Tom Parker Bowles 'It's been a hell of a two years for Mum'

Saturday interview, page 27

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Travel

The Daily Telegraph
PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

Energy bills may rise in nuclear power push

Industry bosses want consumers to pay for work at heart of Labour's net zero policy

By **Matt Oliver** INDUSTRY EDITOR

HOUSEHOLDS could face higher energy bills to pay for nuclear reactors as the Government puts the power source at the heart of its net zero plans.

The Telegraph understands that industry bosses are pushing Ed Miliband, the Energy Secretary, to let companies add the costs of building new mini-nuclear reactors to consumer bills.

It comes as Mr Miliband this week described nuclear power as "essential" to Labour's net zero plans. He urged private companies to build nuclear projects in Britain and said the Government was exploring how it could "help".

The prospect of higher bills is likely to prove contentious at a time when Mr Miliband's plan to overhaul the electricity system is already raising concerns about increasing bills.

British companies pay the highest industrial electricity prices in the developed world, official data showed in September, with ministers concerned that any further increase in bills could sound the death knell for struggling industries such as steel and car making.

It comes amid a wider backlash over the cost of net zero to businesses, with ministers under pressure to water down ambitious electric vehicle sales targets that the car industry has warned are too punitive and are putting investment and jobs at risk.

Labour has said that the move to green energy will cut bills in the long term, and a report last month by the National Energy System Operator (Neso) found the switch to "clean power" by 2030 would reduce bills slightly. However, the claim has been disputed by several experts and the Conservatives, who argue it is based on unrealistic data.

The shift to more intermittent power sources such as wind and solar has also raised concerns about blackout risks.

Earlier this week the UK briefly activated its anti-blackout plan for the second time this winter, with power companies told to bring gas-fired stations out of hibernation in case they were needed.

Amid these concerns, on Thursday, Sir Keir Starmer appeared to water down Labour's pledge to achieve a totally carbon-free electricity system by 2030 by promising instead to reach 95 per cent by the end of the decade.

The Government is increasingly putting nuclear at the heart of its plans, with investment in multi-billion nuclear projects also aimed at reviving the stuttering economy.

Sir Keir will next week travel to the UAE where he is expected to court Gulf investment for Britain's Sizewell C reactor.

Mr Miliband told executives at an industry conference this week that nuclear power would play an "essential" role in the Government's net zero plans. He said: "My message is clear: if you want to build a nuclear project in Britain, my door is open.

"On funding, we are exploring how Government can help private developers bring advanced nuclear projects to market. On planning, we will be consulting on a new nuclear planning framework and siting policy next year."

He added that nuclear power would

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AARON CHOWN/PA WIRE

Prince Louis and the Princess of Wales during the Together at Christmas carol service at Westminster Abbey *Report: Pages 6-7*

Prince of Wales to join Trump at reopening of Notre-Dame

By **Victoria Ward**
DEPUTY ROYAL EDITOR

THE Prince of Wales will today join Donald Trump at the official reopening of Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, after being scrambled to attend in a last-minute diplomatic mission.

Prince William accepted an invitation from Emmanuel Macron, the French president, to attend the ceremony five years after the cathedral was wrecked by fire.

He will join Mr Trump, the US president-elect, Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, dozens of other world leaders and more than 1,500 guests for the service, which will be led by Laurent Ulrich, the Catholic archbishop of Paris.

The Prince, 42, is travelling at the request of the Government, the palace said. It is understood that the Prince's attendance was arranged at the last minute. Mr Trump announced that he would be travelling to France for the ceremony on Monday evening.

Prince William last met Mr Trump in 2019, when the then-president made a state visit to the UK, joining senior royals for a traditional white-tie state banquet at Buckingham Palace.

Sir Keir Starmer has not met Mr Trump since the Republican's election victory. The Prime Minister has insisted that he is looking forward to working with Mr Trump, despite highly critical comments about the president-elect made in the past by senior Labour figures threatening to strain relations.

The Prince of Wales's trip to France came after he attended a Christmas carol service yesterday at Westminster Abbey hosted by his wife, the first she has arranged since her cancer treatment. The royal couple was joined at the service by their three children, and the Prince gave a reading about those who have "walked in darkness" finding the light.

Mr Trump was serving his first term when the Notre-Dame fire broke out on April 15, 2019. The fire started in the attic, destroying the oak roof beams and supporting lead roof.

The service will begin with a ceremonial reopening of the cathedral's great doors and the playing of its organ. The celebration of the first Mass will come on Sunday. Archbishop Ulrich will reopen the doors by tapping them with his crozier, or bishop's staff, created by designer Sylvain Dubuisson using pieces of wood that fell from the cathedral roof during the inferno.

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NEWS

'Danger to life' alert as Storm Darragh hits

A rare "red weather" warning has been issued ahead of the arrival of Storm Darragh. The Met Office has warned parts of Wales and South West England could see significant disruption and a "danger to life" becasue of high winds today. Separate yellow and amber warnings for wind are in place for much of England, Wales and southern Scotland until tomorrow. The Met Office said red warnings are for "very dangerous weather" where people should take "direct action" to stay safe.
Page 9

NEWS

Wallace: autism caused inappropriate actions

Gregg Wallace is expected to tell independent investigators that his sexually inappropriate behaviour could be linked to undiagnosed autism. Friends of the *MasterChef* presenter are convinced he suffers from a neurodiversity condition that explains his behaviour. The production company which makes the show, Banijay, announced last week it was launching an investigation into complaints made against Wallace over his behaviour.
Page 14

MATT

'Flu, Covid, Norovirus and RSV. Are they Keir Starmer's four new pledges?'

WORLD

Syrian rebels make headway for Homs

Syrian rebels are rapidly advancing on Homs, having taken control of the northern countryside in a lightning offensive against government forces that has already seen Hama and Aleppo fall. There were conflicting reports about whether Bashar al-Assad's army had withdrawn from the strategic city yesterday as anti-regime forces moved in from the north in the latest stunning challenge to the president and his 24-year rule. It comes just a day after rebels took the nearby city of Hama.
Page 16

BUSINESS

'High streets will be ravaged in New Year'

High streets will be "ravaged" after Christmas as Labour's tax raid costs small businesses as much as £32,000 more a year, the Tories have warned. Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, cut the relief entrepreneurs can claim when passing their company on to their children, so those inheriting face a 40 per cent tax bill on half of everything above £1 million. Andrew Griffith, the shadow business secretary, warned that the changes would lead to a "January of discontent".
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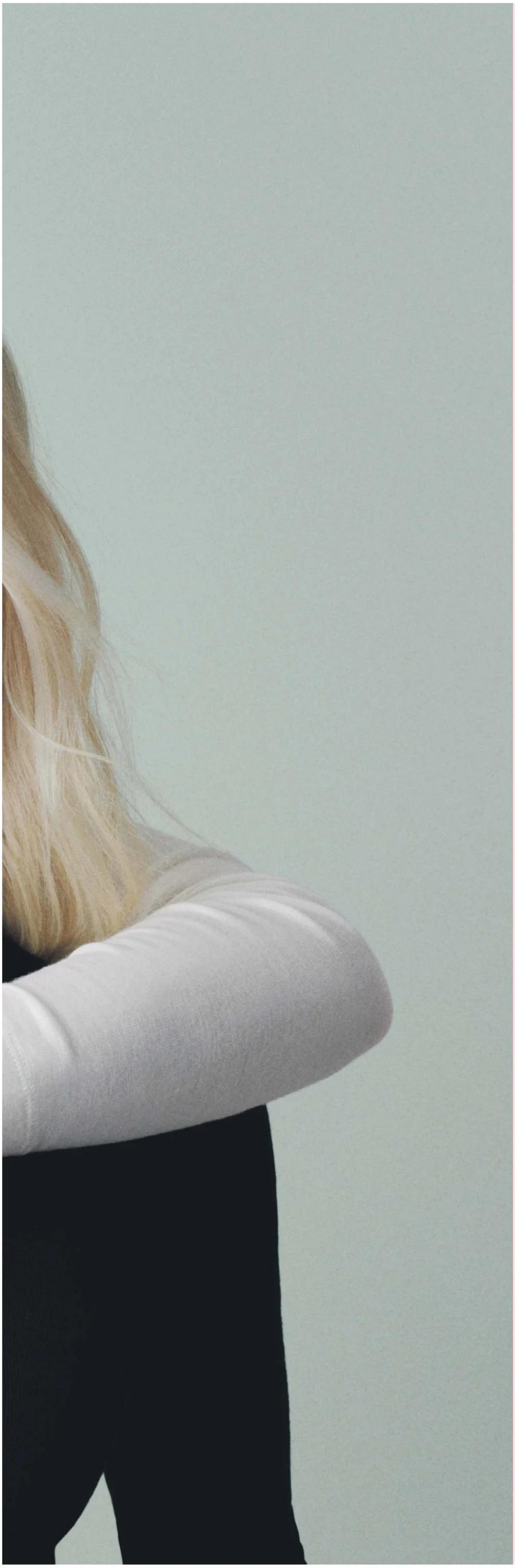
BOODLES
1798
A FAMILY STORY



BOODLES

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Chancellor: No magic money tree for defence

Chancellor warns that raising the military budget to meet target will squeeze other parts of government

By **Albert Tait**

RAISING Britain's defence budget will squeeze spending on other parts of government, Rachel Reeves has warned.

The Chancellor, who aims to increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP, said that extra money for the Armed Forces would come out of the same spending "envelope" used for other priorities.

She told the *Daily Mail*: "There is not some magic pot for any area of government spending – it has to come out of this (spending) envelope."

Labour pledged to "set out the path" to reach the 2.5 per cent figure in its manifesto but has not yet said when it will be achieved. In an interview with the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg last month, Darren Jones, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, repeatedly refused to promise it would be met in the next five years.

Ms Reeves told the *Daily Mail* that the plan for defence spending would be set out once the sector-wide Strategic Defence Review is completed next year.

She said: "We're doing the defence review at the moment, being led by George Robertson, former head of Nato, and that will be reporting next year. And then we'll set out the trajectory for defence spending alongside that." But she warned that other parts of government would have to be squeezed to fund the spending, saying: "If you spend money on one thing, you can't spend it elsewhere. There's not a magic money tree."

Ms Reeves said a one-year spending review she announced during the budget would involve a "line-by-line" examination of every item of Whitehall spending in a bid to slash waste and increase efficiency.

"It's a good process, because we'll go through line by line, every spending item of every department, and then we will also use outside people to challenge that and look at that," she said.

There is growing debate about when Britain should reach this threshold for expenditure on defence, further fuelled by the election of Donald Trump in the US, someone who has repeatedly called for Nato allies to increase spending.

Government insiders, Labour grandees and defence industry sources all told *The Telegraph* last month they expect the timetable for hitting 2.5 per cent to be unveiled in spring 2025, just weeks after Mr Trump enters the White House in January. The UK currently spends around 2.2 per cent each year of GDP on defence. That is above the 2 per cent target set by Nato for its members and puts Britain in eighth place for spending out of the 32 Nato members. An uplift to 2.5 per cent would see the UK jump to fourth place in the Nato league table.

Military figures have called for increased spending on the military. Gen Sir Roland Walker, the Chief of the General Staff, used his first speech as the new head of the Army to warn in July that the UK needed to be ready to fight a major war in three years, double its ability to kill the enemy by 2027 and triple it by the end of the decade.

Rishi Sunak had promised that his government would allocate 2.5 per cent of GDP to defence by 2030, a pledge that Sir Keir Starmer failed to match during the election campaign.

When he announced the plan in April, the former prime minister warned that Europe's future security was at risk from Russia.

Ex-Chinese spy and daughter 'terrorised' neighbours

By **Will Bolton** CRIME CORRESPONDENT

A FORMER Chinese intelligence officer and her solicitor daughter "terrorised" their neighbours in a campaign of harassment by playing loud music on a loop and banging paint cans.

Susan Chen, 61, and Linda Lu, 35, were each jailed for five and a half years after being convicted of causing serious alarm or distress to their neighbours, James and Lynn Smith, in the village of Bassingham, near Lincoln.

Chen and Lu used binoculars to spy on the couple, shone torches at their home for hours, took photographs of them and shouted abuse.

The Smiths, who have two young children, were targeted by the mother and daughter following a disagreement about a hedge in July 2023, jurors heard. Mr Smith had attempted to trim the front hedge separating his property from the one rented by Chen, but his neighbours, who had only moved in three months before, objected.

Passing sentence at Lincoln Crown Court, Judge James House KC said events took an "unexpected and sinister turn" following the incident.

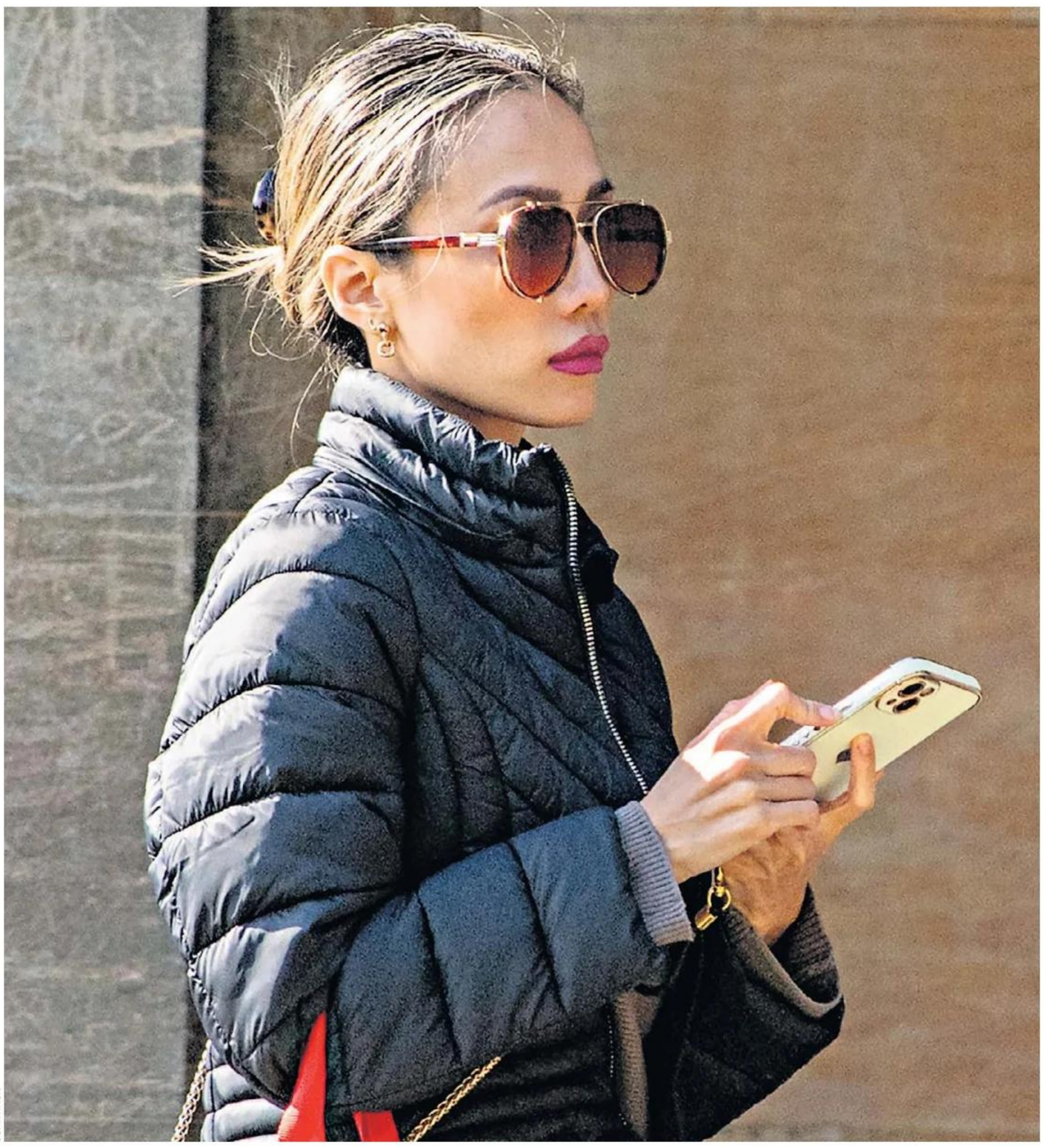
"Mr Smith went out and had only been cutting for 30 seconds when he became aware of Ms Chen shouting," the Judge explained. He said the couple were subjected to a "persistent, calculated and appalling" pattern of behaviour that lasted more than two months.

Footage and audio was also shown of the "loud metallic banging" of paint cans and the repeated playing of music including the "laughing policeman".

On another occasion, CCTV showed Chen and Lu shining torches at the house for two hours during the night. Chen and Lu also used a mobile phone linked to a camera to know when the Smith family were outside.

"In short, the defendants terrorised the Smith family," Judge House concluded. "It amounted to a complete persecution of them."

Both defendants declined the offer of a psychiatric assessment before the sentence hearing.



JOHN ARON

Susan Chen, above, was jailed for five and a half years alongside her daughter Linda Lu, main

'He had only been out cutting for 30 seconds when he became aware of Ms Chen shouting'

Nuclear firm needs clarity from No 10 in order to invest

Continued from Page 1

also provide a boost to jobs. He said: "we should be enthusiastic about nuclear, not just for what it offers for our energy system, but what it offers in terms of jobs, investment, industry and exports".

Industry bosses are pushing the Energy Secretary to let companies add the costs of building new mini-nuclear reactors to consumer bills during construction in exchange for private investors and banks providing the bulk of the cash upfront. Investors would then recoup this cost from bill payers over time. The proposals would replicate how London's £5 billion "super sewer" was built, with supporters arguing that the arrangement keeps borrowing costs low without requiring the Government to be involved directly.

One Whitehall source said the Government was "open to a lot more private sector dynamism on nuclear" but stressed the idea would only work if it involved "less taxpayer funding and more private funding". New funding models are being explored for the new breed of mini-nuclear reactors being developed by industry, rather than full-scale plants.

X-Energy, a nuclear company backed by Amazon, told *The Telegraph* it was prepared to invest £20 billion into Britain but said it first needed "clarity" from the Government on how the project could be financed.

It is understood the company favours a model that would allow the cost to be paid for through bills. Some nuclear plant developers also want taxpayer-funded grants to help them with early development costs, *The Telegraph* understands.

Whitehall sources stressed it was too early to discuss potential funding models but said the objective would be to leverage private, rather than public cash.

The sources said it was too early to say how funding could be structured but potential options include allowing plants to use the regulated asset base (RAB) model or contracts for difference, which are used in the wind and solar industries. Both arrangements would see households and businesses pay for power and some project costs through their bills.

A Government spokesman said: "Thanks to decisive action, there are now four companies shortlisted in Great British Nuclear's SMR competition. As confirmed in the Autumn Budget, contract negotiations are under way, with final decisions to be taken in the spring."

NEWS BULLETIN

Reeves to hold talks with EU on Ukraine funding

Rachel Reeves will hold talks with EU finance ministers in Brussels next week on how to ensure ongoing support for Ukraine.

The Eurogroup meeting is the first a British chancellor has attended since Brexit, with the focus set to be how to ensure financial support for Kyiv continues amid fears Donald Trump will cut US funding.

The President-elect has vowed to hit EU and UK imports with a tariff of 20 per cent, raising fears of a trade war, and may reduce US support for Ukraine and even Nato.

"With China, Russia and the US all pulling in different directions, it turns out that have more in common than we have differences," an EU diplomat said.

EU officials told *The Telegraph* that $50 billion of support for Ukraine agreed at the G7 would be discussed.

MPs agree to embark on power-sharing approach

Two recently elected Labour MPs have announced their engagement after first meeting on the hustings.

Jeevun Sandher proposed to Louise Jones at her home on Sunday, 14 months into their relationship.

The pair were both elected in July this year – Mr Sandher to the constituency of Loughborough, while Ms Jones claimed North East Derbyshire, about 30 miles apart.

The couple are not the first Labour MPs to marry.

Yvette Cooper, the Home Secretary, served in Gordon Brown's cabinet alongside her husband, Ed Balls, the education secretary at the time.

Labour grey-belt plans 'risk scrubland habitats'

Labour's plans to build on grey belt put vital scrubland habitats at risk, a charity has warned.

This week, Sir Keir Starmer reiterated his target of building 1.5 million homes, but that relies on redefining green-belt land, where development is restricted, as grey belt, including "poor-quality scrubland, mothballed on the outskirts of town".

CPRE, the countryside charity, has warned scrubland can include vital habitats for wildlife and be turned into woodland and wetland. CPRE's Lizzie Bundred Woodward said profit should not be put "before food security, health and nature restoration".

Prince Harry's memoir is most traded-in biography

The Duke of Sussex's 2023 memoir, *Spare,* broke many records including being the fastest selling non-fiction book of all time.

But it has now notched up another milestone as it has become the most traded-in biography for the second year running, according to We Buy Books. A spokesman for the website said: "For the second year running *Spare* is the most traded-in biography of 2024. This year, we purchased a total of 567 copies."

Spare originally retailed at £28 and We Buy Books is now offering £3.38 for a second-hand copy of the hardback edition and 50p for the paperback.

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The Daily Telegraph, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 0DT

Who's a good doggie? Fewer than one in 100

Fear-related issues and separation anxiety among reasons why even pampered pets like to let rip

By **Joe Pinkstone**
SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

THERE may be no such thing as a well-behaved dog, a study has found.

Research on more than 43,000 dogs in the US found that "essentially all" pet dogs have at least one relatively serious behavioural issue.

Dogs of all breeds, age, sex and neuter status were included in the analysis. It found that 99.12 per cent had behavioural issues.

Questionnaires were given to owners and asked them to anonymously, and honestly, rank the severity of bad behaviours in their pet on a scale of 0-4.

These included a range of issues categorised into aggression, fear and anxiety behaviours, house-soiling and attachment problems.

Aggression questions looked at any signs of animosity towards other dogs when on a walk, when toys are taken away by the owner and barking when a person walks by the house.

Fear-related issues include being scared when approached by an unknown person, being scared of baths, and afraid of loud noises such as fireworks. House-soiling included urination and defecation when left alone.

Examples of separation and attachment disorders include whining when alone, chewing furniture and following people around the house.

Data show that 86 per cent of dogs exhibited a type of separation issue to at least a moderate degree.

The next most common issues were frequent eating of faeces (73 per cent), aggression (57 per cent) and fear/anxiety (50 per cent).

"Essentially all pet dogs in the United States have at least one moderate to serious behavioural issue, which typically goes unaddressed by veterinary practitioners," Prof Bonnie V Beaver, the study author from Texas A&M University, writes in her paper.

The study found that 99.12 per cent of dogs surveyed had behavioural issues

She told *The Telegraph* that the ubiquity of behavioural problems surprised her as it far exceeded previous estimates.

The anonymous surveys likely allowed the owners to be completely honest about the behaviour of their pet, she said, which could explain the study's estimated prevalence being more than 99 per cent.

"The dog ages vary considerably and range from very young to very old with most acquired pre-pandemic," she said.

"These results are owner-reported with the knowledge of confidentiality so they are likely to be more honest.

"Some other reports are as high as 78 per cent, and I think the large number of participants, multiple aged dogs, and confidential information may be why [the figure is so high], but I really don't know. It has been a surprise to all."

The data behind the study came from the Dog Aging Project which is investigating the secrets to a long and healthy canine lifespans and just 110 of the 43,517 animals in the study had no behaviour issues.

An additional 273 dogs scored "moderate" – a two out of four – for just one behaviour and the combined 383 animals were the only good dogs in the entire study, a paltry 0.88 per cent.

'Essentially, all dogs in the United States have at least one moderate to serious behavioural issue'

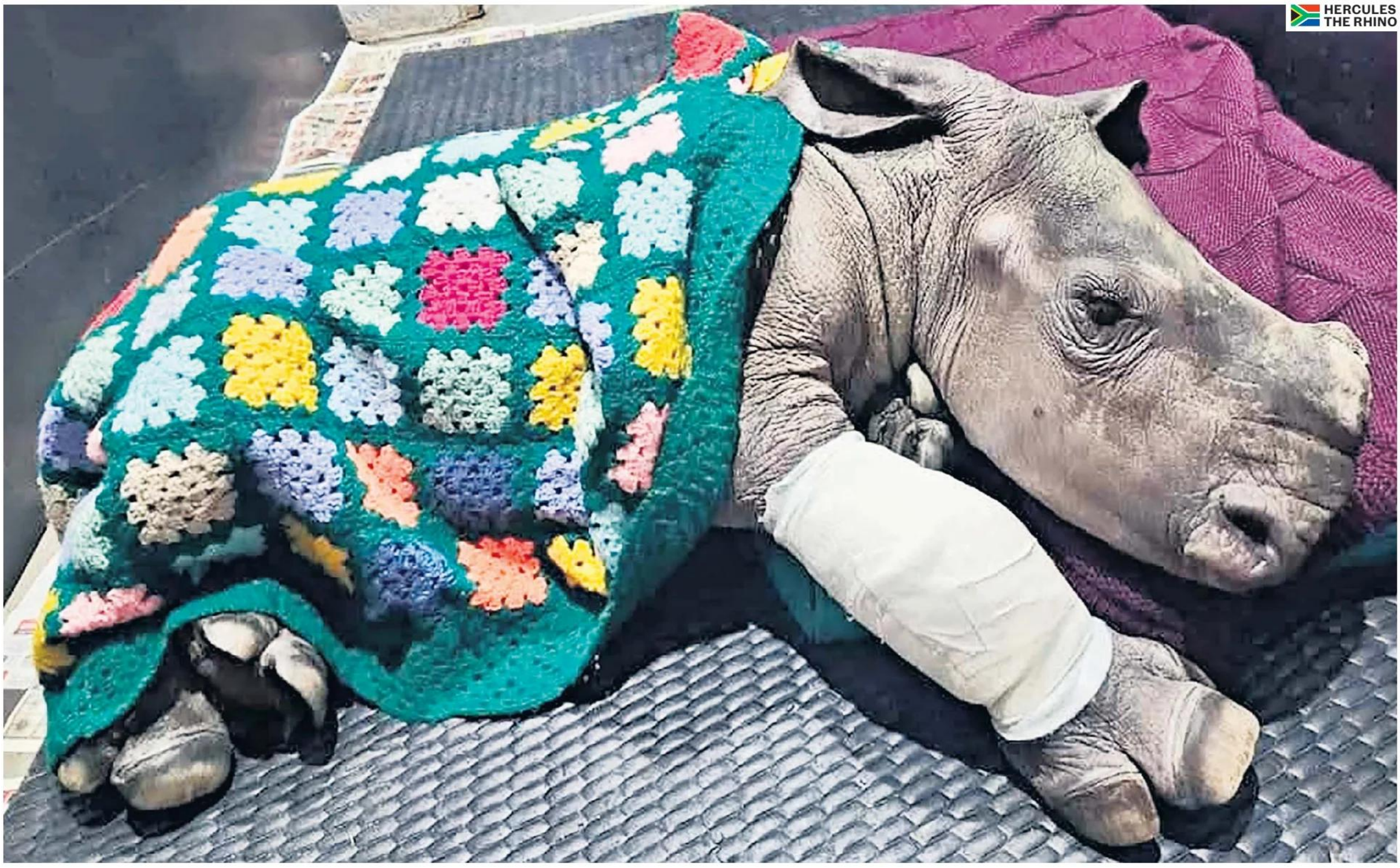
"Thus 99.12 per cent of dogs in this study have either a single behaviour problem described as moderately serious or serious – a three or four out of four – or more than one problem described as moderate or worse - two or more," the report reads.

Daniel Mills, professor of Veterinary Behavioural Medicine at the University of Lincoln, who was not involved with the study, told *The Telegraph* the data was robust, but some of the questions may lead to an overestimate of the prevalence.

The study included behaviours such as a dog which "tends to follow you" and "tends to sit close to, or in contact with, you", which Prof Mills says could be argued as not being problematic at all.

"That might explain the 85 per cent prevalence of separation-related problems reported and I would question if that is a problem," he said.

The study is published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behaviour*.



Nans have just the right stitches for baby rhino injured in hyena attack

By **Tim Sigsworth**

A GROUP of "knitting nanas" from Teesside have sent a handmade blanket to Africa to help a baby rhino recover after it was attacked by hyenas.

Residents of Hazelgrove Court Care Home in the Victorian seaside town of Saltburn-by-the-Sea, North Yorks, worked together on the multicoloured quilt for three-week-old Hercules.

The rhinoceros was rescued by an animal sanctuary in South Africa after it suffered fractures, crush injuries and infected wounds in an attack by hyenas.

Aided by the warmth provided by the blanket, Hercules is expected to make a full recovery.

The group spent several months producing a number of blankets for the charity Blankets for Baby Rhinos.

These were sent more than 5,000 miles to the Care For Wild Rhino Sanctuary in Barberton Nature Reserve, in the Mpumalanga province.

Hercules was one of the fortunate beneficiaries of their generosity.

Betty Wood, 100, was born in Durban, South Africa, but moved to Britain after the Second World War.

She said she had "done something for my home country" by taking part in the project, adding: "Hercules is so cute."

Sheila O'Neill, 83, said seeing the "cute little fellow" making use of the blanket had "made my day".

Hercules on the mend and, right, the knitting nans

Joyce Wooffindin, also 83, said: "To see Hercules wearing one of our blankets brought a tear to my eye."

Sharon Lewis, activities co-ordinator at the care home, said it was "wonderful" for the residents to take part in the project.

"It has been the icing on the cake getting a photo of Hercules being comforted by wearing one of our blankets," she said.

Blankets for Baby Rhinos supports wildlife orphanages by supplying them with knitted and crocheted blankets to keep animals warm.

The blankets are also used to raise funds to buy equipment for the sanctuaries.

Swift fans turn on 'Errors' idol over tour book with pages printed upside down

By **Tim Sigsworth**

TAYLOR SWIFT fans have claimed the pop star's new book celebrating her worldwide tour is full of typos.

The book, which goes on sale in Britain today, has been criticised by Swift's followers for including unnecessary commas, cut-off text and low-quality images.

The *Eras Tour Book*, which has now been labelled the "Errors Tour Book", was produced and published in-house instead of by a conventional publisher.

It went on sale in the United States at the weekend for $39.99 (£31.36) and sold more than 800,000 copies.

Reviewers on TikTok praised the behind-the-scenes photographs. But they criticised the product for including unnecessary commas, repeating the same words in consecutive sentences and having "clunky sentences".

Some copies of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour Book had been printed upside down

George Mansour, a TikTokker who posts about pop culture, pointed to two examples of pages where words at the top of the pages were cut off.

"Maybe that's stylistic and cute to some people, but that's a mistake to me," he said.

Another reviewer said: "I guess I expect more love and care to be taken into account when writing, designing and editing."

Others said copies had been printed upside down and back-to-front and that there were eight typos in a list of songs performed acoustically by Swift.

The song *This Is Me Trying*, from Swift's 2020 album *Folklore*, is listed as "this is me trying".

Editions of the book are being resold online for as much as £180.

The 152-date Eras tour ends on Dec 8 and is estimated to have generated $1 billion (£785 million) for the pop star.

Hell's bells! Village stands firm as newcomer bangs on about church's chiming clock

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

A VILLAGE newcomer's complaint over the decision to allow the local church's bells to chime overnight has fallen on deaf ears.

Tony Partridge, 68, recently moved to the Lincolnshire village of Helpringham, where the bell of the clock at St Andrew's tolls on the hour, every hour.

Mr Partridge, 68, said the chimes were keeping him awake at night and not necessary in the age of phones and watches.

He said: "I couldn't believe how loud it was – I assumed they'd turn it off for the night-time hours and just have it during the day."

However, Rev Capt Chris Harrington said the automated chimes were part of village life and there was no chance of them being silenced.

Mr Partridge posted his comments in a Facebook group to ask villagers if they agreed with his stance.

But his argument failed to strike a chord with local people.

Tony Partridge assumed the church would 'turn off' the clock during night-time hours

One replied: "If you move to the countryside, don't complain about something that has been going on here for centuries."

Another said: "I really hope your post was meant in humour, because I will worry that you may hear the cows mooing or the freight trains running."

Mr Partridge said he was aware he might have come across as a "grouch" and admitted his Facebook post was a little "mischievous".

He added: "Coming from a town, I'm just not used to that sort of thing.

"I'm sure I'll get used to it like everyone else. I don't want to cause trouble."

The church was founded in about 1200 and was restored in 1891.

Rev Harrington, who at 4ft 10in has previously revealed he needs to stand on a box behind his lectern, said the bells were simply a "part of village life".

He said: "It's a bit like a grandfather clock in your hallway – it chimes on the hour, 24 hours.

"It's just part of village life. If you've got a lovely church like this, with a lovely clock on it and a bell, it's great.

"I think most people don't really notice it until it stops. I'm sorry it's affected somebody – but that's just life."

Princess's concert of hope and kindness

Hannah Furness
ROYAL EDITOR
in Westminster Abbey

After a year that tested her as perhaps never before, Catherine's optimism and joy were obvious to all

THE service, the Princess of Wales said, was a chance to "slow down and reflect on the deeper things that connect us all".

As hymns soared, fairy lights twinkled on fir trees sent by the King, and the Wales children laid their messages of thanks on a "Kindness Tree" outside Westminster Abbey, few could fail to be moved by the spectacle, or the sentiment.

In a year that has been tough for the Royal family, and countless others around the world, the Christmas carol service theme of love, kindness and empathy has rarely been needed more.

The Princess drew her children close to her, smoothing Prince Louis's hair as they watched wide-eyed at ballet dancers in the Abbey aisles, singers delivering their festive hymns, and a booming Richard E Grant reading from *A Christmas Carol*. Many in the congregation had felt the effects of cancer: been diagnosed themselves, watched loved ones endure it or volunteered to help strangers.

The Princess, on a journey back to a full public and private life after gruelling chemotherapy, was heard to say: "I didn't know this time last year it was going to be the year I've just had."

It is the fourth of the Princess's annual celebrations and her first since her own serious illness struck.

She was surrounded by family: her husband, children, parents, siblings, cousins-in-law, and a full-scale show of support from the Kents, Gloucesters and Chattos filling the pews. Prince Louis, his six-year-old's handwriting on show, added a message to the Kindness Tree – a new addition to the ceremony this year – reading: "Thank you to Granny and Grandpa because they have played games with me."

Prince William read a lesson, referencing those who have "walked in darkness" finding the light.

As a schoolboy chorister trilled the opening lines of *Once in Royal David's City*, each and every member of the 1,600-strong congregation could have been lost in their own thoughts.

The bereaved families of Southport, four surviving D-Day veterans, elderly volunteers who drive their neighbours five hours to hospital treatments; each were invited in recognition of all they had experienced and used to help others. Lady Gabriella Windsor, who this week attended the inquest into her husband's death, Sir Chris Hoy, who recently revealed his terminal cancer diagnosis, and the loved ones of Liz Hatton, the teenage photographer who was seen hugging the Princess two months before she died – all were there in recognition as someone who has "inspired, counselled, comforted, and highlighted how love unites and connects us all".

The Princess, wearing a red coat dress by Sarah Burton for Alexander McQueen with a large black bow, arrived ahead of her family, for an extra half an hour of seeing the Abbey, thanking performers in its Chapter House, and welcoming others.

In filed the Duchess of Edinburgh, Princess Beatrice, her husband, Eduardo, and stepson Wolfie, Zara Tindall, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke of Kent, Lady Helen Taylor, Prince and Princess Michael of Kent with Lady Gabriella and Freddie Windsor with his wife, Sophie, Lady Sarah Chatto with sons Daniel and Samuel.

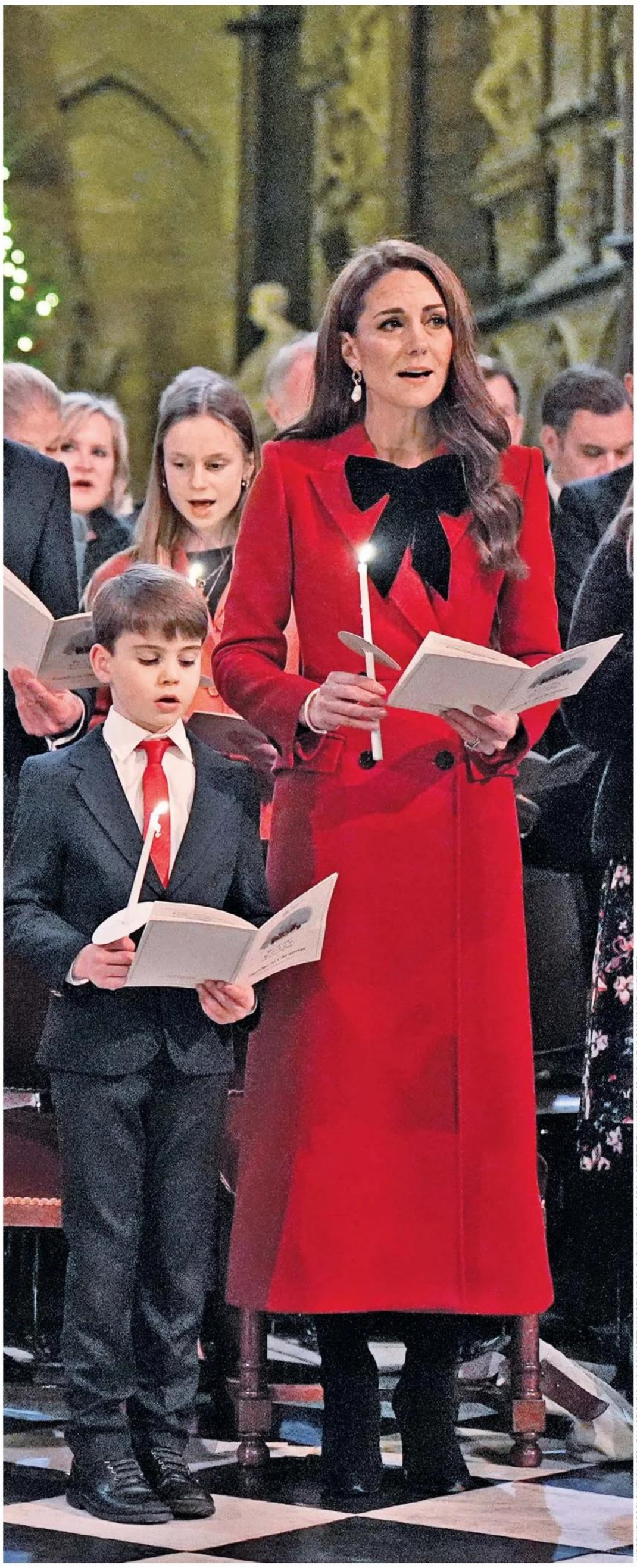
Absent were the King and Queen, who nevertheless sent trees from Great Windsor Park to decorate the Abbey.

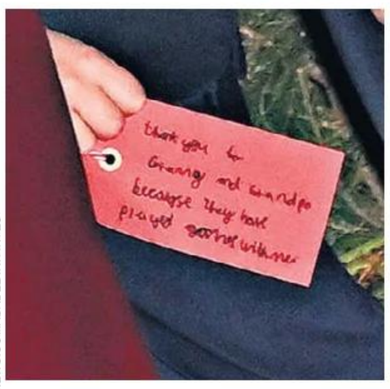
With 10 minutes to go, the smallest stars of the show arrived: Prince George, Princess Charlotte and Prince Louis in co-ordinated red ties and coat.

Each child hung a message of

The Princess of Wales talks with Paloma Faith. She disclosed to the singer a secret told to her by Prince Louis

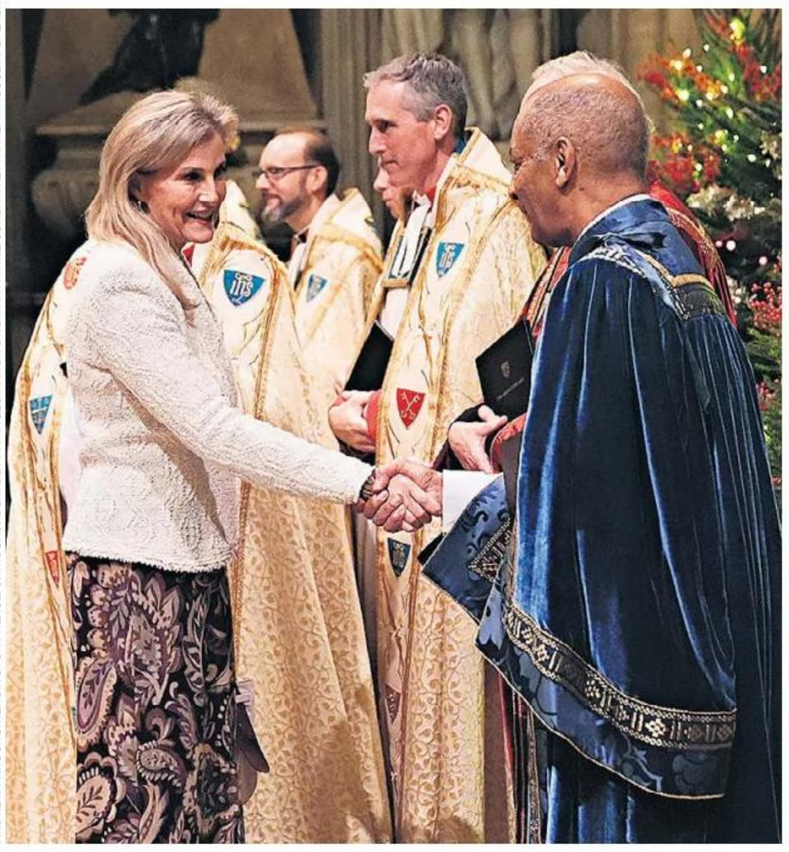
'It was lovely to see her looking so well. It was a delightful event and a night I will never forget'





ANDREW PARSONS/KENSINGTON PALACE/CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES/AARON CHOWN/PA WIRE/JORDAN PETTITT/ZAK HUSSEIN/SPLASHNEWS.COM/ISABEL INFANTES

Clockwise from main: the Wales family takes centre stage; Princess Charlotte helps her little brother with his candle; Prince Louis leaves a message on the Kindness Tree; inset, 'Thank you to Granny and Grandpa because they have played with me'; D-Day veteran Bernard Morgan; the Duchess of Edinburgh greets the clergy



brings Christmas to the Abbey once more

thanks, guided by the Prince and Princess, before making their way to their front row seats.

Louis, smoothing his suit down as he walked, was carrying a big secret.

He had been told there were dancers from the Royal Ballet coming, the Princess disclosed in conversation with singer Paloma Faith, and she had asked him to keep it from his ballet-loving sister.

"This morning he said: 'Mummy, please can I tell her – I'm bursting,'" the Princess told Faith, smiling. "I did [school] drop off [today] and he really wanted to tell her. I think – hopefully – he's kept it."

When the ballerinas appeared later, Princess Charlotte's face lit up with surprised joy. The Princess of Wales, more poignantly, also told Faith that the Abbey held "so many memories" for her. It was the setting of her wedding, as well as the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II.

Greeting guests as she walked up the aisle, the Princess stopped at the nave to greet Sir Chris Hoy and his family. Shaking hands with Hoy's young son Callum and daughter Chloe, she admired the little girl's sparkly dress, telling her: "I was going to wear sparkles too."

She also paused to speak to 100-year-old D-Day veteran Bernard Morgan who was attending the service as an ambassador for the Royal British Legion. "It was lovely to see Her Royal Highness looking so well," he said afterwards. "It was a delightful event at the Abbey and a night I will never forget."

The service began, as ever, with hymns and a prayer from the Dean of Westminster.

Michelle Dockery, who lost her fiance to cancer in 2015, read her own reflection on "empathy and kindness", saying: "Every one of us has something we can offer to another. It is love, compassion and kindness that really matters and we all have it within ourselves to give it in abundance."

The Princess read a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye about times of grief. It is "only kindness that ties your shoes", it says, "and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread."

The Prince of Wales, reading the First Lesson (Isaiah 9: 2, 6–7), said: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Sir Chris Hoy and Sarra Kemp attend the service

It echoed the Princess' letter accompanying the Order of Service, sealed in an envelope, in which she said: "Love is the light that can shine bright, even in our darkest times".

Among the star performers was Grant, the actor, who left the children in the congregation wide-eyed and gaping with his booming, hoarse performance as Scrooge finding redemption in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

Then a little choir with a big heart: the intergenerational Sankofa Songsters made up of elderly singers matched with toddlers to perform *Away in a Manger*, small children waving star decorations aloft.

The Olympic swimmer Adam Peaty, who has spoken candidly about his mental health this year in a cause close to royal hearts, delivered the Second Lesson, and Lindsey Burrow, the widow of rugby player Rob, lit a candle.

Soloists from The Royal Ballet danced up the aisle, Paralympians Lizzi Jordan and Danni Khan will lit festive candles, Gregory Porter, JP Cooper, Olivia Dean and Paloma Faith sang, and Sophie Okonedo, the Oscar-nominated actress, gave a reading about "The Kindness of Trees".

The order of service said: "This Carol Service is dedicated to those who have shown love, kindness and empathy to others in their communities.

"They have inspired, counselled, comforted, and highlighted how love unites and connects us all." Other guests included four D-Day veterans – Bernard Morgan, Jack Mortimer, Joe Mines and Jim Miller – attending on behalf of the Royal British Legion.

Nine-year-old Shyla Brown, who has raised over £2,000 to help research into degenerative Batten Disease in honour of her best friend Harrison, joined Diven Halai, who is the first man to run the London Marathon with an oxygen machine, Paralympic swimmer Ellie Challis, and Christopher Hall, who was formerly homeless and is now a photographer.

Allen and Joan Miller, both in their 80s, were invited in recognition of their tireless volunteering efforts, taking their neighbours to hospital appointments a five-hour round trip away from their home in Moray, Scotland. Numerous other guests have personal experience of cancer, and some, including 18-year-old Olivia Bowditch from Dorset, volunteer at charities including "From me to you" letters, which sends anonymous letters to share with support with cancer patients.

> 'It is when we take ourselves away from pressures of daily life, that we find the space to live our lives'

"It's a celebration," the Princess said as she arrived. "Everybody's wearing red."

The Royal family bowed their heads solemnly during the Lord's Prayer, then thanked everyone for coming as they left.

Grant, piping up with "God bless us, every one!" at the end of his reading, raised irrepressible smiles around the Abbey.

As the congregation filed out, thoughts turned inevitable to what is coming next.

A Christmas with family, a fresh New Year start, and hopes for happier times to come.

"It is when we stop and take ourselves away from the pressures of daily life, that we find the space to live our lives with an open heart," the Princess wrote. "With love, kindness, forgiveness – so much of what the Christmas spirit is about."

The event will be broadcast as part of *Royal Carols: Together at Christmas*, on ITV on Christmas Eve.

Official fuel consumption results for the Maserati Grecale Range in mpg (l/100km) combined: 25.2 (11.2) – 0 (0). CO_2 emissions combined: 254 - 0 g/km. Electric range for Grecale Folgore up to: 310 miles(WLTP) based on a full charge.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption, CO2 emissions and/or electric range figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Model shown is a Grecale Folgore including Rame Folgore paint, 21" Lampo alloys wheels, sunroof, LED matrix headlights and rear privacy glass. Personal Contract Purchase. Offer subject to availability, on selected models at participating retailers only. 20% deposit required. Finance subject to status. T&Cs and exclusions apply. Applicants must be 18+. Guarantee may be required. 48 month term. Finance by Stellantis Financial Services, RH1 1QA. At the end of the agreement there are three options: i) Part exchange the vehicle where equity is available ii) Pay the optional final payment to own the vehicle, iii) Return the vehicle. Excess mileage and vehicle condition charges may apply if you return the vehicle. **You will only own the vehicle if you pay the optional final payment**. Offer applies to retail customers only. Cannot be used in conjunction with any other offers. Available on orders from 7 October 2024 to 31 December 2024. **Maserati GB is acting as a credit broker, not a lender. We will only introduce to Stellantis Financial Services RH1 1QA as lender. Commission may be received**. Maserati GB Ltd reserves the right to change, amend or withdraw this offer at any point in time. Correct at time of print.

Met Office warns of 'risk to life' from storm

Parts of Wales and south west England could see significant disruption due to high winds over weekend

By **Daily Telegraph Reporters**

A RARE "red weather" warning has been issued ahead of the arrival of Storm Darragh this weekend.

The Met Office has warned parts of Wales and south-west England could see significant disruption and a "danger to life" as a result of high winds this morning. Storm Darragh is expected to last until tomorrow. Separate yellow and amber warnings for wind were put in place for much of England, Wales and southern Scotland from 3pm yesterday until 6am tomorrow.

More than 60 flood alerts have been activated ahead of another stormy weekend. Red warnings are the most serious type of weather warning. The Met Office said these are reserved for "very dangerous weather" where people should take "direct action" to keep themselves safe.

Areas under the red warning could see winds of up to 90mph, according to the Met Office. A spokesman said: "The strongest winds will begin to ease from late morning, though it will remain very windy with Amber wind warnings still in force until the evening."

Flying debris and falling trees could pose a risk to life, while large waves and beach material could hit seafronts. There could also be damage to buildings and homes, with roofs blown off and power lines brought down, as well as power cuts affecting other services, such as mobile phone coverage.

Roads, bridges and railway lines may be closed, with delays and cancellations likely to bus, train and ferry services and flights. It comes as communities are still recovering from the impact of Storm Bert. Met Office officials were criticised over the forecasting of Storm Bert, when red warnings were not issued despite devastating floods across South Wales.

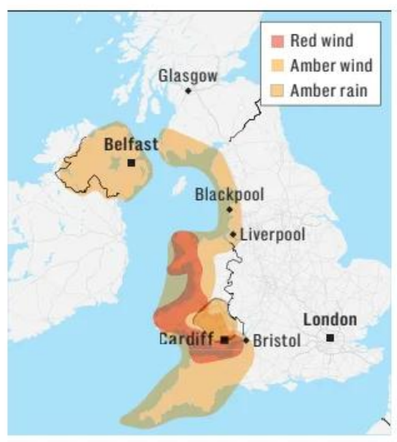
Footage last night showed heavy wind and rain hitting Wakefield, west Yorkshire, causing tiles to fall off roofs and bins to be blown across streets.

The red warning is the first to be issued since Storm Isha brought damaging winds to north England and Scotland in January. Two people died during the Storm. Met Office chief forecaster Jason Kelly said: "The worst impacts from Storm Darragh will be felt as we go through the early hours of tomorrow morning and throughout Saturday with, in addition to the broad yellow warning, red and amber wind warnings in place from 1am tomorrow.

"In the red warning area, we could see wind gusts of up to 90 miles per hour along the coasts of west and south Wales as well as funnelling through the Bristol Channel, with some very large waves on exposed beaches.

"Although there is a lower likelihood of impacts outside of the red and amber warning areas this doesn't mean you won't see them.

Today's red and amber warnings



"We are likely to see impacts across the whole of the country and people should keep an eye on the latest forecast details and prepare for the bad weather, especially if planning to be out and about on Saturday.

"Some areas are likely to have a relatively quiet start to Saturday, weather-wise, but winds will quickly increase from the west through the day."

Drivers have been encouraged to postpone journeys and park away from large trees.

An RAC Breakdown spokesman said: "A red weather warning is highly unusual and should be heeded as it can indicate a risk to life.

"With parts of Wales and the South West set to be battered by the wind between 3am and 11am on Saturday, we strongly advise drivers to postpone their journeys if they can.

"Anyone who must drive should stick to major roads, reduce their speed significantly, always keep a firm grip of the steering wheel and be on high alert for debris in the road. Exposed rural and coastal routes will be particularly treacherous. Drivers in these areas should be wary of any high-sided vehicles as they are at risk of being buffeted off course or, worse still, blown over."

The largest ever use of the Government's Emergency Alert system was sent yesterday evening to the phones of around three million people living in areas covered by a red weather warning.

People in Wales and the South West received a siren-like alert at 6.45pm warning them of high winds overnight.

A Cabinet Office spokesman said: "Mobile phones will make a loud siren-like sound even if they are set on silent. The sound and vibration will last for about 10 seconds.

"The UK Government has well rehearsed plans in place for severe winter weather and is working with teams from devolved governments, local authorities, the emergency services and other public bodies to coordinate the response to any disruption."

A woman takes shelter under an umbrella as they cross the Sean O'Casey Bridge in Dublin's city centre

'People should keep an eye on the latest forecast details and prepare for the bad weather'

BRIAN LAWLESS/PA WIRE

Train chaos across country after maintenance fault causes delays

By **Gareth Corfield** *and* **Tim Sigsworth**

TRAIN services were delayed across the country yesterday morning because of overnight maintenance to a communications hub in Stoke-on-Trent.

A total of 14 train operators from around the country suffered varying levels of disruption after the fault in the early hours of yesterday. ScotRail, South Western Railway, London Northwestern Railway, West Midlands Railway, Thameslink, Southern Rail, the Elizabeth Line, Great Northern, Southeastern, the Gatwick Express, Northern and c2c were all affected.

Network Rail said that a network card – a piece of computer hardware – installed at a communications base in Stoke-on-Trent as part of routine maintenance had failed.

Engineers replaced the faulty card and the affected radio system, known as GSM-R, was up and running again just before midday.

Apologising to passengers for the disruption caused, a Network Rail spokesman said: "An overnight fault with our railway radio system in England and Wales has been traced to one of our major hubs near Stoke, which has now been fixed.

"The fault meant that train drivers were having to manually log into the national radio network rather than it happening automatically."

GSM-R is used by train drivers and signallers to talk to each other.

Normally the system works automatically, similarly to how mobile phones connect to Wi-Fi routers.

After the failure, however, drivers had to use a back-up method to connect to the network, adding several minutes to the process of starting each and every train this morning.

South Western Railway said that the fault was "preventing our train drivers from contacting the respective signalling centre this morning and a reset is having to be performed before the train can start its journey."

Railway experts described the system as outdated, while others said it was high time that GSM-R was replaced.

'A lack of investment in modernisation and automation ... undermines trust in the rail system'

Philip Haigh, the former deputy editor of Rail magazine, told Sky News: "I think Network Rail will be pretty embarrassed this has happened this morning.

"In mobile phone terms, it's quite old," he added. "We're used to 4G or 5G networks on our phones; railway people liken this system to 2G.

"It is something that Network Rail is beginning a major upgrade programme to improve its communications."

Prof Feng Li, of City St George's, University of London, said: "While countries like China have high-speed rail networks, 5G coverage in tunnels and underground networks, and satellite communications in remote areas, the UK remains reliant on outdated technology that is prone to failure.

"A lack of investment in modernisation and automation not only undermines trust in the rail system but also keeps costs sky-high for consumers.

Race discrimination case dismissed after woman queries the meaning of 'no biggie'

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

AN EMPLOYEE accused her manager of racism following a row that arose from the use of the phrase "no biggie" in an email, a tribunal has heard.

Jessica Ayo sued Resuscitation Council, a charity, after she was accused of being "aggressive" when she queried with her boss what the term meant after he had used it to describe her omission from an email group.

The phrase is generally used to indicate that something is not important or not a problem. Following an email exchange over separate issues, the charity worker alleged she had been labelled as an "angry black woman" by querying the meaning of the phrase after manager Carrie Gaston said her email tone could often come across as "accusatory".

The coordinator launched legal proceedings against bosses and argued that "black people's email writing style is more formal and professional than how white people write their emails".

But her claims of race discrimination and harassment have been dismissed by a judge who said it was not "unreasonable" for Ms Gaston to find the tone of the emails "accusatory and aggressive".

The tribunal, held in central London,

Being labelled 'aggressive and angry' makes her feel 'stereotyped and profiled as an aggressive black woman'

heard Ms Ayo started working for the charity in 2003. Soon after the "no biggie" incident, Ms Gaston gave Ms Ayo feedback during a video call and said that the tone of her emails were "accusatory" and "aggressive", at which the coordinator became "visibly upset and went quiet". The manager asked Ms Ayo if there was anything going on at work or home that she wanted to share, at which point Ms Ayo "terminated the video call without saying anything".

Afterwards, Ms Gaston sent an email to Ms Ayo telling her, among other comments, that it is "unacceptable to abruptly terminate the call".

In response, Ms Ayo said that being labelled as "aggressive and angry" makes her feel "stereotyped and profiled" as an "aggressive black woman".

She raised a complaint with Mr Williams and said that the comments from Ms Gaston were "a racial attack" and she would be taking her complaint "to the highest possible level".

Ms Ayo's claims of race discrimination and race harassment were dismissed.

But the tribunal upheld a claim of disability discrimination,relating to Ms Ayo's stress and anxiety, after the charity suspended her "virtually at the same time" as she went off sick. She will receive compensation at a later date.

Pensioner loses arm and leg to rottweilers 'not given enough to do' by their owners

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

A PENSIONER was "ripped to shreds" by two bored Rottweilers in a random attack that lasted 11 minutes, a court has heard.

Vic Franklin, 78, had to have his leg and arm amputated after the attack carried out by the large dogs, called Ziggy, four, and Daisy, one.

A court heard that if it had not been for the help of a neighbour who tried to bat the dogs away with a spirit level, the retired security guard would not have survived.

Owners Matthew Roberts, 30, and Chloe Taylor, 27, appeared at Portsmouth Crown Court, Hants, where it was heard the aggressive pets were not given "enough to do" which meant they were often "bored".

Neighbours reported that Ziggy and Daisy – which lived outside in the garden – were often spotted "roaming around" and "showing their teeth" at passers-by, the court heard. The couple will be sentenced later on in the month for the offence.

Vic Franklin, 78, said his life had been 'turned upside down' by the attack

Mr Franklin was attacked on Aug 18 last year near his home in Bognor Regis, West Sussex, while walking his Spaniel, Peggy. Prosecutor Ellie Fargin told the court that a couple who lived nearby overheard dogs barking outside.

James Jones's wife shouted 'there's a man being attacked by a dog" which prompted him to grab a spirit level and go outside. He saw Mr Franklin being mauled by the Rottweilers, whose faces were "covered in blood".

"The police attended and got there as fast as they could," Ms Fargin said.

The dogs have now been destroyed.

Mr Franklin was taken to hospital and his injuries were both "extensive and very severe", resulting in him requiring emergency resuscitation.

"The results of the combination of all these injuries and life threatening condition is that he had to have amputations," the prosecutor said. "One to his left leg above the knee and one to his right arm below his elbow."

Mr Franklin said that his life was "turned upside down" as a result of the attacks.

News

Americanisms have 'gotten' big in Parliament

The Telegraph scours 25 years of Hansard to find transatlantic English has exploded in Westminster

By **Henry Bodkin** *and* **Ollie Corfe**

HAVE you ever gotten frustrated with something and decided to reach out to your MP?

Perhaps you want to discuss a local service that was better back in the day, or to complain that it takes a half hour to find a parking space. Maybe there is something afoot at the laundromat, or an unscrupulous landlord is trying to leverage you for more rent.

If so – and you phrased it like this – there is a good chance your MP would approve of your choice of words.

That is because, according to new analysis, the use of American English in Parliament has exploded since the turn of the century.

The Telegraph scoured 25 years of Hansard, the record of proceedings in both chambers and their committees, and found that use of 100 common Americanisms has risen nearly 40 per cent. These words and phrases came up just over 26,500 times in official transcripts between 2001 and November 2024. Averaging 951 times a year in the "Noughties", this figure has shot up to 1,330 over the current decade.

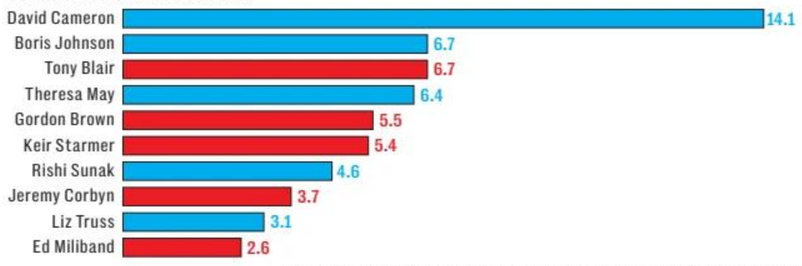
"Gotten", the most popular on the list, was spoken 5,877 times over the period, with the frequency far greater in recent years – 367 times in 2020, compared to 192 times in 2001.

"Reach out" grew steadily in use, hitting a pinnacle between 2019 and 2020 of almost five times the frequency compared to 2001. "Leverage" was uttered a good 1,933 times, while "half hour", instead of the correct British usage "half an hour", was heard on 1,456 occasions.

The Telegraph also analysed the number of Americanisms utilised by individual MPs and found Lord Cameron was the most prolific user. The ex-prime minister had the highest number of Americanisms counted over the period – 226 – and the highest average annual rate of 14.1. Jim Shannon, the DUP health spokesman, is next – averaging about 14 for every year he appeared in Hansard's records. In a finding that could potentially undermine his new reality show, Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg is also relatively high on the list, coming in eighth, with 111 recorded uses.

The most Americanism-prone party leaders

Average annual matches for the Telegraph's list of top 100 terms of US origin in House of Commons debates



SOURCE: TELEGRAPH ANALYSIS OF THEYWORKFORYOU/HANSARD TRANSCRIPTS

The biggest individual word increases between the 2000s and current decade were "laundromat"– the US word for a self-service laundry – followed by "staycation" and then "mass transit", perhaps reflecting both the economic difficulties of the period and the rise of wide-scale migration.

"Called out", pulling someone up for perceived bad behaviour, was only spoken 10 times in Parliament in 2001, but reached a peak of 51 last year.

Language experts have for decades noted the infiltration of American English into the British lexicon.

Meanwhile, political observers have long noted how many in Westminster are obsessed with US politics.

The wider trend is generally agreed to have begun with the introduction of American pulp fiction around the turn of the 20th century, before being accelerated by both Hollywood and the dominance of US television.

The phenomenon has prompted debate between experts who believe that Americanisms should not be resisted because their use simply reflects a natural evolution of language and those who believe the distinctiveness of British English is being accidentally eroded.

It is worth noting that prime ministers, leaders of the opposition and serial cabinet ministers are likely to have spent more time intervening in Commons debates than those whose parliamentary career was spent on the backbenches.

As such, the volume of words attributed to them is generally far greater, as, in turn, is the likelihood for Americanisms to have slipped in.

Lawmakers may unveil first and second degree murder charges

By **Charles Hymas**
HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

A US-style system of first and second-degree murder could be introduced by the Government under the first review of homicide laws in England and Wales in nearly two decades.

Shabana Mahmood, the Justice Secretary, unveiled the review and also announced that murderers who kill their ex-partners or have strangled them during their relationship will face longer sentences. The two changes, treating murder after a relationship ends and the use of strangulation within a relationship as "aggravating" factors, come ahead of a wider review of homicide laws by the Law Commission.

The Commission, which advises the Government on legal changes, has been asked to review whether to adopt a three-tier sentencing system for first and second-degree murder and manslaughter. The expert body proposed the changes in 2006 to give judges and juries a clearer set of options on murder and enable them to differentiate between those who intended to kill and others who may have intended harm or with mitigating circumstances that still ended up taking their victims' lives.

Under the plans, first-degree murder could be confined to unlawful killings committed with an intention to kill or cause serious injury where the killer was aware that their conduct involved a significant risk of causing death. It would continue to result in an automatic life sentence. Second-degree murder could encompass unlawful killings committed with an intent to cause serious harm but not necessarily to kill.

It could also cover unlawful killings intended to cause injury, or fear or risk of injury where the murder was aware that his or her actions involved a serious risk of causing death.

It could include cases that would constitute first-degree murder but for the fact that the accused successfully pleaded provocation, diminished responsibility, or that he or she had killed as part of a suicide pact.

Sentencing would be left to the discretion of the judge and would still include the option of a life sentence.

The Commission will also consider whether to increase the minimum sentence for murders that take place in the home from 15 to 25 years.

The current tariff is 15 years for using a weapon found in the home to kill compared with 25 years for a murder outside the home with a weapon brought from elsewhere.

Research shows that around one in four homicides is committed by a current or former partner or relative. Women's groups have campaigned for a change in the law that they claim discriminates against female abuse victims who kill after grabbing a weapon in their home.

The two new statutory "aggravating" factors will mean judges have to consider tougher jail terms for murders involving strangulation or when the killing is connected to the end of a relationship.

The move will implement two outstanding recommendations from Clare Wade KC's independent Domestic Homicide Sentencing Review. In the murder cases analysed by Ms Wade, 30 per cent involved strangulation and 40 per cent occurred at the end or perceived end of a relationship.

In both of these scenarios all of the victims were female and all of the killers were men.

Alex Davies-Jones, the justice minister, said: "The level of violence against women is a national crisis which this Government is determined to tackle, and that includes ensuring the punishment fits the crime for the most abhorrent crimes."

Diana Parkes CBE and Hetti Barkworth-Nanton CBE, co-founders of the Joanna Simpson Foundation said: "The Law Commission report that this review is based on is narrow-focused and only looks at legal structures, not sentencing and procedures."

Journalists 'enraged' after owners agree Observer sale

'We are being treated like children', say staff, as Scott Trust opts to hand paper to loss-making start-up

By **James Warrington**

JOURNALISTS at the *Guardian* and the *Observer* are in open revolt after bosses approved the sale of the world's oldest Sunday newspaper to a loss-making start-up, even after staff went on strike in protest against the deal.

The Scott Trust, the £1.3 billion fund that owns both titles, voted in favour of selling the *Observer* to Tortoise, run by James Harding, the former BBC News boss, at a meeting on Thursday night.

In a heated meeting yesterday, journalists expressed outrage at the decision and the way the process had been handled.

Simon Hattenstone, a features writer who has worked at the *Observer* for almost four decades, accused Ole Jacob Sunde, the Scott Trust chairman, of being out of touch, pointing out that he was unable to name a single journalist at the newspaper.

Guardian Media Group (GMG) editor-in-chief Katharine Viner interjected to ask whether the comment had been made "because he [Mr Sunde] is foreign".

This prompted widespread derision from staff, with one attendee commenting that the room "erupted in howls". Marina Hyde, the *Guardian* columnist and co-presenter of *The Rest is Entertainment* podcast, branded Ms Viner's response "abysmal".

Mr Sunde defended his three-decade career in media and said his intention was to protect liberal journalism.

It was one in a number of fiery exchanges during the hour-long meeting, with other journalists complaining they felt ignored and questioning the *Guardian*'s credentials as a progressive media organisation. One columnist said: "We are absolutely enraged. You're not treating us like adults with a stake in this organisation, which is what we would hope from a progressive organisation. We feel – and this goes across the *Guardian* and the *Observer* – like we are being managed like children and our views are not being listened to."

Laura Davison, general secretary-elect of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), added that the Scott Trust's decision to approve the sale at the end of a 48-hour walkout by staff was "particularly shabby".

At an emergency meeting yesterday afternoon, the NUJ passed a motion to continue strike action next week. The union is also considering holding a vote of no-confidence in Ms Viner.

One disgruntled employee has posted a lost property sign in the newspaper's offices stating: "Lost: Any sense of morality and decency on the part of management."

The board approval paves the way for the *Observer*, which was founded in 1791, to pass into the ownership of a start-up that has racked up losses of more than £16 million since its launch in 2018. The deal is expected to be completed in the coming days.

As part of the deal, the Scott Trust will invest £5 million in Tortoise and become one of its largest shareholders. The fund will also retain a stake in the *Observer* and have a role on both its editorial and commercial boards.

In a note to staff, the company said: "Collectively we have thought long and hard about this decision. We have listened to staff, many of whom we know hold strong views on the *Observer*'s ownership.

"Our priority has always been to make the best decision for the *Observer* and its staff, serve our readers, protect jobs and support teams so that the *Guardian* and the *Observer* can continue to promote liberal journalism and thrive in a changing media environment. We're confident we have agreed the best possible way forward for staff, readers and the future of both titles.

"It is a model that will see investment in journalism, enshrines the Scott Trust's values in the *Observer*'s future, and protects the *Observer* and *Guardian*'s ability to continue to produce trusted, liberal journalism."

Mr Harding said: "We are honoured and excited at the prospect of working together to renew the *Observer*, a name that represents the best of liberal, pioneering journalism."

Staff staged a 48-hour walkout this week after the NUJ accused the Scott Trust of "betraying" its obligations.

Employees have also expressed frustration at how bosses have handled the process after it was announced that the company was in exclusive negotiations with Tortoise.

Mr Harding, who is also a former editor of the *Times*, plans to put the *Observer* behind a paywall and create a new digital identity for the newspaper similar to the model employed by the *Atlantic* and the *Spectator*.

He has vowed to keep on all 70 journalists, although the newspaper has since offered voluntary redundancy to any staff members who do not want to make the move.

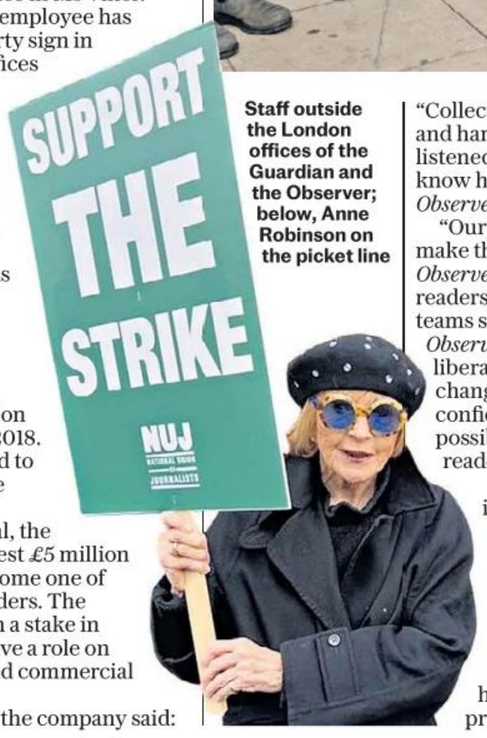
Mr Harding has pledged to invest £25 million over the next five years.

But critics fear the paper is at risk under Tortoise's ownership and have raised concerns that the title will be transformed into a weekly magazine, while questioning how easy it will be to separate the newspaper given high levels of overlap with its sister title.

Union bosses, former editors and high-profile cultural figures had called for a pause in discussions to consider other options newspaper. At least two groups of suitors have expressed an interest. One vowed to double investment to £50 million; another said it would offer journalists a stake. Dale Vince, the green energy tycoon and Labour donor, has also confirmed his interest in buying the title.

The *Guardian* has insisted it has not had any "substantive" bids from other parties and argued that the Tortoise deal is the best way to provide a sustainable future for the *Observer*.

A spokesman for Guardian Media Group said: "The board has considered this issue in detail for a long time and weighed up all the alternatives, and we are certain we have made the right decision for both titles which will give them a sustainable future."



Staff outside the London offices of the Guardian and the Observer; below, Anne Robinson on the picket line

'Lost: Any sense of decency and morality on the part of management'

HEATHCLIFF O'MALLEY FOR THE TELEGRAPH/ HESTHER NG / STORY PICTURE AGENCY

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Edinburgh Investment Trust NAV	-19	37.3	-4.6	22.8	17.6
FTSE All-Share Index	-16.6	27.9	-4	13.8	13.4

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Undertakers: fat corpses will be the death of us

Funeral directors report broken bones and back spasms after handling overweight bodies

By **Tim Sigsworth**
and **Matthew Davis**

UNDERTAKERS are struggling with the weight of coffins amid Britain's obesity epidemic.

Funeral directors have reported a series of injuries to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which regulates workplace health and safety, caused by lifting excessively heavy coffins.

It comes as NHS data revealed in October that Britain has never been fatter and that the average man weighs 14st by middle age.

Accident logs disclosed under Freedom of Information laws revealed one case in which an undertaker broke a bone in his hand when a coffin containing an obese body slipped and crushed his fingers.

The man, who was employed by the Co-op, had to have surgery.

A case in Newbury, Berks, saw two funeral directors suffer injuries as they strained to move an overweight body out of a house.

Health and safety records showed they were meant to request a back-up team to assist them but they decided to try to move the deceased on their own because of the "distressed" family in the house.

As they tried to put the body on to a stretcher and move it through "a number of doorways", one strained their lower back and the other strained their shoulder.

In Hampshire , a team of three hurt themselves as they carried the body of a 25st man downstairs and out of a house into their vehicle.

Another accident involved an undertaker who had to take a week off work after suffering "severe" back spasms when they lifted the coffin of an obese person into the back of a private ambulance.

One Co-op undertaker suffered a back injury because of "the weight of the deceased" while attempting to carry the coffin up a flight of stairs and into a church for the funeral service.

Undertakers increasingly use specialist equipment, such as wheeled trolleys, to help them cope with the increase in heavy – or bariatric – bodies.

£98 billion

Estimated annual cost to the UK economy as a result of excess weight in the general population

Other accidents reported by funeral directors included one where an undertaker fell into an open grave and another where an employee ended up having their leg amputated when a wound inflicted by a park bench turned septic.

Another undertaker broke a bone in their foot when they slipped into an open grave at the end of a burial service.

The HSE said they ended up doing the "splits" with one leg in the grave and the other leg outside.

Elsewhere, an elderly church mourner ended up with a severe face injury after they tripped up on a step as they went to place a rose on the top of a coffin and bashed head first into the coffin's wooden stand.

NHS data show that the public weighs about a stone more than we did 30 years ago. Middle-aged women now weigh an average of 12st, the figures show, with waists of around 36in. Men of the same age tip the scales at 14st, with a waistband of around 40in.

Excess weight is estimated to cost the UK economy £98 billion every year.

Extra-heavy coffins are usually wheeled into a church or crematorium, rather than carried on the shoulders of pallbearers as is traditional.

Councils are increasingly looking to charge families extra if they want to bury overweight relatives.

Last year, the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) told Mid and East Antrim Borough Council that introducing extra charges for the overweight would "stigmatise" them.

A playful, graceful adaptation – and it's a palpable hit

Dominic Cavendish
CHIEF THEATRE CRITIC

Theatre

Ballet Shoes

National's Olivier Theatre, London SE1

★★★★★

I SUSPECT there will be a very un-balletic stampede to the box-office to see this – the first major stage-adaptation of Noel Streatfeild's much-loved children's classic of 1936 – as the critical verdicts emerge, and word of mouth spreads.

Unlike *The Importance of Being Earnest*, its hot-ticket rival for festive attention at the Lyttelton, *Ballet Shoes* – as brought to the main Olivier stage by Kendall Feaver, with Katy Rudd directing – still had plenty of availability at the hour of its opening. It's possible that the intrigued have been put off by the top-price ticket of £99 – albeit there are cheaper options, including £25 tickets catering for family groups (the show is suitable for aged seven and up). But it's equally probable that devotion on the one hand, and detachment on the other, has delayed decision-making.

From those who grew up on the book – and it's so adored it has never been out of print – it elicits fierce loyalty. The talk is of much-thumbed copies, retained into adulthood, the chat inclined to turn to which of the three girl protagonists, each adopted as nippers by the errant eccentric paleontologist "Great Uncle Matthew" ("Gum"), were most identified-with: Pauline, Petrova or Posy. What could be worse than something that tramples on hallowed memories?

Equally, for those who left it alone (and I sheepishly count myself in that camp), and missed, too, the 2007 BBC adaptation, Streatfeild's book likely remains terra incognita but maybe thought to be awash with sentimentality and precocity in its portrayal of the trio's formative time at the Children's Academy of Dancing and Stage Training, run by the formidable old Russian émigrée Madame Fidolia.

I can't fully vouch for the satisfaction of devotees, but my twin-sister (long a fan of the book) was unequivocally enthusiastic and overheard approving appraisals in the ladies at the interval. For my own part, I finally got what the fuss was about. While this is manifestly a tale of young girls finding themselves and contending with the world – and a difficult world at that, parent-less, cash-strapped – its capacity to enchant transcends the hermetic particulars of its domestic and theatrical milieux. The Fossils, as they're named (after their adoptive but largely absent parent), may not enter Narnia, but their voyage of discovery is no less thrilling and catches a collective joy achieved through pluck and grit.

MANUEL HARLAN

The show honours its literary heritage, advances the theatrical form and offers feelgood pleasure

"A fairy story with its feet halfway on the ground," is how the author termed it; Cinderella, you might say, without Prince Charming but with can-do spirit – as juvenile theatrical and balletic skills are turned to vital financial advantage (apparently the Government's blinkered jibe at ballet dancers – the "Fatima's next job could be in tech" campaign in the pandemic – part-prompted this production).

Feaver's judicious script stipulates "a fast, sometimes dizzying pace... a hint of magic in every move". And Rudd's fleet, beautiful production – dominated by an arching stack of fossil-lined alcoves – has a lightness of touch on all fronts. When the time comes for the company to bend and flex at the barre, to pirouette, plié or walk en pointe, the skill-set is there. But there's a sense of poised movement at every turn; even the scene-shifting has a bustling grace. Justin Salinger's explorer Gum partakes in playful tableaux of his adventures at the start, the actor returning in the guise of the stern, stiff, indomitable Fidolia.

Rudd delivered coups de théâtres in the NT hit *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*; they're less spectacular here, but when Fidolia's younger self materialises in a mirror (Xolisweh Ana Richards, the model of elegance and balletic elan) or we're treated to an hallucinogenic dance-version of Alice in Wonderland, or Yanexi Enriquez's Petrova literally spreads her wings over the stalls in a rehearsal for a comically futuristic *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the effect is still spellbinding.

> 'There's a sense of poised movement at every turn; even the scene-shifting has a bustling grace'

Enriquez almost steals the show as the gender-stereotype refusenik, smitten with all things mechanical (fulfilled in a priceless pay-off that positions Croydon as the gateway to a world of possibility). But each characterisation has its delightful distinguishing marks. Grace Saif's acting prodigy Pauline is perhaps more bolshy than in the book, but none the worse for it; and Daisy Sequerra's Posy seems to come to life, radiant, every time she gets into her ballet shoes, though she almost trips herself up with her ambition and resulting callousness.

There's terrific support from Pearl Mackie and Jenny Galloway as Sylvia and Nana, the long-suffering surrogate heads of the household, with lovely work too from the lodgers: Nadine Higgin as the bohemian jazz-lover Theo Dane, Sid Sagar as the newly crafted character of Jai Saran, car-mechanic and charmer, Helena Lymbery as the gently feminist-minded, self-styled "Sapphic Queer" Dr Jakes.

Departing Rufus Norris has been often criticised for being dour in his choices, but this is another welcome validation of his programming instincts; a family-friendly evening that asks the big questions – who we are, what we can do with our lives – honours our literary heritage, advances the theatrical form and offers feelgood pleasure.

Until Feb 22; nationaltheatre.org.uk

Thatcher's desk sells for 30 times auction estimate

By **Tim Sigsworth**

MARGARET THATCHER'S personal writing desk has sold for 30 times its estimate after it triggered a bidding war at auction.

The antique five-drawer mahogany desk was in the main reception room of her townhouse in Flood Street, Chelsea, London, in the 1970s.

The desk was given a pre-sale estimate of £2,000 but such was the level of interest that it sold for £60,000.

There were 20 domestic and international bidders who drove up the price.

There was a round of applause in the Sloane Street Auctions London saleroom when the hammer came down.

With auctioneers' fees included, the undisclosed international online buyer handed over £75,000 for it.

It was the top performer in a collection of 39 lots sold by the Thatcher family, which fetched £300,000 all together.

Thatcher wrote many speeches on the desk while leader of the opposition between 1975 and 1979 as she prepared for government.

The 30ins by 54ins by 32ins desk, with a dark red leather and gilt inset top, was bought by the former prime minister and her husband, Denis, in the 1960s when they lived at their home in Kent, The Dormers. It went with them to Flood Street in 1967, which the Thatchers owned until 1985.

The desk remained in her private residences throughout her lifetime, including Chester Square, Belgravia.

The Thatcher family put it on the market as they are moving house.

Of other items up for auction, her Tomasz Starzewski powder blue 1980s ensemble – comprising a coat and matching dress – went for £1,500, while her pale blue silk George II style camel-back sofa from Downing Street achieved £6,875.

Of the desk, Dan Hunt, founder of Sloane Street Auctions, said: "It was very exciting. There were 20 bidders, both British and international, after [it] and the price kept going up and up.

"I believe the desk captured the imagination because of its history, the fact that she had written her speeches whilst in opposition and in power."

Margaret Thatcher wrote several speeches at the desk in her Chelsea townhouse

Judge rules Soldier F can be tried over Bloody Sunday

By **Tim Sigsworth** *and* **James Crisp**

A JUDGE has ruled that there is sufficient evidence for "Soldier F" to stand trial for two murders on Bloody Sunday.

The ex-paratrooper, who cannot be identified and is in his mid-70s, is accused of murdering James Wray and William McKinney on the streets of Londonderry in January 1972.

Members of the Parachute Regiment fatally shot 13 protesters in the Bogside area of the town on what was the most notorious day of the Troubles.

Soldier F, who is also charged with five attempted murders on Bloody Sunday, pleaded not guilty to each of the seven counts at Belfast Crown Court yesterday morning.

In June, Soldier F's barrister made a "no bill" application to have the case thrown out, arguing there was an "insufficiency of evidence" against him.

The prosecution insisted Soldier F was part of a group of paratroopers that entered a courtyard and opened fire on "unarmed civilians" who were running away. Each soldier is alleged to have fired with the intention to kill.

Delivering his ruling on the no bill application yesterday, Mr Justice Fowler said the defence had failed to convince the court that the evidence against Soldier F was "tenuous in character".

The veteran known as Soldier F sat in the witness box behind a thick floor-to-ceiling blue curtain that shielded him from the court to protect his anonymity.

Relatives of Bloody Sunday victims watched proceedings from the public gallery as Mr Justice Fowler dismissed the application by Soldier F's lawyers to have the case thrown out.

Sinn Fein welcomed the decision to proceed with the trial as a "vindication".

Pádraig Delargy, the Northern Ireland Assembly member for Foyle, which includes Londonderry, said: ".

"This is a vindication for the Bloody Sunday families who, over five decades on, have not given up in their fight for truth and justice.

"As the families' courageous campaign goes on, Sinn Fein will continue to stand by their side every step of the way."

A date for trial is due to be fixed at a further review hearing on Jan 24.

Working from home is bad for grumpy old colleagues

By **Amy Gibbons**

Young people and "grumpy" older colleagues benefit if they shun working from home, a peer has said.

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone, 76, said she is "viscerally opposed" to the shift from office working to home-based arrangements, except for those people with childcare responsibilities.

Speaking at a debate on social cohesion and community, the former Tory cabinet minister told the House of Lords: "I will not believe that working from home is a healthy thing to do.

"We are social people, we need to go to work. Young people need to go to work to see sort of grumpy old women like me at work, and grumpy old people like me need to see young people who can explain TikTok to them."

Lady Bottomley said attending the office is how people "share values" and change, adding: "The sooner we move away from thinking working from home is a very wonderful thing, I shall be delighted.

"I do accept it has transformed life for women and I will allow it there but otherwise nothing will convince me."

Her comments come after *The Telegraph* revealed the scale of working from home across the Civil Service, the BBC, the NHS, police forces and town halls amid growing concerns over public sector efficiency.

Research has suggested productivity drops when staff work remotely. An MIT and UCLA study showed an 18 per cent decline when comparing office workers to those at home in 2023. A previous analysis by Stanford also reported an average drop of up to 20 per cent.

Public sector productivity still lags behind the private sector at 8.5 per cent, which is below pre-pandemic levels.

NASA/CXC/SAO/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

Webb's feat The Crab Nebula, the result of a supernova seen by astronomers in the year 1054, 6,500 light-years from Earth, is seen in an image taken by the James Webb Telescope. At its center is a neutron, a super-dense star produced by the supernova. This image shows the X-ray data from Chandra along with infrared data from the Webb space telescope.

Wallace: autism to blame for bad behaviour

Friends of disgraced TV star say undiagnosed condition could explain inappropriate conduct

By **Robert Mendick** CHIEF REPORTER

GREGG WALLACE is expected to tell independent investigators that his sexually inappropriate behaviour could be linked to undiagnosed autism.

Friends of the *MasterChef* presenter are convinced he suffers from a neurodiversity condition that explains his behaviour. The production company which makes the show, Banijay, announced last week it was launching an investigation into complaints made against Wallace over his behaviour. A law firm is conducting the inquiry.

The Telegraph understands that there is little chance of Wallace returning to the BBC with corporation bosses alarmed by the deluge of complaints.

But Wallace, 60, is desperate to salvage his reputation and the investigation's findings are critical if he wants to carry on working in broadcasting.

The Telegraph understands Wallace is likely to raise the possibility he has autism with Lewis Silkin, the London law firm hired by Banijay.

Friends of Wallace said they were also planning to tell the lawyers the same thing in support of his case.

One source said: "We think Gregg has an undiagnosed condition. Probably autism. If you look at symptoms of autism he seems to fit those. The symptoms fit him. He tells inappropriate jokes but it's never been malicious. He just doesn't understand that sometimes the jokes he tells just aren't funny."

One friend said: "It's clear to me he probably has to work with a level of neurodiversity", while a source said: "Many people close to him have over the years suggested he exhibits characteristics associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder."

Friends point to his obsessive behaviour that includes an hour by hour weekend schedule, first disclosed in February, which was widely mocked at the time. They have also dug out official studies which suggest that inappropriate behaviour, including making sexual remarks, could be a sign of autism.

They also point out that Wallace's four-year-old son has been diagnosed with autism.

Studies have shown a majority of autism cases are linked to inherited genes and tend to run in families. Sources suggested that Wallace had not been keen to get an official diagnosis because of a sense of guilt at having possibly passed autism to his son, who is also non-verbal.

Dr Fiona Gullon-Scott, an autism expert and senior lecturer in clinical psychology at Newcastle University, said she had wondered if Wallace may have undiagnosed autism after seeing his extraordinary claim posted online that only "a handful of middle-class women of a certain age" had made complaints. The comments were widely condemned and later withdrawn by Wallace who said he had been under a "huge amount of stress".

Dr Gullon-Scott said: "There are many undiagnosed autistic adults, particularly middle aged and older, because our understanding of autism was far more limited 30 to 40 years ago than it is now. Those adults have often experienced a lifetime of being misunderstood."

Only 5pc of current public BBC job adverts 'are in office full-time'

By **Lily Shanagher** *and* **Dominic Penna**

ONLY five per cent of jobs currently advertised by the BBC are full-time in the office, analysis by *The Telegraph* has found.

Out of 87 non-apprenticeship UK roles on the corporation's job portal, only five require applicants to work in one of its offices every day.

More than two in five jobs (42 per cent) are advertised as hybrid, with applicants offered a mix of home and office working, or it is stated that flexible working can be discussed, including senior leadership positions which offer higher salaries than office-based roles.

The BBC said the jobs currently advertised online represent less than 1 per cent of its staff and that many people are required to be in their buildings or working on location.

It comes as Lisa Nandy, the Culture Secretary, prepares to lead an "honest national conversation" about the long-term funding of the broadcaster. The corporation will be funded by the licence fee until 2027. The levy, which will rise to £174.50 in April, will then be reviewed by the Government.

The research is the fourth part in a *Telegraph* series looking at working from home practices across the Civil Service, police, town halls, BBC and NHS, amid growing concerns over public sector efficiency. Research suggests productivity drops when staff work remotely, with an MIT and UCLA study last year showing an 18 per cent decline when comparing office workers to those at home. Previous Stanford analysis had reported an average productivity drop of between 10 and 20 per cent.

> 'Executives should think again about whether this is the best use of other people's money'

Critics of the BBC called on its bosses to "think again" about its work from home policy in the wake of *The Telegraph*'s findings.

Stuart Andrew, the shadow culture secretary, said: "Executives should think again about whether this is the best use of other people's money."

Rupert Lowe, Reform MP for Great Yarmouth, added: "It's quite clear that the culture in the BBC hasn't been right for a long time."

Rebecca Ryan, campaign director of the Defund the BBC pressure group, said there was "increasing evidence" that working from home led to lower productivity.

"It is time the BBC caught up with reality. Lockdown is over, people are back in the office," she said. "It is outrageous that the corporation does not publish working from home data for its employees."

A BBC spokesman said: "It is wrong to judge the BBC's work-from-home policy on less than 1 per cent of total jobs across the BBC Group, anyone attending our buildings can see they are busy with people making the programmes audiences at home love."

'Slap therapy healer' jailed over patient death still promoting practice in prison

By **Will Bolton** CRIME CORRESPONDENT

A "HEALER" jailed for 10 years after a diabetic grandmother died at one of his slap therapy workshops is continuing to promote the practice in prison.

Hongchi Xiao was found guilty of manslaughter by gross negligence in July this year after Danielle Carr-Gomm died while taking part in a week-long "Paida Lajin", meaning "slap and stretch", retreat in Wiltshire in 2016.

The 71-year-old, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 1999, died in agony after Xiao encouraged her to stop taking insulin during the workshop.

Xiao, 61, was extradited to the UK from Australia, where he had previously been prosecuted after a six-year old boy died when his parents withdrew his insulin medication after attending one of his workshops in Sydney.

Yesterday, at Winchester Crown Court he was sentenced to 10 years in jail. Mr Justice Bright said that Xiao knew from the first day of the therapy workshop that Mrs Carr-Gomm had stopped taking her medication. "Furthermore you made it clear to her you supported this," he said. He said Xiao made a "token effort" to get her to take her insulin which was "too little, too late". He said he showed "no real sign of clear remorse" as he goes on practicing and promoting Paida Lajin in jail.

Danielle Carr-Gorman, left, died after Hongchi Xiao, above, encouraged her to stop taking insulin

The judge said that Xiao's suggestion during the trial that Mrs Carr-Gomm was ultimately responsible for her own death was "repugnant and disturbing".

Jurors were told Mrs Carr-Gomm had sought alternatives to her insulin medication because of her vegetarianism and fear of needles.

She joined the Paida Lajin workshop run by Xiao in Wiltshire in October 2016.

The court heard that Xiao said "well done" to Mrs Carr-Gomm, after she told the participants in Wiltshire that she had stopped taking her insulin at the retreat.

By the third day "she was vomiting, tired and weak, and by the evening she was howling in pain and unable to respond to questions", prosecutor Duncan Atkinson KC said.

Men's club opens door to woman member for first time in 120 years

Elizabeth Day brings tradition to shuddering halt as all-male bastion starts 'exciting new chapter'

By **Tim Sigsworth**

A DORSET gentlemen's club has welcomed its first female member in its 120-year history.

The Society of Dorset Men, which was founded in 1904, changed its rules earlier this year to allow women to join.

Elizabeth Day, whose husband Bob is also a member, has now become the first to take up the offer.

"I feel privileged and excited to be the first female member of this wonderful society," she said.

The society was founded in London in the early 20th century to make it easier for men from Dorset who had moved to the capital to socialise with fellow Dorsets.

Its founding president was Frederick Treves, an eminent surgeon who treated Joseph Merrick, who was labelled "the elephant man" because of his disabilities.

Treves was also credited with saving the life of Edward VII in 1902 when he operated on the King's appendicitis at Buckingham Palace.

Notable members of the club have included Thomas Hardy, the author of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and Lord Fellowes, the creator of Downton Abbey and its current president.

But the club had never allowed women to join until August, when members approved a motion calling for them to be admitted for the first time.

"This change marks an exciting new chapter, welcoming more voices to celebrate Dorset's enduring legacy," the society said in a statement.

Peter Lush, the society's committee chairman, said existing members' wives had wanted to join the club, which has more than 900 members, and their husbands lobbied for them to be admitted.

Elizabeth Day and, below, Lord Fellowes, creator of Downton Abbey

RON GALELLA/BNPS

"There has been a certain amount of pressure for this change for some while," he said. "We had a special AGM and the motion was passed that we should admit women into the society.

"There are lots of women who have wanted to join, but they were the wives of members who wanted to join their husbands, and the pressure came from the husbands.

"The wife of a current member is the first woman member. Now the news is out we hope there are going to be many more ladies joining in the future."

At the special general meeting, a motion to change the name of the society to "The Society of Dorset" was rejected.

"The subject of the name of the society came up at the meeting and it was agreed it will not be changed," Mr Lush said.

"It is 120 years old and it has a history to it and we wanted to retain that history. If we change the membership criteria and the name then it will be a new society and lose that history."

The society is based in Dorchester, Dorset's county town, and hosts dinners, outings and other events for its members, who pay an annual fee of £15.

"With a membership of over 900, the Society encourages members to be enthusiastic about all things Dorset – not forgetting the Dorset dialect – and to foster a love of and pride in the county, its history, culture and traditions," its objectives read.

The change comes after the Garrick Club vote to allow women to join as members for the first time after a high-profile campaign.

The club overturned the policy following a vote of its 1,500 members in May 2024. And in July, Dame Judi Dench and Dame Sian Phillips became the first female members of the club in its nearly 200-year history.

Founder Sir Frederick Treves, who was widely known for his friendship with 'Elephant Man' Joseph Merrick

Russia distracts us from terror threat, says MI5 boss

By **Max Stephens**

MI5 has been forced to "pare back" its focus on counter-terrorism to tackle the growing threat from Russia and other aggressive nation states, its director-general has disclosed.

Ken McCallum has warned that Britain's security services are increasingly faced with "grander and sophisticated" attacks from hostile nations. These are said to include sabotage, arson and assassinations on home soil.

He admitted the UK only had "finite" resources to confront such threats and that he had been forced to make "uncomfortable choices" in apportioning resources.

Mr McCallum, 50, made the comments in a podcast interview with Simon Case, the outgoing Cabinet Secretary, *The Times* reported.

The podcast was distributed internally to civil servants online and was recorded at MI5's headquarters at Thames House, central London.

He said: "We now face much, much more aggression from nation states. In effect, we had the 20- to 30-year holiday from that kind of big player, sophisticated states in serious conflict with each other. It's back, I'm afraid ... And so there is something quite profound about that."

'We now face much, much more aggression from nation states ... It's back, I'm afraid'

Mr McCallum added: "We've had to make some of those uncomfortable choices in recent years; how could we pare back a bit on the amount of our capacity we are spending on countering terrorism in order to be ready to meet these somewhat grander and more sophisticated, in some respects, threats from nation states."

MI5 is also having to contend with the growing terror threat presented by teenagers who have been radicalised on the internet, he said. He explained that in some less serious instances a criminal prosecution should not be the first port of call and that intervention by an authority on "a local level" may be more suitable for "a deeply misguided person who's consumed too much of the wrong things on the internet".

This week, Five Eyes security chiefs issued an unprecedented warning about terrorist radicalisation of children online. The alliance of Britain, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand published a public-facing paper calling for a "whole society response" to the threat of the radicalisation of children from violent extremism.

Tindall's private school switches to co-ed over Labour's VAT raid

By **Poppy Wood**

A 400-YEAR-OLD independent boys' school attended by Mike Tindall, the retired England rugby star, is going co-educational in response to the Government's plans to impose VAT on fees.

Wakefield Grammar School Foundation will "join together" its two single-sex schools in West Yorkshire into one institution from September 2026.

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, a 433-year-old boys' school whose alumni include the husband of Zara Tindall, will merge resources with Wakefield Girls' High School.

Under a "diamond-model" approach, girls and boys will have separate lessons in Years Seven to 11, while sharing extracurricular activities and some topics such as personal, social, health and economic education. They will then come together for a fully co-educational sixth form.

Wakefield Grammar School Foundation said the move would help the schools remain competitive as it prepares to increase fees by 17 per cent as a result of the Government's VAT policy, which will come into force from Jan 1.

The foundation said it was a "positive and proactive response to the challenges facing all independent schools including increased costs and the impending 20 per cent VAT on school fees".

The Telegraph understands the group rowed back on plans to ditch the names of the two historic schools and place them both under the umbrella name of Wakefield Grammar School. Instead, both Queen Elizabeth Grammar School and Wakefield Girls' High School, plus the group's Wakefield Grammar Pre-Preparatory School, will all be renamed Queen Elizabeth's School, Wakefield.

It followed a backlash from parents who warned the schools risked diluting long-held traditions as part of attempts to weather political changes.

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School was founded by Elizabeth I under a royal charter in 1591. The girls' school, founded in 1878, counts Dame Barbara Hepworth, the British sculptor, and Helen Fielding, the author of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, among its notable alumni.

One parent said: "The VAT changes and general hostility towards private schools by the Government is forcing schools like the Wakefield Grammar School Foundation to enact radical changes that will sweep away generations of tradition and reputation."

"Parents like me put their money and faith in the belief that these schools will afford an education and history for their children that can be appreciated and valued beyond their own lifetime."

The school will raise fees from £5,633 per term to £6,587 for pupils in Years 7 and above when VAT is added to bills next year.

Other private schools have announced major changes as part of efforts to continue attracting pupils despite the prospect of higher fees under the Government's plans.

Mike Tindall, 46, was once a pupil at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in West Yorkshire

Father killed in fire after e-bike explosion

By **Daily Telegraph Reporter**

A FATHER who was killed in a fire caused by an e-bike had bought and sold the vehicles as a hobby, an inquest heard.

Parents Danielle Bamber, 24, and Joshua Pearson, 28, were killed in the blaze in July after an e-bike battery exploded inside their family home, leaving their sons Oscar, six, and 18-month-old Lorenzo orphaned.

Emergency services rushed to their terraced home in Blackpool, Lancs., after the fire broke out at around 2.35am on July 17.

Neighbours managed to save Oscar and Lorenzo by smashing windows and pulling them to safety, before they were both hospitalised in a critical condition.

But an inquest heard that Ms Bamber died at the scene from smoke inhalation and Mr Pearson was found unconscious by the bathroom door. He later died in Blackpool Victoria Hospital from the "effects of fire".

Blackpool and Fylde Coroner's Court heard that Mr Pearson's hobby was buying and selling e-bikes, a practice which had continued until the time of his death. There was clear evidence that a battery from a bike had been the source of the fire, either through overcharging or from the way the device had been managed, the inquest heard.

The court was also told that Mr Pearson had sought advice on social media about adapting batteries. It was highly likely that the fire would have taken hold quickly, giving the occupants little chance to escape. Alan Wilson, the coroner for Blackpool Fylde, raised concerns about the lack of a working smoke alarm in the privately owned property.

But he added there was no evidence that a working detector would have caused a different outcome given the rapid spread of the blaze.

The court also heard that the couple had experienced conflict with other parties and that incidents of damage and violence had occurred in the past.

But firefighters and police told the coroner that any third party or criminal involvement in the fire had been ruled out early in the investigation.

Concluding, Mr Wilson said: "The death of a young person is sad and distressing – doubly so when two are joined together in the one incident."

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World news

Syria rebels make rapid gains as Assad forces flee

President's rule at its most precarious as lightning offensive gathers pace with Damascus in rebels' sights

By **Liz Cookman** *in Istanbul*

SYRIAN rebels are rapidly advancing on Homs, having taken control of the northern countryside in a lightning offensive against government forces in which Hama and Aleppo have fallen.

There were conflicting reports about whether Bashar al-Assad's army had withdrawn from the strategic city as anti-regime forces moved in from the north in the latest stunning challenge to the president and his 24-year rule.

It comes just a day after rebels took the nearby city of Hama, which had remained under regime control throughout the 13-year civil war, and a week since they swept into Aleppo.

Controlling Homs will allow the opposition to cut off the main road leading to the Syrian coast, a key stronghold of Assad's Alawite minority, and paves the way for an advance on the capital Damascus.

It marks the most precarious moment for the regime since the start of the civil war in 2011, with the rebels seeking the full overthrow of Assad and his "dead" regime, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, head of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) who leads the anti-regime forces, told CNN.

He said: "The goal of the revolution remains the overthrow of this regime. The seeds of the regime's defeat have always been within it... the Iranians attempted to revive the regime, buying it time, and later the Russians also tried to prop it up. But the truth remains: this regime is dead."

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's president who is a key backer of some of the rebel groups, said the target of the advance was Damascus, adding that attempts to negotiate with Assad had not been well received.

"Idlib, Hama, Homs and the target, of course, is Damascus. The opposition's march continues. Our wish is that this march in Syria continues without accidents or disasters," he said.

"We made a call to Assad. We said, 'Come, let's determine the future of Syria together'. Unfortunately, we did not receive a positive response to this."

Separate clashes are also under way in Daraa, south of Damascus, with one person reported dead, while regime forces and Iranian-backed proxies withdrew from Deir Ez Zor, an oil-rich region bordering Iraq.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who are not allied with the rebels, have reportedly entered the west bank of Deir Ez Zor and taken control of the local airport.

Deir Ez Zor is key to Iran and its proxies and part of Tehran's land supply corridor connecting to Lebanon – Iran-backed paramilitaries have supported Assad's forces throughout the war.

The protracted civil war was considered effectively over for the past four years, but the flare-up comes as Assad's main regional and international backers, Russia and Iran, are preoccupied with wars elsewhere.

Thousands of people have already fled Homs, with heavy traffic reported on the road heading towards the coast after Hama fell on Thursday evening.

Hassan Abdul Ghani, a rebel coalition commander, posted on X, formerly Twitter, yesterday that they are advancing on Homs "at a steady pace".

Meanwhile, there were celebrations in Hama, with videos shared to social media showing militants shooting into the air in front of a defaced poster of Assad, promising to move on to Homs.

'the Iranians attempted to revive the regime, and later the Russians. But this regime is dead'

A large statue of the president was toppled after decades of brutal rule, with Hama the site of a 1982 massacre of between 10,000 and 30,000 people.

Russian bombing, meanwhile, destroyed the Al-Rastan bridge along the key M5 highway between Hama and Homs on Thursday night to prevent rebels from using it, Syrian officials said, with barriers also erected in an attempt to slow the advance.

A video appeared to show the night-time strike on the bridge. A flash of orange light is seen illuminating the large crossing over the Orontes river, before the footage cuts to black.

Footage later posted by the rebels online appeared to show them successfully crossing the bridge despite the Russian attempt to destroy it.

Al-Rastan Bridge sits almost exactly halfway between Hama and Homs, and is around 13 miles north of Homs

In an offensive that began last week, the rebel coalition quickly took control of most of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city and the country's economic heart before the civil war.

Hama fell days later, with the rebels capitalising on their momentum, and the weakness of Assad's army, moving forward quickly to deny the regime the opportunity to redeploy, rearm or recruit.

Anti-government fighters pose for a selfie in one of Hama's water wheels, or norias, after they captured the city

BAKR AL KASSEM/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Russia will not come to rescue as it orders citizens to leave Syria

By **James Kilner**

RUSSIA has no plans to rescue Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad from advancing rebel forces, according to reports.

Bloomberg News quoted a source close to the Kremlin saying that Vladimir Putin was disgusted by reports that the Syrian Army was fleeing its positions.

"Russia doesn't have a plan to save Assad and doesn't see one emerging as long as the Syrian president's army continues to abandon its positions," the source said.

The jihadist-led rebel forces captured Hama on Thursday night after seizing Syria's second city, Aleppo, last week. Yesterday, they were advancing on the city of Homs, which lies on the road to Damascus.

The Kremlin told all Russian citizens to flee on the next available commercial flight.

Charles Lister, director of the Syria programme at the Washington-based Middle East Institute, said that Assad had relied on Putin to save him in 2015 but his future now looked bleak.

"Russia doesn't seem able, or perhaps even willing, to save him," he said.

Iran has a military presence in Homs and other parts of Syria and yesterday, Abbas Araghchi, the Iranian foreign minister, said he would support Assad "to the extent necessary", without elaborating.

But Iran may have been weakened by direct and indirect clashes with US-backed Israel and its Hezbollah allies in Lebanon, and has been degraded by a major Israeli offensive.

'Russia doesn't have a plan to save Assad as long as his army continues to abandon its positions'

The lightning-fast rebel strike has not only strained relations between Russia and Syria but it has also made the Kremlin nervous about the safety of its military bases.

Fighterbomber, a prominent aviation military blogging channel, has warned the Kremlin will struggle to evacuate its main air base in Syria before rebels attack and capture it.

Fighterbomber issued the warning after Jihadist rebels captured the city of Hama on Thursday evening, opening up a clear route 75 miles west to the Khmeimim airbase near the Mediterranean Sea.

"It is almost impossible to evacuate the base. In the best case, it is possible to evacuate most of the personnel, documentation and ferry serviceable aircraft," he said. "All other property will remain at the bases."

It appears that the lightning rebel strike that has routed Syrian government forces across the country over the past week was never considered feasible. Emergency evacuation plans were not drawn up.

According to Fighterbomber there are only two reserve airfields in Syria which he described as a "critical minimum".

This means that instead of flying aircraft off vulnerable airstrips, they need to be driven to the Russian naval base of Tartus, 50 miles away, and then loaded onto transport ships.

Time's up for a president who is running out of friends and power

Analysis

By **Lina Khatib**

SYRIA'S emperor has no clothes. The extraordinary military advances made by Syrian rebel groups over the past week and a half have taken both the world and Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, by surprise. Until late November, Assad – and many outside observers – had considered the Syrian conflict to be indefinitely frozen.

While Assad could not declare outright victory – with the north-west and the north-east of the country still outside his control – he hoped that presiding over a rump state would be enough for the international community to eventually give up on the UN-led peace process and accept him as the de facto winner in the Syrian conflict. In other words, Assad was relying on pragmatism prevailing.

But that pragmatism has now shape-shifted to become Assad's worst nightmare. What Assad banked on as pillars propping up his regime are falling one by one, leaving him exposed and disposable.

Israel tolerated the Assad regime for decades because its behaviour proved to be low-risk. But the threats to Israeli security that the horrific October 7 assaults unleashed meant that Israel was no longer going to put up with Iran-backed armed groups roaming freely at its borders and attacking it, including militias such as Hezbollah.

Assad would not have survived in power for so long without Iranian support. With Israel having significantly weakened Iran and its key proxy Hezbollah, Iran no longer has the capacity to protect Assad.

Russia has also come to see the Assad regime as no longer necessary for its influence in Syria. Having secured long-term presence through its military and naval bases in the country, and with Iran's role diminishing, Russia has become the most dominant foreign actor in Syria. It can maintain this influence by bringing multiple Syrian sides together under its political umbrella instead of spending resources on an Assad regime bereft with corruption.

Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, hinted at this when he said that "the rules of the game in Syria are based on helping Syrians reach agreement". This is a marked departure from Russia's earlier position in which it equated stability with support for Assad's government.

Syria seems to be finally heading towards political transformation but the actors around the table are not quite those the UN-led peace process has been bringing together for talks.

Joining them will be an alliance of pragmatists who have proven to be willing to change their ideologies and behaviour for the sake of obtaining power. Assad had written off those Syrian rebels as terrorists. Their pragmatism – and that of Syria's foreign stakeholders - has come to be his undoing.

Lina Khatib is associate fellow for Middle East and North Africa programme at Chatham House

Iran ramps up uranium enrichment programme

By **James Rothwell** *in Berlin*

IRAN is "dramatically" increasing enrichment of uranium to near-weapons grade, the UN atomic watchdog warned on Friday, as fears grow that the regime is edging closer to having the capacity to build a bomb.

Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Tehran was growing its capacity to enrich uranium at up to 60 per cent purity, bringing it closer to the 90 per cent weapons grade threshold.

"Today the agency is announcing that the production capacity is increasing dramatically of the 60 per cent inventory," Mr Grossi said at a security conference in Bahrain.

He added that Iran's capacity could rise "seven, eight times more, maybe, or even more" than the previous rate of five to seven kilograms per month.

It came as a US intelligence report said that Iran has enough fissile material to potentially produce more than a dozen nuclear weapons, and that the risk of Tehran becoming a nuclear power was rising. Iran denies it is building a nuclear weapons programme.

The report also expressed concerns over a growing debate in Iran about the value of nuclear weapons as a deterrent.

"This debate risks emboldening nuclear weapons advocates in Iran's decision-making apparatus and shifting the thinking of current and future Iranian elites about the utility of nuclear weapons," the report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said.

Iran denies it is trying to produce nuclear weapons and says its programme is for civilian purposes only. Western officials argue there is no civilian justification for the regime's increased rates of enrichment.

'We do not have any ongoing diplomatic process which could lead to a more stable equation'

European and Iranian officials attempted talks on Tehran's nuclear programme last week before Donald Trump's return to the White House, but made little progress, Reuters reported.

Speaking yesterday, Mr Grossi said it was "regrettable" that diplomatic attempts to "de-escalate" the situation have so far not succeeded.

Nicolas Lerner, the head of France's foreign intelligence service, has also said Iranian nuclear proliferation would be a "critical threat" in coming months.

"We do not have any diplomatic process ongoing which could lead to a de-escalation, or a more stable equation when it comes to Iran," he said.

Taken prisoner Captured Russian soldiers are lined up by the side of the road after Ukrainian Special Operations Forces carried out a raid behind enemy lines in the Kursk region, eliminating 17 of Vladimir Putin's troops.

Tokyo offers four-day week in attempt to boost fertility

By **Iona Cleave**

TOKYO's government is introducing a four-day week for its staff in an attempt to help working mothers and boost Japan's plunging fertility rate.

The plan, which is due to start in April, will allow civil servants to take a more flexible approach to working hours alongside other reforms aimed at improving work-life balance.

"Now is the time for Tokyo to take the initiative to protect and enhance the lives, livelihoods and economy of our people during these challenging times for the nation," said Yuriko Koike, the city's governor, when she unveiled the plan this week.

"We will review work styles... with flexibility, ensuring no one has to give up their career due to life events such as childbirth or childcare," she added.

Japan is grappling with a demographic crisis with a fast-ageing population and tumbling fertility rates, which sank to an all-time low last year, threatening to further shrink the workforce.

Last year, the fertility rate – the number of children born per woman of childbearing age – fell to a record low of 1.2, according to Japan's health and labour ministry. A rate of 2.1 is needed for a population to remain stable.

The Japanese government has been pouring billions into "now or never" policies to encourage more young people to get married and have children, including offering lump sums to mothers and covering the cost of fertility treatments.

However, the birth rate has remained stubbornly low.

The crisis has long been attributed to Japan's gruelling work culture and long hours, where at least 54 deaths per year from overwork are reported.

LAURA JOHANSEN/ALAURA IMAGERY & DESIGN/PA

Keep dancing *Mary Poppins* star Dick Van Dyke appears in Coldplay's video for new single *All My Love*. The 98-year-old Hollywood star says he is "not afraid" of death in a seven-minute film created as a director's cut of the video.

Synagogue firebombed in 'clear act of anti-Semitism'

By **Nick Squires**

AUSTRALIA's Jewish community has been left "reeling" by an arson attack on a synagogue in Melbourne.

Firefighters were deployed to put out the blaze which erupted inside the Adass Israel Synagogue in a suburb in the south-east of the city in the early hours of yesterday morning.

Anthony Albanese, the Australian prime minister, condemned the attack. "This is clearly an act of anti-Semitism. It's an attack on a place of worship so by definition it's an act of hate," he said.

The synagogue was built by survivors of the Holocaust, local politicians said.

The arson marked an escalation in a campaign of attacks on Jewish targets in Australia since the war began between Israel and Hamas last year.

Buildings and vehicles have been vandalised and torched around the country in attacks believed to be fuelled by the conflict in the Middle East.

Witnesses said they saw two men in balaclavas dousing the synagogue with some kind of fuel before spreading it around with brooms before setting it alight.

"There was banging on the door, some liquid was thrown inside and was lit alight. The few people inside the synagogue ran outside the back door. One of them got burned," Benjamin Klein, a board member from the synagogue, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

About 60 firefighters with 17 fire engines responded to the blaze, which caused serious damage. Police are looking for three suspects.

"This is the focal point of the community and to see it lying burnt and in ruins is quite horrendous," Mr Klein told ABC.

NY assassin hunt widens across state lines

Police fear gunman who shot dead health insurance boss has fled the city after arriving on bus from Atlanta

By **Susie Coen** US CORRESPONDENT *in New York*

THE manhunt for the gunman who shot a health insurance boss dead in midtown Manhattan has expanded across state lines amid fears the assassin has fled the city.

The masked shooter arrived in New York on a cross-country bus which set off from Atlanta, Georgia, 10 days before the murder. It is not clear if the suspect was on the 17-hour coach from the outset, or boarded along the way.

The bus typically stops at destinations including Greenville, South Carolina; Charlotte and Greensboro in North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland.

There have still been no arrests more than two days after Brian Thompson was fatally shot in an audacious killing outside the Hilton Hotel at around 6:45am as he made his way to United-Health Group's investor conference.

Police have CCTV footage of the killing itself, DNA evidence on a water bottle left by the suspect, a burner phone left and pictures of the gunman's face, but so far no name has been released.

Eric Adams, the New York City Mayor, yesterday refused to disclose whether he thinks the suspect is still in the city.

Brushing off the question, he said: "I don't want to do anything that's going to impact the investigation of our team is looking at all the leads that we see."

He praised the New York Police Department, saying it had used "good old fashioned police work" to source a picture of the unmasked gunman. "We are on the right road to apprehend him and bring him to justice", Mr Adams said.

Mr Adams' comments came as it was reported the manhunt for the "brazen" killer had expanded into a multi-state search, including Connecticut and New Jersey. Police sources told CBS News it was an "important development" and could prompt the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to take the lead on elements of the case.

> 'We are on the right road to apprehend the killer and bring him to justice'

The outlet also reports that police have tracked the suspect through New York City, with more than 200 images of him from when he arrived to when he carried out the attack and absconded.

A collection of key images have been sent to 80 police departments across the country, CBS News reported, adding that the NYPD had requested assistance from outside forces. Officials have said they are confident they will catch the murderer, with one police officer saying: "We're gonna get this guy."

Images of the gunman shared by police show the suspect grinning as he checked into HI New York City Hostel on the Upper West Side. He reportedly lowered his mask to flirt with the hostel receptionist.

The killer was caught on CCTV entering Port Authority Bus Terminal on a Greyhound bus at 9pm on 24 November, sources told ABC News.

The gunman is understood to have then checked into the hostel. He checked out on Nov29 and returned the next day, using a fake New Jersey ID according to reports.

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South Korea's opposition politicians and activists hold 'Impeach Yoon Suk Yeol for rebellion!' placards at the National Assembly in Seoul in support of the motion to remove the president from office

JUNG YEON-JE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

South Korea at risk of martial law if president stays in power

By **William Yang** *in Seoul*

SOUTH KOREA's president could declare martial law again, the leader of the ruling party suggested as he called for an immediate suspension of his presidential power.

Yoon Suk-Yeol shocked the nation – and his own ruling People Power Party – on Tuesday, when he gave the military sweeping emergency powers to root out "anti-state forces" and overcome obstructionist political opponents.

Han Dong-hoon, the leader of Mr Yoon's People Power Party, said yesterday: "If President Yoon continues to hold the office of the presidency, there is a significant risk that extreme actions similar to the current state of emergency could be repeated, which could put the Republic of Korea and its citizens in great danger."

This is a dramatic change in tone from Mr Han, who initially said the ruling party would vote against an opposition motion to impeach Mr Yoon.

However, after the president refused to acknowledge his mistake, Mr Han said he was convinced the president posed a threat to the public and should not remain in office.

More than two thirds of the 300-member legislature must vote in favour of the motion proposed by opposition parties at 7pm local time (10am GMT) today for the president to be impeached.

In response to growing concerns, Kim Seon-ho, South Korea's acting defence minister, said the military and the defence ministry would not obey any further orders from the president to execute martial law.

Romanian vote annulled amid Russia fears

Suspicions raised after shock first-round victory of pro-Kremlin candidate in presidential election

By **Kieran Kelly** *and* **Madeleine Cuckson** *in Bucharest*

ROMANIA'S top court annulled the first round of the country's presidential election after Russia was accused of orchestrating an online campaign to promote a pro-Kremlin candidate.

The constitutional court's decision, which is final, sounded the alarm over hard-Right outsider Calin Georgescu's shock first-round win last month. Klaus Iohannis, the president, declassified intelligence on Wednesday detailing a slew of allegations against Mr Georgescu and Russia, including that Moscow was behind Mr Georgescu's victory through "massive" social media promotion and cyberattacks.

Elena Lasconi, the centrist candidate who had been due to face Mr Georgescu in Sunday's run-off, said the court's decision was "illegal, immoral, and crushes the very essence of our democracy".

She also said the ruling "destroyed 35 years of progress".

Mr Georgescu, 62, surged in the polls after gaining popularity on social media platforms such as TikTok and Telegram to emerge as a surprise frontrunner in the presidential elections. Fears had been rife that if Mr Georgescu, who has been vocal in his admiration of Vladimir Putin, won, it would derail Romania's pro-Ukraine stance and undermine European unity against Russia.

Yesterday Romanian prosecutors said they had opened an investigation into computer-related crimes linked to Mr Georgescu's campaign.

Mr Georgescu, an outsider who this week vowed to end Romanian aid for Ukraine, built his campaign from the ground up in a short period of time before the elections.

Romania's constitutional court received a variety of legal complaints after files were released by the country's intelligence service, foreign intelligence service, and ministry of internal affairs. The court initially ordered a recount of the first-round votes. A new date will now be set for a rerun of the first round, with the entire process to be restarted from scratch. The court said it annulled the results "to ensure the correctness and legality of the electoral process".

> 'Everything stops. I have to take care just about my people. We have a lot of problems ourselves'

Marcel Ciolacu, the outgoing prime minister and leader of the Social Democratic Party, said the ruling was the "only correct decision" following accusations of Russian interference.

However, Ms Lasconi, from the Save Romania Union Party, said the "serious problem" of Russian interference should be dealt with after a free election.

Authorities said data had "revealed an aggressive promotional campaign, in violation of electoral legislation, and an exploitation of algorithms to increase the popularity of Calin Georgescu at an accelerated pace".

The papers also said the country was a target of "aggressive hybrid Russian attacks" during the election period.

Romanian officials also slammed the "preferential treatment" of Mr Georgescu on TikTok where his clips were often viewed by over a million people.

TikTok has denied the allegations. However, on Thursday the EU ordered the video-sharing app to freeze data linked to the Romanian election.

Mr Georgescu, a staunch critic of Nato, surprised the country by winning the first round of the election last month with 22.9 per cent of the vote.

His popularity surge was largely attributed to his massive following on TikTok, where his videos would regularly be watched by over a million people.

Mr Georgescu, a staunch critic of Nato, praised Vladimir Putin as a "patriot and a leader" but added "I am not a fan".

When asked if he would continue sending aid to Ukraine, he said: "Everything stops. I have to take care just about my people. We have a lot of problems ourselves."

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Starmer must come clean on future tax rises

When Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, told the Confederation of British Industry last week that she would not be "coming back with more borrowing or more taxes", few will have been naive enough to take her at her word.

Sir Keir Starmer has now confirmed the wisdom of this approach, stating that he cannot rule out further tax rises due to "unforeseen" circumstances. If the Prime Minister wished to be even more straightforward with the British public, he could put on record what many of us already suspect: that tax rises are likely for entirely foreseeable reasons, too.

As Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has noted, Rachel Reeves's plans mean that the Government is already likely to need an additional £9 billion in spending in order to avoid real-terms cuts to departments. And given the lavish nature of Labour's spending on public sector wages, the prospect of telling state employees to tighten their belts seems slim indeed. In Mr Johnson's words, "the spending plans will not survive contact with her cabinet colleagues".

After all, Labour made much of their tax plans ahead of the election only to declare the discovery of a "black hole" in the public finances and impose £40 billion of tax rises. It would be a particularly gullible business that fell for exactly the same rhetorical pattern a second time.

This is particularly so given the blatant partisan nature of Labour's economic policy. While extra funds were doled out to public sector bodies to shield government workers from the tax raid, and inflation-busting pay deals awarded across the board, state productivity actually dropped as Labour allowed staff to revert to "working" from home.

To add injury to insult, much of the burden is falling on precisely the "working people" Sir Keir and Ms Reeves repeatedly promised would be shielded from tax rises. By 2029, it is believed that the National Insurance raid will result in a £7.5 billion reduction in wages across those affected. Other traditional class enemies – farmers, entrepreneurs and middle-class families with assets – have also been targeted.

In combination, this damage to the private sector and reward for public sector inefficiency seems all but calculated to lead to further demands for funds. The Budget has already seen a "sustained loss of momentum" in the economy, with more than half of Britain's businesses expecting to put up prices and cut jobs, and the chances of public sector reform seem slim.

Sir Keir's claim that the Government has taken the "really tough decisions" and "stabilised the economy" does not stand up to even the slightest scrutiny. It seems all too likely that this time next year we will find ourselves being told to open our wallets once more.

Britain's housing crisis

The news that house prices have reached a new record high serves only to underscore the urgent need for radical reform of Britain's planning rules.

Even before this latest rise, those looking to buy a home in England could expect to spend over eight times their annual earnings on a property, compared with just over three-and-a-half times in 1997. This shocking rise is the result of misguided policy that has constrained supply even as it has fuelled demand, with a Centre for Policy Studies report co-authored by Robert Jenrick finding earlier this year that migration accounted for 89 per cent of the rise in England's housing deficit over the past decade. Sir Keir Starmer has pledged to build an additional 1.5 million homes by the end of this Parliament, but has laid out few details on how this is to be achieved. Builders are struggling under a dysfunctional bureaucratic regime, with the planning system offering vetoes across the process of housebuilding.

Labour's solution to this so far has been to hire more planners, and it is notable that when the Conservatives attempted to scrap deeply flawed nutrient neutrality laws, Labour peers led a rebellion to block the measure in the Lords. Moreover, Rachel Reeves's first Budget included a rise in stamp duty which is likely to further gum the workings of the housing market and make it even harder for young families to buy a first home.

The scale of the housing catastrophe is now impossible to deny. The Prime Minister has made addressing it a key target. It is time he offered a credible plan for doing so.

Notre-Dame restored

Today, when France needs cheering up even more than Britain, the Prince of Wales is off to Paris for the reopening of Notre-Dame. How we gasped when fire engulfed it five years ago. And how worried we were by the posturing architects wanting the thing remade in glass and steel. Now 1,200 oak trees have gone to rebuilding the roof; the stained glass and vaulting are bright and clean. "I was glad," the choir will sing as the Archbishop of Paris knocks at the door with a crozier made of salvaged timber. Donald Trump, who gave unwise advice during the fire, will join poor Emmanuel Macron. Notre-Dame is big enough to contain them all.

LETTERS *to the* EDITOR

Justin Welby's shameful speech was further proof of his unfitness to lead

SIR – The Archbishop of Canterbury's dire swansong in the House of Lords (report, December 6) has been rightly criticised as tone-deaf by survivors of John Smyth's abuse.

There was precious little indication of contrition. Instead, Justin Welby's script suggested he was undecided whether to channel *Wolf Hall* (heads rolling) or Noel Coward (his diary secretary's predicament). Either way, it was thoroughly cringeworthy, and amply demonstrated his utter unfitness for leadership.

Particularly unedifying was the fact that some of his colleagues tittered sympathetically from the wings. The Good Book promises: "His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear His threshing floor" – starting, one might hope, with substandard clerics.

Dr Catherine Moloney
Liverpool

SIR – Was cracking jokes in the House of Lords the right way for Justin Welby to take leave of his colleagues?

It seems that the Archbishop and other top people in the Church still do not get the full horror of what has been done by some Church leaders to those they are meant to care for.

Andrew McLuskey
Ashford, Middlesex

SIR – Justin Welby clearly doesn't understand the concepts of leadership, responsibility or remorse.

Christians around the world will be ashamed at his frivolous "not me, guv" statement in the Lords. No wonder so many Bishops had their heads in their hands.

Dr Margaret Platts
Harrogate, North Yorkshire

SIR – Now is a good time to reflect on Justin Welby's legacy.

He showed pity in his speech for his diary-keeper, but little sympathy for the survivors of abuse in his church.

He managed to find plenty of money for reparations, but little for parish priests and their church buildings.

He presided over an increase in diocesan inclusion and diversity officers, and a decline in parish congregations.

He loved national ceremony and flummery, and showed disdain for day-to-day parish work.

He offered few words of scriptural faith, but plenty of comment on woke nonsense.

Perhaps we should allow the Most Rev Welby to move on to a role that better suits his beliefs and talents. He would do well as an aspiring candidate to be a Labour MP.

Fred Fearn
Bridport, Dorset

Pensioners' bonus

SIR – Sir Steve Webb, a former pensions minister, may think that the £10 Christmas bonus sent to pensioners is "almost meaningless" (Money, December 2) – and calls for it to be increased – but as a pensioner I would rather have it than not.

Two of us in our house are eligible, making it £20 in all. Shopping carefully will buy a small turkey at £17, leaving £3 for some vegetables. Other options offer even more delights. For £20 we can have a large chicken, stuffing, pigs in blankets, vegetables and a Christmas pudding.

If we eat in the kitchen when it's all ready, we might not notice the lack of heating in the rest of our house.

Maureen Wilde
Liverpool

Reintegrated railways

SIR – In your Leading Article (December 5) on renationalisation of the railways, you argue that "the network was failing under the old British Rail".

However, the main cause of the privatisation of British railways was the European Union directive 91/440 of 1991, which led to the current fragmentation of the network.

Many of the franchise train operators are now under the ownership of foreign governments' state railway companies, and thus are not "privatised" in reality. A long overdue return to a fully integrated railway system will be no bad thing.

Roger Croston
Chester

SIR – Having been told that the wait time just to start investigation of a neurological condition by the state-run NHS is 20 weeks, am I persuaded that a state-run railway will be an improvement?

Michael Turner
Winchester, Hampshire

SIR – On Thursday, my 1705 train from London Waterloo to Winchester was cancelled, due to a driver shortage. While claiming "delay repay" online, I noticed in the data provided for the last four-week period that South Western Railway had paid out a total of £343,777 for disrupted travel.

No doubt this is currently a burden on shareholders. Will a nationalised railway system be as generous in recompensing customers for the no-doubt worse performance we will have to suffer?

Great Western Railway, also part of FirstGroup, has recently refunded £3,042,452. Just how will the Government afford these losses?

Chris Ford
Malmesbury, Wiltshire

M&S store demolition

SIR – It will be sad to see the destruction of the Art Deco Marks & Spencer flagship store in Oxford Street, to be replaced by a dull modern structure (report, December 6).

Churchill House in Bath, built in 1932, was the headquarters for the city's electricity company. It was a beautiful building with fluted Tuscan columns, frieze and entablature, one of the last products of the Municipal Georgian revival. It was replaced by the ugly modernist bus station – an eyesore that locals hate.

Rob Dorrell
Bath, Somerset

Truth and facts

SIR – In her criticism of fact checkers, Madeline Grant confuses facts with truth (Comment, December 4). They are not the same thing.

Facts are discrete and observable, truth is almost always a subjective claim. At Full Fact, we are not trying to tell anyone what the truth is. We are trying to establish verifiable facts as an important basis for much-needed, robust political debates.

Equally, we are not telling anyone what to think. We are trying to give them accurate information so they can think for themselves, in order to make informed choices on the issues that matter to them.

Ms Grant also suggests that Full Fact treads more lightly on one party than another. We disagree. Our fact checks during the recent general election called out Labour's dodgy numbers as robustly as the Conservatives' fudged calculations. Our recently launched government tracker will hold people in power to account for the promises they have made.

Ms Grant asks: who fact checks the fact checkers? And the answer is reassuringly simple: everyone. From our methodology to our sources, everything Full Fact does is a transparent matter of public record. Anyone who chooses to do so can reverse engineer our fact checks by examining the sources we have used, and they can decide whether or not they agree with our conclusions. When we get it wrong, we say so.

Full Fact is committed to promoting honesty and accuracy in politics, which are essential for rebuilding public trust. Agreeing that shared facts exist – which are open to different interpretations by different parties – is indispensable in a healthy democracy.

Chris Morris
Chief executive, Full Fact
London SE11

Benefits of Britain

SIR – Sir James Dyson (Letters, December 5) asks why anyone would wish to start a business in the UK, following the recent Budget.

He is right that other countries might be more attractive, provided you are content to move home, lose friendships, purchase health insurance and pay for your children's education until they reach adulthood.

As with any business decision, there are many elements to consider, and if your one concern is to maximise your potential wealth by moving to an unfamiliar location, then one can follow his path.

The sacrifice will be to leave a country that has a reasonably balanced democracy (an observation that cannot always be made about the United States and several Asian countries), a health service that largely protects you, some of the best creative minds in both scientific and artistic fields, outstanding cultural assets, reasonable weather, and a stimulating and largely open-minded social mix.

Of course, there are serious faults and flaws, but true entrepreneurship requires taking the longer view, not just maximising the return in one generation, and seeking to adjust those elements you believe wrong.

Whatever one thinks of the current Government, the real damage is being done by the constant negativity being proclaimed virtually every day, sadly usually by people who have nothing to lose in any case.

Iain Harvey
Richmond, Surrey

Policing dog-owners

SIR – That more councils are getting to grips with law-breaking dog-owners is welcome news, but why aren't all councils doing this ("Dog owners are new target of spot fines by 'busybody' councils", report, December 6)?

A mere 88 out of 317 councils issued penalty notices for dog offences in 2023. Many more should be carrying out their duties.

In Torbay, dog-exclusion zones on beaches, parks and even in fenced-off children's play areas are constantly ignored, while fouling is commonplace and goes unpunished. Noise pollution from barking dogs is off the scale.

In my particular neck of the woods, Brixham, I have never seen a dog warden, which is a shame, as they would not only pay for themselves in fines collected but would also contribute to a safer, healthier and cleaner local environment.

John Hadley
Brixham, Devon

STEPHEN CHUNG / ALAMY

Inspiring: *The head of a young woman*, 1582, by Federico Barocci, at the King's Gallery

Renaissance art to feed the soul in dark times

SIR – I have just returned from a visit to London, where I viewed astonishing Renaissance art in separate exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the King's Gallery in Buckingham Palace.

I came away with my spirits greatly lifted and a renewed feeling that there is far more in our society that is virtuous than has often seemed to be the case during 2024, given what we've learnt about many hollow men and women in branches of public life – politics, showbusiness and sport, for example.

Both exhibitions continue in 2025 and I commend them as affordable therapy for the soul.

Kevin Duffy
Manchester

Parsnip persuasion

SIR – I have to agree with Henry Maj about parsnips (Letters, December 5). My father always insisted that I eat my parsnips, though they made me retch, on the premise that they were the Queen's favourite vegetable.

I later discovered that he didn't even like them himself, so I cannot understand his reasoning.

I never did find out the Queen's true opinion of parsnips, but they're definitely banned in our house.

Carol Kelly
Horwich, Lancashire

The best Christmas

SIR – I was surprised that William Hanson frowned on the idea of proposing on Christmas Day (Features, December 5). My boyfriend had moved into my flat in September, and when the question of celebrating Christmas came up I explained that I had already invited my mum to stay, and I couldn't uninvite her.

After we had all gone to bed on Christmas Eve, my boyfriend disappeared and came back in wearing a big red bow, got down on one knee and proposed to me with a plastic ring he had kept from a Christmas cracker.

The next day we took mum and visited his parents, and he announced our engagement, at which all three swooned and collapsed into armchairs. We then went home and enjoyed Christmas dinner.

We all agreed it was the best Christmas ever.

Shirley Batten-Smith
Watford, Hertfordshire

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CHARLES MOORE

Ed Miliband's net zero zealotry risks killing Labour's dream of growth

The Energy Secretary's ideological mission will make us all poorer – and our stalling car industry is an early sign of how bad things will get

Wes Streeting, the Health Secretary, was guest of honour at *The Spectator*'s Parliamentarian of the Year Awards on Tuesday night. He was in excellent form, making jokes not only at the expense of the Tories, but of his own party too. In the following, he combined both:

"I'm sorry that your protégée Kemi can't be here tonight," said Mr Streeting to the editor, Michael Gove. "But it's good to see her repeating all the same mistakes we made in opposition. Trashing her party's own record… talking to the members, not the voters. Kemi, if you carry on like this, you'll be energy secretary in 10 years' time."

Ed Miliband was not present, but he will have noticed and been unamused by Mr Streeting's Blairite tease. He was once the leader of the opposition and is the current Energy Secretary – or rather, to give him his full, portentously ideological title, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. He is on a mission.

Mr Streeting's jibe aside, this has been a good week for Mr Miliband. His net zero mission was confirmed as one of Sir Keir Starmer's six "measurable milestones" (have you ever met a milestone that wasn't measurable?). Milestone Five, Sir Keir told us, is "clean power by 2030", making us secure against "a tyrant like Putin" as "a clean-energy superpower" with "home-grown British energy".

Actually, Mr Miliband is somewhat selective about home-grown British energy. He is phasing out all North Sea gas and oil and would not dream of fracking British shale. But he is determined to make us home-grow wind farms with their accompanying 5-6,000 more pylons covering the country by 2030. He also wants to triple solar photovoltaic capacity by the same date, which means filling a total agricultural area not much smaller than Berkshire.

I think Mr Miliband may find his home-grownery overtaken by Chris Wright, the energy entrepreneur who is Donald Trump's choice for US energy secretary and intends to follow his master's intention of "drilling, drilling, drilling" for oil and gas. The Trump aim is not net zero carbon by 2050, but "zero energy poverty". We shall be able to conduct a controlled experiment to see which is more popular.

Labour's Milestone Five also declares that the Government committed to "keeping bills down" and "at least 95 per cent low carbon by 2030". These are incompatible aims, if bills are allowed to reflect real costs. (If they are not, people and businesses will have to pay in taxes instead.) We can have as many wind farms as we like, but they cannot cure the problem of intermittency – not only the famous winter days when there is no wind, but also what the Royal Society calls "wind-drought years".

To prevent energy rationing or power cuts, we shall still need to keep gas turbines too and therefore, as the Global Warming Policy Foundation points out, still bear a double system cost. And because no one knows exactly when gas will be needed, we shall have to buy it not in long-term contracts but at far higher spot-market prices. Britain already has the highest industrial electricity prices in the developed world. How can we be "an energy superpower" in such circumstances? The Milestone will become a millstone.

Then there is Mr Miliband's enthusiasm for Electric Vehicles (EVs). Unlike wind farms, EVs may ultimately prove the better technology. Many drivers like their silence, acceleration, simplicity and easy handling. But they are far more inconvenient than the internal combustion engine (ICE) – range anxiety, the slowness and shortage of charging points, their weight (its effect on tyres and roads) and what happens when the battery – for which we mostly depend on China – goes wrong.

A friend tells me about his brother-in-law's Tesla. It went into a pothole: the battery was ruined by water. The replacement would have cost £17,000; a reconditioned battery was a trifling £10,000. Such battery costs keep EVs' second-hand values very low. As happens with technological change at first, the price of new EVs is very high. Markets iron this out over time. But once politics interferes with business development, everything goes wrong.

Because they cannot be confident about the future, British drivers are stalling. The industry is therefore doing the same. New car sales to private buyers (as opposed to fleets, who are incentivised) are down 11.8 per cent on last year.

The issue of costs is acute. New car prices have shot up: the average of all types was just below £23,000 in 2009

> Sir Keir Starmer's 'six milestones' include making us a 'clean-energy superpower' by 2030

and reached nearly £53,000 in 2003, a 129 per cent increase. Over the same period, real wages have increased by about 6 per cent. The average new EV costs £62,000. It is not surprising that nearly half the 34 million cars on our roads are more than 10 years old.

On the radio this week, I heard the boss of Ford UK, speaking in the ingratiatingly polite tones of one seeking subsidy. Ford loves the Government's "ambition", she said, "It's just that there isn't customer demand." Just! It reminded me of the old saying, "The operation was a success: unfortunately, the patient died."

The only surprise about Stellantis's announcement that it will close its Luton van factory is that it has taken so long. Yet Mr Miliband is fining the companies that fail to hit his 22 per cent quota of EV sales this year and will ratchet up this percentage to 80 per cent of new cars by 2030. The companies can meet this quota only by fiddles like delaying into the next tax year the sales of petrol and diesel cars to would-be customers, artificially creating queues.

We already know that Western Europe's dominance of the ICE era will not be replicated if the era of EVs is coming. This is bad for us and near-fatal to Germany. We are over-virtuous, over-regulated, over-costed. China, which is none of those things, and is entirely cynical about net zero, can capture our markets.

In the world of EVs, people speak enthusiastically about the rapid acceleration produced by "PSMs", initials which stand for "permanently excited synchronous motors". Perhaps Mr Miliband thinks he can achieve a similar acceleration politically. But politics is different from business, its mistakes made hideous by its failure to understand customers and markets. In politics, PSM should stand for "permanently excited socialist ministers" of all parties (yes, plenty under the Tories too). It spells doom.

The tragedy is that this is unnecessary. There is no climate "emergency". Even the report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) does not endorse that word. It follows that there is no need for net zero by 2050, let alone by 2030. It is not the concern about climate change which is causing such harm, but the panic.

In recent days, we have seen the weird non-car advertisement for the new Jaguar, followed by the first pictures of the new design. It reminds me of the time when tobacco advertisers, scared by attacks on smoking and its promotion, started to create ads which featured no cigarettes and no brand names, fighting only for market share of something which was on the way out.

The Jaguar ad feels a bit like that – the result of a mental crisis about why it exists at all. But whereas cigarettes were always a luxury, cars are, for most people, a semi-necessity – an emancipation for the poor, essential transport for most families, a major part of working life and therefore of prosperity. If they suffer a nervous breakdown, so will Western civilisation. Quite possibly, that is the intention.

READ MORE *at telegraph.co.uk/opinion*

Way of the World Michael Deacon

This week the BBC unveiled its list of the 100 most "inspiring and influential women" of 2024. As I wrote in my column on Thursday, however, I couldn't help but notice a peculiar pattern.

Among the BBC's choices were an Israeli woman who is "an outspoken critic of the Israeli government"; an "immigrant rights campaigner" who helped file "criminal charges against Donald Trump"; a Republican who loathes Trump so much, she's refused to vote Republican at the last three presidential elections; and a male biologist named Brigitte who "analyses landscapes" using "a queer lens".

And so on. All in all, it was difficult to avoid the impression that the list was not really about celebrating women. It was about promoting the BBC's own stridently progressive view of the world.

So, to redress the balance, here's an alternative list of "women of the year" – all of whom the BBC overlooked…

Hilary Cass
Few people have produced anything more influential in 2024 than the Cass Review – which cast serious doubt on the wisdom of pumping puberty-blocking drugs into vulnerable children confused about their "gender identity". Oddly, though, the BBC didn't find space for the review's author on its list of 100 "influential" women. Still, it did at least find space for a "hijab-wearing heavy metal band".

The Darlington nurses
A group of female NHS staff are suing their employer for letting a male colleague named Rose use the women's changing room with them. They say they aren't transphobic – they just don't feel women should be obliged to undress in front of a man. Quite a big story, this year. But perhaps the BBC forgot about it.

Mandy Damari
Mrs Damari is the mother of a British hostage of Hamas. Ever since Emily, 28, was seized by the Palestinian terror group on October 7, 2023, Mrs Damari has been tirelessly campaigning for her daughter's release. She would, therefore, have made a strong candidate for the BBC's list. Instead, however, it chose an Israeli woman who blames Israel's own government for "failing to find a way to bring the hostages home". What a curious decision. I wonder why the BBC did that.

Katharine Birbalsingh
Two notable successes this year for the woman often described as "Britain's strictest headmistress". First, a High Court judge ruled that her school's ban on prayer rituals was lawful, after a Muslim pupil claimed that it was discriminatory. And second, her school's GCSE results only narrowly fell short of Eton's – even though her pupils are drawn from one of London's most deprived boroughs. No wonder so many people on the Left despise her. She just keeps on showing them up.

Giorgia Meloni
This year the Italian PM has taken a stand against deepfake pornography – which, having been a victim of it herself, she describes as "a form of violence against women". She's also banned "surrogacy tourism", making it illegal for Italians to obtain other women's babies abroad. But the BBC calls her "far-Right", so forget all that.

JK Rowling
In the 11 years since the BBC started compiling its annual list of the world's most influential women, it has for some reason never found room for the mega-selling author, philanthropist and prominent defender of women's rights. Still, maybe next year.

Rosie Duffield
After telling Sir Keir Starmer in September that he was "entirely undeserving of holding the title of Labour Prime Minister", Ms Duffield set an all-time record: no MP in British parliamentary history has resigned the party whip so soon after an election. A proud boast. Especially in this case.

HRH Princess of Wales
Presumably our future Queen's battle with cancer wasn't deemed sufficiently inspirational to make the BBC's list of 100 "inspiring women".

Allison Pearson
Essex Police's treatment of our columnist – over a deleted, year-old tweet – was chilling. But perhaps some good will come out of it. First, because the backlash may deter at least some police officers from wasting their time and the taxpayer's money on pursuing people over their social media posts, while countless real crimes remain unsolved (and even uninvestigated). And second, because the whole sorry episode woke the public up to the fact that many supposed liberals – including some who work in journalism themselves – aren't really all that fussed about free speech.

Martine Croxall, Kasia Madera, Annita McVeigh and Karin Giannone
This year, these four female journalists took legal action against their employer – a well-known broadcasting corporation funded by a licence fee – because they claimed they'd been paid significantly less than male colleagues performing equivalent roles. At an employment tribunal, they were told they wouldn't be able to bring a claim for equal pay. It's not over, though – because they recently filed an appeal. So perhaps they'll end up among 2025's women of the year, instead.

CAMILLA TOMINEY

Sadiq Khan, Sue Gray and Chris Wormald show that in the public sector you only fail upwards

The Mayor of London's proposed knighthood follows a sorry pattern of rewards for the most incompetent civil servants

Could there be a better example of a reward for failure than Sadiq Khan's proposed knighthood? The London mayor is reported to be in line for the gong in Sir Keir Starmer's first New Year's Honours list as Prime Minister.

Khan will apparently receive his award for "political and public service" after almost two decades in front-line politics. Which is ironic, when you consider that Khan has actually done the public a complete disservice in London since he first took control of the capital in 2016.

Consider his record since then. He implemented public transport fare rises in 2021, in return for a £1.6billion bailout from the government after Transport for London (TfL) twice went bankrupt on his watch. In a sign of his own economic illiteracy, he recently offered Tube drivers a four-day week for the same pay in response to their latest strike threat.

His mismanagement of Covid is best summarised in two statements made just three weeks apart. On March 3, 2020, he declared: "There is no risk in using the Tube or buses or other forms of public transport."

Then, on March 24, 2020, after restricting the Underground to essential workers only, he warned: "Stop Tube travel or more will die." He initially refused to give bus drivers personal protective equipment (PPE) and then advocated even harsher lockdowns than those imposed by his predecessor Boris Johnson. Many still blame his mixed messaging for London suffering more economic damage than other major cities.

Khan has repeatedly missed his housebuilding targets, with City Hall only a tenth of the way to hitting the lower end of his already reduced target of delivering at least 23,900 affordable homes.

His 20mph zones and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods have resulted in rush-hour traffic moving through London more slowly than it did in the pre-combustion engine era.

Meanwhile, he has penalised front-line workers and tradespeople with the punitive expansion of the congestion charge and ultra-low emission zone (Ulez) – with the jury still out on whether either have actually helped to lower pollution.

When the Advertising Standards Authority investigated claims that TfL had exaggerated the benefits of the Ulez during a £9million "marketing blitz", it found that its radio and newspaper advertisements had been "misleading".

On crime, Khan has been accused of "completely losing control" of London's streets, with a 38 per cent increase in knife offences since he took office. Despite the huge increase in stabbings, stop and search has fallen by 44 per cent over the past two years.

Under Khan's watch, the capital appears to have become a playground for watch and phone thieves – and shoplifters, with "theft from person" up by 96 per cent since he took office. According to the Tories, a phone is effectively snatched in the capital every six minutes.

Meanwhile, Khan has overseen the "two-tier" policing of the pro-Palestinian marches through London and undermined the police by expressing his sympathy for the family of Chris Kaba – a gangster shot dead by armed officer Martyn Blake, who was later acquitted of his murder.

The list goes on and on – but apparently just being in public service is enough to merit a reward these days, regardless of the quality of the service provided.

Knighthoods have basically become the public sector's equivalent of a long service medal – doled out to politicians and civil servants simply for doing their (well paid) jobs, regardless of how well or badly they have executed their duties.

We also learnt this week that Starmer is said to be planning to give Sue Gray a peerage – despite her lasting just three months as his chief of staff and being forced to resign amid a furore over her previous links to Labour, which found her in breach of the Civil Service code. It remains an outrage that the supposedly neutral Ms Gray skewered Boris Johnson only to become Starmer's right-hand woman.

But apparently we're all supposed to turn a blind eye because Gordon Brown's memoir described her as someone who could be counted on for "wise advice when – as all too regularly happened – mini-crises and crises befell". Really? In the case of Brown's successor, she had one job – and bungled it.

Only in the Civil Service can you fail upwards quite so spectacularly.

This week also witnessed the promotion of Sir Chris Wormald (already knighted, naturally) as the new Cabinet Secretary; a man who once compared Covid to chickenpox.

He has been in charge of the Department of Health and Social Care for the past eight years – a department seemingly so inept that post-pandemic waiting lists remain at record highs and patients are struggling to see an NHS doctor or dentist. When he appeared before the Covid Inquiry last year, Sir Chris suggested that "we never nationally ran out of PPE" (tell that to care homes), while admitting there was a "flaw" in the thinking in the run-up to the pandemic, which he would now handle "differently". That's all right then.

PA

Sadiq Khan, the London Mayor, has presided over a disastrous rise in crime and two-tier policing in the capital

Supporters of Khan, Gray and Wormald *et al* will no doubt argue that because they have dedicated their lives to "public service" then they deserve to be recognised. But this completely overlooks the extent to which the government machine has completely failed British citizens in recent years. It's all very well blaming successive governments for broken Britain – but can we please acknowledge the role played by inept and inefficient officialdom? Most of our departments of state appear to have become badly run basket cases.

And let's not even get started on buck-passing quangos. At every level it's a tale of waste, with bureaucrats prioritising pet projects over the needs of the public, coupled with a total lack of accountability. A scandal happens, and we're told heads must roll – only for them to invariably end up bowling into another cushy public service job, with the promise of one day being invited to an investiture.

In his "Plan for Change" speech on Thursday, Starmer acknowledged that "too many people in Whitehall are comfortable in the tepid bath of managed decline." Yet it's hard to take his quest to "rewire the state" seriously when we continue to see those who work for it enjoying perks, promotions and gold-plated pensions for doing a worse job than their private sector counterparts.

The latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) data show public sector productivity is lagging behind the private sector, at 8.5 per cent below pre-pandemic levels. Yet still public sector workers continue to receive inflation-busting pay rises, even though they work from home more than private sector workers, which has been proved to be 18 per cent less productive than being in the office.

So let's not have gongs glorifying and glamourising public service when we have an ever increasing state delivering ever diminishing returns.

The truth of the matter is that the British public hasn't been well served for years. The honours system must stop rewarding those responsible for taxpayer-funded failure.

Don't we all need to face up to our sins in a timely manner? Seemingly, not Archbishops

Abuse victims said they were 'disgusted' by the 'frivolous' speech

It is really no wonder that victims of the Church of England child abuse scandal were outraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury's resignation speech.

In his first public address since announcing his resignation last month, Justin Welby appeared completely out of step with his flock as he appeared to make light of his role in the Church's failure to investigate properly the allegations.

After expressing his pity for his secretary, who he said had worked hard on arranging his diary for the year ahead, he joked: "The reality is that there comes a time if you are technically leading a particular institution or area of responsibility where the shame of what has gone wrong – whether one is personally responsible or not – must require a head to roll.

"And there is only, in this case, one head that rolls well enough."

He also referred to a 14th-century predecessor who had been beheaded, adding: "I hope not literally."

Abuse victims said they were "dismayed" and "disgusted" by the "frivolous" speech, which made no mention of remorse for survivors.

The Makin review found Mr Welby "could and should" have reported prolific child abuser John Smyth to the police in 2013 and criticised the Church for not doing enough to prevent further abuse until the lay preacher died. Smyth is believed to have abused more than 100 boys and young men at Christian summer camps in England in the 1970s and 1980s, and later in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The Archbishop has since apologised for his insensitive Lords' speech. In his latest mea culpa he has finally taken personal responsibility for the scandal, but why has it taken so long? Is saying sorry really the hardest part?

This strikes me as a rather un-Godly way to behave. In order to be forgiven of our sins, we must surely confess them in a timely manner?

Odd that the normally outspoken Archbishop should remain silent for so long on the issue of his own guilt. It was bad enough when he shot his mouth off about issues such as Brexit and the Rwanda scheme. Now his 11-year tenure will largely be remembered for this biblical blunder.

TOM HARRIS

I'm starting to think Starmer will not survive

Backed only by a loveless landslide, the Prime Minister lacks the leadership qualities needed in the long run

The comedian Bill Bailey once tried to explain Ed Miliband's role as leader of the Labour Party by comparing him to a plastic bag stuck in a tree: no one knows how it got there and nobody can be bothered bringing it back down.

Following the "relaunch" on Thursday of his government, it's fairly apparent that Keir Starmer, despite winning 4 per cent more of the vote than Miliband did in 2015 – and the small matter of having actually become Prime Minister – is sending out the same "plastic bag" vibes as his predecessor.

One of the reasons I have resisted rejoining the party of which I was a member for 34 years until 2018 is a conviction that Labour is not serious, that it is essentially dysfunctional. This can be summed up in one fact: the last time the party elected a serious figure as leader was 30 years ago.

Tony Blair was unapologetically on the Right of the Labour Party; we all knew (mostly) what we were getting when we voted for him in preference to his two opposing candidates, John Prescott and Margaret Beckett. Blair's successor as leader and prime minister, Gordon Brown, was crowned rather than elected, the party having decided that open elections could be temporarily dispensed with.

Then we had Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn in quick succession, the latter being chosen twice by the party membership.

When Starmer stood as leader in 2020, he adopted virtually every policy position that had been held by Corbyn in an attempt – as we now know – to fool his members into believing he was as Left-wing and radical as the Islington sage. That might be considered realpolitik and justifiable (it was). But it says more about the Labour Party than it does about Starmer that only a sheep in wolf's clothing could gain enough support from them after the drama and defeats of the previous five years.

Starmer was not chosen to lead his party or his country because of his oratorical skills, his political instincts or his keen sense of self-deprecating humour. This was made even more obvious on Thursday during the damp squib we must still refer to as the Government's relaunch after only five months in office.

No, Starmer was the best option for a party in crisis, even if that crisis was created by the members themselves through their own blind stupidity.

There is certainly no trace of a leadership crisis in Labour right now, and the chances of a leadership challenge are beyond remote.

Still, the "loveless landslide" based on barely a third of the vote in a general election with a historically low turnout does not suggest that voters embraced Starmer out of enthusiasm for him personally. The Prime Minister will be relaxed about that: he has long encouraged comparisons with that other famously dull but radical Labour leader and PM, Clement Attlee, about whom Winston Churchill never actually said, "An empty carriage pulled up outside Downing Street and Clement Attlee got out."

But it's an aphorism that might be applied as accurately to Starmer as to Britain's first post-war prime minister. That doesn't matter for now. But if future relaunches of this government are deemed necessary, and if those relaunches have as little impact or as little substance as Thursday's did, and if the polls, in consequence, start to suggest a wider polling deficit with the Conservatives, or if the party drastically underperforms in next May's local elections, it's not hard to imagine discontented and ambitious Cabinet ministers agitating for a change at the top.

Nothing is certain, of course, especially in these febrile political times. But to quote Samuel L Jackson in *Pulp Fiction*: "Personality goes a long way." Indeed it does, in politics more than any other sphere of life.

At the risk of being proved wrong (any columnist's worst nightmare), I predict that Starmer's own personality will not get him to the end of this Parliament.

PETERBOROUGH

Cold curry for Boris

The problem with living in No10 is that it is impossible to get a take-out meal. Boris Johnson says: "The number of evenings we would order some Chinese, Lebanese or curry, and the guy would say, 'I'm sorry they're not letting me in, they say I can't come this way'. We'd say, 'No, no, no you can, we're in the flat just down the end of the road called Downing Street.' He said, 'No, no, no, the police are telling me to go away.'"

Johnson tells the *Rosebud* podcast that he would have to "pad in my boxer shorts" to the Cabinet Office where deliveries are allowed and "try to persuade the guards there to let the kebabs through". He says: "I don't know how many takeaway meals simply disappeared because of the difficulty of penetrating the defences of No10."

Cook like a Queen

The Queen, *below*, is a dab hand in the kitchen. Her son Tom Parker Bowles tells *Saga* magazine: "My mother made all our meals. She was a great cook then and still is. Nothing fancy, just hearty food: scrambled eggs, fresh mince from the local butcher, fruit and veg from the garden. Her approach has always been instinct and feel; no recipe book, no apron, no fuss. If I ask her how she gets her roast chicken to taste so good, she'll say, 'Well, you get a chicken and put it in the oven'. What temperature? 'Nice and hot'. How long? 'Till it's done.'"

Fry's delight

National treasure Stephen Fry says fame isn't plain-sailing: "I literally find it impossible to go into pubs now," he tells the *Dish* podcast. "There'll always be someone who says 'Let me buy you a drink'. Now what do you do to that? If you say 'Yes', you'll have to talk to them for as long as it takes to drink the drink. On the other hand if you say 'No', [they say] 'I'm just offering you a drink, what's wrong with that? You're so stuck up!' You just cannot win. It's very tricky."

Game of two halves

Talk of a "coup" at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Football where Tories complain that Labour MPs Jake Richards and Gregor Poynton (they are brothers-in-law) have taken over. A match with Labour staff has been cancelled after some Tory MPs and peers refused to play. Friends of Richards blame mischief-making. One says: "It's a pain organising games but nobody else fancied it. Any Tory [is] very welcome." This one might go to extra time.

Suella's song

Shadow Cabinet minister Robert Jenrick – whose appearance in a GB News debate against Kemi Badenoch failed to win him the Tory leadership – hosted a thank you party for 100 friends in a central London pub on Thursday. Soon talk turned to an unlikely friendship between Jenrick, his former Cabinet colleague Suella Braverman, *below*, and Health Secretary Wes Streeting, all contemporaries at Cambridge. One source said: "They all had dinner together at Suella's flat. Suella then pulled out a guitar and sang *Yesterday*." A friend of Braverman tells me this sounds "vaguely true" but thinks she never knew Streeting then, adding: "She did play guitar and did play a lot of Beatles."

Your own personal Jesus

Reader Elizabeth Serjeant gets in touch. "Since 1968 every Christmas we have had a crib in the house, and the full complement of Nativity figures including a tiny baby Jesus," she says. "We can only assume that an energetic grandchild hoovered him up on Twelfth Night. Despite many attempts, from cathedral shops to Amazon, it appears you cannot purchase a single tiny baby Jesus suitable for a crib."

This seems like a gap in the market.

Elizabeth I restored

Sir Keir Starmer caused consternation when he replaced portraits of Elizabeth I and Sir Walter Raleigh, *below*, in No10

with scenes from Crivelli's Garden, by Portuguese-born artist Dame Paula Rego. Labour minister Baroness Twycross has told peers that Elizabeth I is back on the walls at 11 Downing St "as part of the Chancellor's display of works 'of or by women'". It's a victory of sorts.

Unwelcome US imports

Former Cabinet secretaries are uneasy about the PM's reliance on politically appointed advisers. There are 41 new "special advisers" in No10, including Jonathan Powell, the new National Security Adviser. Lord Turnbull, who ran the Civil Service from 2002 to 2005, blames it on the fad for US style chiefs of staff in Downing St. He told peers: "This is like chewing gum and Halloween: an unwelcome import from the United States." What other "unwelcome imports" from America could Peterborough readers do without?

Edited by Christopher Hope; *peterborough @telegraph.co.uk*

How the soaring minimum wage is obliterating the worth of a degree

With the mandatory pay rate matching starting salaries in many careers, middle-class graduates paying back hefty student debts feel betrayed – and experts warn this may soon create problems for the British economy and have implications for the nation's politics. By *Ben Wright*, *Natasha Leake* and *Ben Butcher*

'I remember when I realised I was earning just more than minimum wage despite gaining a high 2:1 degree from a reputable university," says Tara, a 24-year-old marketing executive who graduated from Southampton University last year. "I try not to focus on it because of how frustrated I get." Sam, who studied law at a Russell Group university and now works in government on £28,000 a year, has similar gripes: "I expected I'd be earning more."

What rankles Tara, Sam and many others in a similar position is not just being squeezed by stagnant wage growth, high inflation and heavy student debts, but that they're barely earning more than the mandatory minimum.

At two-thirds of median income, the UK's increasingly generous minimum wage is now one of the highest in the world. In October, Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, announced that from April next year the rate will rise from £11.44 per hour to £12.21, a 6.7 per cent increase. This means that a person working full-time on a minimum wage can expect to earn over £25,000 a year – very much in the same ballpark as the starting salaries for many graduate careers.

"The implicit message is that you shouldn't aspire to be the best you can be, because it won't make much of a difference," says Sam. "Many young people are looking at some of their peers working in Tesco and Asda and thinking: 'That would be a lot easier.' When my job is particularly demanding and I have to do lots of unpaid overtime, I do feel that I could be doing something else for an easier life. Nobody is against fair compensation for a good job done but there needs to be a recognition that these are not the same jobs. It's incredibly demoralising for many who are starting their careers in working environments where it takes genuine sacrifice to get ahead."

Rewarded for avoiding university

Wage compression, when the lines on the graph depicting the wages of skilled and unskilled labour start to converge, is already having a profound impact on the UK's labour market. Experts are warning it may soon create problems for the economy and have uncertain implications for the nation's politics. The constant ratcheting up of the minimum wage is also slowly reducing the cachet of a university degree and the kinds of roles that require them.

Formerly precarious jobs have enjoyed big pay increases in recent years. Median hourly wages for bar workers, for example, increased by 26 per cent in real terms between 2011 and 2023, according to research by the Resolution Foundation. However, median salaries rose by just 1.9 per cent overall. The result is that, while the lowest paid have done relatively well, those in the middle are feeling the squeeze and are being gnawed by a growing sense of unfairness. The pressure is particularly acute for recent graduates just starting out on their careers.

Paul Johnson, the outgoing director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies and one of the country's most prominent economists, recently pointed out that his 24-year-old son was in a position to buy a house in London, something that is far beyond the dreams of most twentysomethings. This was not thanks to the largesse of the Bank of Mum and Dad but rather because he had eschewed university and started work as an apprentice aged 18.

This means he has almost three times as much work experience as his university-educated peers, has had longer to build up savings for a deposit (for this it helped to be working but not spending much during the pandemic) and isn't having to pay back a student loan. This week, Rob Wilson, the deputy chairman of the Social Mobility Commission, argued that policymakers had adopted too narrow a focus on academic achievement and that a university degree is not a "silver bullet" to success.

Gaining a degree has a certain amount of cachet, but following years of stagnant wages and as UK society becomes increasingly classless, young people are increasingly deciding that getting on the housing ladder and winning a promotion at work matter more. Wilson argues that the Government needs to wake up to this fact and do more to encourage young people to start businesses and get apprenticeships.

Drag anchor of student loans

Last year, the Conservative government introduced the biggest reforms to the student loans system in England in more than a decade. Students starting university from August 2023 will have to start repaying their loans when their salary reaches £25,000 – less than can be earned on the minimum wage – rather than just under £30,000 and make repayments for up to 40 years rather than 30.

Most people earning £25,000 would normally pay the basic rate of tax of 20 per cent. But graduates, who are also having to pay back their student loans, will effectively be hit by a marginal rate of 37 per cent – a huge discrepancy in the UK's supposedly progressive tax system. The changes also mean that 79 per cent of new borrowers will repay their student loans in full, compared with just 49 per cent of those who took out their loans before August 2023, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. That's good news for the Government (and taxpayers) but could be bad news for many graduates.

The IFS estimates that low-to-middle earners could end up repaying on average about £30,000 more over their lifetimes while higher earners, who previously paid a higher rate of interest, could pay less. Again, not very progressive.

Tara says that she loves her job and is happy with her salary. But she's intensely frustrated by the knowledge that she could be in the same situation without a degree and the attendant debt. She admits that she's also jealous of those people in her career who took the non-graduate route: "I don't think that university has benefited my income at all – it probably hindered it in fact. I regret going. I don't think I got my money's worth. An Open University degree would have been a hell of a lot cheaper.

"People have a massive misconception that going to university means success, but to make the most out of uni, I think you have to be in a certain position financially. I had to work throughout university, and so you end up with ridiculous hours and so anything that I learnt wasn't retained anyway.

"I enjoy what I'm doing. But the money side of the job is always a bit of a pinch point because it just feels a bit unjust. It feels like you were made to study and pay tens of thousands of pounds under the belief that you will immediately earn that back – but it's just not the case."

Increasingly, students are realising this is not the way forward, says Sam: "Why would you be saddled with tons of student debt without any rewards or recognition or ability to get ahead? I see people who are doing apprenticeships, they're getting first-hand experience, and they're getting a good wage. They're getting tons of experience – and being paid for it."

Disproportionate rise of the minimum wage

The constant ratcheting up of the minimum wage has shielded the lowest paid from the stagnant pay inflation suffered by the rest of the country. Real average weekly earnings grew by just 2.2 per cent between February 2008 and February 2024.

While the majority of the low-paid graduate jobs are generally still paid more than the minimum wage (and are obviously hopeful of big increases in the future), the gap is closing all the time.

In 2004, someone earning the minimum wage in a full-time role would earn £10,137 a year. Meanwhile, the lowest quartile of workers would earn £15,571 – £5,434 or 35 per cent more. Next year, the gap will fall to just £4,394 or 15 per cent (assuming a three percentage point increase in employee wages).

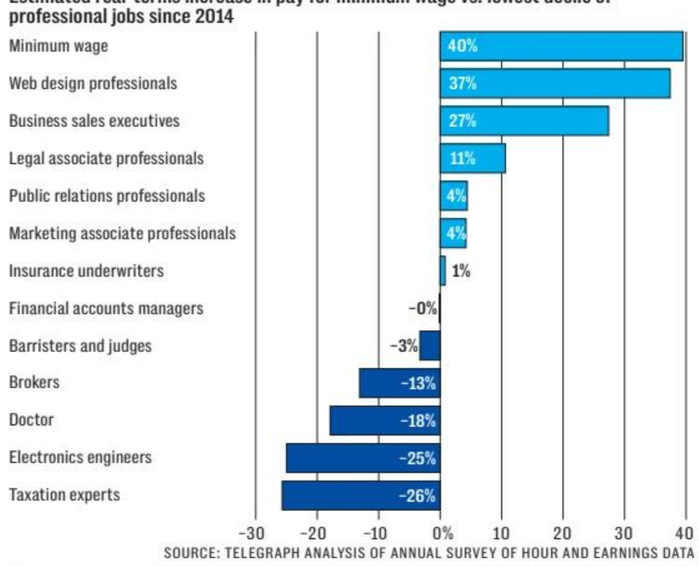
This situation is playing out across a range of professions. In 2014, a public relations executive in the lowest decile earned around £9.30 an hour. This was 47 per cent higher than the £6.31 minimum wage. Today, they earn just 11 per cent more and come April next year, if their wages don't increase, it will be just 4 per cent higher.

Meanwhile, the gap between what junior barristers earn and the minimum wage has fallen from 89 per cent to 30 per cent in the past 10 years; for pharmacists it has narrowed from 74 per cent to 27 per cent, and for sales executives from 15 per cent to just 5 per cent.

The gap between those at the top and the bottom of the wage scale is also closing: the highest decile of full-time employees earned four times the minimum wage in 2004, compared with three times more now. Supporters of the minimum wage therefore rightly point to the enormous impact the policy has had in reducing inequality.

Minimum wage has far outpaced professional jobs

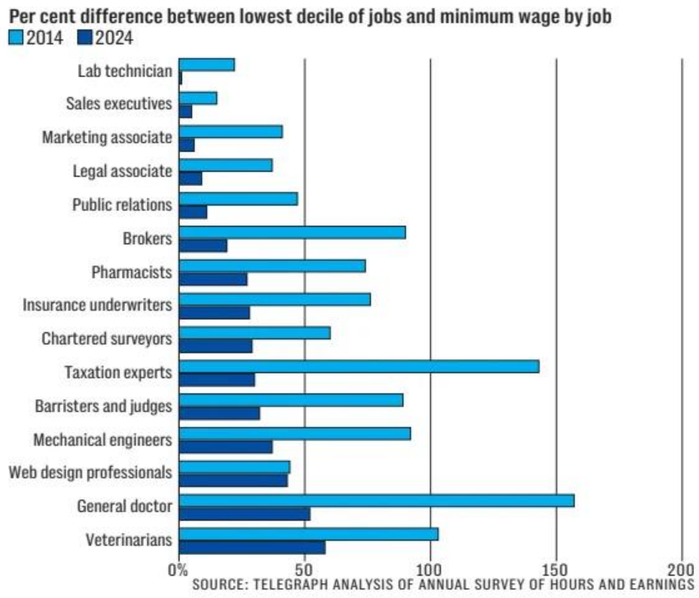
Estimated real-terms increase in pay for minimum wage vs. lowest decile of professional jobs since 2014



SOURCE: TELEGRAPH ANALYSIS OF ANNUAL SURVEY OF HOUR AND EARNINGS DATA

Trainee middle-class jobs getting closer to minimum wage

Per cent difference between lowest decile of jobs and minimum wage by job



SOURCE: TELEGRAPH ANALYSIS OF ANNUAL SURVEY OF HOURS AND EARNINGS

Initially opposed by businesses and unions

That extraordinary success of a national minimum wage was far from a given. A policy was debated by the Labour Party for years and made it into the party's 1992 manifesto. But even then it wasn't considered an election winner. The proposal was opposed by businesses, who were concerned about increased costs; economists, who thought it might result in job losses; and, in some cases, unions, who worried it would reduce the effectiveness of collective bargaining.

However, by the time it was introduced by Tony Blair in 1999, the labour movement was in favour and the business community had been softened up by a series of academic studies that suggested the impact would be muted. Support for the initiative has only grown since. The national minimum wage was voted the best policy of the past 30 years in a recent poll of political studies academics conducted by the Institute of Government. Economists believe there are two main reasons why the introduction of the minimum wage didn't lead to job losses and unemployment as some had forecast. The first was that the government set the minimum wage at a "sensible level", having taken independent advice into consideration, and then ratcheted it up slowly.

The second factor is that there has been a sharp demand for labour, particularly in lower paid jobs – especially over the past decade. "This was partly the result of Brexit and suggests that wages at the lower end of the scale would have risen even if the minimum wage hadn't been introduced," says Julian Jessop, an independent economist.

Employers struggling with costs

However, economists are now warning it can't keep rising inexorably. "The labour market is starting to cool and the increases in the minimum wage will add to other cost pressures, notably the increases in employers' national insurance contributions," says Jessop. "Moreover, the Low Pay Commission (LPC, which advises on the minimum wage) is increasingly worried that employers are finding it harder to adapt to the increases."

In October, Baroness Stroud, the chairman of the LPC and a former Conservative adviser, gently pointed out that the minimum wage had increased by 20 per cent in the past two years, at a time when many employers were struggling with many other increases in their cost base. She added: "The data show some signs of employers finding it harder to adapt to minimum wage increases."

And this warning was delivered before the Budget. Since then, the UK's largest retailers – including Tesco, Boots, Marks & Spencer and Next – have written to Rachel Reeves saying they face a £7billion increase in annual costs as a result of the impending increase in the national living wage and employer national insurance contributions. The industry warned this could mean higher prices for consumers, smaller pay rises, job cuts and store closures.

Politicians flying blind

Lady Stroud's was not the first attempt to nudge the Government towards a more circumspect approach. In 2019, Prof Arindrajit Dube of University of Massachusetts Amherst was asked to consider how the introduction of minimum wages had gone in other countries and the implications for UK policy.

He concluded that the introduction of a minimum wage had been a policy success in all the developed countries in which it had been introduced – significantly increasing the wages of the lowest paid and yet only having a "very muted" effect on employment. On that basis, he suggested increasing the minimum wage up to a range of between 60 per cent and two-thirds of median hourly earnings. Both the Conservatives and Labour decided to increase the minimum wage at the very top of this range.

Yet in reality, because neither party has yet addressed some pretty fundamental problems with UK labour market data, it is hard to assess the impact of minimum wages. In recent weeks, the Resolution Foundation think tank warned that policymakers have been "left in the dark" by official jobs figures since the pandemic and that almost a million workers may be missing from the data. The issue was also raised by Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, in an appearance before MPs on November 19.

"The sample is now so small that it is not a statistically representative sample, that's the problem – so we don't know how much faith we can put into it," he told politicians on the Treasury select committee. "It's an important issue and it's not just important for us, it's important for other aspects of public policy as well."

Have Conservative and Labour politicians therefore been flying blind and constantly hiking the minimum wage without any clear idea of the impact it's having on the jobs market? Economists worry the LPC's advice is

'There's a deep sense that the system is screwing them – and that is a very dangerous sentiment'

£12.21
Minimum wage
The amount the rate will rise to from April next year, up 6.7pc on its current level

£10,137
2004
The annual earnings of a person receiving the minimum wage then – now they are £25,000

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now somewhat constrained by the very explicit remit it's been given. "The Government's ambition is for this rate to reach at least two-thirds of median earnings," says Jessop. "On this basis, the LPC recommended an increase to £12.21 for next year. But without that remit the LPC would probably have recommended a lower rate."

Radicalisation of young professionals

Just as worrying as the potential impact on the economy is the growing sense of disenchantment that is being felt by an increasing proportion of society because of wage compression.

Luke Tryl, executive director of More In Common, a think tank that works on initiatives to tackle divisions in society, says that when politicians think about those segments of society that have suffered because of recent economic malaise they tend to think about non-graduates in former industrial towns of the North and the Midlands.

They are not wrong to focus on such people – for all the talk of "levelling up", precious little has been done for those in the so-called Red Wall parts of the country. What's interesting, however, is that when Tryl holds focus groups with young professionals in large cities, whose individual circumstances will be very different to those in the north of England, he hears them expressing very similar concerns.

"What unites this group with more traditionally 'left behind' groups is a deep sense that the system is screwing them, that they've done the right thing, work hard and yet they have nothing to show for it," says Tryl. "It's a very dangerous sentiment."

Tryl says that the view that comes up again and again in different forms is: "The rich are OK, the poorest will be looked after with benefits or the minimum wage but no one's looking after me." There's also a sense that people do their bit, pay their taxes, make their contribution but they don't benefit from the system and feel their contribution isn't respected.

"There are lots of graduates who are in, say, policy jobs or working for charities and are definitely not in it for the money," says Tryl. "However, they know that there was a time when those kinds of jobs paid a salary that would allow them to get by. Now there's a precariousness to their existence."

Tryl often hears from those on lower incomes say they're worried about being just one boiler breakdown from getting into financial difficulties. The young graduates he talks to worry they are just a phone theft away. The increase in petty crime is, along with housing costs, therefore a big focus of discontent among young urban professionals. "You can see they're being increasingly radicalised," he says.

Tryl invokes a hypothetical criminal barrister, who after gaining a good degree, training and pupillage has to house share with three others in their 30s, and then loses this month's savings to replace a snatched phone. For that individual, for whom owning a pet, let alone having a child, is out of reach, the "British dream" is as broken as for the redundant steelworker in Port Talbot.

It's hard to gauge the political ramifications of all this. Tryl says the marginalised communities in the deindustrialised parts of the country have long been considered fertile hunting grounds for populist Right-wing politicians. However, urban graduates traditionally err to the Left of centre.

The emerging cohort of squeezed middle-class professionals are therefore "more (but far from exclusively) likely to express discontentment through support for progressive and 'woke' causes that speak to them". He adds that the worse this situation becomes the harder it will be for such people to afford the usual trappings of a middle-class life – a house, a family and savings invested in stock markets – that results in them having a greater vested interest in the economy and therefore typically becoming more inclined to embrace a conservative mindset as they get older.

So, less a case of "go woke, go broke", and more a case of "going woke because broke".

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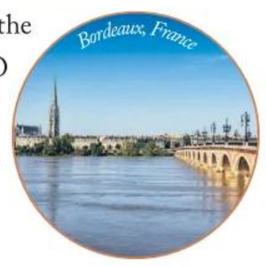

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WILLIAM SITWELL

Middle-aged men should keep their tops *on*

I don't want to see pictures of partially dressed midlife males popping up on my phone – ever

Allegations aside, the images are alarming. Gregg Wallace, shirt off, firm, ripped and six-packed to the gills. As claims of improper behaviour swirl around the media landscape, pictures of him without a shirt on have been used to accompany the feverish coverage. But while the photographs might be new to you, they aren't to me. While I know him well personally, having enjoyed my role as a critic on *MasterChef* for a good 20 years, I also follow him on Instagram. So I know of his (until last week) daily 7am "live" broadcasts. He's on his phone, talking to his followers each morning, come rain or shine, whatever country he is in, chatting about diet and health, his weight-loss journey having formed a very concise methodology for how to lose weight, enjoy life and not diet. And along with these broadcasts have been the photos: shirt off, you know the rest. And that is why, sorry Gregg, I muted him.

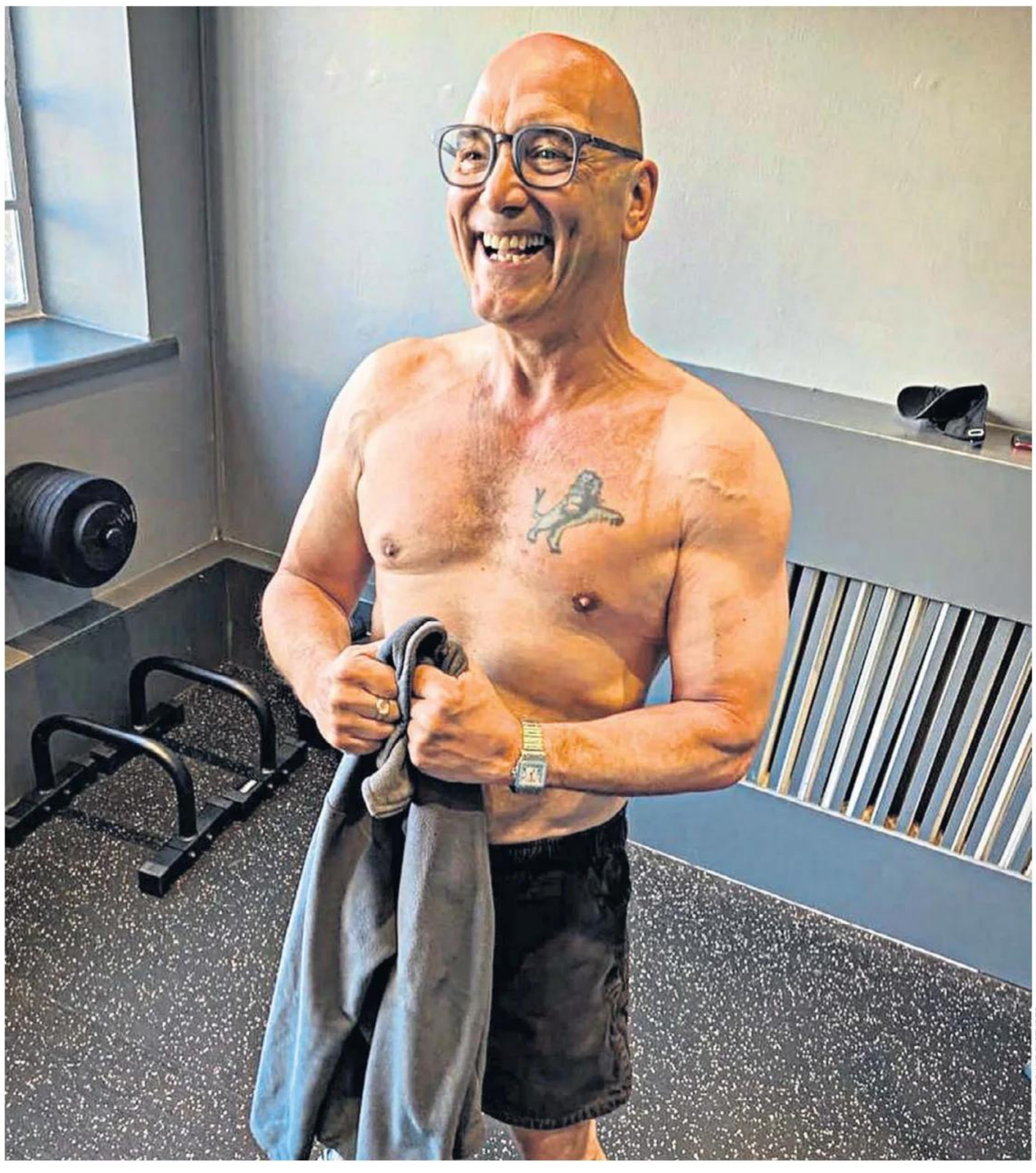
I don't want images of middle-aged, semi-naked men popping up on my phone. I react, like others might, to a spider. I recoil, repulsed, mentally soiled even, from the sight.

Yet it is hard to escape. Because it's not just Gregg Wallace. Even the Duke of Windsor was at it this week. OK, so it wasn't really his fault, but there he was, the former Edward VIII, shirtless and with scythe in hand, a valiant precursor perhaps to the *Poldark* chap (note to editor: please don't illustrate this article with aforementioned photo…), and showing us quite how fit and toned he was in 1937.

Actually, it's an affliction that appears mainly to affect Russian presidents and famous foodies. There's Vladimir Putin, when not in a suit, almost constantly shirtless: while fishing, out riding, taking a dip in an icy lake. And then there's Gordon Ramsay, who just seems to turn up for photo shoots with his shirt off. He was at it again this autumn posing for *Men's Health* magazine. Shirt discarded, he then fell to the floor to pop out some press-ups, duly photographed.

Of course, it's understandable. Men of a certain vintage are proud of not being fat b------s, which is why it's so prevalent among those who constantly taste food, such as famous chefs. Because others on *MasterChef* can't help themselves either.

Marcus Wareing keeps posting on Instagram from the treadmill, providing details on miles run and weights lifted. John Torode's first post after the Gregg Wallace story broke included a photo of himself sweating outside his gym. The Italian celebrity chef Aldo Zilli's actual profile picture on his Instagram account is of him red-faced and sweaty in the gym. I've had to mute the lot of them. Not that I don't understand.



ENTERPRISE NEWS AND PICTURES

Even the Duke of Windsor was at it this week. There he was, shirtless and with scythe in hand, and showing us quite how fit and toned he was in 1937

Baring all: Gregg Wallace gave daily Instagram updates on his workouts – complete with topless photos – until last week

As a middle-aged restaurant critic, I too don't wish to conform to the clichéd image of someone in such a profession: a Mr Creosote, monstrously obese, soon to explode after a "wafer-thin" mint.

For every lunch, dinner, course or morsel of food consumed, I pedal on my Peloton. That nice soufflé? Six minutes of pedalling. That bottle of chardonnay, another 12. A self-saucing chocolate fondant? Half a bloody hour of US fitness instructor Cody Rigsby. I look at a menu, see the dishes arrive and think of the output I'll need to put in. It's an exhausting, anxiety-driving prospect.

"Naturally skinny, are you?" a friend said recently.

"You have no idea," I pondered to myself, considering the hours I have to spend driving around the wheels of my exercise bike. Sure, I can admit this to you, but would I parade these exercise achievements in public? No chance. No sweaty updates, and no shirtless photos.

My body is of course a temple. Am I ripped like Rupert Campbell-Black? Obviously. And you'll just have to take my word for it.

Health warnings can go burn: I'll never give up my fireplace

The solution to being cold, my mother would always tell us, was to put another layer on. And thus we walked around our old, rather large, home in Northamptonshire like Michelin men. Even when my father relented and turned up the thermostat, the old boiler never did seem to have the puff needed to push water into the radiators at the furthest reaches of the house.

So we lit fires. We lit them in the drawing room, the hall, the library and an old parlour room called the Justice Room. And that love of fires has stayed with me. I walk down the hall of our home off Exmoor and tweak the thermostat down. This rather smaller house has a heating system that works and I have some of the old radiators from our, now sold, family home, cleaned, painted and they work a treat.

So efficient, so cosy, so cost effective, so sensible. Except not, as I now read. The big polluters are no longer the haulage contractors whose trucks pile up and down our motorways. No, it's the wood burners.

A report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies says that the domestic burning of wood and other fuel is now the UK's biggest source of the most dangerous type of air pollution called PM2.5. These are tiny particles about one-thirtieth of the width of a human hair. They can penetrate the lungs, enter the blood stream and are associated with health problems such as asthma and bronchitis, they can cause heart attacks and strokes.

Yet, whoops, what's this? Sales for wood-burning stoves continue to be strong with figures growing robustly – clearly I'm not the only one who desires a fire in my home. Furthermore, as a foodie and restaurant critic – and organiser of events – I relish the trend for cooking over embers, over charcoal and wood. But apparently we're wrong. We're told to invest vast sums on heat pumps, to lay cables across the lawns.

As the storm rages this weekend and the power cuts, as it inevitably will, we shall do the only thing available to us. Grill a steak, open a bottle of wine and light a fire. It's an entirely primal response to the elements and one which I, despite the warnings of academics and local council jobsworths, shall never be persuaded to reassess.

With Christmas lights, we're now way past peak garishness

There were two big switch-ons in my life this week. Yesterday night I did the honours in the beautiful Devon town of Bampton. Doing my best to learn from Sir Keir Starmer and perform a non-Dalek-style countdown, I set the streets ablaze with festive festoonery. And then at home, around our front door, I hung some little twinkly lights. And that was it. Both respectable acts, both speaking to sense and modesty, both creating pockets of respectable joy.

The municipal lighting of Bampton can draw people to this exquisite town on the river Batherm, can entice them to see what a pretty place it is, with its wondrous shops. The lights are pretty, the purpose noble.

And as for my domestic design, they shape the front door, their subtle golden glow acting as a gentle hug of welcome. Which is the model of what Christmas lights should be: unassuming, a nod to Yuletide and a limited drain on resources. Yet it seems I am increasingly alone in what is becoming a swamp of quite horrendous garishness, a competitive sport of one-upmanship, where houses vie for the title of most outlandish, brightest and eye-catching display.

Drive around your neighbourhood and the evenings are lit up like Hinkley Point, a glow of a billion fulgurations that you can probably see from space. It's nothing less than a battle of the chavs – a vulgar competition to see who can out-common whom.

I spotted a post on the Facebook community page for a local town this week. There was a photograph of a shady character caught in the act of cutting the wires of various domestic displays around the town. Apparently – the post read – the individual had now been identified and spoken to. Glad-handed, I wondered, by some sensible inhabitants who had then furnished him with an even stronger pair of scissors so he could go and cut the cables of frightful light displays in other towns and villages.

You might be hoping for peace and goodwill this Christmas – I'm praying for a power cut.

It's nothing less than a battle of the chavs, a vulgar competition to see who can out-common whom

The Telegraph

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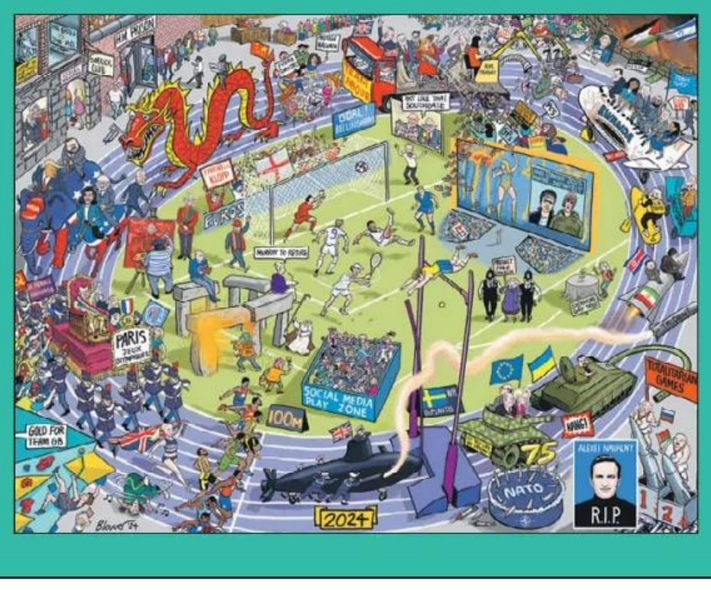

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The Saturday Interview

ADRIAN SHERRATT

Tom Parker Bowles

'It has been a hell of a two years for my mum'

Ahead of his first Christmas Day at Sandringham, the Queen's son talks to *Ed Cumming* about his hard-living youth, the plight of farmers and writing a royal recipe book

After 25 years, Tom Parker Bowles finally caved in to the inevitable and wrote a royal book.

"Everyone's always said 'why don't you do royal cooking, why don't you do royal cooking,' and I'd always said 'no'," he says, over coffee at a private members' club in Notting Hill. Looking boyish in a blue jacket, Parker Bowles, 49, is the epitome of slightly rumpled affability.

"Then, around the time of the Platinum Jubilee, I was asked to write a piece on historical coronation food. I thought, 'this is fun'. And it was a hell of a word rate. And it was fascinating. I love street food, but you have to have the high and the low."

As he approached 50, with a long career as a food writer and broadcaster under his belt, Parker Bowles decided at last to write about the great inescapable topic in his life. Family is the starting point for many good writers; the King's son-in-law has taken a quarter of a century to make his peace with the idea.

"I suppose I have come full circle," he says. "I knew that if I did it, it would be all 'ah, he's just a nepo middle-aged man, jumping on the bandwagon'. But I've been thinking about it for a long time. In the end I just thought 'screw it'. After 25 years, I thought 'I want to do something I'm proud of.' I was aware I was being given the opportunity to do something proper."

If the book has provoked a few snarky comments, that is nothing he is not used to. "I've had [criticism] my whole life," he says. "You get used to the slings and arrows."

The result is *Cooking and the Crown*, a charming romp through regal dining habits, from Queen Victoria to Charles III, which came out in September. Covering everything from breakfast and picnics to state banquets, there are recipes for Camilla's porridge and the Queen Mother's gin and Dubonnet and Elizabeth II's curry, as well as tales of Edward VII and Victoria's prodigious appetites. As the book makes clear, being a member of the Royal family is about moderation as well as excess. There is turtle soup and "trilogy of mutton", but there is also Camilla's healthy chicken broth. It serves as an interesting snapshot of how fast the family's role in food has changed. Where a century ago it was a matter of "soufflé diplomacy", roast cygnet and endless shooting weekends, today the King is a figurehead for organic and heritage produce.

Given the author, the book was never going to be a *Spare*-style tell-all, but Parker Bowles sought the appropriate permissions anyway.

"Everyone thinks I knew the late Queen, but we only met twice," he says. "Once when I was eight and I was scared so I curtseyed rather than bowed, and again at my mother's wedding, where my sister and I went for a fag and heard her voice behind us saying 'are you lost?' [The relationship] was very much once-removed. I asked my mother if it would be OK if I wrote the book. I asked my stepfather, he said 'great'. I asked if the book had been mentioned to the late Queen – I'm not 100 per cent [certain], but I think she said OK."

While the name did not help in the research or writing of the book, it has been helpful for flogging it.

"You're well aware of [the benefits]," Parker Bowles says. "The marketing people liked it. If my name was Tom Smith, I would not have been on *Good Morning America*. I might not be doing this interview."

It is a surprise he was so concerned about accusations of nepotism. Who better to write a book like this? Of all the extended Royal family, the genial and self-effacing Parker Bowles has struck a respectful balance between not publicly criticising the firm while acknowledging that he has benefited from the associations. He has a discernible career and he has never grumbled about what must at times have been a difficult road.

Born in 1974, Parker Bowles grew up in Wiltshire, the only son of Andrew and Camilla Parker Bowles. He has a younger sister, Laura. After prep school and Eton, Parker Bowles was studying English at Oxford when the news broke that his mother was having an affair with the then Prince of Wales, after tabloids published details of a romantic phone call between Charles and Camilla. Andrew and Camilla divorced in 1995, Charles and Diana the following year. (Charles and Camilla finally married in 2005.)

In 1999, when he was 24 and working for a talent agency, the tabloids busted him for taking drugs at the Cannes film festival. He received a dressing down from his future father-in-law and keelhauling in the then-rabid press.

"It was the very height of the tabloid era," he recalls. "I remember being chased at 100mph by paps trying to get a shot. My mother being screamed at to try to get a reaction. Pushing, jostling. It was horrific, and you are protective of your mother. Counting how many paps were at the gates, to see who was watching us and taking photographs: it was all as normal as bacon and eggs in the morning. You didn't think of it in any other way … [But] it was barbaric."

"I learnt a long time ago not to put my fat fingers into the world of William and Harry," he adds. "But it was appalling what they went through. I've had a billionth of what they've had to go through but hell, I sympathise."

Two years after his brush with notoriety, he was hired by *Tatler* as their food columnist and never looked back. In 2003, he joined *The Mail on Sunday*. *Cooking and the Crown* is his ninth book; he has been a critic on *MasterChef* for a decade, as well as presenting dozens of TV and radio programmes. In 2010, he won a Guild of Food Writers' award for work on British food. He has earned his dues.

"I don't think you can get bitter about the whole thing," he says. "I knew full well that I only got my job at *Tatler* … under [its then editor] Geordie Greig, because of [his connections]. I wouldn't totter up to the editor of the *Socialist Worker*. I hope I've made my own way since then. I know I can string a sentence together. I know I like food. I'm not really given to self-doubt on that front."

At this point he is a food media veteran who has seen chefs rise and fall, newfangled ingredients become commonplace, small plates come and go. "All the young thrusters from when I was young – Angela [Hartnett], Jason [Atherton] – are the grand old ambassadors now," he says. His industry has changed too: it can be a surprisingly angry place, where arguments rage over cultural appropriation and diversity. Parker Bowles casts himself as a curious, conflict-averse presence.

"With my reviews I go looking for good," he says. "The language of hate is far richer and more satisfying than the language of like and love. We all know what fun it is to give something a massive kicking. But I don't think many of the critics do it anymore."

A few subjects nudge him from his usual bonhomie. As a reformed raver he is upset with Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London. "London's nightlife seems to have disappeared," he says. "It's not a 24-hour city. [Khan] has done badly by the after-dark industry. London for me is the greatest city in the world. But he is not the greatest mayor in the world, not by a long stretch."

His ire also extends to those who go seeking offence. At an awards do on Monday, after we speak, Parker Bowles will rage against "virtue signallers". "As for the 'me, me, me' moaners, the whiners, the bleaters, and the empty virtue-signallers and the eternally bloody offended," he said at the Boisdale Cigar Smoker of the Year Awards, "f--- off."

As a country boy who has made his living writing about produce and producers, Parker Bowles has a special interest in the plight of the farmers.

"The farming protests were magnificent," he says. "This idea that if a farm is worth £5million they're millionaires – they make nothing. Food is the backbone of our country. I grew up among farmers. We're a farming country and farmers have been criminally ignored by the Government. Think of the last great agriculture minister – Thérèse Coffey, Jesus Christ – you have to go back to [William] Waldegrave, or [Nicholas] Soames, for someone who took this role of minister seriously. If you care about food and producers, you've got to care about farmers. To start taxing it, you're basically breaking a butterfly on a wheel. It's not right. It's the politics of envy. That's the one thing I feel qualified talking about!"

"The two heroes of farming are the King and Jeremy Clarkson," he adds. "Clarkson's a hero of the farmers because he has shown that it's a thankless task.

"I'd never ever speak for the King. But all my life, way before it was trendy, way before regenerative was even a word … he has been banging the drum and supporting farming. There is no man – and I'm not being oily – who knows more about cheesemaking. If he wasn't King he would be a fantastic food writer."

Tom's father, Andrew Parker Bowles, is in fighting form, too. "He's almost 85, but he has always been fit and he has only ever drunk at night," he says. "That's why he's fine." Parker Bowles senior has been in the news for his reported relationship with the former *Weakest Link* presenter Anne Robinson. (He apparently has a *Telegraph* article speculating on the union hanging up on his wall.)

"I still don't know the truth of it," his son equivocates. "He denies it, he says they're just good friends. And I'll take his word for it. But there's life in the old dog yet." Andrew and Robinson may want to thrash their story out: she confirmed the relationship earlier this year.

On reaching middle age, Parker Bowles has had to take his own health more seriously. The job of a restaurant writer is a calorific undertaking. "When I first started writing about food I was whippet thin," he says. "Then the weight slowly creeps up and now I can't get it off. I do Pilates twice a week, which I really like, but I'm this 49-year old man sat with all these very buff men and lithe women. I went to the doctor and said 'can I have one of those Ozempics?' He said 'no you can't'. I said 'why? I'm eating more healthily, I'm exercising, I don't smoke, I don't drink three days of the week.' He said 'it's the other four I'm worried about'. I said how much rosé and white wine I drink. He doubled it to get the right amount, and worked out that it was [equal to] about 18 cheeseburgers. At my age, diet is all it is. And it kills me. But I couldn't give up carbs."

Parker Bowles is unlikely to lose weight at Christmas. For the first time, although he says it is not 100 per cent confirmed, he is planning to take his family to Sandringham for Christmas Day. Usually he has spent it with his ex-wife, the former fashion editor Sara Buys, and their teenage children Lola and Frederick, but this year he is set on taking the children to Norfolk.

"For the past 15 years, it has been: I go back to my ex-wife's house, sit in my tracksuit bottoms, go to the pub while the beef's in, then try to get my children to watch *The Wild Geese*. Classic. So this would be a bit different."

He says he does not know which other family members will be in attendance, nor what the activities might be. No Monopoly with Meghan? Articulate with Prince Andrew? "I genuinely know nothing about it," he protests. "I know there's turkey and sprouts and church. And I have to bring a suit and a dinner jacket."

Will there be a Secret Santa? "No."

He says that while the invitation has always been there, his mother specifically asked him to come this year. It has been a difficult period for the King and Queen, health-wise. The King is being treated for cancer; the Queen has been recovering from a bout of pneumonia after their trip to Australia and Samoa.

"My mum said 'I'd love you to come, I haven't had Christmas with you for a long time'," he says. "It has been a hell of a two years for them. The older you get, the more conscious you become of mortality, especially with illnesses and the rest of it."

Despite his mother's infection, Parker Bowles says she is resilient. "She went back to work before she should have done but she's fine. She's tough. She hates that she missed Remembrance Sunday. That's a big day for her. She just gets on with it. She's always been like that. Sometimes you don't know where she is and you'll look at the telly and she'll be in Ireland. Nothing's changed [since she became Queen] except she's now Your Majesty, rather than Your Highness, and she works a lot harder."

Frederick was a page boy for the Queen at the Coronation, along with

> 'No man knows more about cheesemaking – if he wasn't King, he'd be a fantastic food writer'

his twin cousins Gus and Louis, but other than that he and Sara have mostly kept their children out of the public eye. "It was a huge honour to be asked," he says, recalling the family discussion about whether to put them into such an enormous event. "We'd do anything for our mother and stepfather. But suddenly to show them to an audience of two billion …

"Luckily, it worked out beautifully. They were great, they did it, then they disappeared again. The children are protected at school. The worry comes when they leave school and go out into the big, wide world."

Lola is 17, on the cusp of being at risk of the same tabloid scandals her father endured. "I just say, don't trust everyone and don't get caught falling out of nightclubs like I did," he says.

"I can't give my children the drink-and-drugs chat. I mean I can, but they can just google [me]. Drugs and drinking are dangerous things.

"I don't condone it. But one thing I do say is 'look, if something terrible happens, call us and call the ambulance straight away.'"

If Parker Bowles has any anxieties about turning 50, they are well hidden. He is planning a couple of lunches to celebrate. He lives in north Kensington with his girlfriend of almost four years, a relationship he prefers to keep out of the public eye. After his split from Buys, he suffered a public tragedy in early 2021 when Alice Procope, his partner of two years, died of cancer.

"The only worries you have are the people you love," he says. "You want your children to be happy, your parents to be happy. I've been with the same girlfriend for four years, but nobody has any interest in her, thank the Lord. In the past, people used to delve into my relationships and I always felt guilty.

"You just want to keep your head down and let the work speak for itself."

Speaking of work, he and the drinks writer Henry Jeffreys have started a podcast, *Intoxicating History*, about the role alcohol has played in world events.

Like many a journalist seeking to diversify his income stream, Parker Bowles is about to launch a Substack newsletter, about "everything, but mainly food and travel". There are always more restaurants to seek out, more programmes to present.

Halfway through our interview another outlet messages him to ask if he will go on the radio and talk about Gregg Wallace, his *MasterChef* stablemate who has been in the news after accusations of inappropriate behaviour towards women.

"I've always liked Gregg. In my presence he's just told a couple of crap jokes, nothing filthy," he says. "Because I'm a middle-aged man I wasn't made to feel uncomfortable.

"But I don't like social media pile-ons. I respect [*Telegraph* columnist] William Sitwell for standing up for his friend. That's what you do for friends. I always feel sorry for people [in media storms]." (Parker Bowles is speaking before allegations by Shannon Kyle, Wallace's ghostwriter, were made public.)

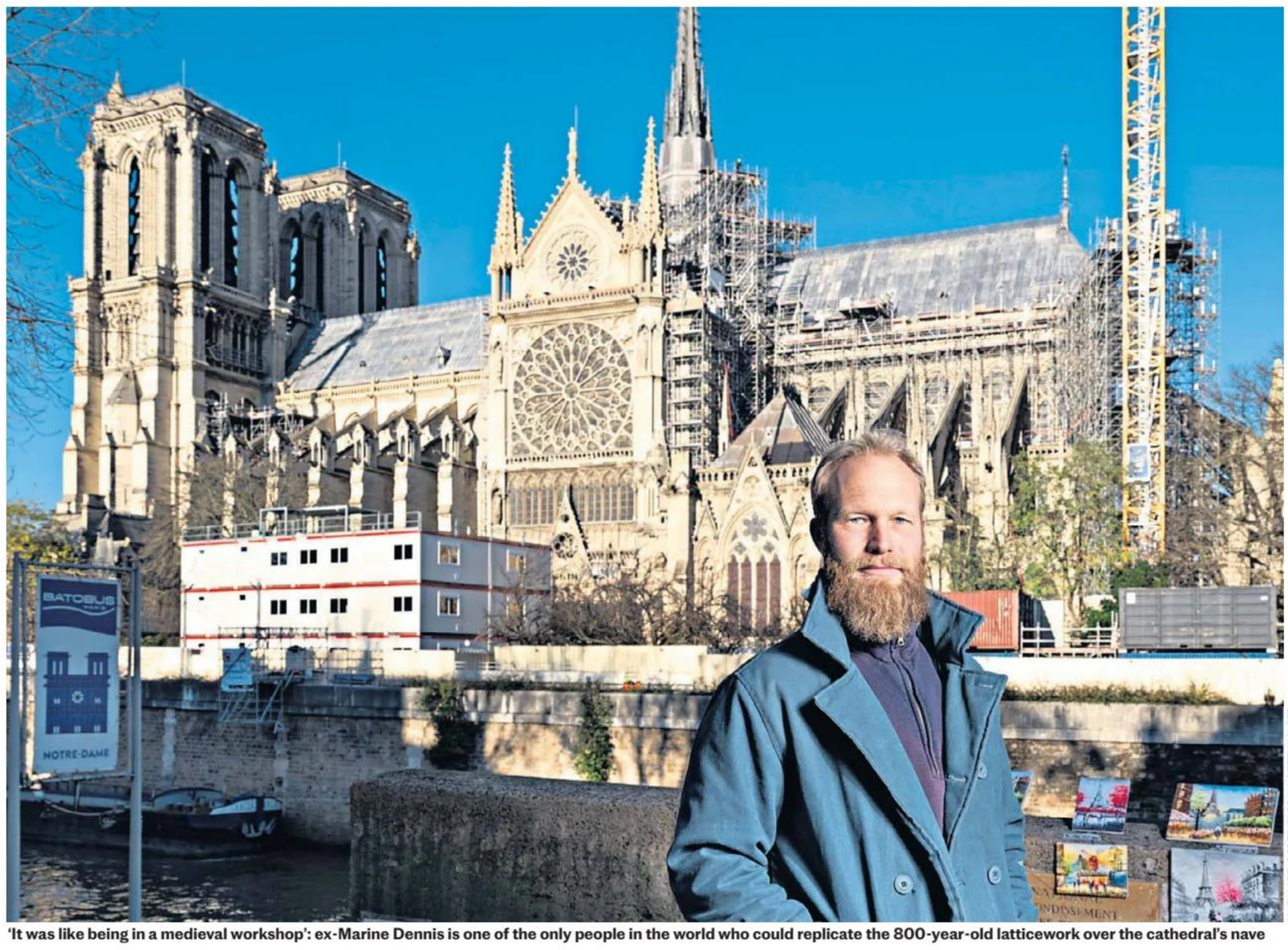
"But sometimes you need a bit of PR advice. Pile-ons are like storms of hornets. They happen and they move on."

Wise words, from one who knows. Keep your head down and let your work do the talking. One or two other members of the Royal family could learn from him.

'Cooking and the Crown: Royal Recipes from Queen Victoria to King Charles III', by Tom Parker Bowles, is published by Aster at £30

The British carpenter who rebuilt Notre-Dame

Mike Dennis used rare ancient skills to help bring the Parisian cathedral back from the ashes. By *Eleanor Steafel*



'It was like being in a medieval workshop': ex-Marine Dennis is one of the only people in the world who could replicate the 800-year-old latticework over the cathedral's nave

MAGALI DELPORTE; TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES

When flames began to tear through Notre-Dame in the early evening of April 15 2019, it was one of the rare occasions when people across the world felt they had a front row seat to a live catastrophe. Usually, when something awful happens, we hear about it a beat after the fact. But though the crowds on the banks of the Seine who could smell the smoke billowing above Île de la Cité might have had a more visceral experience, everywhere else – from Paris to Perth – people clutched their phones, watching in real time as the cathedral burnt.

On the lips of anyone who had once visited the landmark – as a tourist or as one of the millions of Christians who make a pilgrimage there every year – was a list of the things they hoped would be saved. "What about those beautiful windows?" "And the spire. Remember, we could see it from our hotel?" "Isn't Notre-Dame where the Crown of Thorns is kept?"

In fact, when the last hose was turned off and the damage assessed, an extraordinary amount of the cathedral remained intact. Sodden or covered in dust and ash, but intact. The windows and bell towers were still standing, the Catholic relics and art had been saved. Apart from the spire, which had tumbled through the roof, many of the casualties of the fire were elements of the structure that in all likelihood had gone unnoticed for much of the 800 years Notre-Dame had been standing. But crucially, what was known as la forêt – the latticework of timber over the nave that had supported the roof for eight centuries – had been engulfed in flames and would need rebuilding.

The donations (£865 million) came flooding in and plans were hatched for how to approach the restoration. Five hundred miles away, in the Dordogne, Mike Dennis was making a list of capable British hewers. "The list was 10 people long," he says. "I was on that list, and I don't live [in the UK] anymore."

Dennis, who has lived in France since 2016, in a medieval house he is slowly restoring, was one of a small number of carpenters in the world with the skill and expertise to tackle Notre-Dame. The Office National des Forêts was to find the wood, while a workshop based in Normandy specialising in heritage projects was instructed to run the job. The group Charpentiers sans Frontières (Carpenters without Borders) – which brings together experts to work on historical construction sites – was tasked with sourcing the manpower.

The UK has "a very good reputation for traditional timber framing," says Dennis, who recalls the French were at one point "looking to see how many people in the UK could possibly come over and help." Dennis, 43, a former Royal Marine, ended up being one of two Britons in a team of 25.

Their task was to rebuild la forêt. It required 11 principal trusses and 45 secondary trusses, all of them 46ft wide and 33ft high. They began in December of 2022. "We did a month of pure hewing and then went home for Christmas." Picking up their axes again in January, they worked tirelessly throughout last year, "figuring out how to do it in real time".

"There were a lot of things that hadn't been figured out," says Dennis. "We had the dimensions, we had the drawings from the architects. Remi Fromont, the architect there, had [by chance] done a study in 2014 and his knowledge was absolutely incredible."

Fromont's study alone would not be enough to begin with, especially as their commitment was to recreate the roof down to the tiniest detail. But given the original had been 115ft above the nave, it had never been the most closely photographed part of Notre-Dame. Dennis's evenings were spent "trawling through the internet" for photographs that would reveal the close ups and angles of the trusses and tie beams that had been carved 800 years ago. "I had a tick list," he says, explaining it was a case of "seeing if anyone had visited and taken a photo in that certain place."

He would examine the assembly marks on the wood left there by the carpenters and try to scale them. "I was able to trace an image off my iPad, give it to one of the guys and say, 'Make me a tool that will make this mark.'" Two days later, a blacksmith come into the workshop wielding a new custom-made tool. "Here, a gauge."

Sometimes, it was only in trying to use one of the new tools that he would realise a key discrepancy between how each truss had been carved – a discrepancy they would then have to replicate. "I found an image at random of the historical mark, put [the gauge] next to it and it didn't fit. It didn't work. And I thought why? And so I had a look and it fit the image that I found perfectly, and all the trusses up to [number] seven, but after that it changed.

"These small details tell us about the carpenters on the project. Was it that multiple gauges were used? Or does that show that a gauge was lost? Or a new head carpenter came along? Or there was a pause and a delay and it's a whole new team?"

Going through, truss by truss, "you'd find where they'd made a mistake, when they'd done the same mark twice and then corrected themselves and gone back". You wouldn't then correct their correction. "You copy their mistake."

Dennis posts updates from the workshop on Instagram. At the moment, you can follow as he helps recreate William the Conquerer's ship, Le Mora. "I'm a glutton for punishment and after Notre-Dame [...] I was thinking well, what do I do now? I've done a cathedral. What do you do after Notre-Dame? Honestly. A Viking ship."

He grew up on the Norfolk-Suffolk border, joining the Marines from school in order to experience "what's said to be the hardest training in the world". "I wanted to challenge myself. And that really put me in good stead."

It could sound like a stretch to say a tour of Afghanistan and another of Iraq prepared Dennis for life as a carpenter. But when he talks about his work and the laser focus it requires, it makes sense. "The mindset of 'I can do anything if I put my mind to it.'"

> 'We had to figure out how they would make a frame with axes, with hand tools, with hewn timber'

In fact, he suspects a lot of ex-Forces people would "benefit from going into trades". "You're a part of history when you're in that kind of environment. Civilian life is a bit boring after those kinds of challenges. With things like heritage crafts, you can really feel like you are part of history again."

Dennis left the Marines because he'd "seen enough of the hardships of the world". He did a carpentry apprenticeship in Wales and ended up travelling, taking jobs in Canada and China. You suspect that the itinerant nature of carpentry along with the team spirit you get in a workshop might bear some resemblance to life in the Navy. In France, the team stayed on site, going to bed early and rising before dawn. The workshop was "similar to the medieval workshop," he says. The timber would arrive, they would prepare it, work away on the trusses and then pile them up ready to be sent to Paris as soon as the masons had finished working on the walls. "It's like a medieval flatpack, really, on a massive scale."

Every element of the new roof was made by hand just as it would have been 800 years ago. "We had to figure out how they would make a frame like this with axes, with hand tools, with hewn timber."

You would imagine that if the aim was to reproduce something as close to the original as possible then a computerised machine might do a better job. Not so, says Dennis. "It would struggle to. The thing with the axe is you can look at your timber very closely and you can really work with the grain."

They commissioned a team of blacksmiths to make a fleet of 13th-century style axes. The only modern tool they used was a circular saw to cut the joints. "We still live in a modern commercial world where we have to get this job done quite quickly."

Most of them had assumed a saw would have been alien to a medieval carpenter. When examining the markings on old pictures, they realised they were wrong. "Some of the elements of the frame have really clear saw marks on them," says Dennis.

The wood came from forests that were always within a two-hour drive of the site. The French forestry commission would go into the forests with a couple of guys from the workshop. "There might be a tree and they'd say this is the best one, we'd love to have this tree. And they'd say, you know, for the health of the forest this tree is really important so we'd prefer you didn't. And there was never any argument."

It made him realise that, should something like the Notre-Dame fire happen in Britain (to Salisbury Cathedral, perhaps, or Winchester), we would struggle to source the wood needed to rebuild. "We don't have the trees. France has around 30 per cent forest cover and the UK has around 15."

Someone who would likely share his concerns is the King, who mentioned him in a speech at Versailles during his state visit to France last year, praising his work on Notre-Dame and hailing it a living example of the *entente cordiale*. "Rather disappointing because he hasn't invited me round for a cup of tea yet," says Dennis, laughing.

With his fellow carpenters, he was invited to the topping-out ceremony, when the roof was finally in place. "You take a bouquet of flowers and pin it to the highest point. It's a real milestone when the whole of a timber frame is put up."

When the cathedral reopens today, and the visitors start flocking through the doors, I wonder if he minds that his work, hanging so high above them, will likely go unnoticed? "No, it doesn't matter, because it will be there, and it will be working," he says. "It's not there to look good, it's there to do a job."

Global catastrophe: the fire at the cathedral in 2019 was watched by millions online

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0524TEL

Marmalade is flying off the

As the new film boosts sales, *Xanthe Clay* picks some of the more unusual conserves to keep in your suitcase

In case of emergency: the bear stocks up

Paddington be praised. After a long decline, there are signs marmalade is once again back in favour, with Ocado reporting sales up by 11 per cent on last year, while Waitrose is selling 135 per cent more of its Duchy Organic Seville Orange Thick Cut Marmalade.

The recently released family film *Paddington in Peru* is thought to be behind our renewed interest in the toast-topper. The highest grossing British-produced film since the Bond movie *No Time to Die* in 2021, it stars the bear who keeps a jar of marmalade in his suitcase and a sandwich of the same under his hat. This time he's off to find his Aunt Lucy in Peru.

To be fair, there's a spike every time a new Paddington film comes out. But this time it's not all about traditional Seville orange. Sales of innovative flavours are up too, with Marks & Spencer's Blood Orange & Orange Liqueur version up 43 per cent, and Radnor Preserves Hand-Cut Pink Gin marmalade up 25 per cent. Waitrose's No1 Triple Citrus Marmalade, launched in August, is up 11 per cent since last week.

If it's something different you're after, there's plenty of choice, although the supermarkets might not be the best place to find it, as they stick to simple citrus with the occasional whiskey-flavoured version. Fortnum & Mason, which produces a batch of the winner from the prestigious Dalemain Marmalade Awards each year, does a huge range, including yuzu and champagne, and Lucifer's, which contains ginger and chilli.

The Artisan Kitchen makes a negroni version, which is a good riff on a naturally bitter conserve, and Durslade Farm Shop does one with rosehip (available in its shops in Somerset and London) as well as pink grapefruit, and clementine and gin. For those in search of the even more recherché, Radnor Preserves has a lime and laver offering. That's right, seaweed. What would Aunt Lucy say?

Judi Dench at 90 – 'she can still recite the whole of Twelfth Night'

To celebrate the actress's birthday on Monday, director *Richard Eyre* details the qualities that make her a great

I first saw Judi Dench act in 1966 in a brilliant four-part television drama called *Talking to a Stranger* in which each episode of the story of a dysfunctional family was related from the point of view of a different family member. I was dazzled by Judi's passionate energy, her abandon, her sharp wit and her painful vulnerability: "Every day when I wake up I think: today I'll be different, today I'll be happy, today I'll sparkle. Today... by 10 o'clock, it's gone."

It says everything about Judi that she didn't immediately gravitate to films. But this was the age of "dolly birds" and "Swinging London" and all the tatty crap that makes it difficult to be nostalgic about the 1960s (unless you were stoned all the time, living in Ibiza, or both). Film producers (with Samantha Eggar as their role model) recoiled from this quicksilver, round-faced young actress who could move from laughter to tears in the blink of an eye. Perhaps she was too volatile for the cinema, and the theatre presented her with a world in which she was, if not entirely in control of her destiny in the choice of parts, wholly in control of it when she was acting.

I saw her on stage for the first time a few months after seeing her on TV, in a production of *Richard II*. John Neville was playing the king. Judi – wholly characteristically – played a practical joke by appearing in a mid-week matinee as a conspicuously small soldier dressed from top to toe in chain mail with a helmet on her head that looked like a metal mixing-bowl. One by one the actors realised that they were sharing the stage with her and a contagious frenzy gripped the whole company. They shuddered in unison, legless with laughter. "What larks, eh Rich?" she said. It's not perhaps the image that most people have of someone who, as the Japanese say, is a Living National Treasure – but it's closer than the odd caricature of gentility that's sometimes touted in the press.

With Judi, sexy and subversive laughter – a sound somewhere between a chuckle and a gurgle – is always bubbling up. She revels in banter, bonhomie, and practical jokes, yet behind that wholly accessible, almost excessively generous façade there's an intensely private, even unreachable person; what Franco Zeffirelli called "a secret garden". It's one of the many paradoxes of her character: she's hard headed but big hearted, seditious but respectful of tradition, insecure but defiant in the face of fear, wildly passionate but almost always temperate. Her notion of good behaviour – of "acting well" if you like – is tied up with what makes her such a good actor: her ability to empathise with other people, to imagine what a real or fictional person is feeling. She acts well in life (she's a practicing Quaker) and in her work, but while acting well on stage is difficult and demanding it's an admirable but far from unique gift. What is rare – very rare – is for an actor to square the circle of work and life.

With Judi, sexy and subversive laughter is always bubbling up. She revels in banter, bonhomie and practical jokes

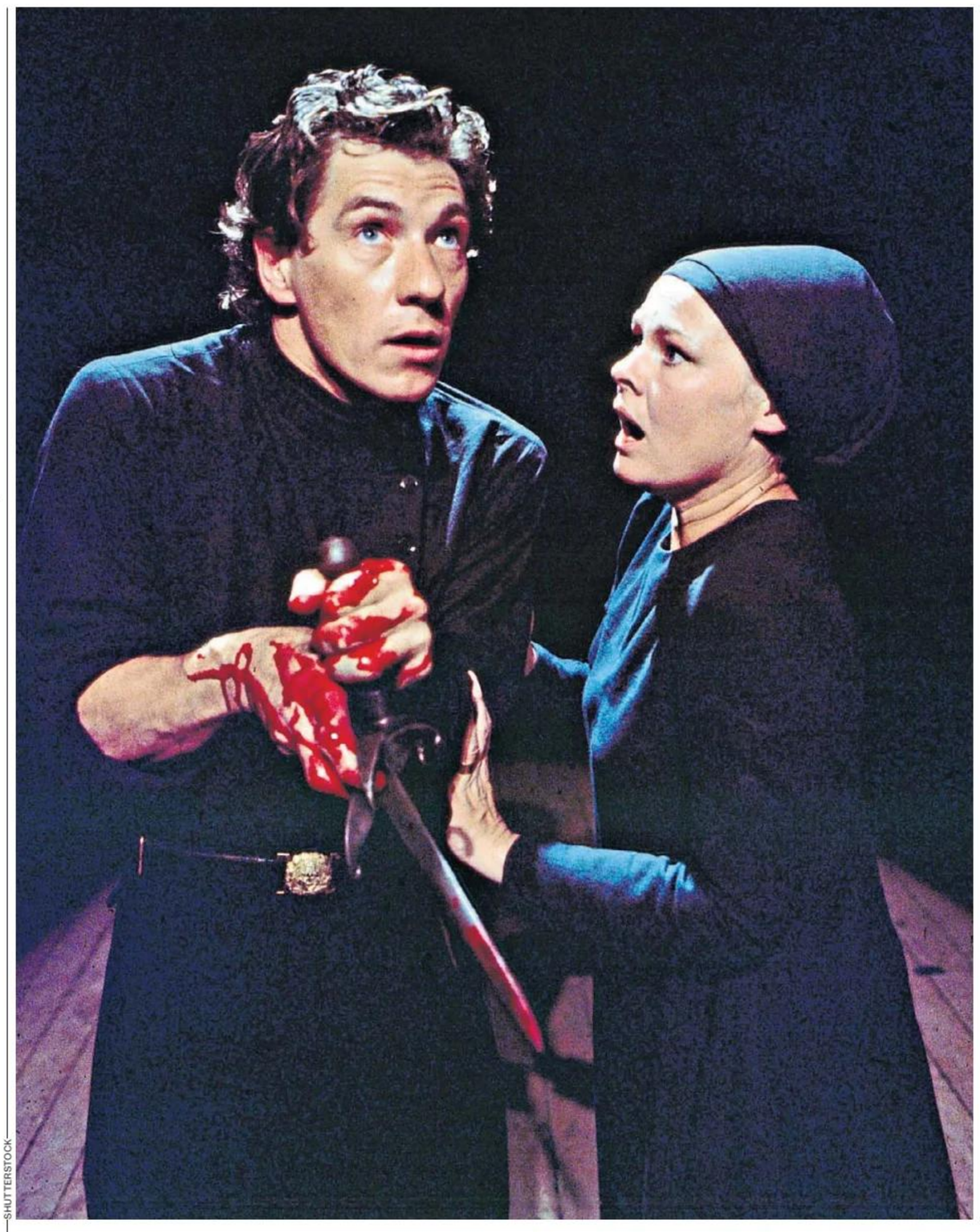
Judi works through doubt, scepticism and guesswork and, like a prospector panning for gold, is never content until she's found something solid, something truthful. She has technique to burn – she can turn a line on a fragment of a syllable, a scene on the twist of a finger – but her technique never shows. She has the ear of a musician and the eye of a painter. With her voice – that bluesy alto – she can bend a note from joy to a sob and she has a dancer's dexterity, always using her body expressively. If you doubt any of this watch her sing *Send in the Clowns* on YouTube and break your heart. In film they say you should hold everything in, in theatre the opposite. But Judi breaks the rules, in any medium she seems mercurial and yet constant, she's entirely open yet never lets you feel – as in life – that you've glimpsed the whole person.

I really don't know how she does it. When I was editing *Iris*, the editor was reluctant to cut the clapper board off the beginning of one take. At the beginning of the shot (a close up of Judi) you could see Judi laughing – she'd been telling a joke – then you could hear my voice "... and ... action" and within four frames – that's one sixth of a second – there was a woman in the latter stages of decay from Alzheimer's disease, or more to the point there wasn't a woman, there was an absence of a woman, totally vanished behind the eyes. It was like watching a musician rehearse.

I think Judi is a genius. That word is rather debased currency – we tend to sprinkle it about like Italian waiters with peppermills – but I think it's accurate to call Judi a genius, because she's one of those people, like Oscar Peterson or Yehudi Menuhin or Cary Grant, who appear to do what they do brilliantly as if it cost them nothing. Judi acts like Matisse draws, never taking his hand from the page.

Every part Judi takes on has to test her; it has to be something that she thinks she might not be able to do. Every time she acts has to feel just enough fear to keep self-love at bay and need to find affirmation from the audience. The lure of acting – of doing something really well – is that when she's finished a performance there's a sense of triumph over the fear: danger is overcome and love is requited. She'd be frightened if she wasn't frightened. While there's danger and insecurity there can never be boredom.

The difficulty in describing Judi is avoiding making her sound like Maria von Trapp. To suggest this would be to conceal the side of Judi's personality that's in some ways the essence of her: her impish sense of humour, her wit, her love of games, of jokes, of betting, of raucous company. At the age of 90, even if her sight is much diminished, her brain is undimmed: she can still recite the whole of *Twelfth Night* from the top. She'll shrug diffidently, like a cat arching its back, at the praise I heap on her and she'll say "Oh Rich, don't exaggerate." But it's all true.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Grande dame: six of the best Dench performances
by Claire Allfree

Lady Macbeth in Macbeth (1976) *RSC Stratford-upon-Avon*
Starring opposite Ian McKellen, this landmark reading of the role conveyed both Lady Macbeth's profound emotional damage and the depths of her malignity. The performance won her an Olivier award, and the production was turned into a film in 1979.

Goldeneye (1995)
Dench was the first woman to play M in this reboot of the Bond franchise and her icy wit brilliantly reanimated the character's relationship with 007. The first Bond film to star Pierce Brosnan, it marked the start of an enduring partnership between Dench and 007 which ended with 2016's *Skyfall*.

Desiree Armfeldt in A Little Night Music (1995) *National Theatre London*
Dench singing *Send in the Clowns* remains a golden moment in musical theatre history. Armfeldt, a grande dame of the theatre reduced to touring small towns, was illuminated in Dench's performance in Sean Mathias's sublime production.

Esme in Amy's View (1997) *National Theatre London*
It was thanks to Dench's performance as a great but fading actress that David Hare's state-of-the-nation drama made it to Broadway in 1999. Hare's play is considered middling, but Dench was so good that critics ran out of superlatives. The part won her a Tony.

Mrs Brown (1997)
Dench's grieving, implacable, magnificent Queen Victoria, wreathed in black yet captivated against the odds by her upstart Scottish servant, was Dench's first major screen role. It is also one of the finest demonstrations on celluloid of how much can be conveyed by the merest flick of the eye.

Philomena (2013)
Another actress would have turned this film, based on the true story, into a mawkish sob story. In Dench's hands, it becomes an exquisite character study in fortitude and unexpected depths. Her on-screen odd-couple relationship with Steve Coogan's antic journalist is pure delight.

shelves, thanks to Paddington – here are eight jars to try

M&S Collection Blood Orange & Orange Liqueur Marmalade
£2.50 for 235g (£1.06 per 100g) at Ocado

Bits of orange flesh as well as peel give this a jammy quality: opaque and pulpy rather than gelatinous. The flavour is tangy and sweet rather than bitter, and richly fruity, rounded out by the orange liqueur, though it's not obviously boozy.

Dalemain Stephen Snead's Seville Orange & Lime Marmalade with Chilli
£6.95 for 340g (£2.04 per 100g) at Fortnum & Mason

This year's Marmalade Awards winner is a limpid, firm gel, with lots of palest green and orange shreds, and a pleasing syrupy coating. There's a rounded flavour that's more lime than orange, perfumed and gently bitter, with a warm back burn from the chilli.

Radnor Preserves Hand-cut Smoky Campfire Marmalade
£5.30 for 240g (£2.21 per 100g) at Ocado

A dark, thick gel with lots of chewy peel, speckled with dried chilli seeds. Savoury-sweet and smoky, with little acidity but a back punch of spice, this would make a great glaze for sausages. On toast, it's arguably the perfect partner to a full English.

Harvey Nichols Clementine Marmalade with Thyme
£5.95 for 300g (£1.98 per 100g) at Ocado

A soft, clear amber gel with neat strips of peel and lots of flecks of dried thyme. The combination is bitter but not balanced. Medicinal and slightly soapy; strictly for novelty seekers.

Rosebud Preserves Lemon & Ginger Marmalade
£4.05 for 227g (£1.78 per 100g) at Ocado

This super-fresh-tasting, fruity marmalade – not over sweet and with just the right edge of bitterness – is made by a small producer in Yorkshire. The texture is a thick gel, nubbly with lots of small pieces of peel. A lemon-lover's dream, although I'd like to taste more ginger.

Radnor Preserves Hand-cut Lime & Laver Marmalade
£6.50 for 240g (£2.71 per 100g) at Radnor Preserves

The laver seaweed gives a slightly murky look to this marmalade, with dark green flecks among the bountiful neat steps of lemon and lime. It's not obvious in the flavour, though, which is well balanced, with a beguiling background savouriness and a hint of salt.

Durslade Farm Shop Blood Orange & Rosehip Marmalade
£6.95 for 200g (£3.48 per 100g) at Farm Shop

Blood oranges make for a sweet rather than bitter marmalade, but Durslade Farm chefs love to forage, and adding rosehip is a clever touch, giving a flower-water-like fragrance to the flavour. This would be lovely on yogurt.

Durslade Farm Shop Clementine & Gin Marmalade
£7.95 for 310g (£2.56 per 100g) at Farm Shop

A Great Taste Award-winning conserve, stiff and syrupy, stuffed full of chewy peel, with a mellow bitterness. The gin flavour lingers pleasingly after the last toast crumbs have been brushed from my chin.

Court & Social

Court Circular

KENSINGTON PALACE
December 6th
The Prince of Wales and The Princess of Wales, as Patron of the Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales, this afternoon held a Christmas Carol Service in Westminster Abbey, London SW1.

ST JAMES'S PALACE
December 6th
The Duchess of Edinburgh this afternoon attended a Christmas Carol Service held by The Princess of Wales in Westminster Abbey, London SW1.

ST JAMES'S PALACE
December 6th
The Princess Royal this morning visited Crane Process Flow Technologies Limited's new building in Grange Road, Cwmbran, Monmouthshire, and was received by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Gwent (Brigadier Robert Aitken).

Her Royal Highness this afternoon opened the new engineering e xtension at Safran Seats GB, Kestrel House, Llantarnam Business Park, Cwmbran.

The Princess Royal, Patron, British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons, afterwards attended the Annual Congress at the International Convention Centre Wales, the Coldra, Newport, Monmouthshire.

KENSINGTON PALACE
December 6th
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester this afternoon attended a Christmas Carol Service held by The Princess of Wales in Westminster Abbey, London SW1.

His Royal Highness and Her Royal Highness, Protector, the Anglo-Danish Society's Scholarship Programme, this evening attended a Dinner at Drapers' Hall, Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2, in celebration of the Centenary of the Anglo-Danish Society.

KENSINGTON PALACE
December 6th
The Duke of Kent this afternoon attended a Christmas Carol Service held by The Princess of Wales in Westminster Abbey, London SW1.

Weekend birthdays

Today: Miss Ellen Burstyn, actress, is 92; **Sylvia, Countess of Limerick**, Chairman, British Red Cross, 1985-95, 89; **Mr Stan Boardman**, comedian, 87; **Mr Kaffe Fassett**, textile designer, 87; **the Rt Rev Peter Selby**, Bishop of Worcester, 1997-2007, 83; **Sir Henry Paston-Bedingfeld**, Norroy and Ulster King of Arms, 2010-14, 81; **Sir Stephen Wright**, former diplomat, 78; **Ms Anne Fine**, author; Children's Laureate, 2001-03, 77; **Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman**, military historian; Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King's College London, 76; **Mr Tom Waits**, singer, songwriter and actor, 75; **Sir Peter Housden**, Permanent Secretary of the Scottish Government, 2010-15, 74; **Ms Anna Soubry**, former Conservative and Change UK MP, 68; **Ms Winifred Robinson**, presenter, *You and Yours*, BBC Radio 4, 67; **Sir Tom Winsor**, former Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services; former Chief Inspector of Constabulary, 67; **Sir Jeffrey Donaldson**, former leader, DUP, 62; **Lady Emma Barnard**, Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, 61; **Mr Colin Hendry**, former Scotland footballer, now coach, 59; **Mr Luke Donald**, golfer, 47; **Mr John Terry**, former England footballer and captain, now coach, 44; **Ms Kylie Grimes**, wheelchair rugby player; Paralympic gold medallist, Tokyo 2020, 37; and **Mr Matt Rotherham**, guide cyclist; Paralympic gold medallist, 1K time trial, Tokyo 2020, 30.

Tomorrow: Ms Barbara Hulanicki, founder, Biba, will be 88; **Sir Jonathan Parker**, a former Lord Justice of Appeal, 87; **Sir James Galway**, flautist, 85; **Earl Waldegrave**, 84; **Sir Geoff Hurst**, former England footballer; a member of the 1966 World Cup-winning team, 83; **Lord Levene of Portsoken**, Chairman, Lloyd's of London, 2002-11; Lord Mayor of London, 1998-99, 83; **Sir Bernard Rix**, a former Lord Justice of Appeal, 80; **Mr John Banville**, author, 79; **Mr William Hunt**, Windsor Herald of Arms, 1999-2017, 78; **Dame Pauline Green**, Chief Executive, Co-operatives UK, 2000-09, 76; Mr Laurence Marks, writer and producer, 76; Sir Stephen Richards, a former Lord Justice of Appeal, 74; Sir David Verey, Chairman, The Art Fund, 2004-14, 74; **Mr Bill Bryson**, author; President, Campaign to Protect Rural England, 2007-12, 73; **Sir Derek Jones**, Permanent Secretary, Welsh Government, 2012-17, 72; **Miss Kim Basinger**, actress, 71; **Mr Louis de Bernières**, author, 70; **Baroness Valentine**, Chief Executive, London First, 2003-16, 66; **Prof Amanda Vickery**, historian and broadcaster, 62; **Mr David Harewood**, actor; President, Rada, 59; **the Rt Rev Elizabeth Lane**, Bishop of Derby, 58; **Ms Victoria Siddall**, Director, National Portrait Gallery, 47; **Mr Amir Khan**, former world light-welterweight boxing champion, 38; **Mr Raheem Sterling**, England footballer, 30; **Mr Scott McTominay**, Scotland footballer, 28.

Today is the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Tomorrow will be the anniversary of the birth of Lucian Freud in 1922 and of the birth of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1542.

Forthcoming marriages

Capt J.P. Roy and Miss C.R. Bampfylde
The engagement is announced between Captain Jamie Roy, Irish Guards, son of Mr and Mrs Paul Roy, of Windlesham, Surrey, and Millie, daughter of Mr and Mrs Richard Bampfylde, of Inkpen, Berkshire.
Online ref: WO031292

Mr A.J.G.R. Axon and Miss C.R. Watts
The engagement is announced between Alexander, youngest son of Dr and Mrs Jeremy Axon, of Tewin, Hertfordshire, and Charlotte, only daughter of Mr and Mrs Mark Watts, of Eversley, Hampshire.
Online ref: WO031350

Mr E.J.B. Elston and Miss C.M. Mountain
The engagement is announced between Edward, eldest son of Mr Howard Elston, of Netton, Wiltshire, and Mrs Ed Mead, of Ibberton, Dorset, and Millie, daughter of Sir Edward and Lady Mountain, of Delfur, Moray.
Online ref: WO031321

Mr G.E. Pedrick and Miss K.V. Taylor
The engagement is announced between George, son of Mr Charles Pedrick and Mrs Suzanne Pedrick, of Stroud, Gloucestershire, and Katie, daughter of Mr and Mrs Timothy Taylor, of Walton-on-the-Hill, Surrey.
Online ref: WO031179

Mr P. Ledger and Miss L.M.C. Baker
The engagement is announced between Peter, only son of the late Mr T. Ledger and of Mrs H. Ledger, of Cheltenham, and Lucinda, only daughter of Mr and Mrs G.W. Baker, of Wilmcote, Stratford-upon-Avon.
Online ref: WO031305

High Sheriff appointments

The following have been appointed High Sheriffs for Northern Ireland in 2025: **County Antrim**: Mrs Jenny Lendrum. **County Armagh**: Mr John William Thomas Shephard. **County Down**: Mr Peter Hamilton Leckey. **County Fermanagh**: Mr David Robert Martin Donaldson. **County Londonderry**: Mr Ian Scott Henry. **County Tyrone**: Mr Allan Kenneth Duncan. **County Borough of Belfast**: Cllr Fiona Elizabeth McAteer. **County Borough of Londonderry**: Mr Brian John Charles Dougherty.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The Daily Telegraph.

LONDON, DECEMBER 1924

FRANCE'S WAR ON COMMUNISTS.

BIG POLICE RAIDS.

A VIGOROUS POLICY.

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.
PARIS, SUNDAY NIGHT.

The Government has at last been moved to take action against the Communists. The police were very busy yesterday making raids on Bolshevik centres in the Paris suburbs and in the provinces, and the searches, evidently dictated by the statements published during the last few days as to intensive Communist activity to be started in the New Year, when the new plan of organisation is completed, are to be continued. A start was made at Bobigny, a Paris suburb. The result was not so startling as was at first supposed, seven Communists, all foreigners, and one Frenchman, who carried a revolver, being arrested. Nine other foreigners – Russians, Jugoslavs, and Swiss – who were without identity cards, were arrested at Montreuil-sous-Bois and at the Pré Saint Gervais, and will be expelled. About twenty police searches were made in the provinces.

One hundred policemen in plain clothes made the raid at Bobigny, where a Communist school was opened a fortnight ago. They proceeded to the scene in three touring motor-cars and two lorries. The intention was to invade the school, which is a wooden building, similar io the huts which M. Clemenceau, when he was Premier, created for selling cheap food. The police arrived at the moment when the pupils, men and women, sixty in number, were being given a lesson in revolution under the surveillance of Bourjois, the Communist Deputy, and Marion, who is a Master of Arts. The pupils were ordered to show their papers, and were afterwards brought into the courtyard one by one and put into the waiting motor-cars. The police seized a number of documents and the text books of the school, which were closely examined. It seems that two days ago the pupils had studied Lenin's formula: "War against war. Let us transform the Imperialist war into a civil war." In the exercise books was written: "The masses are poisoned with pacifism and democracy. With this pacifism wars which last several years are made. We cannot make use of this pacifism for the revolution." In addition to the documents seized, a large number of copies of the "The Aube Sociale," the organ of the workmen's and peasants' "bloc" of the Seine and Seine-et-Oise were seized.

An ex-police inspector, M. Fagot, who was connected with the General Information Department at the Prefecture of Police, and had been engaged in watching the Communists and was well known to them, has been found mortally wounded in a street at Charenton. During the last three weeks there has been a strike at Douarneuez, led by Flanchec, the Communist Mayor. The Government came to the conclusion that the strike was a pretext for criminal propaganda, and was a menace to the security of the State and to individual liberty. The Mayor had been suspended from his duties, and a report had been drawn up against him for rebellion and interference with the liberty of work. He will be brought before the Correctional Tribunal.

Another traitor, Henri Guilbraux, who was condemned to death by court-martial and took refuge in Russia, has been ordered by Zinovieff to return to Paris and give himself up. Guilbeaux conducted the pacifist review "Demain" during the war. He was accused by military justice of receiving money from Germany in order to enable him to publish his review. He became very influential in Russia, where, it is alleged, he was attached to the Cheka. The Minister of the Interior has given orders for a strict watch to be kept at the frontier posts and stations.

Bridge news

The Northern Ireland Bridge Union holds national online matchpoint pairs events on Thursdays and Sundays, **writes Julian Pottage, Bridge Correspondent.** During November the highest scores on these two days of the week were:

Thursday: 72.78%, achieved by Molly Ward and Michael Kearney on the 14th.
Sunday: 66.67%, achieved by Anne Hassan and Tom McKeever on the 24th.

November was the month for rounds five and six of the NIBU Senior League, with scores for these two rounds and overall for six rounds as follows:

1st David Greenwood, Rex Anderson, Wayne Somerville and Paul Tranmer 31.05 VPs and 96.05 VPs.
2nd Ian Lindsay, Robin Burns, Patrick McDaid and Zrinka Kokot 27.08 VPs and 83.52 VPs.
3rd Ian Hamilton, Diane Greenwood, John Ferguson and Tony Kelly 27.64 VPs and 81.78 VPs.

November was also the month for the Senior Intermediate Pairs, with the winners as follows:

1st Nuala Mooney and Rae Seaton 57.92%.
2nd= Diane Greenwood & Christine Stewart 56.25%.
2nd= Anne Hassan & Ray Nicholas 56.25%.

Service dinner

Honourable Artillery Company Mess Club
Mr Christopher Hayward, Policy Chair, Corporation of London, was the principal guest and speaker at a dinner of the HAC Mess Club held last night at Armoury House. Col Robert Murphy, President, was in the chair. Lt Col Karl Eze also spoke.

Luncheon

Saints and Sinners Club
The Saints and Sinners Christmas luncheon was held yesterday at The Savoy. Mr Mike Parkinson welcomed the guests and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, KC, responded on their behalf.

Dinners

The Guild of Freemen of the City of London
The Representative Lord Mayor, Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley, accompanied by Alderman & Sheriff Greg Jones, KC, and Sheriff David Chalk attended the annual banquet of The Guild of Freemen of the City of London at Guildhall last night.

The Master of the Guild, Mrs Lisa Rutter, Sir Andrew Parmley, Mr Nigel Wray and the Senior Warden, former Sheriff Adrian Waddingham, were the speakers. The Master presented a cheque to the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal.

Among others present were Mr Victor Hadjiavraam, Mayor of Morphou; Judge Mark Lucraft, KC, the Recorder of London; Mr Hugh Wolley, Master of the Tallow Chandlers' Company; Lt Col Mark Shapland, Commanding Officer, 3 Regiment Royal Military Police; Ms Laura Miller, Clerk to the Chamberlain's Court; the Masters of the City of Coventry Freemen's Guild and the Guild of Freemen of the City of York; the President of the United Wards' Club; the Chairman of the Royal Society of St George (City of London Branch); and the Deacon Convenor of the Trades House of Glasgow.

Anglo-Danish Society
The Anglo-Danish Society held a dinner to celebrate its centenary last night at Drapers' Hall.

Col Wayne Harber, Chairman, presided. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester were the guests of honour and the Danish Ambassador, Mr René Dinesen, was among others present.

Parish Clerks' Company
Dr Colin Podmore, Master, presided at the Parish Clerks' Company's Feast of St Nicholas, held last night at Fishmongers' Hall.

Miss Prudence Dailey was the guest speaker and Mr Michael Cooper welcomed the guests.

Earlier, the Company attended a service of Holy Communion at St Magnus the Martyr. The Rev Philip Warner officiated.

Church services tomorrow

Second Sunday of Advent

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL: 8 HC; 10 Choral Mattins; 11.15 Sung Eucharist, Prof Anthony G. Reddie; 3 Choral Evensong, Canon Dr Catherine Okoronkwo; 5.30 Eucharist.
WESTMINSTER ABBEY: 8 HC; 10 Mattins; 11.15 Sung Eucharist, Archdeacon; 3 Evensong, Rev Mark Birch; 5 Organ Recital, Travis Baker; 6 An Advent Liturgy.
SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL: 8.30 Morning Prayer; 9 Eucharist, Precentor; 11 Choral Eucharist, Precentor; 3 Choral Evensong, Succentor; 6 Compline (online only). Streaming details: *cathedral.southwark.anglican.org*
ALL HALLOWS BY THE TOWER: 11 Parish Sung Eucharist, Rev Jennifer Midgley Adam. Streaming: *ahbtt.org.uk*
ALL SAINTS, Margaret St: 8.30 Low Mass; 11 High Mass; 5.15 Low Mass; 6 Evensong and Benediction. Streaming: *asms.uk*
ALL SOULS, Langham Place: Worship at 9.30 and 11.30 Campbell Patterson, 5.30 Charlie Skrine.
GROSVENOR CHAPEL, South Audley Street: 11 Sung Eucharist.
HTB Brompton Rd: Informal Service 9.30 and 11.30 Hilton Sonday, 5 Carols by Candlelight. 11.30 Service streamed: *htb.org*
HTB Onslow Square: Informal Service 10.30 Louise Powell, 4.30 and 6.30 Carols by Candlelight. 11.30 Service streamed: *htb.org*
HOLY TRINITY, Sloane Square: 11 Choral Eucharist, Canon Michael Robinson.
ST BARTHOLOMEW THE GREAT, Cloth Fair: 9 Said Eucharist, Rector; 10 Family Service, Fr Taylor Wilton-Morgan; 11 Choral Eucharist, Rector; 5 'Ero Cras' Mid Advent Carol Service. Streaming details: greatstbarts.com
ST BRIDE'S, Fleet St: 11 Choral Eucharist, Rev Dr Jeff Lake; 5.30 Handel's Messiah (Part 1). Streaming details: *stbrides.com*
ST GEORGE'S, Windsor: 8.30 HC; 10.45 Mattins, Treasurer; 12 Sung Eucharist; 5.15 Evensong.
ST GILES-IN-THE-FIELDS: 11 HC, Rev Chris Smaling; 6.30 Evensong, Rev Stuart Labran.
ST JAMES'S, Garlickhythe: 9 Morning Prayer; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Rector. Streaming: *stjamesgarlickhythe.org*
ST JAMES'S, Piccadilly: 11 Eucharist, Rev Dr Ivan Khovacs; 3 Blue Christmas. Streaming via: *sjp.org.uk*
ST JAMES'S, Sussex Gardens: 10.30 High Mass; 5 Evensong and Benediction. Streaming via: *stjamespaddington.org.uk*
ST MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS: 10 Eucharist, Rev Angela Sheard; 1.30 Service in Cantonese; 5 Blessing of Crib on Trafalgar Square. Streaming details: *smitf.org*
ST MARYLEBONE, Marylebone Rd: 8.30 HC, Rev Stephen Evans; 11 Choral Eucharist, Rev Stephen Evans. Streaming details: *stmarylebone.org*
ST PAUL'S, Covent Gdn: 11 Eucharist; 6 Advent Carols. Streaming: *actorschurch.org*
ST PAUL'S, Knightsbridge: 9.30 Morning Prayer (said); 11 Solemn Eucharist, Rev James Chegwidden. Streaming: *spkb.org*
TEMPLE CHURCH, Fleet St: 8.30 HC; 11.15 Carol Service. Streaming details: *templechurch.com*
KING'S CHAPEL, Savoy Hill: 11 Chapel Mattins, Rev Justin White.
CHAPEL ROYAL, Hampton Court Palace: 8.30 HC; 11 Choral Mattins, Chaplain; 3.30 Choral Evensong.
CHAPEL ROYAL, St James's Palace: 8.30 HC; 11.15 Carol Service (ticketed event).
CHAPEL ROYAL of St Peter ad Vincula, Tower: 9.15 HC; 11 Choral Mattins, Canon Roger Hall.
OLD ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE CHAPEL: 11 Choral Eucharist, Rt Rev Christopher Chesun.
CROWN COURT (C-o-S), Covent Garden: 11.15 Morning Worship with Communion and Baptisms, Rev Scott Rennie. Streaming via: *crowncourtchurch.org.uk*
ST COLUMBA'S (C-o-S), Pont Street: 11 Morning Service, Rev Angus McLeod. Streaming: *stcolumbas.org.uk*
WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL: Masses: 8, 10 (Sung), 12 (Solemn), 5.30 (Sung) and 7; 9.30 Morning Prayer; 4 Solemn Vespers and Benediction. Mass at 12 streamed: *westminstercathedral.org.uk*
THE ORATORY, Brompton Rd: Masses: 8, 9, 10 (Family), 11 (Solemn Latin), 12.30, 4.30 and 7; 3.30 Sung Vespers and Benediction.
OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION AND ST GREGORY, Warwick Street: Masses: 10.30 (Solemn) and 5.
GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL, Moscow Rd: 9.30 Mattins and Divine Liturgy.
SALVATION ARMY, Oxford St: 11 Toy Service, Captain Rona Mutcha. Streaming: *salvationarmy.org.uk/regent-hall*
WESLEY'S CHAPEL, City Rd: 9.45 HC, Canon Dr Jennifer Smith; 11 Morning Service, Rev Stephen Poxon.
WESTMINSTER CHAPEL, Buckingham Gate: 11 Morning Service. Streaming: *westminsterchapel.org.uk*
WESTMINSTER METHODIST CENTRAL HALL: 9.30 Church online; 11 Morning Worship; 6 Traditional Carol Service with Premier. Register and stream: *mchw.live*
ARMAGH: 10 HC; 11 Choral Mattins, Dean; 3.15 Choral Evensong.
BATH ABBEY: 8 HC; 9.30 Family Communion; 11.30 Sung Eucharist; 3.30 Choral Evensong; 6.30 Informal Service. Streaming details: *bathabbey.org*
BIRMINGHAM: 9 HC; 11 Choral Eucharist, Rev Prof David Cheetham; 3.30 Choral Evensong, Missioner. Streaming details: *birminghamcathedral.com*
BLACKBURN: 9 Parish Eucharist; 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist; 4 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *blackburncathedral.com*
BRADFORD: 8 Common Prayer (BCP), Rev Duncan Milwain; 10.30 Choral Eucharist, Rev Duncan Milwain; 3.30 Choral Eucharist, Rev Emma Halliwell. Streaming details: *bradfordcathedral.org*
BRISTOL: 7.40 Morning Prayer; 8 HC; 10 Cathedral Eucharist; 3.30 Choral Evensong.
CANTERBURY: 8 HC (BCP); 9.15 Morning Prayer; 11 Sung Eucharist, Treasurer; 4 Said Evening Prayer; 5.30 St Nicholas Family Service. Streaming via: *canterbury-cathedral.org*
CARLISLE: 7.40 Morning Prayer; 8 Eucharist; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Canon Dr Benjamin Carter; 3 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *carlislecathedral.org.uk*
CHELMSFORD: 8 Said Eucharist; 9.30 Sung Eucharist; 11.15 Choral Eucharist; 3.30 Choral Evensong with Farewell to Very Rev Paul Kennington; 7 Light Up a Life with Farleigh Hospice. Streaming details: *chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk*
CHESTER: 8.30 HC; 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Prof William Horbury; 3 Choral Evensong; 6 Sung Compline.
CHICHESTER: 8 HC; 9.15 Children, Families and Caregivers Service; 10.15 Choral Mattins; 11.15 Sung Eucharist, Dean; 3 Choral Evensong; 6 Light Up a Life: St Wilfrid's Hospice Carol Service. Streaming details: *chichestercathedral.org.uk*
COVENTRY: 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist; 4 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *coventrycathedral.org.uk*
DERBY: 8.30 HC, Rev Michael Futers; 10.45 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Michael Futers; 5.15 Evensong. Streaming details: *derbycathedral.org*
DURHAM: 8 HC; 10 Sung Eucharist, Rev Daniel Parkinson; 11.30 Mattins, Dean; 2 Carols for All; 3.30 Evensong; 7.30 St Chad's College Advent Procession. Streaming details: *durhamcathedral.co.uk*
ELY: 8.15 HC; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Fr Peter Nicola Dean, Germany; 4 Evensong; 5.15 Christmas Tree Lights Switch-on Service; 6.30 Advent Taizé. Streaming details: *elycathedral.org*
EXETER: 8 HC; 9 Morning Prayer; 10 Choral Eucharist; 2.30 Handel's Messiah. Streaming details: *exeter-cathedral.org.uk*
GLASGOW, ST MUNGO's (C-o-S): 11 Morning Worship with Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Rev Mark Johnstone; 3 Beatson Cancer Charity Christmas Celebration. Streaming: *glasgowcathedral.org*
GLOUCESTER: 8 Eucharist; 10.15 Choral Eucharist; 3 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *gloucestercathedral.org.uk*
GUILDFORD: 7.30 Morning Prayer; 8 HC; 9.45 Cathedral Eucharist; 6 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *guildford-cathedral.org*
HEREFORD: 8 HC; 10 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Jonathan Roberts; 11.30 Mattins; 3.30 Evensong with the Dedication of the North Door draught lobby and the Installation of a Chapter Lay Canon and the Succentor. Streaming details: *herefordcathedral.org*
INVERNESS: 8.30 Holy Eucharist; 10.50 Sung Eucharist, Rev M. Massey. Streaming details: *invernesscathedral.org*
ISLE OF MAN: 8.30 BCP Communion; 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Dean; 3.30 Choral Evensong.
LEICESTER: 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist; 3.30 Global Carol Service. Streaming: *leicestercathedral.org*
LICHFIELD: 7.40 Morning Prayer; 8 Eucharist; 10.30 Choral Eucharist; 3.30 Christmas Light Service. Streaming via: *lichfield-cathedral.org*
LINCOLN: 7.45 Litany; 8 HC; 9.30 Choral Mattins; 10.30 Sung Eucharist; 12.30 HC; 3.45 Choral Evensong.
LIVERPOOL METROPOLITAN: Masses 9, 10 (Family), 11 (Solemn) and 7; 3 Bach and Handel. Mass at 11 streamed: *liverpoolmetrocathedral.org.uk*
LLANDAFF: 8 Holy Eucharist; 9 All Age Eucharist; 11 Choral Eucharist; 4 A Christmas Sequence. Streaming details: *llandaffcathedral.org.uk*
MANCHESTER: 8.45 Morning Prayer followed by HC; 10.30 Sung Eucharist; 5.30 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *manchestercathedral.org*
NEWCASTLE: 8 Eucharist; 8.30 Morning Prayer; 10 Sung Eucharist, Katherine Govier; 3 Marie Curie Carol Service. Streaming details: *newcastlecathedral.org.uk*
NORWICH: 7.30 Morning Prayer; 8 HC; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Canon Susanna Gunner; 3.30 Evensong, Canon Andy Bryant; 7 Norwich School Carols.
OXFORD: 7.30 Said Mattins; 8 HC (BCP); 11 Choral Eucharist; 6 Choral Evensong.
PETERBOROUGH: 8 HC; 9.15 Mattins; 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Vice Dean; 3.30 Evening Prayer; 6 Masonic Carol Service. Streaming details: *peterborough-cathedral.org.uk*
PORTSMOUTH: 8 HC; 9.30 Pompey Sundays Christingle; 11 Choral Eucharist with Christingle, Chancellor; 5.45 Choral Evensong, Kitty Price. Streaming details: *portsmouthcathedral.org.uk*
RIPON: 8 HC, Nina Harrison; 9.30 Mattins; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Canon Michael Gisbourne; 12.30 HC; 3.30 Evening Prayer; 5.30 Light Up a Life Service with St Michael's Hospice. Streaming details: *riponcathedral.org.uk*
ROCHESTER: 8 HC; 9.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Stephen Padfield; 12.30 and 3 Carol Service (for Dickens Weekend).
ST ALBANS: 8 Eucharist; 9.30 All Age Parish Eucharist with Nativity; 11.15 Choral Eucharist, Bishop of Hertford; 6 The Royal Foundation 'Together at Christmas' Carol Service; 8.30 Compline. Streaming details: *stalbanscathedral.org*
ST ASAPH: 11 Cathedral Eucharist, Precentor; 3.30 Choral Evensong.
ST DAVIDS: 8 Holy Eucharist; 9.30 Parish Communion, Canon Sheridan James; 11 Choral Eucharist, Precentor; 4 Choral Evensong with Procession to the Chapel of St Nicholas.
ST EDMUNDSBURY and IPSWICH: 8 HC; 9 All Age Eucharist; 10.30 Choral Eucharist, Canon Dr John Parr; 3.30 Choral Evensong. Streaming details: *stedscathedral.org*
SALISBURY: 8 HC; 9.15 Choral Mattins; 10.50 Eucharist, Chancellor; 4.30 Choral Evensong with Chorister Bishop Ceremony, Emmie Piper. Streaming details: *salisburycathedral.org.uk*
SHEFFIELD: 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Dr Richard Walton; 4 Christingle Service.
SOUTHWELL: 7.40 Litany; 8 HC, Precentor; 10 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Erika Kirk; 11.15 Sung Eucharist, Interim Dean; 3.30 Evensong of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Theologian; 7.30 Carols in the State Chamber. Streaming details: *southwellminster.org*
TRURO: 8 HC; 10 Choral Eucharist; 4 Choral Evensong; 7 Cornwall Hospice Care Light Up a Life Service. Streaming details: *trurocathedral.org.uk*
WAKEFIELD: 8 HC; 9.15 Sung Eucharist; 11 Choral Eucharist; 2 and 4.30 Wakefield Hospice Light up a Life Service.
WELLS: 8.30 HC; 10.30 Cathedral Eucharist, Rev Mary Lewis; 3 Choral Evensong, Canon Tim Stevens; 6.30 Wells Cathedral School Carol Service.
WINCHESTER: 7.40 Said Mattins; 8 HC; 11 Sung Eucharist, Dean; 3.30 Market Carols. Streaming details: *winchester-cathedral.org.uk*
WORCESTER: 7.30 Morning Prayer; 8 HC, Canon John Paul Hoskins; 10.30 Sung Eucharist, Canon Kimberly Bohan; 4 Evensong; 6.30 Evening Worship, Canon John Paul Hoskins. Streaming details: *worcestercathedral.co.uk*
YORK: 8 HC; 10 Mattins; 11 Sung Eucharist, Canon Timothy Goode; 1.30 Lullaby Service; 4 Evensong with Chorister Bishop Ceremony. Streaming details: *yorkminster.org*

Announcements

Email: announcements.ads@telegraph.co.uk **Book online:** announcements.telegraph.co.uk

Births

JACKSON.—On 8th November 2024, to Lucinda (née Alderson) and George, a son, Alfred Robert Archibald, a brother for William.
Online Ref: WO031375

KING.—On Thursday 14th November, at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, to Katie (née Clarke) and Julian, a daughter, Harriet Petronella Jane, a sister to Charlotte and Wilfred.
Online Ref: WO031266

STYLES.—On 19th October 2024, to Isabella (née Onslow) and David, a daughter, Ottilie Elaine Frances, a sister for Ophelia.
Online Ref: WO030498

Anniversaries

Ruby wedding

PHILLIPS - YEO.—On 7th December 1984, in Tunbridge Wells, Christopher to Joyce.
Online Ref: WO031330

Deaths

BINGLE.—Brian Charles, Colonel RAPC (Retd) died peacefully aged 94 on 24th November 2024. Husband to Thelma for 72 years, father to Anthony, Elaine and Alistair, grandfather to Jamie, Charlie, Josh, Katie and Oliver, great grandfather to Ezra and Navy. A strong family man and a friend to many, he will be missed. All enquiries to Lodge Brothers. Tel: 01932 220081.
Online Ref: WO031332

BURGESS.—It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Ann Burgess, aged 90, who died peacefully in Ascot on 23rd November surrounded by family. She will be greatly missed by husband Brian, children Adam, Caroline and William, grandsons Jamie and Joe, and daughters-in-law Amanda and Gilly. The Service will take place at Easthampstead Crematorium on 23rd December at 11 a.m. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that any donations be made to Dementia UK.
Online Ref: WO031340

CAVAN.—Patricia Mary "Babs". Died at home on 23rd November, aged 87. Beloved wife of the late Ian, and much loved mother of Christopher. Lifelong devotee and multiple winner of The Telegraph prize crossword. Service to be held at More. All enquiries to W.J. Morris & Son, Bishops Castle, Shropshire, SY9.
Online Ref: WO031264

GAMBOLD.—William George (Bill), Air Commodore RAF (Retd) died aged 86 on 25th November. Dearly beloved husband of Jennifer and proud, loving father of Keven and Iain. Loved and admired by daughter-in-law Katie and grandchildren Oisin, Blathnid, Abigail, Theo, Ben, Evie and Edward. Memorial Celebration at York Racecourse on 4th January at 11 a.m.
Online Ref: WO031354

GARRAD.—Mary Ann Garrad died peacefully at home, aged 94, on 30th November 2024. Devoted wife of Douglas and much loved mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Her Funeral will be held at St Andrew's Church, Ombersley, on Monday 16th December at 2 p.m. The funeral will be streamed at https://www.st-andrews.church Please send any donations in her memory, in lieu of flowers, to https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/donate?form=DonateNow
Online Ref: WO031303

GEE.—Francine Melanie Gee, (formerly Winch, née Singer-Lawerence), 02.09.1946 - 18.10.2024. To all who knew Fran 'a lifelong friend' funeral took place at Croydon Crematorium on 22nd November 2024.
Online Ref: WO030958

GOODALL.—Elisabeth. Died on 18th November 2024 aged 94 years. Much loved by her two daughters and two grandchildren, family and friends, she will be sadly missed. Family flowers only but donations can be sent to Grandfield & Son, Keenthorne, TA5 1HZ for Oak Tree Animals and Brain Research Trust charities.
Online Ref: WO031388

GOW.—Jane (née Scott) died very peacefully at home on 1st December aged 99. Widow of General Sir Michael Gow. Adored mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister and friend. Funeral at 12 noon at Mottistone, IOW on 3rd January. Prayers at Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh during the 10.30 a.m. service on 15th December. All invited to tree planting in Edinburgh in the Spring. For information janegow99@gmail.com
Online Ref: WO031301

ILLINGWORTH.—Gemma Rachel, of Saddleworth, passed away far too soon on 27th November 2024, surrounded by her family at home. Her kindness touched more people than she will ever know and we were lucky to have had her in our lives, if only for 31 years. May she rest in peace. We will celebrate her life at St Chad's Church, OL3 6LW on 10th December at 2 p.m.
Online Ref: WO031217

JACKSON.—Geoffrey John, died suddenly at home in Crickhowell, Wales, on 17th November 2024, aged 79. Devoted husband for 53 years to Carol, adored father of Fiona and the late Iain, loving father-in-law to John and Kate, and much missed by all his family and friends. Funeral at St Edmund's Church, Crickhowell at 2 p.m., Wednesday 18th December 2024; wake to follow straight afterwards. All welcome and no black attire. No flowers but donations, if desired, to Parkinson's UK: for 20 years he refused to let Parkinson's Disease slow him down. All enquiries to T J Brown & Sons, 1 George Street, Brynmawr. Tel: 01495 310238.
Online Ref: WO031393

LYSZKOWSKA.—Linus Helen Lamont, died peacefully on 18th November, aged 98. Dearly beloved wife of the late Marian, mother of Richard and Adrian, aunt of Duncan and Kenneth, grandmother of Alex and Ben, and friend to many. Private cremation. In lieu of flowers, donations to the Royal British Legion may be given via the funeral services at www.cheaters.co.uk
Online Ref: WO031368

McNAIR.—Patricia Elizabeth (née Simons). Tricia died peacefully on 4th December aged 86. Beloved wife of the late Graham, loving mother to Duncan and Heather and a much loved Granneeeee. Enquiries to Arnold Funeral Service, Gerrards Cross. Tel: 01753 891892.
Online Ref: WO031404

PARKER.—John Humphrey. Died peacefully at home on 29th November aged 93. Beloved husband of Elizabeth, very dear father of Katherine and her husband Andrew, adored and loving Grampa of Annabelle and Edward. Thanksgiving Service at St Peter's Church, Soberton (SO32 3PF) on Saturday 14th December at 12 noon. Please wear some colour to celebrate John's life. No flowers please but donations to Portsmouth Hospitals Charity may be made online at https://johnhparker.muchloved.com If you wish to send a cheque, please contact AH Freemantle Funeral Directors, 46 South Street, Titchfield, PO14 4DY. Tel: (01329) 842115.
Online Ref: WO031392

POWLESLAND.—Michael died peacefully at home on 15th November. Beloved husband of the late Joan and loving father of Sarah and Mary, grandfather of Verity, David and Ruth, and sons-in-law Tony and David. Funeral Service to take place at St Peter's Church, Stumpshaw, Norfolk on Thursday 19th December at 12.30 p.m. Family flowers only please but donations if desired will go to St Peter's Church, Strumpshaw (made payable to Strumpshaw PCC) c/o Gedge & Sons, Independent Family Funeral Directors, Garden Rd, Blofield, Norwich, NR13 4JL. Tel: 01603 712276.
Online Ref: WO031351

RITCHIE.—Joan Charleson (East Lothian). On 15th November, in her 80th year, after a long illness. Joan Charleson Ritchie, wife of the late Dr J.M. Graham Ritchie, passed away peacefully in her sleep. A native of Vancouver, she made Scotland her home. A patron of the arts, an all round amazing lady and a unique character. She will be sorely missed by friends and family. A private cremation has taken place. Donations can be made in Joan's memory, to StreetVet at www.justgiving.com/page/estelle-buchanan-1732885732779
Online Ref: WO031165

ROBERTSON.—Peacefully in Kirkcaldy Victoria Hospital on November 22nd 2024. Alan Smith Robertson MA (Hons) (St Andrews), Major (Retired) (HLI/RHF/RMP) latterly of Ladybank, Fife. Elder son of the late Ernest and Alice Robertson, brother of Pamela, Barbara and of the late Bruce, uncle and friend. Funeral Service to take place on Monday December 9th at Dundee Crematorium at 2.30 p.m. to which all friends are invited.
Online Ref: WO031358

RYDER.—Benjamin Guy Dudley died peacefully on 27th November, 90 years young, surrounded by his family. He will be sorely missed. Funeral will be held on 20th December at 10.30 a.m. at Harbour View, Lytchett Minster. No flowers thank you but donations to www.alzheimers.org.uk
Online Ref: WO031193

SCHAAFSMA.—Hubert Alle, died peacefully at home on 2nd November, aged 80 years. Beloved husband of Ines, proud father of Annabel, Emma, Alexandra and Livia and loving Pake of Freddie, Isabella, Max, Theo, Ophelia, Oliver and Sophia. Private cremation. A celebration of H

Eddie Stobart

Devout chapel-going Cumbrian founder of the haulage firm that his son turned into a 'superbrand'

EDDIE STOBART, who has died aged 95, was a Cumbrian agricultural contractor whose name became an icon of the road haulage industry and a source of truck-spotting entertainment for generations of bored car passengers.

It was in fact the second of Eddie's three sons, Edward (1956-2011), who created the Stobart "superbrand" – while Eddie himself, a devout chapel-goer, was content to run a modest village-based business distributing fertiliser, doing contract work for local farmers, running a farm shop and wheeling and dealing at local agricultural auctions.

Young Edward grew up to be a lorry enthusiast with big ideas for the haulage side of the family enterprise, which operated just eight vehicles when his father gave him charge of it in 1976. Soon afterwards, they agreed an amicable split in which Eddie and his daughter Anne continued to run the non-haulage activities, as Eddie Stobart Trading, while his son Edward moved to a new base at Carlisle to realise his ambitions under the banner of Eddie Stobart Ltd.

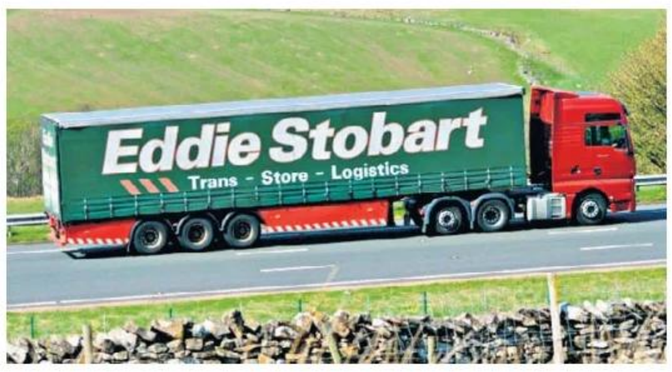
Thus it was that Eddie's name was eventually emblazoned on more than 2,000 trucks that were also distinguished by their shiny green and red livery and their well-dressed drivers, trained to honk cheerfully at other motorists who waved at them. The trucks were adorned on the drivers' doors with individual female names – Edward's early choices having included "Twiggy", after the model, "Tammy" (Wynette) and "Dolly" (Parton) – giving rise to a children's craze for spotting them on motorways. That in turn led to the creation of a fan club with thousands of members, and a thriving sideline in Eddie Stobart model trucks and other branded merchandise.

Eddie himself, meanwhile, sold most of his trading interests in 1980 to invest in an industrial warehouse near Carlisle – with Edward's lorry depot next door – which gave him an easy-to-run business for semi-retirement, allowing him to devote more of his time to evangelical work.

Edward, as a fully fledged entrepreneur, told his father: "Thanks, Dad, I can manage now," while Eddie told the author Hunter Davies: "I never aimed to devote my life to work… I am by nature fairly laidback compared to Edward.

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES/ ALAMY

Stobart, always known as Eddie and sometimes Steady Eddie, at the 2011 funeral of his son Edward; below, a Stobart truck with its famous green and red livery



"I used to think to myself, what's the point of all his worry and rush? We are here to serve God, not Mammon… I was still a director of Eddie Stobart Ltd, but board meetings consisted of me sitting in an armchair at home while Edward was ringing me from somewhere on the M6 telling me what he was doing."

Edward Pears Stobart, always known as Eddie and sometimes Steady Eddie, was born on April 18 1929. His devout Methodist parents, John and Adelaide, farmed a 32-acre smallholding with eight cows at Hesket Newmarket, south of Carlisle. At 14 Eddie left the nearby Howbeck village school to help his father on the farm and with occasional horse-and-cart work for Cumberland County Council.

From the age of 10, Eddie suffered a stammer which he attributed to the shock of catching his thumb in a door. But it left him just as suddenly at 17, when he was asked to stand up and speak in chapel for the first time: "God took me by the hand. God helped me to cure it."

That handicap did not hinder Eddie's entrepreneurial instinct. He bought his own first horse for 33 guineas, trained it to pull farm machinery, sold it for 66 guineas and invested the profit in hens and henhouses. In the 1950s, he and his father and brother built a business that undertook ploughing, threshing, ditching, carting and spreading fertiliser for other local farmers.

The first Stobart lorry arrived in 1960: Eddie had it painted Post Office red and Brunswick green, with "E.P. Stobart" on the cab door. But he never believed there was money to be made in haulage, seeing his small fleet simply as "a tool for my main business", which was distributing slag, the fertiliser by-product of steelmaking.

In later years Eddie watched his son Edward's fortunes rise to an estimated £100 million – and fall again in difficult business conditions in the early 2000s, when the haulage business was bought out by a partnership led by Edward's younger brother William. The breakdown of Edward's first marriage was also a sadness to his deeply religious parents.

"Edward's got everything money can buy," Eddie observed, "but he lacks what money can't buy." Edward died of heart problems – reportedly bankrupt – aged 56 in 2011.

Eddie Stobart was prone to remark that he would never have set up a business under his own name if he had known how big and famous it would become. He married, on Boxing Day 1951, Nora Boyd, who came from the neighbouring village of Caldbeck and whom he had met at a Bible rally in Carlisle.

In retirement they lived in a bungalow outside Carlisle and were active members of the Free Evangelical Church, having helped fund its new building at Wigton. Eddie was an occasional preacher, while Nora devoted many years' work to the Gideon Bible movement.

As well as Edward, they had two other sons, John and William, and a daughter, Anne.

Eddie Stobart, born April 18 1929, died November 25 2024

Princess Birgitta of Sweden

Colourful and down-to-earth descendant of Queen Victoria who moved from palace to bungalow

PRINCESS BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN, who has died aged 87, was a sister of the King of Sweden, and a descendant of Queen Victoria through both her third and favourite son, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, and her fourth and youngest son, the short-lived Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany.

The frail, haemophiliac Leopold died aged 30 in 1884, just before the birth of his only son, Charles Edward. The boy was raised as a British prince, alongside his elder sister Princess Alice, later Countess of Athlone, but as a teenager he was picked to be the next Duke of Coburg, the Duke of Connaught having wisely refused it, and packed off to Germany.

As the last ruling Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Charles Edward went on to make a string of unfortunate choices. When the First World War broke out he sided with the German Empire, and in 1917 was stripped of his British styles and titles. He was forced to abdicate in 1918 and, anxious about communism, became an enthusiastic and early Nazi, donating considerable sums to the party and attending the funeral of George V in uniform, which terrified some of the younger mourners. In 1950 he was bankrupted by the fines imposed on him as a Nazi sympathiser.

His daughter Sibylla, meanwhile, had in 1932 married her cousin Gustaf Adolf, the son of the Swedish Crown Prince and Princess Margaret of Connaught, another grandchild of Queen Victoria. On January 19 1937, at the Haga Palace outside Stockholm, Princess Birgitta Ingeborg Alice, their second daughter, was born.

When Birgitta was 10, however, her father died in an air crash, leaving Sibylla with four daughters and a seven-month-old son – the future King Carl XVI Gustaf – on her hands. They were raised, Birgitta recalled, in their grandfather's royal house, where "children's questions were met with silence, children's anxiety and fear with the same silence".

Princess Birgitta grew up to embody the Swedish ideal of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, pillow-lipped athlete. She learnt to ski as soon as she could walk, held the highest certificate in life-saving and was a fully qualified gym mistress and a successful competitive fencer, on the winning team of the Swedish women's foil championship.

She undertook royal duties, representing her grandfather in New York at the 50th anniversary of the American-Scandinavian Foundation in 1960, and as princesses go seemed well-suited to the Swinging Sixties. With looks reminiscent of Julie Christie, she gave tape-recorder parties for her friends, and took them into the palace kitchen to roast popcorn. "Call me Birgitta and drop the Royal Highness whenever you can," she would tell her friends, "who come from all classes," noted *The Daily Telegraph*.

In 1960, hopeful of grand matches, the King of Sweden hosted a magnificent ball for his three eldest granddaughters, Margaretha, Birgitta and Désirée, to which he invited the young Duke of Kent and his sister Princess Alexandra, along with Crown Prince Constantine of the Hellenes and Crown Prince Harald of Norway. Despite the King's efforts, however, Birgitta would be the only one of her sisters to marry a prince of any description.

At the age of 23 she became engaged to Prince Johan Georg of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. "Hansi" was a member of the senior Swabian (and Catholic) branch of the house of Hohenzollern, which had produced the rulers of Romania but were otherwise inevitably overshadowed by the Franconian (and Protestant) branch, a 13th-century offshoot that went on to rule Brandenburg, Prussia and eventually the German Empire.

ROLLS PRESS/POPPERFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

'Call me Birgitta and drop the Royal Highness'

She had met Hansi, a younger son, at a cocktail party. Rather than a fairytale castle, their marital home was a bungalow outside Munich, where her husband was taking a PhD in art history and archaeology. "The bungalow," she told the press, "is just the right size for us. We shall furnish it in the contemporary style mixed with antique pieces."

In 1961 they were married at a civil ceremony in Stockholm, with Britain represented by Admiral Sir Alexander Ramsay and Lady Patricia Ramsay (Princess Patricia of Connaught), a great-aunt of the bride. There followed a Roman Catholic ceremony in Sigmaringen and a reception at the Hohenzollerns' partially abandoned castle, with extra servants borrowed from neighbouring big houses to handle the 136 guests.

When asked whether they would live a good bourgeois life in Germany, Hansi said: "Yes, of course. Being a prince in Germany today is like being an ordinary citizen. That is what I was brought up to and am accustomed to." For his bride it was more of an adjustment. "To pick up a phone and just call a dentist, have money in hand and go out shopping… I hadn't done anything. Everything was totally new," she recalled. She opened a boutique in Munich and co-founded the Help Foundation to support vulnerable children across the world.

The strict formality of the Swedish royal family relaxed with the death of Birgitta's mother Princess Sibylla in 1972 and her grandfather King Gustaf VI Adolf in 1973. In 1976, her brother, the new young King, married a commoner, Silvia Sommerlath. The same year, Birgitta's uncle, Prince Bertil, was allowed to marry his long-term mistress, the Welsh model Lilian Craig.

Princess Birgitta and her husband separated in 1990, and she settled in Majorca in Spain, where she had her own golf course and organised the Princess Birgitta of Sweden and Hohenzollern Golf Cup.

The King of Sweden remembered his sister as "colourful and straightforward".

Her husband predeceased her in 2016 and she is survived by their two sons and daughter.

Princess Birgitta of Sweden, born January 19 1937, died December 4 2024

Paul Dickenson

Olympic hammer thrower who went on to become a popular athletics commentator for the BBC

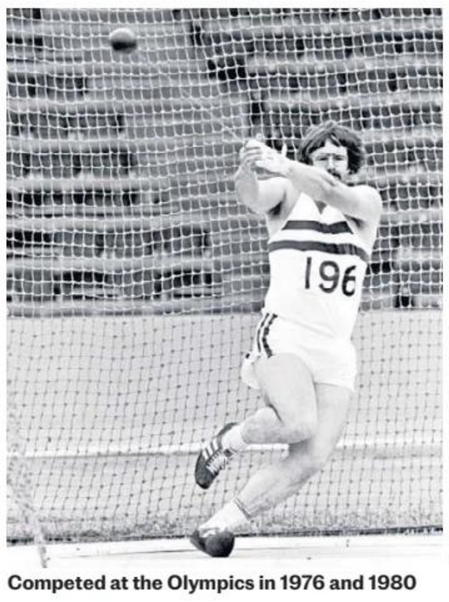
PAUL DICKENSON, who has died aged 74, was a hammer thrower who subsequently became a senior sports commentator for the BBC, working at every Olympic Games, both summer and winter, from 1992 until 2014; his best-known performance behind the microphone came when Jessica Ennis became the women's Olympic heptathlon champion at London 2012.

"You've got to sound knowledgeable and you've got to make it sound easy," he said of his broadcasting career. "I might be commentating to an auntie or an uncle who might not know anything about athletics, so you've got to make it sound very simple. That requires a huge amount of background reading and preparation."

Derek Paul Dickenson was born in North Shields, Northumberland, on December 4 1949. He attended Tynemouth Grammar School, where he was introduced to the hammer by his PE teacher, Carl Johnson, who went on to be his coach.

He was the English Schools champion five years in a row, and in 1965 *Athletics Weekly* featured him in their "Spotlight on Youth" slot, describing him as "the most exciting youth hammer thrower Britain has ever had". Two years later, when he was defending his Schools title at Crystal Palace he broke the hammer record three times in a day.

He went on to a long throwing career while working as a schoolteacher, spending 10 years at Dr Challoner's Grammar School in Amersham. In 1976 he broke the UK record with a throw that still puts him 21st in the national all-time rankings 48 years later, but that did not even place him in the world top 20, and he was never a medal candidate for that year's Olympics in Montreal, though he did finish a creditable 14th.



ED LACEY/POPPERFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

Competed at the Olympics in 1976 and 1980

He went on to compete in the 1978 Commonwealth Games in Edmonton and the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, while in the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane he finished just outside the medals.

He was also head of the International Athletes Club, which raised money for amateur athletes and looked after their interests: in 1982 he was leading the call to end two-team matches, which he said had "little use in today's sport". The same year he led athletes in their protests about being bullied by the British athletics board into appearing in a meet at Crystal Palace in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games.

In 1984 he was a vocal opponent of the importation and quickfire naturalisation of the South African runner Zola Budd, saying: "There are political prisoners in South Africa with as much claim to British citizenship as Budd, but nothing is being done for them." He did, though, add that as she was now in Britain, "she should be made to feel welcome and accepted by other British athletes."

He retired from the hammer in his mid-30s and began working unpaid for a local radio station, typing out results and making the tea. "I learnt how to make programmes and eventually was asked if I wanted to go out on the road with a microphone and try to do some commentary. I ended up commentating on football, rugby, hockey, local budgerigar shows, cat shows and everything else."

Then, he recalled, "I was at Crystal Palace watching a meet, just as a spectator, and I saw the BBC commentary team. They remembered me from my athletics days and I said to David Coleman, 'I'm actually after your job.' He remembered this, and about two months later I got a call from the BBC saying, 'We need somebody to do trackside interviews at the World Championships in Rome.'"

His first was with Carl Lewis – "I was diabolical" – but he became a BBC stalwart, branching out into their World's Strongest Man coverage, the Paralympics and even royal events. In 2000, the *Telegraph*'s Paul Fox described him as "informative, never flummoxed, and adding to the pictures".

The BBC reported that he was one of only five commentators to call British golds at both summer and winter Olympics. His last work for the Corporation was commentating on Lizzy Yarnold's skeleton victory at the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi.

Paul Dickenson married his childhood sweetheart Ann Stevens in 1971. She survives him with their two daughters.

Paul Dickenson, born December 4 1949, died November 26 2024

Sacred Mysteries

Queen Victoria's four amazing granddaughters

CHRISTOPHER HOWSE

In 1947, at Westminster Abbey, the Marchioness of Milford Haven witnessed her grandson Philip marry Princess Elizabeth, soon to be Queen. The Marchioness, who had been Princess Victoria of Hesse, was Queen Victoria's granddaughter, spanning two very different worlds.

Even more remarkably, a statue of her sister now looks out above the great west door of the Abbey, as one of the 10 Modern Martyrs of the 20th century, along with Maximilian Kolbe and Oscar Romero. She was Princess Elizabeth of Hesse and had married one of Tsar Alexander II's sons, the Grand Duke Serge, before becoming a nun in her widowhood. In 1918 she was thrown down a mine by the Bolsheviks and some hand grenades thrown after her.

The story of Victoria and Ella, as Elizabeth was known in the family, and their two sisters Irène and Alexandra (Alix) is compellingly told by Frances Welch in *The Lives and Deaths of the Princesses of Hesse*.

They were more English than they sound, for Victoria was born in Windsor Castle and lived to become a godmother of the present King. She and her sister Ella stayed with Queen Victoria, who doted on them, for months in 1866, when Prussia invaded Hesse.

The jumbled world of the princesses is reflected by juxtapositions in the index of the new book: "disapproval of Rasputin … dislike of Kaiser … home in Walton-on-Thames … jewels left in Russia."

In 1880, Queen Victoria visited Darmstadt to be at Victoria and Ella's Confirmation in the Lutheran Church. They were asked, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" They did. But Ella's defiance of death came after her conversion to the Orthodox Church. She was not obliged to convert in order to marry Serge, but they were both spiritually stirred by a visit to the Holy Land in 1888. She wrote at the time: "How I should like to be buried there."

Queen Victoria was unexpectedly supportive of her granddaughter's decision to embrace Orthodoxy in 1891. "The Greek Church reminds me of the English Church," the Princess wrote to the Queen, "and that is why I understand it differently to those who have been brought up in the German Protestant Church."

I do not want to make the book, full of passions, royal peculiarities and misspelt letters, seem more about religion than it is. But Ella's faith had been strengthened after her husband Serge was blown to pieces by a terrorist's bomb in 1905.

Alix supported Ella when in 1910 she founded an order of nuns, named after Martha and Mary in the Bible, devoted to working with the poor and sick. The role of Rasputin was obvious in the life of Alix when she had married Tsar Nicholas II and become the mother of a son with haemophilia. Alix and Ella fell out, to say the least, over Rasputin's murder.

Doting: Queen Victoria with Princess Victoria of Hesse

The sisters were already separated by the First World War from Irène, who had married the Kaiser's younger brother.

But Irène was grateful when her sister Victoria arranged for Ella's burial in Jerusalem (after her body and that of her companion martyr Sister Varvara, or Barbara, had been brought in a two-year journey via Lake Baikal to Peking). She lies at the golden-domed Church of Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives, recognised as a saint, like her sister Alix, by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Also buried there is Princess Victoria's daughter, Prince Philip's mother, whose own Orthodox faith was deeply influenced by her aunt Ella's life.

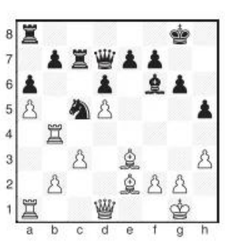
Chess

Classic control

By **Michael Adams**

THE Super Blitz at the XTX Markets London Chess Classic begins at 4pm today at the Emirates Stadium, and should be great fun for spectators.

This game from the main event is less dramatic, but features good strategic control. Visit londonchessclassic.com/super-blitz for more information on the event.



M Adams – S Royal
London Chess Classic 2024
1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.Nf3 g6 4.Bc4 Bg7 5.0–0 d6 6.Re1 Nf6 7.d4 cxd4 8.Nxd4 0–0 9.h3 Nxd4 10.Qxd4 Ng4 (Although the discovered attack is tempting, it is not clear if it improves the position of Black's knight) **11.Qd1 Ne5** (11…Bxc3 12.bxc3 Ne5 13.Bb3 followed by Bh6 looks quite dangerous with Black's draughty king) **12.Bb3 Be6 13.Nd5!** (Seizing a key outpost in the centre of the board) **13…Bxd5** (Black could have delayed this capture with the developing moves 13…Rc8 14.Bg5 Re8) **14.exd5 Qc7** (The logical follow up was 14…b5! planning a future Nc4. Then 15.a4 a6 is only a little better for White with the sensitive pawns on e7 and b5) **15.a4!** (Clamping down on the queenside) **15…Bf6** (Covering the pawn on e7) **16.c3** (Reinforcing the long diagonal) **16…Rfc8 17.Re4!** (The rook is very powerful on the fourth rank) **17…a6 18.a5 Nd7** (Shreyas should have looked for activity with 18…b5! I thought 19.axb6 Qxb6 20.Be3 was strong, but the sneaky 20…Qb5 21.Rb4 Qd3! causes trouble) **19.Be3** (Starting to develop my queenside forces) **19…Nc5 20.Rb4!** (Now White controls the midfield, and can play on either flank. Black is doomed to passivity without queenside counterplay) **20…Qd7** (20…Nxb3 21.Qxb3 Rcb8 (21…Rab8 22.Ba7!) 22.Raa4 Qd7 23.Rb6 dominates) **21.Bc4** (The simple 21.Bc2 was also good, but I wanted to position the bishop on the diagonal, pointing at d7 and c8, where the black major pieces are situated) **21…h5 22.Be2 Rc7** (See board left) **23.h4** (A key moment. I had the feeling that 23.Bxh5! gxh5 24.Qxh5 should work, but 24…e5! is a resourceful defence 25.Rg4+ (25.dxe6? Nxe6, 25.Bh6 e4 blocks the rook) 25…Kf8 26.Bg5! Bxg5 27.Rxg5 Re8 (27…Ke7 28.Qh4!) I missed the devastating quiet move 28.Rf5! preventing the king from running 28…Nd3 (28…Qb5 29.Qh4! Qxb2 30.Rf1 Qxc3 31.Rh5!, or 28…Ne4 29.Qh8+ Ke7 30.Qh4+) 29.Qh6+ Ke7 30.Qf6+ Kf8 31.Rh5!) **23…Kg7 24.g3 Rb8 25.Kg2** (There is no need to hurry) **25…Re8 26.Bf3 Qc8 27.g4!** (A good moment to break open the position, and switch the play to the kingside, where my pieces can arrive quicker due to the extra space) **27…hxg4 28.Bxg4 Qd8 29.h5!** (Targeting Black's king) **29…Rh8 30.Qe2!** (The queen has done good work without moving, but now it clears the way for my last piece to join in) **30…Qe8** (30…Qg8 31.Rg1 Kf8 32.h6 strands the black major pieces in the corner) **31.Rg1 e5 32.hxg6 fxg6 33.Kf1!** (Finding a safer spot for my king, now the rook on g1 will attack Black's monarch) **33…Kf8** (33…Nd7 34.Bf5 Nf8 35.Rbg4 piles up on the pawn on g6) **34.Bxc5!** (A good moment to make this exchange) **34…dxc5** (After 34…Rxc5 I was enticed by 35.Qf3 Qe7 36.Rxb7 Qxb7 37.Qxf6+, but 36…e4 is not so simple. The straightforward 35.Rxb7 with the idea of 35…Rxa5 36.Qf3 is cleaner. The game capture leaves me with a strong well supported passed pawn, though) **35.Rb6 Bd8 36.Re6 Qb5 37.Qxb5** (37.c4 Qa4 38.Rxg6 was the alternative, if 38.Qxe5 Qxc4+ 39.Be2 Qc1+ 40.Kg2 Qg5+ swaps) queens) **37…axb5 38.Rxg6** (38.d6 Rf7 39.Rxg6 Rh2 is trickier) **38…Rg7 39.Be6 Rhh7** (39…Rxg6 40.Rxg6 Bxa5 41.d6! leaves Black paralysed, then 41…c4 42.Rf6+ Ke8 43.Rf5! collects the pawn on e5) **40.d6 c4** (40…Rxg6 41.Rxg6 Rg7 42.Rh6!, or 40…Bxa5 41.Rf6+ Ke8 42.Rxg7 Rxg7 43.Rh6 catch the king in a mating net) **41.Rxg7 Rxg7 42.Rh1! Rg6 43.Rh8+ Kg7 44.Rxd8 Rxe6 45.Rd7+ Kf6** (45…Kf8 46.Rxb7 Rxd6 47.Rxb5 is also simple) **46.Rxb7 Rxd6 47.Rb6** Black resigned, due to 47…Ke6 (47…Rxb6 48.axb6 Ke6 49.b7) 48.Rxd6+ Kxd6 49.Ke2 Kc6 50.Ke3 Kb7 51.Ke4 Ka6 52.Kxe5 Kxa5 53.f4 Ka4 54.f5 Kb3 55.f6 Kxb2 56.f7, promoting first.

Pension fund investment in UK stocks dives

By **Michael Bow**

BRITISH pension funds have slashed their exposure to London-listed shares to a record low, delivering a fresh blow to hopes of a stock market revival.

Only 6.6pc of pension pots are allocated to UK stocks – down from 7.6pc last year and 48pc in 2008 – according to a survey of 5,000 corporate schemes.

The figures from industry regulator the Pension Protection Fund (PPF) will put fresh pressure on the efforts to revive the London stock market. Since taking power, the Government has backed policies including making it easier and less burdensome to list shares on the exchange.

Tulip Siddiq, the City minister, has led calls to reinvigorate capital markets, saying the stock market can help become a plank of the Government's growth agenda.

While Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, has launched plans to make local council funds to invest in UK infrastructure, the Government has shied away from policies aimed at the £1.5trillion contained in private sector defined benefit schemes.

Ministers have also refused to impose a minimum threshold of UK stocks for pension funds, despite concerns that London's stock market will remain out of favour without mandating funds to invest. The decline of the British stock market has been blamed on UK pension funds cutting their exposure to shares because of onerous regulations.

Gordon Brown, the former Labour chancellor, removed a key tax break for British pension schemes holding UK shares in 1997, which led many funds to move away from shares into bonds.

However, the PPF figures, contained in its annual "Purple Book" report released on Thursday, suggest pension funds have accelerated their exit from London stocks over a shorter period. Allocations to UK stocks stood at 18pc in 2018, but that has collapsed to under 7pc today.

The PPF is the so-called industry lifeboat fund which bails out pension funds if the employer attached to them goes bankrupt. It collects a levy on thousands of pension funds every year to pay for the bail-outs, and, to do so, collects data on 4,974 defined benefit schemes.

A Treasury spokesman said: "Recent IPOs and listings announcements by high-growth companies like Raspberry Pi and Canal+ demonstrate confidence in our capital markets."

Rayner backs data centre on green belt

By **Matthew Field**

ANGELA RAYNER has overturned a decision blocking the construction of a £670m data centre on green belt land, days after Labour vowed to "send a clear message to the nimbys".

The Housing Secretary has given the greenlight to a project in Buckinghamshire, where developers are planning to build a new data centre on land around an 18th century, Grade-II listed farmhouse.

It comes as the Government this week unveiled plans to "unleash the biggest building boom in half a century" by waving through major development projects.

On Thursday, Ms Rayner gave Marks & Spencer approval to bulldoze and rebuild its Oxford Street store. The decision to wave through the data centre plans follow months of wrangling over the scheme, which is to be built at Court Lane on the green belt. The site is next to the M25.

The scheme was blocked by the Conservative-majority Buckinghamshire council in October 2023, which found the project constituted "inappropriate development in the green belt". The council had claimed it would damage the "landscape character and appearance and visual effects" of the area.

The approval by Ms Rayner came after the Prime Minister used a speech aimed at resetting Labour's agenda on Thursday to take aim at "the nimbys, the regulators, the blockers and bureaucrats". Ms Rayner is also expected to rule on a larger data centre in Hertfordshire within weeks.

World market indices

		Index	Change	
↓ Australia	All Ordinaries	8689.30	-55.20	-0.63pc
↓ Brazil	Bovespa	125945.67	-1911.91	-1.50pc
↑ China	Shanghai Composite	3404.08	+35.22	+1.05pc
↑ France	CAC General	7426.88	+96.34	+1.31pc
↑ Germany	DAX	20384.61	+25.81	+0.13pc
↑ Hong Kong	Hang Seng	19865.85	+305.41	+1.56pc
↓ India	BSE S&P SENSEX	81709.12	-56.74	-0.07pc
↓ Japan	Nikkei	39091.17	-304.43	-0.77pc
↓ Singapore	Straits Times	3796.16	-26.52	-0.69pc
↓ Spain	Madrid SE	1176.73	-4.88	-0.41pc
↓ Switzerland	SMI Index	11780.65	-10.14	-0.09pc
↓ USA	Dow Jones	44642.52	-123.19	-0.28pc
↑ USA	Nasdaq	19859.77	+159.51	+0.81pc

Commodities summary

		Price	Change	
↑ Gold	per troy oz	$2631.57	+0.20	+0.01pc
↓ Silver	per troy oz	£24.29	-0.23	-0.94pc
↑ Krugerrand		£2049.59	+3.19	+0.16pc
↓ New Sovereign		£474.73	-4.93	-1.03pc
↓ Maples		£2066.07	-0.71	-0.03pc
↓ Platinum	per oz	£729.69	-6.30	-0.86pc
↓ Palladium	per oz	£752.73	-2.41	-0.32pc
↑ Copper†	grade A	£7134.73	+10.35	+0.15pc
↓ Tin†	high grade	£22818.58	-102.49	-0.45pc
↓ Lead†		£1621.55	-22.78	-1.39pc
↓ Zinc†	special high grade	£2410.55	-25.38	-1.04pc
↓ Aluminium†	high grade	£2046.06	-21.50	-1.04pc
↑ Nickel†		£12551.00	+69.62	+0.56pc
↑ Baltic Dry Index*		1167.00	+7.00	+0.60pc
↑ Wheat	per tonne	£179.35	+0.35	+0.20pc
↓ Brent Crude	Feb settlement	$71.12	-0.97	-1.35pc

*Copyright Baltic Exchange Information Services Ltd. †Data provided by the London Metal Exchange

Exchange rates

£ > € Rate 1.2064 Change -0.01¢ £ > $ Rate 1.2744 Change -0.13¢

		Tourist £1=	Sterling £1=	1 Euro =	1 Dollar =
Australia	Aus $	1.8833	1.9943	1.6531	1.5650
Canada	Can $	1.7071	1.8017	1.4935	1.4139
Denmark	Krone	8.5634	8.9972	7.4581	7.0602
Euro	€	1.1518	1.2064	...	0.9467
Hong Kong	HK $	9.4270	9.9146	8.2185	7.7801
India	Rupee	95.28	107.9327	89.4689	84.6963
Israel	Shekels	4.1400	4.5655	3.7845	3.5827
Japan	Yen	182.65	191.0123	158.3363	149.8900
Kuwait	Dinar	...	0.3916	0.3246	0.3073
New Zealand	NZ $	2.0311	2.1841	1.8106	1.7139
Norway	Krone	13.45	14.1945	11.7662	11.1386
Pakistan	Rupee	334.19	354.1738	293.5861	277.9250
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	4.4837	4.7884	3.9693	3.7575
Singapore	$	1.5942	1.7093	1.4169	1.3413
South Africa	Rand	21.64	22.9622	19.0341	18.0188
Sweden	Krona	13.23	13.9221	11.5405	10.9249
Switzerland	Franc	1.0690	1.1179	0.9267	0.8772
Thailand	Baht	38.81	43.4394	36.0084	34.0875
UAE	Dirham	4.3999	4.6806	3.8800	3.6730
UK	£	...	...	0.8289	0.7847
USA	$	1.2192	1.2744	1.0563	...

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Winners and losers (pc)

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Tradeweb

Government securities

52 week High	Low (£)	Stock	Price (£)	+/-	Flat Yield	Rdm Yield
104.14	99.60	Treas 5¾ 25	100.08	-0.01	5.00	4.63
112.21	100.63	Treas 6% 28	107.34*	-0.08	5.59	3.99
106.59	99.23	Treas 4¼% 32	100.79*	-0.11	4.22	4.13
106.09	96.70	Treas 4¼% 36	99.02	-0.14	4.29	4.36
110.73	99.68	Treas 4¼% 38	102.69*	-0.16	4.63	4.49
Index Linked Securities						
352.43	336.08	Treas 4½% IL 30	340.81	-0.53	1.21	0.55
247.05	240.83	Treas 2% IL 35	244.11	-0.50	0.82	0.94

10-year Government Bonds

	Yield%	Spread vs Bunds	Spread vs T-Bonds
France	2.88	+0.78	-1.28
Germany	2.10	-	-2.06
Japan	1.04	-1.06	-3.12
Great Britain	4.28	+2.18	+0.12
United States	4.16	+2.06	-

The share prices, price-earnings ratios and dividend yields below are supplied by Interactive Data (Europe) Ltd. The yields are calculated using historic dividend payments divided by the closing share price multiplied by 100.

Aerospace & defence -0.82%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
594	373¾	Babcock Intl •	521½*	-6½	1.0	15.9
1417	1012½	BAE Systems	1229½	-17½	2.5	20.1
491	292¼	QinetiQ •	414¾	-4¾	2.0	17.1
599¾	282¾	Rolls-Royce	586¾	-2¼	–	20.3
183	120	Senior •	154	+1¼	1.6	20.5

Banks -0.70%

269¾	138¼	Barclays	264¾	-2¾	3.1	9.6
828	179¾	Close Bros •	228¼	+1¾	–	3.8
752	572½	HSBC	743½*	-7¾	6.4	8.2
64¼	41	Lloyds Bk Gp	53¼	-¾	5.5	7.0
418¾	203¼	NatWest Group	413¾	+1¾	4.2	8.6
423	304½	Santander	388	-2	3.4	23.4
995¼	571	Standard Ch	973¾	+3¼	2.4	11.4

Beverages -0.25%

3056	2275	Diageo	2422½	-6	3.3	–

Chemicals +0.84%

5154	3359¾	Croda Intl	3409	+40	3.2	27.8
1917½	1318	Johnson Mat •	1387*	+1	5.6	23.7
1575	816	Victrex •	1096	+16	5.4	55.4

Construction +0.47%

472¾	315¾	Balfour Beatty •	452¾*	+3	2.6	12.8
582½	395	Barratt Redrow	434¾	+4¾	3.7	36.8
3384	2384	Bellway •	2536*	+2	2.1	23.1
5560½	4048	Berkeley Grp	4118	-48	3.2	10.6
245	173¾	Boot H	223	+3	3.4	11.3
113	59¾	Costain	105½	+2½	1.1	13.0
1097	825	Grafton Gp •	964¼	+11¾	3.8	13.9
3970	2020	Morgan Sindall •	3850	+30	3.1	15.1
1721¾	1204½	Persimmon	1287½	+11	4.7	16.1
169¼	126¼	Taylor Wimpey	128¼	+¼	7.5	13.0

Electricals +1.19%

275½	94	Dialight	100½	+2½	–	-1.8
816	561	discoverIE Grp •	721	+25	1.7	44.5
2780	2104	Halma	2772	+31	0.8	44.7
4500	3065	Renishaw •	3180*	+30	2.4	23.9
1758	884	XP Power	1258	-8	–	-27.7

Electricity -1.41%

692	407¾	Drax Group •	656	-6	4.0	4.6
1062	645	Nat Grid	958¼*	-15	5.7	16.8
2019	1543½	SSE	1700	-19½	3.6	10.8

Engineering / Industrial +0.07%

104¼	66¾	Coats Group •	96¼	+½	2.4	34.8
828	180	Cropper J	235	–	–	-5.6
8860	4700	Goodwin •	6900	+120	1.9	30.7
1911	1531	IMI	1836	+19	1.6	20.1
1719¾	1149¼	Mondi	1193¾	+43½	5.0	13.4
89¾	39¾	Severfield	49¼	+¾	7.5	9.5
1894¾	1514¾	Smiths Gp	1761	-6	2.5	24.4
601¼	270¼	Smith (DS)	562½	-½	3.2	20.1
4600	2827½	Smurfit Westrock	4287*	+25	2.2	–
11280	6350	Spirax Gp	7275	-220	2.2	29.2
2272	1758½	Weir	2260	+6	1.7	25.6

Food producers -0.90%

2765	2130	Ass Brit Fds	2232	-29	4.0	11.5
2896	2173	Coca-Cola HBC	2812	-22	2.7	19.6
5260	3728	Cranswick •	4985	-15	1.9	23.7
996	718	Hilton Food •	903	+15	3.6	22.2
99	62½	REA Hldgs	78¼	-¼	–	-3.0
5034	3680½	Unilever	4626*	-41	3.2	21.6

Gas & Water -2.28%

157¾	113	Centrica	130¼	-½	3.2	1.8
775	518	Pennon Gp •	609½	-3½	7.4	-169.3
2807	2310	Severn Trent	2656*	-86	4.5	52.1
1145½	950¾	Utd Utilities	1090½*	-38¾	4.6	58.6

General financial -0.02%

234¼	158¼	Ashmore •	172*	-1¾	9.8	12.3
391¼	202¾	Bridgepoint Grp •	371¾	+15¾	2.4	41.3
1169	688	Hargreaves L	1093½	+1	4.0	17.7
995¼	671	IG Group •	966½	-4½	4.8	12.2
2448	1540¾	IntermediateCp	2206*	+36	3.6	13.3
627½	479	Investec •	586	+14	6.1	5.6
60¾	35¾	IP Group •	48¼	...	2.6	-2.9
865	410	Liontrust	472½*	+15	15.2	-86.5
73¾	30	Lon. Fin. & Inv.	61*	–	2.0	4.5
11490	8648¾	Lon Stock Ex	11365	-70	1.1	81.8
241½	192¾	M&G	201¼	-¾	9.8	-3.1
279¼	196¾	Man Group •	207¾	-1¾	6.2	13.3
156¾	92¼	Quilter •	155¼	+½	3.5	50.1
2290	1230	S & U	1430	+30	8.0	6.8
447¾	298¾	Schroders	315¼	+3¼	6.8	12.8
134¾	37¼	Vanquis Banking Gp	49¾	+1¾	12.2	-20.6

Healthcare -0.17%

400¾	308¼	Haleon	375	-¾	1.7	32.9
1245¼	911	Smith & Nep	980	+1¼	3.0	41.4

Household goods -0.91%

1579	555½	Burberry •	929¾	+33¾	–	12.5
145	67¼	McBride	110	+½	–	5.7
159	75¼	PZ Cussons •	85¾	+1¾	4.2	-6.3
5886½	4034	Reckitt Benck	4709	-66	4.2	20.5

Information technology +0.48%

390	262	Aptitude Sftwre	334	+4	1.6	46.3
1321	954¼	Sage Gp	1316	+7	1.6	41.0
205	102¼	Spirent •	179¾	-¾	1.7	53.3

Insurance -0.06%

186¾	131	abrdn •	140¾	-¼	10.4	–
3143	2383	Admiral	2720	+5	3.9	24.5
510¼	414¼	Aviva	483¾	-5¾	7.1	12.8
820½	493¾	Beazley	820½	+3	1.7	6.6
257¾	147½	DirectLineIns •	249¼	+13¼	2.4	15.7
1282	998	Hiscox	1126	-15	2.6	7.0
721	559	Lancashire Hldg •	659*	-10	11.7	6.2
259	211¾	Legal & General	237½	-1¾	8.7	32.3
581¼	475	Phoenix	521½	-5	10.2	-37.8
907¾	594¾	Prudential	662¼	+5¾	2.5	13.6
922½	393¾	St. James's Place •	855	-2	1.6	-475.0

Investment trusts -0.04%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	NAV
3779	2244	3i	3730*	-12	1.7	2240
360	308	3i Infrastructure •	320*	-2	3.8	371
830	621¾	abrdn New India	814	+4	–	1018
1300	1052	Alliance Witan •	1286*	-4	2.1	1338
418	278½	Allianz Tech Trust •	416	+2½	–	463
445	321¾	Asia Dragon Trust •	421*	+3	1.6	480
255¾	175	Baillie Giff China	219	–	0.9	254
101¼	83	Baillie Giff Euro Gwth	87¾	+¾	0.1	105
118¾	98	Bankers Invstmt Tst •	117	-¼	2.3	132
1068¼	761	Biotech Growth	939	-1	–	1025
215	177¾	BlckRckAmInc	208*	-4	3.8	227
127	104	BlackRockEnrgy&Res	119½*	-1½	3.8	136
159¾	137½	BlckRock FroInv	150½	–	5.0	169
653	522	BlckRck Grt Euro •	564*	+4	1.2	604
210	175	BlckRck Inc&Grth	204	–	3.7	228
1622	1303¾	BlackRock Small •	1398	+16	3.0	1595
682	566¼	BlkRk Throg Tst •	607	+4	2.5	688
634	470	BlackRock Wld M •	502*	+1	6.7	555
1545¼	1085	Brunner •	1485*	–	1.6	1456
3730	3200	Caledonia •	3435*	+5	2.1	5516
454	387½	City of Lon •	434½	-2½	4.8	439
207	151½	CQS Nat Res G & I	198½	-2½	2.8	205
261	222	CT Glbl Mgd G	257	–	–	267
122	106	CT Glbl Mgd I	115½	–	6.4	114
490	412	CT Priv Eq Ord	470	+1	6.0	678
347	284¾	CT UK Cap & Inc	322*	-2	3.9	341
99	77¼	CT UKHighIncTst	89	-3½	6.3	100
540	439¼	Dunedin Ent	468	-9	4.9	629
786	647¾	Edinburgh Inv Tr •	759	-2	3.6	848
194½	136¼	Edin Worldwide •	190	-1¾	–	185
92¼	80¼	European Assets	83¼	-¾	7.1	95
1144¼	885	F&C Inv Trust	1134	-2	1.3	1232
549¾	467¼	Fidelity Asian V	500*	+1	2.9	561
249½	170¾	Fidlty Chna Sp Sits •	215½	+2	3.0	247
412½	339	Fidelity Euro Tst •	362½	+4	2.4	395
186½	144¼	Fidelity Japan Tst	170	-1	–	195
335½	266¼	Fidelity Sp V •	319*	+2½	3.0	347
895	803¾	Finsbury Gwth •	894	–	2.2	975
172¾	139¾	Gibl Small Co Trust •	167	+¼	1.7	188
174	149½	Hend High Inc	167	+1	6.3	182
172½	154½	Hend Intl Inc	167	-½	4.6	190
987¾	724¾	Hend Smaller Co •	848	+6	3.2	970
239	186	Hend Opp	232*	-1	3.1	238
2445¼	1790	Herald Inv •	2445	+15	–	2505
550	387½	HgCapital •	525	-4	1.2	521
140¾	117¾	HICL Infrastructure •	118*	-¾	7.0	156
1352	1148	ICG Enterprise Tst •	1322	+8	2.6	1941
748	644	JPM Claverh'se	713	-3	4.9	763
110½	94	JPM Eur G&I	99*	–	4.7	113
588	470	JPM Japanese •	580	-3	1.1	660
729¾	567½	Land Secs	594*	-1	6.7	–
135	112½	Lowland Inv	127	+½	5.1	144
254	212	Majedie	233*	-1	3.4	280
399	324¾	Mtn Currie Port	373	+3	1.1	378
269	205	Mercantile InvTr •	243½	+1½	3.2	274
605	512¾	Merchants Tst •	568	+4	5.1	576
1296	993	Monks •	1284	+4	0.2	1434
908	797½	Murray Income •	826*	–	4.7	943
263½	236¾	Murray Intl •	257½	-½	4.6	282
56	50½	Northern 2 VCT	54½	–	5.3	57
86	80½	Northern 3 VCT	84	–	5.0	88
59	54	Nthn Venture	57	–	5.6	60
390	344	Pacific Assets	371	-1	1.1	429
341	292½	Pantheon •	340	+½	–	491
130	87	PremierMitonGlb	94½*	–	8.3	107
2030	1698	RIT Cap Ptnrs •	2010	-15	1.9	2600
289½	261	Ruffer Inv Pref •	274½	–	1.9	288
494	404	Schroder Asian TR	484	-1	2.4	519
540	481	Scot American •	513*	–	2.8	574
983¾	718¼	Scot Mortgage	972¼*	+5¼	0.4	1070
1520	1284	Smithson Inv Tst •	1518	+10	–	1680
240	207	STS Global Income	236	-1	2.8	241
175¼	141	Tmpletn Em Mt •	166¾	+¾	3.0	196
360	302½	TR Property •	320	+2	4.9	344
133	105¼	UIL Fin ZDP 2026	132½	+½	–	138
241	200	Utilico Emerg	206*	+2	4.4	257
372½	296½	Worldw HealthTr •	335*	+3	0.8	382

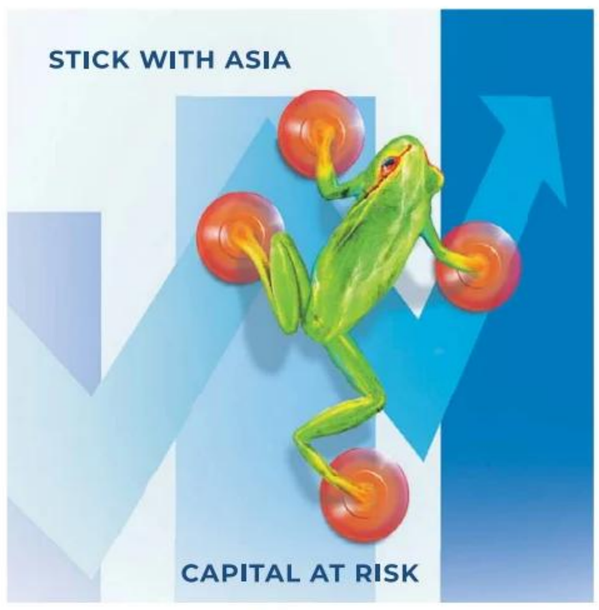
Net Asset Values © 2024 Morningstar Estimated at previous day's close see www.Morningstar.co.uk.

Media -0.42%

52 week High	Low (p)	Stock	Price (p)	+/-	Yld	P/E
899	666	Auto Trader	845	+6¾	1.2	30.0
766	420	Bloomsbury •	670	+6	2.2	16.8
886	719¼	Informa	844¾	-1¾	2.2	28.1
89	55½	ITV •	73½	+¾	6.8	14.1
1263	923¾	Pearson	1253	+2	1.8	23.6
112¼	58¼	Reach	90	-¾	8.2	13.2
3796¾	3004½	RELX	3746	-38	1.6	39.8
710	499¼	Rightmove	675¼	+10	1.4	27.6
878¾	678¼	WPP	867¾	+7	4.5	13.9

Mining -0.67%

2813	1630	Anglo Amer	2464½	-27½	2.6	–
2425	1408½	Antofagasta	1730½	-9	1.5	26.0
2707½	1941¼	BHP Group	2032	-17	5.4	16.6
81	81	Evraz #	81	–	–	0.5
782	435¼	Fresnillo	655½	-8	1.3	26.4
506¼	360¼	Glencore	378	+¾	2.7	14.2
251¾	84¾	Hochschild Mng •	224	+1	–	-28.5
410	291	Kenmare Res	353½	-2½	12.0	3.2
5910	4509	Rio Tinto	4924	-42	6.9	10.1



Oil & Gas -0.60%

541	365¼	BP	377¾*	-1½	6.3	5.5
17¾	10	EnQuest	10¾	-¼	–	-8.5
465¾	247	Hunting •	302	-9	2.7	5.2
45	8¼	Petrofac	10¾	-¼	–	-0.1
2961	2345	Shell	2478*	-16	4.4	11.0
213¼	46	Wood Grp (John) •	64¾	-1¼	–	-5.1

Pharmaceuticals +0.27%

13388	9461	AstraZeneca	10654	+36	2.2	35.4
2378	1478	Genus •	1642*	-20	1.9	–
1823½	1282½	GSK	1344*	+2½	4.5	11.1
2165	1722	Hikma	1931	-9	3.2	28.6
1770	554½	Indivior	862½	-17½	–	–

Property +0.05%

9¾	6	Alina Hldgs	7¼	–	–	22
49¼	37½	Assura •	40¼	-¼	8.3	–
1344	989	Big Yellow Gp •	1028	-2	4.4	–
467¾	342¼	Brit Land	368¼*	–	6.2	–
73¼	48¾	Cap&Regional	63	–	–	–
2530	1874	Derwent Ldn •	2072	+2	3.9	–
381	288	Gt Portland Est •	303½*	+2½	3.6	–
278¾	218½	Grainger •	233	+2½	3.2	55.5
325	246	Hammerson •	294¾	+2¾	5.2	–
259	181	Helical	198*	–	1.7	-1.3
949	739	Segro	751	-1¼	3.8	–
156¼	119	Shaftesbury Capital •	137¼	+1	2.4	3.0
165	120¾	Town Centre	130	+4¼	3.8	–
173	131¼	Tritax Big Box •	137½	-¾	5.5	182

Retailers -1.05%

39¾	13	Brown (N)	38¼	-¼	–	–
90	44	Currys •	81½	+1¼	–	5.5
1279	959	Dunelm •	1140	+6	3.8	15.3
949½	626½	Frasers Group	638	-24	–	7.4
3250	2424	Greggs •	2758	+10	2.4	19.6
212	125	Halfords	145¾	-1¼	5.5	18.7
982½	729¾	Howden Joinery	844	+6	2.5	18.2
1771¾	931¾	JD Sports Fash	1043½*	+2¼	0.9	10.0
333½	209¾	Kingfisher	253¾	-¾	4.9	13.9
415¼	229¾	Marks & Spen	391¼*	-5¾	0.8	17.9
8½	3	Mothercare	4¼	...	–	7.3
11103¾	7952	Next	10000*	-230	2.2	17.4
798¾	278¼	Ocado •	317½	+3¾	–	-8.3
814	280½	Pinewood Tech	339	-1½	–	2.9
161½	93¾	Saga	116	-7¼	–	-1.4
311¼	237¾	Sainsbury J	267*	-¾	4.9	45.3
1499	1069	Smith WH •	1255	+1	2.7	24.2
375¼	217½	Tesco	366¾	-7¾	3.4	21.9

Support services -0.15%

6446	4706	Ashtead Gp	6400	+16	1.3	22.3
3732	2896	Bunzl	3588*	-24	2.0	22.8
23¼	12¾	Capita	17¾	–	–	-1.7
20¾	12½	Carillion #	14¼	–	–	0.5
6075	4828	DCC	5545*	-90	3.6	16.8
119¾	68¾	De La Rue	112	+5	–	-11.0
191¼	125¾	Essentra •	147¾	+1¾	2.5	82.0
3978½	2981	Experian	3710	-19	1.3	36.0
17810	13455	Ferguson Ent	16980	-10	1.4	–
5240	4011	Intertek Group	4826	-40	2.7	26.2
211	152	Int'l Workplace •	168¾	+1½	0.8	-7.9
172	117¼	Johnson Serv	144¾	+¼	2.2	22.6
127	93	MITIE Gp •	109	+¾	3.9	11.1
517¾	336¼	Rentokil	408¾	+7	2.2	27.0
536¼	385	Ricardo Gp	395	–	3.2	–
472	320	Robt Walters	338	-3	7.0	16.8
196¾	146	Serco Group •	147½	-7¾	2.4	8.1
34½	18¼	SIG	19¼	+¼	–	-5.1
976	687	Travis P •	750	+3½	1.5	41.4

Telecommunications -0.10%

162	101¼	BT Group	157½	-1¼	5.1	18.1
1932	1356	Telecom Plus •	1790*	-36	4.7	19.9
79½	62¼	Vodafone	72¼*	+½	7.8	20.7

Tobaccos -0.26%

3010	2233	Brit Am Tob	2968	-3	7.9	-4.6
2636	1662	Imp Brands	2573*	-18	6.0	8.6

Transport -0.12%

364¾	209¾	Int'l Dist Services •	357	+¾	0.6	-24.5
445	331	ZIGUP •	337½	-4	7.8	6.1

Travel & Leisure -0.48%

1936	965¼	Carnival •	1875	-36½	–	-398.2
591¼	404¾	easyJet	574¾	-1¾	2.1	9.5
1034	498½	Entain	813¼	-¾	2.2	-5.4
189	128¾

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Business

MARKETS

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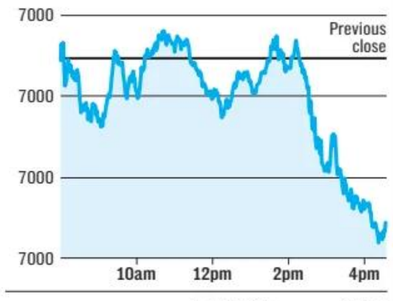


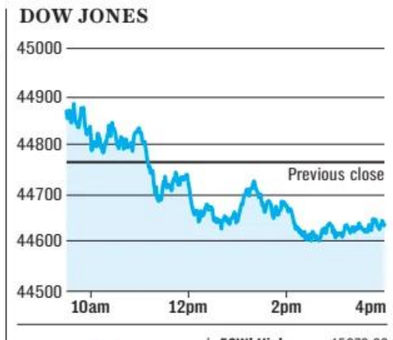
8308.61
-40.77 (-0.49pc)

52WkHigh	8474.41	
52WkLow	7404.08	
Yield	3.57pc	+0.02
P/E Ratio	13.86	-0.07

BIGGEST RISER
B&MEurValRtl
361½p
+9⅜ (+2.67pc)

BIGGEST FALLER
Frasers Group
638p
-24 (-3.63pc)

DOW JONES



44642.52
-123.19 (-0.28pc)

52WkHigh	45073.63	
52WkLow	36021.95	

FTSE 250	21059.00	+57.94 (+0.28pc)
FTSE All Share	4543.98	-17.23 (-0.38pc)
FTSE All Share Yield	3.54	+0.02
FTSE Eurotop 100	4067.94	+9.39 (+0.23pc)
Nikkei 225	39091.17	-304.43 (-0.77pc)
EURO STOXX 50	4977.78	+26.20 (+0.53pc)
S&P 500	6090.27	+15.16 (+0.25pc)
Nasdaq	19859.77	+159.51 (+0.81pc)

CURRENCIES

£$
Rate 1.2744
Change -0.13¢

£€
Rate 1.2064
Change -0.01¢

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COMMODITIES

GOLD
$2631.57
(£2065)
+0.20 (+0.01pc)

BRENT CRUDE
$71.12
(February)
-0.97 (-1.35pc)

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Debanking anger
Tech billionaires lash out at Biden's administration as rows over access to accounts break out in US

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Immigration matters
It's nonsense to argue Britain needs lots of foreign workers to build 300,000 houses a year
Matthew Lynn

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Britain's high streets 'will be ravaged' after Christmas

Small businesses braced for 'January of discontent' after Labour's tax raids, warn Conservatives

By **Genevieve Holl-Allen**

HIGH streets will be "ravaged" after Christmas as Labour's tax raid costs small businesses as much as £32,000 more a year, the Tories have warned.

Rachel Reeves unveiled a raft of measures in her Budget that negatively affect small businesses, including an increase in employer's National Insurance (NI) and changes to business rates.

The Chancellor also cut the relief entrepreneurs can claim when passing their company onto their children, so those inheriting firms face a 40pc tax bill on half of everything above £1m. The move mimics a controversial inheritance tax raid on farms.

Now, a new analysis has revealed that the changes could add up to £32,000 extra in tax a year from next April for small businesses.

Speaking to *The Telegraph*, Andrew Griffith, the shadow business secretary, warned that the changes amount to a "triple whammy" on family firms which would lead to a "January of discontent".

Mr Griffith said: "They are like family farms, they're often not producing a huge income and if the owner faces the prospect of this new death tax, then we're going to see very many of them just simply give up.

"They will capitulate in the face of all of the other changes that are already happening to National Insurance, high street business rates, or the motivation for the inheritance tax change itself and that will leave our high streets ravaged."

The analysis shows that the increase in NI contributions alone will mean the average shop facing a hike of £7,576 while a small chain of shops will face an increase of up to £22,728. Meanwhile, changes to business rates, including the reduction in the relief for retail from 75pc to 40pc, will mean the average shop is taxed an extra £3,091 while a small chain of three shops is set to face a hike of £9,273.

Other changes are also set to significantly increase costs for small businesses. These include changes to the National Living Wage, which will cost the average small shop up to £12,057 and a small chain of three shops up to £36,173. The Employment Rights Bill is set to cost £156 per employee, equivalent to £1,477 for a shop or £4,437 for a chain of small shops. In total, a small chain of three shops will face a £32,001 increase in taxes, owing to measures announced at the Budget.

Mr Griffith warned: "I think we could well see a January of discontent where businesses feel that they are already being whacked, that they've got further changes coming down the track from the Budget and the change to the family death tax is something that will just sap their motivation to carry on."

He added: "It is recognised that it is much better to have a goose that sits in the community laying eggs for generations than to seek to snatch value in one particular go via a death tax.

"That's why this relief exists. They are making a contribution. The contribution they're making is to jobs, to providing character to the community, keeping our high streets vibrant."

The Confederation of British Industry and Family Business UK have previously warned that the changes to business relief alone could cause a hit to economic output of £9.4bn.

The relief allows shareholders to leave business assets to family members without paying inheritance tax on them. From next April, full business relief will only apply to the first £1m of assets upon a shareholder's death, with everything above subject to 20pc tax.

A Labour spokesman said: "We'll take no lectures from the Tories who hammered business for 14 years, overseeing 900,000 small businesses shut in the last three years. We're cleaning up their economic mess, with nearly a million firms set to benefit from paying reduced or no national insurance at all."

The Treasury has been contacted for comment.

DANNY LAWSON/PA WIRE

Christmas shopping Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, yesterday on a visit to Leeds Corn Exchange ahead of Small Business Saturday today. The campaign, now in its 12th year, encourages customers to support independent, local businesses.

Drivers 'at risk of higher car insurance' after £3.6bn deal

By **James Titcomb** *and* **Michael Bow**

A £3.6bn deal to create one of Britain's biggest car insurers has raised fears of higher prices.

Direct Line said yesterday it had agreed a provisional 275p a share takeover offer from larger rival Aviva.

The takeover would give Aviva a car insurance market share of more than 20pc, according to Confused.com, overtaking Admiral, the UK's biggest motor insurer. Direct Line and Aviva are the second and third biggest motor insurers in the UK respectively.

Deutsche Bank analysts also say that the combined group would have a market share in motor, home and travel insurance of about 20pc – ahead of Admiral with between 10pc and 16pc in those markets.

Foxglove, a consumer advocacy group, which campaigns against mega-mergers, attacked the tie-up and warned the deal could drive prices up for consumers.

"Aviva will now face substantially less competition from commercial rivals and that means less choice for consumers, so they lose the ability to vote with their feet if they get hit with higher prices and worse terms," said Rosa Curling, Foxglove's co-executive director.

Competition lawyers said the deal was likely to attract attention from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), which would look at whether it could lead to higher prices for consumers. "The CMA would be likely to focus in particular on whether insurance premiums might go up as a direct consequence of the transaction," said Alex Haffner, competition partner at Fladgate.

Direct Line shareholders will own about 12.5pc of Aviva if the deal goes through. Aviva and the CMA declined to comment.

BT loses bid to run emergency mobile network for police and fire

By **James Titcomb**

BT is set to miss a £900m deal to upgrade police and ambulances radios after losing out to American tech giant IBM.

The Home Office is poised to select a joint bid from IBM and Samsung to run IT for the emergency services network (ESN), a £14bn project to modernise communications used by the police, fire service and ambulances, *The Telegraph* understands. The ESN, devised during the coalition government, was designed to save billions of pounds of taxpayer money by running on commercial mobile networks instead of the dedicated Airwave radio system used today.

However, its original £6.2bn budget has risen to £14bn and it will arrive more than a decade later than its forecast 2017 start date, leaving emergency services reliant on the ageing Airwave system. The Home Office's decision to select IBM and Samsung comes despite the fact that a rival bid from BT and Leonardo, the Italian government contractor, had previously been considered the frontrunner.

John Black, ESN programme director, had a 34-year career at IBM before joining the government project in 2020. The ESN project has become one of Whitehall's most troublesome, blighted by legal cases and technical issues.

The winner of the lucrative contract will replace Motorola, which left the ESN programme in 2022 amid a clash with regulators over claims it was overcharging the taxpayer for access to the existing radio network.

The breakdown has been blamed for the project's delays, with Motorola receiving hundreds of millions of pounds for work on the project since 2015 despite playing no further role.

BT's EE subsidiary has already been chosen to provide the network infrastructure for the ESN, a deal that was last week extended at a cost of £1.3bn.

However, the company had bid for the multi-year "user services" contract, which would involve managing accounts for the 108 police, fire and ambulance services set to use the network, providing handsets, and designing bespoke "push to talk" functionality demanded by emergency responders.

One industry source said the BT and Leonardo bid had been considered the preferred bidder, but that there may have been concerns about awarding two major contracts to the same company, given EE's existing role.

BT did not comment. IBM did not respond to a request for comment.

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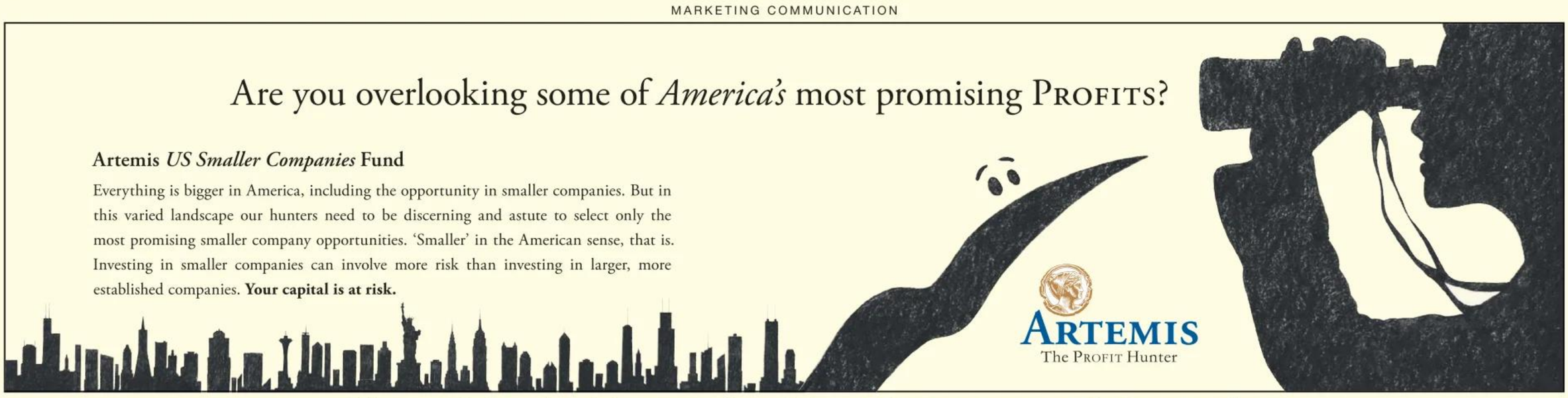

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Business comment

Kate Andrews

Starmer's tepid bath of a speech is no shock

"I don't think there's a swamp to be drained here," Sir Keir Starmer told his audience at Pinewood Studios as he geared up to, once again, relaunch his government. "But I do think too many people in Whitehall are comfortable in the tepid bath of managed decline.

"To paraphrase JFK," he said, "you choose change, not because it's easy, but because it's hard."

To credit the Prime Minister, he does not seem at all "comfortable" with the obvious declining trajectory of the UK. Indeed, he is so uncomfortable with Britain's direction, he has once again reset his agenda, despite arriving in Whitehall with a massive majority and mandate just five months ago.

But to talk about change is not the same as delivering it. The six milestones announced could be described as turning on the lukewarm taps, filling the bathtub with lots more lukewarm water.

> 'The biggest question is not how Labour will reform key institutions, but where is the reform?'

Some of the promises are worthy in principle. Far more children should be "school-ready". Residents should have the confidence that if they are the victim of a serious crime, their case will be followed up and investigated. But these are not transformational milestones. In some cases, they cannot even be described as "change". The milestone for the NHS, for example, is for the health service to make good on an existing target: that 92pc of patients be seen for routine care within 18 weeks.

That the NHS has not delivered this target for almost a decade does not mean that if it finally does, the country will be transformed. (Officials are already suggesting it cannot be done.) It will simply mean a very basic standard of care – in an advanced economy, no less – is finally being met.

If Labour really does deliver 1.5m new homes by the end of this parliament, it will deserve all the credit for doing so. If it really gets to generating 95pc of our electricity from "clean power", it will be considered a miracle. For both the housing and energy pledges, the details remain unclear and the plan is vague at best.

This is one of the big risks taken when a party announces "milestones" with specific metrics. The immediate question that follows is: OK, how?

But there is an even greater risk that those milestones reveal the extent of a government's ambitions. In the case of this week's announcements, the biggest question is not how the Government will reform key institutions, but where is the reform?

Why is it just so difficult to change the UK's trajectory? I was struck by comments made by writer Matthew Syed on Times Radio this week, talking about a different, but neighbouring nation. "Since 1970, France has had governments of Left, Right and centre", he said, "and they've run deficits every single year."

How is it that parties rooted in completely different ideologies end up all contributing to ever-increasing debt levels? "The problem isn't the political structure ... It's not politicians," says Syed. "It's electorates, who are putting today over the future."

Voters in France – and across the West – have been repeatedly sold the idea by politicians that they can have both never-ending spending and also keep taxes down.

People find that offer appealing, of course – no trade-offs are involved. It also quickly reveals itself to be undeliverable, as Rishi Sunak found out when he claimed his party had been "cutting taxes" when it had implemented stealth taxes by freezing tax thresholds. It's what Starmer found out after the Budget, when it was made abundantly clear how higher taxes on business would impact employee wages. It explains the launch of yet another reboot now.

This is the change that is long overdue: in both policy but also narrative. To tell people, honestly, that too much has been promised, the state has overstretched itself, so rather than doing specific tasks well, it feels like all public services are collapsing.

This change would be a real reset – and one that could get Labour back on firmer footing, as it tries to make good on the politically controversial, but deeply necessary reforms around housing and healthcare.

The milestone announcement, however, suggested the Government is not quite ready to do so. To paraphrase the paraphraser: change is hard.

Kate Andrews is economics editor at The Spectator

Employers need to stop trying to play the immigration card

MATTHEW LYNN

Low-paid migrant workers are a drain on public finances when millions are claiming benefits

The building industry claims it has too few workers to hit Government targets GETTY IMAGES

THE National Federation of Builders this week has been warning the Government that the country needs hundreds of thousands of immigrants if it is to have any chance of hitting its house building targets. We don't have the people, it says. It will take years to train them all. And even then they may not be able to do the jobs that need to be done.

The federation joins the long list of trade bodies, from care homes to hospitality chains to distribution firms, constantly threatening the Government that one objective or another won't be met unless we ramp up immigration again.

Given that he carefully failed to mention the subject in his reset on Thursday, Sir Keir Starmer, the Prime Minister, is probably planning to give in. Yet employers ought to stop constantly playing the immigration card. It isn't working anymore – and the claims that nothing can be done without huge numbers of foreign workers sound increasingly hysterical and ridiculous.

There was probably not much chance of the Labour Government meeting its target of building 300,000 homes a year anyway. The planning system is far too complicated, local councils are refusing to co-operate, judicial review is too powerful.

Green targets and affordable housing quotas mean many projects don't make any financial sense for developers. And even if all those obstacles could be overcome, there is another major problem. We won't have enough brickies or sparkies to do all the work.

The National Federation of Builders argued this week that if the target of 1.5m new homes by the end of this parliament was to be hit, then the UK would need to bring in "hundreds of thousands" of new workers. It takes years to train each apprentice, and declining birth rates mean there are not enough teenagers anyway, it argued, suggesting that the UK needed temporary work visas to bring in the people the industry requires.

Trade bodies are so used to making this argument, and to ministers quietly agreeing to whatever they ask for, that the papers and submissions probably write themselves.

Across a range of industries, whatever the problem might be, the answer is always the same. Hand out more visas. It has worked time and time again, it saves the employers the expense of training up the staff they need, and typically means they can get away with lower wages as well.

Sir Keir will probably give them what they want. It was telling that he made no mention of a figure for net migration when setting out the goals for his Government, even though all the polling suggests it is the top issue with the voters. The builders, and all the other industries clamouring for more immigration, are pushing at an open door.

The trouble is, it is clearly nonsense to argue the UK needs lots of foreign workers simply to build 300,000 houses a year. In 1953, for example, Harold Macmillan, the then housing minister, built 318,000 homes, well ahead of today's target, with a far smaller population – 50.7m people, compared with 68m today – and hardly any immigration, at least compared with the levels the UK has now.

If we could build that much then, how come we can't do it today? After all, the technology available has improved, and houses are so much more expensive it pays better as well.

In reality, we have plenty of people to do the work. There are 2.8m people on long-term sickness benefits, and many more on Universal Credit.

There are also plenty of people who could be persuaded to switch industries if the pay was better and the work was more satisfying.

> 'The blunt truth is this. The arguments for constant mass migration are collapsing'

Is it really true that it takes three years or more to train an apprentice? Hasn't artificial intelligence, and remote learning, done anything to speed up the process? Are there really not enough young people?

Or is it simply the case that the building companies are not doing enough to tempt teenagers away from university courses that land them with huge debts and little in the way of marketable skills in favour of a trade instead? And does robotics not mean that, even on a building site, there are many jobs that could be done by a machine instead of by a bloke with a bright yellow hat.

Time again, employers just ask for more work visas, instead of thinking creatively about how they might be able to manage without them.

The blunt truth is this. The arguments for constant mass migration are collapsing.

Low-paid migrant workers are a net drain on the public finances, even more so once dependants are taken into account. Immigration traps the economy in a low-skill, low productivity cycle from which it is almost impossible to break free. And it puts far too much pressure on public services and the country's creaking infrastructure (indeed, it seems to have escaped the federation that there isn't much point in building 300,000 extra homes if they are all needed to house the people constructing them).

Sure, it is primarily up to the Government to fix that and design an immigration policy that works for the country as a whole. But it is also up to employers. They need to stop playing the immigration card every time something needs to get done.

It is not working anymore – and there are far better solutions if only they had the imagination and flair to start focusing on them.

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[1] 27% increase from 2022 to 2023 - Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023

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Expiry date: / Date:

Title: Full name:

Full address:

Postcode:

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Tech billionaires lash out in US debanking row

Crypto bosses claim they have been unfairly targeted by the Biden administration, writes *Matthew Field*

Brian Armstrong, left, the chief executive of Coinbase, has accused Joe Biden of debanking crypto bosses, while Elon Musk has amplified such claims on X

WHEN Coutts threatened to close the bank account of Nigel Farage last year, the fallout claimed the scalp of one of Britain's most senior banking executives and triggered a national debate over "debanking".

Was it really acceptable for a bank to close the accounts of customers seemingly without warning, explanation or recourse? And were the decisions motivated by politics?

Now, anger over debanking is picking up steam across the Atlantic. Technology billionaires, many of whom supported Donald Trump's presidential campaign, accuse the Biden administration of cutting them off from the US banking system.

Executives, primarily drawn from the cryptocurrency industry, have railed against what they have dubbed "Operation Chokepoint 2.0" – an alleged government effort to smother their businesses by making it almost impossible to maintain a formal banking presence.

"This is one of the reasons we ended up supporting Trump," Marc Andreessen, the billionaire co-founder of the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, told the podcaster Joe Rogan last week. "We've had, like, 30 founders debanked in the last four years."

Over the past week, these claims have been amplified by billionaire Trump supporters, including Elon Musk, as well as dozens of cryptocurrency and tech founders. They allege they have been cut off from the US banking system by the Biden administration and government watchdogs.

David A Marcus, a former Facebook executive who led the tech giant's Libra digital currency project, claimed its plans were "killed" by top government officials, including Janet Yellen, Biden's Treasury Secretary. "There was no legal or regulatory angle left for the government or regulators to kill the project. It was 100pc a political kill," he claimed in a post on X.

The alleged debanking of crypto entrepreneurs comes amid a years-long crackdown on the digital currency business and their billionaire founders. Under the Biden administration, US regulators have unleashed a series of civil and criminal lawsuits against cryptocurrency exchanges. Those prosecuting such cases claim they are simply enforcing regulation or cracking down on wrongdoing.

Yet critics claim it is part of a broader effort to target political opponents. Andreessen claimed that it is not only businesses that have been impacted, but "just generally political opponents".

In her book, Melania Trump, the former first lady, claimed her bank account and that of her son Barron were shut down in the wake of the Jan 6 riots. "This decision appeared to be rooted in political discrimination," she wrote.

Farage's fury toppled Alison Rose, Britain's most senior female banker and the ultimate boss of Coutts, in a victory for the Reform UK leader.

However, US cryptocurrency executives claim their anger has been channelled towards even more powerful ends: winning the White House.

In the technology industry, the crackdown has prompted many billionaire cryptocurrency entrepreneurs to become funders of the Republican Party's election efforts.

Crypto donors spent $245m (£192m) backing pro-cryptocurrency candidates, largely Republicans. One crypto-funded political action committee spent $40m alone to defeat Sherrod Brown, a Democratic senator for Ohio.

Trump has seemingly repaid the industry for their support, naming Paul Atkins, a cryptocurrency lobbyist, as his nominee to chair the US Security and Exchange Commission.

On Thursday, the president-elect claimed responsibility for helping to drive a surge in the price of Bitcoin to $100,000, posting "You're welcome" to his followers on Truth Social.

Brian Armstrong, the chief executive of Coinbase, the $80bn cryptocurrency trading app, said in a post on X the crackdown on cryptocurrency companies was one of the most "un-American things that happened in the Biden administration" and "a major factor in the Dems losing the election".

Kyle Bligen, director of financial policy at the tech lobbying group Chamber of Progress, says: "I've heard directly from crypto-founders at conferences and round tables who view 'debanking' as a key driver of their political advocacy.

"Many in the industry see this issue as a motivating factor behind their support for incoming president Donald Trump, hoping his administration can reset regulatory relations with the crypto and blockchain sectors."

Andreessen, whose venture firm is an investor in Coinbase, and others have compared "Operation Choke Point 2.0" to a previous Obama-era scandal known as "Operation Choke Point". This involved US justice officials pushing banks to close accounts used by legal – if politically controversial – customers, such as sex workers, gun dealers or legal marijuana shops.

After Trump's victory in 2016, the programme was shut down. But the cryptocurrency industry believes the initiative was reheated on Biden's watch, in what Armstrong called an attempt to "unlawfully kill our entire industry".

In June, Coinbase hired a research firm to sue the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the US banking agency, accusing it of having "pressured financial institutions to cut off the industry from the banking system". It has accused the regulator of sending so-called "pause letters" to banks, ordering them to halt crypto related activity indefinitely. After its efforts to reveal these documents using Freedom of Information laws were blocked, the regulator was sued.

The lawsuit claims: "It is illegal for financial regulators to coerce regulated institutions in secret to cut ties with businesses the government disfavours."

John Berlau, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, says the "supposed purpose" of this crackdown is to "prevent banks from doing business with firms that have a 'reputational risk'. The government tries to intimidate banks into keeping the reason for debanking a secret".

The Federal Reserve and the FDIC previously insisted there was no blanket ban on cryptocurrency companies in banking. "Banking organisations are neither prohibited nor discouraged from providing banking services to customers of any specific class or type, as permitted by law or regulation," they said in 2023.

Still, US officials have aggressively pursued regulatory action against some of the biggest names in the digital currency space.

In particular, US regulators ramped up their efforts in late 2022 the wake of the bankruptcy of FTX, which at one stage was valued at $32bn, and the crash of digital coin Terra Luna, which was at one point valued at $50bn. Both led to concerns that a major collapse could spread to the wider financial industry.

Supporters of this crackdown argue that regulators are justified in taking an intense interest in the crypto industry. Fears of scams, fraud, money-laundering and cyber attacks have never been far from cryptocurrency businesses.

Carter Dougherty, of the non-profit group Americans for Financial Reform, says: "It is absolutely justified that banking regulators take a particularly jaundiced eye to the activities of cryptocurrency companies, precisely because they have been so systemically involved in fraud. This is a no-brainer. It shouldn't be that controversial.

"But you now have cryptocurrency lobbyists who are going to try and push for what in the end will be some kind of turning a blind eye to fraud."

Anger over the difficulties in accessing banking in the cryptocurrency industry are not limited to the US. In the UK, many high street banks block or flag cryptocurrency-related activity.

In a report from the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking, MPs found "groups such as cryptocurrency businesses, jewellers, bookies, politicians, sex workers, yacht brokers and others are seen as problematic for banks".

It added: "Pretty much the entire banking industry has turned its back on the crypto industry. Even the industry trade body, CryptoUK, has found itself being refused banking facilities, not because it trades in cryptocurrencies in any way (the organisation only accepts membership fees in fiat currency) but because it has the word 'crypto' in its name."

Bivu Das, of Kraken, a cryptocurrency exchange, says: "To date, many UK traditional high street banks and popular neobanks [digital banks] have blocked or restricted their customers from depositing to crypto platforms, including FCA-registered ones like Kraken.

"To be clear, this is a bank telling people how they can or can't spend their money. We believe that is simply not right in 2024."

Still, data from Action Fraud suggest that £245m was lost to cryptocurrency scams in the UK in 2023 – a number that probably under-reports the true scale of the problem.

In the US, Musk and his allies such as Andreessen are on the warpath. Musk, who is to lead a Trump commission on government efficiency, last week tweeted that he would "Delete CFPB (the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau)", which has been criticised by crypto investors despite the fact the office has itself lobbied against debanking.

The agency has been championed by Elizabeth Warren, a Democratic senator who has attracted the ire of cryptocurrency enthusiasts for her scepticism about the industry.

Dougherty says the regulator has been routinely targeted by industries who "want to stop consumer protection authorities from doing their job of stopping people getting ripped off".

Even still, Berlau, of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, says the heavy-handed banking crackdown in the US has meant businesses that have tried to be on the right side of regulations have been unfairly targeted.

"Industries are being painted with a broad brush, and individuals and businesses working in an industry that somehow offends the political elite get debanked."

> 'Many in the industry see this issue as a motivating factor behind their support for incoming president Donald Trump'

> 'There was no legal or regulatory angle left for the government or regulators to kill the project. It was 100pc a political kill'

The killing of health boss unleashes anger against US insurers

Many Americans, furious at the country's insurance system, lack sympathy. By *Hannah Boland*

The assassin who shot Brian Thompson on a New York street

TWO years before Brian Thompson was shot dead on the streets of New York, a post by the health insurance executive received a string of anguished, angry responses.

"Making health care more affordable means more money in people's pockets," Thompson, the chief executive of UnitedHealth Group's insurance unit, had written on LinkedIn. "That's more important than ever right now. Reducing drug prices and improving price transparency are two ways we are working to lower costs for UnitedHealthcare members."

Underneath the post, there were few who praised the sentiment. "I'm curious, money in whose pockets?" wrote one user. It seems members are not the primary recipients when the ratio of CEO to median employee pay is 30:1 and revenue increases over 10pc in a year." Another spoke of how her 86-year-old mother's healthcare plan had been terminated with no notice.

"Do better," said a woman who said she had been diagnosed with stage four cancer, but had been forced to end her insurance coverage after UnitedHealth denied her medications.

"Every month there is a different reason for the denial. As of today, we are out of pocket for the year, having spent well over $20,000 (£16,000). Since we are in our 60s – we don't have time to recoup that."

Now, Thompson's murder at the hands of a masked assassin has unleashed a further torrent of public anger in the US about the state of the country's healthcare system.

For some, sympathy appears to be in short supply.

Within hours of the killing, videos appeared online in which nurses and patients posted horror stories of when they have had to deal with healthcare insurers. Under a video on CNN of the shooting, one commenter said: "Thoughts and deductibles to the family. Unfortunately my condolences are out-of-network."

A manhunt is still under way for the assailant in Thompson's attack and their motive is unknown. However, speculation has been mounting that he was targeted because of his work in the health insurance industry.

Speaking to reporters this week, Thompson's estranged wife suggested he had been the victim of threats in the past. She said these might have been over healthcare "coverage".

Evidence discovered on Thursday only added fuel to the theory that Thompson's job has played a role in the attack. Law enforcement officials revealed that shell casings had been found at the crime scene emblazoned with the words "deny", "defend" and "depose". Some suggested this could be a reference to the tactics used by insurers to avoid paying out claims to patients, with a book published in 2010 titled *Delay, Deny, Defend: Why Insurance Companies Don't Pay Claims and What You Can Do About It*.

In the book, author Jay Feinman writes: "All insurance companies have an incentive to chisel their customers in order to increase profits."

Frustration with the state of the US healthcare system has been building for many years. Speaking in April, Democratic senator Bernie Sanders said: "It is a system not designed to provide health care to all people in a cost-effective way. It is a system designed to make huge profits for the insurance companies, the drug companies, and many other industries within the system." He claimed this system was "totally broken".

Insurers argue that they are facing rising medical costs, rather than raking in profits. However, there are signs that the system is starting to creak.

Across America, 85m people are either uninsured or underinsured.

For those who do pay for insurance, it is a significant chunk of their pay packet each month.

By 2022, health insurance was second only to wages as part of employee compensation, at 7.9pc of their pay packet.

The costs of family health insurance plans offered through employers have only risen since, up a massive 7pc this year to $25,572.

Many of those who are covered claim that they are being overcharged for services that they believed should be covered by their insurance.

Research by the Commonwealth Fund earlier this year found that more than two of five working-age adults had received a bill or been charged a co-payment – a fixed amount patients must pay before insurers offer coverage – for a health care service that they thought should have been covered by insurance. It has led to growing resentment for health insurers across the country.

According to a survey from Gallup, less than a third of Americans have a positive view of the healthcare industry. Only oil and gas, the federal government and drug companies came out worse.

A particular gripe by those dealing with insurers has been "denial rates". Although companies are not required to publish how often they are denying claims, official studies have claimed the issue is significant.

A Senate committee investigation earlier this year claimed that the three largest companies in the space – UnitedHealthcare, Humana and CVS – were all denying nursing care to people who had suffered from falls and strokes. It accused UnitedHealthcare of denying requests for nursing stays three times more often than it did for other services.

The companies rejected the report.

For now, all UnitedHealthcare executives can do is mourn their colleague. Andrew Witty, the chief executive of parent company UnitedHealth Group, said the case was a "terrible tragedy".

"Our hearts are with his family, especially his mom, his wife Paulie, his brother and his two boys, who lost a father today," he said.

Yet not everyone can appreciate the human tragedy of the case.

As one nurse on TikTok said: "I just can't feel sympathy for him because of all of those patients and their families."

Counting the cost of healthcare

85m

Americans who are uninsured or underinsured

7.9pc

Percentage of pay spent on health insurance

7pc

Rise in cost of health insurance this year alone

Trustpilot

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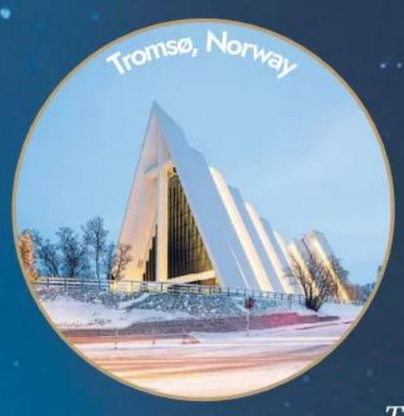

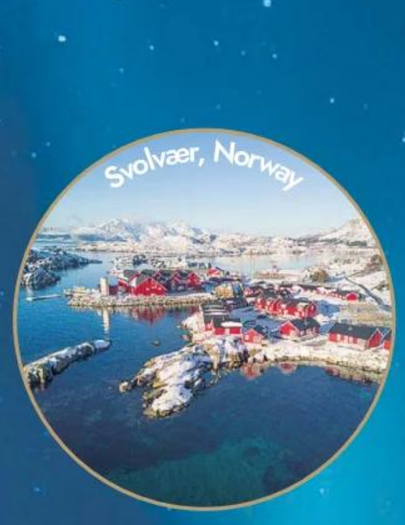

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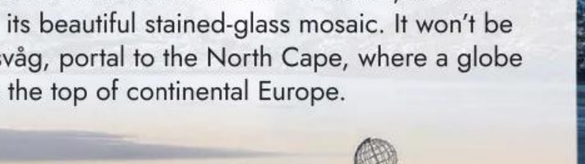

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Forecast

General situation

Storm Darragh will bring gales to much of Wales and England today; strong gales in the west. Rainy periods through Britain. Snow will fall across the Scottish Highlands.

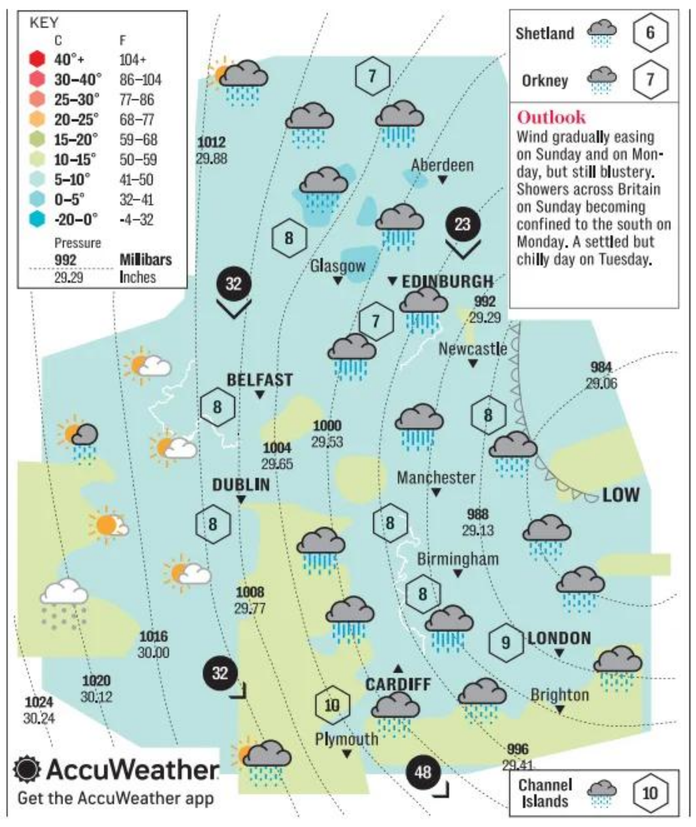
◆**London, Cent S England, Channel Is, SW England, E England, SE England, E Anglia, Midlands:** Very windy today with rainy periods. Northwesterly gales that can locally be damaging. Max 44-52F (7-11C). Remaining windy tonight with rainy spells. Min 39-47F (4-8C).

◆**NW England, Lake Dist, IoM, Cent N England, NE England:** Very windy today and tonight with outbreaks of rain. Northwesterly gales. Max 39-53F (4-12C). Min 30-45F (-1 to 7C).

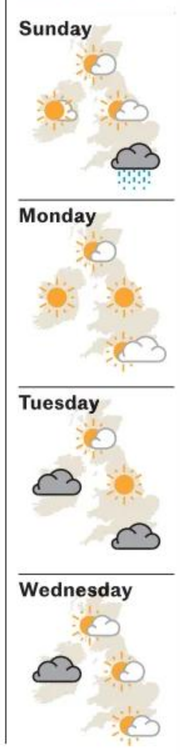
◆**Wales:** Severe northwesterly gales and rain today. Windy tonight. Max 45-52F (7-11C). Min 38-45F (3-7C).

◆**N Ireland:** Showers today. Severe gales early gradually lessening. Max 44-52F (7-11C). Mainly dry tonight. Min 37-43F (3-6C).

◆**SW Scotland, NW Scotland, Glasgow, Cent Highlands, Argyll, W Isles, SE Scotland, NE Scotland, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Moray Firth, Orkney, Shetland:** Rain and wind today into tonight; snow across the Highlands. A strong N wind. Max 30-50F (-1 to 10C). Min 24-42F (-4 to 6C).



Four day forecast



European readings

Last night's report for 24 hours to 6pm

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Akrotiri	20	17	windy
Alicante	27	13	windy
Amsterdam	12	8	rain
Athens	17	10	showers
Barcelona	19	10	windy
Bari	13	9	p/cldy
Belgrade	8	3	showers
Benidorm	26	11	p/cldy
Bergen	6	4	showers
Berlin	7	1	snow
Biarritz	17	13	rain
Bodrum	17	13	showers
Bordeaux	16	10	showers
Brest	14	7	showers
Brussels	11	6	showers
Bucharest	5	0	rain
Budapest	3	-1	snow
Cagliari	19	4	p/cldy
Chamonix	6	1	rain
Copenhagen	5	3	snow
Corfu	19	15	cloudy
Cork	12	5	rain
Corsica	13	4	rain
Crete	20	14	cloudy
Dublin	11	4	rain
Dubrovnik	14	10	rain
Faro	20	9	p/cldy
Florence	7	2	p/cldy
Frankfurt	10	4	windy
Funchal	23	17	cloudy
Gdansk	3	-1	snow
Geneva	11	5	rain
Gibraltar	23	13	sunny
Hamburg	9	3	showers
Helsinki	0	-1	snow
Innsbruck	9	0	showers
Istanbul	14	8	haze
Kyiv	2	-2	snow
La Rochelle	15	10	p/cldy
Lisbon	19	12	p/cldy
Locarno	15	2	showers
Luxembourg	9	4	windy
Madrid	16	4	p/cldy
Majorca	20	6	p/cldy
Malaga	23	10	sunny
Malta	18	16	p/cldy
Marseille	16	4	windy
Menorca	18	9	p/cldy
Milan	10	1	showers
Monaco	17	7	p/cldy
Moscow	-4	-7	snow
Munich	7	2	rain
Naples	15	7	p/cldy
Nice	20	7	p/cldy
Nicosia	19	9	p/cldy
Oporto	17	11	cloudy
Oslo	1	-1	snow
Palermo	17	13	p/cldy
Paris	12	7	p/cldy
Perpignan	20	11	windy
Prague	6	0	rain
Reykjavik	-1	-7	sunny
Rhodes	17	14	showers
Riga	0	-3	cloudy
Rome	13	2	p/cldy
Saint Malo	12	8	p/cldy
Salzburg	7	2	snow
Santander	18	14	rain
Santiago/Comp.	15	12	rain
Sofia	5	2	cloudy
St, Petersburg	-1	-4	snow
Stockholm	3	-3	p/cldy
Strasbourg	12	7	windy
Tenerife	27	20	cloudy
Tirana	17	9	cloudy
Toulouse	15	9	showers
Valencia	25	9	sunny
Venice	7	1	haze
Vienna	3	0	snow
Vigo	17	13	cloudy
Vilnius	-2	-4	cloudy
Warsaw	3	0	cloudy
Zagreb	4	-1	showers
Zurich	8	5	showers

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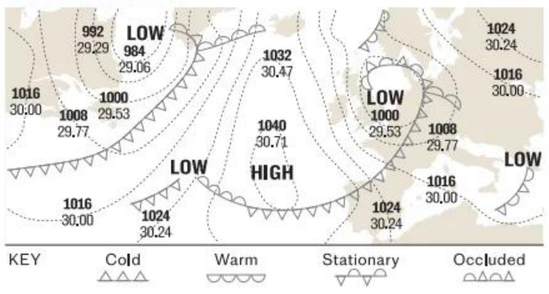
British readings

Last night's report for 24 hours to 6pm - *estimated readings

	Sun hrs	Rain in	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Aberdeen	1.9	0.00	8	3	cloudy
Aberystwyth	2.7*	0.04	11	5	showers
Antrim	0.0	0.29	10	3	showers
Aviemore	0.0	0.12	6	1	showers
Barnstaple	3.9*	0.22*	11*	5*	showers
Barrow-in-Furns.	3.4*	0.10	11	6	showers
Basingstoke	4.0	0.20	13	5	showers
Bedford	4.9*	0.21	12	4	showers
Belfast	5.5*	0.62	11*	4*	rain
Berwick	1.5	0.06	8	3	showers
Birmingham	4.4*	0.02	12	5	showers
Bodmin	1.0*	0.07	12	4	showers
Bournemouth	0.4	0.10	14	3	showers
Braintree	5.5*	0.14	13	6	showers
Brecon	3.7*	0.05	11	1	showers
Bridlington	5.9*	0.21	9	6	showers
Brighton	5.0*	0.08	13	6	showers
Bristol	5.2*	0.28	13*	5*	showers
Camborne	0.0	0.16	13	7	showers
Cardiff	0.0	0.05	13	6	showers
Carlisle	4.8*	0.04	9	4	showers
Catterick	2.2	0.01	10	4	showers
Cheltenham	5.0*	0.20	13*	4*	showers
Chester	0.5	0.59	11	7	rain
Coventry	5.4*	0.23	12*	5*	showers
Doncaster	5.1*	0.09	11*	6*	showers
Dover	3.1*	0.00	13	6	cloudy
Dundee	1.1	0.04	8	1	showers
Eastbourne	3.7	0.19	13	5	showers
Edinburgh	0.1	0.10	8	4	showers
Epsom	3.9*	0.12	13	4	showers
Falmouth	1.5*	0.04	13	7	showers
Farnborough	5.5*	0.00	13*	4*	p/cloudy
Fort William	0.0	0.37	7	2	rain
Glasgow	0.0	0.26	8	3	showers
Great Malvern	4.8*	0.04	13	5	showers
Grimsby	5.9*	0.00	12	4	p/cloudy
Guernsey	4.5*	0.02	14	9	showers
Hereford	5.5*	0.03	12	3	showers
High Wycombe	5.3*	0.28	13*	5*	showers
Holyhead	0.0	0.02	11	6	showers
Huddersfield	2.8*	0.00	8	4	cloudy
Ipswich	3.0	0.16	12	6	showers
Isle of Man	0.1	0.20	10	7	showers
Isle of Skye	2.3*	0.27	7*	3*	showers
Isle of Wight	5.1*	0.07	13	8	showers
Isles of Scilly	6.4*	0.03	14	9	showers
Jersey	1.2	0.07	14	8	showers
Keswick	2.1*	0.17	10	4	showers
Kew Gardens	4.9*	.030	14*	7*	showers
King's Lynn	6.1*	0.09	12	4	p/cloudy
Leeds	4.9*	0.11	9*	4*	showers
Leek	2.9*	0.10	11	3	showers
Leominster	0.8	0.07	12	2	showers
Lincoln	2.1	0.13	12	6	showers
Liverpool	0.5	0.59	11	7	rain
London	3.5	0.13	13	6	showers
Manchester	0.2	0.06	9	4	showers
Middlesbrough	5.0*	0.02	8	4	showers
Newcastle	5.8*	0.06	8	4	showers
Newquay	0.0	0.16	13	7	showers
Nottingham	1.7	0.29	12	6	showers
Orkney	0.7	0.22	7	4	showers
Oxford	2.4	0.12	13	4	showers
Perth	4.5*	0.10	7	3	showers
Peterborough	2.3	0.12	12	4	cloudy
Plymouth	5.5*	0.08	13	5	showers
Portsmouth*	5.8*	0.09*	13*	6*	p/cloudy
Prestwick	0.0	0.25	10	5	showers
Ramsgate	4.4	0.12	13	6	showers
Rhyl	2.7*	0.49	9	6	rain
Rugby	5.4*	0.13	12	4	showers
Salisbury	6.0*	0.25	13	4	showers
Scunthorpe	5.3*	0.06	11*	6*	p/cloudy
Sheffield	5.1	0.09	11	6	showers
Shetland	1.2*	0.07	8	3	cloudy
Shrewsbury	0.5	0.04	11	4	showers
Skegness	5.9*	0.02	12	5	p/cloudy
Southampton	5.6*	0.02	14*	7*	p/cloudy
Southend-on-Sea	4.1	0.11	13	7	p/cloudy
Stockport	0.2	0.06	9	4	showers
Stornoway	0.0	0.19	7	3	showers
Swansea	4.5*	0.08	12*	3*	showers
Swindon	5.5*	0.00	12	4	p/cloudy
Thirsk	5.5*	0.01	10	4	p/cloudy
Tiree	0.0	0.53	8	3	rain
Weymouth	5.3*	0.05	13	9	showers
Whitehaven	5.0*	0.07	9	5	showers
Windermere	4.3*	0.53	9*	4*	rain
Worcester	4.9*	0.04	13	5	showers
Yeovil	0.0	0.04	14	3	showers
York	5.0*	0.09	9*	6*	showers

Atlantic front



Noon today: Storm Darragh, now across the southern North Sea, will lose intensity as it moves south toward the Mediterranean.

Sun & moon (Greenwich)

Sun rises	0753
Sun sets	1553
Moon rises	1223
Moon sets	2235
First quarter	Dec 8

Yesterday

Warmest	Bournemouth 14C (57F)
Coldest	Lochnagar -4C (24F)
Wettest	St. Angelo 0.82 in.
Sunniest	Isles of Scilly 6.4 hr.

Lighting up

Aberdeen	1527 to 0835
Belfast	1600 to 0834
Birmingham	1554 to 0805
London	1553 to 0754
Manchester	1551 to 0811
Penzance	1620 to 0808

High water

Aberdeen	0522	3.7m	1719	3.9m
Belfast	0254	3.1m	1501	3.4m
Cardiff	1037	10.6m	2309	10.2m
Dover	0224	6.1m	1452	5.8m
Falmouth	0901	4.7m	2136	4.2m
Harwich	0300	3.6m	1544	3.6m
Holyhead	0200	4.8m	1419	5.1m
Hull	1015	6.4m	2214	6.6m
Liverpool	0240	8.1m	1504	8.3m
London	0513	6.3m	1749	6.5m
Portsmouth	0318	4.3m	1523	4.2m
Southampton	0240	4.3m	0810	1.7m

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Sea forecast

S North Sea: A gentle to fresh west-southwesterly wind today. Seas will be slight. Visibility will be poor.

Dover Strait, English Channel: A strong to gale west-southwesterly wind today. Seas will be smooth on the east and the west. Visibility will be poor.

St. George's Channel: A near gale to storm northwesterly wind today. Seas will be smooth. Visibility will be poor.

Irish Sea: A near gale to storm north-northwesterly wind today. Seas will be smooth. Visibility will be poor.

World readings

	Max °C	Min °C	Daytime weather
Accra	33	24	p/cldy
Addis Ababa	27	6	sunny
Adelaide	30	22	showers
Alexandria	22	11	p/cldy
Algiers	19	9	p/cldy
Amman	18	8	haze
Anchorage	0	-1	p/cldy
Ankara	6	0	cloudy
Ascension Is.	26	23	showers
Auckland	23	17	windy
Baghdad	22	4	haze
Bahamas	25	18	p/cldy
Bahrain	26	19	sunny
Bamako	32	18	p/cldy
Bangkok	34	24	p/cldy
Beijing	7	-6	p/cldy
Beirut	22	14	haze
Bermuda	21	17	showers
Bogota	20	10	rain
Bridgetown	30	26	showers
Brisbane	29	22	sunny
Buenos Aires	25	17	p/cldy
Cairo	22	14	haze
Canberra	33	17	rain
Cape Town	21	16	rain
Casablanca	21	9	sunny
Chicago	-2	-9	p/cldy
Christchurch	19	11	p/cldy
Colombo	31	24	rain
Damascus	18	1	sunny
Dar es Salaam	32	25	storms
Dhaka	28	17	sunny
Dubai	27	18	sunny
Falkland Is.	4	2	rain
Harare	35	16	sunny
Havana	26	12	p/cldy
Hong Kong	23	17	p/cldy
Honolulu	24	22	showers
Jakarta	32	25	showers
Jeddah	31	23	sunny
Jerusalem	19	9	haze
Johannesburg	33	16	sunny
Kabul	14	-7	sunny
Karachi	33	16	p/cldy
Kolkata	27	18	sunny
Kuala Lumpur	33	25	p/cldy
La Paz	15	3	showers
Lahore	27	9	haze
Lima	23	18	p/cldy
Los Angeles	19	9	sunny
Maldives	31	27	sunny
Manila	34	26	p/cldy
Marrakesh	24	9	sunny
Melbourne	32	19	p/cldy
Miami	26	15	p/cldy
Montego Bay	29	24	rain
Mumbai	33	26	p/cldy
Nairobi	28	14	p/cldy
New Orleans	8	4	sunny
New Delhi	25	10	sunny
New York	1	-1	windy
Ottawa	-6	-9	snow
Perth	31	16	windy
Port-of-Spain	31	22	p/cldy
Rio de Janeiro	28	22	p/cldy
Riyadh	26	14	haze
San Francisco	13	9	sunny
Santiago	25	9	p/cldy
Seattle	6	3	cloudy
Seoul	5	-2	p/cldy
Seychelles	29	25	rain
Singapore	34	26	cloudy
Sydney	32	22	p/cldy
Taipei City	24	19	windy
Tangier	22	10	sunny
Tel Aviv	26	14	p/cldy
Tokyo	17	7	windy
Toronto	-2	-11	flurry
Tunis	19	10	p/cldy
Vancouver	7	4	rain
Washington	4	-2	p/cldy
Wellington	19	12	p/cldy
Winnipeg	-6	-8	snow

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather.com** ©2024

Weather watch

Huge waves crash against Hartlepool pier

Outdoors not a place you want to be this weekend

By **Joe Shute**

"O WILD West Wind," wrote the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his famous ode to Atlantic gusts. "Thou breath of autumn's being."

Storm Darragh's arrival overnight yesterday brings us to the fourth named storm of autumn. And it is shaping up to be another blustery one.

The Met Office is predicting gales of 70-80mph around western coasts, with Devon and Cornwall in the thick of it. Even inland, and I can testify to this in land-locked Sheffield where the wind has been howling down our chimney like invading ghouls, speeds of up to 70mph are forecast.

I may have started this column with the words of a Romantic poet, but it is an ill-advised weekend to be standing outside contemplating a tree. A series of yellow weather warnings remain in place across the country until Sunday.

There has been an uptick in storms over recent years due to the position of the jet stream either pointing towards the UK, or to the south of us, whipping up wild weather in our direction.

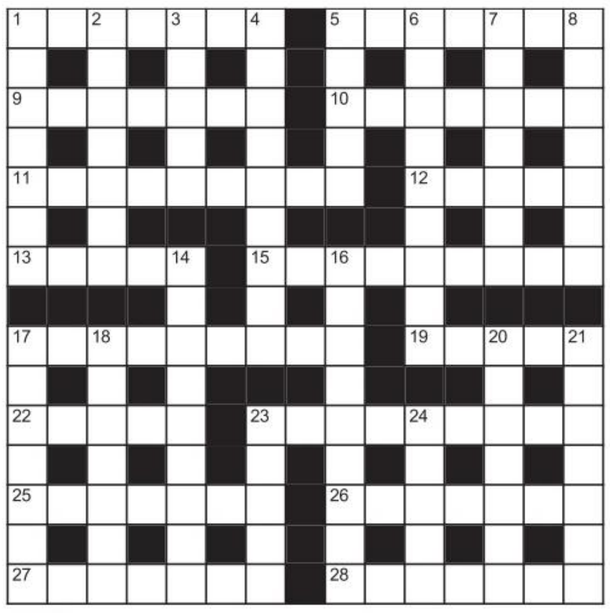
A record 12 storm names were reached in 2023/2024. Well, a record since the practice was first introduced in 2015. I recall writing on this page back then about what a feeble, infantilising idea it seemed; but in truth I have warmed to it over time.

The names definitely still need work, however. At present they are given by a combination of the Met Office, Ireland's Met Éireann and the national weather forecasting service of the Netherlands, known as KNMI, who supposedly select them from a shortlist submitted by the public. But compared to Shelley's title, they all seem so corporate and banal.

Perhaps I am merely jealous, as there has yet to be a Storm Joe on the list. In fact, such is our collective myopia in the face of increasingly troubling weather that one of the most searched for questions online is: how do I get a storm named after me?

Prize Crossword 30,791

telegraph.co.uk/puzzles



Across

1 Letter from the front? (7)
5 *See 17 Across*
9 Encouraging words spoken by Guardiola? (3,4)
10 Rider in mask endlessly following behind (7)
11 Agents around in flat ring criminal (9)
12 *See 13 Across*
13, 12 & 26 Across Some nuts, including Kelvin and Mickey, inhale insanely? (5,4,1,7)
15 Starting in Channel Islands, English plunged into beer (9)
17 & 5 Across London side at Portsmouth then thrashed (9,7)
19 Square loaf shortly devoured by dad (5)
22 Sanctimonious crowd in very first episode (5)
23 Boy back at one welcomed by man and dog (9)
25 Oil supply on flow easily makes capital (7)
26 *See 13 Across*
27 Charity event that's no fashion show? (3,4)
28 Instructed Edward to carry bucket down? (7)

Down

1 Little devil distributed seed in hampers (7)
2 Paint thickly applied: finished in one second (7)
3 Firm haggles periodically for representation (5)
4 *See 23 Down*
5 Joint surgery reversed for thick-skinned sort? (5)
6 Lackey with hint for Spooner: see you later! (6-3)
7 Something sharp puts king in predicament (7)
8 What might be read as warning to mob? (4,3)
14 Conductor to choose route did you say? (9)
16 Firm with politician within the law, but sharing guilt (9)
17 Row about parking on street calls for better adviser? (7)
18 Snitch's activity significant (7)
20 Soon to invest six grand in French city (7)
21 Cross ground one day bearing north (7)
23 & 4 Down Fakir led in with Sikh bent down a lot (5,4,1,4)
24 Soul found in Jungian 3 (5)

Three prizes of a boxed Telegraph fountain pen will be awarded to the senders of the first three correct solutions opened from all those received. Five crossword companion notebooks will be awarded as consolation prizes.

To enter by email: Scan or photograph your filled-in solution and coupon and send to: **prize.puzzles@telegraph.co.uk** with **DT 30,791** in the subject field.
To enter by post: Send to **DT 30,791**, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT.

Closing date: 9am Friday. Solution and winners' names published Mon, Dec 16. See telegraph.co.uk/prize-terms for terms and conditions.

Solution No 30,790

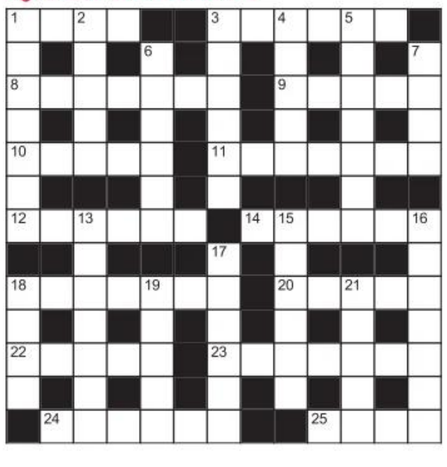
H	E	I	R	A	P	P	A	R	E	N	T	■	■	■
A	■	N	■	V	■	R	■	E	■	O	■	C	■	L
M	Y	S	T	E	R	I	E	S	■	G	R	A	V	Y
B	■	T	■	M	■	D	■	I	■	G	■	P	■	C
U	N	A	W	A	R	E	■	L	E	I	S	U	R	E
R	■	■	■	R	■	■	■	I	■	N	■	C	■	U
G	E	R	M	I	C	I	D	E	■	■	W	H	I	M
■	■	A	■	A	■	B	■	N	■	D	■	I	■	■
S	A	V	E	■	■	U	T	T	E	R	A	N	C	E
A	■	E	■	S	■	P	■	■	■	E	■	■	■	A
M	O	N	I	T	O	R	■	H	E	D	G	I	N	G
O	■	O	■	U	■	O	■	O	■	G	■	O	■	E
S	O	U	N	D	■	F	I	R	E	E	A	T	E	R
A	■	S	■	I	■	E	■	U	■	U	■	A	■	L
■	■	■	C	O	R	N	I	S	H	P	A	S	T	Y

Yesterday's Quick Solution

Across: 1 Gem, 3 Raw, 5 Leap, 7 Early, *(Jam roly-poly)* 8 Rakish, 10 Dear, 11 Seawater, 13 Gaelic, 14 Brazil, 17 Truffles, 19 Sari, 21 Steamy, 22 Clown, 23 Trek, 24 Neb, 25 See.

Down: 1 Greedy guts, 2 Margate, 3 Rays, 4 Warren, 5 Lukewarm, 6 Asset, 9 Brilliance, 12 Hipflask, 15 Zealous, 16 Kenyan, 18 Utter, 20 Scab.

Quick Crossword



Across

1 *Hebridean island* (4)
3 *Booze habitually* (6)
8 Assembly room (7)
9 Lassitude (5)
10 Soak in a tub (5)
11 US atlas (anag.) (7)
12 Possessions (6)
14 Golfing assistant (6)
18 American whiskey (7)
20 Kit out (5)
22 Extraterrestrial (5)
23 Knead (7)
24 Saunter (6)
25 Street of stabling (4)

Down

1 Gruesome (7)
2 Minimum (5)
3 Plaid (6)
4 Crush (5)
5 Nail dug! (anag.) (7)
6 Not present (6)
7 Lean (4)
13 Holiday traveller (7)
15 Loath (6)
16 Fast train (7)
17 Tooth surface (6)
18 Badly behaved child (4)
19 Bluegrass instrument (5)
21 Customary practice (5)

Help with today's Quick Crossword clues Single clues **0905 757 0122.** Solution **0905 757 0123.**
Calls cost £1/min, plus network access charge. You must be 18 or over and have the bill payer's permission. Services open Mon-Sat. SP: Spoke – Helpline 0333 202 3390.

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By Anthony Seklaoui, 2024