenknecht is certainly a fascinating figure, said Thomas Fazi on [UnHerd](#). Once an "icon of the German radical Left", she only set up her party, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW), in January. Yet it was still able to finish third in both states that held elections: voters rallied behind its unique agenda of "left-conservatism", which mixes socialist-style calls for market regulation and higher welfare payments with fierce criticism of military aid for Ukraine, and calls for strict immigration policies.



Wagenknecht: a "glamorous and divisive enigma"

Wagenknecht always was something of an outsider, said James Angelos on [Politico \(Brussels\)](#). Born in East Germany in 1969 to a German mother and Iranian father, she was raised by her grandparents after her father returned to Iran when she was three. As a child, she was teased for her black hair and dark eyes; but by age 19, she had become active in the East German Communist Party and she continued to hold the GDR up as a model even after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. She went on to study philosophy, write an MA thesis (later published as a book) on Karl Marx's interpretation of Hegel, and to become a leading member of Die Linke, the party formed by an alliance of leftist parties in 2007. But her tough line on immigration led to her being driven out of the party last year, and she promptly announced plans to set up a party of her own.

It was a decision grounded in her belief that "left-wing parties no longer serve the working class", said Alessio Dell'Anna in [Euronews \(Brussels\)](#), that they have become too liberal on

migration and too dogmatic in their pursuit of net zero, which she "vehemently opposes". And it has given her a strong platform from which to express her, often radical, views, said Rainer Zitelmann in [Focus \(Berlin\)](#). She calls for the dissolution of Nato and a security pact with Russia; and has lavished praise on leaders from Stalin and Castro to Jeremy Corbyn.

Wagenknecht's agenda might not sound like a recipe for electoral success; but it appeals to plenty of voters in the former GDR, said Aiko Wagner in [Der Spiegel \(Hamburg\)](#). Many still identify as "Ossis" (easterners), and are more anti-American, more socially conservative and more wary of mass migration than their West German counterparts. And they know that Wagenknecht isn't the dangerous radical she's painted, said Maritta Adam-Tkalec in [Berliner Zeitung](#). On the contrary, she articulates positions many reasonable people support: that we should strive for a ceasefire in Ukraine and exercise better control over our borders. Shouldn't we be glad such voters are backing the BSW, and not the extremist AfD?

Love her or hate her, Wagenknecht is in a powerful position, said Hugo Müller-Vogg in [Cicero \(Berlin\)](#). The conservative CDU (which finished second to the AfD in Thuringia, and scraped to victory in Saxony) is now considering governing in coalition with the BSW in both states. That could damage the reputation of the CDU, the party of Angela Merkel; said Angelika Slavik in [Süddeutsche Zeitung \(Munich\)](#), but it's the right call. We'll only ever know if the BSW is capable of being a constructive partner, if it lands a role in government. The omens aren't encouraging, said [The Economist](#). Wagenknecht wants to play a role in coalition negotiations, despite not having stood as a candidate in either state. But sooner or later, the BSW's exclusive focus on its eponymous leader will become a problem. Wagenknecht views herself as an outsider, a rebel. But "as party leader and kingmaker she will need diplomacy and a talent for compromise, skills she has shown few signs of possessing".

CHINA

A people losing love for their president

[Nikkei Asia \(Tokyo\)](#)

For decades, China's Communist Party had "a covenant of sorts" with the people it governs, says William Pesek: we'll deliver prosperity, if you submit to one-party rule; that was the deal. But that pact is breaking down. The US-based Freedom House has logged 6,400 public protests since June 2022, and the figure is rising. For Xi Jinping this is the latest and "arguably most dangerous" reminder of "his failure to boost living standards and economic growth" – many of the protests involve disgruntled workers or people stung by plunging land values. Next year is the climax to his ten-year Made in China 2025 project to move manufacturing to higher-value sectors. But China is nowhere near where he'd hoped, its progress slowed by Xi's war on open discourse, by his extreme Covid lockdowns, and by his crackdown on internet giants such as Alibaba. The result is that China's four-decade rise in living standards is now in serious peril. If Xi can't reverse that trend, 2025 may well turn out to be "a year of regret" for his party – "not the triumph it envisioned".

CANADA

Blame Trudeau for opening the gates

[The Globe and Mail \(Toronto\)](#)

"Canada once enjoyed a remarkable consensus on the value of immigration," says Robyn Urback. We took pride in our "scrupulous" vetting and points-based system, which allowed us to welcome in the migrant workers needed to plug gaps in our jobs market left by our falling birthrate and our ageing population. But Justin Trudeau has put paid to all that. After coming to power in 2015, he threw open the gates to new arrivals, so much so that Canada's population is now growing by a million people a year – 96% of whom are temporary or permanent migrants. There's no way each of these arrivals is filling jobs in industries hit by a shortage of workers – let alone being "scrupulously vetted". The result is that Canadians, already facing a chronic housing crisis and a creaking healthcare system, are now being served at restaurants by low-wage temporary workers while their unemployed children sit at home. And the public mood, once so welcoming to migrants, is turning. Trudeau is now promising to tighten immigration rules ahead of elections next year, which he is certain to lose. But a few "piddling" changes won't change much. No, ending the consensus on immigration looks destined to be Trudeau's defining legacy – "and it's not one that he, or the country, can be proud of".



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What the scientists are saying...

Diabetes and dementia linked

A drug that is already used to treat diabetes may cut the risk of developing dementia by a third, a major study has found. Globally, around 55 million people have dementia, a number that is expected to almost triple by 2050; but there is no cure, and existing treatments only bring about small improvements. For the new research, scientists in South Korea analysed data on 220,000 people aged 40 to 69 with type 2 diabetes. Half were taking sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 (SGLT-2) inhibitors, pills that lower blood-sugar levels in patients with diabetes; the rest were taking dipeptidyl peptidase-4 (DPP-4) inhibitors. All were free of dementia at the start of the study and, over the next two years, 1,172 were diagnosed with the condition. Those taking SGLT-2 inhibitors were found to have a 39% lower risk of Alzheimer's, and a 52% lower risk of vascular dementia, giving them a 35% lower risk of dementia overall. The results are not entirely surprising: diabetes is a risk factor for dementia. Why that is is not clear, but it may be that the damage diabetes can cause to blood vessels also hastens cognitive decline. However, the study does not prove cause and effect; and other experts have suggested that a flaw in the methodology could have produced the striking result.

There's no such thing as safe cake

If you can eat cakes and pastries without gaining weight, you may think it's OK to gorge on these buttery treats for a few weeks over the holidays, say. But a new study has found that foods high in saturated fat can compromise heart health in less than a month, even if there is no weight gain. For the research, 24 people altered their diet for 24 days: half upped their intake of butter, whole-fat dairy



Cakes: only for special occasions?

products, cakes and the like; the rest ate more oily fish, walnuts and other foods rich in polyunsaturated fat. At the end of the period, the body weight of the people in both groups was unchanged, but the cholesterol levels of those who ate more saturated fat were up 10% (both total cholesterol and "bad" non-HDL cholesterol); these people also had 20% more fat stored in their livers (a risk factor for various diseases). By contrast, the levels of those who ate more polyunsaturated fat had gone down. "Even when you are not gaining weight, different fats can have drastically different effects on health in a short timeframe," said lead researcher Nikola Srnica, of the University of Oxford.

A quick test for prostate cancer

When prostate cancer is caught early, more than 95% of patients in the UK live for 15 years or more. Now, a new blood test has been developed that has the potential to

make prompt diagnosis more likely. The test works by looking for proteins in the blood that change their shape, and the way they fit together, in the early stages of cancer. When a team from Aston University applied the technique to blood from 108 men, they were able to identify cancerous samples before symptoms appeared – and do so with 90% accuracy. This is an improvement on existing diagnostic methods, which include blood tests, rectal examinations and biopsies; it is also non-invasive and takes just 15 minutes. Larger trials will need to be undertaken to confirm the efficacy of the test.

Food allergies have soared

The number of people in the UK with food allergies has more than doubled in a decade, new research has shown – with up to one in 25 pre-school children now affected. A team at Imperial College London analysed the records of nearly a million people, and found that 1.1% had food allergies in 2018, up from 0.4% in 2008. The rate was highest in the under-fives, of whom 4% were allergic to foods such as milk, peanuts or eggs. Food allergies have become more common in countries across the world in recent years. It's not clear why, but suggested reasons include greater awareness, greater use of antibiotics early in life, poorer diets and the "hygiene hypothesis" – the idea that children are failing to develop healthy immune systems owing to being kept away from germs. The good news is that there are signs that the surge in new cases seems to be tailing off. Study leader Dr Paul Turner said the study highlighted the need for awareness about allergies: for instance, many people with severe food allergies are not prescribed EpiPens; and it has been estimated that a third do not carry them.

Marmosets seem to know their names

Devising and using personal signifiers (or names) is a highly complex process, and one that only humans, dolphins and elephants were thought to be capable of. But it now seems that marmosets may also address each other by name. For the study, a team at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem recruited ten of the highly sociable, tree-dwelling monkeys, and let them interact in different paired groupings. They then placed two at a time in a room that was divided by a visual partition, and recorded their dialogue.

When AI was used to analyse the thousands of sounds they'd made, this revealed that the marmosets had made variations to their "phee calls" – a shriek that they use to communicate in their densely forested habitat – depending on which monkey they were with. A second test, in which the calls were played back to three of the monkeys, showed that they were much more likely to answer phee calls that had appeared to be directed to them by name. If marmosets really are using names for each other, and further studies will be needed to confirm this, the next question will be, do they also name objects – a fundamental property of language, asks *The New Scientist*.



The pressure on GPs

GPs spend more than a third of their time treating a relatively small but growing group of patients who have multiple illnesses, new research has found. The analysis of more than ten million patients at 824 surgeries revealed that in 2019, 16% had three or more long-term conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure and dementia, up from 9.7% in 2005; and that these patients accounted for 34.5% of the time GPs spent with their patients, up from 22.5%. In the same period, the number of people without any serious illnesses had fallen from 51.5% to 43.6%. The study, published in the *British Journal of General Practice*, also found that the average person sees their GP less often than they used to; but that the consultations last longer and involve more paperwork. Admin took up more than a quarter of GPs' time in 2019 – about twice as much as 14 years earlier.

**Pick of the week's
Gossip**

During campaigning, former presidential hopeful **Robert F. Kennedy Jr** was accused of having eaten dog, and admitted to having once dumped a dead bear cub in Central Park. Now, a third story has emerged – of the time he found a dead whale on a Cape Cod beach, used a chainsaw to cut off its head, then drove the head back to New York on the roof of the family car. “Every time we accelerated on the highway, whale juice would pour into the windows of the car,” his daughter Kick recalled in an interview in 2012. “We all had plastic bags over our heads with mouth holes cut out, and people on the highway were giving us the finger, but that was just normal day-to-day stuff for us.”



Diane Abbott famously dated **Jeremy Corbyn** in the 1970s – but in her new memoir, she recalls that it didn't take her long to realise that they were not a “match made in heaven”. The problem, she writes, is that while she has a range of interests, Corbyn is “99% absorbed in party politics”. On a road trip to France, he was shocked that she wanted to eat in restaurants: he had brought enough instant macaroni to last them a week; and Christmas chez Corbyn was a frugal affair, with boiled vegetables and no alcohol. Eventually, she suggested they needed to socialise more. A few days later, he told her he was taking her out. She got dressed up, thinking he was taking her to a wine bar. But “it turned out Jeremy's idea of a social outing was to drive me to Highgate cemetery and proudly show me the tomb of Karl Marx”.

The Pélicot case: a horror exposed

For members of the Pélicot family, one date will be etched on their memories forever, said Luc Leroux in *Le Monde*. It was on 2 November 2020, in a police station in southern France, that Gisèle Pélicot, now 72, was told what investigators had found on her husband Dominique's computer: tens of thousands of images of her being raped and sodomised by him and by scores of strangers, while she was drugged and unconscious. In court last week, where 51 men, including Pélicot, are on trial, Gisèle testified that she had no idea of her husband's depravity; their marriage had been happy, their sex life conventional. Her world had “collapsed” when she saw herself lying like a “rag doll” in her bed, being “sacrificed on the altar of vice”. Her daughter, on being told of what her father had done, had screamed “like a wild beast”. One of her sons had vomited.



Gisèle Pélicot: her world “collapsed”

This case has so many horrible details, it is hard to select the worst, said Hadley Freeman in *The Sunday Times*. Was it the allegation that Pélicot had allowed a man who was HIV positive to rape his wife six times? Or that, out of the 80 that he invited to his house, only three left when they realised that Gisèle was unconscious? Much has also been made of the seeming normality of many of the defendants: they include nurses,

civil servants, a journalist and a firefighter. But when it comes to the cruelties men are capable of inflicting, I am past feeling surprised. This case is unusual; but the misogynistic attitudes that enabled it – that women are “meat puppets”, whose purpose is to pleasure men – are not. They are shared by men who use prostitutes; by those who get off on flashing women, harassing them and groping them; and they are promoted online, where porn has normalised the view that, for women, sex should be painful and humiliating.

It was on a dark corner of the web that Pélicot lurked, said Nabila Ramdani in *The i Paper*. On the *Coco* platform, he joined a chatroom called *Without Their Knowledge*, where he found no shortage of men who wanted to rape his wife (though many of the defendants claim they thought the sex was consensual). *Coco* was facilitating a range of “unspeakable” crimes; yet it was only closed down in June. Many see this as evidence that sexual violence is still not taken seriously enough in France, said Peter Conradi in *The Sunday Times*; and it's telling too that most of the alleged rapists in this case are not in custody; and that it has not made front-page news in France. That is why Gisèle Pélicot waived her right to anonymity: she wanted people to know the evil that men do.

Labour's arms ban: “gesture politics”?

Keir Starmer's Government has pulled off the impossible, said Jonathan Freedland in *The Guardian*: finding common ground between vocal supporters of Israel and trenchant defenders of the Palestinians. Unfortunately for Starmer, what both sides agree on is that Labour's recent suspension of 30 arms export licences to Israel is a disgrace. The first group say it is a craven sop to Labour backbenchers that will only encourage Hamas. Britain's chief rabbi said the move “beggars belief”. Critics on the Left, meanwhile, protest that the ban – which left 320 other arms licences for Israel untouched – was far too limited. Amnesty International said the decision to keep supplying Israel with parts for F-35 fighters was “catastrophically bad”, while the Campaign Against Arms Trade called it “utterly outrageous and unjustifiable”.

Some criticisms of this partial arms ban can be quickly discarded, said *The Economist*. The idea that it will hurt Israel, for instance, is laughable. Britain accounted for just 0.02% of Israel's defence imports in 2022; our Army is “much more reliant on Israeli kit than vice versa”. Equally wrong is the charge that this is just “gesture politics”. It's true that Labour is under pressure from some of its MPs and members to take a tougher stance on Israel, but ministers also have legal obligations. Under British law,

they cannot export kit if there's a “clear risk” that it will be used to breach international humanitarian law. In this case, their concerns apparently centred on Israel blocking aid convoys to Gaza and mistreating detainees.

This is a Government that takes the law very seriously, said George Eaton in *The New Statesman*. During the Brexit process, a Tory minister spoke of one his party's bills breaking international law in a “very specific and limited way”. Rishi Sunak later threatened to “ignore” international law in order to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. “Those are not words you will hear from any of Starmer's ministers.” The PM is a determined follower of legal process, agreed Tom McTague on *UnHerd*. But his fastidious approach seems ill-suited to a world in which “the mythical ‘rules-based order’ of old has been replaced by the hard realities of power politics”: a world in which Houthi rebels control parts of the Red Sea, the US pursues protectionist trade policies and Vladimir Putin mockingly defies the international warrant for his arrest. The “cruel reality” of international law is that it is very selectively applied, agreed Mark Almond in *The Independent*. Its writ only runs in countries that choose to accept it. By suspending these arms licences to Israel, Labour is, ultimately, just signalling its own virtue to itself.

Channel migration: a “deadly impasse”

How many men, women and children will have to drown before France and Britain solve the problem of the Channel crossings, asked *Le Monde*. The latest tragedy, which claimed the lives of 12 migrants, including six children and a pregnant woman, took place last week, when the bottom of an overloaded inflatable boat ripped open off Cap Gris-Nez, south of Calais.



A dinghy attempting the crossing earlier this year

It's another illustration of “the deadly impasse in which the two countries have locked themselves”. Not only is it unconscionable for France to act as the UK's border guard “in exchange for payment”, it is also ineffective.

The new Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, has made a “fresh start” on the issue, said *The Independent*. She is determined to treat it “primarily as a criminal-justice matter”, not a political one. The “tokenistic” plan to deport migrants to Rwanda has been dropped; parts of the *Illegal Migration Act 2023*, which stopped irregular migrants being processed as asylum seekers, are being repealed. The money saved will be diverted to processing the “intolerably large asylum backlog” bequeathed by the last government – and to trying to “smash” the smuggling gangs. A new Border Security commander is being appointed. In the circumstances, is it any wonder that the

There's no sign at all that Keir Starmer's Government recognises the gravity of the situation, said Aris Roussinos on *UnHerd*. Just look around at Europe: uncontrolled migration has become “the central crisis around which political systems revolve and then disintegrate”. The far-right is winning state elections in Germany and national elections in Italy. France has had a political breakdown because of the rise of *National Rally*. Starmer has “a narrow window to reform Britain's failing system”. He should follow the path of liberal neighbours, such as Denmark's social democrats, who have taken a hard but fair line, with strictly limited asylum rights, swift deportations, and a relentless focus on pull factors such as the grey economy (a particular problem here). The policies are so popular that they have effectively “depoliticised” migration as an issue, freeing Denmark's centre-left “to get on with the business” of normal government.

migrants keep coming, said the *Daily Mail*. The Rwanda scheme has been axed. The *Bibby Stockholm* barge, used to house asylum seekers securely, has been closed. Labour is offering the thousands who arrive in small boats “an effective amnesty”. As a result, “more are making the perilous journey – and more are drowning”.

British history: should we be proud of it?

“Ask 100 people what it means to be British, and you'll get 100 different answers,” said Robert Tombs in the *Daily Mail*. For some, it will be cream teas and cricket; for others, the Beatles or the NHS. And yet, whatever these superficial differences, “there was once a time when the vast majority of people could agree that they were proud of our country”. Sadly, “that is no longer the case”. According to the latest *British Social Attitudes* survey, just 64% of us are proud of Britain's history, down from 86% in 2013; only 49% would rather be British than a citizen of another country, down from 62%. Some of the change might be the result of people moving to Britain in large numbers, without much regard for our history and culture, said Rod Liddle in *The Spectator*. But the main reason, I suspect, is the “perverse insistence from a ruling liberal elite that everything our country stands for, or has done, is – by and large – utterly disgusting”.



Happy to be British: 49%

I'm just surprised that the drop in patriotic feeling hasn't been greater, said Helen Coffey in *The Independent*. Over the past ten years, we have been “pummelled from every conceivable

direction”: Brexit stripped us of our influence; the “universally adored” Queen died; Liz Truss tanked the economy; Mel and Sue left *Bake Off*. The fall in our propensity to brag about our history is, in my view, “a sign of hope”: we are finally facing up to some of the more unsavoury aspects of our past, as we should. In any case, patriotic pride “does no one any good”, said Yasmin Alibhai-Brown in *The i Paper*. It is often “vacuous, oppressive and dangerous”; it causes “social rifts”. The survey simply shows that Brits are “growing up”.

I'm not sure it even makes sense to think of history as a source of either “pride or shame”, said Kenan Malik in *The Observer*. British history “is one of conflict and contestation”; it's not a “single package all nicely wrapped up, but consists of many threads, some admirable, others despicable, yet others a mixture of the two”. The survey shows that, over the past decade, Britons have become prouder of the nation's cultural and sporting achievements, but more willing to question aspects of its history. This is surely “something to be welcomed, not denounced”.

Wit & Wisdom

“Big shots are little shots who kept shooting.”
Christopher Morley, quoted in Forbes

“Fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.”

George Santayana, quoted in The i Paper

“The power of accurate observation is generally called cynicism by those who have not got it.”
George Bernard Shaw, quoted on The Knowledge

“My foreign policy is to be able to take a ticket at Victoria Station and go anywhere I damn well please.”

Ernest Bevin, quoted in the Financial Times

“I always arrive late at the office. But I make up for it by leaving early.”

Charles Lamb, quoted in the Iceland Review

“Civilisation is in a race between education and catastrophe.”

H.G. Wells, quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle

“The magnificent and the ridiculous are so close that they touch.”
Bertrand de Fontenelle, ibid.

“Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.”
Søren Kierkegaard, quoted on Threads

“I generally avoid temptation unless I can't resist it.”
Mae West, quoted on Today.com

Statistics of the week

Five politicians – Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer, Diane Abbott, Suella Braverman and Sadiq Khan – received between them 85,000 abusive messages on X/Twitter in the three months before July's election. Some 3,000 of them contained the word “c**t”.

The Guardian

A quarter of teachers leave the profession within three years of starting work.

Daily Mirror

Football: England's interim manager does the business

"If at first you do not succeed, try again." This mantra has long "been a guiding principle" for England's most prolific striker, Harry Kane, said David Hytner in *The Guardian*. And on Tuesday, as England took on Finland, the 31-year-old – who was marking the occasion by wearing gold boots – sealed his 100th appearance for his country by proving its value once again. During the first half, and early in the second, the England captain had numerous nearly-but-not-quite moments. With any other player, it would have been tempting to conclude that this was "going to be one of those nights". Kane had other ideas. With 57 minutes on the Wembley clock, he received a "lovely first-time pass from Trent Alexander-Arnold", manoeuvred the ball into space with the outside of his right boot, and then lashed an unstoppable shot "high into the Finland net". Minutes later, he gilded the occasion further with an equally emphatic second goal – this time connecting first time with a pull-back from debutant Noni Madueke. The striker's 67th and 68th goals for England secured a second straight 2-0 victory in the Nations League, following the team's victory over the Republic of Ireland three days earlier.

Coming into these games, Kane would have felt that he had a point to prove in the wake of his disappointing showing at the Euros, said Martin Samuel in *The Times*. Yet in reality, it was his



Carsley: bold selections

manager, Lee Carsley, who was "most obviously on trial". Currently occupying the position on an interim basis – Gareth Southgate having stepped down in July – Carsley has made a positive start, even allowing for the fact that his two victories so far have been against mediocre opposition. The 50-year-old has quickly put his stamp on the side – committing them to play in a more control-orientated style, and making "bold individual selections", such as bleeding the 5ft 6in Angel Gomes in midfield. And his approach seems to be working. His "excellent age-group record" – his England U21 team won the Euros last summer – will also count in his favour. Should he continue winning games, it seems inevitable that he will be appointed permanent manager.

The problem is that England are currently in group B in the Nations League, which means that the FA won't have a chance in the near future to assess Carsley's managerial skills against genuinely world-class opposition, said Ian Ladyman in *The Daily Mail*. In a group whose fourth member is Greece, the "horizons feel limited". Still, "Carsley can only do what he can do" – and there's no doubt that his England have so far been impressive. Against Finland, they were noticeably "better than they were when slogging their way through the Euros" – which can only be a positive sign.

Tennis: a sickening loss for Britain's No.1

Jack Draper has enjoyed an incredible season of tennis this year, said Stuart Fraser in *The Times*. It saw him become Britain's No.1; in June he won his first ATP tour title; and, last week, in the US Open at Flushing Meadow, he reached his first Grand Slam semi-final. And he knew he'd have his work cut out if he was going to beat the world No. 1, Jannik Sinner. But what he didn't anticipate were the physical problems – including repeatedly "vomiting on the court" – that would make his challenge even tougher.

Conditions were muggy "inside the world's biggest stadium" and Draper sweated profusely from the start: his racket repeatedly slipped in his hands; twice, he had to change his shoes and socks. By the second set, he "was shedding so much sweat that the ball kids were asked to wipe the court with towels". Worse was to come. Draper's body rejected the fluids he was drinking to stay hydrated



Draper: "enormous heart"

and he vomited twice behind the baseline. He used his own towels to clear up the mess and, after a doctor was called, he threw up a third time.

Lasting slightly over three hours, this "brutal, intense and at times remarkably unhygienic" encounter ended with Sinner (who went on to beat Taylor Fritz in the final) winning 7-5 7-6 6-2, said Simon Cambers in *The Guardian*. So no surprise Draper lost; but his performance suggested that he has the skills and the temperament to compete with the world's best. He now moves inside the world's top 20. Draper showed "skill, poise and enormous heart", said Simon Briggs in *The Daily Telegraph*. Yet this isn't the first time he has vomited on court: he did so at the Australian

Open in January. He has suggested it may have something to do with being "quite an anxious human being". If he wants to rise to the summit of men's tennis, he'll need to tackle that problem.

England "shoot themselves in the foot"

England's cricketers have mostly had a good summer, winning five of the six Test matches they played "despite several injuries to important players", said Nick Hoult in *The Daily Telegraph*. Yet in their final Test against Sri Lanka, they received a "wake-up call". At key moments in the Test, at the Oval, the team simply "switched off". From 261-3 on day one, they allowed themselves to be bowled out for 325. They then had Sri Lanka at 93-5 in their first innings, but "failed to put foot on throats" and allowed Sri Lanka to amass 263. Even worse was the abject second-innings performance, as England were skittled out for 156 in just 34 overs, leaving Sri Lanka 219 to win – a target they knocked off comfortably. As England's stand-in captain,



Smith: a "find of the summer"

"slapdash, slack and sloppy" batting. Still, England can take positives from the summer – particularly in the way that new players such as Jamie Smith and Gus Atkinson "bedded in" to the side. Smith excelled as a wicket-keeper batsman, and Atkinson not only took 34 wickets, but scored a memorable hundred at Lord's. This pair were "the finds of the summer".

Ollie Pope, observed: "We shot ourselves in the foot."

This has to go down as England's worst performance since Brendon McCullum took over as head coach in 2022, said Mike Atherton in *The Times*. Although Pope denied that complacency had crept in, it's hard to come up with any other explanation for their

Sporting headlines

Paralympics Great Britain finished in second place in the medal table, with 49 gold medals and 124 medals overall. China, the top country, won 94 golds.

Tennis Aryna Sabalenka won the US Open for the first time. The Belarusian beat the American Jessica Pegula 7-5 7-5. The British 15-year-old Mika Stojsavljevic won the girls' title.

Cycling Primož Roglič, of Slovenia, won the Vuelta a España for the fourth time, equalling the all-time record.

Football France beat Belgium 2-0 in the Nations League.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Educating the workforce

To The Daily Telegraph

Mel Stride's article on immigration raises valid concerns, but his proposed solutions fail to address the recruitment challenges faced by industries such as construction.

As a manager in the industry, I've seen the difficulties of finding skilled British workers. When we recently advertised for structural detailers, we received eight applications, with just one from a UK national, who lacked the necessary qualifications. The successful candidates were immigrants with relevant degrees and specialised skills.

We need a comprehensive approach, starting with stronger partnerships between industry and educational institutions, and campaigns to promote careers in industries with skills shortages.

Paul Watson, Shefford, Bedfordshire

Ban the bishops

To The Times

Your article "Hereditary peers could be gone in 18 months" was encouraging. However, it did not mention the other anomalous group who will retain their place in the House of Lords as a result of their jobs. If you become Archbishop of Canterbury or York or Bishop of London, Durham or Winchester, you get the right to speak and vote in the House. And you get the same rights if you are one of the next 21 most senior diocesan bishops.

I can find no other country, apart from Iran, that provides an automatic right for clerics to sit, speak and vote in their country's parliament.

Lord Warner, recently retired member of the House of Lords

Boomers and bust

To The Independent

How can the same people criticising the fuel-benefit measures proposed by Rachel Reeves complain about cancer patients suffering delayed treatment because of lab closures? The latter is a result of a lack of funding. I am a pensioner – and although I am by no means well off, I would much rather my £400 go to causes more deserving than me.

Us "boomers" did very nicely over the past 14 years. If some

Letters of the week

Lessons from Grenfell

To The Guardian

I appreciated your in-depth reporting on the Grenfell report, but I can't help thinking that the system of company directors is also failing people. Directors are rarely held accountable for their decisions affecting the health and safety of others. In many cases, where companies are prosecuted, the company folds and the directors set up a new one under another name.

Instead, we should have a directors' licence system, with points added after health and safety prosecutions, like a driving licence. Once you've collected nine points, you can no longer operate as a director for any company. All directors would then have a vested interest in ensuring health and safety and would not be as cavalier about safety issues, as many are. I suggested this, in my role as a health and safety manager, at a conference many years ago, and was told by a barrister: "That's far too sensible ever to be implemented!"

SallyAnne Clark, Tonbridge, Kent

To The Times

The change in the early 1990s from prescriptive guidance in the building regulations to a functional approach allowed for a variety of interpretations of how fire safety in buildings might be achieved. I was told then that the change would "allow the architectural profession to exercise its creative flair".

However, there was some scepticism among fire-safety officers that the change might result in buildings with fire-safety provisions below the minimum acceptable level for the occupancy. This doubt arose from experience under the previous system, when there had been involvement in building-regulation approvals at the planning stage and when, in many instances, the fire service were considered obstructive and seen as causing unnecessary expense for developers.

The government resolved this by removing the obligation to involve the fire service and replaced it with a voluntary option to consult. A witness to the Grenfell inquiry has said that this was avoided because the fire service were seen as "trouble".

This, in my view, is a very good reason to restore the fire-service role in building control.

R.A. Graham, Greater Manchester Fire Service, 1981-1993

need assistance to help them through the winter, at least make it means-tested.

John Stanton, via email

The vanishing science

To The Guardian

You report that the British Social Attitudes survey asked the public to indicate their degree of pride in the UK's achievements in the arts and literature, sport, history, democracy, political influence and economic achievements. It is appalling, but unsurprising, that science was not in this list.

The UK has an astounding record of scientific excellence – by many measures the best in the world. The oblivion about this is evidence of how skewed are the views of the UK elite – the media, civil service and government. Unsurprising, as they are stuffed with PPE, classics, business and law

graduates recruiting people like themselves to run TV channels, newspapers and Post Office accounting software.

Andrew King, Leicester

Scared to speak up

To The Times

I taught in an inner-city primary school and found Sir Michael Wilshaw's comments out of touch. The former Ofsted head said: "Teachers should never be afraid to tell aggressive parents they are a bad example to their children." Some of our pupils were from a community for whom it was an ordinary occurrence for police to knock on their door; many were told to hit anyone who hit them first.

Not only was I afraid to speak up, I considered it wise not to.

Gill Moss, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire

Hume truths

To the Financial Times

Gideon Rachman reports that some pundits have concluded that there is no danger that Russia will use nuclear weapons in connection with the war in Ukraine. Their argument appears to be that the West, having crossed successive supposed thresholds without provoking a nuclear response, shows either that there are no red lines, or that crossing the next one will also not lead to a nuclear response.

It is alarming to see this argument deployed in the context of possible nuclear war. That it has no reasonable foundation was shown by the philosopher David Hume. He intended to raise a problem of scientific knowledge, namely that the only evidence we have for the uniformity of nature is its uniformity up to the present moment. Hume would no doubt be appalled to see such sloppy thinking applied in the more uncertain and dangerous world.

Julian Wells, London

ID and EU

To The Times

Libby Purves is right to argue that ID cards should be introduced to the UK. From November, millions of British holidaymakers to Europe will be required to provide fingerprints and will do so without objection, in addition to our photographic facial recognition passports. It is ridiculous that our identities will be logged throughout the EU but not in our own country.

Peter Moss, Fernhurst, West Sussex



"Surprisingly, Robin, nobody likes your plan to steal from pensioners to give to train drivers"

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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

A Voyage Around the Queen

by Craig Brown

Fourth Estate 672pp £25

The Week Bookshop £19.99

As a “man who supposedly trades in throwaway wisecracks”, you wouldn’t think the satirist Craig Brown would be the person to “tell us something thought-provoking, perhaps even deep, about monarchy”, said Stephen Smith in *The Observer*. Yet in his glorious new book – a follow-up to similar works about Princess Margaret and the Beatles – that’s exactly what he does. Brown has hoovered up virtually everything ever written about Elizabeth II – decades-old newspaper reports, the “memoirs of courtiers, flunkies and hangers-on” – and out of this material has crafted 112 thematic chapters, focused on everything from the Queen’s love of horse racing to the dreams people have had about her. (The oddest belongs to Paul Theroux, who imagined “her nipples cool against my ears”.) It adds up to a “vivid and remarkably telling study of our late head of state”.

Brown has perhaps only one serious thesis, said Matthew Parris in *Literary Review*: “almost everyone, he says, goes slightly bonkers” in the Queen’s presence. “We gabble, we dry up, we lose



“How very interesting”: with Jayne Mansfield in 1957

our thread, we gawp, we stammer.” Kingsley Amis even avoided beans before meeting her, so anxious was he about farting or belching. Brown devotes a chapter to the “brisk dispatch with which she would terminate conversations”. “How very interesting,” she’d intone, before moving on. As much as this “wonderfully readable” book is about the Queen, it is also “about ourselves as a nation, reflected and refracted through our own relationships with one person”.

“I enjoyed *A Voyage Around the Queen* so much that I wished it were longer than its 672 pages,” said Christopher Howse in *The Daily*

Telegraph. We learn that when Mahatma Gandhi sent Elizabeth a hand-woven tablecloth as a wedding gift, her grandmother, Queen Mary, declared it a “horrible thing”, having mistaken it for one of his loincloths. When, at the beacon lighting for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, the officer in charge confided that “absolutely everything” had gone wrong, she replied: “Oh good. What fun!” Brown even has “unmistakably irreverent fun” with the aftermath of her death, said John Banville in *The Guardian* – noting the battier expressions of mourning, including Norwich Council’s decision to close a bike rack as a mark of respect. Funny, clever and “gloriously bizarre”, his book is an “astute account of the well-nigh unaccountable public life of an intensely private person”.

Hope I Get Old Before I Die

by David Hepworth

Bantam 432pp £25

The Week bookshop £19.99

At its inception, pop music was about youth, said Danny Kelly in *Literary Review*. Performers, listeners: all were young. The form was “ephemeral, disposable”. But as David Hepworth argues in his fascinating new book, at some point that changed. Today, from Bruce Springsteen to the Rolling Stones, “a phalanx of 70- and 80-year-old artists continues to work, attracting adoring multitudes and banking stupendous-sized cheques”. The trend sucks in even the most bitterly riven bands – as Oasis’s imminent reunion attests.

Hepworth thinks the turning point was Live Aid, said Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian*. That show’s big successes weren’t acts in their 20s, but the likes of Queen and Elton John. It heralded a “sea change”, which he deftly analyses. But he fails to acknowledge how music-industry conditions now skew things in favour of the ageing, said Ian Winwood in *The Daily Telegraph*. Young bands today struggle to make a living. Older performers had the “time and freedom” to amass a body of songs; playing them to full arenas for large sums is obviously “preferable to packing it in”. Tragically, the industry has turned away from the “very demographic without which it would never have been born”.

© CHLOE AFTEL

Novel of the week

Creation Lake

by Rachel Kushner

Jonathan Cape 416pp £18.99

The Week bookshop £14.99

Despite having written the critically acclaimed *The Flamethrowers* (2013), and the Booker-shortlisted *The Mars Room* (2018), the US novelist Rachel Kushner is probably not “on the radar” of many British readers, said Anthony Cummins in *The Observer*. That ought to change with the publication of *Creation Lake*, a “hugely enjoyable” espionage drama that pulsates “with twisty revelation”. The narrator is an attractive young American spy, with “large (and fake) breasts”, who is tailing a group of communists in southwest France, hoping to “incite them to commit eco-terrorism”, said Rachel Connolly in *The Daily Telegraph*. Her assignment involves delving deep into the history of the radical French Left – and she becomes obsessed in particular with a mysterious intellectual named Bruno Lacombe, who is a mentor to today’s activists despite having “spent much of the past decade living in a cave”. Full of “memorably drawn” characters and “profound” ideas, *Creation Lake* is wide-ranging and “remarkably original” – and would be a “worthy winner” of the Booker Prize.

There is, perhaps, too much listening in with the narrator on “ardent talk about social rebellion” in these pages, said Dwight Garner in *The New York Times*. Yet such earnestness is undercut by “pointed comic observation”, such as the “extended mockery” of a French writer who resembles Michel Houellebecq, and a “long and funny takedown” of Italian food. A significant step up from her previous work, this book shows Kushner (pictured) to be “one of the finest novelists working in the English language”.



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Theatre: The Real Thing

Old Vic, London SE1 (0344-871 7628). Until 26 October Running time: 2hrs 30mins ★★★★★

London's autumn season is bookended by "weighty Stoppards", said Dominic Cavendish in *The Daily Telegraph*. In December, *The Invention of Love* (1997), Sir Tom's erudite portrait of A.E. Housman, is being revived at the Hampstead Theatre. But first we have this "cleverly engaging" – if "not wholly lovable" – staging of *The Real Thing* (1982), one of his most "accessible and emotionally resonant successes". This "witty", twisty play has as its central character a distinctly Stoppard-like playwright named Henry, said Will Lloyd in *The Sunday Times*. Henry's actress wife, Charlotte, is starring in his latest play as a woman who is suspected of cheating on her husband. But Henry has left her for a younger actress, Annie, whose actor husband has been cast in Henry's play as the possible cuckold. Meanwhile Annie, alas, seems to be falling for another actor, named Billy. "Got that? Nobody ever said affairs of the heart were straightforward."



McArdle and Wokoma in a witty, twisty play

The Real Thing is one of Stoppard's most popular plays, said Sarah Crompton on *What's on Stage*: it has "all the whirling wit of his early work", and its subject is "the most important in the world – what it means to love and be loved". At the heart of Max Webster's sophisticated revival is a "sensational performance"

from James McArdle, who beautifully conveys both Henry's "monstrous self-satisfaction and his deep and abiding confusion". Bel Powley has a "lovely, lithe quality as the impetuous Annie, who gradually carves out her own sense of self", said Sarah Hemming in the FT. And though the "other characters are underwritten – partly a function of the play's interest in Henry's solipsism" – Oliver Johnstone and Susan Wokoma as the other spouses are also superb.

I found this production a little "stodgy", said Alice Saville in

The Independent – not aided by some "declamatory" acting. It is a bit effortful at first, said Dominic Maxwell in *The Times*. But "the longer it goes on", the more it finds a "plangent tone where the witty, the wise and the wounded are forever colliding".

The week's other opening

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold

Minerva Theatre, Chichester (01243-781312). Until 21 September David Eldridge's adaptation of the classic spy thriller – the first staging of a John le Carré novel – boasts a "star-making" performance from Rory Keenan as Alec Leamas, and a brilliantly vivid one from John Ramm as George Smiley (*Guardian*).

Podcasts... micro-documentaries and defeated superheroes

When it comes to literature, I am not a big fan of short stories, said Fiona Sturges in the FT. "I prefer to spend several days, rather than a lunch hour, in the company of my favourite authors." With audio, though, it's different – and for an inventive short-form podcast, I'd strongly recommend **Short Cuts**, the Radio 4 strand that's fast approaching its 250th episode (all are available on Sounds). It consists of "beautifully crafted and curated micro-documentaries", on a wide range of subjects, introduced by the writer/comedian Josie Long. Roughly ten minutes long, they are billed as "brief encounters, true stories, radio adventures and found sound", and they have a "slightly woozy vibe". Listening late at night, I often find myself staying awake "just long enough to finish a story that will invariably float into my dreams".

An oddity of podcasts is that most listeners are not just listening; they are also "eating dinner or commuting or taking out the bins", said James Marriott in *The Times*. As a result, there is a market for "amiable, low-stakes background chuntering". And though podcasters "talking about nothing" can be "ghastly" (e.g. *Shagged. Married. Annoyed.*), it can also be "sublime" (e.g. Catherine Carr's *Where Are You Going?*). **What Did You Do Yesterday?**, a "delightful" new series produced by broadcaster Max Rushden



Susan Sarandon and Robert Patrick star in *Marvel's Wastelanders*

and comedian David O'Doherty, is in the latter camp. It is an audio equivalent to a "life in a day" newspaper feature: we hear from radio host Elis James on his pitiful attempts to get his children out of the house, and from comic Lou Sanders, who talks about a quiet day at home with her two cats. It is not action-packed, but "the lack of excitement is charming", rather than banal. It turns out that when you "get a succession of really funny people" to talk about apparently mundane topics, you end up with an illuminating

guide to "the different textures of people's lives".

The podcasting space is awash with big-budget sci-fi audio dramas, said Graeme Virtue in *The Guardian*. "The sleek but unsettling conspiracy thriller **Ad Lucem** is a state-of-the-art example." With dark themes and lots of swearing, it turns on the question: what if your voice assistant could hug you? Olivia Wilde, Chris Pine and co-creator Troian Bellisario star, while Fiona Shaw and Clancy Brown are "immaculate in the margins". Also recommended is **Marvel's Wastelanders**, set in a timeline where super-villains have won out, and the surviving superheroes (played by stars including Susan Sarandon and Robert Patrick) are broken or in hiding. "Immersive world-building and a rich vein of satirical humour help make each series a rollicking ride."

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don't miss; 1 star=don't bother)



Beetlejuice Beetlejuice

1hr 45mins (12A)

*Incoherent sequel to
Tim Burton's 1988 hit*

★★

“Hollywood has a history of reanimating the decaying corpses of long-dead movies”, so it was perhaps “just a matter of time before somebody delved into the grave marked *Beetlejuice*”, said Wendy Ide in *The Observer*. Tim Burton made his name with the original, and he has also directed this “belated sequel” – and it’s not bad at all. Rocking “exactly the same haunted Victorian doll wardrobe” as she did in the first film, Winona Ryder reprises her role as Lydia Deetz, now a widow and distant mother to rebellious teenager Astrid (Jenna Ortega). Also returning from the original cast are Catherine O’Hara (as Lydia’s stepmother) and Michael Keaton, as the titular prankster-demon-“bio-exorcist”. There is a sense that “decades-old ideas have been dusted off, dressed up a little and passed off as new”, but what redeems the film is the fact “that those ideas were so wiggled out and distinctive in the first place”. Sure, “*Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is derivative, but it’s also pleasingly idiosyncratic”, and though it can’t match the cult appeal of the original, “it has a lot of fun trying”.

I’m afraid I found the whole thing “messy and tiresome”, said Robbie Collin in *The Daily Telegraph*. This unnecessary sequel is pure “nostalgia bait”, and throughout, you can “hear the writers cackling and high-fiving each other as they crowbar in favourite details” from the original, regardless of whether their inclusion makes any sense. *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* is, alas, mediocre mediocre, agreed Brian Viner in the *Daily Mail*. Burton has some fun with the “great hereafter”; it lasts a “sensible hour and 45 minutes”, and boasts a lively retro soundtrack. But it “lacks coherence”; it often feels like no more than an “assembly of random macabre ideas from Burton’s undeniably fertile mind”.



Firebrand

2hrs 1min (15)

*Period drama in which
Jude Law excels as
Henry VIII*

★★★★

“Jude Law immediately joins the upper ranks of the great screen Henry VIII’s” with his “incendiary” performance in this period drama, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. Adapted from Elizabeth Fremantle’s 2012 novel *Queen’s Gambit*, the film “takes as its subject the closing, paranoid and increasingly incapacitated years of Henry’s reign, and specifically his relationship with his sixth and final wife Katherine Parr (Alicia Vikander)”. We meet Henry in 1546, when he is “exhausted from the second invasion of France” and suffering from an ulcerated leg. “He seems a fiery beast initially, but one who is easily mollified by Katherine’s attentiveness and her acquiescence in the brutal marital bedroom.” Katherine, however, is depicted as close to, and possibly a former lover of, the radical Protestant reformer Anne Askew (Erin Doherty), a relationship which, if discovered, could cost her her head. “There are some silly 11th-hour shenanigans involving a MacGuffin necklace and a dose of historical wish fulfilment”, but this is a “vividly constructed drama, expertly played”.

Firebrand is “sumptuously photographed” and “magnificently costumed”, and Law’s performance is “so gloriously disgusting you can’t take your eyes off him”, said Deborah Ross in *The Spectator*. But be warned: the film “doesn’t play fast and loose with the facts so much as throw them out of the window”. And with its shots of oozing pus and maggoty flesh, it’s not “for the medically squeamish”. As a historical thriller, *Firebrand* is “hampered by a pedestrian script and an improbable ending”, said Phil de Semlyen on *Time Out*. Still, it “works pretty well as a political potboiler with the brooding undercurrents of *Wolf Hall*”, and it “catches fire” whenever Law is on screen.



Rebel Ridge

2hrs 11mins (15)

*Gripping thriller about
a wronged former Marine*

★★★★

The worst thing about the Netflix thriller *Rebel Ridge* “is its abysmally generic title”, said Benjamin Lee in *The Guardian*. “Sounding like some anonymous action slop”, it could lead you into thinking that this is “yet another one of the streamer’s low-impact time-erasers”. In fact, *Rebel Ridge* is an electrifying triumph. The Brixton-born actor Aaron Pierre stars as Terry, a former US marine who is en route to a court house in Louisiana to post bail for his cousin when he is rammed off his bicycle by a police car. Two racist police officers promptly search him and confiscate the bail money. Soon, he finds himself “up against both local cops with an agenda” and a system that makes it easy for the powerful to “take advantage”. The film is a mix “of small-town western, *Taken*-adjacent action thriller” and “grimly-of-the-moment social drama”, and it keeps the viewer “enthralled” throughout.

The filming of *Rebel Ridge* was thrown into disarray in 2021 when its original star, John Boyega, walked away from the set citing “family reasons”, said Tim Robey in *The Daily Telegraph*. Thank goodness Pierre – mainly known as a stage actor – was available to replace him: he “steps up to his task with dry humour and manful understatement, proving that he’s the real deal” as a big-screen lead. If you are in the mood for “a cathartic tale of one wronged man beating the ever-loving shit out of an assortment of dirty cops”, then *Rebel Ridge* will fit the bill, said James Dyer in *Empire*. Although it is not groundbreaking, it is “undeniably a fun night in”. But it is not just a vigilante movie; it also serves as a subtle indictment of US justice.

The Perfect Couple: glossy Netflix murder-mystery starring Nicole Kidman

“Pitched somewhere between *The White Lotus*, *Glass Onion* and the latest Harlan Coben series”, Netflix’s six-part drama *The Perfect Couple* is “a glossy spin on the rich-people-are-awful sub-genre of murder-mystery,” said Sophie Butcher in *Empire*. Nicole Kidman stars as Greer, a fabulously rich novelist whose son’s wedding on Nantucket is ruined when a body turns up on the beach. Suddenly, everyone staying at the family’s huge beach house for the weekend is a suspect. The dialogue is often a bit cheesy, and the whole thing is “schmaltzy, silly and very soapy”; but it’s elevated by an impressive supporting cast that includes Meghann Fahy and Dakota Fanning; and the compelling plotting and well-established characters “will have you hooked”.



Sam Nivola and Kidman

The series ticks off “every cliché of the mega-bucks mystery thriller”, said Benji Wilson in *The Daily Telegraph*, from its title to the fact that none of the couples are perfect; in fact, they all hate each other. Still, though it is all predictable and trashy, this is “top-notch trash”, a show that aims only for “sugar-hit moreishness” and hits the mark time and again. “Nantucket looks ludicrously beautiful; the family are ludicrously snobbish and unpleasant”, and however hard you try to resist it, “you will want to know the who, what, where and why-dunit”. I found it “awful: ugly, slow, boring”, said Camilla Long in *The Sunday Times*. The cast are horribly dunked in fake tan, and it’s deeply unfunny. You’d do much better watching the new season of *Slow Horses*, which is “utterly brilliant”.

Exhibition of the week **Hockney and Piero: A Longer Look**

National Gallery, London WC2 (020-7747 2885, nationalgallery.org.uk). Free entry

In the 1950s, when he was a student at Bradford School of Art, David Hockney won a sketching competition. His prize, said Alastair Sooke in *The Daily Telegraph*, was a small book on the 15th century Italian painter and mathematician Piero della Francesca featuring a sole colour plate: a reproduction of the master's *The Baptism of Christ*. Clearly, it made "an impression" on him, because he has been looking at the painting "ever since". Created in 1437-45 in egg tempera on panel, it portrays a bearded Jesus "with downcast eyes" standing "solemnly" by a body of water; aside from a modesty garment, he is almost entirely nude and could almost be one of Hockney's own depictions of "buck-naked Adonises sunbathing beside Californian swimming pools". This free show at the National Gallery features only three paintings, in a "whimsical triptych": Piero's *Baptism* is the centrepiece, flanked by two "important" Hockney paintings which pay direct homage to it: *Looking at Pictures on a Screen* and *My Parents* (both 1977); in both Hockneys, in fact, the baptism can be glimpsed in the background. More works could have been included, but there's no doubting the luminous quality of what is here.

"Copying, looking, borrowing" are the themes of this "absorbing puzzle-box show", said Laura Freeman in *The Times*. Decades after Hockney first saw Piero's *Baptism* for real, he gave his



Looking at Pictures on a Screen, 1977: with homage to Piero (centre)

mother, Laura, a reproduction of it which she kept "until the day she died". In this show, the image is reflected in a mirror as she poses beside Kenneth, her husband: Hockney captures the restlessness of his sitters, the former "rubbing the edge of one soft shoe against the other", the latter "lifting his heels, impatient to be up and on the move". The pair may even be echoing the poses of Jesus and St John in Piero's picture – the one facing forward, the other sitting in profile. It makes you start to wonder: "What is deliberate, what is unconscious – and what is the slightly fanciful imagining of a spectator carried away with the game?"

The other Hockney is also revealing about his "artistic inheritance", said Florence Hallett in *The i Paper*. The artist depicts his friend, the curator Henry Geldzahler, in profile against a screen onto which are taped reproductions of works by Degas, van Gogh and Vermeer, as well as Piero's *Baptism*. The bright colours in Hockney's miniature copies rhyme with those of the screen and the floorboards. His reproductions of reproductions show that "books and postcards have been as important in his visual education as trips to the museum" – though Hockney tells us in the catalogue that he'd love to own the Piero so that he could look at the real thing, "just so I could look at it every day for an hour". It's "remarkable" that these works have never been seen together, and it makes for an "exquisite exhibition-in-miniature".

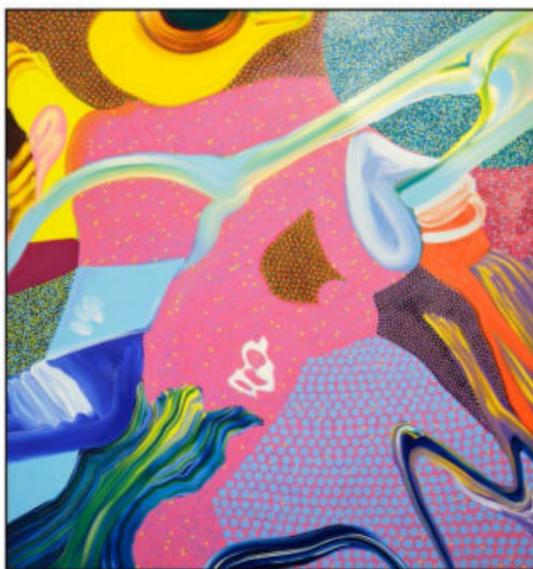
Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Altar States

at Josh Lilley

It's rare to find an exhibition that seems to revel in the ugliness of the works it contains – and rarer still that the show should turn out to be quite so compelling. *Altar States* at Fitzrovia's Josh Lilley gallery is just such an exhibition, full of gaudy, quasi-symbolist paintings and wonky sculptures, from Robert Zehnder's landscapes, pockmarked with tumescent, grime-hued hills, to the aggressively bright, amorphous abstractions of Heather Guertin. It encourages the viewer to consider the kind of subjective spiritual value with which the artists here inject their work, transforming it – for them – from the decorative to the totemic. So, Fin Simonetti gives us the scaled-up top half of a bear's jaw in white



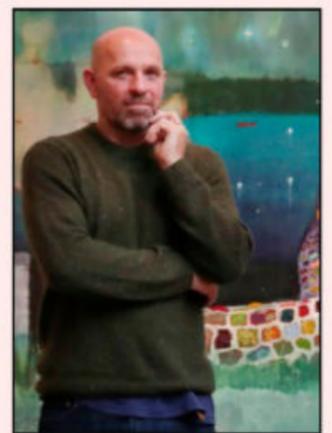
Detail from Heather Guertin's Shear, 2024

marble, while Nickola Pottinger fields strange but fascinating little voodoo doll-like sculptures, hewn from the cheapest and most contingent of materials. Certain elements don't quite come off, but overall, it's great fun. Prices on request.

40-46 Riding House Street,
London W1 (020-7580 5677).
Until 28 September

Doig vs. the art market

Peter Doig is Europe's most expensive living artist, says Dalya Alberge in *The Observer*. In 2017, *Rosedale*, his depiction of a house in a snowstorm, sold for £21m. In 2021, *Swamped*, another "enigmatic" painting, of a canoe, sold for nearly £30m. Since 2007, he estimates



that his paintings have achieved combined sales of almost £380m. But Doig, 65, has revealed that he has made barely £230,000 himself from selling them. The Scot says it is collectors who are profiting, buying and selling his works on the secondary market for "crazy prices". He also has no idea who they are, because the art trade is so opaque. Doig said that he recently had a "real row" with one of his former art galleries because they refused to tell him who had bought his works. They said: "We can't give you that information." They also refused to discuss prices. He is now calling for more transparency within the art market, particularly to protect vulnerable young artists.



Best books... Sam Leith

The journalist and author chooses his six favourite children's books. His new book, *The Haunted Wood: A History of Childhood Reading* (Oneworld £30), examining classics from Aesop to Harry Potter, is out this week

Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie, 1904 (Vintage £7.99). Much, much wilder and stranger than Disney would have you believe, Barrie's original *Peter Pan* is dangerous, exciting and also, as his creator describes him, a "tragic boy". It's a complex and magical piece of work.

The Once and Future King by T.H. White, 1958 (HarperCollins £12.99). Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* pushed through White's bizarre sensibility. Radiantly well written, deeply moving, morally serious and wildly funny in the silliest ways possible, it's like nothing else.

Grinny by Nicholas Fisk, 1973 (available used). Weird sci-fi/

horror alien home-invasion fantasy. What if a Great Aunt Emma you'd never heard of turned up on the doorstep and said, "You remember me?" and your parents came over all weird and asked her to stay? It traumatised a generation.

Watership Down by Richard Adams, 1972 (Penguin £9.99). Adams's bizarre but thrillingly successful book asks us to take the lives of rabbits as seriously as the lives of Homeric heroes. It's gripping, punctiliously realistic about rabbit behaviour and biology (except for the, um, psychic one) – and the final page will break you.

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce, 1958 (OUP

£7.99). Heartbreaking time-slip novel about the friendship between a modern boy and the Victorian girl he meets when the clock strikes 13 and he finds himself wandering like a ghost through the formal garden that once stood where he's living. *The Time Traveler's Wife* for pre-teens.

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, 1947 (Pan Macmillan £7.99). On a skim, this postwar children's picture book is a mimsy bedtime story about a bunny. But what's going on with the vanishing and reappearing objects and figures? The more you examine it, the more you see. "Goodnight, nobody."

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

A new production of Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play **A Raisin in the Sun**, an American classic about life in segregation-era Chicago, directed by the "strikingly talented" Tinuke Craig, is going on tour (Guardian). Until 28 September, Leeds Playhouse (leedsplayhouse.org.uk); then Oxford, London and Nottingham.

An Irish Impressionist: Lavery on Location takes visitors on "a splendid journey" to the locations – from Tangier to Venice to Palm Springs – visited by Sir John Lavery (Times). Until 27 October, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (nationalgalleries.org).

Book now

General booking opens on Tuesday for the **BFI London Film Festival**. The programme includes premieres of Trump biopic *The Apprentice*, Steve McQueen's wartime drama *Blitz*, and the Palme d'Or-winning Cinderella story *Anora*. 9-20 October, various venues (whatson.bfi.org.uk/lff).

As the Guardian said of 83-year-old **Bob Dylan**, "it's not macabre but merely pragmatic to



The Apprentice premieres at the London Film Festival

wonder quite how many more chances you'll get to see him play live"; so book while you can for his ten-date Rough and Rowdy Ways tour. 1-14 November, various venues (bobdylan.com).

Sigourney Weaver makes her West End debut as Prospero in Jamie Lloyd's new production of **The Tempest**, the first play in a starry new Shakespeare season. 7 December-1 February 2025, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, London WC2 (thejamielloydcompany.com).

Television

Programmes

Nightsleeper Real-time thriller about the hacking of a Glasgow-London sleeper train, as two passengers battle against the clock to save it. Sun 15 and Mon 16 Sep, BBC1 21:00 (60mins each).

Britain's Atomic Bomb Scandal Documentary tracing the legacy of Britain's nuclear tests in the 1950s and 1960s, which left many soldiers – and their descendants – with catastrophic health issues. Sun 15 Sep, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Mozart: Rise of a Genius Three-part exploration of the composer's musical genius and eventful life, starting in 1777 as he leaves Salzburg and his secure job as court musician. Mon 16 Sep, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

In My Own Words: Hanif Kureishi The writer looks back on his life and work, including his experience of growing up as the child of immigrants in postwar Britain. Mon 16 Sep, BBC1 22:40 (45mins).

Trump's Heist: The President Who Wouldn't Lose Former White House loyalists give insider accounts of Donald Trump's attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Tue 17 and Wed 18 Sep, C4 21:00 (65mins each).

Films

Goodbye, Mr. Chips (1969) Not the 1939 classic adaptation but a lavish musical one, with Peter O'Toole and Petula Clark, that divided the critics. Sun 15 Sep, BBC2 12:00 (140mins).

Kes (1969) Ken Loach's second film tells the story of Billy, a boy growing up in a depressed Yorkshire mining community, who adopts a kestrel. Tue 17 Sep, Film4 01:05 (110mins).

New to streaming

A Very Royal Scandal Three-part drama about Emily Maitlis's interview with Prince Andrew. Ruth Wilson and Michael Sheen star. On Prime Video from 19 Sep.

Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story Ryan Murphy's glossy true-crime drama is about the case of two brothers accused of killing their parents in 1989. On Netflix from 19 Sep.

The Archers: what happened last week

At the cricket, Emma confronts Clive with a few home truths and he clears off. Joy sets up a community litter campaign. After Xander's first day at school, Ian sets up a parents' group chat and gossips with school mum Lottie; Adam's not so keen to get involved. Chatting to Joy, Susan learns that George bought cider on the night of the accident, but Alice only bought vodka; as realisation dawns, she tells Neil something is very wrong. Mia and Brad have a picnic on Lakey Hill before she heads to uni in Newcastle. He says he loves her but thinks they should break up; stunned Mia agrees. Neil and Susan turn up at Emma's and, after some prodding, Emma tells them everything. They persuade her to call the police while Susan makes an "emergency" call to George, prompting him to dash home – they tell him that the police are on the way. The next day, George is released on bail. Ed is furious at Emma for not telling him, and Emma lashes out at Neil and Susan. Ed talks her down – but she's so worried about George.

Impressive houses by rivers



▲ **North Yorkshire:** Rake Farm, Glaisdale. A Grade II farmhouse with a holiday cottage and fishing rights on the River Esk, situated within the North York Moors National Park. 3 beds, family bath, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, 1-bed self-contained cottage, garden, stables, outbuildings, garage; approx. 6.4 acres. £1.17m; Peter Illingworth (01751-431107).



▲ **Berkshire:** Marsh Cottage, Weston. An enchanting thatched cottage overlooking the River Lambourn. The property is surrounded by mature gardens and meadows. 3 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, garden, parking. OIEO £900,000; Strutt & Parker (01635-521707).



▲ **Northamptonshire:** Mill Lane, Islip. An 18th century mill house with mooring and fishing rights. 5 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 4 receps, garden, parking. OIEO £1.225m; Woodford & Co (01832-274732).





◀ **Wiltshire:** Mill Race Close, Salisbury. With direct river frontage on the River Nadder, this delightful Grade II house sits in an enviable position. Main suite, 3 further beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps, garden, parking, garage. £600,000; Hamptons (01722-563117).

▼ **Somerset:** Paddons, Dulverton. This handsome property, built in the early 1800s, is set in 15 acres overlooking the River Barle and comes with fishing rights and woodland. Main suite, 4 further beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 2 receps, parking, garden. £925,000; Knight Frank (01392-848846).



◀ **West Sussex:** Blann House, Upper Beeding. An Italianate villa built in 1833 on the Monarch's Way overlooking the Beeding Bridge and the River Adur. 4 beds, 4 baths, kitchen, living/dining room, recep, annexe, garden, parking. OIEO £1.5m; Fine & Country (01273-739911).



▶ **Devon:** Higher Shapter Street, Topsham. A characterful 400-year-old cottage a few steps from the foreshore of the Exe Estuary. 3 beds, shower, kitchen, recep. £395,000; Inigo (020-3687 3071).

▶ **Hampshire:** Cob Cottage, Nether Wallop. Thatched cottage in the Test Valley overlooking the Wallop Brook. 4 beds, 2 baths, shower, kitchen, 3 receps, garden, parking. £1.075m; Myddelton & Major (01264-810400).



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The American way with salad

Someone has to say it, says Olivia Potts in *The Spectator*: “Americans are weird about salad.” A word that to us generally means green leaves – with tomato if we’re feeling adventurous – in the US encompasses any number of ingredients, some decidedly bizarre. For a start, American salads often aren’t savoury: hence “Snickers salad” (a combination of whipped cream, apple slices and chopped-up Snickers bars) and “Coca-Cola salad” (strawberry jelly, tinned pineapple, cherry pie filling and Coca-Cola). But the savoury repertoire is scarcely more conventional. Jello salads – a mix of fruit, vegetables and sometimes protein, suspended in jelly – are beloved in the Midwest, but “pop up” everywhere. “At the Thanksgiving table, a creamy, jelly-laden salad will often be rubbing shoulders with a beautifully roasted bird, mashed potato and stuffing.” Yet it would be a mistake to write off American salads: this is “also the country that gave us the Cobb, the Waldorf, the Caesar”. Clearly, their “maximalist” approach can work. A case in point is American egg salad. Containing celery, cornichons, spring onion and parsley, in addition to egg and mayo, it is “zippy and interesting” – and “more comprehensive than our pale imitation”.

Smash burgers make a splash

“Food trends move at incredible speed,” says Tony Naylor in *The Guardian* – and nothing illustrates this better than the rise of the smash burger. A year ago, this



A salad made with jelly and Coca-Cola

variation – “essentially, burgers rendered as wider, flatter, crispier patties” – was a niche concern. Now, every second burger joint specialises in them, and they’re even available – with added bone marrow – at Waitrose. But while the trend may seem novel, it’s actually old school: “historically, smashing was the quick, efficient and unremarkable way burgers were cooked in US diners”. Smash patties are not pre-formed: instead, balls of mince are simply placed on a “furiously hot flat-plate grill” and pressed into thin, wide patties using a burger press or heavy spatula. This creates a “pronounced sear” – which is the source of the “intense, savoury flavours on the patty’s exterior”. These are a large part

of the smash burger’s appeal. However, aficionados also relish their “differentiated flavours and textures”: a good smash burger has a plump, juicy middle while its edge has plenty of “crusty, crunchy bits”. The trend marks a break from the “dude food” excesses of the past decade – typified by “towering, monster burgers”. Smash burgers are typically light and compact, contain relatively few additional ingredients, and are distinguished by their “confident simplicity”.

Tips for tomato season

While a “sub-par tomato” is always a disappointment, a good tomato “is just so good”, says Giulia Crouch in *The Times*. Thankfully, with tomato season upon us, the latter type are currently available in abundance. And here’s my advice for making the most of them. Avoid putting tomatoes in the fridge: it “reduces the number of flavour and fragrance chemicals”, known as “volatiles”. If making a sauce, plum tomatoes are best – and the best of all is the San Marzano variety, the flavour of which is “very intense”. Many people put vinegar on tomato salads, but when your tomatoes are good (and therefore acidic), you really don’t need to: stick with extra-virgin olive oil, salt and a few torn basil leaves. If you get a batch of tasteless cherry tomatoes, try blistering them over a high heat with olive oil, salt and chunks of garlic. It will make even previously watery ones taste “sweet, jammy and umami”.

Baingan & aloo sabzi (aubergine & potato curry)

This delightful pairing showcases the contrasting tastes and textures of aubergines and potatoes in a medley that is both comforting and full of depth, says Romy Gill. With its earthy and slightly bitter undertones, aubergine sits well next to potato and each one complements, rather than overshadows, the other. The combination creates a hearty wholesome dish, which is prepared with different spices in homes across India.

Serves 4

2 small aubergines, diced into 3cm (1in) cubes 1 tsp salt 1 tsp ground turmeric 60ml sunflower oil 1 tsp cumin seeds
200g red onions, peeled and thinly sliced 10g ginger root, peeled and thinly sliced 4-5 large garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
2-3 green chillies, cut in half lengthwise 1 large tomato, chopped large handful of fresh coriander, chopped 1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp garam masala 200g potatoes, peeled and cut into 2cm half-moons 30ml water To serve: roti

- Place the aubergines in a large bowl with half the salt and half the turmeric. Mix together and set aside for 10 minutes.
- Heat 35ml (2 tablespoons) of the oil in a frying pan over a high heat. Once the oil is hot, add the marinated aubergines and cook for 5-6 minutes. Once cooked, place the aubergines back in the bowl.
- Using the same pan, heat the remaining oil. Once the oil is hot, add the cumin seeds and, as soon as they start to sizzle, add the onions and cook on a high heat for 4-5 minutes. Add the ginger, garlic and chillies and cook for a further



- 2-3 minutes. Add the chopped tomato, and the remaining turmeric, chopped fresh coriander, ground coriander and garam masala. Mix to combine, cover the pan with a lid, lower the heat to medium and cook for 2 minutes.
- Next, stir in the potatoes, then add 2 tablespoons of water. Cover the pan and cook over a low heat for 5-6 minutes until the potatoes are almost cooked. Add the aubergines, mix again and cook for a further 10 minutes.
- Once cooked, remove from the heat and serve hot with warm roti.

Taken from Romy Gill’s *India: Recipes from Home*, published by Hardie Grant at £28.
To buy from *The Week Bookshop* for £21.99 (incl. p&p), call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.

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New cars: what the critics say



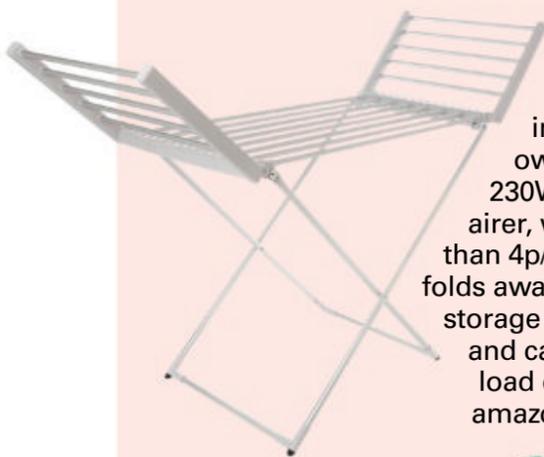
Peugeot E-5008
Price: from £48,500

The Daily Telegraph
Long-range, electric seven-seaters that don't cost a fortune are few and far between, but Peugeot has finally made a reasonably priced family EV. "Welcome to the E-5008; coming to a school run near you." Initially, there are two options: either single- or dual-motor, both with 73kWh, capable of a range of 311 miles. Next year, a longer-range all-wheel drive 98kWh joins the line-up, with hybrids on the cards.

Auto Express
The E-5008 is not exactly exciting to drive, but you'll soon forgive that. It lacks the rapid acceleration you can now expect from an EV, but 0-62mph in 9.7 seconds isn't bad for a 2.2-tonne SUV, and there's enough oomph for overtaking and keeping pace on A roads. Despite its size, it doesn't feel like a large car on the road, and visibility is good. The ride is well damped, though there is some tyre noise.

Stuff
It may be a "heavy hauler", but the E-5008 copes with motorways "with aplomb" and handles pretty well, especially on country roads. "Hugely likeable" and "very practical", it has "oodles" of space. The impressive tech-packed cabin feels comfortable, with a high driving position. There is a "cool" 21-inch curved display, "neat" ambient lighting and Apple CarPlay and Android Auto as standard.

The best... kit for university students



◀ **Status heated clothes airer**
Dry wet laundry in no time in your own room with this 230W heated winged airer, which costs less than 4p/hour to run. It folds away for compact storage when not in use and can handle a 15kg load of laundry (£40; amazon.co.uk).



◀ **Silentnight Deep Sleep mattress topper**
Mattresses in student rooms are often old and uncomfy, so invest in a topper to ensure a good night's sleep. Machine washable, this double topper from Silent Night is hypoallergenic and easy to fit (£16 for a double; argos.co.uk).



◀ **Ikea Klunka laundry bag** This 16-litre bag is rigid enough to be used as a laundry basket, though it can be folded up for easy storage if you prefer (£9; ikea.com).

▶ **JBL Go 3 Eco speaker**
"Small but mighty", with impressive bass quality, this lightweight speaker gives up to five hours of playtime from a single charge. It is water- and dust-proof and made from 90% recycled plastic, and comes in fun colours (£31; gadget.com).



▶ **Habitat Lizzie desk lamp**
This funky orange desk lamp is easily adjustable, even with the light on, using the stem on the back of the shade. 32cm high and 17cm wide, it takes a small Edison bulb, which is not included (£16; habitat.co.uk).



▶ **George Foreman Fit Medium Grill**
A university-digs classic, this grill doesn't take up much space, is versatile, easy to clean and uses 82% less energy than a conventional oven grill (£43; diy.com).



SOURCE: THE INDEPENDENT

Tips of the week... for aspiring entrepreneurs

Retailer Julian Richer offers some advice for young people getting into business:

- Run your business ethically – it gives you and your stakeholders a clear conscience, which makes the firm easier to manage.
- Look for the big picture, but always remember the devil is in the detail.
- Avoid giving equity away unless you really have to. It's always better to borrow.
- What goes up slowly, goes down slowly, so try not to grow too fast.
- Keep a sharp eye on your cash flow. Lots of profitable businesses go bust because they can't pay their bills.
- Wherever possible, buy freehold property; it's better and cheaper than renting and freeholds should increase in value, which is good for the balance sheet.
- Aim for a niche business with a USP, ideally in a market with barriers to entry to protect you from the big guns.
- If you meet clever people along the way, try to keep them as informal mentors.

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

And for those who have everything...



Artist and illustrator Emily Forgot has hand-painted a limited number of these engineered dolomite stone baths with her *Apricity* design, an abstract depiction of the four seasons.

£10,000; clearwaterinteriors.net

SOURCE: THE TIMES

Where to find... Europe's best sculpture parks

Fondation Maeght, Alpes-Maritimes, France, perched on a wooded hillside inland from the Riviera, has works by some of the greatest 20th century sculptors, including Braque, Giacometti and Miró (from €14; fondation-maeght.com).

Kröller-Müller Museum, in Arnhem, the Netherlands, is one of Europe's largest sculpture gardens, and has pieces by Rodin, Hepworth and Moore (from €6.50; krollermuller.nl).

Museum of Underwater Sculpture, Ayia Napa, Cyprus, is a submerged sculpture forest, which you can snorkel over or dive down to (free; musan.com.cy).

Austrian Sculpture Park, Graz, Austria, has quirky pieces such as Erwin Wurm's life-size *Fat House*, which appears to be made of marshmallow (free; museum-joanneum.at).

Middelheim Museum, in Antwerp, Belgium, has more than 100 sculptures dotted through the park, plus a restaurant in the old castle (free; middelheimmuseum.be).

SOURCE: THE OBSERVER

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This week's dream: Ravenna's glittering treasures

It receives fewer tourists than the great cities of the Italian Renaissance, but Ravenna has its own, highly distinctive treasures, says Norman Miller in *The Times*. Situated 90 miles south of Venice, an easy cycle ride from the beautiful beaches of the Adriatic coast, this “magical” town was the capital of three empires in succession – Western Roman, Ostrogoth and Byzantine – between AD402 and AD751. The magnificent churches their rulers built still stand, and the mosaics that adorn their interiors are amazingly well preserved. Dante lived (and died) in Ravenna after his exile from Florence, and Byron spent three years here. To Wilde, it was a “poet’s city”, and it has also inspired painters such as Klimt, who first used gold in his work after seeing its mosaics.

Among the oldest of Ravenna’s great buildings is the mausoleum of Galla Placidia (half-sister of Emperor Honorius), with its depictions of the night sky, doves drinking, and Jesus as “a young man, lively and happy”. Next door, the “soaring”



The Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo: a “masterpiece” of the Dark Ages

Basilica di San Vitale has “shimmering” mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora in “lush greens, brilliant gold and deep blues”. In the Basilica di Sant’Apollinare Nuovo is the oldest known artistic image of the Last Supper, created nearly a millennium before Leonardo’s. And these masterpieces of the Dark Ages are not Ravenna’s only attractions. There’s a good museum of modern art and another dedicated to Dante, and the town’s restaurant scene is excellent.

The coast, with its golden beaches and seafood restaurants, is four miles to the east, and 20 miles north is Comacchio, a “colourful” 17th century town

built around canals like a “miniature Venice”. For centuries, it was “the eel capital of Europe”, a heritage chronicled in the “evocative” *Manifattura dei Marinati* museum. It sits beside the watery Po Delta national park. “Puttering” in a boat through its “serene” lagoon channels, I didn’t see another human for an hour – just flamingos “taking to the air at our approach”.

Getting the flavour of...



A spectacular Croatian island

Although its “windswept” limestone landscape and “phthalo blue” seas are “spectacularly photogenic” (Vogue and Porsche have both shot campaigns here), the Croatian island of Pag is an arid place that may not look very welcoming at first glance. It took a hiking tour with Pag Outdoor to open my eyes to its “ethereal beauty”, says Jane Foster in the *Financial Times*. Hidden among its “jagged rocky slopes” are tiny stone churches, ruined Byzantine forts, and secluded pebble beaches. The island’s capital – also called Pag – is a Renaissance creation with dramatic fortifications, but its “loveliest” hotel – the “family-run” Boškinac – sits near its second town, Novalja. The hotel’s Michelin-starred restaurant draws heavily on local produce, including “excellent” wines (vineyards cling onto patches of fertile soil in the north of the island) and *Paški sir*, the “delicious dry, salty” sheep’s cheese, for which Pag is known.

Bicycling from Tokyo to Kyoto

Groups of foreigners pedalling around on bikes are a rare sight in Japan, but you’ll get to know the country better on two wheels than from the window of a speeding bullet train, says Tom Vanderbilt in *Condé Nast Traveller*. On one of Raid Cycling’s “pioneering” eight-day trips from Tokyo to Kyoto, you follow quiet roads over mountain peaks and among “iridescent green” rice paddies, stopping at family-run restaurants for “restorative” bowls of soba noodles, and staying at “little-known” *ryokans* (traditional inns). Evenings are spent soaking in *onsen* (hot spring baths), enjoying “elaborate” *kaiseki* (multi-course) meals, or hanging out in karaoke bars in little-visited cities such as Takayama (like a miniature Kyoto, “without the crowds”). There are golden eagles and snow monkeys to spot – and you can always make the return journey by rail, so there’s no need to miss out.

A lakeside holiday in lovely Carinthia

With its “gentle” peaks and countless lakes, the southern Austrian region of Carinthia (pictured) is a great place for an outdoorsy family holiday, says Isabel Choat in *The Guardian*. We stayed at the lakeside Brennseehof hotel, which is geared to young families but has activities for all ages – tennis, e-biking, windsurfing, sailing and more. I enjoyed the spa and saunas, and took regular dips in the lake, which has water “pure enough to drink”. And there was lots to do nearby, too, including riding the Kaiserburg Bob (an alpine rollercoaster I found terrifying), trips on the Brunnach cable car (for great views of Carinthia’s highest peak, the Rosennock, at 2,440m), and trying local delicacies, from *kasnudeln* (cheesy dumplings) to *reindling* (cinnamon pastries).

Hotel of the week



Gundari Folegandros, Greece

Known for its “dramatic peaks and plunging canyons”, the little Greek island of Folegandros is spectacular, but blessedly untouristy. This new hotel is its first five-star “boutique resort”, says Francesca Syz in *The Daily Telegraph*. Perched on a cliff ten minutes by car from the main town, it has 25 suites, all “spacious and light-filled”, with sea views through floor-to-ceiling windows and terraces with infinity pools. The restaurant is overseen by the “legendary” Michelin-starred chef Lefteris Lazarou. There’s also a communal pool, a spa and an organic farm. A second restaurant is due to open next year.

Suites from £520 b&b;
gundari.com.

The former TV presenter who wrote *Danger Mouse*

Brian Trueman
1932-2024

When Brian Trueman was reading the news on Granada TV in the late 1950s, his demeanour was so serious, and his delivery so deadpan, colleagues named him “Old Stoneface”. But unbeknown to most viewers, Trueman had a vast well of silliness lurking inside him, said *The Times*. This would be unleashed some 25 years later when Trueman, who has died aged 92, was asked to provide the scripts for a new children’s cartoon about the “madcap adventures” of a superspy rodent – “a secret agent so secret that even his code name has a code name”.

In each brief episode, *Danger Mouse* (voiced by David Jason) is tasked with saving the world from the villainous Baron Silas Greenback (Edward Kelsey) – a whispering toad as malevolent as 007’s arch-enemy Blofeld. Operating from a futuristic base in a pillar box in London’s Baker Street, and assisted by a timid hamster named Penfold (Terry Scott), DM – ingenious, level-headed, quietly heroic, and yet a little bit cowardly – invariably thwarts Greenback’s diabolical plot. Yet the terrible toad is never vanquished, and exits with a warning that he’ll soon be back, “to show that wretched mouse the meaning of pure terror”.

Trueman wrote 79 of the 89 original episodes, which featured surreal storylines (in one episode, Greenback steals all of Scotland’s bagpipes to create an unspeakable cacophony) and quick-fire dialogue peppered with catchphrases (“Good grief”; “Penfold, shush”; “Crikey, DM!”). Other notable cast members included Isambard Sinclair, an off-screen narrator who sometimes ruminates on his own life; Stiletto, a trenchcoat-clad crow (voiced by Trueman himself); and Colonel K, a crusty chinchilla



Trueman: “Old Stoneface”

who is the head of the Secret Service and given to roaring: “Good show, DM!”

Brian Trueman was born in Manchester, in 1932. His mother was a secretary; his father a newspaper print worker. He started acting on BBC radio while at Stretford Grammar School, and after national service, he studied literature at the University of Manchester, where he was a “leading light” of the student drama club, said *The Guardian*. He carried on acting until 1957, when he was recruited to the fledgling ITV franchise Granada. As well as reading the regional news, he hosted various programmes including the documentary *A House for the Future*, the film-review show *Cinema*, and the children’s movie quiz *Screen Test*. The last was for the BBC, where he briefly had a contract; but he was not happy at the corporation – too big, too “clubby”, he said.

In the mid-1970s, Brian Cosgrove and Mark Hall – whom Trueman knew from Granada – asked him to come and work at Cosgrove Hall Films, their animation studio in Manchester. His first scripts were for *Chorlton and the Wheelies* (1976-1979) and *Jamie and the Magic Torch* (1977-1979). *Danger Mouse* launched in 1981 and was a huge hit. Blessed with Mike Harding’s catchy theme song, it attracted more than seven million viewers at its peak (many rather older than the standard tea-time audience) and was popular in the US, too. The show ran for a decade on ITV (before being revived on the BBC in 2015) and spawned a spin off – *Count Duckula*, which ran for five years. In the 1980s, Trueman set aside his gift for the anarchic to write 43 episodes of Cosgrove’s charming stop-motion series based on Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*. He is survived by Angela, his wife of 63 years, and their two sons.

Author of a bestselling memoir about a Glasgow childhood

Meg Henderson
1948-2024

Meg Henderson, who has died aged 76, turned to writing in middle age, said *The Daily Telegraph*, after many years working as a technician in the NHS. She produced several novels, but was best known for *Finding Peggy*, a memoir of her harsh childhood in the slums of Glasgow, which also investigated the harrowing death of her maternal aunt, Peggy.

She was born Margaret O’Brien in 1948. Her father was an Irish Catholic; her mother was an Irish Scottish Protestant. Their home was in a crumbling tenement in Townhead, which collapsed in a storm in 1951, at which point they moved to Blackhill, where sectarianism was rife. Her father was a shoemaker who spent all his money on alcohol, leaving her mother, Nan, to cobble the necessities out of “thin air”. Aided by her sister Peggy, Nan shielded the children from the worst of their father’s drinking, and created a warm home. Then one day, Meg was told that Peggy – a romantic who had endured an unhappy marriage herself – had died. Her children were taken into care. It was only decades later that Meg discovered that Peggy had died in childbirth during a botched forceps delivery. Nan collapsed under the weight of her grief, putting an abrupt end to Meg’s childhood.

In the 1960s, she started working for the NHS and rose to become the chief cardiological technician at Glasgow’s Western



Henderson: adoption campaigner

Infirmiry. She married Robert Henderson in 1971 and, in 1976, they started to foster children. It was, she said, partly an attempt to assuage the guilt she felt about Peggy’s children. “I was trying to reclaim [them] again and again.” They adopted three, two of whom were half-sisters, aged 18 months and three years old. Both turned out to have extremely complex needs, said *The Times*. Though she referred to them as a “happy little band”, family life was extremely challenging, and Henderson was angry that she and her husband had not been made aware before the adoption of the history of mental illness in the girls’ family, or of the abuse they’d suffered. In the 1990s, she began writing articles in which she argued that social services needed to slow the rate of adoption of older children, “because the majority of children in care are so damaged that ordinary, warm-hearted individuals have no hope of coping with them”.

Her journalism kick-started her second career as a writer. In 2004, she was reported to be in talks to ghost-write Sean Connery’s autobiography – and when he dropped her for another writer, she wrote a furious article in which she accused him of being not “the man I thought he was, nor the man he likes to think he is”. One of her last pieces came out in 2018, following the suicide of one of her daughters. Yet for all she had been through, she wrote in 2005 that she did not wish to be regarded as a “tragic figure”; there had been lots of “tremendously happy times”.

Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed

Hostmore: smashed shareholders



Shares in the hospitality company behind TGI Friday's in the UK cratered by 91% on Monday, leaving it on the "teetering brink of collapse", said Hugo Duncan on This is Money. In a "spectacularly bleak" update, Hostmore said sales were 12% down year on year, and that its plans to buy TGI Friday's in the US, for £177m, had been abandoned. It also said that a separate sale of its UK restaurants would go ahead, but that the sale price would "not recover any meaningful value"; so Hostmore would be

"wound up and delisted" once that sale completed. Forget the "Glazed Smashed Burger", said Alistair Osborne in The Times. "What about the glazed smashed shareholders?" Three years after the business was spun off from Electra Private Equity at 147p, Hostmore is valued at less than a penny a share (and that looks too high). In hindsight, the proposed reverse takeover of US TGI Friday's now looks like a crazed attempt to rescue two failing businesses, not just one. To fund it, Hostmore hoped to become an "asset-lite restaurateur" by selling the leases to its 87 UK outlets – yet none of the bids even cover its £29.7m net debts. With "nothing else on the menu", it looks like the end.

The Spectator: hungry for influence?

The hedge fund tycoon Sir Paul Marshall has sealed a £100m takeover of The Spectator magazine – part of his long-term "ambition to control a significant swathe of the UK's conservative and right-wing media outlets", said Mark Sweney in The Guardian. Marshall, who owns the UnHerd website and is a major backer of the loss-making TV channel GB News, is also in the running to buy the Telegraph titles, with a second round of bids due by 27 September. Even by the standards of "trophy media deals" – driven more by the desire for "influence and power" than an immediate return on investment – the price paid for the Spectator looks "generous", said George Hay on Breakingviews. Sources say the magazine made around £2m in pre-tax profits last year, implying a price multiple of 50. "By comparison, Rupert Murdoch and Jeff Bezos, who forked out around 17 times for Wall Street Journal publisher Dow Jones and The Washington Post respectively, look like bottom-fishing value investors."

Thames Water: thirsty hedge funds

The hedge fund Elliott Management is one of a "pack of aggressive US players" buying Thames Water debt at steep discounts, said Ben Marlow in The Daily Telegraph. City sources say Elliott's stake is now worth £1bn, making it one of Thames's largest lenders. Clearly, it thinks any enforced writedowns will be less severe than current bond market prices imply. On balance, it's good news that hedge funds are "having a punt" on Thames Water, said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. "Financial bruisers" are betting they can make a profit when writedowns happen, though they clearly think that bondholders will "not escape the Thames disaster zone intact". In marked contrast, the Thames chairman Sir Adrian Montague is denying financial reality: he still thinks the firm's troubles "would evaporate if only the regulator, Ofwat, would capitulate and inflate customers' bills by almost two-thirds". It also means that the threat of "special administration" (temporary nationalisation) is concentrating minds, and may be smoothing the path to a credible, voluntary debt-for-equity swap that would return the company to stability. "A financial restructuring still looks hellishly complicated", but may well be edging closer.

Verizon: cooking up a deal

America's big telecoms companies have "struggled in recent years to excite investors", said Sujeet Indap in the FT. Shares in the biggest, Verizon, remain a third off where they traded pre-pandemic, though some of its peers have had "far bigger blow-ups". The sector looks ripe for consolidation, with a few titans (Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, Charter, Comcast) looking to buy mid-tier firms. Verizon itself has just announced the acquisition of Frontier Communications, a "localised telco" that has been investing heavily in fibre infrastructure, for \$20bn in aggregate value. The deal looks expensive, implying a 30% equity premium. CEO Hans Vestberg has his work cut out to make it stack up, agreed Jennifer Saba on Breakingviews. The rationale is that Verizon will grow its fibre broadband network from 18 million homes to 25 million. But the likely return looks meagre. Still, the £20bn is small compared with Verizon's own enterprise value of \$323bn, lowering the risk. And even if the acquisition doesn't live up to expectations, it "can't be any worse" than some of those that came before Vestberg's time – like the \$9bn acquisition of AOL and Yahoo!, which Verizon later offloaded for half that price.

Seven days in the Square Mile

The UK economy stagnated for a second consecutive month in July. Economists had expected growth of 0.2%. The figures make it more likely that the **Bank of England** will cut interest rates again at next week's monetary-policy meeting.

Britain's biggest housebuilder and its largest mortgage lender announced a joint venture with the Government's housing agency to build thousands of homes. **Barratt Developments**, **Lloyds Banking Group** and **Homes England** have each put £50m into a joint venture called the Made Partnership.

The UK Government has committed £500m in state aid to help Britain's largest steelworks in south Wales move to greener forms of steelmaking. The deal will still involve about 2,500 job losses at the **Tata Steel** plant in Port Talbot.

Glencore's billionaire former head of oil, Alex Beard, and five other former executives appeared in a London court to face corruption charges over the commodity trader's business in Africa. **Rightmove** rejected a £5.6bn takeover offer from the Murdoch family, claiming it undervalues the online property portal.

US **inflation** fell to 2.5% in August, strengthening market expectations of a Federal Reserve rate cut next Wednesday. **Apple** lost a long-running €13bn battle with the EU over unpaid taxes using "sweetheart" tax deals in Ireland. The EU's top court overturned a previous decision in Apple's favour. **PwC** is to send a UK senior partner, Hemione Hudson, to run its business in China. The firm there is in crisis following failures relating to audits of Evergrande, the collapsed property developer.

NKU once more

It's hard to imagine a better advertising slogan than "Never Knowingly Undersold", said Chris Blackhurst in The Independent. Audi's "Vorsprung durch Technik" and Tesco's "Every Little Helps" arguably come close. But John Lewis's iconic price guarantee – dating from 1925, was dropped in 2022, as John Lewis "wilted under the pressure of competition". Now the slogan is back – in tweaked form – as new-broom boss, Peter Ruis, brings "renewed vigour and sharper focus". Now it's "Never Knowingly Undersold on quality, service & price" – and a promise to price-match the company's 25 biggest competitors, in store and online. Welcome back "NKU": you've been missed.

Issue of the week: Europe's woes

Europe's economy is stagnant, while the US and China motor ahead. What is to be done?

“Whatever it takes.” That was Mario Draghi’s three-word promise, when he was president of the European Central Bank, which was widely credited with saving the eurozone from collapse during the sovereign debt crisis of 2012. At 400 pages, Draghi’s blockbuster report into how to put momentum into the EU’s stagnant economy is “a great deal more wordy”, said the FT. But the message is similar. To compete with the US and China, Draghi argues, Europe needs a new, bloc-wide industrial strategy focused on digital and clean tech, and powered by public and private capital; it must raise investment by €800bn a year to boost growth. What he’s calling for, at 4.7% of GDP, is more than double the scale of the postwar Marshall Plan relative to the size of the economy.



Draghi with Ursula von der Leyen: a “chilling” report

The Italian technocrat’s long-awaited report, commissioned by Brussels a year ago, makes for “chilling” reading, said Francesco Guerrera on Breakingviews. The EU is growing 30% slower than the US, and its 27 member states account for just 14% of total global output, down from 20% in 2020. In 1995, European productivity was 95% of America’s; now it’s less than 80%. Geopolitical tensions are slowing growth in trade, which accounts for 45% of Europe’s GDP. An ageing population means that, if productivity growth doesn’t rise, the EU economy will be no

bigger in 2050 than it is today. It is, says Draghi, nothing less than an existential crisis. “Super Mario” has made 150 recommendations, from energy market reforms and looser merger rules, to streamlining the EU’s legislative process. If a “wand could be waved” and all these implemented, “there’s no question it would put rocket boosters” under Europe’s economy, said Carlo Martuscelli on Politico. Will that happen? Of course not.

Europe has been “worrying about economic decline and techno-stagnation for a quarter-of-a-century”, said Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in The Daily Telegraph. Now “gnawing angst has finally given way to something closer to panic”. Europe’s elites know that the bloc urgently needs its own version of the US Inflation Reduction Act (with help for clean tech) to revive its broken industrial base. But, in practice, “that is impossible, because the EU has no money, no treasury, no permanent debt-raising powers, no unified fiscal or tax system”. Joint debt issuance is simply not going to happen: Germany’s finance minister has made that clear. Draghi’s report is “commendably plain-spoken”, said The Economist, and he is no “crude protectionist”. But if policymakers now use it as “intellectual cover for weakening competition and state-aid rules”, then Europe’s problems are likely to get worse, not better.

Making money: what the experts think

● **Buying British**

Were you preparing to do your patriotic duty by investing in a “British Isa”? In March, the then-chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced a top-up allowance of £5,000 for anyone wealthy enough to max out the existing £20,000 limit – but only if they invested their extra loot in UK stocks. But the idea was rubbished by investment platforms as overly complex and “pointless”, said Nils Pratley in The Guardian – a “lot of faff for little gain”, in terms of boosting investment flows into UK-listed companies. According to the Financial Times, Rachel Reeves is now set to “kill the Brit Isa” before it has even been launched. Very sensible. Far better to find ways of prodding UK pension funds into taking more interest in their home market.



UK stocks: still good value?

British” for value and diversification. We think UK equities “look inexpensive, offer high shareholder returns and – for the mid-caps – should benefit from a continued modest economic revival”, analyst Sharon Bell wrote. It seems “boring is beautiful”, said

Martin – or, as an FT reader put it to her this week, the UK’s current appeal “is a case of Beige Against the Machines”.

● **Long-term benefits**

Only 4% of UK pension assets are invested in UK stocks, a far lower proportion of domestic assets than in most comparable markets, said John Stepek on Bloomberg. Part of the explanation lies in the gradual death of the once-dominant private sector defined benefit pension. Such schemes still account for about £1.4trn (about half) of total UK pension assets, but are almost all now in “run-off” mode, dramatically shrinking holdings in equities, including UK equities. As defined contribution models overtake them in the coming years, “the persistent headwind of outflows will turn into a tailwind of inflows, or at least, abate a bit. Another decent reason to consider having at least a bit of your asset allocation in UK equities.”

City jargon

The language of City dealmaking is “dense and confusing”, says City AM. Patrick Sarch, head of UK public M&A at law firm White & Case, helps us sort our white knights (a friendly acquirer who swoops in to save a target company from a hostile bidder) from our poison pills (when a target tries to put off a hostile bidder by issuing new shares to existing shareholders).

Pac-Man defence When a target company tries to turn the tables by launching its own offer for an unwelcome bidder.

Macaroni defence Issuing a large number of bonds that must be repaid at a premium if the company is taken over, making it more expensive for the bidder.

Starburst Breaking up a company when under pressure from activist investors or a hostile bid.

Swarm When a group of investors all buy into a stock simultaneously; a “wolf pack” is a more co-ordinated version of the same strategy.

Ninja DD A swift, “cut to the chase” version of due diligence; the opposite is “boil the ocean diligence”, meaning no stone is left unturned.

Bumpers and grinders “Investors who try to bump up the price of a deal by refusing to support it (“bumpitrag”) or in the case of “grinders”, by trying to block it.

The “Internet of Things” is still not a thing

Adrian Wooldridge

Bloomberg

The tech-industry hype around the “Internet of Things” continues unabated, says Adrian Wooldridge. A breathless new report from McKinsey reckons “the total value potential for the IoT ecosystem could reach £12.6trn by 2030”. Hmm, maybe. Fridges that let you control their temperature remotely! Umbrella handles that glow when it’s about to rain! Pillboxes that yelp when you forget to take your meds! All sound useful – for a moment or two. But, in reality, the upside of attaching household devices to the internet is often minimal – a “cumbersome way of addressing a non-problem”. Manufacturer surveys suggest that fewer than half of internet-capable devices are actually hooked up to the internet. Why is that? Because being able to control the temperature of your fridge remotely is not worth the struggle involved. It means downloading multiple apps; reprogramming devices when you change your smartphone or service provider; upgrades that go wrong and take a vital appliance offline; and the nagging sense that your smart appliances are actually spying on you. Little wonder that many of us think: why bother?

Trump redux: just say no

Joseph Stiglitz

Project Syndicate

November’s knife-edge US election is critical for many reasons, says Joseph Stiglitz – not least because Donald Trump is an “impulsive narcissist” who poses a proven threat to America’s democracy and to the global order. But what of the economy? What would a second Trump presidency mean for the US, and for the world economy? In a nutshell: a “triple whammy of slowing growth, rising inflation and higher unemployment”. Blanket tariffs of 60% or more on China would fuel rampant inflation, hitting lower- and middle-income Americans worst, and forcing up interest rates. Trump’s “extreme” position of threatening the Federal Reserve’s independence would further depress investment and growth, as well as boost inflation. Tax cuts for corporations and the super-rich would send deficits surging and add trillions to the national debt, discouraging investment. And, arguably worst of all, a second Trump administration would “slash funding for basic science and technology”, which has been “the source of US competitive advantage and rising living standards” for the past 200 years. My fellow Americans: don’t do it.

Britain’s downward spiral

Sam Ashworth-Hayes

The Daily Telegraph

Britain’s economic stagnation is a “bipartisan endeavour”, says Sam Ashworth-Hayes. Both the Tories, and now Labour, talk up the prospect of economic growth, but once in office “shy away from ever putting in the hard work to actually make it happen”. Labour recently promised a “brighter future” with wealth creation – led by the private sector – “at the heart” of its manifesto. Just weeks later, that entrepreneurial vision has vanished. Ministers are threatening probes into everything from the price of holiday flights to Oasis tickets, while working out how to “extract as much money from a dissatisfied populace” as they possibly can. Ministers must be careful. The UK already “relies on a relatively small number of people” to keep the crumbling state going: the top 10% of taxpayers pay 60% of income tax; the top 1% a startling 29%. If the “exodus of the wealthy and talented” goes on, tax rises will “creep down the social ladder”. Then we’ll see “just how much of the burden they were bearing”. “And serve us right, too: you get the Government you deserve.”

The weird truth about work

Pilita Clark

Financial Times

Summer’s over, September’s in full swing, and offices are full of people moaning about the post-holiday grind back at work, says Pilita Clark. The reputation of work has taken quite a battering in recent years, from the notion of “bullshit jobs” to the Great Resignation and “quiet quitting”; from toxic bosses to “Quit-Tok” videos. But here’s the “weird and unsung” truth: most of us find our working lives pretty satisfying, most of the time. Research by Canadian sociologist Scott Schieman has found that 79% of Canadian and US workers surveyed felt “somewhat or very satisfied with their own job” – but only 49% of workers thought that others felt the same way. Conversely, only 32% of workers found their job stressful “often or always” – but 69% thought that most others would feel this way. The research also found that when people think that other workers are dissatisfied, they tend to feel less committed themselves. Despite this “perception gap”, the cheering truth is that you, and your colleagues, are probably doing work that makes you all “reasonably satisfied”.

City profiles

Alex Baldock

At the UK’s largest electrical goods-repair centre, just outside Newark-on-Trent, more than 1,000 Curry’s employees mend some 1.4 million appliances a year, from smartphones to fridge-freezers. The company’s chief executive, Alex Baldock, a 53-year-old Oxford history graduate, moved into retail 12 years ago after stints as a management consultant and a banker. “I always wanted a proper job,” he says. The giant repair and refurbishment plant, along with a linked recycling centre, are at the centre of his strategy to keep the retailer, with 727 stores in six nations, relevant. “If all we did was sell laptops... well, other people do that. But competitors can’t do repairs like we do,” Baldock told Sarah Butler in *The Observer*. “Our purpose and profit go hand in hand.”

Daniel Ek



The “unflashy” programming whizz behind Spotify is moving into healthcare, says Oliver Shah in *The Sunday Times*. Daniel Ek (pronounced eek) has long been “baffled by the medical establishment’s reluctance to use data, and its focus on cure rather than prevention”. Whenever people would tell Ek how amazing Spotify was, “I kept responding with the same thing – ‘Yeah, it’s really great, but it’s not like we’re saving lives.’ And lo and behold, I started thinking, well, why am I not saving lives?” His new venture, Neko Health, has just opened its first clinic in London, and offers what it calls “a preventative health check for your future self”, including the mapping of skin blemishes, blood and heart tests and near-instant blood-test analysis.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Currys

The Times

Curry's, which has about 800 stores in the UK and abroad, sells everything from TVs to dishwashers. Revenues are up, debt and pension liabilities are down. Shares have jumped on takeover interest, but are cheap versus peers. Buy. 80p.

Haleon

The Daily Telegraph

The Aquafresh and Panadol owner is growing solidly, while rising margins suggest it has "clear competitive advantage" over peers. Simplifying ops and focusing on core brands, for which demand is set to grow. Buy. 382.3p.

Naked Wines

Investors' Chronicle

The online wine retailer's new management team is aiming to get back to growth via customer value proposition, acquisition and retention. Costs are falling and cash is rising sharply as inventory is wound down. Buy. 55p.

Empiric Student Property

The Times

An acute shortage of student homes is driving demand in the purpose-built market. Now Empiric's disposal and refurbishment programmes are "materially complete", it's set for growth. Prospective 4.2% yield. Buy. 96.4p.

Knights Group Holdings

The Mail on Sunday

This commercial law firm has about 1,000 lawyers focused on corporate work in regional cities – M&A, property, employee affairs & tax advice. Bullish spirits are fuelling activity. Growing organically and via acquisition. Buy. 129p.

Teck Resources

The Daily Telegraph

The Canadian miner has sold its steelmaking-coal arm to become a "cleaner, simpler story". Now "swimming in cash", it's set to major on low-carbon future-facing metals – copper and zinc. Buy. \$42.49.

Directors' dealings

Victorian Plumbing Group



Although the "exciting strategic milestone" of May's acquisition of rival Victoria Plumb "hasn't quite worked out", a new distribution centre could be a "step change". CEO Mark Radcliffe has taken advantage of rising shares, selling £2.7m-worth.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Costain Group

The Daily Telegraph

The infrastructure specialist continues to win water company contracts, and is well placed in energy, road and rail. Margins and the cash pile are rising, and it has visibility on £4bn in revenues. Hold. 104p.

EasyJet

The Times

The budget airline has "just managed to escape" FTSE 100 relegation. Still vulnerable to macroeconomic volatility, but its higher-margin holiday arm is "progressing well", making ambitions look feasible. Hold. 483.5p.

Spirax Group

The Times

Once a stock market darling, the thermal energy specialist may have lost "momentum" amid the global industrial production slowdown. Yet there's hope – forecasts suggest it might be "through the worst". Hold. £76.

Drax Group

The Times

The energy firm has thin margins and relies heavily on government subsidies. Results from an Ofgem probe have removed some of the doubt, but biofuel's future is uncertain as green campaigners call for the state to "pull the plug". Avoid. 647.5p.

Nichols

The Daily Telegraph

Tough times continue to weigh on the Vimto-producer. But finances are sound, it's gaining market share and profits are rising. Seeking growth via new products and expansion into new geographies. Hold. £11.80.

Zigup

The Mail on Sunday

Zigup supplies keenly priced, long-term car rental to UK firms and second-home owners in Spain. It also has a thriving insurance-related arm, providing post-accident services. Growing demand is fuelling profits. Hold. 390p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip

Time to Act

The Mail on Sunday up 30% to 65p

Worst tip

Oxford Instruments

The Mail on Sunday down 16.38% to £21.95

Market view

"With the Government... warning of 'difficult decisions' around tax and spending, it is harder for businesses to retain confidence about the environment going forward."

Rob Morgan of Charles Stanley

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

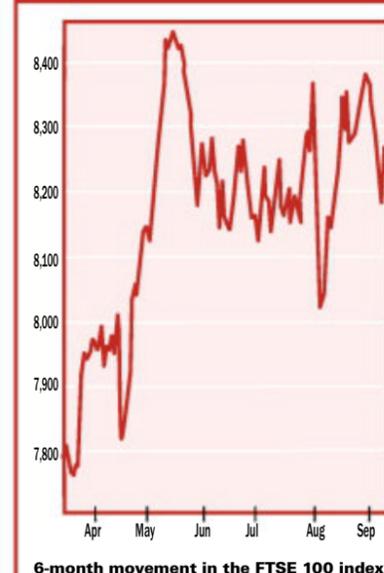
	10 Sep 2024	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8205.98	8298.46	-1.11%
FTSE All-share UK	4483.76	4531.63	-1.06%
Dow Jones	40477.10	41109.77	-1.54%
NASDAQ	16828.98	17271.96	-2.56%
Nikkei 225	36159.16	38686.31	-6.53%
Hang Seng	17234.09	17651.49	-2.36%
Gold	2499.70	2498.60	0.04%
Brent Crude Oil	68.98	74.05	-6.85%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.59%	3.54%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	3.90	4.06	
US 10-year Treasuries	3.65	3.85	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.2% (Jul)	2.0% (Jun)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.6% (Jul)	2.9% (Jun)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	4.3% (Aug)	2.3% (Jul)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.308 €1.185 ¥184.782		Bitcoin \$56,780.00

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS		
RISES	Price	% change
Entain	679.00	+7.10
JD Sports Fashion	140.50	+5.20
Whitbread	3065.00	+5.00
National Grid	1043.00	+4.60
Marks & Spencer Group	356.60	+4.30
FALLS		
Associated Brit. Foods	2163.00	-13.30
Burberry	571.00	-12.50
B&M Eur Value Retail	415.90	-7.00
Prudential	601.40	-6.80
AstraZeneca	12406.00	-5.90
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Centamin	146.90	+22.10
Amigo Holdings	0.47	-27.70

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 10 Sep (pm)

Following the Footsie





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Can Britain's department stores be brought back to life?

With many branches of famous chains lying empty, work is under way to transform them into housing, hotels, independent shops and more. Rowan Moore reports

Department stores, once palaces of delight and theatres of modernity, enclosed commercial town squares where you might meet, fall in love, get married and furnish your new home, are now none of these things. Empty, cold and bulky, they occupy town centres like fridge freezers that no one will take away, signs of the more general malaise of high streets, their boarded-up windows sapping whatever life there still might be. Yet there are signs of hope. Just as warehouses and workshops were turned into homes and studios when industry retreated 50 years ago, so might department stores. Their low values are provoking creative thinking about their future. The £25,000 Davidson Prize, an annual design award for “transformative architecture of the home”, has this year been won by a proposal to make an old Debenhams in Taunton, Somerset, into a centre of communal life.

In Bournemouth stands Bobby's, founded in 1915, absorbed by Debenhams in 1972, closed in 2021. Its building's curving facade is a cheerful confection of pillars, columns and cupolas, in red terracotta, white faience and green copper, in an off-kilter classical style that doesn't mind if it's a bit incorrect, a suit worn by a seaside dandy. It stands on a favoured spot of the town's charming up-and-down topography around the course of the River Bourne. Exotic Victorian gardens in front wind off towards the beach and the pier.

Verve Properties, the developer now reviving Bobby's, has gathered stories of people such as June, who in the 1950s worked in the soft-furnishings and dress-fabrics department from the age of 15, and met her future husband, Eddy, a buyer, there. Or Douglas Vine, a chief petty officer in the Royal Navy, who married Thelma, who worked in Bobby's, in the restaurant, in 1952. Millie Foy, who worked in its hairdressing and beauty salon for four years from the age of 20 – in the days when cash was dispatched in overhead chutes from the tills to the accounts department – remembers it as “a beautiful store”. “Everything was luxurious,” she says. “It was city life. The restaurant was a bit like if you go to the Ritz. It had damask napkins, silver dishes and music playing.” There were “models on parade”, sporting the fashions for sale on the floors below.

In those days, she says, “people would come for the whole day to Bournemouth to shop, the hotels were vibrant, there'd be coachloads of people coming from the north when the factories closed for the holidays”. Bobby's was also a source of



In the 1950s, “Everything was luxurious... People would come for the day”

“Millie Foy, who worked in Bobby's beauty salon in the days when cash was dispatched from tills in overhead chutes, remembers a beautiful store”

employment and a hub of social life. “There was a job for everybody,” says Foy, including “men with one leg who'd been in the War”.

It was one of three department stores that the town still boasted at the start of this decade, all of them (plus a Marks & Spencer) now gone. One is still empty. Another is becoming student housing on its upper floors, higher education being a boom industry in Bournemouth, with retail at ground level. Verve is making Bobby's into a hive of uses, seeking to build back its past conviviality.

Green awnings have been added, a clunky 1970s canopy removed, and the old Bobby's branding, including curly, gold-painted ironwork Bs on the balconies, reanimated. On the ground floor is Bobby's beauty hall, a friendly, relaxed, less corporate version of what was there before. On upper floors, builders are uncovering bas-relief plasterwork, ripe with decoration, opening up blocked windows, getting the old building to breathe. It is a loose, not-too-precious kind of conversion with the help of local architects Footprint, happy to combine modern joists and conduits with the relics of past glory.

The third floor is already in use, as the R&D offices of Gozney, a pizza-ovens company, its employees roaming a loft-like, open-plan, work-is-fun space with pool table and table football. Above them is the once-elegant rooftop restaurant, a space with a whiff of an ocean liner, with steel-framed glass walls giving wide views of the town, and in the process of becoming an outlet of dining-pub chain The Botanist. The first floor is taken by Patch, a young company that provides co-working space close to where people live; its Bobby's branch will open this autumn. The lower ground floor, which opens onto a new “urban garden” at the back, will contain “retail pods” let to local businesses rent-free for at least six months. South Coast Makers, a growing craft market, will be based on the lower level. Like other plans for reviving old department stores, this brings back an old idea of what town centres should be – places of many different uses, and not just shopping. These new versions won't all be as glamorous as the originals were in their prime, but they will be less monolithic, more open and lively.

Department stores were once celebrated in movies, TV series and songs, the bigger ones innovators in everything from escalators, electric lighting and plate glass to book signings and Father Christmas impersonators, proud of their standards of service.

In 1909, in his London store, Gordon Selfridge displayed the monoplane in which Louis Blériot first flew across the English Channel. In 1925 John Logie Baird presented a prototype of television in the same venue. “Blériot and I were changing the world, each in our own way,” said Selfridge.

Department stores inspired pioneering works of architecture: the exquisitely decorated steel frame of Carson Pirie Scott in Chicago, the art deco palace of Samaritaine in Paris, the optimistic modernism of Peter Jones in Sloane Square. In smaller towns they were often local enterprises, once handsome and proud, in styles that range from Edwardian baroque to Festival-of-Britain modern, each with its own character. Some became celebrated. “Maybe there’s someone waiting for me/ With a smile and a flower in her hair,” sang Richard Hawley on *Coles Corner*, about a famous store in his native Sheffield.

Their demise was a long time coming. They lost some of their spark when the mid-century takeovers by big chains started to crush their adventure and individuality. Department stores’ power was eroded by out-of-town shopping centres and then by online shopping, further undermined by business rates, with Covid in many cases delivering the coup de grâce. The Beales chain closed all but one of its 23 stores in 2020. House of Fraser has shrunk from 59 in 2018 to 25 now. The biggest crash of all came when Debenhams, founded in 1778, closed all its 124 outlets in 2021.

In prosperous and historic locations, developers are finding viable new uses. Boswell & Co, a family-run business in the centre of Oxford that was founded in 1738, met its Covid-accelerated end in 2020, but its 1920s stone building has reopened as what is promoted as an “inviting luxury lifestyle hotel” called The Store, with 101 rooms and views of dreaming spires from its rooftop bar. There are proposals to make the city’s old Debenhams into laboratories, a use which, not requiring much daylight, works well with stores’ deep floorplans.

The Edinburgh landmark of Jenners, another casualty of 2020, is to be a “fully refurbished department store”, with a 96-room “high-end lifestyle hotel” on its upper floors. It is a “moral obligation”, its Danish billionaire owner Anders Holch Povlsen, who made his fortune with the clothing-retail chain Bestseller, has said, to bring “it back to its former glory”. It occupies a turreted pile of stone from the 1890s, a palazzo of merchandise encrusted with an eclectic haberdashery of Renaissance-style decoration, that stands just across Princes Street from the Scott Memorial. Its elaborate interiors include a famous three-storey “grand saloon”, glass-roofed and arcaded. All are being restored and respectfully extended, with windows unblocked and ornaments uncovered, by David Chipperfield Architects. It is expected to reopen in 2027. The Edinburgh-raised Lewis Armstrong, the architect in charge, remembers Jenners as a city institution. “Everyone has a story about it,” he says. “Everyone went for tea there with their gran – maybe just once a year – it was a special event. It was a social space, a public space. Our ambition is to bring back that notion.”

It’s more challenging, but potentially more life-enhancing, to take on the old stores in less celebrated towns. One of the bolder, and most useful, conversions is in Poole, just along the coast from Bobby’s, where an NHS diagnostic health centre has been made out of a former Beales. Its owner, Legal & General, hopes this will bring people to the surrounding Dolphin Shopping Centre and neighbouring Kingland Crescent, formerly struggling retail areas



The Bobby’s development in Bournemouth

that it is turning around. Here, with the help of tenancies that are rent- and rates-free for two years, they have attracted young, independent businesses – shops selling plants, coffee, records, jewellery, fashion, toys, and a graphic designer’s studio. In Sheffield there’s a plan to resuscitate what was once Cole Brothers, the institution of which Richard Hawley sang (later a John Lewis, it closed in 2021). Branded Cole Store, the developer is Urban Splash, renovator of the city’s brutalist Park Hill housing estate. The hope is to activate the ground floor with a mix of lively independent retailers, eateries and bars, with flexible workspace above, a “pocket park” on the roof with games and sports events, maybe a club in the basement, perhaps some flats

somewhere. Public routes are to run through at ground level, the pavements outside to be populated by café tables.

The Apartment Store in Taunton, the prize-winning speculative proposal by the young, local architects who form Studio Saar, is more idealistic than the Bobby’s and Cole Store projects. Here they dream of a new community of affordable housing for young people, owned in common, with shared social, learning and working spaces and collective rooftop food growing. It is meant to be a prototype, “a defibrillator to the hearts of our towns”, according to Jonny Buckland of Studio Saar. “Apartment Store would not only provide new, sustainable homes”, said the chair of the Davidson Prize jury, but “would turn high streets back into thriving hubs for the community”. The jury, he added, “could all see themselves living there”.

“The elaborate interiors of Jenners in Edinburgh are being respectfully restored, with windows unblocked and ornaments uncovered”

Where, in the past, such sunny, hopeful places might have been imagined in idyllic rural settings, the idea here is to bring it to life within the cold, impervious

shell of a long, curving, slightly deco building that once housed yet another Debenhams. The plans are some steps from becoming reality, given that Buckland and his collaborators haven’t yet discussed them with the owners of the old Debenhams, which are the BP pension fund and its development partners, Ropemaker Properties. But, as the latter have tried and failed with a humdrum planning application to replace the old building with 92 flats, they might perhaps like to consider a more imaginative alternative.

The Apartment Store idea is not, say its backers, fantastical. The team behind it includes the “socially responsible” property firm Stories. Multi-use, adaptive, open-ended, community-friendly projects like those in Bournemouth and Poole are not charitable undertakings – Verve is a London-based company that seeks “to successfully reposition property into higher value markets” – but it sees that it has to be clever to solve a problem like a department store. It does, however, need some patience as well as imagination, and funding that doesn’t look for instant returns.

There is, to be sure, much to be done – as of last November, 73% of Debenhams’ former stores were still empty. You might also wonder whether there are enough florists and coffee shops and bright-eyed startups to reanimate every ex-retail hulk in the country, especially in less well-off places. Housing, as proposed in the Taunton plan, is – given that we are in the grip of a well-known housing crisis – an appealing if hard-to-achieve alternative. But these old buildings are too big, significant and in some cases too beautiful simply to be binned, with all the waste of resources that entails. There is the ingenuity and affection out there to get new life to grow from the ruins.

A longer version of this article appeared in The Observer
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Often tired and don't know why?

This game-changing supplement could help restore energy levels.

Feeling tired and don't know why? You're not alone. According to a recent study, less than half of us consume our recommended daily amount of magnesium, a mineral that helps turn the food we eat into energy.

Best known for helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue, magnesium is also vital for our health.

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'Within two weeks I was a different woman, with energy to spare'

Magnesium is present in foods such as black beans, bananas and pumpkin seeds, but to get the benefits we need to absorb it into our bodies.

One way to ensure we consume a consistent level of magnesium is by taking a daily supplement – but not

all supplements are equal.

Your body's ability to absorb the magnesium depends on the way that the supplement is made.

'Most supplements use magnesium oxide – it is the most common form, as it has a high concentration of magnesium but it's not easily released into the body,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, head of product development at FutureYou Cambridge.

'Taking more magnesium to try and make up for the problem isn't the best approach, as too much can cause an upset stomach so we created Magnesium+ using magnesium lactate which is twice as absorbable as a standard magnesium oxide supplement. This means you need much less per capsule to deliver the same amount.'

Nicole, 57, says: 'I genuinely started to feel different within a couple

of weeks. I started to feel much more perky – that's the best word to describe it... I've taken them religiously ever since.'

Another happy customer, Anne, 74 says: 'I had no energy at all. I put it down to my age, but it was really impacting on my life. Within two weeks of trying it I was a different woman, with energy to spare.'

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THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1431

Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 23 September. Send it to The Week Crossword 1431, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**



This week's winner will receive Week-branded items including a notebook, coffee mug and tote bag, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

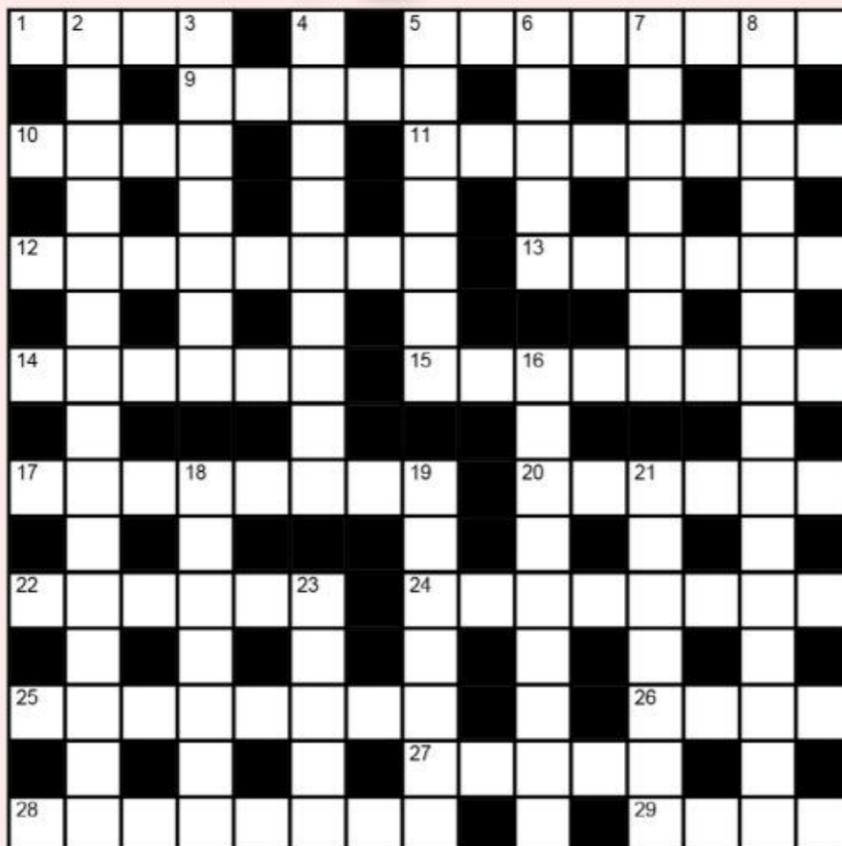
ACROSS

- 1 Express poll, underlying support not changed (2,2)
- 5 China is forced to spend millions for defence (8)
- 9 Take courses after university in Italian city (5)
- 10 Tunes, sounding as if they may succeed (4)
- 11 One close outside back of room for changing (8)
- 12 Alert put out in court battle (8)
- 13 Youngster's cutting tool? (6)
- 14 Fly first-class out of Belgium twice over (6)
- 15 Singer Mat lisps badly (8)
- 17 Rock artist arranged musical suites (8)
- 20 Only right to include a short verse for you (6)
- 22 We hear Harry, say goes to press (6)
- 24 Ministers set about advanced energy suppliers (8)
- 25 Clear party aims, nothing left out (8)
- 26 Lift for the pub in Yorkshire? (1-3)
- 27 Team with energy from a Cheshire town (5)
- 28 Carpet salesman stuck with insect (8)

29 Trainer perhaps excelled? Not new (4)

DOWN

- 2 Scrap Israel as it involves flight that's not direct (6,9)
- 3 Caught in dodgy set-ups? Could be me (7)
- 4 Most cordial sort is let off (9)
- 5 Go around a bit in dense fog (3,4)
- 6 Directions announced for the city (5)
- 7 Fan admires baseball pitch (7)
- 8 A long time back for Jenny? (7,5,3)
- 16 A book on English composer? One's on the wagon (9)
- 18 Moroccan port giving off a comparatively strong smell (7)
- 19 Expand sentence (7)
- 21 Literary device of T.S. Eliot in new edition (7)
- 23 Miller said to be in Tuscan city (5)



Name _____
 Address _____
 _____ Tel no _____
 Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: One notices one's behind in these! (7)
The Daily Telegraph

Solution to Crossword 1429

ACROSS: 1 Half 5 Boarding 9 Lhasa 10 I see 11 Thorough 12 Proposal 13 Groats 14 Clothe 15 Reactive 17 Mandated 20 Shadow 22 Fright 24 Accurate 25 Pleasure 26 Eton 27 Rites 28 Assembly 29 Sikh

DOWN: 2 Australian rules 3 Fleapit 4 Mare's nest 5 Battler 6 Among 7 Drop out 8 Negative outlook 16 Associate 18 Degrade 19 Drapery 21 Airless 23 Thumb

Clue of the week: Trump's core support returning chaos to America (5, first letter S last letter U) **Solution:** SNAFU (fan in US reversed)

The winner of 1429 is Jill Barker from Guildford

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Sudoku 973 (difficult)

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 972

8	7	4	9	5	6	2	1	3
2	9	3	4	1	7	6	8	5
6	5	1	2	3	8	4	7	9
1	4	5	7	8	3	9	2	6
3	2	6	1	4	9	8	5	7
7	8	9	5	6	2	3	4	1
4	3	7	8	9	1	5	6	2
9	1	8	6	2	5	7	3	4
5	6	2	3	7	4	1	9	8



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Charity of the week



The Waterlife Recovery Trust is dedicated to the recovery of native waterside wildlife by removing their nemesis – the American mink. Introduced for fur production in the 1920s, mink escaped from farms, or were deliberately released, and quickly munched their way through vulnerable creatures like water voles, kingfishers and sand martins. WRT has pioneered a science-based, humane strategy of removing mink, empowering an army of volunteer citizen conservationists to free their local patch of this invasive predator. Some 10% of England has already been liberated, a further 15% is under way. Our ambition is a mink-free GB. **Please visit waterliferecoverytrust.org.uk to find out more.**

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