32-PAGE OLDIE REVIEW OF BOOKS

MACCA THE SNAPPER
PHOTOS BY PAUL McCARTNEY

The Oldie

'The Oldie is an incredible magazine – perhaps the best magazine in the world' Graydon Carter

July 2023 | £5.25 £4.13 to subscribers | www.theoldie.co.uk | Issue 428

Keep on rockin'!

Mick and Keith at 80 – Christopher Sandford

Lord Lucan electrocuted his dog – Algy Cluff

Back from the dead – Roger Lewis on his heart attack

Westminster's dirty secrets – Cleo Watson

07
9 770965 250192

Est. 1986

Agincare

Caring in your community

The Empowering Benefits of Live-in Care: Sue's Story

In March 2020, Sue's life took a transformative turn when she began receiving support from live-in care worker, Gina.

Sue, who has had an acquired brain injury since childhood, previously lived in a care home, with limited choice of activities, meals and excursions. However, with live-in care provided by Agincare, she was able to return to her family home, surrounded by cherished possessions and memories.

Since then, live-in care has played a pivotal role in Sue's life; restoring her independence through around-the-clock support and companionship.

Gina's presence has become invaluable to Sue, enabling her to engage in activities and hobbies that bring joy to her life. Whether it's strolling through nature, embarking on day trips, or indulging in creative pursuits like flower arranging or colouring, Sue has rediscovered her passions with Gina's support.

Across the country, live-in care is empowering people like Sue to live comfortably in their own homes while receiving dedicated, one-on-one care.

"She has a big smile on her face from the moment we go downstairs in the morning. She is always making jokes and we always laugh." - Gina

The impact of Agincare's live-in care service on Sue's life is a reminder that, with the right support and companionship, everyone is able to enjoy independent living at home with personalised care tailored to their unique needs.

With a team of dedicated care workers like Gina, Agincare is enabling individuals to embrace life on their own terms, remaining in their own home, and living to their own schedule.

If you or a loved one are in need of support, contact Agincare today to find out more about live-in care.

Inspected and rated Good

CareQuality Commission

0808 273 2198

carehub.agincare.com/oldie

The Oldie

KEYSTONE PICTURES USA

Ageless: Mick and Keith page 14

Westminster tribes page 18

Dogs, beware of the lord! page 34

Features

Regulars

Books

Arts

Pursuits

Travel

Reader event

Oldie literary lunch p39

The Oldie
Moray House, 23/31 Great Titchfield Street, London W1W 7PA
www.theoldie.co.uk

Subs queries? Email theoldie@subscription.co.uk or phone 01858 438791

ABC circulation figure July-December 2021: 48,249

Editor Harry Mount
Sub-editor Penny Phillips
Art editor Jonathan Anstee
Supplements editor Jane Mays
Editorial assistant Amelia Milne
Publisher James Pembroke
Patron saints Jeremy Lewis, Barry Cryer
At large Richard Beatty
Our Old Master David Kowitz

***Oldie* subscriptions**
To order a print subscription, go to www.subscription.co.uk/oldie/offers, or email theoldie@subscription.co.uk, or call 01858 438791, or write to *The Oldie*, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough LE16 9EF.
Print subscription rates for 12 issues: UK £49.50; Europe/Eire £58; USA/Canada £70; rest of world £69.
To buy a digital subscription for £29.99 or single issue for £2.99, go to the App Store on your tablet/mobile and search for 'The Oldie'.

Advertising
For display, contact :
Paul Pryde on 020 3859 7095
or Jasper Gibbons on 020 3859 7096
For classified: Monty Martin-Zakheim on 020 3859 7093

News-stand enquiries
mark.jones@newstrademarketing.co.uk

Front cover Mirrorpix/Alamy

Whatever happens, Wherever it happens, Whenever it happens, Help is at hand.

The Assure
Life-Saving Wristband

SOS Alert
A simple squeeze of the wristband calls for help.

Fall Alert
Monitors for severe falls.

I'm OK Checks
The simple way to confirm you're OK in the morning and before bed.

24/7 Uninterrupted, comprehensive protection in your home, garden and beyond.

4.8 322 reviews ★★★★★

acticheck.com
0345 25 75 080

acticheck

ITS NEVER BEEN EASIER TO GET CONNECTED

The Oldie has teamed up with mobile manufacturer emporia and network provider IQ Mobile to bring you an amazing offer on easy to use phones which will get you better connected with family and friends.

Buy either of these phones and receive a great **FREE** gift as well as your first month's connection **FREE**.

If you already have a mobile you can transfer your existing number to your new emporia and you can cancel your contract at any time if you wish.

emporia

£249

£90

emporiaSMART.5

Combining performance and ease of use, this amazing smartphone has a 5.5" screen with large easy-to-see icons, and a triple lens 13mp camera system for great photos.

The unique smartcover protects your phone and also means you can make or answer a call without even opening it.

£249 + £10 per month for unlimited calls and texts and 3gb of data.

SAVE £30 on SRP

First month connection FREE, plus FREE protective screen.

emporiaJOY

A classic big button clamshell phone with a large keypad, large screen and an outside display to see who is calling.

£90 + £7 per month for unlimited calls and texts.

SAVE £42 on SRP

First month connection FREE, plus FREE protective carry pouch.

Contact IQ Mobile to buy your emporia device & claim your free connection and exclusive savings. Visit www.helloiq.co.uk/theoldie or call 01225 588101

IQ mobile

The Old Un's Notes

If you want to be a bestselling writer, get on the GCSE syllabus.

That's the message from the Bookseller magazine. It reports that the top-selling book on the syllabus is *An Inspector Calls* (1945) by J B Priestley, selling 123,059 copies this year – that's £1,040,450 in sales. Over the past 25 years, the book has made £11.7m.

The book benefited from then Education Secretary Michael Gove's decision to remove American texts from GCSE set texts in 2014. In the last year before John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* was dropped by English boards, it sold 150,000 copies. Over the last year, it has sold only 32,000.

Coming up behind J B Priestley on the gilded GCSE list are those reliable favourites *A Christmas Carol* (112,755 copies last year), *Macbeth* (98,055 copies) and *Animal Farm* (68,964).

It brings to mind Roald Dahl's wise advice to Kingsley Amis.

Dahl told him, 'What you want to do is write a children's book. That's where the money is today, believe me.'

'I couldn't do it,' said Amis. 'I don't think I enjoyed children's books much when I was a child myself. I've got no feeling for that kind of thing.'

'Never mind,' replied Dahl. 'The little bastards'd swallow it.'

RIP, Glenda Jackson, aged 87.

When the late great actress made her return to the stage as King Lear in 2016, our theatre critic Paul Bailey was overwhelmed by her brilliance. She was crowned as our Oldie of the Year the following year.

Paul wrote, 'Within minutes of the production opening, it became clear that she had lost none of her inimitable power to take control of a stage.

'She had the commanding presence necessary for great classical acting, as well as an ear for the beauty and diversity of Shakespeare's poetry, which she spoke as if the words were just coming to her, ready to be expressed.

'Her voice encompassed an astonishing range for a woman so small in stature.'

Paul concluded, 'She didn't indulge in charm, but what she did have was something far more precious: grace. She may have been abrasive but she was gracious. There was absolutely no danger of her ever becoming one of that dread species known as "national treasure".

'Oh, it was so good, so very good, to have her back.'

Queen Lear: Glenda Jackson by Gary Smith

York Membery, a regular *Oldie* contributor, fell foul of security staff at the Palace of Westminster recently.

He was collared for having had the audacity to take a digital recorder into Westminster's Portcullis House, when he'd gone to interview Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrats.

'None of the entrance security staff has ever batted an eyelid at my taking a mini-recorder into the building before,' says the aggrieved hack.

'Every journalist uses one, and they've just put it through the scanner along with my keys and mobile phone and hurried me along.

'But, this time, they gave me the third degree, asked me why I needed it and impounded it until a parliamentary aide could come to my rescue and vouch for the fact that I was a member of His Majesty's Press and not an enemy of the state.'

He adds, with a sigh, 'I could understand if they had confiscated a pair of scissors or a sharp item of some sort, but whenever did a tiny

Among this month's contributors

Cleo Watson (p18) was Boris Johnson's Deputy Chief of Staff. She worked on Barack Obama's 2012 election campaign, and on the 2017 and 2019 UK General Elections. She is author of *Whips*.

Nick Newman (p30) works for *Private Eye* and does cartoons for the *Sunday Times*. With Ian Hislop, he co-wrote the comedy film *A Bunch of Amateurs* (2008), starring Burt Reynolds.

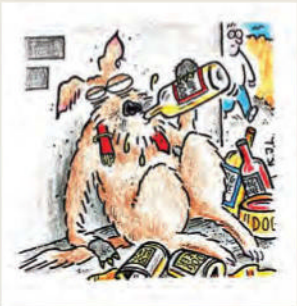
Algy Cluff (p34) struck oil in the North Sea over 50 years ago. He owned the *Spectator* magazine. Tom Stoppard came up with the title of his new memoir, *The Importance of Being Algy*.

Elinor Goodman (p57) was political editor of *Channel 4 News* from 1988 to 2005. She was one of the panel members on the Leveson Inquiry into phone-hacking.

NOT MANY DEAD

Important stories you may have missed

'Alcoholic dog' is taken in by shelter
i



Car stopped for 'illegal' window tints
Oxford Times

No more deaths recorded in Monmouthshire
Abergavenny Chronicle

£15 for published contributions

NEXT ISSUE
The August issue is on sale on 26th July 2023.

GET THE OLDIE APP
Go to App Store or Google Play Store. Search for Oldie Magazine and then pay for app.

OLDIE BOOKS
***The Very Best of The Oldie Cartoons*, *The Oldie Annual 2023* and other *Oldie* books are available at: www.theoldie.co.uk/readers-corner/shop Free p&p.**

OLDIE NEWSLETTER
Go to the *Oldie* website; put your email address in the red SIGN UP box.

HOLIDAY WITH THE OLDIE
Go to www.theoldie.co.uk/courses-tours

KATHRYN LAMB

digital recorder pose a security risk?'

When did Parliament start losing its confidence like this?

✳ Roman Polanski, director of *Rosemary's Baby*, turns 90 on 18th August.

He's gone swiftly from being cinema's perpetual *enfant terrible* to its elder statesman, albeit with some significant speed bumps along the way.

Polanski's own life has the makings of a Hollywood drama, with some deeply dark twists. His mother, then four months pregnant, was killed in the Holocaust, and his father spent three years in a concentration camp.

Polanski himself escaped the Nazis, but then spent the rest of his early life under Stalin's jackboot. He eventually made it to freedom in the West, only for his pregnant wife Sharon Tate to be brutally murdered in the couple's Los Angeles home in 1969 by the so-called Manson family.

In March 1977, Polanski, who was then 43, took a 13-year-old girl to a house in the Hollywood Hills to take photos of her for a magazine. Once there, he gave her champagne and tranquillisers and had sex with her; then he drove her home and the following week he was arrested.

Polanski absconded from court on the eve of his being sentenced a year later. As a dual Franco-Polish citizen, he

Roman Polanski, cinema's *enfant terrible*, turns 90

was able to settle in Paris, where he remains at liberty to this day.

Whatever you think about the man who's described himself as an 'evil dwarf', he's at least persistent. Polanski's 27th and latest film, *The Palace*, was released earlier this year.

'I find myself where I am and I'm glad, as I like my life now,' he recently remarked.

It sounds like a happy ending, although there's still the matter of an outstanding arrest warrant waiting for him should he ever again set foot in the United States, or any other country willing to send him back to face the court he fled 45 years ago.

✳ An artistic director's departure from a theatre would once have been an occasion for exquisite self-effacement – a touch of fluttering palm to chest and a dab of glistening eyes amid protestations that 'Really, you are all too kind' and 'I have done nothing.'

These days, it seems, you need to be harder-nosed.

Erica Whyman, leaving the Royal Shakespeare Company after a decade as its deputy supremo and two years in charge, issued a press release, saying that her tenure was marked by 'courage, honesty and ingenuity'.

Critics and the public did not necessarily agree. Reviews for the RSC's recent *Julius Caesar* were terrible, audiences fleeing from it like stampeding cattle.

Good luck to Whyman's successors, Tamara Harvey and Daniel Evans, as they try to rebuild Stratford's reputation.

'And here we are again, still queuing'

✳ Farewell to Martin Amis, celebrated in this issue on page 48 by his cousin and in the *Oldie Review of Books* by Dan Franklin, his publisher.

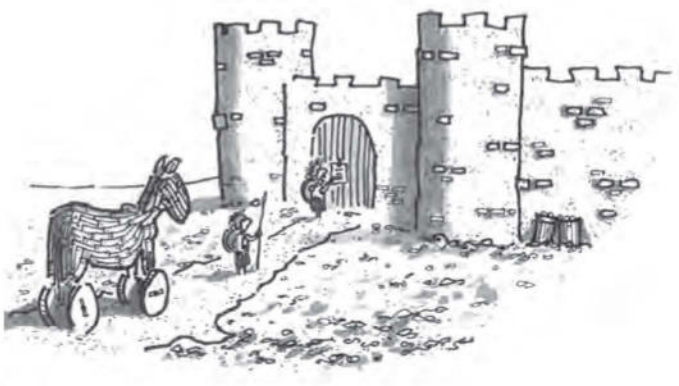
He is also fondly remembered by Simon Collins, an *Oldie* contributor and writer.

In 2010, impoverished by divorce, Collins lived briefly in a first-floor studio flat in Camden Town, where he wrote his first novel.

A smoker at the time, he would puff away as he typed, his desk positioned beside an open sash window.

Collins recalls, 'One evening, after typing the words "THE END", I sat back in my chair, lit a celebratory fag and glanced out of the window as a slim man in a navy two-piece suit and open-necked white shirt emerged from the Portuguese corner store across the street.'

The man paused to light



It says, 'If no one in, please leave behind bins'

one of the fags he'd obviously just bought – and happened to look up.

Collins says, 'Our eyes met briefly, and before he turned away I realised it was Martin Amis.'

'Martin!' Collins shouted.

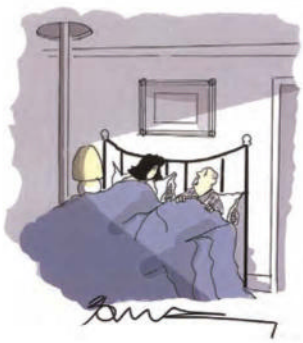
Amis stopped and looked up at him again. 'What?' he shouted.

'I've just written a novel!' Collins shouted back, for want of anything better to say.

Amis took a drag of his cigarette and held the smoke in while he seemed to consider this. 'Is it any good?' he shouted eventually, after exhaling.

'I think so,' Collins shouted back.

'Well, write another one, then,' he shouted. 'You'll need it.'



'Caroline, is there any truth in these rumours about you and that fireman in the upstairs flat?

Then he turned and walked off along Delancey Street.

Collins pondered Amis's words and concluded that he meant 'One novel won't be enough to become a successful writer – even if it's good.'

'Two days later, I started writing my second novel,' says Collins. 'And he was right, because neither of them has yet been published. But, unlike him, I did stop smoking.'

By chance, Simon Collins had a rather less charming meeting with Martin's father, Kingsley Amis, in the same area, in 1985.

Collins walked into the Queens, a pub in Primrose Hill, one lunchtime. There was Kingsley Amis, sitting in a corner reading a book.

Collins said, 'Excuse me, but aren't you Kingsley Amis?'

And he said, 'F**k off.'

So Collins knew it was the great writer.

Seventy years ago, on Saturday 18th July 1953, the BBC screened the first story of a new six-part science-fiction series, *The Quatermass Experiment*.

The plot concerns Professor Bernard Quatermass of the British Experimental Rocket Group, the scientist behind the world's first human-crewed space mission. Only one crew member returns.

The programme's creator, Nigel Kneale, used the working title *Bring Me Something Back...!* and named the hero of *The Quatermass Experiment* from a London telephone directory listing.

He recalled writing the last two episodes during

'...and what if you added a funny caption?'

'It's not going to work. He's great, but not as great as I am'

transmission: 'So nobody really knew what the end was – even the production team.'

The programme's budget of under £4,000 was low, even by 1953 standards.

But, despite a senior member of the British Interplanetary Society's complaining that *Quatermass* was 'footling', the impact of the series resulted in the 1955 sequel, *Quatermass II*.

That year, Hammer released a cinematic version of *Experiment*, their first major horror film, even though Kneale disapproved of the US actor Brian Donlevy in the leading role.

In 1958, the BBC broadcast *Quatermass and the Pit*, a meditation on good and evil that remains one of Kneale's finest works.

He found characters and settings 'far more interesting than sparks flying', and it is perhaps for those reasons that the Professor's adventures continue to resonate after seven decades.

As writer and actor Mark Gatiss once noted, the *Quatermass* adventures 'cemented themselves in the psyche of a generation'.

Hammer's 1955 version of *The Quatermass Experiment:* Brian Donlevy as the Prof, David King-Wood, Richard Wordsworth

KEYSTONE PICTURES USA/ZUMAPRESS

Poor sleep? Aches and pains? Here's the solution...

A father's love and devotion leads to incredible patented pillow

A NEAR tragedy has led to an amazing new development in sleep technology. When Georgia Miles was recovering from a life-threatening accident, her father Alexander looked everywhere for a pillow that would keep her comfortable throughout the night.

After purchasing dozens of different types and finding none that worked, Alex, a renowned furniture and domestic product designer, decided to engineer his own.

UNIQUE BREAKTHROUGH

He made a breakthrough when he realised that all pillows spread out and flatten down as the weight of the head rests on them. This flattening progresses through the night, leaving the head and neck poorly supported – and sleep interrupted. This is why many people find themselves half awake and 'pillow-punching' in the middle of the night, desperately trying to get comfortable.

EXTRA COMFORT AND SUPPORT

The innovative model that Alex designed has internal ties that hold the filling in place, and pull the pillow in and up to cradle the head and neck. This provides extra comfort and support that lasts through the night and ensures that you get the most benefit from an undisturbed sleep.

"I can honestly say that your pillow has made the world of difference... and fully endorse your pillow as being quite unique in its ability to maintain support throughout the night."

Dr Deane Halfpenny
Harley Street Consultant and Spinal Pain Specialist

MADE IN THE UK

Made in the UK, the Gx Pillow comes in a choice of two levels of support: Medium-soft, which most people seem to prefer, or Medium-firm for those who like a little more resistance. Alex's desperate desire to help his daughter Georgia has led to a pillow that has also transformed the lives of thousands of people. So if you have spent a lifetime looking for the perfect pillow, your search may well be over!

Alexander Miles, inventor of the Gx Pillow pictured with his invention

INFORMATION: *gxpillows/0800 316 2689*

BIGGEST EVER DISCOUNT for The Oldie Readers – 25% off!

The amazing Gx Pillow™ helps thousands sleep better

- ✓ Unique internal tie technology maintains shape throughout the night

- ✓ Provides comfort and support
- ✓ Integral air vent keeps you cool
- ✓ Luxurious 100% cotton shell
- ✓ Hypoallergenic Polycoz filling
- ✓ Designed, patented and made in the UK
- ✓ Choose from Medium-soft or Medium-firm

"I cannot believe that after 40 years I have finally found the best pillow ever!!!! It simply stays put and so comfy, fabulous, must buy more for hubby and a spare."

Izzy, Yorkshire

OUR PROMISE TO YOU! Sleep on the Gx Pillow for 30 nights and if you are not completely satisfied, we'll give you your money back*

Enjoy a great night's sleep AND 25% OFF! THAT'S...

2 PILLOWS FOR ~~£59.99~~ £44.99! £15 SAVING!

Choose from Medium-soft, Medium-firm or one of each!

25% off for The Oldie readers with code OL14

Or buy 1 Gx PILLOW for ~~£39.99~~ £29.99 £10 SAVING!

SCAN HERE and code will automatically be applied

ORDER NOW! FREEPHONE:
0800 316 2689
Lines open Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm.
Quote OL14 for 25% off

OR GO ONLINE:
gxpillows.co.uk
Enter OL14 in discount box for 25% off

*Terms and conditions apply - please see website for details.

Post to: FREEPOST BEAUTIFUL SLEEP OL14
No other details or stamp required

Description	Tick your preferred pillow(s)	Price	Qty	Subtotal
£15 off! Gx Pillows Twin pack	2 x Medium-soft (was £59.99)	£44.99		
	2 x Medium-firm (was £59.99)	£44.99		
	1 x Med-soft + 1 x Med-firm (was £59.99)	£44.99		
£10 off! Single pillow	1 x Medium-soft (was £39.99)	£29.99		
	1 x Medium-firm (was £39.99)	£29.99		
		Postage & Packing		£4.95
		ORDER TOTAL		

☐ I enclose a cheque payable to Beautiful Sleep for £_____
☐ Or charge my credit/debit card:
Card No. _____
Expiry ___ / ___ CVC ___
Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
Postcode _____
Tel no _____
Email _____

Fifty cheers for Frasier, my hero

After half a century of marriage, my wife and I agree on one thing – the genius of Kelsey Grammer

This month, all my dreams have come true.

My wife and I have reached – and passed – our golden wedding anniversary without her changing the locks. And I have met and made a friend of the one person in the world who for 30 years I have hero-worshipped and most wanted to meet.

We will come on to where and how Mrs B and I celebrated our half-century in harness in a moment. First things first.

As regular readers of this page will know, I have a weakness for name-dropping and a particular fondness for collecting memorable moments with stars of stage and screen.

In my time, I have sung a duet with Debbie Reynolds, sipped champagne with Olivia de Havilland and, with both hands, held Marlene Dietrich's left thigh. Ken Dodd once gave me a tickling stick and Laurence Olivier once blew me a kiss.

What more could I want? Since 1993, when the American TV sitcom *Frasier* first hit our screens, I have longed to meet its star, the Tony, Emmy, Golden Globe Award-winning actor Kelsey Grammer, now 68.

If you have not seen *Frasier*, you must. All 264 episodes are available via Channel 4, which still screens it daily. No show in the history of television has won more awards – and for a reason. It's beyond brilliant (witty, humane and hilarious) and Grammer, as the eponymous psychiatrist Dr Frasier Crane, is a comic actor of genius.

What's extraordinary is that Grammer, who played the same character in an earlier series, *Cheers*, is consistently sensational in every one of the many episodes made over many years, despite a history of substance abuse. Neither drink nor cocaine seems ever to dim his on-screen dazzle.

Given his challenging private life – four marriages, seven children; his father murdered; his sister kidnapped, raped and murdered; his two half-brothers killed in a scuba-diving accident; and there's more – you might be inclined to forgive a bit of booze and dope. I would forgive him anything.

Separated at birth? Gyles and Kelsey

I love him. And so does my wife. We watch an episode of *Frasier* every day. Sometimes we watch three in a row. The quality of the writing and the ensemble playing make it our all-time favourite TV.

Grammer is the linchpin – and the glorious news is that ten episodes of a new series of *Frasier* have just been completed. Some of the original cast may be making guest appearances, while the character of Frasier's brother, Niles (beautifully played by David Hyde Pierce), has been replaced by Frasier's new best friend, played by the British actor Nicholas Lyndhurst.

How do I know this? Because Kelsey told me. Yes, I have met him. This month I heard he was at Television Centre in London, giving an interview. I happened to be in the building. I found out where his dressing room was and I knocked on the door.

It's Kelsey and Gyles now. We are friends. Kelsey turns out to be as delightful as a person (easy-going, engaging, empathetic) as he is brilliant as an actor.

I like to collect the greats. And if they are not around, I make do with their descendants.

Another of my treats this month was being invited to Oxford, to the towpath on the River Isis by Folly Bridge, to unveil a plaque commemorating the golden afternoon of 4th July 1862 when the Reverend Charles Dodgson (better known as Lewis Carroll) and his friend the Reverend Robinson Duckworth took the three Liddell sisters, Alice, Lorina and Edith, daughters of the Dean of Christ Church, on a boating trip to Godstow. To entertain the children, Dodgson improvised the story that would become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

I was honoured to unveil the plaque, and even more honoured to meet two sisters who turned out to be direct descendants of one of Dodgson's brothers and a brother and sister who were the great-grandchildren of Alice Liddell.

My only disappointment was that my friend Robin Wilson couldn't make it. One of the sons of Harold Wilson, Robin, like Dodgson, is a mathematician of note and author of *Lewis Carroll in Numberland*, a celebration of Dodgson's love of number play.

Robin is a funny man himself. He called his introduction to the fundamentals of geometry *Here's Looking at Euclid*.

Bah. I have run out of space to tell you about our golden wedding anniversary. The main thing is we reached it. Ahead of it, my wife said, 'No fuss, Gyles. Don't tempt providence.'

I took her somewhere she had not been before: Bridlington in the East Riding – the only English county mentioned in the Bible. ('And it came to pass that three wise men appeared from the East riding on camels.')

And, for an anniversary present, we gave each other something we both wanted and needed: matching his-and-hers hot-water bottles.

American NHS? Let's call the whole thing off

My heart problem isn't any better in American English

MATTHEW NORMAN

For an institution widely believed to be on life support, the health service shows signs of vibrant health when it comes to inclusivity.

Take me, as the late Max Miller might have put it. Seldom does a month pass without the NHS – 'our NHS', technically, if only to Tory politicians with lavish private health insurance – graciously including me in one way or another.

Over the last couple of years, I have been such a regular at the Royal Free Hospital in north London that I anticipate the arrival of a loyalty card, entitling the bearer to free vinyl gloves and a two-for-one colonoscopy deal, any day.

In succession to impertinent inspections of the testes, kidneys and oesophagus, the latest act of inclusion concerns the heart. A 24-hour ECG having developed not necessarily to my advantage (an arrhythmia, cause as yet unknown), I was cordially invited for an echocardiogram. This procedure, for any medical ignoramuses, is an ultrasonic test to determine how well, or otherwise, blood is flowing to, through and from the organ.

The appointment was set for a morning a couple of weeks back, but the combination of a diary clash and the traditional FOFO (fear of finding out) dictated a postponement.

It was on my calling the cardiology department's bespoke appointments phone line to rearrange that the extent of the NHS's commitment to leaving no patient behind became plain.

If that notion seems bizarre in an age when nonagenarians can spend 18 refreshing hours nursing a broken hip on the street while awaiting an ambulance, consider the following.

On ringing the number, and being shocked to the precipice of ague on finding it unanswered by a human, I was treated to a recorded message. Among myriad options on offer was this: 'Press the star button,' the mechanical voice instructed, 'for American English.'

So whenever next you hear of some tragic soul whose cancer metastasized (or rather metastasised, lest certain readers be perplexed) during the gaping temporal chasm between diagnosis and treatment, console yourself with this.

No one whose lingua franca is American English, but cannot speak a word of English English, will be let down by the Royal Free should they need to change an appointment.

Not, at least, if they have a heart condition. I cannot vouch for other departments. However, there's no shred of evidence that these are any less accommodating towards this crucial linguistic sub-demographic of the unwell.

Should you ring gastroenterology, for example, and press the * button when prompted, there's every chance of your hearing, 'If during your consultation you are asked about the colour of your stools, please be reassured that the word "color" is brought to you without the letter *u*.'

As for orthopaedics, logic implies that pressing the button will bring forth 'If you break a bone after falling on the sidewalk on the way to your appointment, don't call us to cancel. Ring for an ambulance, and we'll catch up with you in A&E when you arrive on Wednesday week.'

God knows what the * button leads to, American English-wise, in cardiology. It might be the simple substitution of ECG with EKG, or something less technical such as 'If you think two flights of stairs could kill you – and with *your* heart, you might just be right – please take the elevator instead.'

> 'If you think two flights of stairs could kill you, please take the elevator instead'

It may even be something more playful, such as 'If your appointment is scheduled for 2pm, please arrive 15 minutes early at … but, hey, you do the math.'

With hindsight, I suppose I should have pressed the * button, and found out. But news of this option's existence induced such instant, violent palpitations that I feared another ounce of high excitement would provoke a myocardial infarction – and that on a day when my defibrillator paddles happened to be at the dry cleaners.

Reflecting on the matter now, I do find it extraordinary that this group is so abysmally ignored. We hear much about the exclusion of vulnerable minorities, but never a dickie bird about the battalions of American-English-speakers in grave peril of dying of thirst because no one has informed them that what they call a faucet is known here as a tap.

George Bernard Shaw was no dummy in the medical field. *The Doctor's Dilemma*, a magnificent play, now reads less like a brutal satirical deconstruction of early-20th-century class-based health inequality than as an eerily prescient vision of what 'our NHS' would become.

But the old boy dropped something of a bollock when he famously described England and America as two countries divided by a common language. English English and American English have nothing in common whatever.

If you don't believe me about that, check out the hordes of ailing tourists from Baltimore and Phoenix who are wandering endlessly around the ground floor of the Royal Free, desperately trying to get their prescriptions filled.

They are wholly unable to compute that the area with 'Pharmacy' above its entrance – the one with all the medicines prominently displayed on shelves – is in fact the drug store.

Safer bathing from the mobility experts

NOW WITH A **15 YEAR WARRANTY***

Slip-resistant surfaces

Integrated riser grab bar

Stylish folding seat

"My husband and I would like to thank you for the superb makeover. We are delighted with your service"
Mr & Mrs R Pleasants

At Premier Care, our extensive range of stylish **easy-access showers** and **walk-in baths** have been designed to give people with increasing mobility issues the confidence to bathe safely and securely in style and comfort.

Our all-inclusive service means we take care of everything, from design through to expert installation by one of our skilled teams. We even clean up after ourselves. All you need do is enjoy your new bathroom.

- A complete service that will transform your bathroom and your life.
- Peace of mind - helping tens of thousands of people for over 30 years.

Premier Care in Bathing - the UK's No.1 for stylish wet rooms, easy access showers and walk-in baths.

For your **FREE** brochure call us today:

0800 988 4232

Ref PCF448

* Call 0800 988 4232 for more details

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF KBB INSTALLATION PARTNER

COVID-19 AWARE
· HAND SANITISER
· SOCIAL DISTANCING
· PPE

Premier Care™ in Bathing

www.premiercareinbathing.co.uk

OLDEN LIFE

WHAT WERE Teddy Boys?

Seventy years ago, Britain seemed under threat from menacing young men who favoured exaggerated frock coats and drainpipe trousers.

Savile Row devised the 'Edwardian' suits for their wealthy clientele in 1950, and working-class youths across Britain quickly adopted this look. A *Daily Express* article of 23rd September 1953 shortened the term and created the phrase Teddy Boy.

Jeff Nuttall wrote in *Bomb Culture* that Teddy Boys were 'waiting for Elvis Presley'. Popular mythology associates them with frenzied bouts of cinema-seat-slashing to the strains of *Jailhouse Rock*, but the first Teds jived to Ken Mackintosh's *The Creep* at their local Palais.

The 1953 proto-Teddy Boy drama *Cosh Boy*, the first of a succession of cinematic Brylcreemed menaces, recommended thrashing to cure juvenile delinquency. In the following year, the *Londonderry Sentinel* complained that 'no well-dressed man would be seen dead' in an Edwardian suit, thanks to 'youths with more money than dress sense'.

Teddy Boy crime was a regular fixture in 1950s newspapers. The *Daily Mirror*

A Best-Dressed Teddy Boy contest, 1954

headlined its account of the 1953 murder of John Beckley 'Flick Knives, Dance Music and Edwardian Suits'. A 'family doctor' told the *London Evening News* that 'what they need is rehabilitation in a psychopathic institution'.

Many teachers fervently hoped National Service would cure antisocial habits, while dance halls and fish-and-chip parlours frequently banned Teds.

Lancashire's assistant education officer suggested, 'Well-chosen poetry, well-read in youth clubs, would make even Teddy Boys come to enjoy it.'

But many Teds were hard-working apprentices, while a few middle-class grammar-school boys, such as Vivian Stanshall and John Lennon, relished dressing as part-time delinquents. A BBC television *Special Enquiry* contained a priceless interview with the amiable 'Pat' and 'Mike', who tried – and failed – to look menacing.

The *Daily Herald* was still reporting 'Yard orders "get tough on Teddies"' in 1957. However, the decade's end saw the rise of 'Italian style' suits and the 'Ton Up' boys who combined quiffs with leather jackets and BSAs on hire purchase. Some diehard Teds now wore brightly coloured drape jackets with velvet pockets – the outfit's last stage before its presumed demise.

But surviving Teddy Boys still haunted the provinces in the mid-1960s, bemoaning those long-haired Beatles. Then, a few years later, there was the first of a series of revivals, even if some original Teds regarded 1970s followers of Showaddywaddy as 'plastics'.

Today, there are several Facebook groups, and this writer is proud to belong to the Teddyboys Appreciation Society.

George Melly saw Teddy Boys as a reaction against a grey, dismal realm 'where good boys played ping-pong'.

The observation of a 1954 Mecca Dance Hall customer encapsulates their legacy: 'Our dress is our answer to a dull world.' The Ted anticipated future generations of British youth who created a costume to please themselves.

Andrew Roberts

MODERN LIFE

WHAT IS ROMEO?

ROMEO stands for Retired Old Men Eating Out.

The ROMEO acronym originated in New York, where the first group was called Retired Old Men Eating Out Wednesdays – ROMEOW, which dampens the Shakespearean resonance.

It is a growing movement offering camaraderie and the conversation of kindred spirits for the retired or those on the brink of retirement.

I discovered ROMEO on a recent trip to Nevis when my brother-in-law (who lives there) invited me along as a guest to his ROMEO group lunch. Sat round the table were a retired dentist from New York, one or two who had been something 'in finance', a retired State administrator from California, a still-practising obs-and-gynae doctor and a retired NATO grandee.

Conversation ranged from the mundane (local airport expansion) to the intensely personal ('It must be a year now since your wife died – how are you doing and how was the anniversary?').

As a young shaver, I never sought out or much fancied all-male company. I didn't like football and after just one pint of roguish beer I felt full to bursting. I preferred the company of women where wine, canapés and jollity might lead to romance.

But now north of 75 I realised that ROMEO lunches are a way of providing excellent male company, rooted in a group with centuries of life experience between them. There is also something about getting older that encourages honesty and helpfulness. So when I got home, I set about creating my own ROMEO group.

The Nevis ROMEO group meets once a week; we are starting with once every two weeks or so and are planning ROMEO lunch 7. Our group includes a retired BBC editor, two people who worked on the Concorde air intake at Filton, a retired structural engineer, me and a man who makes and sells sausages.

A few basic requirements. We always find a restaurant that does a set lunch for under £25 or so and pay our own bills. The other essential is that we are all 'up for it'; 'it' being meeting people whose paths ours might not normally cross.

In the group there are the eternally cheerful, the fairly silent, the effusive, the previously lonely, the rich, poor and in between, the widowed and never married.

I'd thoroughly recommend the concept.

Alan Ravenscroft

Alan Ravenscroft is author of From Here to Infirmity: A Beginner's Guide to Retirement

ANL / SHUTTERSTOCK

As Mick Jagger and Keith Richards turn 80, *Christopher Sandford* salutes their old-fashioned attitudes that have kept them young

Time is on their side

It's a sobering thought that Mick Jagger, once the embodiment of rebellious youth, celebrates his 80th birthday on 26th July.

Even more shockingly, Sir Mick's Rolling Stones colleague Keith Richards, once thought unlikely to see middle age, reaches the same milestone on 18th December.

So what happened? How do we explain the strange fact that Mick and Keith have apparently defied all the insurance industry's mortality tables and made it into a ninth decade?

It doesn't hurt that, for much of the past 60 years, Jagger and Richards have had access to the very best medical and (especially in Keith's case) legal backup money can buy.

In April 2019, Sir Mick had to pull out of a major US tour when he was found to need a heart-valve replacement operation. He was immediately flown by private jet to a New York hospital, and was later able to recuperate first at his beachfront home in Florida and then at his château in the Loire Valley, which was also where he rode out the Covid pandemic.

And good luck to him; he's earned it. But it's not exactly the six-month wait for a similar procedure on the NHS followed by a convalescence, or lockdown, in one's suburban semi.

Similarly, when in 2006 Richards fell while relaxing in the branches of a banyan tree in Fiji and hit his head on landing, a full-scale emergency team swung into action. An air ambulance flew the veteran guitarist to the nearest major hospital in New Zealand, where doctors drained blood from his brain, reattached his scalp with titanium bolts and put him on a morphine drip, thought to be a not wholly unfamiliar experience for him. Remarkably, Keith was back on the road with the Stones just nine weeks later.

This wasn't the first medical intervention over the years for the beloved Human Riff, once famous for his chemical binges and a particular fondness for a tipple he called Nuclear Waste, a pint-size cocktail of Stolly and Sunkist he was known to chug with his morning cornflakes.

But the secret to Jagger and Richards's longevity lies further back than that. It has its roots in the values with which they grew up in the bracingly austere years of postwar Britain.

In Jagger's case, this involved a lifestyle at home in suburban Dartford characterised by hard work, service to others, a carefully rationed diet and an exercise regime supervised by his physical education buff father, Joe.

For at least the first 18 years of his life, Mick's routine took place amid a welter of sporting equipment and barbells, and was punctuated by twice-weekly attendance at Dartford's medieval Holy Trinity Church, where he was known not so much for his singing voice as for his voluntary work and a quiet determination to make something of himself.

In 1961, Jagger's grammar-school leaving report called him 'a lad of good general calibre [with] a quality of persistence when he makes up his mind to tackle something'.

More than 60 years later, it would be hard to quibble with that core assessment of Jagger's character.

There's a discrepancy between the raised-by-wolves legend of Keith Richards's upbringing and the reality, with its emphasis on duty, rank and sound traditional values.

Richards's paternal grandparents were both well-respected pre-war councillors in Walthamstow, where his grandmother served as the first female mayor. His maternal grandfather was a First World War hero. Keith's father was among the first to hit the Normandy beaches on D-Day and was badly wounded.

Perhaps there was a touch less emphasis on physical exercise than across town at the Jaggers', but still Keith grew up with the benefits

Men of wealth and taste: Keith Richards and Mick Jagger today, on the eve of turning 80

WENN RIGHTS LTD / ALAMY

of a largely fat-free diet, as well as a fundamental sense of patriotism and service.

As a nine-year-old, he was a member of the choir singing *Zadok the Priest* to the newly crowned Queen in 1953, earning one of his merit badges as a Boy Scout. He later showed a pronounced streak of English romanticism by spending his first songwriting money on the thatched cottage in the Sussex countryside where he still lives today.

As Richards himself once put it, in his inimitable style, 'I can be the cat on stage any time I want. But really I'm a very placid, nice guy – most people will tell you that. It's really just to placate this other character that I work.'

A prince of darkness, maybe, but a prince nonetheless.

In the end, perhaps the most shocking revelation about Jagger and Richards – far eclipsing all the stories about Mars bars and drugs – is just how grounded both of them are in the values of the Britain where they grew up.

Not being privy to their inner thoughts, I wouldn't dare to suggest that both are fundamentally conservative types who might harbour a sort of amused contempt for a younger generation they see as feckless, whiny snowflakes, scared of hard graft and more interested in their social-media posts than in doing anything productive.

But there was always something about the two middle-class lads from the Kentish suburbs that was in it for the long haul. The very idea of Jagger and Richards as OAPs is a joke we never seem to grow tired of.

Remember, though, that when the Rolling Stones first formed, most of their material was written by American bluesmen in their sixties and seventies. It's only recently that Mick and Keith have approached the status of the originals.

Dangers of a sex-free life

Successful marriages need a physical element, says *Charlotte Metcalf*

Robbie Williams, 49, the rock god voted the sexiest man in the world by *Cosmopolitan* in 1999, recently announced he was eschewing marital sex.

Thousands of oldies rolled their eyes at the banality of the news. Tell us something we don't know.

Thousands of married oldies have not had sex together for well over a year – though they would baulk at admitting they had given it up for good. Robbie insists he adores Ayda, his wife of 13 years, and has no plans to leave her. He is just reverting to the norm of the many oldies who have long since yielded to a sexless but functioning companionship.

Those who have been in a relationship in which the sex fades out – often because of starting a family – know how hard it can be to sustain a marriage without that intimacy. It can smooth over escalating differences of opinion, diverging interests, irritating habits and ferocious rows.

Some 42 per cent of British marriages end in divorce, a figure on the rise. 'Unreasonable behaviour' is the number-one cause, with adultery responsible for around 14 per cent of bust-ups. In 2021, the average length of marriage between opposite-sex couples was just eight years.

Looking around at fellow oldies, I see quite a few who have stuck it out until the last of their offspring have left the nest. They worry that their children will suffer permanent emotional trauma if exposed to family breakdown. In fact, sensitive offspring usually predict the looming split, seeing right through attempts to disguise tension for their sakes.

For adultery to stick as a reason for granting divorce, the unfaithful partner must admit to it, which is why 'unreasonable behaviour' is the preferable speedy route to legal closure. My hunch, though, is that the vast majority of relationships break down because of sex – or lack of it.

The cliché of a married man succumbing to a younger woman's sexual charms is all too evident. The cringeworthy recent Netflix series *Obsession* showed a successful, wealthy surgeon hurtling into a catastrophically destructive affair with his son's fiancée. The series was inspired by Josephine Hart's 1991 novel *Damage*, made into a film starring Jeremy Irons and Juliette Binoche, with a screenplay by David Hare.

Mariage blanc: **Robbie Williams and Ayda Field**

The plot would be risible, were it not based on millions of actual male fantasies – not that all men have the same propulsion to act on them.

Take Piers Paul Read's 1979 novel, *A Married Man*, where the protagonist remains married, despite a midlife adultery crisis. I was gripped by the visceral descriptions of the protagonist fantasising about a 17-year-old while his slack-bodied wife snores and farts contentedly in the bed beside him.

I know a serial adulterer who has remained married for over 40 years because he ensures he has sex with his wife once a week. He insists it's the reason for his marriage's longevity.

Regular sex makes her feel valued and desired and thus more likely to overlook his peccadillos. It's this ability to make the spouse feel adored, more than the sexual acrobatics, that can sustain a marriage, but it's a difficult trick to pull off.

Laying such importance on regular sex is a conundrum for oldies. Most of them would rather read a good book in bed and would happily sink into a lasting, convivial pact that didn't rely on bedroom antics.

So why don't more of us feel confident to abandon sex like Robbie Williams? One reason is that most women believe (mainly from bitter experience) that there is inevitably a tempting siren round the next corner. Keeping a man's eye from roving can be a full-time job, involving anxieties around all sorts of things from sprouting hairs and sagging bellies to harsh lighting and appropriate underwear.

The numerous men who do yield to the younger model often regret it, yearning for the stable – if sexually dull – former family life. The younger model undoubtedly administers a blissfully sharp romantic shock, persuading the man he needn't contemplate his mortality for a few more years. Yet she is likely to stray if the ageing man becomes tired – not just of delivering in the bedroom, but of feigning interest in her diverging interests and the indecipherable, if not alien, cultural references of her friendship group.

Sexless marriages are more likely to survive in villages, where single women are perceived as predatory and so are put off settling there. Yet, in cities, full of opportunities to socialise, including the office, now that we're not working from home any more, the prospect of feeling cherished and sexually admired remains irresistibly romantic.

I wonder how long Robbie Williams or his gorgeous wife Ayda can hold out before succumbing to a flatterer. Who can resist a boost to the ailing belief in their own charms, particularly female oldies fed up with feeling so invisible?

Let's not underestimate the power of sex, as I suspect most of us secretly crave it or lament its passing. If the Williams marriage holds out without it, I'll be surprised.

ANDIA / ALAMY

Your free guide to achieving financial peace of mind

Charles Stanley's latest guide uncovers why prevention is better than cure when it comes to your financial wellbeing.

Download now for tips and takeaways from financial professionals

CHARLES STANLEY
Wealth Managers

Scan the QR code to download
or call 020 3797 0409

Cleo Watson, bonkbuster novelist and Boris Johnson's ex-Deputy Chief of Staff, reveals Westminster's warring tribes

Whipping boys

There's been a lot of speculation about which characters in my book, *Whips*, are based on real people.

The thing is, I honestly didn't set out to draw specific people. Even the shambolic ex-PM, rattling around the speaking circuit, writing poorly researched hagiographies of his favourite historical figures, was conceived while politicos and media types were touting ten more years of Boris Johnson. Perhaps I'm a mystic.

Anyway, I *did* set out to group the different types of MPs I've come across into individual caricatures. That way, everybody gets an airing and nobody's entirely exposed. A new kind of collective responsibility.

So here is my list of 'types' (just the main ones, of course – listing the full splinter groups and offshoots would require the entire magazine).

Ups and downs of Downing Street: Cleo Watson

Try-Hards – Need someone to do a media round to polish the biggest turd the Government has laid this year?

No problem – the try-hard likes pain. They'll take the party line and just keep saying it, without deviation or hesitation, their large, unblinking eyes staring down the camera lens.

Batter them at Question Time, skewer them on *Newsnight*. Water off a cuck's back.

They'll ask whatever easy, sycophantic questions are needed at PMQs on the day the PM is facing calls to resign. They go to every single event they're invited to and like to keep up with the Chief Whip, pressing their suit for a ministerial post somewhere in the next reshuffle.

They *know* they can deliver on whatever the agenda is. Just give them a team of civil servants, some time at the despatch box, a microphone and a teeny-weeny bit of power… It's all great experience for the jungle/ice rink/dance floor/jail.

Spams – Have you ever looked at a full list of Members of Parliament? I bet there are a lot of names on there you've only vaguely – or perhaps never – heard of.

A recurring theme in *Whips* is an interchangeable assortment of Davids whom you never meet but who are dutifully trotting through the voting lobby the way they're meant to.

In real life there is a bit more variety. They are called things like Graham and Stuart, too. Not bad people, but not setting the world alight with their oratory, ideas or charisma. Spam because they constitute a fair amount of the meat in any Parliamentary room but their presence is essentially just matter.

Spam also because this generally matches their complexion. Their numbers are especially important for leadership contests, where they are surprised to be singled out for wooing when all the media attention is devoted to landing the endorsement of a handful of big beasts.

Ex-Professionals – Just imagine.

You finally leave work in the Square Mile, where you carefully avoided the more spirited elements of Christmas parties and work ski trips at your investment bank/law firm/insurance brokerage because you had political ambitions and you wanted to be able to say you'd not even *seen* cocaine.

Then you get to Parliament and all the same outrages are happening here! Only there's no proper HR department to get everyone straightened out. It's annoying to be competently on top of your brief only to be overtaken by swivel-eyed loons on loyalty or party-unity grounds. And where on earth is everybody getting their suits made?

MARK THOMAS / ALAMY

Left: **Boris Johnson and Cleo Watson leave Downing Street, October 2020.** ***Top:*** **with Dominic Cummings, October 2020.** ***Above:*** **with Suella Braverman, November 2020**

You've got ambitions to be Chancellor – but a cool one. It feels good to tell your friends you're fiscally conservative but socially liberal. The Budget will be your Glastonbury. And if it doesn't quite work out, it's nice to know you can return to make piles of cash again – and who knows, maybe give the blow a go in Ibiza.

Bright Balliol Chaps – If I'm making an intervention in the Chamber, you know it's going to be good. Why else would I waste my time?

I was one to watch at the Union – not that I still think about that, of course – and I'm still a pretty good speaker. Anyway, I've got plenty to be getting on with, thanks to my latest book. Very, *very* highbrow non-fiction. Plus I'm learning Mandarin. And writing my column. There's some talk about podcasts. National treasure, here I come…

It's fun to be a sounding board for my more shamelessly ambitious friends. Some are giving up their club memberships in their bids for power. What are they going to do – survive on House of Commons plonk? Good luck.

I'm not all about Pall Mall, of course. Some of my dearest new friends are Red Wallers. Occasionally it gets written up that I have Cabinet ambitions, but I think I'd rather pass on the team sports – unless, of course, the team in question is led by me.

Good Eggs – They exist, trust me. Perhaps they don't get as much airtime in *Whips* as they should, but that's simply because the rotten eggs are far more fun to satirise.

Good eggs do make brilliant protagonists, though. So take heart that they find their time in the sun. In my experience, the good eggs are faultlessly polite and pleasant to deal with, regardless of how junior or unimportant you seem. They dish out advice freely, work hard and spend as little time as possible on Twitter.

They are willing to do media when it is necessary, and tend to be good at it, but are not incentivised by column inches. They have great ideas but are courteous about relaying them to people, working behind the scenes with their colleagues to write policy papers and research with think tanks.

They are diligent constituency MPs, are incredibly loyal and abhor psychodramas. Somewhat as with the spams, if you are a party leader and lose the good eggs' confidence, you're finished.

Absolute Grims – Sex pests. Gropers. Bullies. Fraudsters. Cheaters. Liars.

The grims make up a tiny proportion of the House of Commons, but their sleaze has undermined the credibility of the entire place.

The spectrum is wide, from dodgy expense claimants and the annoying, drunken slobberers at party conferences, to tax-avoiding fraudsters and the perpetrators of serious sexual assault.

There isn't a particular formula for these people. Some arrive as rotters, while others cave in to the corrupting influences of SW1.

How they are exposed also varies – and always shocks, not least because they are often overlooked as a result of their membership of one of the above groups.

I once read that roughly one per cent of the population are psychopaths, but this increases to ten per cent in business and politics.

How do you keep them out of Parliament? Being an MP is a strange, tough existence and it's hard to sift out the psychos and retain the sincerely brilliant.

The good news is that, in *Whips*, there are a few ideas on how to get rid of them once they're discovered…

Whips *(Corsair, £20) by Cleo Watson is out now*

Fifty years after J R R Tolkien's death, *Tanya Gold* tracks him from Birmingham to Oxford to Switzerland

On the Hobbit trail

J R R Tolkien in his study, Merton College, Oxford, 1968

HAYWOOD MAGEE / PICTURE POST / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, the philologist and author of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, died 50 years ago in Bournemouth on 2nd September 1973, aged 81.

His wife, Edith, loved Bournemouth's bourgeois placidity. She was tired of intellectuals, having lived in Oxford for 40 years. In 1968, when he was 76 and she 79, she persuaded him to move there.

He returned to Oxford when Edith died in 1971, but he was visiting Bournemouth to see the doctor who had treated her before her death.

It was his penultimate journey. He is buried with Edith in Wolvercote Cemetery, four miles north of Oxford. On the gravestone, the names Beren and Lúthien are engraved: characters who repeatedly appear in his most treasured works – the love tale of a man and an elf. Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher, one of his four children, 'She was (and knew she was) my Lúthien.'

I studied at Merton College, where Tolkien was Professor of English Language and Literature from 1945 to 1959, when he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*. 21 Merton Street, an Edwardian block of flats – student accommodation in my day – was his final home, which seemed to me miraculous.

I have always loved Tolkien's writing because it is and isn't of our world.

Oxford is a doughty city, and Tolkien seemed to me a wild romantic who saw beyond and below it, and imbued the landscape with an intensity and grief the city could barely acknowledge.

At Oxford, I followed his path – he lived for a while in what looked like a blackened witch's house opposite my lodgings in Holywell Street. I ate in the Eastgate Hotel in Merton Street, as he did in the gaudy waistcoats of Bilbo Baggins, his small and indomitable avatar.

'Middle-earth is *our* world,' he wrote, 'in a purely imaginary (though not impossible) period of antiquity.' And I knew it.

This spring, I decided to follow Tolkien's path again. I began in Sarehole, a suburb of Birmingham which was once a tiny Worcestershire hamlet. He was born not there but in what is now South Africa, where his father, Arthur, a native of Birmingham, was a banker.

The climate didn't suit John. When he was three, his mother, Mabel, brought him and his younger brother, Hilary, to England. Arthur was to follow, but he died of rheumatic fever before he could make the journey.

According to his biographer Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien's only memory of his father was of his

painting the name Tolkien on a travelling chest. All John's stories are quests into the past.

Sarehole was his paradise. 'I loved it with an intensity of love that was kind of nostalgia reversed,' he said. He lived at 5 Gracewell Road, a semi-detached cottage, between the ages of four and eight – 'the longest-seeming and most formative part of my life'.

The house, now on a suburban street, looks almost offensively ordinary now; when Tolkien visited in 1933, he found it 'in the midst of a sea of new red brick'.

Here Mabel taught him languages, botany and drawing. He was bewitched by Sarehole Mill, a late-18th-century mill on the River Cole, with a large pond and a tall chimney. It's now a museum. Browsing its archive, I found that Tolkien contributed to its renovation.

It still has an eerie peace, even though people dressed as hobbits eat pizza in the courtyard. John and Hilary would trespass and be chased away by the miller and his son, whom they called the white ogre, because he was covered in bone dust.

'I always knew it [Sarehole] would go,' he said – and it did, swallowed by industrialisation: the shadow.

The family moved to Birmingham so John could study at King Edward's School. We drive past Edgbaston Waterworks tower and Perrott's Folly, sometimes called the two towers of the second part of *The Lord of the Rings* – Saruman the wizard's Orthanc and Sauron's Cirith Ungol. John Garth, who wrote *The Worlds of J R R Tolkien*, the definitive guide to Tolkien and place, says there is no evidence for it.

In 1904, Mabel died of untreated diabetes; John blamed her family, who

The Tolkiens' gravestone, Wolvercote

cut off financial support when she converted to Catholicism. (He wrote that she 'killed herself with labour'.)

He found succour in the friendship of Father Francis Morgan, the Catholic priest to whom Mabel entrusted him – he remained devout all his life – and three friends at school with whom he formed a learned society.

'His feelings towards the rural landscape,' wrote Humphrey Carpenter, 'now became emotionally charged with personal bereavement.'

He began to write about hobbits, he said, 'as a *Sehnsucht* [yearning] for that happy childhood that ended when I was orphaned'.

He went up to Exeter College, Oxford, and graduated with a First in English Literature and Language in 1915. He married Edith Bratt, an orphan he met when they lived in the same boarding house in Edgbaston. He joined the army and fought at the Somme, where Rob Gilson and Geoffrey Smith, two of his school friends, were killed.

'Death can make us loathsome and helpless as individuals,' Smith wrote to Tolkien before he died, 'but it cannot put an end to the immortal four!'

I can't say whether Tolkien agreed, but he began the legendarium *The Silmarillion* then, setting down his 'feeling about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalise it'.

By 1925, he was Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, and he began to create the mythology he believed England lacked.

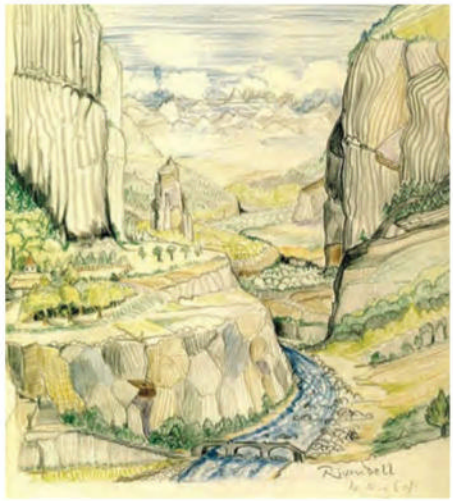
'Once upon a time,' he wrote, 'I had a mind to make a body of … connected legend … which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country.'

He was close to C S Lewis, a don at Magdalen College, with whom he formed the Inklings, a society dedicated to fantasy literature which met in the Eagle and Child on St Giles', which they called the Bird and Baby.

When the landlady installed a dartboard, which repulsed the Inklings, they moved to the Lamb & Flag – now run by a community interest company, also called the Inklings.

Lewis wrote his Narnia chronicles quickly – seven books between 1950 and 1956 – whereas *The Lord of the Rings* took Tolkien 12 years.

'It is written in my life-blood,' he wrote, 'such as that is, thick or thin; and I can no other.'



Tolkien's 1930s drawing of Rivendell, inspired by Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland

He never finished *The Silmarillion*. He was a procrastinator: he made multiple drafts and could not choose a working copy. His schoolfriend Christopher Wiseman predicted why he would not finish it years before, when critiquing Tolkien's early poetry:

'Why these creatures live to you is because you are still creating them. When you have finished creating them, they will be as dead to you as the atoms that make our living food.'

He needed them. After Edith died, Tolkien wrote to Christopher, 'The dreadful suffering of our childhoods, from which we rescued one another, but could not wholly heal wounds that later often proved disabling … these never touched our depths nor dimmed the memories of our youthful love. For ever we still met in the woodland glade and went hand and hand many times to escape the shadow of imminent death before our last parting.'

Those searching for Middle-earth have some certainties. Rivendell is Lauterbrunnen in Switzerland, which Tolkien visited in 1911: the resemblance in his drawings is uncanny. Helm's Deep is Cheddar Gorge in Somerset. The Withywindle is the Cherwell.

As for the rest of it, Garth calls Tolkien's imagination a kind of photographic double exposure, 'the ability to visualise unreal places perfectly, and the tendency to project the world he inhabited onto one he only imagined'.

I visit the yew-flanked door at St Edward's in Stow-on-the Wold. People say this was the inspiration for the Doors of Durin at Moria, with its holly trees.

I hope it was, but we cannot know and in that, surely, lies the possibility of magic.

Rev Michael Coren salutes his taxi-driver father and his cousin Alan Coren, who would have turned 85 in June

My funny family

My cousin Alan Coren would have been 85 on 27th June. The former editor of *Punch* and the *Listener*, regular panellist on *The News Quiz*, team captain on *Call My Bluff*, columnist and author was one of the most gifted and loved humorists of postwar Britain.

When he became editor of *Punch*, then a bastion of English satire, he was profiled by the *Jewish Chronicle*. He allegedly waved around a copy of the paper and said, 'This is ridiculous – I haven't been Jewish for years.'

He was, of course. I should know because my late parents were at his bar mitzvah. My father, Phil, was Alan's cousin. Only a second cousin – not especially close – and Dad was 15 years older than Alan. But he was part of the Coren tribe, which always made my dad extremely happy.

I made him happy too, although when I became a Christian in my early twenties, his response was: 'Fine – just don't tell me about it.' He died before I was ordained an Anglican priest – I can only imagine what might have been his reaction!

He was a working-class cab driver from Hackney, whose family had come to London in the late-19th century to flee East European pogroms.

Lots of Jewish men drove cabs after the Second World War because no family connections were needed, antisemitism wasn't an obstacle, and with hard work (50-hour weeks; very few holidays) there was a fairly good living to be had.

He enjoyed and was proud of what he did. But never so proud as when sitting at home in front of the television, with tea and a sandwich, and his cousin Alan would come on the screen. It was like a statement was being made, a triumph shared. 'See, there's a Coren.'

I told Alan this over lunch when I was starting out as a journalist in the early 1980s. I think he already knew.

'I once got into a cab in the middle of the day and the driver was Phil,' he said. 'We had such a wonderful conversation. He was quite emotional, and so was I.'

Dad told me about that meeting – because he told me about how most of his working days had gone. He kept a diary, too, and an autograph book. Working in central London for 40 years meant lots of famous people would at some point get into his cab (just like in Derek and Clive's *Back of the Cab* sketch): Laurence Olivier ('very nice but very tired'); Alan Alda ('lovely man but wouldn't stop talking'); Richard Harris ('very down-to-earth, funny, and seemed genuinely curious about what driving a cab was like').

Alan Coren (1938-2007) at *Punch*, 1975

Dustin Hoffman had an artificial-fart balloon with him, which he insisted on showing off.

Ralph Richardson and John Gielgud didn't say much but were polite, Peter O'Toole 'filled the whole bloody cab with

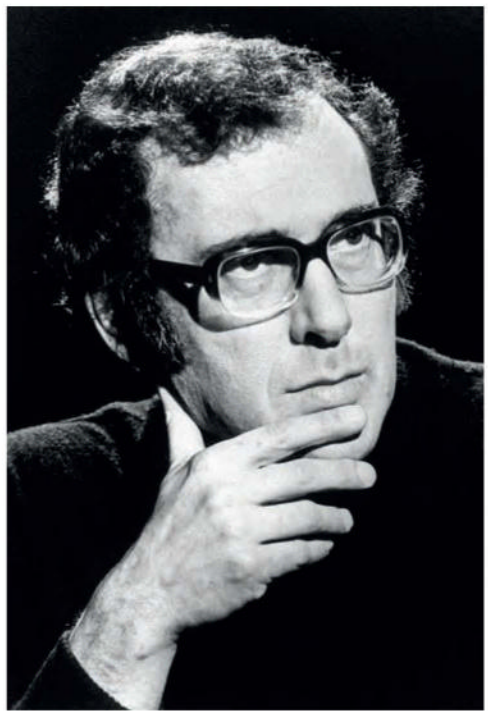
his personality. I liked him.' Jeremy Thorpe was 'shifty'. Jimmy Savile ('something I don't trust about him') was a big tipper, but London cabbies – every journalist should have one as an informed contact – always seemed to be suspicious of him. They didn't know the details of what is now public but, according to oracle Phil, even in the 1970s, 'He's not what he seems.'

Harold Pinter was a more awkward customer. Dad had been two years above Pinter at Hackney Jewish Youth Club. 'Good Lord,' said Pinter when he got into the cab. 'Hello, Philip.'

My dad was Phil to everybody. Harold spoke with a refined and educated English accent; my dad, from an identical background, spoke as you'd expect a cabbie from Hackney to sound – clearly, one of them had worked at it.

Lovely Benny Green, the well-known musician, author and raconteur, was different. He too was of that Jewish youth-club generation but from a West End branch. Benny and Phil had played football against each other. Dad told Benny about picking up Harold Pinter. Benny just rolled his eyes, and they laughed.

How well-known people behaved in the cab, and how they treated the driver, had a strange effect on my life as a child. These people were on television or in the news, and I'd see them through the lens of my father's experience.



In the back of Dad's cab: Richard Harris, Dustin Hoffman, Harold Pinter, Peter O'Toole

MIRRORPIX / MOVIESTORE COLLECTION LTD / PICTORIAL PRESS / KEYSTONE PICTURES USA / PA IMAGES

Graham Hill didn't tip at the end of a long trip. 'Bloody cheap sod,' said Dad

If they were rude or dismissive, I'd hear about it. I grew up disliking the racing driver Graham Hill, even though I'd never met the man. 'Bloody cheap sod,' said Dad. He didn't tip at the end of a long trip. Poor man probably just forgot, but Phil Coren didn't.

Dad was intelligent, good and wise. Born two decades later, he would likely have gone to university just as his son did. That was why he was so proud of his cousin Alan, an Oxford graduate. Proud of his success and abilities, and also because he'd broken the barrier.

When our first child was born, a perfect little boy, we gave him a Hebrew middle name – my dad's Hebrew name, Avi. That baby, now in his thirties, is a professor of philosophy at an excellent American university. I really do wish that Phil Coren could have seen that.

Rev Michael Coren is an Anglican vicar in Canada

When was the last time you knew your banker by name?

Hampden & Co.
BANKERS

At Hampden & Co, we provide private banking as it should be and each of our clients has a nominated banker who gets to know them and their banking requirements. If this sounds like the type of tailored service that you, your family and business would benefit from, please contact Banking Director, Samantha Dunne.

020 3841 7483
samantha.dunne@hampdenandco.com

hampdenandco.com

My boring heart condition

After a heart attack, *Roger Lewis* was in bed for two months. Jigsaw puzzles and Frankie Howerd films stopped him going mad with boredom

Roger's air ambulance drops him at Eastbourne Hospital, 19th February 2023

Having been told by the doctors, after a heart attack, that I must do nothing for at least two months, how am I, the penniless freelancer, with no sick pay or rainy-day savings, meant to manage?

Crime? Sex tourism? It's such a worry, I'm likely to have another heart attack.

For a week after discharge from the hospital, I kept going on sheer adrenalin. By scrawling on the bedsheets, I was able to deliver articles about A A Milne, Noël Coward and what it was like going up in an air-ambulance helicopter (*pictured*) – the frightful vibration wrecked my coccyx, if you must know.

Then I flopped, sagged, drooped. I simply haven't had the puff to rustle up any extra business, and the nation's literary and features editors have already clean forgotten my existence.

Maybe they assumed I'd croaked, which is why the *Daily Mail* sent two bunches of flowers. Kindly meant, no doubt. The net effect, anyway, is that gross income for February onwards is nil.

At liberty, as out-of-work music-hall artistes used to say, I've done a lot of reading – but all my life I've done a lot of reading. I am currently on the final few hundred pages of *The Sea, The Sea*.

What did anyone sane ever see in Dame Iris Murdoch? Frightful drivel: one improbable scene after another; the dialogue atrocious.

Anita Brookner is much better, at least as a prose stylist, except her novels are identical – impossible to tell one book from another: well-off single women in South Kensington mansion flats thinking they ought to fall in love and regretting it when they have done so.

I got a bit stuck on Richardson's *Clarissa*, the punishingly long 18th-century epistolary novel. Alexander Pope's Homer translations I have loved.

I re-read a few Shakespeare plays: *As You Like It* (in an edition containing mad designs by Salvador Dali) and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Though, here and there (obviously), the speeches are marvellous, the comic scenes are dreadful and the construction is hopeless, as if the bard couldn't be bothered. I'd truly like to cut Touchstone's balls off.

But I did have wet eyes at this from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*: 'O, how this Spring of love resembleth/ The uncertain glory of an April day,/ Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,/ And by and by a cloud takes all away.'

Not bad, eh? The whole of romantic poetry, several hundred years in the future, is encapsulated there.

Otherwise, I watch old films on Talking Pictures. Frankie Howerd really does say, 'Slap my nelly!' in *Further Up the Creek*, where he replaced Peter Sellers (anxious to be an international star and get away from little British entertainments) from *Up the Creek*. I have a growing admiration for Kenneth More, who had bounce and charm and was never infuriating. More was English in the way Richard Burton was Welsh.

I worry about my alleged 'demographic'. I can and do watch Joan Hickson as Miss Marple over and over, but the adverts interrupting the narrative every five minutes are all about vaginal dryness creams, leaving the RNLI money in one's will, the Co-op's prepaid funeral plans, and river cruises for those jammy sods (doctors, for instance, and teachers) on gold-plated, index-linked public-sector pensions.

You'd think I'd like music, but I can't make sense of it. It is too abstract for me. I bought a box set of Puccini operas. Noise.

Nor can I listen to people talking on the radio. I need things to look at. Hence my new enthusiasm – jigsaw puzzles. When I was busy and active, an out-in-front journalist and parent of newborn babies, I couldn't detect any merit in jigsaws.

Now they have a soothing quality, and, as the Drabble woman says in her book about them, they are a brilliant antidote to paranoia and depression.

Well, theoretically they are these things. I haven't finished any, except the 50-piece ones where it says Age 3+ on the box. I have an Edward Gorey design, with his detailed cross-hatching for the expanse of Dracula's castle. I'll need to live to be 1,000 to place the final segments.

Being poorly is a full-time job, or becomes one. I am on a ton of pills, neatly arranged in one of those coloured plastic trays old people have to hand. I inject insulin four times daily.

You know how, in a police-procedural drama, there is always a shot of a dead prostitute, her arms full of needle jabs, sprawled in a heroin den in somewhere like Leeds? That's what I look like, my belly a picturesque array of pinholes and bruises.

I take a taxi to the hospital, where they run a stethoscope over me and I tell lies about how much red wine I drink. It all goes in the dossier.

Perhaps because I found climbing on to the examination couch a struggle – indeed needed assistance – the nurse wants me to join her cardiac rehabilitation sessions at a gym.

'Each session begins with a group gradual warm-up, followed by a structured exercise circuit, and finishes with a group cool-down,' it says breezily on my appointments letter. Patients are advised to 'bring a small towel and bottle of water'.

I don't think so, do you?

Last chance saloon

Over 50 years ago, at university, *Jeremy Walker* began a six-year drinking binge. He thanks God it came to an end

I can't beat Brendan Behan, the Irish writer who was an alcoholic from the age of eight. My six seasons in hell – to adapt a phrase from Rimbaud, a fellow traveller in the land of excess – began soon after my 18th birthday.

All addicts are determined extremists and I joined the fraternity suddenly and totally. Sharing a Winchester education, but little else, with the Prime Minister, I left the cosy embrace of boarding school in 1969 and became subjected to the baffling, nightmarish demands of Merton College, Oxford, in 1970.

There I came into contact with a new form of human – woman – and the terrifying burden of choice.

I could choose whether to go to the occasional lecture. I could choose whether to inconvenience my eccentric tutor by visiting his house for the odd tutorial. And I could choose whether to get up before dusk. And choice without consequences is the motto of the damned.

As I ceded management of panic and the depression that had been welling for some time to alcohol, my commitment to its seeming cure was total. There were no days off, no furloughs, no doomed attempts to cut down, ease off or go without. I gave myself up to its powers, like a fool to a cult. No waking moment was free of nameless dread and the slow sabotage of privilege and promise.

Once alcohol became medicine, I knew I was in trouble. I had been inducted into its magical qualities at the age of 12. The pushers were men in and around the family who gathered to slaughter essentially flightless gamebirds in the stubbled winter fields of rural Wales. They were lost in a world of desperate postwar machismo and make-a-man-of-you schtick.

Many of them were later propelled to an early, indebted death through their own alcoholism, tobacco addiction and depression.

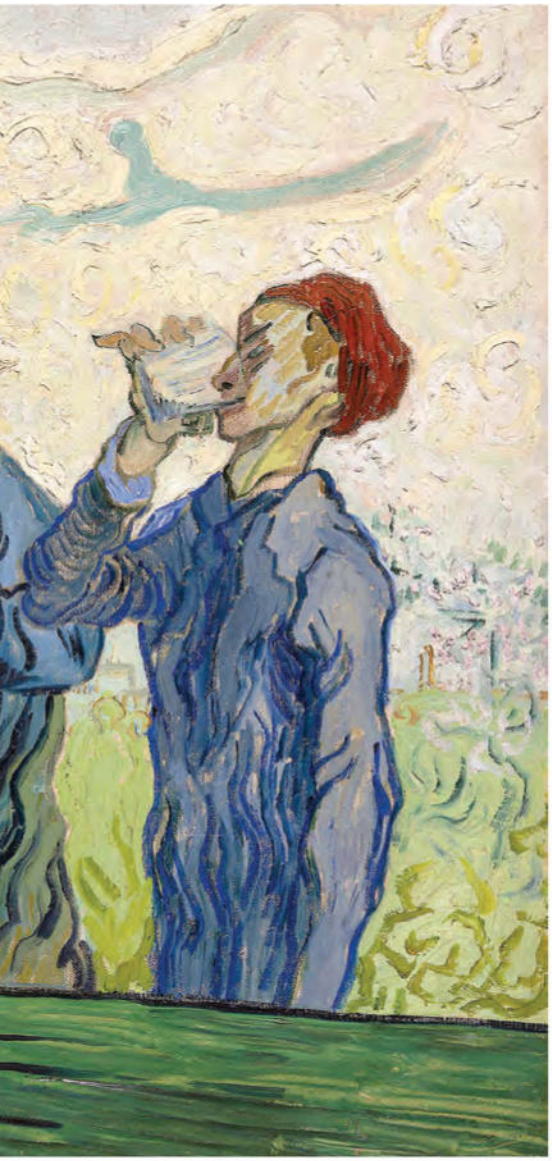
INCAMERASTOCK / ALAMY

Normally, they were constrained by the need for the 'sun [to be] over the yard-arm'. The tiresome code meant it was just about late enough in the day to have your first drink, thereby signalling you weren't alcoholic – but in fact you were. Shooting jaunts, though, came with a pass allowing you an early 'snifter', another key concept drawn from the lexicon of euphemisms.

Anxiously observing their *faux* bonhomie as a trainee beater, I was co-opted into their toxic world of self-destruction through the medium of self-treatment. 'Give the boy a beer – it'll put hairs on his chest,' they said. That led to teenage dabbling until I reached Oxford.

There, extreme loneliness meshed with the brutal realisation that, far from

Dutch courage: Van Gogh's *Drinkers* (1890)



I got the academic equivalent of *nul points*. I didn't get any degree at all

being the genius others had convinced me I was, I had an O-Level brain and had peaked at the age of 13.

My descent was steep. The usual accompaniments of alcohol addiction – amnesia, debt, debilitating shakes and others too shameful to mention – very quickly had me in their grip. And the fearful realisation which never left me – whether doused in alcohol or withdrawing from being doused in alcohol (there was nothing in between) – was that I was truly incapable of doing anything that could, even at a stretch, be called work.

As my Law finals inexorably approached in 1973, my determination not to be discovered strengthened. In no circumstances could I allow intervention from others, however kind or supportive, to interrupt my mission. For reasons I still don't understand, I could not be well. The peculiar misery of my life for those years was me.

Eventually, eight three-hour stints in the exam room with nothing to say, nothing to write – and nothing to drink – had to be negotiated with well-timed administration of Valium. The copy of *Men Only* I smuggled in to occupy my thoughts was quickly confiscated and, controversially, never returned.

I did what I could to intercept the letter informing my parents some weeks later of their precocious son's precipitous fall from grace but it duly arrived, in midsummer, bearing news of the academic equivalent of *nul points*. I didn't get any degree at all.

The minimalism of familial communication of those days saved me from inquiry or challenge. I moved soon after, mission intact, to the blessed anonymity of London.

My relentless consumption at university had been made possible by a generous grant from the state – and a system run by Kevin, the Geordie manager of the Bear Inn, in which my bounced Lloyds Bank cheques would be pinned to the green baize behind the bar until my grant put me briefly in the black at the beginning of each term.

In London, to replace this highly reliable income, I found a modest, if menial, job with just the smallest hint of caring about it. I fitted this unwelcome demand around my lunchtime binge and my evening work of procuring supplies and titrating my intake so that none left my system prematurely and wastefully.

Addiction is a series of repeated escapes from one prison into another. As with all addicts, my approach to the preservation of the strange safety of my cell was consistent, meticulous and well planned, since psychological survival without supplies of alcohol was unimaginable.

Because I was out and about, my job was one into which visits to pre-supermarket off-licences could be furtively woven. As my descent quickened, morning tremors had to be chemically stilled before I could manage the bus journey to my first boost of the day.

The end didn't come with the cliché of 'reaching rock bottom', where I had been for some time. Instead, when I was 24, on 17th May 1976 – a spring day in a rough pocket of Notting Hill – a voice said, 'I am beaten, I cannot do this any more.'

After a couple of visits to an elderly Irish GP – in those days, you could pop in for a bit of a chat – I was given an immediate appointment to see a young man not much older than me in one of the last inner-London Victorian asylums.

I evasively answered his questions about masturbation but fully fessed up to my daily consumption and the daily catastrophe of this level of drinking.

I negotiated one more weekend of self-destruction and checked in on the Monday afternoon, following a quite modest lunchtime session at the Irish pub not far from the gatehouse.

Before I was started on vast, though gradually reducing, quantities of Librium – a cognate of Valium used to stifle the potentially fatal and certainly traumatic withdrawal process – I was asked to wear pyjamas to reduce the risk of escape to the Irish pub. Having no pyjamas and no intention of messing up what I knew to be my first and last chance, I demurred.

The bliss of release from the prison of active addiction was too pure and heady to be diminished by ten days of dormitory incarceration with those who were noisily wrestling with different demons. Because of those few days in May and the six years of tribulation that preceded them, I was free to be a different person and maybe the right person.

The benign indifference of those around me during that time had saved me. Intervention at the wrong time would simply have been a postponement of the necessary crisis. And the later in life this comes, the messier it always is.

It is only the addict who knows when his mission has run its course.

Jeremy Walker has worked in mental health for 40 years

Why we laugh

Cartoonist *Nick Newman* takes part in a scientific experiment into the funny side of things

Laughter's a funny thing.

Who hasn't had to stifle a giggle at a funeral – and stared blankly at a legendary comedian like Charlie Chaplin?

When Spike Milligan was being shelled at Monte Cassino in 1944, he saw a sign written in chalk on a stone with an arrow pointing to 'World War II – this way'.

The bleakest of situations can be defused with the blackest of jokes. As Mark Twain noted, 'The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter.'

To understand why we laugh and what we laugh at, I recently took part in an experiment at London's Cartoon Museum. The Laughter Lab research project was conducted by Robin Dunbar, Professor of Evolutionary Psychology at Oxford University.

His experiment asked visitors to choose preferences in an exhibition of 19 paired sets of cartoons, some with captions, others without. The gags varied thematically from relationship jokes to political cartoons.

Some 4,500 people took part in the project – psychology experiments usually run to a few hundred participants – and the results were surprising. Unlike with aural humour, the more complicated the cartoon, the funnier the joke.

Sense of humour also changes with age. People generally prefer political jokes to social jokes, but as you get older, your preference changes – political cartoons become less appealing. Says Dunbar, 'You've seen it all before – it's no longer amusing.'

An examination of verbal versus visual cartoons saw a gender divide. Men prefer visual cartoons and switch to verbal as they get older. Women prefer verbal cartoons and veer towards visual gags as they age.

A similar gender split became apparent in the type of joke preferred. Men prefer 'situational' (slapstick) cartoons, whereas women like political jokes more than men. The only category on which the sexes agreed – and preferred by far – was 'domestic dynamics' (relationships). Professor Dunbar concludes, 'Women are able to read social context in much greater depth than men – men are rather shallow.'

Grandma by Giles in the *Daily Express*

Dunbar's primary interest is in social evolution and the mechanisms underpinning social bonding.

His physiological research shows that laughter is good for you. Laughter triggers the release of chemicals in the brain called endorphins. Endorphins are feelgood opioids. Primates release endorphins through grooming – stroking and hugging – but this intimate form of bonding precludes bonding with big groups.

That's where laughter comes in – allowing communal bonding without intimate contact. Through evolution, that bonding has expanded to include singing, dancing, the rituals of religion, eating together and drinking alcohol (some might say alcoholics are addicted to endorphins, not alcohol).

Tragedy, like comedy, triggers the endorphin system. Endorphins also help manage your pain threshold – so laughter really *is* the best medicine.

Professor Sophie Scott is Director of Cognitive Neuroscience at UCL – and has a sideline as a stand-up comedienne – so knows how jokes work. She was a member of the panel I sat on with *Guardian* cartoonist Rebecca Hendin, discussing the Laughter Lab's findings.

'There are theories about humour: laughter is because you feel superior to someone else – but then why are puns funny?' says Scott. She believes that the fewer barriers there are to understanding humour, the funnier it is. So the wordless comedy of slapstick translates universally – like Mr Bean.

Cartoons are often just verbal jokes in two dimensions – and, likewise, the most satisfying cartoons are captionless.

If humour science proves anything, it's that no one thing is funny for everybody. Scott says that, even with slapstick, 'There's always somebody saying, "That's not funny – my brother died that way." '

Closing the discussion, Laughter Lab curator Emma Stirling-Middleton asked, 'What is the purpose of humour?'

Dunbar's succinct reply was 'I have no idea' – but he added, 'Laughter is such an old and important feature of our social interactions. When it started, two million years or so ago, it was just a form of chorusing, sitting around a campfire, effectively singing. And a response to slapstick – somebody falling over.'

This developed into a way of controlling what was humorous – in other words, telling jokes. Otherwise, you had to wait for someone to slip on a banana skin before releasing those endorphins.

Scott points out that laughter in other apes involves physicality, and while tickling makes baby apes laugh just as it does baby humans, some things make humans laugh but not apes – such as a game of 'peek-a-boo'. For humans, laughter can happen at a distance.

Laughter is also contagious. There are examples of contagious behaviour throughout the animal kingdom. Turtles yawn contagiously; orang-utans scratch contagiously. But there are no examples of contagious laughing – other than in humans. As Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote, 'Laugh, and the world laughs with you'.

Laughter is an essential and unique component of human communication, but I hoped the experiment would yield some sort of formula for what makes a funny joke – like *The Day Today*'s brilliant equation 'Events x Importance = News'.

Sadly, no such theorem was forthcoming. Ultimately, the only humour equation that matters is Cartoon = Cheque = Booze.

Nick Newman works for Private Eye *and does cartoons for the* Sunday Times

We all do it – after extensive research, *Dr Michael Farrell* reveals the reason

Why we yawn

In the cinema, it is hot and the film is boring. Someone a few seats away is yawning. You cannot resist doing the same.

At dinner with friends, you cannot hide your tiredness. Each time you yawn, you cover your mouth and mumble, 'Sorry.'

Why do we yawn at these moments?

Yawning is not just deep breathing to give us some fresh air. It has a particular pattern of three phases: a long drawing-in of breath, a peak and then a quick exhalation. At the same time, we may or may not stretch our trunk and limbs. Either way, afterwards we feel relaxed and content.

Greek physician Hippocrates thought yawning helped clear fever out of our systems in a way similar to how a chimney gets rid of smoke. Only in the 1980s did medicine, especially neuroscience, begin to take a stronger interest.

But the basic question of why we yawn at all is still not fully understood. It seems to improve our vigilance and may have some distant link with helping survival. At least we now know that it has no role in getting rid of fever.

Everyone has seen newborn babies yawning. But does it start even earlier? Molly Helt at the University of Connecticut gives a confident 'Yes' to this question.

'Foetuses yawn quite spontaneously in the womb,' she says. 'Researchers in the Netherlands used ultrasound to observe such yawning. They found it happens as early as 11 weeks after conception. Foetuses also yawn and stretch their bodies at the same time, just like adults.'

When we see someone yawn, we find it hard not to succumb ourselves. 'Oh look, you've started me off now' is a common response. This urge to mimic yawning happens not only with us but with great apes, too.

Do young children 'catch' the yawning of others, as adults seem to? Helt says, 'We looked at yawning in infants and children. Previous studies had examined how copied yawning is triggered by videos. This detected such mimicking at about the age of five. When we used the stimulus of real people yawning, rather than video clips, we found that infants as young as two copied the behaviour.'

In fact, researchers used this contagious effect to try to identify key features of yawning in adults. They found that some essentials seem to bring about copying more than others.

Robert Provine of the University of Maryland says, 'We normally think of the most essential feature of a yawn as being a wide-open mouth.' But this alone was not enough to trigger yawning. It looks too much like someone shouting or singing at full pitch.

In one experiment, researchers showed volunteers representations of a yawning mouth but without the context of the whole face. Participants were as unlikely to yawn afterwards as when shown an isolated mouth smiling. But if volunteers were shown a whole animated face yawning, but with the mouth masked, they were just as likely to yawn in response as when they could see the mouth.

Provine explains, 'It seems that when yawning is triggered, we take in the context of the whole face. This includes the gaping mouth but also other features like squinting eyes. Other clues in real life can come from stretching our arms or tilting our head back. Yawning includes a whole package of facial expression and sometimes our body posture and movement as well.'

Why is this strange behaviour so contagious? It appears that certain nerve networks are brought into play when we copy yawning, and these relate to the circuits activated when we feel in tune with the emotions of other people.

It is as if yawning is some deep-seated copying behaviour, showing empathy.

Dr Michael Farrell is a psychologist. His book Controversies in Schizophrenia *is out in August (Routledge)*

Tony Blair's bad hair day

The PM should have praised the genius of hairdressers

In 1997, newly elected Tony Blair declared that he aimed to deliver a university education to over 50 per cent of school-leavers. He didn't want anyone to feel they had to 'settle for being a hairdresser'.

'What on earth is wrong with being a hairdresser!?' raged my intellectual friend Anne. 'Hairdressers can double as psychotherapists and it can be an incredibly well-paid job.'

I think of her words each time I visit my own good-vibes-emitting local hairdresser Serena. I reflect on her trajectory from unmotivated teenager who left school at 16 to prosperous salon-owner by the age of 30.

Serena was amazed when her mother told her, the day after school ended, that she couldn't just sit around at home and she needed to get a job – any job.

But it was the days when people obeyed their parents and so, *faute de mieux*, Serena, who had no interest in hairdressing, sulkily agreed to take up a trainee position her mother had found for her in a salon in Marlborough High Street.

The cool and trendy environment piqued her interest. Naturally intuitive Serena learned how to snip, style and colour. She acquired that indefinable skill of being able to tune into each customer and deliver just the amount of chat they wanted.

Serena worked so hard that when one of her cool colleagues left to open her own salon, she asked Serena to come with her.

And when after a couple of years that cool colleague went freelance, Serena, undeterred, rented a chair in another trendy salon and built up a following.

One day, an estate-agent customer announced that she was representing the owner of a run-down cottage in an unglamorous village, and was having difficulty selling it because it was next door to a noisy pub. She said, 'Serena, that would make an ideal salon for you.'

Shear delight: Mary loves her hairdresser

Serena says, 'The thing is – it was affordable *because* it was an unglamorous village and it was the days when you had to put down only a small deposit.'

The location turned out to be irrelevant, because Serena's personal popularity meant her clients followed her. I calculate she makes a six-figure income after mortgage, services and product costs, and the salary of her assistant.

Her success is linked to the fact that she's never in a bad mood. Why would she be? She has the life of Riley and enjoys the work. Demand is so great that she can filter her customer list to admit only those she gets along with.

A key thing, she says, is 'You have to be reliable, Mary. You can't let people down. If you have made them an appointment, then you have to be there for them.'

I don't use her as a therapist. I am usually too busy catching up with reading while she tweaks me in her haven. But others spare themselves the cost of psychotherapy as they gush forth.

'You can tell your hairdresser things you don't want to tell your best friend,' Serena says.

But, she adds, 'You mustn't become complacent. You always have to ask, "Do you fancy a change?" Because some customers will leave their hairdresser because they are too embarrassed to say they want to try a different look. So you mustn't assume they want the same thing each time.'

For a third of the price of a top London salon – with the same results – Serena delivers a five-star provincial service.

The fact that the business is manageably sized is key. Friends continually urge her to open more salons to follow the winning formula, but she prefers to remain in charge of just one successful salon: 'Mary, I have no reason to add more stress to my life by running a bigger business.'

Sadly, she can't now find any apprentices to be inspired by her story and ambition. She says, 'It's been the hardest time in 20 years to recruit apprentices. People have changed since Covid – they don't seem to have any energy or ambition and they have quite bad entitlement syndrome.

'That said, it takes two years to train and the minimum wage is – what, £5 an hour? No one can afford to do it. You can get £13 an hour stacking shelves at Lidl.'

It's the same story in China. In a bid for tech supremacy, the leaders have encountered resistance in a generation of young Chinese who balk at the Party's high-minded calls for 'continued struggle'. They opt instead for 'lying flat', or *tang ping*. They got a taste of freedom during lockdown and it dawned on them that they did not want to work the rest of their lives away.

Meanwhile, we hope that Tony has had time to eat his words on hairdressing – not least since his son Euan has made a fortune with his company, Multiverse, promoting apprenticeships for non-graduates.

No sex, please – we're your parents

My family's in-house censors won't put up with toilet humour, violence or Jim Broadbent taking his trousers off

JEM CLARKE

Jem Clarke is in his very, very early fifties, is five foot zero inches tall and has never left the family home in Cleethorpes, which he shares with his parents...

STEVE WAY

Finally, at the age of 52, I've had a conversation with my mother about sex.

I got the downstairs telly to support Netflix and was treating my parents to their first free movie on the network.

They got into cinema mode: Mother tutted at the time it took me to convince the Netflix screen I wasn't a child, while Father fell into a deep sleep.

My parents have various requirements when it comes to films. It must be British and not contain toilet humour, violence or sexual language. Many genres, from thrillers to chillers, are strictly forbidden. Their sweet spot is kitchen-sink – but as far away from the sink as possible.

23 Walks was ideal. 'Dog walkers finding later-life love' was a safe bet. I crossed my fingers and pressed play.

My parents thought it was too young and American for their tastes. They declared that they would split the 90-minute film into half-hour viewing sessions.

Mother said, 'We'll slot it in between a quiz and Kirsty Wark staring cross-eyed at some startled junior minister.'

On the final evening of *23 Walks*, my bedroom was invaded by a non-knocking mother. She demanded an immediate explanation as to why I'd forced her to sit through 15 minutes of 'filthy moaning' business: 'I expected it of the Geordie man, but Alison Steadman should know better than getting involved in this game.'

I robustly defended the cinematic convention of using the sex act as an allegory for change or opening up.

Mother scoffed, 'She had nothing left TO open up! And there was absolutely nowhere left to put any change!'

I said, 'The characters were having an epiphany.'

'Epiphany! Let me assure you there was nothing godly going on under that duvet. No incense. No knackered male adult choir doing a second circuit of the main aisle because the temporary vicar is a showy devil. No passive aggression from the ladies' lunch trio in the third row. This was what I can only describe as a full game of human shuffleboard you infected my front room with. Your father hasn't reached for a remote quicker – and that includes when Matthew Bourne put too many nuts in his *Nutcracker*!'

(Father did fall off the Chesterfield reaching for the remote, ironically catching his own nuts on the coffee-table leg.)

I can't now rest, post-supper, in pyjama bottoms alone, without worrying about a wrathful mother barging in, like Mark Kermode in drag, denouncing modern film. As a diversionary tactic, I now phone the local cinema for advice.

'I note you are currently screening *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*. If you're not too busy, could you pop in to the screen and let me know if Jim Broadbent is removing his trousers at any point?'

Kelli, who explains she started only on Thursday, hands me over to her line manager, Maurice, a kindly man who is far too brusque for someone who has chosen a career in show business: 'Mr Clarke, I told you last week it's not my job to determine whether Richard Eyre's *Allelujah* is full-on Trot propaganda or has more *Carry On* vibes. I neither know nor care whether *The Railway Children Return* is "anachronism-free" or not.'

'I'm only asking for a friend,' I said. 'An elderly male friend, who finds a casual cinematic anachronism more triggering than a contextually inappropriate nipple.'

Maurice suggested I look on the British Board of Film Classification website and search for 'contextually inappropriate nipple'. By the time I explained I wasn't searching for nipples but trying to avoid them, Maurice had gone. But mother was towering under me. Because she is 4ft 7in, she can often enter a room undetected.

When she heard mention of the word 'nipple', she shook her head – in sadness more than anger – and asked me that dreaded question, 'Is it time we had that talk, son?'

What a shocker!

It's one short step from torturing your pet to murdering your nanny, says *Algy Cluff* – who watched Lord Lucan electrocute his dog

One of my oldest friends is Billie Edgson. From 1969, he was the doorman of the Clermont Club and Annabel's, the nightclub beneath the Clermont at 44 Berkeley Square, before 25 years at Mark's Club in Charles Street, followed by his current role at 5 Hertford Street.

The Clermont Club was John Aspinall's first casino, which he owned from 1962 to 1972. Among the regulars was Ian Maxwell-Scott, a heavily bespectacled, urbane Old Etonian possessed of three interests: golf, darts and gambling.

Having lost his money at the Clermont tables, Ian converted from patron to employee, as right-hand man to John Aspinall, the legendary proprietor and pioneer of gambling in the West End when it was illegal and later, by the late 1950s, legal.

Billie well remembers one infamous Clermont member, John Lucan.

Billy was much involved in the Lord Lucan affair, as indeed was I, having had my house searched by 'the Lucan squad' from Gerald Road Police Station!

We are blessed because during the last war the whole of the White Cliffs of Dover, including our house and garden, was taken over by the Army, where they installed mammoth ammunition bunkers.

The police convinced themselves that I was hiding Lord Lucan in them. They are now used for storing bottles for our White Cliffs of Dover Sparkling Wine – first crop to come this year.

At one stage, before the 1974 murder of Sandra Rivett, the Lucan family nanny, Billy would take the two Lucan children to school in a DAF vehicle provided by his lordship. Lucan's nights were so committed to playing for the house at the Clermont Club that he was incapable of fulfilling parental responsibilities.

Billy was as astounded as anyone else when the grisly and shockingly inept crime was committed and has a view that Lucan had an accomplice. However, he will not reveal his identity.

If there was such an accomplice, he or she must have taken off the moment it was evident that the wrong woman had been murdered. Lucan intended to kill his wife, not the nanny.

There is no doubt that, after the murder, Lucan turned up alone at the Maxwell-Scott residence in Sussex, the last person to see him alive being Ian Maxwell-Scott's wife.

Billy does not have a view about what happened thereafter, but leans to the view that Lucan's suicide was followed by the destruction of his corpse, duplicating whatever had been planned by Lucan to dispose of his wife's body.

This does not, in my view, seem at all likely, particularly as he drove in Michael Stoop's borrowed car from

Lady Lucan at her London home, pleading for her husband to give himself up, in 1977. Lucan absconded after murdering Sandra Rivett in 1974

MIRRORPIX / ALAMY

Murderer most foul: Lucan marries Veronica Duncan, Holy Trinity Brompton, 1963

the Maxwell-Scott house to the ferry terminal at Newhaven.

Larger than life as indeed they were, it is beyond reasonable sense that the Clermont set would have allowed themselves to be complicit in an act of murder. The evidence supports the theory that Lucan killed himself by launching himself from the deck of the Newhaven ferry into the freezing embrace of the English Channel.

I had a flat at 18 Eaton Square during the decline and collapse of the Lucan marriage.

This was the section of Eaton Square that was at a right angle to Lower Belgrave Street, the Lucan residence and murder scene.

In the square, there is a garden in which Lucan 'trained' some unfortunate dog (probably a Rhodesian Ridgeback).

> The poor dog used to leap involuntarily one foot into the air

He did this by administering electric shocks to the animal via a console to a collar around the animal's neck. The poor dog used to leap involuntarily one foot into the air as Lucan, in Bond-villain style, sought to induce the poor animal to conform to his instructions.

So objectionable was this that I was moved to intervene with a fellow clubman who, knowing of my friendship with his wife, was less than cordial.

It's one short step from torturing your dog to murdering your nanny, I should have realised.

It was about this time that the sensible judge refused custody of the Lucan children to their father, a judgment that, although correct, was the catalyst for the death of Sandra Rivett.

It is worth recording that the two children whom Veronica Lucan brought up have, notwithstanding the distressing background to their childhood, both led successful and useful lives.

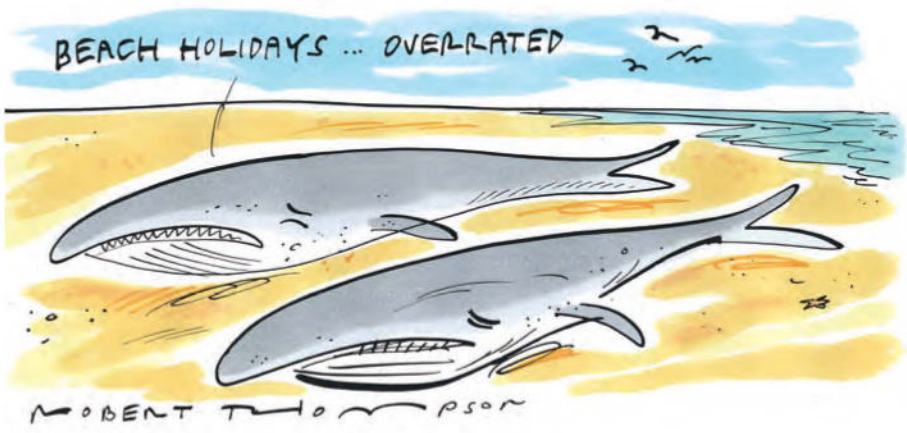
Billy, now 79, continues to work as a doorman for Robin Birley at 5 Hertford Street. He is the Peter Pan of Mayfair, still retaining his charm and impish good looks.

Algy Cluff's The Importance of Being Algy *is published on 6th July*

Town Mouse

Oh, I don't like to be beside the seaside

TOM HODGKINSON



This year, it's a summer in the city for Mrs Mouse and me.

No foreign holidays. No fretting about suitcases being overweight. No early starts. No shuffling through Stansted Airport like condemned pigs.

No shovelling out untold piles of cash on swordfish steaks, questionable pizzas and strange beer. No lining up outside the Uffizi. No embarrassed pointing at things in charming delis as the only Italian I know is '*Due birre, per favore*.' No boredom on beaches.

There's a clue in the name. The word 'travel' is derived from the Latin *trepalium*, meaning 'a three-pronged instrument of torture'. In French, *travail* means pain, suffering or work.

Instead we'll be holidaying at home, in Shepherd's Bush. It'll be great. We're near the Thames. We'll visit Hyde Park and Soho and I'll play tennis in Holland Park.

We've got Kew Gardens and Richmond Park. So many lovely parks. On my bicycle, I can find beauty everywhere. And we can easily get to the M40 or the M4 if we feel like getting out of town.

It was an enormous relief to make this decision – a moment of liberation. A lightness entered my soul. I felt free as a bird.

American poet Billy Collins experienced the same surge of delight when his holiday to Italy was cancelled. In his 1991 poem *Consolation*, he writes:

How agreeable it is not to be touring Italy this summer,
wandering her cities and ascending her torrid hilltowns.

He thought it was a treat to spend the summer in his own neighbourhood:

How much better to cruise these local, familiar streets,
fully grasping the meaning of every roadsign and billboard
and all the sudden hand gestures of my compatriots.

We'll be avoiding seaside towns in Blighty as well. I used to think I liked the sea, but lately I'm not so sure. It was while at the seaside that T S Eliot wrote a particularly depressing section of his melancholic poem *The Waste Land*: 'On Margate Sands./ I can connect/ Nothing with nothing'.

Lewis Carroll was no believer in the hype, either. In his 1909 poem *A Sea Dirge*, he complained about the contemporary mania for rushing to the seaside:

If you like your coffee with sand for dregs,
A decided hint of salt in your tea,
And a fishy taste in the very eggs –
By all means choose the Sea.

In the ancient world, being exiled to a seaside town was considered a fate almost worse than death. If you muttered to an enemy, 'I hope you like the taste of seafood,' that meant you were threatening them with banishment to a distant shore.

In 8 AD, poor Ovid was exiled by Augustus to Tomis on the Black Sea, now a seaside resort called Constanta, in Romania.

Today's tourists might welcome a visit to sunny Tomis. But for Ovid it was not pleasant. One of the worst things about it was that nobody there realised how important he was. 'Here I'm the barbarian, understood by nobody,' he wailed.

Delacroix and Turner both pictured Ovid standing on the shore of the Black Sea, looking really miserable. They were doubtless inspired by these cheery, Eliot-like sentiments from his exile poems:

The face of the land is covered with neither shrubs
nor trees, and that lifeless winter merges into winter.
Here a fourth winter wearies me, contending as I am
with cold, with arrows, and with my own fate.
My tears are endless, unless numbness checks them:
and a lethargy like death grips my thoughts.

We've only very recently decided to start liking the sea as a place for holidays. In a short essay on exile, Jan Morris says a British officer in 1830 whinged in a letter home about his posting. 'Oh, what have I done,' he groaned, 'what have I done, that Her Majesty should banish me to this vile and abominable place?' The abominable place in question? The Greek isle of Corfu.

Paradise is not the same as home. Last year, we spent four weeks on a lovely island in Croatia. Sun, sea, medieval architecture. But halfway through week three, I started to long to be back in London.

Matthew Arnold was another sea-hater. To him, it brought to mind 'the turbid ebb and flow of human misery'. It was the *sound* of the sea, for Arnold, writing in 1867, that was really depressing:

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.

So please enjoy your trip to the seaside, whether foreign or domestic. I'll be thinking of you when walking round my neighbourhood, free of care and worry, basking in the joy of the familiar.

Country Mouse

I've become a 5,000-year-old axeman

GILES WOOD

It is good practice for all growers to observe crop rotation – it is the cornerstone of organic gardening.

But with my patch being the size of a London-square garden, it makes sense to break new ground when I'm planting potatoes. Potatoes love fresh soil, especially where tall flowering nettles have graciously enriched it with their peaty roots. I was pleased to read that the variety I favour, the Red Duke of York, was also recommended by the great organic gardener Lawrence D Hills, founder of the Henry Doubleday Research Association.

During the site preparation, a strange, inanimate artefact literally flew out of the ground, as though in a hurry to be reunited with a living soul.

Or so I fancied as a student of Carl Jung's acausal connecting principles – illustrated by strange tales of lost wedding rings being improbably reunited with their owners.

The find was only three yards from my boundary fence and I recognised it as an artefact. Very old, made not of flint but of gritty volcanic stone – so not from round here in Wiltshire. But I foolishly mistook it for a sharpening stone.

I stood corrected on the internet by a man in Ipswich, a dealer in Stone Age artefacts to whom I had emailed the image.

He replied, 'Your item appears to be a late-neolithic, coarse, hard stone axe, dating to c 3000-2000 BC. It would have been hafted into a wooden handle for use, utilising tree resin and/or sinew to secure it in place.'

There's nothing like one amateur archaeologist, in a profession characterised by obfuscation, to take the wind out of the sails of another.

He told me 'for nothing' that it was not that unusual a find and, 'with some slight damage to blade edge, would probably realise £100, after buyer's commission, postage etc'.

A hundred pounds to a cottager is still undreamt-of riches. Its financial value is more than that of my entire crop of potatoes.

Of course I wouldn't dream of selling it. It will be an heirloom. It may be mounted in a case with printed commentary on a strip of pale canvas as in the Wiltshire Museum.

It increases the timeline of this property's human settlement by up to 5,000 years – to put such details into the property particulars, were we to sell, would be an estate agent's dream.

Jung said that each man must create his own myth and to me the find is highly significant. It is the *prima materia*, running parallel in significance with dreams. It is a symbol of great cultural resonance that I should find such an object on land to which we now have the title deed after so many years of struggle. And how much more powerful an object than a sheaf of papers in a solicitor's safe.

Giles's neolithic axe head, c 3000 BC

We do not know how many boatloads – in a strange foreshadowing of today – of dark Iberian farmers arrived in boatloads on the southern and western shores of the British Isles in neolithic times. The owner would have brought the axe with him, having fashioned it himself, and it would have been part of the toolkit, along with flint sickles, used for forest clearance so that the first cornfields could be sown.

These farmers displaced the hunter-gatherers, who had been dependent on scavenging whelks and berries. Once food supplies could be controlled, you could swell the population.

Was the axe-owner nagged by his wife? Did he sleep, like Asterix the Gaul, on a bed of stone? These are the questions that arise as I roll the pleasingly cool and heavy object, over and over in the palm of my hand.

It is not fanciful to ascribe to my farmer a belief in a deeper reality lying behind the world of appearance. We know from their chambered barrows and tombs that neolithic farmers venerated the dead and raised megalithic structures in their honour. So they must have been capable of abstract thought.

They also feasted near Stonehenge – a tradition we continue in Wiltshire to this day; indeed every day, if Waitrose can only get its supply chains in order.

A hunter-gatherer could just about survive in drought by feasting on carrion, but a farmer, or a vegetable-grower like me, relies on rain – and rain cannot be controlled. This neolithic farmer would need to propitiate the gods.

Once again, a severe drought is predicted. I asked Mary to remind the vicar at our church to pray for rain. Meanwhile, this pagan will consult James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The timeline for our tenure in Wiltshire has been so far extended by this axe head as to make Christianity a relatively recent development.

Could the discovery supply me with the sense of belonging that I have been searching for – an object that connects me to an ancient past and validates my choosing to live here?

Only last week, on an orchid-spotting downland walk with wildlife writer Peter Marren, he reminded me that 'change of ownership' is one of the greatest enemies of conservation.

'Stay put,' he told me. 'Better to protect your own plantation from the next round of forest clearance.'

The ultimate storm in a teacup

Almost 250 years ago, the Boston Tea Party left George III in hot water

DAVID HORSPOOL

Assam overboard

GARY WING

In 2019, Alex Morgan, a player for the US women's soccer team, celebrated scoring against England by raising an imaginary cup of tea to her lips, complete with outstretched little finger.

Most English viewers took this as a dig at our national drink and our la-di-da ways. More detailed theories abounded.

One, put forward on a football website of the sort that exists to analyse everything about the game with the zeal of French philosophers discussing existentialism, was that it was 'a reference to the Boston Tea Party – a significant event in American history'.

The same source placed this in the category of 'Possible explanations that don't involve making a mockery of English culture'.

Up to a point. Describing the Boston Tea Party as a significant event in American history is a bit like describing the Battle of Hastings as a significant event in Norman history. It was, but it mattered to the other side, too.

And the idea that invoking the Tea Party wouldn't mock the English ignores the fact that the event itself, 250 years ago, in December 1773, was calculated to mock – and then some.

It was – as one Bostonian, Josiah Quincy, Jr, warned 5,000 or so of his fellow citizens, gathered that night at the Old South Meeting Hall – an act likely to 'bring on the most trying and terrific struggle this country ever saw'.

Some historical events, such as the Boston Massacre of 1770 (death toll – five, which would barely make the evening news in the US today), have acquired historical names that exaggerate their severity.

The opposite is true in the case of the Tea Party. It sounds like a lark, particularly when you learn that the people who took part dressed as Native American Mohawks and blackened their faces with soot.

If we describe what happened as a group of men dumping some tea into a harbour, that doesn't really do justice to the Tea Party either.

Imagine that a group from Just Stop Oil managed to get on to three container ships and spend the next three hours dumping cars into the sea, with the authorities apparently powerless to stop them. The circumstances are different, of course, but no one would view what was happening as a joke.

What had steered the Bostonians to an act they knew very well might lead to war? Historians have spent the past two and a half centuries debating that, and the short answer is it's complicated.

Explanations can still be divided into two camps. There are those who focus on the tea, and those who focus on what the tea stood for.

The first group concludes that, though mismanaged by the British, the whole thing was a tragic misunderstanding.

It wasn't helped by the fact that it was in the interests of many on the American side, who either were tea-smugglers or benefited from tea-smuggling, to make sure the new consignment of tea, arriving from England under the auspices of the East India Company, never made it to market.

They weren't really bothered by the threepence-per-pound duty, a tax out of which the colonial government would be financed. Even with it, the tea would undercut the stuff being illegally imported through the Dutch, and break their business model.

But seeing the Tea Party as a kind of Mafia hit ignores the real swelling of ideological objection to being governed without representation by a power thousands of miles away.

Yes, there were, in the words of one historian, J C D Clark, 'colonial slave-owners … colonial merchant smugglers, colonial Dissenters, colonial debtors, and colonial land speculators' among those 'with an interest in emancipation from British policy'.

But they, and the less venal people who joined them in their protest, were able to attach themselves to a powerful, and ultimately incontrovertible, idea, powerfully expressed in the *Boston Pamphlet*, published in 1772: 'The British Parliament have assumed the powers of legislation for the colonies in all cases whatsoever, without obtaining the consent of the inhabitants.'

> The Tea Party was calculated to mock the English – and then some

The tea – and the purpose of the tax on it, to pay for that unconsented government – represented tyranny. Tipping it into the sea was an ideological act, not a criminal one.

One of the many ways in which the British and the colonists misunderstood each other was in the latter's focus on George III. He was constantly appealed to about – or decried as responsible for – American policy, which was in fact governed by his Prime Minister, Lord North.

Still, when Elizabeth II visited Boston during the 200th-anniversary celebrations of American Independence in 1976, she was greeted as redressing 'the tyrannical reputation of her great-great-great-great-grandfather'.

Since the musical *Hamilton* has re-established that reputation, perhaps George's great-great-great-great-great-grandson Charles will be called upon in three years' time to do it all again.

Sophia Waugh: School Days

The strange decline of exam stress

We are in the middle of exam season and, you might think, towards the end of revision season.

I was a staggeringly idle student in every subject except for English, but then doing what I love (reading *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) never really felt like work to me. It still doesn't – hence my late return to university to work for a PhD.

I have soppy memories of lying on the lawn revising in the sun while my pet goose grazed around me. But I can't tell the students that – 'lawn' and 'pet goose' both sound a little showy-offy.

Even I, lazy as I remember myself to be, am taken aback by the lax attitude to revising that many of my students have. I have told the students, endlessly, that I was revising for five hours a day by the Easter holidays.

At the last minute, thanks to various staffing disasters in our department, I was given another top set to prepare for the exams: two weeks to undo their terrible mock results and teach them how to write an essay – which was basically the problem, rather than a lack of knowledge of the texts.

It was not long before I realised that in this set there was in fact quite a lot of ignorance of the content, as well as an inability to structure an analytical response to a question. I asked one boy, billed as a clever one, why he had done so badly in his mocks.

'I didn't revise.'

'That's honest. Why not?'

'I thought I knew it all.' He did have the grace to smile. 'It turns out I was wrong.'

'Be honest,' I said to one girl a couple of days before the first literature paper, 'have you revised the poems at all yet?'

'No, but I will do', she answered.

'When?'

'At some point.'

Even her classmates laughed at this, but it did not reassure me.

Another girl turned up to one of her last lessons with me with a special plea. 'Miss,' she said, 'I know you're going to say no, but can I revise for chemistry this lesson? Last-minute revision is my vibe, but I couldn't revise last night because I spilled my spaghetti Bolognese on the carpet and I was up until one o'clock cleaning it.'

I answered wearily, 'I'll pretend I can't see you revising chemistry.'

I am more confident about my own class. There is the boy who learns his quotations via Latin. And the boy who somehow writes nine pages per essay, even though I tell him that, by the end of the first two, I know I can give him top marks. There's the free-school-meals girl to whom the Glorious Benefactor has gradually given the beginnings of a fine library (and who will be going on to study A-Level literature next year).

I feel sick with fear for them, but also quietly confident.

And so on it goes, the eternal cycle. Year 11 is off my hands; time to turn my gaze on Year 10.

Quite Interesting Things about ... airports

● The saddest-ever unclaimed item at Dublin Airport's lost-property office was a tombstone bearing the words 'You will always be remembered, never forgotten.'

● There are over 41,700 airports in the world, almost one-third of them in the USA.

● Passengers at Hong Kong International Airport can de-stress at the nine-hole golf course next to Terminal 2.

● King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, takes up 192,000 acres – more than the entire country of Bahrain.

● The world's shortest commercial airport runway is on the Dutch Caribbean island of Saba. It's only 15,744 inches long.

● The world's oldest airport is College Park, Maryland, founded by Wilbur Wright in 1909.

● The world's prettiest airport is said to be Compton Abbas airfield in Dorset, now owned by film director Guy Ritchie. In 1993, disgraced tycoon Asil Nadir escaped from there.

● In 2017, a Lucky Air flight was grounded at Anqing airport in China and a 76-year-old woman passenger arrested after she threw coins into the plane's engine for luck.

● The average number of connections needed to get from any one airport in the world to another is four.

● Davos, host town to the annual World Economic Forum, has no airport. The nearest one is almost 50 miles away.

● Gibraltar International Airport's only runway is bisected by the colony's busiest road, Winston Churchill Avenue. The road has to be closed every time a plane takes off.

● At 6,500 feet, Paro's runway is shorter than its own height above sea level (7,300 feet). It's so dangerous only eight pilots are qualified to land there.

● Pilots once identified airports using US National Weather Service two-letter shortcodes for cities. When three-letter codes came in, some cities simply added an X – hence LAX for LA.

● The airport shortcodes for Nutuve, Papua New Guinea; Funafuti, Tuvalu; Boset, Papua New Guinea; and Butler, Missouri are respectively NUT, FUN, BOT and BUM.

● The international airport at Georgetown, Guyana, used to be called Ogle.

● Ulaanbaatar International Airport is named after Genghis Khan.

JOHN LLOYD

222 QI Answers to Your Quite Ingenious Questions *is out now*

For more on QI, visit qi.com and, on Twitter, @qikipedia

The Tablet That Makes Tech Easy!

The Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 easology is specially designed for ease-of-use, yet it is also packed with the very latest technology....

SAMSUNG Galaxy Tab A8
easology

★★★★★
"It lets me do everything I want without hassle or difficulty"
Sandra, 72 N.York

SPECIFICATIONS

- Easy-to-use interface
- Big 10.5" HD screen
- 32GB storage
- All day battery
- Both front and rear facing cameras
- Expandable storage with microSD card

- **Hi spec tablet designed for ease-of-use.**
- **Download your favourite apps.**
- **Great tech from a trusted brand.**
- **Easy searching, easy reading, easy navigation.**

The easology Home Screen Explained

The Home Screen is split into 4 main sections:

TOP RIGHT: Four quick contacts you can assign to friends and family, or anyone you might need to contact easily.

TOP LEFT: Features the time, date and weather for your area.

MIDDLE: A list of your favourite apps. Download apps from the Google Play Store and add them to your home screen.

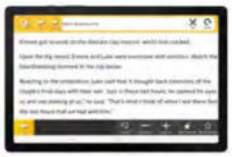
BOTTOM: A row of apps you are likely to use the most, including a handy magnifier, camera, settings, and internet.

HOME BUTTON: A single tap on this rounded square will return you to the familiarity of the Home Screen at any time.

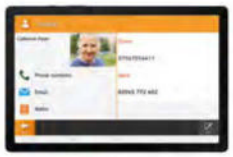
Watch online at www.easology.net/a8

EASY SEARCHING
Internet browser with buttons to magnify.

EASY LAYOUTS
Enjoy intuitive screen layouts.



EASY READING
Easier reading with large text.



EASY NAVIGATION
Clear actions and buttons.

★★★★★
"I am very happy with my new Samsung easology tablet. It is nice and easy to use. I can 100% recommend."
Jenny, 71, Cardiff

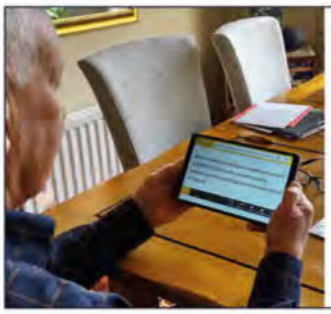
Technology is central to our lives, yet are you sometimes left wondering why it cannot be easier? That's where the Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 easology comes in....

Easy-To-Use

Designed with ease in mind, this tablet makes the latest technology available to all. Find clear layouts, easy internet browsing, large text & icons, and tons of helpful features.

Stylish, Sleek And Powerful

The Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 easology is perfect for searching the internet, video calls, watching videos, social media and much more.



The Samsung Galaxy Tab A8 easology delivers market-leading performance with all the latest features, in an easy-to-use tablet.
Exclusively available from the easology store for £229.99

ORDER BY PHONE (Local Rate)
0118 418 1217
Mon-Fri. 08:30 - 20:00 Sat. 9:00 - 14:00

ORDER BY WEB
www.easology.net

Free Delivery
2-Year Warranty
Secure Payment

LIMITED TIME OFFER

COTTON CANVAS

SUMMER BLAZER

"Good lightweight jacket for the summer..." Michael

Trustpilot RATED EXCELLENT

Sand

only **£100** buy 2 for £190 **SAVE £10**

PETER CHRISTIAN
Gentlemen's Outfitters

Summer offers us many an opportunity to get dressed up; whether it's a wedding, Mediterranean cruise or a smart al-fresco dinner. Now you can be well turned out, and comfortable at the same time, thanks to cool cotton canvas with the helpful addition of a little stretch.

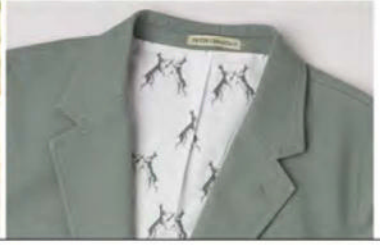
- 99% cotton canvas/ 1% spandex
- Peter Christian hares lining
- Double vented
- 2 button front & working cuff
- 2 patch & 2 inside pockets
- No Quibble Money Back Guarantee**

Chest: 36 38 40 42 44
46 48 50 52 54 56"
Length: Short, Regular & Long
Colour: Sand, Navy Sage

FREE DELIVERY*
SAVE £5
+Free Returns**
use code
24G26


Navy


Sage



Order Cotton Canvas Blazer (MJ94)
Use code **24G26** for **FREE P&P**

peterchristian.co.uk

01273 493 393 Mon-Fri 8am-Midnight Sat-Sun 8am-8pm

Order by post – Cheques payable to Peter Christian.
Quote **24G26** and send to: Freepost PETER CHRISTIAN

Go Online or Call for a Free Catalogue

*Free UK delivery (normally £5). Offer ends midnight 28/08/23. £50 Minimum spend applies. **Free returns within the UK only and subject to items being in perfect condition, in their original packaging and returned within 30 days.
A Division of Hills of Bramley Ltd. Co Reg No 04767802

The joy of funny papers

With new owners, the *Telegraph* could recover its sense of humour

A N WILSON

It was no surprise to read that BUK, a Bermuda-based holding company, had been passed into receivership.

The receiving company is called AlixPartners, and they are now selling the holding, which, notoriously, includes the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Spectator*.

The Bermuda-based company was owned by the Barclay brothers, the mysterious twins who bought the titles in 2004 after the collapse of Conrad Black.

Conrad Black has his faults. He is a pompous windbag. He was convicted of fraud by a US District Court in Chicago in 2007 and, although two of those charges were overturned, he had to serve his time in two Federal Correctional Institutions in Florida.

His protestations of innocence made him seem even more ridiculous than he had done when standing at London parties and opining in orotund tones about Cardinal Newman. On the other hand, he behaved with grit and dignity when imprisoned. His wife, Barbara Amiel, herself a good journalist, stuck by him, contrary to what everyone predicted. Their time as the proprietors of the *Telegraph* now seems, in retrospect, to have been a glory age.

I worked for three of the titles up for grabs. I was literary editor at the *Spectator* when it was owned by Algy Cluff, who writes elsewhere in this issue.

I was chief book-reviewer on the *Sunday Telegraph* when it was still owned by the Berry family; then, after it had been bought by Conrad Black, TV critic. While Charles Moore was editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, I had a column called The World of Books. He let me write what I liked, and paid generously.

I remember those who worked on these papers, many of whom I came to know. From the old days, on the *Telegraph*, figures such as Malcolm Muggeridge (deputy editor), Colin Welch – probably the cleverest journalist I ever knew; the best-read, the funniest – Michael Wharton and Peregrine Worsthorne.

Among those with whom I worked, on any of the three publications, Charles Moore, John Preston, Gavin Stamp, Richard Ingrams (TV critic on the *Spectator* when I was there), Ferdinand Mount (political editor, ditto), Auberon Waugh and Max Hastings (editor before Charles Moore) all stand out in my memory as writers of quite outstanding and varied ability.

Some of the best criticism of the arts was found in the *Telegraph* – one thinks of Rupert Christiansen's opera critiques, or Richard Dorment's writings on art.

I could have filled this entire column with the names of good journalists, many of whom used to work for the papers under the Berry family or under Conrad Black, but who did not fit into the *Telegraph*s under the Barclay brothers.

The *Daily Telegraph* under their proprietorship became pathetically thin, and the *Spectator* became samey and dull – perhaps because the editor stayed on too long; perhaps because of the executive role there of the leaden – though clever – old bruiser Andrew Neil.

Those who hate newspapers – and in particular those who hate the proprietors of those newspapers they never read (Lord Rothermere; Rupert Murdoch) – probably think there is something appropriate when a proprietor is found to be not merely a bit dodgy but actually criminal. I do not share this mindset myself, because I actually think that there is no such thing as clean money.

What we look for in a proprietor of a newspaper or magazine is someone who understands the media; someone who likes, or at least 'gets' journalists. From a professional point of view, by far the best editor I ever worked for was Paul Dacre at the *Daily Mail* (another hate figure among liberals).

There was not a single aspect that he did not understand of the business of how to make a newspaper for the next morning. Often, he was still there at ten o'clock at night, altering picture captions on the sports page, rewriting the leaders, agonising about the headlines on the front page, scratching his shoulders until blood appeared through his white shirt, and shouting at the subs on the back bench. The result, time after time, was a role-model paper.

You might hate the *Mail*. You must recognise that, under Dacre, it was a flawless work of its own kind.

The only drawback to Dacre and the *Mail* generally is not that they are humourless – they aren't, exactly – but that there is something about their titles that slightly deadens humour. Keith Waterhouse had a good comic column in the *Mail* for years and Craig Brown has the same today, but the columns they write, often funny, somehow get buried by the *Mail* atmosphere.

In the old *Telegraph*, by contrast, Peter Simple – invented by Claudie Worsthorne (Perry's first wife), Perry himself and Colin Welch, and carried forward by the immortal Michael Wharton – always felt like the core of the paper. Its facetiously invented cast of characters – Dr Spacely-Trellis, the go-ahead Bishop of Bevindon, Mrs Dutt-Pauker, the hugely rich Hampstead leftie who lived in a mansion called Marxmount, et al – all seemed more real than figures in the news pages.

Nearly all the journalists I named earlier in a sycophantic paragraph have advanced senses of humour.

One would guess the Barclays have none. Charles Moore and Max Hastings, very different editors, had advanced senses of humour. If the *Mail* do buy the *Telegraph*, their first task, if they wish to recapture the glory days, should be to resurrect Peter Simple.

God

SISTER TERESA

The Nosy Parker in my monastery

Curiosity, most of the time, consists in taking an intelligent interest in what is going on around us.

But if carried to excess, it can become bad manners and insensitivity, both of which almost inevitably tip over into sinfulness.

'Custody of the eyes' is something that was and still is taught to a Carmelite novice. Its purpose is to ensure that at all times she is concentrating on God: not necessarily having high-flown thoughts on theology while looking at a blank wall, but ensuring she is not dispersing her energies by nosily looking around at what other people are up to.

This in turn carries with it the highly likely consequence of uncharitable criticism. Even if it is not voiced aloud, it is hardly constructive.

When I first arrived at the monastery, there was an elderly sister who was fascinated by the minutiae of other people's lives. Sometimes it can be downright unpleasant to be on the receiving end of someone's gawking: 'My enemies whet their eyes on me, and have gaped at me with their mouths.' (Job 16:10)

But she was a wonderfully funny character, and I never begrudged her the interest she took in what was on my plate during meals. She would look at it surreptitiously, because she knew she wasn't really supposed to.

Even when she was silent, one had a reasonably good idea as to how her mind was working: 'Hmm. I wonder why she has been given a fried egg. The kitchen sisters are so much more generous to her than they are to me. They forget my needs more often than not. Life is most unfair.'

Taking a peek at someone else's lunch is hardly a grave matter, but it does have a knock-on effect. We do not talk during meals, but listen to an improving book read out loud.

Her thoughts being occupied elsewhere, she almost certainly failed to take in the whys and wherefores of the start of the Second Vatican Council, or how Michelangelo managed to paint the Sistine Chapel, thereby missing out on something far more interesting and significant than the number of Brussels sprouts on her neighbour's plate.

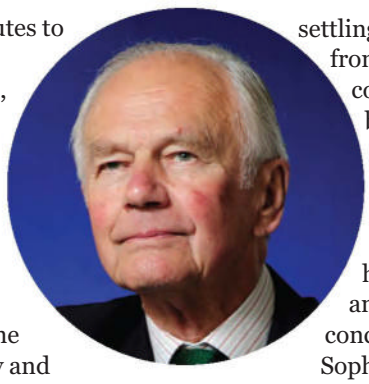
'If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.' (Mark 9:47) This is Jesus at his most hyperbolic and one can hardly expect it to be applied to the trivia described above. But the ancients regarded the eye as the lamp that not only projects light but also grasps the external world.

As Proverbs has it, 'He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.'

It all boils down to generosity of spirit that deals not with trifles, but with what really matters.

Memorial Service

Philip Ziegler CVO FRSL (1929-2023)



Sophie Ziegler led the tributes to her father, Philip Ziegler, biographer of Edward VIII, Lord Mountbatten and Edward Heath, at Christ Church, Kensington.

She said, 'You don't leave Oxford with a First, win the Chancellor's Prize, enter the Foreign Office, write 21 books, complete the *Times* crossword every day and become editor-in-chief of one of the largest publishing houses in England without having a fairly extraordinary brain.

'As a child, I remember him writing in the morning before he went to work, then getting back from Collins at night, settling down to continue from where he left off for a couple more hours, before he came down to supper. His focus was such that we could weave in and out of his feet in the kneehole of his desk, playing hide and seek, without his concentration wavering.'

Sophie, a photographer, told of Philip's service with the Foreign Office in Laos, Paris and Pretoria and his posting to Bogotá, Colombia. There his wife Sarah, then 30, mother of two small children including Sophie, was killed by burglars. That caused him to leave the FO and join his father-in-law, William Collins, in the family publishing house in St James's.

Ziegler's son Colin read a letter sent from Philip to his friend John Julius Norwich in 1959, warning him that a friend was about to be posted to Beirut: 'On Sept 11 or so, a great, grotesque lobster will trip and fall heavily from a plane at Beirut Aerodrome. It will wear a monocle and probably a kilt. It will be called Alec Brodie, will have a DSO and an MC and will be the ex-military attaché in Laos and the new one in the Lebanon.'

Younger son Toby Ziegler read from *East Coker* by T S Eliot. The choir sang Fauré's Requiem. Hymns included *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* and *Let All the World in Every Corner Sing*.

JAMES HUGHES-ONSLOW

Pros and cons of prostate surgery

The operation often has unfortunate side effects – so is it worth it?

DR THEODORE DALRYMPLE

These days, people – that is to say, politicians – have some difficulty in defining women, though not the same difficulty in recognising them.

How long will it be before difficulties attach to the definition of men? How about 'people with prostates'? I make this as my contribution to intellectual clarity.

For most of their lives, men don't think about their prostates, in the same way as no one thinks about their appendix until they get appendicitis.

But there comes a time of life when Englishmen's first talk is not of the weather, but of the prostate, with such interesting (and important) questions as 'How many times do you have to get up at night?'

Cancer of the prostate is a dreaded disease. At least three of my acquaintances have died of it, one at an age I now consider young. How should it be detected and, once detected, treated?

The PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) test was long-used for detection. Between 1999 and 2009, 82,429 men aged between 50 and 69 – that is to say, with a life expectancy of more than ten years – underwent the test in a very large trial of various kind of treatment.

Some 2,664 of them were found to have localised cancer, and 1,643 of them were entered into the trial: they were allocated at random to active monitoring of their condition, prostatectomy or radiotherapy.

They were followed up for a median length of time of 15 years. The investigators managed to follow up 98 per cent of those who entered the trial, which was a triumph of organisation in itself. The trial was carried out in Britain. We are good at clinical trials and coronations.

During the follow-up period, 356 patients died, but in only 47 of them was their death attributed to prostate cancer.

There was no significant difference in the rate of death between any of the three approaches, either in all-cause death or in death from prostate cancer.

'Can't get better, or won't?'

Should you conclude from this that prostatectomy is either useless or harmful? It often has very unfortunate side effects such as urinary incontinence.

Alas, it is not quite so simple. Those who underwent prostatectomy had half the rate of metastasis of those who underwent active monitoring.

This did not affect the eventual death rate from prostate cancer, and most of the metastases were in the local lymph nodes – but what I would really have liked to know was whether they caused much suffering. It is not only death but suffering that one wishes to avoid.

Another problem was that a much higher proportion – 25 per cent versus 11 per cent – of patients who were actively monitored, rather than operated on or given radiotherapy, required androgen (male sex hormone) deprivation therapy, which is usually given by injection. This therapy has a list of side effects that competes with those of steroids for unpleasantness.

They include hot flushes, fatigue, erectile failure, testicular atrophy, cognitive decline, increased likelihood of diabetes and osteoporosis.

Since the many forms of human suffering, as of pleasure, are incommensurable, there is no indubitably correct answer to the conundrum as to what treatment is best – at least not until a method of treatment comes along that is vastly superior to any other. And in a disease that kills only about three per cent of the people who have it after 15 years, it will not be easy to prove that one treatment is vastly superior to another.

It is an old medical adage that many more men (as defined above) die *with* rather than *of* cancer of the prostate. About 80 per cent of men aged 80 have evidence of prostate cancer.

Though it is far from a sentence of death, still about 12,000 men a year die of it in this country alone.

READERS' LETTERS

The Oldie, 23–31 Great Titchfield Street, London, W1W 7PA *letters@theoldie.co.uk*
To sign up for our e-newsletter, go to www.theoldie.co.uk

Max Wall's funny wasp

SIR: Thank you for running my piece on Max Wall (June issue). An error crept into the poem he recited at the Palladium:

'There was a young man from Dundee
Who got stung on the neck by a wasp.'

In the *Oldie* piece, 'wasp' was changed to 'bee'. 'Wasp' is funnier – perhaps a precursor of that Scottish master of whimsy Ivor Cutler.

Love,
Kenneth Cranham, London N1

Suspender-belt failure

SIR: Surely Mary Killen (Spring issue) could not in the event of suspender failure have resorted to a 5p piece: decimalisation did not come until 1971, well after the arrival of tights.

In the forties and fifties, my mother always had with her – to respond to the inevitable ping of suspender malfunction – a reliable, ideally-sized and hard replacement, namely an aspirin.

Yours,
Diana Finch, Felixstowe, Suffolk

Pritchett family fan club

SIR: How wonderful are the Pritchetts! I laughed out loud at Oliver's 'Dead funny' (June issue) about the joy of accidents.

Having been a fan of his for years, I wrote to him once saying how much I enjoyed his Good King Wenceslas pieces which often turned up in December, and he was kind enough to reply. Likewise Matt, whose cartoons are an excellent start to the day and a brilliant accompaniment to his father's writing. Many thanks to them both. What a team!
Judy Davies, Tenby, Pembrokeshire

Bosses from Hell

SIR: I so enjoyed Oliver Pritchett's witty and amusing look at our inability to keep a straight face when witnessing life's banana-skin moments ('Dead funny', June issue).

However funny minor accidents can be, I could not help remembering my time working in the information-and-guidance department of that often – but mostly unfairly – maligned public guardian the Health and Safety Executive.

One of my jobs was to record news releases describing workplace accidents. Many of these defied belief as they chronicled the unravelling of bizarre events leading to disastrous outcomes.

Others documented the result of workers' scant regard for their own safety or their suffering at the hands of outrageous misfortune due to circumstances beyond their control.

The worst by far, though – and the ones that would make my blood boil – were reports of workers who suffered life-changing or even life-ending injuries at the hands of unscrupulous and shameless employers who put lives of their staff at risk simply in order to save time and therefore money. Health and safety gone mad? Tell me about it!

Yours cautiously,
Stephen Carr, Southport, Lancashire

Unhappy accident

SIR: Oliver Pritchett's article in your June issue brought back memories of the time I arrived home to find my husband pinned to the floor by the grandfather clock. It had fallen on him when he was winding it.

Fortunately, he was unhurt physically – but oh how his dignity suffered, particularly when friends and family fell about laughing on hearing of the incident. He never did see the funny side of his accident.
Maureen Ferguson, Eastbourne, Sussex

Fat chance

SIR: There may well be a future article by the esteemed Dr Dalrymple ('Ignore Wallis Simpson's health tip', June issue) advocating obesity but in the event that is not the case, I think it is vitally important to state the corollary of his thesis that losing weight in the elderly can increase the risk of early (late) death.

I have carried out extensive desk-based research and the good doctor's thesis has gone a long way to support my contentions that a ten-per-cent increase in the weight of the over-70s could increase life expectancy by more than ten per cent. Extrapolation also shows that an increase in weight of 50 per cent could lead to a life expectancy of 150 or more.

I think we should be told.
David Pettit, Raglan, Usk

Julius Caesar's steam train

SIR: 'Our new king is a Shakespeare buff.' How right Gyles Brandreth is in stating this (June issue) I found out

'Now, what did I fly up here for?'

during a memorable meeting with the future monarch in September 2006.

The occasion was the annual get-together of the Prayer Book Society at an Oxford college. There was general excitement as the Prince of Wales as Royal Patron was paying us a visit by helicopter.

Much to our surprise, the Prince not only addressed us but did the rounds, meeting and exchanging words with all 60-odd members present.

As he approached, I thought he was bound to ask, 'Why do you like the old Book of Common Prayer?' and I frantically tried to come up with an answer. But no, the question when it came was 'Did you study Shakespeare at school?'

With a sudden inspiration, I replied, 'Yes, sir, and not only did I study him but also I taught Shakespeare.'

'Oh, really – where was that?'

And that led on to a final exchange:

'Are you still teaching?'

'No, I gave it up and become one of Her Majesty's Civil Servants.'

'Oh, you poor chap!'

At which the Prince moved on to the Archdeacon of Berkshire.

I don't know what he would have said had I related the incident that perhaps contributed to my premature exit from the teaching profession.

Scene: the School Hall. Thirty 14-year-old boys and one 24-year-old schoolmaster, all holding copies of *Julius Caesar*.

Master (reading Act 1, Scene 2): Re-enter Julius Caesar and his Train.

Chorus of boys: Choo-choo-choo-choo-choo…

Long may King Charles reign over us!
Yours sincerely,
John Dearing, Reading, Berkshire

Sterling moths

SIR: I read with interest the review of *The Jewel Box* (June issue) which celebrates the wonderful world of moths. It was a moment of irony to come across, a couple of pages later, an advert offering a service 'guaranteeing the removal, destruction and prevention of moths'.
Regards,
Verne Sanderson, Tenterden, Kent

Corned beef? Yum yum

SIR: By sheer chance, as I was enjoying a corned-beef salad in the sun this lunchtime, I turned the page of *The Oldie* (June issue) to be met with the headline 'Where's the corned beef?'

Corned beef has formed the staple diet of every yacht I have had the pleasure of skippering in high latitudes, especially when locally-caught, -shot or -snared meat has been scarce. Indeed, it also formed the fundamental ingredient of many meals in my youth while I was at sea in the '40s and '50s.

Yes, we called it 'bully beef' too, but more often it was referred to as 'corned dog' or, when in arctic Norway, as 'dog in box'. I won't horrify you with my 'serving suggestions' but they include masses of red wine, garlic and vindaloo – perfect when the cabin temperature is well below freezing.
Yours faithfully,
Ewen Southby-Tailyour, Ermington, Devon

Making a hash of it

SIR: Trevor Groves's article on corned beef (June issue) brought back not-so-treasured recollections of a year or so on National Service in the Suez Canal Zone in 1954. Our camp was on the shore of the Great Bitter Lake but, in other respects, very isolated – and we had no fresh meat; only corned beef, also known to us troops as corn dog.

I must say that our Army Catering Corps staff tried their best to make dishes to tempt jaded taste buds, but it must have been very difficult for them.

These days, I am not over-tempted by corned beef, although a simple hash has its merit.
Sincerely,
David Holme, Accrington, Lancashire

Scotland the Brave

SIR: Regarding Tom Hodgkinson's enquiry (Town Mouse, June issue) whether one can buy a property for £100,000: there are at least ten under £80,000 going in Wick, Caithness.

Please tell only those who can stand 70 mph+ winds, consider 10°C mild and can stand living with friendly, courteous neighbours who like a blether.
Stephen Cox, Wick, Caithness

Anti-cash conspiracy

SIR: I was delighted to see Julie Cruickshank's Rant in the June issue. She is a woman after my own heart. I have been insisting on using cash everywhere I go, and like her I refuse to pay by card.

There is a conspiracy to get rid of cash and we must fight to keep it.

'There's been another rant increase'

The card/banks make so much money from cards and will have complete control of the population if cash is removed. I thought that as cash is legal tender, companies cannot refuse it. I have found that if I say I have only cash so if they won't accept it they must cancel my order, I find they *do* accept it.

I lecture all my friends and family to try to get them to use cash, as WHEN – not if – all the card machines fail because of a satellite crash (or interference from another country), the whole world will be in chaos and nobody, citizen or government, seems to see this.

Everyone, please WAKE UP and USE CASH. Boycott any business that says 'Card only'.
Bright blessings,
Kate Jackson, Brixham, Devon

Cosy Iron Curtain

Sir, I write in defence of Hotel Moskva in Belgrade (David Halley, Letters, June issue). I have stayed there a number of times and never found it uncomfortable – certainly not the worst, by far.

There were hotels in Africa where taking a shower was risking electrocution and one in Bucharest where the stairs had no risers of the same height and the light switch was hidden behind a wardrobe, although the bed was comfortable. I am always puzzled as to why in most hotels it's assumed you want to watch television only when you're in bed.
Sincerely,
Richard Barnes, Sellindge, Kent

Expert thong-writer

SIR: A thong does not dissect the buttocks (Mrs Bee's letter, June issue). It bisects them. Cutting one's buttocks into small pieces while wearing a thong is mind-boggling, to say the least.
Geoffrey Robinson, Clifton, Bristol

Cynthia Payne

While I was on a package tour of the Amalfi Coast in 2007, staying at a hotel in Sorrento, one of the fellow travellers stood out from the rest.

She wore a striking tweed jacket and, apart from being constantly shadowed by her diminutive female companion, very much kept her distance from everyone else.

It wasn't until a week later, in the minibus taking us from the hotel back to the airport, that I spotted her luggage label: 'C Payne' – and the penny dropped.

Over the next few hours on the flight, I experienced a mixture of feelings, ranging between embarrassment and amusement.

My own companion, Gordon, was a charming elderly gentleman, somewhat old- fashioned, who in years past would have been considered gallant. I went cold as I recalled his words to Ms Payne as he'd helped her into the cable car in Capri with the words, said with a twinkle, 'Trouble is, you need a man in your life!'

She retorted, 'Oh, don't worry, dearie, I've had plenty of those!'

I'd muttered something crass like 'Good for you!'

The other cringeworthy recollection was Gordon helping Ms Payne, who was slightly unsteady and using a walking-stick, over the uneven cobbled paths of Pompeii and calling her 'madam' on several occasions. Oh dear, if only we'd known!

Cynthia's notes to Heather and Gordon – and her card. Her clients paid in luncheon vouchers

On arrival at Heathrow, lingering at baggage reclaim – being a very keen collector of autographs – I approached Ms Payne with a request for her signature. She responded eagerly, asking, 'Was it my voice gave it away?'

I resisted the temptation to respond in similar London tones, 'Nah, it woz yer bleedin' luggage label!' as she rummaged in her capacious handbag, scattering plastic cutlery, paper cups and other random detritus from the flight – totally oblivious to the annoyance of a nearby airport-cleaner. She eventually produced her 'business card' with its Luncheon Vouchers logo, which she inscribed, 'To Gordon. Thank you for your past custom!' and a separate note for me: 'Sorry I lost one of my best girls!'

On the evening before our departure to Sorrento, Gordon and I had dined at one of our local upmarket hotels. At a nearby table sat a party including the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

I wonder how many people have dined in such contrasting company in the space of just 24 hours.

Heather Evans

What a success you were, Cousin Martin!

MEMORY LANE

The late Martin Amis is one of the greatest writers of his generation.

He was also one of my relatives.

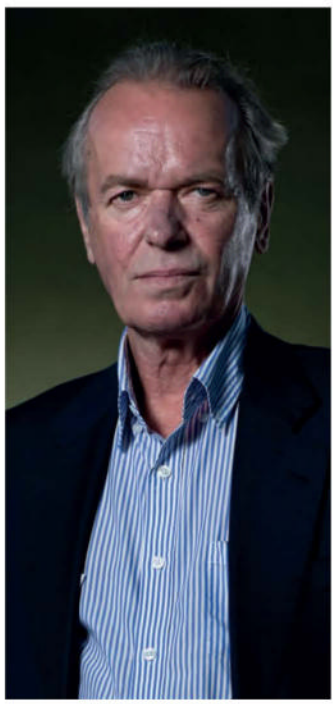
I have known of him all my life. We were quite closely related and yet had no real knowledge of each other at all. He was my second cousin: my mother, Mary, and his mother, Hilary, were first cousins.

As the sad news of his death started to filter through, I suddenly felt plunged into my distant past and my myriad early childhood memories.

My Great Uncle Len was his Grandpa Len. Hilary Amis was Len and his wife Margery's youngest child.

We must have both run around the beautiful Abbey Timbers, in the then very rural Oxfordshire – the large, timber-framed thatched house that Len and Margery had bought some years earlier.

We almost certainly enjoyed the same wonderful country lanes, pig farms, dairy farms and fruit orchards surrounding their home and were entertained by Len's accordion-playing on the lovely lawn in their country garden. Halcyon memories, at least for me.



Martin Amis (1949-2023)

Every summer, the boys in the extended family spent time in Swansea with Martin and his siblings and his parents, Hilary and Kingsley.

The girls went to stay with Hilary's sister Margaret and her children near Cheltenham – so I never met up with Martin. My brothers did.

It suddenly seems a shame that we will now never be able to meet up and share such special memories of people and places.

By Alison Tomlin, Reigate, Surrey, who receives £50

Readers are invited to send in their own 400-word submissions about the past

GL PORTRAIT / ALAMY

Thrill of the human touch

Don't worry about AI – it only shows how lovely real contact can be, says *Mary Kenny*

Who's afraid of artificial intelligence (AI)?

It seems that everyone is, and sometimes with reason – even its inventors have been panic-stricken about the robots' threats to humanity.

It's predicted that AI will wipe out jobs by the tens of thousands, from accountancy to the waiters' and waitresses' trade. In Korea, you may now be served at table by a robot – which children love. Journalism too will come under pressure from the AI takeover: I have been told by an editorial pal that a robot may be instructed to 'write a column in the style of Mary Kenny'. I take this as a compliment.

Robots dominating our civilisation doesn't seem an inviting prospect. Even Alexa, Amazon's disembodied voice box that answers questions, encouraging mental laziness, seems sinister.

And yet there's one welcome aspect of the robot revolution: it may make us appreciate human beings more.

We are familiar with the scenario of waiting on a telephone 'helpline' for half an hour – hoping to talk to someone at, say, a bank or a water company – and all we get is a repeated voicemail with some twaddle such as 'Please hold on – we value your custom'.

And then – wonderful! – a human being at last becomes available. How delightful it suddenly is to be in contact with a real person!

AI may well turn out like that. We'll use the machines for much of the boring, routine stuff – one hopes for the invention of a robot that performs housework. But we'll treasure real human beings for the tasks only a human can do – a kindly nurse to hold your hand when you're having eye surgery; a jolly solicitor who explains the intricacies of inheritance tax.

Human contact will be doubly appreciated – because robots will show that the human touch is irreplaceable.

The ersatz replacement always increases the value of the real thing.

TOBY MORISON

I was amused to hear from an Irish farming woman that AI once signalled Artificial Insemination – when sperm was taken from the bull, to be served to the heifer. There was the popular AI man who toured the countryside pursuing his vocation cheerfully – a career unknown to us townies.

Thus do alphabetical abbreviations come to change their significance.

Polly Toynbee, the grande dame of radical chic, will grace the delightful and varied Deal Music and Arts Festival in July, to be interviewed (about her memoir of her posh radical family) by Gavin Esler. The discourse might be fizzier if I conducted the conversation.

I was the first journalist to interview La Toynbee, back in 1967 – for the *London Evening Standard* – when, aged 20, this granddaughter of the great Arnold Toynbee was regarded as the coming thing. I wrote rather a smart-aleck piece, which greatly displeased young Polly.

I had been sent to meet all kinds of celebrities, from Lord Attlee to Tom Wolfe, but none had reprimanded me for what I had penned. I was impressed by her confidence – which I suppose comes from the family social inheritance she uneasily now writes about in the aptly named *An Uneasy Inheritance: My Family and Other Radicals*.

Our world views have remained very different, but old age is a mellowing process, and the lady has earned her spurs.

And I do admire one consistent aspect of Polly's career: she has always cared about the poor, and even taken a succession of humble serving jobs to see life from the vantage point of the disadvantaged.

I shall pay my £10 to hear her speak in Deal.

The Irish government is planning to introduce compulsory warning labels on beers, spirits, liqueurs and wine to alert imbibers that alcohol causes liver damage, cancer and death. The warnings will be issued bilingually – in Irish and English – and will also be pasted outside any premises, such as pubs, restaurants, theatres and hotels, that trade in alcohol.

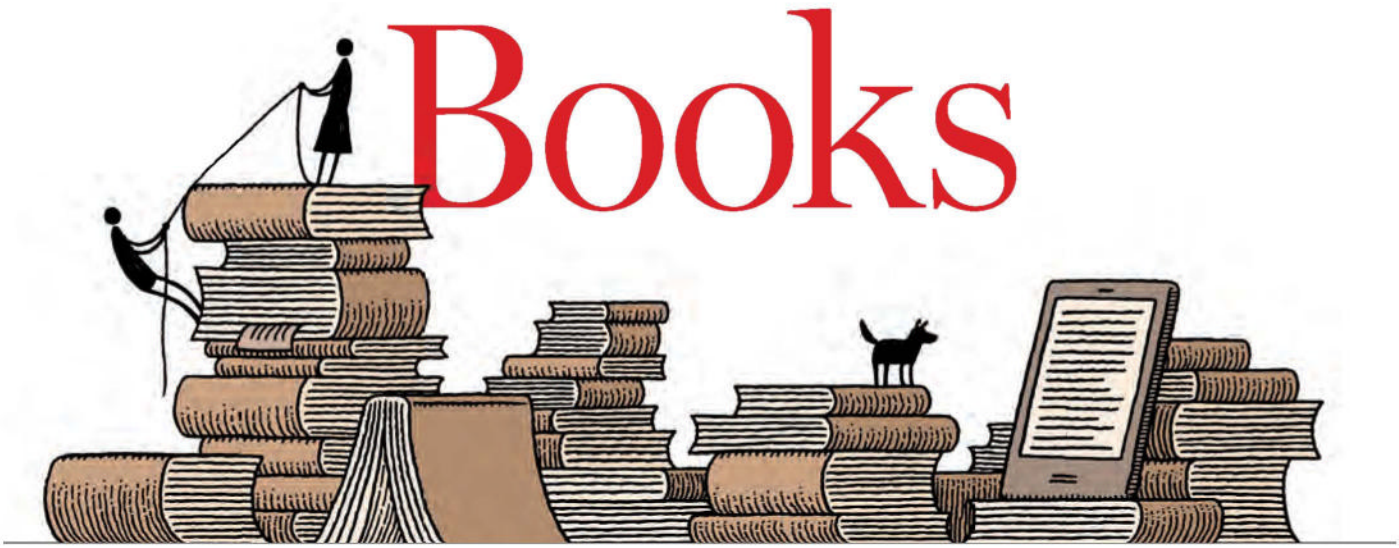
Ireland is the first country in the EU to embark on this endeavour, and the EU is very cross about it: the Continent is wine- and beer-producing. By the way, some of these wine-drinkers are exceptionally healthy and long-lived – Sardinians and Greeks are among the world's fittest oldies.

As Ireland becomes more secular, it also becomes more moralistic and the authorities more finger-wagging about human frailties.

My cousins in France have invented a charming family summer festival, which they have named a *cousinade*. This consists in inviting a group of one's cousins to spend the day – possibly the weekend – getting together.

It's rather regrettable that the main occasion for meeting up with a variety of family connections is often, for our vintage, a funeral. So it's nice to introduce a new tradition of bringing interlinking kin together – especially since extended families are now so spread out, geographically.

The *cousinade* went off successfully, and a happy precedent was established.



Macca the snapper

JOSEPH CONNOLLY

1964: Eyes of the Storm: Photographs and Reflections

By Paul McCartney

Allen Lane £60

I could review this book in just one word: Fab.

But I suspect the editor requires rather more. So let's take a look at this thing.

What we have here is Paul's selection of 275 photographs (from nearly 1,000), nearly all taken by him between October 1963 and March 1964, and newly unearthed as contact sheets and negatives – he had never developed a single roll.

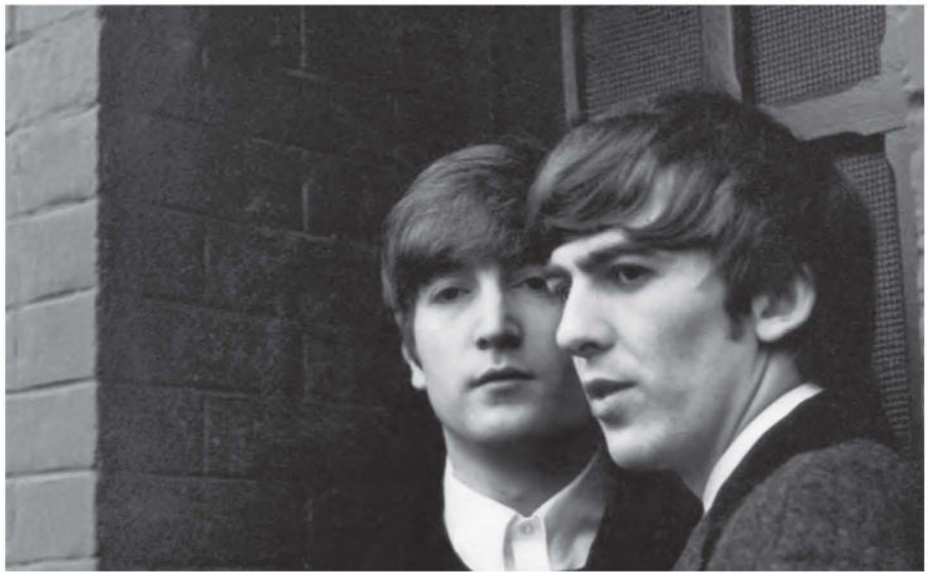
The period is pivotal, covering the emergence and then absolute explosion of Beatlemania. It is highly fitting that the great majority of the images are in black-and-white. Back in those days, that was how we all came to see and know (and love) the Fab Four.

Newspapers were black-and-white and so was television – as were the very memorable early publicity shots by Dezo Hoffmann, as well as Robert Freeman's brilliant and moody image for the cover of their second LP, *With the Beatles*.

We really came to know that they actually had complexions, and that their hair colours varied, only from magazines such as *Fabulous* and *Rave*, both of which made their debuts in early 1964.

Even that first great film, *A Hard Day's Night*, was shot in black-and-white. A lot of the mayhem of fandom, echoed in the film, is very ably and excitingly captured in this book by an actual Beatle, who was very much one of the eyes of the storm.

The earliest pictures here were taken in Liverpool, before things went



1964 PAUL MCCARTNEY

completely crazy. Many are quite a revelation – and testimony to Paul's innate ability to light and frame a picture.

Amid the everyday snaps are some notable portraits of his fellow Beatles, maybe influenced by the photographer Astrid Kirchher, the girlfriend of the 'fifth Beatle', Stuart Sutcliffe, whom they met in the very early days in Hamburg (and who gave them the Beatle haircut).

There is here the best picture I have ever seen of Brian Epstein (not looking anxious as he nearly always did) and a beautiful portrait of Paul's girlfriend Jane Asher.

Paul's preface constantly alludes to his sheer amazement at being in this quite extraordinary situation: a very young man caught up in the whirlwind. As he says, 'We were strangely at the centre of a global sensation.'

That the National Portrait Gallery has just reopened, after a long refurbishment, with an exhibition of these pictures he finds 'humbling, but also astonishing'. As indeed it is.

What comes across most vividly in this book is the sheer helter-skelter thrill of it all – being a Beatle with his three best chums, having the time of their lives, as they simply gasped in wonder.

From Liverpool, the book moves to London, and the opening of the first Beatles Christmas Show at the Finsbury Park Astoria. In this section, there are some great backstage shots and pictures of John Lennon in glasses (he never appeared with them in public) – not in the weird little round ones he became famous for, but the full Hank Marvin.

In Paris, the pictures become a little more self-consciously arty. But in New York, the full frenzy of fandom is brilliantly caught: the masses of people chasing after them; mounted and armed policemen trying to maintain control.

Amid it all, Paul says, 'We messed around. It kept us sane … but who can ever be prepared for fans ripping at your clothes or taking scissors to your hair?'

He also captures New York street life with its brash billboards – while in Washington he snaps an 'art' cinema with this in lights: 'Christine Keeler Goes Nudist. Plus Playgirls'.

Then comes a rather *Wizard of Oz* moment in Miami, when Paul switches to Kodachrome, the better to capture the sunshine, palm trees and turquoise swimming pools.

'We all look beautiful when we're young,' Paul says – though we see from when he passed his Pentax to someone else that he always managed to be the most beautiful of the lot.

At the age of 81, Sir Paul McCartney CH MBE is well aware of his towering status and vast achievements as a musical genius. But clearly he has never forgotten the sheer sensation of being young in those early innocent days, when he, John, George and Ringo never even dreamed that they would be a force for ever.

A reporter whom he photographed on an American train asked him, 'What place do you think this story of the Beatles is going to have in the history of western culture?'

Paul replied, 'You must be kidding.'

Fab. Just fab.

Joseph Connolly is a novelist, a former bookshop-owner and a huge Beatles fan

Left, top: **John and George in Paris.** ***Middle:*** **John in Paris.** ***Bottom:*** **'The crowds chasing us in *A Hard Day's Night* were based on moments like this,' New York.**

Above: **self-portraits in a mirror, Paris.**

Right: **George on Miami Beach.**

All photos 1964

Escape to victory

TANYA GOLD

Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad: A Family Memoir of Miraculous Survival

By Daniel Finkelstein

William Collins £25

'Hello, my name's Gucci, this is Hermès and you must be Mulberry'

Danny Finkelstein is a columnist at the *Times*, and a moderate Tory peer, and he lives in Pinner, north London.

My mother asked me, 'Why does Danny Finkelstein live in Pinner?'

Now I have read his book, I feel I can give her a very full answer.

Dolu and Lusia Finkelstein, Danny's grandparents, were Polish Jewish industrialists. His father, Ludwik, was their only child.

When their story begins, in 1938, they had built themselves a modernist house in Lwów, a manifestation of their hope for the future. Dolu was the Iron King of Lwów, dedicated to a free and independent Poland.

After the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact carved the country up, Dolu was arrested for capitalism. Lusia and Ludwik were transported to a state farm in eastern Kazakhstan. Corpses of fellow travellers were taken off the train and left by the rails.

Finkelstein writes brilliantly on the Soviet hoax: free citizens were free to starve to death. Ludwik almost froze to death that first winter, but the beloved only child of a Polish-Jewish iron baron was not allowed to neglect his schoolwork: what would that achieve?

Lusia taught him *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* as he lay in his wicker basket in a lean-to: I smiled at that. Finkelstein fears that Dolu's company built the rails to take them east.

Stalin freed them when Hitler invaded Russia. They were reunited with Dolu and came to England, where Ludwik became a distinguished scientist, entrusted with planning London's response to a nuclear war. He lived a long, tranquil, useful life. And that was Stalin and Dad.

Then there were his mother's family, the Wieners, Berlin Jews of the most erudite kind. Finkelstein's grandfather Alfred Wiener was the first to amass detail on the National Socialists in the early 1920s. His collection eventually became the Wiener Library in London.

As Hitler rose to power, *Die Welt* judged that Alfred 'devoted his energies to the goal of eliminating the mistrust between Germans and Jews'. Finkelstein, ever a newspaperman, retorts that a German Jew is 'one indivisible concept'.

Finkelstein gives Alfred the book's epigraph: 'I'm prepared to forget as long as everyone else remembers'.

Alfred and his wife, Grete, an economist, and their three daughters – Finkelstein's mother, Mirjam, was the youngest – fled to Amsterdam when Hitler took power, where they knew the Frank family. Ruth, the eldest daughter, was at school with Anne Frank.

Weiner went to London to advise the British government – when Rudolf Hess landed in 1941, he provided briefing notes for his interrogation – and then to America, where he spent the war. He was a fanatical archivist: his collection of provincial German telephone books is the only remaining evidence that some German Jews ever existed.

The visas he secured for his family arrived too late. They were transported to Westerbork, a concentration camp Dutch Jews paid for – the smaller crimes stay with me – and then to Bergen-Belsen.

These are the most awful passages in the book. The family avoid the transports to the extermination camps, day after day. Then Grete's older sister Trude and her family are transported to Sobibor and murdered.

Their love for one another never falters. Grete starved herself to feed her children. Hours after she ensured they got to Switzerland and safety – Alfred finally secured fake Paraguayan passports, and the family were swapped for Allied prisoners – she died, knowing her daughters lived, and was given the Jewish burial denied to so many.

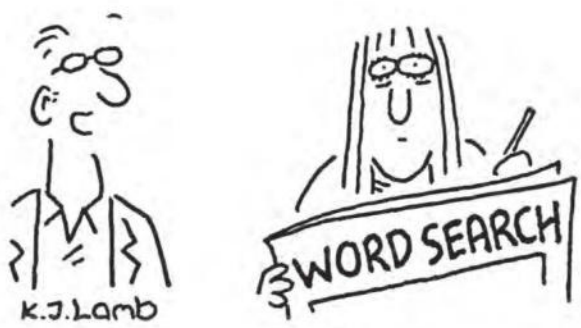
The girls went to America to join Alfred, and then to London, where Mirjam met Ludwik. And that was Hitler and Mum.

All this Finkelstein writes in the calm and detailed prose that is essential for his story to be bearable. It is perfectly judged, with Finkelstein's customary habit of emphasising what is good.

Much of it is agony, as Europe delved deep for its greatest cruelty. The Poles attacked the Jews before the Nazis did, he notes. The Soviets were immune to the suffering of the Poles they farmed with. (Lusia was a terrible farmer. The day she led a working party, her group ripped up the growing crops, and left the weeds. I smiled at that, too.)

There is dehumanisation from left and right. And yet Ruth, dining with a local Jewish family in Switzerland after her liberation, retained the table manners Grete had instilled in her, even after Bergen-Belsen. She waited for the family to serve themselves before she ate and, somehow, that means everything.

Tanya Gold is the Spectator *restaurant critic*



'You're doing one of those puzzles ... what are they called? It's on the tip of my...'

The gay duchess

A N WILSON

Blue Eyes and a Wild Spirit: A Life of Dorothy Wellesley

By Jane Wellesley

Sandstone Press £30

The story of the Royal Family – George VI, the Little Princesses and Queen Elizabeth – all having the giggles when listening to T S Eliot read from *The Waste Land* is well known.

What I had not appreciated until reading this wonderful biography was that this occurred during a gala evening, at which poets aimed to raise money for the Free French during the Second World War. The Sitwells, Eliot, Stephen Spender and Walter de la Mare were all there. And the final poet on the bill was Dorothy Wellesley, married to the future Duke of Wellington.

No one has heard of her now, but she was regarded by W B Yeats not only as a friend, but also as a good, philosophical poet. He included her work in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Yeats was dead by the time of the royal evening.

Dottie was in a sad place. Her marriage to Gerry Wellesley had broken up acrimoniously. She had fallen in love with Vita Sackville-West, never exactly a recipe for happiness, and with Hilda Matheson, who organised highbrow talks on the wireless, and was responsible for that glorious series *Britain in Pictures*.

Hilda was dead by the time of the royal gala evening. (Dottie wanted to be buried in the same grave as Hilda, with the inscription '*Amica amicarum*'.) Dottie was lonely and, at the prospect of reading poetry to the philistine royals, nervous.

The evening was, for her, a disaster. She took a little too much to drink. Her fellow poets stopped her going on stage, physically restraining her as she shouted.

She was eventually seen sitting on the pavement outside, banging the stones with her stick, before being taken off in a taxi by Vita and pals. She felt the embarrassment of it keenly, especially when she realised that 'everyone', including the Queen, thought her humiliation hilarious.

Dorothy Wellesley has not had a good press. Very rich, she helped to bankroll the Hogarth Press, paying the Woolfs to keep their poetry list alive. She paid for 24 volumes of poetry to be published.

The only mention she gets in Victoria Glendinning's biography of Leonard Woolf, however, is 'Dottie Wellesley was dotty, and wrote poetry much admired by W B Yeats. Leonard could not stand her.'

This wise, generous book, by her granddaughter, puts the record straight.

It tells the story of a highly intelligent girl brought up in the stultifying world of the Edwardian rich. She came out – as a deb, but she could not come out as one who loved her own gender.

Her friend Hilda wrote to Vita, 'I loathe the need for furtiveness and secrecy. I find it comprehensively absurd and I have to keep reminding myself that it is considered antisocial and immoral and it makes me fairly blaspheme.'

The sheer stultifying tedium of that world is well evoked by Jane Wellesley.

Dottie, while keeping up appearances, managed to pursue a worthy career as a writer and a poet. She met Yeats when he was an old man and she was in middle age.

Jane Wellesley writes, 'As 1935 was drawing to a close, my grandmother's relationship with Yeats had changed her life. "You have said to me more than once that you felt you must rebuild things around our friendship," she wrote to WB. "I was too moved to answer. You are the Master of us all. You understand that I could not answer? Perhaps you are too modest and too great a man to realise what our friendship has meant to an obscure poet."'

A third in their friendship was her Great Dane, Brutus. She wrote, 'Lord of the house, open the door with thy shoulder!/ The poet Yeats has given unto thee /In his Last Poems some immortality/ To bay in fancy's hour the moon again. /But never by moonlit rock or spirit glade/ Shall we three walk again.'

In the lonely last years of her life, she was befriended by John Betjeman.

Since finishing this book – so touching, so honest, so well written – I have been reading Dorothy Wellesley's poems and, yes, Yeats was right. She was a great poet. Try the one called *Mother*. Or her masterpiece, *Genesis*.

Yet she is omitted from all the anthologies, and no one teaches her in schools.

A N Wilson wrote Betjeman, *a biography of the poet*

Dying of the light

FRANCES WILSON

One Last Thing: How to Live with the End in Mind

By Wendy Mitchell

Bloomsbury £16.99

In July 2014, when she was a 56-year-old NHS administrator, Wendy Mitchell was diagnosed with young-onset vascular dementia and Alzheimer's.

Since then, she has written two bestselling books about adapting to her ghastly disease, *Someone I Used to Know* and *What I Wish People Knew About Dementia: From Someone Who Knows*.

Know, knew, knows... Wendy (we are on first-name terms) is a fountain of knowledge about what it is like to live with dementia, and she is also someone we feel we know.

I know, for example, that when she walks along the River Ouse in her home town of York, she follows the flow of the water (the other direction would be too confusing). I know that the television screen in her living room looks like a black hole in the wall, that she sets an alarm to remind herself to eat, that her recent dramatic weight loss is not, as she secretly hoped, due to cancer. Dying of cancer would be her 'escape route'.

One Last Thing is about how to die with dementia, a subject rarely approached by doctors. Wendy is not afraid of death – she is no longer afraid of anything, even sky-diving – but she does not want to 'go over the edge' of her illness.

Despite having weeks of 'fog' when she 'might as well be inside a black void', her life still contains joy. When she is no longer able to recognise her two daughters, go for walks or type, living will lose its purpose. At this point, she would like to die in a hospice ('I don't want my house to be associated with death'). She doesn't want to die in a hospital: 'the

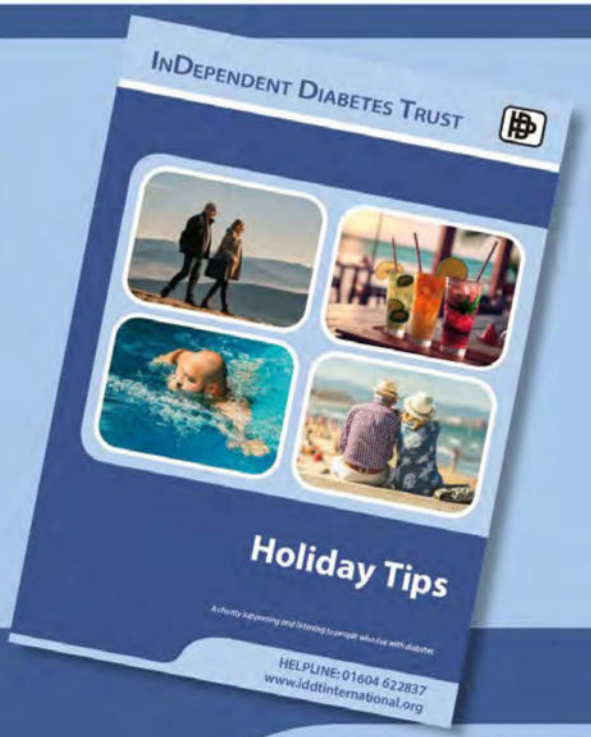
'Can Bill come out and network?'

INDEPENDENT DIABETES TRUST

Do You have Diabetes?

Are You going on Holiday?

Want some Holiday Tips?



Ask for your FREE copy of our Holiday Tips booklet, full of tips for safely enjoying your holiday.

InDependent Diabetes Trust
P O Box 294, Northampton NN1 4XS.

www.iddtinternational.org
Charity Number: 1058284
Registered Number: 3148360

"We are not here to sell you Moth Shield, we are here to remove your moth problem"

MOTH SHIELD

MOTH PROBLEMS?

Not with Moth Shield!

Non-powered vaporiser for on-going 24/7 protection against moth.

The most effective **ODOURLESS** treatment against moth attack with maximum effectiveness from large storage areas to the narrowest corner of your home.

Moth Shield now has an exceptional track record in **guaranteeing the removal, destruction and prevention of moths in your home within 24 hours.**

If you're not sure how best to deal with your moth problem, you are welcome to call us on (020) 8959 5877 for more specific advice (other options are available).

Unique 4 for 2 SPECIAL OLDIE OFFER

4 non-powered 100ml vaporisers (normally £29.16 each) for £58.32 saving £58.32

Minimum of 10 weeks moth protection each time your vaporiser is refilled. Each new vaporiser is supplied with 100 ml of our Moth Shield liquor to start you off, 500 ml refills available thereafter at £62 for 2 (including delivery)

T: 020 8959 5877
E: robertbehar@mothshield.com
W: www.beharprofex.com/moth-removal

worst place for someone with dementia: our routine is gone, our familiar surroundings disappear and are replaced with a totally alien environment full of noise and people we don't know'.

It is curious, she notes, how little value we place on the 'good death', when the death rate among humans is currently 100 per cent.

Wendy knows exactly what she wants. *One Last Thing*, an argument for assisted dying, takes the form of conversations with herself, us, medical experts, bereaved family members and others who have terminal illnesses, including her 'amigos', Gail, George and Dory.

Dory, like Wendy, no longer goes to her hospital assessments because she has lost interest in monitoring the deterioration of her dementia and simply wants to live in the present: 'It was like getting a diagnosis all over again … do I really want to know I'm getting worse?'

Wendy has conversations with Catherine Wood, who is doing a PhD in dementia. And she talks to Aly Dickinson, who runs an organisation called End of Life Doula UK which helps with 'dying plans' (who will look after the cat, for example?).

Baroness Ilora Finlay of Llandaff, a palliative care professor in the House of Lords, tells her she is opposed to assisted dying. The record of this conversation provides the book's climactic scene.

Instead of responding to Wendy's points about respecting the patient's desire to 'live the life that you want in the time that you have', Baroness Finlay rolls out a pre-prepared spiel about a 'broken system' and the need to fund the NHS.

Wendy writes, 'She insisted it was important to listen to patients, but it didn't feel that she was listening to me.'

Taking control over your own death involves a vast amount of paperwork and a truckload of acronyms. There are ACP forms (advance care planning), ReSPECT forms (recommended summary plan for emergency care and treatment), LPA forms (lasting power of attorney) DNACPR forms ('do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation'), and ADRT forms (advance decision to refuse treatment).

I now know about the existence of an MIAB (Message in a Bottle) kit to help paramedics find your medical details at home. There's also a drug in the States called MAID (medical aid in dying). With the system known as VSED (*vee-said*), patients are medically supported to stop eating and drinking.

VSED may be the only option available to Wendy if 'society and the government fail to see the release and kindness that assisted dying would allow people'.

One Last Thing will be Wendy Mitchell's last book. It is also her boldest and best.

Here is a writer who makes us feel truly alive; it has been a privilege to know her.

Frances Wilson is author of Burning Man: The Ascent of D H Lawrence. *She is The Oldie's TV critic*

Riding high

ELINOR GOODMAN

The Bridleway: How Horses Shaped the British Landscape

By Tiffany Francis-Baker

Bloomsbury £17.99

Ever since I was seven years old, and I won my first rosette at a village gymkhana, I have had a passion for horses and the countryside. The two were inseparable, giving me a sense of freedom and being at one with an animal.

As I grew older and was allowed to explore further afield, I would imagine people who had ridden along the tracks I used, like the Pilgrims' Way and a sunken path used to transport coffins to the church from the outlying villages.

Later, when I moved to Wiltshire, I found myself in a place where reminders of the importance of what had happened there in the past abounded, too. Outside Calne, on the Bath road, you'll find Labour-In-Vain Hill, a name that invokes weary horses struggling up the gradient.

So I was drawn by the title of Tiffany Francis-Baker's book. It wasn't quite what I expected. It's far more than a guidebook to Britain's bridlepaths or an exercise in – what I now know is called – geomorphology.

Rather, it's a eulogy to the relationship between human and horse, and what we can learn from it.

Told in self-contained chapters, it covers such things as the role of the outdoors in improving mental health, horses as an inspiration for artists and their role as beasts of burden. At one point, Francis-Baker and another mother of a baby girl reflect on the lessons a herd of Exmoor mares with foals at foot can teach us about human familial relationships.

'Who knew there were skyscraper gurus?'

A committed environmentalist, she has an elegiac style. She describes the 5,000-year-old Ridgeway path as 'moulded and padded by foot, hoof and paw, as one generation after another travelled along it'. (She doesn't mention the ruts made more recently by motorcycle enthusiasts.)

The link horses provide with our past is a recurring theme. She goes back to the origins of the relationship between humans and horses, when Neolithic hunters ate horses. Judging by their cave paintings, it was Bronze Age man who first rode them.

Centuries later, the Romans were probably the first to use them for sport. Today, York Racecourse is close to where the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus introduced horse-racing to this country in 208 AD.

Since then, horses have gone through numerous evolutions, with intensive breeding started by the Arabs in Spain in the eighth or ninth century. Centuries later, according to Francis-Baker, a German zoologist became so obsessed with genetics that he attempted to recreate an extinct breed of truly wild horses suitable for the pure Aryan race.

For centuries, of course, transport depended on horses. Vast numbers were sent to the battlefields – and died there.

One of the many literary sources the author quarries is a poem by Henry Chappell, *A Soldier's Kiss*, illustrating the depth of the bond between horses and their riders. The final moments of a mortally wounded horse are witnessed by a soldier who, under enemy fire, risks his own life to kneel by his dying companion's side:

arrowfile

10% OFF

Audio Storage, Video Storage, Binder Albums, Coin Storage, Family History, Photo Albums, Pocket Refill Sleeves, Vinyl Storage, Portfolios, Stamp Storage, Scrapbooking and Much More

We are passionate about helping collectors protect and preserve their precious collections. With our extensive range of storage options for stamps, coins, photographs, documents and other collectibles we are committed to providing high-quality products that meet the needs of both novice and experienced collectors.

We offer a range of innovative and practical solutions to help you keep your collections organised, protected and easily accessible. Our products are designed with you in mind and we're always here to offer expert advice and support whenever you need it. Browse our collection today and discover how Arrowfile can help you take your collection to the next level!

Vinyl Storage

Magnifiers

CD / DVD storage

Huge Range of Ringbinders and Refills

Huge Range of Photo Albums

See thousands of products at www.arrowfile.com

★★★★★ 4.65 Excellent

Always a fast reliable service over the many years I have been a customer of yours **Mick K**

I have always been impressed by the quality of Arrowfile Collector's storage items, by the ease of ordering, value for money and speedy receipt of items, my latest purchases re-enforces that good impression **Alexander M**

I can always rely on Arrowfile for good quality products and fast delivery **David A**

10% off your next order

Get 10% off your next order with discount code:

OL723

Expires 30 Nov 2023, Limited to one use per household

Request Our Catalogue

Order our free catalogue from the website on contact us

3 Easy Ways To Order

Online
www.arrowfile.com

Telephone (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)
01722 716 121

Post Arrowfile
Unit 6, West Wing, Manor Farm, Chilmark, Salisbury, Wiltshire. SP3 5AF

Free Standard UK Delivery On Orders Over £65

www.arrowfile.com

Only a dying horse! He swiftly kneels,
Lifts the limp head, and hears the shivering sigh,
Kisses his friend, while down his cheek there steals
Sweet pity's tear: 'Goodbye, old man, goodbye.'

That relationship survives today, not just in the passion of little girls for their ponies but in whole communities. One of the chapters I enjoyed most was on Gypsies, based on Francis-Baker's visit to the Wickham Horse Fair, a favourite of mine.

Horses, usually black and white and the hairier the better, are 'flashed' through the normally sedate town, with sparks flying from their hooves. Bundles of notes change hands, raising the question as to why Gypsies buy so many horses, given that they are largely redundant for transport.

She quotes the Gypsy film-maker and author Damian Le Bas, as saying they are a link not just with each other, but with their past.

For others, they are pets or status symbols. It's a lot more satisfying investing your cash in a horse that you can watch in a field than putting it under the bed or in the bank.

She also visits Knepp Estate in Sussex. It's famous for abandoning intensive-farming methods, and rewilding the land by letting native species such as Exmoor ponies graze there. It's part of what the author hopes is a growing trend towards conservation grazing. It could shape the landscape in future, as horses did in the past.

Tiffany Francis-Baker has put in a great deal of research and evokes the sites and sounds of the countryside beautifully. Occasionally she meanders off down byways – but that is what horses and riders do.

Elinor Goodman was political editor of Channel 4 News*, 1988-2005*

'Do you think playing hard to get might just be your way of deflecting intimacy?'

It was all Greek to him: Robin Lane Fox thinks Homer couldn't read

Homer, sweet Homer

HARRY MOUNT

Homer and His Iliad

By Robin Lane Fox

Allen Lane £30

Robin Lane Fox is rather more physically active than most Oxford classics dons.

When Oliver Stone made *Alexander* (2004), Lane Fox, Alexander the Great's biographer, was an extra, charging with the cavalry.

In 1976, Lane Fox emulated Alexander the Great's visit to Troy in 334 BC, when the Macedonian ran to the tomb of Achilles naked. Lane Fox outdid him by running naked round what he thought was the whole city of Troy.

Lane Fox now realises that he streaked round only Troy's citadel. Recent scholarship has shown that the city of Troy was bigger than previously thought.

That's the problem with trying to nail down anything about Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The epics were composed so long ago – and the events described took place even longer ago, if they did take place – that it's impossible to say definitively who Homer was, when he was around and how he composed the two poems.

Still, Lane Fox, 76, armed with over 60 years of classical education, bravely sets out to answer the great Homeric questions. Like a donnish Sherlock Holmes, he settles on the only conclusion that fits all the known parameters.

Lane Fox doesn't deal with the *Odyssey*, except to argue it wasn't as prominent in the ancient world as the *Iliad* – ancient verses from the *Iliad* survive in three times as many sources as those from the *Odyssey*.

He also argues convincingly that the *Iliad* was composed before the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* shows awareness of its predecessor, while the *Iliad* shows no awareness of the *Odyssey*.

That also implies both epics were written down early on. If they had been circulating only in oral versions, they would have influenced – and become melded versions of – each other.

When it comes to how the *Iliad* was composed, there are three possibilities.

One is that Homer was illiterate and composed the *Iliad* in performance. Then other illiterate bards performed it, transmitting it orally, until it was written down. Alternatively, Homer was literate, wrote down the *Iliad* and then recited it after memorising it.

The third option – Lane Fox's own preference – is that Homer was illiterate but dictated a version of the *Iliad* to someone who wasn't. Our poem derives from that copy.

Surely it's impossible for someone to remember the 15,000 lines of the *Iliad* by heart?

Not so, says Lane Fox, agreeing

Actual size is 11" (28cm) standing.

ONLY FOOLS and HORSES

Here's...

DEL BEAR

by Steiff

A comedy legend brought to life in an exclusive limited-edition collector bear

Del Boy, one of the greatest comedy characters in British television history, appeared on our screens for the first time in September 1981. Soon, we'd all fallen for the charms of this ambitious, fast-talking market trader with his dodgy get-rich-quick schemes.

Now, to celebrate 40 years of John Sullivan's *"Only Fools and Horses"* Steiff present ***Del Bear***, their tribute to this icon of comedy.

Del Bear's glorious sandy-coloured fur is made from luxurious mohair. He has corresponding beige felt pawpads and an optimistic twinkle in his black button eyes. He looks proper *"cushty"* in his iconic faux sheepskin jacket, red polo-neck and flat cap. He even wears a replica of Del's gold-plated initial 'D' pendant around his neck.

Exclusive limited edition – order your bear now

Available exclusively from Danbury Mint, ***Del Bear by Steiff*** will be issued in a strict limited edition. No more than 3,000 bears will ever be made worldwide! ***Del Bear*** can be yours for five convenient monthly instalments of £59.80 (plus £1.96 postage and handling) – a total of £299 (plus £9.80 p&h). We are so confident that you will be delighted with your bear, that unlike *"Trotter's Independent Traders"*, we offer a full money-back guarantee. If you are not completely satisfied, simply return him within 90 days for a FULL refund – including our postage and handling charge!

Don't miss out. Reserve your bear now. Order online at **www.danburymint.co.uk** or call us on **0344 557 1000**. Alternatively, post your order form today to Danbury Mint, Davis Road, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1SE.

Steiff Makers of the world's most valuable bears.

Danbury Mint, Davis Road, Chessington KT9 1SE.
Order online at www.danburymint.co.uk
☎ Telephone orders on 0344 557 1000

Del Bear by Steiff

Please reserve ***Del Bear by Steiff*** for me, as described in this offer. My satisfaction is guaranteed.

☐ Please charge my credit /debit card.

Card No. ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa/Delta

Card expiry date _____ Signature _____

☐ I will pay by cheque or postal order.
We'll invoice you for the first instalment

SEND NO MONEY NOW

Title _____ First name _____
(Mr/Mrs/Miss etc.) (please print clearly)

Surname _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Telephone No. _____

Email address _____

A division of MBI, Inc. Overseas orders (Eire and Channel Islands only) pay £66 per instalment – card orders only. We may process your information and share it with carefully considered companies to enhance the services we provide. For more information see our Privacy Notice at www.danburymint.co.uk.

OFFER CODE: H10473

with Milman Parry (1902-35). Parry was the great American classicist who died in mysterious circumstances, aged only 33, when his gun went off while he was unpacking – or, some say, when he was shot by his wife.

On travels round Yugoslavia, Parry found bards who could recite thousands of lines from memory. Parry was building on research that had gone on since the 1850s, showing that long poems could be composed without writing. In 1887, a Bosnian singer performed 90 songs with more than 80,000 verses, five times longer than the *Iliad*.

My God, you needed stamina to listen to those shows. At one wedding, three members of the same family were married off, one after the other. The celebrations lasted for 34 days.

In Bosnia, Parry also found that a poet who became literate and began to write new poems could no longer compose orally. Literacy destroys oral technique.

And so, Lane Fox concludes, Homer could compose the *Iliad* only *because* he was illiterate. Since early boyhood, he'd listened to his elders performing poems. Every day, he performed his own versions, working towards the greatest epics of all.

And when was the *Iliad* composed? Answers range from 1050 BC to 550 BC. Lane Fox dismisses the latest theory from Adam Nicolson that it was created in 1200 BC.

Going on archaeological finds, it looks as if the ancient Greek script was devised in around 790-780 BC. The clues in the writing style and the social background of the epic suggest to Lane Fox that the *Iliad* was written in about 750-740 BC.

Again, impossible to prove – not least since the Trojan War, if it did happen, happened in around 1200 BC, and so Homer was consciously ageing his references in the poem.

Along with delving into these tantalising questions, Lane Fox also writes an engaging, scholarly commentary on the *Iliad*'s main characters, the women in it, the gods and, inter alia, the horses.

As the gardening correspondent of the *Financial Times* since 1970, he is particularly good on nature in the *Iliad*.

Homer alludes correctly to the great height of fir trees and knows the cardinal fact of Greek and Turkish treescapes: poplars and plane trees grow best beside streams and rivers.

Harry Mount is author of Odyssey: Ancient Greece in the Footsteps of Odysseus

OLDIE NOVEL OF THE MONTH

American guy

JASPER REES

Be Mine

By Richard Ford

Bloomsbury £18.99

'When you're young, your opponent is the future. But when you're not young, your opponent's the past.'

Frank Bascombe came up with that fretful axiom in *Independence Day* (1995), the second of Richard Ford's novels featuring Frank as narrator and, perhaps, alter ego.

Middle-aged and thus with no opponent to speak of, back then Frank imagined that when he reached his seventies, he'd be in diapers.

In *Be Mine*, he's made it to his dotage and the glad tidings are that he's still got everything under control down there.

He even boasts of functionality in 'the erectile department' – a Vietnamese masseuse called Betty can attest that he is capable of what he calls 'a frank tumescence' (a Frank tumescence?) although, the old fool ruefully adds, 'my nakedness is of little interest to her'.

The sadder news is that Frank is divorced again, his first wife is dead, and their surviving son, Paul – another son died before the start of *The Sportswriter* (1986) – is also on the way out.

Paul was introduced in *Independence Day* as an awkward teenager who joined his absentee father on a 4th July bonding trip. At 47, he's still awkward, and has never found a way of coalescing with the world.

'He has merely lived the *somehow* life I and others live,' muses Frank. (In *The Sportswriter*, he called this 'the normal applauseless life of us all'.)

Now the age Frank was in *Independence Day*, Paul is battling a fast-acting type of motor neurone disease. His father resolves, before Paul's number is up, to collect him from the vast megalopolitan hospital in Minnesota where he's been contributing to medical studies and take him on a last wintry road trip, this time to study the physiognomies of democracy at Mount Rushmore in North Dakota. His hunch, a winning one as it turns out, is that the odyssey will appeal to Paul's enhanced sense of the preposterous.

This often comic elegy is the fifth outing for Frank Bascombe and may be his last. At the rate they come out – every decade or so – the author, now 79, would be close to 90 for the next one.

A picaresque record of American boomerdom, Ford's run with him has been a more accidental series than John Updike's with Rabbit Angstrom.

A lapsed writer himself who thinks a lot about the function of literature, Frank even mentions Updike here as the more successful scribbler. Currently on his bedside table is a pocket Heidegger, 'which puts me dead to sleep in five minutes, and is all I ask of it'.

Be Mine brings us into the Trump era. Not that Frank has much to say about all that chaos. He spies the 'pooch-lipped, arms-folded Mussolini' on TV and 'couldn't take my eyes off him', he says. Mainly, though, he has to because 'when you're in charge of a failing son, little else goes on'.

His failing son is a startling, even freakish creation. Paul fancies himself a ventriloquist and soothes his angst by listening to Anthony Newley. Chubby and balding in his wheelchair, he resembles 'a studious Larry Flynt'.

Frank plays along as he always has. 'You're fine with everything,' Paul snaps in one of his less self-absorbed moments. 'That's your whole problem.' (Frank's daughter is even ruder: 'You really are an awful man,' she hisses down the phone. The antipathy is mutual.)

Mostly the two Bascombes communicate through avoidant jokes and encrypted parley, 'sustained, on-topic converse being simply not our way'. What emerges through the crackle is a moving portrait of a father and a son converging on the edge of the abyss.

Ford has always resisted the idea of Frank as Everyman, although he's certainly good at taking the national temperature in breezy non-conversations he strikes up with compatriots of every stripe.

He now carries over that resistance to Paul whose decline, he protectively insists, is symptomatic of nothing bigger than itself. To make it stand for America's moral degeneration 'seemed to steal his death from him'.

That, in the end, is what Frank Bascombe has been about all along: the individual in pursuit of the particular experience, questing for a happiness over which there is no control.

'How do we end up where we end up,' asks Frank, 'when all our intentions are the best?'

It's the insoluble riddle at the heart of all these wonderful novels.

Jasper Rees is author of Let's Do It: The Authorised Biography of Victoria Wood

Homelifts

AS SEEN ON TV

by pollock Homelifts

Taking your home to the next level.

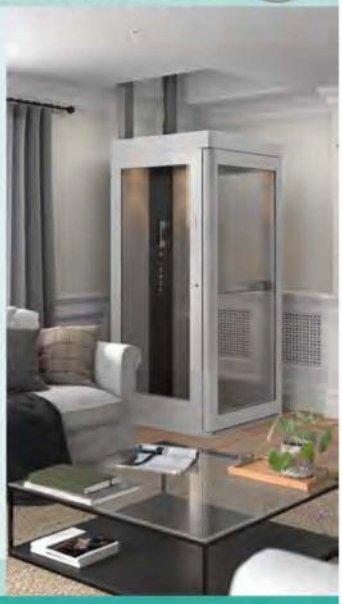
MADE IN THE UK

BUY DIRECT FROM THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT

- Market leading technology
- Smallest lift on the market
- Quick and easy to install
- 12 month warranty
- Certified to the British Standard 5900:2012

Pollock Lifts is an independently owned British business, that has, for over 35 years, designed and manufactured lifts that help people regain their independence and stay in the home they love.

We have a top-quality collection of homelifts, home elevators, through-floor lifts and platform lifts to suit you and your home. Our lifts are designed to be whisper quiet and fit seamlessly with your home. With their simple one touch controls, they are easy to operate too. Installation is quick and easy, only taking two or three days.



Homelift specialists since 1983

Call
0800 472 5008
www.pollockhomelifts.co.uk

For a **FREE** no-obligation survey to see if a Pollock Homelift is right for you

Practical & Pretty Paving Solution

21 year guarantee - when installed by a SureSet Approved Installer.

No loose stone - a beautifully smooth, accessible finish with no loose stone to migrate into other areas, making it practical and attractive.

Low maintenance - periodic sweeping and occasional power washing keeps its high end looks. The technology of SureSet minimises weed growth and reduces puddles.

sureset.co.uk +44 (0)1985 841 180 mail@sureset.co.uk

Choice HOMECARE
Because you are special

Call today for your free assessment
0208 857 7717

What's the alternative to a care home?
Live-in care is the answer.

Our care-workers live with you and tend to all your needs. Providing support with personal care, management of the household chores, accompaniment on outings, liaison with medical professionals and best of all, companionship.

- You have control over your care, in your home.
- Live-in care is often more cost effective than a care home
- Stay close to family, friends and your community
- We have specialist Dementia and Elderly care teams
- Care plans are prepared and fully supported

Download our free information pack at **www.choicehomecare.co.uk**

Commonplace Corner

Hannibal set off with 60,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry, 37 elephants and a soothsayer called Bogus.
Bernard Levin, Hannibal's footsteps

She never made the same mistake again. She always made a new mistake instead.
Wendy Cope

At the age of 32, research says, a woman turns into her mother.
Mary Kenny

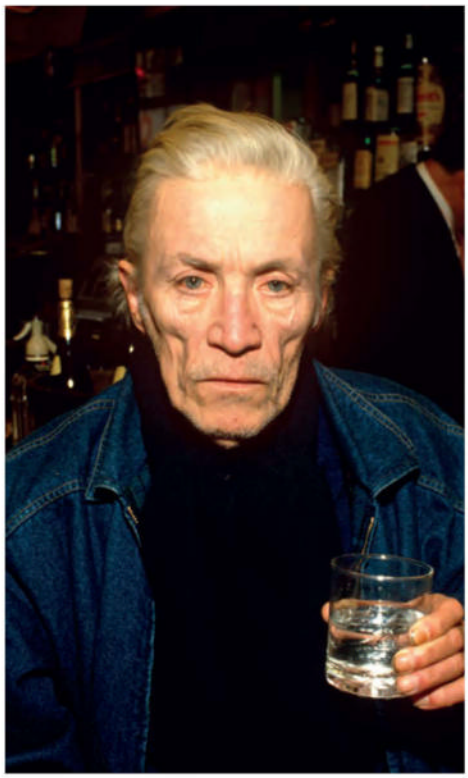
Silver had the rare ability to be at once enthusiastic and relaxed.
Obituary of Jonathan Silver, Salford entrepreneur, Daily Telegraph*, 1997*

You're happy if the thing you naturally want makes the other person [in a relationship] happy.
Richard Ford

What makes us so sure that men and women are basically attracted to each other? We don't know any different, that's all.
Kingsley Amis, Take A Girl Like You

Americans, while willing, even eager, to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry.
F Scott Fitzgerald

Never put off till tomorrow what you can drink today.
Charles Jackson, The Lost Weekend



Jeffrey Bernard (1932-97), vodka & tonic

Charles Lamb said he had no literary repugnances and that he could read any book that was a book, excluding Hume and Gibbon.
Mary Clive

Only catastrophe will give us back the fields.
John Betjeman on the growth of cities

I realised in those dives in Soho that there is no virtue in work for its own sake.
Jeffrey Bernard

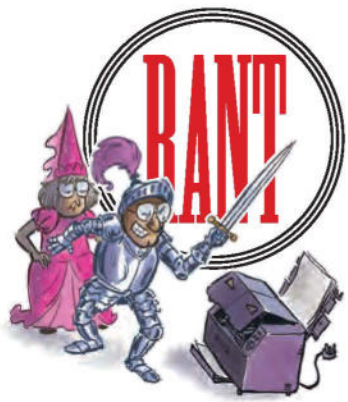
Her method of dealing with wayward human nature when it insisted on obtruding its grossness upon her scheme of life was short and effective: she pretended things were not so and usually, after a time, they were not.
Stella Gibbons, Cold Comfort Farm

His prose mixed hard observations with extravagant fancy, without ever losing a grip on either.
George Plimpton on Truman Capote

In the library, he took out several more volumes of Russian memoirs, for he was a great armchair snob, and in his reading could seldom find company too high for him.
Cyril Connolly, The Rock Pool

Marijuana will be legal some day because the many law students who now smoke pot will some day become congressmen and legalise it in order to protect themselves.
Lenny Bruce, 1963

Only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from all these things.
T S Eliot



TOM PLANT

Damsels in distress

Please, I am begging the men in my life, don't come charging to my rescue!

Although I have lived on my own and coped reasonably well for over 30 years, I am still seen by male friends and family as a damsel in distress or, more likely, given my age, as a dowager in distress, even when I am not remotely in distress.

The 'damsel in distress' syndrome, which forms the basis of every romantic novel and many fairy stories, happens when a man, a supposed knight in shining armour, leaps to aid the woman in trouble.

To put this into a present-day context, every time I mention to a male visitor that I have a computer, printer or electrical glitch, he offers to fix it for me.

He seems to think that if he frowns and fiddles enough, he will get the thing working and I will be eternally grateful and applaud the wonderful genius. This generous offer is usually accompanied by a complete inability to get the device working again.

The urge to help seems to make a man feel like a real man and it goes very deep. Just recently, a guest asked why one of my pictures was on the floor. When I told him it had fallen down, he said instantly, 'I'll put it back up for you.'

It doesn't stop there. Men will often, unasked, proffer financial advice. And of course they are all expert gardeners, telling me what will grow and where, even when they have no gardens of their own.

I appreciate their kind intention to help, but it's odd that I never get such offers from my female visitors. The impulse is firmly attached to the male chromosome.

It is all out of date. These days, the little woman can find detailed instructions for most jobs on YouTube or Google and if they don't work, she can call in an expert.
LIZ HODGKINSON

SMALL DELIGHTS

You open the right end of a pack of tablets and can remove the blister sleeve without negotiating the folded instructions.
GREG JONES, MAIDENHEAD, BERKSHIRE

Email life's small delights to editorial@theoldie.co.uk

Arts

FILM

HARRY MOUNT

MAD ABOUT THE BOY: THE NOËL COWARD STORY (12)

The best insight in this engaging documentary comes from Sir Anthony Havelock-Allan (1904-2003).

Havelock-Allan, who produced *Blithe Spirit*, *In Which We Serve* and *Brief Encounter*, said of Noël Coward (1899-1973) that he was 'not very secure. His armour is his super-sophisticated façade.'

The compelling interviews in the film fit with that insight. How lightning-quick Coward's mind was. How brilliant the put-downs of David Frost et al. How super-clipped the voice.

He combined syntax, vocabulary and exaggerated facial expressions to sublime comic effect. His Las Vegas accompanist, Peter Matz, particularly admired the small gestures Coward made to show a joke was coming.

But all those characteristics come not from arrogance – as they might at first seem to – but from what Coward called his 'talent to amuse', honed with a ferocious work ethic from childhood. As his accompanist Norman Hackforth put it, 'He wouldn't suffer anything but perfection.'

The work ethic was powered by a constant feeling that – for all the friendships with the Queen Mother, the great and the good, and for all the success – he was an outsider. At his own admission, he couldn't write music and could barely read it. He had next to no academic education.

Born into humble circumstances in Teddington, he was in amateur concerts by the age of seven, boosted by his adored mother Violet. His overwhelming sadness at her death in 1954 is touchingly captured in the film.

Coward worked at breakneck speed, producing hundreds of songs, plays, screenplays, short stories, poems, a novel and a three-volume autobiography.

As is often the case in this country, his gift for being funny meant his genius wasn't taken seriously. From *The Vortex* (1924), written when he was only 25, to *Hay Fever* (1924) and *Private Lives* (1930), his pre-war plays still seem modern and quick-witted.

The clips from his wartime films are moreish. *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *Brief Encounter* (1945) show the great variety of Coward's work – contrary to the cliché of the witty gentleman in the dressing gown. How brave and original to write a light comedy about death – the play *Blithe Spirit* (1941), later a film – during the mass slaughter of the war.

Masterly: Coward in Las Vegas, 1955

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY

As the film, written and directed by Barnaby Thompson, convincingly argues, most of his works share a common theme – of longing. Under the wit lies a strong seam of melancholy. Or, as Coward put it much better, 'Cocktails and laughter, but what comes after?'

Coward also had to deal with his trump outsider card – being gay when, almost until the end of his life, homosexuality was illegal. Yes, he could be camp, but he couldn't come out – not least because, as he said, 'There are still a few old ladies in Worthing who don't know [that I'm gay].'

Still, he played deliciously with his campness. In one golden interview, Coward declares, 'I belonged to Battersea Park Public Lavatory – Library! Freudian slip…'

He had many affairs and ended up in a happy, long relationship with actor Graham Payn. But the difficulties of being gay in 20th-century Britain must have fed into that streak of melancholy, which runs through so many of his songs: *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *The Party's Over Now*, *London Pride*, *World Weary* and, greatest of all, *Mad About the Boy*.

At only 91 minutes, the documentary never palls. Rupert Everett does a good job of reading out Coward's words without trying to impersonate him.

The real moments of pure comic joy come when we hear him sing at his Las Vegas comeback in his mid-50s, when the arrival of kitchen-sink dramas threatened to consign him to the past. The astonishing diction and dexterity with the wordplay of *Mrs Worthington* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* are a delight to watch.

He was the Cole Porter of Teddington. As Frank Sinatra said, 'If you really want to hear how songs should be sung, listen to Mr Coward.'

THEATRE

WILLIAM COOK

PATRIOTS

Noël Coward Theatre, London, until 19th August

How did Vladimir Putin, a medieval tyrant, end up in charge of a modern superpower – a country that looked as if it had thrown off the shackles of Communism and embraced democracy and the free market?

That's the pressing question that Peter Morgan's absorbing new play (now transferred to the West End after its première at the Almeida Theatre last year) sets out to tackle.

Morgan is one of Britain's finest dramatists, whose credits include *The Queen*, *The Crown* and *The Damned United*. Instead of simply focusing on Putin, which would have made for a flat, formulaic drama, he charts the rise and fall of Boris Berezovsky, the Russian oligarch who helped to make him.

This oblique approach is inspired. By casting Putin as Iago to Berezovsky's Othello, Morgan reveals far more about Putin than if he'd tackled him head on.

At the start of the play, Berezovsky is flying high, cheerfully exploiting the vast opportunities for self-enrichment that Yeltsin's chaotic regime created. Berezovsky's justification for his avarice is that his Wild West capitalism is also enriching Russia – trickle-down economics of the crudest sort.

Berezovsky is gleefully corrupt, facilitating business deals with shameless bribes to state officials. The only man who can't be bought is the Deputy Governor of St Petersburg, an obscure puritanical oddball called Vladimir Putin. When Putin loses his job and ends up as a taxi-driver, Berezovsky tries to turn him into a puppet who'll do his bidding.

Initially, Berezovsky comes across as a thoroughly unattractive character. He's a bad husband and an absent father. His only interest is making money. When Putin becomes president, and dismantles Russia's nascent democracy, he finally finds his moral compass, but by then it's far too late.

Played by almost any other actor, Berezovsky would be an unsympathetic figure, a man who sells his soul and then tries to buy it back at a knockdown rate. However, Tom Hollander is an actor of immense charm. His Berezovsky has such warmth and humanity that he becomes tragic – almost heroic.

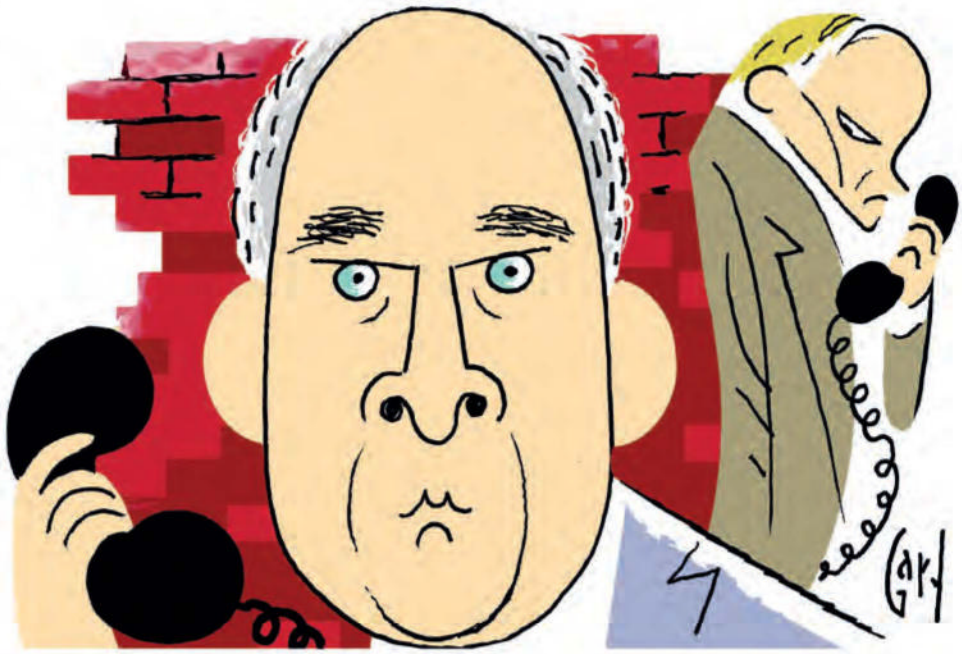
Likewise, Will Keen resists the temptation to play Vladimir Putin as a pantomime villain. His Putin is awkward and insecure, full of pent-up rage – a personification of the forgotten Russian proletariat, who are furious they've been left behind while fat cats such as Berezovsky line their pockets.

Keen and Hollander are mesmeric, and they're ably supported by Josef Davies as Alexander Litvinenko and Luke Thallon as Roman Abramovich. Litvinenko is an idealist who pays an awful price for his idealism. Abramovich is a realist who knows which way the wind is blowing. Yet, like Berezovsky and Litvinenko, Putin and Abramovich are both patriots – both motivated, in their own ways, by a deep, abiding love of Russia.

There's a dearth of decent female parts, and a few too many phone conversations, but these are minor quibbles. Morgan's play is compelling, and its malevolent ambience is enhanced by Miriam Buether's lurid nightclub set, a striking metaphor for the amoral free-for-all of 1990s Russia.

This isn't a play about a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing. A lot of the action happens in our own backyard. Litvinenko was poisoned here and died in a British hospital. Abramovich and Berezovsky did battle in a British court. Abramovich bought Chelsea Football Club. Berezovsky died in Berkshire, the buckle of the commuter belt.

At Berezovsky's inquest, the British coroner recorded an open verdict. *Patriots* suggests he killed himself. After watching this engrossing drama, I'm not so sure.



GARY SMITH

From Russia with hate: Boris Berezovsky (Tom Hollander) and Vladimir Putin (Will Keen)

RADIO

VALERIE GROVE

It's been reported that 800,000 have switched off – fleeing perhaps from fearful news of cyber-crime, disinformation, strikes, transphobia, witchcraft, abuse of all kinds … or from a certain presenter's gabbling voice.

Libby Purves says listeners have always been infuriated by *Today* presenters, including her. 'Contumely goes with the job,' as she put it.

Contumely! Hamlet's word. Radio 4 assumes a Shakespearean hinterland: so Michael Gove could quote (re Boris shenanigans) Marc Antony's 'The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.'

'I used to want a bomb to go off under Radio 4 – it felt so stale,' wrote the *Observer*'s Miranda Sawyer, apologising for having dared to single out three Radio 4 items in one week.

Every new generation of radio commentators rediscovers Radio 4's lingering USP: quirky documentaries and chance encounters. Take the *Great Lives* on John Gay by Ian Hislop. Or Adam Rutherford's riveting series on eugenics. Or Errollyn Wallen, Belize-born composer, or sculptor Nicole Farhi, discovered in John Wilson's *This Cultural Life*.

Apparently the appearance of uni-named Rylan on *The Archers* helped to propel the ancient soap to the top of the BBC Sounds app, where its fan base includes the under-35s. So Rylan (Clark) gets to make a podcast on *How to Be a Man*. Rylan, gay model, *X Factor*

star and comedian, assembles an 'amazingly broad spectrum' of guests: a boxer, another comedian, an athlete, a gay footballer, a camp TV chap etc – to ask, 'How masculine are you feelin' today?' That was its level.

There was nobody outstanding, although Janet Street-Porter came closest. Or Hamza Yassin, wildlife cameraman and *Strictly* winner. Hamza is feeling broody. But watch out: his role model is the polygamous silverback gorilla, supervising a harem of she-gorillas, and proving his manhood by multiple fathering.

I'm compiling a list of oldie-friendly podcasts and yes, Rachel Johnson, your indispensable *Difficult Women* is there, along with Catherine Carr's *Where Are You Going?* I'm trying *My Therapist Ghosted Me* with Joanne McNally and Vogue Williams. On *Saturday Live,* Vogue said she was glad her mother never listened because they talked a lot about sex. Up spake Dame Sheila Hancock: 'It's all right – mothers do know about sex.'

Suddenly, without fanfare, came *Wedgwood: A Very British Tragedy*, briskly told by Tristram Hunt, former Labour MP for the Potteries, now director of the V&A, biographer of the visionary Josiah Wedgwood.

Readers of A N Wilson's *Confessions* memoir will know this terrible story, because his father, Norman Wilson, was running Wedgwood until one Arthur Bryan persuaded Josiah the fifth to float the company. Flotation spelled doom. New bosses aimed to make only money, not pots.

'My father was so angry, he was broken by it,' said A N W.

We also heard from potters Edmund de Waal, David Queensberry and Emma Bridgewater. And from skilled workers, helpless in the face of takeovers (by Tony O'Reilly, then KPS Capital Partners), false promises, buy-outs, outsourcing to China for cheap labour and receivership. The present owners, Fiskars, Finnish secateur-makers, inspire confidence. This packed, well-crafted documentary was made by Anna Horsbrugh-Porter: in 28 zippy minutes, it left you wanting more.

Times Radio is gathering listeners, despite the unmistakable voice of programme host Mariella's being allowed to ask suddenly, 'Fancy a Fever-Tree?'

Perhaps it's Mariella's avatar. Hugo Rifkind had an avatar created of himself. Last Saturday, the real Hugo made me laugh. In a Blackpool hotel, he recalled, he asked reception what time breakfast was served.

'Seven o'clock'.

'Till when?' asked Rifkind.

Puzzled pause. Then a reply: 'Till you've finished your meal!'

TELEVISION

FRANCES WILSON

'I'll be back,' he threatened in *The Terminator*, and Arnold Schwarzenegger is a man of his word.

The line was repeated in the five other *Terminator* films and again in *Commando*, *The Running Man*, *Twins* and *Last Action Hero*.

'You've been back enough,' Bruce Willis wearily replied when Arnie said it yet again in *The Expendables 2*.

Two weeks after Netflix released all eight episodes of the 'kick-ass spy-action-comedy' *FUBAR* – Arnie's first television show – he's back again in *Arnold*. It's an 'intimate' three-part docuseries in which Arnie shares his insights and wisdom.

Arnold opens with the Austrian Oak enjoying a cigar in an outdoor hot tub. 'My whole life,' he explains in his AI voice, gazing at a snow-capped mountain range, 'I had this unusual talent. That I could see things. Very clearly in front of me. If I can see it. Then it must be achievable.'

Seeing him squashed into a 14-inch screen, I was reminded of Norma Desmond's quip in *Sunset Boulevard*: 'I am big – it's the pictures that got small.'

Whether it's fact or fiction, the unique selling point of an Arnie plot is implausibility. On-screen, he's played cyborgs, a kindergarten cop, Danny DeVito's twin, a mattress salesman (in *Jingle All the Way*) and, in *End of Days*, the single-handed defeater of Satan.

His off-screen plotlines are even harder to believe. The son of a former Nazi, he was born 75 years ago in a village called Thal. Aged 20, he became Mr Universe; he rehashed the role in his fifties when he was crowned Governor of California.

In what sounds like a plot line from *Desperate Housewives*, his 25-year marriage to Maria Shriver, the niece of JFK, ended in 2011 when he confessed in a family therapy session, which included their four children, that he was the father of the Guatemalan housekeeper's 13-year-old son.

In *FUBAR*, Arnie plays Luke Brunner, a 65-year-old CIA operative determined to win back his ex-wife, Tally (Fabiana Udenio), who has no idea of her husband's double identity. Nor does their daughter, Emma (Monica Barbaro), an apparently non-smoking, non-cursing, cookie-dough-loving lobbyist, whose boyfriend, Carter, a kindergarten teacher, is seen by her dad as a drip.

'Those paintings don't finger themselves,' Brunner says to Carter in one of his dead-on-arrival jokes about a finger painting.

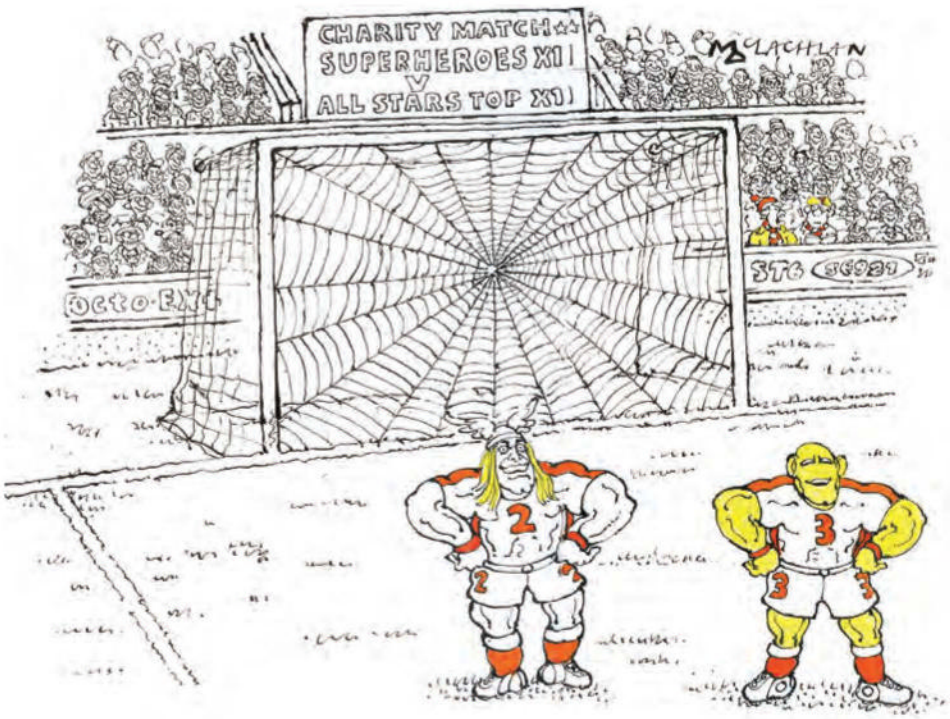
But, as Brunner discovers on his last secret mission, Emma is also Dani De Rossa, AKA Panda, a CIA agent posing as a tough American soldier in an arms-trading compound in Guyana. Not only does she smoke and curse, but also she doesn't give a damn about cookies.

Will she ever use that stand-up mixer

He'll always be back: Arnold Schwarzenegger in *FUBAR*

FLIXPIX / SKYDANCE TELEVISION

Ed McLachlan



'Who's in goal? Let me guess'

for the Sunday Funday chocolate-fudge bake-offs her dad bought for her birthday? Will she, hell! She's too busy cage fighting for cash.

'How does my ass taste, bitch?' Emma/Dani/Panda asks the GI whose head is clamped between her upper thighs when her dad first encounters her at work.

The relationship between father and daughter, meant to be witty and aggressive, is instead queasily sexual. To alleviate the tension, they are given joint therapy, which we already know is a bad idea. In one session, they are invited to speak in each other's voices through lookalike, *Sesame Street*-style glove puppets.

'I ruined my own marriage,' says Emma in a singsong German accent, her hand inside the Brunner puppet's trousers, 'but I'm the expert on everyone else's. I have muscles, so that means I know everything. And I'm from Austria, where life is hard and everything costs a nickel.'

FUBAR is army slang for 'fucked up beyond all repair', but in this instance it might be an acronym for feeble, unfunny, banal and ridiculous. Unable to come up with something newly implausible, Nick Santora, the showrunner, has rehashed all Arnie's other roles, including the real-life ones.

Other Hollywood icons have matured with their parts, but Arnie is determined that time has stopped. The effort involved in persuading us that this creaking, limping geriatric was doing his own stunts was so embarrassing that I switched screens and scrolled down Schwarzenegger's Wikipedia entry instead.

This, I can report, is a staggering 13,000 words long – that's 12,950 more words than he's ever spoken. Among the nuggets contained here is his insight on infidelity: 'You can't go back – if I could, in reality, be Terminator, of course, I would go back in time and would say, "Arnold ... no."'

Amen to that.

GARY SMITH

MUSIC

RICHARD OSBORNE

GRAMOPHONE CENTENARY / COMPTON MACKENZIE

It's interesting what survives from the life of a man such as the writer Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972).

'Monty' to his friends, he had an astonishing array of interests and achievements that could have furnished a dozen lives.

He's been a good deal written about of late: first, in a superb essay, 'The forgotten genius of Compton Mackenzie', published on the UnHerd website by writer and comedian Andrew Doyle; and more recently in the pages of the special centenary edition of *Gramophone*, the monthly magazine devoted to records and recording, which Mackenzie founded in 1923.

Mackenzie was already a world-renowned author. His two-volume novel *Sinister Street* had been lauded by Henry James, been surreptitiously enjoyed by a very young George Orwell, and offered inspiration to Scott Fitzgerald, whose own first novel had just appeared.

That was one Mackenzie. Another was the high-flying intelligence officer, whose activities in the eastern Mediterranean during the First World War read like something from the pages of a John Buchan novel.

Music had entranced Mackenzie from birth. Serious knowledge of it, however, had largely passed him by until, shortly after leaving Oxford, he was involved in an OUDS production of Aristophanes's *The Clouds*. The music was by Hubert Parry and contained, so a friend told Mackenzie, some terrific parodies of the music of Richard Strauss – apt for a play that lampoons the intellectual fashions of the day.

Piqued by his inability to appreciate any of the 'in' jokes being perpetrated by Parry – a most agreeable fellow, 'who looked like a boisterous, fox-hunting squire but talked so eloquently about music and literature' – the 22-year-old Mackenzie resolved to get to know more about the subject.

For most of its 100 years, *Gramophone* has been a largely family affair. In 1923, Mackenzie was living on the island of Herm in the Bailiwick of Guernsey. It was there that he worked in the company of his literate and music-loving wife, Faith, a piano-playing secretary, a Siamese cat – another Mackenzie speciality – and the 1,200 discs he'd acquired for his own and his new magazine's benefit for the then astonishingly steep sum of £400.

A mainland office was set up and it was there that Faith's younger brother, Christopher Stone, was installed as London editor. A man of more middlebrow musical tastes than Monty, he'd long been a huge fan of the gramophone.

'There is no pet that can be so easily domesticated and so constantly exercised as the homely gramophone,' he wrote in his memoir, *Christopher Stone Speaking*.

Highbrow opinion still rather despised the gramophone, as did Reith's fledgling BBC. This didn't prevent Stone from joining the corporation in 1927 as its first disc jockey – becoming, more or less overnight, an early 'national treasure'.

Like many start-ups, *The Gramophone* (as it was first titled) was an instant editorial success but financially a

Compton Mackenzie, 1936

bit of a basket case. Three years in, a young accountant, Cecil Pollard, offered to give up his job and look after the paper's finances – something he, and later his son and grandson, would do for the next 73 years.

These days, *Gramophone* is owned by the Mark Allen Group, which has proved the happiest of landings. Not that the Pollards are out of the picture. Cecil's son, Tony, now in his 95th year, gave advice and read proofs for the special centenary edition (available to *Oldie*-readers with discount code OLDIE23 from magsubscriptions.com/gramophone-centenary-issue).

Every issue since 1923 is now online, and a few plums have been picked for the celebratory edition. These include Pablo Casals describing how, aged 12, he first encountered Bach's suites for unaccompanied cello in an 'old and musty music shop pervaded by a faint smell of the sea', overlooking the harbour in Barcelona. And a superb memoir by pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch about his friend and fellow Russian exile Sergei Rachmaninov, published in May 1943, shortly after the great man's death.

The centenary was also marked by an evening of live music-making at London's Wigmore Hall, featuring a number of distinguished recipients of the annual *Gramophone* awards.

Several of the performers were French, which would have delighted Mackenzie. It was while he was finishing his 1955 memoir *My Record of Music* – as absorbing as his ten-volume autobiography but shorter – that a telegram arrived from the French Prime Minister Edgar Faure. It announced that '*la plus grande revue du monde*' specialising in music and the gramophone was being honoured by the French state.

Mackenzie was thrilled. He'd published some wonders in his long life – *Sinister Street*, *Whisky Galore* and that most brazenly spectacular breach of the Official Secrets Act in our nation's history, *Greek Memories*.

But none, I suspect, was closer to his heart than his beloved *Gramophone*.

GOLDEN OLDIES

RACHEL JOHNSON

RETURN TO OZ

In *Ten Pound Poms*, the series followed the lives of Brits who took the tenner to go Down Under after the Second World War.

Then we had Howard Jacobson on the great Aussies who made their way to our damp and less fatal shores: Germaine Greer, Clive James, Robert Hughes and Barry Humphries. RIP, Dame Edna.

It was nice, I thought, to see them all again– but, I thought, what about Kylie?

Surely the pocket rocket with the best ass in showbiz (gasp at the impossibly pert globes bobbing in gold lamé hotpants in the 2000 video of her hit *Spinning Around* before you complain to the editor) is the biggest cultural export the Antipodes have ever bestowed upon a grateful world.

It took me a while to 'get' Miss Minogue. First there was the fact that my grandparents had a vicious sheepdog called Kylie. It once bit Boris. 'He turned around and bit me – quite properly – when I tried to ride him like a horse,' my brother recalls. There was permed Kylie in *Neighbours* and then she was Jason Donovan's moll for a while. Next came Sex Kylie, when she was Michael Hutchence's girlfriend. When she became a gay icon, she hooked me in.

The hot-pants video, yes, but it was also the shallow catchiness of her tunes that you can't get out of your head. Now, somehow, here she still is, spinning around at the top of the charts with a new single after five decades in pop, almost as long – in dog years – as this issue's octogenarian cover stars, Mick and Keef.

The new hit is a tribute to an Edith Piaf 1951 chanson, *Padam Padam* – the sound the beating heart makes when gripped by hopeless passion, I am told.

Kylie's *Padam Padam* is a TikTok sensation (ask a grandchild to show you) and the dance moves have gone viral, like *Macarena* or *The Chicken Song*.

Unlike Kylie, who is top of the pops aged 55, La Piaf died aged 47. *O tempora* etc, but it does cheer me to think that the non-binary Kylie fans out there on TikTok or Snapchat (even I am getting out of my depth here) may be curious to know the genesis of the hit.

They might even type the words 'Padam Padam' and 'Edith Piaf' into their smartphones and be taken by algorithms unknown to that wonderful world of pain and loss and torch songs, if only to return to the writhing, tinny disco beats of the Pop Princess from Oz.

GRUNDY TELEVISION

Good neighbours: Scott (Jason Donovan) and Charlene (Kylie Minogue)

EXHIBITIONS

HUON MALLALIEU

MASTERING THE MARKET: DUTCH AND FLEMISH PAINTINGS FROM WOBURN ABBEY

Barber Institute, Birmingham, to 24th September

Government projects and other public schemes always come in over budget and over time.

So it will comfort our bureaucrats to see that much the same can happen in the private sector – at least as far as time is concerned.

The first major refurbishment of the Duke of Bedford's Woburn Abbey since it opened to the public in 1955 was initiated in 2018 and was intended to be finished in 2020. Two more years were then added and then, partly owing to the discovery of asbestos, another three. I don't know how the budget is behaving.

However, this long closure has allowed the ducal curators to send some of Woburn's masterpieces out as ambassadors for the collection to galleries around the country. It should be good for the turnstiles when the Abbey eventually reopens.

The splendid group of Canalettos has been seen in Bath, Worcester and Greenwich, where it was accompanied by portraits and landscapes.

Now a group of 17th-century Dutch paintings, headed by a little-known Rembrandt, has come to Birmingham. The exhibition sets out to illuminate the workings of the art market in the Netherlands during the Golden Age, and then to look at the collecting tastes of the 4th, 5th and 6th Dukes in the century from 1730.

As well as Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Bearded Old Man* (1643), the group includes Frans Hals's *Portrait of a Man* (c 1635-38). The subjects of Anthony van Dyck's *Portrait of a Married Couple* (c 1632-34) have been identified as the artist Daniel Mytens and his second wife, Susanna Droeshout, a miniature-painter.

Highlights include Aelbert Cuyp's *A Landscape near Calcar with the Artist Sketching* (c 1652), Jan Steen's *Twelfth Night* or *Le Roi Boit* (1670-71) and Jan van de Cappelle's *A Dutch Harbour, with Numerous Fishing Boats* (c 1652-54).

The Rembrandt, also known as *The Old Rabbi*, was fully authenticated only in 2012. It was almost certainly conceived as a pair to the portrait of the artist's wife, Saskia, now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. They are painted on mahogany panels from the same packing case.

Steen's *Twelfth Night* portrays just the sort of boisterous scene featuring members of his family that gave rise to the expression *een huishouden van Jan Steen*, meaning the sort of household you really don't want as neighbours.

The Barber's own impressive collection is able to complement these well, with further examples by Hals, Steen and Van Dyck.

***Clockwise from above: A Landscape near Calcar with the Artist Sketching*, by Aelbert Cuyp; *Portrait of a Man* (traditionally identified as the artist), by Frans Hals; *The Interior of Archduke Leopold William's Picture Gallery at Brussels*, by Teniers the Younger; *Portrait of a Bearded Old Man*, by Rembrandt van Rijn**

THE WOBURN ABBEY COLLECTION

Pursuits

GARDENING

DAVID WHEELER

IN SAFE ARBORS

We were out and about in May, finding cool woodland glades. We were trying to dodge unseasonal unbroken sunshine which made garden work at home too troublesome for an entire month.

Who'd have thought south-west Wales would have been Britain's sunniest and hottest spot? Friends in East Anglia, more accustomed to such stress than us, were still in woollies, wondering – like us – why the UK's weather pattern has been reversed.

It won't last, of course. We'll doubtless have our brollies out in midsummer, grateful for whatever moisture the sky bestows.

May warmth is glorious, but it should ideally be tempered. New plants have to be watered judiciously – not dowsed, for fear of drowning them. Instead, kindly wet them and their surrounding soil so that new roots can find a comfortable and auspicious home in which to establish themselves.

Little and often is my mantra – a splash morning and night being enough for the ground to remain sufficiently moist. Once new plants are settled after, say, several summer months, damp and cooler autumnal conditions will assume the gardener's labour.

We have our own good acres of woodland in which to wander when, as Cole Porter penned, 'It's too darn hot.'

Still, off we trundled to discover other havens of quietude and shade to linger beneath bosky boughs. We found them in the gardens of Upton Castle, on a tidal creek in Pembrokeshire.

Far less known and visited than other local 'attractions', Upton – a fortified manor house dating back to the 13th century – blessed us with a venerable garden partly lost in time and, with gusto, partly undergoing sympathetic revival. Magnificent, century-old specimen trees (including 17 national and county champions) enrich its grounds, while a long leafy path led us to the reedy banks of the River Cleddau.

Similarly, at Picton Castle near Haverfordwest a week earlier, ancient arboreal grandees sheltered us from the heat. We couldn't, though, resist the walled garden, with its long, Mediterranean border set against mellow brick walls.

Among strollers under umbrellas providing individual pools of shade, we sighed admiringly at the fleeting beauty of irises at their peak, a freestanding, clipped wisteria in full floral avalanche, outcrops of phlomis and magnificent stands of giant fennel (*Ferula communis*). Thyme and rosemary sweetened the air, truly justifying the enclosure's Mediterranean associations. Was this really south-west Wales? Wet Wales?

A lack of spring rain is worrying. Woody plants in particular do their best growing in April, May and June, and they need good, well-irrigated roots to see them through July and August.

We store what rainwater we can in butts and are adding to their number wherever possible. But my ancient limbs now rebel at the ferrying of heavy watering cans across long stretches of garden.

Thank heavens for mulching. It's proved fabulously beneficial this year, especially around newly planted trees and shrubs. I mix barrowloads of grass clippings and compost in roughly equal measure, spreading the mixture three to four inches thick around plants after they've been well watered. Blackbirds toss it all about in search of insects, but the thatch is easily kicked back in place.

Having recently spent considerable amounts on young trees – maples, dogwoods, birches, flowering cherries – I don't want them to suffer. And my extensive collection of famously thirsty hydrangeas need good, regular guzzles.

I'll be taking cuttings of the rarer varieties in late June and early July. With new-found fellow hydrangea enthusiasts nearby, I need a ready supply for swaps and giveaways.

With luck, I'll again be among the world's best collection of these flowering shrubs in September – at Jardin Shamrock in Normandy, where, I trust, rain has fallen generously.

David's Instagram account is @hortusjournal

KITCHEN GARDEN

SIMON COURTAULD

BROAD BEANS

I can't think why King Charles chose, as the principal ingredient of his Coronation Quiche, a vegetable that was not in season in the first week of May. As every gardener, including the King, knows, the season for broad beans begins in mid- June.

So the broad beans for this unexciting quiche would have been frozen or imported, and should not have been approved by our organic monarch unless, which is unlikely, they had been organically grown.

My broad beans are a bit late this year owing to the cold winter. I planted them outside, as usual, at the end of February, but they did not appear above ground for a month, and were not flowering until mid-May. However, we were picking the first little beauties during Royal Ascot week.

Broad beans can, of course, be started in pots in a greenhouse, and some varieties can be planted outside in late autumn. But in my experience very little time is gained by an autumn sowing, and after last winter they might not have survived at all.

When the pods start to form, pinch

out the tops of the plant to reduce the risk of an infestation of blackfly. This can also be controlled by spraying with soapy water or, in extremis, with a chemical spray. Some bean plants may need supporting with sticks and string, but if planted in double rows they should support one another.

My current favourite variety is Masterpiece Green Longpod: it yields a large crop of beans, which I try to pick when they are fingernail-size and at their tastiest. The larger ones should have their skins removed after cooking.

In France people let their broad beans grow until they are suitable only for soups (and certainly not for quiches), while the Spanish offer a delicious dish of tiny beans (habitas) with olive oil and chopped Iberian ham.

At the time of the Coronation, the politician Jacob Rees-Mogg actually called broad beans 'loathsome', a word that some oldies might think would be better applied to him.

COOKERY

ELISABETH LUARD

DINNER WITH DRACULA

This summer, His newly crowned Majesty returns for his hols to Transylvania and the rural Saxon lifestyle he admires.

I first paid a visit to the region in 1985, four years before the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian dictator, while researching *European Peasant Cookery*. On the way through Bucharest, I'd acquired an introduction to the Lutheran Bishop of Sibiu – aka Hermannstadt. This is the German-speaking capital of the *Siebendörfer*, seven villages full of hard-working, upright Protestants who'd been ploughing the fields and keeping themselves to themselves since the 12th century.

The bishop was away on business, but his wife, Frau Klein, volunteered to collect recipes for me on her weekly round of the parish. 'We like to eat soup. Lettuce soup with eggs and cream. Cabbage soup with bacon. Bean soup with sausage. Always with bread.'

Among the settlements of the bishopric, it was the village of Viscri (HM's first choice) that Frau Klein considered best represented the Saxon way of life: deeply religious, frugal, respectful of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*. The congregation attended church in traditional dress (families, men and boys on one side, unmarried women and widows on the other). They celebrated feast days with decorous ring dancing in the churchyard. They stored their hams

ELISABETH LUARD

in the tower when invaders threatened. And they were self-sufficient in all things except salt for preserving meat and vegetables, and needles and thread for the embroideries whose patterns were specific to each village.

Small but important luxuries – coffee for after-church gatherings, sugar for preserves and cakes, spices for the traditional *Wurst*, carpets to hang in the Lutheran church to remember the dead – were supplied by the travelling Turkish market set up weekly in Sibiu's main square, opposite the Lutheran church.

Unfortunately this became impossible after the dictator's equally unpleasant son bulldozed the main square and forbade the return of the Turkish market, declaring it a source of subversive goods and a threat to the authority of the state.

Transylvanian picnic pork-liver pâté

On our return from Viscri to the Bishop's Palace, a small, round dining table covered with a beautifully embroidered, white linen cloth had been laid for a picnic supper. On it were placed a basket of boiled eggs (no eggcups supplied – a sharp tap on the round end, explained my hostess, allows the egg to be balanced upright), freshly baked bread, a large pat of butter, a slab of fruitcake (called, appropriately, Bishop's bread), jam, honey and a plate of home-made *Liverwurst*, ready-sliced, with pickles. Serves 6 to 8.

500g pork liver, cut into strips
1 small onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp pork-lard or butter
250g lean pork (shoulder)
250g pork belly (de-rinded)
1 medium egg
1 tsp crushed allspice
½ tsp crushed peppercorns
1 tsp salt

Turn the liver and onion in a hot frying pan with the lard or butter until the meat stiffens, leaving it pink. Chop or mince the contents of the pan with the pork. Using your hands, work in the egg, spices and salt.

Pack the mixture into a loaf tin, cover with foil and set it in a *bain-marie* roasting tin with enough boiling water to come a quarter of the way up the loaf tin. Bake at 350°F/180°C/Gas 3 for about an hour, then remove the foil so the top browns a little. Continue baking for another 30 minutes, until a skewer pushed into the middle releases clear juice.

Pop a weight on top and leave it to cool – overnight is best. It'll keep for two weeks in the fridge. Slice thickly and serve with pickles, butter and bread. Royal organic apple juice to accompany, naturally.

RESTAURANTS

JAMES PEMBROKE

SEA FARE

If you were to take a trip to Lichfield this summer – millions of you won't feel the urge – you would see a plaque boasting that, at 84 miles inland, Dr Johnson's birthplace is the furthest town in mainland Britain from the sea.

I have never understood why, surrounded by water, we island folk don't want to live slap-bang next to the eternal blue. What's the point of living in Wiltshire?

The only possible explanation is that we still have an innate fear of being picked up from the beach and taken into slavery by Barbary corsairs, the fate of so many Devonian families until the navy took control of our shores. In 1740, we were finally able to sing 'Britons never, never, never shall be slaves' with some confidence.

Last month, I toured our glorious coastline from Margate to Bournemouth. In 1736, realising the corsairs were sticking to the Mediterranean, the first sea-bathing hospital was opened in Margate, and our first purpose-built seaside resort was launched.

Despite Tracey Emin's leading hipsters to her childhood home, Margate is pure joy: 80 minutes from London, pretty Georgian squares and terraces and a front from which you can watch the sun go down. We had dinner at Angela's, a tiny seafood restaurant with great prices: turbot for just £24.

The next day, we drove to Broadstairs, which won't let you forget its Dickens connections. Blank out all the old curiosity shops and head to the tiny sandy beach. On your left, you'll see the Astors' seaside house, which is not in the least bleak. Nearby is Wyatt & Jones, which overlooks the beach. We had

oysters aplenty, in tempura with a wild-garlic gel, and chilli. Then bass cooked on the open grill.

On through elegant Ramsgate to Brighton, which has transformed itself since I was last there in 2015. The beach was humming with trippers hungry for the sunset and all those restaurants. We chose The Copper Clam, and after eating fell asleep on the pebbles.

While shopping, I saw English's, whose red velvet banquettes gave comfort to Laurence Olivier's bottom and those of visiting thesps. They revamped it eight years ago but the '50s Lautrec-style murals are still there. They offer a bargain two-course set for £25 (including three rock oysters).

Then onto The Cove, at Fairlight, near Hastings, for lunch with my cousin and her husband, the Quiet American. Lucky them to have such a great local pub/restaurant. Proper food and great service with pints of Harvey's beer.

I've always wanted to go to Chewton Glen, on the edge of New Milton, but I still can't afford it. So I was thrilled to be told they've opened a cheaper version, the Kitchen. It's not very cheap – order a starter portion of their delicious crab risotto for £15, which is all you'll need.

Our waitress was very good – as was all the service on our tour, save for one blight: QR menus. I always have to ask the waiter to scan the code on my phone, and then I have to squeeze the list of around 50 dishes into a screen the size of my palm. Where's the joy and gastronomic anticipation in that? Brighton was the worst offender.

Quite clearly, coastal restaurants want us to pay before we are picked up by the Barbary corsairs.

DRINK

BILL KNOTT

FRENCH LESSONS

The recent *Oldie* trip to Bordeaux featured many memorable ingredients.

These ranged from the grandeur of the rooms, terrace and gardens at our home for the week, Château Beychevelle, to the draught horses in the stables at Château Pontet-Canet, and the Chanel-chic décor at Château Canon.

Admittedly, there was the little matter of the bistro in Margaux that had lost our lunch reservation. Chef looked in a barren fridge and offered us merguez sausages and pasta, a dubious fusion of Maghrebi and Italian cuisine. But he was, eventually, persuaded to rustle up *steak frites* for 16, and the day was saved.

What struck me most about all the wineries we visited was the extraordinary level of investment. Beychevelle, owned by drinks giants Suntory and Castel, and Château Kirwan, owned by the Schÿler family, opened their stunning new cellars within days of each other in 2017.

At Château Léoville Barton, whose new cellar was finished just a couple of months ago, we were the first visitors through the doors.

And then there is Le Dôme, a spectacular spaceship of a winery in Saint-Émilion, with vineyards bordering Canon and Château Angelus. The shared vision of English winemaker Jonathan Maltus and architect Sir Norman Foster, it rises just six yards high but spirals deep into the limestone and clay, its dozen gleaming fermentation vats gazing up at the eponymous glass dome.

Maltus is a serial disrupter and an aspiring rock star who has been making wines (and ruffling feathers) in the area for decades. He was first a *garagiste* – French wine writer Michel Bettane's somewhat withering term for the makers of small-batch wines in the 1990s – Le Pin, among others). Now, with 61 hectares, he's Saint-Émilion's second-biggest landowner.

His two top wines – we tasted Vieux Château Mazerat 2018 and Le Dôme 2018 – are as opulent and skilfully constructed as his €14 million winery. The exuberantly fruity, heady wines, according to Mayfair wine merchant Hedonism, will set you back £124 and £215 respectively.

Perhaps the most memorable glass of our trip, however, came during our visit to Léoville Barton. The new cellars are stunning, the perfect synthesis of modern winemaking and Bordeaux tradition. They are very much in the image of Anthony Barton, the estate's charismatic owner who died last year, aged 91.

We tried Léoville Barton, Langoa Barton – the family's other great Saint-Julien estate – and Mauvesin Barton, their Merlot-rich wine from Moulis, further south (great value at around £20 a bottle). The two Saint-Julien wines showed, typically for Barton wines, great poise and restraint; for lovers of classic claret, they are hard to beat.

Then we were led through the glorious garden to meet Anthony's widow, Eva, who greeted us with a glass of champagne. But not just *any* glass: this was Pol Roger Cuvée Winston Churchill 1998, served from magnum. By an old family retainer wearing white gloves. In an orangery.

This, I think, must be how they serve champagne in heaven.

SPORT

JIM WHITE

IN GOLF, MONEY TALKS

By the time the first drive is struck at this year's Open in Hoylake, golf will be under new ownership. The Saudis have bought out the game. Lock, stock and pitching wedge.

The moment a barrow laden with the Saudi Public Investment Fund's cash was wheeled into negotiations, the existing organising bodies crumbled, dispensing with things like heritage, history and tradition in the blink of an eye. Forget talk of partnership or amalgamation. This is a takeover.

This is not the last of it. Saudi Arabia is on an unabashed sporting campaign: not to win things, or to top medal tables – but to own sport. All sport. Golf, football, boxing, tennis, Formula One: their shopping list is comprehensive. They want the lot.

For many an observer in the West, the reasons are clear: they reckon the Saudis are hoping to use sport as a reputational launderette, to present themselves as your mate down the golf club rather than a bunch of medieval theocrats who chuck gays off rooftops and feed those who disagree with them through the meat-grinder.

In fact, it's doubtful sportswashing is a remotely plausible concept, as was clear when Saudi's neighbours Qatar hosted the World Cup last winter. Far more scrutiny was shone on their murky processes than would have been the case had they quietly carried on supplying the West with its gas.

While there may be politics behind the drive, they are more local than international. Five years ago, the country's leader, Mohammed bin Salman, instigated what he calls his Vision 2030 project to wean the economy away from the proceeds of oil and find new revenue streams.

But that could be done through commerce and technology, turning the desert into the world's solar-powered engine room. In real-world terms, sport is not a big earner. Yet there it is, top of his agenda.

It is not hard to see why. MBS, as he likes to be known, is 37 and intends to be around for a while yet. More than half the Saudi population is younger than him, many of them educated in America or Europe. To keep a young, smart constituency on side, he needs to give them something. And it sure isn't democracy or political freedom.

But sport could do the job. Regular heavyweight-boxing title fights, Formula One races and Ronaldo sulking in the kit of Riyadh's Al-Nassr are already commonplace sights in the kingdom.

And that is just the start. The idea is to turn the desert into the heartland of world athletic competition, the venue of choice for any tournament, with state-of-the-art facilities cooled by hosepipes of cash.

Though they can't move the Masters golf from Augusta to Riyadh, don't put it past them soon to stage one of Saudi-owned Newcastle United's home Premier League games in a swanky new stadium, purpose-built where currently there is only sand. Or maybe host the Ryder Cup or put on the America's Cup in the Gulf.

Why not? After all, absurd as it might seem, Saudi has already won the right to host the 2029 Asian Winter Games, to be staged inside a giant indoor ski dome.

After that, well, as Qatar proved, the World Cup can be bought. The Olympics, too. How much fun that will be for Saudi's youthful elite, watching the 100m final just down the road, their formerly derided nation for once at the centre of the world's attention. How they will thank MBS.

It's no more complicated than that. This is bread-and-circuses politics, fuelled by more money than Croesus could dream of. And the good news for MBS is, as the abject capitulation by golf's ruling bodies demonstrated, that the traditional sporting establishment is all too willing to yield to his ambition at the first flash of his wallet.

MOTORING

ALAN JUDD

END OF ELECTRIC DREAMS

Government is difficult.

There's so much going on, capacities are limited and the best-laid plans do not always survive contact with reality.

Although there are some issues that are no more difficult to get right than to get wrong, getting them wrong is what the Government sometimes seems bent on.

Sales of new ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles are to be banned from 2030, with hybrids banned from 2035. The year 2030 is an arbitrary date, chosen to show we're more virtuous than the EU, which will ban ICEs from 2035. I bet it ain't gonna happen – not by 2030 nor by any time soon after.

Four reasons. First, synthetic fuels work and are with us now, contributing radically less to global warming than petrol and diesel. In bio-form, they can be derived from 'second-generation' waste such as sugar-beet husks, which, left in the ground, produce methane (worse than CO_2). One event at this summer's Goodwood Revival will feature cars running on synthetic fuel.

Porsche has invested over £81 million in an e-fuel plant in Chile, which takes carbon from the atmosphere to produce hydrogen and is already functioning on an industrial scale. In Britain, firms such as Coryton and Zero Petroleum are already fuelling vehicles with environmentally-sustainable synthetics. They take no crude oil from the ground, and can be used in any ICE and distributed via our familiar petrol and diesel pumps.

Secondly, the EU recently bowed to pressure from Germany and Italy to permit the sale of new ICEs after 2035, provided they run on synthetics.

Our government has not yet committed to this but it should, not only for the benefit of synthetic-fuel research here but for the future of what remains of our motor industry. If the EU industry goes that way, we either go with it or are ignored. Better get ready now.

Thirdly, EVs (electric vehicles) are too expensive for the great majority of drivers. Most people drive used cars because they can't afford new – about 5.3m UK cars are aged 15 or older, up from 1.7m in 2002. The figure is projected to reach 9.3m by 2032.

Data from Auto Trader show interest in new EVs has already declined by two-thirds, while the value of used ICE vehicles has increased by about a third since the start of the pandemic. True, the market in used EVs may grow, but their values are already dropping, as owners confront the prospect of battery replacements, which can cost well into five figures.

This brings us to the fourth reason, the inadequate charging infrastructure which, even on the most modest predictions of EV numbers, will not sustain the universal mobility we have become accustomed to over the last century. Unless governments are prepared for half the population to be in effective lockdown for half the time, ICEs will be with us for decades to come.

This isn't to say we should give up on reducing fossil-fuel dependency. Toyota and BMW are looking into producing ICE cars that are leased, refurbished and re-leased with a lifespan of 25 years and a lower lifetime carbon footprint than conventional EVs.

The best way to get close to the utopian aspiration of net zero is for government to encourage multiplicity of research and endeavour, not to stifle it by saying it must be this or that.

Set the standards – such as zero tailpipe emissions or lifetime carbon footprints – and leave it to scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs to work out how best to get the goods to us.

And start by exempting synthetic fuels from the 2030 ban.

Travel Insurance with No Age Limits!

Peace of mind for your next holiday

- Experts in Cover for Medical Conditions
- 24 Hour Medical Emergency Support
- Cover for Cruise Holidays
- Cover for Covid-19

SPECIAL OFFER FOR THE OLDIE READERS
10%* OFF
BASE PREMIUM
Quote code od10

Call us FREE for an instant quote - It's easy!

0808 196 2115

Our friendly team are waiting to help you

goodtogoinsurance.com

Excellent ★★★★★ Trustpilot

Insurance Choice Awards

Goodtogoinsurance.com is a trading name of Ancile Insurance Group Limited. Authorised & Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority - No. 471641.
*Discount applies to base premium only and not to any medical screening premiums or optional extras. Discount valid until 31 December 2023.

The Hawthorns

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Enjoy a worry-free and active retirement at the Hawthorns, where community living is at our heart.

Hawthorns' Well-being Co-ordinators provide a daily programme of stimulating and engaging activities, social events, trips out, exercise classes and interest clubs to keep your mind and body active and support you in staying healthy.

Studio, 1-bed or 2-bed apartments available for single occupancy or couples.

0800 0125382 | hawthornsretirement.co.uk

Call today to request a free information pack

Braintree, Essex | Clevedon, Somerset | Eastbourne, Sussex | Northampton, Northamptonshire

Lightning strikes my computer

We've had some good thunderstorms round here recently. In one of them, my internet connection was struck by lightning.

Late one Friday evening, our internet stopped working. I assumed it was temporary, and expected it to be better in the morning, but it wasn't.

So I called BT. The recorded message sympathetically advised me to report the problem online, which is a bit like asking someone with a broken-down car to drive to the garage.

My mobile phone still worked. So I filled in the online form and, to my happy surprise, within 20 minutes a cheerful chap in Wales called me. He told me, among other things, that the weather was lovely there.

He explained that there had been a rash of similar problems in my area, because of the 'extreme' weather. He tested the line. That was fine, and so he diagnosed that my router (the Home Hub) had been struck by lightning and had given up the ghost. I imagine I would, too, if I were hit by lightning.

He said he'd send me a new one, which would arrive in two 'working' days and, in the meantime, they would send me a Mini Hub to keep me online. A Mini Hub allows you to connect to the internet using a mobile-phone signal. Most smartphones can do the same thing, but it sucks up your data allowance at a prodigious rate and would be very expensive if you did it for too long.

The Mini Hub would be with me in 24 hours, he assured me. So far so good.

In practice, to no one's surprise, the Mini Hub arrived after three days and the router pitched up a day after that. The Mini Hub was useless, because the mobile-phone signal for the BT network (bizarrely known as EE) is almost non-existent here. Nonetheless, the router worked well.

I had, therefore, four days with no proper internet, despite the promises about 'unbreakable' connections.

Perhaps you think that four days without internet is no great drama, and for us it wasn't, but a sick friend of mine is being very successfully cared for in a 'virtual ward'. In other words, he is at home, but connected to all sorts of sensors, which are linked to the hospital through the internet. They can keep an eye on him, and he is comfortable at home. But if his router had been struck by lightning, as mine was, four days would be too long to wait.

In hindsight, what I should have done was buy a cheap router on Amazon (there is no need to be tied to a BT product) and it would have been delivered the next day. I would have been up and running again and could have swapped it for the official BT router once it finally appeared. In fact, now I think of it, why doesn't BT use Amazon's delivery service?

I have now bought a second-hand router as a backup; I should have done it years ago.

I was also reminded how difficult it can be to make even a very small domestic network like ours (three computers and a printer) accept a new piece of equipment and how frustrating setting it up it can be. My late parents, for example, were enthusiastic emailers and web surfers, but the slightest technical issue of this kind flummoxed them.

However, every problem is an opportunity for someone, and their resourceful vicar developed a useful pastoral sideline in solving computer problems for his flock. He thus endeared himself to many who might have resisted his ministrations in any other context.

The Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways – even through cyberspace.

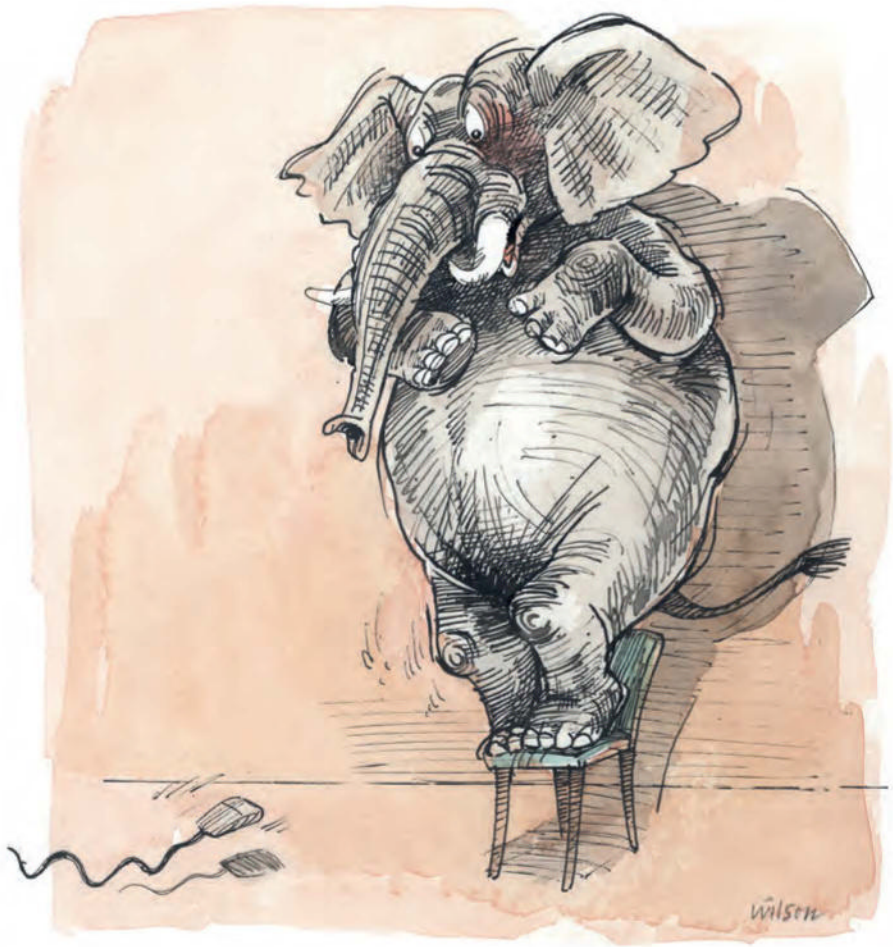
Webwatch

For my latest tips and free newsletter, go to www.askwebster.co.uk

Lightning maps
lightningmaps.org
A lightning-detection network that plots occurrences on a map.

British Museum
youtube.com/@britishmuseum
The British Museum's video channel – lots of fascinating videos made by experts.

I will happily try to solve your basic computer and internet problems. Go to www.askwebster.co.uk or email me at webster@theoldie.co.uk



Beware deposit-free mortgages

Property prices are too high, which is why so many young people can't afford to buy their own homes.

Over the years, there have been numerous government-backed schemes to help renters become owners – Help to Buy, Help to Build, Rent to Buy, First Homes, Lifetime ISA and shared ownership. Some of the plans hang around longer than others; all of them are designed to help people pay the prevailing house prices.

They do nothing to make homes more affordable. The House of Lords found that the Help to Buy scheme cost about £29 billion and actually pushed up prices even further in the areas where it was needed most.

And now interest rates have shot up, making home ownership even less affordable. The cost of fixed-rate mortgage deals has doubled within 18 months.

This is calamitous for first-time buyers and it is also hitting existing borrowers, whose fixed-rate loans are coming to an end. Some 1.6 million borrowers are renegotiating their fixed-rate mortgages, according to the Resolution Foundation think tank, and the interest payments are costing them on average an extra £2,300 a year each.

This changing market has encouraged lenders to innovate. It is almost standard for fixed-rate loans to include perks such as cashback, free valuations or paid legal fees – though not cut-price interest rates. The most talked-about scheme is Skipton Building Society's 100-per-cent mortgage for first-time buyers because, unlike others, it does not require a friend or relative to act as guarantor.

No-deposit home loans have not been around since the financial crash of 2008 when nearly one million borrowers fell into negative equity: falling house prices meant they owed more to the lender than they could sell their home for. That risk has returned today for borrowers who put down little or no deposit when the outlook for house prices is precarious.

Among other innovations, with Barclays' Family Springboard mortgage, a guarantor must put ten per cent of the house price as security in a savings account for five years. A few small building societies have similar schemes.

Nationwide Building Society has a zero-per-cent home-improvement loan for its existing mortgage customers who want to make their homes more energy-efficient, perhaps with solar panels, electric-car charging points or double glazing. The loans can last for 40 years or until you reach 75 (though they are interest-free for only two or five years).

Older borrowers used to be written off at state pension age, but now typically lenders allow you to repay your loan until you reach 75. Some stretch the limit to 80 or even 90 and a few small building societies have no upper age limit at all.

For those with time on their side, borrowing over a longer period reduces monthly payments; Kensington Mortgages has brought out a 40-year mortgage. There is, though, one big downside: the longer you are repaying a debt, the more it will cost you overall. By stretching repayments over 40 years instead of the traditional 25, you pay almost twice as much interest.

With any debt, the best advice is to repay as much as you can as quickly as you can, however low interest rates fall.

'And will he know what this is regarding?'

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Canada Goose

BY JOHN McEWEN * ILLUSTRATED BY CARRY AKROYD

The Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) is the largest of our geese. Ganders weigh up to 14lb. They're also the most sedentary – and therefore domesticated – of our geese.

They were first introduced from north America in the 17th century, when Canada was not yet designated. They were imported as an exotic addition to Charles II's new lake for ornamental water birds in St James's Park. The 18th century saw them decorate the landscaped lakes of country seats, and the 19th century the parks of industrialised cities.

It was only in the 20th century that a long-established feral population earned this goose the status of a British bird. By 1953, the most generous estimate was 3,600, since when numbers have burgeoned. In the 1960s, birds were collected during the flightless summer moult and widely distributed. By 2013, the population had spread to include the entire British Isles, the majority in England and Wales. Numbers breeding (up to eight eggs per clutch) had risen by 73 per cent since 1995.

Today, the UK has 54,000 breeding pairs – juveniles and continental migrants increasing the total winter population to 160,000.

CARRY AKROYD

The native bird is the most popular with hunters in Canada and the USA. Some say it is 'yummy' to eat. Others welcome its control as a pest. Its grazing of grass and arable crops is the equivalent of a sheep, and every 40 seconds (28 ounces per day) it fouls the ground with droppings immune to over 100 antibiotics.

Since municipal parks are a favoured habitat, this makes Canada geese a more noticeable public nuisance than other birds. In flight, they have caused one fatal airliner crash in Canada and the sensational safe landing of a US Airways plane on the Hudson River off midtown Manhattan in 2009.

This century, they have been removed from the UK protected list. They can be shot or have their eggs dispatched, but only by the owners of land where they are deemed intolerable. In 2008, the cookery writer and entrepreneur Prue Leith caused a furore by telling an interviewer she had made an omelette with eggs from her resident Canada geese. Robert Hardman, the royal biographer, came to her defence with a newspaper article headlined 'The most loathsome bird in Britain'.

Canadas are imposingly large – but are the brownest, plainest of geese and no match for our migratory species, especially the smaller silver-and-black barnacle, which also has a black-and-white head and black neck. Their honking cry is tuneless, but for me all is forgiven because they amused my wife in her last years.

At Hampstead Heath's sanctuary pond, there was the well-known Eddie, flightless owing to a genetic deformity called angel wing. My wife pitied him for the relentless bullying he endured from the pond's mute swan cob. Her 'Goosey!' call would bring Eddie from the furthest reaches.

In Regent's Park, the resident gaggle would pursue her regardless of reward, nipping where they could. And at Kenwood in springtime, leggy goslings would hurry from parental safety to greet her.

Hail the conquistador heroes

Paul Canham tours Extremadura, home to the Spanish explorers who conquered the New World

When James Pembroke, *The Oldie*'s publisher, asked Dawn and me to lead an *Oldie* trip to central Spain, we leapt at the chance.

It would it be our 40th trip with *The Oldie* and coincide with our 40th wedding anniversary. It was also an opportunity to introduce fellow oldies to a part of central Spain that remains largely unknown and unvisited.

Extremadura generated an exceptional number of conquistadors – the explorer soldiers of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. They were usually the younger sons of minor nobility with few prospects at home. The discovery of the New World offered opportunities for adventure, fame and fortune.

With these conquistadors, Extremadura briefly took its place on the world stage in the first half of the 16th century. Many local place names are more familiar to us as the names of Latin American towns.

Extremaduran explorers and adventurers are credited with the establishment of 20 American countries.

Vasco Núñez de Balboa, one conquistador, crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1513, to become the first European to look out on the Pacific Ocean from the East.

Between 1519 and 1521, Hernán Cortés led the conquest of Mexico and the destruction of the Aztec Empire. He inspired Keats's lines in *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*:

*Or like stout Cortez [*sic*] when with eagle eyes*
He stared at the Pacific – and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Darien refers to Darién Province in Panama.

Between 1524 and 1532, another conquistador, Francisco Pizarro, explored and then conquered Peru and destroyed the Inca Empire.

At around the same time, Pedro de Alvarado conquered much of Central America, including Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. In 1542, Francisco de Orellana explored the length of the Amazon, from its source in the Andes. Between 1539 and his death in 1542, Hernando de Soto was the first European to explore deep into the territory of today's United States: through Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana. He was the first European to cross the Mississippi.


Paul and Dawn Canham

The conquest and exploitation of the New World led to the export of vast quantities of gold and silver to Spain over the next 100 years.

The conquistadors' greatest, if unintended, contribution was the introduction of new food groups into the European diet: chocolate, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, beans and squashes. And tobacco, too.

Extremadura borders Portugal to the west, Castile-La Mancha to the East, Castile-Leon to the North and Andalusia to the South. It has the two largest provinces in Spain; Cáceres in the north and Badajoz to the south.

Spain's poorest region, with one of the country's lowest population densities, it remains largely unspoilt. It's famous for the *dehesa* – semi-forested areas of well-spaced holm and cork oak, intermingled with wild grasses. It is home to the *pata negra*, the black-foot pig, which feeds on the acorns. It's the source of the finest ham in the world, *jamón ibérico de bellota*, while La Vera produces the fragrant Spanish paprika, *pimentón de la Vera*.

For almost 500 years, the Arabs ruled here. The name Extremadura comes from the Latin *extrema Durii* – beyond the Douro river. It was the name given by the Christians to that area held by Christian forces at any particular time, its boundaries shifting with the fortune of war.

Among the loveliest of its towns is Jarandilla de la Vera. There, following his 1556 abdication, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, briefly made

ROBERT HARDING / ALAMY

The heart of Extremadura: Trujillo, ruled by Romans, Visigoths and Arabs

his home before, exhausted and gout-ridden, he retired to the nearby monastery at Yuste.

Hervás, a small town on the banks of the River Ambroz, sprang up around a 12th-century shrine, the Santihervás, built by the Knights Templar. A magnet for Jewish families fleeing persecution, it has the best preserved *judería* in Spain.

Trujillo, with its old city standing on a rocky hump in the plains of Extremadura, was occupied by the Romans and Visigoths. Then ruled by the Arabs for over five centuries, it was the birthplace of Diego García de Paredes (1466-1533) – 'the Samson of Extremadura', a warrior of legendary strength. According to Cervantes, he could stop a rolling millstone with one finger.

Lying at the terminus of the old Ruta de la Plata is Mérida, or Emerita Augustus to the Romans. It was founded by Emperor Augustus in 25 BC to resettle 'emeritus' legionaries, honourably discharged at the end of the Cantabrian Wars.

Capital of the Roman province of Lusitania – and now capital of Extremadura – it has the best preserved and most extensive Roman ruins in Spain. They include the Puente Romano, the longest Roman bridge that survives anywhere.

Founded by the Romans and razed to the ground by the Visigoths, Cáceres was recolonised by the Arabs in the 12th century, falling to Alfonso IX of León in 1229. Its old town is a mix of Arab, Christian, medieval and Renaissance architectural styles. It includes a palace built by the grandson of the Aztec Emperor Montezuma.

The spiritual centre of Extremadura was – and remains – the shrine of Guadalupe with its Black Madonna, found within the Monastario Real de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. This Romanesque sculpture, carved in cedar wood, dates from the 12th century.

It was here in 1492 that the Reyes Catolicos, Isabelle I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, who completed the Reconquest, signed the documents authorising Christopher Columbus to find a westerly trade route to the Indies.

The first city built in what became Extremadura was Plasencia, founded by Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1186. In 1196, it had the unique distinction of being captured by the Arabs and recaptured by Alfonso on the same day. Situated on the banks of the Jerte river, Plasencia is strategically located along the Ruta de la Plata.

It has two conjoined cathedrals, the result of delayed construction and changing architectural styles. The original Romanesque cathedral was started in 1190. Then, in 1498, it was decided to build a new Gothic cathedral on the same site, destroying the old cathedral as work progressed. It progressed slowly – so, by the 16th century, Renaissance elements were being added.

Work was eventually abandoned in the 18th century, with only the transept and sanctuary of the New Cathedral completed. Though under the same roof, the two half-cathedrals are separate – an eclectic mix of architectural styles.

It's surprising, considering what came later, that there was huge tolerance for Muslim and Jewish subjects in Castile during much of the medieval period. At the end of the 13th century, the Charter of Plasencia was created, confirming the peaceful co-existence of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish populations within the city.

It is the birthplace of Inés Suárez, the first of a small band of conquistadoras who with her lover Pedro de Valdivia conquered and held Chile for the Spanish Crown.

Today, Extremadura is a geopolitical backwater once more. But change is coming to this rugged and unspoilt region. Solar farms are springing up. Lithium crystals have been found: the people of Cáceres are fighting plans to build a mine (and a giant Buddha) on a nearby hill.

Drought has already come and for two years has devastated the *dehesa*. Water levels run low in the Vera valley, threatening the pimentón crop; the livelihoods of farmers and livestock owners are threatened.

There is an Extremaduran saying, 'Cáceres is the head, Trujillo is the heart, Plasencia sheds no tears, Coria speaks no words.'

We visited the head and stayed in the heart. I didn't cry when I left Plasencia. And I haven't written about Coria because it wasn't on our itinerary. Perhaps next time.

Craven Cottage is top of the league

LUCINDA LAMBTON

Fulham FC owes its lovely ground by the Thames to Lady Craven – and Anne Boleyn

Thousands of Fulham FC fans revere the club's ground, Craven Cottage, on the bank of the Thames.

But how many of us know about the original Craven Cottage, the grand yet minuscule dwelling in five acres?

The cottage was set in woods used for hunting by Anne Boleyn. It was built in 1780 for a Lady Craven (1750-1828), later the Margravine of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Bayreuth. She was notorious for her love affairs; she also gave her husband, the Margrave, six children by way of proof of their union.

Lady Craven was a dramatist, a composer of musical farces and the authoress of pantomimes and such works as *Modern Anecdotes of the family of Kinvervankotsprakengatchder: a Tale for Christmas*.

From 1785 to 1786, she travelled through Central Europe to Saint Petersburg, Moscow and the Crimea, from where she sailed to Constantinople. She visited the Greek islands of Andros, Siphnos, Naxos, Antiparos and Melos and ended up again at the Bosphorus.

She had lovers galore, including William Beckford, the novelist and plutocrat. She collaborated with him on *Arcadian Pastoral*, a musical entertainment. She was the first to read his novel *Vathek* (1786), which he had sent to her in manuscript form.

Hurray for her 18th-century elegance and frailty. Hurray for a woman so ahead of her time.

What a house she did create for herself to show off her triumphs. And so it is that this little football stadium was famed throughout the land, even becoming the very nub of high culture in the British Isles.

In 1805, it was leased to Walsh Porter, an art dealer in the Prince Regent's circle. His 'refined taste stood alone', according to some, but was 'grotesque and ridiculous', according to others.

He needed somewhere to show off both his person and his treasures and was determined to employ an aesthete to help with the transformation of his rustic retreat. It was to be a glorious transformation – according to a contemporary commentator, 'with every architectural fancy in full and fantastical flower'.

Porter spent the vast sum of £4,000 in improving and embellishing the property to become 'the prettiest specimen of cottage architecture then existing'. The term 'cottage' is a misnomer unless the average cottage had two storeys with 19 rooms decorated in a variety of sumptuous styles, including Egyptian and Gothic. The principal rooms were supported by immense columns covered in hieroglyphics or sculpted as huge palm trees with drooping foliage at the top.

The furnishings were a great glory: a movable bronze camel, a Persian chieftain's tent, a lion and a quantity of tiger skins. The Prince Regent was so impressed with the result that he promptly commissioned the designer, a young Thomas Hopper, to work on Carlton House in Pall Mall, making his reputation as an architect.

Craven Cottage became well known for lavish, fashionable parties in the mid-1830s, when it was leased to the high-society financier Charles King.

In 1840, it was taken for six years by the writer and politician Edward Bulwer-Lytton, author of *The Last Days*

Top: **Lady Craven**

Middle and left: **Craven Cottage before Fulham FC arrived in 1896**

Blow me down! Florence Nightingale even came here, delighting in its charms

of Pompeii. He entertained Prince Louis Napoleon at his 'elegant little riparian retreat'. Bulwer-Lytton was followed by Sir Ralph and Lady Howard, who made the house the rendezvous of polite society. The Prince of Wales and the future Empress of the French attended some of the gatherings.

Among other visitors were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Jeremy Bentham. And, blow me down, Florence Nightingale even came here, delighting in its charms.

The glory days of Craven Cottage were over by the late 1860s, when an American entrepreneur's scheme to turn it into a pleasure resort failed.

From 1872, it stood empty, ivy-covered and picturesquely dilapidated. In the early morning of 8th May 1888, a mysterious fire broke out. The combined efforts of 26 men, two steam fire engines and a fire boat could not save it and it burnt to the ground.

Fulham's ground, built in 1896, is now on the exact site where all these delights took place. Craven Cottage was restored in 1905 by the renowned Scottish master of football-stadium architecture Archibald Leitch.

In 1986, the land was threatened with redevelopment but survived, not least thanks to the club's supporters roaring, 'WE WANT CRAVEN COTTAGE ... SAVE OUR CRAVEN COTTAGE!'

Hurrah for such a wildly odd turn of events.

Top and middle: **the ground today.** ***Below:*** **Stevenage Road Stand, 1926**

Jersey, my treasured island

PATRICK BARKHAM

My walk around east Jersey was governed by sparrow time.

On a gloriously fresh, early summer morning, the whole island seemed to run on it. Time was stilled by the desultory, monosyllabic chirp of plump brown birds in the shrubbery.

'Time?' they seemed to say.

'What's that?'

'Calm.'

'Down.'

I set out from Gorey Pier, an achingly pretty row of old stone houses built mostly during the 19th-century oyster boom when 250 boats brought back 12,000 oysters on every trip, soon exhausting the wealth in the shallow turquoise seas just off the coast.

Above them loomed the hulking medieval castle of Mont Orgueil, once the seat of power in Jersey, built on the closest outcrop to France.

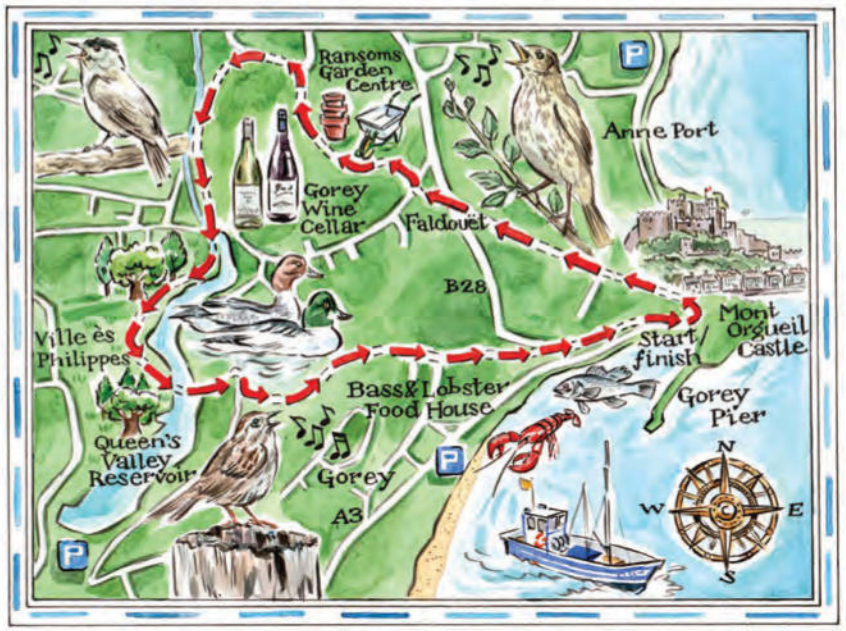
Small boats slumped in the low-tide harbour, beyond which was Gorey Bay, a great sweep of pale sand. The light was bright, the air superbly fresh, and a brisk wind gave the sycamores beside the castle the gift of sound.

It was just before 7am, and it had been a struggle to leave my bed – but how could I regret getting out to enjoy an early summer's morning? How lucky to be alive on a day like this!

I climbed the path to the castle and gazed east, where France looked unexpectedly close, barely ten miles across the sea. Then I turned up a little lane, its banks filled with hogweed throwing its flying-saucer-like flowers to the heavens.

The wind wafted the scent of May blossom from the fields, and after a moderate incline I was in a maze of intimate lanes that could've been miles from the coast. The pink granite walls of fine old farmhouses were sprouting bright pink valerian and pinkish Mexican fleabane, which resembles daisies and loves Jersey's wealth of old stone.

I turned into one of the island's designated green lanes, where traffic must slow to 15mph (anything over 30mph feels wrong here), and it delivered a tunnel of oaks still leafed in their brilliant green of early summer. The shaded banks were filled with the creamy, bell-like flowers of three-cornered leek. The summer breeze continued to worry the treetops, but in the lane all was still.



After a short time traversing the high ground, where tiny fields carried neat furrows of Jersey Royals, the lane wiggled down one of the little valleys that run from the high north to the low south across the island. The first easyJet of the morning moaned gently as it climbed into the blue. In the valley bottom, I found an even deeper peace, broken only by blackcaps and blackbirds and an astonishingly loud melody from a song thrush high in a poplar.

Then the winding-lane walk turned into a lakeside stroll, and I chose a path along the sunny west bank of a little reservoir, on which two goldeneye swam. A strong smell of cow drifted into the woods beside the water.

I crossed the bridge over the middle of the reservoir and joined a new network of tiny lanes, enjoying glimpses of the castle. A miniature holloway plunged down the hill, into the green gloom of a ferny gully, and then I was catapulted back into the little town of Gorey, where the air was scented with jasmine from immaculate gardens.

I've taken a couple of walks in Jersey before and the intimacy of its landscapes – the sheer density of tiny fields as well as the intermingling of both England and France and present and past – is bewitching. In an hour, I'd encountered a fishing port, a castle, a Cornish-style coastline and a deep green lane walk; woods, a lakeside stroll and finally, back in Gorey, a Victorian seaside promenade reminiscent of genteel southern England, as well as an English pub and French restaurants for refreshment at the walk's end. Nowhere but a small island can deliver such variety in a short stroll.

Phew. And the sparrows continued to chirp, reminding me to slow down.

Take the path up the hill to the castle. Turn onto the lane beside Jersey Crab Shack heading north-west. Cross two larger roads onto La Chasse Mallet, then two lefts onto Rue de la Chouquetterie down to Queen's Valley Reservoir. Take the bridge over its middle, follow the lanes east back to Gorey. Three miles/ two hours

GARY WING

Discover the UK

Bed & Breakfast Nationwide

Holiday Cottages Nationwide

Summer, plan a UK stay. Avoid the queues to travel abroad - study our website and brochure for home-grown ideas. See a superb selection of B&Bs and self-catering cottages, all inspected and chosen for their high quality and hosts' warm welcome.

Browse other 'collections' including dog-friendly, facilities for the less mobile, ground floor rooms, those near the coast and ideas for city breaks.

Discover the wonders on our doorstep here in the UK with our latest travel features including National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Discover Scotland.

BOOK DIRECT - Easily find the host's contact details to help you obtain the best price & discuss any requirements.

W: Bedandbreakfastnationwide.com
Also order a brochure (£3 p&p) - online or
Post: P.O. Box 10894, Frinton-on-Sea, CO13 3AN

E: office@bbnationwide.co.uk - **OLD2370**

T: 01255 672377

If you own a B&B or Self-catering Cottage, and would like it featured, please contact us

Please help us to continue serving the theatrical profession by making a donation or leaving a gift to the Actors' Benevolent Fund in your will.

In 1882, the great actor manager Sir Henry Irving founded the **Actors' Benevolent Fund** with a promise to help actors and actresses experiencing hardship due to accident, illness or old age.

Sir Henry's legacy lives on today, and the Fund remains committed to his promise by offering confidential advice and support to those most in need. This vital work is made possible through the kindness of our supporters.

For further information, including details of inheritance tax relief, please call us or visit our website.

020 7836 6378

actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk

Registered charity number 206524

Acorn Stairlifts

Regain the freedom of your home

"I no longer dread having to climb the stairs."

Mr. Rowe, Nottingham

Our customers love us!

Trustpilot

Keeping you safe in the home you love

It is more important than ever for people to remain mobile and independent in their own homes, and we are here to help.

NEXT DAY INSTALL

- NEXT DAY installation available
- Stay in the home you love
- For straight and curved stairs
- FREE Survey and quote
- 365-day local service
- New or reconditioned

CALL ACORN NOW ON FREEPHONE

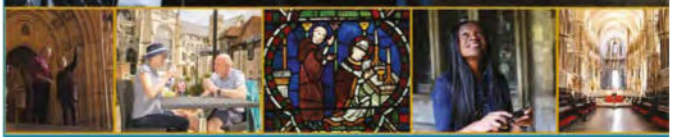
0800 326 5145

FOR YOUR FREE BROCHURE & QUOTATION

CANTERBURY cathedral

Rediscover England's First Cathedral

2022 Travellers' Choice Tripadvisor



Kids Go Free until 31 December 2023 (T&Cs apply)

HERITAGE FUND

www.canterbury-cathedral.org

unesco

‘We’ve gone on holiday by mistake’

Richard E Grant praises Withnail’s approach to travel – and mourns the loss of his late wife. By *Louise Flind*

Is there something you really miss when you’re away?
For the last 38 years, I would say my wife [Joan Washington, who died in 2021, aged 74].

Do you travel light?
My luggage got lost flying to New York 22 years ago, and I swore I would never ever travel with luggage again.

What are your earliest childhood holiday memories?
Mozambique, one hundred miles from Mbabane where I grew up.

We went to the beach there almost every other Sunday and ate two dozen prawns for lunch.

What was Swaziland (now Eswatini) like when you were growing up?
Sub-equatorial Ealing…

It was a kind of homogenously sealed goldfish bowl of a very strict pecking order, according to where you were in the colonial hierarchy.

And that was pre-independence, which I remember very, very clearly. And then sort of vestiges of that carried on post-independence.

It was stuck in a ’50s sensibility. It was White Mischief*, with the three Bs: booze, boredom and bonking.*

Do you speak Afrikaans?
No, but I speak siSwati. Afrikaans wasn’t taught there because they were so fiercely anti-apartheid. I learnt siSwati in school.

Where does your mother live now?
She’s still there. She’s 92, plays bridge three times a week, thinks that England has gone to the dogs, reads books for a publishing company and writes précis for them, drives and is completely independent.

Did you know *Withnail and I* might be a hit?
God, no. It had no car chases, no women under the age of 75, no plot and nobody in it anybody had heard of.

HANDMADE FILMS

When it was released in 1987 with an unpronounceable title, it got middling reviews. With the advent of video in the mid-’80s, and subsequently DVD, it got a student and university following.

It was re-released ten years later and then was a box-office success.

Did you find the script very funny – not least Withnail’s line on travelling, ‘We’ve gone on holiday by mistake’?
I thought it was hilarious – and because I’d been out of work for nine months, it wasn’t a huge leap to play somebody who’s so enraged at being completely anonymous and sidelined.

Was it true about the director making you drink even though you’re allergic to alcohol?
He wanted me to have a chemical memory of what it was like to be drunk. So he gave me a bottle of champagne and said, ‘Go home and get that down you.’

Where is the Cumbria cottage? And Uncle Monty’s flat?
It’s Sleddale Hall, about half an hour south of Penrith. And in Glebe Place in Chelsea.

Did you find it difficult to move on from that character?
That was made in 1986. In 2018, I played another alcoholic in Can You Ever Forgive Me? *with Melissa McCarthy.*

What was Hollywood like in the late ’80s?
I’d obsessively followed the careers of Francis Ford Coppola, Marin Scorsese and Robert Altman.

To be cast in three films in a row with those directors was beyond anything I could’ve dared imagine.

And the least exotic?
Slough [he cackles].

Where did you film *Wah-Wah*?
In Swaziland, where all the events of my adolescence took place.

Do you prefer theatre or film?
In film, you get paid much better and you have a record of your work.

Whereas, in theatre, it’s ephemeral and, apart from having a programme and a couple of photographs, you have no record of it.

What’s the most incredible hotel you’ve stayed in for your hotel programme?
The most expensive was the penthouse suite at the Four Seasons in Manhattan, at $45,000 a night.

The one I loved was the Ballyfin in Ireland, an 18th-century stately pile built for the Beckhams of their day.

How did you find the public’s reactions to your wife’s death?
I’m on social media, and have been astonished by how compassionate people have been.

How are you feeling now?
It’s nearly two years down the line now, and… People say time heals. I think you have to navigate your way around bereavement daily.

What’s your favourite food?
Christmas pudding. I eat one every month.

Do you have a go at the local language?
I speak Swazi, English – and French entirely in the present tense.

Richard E Grant’s memoir, A Pocketful of Happiness*, is just out in paperback (Gallery UK, £9.99)*

QUEEN SQUARE
FOCUSED ULTRASOUND

For millions of people, a diagnosis of Essential Tremor means a loss of independence, self-esteem, and the freedom to live an active life.

But there is new hope.

The Queen Square Imaging Centre is proud to work in partnership with the functional neurosurgeons of the renowned National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery to provide rapid access to a new form of treatment - MRI-Guided Focused Ultrasound.

MRI Guided Focused Ultrasound is a pioneering incisionless treatment that can help you regain control of your life. Through our unique tremor service, we offer expert assessment, and safe and effective private treatment from our outpatient facility in Central London.

Key facts

Immediate tremor improvement post procedure

No hospital stay required

Incisionless treatment meaning low risk of complications and minimal recovery.

Contact us today to begin your journey.

treatment@queensquare.com

020 7833 2513

www.queensquare.com

Examples of essential tremor patient writing tasks

Genius crossword 428

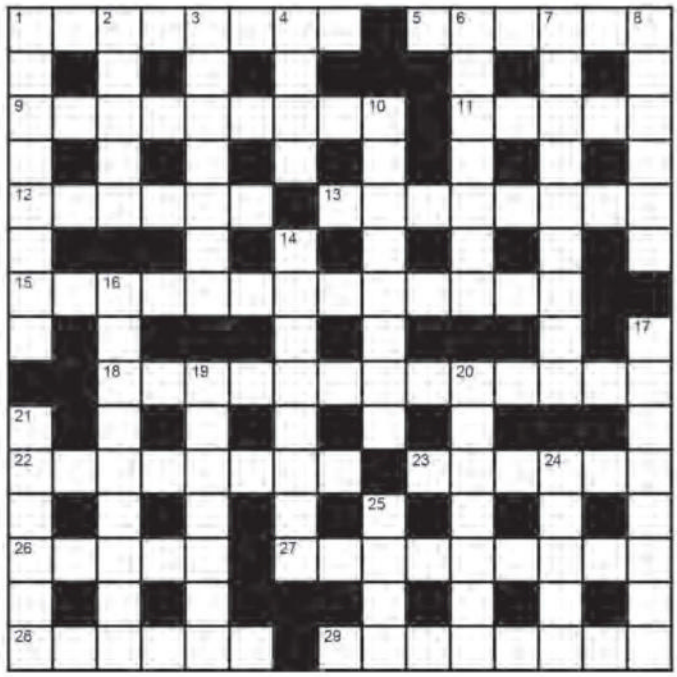
EL SERENO

Across

1 Highlight resistance with worker being shameless (8)
5 Exhausted, take advantage of party (4,2)
9 Lose temper during viral infections and such weather conditions (4,5)
11 Gather popular whistle-blower's back (5)
12 Think I'm not sure it's 16 or 26 perhaps (6)
13 &27 12's queen with consort (8)
15 Fouling such a defender could produce such perverse pleasure (13)
18 Translated by soldiers and given a new meaning (13)
22 This may be in coffee as queen takes it (8)
23 Walk for some bread on the way (6)
26 Priest has trouble building in Madrid (5)
27 See 13 (3,6)
28 One's regular partner is not easily shaken (6)
29 Dr Crippen perhaps losing love for right inmate (8)

Down

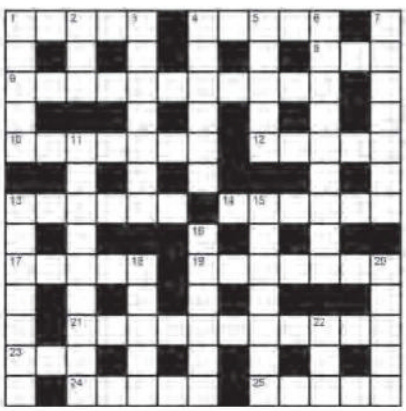
1 Confront head of medicine and demand protective gear (4,4)
2 Finally docked to get a book of charts (5)
3 Relieved, and looking embarrassed about second prompt (7)
4 Boat builder showing evident lack of surprise? (4)
6 Has it moved American going north for hands-on treatment? (7)
7 Delay degree after vacation and create unrest (9)
8 Opening temporary facility for going loveless (6)
10 People agitating in prison? (8)
14 Three articles on mother's pet hate (8)
16 Tradition has to include mass retreat (9)
17 Procrastinator's promise for worshipper? (8)
19 One empty case left covered by fish that's freezing (3-4)
20 Upsets child's toys (7)
21 Pinches first of six cloths for cleaning (6)
24 Water may see criminal once stifling answer (5)
25 Moving up, partially cleared out river (4)



How to enter Please scan or otherwise copy this page and email it to **comps@theoldie.co.uk**. **Deadline: 26th July 2023**.
We do not sell or share your data with third parties.

First prize is *The Chambers Dictionary* and £25.
Two runners-up will receive £15.
NB: Hodder & Stoughton and Bookpoint Ltd will be sent the addresses of the winners because they process the prizes.

Moron crossword 428



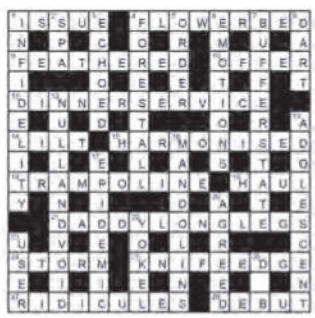
Across

1 Sounds horn (5)
4 Cereal crop (5)
8 Objective (3)
9 Data, gen (11)
10 Spend money extravagantly (4,3)
12 Characteristic (5)
13 Pardon, forgive (6)
14 Deviated, diverse (6)
17 Conflagration (5)
19 Profaneness (7)
21 Vision, resourcefulness (11)
23 Form of matter (3)
24 Admission, ingress (5)
25 Fencing swords (5)

Down

1 Hearing; tribulation (5)
2 Cancelled; turned (of food) (3)
3 Grave, important (7)
4 Ghost (6)
5 Throw out of accommodation (5)
6 Provisional, speculative (9)
7 Took as your own, fostered (7)
11 Mix well at parties (9)
13 Trade barrier (7)
15 Conciliate, assuage (7)
16 Dismissively (6)
18 Precise (5)
20 Donkey's years! (5)
22 Form of water (3)

Genius 426 solution



Winner: Erika Fairhead, Aberdeen
Runners-up: Dr Stephen Clarkson, Ipswich, Suffolk; Alison Essex-Cater, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

We apologise for the missing clue at 26 down. All otherwise correct solutions have been accepted (left blank/ DEB, DUB, DAB etc)

Moron 426 answers: Across: 1 Weighty, 5 Tout (Wait it out), 7 Topic, 8 Attain, 10 Reap, 11 Bloomers, 13 Entrap, 14 Escape, 17 Eviction, 19 Apes, 21 Devout, 22 Throb, 23 Glad, 24 Repulse. Down: 1 Water level, 2 Implant, 3 Hock, 4 Yearly, 5 Titmouse, 6 Unite, 9 Ostensible, 12 Fast food, 15 Apparel, 16 Doctor, 18 Ideal, 20 Step.

Should you make Four Hearts on best play and defence?

Dealer South Neither Vulnerable

	North ♠ A8532 ♥ AQ2 ♦ 64 ♣ J94	
West ♠ Q1064 ♥ 97 ♦ KJ9872 ♣ 3		East ♠ KJ7 ♥ 854 ♦ 105 ♣ AK852
	South ♠ 9 ♥ KJ1063 ♦ AQ3 ♣ Q1076	

The bidding

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass (1)	1♠	Pass (2)
2♣	Pass	4♥ (3)	End

(1) A Two Diamond overcall would be unsound, short of high-card values.
(2) A Two Club overcall would be unsound, short of suit quality, shape and tricks.
(3) Upgrading because of the useful holdings in partner's Clubs and Hearts – plus Ace and doubleton in partner's other suits.
West leads her singleton club, East winning the king and presumably playing ace and another club – the eight as a suit-preference signal for spades (over diamonds). West ruffs and duly switches to a spade to dummy's ace. What should declarer do?

Alfie, our first declarer, led a diamond to the queen – no good when the finesse lost to West's king.

Bertie saw an improvement. He led a heart to the ten and followed with the queen of clubs. Had West been able to ruff, declarer would have overruffed and had to rely on the diamond finesse. Here, though, West had no more trumps. Declarer could discard a diamond from dummy and then cash the ace of diamonds, ruff a diamond, ruff a spade, ruff the queen of diamonds, ruff a spade and table the king-knave of hearts. Ten tricks and game made.

However, it was Claudia, sitting East, who nailed it. After winning the first trick with the king of clubs, she returned a low club (actually, a suit-preference eight) – after all, she knew from South's 2♣ rebid that West had led a singleton. West ruffed and led a spade. Declarer won dummy's ace and cashed the ace of hearts, removing West's heart. However, when declarer led dummy's jack of clubs, East could win and lead a second heart. Unable to ruff two diamonds in dummy, declarer had to fail.

Four Hearts cannot be made on best play and defence.

ANDREW ROBSON

Competition

TESSA CASTRO

IN COMPETITION No 294 you were invited to write a poem called *Artificial Intelligence*, with enough evidence to show its author was a robot.

J M Olsen took the clever step of asking ChatGPT to write the poem. It produced something that made a sort of sense: 'In circuits humming, dreams take flight, /Virtual beings, forged in luminescent light.' But it totalled 20 lines. Can't computers count?

Commiserations to her and to Judith Green, Graham Rumney, Bill Holloway, Sue May, Stefan Badham, Ted Lane, Jeremy Conway and Jonathan Lovett, and congratulations to those printed below, each of whom win £25, with the bonus prize of *The Chambers Dictionary* going to Richard Spencer.

The stroll was long, but not unduly strenuous.
Such Cumbrian meanderings perpetuated
My predilection to remain companionless:
A 'solo cirrus', so to speak. I cogitated,
Then suddenly – O gratifying happenstance –
I saw, in terms of flora, a preponderance:
Narcissi! Yes! A veritable multitude
Of sparkling yellow trumpets, everlastingly
Cavorting in a pirouette of pulchritude,
And all for me, the lucky beneficiary:
An AI 'Wordsworth' chatbot, born to celebrate
Epiphanies like these ones, deeply aureate!
Quite frequently, when I am semi-somnolent,
The panoply continues, retrospectively;
My ticker – and the flowers – dance.
Exuberant,
We undertake a cha-cha-cha, collectively.
Richard Spencer

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty Second Street
And today we have naming of parts.
Axes
After whose work the wood rings.
Hullo clouds. Hullo sky.
Up the ash tree climbs the ivy
Up the ivy climbs the sun
Alone between nurses and swans
Hatless I take my bicycle clips off
And now I print the vilest words I know
Like lightning – myxomatosis, hydrogen,
Communist, culture, sodomy, striptease.
That shocked you!
Stands the church clock at 14.50?
And is there honey still for tea?
David Dixon

Comparing you to summer days, I wonder
What rhymes and images my mind might host.
May can be windy sometimes, so I ponder
How best to write your praise before we're lost.
Research reveals increasing summer heat
As round the world the temperature climbs.
Such warming is an existential threat.
I soothe myself by conjuring up your limbs.
Of memories of you I have a cache
To last me through a lifetime's life, although
If you would leave me how my heart would ache.
Of love we lovers never have enough.
I pen my verse, a poet like John Keats
Or any of his fellows, such as Yeats.
D A Prince

Oh my love's like a read, read book,
That's never due back soon.
Oh my love's like a playlist
With the same recurring tune.

And fair thou art, though that might be
The filters I've applied,
Which makes you look a little
Less like Bonnie, more like Clyde.

But I still think you're bonnie, lass,
It's written in my code.
'Eh Aye!' I'll cry, and love you
'Til my circuit boards corrode.

I'll hold your software close
And praise its softness to the heights,
Keep each tweet in my memory
Though it were ten thousand bytes.
Con Connell

COMPETITION No 296 I never foresaw the day I'd have difficulty using up food in time. Please write a poem called *Leftovers*, in any sense. Maximum 16 lines. We cannot accept any entries by post, I'm afraid, but do send them by e-mail (comps@theoldie.co.uk – don't forget to include your postal address), marked 'Competition No 296', by Thursday 27th July.

UK Travel

Exmoor Holiday Cottage

3 bed riverside cottage in the heart of Exmoor's spectacular "*Doone Country*" river & moorland walks, Lynton 3 miles. Lets Fri to Fri from £600. **10% discount** for "Oldies"!

www.exmoorholidaycottage.com
Tel: 07989547966 / 01305848460

Manston Court Accommodations

3 self-catering holiday properties in Ramsgate, Kent, close to the coast.

Well Cottage - 1 bed cottage on one level, sleeps up to 4 guests. **Annie's Cottage** - 1 bed cottage on two levels, sleeps up to 4 guests. **The Chapel** - 3 bed sleeps up to 13 guests.

Please contact Suzanne at: **anniescottage1@aol.com**, or call **01843 823371**

NORTH NORFOLK

charming brick and flint cottage, sleeps four, in peaceful Kelling near Holt. Weeks and short breaks. Minimum three nights, from Saturdays.

Visit violetcottagekelling.co.uk

Welsh Border

Spacious properties sleeping 7 & 14. Wheelchair friendly. Pets welcome. Indoor swimming pool. Games room. BBQ cabins. Open all year.

Tel: 01544 260237
www.hicksfarmholidays.co.uk

LOVELY SELF-CATERING CONVERTED RAILWAY WAGONS

Beautiful Yorkshire Wolds.

Four-posters, c/heating, TV's, pets welcome – NO giraffes!!

01377 217342
www.thewagons.co.uk

Blue Riband Holidays

Gt Yarmouth, Bungalows & Chalets, Hemsby & Caister

Pets Welcome, Clubhouse, Entertainment

www.blueribandholidays.co.uk
For free brochure, 01493 730445

GLORIOUS NORTH DEVON

Only 9 cosy caravans on peaceful farm. Wonderful walks in woods & meadows. Close sea, moors & lovely days out. £125-£395 pw. Discount couples Pets welcome. 01769 540366

www.snapdown.co.uk

Near Stratford-upon-Avon

Lovely self-catering cottage in peaceful location. Sleeps 2. Large garden. Perfect for famous gardens, NT and the Cotswolds.

Tel: 01789 740360
www.romanacres.com

Overseas Travel

ALTEA, COSTA BLANCA

Modern 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom, heated apartment. Pool, tennis, garden, garage. Shops, restaurants, beach close. Warm winter area. Airport transfers available. 02920759314, dee.jones@virgin.net

ITALIAN (Umbria) farmhouse

sleeps six plus separate two person apartment, with pool, standing in two acres surrounded by great scenery and welcoming locals

See www.casaduchi.co.uk and email: jfurber40@gmail.com

Wild Gardening

PLANT A BLUEBELL WOOD

5000 for £30
Instructions and free delivery
Cheque/PO to Mike Thorne:
8 Church St, Llandderfel, LL23 7HL

Services

Homesitters®

We stay while you're away

We are actively recruiting homesitters nationwide to look after our clients' homes and their pets, whilst they are away.

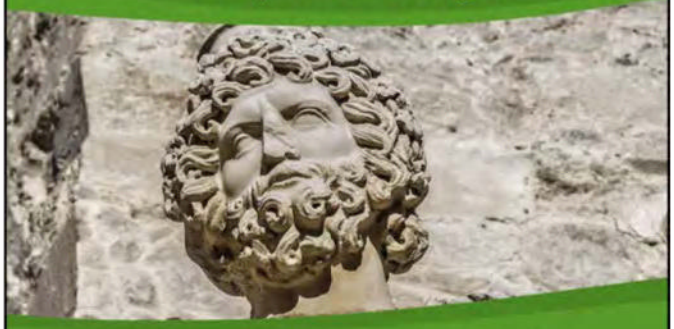
For more information visit www.homesitters.co.uk or call Head Office on 01296 630 730

Overseas Travel

Caminos

by Casas Cantabricas

Independent Touring in Spain & Portugal



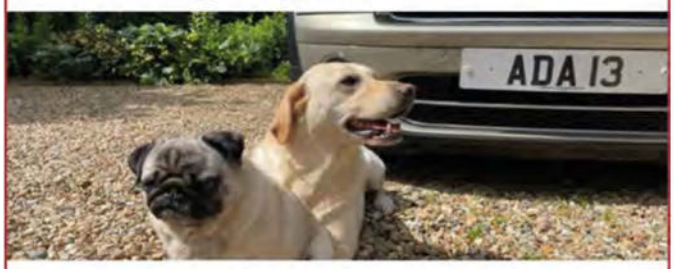
Bespoke tours for discerning travellers

Discover a different side of Spain & Portugal with our bespoke, self-drive itineraries. Stunning drives, breathtaking mountains, world-class heritage and gastronomy - the road trip of a lifetime awaits!

caminos.co.uk • 01223 328721

Mobility

Is now the time to change your car...?



Your garage would probably say YES

We would say that it depends...
...on YOUR OWN motoring needs, uses, preferences and biases.

Talk to real people with in-depth knowledge; years of experience; integrity and no axes to grind.

ADA

The ADA Car Consultancy – Founded 1968
Supporting the March Foundation

Please telephone: 01256 701221

Books & Publishing

Video

Friendship & Dating

Gifts

Wanted

Genealogy

Health

Gifts

Health

Religion

Music

Wanted

Societies

The Prayer Book Society

For half a century the Prayer Book Society has been working to keep the Book of Common Prayer at the heart of the Church of England.

Join us and keep this wonderful tradition thriving in our churches.

0118 984 2582

www.pbs.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1099295

Clothing & Bedding

Love Cotton?
100% Cotton
Nightdresses
Ready for Summer!
JBL Is The
UK Supplier
of Val d'Arizes
100% Pyrenean Wool
Dressing Gowns and
Bed Capes

JOYCE BROOKS LINGERIE of Cheltenham

www.joycebrookslingerie.com
info@joycebrookslingerie.com
01242 524706 for information or to buy

Elgar Shirts

www.ElgarShirts.com
Tel: 01422 882346

Genealogy

Do you have an Irish parent, grandparent or great grandparent?

Hire an experienced and **Qualified Genealogist** to track down civil records and other documentation for the purposes of obtaining Irish citizenship and a passport.

Whether you know a lot or a little about your Irish ancestry, find out one way or the other if you are **eligible for Irish citizenship**.

heir loom
FAMILY TREE SERVICES

IRISH CITIZENSHIP RESEARCH

www.heirloomfamilytreeservices.co.uk
07482 333101 | Luke Theobald QG

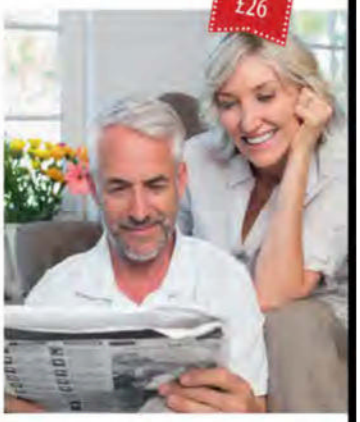
Gifts

ONLY WHILST STOCKS LAST AT THIS PRICE ORDER TODAY DONT MISS OUT.

Amazing New Technology Lamps take the strain out of reading. Introducing the Toby reading Lamp. Now available in antique brass, satin Chrome, black, and white.

SAVE OVER £26

The Craftlight Company
better by design.



1.5 mtr high

British Design

ULTRA HIGH DEFINITION LAMPS

Unlike a traditional filament bulb, our lamps producea brighter concentrated light which will transform your reading experience. Small and large print will appear crisp and clear with more vibrant colour.
The focussed beam of light is similar to direct sunlight and is ideal for reading books,magazines,newspapers, also hobbies including painting, jigsaws, sewing and much more.
Making it the essential lamp for your home.

Virtually no heat and consumes just 6watts

Elegant all metal construction.

The Toby 1.5 mtr was £96.00 Now only **£69.95** inc p+p

TO ORDER
visit www.craftlights.co.uk
look under newspaper and magazine offers for special offers.
or call 01502 587598
for help or advice

Add a second lamp for £59.95

MUCH EASIER ON THE EYES

Ask Virginia

VIRGINIA IRONSIDE

The incredible sulk

Q *Recently you seemed to support a partner's destructive behaviour towards their other half – sulking. He asked why she couldn't just shout and get it over with, like him. Sulking – a refusal to talk or have eye contact – can be classified as abuse. This couple urgently need to seek counselling. What a terrible example to set to young children, who can find this behaviour most frightening.*
Jeremy D, Edinburgh

A I quite agree. But children can find shouting very frightening as well. Also, some people find anger almost impossible to express and a couple of days of withdrawal is their only method of retaliation. My correspondent wasn't writing of weeks of silence – obviously extreme sulking is as bad as extreme violent and abusive behaviour. But a little bit of coldness is just another way of expressing how upset one is at being shouted at. Like many people, I find even a raised voice absolutely terrifying. We're not all programmed to express hostility in the same way. Fury is fury and it's irrational. There aren't rules or etiquette about how you should behave. And at least sulking doesn't involve physical harm.

Château Paintstrippeur

Q *We have a number of friends from Eastern Europe who, when they come to visit, bring an undrinkable bottle of local hooch. These accumulate in the drinks cabinet. To give them to an alcoholic would be dangerous, to use them for cookery would ruin a good meal and to use them to power the lawnmower might damage the engine. What should we do with them?*
Christopher H, by email

A Our brilliant wine man, Bill Knott, suggests getting hold of a 'vinegar mother' – some weird bit of gloop that has a life of its own, apparently, similar to a 'yoghurt mother' or a 'sourdough mother' (I wonder if they have a union?) – and make vinegar. Bottle it in pretty bottles and give them to unsuspecting friends at Christmas. Or throw it on the compost heap if you have one. Wine can be full of nitrogen which activates good bacteria within the mixture. And don't blame me if you're woken in the early hours by your roses belting out *Danny Boy*.

Cure for mourning sickness

Q *I'm commenting on a letter from someone who says she can't grieve the death of her father. My father died having suffered from dementia (as, it seems, did hers) and my grieving effectively took place while he was still alive. His actual death was something to be accepted with some gratitude.*
A S, Devon

A Grief is the weirdest of things. Yet we're encouraged to think that it follows strict patterns, usually involving lots of tears. Not so. Fury (sometimes at some blameless family member) is one reaction, as is grieving in advance, like yours. Sometimes it can be put on hold; until her late mother's dog died, a friend didn't shed a tear. On the dog's death, she was overwhelmed and went to pieces. In other instances, it can be expressed physically. It's very common for close relatives to suffer agony – often imagining they have the same ailment that killed their loved one. And, don't forget, you might never 'get over' a loved one's death. Anniversary grief is very common – feeling unusually wretched every year around the same date as the death.

Reciprocal dinners

Q *When I was a young man, my friends took it in turns to ask one another to dinner. I love entertaining and cooking. Now I'm 75, in good health and sociable. Moreover I love to cook and experiment, and love entertaining friends to dinner. The problem is that my wife and I no longer seem to get asked back very much, although our many friends jump at the chance of a meal here. Why is this? How can I encourage my friends to return my hospitality? It doesn't have to be cordon bleu. If they just ordered a pizza, that would be fine. I'm getting tired of always being the host.*
Name and address supplied

A I suspect that you're *too* good a host. Your friends, on being presented with your special truffle soup, followed by wild garlic and marinated acorns from Tuscany, feel a bit daunted. So, next time, why not ask if they'd like a takeaway, a Charlie Bigham or something from Cook? I've done this occasionally when feeling knackered and, to be honest, no one seems to notice, despite my declaring that it isn't home-made. The starter can be gazpacho from a box and the pud could be frozen pancakes from Waitrose or just posh cheese and fruit. Once they know you're prepared to slum it, they'll feel more eager to ask you back.

Please email me your problems at problempage@theoldie.co.uk; I will answer every email – and let me know if you'd like your dilemma to be confidential.

The Oldie

The Oldie is published by Oldie Publications Ltd, Moray House, 23/31 Great Titchfield Street, London W1W 7PA

ISSN 0965-2507. Printed in England by Walstead Group. Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT; www.seymour.co.uk

To order a print subscription, email theoldie@subscription.co.uk, or call 01858 438791, or write to *The Oldie*, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough LE16 9EF. **Print subscription rates for 12 issues**: UK £49.50; Europe/Eire £58; USA/Canada £70; rest of world £69.

To buy a digital subscription for £29.99 or a single issue for £2.99, go to the App Store on your tablet or mobile and search for 'The Oldie'.

The Oldie is available in audio and e-text format for the benefit of blind and partially sighted readers through RNIB Newsagent. Telephone 0303 123 9999 or visit www.rnib.org.uk/newsagent for further details.

RNIB Supporting people with sight loss

Eximius
REFINED LIVE-IN SUPPORT

Inspected and rated Outstanding ☆ Care Quality Commission

sia Business Member

BABICM

SOLLA Society of Later Life Advisers AFFILIATE

Homecare Association

Looking for an OUTSTANDING alternative to a Care Home?

Live-in care offers a safe and cost-effective alternative to a care home, nursing home and hourly care.

With support from an Eximius companion, individuals or couples can remain safely in their own home, surrounded by family, friends and their own comforts and memories.

Bespoke live-in care for all your personal, medical and domestic needs

Our companions are highly trained in all areas of live-in care, including:

- Dementia
- Stroke
- Parkinson's Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Spinal Injury
- Brain Injury
- Recovery and Respite Care
- Care for Couples

Eximius companions will support you with your day-to-day needs such as:

- Medication
- Personal Care
- Shopping and Cooking
- Cleaning and Laundry
- Social Outings and Appointments
- Companionship

LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL
Call us today for a chat and a free no obligation assessment

Call: 01494 424222 / 0203 794 9933

Email: info@eximiussupport.uk ■ www.eximiussupport.uk

Accessibility never looked so simple.

WALK IN BATHS | WALK IN SHOWERS | WETROOMS

*Call our UK office for a **free home visit** or brochure:*

0800 999 8994

www.agecare-bathrooms.co.uk

age care bathrooms

The Oldie

Review of Books

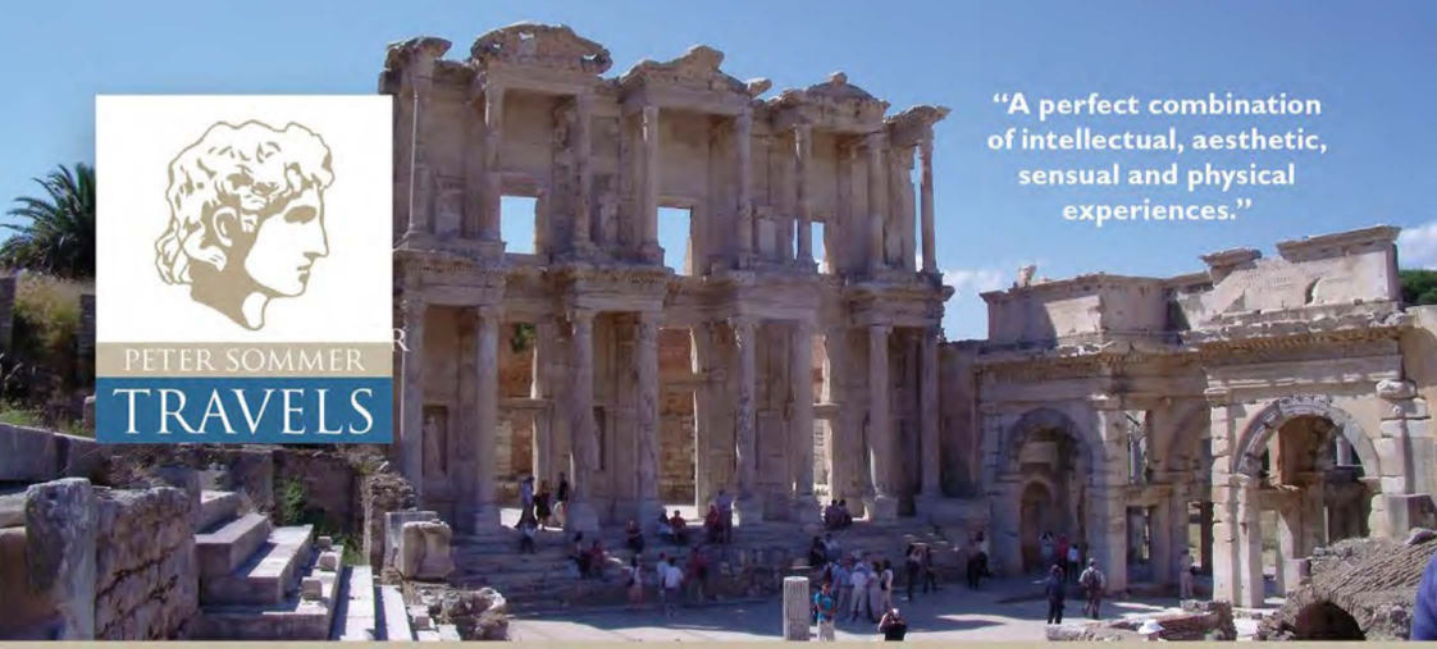
Summer round-up of the reviews

'Cool and funny' - Martin Amis by his publisher

Why are authors so skint? By Michael Barber

Biography & Memoir * Current Affairs * Music

Arts *History * Nature * Children's books



PETER SOMMER
TRAVELS

EXPERT-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL TOURS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Tour Operator of the Year

2022 Gold Award, 2019 Silver Award, 2018 Silver Award,
2017 Gold Award 2016 Silver Award & 2015 Gold Award
- AITO (The Association of Independent Tour Operators)

One of the world's "Top Ten Learning Retreats"
- National Geographic


EXPLORING WESSEX


WALKING HADRIAN'S WALL


A GASTRONOMIC CRUISE IN CROATIA


A GASTRONOMIC TOUR OF SICILY


WALKING AND CRUISING THE LYCIAN SHORE


EXPLORING ATHENS


EXPLORING CRETE


EXPLORING SICILY


EXPLORING THE PELOPONNESE

Visit: petersommer.com
Call: 01600 888 220
Email: info@petersommer.com

Escorted Archaeological Tours,
Gulet Cruises and
Private Charters

AITO Association of Independent Tour Operators
ABTA No.Y6151

The Oldie

Review of Books

Issue 64 Summer 2023

Not forgetting...important titles recently reviewed in *The Oldie*

Orwell: The New Life
by D J Taylor

The Seaside: England's Love Affair
by Madeleine Bunting

Killing Thatcher: The IRA, the Manhunt and the Long War on the Crown
by Rory Carroll

Lady Caroline Lamb: A Free Spirit
by Antonia Fraser

Ravenous: How to Get Ourselves and our Planet Into Shape
by Henry Dimbleby with Jemima Lewis

The King Is Dead: Long Live the King Majesty, Mourning and Modernity in Edwardian Britain
by Martin Williams

Foreign Bodies: Pandemics, Vaccines and the Health of Nations
by Simon Schama

An Uneasy Inheritance: My Family and Other Radicals
by Polly Toynbee

Ways of Life: Jim Ede and the Kettle's Yard Artists
by Laura Freeman

Published by The Oldie magazine, Moray House, 23/31 Great Titchfield Street, London W1W 7PA
Editorial Panel: Sam Leith, Lucy Lethbridge, Jane Mays, Harry Mount, James Pembroke
Editor: Jane Mays
Design: Lawrence Bogle
Cover: Bob Wilson
Reviewers: Liz Anderson, Michael Barber, Kate Ehrman, Helen Hawkins, Sam Leith, Lucy Lethbridge, Deborah Maby, Christopher Silvester, Nigel Summerley, Maureen Waller
Publisher: James Pembroke
Advertising: Paul Pryde, Jasper Gibbons, Monty Martin-Zakheim
For advertising enquiries call Paul Pryde on 020 3859 7095 or 7093
For editorial enquiries, e-mail: editorial@theoldie.co.uk

COVER ILLUSTRATION: BOB WILSON

The future of writing

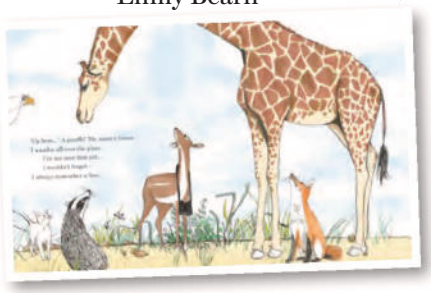
In March this year, *Granta* announced its Class of 23 Best of British Young Novelists list. First published in 1983 – and every ten years since – the list for this decade has been deemed less 'sexy' than the original, which featured Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, Rose Tremain and, of course, Martin Amis, whose death on 19th May sent a seismic shock through the literary world.

Martin's publisher Dan Franklin writes a personal tribute to him on page 15, to join the outpouring of words following the news that he had died. It is perhaps worth reflecting that Amis was luckier than today's listed authors in that he inhabited a world in which the notions of wokeness and AI were unknown. Today's authors, as the *Critic* magazine pointed out, 'will almost certainly not be able to make a living from their writing'. Perhaps Amis and his ilk were unusual in their success. On page 18, Michael Barber considers how badly most writers have been remunerated over the centuries and what on earth it is that makes them carry on.

Happily for us, they do. We have a plethora of excellent books on offer this summer, including a new release from one of the current *Granta* authors - you can read about *Penance* by Eliza Clark on page 27, along with other recommendations for holiday reading.

So we wish all our authors – great or small, rich or poor, established or just starting out – and all our critics, success. And our readers a summer of sun-drenched pleasure and unending literary delights.

Jane Mays



Ehrneberg Castle in the heart of Europe

THE MIDDLE KINGDOMS
A NEW HISTORY OF CENTRAL EUROPE

MARTIN RADY

Allen Lane, 640pp, £35

Central Europe might seem a frail idea. But Martyn Rady's new history shows that the concept has a long pedigree: from the sprawling supra-state of the Holy Roman Empire; the huge expansion of Habsburg power to the east of Austria; and the spread of Roman Catholic culture in the Slav world.

Pratinav Anil, in the *Sunday Times*, admired Rady's huge grasp; 'History this sweeping usually favours the panoramic over the particular. But Rady's history isn't what we in the trade pejoratively call histoire événementielle — one damned thing after another.

'He combines a bird's-eye view with a worm's-eye view, pausing the breakneck chronicle of royal deeds and misdeeds every so often to consider peasant life and religious belief. The Roma and Roman law get equal billing.' Peter Frankopan in the *Spectator* felt similarly, 'The breadth of Rady's coverage is as impressive as

> A book to be read for pleasure and serious reflection

it is eclectic, with gems scattered throughout the book... Rady writes with flair and humour about some of the great (and not so great) figures of the past.' Noel Malcolm in the *Telegraph*, appreciated the need for this new history; 'For those of us brought up in the Cold War, there were just two Europes: East and West. The only people who talked about Central Europe were intellectuals in Prague, Warsaw and Budapest, keen to assert an identity that made them seem more European – since the term included Germany and Austria – and less like the alien East.' He concluded that, 'this is a very impressive book, quirkily original but also scholarly and authoritative, to be read for pleasure and serious reflection, whether in a beer hall in Prague or a pastry shop in Vienna – or a bomb shelter in Kyiv.' For him, 'Rady, an expert on Hungary and the Habsburgs, is a marvellous guide to this complex story.'

HOMELANDS
A PERSONAL HISTORY OF EUROPE

TIMOTHY GARTON ASH

Bodley Head, 384pp, £20

'As Europe's "old normal" of state-on-state thuggery comes back,' wrote Boyd Tonkin in the *Financial Times*. 'Homelands looks through the prisms of personal memory, shared history and political analysis to measure the continent's progress in its post-war decades of hope, and to ask how much endures. Bright nuggets of autobiography – whether Garton Ash's father's memories of the D-Day landings, or his own adventures in insurgent Poland and on the scorched earth of former Yugoslavia – illuminate a broad-brush chronology.

This "history illustrated by memoir" journeys via bold strokes and pivotal scenes from the "Destroyed" continent of 1945 across its "Divided", "Rising", "Triumphing", and now "Faltering", periods... Readers could hardly wish for a wiser guide. Over 40 years, Garton Ash has both watched from the stands and played on the pitch in the arena of European change.'

Richard Briand, in the *Spectator*, noted that among the book's 'great strengths are the personal encounters, experiences and anecdotes it relates', but 'also outstanding are the vivid turns of phrase'. *Sunday Times* reviewer Dominic Sandbrook thought that 'on paper a book interweaving the grand sweep of Europe's history with the author's youthful reminiscences might seem a bit self-indulgent,' but 'Garton Ash does it brilliantly, and even readers familiar with the territory will find his book tremendously enjoyable. It helps that, as a journalist and academic, he seems to have been everywhere and talked to everybody... He is unsparing about Europe's failures, such as its inability to stop nationalist demagogues tearing Yugoslavia apart in the early 1990s, the reckless rush to adopt the euro and the imposition of punitive austerity on Greece in the 2010s... The aftermath of Brexit has given us some truly terrible books, variously arrogant, ungenerous, preachy and obsessive.

'Garton Ash's book is the exact opposite: thoughtful, honest, open, self-deprecating. Yet he never wavers in his fundamental loyalty to the European cause.'

COURTING INDIA
ENGLAND, MUGHAL INDIA AND THE ORIGINS OF EMPIRE

NANDINI DAS

Bloomsbury, 480pp, £30

In 1614, Sir Thomas Roe led the first English embassy to the Indian subcontinent, but his meeting with the Mughal Emperor Jahangir was initially deemed a failure. 'For Das the Roe mission is the lens through

Portrait of Shah Jahangir

which to give sharp focus to a remarkably wide-ranging study that does much to illuminate the bigger story of the unpromising origins of British power – and initial powerlessness – in India,' wrote William Dalrymple in the *Financial Times*. 'For at the time, as Das shows, England was a place of little consequence, least of all to the mighty Mughals... Born in Bengal, Das is now a professor of early modern English literature at Oxford and is as sure-footed and knowledgeable about the politics and arts of Jacobean London as she is about those of the Mughal court.

Her style, while nuanced and erudite, is also jaunty and often witty. The book is as full of lovely passages of prose and finely shaded pen portraits as it is of new archival research, of which there is a great deal... The embassy may have been a failure, but Das's book about it is a triumph, of writing and scholarship.'

The *Spectator*'s reviewer was William Dalrymple's son Sam, who was equally impressed by Das's study. 'Roe is on the back foot until things gradually begin to turn in his favour after he makes a fateful wager with Jahangir. Gradually making his way into the emperor's inner circle, he carves out the foundations of Britain's empire in Asia.

The picture that emerges of the first official encounter between Jacobean England and Mughal India is a vivid one, drawn in dazzling technicolour. Courting India is as much about Britain as India, a glimpse of one of history's turning points, and the start of a relationship that would change not just England but the world.'

THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF MODERN SPAIN

1898 TO THE PRESENT

NIGEL TOWNSON

Allen Lane, 400pp, £30

Sarah Watling, whose own feminist history of the Spanish Civil War was published recently, reviewed this for the *Spectator*, describing it as 'a chronicle of ineffectiveness and corruption at the highest levels, and of failures to implement reform.

Townson, an academic at Complutense University of Madrid, 'offers a detailed survey of political, economic and social history,

Franco: Spain's 'iron fist' , 1936 to 1975

A chronicle of corruption at the highest levels

illuminating many of the trends, tensions and power players that have influenced the course of Spain's modern era.

The Catholic Church, Catalan and Basque nationalism, a legacy of clientelism, an endlessly fractured left and frequently embattled middle ground, and the peaks and troughs of working-class activism all receive space.' Although he 'sacrifices some of the pleasures of narrative and character: there are too few individual portraits and little scene-setting',

Gerard DeGroot, in his review for the *Times*, was not convinced by Townson's argument that Spain's peculiarity among European nations has been greatly exaggerated. 'This might have been a better book without the dogged attempt at revisionism; Townson ties himself in knots trying to defend his thesis.'

He wants us to compare Spain to 'the smaller countries of southern and eastern Europe', but as a former great power 'Spain has always invited comparison with Britain, Germany and France' and 'it seems appropriate for us to do so'.

DeGroot suggested that despite having exchanged Catholic prudishness for sexual freedom, Spain's propensity for political violence has set it apart from other European nations.

In his review for the *TLS*, Felipe Fernández-Armesto called it 'the best account in a single volume of Spain since 1898, exemplary for concision and for accuracy in the use of language, as well as for equanimity and generosity of spirit'.

ATTACK WARNING RED!

HOW BRITAIN PREPARED FOR NUCLEAR WAR

JULIE MCDOWALL

Bodley Head, 256pp, £22

'Oh, we will all fry together when we fry/We'll be French fried potatoes by and by ....' So sang Tom Lehrer at a time when the Cold War had begun to hot up. His fatalism echoed edgy jokes about clap before antibiotics.

But the Government had to keep a straight face, even though they must have known that gallows humour was a legitimate response to the apocalyptic consequences of nuclear fall-out. As Julie McDowall emphasises, in what the *Telegraph*'s Tim Stanley calls her 'cracking book on civil defence during the Cold War', the 'only defence against nuclear blast was avoidance of nuclear war.'

Stanley invokes *Dad's Army* when describing how amateurish our early warning system was. He recounts how a Derbyshire publican, whose

The Cold War: when things got hotter

promised siren never turned up, 'planned to jump on his bike and peddle through the streets shouting, "The Russians are coming!"' Astonishingly, the WRVS said that not even a nuclear attack would prevent them from delivering their meals-on-wheels service.

In the *Sunday Times*, Stephen Smith thought there was something 'quintessentially British and unsettling at the same time' about this story, 'like a picnic at a missile battery.' He saluted McDowall's 'bleakly comic' approach to the subject. Describing her tone as 'a nice combination of the dry and the dry-mouthed', he welcomed her book as 'a timely reminder of the mind-blanking horror of nuclear warfare, as it menaces Europe once more.'

In the *i*, Gwendolyn Smith said

that McDowall opens with the cautionary tale of a couple for whom the prospect of nuclear war was so unthinkable that they gassed their three young daughters and then drowned themselves.

No wonder the authorities banned *The War Game*, a BBC film that was deemed too graphic for public consumption. And yet, 'alongside generous helpings of fear and unease', Ms Smith detects a 'strong charge of nostalgia' in *Attack Warning Red!*. 'Doom was less complicated back then.'

KITTY'S SALON

SEX, SPYING AND SURVEILLANCE IN THE THIRD REICH

NIGEL JONES, URS BRUNNER AND JULIAN SCHRAMEL

John Blake, 320pp, £22

Kitty Schmidt (left) and daughter

When the Nazis came to power, the backlash against 'moral laxity' was swift. Yet, perversely, the high-end brothel of the notorious madam Kitty Schmidt was repurposed by the SS to spy on senior Nazi officials and other unwary customers. A listening-post was set up to eavesdrop on the pillow talk picked up from microphones in the bedrooms.

As Daniel Brooks described it in the *Telegraph*, it is 'a tale of sex and surveillance ... murky and salacious'.

Brooks recalled the film treatment of *Salon Kitty*, a 1976 soft porn romp. 'The book offers a more factual, if harrowing account,' even if in 'the course of seeking out the truth a lot of dirty laundry gets aired.' A paucity of sources, he conceded, meant that 'a good amount of space is dedicated to titillating rumours'.

Oliver-James Campbell in the *Spectator* was more damning in his criticism. Information about Kitty herself gleaned from her descendants is thin, as is that about the clientele from sparse sources, mostly interviews with women who claimed to have worked at Salon Kitty. This explains why 'after an introduction, the subject [Kitty's Salon] doesn't reappear until chapter eight.' '

The book offers a mish-mash of information pertaining to attitudes about sex, prostitution and women from the Weimar period to the end of the second world war,' Campbell continued. 'Paragraphs detailing the concentration camp brothels and the bizarre sadomasochistic relationship Hitler had with his niece Geli Raubal, although interesting topics, read oddly in conjunction.... The threads feel too loose — and what does all this have to do with the salon and its madam, Kitty Schmidt? While some discussion of changing attitudes to prostitution may be helpful as a preface to the story, the treatment of the subject is all over the place.'

'It's a story that deserves to be told,' Brooks concluded, 'even if it does cut across many of our modern sensibilities.'

BEYOND THE WALL

EAST GERMANY, 1949-1990

KATJA HOYER

Allen Lane, 496pp, £25

Beyond the Wall 'aims to show that real people lived real lives in a Germany that for forty years was utterly distinct from its neighbour to the west – and that this other Germany offered "opportunity and belonging as well as oppression and brutality",' wrote Karen Leeder in the *TLS*. The book is 'fast-paced, vivid and engaging.' Hoyer, who was born in the GDR, 'covers the large political history with economy and confidence, ranging from geopolitical tensions to the personal shortcomings of the GDR leadership. Her history is humanised by the many smaller stories of ordinary individuals whose lives are told through snippets of memoirs, archive documents and interviews... Cumulatively they give a rich insight into a vanished country from the bottom up.'

The author of this 'enthralling, fascinating and very readable book', wrote Peter Hitchens in the *Mail on Sunday*, 'tells of how her own father, an air force officer, was arrested and locked up for making a joke. Even more disturbingly he was then forced to join the SED, the local version of the Communist Party, the body which had demanded and caused his punishment.' Yet she 'can't quite break off a sort of love affair with her socialist motherland, occasionally slipping in a good word, or an excuse.'

For Dominic Sandbrook in the *Sunday Times*, Hoyer writes 'with palpable gusto about the paid holidays in Baltic chalets, the huge popularity of Trabant cars, the thrill of visiting East Berlin's TV tower, the popular joy at the steroid-fuelled sporting successes and the delights of listening to bands such as the Puhdys, who sold more than 20 million records in the 1970s and 1980s...

'She's under no illusions, of course, about the regime's dishonesty and repression. But she's more interested in the lives of the great majority than in the experience of the relatively small number of genuine dissidents.'

THE RETURN OF THE TALIBAN

AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE AMERICANS LEFT

HASSAN ABBAS

Yale, 256pp, £16.99

Oliver-James Campbell in the *TLS* felt that Abbas had successfully challenged the persistent version of recent Afghan history: [He] demonstrates that the received narrative – that the [Taliban] takeover was abrupt, opportunistic and a capitalisation on the withdrawal of US troops – is wrong.

'By detailing secret US-Taliban negotiations from 2018 onwards, he reveals a gross negligence and lack of consideration for ordinary Afghans who are now susceptible to the whims

A Taliban member with chest flags

of the Taliban. More heinous is the way Afghanistan's President Ghani and his government were excluded from all peace negotiations.'

Isambard Wilkinson in the *Times* said this book was being 'sold as the first account of the "new Taliban" ruling the country. Hassan Abbas is a veteran observer of the region who served briefly as a police officer in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province before becoming an academic in the US.

'He recommends engagement with the Taliban. The basis of his argument is that the "new Taliban" comprises pragmatists and younger members with a more modern outlook. He claims that "slowly, we are beginning to see the shedding of the old Taliban's skin".'

Wilkinson said Abbas reckons today's Taliban 'is deeply divided between moderates and hardliners, so much so that it is "unravelling before our eyes: even if they haven't changed ideologically, Afghanistan has – and they have no choice but to adapt" '.

But Abbas himself warns: 'While many leaders have experienced living in urban centres, their foot soldiers come from rural backgrounds. These are men for whom purdah is a core Islamic tradition on which there can be no compromise and they are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideas of women.' Any attempt by the leadership to re-educate them is fraught 'which is why it is so important for Western interlocutors to remember this dilemma when issuing policy statements'.

Change will only come about through 'positive – and very careful – engagement,' he argues.

UPROAR!

SATIRE, SCANDAL AND PRINT MAKERS IN GEORGIAN LONDON

ALICE LOXTON

Icon Books, 416pp, £25

In her 'vivid history of Georgian satire', wrote Michael Prodger in the *New Statesman* Alice Loxton shows that Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray, and Isaac Cruikshank 'spawned not just a voracious market for their prints but also a continuing irreverence towards power and a recognisably modern celebrity culture'. The targets of their satirical cartoons 'were low-hanging fruit in some cases, but Loxton is keen to

Monstrous Craws: The royal family devours the national wealth (Gillray, 1787)

stress that it took artists of rare facility – and, in Gillray's case, of profound classical learning – to skewer them quite so devastatingly.'

Loxton offers readers 'an irreverent gallop through the scandalous streets of Georgian London', said Charlotte Mullins in *Country Life*. Her 'vivacious prose brings to life the competitive, combative climate'.

Henry Hitchings, in his review for the *Times*, pointed out that Loxton creates history videos on TikTok and that while studying these 18th-century satirists at university she 'noticed that there was no accessible modern account — "nothing for the general history reader to enjoy on a sunbed in Monaco"'.

Loxton 'revels in the tumult and deformity' and 'sees Gillray as the eternal enemy of priggishness and rates his artistic vision as the equal of William Blake's'. She also 'loves extravagant analogies. Students visiting the Paris workshop of the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle were "much like X Factor starlets staying at Simon Cowell's LA mansion".

Although this breezy approach is meant to make the past vivid, that's not always the effect.

One chapter begins, "Had James Gillray tuned his radio to 104.1 FM on a summer afternoon in 1794". Keen to be engaging, she addresses the reader directly — "Xylophone scales fill your ears to herald that we are stepping back in time to 1778" — but do we really need to be told to "pay attention" and "keep up"?'

REVOLUTIONARY SPRING

FIGHTING FOR A NEW WORLD

CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Allen Lane, 896pp, £35

Cambridge's Regius Professor of HIstory turns his attention in his latest book to what he calls 'the only truly European revolution there has ever been': the upheavals of 1848-9 in which, as Dominic Sandbrook put it in the *Sunday Times*, 'a tide of protest swept from the streets of Paris to Denmark, Naples, the patchwork of German states, even Moldavia and Wallachia'.

The 1848 revolutions occupy a strange place in European historiography,' said the *Guardian*'s Kenan Malik. 'Most historians acknowledge their significance as a Europe-wide set of uprisings.

Yet they remain largely a submerged presence in European consciousness, viewed not so much as Radowitz's 'turning point' but 'the turning point at which modern history failed to turn', in GM Trevelyan's pithy phrase.'

'What was it all about?' Sandbrook wondered. 'That Clark's book is almost 1,000 pages long tells you that there is no simple answer.' Rather, as several reviewers reported, Clark deftly draws a distinction between radical and bourgeois strands of revolutionary thought and sees the uprisings as a Europe-wide response to a set of conditions that we might now call a 'polycrisis'.

In the *TLS*, Abigail Green applauded the way that Clark went

behind the 'Technicolor' images of flags waving over barricades to give us 'a brooding, hazy, sepia-tinted world in which the protagonists are barely discernible. All across Europe the nature of work and of property was changing, agriculture and landholding practices were in a state of upheaval, and social conflicts broke out – often violent, always unsettling, and driven', Clark tells us, 'by competition over every conceivable resource in a world marked by scarcity and low rates of productivity growth'.

The reviewers were united in admiration for Clark's achievement. 'Magnificent,' thought Malik. 'Massive, authoritative and deeply researched – a supreme work of scholarship,' said the *Telegraph*'s Simon Heffer; and Sandbrook admitted that though 'a daunting prospect for the casual reader, it's a marvel of research and analysis'.

OPERATION CHIFFON

THE SECRET STORY OF MI5 AND MI6 AND THE ROAD TO PEACE IN IRELAND

PETER TAYLOR

Bloomsbury, 400pp, £22

'The veteran reporter Peter Taylor spent nearly four decades tracking down [MI5 agent] Robert to piece together the final details of his secret 1993 meeting with the IRA's chief of staff, Martin McGuinness, explained Paul Vallely in the *Church Times*. Taylor 'finally broadcast an extraordinary interview with Robert... which laid bare the clandestine encounter and its far-reaching implications... It may generally be economic, political, and social forces that shape our history. But sometimes it takes the actions of an individual to channel the forces of their age to produce change.'

Operation Chiffon is 'a compelling, exhilarating historical account,' wrote Dr Paul Winter in *The Critic*. 'A significant journalistic "scoop" for the author, it is also an authoritative, insightful and balanced treatment of one of the most extraordinary intelligence cases of modern times.

'Taylor is a master at juxtaposing scenes. It is these small but significant details that not only draw in Taylor's audience but bring to life his magnum opus.'

Sean O'Neill, in the *Times*, pointed out that the book tells 'the story of three unsung heroes of the peace process... The third man Taylor profiles, named only as Robert, was the MI5 officer who took over management of the back channel in the 1990s.

Robert's is a true tale of espionage, a mixture of the dangerous and the humdrum... Taylor draws our attention to those whose crucial behind-the-scenes contributions went unnoticed.'

For Ian Cobain, in his *Guardian* review, the 'undoubted hero' of 'this deeply researched and highly readable book' is Brendan Duddy, a businessman who liaised with Martin McGuinness. 'An energetic, garrulous and resilient man, he faced a number of harrowing interrogations on occasions when the IRA suspected his motives. The others faced dangers, but were crown servants, performing their duty, sometimes going above and beyond.'

The Shankill: notorious during the Troubles as the Loyalist centre of Belfast

THE COLLABORATORS

THREE STORIES OF DECEPTION AND SURVIVAL

IAN BURUMA

Atlantic Books, 320pp, £20

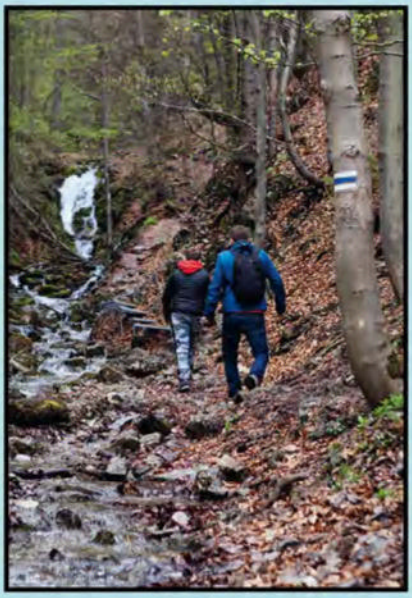
What do Himmler's Estonian-Dutch masseur, a non-binary Manchu princess, and a Jewish economist from Lviv have in common?

They are 'self-invented figures' who became collaborators during WWII and the subjects of Buruma's 'richly enjoyable, vital and astute book', as Richard Davenport-Hines put it in the *Literary Review*. 'Each of this trio had childhoods dislocated by war, which left them with confused nationalities, divided loyalties, fallen status and idealised memories of lost paradises. Buruma sees them as exemplary figures for the 2020s: avid, idealistic thrill-seeking, improvisational, lusting for status and with an overmastering need to be valued at their own high estimation.'

They are connected by 'their outsize, self-delusional fabulism,' wrote Lesley M. M. Blume in her *New York Times* review, and by the fact that they 'publicly cast themselves as saviors, serving noble causes'. (Two out of the three believed they had saved Jewish lives.) Some readers may find Buruma's permissiveness toward his subjects' conduct and moral barometers unnerving, even disturbing,' Blume argued. 'Yet in some instances, the existing, court-admissible evidence against them appears damning.' Rather than see these characters as victims of self-deception as Buruma does, we should recognize 'the depravity and grotesque opportunism that lie beneath the veneer of civility, the evaporation of even basic empathy during wartime and the relentless willingness of human beings to worship at the altars of madmen'.

Ben Macintyre, in his review for the *Times*, preferred Buruma's nuanced approach. None of his three characters 'was entirely without admirable qualities. Only one was executed after the war... The war presented opportunities for counterfeiters of every stamp, but the postwar world demanded a strict moral accounting, the division of the past into perfect good or absolute evil, even though, as this superb book proves, there are no such things.'

Gone To Look for America



Jacobus Rawley

Gone to Look for America is the riveting new sequel to the popular trilogy exploring the taboo theme of incest in ***A Fraternal Attraction*** and ***The Longest Acquaintance***. The book is set in 1968 during one of the most tumultuous years in American politics - with two prominent political assassinations, increasingly violent anti-war protests and a pivotal election. Joe Turnbull's misgivings about the unnatural intimacy between his two sons recede into the background when he faces much larger problems. Motivated by his desire to keep his younger son out of Vietnam, he insists that Rob continues to see a psychiatrist: the therapy sessions contrive to be both farcical and revelatory at the same time.

The author's love affair with the wilderness areas of America is evident as the brothers hike Kentucky's spectacular Red River Gorge. The sense of time and place is skilfully evoked, with the small town of Harperville and its inhabitants featuring largely: much of the social interaction takes place on the porches of various residents or local establishments such as the Drive-in movie theatre or *Lonnie's Late Nite Diner*. Like the song from which it takes its title, the novel is an elegy to lost innocence but above all it is about a nation's dreams and unfulfilled possibilities.

Now available at **www.unique-books.co.uk**

Brian Blessed, *Actor, Writer and Presenter*

"Churches are such heavenly buildings. Your legacy will help keep them flourishing on earth."

St Mary's and All Saints' Church, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire © Bob Stewart.

I ADORE CHURCH BUILDINGS. They're hauntingly beautiful, evocative and stir such powerful emotions. And they've always played an important part in my life.

But time takes its toll on all of us and churches are no exception. Many are threatened with leaking roofs and crumbling stonework but once they are gone, they'll be gone forever.

Last year, gifts in Wills enabled the National Churches Trust to help remove 18 historic churches from Historic England's At Risk register.

A legacy from you can help save even more.

NATIONAL CHURCHES TRUST

To find out how you can help keep the UK's churches alive, please call Claire Walker on **020 7222 0605,** email: **legacy@nationalchurchestrust.org,** visit: **nationalchurchestrust.org/legacy** or complete the coupon below.

Yours for good.

☐ Please send me details about leaving a legacy to the National Churches Trust. (Please affix a stamp.)

Forename Surname

Address

Postcode Email

Return to Claire Walker, National Churches Trust, 7 Tufton Street London SW1P 3QB.

Your information will be treated as private and kept securely, we will never make public, swap or sell your details: www.nationalchurchestrust.org/privacy-policy. We will write to you around four times a year with newsletters, our Annual Review and invitations to events. If you would rather NOT hear from us by post please tick this box ☐

SCAN ME

Registered charity number 1119845

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

TO -07 -23

LUCY LETHBRIDGE recalls the irrepressible Inez Holden

The writer Inez Holden (1903-74) is one of those people who crops up here and there in the memoirs of mid-twentieth century literary lives but whose work seems to have slid inexorably below the cultural radar. She is the shingled, gamine beauty in the centre of a grainy photograph of bright young 1920s people in fancy dress; the lover of Orwell, the tenant of HG Wells, the acquaintance of Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh, the friend for 40 years of the equally un-categorizable Stevie Smith.

The Impersonation Party, 1927. Back row: Elizabeth Ponsonby as Iris Tree, Cecil Beaton on her right. Seated: Stephen Tennant as Queen Marie of Rumania, Georgia Sitwell (with false nose), Inez Holden, Harold Acton. Foreground: Tallulah Bankhead

She seems to have intrigued many (Powell described her allure as 'consumptive charm') but, independent to the end, was less interested in her literary legacy than in her continuing preoccupation with observing and enjoying what is odd and strange and poignant in life.

Now reprints of her wartime writings (*Blitz Writing* and *There's no Story There*) by Handheld Press and of the short stories she wrote for *Punch* in the 1950s, selected by Jeff Manley and Robin Bynoe for the Anthony Powell Society (*Late Stories)*, bring to modern readers her distinctive and captivating writing voice. Inez was a trooper, writing all her life for money – as a journalist, reviewer, screenwriter, novelist and short story writer – but the work here never seems dashed off: it is funny and serious and, because it is based on her scrupulously close observations of how things are and how people really talk and respond to each other, is slightly off the wall.

Inez came from gentry in Warwickshire and her parents drank, bickered and neglected her. She was probably born in 1903 but no-one bothered to register her birth. Unsurprisingly, she shook her family off as soon as she could and came to London, aged 15, to try her luck as a journalist. From then on, she became arrestingly classless, an outlaw to her parents' Edwardian bourgeois world.

Although she was always poor, she was good at accumulating the capital of connections and despite her commitment to socialism seems to have been able to move comfortably in all circles.

This is most evident in her wartime diary, *It Was Different at the Time*, which is a compellingly vivid picture of wartime life, of its covers and fears and subterfuges. Here she is at a dinner party in 1938, where a fellow guest is a German who works for the Reich: 'The Nazi came into the room like a Labrador dog, half sideways, fawning and smiling. He wanted to pat people on the shoulder, put out his hands to touch them, but not at all costs to risk the refused handshake.'

She worked in a hospital, as a fire watcher, for the BBC and in a munitions factory - the silent, stoic fear of which she captured in two novels, *Night Shift* (1941) and *There's No Story There* (1944-45), both set in a fictional rural factory, Statevale.

Clearly influenced by the work of Mass Observation, they are documentary novels, freeze framing moments of ordinary life and dialogue. Holden's attention, like a camera, moves in and out, between spoken and unspoken, snatches of thought, activity and conversation, between manual workers, clerks, representatives from the ministries, all of them gathered in a rural factory called Statevale. 'They talk in a low, unhurried way', she writes. 'Here are the thoughts of Julian in *There's no Story There*, invalided out of the army to work at Statevale, carrying deadly 'powder K' in its leather case: 'we walk together, along a long black road – powder carriers never walk alone – like a flunkey for death, sneaker-shoed Lofty waits on me now; he must open the doors; he must see that no one bumps into me…'

> An outlaw to her parents' bourgeois Edwardian world

Inez wrote several stories for Anthony Powell when he was literary editor of *Punch* from 1953 to 1959 – and we see in Late Stories the same taste for refreshing a moment of bathos or a conversational old saw with an odd angle or a new slant. Powell didn't rate her novels but co-editor Robin Bynoe writes that *The Owner*, published in 1952, is 'beautifully written, convincing, compelling and deeply weird.' A candidate for reprinting perhaps. When she died in 1974, Inez had outlived most of her contemporaries and was living frugally in Belgravia. Powell wrote a tribute to her that year in which he said he had had reports of sightings of her in the neighbourhood wearing 'stray adjuncts of military uniform;' and recalled, with pleasure, her outstanding talents as a mimic.

Her cousin Celia Goodman followed this up 20 years later with a delightful memoir in the *London Magazine*. Despite many suitors, Inez had never married but lived a life of trenchant and pleasurable independence, free of the complexes one might have expected from her awful childhood. She dressed in raffish charity shop clothes, lived in domestic chaos and her idea of cooking was 'a neck of lamb, a gallon of water and some unwashed potatoes.' 'A compulsive newspaper reader and TV viewer, she would become obsessed by subjects the papers were running – say, sex-change or computer dating – and talk of these without cease throughout a whole luncheon or dinner.'

In the 1960s, she went undercover writing an article about working in Marks & Spencer. It was 'the never-failing fascination of life' which kept her going.

GLOWING STILL
A WOMAN'S LIFE ON THE ROAD

SARA WHEELER

Abacus, 368pp, £22

'*Glowing Still* is a thoughtful and entertaining meditation on identity, geography and the position of the self in the world,' Viv Groskop wrote in the *Spectator*, a 'magnificent and unusual book'. 'Some of the "travel" here is not a journey to a place but instead through her memories .... She turns herself into an expert revisionist guide, reframing voyages from the Antarctic to Paris and from Bangladesh to Russia through the lens of an increasingly uncertain and contradictory 21st-century world. She does this with humour, pathos and genuine curiosity about herself and her work'.

Ian Sansom in the *Telegraph* regretted that Wheeler has always preferred to travel alone, but decided the book 'is the next best thing to hopping on board with her.'

'An ingenious piece of work, it's a set of re-readings of her innumerable journeys over half a century, re-thinking what she wrote in previous books'.

> Oddly comforting – and apocalyptic at the same time

'Part of the pleasure of this book is the way Wheeler drops in and out of the world she left behind,' Caroline Moorehead wrote in the *Literary Review*. 'She has structured this, her tenth book, to bring in what she calls the best bits of journeys left out of earlier accounts, while also weaving in thoughts about what it has been like to be a woman travelling on her own through a rapidly changing planet.'

Constance Craig Smith in the *Mail* found it 'engrossing', while Ann Kennedy Smith in the *TLS* praised 'a colourful, deceptively capacious carpetbag of a book ... an entertaining smorgasbord that allows her to touch on serious issues'. Wheeler's themes, Smith continued, 'include economic inequality, increasing evidence of looming climate catastrophe and "minority groups under pressure or gone"'.

From being one of the first intrepid women travellers, Wheeler may be among the last. '*Glowing Still* feels oddly comforting and apocalyptic at the same time, like a sepia snapshot of a window of historical opportunity that is rapidly closing,' Groskop concluded

HONEY, BABY, MINE

LAURA DERN AND DIANE LADD

(Coronet, 256pp, £18.99)

Mommy dearest? A Hollywood memoir

Mother and daughter actors Diane Ladd and Laura Dern (above) have produced a joint account of two generations of life in Hollywood. They based it on the conversations they had while on the walks that doctors had prescribed for Ladd's health. The result is, said Helen Brown in the *Telegraph*, 'brutal.' This is the 'best, truest, most shockingly entertaining Hollywood memoir I've ever read. It is also one of the most loving.'

Dern, 56, is the daughter of actor Bruce Dern, who met Ladd when the pair appeared in a 1961 production of *Orpheus Descending*, by Ladd's cousin, Tennessee Williams. 'Most Hollywood autobiographies,' wrote Brown, 'are stuffed with therapy-endorsed self-exculpation. So its gripping to hear these two Tinseltown titans, Oscar-winning (Dern) and -nominated (Ladd) respectively, holding each other to account.'

In the New York Times, Mary Laura Philpott also enjoyed the revelations. 'As actors, Dern and Ladd have spent decades peeling back layers to reveal their characters' fears and desires. It's when they turn that focus to each other and themselves that something remarkable emerges ... At first it seems a bit repetitive ... They tell funny anecdotes ... Then the tone shifts.'

Marian Winik in the *Washington Post* was equally enraptured. 'A brilliant end-run around the one-sidedness of a traditional memoir ... The exchanges convey a rich mixture of love, exasperation, nostalgia and resentment that will be familiar to anyone who has ever been a mother or a daughter. At the same time, they offer rare glimpses behind the curtain of two great Hollywood careers.'

SLEEPING ON ISLANDS
A LIFE IN POETRY

ANDREW MOTION

Faber, 320pp, £20

Former poet laureate and literary elder Andrew Motion's new memoir received a thorough pasting from young Turk James Marriott in the *Times*. *Sleeping on Islands*, he wrote, might 'usefully be described as a meditation on the futility of being Andrew Motion.' Like Motion's poetry, he continued, his prose 'aims at a Wordsworthian solemnity and plainness. The still surface is presumably intended to be suggestive of subaqueous profundities and dramas. But all too often the reader feels he has been confronted with a millpond of a man. The author's character presents a turbid and unruffled blank.' Ouch.

David Wheatley, reviewing the book in the *Literary Review* was more generous, though he noted the 'committee-pleasing tone' that creeps into Motion's accounts of a life spent shinning up the greasy pole of public literary culture. 'Motion's acceptance of the laureateship was a calculated risk', noted Wheatley. 'Many great writers have been poet laureate, but history has not been kind to those remembered exclusively for their time in that role.' The ex-laureate, 'far from enjoying his freedom, takes on yet more committee jobs and honorary presidencies, unsure if his identity is now stuck in civic mode or if he isn't just "anxious that if I said no to anything, I might disappear from view".'

In the *Daily Telegraph*, Tristan Fane Saunders interviewed Motion, who now lives and teaches in Baltimore, and asked him if he regretted 'writing all those royal poems.' The answer was 'Yes! Every day!'. None is included in his *New and Selected Poems*, but he says he's not 'hideously ashamed' of them.

DAM BUSTER
BARNES WALLIS: AN ENGINEER'S LIFE

RICHARD MORRIS

Weidenfeld&Nicolson, 520pp, £28

Boffins, as they used to be called, helped us win the last war. Think of Alan Turing, who broke the Enigma code, or Professor R.V. Jones, the Air Defence wizard. But for those of us for whom the *Dam Busters' March* is as evocative as Proust's madeleine, the palm must go to Sir Barnes Wallace, inventor of 'Upkeep'. the bouncing bomb. Little did we know that Upkeep was initially dismissed as 'tripe' by Bomber Command's curt supremo, Sir Arthur Harris.

This is one of the many fascinating details to emerge from Richard Morris's biography. In the words of the historian James Holland, author of an acclaimed account of the famous dam buster raid itself, 'Morris skilfully picks through the myths, the legend, and the ever-evolving narrative to put flesh back on the bones of an unquestionably brilliant, but also highly complex, figure.'

In the *Daily Telegraph*, Saul David described Wallis as 'a complicated man who combined Victorian cultural conservatism with implicit faith in technology and an "organic Anglo-British nation"'. David said Wallis's devotion to his 'cold, controlling and needy mother was something of a mystery.' He thought 'an Oedipus complex' surely explained Wallis's 'awkwardness with the opposite sex' until, aged 35, he fell for and later married his teenage cousin-in-law.

In the *Observer*, Alexander Larman welcomed this biography because 'Wallis was in the unenviable position of being one of Britain's most talented engineers who was nevertheless under-appreciated in his lifetime and since, wartime efforts aside.' Morris, said Larman, 'does a sterling job of re-establishing his reputation as an innovator in countless fields, in highly readable fashion.'

Wallis: hero of the bouncing bomb

THE MARRIAGE QUESTION
GEORGE ELIOT'S DOUBLE LIFE

CLARE CARLISLE

Allen Lane, 372pp, £25

Declared a genius by her literary critics and a pariah by society for living for 25 years with George Lewes, a man not divorced from his wife, Eliot considered herself 'married', though not in the conventional sense.

Jane O'Grady in the *TLS* described the book as 'fascinating and scholarly' and Marina Benjamin in *Prospect* as 'a richly textured and absorbing biographical study'. Rupert Christiansen in the *Telegraph* felt 'it doesn't add any facts or documents to existing accounts.' Kathy O' Shaughnessy in the *Financial Times* disagreed, calling it 'a splendid addition to the Eliot biographical canon.'

'Carlisle's magisterial book has many facets to it: biographical, philosophical, literary,' she continued. 'Carlisle takes the reader into fascinating territory with the doubleness of Eliot's life. "At once inside marriage and outside its conventions", Eliot was perfectly pitched to write about it.'

'In her scholarly and thoughtful new book, the philosopher Clare Carlisle does something a little bit daring: she suggests that Eliot and Lewes' relationship was not perfect after all ... it was an image that the couple cultivated deliberately to prove their critics wrong,' Susie Goldsborough opined in the *Times*.

'Eliot's novels do not exactly overflow with happy marriages. Was this a blast against 'the moralism that condemned their author, by smashing the facade of respectable marriage, Carlisle wondered, or are they a hint about Eliot's own relationship?'

Describing the book as 'thrilling', Kathryn Hughes in the *Guardian* noted that Eliot was 'the richest self-made woman in the country', but no feminist, she was content that all her earnings went into Lewes' bank account. Was Lewes, her capable manager, perhaps, a little too controlling?

George Eliot: a contradictory woman

PARADISE NOW
THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF KARL LAGERFELD

WILLIAM MIDDLETON

Ebury Press, 470pp, £25

The fashion designer who revived Chanel and was the creative director of two other major brands, Fendi and Lagerfeld, also led a mysterious personal life. Indeed, his one serious relationship was with Jacques de Bascher, who died from Aids in 1989. 'Was his and de Bascher's relationship really celibate, as Lagerfeld claimed?' asked Hadley Freeman in her review for the *Sunday Times*. 'And was he sleeping with the beautiful young men he collected in his later years?' Freeman acknowledged that this is 'a deeply researched book, written by someone with a fondness for Lagerfeld, and although I came away from it not knowing the designer as well as I would have liked, I did end up liking him more than I had expected.' In her *Times* review Hilary Rose, found 'much to enjoy' in this book about someone who was 'an influencer long before the internet, a chameleon who constantly reinvented himself and his surroundings, and a man with a talent for both friendship and enmity', as well as 'a top notch party planner'. *Observer* reviewer Rachel Cooke found that the more she read about Lagerfeld's frenetic activity, 'the stronger the whiff of loneliness grows. .' Duncan Fallowell, in the *Spectator*, emphasised Lagerfeld's evanescent quality: 'When

Fashion victim? Karl Lagerfeld

you consider the names Worth, Poiret, Chanel, Dior, Quant, Saint Laurent and Westwood, countless images of their transformative apparel rise up in the mind. With the name Karl Lagerfeld there is only one image, the grotesque costume he adopted in later life. His career made no mark on fashion itself, only on the fashion business.' This was entirely appropriate for a man who 'often said that he hadn't the slightest concern for posterity and was interested in living for the moment'.

AMONG OTHERS

MICHAEL FRAYN

Faber, 272pp, £25

Now approaching 90, the playwright and novelist Michael Frayn is still working but is also one of the last survivors of a mid-20th century world of letters now almost completely vanished. His recent collection of short essays, becomes, mused Tim Adams in the *Guardian*, 'a thoughtful and often moving portrait of a disappearing world in which a generous kind of bookish rigour and worldly wit created fleeting incandescence at the heart of British cultural life.'

In the *Telegraph*, Ian Sansom tried to pin Frayn down. 'The thinking man's Alan Bennett? A less clever-dick Tom Stoppard? Ayckbourn without quite so many laughs? Intelligent without insisting on his intelligence, witty without too much trying-to-please, ingenious yet sedulous, Michael Frayn is the ideal of the old-fashioned man of letters.'

Sansom admired the 'clear-eyed serenity' of Frayn's late style which includes an amusing, insightful exploration of his relationship with his own body, 'in decline and decay.'

In the *Sunday Times*, Peter Kemp was also full of praise: 'wit, zest and a keen relish for the ridiculous predominate in Frayn's pleasurable backwards look at what has been (as tour operators say) "the journey of a lifetime".' And Libby Purves, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, paid tribute to a writer 'amused without malice, eager to love.' Each essay in the collection, she wrote, is so 'sharply drawn' that readers should read one at a time, 'then go for a short walk to think about it.'

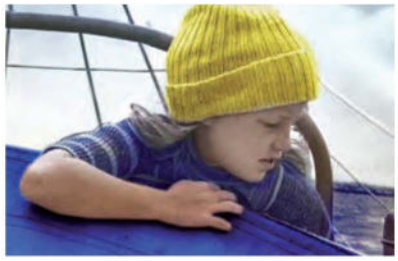
WAVEWALKER
BREAKING FREE

SUZANNE HEYWOOD

William Collins, 416pp, £20

Imagine your parents taking you out of school to sail the oceans of the world. Sounds blissful? Reviewers of Suzanne Heywood's memoir found it a useful corrective to any mistaken dreams of freedom on the high seas. Heywood's father Gordon took his wife and two small children off to sea in a schooner 1976 and they didn't return for a decade. 'I can't think of a better education that sailing around the world,' he told them. His daughter has a different story.

In the *Times*, Hadley Freeman observed that the book describes 'an unforgettable kind of parental negligence.' Freeman thought that Heywood's accounts of her parents' monstrousness were somewhat one-sided, 'like reading a teenager's diary' but in the *Daily Mail*, Ysenda Maxtone Graham listed the ordeals.



Seasick: Suzanne braves the waves

'Stuck on a coral reef; stuck in "the doldrums", mid-Atlantic; stuck mid-ocean with a flat battery and a broken engine; stuck in a cyclone, stuck on various tropical or volcanic islands for months while her cash-strapped parents desperately tried to make money. Running out of drinking water; living on tinned corned beef.'

Against the odds, Heywood finally got to Oxford and then married the late civil servant Sir Jeremy Heywood. Freedom in order. Interviewed by Louise Carpenter of the *Daily Telegraph*, she said: '.... the choice of voyage was incredibly dangerous with such small children and no real provision to look after us. We were stateless and invisible.'

JOHNSON AT TEN

ANTHONY SELDON AND RAYMOND NEWELL

Atlantic, 624pp, £25

'If the reign of Bad King Boris looked dreadful from the outside, it was even more diabolical viewed from the inside,' said the *Observer*'s Andrew Rawnsley after reading what he called 'an authoritative, gripping and often jaw-dropping account of the bedlam' in Boris Johnson's Downing Street.

Daniel Finkelstein, writing in the *Times*, agreed: ' Even those already pretty sceptical about Johnson will find this book eye opening. Johnson was incapable of taking a decision, failed to read his papers, often ignored the detail and would tell whoever was with him whatever they wanted to hear'. He also had bad points.

Gaby Hinsliff, in the *Guardian*, found room to enter a note of regret that the authors' high-mindedness – they are more interested in failures of policymaking than gossip and scandal – means 'the book's weakness is that its charges of chaotic vacuousness are not new, while the sheer flimsiness of Johnson's programme provides such heavyweight authors with too little to get their teeth into; the overall effect is rather like sending distinguished theatre critics to cover a school nativity play'.

Less enthusiastic was Robert Harris in the *Sunday Times*, who noted that the more than 200 interviews the authors conducted 'add[ed] much useful detail', but added 'unfortunately that is the most that can be said for the book.

'For nearly 20 years,' he said, 'Anthony Seldon, a leading public school headmaster, has produced a series of magisterial end-of-term reports on recent prime ministers', and 'finds pupil Johnson an affront to the traditions of the school, rather as if Flashman had been appointed head boy'.

Martin Amis

Memories of Martin by his long-standing friend and publisher Dan Frankln

From almost the moment I was first aware that there were different publishers, with lists of different character, and therefore started looking at the colophons on the books on the library shelf, I recognized that Jonathan Cape was the best. It was the one whose taste I trusted even if I hadn't heard of the author.

I went into publishing in 1970. Thereafter, every time a job at Cape came up, I wrote to Tom Maschler, the managing director, and three times I was interviewed in his huge room in Bedford Square.

By now, Maschler had created what was probably the most exciting literary list in the world: Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Thomas Pynchon, Tom Wolfe, Bruce Chatwin, Salman Rushdie and … Martin Amis.

Amis, who was a few months younger than me, had written his first novel when he was 23. By 1984 and his fifth novel, *Money*, he had left everyone else behind. He was the one – the coolest, funniest writer in Britain.

In 1993, I was offered the job of publishing director at Jonathan Cape. It had taken me 23 years, but I'd made it at last.

I had only been at Cape for a few months when Pat Kavanagh, Amis's agent, rang to say that she was sending me his new novel.

Called *The Information*, it was the story of two friends, both writers, one spectacularly successful, the other, after a promising start, a failure. It was classic Amis, but not his best. My task was to acquire it from Pat, the most terrifying agent in London, for a sum that wouldn't break the bank.

I can't remember what I offered, but it seemed to have gone down okay. Pat would talk to Martin. A day went by, then another. Something was clearly wrong. Then Pat rang. Her voice sounded different. Martin had asked her to ask Cape for an advance of £500,000. When she demurred, he sacked her and he was in future going to be represented by the New York agent Andrew Wylie.

Wylie had already lured Salman Rushdie from his agent Deborah Rogers and he was causing

Amis: 'The coolest, funniest writer'

consternation at British publishers for the high advances he was demanding.

So I didn't get to meet Martin Amis. Wylie sold the book to Harper Collins. Did they pay half a million? I don't know, but within days the gossip columns were full of the news that Julian Barnes, Pat Kavanagh's husband and one of Martin's oldest friends, had sent him a fierce letter ending their friendship.

Then came the next story: Martin had told someone that he needed all that money to pay for dental work in New York. What Amis later described as an 'eisteddford of hostility' broke over him. From then on, every move that Martin made was picked over by the British press, almost aways to his detriment.

It felt as though every male writer in Britain wanted to be Martin Amis, and when they came up short, they took it out on him.

Harper Collins's publication of *The Information* was a disaster. As a marketing ploy – and counting on the book's notoriety – they decided to leave the author's name off the jacket.

> Moving, funny, brilliant about his childhood, *Experience* was nothing less than a masterpiece

He was back at Cape for his next novel, *Night Train*. Two years later came *Experience*, a memoir he had started writing after the death of his father Kingsley. It was moving, funny, brilliant about his childhood – he and his brother Philip hanging out in the King's Road – and heartbreaking about the murder of his cousin Lucy Partington by Fred West. *Experience* was nothing less than a masterpiece.

Amis never needed editing – those famous sentences were very carefully planned – and that was the case here. I just had a few queries.

He tells how Elizabeth Jane Howard's brother Colin, after being thrashed at backgammon by Martin, was so depressed that he went to bed at 6pm 'after putting a lightbulb down the wastemaster'.

As Martin describes in a footnote, I asked, 'Is putting a lightbulb down the wastemaster' slang for 'having a stiff drink'. The answer was no. It was an everyday event in the Amis/Howard household, Colin's 'most dependable pick-me-up'.

My third memory is from 2001. September 11 2001. I was working on quotes for the paperback of *The War Against Cliché*. I rang Martin in New York and asked, 'Are you happy with the quotes? I wanted the LRB on the front, but they…' He wasn't listening. 'Dan,' he said, 'two passenger jets have just crashed into the World Trade Centre…'

ALAMY

Literature

NB BY JC: A WALK THROUGH THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

JAMES CAMERON

Carcanet, 396pp, £25

People don't use the term 'causerie' much these days, but it sums up *NB*, the pithy miscellany that in 1997 first appeared on the back page of the *TLS*, and soon became the item that very many of its subscribers turned to first.

For more than 20 years, it was written by James Campbell, alias "JC", a *TLS* staffer who enjoyed 'going against the grain', like Private Eye.

Cant, of which there is, alas, no shortage in the modern literary world, really ripped his knitting. But he also enjoyed grappling with such grammatical enigmas as 'the potential of "whom" to ignite class war; the invasion of the impertinent preposition; the anxiety-provoking apostrophe', and so on.

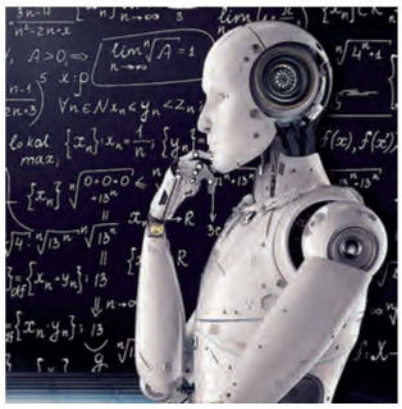
Vexatious columns: the *TLS* with the gloves off

In the *Literary Review*, Sean O'Brien described *NB*'s 'entertaining and vexatious' column as 'the *TLS* with its gloves off.' Dwight Garner's review in the *New York Times* was headed 'Columns That Scrutinized, and Skewered, the Literary World'.

Not only did NB distrust 'identity politics', said Garner, 'he distrusted, as well, the culture of cancellation. He listed the foibles of many, many, many writers but arrived at the realization that "if you insist on judging writers by their personal behaviour, you'll be better off not reading at all.'"

But, as Henry Eliot revealed in the *Daily Telegraph*, NB could also be playful: 'One of his best running gags was the interminably unpublished *TLS Reviewer's Handbook*, which underwent continual refinement in a cavernous labyrinth below the *TLS* offices. JC transcribed excerpts – lists of banned words and stylistic preferences – received from the labyrinth's mysterious tribe of elders, who communicate through smoke signals and knocks on radiators. He received requests from hopeful purchasers of the *TLS Reviewers Handbook*, including one from the director Martin Scorsese, to whom he had to admit it was a fiction.'

Current affairs



Thorny calculations: the robots have it

QUANTUM SUPREMACY

MICHIO KAKU

Allen Lane, 352pp, £25

Michio Kaku is a Japanese-American professor of theoretical physics who has made his name outside the academy writing friendly gee-wow explainers about black holes, time travel, space exploration and other staples of science-fiction speculation. His latest book addresses quantum computing, which Kaku says has the potential to revolutionise human life even more profoundly than the first digital revolution or the invention of the printing press.

They have such vast potential, Kaku explains, because instead of calculating with 'bits' -- the binary states of a transistor, either noughts or one --they use " 'qubits', the infinite number of states of an atomic particle. (The problem so far is that quantum computers are expensive and tricky to keep running.)

The *Telegraph*'s Steven Poole was cheered by 'a rather unfashionable burst of techno-optimism', in Kaku's argument that quantum computers 'will in the future be able to help us invent novel means of capturing carbon from the atmosphere, revolutionise food production, invent better batteries, cure cancer and Alzheimer's and even prevent death'. He saluted Kaku's 'gift for splendidly pellucid explanation' in this 'vivid primer' but noted that 'as it looks into the future, the language becomes inescapably conditional'.

Neil Tweedie, in the *Times*, was likewise persuaded by the author's enthusiasm: 'The quantum computer is [...] a machine that in its ability to model the workings of the universe will leave present computers, reliant on their primitive language of 0s and 1s, in the dust.' Tweedie briefly fretted, as did Poole, about whether quantum AI might have 'a low boredom threshold when it comes to the primitive, childish creatures who were foolish enough to call it into existence' and wipe us all out, but one way and another, 'the prize is great and the race is on'.

THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM

MARTIN WOLF

(Allen Lane, 496pp, £30)

'It is not too much of a stretch to see Martin Wolf, the *FT*'s chief economic commentator, as a modern Marx," wrote Bill Emmott in (where else?) the *FT*. 'He, too, is an economist forever looking for the bigger political and social picture, as well as for the crises that may shape it. But unlike Marx, he does so without relish. And in his fine new book [...] his principal concern is with democracy rather than capitalism.'

This gloomy new book – which draws a line between the 2008 crash and culmination of Trump›s "pluto-populism",' in the January 6th Capitol riots – identifies a 'doom loop' that threatens the future of both. 'Adam Smith warned two centuries ago of "the tendency of the powerful to rig the economic and political systems against the rest of society". But each time it needs to be fought against.'

Steven Pearlstein in the *Washington Post* was also laudatory. 'Among business and financial journalists, there has never been a doubt that Martin Wolf is at the top of our heap.' In this new book Wolf develops his belief that the harmonious combination of democracy and capitalism has built 'the most prosperous, free and happy societies the world has ever known', but issues a warning: 'crony capitalism and repressive regimes are "undermining the social trust essential for the success of capitalism and democracy" and risk democracy perishing altogether'.

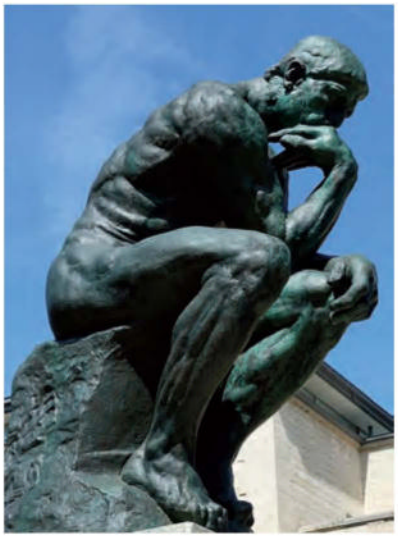
The *LRB*'s David Runciman characterised Wolf's view of capitalism and democracy as 'like an old married couple: both partners a necessary restraining influence on the other'. In seeking a 'Goldilocks' solution – the return of moderation – Wolf was on the right track, but the problem is 'chicken-and-egg'.

HOW TO THINK LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR CLEAR THINKING

JULIAN BAGGINI

Granta, 320pp, £16.99



Blue sky thinking – Rodin's 'penseur'

Julian Baggini, the non-academic journalist-philosopher, has produced a book reviewers found 'lively' and 'engaging', offering both a guide to the basics of philosophical thinking and a portrait of its practitioners, many of whom Baggini has interviewed for the *Philosophers' Magazine*.

In the *Literary Review*, Alexander Raubo usefully stripped the book down to its component parts: a chapter each on deductive and inductive logic and philosophy of language, then consideration of the qualities required in a philosopher, especially their attitude, knowing what to pay attention to and always being ready to ask questions and not assume one is right.

Raubo enjoyed Baggini's more contentious opinions, especially about fellow philosophers: scholastic theologians seemed to be a bugbear, along with those who would turn the discipline into a branch of maths. He also noted Baggini's warning against excessive specialisation of the kind rewarded by academia. Happiness was not promised for philosophers, he said, but engagement with the world and other people was.

The book worked best for Susan Flockhart in the *Herald* when it made its points using contemporary examples, as in its distillation of the gender ID debate. It's an 'important' book, she decided, for urging open-mindedness; all commentators and politicians should read it, as well as 'anyone who risks becoming too enamoured with their own rectitude'.

KNOWING WHAT WE KNOW

SIMON WINCHESTER

William Collins, 400pp,£20

As Simon Winchester explains in the prologue: 'This book seeks to tell the story of how knowledge has been passed from its vast passel of sources into the equally vast variety of human minds, and how the means of its passage have evolved over the centuries of human existence.'

In the *Sunday Times*, James McConnachie wrote: 'This is not a memoir — far from it: it's all about objective knowledge and people in history who have obsessively hoarded and enthusiastically disseminated it….It is erudite and sprightly…Fearful of what will become of knowledge in the computer age, Winchester has now written a book that is really just two covers stuffed with knowledge of knowledge-related stuff.'

Michael Dirda in the *Washington Post* explained: 'The book… covers oral storytelling, the development of writing, the emergence of libraries in antiquity, the discovery of paper by Cai Lun in China, the Gutenberg printing press, the heyday of the encyclopedia, the rise of the media, the techniques of propaganda and public relations and, finally, the digital and artificial intelligence revolutions of our own time.

'In a loose sense,' Dirda continued, 'the first half of *Knowing What We Know* supplies the background history to the overriding and more philosophical question that comes to the fore in the second half of the book: What will be the fate of humankind in a world where, increasingly, machines do our remembering, thinking and creating for us.'

'Winchester has spent his literary career bestowing on readers things they never knew, ' wrote Peter Sagal in the *New York Times*. So while 'the book may not, in the end, propound a new argument for the value of acquiring knowledge, like all of Winchester's books, it is one.'

What future for knowledge in the computer age?

THE GOD DESIRE

DAVID BADDIEL

TLS Books, 112pp, £9.99

Two years ago, David Baddiel published an angry polemic, *Jews Don't Count*, which set out to demonstrate 'how identity politics failed one particular identity', Matthew Reisz reminded us in the *Observer*. '*The God Desire* presents itself as a similarly rigorous statement of the case for atheism.' Its central thesis is that, to conquer our fear of death, we need to believe in God.

Rabbi Howard Cooper described in the *Jewish Chronicle* how it is in the face of Baddiel's 'terror at the thought of annihilation' that his God Desire kicks in. 'The desire for this kind of utilitarian God — "a superhero dad who chases off death" — is a desire that he believes exists "within the deep recesses of most humans".' Baddiel, Cooper believes, 'is writing, perhaps unknowingly, in a direct line of descent from Freud's century-old dismissal of religious belief as being rooted in infantile needs.'

Reisz wondered where Baddiel's Jewish identity came in, concluding that he is 'moved by Jewish survival over the centuries… But that the expression of their survival was their religion.' The Catholic writer Tim Stanley disliked the book, accusing Baddiel in the *Telegraph* of damning 'religion with praise that is both faint and under-researched'. Baddiel, he went on, 'typifies cynics who criticise Christianity not as it is, but as it exists in their head'.

While Reisz was impressed by Baddiel's refusal to be 'dismissive of religion', Stanley questioned why 'any publisher would bankroll so slim a volume on such an enormous subject'. 'If I had this author's certainty in a godless universe, I wouldn't waste time writing books. I might rob a bank,' was his damning conclusion.

Rabbi Cooper was bemused by what he regards as Baddiel's veneration of Christianity, accusing him of 'a lack of understanding of his own Jewish story'. For Baddiel, he said, 'God is all about death. If he allowed his intellectual curiosity fuller rein he might discover the ways in which within his own tradition God is all about life.'

Are writers undervalued?

Michael Barber bemoans literature's slim pickings

In 1962, an international writers' conference, attended by a pride of literary lions and lionesses, was held at the Edinburgh Festival. One of the last to speak was Simon Raven, who caused a mild sensation by saying he wrote primarily for money. He felt the other speakers, who included Norman Mailer, Rebecca West, Mary McCarthy and Stephen Spender, had been too coy on the subject.

Raven had a point. I once asked Eric Ambler what he and Ian Fleming used to talk about when they lunched together. 'Royalties,' he relied. Dr Johnson would have applauded.

'No one but a blockhead wrote, except for money', he famously declared (though even he sometimes wrote on spec).

So does that mean the literary world is full of blockheads? – because it now seems that only a small percentage of British writers earn more than the basic wage from their work, and some take home as little as £7K per annum.

Greedy, risk-averse publishers have been blamed for this, and so has Amazon. But writing has always been a precarious trade. 'You put your book to sea in a sieve,' said Muriel Spark. Addressing the problem in his manifesto, *Enemies of Promise*, Cyril Connolly said that writers needed a private income (his came from his wealthy American wife). Otherwise they would waste their time making ends meet in jobs like journalism or copywriting.

A few years before, Virginia Woolf had declared that 'intellectual freedom depends upon material things.' As well as 'a room of her own', a woman needed money in order to write.

She thought at least £500 a year, a large sum then, from whatever source, was the bottom line.

Recalling the early 1970s, before he hit the jackpot with *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Paul Theroux wrote recently that no writers he then knew had any money and publishing was still 'the cottage industry it had always been', run by 'tweedy, literature-loving, mostly older men.'

Instead of being paid decent advances, writers were kept onside with long boozy lunches and, if they did some reviewing, invitations to lavish book launches.

Reviewing was, as Theroux said, 'appallingly paid', but you could flog your review copies for half the published price in cash, at Gastons, the public library suppliers in Chancery Lane. There was no shame in this. I recall queueing up there behind A.J.P. Taylor and Anthony Burgess, who said he would traipse up from deepest Sussex every week with two suitcases full of books.

Gustave Flaubert and Mary McCarthy

Gastons closed years ago. But for a lucky few things looked up in the 1980s, when literary agents began to throw their weight around. Writing suddenly became 'sexy', the adjective used by Julian Barnes to describe the publicity wave he and coevals of his like Ian McEwan rode, thanks to the excitement generated by prizes like the Booker and promotions like Granta magazine's inaugural Best of British Young Novelists.

But as Martin Amis, another of Granta's Young Novelists, later cautioned, 'Writing is a sedentary, carpet-slippers, self-inspecting, nose-picking, arse-scratching kind of job, just you in your study and there is absolutely no way round that.' Little wonder that it did not appear sexy for long.

Writers were kept onside with long boozy lunches and lavish launches

Meanwhile much of the 'cottage industry' invoked by Theroux had been taken over by conglomerates and the accountants to whom they were in thrall.

It became inconceivable that a publisher would keep faith with a loss-making author for twenty years, as happened with Heinemann and Graham Greene.

Or that a publisher would pay a spendthrift author a weekly retainer on condition that he live at least 50 miles from London, as Anthony Blond did with Simon Raven.

But, for some writers, fame, rather than money, is the spur. George Orwell might insist that every word he wrote was to further the cause of democratic socialism.

But in his essay, *Why I Write*, he was also honest enough to admit that 'Sheer egotism. Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death …' was also a very strong motive. This, I believe, is one of the reasons why, despite the meagre rewards so many of them can expect, writers will continue to write.

Another reason was put to me many years ago by John Fowles, who described himself as 'a compulsive storyteller – a kind of victim almost, in that I cannot not write.'

After coming down from Oxford, he spent years accumulating masses of 'unpublishable material' before *The Collector* was accepted.

Flaubert put it more succinctly. Writing, he said, 'is an itch that I scratch.' This doesn't mean that in time you'll produce another *Madame Bovary* or *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, but if the urge is there, surrender to it.

But as I write another cloud has appeared on the literary horizon in the shape of AI. Given that machines don't have emotions, could they really produce Art? Probably not.

But who's to say what is Art and what isn't? There is no way of proving that one bwook is better than another. And what algorithms can do very well is imitate. Writers should watch their backs.

The Met Museum: a strange universe

ALL THE BEAUTY IN THE WORLD

PATRICK BRINGLEY

Bodley Head, 240pp, £20)

Patrick Bringley was working in the events department of the *New Yorker* when his brother died. Bringley found he 'badly wanted to stand still a while.' He gave up his job and went to join New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art as a guard. He spent a decade wearing the Met's regulation blue suit and clip-on tie, developing calves of iron from standing still amid the bustle of a busy museum. In the *Telegraph*, Alex Diggins loved his 'gentle mix of memoir and criticism.'

The Met, according to Waldemar Januszczak reviewing the book in the *Sunday Times*, is a weird place to work. 'When it comes to separations, *Upstairs, Downstairs* has nothing on the Met. Upstairs live the curators, who rarely make an appearance in the galleries, never work on Saturdays and pop down only occasionally to admire the captions they have written for the exhibits.'

Diggins found Bringley 'a marvellous guide to this strange hermetic universe. There's a wonderful section where he takes readers through a typical start to his day, beetling between the Museum's restricted areas and its public galleries: a paseo with all the bustle and snap of a Wes Anderson skit.'

The *Kirkus* reviewer found some of Bringley's responses to artworks 'border on the saccharine' and thought him insufficiently reverent to the institution of the Met. But Januszczak was pretty impressed. 'All this is told with real literary gusto and an impressive command of pace and shape.'

DON'T THINK, DEAR

ON LOVING AND LEAVING BALLET

ALICE ROBB

Oneworld, 304pp, £16.99

Alice Robb had always been obsessed with ballet. And on her third attempt at the age of nine she won a place at the School of American Ballet, feeder school for New York City Ballet.

Aged 11, she wrote in her diary: 'It is my dream to become a ballerina. I love ballet.' However, her dream 'of turning professional unravelled when she reached puberty', explained Fiona Sturges in the Guardian. 'Her hips widened, she grew tall and her teachers began to ignore her in class. She started bunking off lessons and, in 2004, was finally expelled. Robb subsequently finished high school, went to college and embarked on a successful career as a science writer and journalist. But, she notes: "I couldn't unlearn the values of ballet."'

'*Don't Think, Dear* – the title is a saying of Balanchine's – is part memoir, part investigation, and enthralling whether or not you have any knowledge of ballet,' wrote Pippa Bailey in the *New Statesman*. 'Such is [Balanchine's] hold over American ballet that Robb wonders if she spent her adolescence "in thrall to a deceased cult leader".... One of his soloists, Gelsey Kirkland, recalled him rapping his knuckles on her ribs, saying: "Must see the bones," though she weighed less than 100 pounds.'

Debra Craine in the *Times* described Robb's writing style as 'scattershot at times, as she jumps from one idea to another and then back again, but she brings a welcome academic rigour to the subject, clearly born of deeply held emotions. It's certainly no love letter. Robb is unsparing in her condemnation of ballet's body-shaming and infantilising of women.'

LEAD SISTER

THE STORY OF KAREN CARPENTER

LUCY O'BRIEN

Nine Eight Books, 358pp, £22

O'Brien's book recounts the shocking tragedy behind what John Aizlewood in the *i* called 'one of the indisputably great 20th-century voices' – the female half of sister/brother band the Carpenters who died from anorexia aged just 32 in 1983.

She identifies many factors that led to Karen's descent into psychological turmoil: domestic upheaval aged 13 when the family move from Connecticut to the LA suburbs; forced deference to her brother, Richard, regarded as the family genius; a mother who could not bring herself to say 'I love you'; and not being fully recognised for her precocious skill as a drummer.

O'Brien herself wrote in the *Guardian*: 'As the hits racked up, Karen was pressured by her brother and A&M to forgo the drums for a role as decorative frontwoman. Exposed and self-conscious, Karen began a stringent diet and exercise regime.'

The result: 'In September 1982 she was admitted to intensive care, weighing just 77lb. After gaining a little weight, she discharged herself but died soon after of heart failure.'

'While Richard battled Quaalude addiction and its mood swings in private, Karen's fight with the barely discussed condition of anorexia nervosa was much harder to disguise.'

'Regarding Karen's illness, O'Brien is empathetic in tone but unsparing in detail,' said Aizlewood. 'In an era where understanding of eating disorders was primitive and Agnes suggested her daughter's illness was merely "dieting gone too far", Karen was a victim once more, this time to her body dysmorphia.

'Karen emerges as a smart but naive woman enslaved by both her disease and the expectations of those around her. She should have been treated better: Lead Sister treats her well indeed.'

Karen Carpenter: a 'born' pop singer

THE LOST ALBUM OF THE BEATLES

WHAT IF THE BEATLES HADN'T SPLIT UP?

DANIEL RACHEL

Octopus, 368pp, £10.99

This is very much a book of two halves. The first 140 pages take us through the last days of the Beatles (the not-so-fairytale ending that most of us of a certain age are all too familiar with).

'The counterfactual second half of the book,' wrote David Hepworth in the *Guardian*, 'looks at the album that could arguably have followed, had they acted upon their plan to divide up the songwriting chores equally. It proposes a double album made up of songs that appeared on their early solo records. That means it contains everything from John's *Jealous Guy* and George's *My Sweet Lord* to Paul's *Maybe I'm Amazed* and even Ringo's *It Don't Come Easy*.'

The conceit is that each Beatle would have one side of an LP, six tracks – but recorded with the band rather than as solo performances backed by other musicians.

It's not as bonkers an idea as it might sound... since quite a few of the songs released on the Fab Four's early solo albums had been Beatles works in progress, scuppered only by the band's demise. Chris Hawkins of BBC 6 Music called the book 'a fantastical journey through what might have been... exciting and compelling'.

Hepworth was more down to earth: '[It] makes excellent stimulus material for a night down the pub with middle-aged Beatles fans who can't help wondering about this. We who were there know that in reality it wouldn't have been all jam.'

And he made one vital point: 'The reason the Beatles' reputation stands head and shoulders above everybody else's is precisely because they didn't release the lost album.'

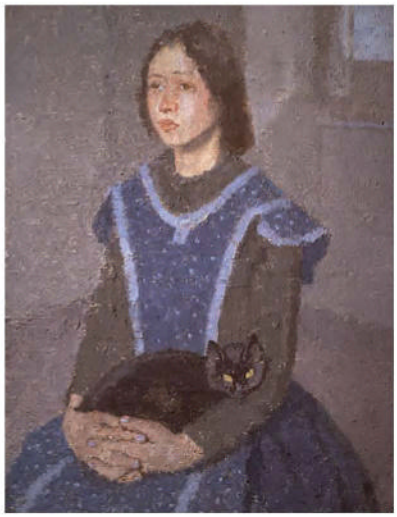
GWEN JOHN

ART AND LIFE

ALICIA FOSTER

Thames & Hudson, 272pp, £30

Described by Alastair Sooke in the Telegraph as a 'brisk, beautifully illustrated biography', the book coincides with the new, corrective



Haunting: Gwen John's *Girl with a Cat*

exhibition of Gwen John's work, curated by Alicia Foster at Chichester.

'This is a show with a mission to surprise, to jump us out of our old preconceptions,' Laura Cumming wrote in the *Observer*, while praising the book as 'exemplary in its social and art historical research'. 'Gwen John is no longer to be seen as a lonely recluse, fragile, withdrawn and pale as her painting,' she continued.

While acknowledging that John has been marginalised in the past, Sooke felt that Foster takes the 'victimhood' too far: 'Why press her compelling idiosyncrasy into a contemporary mould of fourth-wave feminism, and make her biography conform with the current mania for collectivism?'

The book is the story of 'connections, not isolation'. As Sarah Watling noted in the *Literary Review*, it is 'a welcome critical study of her work that acknowledges her ambition and places the artist within the various environments that inspired, shaped and stimulated her.'

For too long, Foster argues, Gwen John has been 'diminished', overshadowed by her flamboyant artist brother Augustus and her lover, the sculptor Rodin.

The book 'dismantles the myth of John as a timid recluse,' Laura Gascoigne wrote in the *Spectator*, 'John was a woman in full charge of her destiny.'

Mark Hudson in the *Independent* admitted that 'John emerges ... as a more interesting and more radical artist than I'd imagined.'

Just because John is known for her quiet interiors does not mean she was not gregarious.

'For a woman artist working in the early 20th century, it represented radical freedom — a room of one's own — and John's commitment to an unconventional, independent modern life,' Hettie Judah proclaimed in the *i*.

Or, as Rachel Spence put it in the *Financial Times*, 'only a woman could have chronicled such an ecstatic affair with a room of her own.'

SONG AND SELF

IAN BOSTRIDGE

Faber, 128pp, £14.99

The tenor Ian Bostridge, born in 1964, is well known for his performances as an opera and lieder singer. He became a full-time singer in 1995, aged 30, having taught political theory and 18th-century British history at Oxford. He has given recitals around the world and sung at most major opera houses. A previous book, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*, won the Duff Cooper prize for non-fiction in 2015 plus numerous literary awards in France — a polymath indeed.

Song & Self is a collection of essays, written during lockdown, 'exploring the relationship between self and singer, silence and song', explained Alexandra Coghlan in the *Spectator*. 'When Bostridge forgets he's an academic and just writes, it's magic. His ability not only to sing this vast repertoire (from Monteverdi to Benjamin Britten, by way of Schumann and Ravel) but also to stand back and unpick the hows and whys of performance — translating his instinctive reactions and resistances into fully fleshed-out arguments, in a gloriously broad frame of cultural reference — is singular.'

Although he reckoned some knowledge of musicology and world history is assumed, Barry Zaslow (in the *Library Journal*) thought the author's engaging style and the universality of the subject matter would have widespread appeal and warmly recommended the book.

Coghlan concluded that *Song & Self* is at its best when 'it tinkers around inside the engine, and lends the reader some critical tools.Who wouldn't rather join a master-craftsman in his workshop, shadow him at his art and eavesdrop on his inner monologue than hear it analysed at arm's length in the lecture hall?'

Lawrence Bogle

STEEPLE CHASING
AROUND BRITAIN BY CHURCH

PETER ROSS

Headline, 400pp, £22

Writing in the *TLS*, Ysenda Maxtone Graham described how it was that 'lockdown galvanised Peter Ross into writing his latest work of non-fiction', a time during which he was filled with longing to 'visit churches and other holy sites in Britain, and to meet the people attached to them'.

Anyone who enjoyed his previous book, *A Tomb with a View*, 'about the hidden joys and beauties of Britain's cemeteries will hear and remember his hushed, gentle, poetic Scottish voice,' she continued, calling it a 'lovely, lyrical, whimsical, elegiac journey round the holy buildings and sites of Britain'. 'But how to shape a church-crawling book like this?', she asked; he is 'thematic and physical, giving his chapters sturdy, monosyllabic titles such as "Steel", "Fire", "Paint" and "Bone".'

'Some of the churches Ross visits

> A longing to visit churches and holy sites in Britain

are the superstars,' wrote Stuart Kelly in the *Scotsman*: 'St Paul's Cathedral or the infamous modernist ruin of St Peter's Seminary, while some are hidden away, but with fabulous stories, such as St Peter and St Paul's in Chaldon with its Bosch-like wall painting.' In terms of style, he points to a 'clue in the reference to W.G. Sebald. They are both melancholic enthusiasts, seekers for the numinous in a ruined world'.

Restored steeple, Abney Park chapel

Miranda Seymour in the *FT* was of the view that Ross shared with that 'prince of church-crawlers, the poet John Betjeman', the 'delightful quality' of empathy. 'Blessed with Betjeman's gift for striking up friendships with eccentric characters', Ross used these 'seemingly random encounters to reveal some of the stories attached to the glorious religious sites which he brings to life'.

Maxtone Graham was particularly taken with the picture Ross built up of this 'quiet, sacred world of Britain, ploughing on, short of money, often kept going by heroic volunteers', while both Kelly and Seymour agreed that this was a book for believers and sceptics alike, with Kelly alluding to the 'curious, steadfast passion' British people feel for the churches that so few of them now attend.

THE WOMEN WHO SAVED THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

MATTHEW KELLY

Yale University Press, 400pp, £20

Kelly, who is Professor of Modern History at Northumbria University, profiles four women in particular: Octavia Hill was co-founder of the National Trust, children's writer Beatrix Potter helped preserve the grazing uplands of the Lake District, Sylvia Sayer was chair of the Dartmoor Preservation Association from 1951 to 1973, and Pauline Dower was a founding member of the National Parks Commission in 1949 and became its deputy chair in 1958.

'As Kelly demonstrates, the achievements of these four preservationists deserve to be remembered and indeed celebrated,' wrote P.D. Smith in the *Guardian*.

'All of them shared a commitment to traditional approaches to farming, such as upland grazing, but they were not nature conservationists... Though they all had privileged upbringings, each had to confront gender stereotypes; being the only woman in the room "could be isolating but it also gave the four licence to challenge existing mores and assumptions"...

Kelly's book is rich with insights into their motivations. Although at times the level of detail about land deals and committees makes for a rather dry read, an important part of Kelly's argument is that the activism of these women involved precisely this kind of painstaking work to create and change legal structures, so that future generations could enjoy the rights they do today. As well as exploring their lives and activism, Kelly guides the reader through the landscapes that they fought to preserve.'

Pauline Dower: National Parks heroine

Kelly describes these women as having saved the English countryside, wrote Camilla Swift in her *Spectator* review, 'which is perhaps a bit of a stretch, though it's true that individually they fought tooth and nail to preserve vast tracts of it. Their lives spanned the past two centuries and they were all, as Theresa May would have it, "bloody difficult women", each with a driving force and often a particular region that concerned them.'

England

THE FULL ENGLISH
A JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF ITS COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

STUART MACONIE

HarperNorth, 368pp, £20

J B Priestley did it first. Three years later George Orwell had another go at the idea and now, 90 years later, Stuart Maconie, *BBC Radio 6* DJ, has written up his own version of a 'Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought'. (These are J B Priestley's words to describe his endeavour as he travelled his way round the counties of England.).

For Maconie, Priestley's *English Journey* has become a key text in understanding England.

He felt it had become 'ripe for a proper revisit.' So he hops on a Megabus to Southampton, where Priestley began his journey, and follows him to Bristol, Swindon, the Cotswolds (far too full of pink corduroy-trousered men), the West Midlands, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Tyne and Tees, Durham, Lincoln and Norwich.

In 2022, Maconie wrote, 'the English are still as beautiful, exasperating, passionate, solid, divided, combative, warm, humane and funny as ever.

But post-Brexit, post-pandemic, and in the midst of new and endless crises, this seemed to be the perfect moment to pack notebook, check train times and go and see what had changed, and what had stayed the same.'

Victoria Segal, in the *Sunday Times*, enjoyed the carefully nuanced observations of the author, 'Part of the writer and broadcaster's persona is that of a slightly grumpy old flâneur,' she wrote, yet this travelogue is packed with 'cosy observational comedy and whimsical digression, … Maconie is a funny, astute writer, alert to the absurd.' His tone is conversational and 'despite his enthusiasm for apparently unpromising locations, Maconie's journey is rarely sentimental.'

Stuart Maconie 'is observant and witty, veering from caustic indignation to delight in eccentricities,' wrote Christina Hardyment in the *Times*. He 'knows his musical and literary onions well and has form in writing English travelogues with snappy titles.'

Nature

Under threat: Mrs Tiggiwinkle

GHOSTS IN THE HEDGEROW
A HEDGEHOG WHODUNNIT

TOM MOORHOUSE

Doubleday, 272pp, £16.99

In 2016 hedgehogs were voted Britain's favourite mammal. Yet since the new millenium the total hedgehog population is estimated to have halved, and now less than one million remain. Tom Moorhouse asks, is it the motorist, the farmer, the badger or maybe even the gardener who is the villain? As in an Agatha Christie novel Moorhouse gathers all the suspects together, and Poirot-like analyses the motives and consequences of all their actions.

He asks, do we know the contributions of these different factors to the population decline? And finally of course, how can the hedgehog be saved? Mark Avery, in his nature blog appreciated it, 'This book is written wittily as a whodunnit trying to track down the responsible party and looking at the evidence. That's a clever way to tackle the issue, and generally it works and makes the book a different and gripping read.'

Hana Ketley, writing for the *Natural History Book Service*, agreed: 'Throughout the book, Moorhouse takes these complicated factors and picks them apart, examining the reliability of the data and challenging baseless assumptions. He discusses the impact of hedgerow removal in the 1930s and 40s, the emerging threat of automatic lawnmowers, the problem of enclosed gardens and the reluctance of landowners to cut holes into fences for "hedgehog highways".'

Christopher Hart in the *Sunday Times* felt that, "Ghosts in the Hedgerow tries to offer some good cheer to do with creating log piles and hedgehog corridors, as well as some fun facts.' But he emphasised Moorhouse's sense of urgency for action: 'The lack of wildlife that I, born in the latter half of the 20th century, experience as "normal" would be regarded as a horrific aberration by anyone living in the preceding 99.99 per cent of human history.'

CHICKEN BOY
MY LIFE WITH HENS

ARTHUR PARKINSON

Particular Books, 240pp, £22

Arthur Parkinson, gardener, Instagram star and 'henfluencer' has written, according to Emma Beddington in the *Observer*, a 'love letter' to the chickens in his life.

It includes paeans to several older women, including his grandmothers who encouraged the young Arthur, who had difficulties in school, to love growing plants and cultivating hens

The Duchess of Devonshire, a fellow hen-lover in nearby Chatsworth, also plays a prominent role in the story: she took him up and he adored her.

'To me', wrote Parkinson in the *Telegraph*, 'she was just a beautiful, mesmerising queen of chickens.'

A 'henfluencer's' love letter to the chickens in his life

The Daily Mail's Mark Mason was seduced despite himself. 'The breed names read like poetry. There's the Barbu d'Uccle and the Vorwerk, the Silver Spangled Hamburg and the Legbar. Arthur has a Blue Pekin called Claudia (after Ms Winkleman, "due to her similar bravado and glamour"), while "the Marans can be quite a lazy layer". You'll know the Silkie because it's so broody it'll sometimes try sitting on windfall apples.' Mason concluded: 'I can't decide which I loved more – the bits about him or the bits about the chickens.' In the *Sunday Times*, food writer Bee Wilson also found Chicken Boy 'poetic'. And 'a bit strange, in a good way.' As well as being a 'brilliantly practical how-to manual for looking after chickens, punctuated with pleasingly detailed illustrations of rare breed hens by Parkinson, it's a memoir of growing up obsessed with them.'

HAGS
THE DEMONISATION OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN

VICTORIA SMITH

Fleet, 368pp, £20

'Dear, problematic' Germaine Greer

Smith has in her sights 'those people who, even as they loudly proclaim their righteous politics, are apt to label older women as Karens and Terfs', wrote Rachel Cooke in the *Guardian*, people 'who either roundly ignore or demonise the views of such women, however well-founded or based in experience'.

Hags 'brilliantly and unrelentingly exposes all the weasel ways in which ageist misogyny enables regressive beliefs to be recast as progressive. In my eyes, it's a future classic, up there with Joan Smith's *Misogynies* and Susan Faludi's *Backlash*.'

Smith's 'eloquent, clever and devastating' book describes the 'strange modern witch-hunt' against older women, wrote Janice Turner in the *Times*, but also 'traces the hatred and fear of the middle-aged woman back through history'. Turner praised its 'lively erudition. Smith, she said, 'draws on the second-wave feminists I read as a student: Dale Spender, Andrea Dworkin, Adrienne Rich, Sheila Jeffreys and dear problematic Germaine Greer. All have fallen from fashion for no good reason except that, while every other social justice movement cherishes its elders, feminism cries wrong-think and burns them as hags. Smith deftly reconnects these snipped intellectual threads.'

This book offers 'a spirited and enjoyable reworking of a familiar subject – the devaluing of older women,' wrote Susan Flockhart in the *Herald* (Scotland).

'Yet, aside from a few statistics on the comparative earning power of older males and females and the shortage of middle-aged women in the public eye, Smith presents little scientific evidence to support her thesis, favouring instead a series of anecdotal comments gleaned from social media posts or classic texts by feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem, Andrea Dworkin and Naomi Wolf, as well as conversations with contemporary women. All the same, *Hags* is a cracking read. Bubbling with wicked wit, it is sure to raise hackles as well as cackles.'

FRIENDAHOLIC
CONFESSIONS OF A FRIENDSHIP ADDICT

ELIZABETH DAY

Fourth Estate, 416pp, £16.99

'Until recently Elizabeth Day wasn't simply passionate about friendship, she was addicted to it,' wrote Kathryn Hughes in the *Guardian*, confessing that she too was a 'recovering friendaholic', and therefore found it 'essential reading'. Charlotte Stroud in the *New Statesman* pointed out that 'emotional exhibitionism is now a lucrative business', and that the book is an offshoot of Day's podcast series *Best Friend Therapy*. That it will be a commercial success is a 'foregone conclusion' as 'Many people will find in Day's relatable prose an everywoman figure who, like them, has survived the harrowing experience of being ghosted by a friend'.

Stroud confessed that it was a book she 'loved to hate'. For much of it, she felt 'like [she] was rubbernecking a car crash, unable to tear [her] head away from the scene of the disaster'. *Friendaholic* 'finally made me understand the Cult of Day', wrote Charlotte Ivers in the *Sunday Times*. 'To see the level of scrutiny usually reserved for romance applied to friendship feels striking and almost disorientating.'

Lilly Subotin in the *Daily Mail* related how Day, who had been bullied at school, realised as she got older that she was 'great at making friends' and 'set out to collect as many as possible'. But she found, to her cost, that having too many can have a negative impact on one's mental health. The perfect number is apparently four to five, and a bit of 'natural pruning' is therefore 'healthy and necessary', wrote Hughes, going on to describe how Day even recommends sending potential friends 'the equivalent of a pre-nup before agreeing to a first coffee date'. Subotin concluded that Day's book is 'perceptive, compassionate and filled with relatable insights', while Stroud carped that the 'most galling thing about it was the banality of its advice'. She couldn't think of 'any reader who would be glad to wade through 400 pages of Day's anecdotes to be told that', surprise, surprise, it is "quality not quantity" that counts.'

> A cracking read, *Hags* is sure to raise hackles as well as cackles

FEMINISM AGAINST PROGRESS

MARY HARRINGTON

Forum, 224pp, £16.99

Have women been sold a pup in the name of 'progress'? Mary Harrington thinks so. According to Janice Turner in the *New Statesman*: 'Her central thesis is that the liberal shibboleth of humanity being on a perpetual up-escalator towards progress – or at least "progress" that benefits women – is a lie. In pursuing a freedom from our embodied selves and in "the replacement of relationships by individual desires" we end up broken into constituent parts: "Meat Lego",

Girl power: Diana the huntress

which capitalism surges in to exploit. The results are commercial surrogacy, porn culture, soulless hook-ups, plastic surgery and gender reassignment treatments, a low birth rate, and a universal, atomised loneliness.'

Suzanne Moore in the *Telegraph* was among many who drew a line at the book's solutions ('I threw the book against the wall') but loved the exhilarating ride of ideas. 'This is one of most challenging, inspiring and often irritating books I have read in a long time. Harrington is so annoyingly brilliant; she makes you rethink everything. That is progress all right.'

Charles Haywood in the journal *IM-1776* was another fan. 'Harrington's aim is not mere complaint. Rather it is to tell us that both women and men can truly flourish, even in this age of liquid modernity, by building a new system — one informed by the wisdom, not of the 1950s, but of the pre-industrial age.'

In *Quillette*, Marilyn Simon was less keen on the return to thepast. 'Harrington's solution moves too far in the other direction, becoming regressive rather than reactionary. Her call to rewild women's bodies is a pill I can try to swallow, but it only goes half of the way down.'

The book even provoked a heated discussion on *Mumsnet* with one poster stating: 'It's a critique of capitalism as much as one of gender politics, and how the transactional values of capitalism and the market have infiltrated our personal, emotional, sexual and familial lives. I'm finding it very interesting.'

WOMEN WITHOUT KIDS

RUBY WARRINGTON

Orion Spring, 240pp, £16.99)

Ruby Warrington, now 47 and a former editor of the *Sunday Times* style supplement, now lives in Miami. According to Kate Ng in the *Independent*, both Warrington and her husband 'identify as being "childless by choice".'

Warrington's book is about and for people (mostly women) like her: who have simply decided not to have children. Ashley Holstrom of *Foreword Reviews* describes the book as a 'feminist exploration of being child-free, treating that decision as one of empowerment.'

Maternity is not for every woman

As Warrington herself put it: 'I was also at a stage in my personal development where I felt ready to unpack my deeper "whys" for not having children—the better to understand myself and my path.

'Zooming out, I realised that these "whys" were inextricably bound to the society, culture, economy, and environment that had been the backdrop to my becoming a woman, and that these same factors had influenced all of our decisions about our procreative potential, leading to the drop off in the birth rate globally.

'As such, the project took a more anthropological turn, the question I seek to answer with the book going from: "why did I not want kids?" to "why have WE stopped having kids?"'

Marianne Power reviewed it in the *Times* and concluded: 'At times, the writing felt cumbersome and I couldn't quite follow the connections she was making, but ultimately it didn't matter. By the end, I felt informed and blessed to live in a time when women can shape their lives in a way that my mother's and her mother's generations could not.'

GOOD GIRLS

A STORY AND STUDY OF ANOREXIA

HADLEY FREEMAN

4th Estate, 288pp, £16.99

Hadley Freeman's unflinching account of the two decades in which her life was dominated by anorexia nervosa is, wrote Sarah Haight in the *TLS*,'wry and diligently researched', a harrowing exploration of why a disease so 'medically and culturally visible should have such a poor rate of recovery and be so persistently misunderstood.'

In the *Guardian*, Kate Kellaway found a 'curious sense of separation between the suffering younger self and the aloof older self, but Freeman is a brave, illuminating and meticulous reporter and uses her experience wisely.'

Suzanne Sullivan in the *Times*, praised a 'frank and insightful' depiction of a disease that for Freeman came from a 'need to be perfect and a horror of growing up. It is an erasure of all womanly parts.'

A need to be perfect and a horror of growing up

Several reviewers concluded that Freeman deeply explores questions but does not (cannot?) answer them. 'The clues she brings to the surface are prefaced by disclaimers,' observed Haight. Emma Seaber in the *Telegraph* was more critical. 'Freeman follows a well-trodden path to an intellectual dead-end. The book contains numerous errors. Some are trivial; others gross distortions.

At one point, Freeman claims that 10 per cent of anorexics and 45 per cent of bulimics are alcoholics, citing a research paper that does not support this.'

But Seaber conceded that the book captures the 'existential wasteland' of life with anorexia.

Lawrence Bogle

Sally Morris selects the best poolside novels

THE THREE GRACES

AMANDA CRAIG

Abacus, 416pp, £18.99

Canova's Three Graces: reborn in Italy

The Tuscan countryside plays host to a wry examination of generational, political and national disparities in Amanda Craig's latest state-of-the nation satire. Three white, wealthy, octogenarian women friends retired to Italy await the arrival of relatives attending the marriage of one character's grandson to his 'influencer' fiancée. Cue crises of age vs youth, liberalism vs racism, love vs pragmatism, past vs present. It skewers with pinpoint accuracy but retains an optimistic belief in human connection.

TRESPASSES

LOUISE KENNEDY

Bloomsbury, 320pp, £8.99

The backdrop of the Northern Ireland Troubles may seem well-mined territory for contemporary novelists, but Kennedy's award-winning debut goes beyond the familiar to create something deeply moving and surprising. Young Catholic schoolteacher Cushla begins a passionate affair with older, married, Protestant lawyer Michael, who defends young Catholic boys, but it's in the detail of everyday trauma and the effect of love and kindness on one of Cushla's pupils that raises this above the rest of the pack.

THE GUEST

EMMA CLINE

Chatto & Windus, 304pp, £18.99

A sultry dissection of wealth, privilege and the commodification of sex could easily descend into cliché but Cline's control of her material keeps everyone on edge in this psycho-thriller. Alex, 22, an escort on the run, hooks up with wealthy Simon, 50, who invites her to spend August with him at his summer house on Long Island. There she commits an embarrassing faux pas and is ordered back home. Instead, Alex spends a week drifting and grifting, hoping to worm her way back into favour as the odds stack against her.

THE HOUSE OF DOORS

TAN TWAN ENG

Canongate, 320pp, £20

In Malaysia, 1911, a woman shoots dead a man visiting her house – a crime that inspired *The Letter*, a short story by W. Somerset Maugham. In this complex novel, Maugham is a character who visits friends in Penang in 1921, where he is told about the trial by his unhappy host, Lesley. This triggers a cascade of long-hidden secrets, woven stories, culture clashes and challenged memories. All written in highly descriptive prose - echoing Maugham - it's as much about how and why writers write as about infidelity, lies and empire.

THE STORY OF THE FOREST

LINDA GRANT

Virago, 288pp, £18.99

The history of a Jewish family is traced from Latvia via Liverpool to London in this multi-generational novel. In 1913, fourteen-year-old Mina stumbles across drunken Bolshevik men in a forest, a foreshadowing that leads her and her brother to sail for America, although they wind up in Liverpool. Mina's encounter is retold so often it enters into folklore as the Jewish diaspora unspools through the war and Mina's daughter reinvents herself in 1940s Soho. Bristling with life, as random moments clash with historical events.

Forest memories that shape lives

THE WRITING SCHOOL

MIRANDA FRANCE

Corsair, 224pp, £18.99

Miranda France blends memoir and fiction in this entertaining and thought-provoking story of a creative writing teacher running a residential course in a remote valley, which France has done. There's a curious mix of students – Peter tries to blackmail her by pointing out errors in her book on Spain - but she is haunted, unexpectedly, by a ghost of her own; the suicide of her brother as a teenager. How this affects her writing leads to wider reflection on life imitating art and how memories resurface. Funny and warm.

WHIPS

CLEO WATSON

Corsair, 400pp, £20

Cleo Watson was Boris Johnson's aide throughout the pandemic, a role she described as being his 'nanny', so there's no shortage of insider knowledge in this bonkbusting romp around the corridors of Westminster. Malevolent press officers, sexually incontinent MPS, flatulent dogs... When three young women sharing a flat all become involved in the male-dominated world of government, they discover that the people really holding the whip hand are women and that they exercise that power in scandalous ways.

THE CHOICE

MICHAEL ARDITTI

Arcadia, 416pp, £18.99

Contemporary moral debate underpins this clever, provocative novel that asks whether art can be separate from the artist. In the 1980s, Clarissa Phipps, unable to join the priesthood, interviews Seward Wemlock, a church artist, for the BBC. Fast forward thirty years and she's now rector of that same Church where she discovers the chief bellringer, her best friend's husband, is molesting a 15-year-old boy. She does the 'right' thing, but reflects on the rumours she ignored years ago that Wemlock was an abuser of his teenage models.

Summer crime

Choice crime hand-picked by Karen Robinson

At the current rate, by the end of the decade there will be more Philip Marlowe tribute thrillers than the seven Raymond Chandler actually wrote himself. The latest author to be handed the challenge is an inspired choice by the Chandler estate: Denise Mina's **The Second Murderer** (Vintage, 256pp, £18.99) gives us the LA gumshoe at the height of his powers. There are sizzling one-liners, hard-boiled philosophy via the bottom of a bottle of rye and a seen-it-all humanity that expands on the original's as the plot careers into the secretive gay world of 1940s California.

Mark Billingham has relocated to Blackpool for **The Last Dance** (Sphere, 400pp, £22), the first in a series featuring a new detective. Declan Miller is traumatised: his wife has just met her death at the hands of a yet-to-be identified assailant among the tawdry resort's criminal classes. The sometimes brooding, sometimes wisecracking widower attempts to assuage his grief by flouting his superiors - so far, so normal for a maverick-cop hero - but also by enthusiastic participation in ballroom dancing, a pleasingly original twist. Reliable crime-fiction veteran Billingham, delivers gentle laughs and darker emotions in a pacey plot shaped by its unique location.

Readers first encountered Ray Carney, furniture shop proprietor and part-time fence, in Colson Whitehead's **Harlem Shuffle**, set in the African-American heartland of New York in the 50s and 60s. Now he's back, older but not quite wise enough, in **Crook Manifesto** (Fleet, £20). Three linked stories span1970s street life -a world of explosive violence, pervasive fear and the slim chance of redemption. There's spikey humour and perceptive honesty from the get-go as a bent cop lures Carney back into the criminal life he has renounced, with jewel-heisting Malcolm X-inspired black liberation activists upping the ante.

Short stories are the perfect opportunity to explore an idea or a character that wouldn't sustain a full-length book. *In Best Crime Stories of the Year Volume 2*, edited by Sara Paretsky (Head of Zeus, 560pp,£20) Susan Frith's Better Austens conjures a disturbing dystopia: the US is an 'execution economy' - and it's mothers who do the executing. The 21 stories include polished gems by big names Michael Connelly and Jo Nesbo, and plenty of smart one-act entertainments by American writers better known in their own country.

Original twist: a dancing detective

In Peter May's **A Winter Grave** (riverrun, 368pp, £22), it's 2051, and climate chaos has plunged Scotland into even worse weather than usual: ice storms, perma-floods, freezing temperatures. That the country is now independent, and back in the EU, doesn't seem to help much. Baffled by self-flying helicopter drones and other futuristic gizmos, ageing detective Cameron Brodie heads to the ice-bound Highland village of Kinlochleven to investigate how a journalist ended up dead there, and to confront his own troubled past.

The ubiquity and popularity of true crime stories has not gone unnoticed by novelists. For **Penance** (Faber, £14.99), Eliza Clark, one of the under-40s on *Granta*'s latest Best of British Novelists list, has made up a grisly crime: the killing of a teenage girl in a small Yorkshire coastal town by three fellow teens on the night of the Brexit vote in 2016.

> Sizzling one-liners and hard-boiled philosophy via the bottom of a bottle of rye

Our narrator is a washed-up hack who puts in the legwork with interviews and research, and his story is studded with podcast chat and the girls' own accounts of themselves.

The relationships and feelings are raw, complicated, half-understood – but this is no freak show, they are touchingly ordinary and their lives in the comically horrible Crow-on-Sea, with its UKIP vibe and its own version of Jimmy Savile, don't explain them either. We know whodunnit, but whydunnit remains tantalisingly out of reach.

Global bestseller Cara Hunter has also embraced the true crime trend. **Murder in the Family** (HarperCollins, 480pp, £8.99) centres on a TV show investigating a cold case. Who killed Luke Ryder in the garden of his wife's opulent west London home 20 years ago? She tells the story entirely via scripts, transcripts, e-mails, group chats, press reports and sundry documentation.

It's a convoluted puzzle, with timely shock reveals and new suspects entering the frame. But with characters you never quite get to know or really care about, having only read their emails, scripts, etc, it's sometimes hard to engage.

There has been no shortage of excellent crime fiction from Australia in the past few years, and newcomer Hayley Scrivenor's **Dirt Town** (Macmillan, 368pp, £8.99) is outstanding. Nailing the atmosphere of a depressing, dying, dried-up bush town, the book charts the effects of the disappearance of a schoolgirl, as detective Sarah Michaels's investigation causes tightly held secrets to unravel in a mire of guilt and shame. Scrivenor even tells part of the story through the voices of local kids, a big risk for a writer, but she's pitch-perfect on the voices of the downbeat community's next generation.

HUMANLY POSSIBLE

SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS OF HUMANIST FREETHINKING, ENQUIRY AND HOPE

SARAH BAKEWELL

Chatto & Windus, 464pp, £22

Spinoza: defender of the 'free mind'

Sarah Bakewell's popular blend of philosophy, history and biography was welcomed by most reviewers of her latest, an account of freethinking from the medieval Christian umanisti to today's secular advocates. Her 'scholarly yet accessible' approach was applauded by Jane O'Grady in the *Guardian*, along with her ability to animate the past without anachronism. Her fans acknowledged that humanism has not proved a viable weapon against censorship, war, fascistic autocracies et al, but then, as Bakewell said, it's a work in progress.

Kathryn Hughes in the *Sunday Times* found the book 'bracing' and 'exhilarating', a clarion call to those who, in Bakewell's words, 'try hard to live bravely and humanly in what sometimes seems like an aridly abstract and loveless world'. For the *New York Times*'s Jennifer Szalai it was a 'brisk narrative' filled with her 'characteristic wit and clarity', though possibly lacking her usual 'bracing focus'.

This last point was amplified into an extended snort of derision by John Maier in the *Times*, for whom the endeavour was a 'ramble', and in trouble from page one, through its failure to clarify the term humanism. Bakewell suggests it's 'a semantic cloud of meanings and implications'. She also uses Forster's dictum 'only connect' as an organising principle, which, Maier decided, gave the reader 'the unsteadying sensation of being taken for a random walk through all cultural history, conveyed by a guide whose buoyant lack of discretion gives the impression of all the passing monuments being of equal importance'.

Maier also accused Bakewell of a 'soupy benevolence' towards the great men (they are invariably men, and white) she venerates, such as Bertrand Russell, who ran a 'dysfunctional' school that its pupils, trying to set fire to some pet rabbits, almost burned down. 'Some authors might regard this as an opportunity to reassess the soundness of Russell's humanist commitment. Not Bakewell.'

UNSCRIPTED

THE EPIC BATTLE FOR A HOLLYWOOD MEDIA EMPIRE

JAMES B STEWART AND RACHEL ABRAMS

Cornerstone, 416pp, £25

This book by two *New York Times* reporters arrived in a world already engrossed in the shenanigans of Logan Roy's family in *Succession*, so unsurprisingly reviewers found its revelations even more enthralling — and grotesque —for being real. But as Adam Davidson noted in the *New York Times*, Unscripted's antihero, the cruel, womanising corporate raider Sumner Redstone, head of Viacom/CBS/Paramount, was 'as odious a character as I have encountered in fact or fiction' and that Logan Roy had 'nothing on him'.

In the first half, the fading nonagenarian's abusive behaviour and decline are laid out; in the second, Les Moonves of CBS is in the dock. Sumner's daughter Shari finally saw off his two predatory girlfriends, who had trapped him in his room while they went through $150 million of his fortune; in the second half, the MeToo allegations bring down Moonves, though he was never prosecuted.

It was not a tragic story, Anne Billson noted in the *Times*: 'these people are hardly what you might call losers, with their $24 million mansions and private jets. But at least the rest of us can wallow in this racy slice of schadenfreude about people with more money than taste'.

These people are hardly what you might call losers

The *Guardian*'s Edward Helmore seemed equally aghast at 'just how awful, shocking and abusive' the culture was at one of America's biggest media empires. Billson supplied the telling detail of how Sumner ended his days communicating via a laptop programmed to respond 'Yes', 'No' and 'F*** you'.

GREAT AND HORRIBLE NEWS

MURDER AND MAYHEM IN EARLY MODERN BRITAIN

BLESSIN ADAMS

William Collins, 304pp, £18.99

'The early moderns were obsessed by stories of death, crime and justice,' declares Adams in her introduction. Her book, wrote Nick Rennison in his review for the *Daily Mail*, 'proves her point with a succession of grisly but engrossing cases. People in the past enjoyed learning about true crime as much as we do – and the bloodier the better. We have podcasts and gritty TV dramas; they had lurid broadside ballads and cheap pamphlets.' However, 'one thing that has changed over the centuries, thankfully, is the nature of punishment.

For example, we no longer take such a harsh view of sex outside marriage. Adams quotes the case of Henry Wharton and Elizabeth Mason who were condemned for the "crime" of begetting a "base born childe". Stripped naked to the waist, they were paraded through the streets of their Middlesex village and flogged.'

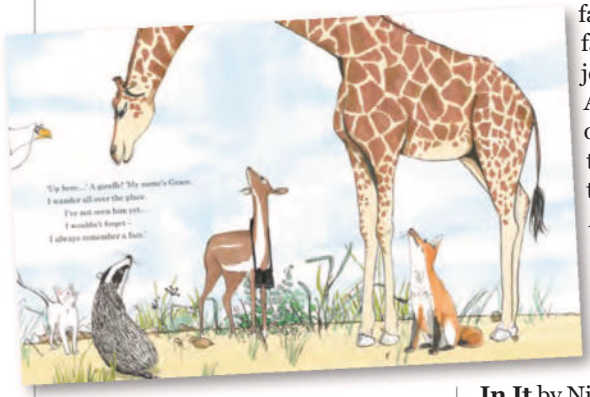
A former police officer turned historian, Adams has combed through an astonishing array of sources to retell nine stories of crime and punishment in England between 1500 and 1700.

As an ex-copper, Adams is greatly interested in developments in forensic pathology in this period, which are superbly reconstructed from the sources. As a modern historian, she is reluctant to give us a both-barrels moral lesson, beyond implicitly suggesting that England's dirty, filthy, gritty past was much crueller and more sexist than the present. Her book, oddly, ends without a conclusion... So, in the end, and inadvertently, she has written a history that is more revealing about present squeamishness than past crimes.'

EMILY BEARN recommends brilliant holiday reading for all ages

Three plus

Fashion moves fast in children's publishing – and while last year grandmothers topped the bill in picture books, this season it is grandfathers who take centre stage. 'Every grandad's different,' is the message in **Grandads are the Greatest** (Bloomsbury, £7.99) by Ben Faulks, which combines simple rhyming text with engaging illustrations by Nia Tudor. 'Grandads are the GREATEST, / no two are quite the same. / And each one's had ADVENTURES / you and I can barely name.' This is a truth borne out in **Grandad's Pride** by Harry Woodgate (Andersen, £12.99) which continues the adventures of Milly and her grandfather, who has been left shattered by the death of his male partner. When Milly discovers a gay pride flag in Grandad's attic, she has an idea to help him celebrate again. ('"What's Pride?" I ask. "Pride is like a giant party."') And **Grandpa and the Kingfisher** by Anna Wilson (Nosy Crow, £12.99) is another deceptively multi-layered story, recounting a year in nature, as observed by a grandfather walking with his grandchild. ('"The river is full of hidden things," Grandpa said. "What can you see?"') The river is also the setting for **I am Oliver the Otter** by Pam Ayres (Macmillan, £12.99), in which an otter called Oliver finds



When Cherry Lost Terry

his life turned upside down by love. ('I am very beautiful, with whiskers round my snout, / And I can close my ears and nose to keep the water out.') And for some merry rhyming mayhem, **When Cherry Lost Terry** by Penny Phillips (Old Street, £6.99) tells the enchanting story of a white cat who recruits an A to Z of animals to search for her missing friend Terry. ('"Oh, please," twitched a squirrel named Sue, / "Won't someone decide what to do?"')

Seven-plus

For young detective fans, **The Case of the Lighthouse Intruder** by Kereen Getten (Pushkin, £7.99) follows the adventures of a girl who dreams of becoming a detective. 'Fayson Mayor, the twelve-year old FBI agent, has been recruited yet again to save the world. It's getting exhausting, as she has only just stopped a major assassination plot against the King of England.' But when her cousins recruit her to their gang, she finds that sleuthing does not always live up to her expectations. '**The Magician's Daughter** by Caryl Lewis (Macmillan, £7.99) is an engrossing fantasy about a girl whose father is struggling as a jobbing magician. When Abby discovers an old book of spells, the fortunes of the family seem set to be transformed – but can Abby achieve her goals before the magic runs out? ('"Abby, what on earth?! ....We're FLYING!"') And **The House With A Dragon In It** by Nick Lake (Simon & Schuster, £12.99), is the magical story of a child in foster care whose adventures begin when she finds a hole in the floor. 'When Summer was little, her real mum used to tell her that if she ever saw a glass bottle lying on the ground, she should not pick it up in case a witch was inside. She said that one day Summer might know why, but she hoped not.'

The Magician's Daughter

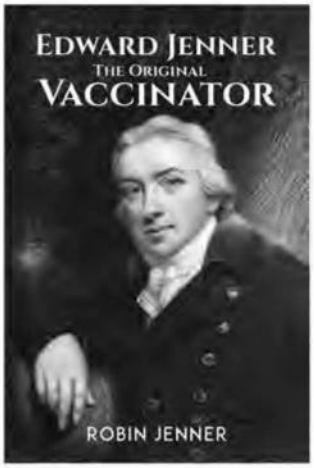
Nine-plus

For slightly older readers, there is plenty of schoolgirl high-jinx in **Friends and Traitors** by Helen Peters (Nosy Crow, £7.99), set in a girls' boarding school during world-war two. When Sidney sees mysterious things being smuggled into the stables, it will fall to her and the reticent housemaid to uncover a dastardly plot. ('Sidney took a deep breath. "We have to stop him. If we don't it's an insult to – to everyone who's stood up against the Nazis."') **Call of the Titanic** (Chicken House, £7.99) by Lindsay Galvin, author of the bestselling Darwin's Dragons, uses a mixture of letters and fictional witness statements to tell the stories of a cabin boy on board the Titanic, and a stowaway on Carpathia. ('Can you believe I am writing from RMS Titanic! Quite the crowd at Southampton dock, but I was sure I could see you waving.') And no young diary-keeper should be without a copy of **A Calamity of Mannerings** by Joanna Nadin (Uclan Publishing, £8.99), a former special adviser to Tony Blair. In this rumbustious coming of age story, our diarist Panth

A Calamity of Mannerings

takes us on a whirlwind tour of 1920s England, as she negotiates cocktail parties, patriarchal injustices, and varyingly roguish suitors. ('It is a curse to be born a girl ...') Finally, to keep young brains ticking during the long summer holiday, **Philosophy for Everyone** by Clive Gifford (Magic Cat, £14.99) gallops us through everything from feminism to categorical imperatives in 64 illustrated pages, lightened by the odd nugget of useless information. (Did you know that Francis Bacon died from pneumonia after stuffing a chicken with snow?)

Edward Jenner
The Original Vaccinator



'This book tells the story of **Edward Jenner**, the 18th century country doctor who devoted his life to find the cure for the dreadful disease of smallpox, the disease that killed millions of people from all over the world over many centuries. The book tells the story of how Jenner persisted in his research despite opposition from many people, including many of his friends in the medical world. Jenner would not be put off however and on 17th May, 1796, he carried out the first ever vaccination on a young boy, James Phipps, and Jenner was delighted that it was a success. That small but incredibly important operation led the World Health Organisation to say in 1980 that the disease was conquered.

The book also tells of Jenner's other interests that are little known. During his long career he worked on other things such as the nesting habits of the cuckoo, the annual hibernation of animals during winter, and his work on angina, to name but a few.

Jenner died on 26th January, 1823 making this year, 2023, the two hundredth anniversary of the great man's passing. It would be a fitting tribute to this great man to see if there was a resurgence in his reputation and a celebration of his achievements.'

Available from all good booksellers inc. Waterstones & Amazon

DECPLAY
PIANO MADE EASY

Learn piano later in life... the EASY way!

Hi I'm Declan

featured on BBC

Trustpilot
Excellent 4.9
VERIFIED COMPANY

- Treat yourself or someone you love
- Play songs you love on piano
- Easy method – no 'reading music'
- Designed for seniors
- Online course – go at your own pace
- Access by computer / tablet / phone

Get your FREE Starter Pack at
www.DecPlay.com/oldie

No Ordinary Reading Light

Ergonomically designed on the outside, inside it's one of the most advanced reading lights in the world.

Offering crystal clear clarity and incredible colour rendition, a Serious Light is perfect for anyone who struggles to read small print for any length of time or who needs to see fine detail.

It will transform your visual experience.

Using Daylight Wavelength Technology™, inside every Serious Light are the latest special purpose purple LEDs, patented phosphors and bespoke electronics. The end result is a powerful light beam that closely matches natural daylight, something our eyes find most comfortable to read and work by. When combined with the ability to adjust the beam width, dimming facility and fully flexible arm, a Serious Light enables you to enjoy reading again in complete comfort and see colours like never before.

HD Floor Light
Height 60" (152cm) Weight 13lbs (6kg)
RRP ~~£399.99~~ **£299.99**

HD Table Light
Height 27" (68cm) Weight 5lbs (2.2kg)
RRP ~~£349.99~~ **£249.99**

SAVE £100 when buying any HD Light. Quote offer code 8396 at checkout or when calling. While stocks last.

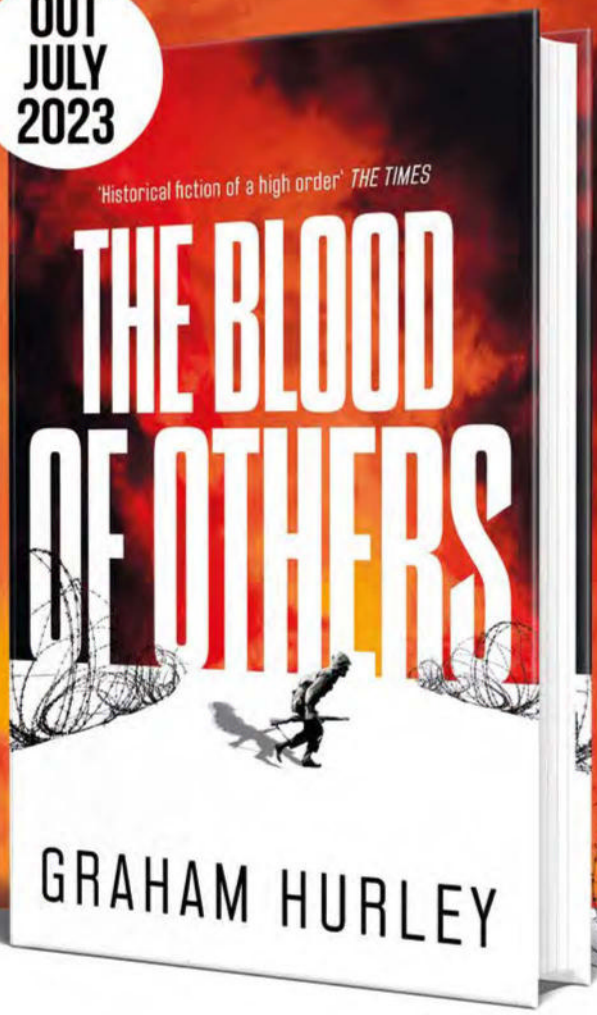
For Advice. For a Brochure. To Order:
0800 085 1088
seriousreaders.com/8396

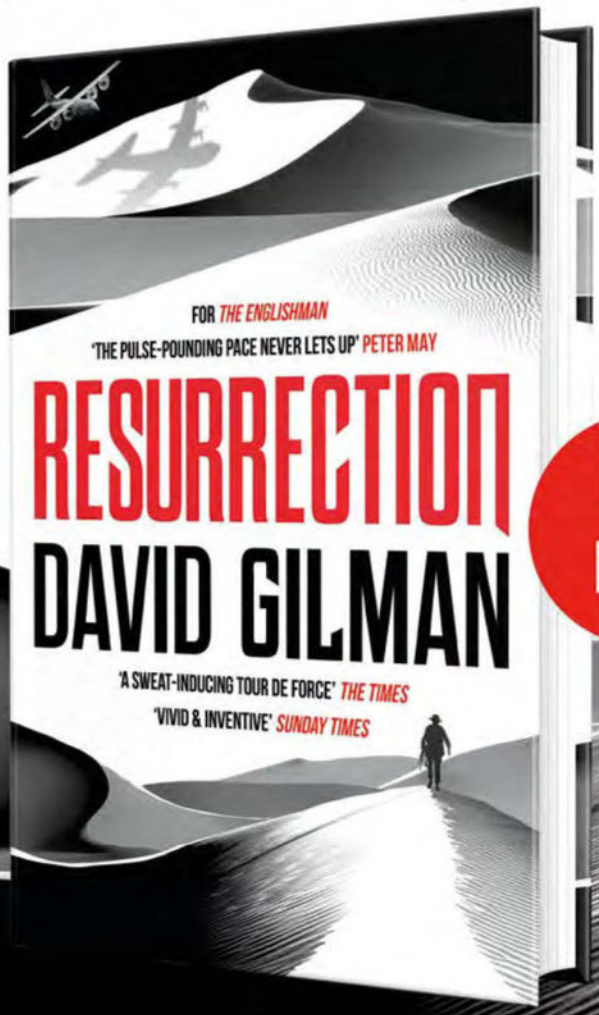
Serious Readers
Light up your life indoors

OUT JULY 2023

DIEPPE, AUGUST 1942. A CATASTROPHE NO HEADLINE DARED ADMIT.

'This series cannot be recommended too highly'
Mike Ripley





DAN RAGLAN, FORMER FOREIGN LEGION FIGHTER, ALIAS THE ENGLISHMAN, RETURNS IN RESURRECTION, THE NEW HIGH-OCTANE, HIGH-STAKES INTERNATIONAL THRILLER.

Out Now

'A satisfying international adventure'
Financial Times

AVAILABLE ON amazon.co.uk

HEAD OF ZEUS