

SURVIVING AL FAYED

Six women abused by the Harrods boss speak out







THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER

This is our Oyster case, the world's first waterproof wristwatch case, conceived by Rolex in 1926 and patented. A one-of-a-kind feature, which holds within it an intricate world of cogs and minutely crafted parts. Made of some of the most refined alloys, the Oyster case is incomparably resistant to all sorts of external aggressions. Yet no object so hermetic, so immovable, has ever opened the door to so many

possibilities. With its original patented design consisting of a bezel, a case back and a winding crown screwed down against the middle case, it profoundly changed the course of watchmaking history and set new standards of waterproofness for all wristwatches. To this day, the Oyster case continues to protect our watches and our movements within them. It stands as undeniable proof of our constant quest for reliability.

#Perpetual

BUCHERER

1888

ROLEX BOUTIQUE, ONE HYDE PARK, KNIGHTSBRIDGE
ROLEX BOUTIQUE, WONDER ROOM, SELFRIDGES LONDON
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, THE PIAZZA COVENT GARDEN
THE VILLAGE, WESTFIELD WHITE CITY LONDON
BUCHERER.COM


ROLEX

OAKWRIGHTS[®]

Celebrating 25 Years

Where tradition meets innovation in the art of timber framing.

From oak frame homes and garages to extensions and pool houses, our dedicated team will guide you every step, ensuring your oak frame vision reflects quality, sustainability, and unparalleled beauty.

01432 353 353 | enquiries@oakwrights.co.uk | oakwrights.co.uk



Scan to discover more about Nicola and Simon's luxury garage and stylish room above accommodation.



THE SUNDAY TIMES *magazine*



THIS WEEK IN 1967

Winston Churchill — grandson of the former prime minister Sir Winston Churchill — and his wife, Minnie, toast supporters of his campaign to be elected MP for Manchester Gorton. The 27-year-old Conservative Party candidate went on to lose the by-election on November 2, 1967, to Labour's Kenneth Marks by 577 votes. Churchill eventually found political success in 1970 as the MP for Stretford, near Manchester.

27.10.2024

7 Matt Rudd

I'm not saying my dog's a diva but she has her own duvet

8 Relative Values

The musicians Gary Numan and his daughter Raven on pop stardom and mental health

12 COVER: Time's up
Six of Mohamed Al Fayed's victims speak out. Interviews by Rosamund Urwin

22 Success by numbers

The mathematician and TV star Hannah Fry talks to *Hannah Swerling* about sexism, divorce and surviving cancer

28 Le retour

Could the former French president François Hollande save his country from Marine Le Pen? Interview by *Matthew Campbell*

34 Undead end

The macabre secrets of a Polish vampire cemetery. By *David James Smith*

41 Table Talk

Oven-ready suppers by *Mark Diacono*. Plus *Natalie Whittle's* ode to crisps, *Charlotte Ivers* is on trend in Hackney and *Will Lyons* recommends cheap fizz to impress your guests

48 Health and fitness

Are plant-based milks really better for you — and for the planet? *Lucy Denyer* reports.



Plus *Rosamund Dean* on how to boost your flexibility if you don't practise yoga

50 Jeremy Clarkson

The Toyota GR Supra — a car that's seemingly oblivious to the plight of the polar bear

62 A Life in the Day

The comedian *Rose Matafeo* on Tinder and oversharing

© Times Media Ltd, 2024. Published and licensed by Times Media Ltd, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF (020 7782 5000). Printed at Walsstead Bicester Limited, Oxfordshire. Not to be sold separately



THE
BUSINESS
CLASS
SALE

ENDS 5 NOVEMBER

DISCOVER THE WORLD.
SALE NOW ON.



BRITISH AIRWAYS
A BRITISH ORIGINAL



T&Cs apply. See ba.com/sale

MATT RUDD

Who let the dog into our bed (and gave her her own duvet)?

That argument made by the assisted dying campaigners — that we treat our pets better than we treat ourselves — has got me thinking. Maybe it's time to put the dog down. There's nothing wrong with our loyal border collie, so it would be straight-up murder rather than euthanasia. But, and I say this even though she's currently gazing lovingly into my eyes, Floss is becoming impossible to live with.

The latest straw came one rainy day in September. Floss decided she would no longer go to the toilet outside. It was bad enough having to take her humans for walkies three times a day but having to squat in wet grass? No thank you. Since then we have been greeted on most mornings by a treat. Or several treats. Her preference is for the carpeted areas of the house. She's fussy like that.

At first we blamed ourselves. Maybe her last walk of the day was too early and maybe the first walk was too late? And maybe they were both too short. Floss is 12 — mid-seventies in dog years — perhaps it's just taking her longer to get the old peristalsis going? So come rain or shine, but mostly rain, I've been walking her for miles after midnight and Harriet has been walking her for more miles before 7am. And it hasn't helped. We walk and walk and walk and then Floss comes home for a dump.

Floss was a rescue. She spent the first two years of her life on a long chain in an elderly farmer's yard. When the farmer hung up his crook she came to us. It was the first time she'd slept indoors. She was afraid of everything and everyone, and it took years and years to convince her that she was part of the family. Clearly we went too far.

The first mistake was to teach her to fetch. It took about half an hour, but once she'd cracked it that was it. Since then, every time anyone goes outside, she follows, finds a ball or a stick and then drops it theatrically at our feet. If we ignore her she does it again and again until we relent. Everyone — visiting friends, the postman, random delivery drivers, a Liberal Democrat hoping for our vote — must throw the ball for Floss.



One summer, after a concerted campaign on Floss's part, we agreed she could be a ball girl during a tennis match at the local park. It ruined the balls but she was brilliant — lightning quick from the net back to the server. Only when we stopped for a drink and she collapsed did we realise she had run all the skin off the pads of her feet. Then, desperate not to let us down, she'd kept running. It took the week we were supposed to be on holiday to nurse her back on her paws. Probably shouldn't have bothered.

Because, after five years of patience and love, Floss got over most of her anxieties. She began to relax in our company. She stopped being terrified of the sofa, the stairs and the car, and that's where the problems began.

"Let her stay on the sofa, Dad," said Child C in 2019. "She's lonely." So now she's always on the sofa.

"She doesn't like going in the boot, Dad," said Child B in 2021. So now she rides up front.

"I let her in the bedroom because of the fireworks," said Harriet last October. So now she sleeps on the bed. She has her own duvet. And pillow.

I used to judge people who treated their pets like children. Now I am one of those people. The only reasons I don't carry her around in a handbag are logistical rather than psychological — I don't have a handbag and she wouldn't fit anyway — but I do make her a hot-water bottle when it's cold and I do spend quite a lot of time making her dinner. The other day it included a starter.

Harriet is worse. She's chief mollycoddler. Perhaps it's because the nest is beginning to empty. Or because Floss is a more enthusiastic hugger (but sloppier kisser) than I am. Whatever it is, it has got to the stage where she spent four quid on organic dog ice cream the last time we went to the pub. Euthanasia will be a tough sell.

Except this morning Harriet was first down the stairs, barefoot and still drowsy enough to forget momentarily the risk of a faecal minefield. I heard a loud shriek and some extensive swearing, and then I pretended to go back to sleep.

"Isn't it terrible how we treat our pets better than we treat ourselves?" I'll say this evening, and we'll take it from there ■

A dog has been hailed a "true hero" by police in the US for saving her owner's life. After Keith Johnson, 84, fell outside his cabin in Washington state,

his 13-year-old mixed-breed rescue dog, Gita, sat in the road to flag down help. A deputy sheriff stopped and Gita led him to Johnson,

who had injured his hip and couldn't get up or reach his medication. This may have had "serious consequences" if Gita hadn't acted, authorities said.

RELATIVE VALUES

Gary and Raven Numan

The musician on dark songs and dreading the day his daughter, 21, leaves home

Gary

I was 45 when I first became a father. I thought I was ready, that I had everything worked out. I couldn't have been more wrong. It's the most difficult thing I've ever done. Parenthood is a moving-goalposts situation to the extreme, and each of my three daughters has moved the goalposts! All that confidence I had, the arrogance about how easy I thought it was going to be, when instead it was shockingly difficult and traumatic. I spoke to my dad the other day — he's 88 this year — and asked at what point he stopped worrying about me. "I still do," he said.

When Raven came along in 2003, life changed overnight. We were living in East Sussex, and until then everything had been about me: what I wanted to do, what was good for me and all the exciting things I enjoy getting involved in, like flying aeroplanes, taking risks and living to the full. But my wife, Gemma, and I then had to focus on making everything better for our family.

Have I been a good dad? I hope so. Everyone still lives at home — Raven, 21, Persia, 19, and Echo, 17 — which is nice, I want to hang on to them. They're important to me; I want to do right by them. Whenever I've said the wrong thing in anger, it bothers me for a long time. I take my mistakes really hard. Fortunately Raven hasn't suggested I've said anything of lasting damage.

Raven was different from very early on, and always reacted differently from how we expected. She never liked change, for example. Any last-minute switch in plans really bothered her. To be honest, we thought she was autistic. I have Asperger's, by the way. We had her tested for it — we had all our daughters tested — but she doesn't have it. As far as I'm concerned, though, she leans that way in some areas. Holidays were problematic as she never wanted to go. Then when we did go and she really liked it, she never wanted to go anywhere else. She has got borderline personality disorder, and she's done an amazing job of not letting that take over but I'll let her tell you about that.

I often wonder why she chose to follow in my footsteps with a career in music. I assume it's about being on stage, people screaming at you. And the money can be good if you do well at it. She has always been musical and followed her own path. She's a brilliant songwriter, and many of her songs are very personal. I would never tell her what's appropriate to write about. It's her way of working through her worries and fears. She's like me in that way: none of our songs are happy songs.

A lot of things in this industry can be really shitty and horrible, a lot of backstabbing and people letting you down. And even though music critics don't seem to be as evil as they were in my day — and they could be very evil — nowadays you have social media, which can be

a nightmare. I always used my Asperger's as protection really, like a snowplough to push everything out of the way, and I think Raven behaves similarly.

She is very focused. If there is a plan B, I don't know about it. For the time being Gemma and I are looking after her in a management role, but there's only so much we can do. I'm still trying to work out how my own career works. I am not a font of wisdom for her, definitely not. I'm sure that new people will come into her life — boyfriends, husbands, managers — who may have a stronger influence, and I'll only be OK with that depending on what they say to her. We are such a close family and I don't want that to change.

To be honest, I don't think it will. Even if a smarmy boyfriend does come along with his own ideas, Raven is too strong a character to be swayed.

Raven

One of my earliest, most vivid memories is from when I was about three years old, and I saw snow for the first time. We were somewhere in Sussex and Dad put me in a sled and pushed us both down the hill really fast, zooming up in the air and back down again, crashing into my younger sister. It was so much fun. Dad has always been adventurous. I wanted to be a

I still listen to Dad's music all the time. He's always in the Top 5 of my Spotify Wrapped every year



Main: Gary, 66, and Raven, 21, at the family home in Los Angeles. Right: 13-year-old Raven with her dad on Father's Day, 2017



pilot, like him. If you mentioned planes, he'd talk about nothing else for hours. He took me to hot-air balloon shows and car shows. I've always looked up to him.

I remember being six and a teacher telling me that my dad was famous, a singer. I was too young to understand. It was only when I was about eight and went to one of his shows that I began to realise. He brought me up on stage and I was, like, whoa, what's going on? It was insane! They were all chanting "Nuuuman!" Dad has a lot of diehard fans.

We left Sussex for California when I was ten and I didn't like that at first. Too many mountains. Too hot. Too many palm trees! Why is everyone being so nice? I'd find everything to complain about. But then I went to school, made friends, and now I love it here.

Dad and Mum were away on tour a lot while we were growing up. They were very much a unit. We had nannies looking after us, or my grandmother. My grandma, who I really love, would tell me they were just going to the shops, but they would be away for two months. That affected me quite negatively and was the start of my borderline personality disorder, I think. It wasn't diagnosed until I was 18, so before then I just had no idea what was going on. I was a mess — a lot of mood swings. I can cope with it all much better these

STRANGE HABITS

Gary on Raven
When she went to bed as a child, she would lie as close to the edge as possible. The rest of the bed was immaculate and undisturbed

Raven on Gary
When he's mad he does this llama face, grinding his lower jaw. I can't take him seriously and have to look away

days — and medication helps — but it made childhood pretty difficult. I just wanted my parents to be around all the time; I didn't want to take my eyes off them. I didn't like feeling abandoned. I ended up pouring a lot of those frustrations into my songwriting, and it helped.

It was Katy Perry who made me want to become a pop star. All those colours — I loved it. It wasn't until I was 15 that I started to look towards my dad's music. My favourite band is Nine Inch Nails; I love Trent Reznor. Dad loves him too. We have quite similar tastes.

We've always been a close family. That's why I haven't moved out yet — although I will soon. Don't tell my dad! I'm best friends with my two younger sisters, I love them so much. My parents are also my best friends.

Dad has set the bar really high with music, but he's so humble. I have to remind him of everything he has done, and the fact that he's still going strong. Unless you are like Madonna or Beyoncé, you just don't see that. I still listen to his music all the time, and he's always in my Top 5 Spotify Wrapped every year. Is he pleased by that? Yes, I guess — but he gets mad because he's never No 1! He's more like No 2, maybe No 3... ■

Interviews by Nick Duerden.

Raven Newman's latest single, *In Your Head*, is out now on BMG

car de triomphe



RENAULT RAFALE
E-TECH 4X4 300 HP
PLUG-IN HYBRID

also available as E-Tech full hybrid





“They said they knew
where my parents lived.
This is why we kept silent.
You fear your loved ones
may end up under a bus”

Six women reveal to *Rosamund
Urwin* how they were harassed,
abused, assaulted and even
raped by Mohamed Al Fayed,
the predator at Harrods

IT'S

like we have been in a plane crash 25 years apart but all somehow together,” says Lindsay Mason of the women who have united to tell their experiences of Mohamed Al Fayed. “There’s an incredible camaraderie.”

Al Fayed, who owned the London department store Harrods between 1985 and 2010, died last year aged 94. Following a BBC documentary, *Al Fayed: Predator at Harrods*, scores of women have come forward with allegations including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. Many of the women allege that they were forced to undergo highly invasive medical checks before working for Al Fayed, who then humiliated and abused them, using security cameras to keep tabs on them and threatening them if they tried to speak out.

A vast operation around Al Fayed — from security staff and lawyers to Harrods colleagues — enabled his predatory behaviour: some by turning a blind eye but others by delivering victims to him or preventing their voices from being heard.

The BBC documentary was not the first time that allegations had surfaced. In 1995 a number of women spoke to *Vanity Fair* alleging sexual misconduct; Al Fayed sued the magazine but dropped his libel claim after the deaths of his eldest son, Dodi, and Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. Both a 1998 biography of Al Fayed by Tom Bower and a 2017 *Dispatches* documentary by Channel 4 also featured allegations of sexual assault.

The police have since revealed that they received allegations relating to 21 women about Al Fayed between 2005 and 2023; a further 40 alleged victims have now contacted the Met. But his alleged behaviour wasn’t a secret: it was front-page news in 2008, when he was questioned under caution after a 15-year-old girl said he had sexually assaulted her in the Harrods boardroom (the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the case, concluding there was no realistic prospect of a conviction).

Yet Al Fayed was still indulged as an eccentric billionaire: he appeared on the TV shows *TFI Friday* in 1999 and *Da Ali G Show* in 2000. The Netflix series *The Crown* portrayed him as avuncular in 2022, even naming an episode in its fifth series *Mou Mou* — his nickname. At Harrods, which he sold to Qatar Holding for a reported £1.5 billion in 2010, his face still appears on a pharaoh statue in the Egyptian corridor.

The current owners say that they are “utterly appalled” by the allegations and



AL FAYED TOLD HER THAT THE DOCTOR WAS MAKING SURE THAT SHE WAS “CLEAN”. HE SAID, “I NEED TO KNOW THAT YOU’RE A VIRGIN”

Jen

apologised that his victims were failed. Harrods has opened a compensation scheme and says: “Since 2023 Harrods settled a number of claims with women who alleged historic sexual misconduct by Fayed. Since the airing of the documentary, so far there are over 250 individuals who are now in the Harrods process to settle claims directly with the business.”

Many of the women have found support in each other after speaking out. “Having these ladies has allowed me to open the box I had locked away for so long,” says Gemma, who worked at Harrods from 2007 to 2009. “Now I don’t feel isolated and alone. I used to think, I’m going to take this to my grave. I’d sit at a dinner table and every time someone mentioned Harrods it would be, ‘Oh, you worked at Harrods. Tell us a story,’ and you sit there and go, ‘Oh, there was this one time I did such and such, and you have to find this stupid story to cover that you were raped. How long can you keep doing that before you combust?’”

Here six women who worked for Al Fayed across a 23-year period reveal their experiences of the beast of Brompton Road. They are all being represented by the legal team at Justice for Harrods Survivors, which is acting for 128 women, with a further 41 in the process of being signed, and another 100 who have made inquiries.

Jen, 54

For 35 years Jen kept silent about what Mohamed Al Fayed had done to her. She didn’t tell her parents, her brother or even her husband that, during the four and a half

years she worked for him at Harrods from 1986 to 1991, he had subjected her to serious sexual assaults and tried to rape her.

Jen joined Harrods as a management trainee a month after her 16th birthday. She met Al Fayed on one of his regular wanders around the office, was interviewed by him that same day and was almost immediately transferred to work for him. “I thought it was because I was a bright young thing,” Jen says. “I now realise it was because I was young, virginal-looking, blonde, naive and malleable.”

Before she had the mandatory medical check-up, Al Fayed told her that the doctor was making sure that she was “clean”. When she asked what he meant, he replied, “I need to know that you’re a virgin.”

It was a “farcical” office environment, “like a soap opera”. Al Fayed kept a large black dildo on his desk and would tease Jen with it. “It was very common to see girls arrive and disappear [from the company], and you didn’t ask where they went,” she says. “We had our phones tapped and surveillance cameras watching our every move.”

Jen would often work late and would have to travel to her home in Surrey by coach, so Al Fayed offered her a flat to stay in. “He suggested it would be safer — except of course it wasn’t.”

After she left Harrods Jen spoke to *Vanity Fair* anonymously. Before the article was published she was contacted by Al Fayed’s head of security, John Macnamara, a former Scotland Yard detective chief superintendent, who was tasked with shutting down allegations about his boss. “I have no idea how they knew it was me,”

she says. “He reminded me that they knew where I lived and where my parents lived, and wouldn’t it be a shame if something happened to them or me? This is why we kept silent so long. You fear your loved ones may end up under a bus.” Macnamara died in 2019.

She wants the current owners to exorcise Al Fayed from the store: “They talk about their disgust for what happened, yet the Egyptian hall is still there, Mohamed’s face is there.” After his death there were those who still eulogised Al Fayed. “That’s why we are doing what we are doing,” Jen says. “We can’t have our day in court with him. That opportunity is gone for ever. But we can make sure that everyone in the world knows who he was. That’s not said out of bitterness; it’s because people need to know the truth.”

Lindsay Mason, 55

For years, whenever Lindsay Mason had a massage, the masseuse would tell her: “You have so much stress in your shoulders.” She feels she has spent more than three decades carrying the trauma of working for Al Fayed in her skeleton, especially the agony of a nightmare night in Paris where she alleges that he attempted to rape her

before, she believes, she was drugged, “trafficked” and raped.

Lindsay, who was 20 in 1989 when she went to work as a personal assistant to Al Fayed, recalls a perfunctory interview process: she met the head PA, then Al Fayed came in and looked her “up and down once”. She too was made to endure a medical examination, this time by a male doctor from a private clinic: “I have a massive trauma about smear tests and have stopped having them, because a man said he was feeling for my ovaries. It was very painful.”

Once she started the job, Lindsay was underworked. “I didn’t have anything to do,” she says. “We were definitely hired to be ornaments to do bad things to. People saw us paraded around like china dolls... and everyone would have known what our purpose was, but no one spoke up. So the culpability goes all around, but especially within the evil serpent that was the store, which killed a certain part of all of us.”

Five months into the job Al Fayed took her to Paris on a private jet. She thought it was a business trip but she soon realised that she “was being trafficked”. During dinner at the Ritz, which Al Fayed owned, Lindsay says she was tapped on the shoulder by a security guard and taken to

Dodi’s flat, where the doors were locked behind her (Dodi was not present). The security guard told her, ““Oh, it’s just to keep you safe,”” she recalls. “But it was to make sure you couldn’t escape.”

She alleges that Al Fayed sexually assaulted her at the flat, throwing himself on top of her, until she kicked him off. She then ran down the hallway and barricaded herself in her room.

“I came out of my room in Dodi’s flat, had a glass of orange juice or something,” she says. She does not remember being brought out of the room and believes she was drugged. “Suddenly this other colleague was shutting a door [in front of me] and saying, ‘Sorry.’ I was thinking, what are you [the colleague] doing in Paris? But I wasn’t in Paris, I was back in the offices in the store [in London] and so I had not been conscious presumably for that time. That person was under Al Fayed’s instructions to lock me in. Only after I escaped did I discover I had sustained bad injuries.”

About a week later she says she received a letter telling her that her employment had been terminated because she did not use the correct staff entrance.

She thinks the women have been denied justice by his death from old age. “I feel it was very much too late because he was swanning around with the royal family and I know the man is a rapist,” she says. “I wish he could have suffered a modicum of the pain that he put us through.”

To stop other people suffering, Lindsay wants companies to pay to affiliate with an independent foundation for abused staff, “a Childline but for the working environment”, and to ensure they have checks and stops to prevent abuse. “There were no checks [at Harrods], and the beast was so big that there was no one we could go to.” Lindsay is now urging other women to come forward. “Join our collective. I hope we have got closure — but, failing that, we’ve got a whole load of brilliant friends.”

Cheska Hill-Wood, 50

When Cheska began working as a junior PA for Al Fayed in 1994, she was made to undergo a health check, including STD tests, which she says were performed by Dr Ann Coxon, now 83 and still practising on Harley Street. “I was told that it was because his son Dodi had a weak immune system,” Cheska says. “The doctor told me how wonderful Mr Al Fayed was: didn’t he look after his employees so well?” ➤

“WE WERE DEFINITELY HIRED TO BE ORNAMENTS TO DO BAD THINGS TO.” SHE BELIEVES SHE WAS DRUGGED, TRAFFICKED AND RAPED

Lindsay Mason



CRACKING WITH A CUPPA BUT CRAFTED FOR COMPANY



MADE
FOR A
HIGHER
BISCUIT
PURPOSE

Cheska, who was 19 and wanted to be an actress, worked in Al Fayed's office at 60 Park Lane. At the end of her first week he told her that Dodi was producing the sequel to *Hook*, a film about Peter Pan that he had worked on as a producer in 1991. Al Fayed handed her the script, claiming that she could audition straight to camera and that he would send it to his son. He asked her to change into a pink floral swimming costume that he had brought. She felt uncomfortable but it was late at night and she was on her own, so she complied to try to avoid antagonising him.

The script featured the line "Take me, take me, please", she recalls. "And he then came round from behind the camera and grabbed me and kissed me on the mouth, and I pushed him away, and said, 'What are you doing?'" Al Fayed then told her, "If you won't sleep with me I am not helping with your acting career."

Cheska grabbed her clothes, dressed and fled. She never returned to the office and no one called to check on her. When a future employer asked Harrods for a reference some time later, the store denied any knowledge of her.

In the years afterwards Cheska repeatedly tried to warn the world about

Al Fayed. She spoke to *Vanity Fair* in the late 1990s and to Channel 4 in 2010 for a *Dispatches* documentary that never aired. Seven years later, saying she had realised "the shame wasn't mine — it was his", she waived her right to anonymity for another *Dispatches* to ensure it could be broadcast. The legal letter this time was much less threatening than past ones. "It was, 'Oh, he has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, think about his grandchildren — they're at school,'" she remembers. "And I just thought, I wasn't long out of school when he did what he did to me."

However, the programme "slightly sank without trace". She adds: "I went into it with my eyes wide open, acutely aware that the kickback could have been enormous, and there were social media trolls, but there wasn't any follow-up. Although it turned out that women came forward to the police, which was fantastic. But I wasn't told anything, so I just felt very isolated on the top of an obvious platform. It was a frightening silence."

She was not threatened by anyone in Al Fayed's camp after broadcast, but says the programme didn't really dent his image: "People still thought of him as this cuddly clown."

Cheska, who now works for an art dealer, would like his legions of enablers to be exposed. "He got away with as much as he did because a lot of people engineered these situations on his behalf," she says. "He stood a few paces back and had everyone else doing his dirty work."

Coxon has denied carrying out sexual health tests on staff members. When approached by *The Sunday Times* she declined to comment.

Nicole, 51

Nicole was still in the office at 10pm one night in late 2005 when she received a phone call from a police station. "The sergeant said we need to pass on a message to Mr Al Fayed that someone has come into the station with Max Clifford [the celebrity publicist who died in 2017] to make an allegation of sexual assault," she recalls. "Clifford was saying it would run in the *News of the World* that Sunday. I told Mohamed, then he told the lawyers and they were straight on it. I had to draft a letter from Al Fayed saying to Clifford, if you run this story I'll absolutely destroy you, you'll never work again. And it shut the story down."

Nicole was in her early thirties and had been brought in through an external recruiter to work as a senior executive assistant to Al Fayed that year. The office was unlike anywhere she had worked before: the air was thick with anxiety. "It was just so stressful being there," she recalls. "And you're on a hamster wheel, so you're exhausted — I'd get home at 11pm."

She too was made to undergo an internal examination when she was hired, and an HIV test. "When I questioned it I was told this shtick of 'You're so lucky — if you went to Bupa it would cost you thousands,'" she says. "I was told it was because Al Fayed's son Karim had had meningitis as a child and been left profoundly deaf, so Mohamed was a total germ freak."

In her two years working for Al Fayed Nicole says the sexual harassment was constant. At the end of an evening he would ask if she wanted to "come and see the pyramids". When she declined, he would ask, "What's wrong with you? Are you a lesbian?" He would also try to humiliate her. When Michael Jackson visited Harrods, Al Fayed introduced the pair by saying, "Nicole's here to look after you. She's a lesbian." She cringes at the memory. "I said, 'Well, not that it matters, but I'm not,' and here I am, standing in front of Michael ▶

**"HE KISSED ME
AND I PUSHED HIM
AWAY. HE SAID,
'IF YOU WON'T
SLEEP WITH ME,
I'M NOT HELPING
WITH YOUR
ACTING CAREER'"**

Cheska Hill-Wood





THE DIFFERENCE IS
NEVILLE JOHNSON

REQUEST A BROCHURE NEVILLEJOHNSON.CO.UK 0161 873 8333

STUDIES

BEDROOMS

LIVING SPACES

LIBRARIES

Jackson, stuttering that I'm not a lesbian." There was no point in ever reporting his behaviour, she adds: "He'd have heard about it in five seconds flat."

Nicole is speaking out now to ensure that Al Fayed's abusive behaviour is not forgotten. "I think he still has a sort of legacy, especially after *The Crown* portrayed him as this lovely, misunderstood, avuncular guy who did so many wonderful things," she says. "I'm very happy to be tearing that down."

Katherine, 51

One Saturday morning Katherine — who worked for Al Fayed for three months in 2005 — was the only PA in the office and he decided to test her. He made her hold out her hands, filled them with diamonds of all sizes and told her to take them to the gem department to be valued. There was no bag, no security escort, so she knew he was playing a game with her. "I thought, well, I'll show you then," she recalls. "So on a busy Saturday morning, with loads of shoppers around, I took a fortune of diamonds through the store."

She was 32 when she started working for Al Fayed, having replied to an advert in *The Times* for a "senior PA to a high-net-worth individual". She started at the same time as Nicole, but the pair worked different shifts. Her interviews included a medical check by a Harrods doctor, Wendy Snell, including an internal examination; Katherine has kept the report Snell wrote, which includes the line: "The gynaecological swabs, including for chlamydia, also showed no signs of infection, a very reassuring finding." Snell died in 2022, aged 64.

Katherine describes Al Fayed as "obsessed with sex". On her first day he took her into a walk-in cupboard, which housed a bizarre collection of items. He showed her a decanter shaped like male genitalia, which had a stopper that spurted. He asked her if she wanted "Egyptian sperm", and said he'd give her "Egyptian babies". She recalls: "This was disgusting, and he was between me and the door and I felt increasingly uncomfortable. But I thought maybe this is just his sense of humour."

That afternoon he called her into his office, telling her that her clothes were distracting. She was wearing a suit from Jigsaw. He then leant over, put his fingers in her cleavage and ripped the buttons on her shirt. Then Al Fayed hugged her, stuffed



"THE CROWN PORTRAYED HIM AS THIS LOVELY, MISUNDERSTOOD, AVUNCULAR GUY. I'M VERY HAPPY TO BE TEARING THAT LEGACY DOWN"

Nicole

banknotes into her hands and told her to buy a new suit. She left Harrods that day in tears. He would later complain about her curly hair and sent her for an unnecessary lip wax: "It was to shatter my self-confidence."

"I thought I didn't have the right look," she says. "I thought I'd done something wrong that made him treat me the way that he did, and I thought Nicole was sailing through, all glossy hair, being an amazing PA who wasn't having any of this attention."

On a trip to Paris Katherine stayed at Villa Windsor — the former home of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, which Al Fayed leased and renovated — and suddenly realised that she and another PA were alone with Al Fayed, his security team and the housekeepers having left. "I was horrified," she says. "We were on our own with a dirty old man and a high gate around us." Her door had no lock, so she barricaded it with a chair and her suitcase. In the morning Al Fayed told her, "Don't ever f***ing block a door in my house again."

Back in London he again called her into his office, where she says he ran his hands over her and tried to force his tongue into her mouth. She resisted, stressing that she was "a PA only", and he eventually ordered her to leave. Her desk was removed from the office and she was sent to walk the dogs and then shred paper. A few days later the HR department called her in, saying that Al Fayed was happy with her work but felt they were not "bonding on a personal level". They offered Katherine a more junior role and she quit. She recalls walking to Hyde Park and lying on the grass, feeling both embarrassment and "immense" relief.

Gemma, 42

Gemma's experiences at Harrods came back to haunt her recently at a film night she had organised for her family. "I'd brought out the fairy lights, made popcorn and put on *Peter Rabbit*, and there's this long scene in Harrods, as Mr McGregor's nephew works there, and it's made to look like this beautiful, magical place. And I had tears streaming down my face. I thought, even though I have tried my hardest to put this behind me, it's never going away."

Gemma worked as a PA to Al Fayed from 2007 to 2009. Her life before Harrods had been "sheltered": she grew up in a small town and trained as a preschool teacher. Aged 25 she was escorted by her mother to the interview for what would be her first job in London. "I was told I got [the job] on the train home and we both cried because we thought it was my big break," she recalls. "I worked in Harrods for three months and then I was transferred to work with the monster and that whole dream was shattered."

When she started working for Al Fayed, she was sent for a health check with Snell, who gave her a smear test and "checked" her ovaries. Gemma's results were sent to Al Fayed before she was even back at her desk. Another time she had a severe chest infection and went to Snell asking for permission to go home; Snell advised her to put on some lipstick because she looked pale. Al Fayed then pulled out a packet of Strepsils and told a horrified Gemma: "Stick one of them in your pussy."

She eventually bought a Dictaphone to record his behaviour. He would demean ►

PARKINSON'S^{UK}

Make a new will for free

Make your will with our trusted partner Farewill, the UK's largest will writer, online or by phone. It's quick, easy and free.

You don't have to include a gift in your will to Parkinson's UK. But after loved ones have been provided for, a gift could make the difference to us finding a new treatment and a cure.

Parkinson's is the fastest growing neurological condition in the world. There's currently no cure. But as the largest European charitable funder of Parkinson's research, we're determined to change that.

Visit farewill.com/parkinsons-tt2024 or phone **020 8050 2686** to speak to one of their experts. Terms & conditions: parkinsons.org.uk/free-will

Valid until 31/12/2024



Scan to make a will



Parkinson's UK is the operating name of the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom. A charity registered in England and Wales (258197) and in Scotland (SC037554). © Parkinson's UK 09/24 (244088)

Registered with



FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR



female staff: one day he made the whole office unpack vibrators and put batteries in them. He would also give her impossible tasks, once asking her to use a satellite phone to book a helicopter to take them from the airport to Fulham Football Club at 3am. "I had no idea how to work the phone and he just sat there and grinned."

She tried to fend off his attention. A senior PA told her that Al Fayed would eventually move on to another young woman. "So every week that passes — and this is awful — but you're hoping that somebody else takes the baton," Gemma says. "But he doesn't get bored. You're like a toy to him. He persists and persists until you're broken."

His behaviour was more frightening on trips. In Abu Dhabi he tried to break into her room. Then, at Villa Windsor in Paris, she woke up to find him in her room, asking, "Are we having a party tonight?" and telling her that it was "important to make love and relax"; she pretended she'd had an allergic reaction to nuts and he left the room furious.

The final incident was again at Villa Windsor, in 2009. Gemma woke up, startled, to find him trying to climb into her bed wearing only a silk dressing gown. She repeatedly told him "No", but he climbed

on top of her and forced himself on her. She cried. After the attack he instructed her to wash herself with Dettol. "He wanted me to erase any trace of him being near me," she says. "It burnt but I was afraid not to, as I thought I was being filmed."

Afterwards she hired a lawyer and said she was leaving Harrods on the grounds of sexual harassment. Al Fayed covered up his

sexual abuse by intimidating victims into signing non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). His lawyers arranged for a shredding truck to go to Gemma's lawyer's office and everything was destroyed in front of them, including her recordings, although she later discovered that she still had transcripts in her sent emails.

In 2017, after the *Dispatches* programme was broadcast, Gemma received a phone call warning her that she would be "in trouble" if she had participated in the documentary. She hadn't; she had not even told her family what had happened. "It was embarrassing and you think, are they going to believe you? Are they going to accept it?"

Last month Harrods said it "would not seek to enforce any NDAs that relate to alleged historical sexual abuse by Fayed that were entered into during the period of his, Fayed's, ownership". The store added: "There are no NDAs attached to settlements made under the current ownership." However, it was unable to say how many NDAs were signed under Al Fayed.

"The Harrods of today is a very different organisation to the one owned and controlled by Al Fayed between 1985 and 2010," the store says, adding that its process for any current or former employees who want to make a claim remains open.

Gemma had thought his death would enable her to move on. "And then he died and I felt so angry and frustrated that nothing ever happened," she says. "But now we've got each other and it finally feels like we may be able to get some closure." ■

The women in this article are represented by the legal team at harrodssurvivors.com

IN A WALK-IN CUPBOARD HE ASKED IF SHE WANTED "EGYPTIAN BABIES". "I THOUGHT MAYBE THIS IS HIS SENSE OF HUMOUR"

Katherine

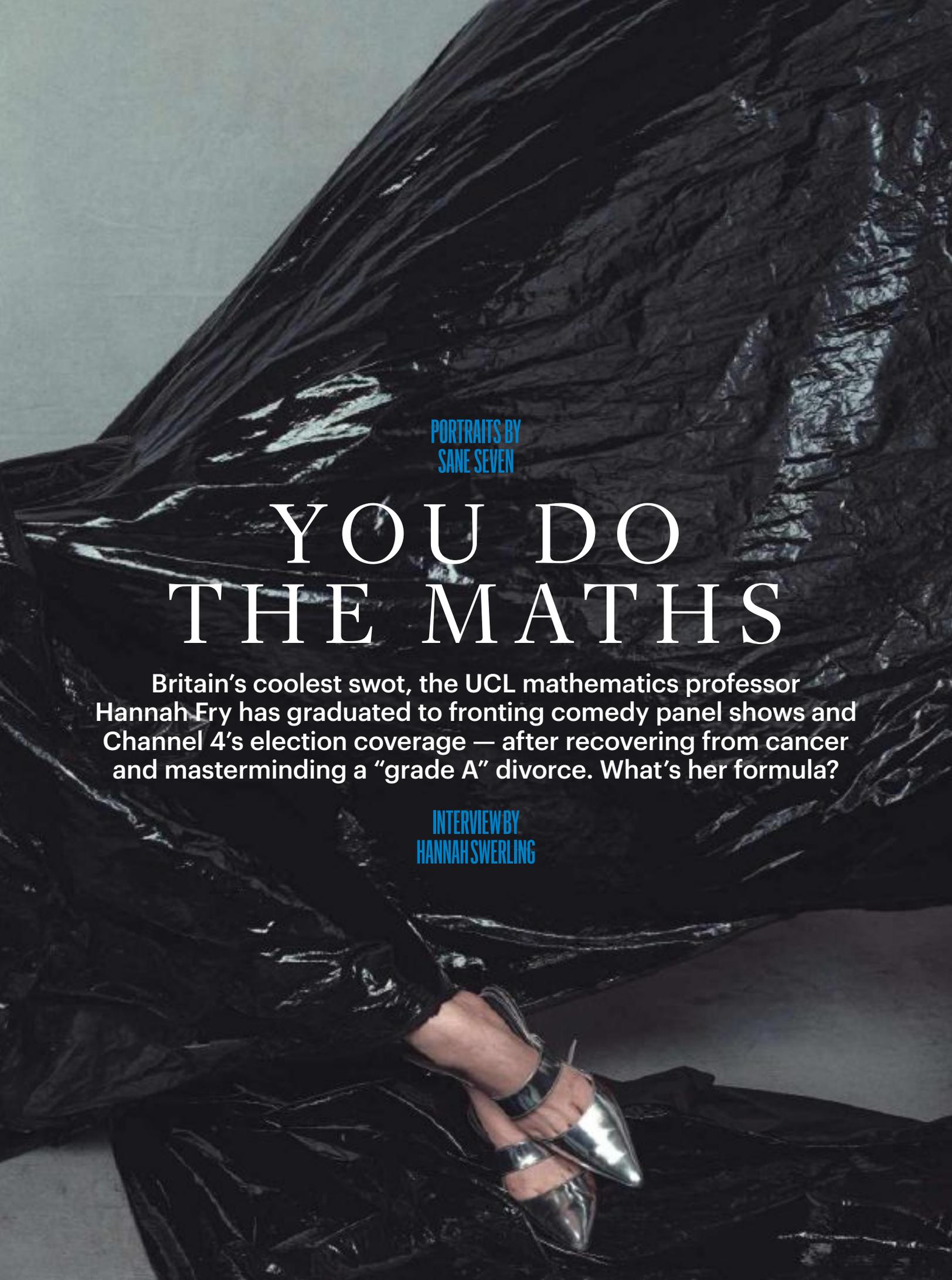


SHE WAS SENT TO DR SNELL, WHO "CHECKED" HER OVARIES. THE RESULTS WERE SENT TO AL FAYED BEFORE SHE WAS BACK AT HER DESK

Gemma





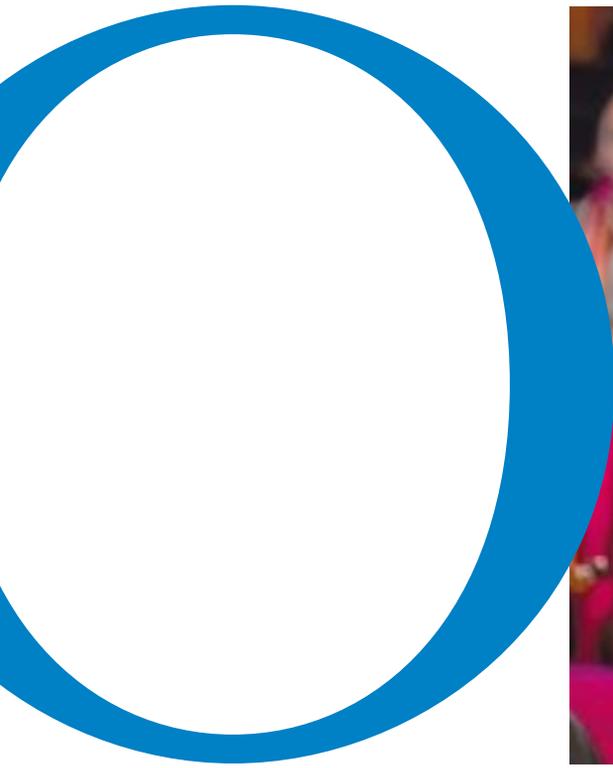


PORTRAITS BY
SANE SEVEN

YOU DO THE MATHS

Britain's coolest swot, the UCL mathematics professor Hannah Fry has graduated to fronting comedy panel shows and Channel 4's election coverage — after recovering from cancer and masterminding a “grade A” divorce. What's her formula?

INTERVIEW BY
HANNAH SWERLING



ne day in 2018, a male viewer of the BBC4 series *Magic Numbers: Hannah Fry's Mysterious World of Maths* took to Twitter to say that its presenter was “making soft porn”.

“I was quite naive at the time so I decided to engage,” Fry says. The Twitter user, presumably thrilled with the chance of some human interaction, sent back a clip where she’s sitting with a mini chalkboard, explaining set theory and wearing a seductive outfit of... jeans, trainers and a blazer. “I was, like, ‘If you think that’s soft porn, I think that says a lot more about you than it does about me.’”

Around the same time a Telegraph review of another TV series, *Climate Change by Numbers*, described the presenting line-up as “two eminent professors and a nubile young woman”. Guess which one was Fry.

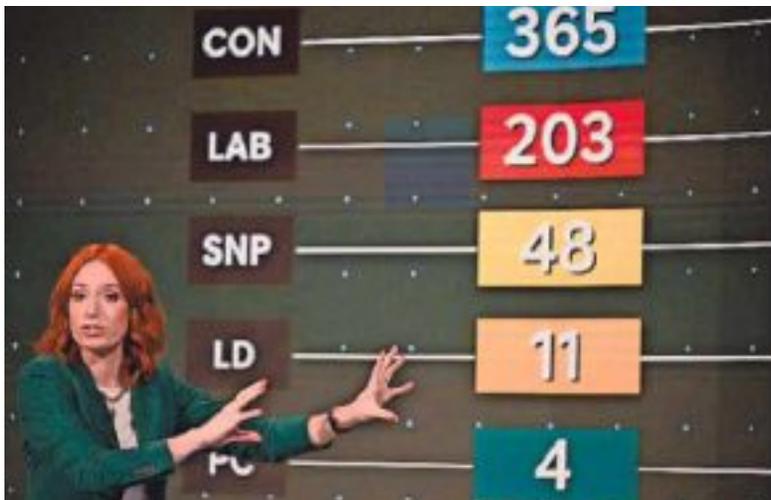
Fry is an eminent professor — we meet after a busy day of lecturing at University College London (UCL). Having studied mathematics and theoretical physics at UCL, she completed a PhD in fluid dynamics in 2011 — four years of wrestling with the equations that describe the way fluids move, from drops of honey to the formation of galaxies. She is now a professor in the mathematics of cities at UCL’s Bartlett Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis. She has written four books, and was awarded both the Christopher Zeeman medal and the Royal Society David Attenborough award for her work in engaging the UK public with mathematics. Oh, and this year that “nubile young woman” — now 40 — was appointed president of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications.

She’s also all over the TV, and if you’re one of the half a million followers of her

Fry delivers the Christmas lecture at the Royal Institution in London, 2019. Below, from left: number-crunching for Channel 4’s election coverage in July; at the helm on *Have I Got News for You* last year; receiving her PhD at University College London with her sister Natalie in 2011

@frysquared account (“All math and no trouser”) all over Instagram, where she crunches complex ideas — or just revisits fun moments in scientific history — and explains them with a conspiratorial wink. There’s *The Sky at Night*, *The Joy of Data* and *Stargazing Live* on the BBC; *The Maths of Life* on 6 Music; and the podcasts *Uncharted* and *Curious Cases*. She has just appeared in a mudbath alongside Fearnie Cotton in a (presumably lucrative) ad campaign for Samsung, and made films for Bloomberg (sponsored by Nokia). One of her latest “collabs” is presenting the *Google DeepMind* podcast with Demis Hassabis and John Jumper — who only went and won a Nobel prize earlier this month.

Respected by her peers and a role model for aspiring brainboxes — including my own ten-year-old daughter — her



graduation from dusty lecture theatre to the mainstream has been confirmed with recent slots hosting *Have I Got News for You* and running the numbers in the Peter Snow/Jeremy Vine role for Channel 4's live election night coverage in July. "I'm a proper politics nerd," Fry says. "I listen to so many political podcasts, it's the background music to my life. It's like a soap opera. I mainly did it because I want to be best friends with Emily Maitlis. I did not achieve my goal, though, as she was at her desk for 24 hours. Damn it."

She has also since 2021 recovered from cervical cancer and masterminded what she calls a "grade A" divorce. So she's really not bothered about how people — "guys going crazy on Twitter" included — perceive her. "It's changed as I've got older," she says. "There was definitely a time when I was, like, I'm not showing any flesh at all. I was really careful, but as time has gone on I just don't give a shit any more."

"In everything I do, it's always about what I'm saying or doing that's interesting, it's never about how I appear," she continues. Nevertheless she was nervous about the photoshoot for this interview. "It's really emotionally exposing. You strip all that intellectual armour away and it's just what you look like. I find that very stressful. You can't look clever in photos, can you?"

Growing up in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, she was the middle child of three sisters. Her English father worked in a hydraulics factory and her Irish mother stayed at home. Fry describes it as a strict household. "My mum is the most Catholic person I've ever met — including any priests," she jokes.

"My parents have an unhealthy respect for authority — very meek," she says. "I never acted out in my teens, I didn't have the opportunity. I really think my mum thought that if she gave me any rope at all I would immediately be a pregnant drug dealer. I think the only men I knew until I was 18 were my dad and the priest. I always thought, I'll never subject my daughters to that."

"I MAINLY DID THE ELECTION BECAUSE I WANT TO BE BEST FRIENDS WITH EMILY MAITLIS, BUT SHE WAS AT HER DESK FOR 24 HOURS. DAMN IT"



As a result of her upbringing she was a "goody two-shoes" and spent a lot of her free time studying. She even took extra modules in her further maths A-level at the local state school, Presdales, just for the fun of it — gaining straight As, of course ("I told you, prefect energy"). She always enjoyed the challenge of the world of numbers. "I've got this friend Matt Parker [an Australian mathematician and author] and he says that mathematicians don't find maths easy, they just enjoy how hard it is. I really think that's it. It takes this toxic stubbornness. That's a driving force with most things that I do."

Until 2014 Fry assumed she would spend her entire working life in academia. Then she gave a TED talk on "the mathematics of love", which went viral and has nearly six million views. "I was really scared of the world then," Fry says. "I can't tell you how hard I tried. It was slightly traumatic."

Soon after came motherhood. She has two daughters, aged seven and five, with whom she is more relaxed than her parents were with her. "With kids of course you don't want them to put themselves in danger, but you can end up making them anxious about everything, so I try to stand back and let them make their own mistakes."

This laid-back attitude chimes with Fry's admission in an interview for this magazine's *Life in the Day* column last year that she can be a slightly messy mum who often eats Haribo for lunch. "By the way, I'm quite bad at remembering to feed my children. They never starve, but it can get to 2.30 and one of them will be grumpy and I'll be, like, 'What is wrong with — oh shit, I haven't fed you.'"

Home life for Fry is a "two-household family" in south London with her ex-husband, Phil, a sports writer from whom she split in 2022 after a nine-year marriage. It all sounds terribly civilised: he lives three doors down and they share parental responsibility. "There have been very few hiccups, but if such a thing is possible we've basically had a grade A, gold-star divorce," she says, ever the high-achieving swot. "I have a new partner, Oli, who I met last year and they've met and are on very good terms. The reason why we broke up — there was no nastiness or great drama — was just that we weren't suited. So you can separate from somebody while respecting them."

Fry met Oli on Hinge, soon after being banned from the dating app for supposedly impersonating herself. "I set up a whole new profile on a different mobile number to get around the ban," she says. "I think there's something quite amusing about the fact that I didn't commit identity fraud on their platform until they accused me of it."

True to type, she has a scientific explanation for the success that soon followed: "I strongly suspect that relaunching as a 'new person' with a brand new sparkly profile did make a difference to the algorithm, which still puts you in "buckets" with people who are a similar level of attractiveness to you. Those buckets are really difficult to escape, even when you add better pictures and wittier prompts. Put it this way — I wasn't getting to see men as good as Oli before being banned, and I met him almost immediately afterwards. I mean, correlation isn't causation, except sometimes it is!"

The initial split from Phil came after a shock: her diagnosis, then recovery, from cervical cancer at the age of 36. That's a lot of personal turmoil to endure in a short space of time, I suggest, stating the obvious. "Yes, but they're not unconnected, are they?" she says. "You wake up from that first one and you're, like, 'OK, I'm going to firebomb my life.'"



In early 2021, after a routine smear test, Fry was diagnosed with cervical cancer and underwent a radical hysterectomy, in which the uterus, cervix, both ovaries, the fallopian tubes and nearby tissue are removed. She documented her experience in a film for the BBC, *Making Sense of Cancer with Hannah Fry*. In the intimate footage we see her in tears as she receives her test results — and ultimately the all-clear — and watch her navigating family life during the pandemic with her two young daughters.

As part of her hysterectomy Fry had a number of lymph nodes removed as a precaution in case they too were cancerous. This resulted in her developing lymphoedema — a chronic condition that causes swelling of the limbs. For Fry, managing that involved further surgery and Pilates, which she has to do weekly to keep the symptoms at bay.

Applying her understanding of risk and probability, she questions in the film whether the risk-averse route taken was worth it. Even after she was given the all-clear in 2021, she was told there was a 10 per cent chance of her cancer coming back, and if it did it would be incurable.

In the film she questions our treat-at-all-costs approach to diseases such as cancer. “I never wanted to tell people if they should or shouldn’t have treatment,” she says. “But I do think that when it comes to uncertainty and risk, only you can make the decision about what matters to you. I don’t think the way we’re doing it at the moment prioritises that.”

Last year she had a scare when she went for a scan and they found a lump. “It turned out to be OK but it looked for a moment... I had got into this habit of not really thinking about it, so that was a really sharp shock.”

After her initial diagnosis in 2017 she had spoken to one of her Irish cousins, who

Fry with her daughters in London last year. Above: photographed by Sane Seven for The Sunday Times Magazine



told her, “One day I hope you’ll see the gift in it.” “I was, like, ‘OK, thanks,’” Fry says, deadpan. “It was really annoying.”

As time has gone on, though, Fry says she has started to see what her cousin meant. “I read about women in their fifties and sixties who finally get the confidence to not give a shit any more and I think it accelerated that process for me. To have that in your late thirties and to be healthy is an extraordinary gift. But you do slip back into the old pattern of forgetting that life is finite. The scare [earlier this year] jolted me in a positive way.” I wonder if some of that came into play when she talked herself into doing this shoot. “Absolutely,” she says. “Put me in a bin bag!”

The study of Stem subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — is still a male-dominated field. The percentage of female graduates with core Stem degrees is just 26 per cent, but Fry is

seeing more female students in her lectures and believes that universities are trying hard to change things.

Her biggest run-ins with sexism have been in television, however. When I ask for an example, she lowers her voice and leans in to emphasise the point. “In terms of outright despicableness... Do you want me to tell you a story?” I do.

She was preparing to host a new TV programme and turned up the day before to meet the director, the co-host and the cameraman, and was confronted with a “massive wall of men”. She was having a tour of the studio when she told the director that she and the co-host had grown up near each other. At this point the co-host made a move towards Fry. “He grabs my arm, turns me around and when I’m facing the other way he’s, like, ‘Oh, now I recognise her’ [clearly insinuating that he had previously had sex with her —

of course they hadn't]. In front of everyone. And literally no one said anything."

Fry was fuming. She didn't sleep that night and planned to go to work the next day and say something "because that's normally what I'd do. But TV is so stressful that I let it go. If that happened now I would expect that the guys would say, "That's not OK."

Fry may be one of the UK's coolest nerds, but she is not alone in what's becoming a burgeoning industry. Indeed, this could well be the Age of the Nerd, where brainy quiz shows such as *Only Connect* pull in millions of viewers and the podcast *The Rest Is History* sells out world tours.

The day Fry and I meet, two her of her podcast buddies — the British computer scientist Demis Hassabis, a chess prodigy who co-founded the AI company Google DeepMind, and his American colleague John Jumper — have been awarded the Nobel prize in chemistry for their "revolutionary" work applying artificial intelligence to understanding proteins, the building blocks of life.

Does she lie awake at night worrying about AI and what could happen with it in the hands of people perhaps less altruistic than Hassabis and Jumper? Is there a difference between the tech bros and the proper scientists?

"Yes, definitely," Fry says. "I wanted to work with [Hassabis and Jumper] because

**"TO BE HONEST,
I'VE SPENT TOO
MUCH ON NICE
FOUNTAIN PENS
AND FANCY DOTTED
NOTEBOOKS
TO EVER GIVE UP
ACADEMIA"**



they are scientists to their core. There is a reason why they wanted to be in London instead of Silicon Valley. They publish in peer-reviewed journals, they release their findings for free to genuinely advance science. I'm not saying they will be perfectly successful in shielding that from people who just want to make some money or want to actively do harm, but I do think they are at least treading carefully."

Although academic research has taken a bit of a back seat in the past couple of years, Fry says she will always be "an active professional mathematician. To be honest, I've spent too much on nice fountain pens and fancy dotted notebooks over the years to ever give it up."

Now she just needs her daughter to get the memo. Lately the woman who has switched much of the country on to the power and beauty of numbers has been struggling to inspire her seven-year-old to do her maths homework.

"I have none of my existing weapons with her," she says. "I have so many cool things to tell her but she says, 'No.'" I sense that Fry will find a way. And if not, there's always her younger daughter? "Yes, there's always the little one. I'll get her." ■

Series two of BBC Radio 4's *Uncharted* is available on BBC Sounds, alongside the latest series of *Curious Cases* with the new co-host Dara Ó Briain

Lily O'Brien's



go on,
have another!

The perfect truffles to share with your best  friends.



Scan here



Grab a box and get together. Available in the confectionery aisle.

Lily O'Brien's

For the ones you really know.

INTERVIEW BY
MATTHEW CAMPBELL

ENCORE UNE FOIS

François Hollande was the unpopular *président* best remembered for visting his mistress on a three-wheeled scooter.

Is he serious about wanting a second crack at France's top job?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MARIN DRIGUEZ

François Hollande in his National Assembly office in Paris earlier this month



W

are on our way to François Hollande's office in the back of his black, chauffeur-driven Renault Espace. Crossing the Place de la Concorde, where more than a thousand people were guillotined during the revolution, a man falls off his bicycle in front of us. With lightning reflexes our driver brakes with only a split second to spare. The man gets up off the cobbles, uninjured. "It would have been a bit awkward if I'd run someone over," the mild-mannered Hollande says with a grin.

With a weak new government, France is in a dark and dangerous mood, its politics fractured over immigration, identity and drug violence — a 14-year-old contract killer has been arrested in Marseilles, a 19-year-old student named Philippine has been murdered in the Bois de Boulogne by a 22-year-old Moroccan, who had been released from jail after a five-year sentence for rape. But there is a spring in the step of the former French president, an affable septuagenarian who is savouring a surprising political comeback.

His time in office is remembered for zigzagging policies, high unemployment and the devastating Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan and Nice terror attacks of 2015 and 2016 that killed 233 people. But also for him trying to be dull — "normal", he called it: he failed at that too, bringing domestic turmoil to the Élysée Palace when he was photographed on the back of a scooter, being dropped off at the apartment of his lover, the actress Julie Gayet. His bodyguard was seen delivering croissants the following morning.

Having come to power in 2012 with a leftist manifesto, he shifted towards business-friendly policies and an attempt to tackle France's famously rigid labour laws, prompting violent protests. Criticised for being inconsistent and indecisive — and

ridiculed over "*l'affaire du scooter*" — he left office in 2017 with an approval rating of just 4 per cent, making him the most unpopular leader in modern French history and the only one not to seek a second term.

Today, however, all seems forgiven as he returns to his old job as an MP while trying to revive the moderate left. People queue for a chance to see this cheerful political revenant at his many book signings and lectures. They jostle for selfies with him; they pat him on the shoulder as if he were a favourite pet. "We're with you, François!" shouts a man passing on a scooter as we stand outside the French parliament in the autumn sunshine.

Thanks perhaps to an energetic social media campaign, he is polling particularly well among under-30s; his average of three weekly trips across all regions of France to promote his third book since leaving office — *Le défi de gouverner* (*The Challenge of Governing*), currently published only in French — has further encouraged speculation that he wants his old job back when Emmanuel Macron's chaotic second term ends in 2027.

He regrets not running for re-election against Macron, his one-time protégé, in 2017. He had appointed the young former banker as his economy minister, only to see him break away to launch his own centrist campaign for the presidency, a brutal betrayal. "He [Macron] didn't tell me what he was up to — he prepared things secretly and mysteriously. Morally, humanly and politically, it was not right," Hollande says.

But he is not trying to get even, he says: he just wants to help save the country from Marine Le Pen and what he sees as the growing threat of her far-right National Rally group and other parties like it across Europe. "At my age I could live enjoying other pleasures than politics. But you can't say, 'Well, if the extreme right becomes the majority in France, it's not my problem

— I was president, everything is OK," Hollande explains.

He accepts that he was, "like lots of presidents", unpopular in office, "and even very unpopular at a certain moment, but people never hated me like [Nicolas] Sarkozy and Macron" — the presidents before and after him. So he might run if he thinks he can win. "A former president can't risk a miserable score," he muses. Warming to this theme, he adds: "A former president has to be in it to win — not to be beaten."

No French president has ever returned to office years after leaving it. Will he be the first?

The French presidency is often said to be the most powerful executive job in the world. Like his near-monarchical predecessors, Hollande lived for five years amid the gilded splendour of the Élysée Palace, surrounded by footmen and palace guards in quaint uniforms.

With a fairly stocky build and a round, friendly face framed by thinning dark hair, he has a reputation as a bon vivant. His battle against temptation — and the bulge — became a focus of humorous press scrutiny when he had access to the Élysée's legendary wine cellar and world-class kitchen. Now life is a bit different.

Our first stop is the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, on the left bank of the Seine. Hollande was elected recently as an MP for the southwestern Corrèze department, where he has a home. This was where he began his political career: he was first elected as an MP for Corrèze back in 1988. So what has changed since then?

"My office was on the third floor in those days," he says, showing me into a little corner office in the parliamentary complex where an assistant is waiting to brief him. "Now I am on the fourth floor — and I have a view," he adds. He steps through double doors on to a tiny ledge: "I have a balcony too: it's a considerable advance," he jokes.



In 2014 the French magazine Closer published pictures of Hollande visiting his mistress, Julie Gayet, on a scooter



“PEOPLE NEVER HATED ME LIKE THEY DID SARKOZY AND MACRON. A FORMER PRESIDENT HAS TO BE IN IT TO WIN — NOT TO BE BEATEN”

With fellow MPs in the National Assembly following his election in July. Below: posing for a selfie with passersby in Paris earlier this month

Hollande is expected in parliament that afternoon to hear a speech by Michel Barnier, the veteran centre-right politician appointed prime minister last month. First, though, *bien sûr*, we must have lunch. He has been invited by four French newspaper journalists to Thoumieux, a 1920s brasserie just down the road from the Eiffel Tower and he wants me to tag along. With one of his bodyguards guarding the entrance, we sit on red velvet banquettes as the journalists quiz him on recent events.

When it comes to ordering, he and his audience are opting for restraint today: “Wine before Barnier would be... *ouf!*” says one of the French journalists, alluding to the new PM’s reputation as a boring speaker inclined to promote postprandial lethargy.

It took Macron more than two months to pick a prime minister who, he hopes, can end the political paralysis in the 577-member assembly, after inconclusive parliamentary elections that produced no majority for any of the three big groups vying to form a government. The New Popular Front (NFP), a broad electoral alliance of left-wing parties (in which Hollande was elected MP), came first with 180 seats, Macron’s centrist Renaissance party and its allies slumped to 159 seats, and Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally and its allies surged to 143.

Macron had called elections after suffering a humiliating defeat to the far right in the European ballot. The journalists around the table want to know why the president took such a gamble just before hosting the Olympics.

Hollande has told me he is over Macron’s betrayal — “It’s behind us,” he claims. Over lunch, though, he puts the boot in: “He alone is to blame for the mess we’re in. He didn’t even warn his own side what he was going to do,” says Hollande, tucking into his *oeuf mayonnaise*. “Macron prefers



transgression to decision. Transgression is what he knows,” he adds, referring to a president who, while a teenager, had an affair with his married schoolteacher, Brigitte Auzière, and eventually married her.

Hollande has long since given up the dieting battle of his presidential years. After a grilled sea bass and chocolate mousse he is ready for Barnier. So we head to the Palais Bourbon. With its vaulted ceiling and gilded colonnades, it first became a forum for debate in the years after the French Revolution of 1789 and, given the fading of Macron’s presidential aura, is likely to take precedence over the Élysée Palace in coming months as the place where things are decided.

From my perch on a theatre-like balcony I watch Hollande, a former leader of the Socialist Party, taking his seat on a red bench below with other MPs. In a strategic move to counter the rising far right he decided to run for election under the broad NFP alliance instead of with the remnants of his once-powerful Socialist Party.

He had to hold his nose: the alliance leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon — who is also the head of a far-left party called France Unbowed — is one of Hollande’s arch enemies, a Nato-hating former supporter of Vladimir Putin who sounds nostalgic for 1789 in his desire to “sweep away” the elite.

Mélenchon’s France Unbowed followers certainly seem to be channelling the rowdy revolutionaries of yesteryear as they noisily heckle Barnier, a silver-haired patrician figure who has started droning about the political impasse, immigration and crime after a minute of silence for Philippine, the murdered student.

Hollande is unimpressed with Barnier’s performance. Later he tells me he gives the former Brexit negotiator six months at the most before his government falls. He compares the rabble-rousing Mélenchon, meanwhile, to Jeremy Corbyn. Hollande, who backtracked on his key campaign promise of a 75 per cent tax rate on salaries of more than €1 million, says he admires Keir Starmer for having resisted his ►

party's extremists. He is about to write a letter to the new British prime minister asking for a meeting when he visits London in November. He will tell him to "hold firm" against the hard left.

"Starmer is going to know unpopularity — it's already there," he says, referring to the row over the winter fuel allowance. "They are going to reproach him for not being left enough. But he must not give in."

He believes that, even outside the EU, Starmer has a great opportunity to play a prominent "international and European role", adding: "France and Germany aren't getting on at the moment, their governments are fragile, so — I shouldn't say it — this is a good time for the British. And if Kamala Harris is elected president of the US, she and Starmer will be able to do something special together."

He cautions, though, that "governing is very difficult" and "it will not be easy for Starmer", adding: "I knew this when I was president. There are so many hopes riding on you. Then there are disappointments."

Hollande was born in Rouen, Normandy, where Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake. His mother, Nicole, was a social worker, his father, Georges, an ear, nose and throat specialist. When he was 13 the family moved to Neuilly-sur-Seine, an exclusive suburb of Paris. A keen footballer, he studied law at the Paris-Panthéon-Assas University before attending the Sciences Po public administration school and École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), a factory for future leaders.

He joined the Socialist Party, becoming its first secretary in 1998. He also served as mayor of Tulle — the capital of Corrèze — until 2008 and president of the Corrèze departmental council until 2012, by which time he had been nominated as the Socialist Party's candidate for the Élysée. He defeated the incumbent, Sarkozy, with 52 per cent of the vote. It was the first time in 17 years that a Socialist had won.

His presidency started under a literal cloud. After a swearing-in ceremony on May 15, 2012, he stood in an open car for a traditional parade around Paris, only to be drenched by torrential rain. It has prompted jokes ever since about him being a bad weather magnet. His ambition was to run a "normal" presidency after the tempestuous tenure of his predecessor. Sarkozy's divorce from his wife Cecilia and subsequent marriage to Carla Bruni, a model and singer, turned news from the Élysée Palace into a popular political soap. They have both since been swept up in legal troubles, "Sarko" for corruption and influence peddling and his wife for alleged witness tampering. But the next season of soap under "President Normal" dished up an even greater domestic drama: enter the "love scooter".



From top: with Ségolène Royal, right, his partner for three decades, and their children in 2001; Valérie Trierweiler was first lady until Hollande's affair in 2014; he is now married to Julie Gayet

Under the French Fifth Republic there is nothing unusual about unfaithful presidents, who, with the exception of Charles de Gaulle (1959-69) and Georges Pompidou (1969-74), have shared a reputation as shameless adulterers. François Mitterrand had a secret mistress for years. Jacques Chirac, his successor, was supposedly chauffeured to his romantic liaisons in a black limousine.

Nicknamed "Flanby" after a wobbly French pudding, Hollande seemed an unlikely presidential candidate — and an even more unlikely lothario. He had lived for three decades with Ségolène Royal,

a Socialist politician, and had four children with her, albeit without marrying.

By the time Royal won the party's presidential nomination in 2007, their relationship had greatly deteriorated and they separated shortly after she lost the election that year to Sarkozy. A few months later a French website published news of a romance between Hollande and Valérie Trierweiler, a journalist for Paris Match who was 11 years his junior.

It was Trierweiler who became Hollande's *première dame* when he won office in 2012. According to some accounts, though, he was already secretly involved with Julie Gayet, an actress and producer, now 52.

His biggest crime in the public eye was not infidelity but riding to meet Gayet on the back of a scooter with his bodyguard at the controls. The three-wheeler, in particular, seemed an undignified form of transport for a president on a romantic mission. To compound his sin he kept his motorcycle helmet on to avoid recognition as he walked up to Gayet's door.

Then came another explosive chapter in the presidential vaudeville: Trierweiler's tell-all book about her hell in the Élysée. She claimed she was drugged in order to keep her away from an engagement Hollande had in Tulle. She also claimed he had once mocked poor people as "toothless". Today Hollande admits seeing his private life paraded under a global spotlight was difficult. "It wounded me," he says. "But you develop crocodile skin."

His arrival in power, he adds, coincided with the blossoming of "social networks" and an erosion in the French media's traditional respect for politicians' privacy. "That was completely new... Sarkozy faced this issue with his divorce and marriage, Macron too, including conspiracy theories about his wife," he adds. "Even for Macron, who has an indifferent and insensitive side, it's difficult to see your private life exposed."

He goes on: "I think any president should know that everything will be exposed. Even with Starmer today there are difficulties. Somebody lends you money, finances you, everything is known immediately. So you have to be careful: that's a good principle."

Today, though, he professes happiness, having married Gayet two years ago in Corrèze in the presence of close friends and family, including one of Hollande's sons, Thomas, and the singer Benjamin Biolay. "I am at peace," he says.

When I ask if his wife supports his return to politics, though, he notes that she is quite often away from home and therefore is not in a position to complain: "She's as absent as I am," he grins. "She's shooting a film at the moment."

As for the famous grey Piaggio scooter, which once seemed to embody the hapless Hollande epoch, it has become a symbol of his return to favour. The Élysée sold it in 2015 and it was auctioned off by its owners,



OF HIS FORMER PROTÉGÉ HE SAYS: “MACRON IS TO BLAME FOR THE MESS WE’RE IN. HE DIDN’T EVEN TELL HIS OWN SIDE WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO”

Patrick and Manola Sionneau, over the summer. With 34,000km on the clock and worth only about €1,300, it fetched more than €20,000. It came with a note written to the couple by Hollande certifying that “it’s the right scooter”. He signed a picture with the words: “To Patrick and Manola, who are lucky to ride my scooter to boost their happiness.”

When I ask about this, however, he jokes that he still has “the real scooter” — not the Élysée scooter on which he visited Gayet — but his own personal scooter that he had before running for president, which is parked downstairs: “I bet I could get more than €20,000 for it,” he says with a grin.

By now we are sitting in Hollande’s other, much grander, office — all former presidents get one as a reward for their service along with a rotating security detail (Hollande’s is 12-strong) — and I realise I’ve been here before. Overlooking the Tuileries Garden and conveniently close to the Élysée, this flat of 314 square metres, with multiple bedrooms and creaking parquet flooring, used to be the Parisian headquarters of the Daily Telegraph. The parties were legendary.

While Gayet is away filming, Hollande’s closest companion these days seems to be Philae, an ageing black labrador who looks up from a sofa in the hall and gives a wag of her tail when we arrive. She lived with Hollande in the Élysée and was named after a European Space Agency robotic lander that delivered images from a comet in 2014.



Philae the labrador has been Hollande’s companion since his Élysée days. Above: with Macron, then France’s economy minister, in 2014

“I take her everywhere,” Hollande says. True to his word, he puts her on a lead and ushers her into the Renault’s boot that evening when we set off to a television studio, our last appointment of the day.

The French have a reputation for being nice to their former leaders. Besides the offices and security guards, they, like their American counterparts, are allowed to retain the “president” honorific for life. Once they are safely out of office they tend to become more popular.

Hollande is well aware of this. Two of his predecessors, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (1974-81) and Sarkozy (2007-12), were so bewitched by a postpresidential surge in popularity that they toyed with running again.

“Now if I go into the street I’m very popular, people take photos... but imagine if I become president: I can’t go into the street, it’s raining and on top of that people aren’t happy,” Hollande muses in the car.

Yet he believes “the end of Macron”, as he puts it, has created an opening for “a new centre left” and he wants to relaunch his Socialist Party, now under the sway of the far left, on to a more moderate course.

“Forming a movement is like gathering flowers, but you need a bouquet. Some people aren’t necessarily that happy to see me back,” he says. “But everyone says the party has taken back a bit of strength.”

A large reception committee is awaiting him at France 2, where he is the star guest of the evening news. In front of a mirror he watches a screen relaying the news from the Middle East. The biggest global crisis he had to deal with as president was Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, when he and other European leaders faced criticism from Britain’s David Cameron for not backing stronger sanctions against Moscow.

A woman sprays his hair, then he runs a comb through it. “It’s not very abundant,” he says, to laughter. This elder statesman with a curiously self-effacing streak never seems to let the attention go to his head. “If someone in my political family has a better chance of winning, I don’t want to impose myself,” he tells me.

It turns out he loves nothing better than going to country fairs and mingling with his constituents. “I did it for 25 years, I really love it,” he enthuses.

He won’t be unhappy, in the end, if he fails to reconquer the Élysée. On the contrary. “Man or woman, a politician who wants to succeed in their career thinks of the presidency or, in the UK, of 10 Downing Street. But I have already been president — I’m indifferent to that.” After a pause, he adds, with another smile: “I’m at ease.” ■

Le défi de gouverner by François Hollande (Perrin €23). Go to timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount for Times+ members

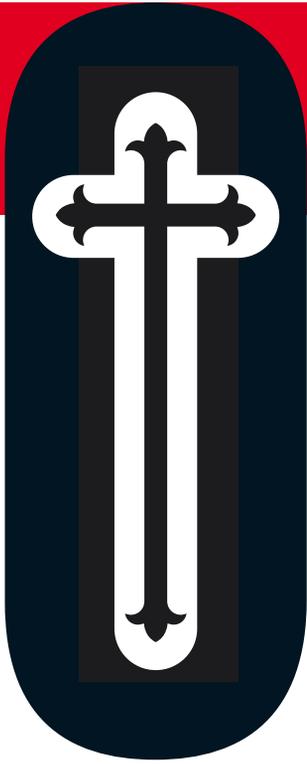
INTERVIEW WITH THE (COUPLE WHO DUG UP A) VAMPIRE

A human skull is positioned on the right side of the frame, partially cut off. Below it, a long, rusted metal sickle lies horizontally across the lower half of the image. The background is a dark, textured surface.

This skull of an 18-year-old woman was excavated from a grave near Torun, northern Poland. A sickle, a padlock on her big toe and fragments of a bonnet were found buried with her



She lay in a field in Poland for 350 years until archaeologists discovered her unmarked grave. But why was a sickle placed across her throat? *David James Smith* unearths the macabre secrets of Europe's most mysterious cemetery

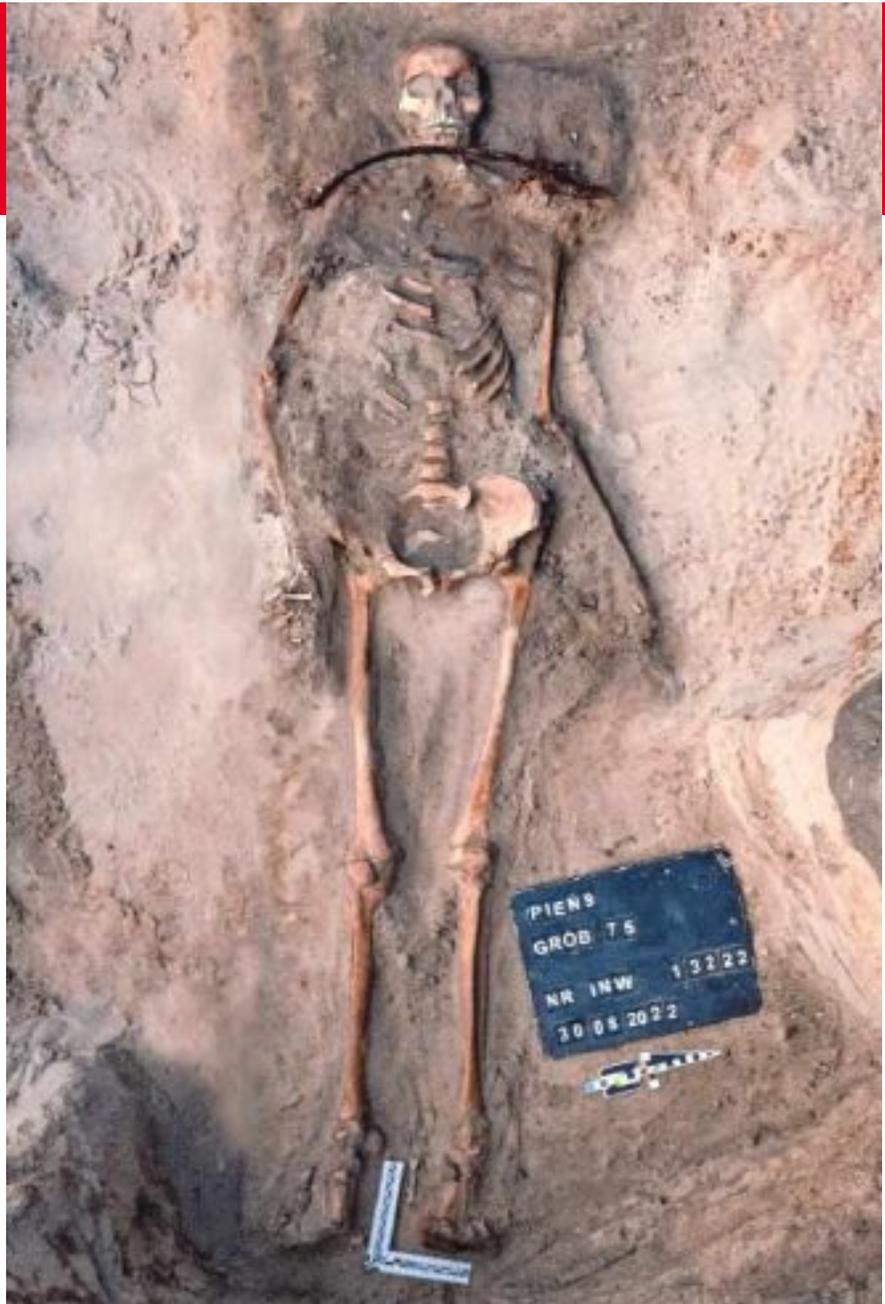


ver an unmarked grave on a bleak hill in northern Poland in the late summer of 2022, Dariusz Polinski was prodding with a trowel when he heard the ring of metal on metal. He and Marta Zagrodska, his partner in archaeology and in life, worked carefully with brushes and trowels to clear away the soil and debris. They found a young woman, all 206 bones of her.

It was not a crime scene, not in the conventional sense — there was no evidence of a violent death. But there was no doubt her body had been violated, the grave desecrated; illegal acts, surely. She had been buried, unburied and reburied, at least once, maybe twice. In death, the woman had aroused fear, that much was obvious. The metal object that Polinski's trowel had struck was a heavy metal sickle around her neck. It had been used to pinion her to the earth. Whoever buried her had intended that if she raised her head she would be decapitated.

There was also a triangular padlock on the big toe of her left foot. And there were signs of an attempt to twist her corpse in the grave and turn it face down. The attempt had failed, leaving her spine buckled and twisted. All of this could only mean one thing: a community had sought to prevent the woman rising from her grave, becoming undead.

Around her in this field near the city of Torun, outside the small village of Pien, home to just 28 people, the archaeologists had already uncovered many other graves — about a hundred have been found to date, all unmarked. As Polinski wryly remarks, there are more dead than living there today. A significant number of the graves bore evidence of what he calls “deviant” burials:



The excavation of grave 75 showing the skeleton restrained by a sickle, as unearthed in 2022 by the archaeologists Dariusz Polinski and Marta Zagrodska, below



bodies of both adults and children turned to face the earth so they could not claw their way out of their graves; bodies weighed down with stones across the neck and chest; bodies with half their bones missing. More bodies with padlocks, believed to be talismans to lock restless souls in the grave.

The graveyard was full of mysteries: a woman buried while pregnant, with the foetus (aged 25 weeks) still present; a woman with advanced syphilis; a man with a child's corpse at his feet, the pair laid out like a crucifix; a child with his upper torso and skull missing, but with his heels turned upwards showing he had been laid out face down, with a padlock at his foot. But only one had a sickle over their neck: the woman



The dig revealed about a hundred unmarked graves at the cemetery near Pien. No historical records exist of the site or those buried there

Below: this corpse had stones placed on the neck and chest, presumably to hinder its escape from the grave

in the plot marked grave 75. She was the archaeologists' dream — and someone's nightmare from long ago — the queen in what appeared to be a field of vampires.

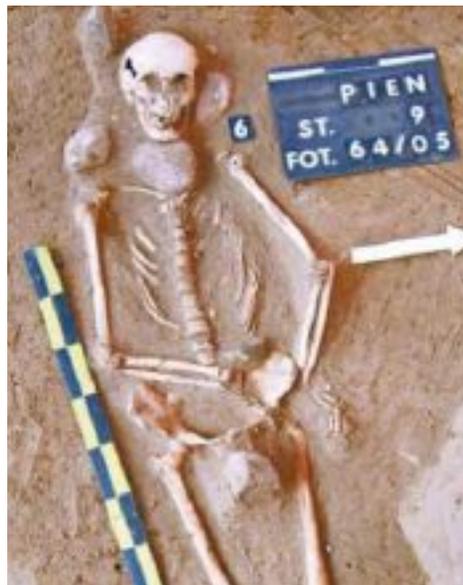
Polinski teaches archaeology at Torun's Nicolaus Copernicus University, named after the 15th and 16th-century astronomer who was born there. The archaeologist had long known about the unmarked cemetery on the hill. Locals had cohabited uneasily with it for generations. Heavy rains might bring skulls and bones to the surface and wash them down the slopes to be found by villagers. Children were warned not to play there and some said horses shied from passing through.

Polinski, originally from the nearby town of Chelmza, recently turned 60 and looks healthy from a life lived outdoors. Zagrodska, 53, from Torun, was one of his students in the 1990s. They have been a couple since 2011 and are joined on their digs by their dog, Petra, who is trusted not to run off with any bones. The couple's discovery of the woman in grave 75 made news around the world and aroused fresh interest in the history of vampires and their representation in drama, literature and mythology. But who was she?

The cemetery was not formalised in any way, not attached to a church, not walled; no tombs or headstones. There were no written records of its existence or who was buried there. "What we know for sure is that this place, this cemetery, was for people who were excluded from the community," Polinski says. "There are no historical sources about this place, which is very strange and means that it was the cemetery for people who were abandoned. It has been written out of history."

The absence of any record meant that the original intent behind the deviant burials was lost. But there were plenty of records

IN DEATH SHE HAD AROUSED FEAR. WHOEVER BURIED HER HAD INTENDED THAT IF SHE RAISED HER HEAD SHE WOULD BE DECAPITATED



of local vampire encounters and beliefs that could help to interpret what had gone on in the hills above Pien. Polinski and Zagrodska attempted to age and date the woman in grave 75 — to whom they gave the name Zosia — and to recreate her image using forensic techniques more commonly deployed in crime scene investigations.

In a new two-part documentary, *Field of Vampires* on Sky History, they take viewers on a global journey, from the grave's discovery to the moment Zosia is brought back to life (almost) through the artistry of a facial reconstruction expert in Sweden.

Here's what we know about her so far. Carbon-dating tests place her age at 18 and her death about 350 years ago, in the middle of the 17th century, during a period of instability and some conflict between Poland and nearby nations including Russia and Sweden. That was before the term "vampire" entered into usage in Europe in the 18th century.

The first known record of the word appears in 1725, when military officials on the eastern borders of the Habsburg empire began logging accounts of encounters with the undead. The first came from a medical officer, Frombald, who reported to his superiors that Serbian soldiers had exhumed, staked and burnt a corpse that had risen from the grave to strangle and infect victims. The attacker, later named as Peter Plogojowitz, had reportedly choked nine people in eight days. Frombald recorded the Serbian word the locals used: "vampyri". The term spread like wildfire through Europe. But there was already a common Polish word for the undead in use in the 17th century: *upior*.

"People truly saw *upiors*, fought with them, died because of them, and some were convinced that they themselves were *upiors*," says Lukasz Kozak, a Polish historian who reprimands me when I tell him I am writing about the local "myth". "That is not the right word here, as it was — however it may sound — a reality."

Our understanding of vampires has arisen in part through oral and written testimony of actual, albeit mysterious, incidents. Such accounts are a far cry from the Noughties romanticised vampire ►

fiction of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books and films. They bear little resemblance to the fanged blood-sucking Count Orlok in the classic 1920s German expressionist film by FW Murnau, *Nosferatu: Symphony of Horror*. The breadth and scope of "actual" vampire events and behaviours is truly surprising.

Kozak says that Poland — and Slavic culture, more widely — is the wellspring of vampirism. Poland trumps Transylvania, the home of the man whom many regard as the original vampire, Count Dracula, created by Bram Stoker in his 1897 gothic novel.

"If one were to weigh up the greatest Slavic contribution to global culture, vampires would certainly be a contender," says Kozak in his 2020 book *With Stake and Spade*, a study of historic accounts of encounters with the undead. These early vampires had two souls, it was believed. "After death, one soul leaves the body," Kozak explains, "while the other remains to revive the corpse, which will rise from the grave to frighten and attack people."

In old Poland it was understood that babies born with teeth would become vampires, that they would eat their own death shrouds or the clothes they wore in their coffins and then rise up to attack and devour members of their own families. Sometimes the teeth of corpses would be smashed with a brick, to prevent any maulings. Such stories were recorded as real events for posterity by scientists, local officials or members of the church and even in local newspapers after court trials.

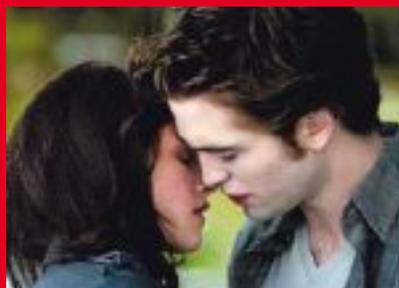
Accounts of *upiors* in journals from the 16th and 17th centuries often featured women like the occupant of grave 75. Their graves would be opened to reveal that they had not decomposed and their clothes were half-eaten or shredded. People would report hearing slurping noises from the graves — assumed to be the vampire feeding noisily on her clothes or her own body.

Some male *upiors*, however, were found to have risen up and returned to the arms of their widows, to father new generations. Where they had not decomposed they were often noted to be ruddy-faced, or as Kozak writes, "they were frequently said to lack hair in their armpits or on their groin, to have hairy chests, or to have hair that stuck out in two whorls (supposedly proof of their having two souls or two hearts). The circumstances of death were also important because, as a rule, suicides would later turn into *upiors*. Similar beliefs applied to people suspected of practising witchcraft."

In one case from 1870 in what is known today as the city of Wejherowo in northern Poland, three men faced prosecution for desecrating the grave of a local landowner, Poblocki, who was feared to be infecting his own family members after his son had also died of tuberculosis. The men attempted to protect themselves by doing two things commonly associated with vampires: they



From top: Max Schreck in *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922); Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931); Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994); Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson in *Twilight* (2008)



decapitated the landowner's corpse and, in a reversal of the vampire myth as we understand it today, they drank his blood.

You might think a plausible explanation for the undead was that they were inadvertently buried alive, but it seems this was not the explanation people reached for.

"There was a serious debate about how they could leave and return to their coffins without disturbing the soil," says Nick Groom, a gothic literature specialist and the author of the 2018 book *The Vampire: A New History*. "This became a crucial detail in determining that the most likely explanation was mass hallucination and nightmares, possibly caused by diet and accidental drug ingestion, and exacerbated by local superstition, the Orthodox church and communal trauma under the martial law of the Habsburg empire."

The shifting borders of that empire, and brutal attempts to unify it, exacerbated the locals' fear of outsiders. Groom, a professor of English at the University of Macau, likens the region's peasant vampires to "shambling zombies". He suggests that the Orthodox church had been "actively fostering the vampire belief" to enforce its own faith, with priests overseeing exhumations and desecrations of graves from the early 1700s. By the mid-18th century, Groom says, "vampires were everywhere".

As the vampire passed out of folklore and into literature, they became the aristocratic, debonair figure popularised by Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and portrayed in films by Bela Lugosi. Groom describes vampires as a "thought experiment... a way of exploring the difference between life and death, between human and non-human". In turn, the vampire became a metaphor for parasitic government officials, traders and others who were seen to be exploiting or feeding off others.

Lord Byron's 1813 narrative poem *The Giaour* contains these lines: "But first, on earth as Vampire sent/ Thy corpse shall from its tomb be rent/ Then ghastly haunt thy native place/ and suck the blood of all thy race". In 1819 Byron's friend and fellow writer John William Polidori wrote a short story, *The Vampyre*, which is said to have emerged from a gothic story "contest" between him and Mary Shelley (the author of *Frankenstein*), Percy Shelley and Byron. Polidori is credited with sparking the literary genre of romantic vampirism, which can be traced through to the *Twilight* novels and other contemporary representations.

In another age or place, a stake might have been plunged into Zosia's heart. Instead, the padlock and the sickle were intended to keep her from causing harm to the living. Polinski is rational — a man of science, he tells me — but Zagrodska believes in the supernatural. She felt that



“Zosia” is brought to life by a facial reconstruction expert. Her bonnet has gold and silver thread, which suggests she was a wealthy outsider

all was not well at Pien. “People who come here ... they feel fear and anxiety,” she says. “There is an extraordinary aura here, an extraordinary atmosphere.”

Zagrodska took to wearing or carrying a small padlock as a talisman to protect her from the dark forces she felt at the cemetery — forces that she believes had been unleashed by the discovery of the girl in grave 75 on the final day of their permit to dig there, on August 30, 2022.

“The day we discovered the grave everyone was getting ready to drive off to the base,” she recalls. “All of a sudden, silence, peace. There is a sudden gust of wind. That wind picks up our excavation tent and the tent is torn towards grave 75 and hits two people. One gets hit in the head and the other in the arm.”

As their brushes exposed the girl’s head, Polinski saw something catching the sunlight, shimmering around her skull — gold and silver silk strands, the last vestiges of a bonnet the young woman had worn. “Materials like this were normally found in the tombs of pretty wealthy people, which probably indicates that this woman was not from the village, but from a wealthy family,” he says. “There were traces, too, of a pillow for her head and wooden fragments of a coffin, which were further clues to her superior, outsider status.”

It took a while longer to expose the lower half of the skeleton and discover the small metal padlock attached to her big toe. The padlock was open, but that might just have been the mechanism failing with age. The discovery of padlocks near bodies was unusual but not unfamiliar to Polinski, and the sickle was rare, though not unique. But the discovery of a sickle and a padlock on the same corpse, with the padlock still attached — now that was something special.

“I tried not to get too excited but I knew it was definitely an amazing burial,” Polinski says. “There is probably no such second case in the world. So it was carefully exposed, documented. And then we knew

“IF ONE WERE TO WEIGH UP THE GREATEST SLAVIC CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL CULTURE, VAMPIRES WOULD CERTAINLY BE A CONTENDER”

it was really something incredible.”

Zosia also had green staining in her throat. In others where this staining was visible, a coin was found. According to Polinski, coins were sometimes put into the mouths of corpses for them to bite on — to stop them sinking their teeth into victims.

The absence of any eyewitness testimony or written records of how the young woman, Zosia, came to be in grave 75 meant the archaeologists Polinski and Zagrodska could rely only on the benefit of scientific hindsight. Zosia’s bone scans were examined in Albuquerque, New Mexico, by Dr Heather Edgar, a medical investigator, who identified an abnormality in the breast bone, which could have been a visible deformity that caused Zosia pain and “marked this person [to others] in a negative way”.

Zosia’s teeth, along with some bone samples, were subjected to molecular analysis to get a strontium isotope reading. The human body incorporates strontium through diet and its isotope values in bone and tooth enamel generally reflect

those of the geographical area in which a person lived. Zosia’s matched Poland — but also Germany and Sweden. Around the time that she died Sweden had invaded Poland from the north, leading to the Swedish-Polish wars. If Zosia was Swedish she would have been an unwelcome, perhaps distrusted, outsider.

In Sweden the facial reconstructor Oscar Nilsson had become entranced by the young woman he was recreating. Nilsson has worked for many years with Swedish police and is more used to murder case reconstructions. Although he tried to work objectively, he said he felt sad for the young woman and hoped to treat her better than she had been treated in life, or death.

“I wanted to give her back her dignity,” he tells me. He scanned her skull and created a precise copy using a 3D printer. He moulded the muscles of her face using clay before turning to silicon as a substitute for human skin. He acquired an imagined copy of the headdress the woman had worn. Finally he unveiled his recreation to Polinski and Zagrodska. Nilsson was nervous. “She feels like my own child at this point,” he says. But the archaeologists were both deeply affected by his achievement. “How is something like this possible?” Polinski says in the documentary.

They may never know the truth about the woman in grave 75 and why she was reburied the way they found her. But Polinski and Zagrodska are not done with Pien, and plan to return soon for further excavations. First they are going there in the early hours, to conduct a night survey using fluorescent lamps that will reflect any bones that have been exposed by recent ploughing. They seemed untroubled by the prospect of spending the night in a field of vampires ■

Field of Vampires, produced by Caravan Media, will be broadcast in two parts on Sky History at 9pm on Tuesday and November 5

Wines worth talking about



If you only buy one case this year ... make it this celebratory mixed case filled with top wine choices from your favourite writers.



COLUMNISTS' CASE 2024

was ~~£176.88~~ now **£119.88** Just **£9.99** a bottle + **FREE** delivery

SAVE OVER
£56
PLUS... **FREE** delivery

ORDER NOW AT: sundaytimeswineclub.co.uk/thecolumnistcase2024

Savings based on individual bottle price. Free standard delivery, usually £7.99. Delivery to UK only (excluding CI and BFPO). Offer ends 31/12/2024 or while stocks last. You or anybody you buy wine for must be 18 years or over. All goods are subject to availability and all orders are subject to acceptance by us. If a wine becomes unavailable, a substitute of similar style and of equal or greater value will be supplied. Order acceptance and the contract between us is formed on despatch of products. Please see sundaytimeswineclub.co.uk/terms for full terms and conditions., and sundaytimeswineclub.co.uk/privacy for our Privacy Policy and Cookie Policy. The Sunday Times Wine Club is operated by Direct Wines Ltd. Registered in England and Wales. Registered Number 1095091. One Waterside Drive, Arlington Business Park, Theale, Berkshire, RG7 4SW. Unless otherwise stated, all wines contain sulphites.



SCAN ME

be drinkaware.co.uk

TABLE TALK

Mark Diacono's
twice-baked potatoes
with rosemary
creamed leeks



Oven-ready autumn

PLUS Sharing plates and “natty wine” in Hackney ● Bargain fizz to buy now for party season ● Supermarket mango chutney: ranked ➔



MARK DIACONO

At this time of year, most of us need a little edible comfort and heartiness to lighten the dark evenings. These three recipes — all takes on the familiar kinds of dishes that you are used to popping in the oven — offer exactly that, and take little of your precious time to create.

◀ **Twice-baked potatoes with rosemary creamed leeks**

The simple pleasure of a baked potato can be elevated to the exceptional with rosemary creamed leeks and the punch of a little smoked paprika — a few moments of extra prep is all it takes. Chipotle chilli flakes work well in place of the paprika, should you fancy, and crisp quartered little gems dressed in excellent olive oil are very good on the side.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 4 large baking potatoes
- 2 large leeks, tough green bits removed
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled
- Salt and pepper
- 200ml double cream
- 20cm twig of rosemary, leaves only, finely chopped
- 1 tsp smoked paprika

1 Heat the oven to 190C fan/gas 7.

2 Place the potatoes in the oven for about 1 hour, until the skins are crisp. Meanwhile, cut the leeks lengthways from the green end to about a third of the way along their length and

wash. Place a clove of garlic in each cut, wrap in foil and put in the oven with the potatoes.

3 After 30 min check the leeks — they should happily take the point of a sharp knife without resistance. If not, give them a little longer. Unwrap the foil and allow to cool while the potatoes continue to cook.

4 When cool enough to handle, remove the garlic and squish to a puree. Peel the toughest outer layer off the leeks, slice off the root ends and discard both. Chop the leeks on the fine side of roughly and put into a bowl, seasoning well.

5 Add the cream, garlic puree and rosemary to a saucepan and slowly bring to the boil. Boil for a minute or so until just beginning to thicken, then remove from the heat.

6 Cut the potatoes in half and scoop out the flesh, leaving the skin for a boat in which you will

sail the filling back into the oven. Mash the potato into the leeks with about 150ml of the cream. Season well. Scoop the mixture back into the potato halves, put on the baking tray and cook for 10 min or so, until colouring nicely.

7 When ready, pour over the rest of the garlicky rosemary cream and sprinkle with smoked paprika.

Pot roast chicken in milk with grapes

Chicken cooked in milk is a classic, as is chicken with grapes, and the two combined — succulent chicken with the sweetness/sharpness of roasted grapes — is so good. You can do this with a whole chicken, but I make it most as a simple midweek supper, using chicken thighs when time is tight.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 40g butter
- 8 chicken thighs, skin on

- Salt and pepper
- 80g black olives, stoned and chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- Handful of thyme
- Zest of 1 lemon, half in strips, half finely grated
- Approx 500ml milk
- 2 tsp paprika
- 400g grapes
- Small handful of coriander, finely chopped
- Tenderstem or sprouting broccoli (optional), to serve

1 Heat the oven to 180C fan/gas 6.

2 Heat the oil and butter in a large frying pan and add the chicken thighs, skin side up — do this in batches if they don't fit comfortably. Season well. After a few minutes, turn each one over and season. Fry until both sides are golden.

3 Place the chicken into an ovenproof dish, spreading the olives, garlic, bay, thyme and





lemon zest strips around the pieces. Pour in enough milk to come halfway up the chicken pieces. Sprinkle the chicken with half the paprika.

4 Put the grapes on a baking sheet — it's fine for all or some to be attached to the stem.

5 Place the chicken in the centre of the oven and cook for 25-30 min, until the juices run clear. The grapes can go on the shelf below and should take 5-10 min less to juicily half-collapse.

6 Serve sprinkled with coriander, grated lemon zest and the rest of the paprika, the grapes to the side, and with broccoli if you like.

Apple, olive oil and oat crumble

Apple crumble is so rewarding to embellish — a tablespoon of fennel seed in the crumble, perhaps; nutmeg or cardamom in with the apples. Here, it is lifted by olive oil in place of

butter, its gentle bitterness offsetting the sweetness. It's perfect for dairy-dodgers, while those avoiding gluten can swap for either a gluten-free flour or 200g extra oats swizzed into a flour in the food processor. The use of two sugars isn't critical — I love the flavour and texture of the demerara, but you can use 100g caster sugar instead.

Ingredients

(Serves 4-6)

- 1 wheel of star anise
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1kg Bramley apples (approx 3 large), peeled, cored and cut into 1cm chunks
- 200g plain flour
- 50g caster sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 5-6 tbsp olive oil
- 75g oats
- 50g demerara sugar
- Cream, to serve

1 Heat the oven to 180C fan/gas 6.

2 Add just enough water to cover the bottom of a medium

pan by 3-4mm. Add the star anise and cinnamon, then the apples. Bring slowly to a low-medium heat, stirring the apples occasionally until they begin to soften, a few edges collapsing. Remove and discard the star anise.

3 Blend the flour, caster sugar and salt in a food processor. With the processor running, slowly pour in 5 tablespoons of olive oil — you might need a little more depending on your flour — until it resembles breadcrumbs. Stir in the oats and demerara sugar.

4 Spoon the apples into an ovenproof dish and spread the crumble mix on top.

5 Place in the centre of the oven and bake for 30-40 min until golden, with the apples swelling around the edges of the crumble here and there. Rest for 15 min before serving to allow the crumble to firm up a little, then serve with plenty of cream ■

Tasted! The best supermarket

MANGO CHUTNEY



OUR PICK

Geeta's Premium

Asda, 230g, £1.90

A very well-balanced chutney with subtle spice and lots of chunky pieces of fruit **5/5**

Taste the Difference

Sainsbury's, 340g,

£2.85 Everything is dialled up to ten in this jar — it's very sweet but also packs a big, fiery punch **4/5**

Fruity

Waitrose, 315g, £2

Mango chutney that tastes of, well, mango chutney! I'd have liked a bit more spice **4/5**

Tiptree

Tesco, 220g, £2.15

Just seven ingredients in here. It won't rock your world but it is nice on the side **3/5**

Patak's Original Mild

Morrisons, 210g, £2

Sweet and spiced, but it doesn't taste like mango — and given the smooth consistency, it doesn't look like it either **2/5**

Sainsbury's

240g, £1.03 Where are the paprika and cayenne pepper in this? It's just a sugary brown goo **1/5**

Tesco

230g, £1 I am just getting sugar and acidity: not mango. There's no way I would choose this **1/5**

Hannah Evans

FOOD

The best crisps of all time

Natalie Whittle has written a cultural history of the snack. Do you agree with her selection?



“Crisps to the rescue.” If ever you needed assurance about the brilliance of fried, flavoured

potato slices, consider how this statement can work in a hundred and one scenarios. A poorly planned picnic? Crisps to the rescue. A four-hour train journey you just caught with no food on your person? Crisps to the rescue. I could go on, but you know crisps and their magical turnaround power just as well as I do.

When I sat down to write a book about my favourite snack, I was surprised to find that for all our worship of crisps, their history is scattered at best — like one of those packets bloated with nitrogen that sends shards of potato everywhere when you attempt to open it. But in assembling the story, the first principle didn’t change much. Crisps are amazingly comforting, able to lift a bad mood and confirm a good one in seconds. In a crowded field, these are the packets I turn to time and time again.



3 KP Hula Hoops Original

One of the first crisp-adjacent products (made from dried potato flakes, not slices), Hula Hoops launched in 1973 aimed squarely at schoolchildren, who intuitively knew that the rings were the ideal circumference to be worn first as potato jewellery before being crunched off the fingers. So began a dazzling subgenre of crisps as an amusement park — from Monster Munch in fuzzy foot shapes to the dehydrating rashers of bacon-flavoured Frazzles. It also reflected that 1970s children were becoming more exposed to the power of advertising. By 2005 the National Consumer Council found that under-16s were spending £680 million of their own pocket money on snacks.

Co-op’s excellently tart sea-salt and chardonnay wine vinegar crisps, but props must also go to Marks & Spencer for a relentless run of seasonal, jokey and luxury flavours, and a notable skill for crinkle cuts. I especially like its truffle flavour: neat, round and thickly cut with a moreish umami tang. In the 1950s M&S outsourced most of its crisps to the snack-maker Meredith & Drew, which had been making biscuits since Victorian times. A lot of crisp business was developed from this sturdy base: companies that had originally got started in biscuits.

Crunch time: Natalie’s top 10



1 Patatas Torres Fried Egg

Whiffer or winner? No premium crisp in the past ten years

has come even remotely close to the controversy surrounding this Spanish number. Some find it revolting, others love it. Via a cunning compound of natural ingredients that bypasses eggs entirely, the flavour conjures a dry sulphuric taste that’s potently similar to egg sandwiches. It’s guaranteed to get people talking, if nothing else — so a good dinner-party offering. Patatas Torres told me its sales of daring flavours have increased, and it seems part of a rolling revolution in Europe where it’s no longer just sea salt, sour cream and chive, and paprika as the holy crisp trilogy.



2 Kettle Chips Mature Cheddar & Red Onion

When Kettle Chips burst into the UK in 1988, they brought a big-bags-full American sense of confidence and a new market for upscale “hand-cooked” chunky crisps made in careful batches. The style was wonderful — so unabashedly crunchy — but less significant to me than the game-changingly thick coating of powdered flavour. In this case an intense orange crumb all but smothered the potato, making every crisp a delight of cheese melting on the tongue. It’s impossible to quantify but I think the coating has been incrementally thinned out over time. Still, the original remains a golden childhood memory.



4 M&S Food Collection Black Truffle & Olive Oil

The supermarket own-brand crisp scene has produced some bangers in recent years. There’s the



5 Kent Crisps Ashmore Cheese & Onion

Why doesn’t the UK have more regional crisp offerings?

Admittedly the US is a bigger country, but by comparison it has a much stronger heritage of small potato chip brands dotted from state to state, churning out hyper-local flavours. Such as



Route 11's Chesapeake Crab in Virginia, for example. Over here, plenty of national brands leverage local tastes — Pipers' Kirkby Malham Chorizo, for example — but there aren't many independent local brands that draw on close-to-home flavours. Kent Crisps is a notable exception, using raw local ingredients such as Ashmore cheese to offer proper provenance.



6 Yorkshire Crisps Worcester Sauce

As a teenager I used to love Walkers Worcester

Sauce flavour and cried when the royal-purple packets were discontinued from sale. This take, from a Yorkshire indie based in the village of Wales Bar, is much more Noughties gastropub than Nineties camping trip, with fine notes of tamarind and aromatics in the seasoning. For nostalgia's sake, it is still a very comforting crisp — the presence of Worcester sauce in British culinary life being all but timeless.



7 Walkers Squares Salt & Vinegar

These little potato tabs deliver a sharp bolt of old-fashioned

vinegar to the roof of the mouth. It used to be owned by Smiths but was given to Walkers by Pepsico, which bought both brands in the late 1980s. In Scotland, where salt and vinegar is hugely popular, a consumer panel said they were not bothered by the idea of Smiths branding being dropped in favour of Walkers. But they rejected the idea that the blue packet colour might be changed to green to fall in line with the rest of Walkers' salt and vinegar portfolio. The idea was passionately unpopular — a former Walkers employee who supervised the panel told me it was the closest to a riot he'd ever witnessed in a consumer group.



8 Bonilla a la Vista

Many crisp companies rose out of the ruins of the Second World War, as economies

patched themselves together again and turned to cheap raw ingredients to turn a profit. Bonilla a la Vista got going earlier, in 1932, as part of a family enterprise based on the charming Galician coast of northwest Spain. The brand has a steady commitment to getting the details right — Spanish potatoes, local olive oil and sea salt, and a wafery pale crisp at the end. It's possibly the only crisp brand of late to feature in an Oscar-winning film too, with a large tin spotted in Bong Joon-ho's satire *Parasite*. After the film came out, there was a flurry of orders from Hong Kong and South Korea. Other Spanish brands stick to the

same formula of just potatoes, salt and olive oil, such as the Waitrose-stocked San Nicasio.



9 Smiths Scampi Fries

OK, not a crisp technically (it's a "cereal snack"), but in my personal church of crisps

I don't distinguish between potato and non-potato brethren. (HMRC does; see its court cases versus the Pringles brand owner Procter & Gamble. Verdict: Pringles are crisps.) The fact that they are so deeply fried is what makes them perfect for the clip-strip displays next to trad pub beer pumps. In the Twenties it was illegal to sell alcohol in pubs without also selling some kind of steadying food alongside, even if just a tin of biscuits. Crisps got a leg-up from this policy once the trade got going after the First World War.

A Walkers employee told me the Squares consumer panel was the closest to a riot he'd witnessed



10 San Carlo Tomato Chips

I pick these up from time to time at a local Italian café-deli. The flavour is at once subtle and

unsatisfying, and the crisps themselves aren't larded with oil for extra crunch. I eat them to remind myself that very different styles of crisps are a

holiday of sorts — revealing in this case just a glimpse of what it might be like to be an Italian, who presumably has a brilliant lifetime of pasta to look forward to and therefore doesn't dwell on crisps. However, San Carlo, founded in Milan in 1936, is name-checked by some chefs as the brand to serve with restaurant food ■

Crunch: An Ode to Crisps by Natalie Whittle (Faber £18.99). Buy from timesbookshop.co.uk. Discount for Times+ members



GETTY IMAGES

Painfully fashionable —
and a total pleasure



SESTA
LONDON E8



Have you been to Pidgin yet? Set menu place in Hackney? Very small, very cool? Everyone's been." This is what all my friends were saying for a couple of years in the mid-2010s. Every now and again a restaurant breaks through like this and it's no longer just a place to shovel beans into your maw. It's a must-have, an accessory, somewhere that defines its fans as — that most unappealing of traits — in the know.

I hate it when this happens. It makes me worry we are skulking closer to our poor friends in New York, where it's impossible to get a table anywhere decent unless you palm £500 to a concierge or look so fit that the border enforcement officer on the door deigns to let you perch at the bar for 63 minutes.

Still, have you been to Pidgin yet? Bad news — it closed in August. In its place comes Sesta. The founders, James Ramsden and Sam Herlihy, have tapped out, while the head chef, Drew Snaith, and the general manager, Hannah Kowalski, are striking out alone. Same minimalist decor, but the set menu is out in favour of à la carte. Set menus are no longer à la mode. Nobody can afford them, including restaurants themselves, because the economy is à la toilette.

Despite the Treasury's best efforts, Sesta was buzzy on the



Just as 2023 was the year of black garlic and hispi cabbage, the cool kids are all eating taramasalata

night I went. This came without the frantic mêlée I encountered at the similarly trendy Goodbye Horses a couple of weeks ago, where they shunt people in and out with the efficiency of an industrial slaughterhouse.

Many of the dishes are almost laughably fashionable. Just as 2023 was the year of black garlic and hispi cabbage, now the cool kids are all eating taramasalata — rather a shock to those who grew up thinking of it only as the sweet, textureless lurid slop they'll sell with a straight face

in supermarkets. Proper taramasalata is, of course, salty, sultry and smoky. Particularly this one, with smoked eel and pickled radishes. Also very in: posh toasties. Sesta's comes with beef ragu, chilli pickled onion and a rich brown sauce made from the dripping. Perfect, but so rich you only want a bite or two.

Lucky, then, this is a sharing plates restaurant, so you'll be sharing. Of course it's a sharing plates restaurant. How many times have we heard these are dying out? Claiming that

THE DAMAGE

Smoked eel taramasalata	£7
Winter radishes	£7
Beef ragu toastie	£10
Tempura oyster mushroom	£10
Smacked cucumber	£12
Stone bass dolma	£14
Ballet squash	£21
Yorkshire chicken leg	£26
Crispy potatoes	£6
Hispi cabbage	£6
2 x saké skillet cake	£18
2 x bottles Arndorfer	£104
Subtotal	£241
Service (12.5%)	£30.12

Total (for four) £271.12

sharing plates are terrible, and you just want a “proper dinner”, is as fashionable as taramasalata. Yet sharing plates restaurants keep opening and thriving. And it’s nice to try a bit of everything when you’ve got a talented chef with lots of ideas. Make your peace with it and enjoy.

Order the tempura oyster mushroom with whipped mushroom parfait. I would never have chosen this — it sounds terribly dull. The idea of Pidgin’s set menu was to get people to try dishes they wouldn’t otherwise have ordered. Turns out you can achieve the same effect here if you have friends with unnatural ideas about mushrooms being exciting. Due thanks to them. It’s an earthy, delicate joy.

Try the confit carrot with marjoram crème fraîche; and the prawn and stone bass dolma (stuffed vine leaves: also highly fashionable), bursting with rich black rice and drenched in ouzo butter. In fact, let’s add “the entire nation of Greece” to the “what’s hot right now” list. (See Oma, the Borough Market restaurant fast becoming this year’s Pidgin.) For dessert you want the plum skillet cake with saké lees parfait. Lees are the crusty deposits of dead yeast that accumulate when you ferment rice wine. If you can get over the horror of that, you’ll be rewarded with the most subtle, creamy hints of saké cutting through the cake’s sweetness.

All of this should be accompanied by a glass of “natty wine”, as our waitress saw fit to call it. What? Sorry, can you use that in a sentence? Yes, I can — here’s how the waitress did: “Do we have any natty wine fans at the table?” Good Lord. Yet we did. And we went for a zingy orange Austrian “natural wine”, which worked so well with our umami-rich food we got another.

Look, if you can get past someone saying “natty wine” out loud, you’ll have a lovely evening at Sesta. This is how to do fashionable dining in a way that delivers good food and a peaceful, pleasant experience. Go now, because in a few months all the worst people you know will be asking if you’ve been yet. Get ahead of them ■



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

WINE • Will Lyons

Party-season fizz for less than a tenner

It feels as if the choice of sparkling wine has (forgive the pun) exploded in recent years. Whereas shelves used to creak under expensive bottles of champagne and gallons of cheap, sweet prosecco, these days they have been joined by an ocean of English sparkling wine and a cast of international bubbles. Almost every country on the wine route is producing some sort of interesting fizz and the Champagne region hasn’t stood still either, with a swathe of highly priced but top-quality grower champagnes.

This is all great news for those wanting to stock up ahead of party season and there is no need to spend north of £20 for a bottle of something vibrant. New Zealand is a great source — The Sunday Times Wine Club’s Hunter’s Miru Miru (£17.99) is a complex, creamy fizz with chardonnay-based, citrus appeal. The champagne house Mumm has just launched its own sparkling wine from Marlborough, and across the Tasman Sea you’ll find world-class examples such as the delicate, nutty NV Jansz Premium Cuvée (Waitrose, £18.49) or the superb, toasty House of Arras Blanc de Blancs (harveynichols.com, £25). Down in South Africa, Cap Classique has bargains produced in the same way as champagne such as the toasty Graham Beck Brut (Majestic, £17).

I think you can get away with spending even less. If you know where to look there is a host of easy-drinking, zesty, well-crafted party fizz at under £10 a bottle, such as the uncomplicated Stormhoek Cape Tradition Fairtrade Sparkling Rosé (Co-op, £6), which is packed with bright ripe berries and delicate hints of cherry.

France’s other noted sparkling wine, crémant, is often a great buy, but don’t overlook Spanish cava. Made from parellada, macabeo and xarel-lo

grapes, its flavour can range from light and appley to toasty and rich. A decent bottle can really fire up a party — just don’t show your guests the label ■

2023 Prosecco Spumante Conegliano Valdobbiadene Italy (11%) Lidl, £7.49 This is the top pick of Lidl’s proseccos. It’s a light, crisp fizz with notes of summer flowers and apple.

Taste the Difference NV Cava Brut Spain (11%) Sainsbury’s, £8.75 Cava can be terrific value and here’s a case in point, with hints of citrus, a vibrant texture and a clean, silky finish.

Loved & Found NV Ribolla Gialla Spumante Italy (11%) Waitrose, £8.99 Fresh, floral and full of zesty white apple, this is a great party-pleasing alternative to prosecco.

Irresistible NV Tilimuqui Sparkling Argentina (11%) Co-op, £9 This torrantes is a light, lively fizz with plenty of tropical fruit and refreshing notes of lime and grapefruit.

2021 The Society’s Cava Reserva Brut Spain (12%) The Wine Society, £9.76 From a small family estate, this cava has lovely flavours of peach and a smooth finish.

NV Étoile de Timberlay Crémant de Bordeaux France (11.5%) M&S, £10 One of the best-value crémants around, with the mature, biscuity notes you expect from champagne.

Bargain of the week

2023 Taste the Difference Picpoul de Pinet France (12.5%) Sainsbury’s, £8.50 (down from £10) This light, elegant picpoul with citrus and peach is a fine aperitif.



HEALTH

Pull the udder one

Are “alt-milks” any healthier — or greener — than the stuff from cows? *Lucy Denyer* reports

When I was a child, the only choice of milk we had was which colour of bottle top you bought. In our family it was whole milk (silver) and the occasional gold top as a treat, with that thick layer of cream plugging the top of the bottle.

Open my fridge now and it's a different story. You'll find the full-fat milk my kids drink, a carton of oat milk, possibly one of almond and occasionally some coconut milk. Scan the aisles of any supermarket and you'll find rice, soya, cashew and even potato milk.

The alternative milk — or alt-milk — market is booming. Mintel data from 2021 found that nearly a third of us now use them: in the UK oat milk is the most popular, followed by almond. Alt-milks, which are all plant-based, are great for vegans and those with a dairy intolerance; Bupa estimates that one in ten adults and older children are thought to be lactose intolerant. Further data from Mintel found that 57 per cent of people ditching cow's milk do so for animal welfare reasons.

But is there an impact on our health? Cow's milk is an

excellent source of vitamins and minerals, particularly calcium. “In general, you can get most of the nutrients you need from 250-300ml of milk a day,” says Professor Ian Givens, director of the Institute of Food, Nutrition and Health at Reading University. “Most milk alternatives are not milk replacements. Very few have much protein in them, and plants do not contain any vitamin B12 — most people get most of their B12 from milk.”

Givens points to research this year at Nottingham University examining the nutritional levels of milk and plant-based alternatives.

It found that apart from soya milk, plant-based drinks do not match the levels of cow's and goat's milk because they do not provide iodine and only limited amounts of calcium, potassium and magnesium. Oat, almond, coconut and rice milk barely contribute to our recommended daily intake of macro and micronutrients. This isn't always clear from the label.

Many almond milks have been fortified with more calcium than (real) milk. But the amount of bioavailable calcium — ie what can be absorbed into our digestive tract — is consistently less than dairy. “The nutrients are there but not in a form the body can absorb as well as it can from actual milk,” Givens says.

Of course there are other ways to get nutrients such as protein and calcium. “Many adults are consuming more protein than they need anyway,” Givens says. But for small children and the elderly, a protein shortfall can be dangerous. “There have been some serious cases of protein deficiency in children who have been weaned onto plant milks too quickly.” For older people, drinking cow's milk can reduce the loss of skeletal muscle that starts to decline in our fifties.

What is in alt-milk? Many are “mainly processed or just sugar”, says the epidemiologist

Many alt-milks are “mainly processed or just sugar”, says the epidemiologist Tim Spector

Tim Spector. Most plant milks count as an ultra-processed food as they contain added ingredients such as oils, fats, preservatives, artificial stabilisers and sometimes sugar.

Spector says this doesn't matter much in fairly small amounts such as in a coffee, but predicts soon we'll start to see bio-identical milk substitutes that mimic the proteins found in cow's milk, creating a liquid that is essentially milk but not produced by a cow.

What about your carbon footprint? A 2018 study found that cow's milk causes about three times as many greenhouse gas emissions as plant milks, uses about ten times as much land in production, and two to twenty times as much fresh water. "If we want to help the planet we should drink less milk," says Spector, who has given it up (though still eats kefir, yoghurt and cheese).

But alt-milks can also be bad for the environment. Soy plantations contribute to deforestation. Almond milk production emits lower levels of greenhouse gas and uses less land than soy, but requires more water, which can lead to shortages. And although oat milk has a relatively low environmental impact, in 2022 adverts by the Oatly brand were banned for overstating the benefits to the planet of switching from dairy.

So is alt-milk a red herring? "The reduction in your total personal footprint from drinking plant milk is tiny," argues Jayne Buxton, author of *The Great Plant-Based Con*. "It's completely dwarfed by the reduction achieved by forgoing a long-haul flight, one of your weekly hot baths or swapping a weekly car journey for a train."

For now I've switched to weekly milk deliveries from local farms where the farmers are paid fairly. I include a pint of oat milk alongside my sons' six pints of "real" stuff, but only because I like the taste. I'm trying to wean myself onto black coffee, eat more yoghurt and grow my own kefir. Which goes some way towards being able to ignore the problem entirely ■

FITNESS

Do the twist — and other ways to boost flexibility



Embrace that sinking feeling

Our prehistoric ancestors squatted to eat or go to the lavatory. "We tend not to squat in modern life," Woolnough says, "but it aids hip, lower back and knee flexibility."

When squatting, see how low you can sink your hips. It should feel challenging but not painful. Even sitting on the floor is great for hip mobility: try it while watching television. Put the soles of your feet together and relax your knees. Tight hips? Sit on a yoga block or a thick book.

Let's twist again

Gently twisting your body is rejuvenating. "A good analogy is of a sponge being squeezed out," Woolnough says. Sit cross-legged on the floor. Place your right hand on the floor behind you. Bring your left hand to the outside of your right knee, gently twisting to the right. Inhale to lengthen your spine and exhale to twist deeper. Look over your right shoulder. Hold, then gently return to centre. Change the cross of your legs and twist to the opposite side.

Go round in circles

Work on your flexibility from your desk. "A simple ankle circle will increase flexibility and mobility in the ankle joint," Rowe-Ham says. Raise your foot and rotate in one direction, then the other. "This reduces stiffness in the joints and helps with range of movement and balance."

Try a foam roller

A foam roller is "a good complement to more dynamic stretching", Rowe-Ham says. Place one under your back or thighs, then roll your body back and forth across it. As always, go easy. Learn the difference between a pain that means you should stop, and a tightness that needs stretching out.

And finally... enjoy it!

"Stretching feels good," Woolnough says. "Not only does it improve circulation and posture, it reduces the risk of injury by promoting better balance. It also releases endorphins, reducing pain." ■

Rosamund Dean

When it comes to exercise, flexibility tends to be an afterthought. If you're fit and strong, does it really matter how bendy you are? The answer is yes, it does.

"As we age, we're faced with reduced muscle mass and decreased bone density," says Kate Rowe-Ham, the author of *Owning Your Menopause: Fitter, Calmer, Stronger in 30 Days*. "We can become less flexible and experience joint aches, which inevitably leads to reduced mobility."

Women are more prone to joint pains around the menopause, but men are also susceptible as genetically they tend to be less flexible.

"Think of turning your head while reversing a car," says Omae Woolnough, a yoga teacher at the Good Rooms studio in Muswell Hill, north London. "When your spine is supple, it twists freely as you move. Often, however, you see people having to move their whole body because the spine has started to lock up."

Yoga is of course a great way to improve flexibility. Here are some other exercises that you can try at home:



D R I V I N G • Jeremy Clarkson

What the car would be like if we all just ignored climate catastrophe



REVIEW TOYOTA GR SUPRA

appreciate that some of you reading this will have a ground source heat pump and an electrical car, and that you holiday in a tent to cut your carbon emissions, and I promise I'm not going to be wilfully provocative. I agree with you that the world is heating up, so let's move on and ponder for a little while what the world might feel like today if the concept of global warming had never really caught on.

What if we dismissed it as something Margaret Thatcher

invented in the Eighties to use against the miners? What if we noticed the rise in temperatures and said, "Yeah, but it was a damn sight hotter than this before records began"? What if we didn't hold Greta Thunberg aloft as a sort of Mayan Nostradamus and instead saw her as a rather spoilt little girl whose silly parents allowed her to sit in the school playground all day, rather than telling her to go inside to learn something?

How would things be if we'd done all that? Well, there'd be no such thing as Ed Miliband, that's for sure, and you wouldn't have to go through the Hyde Park underpass at 20mph. What's more, your heating bills would be lower, there'd be no such thing as a vegan sausage roll and most of the world's great art wouldn't have orange paint all over it.

On the road, it's possible the electric car would have

made a comeback. Some people like the bang/nothing torque delivery and enjoy driving along listening to the tyres. But there'd be no government discounts or pan-European drive to make them mainstream. They'd just be a curiosity for the few. Like boned pigeon.

The Toyota Prius? That might well have happened, even if climate change was seen as some sort of mad Scientology-type cult for the world's flat-Earth antivaxers. Using electrical assistance to create greater fuel economy would have been appealing to many, and certainly to Uber, which would also have happened. Electric buses would certainly have come along too because they make life so much better for people in cities.

Who knows? If the world hadn't been propelled by its fear of rising temperatures, maybe some of the money being hurled into the development of

alternative energy sources could have been spent developing a global system of hydrogen delivery. That would have been very cool. And indeed cooling.

But for the most part cars would have continued along the same trajectory, getting better, more reliable and safer. And their engines would have got smoother and more powerful and more economical until we ended up with something not far removed from the Toyota GR Supra.

I mean it. While the rest of Toyota has been busying itself with the whims of the world's politicians, and working hard to make the Prius even more Lib Demish, it seems that they've had a special roomful of engineers who were allowed no access to the outside world. People who therefore have no clue about the plight of the polar bear or the high-water mark in Tuvalu.

It seems Toyota has a roomful of engineers that were allowed no access to the outside world



I reviewed the Supra when it came along five years ago and described it as neither over nor underwhelming. It was just whelming. But the new version I'm reviewing today is the GR. Which is short, I think, for Grrrr. When a Toyota says GR on the back, petrolheads pay attention.

I was therefore expecting great things, but first there's the problem of getting inside. Five years ago, when I tried the old car, it was a struggle, but today I'm considerably fatter, so it was nigh-on impossible. The problem is the door, which is just too small. It's like climbing into a postbox, but if you can manage it there's actually quite a lot of space.

Now, first things first, this may be a Supra but it's nothing

like the Supra from the Nineties. That, like the Nissan 300ZX, and to a lesser extent the Mitsubishi Starion, was part of Japan's attempt to give the Chevrolet Corvette a kicking. It was unnecessarily big and childish and American, and I actually rather liked it.

Today's Supra is aimed more at the European sports car market. Which is why it shares a great many parts — by which I mean the engine and gearbox — with the BMW Z4. And now it's been breathed on by the team that brought us that modern-day Lancia Integrale, the GR Yaris.

It's not the best-looking car in the world. It put me in mind of a chap who's spent way too much time in the gym, building up

muscles and bulges that aren't strictly necessary for everyday living. But it does have purpose. And the figures suggest it isn't all show and no go. The straight-six, old-skool turbo engine produces 335bhp, and in a car this size that's a lot.

There's more old-skool stuff, such as, for example, a manual gearbox in the car I drove. It took a while to reacquaint myself with this technology and, while I'd love to be all misty-eyed and nostalgic, it did feel as though I'd gone from a laptop to a sit-up-and-beg typewriter. I'd specify the flappy paddles if I were you. Unless you are the sort of person who thinks your TV remote is witchcraft.

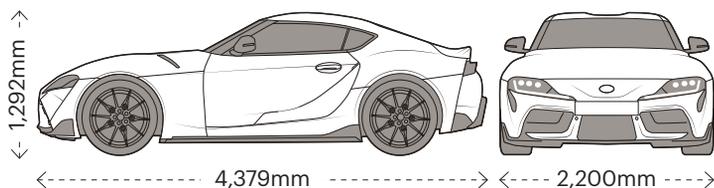
Much better blasts from the past are the actual knobs for the stereo and the heating system. You don't have to use the touchscreen at all to be warmer or to make the radio go away. And then there's the nanny state stuff. For some reason this car doesn't sound a klaxon if you stray slightly over the speed limits. There are no *T. rex* escape warning lights either. Just a discreet symbol on the dash, a polite "ahem" from the onboard butler to suggest that "Sir might want to slow down a tad". This alone makes the Supra worth buying.

And there's more. It rides beautifully, the back end is wonderfully loose when the road's greasy and the speed is slap bang in the middle of the ballpark marked fun without being scary. And you can engage Sport mode, which just makes everything a bit better.

It's not like riding around in the olden days, despite the gearbox and the knobs. It's like riding around in what the olden days might have been like if global warming had never happened. It feels like what the car could have been if it had been left to its own devices. Analogue.

The GR Supra hasn't won much praise from my colleagues in the specialist press. But I rather liked it. Obviously I'd never buy one and neither would you if you are either tall or fat, or both. You'd be better off with a Porsche or an Alpine. Or the Yaris GR. But it has something, this car. So if you're short, put it on the list as a maybe ■

The Clarksometer Toyota GR Supra 3.0 Pro Manual



Engine 2998cc, 6 cylinders, turbo, petrol **Power** 335bhp @ 6500rpm **Torque** 369 lb ft @ 1600rpm **Acceleration** 0-62mph: 4.6sec **Top speed** 155mph **Fuel** 32.1mpg **CO₂** 198g/km **Weight** 1,502kg **Price** £57,130 **Release date** On sale now

Jeremy's rating ★★★★★☆

CAR CLINIC Our experts answer your questions



Q My son has been fined for turning into a road that is "no entry" during school hours. There is no advance warning except for a sign obstructed by a tree. Can he appeal?

DC, Waltham Forest

A The law governing traffic signs says they must be visible, properly positioned, of sufficient size, clear and legible. They must also be maintained to ensure they are not obstructed by the growth of trees or shrubs.

You cannot be reasonably expected to comply with a sign you are unable to see. On this basis you can appeal. Photograph the sign from the perspective of the driver as well as close-ups to show how it was masked by foliage. If you believe no warning was provided about the time restriction, this is another important point to raise.

You typically register an appeal online via the issuing authority's platform. It should clearly outline the facts and be supported by photographs. If the initial appeal is rejected, you can escalate your case to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal. Should the penalty remain uncontested, you may face a £100 fine and three penalty points, though the fine can increase to £1,000 if the matter proceeds to a magistrates' court ■



Nick Freeman, aka Mr Loophole, motoring lawyer

Send questions to carclinic@sunday-times.co.uk

HOTTER®

This season's
wardrobe essential

SAVE
£40
OFF RRP



Tan
Leather

Navy
Leather

Wine
Leather

Dark Grey
Nubuck

Khaki
Nubuck

WHISPER

With handy twin side zips and available in soft leathers and nubucks, this iconic women's ruffled boot is a wardrobe must-have.

NOW £59

Black Lizard
Leather

Black
Leather



3 Pairs



Half Sizes



Leather

ORDER TODAY AND SAVE £40 with code **HRWS40H**

Call 01695 79 79 79 Mon - Sun (24hrs) or visit hotter.com

This offer entitles the customer to purchase selected colours of Whisper at £59, a saving of £40 off RRP when code HRWS40H is applied at checkout. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or promotion, and is subject to availability. A minimum spend of £30 is required to qualify for this promotion. Offer valid until 26th Nov 2024. We reserve the right to amend or withdraw this offer without notice or liability. For full T&C's, visit hotter.com/terms

FUTON

C O M P A N Y

Double your useable space
with our sofa beds



24 stores • futoncompany.co.uk • 0345 609 4455



AND SO TO BED
LONDON

UP TO
20% OFF
VISPRING
Luxury Beds - London 1901

AUTUMN
SALE
ENDS TODAY

BEST PRICES ON

AIRELOOM
Luxury Beds - London 1901

VISPRING
Luxury Beds - London 1901

TEMPUR

ANDSOTOBED.CO.UK | 0808 144 4343

Julius Bahn
OAK BUILDINGS



REQUEST OUR
2024 BROCHURE



03444 171 400 | JULIUSBANH.CO.UK



JAMES BARCLAY

Assessments & Valuations . Hand Cleaning . Repairs & Restoration . Uplift & Delivery

At James Barclay we have many years experience in preserving and restoring all types of handmade carpets and rugs. We recommend your Persian and Oriental carpets and rugs are cleaned every 5-7 years and repaired every 8-10 years. Our team of specialists will appraise your rugs and offer expert advice and guidance. From small prevention repairs to large scale restoration, we can advise you on all types of repair work.

Call us now on **0203 174 2427** for uplift and advice, we collect daily in London and weekly throughout England and Wales.

Head office: 47b Welbeck Street, Marylebone, London W1G 9XA
 Workshop : 12 Oliver Park, Park Royal, London NW10 7JB
 info@jamesbarclay.co.uk jamesbarclay.co.uk



SIMPLE AND CONVENIENT YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP FOR SAVINGS



- ✓ Simple & convenient to use
- ✓ Competitive savings rates
- ✓ Manage multiple accounts with a single login



raisin.co.uk/offer-tmm0424

DIESEL CLAIM DEADLINE LOOMING

CITROEN

DEADLINE: 15th December 2024

VOLVO

DEADLINE: 15th November 2024

PEUGEOT

DEADLINE: 15th December 2024

FORD

BMW

JAGUAR

**LAND
ROVER**

You could receive **up to £10,000** in compensation if you owned or leased a diesel vehicle between 2009 and 2018... Don't miss out!



To determine whether your vehicle was affected, simply input your registration into our Reg Checker.

check-my-vehicle-reg.co.uk



DIESEL CLAIM
NO WIN, NO FEE COMPENSATION

Our Emission deadline **31st October, 2024**. Cars affected manufactured between 2009 - 2018.



**SAVE
£270**
FREE NEXT DAY
DELIVERY

System Platinum

The ultimate home cleaning solution

Was £669.98

£399.98

Use code

LU25



Easy to manoeuvre

The AirRAM Platinum's low-profile handle glides easily under furniture, while the Multi Platinum is the handheld cleaning solution for spotless upholstery and stairs.

Handy attachments

The Multi Platinum comes with a crevice tool for awkward spaces, an extension tube to reach high or low, and a dusting brush to make delicate surfaces sparkle.

Introducing the **Gtech System Platinum**. Two lightweight, cordless vacuums in one powerful combination. Glide from carpets to hard floors, with our award winning upright, the **AirRAM Platinum** or use the handheld **Multi Platinum** to tackle stairs, upholstery and everything in between. The forefront of innovation and beautifully crafted using superior materials, the **System Platinum** combines advanced cordless technology with first-class performance.

Even longer run-time

Powered by 22V lithium-ion batteries, the AirRAM Platinum and Multi Platinum have a combined runtime of up to 90 minutes*.

Forward Inertia Drive

Enhanced with Forward Inertia Drive, the AirRAM Platinum glides forward, making cleaning your home virtually effortless.

Anti Hair Wrap Technology

The AirRAM's built-in comb keeps the brush bar clean, so hair and dust go straight into the bin – so your vacuum can keep performing at its best.



Easy-empty bin

The dust bins efficiently compress dirt and hair as you vacuum. Empty it away by removing the waste cylinder and sliding compressed dirt into the bin.

Aluminium strengthened

More robust than ever, we've reinforced both vacuums with aluminium to help withstand the strain of busy homes and pets.



"Probably the best upright cordless vac ever."

"It's powerful, beautiful to look at and the light is really bright. I love having the separate cleaner to do the stairs. It has made my life so much easier. Also the tools and air fresheners."

Sandra K ★★★★★

"This innocuous-looking machine hides a world of power. My carpets have never looked so good."

Chrissie M ★★★★★

"I just love this Hoover my carpets have had a new lease of life. It is so light and easy to manoeuvre, also easy to empty and store, most importantly it does a great job of what it was designed for."

Eileen M ★★★★★

Includes Car Accessory Kit



Kit includes flexible crevice tool, small upholstery tool and soft dusting brush in storage bag, to clean tricky areas in your home and car.

Get our **System Platinum and Car Kit** bundle for just **£399.98**

(RRP £669.98) saving £270 if you order before 15/11/2024.

Add the System Platinum and the Car Kit to your basket to redeem offer.

Order now at www.gtech.co.uk call **0800 030 86 49** or scan the QR code:



Offers valid until 15/11/2024 or while stocks last and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Individual RRP of AirRAM Platinum is £349.99, Multi Platinum is £269.99 and Car Accessory Kit is £50, which gives a total RRP of £669.98. 30-day money-back guarantee, excluding £10 collection fee. *Runtimes quoted may vary depending on surfaces cleaned. See www.gtech.co.uk for full details.

Inventor & Owner, Nick Grey

"The AirRAM Platinum and Multi Platinum are perfect partners. We've combined our newest innovations to create the ultimate cleaning solution, as well as being robust and stylish too. Ideal for modern homes."

Nick

www.gtech.co.uk

★ Trustpilot ★★★★★

Gtech's rating is 4.8 out of 5 after 150,000 reviews



Free tracked next day delivery and 2-year warranty†



FREE CONSULTATION PACKAGE

includes
CONSULTATION,
FLIGHTS AND
ACCOMMODATION

OUR PRICES
ARE TYPICALLY
70% LOWER
THAN UK PRICES

GET YOUR BEST SMILE IN 2024

KREATIV DENTAL HAS OFFERED UNRIVALLED WORLD CLASS DENTAL TREATMENT IN BUDAPEST SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ITS FIRST CLINIC IN 1996

DENTAL CLINIC OF THE YEAR
*See website for details

20 YEARS TREATING UK AND INTERNATIONAL PATIENTS

Holder of two 'BEST IN EUROPE' awards 80,000 plus satisfied patients



- ✓ Our focus is always on quality and customer satisfaction
- ✓ We invest constantly in the latest technologies
- ✓ We offer the most extensive guarantee available from any dental clinic in Europe
- ✓ Highly advanced dental surgery and on-site laboratory
- ✓ Our **Free Consultation Package** offers amazing value to our patients

T. 0203 6530 331

www.kreativdentalclinic.co.uk



Extra-Warm for a Scottish Winter

Warm Fleece-Lined Shirts £29.95 each

SAVE £30
(when you buy 2)



Bark

Bramble

Beech

Birch

Blackthorn

Boxwood

Scotland's Warmest Shirt? Well, thousands of our satisfied customers would certainly agree. This fleece-lined shirt will keep you warm and cosy whether you're enjoying the outdoors or hunkering down indoors. The fibres of the soft micro-fleece lining trap warm air, keeping you warm on the coldest day. Equally comfortable tucked-in or worn as a rugged overshirt. With one button-down chest pocket, double button cuffs and extended shirt tail. Trusted by outdoor professionals and country enthusiasts for over 135 years. **Order Today.**

Sizes: S(35-37) M(38-40) L(41-43) XL(44-46) 2XL(47-49) 3XL(50-52) 4XL(53-55)

Colours: Bark, Bramble, Beech, Birch, Blackthorn, Boxwood

Fleece-Lined Shirts were £44.95
Special Price £34.95 (SAVE £10)
2 Shirts for £59.90 (SAVE £30)
Plus FREE p&p (worth £4.95)



www.fifecountry.co.uk Tel: 0345 607 6632
Please Quote 24ASTM6 Mon-Fri 9-7pm, Sat 9-5pm, Sun 11-4pm

Money Back Guarantee

Please quote code 24ASTM6 on our website, by 'phone or return coupon to: FREEPOST RTCK-ZKYJ-GGRB, Fife Country, Cupar, Fife KY15 4RB

I enclose a cheque made payable to Fife Country.
 Please charge £_____ from my credit/debit card

Card Type: Visa Debit Visa Credit Mastercard

Card No

PLEASE SEND:	CODE	CLOUR	SIZE	QTY	TOTAL
Fleece-Lined Shirt	2269				
Fleece-Lined Shirt	2269				
Fleece-Lined Shirt	2269				
FREE P&P SAVE £4.95					P&P £ FREE
TOTAL					£

Valid From Expiry Date Security No

Name

Address

Postcode Tel

email

Thank you for your order. If you DO NOT wish to receive offers from carefully selected companies* please tick the box
*Please see our full privacy policy at www.fifecountry.co.uk Company Reg No 15281 **Trusted for over 135 Years**

Stannah Homelifts

Being
independent is
knowing you
can use all of
your home.



Here at Stannah, we believe in making life easier for everyone. We understand the dilemma you face when you can no longer manage the stairs. The worry about moving house or living on the ground floor of your current home. That's why we have developed a new range of homelifts, Uplifts by Stannah.

Our Uplifts range are styled to seamlessly blend in with your home, giving you independence to effortlessly move between floors with ease. It's also ideal for taking bulky items like vacuum cleaners, laundry baskets and suitcases up and down stairs too.

Choosing a Stannah homelift, you can rely on us to handle everything for you. From quick and easy installation in just a day, that doesn't require any major structural work, to our 24-hour UK based helpline, we pride ourselves on giving you peace of mind and confidence in your home.

Call us today

0800 707 6847

stannah.com

Why choose a Stannah homelift:

- ✓ No major structural changes required
- ✓ Quick and easy installation – fitted in just one day
- ✓ 2 free services to ensure your homelift is kept in good condition
- ✓ 2-year warranty including parts and labour for repairs
- ✓ Local Stannah engineers available for emergencies 24/7
- ✓ Safety sensors which automatically detect any obstruction
- ✓ Two cabin sizes, for up to three people or a wheelchair



Stannah

Best of Travel

Whether you'd like to escape to the other side of the world, or venture somewhere closer to home, these travel ideas and tips are sure to fire up the imagination.

Secure your winter getaway

As winter approaches, now is the perfect time to secure your dream getaway before availability runs out. With over 600 properties to choose from, ChaletFinder have something to cater to everyone's preferences and needs.

ChaletFinder, a renowned accommodation portal based in Cheshire, UK, boasts over 20 years of expertise in the ski travel industry. Their platform offers a wide array of catered and self-catered apartments, chalets, and hotels in resorts worldwide, perfect for skiing, mountain biking, or simply unwinding. Whether you're



planning a winter getaway or a summer holiday, ChaletFinder has the ideal chalet accommodation to meet your needs.

ChaletFinder connects travellers directly with property owners who possess in-depth knowledge of the resorts and can provide valuable assistance with the local area, tailoring their services to your specific requirements.



If you're seeking the perfect getaway or want to generate genuine leads for your property, contact them today at chaletfinder.co.uk

CHALET FINDER



Sail Alaska with Steppes Travel

Explore southeast Alaska's 'panhandle' on this exclusive photography voyage. Witness the magnificent wildlife under the guidance of award-winning photographer, Paul Goldenstein.

This trip is ideally suited for beginners and serious photographers, and for those who also wish to savour the moment in this beautiful place. Days are determined by the wildlife, with no rush to move on.

Photograph humpback whales bubble-net feeding, observe a family of grizzlies feeding on spawning salmon, or awe-inspiring tidewater glaciers, where seals bask on floating ice. Master composition techniques, lighting adaptation, filter use and capturing



morning wildlife with your smartphone or DSLR camera.

A ratio of one guide for up to six clients ensures an attentive and relaxed experience. The voyage is from 24 July to 5 August 2025, costing from £9,550 per person, excluding flights.

Only 11 spaces are available, you can reserve your space by speaking to a Steppes Travel expert.

SteppesTravel



Speak to the Steppes Travel experts to reserve your place: visit steppestravel.com or call 01285 402195 or email times@steppestravel.com

Win a week away for four Worth £1,200!



Padstow Breaks is a collection of pet-friendly, luxury self-catering cottages in the Cornish town of Padstow. Leave feeling rested, relaxed and inspired. For more information, visit padstowbreaks.com

To enter, visit checklists.co.uk/ra/padstow

Stanhope Hotel: a luxury weekend escape

Escape to the luxurious Stanhope Hotel Brussels by Thon Hotels, nestled in a peaceful area in the heart of the Belgian capital.

Experience elegance and comfort with their special weekend rates, which include early check-in and late check-out, giving you more time to explore the city or relax in their serene secret garden.



Each room tells a unique story, blending history with modern luxury for a truly memorable stay.

Visit Brussels for a special weekend getaway at the five-star Stanhope Hotel, where history and luxury awaits you.



Scan the QR code or book directly at thonhotels.com

Set sail on the adventure of a lifetime



Classic Charters, the premier yacht broker, specialise in organising bespoke charters and adventures aboard the world's most stunning yachts. Whether you're dreaming of the vibrant Caribbean this Christmas, the sun-soaked Mediterranean coastlines for next summer, or a more off-the-beaten-path expedition to remote locations, Classic Charters create timeless, unforgettable experiences with the world's finest yachts, tailored to your every desire.

As inspiration, consider the magnificent 32-metre *Fir Niente*, available for private charter next summer to explore Norway's breathtaking fjords. With expansive deck spaces, elegant staterooms, and exquisite

design, this modern classic blends timeless elegance with luxurious comfort for a truly unique experience. Your captain and crew will craft a bespoke itinerary to match your pace, and your chef will create an exquisite menu, ensuring your perfect, once-in-a-lifetime adventure. With charters starting at £100,000 per week, *Fir Niente* offers a unique opportunity to explore one of the world's most stunning destinations in unmatched style. This yacht is also offered for sale.

Whether it's a romantic escape, a family holiday, a grand adventure or your first foray into ownership, Classic Charters are dedicated to bringing your vision to life.

CLASSIC CHARTERS



To find out more information, visit classic-charters.com

Create your own true love island

Adaaran Prestige Vadoo is a luxury all-inclusive resort in the Maldives that specialises in adult-only stays — perfect for when you and your partner want to feel like the only two people on the planet.

The resort's water villas are the very picture of seclusion. Dive straight into the Indian Ocean from your villa for a swim among spectacular marine life, enjoy room service with a personal butler, and make unforgettable memories.



When you're ready to tear yourselves away, the Mandaa spa, the resort's incredible restaurants and a choice of thrilling water sports await.

ADAARAN
MALDIVES



Visit adaaran.com/prestigevadoo

Tee off in the sun this winter

Precise Resort El Rompido in Spain offers two golf courses on site in a beautiful Andalusian setting.

Open year round, with the appealing Iberian climate, it's a great choice for those essential R&R extras beyond the fairways, too. Relax by one of the resort's many pools, then rejuvenate in the spa and fitness centre.

The resort offers golfers a range of challenges on its 18th

and sixth courses, plus cycling, water sports and nearby cultural attractions.



The resort has its own restaurants and bars, including luxurious all-weather dining at the golf club and stylish poolside dining at the hotel.



PRECISE RESORT
El Rompido Costa de la Luz

Visit precisehotels.com/en/elrompido

Stay in a dreamy Greek oasis

Discover The Roc Club, a one-of-a-kind, brand-new resort Club-Maison located in the heart of the Athens Riviera.

The resort's 34 exclusive suites, rooms, and apartments are graced with sublime sea views, bright interiors, marble baths, and soothing natural fabrics.

Bathe by the sun-drenched pool or indulge in alfresco dining with a Mediterranean menu and signature cocktails.

Embodying an inspiring beachside allure and the essence of authentic Greek hospitality, The Roc Club awaits you for an unmatched coastal escape in Athens.



THE ROC CLUB
VOULGAREN



Experience true luxury at The Roc Club. Call (+30) 2108-964-901 or visit therocclub.com

Win a
winter
break in
Scotland
Worth £480!



Coal House Hotel is a privately-owned country house hotel just north of Inverness, in the Scottish Highlands. Beyond the log fires, stunning mountain views, great reputation for its cuisine and extensive wine list, the most memorable part of a stay here is the warm service provided by the staff. Expect a genuinely warm, friendly and relaxed stay.

Enter now for a chance to win a two-night Scottish Highlands winter break at Coal House Hotel, in a superior room with breakfast, with a value of £480.

Email them at stay@coalhouse.com, call 01997 421487 or visit coalhousehotel.com/offers

COAL HOUSE HOTEL
Deliciously Publishing



To enter, visit checklists.co.uk/win/coalhouse

Please visit checklists.co.uk/competitions-terms-and-conditions for full terms and conditions

Celebrate a magical Christmas at The Langham, London



THE LANGHAM LONDON

This Christmas, The Langham partners with renowned toy store Hamleys to create a magical festive experience.

The exclusive Christmas family package includes a luxurious stay in an executive room or higher, access to the Hamleys Grotto, a Christmas tree in the room, treats and a bottle of Taittinger for adults.

The Langham's restaurants and bars, all overseen by Michel Roux, will offer festive dining from 7 November.

Palm Court will serve a specially designed Hamleys children's afternoon tea featuring pastries shaped like historic toys, while adults can enjoy a Christmas twist on The Langham's traditional afternoon tea — honouring the hotel's legacy as the birth place of afternoon tea back in 1865.

At Chez Roux, guests can indulge in seasonal dishes such as venison tartare with confit egg yolk, Bœuf à la mode with morel sauce, and decadent desserts like mince-pie tart. The award-winning Artesian bar, The Wigmore pub and the cookery school, Sauce, will also embrace the festive spirit. Whatever your heart desires this Christmas, The Langham promises a celebration in true festive style.



For more information, visit langhamlondon.com/christmas or call 020 7636000.

Drive, travel, explore



Combine the thrill of driving classic cars with the joy of discovering new landscapes, cultures, and fascinating sites around the world. Itineris driving adventures offer a unique way to travel together. Enjoy unmatched camaraderie from like-minded enthusiasts, exceptional hospitality, fun and flawlessly curated experiences, and the most dedicated organisational team. Events

are fully hosted, including hospitality host, route coordinator, media team, mechanical support, and luggage service.

Entries will soon open for the Temple Tour in 2016, a week-long odyssey between two of the most historically significant cities Athens and Rome. Register your interest now, or build your perfect driving adventure and the Itineris team will let you know when there's a matching tour.



Visit itineris-events.com

Best of Luxury

A little indulgence can elevate the everyday. Get inspired with this carefully curated selection of premium products and experiences to spoil yourself and your loved ones.

The best of art by women

Gillian Jason Gallery is a go-to reference point for specialist advice when it comes to collecting the best of art by women. The Gallery presents modern and contemporary artists whose works are both visually beautiful and intellectually resonant, grounded in art history concepts whilst addressing today's critical shifts.

Founded in 1980 by Gillian Jason and re-established in 2021 by Millie Jason Foster, the third generation of women to lead the Gallery, GJG combines a legacy of expertise with a modern, design-led approach. The Gallery prioritises representing female-identifying artists whose work challenges societal and artistic conventions, addressing themes such as identity, equality, and diversity.

GJG is a key reference for collectors seeking diverse, impactful and thought-provoking art that will stand the test of time, with a focus on emerging and mid-career contemporary artists.



Explore more at gillianjason.com or reach out by emailing info@gillianjason.com to receive more information, specialist advice or market insights.

The ultimate country house party

Huntham Court is a completely exclusive-use private estate for you to take over, whatever the occasion.

The magnificent and vast mansion sits in beautiful grounds amidst the rolling countryside in Devon. Inside, a stunning collection of adaptable reception rooms are warm, welcoming, and present a rarely-found relaxed glamour. Its 42 elegant, inviting bedrooms and suites mean up to 100 guests can enjoy a really special stay.

There is no corkage or hidden fees.



HUNTHAM COURT

Use either the venue's fantastic network of local suppliers (from Michelin chefs to festival-style food trucks) or bring your own caterers or staff. A team of in-house, experienced event planners are on hand to help as little or as much as you require.

Huntham Court is your number one venue to host the ultimate party, wedding or a gathering in 2025 and beyond.



For more information visit hunthamcourt.co.uk or call 01398 361277.

Win a Conway Stewart luxury pen Worth £500!

Nothing beats a luxury pen to write letters to loved ones, sign big contracts or keep journals, and Conway Stewart have one of the largest ranges of British-made pens. To see the full range visit conwaystewart.com



Enter here

checklists.co.uk/win/conway24



Charles Tyrwhitt's autumn-essential Merino

It's that time of year again, but you might not mind so much, thanks to Charles Tyrwhitt's cosy-yet-refined new season collection.

Update your cool-weather looks with quality and comfort in a huge range of styles and colours, crafted from pure wool and winter-ready fabrics. From work to the weekend, every dress code is covered with an array of knitwear, effortless trousers and everyday shirts.

Layer up in Merino jumpers that do more, coming in enough colours and neck



styles to please everyone. These seasonal heroes are easily teamed with polos, chinos and trainers, or pair just as well under a suit with smarter shirts and blazers. Stocking up for every day of the week sounds like an even smarter plan now.



CHARLES TYRWHITT
JERMYN STREET LONDON



Visit charlestyrwhitt.com for the full range, or pop into one of their stores now.

The Julius Prague: your gateway to elegance

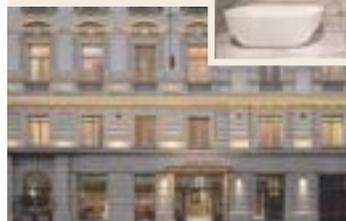
Nestled in the heart of one of Europe's most enchanting cities, The Julius Prague offers a unique blend of contemporary luxury and historical charm. Located just steps away from Prague's most iconic landmarks, this premium destination is the perfect base for both leisure and business travellers.

The Julius Prague is more than just a place to stay: it's an experience. Each suite is thoughtfully designed with modern elegance, offering spacious living areas, fully-equipped kitchens, and lavish bathrooms. Guests can enjoy a range of exclusive services, including 24-hour reception, daily housekeeping, and a state-of-the-art fitness centre.



Brasserie The Julius, the on-site restaurant, serves a delectable fusion of Czech and international cuisine and offers an ambiance that perfectly complements the hotel's luxurious setting.

For those seeking the finest travel experiences, The Julius Prague is your gateway to the best of Prague.



THE JULIUS
PRAGUE



For reservations and inquiries, visit thejulius.eu or email info@thejulius.eu

An artisan approach

Holland & Holland's country clothing is sourced from artisan suppliers across the British Isles. By adopting this artisanal approach, the company is proudly preserving traditional techniques and supporting local communities.

From tweed shooting suits to hand-woven knitwear, cashmere sweaters to silk ties — natural materials are woven with luxury and performance in mind; timeless styles that are made to last.

An accessories collection continues this ethos. Frequently gifted and often collected, an extensive array of accoutrements ranges from copper wheel engraved crystal decanters



HOLLAND & HOLLAND

and tumblers to English pewter hip flasks, intricately engraved silverware to fine leather goods made with oak bark tanned hides.

This approach to true modern luxury is steeped in traditional craftsmanship and has resulted in a range that is elegant, standing the test of time both in their durability and their timeless aesthetic appeal.



Visit hollandandholland.com/shop to view their full range.



Exquisite British heritage leather goods

Launer London is synonymous with exquisite, handcrafted leather goods for men and women.

Their handbags have graced the arms of the most prestigious clients, including Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Her Majesty Queen Camilla. A Royal Warrant Holder since 1968, Launer's bags and leather goods are coveted for their

meticulous craftsmanship, employing time-honoured skills and traditions.

A pioneer of customisation, Launer provides a service which transforms any item — be it a handbag, wallet, purse or accessory — with an array of shades to choose from. There are 65 in their colour portfolio, with an additional choice of leather materials, fittings and lettering.

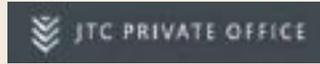


Every piece is made to order, which ensures Launer retains its lauded heritage status.



Visit launer.com to see the full range.

The power of an outsourced family office



JTC Private Office support families to manage life's complexities as a dedicated outsourced family office.

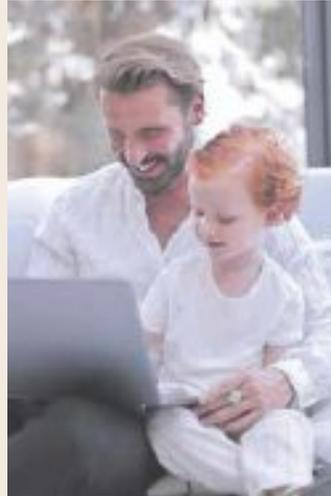
Their holistic approach is built around the unique needs of each family and aims to simplify their lives and improve the management of their financial and non-financial assets. The Private Office team specialise in luxury asset consulting, improving family governance, succession planning and next-generation education.

JTC Private Office takes pride in partnering with their clients to embrace their lives today while also planning for their future. They also provide outsourced administration services for clients without their own family office.



A client said, "Our family office was basically running off a spreadsheet. We knew that we had to professionalise and properly separate our private and business affairs - but had been putting this off for a while as the task seemed too big. JTC Private Office managed the entire process for us and we are very proud of the new set-up."

Whether buying a superyacht, moving country, or planning for the transfer of wealth to the next generation, the team help their clients to identify and prepare for the complexities that arise — along with supporting them with the ongoing administration and reporting.



For more information, visit jtcprivateoffice.com



New collection launch

Augustine Jewels, an award-winning luxury jewellery brand from Notting Hill, is launching its stunning New York collection.

It features rings inspired by the Chrysler Building, showcasing polished blends of gold, diamond and black enamelling to create truly special jewellery.

Augustine Jewels was shortlisted for Bespoke

Jewellery Designer of the Year in 2024.

Their service invites clients into the creative process, using extraordinary gemstones to craft exquisite designs.

Shop the collections at their flagship store: 75 Ledbury Road, Notting Hill W11 2AG or shop online at augustinejewels.com

For enquiries, email alexandra@augustinejewels.com or call 020 3556 5780.



A LIFE IN THE DAY

Rose Matafeo

Comedian and writer, 32

Matafeo was born in Auckland and started doing stand-up aged 15. She moved to the UK in 2014 and made her Edinburgh Fringe debut two years later. She won best show for *Horndog* there in 2018. As well as being a regular panel show guest she is the co-writer and star of the BBC comedy drama *Starstruck*, which earned her a Bafta nomination in 2022. She lives alone in London.

Sorry, but I will not reveal what time I get up. Suffice to say, I am genetically disposed to avoid mornings. The day has to be approached... slowly. Exercise? I have no idea what you're talking about. I walk, I have a bike; what more do you want? And my breakfast is healthy: scrambled eggs on toast. With coffee, of course, made in my Aromaboy filter machine. With coffee beans that cost too much.

I used to live in a flat with a lot of mirrors. My reflection was a constant reference. I look pretty darn fabulous in the morning but, as the day wore on, things got worse and I'd end up feeling daggy as hell. My new flat hasn't got as many mirrors. Being terrified of how you look isn't good for anyone.

London has been my home for most of my adult life, which is weird. It's best to keep it simple: wherever I lay my stuff, that's my home. I came here for comedy when I was 22, but for the first couple of years I earned hardly anything. Those years of not being recognised did at least give me a chance to use dating apps. Having said that, I do have fairly well-known friends who use them now. It's just the way



that people meet these days. You go on Tinder or Hinge and you get married.

I talk about relationships on stage. What did you expect? I'm part of the oversharing generation. As I'm getting older, I realise there are some things I don't want to put out there. I'm beginning to value my privacy. Basically, I'm a complete f***ing liar. There's your headline.

Lunch is whatever's in the fridge. I'm aiming for zero food waste. Back in New Zealand we have a much more seasonal approach to meals. I was kind of surprised when I first came over to the UK; this idea that you can eat what you want, when you want. If you're trying to be green, that's not going to work.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Best advice I was given

Don't overthink things

Advice I'd give

Don't listen to me. I don't know what I'm talking about

What I wish I'd known

Nothing. Ignorance is bliss

You'll often find politicians turning up at comedy shows in New Zealand. Doesn't happen as much here. Yes, the population is smaller there, so it can feel like everyone knows each other, but I also think those politicians are much more... they're real people. They get into the job because they genuinely want to change things for the better. We don't have an Eton in New Zealand.

I might be on the other side of the world, but New Zealand is part of most days. There's a constant flow of friends and relatives coming to stay, plus social media making me constantly "available". My family's not going to like this, but I wish I wasn't so available. Back in the Eighties, if I'd have been that crazy aunt who went to live in another country, I would have disappeared. Now I've only got to flick through Instagram and I know what I'm missing out on — and that hurts.

Dinner is often just for me. I'm living on my own and I'm a master at cooking for one — this many potatoes, this much spaghetti. I spend a lot of time eating while standing up. Does that say something about me?

I get asked if it's hard being a woman comedian. It's hard being a woman, full stop. Things are changing in comedy but they're changing very slowly. And they're only changing because some amazing women have had the bravery to stand up and make themselves heard. Yes, there's gender parity in some industries, but out in the wider world, we're still f***ed!

Comedy is a night-time job. I might finish around 11 but even when I come off stage I'm still full of energy. I feel so lucky. Millions of people have a go at comedy, but not everyone makes it. Being able to make a living from it is a privilege. Thank God it did work out as I didn't have a back-up plan. No safety net, no one to rescue me. Comedy has to be like that — it really is all or nothing ■

Interview by Danny Scott.
Rose Matafeo appears on *Junior Taskmaster* on Channel 4 later this year; @rosematafeo



DON'T MISS OUR SPECIAL
30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION
NEXT SUNDAY

ALWAYS IN

THE SUNDAY TIMES
STYLE



NEXT



This page:
Blouse £38
Jeans £48
Earrings £55

Opposite:
Dress £96
Earrings £10



This page:
Jumper £48
Skirt £34
Boots £85
Earrings £8

Opposite:
Knit £44
Scarf £23
Jeans £35



NEXT

THE SUNDAY TIMES *magazine*

October 27 2024

ADVERTISEMENT

Flip over
for your regular
copy of The
Sunday Times
Magazine



N
E
X
T