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JULY 2023
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magazine

Inside

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JUDY MURRAY
PAM AYRES
ALAN JOHNSON
DR MARK PORTER
SUSIE DENT
& JEREMY PAXMAN

A class act

Helen Mirren on her happy
marriage, having fun &
fangirling over Harrison Ford



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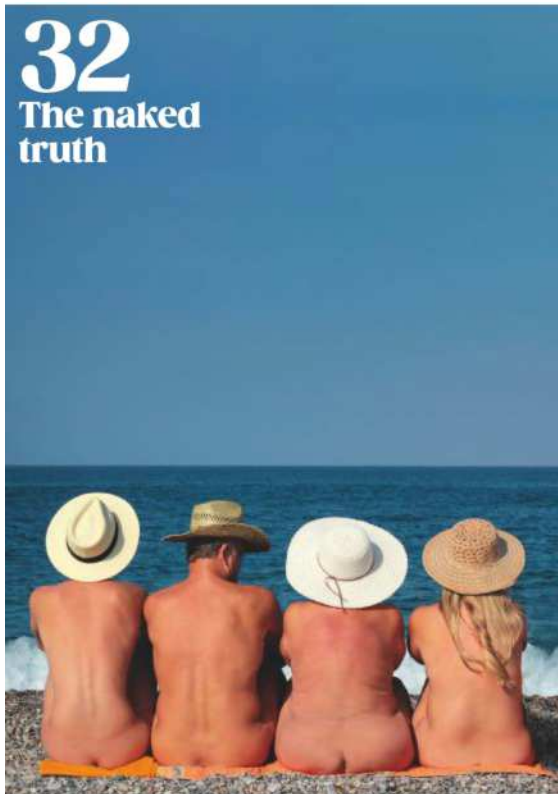
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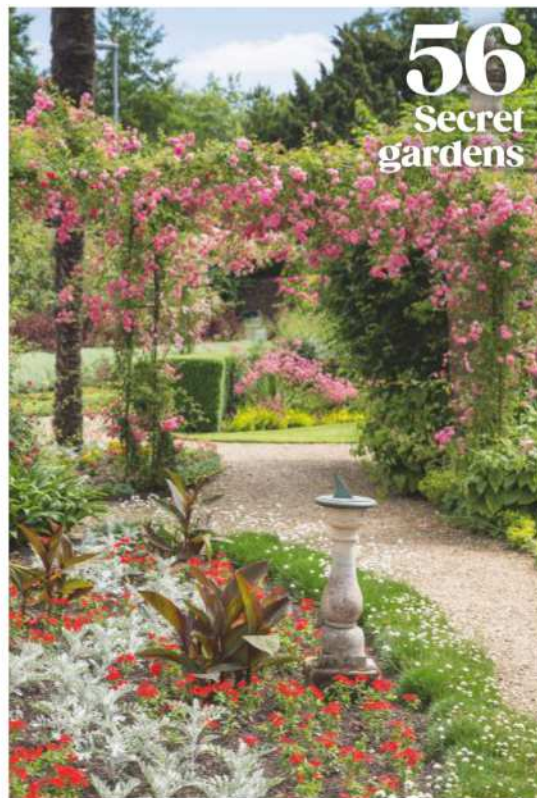
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Welcome

Euan Sutherland



Hello everyone and welcome to July. It's been a very productive summer so far - both on the personal front, as I gather my first honey harvest of the season, and on the professional front with the launch of our newest brand, Saga Money. On reflection, what they both have in common is a tremendous sense of collective endeavour and achievement: a bee makes one tiny dollop of honey in its entire lifetime, but together the hive can produce upwards of 11kg.

What I've always loved about working at Saga is that same sense of community and collectivity, and I think it shows in the quality of our offer to customers. All my colleagues at Saga Money (which used to be Saga Personal Finance) have been busy as bees and look forward to launching a terrific range of new products from September, which we hope will meet more of your needs.

Money management has never been more important in these uncertain times, and we know from research how vital it is to our customers. This is why Saga Money is adding to its savings range with new Fixed Rate and Notice accounts so you can save in a way that best suits you. We are planning a new Investment ISA range too, which will allow customers to invest in stocks and shares in a way that matches their risk appetite and at a very competitive low cost.

We've also gleaned from research that many of our customers either do not have a will or

haven't reviewed their will for a number of years. Our new legal service is going to help you create the most suitable will, as well as arranging lasting powers of attorney or probate.

On the mortgage front, Saga Money will be introducing a broader range to help customers

find the right product, including buy-to-let or holiday home properties.

Regular readers of my letter may remember I'm an enthusiastic amateur beekeeper; I can't

recommend it highly enough as a hobby. Not only do you end up with delicious honey (I've christened mine E's Bees) that changes in flavour with each season, it's also a great distraction from the hurly-burly of everyday life. You can't let anything distract you when you are next to a hive of, in my case, 50,000 little predators that, with one false move, could make your life very painful. You will certainly never see me without my protective hat and gloves - though I have now stopped wearing the full monty beekeeper suit. I'm hoping for a bumper harvest this year if the conditions are right, but I don't think it will beat my 2020 record of 140 jars.

So, here's to bumper harvests, whether that's sweet nectar or sweet financial returns for Saga customers! *

'My colleagues have been busy as bees and look forward to launching a terrific range of products'

Euan Sutherland
Group Chief Executive Officer



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Hello, everyone



There's more ontheapp For our digital and bundle subscribers

Wild horses Marley and Cracker safely back behind bars (below!)

It may be summertime but the living ain't easy here at Robinson Towers since Marley and Cracker, the two beautiful horses in the next-door field, broke in and recreated a Lloyds Bank advert all over our lawn, complete with thundering hooves and excited snorts. I say 'our lawn' but really, it's my husband's. And, apart from his daughters and his dogs, it's his pride and joy. As he surveyed each hoof-sized crater dejectedly, I tried to cheer him up by joking that he'd be less upset if I'd announced that I was leaving him. He didn't laugh - or, perhaps more worryingly, disagree.

What is it about men of a certain age and their lawns? I wondered if it was some odd Bedfordshire thing, but a quick scout of the internet tells me it's a global phenomenon and even the subject of academic studies. It appears it's all about control and accruing symbols of success - and the older men get, the stronger the desire for a perfect lawn becomes.

I've no idea if there's a female equivalent, but I've told my husband that, as every other man we know has grass considerably greener and flatter than ours, we shall simply have to spend lots more of the summer away. I have my eye on a river cruise (p89), the perfect

way to take his mind off dry land - most particularly in his garden.

I do hope you enjoy this issue, which is jam-packed with great reads. As a nervous driver myself, I was fascinated by Jenni Murray's very honest account of her later-life motor phobia (p15). The answer for us both may come in the form of driverless cars (p44), which are on their way - unlike the buses, which probably aren't (p36).

Sadly, there is one element missing this month. For the first time since the magazine was launched almost 40 years ago, our money expert Paul Lewis has had to take time off due to unforeseen

circumstances. The good news is, he hopes to be back next month and we can't wait to see him. Huge thanks to Annie Shaw for stepping into his shoes (p85). They are almost as hard to fill as the hoof craters in our grass, but Annie has done an absolutely sterling job.

As ever, thank you for your letters and emails and please keep them coming. Any advice on lawn care much appreciated... °

Louise Ranson

Editorial Director
Saga Magazine

'What is it about men of a certain age and their lawns?'



This month's CONTRIBUTORS

Jonathan Margolis
Driverless cars, p44



Our columnist has been writing about technology for 40 years. He can't wait for self-driving cars to come along so he can start having a pint in country pubs again.

Mary Berry
Recipes, p62



The baking queen has written more than 80 cookbooks and presented numerous TV shows and at the age of 88 says that she has absolutely no plans to retire yet.

Richard Askwith
Late-life running, p28



The award-winning author is a keen runner who relies on the habit for physical and mental wellbeing and believes, rightly or wrongly, that it keeps him young.

Judy Murray,
World According To =, p129



The mother of British tennis pros Andy and Jamie Murray, who was a coach for 35 years, says she'd now rather do anything than be near a tennis court in her free time.



Our
July
picks

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Jeremy Paxman

A surprise delivery of a cookbook from a Scottish address has given our columnist an appetite for discovering the sender's identity

Perhaps you know - or have heard of - the *Selkirk Grace*, a short prayer of thanks usually recited north of the border before countless mountains of neeps and tatties at a traditional Burns Night supper. It goes like this:

*Some hae meat an' cannae eat,
And some wad eat that want it;
But we hae meat an' we can eat,
And sae the Lord be thankit.*

The grace has been much on my mind today, since the arrival of an unexpected parcel from Selkirk. My mother used to get us to repeat 'white rabbits' at the start of every month,

to give us good luck - but also, she said, to make sure everything coming through our door that month was welcome. I had forgotten to do so on the first. I therefore received this parcel with foreboding.

It turned out to contain two books on cooking for carnivores, including one entitled *The Big Fat Surprise* (which it certainly was) on the importance of having plenty of butter, cheese and meat in our diet. Maybe my benefactor had caught a glimpse of me in profile and thought, 'He looks as if he could do with a couple of strings of sausages inside him'. It is, I confess, unlikely.

After some minutes of wistful speculation - more recollections of temple-shattering hangovers caused by toasts to the 'fair fa' your honest, sonsie face' of the 'Great chieftain o' the puddin'-race' on Burns Nights past - I concluded that it was mere coincidence the package had come from an 'R Paton'

in Selkirk. I know the town a little, having filmed there for part of a TV documentary series about the River Tweed and the days when every estate had its own tweed made at one of the multitude of mills in the town.

Selkirk is still a good-looking, prosperous Scottish border town in the way of a Kelso or a Melrose, surrounded by rich-looking pastureland and lowland forest. I was lucky to meet the man in charge of one of the last surviving mills who allowed me to design and run off a bolt of cloth to be made up into a coat in 'the family tweed'.

Unfortunately, my son will have nothing to do with it. Can't say I blame him, given the chump I looked in my own father's hand-me-down overcoat at Cambridge.

But the only 'R Paton' I could discover from my searches online was an Irishman called Rurai in the match report of a game against the team with the most magical name in Scottish football, Queen of the South.

Supporters used to burst forth at home games with the boast that they were the only team singled out for special mention in the Bible.

It's true: 'the Queen of the South' appears in both Luke and Matthew, although is generally thought to be a reference to the Queen of Sheba not, sadly, a biblical endorsement of a Scottish League One football team. Mind you, she was rather famous for her gifts, albeit of spices and precious stones rather than diet books. But Queen of the South's home ground is in Dumfries, which must be 50 miles away from Selkirk - even in an Irish footballer's car.

On which note, this preposterous flight of fancy about the sender of my mystery gift foundered. I shall console myself by imagining Queen of the South's dashing footballer tearing about the place with no time for anything because he has a present to buy for a stranger.

Meanwhile, I may even mumble the *Selkirk Grace* before making a thickly buttered steak sandwich and settling down to read my new book. °

'Maybe someone saw me in profile and thought, "He could do with a string of sausages inside him"'





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Jenni Murray

It's natural to be nervous on the road, muses our columnist, especially when you consider the behaviour of other drivers

It started as spring began to turn to summer. I was nervous behind the wheel for the first time ever. My friend Sally and I had booked dinner for 8pm at our favourite restaurant. Sally and I are drivers. She's 74 and I was about to become 73 on the night in question, and we had no qualms about setting off and crossing London. Me from the north, her from the south and meeting somewhere in the middle.

We've travelled all over the country together for years. We've always felt safe. We checked our eyesight and speed of reactions when licence renewal was demanded by the DVLA as we hit our seventies. No problems to report.

The days had not yet begun to lengthen to any great extent so our journey to the restaurant would take place under a darkening sky. It was pouring with rain. There were three road closures on my route, but I felt confident about the diversions and was convinced I would get there on time. It soon became clear I would be late. I stopped the car and called Sally to warn her. She'd been about to call me. She had the same trouble on her route. We'd just do our best.

We arrived at around the same time - hungry, tired and shaking a little. 'That was awful,' said Sally. 'I've never felt scared behind the wheel before, but tonight I did.' I never thought I'd feel nervous behind the wheel of any car, let alone my lovely new convertible Mini Cooper, but I had to confess I too had felt anxious.

'God,' said Sally. 'Is it the dark, is it the rain, is it the diversions or could it possibly, horror of horrors, be that we're getting old?' For just a moment my stomach knotted. Could she be right? Could we no longer cope with the demands of concentration and physical fitness presented by driving a car? Neither of us drove motors designed for speed. My Mini and her Renault were suited to our view that a car was not for racing, but for getting safely from A to B.

We had the right kind of transport, the right attitude and had checked that we were

physically and emotionally fit for the job, so why this sudden onset of nerves? It is, I've found, not at all uncommon. The Department of Transport has no statistics on nervousness, but I've heard from a number of friends and colleagues worried that maybe their reactions are not fast enough.

As far as accidents go, there are far fewer among 70- to 75-year-olds than among 17- to 24-year-olds. The rate does increase a bit between 78 and 85 and then rises sharply for those aged 86-plus, so it's our responsibility to keep checking our fitness to drive. The latest figures show there are 5.6 million older people with a full driving licence in Britain.

There is no age at which we should give up as long as we've told the truth to the DVLA, are able to read a number plate 20 metres away (five car lengths) and have not been diagnosed with dementia or any other condition that might affect our cognition.

I'm sure neither Sally nor I could bear to give up driving. The car has always been important to us both in giving us freedom to go where we want to go whenever we choose. It means

'The car has always been important in giving us freedom to go where we want'

invaluable independence and, even after all these years, it's still a pleasure.

As for the nervousness we felt that night - and numerous times since - I put it down to lack of trust in other drivers. They get worse and worse. Driving up the M1 the other day I was in the middle lane having just overtaken when a flashy lad undertook me just as I was signalling to move into the inner lane. Don't they teach that it's illegal to undertake any more?

Then there's the impatience of everyone around me. I'm carefully sticking to the 20mph limit in the city and I'm deafened by the hooting horns behind me trying to hurry me along. A few chosen words screeched out of my open window have become common practice. Sometimes they even look shocked at such language coming from a furious elderly lady, but they still can't wait to overtake. Hope they get done for speeding! *

IN MY EXPERIENCE...

Pam Ayres

The much-loved entertainer, 76, on the wonders of grandchildren, otters and hares - and why she'd quite like us to stop talking about her accent

What made you want to write about British wildlife? Your latest is a children's picture book about an otter, to be followed by more about a hare, a barn owl and a fox.

Some people write about fairies and spaceships, but I grew up in a village called Stanford in the Vale [in Oxfordshire], surrounded by wildlife. Trees, hedgerows, frogs in the pond, birds in the garden... I felt directly connected to all this beauty. I hope these books can get today's kids interested in wildlife like I was. Sadly, I don't think the natural world plays as much of a part in most children's lives.

Recent studies indicate that our wildlife is disappearing. What can we do to stop that?

I'm not sure we're ever going to claw back what we've lost, but you don't need to do much to give nature a helping hand. Get yourself a bird table, leave a bit of the garden to grow wild. My brother built me an owl box out of an old bedstead and we had three chicks hatch in it.

Is it true that you have a soft spot for grey squirrels?

They are a pest and they've decimated the red population, but I refuse to blame them because it was our fault for bringing them over from America. Posh people wanted them to decorate their fancy gardens.

You and your husband, Dudley, used to have a smallholding in the Cotswolds, but you've downsized. Do you still look after any animals?

Just a rescue dog and my late brother's bees. We moved to a village six miles from our old place and I've bought a patch of land that is managed for wildlife. I'm still doing my bit.

by DANNY SCOTT

Last year, we saw King Charles - then Prince - giving you a guided tour of the Highgrove gardens. What tips did he have for you?

There is a man who has always been so far ahead of his time. He was talking about wildlife and the state of the planet years ago, well before it became fashionable. And he understands that you have to be passionate about every aspect of the environment, right down to the insects at the bottom. I wish I could grow a wildflower meadow like he's got. Seeing that explosion of colour reminded me of the meadows I used to walk past on my way to school. All gone now, of course.

Do you have fond memories of *Opportunity Knocks*, the show you won back in 1975?

Not really, no. I hope that doesn't make me sound ungrateful. Although it was a fantastic platform for someone like me, they didn't look after us very well. As soon as you were famous, the sharks started moving in, looking for a quick buck. I was writing original material, but I wasn't told how to protect it.

Your accent has long been a topic of conversation. Do you get fed up with that? I'm sick to death with people banging on about it. In the early days I was encouraged to make more of it and that was probably a mistake.

Concentrate on the words I write, not how I say them. This is how my mam and dad sounded and I feel very comfortable with the way I talk, thank you very much.

Did you ever feel your poetry was looked down on because it rhymed and was on television? I've never considered myself a female 'poet'. I didn't come up via the poetry world; I was playing the folk clubs along

Star turn
Below: Pam on *Opportunity Knocks*, which she won in 1975.
Far right: performing in 1977 at Bristol Hippodrome





with Billy Connolly and Max Boyce. Yes, I write poetry, but if people don't think I'm a proper 'poet', that's all right by me. Neither do I.

Which of your poems get the best reaction on stage? Have you a favourite?

They Should Have Asked My Husband. We all know blokes like that; got an opinion on everything. *Encyclopaedias? On them, we never have to call. Why clutter up the bookshelf when my husband knows it all?* That's an example of what I do. Having a laugh about stuff we all recognise.



What's your biggest regret?

Not asking my dad more about what he did in the war. He would often start telling us stories and we'd all laugh at him, 'Oh, here we go again. Dad's war tales'. He was in Belgium and Germany for four years and I remember him telling us about how he thought the German civilians had such a terrible time. I wish I'd listened instead of being so dismissive.

What's the best advice you got from your mum and dad?

They always told me to be confident in who I was. Those words are even more important for young people today because social media puts them under so much pressure to look and act a certain way.

'I didn't come up via the poetry world. If people don't think I'm a proper "poet", then that's all right by me. Neither do I'

Are you a good grandmother?

Being a grandmother is a strange mix of maternal instinct and keeping your distance. Before I became a mum, I didn't think I had a maternal instinct. I'd watched my mum spend every hour of every day looking after six kids, washing by hand, cooking, nursing, being shouted at by my dad. When people asked me if I was getting married and having kids, I used to think, 'No way, mate!'

What keeps you awake at night?

Well, I look around and I see the Middle East being blown apart; I see people destroying the planet; I see plastic in the oceans; you can't get a doctor's appointment; and no one cares about the family. But it doesn't keep me awake because I feel helpless. The most you can do is look after your own little gang and try to point them in the right direction.

Do you care how people will remember you?

Hopefully, I made a few people smile.*

*I am Oliver the Otter is published by Macmillan (£12.99); the second of a four-book series, I Am Hattie the Hare, will be published in March 2024

This month we talk...

having a laugh

Each month our insight team conducts an in-depth poll of Saga customers to find out what you're thinking. This month: **what do you find funny?**

by RACHEL CARLYLE



They say getting old is no laughing matter, but Saga customers are having a good go. When we asked how often you laugh out loud, 62% said they do it once or twice a day, and it didn't change much from our youngest group in their fifties to our oldest at over 100. Fewer than 10% rarely or never laugh.

It's just as well because laughter has an almost magical effect. No surprise that studies have found it lifts mood and reduces stress. It also activates the release of serotonin - the same chemical affected by the most frequently used antidepressants. 'In fact, laughter can be as effective as mild antidepressants,' says psychologist and author Dr Sandi Mann, from the University of Central Lancashire.

But what's really eye-opening is laughter's physical effects: it protects blood vessels from the effects of heart disease, boosts immunity cells, reduces inflammation, improves pain tolerance, lowers cholesterol and even reduces blood pressure readings in older people.

No wonder, then, that 62% of the record 4,000 people who took part in our online survey said they wanted to laugh more. Only 20% disagreed with the statement that they laughed less now than as a child. 'We talk about the "laughter cliff",' says Dr Mann. 'That's when laughter drops off, which happens around the age of 23. It's partly because that's when we take on responsibilities, entering the world of work and suddenly life is serious.'

However, it's clear that many are still enjoying some belly laughs. When asked who made them laugh most, the top answer across all age groups was friends (74%), followed by a partner (59%), children (46%) and grandchildren (44%). Those with grandchildren also laughed

44%
laugh less
than they did
as a younger
adult

38%
laugh at least
twice a day

22%
laugh at
someone's
joke even
when it's not
funny



more often in general, we discovered. There were clear favourites when it came to the comedians you love, too: Peter Kay, Billy Connolly, Michael McIntyre and Lee Mack were mentioned, as was the late, great Victoria Wood (above). And the shows you found funniest were of a certain vintage: *Last of the Summer Wine* (over the page), *Only Fools and Horses* (below), *Fawlty Towers*, *Dad's Army*, 'Allo 'Allo and *Monty Python* were all favourites. More recent additions included *Taskmaster*, *Gogglebox*, *Mock the Week* and *Have I Got News for You*.

Many remarked that they didn't find much modern comedy funny - and there was disdain for aggressive and 'cringe' comedy, which gets its laughs from characters belittling others and evoking embarrassment in the viewer, such as Ricky Gervais's *The Office*. Only 22% said this kind of humour was funny, a finding reflected in a US study which showed one episode of *The Office* to young, middle-aged and older C



HOW TO LAUGH MORE

* Make a resolution to laugh more often; start by smiling more - even a fake smile tricks you into feeling happier.

* Watch what children do and copy them (within reason). 'When do adults ever swing on a swing? Why not try it when the playground is quiet?' says Dr Mann.

* Practise laughing. Remember something you found funny and deliberately laugh out loud.

* Don't be embarrassed laughing on your own; replay films or shows you love and take the opportunity to really laugh.

* Seek out funny people. 'Meeting people and socialising makes life more rewarding. If we are isolated it's harder to find the fun,' says Dr Mann.

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groups. The 64- to 84-year-olds were left cold. Why? It's more a case of generational preferences than tastes changing as we age, says Dr Sharon Lockyer, founder of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research at Brunel University. We tend to like comedy that's tinged with nostalgia and memories. "'Cringe' comedy is a relatively new style,' she says. 'People tend to like a sense of familiarity and reflection of how life was then - think of *Only Fools and Horses* and you think of Del Boy falling through the bar or he and Rodney smashing the chandelier.'

The reason, she says, that many don't find modern comedians funny is that comedy is a reflection of the society that produces it. 'It reveals the issues we are struggling with, that we don't really know the answer to. *Only Fools and Horses* [from the 1980s] is about social class, the tensions between them, and the emergence of entrepreneurs.

'Modern comedy takes us into "taboo" topics - race, gender, disability - which can be quite threatening and a challenge for viewers.'

What kind of humour do you like? Top with 80% approval ratings was observational humour, the kind that finds laughs in everyday situations. Next was satire/parody, with 63% finding it funny. What came next was different for men and women. Men put surreal comedy such as *Monty Python* in third place, followed by word puns (53%) and double entendres (49%), whereas women weren't as keen on surreal comedy (38%), but agreed about the others.

Overall, men seemed to have a wider taste; more than twice as many men than women found juvenile/bodily functions humour amusing. Men also found physical/slapstick funnier (40% vs 24%) and prank humour too (25% vs 15%). Appetite for double entendre jokes seems to increase with age in both sexes, with only 42% of those in their fifties going phnarr phnarr, rising to 60% of the oldest cohort.

As Dr Lockyer says, 'It goes to show that what we find funny is a really complex dynamic, and it tells you so much.'

do you think?

@ What Join the conversation by emailing your thoughts to us at editor@saga.co.uk

92%
say laughter
is good for
wellbeing

5%
of women
find 'bodily
functions'
humour funny

69%
of 50-
somethings
want to laugh
more



NOW YOU'RE LAUGHING

When we asked you for your best jokes, we received 1,001. Here are our favourites

- * I used to go out with a girl from Amsterdam who wore inflatable footwear. I heard she recently popped her clogs.
- * I walked into a cake shop where all the cakes were 50p. I asked for one from the top shelf. The shop assistant said, '£2 please'. I said, 'I thought all the cakes were 50p?' 'No,' she said. 'That's Madeira cake.'
- * What is ET short for? He's only got little legs.
- * Did you hear about the man who was hit by the same bike every morning? It was a vicious cycle.
- * Two parrots sitting on a perch; one says to the other, 'Can you smell fish?'
- * People always ask me what I do at the Teddy Bear Factory. I reply, 'Just stuff.'
- * You're through to the incontinence hotline, can you hold please?'
- * How many country and western singers does it take to change a lightbulb? Ten. One to change it and the other nine to sing about how they miss the old bulb.
- * I got a job on an assembly line making toy Draculas. There were only two of us working so I had to make every second count.
- * My brother suggested I register for a donor card. He's a man after my own heart.
- * Hedgehogs. Why can't they just share the hedge?
- * I bought my husband a trampoline for his birthday. He hit the roof!
- * Why did I get rid of my vacuum cleaner? It sat there gathering dust.
- * I just accidentally swallowed some Scrabble tiles. The next visit to the toilet could spell disaster.

Given she's one of the world's most recognisable leading ladies, it's hard to imagine Dame Helen Mirren being rendered awestruck by anyone.

Yet there is one person who gets the award-garlanded actor to channel what she calls her 'fangirl thing', and he happens to be one of her recent co-stars.

Last year, Helen, who is 78 this month, spent time in an old mining town in Montana filming American western TV drama series *1923* alongside Hollywood veteran Harrison Ford, a man she confides with a smile that she had loved 'from a distance' after last working alongside him nearly 40 years ago.

When reunited with him on *1923*'s set as husband and wife duo Jacob and Cara Dutton, she says that she was 'slightly intimidated' by him. 'He'd be mortified to hear me say this because he's such an unintimidating person. He is the kindest, most generous, warmest person to be around,' she smiles. 'But still, my fangirl thing is something I can't quite get over, you know, "Oh my God, it's Harrison Ford!"'

The duo last appeared on screen together - again as husband and wife - in the 1986 drama *Mosquito Coast* at a time when Harrison was already firmly embedded in A-list heartthrob territory courtesy of his role as Han Solo in the *Star Wars* franchise. 'He was a massive, popular, movie star, which he's been ever since,' recalls Helen. 'It's an amazing journey that Harrison has taken through our profession.

And to be still up there, where he has been for the past 40 or 50 years, is amazing.'

Of course, the same could be said about Helen herself. Veteran of a half century-long career spanning theatre, television and film, she has amassed so many awards - among them an Oscar and countless BAFTAs - that her mantelpiece must be groaning under their weight.

At just two years shy of her 80th birthday, she doesn't show any signs of slowing down,

taking on a myriad of astonishingly varied roles to add to an acting CV that's bursting with diversity. This year she's already appeared in two Hollywood blockbusters, reprising her roles as the crime matriarch Queenie in the big-budget hit *Fast X* - a franchise she was so keen to be part of that she admits to begging its star, Vin Diesel, for a part - and the villainous goddess Hespera in *Shazam! Fury of the Gods*.

She's narrated this month's much-anticipated release *Barbie*, and will soon be seen tackling the role of late Israeli prime minister Golda

Meir in biopic *Golda*. So it's safe to say the actor remains robustly resistant to being typecast, not to mention enjoying some late life experimentation both on and off screen (in May, she hit the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival with electric blue hair to match her dress).

'I just love to find projects that are very different from each other,' she says when asked about these varied roles.


'This year is an absolute case in point, to go from *Barbie* to *Golda* to *Shazam!* to *1923*. And some are just for the pure fun of it. Like *Shazam! Fury of the Gods*, I loved the first *Shazam!* movie. I thought it was very funny and I loved the idea of the character that I'm playing - a Roman goddess. I mean, who doesn't want to play a Roman goddess?

'And then other projects, such as *Golda*, are a much more serious undertaking. You're putting your head above the parapet. But mostly, it's whatever is different from the last thing I've done.'

Taking on the role of Golda was certainly not without risk: Helen's casting led to criticism from some people, including Dame Maureen Lipman, who was displeased that a non-Jewish actor had been chosen to play a Jewish woman with such a prominent place in the history of Israel. In response, Helen has said that it's 'utterly legitimate' to raise the discussion about casting for the film, C

Role model

From a villainous Roman goddess to a tough rancher's wife, Dame Helen Mirren reveals how she chooses her extraordinarily diverse roles - and says she still feels like a 'fangirl' alongside co-star Harrison Ford



**'I loved the idea-of the.;'
character - _ a Ro:marr'
goddess. I mean, o
wouldn't want to; play
a Roman goddess?'**

'My fangirl thing is something I can't quite get over, you know, "Oh my God, it's Harrison Ford!"'

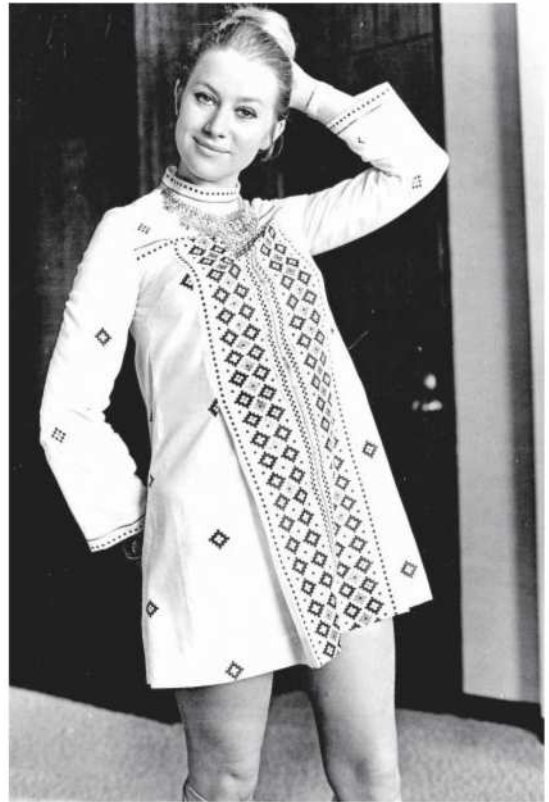
adding that she'd love to meet Maureen for a cup of tea to discuss it 'dame to dame'.

Despite the controversy, Helen says Golda is a character she found 'incredible' to take on. 'I came away from it with the deepest of admiration for her and indeed a kind of a love for her,' she enthuses. 'She was extraordinarily brave and with a commitment to Israel that was total. In a weird way, it was a bit like playing Elizabeth I in the sense of her utter commitment to her country and to her nation. The absolute total dedication of her life to that. And she achieved it without being a power-mad, dictator-type character at all. She was very maternal and - this is something I have in common with her - she absolutely loved kitchen equipment! I'm always buying the latest kitchen equipment.'

Shared domestic idiosyncrasies aside, Helen, who still oozes red-carpet glamour, is almost unrecognisable in the part. 'I did have a lot of make-up, obviously, and costume is incredibly important,' she says. 'It always rather surprised me at the end of the day when I took it all off and I was me again because I got so used to looking in the mirror and being that person.'

Certainly no one can accuse Helen of taking half measures when it comes to her performances: earlier this year, she revealed to chat-show host Graham Norton that she had broken one of her fingers while performing her

Tlienand now Helen Mirren aged 22 (above); and with her husband Taylor Hackford (below)



own stunts in *Shazam!* (it's now known as her 'Shazam finger'). Yet it seems there are some things even this redoubtable dame won't try: Helen admits to telling *1923* creator Taylor Sheridan that, western or no western, she drew the line at riding a horse.

'I said right at the beginning, "I don't ride horses",' she laughs. 'I mean, I have ridden horses, I've fallen off a horse many times. But I'm not a rider. I usually find it impossible to get them started. I'm like, "Go!" And they look at me like, "No!" So I thought I'd better put that out there in case Taylor was expecting some wonderful horse woman. And he said, "Don't worry, we'll put you in a [horse-drawn] buggy." So I learned how to drive a buggy, which was great. I loved my buggy. And certainly I came to appreciate horses very much and kind of understand them, which I didn't before.'

1923, which was recently commissioned for a second series, focuses on the challenges facing the Duttons as ranchers in prohibition era America. Helen is matriarch Cara - the latest in a line of strong women she's played over the years - a character who, at her request, was given Irish origins as a nod to the impact immigrants had on the shaping of America.

It's a theme that clearly resonates with Helen, whose father was a Russian emigre to the UK. 'To this day, that sense of recent immigration is

DAVID J. PHILLIPS/GETTY IMAGES; NECHAMA/PA; ATOUN/NTV

what gives America its incredible vibrancy and creativity,' she says. 'It's what I've always loved about America. I'm married to an American, I've lived in America, I've got my American passport, I drive with an American driving licence. But real Americans don't have a return ticket. They came with no return ticket, and they still come with no return ticket. They give up everything to make a life there and that's America's enormous strength and power, I think.'

The symbolism of two older actors being the centrepiece of a drama also attracted her - 'it's great to see two people of our age up on a poster,' as she puts it - alongside the portrayal of long-lasting partnerships. 'It's about how you live happily ever after,' says Helen. 'I know this because of my relationship with my husband. What happens is you become an absolute partnership and you have an equal voice in that partnership. It doesn't mean you don't have discussions about how to move forward, but it becomes a respectful partnership. And I think that's absolutely the relationship that Taylor has written for Harrison and me.'

The other Taylor in her life, of course, is Taylor Hackford, Helen's director husband of 25 years. The two met in 1985 when Taylor directed her in musical drama *White Nights*, prior to which Helen had been in a relationship with actor Liam Neeson. They married in December 1997 and have since enjoyed one of showbusiness's most durable and happy marriages, today dividing their time between properties in Lake Tahoe, Nevada (where Helen has to chase the odd black bear out of the garden), New Orleans and London.

The duo's partnership is clearly one of mutual respect, and Helen admits that they keep their professional lives largely separate. 'I don't in general ask him to read the scripts that I'm going to be involved in,' she says. 'Only if he really, really wants to. We allow each other to go and do their thing and do it however they want to do it. We don't interfere in each other's lives in that way.'

It's a formula that clearly works, as does Helen's professional mantra. 'What I love,' she smiles, 'is just constantly mixing it up.'

1923 is on Paramount+ now

'I usually find it impossible to get horses started. I'm like, "Go!" And they look at me like, "No!"'

Mixing it up
Clockwise
from right:
Helen and
Harrison
Ford in 1923;
starring with
Camille Cottin
in Golda; in
a poster for
Barbie;
with
Jack Dylan
Grazer in
Shazam! Fury
of the Gods;
at the Cannes
Film Festival





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101 - it for the long run

More Brits than ever are embracing running in later life - particularly women. Here we meet three female runners who got the bug after 50 and have completed nearly 300 marathons between them

by RICHARD ASKWITH
photography JOHN MILLAR

**T11reof
the best
Left to right:
Dot
Kesterton;
Hilary
Wharam;
Chris Hobson**

There was a time when the sight of someone well past retirement age out for a run would have seemed highly unusual. But today the UK is in the early stages of a late-life running boom. Almost 240,000 British over-65s are regular runners, including nearly 40,000 over 75. And many of them are running regularly and seriously, too.

This year's London Marathon included 2,643 finishers over 60, of whom 323 were over 70 and 16 were over 80. Roughly one in four - 11,490 - were over 50. And women are particularly keen; the number of women over 70 finishing the London Marathon (99 this year) has doubled since 2017. Many are drawn to running because of all the health benefits it can offer. Not only do runners live longer than non-runners by up

'I hadn't run very fast,' says Hilary, 81, 'but I was the fastest in my age group'

to seven years, but they also enjoy more years free from chronic illness or disability.

Regular exercise can delay the progression of more than 30 common diseases, plus it's good for bone density and mental wellbeing. As for the old chestnut that running will 'wreck your joints', it just isn't true. Runners are seven times less likely than non-runners to need knee replacements.

The benefits are so huge and life-enhancing that people who have never run before are taking it up in middle age or later. Many also find running empowering: an activity that builds strength and confidence and opens up their lives to new experiences and connections.

The women interviewed here have different motives and different stories. What they have in common is that they have shed the inhibitions that keep many older people indoors.

Hilary Wharam, 81

Hilary Wharam (*opposite, centre*), from Rawdon, near Leeds, was in her early fifties when she began running and, 30 years on, has completed 175 marathons. She first started to run with her daughter-in-law. 'We ran about three-quarters of a mile, stopped three times and were absolutely stuffed,' she says. After two months, she tried a local 10k race, and a few days later a man came round to her house with a trophy. 'I hadn't run very fast, but I was fastest in my age group.' Soon she felt confident enough to start training with her local club, the Horsforth Harriers. Three years later, aged 55, she got a place in the London Marathon. I got **Q**



3

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'I remember telling myself that I might never get another chance to do this'

Dot Kesterton, 71

Dot Kesterton (below) from Sheffield showed promise as a teenage cross-country runner but then gave up the sport until being talked back into it 40 years later aged 56.

She was dropping the eldest of her seven grandchildren at school, when a much younger mother persuaded her to go jogging with her.

'I hated it. I felt ill, everything ached afterwards,' she recalls. In fact, on one early run, she was even sick in the woods.

'Yet somehow, astonishingly, I was bitten.'

After a few months, she ran a 5k Race for Life, then a 10k race. She was absurdly slow by her current standards, but loved the atmosphere at the finish.

She had just retired from her job as a PE teacher, so running quickly became a big part of who she was. 'You go through life with these roles that you identify with: student, wife, mother, teacher. Then you retire, and it all slips away.' Now, however, she is a runner.

Dot, who has three grown-up children, joined a running group, the Smiley Paces, and ran her first London Marathon, aged 60, in 2012. The following year, she ran 12 minutes faster. 'I remember telling myself that I might never get another chance to do this.'

She nearly didn't. The following January, she was diagnosed with breast cancer: an 'incredibly distressing' experience, requiring surgery and

0 round in four hours, seven minutes, and apparently that's "good for age", which means you get a place in the following year's race.' She went on to run London 14 times in a row. Her fastest time was 'four hours and six sodding seconds'. But she slowed down as the years passed, and the annual pilgrimage to the capital, which she last did in 2016 when she was 75, lost its appeal.

She had, however, found a new role at the club by then: as the kindly leader of an 'absolute beginners' training group. 'When you could "beat the old woman", you could move up to the main group,' laughs Hilary, a former social welfare officer. She lost her husband in 2015, and the social connections of running are now more important than ever. 'I have to go out to speak to somebody,' she says.

She hopes to reach 300 marathons, but she finds them very hard now. 'I've got a spinal stenosis, which means that you run more bent,' she says. Yet she's far from frail. Finding the main stadium gate locked when she arrived for the Saga Magazine photoshoot, she astounded everyone by climbing over a 6ft fence!

She limits herself to the local, off-road marathons organised by It's Grim Up North Running. 'I'll never do a road marathon again unless I can start early or they have a very generous cut-off time,' she says. And although she's usually among the last to finish, the younger runners find her presence encouraging. 'I shout, "Well done!" to every single pair of legs that passes me and a lot of them call my name. It's nice if someone's feeling inspired, just because you're there shuffling along.'

Hilary (above) ran 14 London marathons in a row

'Running gave me continuity, recovery and headspace'



radiotherapy. But running, she believes, helped her to endure it. 'I used to run three miles to the hospital for treatment and then run back. Running gave me continuity, recovery and headspace.'

She has been in remission for almost ten years, and is running better than ever, helped by a supportive Sheffield running club, Steel City Striders. She has tried everything from marathons to 800-metre track races, and also loves fell-running.

In recent years, she has raced, with increasing success, in organised Masters athletics, where runners aged from 35 to over 100 compete in five-year age groups.

By 2019, Dot felt confident enough to compete in the European Masters championships. 'When you've survived cancer, you've got nothing to lose,' she says. She came home with three silver medals in the over-65 category. Then, last year, she won the over-70 gold in the 10k road race at the World Masters championships in Tampere, Finland.

For all her competitive success, which also includes two world championship silvers, Dot still believes that running's main rewards are wellbeing and camaraderie. 'I love running with my friends, many of whom are 30 years younger than me. It's fundamental to the person I've become.'

To anyone thinking of trying it, she says simply: 'Don't wait till tomorrow. Go out and enjoy yourself. Just go for a walk, enjoy being in the outdoors, and then if you feel like it, try trotting for a bit - and think about what that felt like when you were a child, just having a play. That's all I'm doing, really: playing. I'm 71, and I'm revisiting my childhood.'

Chris Hobson, 69

Chris Hobson (*above, right*) started running at 60, six months before retiring from her job as a head teacher. Now she has run marathons on all seven continents including, last December, the Antarctic Ice Marathon, which she was the oldest woman ever to finish.

When her daughter first talked her into joining her local running club, Holmfirth Harriers near Huddersfield, Chris was apprehensive. 'I had high blood pressure and I was overweight,' she recalls. However, she started by mixing running with walking, and before long she was signed up for the London Marathon. 'I retired from work on the Friday and ran the marathon on the Sunday.' She finished in 5 hours 52 minutes and ran another marathon that September, in Chester.



Chris (above) is a member of the 100 Club, for those who have run 100 marathons

'That's when I heard about the 100 Club - people who've done 100 marathons. So I thought, maybe that's something I could aim for.' Nearly a decade on, she's training for her 120th marathon - and hopes to run it fast enough to secure a 'good for age' place in the 2024 London event, given that she'll have just turned 70 by the time she runs it.

She likes to run a marathon every five or six weeks, and much of her time in between is devoted to training. As well as daily mobility exercises and having regular sessions with a chiropractor, she monitors her sleep and her blood glucose, tracks her running data with a Garmin watch, and tries to stick to a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet.

'I eat the equivalent of five chicken breasts a day,' she says. This 'athletic lifestyle' is not just about marathons. 'It's about making me fit enough to enjoy my older age and do all the things I want to do,' she says.

She hopes to run the North Pole Marathon one day, and perhaps also the Dead Sea Marathon in Israel. To Chris, 'Age is just a number'. And, she insists, 'If I can do this, anyone can.' ®

To find out about running clubs in your area, see runtogether.co.uk and englandathletics.org for England. For Wales, see welshathletics.org; for Scotland, see scottishathletics.org.uk; and for Northern Ireland, it's athleticsni.org

The Race Against Time: Adventures in Late-Life Running by Richard Askwith (Yellow Jersey Press, £18.99) is out now

The naked truth

Naturism may be having a moment, but for many 1970s fans, the joys of baring all never went away...

by LUISA METCALFE



Prepare to bust out your SPF, grab your towel and get naked, because taking off your clothes is in again. But forget Gwyneth Paltrow-like poses in your birthday suit on Instagram to celebrate turning 50; this isn't about exhibitionism or showing off a gym-toned body. Instead, we're returning to a simpler time of feeling the sun on our backs, the grass under our feet and water on our skin. Yes, naturism is back.

Around 13 million people enjoy 'social nudity' (although British Naturism, the UK official naturists' organisation, puts the number as high as 6.75 million). And celebrities such as Esther Rantzen, Ulrika Jonsson and Kate Humble have extolled the virtues of spending time in the nude.

The pandemic appears to have driven up numbers, as workers - stuck at home with no fears of any unannounced visitors - got into the habit of wandering around starkers. During the first lockdown in 2020, British Naturism, founded in 1964, saw a dramatic growth in new members. Now businesses have got in on the act with lidos offering naked swims and restaurants putting nude dining nights on the menu.

The resurgence echoes the era when naturism first emerged after the First World War and flu pandemic, when people wanted to feel free and explore new ways of living, argues Anabella Pollen, author of naturist history *Nudism in a Cold Climate*.

And while it may appear that naturism is a hot new trend, many mid- and late-lifers have been enjoying it since the Seventies and Eighties. In fact, when it comes to being comfortable in their own skin, the Saga generation is frequently ahead of the curve. 'When you strip off your clothes, you strip off your cares,' says Andrew Welch, 57, spokesperson for British Naturism.

Retired teacher Vivienne Heenan and her husband Duncan, a former company director, both 74, who live in the West Midlands, met at university in 1967 and quickly fell into their clothing-free lifestyle. 'Neither of us suffered from the body shame that is passed off as "modesty", so nudity between us was normal and unremarkable from early on,' says Duncan. 'To us,

our bodies are what we live in, not status symbols or shameful things to be hidden.

'Over the years, we have acquired the lumps, bumps, scars and blemishes life brings, but they have been accepted because we know what real people look like, and that the Hollywood images so many people aspire to are largely artifice.'

The couple, who first visited a naturist beach on the Isle of Wight, and later naturist beaches in the South of France, say they were following their instincts and it was once they met other naturists that they discovered their lifestyle had a name.

'We found we preferred the ambience of shared values, which made for a more community feeling than on "textile" [the term used by naturists to describe people who prefer to wear clothes] beaches; plus there were the practical advantages, especially with young children, of no wet costumes, no ludicrous towel dances, and much easier sand management,' says Duncan.

In the early Eighties, stripping off on beaches or in saunas may have been *de rigueur* on the Continent, but in Britain, a confused 'nudge, nudge, wink, wink' attitude to anything nudity-related prevailed. So people kept their clothes on in public but didn't blink an eye over naked torsos splashed on page three.

Fortunately, Duncan and Vivienne didn't feel judged by their peers. 'People's reactions ranged

from polite interest to indifference but none disapproved, and a few people admitted to at least trying it themselves,' says Duncan. 'We were very central to local society, being involved with youth groups, our children's schools, church and our jobs. Though we were not evangelical about it, we didn't keep our naturism secret.'

With its roots in the early 20th century, naturism was initially an antidote to the era's restrictive clothes - tight collars and studs, corsets, laced shoes. It was practised largely privately among like-minded people in small groups with names such as 'Sun Ray club' and 'New Health Society'. Naturism even had a royal moment when King Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson skinny dipped off Croatia's island of Rab.

'In the early days leading up to the 1960s, it was very private,' explains Welch. 'People didn't even give their real names at naturist clubs. It was in the Seventies and Eighties when

'When you strip off your clothes, you strip off your cares'

C, topless sunbathing became a thing. But there was an erroneous connection between nudity and sex. People would think that if you're on a campsite and you have no clothes on, something raunchy was going on. But that's not the case.'

In 1978, the UK's first officially naked beach was declared in Hastings; the following year the BBC made *Let's Go Naked*, a documentary on the thriving naturist community; and in 1980, Brighton beach set aside a stretch for nudity.

During the Nineties and pre-recession 2000s, naturism retreated from the headlines but the lifestyle continued to grow. 'Since 2004 it's been legal to be nude on all beaches,' says Welch.

The Crown Prosecution Service outlines that naturists can be naked outside designated nude beaches, for instance, 'in the absence of any sexual context and in relation to nudity where the person has no intention to cause alarm or distress'. (However,

many naturists prefer the company of their community, not to mention the more egalitarian experience of being one of many unclothed people rather than the only one.)

In 2010, Vivienne was ordained as an Anglican priest and declared she was a naturist during her selection process. 'We discovered several members of the congregation who were regular users of our local naturist beach,' adds Duncan. Soon after, the couple joined the Christian Naturist Fellowship, where members, who include clergy, can discuss their faith in a clothing-free environment.

Younger people may be discovering the joys of naturism, but the Heenans are contented

veterans of the movement. 'It has given us a lot of pleasure and kept us and our kids clear of the body phobias and hang-ups that seem to cause so many people grief,' says Duncan.

Today, one of the attractions of naturism is as an escape from a selfie-obsessed society in which social media filters are used so widely, and where beauty icons are heavily airbrushed. 'As a naturist you accept yourself for what you are,' says retired nurse Suzanne Piper, 74, who has been a naturist since 1976. 'I've had several operations for polycystic ovarian syndrome but I'm not bothered about my scars.'

So, if you're curious about naturism, how do you get started? The easiest way is to visit a naturist beach. 'Once you get into a naturist environment, you realise that everybody is normal, you're not walking around in a field of supermodels and no one's judging you,' says Welch.

There are a few guidelines:

'You must swim naked in swimming pools,' adds Welch. 'It's to do with the philosophy, but also hygiene - you're not bringing in dirt or traces of laundry detergent. Lastly, if it's bad behaviour when you have your clothes on, it's bad behaviour with your clothes off. You don't stare at people on the tube, or make comments about people's boobs or bums, and you don't do that in a naturist place either,' he says. 'We laugh when people ask about the rules as there really aren't any. Just be nice and be normal.'

But the true appeal lies in the experience itself, he says: 'It's the joy of the sense of wonderment and feeling of not having clothes and we can all benefit from that.' ®

'Our bodies are what we live in, not status symbols or shameful things to be hidden'

LET IT ALL HANG OUT

Six of the UK's best naturist spots and activities



* **Nudefest** This week-long festival (3-9 July, Thorney Lakes, Somerset) has naked fitness, music acts and discos.

nudefest.co.uk
* **Studland Beach** A 1km stretch of Studland Bay,

Dorset, is set aside for naturists.

* **Morfa Dyffryn** One kilometre of this long sandy beach on the west coast of Wales is clothing-free.

* **Naked Heart Walks Annual** fundraising walks

for the British Heart Foundation. **shop.**

bn.org.uk/pages/bhf
* **The Great British Skinny Dip** Thousands of people strip off for swims in pools, lakes and the sea around the UK to raise money for the British

Heart Foundation. greatbritishskinnydip.co.uk

* **Clover Spa & Hotel** Britain's only naturist spa, near Birmingham, has treatments, a sauna, steam room, hot tub and cafe. cloverspa.co.uk

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(Not) on the buses

Our bus services are being quietly decimated - with a quarter lost in ten years. We visit a county where 43% of 'bus miles' have been cut - and discover the devastating impact on people's lives

by
ANNA
MOORE

When Mary Snelling moved to Yeovil, in South Somerset, it was partly for its bus service. Her former

village home in Charlton Horethorne - just ten miles away - was poorly served and, although Mary couldn't drive, this hadn't been a problem because her husband, Dave, could. But in 2002, he was

diagnosed with an eye condition which meant his sight was beginning to fail. 'We took the decision to move to an area with regular services and amenities,' says Mary, now 73. 'We chose our house partly because it had the luxury of two bus services every 15 minutes.' Never did she imagine just how much they would be depleted.

At first it was a gradual withdrawal - one service stopped, then the number 53 bus that remained was pushed back to every 20 minutes, then every half-hour. Last June, it was announced that it would be cut completely.

The impact on Mary, who is living with mobility problems, and Dave, 77, who is now almost blind, was immediate. She could no longer travel easily into the town centre so she switched to shopping online. Getting to the GP and making hospital appointments became expensive with a taxi costing up to £10 each way.

Their daughter Linda, who lives with them and is also a non-driver, launched a local petition and founded Yeovil Bus Users Group, which now has 1,200 members. 'On the last day the 53 ran, one of our neighbours said to me, "That's it now. I'm stuck here",' says Linda, 47. 'Another local man, who has diabetes and is partially sighted, rang me to explain how he was now relying on family who lived in another town

to take him and his wife to the shops. He said, "I feel like a burden".' After local pressure, the 53 bus has been partially reinstated, once every two hours, on a reduced route. 'But the times are not user-friendly and you're often left stranded,' says Mary. 'There's so much planning involved, we tend not to go out. I miss the freedom.'

Somerset is a broad, rural county with long distances between populated places (in bus terms, 'dead mileage'). It has lost 43% of bus miles covered by services in the past five years, but cuts like these have been countrywide.

Almost one in ten local bus services in the UK were axed in the past year. Silviya Barrett, director of policy at the Campaign for Better Transport, explains that a decade of austerity and tightly squeezed budgets led many local authorities to withdraw funding from bus services since there's no legal requirement to provide them.

'Across so much of the UK, buses are the beating heart of getting people around. Without them, everyone's life gets poorer'

Between 2009 and 2019, 3,000 local bus routes were lost or reduced. With council withdrawal, bus services were left to commercial operators but then Covid came and the message to stay away from public transport. About 20% of bus users have not come back. 'That reduction in usage has made commercial services unviable,' she says. 'The

subsequent cuts are having a huge impact on the 80% of people who still need them.'

Claire Walters, chief executive of the campaign group Bus Users, believes this has gone ahead partly because many people aren't that interested. 'Buses often get ignored,'

**Stranded
Mary and
Dave Snelling
with daughter
Linda, founder
of Yeovil Bus
Users Group**





she says. 'We think it doesn't affect us until it does. It's short-sighted to think you're never going to be reliant on a bus.'

Running a car is increasingly expensive. 'There's the high cost of fuel,' says Walters, 'but also the government and local authorities are trying to reduce car usage and there will eventually be road pricing where you pay per mile.' Then with age, the chance of having your licence taken away looms larger. The number of conditions that may have to be declared to the DVLA runs to almost 200. 'I know someone who went to the GP with a retinal problem and her licence was cut up almost on the spot,' says

Walters. 'We hear from people who have retired to the country and then their partner who did the driving has died. So many villages have lost their post offices, GP, shops. You don't want to rely on others, so what can you do? Catching a bus means you can make a new life. On rural routes, people get to know the driver and meet other passengers. Across so much of the UK, buses are the beating heart of getting people around. Without them, everyone's life gets poorer - including the lives of people in cars, as buses mean less traffic on the road.'

There are patches of Somerset that show how much can be achieved when communities



Ⓞ come together to back buses. Peter Travis is co-chair of Somerset Bus Partnership and lives in the village of Rode, which almost lost its entire service in 2014. 'We went from having 50 buses going through the village to half a dozen,' he says. 'We staged a protest where 200 people sat down in the middle of the high street. Every age group was there: children, the local vicar, the chair of the parish council, and local TV reported on it.'

The bus operators did agree to reinstate services and everyone in the village uses the bus - even those with cars. 'The community is passionate about our bus service now,' says Travis.

Bus operators don't necessarily make it easy: there have been three timetable changes in the past nine months alone. Each new timetable has been copied by Rode volunteers and delivered to every household to inform people who are not online and to make taking a bus simple and straightforward. 'If you can't rely

on them, people won't use them,' adds Travis.

The government has recognised the need for action. In 2021, it launched a National Bus Strategy called Bus Back Better with the aim of improving services and encouraging more passengers. It came with a £3 billion transformation fund. 'Unfortunately, £2 billion of that had to be diverted to maintain services through Covid,' says Travis. 'At Somerset, we asked for £165 million and got £119 million. Two-thirds of local authorities didn't get anything at all.' In March this year, a report by the Transport Select Committee praised the ideas and ambitions set out in Bus Back Better but underlined the need for better funding and better guidance for local authorities.

Silviya Barrett believes that long term, ring-fenced funding is the only solution. She supports the development of a hybrid model where local councils and commercial bus operators work together. 'One option is that commercial operators run the core 9 to 5 service, supplemented at evenings and weekends by the local authorities,' she says. As for the funding, she points to the £27 billion road-building plan launched in 2020: 'We need to maintain our existing roads but we shouldn't be building large new road capacity projects.'

As Walters says, 'There's no point asking people to think green when they travel if there are no options other than driving. Young people need buses - teenagers who can't

drive and don't want to rely on parents. Older people reach a point when they need them, too. It's fine in the middle years but before and after, it's not so great. The planet needs us to start living sustainably. Evidence shows that using public transport helps you lose weight and keeps you active. The best way to keep a bus service is to use it. Don't lose what you've got!' ®

Joined-up thinking
'There's no point asking people to think green when they travel if there are no options other than driving'

'The best way to keep a bus service is to use it. Don't lose what you've got!'

BRING BACK THE BUS

* The Campaign for Better Transport's research shows that 27% of bus services in England (as measured in vehicle miles) disappeared in the ten years to 2022.

* The biggest drop has been as a result of the pandemic: in the years between 2011/12 and 2018/19, bus vehicle miles in England dropped by 10%. In the two years between March 2019 and March 2021, they

fell by almost double that (18%).

* The regions with the biggest declines were the North West and the East, both losing 38% of services, followed by the East Midlands with a 35% loss. Next was Yorkshire and Humber at 34%, West Midlands 32%, the South West 29%, the South East with 28% and London 5%.

* The *Guardian* reported the number of live registered bus services fell by

9.5% from January 2022 to 2023.

* The West Midlands saw the greatest decline in services with 28.3% fewer registrations this month compared with January 2022. The North East saw a decline of 15.9%; the North West 9.0%; the West 8.7%; the South East and London 6%; Wales 2.4%; Scotland 0.3%. The only area to witness an increase was the East, with growth of 2.3%.



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octopus;
giant Pacific
octopus;
common reef
octopus



Shape shifters



They're highly intelligent and can even form bonds with humans. No wonder the world has become transfixed by octopuses. We talk to the author of a new book about these mesmerising sea creatures



With their alien-like bodies, octopuses may not be the most attractive of animals, but these enigmatic sea creatures are having quite the moment and winning lots of new fans.

Ever since the success of the 2020 Oscar and BAFTA-winning Netflix documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, in which a diver forms a close friendship with one of these cephalopods, the world has been captivated by what these intelligent, eight-limbed molluscs are capable of.

While recovering from burnout and depression, South African filmmaker and diver Craig Foster recorded footage of the same octopus every day for a year, during which time they formed such a unique bond they even held 'hands' and the octopus grew comfortable enough to lay on his chest. Craig's documentary was a surprise hit that has been viewed by millions of people worldwide.

Like Craig, marine biologist David Scheel, 62, is also fascinated by octopuses, having studied them for 30 years and even kept some as pets at home and work, including at Alaska Pacific University, where he is a professor. Far from his explorations being purely academic, over the years, David has done more than 500 ocean dives, and collected data on at least 1,000 wild octopuses in their natural habitats.

While the so-called common octopus in the Netflix documentary is, at around 20lb, relatively small, David has encountered a whole host of different species in his work, some weighing a whopping 100lb. So 'awe-inspiring, complex and exciting' does David find octopuses - of which there are at least 300 species worldwide - he has written a new book, *Many Things Hidden Under a Rock*, in homage to them.

He also made a documentary, *The Octopus in My House*, broadcast on BBC Two in 2019,

by HELEN
CARROLL



about Heidi, a day octopus who lived in a saltwater tank in his house for a year. After his divorce, David had space for a tank as his ex-wife took most of the living room furniture.

Heidi became such a part of the family that she would watch TV through the glass with the scientist and his teenage daughters.

'Octopuses are curious. They like to investigate tubes and mazes, and open containers to see what's inside,' says David. 'They can change their skin colour, pattern texture and body posture, all in the blink of an eye. There aren't any other animals with those capabilities.'

As well as holding hands, Heidi liked playing games and would grab hold of, and try her tentacle at, a Rubik's Cube; and tug on a plastic ball attached to a light and a buzzer designed to summon David into the room.

Octopuses' capacity for disguise is a sight to behold. Their ability to camouflage themselves when they emerge from their dens helps them avoid being eaten by predators such as sharks, dolphins, seals and sea otters.

The octopus in the Netflix documentary did a remarkable job of camouflaging when she first spotted Craig, rolling into a ball and covering herself with shells picked up from the ocean floor with her tentacles. In another clip, she escaped being eaten by a shark by riding on its back, no longer detectable by sight or smell, jumping off when there was somewhere to hide then squirting ink to cloud the water as she made her escape.

Octopuses are also capable of recognising human faces, enabling them to distinguish between people, which explains why Craig could form a bond with his underwater friend.

David, however, had an opposite experience with Amethyst, an octopus that was kept in a tank at the aquarium attached to the university where he works. She wanted to get her own back on him for capturing her in a net for regular weigh-ins so would squirt water

'They can change their skin colour, pattern texture and body posture, all in the blink of an eye'

Sucker for you
Craig Foster
forms a bond with an octopus in
My Octopus Teacher
(be/ow); David Scheel with Heidi (above)



at him whenever he approached the tank.
 Before you start trying to make friends with these sea creatures, it's important to know that blue-ringed octopuses are venomous. So potent is their venom it can cause respiratory arrest, heart failure, paralysis, blindness and even death. Encounters with the bigger ones can be perilous too. 'The giant Pacific octopus we have up here in Alaska is big and strong enough to potentially be dangerous,' says David. 'Early on in my work, I heard about one drowning a dog and there are stories of them holding people underwater.'

'So, you do have to take a little bit of care - the advice I give my students [before dives] is, if one does get hold of you, remove their tentacles one sucker at a time, like you would a bathmat.'

'I was once told a story about a huge octopus getting into a tussle with a fisherman on deck before stealing a knife from his sheath, stabbing him in the leg and escaping overboard, knife in tentacle.' While David can't confirm the veracity of this tale, it's become part of octopus folklore.

But octopuses are less of a threat to humans than we are to them, especially given a recently discovered proposal to commercially farm them for food in the world's first octopus farm. The planned farm, in the Canary Islands, would raise a million octopuses annually. It has been described as 'cruel' given that octopuses would be kept together in light tanks, when they are solitary animals who like the dark, and killed in containers of ice.

In the wild, octopuses live for around two years. Males usually die soon after procreating, either at the hands of predators or, incredibly, their mates, who sometimes eat them. Females live long enough to protect their eggs after giving birth, dying soon after they hatch from lack of nutrition.

They stop eating as going in search of crabs, shrimps and lobsters to eat would leave their offspring (hidden under their bodies during the incubation period) exposed to danger.

Every ocean in the world boasts some species of octopus. Last summer, conservationists were excited to discover a population boom in the common octopus around Cornwall's Lizard Peninsula. One fisherman reported catching 150 octopuses in



Master of disguise
A Galapagos octopus camouflaged on a reef in Galapagos National Park, Pacific Ocean (right). David Scheel (below left and right)



a day, compared to his usual catch of one or two a year. According to David, climate change, creating warmer waters, could be attracting more octopuses to our coasts.

While it's tricky to do an octopus headcount, David believes numbers are also rising 'possibly as a result of removing so many other fish from the ocean [which might have preyed on them]'.

Here's hoping that, during future summer holidays, a few more of us can enjoy seeing an octopus put on one of its incredible shows. *

'I was once told a story about a huge octopus getting into a tussle with a fisherman on deck'



Many Things Under a Rock: The Mysteries of Octopuses by David Scheel (Hodder & Stoughton, £25) is out on 6 July

OCTO-FACTS

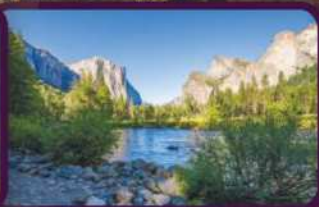


- * Octopuses have three hearts, two of which pump their blue blood through the gills, and a doughnut-shaped brain.
- * Most octopuses are solitary except the Pacific striped octopus, which lives in groups of up to 40.
- * Their ability to create horns - as well as stand on two tentacles - while shape-shifting has earned them the moniker 'devilfish'.
- * The largest octopus captured, north of Victoria, British Columbia, in 1967, weighed 156lb and measured almost 23ft from arm tip to arm tip.
- * Octopuses have a 'mini brain' - or neurons - in each of their eight arms which can survive independently for a short time after being severed, and can even grow back.
- * Males have a modified third right arm, a hectocotylus, containing a sperm groove and specialised tip. During mating, he inserts the hectocotylus into the female's mantle cavity, which houses her organs, and deposits sperm.

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Who's in the driving seat?

Once the realm of science fiction, driverless cars are coming to a town near you. But how safe are they - and would you want to be a passenger?

'Grandad, is it true that in the olden days, some people's job was just steering a car?'
Let's be clear; this is not a question any of us are going to hear from our grandchildren.

But it's almost certain that their grandchildren will find it hilarious that, yes, people in history had to drive cars, lorries and buses, looking out for hazards, wiggling a steering wheel - and, inevitably, given human failings, crashing.

That self-driving vehicles are coming is pretty much beyond dispute. Technologists, politicians, town planners, even lawyers, are increasingly geared up to motoring as we know it becoming a heritage skill, like driving a coach-and-four. In San Francisco, there are already driverless taxis. And our government last year committed to having self-driving cars on British roads by 2025, pledging £100m to help.

by
JONATHAN
MARGOLIS

Carmakers are accordingly investing billions in the new dawn; in April, Ford in the UK announced that its BlueCruise self-driving technology had received government approval. It was a tentative step - it allows drivers to take their hands off the wheel on selected motorways while a camera monitors their eyes so they stay alert - but it's a step nonetheless towards truly 'autonomous', as the new breed of robotically controlled vehicles are technically known.

Asda and Ocado are currently conducting tests of driverless delivery vans in secret locations in London, and there are seven government-funded self-driving pilot schemes due to start. In Sunderland, self-driving 'mobility' shuttle buses will be operating to the university and hospital next year. These are being tested by the Aurigo company in Coventry. And the world's first full-sized 'autonomous' bus was launched on a 14-mile route from Fife to Edinburgh in May (although it has a 'safety driver' on board, which rather blunts the experience). There will also be pilot projects in Belfast (a harbour shuttle), Solihull/Coventry (a control hub) and Cambridge (self-driving taxis), plus HGV lorry trials with Asda and between factory sites in Sunderland.

'Our health and our wealth will be lifted by this technology,' says Paul Newman, founder of



Oxbotica, which has been working on software for self-driving vehicles since 2015. Oxbotica has Ocado as one of its investors, and built the software for the first unmanned autonomous vehicle to be tested on public roads in Europe, cruising around its home city of Oxford last year. 'But even though this is going to break through it's still a bit like standing in 1975 and saying, "This computing thing could really take off".'

Autonomy is transformative like computers were.'

The advantages of driverless cars are legion, say enthusiasts. Computer-driven vehicles can - supposedly - make driving safer than the softest of software in our brains. Some 94% of road accidents are caused by human error, and self-driving cars have the potential to eliminate these mistakes, thanks to multiple cameras, sensors firing out laser beams, and computer algorithms able to react hundreds of times faster than a human being.

Devotees argue they will give mobility to people unable to drive. Robot-driven cars should also reduce traffic delays; AI-controlled vehicles beaming data to one another automatically are more agile than the lumbering traffic management we are used to. Busy crossroads controlled by traffic lights should become unnecessary, as self-driving cars turn such junctions into an intricately synchronised ballet with traffic flowing simultaneously but never colliding. Motorways will also run freer, with cars speeding along closer together, because for non-human drivers with instant reaction times, safe stopping distances become a thing of the past.

The need for huge car parks should also diminish, along with roadsides with parked cars; for the likelihood is that, in our great-great-grandchildren's day, owning a car to sit unused for 95% of the time will be regarded as ridiculous.

Streets and the air will be clearer because these cars will be electric and charged from renewable sources. They will circulate urban streets, picking up our descendants and taking them where they want to go; it's possible that if passengers don't mind adverts playing in their self-driving transport, they will even be driven free of charge.

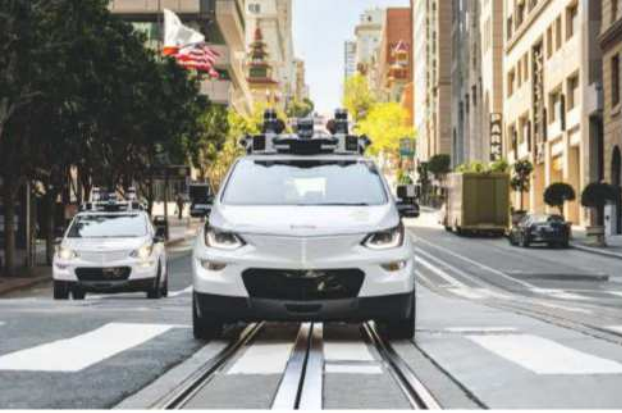
'It's still a bit like standing in 1975 and saying, "This computing thing could really take off"'

People may become more productive, too. Instead of concentrating on the driving, they will be able to spend their travel time on calls, thinking great thoughts or just relaxing.

There's also potential for a revival of the countryside. People living in a remote spot who become disabled will be as able to pop into town as they did when they could drive. And when we don't need to worry about drinking and driving, rural pubs and restaurants could boom.

All sound too good to be true? Realistically, as with most progress, it's going to be slow in coming. In fact, talking with experts, there's slightly more fly than ointment.

In San Francisco, which is very much the Q



On the road
Left, from top:
self-driving taxis in San Francisco. The world's first autonomous bus, which was launched in Scotland on 15 May



for example, bought the technology but sold it again. So, the position now is that for the immediate future, this is probably a technology for segregated areas with no human drivers – like airport buses and shuttles, buses in bus lanes and vehicles in pedestrianised areas.

I think full adoption is inevitable, but whether that's in five or 50 years, I don't know. There will come a point when the benefits are so significant that as a society, we will accept that the safety is not 100% but is good enough.'

'When we get into a vehicle, the "driver" will have the experience of every mile driven ever and every event on the road ever'

Paul Newman at Oxbotica, who first built an autonomous vehicle in the Sydney docks in 1995, says his team spends much of its time looking for weaknesses in the AI and, 'doing boring things in search of odd, tricky scenes, getting software to imagine situations that have never happened. We have a scenario generator that tries to simulate the worst possible driver behaviour around you.'

The strength of all this research, he explains, is making autonomous driving safer than the human variety, because autonomous cars are constantly reporting new situations and how they can be navigated. 'This is the knockout reason this technology is coming,' Newman concludes. 'When a young driver starts, they can be driving at 70mph with no knowledge at all. In the future, when we get into a vehicle, the "driver" will have the benefit of the experience of every mile driven ever and every event on the road ever, available to every vehicle and updateable.'

'Someone takes a dodgy left-hand turn in Caracas and seconds later, your car is aware of that set of circumstances. With this technology, it's not a fixed competency found in one vehicle - it's the shared experience of every mile ever.' @

CI Petri dish for self-driving technology, there's evidence that their self-driving taxis are not quite hacking it yet. Bus drivers are reportedly getting fed up with confused robo-taxis stopping inexplicably in the middle of the road for lengthy periods and leaving buses and their passengers stranded. There have been minor crashes, too: 'When an autonomous vehicle causes a collision, it wasn't tired, or intoxicated, it didn't get distracted or try to get away with something it knew better than to do,' tweeted one San Francisco bus driver. 'It "believed" it was driving correctly. They don't work as advertised, and they shouldn't be on the road.'

One issue is that driving in traffic is much more complicated than anyone realised when self-driving cars first became possible, and that robot enthusiasts underestimate how clever and flexible our brains actually are at reacting to rare or unique traffic occurrences.

Stephen Hamilton is technology partner in London law firm Mills & Reeve and has been studying autonomous vehicles from a legal and more general standpoint for many years. The legalities of, say, establishing responsibility in a crash involving two vehicles of different makes with different software has been puzzling lawyers for years and, Hamilton reports, little progress has been made. 'The core problem,' he explains, 'is that we expect perfection from robotics, while we readily accept that humans make mistakes. So, a few years ago, we thought self-driving cars would be everywhere by 2020, but some companies have now withdrawn. Uber,

No hands!
From left:
a self-driving car's visible sensors; an autonomous vehicle of the future with an interior in a 'meeting' configuration



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A life in full bloom

As she turns 90, Shirley Sherwood, owner of the world's largest collection of contemporary botanical art, reflects on her amazing life

by KATHRYN KNIGHT

As a girl, Shirley Sherwood had set her heart on becoming a botanical artist, yet when, aged 21, she was offered what she once would have thought of as her dream job - drawing plants and dissecting flowers and fruit - at Oxford University, she turned it down. 'I wanted to be out in the world, not at the back of a herbarium,' she says. And out in the world the redoubtable Shirley has been ever since, amassing any number of extraordinary accomplishments along the way.

In an era when female scientists were a rarity, she was the lone female botanist in her year at Oxford in 1951 and became the only woman on a Nobel-prize-winning pharmaceutical team.

Shirley's CV does not stop there: she's written several books on botany, and, alongside her second husband James, relaunched the iconic Orient Express in the early Eighties. Yet there is one achievement she holds dear above all



Plant portrait
Above: Shirley Sherwood.
Below: the collection includes 'Sunflower' by Paul Jones



others and which links her to the passion she first nurtured in childhood. Today, Shirley is one of the foremost collectors of botanical art, and pieces from her 1,064 strong collection - gathered from 36 countries - are seen every week by thousands in the gallery that bears her name in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

It's a rather wonderful legacy, as Shirley, who was awarded the QBE for services to botanical art in 2012, agrees when we meet at her elegant west London home, which is decorated with some of her best-loved artworks. 'I could never pick just one,' she says, when asked if she has a favourite.

The gallery at Kew brought her life full circle. As a teenager, she presented botanists there with 50 plant specimens she had collected on a trip to Pakistan, little knowing that decades later she would have her own dedicated space at Kew.

A passion for plants has proved to be the thread weaving through Shirley's long life. She was raised in Hertfordshire by nature-loving parents and her mother painted flowers

for a living. Determined to study botany, she arrived at the then all-female St Anne's College in Oxford. Unable to find work as a botanist while studying, she got a job researching antibiotics at the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, where she met her first husband Michael Cross, a dashing scientist several years her senior. The couple married in 1957 and had two sons, Charles and Simon.

In 1964, tragedy struck when Michael was killed in a plane crash on the way to a conference, leaving Shirley widowed with two very young children at the age of just 29. 'It was a very ghastly time,' she says simply. 'But you get through these periods.'

Now the breadwinner, Shirley abandoned her academic studies to work at a pharmaceutical company where she helped to develop a pioneering drug used to treat stomach ulcers. Her team leader, James Black, went on to receive the Nobel prize for the work. 'I hit lucky with the job,' she says modestly.

By then, Shirley had met her second husband, the late American businessman James Sherwood. She often accompanied him on his professional travels as he acquired some of the world's most recognisable hotels, including the Cipriani in Venice. 'It was rather wonderful,' she recalls. 'We had a lot of adventures along the way.'

James also expanded into high-end travel and, with Shirley's help, tracked down and restored vintage carriages of the Orient Express before relaunching the luxurious train service, which made its maiden journey from London to Venice in May 1982.

Meanwhile, Shirley took on the editorship of the Orient Express magazine, where her passion for botanical art was revived when she was introduced to Pandora Sellars, who is now widely acknowledged as one of the most influential artists in the genre. 'I saw how beautiful her work was and, while I had never

stopped being interested, I was fascinated all over again.'

She purchased one of Sellars' paintings, which proved to be the start of a global collection credited with breaking new ground and launching the careers of artists all over the world. With her boys now grown up, Shirley often travelled with her husband for eight months of the year, searching out the best botanical art. From far flung regions of Japan to Bangkok and Manila, everywhere was fertile ground for discovering new talent.

By 1996, Shirley's collection was extensive enough to merit its own exhibition at Kew, the first of many both there and internationally. Twelve years later, the Sherwood family collaborated with Kew to open a gallery in Shirley's name, the first display space to be dedicated to the genre.

It has held more than 50 exhibitions since - Shirley presiding beady-eyed over each one - featuring pieces from her own collection alongside works from Kew's archive. 'I think it's interesting to try to stir things up a bit,' she says. 'I sometimes take a very contemporary Hockney-style

piece and put it against a painting of cherry blossom by a Japanese artist.'

Certainly Shirley has lost none of her enthusiasm. While she dearly misses her husband, who died in 2020 at the age of 86, she remains determinedly independent and travels as often as she can, although at home she has a live-in housekeeper.

Given her extraordinary life, it's also no surprise that Shirley is currently writing a memoir, which is due out this autumn. 'It's funny doing this book as it brought back lots of things that I'd forgotten,' she says. 'I've had a long life and my spirit of adventure has certainly not left me yet.'*

For more on Shirley's art collection at Kew, see shirleysherwood.com



Flower power
The Shirley Sherwood Gallery (top) has showcased works by artists such as Zadok Ben-David (centre), and glass artist Chihuly (above)

Hot enough for you?

This month's sizzling fiction wafts us from a German lakeside farm to an Irish village with a stopover in Paris and strife on the ocean wave. By Rose Shepherd



THE FIRE Daniela Krien

The mountain holiday cabin they were to rent burnt down, so Rahel and Peter agree instead to house-sit for old friends and to care for their animals (horse, cats, chickens, a stork) on the German farm where Rahel spent dreamy childhood summers. All the air has gone out of their marriage. Their sex life is kaput. Daughter Selma visits, bringing resentment and two small feral sons. It could be three weeks of purgatory, but wild swimming in the lake, alfresco meals, and honest conversation works its magic in this perfectly paced, nuanced, forgiving story of good, flawed people, with a family secret at its heart.

For more of this month's must-read titles, • - the Saga Magazine app on tablet and smart phone

THE GIRLS OF SUMMER (j) Katie Bishop

Rachel was 17 when she fell for Alastair, 20 years her senior, on a Greek party island, before hedonism gave way to tragedy. Now, 16 years on, she's married to lovely Tom, but a chance meeting rekindles her old passion. Bishop cleverly has her deluded protagonist tell her story of youthful folly as we understand that love's young dream was a living nightmare - and it's high time for Rachel to wake up.

THE LAST PASSENGER (i) Will Dean

It should be the voyage of a lifetime for Caz, aboard New York-bound luxury liner Atlantica with boyfriend Pete. But she awakes on the first morning to find Pete missing. In fact, almost everyone's gone missing. There are just four of them in the same boat, left to endure a nerve-shredding, gruelling ordeal. A page-turner with a gut-punch ending. Such things never happen on a Saga cruise!



SUNBURN Chloe Michelle Howarth

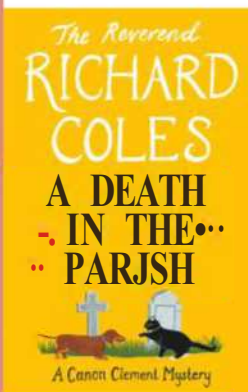
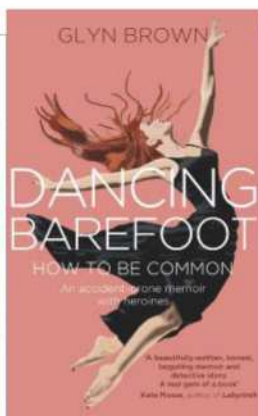
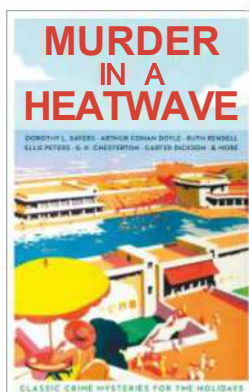
Another tale of teen infatuation and adolescent angst... In a scorching summer, in the stifling atmosphere of an Irish village, 15-year-old Lucy loses her heart to school friend Susannah. How much easier if she could love her best pal, Martin. Over six years, Lucy tells her story in a true, compelling voice, with an eye for minutiae, quaint aperçus and confidences that make her account moving and convincing.

AN ASTRONOMER IN LOVE Antoine Laurain

1760. Guillaume Le Gentil sets sail for Pondicherry, on a futile quest to observe the transit of Venus. Some 250 years later, Parisian estate agent Xavier happens on the hapless astronomer's telescope, and through it spies beautiful taxidermist Alice. When the pair meet, it could be l'amour - until she suspects him of voyeurism and it seems that it is Xavier who's stuffed. Such sweetness in the City of Light.

MURDER IN A HEATWAVE Various

From a sweltering 1930s London to a Fourth of July picnic, from a French casino to a summer village fete, here are ten 'classic crime mysteries for the holidays', by giants of the whodunnit genre. Deckchair detectives can join Lord Peter Wimsey, DI John Rebus and, of course, the inimitable Sherlock Holmes, on the trail of dastardly ne'er-do-wells. Come, come, the game is afoot!



DANCING BAREFOOT (i) Glyn Brown

Glyn Brown wasn't raised to write, but it is clear she was born to. She grew up in relative hardship, with no fancy expectations, but words are free and abundant, and she makes them her own. Here she weaves through her fierce, frank and very funny, affecting memoir, the stories of 17 of her heroines from history, who defied the meanest circumstances to make good - or triumphantly, sensationally bad.

A DEATH IN THE PARISH (i) The Rev Richard Coles

Praise be! We're back in Champton with Canon Daniel Clement, his indomitable mother, Audrey, and beloved dachshunds Cosmo and Hilda, when - wouldn't you know it? - there's another murder, another case for Canon Clement to solve. Fans still in withdrawal after Coles' departure from Radio 4's *Saturday Live* can once again bask in his wit, wisdom and insights. A fine sequel to *Murder Before Evensong*.

THE PEOPLE WATCHER (i) Sam Lloyd

Sweet, eccentric, terribly damaged 'Night Person' Mercy Lake goes about after dark, on her tricycle, doing good by stealth. When a stranger, Louis, rescues her from some thugs at the Texaco station, they team up to right wrongs, but Louis's more into (very) rough justice than random acts of kindness, and our fear for Mercy racks up with every page. Another corker from the author of *The Memory Wood*.

(i)
also available
in audio book



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In the swim

A great swimsuit should be stylish *and* flattering. We offer some top tips and find the best buys for you

*Swimwear that enables you to feel confident and look your best is a crucial part of your holiday wardrobe. It's also likely that you'll need more than one swimsuit to ring the changes.

*Set aside time for a try-on session in a department store with lots of options.

*As a basic go-to, black is sleek, never dates, and looks A-list when paired with oversized sunglasses.

*Don't listen to anyone who tells you bikinis are a no-no over 50. If you've retained your figure, you should show it off.

*Pear shapes can balance proportions with a halterneck or frills on the top half.

*Apple shapes benefit from a one-piece, or a tankini.

*If you're a rectangular figure type, look for styles that create the illusion of curves, such as darker side panels.

*Athletic shapes can add femininity with print, frills, or bandeau styles. Or you could go all-out sporty and try a one-piece from a sportswear brand.

*Wherever you are, enjoy the sunshine, and don't forget to pile on the factor 50. C

tip

If you're curvy, wear styles with light padding, removable cups or underwiring and a bit of structure.



by WENDY RIGG



1



4



2



5



3



6

WOMEN

OBikini

top, £35, and
briefs, £29,
Phase Eight;
phase-eight.com
(removeable
strap)

OChlorine

resistant
swimsuit,
£35, *Adidas*;
adidas.co.uk

Oswimsuit,

£45, *Fig/eaves*
at next.co.uk

OTummy

control
swimsuit,
£25, *F&F* at
next.co.uk
or selected
Tesco
superstores

OMulti-way

bikini top,
£42, and
briefs,
£26, *Freya*;
freyalingerie.com (best for
curvy shapes)

OSwimsuit,

£70, *Triumph x
Wilde House* at
triumph.com
(All body
scanner sizing)

OTankini

top, £42, and
briefs, £22,
Pour Moi;
poumoi.co.uk
(up to 38G)



7



10



8



9



11



A striped
swimsuit will
give you that
chic French
Riviera look.

Brights or
florals will bring
a tropical flavour,
and work well on
darker skin tones.



12



14



13



15



High-waisted styles will accentuate a waist and lengthen legs, so they are great for pear shape and hourglass figures.



16

O Swimsuit, £105, *Seafolly*; seafolly.com (removable cups)

O Swimsuit, £70, *Boden*; boden.co.uk (sizes 6-22)

'1) Swimsuit, £45.83, *Amoena*; amoena.com (best for post-surgery)

G) Tummy control swimsuit, £44, *Next*; next.co.uk (on trend)

a) Swimsuit, £59, *Curvy Kate*; curvykate.com (D-K cup)

♦ Swimsuit, £20, *Tu*; tuclotthing.sainsburys.co.uk (up to size 26)

♦ Swimsuit, £98, *Reiss*; reiss.com (investment buy)

G) Swimsuit, £19, *Matalan*; matalan.co.uk

mswimsuit, £32.50, *M&S*; marksandspencer.com (sizes 8-24)



1



2



3



4



5

MEN
O Pocketed swim shorts, £25, *M&S*; marksandspencer.com (quick dry)

Oswim shorts, £36, *Fat Face*; fatface.com (adjustable tie)

Oswim shorts, £10, *Tu*; tuclotthing.sainsburys.co.uk (bargain buy)

Oswim shorts, £45, *Lyle & Scott*; lyleandscott.com (super-stylish)

Oswim shorts, £18, *Next*; next.co.uk (short and regular lengths)

Step away from the 'budgie smugglers'! Embrace prints for a holiday mood, or stick to plains if understated is more your thing. Look for quick-dry fabrics - they are practical and comfortable.



Secret gardens

From pretty wildflower meadows to enchanting woodland walks and an intriguing Chinese garden, we uncover six hidden National Trust treasures

by REBECCA NORRIS

The National Trust is the country's biggest private landowner with 620,000 acres - including 180 parks and gardens. We step off the beaten track to discover six hidden gems offering peace and quiet along with history and exquisite planting.

Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire

This Grade I listed Victorian garden features plants from around the world, arranged across a series of garden 'rooms'. Visitors journey from Italy to Egypt, by way of a Victorian vision of China (*left*).

'It was designed to show off,' says head gardener Paul Walton. 'The Victorians were all about bragging rights.' The garden features collections of rhododendrons, summer bedding displays, a stunning dahlia walk (at its best in August) and the oldest surviving golden larch in Britain, brought from China in the 1850s.

Don't miss the oldest stumpery in the country, which inspired copycat versions, most notably at Highgrove, King Charles's Gloucestershire estate. The large oak stumps planted with delicate ferns give an intriguing, almost prehistoric, look.

Llanerchaeron, Ceredigion

Llanerchaeron is part of a self-sustaining Welsh country estate that has remained unaltered for 200 years. It has a walled garden, and more than 60 varieties of apple are grown here. Produce from the working kitchen garden, such as garlic, beans and potatoes, is sold at reception. New rose plantings have been made in the parterre.



Hidden gems
Ormesby Hall
(above);
Llanerchaeron
(below);
Biddulph
Grange
Garden *(left)*

'In summer the lake is full of water lilies,' says head gardener Rhys Griffiths. 'You'll hear the buzz of bees and dragonflies, and you'll see horses, chickens, geese and turkeys in the farmyard alongside our two staff cats.'

Most of the property is dog friendly (apart from the farm). Enjoy the 3.6km stroll from the house into Aberaeron along an old railway track.

Ormesby Hall, North Yorkshire
The garden and 240 acres create a green oasis in the heart of Middlesbrough. 'You don't expect to find something so beautiful in such an industrial environment,' says head gardener Nick Fraser. 'The delphiniums and the agapanthus are our summer showstoppers, as well as a great selection of modern dahlias.' The new wildflower meadow is in full bloom for the first time this summer, and don't miss the orchard, rose garden, fern mound and wonderful relics of 18th-century valley gardening.

'We're proud to have heritage apples in our two-year-old orchard,' says Nick. 'There's plenty of interesting varieties from the North East, including Hunthouse, which was reputedly taken by local lad Captain Cook on his travels to keep scurvy at bay.' ☺





at Peckover, Cambridgeshire

Peckover Garden is a rare example of a Victorian urban garden. It has many of its original features, such as the glass houses, the winding paths, the bedding displays, and wilderness shrubbery,' says head gardener Louise Gardner. 'They were developed by the Peckover family and maintained or restored over time. This is an intimate, quiet walled garden with hidden summerhouses and colour throughout the seasons. It's a plant lovers' paradise.'

Peckover is renowned for its rose collection, trained on walls, arches and obelisks, as well as a gorgeous rambler in a tree. We have more than 70 varieties of roses, both historic and modern,' says Louise. 'The peak of the rose display is June-July, and there is usually a second flush of blooms in late August-September. The Orangery has three orange trees thought to be at least 300 years old, and in July, they will be beginning to fruit.'

Acorn Bank, Cumbria

A Knight's Templar site in the 1200s, the oldest part remaining is the Italianate sunken garden, which dates from the mid-1600s, and its ornamental pond is home to all three native newt species.

**Fairytale
A rose garden
at Peckover
(above); and
charming
Stoneywell
(below)**

'Visitors often say it feels more relatable than the big, glamorous gardens,' says senior gardener Heather Birkett. 'Each of our vegetable beds is achievable in its own way at home.'

Acorn Bank has the National Trust's largest herb collection, containing more than 270 different plants, all enclosed by 17th-century walls. 'The herb garden is at its peak in mid to late June,' says Heather. 'The fragrance in the summer is amazing because you're surrounded by these aromatic herbs that come to life in the sun.'

The herbaceous borders are also at their best in July. 'With a gentle colour scheme of pale yellow and pale blue, they are full of geraniums, inulas and lots of aruncus,' says Heather.

Stoneywell, Leicestershire

'Stoneywell is a little jewel nestled in the countryside,' says head gardener Heloise Brooke. The four-acre garden boasts more than 150 varieties of rhododendrons, which look their best in June, though some bloom later. In July, the alstroemeria looks stunning, and in August, the heather provides a purple carpet and eucryphia puts on a great display. A walk in Stoneywell wood is wonderful, to the soundtrack of birds. 'We also have a little dry-stone walled kitchen garden, with immense charm - you expect Peter Rabbit to pop out of a watering can,' says Heloise.

A walk in Stoneywell wood is enchanting, with its choral soundtrack of birds, clouds of butterflies, and common lizards that bask on dry-stone walls.

Visits must be booked in advance and numbers are capped at 120 per day. *

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Go with the glow

Want to give your skin a dewy, natural look this summer?
Ditch your bronzing powder for a cream, advises our columnist



by EMILY DEAN

I often wonder what advice I'd give to my younger self. Perhaps the best advice would be to steer clear of anyone offering you unsolicited advice. But as my younger self would likely respond to this by rolling her eyes and whining, 'Ohmygod boomer, just answer the question, will you?' I'd be inclined to tell her the following...

Nothing good ever comes from drinking shots. Avoid any adult man who still uses the word mummy. Most problems can be solved by watching a dog being ridiculous. Accept that you'll learn more from your blooper reel than your greatest hits. And finally? The moment you turn 50, swap your powder bronzer for a cream formula.

I was deeply suspicious of cream bronzers initially. Too streaky. Too messy. For decades my route to a faux holiday glow had come from a pot of terracotta shimmery powder.

But then I got enlightened. Cream-based bronzers have officially become my greatest midlife discovery since HRT.

The truth is, powder bronzers aren't fabulously kind to postmenopausal skin. Powder clings to dry patches, emphasises lines and leaves a dull finish. Cream formulas not only deliver a much dewier, more natural look, they're also far easier to blend because you can build your colour gradually. And you won't even need a brush, as you can just dab on the colour with your fingers to areas where the sun hits (think cheeks, forehead and nose). But the best news of all? The new gen cream bronzers all have fabulous staying power, so that post-holiday look will last all day.

A great product to try first is **Glossier Solar Paint** (£17, glossier.com). It has a handy sponge tip applicator so you can dot the product around your face before you get to work blending. A lightweight creamy gold and coppery gel that gives a gorgeous lit-from-within glow, it's also packed with aloe and jojoba extracts to condition and nourish skin. They say solar paint, I say gateway to instant radiance.



Brush strokes
For a face slimming effect, brush cream bronzer along your jawline

'Cream-based bronzers have officially become my greatest midlife discovery since HRT'

Best bronzers
Chanel
Healthy Glow;
Revolution
Ultra Cream;
Trinny London
Golden Glow

There's been a whole heap of hype about **ELF Putty Bronzer** (£6, superdrug.com), but mercifully it's all deserved. The putty formula feels creamy but once on skin it transforms into a smooth, matte finish, so it shines and greases-free. Enriched with argan oil and vitamin E, it blends like a dream, and delivers Gwyneth Paltrow levels of healthy glow.

If you haven't got involved with Trinny Woodall's range yet, please do, her multitasking pots of joy will revolutionise your beauty

regime. **Trinny London Golden Glow** (£25, trinnylondon.com) promises to leave you

looking like you've had two weeks in Santorini with just a few finger taps. This year I'd settle for two weeks in Skegness, so I'm sold. Its super-creamy, light texture is ideal for drier skins, and the colour is flawless, giving just the right hit of bronzed warmth. Arise Dame Trinny.

When **Revolution Ultra Cream Bronzer** (£6, revolutionbeauty.com) was featured on ITV's *This Morning* last summer, it was an instant sell-out. You come for its price, but you stay for what it delivers. It has a gorgeous buttery texture which glides on smoothly, comes in five heavenly tawny shades, and blends seamlessly to give you total summer goddess vibes.

Finally, let's meet the undisputed queen of cream bronzers. It's not cheap, but there's a reason why make-up artists and celebrities swear by it. **Chanel Les Beiges Healthy Glow Bronzing Cream Travel Size** (£37, chanel.com) is less a bronzer, more a luxury vacation in a jar. The texture is basically velvet, it delivers the softest veil of golden colour and it's totally budge and streak proof. Reader, you'll marry it.

So, happy bronzing. And if my younger self is still listening, here's one final bit of advice for her: that day you get the impulse to cut your own fringe? Please try to fight it. ®



A piece of cake

Star baker Dame Mary Berry whips up two simple showstoppers, perfect for summer garden parties or celebrations



Swiss strawberry and walnut cake

This is a light walnut sponge filled with strawberries and cream, often served on the Continent as a pudding. For a lighter filling, you can use full-fat creme fraiche and you could use wild strawberries when they are in season.

Serves 8

YOU WILL NEED

For the cake

- 3 large eggs
- 115g caster sugar
- 75g self-raising flour
- 55g walnuts, finely chopped

For the filling and topping

- 300ml pouring double cream, whipped
- 450g strawberries, roughly chopped, plus extra kept whole for decoration

METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C / fan 160°C/gas 4. Grease a 20cm (8in) deep round cake tin, then line the base with non-stick baking paper.
- 2 Measure the eggs and sugar into a large bowl and beat until the mixture is thick and mousse-like and leaves a trail when the whisk is lifted out of the mixture. Sift the flour on to the mixture and lightly fold in along with the chopped walnuts.
- 3 Turn into the prepared cake tin and level the surface. Bake in the preheated oven for about 40-45 minutes, or until well risen and the top of the cake springs back when lightly pressed with a finger. Leave to cool in the tin for a few minutes then turn out, peel off the baking paper and finish cooling on a wire rack.
- 4 When cold, cut the cake into three horizontally



To make a lemon poppy seed traybake, add 30g (1oz) poppy seeds with the other traybake ingredients.



Extracted
from Mary Berry's Baking Bible by **Mary Berry** (BBC Books, £28)

using a serrated or bread knife, then sandwich the slices together with a good amount of whipped cream and strawberries. Spread the remaining cream over the top and the sides of the cake and decorate with the reserved strawberries.

Lemon drizzle traybake
This really is a top favourite. It is always moist and crunchy. The cake needs to be still warm when the topping is added so that it absorbs the lemon syrup easily, leaving the sugar on top. Do allow the cake to cool a little, though - if it ☺

is too hot, the syrup will tend to run straight through.

Cuts into 16 pieces

YOU WILL NEED

For the sponge

- 225g baking spread, straight from the fridge
- 225g caster sugar
- 275g self-raising flour
- 1 level tsp baking powder
- 4 large eggs
- 4 tbsp milk
- finely grated zest of 2 lemons

For the crunchy topping

- 175g granulated sugar
- juice of 2 lemons

METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 170° C/ fan 150° C/gas 3. Grease a 30 x 23cm (12 x 9in) traybake or roasting tin then line the base with non-stick baking paper.
- 2 Measure all the sponge ingredients into a large bowl and mix with an electric hand whisk until well blended.
- 3 Turn the mixture into the prepared tin and level the surface. Bake in the preheated oven for about 35-40 minutes, or until the cake has shrunk from the sides of the tin and springs back when pressed in the centre with your fingertips.
- 4 Leave to cool in the tin for a few minutes, then turn out, carefully peel off the baking paper and leave to cool a little on a wire rack.
- 5 To make the crunchy topping, mix the granulated sugar and lemon juice in a small bowl to give a runny consistency. Stand the wire rack with the traybake on a tray to catch any drips and spoon the lemon syrup evenly over the traybake while it is still a little warm. Leave to finish cooling on the wire rack.*



Bring a taste of Italy to the table with a tiramisu, but which supermarket versions are the best? Our testers find out

Our reviewers
Mother and daughter team Diana Redfern and Emma Gill



Sainsbury's Tiramisu
£3.30, 500g
An exquisitely balanced tiramisu with an ideal mix of chocolate, cream and coffee combined with a substantial dose of alcohol. The sponge was more akin to biscuit but nevertheless a great pudding.
Rating: 8/10

Tesco Tiramisu
£3.30, 500g
Although slightly dry and a bit heavy on the cocoa, the mousse was pleasantly moist and the alcohol flavour prevailed. A tasty dessert.
Rating: 7/10

Morrisons Tiramisu
£3.29, 500g
This looked appealing and had an excellent consistency. The mousse was creamy but the taste was 'manufactured'.
Rating: 6/10

Aldi Tiramisu Dessert
£2.49, 500g
An excellent balance of mousse, mascarpone and sponge, albeit slightly

lacking in alcohol flavour. Good-looking and great value.
Rating: 7/10

M&S Tiramisu
£3.70, 500g
A beautifully layered dessert with a rich, creamy mousse and superb sponge. Although slightly bland in taste this is a great example of how tiramisu should be.
Rating: 8/10

Waitrose Tiramisu
£3.40, 500g
A good-looking dessert with lovely light, fluffy mousse and pleasant alcohol taste but the consistency was a little too moist and the lack of definition in the layers let this down.
Rating: 6/10

Sainsbury's Plant Pioneers Tiramisu Desserts (Vegan)
£2.45, 170g (2 x 85g)
This vegan alternative was heavy on the cocoa powder and was consequently very dry. The taste was not sweet enough and, along with the absence of alcohol, lacked any depth and consistency.
Rating: 5/10*

Fraf;frant an<ffruity

Roses, peaches and cream figure in our expert's choice of aromatic white wines



by JOE FATTORINI

The Romans had a more poetic view of grapes than us. When they saw things buzzing around fragrant vines they called those vines *uva aparia* - 'vine of the bees'. We looked at the same vine and called it *moscato* - 'vine of the flies'.

This is the time of year for wines from aromatic varieties: light, fragrant, summery, and charming - and not just to bees (or flies).

Like moscato, many aromatic grapes declare their fragrant status in their names. The most famous is Gewürztraminer, whose etymology is learned by every wine student. Try **Morrisons The Best Alsace Gewürztraminer** (£10, 14%) and you'll smell the subtle spice that Germans call gewürz. This rose and lychee-scented grape contrasts with its duller, pedestrian cousin from the Tramin region, simply known as 'Traminer'. The combination of soft fruit and sweetly spiced aroma means Gewürztraminer is often paired with Chinese food.

The grape at the heart of **M&S Found Moschofilero & Reditis** (£8.50, 12%) has a similar origin story. There are lots of fileri grapes in Greece. But this is the moscho - or musky - one. It, too, has lychees and roses, but here the softer fruit is balanced by a dollop of the zesty roditis grape. I love this with barbecued king prawns and tomato salads.

M&S's Found range is a great place to explore aromatic whites. Its fabulous **Feteasca Regala** (£7, 11%) is a crisp white with rose and peach scents that means 'royal maiden' in Romanian. It's made by Englishman Philip Cox and his Romanian wife Elvira, who also make **Fetele Feteasca Regala 2021** (£10.45, 12%, Corney & Barrow) - a more silky textured wine with yellow plum flavours.

Fans of something richer should nudge towards viognier. When I first joined the wine business 35 years ago, there were worries this grape would die out. No more. It's thriving, and nowhere more than in Australia, with wines like **Yalumba Organic Viognier** (£10.99, 13.5%, Waitrose and others). Floral and peachy, this is one of the finest you'll find for your money.



Through the grapevine The Tramin region in Germany is known for its sweetly spiced wines

Aromatic charm also means that sometimes wine doesn't need alcohol to be seductive, like **Leitz Eins Zwei Zero Alcohol-Free Riesling** (£6.99, 0%, Waitrose Cellar). It's not quite 'wine', but it's nearer that than grape juice. It's a grown-up aperitif and a white for summer dishes by one of Germany's top producers.

And a treat - this time a moscato. **Innocent Bystander Pink Moscato 2021** (£11.95, 5.5% slurp.co.uk) is musky, rose-scented, grapey, and as softly sweet to smell as to taste. Ideally paired with lounging by a swimming pool. *



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'The new folding screen phones, tablets and even huge-screen PCs are very much cutting edge'

THIS MONTH I'VE BEEN TRYING...



Hi-fi quality headphones for just over £100 seems optimistic, but Grado, a family firm from New York, has an entry level model, the SR60x, which delivers serious sound for £110. It's not the slickest of products but it's comfortable and sounds terrific.

my pick

Into the fold

Boldly going where others have been before, the 'flip phones' predicted by *Star Trek* are back...

by JONATHAN MARGOLIS

Clamshell - or folding - mobile phones were once the epitome of gadgety modernity. The 'flip phone', as it was known in the US, had, in fact, been predicted in science fiction as early as 1928. One featured in *Star Trek* in 1964 and is thought to have influenced designers of real-life phones later.

However, the launch of the full-screen, touch-sensitive iPhone in 2007 did for the flip phone. That is, until the past few years when folding devices started to re-emerge - with the crucial difference that now they had extra-large touch screens that folded in the middle.

Far from being retro, the new folding screen phones, tablets and even huge-screen PCs are very much cutting edge - and also scorchingly expensive thus far. You can see the fold on these foldable OLED (organic light-emitting diode) screens, but it barely affects the picture.

Among the pick of the new-wave folding phones is the Moto Razr, £950 - Motorola reviving the Razr name from its iconic turn-of-the-century flip phones. Samsung, the pre-eminent foldable-screen device

Flipping good
Clockwise from left:
Doro 6820;
Samsung Galaxy Flip 4;
Lenovo Thinkpad X1 Fold



maker, has also distinguished itself with its £999-plus Galaxy Z Flip 4.

A useful tip on all these devices, however, is that they are terrible at holding their value, so you can usually get the latest model (or a slightly earlier one, such as the 2022 Moto Razr or the Galaxy Z Flip 3) for £300-£400, warrantied, from a reputable source such as backmarket.co.uk.

Samsung has another take on folding (not flip) phones with its £1,700-plus Galaxy Z Fold 4, in which the fold is vertical, giving effectively two phones combined, with a 7.6-inch screen - almost as big as a small tablet. Again, Galaxy Fold models are less than half price secondhand.

For folding PCs, Lenovo's Thinkpad X1 Fold is like a small book when folded up, but unfurled has a huge 16.3-inch screen and a conventional keyboard. This is a magnificent machine for work and fun, but costs up to £2,000 new.

There's also been a mini-revival of sub-£100 old-style flip phones without the double screen but with the convenience and some circa 1999 style.

Many are designed for people with reduced sight or dexterity. The Doro 6820, £90, and the Emporia Joy LTE V228, £100, both from Amazon, have a remarkable number of features for the price - the Doro even has talking keys. @

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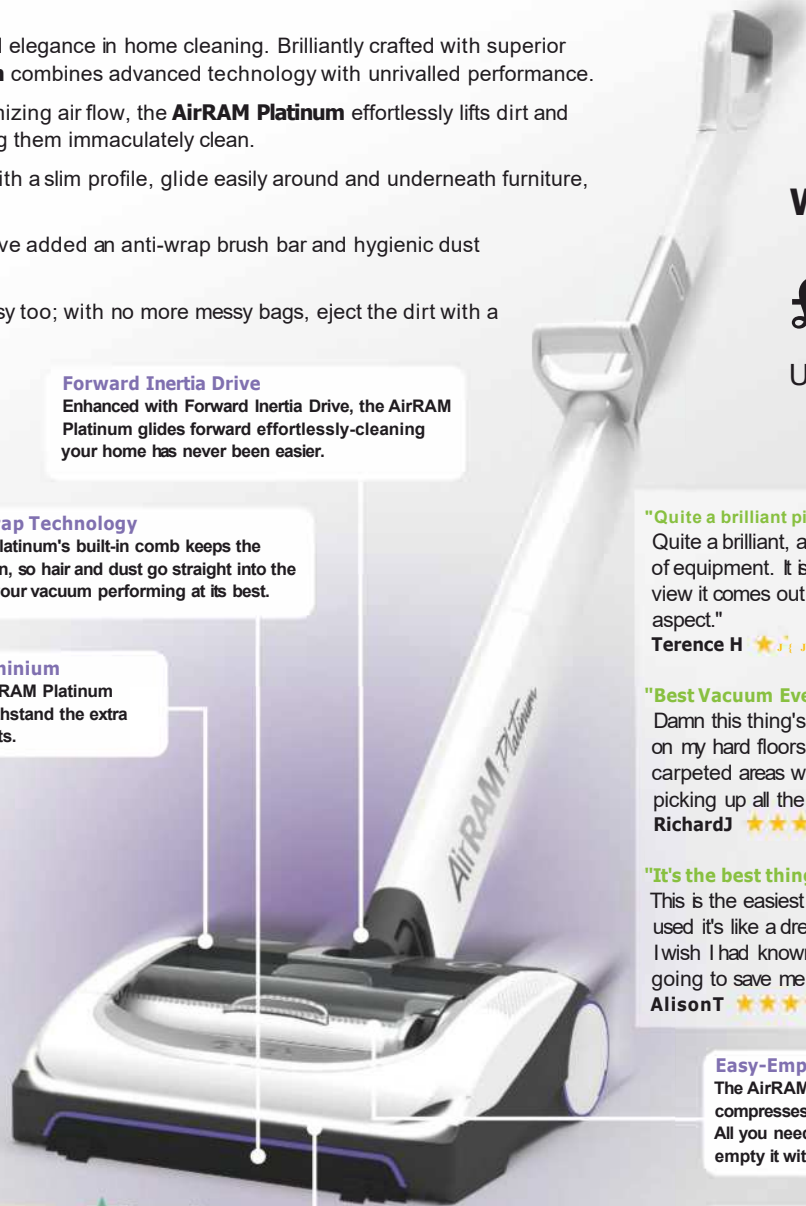
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Generation games

by MARK PALMER

Like his mother before him, our columnist is fanatical about making lists, but his children think it's a sign of impending senility

One of the joys of getting older is realising that so many things your parents regarded as important - which made no sense to you as a young person - are in fact absolutely spot-on.

Take lists, for example. My mother was never without one. Usually, they were written on the back of an out-of-date invitation to a wedding or drinks party, and Mondays were the days when she started to compile her list for the week. Once a task had been taken care of, she would put a line through it, her sense of achievement growing as the crossed-out part of the list began to overtake the still-to-do part.

'Ring Dr Birtwhistle' appeared every now and again. Dr Birtwhistle was our dentist in Reading, the town near where my brother and I grew up. I liked Dr Birtwhistle but hated his drill. On one occasion, I crossed out 'Ring Dr Birtwhistle' on my mother's list because a visit to his practice across the road from the



What do you think? Email us at [editor\(ii\)saga.co.uk](mailto:editor(ii)saga.co.uk) with 'Generation Games' in the subject line

Royal Berkshire Hospital was a ritual torture. My mother wasn't best pleased.

But I'm now just as fanatical as she ever was about lists. I use a clipboard loaded with A4 paper and don't just write down things that need doing, but scribble names of TV programmes, restaurants and hotels recommended in newspapers and magazines. Or certain words and expressions gleaned from the radio which I can steal and pass off as my own. Sometimes I just write myself a terse note such as: 'The office is a shambles - sort it'.

My children think a reliance on lists is tantamount to encroaching senility - just as my son, as a teenager, always thought that having to ask an assistant for help in a department store was, as he put it, 'a sign of weakness'.

Lists are all about sure-footed organisation, just as I believe that a business meeting invariably is helped by having an agenda. It gives everyone a framework, a structure that keeps the meeting on track or at least brings the discussion back to where it should be after any random diversions.

You seldom see young people with shopping lists in supermarkets. Perhaps they have it all stored somewhere on their phones or think they have it in their heads - until they get home and realise they've forgotten the ice cream.

Lists were in some way my mother's pride and joy, proof that she was on top of things. But she was also a great believer in leaving little notes around the house - and, yes, I've started to do the exact same thing. My mother's were almost always loving, cheerful or instructive. There would be one on the bottom step of the stairs waiting for me when I got home after a night on the razzle with friends. 'Hope you had a nice time. See you in the morning', it might have said. And I rather wish I had kept some of these hand-written notes. I suppose parents today might say the same sort of things to their children in a text or WhatsApp message - but I know which I prefer.

If I were a marriage counsellor or were to have children all over again, I would go big on notes, stressing how they should be tender, kind, helpful. As it happens, my wife Joanna has got into the habit of leaving notes - but unlike those of my mother, I can't say they fill me with joy. 'Remember to put the rubbish out'. 'Lock back door'. 'Why was there no hot water this evening?'

All perfectly worthy and practical - but missing the point. I will put 'discuss notes with Joanna' on my next to-do list. ®



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Illustration
MICHAL BEDNARSKI



Ask Dr Mark

Our expert advises on testosterone levels, fluid intake and whether you can catch diseases from cats

O I am in my late sixties and in good shape for my age (I don't take any medicines). However, over the past year, my sex drive has disappeared, I have been getting night sweats, I can't be bothered to do anything and have become a hermit, according to my wife and friends. I googled my symptoms and low testosterone levels seems to be a likely cause. Can I ask our practice nurse to check mine, or do I need to talk to my GP (who is difficult to get hold of)?

∴,J I feel your pain when it comes to getting a GP appointment, albeit from the other side of the fence. We are swamped with record demand, a rise in workload that has been matched by an ongoing, and worrying, struggle

'We are swamped with record demand and a rise in workload'

to recruit and retain staff. And I doubt getting an appointment is likely to get easier any time soon.

That said, your GP should still be your first port of call. And it will be worth the hassle and wait because, while low testosterone could well explain your symptoms, there are other more common causes, including depression and/or anxiety. And some rarer, potentially much more serious ones, such as TB and lymphoma (both unlikely but...)

Even if your GP thinks it is unlikely to be a hormone-related problem, they will almost certainly want to check your testosterone level as part of their investigation. And it is easy: a simple blood test best taken at 9am, typically followed with another confirmatory sample six to eight weeks later if low or borderline.

The tricky bit is interpreting the results and deciding who will benefit most from testosterone supplements (normally a gel or injection). For more detailed information on the diagnosis and management of low testosterone levels, check out this article on my blog: <https://drmarkporter.co.uk/testosterone-replacement-for-men-my-views/>

Make that appointment, please. And if my practice is anything to go by, late morning or after 4pm are probably the easiest times to get through when booking a routine appointment. C)

Q Is it true that drinking water at certain times of the day has specific health benefits? I've been told that two glasses before bed can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, and that drinking a pint first thing in the morning wakes up the kidneys.

O'M There is a lot of nonsense written about U., water. While dehydration can theoretically increase the risk of a range of conditions, including headache, heart attack, stroke and some kidney problems, it isn't that common. If you eat and drink sensibly, and are not exercising hard, living in the tropics or ill (particularly diarrhoea and vomiting) then you can rely on your thirst reflex and your body's fluid balance systems to keep you optimally hydrated.

The simplest way of monitoring this is to look at the colour of your urine. It is not an infallible guide but if it looks like Lucozade you are probably not drinking enough, and if it looks like water then you may be consuming too much. Ideally it should be straw coloured.

It's hard to generalise on daily intakes but the European Food Safety Authority recommends the following in a climate like ours: 2 litres a day for women, and 2.5 litres for men (assuming moderate activity levels, so not too much sweating). This doesn't have to be water; 20% will come from food, and drinks such as squash, milk, fruit juices, fizzy drinks and even tea and coffee all count. It's best not to count alcoholic drinks as some of the stronger versions (anything above normal strength beers) are dehydrating.

As for timing, avoid any drinks two hours before going to bed. Drinking up until bedtime won't protect against stroke and heart attack, but it will get you up in the night, disturbing your sleep and increasing the risk of falls.

Drinking first thing in the morning makes sense as you will have fasted for eight hours or more, but it needn't be water. A mug of tea will do. One exception is people prone to low blood pressure in whom drinking a couple of big glasses of water (250ml each) early in the morning can ward off dizzy spells/feeling faint.

Drinking more than you need isn't a good

Ask DrMark

Email drmark@saga.co.uk or write to Dr Mark at the address on page 5. He can't reply individually, but will respond to questions on this page*

*Always talk to your own GP

idea either. It can worsen fluid retention (eg swollen ankles) and some heart conditions, and lower salt levels, which can be dangerous.

One last plea, if I may. If water is your favourite tippie - and it is healthier than most drinks - please drink it from the tap. Bottled water is bad for your bank balance and the environment.

Q Can children catch diseases from cats? My daughter has been given two unwanted kittens by a neighbour and our two grandsons - aged four and six - play with them constantly. We have never had cats or dogs so perhaps I am making a fuss, but it worries me.

O'M Humans - adults as well as children U., - can catch diseases from cats but they are very unlikely to cause serious problems. The biggest cat-related issue I see is probably allergy (cat dander can trigger itchy eyes, asthma and eczema in susceptible people).

Worms are one potential concern, particularly in kittens, so it is important that your daughter worms the cats regularly. If she hasn't taken them to a vet to discuss worming and vaccination, she should do so as soon as possible.

The parasite *toxoplasma gondii* (toxoplasmosis) is another. It can cause problems in some humans (such as those with weakened immune systems, young babies, older people and pregnant women), but won't harm most people. At least one in five cats carries the parasite and it spreads via faeces so children should be kept away from litter trays - and any droppings in the garden (and sand pit!) should be cleared up promptly.

There is also the risk of infection, typically bacterial, from scratches and bites. A cat bite that punctures the skin carries a high risk of turning nasty and often needs antibiotics. But superficial cuts and scratches are normally OK if washed with soap and water straight away.

Children can benefit from living with and caring for pets, so don't get the risks out of perspective. Bottom line? Follow a vet's advice on worming, clear up after the pets, keep litter trays away from little hands, and wash hands before meals and your grandsons should be fine. *

Lower the pressure

Doing strength training twice a week reasonably vigorously for a couple of months can bring down high blood pressure no matter your age. A review of studies among those with hypertension found exercise such as lifting weights, climbing stairs and doing push-ups and squats reduced readings in the over-50s by an average of 8.7 (systolic, top number) and 4.1 (diastolic, lower number). High blood pressure is normally 140/90 or above. Rachel Carlyle



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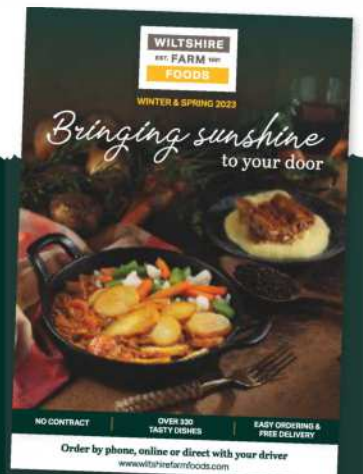


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Crash dieting

In

Once frowned upon, crash dieting is back in favour - and experts say some of us could benefit from doing it every few years. We digest the latest evidence

The conventional wisdom that slow and steady is best for weight loss has been turned on its head in recent years. Now, with compelling evidence that a short, sharp diet can be a safe and successful way to shed excess kilos, the NHS is rolling out its own low-calorie pilot programme for people with Type 2 diabetes. The Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission Programme is on offer in 21 regions across England, with more expected over the next year. More than 8,000 people have been referred so far, and early results suggest each loses an average of 7.2kg after a month, and 13kg after three months.

To day's crash diets are a far cry from the nutritionally poor single-food ones - such as cabbage soup and grapefruit. The NHS year-long programme consists of total diet replacement with nutritionally balanced shakes, soups, porridges and bars for three months, after which participants reintroduce 'real' food. Online one-to-ones, group sessions and digital support are essential ingredients to keep people on track.

The pilot, which is due to continue until at least next April, was inspired by the revolutionary Diabetes Remission Clinical Trial (DIRECT), which in 2018 revealed that an 800-calorie-a-day 'crash diet' along the same lines sent Type 2

diabetes packing, scuppering the idea that the condition was lifelong. New findings from a three-year extension of the trial, funded by Diabetes UK, show that almost a quarter (23%) of participants who were in remission at two years in the original trial

remained so five years later.

'People lose lots of weight quickly, which motivates them to keep going,' says Dr Duncan Radley, reader in obesity at Leeds Beckett University, part of a team evaluating the NHS programme. To be eligible you must be under 65 with a BMI of over 27 (White ethnicities) or over 25 (Black, Asian and other ethnicities) and have been

diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in the last six years.

'Because of its high protein content, participants don't feel hungry,' says Dr Radley. 'Once past initial hiccups, such as headaches and constipation, most find it easy to fit into their lives. People say they feel full, have more energy

'People lose lots of weight quickly, which motivates them to keep going'

and are less tired. Their blood sugar readings improve and they can reduce their medication.'

There's no doubt that finding effective ways to lose weight is an urgent matter; three quarters of people aged 45-70 are overweight or obese. A new report from Diabetes UK reveals that 4.3 million people are living with diabetes and more than 2.4 million are at high risk of developing it. Obesity (a BMI of 30+) also increases the risk of heart disease, asthma, high cholesterol, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure, sleep apnoea, and some cancers.

'Maintaining a healthy weight in later life can help mitigate these risks as well as reduce the need for medications, such as blood pressure lowering drugs,' says nutrition

scientist Dr Nerys Astbury, of Oxford University, a senior researcher on another soups and shakes trial called DROPLET

(Doctor Referral of Overweight People to Low Energy Treatment). Participants were overweight but didn't have diabetes and lost an average of 10.7kg - three times as much as those who followed conventional dietary advice from the GP. 'Losing weight is tough

mentally, meaning that it can be hard to sustain a diet long enough to reap the health benefits,' she says. 'Crash dieting can be easier than conventional portion control, especially if you have a lot to lose.'

One reason experts previously favoured a slower approach was the belief that the quicker you shed the kilos the quicker you put them on

'Crash dieting can be easier than conventional portion control, especially if you have a lot to lose'

again. Not so, says Astbury, citing an Australian study which found that, over two years, people who had lost weight fast were no more likely to pile it back than those who lost it more slowly. A follow-up of the DROPLET trial also discovered that the benefits of steep initial weight loss lasted at least three years, even with some weight gain.

What about the charge that these 'meals' aren't real food and don't teach people how to eat healthily? Actually, it can be a relief to have a breather from planning and cooking, and gives you a chance to reshape eating habits, says Roy Taylor, professor of medicine and metabolism, at the University of Newcastle, who led DiRECT. 'In

fact, the quality of many participants' diets improves because they are no longer eating high-calorie, highly-processed foods,' he says.

But isn't it better to have a bit more flesh on our bones as we get older? It's true the picture becomes muddier over the age of 65. The NHS soups and shakes programme has a cut-off at this point, mainly, suggests Radley, because the data isn't yet there to support it, not because it doesn't work.

However, experts say that the clear association between BMI and the risk of dying is less marked at older ages. A 2014 meta-analysis hinted that there was a sweet spot for older people at around a BMI of 27-27.9 when the risk of death is lowest.

That said, experts say if you're prone to putting on weight, the occasional 'crash diet' could be a positive move, as long as it's nutritionally balanced. If total diet replacement feels a step too far there are real food options. GP Dr Clare Bailey, wife of TV's Dr Michael Mosely, has recently written *The Fast 800 Keto Recipe Book*, which claims you can shed a stone in 21 days.

'The benefits of being slim are so overwhelming that if you need to go on a low-calorie diet every so often it shouldn't be seen as a failure,' says Astbury. 'The right diet for you is the one you can stick to.' *

To see if you're eligible for the NHS Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission Programme, visit england.nhs.uk/diabetes/treatment-care/diabetes-remission/ or ask your GP or diabetes treatment team at your next appointment

by PATSY WESTCOTT



Moving stories

Cancer patients were always told to rest up and avoid exercise, but new research shows physical activity can help treatment and even reduce the risk of recurrence. Meet the pioneers changing the face of cancer care

illustration ANDREW LYONS

Chris Cottrell is not someone to take cancer sitting down. When his prostate cancer returned in 2013, three years after the original diagnosis, he and his doctors decided on a 'watch and wait' approach. Meanwhile, one doctor suggested he get fit. That was how Cottrell, 66, found himself standing on the doorstep of a gym in London's Harley Street, home to clinical exercise physiologist Emily Curtis.

'I'd never set foot in a gym in my life and nearly gave up, but my wife persuaded me to stick with it,' says Cottrell, a retired businessman from Sussex. 'I'm glad I did because it changed my life. Instead of my PSA [a blood marker for prostate cancer] accelerating it began to slow down.' He subsequently sailed through chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone therapy.

'Although my cancer has progressed, my PSA is currently undetectable and I feel amazing. I view it as an important component of my treatment.' He was so taken with the difference exercise had made, he and Curtis set up a private online gym, The Exercise Clinic, for people with cancer.

They approached London's Royal Marsden Hospital with the idea for a pilot study to test a free online programme (THRIVE) and its effects on energy levels, mental wellbeing and treatment side effects in men with prostate cancer. 'The average age of participants is around 70 and they love it,' says Curtis. 'Doing it online removes a lot of barriers to exercising. There's growing evidence that exercise can help men with prostate cancer. One study found that walking briskly for three hours a week or more reduced the risk of dying of the disease by more than 60%. Men who exercised vigorously in the THRIVE study had the lowest risk.'

There are other benefits, too, points out Declan Cahill, consultant urological surgeon at the Royal Marsden. 'Exercise helps patients take charge of part of their treatment, so it's hugely empowering,' he says. 'It's also the one thing that can counteract the side effects of testosterone blockade.' This is a hormone

by PATSY
WESTCOTT

'Physical activity helps people get out of hospital quicker, cope better with treatment, suffer less anxiety and have a better quality of life'

treatment that slows the progress of prostate cancer, but can cause weight gain, fatigue, loss of bone and muscle and, in the longer term, increase the risk of heart disease.

Study participant, accountant Stephen Grant, 61, says he feels fitter, stronger and happier after doing the programme. 'My medication causes weight gain and muscle fatigue,' he says. 'Doing the class and exercising in my own time has helped slow down and ease these. The instructors are sensitive to my abilities and needs, while the frequent one-on-one reviews together with video and written resources help me stay motivated and enthusiastic.'

THRIVE has been such a success that the Royal Marsden is currently planning a larger, more ambitious study to see if it's feasible to roll out nationwide. It will examine how to make it cheap and accessible for more men, with the hope it could eventually be offered on the NHS.

Once overlooked and even frowned upon, there's now compelling evidence that physical activity can help people get and stay well at every stage of their cancer journey - obviously depending on treatment side effects.

'The latest research shows that it helps people get out of hospital quicker, cope better with treatment side effects, suffer less anxiety and depression and have a better quality of life,' says Anna Campbell, professor in clinical exercise science at Edinburgh Napier University.

It can also help improve compliance with chemotherapy as well as combating one of its most debilitating side effects, muscle wasting, which compounds the insidious loss of muscle mass and strength (sarcopenia) that comes with age to all of us. 'If you don't exercise during

chemotherapy, your muscles waste so dramatically it's equivalent to being in space for nine months,' says Campbell.

Getting active could also reduce your risk of cancer returning or spreading. The evidence is strongest for people with breast, colorectal and prostate cancer where, says Campbell, 'There's emerging evidence of a 20% to 30% decrease in the risk of cancer coming back or dying of cancer in those who are active compared to those who are sedentary.' Why? 'Lots of potential reasons,' she says. 'It could be due to strengthening the body's ability to detect and C)



THRIVE-ing
Chris Cottrell
with exercise
physiologist
Emily Curtis

to destroy cancer cells through regulation of the immune and inflammatory response and the ability to negatively affect the cancer's ability to grow.'

Campbell would like to see everyone with the disease receive a personally tailored exercise prescription at diagnosis, in much the same way as heart surgery patients automatically get invited for cardiac rehab.

Following the publication of several groundbreaking research studies, she set up the first community cancer rehab programme in the UK and founded CanRehab, to train fitness instructors to provide safe, effective exercise for people before, during and after treatment. She also set up the CanRehab Trust, which matches people affected by cancer with instructors.

Pre-habilitation - a lifestyle support and advice to help prepare for surgery, in which physical activity plays a leading role - and rehabilitation are on offer in a growing number of UK hospitals, especially for people with oesophageal, bowel, prostate and lung cancer.

'If you don't exercise during chemo, your muscles waste so dramatically it's equivalent to being in space for nine months'

But, while there are programmes around the country, finding one can be a postcode lottery.

One such is Brighter Outlook, an NHS-funded initiative, provided by Albion in the Community (AITC), Brighton & Hove Albion football club's charity. It offers a year-long supported exercise programme for people with cancer. Clients can choose a ten-week, in-person, circuit-based course, online circuit, yoga and seated classes or work with a coach. Almost 2,000 people have been through the scheme since it started in 2015. Physical activity coordinator Rosie Warwick-Brown says, 'They feel fitter, stronger and more confident. We see a huge drop in fatigue levels and breathlessness, as well as improvements in mental health and quality of life.'

Ann-Marie Griggs, 62, from Brighton, who has breast cancer, has nothing but praise for the chair classes. 'I used to do Pilates and yoga but was finding it harder to get down on the floor,' she says. 'I like Zoom because I don't have to use energy getting somewhere and the instructor's enthusiasm is uplifting. The classes have



Chair lift
Ann-Marie
Griggs' fitness
and stability
both improved
by doing
online chair
classes

improved my fitness as well as my mobility and stability. I recently went on holiday to Iceland, and though it was treacherous, I didn't fall down. It's been a lifeline.'

Exercise also helps with the mental challenges of a cancer diagnosis, which, as cancer survivor Sophie Mulligan of MOVE points out, 'can leave you feeling lonely, isolated and out of control'. The charity, which aims to get people with cancer active, was founded by international runner and fellow cancer survivor Gemma Hillier-Moses for younger people with cancer. But its Sk Your Way, devised by Hillier-Moses and Nottingham City Hospital oncologist and Ironman champion Lucy Gossage, is for people of any age. There are currently 87 groups across the UK where people with cancer, their families and friends can join their local weekly Parkrun. 'You can do the course in any way you want - walk, jog, run, whatever. It brings a huge positive boost to their mental wellbeing and is a great way to meet others and feel less isolated,' says Mulligan. ®

Can you help? Chris Cottrell and Emily Curtis want to find out how much interest there would be in an online subscription programme for people living with cancer. Let them know by emailing saga@theexerciseclinic.co.uk



DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER?

* Aim for 150 min moderate or 75 min vigorous intensity exercise a week.

* Options include brisk walking, cycling and/or swimming, gardening or a more structured plan.

* Include a couple of resistance sessions too. 'It doesn't have to be weights, it could be sitting and standing up from a chair a few times,' says Campbell.

* Not up to this amount of activity due to harsh treatments or other health problems? Do what you can.

* Tai chi could be a gentle alternative. 'A recent study shows it helps by boosting immune cells, which can help

people fight off cancer better,' adds Campbell.

Check out...

* theexerciseclinic.co.uk

* canrehabtrust.org

* canrehab.com

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* your nearest 5k Your Way:

Skyourway.org

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* your cancer specialist nurse or Macmillan nurse about local services:

macmillan.org.uk

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* **Get Your Oomph Back:**

A guide to exercise after a cancer diagnosis by Carolyn Garritt (Hammersmith Books)



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The former Home Secretary uses his wisdom, wit and experience to tackle the problems troubling you

Q My husband is renegeing on an agreement that we would move to the country when we retire next year. It had been our dream for as long as I can remember, but earlier this year he started saying he will miss our friends and local golf club too much. I've pointed out our friends can come to stay and there is a wonderful club near our chosen village, but he won't budge. I'm heartbroken and feel let down. I love my husband, but I can't bear the thought of spending the rest of my days in a big city. What do you suggest?

O'J I can understand your disappointment **!..J** but at least he's been open about his change of heart. It would have been worse if he'd just gone along with the original plan without saying anything. The bitterness and resentment that could have led to further down the line could have ruined your retirement.

I do appreciate that as things stand you feel it may be ruined already but I just wonder if you've been as frank with your husband as he has been with you. Is he as aware of how strongly you feel about this?

'My hunch is your husband is having some last-minute nerves. If this continues, you may need to consider a compromise'

Leaving things as they are doesn't seem to be an option, neither should it be given that moving to the country has been your shared dream for so long. My hunch is that your husband is having some last-minute nerves; the comfort of the familiar is temporarily winning out over fear of the unknown. If this continues, having made it absolutely clear that his capriciousness is making you

Ask Alan

Email experts@saga.co.uk or write to Alan at the address on page 5. He can't reply individually, but will respond to questions on this page

deeply unhappy, you may need to consider a compromise. One that springs to mind is to rent a place in your chosen village for a reasonable period of time - long enough to start making new friends and for him to become acquainted with a different golf course.

This throws up practical and financial implications but the act of suggesting it will emphasise how determined you are not to give up on your dream, or on making it a shared dream once again.

Q My daughter bought a dog in lockdown when she was working from home, but now her boss has told her she has to go back into the office at least two days a week. She has asked me to dog-sit, but I'm scared of him. She treats the dog like her child and can't see any wrong in him, even when he is growling at me. It would wreck my life if that dog is part of it, but I don't know how to say no without causing a terrible rift. Can you help?

O'J I may be able to help but not by going **!..J** round to dog-sit your daughter's mutt. As a former postman, I'm aware of the terror that 'man's best friend' can generate. The issue here isn't whether or not your daughter was irresponsible in taking on ownership of a dog without realising that someone would need to look after it when lockdown was over. The way she pampers her pet is also not the issue. The problem is that you are determined not to look after this animal but don't want your refusal to cause a rift with your daughter.

Hiring a dog-sitter would solve the practical problem of who is going to look after the dog and, as it's only for two days a week, the financial implications should be manageable. If she can't afford it, she'll need to find a friend or neighbour to perform these doggy duties. She took on the animal, not you. Its welfare is her responsibility, not yours. If you politely decline to look after a dog that terrifies you it shouldn't cause a family rift. Make sure it's properly explained to your daughter when you have some time together alone - perhaps while you're out walking the dog while it's tightly on the leash. @

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Old age, young love

by HUNTER DAVIES

After an operation, our hero whisks Miranda away to the Caribbean - and soon discovers she's a woman of many talents



To celebrate my recovery from a gallbladder op - and to thank Miranda for looking after me - we went off to the Caribbean. We flew upper class, too. Well, I am a toff. We went to a little island called Bequia in the Grenadines - my fave. We had three weeks together, the longest we have lived with each other since we met. Up to now it has been mainly long weekends. Always rushing, travelling back and forward on buses, tubes, trains and ferries. She does live on the Isle of Wight, while I live there only half of the time.

Goodness, the things I have discovered about her, being in close proximity, not to say, er, intimacy, for 24 hours a day. It does take being up close and personal to get to know someone. And what did I find? Let me count the ways.

She is brilliant at lifting and carrying. So was my wife - she always carried the rucksack when we went youth-hostelling, except when we went through villages and I carried it, trying not to appear a total wimp. Since my operation, I am not supposed to do any lifting, such as putting cases on racks, carrying luggage up steps. I intend to keep this up for ever. Doctor's orders.

She is witty. Obviously, I knew she can write amusing emails and that she is working on her memoirs, half of which I have read so far - and they are excellent. (Stop twisting my arm. I've had an operation.) But I did not realise she was verbally so witty, too. Each day, we sat for ages with our rum punches watching people on the beach in Lower Bay. She got in the habit of imagining the conversation couples were having together as they walked past. She was so funny. And no, it was not just the rum punches.

She is also brilliant at voices. Her best is a rural Norfolk accent, as this is from where she

'Since my operation, I am not supposed to do any lifting. I intend to keep this up for ever. Doctor's orders'

originally comes, but she can also do a good northern accent. I am useless at accents and always admire people who can

do them. My wife used to do an excellent Australian accent, and Flora, my younger daughter, is good at an American one. I can't even manage a Carlisle accent, which I used to have decades ago, before I became a toff. Or did I say that earlier?

She can also sing. After a few rum punches she often broke into song. I can't sing. Doesn't stop me, of course, but I just croak. My wife was totally non-musical. She could only ever recognise one tune: *The National Anthem*. When she went on *Desert Island Discs*, I chose all her records. Mainly The Beatles.

Miranda is also a good dancer - sort of floaty, modern dancing. I think I can still manage a neat Sixties jive, but now I am so stiff and jerky that people look away, embarrassed for me. Do I care? I enjoy doing it.

But Miranda's most surprising talent came out when we happened to be on a long walk along the beach and boardwalk and through the little woods from Lower Bay to Port Elizabeth, Bequia's little town.

All the way we seemed to be followed by lovely tropical birds, all tweeting away. Yet I couldn't see any of them. I blamed my tired, old, bleary eyes. It turned out to be Miranda, imitating the local birds. I was totally taken in.

So that's it. I intend to take her on tour. Roll up, roll up for the Marvellous Miranda and her amazing bird noises... *



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money matters

BANK CLOSURES / MONEY NEWS



Annie Shaw

With more and more high-street bank closures, it's getting harder to find in-person services. We look at your options, including getting to grips with managing your money online



At the latest count a total of 5,632 bank and building society branches have closed since January 2015 - that's around 54 each month. Areas of the country have become 'banking deserts', leaving customers without access to services or even banknotes if they can't find a cash machine.

The banks maintain that most people are now happy to bank online and use digital transfers, such as contactless cards or mobile phone payments. Branches are costly to run, they say, and it's pointless to keep them open when funds are better spent on other services. However, research by the charity Age UK found that four in ten over-65s with a bank account (around 4.09 million people) do not manage their money online, and three in four (7.86 million) want to undertake at least one banking task in person.

The government has said it is committed to retaining access to cash, and campaigners have succeeded in establishing banking 'hubs' in a handful of towns, with the promise of more to come. These are premises shared by the major bank brands and operated by the Post Office, offering a range - though not a complete **Q**

one - of banking services. To date, there are six in operation. Brixham in Devon, Cottingham in the East Riding of Yorkshire, Troon in South Ayrshire and Acton in west London have now opened after trial runs in Cambuslang, south Lanarkshire and Rochford, Essex. A further 47 sites across England, Wales and Scotland have been earmarked, but progress is slow as premises, funding and staffing have to be agreed by the ten participating banks and the Post Office. Some banks offer limited in-person banking services on certain days of the week in public halls and community centres, or via a travelling van.

None of these is a substitute for a traditional bank branch with deposit and cash withdrawal facilities and other in-person services. If you are a dissatisfied customer of one of the banks that has left your high street, what can you do?

You can switch banks

It has never been easier to switch. Simply pick a new bank and, under the banking industry's Current Account Switch Service Guarantee, this new bank will transfer your balance and switch your payments such as direct debits and standing orders. If anything goes wrong, the guarantee ensures a refund of interest or charges incurred.

To make it even more attractive, many banks offer inducements. At the time of writing, NatWest and HSBC are both offering £200 cash upfront and a range of other perks; First Direct is offering £175, a 7% savings account to run alongside and a £250 free overdraft facility. Lloyds offers £150 and rewards, including Disney tickets and magazine subscriptions. All, however, have conditions attached, such as paying in a certain amount each month or using an app.

So, what to look for with a switch?

Identify the core services you need. An interest-free overdraft, easy international payments or shopping rewards can be ignored if you are never going to use them.

Do you want paper statements, or are you happy to check your account online? Some banks don't offer statements through the post, or you may need to pay a monthly fee for them.

Do you need access to cash? Or can you manage without or obtain it elsewhere - from a supermarket ATM, for instance? Do you need a debit card? Not all accounts offer them.

A building society account might suit you better for simple cash transactions and paying



Be realistic
It's unlikely
that cash,
cheques
and branch
banking
will totally
disappear, but
it is certainly
going to get
harder to
use them

in cheques. Is there a small local one in your high street? The main building society that offers a full banking service, Nationwide, has pledged not to close any more branches until 2024. Coventry and Cumberland building societies also offer current accounts and many other societies and credit unions offer access to savings and loan accounts where you can transact in person.

You're unhappy but still want to stay put

Is there a middle way to making your existing relationship work? Perhaps your bank has switched you to online statements: ask to switch back. Do you really need cash, or can you make the move to card payments and accepting transfers from people who need to pay you? Do you really need to pay in cheques? Could you ask for a direct transfer instead, or pay cheques in at the Post Office, at a banking hub or even take a picture of it with a phone and transmit it to your bank via an app?

To aid people who are housebound and depend on cash to get someone to do their shopping, some banks, including Santander, Lloyds and Halifax, have introduced 'carer cards' allowing limited access to a client's cash by a trusted caregiver or family member.

'Some banks offer limited in-person services on certain days of the week in community centres'

Slay the online fear dragon

Many extremely elderly people or those with cognitive difficulties are unable to bank online, or simply have poor internet access.

That said, a large number of people simply dislike the idea of digital payments. But the pandemic gave the lie to the idea that it was somehow 'impossible' for older people to get the hang of them, as customers and shops moved away from cash. Tradespeople, such as gardeners, mobile hairdressers and window cleaners, switched to bank transfers or mobile payments, and over-65s became among the most enthusiastic new users of contactless payments in shops.

You do need both confidence and competence in using digital services. Those not lucky enough to obtain assistance from family members or neighbours may be able to get help elsewhere. Age UK has a useful helpsheet on what you need to know to get started online at ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/online-banking/. It also runs digital skills courses within communities. *

Paul Lewis
is away



July 2023

Money news

by ANNIE SHAW

What the new energy price cap means, building society pay outs, inheritance tax planning and underpaid state pensions

Fuel bills: good news and bad

When is a price cut not a price cut? When it's your fuel bill, it turns out.

The good news is that the energy price cap on household fuel set by the regulator Ofgem has been lowered to an annual average of £2,074 between July and September, down from its March-to-June figure of £3,280. The figure reflects a fall in the capped unit cost for an average household, and serves as a demonstration of a typical charge - so your bill **may well be higher than that** if your energy use is above the UK average.

The bad news is that you may well pay considerably more than a year ago because the separate Energy Price Guarantee - that's the rebate paid by the Government as part of its response to the cost of living crisis - has now come to an end and customers are once again exposed to the full cost of their fuel bills.



Mutual benefits
Nationwide building society has topped up qualifying members' accounts by £100 as part of a 'fairer share' deal from the mutual.

To get the handout members needed to have one of the society's range of current accounts on 31 March and still have had it in June when the payment was due to be made, plus another qualifying savings or mortgage account. The top-up is paid gross but is taxable, like savings interest.

The windfall payment is reminiscent of the dividend that was paid each year or half-year to Co-op shoppers, and also the now-defunct Britannia building society's profit-share scheme for members until it merged with the Co-op Bank. It's too late to qualify for the current Nationwide payout, but the return of the 'mutual dividend' could make it worth keeping an eye on the building society sector in future.



Plan for inheritance tax

The inheritance tax take by the Treasury is soaring, with the haul for the past financial year standing at £7.1bn; £1bn more than the previous year, attributed to rising house prices and frozen allowances.

By 2027-28, it is estimated that 6.7% of estates - around 47,000 - will trigger the charge. IHT is one of the UK's most unpopular taxes, but among the easiest to avoid legally by the use of reliefs and allowances. If your estate might qualify, seek advice sooner rather than later. ®

'By 2027-28, around 6.7% of estates will trigger IHT'



It pays to check your state pension

6%

One in 16 pensioners (6.25%) was underpaid their state pension last tax year. Retirees missed out on around £670 million in the financial year ending in 2023, against £540 million in 2022. Official error (such as failing to note changes to marital status or incorrect record of NI contributions) accounted for £580 million, while claimant error accounted for the rest of the shortfall.

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going places

RIVER CRUISES / LETTER FROM AMERICA

Set sail
The picturesque
Rhine village
of Bacharach
is home to
Stahleck Castle

TAKE TWO

The Rhine and the Danube both have their appeal. From city sights to culinary delights, we help you choose which river to cruise



by LESLEY BELLEW

SHUTTERSTOCK



Scenic highlights

The Danube, at around 1,770 miles (2,850km), is Europe's second longest river. It starts in Germany, meanders through the Wachau Valley in Austria - a UNESCO-listed landscape of green hills dotted with red-roofed houses - and flows into the Black Sea through its vast delta in Romania.

The 766-mile (1,233km) Rhine rises in Switzerland, flowing through Liechtenstein, Austria, Germany, France and into the North Sea at Rotterdam. Marksburg Castle is the start of the dramatic Rhine Gorge and the 'romantic' part of the river. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Rhine Valley is a magical scene of hillside vineyards, fairy tale castles and spires.

Sounds of music

On the Danube, nothing beats a concert in the City of Music, so waltz into Vienna for an evening where the air is filled with the music of Johann Strauss. In Salzburg, it's all about the *Sound of Music* and the sound of Mozart. Visit Mirabell Gardens, where Julie Andrews skipped around the fountains and see the house where Mozart was born.

The Rhine is a treasure trove of musical inspiration. It was home to Hildegard of Bingen, one of the most influential medieval composers. Robert Schumann composed his third Symphony 'Rhenish' after a trip to the

Rhineland with his wife Clara; in Wagner's opera *Das Rheingold*, Rhinemaidens (water nymphs) are personifications of the river.



Danube delights
Clockwise from top left: see Budapest bathed in a golden glow; visit the city's Central Market Hall; and Salzburg's famous Mirabell Gardens

Places to see

While in Vienna, visit the Spanish Riding School and Lipizzaner horses. And make sure you're out on deck when sailing into Budapest: the Hungarian Parliament building bathed in a golden glow is a memory to treasure. Cross the road from the ship to visit Budapest's Central Market Hall, which is brimming with paprika and spices to take home.

Cologne Cathedral is the biggest draw on the Rhine. In Rudesheim, take the gondola over vineyards for spectacular valley views and visit Siegfried's Museum of Mechanical Music with its collection of wacky instruments. In Basel, you can drool over classic 20th-century furniture at architect Frank Gehry's Vitra Design Museum.

Landmarks for art lovers

Belvedere Palace in Vienna is one of Europe's most stunning landmarks. It includes art museum Belvedere 21, a baroque UNESCO



Gliding along a river is the most glorious way to explore the heart of Europe, watching early-morning anglers on the riverbank and walkers on towpaths, passing medieval villages, capital cities, mountain gorges and farmland. There are surprises around every bend.

Both the Rhine and the Danube are steeped in centuries of history, culture and legend. The Danube is the gateway to four contrasting capitals - Budapest, Vienna, Bratislava and Belgrade. Rhine cruises feature the vibrant cities of Amsterdam, Cologne, Strasbourg and Basel.

Whichever waterway you choose, it's easy to walk into the cities from a mooring at Budapest and Bratislava on the Danube, or Amsterdam and Cologne on the Rhine.

'Coffee houses are an institution in Austria. Vienna's Demel salon in the Kohlmarkt is a must for apple strudel or sachertorte'

World Heritage Site that is home to Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*. In the centre of the city, enjoy national and international art from the Classical Modernism and post-war avant-garde period at the Bank Austria Kunstforum.

The Rhine has influenced painters for centuries, with J MW Turner's 19th-century impressions of Ehrenbreitstein Fortress and Lorelei Rock sparking the tourism trail. Many Rhine cruises start from Amsterdam, where art lovers can head to Museum Square for the Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum, Stedelijk Museum and the Moco Museum.

Culinary experiences

Coffee houses are an institution in Austria. Vienna's Demel salon in the Kohlmarkt is a must for apple strudel or sachertorte. In Salzburg, join the literati at Cafe Bazar to read newspapers over coffee and cake.

Along the Rhine, wash down a lunch of pork or sausages and Black Forest cake with regional wine and beer. Visit traditional beer halls in Cologne and sample the delicious dry to sweet rieslings in Koblenz and Strasbourg.

Decision time

Saga cruises showcase both the Rhine and Danube, with itineraries from four to 14 days. If you still can't decide which river to cruise, why not take a longer trip to combine the two? *

Rhine time

Below
(clockwise from top):
take in
Marksburg
Castle;
Rudesheim;
and Cologne
cathedral



TAKE ME THERE



MUSIC

André Rieu's New Year Concert cruise takes guests to an extravaganza at the Ziggo Dome Arena in Amsterdam.

* Seven-night cruise departs Düsseldorf for Amsterdam on 3 January 2024 from £1,849pp.

On Rex Rheni, jazz fans can revel in the music of a six-piece BRB Jazz Band, which plays Dixieland and jazz standards.

* Seven-night round trip departs 15 August from £1,648pp.

ART

The Art of the Danube cruise starts in Budapest for The Hungarian National Gallery; in Bratislava, there's the City Gallery and Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum. Plus a two-night mooring in Vienna with complimentary Vienna Pass.

* Eight nights, departing on 27 October, from £1,699pp.

A TASTE OF THE RHINE

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Lifeboats



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Chris Huxley - proudly leaving a gift in his Will to the RNLI

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We never forgot the relief we felt when the brave Newhaven lifeboat crew came to the rescue. It all happened 50 years ago - and the lifeboat volunteers are still on a mission to save every one today.

By leaving a gift in my Will, I'm helping to ensure they'll be there tomorrow, with the kit and training they need to save lives and come home safely.

'I'll be there, right beside the crew when lives are on the line. And you can be there too.'

6 in 10 lifeboat launches are only possible thanks to gifts in Wills. RNLI volunteers rely on people like you and Chris to keep them safe. When we receive your gift, your name will be added to the side of a lifeboat, so you'll be by their side on every launch.

Three easy ways to request your free RNLI Gifts in Wills Guide:

1. Return the attached form below
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Photos: RNLI/Nigel Millard, Lynda Huxley

-10

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Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Letter from America



by SIMON MARKS

With the runners and riders in the race for the American presidency lining up to put themselves under starter's orders, one figure's intervention in the 2024 election has secured insufficient attention.

Dr Geoffrey Hinton spent his working life leading the development of Artificial Intelligence - he's known as the 'godfather of AI' - but quit his job at Google, warning that this own invention was now out of control.

We're beginning to see that for ourselves in the US. Already, attack ads have been created by former President Donald Trump and the interest groups that support him using artificially created video images and synthetic voices. In one, the Trump team literally puts words that were never spoken into the mouth of his main Republican rival, Florida Governor Ron Desantis.

And in the Republican Party's first ever AI-created advertisement, every image was fabricated, along with the voices. Entitled 'Beat Biden', it showed a dystopian vision of the ruin they predict a second Biden term would bring: explosions in Taiwanese tower blocks as China invades, 80,000 'illegals' pouring across the US border and armed troops on the streets of a lawless San Francisco.

Few voters yet understand the potential of AI's impact on elections and democracy; 2024 will be my eighth presidential election but the first where AI is going to be a major player. Dr Hinton told *The New York Times* that it will be nigh on impossible 'to prevent bad actors from using it for bad things', and said that soon voters will struggle to separate real images from fake ones.

The British expatriate, who left Britain for US academia in his thirties, is sanguine about his role in AI's development: 'If I hadn't done it someone else would have,' he said.

One of the more curious aspects of America's current political debate is the so-called 'war on gas stoves'. They've become the latest battle ground in the culture

wars, after DeSantis vowed to centre his campaign around the 'war on woke' he has pursued as Florida governor.

Earlier this year, the Biden appointee running the Consumer Product Safety Commission in Washington hinted he might endorse calls to ban gas ovens due to the indoor pollution they cause and their contribution to climate change.

Sensing an opportunity, Republicans seized on the threat, telling those with gas stoves in their kitchens to prepare to man the ramparts. Most Americans (more than 60%) cook with electricity. But in some parts of the country (California and New Jersey), gas is used in 70% of homes.

In our house, we are stuck with an electric stove that I have come to loathe. Several years ago an effort to replace it with gas - which I infinitely prefer - was derailed. Not because of climate change but because our local supplier quoted a \$20,000 fee just to run a gas line from our street to the house.

I recently returned to the US from my first ever extended trip to Japan, occasioned by Biden's trip to the G7 Summit. It was everything I'd hoped for, and more. There's a pulsating energy to the place, despite economic vicissitudes that have left Prime Minister Fumio Kishida fervently hoping for any chance to call an early election to avoid a seemingly inevitable drubbing at the polls.

More than anything, it was the food that entranced me. In one hole-in-the-wall joint, a freshly grilled piece of miso-infused mackerel won my heart, and cost less than I pay for a dried-out ham sandwich in Washington DC.

In the space of five days, I experienced two earthquakes: the first, a gentle tremor that everyone ignored. But the second had my hotel room swaying back and forth for at least two minutes.

'QUAKE!!!' I texted my Tokyo-based colleague. 'Don't worry... only a baby one,' he responded. To me, it felt more like a raging toddler. ®

'In the Republican Party's first ever AI-created advertisement, every image was fabricated, along with the voices'



The great British road trip

Do something different and explore the UK from the comfort of your car

In recent years, the nation has rediscovered the delights of holidaying at home and, while many are keen to jet off to faraway places, the UK still has plenty to offer those seeking a bit of adventure or a new experience. Instead of piling down to Cornwall or other popular destinations, why not embrace the road trip and take in as many UK sights and locations as you can?

Once you change your mindset of a holiday as getting to and staying in just one place, your

horizons broaden and already it feels a lot more relaxing. There's no endless scrolling of trying to find 'the one', that perfect place to keep you comfortable and entertained for a fortnight. And after shutting the front door behind you, in just an hour or two, you're already at your first stop on your own personal itinerary when you're in the driving seat.

So what are the top things to consider when planning the perfect car tour? You could head off and follow your nose - see how

far you get halfway through your trip and then start wending your way back home, finding B&B rooms as you go. With an afternoon spent poring over a map, you can quickly come up with a circuit to take in things and places that tickle your fancy. Try a mixture of things to fend off 'visitor fatigue' - pick some history, some culture, some open air, some relaxing, some activity. Factor in some flexibility too, and if you see one of those intriguing brown road signs, go explore!

It seems obvious, but the secret is to enjoy the journey just as much as the destination. Hammering down the motorway is not much fun for the driver or passenger, so set the satnav for the scenic routes and the cross-country roads. They are often quieter, less hectic - and as you're

in the driving seat, if you fancy pulling over to take in an amazing view or spot a gorgeous tearoom to sample, you can.

As well as being in control of the travel, you can vary the places you stay too - think about perhaps going budget on one night if there is somewhere sumptuous further along your route. Unusual and small places, such as shepherd huts or folly cottages, might request more than a single-night booking, so bear that in mind when looking at the location and the attractions in the area.

Wherever you stay, take advantage of the kettle! Filling up an old-fashioned Thermos and liberating a couple of milks and teabags will give you a nostalgic holiday flashback sipping a fresh cuppa in the middle of nowhere.

It goes without saying that you might go through a lot of fuel on a self-drive holiday. Have you heard of hypermiling? This is when you try to drive as efficiently as possible, squeezing the most miles out of each gallon. Bringing your speed down a notch is one way; if you're not on the motorway, you'll already be driving more slowly. Other than making sure your tyre

pressure is all OK and your car is running well, the golden rule is to anticipate the road ahead and avoid sharp braking and acceleration.

Although it would be lovely to imagine we can all pootle into the countryside straight from home, some motorway travel is unavoidable.

'The secret is to enjoy the journey just as much as the destination'

In recent years, more sections of the motorway network have been transformed into 'smart' motorways where the hard shoulders have been absorbed into carriageways. If you find yourself in one of these, pay close attention to the overhead signs and if there's a red cross showing - stay out of that lane. Smart 'all lanes' motorways have emergency refuge areas off the inside lane every 15 miles or so. If your car starts to misbehave, get to one of these areas if you can.

One thing that's also worth keeping in mind is the 'staycation', where you don't stay overnight anywhere, but head out to explore with day trips. It's so true that we often fly past the lovely things on our doorstep to get somewhere else. And not being in a rush, you'll be able to notice what's been right under your nose all along. 0

GET ROAD-TRIP READY

Here are a few tips to make your holiday go smoothly:

0 You can add Saga Breakdown Assistance to a Saga Car Insurance policy any time. It's charged on a pro-rata basis, so it will expire at the same time as your main policy.

0 To save phone gymnastics, jot down your breakdown call-out number, car reg and policy number and put it in the glove box.

0 Fill an empty two-litre bottle with water and bung it in the boot to top up windscreen-washer bottles or radiator coolant.

(.) Pace yourself. Allow 15 minutes' break for every two hours on the road to keep everyone perky.

0 Don't forget that with Saga Car Insurance, you'll have things like onward taxi travel and replacement hire car to get you back on track if a fender-bender dents your plans.

WIN A CAR KIT

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or visit saga.co.uk/breakdown-assistance-article

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what's on

THEATRE / MUSIC / FILM / EXHIBITIONS /
DANCE / RADIO / PODCAST / TV

Senior heroes

From left:
Harrison Ford,
Keanu Reeves,
Michelle
Yeoh, and
Tom Cruise



1 Acting It their age

From Harrison Ford to Tom Cruise, the average age of movie action heroes seems to be rising. We celebrate this growing trend

by ANNA SMITH

Who would you rather watch saving the world on the big screen, a twentysomething or a seasoned senior? If it's the latter, you're not alone: Hollywood is seriously embracing older action stars at the moment.

Harrison Ford has just returned as daredevil archaeologist Indiana Jones, while Tom Cruise is back in action as spy Ethan Hunt in *Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One* this month. As it happens, both actors are celebrating their birthdays: Cruise turns 61 on 3 July and Ford will be an impressive 81 on 13 July.

But it's not just July babies getting all the action. Last year, we saw Jeff Goldblum, 70, W

C, Sam Neill, 75, and Laura Dern, 56, saving the world in *Jurassic World Dominion*. Months later, Michelle Yeoh, 60, kung fu-kicked her way to an Oscar for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

This love for the older action star is a welcome move in an industry that often favours youth, says Philip de Semlyen, global film editor at *Time Out*. 'Hollywood gets a lot of flak for ageism - and rightly so - so it's been really encouraging to see more mature stars front and centre in big blockbusters. Liam Neeson, now 71, blazed a trail in *Taken* [he was 56 in the first *Taken* movie] proving creaky knees are no barrier to playing the action hero. Hollywood has been trying to repeat the trick ever since.' He also points to Keanu Reeves, 58, who will likely play John Wick well into his sixties - the fourth *John Wick* was released in March - and to Denzel Washington, 68, who returns as *The Equalizer* in September. 'Action movies are not the sole preserve of younger stars, they are now an older man's game,' says de Semlyen.

One of the reasons for the trend is the power of big movie franchises. With tough competition from streaming services, cinemas are looking to draw in the punters with familiar faces they know and love. Just mention the words 'Indiana Jones' and most of us of a certain age will break into a nostalgic smile, remembering the excitement the films gave us in our youth - and on the big screen. This tactic is working - *Top Gun: Maverick*, starring Tom Cruise, was the second biggest film of 2022 in the worldwide box office.

With the wonders of modern technology, you can even be transported back to the past along

Age: 101!
Below, from left: Liam Neeson in *Taken 3*; Harrison Ford; Jeff Goldblum, Sam Neill and Laura Dern in *Jurassic World Dominion*

'Hollywood gets a lot of flak for ageism - and rightly so - so it's been really encouraging to see more mature stars front and centre in big blockbusters'

with your favourite actor. 'De-ageing technology is developing at pace, meaning that a younger Harrison Ford in the new *Indiana Jones* movie isn't the creepy prospect it once was,' says de Semlyen. 'It will give filmmakers more options to cast older stars and throw in fun, nostalgic flashbacks.'

Speaking about the new de-ageing technology at the premiere of the latest *Indiana Jones* film in Cannes, Ford said, 'The technology has evolved to the point where to me it seems very realistic. That is my face. It's not Photoshop magic. It's what I looked like 35 years ago. I'm very happy with it. But I don't look back and say I wish I was that guy. I'm happy with age. I love being older. It was great to be young, but I could be dead and I'm still working, so go figure!'

With or without visual effects, these older leading actors have to be genuinely skilled and dedicated to cut it. Ford rides a horse at full pelt in the latest *Indiana Jones* movie, and is *seen* looking in great shape with his shirt off in one scene. In the new *Mission: Impossible*, Cruise - famous for doing all his own stunts - is seen riding a camel,

leaping over balconies while throwing punches, storming buildings with guns, racing down alleyways, diving, leaping off a cliff on a motorbike and, that old classic, scrambling on top of a moving train. And that's just in the trailer. 'Tom Cruise, Keanu Reeves and Jackie Chan are still knocking it out of the park,' says de Semlyen. 'What makes them so good? An almost fanatical dedication, a willingness to do their own stunts, a sheer love of movie-making and probably a vast number of ice baths. Not many are cut from that cloth.'

It's not just older leading actors who are in





Cruise control
Left and below: Tom Cruise in Mission: Impossible - Fallout



Kung-fu fighting
Michelle Yeoh in Everything Everywhere All at Once



Older women still rarely take centre stage in any big-budget movies, and that includes action films. De Semlyen is concerned that Yeoh's recent Oscar victory won't have the impact it should. 'Sadly, Michelle Yeoh's nimble Oscar-winning turn feels like an outlier - Hollywood still doesn't seem as confident about an older female star opening an action movie.'

Nicky Clark, screenwriter, journalist and equality campaigner, who keeps a keen eye on age and casting in the movies, says women still suffer from more ageism than men when it comes to casting. 'As I say in my Acting Your Age Campaign, still too often on screen, men have a whole life and women only a shelf life,' she says. 'Tom Cruise gets to run around with the weapon and the (younger) woman, promoting the ideal of virility of 60-year-old men.'

But women in Hollywood are leading the way towards change. 'The big-name female actors of Hollywood, such as Nicole Kidman and Reese Witherspoon, are now taking on the role of producers as well as performing, meaning that in time we'll see more older women in action on the big screen,' says Clark. 'Distributors are actively seeking projects featuring older leading characters now because they know the numbers don't lie.'

She also has a wonderful vision of the future of action movies. 'I'd personally love to see Helen Mirren and Tom Cruise as a couple, take on the world and win,' she says. 'That's smashing the stereotype. It shouldn't still be seen as a mission: impossible.' @

Indiana Jones and the Dial Of Destiny is *out on 30 June* (see our review on p103). Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One is *out on 14 July*

vogue. We've seen active supporting turns from Michelle Pfeiffer, 64, and Michael Douglas, 78, in *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*, and Pierce Brosnan, 69, in *Black Adam*. This fashion may have been going on longer than you think. 'Since Brando appeared in the 1978 *Superman*, Hollywood has loved to push up its blockbusters with heavyweight thespians,' says de Semlyen. 'Maybe it's because superhero movies share some loose connective tissue with Shakespeare - elemental drama, big themes, lots of people in tights - that gilded stage actors fit so well. Helen Mirren in *Shazam! Fury of the Gods*, Anthony Hopkins in *Thor*.'

So, year by year, are action stars really getting older? Film data researcher Stephen Follows found that between 1996 and 2015, the average age of an 'action star' was 40, but that in the first six months of 2015, it rose to 48.4 years old.

It looks like that trend may have continued. According to the website Puck, an industry study recently asked moviegoers which stars they wanted to see most on the big screen. The average age of those voted into the top 20 was 57.5 years old. The article reasoned that, 'real movie stars are throwbacks because the biggest movies themselves are increasingly throwbacks'. Topping this survey were Tom Cruise, The Rock, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt and Denzel Washington.

But there's something missing here: women.

out and about

BALLET

**Matthew Bourne's
Romeo and Juliet**
On tour

3 July - 4 November
new-adventures.net

Famed for radically shaking up traditional ballets, Matthew Bourne is bringing his version of *Romeo and Juliet* back to the stage. The story has been pulled out of the 'fair' Italian city and into the asylum-like Verona Institute, where Romeo and Juliet are inmates. Highly acclaimed when it debuted in 2019, the adaptation will visit places including Leicester, Salford, High Wycombe, Hull and London.

**Focus on
Africa**
Ethiopian
artist A'ida
Muluneh's
photograph
highlights
water poverty



EXHIBITION

**A World in Common:
Contemporary African Photography**
Tate Modern, London, tate.org.uk
6 July-14 January 2024

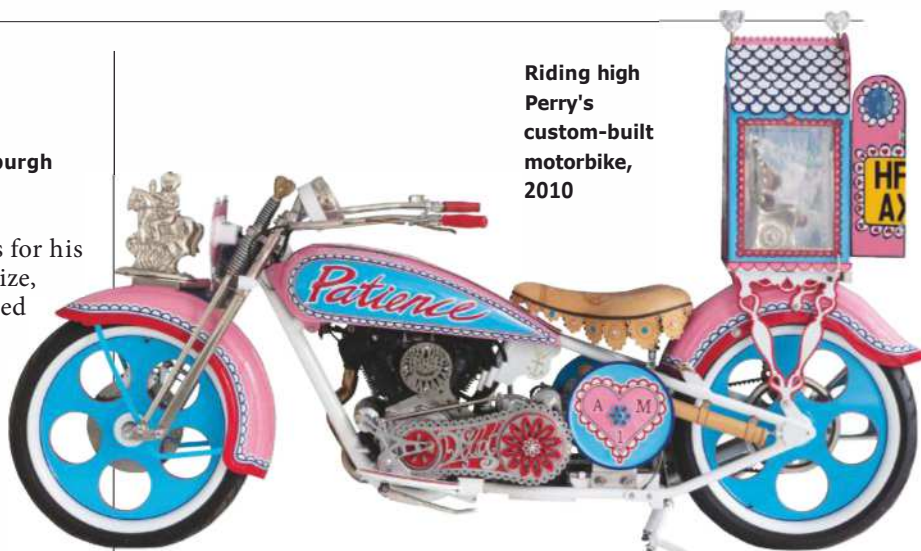
This new exhibition celebrates the dynamic landscape of photography across Africa today. Since the invention of photography in the 19th century, the continent has been defined by pictures taken through a Western lens. Thirty-six artists seek to reclaim Africa's histories, cultures, and traditions.

EXHIBITION

Grayson Perry: Smash Hits
National (Royal Scottish Academy), Edinburgh
22 July-12 November
nationalgalleries.org

Since Sir Grayson Perry became famous for his ceramic pots, he has won the Turner prize, presented TV shows and written acclaimed books. Now, National Galleries Scotland is set to host the largest ever exhibition of his work across his 40-year career. The 63-year-old artist's most notable works will be presented alongside early creations, including a plate (*Kinky Sex*, 1983) made during his first week at a pottery evening class.

Riding high
Perry's
custom-built
motorbike,
2010



THEATRE

The Crown Jewels

On tour

7 July - 7 October

crownjewelsplay.com

Based on the true story of Colonel Blood's heist attempt in the 1600s, the cast of this new comedy is as sparkling as the coveted bling. Al Murray (*below*) plays Charles II alongside Mel Giedroyc (The Great British Bake Off) and Neil Morrissey (Line of Duty). After a West End run, it will tour to Salford, Canterbury, Cardiff and Milton Keynes.



THEATRE

The Lord of the Rings

The Watermill Theatre, Newbury

25 July - 15 October

watermi/1.org.uk

Hosted in a converted watermill in Berkshire, this production, based on JRR Tolkien's trilogy, spills out from the theatre into the gardens. Featuring large-scale puppets, it brings to life characters such as Bilbo Haggins and Frodo.



FILM 

by ANNA SMITH

Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny Harrison Ford swings back into action in the fifth in the franchise about the daredevil archaeologist - and the good news is, he's still got it. Most of the story takes place in 1969, as Indy is about to retire from his professor job. Bored and broken-hearted, he's drowning his sorrows when he meets a blast from the past: his goddaughter Helena (Phoebe Waller-Bridge). She's searching for the 'dial of destiny' that was the obsession of her late father, Indy's colleague (played by Toby Jones). Reluctantly, Indy joins Helena on a globetrotting search for the dial, which the film's chief villain (Mads Mikkelsen) believes has magic properties.

Despite a pace that's a bit plodding, it's great fun to see Indy back in the saddle - literally, in one case when he rides a horse on to the New York subway. Ford does an excellent job as the grizzled Indy, who might occasionally grumble about his aching limbs but generally bucks archetypes of older folks on screen. Waller-Bridge also smashes a few stereotypes as a different kind of leading lady, not least because she has a platonic relationship with the hero.

This film looks terrific on the big screen too, from the opening flashback sequence featuring a younger Indy (thanks to state-of-the-art visual effects) to the recreation of New York at the time of the Moon landings. There are also entertaining turns from a supporting cast including Antonio Banderas and John Rhys-Davies, who reprises his role as Sallah.

The Dial of Destiny may not be up there with Indy's early outings, but it's still an enjoyable way to revisit a much-loved character - possibly for the last time.

'Despite the pace being a bit plodding, it's great fun to see Indy back in the saddle - literally in one case'



WATSON TARRANT PHOTOGRAPHY

out and about



=MUSICAL

42nd Street

On tour

From 13 July

42ndstreettour.com

Samantha Womack stars as Dorothy Brock in a new touring production of this beloved musical. Michael Praed (*Robin of Sherwood*), Les Dennis (*Family Fortunes*)

and Faye Tozer (pop group Steps) also join the cast. Written in 1980, the story follows a young performer who gets her big break on Broadway during the Great Depression. Full of spectacular dance routines and toe-tapping music, it features songs including *We're in the Money* and *Lullaby of Broadway*.

MUSICAL

Annie Get Your Gun

Lavender Theatre, Epsom, Surrey

17 July-5 August

lavendertheatre.com

Nestled within lavender fields, this new outdoor theatre opens this month with an inaugural production of *Annie Get Your Gun*. Irving Berlin's classic musical will be the first to play

at this attractive Surrey venue. Audiences can spend a summer evening lost in the story of sharpshooter Annie Oakley, set to songs such as *Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better)*. Before the performance, theatre-goers can feast at the venue's Glass House restaurant underneath citrus trees, or picnic among the flowers. And there's no need to worry about rain as the 200-seat outdoor area is covered. @



DECADE BUSTERS

compiled by MITCHELL SYMONS

TURNING 50

Fran Healy musician (Travis)
Kate Beckinsale actor, *below left*
Peter Kay comedian, *right*
Rufus Wainwright singer/songwriter
Tracy Shaw actor



TURNING 60

Brigitte Nielsen actor, *right*
Henri Leconte tennis player
Lisa Kudrow actor
Mark Kermode writer and critic
Norman Cook (aka Fatboy Slim) DJ and musician, *below left*
Tracey Emin artist



TURNING 70

Elizabeth Emanuel fashion designer, *above right*
Graham Gooch cricketer
Patti Scialfa singer (The E Street Band)



TURNING 80

Sir Mick Jagger singer/songwriter (The Rolling Stones), *below*
Chris Serie broadcaster, *above*
Jim McCarty musician (The Yardbirds)



Mark Cox tennis player and commentator

TURNING 90

Cormac McCarthy writer (*The Road*)



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staying in

PODCAST by SARAH SHANNON

ZOE Science & Nutrition

You might remember Professor Tim Spector from his pandemic TV appearances. Now the epidemiologist is back with a team of geeks for this excellent podcast all about eating better. One episode concentrates on the horrors of ultra-processed foods - packaged biscuits, sugary cereals, ready meals - which are an increasing part of the UK diet. Spector describes a study that placed two groups in a hospital on different food regimes. One group ate ultra-processed food, the other ate the same food, but made with fresh ingredients. The group on ultra-processed food ate an extra 500 calories a day as the food overcame their brain's signals for fullness. According to Spector, any food labelled 'healthy' or 'fat free' is almost certainly bad for you as it will have been ultra-processed to remove sugars or fat. And sugar-free food is frequently stuffed with sweeteners whose health claims are in doubt. Fascinating stuff, but enjoy your tea and biscuits before listening!



FIFA Women's World Cup

(ITV AND BBC)

England's Lionesses will be keen to repeat their European success in the month-long tournament from 20 July. It's in Australia and New Zealand, so set those alarm clocks for some early starts.



ON THE BOX



What's not to like about a gripping new crime thriller to keep us guessing, the return of a Second World War historical drama, and a globe-spanning wildlife documentary?



RADIO

Vernon Kay, BBC Radio 2

'We're in the chair and the microphone is working and that's all that matters.' For a moment Vernon Kay sounded as if he was trying to reassure himself as he opened his new show on BBC Radio 2. He has big boots to fill, replacing Ken Bruce who had an epic 31 years in the slot. The move was not without controversy as Bruce fans complained about the youngster taking over (Kay is 49).

But after his jittery opening, Kay gave his doubters reason for optimism. His playlist was an uplifting blend of new tracks (Eurovision winner Sam Ryder's new single), classics (U2's *Beautiful Day*) and oldies (Frank Sinatra).

Kay is no ingenue. He's been a TV presenter since his teens and on our radios for decades.

His Bolton blokieness and humour make him hard to dislike but some elements of his new show need work. The replacement for Bruce's popular PopMaster quiz, Ten to the Top, is so hard to follow even the contestants sound bemused. For anyone not convinced by the newcomer, Ken Bruce - and PopMaster - are on Greatest Hits Radio.

'Kay's Bolton blokieness and humour make him hard to dislike'

Evacuation CHANNEL 4

In August 2021, with the Taliban taking over Kabul, the British military commenced Operation Pitting, this country's biggest airlift since the Second World War, rescuing more than 15,000 British nationals and eligible Afghans amid scenes of utter chaos. This visceral and deeply moving three-part documentary tells the inside story of the complex and perilous operation through previously unseen MoD footage and raw, intimate testimony from servicemen and women who found themselves at the epicentre of an unfolding crisis.



by BENJIE GOODHART



Blue Lights (BBC iPLAYER)

Police procedurals are two a penny on TV, but not all are created equal. This six-part drama, following the lives of three police probationers and their colleagues in Belfast, is an astonishingly tense, riveting and ultimately moving watch, played to perfection by an ensemble cast led by Sian Brooke. One of the shows of 2023.

● Wolf

BBC ONE

TV detectives are often tormented by family tragedy. Luther's wife was murdered, Rust Cohle (*True Detective*) lost his infant daughter in a car accident, and Catherine Cawood (*Happy Valley*) and Mare Sheehan (*Mare of Easttown*) both lost children to suicide. BBC One's darkly compelling new six-part crime thriller, *Wolf*, adapted from Mo Hayder's bestselling novel of the same name, takes a similar story of past trauma and places it front and centre in the unfolding plot.

DI Jack Caffery (Ukweli Roach, in his first lead role) is a young man obsessed by the neighbour he believes killed his ten-year-old brother and determined to right the wrongs of the past. But when Caffery's latest case sees the past and the present collide, the consequences are devastating.

Cry Wolf
Ukweli Roach
as DI Jack
Caffery



On an isolated farmhouse in rural Wales, a wealthy family are being held hostage, terrorised by the twisted games of their psychopathic captor. When they manage to smuggle out a plea for help in the collar of their dog, it triggers an unbearably tense chain of events.

Ukweli is outstanding as the tortured Caffery, ably supported by a fabulous cast including Juliet Stevenson (left), Owen Teale, Sacha Dhawan and Iwan Rheon.

Author Hayder, who died of motor neurone disease in 2021, burst onto the literary scene in the early 2000s, and her series of Jack Caffery novels were characterised by some dark and gruesomely shocking crimes - Dixon of Dock Green this is not - but the result is a nail-bitingly suspenseful drama. With *Wolf* one of seven Jack Caffery books, we may be witnessing the birth of a new detective franchise.



Monkey business
Stephen Fry presents and narrates a new wildlife documentary

World on Fire
BBC ONE

It's been almost four years since award-winning screenwriter Peter Bowker's epic historical drama delighted audiences and critics with its riveting tale set throughout Europe at the outbreak of the Second World War. The first series, currently available on iPlayer, won plaudits for telling the story of a global conflict through the lives of ordinary people. The second series, out this month, is wider in scope, with the Northern Blitz bringing the realities of war to the streets of Manchester, and British troops struggling alongside Indian Sappers and Australian Diggers in the North African desert. Lesley Manville, Zofia Wichlacz, Jonah Hauer-King, Julia Brown (*below*) and Eryk Biedunkiewicz all reprise their roles and the wonderful Mark Bonnar (*Guilt*) is among a host of new cast members.

Watch A Year on Planet Earth
ITV1

A spectacular globe-spanning nature documentary presented by a national treasure - you could be forgiven for thinking you were watching a show made by Sir David Attenborough and the BBC's world-famous Natural History Unit. But this six-part series is on ITV, and the familiar voice describing the glorious images is that of Stephen Fry.

Examining how the natural world adjusts to the cycle of the seasons, *A Year on Planet Earth* combines extreme weather, breathtaking landscapes and epic wildlife spectacles, from frozen polar wastelands to baking, arid deserts and humid, dense rainforests.

Fry may not have the authoritative gravitas of Attenborough, but he presents and narrates with a charming sense of awe.



10 YEARS AGO... ANDY MURRAY WON WIMBLEDON

On Sunday, 7 July 2013, Andy Murray finally ended a 77-year wait for a homegrown Men's Singles champion at Wimbledon with a 6-4, 7-5, 6-4 win over world number one Novak Djokovic, to send

a nation into raptures. Nearly 17.3m people tuned in, making it the most-watched television event of the year. This year's Wimbledon Championships will take place from 3-16 July.®

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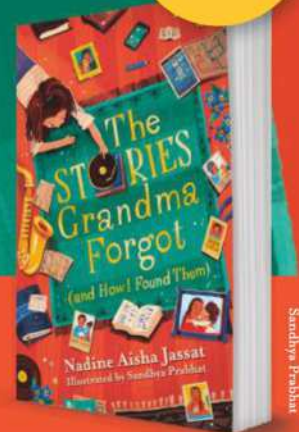
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letters

THANKS FOR WRITING TO US, WE LOVE HEARING WHAT YOU THINK

Ink-credible

I was most interested to read about Louise Minchin and her daughters having tattoos on New Year's Eve (June). I, too, must have a touch of rebel in me as I had a butterfly tattoo put on the inside of my left ankle on 4 April. I am 83.

I had been thinking about having it for a few years, then visiting a local tattoo parlour to have an ear piercing, I thought I must do it.

My two granddaughters accompanied me, and my eldest one was almost having hysterics as it was being done - she thought it was so funny!

Subsequently, most of my friends have been very complimentary about it and it has caused a lot of interest among people who I know. I still love looking at it and can't wait to flash it around during the summer months!
Jean Dickie, Wirral

Australian adventure
I was interested to read your article about the making of the BBC One drama *Ten Pound Poms* (May). It took me back to 1967 when I was in my second year at Leicester



Winging it
Jean Dickie shows off the butterfly tattoo she had done in April - at the age of 83



University. As part of my degree studies, I was undertaking a small research project into how British migrants integrated into Australian society. Having contacted Australia House in London to ask for information and statistics, I was stunned to receive a telegram from the Department of Immigration inviting me to work with them for 12 weeks in Australia.

While there, I visited the Nissen hut hostels to interview about 27 men, asking them to complete a questionnaire. Only one of the men was planning on returning to the UK but it's true that the conditions in the hostels were very basic and usually far from the major cities. The women especially had

a tough time with no family support and their husbands away all day.

My work was a tiny snapshot and, as a young student experiencing the opportunity of a lifetime, I don't think I truly realised the full implications of the decisions these migrants had made. Perhaps they were initially a bit giddy on the excitement of the journey and only realised belatedly how far away they were from the familiar.

It remains a fantastic experience in my life, and I'd be interested to know if any other readers participated in the ESU student cultural exchange of that era.

Jean Anderson
Truro, Cornwall

Life Down Under
My mother's family were a microcosm of the assisted passage programme. Having survived the war, three of her four brothers emigrated to South Australia in the early 1950s under the £10 scheme.

The cost and the time it took to sail to Australia back then meant she expected never to see them again. But the changes in the aviation industry enabled Mum and Dad to visit in 1982.

One of Mum's brothers had returned to England after the minimum two years in Australia. His wife never settled as she was homesick and could not tolerate the heat. I recall them describing the housing conditions - the



'hostels' - almost word for word the same as in Danny Brocklehurst's article. Richard Wooller Lydney, Gloucestershire

Word has it... Regarding the word 'Porn', it is even more likely that the term goes way, way back to 'Prisoners of his Majesty' or 'Prisoners of Mother England', later shortened to 'Porns'. Jim McMaster Marlow, Buckinghamshire

Deliberate mistakes Nick Lambert's letter (June) about sloppy spelling, especially on pub menu boards, made me smile.

My husband and I were in the business many years and I've chalked up more blackboards with menus and messages than I care to remember.

I often made deliberate spelling errors because some bright spark would have to tell you. That way, I knew the boards were being read. Ann Prescott Peterborough

Special place I was interested to read Jenni Murray's views about the importance of trees and green spaces (*May*), and that she is fortunate to live in Hampstead Garden Suburb and supports its work.

I was a temp at the trust in 1981, and soon appreciated its preservation of this special area. I was delighted when I was asked to stay on permanently and I worked there for 17 years.

It never ceased to amaze me how some new residents would say how very special the suburb was, only to then rip out their hedges and apply to concrete their

I laewrite stuff Many readers agreed with Mark Palmer's thoughts on letter writing

you're all talking about...

LETTER WRITING

Pen pals Mark Palmer's piece about letter writing in the May issue reminded me of the time, as a 14-year-old schoolgirl in 1961, I began writing to an American teenager, Kathy.

Our letters crossed the Atlantic every week for more than 40 years. Nothing can compare with the sight of the postman approaching and the sound of the envelope falling on to the doormat.

But it took technology in the form of an email to tell me of her death in 2002. We had lost touch for a while, and after she died, her nephew found my details while clearing out her house. He came to London, bringing bundles of my letters: the Beatles, JFK's assassination, the moon landings, it was all there in black and white. I still get them out and relive those days. Would I have kept an email for 40 years? I think not. Lorna Gillibrand Manchester

Historical archive I know first-hand how important handwritten letters are (although, to

be accurate, some were typed). When we cleared our parents' house, my brother and I found a suitcase full of letters - more than 1,200 - written by them between 1939 and 1947.

They are full of details about the war - what was going on here in the UK and where our father was serving in Italy, India and then as part of the British Occupation Forces in Japan until 1947 - as well as wonderful details about family members and friends. The letters also included sketches, cartoons and poems - an absolutely wonderful archive. Sue Dorman Chalfont St Giles, Bucks

By hand I write a lot of letters. I record posting dates and take copies of letters and notecards. Most of my friends are many miles away and the telephone is inconvenient, so writing is a substitute for speaking to them and keeping up to date. They always mention how much they like to receive my notelets, handwritten letters (on Basildon Bond) or a typed page with lots of chat. I'm 75 and have bags full of letters and diaries going back to the 1980s. Mrs Chris Heal, Essex

Write on When my friend Sue and her family moved down south with her husband's job, we promised to write to each other. Forty years later, our letters are something we both look forward to. We are never short of things to write about. The art of putting pen to paper may be dying out, but I'd rather receive a 'newsy' letter than a text asking, RU OK? Olga Hytollis, Carlisle





Front gardens, and be upset when we and other residents objected, pointing out they chose to live in a garden suburb - 'garden' being a key word!

I am delighted to know the trust is still going strong. I wish Jenni many more happy years living in the suburb. It is a very special area and deserves to be protected.

Jean Carton
Holland-on-Sea, Essex

Sounds of the Sixties
Further to Roger Farrall's letter on music and dementia (June), I help run an over-60s' social choir, our repertoire consisting almost solely of the hits of the 1950s and 1960s. We've performed at almost every local care home and the response is always the same.

People with dementia hear our music and come to life as though someone has thrown an imaginary switch to recharge them. Elderly ladies struggle from their chairs and start gently bobbing to the music. (It's always the ladies, never the men!) So, I put down my song folder, take one of the ladies' hands in mine, and dance with her. I like to think it makes her week, never mind her day!

We quickly realised that these audiences were in fact our generation, not that of our parents. You can forget 'Daisy, Daisy give me your answer do' and songs from the Second World War. What these people want is rock'n'roll. So, care home managers, turn off that

11'esame hymn sheet Reader Brian Goodliffe agrees with previous letter writers about music and dementia sufferers

soporific TV and put on some music of the 1950s and 1960s. You wouldn't believe the cheer it will bring to your residents.
Brian Goodliffe
Leighton Buzzard,
Bedfordshire

That's entertainment
Your feature on *That's Life!* (May) brought back some happy memories, as I appeared on the programme as a result of writing to them in 1977. I suggested that they were sometimes a little unfair to local councils with their regular 'Jobsworth' feature and offered a musical parody of the life of a councillor, having recently been elected as the youngest member of Gwent County Council.

The BBC asked me to organise a choir of my council colleagues to give a performance in our local council chamber. I agreed, but only some of my colleagues were willing to take part. Then, some of the senior councillors complained about the chamber being used.

Despite this, filming went ahead and everyone taking part enjoyed the experience. After it aired, some senior councillors continued to cough and splutter about the use of the council chamber but it got an enthusiastic response from

constituents. I never met Esther Rantzen, but still treasure a copy of the *That's Life!* book published the following year, which included two double-page spreads about our musical 'extravaganza'.
Roger Evans
Blackwood,
Gwent

Fight for your rights
Dame Esther Rantzen hosted *That's Life!* for 21 years



Fond memories
I can hardly believe it's the 50th anniversary of *That's Life!* I have fond memories of the family sat around the TV watching it on a Sunday night. Interesting to think that Margaret Thatcher was doing exactly the same thing!

I was a little blonde toddler when the show started and I clearly remember that it didn't reach success with its safe surfaces in playgrounds campaign, which is actually not a bad thing as falling off a climbing frame at primary school and hitting my head on the concrete below only knocked some sense into me.

Looking back, I remember the weird questions asked in the vox pops, which were clearly designed to get weird answers. I also remember Victoria Wood on the programme. I know her tenure at the *That's Life!* piano was fairly early on in its history, but it's testament to the variety of talent that graced the show as well as the things it achieved. It's unfortunate that such an amazing luminary didn't get a look-in in your 50th anniversary article.
Lisa Best
Crewe, Cheshire

Positive impact
Around 1982, one of Esther Rantzen's investigative reports was into E-numbers, bringing to attention the damage that was being caused by additives in food, sweets and juices.

When I removed E102 from my four-year-old son's diet - it was in the marmalade and orange juice he'd been consuming every morning - he started sleeping well and his behaviour improved. I am forever grateful to *That's Life!*
Peggy Rose
Inverness



Waste away

What a fascinating article on recycling (Saga Voices, *May*). There are so many different regimes for different parts of the country. North Somerset Council is known to be very good. A large black wheelie bin for landfill and two large green boxes into which bottles, paper, cardboard and plastic containers can be sorted.

My food bin never smells and is cleared every week. I line it with a sheet of newspaper and then place all food waste, individually wrapped in several sheets of newspaper, on top. The newspaper is then part of the recycling process. Simple! Sheena_g h Sykes, Bristol

Dream machine

Please put me on the waiting list for a carebot (June). What a fantastic idea. I would love to have one to look after me when I need some help. As for it seeing me naked, who cares? Diana Delahoy East Wittering, West Sussex

Fitting tribute

I'm a big fan of Gyles Brandreth and felt his article on the King (May) was a delightful, genuine and honest read, reassuring us that Charles has experienced life to its full - its highs, lows and everything in between - so is well prepared for the crown. Like Gyles, I am

glad he is an 'older monarch'. Charles is - and will continue to be - wonderful for our country and beyond. He has the support of the woman he loves, a devoted family, and a deep faith in God. You can't ask for more than that in life.

As a nation, we should put our trust in him and be grateful that he is more than capable for the role, which he is facing head on when most men his age are well into retirement. Thank you for a very special and beautifully written tribute. Debby Walker Wareham, Dorset

In praise of Paxman

We are very lucky as Saga readers that we are going to keep Jeremy Paxman as a monthly delight as we lose him on *University Challenge*.

It is a huge pleasure to read his slightly subversive column and it cheers me every time. He is very skilled and persuasive when dealing with topics which could offend but, somehow, he manages not to. He admits he has changed over time too, which is perhaps why he remains such an interesting observer and journalist. Thank you, Saga. Janet Macpherson Cheltenham, Gloucestershire *Wefeelveryluckyindeed that we have him - Ed!*

Switched on Reader Diana Delahoy thinks that Carebots like the ones featured in our June issue are 'fantastic'



Send us a letter* Email us at editor@saga.co.uk with 'Letters' in the subject line

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*We welcome your letters, but reserve the right to edit them. Please include your postal and email addresses

Helpful advice

Thank you for highlighting polymyalgia rheumatica (*April*). My husband was diagnosed with this debilitating condition in January after weeks of muscle fatigue, swollen feet and hands, and loss of strength to the point where I was helping him dress. He is now taking prednisolone, which has helped enormously.

We found the website you mentioned in the article, pmrgca.org.uk, had some very useful information. Gill Palmer, Suffolk

Tribe talking

Reading Susie Dent's column (June) took me back to my time in the Royal Navy when tribe talk was an important part of service life.

During a train journey from Portsmouth to London in the 1950s, the conversation between two Petty Officers who were on leave after a six-month deployment to the Far East went something like this. The other passengers in the compartment had no idea what was being discussed.

'Have you got your rabbits and dee effs?' (Translated: *Have you got all your presents for the family and your ration of duty free cigarettes?*)

'Yes, when I get to Culdee I'll be on RA in MQs, then on Blue Liners.' (*Arriving*



at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose in Cornwall and living on ration allowance in married quarters with a monthly issue of 300 RN cigarettes with a blue line down them to prove they are dutyfree.)

I'm glad that I am not wet nursing that young Snotty any more.' (A Snotty is a young midshipman so called as he had buttons on his sleeves so he could not wipe his nose on them. His pockets were also sewn up so he could not put his hands in them. That is why Royal Naval officers put handkerchiefs up their sleeves.)

And so it went on...
Derrick G Smith {ex-Chief Petty Officer, Royal Navy}
Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex

Broken bond

I read the letter to Alan Johnson (May) about sibling bonds being broken after the death of your parents with interest, because it happened to me.

My two sisters and I would meet up each week at our widowed father's house, but when he passed away, we drifted apart. Sadly, it was when one of my sisters became very ill that we met up again. Unfortunately, she died. I do regret those years when we lost touch, and I hope the lady who wrote to Alan (above) does all she can to stay close to her siblings, even though it is hard. I Jones, Blackpool, Lancashire



Style points

I agree with John Knight (Letters, May) about 'no dress sense, no style and no grooming'. I feel this applies to the staff in my bank, who now find it



acceptable to wear T-shirts and jeans as the new uniform.

When I enter a bank, I expect smart, professional-looking staff, not people who look as though they are dressed for a football match.

A professional look says so much about a company.

So, Mr Knight, you are not just too old and fussy; like me, you just expect certain standards.

Mrs Jenkins
Sheffield

Rag trade

Looking back on some previous issues of Saga Magazine, I read a letter about the 'ragaboh' man (January) collecting old clothes in the Thirties.

I am 95 years old now and remember the old clothes man coming round and exchanging your clothes for a 'pet'. We had rabbits, a gerbil, a hamster and two tortoises! My mum agreed to us keeping them as long as we looked after them and cleaned them out.

One day, when he came, we could only find one of my dad's suits. We were in trouble when he came home! Dad sent us to find him and retrieve it, which

Saitsyoa
One reader shares her memory of the rag and bone man (above); while another says, like Mark Palmer, she prefers maps to satnav (below)

we did. We asked if we could keep the pet. The man agreed, as we were good customers. You couldn't get away with that now. How times have changed!
Doreen Oldham
Penrith, Cambria

A wee idea

Regarding public toilets (March), 20 or so years ago, my wife and I enjoyed a walking holiday in St David's. At the time, we were amazed to find a leaflet at the tourist centre showing where all the public toilets in the town and extended area were located. What a great idea - very forward thinking for the time.
David Wright
Beverly, Yorkshire

From A-Z

I enjoyed the article written by Mark Palmer about his love of maps (June). I have always found maps interesting too.

When I was a young girl in London, the A-Z was my bible for getting to appointments. Once off the train or bus, instead of a head buried in a mobile phone, I'd be looking at my A-Z. By the time I got to my destination, the route was stored in my muscle memory.

For me it's the aerial view that informs the brain. So, while satnav is a useful tool, map reading is an art - and helpful when there is no signal!
Elaine Rixson, Diss, Norfolk ®



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Mrs. K, April 2023

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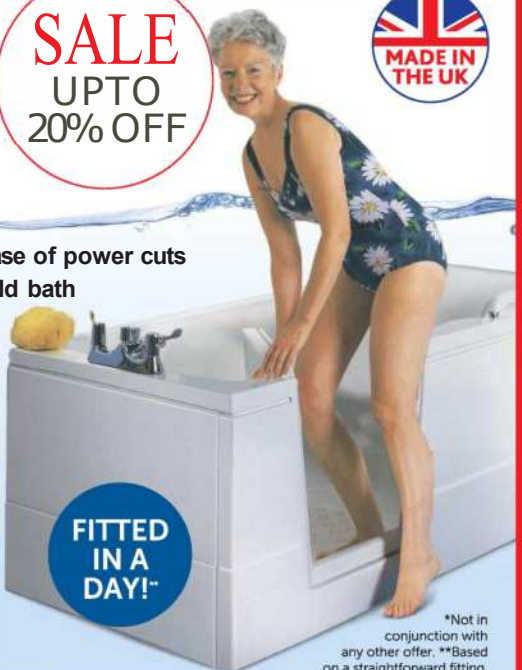
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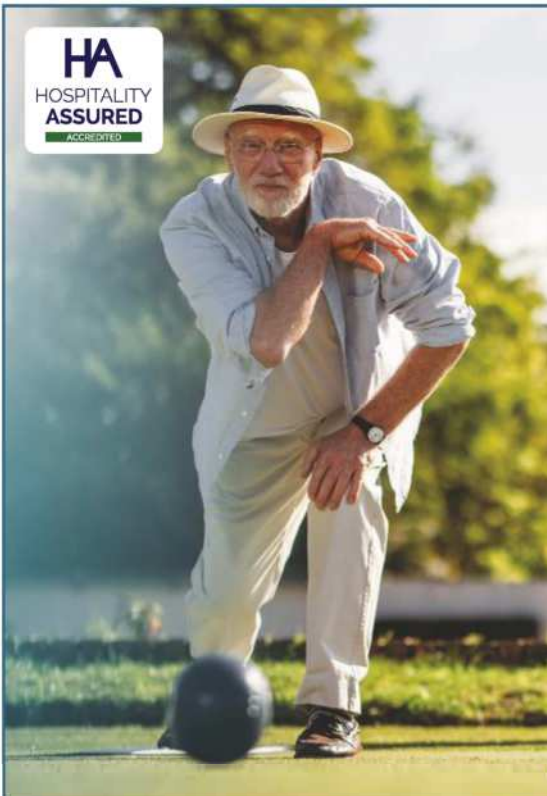
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grey matters

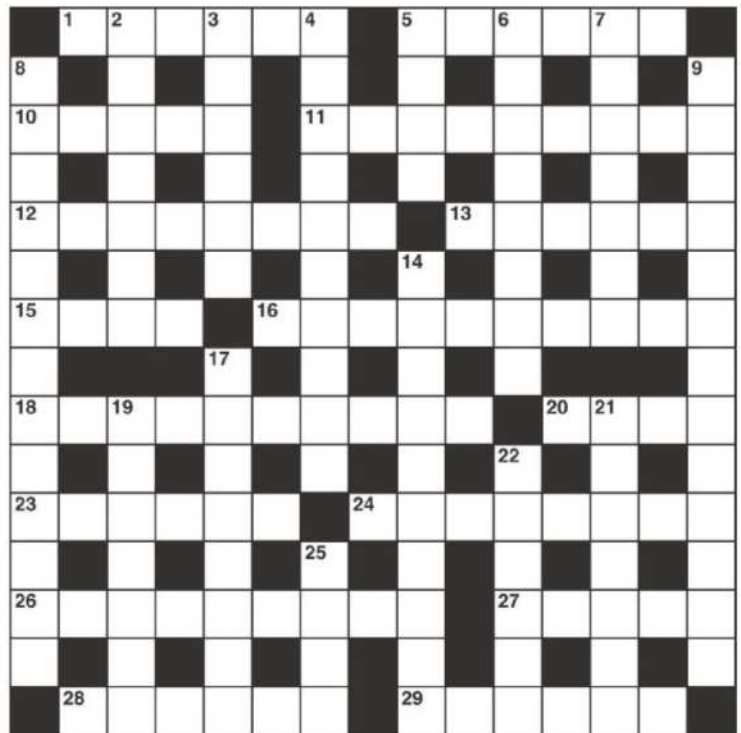
PRIZE CROSSWORD / CRYPTIC CROSSWORD / SUDOKU /
CODEBREAKER / WORD WHEEL / ADD A LETTER /
FUTOSHIKI / PATHFINDER / PUB QUIZ / ANSWERS

PRIZE CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Archery target between the inner and outer rings (6)
- 5 Roman general whose fourth wife was Octavia (6)
- 10 A treeless grassy plain in South America (5)
- 11 Heraldic emblem adopted by Henry VII (5,4)
- 12 Size of wine bottle named after a king of ancient Israel (8)
- 13 Scottish inventor of the pneumatic bicycle tyre (6)
- 15 British Prime Minister who introduced the Factory Act in 1844(4)
- 16 Sinister Italian character in *The Woman in White* (5,5)
- 18 Female star of the 1955 film *To Catch a Thief*(5,5)
- 20 African country that gained independence from France in 1960 (4)
- 23 Egyptian god of the dead (6)
- 24 Heavy cotton fabric used for upholstery (8)
- 26 Famous Edvard Munch painting of 1893 (3,6)
- 27 Courtier who referees the sword fight between Hamlet and Laertes (5)

- 28 American inventor of the phonograph (6)
 - 29 Nearest city to Bondi Beach (6)
- ### DOWN
- 2 Weaver turned into a spider, in Greek mythology (7)
 - 3 Saturn's outermost satellite (6)
 - 4 Cricket fielding position moving out from forward short leg (5,5)
 - 5 Verdi opera in which the King of Egypt is a major character (4)
 - 6 Moliere play of 1664 that satirises religious hypocrites (8)
 - 7 Pasta strings popular in Chinese cuisine (7)
 - 8 Character who marries Mr Barkis in *David Copperfield* (5,8)
 - 9 Island in the Bahamas on which Nassau is located (3,10)
 - 14 Elderly narrator in a series of tales by Joel Chandler Harris (5,5)
 - 17 Curved upper surface of liquid in a tube (8)
 - 19 Flavouring of the Greek drink ouzo (7)
 - 21 Racecourse that includes the jumps Canal Turn and Becher's Brook (7)
 - 22 Kent town that adjoins Rochester (6)
 - 25 Gas discovered by Ramsay and Travers in 1898 (4)



To enter

Email a scan or a photo of your entry, using General Knowledge Crossword (July) in the subject line and send it, with your name and address, to crosswords@saga.co.uk. Or cut out the crossword (no photocopies) and post it with your name and address to: General Knowledge Crossword (July), Saga Magazine, Enbrook Park, Folkestone, Kent CT20 3SE *Closing date: 28 July 2023*

SUDOKU

Place each of the digits 1 to 9 in each row, column and 3x3 box. There is only one solution.

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

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FUTOSHIKI

Fill the blank squares so that each row and column contains all the numbers 1-5. Use any given numbers and the symbols that tell you if the number in the square is larger (>) or smaller(<) than the number next to it.

□	□	□	□	□	
V	^				
□	D	<	D	[I]	□
[fi]	□	□	□	□	
□	□	□	□	□	
V	V	V	V		
□	□	□	□	□	

ADDA LETTER

Rearrange the letters and add one to these words to make five-letter words that fit the clues. The added letters will spell a word.

- LOOT **CJ** pigeon, police informer
- REND **CJ** Evil ___ the Sun, Agatha Christie book
- CARP **CJ** Hinder (someone's style)
- REIN **CJ** Underground worker
- GUTS **CJ** Welcome visitor
- MAST **CJ** Clever

Codebreaker

Each number in the grid represents a different letter. We've given you two letters to start you off, which show that 10=A and 21=N. Write these letters wherever their corresponding numbers appear in the grid and then begin to work out the identity of the other letters. All 26 letters of the alphabet will appear in the finished puzzle.

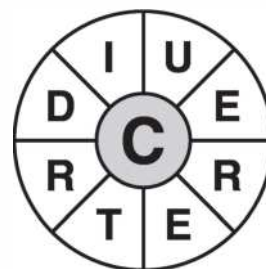
18	11	20	11	1	12		10	18	10	26	10	21	12	
1		22		11		23		14		14		10		23
6	13	2	7	10	12	14	6	21		8	2	20	12	6
6		11		4		8		8		23		10		8
9	23	10	1	10	6	23		6	2	12	15	7	6	4
24		26		17		3				24				10
	19	14	13	11		1	6	10	21		14	3	14	20
7		20		21		6		26		23		2		23
10	5	23	11		20	4	10	21		6	21	7	24	
4				1				11		6		7		23
20	2	3	12	11	25	12		20	9	7	6	18	8	24
2		11		3		10		14		14		6		3
14	8	7	6	6		20	12	10	1	8	10	16	11	1
12		6		1		12		5		10		11		14
	12	4	14	21	20	11	12		14	21	3	1	11	18

t B C D E F G H I J K L M ♦ O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	A	24	25	26
							N					

WORD WHEEL

See how many words of four letters or more you can make using the central letter in each word and the other letters only once in each word. You can make at least one word by using all the letters. No proper names, plurals or verb forms ending in the letter's' are allowed, and all words are from the Collins Dictionary.



- GOOD: 17
- EXCELLENT: 22
- BRILLIANT: 26
- GREAT SCORE FOR KIDS: 12

The pube Quiz

15

The Caribbean and Cloudy Bay, a physics conundrum and a scientist all feature in this month's teasers

by MARCUS BERKMANN

1 You climb the Leaning Tower of Pisa and drop two balls at the same time. One weighs 2kg, the other weighs 10kg. Which one hits the ground first?

0

2 The Victorian traveller would never leave home without a copy of *Bradshaw's Handbook*. What information did this reference book contain?

3 During the Falklands War in 1982, troops from three countries took part. The UK and Argentina were two of them. What was the third?

4 Which so-called religion of several Hollywood stars requires its adherents to stay silent during childbirth to ensure the avoidance of 'engrams', impressions formed in the infant brain because of 'physical pain or painful experiences'?

5 Whose blood group is T-negative?

6 Test cricketer, footballer, diplomat, sailor and literary critic C B Fry equalled which athletic world record in 1893?

7 Offa's Dyke Path follows, more or less, the border between which two countries?

8 Which European country administers the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao?

9 What connects P G Wodehouse's character Gussie Fink-Nottle and the former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone?

10 Which French scientist, who worked with the Curies and won a Nobel prize with them in 1903, now gives his name to the derived SI unit of radioactivity?

11 What, in 1898, was promoted as 'the best brain and nerve drink', in 1905 as 'the favorite drink for ladies when thirsty, weary and despondent', in 1906 as 'the national temperance beverage' and, in 1939, as making 'travel more pleasant'?

12 Four rectangles of sponge cake, two pink, two yellow, in a block wrapped with marzipan. What cake is this?

13 Natasha Richardson was an actor who died in 2009 after a freak skiing accident. Who had she been married to since 1994?

14 In which European city can you find the Beethoven Museum, in the house where the composer was born?

15 Cloudy Bay, Oyster Bay, Felton Road, Esk Valley, and Bannockburn are wines from which country?

16 What was banned in New York in 1639, and made compulsory at Eton in 1665 to ward off the plague?

17 US novelist Margaret Mitchell published only one book, in 1936. What was it called?

18 What do you get by heating sand, sodium carbonate and limestone? (Obviously in the correct proportions.)

19 What medical term means a lack of haemoglobin in blood?

20 In her lifetime, who produced *Leaves From The Journal of our Life in the Highlands* (1868) and *More Leaves From The Journal of a Life in the Highlands* (1884)? (Note the change from 'our' to 'a'.)



3

Public Footpath
Offa's Dyke Path

7



6

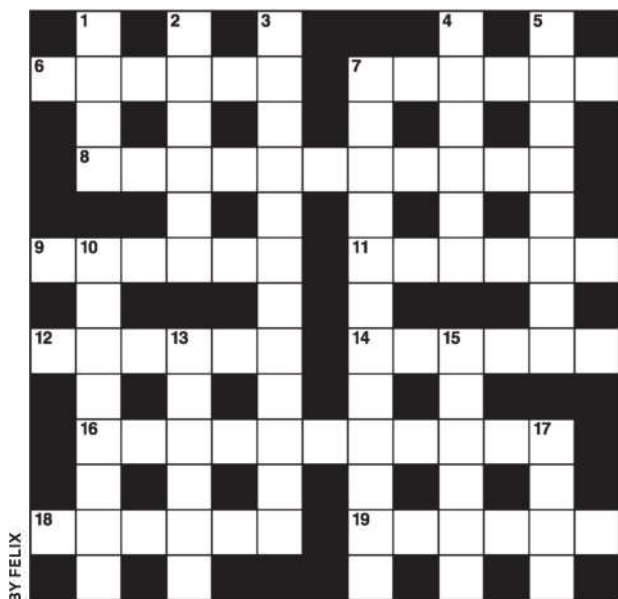
13



1

? Answers on p127

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



BY FELIX



ACROSS

- 6 Lead singer is gracious entertaining six-footer (6)
- 7 Type of language sultan regularly used with cleric (6)
- 8 Same evil mob ruined estates, perhaps (11)
- 9 Monitor fragments of worn face and head of nonagenarian (6)
- 11 One writing record about North Island (6)
- 12 Bird from Jersey avoiding gull dropping wings (6)
- 14 Irish Tory and broken man in the Highlands (6)
- 16 Figure in women's group returned to great ancient council (11)
- 18 Inexperienced European 11 (6)
- 19 Backing soldiers with support sheltering by cathedral city (6)

DOWN

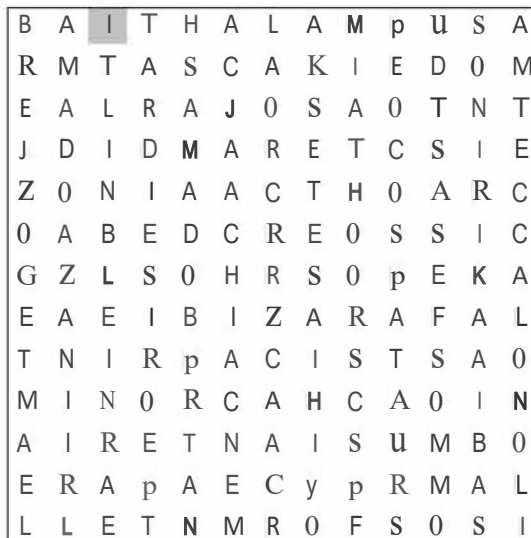
- 1 Female ruler of Asian country after leader's demoted (4)
- 2 Misty fluid over base creates frustrating situation (6)
- 3 Video involving Queen set up in farmhouse and practice area for players (7,5)
- 4 Tree going over waterfall and rock (6)
- 5 Affinity with bears trapped in centre of unsafe capital (8)
- 7 Get sound out holding mouth organ - that's critical (5-7)
- 10 Garden tool lifted beneath firm cabbage (8)
- 13 Some move to estate blocks (6)
- 15 Packed rug up with hamper (6)
- 17 Picked up bait for river (4)

To enter

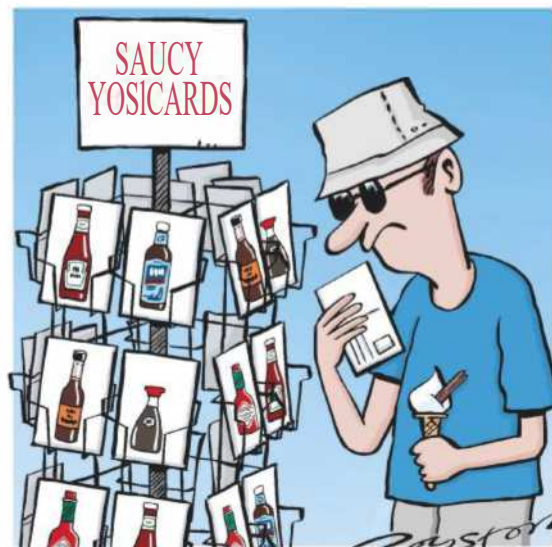
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PATHFINDER

Trace a continuous path, horizontally and vertically but not diagonally, starting from the highlighted letter, to find all the islands listed below.



- | | | |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| ITHACA | MINORCA | CRETE |
| LAMPEDUSA | CAPRI | SKIATHOS |
| MONTECRISTO | ELBA | PAROS |
| CORSICA | ZANTE | RHODES |
| KEFALONIA | GOZO | IBIZA |
| STROMBOLI | DJERBA | ISCHIA |
| SAMOS | MALTA | CYPRUS |
| FORMENTERA | SARDINIA | |
| PANTELLERIA | MAJORCA | |



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THIS MONTH'S ANSWERS

Word wheel

4-letter words

cede, cite, cued, curd, cure, curt, cute, duct, iced, rice

5-letter words

cider, cited, creed, cried, crude, cured, deuce, recur, trice

6-letter words

credit, cruder, deceit, direct, recite, reduce

9-letter word

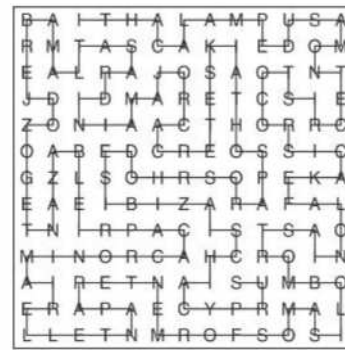
RECRUITED

Codebreaker



RUBWCOLGPAETV
IFZKDJSNQHYXM

Pathfinder



Pub quiz

- 1 They'll both land at the same time
- 2 Railway timetable
- 3 Nepal (The Gurkhas)
- 4 Scientology
- 5 Mr Spockin *Star Trek*
- 6 The long jump
- 7 Walesand England
- 8 Netherlands
- 9 They're both newt fanciers
- 10 Henri Becquerel
- 11 Coca-Cola
- 12 Battenberg
- 13 Liam Neeson
- 14 Bonn
- 15 New Zealand
- 16 Smoking
- 17 Gone *With The Wind*
- 18 Glass
- 19 Anaemia
- 20 Queen Victoria

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Under
Cramp
Miner
Guest
Smart

SUMMER



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Sudoku

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

Futoshiki

@	[]	[g]	[fil]
v	^		
	[g]<	[fil]	[]
		@	
[fil]		[]	@
		[g]	
[g]	[fil]	@	
v	v	v	[]
[]	@	[g]	[fil]

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The world according to... Judy Murray

The 63-year-old on Wimbledon stress, and being persuaded by Anton Du Beke to write a novel

This will be my 21st year of being at Wimbledon to watch my sons Andy and Jamie play and it never gets any easier. Frankly, it's like a series of mini heart attacks and severe nausea all going on at the same time.

I started finding it even more stressful when the boys got to the top of the game because of the expectations on them whether from fans, or the media or from themselves. Wimbledon puts so much pressure on British players because the eyes of the whole country are on the championships.

The name of the game

For 35 years, my life was saturated with tennis as a coach, so now when I have free time, I want to do anything but be near a tennis court. I like playing Padel tennis and Pickleball, and golf, which I have just taken up. And, of course, spending time with my family. I've got five grandchildren who I fly down to London to see as often as I can - Andy's children Sophia, seven, Edie, five, Teddie, three, and Lola, two; and Jamie's daughter Ava, who is ten months. Like all grannies, I love being able to spoil them, wind them up, and then hand them back! None of them show signs so far of following in their daddies' footsteps.

A novel idea

When you are in your sixties there's a realisation that you are coming into the final third of your life, so why not rock that boat a bit! About three years ago, Anton Du Beke, my *Strictly* dance partner, sent me his first novel set in the world of ballroom and suggested I write one set in the world of tennis. So that prompted me to write my first novel, *The Wild Card*. The main character is a woman who put her promising tennis career on hold and finds herself back at Wimbledon many years later. The characters aren't based on anyone real but, funnily enough, when I was 17 and Scotland's number-one player, I was offered a tennis scholarship at the University of

'Watching my sons at Wimbledon is like having a series of mini heart attacks'

The Wild Card by Judy Murray (Orion, £14.99) is out now in hardback

Judy will be appearing at the Henley Literary Festival, supported by Saga Exceptional, on 8 October at 2pm. See henleyliteraryfestival.co.uk

Virginia. I didn't go because 45 years ago, it wasn't the done thing in the way that it is now. I do look back and wonder how my life would have turned out if I had been brave enough to go.

Just for laughs

There is no way I would ever use a dating app because I'm too well known. I'm not ruling out the idea of a relationship, but I like being able to do my own thing. It's been a breath of fresh air for me to try so many different experiences. For example, I never would have imagined that this Mother's Day I'd have been on stage in an Abba costume, dancing in front of 1,400 people at the King's Theatre Glasgow as part of a comedy show with the brilliant Chris Forbes.

He has created a character of a third Murray brother called Duncan, who is basically hopeless at everything he does. Chris does all the work; I just have to sit there and look disappointed. It all started as a Children in Need sketch. Then we had two sell-out Edinburgh Fringe shows last year and we have two more dates there this summer, followed by the Aberdeen Concert Hall in the autumn. Then that will be it, the end of Duncan and Judy.

Labour of love

Andy and Jamie's success in tennis has brought huge excitement and positivity to the town of Dunblane even though the town is well known for being the scene of the school shooting [in 1996], which killed 16 children and one teacher. Along with the other parents, we waited at the school for four hours before we knew what had happened to our children [Andy and Jamie were eight and ten at the time]. It was the worst time of my life, but also made me realise how lucky I was that I still had my kids when a number of my friends had lost theirs. I'm now setting up The Murray Tennis Centre on the outskirts of Dunblane, which we hope will be open in 2025 and will be run as a charitable trust. It's been a huge labour of love for me but will be the long-term legacy for what the boys have achieved in tennis. ®

Word to the wise

by SUSIE DENT

This month, the *Countdown* lexicographer takes us behind the scenes of the show and reveals why she and her colleagues are often found in fits of giggles

It's always struck me that 'corpsing' is a curious choice of word for an episode of uncontrollable giggling while performing. Dead bodies generally don't go in for that sort of thing, although of course the whole idea is of an actor who's meant to be playing dead, but who is suddenly overtaken by laughter. It's not confined to the stage - as I know to my cost.

In my case, it involves a level of chortling that is impossible to control. In the course of my 30 years on *Countdown*, I've resorted to hiding behind my dictionary, hair, and even a fellow guest in a vain attempt to conceal my guffaws. I've tried to turn a sudden snort into a sneeze and, as a last resort, pretended to drop something so that I can let the laughter explode beneath the desk. I always tell people that I should really put *It'll be Alright on the Night* on my IMDb page.

Laughter, just like yawning, is infectious. If I begin to go, then it's likely that Rachel Riley to my right will also start, whereupon we need only to look at our host Colin Murray to ensure the three of us are struggling to maintain any level of composure. It often happens when we're all feeling a little tired. *Countdown* is recorded in blocks of three days, and on each day we film five shows. By show 15 we are all feeling it a little, and it's then that little sparkles of humour can erupt into full-blown hysterics.

Of course it's usually innuendo that causes the greatest corpsing. Some of my sentences, however innocently delivered, are just too rude to report here. One notorious blooper involved the magician and regular *Countdown* guest Paul Zenon. At the top of the show, the programme's host at the time, Jeff Stelling, asked me whether I was looking forward to being Paul's magic assistant again. Without a beat I replied, 'I am

a bit nervous, but I've had a sneak preview of what's under the desk, and it's impressive!' Cue a prolonged silence followed by splutters across the studio, accompanied by the sound of my head hitting said desk.

On another occasion, it was not my voice doing the talking but my stomach, which decided to enjoy an episode of rumbling (I love the word 'borborygmus'). I tried in vain to get through my *Origin of Words* but my intestinal accompaniment was so loud I had to pause and drink several glasses of water in order to

stifle my laughter. I'll never know if our viewers thought I had a grumpy sea lion sitting on my lap that day.

There have been countless more episodes. Unconscious hand gestures are often my downfall. I never notice that my hands are trying to enact the word

'Some of my sentences, however innocently delivered, are too rude to report here'

I'm defining - the 'bogie' that is a train's undercarriage, for example, has me moving my upturned palms back and forth, while 'erumpent' (the bursting forth of a flower's bud in spring)

has me doing a curious explosive gesture. But these pale next to my explanation of an 'areola' (a frequent flyer on *Countdown* that is soberly defined in the dictionary as 'the ring of skin surrounding a nipple'), where I find myself making distinctly circular motions over my chest to the sound of hefty chuckles from Rachel to my right.

Each of these gigglefests occurred during filming of the regular *Countdown* rather than the comedy version [*8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown*] that has spawned a whole host of others, but I'll leave them to another time. Meanwhile, an actor friend once told me that one tactic to prevent corpsing on stage involves putting an ice cube down your jumper and letting it slowly melt. At this point, anything is worth a try. ®



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