

The Guardian

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2021.01.03 - Front page

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Teachers take legal action as chaos grips England's schools plan

Unions advise teachers to stay away from schools and warn reopening plan is an ‘utter shambles’

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Education secretary Gavin Williamson has faced renewed calls to resign over his handling of the reopening of schools in England. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

Education secretary Gavin Williamson has faced renewed calls to resign over his handling of the reopening of schools in England. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

[Michael Savage and Donna Ferguson](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 16.00 EST

The planned reopening of schools in England has descended into disarray, as [unions advised teachers not to return](#) to the classroom, [heads took legal action](#) over the government's plans and senior Tories warned that school gates may have to remain shut for weeks to come.

With warnings that some primary heads would arrive at work on Monday morning unsure about whether they would be able to reopen to pupils, teachers accused the government of making an “utter shambles” of school reopening and demanded a last-minute delay. [Gavin Williamson](#), the education secretary, was also facing renewed calls to resign over the chaos.

There are growing demands this weekend for teachers to be given swifter access to the Covid vaccine and for schools to gain greater military help in testing pupils safely and reliably. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), told the *Observer*: “The people I represent will be going into their schools and colleges on Monday not knowing precisely which staff they may or may not have. There is significant uncertainty. It may well be that there are lots of school leaders who will be writing to parents saying, ‘We don’t know what we can do on Monday, your children shouldn’t be coming in’.

“It is obvious to everybody that the government has made an utter shambles of the arrangements for the start of the spring term with late and confused communications, and the lack of a clear scientific rationale.”

Some Conservatives believe that a delay until the February half-term may be needed. Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, said: “It is massively risky to open schools when so many parts of the NHS are teetering on the brink. The economic and human impact of keeping them closed is severe – but so too is the impact of thousands of wholly avoidable extra deaths. So I wouldn’t be surprised if we end up effectively keeping the majority of schools closed until the February half-term.”

The fallout from teachers was fuelled by the revelation last week that the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies had warned ministers that it was “highly unlikely” that the pandemic could be brought under control if schools opened this week.

The National Education Union (NEU) is [advising primary school](#) staff it is unsafe to head to classrooms on Monday, when most are scheduled to return. The move will force some schools to switch to online learning for the majority of their pupils. The union said on Saturday that all primary and secondary schools should remain closed for two weeks after the Christmas break. The NASUWT teachers' union and the ASCL have also called for a temporary nationwide move to remote education for the vast majority of pupils.

Meanwhile, the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and the ASCL have begun legal action against the government, demanding it reveal the safety evidence for its reopening schedule, given the higher transmissibility of the new Covid variant. Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT, said: "Headteachers are in an impossible situation. The government's simplistic approach of 'schools gates open' or 'school gates closed' means they're hamstrung. It's going to be a difficult couple of days. We hope the government brings clarity as soon as possible this weekend, or early next week."

The crisis heaps further pressure on Williamson, who faced calls to quit over his handling of last summer's exams. He has already reversed his decision that primary schools in some parts of London should open on Monday. Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, said: "It is now beyond doubt that Williamson is the worst education secretary for a generation. From March this government has continually failed our children and young people, at a huge cost to their futures. He must go."

[Is Gavin Williamson the worst education secretary ever? | Peter Wilby](#)
[Read more](#)

Barton said: "Lots of people in school and college leadership know that they are held accountable for what they do – and that if they were to lose the trust of their staff to the degree that I think the secretary of state has lost the trust of the profession, they would definitely be considering their own positions. There is an alternative. Get a grip on this, work with the profession and do it quickly."

The government now expects schools and colleges to have fully reopened from 18 January. Most primaries in England are due to reopen from Monday, except those in local authorities termed “contingency frame areas” with high rates of Covid transmission. English secondary pupils in exam years are scheduled to return to schools from 11 January, with other year-groups taught remotely.

Bernard Jenkin, a Tory MP who has been pushing for greater military help for testing in schools, said: “I’m afraid Gavin Williamson has not handled this well. Schools need a breathing space. They should never have been asked to take charge of testing in schools. Keeping universities and schools closed for a few more weeks may turn out to be a price well worth paying in order that we can concentrate on getting the vaccine out, rather than having a crisis in the health service. We might be looking at mid-February for the schools going back now.”

Robert Halfon, the Tory chair of the education select committee, called for greater military involvement to improve school testing and teacher vaccination. “We have to decide as a nation, are children our number one priority, or not?” David Davis, the former Tory cabinet minister, said special educational needs teachers should be given “special dispensation” for an early vaccine.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We want classrooms to reopen wherever possible in the new term.

“We will move to remote education as a last resort, with involvement of public health officials, in areas where infection and pressures on the NHS are highest.”

[The Observer](#)[Inequality](#)

Richest 1% have almost a quarter of UK wealth, study claims

Official figures have missed £800bn of private assets, says thinktank, amid calls for wealth tax to fund Covid recovery



A Rolls-Royce in central London. The ballooning value of assets such as property, shares and land has been missed in official data, according to the Resolution Foundation. Photograph: Jeff Gilbert/Alamy

A Rolls-Royce in central London. The ballooning value of assets such as property, shares and land has been missed in official data, according to the Resolution Foundation. Photograph: Jeff Gilbert/Alamy

[Michael Savage](#) Policy editor

Sat 2 Jan 2021 19.02 EST

Almost a quarter of all household wealth in the UK is held by the richest 1% of the population, according to alarming new research that reveals a historic underestimation of inequality in the country.

The study found that the top 1% had almost £800bn more wealth than suggested by official statistics, meaning that inequality has been far higher than previously thought. Researchers said the extra billions was a conservative estimate and could well be more.

The revelation comes amid calls for ministers to consider a new wealth tax or substantial reforms to existing levies on the rich, so that they play a bigger role in helping the country deal with the Covid fallout and the costs of an ageing population. Demands for a [mansion tax](#) are also being revived.

Around 5% of the total wealth held by the very richest households has been missed by official measures, researchers at the Resolution Foundation thinktank found. It discovered the missing wealth by comparing official statistics compiled by the Office for National Statistics with data from the *Sunday Times Rich List*.

It discovered that the official data struggled to capture the assets of very wealthy households. Taking the newly discovered billions into account has a significant impact on the share of total UK wealth held by the top 1%, increasing it by more than a quarter – from 18% to 23%.

Wealth [inequality](#) fell throughout much of the 20th century, with the proportion of wealth held by the richest 10% falling from more than 90% to around 50% by the 1980s. However, the Resolution Foundation said it had been flat or increased slightly in recent decades.

Wealth has been fuelled by rising asset prices since the [financial crisis](#), such as soaring housing values, land or stocks – rather than through active saving. Between 76% and 93% of financial wealth gains since the crisis have come through the rising value of assets such as housing.

[Rishi Sunak](#), the chancellor, has faced recent calls to sanction a one-off wealth tax on some households in a move that could raise up to £260bn for the post-Covid recovery.

The call came from the [Wealth Tax Commission](#), made up of leading tax experts and economists convened by the London School of Economics and Warwick University. The group said that targeting such a windfall tax at the

richest households would be the fairest and most efficient way to raise taxes in response to the pandemic.

In November, a study commissioned by the chancellor also recommended reforming capital gains tax by slashing the annual allowance. The move, backed by the independent Office of [Tax Simplification](#), would hit wealthy individuals with assets such as second homes.

Even before Covid, the Treasury faced large spending demands in areas such as social care. Health and welfare spending is set to rise by £38bn a year by 2030. The Resolution Foundation said wealth taxation “will need to play a bigger role in the economy over the course of the 2020s”.

“The foundation is calling on the chancellor to embark on the biggest reforms to wealth taxation in a generation – including via the restriction of capital gains and inheritance tax reliefs (together raising several billion), and adding a council tax supplement of 1% on properties worth over £2m (raising over £1bn).”

[Economic cost of Covid crisis prompts call for one-off UK wealth tax](#)
[Read more](#)

Jack Leslie, an economist at the foundation, said: “The UK has undergone a wealth boom in recent decades, which has continued even while earnings and incomes have stagnated. But official data has struggled to capture these gains, and misses £800bn of assets held by the very wealthiest households in Britain.”

2021.01.03 - News

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The ObserverJudi Dench

That's the spirit! Judi Dench reveals how a clairvoyant chose her name

The Oscar-winning star, who plays the eccentric Madame Arcati in a new film of Blithe Spirit, says her name was revealed to her parents by a famous 1930s medium



Judi Dench as Madame Arcati, with Leslie Mann and Dan Stevens in the new film adaptation of Noël Coward's Blithe Spirit. Photograph: Sky Cinema Original/StudioCanal

Judi Dench as Madame Arcati, with Leslie Mann and Dan Stevens in the new film adaptation of Noël Coward's Blithe Spirit. Photograph: Sky Cinema Original/StudioCanal

Dalya Alberge

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.58 EST

Choosing the right name for a child is a difficult job. Inspiration can come from popular culture or from family, but for Judi Dench's parents it came from a chance meeting with a medium.

The Oscar-winning actress has recalled the story ahead of the release of *Blithe Spirit*, a major screen adaptation of Noël Coward's masterly comedy about the afterlife, ghosts and a love that just won't die.

Dench, who plays the eccentric medium Madame Arcati, said her belief in the afterlife stems from the story of her name.

"A very strange thing happened at the time that I was born. My father was a doctor, my mother was from Dublin, and they lived in York. There was a famous medium. My father met her a day after I was born. She said to him, 'I'm very pleased to hear about Judith.' My parents had no idea what I would be called and so I was called Judith which – fortunately – now I'm never called."

Dench, who was born in December 1934, added: "There was great belief in the 1930s in mediums. They toured and people went to the shows. I think it's difficult for us to say that there is nothing. There is a huge world that we don't know about. I implicitly believe that, because all sorts of things have happened to me."

Blithe Spirit, released this month, introduces audiences to Madame Arcati at just such a spiritual theatrical show. Set in the 1930s, it tells the story of bestselling crime novelist Charles Condomine, who is struggling to write his first screenplay.



Judi Dench as the eccentric medium, Madame Arcati. Photograph: Sky Cinema Original/StudioCanal

Inspiration comes after he sees Madame Arcati's show on whether there is life after death. He invites her to conduct a séance at his house – only for her to cause utter chaos. She accidentally conjures up the ghost of his irritating first wife, Elvira, who is unaware that she has been dead for years while haunting him and his second wife, Ruth, in a deadly love triangle. The wives are played by Leslie Mann and Isla Fisher.

Dench joked about her own afterlife: “I don’t know who I’d haunt. I might haunt places. I might drift a lot around in Scotland because I love it so much.”

Dench is one of Britain’s most revered actresses, whose roles have ranged from monarchs to M in the Bond films. In an interview recorded by the filmmakers, she said: “Being asked to play Madame Arcati is kind of a dream come true. In our adaptation, she doesn’t just come in for a couple of scenes – she goes on a bit and causes even more chaos, but subsequently has a really wonderful part to play.”

The actress recalled the thrill of meeting Coward through her friends Joe Mitchenson and Raymond Mander, actors who founded a [world-famous](#)

[theatre collection](#): “As a young actress, they took me to see everything in London when I wasn’t playing at the Old Vic. One night we saw, at the Savoy theatre, an adaptation of a Coward play. Afterwards, they said we’re going round to see somebody... ‘Here’s Noël’. He shook hands with me. I will never forget the smell of his aftershave. I don’t think I washed for days. It was just magical.”

She said of the new film: “I hope audiences will have a lovely time and have a laugh and be transported for a bit so that they can forget the things they’re worried about, like Brexit.”

It is directed by Edward Hall, former artistic director of the Hampstead theatre in London, whose hits included *Sunny Afternoon*, [the Kinks musical](#) that was also a huge West End success, winning multiple Olivier awards.

['He did love his dressing.gowns': Noël Coward's private life goes on display](#)
[Read more](#)

His father was [the late Sir Peter Hall](#), the famed director who headed the National Theatre and founded the Royal Shakespeare Company, casting Dench in productions such as *Antony and Cleopatra*.

She said: “What is wonderful about working with Ed is that I met his father in 1962. It is just glorious working with Ed now. I keep saying to him, ‘You are so like your father’. And he has a talent like Peter too.”

She added: “It’s so strange, in *Blithe Spirit* – where you see ghosts of people – in a way I see, well, more than a ghost of Peter in Ed.”

The writer-producers, Nick Moorcroft and Meg Leonard, have adapted *Blithe Spirit* with Piers Ashworth, having made some of Britain’s most successful independent films, including *Fisherman’s Friends* and *Finding Your Feet*.

Leonard said: “Judi is one of the great, iconic actresses of our time... It was a real joy watching [her] bring her own magic and mischief to the role of Madame Arcati and we’re sure audiences will agree.”

When Britain was in the grip of the second world war, a staging of *Blithe Spirit*, a comedy about death, was considered a risk. But it turned out to be a great success.

Alan Brodie of the Coward estate said: “Coward wrote it to distract audiences from the awful time they were having. It seems so apt now that the film can do the same.”

He added: “What the writers have done really well is manage to keep the wit of Coward, but at same time bring a modern comic feel to it. It doesn’t feel old-fashioned although it’s set in the period. That’s really hard to pull off.”

- *Blithe Spirit* will be released by Sky Original in cinemas and on Sky Cinema from 15 January. [An exhibition](#), Noël Coward: Art & Style, that will feature two costumes from the film, is at the Guildhall Art Gallery, London, from 14 January: guildhall-art-gallery.arttickets.org.uk/

[The Observer](#)
[Coronavirus](#)

Cancer operations face cancellation across London as Covid patients fill hospitals

Exclusive: lifesaving surgery to be postponed in capital as cases top 57,000, while other parts of UK brace for effects of Christmas Day mixing

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Sat 2 Jan 2021 14.00 EST Last modified on Sat 2 Jan 2021 23.36 EST



Medical staff transfer a patient from an ambulance to the Royal London hospital. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

NHS bosses are set to cancel urgent surgery across [London](#) in a move that could mean cancer patients waiting months for potentially lifesaving operations, the *Observer* can reveal.

[NHS](#) England chiefs are considering the drastic action because hospitals across the capital are becoming overwhelmed by people who are very sick with Covid-19.

The operations likely to be cancelled, known as “priority two” procedures, mainly involve surgery for cancer where specialists have judged that the patients need to be operated on within four weeks. Any delay could allow their tumour to grow, the disease to spread, or both, thus reducing their chances of survival.

[Health](#) service executives and cancer experts fear patients’ cancers may worsen, or even become inoperable, if surgery is postponed for an unknown length of time.

“These are operations that are curative if done within four weeks but if you wait longer they may not be so effective,” said one senior London NHS figure. “The impact of this on patients’ health depends on when they get rebooked. Delaying cancer surgery can lead to tumours growing or spreading – and worse outcomes.”

The situation has arisen because London hospitals are running out of intensive care beds and cannot perform types of cancer surgery that would require an ICU bed for the patient to recover in.

These operations are the second most pressing of the four categories of surgery the NHS undertakes. Priority four cases are elective procedures that can be deferred for longer than three months; priority three operations should be done within three months; and priority two within 28 days. The only types deemed more urgent are emergency operations, which need to be done within 24 or 72 hours.

Sir David Sloman, NHS regional director for London, said: “Londoners continue to receive urgent cancer care and surgery. Urgent cancer surgery is not being cancelled in London.”

The decision came as the UK recorded a further 57,725 cases of Covid-19, the fifth day running that the figure has topped 50,000. A further 445 deaths were also recorded yesterday.

Blood [Cancer](#) UK urged sufferers who were parents, in order to protect their own health, to seriously consider whether to send their children to school if they lived in an area where the infection rate was high. “No parent with blood cancer should feel under any pressure to send their children to school over the next few weeks if they think keeping them off is the right thing for their family,” the body said.

In another sign of the intense strain on the capital’s NHS, five hospitals on Saturday had to divert emergency patients to other hospitals because their A&E units were so overloaded.

Meanwhile, senior doctors and hospital bosses are warning that the NHS is at risk of becoming “maxed out”, with a widespread shutdown of normal care, because of the number of Covid cases needing hospital care.

They fear that the inter-household mixing that was allowed in some parts of the UK on Christmas Day will lead to a further rise in the already dramatic numbers of people becoming very ill. “When you factor in that any surge in infections due to Christmas mixing may only just have started to show, it’s clear the situation could get even worse over the next 10-21 days as the effects of Christmas and New Year become apparent,” said Dr Nick Scriven of the Society for Acute Medicine, which represents many hospital doctors.

“The NHS could well reach a ‘maxed out’ stage that will manifest itself as cancellation of all non-acute work, in terms of operations and clinics, causing further chaos to those waiting for treatment.” The crisis is so grave that the suspension of non-Covid care could last until Easter, he added.

Nicki Credland, chair of the British Association of Critical Care Nurses, said: “Some hospitals are running at up to 200% of their pre-Covid capacity, putting massive pressure on staff. We’ve not seen the effects of mixing on Christmas Day: there’s a two- to three-week timelag. The risk of overwhelming services is a very real one.”

Credland and NHS Providers, which represents hospital trusts in England, warned that the quality of care inpatients receive could suffer because of staff shortages and the strain on hospitals.

“There is significant staff sickness, which impacts on safe staffing levels. This will compromise patient care,” said Credland. Some trusts, she said, are already using one critical care nurse to care for three or even four very sick patients at a time, when the norm is 1:1.

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, said hospitals were supporting each other where they could, for example, by taking patients from busy neighbours: “There’s a real concern that things could get worse before they get better. Given the increasing demand, alongside high levels of staff absences caused by the virus, it will be harder to ensure the right quality of care for patients, many of whom are very sick.”

Dr Alison Pittard, the dean of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, said: “I share the concern that the already dire situation facing the NHS will get even worse over the next few weeks, given the huge spike in infections and hospitalisations, and given that many hospitals are already close to being overwhelmed.

Blood Cancer UK (@bloodcancer_uk)

3/ We know that many parents with blood cancer are worried about their children going back. If you have blood cancer and live in an area where the infection rate is high, we think it is now worth considering keeping your children off school if you can.

January 2, 2021

“Numbers [of people in hospital with Covid] are already higher than in April – and the relaxation of restrictions on Christmas Day, and people not following ‘hands, face, space’, will lead to increased transmissions, translating to hospital admissions in a few weeks.

“I don’t think the NHS will collapse. But it will be hard, and the NHS is likely to cancel some normal activity and perhaps use the Nightingale

hospitals for less sick patients, to free up hospital capacity.”

Macmillan Cancer Support’s director of policy, Steven McIntosh, said: “Any cancer patient who sees delays to tests or treatment as a result of these extreme NHS pressures will be desperately anxious and scared. It is critical any changes to cancer care are carefully discussed with patients and are based on their individual needs, to ensure they access vital tests and treatment and are kept safe from the virus.”

[The Observer](#)[Coronavirus](#)

‘It makes me want to cry’: voices of hospital staff on the Covid frontline

Three healthcare workers describe the realities of struggling against a rising tide of coronavirus cases

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Junior doctor Pushpo Hossain: ‘There are times when we just collectively break down.’ Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Junior doctor Pushpo Hossain: ‘There are times when we just collectively break down.’ Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

[Tom Wall](#)

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

Pushpo Hossain

Junior doctor

Pushpo Hossain is in the eye of the capital's Covid storm. The ward where the junior doctor cares for severely ill coronavirus patients is having to limit oxygen and consider who gets the hard-to-come-by non-invasive ventilators.

The number of Covid patients is “going up exponentially,” she says in her hospital accommodation after another gruelling 13-hour shift. “We are so short staffed and we don’t have enough of the non-invasive ventilator machines that can hold patients until they can be transferred to intensive care units [ICUs].”

Hossain, 31, and her colleagues in the south-west London hospital where she works have to make almost impossible decisions about who gets what and who gets moved.

“We do a risk-benefit analysis based on age, number of comorbidities and sometimes based on the amount of resources we have,” she says. “[A patient] could be an ICU candidate, but we don’t have a bed. Our hands are tied. It makes me want to cry.”

This weighs heavily on the staff, who are battling fatigue, stress and exhaustion. Hossain rarely has time to eat properly and struggles to stay hydrated because she is so busy. Two of the five doctors on her ward are off with Covid, leaving the remaining three covering their shifts. “There are times when we just collectively break down. There are times when we can’t take it any more,” she says. “I remember me and the nurses just held each other in the clinical room.”

Oxygen for patients has already been limited because the hospital’s supply system was approaching the point where it would shut down. “We have the oxygen to give everybody, but we don’t have the delivery system. The system would crash if too many people were sucking in oxygen in a high concentration,” Hossain says. “That would be disastrous, because that would mean the entire hospital oxygen supply would be cut off.”

Her greatest fear is that even more people turn up in need of oxygen, pushing the system over the edge: “We would possibly have to evacuate and

transfer all these patients that need oxygen to some other hospital – and most of the hospitals are in the same situation.”

Epsom and St Helier University [Hospitals](#) NHS trust said that pressure on services was very high and had reached the limit of what the 80-year-old infrastructure could cope with.

It added that a new vaporiser, which will treble its piped oxygen supply, is due to be up and running by 11 January.



Nurse Laura Duffell: ‘It’s got very bad, very quickly.’ Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Laura Duffell

Nurse

It is supposed to be Laura Duffell’s first day off since Christmas Day, but she has been called back in because the major teaching hospital where she works is in danger of being overwhelmed by surging Covid admissions.

“I wasn’t supposed to be at work today,” she says. “It’s got very bad, very quickly. Over this last week it’s escalated massively ... we went from 130 Covid patients to 500.”

Duffell, who is a paediatric nurse, says the south-east London hospital where she works is full, with intensive care beds being moved into operating theatres and recovery wards.

“We’re juggling which patients go where constantly: are they sick enough to go to intensive care? Or could we put them in a high-dependency ward? Where are we going to get ventilators from and where are we going to get the nurses trained to use them? It’s hour by hour,” she says. “It’s far worse than any winter I’ve ever experienced and we’re barely even in January yet.”

Her department worked hard over the summer to get through waiting lists after operations for sick children were cancelled but she fears they may soon be in the same situation again. “Unless something changes, we are going to be in a position where patients that don’t have Covid suffer,” she adds.

The new coronavirus variant, which is thought to be behind the spike in cases, appears to be hitting younger people harder. Duffell has been forced to turn over two paediatric wards to children with the disease. “We had the odd child here and there last time, but in this wave we are getting a lot of positive younger people,” she says. “We have one Covid ward for children already and we are just setting up a second one.”

The deepening crisis is taking a personal toll on frontline nurses like Duffell, who currently has no days off on her roster. She misses her family intensely: “I feel like I’ve abandoned [them]. My kids are really supportive but they make comments about how I’m never around. The guilt is immense. But what can you do?”

David Higgins

Gastroenterologist

Gastroenterologist David Higgins usually carries out elective endoscopies, which are a diagnostic pathway for cancer, but he worries that he may soon have to stop so his wards can accommodate more Covid patients.

“There are more and more demands on our staff to go and cover other wards and ICUs. And ICU has expanded into half of our endoscopy unit, which has massively reduced our capacity to do diagnostic cancer and therapeutic

cancer work,” he says. “We are in the midst of discussions about what we do. How do we maintain the cancer work and deal with Covid?”

I don’t remember seeing corridors full of people the first time

David Higgins

Soon he may have to choose between treating Covid patients or cancer patients. “That’s effectively what we’re having to think about because the hospital is in meltdown. Do we divert resources and people to deal with the Covid crisis or maintain cancer pathways?”

The consequences for stopping cancer pathways are, however, stark he says – “delayed diagnoses and poor survival”.

The situation in the Hertfordshire hospital where Higgins (not his real name) works is deteriorating fast. “I’ve been down to A&E this morning. It’s proper carnage. Corridors are wards and we are talking about whether we use ambulances as cubicles,” he says. “I had to see someone today in a corridor. It was awful.”

The scale of the crisis is unprecedented and feels worse than even the first wave. “We expanded into different areas but I don’t remember seeing corridors full of people the first time,” he says.

Lots of staff are off sick and demands are growing daily. “We are being asked to work more and more. Healthcare workers are fairly robust and resilient, but there are limits – we’ll find out where they are this winter.”

[The Observer](#)[Vaccines and immunisation](#)

The Oxford Covid jab is delivered this week. But when will vaccines bring results?

Fall or rise in coronavirus cases will not initially be a good measure of efficacy, say scientists devising ways to audit progress

- [Why is Britain delaying second doses of vaccine?](#)
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The Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine is being rolled out this week.
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

The Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine is being rolled out this week.
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

[Robin McKie](#) Science editor

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.15 EST

People in Britain are set to get their first shots of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday, with millions of doses being given over the next few months. The mass vaccination of the UK's population should bring an end to the country's [Covid-19](#) misery, but how long will it take for this immunisation programme to make a difference to our lives – and what will be the first signs that salvation is on the way?

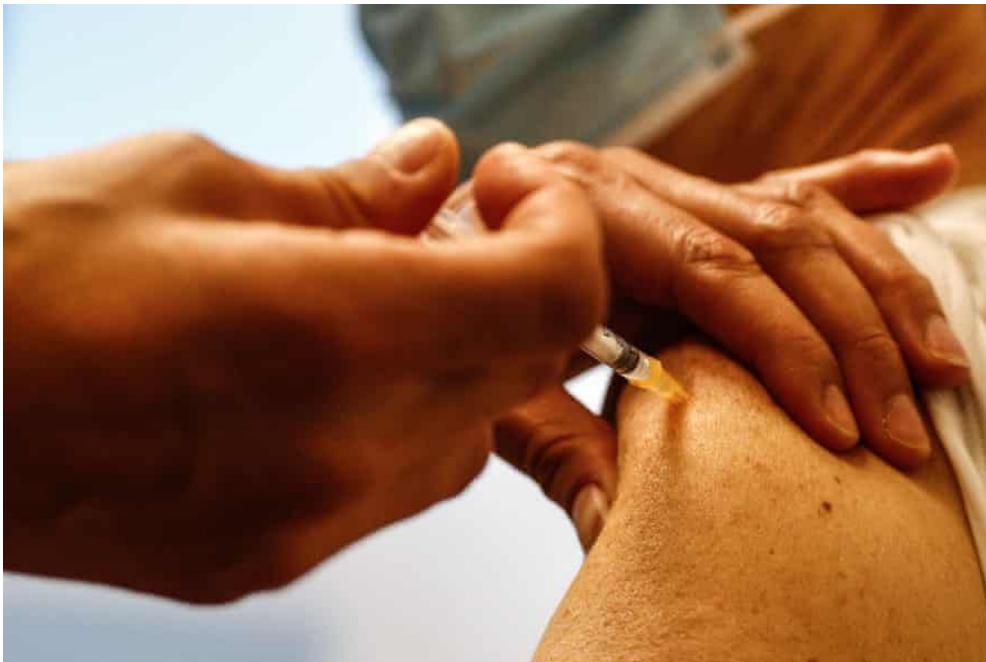
These key issues will be anxiously pursued as the battle against Covid proceeds and daily cases involving the new virus variant continue to spread. However, scientists have warned that simply waiting for a reduction in new cases is not the way to tell whether the vaccine is starting to have an impact.

This point was stressed by Professor Adam Finn of Bristol University. “In February, we may see a big decline in the numbers of cases,” he told the *Observer*. “That would be good news, but we wouldn’t know whether the drop was due to the vaccine, to lockdown measures or to some other factor.

“Conversely, case numbers may go up in February and March, and you might reach the false conclusion that the vaccine was not working when, in fact, the rise was due to other factors, and the increase in daily cases would have been even higher had we not been vaccinating.

“So just looking at overall trends isn’t going to give us answers in the short term. Obviously, we expect the vaccine to have an effect but we will need to be clever about how we find the first signals that say it is working.”

One project that should provide the first indication that the national vaccination programme is having a beneficial impact is being carried out at Bristol University and involves cases of pneumonia. In a case control study, doctors will compare people who are suffering from pneumonia and test positive for Covid-19 with patients who have pneumonia but test negative for the virus.



A nurse administers a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine.
Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP/Getty Images

“Then we will measure rates of immunisation within those two groups,” said Finn. “That will allow us to calculate just how effective the vaccines are, because you will expect to see that a much bigger proportion of the people falling sick are the ones who are not immunised.

“That will give us, very quickly, an indication of how effective the vaccine is. And finding cases of pneumonia to compare will not be the problem at this time of year. There are always plenty of these in winter.”

The Bristol pneumonia study and other similar trials will provide the first signs that the UK is on the right track and the vaccine is starting to make a difference. The next indication will arrive when numbers of hospitalisations and deaths steadily decline to a level where scientists can be confident that it is a Covid-19 vaccine that is producing real results and that other factors are not involved.

The UK will then know just how effective its [immunisation strategy](#) has been. This should resolve a dispute that has led some doctors and scientists – including [leading US infectious diseases expert Dr Anthony Fauci](#) – to question the British decision to delay giving second doses of Covid-19

vaccines in order to maximise the numbers of people who could be protected rapidly against the disease.

Fauci told CNN on Friday that while it was possible to “make the argument” for stretching out the doses, he would not be in favour of doing that.

[Symptomless cases in schools could be key driver in spread of Covid-19](#)
[Read more](#)

This view was echoed by Professor Martin Hibberd of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who said: “The science has been of a very high standard for the vaccine trials, and it is highly frustrating that this is now being ignored. We do not know how the vaccine will perform with an increased gap between the injections, and we do not know how protective a single injection is going to be over the longer term. So why take the risk?”

However, Professor [Chris Whitty](#), the chief medical officer for England, along with his counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, have said they stand by their decision to delay a second dose in order to ensure that more people are able to receive their first as soon as possible.

[Why is Britain delaying second doses of Covid vaccines?](#)
[Read more](#)

And this view was backed by Professor Stephen Evans, also of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: “We have a crisis situation in the UK with a new variant spreading rapidly, and – as has become clear to everyone during 2020 – delays cost lives. When resources of doses and people to administer vaccinations are limited, vaccinating more people with potentially less efficacy is demonstrably better than a fuller efficacy in only half.”

The ObserverStudents

More students choose local universities as Covid pandemic rages

Fears over the impact of coronavirus are fuelling a longer-term trend towards studying nearer home



Students at the University of Bolton in October. Nearly a quarter of school pupils applying for university places want to be closer to home. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Students at the University of Bolton in October. Nearly a quarter of school pupils applying for university places want to be closer to home. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Rachel Hall and Alfie Packham

Sat 2 Jan 2021 08.53 EST

More final-year pupils than ever before are applying to local universities so that they can study closer to home, amid concerns that the impact of the pandemic may extend into the next academic year.

Year 13 pupils across the country are currently finishing their applications ahead of the 15 January deadline, after which universities are no longer required to consider applications equally.

A Ucas survey of more than 20,000 pupils planning to go to university suggested that nearly a quarter (23%) want to study closer to home, accelerating a longer-term trend.

“Young people in our focus groups have said they don’t want to be far from their support networks. That’s been thrown into sharp relief by [pictures in the media of students struggling in halls](#),” said Sarah Barr Miller, head of insight at the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (Ucas).

“Traditionally, we had a boarding school system of higher education. You absolutely did not consider your local university. But we see a lot now want to stay local.”

Marimar Antypa, a student at St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College in west London, said she had applied only to local universities to save money and stay close to family. “I see the purpose of university as getting a job. If you’re just going there to have fun, how is that beneficial for your future?”

Rob Trimble, deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Cumbria, said he had already seen a 10.5% increase in inquiries this year, with substantial rises in applications for vocational courses such as nursing, medical sciences, teaching and business.

For some low- and mid-ranking universities, local students enable them to stay afloat. Ray Powell, an admissions tutor at the University of Greenwich in south London, said that in recent years more selective universities had been “poach[ing] our higher-performing students” to fuel expansion, following the removal of the student numbers cap. “But increasingly, because of accommodation costs and all the rest of it, a good, local university is an attractive option.”

A survey of 1,200 year 12 and 13 pupils by Access HE, a London social mobility charity, indicated that 30% thought the pandemic had made it more likely they [would go to university](#). Nearly half (42%) of pupils on free

school meals planned to study locally, compared with a third (30%) of their better-off peers.

This has been the experience at East Norfolk Sixth Form College in Gorleston-on-Sea, near Great Yarmouth, which has a high proportion of pupils from some of the UK's most deprived postcodes. "We've seen a further increase in students wanting to go to good quality local universities," said principal Catherine Richards. One pupil, Aref Shafiei, has opted for medicine at the University of East Anglia, his nearest institution, as his top choice after he was inspired by the NHS's work during the pandemic. He has already taken part in one of its outreach programmes. "I'm a bit biased because of my relationship with the university," he said. "And I get homesick."

Graeme Atherton, head of Access HE, warned that focusing on local universities could limit young people's choices. "It's encouraging that more young people from across income groups want to go on to university, but every young person deserves the opportunity to progress to the university that best suits their abilities."

Competition for university places is expected to be particularly fierce as experts predict more pupils will apply than ever before. Barr Miller said Ucas was expecting a 5% jump in applications this year, despite a dip in the number of British 18-year-olds. This would follow on from a [12% increase in applications](#) submitted before the early deadline of 15 October for medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences, as well as for places at Oxford and Cambridge.

['Your coursemates are just computer icons': universities call for mental health cash](#)

[Read more](#)

She added that a projected decline in applications from EU students, who will pay higher fees after Brexit, might free spaces: "Savvy teachers will be recommending their students apply to the big-name universities because there's a chance they'll get in."

Some universities, including Birmingham and Sussex, have pledged to consider applications from students with lower grades as a result of disruption to their education during the pandemic.

Mark Corver, an admissions expert and founder of dataHE said that although the January deadline didn't always follow October trends, he expected applications from 18-year-olds to rise. "This is because they generally do, employment alternatives are less attractive and predicted grades and any AS results will be higher than normal," he said.

Why is Britain delaying second doses of Covid vaccines?

Health officials say delays in giving a second jab should not affect protection. Others say we shouldn't be taking the risk. What are the facts?

- [When will vaccines bring results?](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A vaccination centre in London Bridge. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

A vaccination centre in London Bridge. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

[Robin McKie](#), Science Editor

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.15 EST

Why have health officials decided to delay giving second doses of Covid-19 vaccines?

According to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), modelling of “the high level of protection afforded by the first dose suggests that initially “vaccinating a greater number of people with a single dose will prevent more deaths and hospitalisations than vaccinating a smaller number with two doses”. Delays in giving a second vaccine dose for up to 12 weeks should not affect protection, it is argued. Indeed, it may increase it.

So what protection is offered by first doses of the vaccines?

Short-term efficacy from the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is around 90%, says the JCVI, while 70% is given for AstraZeneca’s.

Why has the decision to delay second doses angered some doctors and scientists?

Cancelling second-dose appointments has created administrative chaos and upset elderly patients. In addition, some scientists argue that it is not known how the vaccine will perform with an increased gap between injections. Nor is known how protective a single injection is over a longer term. Why take a risk, they say?

Do most scientists share this view?

No. Many say risks of limiting virus protection are low. With a new Covid variant spreading rapidly, vaccinating more people – possibly with less efficacy – is better than giving second doses to fewer people.



Chief medical officer Chris Whitty has backed the decision to delay second doses so more people can receive their first dose as soon as possible.

What has been the US reaction?

Leading infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci has said that while it was possible to “make the argument” for delaying doses, he would not be in favour. However, commentators have pointed out that the US is highly litigious compared with the UK, so doctors tend to be more cautious about changing vaccine procedures.

[The Oxford Covid jab is delivered this week. But when will vaccines bring results?](#)

[Read more](#)

How has the UK responded?

Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer of England, and his counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, have said they back the decision to delay second doses to ensure more people receive their first vaccination as soon as possible.

Where will the vaccine being given to patients?

According to the NHS, there are more than 700 vaccination sites ready to start giving vaccines over the next few weeks. Up to 100 hospitals will come

online across the country this week, while another 180 GP services will also begin vaccinations.

Cash for Cate? Struggling arts groups offer donors online access to stars

As Zoom fatigue sets in, organisations are seeking creative ways to bring art to patrons to keep them – and their wallets – engaged



Cate Blanchett is among the film stars taking part in remote events.
Photograph: Ron Crusow/imageSPACE/REX/Shutterstock

Cate Blanchett is among the film stars taking part in remote events.
Photograph: Ron Crusow/imageSPACE/REX/Shutterstock



[Vanessa Thorpe](#), Arts and Media Correspondent

Sun 3 Jan 2021 05.15 EST

A concert from your favourite opera singer, delivered personally to your laptop, might help lift the spirits this month. Or how about a remote exercise session with young ballet dancers, or an exclusive virtual tour of an artist's studio?

Arts organisations are seeking inventive approaches to reach key donors in an effort to maintain vital financial support lines. Early in the pandemic a [Zoom cocktail party](#) was a novelty, but now wealthy patrons of Britain's arts organisations and venues are proving harder to entice.

“People don’t want to read Ulysses-length tracts from a fundraising department,” said Wasfi Kani, chief executive and founder of Grange Park [Opera](#), who has been offering donors the chance to hear Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel sing them a personal happy birthday.

Kani’s Surrey-based opera company enjoys the support of around 1,000 key wealthy people and her priority has been to keep in personal contact. “I can answer questions with a phone call and let them know what is happening,” said Kani, who received a CBE in the New Year’s honours list. “These people want sincerity, not slogans and not hyperbole.”

Private fundraising income for the performing arts has fallen sharply in the past 10 months. Events such as gala dinners and drinks receptions are impossible, necessitating creative ideas for reaching sponsors and benefactors.

“Rewards, whether artist works or unique events, are a popular way to generate support for campaigns, allowing people to donate to an important cause, but get something brilliant back too,” a spokesperson for UK charity Art Fund told *Artnet News*.

This was the spirit behind Manchester’s 50 Windows of Creativity initiative in the run-up to Christmas. It features colourful mosaics from Mark Kennedy and Mary Goodwin, and fine art from RP Roberts and Draph. The award-winning photographer Benji Reid also took part in the city-wide, open-air exhibition trail that culminated in an online auction for the art, with all proceeds going to support the artists and designers involved.

A report from the National Campaign for the Arts recently showed that British institutions are now more reliant on individual donations, as the proportion of public funding has dropped by over a third since 2008, while corporate sponsorship has dropped by almost 40% in just the last seven years. Philanthropic giving has also dipped by about 10% since 2017.

To combat this trend and to keep in touch with patrons during lockdown, London-based English National Opera launched an innovative [campaign called ENO TV](#), providing supporters with behind-the-scenes access.



The opera singer Bryn Terfel has been singing personal happy birthdays to donors of Grange Park Opera. Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

The service offers “in conversation” events with singers, directors and performers from the opera chorus and orchestra, plus backstage tours of key departments such as wardrobe, millinery, wigs and props. “Our supporters value it as an opportunity to stay in contact with our organisation and to connect with like-minded people, while simultaneously learning more about opera itself,” said chief executive Stuart Murphy.

The situation in America is more perilous, as there is much less government arts funding and no national Covid-19 support for the arts equivalent to UK Treasury provisions. Individual giving to arts organisations fell by 14% in the US in the first nine months of last year, and the average size of gifts from the most loyal patrons fell by nearly 40%.

Cate Blanchett is one of the film stars to step up to the plate, taking part in remote events, including appearing on screen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music gala event.

The pandemic has forced arts institutions on both sides of the Atlantic to swiftly up their online game. The New York City [Ballet](#) and the School of American [Ballet](#) usually hold a big benefit event and a backstage tour for

donors after a Christmas Saturday matinee of *The Nutcracker*. This time Tiler Peck, principal dancer, gave an online tour instead, while those who had bought tickets watched from home after receiving a package of treats delivered to their doors.

Now “online-event fatigue” is the new enemy. The director of New York’s Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, Richard Armstrong, is facing a \$13m deficit. Rather than switch to a digital gala, he decided to set up a simple “gala fund” for donations instead.

In Surrey, Grange Park Opera’s Kani understands the issue of setting the right tone with donors. “In many ways it is easier for me to keep in touch, in a small operation, but it is important not to just ask for money. Our online seasons, Interim and Found, were free and aimed at employing artists and offering new material. We’ve also put out weekly ‘Amuse-bouche’ items looked at by 5,000 people. They include short films, like baritone Simon Keenlyside’s *Autumn Walk*, which was very popular and a way to learn a different side of an artist.”

Symptomless cases in schools could be key driver in spread of Covid-19

Up to 70% of schoolchildren infected with coronavirus may not know they have it until after a positive test result

- [When will vaccines bring results?](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



It is not yet known how much coronavirus infection is being passed on by children. Photograph: Julian Claxton/Alamy

It is not yet known how much coronavirus infection is being passed on by children. Photograph: Julian Claxton/Alamy

[Robin McKie](#) *Science editor*

Sat 2 Jan 2021 16.03 EST

A key factor in the spread of Covid-19 in schools is [symptomless cases](#). Most scientists believe that between 30% and 40% of adults do not display

any Covid symptoms on the day of testing, even if they have been infected. For children, however, this figure is higher.

“It is probably more like 50% for those in secondary school while for boys and girls in primary school, around 70% may not be displaying symptoms even though [they have picked up the virus](#),” says Professor Michael Hibberd of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

That is a large proportion of symptom-free disease-carriers within a population. What is not yet known is just how much infection is being passed on by this cohort of young symptom-free carriers. It is a critically important issue, and one that will play a key role in determining the effect of Covid-19 on the people of Britain in the next few weeks, say researchers.

Unfortunately a definitive answer on the infectiousness of young people remains tantalisingly out of reach, although there is evidence to suggest that people who don’t display symptoms of Covid-19 may have lower viral loads, which means they are less likely to infect others.

This tendency correlates with age, so younger children have lower viral loads. As a result, they are less likely to display symptoms – and also less likely to pass on the virus. “It’s a real possibility but we cannot yet be sure,” says Hibberd.

One solution to the problem is to [increase testing in schools](#). This would require the widespread deployment of rapid testing, particularly with the lateral flow method, which is easily administered and gives results in less than half an hour. It is less accurate than the standard PCR swab test, however, and there have been concerns about a high level of false negative results leading to the continued spread of the new, more infectious, variant of the coronavirus.

[The Oxford Covid jab is delivered this week. But when will vaccines bring results?](#)

[Read more](#)

However, scientists point out that rapid tests are better at spotting individuals with high viral loads than those with lower ones.

“We know that a high viral load is a key issue affecting the virus’s transmission, so even if we can’t detect every carrier, we are most likely to pick up those children who are more likely to transmit,” says Hibberd.

“And frequent testing using other technologies – such as isothermal amplification (Lamp) testing – could further reduce the rate of false negatives. However, we have to be sure that we have a competent testing system in place in schools before we can be sure of that.”

[The Observer](#)[Prisons and probation](#)

'Deep crisis' in British prisons as use of force against inmates doubles

Increase to almost 60 cases per 100 prisoners blamed on lack of experienced staff and overcrowding



During the Covid pandemic, restrictions in prisons have pushed down levels of violence. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

During the Covid pandemic, restrictions in prisons have pushed down levels of violence. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

[Michael Savage](#)

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.15 EST

The use of force against inmates has doubled over the past decade, amid continuing concern over high levels of violence and disorder in prisons. A loss of experienced prison staff, overcrowding and a subsequent growth in violence against both prisoners and staff has been blamed for force being used 49,111 times in England and Wales in the 12 months before the Covid pandemic began.

According to data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, force was used 59.1 times per 100 inmates in the year from April 2019. The last such figures, published in 2011-12, showed force used about 27 times per 100 prisoners.

Experts said the findings reflected the disorder inside a UK prison system described as in “deep crisis” last year by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, part of the Council of Europe. It said the jails it visited were “violent, unsafe and overcrowded”.

Nick Davies of the Institute for Government thinktank said the use of force was further evidence of drastically declining standards: “Deep cuts to prison funding and staff numbers in the first half of the last decade were followed by big increases in incidents of assault, self-harm and poor prisoner behaviour, and reduced opportunities for rehabilitation.

“Funding injections in recent years have stabilised the system but there is a long way to go to return prisons to where they were. The government’s criminal justice reforms could see the prison population reaching record levels, and it’s unclear whether planned new prisons will be ready in time to safely house additional inmates.”

Mick Pimblett, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers’ Association, said this came as no surprise: “These figures coincide with a period of instability in our prisons where record levels of violence against our members by prisoners and among prisoners themselves were commonplace. The reduced staffing levels and budget cuts imposed on [HM Prison and Probation Service] in recent years are an obvious contributory factor to these figures.”

Since March, restrictions designed to stop the spread of Covid have also led to a fall in violence. Visits have been curtailed, inmates have spent far more time in cells, and group activities have been reduced. There is now debate about how to lift some of the restrictions without a return to chaos. Peter Clarke, the recently departed chief inspector of prisons, warned that the pressures on the system “will not have gone away because of the health emergency”.

Pimblett said officers were now attempting to ensure that the system did not revert to the “lawless” state experienced just before the pandemic. “Since March 2020, the Covid crisis has proved that – with improved staffing levels, investment and spans of control – violence can be reduced in prisons by building relationships with prisoners in a way that was not possible prior to March 2020.”

But Frances Crook of the Howard League for Penal Reform said the pandemic had revealed some “really awful” aspects of prison life. “Prisons were so violent and so under-resourced that people would prefer to sit locked in their cells all alone or with somebody else watching television all day and all night. If that is preferable, it’s an incredibly damning indictment [of] how violent and frightening prisons were before.”

Nick Hardwick, chief inspector of prisons from 2010 to 2016, said there was now an opportunity to improve conditions. “Prisons, up to the epidemic, were in the middle of an enduring crisis. Too many prisons were very violent places. As restrictions in prisons are eased, it is critical that it is done in a way that doesn’t allow us simply to return to what existed before – and doesn’t let the cycle of violence get out of hand. For the first time in a decade, there are some opportunities now. We can’t go back to how it was before.”

[UK prison officers punching compliant inmates, report says](#)
[Read more](#)

The Prison Service said: “Our officers use force as a last resort, and in the overwhelming majority of cases it is unfortunately necessary to protect themselves or others from harm. We are spending £100m to bolster prison security, clamping down on the weapons, drugs and mobile phones that fuel violence and crime behind bars.” It said the term “use of force” covered techniques ranging from those which staff used to prevent themselves being hurt, to restraint carried out by a three-officer team to control a violent prisoner. Violence fell by 37% in the most recent quarter for which data is available, and by 19% in the 12 months to June 2020.

Come clean on logjams at British borders as new Brexit rules kick in, ministers told

Amid confusion for lorry drivers in Kent, logistics firms call for greater transparency to help lessen disruption



Thousands of lorries parked at Manston airport in Kent on Christmas Eve as drivers await Covid tests. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex

Thousands of lorries parked at Manston airport in Kent on Christmas Eve as drivers await Covid tests. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex

[Michael Savage](#) Policy Editor

Sat 2 Jan 2021 16.02 EST

Ministers are facing demands for more honesty and transparency over any logjams at the UK border in the wake of Britain's exit from the EU, amid concerns that waves of disruption will last for six months.

Several lorry drivers are understood to have been turned away at Dover for not having the right paperwork following the end of the [Brexit](#) transition period last week. It has caused concern among logistics and manufacturing companies that more severe problems could occur as trade flows increase later this month.

The main initial worries for businesses concern the availability of vets to carry out checks for new export health certificates. This could hit meat and food sales to the EU. [Bigger challenges will come](#) when freight starts flowing from manufacturers of complex products, which are unlikely to have begun using the new systems.

“We are going into a test period,” said Elizabeth de Jong of trade body Logistics UK. “If you were running your own business, you wouldn’t do it like this. You would have designed your new processes, you’d have trained people in them, you’d have tested the new systems, you’d have used it with dummy data, you’d have had a walkthrough. Those are all fundamentals of management. We’ve not been able to do any of it.

“There are also cliff edges ahead. In July, we’re going to start import checks as well: that will need more capacity and more people. We’ve also got [grace periods in Northern Ireland](#).

“We need the absolute analysis of what’s going well, what isn’t, where the blockages are and what are the difficulties. We need that honesty and transparency. It’s a shared problem. We will get there and there are a lot of people who want this to work.”

As the Brexit transition period ended last Thursday, [Boris Johnson](#) hailed the new relationship with the EU as an opportunity to “transform our country”. Disruption was not expected over the weekend, with low levels of freight crossing the border. However, almost half of the lorries entering Belfast from Britain on the first ferry of New Year’s Day were inspected: one was stopped for three hours. Jean-Michel Thillier, customs director for Calais, has warned the new arrangements will face “trial by fire” when traffic increases.

In a move designed to curb queues, lorry drivers heading for mainland [Europe](#) must have a Kent Access Permit before entering the county. However, there are already reports that some holders of the permits still did not have all the necessary paperwork.

[Johnson won the support of hardline Tory Eurosceptics](#) for his Brexit trade deal, but there remains unease about Northern Ireland being treated differently from the rest of the UK and extra checks effectively creating a border in the Irish Sea. Northern Ireland secretary Brandon Lewis tweeted on Friday, however, that there was “no Irish Sea border”.



Clive Lewis MP said leaving Europe would now open up a whole series of questions for the Labour party. Photograph: Ben Stansall/Getty Images

Labour leader Keir Starmer’s decision to back the Brexit deal – which led to [three frontbench resignations](#) – is still angering his MPs. Some said they were now completely unclear about Labour’s aims for improving Britain’s relationship with the EU. “The Labour MPs [who refused to back the Brexit deal] aren’t going away,” said one rebel. “They will absolutely want Labour to be looking again at a customs union with the EU.”

Former shadow cabinet member Clive Lewis warned that it would prove impossible for Labour to avoid the Brexit fallout. “The departure from

Europe is going to open up a whole series of questions. A big part of the manifesto is going to have to talk about what we're going to do with our relationship with Europe.”

['Betrayed': Dover residents furious over building of Brexit lorry park](#)
[Read more](#)

Meanwhile, Nigel Farage's Brexit Party – which is seeking permission to rebrand as Reform UK – is planning to use concerns about fishing in its local election campaign in May. But for now, with Farage having announced that the “war is over”, the party is planning to focus more on issues such as the government’s Covid strategy.

The [Brexit party](#) says it will field around 2,000 candidates in May’s local elections. However, chairman Richard Tice said he was already concerned there would be attempts to postpone the elections because of the pandemic.

The ObserverMuseums

Building a legacy: world's first factory rises again as a museum of making

Amid a global surge of interest in the physical acts of creating and mending, a shrine for the makers movement is set to open in Derby



Workers pictured in 1908 at the silk mill on the site of Derby's Museum of Making. Photograph: Derby Museums

Workers pictured in 1908 at the silk mill on the site of Derby's Museum of Making. Photograph: Derby Museums

Jamie Doward

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.45 EST

Over three centuries, it has been ravaged by fire and the wrecking ball. But now the world's first factory will rise again from the ashes of its former self, repurposed as a new cathedral for the maker movement.

Amid huge interest in creating and refashioning things, Derby's Museum of Making, which opens this spring, is launching at an auspicious time.

['People see how relevant history is': Smithsonian tackles Covid challenge](#) [Read more](#)

“Look at how popular TV programmes like *The Repair Shop* are,” said Tony Butler, executive director of Derby [Museums](#). “Making resonates with the public.”

The maker movement is a subculture that embraces and celebrates the physical act of creating something. Borrowing from traditional hobbies such as woodworking, textile design and metalwork, there is a strong emphasis on repurposing existing objects and finding fun and fulfilment in the act of creation.

Couple the huge interest in making with the UK’s desire to [understand its new post-Brexit role in the world](#) while grappling with its colonial past and the climate crisis, and it may transpire that the museum is the attraction the country did not know it needed right now.

“We are really keen on putting forward the idea that every young person can be a maker,” Butler said. “The challenges that we face in the 21st century, things like climate change and environmental loss, much of that will be mitigated by technology, engineering and ingenuity, and those are the kind of makers we need in the future.”

The museum is located in [Derby](#) city centre on the site of a silk mill that opened in 1721 and whose claim to being the world’s first factory lies in the fact that it was the first fully mechanised mill supplied by a single power source.

With £18m funding from the national lottery, local development agencies and the Arts Council, there are hopes that the museum, located in the [Derwent Valley Mills Unesco World Heritage Site](#), will show how people can be attracted back into city centres in a post-Covid world.

Those behind the museum say there has been extensive consultation among the local community, with their feedback helping shaping its design. Volunteers even cleaned 11,000 bricks from the original factory to be repurposed in the new building.

“The site has changed since the first factory burned down,” explained Hannah Fox, director of projects and programmes at the museum. “Bits of it have fallen down and there have been major disasters over 300 years of its life, but every single time something happened it was rebuilt by the city because it was so important.”

The new building, designed by Bauman Lyon Architects, retains the original factory’s Italianate tower, its arches and Grade I-listed gates but, in Fox’s words it will be “a kind of mash-up of lots of different periods”.



An impression of Derby’s Museum of Making alongside a picture of the original silk mill taken in 1908, showing the now Grade I-listed iron gates.
Composite: Derby Museum / The Creative Core

“We are redefining it for what it needs to be at this time, and that is a place that really tells a story and inspires people to see themselves as makers,” Fox said.

Butler explained that an “entire culture” had emerged out of the worldwide maker movement. “It’s not just lads with beards in their sheds in Shoreditch tinkering with old bikes. That whole culture of making resonates with someone, whether they’re in San Francisco or London or Derby.”

He said the new museum would explore the links between the factory in its first incarnation and the Derby of today, home to the likes of Rolls-Royce and Toyota. But it would also confront the relationship between the industrial revolution and today's problems, such as the devastating legacy of fossil fuels and the textile industry's reliance on slavery.

"The general, pervasive view of the industrial revolution in Britain is very much that of the 'great man' narrative," Butler said. "There's this idea that the industrial revolution was down to unique British exceptionalism. We want to acknowledge that innovation can be driven by individual revelation and genius, but the revolution also did rely, in the factory system's case, on a ready supply of workers and raw resources."

Almost all of the museum's 30,000 artefacts will be on display. "Most museums have the majority of their collections in store but this museum will have pretty much everything accessible to the public," Fox said. "They range from a huge engine donated by Rolls-Royce to a fantastic little engine run by a single human hair that was showcased at the Chicago World's Fair in the 1930s."

The museum will also return to the manufacturing roots of the original factory by making things – including exhibition displays that will be built on site and sold to other museums. "It will be a full workshop space for new businesses to prototype and manufacture things they want to take to market," Fox said. "It's a place of making in every sense."

A previous museum on the site closed in the mid 2000s. "Visitor numbers were dwindling," Butler explained. "It was to do with the way in which the narrative was framed as something that was inherently in the past. It meant fewer and fewer people were coming to visit the museum. It was seen as almost a paean or a longing for a lost industrial age. What we are trying to do with this museum is make it contemporary and relevant to the sorts of work in which people are engaged today."

The Observer[Slavery](#)

Reparations row MP adds plantation to his register of members' interests

Tory Richard Drax, who represents South Dorset, has corrected a number of 'errors and omissions' in his parliamentary list



Conservative MP for South Dorset Richard Drax. Leading voices in the Caribbean say 'the people of Barbados and Jamaica are entitled to reparatory justice'. Photograph: Graham Hunt/Alamy

Conservative MP for South Dorset Richard Drax. Leading voices in the Caribbean say 'the people of Barbados and Jamaica are entitled to reparatory justice'. Photograph: Graham Hunt/Alamy

Paul Lashmar and Jonathan Smith in Barbados

Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

The Conservative MP Richard Drax has now added the plantation he has inherited in [Barbados](#) to the parliamentary register of members' interests after the *Observer* revealed omissions and errors in his declaration.

Three weeks ago, the *Observer* revealed that Drax, the MP for South Dorset since 2010, had taken control of the 250-hectare Drax Hall Plantation, where his ancestors had a slave workforce from 1640-1836. We also revealed that he is the wealthiest landowner in the House of Commons worth as much as £150m, although he and his family draw a tight veil over their finances.

Leading figures from the [Caribbean](#) Community (Caricom) Reparations Commission insist that Drax must acknowledge the wealth brought to his family from slavery and make reparations. Sir Hilary Beckles, the chair of the Reparations Commission and vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies, said: “If Richard Drax was in front of me now, I would say: ‘Mr Drax, the people of Barbados and Jamaica are entitled to reparatory justice.’”

“Black life mattered only to make millionaires of English enslavers and the Drax family did it longer than any other elite family.”

David Comissiong, the Barbados ambassador to Caricom, said: “This was a crime against humanity and we impose upon him [Mr Drax] and his family a moral responsibility to contribute to the effort to repair the damage.”

[He's the MP with the Downton Abbey lifestyle. But the shadow of slavery hangs over the gilded life of Richard Drax](#)

[Read more](#)

Noted for his *Downton Abbey* lifestyle, Richard Drax was gifted the Drax Hall plantation by his father who died in July 2017. He told the *Observer* three weeks ago that he had not added it to the register because it was still in probate. Under the “miscellaneous” section of the register, the new entry refers to Drax Hall only as a “business property” and suggests it is still in probate.

In the new register released last week, Drax has added other assets we had identified as previously missing. These include agricultural land in North Yorkshire that he now admits he inherited on 8 April 2019. The guidelines say he should have registered the property within 28 days. He does not say whether this includes both Swaledale estates, the Ellerton Abbey farming

estate of 2,200 acres and the Copperthwaite Allotment, a grouse moor of 520 acres.

Again remedying another long-term omission he refers to a “residential property in Dorset” – probably the £4.5m holiday let on Sandbanks he has owned personally since 2009 and lets out at £6,750 per week in peak season.

He has now declared that his trust in Surrey owns a commercial property which has never appeared in the register before. He also refers to the overarching family business by name for the first time. He says he is the “beneficiary of a family trust” that forms part “of the wider family property businesses known locally as the Charborough Estate”.

He has also now provided a first reference to the Drax Dorset property empire. “There are a significant number of properties in each category and some are in joint ownerships with family members and other trusts.”

Our research has shown that the Charborough estate has at least 5,600 hectares owned by five trusts. This includes “the R G Drax Accumulation and Maintenance Settlement” through which the MP is the beneficiary of income from the estate and some 125 properties in Dorset. The new detail provided is still the minimum required by the register and does not give a big picture of the wealth and holdings of Drax and his family.

Drax has also corrected the entry errors that he made under the shareholding section of the register including adding a company that should have been registered several years ago.

Drax told the *Observer*: “Following discussions with the registrar, which I initiated, I have updated my register entries to include the business property in Barbados, although that disclosure is not necessary until it has been legally transferred to me. In reviewing the entries I realised that an agricultural property in Yorkshire transferred from my mother to me after my father’s death had not been included on the register. My parents died in short succession and the administration of both estates is still ongoing. The process has been complicated which led to this accidental oversight.”

Vince Cable, the former leader of the Lib Dems, says Drax should consider paying reparations.

“I hope … Mr Drax pays some attention to the very polite representations from the Caribbean Community Reparations Commission. He could, after all, donate his inheritance to the island on which it stands and still have plenty of property – including a hefty chunk of British land – left over.”

2021.01.03 - World news

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‘This is a referendum’: US Senate on a knife-edge as Georgia runoffs loom

Balance of power in 100-member US Senate at stake as two radically different visions of US collide



Supporters of Jon Ossoff and the Rev Raphael Warnock gather to canvass for votes in Stone Mountain, Georgia, on 2 January. Photograph: Erik S Lesser/EPA

Supporters of Jon Ossoff and the Rev Raphael Warnock gather to canvass for votes in Stone Mountain, Georgia, on 2 January. Photograph: Erik S Lesser/EPA



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.30 EST

“Georgia, Georgia,” sings musician John Legend, before Barack Obama’s narration takes over. “When the moment came to reject fear and division and send a message for change, Georgia stepped up,” says the former US president, referring to Joe Biden’s [victory over](#) Donald Trump in the state. “Now, America is counting on you again.”

[Georgia Senate runoff elections: how they work and why they matter](#)

[Read more](#)

This is [a glossy campaign ad](#) for Jon Ossoff, one of two Democratic candidates challenging two Republican incumbents in the [final election](#) of 2020 – actually taking place on the first Tuesday of 2021. With November’s vote for Georgia’s two Senate seats proving inconclusive, the runoffs will not only decide the state’s direction but could strike a blow to Biden’s presidency before it has even begun.

At stake is the balance of power in the 100-member US Senate. If Republicans win one or both of the Georgia seats, they will retain a slim majority and can block Biden’s legislative goals and judicial nominees. If

Democrats prevail in both seats, however, there will be a 50/50 split in the chamber, giving Biden's vice-president, [Kamala Harris](#), the tie-breaking vote.

[Harris will campaign](#) in Savannah on Sunday and Biden will join the Democratic candidates in Atlanta on Monday, while the president will rally with the Republicans in Dalton on the same day.

Once again, two radically different visions of the nation will collide. [Republicans](#) Kelly Loeffler, 50, and David Perdue, 71, have embraced the president's "Make America Great Again" agenda so tightly that defeats for both would be a stark repudiation of his legacy.



Kelly Loeffler campaigns in Gainesville, Georgia, on 31 December.
Photograph: Robin Rayne/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Trump is already smarting from a narrow defeat by Biden in the presidential election in Georgia, making him the first Republican to lose it since George HW Bush in 1992. It was the most concrete proof yet that [a southern state that fought for slavery](#) during the American civil war and was dominated by Republicans for decades is now among the most competitive political battlegrounds in the country.

“We’ve heard for years that Georgia is changing, Georgia is changing, and it finally changed and it was a brilliant moment,” said [Carter Crenshaw](#), a Republican who founded a group called GOP for Joe to support the Democratic nominee. “As a lifelong Georgian, it’s funny or almost ironic that a state in the solid Republican south is about to determine the future of the country. As Joe Biden said in the election, this is a referendum about the soul of our nation.”

Such is the national resonance of the contests that [record amounts of money](#) are poured in. Ossoff, the [33-year-old chief executive](#) of a company that makes investigative TV documentaries, became the best-funded Senate candidate ever after raising \$106.7m between mid-October and mid-December.



Jon Ossoff speaks to supporters in Stone Mountain, Georgia, on 2 January.
Photograph: Erik S Lesser/EPA

His opponent, Perdue, trailed with \$68m and suffered a further setback on Thursday, [announcing that he will quarantine](#) for an unspecified period after being exposed to someone infected with coronavirus. In the other runoff, Democrat the Rev Raphael Warnock, 51, raised \$103.3m over the two-month period, while his opponent, Loeffler – among the wealthiest and least experienced members of Congress – had a haul of nearly \$64m.

About 3m people have already cast their votes early, in person or by absentee ballot, way higher than the last statewide runoff in 2018. Democrats are depending on voters of colour, [young people](#) and college-educated white people to turn out in urban and suburban areas, particularly in and around Atlanta. These include disaffected Republicans like Crenshaw.

“Part of the reason I made the decision to vote for Ossoff and Warnock was I have seen first-hand how Donald Trump has been so destructive to the party and overall trust in our elections,” he said. “It’s hard when the two Republicans have gone along pretty much consistently and regularly with every conspiracy theory that he and his supporters have come up with.”

Crenshaw, a pharmacy technician and student, added: “It wasn’t just a vote against Donald Trump. It was also the recognition that character still does matter and the character of Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff is at this point miles ahead of what Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue have exhibited in the last several months.”

But the likely deciding factor will be African American turnout. Democratic activist Stacey Abrams, [who lost a race for Georgia governor](#) in 2018, has done much to mobilise the party’s base and fight voter suppression in a state with a long history of racial segregation. The runoffs have led to court battles over the state’s removal of nearly 200,000 people from voter registration rolls, and a Republican effort to curb the use of drop boxes for absentee ballots.

[Trump attacks and vote by mail: the top voting rights stories of 2020](#)
[Read more](#)

As of last Tuesday African American turnout was 31% of the total vote so far, higher than its 27% share in November, according to Cliff Albright, cofounder of the Atlanta-based [Black Voters Matter](#). “You’ve still got some people thinking that what happened in Georgia for the presidential was just a fluke and that’s actually part of the reason why Black voters are so intent on showing up in such numbers right now,” he said.

“Trump and his supporters are reminding us of the same issues, the same racism, the same voter suppression that had us so energised in the general

election, and that energy is spilling over into the runoffs.”

Republican infighting over Trump’s baseless allegations of election fraud could cause some of the president’s base to stay at home in protest. Brian Kemp, the state governor, [has confirmed Biden’s victory](#) but Loeffler refuses to acknowledge the Democrat as president-elect, bragging that she has a “100% Trump voting record” and is “more conservative than Attila the Hun”.



The Rev Raphael Warnock speaks in Atlanta, Georgia, on 15 December.
Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters

Her challenger, Warnock, is an African American pastor [at the Atlanta church](#) where the civil rights leader Martin Luther King often preached. Albright observed: “Sadly enough, many of the issues that King was trying to address are the same issues today. He was talking about racism and capitalism and military exploitation and here we are facing those same three evils.”

The Democratic duo accuse their Republican rivals of abusing their office for self-enrichment and neglecting Georgians’ plight in the Covid-19 pandemic. Republicans are appealing to diehard Trump supporters in small towns and rural areas [with lurid messaging](#) that portrays the Democrats as

radical socialists hellbent on defunding the police and destroying the American dream.

[Ann Jones](#), a farmer from Flowery Branch, said of Ossoff and Warnock: “They don’t give me a warm, fuzzy feeling. I think their agenda leads you way far from agriculture and way far from common sense. Both of them are virtually unknown. What is socialism? We jump right over into communism. They’re way far off the map.”

[Could Asian Americans be crucial to swinging Georgia's Senate races?](#)
[Read more](#)

Jones plans to vote for Loeffler and Perdue and would back Trump again if he is the Republican [presidential nominee in 2024](#). “I don’t have a problem with him. I mean, do I want him to live in my house? Probably not. But he’s done a good job for the country and he’s done a whole lot for agriculture and you can’t throw any rocks at that.”

Opinion polls suggest both races could go either way. [John Zogby](#), a pollster and author, said two Republican wins on Tuesday night would deal a “horrible blow” to Biden’s presidency. Conversely, a Democratic sweep would diminish Trump’s credit for recent Republican gains in Congress and weaken his grip on the party as he teases another bid for the White House.

“Here’s a guy we know is making every indication that he wants to run again and so this could potentially stop him in his tracks,” Zogby added. “It also would be part of his legacy, not only losing the election but losing the Senate. Kind of a capstone.”

[Opinion](#)[Foreign policy](#)

‘Global Britain’ is willing to trade away everything. Including scruples

[Simon Tisdall](#)



The UK’s new deal with Turkey ignores appalling human rights abuses and should have been scrutinised by parliament



Turkey's 'strongman' president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has hailed the trade deal with Britain as the start of a 'new era'. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Turkey's 'strongman' president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has hailed the trade deal with Britain as the start of a 'new era'. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

The UK's new trade agreement with Turkey, [signed last week](#), ignores the Turkish government's continuing human rights abuses, boosts its dangerous president, and undermines ministerial pledges that "global Britain" will uphold international laws and values. The deal took effect on 1 January without even rudimentary parliamentary scrutiny. Here, stripped of lies and bombast, is the dawning reality of Boris Johnson's scruple-free post-Brexit world.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's "strongman" leader, is pleased as punch. He's the new, biggest fan of Britain's international trade secretary, Liz Truss, whose shabby work this is. Erdogan hailed the deal as the start of a "new era" and a landmark for Turkey. After years of disastrous economic mismanagement and fierce rows with the US and EU over Turkish policy towards Russia, Syria, Libya, Greece and Cyprus, Erdogan badly needed a win. Hapless Truss delivered.

The fact that Johnson used the spectre of Turkish migrants to frighten Leave voters in 2016 appears forgotten now. His government has created a favourable bilateral trade framework, and promised bespoke “upgrades”, to a leader who frequently mocks the EU and [faces possible European trade sanctions](#). How does that square with Johnson’s vow to be “the best friend and ally the EU could have”? The level playing field is already tipping.

[UK signs free trade agreement with Turkey](#)

[Read more](#)

This rushed deal rides roughshod over widely shared human rights concerns. It may be naive to think that the agreement, which replicates existing EU-Turkey arrangements, would allow matters of principle to imperil £18.6bn in two-way trade. Yet Britain is Turkey’s second-largest export market. Ankara was desperate to maintain tariff-free access. This gave Johnson and Truss leverage. It was a sovereign moment. But they failed to demand that Erdogan change his ways.

Britain is now unquestioningly tucked up in bed with a government that routinely persecutes its critics, manipulates elections, and suborns judges. Independent lawyers, human rights defenders and journalists are jailed or exiled in their hundreds. Selahattin Demirtas, former leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic party, languishes in jail despite an [order to free him – from the European court of human rights](#).

Alive to these and similar problems relating to other post-Brexit trade partners, the House of Lords amended the government’s Trade Bill last month to require human rights risk assessments when making agreements – to ensure compliance with the UK’s international treaties and obligations. But the government is expected to scrap the amendment when the bill returns to the Commons. The Turkey deal contains no such safeguards.

In its scramble to replace lapsed EU arrangements, Johnson’s government has so far “rolled over” about 30 existing trade deals. Like the Turkey deal, they have not faced thorough parliamentary scrutiny. The list includes other countries or entities with contentious human rights records, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Bilateral deals with notorious

rights abusers such as China and Saudi Arabia have not been attempted – yet.

A blanket halt to trade with Turkey or any other country over human rights concerns is not generally a course of action that appeals to British governments. An exception was the former foreign secretary Robin Cook, who championed an “ethical foreign policy”. But trading ties can be used to advance wider objectives, such as respect for democracy and individual freedoms. This element is wholly absent from Johnson’s cash-and-carry approach.

For example, a large chunk of Turkey-UK trade in previous years has comprised military sales to Ankara. According to Campaign Against the Arms Trade, Britain has [exported £1.3bn worth of arms to Turkey](#) since the 2013 Gezi Park popular uprising. In the period following a failed coup in 2016, when Erdogan began a series of brutal crackdowns, arms export licences worth £806m were granted. New licences were halted in 2019 but existing ones remained valid.

This lucrative business, or the prospect of losing it, may help explain the haste in finalising the Turkey deal. Yet the fact that Erdogan stands accused of using British-made equipment and technology to repress domestic opponents, attack Syria’s Kurds, intervene in Libya’s civil war, and stoke the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict should have given serious pause. These actions run contrary to British interests, as does Erdogan’s trouble-making in the eastern Mediterranean. Yet Johnson’s government, ever mindful of its Brexit needs, [has kept its head down](#).

Full and timely parliamentary scrutiny of post-Brexit trade deals would help bring such omissions and contradictions to light – but is sadly lacking, as Emily Thornberry, Labour’s shadow trade secretary, said in November. She accused the government of “sheer bumbling incompetence” after Greg Hands, the trade minister, admitted there was not enough time for MPs to scrutinise trade deals before the 31 December deadline. So much for a sovereign parliament “taking back control” of Britain’s destiny and laws.

The Turkey deal illustrates a bigger, fundamental hypocrisy. Extolling a future “global Britain” in 2019, foreign secretary Dominic Raab promised

that “once we’ve left the EU … human rights abusers anywhere in the world will face consequences for their actions”. In January 2020, Raab assured the Commons that “a truly global Britain is about more than just international trade and investment … Global Britain is also about continuing to uphold our values of liberal democracy and our heartfelt commitment to the international rule of law.”

Raab seems to mean well, but ne’er-do-wells such as Erdogan are laughing fit to burst. Raab’s recent imposition of sanctions on individual rights abusers in Russia, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere does not affect the bigger picture. It is of a British government hellbent on cutting hasty, ill-considered deals with all manner of undesirable customers around the world, without proper regard for the political, legal, strategic and human consequences. And to think Tory aristocrats used to look down on trade.

[The Observer](#)[Iran's nuclear programme](#)

Iran steps up nuclear plans as tensions rise on anniversary of Suleimani's killing

As Tehran moves on uranium enrichment, Washington braces for retaliation a year after the Quds Force commander's assassination



A crowd at the tomb of Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani on Saturday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A crowd at the tomb of Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force commander Qassem Suleimani on Saturday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) and agencies

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

Iran has announced [plans to enrich uranium up to 20% purity](#), just a step away from weapons-grade levels, as tensions with the US ratchet up during the final days of Donald Trump's presidency.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed it had been notified of Iran's decision to increase enrichment at the Fordow facility, buried in a mountainside to protect it from military strikes, although Tehran did not say when the process would begin.

The weekend also marks the first anniversary of a US drone strike that killed top general [Qassem Suleimani](#), with Washington apparently bracing for possible retaliation.

After the US stepped up military deployments and threatening language, Iran's foreign minister, Javad Zarif, accused it on New Year's Eve of trying to set up a "pretext for war".

In an apparent attempt at de-escalation the Pentagon has abruptly withdrawn the aircraft carrier Nimitz from the region, [the New York Times](#) reported.

The US president-elect, Joe Biden, has made clear that he hopes to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was abandoned by Trump in 2018. The deal limited Iran to enriching uranium to 3.67%. It also called for Fordow to be turned into a research and development facility.

[EU foreign ministers pave way for revival of Iran nuclear deal](#)
[Read more](#)

Iran began violating the deal in 2019, in response to America's withdrawal and imposition of sanctions. But it has also signalled a desire to rejoin the deal, in return for sanctions relief.

November's IAEA report, the latest available, said that Tehran was still allowing inspections, and although it was enriching uranium beyond 3.67%, it was not exceeding a 4.5% threshold.

Other signatories of the deal, including the EU, France, Germany, UK, China and Russia, have been playing for time, hoping the agreement could be restored under Biden.

The German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has said the change of administration in the US means that there is "a last window" for progress

that “shouldn’t be wasted”.

But Biden will be managing a very high-stakes relationship – and attempting to rekindle an always-controversial deal in the face of significant opposition inside both countries – at a time when the domestic fight against Covid is sucking up huge amounts of government time and energy.

Iran originally began 20% enrichment under former hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, heightening concerns that it was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme, although Tehran has always insisted it has only peaceful aims.

The 2015 deal aimed to extend the country’s breakout time for creating a nuclear weapon from a few months to at least a year. If Iran resumes the higher level of enrichment, the international tensions that preceded the agreement could return.

The latest move came after Iran’s parliament passed legislation following the November assassination of a top nuclear scientist, in [an attack blamed on Israel](#).

The new law calls for the country to produce at least 120kg of 20% enriched uranium a year – a key step towards weapons-grade, which is 90% enriched – and put an end to IAEA inspections designed to check its programme is only for peaceful use.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the US-educated head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, offered a military analogy to describe his agency’s readiness to take the next step in uranium enrichment.

“We are like soldiers and our fingers are on the triggers,” Salehi told Iranian state television. “The commander should command and we shoot. We are ready for this and will produce [20% enriched uranium] as soon as possible.”

He said natural uranium in centrifuges at Fordow would need to be switched out for material enriched to 4% if the further enrichment was to proceed. “It should be done under IAEA supervision,” Salehi added.

Fordow is nestled in mountains near the holy city of Qom, about 90km south-west of Tehran.

The ObserverNetherlands

Dutch high hopes for legal cannabis farms hit by nimby protests

Drug supply experiment falters as Netherlands plan for greenhouses stirs anxiety among local residents



A selection of cannabis varieties at a coffee shop in The Hague. The Netherlands is running an experimental scheme in legal production of the drug. Photograph: Robin van Lonkhuijsen/AFP/Getty Images

A selection of cannabis varieties at a coffee shop in The Hague. The Netherlands is running an experimental scheme in legal production of the drug. Photograph: Robin van Lonkhuijsen/AFP/Getty Images

Daniel Boffey in Brussels

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

A Dutch trial of state-regulated cannabis cultivation farms to supply [coffee shops](#) risks being derailed by an outbreak of nimbyism after locals protested about the location of one of the new facilities.

The plans to take over greenhouses on the outskirts of Etten-Leur, a town in north Brabant, near the Belgian border, and replace blackberries with cannabis plants, triggered large local protests and a request by the local mayor for central government to block the scheme.

Board members of the initiative, known as Project C, have now warned that the other projects will face a similar backlash once their locations become known, threatening the success of the experiment.

Joep van Meel, an IT expert and former member of the provincial parliament for Noord-Brabant who is one of four board members of Project C, said: “In the three years of preparation we did everything transparently but when it became public where we wanted to build our facility, a lot of people living nearby protested. People said that friends of their children wouldn’t be allowed to come to the house and play because they lived near the facility.”

Under the policy of *gedoogbeleid*, or toleration, the sale and use of cannabis is still a criminal offence under Dutch law, [but authorities choose not to pursue lawbreakers](#). Coffee shops across the country sell small amounts of cannabis to over-18s. But production is illegal, allowing organised drug-crime to prosper.

The Dutch government decided in 2017 to launch a “controlled cannabis supply chain experiment” to see whether it was possible to regulate a “quality-controlled” supply of the drug. The ministry of public health received 147 applications from those wishing to become regulated growers, then whittled these down to 51, which were put into a lottery draw earlier this month.

The 10 winners will now undergo an investigation into their “integrity”, with organisations that have illegally cultivated cannabis in the past ruled out from the final list, to be confirmed in February. Successful bids must guarantee an annual production of at least 6.5 tonnes of cannabis and a solid financial and security plan.

[Amsterdam looks to bar foreign visitors from buying cannabis](#)
[Read more](#)

Van Meel said that Project C had been a victim of its own publicity. “We wanted to do everything in public – we thought it was important for this trial to be a success,” he said.

“People will find out in the coming weeks that they will have a cannabis facility near them and they will protest.”

“A legal challenge would be very expensive,” Van Meel added. “We are looking at all our options. We think this is a very important project to improve the quality of the cannabis and to take the supply out of the hands of criminals.”

In the ‘land of storytelling’, Netflix and Amazon Prime reshape India’s creative landscape

The streaming giants are making bold TV shows but the threat of censorship looms large

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) South Asia correspondent

Sat 2 Jan 2021 12.41 EST Last modified on Sun 3 Jan 2021 05.41 EST



A scene from the Netflix drama *Delhi Crime*, which won an Emmy for best international series. Photograph: Netflix

This year’s Emmy awards, one of the biggest nights in global television, was particularly historic for India. It was the second year in a row that several Indian television shows were nominated, and the first time an Indian series

won. [Delhi Crime](#), an eight-part Netflix drama exploring a brutal rape case in 2012, took home the award for the best international series.

Indeed, all the Indian nominations were for shows created by [Netflix](#) or Amazon Prime. Over the past two years, streaming has radically shifted India's domestic creative landscape – and created a new global audience for Indian series and films. According to Amazon Prime, 20% of viewers of their original Indian content are now from outside India.

“India is a land of storytellers but for a very long time, because of the formulaic nature of cinema and television, there was not representation of all kinds of stories,” said Aparna Purohit, head of original content at Amazon Prime [India](#). “Streaming has democratised that. Stories that were not picked up earlier, subjects that were ignored or avoided, now there is a space for them.”

The two biggest streaming platforms, Netflix and Amazon Prime, arrived in India four years ago but it is only over the past two years that momentum has begun to build.

But as the platforms began to flourish, they have faced a growing backlash from hardline, rightwing groups in India, which have accused Netflix and Amazon of creating content that “hurts the fabric of Indian society”. While the platforms were previously free from the censorship that controls all film and television in India, enabling new, bolder programming, the government declared in November that [all streaming platforms would be brought under regulation](#).

In a country of more than 1.3 billion people, half of whom are under the age of 25, Amazon and Netflix have made huge investments in harnessing lucrative potential. According to senior executives, India is now witnessing the biggest growth of any global streaming market.

In 2019-20, Netflix invested \$400m (£293m) in creating original programmes and released more than 30 pieces of original Indian content. Amazon Prime now has customers in more than 4,300 towns and cities across India and has about 50 shows in varying stages of development. As

well as shows in Hindi and English, both platforms are creating original content in regional languages including Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam.

“This year has been an incredible year for us in India because we are one of the fastest growing markets in all of global Netflix,” said Monika Shergill, vice-president of content at Netflix India. “We’ve got a huge new member base in India who we have found to be hungry for different stories and formats.”

Several Indian-made shows had made it into the Netflix Top 10 in countries around the world, with the reality show *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives* and the children’s animation *Mighty Little Bheem* cited as recent global successes, said Shergill.



The Netflix reality show Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives. Photograph: Rachel Santos/Netflix undefined

Although India has its thriving Bollywood and regional film industries and a culture of long-running television serials, there was no industry tradition of the immersive longform storytelling that streaming services are known for. Much of Netflix and Amazon’s early investment went into building up a new pool of talent.

“We had to build it, brick by brick,” said Purohit of Amazon Prime. “We invested very heavily in development, taking a long time to green-light projects. We started organising writers’ workshops where we would bring in new writers and veteran show-runners and creators. Just trial and error, working and learning along the way.” At the beginning, Bollywood’s big names were reluctant to collaborate, but now they were knocking on Amazon Prime’s door.

There have also been logistical challenges: 96% of Indian homes have a single TV, which is rarely a smart TV with internet access. But with the second-highest mobile phone ownership in the world and widespread access to cheap mobile data, most of India now watches video via phone. Netflix says its subscribers in India watch more on mobile than anywhere else in the world.

Growth has been helped by low subscriptions starting at 129 rupees (£1.30) a month for Amazon Prime and 199 rupees a month for Netflix, though with average monthly household incomes at 32,800 rupees (£328), it remains unaffordable for millions.

But the threat of future regulation hangs heavy. As government censorship keeps an increasingly tight rein on the cultural sphere, Amazon and Netflix have become a breeding ground for more subversive and groundbreaking shows such as *Leila*, *Sacred Games* and *Paatal Lok*, which have addressed sex, sexual violence, homophobia and caste inequalities, critiqued rightwing Hindu nationalism and depicted the persecution of Muslims. A new gritty political drama *Tandav*, described as India’s equivalent to *House of Cards*, will debut on Amazon Prime this month.

“This kind of programming could not be done in the past,” said Gaurav Gandhi, Director and Country GM of Amazon Prime Video India. “The world of streaming allows new freedom for the creators.”

The backlash against certain shows has been visceral, setting off [online hate campaigns](#) against stars and creators. *Sacred Games*, the big Netflix breakout series, was threatened with a court case for a line where the former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi is called *fattu*, translated as pussy.

Netflix, Amazon and 16 other streaming platforms in India have put together a code of self-regulation which they hope to persuade the government to adopt, rather than being forced to comply with the same censorship rules as Bollywood.

Shibasish Sarkar, group chief executive officer of Reliance Entertainment, one of the biggest production houses in India whose credits include *Sacred Games*, said: “In three years, the cultural side of India had achieved on streaming platforms what it would have taken 30 years to achieve in the traditional film and TV industries.

“Writers and makers have enjoyed [being] free to communicate with the audience [without] restrictions or regulators or censors. A structure of self-regulation and self-discipline is what we should be aiming for. Otherwise we will lose the mojo.”

The Observer
South Africa

South African game reserves forced to cull animals as Covid halts tourism

Tourist lodges run out of cash to feed and care for the animals on their land and thousands of villagers lose their jobs

Jason Burke

Sun 3 Jan 2021 05.45 EST



Three kudu in Nambiti game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal where visitor numbers have slumped. Photograph: TravelMuse/Alamy

Impala run through the thorn bush, ibis fly above the lake and lightning forks over the horizon as a storm rolls in from the Drakensberg mountains.

The visitors driven across the 10,000 or more hectares of the Nambiti game reserve in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province see what they think is an unchanged, and unchanging natural landscape.

Njabulo Hodla, the assistant manager of the reserve, sees something else: thickening undergrowth that someone must cut back, tracks which need clearing, fences to repair and animals that will have to be culled eventually, each another victim of Covid. “It’s tough, really tough. I’ve never seen a season like it,” said the 31-year-old, who has worked at Nambiti since 2008.

Across the continent Covid has hit South Africa the hardest with more than a million confirmed cases and 29,000 deaths [according to official figures](#). As elsewhere in Africa, the pandemic has wreaked massive economic damage, with thousands of businesses failing and tens of millions unable to earn a living. [The economy shed 2.2m jobs in the second quarter of 2020](#).

[Nambiti reserve map](#)

The huge tourist industry – which employs around one in every 20 workers and provides just under 3% of GDP – has been devastated.

Once the December holiday season meant tens of thousands of foreign visitors spending hundreds, even thousands, of dollars every day. Now, with the rate of new infections in the country soaring as authorities [struggle to check a second wave](#), no one expects the tourists to come back soon.

South Africa’s 500 or so private game reserves are often in more remote and impoverished parts of the country. They spend considerable amounts each month to feed and care for the animals. Many have been forced to close permanently, lay off staff and sell, or even shoot, animals. Other have survived – just.

“Reserves like ours went from quite a nice income supporting 300 jobs and a massive conservation project to literally nothing. We fell off a wall,” said Clarke Smith, chairman of Nambiti. “We are still feeling the pain … and the impact on the region is very marked.”

Nambiti is a community-owned project, unlike many, so a substantial proportion of profits and an annual lease are paid to local villages. This year, these revenues are much reduced and, with many employees of the reserve still on reduced hours or at home, the coming months will be very difficult.

“Instead of an end-of-year bonus, people are taking home only half a salary, or nothing,” said Hodla, who grew up in one of the nearby villages. “The communities round here are just on the line. The reserve plays a major role. Everyone knows someone who works here.”

Many fear that if the crisis continues for many more months, hundreds of thousands of hectares across [South Africa](#) that have been converted to more lucrative game reserves in recent decades will revert to cattle or cereal farming – with a massive loss of habitat for endangered animals and other species.

But if the business of wildlife conservation has been hit badly, so too has that of safeguarding other parts of the country’s heritage.



Dalton Ngobose, an Isandlwana battlefield guide, has had few clients.
Photograph: Kevin Rushby/The Guardian

Like many parts of rural South Africa, the north of KwaZulu province suffered from acute unemployment, [massive health problems including TB and HIV](#), and deep poverty even before the pandemic. Industries have been gutted in recent decades, with many mines and factories closing.

In some places, such losses have been partially compensated by what has been a booming trade in battlefield tourism. Tens of thousands of British

visitors have come to walk the sites where British troops fought Zulus in the bloody war of 1879 that consolidated the imperial hold on southern [Africa](#).

The battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift are the main attraction for British tourists usually old enough to be fans of the 1964 film *Zulu* that dramatised the story of the catastrophic British defeat and last-ditch stand at the sites.

This winter – or summer in the southern hemisphere – both battlefields are “empty”, the memorials, graves and museums deserted.

“There is no work. We are just sitting there. The situation is so bad. There is a drought and no crops in our fields, and a sack of mealie [maize flour] costs twice as much as it did back in the spring,” said Dalton Ngobese, a local guide, who has not worked since March.

With the tourists gone, so too are the hawkers who sold ethnic craft, snacks and water. A portion of the entrance fee to the battlefield site goes to schools, so this source of revenue too has dried up.

The accommodation lodges were shut for much of the summer, and have only recently reopened, welcoming far fewer guests. The lodges provide jobs and also fund support programmes for local students, charitable foundations, orphanages and other projects.



Soldiers' graves at Sandlwana hill, Isandlwana, which normally draws many visitors. Photograph: Joe Sohm/Visions of America/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

"If we are suffering, the entire community takes a knock," said Shane Evans, manager of the Isandlwana Lodge, which hosted groups touring the battlefield.

In the village of Isandlwana, there is resignation. With so few jobs locally, men have traditionally travelled to Johannesburg, six hours' drive north, to work in mines or, more recently, hotels. But both industries are suffering too and most of Isandlwana's residents who had jobs have lost them.

Government aid has been patchy, and a huge burden for a country still battling the legacies of the racist, repressive apartheid regime. The ruling African National Congress, in power since 1994, is accused of incompetence and corruption, but also has to deal with a flagging economy, tens of millions of people in poverty and massive debts. A job support programme has been guaranteed until the end of the year, but money is slow to come through.

One consequence in the villages around Isandlwana is that crime is rising, with cattle theft and burglary getting worse, said Ngobese. A recent drought

has meant local communities around the battlefields have been unable to plant the crops that traditionally supplement incomes and diet.

Nellie Buthelezi's husband was among those laid off by the local government in swingeing job cuts earlier this year, while the lodge where she works has been shut since March. The 41-year-old mother of four has lived in Isandlwana all her life and cannot remember times ever being as bad.

"Food is expensive, and it goes so fast. We've got no money for rent," she told the *Observer*. "We just hope to God for a better new year."

Palestinians excluded from Israeli Covid vaccine rollout as jabs go to settlers

Human rights groups accuse Israel of dodging obligations to millions in occupied territories who may wait months for vaccination



Vaccinations in progress in Ashdod, Israel last month. Photograph: Amir Cohen/Reuters

Vaccinations in progress in Ashdod, Israel last month. Photograph: Amir Cohen/Reuters

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem and [Hazem Balousha](#) in Gaza

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.30 EST

Israel is celebrating an impressive, [record-setting vaccination drive](#), having given initial jabs of coronavirus shots to more than a 10th of the population. But Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza can only watch and wait.

As the world ramps up what is already on track to become a [highly unequal vaccination push](#) – with people in richer nations first to be inoculated – the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories provides a stark example of the divide.

Israel transports batches of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine deep inside the West Bank. But they are only distributed to Jewish settlers, and not the roughly 2.7 million Palestinians living around them who may have to wait for weeks or months.

“I don’t know how, but there must be a way to make us a priority, too?” said Mahmoud Kilani, a 31-year-old sports coach from the Palestinian city of Nablus. “Who cares about us? I don’t think anybody is stuck on that question.”

Two weeks into its vaccination campaign, Israel is [administering more than 150,000 doses a day](#), amounting to initial jabs for more than 1 million of its 9 million citizens – a higher proportion of the population than anywhere else.

Vaccine centres have been set up in sports stadiums and central squares. People over 60, healthcare workers, carers and high-risk populations have priority, while young, healthier people who walk into clinics are sometimes rewarded with surplus stock to avoid the waste of unused vials.

The prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has told Israelis that the country could be the first to emerge from the pandemic. As well as [a highly advanced healthcare system](#), part of the reason for the speed could be economics. A health ministry official said the country had paid \$62 a dose, compared with the [\\$19.50 the US is paying](#).

Meanwhile, the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority, which maintains limited self-rule in the territories, is rushing to get vaccines. One official suggested, perhaps optimistically, that shots could arrive within the next two weeks.

However, when asked for a timeframe, Ali Abed Rabbo, director-general of the Palestinian health ministry, estimated the first vaccines would probably

arrive in February.

Those would be through [a World Health Organization-led partnership called Covax](#), aimed at helping poorer countries, which has pledged to vaccinate 20% of Palestinians. Yet vaccines intended for Covax have not yet gained “emergency use” approval by the WHO, a precondition for distribution to begin.

Gerald Rockenschaub, the head of office at WHO Jerusalem, said it could be “early to mid-2021” before vaccines on the Covax scheme were available for distribution in the [Palestinian territories](#).

The rest of the doses are expected to come through deals with pharmaceutical companies, but none have apparently been signed so far.

Despite the delay, the authority has not officially asked for help from Israel. Coordination between the two sides halted last year after the Palestinian president [cut off security ties](#) for several months.

But Rabbo said “sessions” with Israel had been held. “Until this moment, there is no agreement, and we cannot say there is anything practical on the ground in this regard,” he said.

Israeli officials have suggested they might provide surplus vaccines to Palestinians and claim they are not responsible for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, pointing to 1990s-era interim agreements that required the authority to observe international vaccination standards.

Those deals envisioned a fuller peace agreement within five years, an event that never occurred. Almost three decades later, Israeli, Palestinian and international rights groups have accused Israel of [dodging moral, humanitarian and legal obligations](#) as an occupying power during the pandemic.

Gisha, an Israeli rights group, said Palestinian efforts so far to look elsewhere for vaccines “does not absolve Israel from its ultimate responsibility toward Palestinians under occupation”.

[How has Israel launched the world’s fastest Covid vaccination drive?](#)

[Read more](#)

The disparities could potentially see Israelis return to some form of normality within the first three months of this year, while Palestinians remain trapped by the virus. That may have a negative impact on Israel's goal of herd immunity, as thousands of West Bank Palestinians work in Israel and the settlements, which could keep infection rates up.

In Gaza, an impoverished enclave under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade, the timeframe could be even longer than in the West Bank. The strip's Islamist rulers, Hamas, have been unable to contain the virus and are enemies with Israel and political rivals with the Palestinian Authority.

Salama Ma'rouf, head of the Hamas-run Gaza press office, estimated vaccines would arrive "within two months", adding that there was coordination with the WHO and the Palestinian Authority.

Heba Abu Asr, 35, a resident of Gaza, jolted when asked how she felt about others getting the vaccine first. "Are you seriously trying to compare us with Israel or any other country?" she asked. "We can't find work, food, or drink. We are under threat all the time. We do not even have any necessities for life."

2021.01.03 - In focus

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- [Sitting comfortably? Top TV treats to raise your spirits in 2021](#)
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[The Observer](#)[Television](#)

The stop-start year that kept TV drama on a cliffhanger

It took months to find ways to shoot productions safely. The plot twist? There will be a shortage of new shows – then a glut



Nicola Walker and Sanjeev Bhaskar in *Unforgotten*. Photograph: ITV



Vanessa Thorpe Arts and Media Correspondent

Sun 3 Jan 2021 05.30 EST

Fresh drama gleams out from the 2021 TV schedules, and viewers, particularly those with access to streaming services, will not go short. But the truth is there will be fewer new shows overall this year: the introduction of Covid safety protocols in 2020 first halted and then slowed down the production of high-end drama.

And while film crews went back to the studios and out on location, many of these dramas will only be ready to air this autumn, when audiences can look forward to something of a bonanza after a drier summer.

“Drama will be thin on the ground at first, then there will be a massive glut, I suspect, as next year was due to be busy anyway,” said executive producer Petra Fried of Clerkenwell Films, which has three shows in development that are due to shoot in the next few months, including *Cheaters*, a short-form romantic comedy series.

A much-anticipated follow-up to the dramatisation of Sally Rooney’s novel *Normal People*, a serialisation of her first book, *Conversations with Friends*, is one of those still en route to screens, but slightly delayed.

Similarly, the makers of Channel 4 drama *Murder in the Car Park*, Indefinite Films, have complained that the pandemic “made the process weeks longer than it could have been. We had to adapt but it was painful. The delays made it very complicated”.

Many writers and producers say they spent lockdown developing scripts at an intense rate not possible before. As a result, lots of dramas are queuing up to be made, in addition to those already in production when the virus struck.

For Chris Lang, creator of the popular [ITV crime series *Unforgotten*](#), the past year has been both busy and nerve-wracking. He managed to get both the fourth season – and the second season of another show, *Innocent* – out filming. “Delays were not as bad as people feared in the end,” he said. “Pre-production and finding a crew was harder though, especially now it feels like everyone is back up and running.”

Lang and his team filmed *Unforgotten* and *Innocent*, which he writes with Matthew Arlidge, in September, as something of a leap of faith. “You had to make a commitment weeks in advance because you have to line up your crew and cast. So we were in the vanguard really.

A film set is one of the safest places to be. We all wear masks, rooms are sprayed and we're tested all the time

Chris Lang, creator of Unforgotten

“We had already started *Unforgotten* before lockdown, so we restarted, and we were out in Ireland with *Innocent*. *Line of Duty* was also filming up in Northern Ireland, and we both felt we were doing it first. Ireland allowed filming to continue because they put it in a category with building construction.”

Lang had to rewrite, at speed, scenes that had initially involved a large cast. “There were other ways of doing it, I realised, and necessity is the mother of invention. So quite often, the compromises I made ended up working better.

“We had filmed 11 weeks of *Unforgotten* with Nicola Walker and Sanjeev Bhaskar before we had to stop – and then we did four-and-a-half weeks in

September, but I'd be surprised if you could tell the difference," said Lang.

While some drama series were able to return to filming with the backing of a big broadcast or streaming network, small independent companies found themselves more exposed. "Everyone in drama now has an insurance story to tell. But in truth, a film set is one of the safest places to be. We all wear masks, rooms are sprayed and we are tested all the time," said Lang.

Crews, Lang also found, adapted fast to new working rules: "There were a few slow days but after that it was fine. So there should be a lot around by the autumn. I don't know of anything major that had been 'green-lit' that has been cancelled. They were just delayed."

Petra Fried also feels that social distancing restrictions on set have served to focus the mind. "When we got started again, everyone was incredibly focused and glad to be working again. We found it actually made it more efficient," she said. "It was just that we had to pause if someone tested positive, and we had three or four instances of that. Day to day, it was OK, although the stop-start nature made things more expensive."

The biggest challenge now, said Fried, has been finding available film crew for the summer ahead. "Everything is going to be shooting in 2021. There's lots of good stuff, developed with writers over a whole year, and now ready to go."

The Observer Television

Sitting comfortably? Top TV treats to raise your spirits in 2021



Clockwise from top left: Line of Duty, The Serpent, The Pembrokeshire Murders and Staged are all airing this year. Composite: BBC, ITV

Clockwise from top left: Line of Duty, The Serpent, The Pembrokeshire Murders and Staged are all airing this year. Composite: BBC, ITV

It's in with the old and the new, as broadcasters and streaming platforms serve up a slew of fresh dramas, favourite series, comedy hits and debuts

Sarah Hughes

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.45 EST

With no end to lockdown in sight, one thing is certain – we're all going to be inside watching a lot of television at the beginning of the year.

At least, for now, there's a wide variety of programming on offer, with terrestrial and digital channels providing everything from the experimental and daring to comfort TV.

The BBC kicked off the new year in style on Friday with Richard Warlow's sinuous *The Serpent*, which follows the true story of serial murderer Charles Sobhraj (Tahar Rahim) and the man who became obsessed with tracking him down, Dutch embassy official Herman Knippenberg (Billy Howle). An atmospheric slow-burner with a wonderful feel for its 1970s setting, it continues tonight and will air weekly on Sundays at 9pm.

Warlow's drama is the opening shot in a strong spring slate for the BBC. Fans of Jed Mercurio's juggernaut *Line of Duty* will be delighted that filming was completed before new restrictions kicked in and a suitably twisty series six, starring Kelly Macdonald as AC-12's latest protagonist, will air later in the spring.



Jenna Coleman and Tahar Rahim in BBC's *The Serpent*. Photograph: Roland Neveu/BBC/© Mammoth Screen

Mercurio has also been mentoring younger writers and the first fruits will be seen later this year with the arrival of Northern Irish crime drama *Bloodlands*, written by Chris Brandon and starring James Nesbitt as a detective investigating a cold case that centres around a "legendary assassin".

Also coming in the spring is the headline-generating adaptation of Nancy Mitford's comedy of love and (multiple) marriage, *The Pursuit of Love* with Lily James as Linda, Emily Beecham as Fanny and, wonderfully, Andrew Scott as the eccentric Lord Merlin. Period charms of a very different kind are on show in *Ridley Road*, Sarah Solemani's adaptation of Jo Bloom's acclaimed novel about a young hairdresser (newcomer Aggi O'Casey) caught up in the fight against fascism in the early 60s.

For high drama and cold seas, [BBC](#) Two is offering a very different adaptation as Andrew Haigh takes on *The North Water*, Ian McGuire's Booker-longlisted novel about an ill-fated whaling expedition in the 1850s. An all-star cast includes Colin Farrell, Jack O'Connell, Stephen Graham and Tom Courtenay. Closer to home, *Vigil*, written by *Strike*'s Tom Edge, follows Suranne Jones's detective as she investigates the links between the disappearance of a Scottish fishing trawler and a death on board a Trident nuclear submarine.

Before that, David Tennant and Michael Sheen's lockdown comedy *Staged* returns for another run of entertaining ennui, while entertainment of a different kind is promised in BBC Three's *Superhoe*, which sees the wildly talented Nicôle Lecky adapt her funny and moving [one-woman show](#) about sex workers.



James Nesbitt in the Belfast-set drama *Bloodlands*. Photograph: BBC/Northern Ireland Screen/PA

ITV still has crime on its mind, kicking off the year with a three-part, true-crime series, *The Pembrokeshire Murders*. Later there's another outing to *The Bay*, plus Nicola Walker and her weary despair in a fourth series of cold-case drama, *Unforgotten*. Anna Friel is still losing it in a third series of the ludicrously plotted, yet oddly compulsive, *Marcella*, now with added Belfast.

Viewpoint, starring Noel Clarke as a surveillance officer who finds himself caught in a complicated relationship with the single mother (Alexandra Roach) whose home he commandeers, promises to serve up a timely slice of paranoia, while *Finding Alice* stars Keeley Hawes as a widow uncovering dark secrets following her husband's death.

Channel 4 has the year's first five-star drama with Russell T Davies's incredible *It's A Sin*, which follows a group of young friends through London's 1980s Aids crisis. Funny, smart and guaranteed to have you bawling, it's unmissable.

Before that, C4 airs the *The Great*, a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek exploration of the rise of Catherine the Great, written by *The Favourite*'s Tony McNamara with a scene-stealing performance from Nicholas Hoult as Tsar Peter III.



Stephen Graham in *The North Water*. Photograph: Nick Wall/BBC/Harpooner Films

Black comedy *Back* returns after a long absence with David Mitchell's Stephen still struggling to deal with the loathsome Andrew (Robert Webb). New comedies include *Frank of Ireland*, written by Domhnall and Brian Gleeson and starring Brian as a misanthropic disaster and *Lady Parts*, written by the talented Nida Manzoor (*Hounslow Diaries*), which follows a young all-female Muslim punk band.

Channel 5 continues to build up its drama component with thrillers *Deadline* and *Teacher* joining the much-buzzed-about period drama *Anne Boleyn*, with rising star Jodie Turner-Smith in the title role. Those who want a true slice of comfort TV should note *All Creatures Great and Small* returns for a second season.

Streaming channels increasingly dominate TV conversations and all eyes are on [Netflix](#) in particular. Its strong spring slate suggests the usual mixture of big hits and surprise packages. Returning shows include the third series of *Sex Education* and *You*, while later in the year new seasons of *The Witcher* and the brilliant *Top Boy* are expected.

Of the new series, two adaptations, *Anatomy of a Scandal*, which takes on Sarah Vaughan's best-selling tale of privilege and abuse of power, and *Behind Her Eyes*, based on Sarah Pinborough's chilling, addictive 2017 bestseller, are probably the two most anticipated, although I have high hopes for *Inventing Anna*, which stars Julia Garner as pretend heiress Anna Delvey, and *Shadow and Bone*, the long-awaited adaptation of Leigh Bardugo's hugely popular *Grishaverse* novels. Fans of Netflix's more esoteric programming should binge through *History of Swear Words* as Nicolas Cage battles with expletives.



Kelly Macdonald as DCI Joanne Davidson in the new series of *Line of Duty*.
Photograph: Steffan Hill/BBC/World Productions

Over on Sky, all things ancient still appeal with a new series of Jez Butterworth's enjoyably over-the-top *Britannia* plus *Domina*, a 10-part political epic about the rise to power of Livia Drusilla, mother of Emperor Tiberius, with a cast that includes Isabella Rossellini, Enzo Cilenti, Claire Forlani and Liam Cunningham.

Viewers who prefer something set in the present day should consider *Mare of Easttown*, which stars an interestingly cast Kate Winslet as a small-town Pennsylvanian detective, *Your Honor*, which features Bryan Cranston as a corrupt judge in New Orleans, or dark investment bank drama, *Devils*.

Landscapers is Sky Atlantic's darkly comic, sure-to-be-controversial take on the true-crime genre, starring Olivia Colman as convicted killer Susan Edwards who, with her husband, murdered and buried her parents in the garden, while *The Nevers* sees Joss Whedon deliver a slice of Victorian gothic fantasy and the popular *A Discovery of Witches* returns to Sky One. Also returning are outstanding mafia drama *Gomorrah*, the second *Euphoria* special (both Sky Atlantic), and Simon Blackwell's dark parenting comedy *Breeders* returns to Sky One, with new comedy *Bloods* starring Samson Kayo and Jane Horrocks as hapless paramedics.

[Superhero sitcoms, hardcore sci-fi and Belfast noir: the must-see TV of 2021](#)
[Read more](#)

Superhero fans have several Disney+ treats in store with the inventive *WandaVision* kicking off the new year, followed by the highly anticipated *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier*, and a time-travelling Tom Hiddleston in *Loki*. Amazon Prime, meanwhile, has a third series of *American Gods* and mini-series *The Underground Railroad*, in which Oscar-nominated director Barry Jenkins takes on Colson Whitehead's acclaimed novel.

Finally, if something mindless is all you want to watch,Finally, if all you really want is to let something mindless wash over you, don't despair because the most insane reality show, aka *The Masked Singer*, has returned to ITV. We might all be locked down but many of us are still doomed to spend the next few weeks speculating over which D-list celebrity is behind which ridiculous costume.

[The ObserverBirds](#)

A wing and a prayer: how birds are coping with the climate crisis

Some of our best-loved species are changing their breeding cycles and heading north in their fight for survival in a warmer world



A blue tit with food for its young. If they fail to respond rapidly to earlier springs, their numbers will plummet. Photograph: Lisa Geoghegan/Alamy
A blue tit with food for its young. If they fail to respond rapidly to earlier springs, their numbers will plummet. Photograph: Lisa Geoghegan/Alamy

[Stephen Moss](#)

[@stephenmoss_tv](#)

Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.45 EST

Lockdown has sparked a renewed interest in our garden birds, with millions of us enjoying watching them from our windows. But could some species – including the common and familiar great tit – vanish from Britain's gardens by the end of the century?

Researchers from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, working with the University of Oxford, [have modelled how great tits are reacting to the climate crisis](#). Specifically, are the birds able to respond to the earlier emergence of the caterpillars on which they feed their chicks?

Birds such as great tits have evolved to time their breeding cycle so it coincides with the peak of moth caterpillars that feed on oak leaves, which traditionally happens in late May and June. But as temperatures rise, so oaks are coming into leaf earlier, and the caterpillars have responded by hatching out earlier too.

This means that when the great tit chicks are ready to be fed, the peak of caterpillars is already coming to an end. Because the parent birds need to find 1,000 caterpillars every day for their hungry offspring, any mismatch is likely to dramatically reduce breeding success.



A great tit with lots of hungry mouths to feed. Photograph: Andrew Darrington/Alamy

The researchers found that although the birds can respond to climatic shifts, they are not doing so quickly enough. Lead author Emily Simmonds estimates that the tipping point comes when oak leaves, and their associated caterpillars, appear 24 days earlier than usual.

The discovery that birds can and do respond to climate change by breeding earlier than normal was first made in the 1990s by Dr Humphrey Crick, a scientist working at the British Trust for Ornithology. He was analysing thousands of cards from the BTO's long-running [Nest Record Scheme](#), which had been filled in by amateur birdwatchers over the previous half-century, detailing the dates when eggs are laid and chicks hatch.

Crick noticed a surprising trend: for many species, the date on which they laid their eggs had moved forward by an average of nine days. The resulting landmark paper, "[UK birds are laying eggs earlier](#)", published in the journal *Nature* in 1997, provided some of the earliest empirical evidence that wild creatures were already responding to a warming climate.

A decade later, in 2006, I remember Bill Oddie introducingd *Springwatch* with the astonishing news that every blue tit nest they were monitoring had already fledged young – several weeks earlier than usual. Because blue tits only have one brood, they must respond very rapidly to changes such as earlier springs. If they fail to do so quickly enough, their numbers will plummet.

At the end of [his 1997 paper](#), Humphrey Crick made this prophetic comment: "For birds, earlier nesting could be beneficial if juvenile survival is enhanced by a prolonged period before winter. Conversely, birds may be adversely affected if they become unsynchronised with the phenology of their food supplies."



A longer breeding season benefits birds such as the robin, which produce two or more broods. Photograph: incamerastock/Alamy

Less than a quarter of a century later, both parts of that prediction appear to be coming true. In the short term, a longer breeding season has benefits, especially for birds such as the robin, blackbird and song thrush, which produce two or more broods of young. Starting to nest earlier in the year might allow them to squeeze in an extra brood, and so produce more offspring in total.

Professor James Pearce-Higgins, the BTO's director of science, points out that our smallest birds, such as goldcrests, wrens and long-tailed tits, are benefiting from another aspect of climate change: the much milder winters of recent years.

He also points to the positive impact of our habit of feeding garden birds, which helps species such as blue tits, great tits and goldfinches. At present, he suggests that the advantages of higher winter survival rates outweigh the failure to synchronise with the spring food supply, though that may not always be so.

Another climate-driven success is the way many species are now expanding northwards. The [latest European Breeding Bird Atlas](#) reveals that, on

average, the ranges of Europe's breeding birds have shifted north by 28km (17.5 miles) since the original survey was done in the late 1980s – almost 1km every year.

This may not sound like much, but over time it will allow species once confined to continental Europe to cross the Channel and colonise the UK. Indeed, given that some species respond much faster than others, several (including cattle egrets and great white egrets) have already done so.

[Climate change is radically reshuffling UK bird species, report finds](#)
[Read more](#)

But as our climate becomes less predictable, with more extreme weather events such as storms, droughts and floods, what scientists have called the “honeymoon period” will come to an abrupt end.

As Professor Pearce-Higgins notes, ground-feeding birds may not be able to cope with prolonged summer droughts, which make it harder for them to find food: “One potential exception to this positive picture of warmer temperatures is thrushes and blackbirds, which rely on soil invertebrates. We know, from a study we have run recently asking schoolchildren to count earthworms in school playing fields, that the availability of worms – a major food source for many species – declines significantly in summer, particularly when it is dry.”

So, as we stand on the precipice of a runaway warming world, the future for many of our best-known and best-loved birds remains in the balance.

- *Stephen Moss is a naturalist and author who runs an MA in nature and travel writing at Bath Spa University. His latest book, The Swallow: A Biography, is published by Square Peg (£12.99)*

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The Observer view on information about the rollout of the Covid vaccine

Observer editorial

It is right to celebrate the Oxford/AstraZeneca achievement but the government must tell the public when they will be inoculated



Boris Johnson holding a vial of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
Photograph: Paul Ellis/PA

Boris Johnson holding a vial of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

Photograph: Paul Ellis/PA

Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.30 EST

Tomorrow, Britain will witness an extraordinary moment in its grim struggle to limit the devastation caused by Covid-19 when the [first Briton is injected with a vaccine](#) developed by the University of Oxford and the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. The fact that this inoculation is occurring within a year of the emergence of a disease that has since ravaged the globe is an astonishing achievement, a tribute to world-class British

science and a highly effective pharmaceutical industry. More importantly, the vaccine has arrived just in the nick of time. The newly discovered [variant](#) of Covid-19 is threatening to spread across the country and savage our beleaguered health service. A vaccine offers escape from the mounting horrors of this pandemic.

It is therefore right to celebrate the arrival of the AstraZeneca vaccine, though we should also note the pitfalls that await us. We are led by a government that has bungled so much of the Covid response – from its initial, criminally tardy response to the virus, to the shambolic distribution of PPE kit for health workers, to the pitiful rollout of test-and-trace programmes and to the bewildering U-turns on lockdown measures. We need drive and competence to undertake the speedy administration of the vaccine to millions of UK citizens. These qualities have not been displayed in abundance by the government to date.

On the other hand, early signs suggest the vaccine programme has been handled well. Shrewd choices were made in the selection of vaccines to purchase. The early rollout has been managed well and there is evidence of careful thought in the choice of early recipients. Equally, the decision to postpone the administration of second doses - to maximise numbers receiving first doses - suggests scientists and doctors advising the government are responding to the rapidly changing shape of the virus's spread.

The decision has not been without its critics, and it will certainly have caused some alarm among older and more vulnerable citizens and their carers. They had expected to receive a second dose within days but will now have to wait for weeks. Rearranging thousands of appointments at short notice adds to the administrative burden facing already hard-pressed clinics and surgeries.

Nevertheless, chief medical officers are agreed this is the right move, both ethically and practically. Recipients of the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine still gain strong protection. Indeed, delaying a booster jab may even trigger longer-lasting immunity. This, in turn, allows millions of others to be given protection in the short term against a virus that threatens to spread rapidly

across the UK. Any alternative would mean that people who could have been saved might face death.

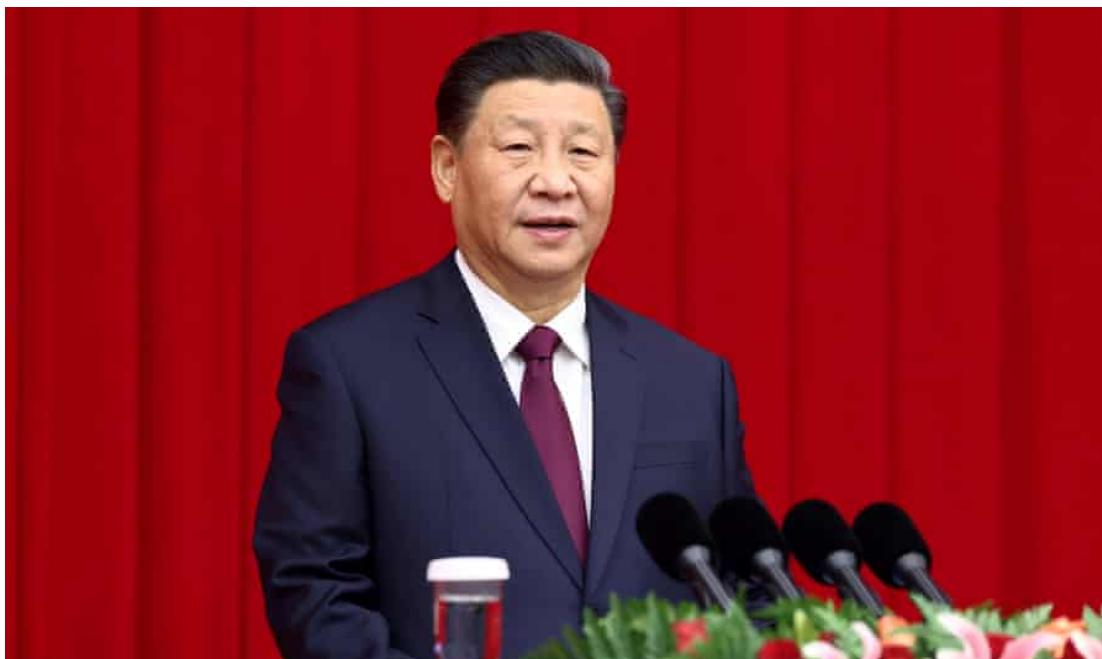
Scientists, doctors and nurses have worked wonders. Now, politicians and administrators must seize the advantage they have been handed and bring an end to the suffering this terrible virus has inflicted on us. And they need to do so in a manner that reassures the public that salvation is at hand.

Here, the signs are less encouraging. [Boris Johnson](#) was asked last week how many vaccine doses are going to be made available over coming weeks but claimed exact answers would be unhelpful. Nothing could be further from the truth. The nation needs to know - specifically – how many doses are going to be administered week by week. Will it be a million? If so, we will have to wait a long time before lockdown ends. Or is it going to be 2m doses a week? In this case, an enjoyable summer would look a more realistic prospect. (Nor is vaccinating two million people a week that difficult. We inoculate against flu every winter on a similar scale.) A lot depends on these figures and Britain now needs to be told if we have the supply chain to match the efforts of our scientists and doctors. In blunt terms, our hopes of ending our misery rest on being given an accurate account of those numbers.

The Observer view on how the west should deal with rising China

[Observer editorial](#)

Xi Jinping's expansionist policies abroad and dictatorship at home make pressing the need for new geopolitical strategy



President Xi Jinping: a 'ruthless consolidation of power'. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

President Xi Jinping: a 'ruthless consolidation of power'. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

How to deal with China is the biggest geopolitical challenge facing Britain and the western democracies in 2021 – and one to which they have, as yet, supplied no coherent answer. China's influence is growing rapidly around the world. It is [predicted to overtake](#) the US as the biggest economy by 2028. Its politicians, diplomats and military chiefs exhibit the bullish

assertiveness of a new imperial superpower. This, they believe, is China's moment.

At the same time, China is increasingly distrusted and disliked. A recent [Pew global attitudes survey](#) found negative views to be at an all-time high in Germany, South Korea and other advanced economies. Nearly three-quarters of Americans and Britons view China unfavourably, up from 35% and 16% respectively in 2002. Trust in China's president, Xi Jinping, "to do the right thing in world affairs" has plummeted.

China's overweening ambition and this concomitant rise in hostility are both relatively new. In Britain's case, it is only five years since David Cameron hailed the dawn of a "golden era". Back then, it seemed China's strength, measured in hi-tech, investment and trade, could be safely harnessed to the UK's advantage. Such collaboration, it was fondly believed, would ultimately hasten China's transition from one-party state to democracy.

The [bursting of this bubble in 2020](#) was swift and painful. The sheer horror of the pandemic inevitably harmed China's reputation. Yet the inimical actions of the Chinese Communist party (CCP) in playing down the initial outbreak in Wuhan, thwarting legitimate WHO investigations, penalising Australia for [demanding an independent inquiry](#) and exploiting the crisis commercially and politically were more damaging still.

Grieving citizens in Wuhan have [been intimidated and threatened](#) by police for questioning official handling of the Covid crisis. Zhang Zhan, a citizen journalist who reported on the early stages of the Wuhan outbreak, was [jailed last week](#) for four years for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". State-controlled media continue to ensure [inconvenient facts](#) are suppressed.

A second phenomenon was central to China's 2020 fall from grace: the CCP's ever more open contempt for democratic freedoms and human rights. Each day seemed to bring fresh evidence of its arrogant insouciance, whether it was unbelievable denials of torture and forced sterilisation in labour camps in [Xinjiang](#), renewed repression in Tibet or the persecution of Hongkongers opposed to oppressive security laws.

Xi's ruthless consolidation of power around himself has thrown an unforgiving spotlight on the state's Orwellian intrusions into the domestic lives of its citizens. One example is the way the ubiquitous messaging app Weixin (WeChat) is [used to monitor](#) private conversations, censor key words or phrases and report suspect users to the police. In Xi's cowardly new world, even the most innocent Winstons are guilty until the party deems otherwise.

Such developments also induced a growing realisation that the behaviour of this nouveau riche superpower is not so very different from that of the empires that preceded it. Put-upon neighbours such as Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines can testify to Beijing's bullying. China almost started a border war with India last year. It still might. Its gunboats routinely flout international law in the [South China Sea](#).

Non-aligned developing countries that traditionally viewed China as a benign ally now have reasons to reconsider. Xi's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, a \$1tn (£760bn) global infrastructure and investment project, is [reportedly caught in a cash crunch](#). American researchers say lending by two Chinese state-controlled banks plunged from \$75bn in 2016 to \$4bn in 2019. Pandemic-hit countries in Africa and elsewhere are scrambling to renegotiate Chinese debt.

In 2020, Donald Trump tried hard to blame China for everything from Covid to factory closures. His scapegoating was cynical and unfair. Likewise, Boris Johnson, bending to US pressure, abruptly [turned against](#) the tech giant Huawei, supposedly on security grounds. Some analysts say there is more than a whiff of calculated cold war "reds under the bed" scaremongering in western behaviour. They have a point.

Yet there is little doubt 2021 will see concerted western pushback. Measures under discussion range from sanctions on individuals to bans on Chinese investment in strategic industries and new laws linking two-way trade to human rights. Joe Biden, who deems China a "strategic competitor", [is proposing an alliance](#) of democracies to counter its global influence. Like Britain, the US plans another policy "tilt" towards the Indo-Pacific.

Much of the western opprobrium heaped on Beijing stems from of its own actions and is thoroughly deserved. A potentially dangerous crisis can be avoided if Xi steps back. It is in his interests to do so. More than other factors, Xi's aggressively nationalist, expansive [policies](#) abroad and Mao-like dictatorship at home have fuelled the deterioration in relations. The “performance legitimacy” calculations that keep the CCP in power suggest he think again.

Xi has overreached. He should drop the big man act and dial things down. But Britain and its partners must be similarly clear headed. The west simply cannot afford a second cold war. It must find ways to work with China, not fight it.

[Opinion](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

Decent, competent, cautious, but Starmer still has to prove he can inspire victory

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



The Labour leader is doing well in the polls, but it's time he laid out a political credo that makes him electable



Keir Starmer visiting Portsmouth last month. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Keir Starmer visiting Portsmouth last month. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

After grief comes a time to heal. After loss comes acceptance. And after even the messiest divorce a willingness to move on eventually comes.

But it's not something that can be rushed, as [Keir Starmer](#) is discovering. However long we have known it was coming, Britain's final break-up with the EU still feels like a bereavement for some. Yet there was no time for mourning in the Labour party. A ticking parliamentary clock forced the opposition to choose between voting for the only form of Brexit deal available or taking the electoral consequences. By asking his party to back the deal, Starmer was, in effect, inviting a grieving widow to move on with the body barely cold.

The revolt in parliament reached beyond the usual suspects, despite some bruising arm-twisting. Outside it, many natural Starmer supporters are dismayed. What happened to the hero of the battle for a second referendum, the man who said that he'd argue for the [return of freedom of movement?](#) Now Labour's position seems to be that there's no use crying over spilt milk.

Starmer would [not, he confirmed, seek to rewrite](#) the deal if he gains office. For some, that was more shocking than the vote itself. Laura Parker, the former Momentum co-ordinator turned Starmer cheerleader, tweeted that she was “beyond words”. But others have plenty. “It’s all tactics, no strategy,” says one senior Labour MP. “Keir and his people are not political and they’re making increasing missteps because they don’t have an analysis about where they ultimately want to get to.”

Yet, as with Labour’s decision to expel Jeremy Corbyn over his response to damning findings on antisemitism, what the party finds painful or perplexing is often a whole lot easier for the electorate. After four interminable years of arguing over Brexit, too many have simply had a bellyful; an [Opinium poll](#) finds even Remainers wanted MPs to vote for the deal by a margin of 50% to 19%, with Labour voters splitting along similar lines. Some will have been motivated by fear of no deal instead, but the Tories’ promise to just “get Brexit done” also resonated with people sick of living with uncertainty or simply beyond caring.

They may soon start to care very much, of course, if their own lives are upended by the unfurling economic consequences. And at best, we face years of haggling over issues left unresolved by this skeletal agreement. Britain can no more simply agree to “move on” from all that than from the pandemic.

But that’s not quite what Starmer meant. [Labour](#) will still have bones to pick, but as his shadow cabinet colleague Rachel Reeves said in closing the debate, the aim is to stop re-litigating the past and start “thinking about tomorrow”; to deal with reality as it is, not brood on what might have been. Her boss seeks to move on less from Europe than from the endless divisions and toxic ghosts of his party’s recent past. But move on to what, exactly?

When Deborah Mattinson, the BritainThinks pollster whose deep dives into Leave-leaning areas are read increasingly closely in the leader’s office, asked her focus groups late last year which animal [Boris Johnson](#) resembles, the answer was a sheep. Voters saw him as hapless, herded first this way and that, always with someone else nipping at his heels. But Starmer was an eagle, circling high in the sky. That beats being a sheep, obviously; eagles are powerful birds. But they’re also seen as remote and calculating, hovering

perpetually out of reach. Who could know what an eagle really thinks? And therein lies his problem.

It's a rookie mistake to confuse political pragmatism, or the willingness to do what is necessary to win, with absence of conviction. As [Tony Blair](#) used to joke, when urged to drop all that stuff he said just to get elected, he'd explain that it was worse than that: he actually believed it. He didn't ditch clause IV or seek to reform education because it polled well, but because those were genuinely his instincts. Sometimes, especially on Europe, he was and is the opposite of pragmatic.

But where Blair did compromise with the electorate, it was usually for a reason: pragmatism with a purpose, securing consent in return for clearly identified progressive gains. He could, at least in the early days, lead the party beyond its comfort zone by convincing them the journey would be worth it. But we don't yet know what it is Starmer burns to change. What drives him, excites him, but also sets him apart from anyone else in contemporary politics?

Nobody expects a full-blown manifesto. But he must now develop at least one idea that defines him for voters, shows his party that uncomfortable compromises lead somewhere worth going and that is recognisably something Boris Johnson wouldn't do. The latter has always struggled to identify what [Brexit](#) is for, exactly; we know he wants to be free, but what he plans to do with that freedom is more of a mystery. Starmer's issue is that it's obvious he wants to win, but not what that might be a victory for.

Starmer must now develop at least one idea that defines him for voters

Was voting for Brexit really a winning move? His willingness to swallow what the SNP MP Kirsty Blackman called "this steaming mug of excrement" will hurt Labour in Scotland, but help in the Leave-voting northern towns it's desperate to regain from the Tories. Focus group work in these "red wall" seats concluded that, to win them back, Labour had to show it recognised Leave had won. Even abstaining would have looked too eagle-like – always circling, never actually landing. Starmer's choice looks very much like that of someone expecting to be judged chiefly in this May's bumper local elections on progress in red wall areas.

He may well find it harder now to criticise any future fallout from Brexit, with the Tories bound to crow that it's what he voted for. Some Labour rebels even see echoes of the war on Iraq, where the Liberal Democrats ultimately benefited from a brave but initially unpopular decision to oppose it from the start. If one day the country does decide this was a terrible mistake, Labour can hardly claim to have said so all along.

The blunt truth, however, is that day may not come. The hideous economic fallout from Covid will make it harder to identify any distinct impact from Brexit. And Leave voters have a powerful incentive not to look too hard, given this is something they chose for themselves, against the advice of almost the entire political establishment at the time. Perhaps the most pragmatic argument for accepting defeat over Brexit, though, is the one Starmer tactfully didn't advance – that the war was actually lost a year ago when Jeremy Corbyn led the party to a thumping defeat, giving Johnson a fat majority for whatever deal he wanted. When the deal finally landed, Corbyn himself abstained.

It's easy to forget how far Labour has come in a year. Starmer has built a reputation for decency and competence and his personal approval ratings now trump Johnson's [even among red wall voters](#). His cautious approach to the pandemic has built bridges with older voters too, who tend to be pro-lockdown; having lagged 23 points behind the Tories when Starmer took over in April, Labour is now consistently level-pegging. Yet that no longer feels quite enough, with some MPs concerned that Johnson may finally be starting to get his act together after a disastrous year.

No deal has been avoided and Downing Street is calmer since Dominic Cummings departed. Covid is raging out of control again, but vaccines still offer hope on the horizon. And there are ominous signs of an emerging political strategy to strangle any Labour recovery at birth.

A redrawing of constituency boundaries, making a Tory general election victory easier, is back on the agenda. Rishi Sunak is raining money on red wall seats in a suspiciously targeted fashion and while Labour will say it's too little too late, a Conservative party willing to spend is a new and disconcerting enemy. Some MPs have begun to fear that their new leader is a nice guy but no match for an opponent very willing to play dirty and running

out of time to define himself. Keir Starmer ends the year less on a high than on a plateau. We'll soon know if his ultimate flight path is upwards or plummeting back to Earth.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

NotebookNew year

I've taken up outdoor swimming. I just thought you should know

Fiona Maddocks



OK, I only started last month and I don't know how long I'll manage it, but for now it's making me glow



Early-morning swimmers at Rotherslade Bay, near Swansea, last month.
Photograph: Phil Rees/Shutterstock

Early-morning swimmers at Rotherslade Bay, near Swansea, last month.
Photograph: Phil Rees/Shutterstock

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

We all eat our words. “No way” sneakily turns into “OK, maybe”, then “yes”. You vow never, ever, to wear Crocs, then you see your smart friend in a yellow pair and British *Vogue* has named them the It-shoe of the winter season (true) and suddenly you’re weakening. My volte face is more extreme. I’ve joined the thousands who’ve taken up outdoor swimming during lockdown. I don’t much like swimming. I’m not good at it. I dislike casting cloths and favour a hot-water bottle all year.

“You’ll need a bobble hat,” advised my aquatic mentor, suggesting a garment I haven’t owned since primary school. I am initiated into the secrets of neoprene, a fabric as alien as Chantilly lace. I arrive at the appointed hour (entry is strictly timed) looking like Nanook of the North. A hardy regular congratulates me on starting this habit mid-December in a pandemic. I glow. But then I am still fully clothed and have not yet set foot in the water (5.6C).

I’m too realistic to make it a new year resolution but I’ll carry on for now. Why do it? It makes me feel less of a physical coward, even somewhat

brave. Or it did, briefly. Then my cool friend with the yellow Crocs sent me a tweet – turns out there's quite a flashback on social media – from Stig Abell. “Here's a fact I discovered recently. Since records began, nobody who has gone wild or outdoor swimming has kept it a secret.” Why would you, Stig? Answer me that.

Bum note

In longed-for ordinary times, the low days of early January are quiet for musicians. New Year's Day concerts apart, it's the one time that classical music stops. Even touring is on pause: that nomadic sequence of “hugs of greetings, hugs of farewell”, as the star pianist Stephen Hough has described it.

Touring is how musicians of every stripe, not just classical, make their careers. It's part of the free cultural exchange that feeds back into the UK economy: £5.8bn last year, contributing more than four times the value to the economy than fishing (£1.4bn).

After this terrible year, when many have abandoned the profession, a fresh blow has been dealt. The post-Brexit deal makes no visa-free travel provisions for working musicians. The consequences are unimaginable. Each EU country has different entry requirements. The list of specifications is enough to make your head spin. If you go to Norway, you must notify the police. If you transport an old instrument with the tiniest ivory insert, you may need the same certificate as for a live animal. A few politicians have taken up the cause, among them Tracy Brabin, Labour MP for Batley and Spen, and, in the Lords, the composer Michael Berkeley. A petition [calling for a visa-free work permit](#) has already got 213,500 signatures. Please sign it. It's a no-brainer.

Hats off

Most of the New Year honours headlines, understandably, have been about those frontline workers who saved lives and put their own at risk in 2020. Yet it's good to see top musicians getting recognition, among them three pioneers: the conductor Jane Glover becomes a dame, a knighthood goes to

opera director Graham Vick and a CBE to Wasfi Kani, opera-entrepreneur extraordinaire. Vick's adventurous work with Birmingham Opera Company – [truly opera for all](#) – has given me my only experience, being a bashful music critic, of climbing into a black plastic bag (in Beethoven's *Fidelio*). Kani, with her Pimlico Opera prison project, has shown me a glimpse of life behind bars. It's no insult to Glover to say my musical encounters with her have involved sitting quietly on a chair in a concert hall and listening. I'd give anything for that right now.

- Fiona Maddocks is the Observer's classical music critic

Observer comment cartoon
Brexit

Welcome to the Brexit golden age – cartoon

The secret diary of Carrie Symonds Boris Johnson

Dom gone, tick. Animals saved, tick. Bozzie divorced, tick. Truly I am blessed

Catherine Bennett



In which our heroine looks back on a plague year in which almost all her wishes came true...



Carrie Symonds and Boris Johnson at the Six Nations international rugby match between England and Wales in March 2020. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP via Getty Images

Carrie Symonds and Boris Johnson at the Six Nations international rugby match between England and Wales in March 2020. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP via Getty Images

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

What a year! Looking over my 2020 resolutions, Wilfie by my side and Bozzie tucked up (probably) in his sleeping bag downstairs, I know if I'd been told last January that [beavers](#) would soon be spotted splashing in our lowland rock pools I'd have laughed in disbelief! And as for Dom and Stanley! I always tell people that even in difficult times miracles can happen – if they could read my diary they might even believe it!

January

Blissful in our winter hideaway – gorgeous Mustique! David Ross goes straight to the top of my peerage list! But will no one think of the planet? Shocked so many travellers fly here first class, but we tried to set an ethical example in economy. While Bozzie is out visiting the poor – Westminster or the Caribbean, it always takes him ages – I write my new year's resolutions.

1. 1 Get Dom done.
2. 2 Get marriage done.
3. 3 Save some animals (nb not grouse).
4. 4 Also Stanley done.
5. 5 Job for Nimco.
6. 6 Fix Bozzie surveillance – but how?

So proud watching my Bozzie sign the historic withdrawal agreement! Me: “Are you sure about that nasty old tie?” B: “Oh don’t be such a girl, Carrie; Dom, Caino, Roxstar and Sputnik know what they’re doing.” We’ll see.

February

Tada! Finally, the divorce is happening! Feel incredibly blessed. Plan a very special announcement the minute poor Bozzie is allowed out of his endless Cobra meetings! Stanley: “Word to the wise, dear girl, I moved in what you might call a ‘fast’ set but we generally left sprogging news until a good 10 days after the decree nisi; tends to upset Number One Wife, or Two, obviously, in the case of my son the prime minister.” Oh good.

Bozzie: “I say, what’s this I’ve read about us being engaged? I don’t remember...” Me: “You want to be the one to tell everyone we’re not?” Dom: “She’s right mate, you’re screwed.”

Bozzie dumped Saj for Rishi! Try to save Saj but it’s useless. Dom: “Have you considered this could be God’s way of telling you to stick to quadrupeds?”

March

The *Times* made up such total BS about Dilyn, what made it worse was no one CARED, even after I ran into Mission Control, crying. Me: “If I’ve called once, I’ve called 20 times! Don’t you see how this makes us – me! –

look! Have you forgotten I'm a leading environmentalist?" Dom: "To be honest, yes. Mind knocking next time?" Bozzie: "Now be reasonable, Marina— I mean, Petro—, that is, Helen, Jennifer— got it, Carrie, that plague thingy is heading this way and—" Me (grabbing an empty bottle): "Liar, you said it's all a pathetic panic, why [taking aim] must you always lie?"

Result? There really is a plague but Bozzie heroically saved my secret lockdown-eve baby shower. Super!

April

Bozzie hasn't just gone down with the completely harmless bug that only girly swots get, he's given it to me, goodness knows how because he swore on Dilyn's life that he had not even shaken hands with anyone.

But B is alive and we have a baby boy and B says he will wrestle the virus to the ground but until then Stanley can't visit! My heart is full.

May

At least lockdown means I always know where B is. Almost always. Me: "Stanley, where does he go when he's following the science?" Stanley: "Omertà, Carrie, you'll find that's Latin for—" Me: "Just tell him to get his arse back here in time to clap for carers."

Amazing news! Now everyone knows Dom drove to Durham, needlessly putting its entire puffin population at risk! Feeling beyond blessed.

June

Bozzie (again): "I'm fit as a butcher's dog." Me: "You know nobody says that any more?" Bozzie: "Well, Caino does." Me: "Do you ever even wonder why your ratings are so crap?"

July

Bozzie [made his brother a lord](#). B (indignantly): “Jo, me, a peerage, what are you talking about?” Me (wearily): “Drop it. It’s on the news. You realise they’ll all want one now?” B: “Why not, didn’t you give Goldsmith an upgrade?” Me: “Just don’t use them all up before Wilfred’s got one.”

August

Survived our camping “holiday” in Scotland. Caino’s idea, apparently. At least we weren’t camping.

September

Seize an opportunity to monitor Italian sustainability developments from [the terrace of the Hotel Splendido](#), Como. Where I persuade [Nimco](#) to join the team! Only £350 a day and part-time – but girl power has to start somewhere.

October

Hurt. It’s so much worse than I thought. “[Princess Nut Nut](#)”? B picks up on my 32nd attempt. “Sorry, Porton Down, no signal – what? Utter piffle. You’ve seen it? Right I am reliably informed that if this ‘Princess’ thing was said, which it wasn’t, it is indicative only of the team’s deep esteem, Carrie, with the ‘nut’ aspect playfully referencing your amazing work saving slave monkeys– Carrie? Right, are you sure [Allegra](#) would work, being of the slightly older female persuasion– oh, you’ve already asked her.”

Stanley rings: “It’s the most fearful bilge, [that Bower book](#), dear girl, the man’s simply jealous, understandably, with one of my sons being the prime minister and another being Lord Johnson of Marylebone, and many more Johnson baronies, I happen to know, in the proverbial pipeline.” Me: “So you’ll be suing him for libel, Stanley?” Silence. Feeling incredibly incredibly blessed.

November

Hooray! [Caino's out, Dom's history](#), finally the party's in the hands of a real PR professional, me! What we need, I tell Bozzie – and Allegra – is more pictures of him, many more, running, walking, waving, looking at me, so the public can see my fiance through the eyes of an amazing photographer who has strict instructions never to let Bozzie out of his sight. “What, never?” B asks. “Never,” I say, “unless you’re with Allegra, right Allegra?”

December

My work for animals has won [the Peta award!](#)

Leaving just one resolution unfinished. Who wants a wedding in a pandemic? Nimco’s right, though – I’m almost 33, lockdown can’t last forever. “Allegra,” I shout. “Bring me Boris.”

- Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

[Opinion](#)[Gavin Williamson](#)

Meet the new breed of cabinet minister – too rubbish to fail

[Sonia Sodha](#)



Gavin Williamson has spent the pandemic being guided by populist politics rather than children's education



Gavin Williamson leaving Downing Street after a weekly cabinet meeting.

Photograph: Tolga Akmen/Getty

Gavin Williamson leaving Downing Street after a weekly cabinet meeting.

Photograph: Tolga Akmen/Getty

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.30 EST

You couldn't make it up. Less than three weeks ago, the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, was [threatening to take legal action](#) against schools in Islington and Greenwich, in London, if they closed a few days early for Christmas in light of alarming increases in Covid infection rates. On Wednesday night, primary schools in these boroughs were told that they would need to reopen as usual on Monday, unlike those in most other London boroughs, despite their high infection rates and a hospital in Greenwich declaring [a major incident](#) just a couple of days before that. Then, on Friday evening, Williamson led the government in its first U-turn of the year to announce that these schools would be closing from Monday after all, giving parents and teachers precisely zero opportunity to make arrangements.

It is just the latest example of Williamson's breathtaking incompetence. At every turn in this pandemic, he has made missteps that will affect children for the rest of their lives. A half-decent education secretary would have worked with teaching unions to set in train a staged reopening of schools last

May when infection rates were falling, as [senior paediatricians were calling for](#) at the time. They would have put on a programme of structured outdoor activities over the summer holidays for children who had missed months of school. They would have properly invested in equipping schools and homes for distance learning in the event of the second wave everyone was expecting. They would have introduced a school-wide test, track and trace scheme run by public health experts, rather than expecting headteachers to organise and [oversee volunteer-led mass testing](#) with virtually no notice. They would have stumped up for a tuition fee rebate for undergraduates and asked universities to move to distance learning rather than encouraging students to spread the virus across the country, which has resulted in many young people forking out for a university experience that has involved long spells of self-isolating in boxrooms. None of this is rocket science. It just takes a little imagination, a modicum of competence and a tiny bit of passion for wellbeing.

Brexit has ushered in culture wars in place of what is in the national interest

But this is an education secretary who appears to have no interest in his brief and little care for the nation's children. This former chief whip, who boasts about keeping pet tarantulas in his office and poses for photos with [a whip on his desk](#), is the ultimate caricature-as-cabinet-minister. We desperately needed the government to collaborate with schools to protect children's education as much as possible in this pandemic. But last May, Williamson preferred [picking a fight](#) with the teaching unions via the tabloids rather than working behind the scenes to get schools reopened as quickly as possible. Pubs and bars reopened as schools stayed shut. Last week, Williamson's allies were briefing madly about the "[enormous battle](#)" he was facing with cabinet "lockdowners" to ensure schools stayed open. Last week's hotchpotch of an announcement was the result of this false positing of this decision as a fight between education and health. Outside cabinet, he has succeeded in driving the supremely pragmatic headteachers' union into launching a legal action against the government for requiring most primary schools to open this week.

This is a mad approach. The idea that critical decisions about school opening should be determined by cabinet compromise hashed out between the

“hawks” and “doves” is ludicrous. [Schools](#) should be the last thing to close. We are probably at that point now, but with vaccine rollout already under way, this could have perhaps been avoided had the government not chosen to ease social restrictions in December or implemented a circuit-breaker lockdown earlier than November. Government communications have been a total mess: the message in the run-up to Christmas should have been to stay home not just to protect the NHS but also to keep schools open.

This is much more than a tale of one man’s incompetence. It is part of a bigger story of a populist takeover of a governing party just before the biggest crisis this country has faced since the Second World War. The consequences of Brexit go way, way beyond our relationship with the European Union. The crisis it unleashed in the Conservative party has purged it of nuance and governing competence, leaving a cabinet stuffed with insipid loyalists and has ushered in a style of politics that favours culture wars over what is in the national interest. Williamson is not the exception, but the norm: prime ministerial wannabes see the route to No 10 as a *House of Cards*-style role play. Politics is a game, not about getting stuff done.

What makes it worse is that we have a male-dominated cabinet so insulated from the real world by wealth and privilege that they perceive the stakes as vastly reduced. Do they have any idea of the impact that closing schools at the drop of the hat has on working parents, mostly mums? Perhaps they would not be so resolute about slashing universal credit by more than £1,000 a year from April if they bothered to find out what life as a parent working in a low-paid job is really like.

The reality is that Covid has driven the stakes higher than ever. Yet Williamson is living proof that the normal political rules have been turned on their head. He is a new species of cabinet minister: too rubbish to fail. Despite having lost the confidence of teachers and parents alike, he is being kept in post as the fall guy who will take the rap for all the government’s dreadful education decisions when this is all over. It is a whole generation of children that will pay the price.

- Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

Letters: we're out of the EU but we'll be back

Leaving the European Union is not an irreversible decision



Boris Johnson signs the Brexit trade deal. Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

Boris Johnson signs the Brexit trade deal. Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

I found Will Hutton's suggestion that in 2029 there could be a referendum on EU membership most encouraging ("[I was one of the millions opposed to Brexit. I've seen nothing here to change my mind](#)", Comment). I am 76 and perhaps I will live long enough to vote Remain again, hopefully resulting in the UK rejoining the EU. I could then die knowing the UK had seen sense and that my grandchild would enjoy all the benefits of being part of the EU.

Virginia Brown

Talgarth, Powys

The *Observer* provided valuable analysis on the Brexit deal. The deal is essentially one of damage limitation, with the negatives overwhelmingly outweighing the positives. Particularly disheartening were Fintan O'Toole's analogies with death – "funereal mode" and "moment of finality" ("[So long, we'll miss you – we Europeans see how much you've helped to shape us](#)", Comment). However, whereas death is final, leaving the EU is clearly not irreversible, as upliftingly made clear by Will Hutton.

When the reality of [Brexit](#) has an adverse impact on the personal circumstances of the electorate, sentiment will undoubtedly change. One thing is inevitable: the 2016 referendum on EU membership will not be the last.

David Newens

Milton Keynes

Tim Adams's thought-provoking "adieu" to the EU ("[We're out of the European Union. Just how did we get here?](#)", Focus) is a timely warning that previous breaks with Europe, notably the 1533 schism from Rome, have, far from opening minds to a more cosmopolitan outlook, resulted in creating centuries of fear, nativist intolerance and even the persecution of those on the losing side.

As the Erasmus programme, which encourages inter-European learning, is closed to British students, can we now expect other iconoclastic pogroms to eradicate all signs and memories of EU influence in this country, whether it be regional assistance grants, funding of the arts or initiatives such as European capital of culture or disabled access city awards? Does a similar fate to Tudor recusants now await the 48% Remainders if they dare to express nostalgic thoughts about ending our 47 years of EC/EU membership?

Paul Dolan

Northwich, Cheshire

Shame the guilty in Goa

Thank you for drawing attention to the environmental destruction facing Goa's forests ("[Fury as Goa's rare wildlife park faces invasion by rail and road](#)", World). It is all too easy for us in the west to wring our hands and

then look away. Instead, we should find out which western financial institutions are backing the coal and infrastructure projects involved. Investment banks, pension funds, insurers and reinsurers are increasingly sensitive about being involved in unsustainable businesses. Lobby groups such as Greenpeace and Unfriend Coal do a good job in highlighting the guilty parties and help people like us to take our business elsewhere.

Garry Booth

Halesworth, Suffolk
Sutton, London

Not all can afford TV licence

In his letter, David Flower says that it is beyond him why anyone would want to risk all that the BBC gives us “to save the cost of one cup of coffee per week” (“The BBC is worth every penny”, [Letters](#)). This reminded me of something that I once read in a *Daily Mirror* column by Keith Waterhouse back in the 1980s. Waterhouse said that you could always tell when you were being conned whenever anyone reduced the cost of something to so many cigarettes per day.

I am glad that Mr Flower can easily afford his TV licence. Millions of the poorest people in the UK cannot. Ask the Trussell Trust whether it thinks the one in every 50 families in the UK that it says is now accessing food banks, or the 800,000 people and rising who have been made redundant this year, can afford to spend £157.50 a year on a TV licence that they might otherwise spend on heating, food or electricity?

Dr Kenneth Smith

London E2

Teachers raise aspirations

In her article (“[With a deal done, can No 10 turn ‘levelling up’ into more than a nebulous phrase?](#)”, Comment), Isabel Hardman writes: “Young people growing up in struggling towns are still told by their teachers or parents that people from their area don’t go to top universities or into certain well-paid jobs. One north-west MP explains, ‘We need to attract better

teachers from elsewhere because when you just take from the pool of people in the local areas, it's no surprise that the aspiration level is the same.””

I am a teacher and I don't recognise the teachers who are being talked about. I have taught for 25 years and have never had a conversation with any student where I have tried to lower their aspirations and discourage them from applying to top universities or kept secret the fact that there are “certain well-paid jobs” that they might apply for. Why on earth would anyone do that, let alone a teacher?

I work in the north-west (though I am originally from “elsewhere”, which might, according to this, make me one of the “better” teachers). I would love to invite the north-west MP to spend a day with us and see the work we do daily to raise aspirations. Perhaps they could volunteer to take part in the government's mass testing scheme, due to be rolled out in schools soon, while they are there.

Suzanne Davies
Chorltonville, Manchester

Impostors all?

Full marks to Jacinda Ardern for her openness about impostor syndrome (“[Some pretty smart women claim to be racked by impostor syndrome. Do men just not get it?](#)”, Comment). However, I feel Catherine Bennett has made an issue of sexism out of something that has very little, if anything, to do with gender. In doing so, she does a disservice both to male sufferers and to female leaders, not all of whom are afflicted. To use David Cameron, Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg as a typical representation of male power is absurd, given that all three were Eton-educated Tories. Would she also suggest that Gandhi was arrogant and brimming with egotism or that Margaret Thatcher was full of self-doubt?

Steve Clarke
Northampton

Don't judge a book...

It was wonderful to read of the support for independent bookshops in Barcelona, and that readers value bookshop owners' suggestions for what they might enjoy next, rather than being given advice by an algorithm ("In a year of forced solitude, Catalans rediscover the companionship of books", World).

In either case it's essential that the expert understands what a given book is about. I remember finding an early edition of *The Elephant Man* (the reminiscences of Sir Frederick Treves, the Victorian surgeon who helped the deformed Joseph Merrick) in the foreign travel section of a secondhand bookshop in Hay-on-Wye, among volumes on the delights of India and Nepal. There must be many similarly amusing mistaken identities waiting to raise a smile on bookshop shelves or in the "minds" of algorithms. *Fifty Shades of Grey* for the home improver?

Tina Rowe

Ilchester, Somerset

For the record
UK news

For the record

This week's corrections
Sun 3 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

An article about the death of double agent George Blake referred to the 1991 trial at the Old Bailey of Michael Randle, who was charged with helping Blake in his escape from prison. However, the piece incorrectly said that Randle's wife, Anne, faced trial alongside him; in fact, Randle was tried with his friend Pat Pottle. Both men were acquitted. We apologise for the error ("A traitor to Britain, a hero to Russia? Soviet spy George Blake dies in exile", 27 December, page 14). The same piece said that Blake betrayed dozens of agents who were subsequently "captured, tortured and murdered"; we should have been clearer that he may have exposed the names of a far greater number – Blake himself said it was hundreds – and the precise fate of the dozens feared arrested or killed has not been substantiated.

Other recently amended articles include:

[The chateau's shut: will a yurt do? Staycations keep millions at home](#)

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736*

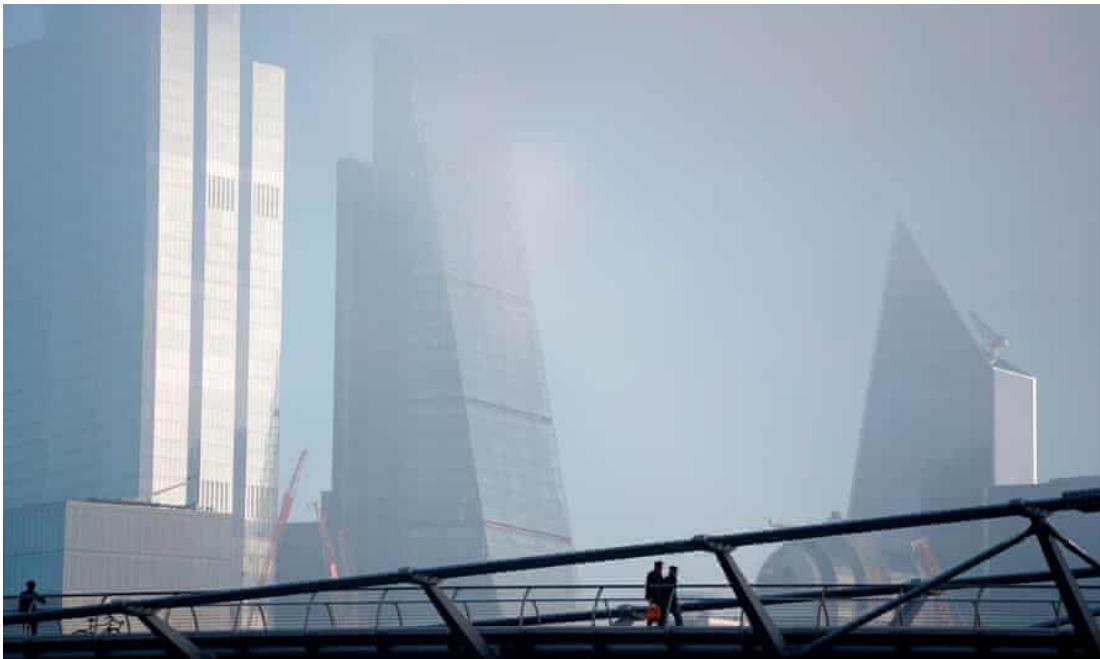
[Opinion](#)[Walking](#)

Like Dickens, we're learning the value of plodding through our frigid streets

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Rediscovering long walks has been one of the delights of lockdown, as a new TV series will show



‘Out on the city streets, I often think of Dickens, that great, compulsive walker.’ Photograph: Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

‘Out on the city streets, I often think of Dickens, that great, compulsive walker.’ Photograph: Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 2 Jan 2021 14.00 EST

The walk from Ravenscar in North Yorkshire to Robin Hood’s Bay, further up the coast, isn’t hard going. High on the cliffs, the way ahead is marked by a cinder path that follows the course of the old railway line from Scarborough to Whitby; once you’ve dropped down to the beach, you need only stroll along the sand for your target (the pub!) almost to be in sight. Yes, it can be blowy. You look at the scant, gnarled trees and wonder at how the wind, like some malevolent sculptor, has turned them all into hunchbacks. But the beauty of it is that this stretch can be done with ease between lunch and tea even in midwinter, when the Yorkshire days come with their own particular concision.

To pinch from [Robert Macfarlane](#), paths run through people as surely as they do through places. A familiar walk is etched on the heart, a ragged line one can retrace in good times and bad, in both reality and the imagination, and thanks to this, I felt a little proprietorial as I sat down to watch a [new series](#) in which the poet laureate, Simon Armitage, follows precisely the route I’ve described. This part of Yorkshire is especially beloved to me and never more

so than at this time of year, its vast, grey-pink skies bringing to mind mascara on a tear-stained cheek. Yet, for now, I cannot travel there. Why, I thought enviously, should he be allowed to have his taciturn-lyrical way with it, roaming its Jurassic outcrops with such abandon, when I must remain in captivity in London?

On paper, *Winter Walks*, which begins on BBC4 tomorrow and continues all week, sounds irredeemably boring: five minor celebrities go a-wandering, accompanied only by a 360-degree camera, a bit of kit to which, should they have the inclination, they may confide their innermost thoughts. Filmed shortly before the introduction of social distancing, you feel, nevertheless, that such a straightforward and relatively inexpensive proposition could only have made it to the screen in a pandemic. But boy, does it work on you. Here is a spell. The gorse. The moss. The rasp of Armitage's lungs as he climbs a hill. In its simplicity, there is a kind of abundance. In its gentleness, there is a certain intimacy. If it is lacking in excitement – plod, plod – this is half of the point. [Walking](#), as Armitage suggests, involves travelling in several dimensions simultaneously. Beneath your feet is scar tissue: those remnants of the past, whether human or geological, which bring with them a sense of perspective, a vista that even as it chastens imbues everything with a feeling of hope and renewal.

What have we learned from the pandemic? How has it changed us? People talk of the end of the office and the high street; about kindness and community. They worry, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly, that things will just snap back into shape; that we'll forget too quickly what this sad time has been like. Mostly, this is all guff. We can't know, now, what we'll carry with us into the future. But I do find it strange that no one ever mentions walking and the place it has taken unexpectedly in our lives – a new centrality to which *Winter Walks* speaks directly. This series, in all its austerity, doesn't only celebrate walking. It encapsulates a striking paradox of the pandemic, which is that while we are all too often glued to our screens in lockdown, it's also the case that we've never been more ambulatory: inclined to wander, to tramp, to stride out. Our daily constitutional is, perhaps, one of the few real things we have in common now – and it may, as a result, be one of the few things to which we'll cling when better times return.

There are Boz-like figures everywhere in London now, doggedly trekking the pavements

It's not only that we know walking does us good in all the obvious ways (the air, the exercise, the greenery). Many of us are experiencing what was hitherto only theoretical: the connection between the rhythm of our footsteps and what I suppose I'm going to have to call our creativity, to my mind a word that can, and should, be extended to almost any aspect of daily life, from thinking, to cooking supper, to sorting your knicker drawer. Out on the city streets, I often think of Dickens, that great, compulsive walker: there are Boz-like figures everywhere in London now, doggedly trekking the pavements. Some stare at their feet, their minds far away, their regular circuit so familiar they could navigate it in their sleep. Others look up, seeing old things with new eyes, raising their phones prayerfully, as if to offer benediction to this peeling facade, that tinned-up pub.

But there's something else. For months, we've only been allowed to meet others outside. In the summer, this was easy: one night I sat with a pal on some grass drinking margaritas she had brought in a flask and I felt both grateful and (even better) younger than my years. But then the winter came, it got colder and we had no option but to walk. In films, people often have difficult conversations in cars, their eyes on the road. What I have found in the pandemic is that it's much easier to talk – honestly, openly – while walking than it is over a drink or a pizza, especially in these times, when the things that need saying are sometimes embarrassing. The other day, I walked with a friend I hadn't seen for a long while and yet we spoke so easily of what was making us sad. Our route was not beautiful. The BBC wouldn't have wanted to film it. But it was our confessional and when I returned to my desk, I felt stronger, more purposeful. Happier, I think.

- Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

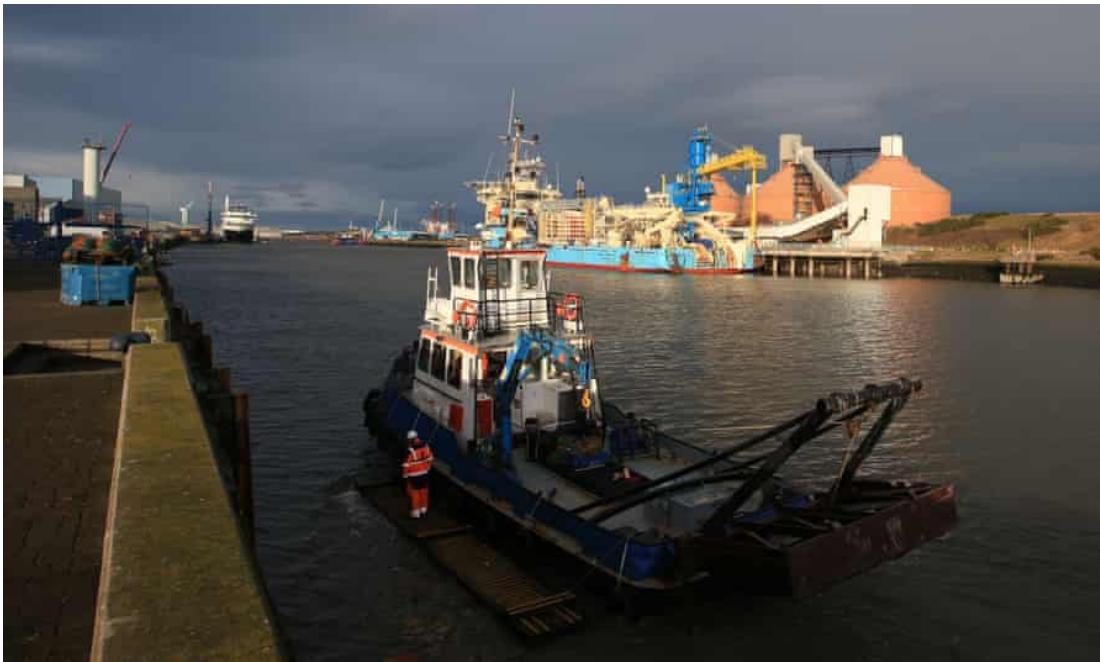
[Opinion](#)[Politics](#)

It's too easy to lapse into stereotypes when we talk about 'red wall' seats

[Kenan Malik](#)



Politics is about listening to people's needs, not resorting to jargon and cliche



Blyth in north-east England on 13 December 2019, the day after the former mining town voted in a Conservative MP for the first time in its history.
Photograph: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP via Getty Images

Blyth in north-east England on 13 December 2019, the day after the former mining town voted in a Conservative MP for the first time in its history.
Photograph: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP via Getty Images

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.30 EST

What will the “red wall” think? As Boris Johnson pivots from Covid-19 and Brexit towards his “levelling up” agenda, that is likely to be a key question in 2021.

Already, on issues from Brexit to Black Lives Matter, from inequality to immigration, both [Labour](#) and the Tories make pronouncements with half an eye on the response in red wall constituencies. This focus, though, is both to misunderstand the red wall and to misjudge the working class.

The red wall comprises a diverse set of constituencies, in which communities range from the highly affluent to the severely deprived. Many are traditional marginals in which, as historian and psephologist Lewis Baston [observed after the 2019 election](#), “the anomaly... was less the Conservative win this time and, rather, more the failure to switch to the

Tories in 2010 and 2015 as they had done on most previous occasions when there had been a change of government.”

The term red wall was coined by analyst [James Kanagasooriam](#) to describe a set of constituencies that demographically, in his view, should have been Conservative, but which had consistently voted Labour, largely for historical and cultural reasons. Such constituencies are almost the opposite of what most people take the red wall to be: not traditional Labour seats that suddenly became blue in 2019 but marginal seats that surprisingly had [not swung to the Tories before](#).

Then there are those constituencies more like traditional Labour strongholds, especially communities once defined by coal or steel, such as Workington or Mansfield. Here, certainly, the problems that Labour faces have been laid bare as many voters abandoned the party for Boris Johnson’s Tories. “I look back and realise they’ve done nothing for us,” a former miner and Labour councillor from Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire told the *Guardian*’s Alison Benjamin recently. “For too many politicians, it’s the career that’s important to them, not the people they represent. We seem to be forgotten.”

In much of the discussion, the red wall is deployed less as a demographic description than as a cypher for a certain set of values that working-class people supposedly hold, a social conservatism about issues such as immigration, crime, welfare and patriotism. The reality is, [as I have suggested before](#), more complex, with the conservatism [being overplayed](#) and differences within the working class underestimated.

The red wall phenomenon has made many on the left wary of appearing too socially liberal

However, the red wall phenomenon has made many on the left wary of appearing too socially liberal. The economist Simon Wren-Lewis recently argued that “while Labour should argue for social liberalism while in government, to do so in opposition would seem to be a recipe for worthy failure”. To avoid Tory traps, it has no choice but [“to appease the red wall voter”](#).

It's a powerful argument and one accepted by many on the left. Yet it's precisely the "say one thing in opposition, do something else in power" approach that has made so many people ever-more cynical about politics. Moreover, accepting the right's framing of what is politically possible is to entrench conservative arguments on issues such as immigration, making it even more difficult to challenge the myths, therefore consolidating a particular narrative. That, too, is a trap to avoid.

Working-class disillusionment with Labour will not be undone by espousing a pretend social conservatism in the hope of winning power. Hostility to social liberalism among sections of working-class voters is, as author Lynsey Hanley [observes](#), the product of decades of neglect. It is a product, also, of a social conversation that too often pits the needs of the working class against those of minorities and of a left that too often dismisses working-class concerns as an expression of racism or xenophobia.

There is nothing inherently "conservative" in talking about families or communities, only in the way one talks about these issues. The problem lies in imagining that to rebuild social bonds one has to be illiberal about immigration or benefits or gay rights, or that to espouse liberal policies on these issues one has to ignore working-class grievances and needs. It is a belief rooted in the unstitching of the relationship between the social and the liberal that once defined the left.

It's another trap to avoid: a debate that transforms a discussion about material change into one about social values whose terms are defined by conservatives. Politics is about listening to people's needs and desires and shaping policies so as to build the largest coalition of support. It is also about standing on a set of principles and trying to win people over. We should not abandon the latter in order to achieve the former. Otherwise we may end up with neither principles nor power.

- Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

[Opinion](#)[Argentina](#)

Is the world waking up to collective action's possibilities?

[Kenan Malik](#)



From Argentina to India, activists are celebrating hard-won victories over harsh regimes



Farmers protest against new legislation in Delhi, December 2020.

Photograph: Anindito Mukherjee/Getty Images

Farmers protest against new legislation in Delhi, December 2020.

Photograph: Anindito Mukherjee/Getty Images

Sun 3 Jan 2021 03.15 EST

In Argentina, huge crowds take to the streets to celebrate the legalisation of [abortion](#). In India, hundreds of thousands of farmers protest against [new legislation](#), while millions take action in support. 2020 might have been a terrible, virus-ravaged year, but it ended with glimmers of new possibilities.

Argentina has become only the third South American nation, after Uruguay and Guyana, to permit elective abortion, a victory founded on decades of activism by women. In 2005, a number of groups came together to create the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion. A decade later came [mass mobilisation against violence against women](#), a campaign that expanded to demand abortion rights, too. In 2018, parliament's lower house approved an abortion bill but church opposition persuaded the Senate to block it. It took two more years of pressure to change the Senate's mind.

Meanwhile, what has been called “the largest-ever mobilisation of the peasantry in [independent India](#)” is challenging three new laws that seek to deregulate the agricultural market, remove price guarantees and invite large

corporations to muscle in. Last November, up to 300,000 farmers and rural workers came to New Delhi, blocking roads and setting up makeshift camps. India's BJP government assumed the protest would soon fracture and dissolve. But the farmers are still there, having resisted police brutality, tear gas and water cannons. It's the government whose resolve is beginning to fracture.

In a year that saw the consolidation of authoritarianism across the globe, events from [Argentina](#) to India revealed the potency of collective action. Signs of hope for 2021.

- Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

2021.01.03 - Business

- Ebullient analysts predict markets will weather the storm in 2021
- Dogger Bank's giant turbines herald a wind of change in UK industry
- 'Energy needed a digital revolution – and we are it'
- If Sunak can lobby for banks post-Brexit, he must do it for other services too
- Covid-19 changed many things. It should change housing policy too

Ebullient analysts predict markets will weather the storm in 2021

Some forecasters, buoyed by the success of big tech and vaccines, are predicting 10-15% gains



The FTSE 100 fell by about 15% over the course of 2020, but some market watchers predict it will be back over 7,000 by December. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

The FTSE 100 fell by about 15% over the course of 2020, but some market watchers predict it will be back over 7,000 by December. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters



Jasper Jolly

@jjpjolly

Sat 2 Jan 2021 19.05 EST

The new year is traditionally a time for looking forwards, for hopeful resolutions, for celebrating. But for economists and investors, the annual forecasts for 2021 might be something of a painful reminder of exactly how much they failed to foresee.

The pandemic quickly made a mockery of all projections. An entertaining analysis of US chief executives' statements during 2020 by data company Sentieo for the *New York Times* showed a 70,000% year-on-year rise in the use of "unprecedented", while "humbled" tripled – perhaps code for "it wasn't my fault, so you should still pay me the same". To be fair, though, in March it really did feel like nobody had a clue what to do – even governments, who are meant to have "pandemic" firmly on their risk radars.

But investors have not been punished too harshly for their failure to foresee the outbreak. London's FTSE 100 benchmark declined 15% during 2020 – the worst performance since the financial crisis in 2008, but hardly as eyecatching as the wider economic collapse, which was on a scale not seen in the UK since 1706. In the US, the pandemic added to the astonishing

dominance of the big tech companies such as Apple, Amazon, and Google, meaning that the S&P 500 has actually gained about 15% in 2020.

For 2021, the big question is exactly how much is left in the recovery that has been taking place since the dark days of March. The positive results for what is turning into a host of vaccines appear at least to have laid the groundwork for a return to something like normality. Despite the travails of the last year, analysts are sounding notes of cautious optimism for the year ahead.

And at least one uncertainty has been put to bed. After the sound and the very considerable fury, the UK left the EU for practical purposes at 11pm on Thursday – it was central Europe that enjoyed the romance of uncoupling at the stroke of midnight, central European time, in a last sting of the negotiators' tail. The jury is still very much out on the questionable merits of the trade deal, but at least businesses know exactly how much extra paperwork they are dealing with – albeit with a shamefully tiny amount of time allowed for them to prepare.

So, to stock predictions. Nick Nelson at UBS was among the braver UK analysts to actually put a number on what will happen in 2021: he said the FTSE 100 would end the year at 7200 points, roughly a 10% gain compared to the 6460 mark at the end of 2020.

In the US some investors are more bullish: Goldman Sachs predicted the S&P 500, the US benchmark, would end the year near 4300 points, an increase of about 15%, even if a clutch of other Wall Street investment banks think 3900 is a more realistic target.

But if things do not pan out quite as hoped, at least we know who to look to. Central banks have been the only game in town – and the referee, to boot – since the global financial crisis and its drawn-out aftermath. The pandemic showed that the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England were more ready than ever to do anything to prevent a collapse. In the context of the last decade-and-a-bit, betting that they will continue to prop up markets for as long as they can is the nearest we have to a sure thing.

[The Observer](#)
[Energy industry](#)

Dogger Bank's giant turbines herald a wind of change in UK industry

The ambition of the North Sea project promises vast quantities of green energy – and many green jobs

[Jillian Ambrose](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 11.00 EST Last modified on Sat 2 Jan 2021 14.07 EST



One of GE's 260-metre-high Haliade-X wind turbines, of the type being installed on the Dogger Bank. Photograph: SSE

Beyond the horizon off the coast of North [Yorkshire](#), a quiet revolution is emerging from the waves of the North Sea.

More than 80 miles from land, hundreds of the world's most powerful wind turbines have begun reaching into the air as construction progresses on the biggest windfarm ever built. Almost 200 turbines, each almost as tall as the

Eiffel tower, will soon rise above the submerged [Doggerland](#) to populate an expanse of sea as large as North Yorkshire itself.

The Dogger Bank windfarm is an engineering feat that marks a step change in the growth of renewable energy. Each steel structure, weighing 2,800 tonnes, has been designed to soar more than 250 metres from where their heels are buried in the seabed to the top of each 107-metre blade. The [staggering scale of the turbines](#) means that each one can generate enough electricity to power 16,000 homes, at less than the average price of electricity in the wholesale energy market.

[Relative size of Haliade-X wind turbine](#)

This offshore windfarm, and others like it, promises to power a surge in clean electricity – which will soon be needed in vast volumes to charge cars, heat homes and produce green hydrogen gas for factories and transport. It is a central part of the government's plan to make [the UK carbon neutral by 2050](#), and to reimagine Britain's global role in what will be an industrial revolution for the low-carbon age.

And it is already playing a significant role: on Boxing Day, Storm Bella ensured that more than half of Britain's daily electricity came from wind turbines [for the first time](#).

The construction of the Dogger Bank farm will fall to one of the UK's few major renewable energy companies, SSE. Built on the legacy of some of Britain's earliest renewable energy projects – its roots are in Scotland's hydro-electricity board – SSE will construct the windfarm in three phases through the 2020s. Each phase represents a multimillion-pound investment, hundreds of jobs in the north-east of England, and enough clean electricity to power millions of homes.

Alistair Phillips-Davies, SSE's chief executive, announced a £6bn financing deal – involving 29 banks and advisers – last month to support the cost of building the first two phases, and the third deal could be announced by this time next year.

“For [SSE](#), and for all our staff, there’s definitely nothing that we could be more proud of at the moment than reaching financial close on what will ultimately be a £9bn project,” he said.

“It will be the world’s biggest, most innovative offshore windfarm. It will generate more energy per turn of those rotors than any other project, enough to power a house for two days. But the amazing thing is, we’re going to do more. We’re going to see more and more [offshore wind] on the back of the [prime minister’s 10-point plan](#). ”

Boris Johnson’s plan for a green industrial revolution relies heavily on offshore wind power, which he hopes to increase threefold to 40GW by 2030. This is important for two reasons. The first is the rapid expansion of the renewable energy industry to help [generate enough clean electricity to displace fossil fuels](#) in the energy system, as the UK works to create a net-zero-carbon economy by 2050. The second reason is to spur a supply-chain boom that can help to drive the UK’s green economic growth and create [substantial numbers of “green-collar” jobs](#).



Alistair Phillips-Davies, chief executive of SSE, inside the wind turbine testing facility in Blyth, Northumberland. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

On a grey December day in Northumberland, Phillips-Davies led the prime minister on a tour of a wind turbine testing facility in Blyth – just one example of the industrial innovation mushrooming in several of Britain’s embattled coastal towns thanks to the burgeoning offshore wind boom.

The Offshore Renewable [Energy](#) (ORE) Catapult centre employs 200 people tasked with testing the equipment used to build offshore windfarms, including the world-beating turbines at Dogger Bank. In a heavily fortified state-of-the-art testing hangar, each 100-metre-long rotor blade is put through its paces to make sure that it can withstand the harsh conditions of the North Sea. This involves specially designed equipment which can “waggle” the blade through a 25-metre range, 24 hours a day, for four to six months.

“We can build world-beating, world-class wind turbines, and have them tested here,” said Phillips-Davies. “But we want to get [more UK content involved in our projects](#). We’re hoping to encourage more supply-chain companies to come to the UK so we can increase the UK-made content in our windfarms to well beyond 60%.”

Today, blades for the Dogger Bank farm are manufactured overseas and shipped to Port of Tyne before being brought to the testing facility on giant barges along the river. Soon, though, the US industrial giant GE may begin building the huge turbine – known as the Haliade-X – at a factory in the UK, providing much-needed jobs for Britain’s struggling manufacturing sector.

[Dogger Bank wind farm interactive](#)

The Dogger Bank windfarm, to date, has supported more than 300 jobs in the coastal communities of Hartlepool and Port of Tyne, which are set to reap economic benefits from the project. Employment is expected to climb into the thousands as construction on the second and third phases begins. SSE’s earlier offshore windfarms have also created new renewable energy centres along the east coast of Britain from Wick and Dundee in Scotland to the Norfolk coast.

Offshore windfarms built by Danish power company Ørsted and ScottishPower Renewables have supported thousands of jobs and supply-

chain hubs across the east coast of the UK too. In total, the [offshore wind](#) industry expects to create 27,000 new jobs by 2030.

“A lot of these offshore facilities are in less well-known places. They’re all around the edges of the UK, in places that probably need investment and more jobs. So it’s a fantastic opportunity,” Phillips-Davies said.

“I think we’re at over 1,000 green jobs created so far, and close to £10bn-worth of projects done. So we feel like we’re in a really strong place, and I hope we can go forward strongly from here over the next decade.”

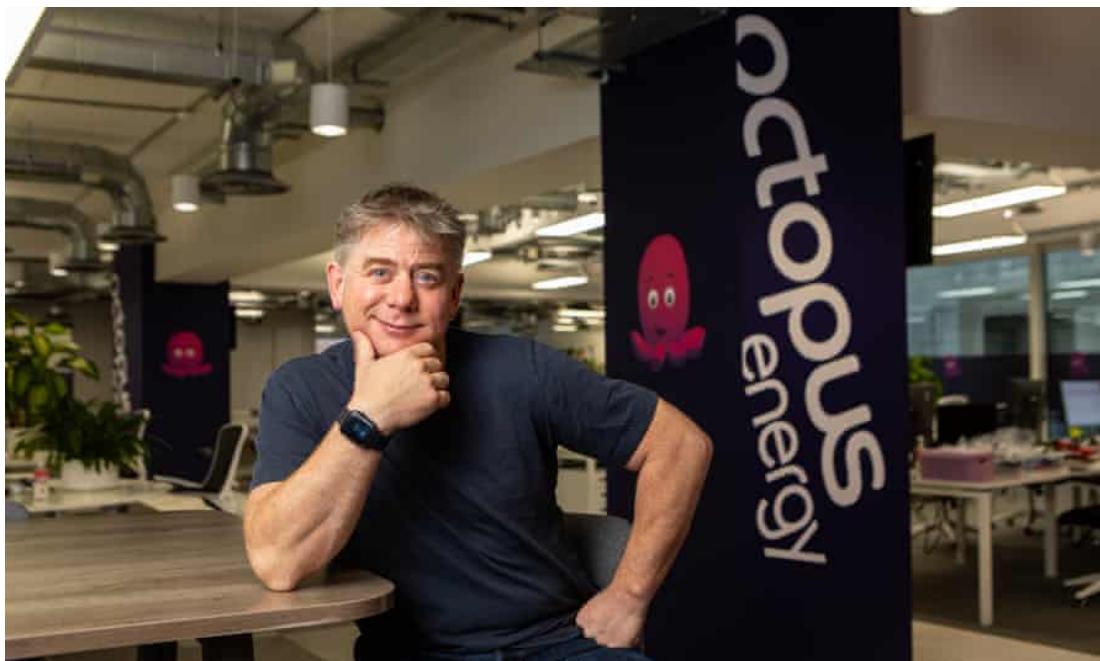
The Observer**Energy industry**

Interview

'Energy needed a digital revolution – and we are it'

Jillian Ambrose

Greg Jackson, boss of Octopus Energy, says the sector was ripe for an Amazon or Uber-style disruptor, but that his version will also boost the UK's green revolution



Greg Jackson, of Octopus Energy, in the company's London workspace.
Photograph: Antonio Olmos/Observer

Greg Jackson, of Octopus Energy, in the company's London workspace.
Photograph: Antonio Olmos/Observer

Sat 2 Jan 2021 11.00 EST

Greg Jackson, chief executive of Octopus Energy, wears the unassuming combination of jeans and trainers one might expect from the founder of a wildly successful startup. There's also a vast open-plan central London office, easy camaraderie with staff, lots of plants. He has the enthusiasm and

world-changing idealism too. With all these markers of a tech unicorn – a deal last month with Tokyo Gas [valued it at \\$2bn](#) (£1.5bn) – it's easy to forget that Octopus is an energy company. Jackson, 49, says the distinction is increasingly irrelevant.

Octopus is a new breed of energy supplier, built on cutting-edge technology and unencumbered by the creaking billing systems and fossil-fuel plants that plague the UK's "big six". Set up just five years ago, it has been free to view the energy market as a tech startup would: ripe for disruption. This has made Octopus [Britain's fastest-growing energy supplier](#), and helped it agree that Japanese deal – under which it will supply energy to homes in Japan, while Tokyo Gas takes a near-10% stake in Octopus.

"When we started the company a lot of people asked how we planned to take on the big six. They looked like big companies. But on a global scale, they're not that big," Jackson said in an interview shortly before the Tokyo Gas deal was announced.

Octopus Energy is backed by investment firm Octopus Group and has more than a million UK energy customers. But Jackson's vision goes well beyond Britain. A serial tech entrepreneur (and former coffee shop owner), he believes Octopus Energy could become the first home-grown energy supplier to reach 100 million homes. And he plans to reach this ambitious milestone within a few years.

"If we look downhill, we've come a long way and can be incredibly proud," says Jackson, whose stake in Octopus is now worth £115m. "But the global energy market is worth about \$2 trillion a year and will grow to \$4tn as we run more of our transport and heating on electricity. This means our global market share is about 0.2%. We've a long way to go."

From windfarms to household, the energy industry was running on systems that were two decades old

Greg Jackson

The beating heart of this ambition is Octopus's energy software, now known as Kraken, which helps it run a super-efficient energy operation, and has

helped unlock the future benefits of low-carbon energy.

“When we set out, we knew a lot about technology,” said Jackson. “We didn’t know about energy, but we could see that the sector had not yet had a digital revolution. From windfarms to household, it ran on systems that were two decades old.”

Fossil fuel plants are turned on and off to meet fluctuating demand. But in a world where cheap and abundant renewable energy is charging millions of batteries in homes and cars, consumers can become active participants in the energy system.

Octopus made headlines earlier this year by [paying its customers to use electricity](#) when Britain’s renewable energy reached record highs. It’s one example of a future hi-tech energy system that empowers individuals. “Electricity is becoming a tech sector,” said Jackson.

Kraken’s “elec-tech” software could facilitate a new way of using energy, and underpin Britain’s green industrial revolution. “When a customer comes home and plugs in their electric car,” he says, “Kraken will automatically charge when electricity is cheap, and sell energy back to the grid when it’s expensive. By morning you’d have a fully charged vehicle at the lowest possible cost.”

In future this could be extended to entire districts: [neighbourhoods full of batteries quietly acting as virtual power plants](#).

“This could be the backbone of the green industrial revolution. But we need to empower people to make the most of ‘green electrons’ when they are available. That’s what Kraken does.”

Already 17 million customers are plugged into Kraken software. British energy suppliers including E.ON and Good Energy use it to run their own businesses and there are Octopus Energy outposts in Germany and the US. Earlier this year it struck a deal with Origin, Australia’s leading energy supplier, which agreed to take a 20% stake in Octopus and license the Kraken software.

It is no surprise, then, that Jackson regularly refers to the tech giants that have used digital tools to build a global business. Amazon and Uber used technology to trigger a fundamental global shift in sectors which are arguably far more local and personal than energy supply. “A big cab company used to be one with more than one office. Today, Uber operates in thousands of cities across the world. So why hasn’t anyone taken a global view of energy?” he asks.

“I realised I needed to be honest with myself and the team about what we can achieve if we set our minds to it. I didn’t dare say it before, but I realised that if I’m not honest, we’ll definitely fail. So now we’re wearing our ambition as a T-shirt.”

Would the T-shirt in question read “world domination”? It would be a good fit with jeans and trainers either way.

Business leaderServices sector

If Sunak can lobby for banks post-Brexit, he must do it for other services too

Holes in the Brexit deal need filling – not just for the City, but for the wider service sector that is essential to UK prosperity



Rishi Sunak hopes a memorandum of understanding will ease banks' access to the single market. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/PA

Rishi Sunak hopes a memorandum of understanding will ease banks' access to the single market. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/PA

Sun 3 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Brexit is done, and yet loose ends litter the negotiating room floor, now abandoned by both sides to satisfy Boris Johnson's need for a 1 January deadline.

The trade deal with the EU, [approved by parliament](#) last week, was not the comprehensive, neatly tied bundle of [tariff and quota arrangements](#) that was

promised. Instead it is shot through with holes.

In the coming months, No 10 and the Treasury will convene a team whose first job will be to examine how the financial services industry can [mend one of these holes](#) – the major obstacle to trade with the EU that results from having no arrangements in place to cover the broader services sector.

Services account for around 80% of the UK's economic activity and about 50% of its exports by value to the EU. While Britain runs a large deficit on the export of goods to the EU, there is always a modest surplus in services – much of it accounted for by the success of London's City financiers – to close the gap.

There may be little sympathy for bankers and insurers complaining about being left to fend for themselves. But the sheer scale of the foreign earnings that the sector brings back to the UK, which also closes the yawning balance of payments deficit Britain runs with the rest of the world, is crucial, at least in the short term.

The chancellor said he hoped [a planned memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) on the issue would reassure the EU and persuade Brussels to give the City of London the access it craves. A promise made by the British chancellor of the exchequer that the UK will “remain in close dialogue with our European partners when it comes to things like equivalence decisions” is supposed to do the trick.

EU negotiators are still angry at Johnson's betrayals, and wary about any handshake agreement with his right-hand man

We will all find out over the coming months whether Rishi Sunak's name [commands respect in Brussels](#) to the extent that the commission accepts an MoU in exchange for full-ish access. After all, Brussels has already agreed to roll over current arrangements for clearing euro-denominated derivatives – a business dominated by London clearing houses – for fear that this business would disappear to New York.

But as the City lobby group TheCityUK has argued, that agreement replicates just one out of almost 50 treaties that would need to be negotiated

within the framework set by an MoU.

And as if this mountain were not already high enough, EU negotiators are still angry at the betrayals and tactical shifting by the prime minister over the last 18 months, and wary about any such handshake agreement with his right-hand man.

This wariness is also likely to extend to London's plan for other services to gain access to the single market. It's true that solicitors have secured an agreement to have their qualifications recognised across the EU, but there is little likelihood that other services will be granted entry to the single market without huge sacrifices from the UK government.

Maybe Johnson considers further compromise acceptable now that he has herded his backbenchers through the aye lobby in favour of his deal. More likely he will urge services firms to look beyond [Europe](#) to grab profitable contracts in Asia, the Middle East and the US.

The same principle could be applied to banks and insurers. It won't be, though. For Sunak, that would be too much of a risk.

And yet, if a deal proves possible for financial services, then the opportunity should be taken to seek better access for other sectors. The UK is over-dependent on the profits from finance and a shift is long overdue.

Brexit might have provided an opportunity to rebalance. Not to deny the City profit, at least not in the short term, but to expand access for other world-beating services industries. Sadly, this chance looks like being squandered.

As Boeing moves past its Max woes, a graver aviation crisis looms

Airline passengers do not appear to have long memories: they eagerly return to the skies even after the highest-profile disasters, such as the 9/11 hijackings in 2001. That bodes well for [Boeing](#), which has finally brought its

737 Max plane back into service after two fatal crashes killed 346 people and caused its global grounding.

Last Tuesday, paying customers in the US took off in a 737 Max for the first time since March 2019, marking the end of a crisis period for Boeing. However, the crashes and subsequent investigations, notably by the US Congress, lifted the lid on a corporate culture where safety did not appear to be the top priority. It must be hoped Boeing has repaired that too, as it and the entire aviation industry prepare for arguably their biggest challenge in the coming decades: finding a way to be part of a net-zero economy.

Flying causes enormous environmental harm. Eradicating carbon dioxide emissions from planes is one key climate challenge that has yet to be truly confronted, as authorities such as the UK's Committee on Climate Change have noted. The technology to do so simply does not exist yet.

Aerospace manufacturers will face a delicate task in managing the expectations of governments and the public, who will wonder why they cannot follow the example of carmakers and embrace electrification.

The comparison with carmakers is instructive: Volkswagen, the world's largest by volume, was rapidly brought to its knees by a failure to tackle pollution – and systematic attempts to cover it up. All companies – even Boeing, a pillar of the military-industrial establishment – need to constantly renew their social licence to operate by seeking to minimise harm to customers or the environment. The 737 Max crisis showed what happens if a business loses sight of that duty.

In a sad year for shops, the quirky and local may come up smiling

It has been a grim year for retail, with 177,000 people estimated to have lost their jobs and thousands of shops permanently closing their doors.

The new year is set to begin in the same vein, with the future of distressed chains Debenhams, Topshop and Peacocks likely to be decided. Thousands

more jobs are expected to go, as rescue deals are unlikely to include the full high street estates of these ageing behemoths.

After months of enforced closures, further retail casualties are also expected to emerge, with clothing specialists and those reliant on city centres among the most vulnerable.

However, some major businesses will increase their dominance in this difficult environment. Next has already taken advantage of its position as a well-resourced multichannel player to adapt and update itself. Its [distribution deal with US lingerie brand Victoria's Secret](#), and its shift into beauty halls on former Debenhams sites, is set to be followed by other acquisitions – possibly including Topshop.

Mike Ashley's Frasers Group, meanwhile, may take on at least some Debenhams stores. While the Sports Direct owner should never be underestimated, the group may suffer some indigestion as it tries to knock ailing House of Fraser together with battered Debenhams.

The downsizing of those department stores may ultimately help the likes of John Lewis and Marks & Spencer, but they will face difficult months battling against heavy discounting from these troubled rivals.

But it's not all doom for physical retail. A surprise winner from the pandemic is the local high street. And that benefit may well continue as people carry on spending at least part of their working week at home, where they have grown to appreciate independent operators with a local flavour.

Cheaper rents and empty sites could also provide the opportunity for new ideas to bubble up. Once the virus subsides, there will be many desperate to visit after months stuck in their homes.

The Observer
Housing market

Covid-19 changed many things. It should change housing policy too

Phillip Inman

Ministers must reconsider the dash to build pokey dwellings when so many more people may work from home in future



Robert Jenrick, the housing minister, seems to care little about the size of homes and sides with developers at every turn. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Robert Jenrick, the housing minister, seems to care little about the size of homes and sides with developers at every turn. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sat 2 Jan 2021 12.00 EST

There is a growing divide between those who want to rethink their lives after Covid and those who want to return to some kind of pre-virus normality. Thinktanks and academics have begun to ask how many people will change their work and social life, and what that will mean for employers, high

streets, culture and even people's ability to meet a partner, fall in love and have children.

At the moment, they can only speculate. A poll might tell us how a random sample wants to work – some might view a return to the office or factory as the best outcome, while others say they prefer to work more from home more often.

What is clear, though, is that some will change their way of working, travelling, shopping and visiting the cinema, and quite a few will make radical changes. This is why ministers should pause before they start throwing cash at whatever problem they perceived needed solving in the months before the Covid-19 crisis.

Some government schemes will need to go through the planning mincer all over again. Ploughing on with the same ill-thought-out programmes for “levelling up” or training ([“rethink, reskill, reboot”](#)) would be a costly misadventure.

Housing should be top of the list of subjects to be re-examined. Inside the Treasury, there is a conviction that only volume matters. It rules all other considerations and leads the housing, communities and local government secretary, [Robert Jenrick](#), to side with developers at every turn. He has torn up the plans of countless local authorities on the grounds that they don't include enough housing.

Jenrick cares little about the size of the homes and whether the abundance of pokey one- and two-bedroom flats with open-plan kitchen/dining/living areas is fit for a 21st century in which at least one person may be working from home.

It only takes one graph revealing a decline in the annual rise in commuting to a city – any city – from the surrounding area for all the profits from a major housing development to evaporate.

There is a concern that ministers will give permission for infrastructure that few will use, or that takes us in the direction of more car journeys

There are still projects across the south-east being promoted by Jenrick that need extra public transport links to be viable. How will these work when many people say they will refuse to travel on public transport until the vaccine has done its work, and maybe not even then?

Hopefully, a Labour government would begin to see towns as places that people should want to live and work in, and would aim to reduce the number who commute, going with the grain of modern urban ideas. The party should challenge the outmoded view that large cities are the only routes to growth and say that a reassessment of what an economy needs to be successful – GDP growth is not necessarily the measure – is a priority.

Reports have highlighted the long-term trends of decline in our towns, most recently one by the Centre for Towns thinktank. Its study provided Labour with the information it needs to overcome concerns that those who live in northern towns, many of whom voted for Brexit, are closed to the idea that their environment should be improved.

Analysis of responses to the British Election Study between February 2014 and December 2019 suggests that over the past five years there has been a near 20% rise in the proportion of people saying measures to protect the environment have not gone far enough, pushing the total who care about the issue to 60% overall.

And the gap in attitudes between towns and cities has nearly halved over this period, indicating, the thinktank says, “that the environment is a growing concern everywhere, and especially in towns and more rural areas”.

According to a poll of businesses by the CBI, many employers are thinking along similar lines. Almost six out of 10 respondents thought people would “shop close to where they live”, and many predicted the widespread adoption of hybrid working patterns, with offices “recalibrated for collaborating and connecting with colleagues”.

That should make every government department stop and think about all their programmes – their one-off projects and their plans to spend big to tackle the growing divides between north and south, towns and cities, old and young.

It is not just about public money being spent on outmoded projects. There is also the concern that ministers such as Jenrick will give permission for infrastructure that few will use, or that takes us in the direction of more car journeys, not fewer. More particularly, the worry is that private developers will be allowed to build dehumanising homes that are in the wrong place and do nothing to tackle climate change.

2021.01.03 - Cash

- The best (and the worst) that could happen to your money this year

[The Observer](#)[Bank charges](#)

The best (and the worst) that could happen to your money this year

As we bid farewell to 2020, with its gains for those who could keep working, and losses for those who were furloughed or put out of work, what could 2021 hold?



Whether you are a spender or a saver, the next 12 months could be difficult.

Photograph: Keith Mayhew/Shutterstock

Whether you are a spender or a saver, the next 12 months could be difficult.

Photograph: Keith Mayhew/Shutterstock

[Shane Hickey](#)

Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

The past year was a strange one for household finances: while [savings rates plummeted to new lows](#), and many people saw their incomes slide, those who could keep working often stashed away large amounts of cash.

[House prices rose](#) and borrowers with big deposits were able to get very cheap mortgages, but lenders' caution saw 95% home loans pulled and [new](#)

restrictions on 90% deals.

Just as the rollout of vaccines raised hopes of bringing life back to normal, then came news of the spread of a new, more infectious coronavirus variant.

So what are the best, and worst, things, that could happen to our personal finances in 2021?

Current accounts

Last year saw a ban on excessive overdraft fees, two cuts in the Bank of England base rate and the impact of coronavirus – meaning some banks withdrew accounts, according to financial information site Moneyfacts, while others stopped offering cash incentives to new customers.

This year could see even more changes. HSBC has already warned that it could consider a charge on its standard current account, saying low interest rates have hit its profits on lending.

Other providers may be looking at their options, and, if the Bank of England base rate goes negative – and there is speculation that it might – that could make up their minds.

“At the moment, consumers have the choice of paying for a packaged account, that’s one that comes with other services, or a simple account that would only require a charge to be paid if borrowing in an overdraft or missing payments,” says Rachel Springall of Moneyfacts.

“This year, providers could apply charges to their banking range or increase fees on their most popular accounts, and we could see benefits capped or slashed.”

New challenger banks are continuing to enter the market with fresh offerings, but many of these now involve a fee. Last month Revolut launched a £2.99-a-month subscription offer which includes theft and accident cover, as well as purchase protection of £1,000 a year.

Best case There is a switching war between banks for a new customer's cash; more rewards are launched to entice people to move.

Worst case: Continued cut in benefits and more fees.

Savings accounts

Coming after one of the worst years on record for savings rates, it is hard to see how things could get worse, although a negative Bank of England base rate could lead to even further cuts to accounts.

Returns are sitting at historically low levels and there is no sign of whether there will be any improvement in 2021.

"It is hoped that challenger banks, and any new brands looking to enter the market, will offer the most lucrative rates. Savers would be wise to take advantage of any government initiatives, such as the Lifetime Isa or Help to Save, but also utilise its Isa allowance," advises Springall.

Tax-free savings allowances are set by the government and Springall says it could decide to review the benefits it is offering.

She adds: "Regardless of whether the market becomes stagnant or worsens, savers would be wise to keep a close eye on the top-rate tables and switch to ensure they are getting the best possible return on their hard-earned cash."

Best case: There is a rise in interest rates; new initiatives are introduced by the government to help savers; new challenger banks enter the market to try to acquire deposits.

Worst case: Further drops in interest rates; cuts in tax-free initiatives for savers.

Pensions

While the stock market has dropped, not all pensions have suffered. The workplace pension for almost 10 million people, Nest, [has gained more than](#)

10% in the last year, partly through investment in US tech firms.

Many have seen the potential value of their funds fall, however, especially those who have not been able to contribute as much because of job loss or being furloughed.

Becky O'Connor, head of pensions and savings at Interactive Investor, is calling for the introduction of “wake-up” pension packs for younger people to encourage them to engage with their savings.

The packs – documents telling people the size of their pots – are now only sent out to savers who are 50, to prompt them into thinking about their plans for retirement.

“They are really popular, but would be even more effective earlier in life,” she says.

Working against consistent pension saving would be the reduction of pension tax relief for higher-rate earners which, she says, could see people shift their money into other savings vehicles, such as Isas.

“Any changes that disincentivise people to save for the long term, in a country where millions are already at risk of poverty in retirement, would be unwelcome,” she says.

Best case: Alerts for people at different times of their lives to keep saving; improvements in the stock market.

Worst case: Reduction of pension tax relief; markets worsen again.

Mortgages

First-time buyers were hit in 2020 by demands by banks for bigger deposits, while some buyers in England and Northern Ireland got a huge boost when a stamp duty holiday on homes costing up to £500,000 was introduced in July.

David Hollingworth, of L&C Mortgages, says the first three months of this year are expected to be busy as people rush to meet the deadline. “Those that

are not already in-flight with a purchase should recognise that there have been delays throughout the process, and so there can be no guarantees for new buyers as the deadline looms,” he says.

The end of 2020 saw some improvement in the availability of 90% loan-to-value products, with Barclays, Halifax and NatWest all launching low-deposit mortgages.

That should hopefully pave the way for more lenders to rejoin that end of the market, and mean a gradual improvement in choice and hopefully in rates over time.

However, it’s worth noting that at the beginning of 2020 borrowers had a broad choice of 95% LTV deals and there’s nothing to suggest a rapid return to that position in the near term.

“Hopefully, there may be scope for a gradual return as the year progresses,” adds Hollingworth.

Lenders are also expected to focus on how borrowers will be able to repay their mortgages as a result of so many people’s finances being affected by the pandemic.

Best case: An extension of the stamp duty holiday for existing buyers; more lenders to return to 90%-plus loan to value mortgages.

Worst case: Price falls force banks and building societies to rein in lending again; construction remains slow due to coronavirus.

Headlines saturday 2 january 2021

- [Coronavirus Government faces major teachers' revolt on schools reopening in England](#)
- [Report Ministers urged to close all schools in England for two weeks](#)
- [Exams to free school meals The government's U-turns on education in England under Covid](#)
- [Which schools will reopen? The advice on English primaries](#)
- [Labour Extend Covid measures or households face 'cliff edges', party says](#)
- [Homebuying Warning of scams as end of stamp duty holiday looms](#)
- ['Empty promises' Tate & Lyle accused of betraying Cambodia families whose land was allegedly taken](#)
- [Tax Millions yet to file self-assessment return as deadline nears](#)
- ['Betrayed' Dover residents furious over building of Brexit lorry park](#)
- [US election Judge dismisses suit filed against Pence seeking to overturn result](#)
- [Nuclear weapons Iran to enrich uranium to up to 20% purity, UN watchdog says](#)
- [Plane crashes Aviation deaths rose in 2020 despite pandemic](#)
- ['Hold my beer' Surf star braves Hawaii swell to rescue struggling swimmer](#)

[The Observer](#)
[Coronavirus](#)

Covid fears spark revolt by unions over return to school in England

Headteachers take legal action against government as UK's largest teaching union says members should not go back

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Donna Ferguson](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 10.34 EST First published on Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.28 EST



The education secretary, Gavin Williamson, has already announced a U-turn over the reopening of primary schools in London and areas of the south where infection rates are high. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

The government faces a major revolt from teachers and headteachers over its plans to reopen schools.

Headteachers began legal action against the Department for Education on Saturday in an attempt to force ministers to reveal why they think it is safe to reopen schools on Monday, given the higher transmissibility of the new Covid-19 variant, particularly among children.

The National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and the Association of School and College Leaders have instructed lawyers to write to the government, giving it until 4pm on Monday to share any information and scientific data that suggests it is safe for schools to return.

The NAHT also plans to issue guidance to headteachers, which will recommend they take no action against staff who refuse to return to work because they feel it is unsafe.

Unions representing teachers and support staff have called for remote learning. In a letter to the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, the NASUWT general secretary, Dr Patrick Roach, states it is “the only sensible and credible option at this time to minimise the risks to those working in schools and to safeguard public health”.

On Saturday, Brighton and Hove City Council advised primary schools to delay reopening and teach remotely until 18 January and has written to Williamson asking to be included in the schools allowed to remain online-only.

The GMB said the differing arrangements across higher tiers was “a dangerous recipe for chaos” and was causing additional stress for parents, pupils and support staff.

The UK’s largest teaching union cautioned teachers on Saturday not to return to their classrooms on Monday over safety fears.

The NEU, which represents the majority of teachers and more than 450,000 school staff in the UK, informed its members that it is not safe for them to return to school until mid-January at the earliest.

Brighton & Hove Green Councillors (@BHGGreenCllrs)

BREAKING: We have written to [@GavinWilliamson](#) asking him to include [#Brighton](#) & [#Hove](#) primary schools as those moving to remote learning until Monday 18 January.

We have also advised primary schools that we believe they should move from Monday 4 January. pic.twitter.com/lizilm41Hn

[January 2, 2021](#)

It expects most of its members will follow its advice, forcing most schools to switch to online learning for the majority of their pupils.

The union will provide members with a template letter to send to headteachers, explaining they are refusing to go into work because their workplace is unsafe, a right enshrined in law by [section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996](#).

Staff should still be prepared to work remotely, the union says, and should volunteer to look after vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers on school premises.

The government is expecting primary schools in England to reopen in two days, with the exception of schools in London and local authorities in the south where Covid-19 transmission rates are high, after another [U-turn on Friday](#).

Secondary school pupils in their exam year in England are due to return on 11 January, the date most schools in Wales will also reopen. A week later, on 18 January, all other secondary school students in [England](#) are due back, along with all schools in Scotland.

Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the NEU, said the government was being reckless and ignoring the advice of its own experts on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage).

He said it was clear from the minutes of the latest Sage meeting, published on New Year's Eve, that [scientists had told ministers before Christmas that](#)

[schools must be closed](#) to contain the new, highly transmissible coronavirus variant.

The minutes from 22 December state that “R would be lower with schools closed” and that it was highly unlikely that the government would be able to maintain R below 1 in the presence of the new variant if schools remain open, with further analysis only possible after the impact of the school holidays on transmission rates is known in mid-January.

NEU members who are penalised by their headteachers for refusing to work on school premises can rely on the union for support with any legal action, Courtney said. “We realise that this late notice is a huge inconvenience for parents and for headteachers. The fault, however, is of the government’s own making and is a result of their inability to understand data, their indecisiveness and their reckless approach to their central duty to safeguard public health,” he said.

“We do want schools to be open safely as soon as possible. We want to work with government to achieve that central aim.”

A [paper by the Children’s Task and Finish Group](#) for Sage, also released on 31 December, says evidence is accumulating that increased transmission occurs between children when schools are open, particularly among secondary school pupils. The latest coronavirus infection survey also shows that [infection rates are highest among school-age children](#).

“We think we should follow the science. We think that everybody in our country should follow the science,” Courtney said. “We’re confident we’re speaking for society, that the government just isn’t taking care of us.

Vik Chechi-Ribeiro, a secondary school teacher and NEU Manchester vice-president, said: “The government’s reckless plan for ... reopening of primary schools risk pouring petrol on to a fire for case rates, hospital admissions and deaths. It also ignores their own advice from Sage.

“Education workers have the right to a safe workplace for themselves, students and the community while continuing to provide face to face teaching for key worker and vulnerable students.”

Courtney said ministers in the Department for Education were so “ideologically committed” to exams going ahead that they were prioritising school attendance over the measures needed to suppress virus transmission, which was causing more disruption to pupils’ education overall. “It’s so shortsighted,” he said.

He also said NEU members were reporting a “huge level of anxiety” about schools reopening. “People know of some staff who’ve died and other staff who have got long Covid,” he said, appealing to parents for understanding and support.

Schools

Ministers urged to close all schools in England for two weeks

Call comes after government said all primaries in London should remain closed next week

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The decision is a further humiliating reverse for Gavin Williamson as education secretary. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

The decision is a further humiliating reverse for Gavin Williamson as education secretary. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

[Richard Adams](#) and [Simon Murphy](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.39 EST

The UK'S largest teaching union has called for all schools in [England](#) to remain closed for two further weeks at the end of the Christmas break after a

government U-turn which means all primaries in London will be shut next week.

The call from the National Education Union came after the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), reversed his decision that primary schools in some parts of London should open on Monday.

The government bowed to protests and legal pressure from the capital's local authorities. Williamson said the decision had been a last resort.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the NEU, said the government needed to close schools in England before infection rates got out of control. "If you allow the conditions to get so bad in the end you'll be closing schools for longer.

"What the government should be doing is what the governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are doing. You don't get this chaos in the other countries of the United Kingdom. And does the government really believe that somehow Covid in England is different than the other countries of the UK?

"I find the government's recklessness in this regard, both with educational professionals' health, but also with community health, and the questions increasingly around children's health, inexplicable."

Under the government's initial plan, secondary schools and colleges were set to be closed to most pupils for the first two weeks of January, while [primary schools within 50 local authorities in London and the south of England](#) were also told to keep their doors shut until 18 January.

But the list omitted several [London](#) areas where Covid-19 transmission rates remain high including the borough of Haringey, whose leaders said they were prepared to defy the government and support any schools that decided to close to protect staff and pupils.

The protests from local authority leaders came to a head with a letter to the education secretary from nine London authorities asking for their primary

schools to be closed to all except vulnerable children and those whose parents were key workers.

The action provoked an emergency Cabinet Office meeting on New Year's Day, which signed off on the revision, adding the remaining 10 London education authorities to the government's "contingency areas".

In the capital, Richard Watts, the leader of Islington council, said: "I'm very relieved to hear this news. There was enormous concern from parents and schools who couldn't understand the rationale for why some boroughs were excluded.

"We welcome that the government has, belatedly, listened to local areas. We will be working with our schools to ensure they offer high quality online learning and can welcome pupils back as soon as Public Health deem it to be sensible."

The Department for Education (DfE) confirmed the move in a statement: "In light of Covid case rates rising rapidly across the capital and ongoing engagement with London leaders and the evidence submitted, the government has reviewed the London boroughs where the contingency framework will apply, with all further boroughs added."

Pupils not eligible to attend in person will be provided with remote learning by their schools. Early years settings will remain open, as will alternative provision and special schools, the DfE said.

"We must make this move to protect our country and the NHS. We will continue to keep the list of local authorities under review, and reopen classrooms as soon as we possibly can," Williamson said.

The move means schools in Camden, the City of London, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Harrow, Islington, Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth and Lewisham will be closed to most pupils from Monday until at least 18 January.

After the move was revealed by the Guardian, London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, welcomed the news saying it would mean all the capital's primary schools

would be treated the same.

But the decision leaves question marks over the government's decision-making, and stands as [a further humiliating reverse for Williamson](#) during his tenure as education secretary.

Kate Green, the shadow education secretary, said: "This is yet another government U-turn creating chaos for parents just two days before the start of term.

"Gavin Williamson's incompetent handling of the return of schools and colleges is creating huge stress for parents, pupils, and school and college staff and damaging children's education."

Several local authorities had been preparing legal challenges to keep their primary schools closed.

"We are advised by leading counsel that the omissions from the list are unlawful on a number of grounds and can be challenged in court," the letter from the nine London authorities sent to Williamson stated.

Schools in the contingency areas may remain closed after 18 January, with [the Daily Telegraph quoting](#) a senior government source: "We have been careful not to say they will definitely reopen on 18 January because we don't know that."

Meanwhile, the DfE faces a further rebellion from secondary school leaders in England over its demand that coronavirus testing of pupils is to be mandatory from 11 January.

School leaders and teaching unions have been meeting over the new year period to discuss a response to the demand, with many secondary heads arguing that [the testing regime is impractical and unworkable](#).

[Coronavirus](#)

The government's U-turns on education in England under Covid

From exams to free school meals, ministers have made a string of volte-faces

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Guardian staff and agency

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.46 EST Last modified on Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.07 EST



The Department of Education building in London. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

The announcement that all [London](#) primary schools will remain closed next week is the latest in a string of government U-turns on education since the pandemic began.

Under the government's initial plan, schools in the City of London and Kingston were due to reopen but those in 22 other London boroughs would have remained closed.

Ministers changed course after the leaders of nine London authorities wrote to the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, asking for their primary schools to remain closed to all except vulnerable children and those whose parents were key workers.

Several local authorities had been preparing legal challenges to keep their primary schools closed.

Here are some of the government's other U-turns on education:

25 August: face masks in schools

The policy that children should not be required to wear face coverings in school was reversed days before classrooms were due to reopen, when the Department for Education announced that staff and students in year 7 and above should wear face in corridors and communal areas in schools in areas with coronavirus restrictions.

Williamson had previously insisted that the Covid-secure measures adopted in schools meant that wearing face coverings would not be necessary. The move came after pressure from teachers around the country who urged their use, and following Scotland's announcement that [secondary school pupils should wear masks in communal areas](#).

17 August: A-level and GCSE results

The government was [forced to act](#) after A-level grades were downgraded through a controversial algorithm developed by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, leading to almost 40% of grades awarded being worse than expected by pupils, parents and teachers. Williamson had previously defended the system as robust and said there would be “no U-turn, no change” to the system.

16 June: school meal vouchers

Following a campaign launched by Marcus Rashford, the government reversed its decision not to extend the children's food voucher scheme into the summer holidays. The move came 24 hours after No 10 had rejected the footballer's plea for the £15-a-week vouchers to continue to be paid over the summer.

The cabinet minister Grant Shapps said on 16 June that free school meals were not normally extended to cover the summer period, but No 10 backtracked a few hours later and said it would extend the programme.

9 June: reopening schools

Williamson set out plans in May [for all primary school children in England to be back in class for at least four weeks before the summer holiday](#). On 9 June, however, he admitted that a full opening of primaries would not be possible because the requirement for 2-metre physical distancing would make it too difficult.

Primary schools

Covid: current advice on reopening primary schools in England

As the pandemic continues, the government has ordered certain schools to close

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Ben Quinn](#) and [Richard Adams](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.53 EST First published on Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.41 EST



The government has yet to divulge the basis on which it selected the 50 areas where primaries have been told to shut. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

When will primary schools in England reopen for the new term?

Until late on Friday evening, the answer had been that most primaries and attached nurseries would open on 4 January, but would remain closed within 50 local authorities spread across [London](#) and the south of England, including Kent and Essex.

In a U-turn, however, the Department for Education announced that all London primary schools would keep their gates closed until at least 18 January.

The schools are required to remain open for remote learning, and for the children of key workers and those classed as vulnerable to attend school in person.

Why had the government ordered some schools to close and others to reopen?

The government has not divulged the basis on which it selected the 50 areas where primaries had been told to shut. [It said the “contingency framework”](#) plans were being implemented in local areas “with high rates of infection and with significant increases in seven-day case rates, and pressure on the NHS”.

All 50 were in tier 4 areas but others in tier 4 had not been included. This led to confusion in areas with higher rates of infection but where primaries had been told to remain open.

How did local authorities in England react?

Haringey council, which has higher rates of infection than some areas on the list, said it would defy government advice and [advise its primaries to close](#)

to all but vulnerable children and those of key workers.

The leader of Greenwich council, which was also not included in the government's contingency framework, said: "There appears to be no logic to how this list was brought together."

A group of London councils, including Haringey and Greenwich, jointly petitioned the government, asking for their primary schools to be able to close from 4 January.

What happens next?

The Department for Education had said it would review the decision on school closures in the 50 named local authorities by 18 January but that move is now redundant.

Possible next moves include adding more councils to the list of areas where primaries should close, adding secondary schools to the closures or an even wider closure across England.

The latter is a serious possibility on the basis of scientific advice, such as research by Imperial College London into the new Covid-19 variant, B117, which found that it was directly affecting a greater proportion of people aged under 20.

Economics

Extend Covid measures or households face 'cliff edges', says Labour

Universal credit boost, ban on evictions and mortgage holiday must continue, party says

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The government's £20-a-week boost to universal credit is due to run out on 6 April. Photograph: Mike Kemp/In Pictures via Getty Images

Many low- and middle-income households will face financial hardship unless ministers maintain support for those who have lost their jobs or experienced steep cuts in income during the second wave of Covid-19, Labour has said.

The shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds, said in a new year message to Rishi Sunak that the chancellor must extend a range of Covid-19 rescue

measures due to run out over the next three months “to protect struggling households from financial ruin”.

A [mortgage holiday scheme](#) and a ban on home repossession should be extended beyond the 31 January cutoff date, said Dodds, while [a £20-a-week boost to universal credit](#), due to run out on 6 April, should remain in place until the crisis is over.

Analysis [by the Bank of England](#) in November found that 28% of households experienced a drop in income during the first wave of the pandemic, rising to 66% among self-employed people.

Dodds said: “Whether employed, self-employed, relying on social security or a combination of all three, Britain’s beleaguered households face several cliff edges in the first few months of 2021.”

The looming deadlines include:

- 11 January: end of the [ban on evictions](#).
- 29 January: deadline for applications for the third grant under the self-employed income support scheme.
- 31 January: end of ban on home repossession.
- 31 March: applications close for government-backed loan schemes and deadline for mortgage holidays.
- 6 April: government due to cut £20-a-week boost to universal credit.
- 30 April: end of the job furlough scheme.

The price comparison website Energy Helpline said the number of UK consumers in debt to their electricity provider reached a five-year high during the pandemic and was on course to get worse.

Citing figures obtained under a freedom of information request to the regulator, Ofgem, the website said about 777,000 households had been in

debt between July and September, a number not seen since the same period in 2015.

The first three quarters of the calendar year showed a rise in the number of consumers in debt to their supplier compared with the same quarter of 2019, with a 12% increase for January-March, a 5% rise in April-June and a 7% jump for July-September.

It called on Ofgem and suppliers to “do all they can to support the most vulnerable consumers struggling to pay their energy bills as a result of the pandemic”.

“Today’s figures could be the beginning of a surge in energy debt right across the country. Not only are consumers facing higher bills as a result of having to use more energy at home, but the pandemic is also leading to the real prospect of more expensive energy into 2021,” Energy Helpline’s director of energy, Tom Lyon, said in a statement.

Labour said British households were among the worst-prepared for a financial crisis after analysis showed they entered the pandemic with one of the lowest levels of savings in the developed world.

UK households saved £3,055 less than the average across other economies in the G7 group of nations in 2019, and a quarter had less than £100 in savings when the first lockdown was imposed last March.

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Dodds said: “The irresponsible decisions taken by the Conservatives over the last decade left many UK households without a penny in the bank going into this crisis. When Covid hit, they had nothing to fall back on – and now some are teetering on the brink of financial ruin as several Covid support cliff edges loom.

“The chancellor’s chaotic, last-minute approach to this crisis plunged the UK into the worst downturn of any major economy, but it seems he hasn’t learned any lessons.

“Families up and down the country will continue to suffer if he doesn’t fix Britain’s broken safety net and tackle the root causes of income insecurity across our country.”

[Property](#)

Homebuyers warned of scams as end of stamp duty holiday looms

Buyers in danger of being conned by fraudsters into paying money into their accounts, says UK Finance

[Hilary Osborne](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 19.01 EST



Homebuyers are in danger of being manipulated by fraudsters, UK Finance said. Photograph: Andriy Popov/Alamy

Homebuyers have been warned to take steps to avoid being scammed during their purchase and after they move, with criminals targeting large sums of money, including house deposits.

The looming end of the stamp duty holiday has fuelled a boom in the property market as people attempt to secure a new home without having to pay tax.

But UK Finance, the organisation representing financial firms, said buyers were in danger of being manipulated by fraudsters into paying money into the wrong account.

The Guardian has covered several cases of emails from solicitors being intercepted and replaced by new messages containing payment details for fraudsters' accounts, including one where a homebuyer was [tricked into sending more than £300,000](#) to criminals.

In the first half of 2020, UK Finance said £16.2m had been lost from personal accounts through frauds involving customers being sent fake emails with new payment details. Other scams movers are at risk from include identity theft, in which letters sent to old addresses are used by criminals to apply for credit or benefits in their name.

Katy Worobec, the managing director of economic crime at UK Finance, told PA Media: “Moving house can be a stressful time; however, it’s vital to remember to take steps which could keep you safe from scams.

“This includes letting your bank and other organisations know that you’ve changed address, making sure your mail is secure, and ensuring the recipient’s bank details are correct when paying large amounts of money during the housebuying process, such as your deposit.”

UK Finance said buyers should be alert to emails purporting to contain new payment details from firms they are already dealing with, or duplicate invoices for services.

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It said there had also been instances of criminals pretending to be from an estate agent and asking for personal details, claiming the mover is due a “refund”.

It advised customers to check payment details with agents or solicitors by phone before transferring money.

To avoid identity theft, it said householders should ensure they had notified banks, building societies and other organisations of a change of address, and set up a redirection service to catch any other post.

Tate and Lyle

Tate & Lyle accused of betraying Cambodia families whose land was allegedly taken

UK company says it will keep trying to use leverage to get compensation from local supplier



Koh Kong province, Cambodia. Prum Khoem, 45, says he used to have 10 hectares of land before it was taken. Photograph: Enric Català/The Guardian
Koh Kong province, Cambodia. Prum Khoem, 45, says he used to have 10 hectares of land before it was taken. Photograph: Enric Català/The Guardian

Rebecca Ratcliffe

Sat 2 Jan 2021 00.00 EST

Tate & Lyle has been accused of betraying 200 families in [Cambodia](#) who have fought for years to secure compensation for land they say was taken from them to make way for a sugar plantation.

Residents in Koh Kong, Cambodia, say their livelihoods, and their children's futures, were devastated when their land was taken from them in a process that began in 2006. The land was later used to supply sugar to Tate & Lyle.

Seven years ago, the Guardian [interviewed affected communities](#) who described how, without space to farm, they had little choice but to work on the plantation, which was run by Thai KSL Group.

People who worked for KSL in Cambodia said they earned as little as 79p a day cutting 1,000 stems of sugar cane, and that children as young as nine were among those working. KSL subsequently denied allegations that it had used child labour, and said that its employees earned a decent wage.

In 2013, 200 families from Sre Ambel district launched a lawsuit against Tate & Lyle in the high court in London, claiming that Tate & Lyle knew – or should have known – of the allegations against its supplier. They demanded compensation for the value of sugar grown on land they allege still belongs to them.

Drawn-out negotiations followed, and families say that they were led to believe that they could expect significant compensation from Tate & Lyle. Yet, earlier this year, they say, the sugar company said it would not pay anything.

“Initially we thought that Tate & Lyle respected human rights, and we hoped they would take responsibility,” said Ann Haiya, a community leader from Koh Kong.

“The community is very, very angry and feels hopeless, but they will keep their will to work with the community leaders to keep fighting against Tate & Lyle,” he added.

In a statement, Martyn Day, senior partner at the firm Leigh Day, which represents the families, said it was disappointing that Tate & Lyle had chosen to walk away from the settlement discussions. “The claimants entered into settlement discussions with Tate & Lyle in good faith over six years ago, but these discussions have led to nothing but empty promises and disappointment,” he said.

Tate & Lyle, Day said, had been exclusive beneficiaries of the sugar produced on the land for a number of years and were involved in the plantation “from an early stage”.

When asked whether it intended to pay compensation to affected families, Tate & Lyle Sugars said it would continue to use any leverage it had “to ensure the villagers receive financial compensation from KSL and its ex-business partner”.

The company said it put pressure on its supplier over seven years “through many trips to Cambodia and meetings with various interested parties, including the Cambodian government”.

Tate & Lyle used the KSL Group for its supplies from Cambodia from 2011, and stopped buying sugar from the country in 2013.

The 200 families have received 1.5 hectares of land each from KSL Group through a government-led scheme, while affected communities elsewhere, who did not pursue legal action, have received financial compensation.

It is understood that KSL feel they have discharged their responsibility towards the families by allocating 300 hectares of land.

Tate & Lyle says it believes it helped bring about the assignment of land to families – a claim Leigh Day disputes.

Community leaders say the compensation received so far is completely inadequate, and that the 1.5 hectares of land is, for many, just a fraction of what they lost. Many were forced to sell their compensation plots immediately because they desperately needed to pay off debts they had accumulated as a result of the ordeal.

“Before, we used our land to cultivate rice, and farm cashew, mango and jackfruit – part of it we sell, part of it we use,” said Ann. He lost 13.5 hectares of land in 2006, he said.

In order to buy food and pay for basics such as healthcare, he, like others, had little choice but to borrow money. “The loan becomes like double loan,” he said, adding that debts quickly rose.

Day said that it was “wholly inadequate” for Tate & Lyle to suggest that responsibility for financial compensation lay solely with its supplier. “The losses suffered by the claimants were well documented and widely reported and Tate & Lyle were well aware of their losses when they received sugar from KSL’s plantation,” he said.

The economic damage wrought on families is hard to quantify, said Eang Vuthy, executive director of Equitable Cambodia, an NGO that has supported affected families. Some young people have had to migrate to neighbouring countries, leaving their families behind, so that they can send back money. “When people migrate they are again exposed to great vulnerability in the new place,” he said.

Community leaders in Koh Kong said that in many cases children had been unable to finish school because of the financial pressures facing their families, and now have even greater challenges in finding work.

Eang said Tate & Lyle should commit to speedily finalising a settlement. “Until they do so, its consumers should be aware that by supporting Tate & Lyle’s business, they are making it easier for the company to avoid its responsibility.”

In a statement Tate & Lyle Sugars said: “We recognise our responsibilities under the OECD guidelines for multinational companies to use our leverage to ensure our Cambodian ex-supplier KSL compensates the villagers for the damage they have suffered.”

It added that it was frustrated that not all affected families have received financial compensation. “We are actively working with other stakeholders to see what pressure we can bring to bear,” the company said.

Self-assessment tax

Millions yet to file self-assessment tax return as deadline nears

People who tick the right box could be £125 better off if they were told to work from home



People who have been working from home can apply for tax relief.
Photograph: izusek/Getty Images

People who have been working from home can apply for tax relief.
Photograph: izusek/Getty Images

Rupert Jones

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

With just over four weeks to go until the 31 January self-assessment deadline, several million people still haven't filed their tax return. This could be the weekend to get it out of the way.

Meanwhile, if you are one of the millions who were told by their employer not to come into the office, don't forget that you can claim [tax relief worth up to £125 a year](#) for working from home.

Each year about 11 million people have to complete a self-assessment tax return. Looking at recent years, there were still [5.4 million taxpayers who hadn't filed by 31 December 2019](#), and [5.5 million who were yet to file by 31 December 2018](#).

[Brexit: how the new rules will change your visits to Europe](#) [Read more](#)

For most people, the coronavirus is no excuse for not doing it, though HM Revenue & Customs has said it is “determined to help customers during this difficult time”.

HMRC says it is aware that many people will have been adversely affected by the pandemic, and may, for example, need help to spread the cost of their tax bill. Once an individual has done their 2019-20 return, and knows their tax calculation, they [can set up a payment plan](#), provided they owe less than £30,000. They can then choose how much to pay straight away and how much to pay each month by direct debit, and it can all be done online. Needless to say, you'll have to pay interest.

It's a good time to remind the many people who have spent much of the past few months sitting at their kitchen table, or in their spare room, to apply for tax relief for working from home.

Because the first lockdown began on 23 March 2020, the pandemic takes in two tax years: 2019-20 (the last two weeks) and 2020-21.

It is arguably a lot easier to claim the relief if you don't fill in a tax return. That's because HMRC has created an [online portal](#) offering employees a simple way to claim.

The relief is offered to workers provided that they were told by their employer, rather than chose, to work from home – and provided that they have not received home expenses payments directly from their company.

If you go for the easy, no-receipts-required route, your claim will be based on the assumption that you have incurred costs of £6 a week, and you will get back the tax you would have paid on that. For basic-rate taxpayers, it is

worth £1.20 a week. Higher-rate taxpayers can claim £2.40 a week. Over the course of a year, this could reduce the bill by £62.40, or £124.80 for higher-rate taxpayers.

Note that the £6-a-week figure relates to the period from 6 April 2020; for previous tax years it is £4 a week.

As Sarah Coles at the investment firm Hargreaves Lansdown explains, to claim for perhaps a couple of weeks of the 2019-20 tax year, and the whole of 2020-21, you just put the details of when you started working from home into the online portal, and the [HMRC](#) will apply the relief.

If you do a self-assessment form, you can't use the online portal – you must claim this as an expense on your tax return (working from home should be included in the “other expenses and capital allowances” box). And, crucially, you will only be able to claim for up to and including 5 April 2020 on the 2019-20 return. You will have to wait for 2020-21 form to claim for working from home after that date.

So who needs to do a tax return? Broadly, it's if any of these apply:

- you are a self-employed sole trader whose annual turnover is more than £1,000;
- you earned more than £2,500 renting out property;
- you, or your partner, received child benefit and either of you had an annual income of more than £50,000;
- you received more than £2,500 in other untaxed income, for example from tips or commission, or are an employee claiming expenses totalling more than £2,500;
- you earn more than £100,000 a year; or you earned income from abroad that you need to pay tax on.

Brexit

'Betrayed': Dover residents furious over building of Brexit lorry park

Letter from transport minister sent on New Year's Eve said white cliffs site will be turned into 'Inland Border Facility'



Mick Palmer, who lives in Guston, in front of the area of the planned lorry park. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Mick Palmer, who lives in Guston, in front of the area of the planned lorry park. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent
[@lisaocarroll](https://twitter.com/lisaocarroll)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 12.55 EST

It was [all quiet on the Dover front](#) in the hours after the UK left the EU, as lorries continued to avoid the port.

But just minutes away, beyond the famous white cliffs, the sense of fury over [Brexit](#) was palpable as local residents came to terms with a government letter they received on New Year's Eve telling them that from summer, their

rural idyll of farmland and ancient Roman ways would be transformed into a customs clearance lorry park for 1,200 trucks.

The site is in addition to the Ashford lorry park 22 miles away that barricades fields behind 4-metre fences.

Locals say they feel “betrayed” and “trapped” by the “lies” of the government over Brexit. Just as they were looking forward to a new year, the letter from the transport minister Rachel Maclean arrived advising them that the white cliffs site had been purchased and would be used as an “Inland Border Facility” from July.



31st December 2020

Dear Resident,

RE: Acquisition of the White Cliffs site

I would like to inform you that the Department for Transport has purchased the White Cliffs site in Dover and intends to develop an Inland Border Facility for use from July 2021. We expect some preparatory works to commence soon. These will include securing the perimeter of the site, clearing the site of grass and vegetation and carrying out surveys.

From December 31st at 2300 hours, the UK will cease to be a member of the customs union or the single market and will have to introduce new customs checks at the border. The UK must prepare for new trading arrangements with the EU which will include additional border checks. Those preparations are relevant whether or not we conclude a Trade Agreement with the EU. The UK will in all circumstances be leaving both the customs union and single market, so new border controls will be introduced. Those new controls necessitate the provision of additional infrastructure at key strategic points of entry into the UK, such as the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel.

The letter to residents from Rachel Maclean

“I am absolutely devastated,” said Charlotte Ashmore, who lives on a short row of period cottages overlooking the vast site, acquired under special legislation.

The Green party coordinator for Deal and Dover, Sarah Gleave, said residents had been kept in the dark and feared they had no way of stopping construction.



Sarah Gleave pointing to the planned lorry park. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

She was told in a freedom of information disclosure by Kent county council, seen by the Guardian, that the white cliffs site would take over from Manston airport, where [thousands of lorries were held last week](#) after the French Covid border closure.

Work is expected to start in days, and residents in the tiny villages of Whitfield and Guston that shoulder the site say the park will destroy the quality of their lives, wreck the environment including an ancient Roman right of way across the fields, and bring non-stop light and noise pollution.

“My son has autism and we only moved here two years ago because of the calmness here. He doesn’t like noise and he doesn’t like light and he’s really anxious about this. He doesn’t want a lorry park here,” said Ashmore of her six-year-old, Nathan.

“I’m considering putting the house on the market but we’ve just got a new five-year mortgage so we are trapped,” she added.



Mick Palmer, from Guston, standing in front of the planned lorry site.
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Like her neighbour Mick Palmer, she complains about the lack of consultation, saying the Department for Transport has given just “brief facts”.

A former HGV international driver, Palmer is all too familiar with the need for lorry parks where drivers can rest up, wash and eat. He doesn’t believe the government claim that lorries will be required only to drive in, get their customs paperwork cleared and drive out again.

“I’ve been here for 36 years and I would have been for all my life. They have just told lie after lie after lie. Never has a country treated its people so badly,” he said, adding that Westminster “bigwigs” had no interest in the consequences of their decisions.

“They say it’s not going to be a lorry park but a customs clearance site and lorries will only be here for 20 minutes.

“I know exactly what will happen. Lorries have nowhere to park in [Kent](#), and they will come in here and stop and wave their tachograph and say: ‘I’m not moving.’

“They will have to have floodlights, power points for refrigerated lorries, which means generators going all night.

“We heard this might happen and they said they might start digging on 3 January. We went to a local meeting with some officials and asked how many of them had come down here to look at the site. Not one of them. They don’t know our lives; they don’t know the impact on our lives,” he said.

Residents say they have seen the 5-metre wooden fencing at the Ashford lorry park up the road, which has destroyed hedgerows and sweeping country views for walkers and residents. They fear they will face the same but just 25 metres away from their doors.

“It is absolutely crazy. We have got to stop this,” said Palmer.



Residents say the 15-foot fence has destroyed sweeping country views.
Photograph: Lisa O'Carroll

Gleave is desperately concerned about the impact on the environment. “People only hear about the port, but this is the North Downs way, the main footpath that goes across the county of Kent. It has fantastic wildlife, and is an area of fantastic food production, which is important post-Brexit, and the last thing we want to do is to destroy it.

“The village of Guston is a wonderful community. People are here for the tranquility and community. They don’t have clout, but they are fighting it.



Greave, left, with Sharon McCartney and her daughter, Missy, and Violet the dog. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Sharon McCartney is one of those residents, out walking with her daughter, Missy, and their dog, Violet. “I am disgusted,” she said. “You can already hear the hum of the A2 but it doesn’t bother me when we are in the garden. But what is it going to be like with 1,200 lorries?”

Missy, 17, is also devastated. “I use that Roman road to go into town. In the summer it’s one of the best walks you can do.”

A Department for Transport spokesperson denied the site was a replacement for Manston.

It said the facility would bring local jobs and “further planning consent” requirements would allow locals to express their views.

They added: “Purchasing the white cliffs site in Dover will allow the government to set up an inland facility with easy access to the port, which does not itself have the space needed for extended checks.

“We understand concerns about resulting disruption, which is why we are working with the relevant authorities and our principal designer to ensure the surrounding roads are not negatively impacted by increased HGV movements.”



[US elections 2020](#)

US judge dismisses suit filed against Pence seeking to overturn election result

Lawsuit aimed at allowing vice president to reject electoral college votes is latest in a long line of cases to be thrown out



A justice department lawyer representing Mike Pence said Republicans in Texas and Arizona were suing the wrong person in their quest to overturn the US election result. Photograph: John Bazemore/AP

A justice department lawyer representing Mike Pence said Republicans in Texas and Arizona were suing the wrong person in their quest to overturn the US election result. Photograph: John Bazemore/AP

Reuters

Fri 1 Jan 2021 23.35 EST

A US judge has rejected a lawsuit from a Republican congressman that sought to allow vice president Mike Pence to reject electoral college votes for Joe Biden when Congress meets on Wednesday to certify his victory over president Donald Trump.

The latest long-shot attempt by Trump's Republican allies to overturn the November election result was dismissed by one of Trump's own appointees to the federal bench, Jeremy Kernodle.

He ruled that representative Louie Gohmert of Texas and a slate of Republican electors from Arizona could not show they suffered any personal harm "fairly traceable" to Pence's allegedly unlawful conduct and, therefore, lacked legal standing to bring the case.

[Facts won't fix this: experts on how to fight America's disinformation crisis](#)

[Read more](#)

The standing requirement “helps enforce the limited role of federal courts in our constitutional system. The problem for plaintiffs here is that they lack standing,” Kernodle wrote.

A spokesman for Trump referred questions to Pence’s office. A spokesman for Pence declined to comment.

Gohmert and his fellow plaintiffs said they would appeal. In an interview with the broadcaster Newsmax, the congressman said the ruling was “an example of when the institutions that our constitution created to resolve disputes so that you didn’t have to have riots and violence in the streets, it’s when they go wrong.”

“All this stuff about it [election fraud] being debunked, unsubstantiated, those are absolute lies,” he said, without evidence. “Basically in effect the ruling would be that you got to go to the streets and be as violent as antifa and BLM [Black Lives Matter].”

Trump has [refused to concede defeat](#) and has repeatedly falsely claimed the election was [tainted by widespread fraud](#). He and his allies have [lost dozens of court efforts](#) seeking to reverse the election results.

Biden beat Trump by a 306-232 margin in the electoral college and is set to be sworn in on 20 January.

Under the electoral college system, electoral votes are allotted to states and the District of Columbia based on their congressional representation.

Some Republicans have said they plan to object to the count of presidential electors next week in Congress. The effort could trigger a lengthy debate in the Senate but has virtually no chance of overturning the results.

A justice department lawyer representing Pence on Thursday had urged Kernodle to dismiss the lawsuit, saying they had sued the wrong person because they raised “a host of weighty legal issues about the manner in which the electoral votes for president are to be counted”.

“The Senate and the House, not the vice president, have legal interests that are sufficiently adverse to plaintiffs to ground a case or controversy,” Pence’s filing said.

Iran

Iran to enrich uranium to up to 20% purity, UN nuclear watchdog says

Latest move was flagged in law passed last month after the assassination of country's top nuclear scientist



Iran has already breached the limit of 3.67% uranium purity agreed in a 2015 nuclear deal with the west. Photograph: AP

Iran has already breached the limit of 3.67% uranium purity agreed in a 2015 nuclear deal with the west. Photograph: AP

Agencies

Fri 1 Jan 2021 20.42 EST

Iran has told the United Nations nuclear watchdog it plans to enrich uranium to up to 20% purity, a level it achieved before its 2015 accord, at its Fordow site buried inside a mountain, the agency has said.

The move is the latest of [several recent announcements by Iran](#) to the International Atomic Energy Agency that it plans to further breach the deal,

which it started violating in 2019 in retaliation for [Washington's withdrawal from the agreement](#) and the reimposition of US sanctions against Tehran.

This step was one of many mentioned in a law passed by Iran's parliament last month in response to [the killing of the country's top nuclear scientist](#), which [Tehran has blamed on Israel](#). Such moves by Iran could complicate efforts by US president-elect Joe Biden to rejoin the deal.

"It is an additional blow," a diplomat based in Vienna told AFP.

[The assassination of an Iranian scientist will make Joe Biden's job harder](#)

[Mohamad Bazzi](#)

[Read more](#)

"Iran has informed the agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country's parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium up to 20 percent at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant," the IAEA said in a statement.

An IAEA report to member states earlier on Friday obtained by Reuters used similar wording in describing a letter by Iran to the IAEA dated 31 December.

"Iran's letter to the agency ... did not say when this enrichment activity would take place," the IAEA statement said.

Fordow was built inside a mountain, apparently to protect it from aerial bombardment, and the 2015 deal does not allow enrichment there. Iran is already enriching at Fordow with first-generation IR-1 centrifuges.

Iran [has breached the deal's 3.67% limit](#) on the purity to which it can enrich uranium, but it has only gone up to 4.5% so far, well short of the 20% it achieved before the deal and the 90% that is weapons-grade.

The deal's main aim was to extend the time Iran would need to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb, if it chose to, to at least a year from roughly two to three months. It also lifted international sanctions against Tehran.

US intelligence agencies and the IAEA believe Iran had a secret, coordinated nuclear weapons programme that it halted in 2003. Iran denies ever having had one.

[Joe Biden will face an inbox of complex foreign policy problems from the start](#)

[Read more](#)

Biden, who takes office on January 20, has signalled Washington would rejoin the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear programme.

The deal has been unravelling ever since president Donald Trump dramatically withdrew from it in May 2018 and imposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran.

Germany's foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has said the change of administration in the US means that there is "a last window" for progress that "shouldn't be wasted".

With Reuters and Agence France-Presse

Plane crashes

Plane crash deaths rose in 2020 despite pandemic

Dozens more died in large commercial plane crashes despite 42% drop in flights worldwide



Officials stand near the wreckage of a Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737-800 after it was shot down in Iran in January 2020. The disaster accounted for more than half of the year's aviation deaths.

Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

Officials stand near the wreckage of a Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737-800 after it was shot down in Iran in January 2020. The disaster accounted for more than half of the year's aviation deaths.

Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

Reuters

Fri 1 Jan 2021 20.58 EST

The number of people killed in large commercial airplane crashes rose in 2020 to 299 worldwide despite a sharp decline in flights due to the coronavirus pandemic, a Dutch consulting firm has found.

In 2020 there were 40 accidents involving large commercial passenger planes, five of which were fatal, resulting in 299 fatalities. In 2019 there were nearly double the number of accidents – 86 – eight of which were fatal, resulting in 257 fatalities, said aviation consulting firm To70.

Large commercial airplanes had 0.27 fatal accidents per million flights in 2020, To70 said, or one fatal crash every 3.7m flights – up from 0.18 fatal accidents per million flights in 2019.

[Boeing 737 Max returns to US skies for first time in 21 months](#)

[Read more](#)

Airlines drastically cut the number of flights they operated in 2020 as the pandemic took hold, with Flightradar24 reporting commercial flights it tracked worldwide in 2020 falling 42%, to 24.4m.

More than half of all deaths in the To70 review were the 176 people killed in January 2020 when a Ukrainian plane was shot down in Iranian airspace. The second deadliest incident was the crash of a Pakistan airliner in May in which 98 people died.

Large passenger airplanes covered by the statistics are used by nearly all travellers on airlines but exclude small commuter airplanes in service.

Over the past two decades, aviation deaths have fallen dramatically. As recently as 2005, there were 1,015 deaths aboard commercial passenger flights worldwide, the Aviation Safety Network (ASN) said.

Over the past five years, there have been an average of 14 fatal accidents for commercial passenger and cargo planes resulting in 345 deaths annually, ASN said.

In 2017, aviation had its safest year on record worldwide with only two fatal accidents involving regional turboprops that resulted in 13 deaths and no fatal crashes of passenger jets.

The United States has not had a fatal US passenger airline crash since February 2009 and only one fatality due to a US passenger airline accident in that period.

[Surfing](#)

'Hold my beer': Australian surfer Mikey Wright charges into Hawaii surf to rescue struggling swimmer

Wright himself was filming the incident, then jumped a fence, dived into the water and pulled the woman to safety

Play Video

1:28

Australian pro surfer Mikey Wright saves woman struggling in Hawaii surf – video

An Australian pro surfer who stepped in to rescue a woman being swept away by strong currents in [Hawaii](#) says he did not stop to consider his own safety because he “just knew that she needed help”.

Mikey Wright was looking out over a beach, thought to be on Oahu’s north shore, when he saw a beachgoer struggling in the surf.

Wright posted footage of the rescue on Instagram with the caption: “Hold my beer.”

Although other beachgoers could be seen trying to help and reach the struggling swimmer, the current was too strong.



Mikey Wright waded in after seeing a woman in trouble.

Up steps Wright, declaring, the swimmer is “going to need to get saved”.

Some of the beachgoers can be heard on the video doubting Wright, with someone heard saying, “You can’t save him.”

But that doesn’t stop the pro surfer handing over his phone, which is still filming, jumping the fence and charging into the surf.

Fighting the surging ocean and difficult conditions, Wright dives in and picks up the woman, and although they were submerged multiple times, successfully pulls her out of the surf.

A group of people awaited them on the beach, helping them from the water and pulling them to safety.



Australia's Mikey Wright surfs a wave at Pipeline on the north shore of Oahu, Hawaii on 24 December 2020. Photograph: Brian Bielmann/AFP/Getty Images

"I didn't question if I was in danger," Wright, 24, later told the American Broadcasting Corporation. "I just knew that she needed help. This lady was in a very tricky situation. Even for a confident person in the water, that's not somewhere you want to be."

Making the rescue all the more dangerous were sharp volcanic rocks and 15-foot waves that were breaking so close together they took on "the force of two waves". Wright said his sister, who also went into the water, helped to warn when this was occurring.

The video was also posted by Wright's sister, Tyler, who captioned it himself by saying "Closing out 2020 with some hero shit by [Mikey]."

It has been reposted by surfers around the world, and has been viewed thousands of times, as people celebrate Wright's bravery.

Many took to comment on Wright's post, praising the 24-year-old and championing his selfless act.

Mick Fanning, former world champion surfer, wrote: “Wow that could of ended really bad!! Well done.”

Another comment came from Jessi Miley-Dyer, a former championship tour surfer, who said, “Who needs a cape when you have a mullet.”

Wright comes from a family of surfers, including brother Owen and two-time women’s world champion Tyler, all from the the New South Wales south coast town of Culburra.

The siblings were in Hawaii for the Pipeline Masters event, held just before Christmas.

Mikey placed 17th in the men’s event, but Tyler won the first women’s tour title at Hawaii’s famed Pipeline break, making it an overall successful trip for the family.

2021.01.02 - Coronavirus

- [Coronavirus live updates India approves AstraZeneca vaccine; Irish health officials warn virus is 'absolutely rampant'](#)
- [Ireland Cases surge and hospitalisations rise](#)
- [France Police attacked while trying to stop New Year's Eve rave](#)
- [US Hundreds of thousands more deaths possible amid vaccine chaos](#)
- ['I'd sunk, lost all confidence' The charity helping young people into work](#)
- ['Optimal time' Fauci says US will not delay second doses of vaccine](#)
- ['A spoilt brat country' The Australians overseas who decided not to come home](#)

Coronavirus

India approves Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine; Italy delays opening ski resorts - as it happened

Coronavirus

Ireland Covid cases surge as health official warns virus is 'absolutely rampant'

Some 9,000 cases yet to be formally reported as chief medical officer says biggest worry is rise in hospitalisations

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Deserted streets in Galway, Ireland, after the government imposed the highest level of restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus.
Photograph: Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters

Deserted streets in Galway, Ireland, after the government imposed the highest level of restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus.
Photograph: Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters

Guardian staff

Fri 1 Jan 2021 23.33 EST

Ireland is bracing for 9,000 more Covid cases to be added to the official tally as the system struggles to handle a surge in positive results, with health officials warning hospitals will not be able to cope if the trend continues.

The sharp rise in positive results led to delays in formal reporting, said Professor Philip Nolan from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET), though he said it “does not affect case management or contact tracing or our overall monitoring and modelling of the pandemic”.

On Thursday, NPHET estimated the number of positive tests still pending registration was 4,000, more than doubling to 9,000 the following day.

On Friday, Ireland formally reported a daily record 1,754 confirmed cases, surpassing 1,500 daily cases for the fourth day in a row.

Chief medical officer Dr Tony Holohan said the biggest worry was the rapid rise in hospitalisations. “We are now admitting between 50 to 70 people a day to our hospital system. Unfortunately, we expect this to get worse before it gets better. Our health system will not continue to cope with this level of impact.”

[US surpasses landmark of 20m coronavirus cases on New Year's Day](#)

[Read more](#)

“We have also seen a significant increase in positive laboratory tests in recent days reflecting a true increase in the incidence of the disease as well as the delay in people coming forward for testing over the Christmas period. As our systems catch up with these effects it places significant pressure on our reporting system.”

On New Year’s Eve, Ireland entered a level-five lockdown, with non-essential shops closing, a 5km travel limit, restrictions on household gatherings and schools staying closed.

Paul Reid, CEO of the Health Service Executive (HSE), told RTÉ Radio 1: “[The virus is absolutely rampant now](#) in the community. Everybody is at extreme risk of contracting the virus.”

The health system was not built to handle a pandemic, and “can’t cope” with the number of tests being conducted, he said. Symptomatic cases are now being prioritised as demand for tests soars.

“The real picture over the last few days is most likely getting close to 3,000 cases per day and that’s the extent of the virus that we’re dealing with,” he said. “When we get to these levels, it has a severe impact across a whole set of areas, not just our systems, the health service, and the volume that any system can cope with.”

Colm Henry, the chief clinical officer at the HSE, urged everyone to treat others as if they had the virus, because its prevalence was “increasing exponentially”. “We know the virus is out of control,” he said.

Ireland has gone from having the lowest infection rate in the European Union just two weeks ago to having the fastest rate of deterioration, after shops and large parts of the hospitality sector were allowed to reopen for most of December.

The 14-day incidence rate per 100,000 population in Ireland went from 87 at the beginning of December to 321.3 at the end of the month, according to [RTE](#). The death toll now stands at 2,248 with a total of 93,532 confirmed cases.

From Wednesday, stricter Covid testing measures will replace a ban on travellers from the UK, with passengers needing to show a negative test result in the previous three days in a bid to curb the spread of a more transmissible variant of the virus, foreign minister Simon Coveney said.

[France](#)

French police attacked while trying to stop New Year's Eve rave

Bottles and stones thrown at officers at event in Brittany attended by 2,500 people

Associated Press in Paris

Fri 1 Jan 2021 15.11 EST Last modified on Sat 2 Jan 2021 04.54 EST



A disused hangar in Lieuron, about 25 miles south of Rennes, hosted a New Year's Eve rave. Photograph: Jean-François Monier/AFP/Getty Images

Police attempting to shut down an underground, curfew-busting New Year's Eve party that drew at least 2,500 people in western [France](#) were attacked by ravers who torched one police vehicle and injured officers with volleys of bottles and stones.

Hundreds of vehicles started converging on a hangar in Lieuron, Brittany, on Thursday night to party into the new year, the regional government said on

Friday. It said police were attacked when they tried to stop ravers from installing their party gear.

french corona cases

On Friday morning, 2,500 ravers from France and abroad were still partying, circled by a reinforced police presence, the regional government said.

Prosecutors were considering an array of possible criminal charges. The party took place despite France's 8pm to 6am nationwide curfew aimed at dissuading public gatherings during the pandemic.

Party-goers, however, appealed for understanding after months of nightlife-destroying lockdowns and curfews designed to limit coronavirus infections.



Party-goers in the disused hangar in Lieuron were understood to have come from different French departments. Photograph: Jean-François Monier/AFP/Getty Images

A volunteer with an aid group that was distributing masks, anti-virus gel and health advice inside the techno party said ravers needed to let loose. He said ravers were trying to stay safe by not sharing joints or drinks. Their group, Techno+, was advising partygoers to self-isolate for a week and then get

tested after attending the rave. The group also said the disused hangar was airy and well ventilated.

France has reported more than 64,000 virus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Coronavirus

Hundreds of thousands more US Covid deaths possible amid vaccine chaos

Scant funding and scattered logistics have slowed distribution process as coronavirus case numbers rise, painting a dire picture for the future



Healthcare workers treat coronavirus patients at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas on 31 December 2020. Photograph: Callaghan O'Hare/Reuters

Healthcare workers treat coronavirus patients at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas on 31 December 2020. Photograph: Callaghan O'Hare/Reuters

Victoria Bekiempis in New York and agencies

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

America had no trouble hitting the appalling milestone of [20m coronavirus cases](#), but reaching the federal government's own target of vaccinating 20 million people by the end of 2020 proved a [huge problem](#).

Just under 3 million Americans were vaccinated by the time the crystal-encrusted ball dropped in New York's almost-deserted Times Square at midnight on New Year's Eve to mark the end of a hellish year.

Now US distribution of the vaccine is being routinely described as “[chaos](#)”, with criticism that inept officials are “botching” efforts.

More than 10,000 people died in the US in the last three days of 2020 alone, to bring the national death toll close to 350,000 so far, including the worst 24-hour toll of the whole pandemic when more than 3,700 people died last Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University [data](#).

So vaccines are the big hope for fighting the outbreak. But experts are warning that hundreds of thousands more deaths are possible if the inoculation process doesn't get quickly and solidly on track.

“Basically, the federal government is botching the vaccine rollout,” said Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University’s school of public health.

“They thought their job ends when the vaccine arrives in the states, and there’s really no well-delineated plan.”

He added: “What America is suffering through is the consequence of incompetence in federal leadership – the entire pandemic has been marred by a group of people, not just Donald Trump – who don’t understand how things work and can’t get something to work effectively.”

Jha noted that he was not including top US infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci or White House coronavirus taskforce coordinator Dr Deborah Birx among this group.

If the rollout continues at the current pace, Jha said, it could take “many, many months and years” to fulfill vaccination goals for the nation.

And if this delay continues for months, it could cause the US to lose “several hundred thousand more people”, he warned.

An NBC [analysis](#) earlier this week found that at this present vaccination rate, “it would [take almost 10 years to inoculate enough Americans](#) to get

the pandemic under control”.

The breakthrough new vaccines [coming on stream](#) so far in the west from Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford University/AstraZeneca are lifesavers, with more still in trial.

“The vaccine looks like it can reduce the risk of … symptomatic Covid,” said Bruce Y Lee, professor at Cuny graduate school of public health and health policy in New York.

But he warned: “Every week, two week, three-week delay, while the cases are pushing up further, is costing lives – and especially if we’re talking about healthcare professionals.”

The state of vaccines being administered to the public in many US areas stems from a combination of scant funding and scattered logistics.

Public health in the US is chronically under-funded. Local and state officials had long warned federal authorities that they required more than \$8bn in additional money to build an infrastructure to get shots into arms. Instead, the White House gave states just \$340m for vaccination preparations.

For months, some congressional legislators chafed at providing more money for vaccine distribution. It wasn’t until last Sunday, when the delayed new coronavirus aid bill was signed by Trump, that an additional \$8bn in funding came through, Stat News [explained](#).

More money to states won’t fully solve the problem, however. Experts said that a unified, national plan is necessary to address logistical snags.

“Not enough doses have been produced and distributed,” said Lee, who is also executive director of public health informatics, computational and operations research at Cuny.

“Of the doses that have been distributed, the majority have not been administered. They’re either getting [caught] up in the supply chain … or not getting administered, which is not too surprising, because there hasn’t been a clear, coordinated national plan.”

The federal government's decision to put the initiative onto states as to how they would administer the vaccine doses to people has exacerbated these problems.

The Pfizer/BioNetch vaccine must be [stored](#) between -112F (-80C) and -94F (-70C), while Moderna's jab needs to be stored at about -4F (-20C) – meaning that localities may struggle to find adequate freezer capacity.

Also lacking is federal coordination over vaccine accessories such as syringes, needles and alcohol swabs.

“We have to remember, earlier this year, testing went awry because we ran out of cotton swabs,” Lee pointed out.

Numerous reports across the US paint a picture of haphazard or limited rollout.

Texas residents have complained that providers aren't picking up the phone when they call for information, that official websites were hard to navigate – and that they didn't know where to get the vaccine, [reported](#) Dallas ABC affiliate WFAA-TV.

In Florida, where those 65 and up can also start getting vaccinated, senior citizens were seen camping out overnight for the jab.

Terry Beth Hadler, 69, queued up in a parking lot overnight with hundreds of others outside the Bonita Springs library in south-west Florida.

She waited 14 hours, and told the Associated Press that a fight almost broke out before daybreak on Tuesday, when some people cut in line.

“I'm afraid that the event was a super-spreader, I was petrified,” Hadler said.

Near Miami, seniors overwhelmed phone lines and a health department website in an often futile attempt to get vaccination appointments, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel [reported](#).

New York City, the world coronavirus hotspot back in the early spring, is also suffering from sluggish distribution.

The city has received more than 340,000 doses but administered only about 88,000, The New York Times reported Friday.

No one denies it's challenging to execute a massive vaccination campaign in the midst of a public health crisis that has overwhelmed health personnel and services in many parts of the nation.

Claire Hannan, head of the Association of Immunization Managers, said in an emailed statement: "Doses distributed to hospitals will not be administered overnight. Hospitals are moving at a very deliberate pace. Providers need to be trained and healthcare personnel need to receive education about the vaccine."

She added: "Hospitals are also stretched very thin right now, we're asking for a lot of their time, resources, space, energy and effort to coordinate vaccine clinics, they have to approach vaccination in the midst of caring for patients."

The pressure is intense.

"We are expecting to move at lightning speed, and I think they're actually moving at a very good pace given that this is a completely new vaccine," Jessica Justman, associate professor of medicine in epidemiology at Columbia Mailman school of public health.

That's not to say that delays, even if expected, shouldn't be immediately addressed. Both facts are true: delays were virtually inevitable, but they will cost lives, she noted.

"Hundreds of thousands of people are dying and the rollout of the vaccine needs to happen as quickly as possible," Justman said.

Some public health experts believe that the US needs to take a more innovative approach, including looking to the [UK's latest plan](#) which aims to get as many people their first dose as possible, rather than [holding back doses](#) in order to ensure ready amounts of the initially-scarce supplies for administering the second required shot to the same people a few weeks after their first shot.

“In the UK, they are spacing out the amount of time between the first dose and the second dose, which is a very creative idea,” Justman said. “I trust that the UK would not make that decision without having data to back that up.”

Brown’s Jha said that science showing efficacy with a single dose isn’t as strong, presenting [a dilemma](#). The US could keep following its present approach – unwilling to take any scientific risks and operating “exactly by the book” on vaccine dispensing or seeing whether something novel works to stem the crisis.

“I think the UK approach in getting a single dose out there is the right approach,” Jha said. “In my mind, it is far more reasonable given the state of play that we are in, that we’ve got to move on this.”

On Friday, however, Fauci [came out against](#) following the UK model to delay second shots in order to deliver to more people the partial protection conferred by a single dose.

Meanwhile, some states’ [decision](#) to prioritize senior citizens above non-healthcare essential workers, which is in opposition to federal recommendations, might create logistical challenges.

However, “in terms of getting the vaccine out and into arms as quickly as possible, this may not be such a bad thing”, Hannan said.

She added: “States have not had sufficient time or resources to set these systems up, so there will be hiccups. But again, the bottom line, every day that vaccine is going into arms is a success.”

Brown’s Jha said the US could get back on track.

Even amid the suffering, he concluded: “I think you can make a moderate set of changes, and I think you can get this fixed.”

Guardian and Observer charity appeal 2020Youth unemployment

'I'd sunk, lost all confidence': the charity helping young people into work

Georgina George and Jamil Mungul credit UK Youth-supported programmes with helping them find a new direction

- Please donate to our appeal [here](#)



Georgina George, 23, who credits the Reach Up employability programme, supported by UK Youth, with providing her with a 'whole new set of skills'.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Georgina George, 23, who credits the Reach Up employability programme, supported by UK Youth, with providing her with a 'whole new set of skills'.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian



[Amelia Hill](#)

[@byameliahill](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.30 EST

Georgina George had a tough time at school and struggled for years afterwards to work out what she wanted to do with her life.

Then just before the pandemic hit, it all came together: she discovered a passion for aviation engineering and found a job in the sector that she loved. Shaking off the problems from her past, the 23-year-old began to forge ahead.

But then what would have been just a wobble in normal times threw her completely off course: the company she worked for went into liquidation and she was made redundant while on maternity leave.

[Guardian and Observer charity appeal hits £1m](#)

[Read more](#)

Forced to move out of her home in West Sussex and into her in-laws' house in an isolated village in Berkshire to save money during the pandemic, George could suddenly only see brick walls ahead of her.

“I want to work and be a good example to my daughter,” she says. “But because of the pandemic it seemed impossible. I sent out hundreds of CVs and spent days trawling the internet for jobs but I just couldn’t find anything in this part of the world. Within a few months of moving here, I’d sunk. I lost all my confidence, began suffering from anxiety, put on weight and stopped going out. It felt like it was all over.”

Then, by chance, George stumbled upon the [Reach Up employability programme](#). Supported by [UK Youth](#), it supports young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are not in employment, education or training (Neet), or at risk of becoming Neet.

UK Youth is one of three charities supported by the [Guardian and Observer 2020 appeal](#) for disadvantaged young people hit by the Covid crisis. £1m has been raised so far, with the appeal still to run for another week.

It was a short, two-week course, but, George says, its eight modules – which included virtual volunteering support, mock interviews, social action planning and networking skills – have been transformational.

“I am a different person now with a whole new set of skills that make me totally employable,” she says, beaming, while bouncing baby Jessie on her knee.

[Youth unemployment](#) in Britain, which was at a record low of 5.5% before the pandemic, [is on course to more than triple](#) to the highest level since the early 1980s, hitting 17% among economically active 18- to 29-year-olds by late 2020. This is the same level as in 1984 under Margaret Thatcher’s government and will have a devastating impact on the employability, living standards and mental health of a generation of young adults.

This generation is, says Patrick Shaw-Brown, the director of national programmes at UK Youth, at risk of losing vital confidence in the abilities and aspirations they need to find employment, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

“Programmes provided through youth work, such as Reach Up, provide an opportunity for young people to learn the skills they need to get a job,

understand where they can make the most of their talents and build the confidence and networks to pursue their goals,” he says.

“The relationship with a youth worker, sometimes the only trusted adult in a young person’s life, and the safe space created by the youth organisations are critical to reaching those most in need. These are elements that young people may not have found through other avenues such as careers advice at school or recruitment services.”

Work readiness programmes, when combined with the broader life support that youth workers can give to young people in difficult circumstances, can transform a young person’s prospects over as little as a few days or weeks, says Shaw-Brown. This not only empowers the young person, it also allows them to contribute to society over the course of a lifetime.

When Jamil Mungul came to another scheme supported by UK Youth, the [Soapbox Youth Centre](#) in Islington, north London, in 2017, he was depressed and close to dropping out of college. Sensing his technological talents, a youth worker, James Dellow, gradually encouraged Mungul to develop from Soapbox participant to volunteer, and finally to a paid youth worker.

Thanks to Dellow’s support, Mungul has developed and taught new coding programmes and techniques, as well as 3D design and virtual reality courses, to other isolated and deprived young people, sensitively tailoring his teaching techniques to each person’s specific issues and anxieties.

Dellow says Mungul is now a key part of Soapbox; someone they cannot do without. He returns the compliment, praising the organisation for helping him set up his own IT business.

“This is 21st-century youth work,” says Mungul. “And while I’m helping others, I’m also developing the skills to propel my own career opportunities and scope for success.”

- Please donate to the Guardian and Observer appeal [here](#)

- If you are a young person struggling with your mental health, advice and support is available on the [YoungMinds website](#), including information about how to get help. If you are a young person in need of urgent support, contact the YoungMinds Crisis Messenger by texting YM to 85258. Young Minds' dedicated helpline for parents can be called free on 0808 802 5544 from 9.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

[Coronavirus](#)

Dr Anthony Fauci says US will not delay second doses of Covid vaccine

American infectious disease expert disagrees with UK's plans to prioritise first doses

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, prepares to receive his first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.
Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, prepares to receive his first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.
Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

[Edna Mohamed](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 19.06 EST

The American infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci has said he does not agree with the UK's approach of [delaying the second dose](#) of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

On Friday, Dr Fauci told CNN that the United States would not be following in the UK's footsteps and would follow Pfizer and BioNTech's guidance to administer the second dose of its vaccine three weeks after the first.

Despite an outcry from doctors, the [UK's chief medical officers defended](#) their plans this week to delay the second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to patients, meaning people would now wait up to 12 weeks. The change is to prioritise giving more people their first dose.

Dr Fauci told CNN: "We know from the clinical trials that the optimal time is to give it on one day and for [the Moderna jab which is also approved in the US] wait 28 days and for Pfizer 21 days later." He added that while you can "make the argument" for stretching out the doses, he would not be in favour of doing that.

Pfizer and BioNTech also warned that the two doses were crucial to achieving maximum protection against Covid, saying that they did not have evidence that the first dose alone would protect patients after three weeks.

In the UK, the new move will apply to people who were expecting to have their second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine after 4 January. Patients getting the first jab of the newly approved [AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine](#) will also have to wait up to 12 weeks.

In a statement on Thursday night, Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer of England, and his counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, said that they stood by their decision to delay a second dose in order to ensure more people were able to receive their first as soon as possible.

They said: "We have to follow public health principles and act at speed if we are to beat this pandemic which is running rampant in our communities, and we believe the public will understand and thank us for this decisive action."

Australian lifestyle

'A spoilt brat country': the Australians overseas who decided not to come home

While hundreds of thousands of Australians returned in 2020, and thousands more struggled to, most expatriates stayed put – here some share why



Expatriate Australians say overseas cities such as Paris often provide more opportunities and a more positive work culture than their homeland, although they also don't necessarily share the same sense of humour.
Photograph: Petr Kovalenkov/Alamy Stock Photo

Expatriate Australians say overseas cities such as Paris often provide more opportunities and a more positive work culture than their homeland, although they also don't necessarily share the same sense of humour.
Photograph: Petr Kovalenkov/Alamy Stock Photo

Kate Guest

Fri 1 Jan 2021 14.00 EST

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the foreign affairs department estimated there were about one million Australians living overseas at any given time. This year, between March and October about [398,000](#) Australians forked out thousands of dollars and navigated strict border controls to return home, many for good. At least another 36,000 [wanted to return](#), but were unable to do so. Which means that most decided to stay where they were – and for some the events of 2020 crystallised exactly why.

“It’s difficult to feel a sense of belonging when fellow Australians act like they don’t want us to come home,” says Ashton Hollwarth, a vet who moved from Perth to the UK five years ago. “People say things like ‘Well, you chose to stay there’ and ‘you were told to come home’ when I have friends that spent thousands trying and had so many flights cancelled. The way Aussies in Australia turned on Aussies abroad is hurtful and a little frightening.”

While many expats praise Australia’s handling of the pandemic, they also see hints of a closed off mindset that sent them away in the first place.



“It is an amazing country but my god, we could do better,” says Hugh Rutherford, a photographer living in Uganda. Photograph: Hugh Rutherford

“Every time I come home, I cringe at the politics,” says Hugh Rutherford, a photographer and filmmaker living in Kampala, Uganda. Ugandans often tell him he is lucky to come from Australia and that they would love to live there. “It’s true, it is an amazing country but my god, we could do better. For young Ugandans heading to Australia it would be tough. Wrong skin colour, for one. Obviously I don’t tell them that, but it does make me sad. We promote ourselves as being welcoming, but we’re really not.”

Stuart McDonald, a travel writer who has lived in south-east Asia for more than 20 years, feels similarly. “It feels more and more like the States – angry, corrupt, terrible treatment of minorities. Why on earth would I want to expose my children to that unnecessarily?”

‘Australia is a spoilt brat country’

Many expats say they are uncomfortable with what they perceive as a political shift to the right, particularly on issues such as climate change and refugees.

“Viewed from overseas, Australia is a spoilt brat country,” says Sam Davies, who runs a communications agency in Paris. “Climate? Deal with it, FFS. In Europe countries work together to tackle climate change. Australia still farts on about coal and carbon credits.”

Rutherford says that while working in South Sudan, he was asked why Australia wasn’t taking more South Sudanese refugees. “I didn’t know what to say.”

Dr Paul Sendziuk, head of history at the University of Adelaide, says Australians perhaps expect more of their country given its advantages, and judge it more harshly when it fails to live up to expectations.

“This would appear to be the case when we think about Australia’s treatment of refugees, which many cite as a source of shame and worthy of leaving our shores or remaining away. By most objective measures, Australia does more for refugees than almost any country in the world. The problem is: compared to our relative abundance, which we could share, and our history, when we

did so much more for refugees, we appear to be so mean and miserable now.”

‘Way too conservative in how it views risk’

For expatriates working in tech and creative industries, the concern with returning home is material, as well as existential. “I don’t know what I would do for work there. I was on some good gigs in Australia but I couldn’t see a pathway for moving up,” says Anna Robb, a producer and stage manager who has worked around the world for productions such as Cirque du Soleil.



‘Nobody supports you until you actually make it,’ says Lashan Ranasinghe, who wishes Australia was more open to creative risks. Photograph: Lashan Ranasinghe

Tara Minton moved to London in 2011 to be a jazz musician after struggling to find an audience in Australia. “In Australia when I told people what I did for a living their reply was always, ‘Yeah, but what’s your day job?’ It seemed inconceivable that a person could make their living from playing music.”

“The country is way too conservative in how it views risk,” says Lashan Ranasinghe, a project manager who was active in Keep Sydney Open before moving to Montreal and then London. “Nobody supports you until you actually make it. In Montreal, if you have an idea you feel supported to try it out. People have a better relationship with risk, and see the potential of failure as part of the process.”

Jacqueline Lauren, the co-founder and CEO of Lenslife, a creative communication platform, says Australia is “light years behind the US and UK where the startup scene is concerned”. After three years trying to make it work in Australia Lauren moved to London – and discovered plenty of Australian founders already there. “The home market just isn’t conducive to early-stage tech – unless your vertical is property, agriculture or mining, in which case you’ll probably do just fine!”



‘It feels like people are more satisfied with the status quo,’ says Michelle Feuerlicht, who lives in London and worries her skills would not be of use in Australia
Photograph: Michelle Feuerlicht

Digital producer Michelle Feuerlicht agrees innovation isn’t supported enough. Feuerlicht was a pioneer of online journalism at the ABC and at 23 won a Walkley Award for her work with Four Corners. “I fought so hard to push digital boundaries, and even after the recognition it continued to be a

battle,” she says. Frustrated, she moved to the UK and now works on an Innovate UK-funded project that explores how live performances can use immersive technologies.

“What I am working on now really exposes the gap between the UK and Australia. This sort of future thinking within the arts doesn’t seem to be happening in Australia. It feels like people are more satisfied with the status quo. I’m not sure there’s any need for my skills, because they haven’t got the sort of industry I work in now.”

‘I have been given much more respect as a working woman abroad’

Australia’s blokey culture feels particularly alienating and outdated for many expats.

Lawyer Claire Campbell, who now lives in Paris, says part of her reason for leaving Australia was that the work culture at law firms makes it harder for women to achieve senior roles. “It’s funny to see that a ‘target’ of 35-40% female partnership by 2023-5 is seen as a positive thing to advertise when women have been comprising at least 50% of law school graduates, and generally outperforming men academically, for a significant period. Clearly these things are not all about merit and have a lot to do with structural discrimination.”

“I have been given much more respect as a working woman abroad than I experienced in Australia,” says Robb, who now lives in Hong Kong with her American husband. For her, the lack of opportunity in Australia was not entirely specific to her industry. “As a mother of two, in Hong Kong I have access to affordable childcare. That allows me to continue to progress in my career and run a side business,” she says. “I simply could not do that in Australia. As someone who works in the arts, financially and personally, it just doesn’t make sense to return to Australia until the kids are much older.”

Campbell says “broad structural change is needed” to improve how women are treated in Australia. “If the same resources were dedicated to changing the culture around equality of women’s participation in society and the

workplace as are dedicated to ‘stopping the boats’ and Australia’s anti-terrorism efforts, it would be a much healthier place for everyone.”

For men, the effects are subtler but still felt. “There’s this social pressure to not really open up about your emotions, which can lead to a lot of mental health problems,” says Ranasinghe. “I’m not saying there isn’t a similar issue in the UK – British people are the most emotionally insular ever – but with London being so international it seems less of a problem.”

‘If Australia were in Europe I’d live in Australia’

Yet even those who feel their relationship with Australia has become dysfunctional still appreciate aspects of it. Campbell says the resilience she developed as an Australian has helped her cope with the challenges of 2020, while many miss Australians’ friendliness and flat social hierarchy.



Sam Davies, missing Australians’ jovial attitudes, wore a Santa belly jumper around a Parisian neighbourhood – it did not go well. Photograph: Sam Davies

When Davies tried to recreate some of that easy Oz-style interaction at Christmas by wearing a conversation-starting festive jumper around one of Paris's posher districts it didn't go well. "It was a Santa Claus with an in-built beer belly. No one smiled or even acknowledged my desperate cry for attention, apart from the security guard who stopped me at the supermarket because he thought I'd been shoplifting."

Most acknowledge the places they live now face similar, or totally different, issues. Yet there is always one overriding, immutable factor: Australia is just so far away.

"If Australia were in Europe I'd live in Australia," says Minton. "For all the flaws of home, I still love it. I would fight for her, work through the sexism, racism and cultural issues if she were closer to the rest of the world. Australia is not perfect, but Europe is not the oasis I imagined it to be either."

2021.01.02 - Coronavirus uk

- [Exclusive Antidepressant use in England soars as pandemic cuts counselling access](#)
- [Anxiety How lockdown led me on to prescription drugs](#)
- [Vaccine Ministers urged to strip away red tape to hit target](#)
- [Universities Students ask for emergency cash to cover fees and rent](#)
- [Hospitals Government hopes for new year easing unravel](#)

Mental health

Antidepressant use in England soars as pandemic cuts counselling access

Exclusive: more than 6m people receive drugs as experts warn of Covid pandemic's effects on mental health

- [How anxiety of lockdown led me on to prescription drugs](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Pamela Duncan](#) and [Sarah Marsh](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.43 EST Last modified on Sat 2 Jan 2021 12.12 EST



A charity says prescriptions of antidepressants should go hand in hand with talking therapy. Photograph: Ijubaphoto/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Calls to mental health helplines and prescriptions for antidepressants have reached an all-time high, while access to potentially life-saving talking

therapies has plunged during the coronavirus pandemic, a *Guardian* investigation has found.

More than 6 million people in [England](#) received antidepressants in the three months to September, part of a wider trend and the highest figure on record.

The fall in referrals to [NHS](#) psychological therapies services (IAPT) is thought to have been down to counselling services going online, which some doctors have deemed inappropriate for certain patients, while some patients were reluctant to seek face-to-face help or add extra pressure to health services.

Concerns have been raised that vital early intervention treatment will not have been given, with experts saying the longer people wait for appropriate help the “more severe and complex their difficulties and their lives can become”.

Lucy Schonegevel, the deputy campaigns director at the mental health charity Rethink, said there was a “big risk of antidepressants being prescribed with no support”, adding that such medications should “go hand in hand” with therapy.

Her concerns were echoed by the mental health campaigner Natasha Devon, who said: “People are going to their GPs with symptoms of mental illness and being sent away with a bag of medication, having been put on an 18-month waiting list.”

Dr Esther Cohen-Tovée, who is chair of the British Psychological Society’s division of clinical psychology, said: “I’m shocked and extremely concerned about the massive extent of the reduction in referrals for psychological help during a time of huge anxiety, stress and distress for the whole population. This is even more concerning when there has been a huge increase in the prescription of antidepressants.”

She said psychological help “can be a lifesaver” and “the longer people wait, the more severe and complex their difficulties and their lives can become”.

Cohen-Tovée said an increase in resources for psychological services was urgently needed and if they were not provided the “impacts will be devastating”. She said they would add “to the existing and profound direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic itself … hampering our efforts towards recovery for individuals, families and communities”.

Dr Gary Howsam, the vice-chair of the Royal College of GPs, said its members had reported an increase in the number of patients presenting with mental health concerns, including anxiety and low moods, during the pandemic.

“While for some these symptoms may be mild, for others they could be risk factors for self-harm and suicidal behaviour and, as such, GPs take these concerns very seriously.

“An increase in antidepressant prescribing over the course of the pandemic is not surprising, given the difficult circumstances people are living under and should not automatically be seen as a negative thing,” he said, adding that this indicates that those struggling are still seeking help.

graphic

There were 601,530 referrals to the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme in the six months to the end of August, according to the [latest available data](#), 235,000 fewer than in 2019, a 28% drop.

Appointments for the most acute cases also fell. Hospital attendances across 10 mental health, psychology and psychiatric categories fell by 9% in the seven months to the end of September while first appointments fell by 26%. An NHS spokesperson said when non-acute cases were included the drop-off was less severe.

Experts said the fall was due to a combination of some people not being provided appropriate support, for example, group therapy, as services went online, [a reluctance among some](#) to come forward due to Covid concerns and service interruptions during the first wave.

The figures point to an unmet need at a time of heightened mental health strain caused by Covid including isolation, lockdown, illness, bereavement and concerns over financial security and job losses. In July, the Office for National Statistics said the number of adults in Britain with depression doubled during the coronavirus pandemic.

There have also been indications of direct Covid impacts on mental health. A recent study found that one in five people who have had Covid-19 were diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder such as anxiety, depression or insomnia within three months of testing positive for the virus.

There are signs that the private sector and charities are absorbing some of the demand.

A spokesperson for Priory, a private mental health provider, said it had a quiet period at the height of lockdown but had since seen a “significant rise in referrals to our private acute services”, with a 70% increase in private referrals in October compared with October 2019.

However, Scott Weich, a professor at the mental health research unit at the University of Sheffield, said the current situation was not solely due to the Covid pandemic: “Years of austerity led to rising rates of psychiatric morbidity and, at the same time, reduced availability and access to care.

“What is clear is that it will take time to get back to where we were before the pandemic, let alone where we should be in terms of delivering high quality mental health services.”

An NHS England spokesperson said some people initially had concerns about coming forward for care but that mental health services remained open and referrals have returned to near pre-Covid levels.

“Talking therapy sessions which the public can self-refer on to for both face to face and online sessions and referrals are now rapidly increasing, while the establishment of all-age 24/7 crisis service helplines, and self-help websites such as Every Mind Matters can also aid those people going through a tough time.”

- In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

Mental health

How anxiety during lockdown led me to prescription drugs

Young people tell of mental health problems during Covid pandemic restrictions

- [Antidepressant use at all-time high](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)



James Leeland went back on antidepressants during lockdown. Photograph: Millie Pilkington/The Guardian

James Leeland went back on antidepressants during lockdown. Photograph: Millie Pilkington/The Guardian



[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.59 EST

Anxiety crept up on Oludayo Asuni until she was having a panic attack a day, and texts and calls from friends and family were increasingly going unanswered. As her world began to unravel, she was prescribed antidepressants.

The 23-year-old university student, whose family come from Kent, is among hundreds of thousands of people who started taking medication during the pandemic, or went back on to prescription drugs to tackle re-emerging mental health problems.

Data show that [more than 6 million people in England](#) received antidepressants in the three months to September, the highest figure on record.

The number of people referred to talking therapies fell by 250,000 in the six months to August, compared with the same period last year.

Asuni was given the option of online counselling when she first started experiencing problems, but it didn't help. "What I found hard about lockdown was the confinement," she said.

Lockdown increased feelings of anxiety she was having about her degree course, and with classes having stopped due to lockdown measures she worried about completing her dissertation. “This is my whole degree,” she thought, “and if I cannot do my work, what will I do?”

Antonia, from London, who did not want to give her surname, said quarantine and isolation also compounded her problems.

“I have always been a fairly anxious person, but I would not say anything outside the norm,” she said, noting that she had just departed a job due to many of the issues raised during the Black Lives Matter protests.

“I found it hard to move on from that, even though I was in a new job. Things that would normally help, such as going to the gym, didn’t because it was closed, and doing things with friends was hard.”

She could no longer get out of bed, lost her appetite and was prescribed antidepressants by her doctor. “I was told I could have counselling in conjunction with it, but I have had counselling in the past and it got to the point where I needed something. I was not feeling OK.”

James Leeland, 29, said he went back on antidepressants for the third time around last May.

He described his depression as being like a bubble forming around him, as he got overwhelming feelings of low self-esteem. “I got in contact with a doctor and I explained how I was feeling,” he said. “I was after a counsellor to discuss it, because this time around there was no trigger but lots of external factors causing extra stress, like the pandemic and I had a newborn child.

“But with things how they are and counselling limited at the moment … after a lot of back and forth with the doctor, that is when I thought ‘I will try tablets’.” Leeland has since come off the drugs and has found talking to his family more helpful.

Christopher Dowrick, a university professor and practising GP in Liverpool, is unsurprised by the rise in antidepressant use, saying that for many people

mental health problems have got worse in recent months. He added that there was little alternative for family doctors other than to prescribe medication as most services went online.

“I think GPs were more likely to prescribe medication in cases they would not normally during peak lockdown ... As a GP you want to help as much as you can within the limits put around you,” he said.

“I am not ‘anti’ antidepressants, I think they are useful for people with more severe and persistent depression and anxiety ... but for most people who have milder symptoms and problems, there are a lot of other ways of helping, whether that is family support or exercise, or psychotherapy.”

- *In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.*

Coronavirus

Ministers urged to strip away red tape to hit UK vaccine rollout target

Doctors say 24/7 vaccine centres and recruiting retired health workers could help reach goal

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent

Fri 1 Jan 2021 13.13 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 23.37 EST



A volunteer being administered the coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. Photograph: John Cairns/University of Oxford/PA

Red tape should be stripped away to allow retired health workers help the coronavirus vaccine effort and vaccination centres should open around the

clock to meet the target of immunising 30 million people by the summer, ministers have been told.

So far, GPs and hospital staff have injected nearly 950,000 people with a first dose of the [Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine](#), and the approval of the [Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine](#) should mean tens of millions more doses will become available in the coming weeks and months.

“This is now a race against time and there isn’t a moment to lose,” said Jonathan Ashworth, the shadow health secretary. “We need ministers to move heaven and earth to roll out vaccination starting with 2m jabs a week to save lives and hit the government’s spring promise of easing restrictions.”

[GPs](#) have called for greater clarity on the role they’re expected to play in delivering these vaccines, stressing that they will be unable to hit the summer target without additional resources.

Despite talk of mass vaccination centres operating at football stadiums and race courses, GPs had been provided with very little information about how these would operate and who would run them, said Prof Martin Marshall, the chair of the Royal College of GPs. “It would be useful to know what the plans are, and it would certainly be useful to know what general practice is expected to deliver,” he said.

“If we’re going to get 30 million people vaccinated twice in six months, which I think is probably realistic, this can’t just be done by general practice. The workforce isn’t big enough to allow for that and to deliver business as usual for people who are acutely ill, those with long-term conditions, childhood vaccinations, as well as cervical cancer screening and all that kind of stuff as well.”

He called for an urgent conversation about the role that retired medical personnel might play. “We’ve got tens of thousands of recently retired GPs, physicians, surgeons, nurses who are desperate to come back, even as unpaid volunteers, and they are being desperately put off by the bureaucratic process which is preventing them from doing so,” Marshall said.

“Some of these bureaucratic demands are ridiculous, such as the requirement to be certified in fire safety, or preventing radicalisation. There are people who have experience of giving a jab and dealing with anaphylaxis if someone had an allergic reaction, so you don’t need to see their O-level certificates or many of the other bits of paperwork they are being asked for.”

Others urged the government to draw on expertise from the military and manufacturing supply chains. “Medics do what they are trained to do, but they are not trained to be logisticians,” said Dr Bharat Pankhania, an expert in communicable disease at the University of Exeter who was also involved in the response to the 2009 [swine flu pandemic](#). “We need to harness this knowledge and skill that comes from other sectors but which we could easily deploy [to rapidly deliver vaccines].”

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence said the military had not yet been approached about assisting in the delivery of Covid vaccines, although about 130 medically qualified military personnel had been placed on standby. “The armed forces have personnel including specialist planners, logisticians and medics, ready to support responses to the outbreak if required,” they said.

Another strategy that should be considered was 24/7 vaccine delivery, Pankhania said. “I appreciate that elderly or infirm people can’t be immunised at 3am, but there are many fit and healthy people who would willingly go to a place which is well-lit, well-directed, well-run at 3am, because it is better to get the vaccine than not to,” he said.

“When you make it a 24/7 operation, you are also giving a clear signal that the government means business, that this is a strategy to get the country back on its feet as fast as possible, but that people must observe infection control practice in the meantime.”

Universities

UK university students ask for emergency cash to cover fees and rent

Announcement that most should delay their return has left students scrambling to make plans

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Michelle Donelan, universities minister, tells international students to think twice before coming to the UK. Photograph: David Woolfall/Crown

Michelle Donelan, universities minister, tells international students to think twice before coming to the UK. Photograph: David Woolfall/Crown

[Ben Quinn](#)

[@BenQuinn75](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 11.33 EST

Students have called on the universities minister to provide emergency financial support to cover fees and rent after she announced that most of

them should not return until at least the end of January.

Michelle Donelan also told international students preparing to travel from overseas that they should “consider whether they in fact need to travel to the UK at this time”.

The spread of a new Covid-19 variant and the extension of tougher tier 4 restrictions across part of England were cited by Donelan as reasons why the government had to consider further steps to reduce transmission in education settings.

However, the announcement on Wednesday evening left students scrambling to make plans, with some directly challenging Donelan [on social media](#) to help them with costs including rent for accommodation that will not be used and fees for course that will not be delivered as envisaged.

“I’ll be blunt, students want to help but without the government helping them with this endeavour, and to make it cost-effective to them, the plan will fail,” Joshua Connor, an international relations and politics student at the University of Lincoln, wrote in a letter to Donelan.

Giving an example of the financial burden he and others faced, Connor told her that he would have to pay £2,100 to the university for the spring term on top of having lost several weeks of accommodation because of travelling home for Christmas during a government-designated “student travel window”. From 5 December to 25 January, he would have paid £1,057 for accommodation he has been unable to use.

Like others, he was considering whether or not to travel to use his rented accommodation.

Further guidance from the government is expected next week. University authorities have been writing to students in the past 48 hours to advise them of the Department for Education announcement.

Cambridge University’s vice-chancellor, Stephen Toope, [said in an email to students](#) that the delay was “potentially disruptive and difficult to students”. The academic registrar of Newcastle University, Lucy Backhurst, told

students: “We appreciate these last-minute changes will bring their own challenges to many of you.”

Support would include January rent rebates for students living in university-owned, university-managed and partnership accommodation arrangements.

Universities UK, which represents the sector, said the announcement by Donelan “would understandably raise further issues and uncertainty – for students, universities and staff – which will need to be addressed by government over the coming weeks, including the need for financial support, regulatory flexibility and assessment changes”.

The government said it was asking universities to restrict the number of practical students returning from 4 January to those reading subjects in areas including medicine, dentistry and related subjects, social work and courses requiring professional assessments for January and which cannot be rescheduled. Other students with “compelling reasons to return” were also identified.

In a separate letter to students, Donelan said her department had worked with the Office for Students to remind education providers that they could use existing funds for hardship support.

She added that the government was making available up to a further £20m on a one-off basis to support those who needed it most.

[Coronavirus](#)

Schools U-turn and rising Covid cases crush hopes of new year easing

London's Nightingale hospital expected to take patients as NHS struggles with number of severely ill people

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Ambulances parked outside the NHS Nightingale hospital at the ExCeL centre in London. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Ambulances parked outside the NHS Nightingale hospital at the ExCeL centre in London. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

[Sarah Boseley](#), [Richard Adams](#), [Matthew Weaver](#) and [Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 15.35 EST

Government hopes for a new year easing of the Covid pandemic are unravelling, with ministers forced into a U-turn on reopening primary

schools and hospitals across the country struggling with rising numbers of severely ill patients.

As the crisis escalates, the Nightingale hospital built in London's ExCeL centre is expected to take Covid patients next week, for [the first time since the spring](#).

Hospitals in east London are under extraordinary pressure, while Essex and Buckinghamshire have both declared a major incident, which enables local leaders to seek government support. Other major hospitals around the country are preparing for the worst.

Warnings of a deepening crisis came as:

- New cases topped 50,000 for the fourth day in a row, with nearly 24,000 people in hospital and 613 deaths recorded – one of whom was an eight-year-old child with underlying health conditions.
- Scientists confirmed that the new variant of the coronavirus increased cases during November by a factor of three.
- The government bowed to a rebellion from councils, school leaders and teaching unions over its “arbitrary” moves to close primary schools in some areas and not others. It now means that [all London primaries will be closed](#) except to vulnerable children and those of key workers until at least 18 January. The U-turn could prompt parents in other areas to demand that their schools shut.

Big hospitals in the capital such as the Royal London, Barts and [UCLH](#) are moving to convert wards into intensive care units to take more Covid patients. An email to staff from the Royal London hospital said it was now in “disaster medicine mode”.

Tracey Fletcher, the chief executive of Homerton hospital in Hackney, [posted a graph on Twitter](#) of their Covid admissions on New Year's Eve, showing high numbers of patients in wards and critical care in every age group, from 27 between the ages of 25-44 to 41 who are 65-74 and 17 over 80. “Admitted patients = extremely sick patients. No-one is partying at

[@NHSHomerton](#) tonight. Please comply with all Covid restrictions,” she tweeted.

In Essex, a major incident has been declared, with patients airlifted from an overwhelmed hospital in Southend to Cambridge.

The Essex Resilience Forum (ERF), made up of members of the [NHS](#), emergency services and local authorities, said this week that the number of patients in Essex receiving treatment for coronavirus had now increased to levels exceeding those seen at the peak of the first wave.

Those numbers were expected to increase further in the coming days and that cases were particularly high in mid and south Essex.

Lisa Ward, a lead respiratory nurse for Southend hospital, tweeted last night that the hospital was in a “very bad way”. Ward pleaded with the public to stay at home after she finished her shift.

The Conservative MP Sir Bernard Jenkin requested armed forces assistance for Essex in the Commons, including for vaccine deployment and testing in schools.

Buckinghamshire also declared a major incident this week. The county council leader, Martin Tett, said: “Our rate in the over-60 years population is now putting our health and social care services under very severe pressure – the rates in this age group have gone up by over 60% and we think this will continue at least for the next two weeks.”

Although [London](#) is taking a big hit, with the big surge in cases linked to the variant form of the virus that took off first in Essex and Kent translating into hospital admissions, the rest of the country is not far behind according to the NHS Confederation, which represents NHS organisations.

Danny Mortimer, the confederation’s CEO, said hospitals were struggling. “It’s possible to cope, but in coping they’re making compromises that they wouldn’t normally make. They are having increasingly to cancel and rebook and disrupt care for patients who haven’t got Covid, they are having to staff

areas very differently to how they would do normally as they repurpose theatres to be critical care or high dependency areas.

“They’re taking the same staff and spreading them more thinly as they’re experiencing increased levels of sickness absence, particularly because of the impact of the virus on their workforce.”

He said nurses who should be in a team of four or five in an acute ward were finding themselves one of just three, with sicker patients, but they were working heroically hard.

“It is remarkable how people are coming on their days off, working extra shifts, working for hours, particularly over this Christmas and new year period to help out their colleagues, to help their patients. That’s all part of the NHS coping, but it leaves people pretty tired. And I think also that people are also coping with some very different things – the severity of the illnesses caused by Covid and the numbers of deaths that people are having to manage both in hospitals and elsewhere,” he said.

If the Nightingale hospitals – which were mostly mothballed after the spring – open again, there will be no new staff, but those now in hospitals will be spread even more thinly. Mike Adams, the Royal College of Nursing’s [England](#) director, told Sky News the expectation of a big rise in capacity through the Nightingale hospitals was misplaced. “If we are having to cancel leave to staff these areas, the obvious question is: where will the staff come from to open the Nightingales?” he said.

“I am sure there will be moves to open some beds, there are some beds open in different Nightingale hospitals in different areas of the country. I have real concerns that the expectation that this mass rollout in capacity can happen is misplaced because there aren’t the staff to do it.”

Many NHS staff are distressed by false claims on social media that hospitals are empty. Dave Carr, an intensive care charge nurse at St Thomas’ in London, who feels he can speak as a representative for the union, Unite, is one of many desperate for the public to know what is going on inside their hospitals at a time when misinformation about the virus is rife.

“The public needs to be aware of what’s happening. This is worse than the first wave, we have more patients than we had in the first wave and these patients are as sick as they were in the first wave. Obviously, we’ve got additional treatments that we can use, but patients are still dying, and they will die,” he said.

Carr added that while more lives were being saved at St Thomas’, those patients have to be hospitalised for longer, leading to more pressure on hospitals, “because we can actually fix more patients than we could the first time round”. He warned that St Thomas’ was now treating patients from other hospitals in the area which were near “collapse”.

2021.01.02 - Weekend

- 'From now on, I was in an LGBTQ+ family' My husband came out as trans while I was on maternity leave
- Nicholas Hoult 'Part of your brain doesn't want to walk down a corridor naked'
- Peaks and troughs After our 112-mile hike in the Sierra Nevada, I won't underestimate my kids again
- Blind date She picked up the entire steak with her bare hands
- Brexit How the new rules will change your visits to Europe
- Krishnan Guru-Murthy 'If I could bring something extinct back to life, I'd choose civil debate'
- The future of boring Inside the 'moving factory' that will cut HS2 through the Chilterns
- The fall of Fox? How rising rightwing media outlets could topple the conservative giant

Transgender

‘From now on, I was in an LGBTQ+ family’: my husband came out as trans while I was on maternity leave



Alexandra Heminsley and her son at Preston Park, Brighton, December 2020. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Alexandra Heminsley and her son at Preston Park, Brighton, December 2020. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

I’d chosen an unconventional partner, and we both bristled at gender stereotypes. But I had sensed a distance between us, and it wasn’t just new parenthood

[Alexandra Heminsley](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

Today I sat on a bench facing the sea and sobbed my heart out. I don’t know if I will ever recover. This is a note on my phone, written on 9 November 2017.

I forgot about it for a couple of years, but I remember typing it as if it were yesterday. The gulls squawked and the sun dipped into the sea. I had been sitting there so long my hands were too cold to type. I put my phone into my coat pocket, and turned the buggy to face home.

The conversation seemed unhaveable. But we had to have it. The vacuum in which my husband had been living since we had returned home with our newborn was now unbearable. Something had come loose and was unspooling irrevocably.

“I think you need to have some therapy,” I heard my voice say, a few days later.

“You keep changing things about your appearance instead of accepting who you are,” I continued. “It’s what’s inside that matters. You’re wonderful, we both love you so much.”

My husband replied slowly and reluctantly – knowing how the axis of our family was about to tilt. “Yes, I do need to see someone. But... it’s not because I can’t, but because I *have* finally accepted who I am.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, unsure if the news was good or bad.

“I mean I have accepted that I am not *this*.” A hand gestured at the body I had lain next to each night for the last five years. “I have accepted that this body doesn’t represent who I am.”

I almost heard my world crack in two.

This was not where my love story was supposed to end up. When D had appeared at my door six years earlier, confessing “I love you”, I felt my world expand. We had been close friends for some time, and now we were a couple. I always resisted the idea of a romance making me feel “complete”, but life simply felt *right*. As we moved from couple to engaged couple, I never doubted that it would continue for ever.

As the pain of miscarriage and fertility issues made their way into our home, we remained close, communicative, attentive. Our first round of IVF failed, but we tried a second, this time creating several embryos. The first resulted in an early failed pregnancy, and as the winter of 2015 turned to spring and then summer, we tried embryo after embryo, only to have my body fail to hold on to any of them. Where to draw the line? We had one embryo left, but I was not sure if we'd ever have the courage to use it.

We had never been an entirely conventional couple. We both bristled at the borders of gender stereotypes. I wanted women to be liberated enough to be as strong and powerful as they wanted, untethered from ragged old notions of femininity. Anatomy is not destiny, I would tell anyone who listened. Meanwhile, D bucked against equally tatty old suppositions about masculinity, had a largely androgynous wardrobe, and was far better at housework than me. Sure, I did all the cooking (it was a passion), but perhaps this was finally the sort of gender equality I had longed for.

But first, that final embryo. After much discussion, we concluded that we simply could not leave one embryo, frozen, in the fertility clinic, and expect to move on. So we took a couple of months off and then gave it a final go. Soon I was pregnant, but the NHS did not have space for a 12-week scan until I would be nearly 15 weeks. Every doctor's appointment included a reminder of my age, now 40. I was constantly reminded that this was a "geriatric" pregnancy, which left me terrified both of carrying a baby with a chromosomal disorder that meant it might not survive beyond birth; and of having an amniocentesis, because of its not insignificant risk of miscarriage.

Despite having longed for this pregnancy, I struggled to make any real connection to it. So at around eight weeks, we decided to pay for a Harmony DNA blood test, which would give the results I craved. Instead, the clinic called to say there was "an additional DNA source" in my blood. *Had I used a donor egg?* I was asked. *Was I sure?*

The possibilities started to sink in. If the embryo did not share any DNA with me, then whose was it? *Who* was it? Was it someone else's baby? If so, where was our last precious embryo? Was it still in storage or inside someone else? Had it already been born? Had it been discarded?

For so long I had been filled with a sense that it wasn't worth trying to bond with this embryo. I had spent countless nights awake, tormenting myself for "making up worries". *I had been right all along*, I said to myself.

What followed was a blur of conversations with lawyers, an emergency visit to the fertility clinic, and finally a trip to Harley Street for a procedure almost identical to the test I had paid to avoid: chorionic villus sampling, which carries a higher risk of miscarriage than amniocentesis. Over weeks, the results began to trickle back. The baby was mine, the baby was D's, the baby was well. In the end, there was no explanation other than an error in the Harmony test.

D had been a peerless support throughout. But D's body had gone untouched. The baby and I had felt that slosh of adrenaline as we were told we might not belong together, felt the jolt of that huge needle together, lain together at night, awake at the same times. It was this shared experience that at last let me exhale, and trust that this pregnancy might be something more than just tomorrow's grief. Finally, we were able to imagine the baby actually existing outside me. But this, in turn, left me feeling as if my body was not my own, and instead a mere theatre for the drama we had just endured.

A few weeks before the baby was due, I headed to London for lunch with my siblings, to celebrate my sister's birthday. I checked what time Crystal Palace would be playing, so I could avoid boarding a train with emotional football fans. I was carrying my medical notes with me at all times, as my blood pressure was creeping up and consultants were starting to mutter quietly about induction.



Heminsley with L and D in spring 2019. Photograph: Courtesy Alexandra Heminsley

I left in good time, but to little avail. Halfway through my journey, a group of men, fresh from a Millwall match, lurched on to my train. One sat uncomfortably close to me, visibly drunk, swaying unnervingly over my bump. I got up to leave. As I walked past, his hand grabbed my behind. I flinched. “What’s your fucking problem?” he muttered as I recoiled. I bristled, aware that the rest of the carriage was listening. “My fucking problem is your hand on my arse,” I said, at what I hoped was a volume audible to others but not likely to increase the level of threat. I moved to the front of the train, next to the driver’s cab – only for three of his friends to follow me, blocking my exit, telling me the entire carriage was discussing my lies. They were evidently wrong, as a fellow passenger came to help. I was met at Brighton station by the British Transport Police, the man was arrested, and an independent witness came forward to say they had seen everything. Their kindness meant so much, but I have never shaken off the heat of that angry paw on my arse, the sense that my body was up for debate once again.

“You have a beautiful son, Alexandra, we’re just giving him a bit of help to get breathing before we cut that cord.”

A son. And not yet mine. More than two days after being induced, during which my blood pressure had continued to rise, the decision was made for me to have a caesarean. Once again, it felt as if I were handing my body over to someone else. For five agonising minutes, the nurses had him while I lay there – naked, numbed, immobile – waiting to begin the mothering.

When the baby was finally put in my arms, I felt as if it were me who had come home, not him.

It was you all along, I thought as I stared at his swollen scowl, D hugging us both. All of those other attempts – now it seemed obvious that they would never have worked. Because it was him who was our baby, and we had just had to wait.

Since we had returned from the hospital, I felt close to invisible. Where was my soulmate going?

We struggled to breastfeed, but I found pumping milk incredibly easy. I had always looked forward to breastfeeding, having spent at least two decades feeling encumbered by my out-of-proportion boobs. How could I not be a natural breastfeeder? But I wasn’t. Still, my son seized the bottles of milk I produced, his urgent mouth latching on to them as if he were made to do it.

Just as that sense of having known the baby all along was developing, the opposite seemed to be happening between me and D. I had never felt less than completely supported, but I had also felt *noticed*. Since we had returned from the hospital, I felt close to invisible. It was not that I was being ignored, because on so many levels my every need was being met. But there was something about D’s behaviour which, while always tender, was never quite meeting my gaze. An essential connection was fraying, and each time D offered to take over the minutiae of looking after L (the baby), I felt a few more threads stretch and snap. Where was my soulmate going?

Sure, I wanted the bottles sterilised. But I would have happily done it myself if only I could be pressed against the kitchen countertop, irresistible, and

told I was a wonder. It would have been worth a thousand neatly stacked teats. Why was kindness starting to feel so cruel?

In what seemed like a final bodily act of betrayal, when L hit four months I had a vicious bout of shingles. Weakened by IVF, pregnancy and the silent battle I seemed to be fighting with both body and heart, my immune system rolled over, a fizzing sharpness attacking one side of my neck and head.

When I went to the GP, I was told the excruciating pain was muscle strain, common in new mothers who tend to carry and nurse on one side more than the other. A few days later, when the blisters started to loop around my head, deep in my hair and blowing one ear up like a rugby player's, I was reluctantly given a diagnosis of shingles.

Why was I consistently being deemed the least reliable witness of my own reality? Being told I was not carrying my own baby, being told there was no hand on my behind, being told those electric prickles were muscle strain. I swung between fury and self-doubt.

One morning I stood at the sitting room door, freshly awake, my hair sticking up, semi-crusted with shingles blisters.

“Is that foundation you’re wearing?” I asked, as D kissed my cheek and turned to leave.

“Sunblock!” came the reply, over a shoulder, followed by the slam of the front door. Fair enough, I thought. It was a heatwave and D has very fair skin. Anyway, what if it was foundation? It was hardly unheard of. Perhaps this scrutiny was just another manifestation of my growing jealousy about who was coping best with the baby.

And yet. A small voice whispered. A couple of years ago, D wearing foundation might have meant a fun trip to the Mac store, feeling conspiratorial as we tested samples. Now, as I wiped the orangey brown smear of... sunblock from L’s cheek, it felt a lot less like a shared confidence.

I later realised D was wearing tinted moisturiser. But why was I so upset? This was who I had chosen, and willingly, adoringly married: an unconventional man. But since the baby, I was increasingly sure that D's unconventionality had begun to seem more furtive, where once it had been celebratory.

How did I have time to fret about the curve of my husband's eyebrows, the smoothness of their legs, the precise consistency of their suncream? What was wrong with me that these things were causing concern, when we had spent so long discussing – and agreeing! – that the definition of what a man could be needed to be broadened just as much as that of what made a woman?

I did have time for this fretting, though. I found time at 3am as I lay listening to the baby breathe in his cot, at 10am while I waited for the kettle to boil, and at 6pm when D came home from work and ran straight to the baby, unable to make eye contact with me. What had I done to deserve this? I see now what lay behind that evasion: months, years, decades of shame, rushing up and out of someone who had done so well at compressing it for so long. But what I saw then was a husband who was choosing not to see me at all.

D seemed largely unfussed by the physical changes that two years of IVF, a horrible pregnancy and a bout of shingles had left on me. Perhaps they weren't that noticeable, I told myself. Or was it because D wasn't looking? It couldn't possibly be that D was the one who had changed. Could it?



Heminsley and her son, December 2020. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

I understand if you want me to produce a list of mounting clues. Something that would fit nicely into a TV drama about marital secrets. But there was no pair of lace panties I didn't recognise, no dress I suspected had been worn in my absence. In the lives of flesh-and-blood humans, I doubt there ever is. Instead, there was a growing distance. Unsayable, but all-consuming. When we hugged – the only physical contact we now had – D's head was not buried in my shoulder, but staring over it, mind elsewhere.

We had our beautiful baby. To be parents at all was beyond what we had let ourselves hope for, but to be this besotted was bordering on outrageous. That D still seemed unhappy was the glaring red flag I could not ignore.

From time to time, I would come home and see the damp evidence of half an hour ago's tears. Glistening eyelashes, the darkness of a wet sleeve. But any inquiry was batted away. Slowly, the pressure of being normal for me and L was creating huge fissures in D, and the cracks – manifesting in mood swings, despair and a powerful sense of absence – were getting deeper. Was it drink? Was it depression? We had had therapy to combat the strain of the IVF, and I never felt we had been anything less than honest. Now, I wasn't so sure.

That autumn, L and I snuggled together watching the sunsets on Brighton's West Pier. He cooed, while I sobbed, still not quite brave enough to confront the truth now roaring towards us: I could see I wasn't the only one in the household wondering where the body I felt represented me actually was.

It wasn't just D's increasingly complicated gender identity that was a preoccupation, but my response to it. I am straight. I couldn't just *become* gay any more than anyone gay can simply *will* themselves to be straight. It mattered to me that I was married to a man. That had been my choice. But it had started to feel as though that choice was being taken away.

The sense of an incoming storm overwhelmed me. By early November, I finally found myself able to suggest to D that perhaps we needed help, which led to the conversation that left me sobbing on the bench by the sea. The storm was finally breaking.

The truth unravelled with breathtaking speed. My husband was a woman. My marriage was unsustainable

Within a few days – interspersed with visits to a therapist to reassure me that I was hearing what I thought I was hearing, that I wasn't making an uncharacteristic fuss in the haze of early motherhood – the truth unravelled before me with breathtaking speed. My husband was a woman. My husband needed to transition. My marriage was unsustainable.

Quickly, so much about the past five years began slipping and refocusing. Panic, grief, despair, all crashing over me. But somewhere in there, already, a glistening shard of hope.

None of this was my fault.

The distance between us had never been to do with my not having lost weight fast enough, breastfed well enough, tried hard enough at any of it. All those spurned attempts at intimacy had been an attempt to conceal feelings that D knew would spell the end of our marriage. The truth was out.

It had never been anything to do with me. I was free, but I was also, while still on maternity leave, having to accept that my marriage was over. Just as

the discussions around trans bodies, feminist politics and government policy concerning the Gender Recognition Act were reaching their most febrile, these issues were clawing at my precious, hard-won family.

Was I going to be a single mother? Would L have two mothers? Where would that leave me? Could I still be the main mother, or did D's change in status mean a reduction in mine? Who would help me with night-times? When did children learn pronouns? Where would we live, and what would life even mean from now on?

The next morning I felt foggy, unsure if I was even remembering our conversation correctly. As dawn broke, I heard the familiar shuffle of movement outside the bedroom, and realised the two of them were up. I stared at the ceiling and rested my hand on the spongy flesh of my belly, pondering the sheer distaste I had felt for my body as it had let me down time and again. The fistfuls of hair falling out in my hands, the pyjama bottoms that no longer reached over me, the tops that strained over my enormous, now defunct breasts.

This? I thought. You want to change yourself for access to this? How dare you assume this is better than how you live? The IVF, with its endless needles and confidence-crushing uncertainties, the doctors referring to my “geriatric pregnancy”, the hot, vengeful hand on my backside in the train carriage. You want to throw everything away for access to this life?

I heard the baby cry. Life was going to carry on happening to me regardless of this change. The outside world wasn't going to care that I was seeing everything through an entirely new prism. Where I had been nervous about rebuilding my body, now I was presented with rebuilding my entire life.

And before that, I had a court case to attend.

Having my experiences debated in court felt like an act of brutality I was far from prepared for. Even more so when the magistrate summed up how he had reached his not guilty verdict: to be found guilty would have a huge impact on the defendant's life. And while he was sure I intended to be a reliable witness, as I was pregnant, I must have been in a heightened emotional state. Something about the ludicrousness of that judgment freed

up a little space in my mind; I felt a kinship with D, at being told your undeniable reality is simply not the truth.

More importantly, I realised others were beginning to understand that the marriage was over, and perhaps assuming that this was a result of IVF or even parenthood. I could sense a lie calcifying around us. I could have hidden, denied the truth, tried to make that crust of silence work as protection. But I knew it could never work.

To live truthfully was the only path I could take. For the first time, I felt a glimmer of hope

From now on, I was in an LGBTQ+ family. We would always be different, and there would always be challenges. But for every person I avoided eye contact with, or told a sanitised version of the truth to, I would be doing a disservice to us all. To live truthfully was the only path I could take.

For the first time, I felt a glimmer of hope that what we had done was the right thing. After all, my openness, my concern for D, and my lack of judgment about the multitude of ways a person can identify had created the space in which D had finally been able to speak the truth about herself. Sure, it had come at the expense of my marriage; but it was becoming clear that this spirit of openness was the only viable means of survival for the long-term health of this little family. I certainly found it easier to build a new relationship with D from that point onwards. Not a romantic one, but something that runs deeper than friendship and is as engaged as any other family.

The corrosion of trust, and what had felt like furtive behaviour, had taken hold of our marriage so suddenly that undoing it took time and effort, but D has surpassed all my expectations. We never had enough money to argue about it, and my horror at the thought of stopping D seeing our son was met by her horror at becoming a stranger to him. She has been consistent, week in, week out, in a way that is more egalitarian than the marriages of the friends who now confide in me. The family ties we promised we would try to maintain grew around us into a network I never dreamed the three of us would ever have, let alone cherish.

[What happens when your partner comes out as trans?](#)

[Read more](#)

I look forward to seeing her when she comes over – several times a week – for bath and bedtime. Neither of us hesitated over the decision that she should move back in for lockdown. I enjoy our chats once L has fallen asleep. We text each other as many silly photos and videos of L as we ever did. The steel frame of friendship upon which our romance was built has remained, revealing its solidity as the rubble of our marriage crumbled around it. D still makes me laugh as much as anyone. And more than that, she has re-earned my trust. There has never been a second lie.

All I ever wanted in life was to be average. I never wanted to win marathons, to run the farthest, to be the slimmest. Now, life had presented me with a turn of events that sat so far beyond “average” that I often felt completely adrift. And it showed me that when I used to speak about “the average woman”, it was a lazy, self-reflective assumption: we bled, we fed, we bred. I would sit happily discussing the books I had written, all the while perpetuating the idea of “woman” as white, fertile, able-bodied, straight, cis. So I found myself not only recovering from heartache, but also reassessing essential truths about myself, and about what it is to be a woman and to live in a woman’s body.

I can never change what happened to my marriage. I can never change the anti-trans sentiment that some cling to. I used to think it was “not my place to get involved”, but now I know what hearing an ally say they believe you, believe *in* you, can mean. I feel a responsibility to admit how limited my assumptions used to be, and to be open and honest about what our life now is. By accepting my body for what it is, and all women’s bodies for what they are. I am average, we are average. Perhaps together we can shift the mean.

- Some Body To Love: A Family Story by Alexandra Heminsley is published by Vintage at £14.99. To order a copy for £13.04, go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

Nicholas Hoult

Nicholas Hoult: ‘Part of your brain doesn’t want to walk down a corridor naked’



Nicholas Hoult: ‘It’s fortunate that people don’t know exactly where to put me.’ Photograph: Michael Schwartz/trunkarchive.

Nicholas Hoult: ‘It’s fortunate that people don’t know exactly where to put me.’ Photograph: Michael Schwartz/trunkarchive.

From starring opposite Hugh Grant aged 11 to joining the X-Men, does nothing faze the actor? Well, there was one scene for his latest role ...



[Emma Brockes](#)

[@emmabrockes](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

Preparing for his role as Emperor Peter III of Russia in the TV show [The Great](#), [Nicholas Hoult](#) wondered if he should go for the accent. The 31-year-old had just finished filming [The Current War](#), a movie in which he played the inventor Nikola Tesla, and it struck him he could, without too much effort, repurpose his Serbian into a passable Russian. Hoult is thoughtful, conscientious, and takes his job very seriously. “It didn’t flow in the right way,” he says, of his stab at Russian, and back he went to the drawing board, specifically to an exaggerated version of his own accent. “I don’t go the full public schoolboy, but I’m very posh – educated but childish.” A new comic antihero was born.

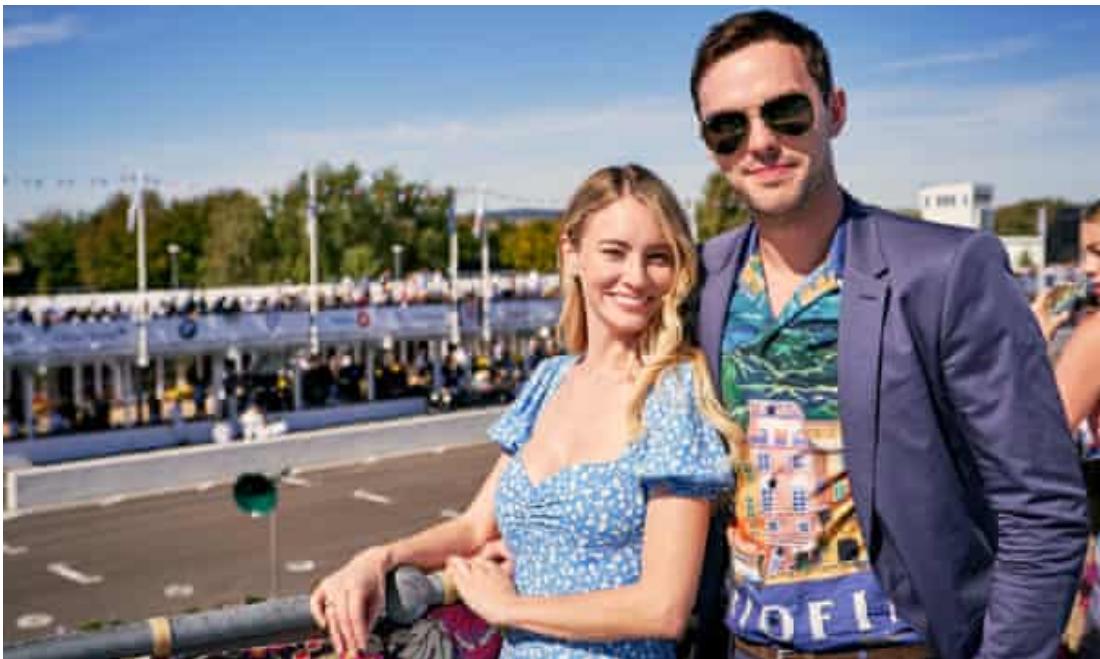
Hoult is in London with his girlfriend Bryana Holly, an American model, and their two-year-old son Joaquin, in the midst of filming season two of *The Great*. It’s a terrific show, written by Tony McNamara – who also penned the Oscar-winning movie [The Favourite](#), in which Hoult appeared alongside [Olivia Colman](#) and [Emma Stone](#) – and co-starring [Elle Fanning](#) as Catherine the Great. It’s riotously entertaining, and Hoult, as Peter III, is spoilt, impulsive, infantile and profane, a figure who will summarily execute or pardon on a whim. It is also very funny. Despite being a period piece,

there is a vibe of [The Thick Of It](#), mainly because of the amazing levels of swearing and Hoult's indignant tyranny. His catchphrase – “huzzah!” – is the most benign thing about him.



Hoult with Elle Fanning in *The Great*. Photograph: Ollie Upton/Hulu

For Hoult, the challenge was to make the character endearing as well as brutal. As an actor, he has ranged across every conceivable genre, from his title role in the 2017 indie biopic, [Rebel In The Rye](#), to Nux in the blockbuster [Mad Max: Fury Road](#), Hank in the [X-Men movies](#) and his turn as Kenny in [A Single Man](#), the gorgeous 2009 film by Tom Ford. Whatever the role, Hoult has about him a sort of guilelessness, the flashing grin and springy manner of someone who is, in his 30s, still perennially boyish. “He is horrible on so many levels,” he says of Peter, “but I think he still has to be fun to be around. You start off thinking, what a tyrant, what a monster – and then you see all the clues of what it’s like trying to rule a country in your father’s shadow. Having all these people around you who you don’t trust, and who never say no to you, and the effect of being able to do whatever you want. It has created this monster.”



With partner Bryana Holly, September 2019. Photograph: Goodwood/Vantagenews.com

Hoult may be describing the condition of modern celebrity, which for the past 20 years, he has tried very hard to resist. He was 11 when he played Marcus, the kid with the bowl haircut in the 2002 movie adaptation of [About A Boy](#), Nick Hornby's hit novel, at which point he had already been acting for six years. Hoult was the antithesis of the notional child star, a performer whose onscreen presence was neither cute nor self-conscious, but was largely unmannered, and characterised by a quietness – almost a reluctance – that has stayed with him.

Some of this may be down to his background. Hoult is from a village outside Wokingham in Berkshire, one of four children with a father who worked as a pilot, and a piano teacher mother. There were actors in his wider family; Hoult's great-aunt, Anna Neagle, who died before he was born, was a popular English film actor of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. But it was a down-to-earth family and when (after following his sisters to ballet class and appearing in Swan Lake and The Nutcracker) Hoult was spotted by a casting director and invited to audition first for the stage, then for TV, he wasn't particularly starry-eyed. In fact, he frequently found acting deeply embarrassing.

“Oh, completely: that’s acting in general,” he says, with a wolfish grin. At 6ft 3in, Hoult is a former teen basketball player for the Reading Rockets, with looks that are more cheeky upstart than conventional leading man. “The sweet spot is when you can be having enough fun in a character to not really care – so when things go wrong, you laugh it off and carry on. There has to be that element of not being precious, or worried about failing. And there’s nothing worse than being self-conscious while trying to be a character.”

‘He is horrible on so many levels,’ he says of Peter III of Russia, ‘but I think he still has to be fun to be around’

In one episode of *The Great* that tested this ability, Hoult was required to walk the length of a long palace hallway, “pretty much buck naked. And I remember reading the script and saying, ‘Aaaaargh, Tony, I’m not sure about this one.’ Because that hallway is long and busy; the hallways are where people hang out and mingle in the palace. We had a debate about how many supporting artists would come in that day. It was originally 70 people in the corridor. I said, ‘Can we get it down to about 30?’” Eventually, he pulled himself together. “You have to switch off that part of your brain that’s saying, ‘I don’t want to walk down a corridor naked.’ You have to go: ‘All right. I’m Peter. And I feel so confident, and I’m so happy and enlightened, that I’m going to walk down this corridor naked. It’s an interesting trick to play on your brain.’”

A lot of Hoult’s attitude towards work was set down in childhood, along with professional habits he has relied on since. Much of this was down to luck; if, after bit parts in shows such as *Holby City*, *Silent Witness* and *Waking The Dead*, he hadn’t scored his first big break opposite a star as disciplined as Hugh Grant, things might have turned out very differently. As it was, Hoult watched and learned from an actor who understood absolutely what it took to stay in the game. “I was only a kid when I worked with him, but he was so hard-working and diligent – neurotic, almost. I can remember him being very specific about beats on the set, and trying things and getting it right. I think you have to be.”

The two didn’t stay in touch much after the movie, but I imagine Hoult is enjoying Grant’s current success. He beams. “In my head, I’m thinking it’s a kind of Hughnaissance, or something. He had so much pressure on him

[back then], and to see him free of that and just doing these wonderful dramas. I had so much fun watching him in [Paddington 2](#), he was wonderful, and then in [A Very English Scandal](#), and I'm about to start watching [The Undoing](#). I'm enjoying what he's doing at the moment, a lot.”

The pressure on Grant wasn't lost on Hoult, even at 11, not least because it was a force he felt subject to himself. He was keenly aware of the cliche of the child actor, burnt out before he exits adolescence, and of the fact that unlike, say, young musicians, or sports stars, as an actor, his early success was considered a potentially irreversibly damaging experience. “Maybe it's because the failure is more public, in terms of child actors, and everyone knows about the horror stories. For me, growing up, it was hard to have people say, ‘Oh, you're a child actor, you know what that could potentially do to you?’ It does give you a little anxiety. But it's also probably good to be aware of that. And there are certain things you can do to improve your chances of being lucky.”



‘I want to tell more stories.’ Photograph: Michael Schwartz/trunkarchive.

One of these contingencies, says Hoult, was to rationalise that when he failed to win a role, it was more often than not nothing to do with his actual performance. “It's not them saying, you weren't a good enough actor; it's them saying, we preferred this person, because they looked more like how

we'd imagined the character. But it's weird, to have people know that you go for things and sometimes don't get them." He sounds fleetingly like Ricky Gervais in *The Office*, trying to smile through a negative feeling.

He also defaults to another reliable consolation: that by missing out on something, it frees you up when something better comes along. "It all comes out in the wash, I suppose. There's not a set path." After making *About A Boy*, he went for a short time to the Sylvia Young theatre school, but quit to return to regular secondary school in Bracknell. It was partly, he says, because he was rubbish at singing and dancing, which made up so much of the Sylvia Young curriculum. But it was also a sense that "it was more important to go to a normal school". At that stage, Hoult says, he wasn't even sure he would carry on acting, and wanted to treat it more like a hobby – not least, he began to realise, because the best barometer of how well he performed was how much fun he had while doing it. "It wasn't that formalised training wouldn't work. But at the same time, some of the best actors I've worked with are very instinctive and, for me, the more fun I'm having, the more playful I am, the more I feel I'm probably in the right zone."

It was also about trying out as many different types of production as he could. After making *About A Boy*, he was [cast in Skins](#), the Channel 4 teen drama that ran to seven seasons, and in which Hoult appeared for the first two. He might have been marooned in adolescent drama for a lot longer had it not been for an experience that drove home how little control he had over his trajectory.

From a career standpoint, Hoult's most pivotal movie was, arguably, [A Single Man](#), the 2009 adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel. Directed by Tom Ford, Hoult's performance as Kenny, a student whose gentle flirtation helps his grieving professor, played by Colin Firth, was as subtle and moving as anything in the film. It emphatically announced Hoult as a serious performer, introducing him to "a different tone, a different audience", and more than able to hold the screen opposite Firth. And yet, he says, it might just as easily not have happened.



Hoult in X-Men: Apocalypse. Photograph: AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo

“That role was originally meant to be someone else,” says Hoult, “and I don’t know exactly what happened, but it didn’t work out. I got a phone call at 3am, and they said, ‘Can you get on a plane tomorrow and come and meet Tom?’ This was just after Skins. And I didn’t have a visa to work in the US, so they said, ‘We want you to do it, but you’ve got to go to Toronto to get your visa done in time. If it comes through by the end of the week, you can fly back and do the film. And if it doesn’t, you can’t.’” Had the chips fallen differently, it might have been years before Hoult had another equivalent chance and he was, he says, incredibly lucky. “Tom’s heart and soul went into that film, and his aesthetic eye is obviously incredible. Just to watch him was a big turning point.”

It is hard to imagine how making a film like *A Single Man*, so quiet and understated, compares with being on a superhero vehicle such as [X-Men](#). Hoult joined the franchise in 2011, and has appeared in four of the movies. If the barometer for any of his performances is joy, one wonders where, in these staggeringly expensive juggernauts, that joy might seep in.

“It’s different,” says Hoult. “It depends on what the standpoint of having fun is. I can be having fun playing a ridiculous character in an enlarged fashion in a costume drama that’s not faithful to real history, and, bizarre as it is in

many ways, that puts you in a very fun zone. Equally, I'm fine in a little drama where you're very serious, because the fun is coming from just trying to get it right, and you feel like you're trying to tell this story about something you care about. And X-Men is the fun in terms of when you were a kid and watched movies, and suddenly you're on set, 10 years later, walking behind the person who you watched play Wolverine when you were a kid. And you're like: this is mad."

These career choices have been strategic. "It's definitely a conscious thing. It's also fortunate that people don't know exactly where to put me. If I feel something is too close to what I've already done, I'll try to mix it up."

It's true that Hoult continues to defy the exact mould of any particular genre, an indie actor who once dated [Jennifer Lawrence](#), an action hero who, with comic brio, can play the lead in a sardonic TV show. He doesn't have a home base, nor much idea of where he'll be in six months' time. "When people ask where I live, it's kind of everywhere and nowhere. In two weeks' time, someone could call and say, 'Oh, this job shoots here for two years, can you go?'"

He remains able to withstand this kind of indeterminate schedule in part thanks to some stability of nature. Having his son in 2018 put everything more firmly into perspective. "I remember feeling I've got this new creative energy and power; I want to tell more stories, and do more, and be better, and to invest more when I'm at work, but then, also, when I step away from work, to have nothing to do with it." When lockdown 1 happened, he was set to work long hours away from his family, and he embraced the cancellations with the same philosophy that has kept him sane since he first set foot on the red carpet aged 11: "I feel really grateful for losing out on those things."

- **The Great starts 3 January on Channel 4**

Family

After our 112-mile hike in the Sierra Nevada, I won't underestimate my kids again

Looking for a big adventure? A challenging Californian trek taught me and my boys the value of patience, trust and bottomless snacks



Jemima Kiss with her husband, Will, and sons Artley and Herbie in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Photograph: Will Whipple

Jemima Kiss with her husband, Will, and sons Artley and Herbie in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Photograph: Will Whipple



Jemima Kiss

@jemimakiss

Sat 2 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

We were less than three minutes into our backpacking trip when the first tantrum erupted. Herbie, our eight-year-old, moaned that his pack was too heavy and threw it on to the floor of the car park. Only 112 miles to go, I thought. We might be embarking on a nightmare.

We knew our two-week hike through the Sierra Nevada was ambitious, but we'd been working towards it for some time. My husband, Will, and I are hardy campers, and have gradually won the enthusiasm of the kids (Herbie and his older brother, Artley, 11) when it comes to day hikes of 10 to 15 miles. Backpacking demands a love of camping and the outdoors, a high tolerance of dirt and discomfort, and some advanced organisational skills – including food planning, map reading and a near-obsessive preoccupation with lightweight kit. For this trip, we will be carrying everything our family needs to survive: tent, sleeping stuff, clothes, food (in bear-proof canisters), torches, first aid and water filters. For backpacking with kids, we also bring generous amounts of patience, most of our annual quota of optimism and a determination to enjoy it. And snacks. Lots of snacks.



Herbie, Jemima and Artley at bedtime on their last night on the trail in Yosemite National Park. Photograph: Will Whipple

The gentle, chalky undulations of Sussex will always feel like home to me, but since we moved to California five years ago, we've become enthralled by the mountains. The Sierra Nevada range is incomparable in scale and grandeur, and there's no better way to see it than to earn every spectacular vista with your own hard walking. This was how the Sierras captured the imagination of John Muir, the Scottish-American mountaineer, writer and conservationist: his eponymous trail stretches more than 200 miles from Yosemite down to Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the contiguous United States at about 14,500ft.

At the time of our trip last year, official advice on outdoor recreation in California during the pandemic was contradictory. Some state agencies advised against nonessential travel; others, notably national parks such as Yosemite, were still issuing wilderness permits, while asking hikers to wear masks and socially distance. Most hikers we met were following this guidance, as well as minimising resupply stops in rural communities and not hiking out of state.

Experienced hikers tackle the full John Muir trail in three weeks, but we planned to cover the northern half in two, starting at the halfway point near

Florence Lake. The trail snakes along the backbone of the High Sierra, past alpine lakes and over mountain passes, through dusty pine forests and lush wildflower meadows.

We set expectations before we started: this would be tough, but worth it. It was important to hand some control to the kids so they felt empowered, which usually meant they walked at the front. They would have the map, decide when to stop for snacks (often), and choose which lakes to jump into. This tactic also resulted in Herbie nearly standing on a 4ft rattlesnake on our first day, though luckily it was early morning and the snake was half asleep. It was an eye-opener to watch her ooze across our trail, and a healthy reminder to look where you put your feet. As for bears, California killed off its grizzlies a century ago and the remaining black bears are quite shy; there's also no chance of seeing any when your children are chanting Dumb Ways To Die for hours on end.



Nightfall under the Lyell Glacier in Yosemite National Park. Photograph: Will Whipple

Each morning we talked about what was ahead, emphasising swimming holes and letting the kids choose when and what we ate. Hiking food needs to be calorie-rich, but also comforting. We usually started the day with porridge, ate wraps and peanut butter at lunch, and then boiled water to

make a large ready meal for dinner. We packed endless granola bars, some raw cake mix for pudding, and countless “surprise” sweets to raise spirits in dark moments. It’s hard to moan when you’re sucking a Werther’s.

Our second day was Artley’s 11th birthday. We gave him small, gift-wrapped pictures of his presents, so he had something to unwrap (they were too heavy to bring with us), and after dinner I wedged a candle into his freeze-dried astronaut’s ice-cream sandwich. We woke up at Senger Creek, an exquisite wildflower meadow on the edge of the forest, and planned rock jumping later that day. (And yes, the activity always leaves me racked with fear, but we have a “system” where they have to thoroughly check the depth of the water and potential obstacles underneath, and we have a very deliberate conversation about it every time.) The Sierra’s lakes are beautiful, ice-cold and often trimmed with snow, but these boys are insulated with joy, so I learned to soften my worries. I liked to call these pit stops “the Sierra Nevada foot spa”, easing off the hiking boots and ecstatically plunging my feet into the ice-cold water. To our delight, our halfway point at Red’s Meadow revealed a natural hot spring, perfect for aching feet and legs.

For two weeks, we didn’t have to worry about managing video game time. Instead, the boys built dams and bridges across streams, climbed and swam, and one lunchtime, spent an hour slapping sleepy flies and feeding them to the wild brown trout. Tantrums were far outweighed by extraordinary bursts of energy and enthusiasm, particularly when we’d been slogging uphill for hours and then got a “summit surge” as a mountain top finally came into view. One night, our planned camp spot turned out to be plagued by mosquitoes, and it was Herbie who decided we needed to push on. He led his astonished parents up another 1,000ft to the idyllic, bug-free Virginia Lake at the top of the hill. I won’t ever underestimate what my children can do again.



Jemima and morning tea at 11,000 feet near the Lyell Fork in Yosemite National Park. Photograph: Will Whipple

By the time we'd finished, we had walked 112 miles, averaging 10 miles a day, with a total of 19,300ft of climbing and 23,000ft of descent. We had crossed five mountain passes, the highest of which was Donohue at 11,066ft, and endured relentless mosquitoes, persistent blisters and terrible sleep. But we were right to be confident about our kids' abilities. They will, I hope, benefit from some invaluable life skills: understanding what they are truly capable of; how perseverance leads to bigger rewards later on; and what it feels like to be encouraged and supported so that they can achieve something great. As an overwhelmed parent, I'm often tempted to do things for my kids because it's the quickest way to get things done. But, as ever, the best thing is that I sit with them, and patiently help them to do it. By the end of the trip, they were cooking dinner, putting up the tent and making tea.

The hike ended as it had begun, with Herbie refusing to carry his pack and complaining about his feet hurting. This time he had good reason; we were on the notorious 5,000ft descent into Yosemite valley on an unusually hot day. We were all exhausted and aching, so we just pushed on, one foot in front of the other, promises of all the ice-creams you can eat and a slap-up dinner propelling us to the end.

This year, for the first time, I won't go home for Christmas. Will my family ties loosen for good?

Read more

Our adventure wasn't quite over once we arrived in the Yosemite valley. As the sun began to fade, Will had managed to find a hotel room at Yosemite Valley Lodge – which meant a three-mile walk to the other end of the valley. The only transport was an abandoned courtesy bike, so we comically loaded it up with our backpacks and a very sleepy Herbie, put our head torches on and wheeled our filthy, exhausted and delirious family through the darkness towards sleep.

Six months later, and all trail travails have been forgotten. It took at least a week to scrub away the persistent Sierra Nevada dust, and the blisters have mostly healed. The intensity of the challenge has faded for the children, and in its place is pride about what they achieved. Herbie says he'd like to do a hike in Australia next, "because there are more dangerous animals there". And Artley says he's ready to do the second, southerly half of the John Muir, which means summiting Mount Whitney. Let's hope we can keep up with him. When we eventually move back to the UK, we'll come with a renewed sense of appreciation for the places we can explore: the [West Highland Way](#), [Hadrian's Wall](#), and the [South West Coast Path](#).

Californians will tell you the mountains aren't only for recreation. If you do it right, even with kids, it's a spiritual experience. I woke one night for a pee, wrestling out of my sleeping bag while my family snoozed, and stepped outside into a transcendent stillness, a star-filled night so calm and clear and noiseless that my mind tried to invent a background hum to fill it. Exploring these mountains is magical. That's the real gift we gave our children.

Blind dateDating

Blind date: ‘She picked up the entire steak with her bare hands’

Andrea, 24, student, and Emily, 24, photographer and brewer



Emily (left) and Andrea: ‘It would be rude not to mention her sexy cackle.’

Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Emily (left) and Andrea: ‘It would be rude not to mention her sexy cackle.’

Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Sat 2 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

Emily on Andrea

What were you hoping for?

To meet someone who appreciates me for the gift to humanity that I know I am, and ideally looks like the reincarnation of Boudica.

First impressions?

Like the radiant sun in the form of a human being.

What did you talk about?

We spent most of the night discussing philately and how deeply involved I'd been in that community from a very young age. It was only when our desserts arrived that it became apparent that she'd spent the entire conversation confusing philately with fellatio.

Any awkward moments?

It was a crushing blow when she rebuffed my advances.

Good table manners?

Aside from noticing her picking off my plate as I made my way to the toilets...

Best thing about Andrea?

I was impressed by her liberal outlook and enthusiasm for my more niche passions. It would also be rude not to mention her sexy cackle.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Should she be so lucky.

Describe Andrea in three words

Fiery, seductive, sensitive.

What do you think she made of you?

Mellow, sensitive and generous (I brought her flowers).

Did you go on somewhere?

I went home. She went to see her ex.

If it weren't for social distancing, would you have kissed?

I suggested we kiss over dessert but she reminded me of the pandemic.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

I'd change the pandemic and I would have undoubtedly had a delightful kiss.

Marks out of 10?

8.35.

Would you meet again?

We're going to Russia in the spring.

Q&A

Want to be in Blind date?

Show

Blind date is Guardian Weekend magazine's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Guardian Weekend magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?
We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?
Thank you for your feedback.

Andrea on Emily

What were you hoping for?

A free meal with someone who tolerates me.

First impressions?

When she waltzed in with a bouquet of orange flowers (£5 from Tesco), I must admit she struck me as being a bit too much.

What did you talk about?

Our shared appreciation for Carole Baskin's wardrobe. I would *love* to see Emily in a bit of leopard print.

Any awkward moments?

There was a miscommunication on a certain topic but I don't feel comfortable disclosing the details.

Good table manners?

Considering she picked up the entire steak with her bare hands, I'd have to say no. But who am I to judge?

Best thing about Emily?

The fact she's utterly outrageous, yet so self-aware.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

No, I'd like to keep it discreet.

[Blind date: 'I got all I was hoping for. No question'](#)

[Read more](#)

Describe Emily in three words

Vivacious, sultry, precarious.

What do you think she made of you?

She kept forgetting my name and calling me Boudica, which made me think she's not that interested. But then she said she loved me.

Did you go on somewhere?

We had a wild walk to the station.

If it weren't for social distancing, would you have kissed?

Well, she still tried to kiss me.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

It would have been nice to get more free alcohol, but you can't have it all.

Marks out of 10?

4.5.

Would you meet again?

Only if she dresses in leopard print.

- Emily and Andrea ate at [Aster](#), London SW1. They were photographed separately for this image. The date took place before London's tier 4 restrictions. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com.

Brexit

Brexit: how the new rules will change your visits to Europe



Brexit has changed Britons' rights when they are travelling, studying, living or working in the EU. Photograph: various

Brexit has changed Britons' rights when they are travelling, studying, living or working in the EU. Photograph: various

From holidays and health to mobile phones, we explain what has changed for consumers

[Miles Brignall](#), [Patrick Collinson](#) and [Anna Tims](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Before [Brexit](#), UK citizens could travel, live, go on holiday and work anywhere in the EU without any special permits or visas. As of 1 January 2021 that is no longer the case.

The Guardian's Money team has spent the week poring over the many pages of documentation to explain how Brexit will affect you.

Holidays and travel

What does all this mean for holidays this year – if and when they are allowed to resume? While the coronavirus crisis has pretty much put a halt to all immediate travel, when the current restrictions are lifted and European trips can resume, Brits face some significant changes over the next two years.

While most of those taking city breaks or beach holidays to an EU country (plus Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) will see little immediate difference, the picture is markedly different if you travel a lot or spend a significant amount of time in the EU.



The Grand Canal, Venice. UK passport holders can spend up to 90 days in the EU's Schengen zone during any 180-day period. Photograph: Andrea Matone/Alamy

Britain and the EU [have agreed visa-free travel for short visits](#), meaning UK passport holders can spend up to 90 days in its Schengen zone during any 180-day period.

This can be in a series of short visits or one long visit, and it applies to all EU countries with the exception of the non-Schengen countries Bulgaria,

Croatia, Cyprus and Romania. You could make a 90-day trip to any of those and still not use up your 90-day allowance. The same is true of Ireland, which allows unrestricted travel from the UK as part of a common travel area for British nationals.

From 2022 (the exact date is yet to be confirmed), you will have to buy a visa waiver for holidays and short stays in the EU. This is not a visa but a permission to enter. It will cost €7 (£6.29) and will be issued under the [European Travel Information and Authorisation System](#), similar to the Esta permit currently required to visit the US.

I usually spend more than 90 days in the EU over a six-month period as a tourist – will I be able to with a visa? Probably not. The Brexit agreement clearly restricts short trip visits to a maximum 90 days within one 180-day period. While the UK government says Brits who have exceeded their 90 days will be able to apply for a visa to stay longer, the European commission says that once the 90 days are up, the person would cease to be a tourist or “short stay” visitor, and would have to apply for a full long-term immigration visa – with all the costs and hassle that that entails.

As it stands, someone spending May, June and July with a friend in Spain would not be able to return visa-free to any EU country inside the Schengen travel area until November – six months after they arrived in Spain. So, for example, if they wanted to visit Venice in August, that might prove tricky.

However, each EU country has the right to set its own entry terms. It is possible that, for example, the Spanish or Portuguese governments, which are keen on maintaining UK tourist levels, could decide to offer an easy, non-work visa in the future, but this is by no means a given.

Expect more details to emerge from EU countries during the coming months – but don’t bank on it.



Ehic cards remain valid in the EU until they expire. Photograph: Alamy

Will my Ehic card still work? Yes and no. According to the [NHS website](#), your European health insurance card remains valid in the EU until it expires, which for some people will be quite a way off.

However, a replacement is being developed called the global health insurance card (Ghic). The bad news is that there are few details at the moment, and it does not for now extend as far as the Ehic.

Currently, the new Ghic is expected to cover you for travel in EU countries, but not Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein. If travelling to any of those countries, buying private cover should be regarded as an absolute necessity. Transitional arrangements have been put in place for Norway allowing UK nationals to use their UK passport to access state-provided medical treatment if necessary.

The government is also negotiating new arrangements with Switzerland and the European Economic Area (EEA)/European Free Trade Association (Efta) states that could result in Ehic-style reciprocal healthcare cover there.

Keep in mind that the Ehic and its successor the Ghic are not the same as travel insurance. The Ehic card entitles visitors only to necessary state

healthcare for free or at a reduced cost. It does not, for example, cover repatriation to the UK after a serious accident.

The “global” bit of the new Ghic is something of a misnomer. The British government has not suddenly decided to give British tourists free health cover in the US. It will offer cover only under existing reciprocal arrangements: largely in Commonwealth countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

Will I need travel insurance? It is not a legal requirement that a traveller buys insurance when visiting the EU, but for the vast majority of people it would be daft not to, with scores of annual multi-trip policies costing less than £50 available for travel to Europe in 2021. There have been widespread concerns about the cost of travel insurance post-Brexit as the Ehic is withdrawn, particularly for those with pre-existing conditions.

[From tariffs to visas: here's what's in the Brexit deal](#)

[Read more](#)

What about passports/immigration control? Pre-Brexit, you could travel to EU countries on your passport right up to the point it expired. As of 1 January 2021, the UK government was advising travellers visiting the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, to have at least six months left on their passport.

You will no longer be able to use EU fast-track passport control and customs lanes, meaning possible delays at some airports. Also, when you arrive in an EU country (except Ireland), be prepared to show your return ticket. You could also be asked to show that you have enough money for your stay.



UK licences remain valid for driving in Europe. Photograph: Alamy

And driving abroad? The good news is that your UK driving licence will continue to be valid in Europe. Previously it was understood that UK drivers would have to apply at the Post Office for one of two (or both) international driving permits, depending on the destination country.

However, if you are taking your own car or other vehicle abroad, you will still need to apply to your insurer for a green card to prove that you have cover. There shouldn't be a charge, except perhaps an admin fee, according to the Association of British Insurers. You should print it out and be ready to show it if asked by the police or other authorities. Note that Northern Irish drivers who enter the Republic will also need one. The ABI says the EU could end the green card requirement in the coming months.

What about mobile roaming? The right to use your UK phone allowance while in Europe will end, meaning there is nothing to stop the phone companies reintroducing roaming charges. The big four main providers – EE, 02, Vodafone and Three – have said they have no plans to do this in the short term.

As part of the deal, the UK and EU have agreed to cooperate on “fair and transparent” rates for mobile roaming. It remains to be seen what that means.

And pet passports? The old EU pet passports are no longer valid. Instead the EU has agreed that Great Britain should be given “part two listed” status, allowing pets to travel within its borders providing the owners obtain an animal health certificate (AHC). This confirms that your pet is microchipped and vaccinated against rabies. You will need to get a new certificate each time you travel up to 10 days prior to travel. The AHC will be valid for four months.



European Union pet passports are no longer valid. Photograph: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

How much booze can I bring back with me? The days of filling the car with as much wine as the suspension could take are also over, and a booze cruise to Calais won't really be worth it after 1 January. Travellers returning from the EU will be restricted to 18 litres of wine (24 bottles), 42 litres of beer and 4 litres of spirits or liqueurs over 22% in alcohol – plus up to 200 cigarettes.

So, compensation for flight delays ... will we still get it? Yes. The EU261 rules that require airlines to compensate passengers for seriously delayed or cancelled flights have been written into UK law and remain as before. EU travel firms supplying UK consumers will also still have to provide compensation if their company goes bust.

Studying in the EU

For anyone who was already living or studying in the EU before 31 December 2020, it is business as usual, and you will pay the same (EU) fees until the course ends.

You will also continue to be eligible for the same support – access to loans and so on – as students from the country you are studying in.

However, as things stand, British students applying to study in the EU from September 2021 onwards face paying the much higher international fees paid by all non-EU nationals. They may well also not have access to the loans and other help that their predecessors enjoyed.

Working in the EU



Britons who live in the UK but spend a lot of time working in the EU face a complex situation. Photograph: Xsandra/Getty Images

From 1 January 2021, UK citizens no longer have an automatic right to live or work in the EU, so if you are looking to do this, you will need to check your destination's immigration rules.

UK citizens who moved to an EU member state before 31 December 2020 can carry on living and working there but must register as a resident in the country where they live by 30 June 2021.

For Britons who live in the UK but spend a lot of time working in the EU, things are now very complicated.

There is a deal for senior managers who are seconded, and some short-term business visitors can work for 90 days in any given six-month period, but there [are restrictions on the activities they can perform](#). The list of permitted activities shows that while meetings, trade exhibitions and conferences, consultations and research are fine, anything that involves selling goods or services directly to the public will require a work visa.

Each EU member state has its own immigration regime, with often strict sanctions for those who don't comply.

Musicians and other performers have been left out of the deal, meaning that they have to get work permits to tour in the EU. The singer-songwriter KT Tunstall and the comedian Dawn French are among the more than 200,000 people who have [signed a petition](#) on the subject.

There is no mutual recognition of professional qualifications in the deal, causing [complications for those such as doctors, accountants and architects](#) qualifying in the UK who wish to practise in the EU after 1 January.

Living in the EU



UK state pension holders can continue receiving payments if they move to live in the EU, EEA or Switzerland. Photograph: Quique García/EPA

I am a UK national in Europe – will I still get my UK pension? Yes. UK pensioners (including EU citizens who have worked in the UK) who have retired to an EU country have already been guaranteed that they will be able to receive the UK state pension, and benefit from any annual uprating. For people who intend to retire to another EU nation in future, there are also safeguards.

The [government guidance](#) says: “You can carry on receiving your UK state pension if you move to live in the EU, EEA or Switzerland, and you can still claim your UK state pension from these countries. Your UK state pension will be increased each year in the EU in line with the rate paid in the UK.”

If you are receiving a private pension, such as an annuity, from the UK but are resident abroad, the government says you should contact your provider. But in general it says: “UK law allows for workplace pensions to be paid overseas. The government does not expect this to change because the UK has left the EU.”

However, there may be issues about the bank account into which your pension is paid. The Pensions Advisory Service says that although practice

varies, pension schemes and annuity providers do not typically pay pension benefits directly into an overseas bank account, leaving the individual to transfer the money from a UK bank account – which will result in transfer fees and exchange rate fluctuations.

More importantly, if you are resident overseas, there is a risk that your bank may close your UK account. In that case, you will need to contact the pension provider to ensure that it can pay the money into an overseas account.



Barclays is closing accounts for customers in Belgium, Estonia, Italy and Slovakia. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

So can I keep my UK bank account? Thousands of Britons resident in the EU were [told in September](#) that they would have their UK bank accounts closed by the end of the year. UK banks have been operating across the EU under passporting arrangements. Account holders who bank with firms that own an EU-based subsidiary will have their accounts transferred to that EU entity. But where that is not the case, accounts are likely to be closed.

The Netherlands is particularly affected, with Lloyds Banking Group, Nationwide and the Co-operative Bank withdrawing services. The Lloyds group, which includes Bank of Scotland and Halifax, is also closing

accounts in Germany, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and Slovenia, and Nationwide will no longer serve Italy. Barclays is closing accounts for customers in Belgium, Estonia, Italy and Slovakia, and Barclaycard accounts across the EEA will be closed unless linked to a UK address. While Santander customer accounts remain open, the bank is not taking on any new requests from EU-based customers.

What does this mean for my payments in and out of the account? If you used your account to run direct debits for bills in the UK, there is no obvious solution other than to check with other banks to see if you can switch to a new account, according to Robert Hallums, of the advice consultancy [Experts for Expats](#). Some pension providers may accept transfers from a currency account such as the [Moneycorp online currency account](#), which converts payments and receipts into the desired currency without large fees or currency fluctuations. You can also use this kind of account to pay bills in the UK or receive rental income. In the worst-case scenario, you may need to consider paying it into a local bank account and accept the higher costs of currency exchange rates and fees.

Will £85,000 of my savings still be protected? The Financial Services Compensation Scheme will still pay out the first £85,000 of your balance if your bank collapses, provided it is regulated by the UK's Financial Conduct Authority.

The Q&A Krishnan Guru-Murthy

Interview

Krishnan Guru-Murthy: ‘If I could bring something extinct back to life, I’d choose civil debate’

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)

The television journalist on Tom Jones, a brush with death at a fairground, and why he wants to apologise to every offended interviewee



Krishnan Guru-Murthy: ‘I never feel guilty about pleasure.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Krishnan Guru-Murthy: ‘I never feel guilty about pleasure.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Sat 2 Jan 2021 04.30 EST

Born in Liverpool, [Krishnan Guru-Murthy](#), 50, began presenting youth television for the BBC at 18. He went on to report for and produce Newsround and Newsnight. In 1998, he joined Channel 4 News, where he is

one of the anchors. He takes part in [Taskmaster's New Year's Treat](#), available on All 4. He is married with two children and lives in London.

What is your greatest fear?

Grief.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Being impatient.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Bigotry.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

I'm trying not to dislike anything about it.

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?

Civil debate.

Who would play you in the film of your life?

Michael Sheen, obviously. He plays everyone.

What is your favourite word?

Gorgeous.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?

"Sorry, we're closed."

Is it better to give or to receive?

To give is to receive.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

I never feel guilty about pleasure.

What was the best kiss of your life?

I'm fond of the [Tom Jones cover](#), but the [Prince original](#) is still the best.

What do you owe your parents?

Everything. And a phone call.

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?

Every offended interviewee who thought I was asking hard questions for some personal reason. It's never personal.

What does love feel like?

A chihuahua giving you a cuddle.

[Bernardine Evaristo: 'How often do I have sex? Eight times a day'](#)

[Read more](#)

Which living person do you most despise, and why?

I'm not ready to say that in public.

What is the worst job you've done?

I did a terrible job of fixing the downstairs loo once.

If you could edit your past, what would you change?

I'd have been there on the spot for every major news story I've talked about in the studio, at the time it happened.

What is the closest you've come to death?

I've dodged a couple of bullets in dodgy war zones, but I suspect the closest I've come to death was a reckless, drunken brush with a waltzer at a student funfair. It nearly chopped me in half.

What has been your closest brush with the law?

Asking various Metropolitan Police commissioners some hard questions.

What keeps you awake at night?

My daughter talking to her friends even though I thought I'd disabled her devices.

How would you like to be remembered?

As devastatingly talented, gorgeous and wise, but I'm not betting on it.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

That I haven't learned the most important lesson yet.

HS2

Inside the 'moving factory' that will cut HS2 through the Chilterns

With protesters camped nearby, two giant 170m machines are being assembled



Workers prepare the tunnel entrance at the HS2 construction site in Chiltern, Buckinghamshire, ahead of tunnelling due to start in 2021. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

In a decade's time, passengers on the new high-speed trains hurtling out of London will get just a burst of daylight and a glimpse of the Colne Valley landscape before disappearing back underground through the Chiltern Hills.

Today, in that three-mile stretch between future tunnel openings to the north-west of the capital, the £98bn [HS2](#) project's scale, engineering might and cost are all evident: both at the vast work site scooped out beside the M25 in Buckinghamshire, and in nearby waters and woods where protesters are still encamped to stop machines coming through.

What was billed as the formal start of [construction of HS2 began](#) in September, after years of design, preparatory work and demolition. Funds were finally released for major works for phase one of HS2 between London and Birmingham after the government reviewed its decision one more time, with Boris [Johnson giving the go-ahead in February](#).

[HS2 map](#)

On Chalfont Lane, just inside the motorway, lies HS2's biggest single work site, part of a £1.6bn contract to create just 15 miles of the proposed 330-mile network. An expanse of bare earth the size of 80 football pitches holds temporary offices and factories to treat excavated chalk and cast enormous concrete segments. The focal point resembles half an excavated stadium with two circular portals at one end: the start of a future 10-mile tunnel through the Chilterns.

Two giant 170m-long tunnel boring machines (TBMs) are being assembled in this arena. Simply getting this state of the art German technology to the start line has proved an epic challenge. HS2 will not put a price on it, but each TBM will have cost many tens of millions of pounds. Transporting the machines from the Herrenknecht factory in southwest Germany by truck and ship meant slicing them into parts: the giant cutter heads, with a diameter of 10.3m, had to be bisected and welded again on site.



The start of the tunnel through the Chilterns. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Reassembly started last month and could take until spring, a giant Meccano set requiring a 600-tonne crane to complete.

“It’s a moving factory,” says Didier Jacques, construction director, and a veteran of the Channel Tunnel project. Behind the cutter head will be a control cabin, where more than a dozen screens tell the operators exactly what is going on. “It is pressurised like a submarine so we can work safely underground.”

The two machines, named Florence and Cecilia by HS2 Ltd, are a significant upgrade even on the beasts brought in to dig out London’s Crossrail tunnels: not just bigger but also capable of continuous boring to speed up the years of work, drilling onwards even as the 7.5-tonne concrete tunnel segments are sucked up and swung into place by hydraulic arms behind the cutter head.

Further back is all the machinery that supports the process – as well as a canteen and toilets for the workers labouring within, and a refuge chamber promising 24 hours of survival should anything occur underground. Human safety will be improved by a pioneering robot, dubbed the Krokodyl because

of its jaws, whose job will include removing the pieces of wood used to space out the hefty concrete segments.

Segments are baked here not just for the tunnel walls but for a two-mile viaduct spanning the Colne Valley, leading south-east into London. While tunnelling takes much of the disruption out of sight and mind for the Chilterns, the viaduct will traverse the lakes and waterways of local nature reserves.



Police climbers pull protester Dan Hooper, aka Swampy, out of a 30-feet high bamboo structure in the River Colne in Denham Country Park.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

And its construction will not just affect its eventual location, as the ongoing protests are highlighting. To reroute power lines in its path, pylons must be removed from Denham country park, a job that meant building another bridge and route through woodland. Work was briefly halted last month by more ingenious construction – this time on the part of protesters. A mesh nest in a 30ft tall bamboo tower erected in the River Colne was [occupied by veteran activist Swampy](#), before police moved in to end the standoff and allow the works bridge to be built.

Now, more trees lie in the path of construction, including a number of oaks where treehouses have been installed by protesters. Sam Smithson, who left a job in fashion design to join Extinction Rebellion, has been part of the camp since May. Sooner or later, she says, the protesters will be evicted and trees felled: “It’s looking more inevitable each day but they haven’t moved in yet.”

A cheerful Swampy, speaking before his arrest, said he hoped the protests would slow HS2 until the government decided to can the works: “I still think there is a very good chance they will cancel it: it’s unpopular already and more hearts and minds are changing now they see the devastation.”

Despite the government’s go-ahead for HS2 last year, the network’s future appears to perennially remain in doubt. A report last month by the National Infrastructure Commission, previously a solid backer of HS2, suggested it would be better to [prioritise regional rail links](#) above building the north-eastern leg, which would link Birmingham to Sheffield and Leeds.

Lord Adonis, the former Labour transport secretary who launched HS2 as a scheme in 2009, points to facts on the ground. “It’s going to be largely built ... there are 250 construction sites between London and Birmingham, there is £10bn spent, parliament has just enacted the leg to go on to Crewe... and it’s consulting on the fine detail of the route to Manchester. A line linking the three biggest cities in the country is a certainty.”

However, the eastern leg’s fate will only be announced in the context of broader rail plans for the Midlands and north of England. Adonis believes the only question is whether it goes ahead now or in decades to come. “In terms of what the country’s going to look like in 30 to 40 years’ time, it’s one of the most critical decisions for 2021.”

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[Failing to build high-speed links east of the Pennines](#) would, Adonis says, “be like the Victorians building railways to Birmingham, to Manchester, and leaving Sheffield and Leeds with the canals. In social terms, if it believes in levelling up, the government really needs to build the eastern leg. Or the east

will be two centuries behind, and it will lead to an exodus of jobs and people.”

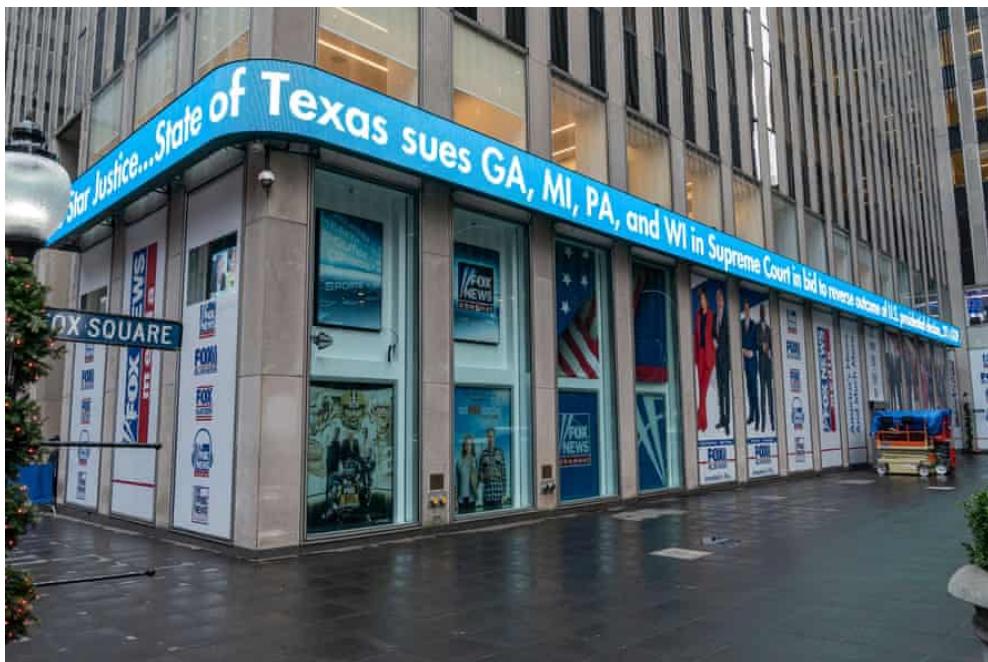
With many around the PM remaining hostile, and the Treasury eager for cost savings, the political battle over the cost and economic benefits of the railway will continue.

As will the physical standoff in Colne Valley. “We’re continuing building more treehouses and better infrastructure, so that they are weatherproof and people can stay as long as possible, with sleeping bags and tarps and stoves to keep going up there,” says Smithson. “The area is historically known for flooding, and we are expecting flooding in January and February. It will be a tricky environment for everyone, whichever way you look at it.”

The far right

The fall of Fox?: how rising rightwing media outlets could topple the conservative giant

Once Trump's darling, Fox has seen its favorability decline among GOP supporters with the rise of OAN and Newsmax



Fox News has seen its favorability among GOP supporters drop from 67% to 54%. Photograph: Lev Radin/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

Fox News has seen its favorability among GOP supporters drop from 67% to 54%. Photograph: Lev Radin/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock



[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Just as change is coming at the White House, a fresh wind appears to be blowing through the established rightwing media system, with a collage of TV stations and social media networks seeking to attract the ardent, dissatisfied [Donald Trump](#) supporters.

For years [Fox News](#) has dominated the conservative landscape. The network has spent four years fawning over Trump, and promoting sometimes spurious stories about his rivals over the past four years.

But for Trump, even that has not been enough. Largely because of the president, Fox News now has competitors, in the form of One America News and Newsmax. The two relatively new channels have seen their viewership soar in recent months.

Both OAN and Newsmax are more rightwing than Fox News – quite a feat – and each has pushed zany conspiracy theories, including that there was a deep state or Democrat-led plot to [infect Trump with coronavirus](#), and that Anthony Fauci, the head of the NIAID, [funded](#) the creation of the coronavirus.

In December, Newsmax overtook Fox News in the ratings – very briefly, and in a very specific time slot – for the first time.

Among the 25-54-year-old demographic, Newsmax's flagship show, hosted by Greg Kelly, [reeled in 229,000 viewers](#), compared to Fox News' Martha MacCallum's 203,000.

That may be a narrow comparison, but it's true that Newsmax's viewership more generally has surged in recent months. Over the summer, Newsmax was recording about 25,000 viewers a day, [according to](#) CNN's Brian Stelter. In election week, that jumped up to 182,000 viewers.

Still, the channel has experienced a real surge since the election, after Fox News came under fire, and Newsmax's nightly shows have drawn 700-800,000 viewers, [according to Nielsen](#). Republicans' perception of Fox News has shifted too: since the election, Fox News' favorability among GOP supporters [has dropped](#) from 67% to 54%.

The rise has been fueled by Donald Trump's frequent turns on Fox News. It's hard to tell how serious Trump's turn on the network is. He has criticized Fox, but repeatedly plugs segments – segments favoring him – on Twitter, mostly clips from Sean Hannity's show, or Tucker Carlson.

Still, the outgoing president has frequently railed against other parts of Fox News' programs, particularly the network's daytime programming which tends to focus on straighter news rather than rightwing opinion.



One America News has seen an increase in growth since Donald Trump began recommending the rightwing news outlet to his Twitter followers.
Photograph: KC Alfred/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

He has specifically suggested people should watch Newsmax and OAN instead, particularly after Fox News called the election for Biden – and after at least some of the hosts on Fox News refused to indulge Trump's desperate quest to overturn the election results.

"It does seem to be as a result of those election calls," said Matthew Gertz, senior fellow at Media Matters for America, a left-leaning media watchdog group.

"That has spurred a bit of a revolt, and Trump has egged that on by telling his Twitter followers that they should be watching OAN and Newsmax instead of Fox particularly during those 'news hours'."

Gertz said that Trump himself seems to have shifted his viewing habits.

"He watches hours and hours of cable news every day. Typically it's been Fox News, but more than I've ever seen before over the last few weeks, he's been watching and responding to OAN and Newsmax coverage as well."

In the looming post-Trump world – or at least the post-Trump-as-president-world – Fox News appears to have responded. The already rightwing network has shunted its coverage even further to the right in an attempt to thwart its upstart rivals, a new change in the rightwing media ecosystem.

Gertz said in mid-November Fox News began a new tactic: running clips from right-wing hosts such as Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity during its ‘straighter’ daytime shows, and sometimes asking guests to respond to what Carlson or Hannity might have espoused.

“That struck me as an attempt to win back audience during the ‘news hours’, when there’s somewhat less conservative red-meat than the primetime hours, by giving [viewers] more of that from the familiar faces of Fox’s biggest rightwing stars.

“That, I think, was an attempt to respond to the audience that was considering or already sometimes moving over to some of its competitors.”

Where Trump goes, many of his supporters follow, and that has accelerated the growth of OAN and Newsmax, in particular. The Newsmax app rose from 4,000 downloads a day in late October to 230,000 in the days following the election. [One Zero reported](#) that downloads of the app have dropped, by a lot, since then, to 32,000 a day, but that still represents a huge spike compared to the pre-election days.

A spokeswoman for Fox News declined to comment.

[Nielsen](#) ratings showed Newsmax and OAN had experienced a decline in viewers since the highs they saw in the days following the election. According to Nielsen, Fox News daytime viewers [also declined](#).

But whether it’s Newsmax or OAN, the spread of more extreme news sources has been happening for quite some time.

“It hasn’t started this year, it’s gone on for a decade or more,” said [Cynthia Miller-Idriss](#), a professor at American university’s school of public affairs. The expansion and proliferation of extreme, hyper-partisan sites purporting

to be news, Miller-Idriss said “is really dangerous in terms of media literacy and democracy”.

“Now you just got dozens and dozens and dozens of potential news sources many of which have tremendous bias,” she said.

Rise of rightwing social media

Away from the emerging cable news channels, another rightwing source has been garnering attention – and numbers: Parler, a conservative ‘alternative’ to Twitter and Facebook. Founded by John Matze and Jared Thomson, it was funded by Rebekah Mercer, dubbed the “first lady of the alt-right” by no less than Newsmax’s CEO Chris Ruddy.



Chris Ruddy is the CEO of Newsmax, which briefly overtook Fox News in the ratings for the first time in December. Photograph: AP

In the week following the election, Parler grew from 4.5m user accounts to 9m users, the chief operating officer, Jeffrey Wernick, told the Washington Post.

“There’s been this flurry of people joining,” Miller-Idriss said.

“It has real potential – I think nobody knows exactly whether that’s sticking potential. Do people get there and then get frustrated with it, do they decide not to stay?”

There certainly isn’t much diversity of opinion on Parler, where almost all of the accounts belong to right-wingers.

Ted Cruz, the Republican senator from Texas, has one of the most followed Parler accounts, with 4.8 million adherents as of mid-December.

Proud Boys, the extremist rightwing group, has a popular account, and one of the most active of the well-known Parler users is Laura Loomer, an anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist who was a Republican candidate for the US House of Representatives in November. (Loomer lost by 20 points.)

Loomer has been banned from Twitter and Facebook for spreading hate speech, while Twitter has also restricted accounts associated with Proud Boys for violating its policy on “violent extremist groups”, but they have found a home on Parler.

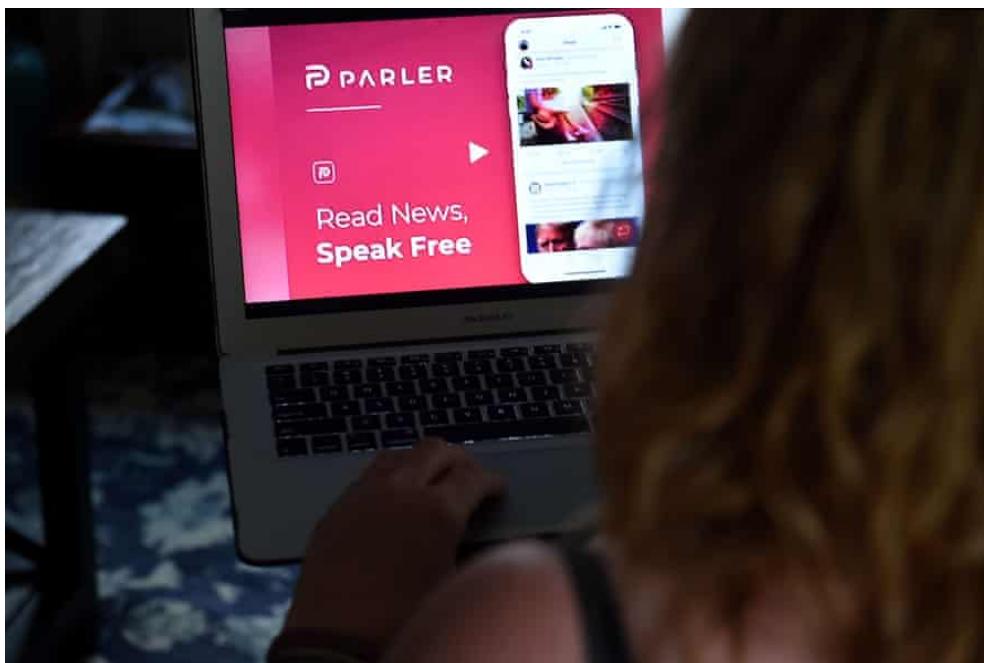
“The things I worry about with Parler are if people are leaving other platforms where there might be a broader range of ideological views, or a broader range of arguments that they hear, and they land in more of an echo-chamber where they are less exposed to contradictory beliefs to their own,” Miller-Idriss said.

“The more time you spend with like-minded people, research shows the more likely you are to migrate to more extreme versions of your own beliefs.”

A key motivator for right-wingers to spend time on Twitter seems to be to tussle or antagonize people with different political or social beliefs. In the most part that doesn’t exist on Parler. There are also signs that the platform’s growth is slowing. Parler saw some 300,000 downloads a day in mid-November, according to One Zero, and that number dropped to about 40,000 by mid-December.

Whether the preaching-to-the-converted nature of Parler eventually turns people off depends on “what are your motivating factors, why are you here, what makes this site the place that you go to”, said Renee DiResta, technical research manager at the [Stanford Internet Observatory](#).

“If your primary reason for engaging on social media in a political sphere is to fight with people who are different, to fight with people who are on the other side or troll them, or drop memes that you think are going to trigger them, then you’re not going to be able to do that on Parler.”



Parler, a rightwing social media site, has become a home for groups associated with the extremist Proud Boys. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

There have been other rightwing platforms that have had rises in popularity, only to fade away.

Gab and [MeWe](#) exist in the same sphere as Parler, but have never gained a mainstream rightwing following. It is unclear whether Parler’s popularity will last.

“There’s always these apps and social networks that come out of nowhere and they have a spike and then they usually dip back down,” DiResta said.

Away from TV and social media, other traditional players are seeing falling numbers. Drudge Report, the influential conservative news aggregator, has seen its visitors drop since it began distancing itself from Trump in 2019.

As its readers have fallen, new players have emerged. Whatfinger, a similar site to Drudge, but loyal to Trump, increased its traffic by 40.8% through 2019, to 3.2 million readers a month, according to the similarly rightwing Washington Times.

It remains to be seen how many of the more traditional Republicans, as opposed to the ardent Trump-followers, are willing to abandon their less-mainstream sources.

In 2019, 22% of Americans said they use Twitter, and 68% use Facebook, dwarfing Parler's usage. Fox News has consistently been the most-watched cable news channel in the US.

The newcomers have a big hill to climb to overcome the established order. Time will tell if they can.

2021.01.02 - Sport

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Walking with giants, talking with stars: this sporting life is grand

[Kevin Mitchell](#)



The journey began in NSW and, after 50 sun-dappled summers in this business, it's been a hell of a ride



Andy Murray plays a forehand against Novak Djokovic en route to winning the 2012 US Open, the first grand slam victory by a British man since 1936.
Photograph: Stan Honda/AFP/Getty Images

Andy Murray plays a forehand against Novak Djokovic en route to winning the 2012 US Open, the first grand slam victory by a British man since 1936.
Photograph: Stan Honda/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

Journalists of a certain era tend to embrace the perpendicular pronoun with all the enthusiasm of Scrooge hugging Tiny Tim. “I” might be the skinniest word but it punches its weight in vanity. Hugh McIlvanney famously would perform linguistic gymnastics in his perfectly crafted sentences so as to refer to himself as “this reporter”, thus diluting any suggestion it was the great man himself at the centre of the story – even though it often was.

He understood the pleasant fact that we are regularly hurled into the orbit of the famous. It can be a perilous place, where the trick is to balance professional distance and disguised awe, then avoid the gentle chiding of envious colleagues, friends and family.

In one oft-quoted instance, the photographer Andy Hall and myself pretended not to be the least bit starstruck for nearly four hours in a New York hotel room as Muhammad Ali interrupted his flow of anecdotes and

tricks to chat with Will Smith on the phone, while Don King cackled in the background, sitting alongside one of Louis Farrakhan's scowling lieutenants. Ali and King then collapsed on the sofa and sang a passable version of Frankie and Johnny, a song whose lyrics echoed a dark episode in the promoter's past. It would be perverse not to cherish such surreal moments.

Having a bit of a clearout, but don't think I'll part with this one. Truly crazy weekend in New York in 2001. I bet King he couldn't stop the rush hour traffic on 7th Ave. I lost. Half an hour later we were sitting down with Muhammad Ali. pic.twitter.com/nYPQ3clV7o

— Kevin Mitchell. I abhor a vacuum cleaner (@kevinmitchell50)
[December 28, 2020](#)

What I (sorry) really wanted to do growing up was play saxophone for Duke Ellington but Johnny Hodges refused to die. I didn't even own a saxophone. Having fallen short of that mountain top, it's been untold fun writing about the doings of others, from political scallywags and criminals, arty types of varying pedigree (from Van Morrison to Barbara Carrera) and a few giants of sporting life, too.

[Last post: dry eyes and an empty page, but after 31 years it is a fond farewell](#)
[| Vic Marks](#)
[Read more](#)

Without wishing to send you all to sleep, the journey began for this reporter on a local paper in Maitland, New South Wales, in 1970 and ended up in the Shangri-La of our business, Fleet Street, where nobody grows old, even if every hungover muscle and bone says otherwise. Fifty sun-dappled summers on – as the darling Frank Keating might have said – and I'm the last man in and just an over or so left till stumps ...

What an unexpected stagger to the finishing line it has been: banged up all year on Zoom in front of the compulsory bookcase pretending to be far closer to the action than the kitchen and the coffee. It's been odd for all of us, of course, including the people we write about. The paradox is they live in a bubble most of the time anyway.

Falling between name-dropping and a humble brag is an impossible task in this business, but those who have been generous enough to share their time all left an impression. Michael Schumacher was unexpectedly kind, vulnerable and utterly obsessed; Seve Ballesteros was boyish but imperious; Dave Mackay (with whom I spent most of a summer) was stern but welcoming; Richie Benaud (whom I knew away from the cameras) judged every utterance like a leg-break looking for a home; Don King was one long comedy act, especially during a mad week in Cairo, with underlying menace; and Jimmy Greaves, who finally has been awarded a gong he is possibly too ill to appreciate, was heartwarmingly human and very, very funny.



Dave Mackay, with whom Kevin Mitchell later spent much of a summer, leaps over his Tottenham teammates Cliff Jones, Ron Henry and Jimmy Greaves in 1965. Photograph: PA

Getting to know some of them has been an unexpected joy. It was in Cincinnati a few years ago that I (apologies) got my first full-throated laugh out of Andy Murray. It had been a while coming. “So, do you think you’ll retire before me?” this reporter asked as we chatted about air miles, rubbish restaurants, boxing and bad backs. He’d already won two grand slam titles and several Masters with a body that was knocking like an old banger. His

draught-horse limp was in its early stages. But he was far from done. “You wish,” he said, allowing himself a wide grin as if he’d just won a bet.

Privately, our little clique of travelling witnesses would wonder how many times Andy would say “tough” in a press conference. Thousands, probably. We never told him. Now he knows.

Murray told me recently he’d like to believe in God but couldn’t because there was so much inexplicable suffering in the world. Of all the things he’d ever said, it was the most illuminating and, from now until he retires, it will most completely inform my understanding of him.

What has been a privilege to witness is how champions differ from the rest of us in nearly every respect. They have no self-doubt. They’re ruthless, sometimes selfish and even cruel. They practise until they drop, and they can touch heights others dare not dream about. They are also usually way richer. Let’s face it, they are not normal.

They do it because they love what they’re mysteriously more brilliant at than nearly anyone else alive – a gift they never properly understand. It’s like they had been vaccinated against mediocrity at birth. Sport is not only their job, it’s their drug, their destiny, they would say, and sometimes their curse. Yet, with the inevitability of a deadline, they all come to realise that one day the magic will leave them and then they’ll be like the rest of us. No overs left to bowl, no saxophone.

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When 47-year-old [Oscar De La Hoya confirmed this week that he intended to box again](#), he said it was because he missed it. Really, he is scared to walk away for good. They are meteors and we are earthbound. Few elite athletes last much longer than a decade while we’re still banging on until we have to turn to golf to squeeze into last year’s trousers.

The pandemic also has given us time to reflect on how leisurely things once were, when the cricket and football seasons tripped over each other, when

pitches were muddy, our heroes skinny and our bellies flat. There were long summer days when you could hear all the birds, smell all the flowers, take some of the wickets.

This much I know: it's been a hell of a ride so far. (More to come).

Five favourite moments from the past 50 years

- 1) The Australia dressing room at the Oval, [last day of the fifth Test of the Ashes, 2005](#). I'd been ghosting [John Buchanan](#) all summer, and I'm standing among the vanquished, with Shane Warne (who seriously did not like Buchanan) grinning over my shoulder, as the coach now has to say nice things about him, when he would gladly have wrung his neck. Doesn't get much weirder than that.
- 2) Madison Square Garden, 1997. Chatting with Budd Schulberg, famous for writing the best line of any boxing movie: "I coulda been a contender." We'd just watched Naseem Hamed get up three times to knock out Kevin Kelley. "He could be the biggest thing in boxing since Ali," Budd says, "except he won't be. His ego will stop him." The frail, stuttering nonagenarian who once stared down Ernest Hemingway was right on both counts.



Paul McGinley celebrates his winning putt at the 2002 Ryder Cup at the Belfry. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

3) Long past midnight in Jimmy's Corner, New York's best dive bar, half a block from Times Square, the tail end of summer, 2012. Unbeknown to me and my colleagues, Andy Murray was around the corner in a Japanese restaurant, picking up the \$6,000-plus tab for family and friends to celebrate [winning his first grand slam title](#) – and drinking orange juice. He'd get drunk for the first time in years on the plane home.

4) [The Belfry, September, 2002](#) – even if the banners said “2001 Ryder Cup”, held over after 9/11 a year earlier. Curtis Strange’s clock was out, too, as the US captain mysteriously held back Tiger Woods until the end on day three – some say to hit primetime TV at home, and they could only listen from a distance as Paul McGinley drained his putt for a half against Jim Furyk on the 18th to win the first of seven tournaments out of nine for Europe.

5) Has there been a more Shakespearian tennis match than [Naomi Osaka's nerveless first grand slam title victory](#), as Serena Williams rides her emotions in the 2018 US Open final, doomed to be as misunderstood as Desdemona? The American, guilty in the eyes of Othello (umpire Carlos

Ramos), cried at the skies and morphed into an emotional wreck. If she ever wins her elusive 24th grand slam title, it will be her greatest triumph.

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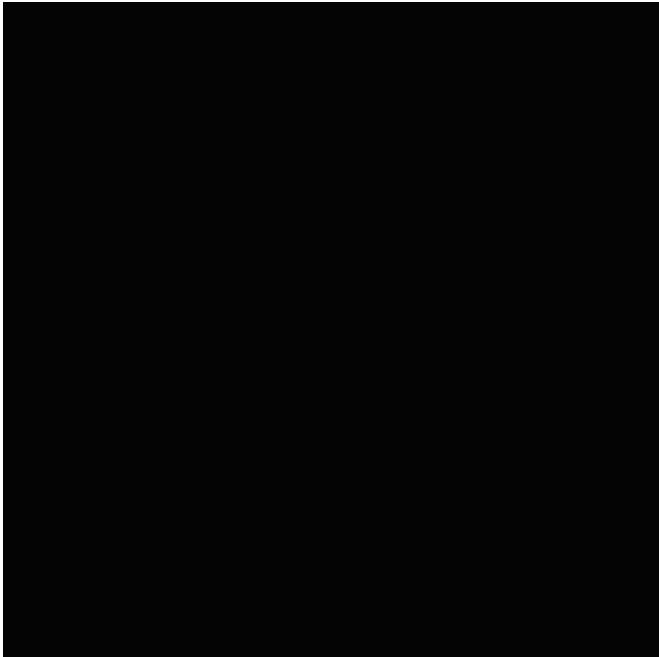
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Interview

Jordan Henderson: 'I was in a very dark place. It made me a lot stronger'

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Liverpool's captain on turning round his career at Anfield, how 2020 has changed him and his use of a sports psychiatrist



Jordan Henderson and Liverpool play on Monday at Southampton, where a game in 2019 marked 'a little turning point' for the midfielder. Photograph: Andrew Powell/Liverpool FC/Getty Images

At the end of a dark year like no other, and the start of a new one that will complete a decade of his life at Liverpool, Jordan Henderson is in a mood to pause and reflect. The [Liverpool](#) captain has family and friends who work for the NHS on the Covid-19 frontline. Sometimes they have held the phones and tablets which offer the only way for people who are dying to say goodbye to those they love.

His father, whom the NHS helped to save during a long battle against cancer, has been shielding and Henderson did not see much of him last year. This helps to explain why he [started and drove the crisis fund](#) that raised millions of pounds from Premier League footballers for the NHS.

Having just returned home after a morning of training, amid the blurring end-of-year fixtures, Henderson is engaging company even when addressing the brutal impact of 2020. “I think it has,” he says when asked whether the year has changed him. “It certainly puts things into perspective. Not that I ever take stuff for granted but it reiterates what is important – family and health. That’s all that matters. You’ve got to enjoy life while you can and try not to get too down. But it’s been difficult for everyone because of the virus. Hopefully we can see the other side very soon but a lot of people are struggling, a lot of people have died, and it’s affected us all. All me and the other lads [his fellow club captains who worked on the fund] tried to do was help make a difference.”

On the field, despite the absence of fans, [Henderson led Liverpool](#) to their first league title in 30 years. He epitomised the imperious self-belief and hard-running zeal of the champions. His Player of the Year award, [voted for by the country’s football writers](#), was followed by [second place behind Lewis Hamilton](#) in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year poll.

The plaudits have replaced the criticism and doubts which once hounded Henderson. Yet he insists his hunger to improve remains undiluted. He points out that, as Liverpool play Southampton away on Monday night, the same fixture in April 2019 represented a turning point. Henderson rose from the bench and produced a commanding display as Liverpool [recovered from conceding an early goal to win 3-1](#). Their captain, striving to establish himself as a much more attacking presence, proved he could play in the advanced midfield role he craved.



Jordan Henderson celebrates scoring for Liverpool at Southampton in April 2019. Photograph: Marc Atkins/Offside/Getty Images

Of course, moments of personal crisis seem more fascinating to those of us who did not live through them. But Henderson responds to questions about the adversity he overcame in a way which suggests his emotions are still vivid. In June 2011, when he [joined Liverpool from Sunderland](#) for £20m, he was one of the Fenway Group's first major signings [following their takeover](#). Fourteen months later, as hard as it is to imagine now when considering Henderson's importance to the club, Liverpool wanted to sell him to Fulham in a swap deal with Clint Dempsey.

“That was a difficult moment I remember very clearly,” Henderson says of a time which reduced him to tears. “We were preparing for a [Europa League qualifying] game against Hearts at Anfield. We met as normal in the [Hope Street] hotel and I got a knock on my door saying the manager wanted to speak to us. To be fair to Brendan Rodgers, it was really just a conversation. It was an opportunity [to leave for Fulham] I didn’t want and I didn’t like. I still felt I had an awful lot to give.

“But I was in a very dark place at that time. It made us a lot stronger and a lot wiser later on and, without that, you never know what could have happened. So I really cherish them moments because you need setbacks, you

need adversity. You get back up, and it makes you stronger because you want to prove people wrong. Ever since that day I had something in me. I needed to prove to the manager I would get in his team eventually. I'd do absolutely everything to be in his team, this football club, and I'd prove them wrong. In the end I did."

I needed to keep working, keep getting stronger in the gym, working around the clock, doing things other people weren't

Henderson explains that he and his wife, Rebecca, remained as close as ever during this tumultuous period but that "it was difficult because I didn't like mixing family with football". He says: "When I was coming home, back then, I wasn't in a great mood a lot of the time. I was still very young and learning how to deal with situations like that. But I was so focused on what I needed to do. I needed to keep working, keep getting better, keep getting stronger in the gym, working around the clock, doing things other people weren't doing, just to be given an opportunity. So, for me, all the focus was on what I love doing – playing football and being the best I can be. Rebecca has always been there for me but, yeah, it was a difficult period."

Steven Gerrard told me, when we worked on [his autobiography](#), that Henderson's mum even approached him to share her concern. "She was worried for her boy," Gerrard said. "He was a little lost. The move was initially too big for him." While he joked about feeling very old because Henderson once had a poster of him on his bedroom wall, Gerrard was convinced the club had found his successor. Stressing that Henderson was one of the Liverpool players "I cared about most", Gerrard reassured his teammate's anxious mother.

He promised Liz Henderson he would look after her boy but, also, that he had been watching Jordan closely. "I know he'll be fine," Gerrard said before emphasising that Henderson would become "a vital player for the club".



Steven Gerrard consoles Jordan Henderson after Liverpool's Champions League exit in 2014. Gerrard backed his fellow midfielder in tough times.
Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Did Henderson share that conviction eight years ago? “I don’t think you ever know what’s going to happen. When I first signed I was very young and I knew it was going to be tough. But I always wanted to test myself and I knew, by going to Liverpool, I would become better. But it took a little time.”

Even as a key presence in the team, when Liverpool came so close to winning the league in 2014, Henderson was tested. His father, Brian, had been diagnosed with throat cancer a few months earlier. “It was a shock,” Henderson recalls. “I didn’t see him for at least five months because he didn’t want to see us when he was having treatment. I kept my head down, kept playing, because I knew him watching and us winning could help. So that’s where my energy went and you’d be surprised how quick six months went. My dad was diagnosed towards the back end of January so, when I was playing, I was just so free and doing everything I could to lift him.”

Few people knew what Henderson was facing then and he reveals that he spoke often [to Steve Peters](#), the sports psychiatrist. “My dad was ill and when we were close to winning the league I spoke to Steve quite regularly. I

also did when he was with England, so I had a good couple of years of talking to Steve. It made a big difference.

“A lot of people deal with stuff like this and it made us grow up even quicker and I learnt a lot. In a way it made my dad stronger and I feel it changed him for the better. He enjoys living life even more now than he already did. If you get through that you can have a positive outlook but for other people, unfortunately, sometimes it’s not a happy ending.”

On the night Henderson lifted the Champions League trophy in June 2019 he and his father shared a tearful embrace on the pitch which completed a profoundly moving celebration. Apart from his dad surviving cancer, Henderson finally felt accepted at the pinnacle of football. Yet just seven weeks earlier he had been a substitute against Southampton and still battling to move beyond the critics and doubters as he played more as a No 8 than a deeper-lying No 6.



Jordan Henderson with his father Brian after winning the Champions League final. Photograph: Carl Recine/Reuters

“That game was a little turning point,” Henderson says. “Even though I performed well before that, I felt that was the start of playing in a slightly different position. I could bring something different to the team and from

that point I felt a lot more confident. I performed much better and more consistently.

“When the manager [Jürgen Klopp] first came [in October 2015] it was difficult for me because I was injured. I kept getting niggles so it took a while to get the real me and my rhythm back. And then I began to play in a deeper role and that is thanks to Jürgen, because I don’t think many people would have seen how I could do that role. There were times when I wasn’t performing well. Then you would question if I was good enough. But I had confidence in the manager and kept working and I matured. I’m really grateful for having that opportunity because my all-round game has improved defensively and offensively.”

Was Klopp easily convinced when Henderson asked to play in a more attacking position? “When we signed Fabinho, a natural defensive midfield player, I felt that was a good thing for me because I could play a little higher up. So when I had the conversation with the manager he was very open. But I don’t think he was going to play us there straightaway. Not long afterwards I was on the bench at that Southampton game before I came on as an attacker and managed to score. I’ve matured even more since then. At the end of last year I played more as an 8, but with certain injuries I’ve had this season I’ve played a little deeper again. I feel I can contribute to both positions.”



A mural near Anfield of Jordan Henderson lifting the Premier League trophy. Photograph: Visionhaus

Liverpool return to St Mary's top of the table and remain favourites to retain the title. "The past few years we've proved how good we can be and now it's about improving, working as hard as possible, wanting more and giving absolutely everything. We're in a good position but the Premier League can change very quickly. But that hunger and desire will always be there for me and the team."

Against the pandemic's grim backdrop of rising rates of infection and death, Henderson stresses that the work his cousin, and other friends, do in the NHS continues to occupy his thoughts. "You hear stories all the time of what they're doing, what they're going through, and it's really tough. They just keep going on the frontline, but there will come a time where the effects may be felt further down the line. It's important we plan for that now and help them as much as possible because some of the stuff they've been doing is incredible.

"People were dying and their families weren't allowed at the hospital. So you want to be there to hold the iPad or iPhone for them to say goodbye to their family. I found it really tough hearing those stories. People on the

frontline see some horrendous sights and so the least we can do is try and support them and help them prepare for what may come when this all stops.”

The pandemic has also meant that Henderson did not see much of his father in 2020. “He’s very high-risk and has to be careful. When the [first] lockdown eased a little I got a moment to see him and maybe once or twice after that. It’s not much but my dad’s in good spirits.”

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Henderson is the figurehead of a Dry January campaign jointeamzero.com created by the team behind Budweiser Zero, a non-alcoholic beer. “It’s a really good campaign which fits me well because I don’t really drink alcohol,” Henderson says. “In 2020 lots of people, especially during lockdown, turned to alcohol for comfort to try and keep their mind off things. I’ve heard people talk about how they were drinking too much. So let’s all try and complete Dry January and stay focused and healthy and make a good start to the new year.”

The last nine and a half years at Liverpool “have flown by” for Henderson and he pauses again only when I ask whether, at the age of 30, he has begun to consider life without football. “I try not to do that. I hope I can play for a very long time, because the hunger, the desire and the love for the game is still there. I feel good physically and mentally. So I’m not thinking that far ahead. I’m just concentrating on doing the best I can over the next however many years for the club and for England and see where that takes me.”

Jordan Henderson spoke on behalf of Budweiser Zero. Sign up to Team Zero to join Henderson and take on Dry January together, and for a chance to win tickets to an England home game at jointeamzero.com

[Jürgen Klopp](#)

Jürgen Klopp urges Premier League to avoid Covid 'circuit-breaker' shutdown

- Liverpool manager says 'we try to keep the boys safe'
- 'It's also important it goes on – people want to watch it'

[Louise Taylor](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 08.30 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 17.37 EST



Jürgen Klopp is keen for the Premier League to continue, 'but I'm not a [medical] specialist and I will respect all the decisions made in the next few weeks'. Photograph: Lee Parker/CameraSport/Getty Images

Jürgen Klopp believes the [Premier League](#) should avoid implementing a "circuit-breaker" shutdown designed to control the rising number of Covid-19 cases at clubs if at all possible.

“I think the competition can go on,” said Liverpool’s manager, presumably mindful of the severe fixture congestion that would be an inevitable consequence of such a suspension. “And it’s also important it goes on. People want to watch it and, in this case, we are not part of society.

“We go to the training ground and stuff like that but usually we isolate. We try to do everything to keep the boys as safe as possible so I think we really can carry on. We all try to do our best to keep the competition going. I think it works well for everybody but I’m not a [medical] specialist and I will respect all the decisions made in the next few weeks.”

The realist in Klopp always expected an increase in coronavirus within clubs at this time of year. “We knew before the winter there would probably be a second wave,” he said. “It’s a challenge when it is about self-isolation so I am not surprised that the numbers have gone up slightly in football.”

Klopp has counselled patience regarding Virgil van Dijk’s return from anterior cruciate ligament surgery. The centre-half is in Dubai undergoing rehabilitation work following surgery in October and the club have sent a physiotherapist to the United Arab Emirates to work one-to-one with him.

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email.

Van Dijk has recently posted videos from his exercise bike in the gym, demonstrating he has reached the milestone of being able to bend his knee again, but Klopp cautioned that a return to playing remains a long-term aim. “Progress is good but there’s still a long way to go. I can be happy when I see these videos because it shows we make good progress but, with this type of injury, it will still take a lot of time. I would like to say something else but these are the facts.”

[Manchester United](#)

Manchester United must improve to challenge for title, says Solskjær

- United level on points with Liverpool after beating Aston Villa
- Villa's Dean Smith unhappy at award of penalty to Paul Pogba



Paul Pogba goes down under the challenge of Aston Villa's Douglas Luiz.
Photograph: Carl Recine/Reuters

Paul Pogba goes down under the challenge of Aston Villa's Douglas Luiz.
Photograph: Carl Recine/Reuters

Jamie Jackson at Old Trafford

[@JamieJackson](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 18.16 EST

Ole Gunnar Solskjær praised [Manchester United](#) for beating Aston Villa and drawing level with Liverpool on 33 points but insisted his team need to improve if they are to maintain their title challenge.

[Manchester United go joint top after Fernandes penalty sinks Aston Villa](#)

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The manager admitted the closing stages of [the 2-1 win at Old Trafford](#) was nerve-racking due to his side's poor game management.

"I did not enjoy the last 10 minutes that much because I feel we should have seen the game out in a better way," said Solskjær.

"It seemed like the cup final or the last game of the season. We need to learn how to play out games better."

United are second to the champions on goal difference after 16 matches and may have a chance to take the outright lead when travelling to Liverpool on 17 January.

Solskjær said: "I think the league and the season is going to be so tight anyway.

"There are going to be strange results. We have to keep improving and since Project Restart started we have been consistent.

"Every time you win a game you take it one step further. The first game is just as important as the last game of the season, they all count the same."



Ole Gunnar Solskjær was a happy man as he left the Old Trafford pitch.
Photograph: Matthew Peters/Manchester United/Getty Images

After Anthony Martial's first-half header opened the scoring, Bertrand Traoré's 58th-minute equaliser was answered moments later by Bruno Fernandes's penalty.

His 15th strike of the season proved the winner, with an injury time David de Gea save from Matty Cash followed by Eric Bailly's block of Keinan Davis's shot the last act of the contest.

[January transfer window: a guide to every Premier League club's plans](#)
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Solskjær praised his goalkeeper and centre-back. "The game was won by a fantastic block and a great save," said the United manager. Fernandes's penalty was claimed by Pogba after Michael Oliver, the referee, adjudged Douglas Luiz to have fouled him in the area. VAR agreed and while Dean Smith also concurred with the decision at the time, when seeing it again after the match Villa's manager was left "dumbfounded".

Smith said: "They got what I believed was a penalty at the time. I thought Douglas had got too tight from the throw in.

"Having seen it back it looks like he [Pogba] has tripped himself up and for me Michael should have been sent to the camera. That is what VAR is for and if there is so much doubt then get yourself over there. I'm a little dumbfounded – it looks very dubious to me."

Premier League

Manchester United go joint top after Fernandes penalty sinks Aston Villa



Bruno Fernandes scores a second-half penalty to secure a home win for Manchester United against Aston Villa. Photograph: Laurence Griffiths/Getty Images

Bruno Fernandes scores a second-half penalty to secure a home win for Manchester United against Aston Villa. Photograph: Laurence Griffiths/Getty Images

Jamie Jackson at Old Trafford

@JamieJackson

Fri 1 Jan 2021 17.05 EST

Manchester United have moved level with Liverpool, separated from the champions by goal difference only. Ole Gunnar Solskjær's side did so courtesy of Bruno Fernandes's 15th strike of the season, United finding a way to claim victory as they did against Wolves, the Portuguese's winner coming moments after Aston Villa had levelled.

[Jordan Henderson: 'I was in a very dark place. It made me a lot stronger'](#)

[Donald McRae](#)

[Read more](#)

Liverpool can go clear once more on points when visiting Southampton on Monday but United play their game in hand at Burnley on Tuesday week and could face Jürgen Klopp's team on 17 January at Anfield with a chance to take over as outright leaders themselves.

Satisfying for Solskjær was how his players fought and he could point to numerous standout displays. At the death, David De Gea's save from Matty Cash and Eric Bailly's block of Kieran Davis's shot summed up United's spirit, the Ivorian being mobbed at the final whistle for his heroics.

"You can see how much it means to him and the boys," Solskjær said of the centre-back. "He is so well liked in the dressing room – everyone wants him to do well after the injury struggles he's had."

United were fast out of the blocks, Paul Pogba, Fernandes and Anthony Martial causing panic in Villa's area, each having a chance to test Emilio Martínez.

Football Weekly

Newcastle, Liverpool, Villa, meat and the EFL

00:00:00

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A rare 4-2-3-1 that had Pogba at times on the left of the trident had the home team stroking the ball between Fred and Scott McTominay before launching attacks, one of which allowed Martial to shoot as Fernandes jumped out of the way.

Villa, though, bared their teeth in a fluid counterattack that featured the effervescent Jack Grealish and ended with De Gea beating away a John McGinn shot.

Aaron Wan-Bissaka can be a reluctant crosser – a prevailing criticism of the right-back – but an overlap that was followed by him rolling the ball into Pogba illustrated how adding this facet will improve his game.

[Manchester United must improve to challenge for title, says Solskjær](#)
[Read more](#)

Pogba dummied the right-back's pass and Fred took aim. The shot was too high but it served to warn Villa.

Yet what followed was McGinn buzzing around midfield, dictating the pattern, and United were under siege for a passage, Pogba making a vital header away from Ollie Watkins as the Frenchman continued to impress.

In an open contest, Solskjær's men threatened again. First, Martínez had to race out and clear with a stooping header; then Pogba ought to have tested the keeper but instead hit wide.

The midfielder was proving a menace as he can be when on song, one slick back-heal to Martial being mirrored by the No 9 to allow Pogba a shot. This was blocked in a half which in its below-par quality in the final third was resembling the Wolves encounter on Tuesday night, when Marcus Rashford's late deflected winner separated the sides.

As the interval approached, Douglas Luiz blasted over a free-kick to sum up the fare on offer.

However, United elevated proceedings with a superb move. De Gea hit the ball upfield and when it went to Pogba he juggled and fed Rashford, whose slick flick had Wan-Bissaka skating along the right flank. Again, he decided to cross and it was pinpoint: Martial headed in, with Tyrone Mings at fault for not intervening.



Anthony Martial gets between Tyrone Mings and Ezri Konsa to head Manchester United into a 1-0 lead. Photograph: Laurence Griffiths/Reuters

“I could just hear voices – back post, front post,” said Wan-Bissaka. “I just went with the front post and put it there.”

As United kicked off the second half they were level with Liverpool’s 33 points: here, then, was a test of game management for them. Their first act featured a sweet Fred flip that fed Martial who released Rashford along the left. The No 10 moved in behind and his low cross was watched carefully into Martínez’s hands.

Villa’s riposte had Grealish setting up Watkins: the centre-forward’s header was goal-bound before De Gea palmed over.

Grealish was provider once more when a diagonal pass played in Anwar El Ghazi: his effort beat the United keeper but not his right post. This was a clear pointer that United firmly needed a second goal.

[Tomas Soucek leaves it late as West Ham stun lacklustre Everton](#)
[Read more](#)

Rashford went close to supplying it when quicksilver feet opened up space but his attempt was too close to Martínez. And United’s profligacy was

indeed costly, as Grealish pounced. Villa's captain ghosted into United's area, rolled the ball over to the right, and Bertrand Traoré equalised.

The match turned again, though, on Douglas Luiz's foul of Pogba in the area. Michael Oliver awarded the penalty kick – VAR agreed, to Dean Smith's post-match incredulity, Villa's manager believing the No 6 "tripped himself" – and Fernandes smashed home.

From here there were shaky moments for United as Grealish continued to probe but Martínez had to tip a Fernandes shot on to the bar as Solskjær's men closed out the contest to go 10 unbeaten and nudge closer to Liverpool on their perch.

Tottenham Hotspur

'Like the under-13s': Mourinho criticises Premier League over postponement

- Spurs-Fulham called off three hours before kick-off
- Tottenham manager calls organisation ‘unprofessional’



José Mourinho says it would be a ‘big surprise’ if Tottenham do anything significant in the transfer window. Photograph: Lindsay Parnaby/EPA
José Mourinho says it would be a ‘big surprise’ if Tottenham do anything significant in the transfer window. Photograph: Lindsay Parnaby/EPA

[David Hytner](#)

[@DaveHytner](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 17.37 EST

José Mourinho has criticised the “unprofessional” organisation of the Premier League, saying the [late postponement](#) of Tottenham’s home game

against Fulham on Wednesday reminded him of when he coached at under-13 level in Portugal.

The match was called off three hours before the scheduled 6pm kick-off after [Fulham](#) reported a number of positive coronavirus cases. It has left Mourinho eyeing further fixture congestion but he has warned he will not tolerate a repeat of the scheduling that left Spurs playing four times in a week earlier in the season.

“I felt [it was] unprofessional but that’s the way it is or that’s the way it was,” Mourinho said, before the visit of Leeds on Saturday. “When I was coaching the under-13 and under-15 [teams] 30 years ago, or something like that, sometimes we go to the game at 9.30am and the opponent was not there.

[January transfer window: a guide to every Premier League club's plans](#)

[Read more](#)

“Or sometimes you arrive for the game in one of the rare Portuguese raining Sundays and the referee didn’t report. The same almost happened to us – arriving in the stadium and not playing.

“When I say unprofessional … of course, I am not referring to Fulham, I am referring to the organisation.”

Mourinho would be unhappy at the distorting effect on the competition if, as seems certain, the Fulham game were rescheduled for the second half of the season. It would mean Spurs would not play each team once in the first 19 matches, a scenario he described as “not correct”.

He suggested it could have an impact on suspensions for accumulated yellow cards. Players who pick up five in the first 19 games are banned for one match.

[Closure of Covid-testing facility a factor in Championship match being called off](#)

[Read more](#)

Spurs were made to play four times between 27 September and 4 October, league matches against Newcastle and Manchester United bookending the Carabao Cup tie with Chelsea and the Europa League play-off against Maccabi Haifa.

“The situation that we had to go through … we have to refuse, at all, to go through it again,” Mourinho said. “It’s impossible, it’s inhuman. We cannot accept at all if any Einstein comes with the idea of us playing four matches in one week.”

Soccer

Karen Carney deletes Twitter account after abuse over Leeds comments

- Carney made comments in role as television pundit
- Leeds mocked her, then ‘completely condemned’ abuse



Karen Carney speaking during Amazon Prime Sport's coverage of Leeds's 5-0 win over West Brom, when she made comments that sparked a backlash.
Photograph: Amazon Prime Video

Karen Carney has deleted her Twitter account after remarks she made in her role as a TV pundit about Leeds United were [mocked by the club's official account](#) and led to waves of sexist abuse.

Online attacks against the former England international, who played 144 times for her country, are understood to have increased each day since Leeds shared a clip of Carney's commentary with their 660,000 followers on Tuesday night.

With the abuse getting “worse and worse”, according to friends of Carney, and with the majority of it sexist, she chose to delete her account on Friday. She will continue to work on TV and radio this weekend as a Premier League analyst.

Carney is hardly the first prominent woman to be forced off social media by cyberbullying. Nor is she the only professional footballer. Last week the Arsenal goalkeeper Rúnar Alex Rúnarsson deleted his Twitter account after a mistake in a [Carabao Cup tie against Manchester City](#) made him a target of his own fans.

It is the central role that Leeds have played in this incident, however, that is different and has outraged many within football.

Speaking after [Leeds's 5-0 victory over West Bromwich Albion](#) on Tuesday night, Carney commented on the winning side’s intense playing style and suggested it could cause fatigue over the course of a season. “I actually think they got promoted [last season] because of Covid, in terms of it gave them a bit of respite,” she said.

Taking an 18-second clip of Carney’s remarks from the Amazon Prime Video broadcast, Leeds’s social media team then posted it on Twitter. They added the caption: “‘Promoted because of Covid’ Won the league by 10 points”. They also tagged Amazon on their message, but Carney’s face was the central image.

The tweet, quickly identified as likely to cause an outpouring of invective in Carney’s direction, was immediately criticised. Fellow women in the game called out Leeds, including Carney’s fellow international Beth England: “Atrocious behaviour by your social platform,” [England wrote](#). “Cyber bullying a female pundit and opening her up to mass online abuse for DOING HER JOB AND HAVING HER OPINION.”

Leeds did not delete the tweet. Instead, the club’s owner, Andrea Radrizzani, [endorsed its sentiments](#). “I take the responsibility of the Club tweet,” he wrote on Twitter. “I consider that comment completely unnecessary and disrespectful to our Club and particularly to the fantastic hard work of our

players and coaches whom were understanding on the pitch for the last two championship seasons by all stats.”

Radrizzani was supported by former Leeds players, and Leeds fans pointed out that Carney was not the first pundit to have been criticised through the club’s social media, with targets in the men’s game including the former Aston Villa player Gabriel Agbonlahor and Sheffield United manager Chris Wilder.

The abuse received by Carney was undeniable. In public messages Carney was called a “silly bitch”, a “stupid slag” and “twat of the week” and told to “get back in the kitchen”, or to “put your mic down and get yourself home there’s dishes to wash and clothes to iron”. Other users wrote they were “sick of this shit women pundits”, while another said: “Women’s lives matter but come on, women and football? Get kettle on love!” These were far from the worst examples.

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On Wednesday afternoon Leeds [released a statement](#) saying they “completely condemned” any abuse directed at Carney and that “everyone at our club respects Karen greatly for what she has achieved in the game”.

The USA international [Megan Rapinoe tweeted](#): “Shame. Shame. Shame. Thicken up that skin y’all. Also, don’t come for [Karen Carney] she’s a National treasure.”

Leeds have yet to publicly acknowledge any link between their actions and the outcome, but privately there is distress at the response, which was not anticipated by the club.

Carney has been invited to visit the Leeds training ground to meet Radrizzani and the striker Patrick Bamford, who has experienced online abuse consistently throughout his Leeds career.

The tweet is expected to remain on the Leeds account, in the belief that deleting it may provoke a second tide of abuse.

[India cricket team](#)

Former India cricket captain Sourav Ganguly in hospital after chest pain

- 48-year-old complained of chest pain after gym session
- ‘I wish and pray for speedy recovery,’ says BCCI’s Jay Shah



Sourav Ganguly is now the head of India's cricket board, the BCCI.
Photograph: Punit Paranjpe/AFP via Getty Images

Sourav Ganguly is now the head of India's cricket board, the BCCI.
Photograph: Punit Paranjpe/AFP via Getty Images

Reuters

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.29 EST

The former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who also heads the country's cricket board, was admitted to a hospital in Kolkata on Saturday after complaining of chest pain.

One of India's most successful captains, 48-year-old Ganguly, who hails from the state of West Bengal, took over as president of the Board of Control

for [Cricket](#) in India in 2019. His transition from a player to top administrator was seen as a natural progression for a former captain who helped India emerge from a damaging match-fixing scandal in 2000.

“Sad to hear that @SGanguly99 suffered a mild cardiac arrest and has been admitted to hospital,” Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of the West Bengal, said on Twitter.

I wish and pray for the speedy recovery of [@SGanguly99](#). I’ve spoken to his family. Dada is stable and is responding well to the treatment.

— Jay Shah (@JayShah) [January 2, 2021](#)

Local media reported that Ganguly complained of chest pain after a gym session on Friday and was taken to hospital after the problem recurred on Saturday. Messages poured in on social media from the cricketing community wishing Ganguly, fondly known as “dada” or “elder brother”, a speedy recovery.

“I wish and pray for the speedy recovery of @SGanguly99. I’ve spoken to his family. Dada is stable and is responding well to the treatment,” the BCCI’s secretary, Jay Shah, said on Twitter.

The former left-handed batsman, who retired from international cricket in 2008, played 113 Tests and 311 one-dayers and led India to 21 Test wins.

2021.01.02 - Opinion

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- [There's a darker side to English businesses citing Magna Carta to defy lockdown](#)
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People started breaking Covid rules when they saw those with privilege ignore them

[Daisy Fancourt](#)

Compliance must be seen as the norm, or people will not stick to the restrictions

- Dr Daisy Fancourt leads the UK Covid-19 Social Study at University College London



Social-distancing signs outside a cafe in Brighton. Photograph: Luke Dray/Getty Images

Social-distancing signs outside a cafe in Brighton. Photograph: Luke Dray/Getty Images

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

We've heard repeatedly during the past year that until mass vaccination is achieved, the key to managing the Covid-19 epidemic is controlling human behaviour. Yet as cases in the UK [continue to spiral](#), with stricter social restrictions being implemented every few days, a key question remains: is anyone complying any more?

Compliance has been one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented concepts of this pandemic. During the first wave of the virus back in the spring, there was concern that a lengthy lockdown would lead to "behavioural fatigue" and diminishing compliance with social restrictions. In fact, "behavioural fatigue" was not a scientific concept but a political one, neither supported by research from previous epidemics nor by data that subsequently emerged from our lockdown ([over 97%](#) showed good compliance with the rules, with no meaningful decrease from March to May). During emergencies, humans are actually primed to act in the collective interest, as we saw from the [sacrifices made](#) by people in the spring of 2020 across the UK.

It was only as lockdown was eased that compliance began to decrease. Partly, people felt the situation was safer. But other factors contributed too. For many, the new rules were simply too complex to understand. While during lockdown 90% of adults in the UK reported feeling they understood the rules, by August this figure was [just 45%](#) in England. Conflicting rules across UK nations, frequent changes to rules, and confusion about dates of announcement (as opposed to dates of implementation) exacerbated the situation.

But the message from the government about adherence also changed after the revelations about the actions of Dominic Cummings, which were followed by a [decrease in compliance](#). Returning to a single event might seem like bearing a grudge, but it was pivotal for many reasons. During lockdown the message on compliance was clear: social restrictions were vital to stop the spread of the virus, so everyone had to play their part; no excuses, no exemptions. But [Cummings changed the tone](#): if you could find a loophole in the rules, it somehow became acceptable (and defensible) to break them. The enemy changed from being the virus itself to being the measures designed to curb the virus.

This shift in tone did not go unnoticed, as [our research at UCL showed](#). The same sacrifices people had willingly made in the spring as part of a collective social responsibility suddenly seemed less necessary. Goodwill turned to anger and upset, largely targeted towards the government that defended Cummings' actions. Trust in the government to handle the pandemic took a sharp downward turn in England, from which it has not recovered since. Trust is crucial, as [research has shown](#) that it is one of the largest behavioural predictors of compliance during this pandemic: larger than mental health, belief in the health service or numerous other factors. As humans, we need to trust our authorities if we are to follow what they tell us to do.

Other factors are important as predictors of compliance, too. Some of these have been demonstrated during previous pandemics: [older adults and women](#) are typically better at following rules to stop the spread of viruses. But others have emerged more specifically during Covid-19. The more privileged within society (wealthier and more educated) were more compliant during the first lockdown as their privilege supported their ability to follow the rules: more opportunities to work from home, spacious homes and gardens to lock down in, and a strong infrastructure, from good social support networks to scheduled food deliveries.

But as the pandemic has continued, this same privilege has been associated with a higher propensity to bend the rules. Money has bought a way out of social restrictions, from providing second homes in the country to retreat to (taking new strains of the virus with them), to enabling holidays abroad to escape more stringent UK measures (along with [late-night covert escapes](#) when quarantines are brought in).

Privilege has led to a belief that one can second guess the virus, meeting up with friends against guidelines because they're "being sensible" or it "won't do any harm". Ironically, the more privileged actually confess to understanding the rules less. As with Cummings' actions, the focus is on the wrong enemy: their mission is not to stop the virus but escape the measures designed to control it.

So as we enter yet a new year and yet another set of new rules, is there any hope for us regaining the trust and compliance we started with nearly a year

ago? Fortunately, the answer is yes. As cases rose again in the autumn and the UK entered new lockdowns, [compliance actually increased](#). When we are reminded of the urgency and danger of the situation, not just in words from politicians but in clear actions such as stricter measures, our sense of duty can return. But there are also lessons we can learn from the past year to help us over the next few months.

[Scientists call for full lockdown in England as new Covid cases multiply](#)
[Read more](#)

Everyone needs to play their part, regardless of status or privilege. Any exemptions or modifications of rules can affect the compliance of others and sends a message that the rules are mere guidelines and personal sacrifices are not necessary. Messaging needs to be clear, consistent and carefully targeted. We are all motivated by different factors: for some, messages about personal risk from Covid-19 will be most powerful, whereas for others a sense of collective duty (“save your granny”) will be more effective.

We all also trust different sources more, whether politicians, healthcare professionals or community leaders. So a plurality of voices is vital to communicating that message. Compliance also needs to be enabled. Punitive measures against non-compliance are of limited efficacy when people are facing tangible barriers, such as unmanageable financial loss from taking time off work or unmissable caring duties for vulnerable relatives. So we need compassion, understanding and practical solutions.

Finally, compliance needs to be modelled as the norm. Currently, [nine in 10 people](#) think they are complying more than the average. News headlines that “tens of millions follow the rules” are understandably less exciting than stories of police raids on raves and other infringements. But we need to beware implying that the actions of a minority represent the behaviours of the entire population. Modelling good compliance is the responsibility of us all. So as we start to practise our new year’s resolutions, let this be the top of all of our lists, and let this be the resolution that we work hardest to keep.

- Dr Daisy Fancourt is associate professor of psychobiology and epidemiology at University College London and leads the UK Covid-

19 Social Study

There's a darker side to English businesses citing Magna Carta to defy lockdown

[Hussein Keskani](#)

Shops using the charter to bypass Covid laws may seem funny – but the online culture that spawns such misinformation is not



A sign in the window of Quinn Blakey Hairdressing in Oakenshaw.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

A sign in the window of Quinn Blakey Hairdressing in Oakenshaw.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

As someone who writes about online culture, I spend a fair bit of time researching the internet's shady corners – and it's hard to be surprised by anything any more. But, last year, there was something uncanny about seeing conspiracist attitudes usually reserved for the screen – comment

sections, forums, chat boxes on Facebook and on any trending hashtag on Twitter or Instagram – [spilling over into the physical world](#) in the form of protests, both individual and collective.

We're all familiar to an extent with the Covid-sceptic worldview: one that stretches from claims that the pandemic itself is a “hoax” to the notion that the vaccine rollout is part of a sinister plot by world governments. This, coupled with a number of rightwing commentators in the US and the UK downplaying the threat of Covid-19 to hundreds of thousands of followers, meant that 2020 wasn't just about navigating a major global health crisis – for many people, it was about partaking in a culture war premised on notions of freedom. It's a “debate” that's largely been created and defined by the internet.

No more clearly was this shown than in November, when Sinead Quinn, a hairdresser from West Yorkshire, [was issued with fines](#) totalling £17,000 for breaching national lockdown rules, put into place in an attempt to slow the rate of Covid-19 infections across England. Quinn's salon, like others, had not been considered an essential service. But in an act of defiance against the local council and, by extension, the government, she kept it open.

This story made headlines because of the particular form her rebellion took. Quinn cited a specific article from an early version of the Magna Carta to claim that she was well within her rights to keep her store open – and had displayed a copy of a document saying as much in her shop window. In 1215, the clauses gave permission to 25 wealthy barons to dissent and rebel if they believed the crown was acting unjustly. Today, the document is considered by most lawyers to be an “[ornament, not an instrument](#)”, and while the document is historically significant, it is legally useless. Still, this hasn't stopped other English businesses, including [a bookshop](#) and a [soft-play centre](#), citing the medieval document in the belief that by doing so they are exempt from government restrictions.

Why have some small business owners tried to safeguard their livelihoods with an antiquated 13th-century treatise? A simple answer is that social media platforms, in particular Facebook, are to blame for allowing the easy spread of misinformation regarding the law. In November, Full Fact traced a number of [viral Facebook posts](#) claiming that article 61 of Magna Carta gave

British citizens legal permission to defy the government. In October, a number of videos showing business owners citing Magna Carta to police officers were being shared across social media platforms, with hashtags such as #knowyourrights and #donotconsent.

It might be easy to laugh at things like this. “Don’t believe anything you read online” is pretty much an unwritten rule of being online – one that most of us who grew up with the internet were constantly reminded of. But as social media has taken up more of our lives, and, during the pandemic, become the primary way to have any form of a social life, abstract and exaggerated forms of posting, designed to captivate users into sharing and retweeting, are more than common among anyone looking to get noticed.

People who know how social media platforms work can create content they know will go viral in spite of its inaccuracies – while people less attuned to the psychological incentives of the platform, who are less aware of how to identify what’s real and what isn’t, believe in the content’s veracity through their instincts.

Digitally literate users often mock those who publicly show their lack of online street-smarts. But the effects of this can have darker consequences. In far-right spaces of social media in particular, [Magna Carta](#) is also invoked as a digital rallying cry, not just against the British government, but pretty much anyone considered to be an “elite”. References to [Magna Carta](#) are often posted on right-leaning social networks such as Parler. Meanwhile, groups such as the British Freedom party, led by former Britain First leader Jayda Fransen, have referred to 2020 as “the year of the Magna Carta” and even made merchandise based on the aesthetics of the document.

The Magna Carta delusion might not just be a type of misinformation affecting struggling small business owners, but a symbol that – promising freedom, security and fixity amid the turbulence of the pandemic-racked free market – converts discontent into a dangerous politics.

Seemingly absurd-sounding memes, like the notion that an ancient document allows you to disobey the law, can take root in people’s imaginations, if the conditions are right, and bleed into the real world. Take the “[love jihad](#)” trope in India, a conspiracy theory that argues that Muslim men are

deliberately targeting Hindu women in order to convert them via marriage. The conspiracy, which spreads primarily via WhatsApp, has led to vigilante groups forcibly preventing weddings and forcing newlyweds into hiding – and its influence has also led to state politicians seeking to [pass laws](#) regulating interfaith marriages.

It's important that we don't dismiss the seemingly ridiculous. While the Magna Carta phenomenon might give some light comic relief or evoke some sympathy, it highlights the fact that many people are prone to exploitation by dubious groups and characters that thrive in a society in which unedited information flows freely while people are stressed and locked-down.

- Hussein Kesvani is the author of Follow Me, Akhi: The Online World of British Muslims

[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

With a heavy heart, Johnson will always remind us who the real victim is: him

[Marina Hyde](#)



His compassion for the public may be limited, but never let it be said that our leader is a man who neglects his own emotions



‘Johnson would have enjoyed being told by Bill Cash he was like Alexander the Great and Churchill, even if that is like being told you make a lot of sense by Mrs Rochester.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

‘Johnson would have enjoyed being told by Bill Cash he was like Alexander the Great and Churchill, even if that is like being told you make a lot of sense by Mrs Rochester.’ Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Fri 1 Jan 2021 07.43 EST

It is one of the curiosities of this inside-out age that [Donald Trump](#) is loved by conspiracists, even though he is a leader – at last! – who embodies all their worst fears. He really does hate them, he really is plotting against them, and he really is lying to them, in multiple and increasingly wicked and baroque ways.

Searching for the lesser ironies native to the UK, we might alight on the puzzle that [Boris Johnson](#) is beloved of many who can’t wait to point out that “facts don’t care about your feelings” – and yet is himself incapable of serving up difficult facts without endless reference to how it’s all making him feel. Is the prime minister in the business of making new year’s resolutions? If so he might consider trying to develop a stiff upper lip this year. It looks like we’re going to need it.

Should Johnson fail to toughen up and take himself in hand – a locked-on certainty, given the form book – then we are condemned to endure what might well be the worst months of the pandemic thus far, led by someone whose first thought seems always to be for his own emotions. “I hate having to take these decisions …”, “I deeply regret having to do this …”, “I do this with a heavy heart …” Once you’ve noticed the tic you can’t stop hearing it. If only he’d take back control of himself.

I can no longer remember any Boris Johnson podium address that wasn’t riven with subconscious invitations to consider the real victim in all this: him. No matter what you’ve been through, please do take more than a moment to consider the heartaches and ballaches visited upon a man who simply wanted to be world king, but would settle for being the kind of prime minister who smiled and [drove diggers through polystyrene walls](#) – yet now has to deal with all this shit in his in-tray instead. Of course, there is the odd bright spark. Johnson would have enjoyed [being told](#) by Bill Cash during Wednesday’s trade deal debate that he was like both Alexander the Great and Churchill. Even if that is like being told you make a lot of sense by [Mrs Rochester](#).

But mainly, we are forever being subjected to [self-dramatising speeches about the latest virus measures he hates](#), to which the only dignified response is: I couldn’t care less how it all makes you feel. You’re the prime minister. The people listening are the ones you’re supposed to lead, not your psychotherapist.

Was this the way with the PM’s noted idol and supposed political lodestar, Winston Churchill? I’m afraid I haven’t Johnson’s Churchill biography to hand – though of course, I never permit myself to be more than four feet away from [Sir Richard Evans’s majestic review](#) of it. (Sample blast: “The Germans did not capture Stalingrad, though this book claims they did.”)

[The one good thing to come out of Brexit: a bonfire of national illusions | David Edgerton](#)
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But even without this canonical text to check against, I think we can be sure that Churchill did not feel the need to deliver all his wartime announcements

laced with frequent expressions of how he was handling the whole thing of having to deliver all these wartime announcements.

“I hate having to be the one who suggests we shall fight them on the beaches ... I deeply regret having to indicate we may be required to fight them on the landing grounds ... Nobody likes being the one whose job it is to announce we shall never surrender ...” It is fair to say that Churchill was not unburdened by self-regard, yet he seems to have realised that what the people really needed to hear in their hour of need was not how it was all making HIM feel.

Inevitably, the prime minister’s needy vacillation has proved highly transmissible among his ministers. Gavin Williamson has spent much of the latter half of this week explaining his [chaotic and belated actions on schools](#) with the words “no one wants to be making these decisions”. And yet, I bet there *are* people who would quite want to be secretary of state for education, and to make those requisite decisions, so perhaps Gavin could stand aside for them? Perhaps Johnson will eventually steel himself to tell Williamson – with deep regret and a heavy heart, no doubt – that he is being moved on from a department he has turned into a full-spectrum clusterfuck for a year now. Until then, the self-dramatisation continues. As you may know, Williamson prominently displays [a bullwhip on his desk](#). This is the version of Indiana Jones where our hero never beats the boulder hurtling down the tunnel behind him, and the mere act of reaching back for his hat causes the loss of both his arm and the educational prospects of an entire generation of children.

Speaking of touches of affectation, when the prime minister comes through the No 10 double doors to announce close to a thousand deaths, as he has twice this week, it can be seen that this 56-year-old man has nonetheless still taken the trouble to mess up his hair just before. What felt mildly excruciating in pre-corona times seems truly grotesque when persisted with today. The podium turns themselves betray even more weirdly skewed priorities. A couple of weeks ago, a shielding and frightened member of the public asked a question in which she said she had already lost two loved ones to Covid. Clearly incapable of feeling compassion for anyone other than himself, Johnson [declined to express any](#), and handed the question over to Chris Whitty.

The reason all this is particularly important is because it tells us so much of why our pandemic story has unfolded the way it has. Time and again, Boris Johnson has so deeply regretted even the prospect of having to do difficult things that [he hasn't done them](#), meaning he has had to do even more regrettable things later. He seems most comfortable casting himself as forever the passive victim of events as opposed to someone who should be out in front of them, shaping them as decisively as possible. A fascinating article by the pollster James Johnson [this week](#) charted the PM's descent in the focus groups over the course of the past year. "As yet another inevitable decision was finally made," he reported, "people came to think more and more that the man who was meant to lead them was following them instead."

Buck up, toughen up, show a stiff upper lip – I'm sure there's some archive [Boris Johnson](#) column out there lamenting that these are now deemed inappropriate responses by "the PC brigade". Either way, I am happy to oblige him by considering them easily the most suitable exhortations in this particular case. For God's sake, prime minister – do man up.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

[Guardian Opinion cartoon](#)

[Gavin Williamson](#)

Nicola Jennings on Gavin Williamson's latest U-turn — cartoon

The Guardian view on liberal Christians: is this their moment?

Editorial

The election of practising Catholic Joe Biden is just one reason for religious progressives to be hopeful



‘The election to the White House of Joe Biden, a Democrat who is also a practising Catholic, is the best news liberal Christians have had for a long time.’ Photograph: AP

‘The election to the White House of Joe Biden, a Democrat who is also a practising Catholic, is the best news liberal Christians have had for a long time.’ Photograph: AP

Fri 1 Jan 2021 11.22 EST

“No one is saved alone,” writes Pope Francis in [Let Us Dream](#), a short book of Covid-related reflections published last month. Those words carry an obvious Christian resonance. But the meaning that the pope intends to convey is primarily secular. The pandemic, he believes, has underlined our

shared vulnerability and mutual dependency. By shocking us out of everyday indifference and egotism, our present troubles can open up the space for a new spirit of fraternity. A fresh emphasis on looking out for each other, claims the pope, can become the theme of a more generous and caring post-pandemic politics.

Let Us Dream is a pastoral, spiritual book that aspires to address a lay audience as well as a religious one. In its emphasis on civic solidarity, tolerance, concern for the poor and the environment, it is also the [latest](#) attempt by Pope Francis to shift the dial of 21st-century Christianity away from the culture wars that have consumed it.

There is an obvious temptation to respond wryly: “Good luck with that.” In a number of high-profile ways, 2020 was another depressing year for liberal-minded Christians. The Polish Catholic church worked [hand in glove](#) with the state in an attempt to effectively ban abortion and trample over LGBTQ+ rights. The strong disapproval of a majority of Poles, who have no wish to live in a theocracy, cut no ice. In neighbouring Hungary, the Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic churches kept stumm as Viktor Orbán’s government [continued](#) to bully minorities in the name of “illiberal Christianity”. During the lead-up to November’s US presidential election, Donald Trump’s cynical weaponisation of the abortion debate helped ensure strong Christian [backing](#) for the most profane, religiously illiterate president in the country’s history. And this week, Pope Francis himself [indicated his disapproval](#) of the legalisation of abortion in his native Argentina.

But this stark summary of the church at odds with the liberal world does not tell the whole story. In Britain, as elsewhere, Christian churches, alongside mosques and synagogues, played a [frontline](#) role in the community activism that kept people and families afloat during months of acute uncertainty and hardship. It is from that wellspring of fellow feeling and altruism, the importance of which is suddenly front and centre in our lives, that Let Us Dream believes a “new humanism” can emerge. For those who share that aspiration, whether secular or religious, there are genuine grounds for hope in 2021.

A liberal Catholic

The election to the White House of Joe Biden, a Democrat who is also a practising Catholic, is the best news liberal Christians have had for a long time. In a book published last month, the conservative Australian cardinal George Pell [said](#) Mr Trump was “a bit of a barbarian, but in some important ways he’s ‘our’ (Christian) barbarian”. The end of that cynically transactional relationship between Mr Trump’s White House and the religious right signals new possibilities. In his [victory speech](#), Mr Biden quoted from Ecclesiastes, saying that for a divided America, “it was a time to heal”. When he has discussed his faith, the president-elect has tended to talk about altruism, decency and personal integrity, steering clear of provocative dividing lines.

Mr Biden has backed access to abortion and same-sex marriage. He will, as a result, be relentlessly targeted by conservative Catholic critics and evangelicals. The president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, José Gomez, has [convened](#) a working group to address the “difficult and complex” situation of dealing with a liberal Catholic in the White House. But the Catholic vote was split evenly between Mr Biden and Mr Trump. And, crucially, Pope Francis is likely to have the new president’s back.

This relationship could constitute an important new axis of liberal influence in the west. After a recent phone call between the two, a [statement](#) from Mr Biden’s transition team said the president-elect “expressed his desire to work together on the basis of a shared belief in the dignity and equality of all humankind, on issues such as caring for the marginalised and the poor, addressing the crisis of climate change and welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees into our communities”. This was to more or less tick off the list of priorities the pope has attempted to set, while under constant assault from religious conservatives. The disruption of the recent alliance between Christianity and rightwing populism carries significant implications not only for America, but for the battle against global poverty, the climate emergency and the migration crisis.

Fraternity as the new frontier

Mr Biden’s election is not the only hopeful sign for Christians who long for their leaders to look beyond the narrow preoccupation with reproductive

rights and sexuality. Last year was marked by two significant theological documents, one from the [eastern](#) church and one from the west. Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, published during Lent, is a radical clarion call for Orthodox Christians to engage with deepening inequalities in developed societies, and to confront wealthy nations with their moral obligations to refugees. The tone is set by the [opening words](#) of the text: “Our spiritual lives … cannot fail to be social lives.” Endorsed by Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the Orthodox church, the document recalls that “[the] early and Byzantine church had a bold voice on social justice”. This, it states, must be revived and renewed.

Pope Francis’s recent [encyclical](#), Fratelli Tutti (Brothers All), was written in the same spirit. Ideas of fraternity and friendship are developed as a necessary complement to the familiar political categories of liberty and equality. The argument is summed up in Let Us Dream, where the pope writes: “Without the ‘we’ of a people, of a family, of institutions, of a society that transcends the ‘I’ of individual interests, life … becomes a battle for supremacy between factions and interests.”

Intriguingly, variations on this theme have been explored in a string of recent publications, both secular and religious. In his valedictory work Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times, the late chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, [criticises](#) the modern priority of “I” over “we”. Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett’s [The Upswing](#) and Michael Sandel’s [The Tyranny of Merit](#) both attempt to map out a civic territory that avoids the twin dangers of selfish individualism and illiberal populism.

In recent years, Christian leaders have too often been silent, complicit or cravenly proactive, as the Bible has been deployed as a weapon in conservative culture wars. The image of Trump marching through teargassed streets to [brandish](#) a bible outside a Washington church encapsulated a kind of capitulation. But in the new year, liberal Christians have grounds for cautious optimism. In the necessary project of carving out a new space for a less polarised, more fraternal public square, they have a vital role to play.

[OpinionBrexit](#)

Could Britain rejoin the EU? It seems like a hopelessly lost cause – but so did leaving

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



It's easy to assume that the question has been settled for a generation. Remember that Brexit once looked impossible, too



The first vehicle entering the Eurotunnel terminal following Brexit, Coquelles, France, 1 January 2021. Photograph: Lewis Joly/AFP/Getty Images

The first vehicle entering the Eurotunnel terminal following Brexit, Coquelles, France, 1 January 2021. Photograph: Lewis Joly/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.11 EST

Have I mentioned the [man in the egg-stained tie](#)? I first spotted him at Tory party conferences two decades ago. A forlorn figure – mocked even by his fellow Conservatives – he stood at the back of fringe meetings, armed with a plastic bag full of leaflets, leaping to his feet to offer “more of a comment than a question”, uniting the room in a collective groan. You’d see him at most political events; he was often in the Question Time audience. His obsession was Europe and the supposed tyranny of Brussels.

Nobody wanted to be the man in the egg-stained tie. He was a bore and an object of derision. Yet today that man is celebrating a victory, one that, at the turn of this century, would have seemed like the stuff of laughably improbable fantasy. Against all odds, he got his way: the new year begins with Britain having [completed its exit](#) from the European Union. What was once the quixotic cause of anoraks and obsessives – to overturn a settled

decision on Britain's relationship with Europe – has proved to be among the most effective political movements in the country's history. For pro-Europeans, that movement ensured the start of this new year is tinged with regret, even longing, for what's been lost.

All of which prompts a question. Could the trick be repeated by those who lament it most? Could Britain's pro-Europeans do to the 2016 vote what the anti-Europeans eventually did to the 1975 one and reverse it? Is it conceivable that Britain might one day rejoin the European bloc it has now left?

The conventional wisdom says no. People are thoroughly fed up with the issue: note [this week's polling](#), which showed Britons simultaneously urging MPs to vote for Boris Johnson's deal even as a [hefty majority](#) of those same Britons couldn't say whether the deal was good or bad. They just wanted the whole saga over with, yearning for an end to an argument that had split the country and consumed four and a half years of our energies.

What of the [6.4% shrinkage](#) in GDP per person that is coming our way over the next 10 years, thanks to Brexit? It won't cut through, and not only because any immediate economic pain in 2021 can be conveniently blamed on the pandemic of 2020. It's also that the agony won't be sudden: thanks to the deal, we did not cycle off a cliff at 11pm on New Year's Eve. Instead, the coming failure will be of the slow puncture variety, the air seeping out of the economic tyres steadily and over time. The UK economy will grow, but more slowly than if we'd never left. That's a hard case to sell. As Gordon Brown's former strategist, Stewart Wood, puts it, "You don't feel a counterfactual."

Little wonder that when asked this week by a Spanish newspaper whether a Bre-entry might occur in his lifetime, Matthew Goodwin, professor of politics and international relations at the University of Kent, [said no](#) – pointedly adding that he's 40 years old. He suspects that the probable consequences of Brexit make a return less likely: with those pesky Brits out of the way, the EU27 can get on with ever closer integration, thereby making the European Union of 2040 an even less enticing prospect to federalism-wary Britons than it was in 2016. What's more, any British attempt to rejoin the club would not be on the bespoke terms we used to enjoy: if we want to

come back, we'll have to do so without the once-cherished, Thatcher-negotiated cash rebate and by agreeing to join the euro, a bridge too far even for some committed remainers. As for the generation that would have voted to stay in 2016 but never got the chance, they'll soon move on: other issues will assume greater priority, starting with the climate crisis.

The most ardent pro-Europeans accept one core part of that view: it won't be economics that wins it for rejoin. They are not braced for a rerun of the stagnation and decline that led post-imperial, 1970s Britain to conclude it had become the economic sick man of Europe and needed to team up with its neighbours.

Instead, they expect – or hope – that the argument might be won generationally and culturally, as young people see their peers in Germany, France or Spain move freely across the continent and demand that same right for themselves. They picture the young Brit who will now need a hard-to-get visa to work as, say, a holiday rep in Italy or chef in Portugal, or the would-be student barred from the Erasmus exchange programme.

Hassle could be a big factor. At the most trivial end, it's the holidaymaker now herded into the longer queue at the airport or burdened with the bother of health insurance and pet passports where there used to be none. More serious will be the 215m additional customs forms a year, costing UK businesses [an estimated £7bn](#), along with myriad other checks – border, rules-of-origin and veterinary – that didn't exist when we were in the single market and customs union. Witness the Gloucester-based [exporter of eels](#) who, having voted leave, now discovers that his continental customers will have to produce “a raft of documentation” to buy his product: far easier for them to buy from an EU-based supplier instead. Every bureaucratic irritation, every job lost, will plant the thought: maybe we'd be better off in than out.

Wood wonders if elite, including even Conservative, opinion will shift in the coming decades as we discover it's cold outside – that the Americans don't give us much attention, that in reality there is no “Anglosphere” to replace the EU as our obvious home. We'd have lost our seat at the grownups' table and, with it, our clear place in the world. Theoretical sovereignty might be a thin comfort blanket to a nation that feels diminished and “marooned”.

Nor will Brexit deliver its most basic, if disingenuous, promise: to have resolved the great European question once and for all. On the contrary, negotiations with Brussels will be a [permanent fixture](#), not least because Johnson's trade deal does not cover all of Britain's trade – excluding, among other things, the 80% of Britain's economy made up of services. "Europe" will remain a live issue, as it has for centuries, and that will give rejoin an opening – not today, perhaps not soon, but eventually.

The easy assumption is that this question has been settled for a generation or more. But politics moves faster now. The case for a second Scottish independence referendum is looking increasingly hard to resist, less than seven years after that issue was also supposedly settled for a generation. (If an independent Scotland [rejoins the EU](#), alongside a Northern Ireland that is already half-in, then the question will press on England and Wales all the harder.)

To be sure, many of these arguments – about red tape or Britain's rightful place in the world – might seem hopelessly abstract or obscure, just as the request that the EU27 "[keep the light on](#)" for our eventual return might seem hopelessly romantic. But even apparently lost causes can prevail in the end. Just ask the man in the egg-stained tie.

- Jonathan Freedland is a [Guardian](#) columnist

2021.01.02 - From the uk

- [Channel controls First lorries cross smoothly as hauliers hold back](#)
- [Essex Suspect arrested in Colchester after killing of 83-year-old man](#)
- [Wham! Last Christmas reaches No 1 for first time after 36 years](#)
- [Mark Eden Former Coronation Street actor dies aged 92](#)
- [New Year's Eve Revellers fined by police for breaking UK Covid rules](#)
- [Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson withdraws from elections](#)
- [Guardian and Observer Charity appeal donations hit £1m](#)
- [Air pollution Avoid using wood burning stoves if possible, warn health experts](#)
- [London Removed bike lane blocked by parked cars most of the time – study](#)

Brexit

First lorries cross into France as Britain and Europe wake to new Brexit reality

No early signs of chaos as trucks haul goods across the new customs border



French custom officers watch the first vehicle entering the Eurotunnel terminal post Brexit Photograph: Lewis Joly/AFP/Getty Images

French custom officers watch the first vehicle entering the Eurotunnel terminal post Brexit Photograph: Lewis Joly/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Sullivan](#)

[@helenrsullivan](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.05 EST

Moments after the UK left the EU with an 11th-hour deal, the first trucks hauling goods across the new customs border presented their clearance documents to French agents before loading on to a train to pass through the Eurotunnel.

With Britain having finally [quit the EU single market and customs union](#), there were [no early signs of feared chaos at the border](#) in the first hours of 1 January 2021.

Ivanov Shumeykov was the first driver processed by officials late on New Year's Eve. He smiled and waved as his HGV went through Eurotunnel controls in Folkestone, Kent just after 11pm. The first arrivals on the shuttle from France following the end of the [Brexit](#) transition period were expected at around 12.23am.



A truck from Britain drives over green and orange lines on the road that is part of the new 'smart border' customs infrastructure to enter France at the Eurotunnel terminal. Photograph: Lewis Joly/AP

Scenes in Dover have been quiet as many hauliers have been staying away to avoid being the first to test new border controls.

Freight flows through the Eurotunnel's Calais terminal were extremely light in the early hours of Friday morning. Yann Leriche, chief executive of Getlink which operates the Eurotunnel, told Reuters tweaks to customs procedures might be necessary but that there would be no chaos in the weeks ahead.

But Matt Smith, managing director of HSF Logistics, which ships mainly fresh meat and chilled goods between Britain and [Europe](#), said the new post-Brexit customs systems and paperwork were largely untested.

“We’re not too sure to be honest, it seems to be a bit of a headache,” he told AFP. “There’ll be delays along the line at some stage.”

[Dover eerily quiet on Brexit eve, but hauliers fear more chaos](#)

[Read more](#)

British and European businesses have warned of carnage as they learn to navigate a wall of red tape and paperwork that threatens to disrupt the smooth flow of nearly €1tn in annual trade.

The Brexit transition period’s end still leaves [Northern Ireland remaining in the EU single market for goods](#).

Northern Ireland will also apply the bloc’s customs rules at its ports, even though the region is still part of the UK customs territory, to prevent the return of a hard border with the Irish Republic.

To avoid disrupting cross-border trade and a return of checkpoints along the politically sensitive Irish border, the EU and UK agreed to move new regulatory and customs processes to the Irish Sea.

That means checks are focused on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Many hauliers based in Northern Ireland will keep volumes light for the first few days of 2021 as they wait to see what the impact will be, industry figures have said.

While the UK formally departed the EU at the end of January 2020, a transition period meant almost all tangible changes were deferred – until now.

From Friday morning, individuals and businesses both in the UK and beyond face a [dizzying new array of red tape](#), a good deal of it still to be

confirmed, covering everything from travel, residency, work and tourism, to the supply of goods and services.

Considerable government anxiety remains focused on the situation at the Channel ports in Kent, particularly after [Covid-related delays earlier in December](#) saw thousands of lorries backed up at a disused airfield – one of 10 sites prepared for possible Brexit-caused disruption.

Officials are hopeful of a smooth start to the new era but are braced for possible delays next week, with government estimates suggesting that more than half of smaller businesses have not yet prepared for the end of the free movement of goods and services.

Boris Johnson largely ignored Brexit in his New Year message to focus on the Covid-19 pandemic instead, heralding the end of a year “in which the government was forced to tell people how to live their lives, how long to wash their hands, how many households could meet together”.

But he did say that the UK had “freedom in our hands” and the ability to do things “differently and better” now the long Brexit process was over.

On Thursday night French President Emmanuel Macron said the UK remained a “friend and ally”.

As the clock struck midnight in the UK, Scotland’s pro-independence first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, tweeted: “Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on.”

Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on 
pic.twitter.com/qJMImoz3y0

— Nicola Sturgeon (@NicolaSturgeon) [December 31, 2020](#)

Former Ukip leader Nigel Farage, who played a key role in the 2016 Brexit referendum, revelled in the milestone, writing: “25 years ago they all laughed at me. Well, they’re not laughing now.”

25 years ago they all laughed at me.

Well, they're not laughing now. pic.twitter.com/Lbu4kTwXFO

— Nigel Farage (@Nigel_Farage) [December 31, 2020](#)

In a video message, Farage said, “This is a moment to celebrate: 2021 as an independent United Kingdom. Cheers!” before leaning into the camera and saying conspiratorially: “Shame the pubs aren’t open.”

['Keep the light on': joy for some, regret for others at Brexit endgame](#)
[Read more](#)

Thursday night marked the end of many previous freedoms for British individuals and businesses, even to the extent of restricting where freight drivers can travel within the UK.

To mitigate against the buildup of lorries at Channel ports, hauliers now need what is called [a Kent access permit](#), or “kermit” for short, to even enter the county. From Friday, those without the 24-hour pass can be pulled over by government officers, fined £300, and sent back.

One issue left unresolved in the trade deal, [agreed between Johnson and the EU](#) on Christmas Eve and [voted into law](#) by parliament on Wednesday, has been partially settled.

A [last-minute agreement between the UK government and Spain](#) will allow Gibraltarians to move freely between the British overseas territory and the EU – but the agreement will only come into force later in the year.

[UK news](#)

Suspect arrested in Colchester after killing of 83-year-old man

Police no longer looking for a suspect after arrest of man in connection with death of Donald Ralph in Essex



Donald Ralph, who was found dead at his house in Aldham, Essex on Tuesday.

Donald Ralph, who was found dead at his house in Aldham, Essex on Tuesday.

PA Media

Fri 1 Jan 2021 18.05 EST

Police on the hunt for Leighton Snook in connection with the murder of a pensioner earlier this week have arrested a 28-year-old man in Colchester.

The suspect was wanted in connection with the killing of 83-year-old Donald Ralph at his home in the Essex village of Aldham on Tuesday.

A 16-year-old boy from Leicester was arrested on Wednesday evening but Essex police had been hunting for Snook.

The force said a 28-year-old man was arrested in Colchester on New Year's Day in connection with the murder and they were no longer looking for the suspect.

Two men aged 30 and 39 and a 21-year-old woman have also been arrested on suspicion of assisting an offender. All four remain in custody for questioning, along with the 16-year-old.

Investigators had also been searching for Ralph's car, a blue Volvo V50, which was stolen from his address. It has now been located in Hastings, Essex police said.

Ralph's family described him as being "very young at heart" and a man who loved being in the countryside.

His niece, Tina Ralph, said: "He was a man who loved all things countryside, particularly fishing and the Norfolk Broads, as well as being an avid bird lover. He loved horse racing and spent many a happy Saturday having a little flutter.

"Don was a unique character, who will be much missed by his wide circle of friends, and all his family."

Anyone with any information about the murder is urged to contact police or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Music

Last Christmas by Wham! reaches No 1 for first time after 36 years

Festive favourite was kept off No 1 by Band Aid's Do They Know It's Christmas? in 1984



Wham! ... Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael, who died on Christmas Day 2016.

Wham! ... Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael, who died on Christmas Day 2016.

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben_bt](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 13.00 EST

Wham!'s Last [Christmas](#) has reached No 1 in the UK singles chart for the first time, 36 years after it was first released.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest Christmas songs of all time, it was originally held off the top spot in 1984 by Band Aid's charity single Do They Know It's Christmas?

Last Christmas spent five weeks at No 2 that year, and was a Top 10 hit in 1985 too. With the advent of downloads and streaming meaning that any song could re-enter the charts, it reappeared in 2007, reaching No 14. It has reached the Top 40 nearly every year since, going Top 3 the last four years.

It sets a new record for time elapsed between a song being released and reaching No 1. This was previously held by Tony Christie with his song (Is This the Way to) Amarillo, which reached No 18 on first release in 1971, but reached No 1 over 33 years later in 2005 after it was rereleased with Peter Kay for Comic Relief.

Wham!'s Andrew Ridgeley said he was "delighted, somewhat amazed and profoundly pleased" that the song had finally reached No 1 and paid tribute to his late bandmate and the song's writer, [George Michael](#). He said the chart placing was "a testament to its timeless appeal and charm". He added: "It is a fitting tribute to George's song-writing genius ... he would have been immensely proud and utterly thrilled."

Until now, Last Christmas was the biggest-selling single to not reach No 1, a record that passes to Maroon 5 and Christina Aguilera's 2011 single Moves Like Jagger.

[Mariah Carey v Wham! – who should finally get their festive No 1?](#)

[Read more](#)

At No 2 this week is All I Want for Christmas Is You by Mariah Carey, which also reached No 1 for the first time this festive season – it was kept off the top spot when first released in 1994 by East 17's Stay Another Day.

Boosted by streams over Christmas itself, it's an all-festive top five with Jess Glynne's cover of Donny Hathaway's This Christmas reaching a new high at No 3, Justin Bieber's version of Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree at No 4, and the Pogues' Fairytale of New York.

There are 28 Christmas songs in the Top 40 altogether. Jose Feliciano's Feliz Navidad is at No 40, earning its first ever Top 40 position 50 years after it was first released – in December it also reached the Top 10 in the US for the first time. Last week's Christmas No 1, LadBaby's charity single Don't Stop

Me Eating, falls to No 78. Michael Bublé's multi-platinum 2011 album Christmas is No 1 in the album chart for the first time since that year.

There was a campaign to get Comin' Over Here, a satirical collaboration between Asian Dub Foundation and Stewart Lee, to No 1 on the day the UK left the EU. The track features the comedian retelling a standup routine that mocks bigoted opinions about immigration, over an industrial rock backing. Despite a spirited effort, it only reached No 65 in this week's chart.

Coronation Street

Former Coronation Street actor Mark Eden dies aged 92

Eden, who played Alan Bradley in TV soap and was married to co-star Sue Nicholls, had Alzheimer's disease

- [Mark Eden obituary](#)



Mark Eden as Alan Bradley in Coronation Street in 1989. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Mark Eden as Alan Bradley in Coronation Street in 1989. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

PA Media

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.42 EST

The former [Coronation Street](#) actor Mark Eden has died aged 92, his agent has said.

Eden, best known for playing Alan Bradley in the ITV soap, is survived by his wife and former co-star, Sue Nicholls, who plays Audrey Roberts.

A statement to PA Media said: “We are very sad to announce the death of actor Mark Eden. He died peacefully, in hospital, earlier today, 1 January 2021. Mark had been living with Alzheimer’s disease for some time, and was hospitalised in November.

“Mark, 92, had a long career spanning more than 50 years, including eight years in Coronation Street as character Alan Bradley. He is survived by his wife, Sue, his daughter, Polly, his stepson, Saul, and granddaughter, Emma. We ask that their privacy be respected at this very difficult time.”

Born Douglas John Malin, Eden had his first screen credit in 1958 for a role in Quatermass and the Pit. He later acted in the 1965 film Doctor Zhivago, starring Julie Christie and Omar Sharif, as well as in Doctor Who and The Avengers. He also appeared in the TV programmes London Belongs To Me and Crown Court.

His run in Coronation Street ended when his character was killed by a Blackpool tram. Eden later unveiled a plaque at the tram stop where the scene was filmed.

Later in his career he appeared in Doctors and Casualty, with his last screen credit coming in 2013 for the TV movie An Adventure in Space and Time.

John Whiston, the managing director of continuing drama and head of ITV Studios in the North, paid tribute to Eden.

“We are all hugely saddened to hear of the death of Mark Eden,” he said. “The character he played, Alan Bradley, made a real impact in the three years he was in the show, embarking on a reign of terror and clashing with just about every other character in Coronation Street.

“He was a consummate actor and played the role of psychotic villain to a tee, making the character both chilling and credible.

“The show owes Mark a great deal as he set the template for all the great villains to come, from Hillman and Phelan to our latest baddie, Geoff

Metcalfe.

“It’s a fantastic dramatic legacy. Our thoughts go out to Sue and their family and friends at this sad time.”

Sally Ann Matthews, who plays Jenny Bradley in Coronation Street, also paid tribute to Eden, who was her on-screen father.

She said in a post on Instagram: “I loved this man so much. Thank you for being the most wonderful TV Dad, teacher and friend. DLP always Xxx”

[UK news](#)

New Year's Eve revellers fined by police for breaking UK Covid rules

Large gatherings broken up across country but police say vast majority of people stuck to rules

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 07.48 EST First published on Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.13 EST



Police try to encourage people to go home on New Year's Eve in London.
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Police across the UK have made several arrests and issued hundreds of fines for New Year's Eve parties and large gatherings that breached strict Covid regulations.

Parties were broken up in Brighton, Manchester, Leicestershire, Sheffield, Essex, London and Lancashire where breaches of stay-at-home guidelines occurred. In Edinburgh, [hundreds of people gathered around the castle](#) despite warnings to keep away.

But according to the Police Federation, officers were pleasantly surprised more illegal gatherings did not take place.

Greater Manchester police issued more than 100 fixed penalty notices for Covid regulation breaches during a busy night for the force. The incidents included a rave at a building in an industrial estate in Wigan, several house parties across the [Greater Manchester](#) area, and a pub in Stockport that breached tier 4 rules by continuing to serve customers.

Chris Sykes, the assistant chief constable of Greater Manchester police, said: “I’m sure the right-thinking majority of our residents will join me in condemning this irresponsible behaviour, which puts lives at risk.”

Leicestershire police said they had handed out 75 fixed penalty notices (FPN) over new year, totalling almost £74,000. In a 24-hour period, the force received 191 reports of Covid breaches by the public.



People take part in new year's celebrations in Edinburgh on New Year's Eve. Photograph: Russell Cheyne/Reuters

Police in [Brighton](#) and Hove issued 66 FPNs overnight but thanked the “vast majority” of people for staying at home.

The FPNs ranged from outdoor gatherings of groups in public spaces, to private parties and people travelling in from outside the area. Several were issued to groups gathering on Brighton beach in breach of the restrictions, although there was no large-scale event on the seafront, police said.

[Essex](#) police said they arrested five people overnight and issued £18,000-worth of fines for Covid breaches.

Assistant Chief Constable Andy Prophet said: “I’d like to firstly thank everyone across Essex who stayed at home and did the right thing last night. Unfortunately, there were others who decided to blatantly flout the coronavirus rules and regulations and, ultimately, they decided that partying was more important than protecting other people.”

The force said officers had objects thrown at them when they broke up an illegal gathering of hundreds of people at All Saints church in East Horndon. Three men were arrested for drugs offences and an estimate £1,000 of damage was done to the grade II* listed church.

Officers later broke up a party of about 100 people at an abandoned warehouse in Brentwood, where two people were arrested.

A woman was issued with a £10,000 fine for organising a house party for 100 people in Sewardstonebury, Epping Forest. More than 25 guests were issued with FPNs. A dispersal order remains in place until midday.

The organiser of a party for 80 people at a rural property in Hyndburn, near Blackburn, was issued with a £10,000 fine. Deputy Chief Constable Terry Woods, of Lancashire police, [described the party as a “shocker”](#).

DCC Terry Woods (@DCCWoods)

Home after a very different NYE. Well done [@LancsPolice](#) & [@NWAmbulance](#) who dealt with a steady stream of incidents after midnight. Some shockers tonight e.g. Hyndburn rural property with

about 80 young people there [@LancsPolice](#) stopped it & organiser reported for £10k fine pic.twitter.com/Vdw4R1gtFJ

January 1, 2021

In Sheffield, police said they broke up a gathering of 70 people in a flat big enough for six people. [“All issued fixed penalty tickets!”](#) police tweeted.

The Metropolitan police said they had attended calls to 58 unlicensed music events and 217 people were handed FPNs. Another five people were reported for a possible £10,000 fine for organising large gatherings.

In east London, police in Newham shut down a [“large unlicensed music event”](#) at a building in the Royal Docks. Arrests were made and the organiser of the event could face a £10,000 fine.

In Bromley, south-east London, three vans full of sound equipment were seized and 11 [“Covid tickets”](#) were issued, and one arrest was made for “abstracting electricity” at another unlicensed music event. In the east London borough of Barking, [six people were fined](#) for Covid breaches at a house party. A “car meet” in neighbouring Redbridge led to four fines.

Despite the incidents in and around the capital, Ken Marsh, the chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation, said New Year’s Eve in [London](#) was “quite quiet”. He said sporadic gatherings of people “who just won’t take note of what is being said” were dealt with quickly.

Speaking to BBC Breakfast, Marsh said: “I think the public have really cottoned on that this is really serious, the position that we are in, and we did not see the numbers [gathering] we thought we would.”

He said the number of officers who were off with Covid-19 or self-isolating had been rising over the last three or four weeks.

He told the programme: “We have got probably 1,200 or 1,300 officers who are off with Covid or self-isolating and that is predicted to double in the next couple of weeks, and puts a massive strain on my colleagues who are still at work performing their roles. There are no other officers available other than what is in the pot.”

[Play Video](#)

3:54

From fireworks to empty streets: 2021 New Year's Eve celebrations across the globe – video

Liverpool

Liverpool mayor Joe Anderson withdraws from elections

Anderson says he will not seek re-election after police extend his bail over corruption investigation



Joe Anderson at a rapid testing centre in November. The government has praised his handling of the city's Covid crisis. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Joe Anderson at a rapid testing centre in November. The government has praised his handling of the city's Covid crisis. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Helen Pidd North of England editor

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

The mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, has said he will not be seeking re-election after police extended his bail as part of a corruption inquiry.

Anderson, who was praised by the government for his handling of the city's Covid crisis, said he had decided to step back from his role leading

Liverpool city council and would not stand in May's delayed mayoral election.

He insisted the police investigation "will confirm I have done nothing wrong, and my name and reputation will be exonerated". However he accepted his presence would be a distraction from "the positives of our city", which he said he had always put first during his 22-year political career.

Anderson [was arrested at the start of December on suspicion of bribery and witness intimidation](#) as part of an investigation into building and development contracts awarded in Liverpool.

Several officers from Liverpool council were also arrested as part of the wide-ranging Operation Aloft inquiry, including the director of regeneration, Nick Kavanagh, and Andy Barr, the council's assistant director of highways and planning.

Shortly before Christmas the government [announced an emergency inspection](#) of the council, to check the authority's planning, highways, regeneration and property management functions and "the strength of associated audit and governance arrangements".

[In a statement posted on Twitter](#), Anderson said Merseyside police had extended his bail until February. "The timing of the extended bail notice means that it is in the best interests of the Labour party to seek a new candidate for the mayoral election," he wrote.

"Although our justice system is built on the principle of being innocent until proven guilty, their decision does in fact change everything, and restricts and restrains me from functioning as normal. Any media attention around the investigation will clearly be focused on me and not on the positives of our city and that is not how it should be.

"I have always put the city first, that is why it is a tough, but the right, decision to continue to step back from my role in the council until the inquiries are completed."

The former social worker, who started out in the merchant navy, was first elected as a councillor in 1998. He became Liverpool's first directly elected mayor in 2012, and had been reselected as Labour's candidate to fight the local election in May, which was postponed from 2020 because of Covid.

He said he would continue to fight to prove his innocence and to protect his legacy as mayor of his home city, writing: "It has been a great privilege to represent the Labour party and be part of a collective movement that represents people like me growing up in, and trying to find a way out of, poverty. Whoever the new Labour mayoral candidate is, I will cheer them on with all my heart."

Guardian and Observer charity appeal 2020 Children

Guardian and Observer charity appeal hits £1m

More than 9,000 readers contribute to charities supporting young people through Covid crisis

- Please donate to our appeal [here](#)



Funds raised will be shared between three charities: UK Youth, YoungMinds and Child Poverty Action Group. Photograph: Antonio Guillem Fernandez/Alamy Stock Photo

Funds raised will be shared between three charities: UK Youth, YoungMinds and Child Poverty Action Group. Photograph: Antonio Guillem Fernandez/Alamy Stock Photo

Patrick Butler Social policy editor

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.15 EST

With more than a week still to go, the Guardian and Observer 2020 appeal has raised an amazing £1m for its three partner charities supporting

disadvantaged young people living in communities hit by the Covid pandemic.

More than 9,500 readers have donated to the appeal since it launched in early December, including hundreds who called journalists to donate through the annual [telethon](#) shortly before Christmas. The funds raised will be shared among the charities [UK Youth](#), [YoungMinds](#) and [Child Poverty Action Group](#).

The proceeds of the 2020 [appeal](#), which runs until midnight on 10 January, will be invested in grassroots youth work projects, initiatives to provide emotional support for young people and improve young people's mental health services, and innovative work to reduce child poverty in the UK.

Ndidi Okezie, the chief executive of UK Youth, welcomed the milestone: "It is just phenomenal that the appeal has now reached £1m. I am humbled, and grateful to everyone who is choosing to actively support young people at this time. This generosity enables UK Youth to support critical youth work, ensuring that young people not only survive but are equipped to thrive. Thank you!"

Tom Madders, the director of campaigns at YoungMinds, said: "Guardian and Observer readers' generosity comes at such a difficult time for many and we know that the pandemic is deepening the crisis in children and young people's mental health. This vital support will help us stop young people's mental health from reaching crisis point and show them that they do not need to struggle alone."

Alison Garnham, the chief executive of Child [Poverty](#) Action Group, said: "The strength of support for this appeal has really inspired us as we are coming to the end of a dreadful year when almost no aspect of children's lives has been untouched by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is heartening to know they have not been forgotten by Guardian and Observer readers. Thank you all so much for your support."

Introducing the appeal this month, the [Guardian's editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, wrote](#): "By putting young people at the heart of this year's Guardian and Observer charity appeal, we signal our support for the generation we

hope will flourish after Covid. Today's young people must not become a lost generation."

Air pollution

Avoid using wood burning stoves if possible, warn health experts

Charity calls for people to use alternative, less polluting heating and cooking options if they can



About 175,000 wood burning stoves are sold each year in the UK.
Photograph: Phil Holden/Alamy

About 175,000 wood burning stoves are sold each year in the UK.
Photograph: Phil Holden/Alamy

Matthew Taylor

Fri 1 Jan 2021 06.05 EST

Campaigners and health experts are calling on people who have alternative heating not to use their wood burning stoves this winter amid growing concern about their impact on public health.

The Guardian recently reported [that wood burners triple](#) the level of harmful particulates inside the home as well as creating dangerous levels of pollution in the surrounding neighbourhood.

[Wood burners triple harmful indoor air pollution, study finds](#)

[Read more](#)

Now experts at the [Asthma](#) UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership are asking people with wood burners only to use them if they have no alternative source of heat.

“We know that burning wood and coal releases fine particulate matter (PM2.5) – the most worrying form of air pollution for human health,” said Sarah MacFadyen, head of policy at the charity. “It’s therefore important to consider less polluting fuel options to heat your home or cook with, especially if coal or wood is not your primary fuel source.”

Wood burners have become increasingly popular in recent years and, together with coal fires, are estimated to cause [almost 40% of outdoor tiny particle pollution](#) as well as creating toxic air inside the home. Almost 16% of people in the south-east of England [use wood fuel](#), and 18% in Northern Ireland, according to 2016 government data, and about 175,000 wood burners are sold annually.

But a growing body of research reveals air pollution may be damaging [every organ in the body](#), with effects including heart and lung disease, diabetes, dementia, [reduced intelligence](#) and [increased depression](#). [Children](#) and the [unborn](#) may suffer the most.

More than a third of local authorities in the UK have areas where the level of PM2.5 exceeds World [Health](#) Organization limits, and MacFadyen urged the government to use the upcoming environment bill to commit to bring the entire country in line with WHO limits by 2030.

She said: “We also need to see politicians doing more to raise awareness on the health dangers of wood and coal burning as part of a national health campaign on toxic air so people can make the best choices for their own health as well as the health of others around them.”

Dr Nick Hopkinson, medical director at the Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership, said both indoor and outdoor pollution caused by

wood burning stoves caused serious health issues, from breathing problems to an increased risk of heart attacks, strokes and lung cancer.

“To protect yourself and others around you, especially children who are particularly vulnerable as their lungs are smaller and still developing, avoid buying a wood-burning stove or using an open fire if you have another source of fuel to cook and heat your home with.”

London

Removed London bike lane blocked by parked cars most of the time – study

Analysis shows average car journey times have also increased after Kensington and Chelsea council took out lane



The Conservative-run authority said removing the cycle lane, which was used by up to 4,000 cyclists a day, would add extra space for motor traffic, and thus ease congestion and quicken journey times. Photograph: Ian West/PA

The Conservative-run authority said removing the cycle lane, which was used by up to 4,000 cyclists a day, would add extra space for motor traffic, and thus ease congestion and quicken journey times. Photograph: Ian West/PA

Peter Walker

@peterwalker99

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

A much-used cycle lane in London that was removed because the local council said it was impeding the flow of motor vehicles has since been

blocked by parked cars up to 80% of the time, a study by a campaign group has found.

Computer analysis of traffic cameras on Kensington High Street have also shown that average car journey times appear to have increased since officials took out the bike lane just seven weeks after it was installed.

Kensington and Chelsea council ripped out the £320,000 lane on the busy east-west thoroughfare in December, [citing complaints from 322 people](#), about 0.2% of the borough's population.

The Conservative-run authority said removing the cycle lane, which was used by up to 4,000 cyclists a day, would add extra space for motor traffic, and thus ease congestion and quicken journey times.

But the study, which involved analysing video footage from [Transport](#) for London traffic cameras using Google artificial intelligence tools, found that the space had instead been largely taken up by parked cars.

The analysis by Bike is Best, which groups together a series of organisations and companies from the cycling industry, found that in the week 21-28 December, what was formerly the eastbound cycle route was blocked by parked cars for 63.6% of the time.

Even greater use of the space for illegal parking was found at other times. The most recent data, from 29 December, found that between 7am and 7pm what was the eastbound bike lane was blocked by parked vehicles for 81.6% of the period, with some parked on double yellow lines for more than 10 hours.

Analysis of traffic camera footage from when London was still in the looser tier 2 coronavirus restrictions, during daytime hours from 14 to 18 December, showed the former lane blocked for 52.9% of the time.

The study assessed average car journey times on a sample 1.1-mile stretch of the street using Google Maps' real time traffic data, finding that these had increased after the cycle lane was removed.

It calculated that average trip times eastbound increased from 5min 39sec to 8min 14sec, with those westbound rising from 5min 48sec to 6min 27sec.

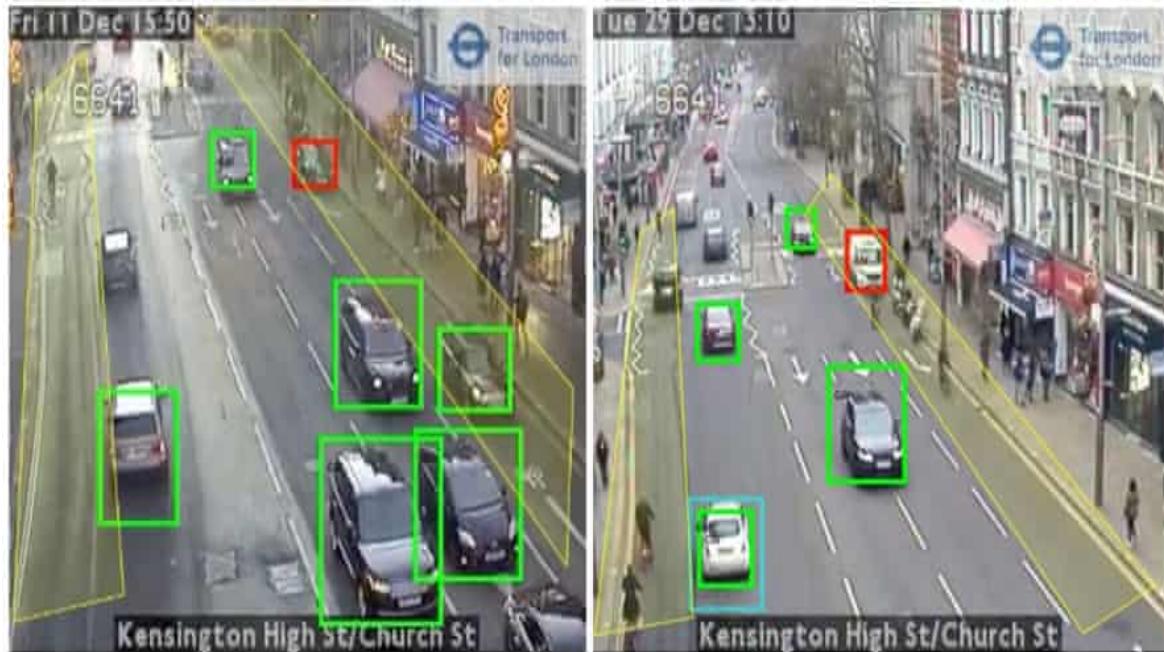
The study will bolster complaints from critics that Kensington and Chelsea council is institutionally hostile towards safer cycling schemes, with London's cycling and walking commissioner, Will Norman, having previously accused it of "putting the convenience of car drivers over the lives of local residents".

In 2019 the council [unilaterally vetoed](#) a separate flagship east-west cycle scheme in the middle of a public consultation, citing complaints from 450 residents, or 0.3% of the borough's population.

Bike is Best submitted a freedom of information request to ask how the council had formally assessed the success or otherwise of the Kensington High Street scheme. The council responded: "No criteria or metrics were developed by which the scheme was to be assessed."

The campaign group is pushing for councils to use data analysis to properly assess the efficacy of cycling infrastructure.

Adam Tranter, the founder of Bike is Best, who has the role of bicycle mayor for Coventry, said: "Active travel is probably one of the only modes that can be removed based on local opinion without data or research; you wouldn't build a new dual carriageway and close it a month later because it didn't look like it was at full capacity."



Images from video footage captured by Transport for London traffic cameras
Photograph: Transport for London

The Kensington High Street cycle lane was now “occupied by a handful of drivers of inconsiderately and illegally parked cars”, he said, adding: “The same councillors and residents who were up in arms about a cycle lane don’t seem to be too bothered about that. It was never about capacity, it was about something new that upset the status quo.”

A council spokesman said it was examining alternative schemes, including so-called school streets and 20mph zones.

He said: “Since the decision we have received a letter signed by 25 residents’ associations, which represent 3,400 households, welcoming the decision to remove the lanes. We have had over 1,300 emails from residents and 85% were against the cycle lane.”

This updated total of 1,300 residents represents 0.8% of the borough’s population.

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[US politics](#)

Republican plan to challenge election signals ‘cult of Trump’ will live on in Biden era

Around 140 Republicans expected vote against counting of electoral college votes, in symbolic move to disrupt Congress and bolster Trump



‘It’s virtue-signaling to the base that after Trump leaves, these people still consider themselves to be Trump acolytes and part of the cult of Trump.’

Photograph: Eric Baradat/AFP/Getty Images

‘It’s virtue-signaling to the base that after Trump leaves, these people still consider themselves to be Trump acolytes and part of the cult of Trump.’

Photograph: Eric Baradat/AFP/Getty Images

[Edward Helmore](#) in New York

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.30 EST

Maverick super-loyalists to [Donald Trump](#) are set to make an audacious spectacle in Washington next week by voting against the formal counting of electoral college votes certifying Joe Biden’s victory.

While the tactic by outliers won’t be enough to stop Biden becoming the 46th president, it will serve to disrupt Congress, bolster Trump and establish an acidic tone to political co-operation with the incoming Democratic administration.

Two Republican members of the House of Representatives are reported to have [told CNN](#), without releasing their names, that they expect around 140 GOP colleagues to vote against a procedural certification vote in a joint session of Congress on 6 January. The strategy speaks to the continuing

stranglehold the outgoing president maintains over a significant faction of the party, political observers said on Friday.

Peter Wehner, vice-president at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a conservative thinktank, and speech writer for three Republican presidents, called the prospect of many Republican lawmakers voting against certification “a disturbing sign”.

“It’s an indication that this is a secession-from-reality caucus,” Wehner told the Guardian.

“It’s illiberal, anti-democratic, pernicious and widespread in the Republican party. It’s not just a closing act for the Trump-era but an opening act for the post-Trump era. It’s virtue-signaling to the base that after Trump leaves, these people still consider themselves to be Trump acolytes and part of the cult of Trump.”

Democratic consultants concurred.

“This is still the Trump party,” said strategist Hank Sheinkopf. “They may see this as an act of survival, and may not even believe in the reality of what they’re doing. What they do believe in is getting re-elected in [midterm elections in] 2022. If we had a president who was prepared to leave quietly, this would not be a discussion.”

[Trump returns to Washington early as allies plot challenge to Biden victory](#)
[Read more](#)

The looming spectacle comes despite the failure of Trump’s legal team to win any of at least 40 lawsuits involving allegations of voter fraud in November, an election officials called [the most secure](#) in American history.

On Wednesday, Trump ally and Missouri Republican senator Josh Hawley announced he would object to certifying the electoral votes during the joint session on 6 January.

[In an essay](#) published Wednesday in the conservative commentary magazine The Blaze, editor Mark Levin backed up Hawley, claiming that states failed to follow their own election laws.

But in a conference call on Thursday, Senate majority leader and Kentucky Republican Mitch McConnell [reportedly](#) said that his 6 January vote certifying Biden's victory will be "the most consequential I have ever cast".

McConnell has told senators not to join any attempt to delegitimize the electoral votes, believing that the effort could cause [Republicans](#) to lose two Senate seats being contested in the runoffs in Georgia on 5 January.

Wehner believes McConnell opposes Hawley's effort because it forces Republicans to go on record and potentially threatens his control of the Senate. "If they go on the record against what Hawley is doing it's going to inflame the Republican base; if they agree it with it, it's so transparently ludicrous that it's going to hurt some Republicans in more moderate states," Wehner said.

In a [blistering open letter](#) on Wednesday, Nebraska Republican Senator Ben Sasse also opposed Hawley, warning that "all the clever arguments and rhetorical gymnastics in the world won't change the fact that this January 6th effort is designed to disenfranchise millions of Americans simply because they voted for someone in a different party".

"We have a bunch of ambitious politicians who think there's a quick way to tap into the president's populist base without doing any real, long-term damage," Sasse wrote. "But they're wrong ... adults don't point a loaded gun at the heart of legitimate self-government."

According to Jim Sleeper, retiring professor of political science at Yale University, the House Republicans' rebel plan aspires to assist the kind of McConnell-led obstructionism he practiced against the Obama administration.

"Beyond January 20, we're looking at a Republican party that is gearing up to make sure – assuming Democrats don't win control of the Senate – that McConnell will be able to repeat his act of stymying almost everything that Democrats could hope to do."

Any effort to block certification goes along in tandem to suppress voting, Sleeper believes, that springs from [organizations](#) such as the American

Legislative Exchange Council ([Alec](#)).

He said it was part of a larger operation to restrict mechanisms that an open, democratic process make possible.

“It’s part of a creeping coup d’etat that we’ve seen Trump going along with in his own loopy-minded way,” he said.



[US politics](#)

What to expect when Congress meets to certify Biden's victory

Joint session will count votes cast by the electoral college in the last step of the process for certification of the new president



Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate will meet in the Capitol. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate will meet in the Capitol. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

[Edward Helmore](#) in New York

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.30 EST

US Congress meets on 6 January to certify Joe Biden's [election victory](#) – here's what to expect.

A joint session of the US Congress meets at 1pm on Wednesday formally to count the [votes cast by the electoral college](#) – 306 for Biden, 232 for Donald Trump – in the last step of the process for certification of the new president.

Under the Electoral Count Act of 1887, members of the House of Representatives and the Senate meet in the Capitol. Mike Pence will preside in his role as president of the Senate.

The vice-president opens certificates of the electoral votes delivered from each state – whose electors [met to cast their ballots](#) on 14 December – and hand them to party “tellers” to read aloud. As they read each state’s certification, Pence will ask if there are official objections.

Any such objections are then read out, resulting in a suspension of the session and members of the two legislative houses considering them separately.

Discussion on each objection is limited to two hours. Both houses then vote on the objection, with a simple majority required to toss out that state's votes. After all votes are counted, the vice-president declares the winner of the election.

Uganda

Bobi Wine likens Uganda election to 'a war and a battlefield'

Exclusive: Reggae singer turned opposition leader tells of how he fears for his life



Bobi Wine, left, escorts an injured supporter to a medical centre in December. Photograph: Getty Images

Bobi Wine, left, escorts an injured supporter to a medical centre in December. Photograph: Getty Images

[Jason Burke](#), and [Samuel Okiror](#) in Lyantonde

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.17 EST

Bobi Wine, the former reggae singer turned Ugandan opposition leader, has spoken about his country's bitter and violent presidential election campaign as it moves into its final two weeks.

"The campaign is crazy. It's like a war and a battlefield," Wine said in an interview conducted before [he was detained for a third time in two months](#) on Wednesday.

“Every day, we are met with heavily armed military officers. It’s always teargas and grenades, live bullets and beatings,” the 38-year-old said in the town of Lyantonde, 112 miles (180km) from the capital, Kampala.

“I am afraid and concerned every day. I fear for my life and the lives of my comrades in the struggle. The regime is after our lives. It’s after hurting and incapacitating us. Every day we live is as if it’s the last one.”

The January polls pit Wine against [Yoweri Museveni](#), who came to power in 1986.



Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni. Photograph: Tiksa Negeri/Reuters

The campaign has already been marked by the worst political violence in Uganda for decades, with [more than 50 people shot dead by security forces](#) over two days of protests that followed Wine’s arrest in November.

Ten days later, police fired shots into Wine’s car, prompting him to briefly suspend his campaign. Last week, Wine said one of his bodyguards was killed when military police ran him over while Wine’s convoy was taking a wounded journalist to seek medical help. Military police said the bodyguard had fallen from a speeding car.

On Wednesday, Wine was detained again, along with members of his team, while campaigning in the country's central region. Wine was flown back to Kampala and was back on the campaign trail again on Thursday, although dozens of his team remained behind bars.

Opposition supporters are routinely dispersed by security forces using teargas and rubber bullets.

"We wake up in the morning and we don't know what to expect for the day. It's only by the mercy of God that we manage to make it through the day. I have to wear a bulletproof vest all the time to protect my life. The brutality and violence continue to escalate," Wine told the Guardian.



Bobi Wine (centre) during his arrest on Wednesday. Photograph: Reuters

The intensifying violence in the east African state has prompted international concern. "We are gravely concerned by the election-related violence, the excessive use of force by security personnel, as well as the increasing crackdown on peaceful protesters, political and civil society leaders and human rights defenders," a panel of UN experts said this week.

Known by supporters as "the ghetto president", Wine broke into formal politics in 2017 when he won a seat in Uganda's national assembly, and has since been badly assaulted and detained many times. The politician, whose

real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, grew up in poverty in Kampala before his successful musical career.

Wine has repeatedly accused Museveni of being a dictator, and has enthusiastic support, especially among Uganda's young and urban population who want change.

"This is a generational cause. I am a Ugandan that represents the pain, misery, aspirations and dreams of millions of Ugandans. What I am saying and representing is what millions of young people in the ghettos, unemployed and those in universities want," Wine said.



Bobi Wine campaigning in December. Photograph: Sumy Sadurni/AFP/Getty Images

Wine faces an experienced opponent who can count on loyalty from individuals and institutions in Uganda that have benefited from his rule over decades. Museveni, 76, has the support of security forces and much of the bureaucracy. Decades of economic growth and subsidies have won him a loyal mass following in rural areas.

The authorities say force is necessary to ensure compliance with measures against Covid-19. "In Uganda, Covid-19 regulations have been weaponised

... as [a] pretext for political repression," [said Deprose Muchena](#) of Amnesty international.

Amnesty said supporters of Museveni and the ruling party had repeatedly gathered in large crowds unhindered by police.

At rallies and in national media, [Museveni has accused Wine](#) and other opposition leaders of being "traitors" who planned "insurrection ... with their foreign backers". At one rally, Museveni said the protesters were "[being used by outsiders](#) ... homosexuals and others who don't like the stability and independence of Uganda."

Richard Emanio, a party worker for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), said foreign powers wanted to use the opposition to destabilise Uganda.

"Museveni should continue to rule Uganda because of his proven leadership ability. He has helped stabilise our country politically, economically and socially. He has helped other African countries see peace," Emanio said.

There are also international concerns over the harassment of journalists and government critics in Uganda.

The recent arrest and week-long detention of Nicholas Opiyo, a prominent Ugandan human rights lawyer, sent "a chilling message about their disregard for basic rights", said Otsieno Namwaya, the senior researcher for Africa at the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Republicans

Senate overrides Donald Trump's veto of defense spending bill

Republicans join Democrats to push through bill against Trump's strong objections



Mitch McConnell at the US Capitol in Washington DC on 30 December 2020. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Mitch McConnell at the US Capitol in Washington DC on 30 December 2020. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Edward Helmore in New York and agency

Fri 1 Jan 2021 16.11 EST

Donald Trump's fellow Republicans in the US Senate on Friday took the atypical rebellious step of overriding his veto for the first time in his presidency.

The Senate pushed through a bill on defense spending against Trump's strong objections – just 20 days before he leaves office.

Meeting in a rare New Year's Day session, the Senate secured the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto with bipartisan support two days before a new Congress will be sworn in on Sunday.

Eight previous vetoes of legislation have been upheld. Under the US constitution, the president has the power to veto a bill passed by Congress, but lawmakers can uphold the bill if two-thirds of both the House of Representatives and the Senate vote to override it.

The Republican-led Senate, following the Democratic-controlled House on Monday, passed the measure without Trump's support, voting 81-13 on Friday afternoon.

Overriding Trump's veto marks a striking departure for GOP senators, who have largely stood by the president during his turbulent White House term.

But Trump's objections to the bill angered lawmakers, who had labored for months to put together a bipartisan bill and pride themselves on passing the military bill each year for 60 years, and voted to ignore his opposition to it.

The \$740bn National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) determines everything from military programs and construction projects to how to address geopolitical threats.

Trump refused to sign it into law because of its failure to repeal Section 230, a federal law that provides a legal liability shield for internet companies, and because it includes a provision stripping the names of Confederate generals from military bases.

"We've passed this legislation 59 years in a row. And one way or another, we're going to complete the 60th annual NDAA and pass it into law before this Congress concludes on Sunday," the Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, said.

As votes were being counted indicating Trump had lost the battle, the president [tweeted](#), touting a protest planned in Washington on Wednesday when the new Congress officially tallies the [electoral college votes](#) certifying Democrat Joe Biden's [presidential victory](#) in November's election.

Fashion

Alexander Wang denies 'grotesquely false' sexual assault claims

More claims emerge on social media after British model says fashion designer groped him at party



Alexander Wang. The accusations against him date back to 2017.
Photograph: Gregory Pace/Rex

Alexander Wang. The accusations against him date back to 2017.
Photograph: Gregory Pace/Rex

Mattha Busby

Fri 1 Jan 2021 08.43 EST

The American fashion designer Alexander Wang has denied “grotesquely false” allegations of sexual assault as grassroots advocacy sites claim that there are a high number of victims.

A British model, Owen Mooney, this week publicly claimed that Wang had groped his crotch at the nightclub Slake in [New York](#) during the promoter

Ladyfag's Holy Mountain party on 21 January 2017, following which a number of similar claims, mostly anonymous, emerged.

"I was by myself at one point and this guy next to me obviously took advantage of the fact that no one could fucking move," Mooney, 26, alleged. "And he just started touching me up. Fully up my leg, in my crotch. It made me freeze completely because I was in so much shock."

"Then I look to my left to see who it was and it was this really famous fashion designer and I just couldn't believe that he was doing that to me. It just made me go into even more shock. I just had to slowly move myself away."

"Now, any time I see his name mentioned or see him with celebrity best friends, it just reminds me of what he did, and it's a really fucked-up memory to have."

Wang's lawyer said "it never happened" and that he "believes Mooney is mistaken about who allegedly groped him".

Sharing Mooney's post, the websites Diet Prada and Shit Model Management also highlighted previous social media posts that had not come to wider attention.

Wang told the Guardian: "Over the last few days, I have been on the receiving end of baseless and grotesquely false accusations. These claims have been wrongfully amplified by social media accounts infamous for posting defamatory material from undisclosed and/or anonymous sources with zero evidence or any factchecking whatsoever."

Gia Garrison, a trans model and actor, described alleged details of another incident at a Holy Mountain party at Slake in February 2017: "He tried to pull my panties down and expose my genitals in the VIP area."

She said: "It was just another night and then I remember being introduced to Alexander Wang and then chatting to him. I just remember dancing around and he was chilling with his posse and then reached for my bikini bottoms I was wearing and tried to tug them downwards."

“I said: ‘What are you doing, what the fuck,’ and stepped away. I didn’t make much of it in the moment because I was just in club mode and tried to let things brush off my shoulder and not ruin my night ... I’ve done many shoots where they’ve wanted to put me in his clothing since and I’ve just said no.” Wang’s lawyer said he “has never grabbed any woman” in the manner alleged.

A young man named Nick, who did not wish for his surname to be published, has also come forward to media with an account of a night out in New York with Wang in August 2017 after meeting him earlier in the year.

“I blacked out at one club and found him giving me a hand job,” he said. “The second time I blacked out in our Uber and woke up to getting oral from him in the car. I honestly feel so embarrassed and manipulated.”

Wang’s lawyer said he “absolutely denies” the claims.

Another man, Nick Ward, who works for a construction company in New York and was happy for his full name to be published, also claims Wang suddenly grabbed his penis, this time at the Brooklyn Mirage nightclub in the early hours of 10 September 2017.

“It was shocking,” he said. “It definitely sobered me up a bit. I was like: ‘wait, holy shit’. He grabbed me, squeezed me and kept moving forward through the club with his entourage without missing a beat.” Wang’s lawyer said he was at a fashion show until 3am on that night and could prove he was not at the nightclub on the date alleged.

Wang, 37, said: “Seeing these lies about me being perpetuated as truths has been infuriating. I have never engaged in the atrocious behaviour described and would never conduct myself in the manner that’s been alleged. I intend to get to the bottom of this and hold accountable whoever is responsible for originating these claims and viciously spreading them online.”

The Model Alliance said it stood in solidarity with Wang’s accusers and criticised a wider absence of support for victims. “The fashion industry’s lack of transparency and accountability leaves all models vulnerable to abuse, regardless of their sex or gender identity,” the statement read.

As the allegations spread on social media this week, Wang's Instagram account was modified so that it could no longer receive comments. On Sunday, he posted a photo straddling a tree trunk on a beach.

The designer was previously criticised for casting the singer R Kelly, since exposed as a serial sex predator and facing multiple sex offence charges, in a campaign in 2017 after longstanding allegations of serious abuse.

Wang, who was born in San Francisco and moved to New York at the age of 18, became notorious for his hard-partying lifestyle and hosting events attended by A-listers as his eponymous brand grew after its founding in 2005. He was creative director at the Paris fashion house Balenciaga from 2012 to 2015.

Inequality

Paramedic in new year honours list calls for global health equality

Nich Woolf spent eight months caring for people in Vanuatu, one of the world's most remote communities

Mattha Busby

Fri 1 Jan 2021 13.51 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 14.09 EST



Nich Woolf has volunteered to work as a paramedic in Vanuatu, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Haiti. Photograph: Facebook

A paramedic who volunteered for eight months caring for people in one of the world's most remote communities has called for action to erode stark global health inequalities after being awarded a [British Empire Medal](#) (BEM) for services to emergency medicine and disaster response.

Nich Woolf, who turned 68 on New Year's Day and is originally from London, had planned to be in [Vanuatu](#) – more than 2,000 miles (3,200km)

off Australia's east coast – working with ambulance crews from February to April but was only able to return home in mid-October due to pandemic travel restrictions.

"Because all the Australians went home as their government said they had to, I was left on Santo island as the only qualified paramedic, along with three local students," Woolf said. "I was essentially on call from end of March through to October when I left."

The paramedic, who along with working for ambulance crews in the west of England and Wales has volunteered in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Haiti, added of the award: "It was a complete surprise and a shock. I'm very proud of it. I've always thought that the best thing I could do with my life was to help other people.

"Give a man a fish and feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life. So I've shared knowledge with people and in return they often share their knowledge with me, even when healthcare resources are not good.



Nich Woolf (right) says he shares his knowledge with others working in the countries in which he volunteers and gains their knowledge in return.
Photograph: Facebook

“My volunteer work has kept me going in my life. That’s what I’m about, I believe in using any skills that I have to benefit other people.”

With Vanuatu’s largest island not having a working X-ray machine and limited other facilities, some patients Woolf reached had to be sent by air almost 200 miles to the country’s capital and main hub, Port Vila, while others with conditions and diseases more easily treatable in the west died, unable to receive the necessary care due to the poor infrastructure.

“These were things that are serious but would easily be dealt with in the UK,” said Woolf. “It was a difficult time. I was having to really stretch myself as a paramedic to deal with things. It’s lovely to be recognised in the new year honours but it brings up a lot of feelings about how much more work there is to do to sort out the health inequalities that exist in the world.

“It’s worth putting a lot of effort into helping people get the healthcare they deserve. People say they’ll spend money on hospitals but seem to spend it on weapons instead.”

In early April, the Pacific archipelago of approximately 80 islands was hit by a cyclone that brought winds of almost 200mph and destroyed whole villages.

“The place was wrecked and the southern half of the island was devastated,” he said. “A lot of villages in the rainforest had lost every single building, including dozens of kindergartens, which for some children could be their only ever schooling.”

To help raise money to build a new preschool on Espiritu Santo, the largest island, Woolf teamed up with other expats to present a funding proposal for about £7,000 to the UK, Australia and New Zealand high commissions.

“Its not fully sorted but we have had some good offers,” said Woolf, who is also a trustee of Somerset charity Festival Medical Services.

[Italy](#)

Italy begins year of Dante anniversary events with virtual Uffizi exhibition

Gallery puts seldom-seen Divine Comedy sketches on display online to mark 700 years since poet's death



Ulisse and Diomede, the fraudulent advisers, in a drawing of The Divine Comedy by Federico Zuccari. Photograph: Roberto Palermo/AP

Ulisse and Diomede, the fraudulent advisers, in a drawing of The Divine Comedy by Federico Zuccari. Photograph: Roberto Palermo/AP

[Angela Giuffrida in Rome](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 09.20 EST

Eighty-eight rarely seen drawings of Dante's The Divine Comedy have been put on virtual display as [Italy](#) begins a year-long calendar of events to mark the 700th anniversary of the poet's death.

The drawings, by the 16th-century Renaissance artist Federico Zuccari, are being exhibited online, for free, by the [Uffizi Gallery](#) in Florence.

“Until now these beautiful drawings have only been seen by a few scholars and displayed to the public only twice, and only in part,” said Eike Schmidt, the Uffizi’s director. “Now they are published in full, alongside a didactic-scientific comment, where from [Friday] they will be freely available.”



Lucifer in a drawing by Zuccari. Photograph: Roberto Palermo/AP

Dante Alighieri, known as the father of the Italian language, was born in Florence in 1265 and died and was buried in Ravenna in 1321. His epic poem, The Divine Comedy, is split into three parts and traces a pilgrim's journey through hell, purgatory and heaven.

The sketches were completed by Zuccari during a stay in Spain between 1586 and 1588. Of the 88 illustrations, 28 are depictions of hell, 49 of purgatory and 11 of heaven. After Zuccari's death in 1609, the drawings were held by the noble Orsini family, for whom the artist had worked, and later by the Medici family before becoming part of the Uffizi collection in 1738.

Owing to their fragility, only a selection of the pencil-and-ink drawings have been exhibited publicly in the past. The first time was in Florence in 1865 to mark the 600th anniversary of Dante's birth as well as the Italian unification, and the second time was for an exhibition in Abruzzo in 1993.



The forest of suicides from The Divine Comedy in a sketch by Zuccari.
Photograph: Roberto Palermo/AP

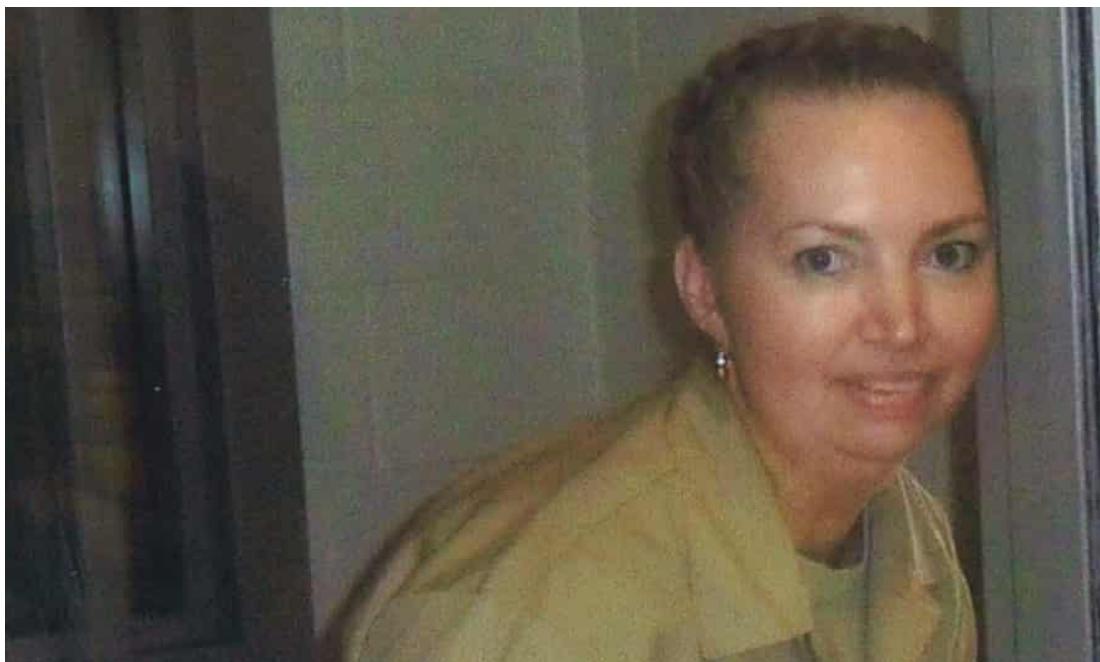
“The Uffizi Gallery is really proud to open the anniversary of the great poet’s death by making this extraordinary collection of graphic art available to all,” said Schmidt. He added that the works were “valuable material” not only for researchers but also for those passionate about Dante and interested in his pursuit of “knowledge and virtue”.

Events commemorating the anniversary of Dante’s death are expected to take place throughout the year in Florence, Ravenna and 70 other towns and villages connected to the poet.

Capital punishment

Execution of only woman on US federal death row can go ahead, court rules

Lisa Montgomery, who strangled a pregnant woman and cut her baby out of her belly, is set to be executed by lethal injection on 12 January



Lisa Montgomery was convicted of murdering Bobbie Jo Stinnett in 2004, and is the only woman on federal death row in the US. Photograph: AP
Lisa Montgomery was convicted of murdering Bobbie Jo Stinnett in 2004, and is the only woman on federal death row in the US. Photograph: AP

Associated Press

Sat 2 Jan 2021 01.15 EST

A US appeals court has cleared the way for the only woman on federal death row to be executed before president-elect Joe Biden takes office.

The ruling, handed down on Friday by a three-judge panel on the US court of appeals for the District of Columbia circuit, concluded that a lower court

judge erred when he vacated Lisa Montgomery's execution date [in an order last week](#).

US district court judge Randolph Moss had ruled the justice department unlawfully rescheduled Montgomery's execution and he vacated an order from the director of the bureau of prisons scheduling her death for 12 January.

['There's nothing to prepare you': what it's like to witness an execution](#)
[Read more](#)

Montgomery had been scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection at the federal correctional complex in Terre Haute, Indiana, in December, but [Moss delayed the execution](#) after her attorneys contracted coronavirus visiting their client and asked him to extend the time to file a clemency petition.

Moss concluded that under his order the bureau of prisons could not even reschedule Montgomery's execution until at least 1 January. But the appeals panel disagreed.

Meaghan VerGow, an attorney for Montgomery, said her legal team would ask for the full appeals court to review the case and said Montgomery should not be executed on 12 January.

Montgomery was convicted of killing 23-year-old Bobbie Jo Stinnett in the north-west Missouri town of Skidmore in December 2004.

She used a rope to strangle Stinnett, who was eight months pregnant, and then cut the baby girl from the womb with a kitchen knife, authorities said. Montgomery took the child with her and attempted to pass the girl off as her own, prosecutors said.

Montgomery's legal team have argued that she has serious mental illnesses. One of her lawyers, Sandra Babcock, said in an earlier statement: "Given the severity of Mrs Montgomery's mental illness, the sexual and physical torture she endured throughout her life, and the connection between her trauma and the facts of her crime, we appeal to President Trump to grant her mercy and commute her sentence to life imprisonment."

Biden opposes the death penalty and his spokesman, TJ Ducklo, has said he would work to end its use. But Biden has not said whether he will halt federal executions after he takes office 20 January.

Afghanistan

Journalist dies in Afghanistan as targeted killings continue

Violence increases amid stalled Taliban peace talks, with Isis claiming it was behind earlier journalist killing



Security forces at site of a previous bomb attack in Feroz Koh, the capital of Ghor province, on 15 December. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Security forces at site of a previous bomb attack in Feroz Koh, the capital of Ghor province, on 15 December. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Associated Press in Kabul

Fri 1 Jan 2021 12.06 EST

An Afghan journalist and human rights activist has been shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in western [Afghanistan](#), the fifth journalist to be killed in the war-ravaged country in the past two months, a provincial spokesman said.

Bismillah Adil Aimaq was on the road near Feroz Koh, the provincial capital of Ghor, returning home to the city after visiting his family in a

village nearby, when gunmen opened fire at the vehicle.

According to the provincial governor's spokesman, Arif Abir, others in the car, including Aimaq's brother, were unharmed. Aimaq worked as the head of the local Radio Sada-e-Ghor station and was also a human rights activist in the province.

['I am not afraid to fight': the female Afghan colonel who survived the Taliban's assassins](#)

[Read more](#)

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the shooting. A [Taliban](#) spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, insisted the insurgents were in no way connected with the shooting.

Last week, Rahmatullah Nekzad, who headed the journalists' union in Ghazni province, was killed in an attack by armed men outside his home. Nekzad was well known in the area and had contributed to the Associated Press since 2007. He had previously worked for the Al Jazeera satellite TV channel.

Afghanistan's intelligence department claimed two perpetrators in that attack were subsequently arrested and aired video recordings of the two, with their purported confessions to the killing and to being in the Taliban. However, the Taliban denied involvement in the killing, calling it a cowardly act. Large swathes of Ghazni province are under Taliban control.

The Islamic State group, blamed for a series of attacks on a range of targets in Afghanistan in recent months, claimed it had killed another Afghan journalist earlier in December. Two assailants [opened fire and killed](#) the TV anchorwoman Malala Maiwand as she left her house in Nangarhar province. Her driver was also killed.

[Taliban denies targeting media after 50th journalist dies in Afghanistan](#)

[Read more](#)

In November, two journalists were killed in separate bombings.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has condemned the relentless attacks. The international press freedom group Reporters Without Borders has called Afghanistan one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists.

This week, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission said targeted killings of Afghan journalists had negatively affected reporting in the country and led to self-censorship in the media. The statement said a number of female journalists had left their jobs in the provinces due to threats.

The statement further said that most journalists were not able to go out openly in some provinces and the government did not act when they reported the threats they were facing.

Violence has increased across Afghanistan, even as the Taliban and the Kabul government continue peace negotiations that began in September. The talks, after some recent procedural progress, have been suspended until early January and there is speculation the resumption could be further delayed.

Hopes for most endangered turtle after discovery of female in Vietnam lake

Find is chance for species' survival say scientists as DNA results confirm turtle found in Hanoi district is a Swinhoe's softshell



Close-up of the head and pattern of the *Rafetus swinhoei* turtle. Photograph: WCS Vietnam

Close-up of the head and pattern of the *Rafetus swinhoei* turtle. Photograph: WCS Vietnam

Damian Carrington Environment editor
@dpcarrington

Fri 1 Jan 2021 07.14 EST

The last known male giant Swinhoe's softshell turtle is no longer alone on the planet after the discovery of a female of his species in [Vietnam](#).

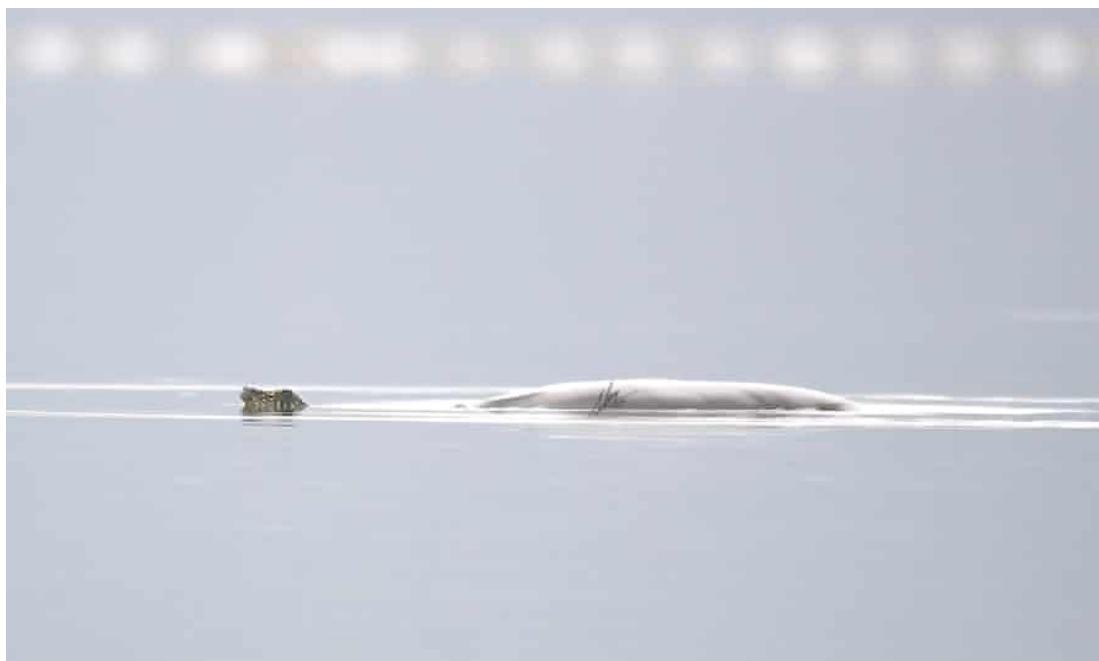
The female 86kg (13 stone) turtle was found in Dong Mo lake, in Hanoi's Son Tay district, and captured for genetic testing in October.

DNA tests have now confirmed the animal is a [Swinhoe's softshell turtle](#), (*Rafetus swinhoei*), the most endangered turtle in the world.

Another turtle estimated to weigh 130kg was sighted in the lake, and conservationists hope that this could be another male.

The only known male Swinhoe's softshell turtle is at Suzhou zoo in China. Scientists aim to ensure that the turtles are given the chance to breed and save the species from the brink of extinction.

The animal, known also as the Hoan Kiem turtle or Yangtze giant softshell turtle, has been driven to the brink by hunting for its meat and eggs, as well as by destruction of its habitat.



The second *Rafetus swinhoei* turtle was discovered on Dong Mo Lake.
Photograph: WCS Vietnam

“This is the best news of the year, and quite possibly the last decade, for global turtle conservation,” said Andrew Walde, at the Turtle Survival Alliance, which advised the Vietnamese government on the [conservation project](#).

Hoang Bich Thuy, country director for the Wildlife [Conservation](#) Society, said: “In a year full of bad news and sadness across the globe, the discovery

of this female can offer all some hope that this species will be given another chance to survive.”

Swinhoe’s softshell turtle was given legal protection in Vietnam in 2013. “[Before] that time, if one was caught, its meat was shared with the whole family, relatives and the neighbourhood,” said Hoang, who added that many of the turtles were also hunted to sell to China. “Its eggs were also collected and soaked in salt, as local people believed turtle salted egg helped cure diarrhoea.”

The conservationists spent weeks looking for the female turtle in the 1,400-hectare Dong Mo lake. She is one metre long and was captured for a day to allow examination and blood samples to be taken. The team said she was healthy, strong – and upon release keen to be in the lake again.

In spring 2021 the team hopes to capture the second, larger, turtle seen in the same lake, as this is when the water level is lowest. There may also be a turtle in nearby Xuan Khanh lake, as scientists have detected DNA in water samples.

The last known female before the Vietnam discovery died in April 2019. She had been paired with the male in Suzhou in 2008 but had not produced offspring naturally. Artificial insemination was attempted but the female did not recover from an anaesthetic, despite similar anaesthesia procedures previously having been performed safely.

Timothy McCormack, director of the [Asian Turtle Program](#) for Indo-Myanmar Conservation, said: “Once we know the sex of the animals in Vietnam, we can make a clear plan on the next steps.”

A report in 2018 concluded that [turtles were among the most threatened of all the major vertebrate groups](#), with more than 50% of the 356 species threatened or already extinct. The causes are destruction of habitat, hunting for food and traditional medicine, the illegal pet trade and pollution.

The report’s first page quotes the late WCS herpetologist John Behler: “Turtles saw the great dinosaurs come and go and are now facing their own extinction crisis.”

Freshwater species have been hit hardest by human action, with average population sizes down by 84% since 1970, due in part to the enormous thirst of agriculture and the large number of dams.

[Donald Trump](#)

Trump looks back and Biden looks ahead in contrasting new year messages

Biden calls for quicker distribution of Covid vaccines, while Trump points out he predicted vaccine's arrival



Donald Trump boards Air Force One in Florida on his way to Washington on Thursday. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

Donald Trump boards Air Force One in Florida on his way to Washington on Thursday. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

[Joanna Walters](#) in New York and agency

[@Joannawalters13](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 10.25 EST

The 1 January messages from the president and president-elect were both short, simple and upbeat.

“Happy New Year,” Donald Trump [tweeted](#) on Friday morning.

“Here’s to 2021,” Joe Biden had [posted](#) as his last tweet of 2020.

That’s about where the similarities ended between the lame duck Republican destined to leave the White House in less than three weeks and the incoming Democrat who will take his place.

A little earlier, in dueling New Year’s Eve declarations, Trump boasted of accomplishments in office, calling them “historic victories” despite his resounding loss in November’s election and a pandemic that has never been under control and is entering its darkest phase with record deaths in parallel with chaotic early [vaccine distribution](#).

Biden praised healthcare workers on the front lines and looked ahead to his prospects of delivering what he has promised will be a transformative first 100 days in office in terms of dealing with the coronavirus, the battered economy, global re-engagement by the US and taking action on the climate crisis.

After weeks of fighting to remain in office, Trump said in a video posted on Twitter in the evening on 31 December: “We have to be remembered for what’s been done.”

Trump, who has yet to formally concede his November election defeat to his Democratic rival, [returned to Washington early from his Florida resort](#) amid a fight with Congress over a defence bill and coronavirus aid checks.

Speaking from Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, Biden paid tribute to healthcare workers and encouraged people to get vaccinated in a brief appearance with his wife, Jill Biden, on the long-running ABC special Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve with Ryan Seacrest 2021.

“I’m absolutely, positively confident – confident – we’re going to come back and we’re going to come back even stronger than before,” said Biden, who takes office on 20 January.

He repeated his call for vaccines to be distributed more quickly.

Trump, who [had Covid-19 in October](#), frequently played down the severity of the pandemic and oversaw a response many health experts have criticised

as disorganised, cavalier and having sometimes ignored the science behind virus transmission.

But in his new year remarks he noted that the US had produced a Covid-19 vaccine in record time and that he had correctly predicted it would come before the year ended.

The US has been one of the countries worst-hit by Covid-19 and [leads the world in fatalities](#), with more than 340,000 deaths officially attributed to the virus.

Trump was originally scheduled to attend a New Year's Eve party at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

The White House has given no reason for why he returned to Washington early, but it coincides with Trump's fight with Congress over his veto of a major defence bill and his demand for increased Covid-19 stimulus checks, as well as a [spike in tensions with Iran](#).

The Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, the top Republican in the chamber, dealt a [probable death blow](#) on Wednesday to Trump's effort to boost coronavirus aid to Americans, declining to schedule a swift vote on a bill to raise relief checks to \$2,000 from the \$600 included in a \$892bn [relief package passed by Congress earlier this month](#).

Trump's fellow Republicans in Congress have largely stuck with him through four turbulent years, but he lashed out at them in recent days for not fully backing his unsupported claims of election fraud, rejecting his demand for bigger checks and moving towards the veto override.

On Thursday, McConnell again rejected a vote on a standalone bill that would increase the stimulus checks, calling it "socialism for rich people" and "a terrible way to get help to families who actually need it". The bill was passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives on Monday.

McConnell also said there should be nothing controversial about approving the \$740bn National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which Trump

vetoed because it does not repeal certain legal protections for tech companies.

“We’ve enacted an annual NDAA for 59 straight years and counting,” McConnell said. “In the next few days – the easy way or the hard way – we’re going to do our job once again. This body will fulfil our responsibility to the men and women who protect our country.”

The House [voted to overturn Trump’s veto](#) on Monday. The Senate will convene again on Friday at noon EST for a rare New Year’s Day session, in which lawmakers are expected to cast the first of two procedural votes aimed at overriding the veto. If that succeeds, the Senate is expected to hold a second procedural vote on Saturday followed by a final vote on passage.

The Republican senator Josh Hawley of Missouri has said he will object to Biden’s victory when Congress convenes to officially tally the electoral college votes on 6 January, which could trigger a lengthy debate in the Senate but has no chance of overturning the results. CNN reported that about 140 Republicans in the House were expected to engage in similar tactics.

Some Republican senators had supported Trump’s call for an increase in the stimulus payments, notably David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, who face runoff elections in Georgia on 5 January that will determine which party controls the Senate under Biden.

But Perdue’s campaign suffered a setback on Thursday, saying the senator was quarantining after coming into contact with someone who had tested positive for the coronavirus.

2021.01.02 - Climate crisis

- '['It's awakened me' UK climate assembly participants hail a life-changing event](#)
- '[Floods, storms and searing heat 2020 in extreme weather](#)
- '[Cold comfort farming German ice wine maker hails crucial big chill](#)

Climate change

'It's awakened me': UK climate assembly participants hail a life-changing event



Sir David Attenborough speaks at the first UK-wide citizens' assembly on climate change in January 2020, Birmingham. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/PA

Sir David Attenborough speaks at the first UK-wide citizens' assembly on climate change in January 2020, Birmingham. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/PA

From buying an electric car to starting a secondhand clothes business, attendees talk of the unexpected delights of the first UK citizens' assembly

Jessica Murray

Thu 31 Dec 2020 04.35 EST

At the start of 2020, Sue Peachey could never have predicted how her life would change over the next 12 months. She was one of 108 people to take

part in the UK's [first climate assembly earlier in the year](#), spending four weekends learning about a range of environmental issues before producing a final report of recommendations.

"The first weekend changed me really. I thought, 'Oh my God, [climate change] is really going to happen,' she said. "It made me want to learn and to live my life greener."

Her first step was to buy an electric car, something she admits she knew very little about. "The only electric vehicle I was aware of was a milk float," she laughed. She was frustrated by how difficult it was to find information, even from the car salesman at her local garage who couldn't answer her questions, but as soon as she gave the electric vehicle a test drive she was "convinced it was definitely the way forward".



Sue Peachey, 57, with her electric car, which she bought after attending the UK's first climate assembly. Photograph: Climate Assembly UK

Next was to figure out a way to pass on what she had learned at the assembly, during which participants [produced recommendations](#), including a tax on frequent-flyers, a ban on selling SUVs, and a cut in meat consumption.

When she saw some openings for councillors at her parish council in Bathampton, she decided to give it a shot. “I thought I could encourage and support my local community to make some greener choices,” said Peachey, who has already used her role to help declare a climate emergency in the area. “I’m no expert and I probably can’t remember half the things they told me [in the assembly], but all I know is climate change is real, it is going to happen and we all need to make changes to our lives.”

She’s not the only participant to have made major life changes after taking part. Linda, 59, who asked that her full name not be used, has decided to set up a sustainable secondhand clothing business after leaving her office job earlier in the year. “I didn’t realise how much fashion contributed to climate change. I think 10% of annual global carbon dioxide emissions are from the fashion industry,” she said. “I thought it was something I could address personally.”



Linda is setting up her own sustainable secondhand clothes business.
Photograph: Climate Assembly UK

She has taken a business course to prepare herself for the venture which she hopes to get off the ground in spring, something she never anticipated earlier in the year. “My family can’t quite believe what I’m going to be doing, but they’re all behind me,” she said.

Other participants' lifestyle changes have not been quite as drastic but have still had a profound impact. Max, 17, the assembly's youngest member, who also asked for his full name not to be used, became a pescatarian after learning how meat-eating was having a negative effect on the planet – despite the jibes of his school mates. "My friends thought it was stupid at first, but over time they've got used to it," he said. "I just saw how much carbon dioxide was released from each type of meat and I thought, 'Wow, this is something I need to think about a lot more'."



Max, 17, the UK assembly's youngest participant, became a pescatarian earlier in the year. Photograph: Climate Assembly UK

Charley Winter, 26, from Northamptonshire, works in PR and used to jetset around the world on about six holidays a year to indulge her love of travelling – but when the pandemic is over, she doesn't plan on going back to normal. "It needs to change. If it does negatively impact me I understand that and I'm willing to make changes in my life for the better," she said, adding she plans to rethink how many flights she takes and go on more UK-based holidays in the future.

Although some participants said it was too early to gauge the impact of the Climate Assembly report, many were pleased with how it had been received

by the government and said they felt the [recently announced 10-point green plan](#) mirrored some of their suggestions.

But all agreed the climate knowledge they gained from the assembly has empowered them to make their own decisions, and stressed the need for better education across the population. “Everybody should receive something in the post from the government informing them of the changes they can make, because a lot of people don’t realise the small things they do make a big difference,” said Linda.



Charley Winter has decided to cut back on flying since taking part in the assembly. Photograph: Climate Assembly UK

In its [Sixth Carbon Budget](#), published earlier this month, the government’s statutory advisers, the Climate Change Committee, said: “The experience of the UK climate assembly shows that if people understand what’s needed and why, if they have options and can be involved in the decision-making process, they will support the transition to net zero.”

[All that glitters: UK retailers shift away from plastic Christmas](#)
[Read more](#)

This is most important for older generations, said Peachey, who would not have been taught about the climate crisis in school. For her, the experience

has been more transformative than she ever anticipated.

“I’m 57, I probably thought this time last year my days of going to meetings and discussing and debating were over, and here we are a year later, I’ve done the climate assembly and I’m now on the parish council,” she said. “Who knows what’s next? But it’s definitely awakened me.”

Floods, storms and searing heat: 2020 in extreme weather

[Germany](#)

Cold comfort farming: German ice wine maker hails crucial big chill

‘You might get one chance in a decade,’ says Ralf Petgen, who has adapted his Mosel vineyard owing to global heating



Grape harvesters bring in the frozen grapes on the Petgen-Dahm wine estate in Saarland, Germany. Photograph: Weingut Ökonomierat Petgen-Dahm



Kate Connolly in Berlin

Wed 30 Dec 2020 00.00 EST

On a recent frosty night, Ralf Petgen made use of the light of a full moon to check every hour on the state of his riesling grapes. The weather forecast over the two previous days had given the winemaker hope that for the first time in years he would fulfil his dream of harvesting his grapes in a frozen state and turn them into *Eiswein*.

“The temperature needs to be -7C, no warmer than that,” he said. “And we hadn’t had it as low as that while the grapes were still in a healthy state, since 2012.”

After harvesting most of his grapes in the autumn, Petgen risked leaving two rows – about 400 vines – hanging on the Sehndorfer Marienberg, a shell limestone slope on his estate in Saarland, western [Germany](#), and crossed his fingers, hoping he could keep the main threats of disease, birds, insects and rot at bay. Then he prayed for Jack Frost.



Harvesters pick frozen grapes on the Petgen-Dahm vineyard. Photograph: Weingut Ökonomierat Petgen-Dahm

At 5am, with the temperature at -6C, he put in a wakeup call to some friends and neighbours, asking them to come to his aid. By 7am, after a sleepless night, the thermometer was finally at the critical -7C. Within half an hour, as the sun had begun to rise, the ungloved but hearty and nimble-fingered pickers had filled 20 vats with the round, icy, citrus-scented jewels, in which the water had frozen, but crucially the sugar had not.

From them, Petgen's wine press – activated before the grapes had time to thaw – was able to extract about 150 litres of juice. His one chance to make it work, after successive years of disappointment owing to lack of frost, had paid off.

Petgen's frosted grapes reached 135 degrees on the [Oechsle scale](#) – the measure German winemakers use to quantify the density of the must, or freshly crushed grape juice – the first stage in wine-making. Though of little meaning to the uninitiated, Petgen said the measure was “impressive”.

Eiswein, a sought-after sweet dessert wine, has become a rarity in recent years. “In the 1960s and 70s, making eiswein was a really regular occurrence,” said Petgen, whose family has farmed the Petgen-Dahm

vineyards in the Mosel valley, close to Luxembourg, since the 17th century. “Now due to global warming, it feels like you might get one chance in a decade if you’re lucky.”



Winemaker Ralf Petgen measures the Oechsle, sugar content, of his *Eiswein*.
Photograph: Petgen Dahm

The last few years, he said, “the winters were so mild, it didn’t get cold enough until January or February by which time the grapes are wet and rotten and dropping off the vine”.

Petgen recognised winters were getting milder and deliberately planted the riesling grapes a decade ago on the Marienberg, 270 metres above sea level, where temperatures are on average 1.5C cooler than 100 metres lower down, where most of his vines are planted – typical behaviour of a winemaker with an interest in eiswein production in Germany’s most prestigious wine region. In decades past, Petgen would have reserved as many as 2,000 vines for its production, but these days the risk that the harvest will fail is too great, said the 63-year-old, who farms with his wife, Brigitte.

The wine comes in long, thin 375ml bottles, which can sell for several thousand euros each, although Petgen’s prices are far more modest, at about €200 (£182) a litre.

Stuart Pigott, a leading wine writer in Germany, said that just as global heating has led to a succession of bumper wine harvests – “the last bad harvest was in 1987” – so the climate emergency has almost ended eiswein production.

“Eiswein has become the white whale of German wine,” he said. “Those who manage to make it, do so because they occasionally get lucky. This rarity will of course increase its value.”

As well as planting vines higher up, as Petgen has done, Pigott said another strategy used by winemakers was to “look for frost hollows – where the warm air rises and the cold air falls, collecting in the hollows”.

Describing eiswein’s acquired taste, he said: “It is unctuous and honey sweet with an enormous natural acidity which gives it a great vitality. It steamrollers its way over everything, blasting through caramel and chocolate.” Connoisseurs say it is best consumed alongside hearty puddings and patés.

Petgen had already had impressive yields from his grauer burgunder, gewürztraminer and auxerrois grapes this year, in what is generally considered a bumper harvest, even though 2019 was even more spectacular. But his riesling eiswein he said, “is the jewel in the crown, the icing on the cake, if you like. It doesn’t make much economic sense but the satisfaction from the winegrower’s point of view is immense.”

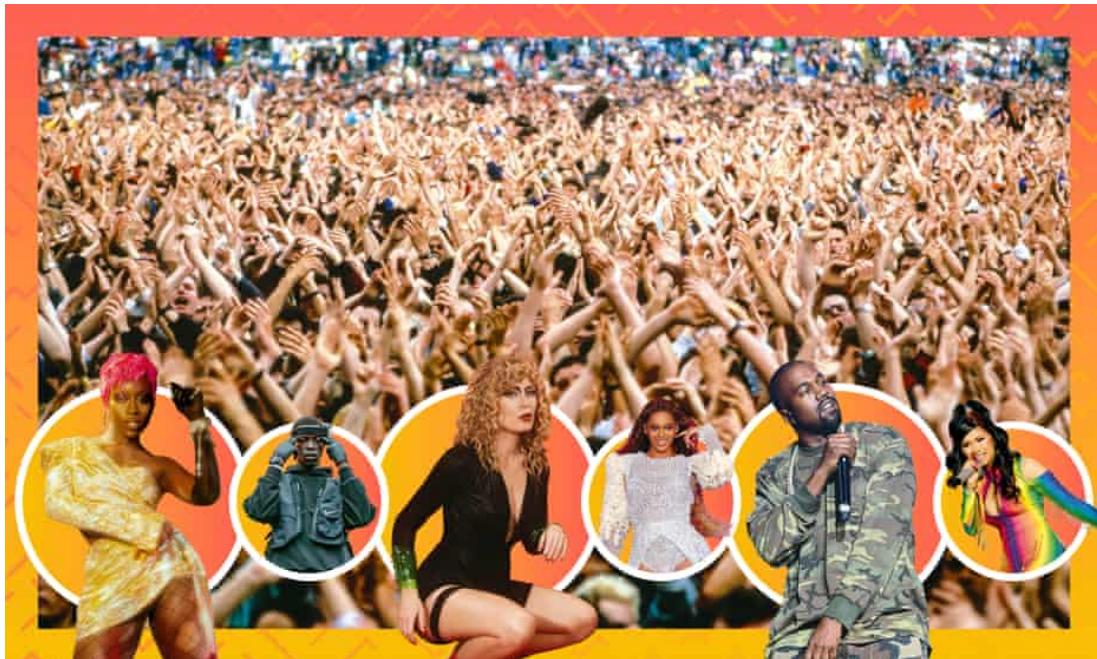
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Events horizon: the films, music, art and more to get excited about in 2021

Music

Lighters at the ready: will 2021 see the tentative return of the gig?



Live and kicking ... (l-r) Bree Runway, Pa Palieu, Róisín Murphy, Beyoncé, Kanye West and Cardi B. Composite: Getty

Live and kicking ... (l-r) Bree Runway, Pa Palieu, Róisín Murphy, Beyoncé, Kanye West and Cardi B. Composite: Getty

Live music as we know it may still be some time away, but venues are getting ready to reopen safely. Moshpit, anyone?

[Jenessa Williams](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

In 2020, symptoms of profuse sweating and a hoarse throat would be reason to nervously check your contact-tracing app, but in previous years, it was merely the byproduct of a really great gig. A night spent hollering the words to your favourite song with arms slung round clammy strangers who most certainly are not in your bubble, the humble live concert is a treat that most of us haven't known for the best part of a year, relying instead on a diet of

livestreams and the rare socially distanced event to tide us over. Collectively, we're more than ready to head into 2021 with a touch more, well ... touching.

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)

[Read more](#)

With [mass vaccination on the horizon](#), the return of live music's adrenaline rush feels tantalisingly close, albeit with a comedown of niggling uncertainties. How can you sing along if you have to wear a mask? What hope is there for “hands, face, space” in a moshpit? Will entry require three negative tests and a vial of blood? It is clear that gigs as we know them are not returning overnight, but is there any hope for some kind of normality in the coming months?

Even if and when some regions slowly move down the tiers, live performance is likely to remain a peculiar prospect for a while yet. “It’s pretty clear that there is going to be a buffer period between now and a vaccine, but most of the onus of that shift will be on staff delivery rather than fans having to do too much their end,” says Nathan Clark, licensee and promoter at the Brudenell Social Club in Leeds, one of the country’s oldest grassroots venues. “The last year has just been a Groundhog Day for us: booking gigs, rescheduling them, and rescheduling again. There’s a stubbornness from bands to make a show work but, as venues, there’s a big issue around building customer confidence, too; even if 75% of a fanbase are raring to get back to gigs, 25% are understandably sceptical, and we have to think about how we win back their confidence.”

The key to it all, Clark believes, is in the preparation. Technology will be instrumental; e-tickets will almost entirely become the norm, as will cashless merch desks and venue-specific apps for buying drinks. Industry talk has led him to believe that misting disinfection systems and UV air filtration (killing pathogens through light exposure) might be among the longer-term plans for venue technology. In the meantime, serious redevelopment work has been under way at the Brudenell to widen entry and exit ways as well as investing in streaming equipment, with the intention of offering more “hybrid” shows that can be delivered synchronously to both an in-person audience and those streaming from home.



The race for space ... a seated, socially distanced live show. Photograph: Dave Kan

Effectively increasing a gig's potential capacity to unlimited numbers, hybrid shows could prove an efficient way to proffer a much-needed cash injection to a wounded industry, but a lot will come down to quality – and demand. In a year when livestream concerts have ranged from ramshackle Instagram “requests please” affairs in living rooms right through to [lusciously shot pay-per-views](#), some artists seem to take to virtual performance more naturally than others.

With [two sold-out nights at London's Jazz Cafe](#) booked for April, soulful DIY pop newcomer Olivia Dean is eager to get away from the “anxiety-inducing” nature of virtual concerts but, like many others, is still waiting on word as to whether she can sensibly plan a wider tour.

“I think people assume that artists are getting some kind of governmental tipoff, but I definitely don't have Boris on speed dial,” she laughs. “I'm so excited about the shows but we know as little as anybody else, and it does make you worry about how you might alter the vibe of the performance. When it's seated you want to go for something classier: an Evening Without-type affair, but there's a huge part of me that just wants people to be able to get up and dance.”

A lot of hopes are being pinned on the summer for music's real return. Festival season is a staple of British pop culture, and the gleeful debauchery of a tent-spent weekender loses something of its essence when it's too burdened with rules and regulations. While some events such as Manchester's Parklife seem to be erring on the side of caution by [pushing their dates to September](#), Zack Sabban, the CEO of event-discovery site Festicket is confident that most of the corona-proofing legwork is already under way, hopefully leaving fans free to frolic with all the Strongbow-toting abandon they used to.

"As we know, the evidence shows that being outdoors massively reduces any risk of transmission, so when it comes to live music, it follows that outdoor festivals will be in a good position to return," he says. "It's highly likely that we will see requests for negative Covid tests and/or proof that you have received a vaccine before access to some events, and we've been working closely with our partners in evaluating potential methods for observing that. We're also now beginning to roll out unmanned self-service scanning terminals to streamline entry, and offering free cancellation of tickets. We want people to feel safe and informed, and the key thing for fans is to be patient and considerate: the more we collectively have things under control in the coming weeks and months, the easier things will be further down the line."



Field of dreams ... Glastonbury goes wild for Kylie in 2019. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

The reality of it, then, will be less of a full-throated stagedive and more of a tentative shuffle back into gigging. While the potent combination of Brexit and Covid will likely see many international artists opting for stripped-back tours that risk less cash and touring-crew contagion, fans should also take appropriate precautions at their end, thinking twice about booking back-to-back shows or heading off to a festival while experiencing symptoms.

Potentially, some of these new responsibilities may even be for the long-term best. A new socially distant iteration of the meet-and-greet could appease some of the more reluctant pop stars (hello Avril Lavigne), while the possibility of more matinee shows to accommodate a “double the gig, half the capacity” approach will directly benefit the under-18s gig-going audience often ignored by venues due to their lack of a pint-buying pound. Having had time off from the touring treadmill to incubate new material, grassroots bands may even triumph, too: smaller capacities mean that the stakes of a “sellout” show at a prestigious venue suddenly fall within reach, hopefully helping to make up some of last year’s lost momentum.

While it might be fanciful to imagine 2021 heralding a summer of love-like renaissance, there is something like quiet hope in the idea of a more spontaneous, intimate approach to live performance. Some, like Olivia Dean, will opt to rerun some of 2020’s innovative measures (for her, a bespoke open-sided truck that allows her to pitch up and play wherever her fans request it).

“I do feel like if we can take anything from this, it’s that I really connected with the fans in ways I might not have done on huge festival stages,” she says. “That’s a really beautiful thing. I get why people would be nervous, but I’m more than ready to be the champion for recovery. It’s time to get back in those rooms with each other.”

Sanitiser at the ready: the shows must go on.



2021 in books: what to look forward to this year

Kazuo Ishiguro returns with a novel about an artificial friend, Zadie Smith brings the Wife of Bath bang up to date, Bill Gates takes on the climate crisis ... a literary calendar for the year ahead

Sat 2 Jan 2021 04.00 EST Last modified on Sun 3 Jan 2021 04.32 EST

January

4 Winners of five Costa category awards announced.

8 *The Father* released – Florian Zeller directs an adaptation of his own play, starring Anthony Hopkins.

11 TS Eliot prize for poetry.

19 Centenary of the birth of Patricia Highsmith, queen of psychological suspense.

22 Netflix adaptation of [Aravind Adiga's Booker winner *The White Tiger*](#).

Release of film *Chaos Walking*, based on first book of Patrick Ness's

eponymous trilogy.

26 Costa awards ceremony, with book of the year announced.



The Netflix adaptation of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. Photograph: Tejinder Singh Khamkha/NETFLIX

Fiction

Luster by Raven Leilani (Picador)

In the year'suzziest debut, a black American millennial tackles the difficulties of work, love, sex and being seen for who you really are.

The Living Sea of Waking Dreams by Richard Flanagan (Chatto & Windus)

A family grapples with mortality while Australia burns, in a magical realist fable about extinction and Anthropocene despair from the Booker-winning author of [The Narrow Road to the Deep North](#).

Memorial by Bryan Washington (Atlantic)

His story collection *Lot* won last year's Dylan Thomas prize; this deft debut novel explores the complications of family and a gay relationship on the rocks.

A Burning by [Megha Majumdar](#) (Scribner)

Three lives entangle in contemporary India, in a debut about class and aspiration that has been a sensation in the US.

The Art of Falling by Danielle McLaughlin (John Murray)

Debut novel about a woman rebuilding her marriage, from the celebrated Irish short story writer.

A River Called Time by Courttia Newland (Canongate)

Ambitious speculative epic set in an alternate London where slavery and colonialism never happened.

People Like Her by Ellery Lloyd (Mantle)

Smart, gobble-at-a-sitting thriller about life as a yummy mummy influencer and the dark side of Instagram.

Girl A by Abigail Dean (HarperCollins)

Incendiary, beautifully written thriller debut about siblings living with the emotional legacy of childhood abuse in a ‘House of Horrors’.

The Stranger Times by [CK McDonnell](#) (Bantam)

Pratchett-esque romp set around a Manchester newspaper dedicated to the paranormal whose reporters get sucked into a battle between good and evil.

Children’s and teen

Amari and the Night Brothers by BB Alston (Egmont)

Film rights have been snapped up for the first in a new supernatural adventure series with a black heroine.

Concrete Rose by Angie Thomas (Walker)

From the US YA sensation, this hard-hitting prequel to the award-winning *The Hate U Give* focuses on Starr’s father as a young man.

Poetry

Living Weapon by Rowan Ricardo Phillips (Faber)

The award-winning American essayist and poet’s first collection to be

published in the UK combines civic awareness with an interrogation of language and self.

Nonfiction

A Swim in a Pond in the Rain by George Saunders (Bloomsbury)

The Booker-winning author of *Lincoln in the Bardo* considers the art of fiction through seven classic Russian short stories by Chekhov, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Gogol.



Francis Bacon in his studio. Photograph: Graham Wood/ANL/REX/Shutterstock

Francis Bacon: Revelations by Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan (William Collins)

A “definitive” biography, written with the full cooperation of the Bacon estate and with unrivalled access to the artist’s personal papers.

Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America by Eddie S Glaude Jr (Chatto & Windus)

Exemplifying the resurgence of interest in Baldwin, this blend of biography, criticism and memoir with the novelist at its heart is an indictment of racial injustice in Trump’s America.

Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain by [Sathnam Sanghera](#) (Viking)

One of a new wave of books on British imperialism, this study, from the likable journalist and author of *The Boy With the Topknot*, looks at the legacy of empire from the NHS to Brexit and Covid.

Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic by Rachel Clarke (Little, Brown)

The palliative care doctor who scored a hit with her book *Dear Life* gives an insider account of hospital life as Covid-19 changed everything.

Saving Justice by James Comey (Macmillan)

The former FBI director and author of *A Higher Loyalty* looks into how institutions of justice in the US were eroded during the Trump presidency.

The Unusual Suspect by Ben Machell (Canongate)

The remarkable story of how a British student with Asperger's became obsessed with Robin Hood following the global financial crash, and began to rob banks.

February

4 Centenary of the birth of Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*.

23 Bicentenary of the death of John Keats in Rome.

Fiction

Light Perpetual by Francis Spufford (Faber)

The author of [Golden Hill](#) imagines the lost futures of children killed in the blitz, in a sparkling, humane panorama of miraculous everyday life.

No One Is Talking About This by Patricia Lockwood (Bloomsbury)

Following her acclaimed comic memoir *Priestdaddy*, a fast and furious debut novel about being embedded deep in the digital world.



Patricia Lockwood. Photograph: Katherine Anne Rose/The Observer

Mother for Dinner by Shalom Auslander (Picador)

Outrageous comedy about identity politics and family ties centred on the Cannibal-American Seltzer clan.

We Are Not in the World by Conor O'Callaghan (Transworld)

Delayed from 2020, the examination of a father-daughter relationship by a rising Irish star.

Maxwell's Demon by Steven Hall (Canongate)

Long-awaited follow-up to ultra-inventive cult hit *The Raw Shark Texts* features a man being stalked by a fictional character.

Open Water by Caleb Azumah Nelson (Viking)

Black British artists fall in love in an intense, elegant debut.

Voices of the Lost by Hoda Barakat, translated by Marilyn Booth (Oneworld)

In a war-torn country, six characters share their secrets, in this international prize for Arabic fiction winner.

Children's and teen

How to Change Everything by Naomi Klein with Rebecca Stefoff (Penguin)

A guide to climate change billed as “the young human’s guide to protecting the planet and each other”.

Nonfiction

Fall by John Preston (Viking)

The author of *A Very English Scandal* turns his attention to the last days of disgraced media tycoon Robert Maxwell.

What Does Jeremy Think? by Suzanne Heywood (William Collins)

A set of revealing insider political accounts, written up by the author after conversations with her husband, the former cabinet secretary Lord Heywood, who died of cancer aged 56 in 2018.

Consent: A Memoir by Vanessa Springora, translated by Natasha Lehrer (HarperCollins)

The memoir, by the director of one of France’s leading publishing houses, of her sexual relationship as a teenager with a leading writer.



Bessie Smith in the 1920s. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Bessie Smith by Jackie Kay (Faber)

The national poet of Scotland has written a new introduction to her study of the American blues singer, whom she idolised as a young black girl growing up in Glasgow.

Keats by Lucasta Miller (Cape)

A new biography “in nine poems and an epitaph” by the author of *The Brontë Myth*, to coincide with the bicentenary of the poet’s death.

Brown Baby by Nikesh Shukla (Bluebird)

A memoir from the Bristol-based editor of *The Good Immigrant*, which is also an exploration of “how to raise a brown baby in an increasingly horrible world”.

Karachi Vice by Samira Shackle (Granta)

An impressive account of the inner workings of the Pakistani city, as exposed by the stories of five individuals.

The Code Breaker by Walter Isaacson (Simon & Schuster)

The biographer of Leonardo da Vinci and Steve Jobs returns with a book about Crispr, the revolutionary tool that can edit DNA.

How to Avoid a Climate Disaster by Bill Gates (Allen Lane)

The co-founder of Microsoft discusses the tools needed to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Raceless by Georgina Lawton (Sphere)

Reflections on identity along with recollections of growing up as a mixed-race girl raised by two white parents who pursued the untruth that the author’s darker skin was the product of a so-called “throwback gene”.

Aftershocks by Nadia Owusu (Sceptre)

A descendant of Ashanti royalty recounts growing up without a mother, travelling from country to country and feeling an absence of home – her experience told through the metaphor of earthquakes.

March

19 Bicentenary of the birth of the explorer, linguist and author Richard Burton, who translated *The One Thousand and One Nights* and the *Kama Sutra* into English.

Fiction

Klara and the Sun by [Kazuo Ishiguro](#) (Faber)

An “Artificial Friend” considers humanity and the meaning of love in Ishiguro’s first novel since winning the Nobel literature prize.



Edward St Aubyn. Photograph: Timothy Allen

Double Blind by [Edward St Aubyn](#) (Harvill Secker)

The author of the Patrick Melrose books investigates themes of inheritance, knowledge and freedom through the connections between three friends over one tumultuous year.

Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi (Viking)

This follow-up to her debut *Homegoing*, focusing on an immigrant Ghanaian family in the American South, has been a huge hit in the US.

Painting Time by Maylis de Kerangal, translated by Jessica Moore (MacLehose)

The French author took the Wellcome science prize for her bravura novel

about a heart transplant, *Mend the Living*; this new book is set in the world of *trompe l'œil* painting.

Hot Stew by Fiona Mozley (John Murray)

Her debut *Elmet* made the Booker shortlist; this followup tackles money and class through the inhabitants of London's Soho.

Kitchenly 434 by Alan Warner (White Rabbit)

The Sopranos author's tale of a rock star's butler at the fag end of the 1970s promises to be "*Remains of the Day* with cocaine and amplifiers".

The Committed by Viet Thanh Nguyen (Corsair)

In the sequel to Pulitzer winner [*The Sympathizer*](#), that novel's conflicted spy finds himself in the underworld of 80s Paris.

The Absolute Book by Elizabeth Knox (Michael Joseph)

From the New Zealand writer, a propulsive parallel-worlds fantasy epic about the power of stories and storytelling.

The Mysterious Correspondent by Marcel Proust, translated by Charlotte Mandell (Oneworld)

Nine previously unseen stories illuminate a young writer's development.



Jeet Thayil. Photograph: Ishan Tankha/The Guardian

Names of the Women by Jeet Thayil (Cape)

From Mary of Magdala to Susanna the Barren, women whose stories were suppressed in the New Testament.

Redder Days by Sue Rainsford (Doubleday)

Twins in an abandoned commune prepare for apocalypse, in the follow-up to her standout debut *Follow Me to Ground*.

The Last House on Needless Street by Catriona Ward (Viper)

A woman believes she has found the monster who snatched her younger sister as a child ... Full of twists and turns, this high-concept gothic horror is going to be huge.

Children's and teen

The Wild Before by Piers Torday (Quercus)

Can one hare change the world? A prequel to the Guardian prize-winning *The Last Wild*.

Poetry



Malika Booker. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different, edited by Maisie Lawrence and Rishi Dastidar (Corsair)

An anthology celebrating 20 years of writers' collective Malika's [Poetry](#) Kitchen, featuring work by now well-known alumni including Warsan Shire, Inua Ellams, Roger Robinson and Malika Booker herself.

Nonfiction

Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life by Jordan Peterson (Allen Lane)

Having spent a year in rehab, the controversial Canadian psychologist, self-styled “professor against political correctness” follows up his global bestseller [12 Rules for Life](#).

Under a White Sky by Elizabeth Kolbert (Bodley Head)

The Pulitzer prize-winning writer of *The Sixth Extinction* meets scientists and researchers and asks: can we change nature, this time to save it?



Isabel Allende. Photograph: Francisco Seco/AP

The Soul of a Woman: Rebel Girls, Impatient Love, and Long Life by Isabel Allende (Bloomsbury)

An autobiographical meditation from the bestselling novelist on feminism and what women want.

New Yorkers by Craig Taylor (John Murray)

The sequel to Taylor's bestselling *Londoners* is another work of oral history, 10 years in the writing and drawing on hundreds of interviews.

The Diaries of Chips Channon, Volume 1: 1918-1938 edited by Simon Heffer (Hutchinson)

The unexpurgated version of the often-quoted diaries of Henry Channon, social climber and Tory MP, who liked to gossip about politics and London society.

A Little Devil in America by Hanif Abdurraqib (Allen Lane)

From Josephine Baker to Beyoncé ... reflections on black performance from the author of a superb book on A Tribe Called Quest.

Inventory of a Life Mislaid by Marina Warner (William Collins)

A memoir from the writer known for her books on feminism, myth and fairytales, which is structured around objects, from her mother's wedding ring to a 1952 film cylinder.

Friends by Robin Dunbar (Little, Brown)

An exploration of friendship by the anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist known for the Dunbar Number, his theory that we can have meaningful relationships with only 150 people.

The Gun, the Ship and the Pen by Linda Colley (Profile)

The historian best known for *Britons* retells modern history by considering the spread of written constitutions.

Failures of State by Jonathan Calvert and George Arbuthnot (Mudlark)

Investigative journalists explore all the things the British government got wrong over Covid.

April

9 Bicentenary of the birth of the influential French poet, translator and critic Charles Baudelaire, author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Fiction

Lean Fall Stand by Jon McGregor (4th Estate)

An inquiry into the meaning of courage in the aftermath of a disastrous Antarctic research expedition, following the Costa-winning [*Reservoir 13*](#).



Gwendoline Riley. Photograph: Adrian Lourie/Writer Pictures

My Phantoms by Gwendoline Riley (Granta)

Fearless, darkly witty novel anatomising a toxic mother-daughter relationship.

Civilisations by Laurent Binet, translated by Sam Taylor (Harvill Secker)

A “counterfactual history of the modern world” from the author of *HHhH*, examining the urge for power across time and space.

The High House by Jessie Greengrass (Swift)

Sight was shortlisted for the Women’s prize in 2018; in Greengrass’s second novel, an ordinary family prepares for climate catastrophe.

This One Sky Day by Leone Ross (Faber)

Set on a magical archipelago, a big, carnivalesque novel that takes on desire, addiction and postcolonialism, but is also a celebration of food, love and joy.



Haruki Murakami. Photograph: Ali Smith/Photograph by Ali Smith

First Person Singular by [Haruki Murakami](#), translated by Philip Gabriel (Harvill Secker)

A new collection of eight stories that play with the boundary between memoir and fiction.

Hummingbird Salamander by Jeff VanderMeer (4th Estate)

A climate change conspiracy thriller about ecoterrorism and extinction.

The Republic of False Truths by Alaa Al Aswany (Faber)

A polyphonic novel about the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

Male Tears by Benjamin Myers (Bloomsbury)

Farmers, boxers, ex-cons ... Short stories about men and masculinity.

Monsters by Barry Windsor-Smith (Cape)

The US army runs a secret genetics programme in this epic graphic novel from the Marvel and Conan artist, 35 years in the making.

You Love Me by Caroline Kepnes (Simon & Schuster)

The latest in the thriller series behind Netflix stalker blockbuster *You*.

Children's and teen

Weirdo by Zadie Smith and Nick Laird, illustrated by Magenta Fox (Puffin)
This first picture book from the husband and wife writers celebrates “the quiet power of being different” through the story of a guinea pig in a judo suit.

Bone Music by David Almond (Hodder)

The *Skellig* author’s new novel focuses on a young girl who moves from Newcastle to rural Northumberland and finds herself “rewilded”.

Poetry



Tishani Doshi. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

A God at the Door by Tishani Doshi (Bloodaxe)

The witty, wise and clear-eyed novelist, dancer and poet deploys both rage and sharp analysis covering issues from the precarious state of the environment to the treatment of women.

A Blood Condition by Kayo Chingonyi (Chatto & Windus)

The second collection from the Dylan Thomas prize-winner explores both the personal and cultural influences of inheritance.

Nonfiction



Philip Roth, in 1968. Photograph: Bob Peterson/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images

Philip Roth: The Biography by Blake Bailey (Jonathan Cape)

Renowned biographer Bailey was appointed by the American novelist, who died in 2018, and granted independence and complete access to the archive.

Go Big: How To Fix Our World by Ed Miliband (Bodley Head)

Inspired by his “Reasons to be Cheerful” podcast, the shadow cabinet member investigates 20 “transformative solutions” to problems as intractable as inequality and the climate crisis.

How to Love Animals in a Human-Shaped World by Henry Mance (Jonathan Cape)

Tapping into new thinking about animals and our changing perception of them, the FT journalist works in an abattoir, talks to chefs and philosophers and looks to a better future.

Everybody by Olivia Laing (Picador)

An investigation into bodies, which travels across countries, looks at protests and alternative medicine and has at its heart the psychoanalyst and sexual evangelist Wilhelm Reich.



Olivia Laing. Photograph: Ryoty/PR

The Adventures of Miss Barbara Pym by Paula Byrne (William Collins)
The biographer of Jane Austen takes on another much-loved English novelist who specialised in social comedy.

One of Them: An Eton College Memoir by Musa Okwonga (Unbound)
Okwonga spent five years at Eton in the 1990s and recalls that time, as well as engaging with such related issues as privilege, the political right and the “boys’ club” of government.

Letters to Camondo by Edmund de Waal (Chatto & Windus)
The author of *The Hare with Amber Eyes* tells the story of Count Camondo, a prominent Jewish banker and the creator of a vast collection of decorative arts, who lost a son in the first world war and whose daughter and grandchildren died in the Holocaust.



Rachel Kushner. Photograph: Chloe Aftel

The Hard Crowd by Rachel Kushner (Cape)

The first essay collection from the American author of *The Flamethrowers* and *The Mars Room*, covering topics such as the San Francisco music scene and her first love, motorbikes.

I Belong Here by Anita Sethi (Bloomsbury)

The report of a lone walk along the Pennines, the “backbone of Britain”, undertaken in the wake of a race hate crime.

May



Scarlett Johansson and Florence Pugh in *The Black Widow*, to be released in May. Photograph: Allstar/MARVEL STUDIOS\DISNEY/JAY MAIDMENT

7 Release of *Black Widow*, starring Scarlett Johansson as the Marvel comic book character.

9 Centenary of the premiere of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

11 20 years since the death of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* author Douglas Adams.

21 Release of *Lawrence: After Arabia*, depicting the final phase of TE Lawrence's life – was his death in a motorcycle accident suspicious?

27 Hay festival opens, running until 6 June.

28 Release of *Cruella*, starring Emma Stone as Dodie Smith's character Cruella de Vil.

Fiction

Second Place by Rachel Cusk (Faber)

Following her Outline trilogy, Cusk explores relationships, male privilege and the power of art through an encounter between a woman and a famous male artist.

China Room by Sunjeev Sahota (Harvill Secker)

From the author of [Year of the Runaways](#), the twin stories of a bride in rural Punjab in 1929, and a young man travelling there from England 70 years later, traumatised by addiction and racism, looking for a sense of home.

The Rules of Revelation by Lisa McInerney (John Murray)

Further misadventures in Cork from the Women's prize-winning author of *The Glorious Heresies*.



Jhumpa Lahiri. Photograph: Nico Rodriguez/EPA

Whereabouts by Jhumpa Lahiri (Bloomsbury)

Lahiri fell in love with Italy as a young woman; she wrote this novel about a woman at the midpoint of her life in Italian before creating an English version.

Great Circle by Maggie Shipstead (Doubleday)

The second novel by the Dylan Thomas prize-winner is a big, ambitious narrative about a vanished female aviator.

Intimacies by Lucy Caldwell (Faber)

A second collection of stories from the Northern Irish playwright focuses on women finding their place in the world.

Careless by Kirsty Capes (Orion)
Coming-of-age debut about a girl in the care system.

Red Milk by Sjón, translated by Victoria Cribb (Sceptre)
The story of a young neo-Nazi in post second world war Iceland sheds light on the far-right global movement today.

Panenka by Rónán Hession (Bluemoose)
The follow-up to cult hit *Leonard and Hungry Paul* features a man who has suffered half his life for the mistakes of the past.

The Fortune Men by Nadifa Mohamed (Viking)
A story of prejudice and murder in the 1950s, based on a real wrongful conviction in Cardiff's Tiger Bay.

Last Days in Cleaver Square by Patrick McGrath (Hutchinson)
An old man who fought in the Spanish civil war is haunted by the ghost of General Franco, in a novel about reckoning with the past set in 70s London.

Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Hutchinson)
Family secrets fly in the follow-up to bestseller *Daisy Jones and the Six*, as a glamorous clan in 80s Malibu throws a party that gets out of control.

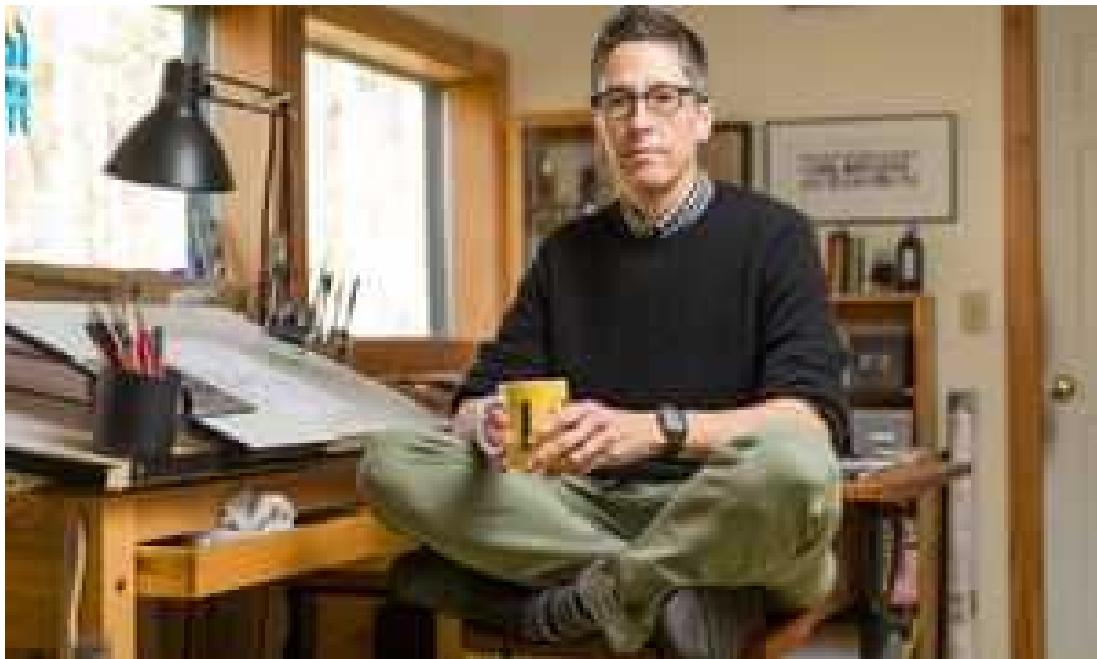
Children's and teen

The Swallows' Flight by Hilary McKay (Macmillan)
A companion novel to the Costa-winning *The Skylarks' War*, following friends on both sides of the conflict in the second world war.

Poetry

Pandemonium by Andrew McMillan (Cape)
The Guardian first book prize-winner, acclaimed for his studies of bodies experiencing pressure and pleasure, now turns his attention to stresses placed on the mind.

Nonfiction



Alison Bechdel. Photograph: Oliver Parini/The Observer

The Secret to Superhuman Strength by Alison Bechdel (Jonathan Cape)
A graphic memoir exploring the American cartoonist's obsession with exercise and fitness fads.

Noise by Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony and Cass R Sunstein (William Collins)

Three authors, known for *Thinking Fast and Slow*, *Nudge* and other books, combine in a study of how to improve decision-making by reducing “background noise”.

Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty by Patrick Radden Keefe (Picador)

An American investigative journalist uncovers the secrets of the controversial pharmaceutical family.

Burning Man: The Trials of DH Lawrence by Frances Wilson (Bloomsbury)

A sparkling biography that focuses on Lawrence between 1915 and his diagnosis with TB in 1925.



Deborah Levy. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Real Estate by [Deborah Levy](#) (Hamish Hamilton)

The final instalment in the award-winning “living autobiography” series following *Things I Don’t Want To Know* and *The Cost of Living*

Finding the Mother Tree by Suzanne Simard (Allen Lane)

A forest ecologist who has conducted decades of research on the “wood wide web” considers how trees communicate with each other.

Everything You Really Need to Know about Politics by Jess Phillips (Simon & Schuster)

The opposition frontbench politician lifts the lid on the mysteries of Westminster.

Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe by Niall Ferguson (Allen Lane)

The historian takes a timely look at disasters, and how nations cope with them.

June



Edward Fox in *The Day of the Jackal*. Photograph: Allstar/Cinetext/MCA/UNIVERSAL

International Booker prize winner announced.

7 Fifty years since the publication of Frederick Forsyth's thriller *The Day of the Jackal*.

10 Centenary of publication of first full edition of DH Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

16 Women's prize for fiction winner announced, in the month that marks 25 years since Helen Dunmore won the inaugural Orange prize.

Fiction

A Shock by Keith Ridgway (Picador)

This long-awaited follow-up to *Hawthorn & Child* focuses on marginal figures on the fringes of London life.

Tokyo Redux by David Peace (Faber)

The third novel in Peace's Tokyo trilogy follows a missing persons investigation during the postwar US occupation.

The Wife of Willesden by Zadie Smith (Hamish Hamilton)

Smith translates Chaucer's "Wife of Bath" to northwest London in a rollicking dramatic monologue.

The Promise by Damon Galgut (Chatto & Windus)

From a twice Booker-shortlisted author, the story of South Africa from apartheid to Jacob Zuma, through the decline of one Afrikaner family.

The Other Black Girl by Zakiya Dalila Harris (Bloomsbury)

Buzzy debut set in publishing that explores race and class in the workplace.

Assembly by Natasha Brown (Hamish Hamilton)

Debut about race in modern Britain, set over one day as a high-flying black woman considers her relationship to the establishment.

Monument Maker by David Keenan (White Rabbit)

Genre-straddling epic set around France's great cathedrals from the author of *This Is Memorial Device*.

Should We Stay or Should We Go by Lionel Shriver (Borough)

A married couple decide on a suicide pact to avoid the indignities of old age, in a satire on society's attitudes to ageing that plays with multiple endings.



Yan Lianke. Photograph: Murdo Macleod/The Guardian

Hard Like Water by Yan Lianke, translated by Carlos Rojas (Chatto & Windus)

Love and sex during the Cultural Revolution, from the author of *Serve the People!*.

The Day I Fell Off My Island by Yvonne Bailey-Smith (Myriad)

A semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novel set in Jamaica and London in the 60s and 70s from Zadie's mother.

The President's Daughter by Bill Clinton and James Patterson (Century)

Another outing for the high-profile thriller writing duo.

Children's and teen

Ace of Spades by Faridah Àbiké-Íyímídé (Usborne)

“*Gossip Girl* meets *Get Out*”: the debut thriller about high-school racism by a British student that netted a million-dollar deal in the US.

Nonfiction

12 Bytes by Jeanette Winterson (Jonathan Cape)

A dozen essays on AI from the writer and feminist, whose most recent novel is [Frankissstein](#).



Sinéad O'Connor brings out her memoir, *Rememberings*, in June.
Photograph: Andrew Chin/Getty Images

Rememberings by Sinéad O'Connor (Sandycove)

A “revelatory” memoir from the Irish singer-songwriter, known for her controversial political gestures and conversion to Islam.

Seven Ways to Change the World by Gordon Brown (Simon & Schuster)

News ways of thinking in the light of the global pandemic, by the former PM.

All in It Together: England in the Early 21st Century by Alwyn Turner (Profile)

A history of modern times, ranging from the smoking ban and Grindr to Brexit and Covid.

An Extra Pair of Hands by Kate Mosse (Wellcome)

A “deeply personal” memoir from the bestselling novelist about finding herself, in middle age, caring for her relatives.

Connections: The Story of Human Feeling by Karl Deisseroth (Viking)

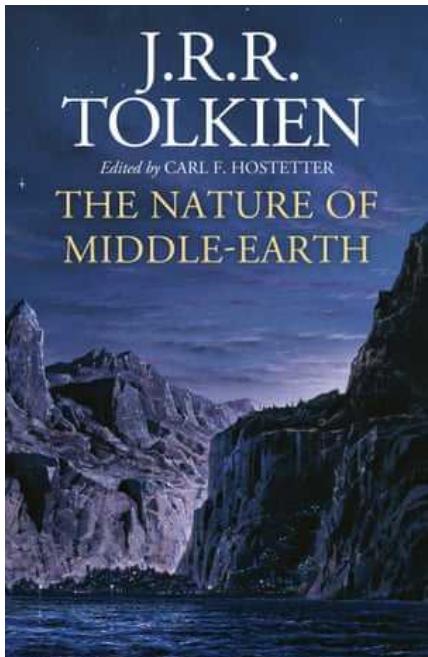
An ambitious story-packed study of mental illness and the nature of human emotion from a neuroscientist who has conducted breakthrough research.

My Mess Is a Bit of a Life by Georgia Pritchett (Faber)

A funny memoir about anxiety from a comedy screenwriter who has worked on *Miranda*, *Veep* and *Succession*.

Consumed by Arifa Akbar (Sceptre)

A memoir from the Guardian chief theatre critic about her sister who died of TB, which also considers the history of the disease.



The Nature of Middle-earth. Photograph: HarperCollins

The Nature of Middle-earth by JRR Tolkien, edited by Carl F Hostetter (HarperCollins)

A collection by Tolkien of previously unpublished scholarly companion pieces to his stories, covering such topics as Elvish immortality and the geography of Gondor.

The Gallery of Miracles and Madness by Charlie English (William Collins)

A study of the Prinzhorn collection of art made by mental health patients, and Hitler's campaign against "degenerate art".

Shape: The Hidden Geometry of Absolutely Everything by Jordan Ellenberg (Allen Lane)

The author of a bestselling book on the "power of mathematical thinking" looks at how geometry affects computer-learning, democracy and much else besides.

A Stinging Delight by David Storey (Faber)

A posthumous autobiography by the professional rugby league player, Booker prize-winner and author of *This Sporting Life*.

July

27 75th anniversary of the death of Gertrude Stein.

Fiction



Lisa Taddeo. Photograph: Christopher Beauchamp/The Observer

Animal by Lisa Taddeo (Bloomsbury)

The debut novel from the author of nonfiction hit *Three Women* is a road trip featuring a woman who is driven to kill.

The Cuckoo Cage: British Superheroes, edited by Ra Page (Comma)

Derek Owusu, Courtia Newland and more draw on folk heroes from protest history to imagine a new generation of radical changemakers.

Jane Is Trying by Isy Suttie (W&N)

The comic's debut novel features a woman in her late 30s whose life is going off the rails.

Poetry

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head by Warsan Shire (Chatto & Windus)

A first full collection by the poet best known for featuring in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* film engages with "sex, death, race, religion and feminism".

Nonfiction

the sea is not made of water by Adam Nicholson (HarperCollins)

The versatile author, whose recent *The Making of Poetry* received rave reviews, turns his attention to the sea.

The Sex Lives of African Women by Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah (Dialogue)
Six years of conversations about sex and relationships have resulted in a report that is being compared to Lisa Taddeo's *Three Women*.

Home in the World by Amartya Sen (Allen Lane)

The memoir of the influential Indian economist who witnessed the Bengal famine in 1943 and has gone on to hold numerous top academic jobs.



Lucy Ellmann follows her novel *Ducks, Newburyport* with a collection of essays. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Things Are Against Us by Lucy Ellmann (Galley Beggar)

Essays on sex strikes, Trump, Hitchcock and other subjects from the author

of the acclaimed novel [*Ducks, Newburyport*](#).

The Comfort Book by [Matt Haig](#) (Canongate)

The bestselling author returns with a blend of “philosophy, memoir and self-reflection”, described as “a hug in written form”.

August

Twenty-five years since Bloomsbury accepted JK Rowling’s first Harry Potter novel in 1996.

14-30 Edinburgh international book festival.

15 250th anniversary of the birth of the seminal historical novelist Walter Scott.

Fiction

The Women of Troy by Pat Barker (Hamish Hamilton)

In this sequel to [*The Silence of the Girls*](#), former queen Briseis observes the aftermath of the fall of Troy.



Karl Ove Knausgård. Photograph: Roberto Ricciuti/Getty Images

The Morning Star by [Karl Ove Knausgård](#), translated by Martin Aitken (Harvill Secker)

His first novel since the autobiographical My Struggle series will be very different, with a range of characters reacting to the appearance of a new star in the sky.

The Country of Others by Leïla Slimani, translated by Sam Taylor (Faber)
In the first volume of a trilogy about a French family after the second world war, a French woman falls in love with a Moroccan soldier.

What Strange Paradise by Omar El Akkad (Picador)
The author of *American War* gives a child's view of the global refugee crisis.

Waiting for the Waters to Rise by Maryse Condé, translated by Richard Philcox (World Editions)
From the “alternative Nobel laureate”, a love letter to the Caribbean islands, in which a child is in search of their family in Haiti.

A Slow Fire Burning by Paula Hawkins (Doubleday)
A man is murdered on a London houseboat in the new thriller from the *Girl on the Train* author.

Children's and teen



Malorie Blackman. Photograph: Jeff Spicer/Getty Images

Endgame by Malorie Blackman (Penguin)

The final volume in the groundbreaking Noughts & Crosses series.

Nonfiction

The Right to Sex by Amia Srinivasan (Bloomsbury)

An investigation into male sexual entitlement, porn and other areas where sex and politics meet, by the youngest ever Chichele professor of social and political theory at Oxford, who is also the first woman and person of colour to hold the post.

Four Thousand Weeks by Oliver Burkeman (Bodley Head)

If you live to 80 your lifespan is four thousand weeks ... an uplifting and original exploration of how to use our time well by the former Guardian columnist.

Tunnel 29 by Helena Merriman (Hodder & Stoughton)

The story, already told in a successful podcast, of Joachim Rudolph, who dug a tunnel underneath the Berlin wall to rescue people from the GDR.



A replica of “Tunnel 29” at the museum of the original escape tunnel from West Berlin to East Berlin at Brunnenstrasse. Photograph: Fabrizio

Bensch/Reuters

School's Out by Ryan Wilson (Chatto & Windus)

Described as “warm and witty”, the memoir of a teacher from stumbling first days to head of sixth form to burnout.

Dante by Alessandro Barbero (Profile)

A new biography, translated by Allan Cameron, marking the 700th anniversary of the Italian poet’s death.

Curepedia: An A to Z of the Cure by Simon Price (White Rabbit)

A biography of the still-feted band by a music journalist who became a fan of the Cure as a 16-year-old in the 1980s.

September

Fiction

The Magician by Colm Tóibín (Viking)

[The Master centred on Henry James](#); here Tóibín explores the life and work of Thomas Mann.



Colson Whitehead. Photograph: Daniel Roland/AFP/Getty Images

Harlem Shuffle by Colson Whitehead (Fleet)

Whitehead describes his follow-up to [The Nickel Boys](#) as a “lively heist” novel set amid the crime syndicates of 1960s New York.

Bewilderment by Richard Powers (William Heinemann)

[His tree epic The Overstory](#) was Booker shortlisted; now Powers focuses on an astrobiologist searching for life on other planets and negotiating his relationship with his troubled son.

Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth by [Wole Soyinka](#) (Bloomsbury)

The Nobel laureate’s first novel in almost 50 years promises “murder, mayhem and no shortage of drama” in contemporary Nigeria.

The Thursday Murder Club 2 by Richard Osman (Viking)

Last year the *Pointless* co-host’s cosy crime debut set in a retirement home broke sales records; here comes the sequel.

Waters of Salvation by Richard Coles (W&N)

A new crime series from everyone’s favourite vicar begins as a proposal to refurbish a village church ends in murder; Canon Daniel Clement must investigate.

Oh, William! by Elizabeth Strout (Viking)

Following 2019’s much loved *Olive, Again*, a new novel from the Pulitzer prize-winner.

Matrix by Lauren Groff (William Heinemann)

The follow-up to US hit *Fates and Furies* traces a 12th-century Frenchwoman who becomes the prioress of a failing abbey in England.

Snow Country by Sebastian Faulks (Hutchinson)

A new novel from the *Birdsong* author, set against the build-up to the second world war.

Checkout 19 by Claire-Louise Bennett (Jonathan Cape)

The second novel from the author of *Pond* is about a woman “who finds herself in love, in conflict with life and death, and in a life made of books”.

A Calling for Charlie Barnes by Joshua Ferris (Viking)
A novel of fathers and sons from the Booker-shortlisted US author of *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*.

The Whistleblower by Robert Peston (Zaffre)
The journalist's debut thriller is set amid dodgy interests in 1997, with New Labour on the brink of power.

Untitled by Bernard Cornwell (HarperCollins)
The historical novelist's first Sharpe novel since 2006's *Sharpe's Fury*.

Poetry

All The Names Given by Raymond Antrobus (Picador)
Antrobus explores his own ancestry to trace how the long legacies of colonialism and the more immediate influences of childhood play themselves out.

The Owl and the Nightingale by Simon Armitage (Faber)
After *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*, the poet laureate returns to Middle English verse and the argument between two birds that was captured in literature's first "debate poem".

Nonfiction

Rationality by Steven Pinker (Allen Lane)
A "toolkit for thinking rationally" from the psychologist and outspoken atheist convinced that everything is getting better

Untitled by Eileen Atkins (Virago)
A memoir from the award winning actor and co-creator of *Upstairs, Downstairs*.



Ai Wei Wei's memoir will be published in September. Photograph: Peter Parks/AFP/Getty Images

Untitled by Ai Wei Wei (Bodley Head)

A memoir and cultural history from the Chinese artist and activist, who has taken critical stances against his country's government.

Foragers and Kings by David Graeber and David Wengrow (Allen Lane)

A new history of humanity, finished three weeks before the death last year of the anthropologist and anarchist Graeber.

Terry Pratchett: The Official Biography by Rob Wilkins (Doubleday)

The life of the much-loved author of the Discworld series by his right-hand man and friend for 25 years.



Terry Pratchett in 2008. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/REX

On Freedom by Maggie Nelson (Jonathan Cape)

The hugely influential writer of *The Argonauts* considers how the concept of freedom is used and abused in relation to art, sex, drugs and climate.

Greek Myths by Charlotte Higgins (Jonathan Cape)

An inspired retelling by the Guardian journalist of the story of Heracles, the Trojan war and other tales – as if they were scenes being woven on to textiles by women.

The Gold Machine by Iain Sinclair (Oneworld)

The psychogeographer and phrasemaker retraces with his daughter a journey to Peru made in 1891 by his great-grandfather.

Shutdown: How the Coronavirus Made a Financial Revolution by Adam Tooze (Allen Lane)

A high-speed account from the respected historian of how Covid-19 ravaged the global economy.

Hard Times: The Permanent Problem of Political (Dis)order by Helen Thompson (OUP)

A dissection of our political predicament by the Cambridge professor and contributor to the *Talking Politics* podcast

October



Dune will be released in October. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

1 Release of *Dune*, based on Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic starring Oscar Isaac, Rebecca Ferguson and Timotheé Chalamet.

3 Twenty-five years since the premiere of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*.

8-17 Cheltenham literature festival.

18 Seventy-fifth anniversary of Thomas the Tank Engine's debut in the second of the Rev W Awdry's children's books.

Fiction

Crossroads by Jonathan Franzen (4th Estate)

A hat tip to *Middlemarch* in the first of the *A Key to All Mythologies* trilogy, examining the myths and realities of American life through the story of one family in the 1970s.

Burntcoat by Sarah Hall (Faber)

A dying sculptor looks back on her erotic life during lockdown in a new novel from the acclaimed short-story writer.



Jennifer Egan. Photograph: Tim Knox/Tim Knox (commissioned)

The Thing That Changes Everything by Jennifer Egan (Corsair)
New fiction from the author of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *Manhattan Beach*.

Case Study by Graeme Macrae Burnet (Saraband)
From the Booker-shortlisted author of [His Bloody Project](#), a metafictional investigation into analysis and responsibility focused on a controversial 60s psychotherapist.

Another Name: Septology VI-VII by Jon Fosse, translated by Damion Searls (Fitzcarraldo)
The concluding volume in a major series from the great Norwegian writer.

Diary of A Suburban Lady by Lucy Mangan (Souvenir)
The Guardian journalist's first novel is a comedy of domestic life, inspired by EM Delafield's classic [Diary of a Provincial Lady](#).

The Selfless Act of Breathing by JJ Bola (Dialogue)
Raw novel about a young Londoner facing police brutality and political angst, who must decide if his life is worth living.

Poetry



Louise Glück. Photograph: Daniel Ebersole/AP

Winter Recipes from the Collective by Louise Glück (Carcanet)
2020 Nobel literature laureate's first poetry collection in seven years.

Nonfiction

Orwell's Roses by Rebecca Solnit (Granta)

The American writer takes a distinctive approach to Orwell's life and messages, centred on his love of nature and gardening.



David Sedaris. Photograph: Publicity image

A Carnival of Snackeries by [David Sedaris](#) (Little, Brown)

More funny vignettes and revelations from the American humorist in a second volume of diaries, following *Theft by Finding*.

HG Wells by Claire Tomalin (Viking)

The renowned biographer of Pepys, Jane Austen, Dickens and others has long been at work on this study of the author of [*The War of the Worlds*](#) and *The Invisible Man*.

This Book Is a Song by Jarvis Cocker (Jonathan Cape)

The Pulp frontman and broadcaster, who is in danger of becoming a national treasure, writes about creativity.

Spiderwoman by [Lady Hale](#) (Bodley Head)

A memoir from the former president of the supreme court of the UK with the spider brooch, known for her bombshell ruling that Boris Johnson's decision to suspend parliament in the run-up to the Brexit deadline in 2019 was unlawful.

The Joy of Small Things by Hannah Jane Parkinson (Faber)

A witty and wise appreciation of the small pleasures of life from the Guardian columnist.



Lady Hale during the verdict on the prorogation of British parliament, 24 September 2019. Photograph: Supreme Court/HANDOUT HANDOUT/EPA

Taste: My Life Through Food by Stanley Tucci (Fig Tree)

The Devil Wears Prada and *The Hunger Games* actor on growing up in an Italian American family, and the importance of a good meal

Winston Churchill by Tariq Ali (Verso)

A biography, likely to be the “life and crimes” rather than the “life and times” of the wartime leader and imperialist.

Everything, All the Time, Everywhere by Stuart Jeffries (Verso)

A history of postmodernism, from the early 70s to now, appearing at a moment when it is so often implicated in the culture wars.

November

Booker prize awarded.

Fifty years since the Booker prize went to VS Naipaul for *In a Free State*, the first winner of colour.

11 Bicentenary of the birth of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Fiction

Untitled by [John Banville](#) (Viking)
A new novel from the Booker-winning author of *The Sea*.



Helen Oyeyemi. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Peaces by Helen Oyeyemi (Faber)
The story of a mysterious train journey from the ingenious author of *White Is for Witching* and *Mr Fox*.

Twelve Percent Dread by Emily McGovern (Picador)
Second graphic novel from the *Bloodlust and Bonnets* author, in which two young women navigate the anxieties of modern life in London.

The Gardener by Salley Vickers (Viking)
The follow-up to 2019's *Grandmothers*.

Poetry

Howdie-Skelp by Paul Muldoon (Faber)
Muldoon's compelling capaciousness here takes in a remake *The Waste Land*, an elegy for his fellow Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson, sonnet responses to lockdown and translations from 9th-century Irish.

Nonfiction

Silent Catastrophes: Essays on Literature by [WG Sebald](#) (Hamish Hamilton)

A collection of literary criticism from the author of *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn*.

The Waste Land: TS Eliot, Ezra Pound and the Making of a Masterpiece by Matthew Hollis (Faber)

The poet, editor and Costa biography award-winning author of a study of Edward Thomas considers the writing of one of the 20th century's most famous poems.



Steve Van Zandt with Bruce Springsteen. Photograph: Dave Allocca/StarPix/REX/Shutterstock

Untitled memoir by Steve Van Zandt (White Rabbit)

Recollections from the guitarist in Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, who also starred in *The Sopranos*.

December

12 Bicentenary of the birth of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, best known for [Madame Bovary](#).

27 One hundred and fifty years since the publication of *Through The Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll's second Alice novel.

- The article was amended on 3 January. An earlier version incorrectly referred to to the “East Street Band” when the E Street Band was meant.

Film

Joan Micklin Silver, Crossing Delancey director, dies aged 85

One of the few women film-makers working in Hollywood in the 1970 and 80s was best known for her Jewish-themed films set in New York's Lower East Side



Joan Micklin Silver, who has died aged 85. Photograph: Ron Galella/Ron Galella Collection/Getty Images

Joan Micklin Silver, who has died aged 85. Photograph: Ron Galella/Ron Galella Collection/Getty Images

[Andrew Pulver](#)

[@Andrew_Pulver](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.06 EST

Joan Micklin Silver, the American film-maker best known for the Jewish-inflected romcom *Crossing Delancey* and the largely Yiddish-language immigrant romance *Hester Street*, has died aged 85. [The New York Times reported](#) that Silver's daughter Claudia said the cause of death was vascular dementia.

Silver was both one of the few female directors operating in US cinema in the 1970s, as well as one of the few film-makers that tackled specifically Jewish material – still a rarity in a Hollywood that had traditionally been dominated by Jewish figures in production and studio roles.

Having made a series of documentary shorts and gained a credit as a writer on the Hollywood picture *Limbo* (1972), about the wives of soldiers serving in Vietnam, Silver attempted to get [her feature debut off the ground](#). *Hester Street*, adapted from Abraham Cahan's novel *Yekl*, detailed the experiences of Yiddish-speaking immigrants to New York; it was named after the street that was then part of the Jewish Lower East Side. Hollywood studios were notoriously reluctant at the time to back a female director; instead the film, which provided an early role for Carol Kane, was produced by Silver's real-estate developer husband Raphael, who raised over \$300,000 for the budget. Cleverly evoking the style of 1930s Yiddish cinema, with black and white visuals and melodramatic acting, *Hester Street* was an indie hit on its release in 1975, making back its budget several times over.



Amy Irving (centre) in *Crossing Delancey*, with Ruby Payne, left and Sylvia Miles. Photograph: Warner Bros/Allstar

After a TV movie based on the F Scott Fitzgerald story *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, Silver and her husband teamed up for her second feature, *Between the*

Lines, about the struggles of an alternative newspaper based in Boston that is taken over by a conglomerate. Released in 1977, its cast featured a list of future major names, including Jeff Goldblum, John Heard, Lindsay Crouse and Marilu Henner.

Silver's third film, a 1979 adaptation of Ann Beattie's novel 'Chilly Scenes of Winter, marked a step upwards in financial terms, with backing from Hollywood studio United Artists, but it proved a troubled experience; it became something of a sleeper hit after the original upbeat ending and title were both dispensed with.

Silver marked time with more TV movies until she returned to features in 1988 with what remains her best known film: Crossing Delancey. Like her debut, it was set in the Lower East Side, and also revolved around a female protagonist experiencing the push-pull of tradition and assimilation; the film's star is Amy Irving, then married to Steven Spielberg. Crossing Delancey shares considerable DNA with When Harry Met Sally, released a year later, as well as the TV sitcom Seinfeld, which also began its nine-year run in 1989.

Thereafter Silver directed middling Hollywood comedies such as Loverboy and Big Girls Don't Cry ... They Get Even. Television provided more fertile territory, with a string of productions including the Warsaw ghetto drama In the Presence of Mine Enemies (1997), starring Armin Mueller-Stahl and Charles Dance and eating disorder drama Hunger Point (2003), with Barbara Hershey and Christina Hendricks, which became Silver's final credit.

Film

Interview

Robin Williams's widow: 'There were so many misunderstandings about what had happened to him'

Hadley Freeman



'It infuriated me when the media said he'd been drinking, because recovering addicts looked up to him and they deserve to know the truth' ... Robin and Susan Schneider Williams. Photograph: Frank Micelotta/PictureGroup/AP Images

'It infuriated me when the media said he'd been drinking, because recovering addicts looked up to him and they deserve to know the truth' ... Robin and Susan Schneider Williams. Photograph: Frank Micelotta/PictureGroup/AP Images

Susan Schneider Williams watched her husband suffer with undiagnosed Lewy body dementia before he killed himself in 2014. A new film tries to educate others about the condition – and put to rest assumptions about his death



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

After Robin Williams [died](#) in August 2014, aged 63, a lot of people had a lot of things to say about him. There was the predictable speculation about why a hugely beloved and seemingly healthy Hollywood star would end his own life, with some confidently stating that he was depressed or had succumbed to old addictions.

Others talked, with more evidence, about Williams as a comic genius ([Mork & Mindy](#), [Mrs Doubtfire](#), [The Birdcage](#), [Aladdin](#)); a brilliant dramatic actor ([Dead Poets Society](#), [Awakenings](#), [Good Will Hunting](#), [One Hour Photo](#)); and both ([Good Morning, Vietnam](#); [The Fisher King](#)). One thing everyone agreed on was that he had an extraordinary mind. Comedians spoke about how no one thought faster on stage than Williams; those who made movies with him said he never did the same take twice, always ad-libbing and getting funnier each time.

[Robin Williams remembered: 'A remarkable performer, a brutal shock'](#)

[Read more](#)

Williams knew this about himself. In Marina Zenovich's 2018 HBO documentary about Williams, [Come Inside My Mind](#), we hear an old

interview in which he is asked if he has any fears. Williams replies: “I guess I fear my consciousness becoming, not just dull, but a rock. I couldn’t spark.” It wasn’t until after he died that doctors were able to see that Williams’s worst fears had come true: the autopsy suggested that he had suffered from severe Lewy body dementia (LBD), more commonly referred to in the UK as dementia with Lewy bodies.

Talking to me from her home in Marin County, California, Williams’s widow, Susan Schneider Williams, tells me: “The doctors said to me after the autopsy: ‘Are you surprised that your husband had Lewy bodies throughout his entire brain and brain stem?’ I didn’t even know what Lewy bodies were, but I said: ‘No, I’m not surprised.’ The fact that something had infiltrated every part of my husband’s brain? That made perfect sense.”

Lewy bodies are abnormal clumps of protein that gather in brain cells and are thought to be responsible for 10% to 15% of dementia cases. People with LBD tend to experience, among other things, anxiety, memory loss, hallucinations and insomnia, and these symptoms are generally accompanied or followed by Parkinson’s symptoms. Since getting that diagnosis, Schneider Williams has made it her mission to correct misassumptions about her husband’s death, to educate others about this still relatively little known brain disease, and to find out what her husband endured while he was – unbeknownst to either of them – suffering from LBD.

So questions about Williams the celebrity are greeted by her with barely suppressed frustration (“Was I a *fan* of his? Um, I’m not really a fan of anybody”), but when I ask about the crossovers between LBD and Parkinson’s, she literally bounces in her seat with excitement: “OK, that’s a great question!” she says, launching into a detailed explanation of the relationship between Parkinson’s, LBD and Alzheimer’s, and how LBD can often be misdiagnosed as one of the others. When she first had the idea of making a movie about LBD, she pitched it as a straight science film (“the director laughed”). So she compromised and made Robin’s Wish, a very affecting documentary about her husband’s experience of the illness. “If my husband weren’t famous I would not have put myself through this. But there were so many misunderstandings out there about what had happened to him, and about Lewy bodies. So this felt like the right thing to do,” she says.

Schneider Williams is neither a neurologist nor a film-maker but an artist and, as if to prove her bona fides, behind her is a canvas and easel, all set up. “Robin and I loved to go to museums together. He was a big history buff, so he would bring the history and I would bring the art side and we would double our fun. People tend to assume that the guy he was on stage was the guy he was at home, and let me make it clear: I would never marry somebody like that,” she says with emphasis.

So he wasn’t [riffing in different voices](#) while making soup for lunch?

“Definitely not. The man at home, my husband, he was quiet, contemplative, an intellectual. The standup and acting, that was his work.”

Schneider Williams met Williams in late 2007, when she happened to stop in at the local Apple store. “I walked in and saw this man and I thought: ‘I think that’s [Robin Williams](#).’ Then on my way out I happened to look at him again and he was smiling at me and something inside me said: ‘Oh, just go over and say hi.’ He was wearing camouflage print so I said: ‘How’s that camo working out for you?’ And he said: ‘Not too good – you found me.’” Four years later they got married, his third marriage and her second, and they lived in Marin County, with her two young sons from a previous relationship. Just two years later, the symptoms started.

[Robin Williams: 'I was shameful, did stuff that caused disgust – that's hard to recover from'](#)

[Read more](#)

Initially, Williams complained of stomach pains. Then his hand started trembling and he had terrible insomnia. Even more noticeable to Schneider Williams was his spiralling anxiety. “It was very out of character for Robin to be so paranoid. And that was the start of this 10 months drumbeat of increasing symptoms, and the thing with LBD is the symptoms don’t come all at once – they change. So they’re incredibly confusing to the patient and caregiver,” she says.

Some of the most moving parts of Robin’s Wish are the interviews with people whom Williams worked with towards the end. David E Kelly, who created the sitcom [The Crazy Ones](#), which Williams starred in, describes

him having to hide his tremoring hand in his pocket. Shawn Levy, the director of the [Night at the Museum](#) franchise, recalls Williams saying to him: “I’m not me any more”, adding: “His brain was not firing at the same speed, the joy wasn’t there.”

In early May 2014, Robin was diagnosed with Parkinson’s, and he started to let his children know (he has one son, Zak, from his first marriage, and a daughter, Zelda, and son, Cody, from his second). But Parkinson’s didn’t really explain the paranoia, the delusional looping, the mild depression and the anxiety, most of which, Schneider Williams says, were being treated as “satellite issues”, as opposed to part of an interconnected neurological problem. Williams’s behaviour was getting so extreme that he and his wife made the decision to go to a neurocognitive testing facility. A week before they were due to go, Williams killed himself. “I think he didn’t want to go. I think he thought: ‘I’m going to get locked up and never come out,’” Schneider says with a catch in her voice.

After Williams died, it was [widely reported](#) that he had been suffering from depression, alcoholism, or both. To Schneider, this shows “how we as a culture don’t have the vocabulary to discuss brain disease in the way we do about depression. Depression is a symptom of LBD and it’s not about psychology – it’s rooted in neurology. His brain was falling apart.” Williams had struggled with addictions in the past, but Schneider Williams says that wasn’t the problem this time.



Williams as Mork in *Mork & Mindy*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy Stock Photo

He had briefly checked into a rehabilitation centre in 2014, but that was, she says, “to take time out, do some meditation, go deeper into the recovery work. Robin had been clean and sober for eight years when he passed.” (In Dave Itzkoff’s 2018 biography of Williams, Wendy Asher, a friend, confirms addiction wasn’t the problem: “This wasn’t that. This was a medical problem. Susan thought everything would be fixed through AA, and it just wasn’t true.”) Schneider Williams continues: “It infuriated me when the media said he’d been drinking, because I know there are recovering addicts out there who looked up to him, people dealing with depression who looked up to him, and they deserve to know the truth.”

Ever since his breakthrough as the gentle alien in *Mork & Mindy*, Williams sparked a fondness in the public that came closer to love. News of his passing caused a shudder of global grief that went far beyond the usual response to a celebrity death. Partly that came from the shock. But it was mainly to do with Williams. Whereas other wildly successful comedians tend to come across as prickly, unhinged or both, Williams always had an extremely endearing sweetness to him – a vulnerability but coupled with such intelligence and self-awareness that he seemed both sage-like and oddly relatable. His epigrams about addiction (“Cocaine is God’s way of

telling you that you have too much money") and depression ("Remember, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem") are so beloved they have become adages.

Julie Kavner, best known now as the voice of Marge Simpson, worked with Williams in the films *Awakenings* and [Deconstructing Harry](#). "Honest to God, walking down the street with Robin was like walking with Mother Teresa, the way people would react to him," she tells me. "I remember once we were walking through the East Village in New York while shooting *Deconstructing Harry* and no one asked him for a photo or autograph. They would just come up to him, really calm, and all they wanted to do was give him a high five, or touch him. His spirit was just so out there, and people wanted to thank him. I'm about to cry just thinking about it."



On the set of *Good Will Hunting* with Gus Van Sant and Matt Damon.
Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy Stock Photo

Gus Van Sant, who directed Williams in *Good Will Hunting*, had the same experience with him: "People were just so happy to see him. They were like: 'Oh, it's you!' and hug him without even asking. I've never seen that with any other famous person I've worked with. Sean Connery [who Van Sant directed in *Finding Forrester*] would have been like: 'Dear God, have some decency!' But Robin would hug them back. He had that soft side, and he

was receptive to people and things around him. I remember once going with him to an art gallery and he would really take in the ideas in the pieces of art. He'd be like: 'Oh, look at this! And this!' He was like a kid in a candy shop." Van Sant echoes Schneider Williams in describing Williams as "very serious", but adds: "Although he would regularly break into comedy routines, just to make the cast and crew laugh."

"When we were making Awakenings, we were filming in the deserted part of a mental hospital, and often shooting through the night," says Kavner. "And there was this TV in the corner on mute, and Robin, between breaks during the scenes, would go off on a riff, inventing dialogue on the TV show, entertaining everyone at 3am, whatever time. It was a very tough role that he did a phenomenal amount of research for, but he didn't keep to himself between takes – he was out there, giving to everyone."

After he died, doctors were shocked by the extent to which the Lewy bodies had gathered in Williams's brain, with one describing it as one of the worst cases he had ever seen. Schneider Williams is certain the LBD led to her husband's suicide; professionals in dementia that I spoke with, while sympathetic to Schneider Williams, say it's impossible to make a direct link between the two. "LBD can be a devastating diagnosis, but if people get the right support and treatment, then they may be able to have a good quality of life for a number of years," Rachel Thompson from [Dementia](#) UK and the Lewy Body Society told me. Sadly, Williams never got the diagnosis, therefore never got the treatment, and so found himself, for reasons he couldn't understand, unable to give as much as he wanted to the people around him.



A memorial for Williams in San Francisco. Photograph: Eric Risberg/AP

“But Robin still tends to show up when I need him. About an hour before this interview I saw him in the yard,” says Schneider Williams. “But when he’s not there, I think of my friend, my love, and I miss him.”

- Robin’s Wish is released digital and on demand in the UK on 4 January. [More information on the American Brain Foundation.](#)
- In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

[Hadley Freeman's Weekend column](#)[US news](#)

My naughty cousin Catie Lazarus was the funniest woman in any room – how I'll miss her

Covid denied her a proper funeral, so it meant a lot to see the love for her from Lin-Manuel Miranda, Kristen Schaal and others



Catie Lazarus (left) and Zadie Smith in Employee Of The Month, Joe's Pub, New York, in 2017. Photograph: Abel Fermin/Rex/Shutterstock

Catie Lazarus (left) and Zadie Smith in Employee Of The Month, Joe's Pub, New York, in 2017. Photograph: Abel Fermin/Rex/Shutterstock



[Hadley Freeman](#)

[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

My cousin Catie Lazarus died last month. She was 44. No, not from Covid – the other big C, which, it turns out, does not take a break even during a pandemic. One of Catie’s and my running jokes was about how Jewish we both look: “We’re like a Nazi propaganda poster,” she said, catching our reflection in her bathroom mirror when I stayed with her in 2014, just after she started chemotherapy. So I like to think she would have got a kick out of the fact that she died in the middle of Hanukah. Although she would have then joked that she wasn’t sure if that made her a good Jew or a very bad one.

Covid denied her a proper funeral, so it meant a lot to Catie’s family to see all the love for her on social media, from people including [Lin-Manuel Miranda](#) and [Kristen Schaal](#). Because Catie wasn’t just my cousin, she was a public figure, one who was [interviewed in the New York Times](#) and written about [in the New Yorker](#). She was a lot of things – a writer, a comedian, a podcaster – and underpinning them all, she was just funny. God, she was funny. Whether she was on stage or just chatting with me, she would throw out funny asides like a catherine wheel spitting sparks. But she always

laughed hardest – a big, open-mouthed laugh – at other people’s (less funny) jokes.

I was initially regretful when she quit her degree in psychology, after Tina Fey – of all people – encouraged her to pursue comedy. Because Catie was funny, but even more than that, she was empathetic. In our last email exchange, she tried to persuade me to move back to the US, promising to help me find childcare. Catie didn’t have children of her own – the cancer scuppered that – but always thought about the needs of friends with kids without prompting or bitterness. On a trip to London this time last year, she schlepped all the way across town just to get a photo of my children with her, even though the two of us had seen each other already that day.

I was sorry Catie quit her degree because she’d have made a great psychologist. But she found a way to combine psychology with comedy in her hugely popular regular live event, [Employee Of The Month](#), in which she interviewed people including Gloria Steinem, David Simon and Zadie Smith about how they started their careers. After he left The Daily Show, Jon Stewart chose to give her [his first interview](#). Honestly, she knew everyone, and she introduced me to all of them and they all had their Catie story, usually involving her somewhat fluid sense of timekeeping, and always her generosity. When I moved back to New York a few years ago, I quickly learned that “I’m Catie Lazarus’s cousin” got me into far more fun things than “I’m a Guardian journalist”.

Catie was only two years older than me, and we looked so much alike she felt more like a sister than a cousin. I took my first solo plane ride to visit, flying from New York to DC when I was eight, to stay with her family, sharing her bed. I’d recently had a sleepover at a friend’s house around the corner from our apartment, but ended up calling my parents, weeping with homesickness. In DC, I didn’t cry once. Why would I? I was with Catie.

Our parents come from a big family so our childhood was punctuated with weddings, bar- and batmitzvahs around the country, and my mother persuaded me to go to all of them by promising me Catie would be there. She was naughty, but not bad, telling the waiters at our cousin Wendy’s batmitzvah that it was actually my party so they would bring us extra cake, and then laughing hysterically when her trick worked.

After I moved to London, we saw each other less but there was never any mental distance. When I went through my first heartbreak, it was Catie I turned to, sending her novel-length emails about my pain, and she always responded in equal depth.

[It's time for Ivanka Trump to step out of her Dad's shadow. But how? | Hadley Freeman](#)
[Read more](#)

But she did not ask of others what she gave to them. “Wait, I wanna know more about *you*,” was her refrain when I’d ask how she was. When she got the cancer diagnosis, she invited me to stay with her, but did not want to talk about the illness. On her trip to London last year, she – for the first time – talked about her prognosis a little, and said she had a scan the following week. When I emailed to ask how it went, she didn’t reply.

Catie took me to so many fabulous parties, but, honest to God, she was always the funniest, kindest and sparkiest person in the room, although she never understood that. She also never knew – but I did – that she was so much braver than me: she was cheekier than I ever dared, and left further education to pursue her dream, a road I am far too conventional to take. Had I been diagnosed with cancer in my 30s, I’d have told everyone, seeking comfort – but Catie shared her diagnosis with almost no one, telling colleagues she just fancied cutting off her hair. It is the cruellest twist that the woman who knew everyone couldn’t have anyone at her funeral. She had an amazing life but, man, she deserved so much more. I know I never deserved her, but I’m so angry that I didn’t get more.

2021.01.02 - Lifestyle

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Waste notFood

There's no need to peel ginger

There's so much waste when you peel fresh ginger, and it's really not necessary – either scrape off the outer skin, or just chop it up peel and all



Keep 'em peeled: Tom Hunt's pickled sushi ginger. Photograph: Tom Hunt/The Guardian

Keep 'em peeled: Tom Hunt's pickled sushi ginger. Photograph: Tom Hunt/The Guardian

[Tom Hunt](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

I used to peel my ginger badly, trimming off chunks of skin until I was left with a hexagonal prism and throwing a good third of the original unpeeled knob in the bin. Then a friend gave me this brilliant tip: instead of using a peeler, simply rub off the outer layer of skin with the back of a knife or spoon. These days, however, I rarely peel ginger at all; instead, I grate or finely chop it skin on, so now I waste nothing and get the benefits from the extra fibre, too. The skin is so papery, it all but disappears as it cooks, anyway.

In my experience, ginger keeps best unwrapped at room temperature in a dry place out of direct sunlight. That way, instead of moulding, it slowly dries out, preserving it for ever more (if you do want to store it in the fridge, it keeps best in an airtight container). If you have an abundance of ginger, you can preserve it by finely chopping it, freezing it on a plate, then crumbling it into a plastic tub and storing in the freezer for as long as is needed. Alternatively, preserve it by pickling it sushi-style.

Pickled sushi ginger

Just a nubbin of fresh ginger will make a nice jar of sushi ginger to keep in the fridge. This recipe makes a small batch, so multiply according to the amount you'd like to preserve. It's a fun way to preserve a glut of ginger, including the skin. Pickled ginger can be used in place of regular ginger in most recipes, so long as you take the extra acidity into consideration. Sushi ginger is traditionally made with young shoots with a pink tip that naturally dyes it a subtle, blushing pink. If you want to imitate that colour, add a small slice of beetroot to the jar before pouring in the vinegar.

50g ginger

1 tsp sea salt

150ml rice vinegar, or cider or white-wine vinegar

2 tbsp unrefined sugar, or honey

Wash the ginger, trim off any tough ends, but leave the skin on, then finely slice with a knife, peeler or mandoline. Boil 250ml water in a small pan with half a teaspoon of sea salt, add the sliced ginger and simmer for a minute (or up to three if you prefer a milder kick). Drain through a sieve, squeeze out any excess liquid and transfer the ginger to a small sterilised jar. In the same pan, bring the vinegar to a boil, take off the heat and stir in the sugar or honey or sugar and the remaining half-teaspoon of salt, until dissolved. Pour over the ginger, seal and leave to cool, then store in the fridge indefinitely.

[Sali Hughes on beauty](#)[Fashion](#)

Sali Hughes' favourite skincare products of 2020

I've had more lipstick-free days this year than over the previous three decades. But these products proved indispensable



‘Skincare channelled our need for self-care.’ Photograph: Alex Lake/The Guardian

‘Skincare channelled our need for self-care.’ Photograph: Alex Lake/The Guardian



Sali Hughes

@salihughes

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

At the beginning of each year, I share my most used and loved products of the past 12 months – and this time the task is very different. I can't pick a lipstick because I've had more lipstick-free days in 2020 than over the previous three decades. Foundation was another thing I left aside, except for high days and holidays, as I was either in pyjamas inside or a mask outside.

Skincare, though, channelled our greater need for self-care, and used up newfound free time. And for me, some products still proved indispensable in this most freakish, high-anxiety, low-maintenance of years. At the time of writing, I have used Skin+Me's prescription cream every night for almost four months – a personal record for someone who must frequently abandon beloved products in the name of testing the next. I answered a questionnaire, uploaded some bare-faced selfies, entered my card details (£3.50 for month one, £19.99 thereafter) and waited for a real-life dermatologist to prescribe precisely the right formula to tackle my self-selected hitlist: melasma (brown patches of pigmentation); age-inevitable loss of firmness; general texture and dullness (a trademark of pandemic-related agoraphobia). Within a week I'd received my first monthly night cream (vegan), containing niacinamide, prescription-strength azelaic acid and tretinoin, the ante of which is raised

with each delivery of the plastic-free click-doser. The effect on my skin is undeniable: tone is more even, pores are noticeably smaller and the very subtle increments in active ingredients meant I did not have a day's redness or irritation.

[The 30 best facial skincare products for under £20 | Sali Hughes](#)
[Read more](#)

Somewhat more frivolous, and all the better for it, is [Biossance's Squalane + Rose Vegan Lip Balm](#) (£16 for 10g), a silky emollient that soothes cracked winter lips while depositing exactly the right amount of restrained, gender-neutral gloss. It's been a lovely, feelgood frippery in miserable times, and may just be my favourite lip balm ever.

[Honest Beauty's Hydrogel Cream](#) is frequently sold out, but I urge you to persevere. It is, quite simply, the perfect moisturiser, softening and hydrating all skin types of all ages, and providing an ideal base for the smooth buffing of makeup. At £25 for 50ml, it's not cheap, but [Versed's Skin Soak Rich Moisture Cream](#) (£16.50 for 43g) is a more affordable alternative, and another I've demolished at a rate of knots. Despite skincare's dominance, some exceptional colour products continued to offer cheer and solace in 2020. My pick of those appears on 16 January, after a break next week.

[The new vegan](#) [Vegan food and drink](#)

Meera Sodha's vegan recipe for spiced beetroot with 60-minute injera flatbread

A quick version of the spongy-sour Ethiopian flatbread made with nutritious teff flour, ideal for dabbing into dips, sauces or this spiced beetroot



Meera Sodha's spiced beetroot with 60-minute injera. Photograph: Louise Hagger/The Guardian. Food styling: Emily Kydd. Prop styling: Jennifer Kay. Food styling assistant: Susanna Unsworth

Meera Sodha's spiced beetroot with 60-minute injera. Photograph: Louise Hagger/The Guardian. Food styling: Emily Kydd. Prop styling: Jennifer Kay. Food styling assistant: Susanna Unsworth



[Meera Sodha](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.30 EST

Injera is a fermented Ethiopian flatbread with a pleasing, sour flavour and a spongy, sauce-soaking texture. As with other fermented breads (such as sourdough and dosa), injera dough usually requires a starter culture, which can take days. Today's recipe is the cheat's version, soured with yeast and vinegar, which is still very satisfying to eat and make, but not quite the same as the original. Injera is usually eaten with *misir wot*, or spiced lentils, but this sweet spiced beetroot also works very well with the sourness of injera.

Spiced beetroot with 60-minute injera

You can find [teff](#) flour in healthfood stores, [online](#) and in specialist food stores. You'll need a good nonstick pan with a lid to cook the injera.

Prep 15 min

Rest 1 hr

Cook 25 min

Serves 4

For the injera

250g teff flour

80g plain flour
7g dried yeast
1 ¼ tsp fine sea salt
2 ½ tbsp cider vinegar
Rapeseed oil

For the beetroot

2 tbsp rapeseed oil
6 fresh curry leaves
1 tsp black mustard seeds
½ tsp cumin seed
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
1 finger chilli, finely chopped
2 medium tomatoes, roughly chopped
500g beetroot, peeled and grated
1¼ tsp fine sea salt
50g desiccated coconut (or 10 tablespoons)

Put the teff, plain flour and yeast in a large bowl, add 400ml hand-hot water (I add 150ml freshly boiled water to 250ml cold tap water), then beat with an electric whisk for a couple of minutes, until lump-free and creamy. Cover with a tea towel and leave for an hour, in which time it should rise nicely.

In the meantime, cook the beetroot. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium to high heat and, once hot, add the curry leaves, mustard seeds and cumin seeds. Cook for a minute, until the seeds pop, then add the onion and fry for five minutes, until soft. Add the garlic and chilli, cook, stirring, for a further three minutes, then add the tomatoes, beetroot and salt. Cook until the water evaporates and the mixture turns quite dry, which should take about six minutes, then stir through the coconut. Take off the heat and leave to one side while you make the injera.

Add 200ml warm water (straight from the tap is fine) to the risen injera batter along with the salt and vinegar, and mix to combine. Rub the surface of a nonstick pan with oil using kitchen paper, then set it over a medium heat. Keep a spatula and a plate to hand. Add a ladleful of batter to the pan, swirl it around into a circle and wait until the “eyes” (ie, the little holes)

have mostly disappeared and the batter has turned dark brown (around 30 seconds). Put a lid over the top of the pan for a minute, until the whole injera has turned darker (around another 30 seconds), then lever out of the pan and on to the plate, and keep warm. Add a drop more oil to the pan, if need be, and repeat with the remaining batter.

To serve, gently warm up the beetroot, bring everything to the table and let people serve themselves, tucking a spoonful of the beetroot into a folded injera.

Fit in my 40sHealth & wellbeing

Prebiotics are hard to stomach, but will your gut thank you for trying?

Since you're seeking the indigestible, whatever it is usually has to be raw – unless it's an onion



‘Underripe bananas are a surprise source of prebiotics.’ Makeup and hair: Sarah Cherry. Wardrobe: [My Gym Wardrobe](#). Photograph: Kellie French/The Guardian

‘Underripe bananas are a surprise source of prebiotics.’ Makeup and hair: Sarah Cherry. Wardrobe: [My Gym Wardrobe](#). Photograph: Kellie French/The Guardian



[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

You'll have heard of probiotics, because they're very 2015, which I have identified as the year in which everyone started talking about gut health (the phrase "gut fauna" entered the vernacular a bit later). The potted version is that you want your gut bacteria to be as varied and exciting as possible, and the best way to ensure that is by eating fermented foods: yoghurts, kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut. Cultures that are alive when you consume them.

Prebiotics are different: these are sources of indigestible fibre. Roughage, broadly, is the element of a plant or legume that won't dissolve in water, and therefore moves intact through your body, not releasing calories but doing other useful things, such as keeping you regular. There's a sub-category within that, though, of indigestible fibres that the bacteria inside your gut can digest: almost always raw, and very often weird – dandelions, acacia gum – and this will boost your bacterial environment overall.

If it helps, think of your gut more as a city than an organ, full of living creatures who need interesting feasts in order to thrive. So you boost your probiotics to increase bacterial variety in the first place – and then you bring in prebiotics to feed them. The probiotic guru is Tim Spector, now better

known for his Covid tracker, who explains the gut brilliantly in his [book Spoon Fed](#).

Since you're seeking the indigestible, whatever it is usually has to be raw, unless it's an onion. So first, I got a mandolin. You can eat anything raw if it's sliced thinly enough; if I had more slicing time, I'd be able to get rid of my oven. Raw asparagus is an acquired taste – initially, it tastes like an accident. Eventually, it tastes like itself, only fresher. Finally, underripe bananas are a surprise source of prebiotics, and really easy to eat more of. I saw all of this as extra to, rather than replacing my previous diet; I never stopped eating cooked vegetables. If you look at it as a process of inclusion rather than exclusion, it's much easier to do long term.

[Fit in my 40s: I'm fell running – so why does it look like I'm walking?](#)
[Read more](#)

The big unknowable is whether it's making any difference: this is because a healthy gut environment has an impact on so many things – sleep, mood, inflammation and everything that ripples out from those fundamental pillars of health – that it's hard to put your finger on what you'd actually measure. You have to take a completely gestalt view: "Am I feeling absolutely incredible from every angle?" And if the answer is, "not exactly", it might not necessarily be insufficient leeks. It might be too much of something else, such as beer.

After a month, I did feel more energetic; but I should disclose that this coincided with the kids going back to school. I'd say the main benefit is that you skew your attitude in a good direction. Once you anthropomorphise your bacteria, you end up treating your gut with a little more respect: less like the bog-standard apparatus you were born with, and more like a Tamagotchi, something to tend.

What I learned

One [meta study](#) identified 25 separate conditions improved by prebiotics, from allergies to immune function, IBS to bone health.

Four favourite recipesFood

Rachel Ama's big vegan brunch – recipes



Tuck in: Rachel Ama's vegan brunch – (clockwise from bottom) mixed berry crossover tarts and a sharing plate of ackee 'scramble', baked butter beans and crisp potatoes with aioli. Photograph: Ola O Smit/The Guardian. Food styling: Ellie Mulligan. Prop styling: Anna Wilkins.

Tuck in: Rachel Ama's vegan brunch – (clockwise from bottom) mixed berry crossover tarts and a sharing plate of ackee 'scramble', baked butter beans and crisp potatoes with aioli. Photograph: Ola O Smit/The Guardian. Food styling: Ellie Mulligan. Prop styling: Anna Wilkins.

Boot up your weekend brunch game with baked butter beans in a rich tomato sauce, ackee scramble, crispy crushed potatoes with a garlicky lemon aioli, and mixed berry puff-pastry tarts



[Rachel Ama](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

Mixed berry crossover puff pastry tarts

One of the first things I missed when I went vegan was picking up a flaky sweet pastry to have with a cup of tea, though back then I had no idea how easy it was to make vegan-friendly ones at home. Once I did, though, it was a wrap - no more missing out! These are quick, addictive and you can experiment with different fruit fillings, too.

Prep 5 min

Cook 40 min

Serves 6

300g frozen mixed berries

4 tbsp maple syrup

A pinch of salt

1 tbsp grated lemon zest

1 tbsp chia seeds

2 x 320g sheets ready-rolled puff pastry

1 tbsp icing sugar

Put a saucepan on a low heat and add the berries, half the maple syrup, a pinch of salt and the lemon zest. Cook until the berries have softened, then turn off the heat, add the chia seeds and stir until they've absorbed most of the liquid, by which time the berries should have a jammy texture. Taste and add more maple syrup to up the sweetness levels, if need be.

Unroll the puff pastry sheets, cut them both in half lengthways across the middle, then cut each half widthways into three equal pieces.

Place two generous tablespoons of the berry mixture in the centre of each piece of puff pastry and spread it out so there's a roughly 1½cm border at the top and bottom of each pastry rectangle. Cut the pastry at 1cm intervals on both sides of the berry mixture to the outside edge, then, starting at one end and working one by one from alternate sides, lift over the pastry strips to wrap the berries in a criss-cross, lattice-like plait. Brush the top of each parcel all over with maple syrup.

Heat the oven to 220C (200C fan)/425F/gas 7. Place the pastries on a lined oven tray and bake for about 20 minutes, until golden brown.

Remove, leave to cool, then brush with a little more maple syrup until glossy. Sprinkle with icing sugar and serve at room temperature

Ackee “scramble”

Ackee is the national fruit of Jamaica and is eaten all across the Caribbean. It's neutral, buttery flavour and soft, light texture make for a delicious alternative to scrambled eggs. Having Caribbean roots myself, our Easter Sundays were always celebrated with ackee and salt fish for breakfast and, since going vegan, I haven't given up my love for ackee.

Prep 10 min

Cook 15 min

Serves 4

1 tbsp vegetable oil

1 red onion, peeled and finely sliced

1 red chilli, finely chopped

2 plum tomatoes, diced
2 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves picked
2 spring onions, trimmed and finely sliced
1 tbsp soy sauce
Salt and black pepper
280g ackee, drained and rinsed from 1 x 540g tin
1 handful fresh chives, finely chopped

Put the oil in a saucepan over a medium to low heat, and saute the red onion for five minutes, to soften. Add the chilli, tomatoes, thyme, spring onions and soy, season with a generous pinch of salt and black pepper to taste, and cook for another five minutes. Carefully add the ackee to the saucepan and stir very gently, taking care to keep the ackee pieces whole: the goal here is not to let the ackee turn to mush. Cover the pan and leave to cook for another five minutes, until the ackee has heated through.

Gently spoon on to a platter, scatter over the chopped chives and serve.

Baked butter beans in a rich tomato sauce, paprika and red peppers

These smoky, harissa-spiced butter beans are baked to develop a richer tomato sauce that highlights the natural sweetness of the peppers and onions. Topped with fresh herbs and pistachio nuts, they make for a rather elegant brunch dish.

Prep 10 min
Cook 30 min
Serves 4

1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 red onion, peeled and finely sliced
1 red bell pepper, stem, core and seeds removed, flesh finely sliced
1 yellow bell pepper, stem, core and seeds removed, flesh finely sliced
1 tbsp harissa paste
1 tsp sweet smoked paprika
500g passata

2 x 400g tins butter beans, rinsed and drained

Salt and black pepper

1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, to finish

1 tbsp fresh lemon juice, to serve

1 small handful chopped parsley, to serve

1 small handful crushed pistachio nuts, to serve

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6. Put the vegetable oil in a large casserole dish over a medium heat and, when hot, sauté the onion and peppers, stirring occasionally, for five minutes, to soften. Stir in the harissa and paprika, sauté for five minutes more, then add the passata and butter beans, and season.

Cover the casserole and transfer to the oven for 20 minutes.

To serve, drizzle the beans with extra-virgin olive oil and fresh lemon juice, and scatter over the parsley and crushed pistachios

Crispy crushed breakfast potatoes with garlic lemon aioli

Prep 5 min

Cook 55 min

Serves 4

500g baby potatoes

3 tbsp olive oil

Sea salt and black pepper

230ml vegan mayo

1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced

1 handful curly leaf parsley

Put the potatoes in a pot of salted water, bring to a boil, cook for 10 minutes, then drain and leave to drip-dry for five minutes.

Heat the oven to 220C (200C fan)/425F/gas 7. Put the potatoes in a single layer on a large baking tray and crush each one slightly with the back of a fork, though keeping them whole. Drizzle all over with olive oil, season with a generous pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper, then roast for 40 minutes, until golden brown and crisp.

Meanwhile, make the aioli by mixing the vegan mayo with the lemon juice and minced garlic, then season to taste.

Sprinkle the chopped parsley all over the potatoes and serve with the aioli.

[Tim Dowling's Weekend column](#)[Family](#)

Tim Dowling: did you hear the one about my second favourite cardigan?

I explain the gag in some detail. The youngest one asks if anyone my age knows who Cardi B is



‘Did you wear that on stage the whole night for the sake of one joke?’

Photograph: Sophia Spring/The Guardian

‘Did you wear that on stage the whole night for the sake of one joke?’

Photograph: Sophia Spring/The Guardian



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

It's late, and my wife is driving me home from what will turn out to be the band's only gig of 2020 – the second one will soon be postponed due to tier 3 restrictions. But I don't know this yet – I still think I have another shot at it before the end of the year.

"I noticed lots of mistakes," my wife says. "And I never notice anything."

"We were nervous," I say. "Next week will be better. Anyway, the cardigan thing worked."

"You looked a bit warm," she says.

"I was wearing a cardigan," I say.

We arrive home. As I open the front door, the dog runs out between my legs. I find the oldest one and the youngest one in the kitchen, playing the same game on separate laptops.

“Anyone with shoes can help me unload,” I say. They both hold up bare feet, proudly.

“How was it?” the youngest one says.

“Not bad,” I say. “The cardigan gag worked well.”

“I’m not sure I’m familiar,” the oldest says.

“About this being my second favourite cardigan?” I say, tugging at my sleeve. He shakes his head. I explain the cardigan gag in some detail, from setup to payoff. The youngest one regards me with a sieved mixture of bemusement and concern.

“Do that many people your age know who [Cardi B](#) is?” he says.

“Not everyone there was my age,” I say.

“Did you wear that on stage the whole night for the sake of one joke?” the oldest one says.

“Your mother will testify that everyone laughed,” I say. “Where is she?” The front door is open to the night, but she has yet to come through it. The street outside the house is empty. I turn down the long lane that runs alongside our garden wall. The way is unlit, but in the distance I can see my wife’s phone screen glowing.

The dog is chasing a fox in circles around a wide lawn, and my wife is taking pictures. As I approach, the dog stops and runs towards me. The fox follows the dog. Then the dog turns around and they resume their game.

“They’re actual friends,” my wife says.

“It’s not natural,” I say, conscious of the fact that I am standing in someone else’s garden.

“The fox was sitting under the streetlamp, waiting for the dog to come out,” she says.

“It will end badly,” I say.

Some nights later I am sitting on the couch in front of the TV, with the dog next to me. The dog is chewing itself furiously, jarring my arm and causing fine ripples to appear on the surface of the glass of wine I am holding.

“Stop,” I say. The dog looks up at me, and I look down. I call my wife into the room.

“What?” she says.

“This dog is chewing holes in itself,” I say, pointing to the raw, furless patches on its back and tail.

[Tim Dowling: something very weird is going on with my neighbour's cat](#)
[Read more](#)

“When did you notice this?” she says, holding up the dog’s back leg.

“I just saw it now!” I say. My wife leaves the room, returns with some kind of dog salve, and begins to apply it.

“This is what comes from hanging out with foxes,” I say.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” my wife says. “Hold still.”

“It’s got mange,” I say.

“You’ve got mange,” my wife says. I look down the front of my favourite cardigan, cardi A.

“Actually, I probably do,” I say.

I go to my office. When I return after half an hour, my wife is watching a different TV programme. The fire is lit, and the dog is sleeping soundly in the spot where I usually sit.

“The answer to the question, ‘Can a dog catch mange from a fox?’” I say.

“Is no,” my wife says.

“Is a resounding yes,” I say. “Fox mange. The worst of the manges.”

“It’s not mange,” my wife says.

“The answer to the question, ‘Can a person catch fox mange from a dog?’” I say, “is also yes.”

“Fine,” she says. “Go to the vet together.”

“Also the gig’s off,” I say.

“Oh,” she says. “That’s sad.”

Later I receive a text from the fiddle player saying his wife thought Cardi B was something to do with the vaccine.

2021.01.02 - Take part

- Healthcare workers in the UK Share your experiences during the second wave of Covid
- UK residents How will you be impacted by Brexit?
- Coronavirus UK supermarket workers: share your experiences during the second wave of coronavirus
- Teachers in England How you are preparing for Covid testing in schools?

Health

Healthcare workers in the UK: Share your experiences during the second wave of coronavirus

We'd like to speak to healthcare workers about how they're coping with the second wave of coronavirus, and how it compares to the first

Guardian community team

Thu 31 Dec 2020 06.42 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 06.43 EST



A patient in intensive care during the coronavirus pandemic in University Hospital in Coventry, taken during mid December 2020. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

With the UK recording its [highest daily death toll](#) since April on Wednesday, and a new variant of coronavirus spreading rapidly, the strain on healthcare workers is as great as ever.

But after months of tackling coronavirus, many are experiencing high rates of stress and fatigue, and some healthcare workers have reported feeling less supported by their communities than during the first wave of the pandemic.

We'd like to speak to healthcare workers in the UK about how they're feeling.

Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below, anonymously if you wish or [via WhatsApp](#) by [clicking here](#) or adding the contact +44(0)7867825056. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions.

One of our journalists will be in contact for publication before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

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Brexit

UK residents: how will you be impacted by Brexit?

We'd like to hear from people living in the UK about how Brexit will impact them

Guardian community team

Thu 31 Dec 2020 11.21 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 11.22 EST



Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel show the signed Brexit trade agreement. Photograph: Johanna Geron/Reuters

With the Brexit deal [signed into law](#) on Thursday morning, the UK's relationship with the EU is set to change dramatically on 1 January.

We'd like to hear how you will be impacted by Britain's departure from the EU, particularly those working in industries which will be directly impacted, such as farming, pharmaceuticals and haulage. We'd also like to hear from people working in small businesses, and those who travel often.

Share your experiences

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[Coronavirus](#)

UK supermarket workers: share your experiences during the second wave of coronavirus

We'd like to speak to supermarket workers about how they're coping with the second wave of coronavirus, and how it compares to the first

[Guardian community team](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 08.44 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 08.45 EST



Shopping during the Coronavirus lock down, London, UK Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

As much of the UK comes under ever-increasing restrictions due to the second wave of coronavirus, we'd like to find out how workers in essential shops, such as supermarkets or chemists, are coping.

How are you finding the second wave, how does it compare to the first? Are you finding that people are abiding by the rules or is it difficult to enforce social distancing? Do you feel there are enough safety measures in your workplace?

Share your experiences

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Schools

Teachers in England: how you are preparing for Covid testing in schools?

We would like to hear from teachers about the preparations being made in their schools, and from parents about the possibility of more homeschooling

Guardian community team

Tue 29 Dec 2020 08.09 EST Last modified on Tue 29 Dec 2020 08.15 EST



The government is yet to decide whether schools in tier 4 should reopen on Monday as planned. Photograph: David Bagnall/Alamy Stock Photo

Amid the debate about whether or not English schools should re-open in January after scientific advisors urged a delay to the start of the new term, it was announced that [members of the armed forces will be deployed to support coronavirus testing](#) operations for thousands of school and college students in England.

We want to hear from teachers in England about how they are getting ready for testing in schools. What challenges do you face and what concerns do you have?

We would also like to hear from parents and how they feel about the prospect of more homeschooling if schools do not re-open on Monday.

Share your experiences

You can get in touch by filling in the form below. Your responses are secure as the form is encrypted and only the Guardian has access to your contributions. One of our journalists will be in contact before we publish, so please do leave contact details.

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2021.01.02 - Explore

- [21 places to go in 2021 The holidays we're dreaming of this year](#)
- ['The sea is rising, the climate is changing' The lessons learned from Mozambique's deadly cyclone](#)
- [Golden ticket The lucky tourists sitting out coronavirus in New Zealand](#)
- [Unexpected journey Hiker who spent lockdown in a hobbit hole](#)
- [Football, flights and food How the EU reshaped Britain](#)
- [It can't be worse, right? Guardian readers on their hopes and fears for 2021](#)

21 places to go in 2021: ‘The holidays we’re dreaming of this year’

[Cyclone Idai](#)

‘The sea is rising, the climate is changing’: the lessons learned from Mozambique’s deadly cyclone



Mother and farmer Palmira Mussa, 38, standing by her banana tree which is being destroyed by locusts. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

Mother and farmer Palmira Mussa, 38, standing by her banana tree which is being destroyed by locusts. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

As another severe tropical storm hits Mozambique, people still struggling to rebuild lives destroyed by 2019’s Cyclone Idai tell their stories

[Sally Williams](#)

Sat 2 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

The tree had stood in the square for nearly 100 years. It was planted by his father, before Afonso Reis was born. He worked as a driver and “liked trees”, says Reis, who is in his 70s. People used to eat the bitter red fruit, but

more recently it had provided welcome shade for the stallholders of a busy market in Beira, one of Mozambique's largest cities.

"I liked to sit under the branches," says Fina, 21, who sells tomatoes, cucumbers, onions and garlic in the market's chaotic alleyways. Others hawk bananas, oranges, secondhand clothes. Life would change but the tree seemed constant. Then something odd happened. At about 2pm on 14 March 2019, the tree suddenly keeled over and crashed to the ground. No one was hurt, but people were taken by surprise. "There was only a light wind," Fina says. "Who would have thought that a tree that size would just fall down?"

Seven hours later, the deadliest cyclone in the history of southern Africa hit Mozambique, before surging inland to Zimbabwe and Malawi. [Cyclone Idai](#) killed more than 1,000 people and devastated Beira, a sprawling port city of 500,000 people, built on a delta in the Mozambique Channel on the east coast of Africa. First there was wind, with gusts of up to 200km an hour, strong enough to blow off roofs and to send plates, chairs, even cats and dogs, airborne. The stink of rotting animals that had been flung into trees lingered for days.

Then came days of heavy rain and, finally, flooding. Beira lies at the mouth of two major rivers, the Buzi and the Pungwe; both burst their banks, submerging surrounding villages, trapping people on roofs and creating a new inland lake the size of Luxembourg. Thousands of trees were uprooted and at least 70% of the town's buildings were severely damaged, with many losing their roofs; six schools and 60 churches were totally destroyed. The cyclone closed roads and shut the airport. Supermarkets ran out of food. Bread and water were rationed. More than 146,000 people lost their homes across four provinces.

Nearly two years on, Mozambique is trying to rebuild. But we are living in a time of record-breaking natural disasters: [extreme droughts](#), [epic floods](#), [apocalyptic wildfires](#). Will we see more frequent catastrophes, such as Idai, strike countries that may not be prepared to handle them? How much is the climate crisis to blame, and what can wealthy countries do to help?

I meet Rita Chiramswuana, 51, and Fatima Vasco Limo, 45, in February, 11 months after the cyclone, in a leaky tent at Ndedia camp, which holds 2,355

people in 471 households, and is a two-hour drive from Beira. Farmers from John Segredo, a nearby village of 200 people, they have 16 children between them, including Zacarias, 11, adopted by Chiramswuana five years ago, after first his mother, then his father died.

Chiramswuana is lively, with a sparky style. She likes jewellery and wears blue nail polish and a crocheted bucket hat. Vasco Limo is quieter, more serene. They have been friends for years. “Our friendship is like this,” Chiramswuana says, holding up her index finger. “She is like the finger and I am the nail.”

Chiramswuana, her husband and nine children lived in two small houses in the village. Vasco Limo and her family had a similar arrangement. They grew their own food – cabbage, peanuts, maize, beans – had running water nearby and made enough money to send their children to school (education is free until grade 10, when pupils are 15, but parents pay for books from grade 8). They were also able to buy things for the home: plastic chairs, pans, forks. Chiramswuana had 20 ducks and 30 chickens; Vasco Limo had 15 chickens and two goats, a sign of high status in the village. Both dreamed of having a “real house” – of bricks, rather than mud and straw – and a torch. “It is very dark at night. Snakes come in and you can’t see them,” Chiramswuana says. But they were content.



Maria Mussa with her children and all their belongings, 24 hours after their home was flooded. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

There had been storms in the village before, with strong winds and heavy rain; when Vasco Limo heard neighbours talk about the cyclone, she thought this could be the same sort of thing (there was a government alert on the radio, but she doesn't have one). At 6pm, she cooked yam and other vegetables for her family. When the cyclone started at about 8pm, she was inside her house with her husband and three youngest children, aged 10, 14 and four (the others were in a nearby house). She had her chickens and goats with her.

At 9pm, the roar grew louder. There was a huge crash. "The roof blew off," she says. They sat there all night, the house open to the elements: "It was very dark. I hugged the children to me."

The world turned grey and the rain started. "The wind was like a loud fan," she says. "Drrrrrrr." Others say it felt as if "the cyclone was coming up through the earth". By 5am the wind had stopped and Vasco Limo went outside. "I could see houses had collapsed and people had died." Among them was Anna, her 60-year-old neighbour. "Then I heard people screaming, '*Socorro! Socorro!* Help! Help!' My husband ran to see what was the matter. He saw a huge mass of water – a flood – and he ran back."

We were trying to run from it but the water was coming really fast. The only thing we could do was climb a tree

Vasco Limo and her family managed to escape the flood; they were ahead of the surge and reached higher ground before the village was swamped. But Chiramswuana didn't. "People were trying to run from it but the water was coming really fast, really strong," she says. With water already up to her waist, "the only thing we could do was climb a tree. First one person climbed, then they pulled the others up. People were being passed from one to the other."

Chiramswuana was the last out of the water: she and her family stayed in the mango tree for 24 hours, in heavy rain, with no food, but too distraught to feel hunger. She sat silently on a branch with her eight-year-old daughter on

her lap, one arm around the trunk, the other around her child, trying not to look at the carnage below: “Pigs, goats, chickens, crates, speakers, DVDs – even people being washed away.” Her brother and his five-year-old son took refuge in a different tree, which collapsed. His body was found covered in sand two days later; the little boy’s body was 400 metres away.

When Chiramswuana saw Vasco Limo at the camp four days later, they fell into an exhausted embrace. Vasco Limo says of the mango tree now: “This is my God! I give thanks.” But their village has disappeared and they can’t go home. They live in makeshift shelters and rely on aid. They were given seeds and a small patch of land. But there were freak rains last January, a disastrous turn of events for people relying on their first post-cyclone harvest. “The crops are useless,” Vasco Limo says. “When we had some savings, my husband and I would say, ‘What shall we buy? A duck? A chicken?’ I was building my life. I can’t do that any more. Everything’s gone – all of it, like that.”



Fatima Vasco Limo and Rita Chiramswuana, with her son Zacarias.
Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

Today, Vasco Limo, Chiramswuana and around 2,300 other homeless people still live in the camp. They have to stand in line for aid, as their last harvest was another disaster. “Intense heat burned the crop,” Chiramswuana says.

But the most recent seeds “are growing nicely”, and there are mangoes to pick from the trees. As the months go on, Vasco Limo tells me “things are improving slowly”; she now has solar panels. But there is a new fear: Covid-19. Rates are relatively low in Mozambique, with 16,521 cases and 139 deaths recorded by December, but there is little testing, so it’s hard to know the virus’s full extent. While Ndedia is Covid-free, fear of it hangs over the camp.

The cyclone caused [\\$3.2bn worth of damage](#), equivalent to 22% of the country’s gross domestic product, or half its annual budget. The government was forced to borrow [\\$118.2m from the International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF) to respond to the emergency, taking its [national debt to a crippling \\$14.78bn](#).

For the people of Beira, the disaster defied logic. Many fell back on the beliefs of their ancestors: according to some residents, the cyclone was whipped up by a god or a demon; the winds were “a beast whistling”; the floods were caused by a “big animal with seven heads”.

Scientists have a different explanation. While the role of the climate crisis in Cyclone Idai is still not fully known, experts believe there are links to rising sea-surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean. “We are getting a much higher frequency of high-intensity storms,” says Jennifer Fitchett, associate professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Idai was followed by [Kenneth](#), another category 4 cyclone that hit the border of Mozambique and Tanzania six weeks later. (Two severe tropical cyclones in one season is very unusual for the Mozambique Channel.)

Just last week, on 30 December, Chalane, a powerful tropical storm, brought heavy rain and wind once again to Beira. The eye of the storm was north of the city, where it destroyed buildings and lifted roofs, including that of the Nhamatanda rural hospital. More than 26,000 households were affected; 265 families are now in temporary accommodation.

“There is absolutely no doubt that when there is a tropical cyclone [such as Idai], then because of climate change the rainfall intensities are higher,” says Friederike Otto, acting director of the Environmental Change Institute,

University of Oxford. “Also, because of sea level rise, the resulting flooding is more intense than it would be without human-induced climate change.”

However, the severity of Idai’s impact is explained less by the intensity of the storm and more by the fact that it struck one of the nations least prepared to deal with one. In Beira, there are a number of grand villas and commercial zones, with wide tree-lined streets, formally planned by the Portuguese under colonial occupation (Mozambique became independent in 1975). Elsewhere, thousands live packed together in poorly made buildings. The average income is less than \$3 a day, barely enough to buy 2kg of sugar and four loaves of bread. The Grande hotel, opened in 1955 for wealthy white tourists from Southern Rhodesia (then a British colony, now independent Zimbabwe) who never materialised, is now a slum. Families even live in the skeletal spiral staircase, taking advantage of the shade.

The biggest employer is the port. Established at the end of the 19th century, it is an important entry point for goods into Mozambique and beyond. Southern Rhodesia made Beira its strategic harbour in the 1930s and that legacy is still present in rail, road and pipeline links. There are some businesses – finance and microcredit – but the economy is largely informal, the men fishing and the women selling fruit, vegetables and secondhand clothes from market stalls.

Daviz Simango has been mayor of Beira since 2003. In 2014, he stood before international donors at the launch of the [Beira Master Plan](#) and warned of the danger caused by the climate crisis for a city just above sea level, with decaying sea defences and a disappearing belt of the mangroves that provide a natural defence against coastal flooding. Simango outlined an ambitious plan to boost Beira’s resilience by 2035 with a green infrastructure project that included planting 7,000 trees and re-establishing mangroves. The cyclone damage is now forcing Simango, the government of Mozambique and a retinue of global experts to come up with more urgent solutions for what he calls “Mozambique’s most climate-vulnerable city”.



Left to right: fishermen Sacura Alberto, Jose Joao Chimoio, Antonio Silvero Namangero, Damiao Victor and Pedro Peter. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

“Every day I see how the climate is changing,” Simango says when we meet. “The sea is rising, the waves are stronger and bigger. I watch how the temperature changes. It is not like it was before.”

Cyclone Idai struck when western countries were considering how to help poorer nations on the frontline of climate change. Yet at the UN [COP25 climate change conference](#) in Madrid in December 2019, policymakers failed to agree a mechanism for wealthy countries to provide financial assistance. “Imagine a poor person is standing outside a fancy restaurant,” Simango says. “You walk by that person, go into the restaurant and order food. When you have finished eating, you go outside and say to the poor person, ‘You are paying.’”

When I visit, Beira still looks as if it has been through a war. Only 30% of the city has been rebuilt: 48 schools are without a roof. “When it rains, children go home,” Simango says. “There is no school.”

Mozambique did not go on to have a total lockdown like other countries, though schools, restaurants and churches were closed after the first cases of

Covid in March. Today, the country is slowly returning to normal life. The inhabitants of Beira are worse hit by the fallout from the cyclone than the global pandemic. The Central hospital smells of damp and there are water stains on the walls. This is where the enormity of the disaster first became apparent. Doctors working in an already underfunded system treated 450 cases in three days: fractures, compression injuries, puncture wounds from debris, bluish skin and chest pains caused by near drowning.

Even now, the neonatal intensive care unit is strewn with rubble and unusable. “We have to look after those babies in the paediatric unit,” says Boniface Rodrigues, a senior doctor and hospital spokesman, pointing out that lives may have been lost as a result. “We are doing our best, but it is not neonatal intensive care as it should be.” The operating theatre was only restored eight months after the cyclone.



Security guard Netto Dezzimata, outside the now derelict rooms at Beira's sailing club, where he worked. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick

The sailing club on Beira's Macuti beach is open when I visit, though guests can sit only on the terrace and must bring their own drinks. The restaurant, outdoor gym and boat shed are still in ruins. Netto Dezzimata, 38, a security guard who helped to evacuate the club after the restaurant manager read the cyclone warnings online, explains how he survived as the club crumbled

around him. He spent the night under a concrete archway with his arms locked around a pillar. “I couldn’t see where the sea ended and the land began – all I could see was water – but, as the security guard, I had to maintain my position.”

[The Golden Peacock](#), however, is pristine. Also known as Chinatown, this gated complex near the airport includes a five-star hotel (with a Chinese restaurant, spa and casino), villas for rental, shops and an amusement park for children. Peacocks – believed to be the first birds imported into Mozambique – roam among manicured lawns and lily ponds. Owned by AFECC, a large-scale Chinese enterprise with interests including a diamond mine in Zimbabwe and an emerald mine in Zambia, as well as hotels and supermarket chains across Africa, the Golden Peacock is popular with Chinese businessmen. Guests from the hotel and the villas sat out the cyclone in the ornate reception area. The damage – although significant, with broken roofs on all the buildings – was repaired within a month.

[Nearly 92,500 people are still homeless](#), living in makeshift shelters in 71 post-cyclone camps across four provinces. The struggle now is to find a new kind of life. Antonio Silvero Namangero, 38, used to catch an abundance of fish with just a canoe and a net – redfish, corvina, shrimp, crab, prawns and, best of all, grouper. “You could sell it for a lot of money,” he says when we meet.

Like many men in the close-knit Beira neighbourhood of Palmeiras 1, he was a fisherman, as was his father. He sold his catch to restaurants, owners of gated mansions and in the market. It meant he could send his five children to school and grow his business. His first canoe made him enough money to buy a second; a second canoe meant he could hire two men. “It was a good life and we were really happy,” says Namangero, whose goal was to own his house.

Then the cyclone destroyed his home and canoes, as well as those of many other fishermen. “People were taking the wood to build fires,” he recalls.

He is settled in Mandruzi camp, run by NGOs including Unicef, Care and Oxfam, an hour's drive from Beira. Here, Namangero and his wife have turned to agriculture – encouraged by NGOs as a practical way to build independence. Their shelter sits on a plot of land with magnificent plants that dwarf his younger children: potatoes, melons, maize and beans. The heat is brutal.

"I miss the birds, the breeze, the waves," Namangero says. "In the evening I used to gather with friends and we would build a fire and start frying fish. Here, there is only cabbage. I am suffocating: first, because there is no food and no options; second, because it is so hot and airless." I ask if he sees himself as a farmer or a fisherman. "A fisherman," he replies.

Jose Joao Chimoio, 37, who is also living at the camp, shows me fish he caught on a day trip to Beira. "I wanted to remind the children that their father used to bring back fish. Right now, he brings nothing." The fishermen's aim is to make enough money from farming to buy a canoe, which costs up to £180, and "start living a normal life again".

But farming has its drawbacks. "You might spend six months farming but end up with only six bags of rice," says Amadaeu Wilson Ibraim, 40. "And those six bags of rice don't last very long. With fishing, you fish, and then you eat or sell what you fish. It's more immediate."

Namangero, Chimoio and Ibraim offer to show us the beach where their canoes were destroyed. Later that day, they catch a bus to Beira, where we meet them on the seafront. The first thing they do is run into the sea, not caring about their clothes. We stand on the beach watching them jump, swim and splash. It's Namangero's first taste of the ocean for eight months. "It is amazing," he says. "I feel like a bird, flying."

He still can't afford to buy a new boat or fishing nets, and nor can Ibraim and Chimoio. This is the reason they are still in the camp, trying to grow food. "More people are coming to live here because it does not flood, and there is electricity," Namangero says.

We visit a farm planted with maize, melons and banana palms. The crops are alive with locusts

There is another unwelcome surprise.

We visit a farm near Ndedia planted with maize, melons and banana palms. We look closer and see things moving – big, yellow and black. The crops are alive with locusts, thousands of them. “There will be hunger for the family,” says Palmira Mussa, 39, who has five children and runs the farm with her husband, Gorge Adjapi, 59. Locusts are already devouring huge parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, and experts believe the [swarms are another result of climate change](#). “The soil is wet and locusts like wet environments, so they are producing a lot compared with previous years,” says Armando Zacarias, 28, from [Kulima](#), a local NGO working with Oxfam to help camp communities grow food. Experts have since confirmed it as the worst plague of locusts in east Africa for 70 years.

Mayor Simango aims to build [“Beira Back Better”](#), which includes developing a sanitation system, improving drainage facilities and building safer schools. This is an ambitious goal: many of Beira’s citizens lacked these facilities before the cyclone. Simango says that, so far, donors have pledged 25% of the total cost of \$888m.

“Cyclone Idai taught us many lessons,” says Carlos da Barca, 47, deputy administrator of Dondo, a district bordering Beira. “We have better tools for weather forecasts, better ways to inform our citizens. But that is all we have: the power to inform, not to respond.” Today, Mozambique is still ill-equipped to avert catastrophe. Poverty, scarce resources and lack of investment to combat the climate crisis continue to threaten millions of lives. “While we can predict tropical cyclones days in advance, early warnings only help to save lives if people have somewhere safe to go,” Dr Otto says.

Aid agencies argue for disaster preparedness – strong defences against the worst of what is to come. There are low-tech conservation solutions: preserving grasslands, restoring forests, planting mangroves. But the world’s major polluting countries also need to make sacrifices for distant threatened nations. The IMF has told rich countries, which have created the lion’s share of the warming so far, that they must [do more to help](#). “Rising temperatures would have vastly unequal effects across the world, with the brunt of adverse consequences borne by those who can least afford it,” it said in

2017. And, of course, in the past nine months, the climate crisis has fallen down the political agenda, sidelined by Covid.

I ask Chiramswuana if she ever has nightmares about Cyclone Idai? “I have dreams,” she says. They come even when she’s awake. “It’s like something playing in front of your eyes, like when you watch TV. I don’t like it, but it stays there, what happened. I don’t feel angry,” she adds. “I feel sad.”

- Sally Williams travelled with Oxfam. For more on the charity’s work with communities hit by Cyclone Idai, go to tinyurl.com/yajktrh6.

Coronavirus

Golden ticket: the lucky tourists sitting out coronavirus in New Zealand



An estimated 250,000 overseas visitors were in New Zealand just before the national lockdown and border restrictions came into force in mid-March.
Photograph: Efrain Vega de Varona

An estimated 250,000 overseas visitors were in New Zealand just before the national lockdown and border restrictions came into force in mid-March.
Photograph: Efrain Vega de Varona

Visitors from UK and North America tell of finding themselves with a pass to one of the best-rated pandemic responses in the world



[Elle Hunt](#) in Auckland

Fri 1 Jan 2021 14.00 EST

For Christmas 2019 Efrain Vega de Varona gave his partner plane tickets to [New Zealand](#) – her dream holiday destination. It has proved a gift that keeps on giving.

A year later they are still in New Zealand, having decided to stay put at the end of their two-week holiday in mid-March rather than return to Los Angeles. “We’ve been living out of two suitcases for 10 months,” says Vega de Varona from their latest Airbnb rental (number 50-something this year) in Island Bay, Wellington.

The couple were among an estimated 250,000 overseas visitors in New Zealand just before the national lockdown and border restrictions in mid-March. Most returned home as restrictions lifted in subsequent months, but when the government extended temporary visas some decided they were better off where they were.

[Ardern unveils New Zealand Covid vaccine deals as economy rebounds](#)
[Read more](#)

By mid-May there [were an estimated](#) 120,000 temporary visa holders in New Zealand, among them tourists from the UK and North America who

found themselves unexpectedly far from home – but with a pass to one of the best-rated pandemic responses in the world.

After their flight to LA was cancelled and New Zealand went into lockdown, Vega de Varona and his partner, Ingrid Rivera, settled in the South Island coastal town of Kaikōura, where they [helped to deliver](#) groceries to local elderly people.

Vega de Varona admits he had to be persuaded to stay on after the six-week lockdown. “Ingrid was the smarter one who said ‘This is the place to be – we’re not going back.’”

Rivera says: “I definitely believed more in the [New Zealand] government than our own – and time has proven me right, unfortunately.”



Vega de Varona and Rivera delivered groceries to 91-year-old Nat and took her on a day trip Photograph: Efrain Vega de Varona

The couple sold their home and cars in LA and spent 2020 travelling New Zealand while working on their motorhome rental business remotely. Rivera now plans to enrol to study, extending their visas; and they are exploring ways to put down roots by starting a business.

“It’s just starting to feel like home to us,” says Vega de Varona.

But as fortunate as they feel to have chanced upon a “golden ticket” through the pandemic, says Rivera, it has been tempered by fears for their loved ones in the US and Puerto Rico: “It’s obviously a completely different story for them.”

['Can't quite believe it': New Zealand tiptoes towards elimination of coronavirus](#)

[Read more](#)

Dr Tom Frieden, a US infectious disease expert and public physician, highlighted the stakes [this week, tweeting](#) that an American in New Zealand had a 200-times reduced risk of dying from Covid. Indeed, inquiries in emigrating to New Zealand from America [climbed by 65% during](#) May alone – representing interest from 80,000 individuals.

‘Like watching a horror movie’

For Eric Denman and Michelle Paulson, on holiday in New Zealand in March, the threat of going back to San Francisco was prohibitive. Paulson has lupus, putting her at elevated risk of coronavirus, so they decided to stay in Christchurch for lockdown. “We had a lot more faith in the New Zealand government in their ability to handle a pandemic – which turned out to be well founded,” she says.

When their flight home was cancelled for the second time, in July, “that was sort of the breaking point”, says Denman. The couple rented a house in Auckland and started working to turn their weeks-long holiday into a permanent move. In October they were granted two-year work visas, which they hope will lead to residency.

Their dogs joined them in their new home this week, with their belongings to follow. It was an unexpected move, they say – but “it’s the hand that we were dealt”, says Denman. “And it’s a lucky hand,” adds Paulson.

Their families’ support for their move (plus “definitely a bit of envy”) tells them it was the right decision, she says – though it has been painful to watch from afar the pandemic unfolding in the US. “Our day-to-day life is a reminder that it didn’t have to be that way.”

Setting aside the question of government competence, Denman says, New Zealanders' rule-abiding nature and concern for the collective set them apart from the "rugged individualism" of the US and UK. "By and large everybody locked down and did everything they were supposed to."

By contrast, says Nicole Gustas, a digital marketer from Boston, the situation in the US and UK has exceeded her worst fears. "The experience of being here in NZ and watching the rest of the world – except for Taiwan, Korea, a few other places – has been like watching a horror movie, when you're shouting: 'Don't go in! ... 'You're not in a lockdown, the malls are full!'"

Gustas and her partner had been approaching the end of a two-month working holiday in New Zealand in mid-March when their departure was cancelled. An old friend in Wellington invited them to live with her for the lockdown. "We did not realise it was going to be 54 days – and yet we are all still friends," says Gustas. "We're so grateful to them – and to New Zealand."

The government's response not only highlighted to her "what a lockdown really is" but the false dichotomy of saving lives or the economy, with the economy [bouncing back from](#) recession earlier this month. "New Zealand is a very capitalist country, they just made a decision to put lives first."

With her visa set to expire in March, Gustas has been busy spending on domestic tourism and hospitality "as a way to show our appreciation" – though she knows to exercise discretion when calling loved ones in the US and UK.

"We went to the movies, to dinner, to this winery, the beach – we're able to do all this stuff that no one else has the option to do ... Even from call to call, people will want to hear what it is like in a normal country, and then in the next call, they're just crushed."

But their advice has been consistent, says Gustas. "Everyone we know in the US has told us – don't come back."

New Zealand

An unexpected journey: hiker who spent lockdown in a hobbit hole



Hobbit Hole accommodation along the Te Araroa trail trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

Hobbit Hole accommodation along the Te Araroa trail trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

Louise Coghill was walking the length of New Zealand when coronavirus struck. She found an unlikely place to retreat from the pandemic

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



[Elle Hunt](#) in Auckland

Fri 1 Jan 2021 14.00 EST

Louise Coghill was on the top of the world when its borders started to close.



Perth based photographer Louise Coghill at the start of the Te Araroa trail, Cape Reinga. The trail is 3,000km down the length of New Zealand, from Cape Reinga in the north to the southernmost point of Bluff. Photograph: Louise Coghill

For four months [Coghill, a photographer](#) from the Australian city of Perth, had been hiking the Te Araroa trail: 3,000km down the length of New Zealand, from Cape Reinga in the north to the southernmost point of Bluff.

Coghill had set out in November 2019. By early March she had made it to the Canterbury region of the South Island. The end of her journey was in sight, plus she had picked up a boyfriend, Marco – a Swiss hiker she had met along the way.



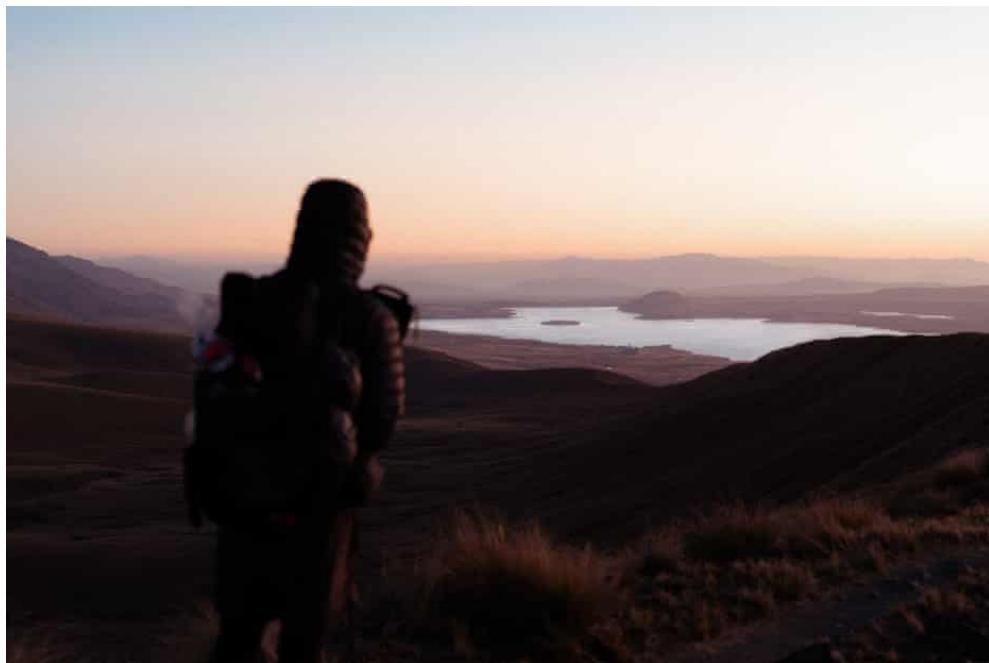
Perth based photographer Louise Coghill takes a selfie with Marco
Photograph: Louise Coghill

But each pocket of network coverage delivered worsening news of a novel coronavirus from overseas. “We would be out of reception from any amount of time from three days, to 10 days – and each time it was getting more intense,” remembers Coghill.

On reaching the Stag Saddle – at 1,925 metres the trail’s highest point, with a panoramic view of Mount Cook – their phones leapt to life for the first time in days: Italy was in lockdown and international travel was rapidly being restricted.

They set out towards Lake Tekapo on the horizon, anxiously discussing their next steps, says Coghill. “Should we fly home before borders shut and

airlines close down? It was really nerve wracking. But Marco was like, ‘I’m not going – I came to finish this hike.’”



Stag saddle - highest point of trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

The decision took them on an unexpected journey: living for nearly four months in a hobbit hole.

Finding a ‘trail angel’

Since Te Araroa was completed in 2011, after a decades-long volunteer campaign led by the writer Geoff Chapple, hundreds of thousands of people walk sections of the trail every year, while the end-to-end route is gaining in popularity.



The 2,000km mark at Nelson lakes Photograph: Louise Coghill

During the 2018-2019 walking season of October to April 1,100 people walked the full 3,000km – the most ever. An average hiker can complete the route in about five months, traversing wildly different terrain – mountaintops and tiny towns, rivers and volcanoes, beaches, bush, valleys, lakes and plains – over a relatively small distance.

With 90% of the journey off-road, hikers sleep in tents, at government-managed huts, or with good Samaritans based along the route who know to offer a meal or a night’s shelter.

These are known among hikers as “Trail Angels” – and one came to Coghill’s rescue when in mid-March, with just 500km and five weeks’ walking to go, New Zealand [announced a national lockdown](#).

By that time she and Marco were in Canterbury’s Mackenzie Basin, breaking their journey at one of Te Araroa’s hidden gems: a hobbit hole guesthouse.

Coghill had learned about it from other walkers while planning her journey: “It was the one thing that I wanted to do on the trail.” (She has asked that the Guardian be circumspect about its exact location so as to preserve that spirit of discovery.)



Inside the Hobbit Hole accommodation along the trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

Their host Denise had built the tiny cabin on her property as a homage to JRR Tolkien's cosy creations, which could also double as basic guest accommodation. Though there was no mains electricity, it had battery-operated lights and a fireplace, with a sitting area and a bed nook.

"I actually think hers is way cuter than the one in the movies," says Coghill. From the outside it appeared as a hillside set with a round front door. "I am small and hobbit-like, so I could stand in it – but Marco is a Gandalf and had to bend to get in."



Louise Coghill at Tararuas on the Te Araroa trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

Life as a hobbit

The hobbit hole became their home for the full six-week lockdown. Coghill says they tried to show their appreciation by helping out around the house, painting a spare bedroom and sharing kitchen duties. But mostly they lived a quiet life of puzzles, Cluedo and conversations over home-cooked meals. After gruelling months of hiking, along with the anxiety about being far from home in the pandemic, “it was just nice being part of a family”, says Coghill.



Tongariro crossing Photograph: Louise Coghill

When New Zealand's lockdown [lifted in mid-May](#), Coghill and Marco set out for the final leg of Te Araroa, hiking for another five weeks into winter. By the time they reached Bluff around mid-June, “we were just going through the motions to finish it”, Coghill says. Exhausted, they returned to the hobbit hole, where they spent nearly two more months recuperating before Marco returned to Switzerland – and Coghill to Perth.

Western Australia – like [New Zealand](#), quick to close borders – was relatively untouched by coronavirus, recording only nine deaths all year. For Coghill it has meant an abrupt return to normality after 10 months of living a “quiet, slow, meaningful life” as a hobbit.

“In lockdown everybody was like, ‘guys, we have so much to learn from this experience: we need to slow down, be present’,” she says – but in her experience, people have done the opposite.



Longwood forest on the Te Araroa trail. Photograph: Louise Coghill

Life in Perth seems to be busier than ever, Coghill says, perhaps fuelled by a sense of obligation to make the most of it as the rest of the world adjusts to a devastating new normal.

Even sharing how she spent 2020 has proved difficult: “For some people it’s really nice escapism, and other people are just like, ‘I don’t want to hear about your amazing year.’”

It had a bittersweet ending. Coghill and Marco broke up in December, their long-distance relationship unfeasible over closed borders – but they remain connected by their unique experience of 2020. Coghill is also still in close contact with Denise: “She’s like my second mum now.”



The Nelson lake side trail Photograph: Louise Coghill

Her plan, when she set out to travel the length of New Zealand, had been to document the kindness of strangers; she could not have imagined the extent to which she would come to rely on it. “New Zealand just doesn’t feel like a real place – it’s too magical. … The community spirit that runs through it is so unique.”

Indeed Coghill’s story is in the spirit of Te Araroa. In 1998, Chapple walked the 1,500km prospective North Island route to demonstrate the project’s viability.

His aim, he wrote on completing it, was “to let the trail speak – to meet the New Zealanders who hunt the bush, who farm, who populate the small towns, and who, as much as ever, but in more dire circumstances now, give this country its character.”



Photographer Louise Coghill finishes the Te Araroa trail reaching Bluff
Photograph: Louise Coghill

Coghill finished Te Araroa – and with it, 2020 – a different person. “It changed me,” she says. Her chief takeaway was of the importance of kindness and value of generosity, “to give when we can and to share what we have”.

And to cherish the small, quiet moments where we can find them – along with the joy.

Brexit

Football, flights and food: how the EU reshaped Britain



Composite: Getty Images/EPA/Alamy/Reuters/Guardian Design Team
Composite: Getty Images/EPA/Alamy/Reuters/Guardian Design Team

As Brexit's tangible effects kick in, we look at the impact the EU's most far-reaching project has had on British society

Katherine Butler

Fri 1 Jan 2021 07.30 EST

Historians of the future will judge the politics of the half century before the Brexit transition ended on 1 January 2021. What, though, of social and cultural historians, those who study how we live?

Perhaps the most symbolic cultural artefacts of the last 50 years will turn out not to be a blue flag but a bottle of Blue Nun, a block of mozzarella, a Ryanair boarding printout or a ticket to a Bayern Munich v Manchester City football match.

Despite half a century of belonging to the EU club, most British people say their emotional bonds to [Europe](#) are not strong. “Nearly 60% of Britons do not identify as European at all,” says Anand Menon, a professor of European politics at King’s College London.

Allegiance to an abstract notion or a set of institutions is a stretch even for Europhiles. The early weeks of the pandemic in March [tested solidarity](#) even among the diehard founding member states. Yet lives and lifestyles across the continent are closer than imaginable in 1973 and in ways that cannot be measured by a survey. Even if no European “society” exists for Britain’s departure to disrupt, an informal convergence of tastes and cultural assumptions that could be called “Europeanisation” has taken place over the last five decades.



A new dark blue British passport alongside the old burgundy EU/UK passport. Photograph: Shaun Daley/Alamy

We may be familiar with how burgundy passports [transformed migration](#), education and work. Scientists, researchers, countless professionals and the [Erasmus generation](#) will be affected by the loss of freedom of movement. EU citizens who made lives in the UK, especially after the opening up to eastern Europe from 2004, are bracing for a new precarity.

But what about the majority of Britons who never married a Swede, bought a holiday home in France, got an engineering job in Eindhoven or spent a year studying in Madrid? How bumpy a ride will their sociocultural readjustment be?

For good or ill, the boring business of trade – integrated supply chains, the free movement of goods and common rules for everything from energy to eggs – has shaped their lives too, even if few saw themselves as participants in a post-national experiment let alone expressed it as a form of identity.

The greatest irony is that much of the Europeanising process that Boris Johnson's hard divorce settlement aims to end was not driven from Brussels but from London.



Margaret Thatcher wears a jumper bearing European flags at pro-common market rally in 1975. Photograph: James Jarrett/ANL/Rex/Shutterstock

Britain entered the bloc in 1973 entirely for transactional reasons and not because it “bought into the narrative” of political integration, says Menon. If GDP alone is the benchmark of success, membership paid off. Income per person is approximately 8.5% higher than it would have been had the UK stayed out, Nicholas Crafts, a professor of economic history at the

University of Sussex, estimates. He attributes this extra prosperity to increased competition, lower trade costs and higher productivity.

Margaret Thatcher may have let her antipathy to the federalist dream seed the culture war that led to Brexit, but she backed the 1985 project that would from 1992 become the EU's most far-reaching achievement: [the single market](#). Unwittingly, in pursuing its own interests via an expansive “common market”, the UK ended up selling EU citizens a common European lifestyle and perhaps even a common identity.

British fingerprints, says Crafts, were all over the project. It meant goods could be packaged, labelled, transported and safely sold across Europe without any additional paperwork. “We were pushing strongly for it,” says Crafts. “It’s very simple: if you reduce the costs of doing business, the volume of trade goes up.

“British business found standardisation a bonus. Because a regulatory union – which is exactly what the single market is – reduces costs much more than tariff-free trade does.”

Food, glorious food

How Europeans eat and drink in 2020 compared with 1973 is probably the clearest illustration of how the single market influenced habits and at least partially rewired Britons’ expectations. The [Daily Mail recently](#) published a pictorial guide to dealing with Brexit-related food disruption. Pizza, brie and avocado could be replaced by chips, toast and mutton, it suggested.

The Christmas Eve Brexit deal spares Britain hefty tariffs on food imports but new barriers and costs could reduce the year-round availability of certain foods and make them more expensive.

The Mail’s much-mocked food chart was an even more useful reminder of the socio-gastronomic transformation that EU membership delivered to Britain. The shift in food quality and the democratisation of Britain’s food culture has been “staggering”, says Tim Lang, a professor of food policy at City, University of London. Food, he says, has been a symbol of European

integration ever since the common agricultural policy ([CAP](#)) was founded to banish the memory of wartime starvation.



A woman cuts open a wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Being a member of the EU expanded Britain's palate. Photograph: Marco Bertorello/AFP via Getty Images

In 1973, the ONS retail price index reflected the pre-common-market British palate: that year's representative shopping basket included mutton, Smash instant mashed potatoes and tinned corned beef. Olive oil may have been on the tables of the Elizabeth David-reading English middle classes, but most people cooked with lard. Wine didn't figure even in 1977: sky-high tariffs put anything more than the occasional bottle of Blue Nun out of most people's price range.

We can partly blame EU agricultural policy for the disappearance of traditional fruit varieties but British supermarkets found it cheaper to import granny smith or golden delicious apples, Dutch-grown tomatoes and Spanish strawberries at the volumes British customers had started to demand. Muesli, ground coffee, pitta bread, fromage frais, riesling and pesto all joined the ONS shopping basket between 1980 and 2000. "The Europeanisation of the British diet is something even Brexiters have to acknowledge," says Lang.

“Mediterranean foods and pizza-eating cafe culture used to be for the British elite. That completely changed and it is remarkable.”

In 1988, domestically produced food accounted for 66% of all food sold in Britain. Today, the figure has fallen to 50% while [more than 60% of the UK's fresh food](#) is [imported from the EU](#). For [dairy products](#), the EU is almost the sole supplier.



Dutch strawberries for sale at a market in south Wales. Photograph: Jeff Morgan/Alamy

Post-Brexit, the nutritional range could narrow for poorer British families and as a [House of Lords select committee report](#) warned, food inequality could widen with those who can afford it still able to buy high quality local fresh produce.

A tightly woven “highly Europeanised” ecosystem of food safety oversight, meanwhile, evolved to protect consumers, which necessarily deepened integration between EU governments, says Lang. “If there is contamination in a tin of tomatoes in Italy every member state is alerted simultaneously.”

Less palatable, he says, is the concentration of giant food manufacturers – which account for half of all European food sales – and the power of a few big retail corporations. Not only have they shaped the food system, they also

make “taking back control” a challenge. “The single market allowed that process to accelerate,” says Lang. “Tesco, Carrefour, Aldi and Lidl were able to go everywhere and they have done so.”



A Lidl shopper in London. The German supermarket chain has expanded rapidly. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Households also reflect the UK taste revolution that coincided with seamless trade. [Terence Conran](#) brought the first “continental quilts” to Britain from Sweden in the 1960s with their promise of uncluttered easy living. Duvets, used on the continent for a century before that, weren’t in the ONS British shopping basket until the early 80s. A few years later, Brits were being sold flatpack modernism and the Scandinavian dream, with the arrival in the UK of the first Ikea store.

In driving down prices, and making linguistic differences irrelevant – although another legacy of Britain’s membership is English as a lingua franca – the single market, with its network of consumer protection laws helped to turbo-charge a consumer revolution. “It might have happened without EU membership but not at the same pace,” Crafts says. “You expect, with greater integration, that relative prices become similar and that affects consumption.”

A broadening of horizons

The soft power of the single market reshaped the culture in other ways. A Milan to Paris airfare cost the equivalent of at least €400 in 1992. Between 1993 and 1997, the EU liberalised aviation. Enter no-frills Ryanair, initially in the UK and Irish markets, now Europe's biggest airline. Cheaper travel has been a mixed blessing for weekend hen and stag do destinations, and disastrous for the climate. But another genie was out of the bottle: air traffic in the EU trebled in the first 20 years of the single market. Trips within the EU accounted for most [British holiday travel](#) in 2019.



Ryanair's low-cost model revolutionised European air travel. Photograph: François Lenoir/Reuters

A “symbiotic” relationship grew, too, between budget air fares and another British institution, says Simon Chadwick, a professor of Eurasian sport at Emlyon Business School in France. Football fans didn’t historically travel in big numbers to continental games, but from the late-1990s, La Liga, Serie A and Bundesliga entered the collective vocabulary as short-haul football tourism exploded.

“Europeanisation has been built through football,” says Chadwick.

In 1995, a seminal European court of justice verdict revolutionised the hiring and transfer of EU players by insisting on their freedom to work in any member state. Football, it turned out, was also governed by the single market.

The [Bosman ruling](#) kicked off a new era. The Italian player Fabrizio Ravanelli caused a sensation by quitting [Juventus for Middlesbrough](#) weeks after his club won the 1996 Champions League. Players, managers, coaches and staff at all levels of the game flocked to the UK. European mainland fans arrived too, fuelling a football economy for Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and other UK cities.

“Fast forward 20 years, the psyche of English fans had changed,” says Chadwick. “We don’t talk now about ‘foreign players’ ,they are just players.” Wenger, Klopp and Guardiola have become household names. “People just accepted their style and approach to the game as part of the culture of English football. Many people are not aware that this exchange is part of freedom of movement within the EU.”



English midfielder Jude Bellingham playing for Borussia Dortmund last month. Photograph: Bernd Thissen/AFP/Getty Images

Brexit makes signing EU players by Premier League clubs more cumbersome with points-based work permits now required. Young English footballers such as Jude Bellingham, who plays for Borussia Dortmund, may find doors closing to them.

The single market has allowed the proliferation of football broadcasting rights and any free trade impediments created by Brexit could also undermine the lucrative nature of Premier League TV deals with EU countries, says Chadwick, especially as services are not covered by the Johnson government's deal with the EU. The Premier League's most lucrative overseas deal, for example, is with Scandinavian EU member states.

Free trade difficulties could also have an impact on Uefa's marketing of broadcast rights, both across Europe and elsewhere in the world. "We take a lot for granted but we are on the cusp of something different," says Chadwick. "Football is so deeply embedded in the life of the nation that people don't realise what they have, or what they might lose."

The EU is today far more than the marketplace Thatcher helped to craft. It has a single currency, legally binding environmental standards, worker protections, social policies, a budgetary policy that attempts to level out regional disparities and a human rights charter. Its critics say the pandemic and the need for a green recovery should be the impetus for a more progressive, less "Anglo-Saxon" EU political economy to emerge.

Will the same realities drive the UK's direction, or will the conscious repudiation of a European identity built on seamless trade and integration become tangible?

Perhaps, as the Lithuanian novelist and historian Kristina Sabaliauskaitė predicted, the moment that Britain starts to experience life outside the EU is the moment it learns "with a shock, how very European it was after all".

[Inside the Guardian Membership](#)

Guardian readers on their hopes and fears for 2021



‘Biden taking over from Trump has averted catastrophe, but dare we hope for real change?’ Photograph: Carlos Barria/Reuters

‘Biden taking over from Trump has averted catastrophe, but dare we hope for real change?’ Photograph: Carlos Barria/Reuters

Protest, politics and pandemic have marked the last 12 months. What does 2021 have in store for us?

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

Guardian readers

Sat 2 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

After one of the most turbulent and terrifying years in recent memory, we asked Guardian readers what they wanted – or expected – for 2021.

Evelyn Mensah, London, UK

My prediction for 2021 is that [systemic racism](#) will start to become eradicated from our greatest institution, the NHS, where I have worked for the past 30 years.

Elisabetta Campeti, Italy

My prediction for 2021 is that the slowing down due to [Covid-19](#) will hopefully make us all understand the crucial points to be tackled. Whether our governments do that depends on how much we can keep the pressure on them. [Biden taking over from Trump](#) has averted catastrophe, maybe, but we still do not dare to hope for a real change of course in the US, even though it's a relief.

Brexit is going to be a disaster, how much of one we are all soon going to find out. But the people of the world are waking up, and the young people even more so. So, let us hope 2021 brings us a bit of relief from the horror and drama of the last four years.

Dan Sheridan, Kent, UK

The news from Oxford/AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer is very encouraging. The news from the US that Trump is being replaced by someone who thinks about others and not just himself is equally encouraging. That said, we are about £2.5tn in debt, are increasing government borrowing by billions daily, and so far have no clear idea how to resolve the problem of our children's final exams and university places on a fair basis. We also have the closure of high street stores, a staggering number of companies going into administration, and untold numbers of unemployed.

But we have a history of being able to bounce back and I'm old enough to have seen us do this on more than one occasion.



‘I so hope that from the embers of the Covid pandemic a new consciousness and awareness can touch humanity.’ Photograph: Getty

Angela Battson, Wales

In Wales, it seems we have a far [more credible government](#) than the one run from Downing Street. I feel Mark Drakeford is leading a more “in touch” government because he is concerned with all aspects of Welsh life and tries hard to meet all the difficult issues we have been presented with since March 2020.

He has such a difficult job to do but exhibits compassion and calmness that encourages us to believe he has our best interests at heart.

While I have always been a staunch supporter of the UK union, I now feel that the shambolic disaster that emanates from Westminster must encourage me to vote for complete devolution. Wales must look after itself with a government that reflects the people of Wales and understands what is best for it.

So unless there is a dramatic change in the Downing Street fiasco, 2021 will mean that Wales must look after itself with strong support for the current Welsh government.



‘Wales must look after itself with a government that reflects the people of Wales.’ Photograph: Philip Rees/Rex/Shutterstock

Sue Marshall, England

I so hope that from the embers of the Covid pandemic a new consciousness and awareness can touch humanity. I hope that the need to nurture the planet, the plants, the animal kingdom and other human beings becomes an ambition to work on, globally, together.

My prediction is that many will want to achieve their own needs for wealth and power, but perhaps this pandemic will make better politicians who understand interdependence in a different way. I am not religious, nor am I a fool, but I hope I live long enough to see things get better.

Stephen Snell, Spain

I am, for the first time in more than a couple years, hopeful. I am hopeful for effective progress with the climate crisis, for opening up immigration, for improved voting rights, for science, professional behaviour, significant gains in equality, and a more transparent government. And finally I am hopeful we

can curtail the power of money in our politics and elect members of Congress who will put the country before party and donors.

Maybe that's too much to hope for? It's not a bad idea; albeit unrealistic? Well, hell's bells, why not!? We might surprise ourselves.

Amanda Wright, UK

I hope I am wrong but I see the pandemic stretching into next year because the government has not been straight with us. They have not been acting in our best interests but have pandered to their own and their party's interests instead – which is why they were slow to lock down (the money men didn't like it).

This is why all their friends have been given lucrative contracts to produce goods and services completely outside their skills and experience. I cannot see anything really improving until we have a government that knows how to govern.



'We have the closure of high street stores and a staggering number of companies going into administration.' Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

Jim Knight, West Sussex, UK

This is not a prediction, it is a deeply rooted concern – that 2021 might prove that what remains of democracy in the UK and the US will be irrevocably destroyed. Brexit and Trumpism have both revealed such a willingness in the people to accept lies as truth and vote for the people who peddle the lies.

I suspect I am far from alone in being glad that Biden triumphed over Trumpism until I look at the number of people who still voted for Trump – more than any other losing presidential candidate.

Sorry, I hope I am wrong, but my only prediction is that 2021 is likely to prove to be even more worrying than 2020.

Maria Urban, Switzerland

From a Swiss point of view my predictions for 2021 are: more shocking news on several ecological crises like climate crisis and [biodiversity loss](#); more shocking news on political inability, unwillingness and lack of urgency in responding adequately to approaching ecological breakdown.

A defining moment will be the implementation of the Covid vaccine: Covid will cause recurring major restrictions in Switzerland throughout the first half of 2021, focused on increasing general compliance with testing and the basic, most effective behavioural rules and minimising restrictions for businesses.

But the Covid vaccine will work and bring substantial relief, save many lives, businesses, families and will somewhat slow down the increase of inequality in income and life expectancy.

For Switzerland, I expect a robust economic recovery and that some changes caused by Covid will stay in place, eg home office and remote work, which is feeding people, capital and social connectedness towards Alpine and rural areas affected by depopulation.



‘Kamala Harris will greatly influence women’s politics.’ Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty

Janet Ferry, England

Surely 2021 has to be better than 2020! I have hopes rather than predictions though. A vaccine could be a turning point so that we can get our lives back and properly see family and friends. I work for the NHS and predict we will “cope”, but at the expense of other conditions with delayed surgery and treatments.

The Labour party will either be slightly smaller and gather around Keir Starmer or complete split. Joe Biden will be a great improvement for America and [Kamala Harris](#) will greatly influence women’s politics, hopefully diminishing fake news if it’s not too late.

From my personal point of view, I will retire in the summer, and hopefully can do some travelling!

Don Ross, Canada

After four dark years of madness south of us here in Canada, we and the rest of the world can begin to see some light and hope again.

Ian Andrews, New Zealand

New Zealand will come out of the Covid crisis better than most, having weathered the storm better than most. [Jacinda Ardern](#) has had a brilliant PM-ship thus far, which I hope will continue. NZ's reactionary right appears to be in something of a retreat as NZ recognises its multiplicity of communities. More houses need to be built. A high-speed rail network would be great. Overall – not optimistic but willing to be proved wrong or at least go down swinging.

James Edge, Norfolk, UK

For me personally, the image of Patrick Hutchinson carrying the white male [anti-BLM protester] to safety over his shoulder, speaks volumes for this man's humanity. It was so good to see black and white people come together through [Black Lives Matter](#) across the globe to denounce the horrific murder of George Floyd.

Obviously it is not good that it had to happen at all, especially in 2020, it's just outrageous. Hopefully now we have the hope and possibility that all people, regardless of race and gender, can be treated equally and afforded the same opportunities.

That is my personal wish for 2021 and beyond.



Patrick Hutchinson carries an injured counter-protester to safety, near Waterloo station, London, during a Black Lives Matter protest. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

Jackie Charlton, Wales

I predict we will see a turnaround in public services. People will be asking: “Where are our services?”

The public sector is in crisis, including adult social care and children’s services. Next year, we have Senedd and Scottish parliament elections, and local elections in England. I predict we will see the Tory government being given a strong message that we value our public services and demand better investment.

Joanna Pritchard, Somerset, UK

There will be a complete change in working environments for a lot of people. The housing market will change to reflect this as many people will want to live away from the city centres and suburbia and small towns will become more desirable.

London and other big urban areas will become centres of culture and entertainment but many pubs and cafes will close and not reopen.

Michael Rosenberg, Madrid, Spain

It won't be nearly as bad as the worst predictions and nowhere near as good as the best. Brexit will add another layer for the UK of misery and uncertainty.

A world without Trump will be a bonus not just to America, and if Biden can reverse all or most of the Trump legacy that will be as much as he can probably achieve without the Senate.

Covid-19 will linger longer than anticipated, not because the vaccines don't work but because the logistics of manufacture and distribution will continue to give the virus breathing space.

What people don't understand is that Brexit and Covid are not instead of the usual trials and tribulations of life, but as well as. They make things worse. The fact that Brexit is a self-imposed catastrophe for all the wrong reasons is neither here nor there.

Rainer Molzahn, Frankfurt, Germany

Covid-19 is the symptom, not the problem itself. The problem will not go away, even if a vaccine is available and deployed across our dear little planet. IMHO, the problem is more along the lines of "How to live?" In other words, I fear the lifestyle we have grown accustomed/addicted to is proving to be toxic for creation, the planet and ourselves, and the evidence is overwhelming. So I reckon the problem is going to unfold further before we acknowledge it in all its unprecedented magnitude and start responding creatively and responsibly.



‘This is truly a climate and ecological emergency, requiring action by governments, councils, businesses, and for us all to find the joy in frugality.’
Photograph: Rafael Bastante/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Peter Wildin, Cheshire, UK

I think the Covid-19 vaccine will make 2021 better than 2020.

Brexit may be a defining moment but the full extent of the downside will be slow to become apparent and will be felt mainly by those at the bottom.

I think the government will take refuge in the fact that the economic damage will be masked by the economic effects of Covid.

Antonio Ceolon, Italy

I live in Italy and I think 2021 will be a horrible year. My pessimism derives from the very bad economic situation of my country combined with the worsening of climate change.

After this pandemic is over we will not find a better world. I am also happy that the Donald is packing his bags, even if I am convinced that the damage

he did during his presidency will last for ever. Time will tell.

Rainer Zelzner, Münster

I expect 2021 to be much better than 2020. I am so glad that Americans voted Trump out and now it looks like a peaceful transition is going to happen. With Joe Biden and Kamala Harris truth, science, multilateralism, responsibility and so on will be back in the White House.

Margaret Turner, Devon, UK

Eclipsing all personal wishes is the flickering hope for the survival, indeed the flourishing, of all kinds of life on our amazing Earth. I say flickering as I sometimes come near to the cliff edge of despair at the continuing destructiveness of humankind towards the planet. This is truly a climate and ecological emergency, requiring action by governments, councils, businesses, and for us all to find the joy in frugality. As an old person, the least I can do is take action with Extinction Rebellion, making essential demands; and I hope to work for a law against "[ecocide](#)".



Aberdeenshire, Scotland. 'The sun will continue to shine and the planet will continue to orbit, creating seasons.' Photograph: Stephen Dorey/Alamy

Tim Everitt, Aberdeenshire, Scotland

My predictions:

- The sun will continue to shine and the planet will continue to orbit, creating seasons.
- Plants will continue to grow to provide all of life with food.
- Animals will continue to follow their seasonal cycles.
- Humans will continue to be very clever at understanding the universe and everything in it.
- Humans will continue to be very dumb by focusing on the short term.
- In the first week of April I will start mowing my lawn.

Diana al-Saadi, Yorkshire, UK

If I'm lucky enough to survive into 2021 and live to complete my 80th year, my fervent wish is that lasting humility, compassion and tolerance are shown among communities, governments and businesses in countries around the world.

Peace will only be won if the world begins to accept and practise these qualities.

If I may be granted a second wish, it will be that science will continue to discover the longed-for cures for some of the most devastating illnesses, including cancers, arthritis, MS, ME, and other fatal diseases. Also I pray we may see a lasting breakthrough in understanding the causes of autism, dyslexia and epilepsy and other conditions that some of my own dear grandchildren experience.

2021.01.02 - In pictures

- [From around the world 20 photographs of the week](#)
- [Wild corners Animals and plants reclaim Scotland's abandoned spaces](#)
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- [Butterflies, bushfires and bears Age of Extinction's year in photography](#)

Twenty photographs of the week

20 photographs of the week

Campaigners in favour of legalising abortion celebrate in Buenos Aires.

Animals and plants reclaim Scotland's abandoned spaces: photo essay

Trees and shrubbery have reclaimed much of the extensive derelict site of the Beardmore naval construction works at Dalmuir. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

Inside the outbreak: photographing England during Covid pandemic

A man wearing a union flag face mask in Oldham, Greater Manchester.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

New Year's Eve around the world – in pictures

Fireworks explode over the Sydney Opera House. Photograph: AAP/Reuters

A life in pictures: Tommy Docherty

Docherty in 1977, after his Manchester United team beat Leeds in the FA Cup semi-final. Photograph: Colorsport/Shutterstock

Biodiversity: what happened next?

Butterflies, bushfires and bears: Age of Extinction's year in photography

An echidna is seen on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, in the aftermath of the 2019-2020 bushfires. Photograph: Evan Quartermain/Guardian Community

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- ['It makes me so angry' Doctors despair over public's disregard for rules](#)
- [Live Coronavirus: EU rollout of Pfizer vaccine may be disrupted by supply issues, BioNTech warns](#)
- [US New variant may have been in America since October](#)
- [Retail UK high street lost 177,000 jobs in 2020, study finds](#)
- [Pat McGrath Damehood is first given to a makeup artist](#)
- [MF Doom Masked hip-hop MC dies aged 49](#)

Brexit

Brexit: in crisis, without fanfare, UK finally ends the EU era

Boris Johnson largely ignores Brexit in new year message to focus on toll of Covid and ‘the grimness of 2020’



‘This is an amazing moment for this country,’ Boris Johnson said in his New Year message. Photograph: Number 10 Downing Street/PA

‘This is an amazing moment for this country,’ Boris Johnson said in his New Year message. Photograph: Number 10 Downing Street/PA

Peter Walker, Lisa O’Carroll and Daniel Boffey

Thu 31 Dec 2020 18.00 EST

Four years, 27 weeks and two days after a referendum that split the country almost down the middle, the UK left the EU’s orbit on Thursday night in a departure that was notably low key, and marked by warnings of likely disruption to come.

In a sometimes sombre new year message, Boris Johnson largely ignored Brexit, an outcome he arguably shaped more than any other politician, to

focus instead on the toll of Covid-19 and what he called “the grimness of 2020”.

With the majority of England subject to tough restrictions, and hospitals warning of a [calamitous winter coronavirus crisis in the weeks ahead](#), the chimes of Big Ben, temporarily reconnected from ongoing restoration work, sounded across near empty streets at 11pm.

This was the pivotal moment for [Brexit](#). While the UK formally departed the EU at the end of January 2020, a transition period meant almost all tangible changes were deferred – until now.

From Friday morning, individuals and businesses both in the UK and beyond face a [dizzying new array of red tape](#), a good deal of it still to be confirmed, covering everything from travel, residency, work and tourism, to the supply of goods and services.

Considerable government anxiety remains focused on the situation at the Channel ports in Kent, particularly after [Covid-related delays earlier in December](#) saw thousands of lorries backed up at a disused airfield – one of 10 sites prepared for possible Brexit-caused disruption.

The moment of Brexit passed without ceremony in Dover. The town had a ghost-like quality, Covid emptying it of new year’s celebrations, as it approached 11pm with half a dozen trucks trying to make it over the line before the new trade barriers were erected. Greeted by two police officers, they were told the last ferry had departed at 9pm for France. Those who had evidence of a Covid-19 test in the last 72 hours were allowed through to the small lorry park at the port where they could sleep overnight before boarding the 7:40am ferry, the first voyage from Dover under new Brexit trading rules.

Officials are hopeful of a smooth start to the new era but are braced for possible delays next week, with government estimates suggesting that more than half of smaller businesses have not yet prepared for the end of the free movement of goods and services.

It all adds to a prime ministerial in-tray already overflowing with the impact of coronavirus, not least the government's decision to defer [the return to school of some pupils next week](#), and with Labour accusing the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, of "serial incompetence".

Johnson used much of his New Year message to herald the end of a year "in which the government was forced to tell people how to live their lives, how long to wash their hands, how many households could meet together".

It was a far cry from [his 2019 message](#), where fresh from a crushing election victory, the prime minister promised "a fantastic year and a remarkable decade for our United Kingdom".

Johnson did maintain some of his trademark Brexit boosterism this time, arguing that the development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine was illustrative of a UK "free to do things differently, and if necessary better, than our friends in the EU".

"This is an amazing moment for this country," Johnson said, citing what he said were boundless possibilities with trade and innovation. "We have our freedom in our hands and it is up to us to make the most of it."

The reality, at least in the short term, is that 11pm on Thursday marked the end of many previous freedoms for British individuals and businesses, even to the extent of restricting where freight drivers can travel within the UK.

To mitigate the buildup of lorries at Channel ports, hauliers now need what is called [a Kent access permit](#), or "kermit" for short, to even enter the county. From Friday, those without the 24-hour pass can be pulled over by government officers, fined £300, and sent back.

However, one issue left unresolved in the trade deal, [agreed between Johnson and the EU](#) on Christmas Eve and [voted into law](#) by parliament on Wednesday, has been partially settled.

A last-minute agreement between the UK government and Spain will [allow Gibraltarians to move freely between the British overseas territory and the EU](#) – but the agreement will only come into force later in the year.

Spain's foreign minister, Arancha González Laya, said she expected border controls, albeit lightly applied, to be required for the next six months to allow for the deal in principle to be formalised.

Under the agreement, Gibraltar will be part of the EU's Schengen free-travel zone. Checks will instead be undertaken at the Rock's airport and ports by the EU's Frontex border agency, a point of contention in talks with the British government.

Dominic Raab, the UK foreign secretary, said: "All sides are committed to mitigating the effects of the end of the transition period on Gibraltar, and in particular [to] ensure border fluidity, which is clearly in the best interests of the people living on both sides. We remain steadfast in our support for Gibraltar and its sovereignty."

Spain has refused to allow the post-Brexit trade and security deal to be applied to Gibraltar, over which it has a territorial claim. The head of Gibraltar's government, Fabian Picardo, said: "There will be complexity to come ... we may end up with a deal on the [free] movement of people but not goods."

Northern Ireland will similarly see a more phased-in approach to the post-Brexit world, with the requirement for customs declarations when retailers in Great Britain send goods to non-business customers in Northern Ireland deferred for three months.

With Northern Ireland remaining under the rules of the EU's single market and customs union, animal-based food products shipped there from the rest of the UK will also require export health certificates from April.

Economic growth (GDP)

UK economic outlook for 2021: Covid surge deepens the gloom

New lockdown restrictions cut chances of rapid recovery as unemployment rises



The normally bustling, but virtually deserted, Oxford Street in central London during the traditional Christmas sales. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

The normally bustling, but virtually deserted, Oxford Street in central London during the traditional Christmas sales. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent
[@RJPartington](#)*

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

The UK economy begins 2021 on the back foot as record numbers of coronavirus infections and tougher restrictions cloud the outlook for growth and limit the chances of a rapid recovery from the country's worst recession in 300 years.

There had been hopes that the arrival of successful Covid vaccines could prompt a rebound in activity. But with new government controls to combat the rising infection rate, the outlook is deteriorating. Here are five charts for the UK's economic prospects in 2021.

GDP

Rising coronavirus infections and lockdown controls are expected to weigh on the economy in the opening months of the year, before enough people can receive the vaccine and restrictions can be relaxed.

Gross domestic product (GDP) was expected to grow by 5.5%, according to [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) forecasts in November. While this would mark the strongest growth rate since the late 1980s, the depth of the Covid recession means the economy would not return to its pre-pandemic peak until late 2022.

Since the launch of tougher Covid restrictions, the Resolution Foundation thinktank now expects GDP could be as much as 6% smaller by Easter than forecast, cutting the 2021 growth rate to 4.3%. Other countries around the world are also grappling with a renewed surge in the virus, but forecasts by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development published in early December [ranked the UK behind every major economy apart from Argentina](#).

Despite a [last-minute Brexit trade deal](#), disruption is still expected as companies adapt to new EU arrangements. Economists view Boris Johnson's deal as a "hard [Brexit](#)", because it involves more barriers to trade than EU membership and other possible alternatives. As a result, the OBR estimates a long-term loss of output of about 4% compared with remaining in the EU.

Unemployment

[Unemployment](#) is poised to spiral up in 2021 once the [furlough scheme](#) is closed – scheduled for the end of April after several extensions – in one of the biggest challenges facing the government.

Redundancies were rising at the fastest rate on record towards the end of 2020 as companies struggled to stay afloat during the pandemic. However, despite attempts by the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), to close the scheme and replace it with a less generous system of wage subsidies, furlough has prevented unemployment from scaling to even greater heights.

The OBR estimates the jobless rate will peak at about [7.5% in the middle of 2021](#) – representing about 2.6 million people out of work – up from about 4% before the pandemic struck. However, the forecast was made before tougher coronavirus restrictions were introduced.

Public finances

The UK government is on track to record a budget deficit – the gap between public spending and income from taxes – of [£394bn for the financial year to March 2021](#), in a reflection of emergency spending and sliding tax receipts during the pandemic.

As a result, the national debt – the combined total of every deficit – has risen above £2tn. Equivalent to more than 100% of GDP, it is expected to remain at about that level over the next five years.

Sunak has said “[hard choices](#)” need to be taken to balance the books, and the deficit will colour much of the UK’s political debate over the course of 2021.

Record levels of public borrowing are expected to recede as the economy recovers and emergency support is scaled back, but a deficit of about £164bn is still expected in the year ending March 2022. While this is still bigger than the deficit incurred as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, most economists agree that [a rerun of austerity should be avoided](#), and that tax rises should be used once a sustainable economic recovery has taken hold.

Inflation

[Inflation](#), the measure of annual average growth in consumer prices, dropped to among the lowest levels on record in 2020. Driven by falling global oil

prices and companies cutting their prices in response to a sharp drop in demand, the consumer price index (CPI) has [fallen to 0.3% in the UK](#).

Some economists worry that a rapid economic recovery could trigger a burst of inflation that would erode households' finances. At a time of record debt levels, it could also lead to the [Bank of England](#) raising interest rates and higher borrowing costs for the government.

Inflation expectations are gradually rising. However, the OBR forecasts inflation to remain below the Bank's 2% target rate until at least 2025. Threadneedle Street has also said it does not intend to raise rates until there is "clear evidence" of a stronger economic picture emerging.

Some analysts believe the Bank is more likely to cut interest rates from the current level of 0.1% – already the lowest rate in its 326-year history – into negative territory. [Negative rates](#) would involve charging commercial banks to deposit funds with the central bank, with the aim of encouraging lending to boost the economy.

House prices

[House prices](#) in the UK are expected to fall sharply next year, driven by rising unemployment and the end of the government's stamp duty holiday.

Despite the worst recession in three centuries, house prices hit a six-year high at the end of 2020 as people rushed to use the tax break and many re-evaluated their living arrangements during lockdown. However, mortgage lenders believe a sharp decline is coming. Halifax, Britain's biggest mortgage lender, estimates an annual drop of [between 2% and 5%](#), while the OBR is more pessimistic, predicting an 8% fall in prices.

Brexit

'Off the hook or cut adrift?': what the papers say as Brexit transition ends

Major moment occupies most front pages – with takes varying from jubilant to sombre



Front pages of the UK papers on 1 January 2021 as the Brexit transition period ends. Composite: Various

Front pages of the UK papers on 1 January 2021 as the Brexit transition period ends. Composite: Various

Agence France Presse

Thu 31 Dec 2020 21.18 EST

Britain's eurosceptic newspapers, after decades of bashing Brussels, celebrate victory in their Friday editions after the [Brexit](#) transition period ended, but pro-EU outlets dwell on a “day of sadness”.

The Guardian's front page headline focuses on Britain finally quitting the EU in the midst of a “[crisis, without fanfare](#)”. The paper’s coverage also

includes a story on Dover being “[eerily quiet](#)” after a “week of mayhem” and an editorial calling Brexit a “[tragic national error](#)”.

Guardian front page, Friday 1 January 2021: In crisis, without fanfare, UK finally ends the EU era [pic.twitter.com/CmI4ntrOpU](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [December 31, 2020](#)

The Times splashes on Boris Johnson’s “upbeat new year’s message” celebrating an “amazing” future for the UK.

Friday’s TIMES: “Johnson celebrates an ‘amazing’ future for UK” [#TomorrowsPapersToday pic.twitter.com/Bolk4uh1EO](#)

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [December 31, 2020](#)

The online **Independent** runs with a satirical cartoon portraying leading Brexiteers as various species of fish, referencing arguments over control of fisheries that nearly upended a trade deal between London and Brussels after months of talks. The headline is “Off the hook – or cut adrift?”. Johnson is a flounder, “generally out of its depth”, while former Ukip leader Farage is drawn as a kipper, “commonly gutted, pickled or smoked”.

Tomorrow's [@independent](#) front page [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#). To subscribe to the Daily Edition <https://t.co/XF8VnDpHYF> [pic.twitter.com/FJ8uIcYw3W](#)

— The Independent (@Independent) [December 31, 2020](#)

The front page of the **Daily Express** shows a picture of the White Cliffs of Dover and the headline “Our future. Our Britain. Our destiny”.

Friday's front page: Our future. Our Britain. Our Destiny. [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)<https://t.co/vnWu7T9nxw> [pic.twitter.com/jfwbTuf9u4](#)

— Daily Express (@Daily_Express) [December 31, 2020](#)

The Sun relegates the Brexit story to a front-page box headlined “PM: Britain Brexpects”, reporting Johnson’s words that Brexit marked a moment for national renewal in which the country would “turbocharge” scientific innovation.

The tabloid splashes instead a graphic of Big Ben with a giant syringe marking 12 o’clock, to publicise its campaign for an army of volunteers to help in Britain’s coronavirus vaccination programme.

Tomorrow's front page: 'Join our Jabs Army'
pic.twitter.com/YhHpLdGP8M

— The Sun (@TheSun) [December 31, 2020](#)

“Welcome to 2021 – and two reasons to hope for a much brighter future,” headlines the **Daily Telegraph**, where Johnson made his name as a Brussels-bashing Europe correspondent in the 1990s.

It refers to Brexit and to UK regulators’ approval of a new Covid-19 vaccine developed in Britain by Oxford University and Cambridge-based AstraZeneca.

Friday's Telegraph: Welcome to 2021 - and two reasons to hope for a much brighter future' [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#DailyTelegraph](#) [#Telegraph](#) pic.twitter.com/TC7nQHTFlw

— Tomorrow's Papers Today (@TmrrowsPapers) [December 31, 2020](#)

The **Daily Mail** has already moved on to focus entirely on the pandemic after new data showed nearly one million vaccinations have already been administered in Britain.

Friday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/oRAI8Og3AS

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [December 31, 2020](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Doctors in England despair over disregard for Covid restrictions

Hospital staff express frustration as they tell of reckless behaviour by some members of the public

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



[Helen Pidd](#)

[Email](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 12.57 EST First published on Thu 31 Dec 2020 12.32 EST



A coronavirus sign in Westminster, London. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

“If people clapped for us now, excuse my language but I would probably just tell them to fuck off,” said the exhausted junior doctor facing January in Britain on an overcrowded intensive care unit. “The majority of people, even people I know who are supposed to be sensible, are all doing things they shouldn’t be and still bubbling with their 80-year-old mother. It feels like almost everyone is breaking the rules in a dangerous way.”

The doctor, who asked not to be named, was training in a hospital in the West Midlands. Like many medics she said she felt increasingly frustrated at the behaviour of people who might have [applauded the NHS](#) on their doorsteps in the spring. It had been a hard year watching patients struggle for breath and, ultimately, life.

“It’s not just elderly people, but people in their 50s, people in their 30s with no comorbidities, who haven’t made it,” she said. “We’ve had two pregnant women in ICU. We had one couple come in, neither were that old but both very ill, and I had to tell one of them that their partner had died. It has been really tough.”

The West Midlands, like much of England, is now in [tier 4](#), the highest level of coronavirus restrictions. Yet outside the hospital, she said, too many

people were behaving recklessly.

“I cannot go to the shops because it makes me so upset and so angry. I needed milk the other day and I didn’t get it because I couldn’t face going into the shop near me – seeing people without masks on and with their [masks around their chins](#) just drives me mad. It feels like a complete slap in the face.”

In London, Hugh Montgomery, a professor who works in intensive care at the Whittington hospital in London, went further. Anyone not social distancing or following the rules had “blood on their hands”, he said.

He [told BBC 5 live](#): “They are spreading this virus. Other people will spread it and people will die. They won’t know they have killed people, but they have.”

In Greater Manchester, also in tier 4, hospital admissions for Covid [are creeping back up again](#). At one emergency department this Thursday a woman in her 90s was admitted. “She’d caught Covid from her family on Christmas Day,” said a consultant, who added that she feared her hospital could be overwhelmed within a few weeks.

Although hospitals in the north-west of England were not yet under the same pressure [as their London counterparts](#), ward space was already running out, said the consultant. Ambulances are backing up, corridors are filling with patients on trolleys and it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate Covid cases from people with other illnesses.

“Our greatest fear is we will become overwhelmed,” the consultant said. “At the moment we are treating everybody. It might not be in the safest, most socially distant way, but if you come in with a serious problem you will be treated and it will be fine, though a few people might get Covid. But it’s getting to the stage where if we have a massive influx of Covid patients our ability to manage that is going to be really seriously compromised.”

The consultant said she did not mind that people were no longer out on their doorsteps clapping every Thursday to show support for the [NHS](#), but wished they would think more about how their behaviour could affect others.

“People don’t realise or maybe care that what they do as an individual, the risks they are prepared to take, doesn’t just affect them – they think ‘well, it’s up to me’. But they might be asymptomatic and could give it to somebody who could die.”

On Wednesday, she said, she had ducked into a hairdresser for a trim before the shutters came down under tier 4, and was horrified to see how many people were bending the rules. “There were two places doing takeaway food and drink and they were basically running an outdoor bar. It seemed to me everyone where I live was going there, buying alcohol and having a night out. I had to fight my way past literally 15 people, all outside the door of the hairdressers, all without masks on because they were drinking. I was thinking, are you crazy?”

She added: “It might feel nice now but it’s just not caring. I try not to say anything because people are already on edge, but it’s so frustrating. These are people who really should know better.”

Coronavirus

Brazil death toll passes 195,000 in world's third worst outbreak; Turkey bans arrivals from UK - as it happened

Coronavirus

New coronavirus variant may have been in US since October

Re-analysis of 2m Covid tests raises fresh questions about origin of B117 ‘UK strain’ and suggests it may already be widespread

[Linda Geddes](#) in London and [Amanda Holpuch](#) in New York

Fri 1 Jan 2021 10.23 EST First published on Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST



People receive Covid tests on Wednesday in Parker, Colorado, one of the closest testing sites to Ebert county, where the first US case of the new Covid-19 variant was found. Photograph: Michael Ciaglo/Getty Images

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A coronavirus variant carrying some of the same mutations as the highly contagious British variant may have been in the US since October and already be widespread, a re-analysis of more than 2m tests suggests.

Genome sequencing to confirm whether the variant observed in Americans is the same as the so-called B117 variant currently circulating in the UK is under way.

Results are expected within days but the revelations have prompted fresh questions about where the altered virus originated, including a small possibility that it began in the US, not the UK, or elsewhere altogether. The variant has also been found in at least 17 countries, including South Korea, Spain, Australia and Canada.

“It wouldn’t be at all surprising if at least some of the cases were B117,” said Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute in La Jolla, California, who was not involved in the research, but whose team confirmed a Californian case of the B117 variant on Wednesday.

“It has probably been here for a while at low levels – but you don’t see it until you look for it.”

The existence of a new and highly transmissible Sars CoV-2 variant was announced by the UK’s health secretary on 14 December, after Covid-testing laboratories reported that a growing number of their positive samples were missing a signal from one of the three genes their [PCR tests](#) use to confirm the presence of the virus.

Further sequencing revealed that such “[S gene dropout](#)” was the result of mutations in the gene encoding the spike protein which the virus uses to gain entry to human cells. The variant is thought to have been circulating in the UK since September.

News of the new variant has led to multiple countries [restricting travel from the UK](#) – or in the case of the US, requiring travelers to show proof of a negative Covid-19 test to be allowed into the country. However, the first known US cases were detected earlier this week in Colorado and California, and the suspicion is it may already be widespread.

In the final hours of 31 December, a third US state, Florida, [officially reported](#) a case of the variant coronavirus, a man in his twenties in Martin

county, north of West Palm Beach, who had no recent history of travel, the Florida health department said.

To investigate, scientists at the California-based DNA testing company Helix examined the prevalence of S gene dropout among 2 million of the Covid tests the company has processed in recent months. They observed an increase in S gene dropout among positive samples since early October, when 0.25% of positive tests exhibited this pattern.

This has since grown, hitting 0.5% on average last week – although in Massachusetts, which has the highest number of such samples, it currently stands at 1.85%, although no cases of the B117 variant have been announced in that state yet.

Further analysis revealed mutations in some of the same regions of the S gene which are also present in the B117 variant – although full sequencing of the viral genome is needed to confirm whether this is indeed the same variant, or something else.

The coronavirus pandemic is out of control in the US, with the death toll in 24 hours of more than 3,740 earlier this week signifying the worst day of the outbreak in the nation yet.

Public health experts and Joe Biden, the Democratic president-elect, have warned that the situation will get worse before it gets better, even as vaccines come on stream.

Helix is currently working with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as it awaits test results on the variant found in the US.

“If we do see the [B117 variant], then we might be able to look at whether it was introduced into the US one time or multiple times, or if it has further mutated,” said Nicole Washington, associate director of research at Helix, whose research was published as a [pre-print](#) and has not yet been peer-reviewed.

“If all the samples have it, then it has probably been here for a while, but if only one or two samples have it then it may be that it was recently

introduced and we're just at the beginning of seeing it spread."

It is also possible that the variant originated in the US and then spread to the UK – although this is unlikely, given that the B117 variant appears to be more prevalent in England, Topol said. "However, I don't think it should be known as the UK variant because we don't know where it came from."



Paramedics administer oxygen to a potential Covid-19 patient in Hawthorne, California, one of the states where the new variant has been detected.
Photograph: Apu Gomes/AFP/Getty Images

If B117 really is widely established in the US, then travel bans are unlikely to work, Topol added: "The variant is likely to become dominant [within the US] in the next few months, so what we need to do is to outrun it through a combination of really tight mitigation measures, including surveillance and testing, and vaccinating like there's no tomorrow," he said. "The vaccines should work fine."

Even if the variant identified by Helix isn't B117, the nature of some of the mutations it contains are concerning, because they may increase the virus's ability to infect human cells, added Ravi Gupta, a professor of clinical microbiology at the University of Cambridge, UK, who helped sequence the B117 variant.

Meanwhile the US has fallen far short of the goals set by the US government for the number of people it had hoped would be vaccinated by the end of 2020.

The top US infectious disease expert, Anthony Fauci, on Thursday called on the federal government to deploy more resources to vaccinate Americans.

As overworked, underfunded state public health departments scrambled to administer the vaccines, some senior citizens waited out overnight to receive their first dose in Florida.

“We would have liked to see it run smoothly and have 20m doses into people ... by the end of 2020, which was the projection. Obviously it didn’t happen, and that’s disappointing,” Fauci told NBC on Thursday.

Retail industry

UK high street lost 177,000 jobs in 2020, study finds

Job losses expected to continue in new year with further 200,000 cuts



A woman walks past sale signs in the windows of a Debenhams store at the start of the Boxing Day sales in Manchester. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

The high street shed 177,000 jobs in 2020 according to a study that predicts an even more devastating toll on retail jobs this year, with a further 200,000 expected to be lost.

The job losses in what is the UK's biggest private employment sector – with particular importance for women – illustrate the dramatic and permanent impact the pandemic will have on the shopping landscape.

The figure equates to 3,400 jobs lost every week in 2020, according to the new figures from the Centre for Retail Research (CRR) published on Friday. With [Debenhams](#) and [Sir Philip Green's Arcadia](#) group among 2020's high-

profile casualties, the CRR described 2020 as one of the most troubled periods for the UK high street over the past 25 years.

Quick guide

Why are department stores struggling?

Show Hide

Big stores are expensive to run

Department stores were once celebrated as temples of consumerism. But mid-market chains like [Debenhams](#) and House of Fraser are saddled with large high street stores in town centres where shopper numbers are dwindling but costs, such as rent and wages, are rising.

The internet is killing the high street

By the end of 2018 Britons had splurged nearly £70bn via their phones and tablets. That spree is expected to continue, with online sales predicted to hit almost £100bn by 2021, according to consultants at Retail Economics. Department stores are in the firing line as fewer Britons now bother to physically visit the high street, with clothing and household gadget sales having moved online fastest.

Money is tight

Britons have faced a sharp rise in living costs since the EU referendum. Last year inflation rose to 3%, while wages remained stuck between 2% and 2.5%. According to pay experts, most wage bargaining deals signed last year were nearer 2%. That made for a significant fall in inflation-adjusted earnings and [depressed the disposable incomes of most shoppers](#).

Britons want experiences not things

The volume of clothing and footwear sold in the UK declined by 0.8% last year and is predicted to fall again this year, according to retail consultancy GlobalData. The slump is blamed on retailers passing on higher sourcing costs stemming from the weakness of sterling but also on Britons prioritising treats such as holidays and eating out.

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About 15,700 stores closed their doors permanently, with Joshua Bamfield, the CRR's director, predicting that up to 200,000 more jobs could disappear in 2021 as the big shift to online shopping during lockdown means yet more tough decisions about the future of stores.

“Our forecast is based upon a number of factors such as the cumulative effects of months of closure and its impact upon cashflow and rent arrears that will be payable when the moratorium ends,” said Bamfield, “while the longer-term effects of the greater use by shoppers of all kinds of online retailing is likely to be hugely damaging for physical stores.”

In 2020 half of employees working for retailers that went bust lost their jobs, which is a bigger proportion than during the 2008 recession, when it was about a third, said the CRR. The majority of the job losses were the result of store closures as independents shut and big chains scaled back their physical presence. In a sign of the times, the rescue deals brokered for the likes of Oasis, Warehouse and Cath Kidston jettisoned all their stores.

The continued hollowing-out of the high street is eliminating entry-level retail jobs – positions such as sales assistant and checkout operator – which have traditionally been held by women, whereas jobs in growth areas related to e-commerce, such as van driving, are going more to men.

[The Fashion and Textile Children’s Trust](#) (FTCT), a hardship charity that assists children whose parents work in the retail sector but are struggling to make ends meet, said it was “braced” for a flood of requests for help. During 2020, the number of inquiries for its grants increased by nearly 50% to 3,400.

Anna Pangbourne, the FTCT’s director, said the charity had handed out a record amount of financial support during the health crisis, helping more than 1,000 children with grants totalling £520,000.

“This year has been challenging for everyone, but has also shown how vulnerable some families are to sudden changes in financial circumstance, such as furlough or redundancy,” said Pangbourne. “We have heard from

families who have had to choose between paying the rent or buying their children's uniform for school.”

In the wake of Debenhams slumping back into administration in April, the FTCT has given grants worth £48,000 to staff made redundant by the chain. Debenhams, which still employs 12,000 people, although many of them are furloughed, is in the middle of a [closing down sale](#) with a potential rescue by Mike Ashley's [Frasers Group](#) the chain's last hope.

Pangbourne said most of the families it worked with were unable to save even when they were earning their full salary “so when faced with furlough, reduced pay or redundancy, they've had to make some very hard choices”. Its grants are for essentials such as domestic appliances, school uniforms and home learning kit.

The total number of retail jobs lost in 2020 was up by almost a quarter on the 143,100 recorded for 2019. Last year Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Boots and [John Lewis](#) were among the major store groups to announce big job cuts.

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Tightening restrictions on the back of rising coronavirus infection rates mean non-essential retail stores are now closed in three of the four home nations: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The move to tier 4 rules has also shut two-thirds of English stores.

Lost Christmas sales, coupled with the end of government emergency support, such as the business rates holiday, means retailers are facing tough financial decisions. Robert Hayton, head of property tax at real estate adviser Altus Group, said there was a “real risk” that some of the hundreds of thousands shops forced to close would not reopen.

[Fashion](#)

Pat McGrath becomes first makeup artist to receive damehood from the Queen

The groundbreaking British artist honoured for services to fashion, beauty and diversity



Pat McGrath, who has been made a dame for services to the fashion and beauty industry and diversity in the New Year's Honours list
Photograph: Ben Hassett/PA

Pat McGrath, who has been made a dame for services to the fashion and beauty industry and diversity in the New Year's Honours list
Photograph: Ben Hassett/PA

[Alyx Gorman](#)
[@AlyxG](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.18 EST

British makeup artist Pat McGrath has been awarded a damehood in the Queen's New Year 2021 honours list, becoming the first makeup artist ever

to do so.

[Beauty queen: how Pat McGrath revolutionised makeup](#)

[Read more](#)

Throughout her three decade-long career in the beauty industry, McGrath has been known for breaking boundaries with her theatrical, experimental and inclusive approach to makeup artistry. She is frequently described as the world's most influential makeup artist.



Makeup by Pat McGrath at the Dior spring/summer 2004 haute couture show in Paris. Photograph: Laurent Rebours/AP

[Pat McGrath: 25 years of skin secrets from fashion's go-to makeup artist](#)

[Read more](#)

McGrath is known for her editorial work with i-D Magazine and Vogue – which have resulted in some of the magazines' best-recognised covers – and her runway collaborations with the late Alexander McQueen, and John Galliano during his time as creative director of Dior.

Her work utilises materials such as feathers, lace, pearls and prosthetics to blur the line between traditional makeup artistry and special effects.

In an [Instagram post](#) acknowledging her receipt of the honour, McGrath thanked her mother, Jean McGrath, a dressmaker and first-generation Jamaican immigrant, whom she frequently cites as the inspiration for her career. McGrath was born in Northampton in 1970 and moved to London as a teenager in the late-1980s, where she met many of the people who would become lifelong collaborators, including the British Vogue editor Edward Enninful.

[Pat McGrath Labs becomes Selfridges biggest-selling beauty line](#)

[Read more](#)

In recent years, McGrath has enjoyed explosive success with her makeup brand Pat McGrath Labs, which launched in 2015, and by 2019 was valued at \$1bn. The line is known for its playful approach and for catering to a large array of skin tones – a strategy that was uncommon even a few years ago.

“ I am especially honoured that this award is also for diversity,” McGrath [told Vogue](#). “Colour across the spectrum is my life’s work and inspiration.”

Music

MF Doom, iconic masked hip-hop MC, dies aged 49

Rapper and producer known for multiple projects including Madvillain died in October, according to announcement by wife



MF Doom, aka Daniel Dumile, who has died aged 49. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

MF Doom, aka Daniel Dumile, who has died aged 49. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

*[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)
[@ben_bt](#)*

Thu 31 Dec 2020 17.42 EST

MF Doom, one of US hip-hop's most distinctive and respected MCs and producers, has died aged 49.

His wife Jasmine posted on his Instagram account:

The greatest husband, father, teacher, student, business partner, lover and friend I could ever ask for. Thank you for all the things you have shown, taught and given to me, our children and our family. Thank you for teaching me how to forgive beings and give another chance, not to be so quick to judge and write off. Thank you for showing how not to be afraid to love and be the best person I could ever be. My world will never be the same without you. Words will never express what you and Malachi mean to me, I love both and adore you always. May THE ALL continue to bless you, our family and the planet.

Her post indicated he died on 31 October. The cause of death was not announced.

MF Doom, AKA Daniel Dumile, was born in London in 1971, moving to New York as a child. He had a first flush of success in the early 1990s with the group KMD, signing to major label Elektra Records, but his burgeoning career collapsed with the death of his brother and bandmate DJ Subroc in 1993.

Following an itinerant few years living, in his words, “damn near homeless”, he returned to music in 1997 and adopted his now-iconic look, a mask similar to Marvel villain Dr Doom which he wore in public ever since; the cover of his debut album that year, Operation Doomsday, depicted him as the comic book character. He later adapted the mask to one worn by a character in the film Gladiator.

His most lauded era came in the early noughties, beginning with Take Me To Your Leader under the alias King Geedorah, which again plundered pop culture for samples and moods. He used another alias, Viktor Vaughn, before returning to MF Doom for second album Mm.. Food.

He explained his populous creative universe in 2011, saying: “The idea of having one different character all the time, to me, makes – to me – the story boring. I get that mainly from novels, that style of writing, or movies, where there’s multiple characters who carry the storyline.” He even populated the stage with different versions of himself – he was criticised for using a masked stand-in at some concerts, but argued: “Whoever plays the character plays the character.”

In 2004 he created what is widely regarded as his masterpiece album: Madvillainy, made with cratedigging producer Madlib, a dense, heady, soulful triumph of charismatic lyricism and brilliant sampling, and regarded by many music publications as one of the great albums of the decade.

Profile raised, MF Doom embarked on further starry collaborations, including with Danger Mouse on The Mouse and the Mask, and Wu-Tang Clan rapper Ghostface Killah, producing tracks for his albums Fishscale and More Fish and rapping together on tracks including Angelz. Other partnerships would come with leftfield hip-hop figures like Czarface and Jneiro Jarel, plus Flying Lotus, the Avalanches, and more. He was remixed by Thom Yorke, and later collaborated with Yorke and Radiohead bandmate Jonny Greenwood on a track called Retarded Fren.

In 2017, Dumile's son Malachi Ezekiel died aged 14. Dumile paid tribute on Instagram, calling him "the greatest son one could ask for. Safe journey and may all our ancestors greet you with open arms. One of our greatest inspirations. Thank you for allowing us to be your parents. Love you, Mali."

El-P, Ty Dolla \$ign and Tyler, the Creator were among the artists paying tribute to MF Doom on Twitter. Flying Lotus said "my soul is crushed", and added that the pair had been working on an EP together. [Hip-hop](#) radio DJ Peter Rosenberg called him "one of the most influential, unique and brilliant MCs of all time".

Acclaimed rap producer Kenny Beats wrote: "I heard that some authors rewrote entire novels by the greats just to see how it felt. Denzel [Curry] and I made Unlocked talking about Doom every single day just trying to channel an ounce of the feeling."

2021.01.01 - Brexit

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Fear, mistrust – and hope: Britain's long walk away from the EU

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The Guardian view of Brexit: a tragic national error

[Editorial](#)

Britain is now out of the EU. But this is a day of sadness, not of glory, for we shall always be part of Europe



‘This is a country divided over Europe. We were divided in the past and we will be divided in the future. Getting Brexit done is a fantasy.’ Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

‘This is a country divided over Europe. We were divided in the past and we will be divided in the future. Getting Brexit done is a fantasy.’ Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 31 Dec 2020 18.00 EST

“And the answer is – we’re out.” Four and a half years have passed since the BBC’s David Dimbleby pronounced the result of Britain’s EU referendum. At 11pm on 31 December, his words became finally and fatefully true. The United Kingdom is now no longer part of the [European Union](#) or subject to

its rules. We have closed the door and walked away. We are on our own. We're out.

For many in Britain, it is a glorious day. Departure from the EU, for those who wanted it, is a moment of [independence](#) regained, sovereignty reclaimed, and of taking back control. They hope it will sweep the European argument out of British life. They want it to be, in the [prime minister's words](#), “a new chapter in our national story”, the fulfilment of “the sovereign wish of the British people to live under their own laws, made by their own elected parliament”.

For others, 1 January is simply a moment of relief. The Brexit wars have lasted eight long years, from the moment David Cameron committed the Conservatives to a referendum in January 2013. Even Brexit’s eclipse by Covid in 2020 could not prevent Europe’s return to the headlines as 2021 approached and the possibility of a no-deal departure again loomed. On this, both Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer spoke as one [on Wednesday](#). These arguments, they both said, are over.

In one sense, they are right. Political parties must look forward, not back. In another sense they are profoundly wrong. This is a day of sadness. Britain’s departure remains a tragic national error. We have expelled ourselves from a union that was good for this country and the world. The role of the anti-European press in making this happen was decisive, so it is somehow fitting that a government [led by journalists](#) has slammed the door. But at least the EU can no longer be blamed for our continuing tensions, inequalities and failures of governance.

These tensions cannot be magicked away. Brexit was opposed by majorities in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and London and other cities, as well as by most young people and most graduates. None of that is going to change, whatever the overall majority verdict was in 2016 and however tired of the argument we all may be. This is a country divided over [Europe](#). We were divided in the past and we will be divided in the future. Getting Brexit done is a fantasy. It is a supposed solution that only creates new historic problems.

In 2016, many of the most fanatical Brexiteers hoped the UK’s departure would trigger the EU’s breakup. Yet two of the most striking consequences

of the vote were the unity of the EU27 in the face of Brexit compared with the growing disunity of the UK4 over the issue. The [breakup of Britain](#) rather than the EU is now the more likely prospect. It would be a terrible price to pay. But the delusions that fed and fostered Brexit still have much of the Conservative party and press in their grip, as a number of gloating speeches from the Tory benches on Wednesday indicated.

Theresa May's warning from those benches posed a far more real question. We must never allow ourselves to think that sovereignty means isolationism or exceptionalism, said Mrs May. We live in an interconnected world, she added. In some ways Mr Johnson seems to understand this. His Commons speech spoke of Britain as "the best friend and ally the EU could have", which perhaps marked a change of tone. But the movement he leads is not interested in alliances or compromises. It feeds off fantasies of greatness, which Mr Johnson constantly indulges. It fatally confuses sovereignty with power.

Brexit is done – but it is not over. In the medium term it leaves behind all manner of sources of [future conflict](#) for British politics. These include the fine print of the agreement (ignored altogether in Wednesday's parody of a scrutiny process), new immigration controls, the maintenance of regulatory alignment, the status of service industries, fishing, access to databases, defence cooperation and, perhaps above all, the ambiguous place of Northern Ireland within the deal. All of these are iterations of [a deeper truth](#): that we shall never cease to be Europeans and will never cease to engage with Europe.

In his novel *The Stone Raft*, the Portuguese writer [José Saramago](#) imagines the Iberian peninsula breaking physically away from Europe at the Pyrenees and drifting across the world's oceans in a fruitless search for a new home. Today, Britain can feel a bit like a metaphorical [stone raft too](#). Except that the real Britain will remain anchored in perpetuity across the Channel from the European continent, its peoples, economies and cultures, of which we shall always be part – and to which we hope one day, in some way, to return.

Brexit

'We feel in a bit of a no man's land': Brexit brings mixed feelings in Trowbridge

Wiltshire voted to leave the EU but jubilation is in short supply as the UK finally exits



Alex Joll, who runs the Free Range Cafe in Trowbridge. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

Alex Joll, who runs the Free Range Cafe in Trowbridge. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian



[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

As the UK's departure from the EU loomed, Alex Joll, who runs the Free Range Cafe in Trowbridge's grand old town hall, thought he had better stockpile one of his key products.

"It's quite random," he said. "Our coffee comes from Peru, but is stored in a huge warehouse in Germany before coming to the UK, where it is roasted. I thought I'd better stock up just in case. I got in an extra month's worth a little while ago to tide us over just in case."

[Sector by sector: are British firms ready for post-Brexit trade?](#)

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Joll voted for [Brexit](#). "For all sorts of reasons, really. I don't think the EU was the right institution for the UK to operate in. I've lived in France and Spain and am married to a Spanish woman. I think they'll let us back in when we want to go. It was time for a change."

Ben Laver, 18, who was doing a shift at the cafe, was too young to vote in the EU referendum. He would have plumped for remain. "As a young person, the economic insecurity of leaving the EU is concerning. I don't

think all that was promised – the extra money for the NHS, all the fishing rights – has come to fruition.”



Ben Laver, 18, a member of an alt-rock band, is worried that the departure from the EU will make it harder to tour Europe. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

Laver is a member of an alt-rock band called [Enter Red](#). He worries that the departure from the EU will make it harder for his band, which tours the south-west of England, to venture overseas. “Usually you get the cheapest plane ticket, sleep where you can and then dash home. Paying hundreds of pounds for visas may not make it viable for us.”

A majority of people who live in Wiltshire – 52.5% – voted for leave. With hours to go before the UK’s final exit, there was no sense of jubilation in the county town of Trowbridge. And for many people, there was a bit of extra work to be done, more rules to read.

[British businesses on preparing for Brexit: 'It's been a bit of a debacle'](#)
[Read more](#)

Sam Rose, a director of a recruitment company, was to be found ploughing through regulations trying to work out how the changes would affect her business. “We feel in a bit of a no man’s land at the moment,” she said.

Her company provides labour for many of the factories, workshops and food-processing plants on the industrial estates on the outskirts of Trowbridge. For years, a steady stream of workers from eastern Europe has arrived here.



Serkan Ozturk with his son Emir, six. He set up a fruit and veg shop in the centre of the town in the summer. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

“That has been slowing down,” Rose said. Because coronavirus has led to more British people losing their jobs, there is no shortage of labour at the moment. “But we don’t know whether that will change.”

Some of the factories for which she supplies labour are reporting concerns that their supply chains with Europe will be impacted. “That could have a knock-on effect on us,” she said.

Trowbridge has long attracted people from across the globe. It has large Italian and [Moroccan communities and is twinned with the Moroccan city of Oujda.](#)

Serkan Ozturk, who is of Turkish origin, set up a fruit and veg shop in the centre of the town in the summer, a bold venture in the time of Covid. “It has been hard,” he said. Now he is a little worried that Brexit could lead to

an increase in the price of his fruit. “But I think Brexit will be good for the UK in the end,” he said.

Wiltshire’s farmers are not so sure. Nick Bush has an arable and sheep farm north of Trowbridge. He is pleased that there is a deal, but says it is just the start, rather than the end, of the next chapter for British agriculture.



Farmer Nick Bush is worried there could be hitches at borders. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

“The fact we have a deal is a good starting point,” Bush said. But he worries that there still could be “hitches” at the borders and is keen to know more about [the new environmental land management \(ELM\) scheme, which will largely replace schemes that have been available under the common agricultural policy.](#)

Farmers will not remain quiet if things do not work out. “I like the fact that the government now has to answer more directly to farmers,” said Bush. “They can’t hide behind the EU and say it’s their fault now.”

The leader of Trowbridge town council, Stewart Palmen, is sad at the departure from the EU. A Liberal Democrat, he campaigned for remain and for a second referendum.



Onofrio Piazza in his barber's shop in Trowbridge with his son. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

“What worries me is the ‘little Britain’ attitude. I see us as just being part of the world. My father’s Finnish and I’ve always classed myself as European. Today I’m angry about my citizenship being taken away and my identity being restricted.”

His Tory counterpart on the council, Antonio Piazza, also voted for remain but said the deal was a “huge relief”. “I think people are ready for a fresh start, to get on with our lives and think about the positives, such as the new trade deals and relationships with other countries.”

Piazza’s family has paperwork to do. His father, Onofrio, a barber in the town, came to the south-west of [England](#) from Italy in the 1970s and settled but still has Italian citizenship. “He has a form to complete to stay in the UK,” said Piazza. “But that shouldn’t be complicated.”

Piazza said he loved the multiculturalism of Trowbridge. “That won’t change. It is possible to leave the EU and still love Europe.”

Brexit

From leave vote to last-ditch deal – a big Brexit timeline



Composite: EPA/Guardian Design

Composite: EPA/Guardian Design

Key landmarks along the bumpy road towards Britain's departure from the EU

Lisa O'Carroll

@lisaocarroll

Thu 31 Dec 2020 18.00 EST

It's all over. There is no going back. The UK has left the EU after 47 years. So how did we get here?

23 June 2016



An EU referendum postal voting form. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

The UK [votes to leave the EU](#) by a slim majority, 51.9% to 48.1%, setting the ball rolling on one of the most tumultuous chapters in recent British history. It will involve supreme court challenges, the prorogation of parliament, sackings of some of the most senior politicians in the Conservative party, and even splits in the future prime minister's own family, with Boris Johnson's brother quitting government and his sister running for election with a rival political party.

24 June 2016

David Cameron resigns, bringing an abrupt end to his six-year premiership.

25 June 2016

[Front pages](#) reflect the divisions that are to come.



Front pages, 25 June 2016. Photograph: PA

- **Daily Mail:** Take a bow, Britain. “It was the day the quiet people of Britain rose up against an arrogant, out-of-touch political class and a contemptuous Brussels elite.”
- **The Sun:** Why should I do the hard s**t? With Cameron photo.
- **The Guardian:** Over. And out.
- **Le Monde:** Good luck.

30 June 2016

take back control



Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, 24 June 2016. Photograph: Mary Turner/Pool/EPA

Boris Johnson rules himself out of race to become Conservative party leader, having been dealt a fatal blow when his former Vote Leave ally Michael Gove announced he was standing.

13 July 2016



Theresa May and her husband, Philip, enter Downing Street, 13 July 2016.
Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

Theresa May becomes prime minister after rivals Johnson and Gove fall.

October 2016

May lays down her red lines to quash Ukip support, telling the party faithful immigration will be the central basis for departure from the EU.

November 2016

Free GIANT map of Britain inside tomorrow



FRIDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2016

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DAILY NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 65p



The Judge: Sir Terence Etherton
Worked with Tony Blair: Lord Justice Sales
The Juris Doctor: Lord Chief Justice Thomas
Fury over 'out of touch' judges who defied 17.4m Brexit voters and could trigger constitutional crisis

ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE

MPS last night tore into an unelected bunch of judges for ruling that embittered Remain supporters in Parliament should be allowed to stop Brexit without a binding verdict of the British public. The Lord Chief Justice and two senior col...

By James Slack Political Editor

into chaos Mrs May's timetable for triggering article 50 - by an ex justice minister - said it was 'ridiculous' that the European court of justice and most traditional Brexit backers could believe that the UK could leave the EU without a referendum. The judgment by Lord Thomas - a feu

Turn to Page 2

Daily Mail ‘Enemies of the people’ front page, 4 November 2016.
Photograph: Daily Mail

Gina Miller wins a high court ruling that the government needs the consent of parliament to trigger article 50.

In an unprecedented attack on the independent judiciary, the Daily Mail brands the judges “enemies of the people”.

January 2017

In a Lancaster House speech, May hardens her red lines, aiming for an end to the jurisdiction of the European court of justice and an exit from the single market and immigration control. On the other side of the Irish Sea, hopes of firm commitments on the Irish border are dashed, sowing the seeds for problems to come.

February 2017

The EU decides the Irish border will be one of the three priority issues to be solved in the legally binding withdrawal agreement. May, still pushing to

convince Eurosceptics of her credentials, will be left unprepared for the weight of the EU juggernaut about to arrive in the negotiation room.

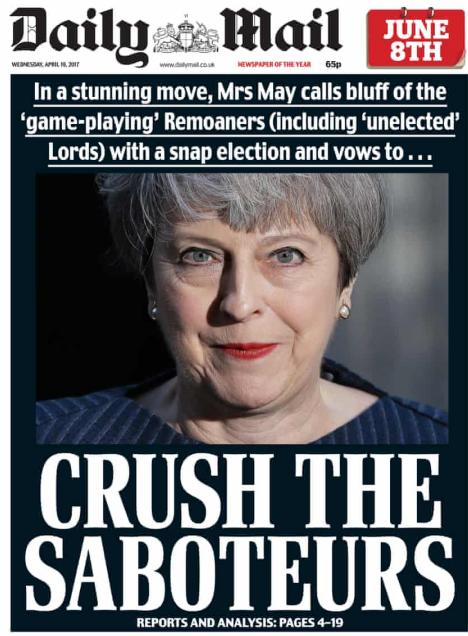
29 March 2017



Michel Barnier, far left, Jean-Claude Juncker, front left, and Donald Tusk, front right, at an EU summit in Brussels on 29 April 2017. Photograph: Virginia Mayo/AP

May invokes article 50, fatefully starting the clock counting down to a Brexit deadline two years later. In Brussels, the EU negotiation machine is at full throttle, [with detailed draft guidelines](#) (including on the troublesome Irish border issue) issued two days later, something UK negotiators will later say gave them a hefty advantage.

April 2017



Daily Mail front page, 19 April 2017. Photograph: Free pic

May calls a snap general election, vowing to “crush the saboteurs”, the Daily Mail claimed. It described her decision as a “stunning move” in which she had called the “bluff of game-playing remoaners (including unelected lords)”.

June 2017



Theresa May on election night, 9 June 2017. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

The election gamble backfires with the shock loss of 13 seats and a hung parliament, forcing May into a deal with the Democratic Unionist party (DUP) in Northern Ireland.

August 2017

Britain releases its plan for the Irish border. It is dismissed by the EU as [“magical thinking”](#).

November 2017

The Telegraph brands 15 MPs including Ken Clarke, Dominic Grieve and Anna Soubry “mutineers” after they say they will join forces with Labour to block measures that would enshrine the date of [Brexit](#) in law.

4 December 2017



Theresa May and Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels, 4 December 2017.
Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

The first phase of negotiations ends with the publication of a joint report, but not without last-minute drama. After touching down in Brussels for lunch with Juncker, May gets an unexpected call from the leader of the DUP, Arlene Foster, who tells her she will not support the paragraphs on the Irish border.

8 December 2017

Four days later, May returns on a pre-dawn flight from Northolt to sign off a deal that contains one new paragraph that sows the seeds of two years of future conflict over the Irish border backstop. Ireland's taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, calls the commitments on the border “bulletproof”.

10 December 2017

The Brexit secretary, David Davis, goes on TV to [downplay the significance](#) of December's joint report, saying it is just a “statement of intent”.

February 2018

Just months after signing the joint report that set up the negotiations framework, May declares that no prime minister could agree to borders between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

6 July 2018



Theresa May gathers the cabinet in her country residence to discuss what will become known as ‘the Chequers plan’, 6 July 2018. Photograph: Joel Rouse/AFP/Getty Images

May produces her Chequers plan to keep the whole of the UK in customs alignment with the EU thus obviating a need for Irish border checks. Michel Barnier rules it out soon after.

9/10 July 2018

[Davis](#) and his junior Brexit minister Steve Baker resign, plunging the government into [a fresh Brexit crisis](#). A day later, Boris Johnson resigns as

foreign secretary.

September 2018



donaldtusk • Follow
• Mirabellgarten Salzburg

donaldtusk A piece of cake, perhaps?
Sorry, no cherries.
#brexit #salzburgsummit2018 #theresamay
#donaldtusk #europeancommission
#europeanunion #euco

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alicia5080 😍😍

holodiana OMG cherry comment 😊😊😊
□

jamilya_the_best I want a little cake with
raspberry□😊

iz4_k We, Poles around the world, are so
proud of you, Mr.Tusk 😊

katarina.art.gal □

justinkacom Cherish the love...

conservativesupporter @chresus Yes, you
can.

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Donald Tusk's post on Instagram: 'A piece of cake, perhaps? Sorry, no cherries.' 20 September 2018. Photograph: Instagram

May is [humiliated in Strasbourg](#) as she is told her proposals won't work. The European council president, Donald Tusk, posts on Instagram mocking May for cherrypicking. Her Europe adviser Raoul Ruparel will later describe it as the [lowest moment in the negotiations](#).

November 2018

Cabinet divisions deepen. The Brexit secretary, Dominic Raab, and the pensions secretary, Esther McVey, [quit](#), as do the Brexit minister Suella Braverman and Northern Ireland minister Shailesh Vara.

23 November 2018

The withdrawal agreement is signed in Brussels as the EU agrees it is the “best possible” Brexit deal, but May returns to domestic political war.

10/11 December 2018

The first meaningful Commons vote on the Brexit deal is postponed after 164 speeches over three of the five days allotted for the debate. May wins a confidence vote.

14 December 2018

Tensions rise with the EU as May returns to Brussels to ask for changes in the deal she has just signed.

14 January 2019

The number of ministers and government aides quitting over Brexit [rises to 19](#) after a whip resigns.

15 January 2019

May [loses the meaningful vote](#) by a landslide 230 votes, the heaviest parliamentary defeat for a prime minister since 1924.

6 February 2019

Tusk wonders about “a special place in hell” for “those who proposed Brexit without a sketch of a plan”.

22 February 2019

Mutiny is in the air as a cabinet trio led by Amber Rudd threaten to [resign](#) unless May takes no deal off the table. The threat works, with May offering votes on no deal and an extension of article 50. But the decision causes shockwaves that will ripple through to the summer when Johnson makes his move on her job.

12 March 2019



The Daily Mail on Theresa May's dash to Brussels for changes to the Irish border backstop, and 24 hours later after a Commons defeat, 12/13 March 2019. Photograph: Daily Mail

What a difference 24 hours makes. May returns from a mercy dash to Brussels for changes on Irish border backstop. The move backfires after her attorney general, Geoffrey Cox, [says legal advice](#) on the Irish border backstop is unchanged. May suffers a [second humiliating defeat](#), this time by 149 votes.

18 March 2019



The Speaker, John Bercow, addressing MPs in the House of Commons, 18 March 2019. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Brexit descends into farce as the Commons Speaker, John Bercow, reaches back to 17th-century parliamentary convention to rule that May [cannot bring her deal back](#) for a third vote unless it is substantially changed.

May 2019

MIRROR: Tears in the back seat 2 [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)
pic.twitter.com/OYNfOUjr5D

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) [May 22, 2019](#)

May confirms she will step down as prime minister by the end of July, firing the starting gun on the race to succeed her, involving Michael Gove, Jeremy Hunt, Matt Hancock, Rory Stewart, Esther McVey and others. May is [pictured welling up](#) as she leaves Downing Street.

July 2019

Johnson is [declared leader of the Tory party](#).

August 2019

Johnson reveals plans to prorogue parliament, causing deep divisions within his party.

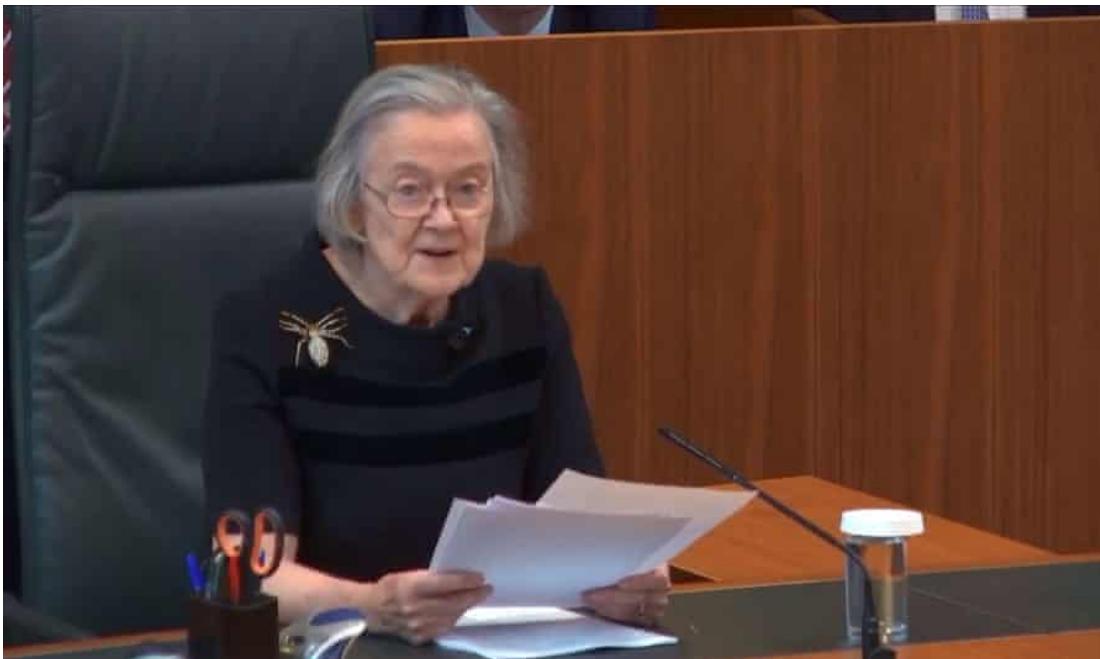
3 September 2019

Johnson suspends 21 members of his party including Grieve, David Gauke and Nicolas Soames who have sought to block a no-deal Brexit. Ten of them will have the [whip restored](#) after a Brexit deal is sealed in October.

5 September 2019

Johnson's brother, Jo, [resigns from the cabinet](#), citing unresolved tension between family and the national interest.

24 September 2019



Lady Hale delivers the supreme court's ruling on the legality of a suspension of parliament, 24 September 2019. Photograph: EPA

The supreme court rules that Johnson's advice to the Queen that parliament should be prorogued for five weeks at the height of the Brexit crisis was unlawful. The court's president, Lady Hale, becomes a hero and her broach an icon for many on the remain side.

October 2019



Boris Johnson and Leo Varadkar at Thornton Manor hotel, 10 October 2019.
Photograph: Leo Varadkar/PA

Boris Johnson and Leo Varadkar meet in the Wirral for 11th-hour discussions to save Brexit and break the deadlock on the Irish border backstop. Days later the deal is revealed, with a Northern Ireland protocol setting a trade border in the Irish Sea.

December 2019



Boris Johnson and his partner, Carrie Symonds, watching election results in 10 Downing Street, 13 December 2019. Photograph: Andrew Parsons/i-Images

Johnson is [returned to power](#) with an 80-seat majority on the promise that he will “get Brexit done”.

31 January 2020



Newspaper front pages on 1 February 2020. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

The UK leaves the EU at 11pm.

March 2020

Trade negotiations begin, hampered by the Covid lockdown. The two sides' chief negotiators, Barnier for the EU and David Frost for the UK, have symptoms.

June 2020

The first deadline for a deal passes with no agreement on fisheries. Johnson tells the EU to put a “tiger in the tank” and get a deal by the middle of July. The EU council president, Charles Michel, tells the UK it will not buy a “[pig in a poke](#)”.

October 2020

Another deadline set by Johnson passes.

November 2020

Several more deadlines pass.

24 December 2020

Finally, a [deal is struck](#).

26 December 2020

The 1,246-page document is released, leaving MPs and MEPs little time to read and scrutinise the detail.

30 December 2020

Johnson tables an 85-page piece of legislation to ratify the deal with less than 48 hours to go before the end of the transition period. Brigid Fowler, a senior researcher at the Hansard Society, [describes the process](#) as a “farce” and “an abdication of parliament’s constitutional responsibilities to deliver proper scrutiny of the executive and of the law”.

The deal is signed in the EU and ratified in the House of Commons by 521 votes to 73.

Brexit

'Keep the light on': joy for some, regret for others at Brexit endgame

Nicola Sturgeon says Scotland will be back soon, while Nigel Farage hails exit from EU



Brexit supporters gather and raise a toast outside parliament. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Brexit supporters gather and raise a toast outside parliament. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Helen Sullivan

@helenrsullivan

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.53 EST

Politicians in Britain and the EU have expressed triumph while others voiced bitter regret after the UK's Brexit transition period ended on Thursday night.

Britain left the European bloc's vast single market for goods, services and the movement of people at 11pm GMT on New Year's Eve – midnight in

Brussels – completing the biggest single economic change the country has experienced since the second world war.

For some, including the prime minister, it was moment of pride. Boris Johnson said the UK was now “free to do trade deals around the world, and free to turbocharge our ambition to be a science superpower”.

But in Scotland, which voted strongly in the 2016 [Brexit](#) referendum to remain, the pro-independence first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, tweeted: “Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on.”

Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on 
pic.twitter.com/qJMImoz3y0

— Nicola Sturgeon (@NicolaSturgeon) [December 31, 2020](#)

The former Ukip leader Nigel Farage, who played a key role in the 2016 Brexit referendum, tweeted: “25 years ago they all laughed at me. Well, they’re not laughing now.”

25 years ago they all laughed at me.

Well, they’re not laughing now. pic.twitter.com/Lbu4kTwXFO

— Nigel Farage (@Nigel_Farage) [December 31, 2020](#)

He also wrote: “This is a big moment for our country, a giant leap forward. Time to raise a glass. BrexitAtLast.”

The UK’s chief Brexit negotiator, Lord Frost, said the UK had a “great future before us” with the chance to “build a better country for us all”.

Britain has just become a fully independent country again - deciding our own affairs for ourselves.

Thank you to everyone who worked with me & [@BorisJohnson](#) to get us here in the last 18 months.

We have a great future before us. Now we can build a better country for us all.

— David Frost (@DavidGHFrost) [December 31, 2020](#)

The Conservative MP Bill Cash, who has campaigned for Brexit for decades, said it was a “victory for democracy and sovereignty.”

On Friday morning, anti-Brexit Labour peer and former Transport minister [Andrew Adonis](#) said: “The very first day of Brexit is a massive rupture of the UK”.

Gibraltar & Northern Ireland effectively remain part of the EU as from today, giving their citizens the freedom of movement & completely free trade which is now denied to the English, Scots & Welsh

The very first day of Brexit is a massive rupture of the UK

— Andrew Adonis (@Andrew_Adonis) [January 1, 2021](#)

Across the Channel the view was different. In his new year’s address, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, expressed regret. “The United Kingdom remains our neighbour but also our friend and ally,” he said. “This choice of leaving Europe, this Brexit, was the child of European malaise and lots of lies and false promises.”

The divorce could also have major constitutional repercussions for the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, which shares a border with EU member the Republic of Ireland, remains more closely tied to the bloc’s economy under the divorce terms, a status some fear could pull it away from the rest of the UK.

Many in Britain felt apprehension about Brexit taking place during a pandemic that has upended life around the world. “I feel very sad that we’re leaving,” said Jen Pearcy-Edwards, a film-maker in London.

“I think that Covid has overshadowed everything that is going on. But I think the other thing that has happened is that people feel a bigger sense of community, and I think that makes it even sadder that we’re breaking up our community a bit, by leaving our neighbours in Europe.

“I’m hopeful that we find other ways to rebuild ties.”

Brexit

Stanley Johnson confirms application for French passport on eve of Brexit

Prime minister's father campaigned to remain in the EU in 2016 while his son led the leave movement



Stanley Johnson was one of the first UK civil servants to work in Brussels after Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973.

Photograph: Brett Cove/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Stanley Johnson was one of the first UK civil servants to work in Brussels after Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973.

Photograph: Brett Cove/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

[Harry Taylor](#)

[@harrytaylr](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.18 EST

Boris Johnson's father Stanley has confirmed that he is applying for a French passport on the eve of Britain's Brexit transition period coming to an end.

In an interview with the French radio station RTL, he said: “It’s not a question of becoming French. If I understand correctly I am French! My mother was born in [France](#), her mother was completely French as was her grandfather.

“For me it’s a question of obtaining what I already have and I am very happy about that.”

Johnson, 80, served as an MEP 40 years ago, and was one of the first UK civil servants to work in Brussels after Britain joined the [European Union](#), then the European Economic Community, in 1973. He went on to work for the European commission.

He campaigned for the UK to remain in the EU in 2016, while his son led the leave movement.

Britain’s transition period will end at 11pm on Thursday, after parliament voted through the prime minister’s post-Brexit trade deal on Wednesday. The UK will no longer be affected by the EU’s freedom of movement rules, meaning among other things that millions will lose the automatic right to work in the EU’s 27 member states.

Thousands of Britons have acquired EU citizenship since the Brexit vote. More than 350,000 had applied for nationality of another EU state as of January this year. Close historical ties between Ireland and the UK [put the country at the top of the league](#) of EU passports held by dual-national Britons.

According to AFP, Johnson said in his interview: “I will always be European, that’s for sure.

“You can’t tell the English ‘you’re not European’. Europe is more than the single market, it’s more than the European Union.

“That said, to have a link like that with the EU is important,” he concluded, apparently referring to an EU passport.

His plans to seek a French passport had already been revealed by his daughter Rachel in a book published in March.

She wrote that her grandmother had been born in Versailles and that if her father received French citizenship she too would like to become French.

Brexit

View from the EU: Britain 'taken over by gamblers, liars, clowns and their cheerleaders'

European commentators weigh in on what Britain's departure from the EU means



A mural by British artist Banksy depicting a worker chipping away at one of the stars on a European Union flag. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images

A mural by British artist Banksy depicting a worker chipping away at one of the stars on a European Union flag. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty Images



[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent
[@jonhenley](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 07.21 EST

Britain faces an uncertain future as it finally pulls clear of the EU's orbit, continental commentators have predicted, its reputation for pragmatism and probity shredded by a [Brexit](#) process most see as profoundly populist and dangerously dishonest.

“For us, the UK has always been seen as like-minded: economically progressive, politically stable, respect for the rule of law – a beacon of western liberal democracy,” said Rem Korteweg, of the Clingendael Institute thinktank in the Netherlands.

“I’m afraid that’s been seriously hit by the past four years. The Dutch have seen a country in a deep identity crisis; it’s been like watching a close friend go through a really, really difficult time. Brexit is an exercise in emotion, not rationality; in choosing your own facts. And it’s not clear how it will end.”

Britain’s long-polished pragmatic image had been “seriously tarnished”, agreed Nicolai von Ondarza, of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. But trust in the UK, too, had taken a heavy battering on the Brexit rollercoaster.

“That’s particularly been the case over the past year,” Von Ondarza said. “Boris Johnson has always been seen as a bit of a gambler, displaying a certain ... flexibility with the truth. But observing him as prime minister has only made that worse.”

Germans tended to view international politics “very much through the prism of international law”, Von Ondarza said, so Johnson’s willingness to ignore it – in the form, particularly, of the [internal market bill](#) – was deeply shocking.

“The idea that you’d willingly violate an international treaty that you’d negotiated and signed barely eight months previously ... That’s just not something you do among allies,” he said. “That whole episode really damaged Britain’s credibility.”

Others were more brutal still. [In Der Spiegel](#), [Nikolaus Blome](#) said there was “absolutely nothing good about Brexit ... which would never have happened had Conservative politicians not, to a quite unprecedented degree, deceived and lied to their people”.

Much of the British media, Blome said, “were complicit, constantly trampling on fairness and facts”, leaving Britain “captured by gambling liars, frivolous clowns and their paid cheerleaders. They have destroyed my [Europe](#), to which the UK belonged as much as France or Germany.”

But Johnson’s lies were the biggest of all, he said: “‘Take back control,’ Johnson lied to his citizens. But all the British government will finally have achieved is to have taken back control of a little shovel and a little sand castle.”

The “sovereignty” in whose name Brexit was done remained, essentially, a myth, [said Jean-Dominique Giuliani](#), of the Robert Schuman Foundation in France. “It is history, geography, culture, language and traditions that make up the identity of a people,” Giuliani said, “not their political organisation.”

It is “wrong to believe peoples and states can permanently free themselves from each other, or take decisions without considering the consequences for their citizens and partners. ‘Take back control’ is a nationalist, populist

slogan that ignores the reality of an interdependent world ... Our maritime neighbour will be much weakened.”

The German historian Helene von Bismarck [doubted](#) Brexit would end what she described as a very British brand of populism. “British populism is a political method, not an ideology, and it does not become redundant with Brexit,” she said.

Von Bismarck identified two key elements in this method: an emotionalisation and over-simplification of highly complex issues, such as Brexit, the Covid pandemic or migration, and a reliance on bogeymen or enemies at home and abroad.

“Populists depend on enemies, real or imagined, to legitimise their actions and deflect from their own shortcomings,” she said. If the EU has been the “enemy abroad” since 2016, it will steadily be replaced by “enemies within”: MPs, civil servants, judges, lawyers, experts, the BBC.

“Individuals and institutions who dare to limit the power of the executive, even if it is just by asking questions, are at constant risk of being denounced as ‘activists’” by the Johnson government, Von Bismarck said. “Everyone has political motives – except for the government, which seeks to define ‘neutrality’.”

Brexit itself is being framed as “the grand departure, the moment the UK is finally free and sovereign, when all problems can be solved with common sense and optimism – justifying a more ‘pragmatic’ approach to rules, constitutional conventions and institutions” that actually amounts to a “worrying disregard for the rule of law”.

“British populism” would continue, she said, especially when the real, hard consequences of the pandemic and Brexit started to bite.

“It is naive to expect a political style which ridicules complexity, presents people with bogeymen to despise, and prides itself on ‘doing what is necessary’ even if ‘elites’ and institutions get in the way, to lose its appeal in times of hardship,” she said.

Elvire Fabry, of France's Institut Jacques Delors, said the past four years had shown Europeans and Britons "just how little we really knew each other". They had also revealed, she said, the fragility of a parliamentary system seen by many on the continent as a point of reference.

"It's been difficult for us to anticipate, at times even to interpret, what's happened" in the UK, Fabry said. "The direction Johnson has taken the Conservative party in – we didn't see that coming. The course he's setting for the country. The polarisation. And the way MPs have been bypassed since he became prime minister"

Most striking of all, she said, was how the politics prevailing in Britain had become "detached from geopolitical reality – from the way the world is developing. It's a political vision turned towards yesterday's world. Ideological. The way the trade deal focused on goods at the expense of services ... It's not the way the world's going."

Painful as the Brexit process may have been for Europeans, however, it had at least demonstrated "the reality and value of the single market, its rules and norms, and of the EU's basis in law", Fabry said. "Those are at the heart of the European identity – and defending them has given the union a new political maturity."

It had also, concluded Korteweg, served as a warning. "I think it's taught us all just how vulnerable our political processes are," he said. "Just eight years ago, leaving the EU was a seriously fringe proposition in British politics, and now look where you are. So we've seen how fragile it all is, what we've built – and how worth defending."

[OpinionBrexit](#)

The left must stop mourning Brexit – and start seeing its huge potential

[Larry Elliott](#)



Those who predict economic Armageddon ignore the reality. The status quo wasn't working – now there's an opportunity for change



‘The mass exodus of banks and other financial institutions from the City of London, predicted since June 2016, has not materialised.’ View over the Thames to the City. Photograph: Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

‘The mass exodus of banks and other financial institutions from the City of London, predicted since June 2016, has not materialised.’ View over the Thames to the City. Photograph: Niklas Halle'n/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 31 Dec 2020 09.04 EST

So this is it. Forty-eight years after Britain joined what was then the European Economic Community, the fasten seatbelt signs are switched on and the cabin lights have been dimmed. It is [time for departure](#).

Many in the UK, especially on the left, are in despair that this moment has arrived. For them, this can never be the journey to somewhere better: instead it is the equivalent of the last helicopter leaving the roof of the US embassy in Saigon in 1975.

The lefties who voted for Brexit see it differently. For them (us, actually, because I am one of them), the vote to leave was historically progressive. It marked the [rejection of a status quo](#) that was only delivering for the better off by those who demanded their voice was heard. Far from being a reactionary spasm, Brexit was democracy in action.

[Brexit is far from done – this deal is no ‘game, set and match’ | Anand Menon](#)
[Read more](#)

Now the UK has a choice. It can continue to mourn or it can take advantage of the opportunities that Brexit has provided. For a number of reasons, it makes sense to adopt the latter course.

For a start, it is clear that the UK has deep, structural economic problems despite – and in some cases because of – almost half a century of EU membership. Since 1973, the manufacturing base has shrivelled, the trade balance has been in permanent deficit, and the [north-south divide](#) has widened. Free movement of labour has helped entrench Britain’s reputation as a low-investment, low-productivity economy. Brexit means that those farmers who want their fruit harvested will now have to do things that the left ought to want: pay higher wages or invest in new machinery.

The part of the economy that has done best out of EU membership has been the bit that needed least help: the City of London. Each country in the EU has tended to specialise: the Germans do the high-quality manufactured goods; France does the food and drink; the UK does the money. Yet the mass exodus of banks and other financial institutions [that has been predicted](#) since June 2016 has not materialised, because London is a global as well as a European financial centre. The City will continue to thrive.

If there are problems with the UK economy, it is equally obvious there are big problems with the EU as well: [slow growth](#), high levels of unemployment, a rapidly ageing population. The single currency – which Britain fortunately never joined – has failed to deliver the promised benefits. Instead of convergence between member states there has been divergence; instead of closing the gap in living standards with the US, the eurozone nations have fallen further behind.

In their heads, those predicting Armageddon for the UK imagine the EU to still be Germany’s miracle economy – the *Wirtschaftswunder* – of the 1960s. The reality is somewhat different. It is Italy, where living standards are [no higher](#) than they were when the single currency was introduced two decades ago. It is Greece, forced to accept [ideologically motivated austerity](#) in return

for financial support. The four freedoms of the single market – no barriers to the movement of goods, services, people and capital – are actually the four pillars of neoliberalism.

The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of nation states and the limitations of the EU. Britain's economic response to the pandemic was speedy and coordinated: the Bank of England cut interest rates and boosted the money supply while the Treasury pumped billions into the NHS and the furlough scheme. It has taken months and months of wrangling for the eurozone to come up with the same sort of joined-up approach.

Earlier in the year, there was criticism of the government when it [decided to opt out](#) of the EU vaccine procurement programme, but this now looks to have been a smart move. Brussels has been slow to place orders for drugs that are effective, in part because it has bowed to internal political pressure to spread the budget around member states – and [its regulator](#) has been slower to give approval for treatments. Big does not always mean better.

Leaving the EU means UK governments no longer have anywhere to hide. They have economic levers they can pull – procurement, tax, ownership, regulation, investment in infrastructure, subsidies for new industries, trade policy – and they will come under pressure to use them.

Many on the remainder left accept the EU has its faults, but they fear that Brexit will be the [start of something worse](#): slash and burn deregulation that will make Britain a nastier place to live.

This, though, assumes that Britain will have rightwing governments in perpetuity. It used to be the left who welcomed change and the right that wanted things to remain the same. The inability to envisage what a progressive government could do with Brexit represents a political role reversal and a colossal loss of nerve.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor

Brexit

Passports and permits: what are the biggest changes to expect after Brexit?

Industry leaders warn of invisible chaos as businesses grapple with trading rules and software systems

- [Brexit: what are consumers' rights on holidays, banking and more?](#)
- [How did your MP vote on the Brexit deal bill?](#)



An anti-Brexit demonstrator holding EU and England flags outside the Houses of Parliament in London. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

An anti-Brexit demonstrator holding EU and England flags outside the Houses of Parliament in London. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent
[@lisaocarroll](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 06.42 EST

The bells of Big Ben will chime to mark the occasion but there will be no street parties or chaos on the roads for the arrival of [Brexit](#) at 11pm, when

the transition period ends.

Covid curbs mean the roads of Kent and streets of Dover, emblematic of the divorce from the EU, are expected to be deserted with little public sign of the abrupt end of a 47-year relationship with the EU.

Industry leaders are warning, however, of “invisible chaos” in the coming weeks as businesses grapple with new trading rules and software systems required from day one for exports to the EU.

While the UK has decided to phase in reciprocal checks over six months, in Northern Ireland they will be operational from day one, raising fears of immediate chaos and confusion despite a £200m support scheme put in place by the government and a grace period for supermarkets.

So what are the biggest changes caused by Brexit?

Immigration

Those who arrive for the first time after 1 January will have to go through the new points-based system requiring a minimum salary of £25,600 for skilled workers and £20,480 for those with job offers in a shortage occupation or in possession of a PhD relevant to the job.

[Messina to Maastricht: the modest European towns that marked the road to Brexit](#)

[Read more](#)

British nationals travelling to [Europe](#) on holiday will be able to do so visa-free for 90 days in a 180-day period but will lose the automatic right to live and work in an EU country.

Passport and other checks at the airport

The “arriving from the EU” lane will disappear at airports and replaced with “goods to declare” or “nothing to declare”.

There will be limits on alcohol and cigarette purchases from the EU on entry to the UK.

The Home Office says Border Force has recruited more than 1,000 extra officers and is training its staff on changes to policy and processes.

EU citizens will continue to be subject to ID and security checks and may be asked about the purpose of their journey. Border officials will be able to check if they have settled or pre-settled status. They will only do this if there is a “specific reason to do so”, according to the Home Office.

EU citizens can continue to use e-passport gates and existing queues – so no separate channel to UK nationals at airports. Some EU citizens not living in the UK may need a “permitted paid engagement” visa if they are visiting for work.

EU citizens

British nationals already settled in Europe have the right to remain although with restrictions on their movements to other EU countries.

EU citizens in the UK before 31 December are entitled to stay but campaigners warn they have only six months to make sure they are granted settled status or pre-settled status by the Home Office.

“The government says ‘you can do this’ by 30 June, but the message should be ‘you must do this or you will lose all your rights’, including your right to live and work in the country, right to healthcare and family reunion rights,” said Maike Bohn, one of the founders of the campaign group the3million.

“We worry about EU citizens losing their temporary pre-settled status and not qualifying for settled status due to absences that are often Covid-related. We continue to be very worried about those who do not realise they could lose all their rights from 1 July 2021, and those who will face discrimination and obstacles because they do not get a physical proof of their rights,” she said.

Landlords and employers

Landlords and employers face sanctions for employing or renting to people not entitled to be in the country, but 1 January will not mean an immediate change for those employing EU citizens already in the UK.

“For landlords there will be no immediate changes to what they are doing already,” said Meera Chindooroy, deputy campaigns director for the National Residential Landlords Association.

“Until 30 June right-to-rent checks will continue in the same way as they do now for EU citizens, along with those from Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Landlords will not, for example, need to make retrospective checks for existing tenants from 2021,” she added.

But she said it was crucial the government published clear guidance to ensure landlords understand their responsibilities from July.

Will there be border chaos?

Postmortems on why food and toilets could not get to the thousands of lorry drivers stuck on the roads in Kent despite two years of planning for such scenes will continue. But Eurotunnel and the ports of Dover and Calais all agree they do not expect a repeat of the horrific scenes seen on Kent roads before Christmas this weekend.

They say that freight traffic is typically quieter in the first week in January but will be especially so in 2021 because so many companies stockpiled goods specifically to avoid the border in the first part of January.

“There is not going to be much traffic on 1 January or the 2 January but I think what we are going to see is invisible chaos in the coming weeks because people simply haven’t done the right paperwork before they get to Dover.

“There won’t be food shortages but you may well find that some supplies are delayed because people will make mistakes in filling out the new paperwork.

“We keep hearing that all the time, both from traders and hauliers, that there is a lack of awareness, we don’t know what needs to be done, and therefore if they’re trying to fill in the forms especially without professional help they will make mistakes,” said Rod McKenzie, policy director at the Road Haulage Association.

Customs

All businesses are required to provide a customs declaration on goods sent into the EU, including Ireland and Northern Ireland (which will follow EU customs rules). They must also know if VAT is applicable and ensure fees are cleared before transit or on arrival.

Lorry drivers going into Kent must satisfy [HMRC](#) they have all the correct paperwork by applying online for a Kent Access Permit, dubbed the Brexit truckers’ passport. Those carrying chilled, frozen food or animals, including race horses, will need health certificates for their cargo to prove to the French they are disease- and pest-free.

Businesses also have to have an economic operators registration and identification system (EORI) for the exporter and the recipient, including special numbers for Northern Ireland prefixed by XI.

Freight owners who have not supplied drivers with the correct customs paperwork or health certificates for food consignments will not get the Kent Access Permit they need to get into the county and “will be stuck in depots and distribution centres around the country” and that’s what I mean by invisible,” said McKenzie.

2021.01.01 - Coronavirus

- [Coronavirus Key London hospital preparing for Covid-only care as cases surge](#)
- [France Covid vaccinations to be stepped up after claims of overly cautious rollout](#)
- [Schools Leaders and councils demand clarity on primary closures](#)
- [Q&A Return to school: England's timetable for new year](#)
- [Tokyo Olympics Fresh fears for games as host city sees surge in Covid-19 infections](#)
- ['The litter was a shock' 2020's Covid-driven rush on UK national parks](#)

Coronavirus

Key London hospital preparing for Covid-only care as cases surge

University College hospital scrambling to convert theatres, recovery areas and stroke wards into ICUs

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

Sarah Boseley Health editor

Thu 31 Dec 2020 14.09 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 10.14 EST



UCLH staff spend New Year's Eve kitting out makeshift ICUs in anticipation of a surge in Covid-19 patients. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

One of London's biggest hospitals has warned it is on track to become virtually Covid-only amid a [surge in cases in the capital](#) that has left it

scrambling to convert operating theatres, surgical recovery areas and stroke wards into intensive care units for the very sick.

As the daily coronavirus case numbers in the UK continued an apparently inexorable rise, hitting a record 55,892, with 23,813 people in hospital and 964 reported deaths, the chief executive of University College [London](#) hospitals trust (UCLH), Prof Marcel Levi, said admissions were already spiralling beyond the first wave in the spring.

Every hospital in London was facing the same demands on beds and staff, and University College hospital was taking admissions from other hospitals that were less well able to cope, he told the Guardian.



The equipment seen on each bed is for a single patient's care. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“This is much more than we had in March and April,” said Levi, an acute medicine doctor. The 500-bed hospital has 220 Covid patients, with the numbers increasing by 5% a day, but the real pressure is on intensive care where there are now 70 very sick patients, as there were in the spring, and the number is rising fast.

“Usually in our ITU we have about 35 patients so we are already doubled in size at UCLH. We are further surging upon the request of London to 92

patients in the next week, and thereafter probably we will have to grow even further,” he said.

At the hospital, whole floors are having to be dismantled and rebuilt to the standards required for intensive care wards. As they did in March, they have had to convert five floors and equip them with oxygen and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines that help people breathe.

It came as a nearby hospital reportedly told staff it was in “disaster medicine mode”. The Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, east London, has more than 90 patients in adult critical care units and the “number of people with Covid continues to rise rapidly”, according to an email sent to staff. It adds: “We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the fact we are now in disaster medicine mode. We are no longer providing high standard critical care, because we cannot. While this is far from ideal, it’s the way things are, and the way they have to be for now.”

Just under half of all major hospital trusts in England – 64 out of 140 – have more Covid-19 patients than at the peak of the first wave of the virus. This includes 11 of the 14 acute trusts in eastern England and 12 of the 19 acute trusts in south-east England. The NHS said on Thursday it was making sure the [Nightingale hospitals](#) were “reactivated and ready to admit patients”.



Prof Marcel Levi, UCLH chief executive. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Levi paid tribute to his “amazing” staff, who volunteered to give up their leave over Christmas and the new year to help save lives. But they are severely stretched: intensive care nurses normally work with one patient; now they may have four or five under their care.

Elaine Thorpe, a critical care matron at the hospital, said they set up 20 new intensive care beds on Christmas Eve that were full by New Year’s Eve. “The biggest thing for me is I’m dreadfully worried about my team. Nurses are having to spread themselves thinly. We’re going back to the levels where we were before, where it was one ICU nurse looking after what will be four patients, or more. And we’ve had lots of tears already.

graph

“This is happening all over London. UCLH is not quite feeling it the way that the other hospitals are, but a little stretch on an ICU nurse is too much of a stretch and you know we’re already doing way beyond what we would not want to do. And they’re just terrified as well. We’re living it again already.”

The tears are partly because nurses are unable to give their patients the dedicated care they want to provide, as well as the distress that Covid inflicts on everyone. Thorpe tells of nurses listening to families at home pouring out their hearts via iPads to severely ill relatives in ICU, who may be able to hear but cannot reply.



Elaine Thorpe, critical care matron at University College hospital.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

But there are also tears of frustration that people are still taking risks with the virus. “It’s not about us not stepping up and doing our job. We’ve all sacrificed Christmas and New Year but it’s not about that. We’re here for the patients. But it’s in the hands of the public to stop this, and it’s not listening and tonight [New Year’s Eve] is obviously going to make things even worse,” she said.

She has seen high-profile people on Twitter claiming that hospitals and intensive care units are empty. “I just don’t understand and my team don’t understand it, and that’s the really hard thing,” she said.

We were almost there, she said, with vaccines on the way. If people had given up Christmas and new year, it could have been different, she said, but now “this is going to be weeks. None of us can see this stopping any time soon.”

Levi also thinks people have relaxed too much. The big rise in cases is not just about the variant, he says. “I think it’s fair to say that we’re also seeing the effects of Christmas shopping, where people were crowding into shops and actually not really obeying distancing rules and all that stuff,” he said.

They will cope because they have to. Levi, from the Netherlands, praises the “enormous resilience and the can-do mentality” of people in London and the UK.

“If we have to do more, we will do more, and we will improvise and we will find other ways of providing the care that we need to provide, but it is extremely tight. In my very long experience both as a consultant and as hospital director, I’ve never experienced something like this before,” he said.

They will cope with the flood because of the commitment and dedication of the staff. “I feel that we have no choice. These people need medical care. We have to deliver it. We can deliver it. And we are also quite confident that we can deliver it in a safe and appropriate way,” he said.

[Coronavirus](#)

BioNTech criticises EU failure to order enough Covid vaccine

Firm races to fill potential gap left by bloc's gamble on several vaccines being approved

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Elfriede Seefeld, 91, receiving the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine from Dr Elke Obst at a nursing home in Grossraeschen, Germany. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Elfriede Seefeld, 91, receiving the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine from Dr Elke Obst at a nursing home in Grossraeschen, Germany. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jon Henley](#), [Kate Connolly](#) and [Kim Willsher](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 10.50 EST

BioNtech has criticised the EU's failure to order more doses of its coronavirus vaccine, saying it is now racing with its US partner, [Pfizer](#), to boost production amid fears of a European “gap” left by the lack of other approved vaccines.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was the first to be approved by the bloc late last month, after being accepted by the UK, Canada and the US. They and other countries have also since approved the Moderna or Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, leaving the EU trailing behind.

With criticism growing of the slow pace of the EU's vaccine programme, Uğur Şahin, the head of the German biotech firm, told Der Spiegel that the order process in [Europe](#) “certainly did not go as fast and smooth as it did with other countries”.

Şahin, who founded BioNtech with his wife, Özlem Türeci, – the firm's chief medical officer – said the situation was “not rosy” as the EU had wrongly assumed several different vaccines would be ready at once, so spread its orders.

“The assumption was that many other companies would come up with their vaccines,” Şahin said. “It would seem that the impression was: ‘We'll get enough, it won't be so bad, and we have this under control.’ It surprised me.”

Türeci told the magazine the EU had assumed there would be “a basket of different suppliers” to choose from. “Such an approach makes sense. But then at some point it became clear that many would be unable to deliver so quickly,” she said. “By that time it was too late to make up for under-ordering.”

The US ordered 600m doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine in July, while the EU waited until November to order half as many. Şahin said the firms were now working flat-out to increase production and “fill a hole due to a lack of other approved vaccines”.

He said BioNTech aimed to get a new manufacturing plant up and running in Marburg, [Germany](#), in February, “far earlier than planned”. It should be

able to produce 250m doses in the first half of 2021.

Tureci said the firm had also signed deals with five other pharmaceutical companies in Europe to increase production, and were negotiating with others. “By the end of January we should have clarity on how much more we can produce,” Şahin said.

The Moderna vaccine should be cleared on 6 January by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), which is under mounting pressure to quickly approve the Oxford vaccine, which was cleared this week by Britain.

Delays in producing and distributing the BioNtech vaccine have caused consternation in Germany, where the focus has been on immunising elderly people in care homes, with some regions having to halt vaccination programmes within days of starting them.

Germany’s health minister, Jens Spahn, said earlier this week he had been bombarded with mail from people complaining about citizens not getting quick enough access to the vaccine, despite it being made in Germany.

He defended EU health ministers’ decision to take a united approach rather than each country operating alone, arguing that having a united front meant smaller, less wealthy member states could have access to it at the same time as wealthier ones.

Spahn said Germany – which has so far inoculated 130,000 people – had taken delivery of 1.3m doses so far. But some of the 400-plus vaccine centres have had to temporarily close due to a lack of supplies.

There have been similar complaints in [France](#), where just 322 people have been vaccinated, prompting the government to promise that health workers aged over 50 could get the vaccine from Monday, sooner than originally planned.

Italy has so far vaccinated 8,300 people and Spain said it was on track to have administered 1.3m doses.

A spokesperson for the French government, Gabriel Attal, defended the pace of France’s campaign on Friday, saying it was targeting care homes for the

elderly and was “not going to judge a vaccination campaign that will last six months on a few days”.

The health minister, Olivier Véran, announced on Thursday evening that the vaccine would be made available earlier than planned to older health workers. Ministers and officials had been accused of [pandering to anti-vaxxers by going too slowly](#).

Quick Guide

How does the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine work?

Show

The Pfizer/BioNTech Covid jab is an mRNA vaccine. Essentially, mRNA is a molecule used by living cells to turn the gene sequences in DNA into the proteins that are the building blocks of all their fundamental structures. A segment of DNA gets copied (“transcribed”) into a piece of mRNA, which in turn gets “read” by the cell’s tools for synthesising proteins.

In the case of an mRNA vaccine, the virus’s mRNA is injected into the muscle, and our own cells then read it and synthesise the viral protein. The immune system reacts to these proteins – which can’t by themselves cause disease – just as if they’d been carried in on the whole virus. This generates a protective response that, studies suggest, lasts for some time.

The two first Covid-19 vaccines to announce phase 3 three trial results were mRNA-based. They were first off the blocks because, as soon as the genetic code of Sars-CoV-2 was known – it was [published](#) by the Chinese in January 2020 – companies that had been working on this technology were able to start producing the virus’s mRNA. Making conventional vaccines takes much longer.

Adam Finn, professor of paediatrics at the Bristol Children’s Vaccine Centre, University of Bristol

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

“Some of you have questioned the rhythm of the Covid-19 vaccination in France, a few days after it began in Europe,” Véran tweeted.

“Some countries have already vaccinated a lot; others haven’t started. Be reassured. The vaccine campaign will soon pick up speed. The vaccine is a historic opportunity to end this epidemic and return to normal life and we will not miss it.”

In his new year address, President Emmanuel Macron said he would not allow an “unjustified delay” in the inoculation of the population to happen for “bad reasons”. The president called on people to trust their doctors and scientists.

French officials had admitted they were taking a “marathon not sprint” approach to vaccination after running into strong public opposition.

A Europe-wide poll by Ipsos showed that only 40% of French people questioned said they were willing to have a Covid-19 jab. France says those receiving the vaccine must give written consent after being fully informed of possible side-effects and time to consider whether they want it.

Opposition politicians and doctors have criticised this approach.

Schools

School leaders and councils demand clarity on primary closures

Haringey advises its schools to close despite not being in government's 'contingency framework' areas

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[Richard Adams](#), [Nicola Davis](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 13.09 EST First published on Thu 31 Dec 2020 12.50 EST



The education secretary has instructed primary schools to remain closed within 50 local authorities in London and the south of England. Photograph: Julian Claxton/Alamy Stock Photo

School leaders and local authorities have demanded the government explain its decisions over which primary schools should stay open in England, as the

opposition accused the education secretary of “serial incompetence” over the patchwork of school closures.

Haringey council in north London said on Thursday night that it was advising its primaries to close to all but vulnerable children and those of key workers [despite it not being in the government’s “contingency framework” areas](#) where primaries had been told to shut.

A day earlier the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#), revealed that secondary schools and colleges would be closed to most pupils for the first two weeks of January. His instruction that primary schools also remain closed within 50 local authorities in London and the south of England shocked many parents. The ruling, which covers nearly a third of England’s 152 education authorities, is in place until 18 January, when the government said it would review their status.

But council and school leaders complain they have been left in the dark over why the [“contingency framework” areas](#) were chosen or how future decisions will be made.

In a letter, the leader of Haringey, Joseph Ejiofor, said: “At the current time, when infection rates in parts of London with lower rates than Haringey are deemed by the government too high to allow children and staff to return, it cannot be safe for children and teaching staff in Haringey to do so. Consequently, we believe that all primary schools in Haringey should therefore open only to the children of key workers and vulnerable children next week and we will support all our schools in this approach.”

Haringey and other London boroughs which have been told to keep their primary schools open have written to Williamson asking him to reverse the decision.

Danny Thorpe, the leader of Greenwich borough in south-east London, said: “There appears to be no logic to how this list was brought together. Kensington and Chelsea has one of the lowest infection rates for the whole of the capital, yet their children and young people are being afforded the extra protection that apparently Greenwich students don’t need.”

The government's order will close primary schools in the City of Westminster, where infection rates are among the lowest in London, while leaving those in Hackney, Greenwich and Lambeth open despite infection rates being higher.

Schools

The government has given few details on how it reached its decision. MPs were told in a briefing this week that infection rates, hospital capacity and “speed of transmission” were taken into account.

A [Department for Education](#) spokesperson said: “Decisions on which areas will be subject to the contingency framework are based on close work with Public Health England, the NHS, the Joint Biosecurity Centre and across government to monitor the number of new infections, positivity rates, and pressures on the NHS.

“These measures will be reviewed every two weeks, and we hope they will be in place for the shortest period possible.”

[Kate Green](#), the shadow education secretary, said Williamson “must end the serial incompetence and urgently clarify how many schools are closing, how many more are at risk, and provide a clear path to reopening for all schools affected.

“With just four days to go parents and pupils are confused about the start of term with dedicated school and college staff again being left to pick up the pieces.”

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said his union would be formally asking the government to explain its decisions.

“There is obviously a huge amount of concern over how it can be safe for schools in some tier 4 areas to open while schools in other tier 4 areas are being told to move to remote learning. In some instances this means different approaches for schools only a few roads away from each other,” Whiteman said.

The teaching unions are likely to welcome a recommendation from the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies for face masks to be worn in education settings.

A new Sage document considering the risks from the new [Covid B117 variant](#) said that "enhanced mitigation measures are likely to be necessary including ... reinforcing the importance of using face coverings, including in settings where they are not currently mandated, such as education, workplaces, and crowded outdoor spaces".

The government also toughened its stance on in-school Covid-19 testing, making it mandatory for secondary schools and colleges to test all students at the start of term after having previously said it would be optional.

But many heads say they will struggle to do so in the time available. One, speaking anonymously, said the unreliability of self-administered lateral flow tests being provided by the government "would, in all probability, allow for increased transmission in schools".

"I have no spare staff resource for this purpose and, even if I did, I would view it as a gross misuse of manpower," he added.

Geoff Barton, leader of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "The government needs to remember that schools and colleges are educational institutions, not medical facilities. It should ensure they are properly supported, not use legal powers to try to bludgeon through unworkable policies."

Schools

Return to school: England's timetable for new year

Guidelines for primaries and secondaries cover vulnerability, remote learning and exam dates

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

[**Richard Adams**](#) Education editor

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.51 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 23.36 EST



Most primary schools will be open from 4 January unless in an area with a high number of coronavirus cases. Photograph: David Mbiyu/SOPA/Rex/Shutterstock

When will most children be allowed back into schools in England?

That depends on the age of the children, where they live and whether or not

next summer they are taking national exams such as GCSEs. The government expects schools and colleges to have fully reopened from 18 January.

Are schools in England closed?

No. In all cases schools will remain open to allow staff to conduct remote learning, and to help secondary schools prepare for mass virus testing of staff and pupils. There is a [national exemption](#) for children classed as vulnerable by the government and for those with a parent who is a key worker; they will be able to attend school in person regardless of the status of other pupils.

Which children in England will be able to go back to school next week?

Only vulnerable children and those of key workers will be able to attend secondary schools and colleges during the first week of term, from 4 January. For most primary school-aged pupils, schools mainly will be open, except those in one of the [50 local authorities termed “contingency frame areas”](#) with high rates of Covid transmission. These schools will stay closed to most pupils until 18 January.

List

What is the reopening timetable for secondary schools?

From 4 January pupils taking national exams (mainly in years 11 and 13) will be taught remotely. Other year-groups might be taught remotely, according to the DfE guidance to headteachers saying schools “should provide some remote learning where possible”. From 11 January those taking exams (mainly years 11 and 13) will return for in-person teaching, while other year-groups will be taught remotely. [Schools](#) are to test pupils for Covid infection at least twice during this period, meaning that all year-groups will be asked to attend for the tests.

So all back to normal by 18 January?

Maybe. The government said it would by then have reviewed the contingency frame areas, so secondary and primary schools in affected areas could stay closed to in-person teaching for the rest of January.

What about students with exams at the start of term?

Students with BTec external assessments or similar exams scheduled for the first two weeks will be able to attend in-person if required. [Secondary schools](#) are likely to reschedule any mock exams (for national exams), such as GCSEs and A-levels, to 11 January or later.

What about school nurseries?

Nurseries will be open, although those attached to a primary school in one of the contingency areas will also have the option of closing.

Tokyo Olympic Games 2020

Fresh fears for Tokyo Olympics as host city sees surge in Covid-19 infections

- Tokyo reported 1,300 new coronavirus infections on Thursday
- Health experts concerned over stretched medical infrastructure

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Fri 1 Jan 2021 03.00 EST



A poll by public broadcaster NHK found that 63% of respondents said the Olympics should be postponed again or cancelled. Photograph: Kim Kyung-Hoon/Reuters

When Japanese and International Olympic Committee officials finally accepted defeat in March and postponed the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, there was general agreement that a one-year wait would give the world ample time to overcome the coronavirus pandemic.

The delayed Olympics, the then prime minister Shinzo Abe said, would be an opportunity to pay tribute to the human spirit in overcoming the world's biggest public health crisis for a century.

But in the nine months since the [first postponement](#) in the modern Games' 124-year history, Olympic officials have found themselves wrongfooted by the virus at every turn. Far from the communal celebration of sport envisaged by Abe, the harsh realities of Covid-19 have forced them to lower their expectations.

With just over half a year to go before the opening ceremony at the \$1.4bn (£1.02bn) main stadium, organisers are battling rising costs stemming from the pandemic and, critically, waning public interest in the host country.

The discovery of a new variant of Covid-19 – which has now been identified in [Japan](#) and prompted a ban on non-resident arrivals – has only underlined the difficulties facing Olympic officials as they prepare for the March release of plans for a scaled-down Games.

Publicly, Japanese organisers and the IOC are optimistic they can ensure the safety of more than 11,000 athletes, as well as thousands of officials, journalists and other Games-related staff.

During a [visit to Tokyo](#) in November, the IOC president, Thomas Bach, said he and Japan's new prime minister, [Yoshihide Suga](#), were “totally aligned in the full determination and confidence” to make the Olympics and Paralympics “a great success”, adding that the events would be “the light at the end of the tunnel”. Suga, meanwhile, was confident a “safe and secure” Olympics would offer “proof that humanity has defeated the virus”.

Just six weeks on, that sounds like wishful thinking. While Japan has fared better than many other countries – with 230,000 cases and just under 3,400 deaths – it is heading into the new year amid a [surge in infections](#), with the host city at its centre.

On Wednesday Tokyo's governor, Yuriko Koike, warned that the capital could face an “explosion” of cases and urged people to “put life before fun” and stay home over the new year holidays. Only 24 hours later, Koike told

the Kyodo news agency that Tokyo had 1,300 new infections, beating the previous one-day high of 949 from last Saturday.

Even if, as Bach believes, it will be possible to admit a “reasonable” number of visitors, health experts have pointed to the logistics of testing and tracking, as well as the potential for additional pressure on Tokyo’s already overstretched medical infrastructure.

Rising costs are also a concern. While all 68 domestic sponsors have reached a “basic agreement” to extend their contracts until next year, along with further injections of money to address the postponement and pandemic, the \$7.3bn Tokyo cited when it [won the bid](#) in 2013 now seems like fantasy accounting.

Last month, organisers announced that the latest Olympic bill had risen by \$2.8bn – including \$900m on Covid-prevention measures – to \$15.4bn, most of which will be shouldered by the Japanese taxpayer.

The double whammy of rising costs and coronavirus fears have combined to turn the Japanese public against the Olympics. In a December poll by the public broadcaster NHK, 63% of respondents said the Games should be postponed again or cancelled. Just 27% said they should take place.

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The next few months will be critical. Japan is not expected to begin vaccinating its population until February at the earliest – beginning with medical workers, followed by vulnerable older people in March, when 10,000 runners are due to start carrying the Olympic torch to every part of the country.

Tokyo, though, will not get a third chance – the IOC and organisers have established that a further postponement is out of the question. With billions of dollars in television rights and sponsorship at stake, the indications are that a version of the Games will open on 23 July. But it will do so in a wary, virus-fatigued country whose people appear ready to abandon the Olympic dream.

National parks

'The litter was a shock': 2020's Covid-driven rush on UK national parks

In lockdown, beauty spots such as Snowdonia attracted new visitors – but also fires, parking rows and 'fly-camping'

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Cars parked illegally on the clearway near Pen-y-Pass, Snowdonia, in the summer. Photograph: Snowdonia National Park Authority

Cars parked illegally on the clearway near Pen-y-Pass, Snowdonia, in the summer. Photograph: Snowdonia National Park Authority



Helen Pidd *North of England editor*

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.30 EST

For some years, Britain's national parks have been wrestling with the same conundrum: [how to attract a broader range of visitors](#).

This summer, they got what they all thought they wanted: the biggest influx of new visitors in their history. With foreign travel off the agenda for most and the shops closed, people who had never before walked up a hill, let alone worn Gore-Tex, heading to their nearest national park as soon as lockdown restrictions were eased.

"I was having a laugh with the chief executive of the Yorkshire Dales, and we were saying we've experienced this year what we always wished for, which is the target audience we've missed in the past," says Emyr Williams, the chief executive of Snowdonia national park. "What we've had is a lot of problems."

Some new visitors had unrealistic expectations, particularly around Snowdon, Wales's highest mountain, says Williams: "People would drop us an email saying: 'I'm coming on Saturday, please save me a parking space.'" Others would "go to Halfords, buy a tent for £40 and just leave it up the

mountain, along with all their food and drink bottles". Fly-camping, he calls it.

The new visitors tended to be younger, says Williams. "We attracted more of a crowd who would usually go to Spain on holidays, and it's a different sort of culture that they have, shall I say."

He remains dismayed that a minority thought it was OK to litter the beauty spots they had come to enjoy. "What is slightly ironic is that all young people now get a lot of environmental education, and they seem to be the worst," he says. "My mother and father lived through the rationing period after the second world war, and that experience meant they never threw anything away."

In the Peak District, rangers were soon dealing with three main problems: litter, fires and parking disputes. The first few months of lockdown were the quietest in the 69-year history of the UK's oldest national park, particularly after [Derbyshire police decided to use drones](#) to shame people who had driven for half an hour from Sheffield to walk their dogs.

But when Boris Johnson eased restrictions in mid-May, the Peaks were inundated. Thanks to the good weather, "every day was like a bank holiday", says Sarah Fowler, the park's chief executive. The [Monsal Trail](#), a traffic-free walking and cycling route near Bakewell, recorded double the number of visitors this summer compared with the same three months in 2019.



Litter left by campers in Snowdonia national park. Photograph: Snowdonia National Park Authority

Considering that the national park is surrounded by the cities of Manchester, Sheffield and Derby, the normal visitor profile “is not as diverse as it could be, given who is on our doorstep”, admits Fowler. She was delighted that Covid brought a “a greater diversity of people enjoying the park”, in terms of race and class. In a survey, 25% of visitors said they had never been before.

Most people behaved impeccably, says Fowler. But still: “The litter was a bit of a shock to me. I couldn’t believe people were littering in the way they were. I was disappointed in the sense that people could just drop litter and walk away and not think about who is going to pick it up, or which bird might get stuck on it.”

In a normal year, the Peak District spends £38,000 picking up litter; this year Fowler expects to have shelled out double that. It’s a lot for an organisation covering an area of 555 sq miles (1437 sq km) which has a budget smaller than some secondary schools ([£6.7m this year](#)).

In the Cairngorms in the Scottish Highlands, most daft behaviour was just people not knowing the rules, says Grant Moir, the park chief executive: “I

was out patrolling one night at Glenmore and there were a number of people who were starting fires or barbecues on the beach. We had a chat with them, and they put out their fires and one or two went to buy a wee stove from the shop nearby. Hopefully they'll be back and camp in the park with their kids in the future and know more what they are doing next time. I don't subscribe to 'let's all blame it on the townies' – I think it's a bit trite and a bit easy."

Despite the influx of visitors, most people did not venture far from the "hotspots" such as Glenmore, Braemar and Loch Muick, says Moir: "The Cairngorms is 4,500 sq km. It's absolutely ginormous, and even if you walk 500 metres from the hotspots, you will get away from the crowds pretty quickly."

The dilemma for the park authorities is whether to encourage visitors to spread out or to stay in the same honeypots. In Snowdonia, Williams prefers the latter approach, continuing to funnel people towards Snowdon, climbed by 600,000 people annually, which not only has a train running to the top in normal times but also a cafe. He described Snowdon as more of an attraction than a mountain, and prefers to keep most people there, to leave the quieter areas of the park to "serious mountaineers and fell walkers".

It's cheaper and more sustainable to keep most people in the same place, says Williams: "If you were to dissipate 600,000 people around all the other massifs, the erosion would be quite substantial. So it's more cost-effective to repair the footpaths on Snowdon, in terms of pence per person."

But he insists he does not want the "Spain people" to get back on planes next year and never return to Snowdonia. "If they come here for scenery, culture, heritage, landscapes, exercise, great. If they are coming for a party, no."

2021.01.01 - Spotlight

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Irish drill, jazz violin and supermarket musicals: 30 new artists for 2021

Best new artists for 2021 Music

Interview

'I'm not wearing tracksuits, I'm sexy!' Ivorian Doll, drill's first female star

Christine Ochefu



'Drill doesn't need to be dark' ... Ivorian Doll. Photograph: Fireshone

'Drill doesn't need to be dark' ... Ivorian Doll. Photograph: Fireshone

Having trained in the gossip-rich world of YouTube, the London rapper is breaking up the boys club with hilarious and brazen lyrics

- [Irish drill, jazz violin and supermarket musicals: 30 new artists for 2021](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

"I didn't think I would get anywhere, I can't lie to you," Ivorian Doll tells me, somewhat unexpectedly. "I mean, I wouldn't have taken me seriously if I was on the other end."

In reflecting on the success she's recently found, the rapper isn't as assured as you would expect from an artist of her standing. This has been a whirlwind year: after a string of million-streaming releases, plus features with fellow UK stars Headie One, Ray BLK, S1mba and more, the "queen of drill" – self-titled, but deserving of it – will release her much-anticipated debut EP Renaissance this month.

Born Vanessa Mahi in Germany to parents hailing from Ivory Coast and moving to east London aged three, she originally found fame as a popular YouTube personality known for playful "storytimes": audacious tales of cheating boyfriends, sugar daddies and scandalous behaviour. She reckons she has long been musically inclined, but just hadn't realised. "I was always performing, and we'd make up dance routines," she says of her teenage years, detailing the verses she and friends created to offend rival boys. "We made up this fake gang called CGG's – we even had our own theme song and diss track."

Spats with fellow vloggers regularly made waves on UK gossip blogs and trended on social media, so when she jokingly dropped a track with rapper Abigail Asante during one altercation, responses were understandably mixed. "People weren't supportive and didn't take me seriously – also because I was a female doing drill, which wasn't really seen before. I secretly wanted to stop, but you couldn't tell."

But then came her breakout single Rumours. Released begrudgingly as a final effort to launch her now-solo career – the "last one" before giving up, she says – the strength of the track turned opinion. Now with more than 5m views on YouTube, it was a song that would skilfully attract various sets of listeners: drill fans hungry for dextrous flows over the punchy, snare-backed beats typical of the genre, but also her social media following. They were drawn by brazen braggadocio detailing her beauty and sexual prowess, and visceral lyrical references to the reputation aroused by her online drama ("they say I'm leaking from the STDs I got").

"The song was saying: 'If you lot think this stuff is true, then let me tell you about it,'" she explains, saying that it actually detoxified her brand: "People thought: she don't care, so why should we?"



‘I’m making it different’: Ivorian Doll. Photograph: Fireshone

Her rise, though, has allegedly been hampered by a management deal she entered into with Oliver Ashley, son of Sports Direct’s Mike Ashley, who has recently applied for trademarks for the name Ivorian Doll. On Twitter, she accused him of unfair financial terms and controlling which label she was allowed to sign to; she begged to be let go from the contract. Ashley has not responded and could not be reached for comment, and Mahi, who made the allegations after we spoke, would not comment further.

The situation badly needs resolving, as there has been space in drill for a woman like her for some time. The style is known for bleak themes and stories of real-world violence, and suffers from a reputation as a boys’ club. But Ivorian’s ability to play with a mix of styles has granted her respect from her male peers, and refreshed the genre as a whole. “I’m not so ‘boyish’ about it,” she says of her artistry. “I’m not wearing the tracksuits; I’m very sexy with it. I feel like that’s what’s making me stand out because I’m making it different.”

Her new EP is evidence of the sounds she’s willing to toy with, like smoother, mellower rhythms similar to afro-swing, and bouncier, chart-friendly rap. The release after that may include more women, as fellow artists such as Shaybo, Br3yna and Teezandos make their own mark,

mirroring the golden era for female rappers in the US. “When I first started, the sexism was just ridiculous. It’s even made me more of a feminist,” she says. “I think it would be good to see other girls make drill a bit more sexy, more fun! It doesn’t need to be dark or violent. Drill is a beat, it’s not what you talk about. So I’d love more girls involved, because that’s what makes the genre bigger.”

World news

2021 – the story of a year in 12 leaders



Biden, Merkel, Kim Jong-Un Illustration: Bela Jude
Biden, Merkel, Kim Jong-Un Illustration: Bela Jude

In 2021, the world will slowly begin to fight back against Covid. But what else will change as the vaccines are administered? Here are the figures who will shape a vital year

Simon Tisdall

Fri 1 Jan 2021 03.00 EST

January

Joe Biden United States

The year will begin on a positive note: the inauguration of [Joe Biden](#) as 46th US president on 20 January. Biden is in the restoration business. The US will quickly rejoin the Paris climate change agreement and the World Health Organization. He will offer closer cooperation with allies in Europe and Asia

and, as the Covid-19 vaccine rollout accelerates, he plans a big stimulus package to revive the US economy.

The appointments Biden makes to his cabinet presage a return to multilateralism and a re-set of the rules-based international order. His flagship initiative is a new “alliance of democracies”.

This appears intended to counter China while avoiding head-on confrontation with Beijing. Ties with other authoritarian regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, will be frostier. New trade deals, such as that sought by the UK, are on hold pending a US recovery, he says.

Biden’s honeymoon will be brief. Unless Democrats win both run-off elections in Georgia on 5 January and gain control of the US Senate, the president-elect may struggle to make his legislative mark.

He must contend with a conservative-dominated supreme court where a battle looms over abortion rights. Those hoping for swift action on police violence, and racism in general, may be disappointed – and may turn against him.

Biden faces three personal political challenges in 2021: the “stolen election” myth peddled by Donald Trump, who – if he stays out of jail – will use TV platforms and his fanbase to de-legitimise his successor; leftwing Democrats opposed to his centrist policies; and nagging questions about his health, which, at the age of 78, could become a distraction.

February

Recep Tayyip Erdogan Turkey

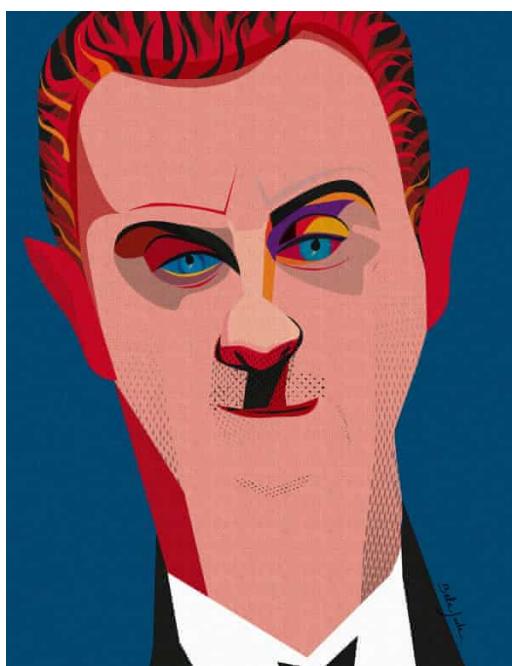
Turkey’s president, who will turn 67 in February and is celebrating 20 years since he founded the ruling Justice and Development party, is the archetypal elected “strongman”. The global power struggle between such leaders and reformist, pro-democracy forces from Peru and Thailand to Belarus and Hong Kong will characterise 2021.

Like many such leaders, Erdoğan runs an aggressive foreign policy intended to whip up nationalist-patriotic sentiment and distract from domestic problems. Thus the year will see more violence against Kurds in Syria and more Turkish meddling in Libya, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Yet Trump's departure, and Biden's less sympathetic approach, may encourage Erdogan to patch up relations with the EU, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Copycat authoritarians seem unbowed despite the loss of the defeated US president's patronage. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman may soon succeed the ailing 85-year-old King Salman. At least MBS does not pretend to be a democrat. Egypt's president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, claims a bogus mandate for ever more repressive, incompetent rule, as do Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro and the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte. None of them will have it all their own way in 2021.

India's Narendra Modi is another elected autocrat who has successfully replicated the populist majoritarian model. Modi, too, may face growing domestic pushback in 2021.

The success of such leaders arises in part from western connivance, indifference or realpolitik. Notwithstanding Biden, there's scant reason to believe this will change significantly.



Bashar al-Assad Illustration: Bela Jude

March

Bashar al-Assad Syria

Syria's catastrophic civil war will be 10 years old in March. Its cities have been destroyed, its people killed or displaced in their millions, and yet still the dictator, Bashar al-Assad, survives. Pressure to prosecute him and other war criminals will grow in 2021. But Assad can still count on Russia and Iran to protect him. A final military push this spring in Idlib, the last province outside regime control, threatens [a new refugee catastrophe](#).

This year will also mark 20 years of war in Afghanistan, dating back to the 11 September 2001 attacks. Peace talks between the government and Taliban will probably stumble on, [even as fighting escalates](#). Biden wants to get out but will not do so without a credible peace deal. As the Taliban pushes for total victory, that may prove as elusive as ever. And as ever, neighbours and rivals India and Pakistan will try to shape any settlement.

For people living in other conflict zones, 2021 will be a year of living dangerously. Hopes are rising that another "forever war", in Libya, may be nearer resolution after a ceasefire was agreed last autumn. If all goes well, elections could be held this year. But the country remains a proxy battleground for regional states. The Yemen conflict could also begin to wind down if, as pledged, Biden obliges the Saudis to pull back. Meanwhile, Ethiopia enters 2021 [fighting a pointless "whatever war"](#) in Tigray.

April

Emmanuel Macron France

It's four years this month since a young political upstart, Emmanuel Macron, narrowly won the first round of France's presidential election and went on to seize the Élysée. In April 2022, Macron will face voters again. Prominent among the issues on which he will be judged will be his record as a

champion of French secularism – *laïcité* – and his handling of Islamist terrorism and “[separatism](#)”.

Unlike other western leaders, Macron offers an ideological rebuttal of extremists’ attempts to divide people by religious belief, upholding the egalitarian, republican principle of universal citizenship. Critics say his stance has provoked the jihadists. France has suffered a string of attacks by individuals or small terror cells. 2021 may bring similar horrors there [and elsewhere](#).

Overall, however, the frequency of Islamist terror attacks in Europe declined in 2020, according to the Global Terrorism Index, and this downward trend may continue in 2021. Syria, Iraq and the wider Arab world have also seen reduced Islamist violence. The main focus in 2021, especially for Islamic State (Isis) affiliates, will be sub-Saharan Africa, notably Mozambique, Mali, Niger, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and northern Nigeria, where a resurgent Boko Haram has been [terrorising rural areas](#).

The coming year may also see a continuation of recent increases in far-right and white supremacist violence in Europe and the US, where it has become a bigger threat than jihadism. The rise, fanned by populist politicians and fuelled by social alienation, inequality, poor education and racial hatred, could be exacerbated by the pandemic.

May

Nicola Sturgeon Scotland



Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon Illustration: Bela Jude

Britain faces a daunting triple challenge in 2021: halting the Covid-19 nightmare while attempting an economic recovery; dealing with post Brexit chaos; and avoiding a constitutional crisis and the break-up of the United Kingdom. Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, will play a key role in all three dramas, but it is the latter – her Scottish National party's [drive for independence](#) – that may dominate as the year goes on.

If, as expected, the SNP sweeps to victory in May's Scottish parliament elections, the drive for a second referendum will be on, but UK prime minister Boris Johnson insists he will not allow another vote. No one knows what might happen then. Some point to Catalonia, which held an independence referendum in 2017 in defiance of Spain's government. That [ended badly](#).

Sturgeon is popular, but many Scots say health and the post-Brexit, post-Covid economy are [more pressing issues](#) than independence.

Johnson will face more political storms. This year will be Britain's first fully outside the EU since 1973, and the country looks chronically unprepared. His mishandling of the pandemic [destroyed Johnson's public standing](#). 2021 will be a bumpy year for him.

June

Hassan Rouhani Iran

Iran's presidential election on 18 June and the departure of the two-term incumbent, Hassan Rouhani, who cannot stand again, could be a turning point for the Middle East. Rouhani was a disappointment. He failed to deliver promised reforms and oversaw a period of domestic repression and economic recession caused by Covid, corruption and US sanctions. But at least he was not against dialogue with the west.

That window is closing. The discrediting of Rouhani's moderate, pragmatic approach has given Iran's diehard anti-western conservatives and military chiefs their chance. If their candidate (no one has yet been selected) wins the presidency, it could scupper hopes of a fresh start with Tehran. Hossein Dehghan, a top Revolutionary Guard Corps commander and adviser to the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, is a hot tip.

Much hinges region-wide on the character of the post-Rouhani era. Iran's confrontation with Israel, waged through proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Gaza, may intensify if hardliners take charge. So, too, could the regional contest with the Arab Gulf states as Saudi Arabia debates whether to follow the UAE and Bahrain in making peace with Israel. Iran's moderates hope an early offer of sanctions relief from Biden will turn the election their way.

This year may see another big Middle East moment: the political demise of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, who faces bribery and fraud charges and whose governing coalition is tottering. Yet no matter who succeeds him, there may be further erosion of Palestinian hopes of an independent state as more Arab countries cut deals with Israel and each other.



Xi Jinping Illustration: Bela Jude

July

Xi Jinping China

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist party by, among others, Mao Zedong.

China's modern-day Mao, de facto president-for-life Xi Jinping, exercises possibly even greater personal power. Under his direction China has moved from "peaceful rise" to aggressive would-be hegemon. 2021 will see increasingly coordinated western push-back.

China's attempts to bully middle-ranking countries such as Australia and Canada by taking hostages and blocking imports, its sneering contempt for declining post-colonial European powers such as the UK, and its new willingness to defy major competitors such as India and the US presages a tough year of deepening friction on a wide range of fronts.

Flashpoints include Beijing's attacks on democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan; its military buildup, especially in the South China Sea and Himalayas; human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet; the global expansion

of Chinese tech companies such as Huawei; western trade sanctions and protectionism; and strategic competition for resources and influence in Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America – as well as in outer space.

The intense debate in Britain about engagement with China – specifically over Chinese investment in critical security infrastructure such as communications and nuclear power – will be mirrored across Europe, where Beijing is wooing disaffected EU members and [non-EU Balkan countries such as Serbia](#).

Biden says he wants to cool things down. But he will not lift sanctions until the US economy is stronger and US-led coalitions are assembled to play Beijing at its own global game.

August

António Guterres United Nations

The rescheduled 2020 Olympics – the ultimate symbol and practical manifestation of one-world internationalism – will reach a climax in Tokyo in August, assuming the Games are not delayed again. The spirit of global cooperation will be needed more than ever in 2021 as the world struggles to recover from the pandemic. Leading the comeback fight is António Guterres, the UN secretary-general.

Wealthier countries may find their own ways to escape Covid, but it falls to Guterres and the UN's agencies to try to ensure everyone else is eventually safe. A record 235 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021, a 40% increase that the UN attributes almost entirely to Covid-19. The world must “stand with people in their darkest hour of need”, Guterres says – and [wants \\$35bn to pay for it](#).

Unfair competition for effective, affordable vaccines may hinder that aim. The independent People's Vaccine Alliance predicts people in up to 70 lower-income countries [will lose out](#) in 2021's coming “vaccine race”. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that 40 million people are at increased risk of discrimination and rights abuses, including [human](#)

[trafficking and child recruitment](#) – part of a Covid-created “coping crisis”. The number of refugees settled in safe countries [is at a record low](#).

All this comes on top of existing challenges such as water shortages that will [affect more than 3 billion people in 2021](#), half of them severely, as a result of rising demand and climate breakdown.

Six countries – Afghanistan, Yemen, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and South Sudan – face famine in 2021.



Angela Merkel Illustration: Bela Jude

September

Angela Merkel Germany

Federal elections in September will mark the political retirement of Angela Merkel, Germany’s chancellor since 2005 and the first woman to hold the job. Her departure will be a watershed for Germany and Europe. The [race to succeed her](#) as leader of the Christian Democrats will climax this month. September’s elections could bring big changes. Attention will focus in particular on the Greens and the far-right Alternative for Germany.

The loss of Merkel as a steadyng, unifying influence will be felt keenly within the EU, especially on touchstone issues such as eurozone alignment, Europe's budget and Nato. France's Macron champions a vision of a stronger, more integrated "global Europe" that [fights for its values and interests](#). Merkel often applied a brake. As she bows out and French elections approach, Franco-German tensions may spill into the open.

Support for European far-right populist parties has appeared to slip of late but they will remain an important factor in 2021, not least in the [unresolved debate over migration](#). In successfully defying the Brussels commission on rule of law and gender and media freedom issues, the illiberal Polish and Hungarian governments [set a bad example that others may follow](#).

With a new US administration focused primarily on domestic problems, with China's tanks metaphorically parked on its lawn, and with Russia playing the neighbour from hell, Europe faces a year of challenges that could further test its unity. Does it throw itself back into Washington's arms, try to hold the ring between the US and China, or go it alone? Does it create a "two-speed" EU? These big questions could nevertheless be overshadowed by the extended battle against Covid and, to a lesser degree, fallout from the Brexit fiasco.

October

Vladimir Putin Russia



Vladimir Putin Illustration: Bela Jude

Vladimir Putin was born in St Petersburg, then Leningrad, on 7 October 1952, 35 years after the October Revolution that eventually produced the Soviet Union. This year marks 30 years since the USSR imploded. The former KGB spook has spent his political career since 1999 as prime minister and president, trying – and failing – to resurrect the Soviet empire. Putin may need a second October revolution to hold present-day Russia together.

He appears secure after a [rigged constitutional referendum](#) theoretically allowed him two more six-year presidential terms. But Putin looks tired and isolated. He has cut himself off during the pandemic. His popularity is falling. Oil revenue, Russia's life-blood, has plunged. He and his allies face difficult parliamentary elections in September amid mounting economic problems and unrest in Russia's far east.

The [bungled attempt to poison Putin's best-known challenger, Alexei Navalny](#), strengthened domestic opposition. Meanwhile, Putin's efforts to reconquer Russia's "near abroad" are unravelling. Belarus's popular uprising refuses to be quelled. Anti-Moscow, pro-democracy sentiment is strong in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The recent Armenia-Azerbaijan

war exposed the limits of Russian power. Syria is a quagmire he cannot escape.

After two decades of land-grabs, assassinations, rampant corruption and subversion, Putin has few international allies. Russia is under EU and US sanctions. Trump, always oddly deferential, is gone. Western countries mostly regard Putin with fear and loathing. Talk of [a military alliance with China](#) reflects his weakness. In short, he looks vulnerable. In October, Russia will send its first spacecraft to the moon for 45 years. Perhaps Putin should get on it.

November

Jair Bolsonaro Brazil

The UK will host the Cop26 UN climate talks in Glasgow in November, hoping to give fresh impetus to the 2015 Paris climate agreement. It will not be a moment too soon. Human beings continue to inflict [extraordinary damage on the planet](#), UN chief António Guterres says. “Biodiversity is collapsing. One million species are at risk of extinction. Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes.” He wants all governments to [declare a state of climate emergency](#) in 2021.

At the forefront of humankind’s “suicidal war on nature” is Brazil’s rightwing populist president, Jair Bolsonaro, who epitomises climate change denial at its most destructive. Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, a vital carbon store that slows global warming, [is at its highest level for more than a decade](#) – and has accelerated since Bolsonaro took office in 2019. Such environmental hooliganism may get worse in 2021.

Yet there are encouraging signs. The UK will ask other countries to match or beat its pledge to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 68% by 2030. The appointment of [political heavyweight John Kerry as “climate tsar”](#) suggests the US is fully back on board. In rejoining the Paris accord, Biden promises the US will achieve net zero emissions by 2050. China has set 2060 as its target and says emissions will peak before 2030. Others will take their cue.

But 2021 will nevertheless see a speeding up of the race against time that is the climate crisis. Attempts to “build back greener” post-pandemic will collide with vested economic interests. Holding politicians to their climate word, and shaming the likes of Bolsonaro, is perhaps 2021’s most urgent challenge.

December

Kim Jong-un North Korea



Kim Jong-un Illustration: Bela Jude

It will be exactly 10 years in December 2021 since Kim Jong-un succeeded his father, Kim Jong-il, as North Korea’s supreme leader. Trump’s vainglorious efforts to cut a deal with Kim to end his UN-proscribed nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes flopped, but Biden lacks new ideas. A worrying question for 2021: will Kim resume nuclear testing?

Even bigger, additional challenges over nuclear proliferation will arise this year. Fears that Iran is trying to acquire an atomic bomb may grow, particularly in nuclear-armed Israel. The Saudis may seek parallel nuclear capability in response. Meanwhile, continuing border tensions between

nuclear weapons states [China and India](#), and between India and Pakistan, are cause for heightened concern.

Biden aims to extend the New Start strategic weapons limitation treaty with Moscow that expires in February. But neither Biden nor anyone else is offering to denuclearise in 2021.

Most UN member states have ratified a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons that [comes into force on 22 January. It lacks](#) teeth, but it's a hopeful step.

World news

New year, new uncertainty: the big events due in 2021

Joe Biden becomes US president, Britain fully leaves the EU and China will land a probe on Mars



Joe Biden will formally become US president on 20 January. Photograph: Joshua Roberts/Reuters

Joe Biden will formally become US president on 20 January. Photograph: Joshua Roberts/Reuters



[Richard Nelsson](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.30 EST

It can't be as bad as 2020, can it? A new year brings fresh promise and fresh uncertainty. Here are some of the principal events expected in 2021.

1 January

- UK's first day properly outside the European Union since 1973.
- Portugal takes EU presidency.

4 January

A judge at the Old Bailey hands down her ruling in the extradition case against the WikiLeaks founder, **Julian Assange**, who is wanted by the US on charges of conspiracy to commit computer intrusion.

5 January

- Georgia Senate runoffs. The Republican senators Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue face the Democratic challengers Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in election runoffs that will decide control of the US Senate.

14 January

- Ugandan presidential and parliamentary elections.

20 January

- Joe Biden inaugurated as 46th president of the United States.

January (undated)

- German CDU picks new leader to take party into September elections at which Angela Merkel will be replaced as chancellor.

1 February

- [MH17 trial](#) begins in the Netherlands of four people accused of shooting down an airliner over Ukraine, killing 298.



England's Anthony Watson scores against Wales in the 2020 Six Nations. The 2021 tournament kicks off on 6 February. Photograph: Andrew Boyers/Action Images/Reuters

6 February

- The men's Six Nations rugby championship kicks off for England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales (until 20 March).

7 February

- Ecuador holds presidential and parliamentary elections.

11 February

- Tenth anniversary of Hosni Mubarak [stepping down](#) as Egyptian president.

- Berlin film festival becomes first to define its performance prizes [in a gender-neutral manner](#), eliminating the categories of best actor and best actress.

21 February

- Lunar new year, as Year of the Ox begins.

28 February

- Golden Globe awards, California.



The Chinese Tianwen-1 mission to Mars blasted off on 23 July. It is due to land a probe on the planet in February. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

February (undated)

- China mission to Mars lands probe on the planet. Three Martian landers are scheduled to arrive at the red planet: China's Tianwen, UAE's Hope Mars mission and Nasa's Mars Rover.

2 March

- Mikhail Gorbachev turns 90.

5 March

- The UK marks one year since the [first confirmed coronavirus death](#) in the country and the beginning of the UK's first lockdown (24 March).
- Pope Francis is due to make his first international visit in 15 months, becoming the first pontiff [to visit Iraq](#) (5-8 March).

12 March

- Uffizi gallery in Florence marks 700th anniversary of Dante's death.

17 March

- Dutch parliamentary elections.

21 March

- UK holds first nationwide census since 2011.

27 March

- WWF Earth Hour – individuals, businesses and organisations to switch off all non-essential lighting at 8.30pm local time.

2 April

- The much-delayed latest instalment of the James Bond franchise is due to be released.

11 April

- Peru's presidential and parliamentary elections.

21 April

- Queen Elizabeth II turns 95.

25 April

- The Oscars (delayed from 28 February).



The Guardian reaches its 200th anniversary on 5 May. Photograph: David Sillitoe/The Guardian

5 May

- Two hundredth anniversary of the [first edition of the Guardian](#).

6 May

- UK local elections.
- Scottish parliamentary elections.
- London mayoral elections.

15 May

- FA Cup final.

18 May

- World Economic Forum [in Davos](#), Switzerland.

22 May

- Eurovision song contest final, Rotterdam.

6 June

- Iraq parliamentary elections.

10 June

- Duke of Edinburgh turns 100.

11 June

- European Football Championship.

18 June

- Tentative date for Iranian presidential elections.



The 2020 Tour de France winner, Tadej Pogačar. The 2021 race sets off from Brittany on 26 June. Photograph: Tim de Waele/Getty Images

26 June

- Tour de France departs from Brittany (until 18 July).

June (undated)

- UK hosts G7 summit.

1 July

- Slovenia assumes presidency of the council of the EU.
- On what would have been Princess Diana's 60th birthday, her sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, unveil a statue in her honour at Kensington Palace.

- 100th anniversary of founding of Chinese Communist party.

23 July

- Olympic Games start in Tokyo.

17 August

- Microsoft pulls the plug on its 25-year-old browser, Internet Explorer.



Tanks in Red Square during an abortive coup against the Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, on 19 August 1991. Photograph: Dima Tanin/AFP/Getty Images

19 August

- Thirtieth anniversary of the failed August coup in the Soviet Union.

24 August

- Paralympic Games begin in Tokyo.

5 September

- Hong Kong holds delayed polls for its legislative council, the first since Beijing imposed its new restrictive [national security law](#) on the territory.

11 September

- Twentieth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

21 September

- UN general assembly opens.
- Ryder Cup begins in Wisconsin, US (until 26 September).

26 September

- Germany's parliamentary elections.

September (undated)

- Russian parliamentary elections.

1 October

- Dubai hosts the World Expo, becoming the first Middle Eastern venue to do so (until 31 March 2022).

28 October

- US government agencies declassify more documents relating to the 1963 assassination of President John F Kennedy.

October (undated)

- Japan's parliamentary elections.
- T20 cricket World Cup, India.
- Nobel prizes are announced.

1 November

- Cop26 climate change conference, Glasgow (until 12 November).

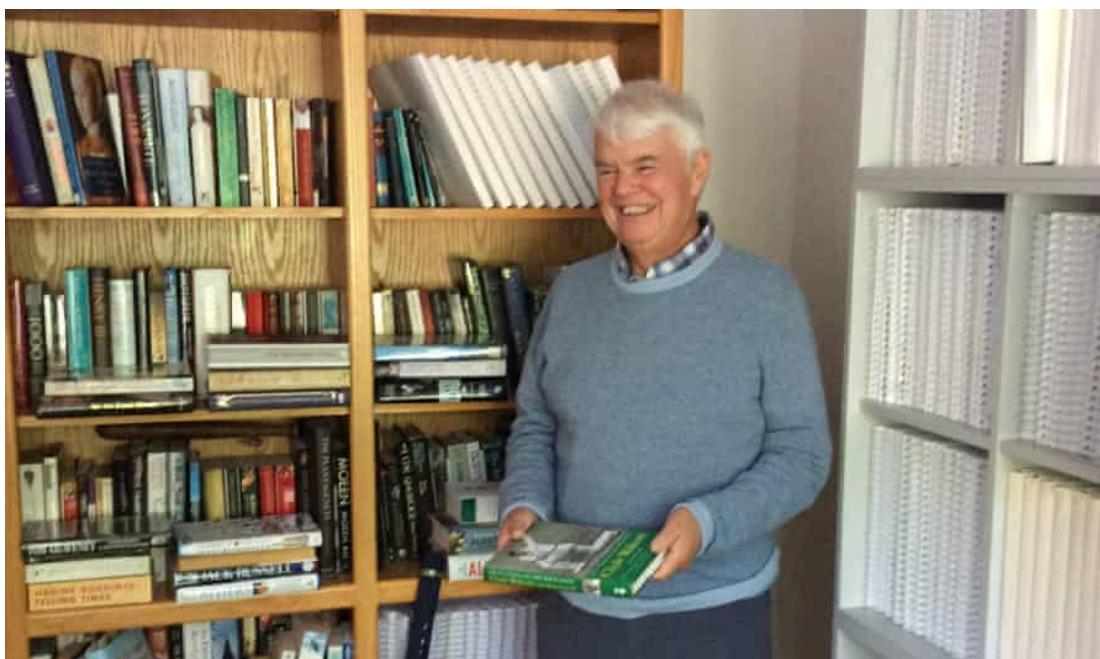
26 December

- Thirtieth anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The resolution I kept Books

No one can read 50 books a week. So why was I buying or borrowing that many?

I have always been a voracious reader. But one day I realised my passion for books had turned into a mania



‘Have you seen the size of a braille book? War and Peace comes in 21 volumes’ ... Peter White at home.

‘Have you seen the size of a braille book? War and Peace comes in 21 volumes’ ... Peter White at home.

Peter White

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

The need for last year’s resolution started in my childhood. (Don’t they all?) By the age of six, I was reading braille at an unheard-of speed, to the point where the teacher at my blind school accused me of lying when I said I had finished the three books she had given me that morning. It was the start of a

lifelong problem: braille books were scarce, but I could not get enough of them.

The school had devised a particularly cruel and subtle form of torture for someone like me: they kept just one title of a child's favourite author in the school library; for example, just one Famous Five book, one Billy Bunter, one Just William. As I grew older and my tastes changed, the problem remained the same: one Raymond Chandler, one PG Wodehouse, just one even mildly dirty book when puberty hit.

But don't feel sorry for me, because this story has a kind of happy ending. The digital revolution hit. Suddenly, through the agency of talking laptops and braille note-taking machines, it became possible to turn print books into braille books; not just the books the braille libraries thought you ought to have, but the ones you actually wanted. It required certain computer skills that I struggle with, but it was possible. Through the generosity of friends and relatives, a trickle of such books began to turn into a stream – and then a flood.

Thank God for the secondhand bookshop, or we would have had to give up eating

The bookshop that used to be a place of torture had become a treasure trove; I began to buy, borrow, steal any book I could lay my hands on and get it scanned into braille. And here lay my need for a resolution.

The rational part of me finally admitted that, unless I were to defy all known rules of longevity, I would never be able to read all the digital books I'd already accrued – let alone any that I might acquire in future.

I was also coming close to exhausting the tolerance of those – usually my spouse or offspring – who, in variable states of willingness, accompanied me on these ill-thought-out book searches. At the peak of my mania, I was acquiring as many as 40, sometimes 50, books a week (thank God for the secondhand bookshop, or we would have had to give up eating).

An added problem was where to put them. There was no room left in our existing bookshelves (have you seen the size of the average braille book?

War and Peace alone comes in 21 volumes). So my new print books began to pile up in every conceivable space: tottering heaps stacked against any vacant wall, from the loft to the loo, the garage to the shed.

It was at the beginning of this year that I realised I would have to stop. I decided to limit myself to books I needed for my work as a broadcaster, or for minimal keeping up with like-minded friends, or books that I could say were “essential reading”. Books I would not just start, but might actually finish, too.

So far, I reckon I am doing all right. After all, that book I discovered the other day on a rather obscure Danish battle in 1864 is sure to come in handy when I meet my friend from the local history society. The job lot of four cricket books I could not resist will oil the wheels should any cricket-obsessed acquaintances drop in for dinner after the pandemic – and then there is Build Your Own Gym, which, in these days of self-managed exercise, is surely an absolute must. I mean, when it comes to books, who is to say what is essential reading?



[US politics](#)

Facts won't fix this: experts on how to fight America's disinformation crisis



‘What does it look like if we don’t have a shared sense of reality?’
Illustration: Nico Krijno/The Guardian

‘What does it look like if we don’t have a shared sense of reality?’
Illustration: Nico Krijno/The Guardian

Trump’s false claims about the election and coronavirus are taking a dangerous toll. Can the divide be healed?



[Lois Beckett](#)

[@loisbeckett](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

At the beginning of 2021, millions of Americans appear to disagree about one of the most basic facts of their democracy: that Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election.

The consequences of Donald Trump’s repeated, baseless claims of voter fraud will come in several waves, researchers who study disinformation say, even if Trump ultimately hands over power and leaves the White House. And there is no quick or easy way to fix this crisis, they warn. Because when it comes to dealing with disinformation, simply repeating the facts doesn’t do much to change anyone’s mind.

In the short term, Trump’s false claims about election fraud have weakened Biden’s ability to address the coronavirus pandemic. “If only 20% of the population is like, ‘You’re not my president, I’m going to double down on

my mask resistance,’ or ‘I’m going to continue to have parties over the holidays,’ that means we are going to be even less likely to bring this thing under control,” said Whitney Phillips, a professor of communications at Syracuse University.

['Don't fuel the fire': disinformation experts on how Biden should deal with Trump's election lies](#)

[Read more](#)

Over the longer term, the president’s falsehoods may also undermine Biden’s overall governing capability, just as the racist “birther” conspiracy theory, another false claim spread by Trump, helped fuel political resistance to Barack Obama’s presidency. And the damage to Americans’ basic trust in their democracy may have effects far beyond electoral politics.

“What does it look like if we don’t have a shared sense of reality?” said Claire Wardle, the executive director of First Draft, a group that researches and combats disinformation. “We’ve seen more conspiracy theories moving mainstream. There’s an increasing number of people who do not believe in the critical infrastructure of a society. Where does that end?”

How we got here

America’s current disinformation crisis is the culmination of more than two decades of pollution of the country’s information ecosystem, Wardle said. The spread of disinformation on social media is one part of that story, but so is the rise of alternative rightwing media outlets, the lack of investment in public media, the demise of local news outlets, and the replacement of shuttered local newspapers with hyper-partisan online outlets.

This “serious fragmentation” of the American media ecosystem presents a stark contrast with, say, the UK, where during some weeks of the pandemic, 94% of the UK adult population, including 86% of younger people, tuned into the BBC, a publicly funded broadcaster, according to official statistics.

And the left and right in the US don’t merely have different sets of media outlets for their different audiences: they have also developed distinct models of information-sharing, Wardle said. Mainstream media outlets still

follow a traditional top-down broadcast model: an authoritative source produces the news and sends it out to consumers. The rightwing media ecosystem, which developed through talk radio, on the other hand, operates as a network of media personalities interacting with each other, “a community telling stories to their own community”, Wardle said.

Trump has built on that, embracing what Kate Starbird, a University of Washington professor who studies disinformation, on Twitter called a model of “participatory disinformation”.



Trump’s false claims about election fraud have weakened Biden’s ability to address the coronavirus pandemic. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

“Trump didn’t just prime his audience to be receptive to false narratives of voter fraud, he inspired them to create them … and then echoed those false claims back at them,” she wrote.

Participatory disinformation might actually be “stickier” and more effective than “top-down propaganda”, Starbird argued, in part because of the “positive reinforcement” of Trump supporters seeing their “discoveries” repeated by their media & political celebrities”.

When their platforms turned out to be ideal environments for making and monetizing participatory disinformation, social media companies were slow

to curb its spread.

Companies like Twitter and Facebook did not begin putting warning labels on Trump's false voting fraud claims until very close to the election. Even then, only a handful of his tweets were flagged, Wardle noted, while Trump sent dozens of other tweets pushing the same story and media outlets continued to report on his statements, creating a powerful national narrative about fraud despite the attempts at factchecking.

The social media platforms' decision to finally flag some of Trump's disinformation right before a consequential election also may have had its own damaging political consequences. "They spent so much time refusing to moderate content that what they're doing now feels like the worst kind of censorship," Joan Donovan, the research director at Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, said. "If they had been doing that for years, it wouldn't be so shocking."

A new approach?

The rapid spread of Trump's election lies should be a "wake-up call" for the "well-intentioned people" who think that disinformation can be cured by providing "more quality information", such as encouraging people to eat "more spinach instead of chocolate", Wardle, who has conducted training sessions for journalists on how to understand and deal with disinformation, said.

"We have an emotional relationship to information. It is not rational," Wardle said. But people who work in the "quality information space", Wardle's term for journalists, scientists, researchers and factcheckers, still often act as if information-processing were fundamentally rational, rather than deeply tied to feelings and the way a person expresses their identity.

It's crucial to understand that the way people process information is through entire narratives, not individual facts, Wardle said. Trying to combat disinformation through factchecking or debunking individual false claims just turns into an endless, fruitless game of "whack-a-mole".

Take the New York Times' banner headline a week after the election: "Election Officials Nationwide Find No Fraud". The story cited election officials from both political parties in dozens of states.

But that reporting, though valuable, wasn't likely to change many minds, Phillips, the communications professor, said.

ELECTION OFFICIALS NATIONWIDE FIND NO FRAUD

- Banner headline on Wednesday's [@nytimes](#) front page
pic.twitter.com/xb4AWS0chh
- Cliff Levy (@cliffordlevy) [November 11, 2020](#)

"There is an enormous percentage of the population who sees the word 'election official' and actually, in their brains, decodes that as liberal, anti-Trump," she said. "If you're disinclined to trust institutions, who cares what election officials are saying, because they're corrupt, they're in bed with Biden and the fake news media.

"The impulse to throw facts at these problems is really strong, and it's understandable," she said "But simply saying what the facts are is not going to convince minds that aren't already open."

Conspiracy theorists, in particular, tend not to be very open to falsification of their claims, added Deen Freelon, an associate professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill who studies social media and politics. "Almost any new piece of evidence or fact can be converted to the conspiracy theory perspective."

Research has also shown that disinformation and conspiracy theories are often deeply intertwined with racial prejudice and hatred, he added. Some of this year's most dangerous disinformation, about the seriousness of coronavirus pandemic, which disproportionately killed black Americans, and about Trump supposedly winning the election, based on the argument that votes in majority-black cities were fraudulent and should not be counted, were clearly influenced by white Americans' racial views, he noted.

It's no accident, Freelon said, that some of the same people suggesting Covid is a myth are also arguing that black votes are illegitimate.

'A lot of the country's been taken'

While it is possible to engage with people who believe deeply in false narratives, and sometimes change their minds, that work is most successful on an individual basis, with people who know each other well, experts said.

It's helpful to understand someone's fundamental framework for viewing the world, including whom they view as the "good guys" and the "bad guys", in order to understand what kind of additional information might sway them, Phillips said.

['Putin could only dream of it': how Trump became the biggest source of disinformation in 2020](#)

[Read more](#)

"The other thing that makes people move on this – it's corny – is love," Freelon added. "People who love you, your family, people who are willing to engage."

But disinformation is also sustained by personal relationships.

"Nearly all conspiracy theories are supported by social connections and ties. It's not just one person subscribing to this in isolation, but a network of people who support each other in their beliefs," Freelon said. "Leaving the group means at a minimum betraying those friends and cutting those social ties."

There are other emotional barriers to people changing their minds.

"Nobody anywhere likes to feel like they've been duped," said Shafiqah Hudson, an author and researcher who has studied [online disinformation campaigns](#). "We will fight tooth and nail as humans to avoid feeling foolish. That's why you see people double down. Nobody wants to feel like they've been taken, but a lot of the country's really been taken."

While personal relationships can help to combat disinformation, many Americans have simply given up trying to fight relatives' false beliefs.

During the holidays in the US, "people are muting their uncles [on social media] or refusing to talk to their mom," Wardle said.

"I am worried," she said. "If you have two different senses of reality, with two different sets of actors who don't trust the other side, who are not open to listening to the other side, that's not how democracy functions."

- This article was amended on 1 January 2021 to remove a reference to the BBC being "taxpayer-funded".

[2021 culture preview](#)
[Television](#)

Interview

James Cosmo: 'My friend said: They're going to drink beer out of your skull'

[Stuart Heritage](#)

After his brutal demise on Game of Thrones, the veteran Scottish actor is back in crime drama The Bay. Is he the baddie?



Intimidating ... James Cosmo in The Bay. Photograph: Ben Blackall/© Tall Story Pictures 2020

Intimidating ... James Cosmo in The Bay. Photograph: Ben Blackall/© Tall Story Pictures 2020



[@stuheritage](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

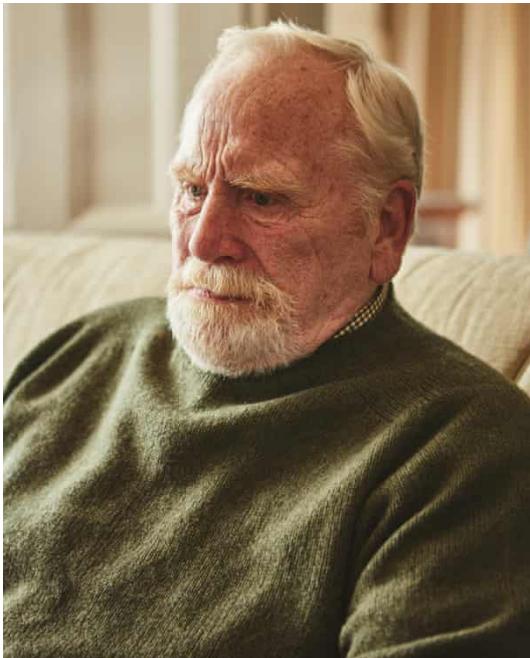
For the most part, actors have now sussed out the art of the Zoom interview. The trick is to do it in front of a completely blank background, so the interviewer cannot possibly glean any personal details from whatever you happen to be in front of.

James Cosmo does not subscribe to this notion. We speak in mid-November and, when his Zoom screen clicked into life, he was vaping up a storm before a massive, illuminated wooden Christmas tree. True, he has played Santa Claus many a time, most memorably for most in the Narnia films, but also annually at his son's school's Christmas grotto (he was so good his son didn't recognise him). Yet who knew he was this excessively festive?

“Well, I actually do little [Cameo](#) things”, he explains “It’s like an online, would you call it a convention? Where you meet people? Anyway, I really enjoy doing it. I do a lot in America, and Thanksgiving is happening soon, so we thought we’d make it look a bit nicer to cheer people up.”

Cosmo has now been working in film and television since the mid-1960s, delivering a specific type of burly authority figure to hundreds of productions. Most will recognise him as Jeor Mormont, Game of Thrones’

original Night's Watch commander, but that shouldn't overshadow the rest of his work. The sheer number of classics he has appeared in over the years is mind-boggling. Softly Softly, The Persuaders, The Sweeney, Braveheart, Trainspotting, Troy, Wonder Woman, Chernobyl, and the recent TV adaptation of [His Dark Materials](#). Over the years, he has blossomed into one of those performers whose presence helps to reassure viewers that things will be OK.



Grieving ... in *The Bay*. Photograph: Jonny Birch/© Tall Story Pictures 2020

Cosmo's latest role is on season two of [The Bay](#), ITV's Broadchurch-alike detective show. Again, he appears as a figure of authority, in this case the intimidating patriarch of a grieving family. So the obvious question beckons. Are you the murderer, then?

"You know that character in *The Simpsons*? Johnny Tightlips?" he replies, slipping into a perfect wiseguy impersonation. "I'm not saying I did, I'm not saying I didn't. What? *The Bay*? I don't know *The Bay*. Who?"

It turns out that Cosmo is fanatical about [The Simpsons](#). "If I went on Mastermind – which is very unlikely – my special subject could only be *The Simpsons*," he says with all seriousness. If you were wondering, his

favourite episode is season eight's [The Springfield Files](#), and he also thinks they should stop making new episodes. "You know, I always look at the screen and when it's the 4:3 format, when it's not widescreen, that's how you know it'll be a good one."

He isn't done. "I was talking to [Andrew Neil](#) a while ago. We come from places that are very close, and were born within a couple of years of each other. He's had an amazing career, but he once told me, 'Jimmy, I am the man who brought The Simpsons to Great Britain.' Back when he was head of Sky. He was so proud of that, more than anything else."

Gradually, I try to steer the conversation back to my original question. On the opening titles of The Bay, his name appears after everyone else's – "And James Cosmo" – so surely that means he's the murderer. "Oh, that's one of your conversations your agent has, he starts to laugh; a big, rolling contented chuckle. "Personally I've got absolutely no interest in that side of things. I wouldn't care if they didn't put my name on any credits at all. Actually, I would prefer if it said, 'Such and such was played by Some Guy.'"

Cosmo isn't a man who seems particularly weighed down by ego. This might be the sheer longevity of his career – you don't get precious spending decades doing one-episode guest spots on Minder and C.A.T.S. Eyes – but it might also be down to the nature of his upbringing. Cosmo's father was James Copeland, a jobbing actor who hung out with the glamorous likes of Sean Connery and Peter O'Toole in London, but he also kept "flitting back" to live in Scotland with his mother and sister. School in Clydebank didn't sit well with Cosmo, something he now attributes to being "exceptionally thick" as a child.

If I went on Mastermind – which is very unlikely – my special subject could only be The Simpsons

"I had no interest in schooling," he says. "I bunked off every Friday afternoon for a year. They didn't know I was even meant to be in class. On Friday lunchtime I'd hide in the boy's toilet and then, when they all went back, I would creep out and go fly fishing."

In the end, Cosmo was caught and belted, before leaving school by mutual consent. “In retrospect, you realise oh, you know, I had a huge opportunity to learn stuff and become something greater than I am just now. But it just wasn’t me at that time. We’re like flowers, aren’t we? We all flower at different periods throughout the years.”

You suspect that he has flowered later. As well as trouble at school, he once missed out on a role in *A Passage to India* after having a “heated debate” with David Lean during an audition. But now he admits that “my fuse has got a lot longer as I got older”, and this is borne out in our conversation, rammed with references to his myriad enthusiasms.

Cosmo quotes Babylonian proverbs as easily as he does *The Simpsons*, and spends a sizeable chunk of the interview discussing George Monbiot’s book [Feral](#) as it pertains to the rewilding of Scotland. “Alan Bennett, he wrote this book *The Uncommon Reader*, it was very funny,” he tells me at one point. “And in it, he used this word, ‘Opsimath’. It means ‘one who comes to wisdom later in life’.” Would you consider yourself to be an opsimath? “I would like to, but I’ve got a horrible feeling I’m wrong,” he replies.

It’s interesting to look at the various stages that Cosmo’s career has been through. In the early days, his physical heft meant that he played dozens of police officers, then in the 70s and 80s he seemed to be tagged as a token Scot, playing characters with names like Jock McLeish and Glasgow McDade. Larger fame didn’t come until the 90s, thanks to roles working for directors including [Mel Gibson](#) and Danny Boyle.



‘My death wasn’t exactly a surprise’ ... in Game of Thrones. Photograph: Allstar/HBO

And now we can add Bollywood to the list. Cosmo recently took a role in [Jagame Thandhiram](#), a Tamil-language thriller that was shot in part in Faversham, Kent. “They approached me and my agent said, ‘Oh, you don’t want to do that.’ I thought, hang on a minute, because why not? Why not? Why am I so precious? I thought, ‘Well, I’ve never made an Indian movie.’ So I did it, and it was an astonishing experience, just fantastic.”

But it’s still [Game of Thrones](#) that gets him the most recognition. His run on the show finished in season three, but even seven years later it still follows him around. During lockdown he even made a video for Oldham council about the importance of wearing face masks, in character as Mormont.

“I didn’t read the books when I took the part,” he admits. “But I’m a fanatical fly fisherman, and I go over to my great friend in Washington state in America, and we fish for steelhead out there. Now Beau, my friend, is a real redneck. He doesn’t read anything and his writing is awful. Anyway, when I said I’d do this series, he bought the books. I don’t know how he did it, but he sat down and he read all of them. I made time to go over and see him, and we’d be fishing away, and he’d say: ‘Well, James, this has happened and that’s happened and you’re still alive, kid.’ I’d say: ‘Oh, good,

good.’ Then one day he said: ‘James, they’re drinking beer out of your skull.’ So my death wasn’t exactly a surprise.”

[The Bay review – Broadchurch in Morecambe? Come on in, the water's lovely.](#)

[Read more](#)

The only downside of the role, he says, was that his character had taken a vow of celibacy. “In that show where everybody’s getting their kit off everywhere, I draw the short straw,” he sighs. Would he have preferred to have had a few sex scenes? “You know what? In my whole career, which is now like 56 years or something, I have only had a romantic kiss with one woman, in His Dark Materials. I’ve never had a love scene.” Should I use this interview to try and get you one? “Oh, I think it’s a bit of a wasted effort,” he chuckles.

The most delightful thing about Cosmo is how unshowy he is about his achievements. “I was in my mid-40s when Braveheart happened,” he says. “As you get older, you lose that testosterone-driven success thing. Am I going to be impressed by money or fame or whatever, really? I don’t think so, no. I mean, a day’s fly fishing is all I’m really aiming for.”

Cosmo brings up fly fishing so often that at one point I end up mentioning my dad, who is a flycasting instructor. “I’m appalled that you’re not a fly fisherman in that case,” he chides. “Listen, can we end this and just get your dad on the line? I think we could have had a much deeper and meaningful conversation had he been here.”

Sensing the slightest trace of sincerity in his sentiment, I start to bring the interview to a close. We’ve spoken for well over an hour, and Cosmo has been warm and expansive company. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you much about The Bay,” he says as an afterthought as we part. “But at least now you can say that you spoke to Johnny Tightlips.”

- The Bay season two is on ITV from 13 January

[United Kingdom holidays](#)

10 good news stories for UK travel and tourism in 2021



Trees for Life operations manager Doug Gilbert plants a tree at Dundreggan Estate, Inverness. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Trees for Life operations manager Doug Gilbert plants a tree at Dundreggan Estate, Inverness. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

From cleaner rivers to greener cities and community projects, there are signs the industry will come out of lockdown travelling in the right direction

Holly Tuppen

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Amid all the challenges, last year's forced pause sent some hopeful ripples across the travel industry. Talk of renewed purpose, going slow and regenerative travel – the kind that does good, rather than merely less harm – spread among tour operators and across destinations. Although travel has ground to a halt once more, [with Britons currently banned](#) from entering

many countries - and even other counties - these ripples will help us to travel better once we can.

Visit Scotland declares a climate emergency

In 2020, Visit Scotland became the world's first national tourist board to "declare a climate emergency" by signing up to the [Tourism Declares](#) initiative. The declaration means that Visit Scotland will prioritise the reduction of carbon emissions in everything it does and promotes. Chris Greenwood, senior tourism insights manager at Visit Scotland, says: "The declaration sends a message that environmental responsibility is essential and that everyone can get involved." Some of the plans under way include helping tourism businesses to reduce food and supplier miles, forming a partnership with Zero Waste Scotland, and increasing public transport use, even in remote locations.

• visitscotland.org

England Coast Path nears completion



The beach in Haverigg, near Millom in Cumbria, where the coastal path is being widened. Photograph: Michael Hoyer/Alamy

The [creation of the world's longest signposted footpath](#), stretching 2,795 miles around the English coast, has been more than 10 years in the making. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, and budget cuts for Natural England, the feat is progressing. Launches in 2021 include opening up larger parts of the Cumbrian coast from Whitehaven to Silverdale, featuring a 40-mile section near Millom widened for activities such as mountain biking. Other newly approved sections include completing Essex's coast path where it skirts several estuaries, access between South Hayling and East Head on the south coast, and the storied trail between Amble and Bamburgh in Northumberland.

• nationaltrail.co.uk

Rye Harbour's new discovery centre



Rye Harbour nature reserve. Photograph: jax10289/Getty Images/iStockphoto

The sheer expanse of Rye Harbour's coastline – dotted with faded military outposts and Henry VIII's crumbling Camber Castle – can make it seem desolate, but in fact, this [465-hectare nature reserve](#) is among the most

biodiverse places in Britain. Shingle, saltmarsh, saline lagoons, marshes and reedbeds create habitats for more than 4,000 species, 300 of which are rare or endangered. To celebrate the reserve, the Wildlife Trust is opening a visitor centre at Rye Harbour in April. The low-lying building will have sustainably sourced sweet chestnut cladding to blend into the landscape and offer accessibility for all visitors. It will also have a cafe to increase its year-round appeal.

• rye harbour discovery centre.org.uk

Wild on the Isle of Wight



White-tailed eagles have been reintroduced to the Isle of Wight. Photograph: Nick Edwards/Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation/Forestry England

The Isle of Wight's coast and ancient woodlands are home to species rarely seen elsewhere in the UK. Glanville Fritillary butterflies, hazel dormice and red squirrels thrive, and a successful reintroduction in 2020 means 11 white-tailed sea eagles now soar overhead. Having [earned biosphere reserve status in 2019](#), in 2020 the Wildlife Trust launched a Wilder 2030 vision for the island. By acquiring more sites for wildlife restoration, the Trust hopes to make nature recovery work for local people. The plan started in 2020 with the purchase of a run-down 40-hectare farm, Little Duxmore. Once restored, the site's wetlands and downland will become a haven for wildlife and

welcome visitors and volunteers.

- hiwwt.org.uk

Trees for Life to build UK's first rewilding centre



Dundreggan has been rewilded by Trees for Life since it purchased it in 2008. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Having been working to restore [Scotland's over-grazed Caledonian forest](#) since 1989, it's apt that charity Trees for Life's Dundreggan Estate, in Inverness, should house the UK's first rewilding visitor centre. The centre hopes to demonstrate to up to 50,000 visitors a year that the Great Caledonian forest is vital for wildlife and sequestering carbon, helping community resilience, reducing flooding risk and improving soil quality. It will also highlight native species, such as pine martens and golden eagles, and explore Gaelic culture. Construction will begin in 2021.

- treesforlife.org.uk

New tour operators embrace slow travel on home turf



The Deerstalker train, part of the Caledonian Sleeper, near Corrour, the UK's most remote station. Photograph: Joe Dunckley/Alamy

Once tourism is possible again, flight-free adventures in (and near) the UK should be easier to arrange with some new tour operators. [Byway](#) hopes to champion lesser-known destinations by slow means. Founder Cat Jones' favourite itineraries include a solo rail and ferry adventure around western Scotland, including stays in Corrour, the UK's most remote railway station, and on the [eco-minded island of Eigg](#). Wilderness Scotland has branched out to offer self-guided walking, driving and cycling tours across the border, working with Wilderness England. The more adventurous may be interested in [Natural Britain](#), which promises to provide a carbon label for each trip and hopes to raise the bar when it comes to adrenaline-packed adventures close to home.

Plunge in to Penzance's geothermal heated pool



Penzance's art deco Jubilee lido, with its new geothermal pool. Photograph: Mike Newman

Penzance's art-deco seawater lido opened the [UK's first geothermally heated pool](#) in September 2020. The steaming slice of the triangular pool is heated via pumps from a geothermal well under the seabed. The system has a minimal carbon footprint and will showcase the potential for further geothermal energy use in the UK. It's run by the community for the community, with a chunk of the funding coming from 970 local people.

• jubileepool.co.uk

UK's first river to achieve bathing-water status



The wild swimming spot on the River Wharfe in Ilkley has become the country's first designated river bathing area. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

Rivers gained renewed attention in 2020 when the Environment Agency revealed that only 14% of the UK's waterways had a “good” ecological standard and none had a “good” chemical standard. One local group took matters into its own hands: the Ilkley Clean River Campaign on West Yorkshire's River Wharfe. Thanks to its campaign a popular wild swimming spot on a shingle-bed meander between the town's main bridge and Beanlands Island became the country's first designated river bathing area. The status means that the Environment Agency will test and declare the water's chemical state at regular intervals throughout 2021, hopefully setting a precedent for other popular dipping spots.

- *Ilkley Clean River Campaign [on Facebook](#)*

Cardiff named UK's most bike-friendly city



On the Cardiff Bay Trail: the city has been declared the UK's most bike-friendly city. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Quieter lockdown roads, the need to reduce congestion on public transport, and increasingly urgent carbon targets created a tailwind for the UK's cycling revolution in 2020. [Cycle-to-work scheme orders increased by 200%](#), and Halfords' share price jumped 23%. The UK government pledged £2bn of investment to double journeys taken by bicycle by 2025, agreed to subsidise electric bikes, and more than 100 bike lanes popped up in British cities as a result of Covid social-distancing measures. A 2020 survey by [cycling route-finding app Komoot](#) declared Cardiff the [UK's most bike-friendly city](#). The city is loved by cyclists for its sizable bike-sharing network, [NextBike](#), five cycle superhighways, and the [Cardiff Bay Trail](#) – a six-mile circular route with historic and cultural markers along the way.

Community buyout and nature-based tourism



Members of the Langholm Initiative with local residents on Langholm Moor. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

In 2020, the former textile town of Langholm, in Dumfries and Galloway, proved that passionate communities can change a landscape's history. In 2019, after grouse shooting was deemed economically unsustainable on Langholm Moor, the landowner, Lord Buccleuch, sought a quick sell. United by the cultural and natural significance of the moorland – which is a site of scientific interest – and backed by the likes of the John Muir Trust, the Langholm Initiative bought 2,000 hectares. The community will now create a new Tarras Valley nature reserve, which will restore the globally significant peatlands and ancient woodlands, and use nature-based tourism to provide local jobs.

- langholminitiative.org.uk; tours, when possible, at wildeskdale.co.uk

Best new artists for 2021 Music

Interview

Ghanaian pop star Amaarae: 'I'm presenting black women as deities'

Timi Sotire



'It's about emancipation, womanhood and sexuality' ... Amaarae.

Photograph: Philipp Raheem

'It's about emancipation, womanhood and sexuality' ... Amaarae.

Photograph: Philipp Raheem

Raised between Accra and Atlanta, the genre-rejecting singer draws from her cosmopolitan upbringing – and a love of Kelis – to confront narrow definitions of womanhood

- [Irish drill, jazz violin and supermarket musicals: 30 new artists for 2021](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

“You can’t box anyone in any more,” Amaarae says from her bedroom in Accra, Ghana. “As older cultures die out, things inevitably change.”

The 26-year-old is describing the shift underway in West Africa embodied by alté, the eccentric musical style that has expanded into a non-conformist cultural movement. Amaarae is one of its pioneers, and her debut album *The Angel You Don’t Know* an instant classic in its canon. Euphoric in its risk-taking, it leaves no genre, sound or cadence off limits: Amaarae’s whispering vocals hopscotch between the Southern hip-hop rhythms on Celine and dance over the lilting soundscape created by Rvdical the Kid in 3AM.

It’s far more expansive than the western perception of African pop encompassed by the catch-all term Afrobeats, which Amaarae wanted to distance herself from as soon as she could. She referred to her debut EP, 2017’s *Passionfruit Summers*, as Afro-fusion, but like many artists of her generation, she finds categorising music into genres outdated. “If it was left up to me, I wouldn’t even place a label on my music,” she says. “My story is being told in many different, colourful ways.”

Being raised between Atlanta and Accra exposed Amaarae to a wide array of musical and visual styles. She pegs the start of her “colourful” story to her teenage years in the US, sitting wide-eyed in front of her auntie’s TV: “The first thing we did when we got there was turn it on and watch music videos.” She vividly remembers watching Kelis in the video for Young Fresh N’ New, “from the mohawk to her driving that crazy monster truck. I just loved it. She made me realise that there’s so many different ways of expression and all avenues are valid. You don’t have to be just one type of person.” She shapeshifts across her own videos, from a black leather conch-studded bodysuit to long beaded braids and a colour-blocked buzzcut.

She is frustrated at the rest of the world for failing to catch up with Africa’s dynamism – this limited perspective jeopardises the careers of West African artists who fail to meet preconceived stereotypes. “They haven’t found ways to compartmentalise African music genres,” she says of the mainstream music industry. “They’re really not giving way for artists to progress globally.” Change is happening slowly, with British labels investing in the

African music industry, but it's cultural disruptors such as Amaarae and her collaborators Santi and Odunsi (The Engine) who are leading the way.



'I'm just reflecting the thoughts of quintessential African women!' ...
Amaarae. Photograph: Carlos Idun-Tawiah

She is challenging values at home, too. *The Angel You Don't Know* is dedicated to those who don't meet society's narrow definition of normality, and Amaarae's lyricism also challenges West African views on gender, opening the track *Fancy* by dominantly exclaiming: "I like it when you call me zaddy / Won't you sit up in my big fat caddy?" Talking about the project, Amaarae says: "It's about emancipation, womanhood and sexuality. It's about boldness. It presents the black woman as a deity, a god!" Tracks such as *Trust Fund Baby* and *Dazed and Abused in Beverly Hills* are explicitly hedonistic, money-hungry and sexually charged. "I'm just reflecting the thoughts of quintessential African women!" she says with a giggle.

Her album reflects the growth she has made on her musical journey. "One of the greatest mental barriers I overcame was letting people into my process and creative space," she says. "I used to think if you were a true artist all your music, words and expressions had to come from you." Working on this project made her appreciate the art of collaboration. "This record is so much more than just my expression but it's also the belief others instilled in me

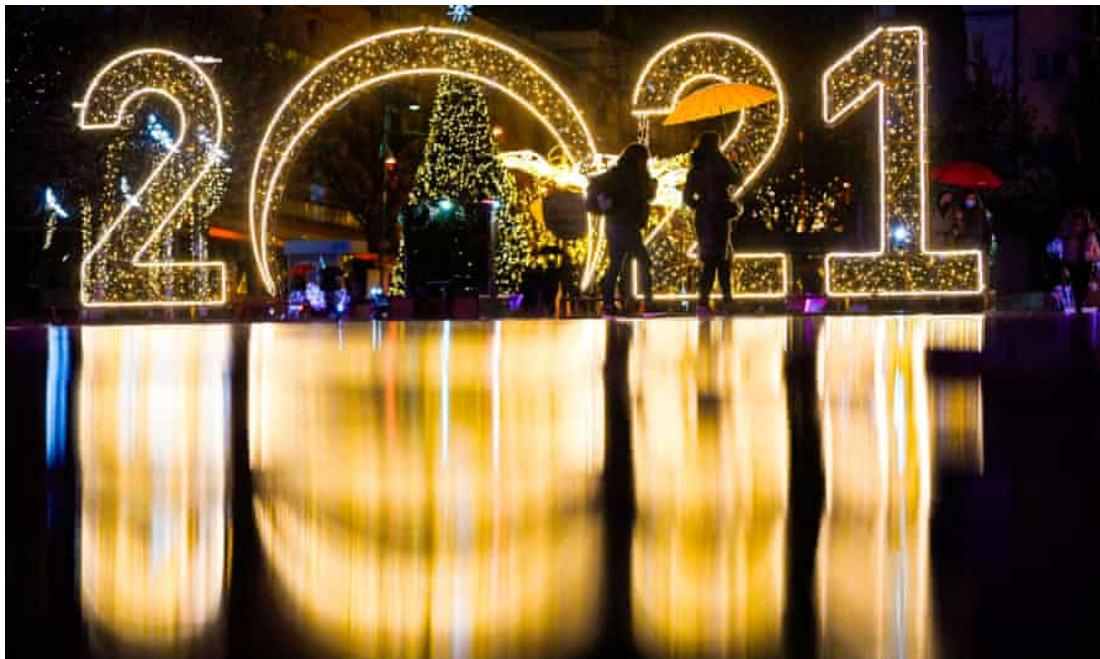
creatively.” The Angel You Don’t Know “is about confidence,” she says. “It’s about swag, it’s about fearlessness.”

- The Angel You Don’t Know is out now on Platoon

[The upsideWorld news](#)

A different world: could 2021 be the best year for a generation?

With the worst potentially behind us, we can be optimistic that somewhere better lies ahead



Golden year? Photograph: Armend Nimani/AFP/Getty Images

Golden year? Photograph: Armend Nimani/AFP/Getty Images



[Mark Rice-Oxley](#)

[@markriceoxley69](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Has a new year ever been as eagerly anticipated as 2021? A fresh start, a new era, technically a new decade, a line drawn under an annus horribilis, and some genuine hope to look forward to. Making predictions is always unwise, especially about the future, they say; making optimistic ones even more so. But could 2021 be the best year for a generation?

Of course this is tempting fate. It would be far safer to predict yet more confrontation, antagonism and misery, and claim vindication the moment the first crisis of the new year erupts, whether it is in Hong Kong, Ethiopia, a snarled-up British port or an unfortunate lowland that happens to be on the receiving end of 2021's first deluge.

So let's quickly note the caveats: there will be times when it won't feel like the best year of the century so far. It's the way of news to focus on the downside, so it would be unwise to promise that all the headlines will be cheerful. Jobs, mental health, isolation, grief, poverty, inequality: as a force multiplier, the pandemic leaves quite a trail in its wake. Even if the world is on the long road to recovery, some communities devastated by Covid-19 may struggle to feel it at all.

And yet ... a few recent breakthroughs have conferred a rare streak of optimism on to the new year before we have even ushered it in. 2021 will be the [year of the vaccines](#), the year [Joe Biden seeks to restore competence and civility](#) to US leadership. It could yet be the year the EU and UK move on from the mutually assured destruction that was Brexit.

All three promise half-solutions to corrosive toxins within our system – the pandemic, populism, polarisation. None will be definitively addressed by treating the symptoms alone. 2021 will just be the start.

But at least in the case of Covid, the start may well be enough to bring about a quite giddy restoration of social life. Assuming vaccination proceeds apace in a fair and sensible manner, official promises of a late spring relaxation and a summer of love beyond seem plausible. We really could be just three or four months away from a very different world.

Crowds should be [back at sporting events](#), and there will be no shortage to choose from in a long summer of thrilling competition. Music festivals may be viable too, as cultural life resumes, and theatres will once again throng. European businesses are cautiously optimistic about [prospects for a rebound in 2021](#). The global economy will [grow again](#), according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and some economists are even predicting [another “roaring 20s”](#). Simple things like a spontaneous pint in a pub garden or dinner with the extended family or a group of friends will feel strangely sublime. The second half of 2021 will feel like taking off a pair of shoes that are too small.

We've also learned so many valuable lessons from this crisis, wisdoms that will make post-pandemic life superior to what went before. Simple things such as neighbours, pets, volunteering and public parks all make life a little better. The [daily commute](#) – 500-plus hours every year that you will never get back – may be a thing of the past for millions around the world, paving the way for the best work-life balance we have ever had. Science is pre-eminent, the pandemic having restored the primacy of fact over rumour, academic rigour over conspiracy theory. “Remote” is here to stay, with everything from business meetings to school parents’ evenings and even medical consultations better for it. Colds and [flu bugs](#) may become less widespread now we know how to avoid them.

On the environment, it is safe to say that 2021 will again be one of the hottest years on record, that ominous weather events (Atlantic storms, bushfires, floods, drought) will again remind us of the challenge ahead. But try also to notice the overwhelming number of organisations, companies, countries that sign up to a zero carbon plan. The US [will rejoin the Paris agreement](#). We should celebrate the plummeting cost of solar, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of new electricity generation capacity globally will [come from renewable sources](#). [Electric car sales](#) are soaring. And we will take confidence from the fact that if humans can overcome Covid-19, they can overcome the climate emergency too, from the same mix of research, resolve, resourcefulness and the resilience of our communities.



Activists demonstrate in front of the Eiffel Tower. The US will rejoin the Paris climate deal. Photograph: Étienne Laurent/EPA

Media will get a much-needed shot in the arm [under a new Facebook licensing deal](#). Journalism, meanwhile, appears safer than at any point since the turn of the century, with [the last two years showing a sharp decline](#) in the number of journalists killed doing their job around the world.

The UN has designated 2021 as [International Year of Peace and Trust](#). And while that may seem a little glib (it's also the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables), we might hope for less conflict and violence in 2021 than in

recent years. Deaths from terrorism have fallen for [five years in a row](#). Though Syria and Yemen remain wretched, the number of people killed in wars [finally seems to be declining](#).

Of course, risks remain. A burgeoning jobs crisis will amount to the gravest economic challenge in a generation. Ditto the mental health backlash from the corrosive uncertainty, restriction and isolation of the past year. An unprecedented debt burden will drag, though with interest rates at rock bottom, the impact is unlikely to be felt until later in the decade. The pandemic has affected people so unevenly that some will live with the negative consequences of 2020 far longer than others.

Germany faces a watershed year, with the end of the [Angela Merkel era](#) heralded in September elections. The [Ethiopian war](#) could yet destabilise the entire Horn of Africa. China and Russia are both big, unpredictable quantities. Scottish elections may herald a new [push for independence](#).

So the year of recovery will probably be an uneven thing. We should not forget that recovery is rarely a straight line or a clear sharp moment like a weather front pulling across the sky. Anyone who has suffered serious illness or injury knows it comes in stops and starts, two steps forward, one step back. But each successive upswing is a little higher, each setback a little shorter, until we find ourselves on higher ground, able to look back on what we came through.

The pandemic was a watershed: there is no going back to how things were. But that is a good thing. But for the first time in more than a decade it feels like we might be able to go forward to somewhere better.

2021.01.01 - Opinion

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- Giving people false hope about the pandemic isn't 'balanced' – it's dangerous
- Essex lorry tragedy must spur greater effort to stop trafficking from Vietnam
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- Government delay has exacerbated the NHS Covid crisis. We need a lockdown now

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The one good thing to come out of Brexit: a bonfire of national illusions

[David Edgerton](#)

Labour must wake up and offer an alternative vision for Britain's future – not just more competence

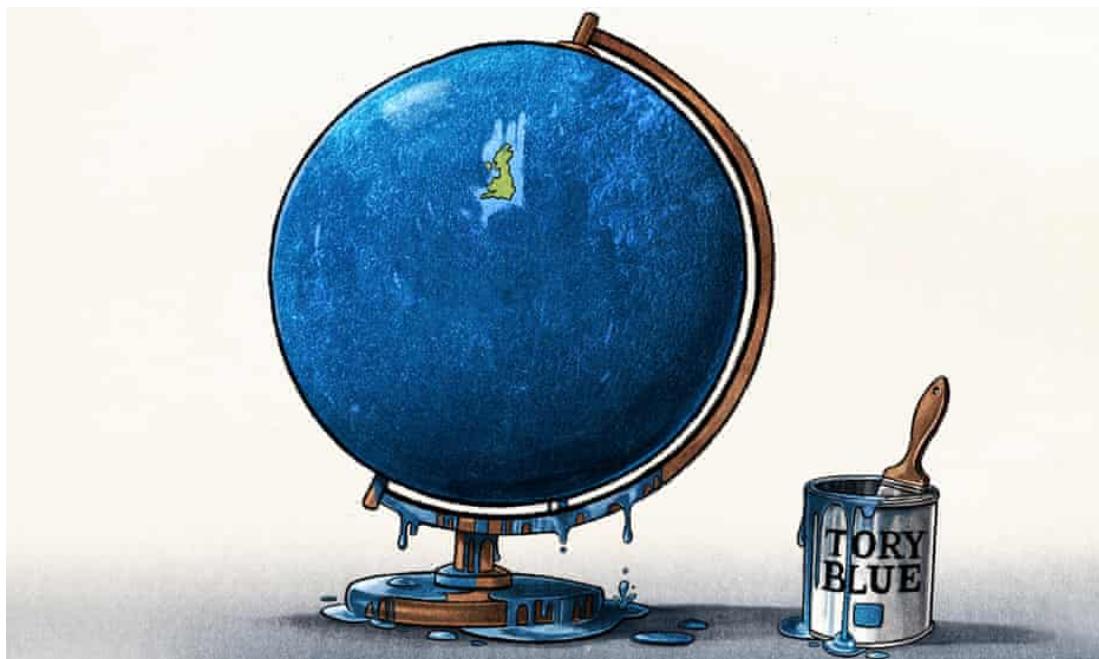


Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

They have done it. The right wing of the Conservative party has won a historic victory. The UK will be a sovereign “third country”, with a [limited trade deal with the EU](#). The UK, rightwingers believe, has been reconciled to its true history as a nation of offshore islanders.

But they have also failed, according to their own terms. Theresa May’s “[red, white and blue](#)” Brexit is long dead, and a bad deal turned out to be better than no deal. The EU will not be supplanted by a great new Europe where

British trade flows unimpeded; there are now frictions and barriers, not least in services. Any serious deregulatory move by the UK will be met with EU retaliation.

In short, the UK has repatriated economic sovereignty and discovered that, far from allowing it to humble the EU, it has harmed itself. Leaders who supposedly stood up for the greatness of the renewed British nation have been revealed as “champions of free trade” who don’t understand the modern economy – and as boastful flag-waving nationalists who don’t realise that great British rulers once looked down on such tinpot antics.

As things now stand, [Brexit](#) is a pointless gesture, a politics of headlines in which sovereignty is performed by bleating world-beating absurdities. Remarkably, four years on from the referendum, it is still a promise without a plan. We have broken out of one regime of international relationships into a holding position – worse than what came before, but with the possibility of redemption or damnation, or, more likely, stagnation.

We might end up with a renewed plebiscitary and parliamentary democracy in which the people take back control, and not just from Brussels. But Boris Johnson’s cronyist Tories make the EU’s bureaucrats look like models of honest and transparent politics; their systematic mendacity, abetted by a loyal press and unconstrained by parliament, hardly inspires confidence. In fact, the legitimacy of the nation has been severely dented, and Northern Ireland and Scotland are likely to take leave of the sinking British ship of state.

In their failure as champions of free trade, the Brexiteers have actually repeated a British failure of the 1950s, an attempt to create a western Europe-wide industrial free trade area that led instead to the UK seeking entry to the European Economic Community in 1961. Perhaps they might reach back even further into history, to the aspiration of an earlier generation of Tory press lords, who pushed for “empire free trade” in the 1920s and 1930s. These men – who had “power without responsibility”, in Baldwin’s famous phrase – also failed, as India and the dominions remained protectionist.

The imperialists and press lords of that era wanted to create a trading bloc to rival the United States; today's Brexiters would prefer a deal with the Americans, handing control to Washington rather than Brussels. But the US, even after Trump, is still protectionist and deeply committed to exporting low-standard foods.

There are some other options left for Brexiters. The strong expat tendency might suggest a Cayman Islands model: merging the UK with an archipelago of tax havens run from the Caribbean, to create an even bigger rentiers' paradise than the one we already have.

As a last option, they may give up on the rest of the world, and focus on national renewal, on [levelling up](#). But we already have some indication of how this is going. The creation of new national business is in reality contracts for cronies and dodgy startups angling for subsidies, while [Brexit businesses actually invest overseas](#). We should hardly be surprised that "levelling up" turns out to be a small pork-barrel fund for financing better bypasses.

Brexit has nowhere realistic to go, for Brexiters at least. Does it offer possibilities for [Labour](#)? For now the answer is no, given that Labour's position is to be patriotic and prostrate. Indeed, Brexit is a potent reminder of the power of new conservative ideas in shaping Labour's agenda. In the 1930s, [Labour](#) followed the Tories from being a party of free trade to one of imperial protection – and then, to backing the EEC, and in the 1990s, to globalisation and the free market.

That pattern is being repeated with Brexit – not merely by virtue of Labour voting in favour, but in accepting a propagandistic Tory analysis of its causes. Keir Starmer is straining to appeal to a mythical *ur*-Labour voter, constructed like a specimen of stone age man by Tory paleontologists of the "red wall".

Yet the ideological maelstrom of Brexit gives Labour the opportunity to abandon old nostrums and re-energise itself with a new national mission and a new history of its own. The left needs to disabuse itself of the cosy and outdated notion that Britain's ills are caused by imperial hangovers and a consequently incompetent upper-class elite. Labour needs to wake up and

offer an alternative future to contest the Tory narrative – one that amounts to more than just better welfare and more administrative competence.

Labour could start by being nostalgic not for a Tory past, but a Labour one: of greater equality, of common purpose, of strong trade unions, of rising wages, of meaningful work. Labour could embrace the idea of a refreshed democracy, of really taking back control – of an anti-elite politics rather than a reheated technocracy. It could once again become the party that offers a national, collective critique of the elite and its power – as it was from the 1930s into the 1970s – and propose a policy of national reconstruction and equality. Labour should be the party that speaks in realities, not in celebratory fantasies, and seeks to create a truthful democratic politics, which is essential to any real programme of progressive change.

The one good thing to come out of Brexit is the bonfire of national illusions which is about to rage. It would be tragic if Labour were to try to put it out. For in its own way, Brexit has forced some essential understanding of Britain's place in the world.

It is no longer even potentially “top nation”. It will not escape the orbit of Europe – it never did, even at the height of its power. It must imitate far more than it innovates. Understanding these truths is crucial to a genuine national reconstruction, which should aim to create a real better country, not to fake being the best.

A policy of national reconstruction, for the [foundational economy](#), for the support of better everyday life, needs to be built on a double critique – of the failed policies of the past 40 years, and of the Brexit ultras seeking an even more disastrous turbo-Thatcherism. For Labour, this moment represents a historic political opportunity: a chance to rethink its own past, and write a new history for the British nation.

- David Edgerton is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: a Twentieth Century History*. He is Hans Rausing professor of the history of science and technology and professor of modern British history at King's College London

[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

Giving people false hope about the pandemic isn't 'balanced' – it's dangerous

[Owen Jones](#)



The media should not promote disinformation under the guise of debate

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Prof Sikora on ITV's This Morning in September. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Prof Sikora on ITV's This Morning in September. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

Professor Karol Sikora, an oncologist at the private Buckingham University, has become a social media star and a regular on TV screens, thanks to his viral tweets. You can see why the “Positive Professor” has developed such a wide fanbase: in an era of death, disease, economic turmoil and suspended freedoms, he offers desperate – often vulnerable – people the one thing they crave most: hope. His formula is simple: contrary to the misery peddled by the doom merchants, the measures strangling our economic and personal lives might actually be unnecessary.

But there is nothing so cruel as false hope, and during a pandemic in which people’s lives depend on adherence to social distancing measures, it can be dangerous. Sikora is not a virologist or an epidemiologist: he is a cancer specialist. That should not preclude him from commenting on coronavirus: newspapers and TV programmes abound with non-specialists discussing the government’s response to the crisis, which is as it should be in a democracy. What matters is that he dissents from the medical consensus on how the virus should be defeated.

Back in 2018, the [BBC sent a briefing note](#) to its staff asking them to be aware of false equivalence, accepting the BBC had got coverage of climate breakdown “wrong too often”, and telling them they did “not need a ‘denier’ to balance the debate”. This is the correct position: just because a fringe grouping of scientists endorse climate denial does not mean it should be treated as the legitimate, valid “other side” of the argument.

But Sikora has the title of Professor before his name, and was saying very different, and reassuring, things compared with other, apparently panic-stricken experts with the same title. “Panic and fear will only make the situation worse,” he [tweeted](#), two days after the first lockdown began and a fortnight before a thousand or more Britons were dying from Covid-19 a day. “If government rules are followed, we will be back to normal by June.”

By May, Sikora felt vindicated, and hubris had set in. “Some laughed at my prediction at the end of March that we would start edging back to normality around the second week of May – it was right!” he [declared](#). “I think by August things will be virtually back to normal, perhaps sooner.” He added a weak caveat: “We should still prepare for the worst, but hope for the best!”

As autumn set in, he began to overstretch his optimism and expertise. [Speaking to the BBC](#), he favoured a prediction that the “the thing just fizzles out, it causes very few deaths, very few hospitalisations” and it “just gradually drifts” into something like flu or the common cold. It was a suggestion [condemned](#) by one leading scientist as “very dangerous”; another declared that “This is not fizzling out in any sense. Minimising the seriousness of this disease risks resurgence on a troubling scale.”

Sikora dug his heels in. As the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) recommended a circuit-breaker lockdown to avert “catastrophe”, Sikora signed a letter calling for the current approach to be abandoned in favour of targeted measures for the old and vulnerable, [described](#) by one scientist as a “thinly veiled return to a herd immunity strategy”.

Even more damningly, just 15 days ago, Sikora penned a [column](#) for the Daily Mail lobbying for restrictions to be eased for Christmas, and ridiculing talk of a more infectious strain – “as though we are living out a chapter of John Wyndham’s Day of the Triffids.” We know what came next: more than

50,000 infections in one day alone. And yet, as I type this, Sikora is [appearing on BBC Radio 2](#) as an informed guest.

Why has Sikora been so systematically signal-boosted by media outlets throughout the crisis? Any cursory exercise of due diligence should have set off alarm bells. Back in 2009, Imperial College London took legal advice to prevent Sikora from claiming he had an honorary professorship there, with its rector [declaring](#): “This individual has been warned before by the college for making claims that he is employed by us” In the past, he has [appeared](#) in rightwing attack ads in the United States condemning the NHS, in which he claims patients have “lost control over their own destiny in the health system”. He has even [denounced](#) the NHS as “the last bastion of Communism”.

Sikora has protested throughout that he is driven by the “[unfolding disaster](#)” of cancer patients not getting the treatment they need because of coronavirus. But without strict measures to suppress coronavirus, our healthcare system would become overwhelmed and unable to treat cancer patients or indeed other desperately ill people. We can see that playing out in our hospitals now, with the NHS facing the prospect of “[horrendous choices](#)” over who gets treatment – and that’s before current case numbers translate into higher deaths in the coming weeks.

[Scientists fought coronavirus, now they face a battle against disinformation | Jim Al-Khalili](#)
[Read more](#)

There will always be people such as Sikora who dissent from consensus thinking, and challenging hypotheses is all part of the scientific endeavour. But we’ve lived with the virus for long enough to test and establish the facts: this virus spreads through social contact, it has mutated into a [more transmissible strain](#), it is at least [10 times deadlier than the flu](#), and it is pushing our NHS to the brink.

Whether the aim is balance or sensationalism – or perhaps the latter hidden under the guise of the former – the producers and editors who provide Sikora with a platform should pause to reflect on the consequences of their decisions. They are responsible for helping to spread disinformation and

discrediting the legitimate voices of scientists, doctors, nurses and paramedics who have understood the scale of the crisis from the start.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

Essex lorry tragedy must spur greater effort to stop trafficking from Vietnam

Mimi Vu, Dorothea Czarnecki and Nadia Sebtaoui

Criminal networks are depending on the chaos of Covid and Brexit. Now more than ever we need focus and international cooperation to prevent further tragedies



The 39 Vietnamese migrants who suffocated as they were being smuggled across the Channel in a sealed refrigeration trailer. Photograph: Essex Police
The 39 Vietnamese migrants who suffocated as they were being smuggled across the Channel in a sealed refrigeration trailer. Photograph: Essex Police
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HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 03.30 EST

Trials in the UK of the drivers and haulage organisers involved in the Essex lorry tragedy in which 39 Vietnamese migrants perished ended in [guilty pleas and convictions](#). Vietnam also convicted the agents who brokered the victims' journeys to the UK and sentenced them to terms of imprisonment.

While these are positive developments in achieving some measure of justice for the victims, they won't do anything to stem the smuggling and trafficking of Vietnamese migrants to the UK. No justice system has reached the actual masterminds and profiteers behind this horrific crime: the organised crime groups.

It's been a year since Essex, and the Covid pandemic has made the world a very different place. International air travel has been disrupted and won't return to normal for the foreseeable future. Vietnam is one of the world's few bright spots: it quickly eliminated the spread of the virus and has recorded just over 1,400 cases and 35 deaths. Consequently, [its economic outlook is rosy](#). Manufacturing is booming, with multinational companies diversifying their supply chain into Vietnam, which means thousands of new jobs.

Yet young Vietnamese are still trying to go to the UK and Europe. Recruiters post daily messages on social media that advertise blue-collar jobs in countries such as Poland, Romania, Hungary, Finland and Slovakia, promising a life of relative prosperity. Scores of Vietnamese reply, eager to be the first ones to depart as soon as international borders reopen. If the risk of anonymous death in the back of a lorry, Covid-19 and criminal convictions can't stop the smuggling and trafficking of Vietnamese people to the UK, what can?

[Met police to compensate child slavery victim arrested after reporting ordeal](#)
[Read more](#)

First, we need to address the root causes of why people embark on this dangerous journey in the first place. Driven by a desire for economic and social opportunities they believe are unattainable in their home provinces in central Vietnam, people are willing to pay £30,000 or more to smugglers for a "safe route" to the UK. Awareness-raising campaigns are not enough to dispel the myth of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The campaigns need to be accompanied by programmes that provide opportunities for a better life in Vietnam, such as vocational training and job placements.

At the same time, trafficking can no longer be considered solely a UK or Vietnam problem. The trade is incredibly lucrative, and includes wildlife, drugs and counterfeit goods, and is led by ethnic Vietnamese organised crime groups based in countries with large diaspora communities such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany and France. It's no coincidence that smuggling routes commonly run through these countries, and Vietnamese migrants often become victims of exploitation while on their way to the UK. The perpetrators may be of Vietnamese origin, but they are EU citizens committing crimes on EU soil.

One of the biggest shortcomings with the UK and EU responses to Vietnamese trafficking and organised crime is the lack of experience and resources to work with victims and diaspora communities. One good first step in 2020 was the secondment of Vietnamese officers to Police Scotland, bringing much-needed linguistic and cultural expertise. This cross-border cooperation needs to be broadened to include EU transit countries and a

long-term strategy and dedicated budget to tackle Vietnamese trafficking and smuggling at the highest criminal levels.

The sad truth is that the Vietnamese migrants in the lorry were only considered victims because they died, tragically and very publicly. Otherwise, they would have been considered illegal migrants with no regard as to how they were exploited or victimised before reaching Essex. Going forward, we must recognise victims no matter where they are in their journey and change our solutions and responses to match the transnational and constantly evolving business of human trafficking and smuggling. Criminal networks are depending on the chaos of Covid, Brexit and economic recession to shift attention away from them, but governments, NGOs, the private sector and law enforcement must remain focused and coordinated. There is always another Essex tragedy waiting in the wings.

- Mimi Vu is a partner at Raise Partners and a Vietnam-based anti-trafficking and modern slavery expert. Dr Dorothea Czarnecki is deputy director at ECPAT Germany and vice-chair of ECPAT International. Nadia Sebtaoui is a Paris-based migration and anti-trafficking expert

Opinion Teaching

As a teacher during the pandemic, I've realised that a school is a genuine community

Jeffrey Boakye

Teaching through Covid has been anxiety-inducing, but we have been the ballast in the deeply uncertain waters of the pandemic

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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'If nothing else, a teacher is a constant in a child's life. We're there, every day, every week, every term, part of the furniture.' Photograph: Juice Images/Alamy

'If nothing else, a teacher is a constant in a child's life. We're there, every day, every week, every term, part of the furniture.' Photograph: Juice Images/Alamy

Fri 1 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

If you haven't been *in* one since the last time you were *at* one, you might not appreciate that a school can often feel like a bad theme park: way too exciting, over-stimulating, and liable to produce headaches. It's what you get if you put hundreds of kids and dozens of caffeinated adults under one roof. It's a hive of human activity and constant, emotional interaction – buzzing with movement, noise, rapid changes, ups, downs and, in many cases, actual bells to tell everyone when to stand up and go somewhere else.

For teachers, it's a bit like hosting an eight-hour Zoom call with nobody on mute and your camera always switched on. That's a comparison that wouldn't have made sense a year ago, but the pandemic has ushered in a whole new reality that we're all struggling to deal with. Not to sound too much like a football score, it's starting to feel like Covid-19, everyone else – nil.

[School leaders and councils demand clarity on primary closures](#)

[Read more](#)

As it stands, amid unprecedented levels of Covid cases, the government has announced a [staggered return](#) to school in January, depending on local infection rates. Until there's a readily available vaccine and infection rates become stable, teachers will continue facing the warped reality of teaching under Covid. I'll tell you what it's like: in a word, weird.

During that first lockdown – the sunny one – many schools became empty shells, open only to vulnerable children, the children of key workers and teachers. We rattled around empty corridors and abandoned rooms. It was like the opening credits of a post-apocalyptic dystopian movie; the first time many of us had worn face masks in public places, stuttering in our steps when we met in stairwells. Was this two metres? Did he just touch that door handle? Can I touch it? Is there any hand sanitiser left?

We soon regrouped. [Schools](#) worked out how to be Covid-secure: one-way systems, no-go zones, policies and protocols. Still eerie, but inching slowly back to something close to normal. Sort of.

My first time teaching online was anxiety-inducing. Like trees that fall in a forest with no one around to hear, my students were there but not there, absent but present. Without all the usual sensory input that makes a school a school, I became a disembodied deliverer of content, my classes only able to communicate through the chat function – a sidebar full of textspeak. (We'd been advised to not let them unmute. Welcome to the future.)

But even when they can't be seen or heard, children are never truly absent. If nothing else, a teacher is a constant in a child's life. We're there, every day, every week, every term, part of the furniture. It was a panic to see so many kids drop off the radar, unable to access this brave new world due to a lack of tech, a lack of will, or both. We could ask where they were and send work home, but we couldn't drag them in. And what's a school without pupils?

I felt myself missing the interactions – good, bad and ugly – and becoming grateful when anyone turned up at all to my online lessons. In a job that's all about communicating with people for extended periods of time, Covid is a reminder that a school is a deeply communal entity – a genuine community.

Teaching under Covid isn't without fear. As school populations have fluctuated, the threat of transmission has grown increasingly tangible. I've watched the staff room thin out as colleagues have been taken ill or been forced to self-isolate, while student outbreaks have led to *bubble closures* – another piece of Covidspeak that we didn't have last year.

I caught it myself in October. Being black and part of the so-called BAME cohort that has been disproportionately affected by the outbreak, I was already at "medium risk". This came with a risk assessment outlining what I could, should and shouldn't do, but it's impossible to teach and be 2 metres away from all students at all times. Not to mention wiping down every shared keyboard, mouse and photocopier display panel, or the constant handling of hundreds of exercise books. I can't say for certain that I caught Covid at school but since my illness, I've been a lot more wary of the risks.

It isn't only the disease that's to be feared, either. We've all seen this year how pupils' exam results, and thus their futures, can hang in the balance of [government algorithms](#). How social inequalities can so easily lead to material deprivation and financial instability. A generation of young people

are staring down the barrel of an exam system that Covid has shown to be precarious. When students have put their faith in your promises as a teacher, you start to wonder if you're part of the problem or the solution.

But it's not all doom and despair. You may not believe me, with my 13 weeks' holiday and "early" finishes, but teachers want to be at school. We want to teach. Covid has exposed the vulnerabilities of the education system but it's also revealed what's at the very core of being a teacher: relationships. It's in our nature just as much as it is in our job descriptions to be there for our students when they need us.

My job has always been much more than talking about books and telling kids how to pass exams. Now, more than ever, I've become part of the ballast for the Covid generation in deeply uncertain waters. And when the only thing that seems certain is more uncertainty to come, that's a privileged position to be in.

- Jeffrey Boakye is the author of Black, Listed: Black British Culture Explored and Hold Tight: Black Masculinity, Millennials and the Meaning of Grime

The Guardian view on Covid science: cooperation, not just competition

[Editorial](#)

Scientists should follow the example of the Chinese professor whose selfless decision to share his breakthrough led to the medical miracle of a vaccine



Two residents wearing masks last January in Wuhan, China. On 11 January 2020, when Wuhan recorded its first Covid death, the virus's genomic sequence was posted on an open access site. Photograph: Stringer/Getty Images

Two residents wearing masks last January in Wuhan, China. On 11 January 2020, when Wuhan recorded its first Covid death, the virus's genomic sequence was posted on an open access site. Photograph: Stringer/Getty Images

Thu 31 Dec 2020 13.46 EST

There are many people deserving of praise for selfless acts during the past 12 months. But one person whose act of scientific generosity ought to be

remembered is [Zhang Yongzhen](#). The scientist, who works out of the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Centre, was the first to map the whole genome sequence of Sars-CoV-2. He did so on 5 January 2020 and hoped to share it with researchers by uploading his work to the US National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI).

The professor knew he was dealing with a deadly virus – but he had no idea how dangerous. The pathogen has killed more than 1.7 million people and shut down nations, leaving a trail of economic disruption. Concerned that the NCBI would take its time, the scientist sanctioned the sequence's [global public release](#) via an Australian colleague. On 11 January, when Wuhan recorded its first Covid death, the virus's genomic sequence was posted on an [open access site](#). The 28,000 letters of Covid's genetic code allowed Oxford University's [Jenner Institute](#), [Moderna](#) and [BioNTech](#) to design their vaccines in days. Testing took the rest of the year. To go from an unknown lethal new virus to an approved vaccine in months is a medical miracle. While the immediate sharing of data from a dangerous infectious disease might seem obvious, it goes against the grain of the way science has too often worked. A scientist's ability to get funding and get ahead has for decades been predicated on competition, not just cooperation.

Doing what is right rather than what one is told is made harder when operating in an authoritarian system like China's. Prof Zhang received unwelcome official attention. His lab was [closed down briefly](#) before sense prevailed. [Such episodes](#) were used by Donald Trump, shamefully, to shift blame from his floundering response on to the nation where the pathogen was first identified.

Prof Zhang's work highlighted the need to be able to map viruses themselves, not just their spread. Sars-CoV-2's evolution has been watched more closely in real time than any other virus in history. The UK's [genomic monitoring](#) identified a highly transmissible Covid-19 variant in December. Such [surveillance](#), with appropriate privacy safeguards, will probably go global. Scientific collaboration will need to be nurtured. By forging links across borders, scientists can provide a trusted early-warning system for global health and ultimately lower the risk of wayward politicians inhibiting progress.

Government delay has exacerbated the NHS Covid crisis. We need a lockdown now

Claudia Paoloni

Within a few days we are likely to surpass 26,500 coronavirus patients in hospital – the point at which all additional capacity will be used up

- Dr Claudia Paoloni is president of HCSA, the hospital doctors' union



Ambulances queueing outside the Royal London hospital in east London, 29 December 2020. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Ambulances queueing outside the Royal London hospital in east London, 29 December 2020. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.21 EST

Yet again the government has been caught flat-footed by Covid-19, moving too slowly in the face of the impending inferno. In Australia, when there is a wildfire in the bush, they cut a firebreak many miles ahead and deep enough to prevent the fire spreading. The government's approach to the pandemic is more akin to gentle pruning as the flames lick ever higher all around.

Instead of acting weeks ago, when impending crisis became apparent, we have had a familiar exercise in dithering and delay. Hospital staff and their patients are now paying the price. The grim, inevitable [rise in cases this week](#) will mean already [overwhelmed A&E departments](#) will soon enter uncharted territory.

[NHS staff on Covid frontline: 'There's no let-up, it's just constant'](#)

[Read more](#)

As president of HCSA, a professional association and trade union representing all hospital doctors in the UK, I am aghast at the way we lurch from one crisis to the next. At every turn, policymakers drag their heels in the face of incontrovertible evidence. Days and weeks are squandered.

It is only when the inferno takes hold that essential measures are taken, and then the lessons seem forgotten until the next fire is upon us. Our members on the frontline report desperate situations which make the record case numbers all the more alarming. The national statistics tell only a part of the story.

In London and the south-east, the new variant has plunged A&E departments into chaos, with some ITUs running at 200% capacity while patients wait 24 hours, forced to stand in corridors, the infected mingling with the uninfected. [Ambulances queue outside](#), while breathing aids are increasingly rationed.

One can only speculate on the reason for this sluggish reaction, [rolling out tier 4](#) in the south-east only on 20 December, when it was already too late to avert disaster. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that unfulfillable promises made in haste, such as on Christmas or keeping our schools open, have placed a straitjacket on government decision-making and acted as a brake on the pace of essential steps.

Wednesday's decision to place more areas into the highest tier is also likely to prove too late. The new variant is everywhere. The average gap between a test and hospitalisation for this new form of Covid-19 is around seven days. It does not take a mathematical genius to see where current record case numbers will take us. In a matter of days hospitals in these areas too are likely to be inundated.

Did it have to be this way? History will judge. But in any post mortem the long-term neglect of our NHS and its staff, with its perennial winter crises even before Covid-19, will be an important chapter.

I have been asked in many interviews why our health system does not appear to have the capacity to deal with this crisis when so many other countries in Europe have coped better, with lower death rates and lower infection rates. The answer is simple. Years of “efficiency savings” have resulted in a lower capacity than most other European countries. We have a bed base one-third the size of Germany's and chronic staff shortages. We simply don't have the flexibility to cope with a pandemic requiring large numbers of hospitalisations and ventilatory support.

In a rushed acceptance of these shortcomings, the Nightingales were thrown up. But what was undoubtedly an impressive feat of engineering and teamwork failed to take into account the number of trained staff that would be required to make them work. Ventilatory support and critical care is a highly specialised area of medical care and cannot be delivered by volunteers.

Diluting staff within our already overstretched hospitals to get the Nightingales running appears a fantasy. As hospitals deal with their own staffing crises every day, as staff self-isolate or are themselves off with Covid, their existence is little more than a totemic placebo.

In the face of a rising torrent of patients, staff are being redeployed within hospitals to assist in unfamiliar areas, adding additional stress to an already fatigued and burnt-out workforce. In London, staff are being called back from much-needed leave, and there are limits on leave in other areas which deal a further blow to their wellbeing and ability to cope. This pandemic will

have a long-lasting impact on hospital staff that policymakers ignore at their peril.

Symbolically, within just a few days we are likely to surpass [26,500 Covid patients](#) in our hospitals. This is the point at which, we were told in October on the eve of the [November lockdown](#), all surge capacity and additional capacity freed up by the cancellation of hospital procedures would be reached.

Around [5-6% of reported community cases](#) end up in hospital with the new Covid variant. With known cases of 50,000 a day, the writing is on the wall. London and the south-east will merely be the start of an [NHS catastrophe](#) if strong, decisive action is not taken throughout the UK now.

This virus transmits through contact. The only way to stop the transmission is to radically reduce contact and restrict movement. It is a difficult decision to halt the country yet again, but when we have a solution through vaccination for the middle and long term, radical action must be taken in the immediate.

The threat we face must be treated with the seriousness it warrants. We need a total national lockdown, now, and we need secondary schools, which act as incubators for this virus, to [remain closed](#) until we regain control. Crucially, the laissez-faire approach to enforcement has to end.

It may be hard for the public to relate to the enormity of the national crisis our NHS faces, but it has implications for everyone. Heart attacks, strokes, cancers and traumatic injuries will be more dangerous. While a young person may not suffer extreme illness from Covid, if they have a significant car accident or life-threatening injury, they too will feel the direct consequences of gridlocked hospitals. This is a national crisis that touches us all. It now requires a national response.

- Dr Claudia Paoloni is president of HCSA, the hospital doctors' union, and a consultant anaesthetist

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Premier League: 10 things to look out for this weekend

[Ten things to look out for this weekend](#)
[Premier League](#)

Premier League: 10 things to look out for this weekend

Sam Allardyce takes aim at Arsenal, Danny Ings could return to haunt Liverpool and José Mourinho must change tack

[Michael Butler](#), [Will Unwin](#) and [Daniel Harris](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.05 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.27 EST



Sam Allardyce gestures, João Cancelo jumps for the ball and Harvey Barnes in action. Photograph: Getty Images

1) Manchester United must be braver at start of games

Ole Gunnar Solskjær has taken significant stick from laymen convinced their footballing expertise trumps his, but even they must concede that Manchester United are better now than at any stage in the Post-Fergie Wilderness Years™. Though it's hard to envisage United winning the title, they must attack games as if they intend to, and should they fail, it will not be because they were too cautious. Solskjær's side are too Ruthless in attack and defence, but can offset these weaknesses by dominating opponents in midfield. Before their midweek [win with Wolves](#), the Norwegian said "we need to go after them and get after that ball," but it was not until the final quarter of the game, when Paul Pogba moved further forward, that United did that. They got away with it against Wolves, just, but to achieve the improbable this season, they must be braver from the outset in every game.

DH

- [Manchester United v Aston Villa, Friday 8pm \(all times GMT\)](#)

Play Video

1:09

'You can't fake your way into this team': Solskjær praises Manchester United mentality – video

2) Coleman has earned New Year's Day start

Back in 2009, Seamus Coleman joined Everton for a fee of just £60,000. After surgery on a career-threatening infected blister, his first appearance at Goodison came in December of that year, when he was named man of the match in [a 2-2 draw with Tottenham](#). For the last decade, Coleman has been one of the Premier League's best right-backs, and was made Everton club captain last year. Injury and a lack of form mean minutes have become scarcer for the Irishman, particularly with the emergence of both Mason Holgate and recent recruit Ben Godfrey. Coleman hasn't started a league

match since 7 November, but has been predictably dependable off the bench over the Christmas period. Carlo Ancelotti could turn to Coleman against West Ham, who are not blessed with pace going forward, as Everton chase a fifth consecutive league win – something they have not achieved since April 2014. **MB**

- [Everton v West Ham, Friday 5.30pm](#)

3) Will Mourinho take a cue from Solskjær?

After Spurs sat back at Wolves and wound up conceding yet another late goal, José Mourinho accepted full culpability for their negativity, noting that only a criminal would restrict Son Heung-min and Harry Kane to counters and set pieces. Not really. He blamed his players, claiming they had disobeyed his commands. Whatever the truth of the matter – and given Mourinho's history, it's fair to be suspicious – the way his team go about things makes no sense. Sitting back on a lead might work when you've got Petr Cech, Ashley Cole, John Terry, Ricardo Carvalho and Claude Makélélé, but when you're relying on Hugo Lloris, Eric Dier, Serge Aurier and pals? Ahem. Spurs' strength is in attack, and just a few days ago Mourinho's successor at Manchester United, Ole Gunnar Solskjær, showed exactly how to play against Leeds: press hard, pull Bielsa's man-to-man system about the pitch, and flood forward at every transition. Is Mourinho flexible enough to do the same? **DH**

- [Tottenham v Leeds, Saturday 12.30pm](#)



Will Son Heung-min and Harry Kane be given more freedom against Leeds?
Photograph: Kevin Warburton/ProSports/Shutterstock

4) Allardyce aims to do another job on Arsenal

Following [West Brom's superb draw at Anfield](#), Sam Allardyce was asked to identify the key factor behind it. “Really good organisation,” he responded. He’s right, but if you think he looked besotted with himself then, imagine if he can put one over on Arsenal, who he frequently troubled as Bolton manager. He and Arsène Wenger were frequently characterised as opposites, but the reality is more nuanced – Wenger’s best teams mixed it, and Allardyce innovated tactically while giving the Premier League Youri Djorkaeff and Jay-Jay Okocha. He will take particular joy if he can outfox Mikel Arteta, who was given a job Allardyce could never get despite doing none of the things the Englishman has done. Allardyce’s problem at West Brom is a squad that fails to aim beyond defending deep and hoping for a set piece. It will be interesting to see what he comes up with. **DH**

- *West Brom v Arsenal, Saturday 8pm*

5) Cultured Cancelo can be key figure on the right

Following the postponement of their trip to Everton, Manchester City may be the fresher of the sides after Chelsea endured a tough 1-1 draw against Aston Villa. One City player who will have enjoyed the brief rest is João Cancelo. The Portuguese international has already made 23 appearances this season for club and country, swapping flanks most weeks as Pep Guardiola makes the most of his utility, while inadvertently impacting his form. At left-back, Cancelo looks composed and competent, although that is not always enough at the biggest clubs. A right-back by trade, he will be finally looking to oust Kyle Walker as the first choice in that position, aided by his teammate's penchant for mistakes and enforced absence. Against Newcastle, Cancelo was arguably man of the match in his preferred role. Being permitted the opportunity to consistently play in his natural position would allow him to prove the remaining doubters wrong. **WU**

- *Chelsea v Manchester City, Sunday 4.30pm*

Football Weekly

Newcastle, Liverpool, Villa, meat and the EFL

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6) Sheffield United need new way forward

It is too simplistic to put Sheffield United's season down to one factor, but a lack of firepower seems an obvious place to start. When [Sheffield United spent £23.5m on Rhian Brewster](#) in the summer, most agreed that it was decent business but a lack of opportunities has left the former Liverpool striker bereft of confidence. Their opponents on Saturday, Crystal Palace, [invested a similar sum](#) into Eberechi Eze, who has revitalised an attack that was previously too dependent upon Wilfried Zaha. If Palace have got things right, Sheffield United can ill-afford another poor transfer window in

January, with the Blades linked with Jesse Lingard (on loan) and free agent Daniel Sturridge. Both seem shrewd, low-risk gambles, and gamble is what Chris Wilder must do, especially if they remain without a win after the visit to Palace. An ominous January fixture list includes games against Spurs and both Manchester clubs. **MB**

- *Crystal Palace v [Sheffield United](#), Saturday 3pm*



Rhian Brewster is yet to score for Sheffield United after his big-money move from Liverpool. Photograph: Alex Livesey/Getty Images

7) Flying Barnes can help Foxes fix forward flaws

Brendan Rodgers is rotating his Leicester players in this crammed period, in the knowledge worse is to come once the Europa League returns in February. Although this is Leicester's strongest squad of the [Premier League](#) era, there are some flaws that need to be addressed. Jamie Vardy was benched for the trip to Crystal Palace, only to be called upon after 65 minutes as it was clear the Foxes were blunted without him. Kelechi Iheanacho rarely gets a run out nowadays and looks all at sea in the lone striking role. A January signing to supplement Vardy would be ideal but if a

suitable candidate cannot be found, it could be time to give Harvey Barnes a chance to prove himself down the middle. With five league goals already this season, the winger has the pace and skill to get in behind defences and he should have learned a thing or two from Vardy over the years. **WU**

- *Newcastle v Leicester, Sunday 2.15pm*

8) Potter feels the pressure before Wolves visit

One home league win in 2020 for Brighton isn't pretty reading for Graham Potter, who has admitted before the visit of Wolves that the current situation is "the most challenging time of my career." With Tariq Lamptey out, Danny Welbeck a doubt and Adam Lallana "touch and go" for Saturday's match, Potter has some gaping holes in his XI and there is even talk of Glenn Murray returning early from his loan at Watford to save the day. Wolves will arrive on the south coast with something to prove following their late defeat at Old Trafford and although this season has been relatively disappointing, a win at Brighton could put them back into the top half. Nuno Espírito Santo desperately needs somebody to fill the boots of Raúl Jiménez – free agent Diego Costa has been linked – so this could be a crucial opportunity for Fábio Silva to impress before the window opens. **MB**

- *Brighton v Wolves, Saturday 5.30pm*



Graham Potter is hoping Adam Lallana will be fit for the visit of Wolves.
Photograph: Paul Childs/AFP/Getty Images

9) Will takeover spark further Burnley bounce?

Burnley have won three out of their last four home games, helping them move clear of the bottom three. Victory over Fulham would put the Clarets on 19 points from 16 games, an impressive feat for a side who picked up only two draws in their opening seven fixtures. Now that the club's takeover [has been completed](#), there is reason for optimism at Turf Moor. Their success has been built on a solid defence, something that is unlikely to be tinkered with despite expected January investment. What has held Sean Dyche's men back is a thin squad, their bench populated by youngsters unlikely to make more experienced colleagues fear for their places. If Dyche can bring in the characters he desires, especially with three more points in his back pocket, then it could be the end of Burnley looking over their shoulder and a bright new era. **WU**

- [Burnley v Fulham, Sunday 12pm](#)

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10) Liverpool look vulnerable and must fend off Ings

Things didn't work out for Danny Ings at Liverpool, but at Southampton he has proved himself to be exactly the player he looked at Burnley: an all-round centre-forward with intelligence, composure and touch. Marking him is a tough night for even the best defenders, and while Fabinho may fall into that bracket, whoever partners him at St Mary's will not. Liverpool remain the best team in the league but their invulnerability cloak has gone. Just this week, West Brom and Newcastle have shown that teams who are well-organised have a chance against them. [Southampton](#) bring all of that and more, and though their more attacking nature will offer Liverpool more space, the champions are now under a bit of pressure. If they are not at their best, things might get difficult for Jürgen Klopp's side. **DH**

- *Southampton v [Liverpool](#), Monday 8pm*

Pos	Team	P	GD	Pts
1	Liverpool	16	17	33
2	Man Utd	15	8	30
3	Leicester	16	9	29
4	Everton	15	7	29
5	Aston Villa	14	14	26
6	Chelsea	16	13	26
7	Tottenham Hotspur	15	11	26
8	Man City	14	9	26
9	Southampton	16	6	26
10	West Ham	16	2	23
11	Leeds	16	0	23
12	Wolverhampton	16	-6	21
13	Arsenal	16	-3	20
14	Newcastle	15	-7	19
15	Crystal Palace	16	-9	19

16	Burnley	15 -11	16
17	Brighton	16 -7	13
18	Fulham	15 -10	11
19	West Brom	16 -24	8
20	Sheff Utd	16 -19	2

[Manchester United](#)

Edinson Cavani's 'heart at peace' after three-game ban for Instagram post

- Manchester United striker reiterates there was no racist intent
- Cavani disagrees with FA assessment of ‘negrito’ but accepts ban

[Louise Taylor](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 03.48 EST First published on Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.09 EST



Edinson Cavani said: 'I apologise if I offended someone with an expression of affection towards a friend.' Photograph: Sam Bagnall - AMA/Getty

Edinson Cavani has said his “heart is at peace” because there was no racist intent behind [his use of the word “negrito”](#) in a social media post that landed him a three-game ban and £100,000 fine from the Football Association.

The [Manchester United](#) striker, who must also complete a two-hour face-to-face online education course, said he accepted the sanction but did not share

the FA's assessment of his message. The Uruguayan had pleaded guilty to a charge of using insulting and/or improper words. According to United he decided not to contest the case "out of respect for the FA and the fight against racism in football".

The 33-year-old had sent the Instagram message to a friend after coming off the bench and scoring twice in a [3-2 victory at Southampton](#) in late November and will miss three games at Old Trafford. After sitting out Friday's Premier League match against Aston Villa, Cavani will also miss Wednesday's Carabao Cup semi-final with Manchester City and Watford's visit for next Saturday's FA Cup tie.

"I do not want to extend much in this uncomfortable moment," Cavani wrote on Instagram. "I want to share with you that I accept the disciplinary sanction knowing that I am foreign to English language customs, but I do not share the point of view.

"I apologise if I offended someone with an expression of affection towards a friend, nothing further in my intention. Those who know me know that my effort always seeks the simplest joy and friendship!

"I appreciate the countless expressions of support and affection. My heart is at peace because I know that I always expressed myself with affection according to my culture and way of life. I send you a sincere hug."

In November Cavani swiftly issued an apology for his use of his phrase "*Gracias negrito*" – Spanish for "thanks little black person" – and said he deleted it as soon as he became aware it could be interpreted differently.

There is a degree of sympathy for him in certain quarters, given the context of a personal post between friends and it being understood that *negrito* is a nickname of Cavani's correspondent, but the FA's punishment sends a powerful message. The governing body has made it clear there are no excuses for being unaware of language deemed unacceptable in wider society.

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Significantly the FA, which will publish the written reasons behind Cavani's sanction in due course, said the post constituted an "aggravated breach" of its rules because it included "reference, whether express or implied to colour and/or race and/or ethnic origin".

United hope the FA will invest Cavani's fine in an anti-racism initiative and responded by saying: "Despite his honest belief he was simply sending an affectionate thank you in response to a congratulatory message from a close friend he chose not to contest the charge out of respect for, and solidarity, with the FA and the fight against racism in football. The club trusts that the independent regulatory commission will make it clear in its written reasons that Edinson Cavani is not a racist, nor was there any racist intent in relation to his post."

[Arsenal](#)

Kolasinac joins Schalke on loan as Arteta targets Arsenal clearout

- Manager planning to keep Reiss Nelson at the Emirates
- Arteta urges Premier League to avoid late postponements

Play Video

0:41

'Players will have to leave': Arteta on Arsenal's January transfer window – video

[Mikel Arteta](#) has revealed Arsenal's priority in January is to trim the numbers in their squad. Sead Kolasinac is one of several players who have barely featured this season and the defender has joined Schalke on loan until the end of the campaign.

"We have a large squad and we knew that," Arteta said. "A lot of things that should have happened in the summer, we cannot accomplish for different reasons. There are some players that are going to go on loan and going to leave and that is the priority at the moment. We cannot sustain the numbers that we have in certain positions. Then we will see if we have the right opportunity in the positions where we need some more help."

Mesut Özil and Shkodran Mustafi are among others who do not feature in Arteta's plans but one player the manager said he would like to keep is Reiss Nelson, whose absence from the squad in recent weeks fuelled speculation that he could be on the verge of a move.

"He has not been 100% fit and that is the reason why he has been out and not featuring in the squad," Arteta said. "He had a muscular issue. He has been in and out of training, but not been 100%. It is a shame because I felt he was getting into his performance levels, he was starting to have some really good games and to build that momentum."

The [Arsenal](#) manager also hailed the influence of Bukayo Saka, the 19-year-old who has come to the fore at a time when more established players have crumpled under pressure. “He’s a great example for any young player: to play with that commitment, that passion and also that courage.”

Arteta says he is confident that increased testing of Premier League players will help to ensure that the season can continue without interruption despite rising Covid-19 infection rates.

Arsenal’s next match is on Saturday against West Brom, whose manager, Sam Allardyce, [called this week for a “circuit-breaker”](#). The latest round of testing returned the highest number of positives since the start of the season, with 18 of 1,479 players and staff found to have the virus.

Two matches [had to be postponed](#) this week owing to high infection rates, with the Premier League [increasing the frequency of testing](#) from once to twice per week for clubs in tier 4 areas, including Arsenal. Arteta says he believes that measure will help to tackle the rise.

“I think we are all concerned with our own health and with what is going on around us,” the manager said. “But all the protocols we have in place, everything we do around the training ground and around matches and the fact that we play our sport outdoors all minimise the risks a lot.

“I think we have shown the system is working. In the last week or so something has happened and we will have more restrictions and more tests to try to be as efficient as we were before and we will see, but I think it can work and we can carry on.”

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However, he urged the Premier League to avoid any more late postponements for coronavirus, saying “we cannot be waiting until the last two hours” to discover whether a match is going ahead. This week, Fulham v Tottenham and Everton v Manchester City were both called off hours before kick-off.

“We need another protocol, clear guidelines of what to do ... because we cannot be waiting until the last two hours [to find out] whether we are playing a football match or not,” Arteta said. “We should know a little bit earlier and at least have an open communication and make a decision about what is right to do in that moment but with a little bit of time.”

Arteta acknowledged it may not be practical to decide the night before whether a game will go ahead.

“I don’t know if it’s possible because if there are players that get up that morning and they have some symptoms it gets a little bit complicated when the game is at 8pm,” he said. “I don’t know what’s the best way. I’m sure the doctors will find the best way. What is important again is that we have an open communication and if something is happening we should know early so we can get prepared.”

Arteta said football had a crucial role to play in keeping people’s spirits up during lockdown. “The importance of football to this society is massive. When you ask around and talk to people and ask them what it means to have football in this difficult period for everybody when there is not so much to do, it is really, really important. What we have to do is try to do it in a safe way.”

[Rumour MillFootball](#)

Football transfer rumours: Jadon Sancho to Chelsea? Isco to Arsenal?

Today's tittle-tattle is taking back control



Here we go again. Photograph: Alexandre Simões/Borussia Dortmund/Getty Images

Here we go again. Photograph: Alexandre Simões/Borussia Dortmund/Getty Images



[Barry Glendenning](#)

[@bglendenning](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.05 EST

The dust sheets are off, some engineers in overalls have hit various bits with a large spanner and the giant lever has been pulled. Yes folks, after months on the sidelines that clunk-whirr-clunk sound you can hear is the sound of the Rumour Mill cranking back into action after wheezing its way through a late fitness test.

With English football's transfer window due to open tomorrow, our return hasn't come a moment too soon; fighting fit, raring to go and ready to bring you daily digests from the frontline of transfer speculation, much of which will inevitably prove to be misguided, if not downright incorrect.

[Women's transfer window January 2021 – every deal in Europe's top five leagues](#)

[Read more](#)

Of course, following the UK's undignified exit from the EU last night, this will be a window like no other. Various governing bodies in English football have been forced to dream up a byzantine set of entry requirements that will

restrict the number of foreign players Premier League and EFL clubs are able to employ.

While the new points system is unlikely to affect the kind of big-name box office signings that make fans of Premier League clubs lose their minds, clubs from the English lower tiers may find it difficult to bring in players from abroad. Still ... blue passports, eh? And something about fish.

Having commandeered more than his fair share of column inches to no avail during the last window, Borussia Dortmund's **Jadon Sancho** looks ready to steal plenty of headlines again. Chelsea have joined [Manchester United](#) in the chase for the signature of a player whose German employers insist is not for sale. In the event of the apparently unsettled Sancho leaving Dortmund, the Bundesliga club have lined up PSV Eindhoven's young Dutch prospect **Donyell Malen** as his replacement.

In the market for an experienced central defender due to their well-documented injury crisis, Liverpool will almost certainly be forced to pay top dollar if they are to land one of their targets. Jürgen Klopp is believed to be interested in Brighton's **Ben White**, Ajax's **Per Schuurs** and RB Leipzig's **Dayot Upamecano**. While centre-halves don't come much more experienced than Leicester's **Jonny Evans**, the Northern Ireland international won't be going anywhere. He celebrated New Year's Eve by signing a contract extension.

Meanwhile at Arsenal, Mikel Arteta says he'll need to trim his squad before bringing in any new recruits and has already freed up one training ground parking space by shipping **Sead Kolasinac** [out on loan](#) to German crisis club Schalke, who are still looking for their first Bundesliga win of the season. **Shkodran Mustafi** looks likely to follow him out the door, while the dilemma over how best to solve a problem like **Mesut Özil** will continue to perplex the Arsenal hierarchy. In the Emirates arrivals hall, fans will be keeping their eyes peeled for Real Madrid playmaker **Isco**.

Manchester United are eager to ramp up their efforts to sign **Max Aarons** from Norwich, having failed in their attempts to lure the 20-year-old full-back to Old Trafford in the summer. A starter in each of the Championship leaders' 22 league games this season, Aarons seems unlikely to leave in the

current window. Having agreed a deal with Atalanta for **Amad Diallo** last summer, United are expected to welcome the 18-year-old winger in the coming weeks. That's your lot for today, have a very happy new year.

Tommy Docherty: colourful, complex coach with a formidable football brain

The former manager of Scotland, Manchester United and many others was an unconventional and outspoken coach



Tommy Docherty celebrates with (left) Tommy Cavanagh and Jimmy Nicholl after Manchester United had beaten Liverpool 2-1 in the 1977 FA Cup final
Photograph: Allsport

Tommy Docherty celebrates with (left) Tommy Cavanagh and Jimmy Nicholl after Manchester United had beaten Liverpool 2-1 in the 1977 FA Cup final
Photograph: Allsport



Ewan Murray

@mewanmurray

Thu 31 Dec 2020 16.06 EST

Tommy Docherty spent a lifetime breaching convention. From a loft – a “doocot” to Docherty – atop the main stand at Stamford Bridge, he could be found peering down on Chelsea. Docherty, the club’s manager from 1961 until 1967, determined he could have a better view of play from on high.

If that was a footballing break from the norm, Docherty’s departure from Manchester United in the summer of 1977 because of an affair with the physiotherapist’s wife dominated Britain’s news agenda. Docherty later married Mary Brown – the pair remained together until his death aged 92 – and apparently bore no grudges at all about his sacking but the scenario was tabloid gold. It helped that Docherty was and remained one of football’s great personalities.

Legend says Docherty was raised in Glasgow’s tough Gorbals district. In fact, he hailed from Shettleston Road in the city’s east end. From where, in the 1930s, you also had to be as hard as a coffin nail to survive. Docherty would later joke about his mother’s visits to charity shops. “You want to try walking to school wearing a third-hand Japanese admiral’s outfit.” Such humour was typical of “the Doc”: self-effacing and sharp.

[Tommy Docherty, former Manchester United and Scotland manager, dies aged 92](#)

[Read more](#)

His stand-up routine included promises made to Mary. “I will take you places no other man could. First stop, the Old Bailey.” This was in reference to the famous libel case served by Docherty on Granada TV and Willie Morgan, one of his former players. Morgan told a television show that Docherty was “the worst manager there had ever been”. Denis Law, Pat Crerand and Lou Macari were among those forced to give witness statements. Docherty dropped the case on day three. “The ordeal is one of the worst times in my life and the stress on my family was incredible,” said Morgan in his autobiography. “But it was worth it in the end.” On reflection, the offence taken by Docherty was strange. He was far from short on opinion and, in fact, revelled in being outspoken.

Docherty’s playing career began at his local club, Shettleston Juniors, before he was picked up by his beloved Celtic after the second world war. He had served in the Highland Light Infantry while also representing the British army at football. A right-half, he lasted only two years at Celtic Park before departing on to a packed tram with a brown bag full of cash handed to him by the club secretary, Desmond White. Due of course to emotional attachment, Docherty branded his departure as one of his great disappointments. Ultimately, he couldn’t displace a Celtic great, Bobby Evans.

I will take you places no other man could. First stop, the Old Bailey

Next stop was Preston North End, where Docherty would play almost 300 matches in a nine-year spell. If Tom Finney was the indisputable king of Deepdale, the winger was consistently reverent towards the club’s strong Scottish contingent. Davie Sneddon, who died on Christmas Eve, was another of that number. Docherty, having played at the 1954 World Cup, was part of Scotland’s 1958 squad shortly before the bright lights of London – specifically Arsenal and Chelsea – rather appropriately beckoned.



Tommy Docherty (left) leads his Chelsea team out to face Bill Nicholson's Tottenham in the 1967 FA Cup final. Spurs won 2-1 but Docherty was victorious in the final 10 years later. Photograph: PA Archive/PA

That Docherty, aged only 33, was unwilling to stand on ceremony when he took over as Chelsea manager in 1962 was instantly evident. He shipped out the old guard while showing faith in players such as Terry Venables, Ron Harris and Peter Bonetti. Promotion back to Division One was instantly achieved, with a fifth-placed top-tier finish in 1964-65 a further sign of sharp progress. Defeat in the FA Cup final of 1967, to Tottenham, came just months before Docherty exited. As had been the case when he was a player, he could be volatile but was a terrific motivator. His Chelsea team had been famed for wowing crowds with high entertainment value; his successor, Dave Sexton, felt the benefit by winning both the FA and Cup Winners' Cups.

[A life in pictures: Tommy Docherty](#)
[Read more](#)

A nomadic spell followed, quite possibly because Docherty would never rank in any shortlist of uncomplicated employees. The feeling was mutual. "If football directors are too old to do it to their wives, they'll do it to their managers," Docherty once said.

International football, then, seemed a natural fit. After brief tenures at Rotherham, Queens Park Rangers – this one lasted only 29 days – Aston Villa and Porto it was Scotland who offered Docherty a semblance of stability. Willie Ormond continued Docherty’s revival of the Scots when taking them to the 1974 World Cup, a first appearance in 16 years. Docherty had lost just three of a dozen games in charge, including 1-0 defeats to Brazil and England.

He expressed regular regret at leaving his country, even if an ailing Manchester United meant seismic opportunity. The United hierarchy, desperate to properly progress from the Matt Busby era, were seduced by Docherty’s blend of talent and charisma. There was no prospect of the Scot being overawed by the post. From the Second Division, Docherty – who was in charge for relegation in 1974 – had a canvas to rebuild United and duly did. Law remained sore at being let go but so, too, were Bobby Charlton and George Best. Once unthinkable acts from which Docherty wouldn’t shirk.

If Manchester United had kept me for another couple of years the trophies would have been rolling in

With United re-established, Docherty’s finest hour was halting Bob Paisley’s Liverpool from winning the treble courtesy of FA Cup final glory in 1977. “If they’d kept me for another couple of years the trophies would have been rolling in,” said Docherty. Instead, his love for Mary – the then wife of Laurie, the United physio – proved an issue nobody could skirt around.

Docherty served Derby, QPR – again – Sydney Olympic – twice – Preston, South Melbourne, Wolves and Altrincham in the conclusion of an extraordinary career. He was the original Mr More Clubs Than Jack Nicklaus.

The after-dinner circuit, rightly and successfully, was a subsequent and natural habitat. The Doc was inducted into Scottish football’s hall of fame in 2013 and last appeared at Hampden Park five years later, where he spoke warmly and hilariously – then aged 90 – about the goalkeeper Bobby Brown, who died in January. Craig Brown, in attendance that night, recalled how barely a Scotland game under his own management would go by without words of support and encouragement from Docherty.

Tommy Docherty was far from just a jolly japester and a colourful character; much as he may have tried to mask such a formidable football brain.

Manchester United

Tommy Docherty obituary

Former Scotland and Manchester United manager known for his ebullient humour and his peripatetic career



Tommy Docherty following the end of the 1977 FA Cup semi-final in which Manchester United beat Leeds United 2-1. Photograph: Colorsport/Rex/Shutterstock

Tommy Docherty following the end of the 1977 FA Cup semi-final in which Manchester United beat Leeds United 2-1. Photograph: Colorsport/Rex/Shutterstock

Brian Glanville

Thu 31 Dec 2020 15.42 EST

Tommy Docherty, who has died aged 92, often liked to say that he had “had more clubs than Jack Nicklaus” – a joke that referred not to his successful playing career as a hard-tackling, intelligent international right-half, but to his peripatetic existence as a manager. Beginning with six years at Chelsea in the 1960s, which started brightly but ended in chaos, he had more than a dozen spells in management, including at Aston Villa, Queens Park Rangers, Derby County, Porto, [Wolverhampton Wanderers](#) and his own national side,

Scotland. His most celebrated period came at Manchester United in the mid-70s.

Although he was one of the highest profile football managers of his generation and remained highly marketable well into the 80s, Docherty's returns were actually rather slight, amounting over three decades to a Second Division title and FA Cup win with [Manchester United](#) and a League Cup victory with Chelsea. He took all the ups and downs with his trademark ebullient humour, and was ever willing to tell a story against himself. In 1967, after the Chelsea directors had called him to the boardroom and told him he was being released, he disappeared momentarily before returning with several bottles of champagne, with which he cheerfully toasted those who had just dismissed him. His enemies would say of him that you always knew he was lying because his lips moved – but he would make jokes about that as well.



Manchester United celebrate their FA Cup final win over Liverpool, 1977.
Photograph: Keystone Press/Alamy

The son of Georgina, a cleaner, and Thomas, who worked in an iron foundry, Docherty was born into poverty in the Gorbals area of Glasgow and joined his first club, Celtic, in 1948, after national service. At Celtic Park he came under the aegis of the English coach Jimmy Hogan, who had managed

Austria's national team to unprecedeted levels of success and was considered one of the great pioneers of the game on the European continent. Hogan was an elderly man by then, and was not always taken seriously in Britain. But the young Docherty was both open-minded enough and sufficiently bright to profit from Hogan's refined techniques, which he eventually carried into his own managerial career.

He did not spend long with Celtic. In 1949 he was bought by Preston North End. Docherty made his debut as an outside-left, but soon settled into the right-half position as the ideal successor to another blond, uncompromising Scot, [Bill Shankly](#), himself beginning an outstanding managerial career. Preston had slipped into the Second Division after several impressive years in the First, but in the 1950-51 season Docherty helped them back up, playing in all 42 games; as he would the following season.



Tommy Docherty, right, in action for Preston North End against Arsenal in 1958. Photograph: Colorsport/Rex/Shutterstock

He won the first of his 25 Scotland caps in 1951 against Wales, and in 1954 played in both of Scotland's World Cup finals games in Switzerland, the first narrowly lost 1-0 to Austria, the second a 7-0 rout at the hands of the irresistible Uruguayans. He travelled to Sweden for the next World Cup

finals in 1958, but did not get a game, unable to displace the veteran [Eddie Turnbull](#) of Hibernian, who had dropped back from inside-left.

Docherty regained his international place the following season, however, winning another three caps while with Arsenal, whom he had joined in 1958. At Highbury he also figured sometimes successfully at centre-half. The 1961-62 season saw him move across London to [Chelsea](#) as a player-coach, making just four more appearances in the First Division and finishing his career having played more than 400 league games for his various clubs.

The Chelsea manager, [Ted Drake](#), was clearly coming to the end of his reign and in January 1962 Docherty succeeded him. It was too late to save Chelsea from relegation, but the following season the new manager, who was always ready to give youth its fling, bought and sold frenetically on the transfer market and gained promotion on goal average.

[Brian Mears](#), then a Chelsea director and later chairman, reported that his new charge was “enthusiastic, swashbuckling, funny, outrageous, successful, rebellious, abusive, unbelievable”, and “always his own worst enemy”. Docherty, he said, acted on impulse, “promising players one thing and then demanding it from the board, making fun of people behind their backs, playing practical jokes, saying ridiculous things to the newspapers, slagging players off one day and then asking them to die for him the next”.

Clashes with players were a feature of his managerial life. At Chelsea, Terry Venables, then a rising young player, constantly locked horns with his manager, and was eventually sold to Spurs. He was also one of eight Chelsea players controversially sent home by Docherty from Blackpool in 1965 before the penultimate game of the season. Docherty insisted the players had gone out at night without permission; they argued the contrary, and accused Docherty of courting publicity. Another future manager of renown, George Graham, was among the eight, and although [Peter Bonetti](#), the acrobatic goalkeeper, was not, Docherty managed to fall out with him too.



Tommy Docherty as Chelsea manager, c1967. Photograph: Getty Images

It would all eventually end in tears, although the club won the League Cup in 1965 and reached the 1967 FA Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur. That summer Docherty was suspended for 28 days by the Football Association over an altercation with a referee during a club trip to Bermuda, and his fate at Stamford Bridge was sealed. In October he officially resigned and was replaced by the markedly less exuberant [Dave Sexton](#), who took Chelsea on to win the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1971.

Docherty skidded down the league to manage Rotherham United in the 1967-68 season. Next came the first of his two spells with Queens Park Rangers, with whom he lasted for just three league games. Second Division [Aston Villa](#) promptly appointed him in December 1968, and he saved them from relegation. However, despite heavy expenditure under a new board of directors, the following season was disastrous and he was on his way again in January 1970 as his side languished at the bottom of the league.

Technically this was the first time he had been sacked, but he was out of work only for a month, joining [Porto](#) in Portugal. He stayed there for almost a year and a half before resigning in May 1971, having failed to break the stranglehold of Benfica and Sporting Lisbon in the league.

Returning to Britain, he briefly became assistant manager to Terry Neill at Hull City, but left to become the caretaker manager of [Scotland](#), taking on the job permanently before the end of 1971. It was his work with [Scotland](#) that landed Docherty the manager's job at Manchester United, as the Old Trafford hierarchy were looking to replace the incumbent, Frank O'Farrell, and two of United's [Scotland](#) internationals, Willie Morgan and Denis Law, gave Docherty enthusiastic references.

So it was that in 1972 he began his hectic five years at United. History promptly repeated itself; they went down to the Second Division at the end of his first full season. But Docherty's attacking style was matched to the traditional expectations of the Old Trafford crowd, and green shoots began to appear in the spring of 1974.

In the Second Division he threw previous caution to the wind, used a fast young winger in Steve Coppell, from Tranmere, and sped back into the First Division. The following season he signed Gordon Hill from Millwall and defied conventional wisdom by using two wingers. In 1976 United's rejuvenated team reached the FA Cup final, only to lose, sensationally, to Second Division Southampton. Docherty promised they would be back the following year, and so they were, this time beating the favourites, Liverpool, 2-1.

The internal fallout from that victory was rather typical of Docherty's rule. The manager had promised the team £5,000 in cash if they won, and handed it to the skipper, Martin Buchan, after the match. Buchan gave it back to him for safekeeping and never saw it again. There were many other alarms and excursions during his tenure, many of them prompted by Docherty's penchant for wheeling and dealing.

When he arrived at the club he had set about buying and selling with his usual abandon, and among those he had jettisoned was Law, who became deeply embittered and left for Manchester City, in due course scoring the goal that sent United down to the Second Division. [George Best](#) also dropped out of the club, and there were harsh disagreements with Morgan, Alex Stepney and Pat Crerand, who was by then a managerial assistant.

“The Doc”, as he was known, also had a reputation – in which as a manager he was hardly alone – for treating his favoured players generously, but those whom he excluded abominably. He even became involved in a failed [libel action](#) against Morgan that led to a charge of perjury, of which he was acquitted.



Tommy Docherty as Queens Park Rangers manager in 1980. Photograph: Colorsport/Rex/Shutterstock

However, it was the public revelation of Docherty’s extramarital affair with Mary Brown, wife of the club physio Laurie, which led to his departure. He was sacked in a blaze of national publicity in July 1977 and replaced by the same man who had followed him into the Chelsea manager’s job, Sexton.

Despite the scandal attached to him, Docherty remained employable for some time afterwards: at Derby for two years from 1977 to 1979; again at QPR; at Preston, fleetingly, in 1981; and at Wolves, by then a sinking ship, in 1984-85. Once he retired from football management he became a successful after-dinner speaker, and through all his triumphs and disasters his sense of humour remained unalloyed.

He is survived by Mary, whom he married after his first wife, Agnes, divorced him, and by six children, three sons, Tom, Michael and Peter, and a

daughter, Catherine, from his first marriage, and two daughters, Lucy and Grace, from his second.

- Thomas Henderson Docherty, footballer and manager, born 24 April 1928; died 31 December 2020

Sebastian Coe

Team GB's Olympic contenders should seek advice from Ennis-Hill, says Coe

- Coe urges gold medal hopefuls to reach out to Ennis-Hill
- Jessica Ennis-Hill's London 2012 preparation was 'textbook'



Jessica Ennis-Hill with her Olympic gold medal in 2012. 'Nobody had more pressure on their shoulders' at the London Games, according to Sebastian Coe. Photograph: Phil Noble/REUTERS

Sebastian Coe has urged Dina Asher-Smith and [Katarina Johnson-Thompson](#) to seek out Jessica Ennis-Hill for advice on how to deal with the pressure of going for gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

Lord Coe, who won 1500m gold medals at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics before taking charge of the 2012 Games, believes that Ennis-Hill gave a "textbook" example of how to cope with great expectations while storming to heptathlon victory at the London Games. He suspects that she can help the

world 200m champion Asher-Smith and Johnson-Thompson, who won the heptathlon at Doha 2019, to hit the highest notes again in Japan.

“I’m sure Jess would be amenable to it because she is that type of person,” said Coe, the president of World [Athletics](#). “She went through London 2012 as the poster-child and came out with a terrific performance. I honestly do not think there was anybody in the Games in London that had more expectation and pressure sitting on their shoulders.

“The other bit of advice I would give – and I think it’s what Jess was very clear about – is that she did not leave her coaching environment. She didn’t play around with variables. She stuck to the same system, the same city, the same training venues, and she kept it about as normal as she possibly could. That’s not always easy in an Olympic year but I think she wasn’t just perfect in her competitions. I think her buildup, given the pressure on her, was probably textbook.”



Jessica Ennis-Hill won gold at London 2012 despite the pressure of being a poster-child of a home Games, Sebastian Coe said. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Coe also dismissed suggestions that the lack of international competition for Asher-Smith and Johnson-Thompson in 2020 could harm their chances in

Tokyo. “The top athletes will bounce back,” he said. “And because they’re resilient, and they have the ability, I don’t think those delays are going to be so huge for them.”

British Athletics has experienced a difficult few years, but Coe said he was encouraged by a new wave of talent coming through – especially the young 800m star Jemma Reekie, who set the fastest time indoors by a woman since 2006 when [she ran 1min 57.91sec](#) in February.

“She’s a precocious talent,” said Coe. “She works within the same group as Laura Muir which can’t be a bad thing. And they also seem to both be handling the competitive nature of what they confront each other with on the track, and the collaborative work that they both obviously do together in training, extraordinarily well too.”

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Coe said he was encouraged at how many British athletes – including the 1500m runner Jake Wightman, who was fifth at the 2019 world championships, and the exciting 800m talent Daniel Rowden – seemed to understand what it took to go all the way.

“I think there is a fantastic crop of young athletes coming through,” he said. “I’ve had conversations with Laura, while Jake Wightman picks up the phone quite a bit. I had a long conversation with Daniel Rowden the other day. And certainly around middle distance, this current crop really do understand, probably more than earlier generations, exactly what it takes to get to the highest level.”

[Tokyo Olympic Games 2020](#)

Back to the future: Team GB gear up for delayed Tokyo Games

Bold predictions have been dampened by the pandemic but hopes for Team GB remain high as this Olympic year dawns, for a second time



Dina Asher Smith, Adam Peaty and Laura Kenny of Team GB. Photograph: Reuters/Getty Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Dina Asher Smith, Adam Peaty and Laura Kenny of Team GB. Photograph: Reuters/Getty Images/Rex/Shutterstock



*[Sean Ingle](#)
[@seaningle](#)*

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.45 EST

Deep inside the [UK Sport](#) offices in central London there is a secret wall, accessible to only the most senior figures, on which the performances of every potential Team GB medal prospect are tracked and scrutinised. Normally, if it was seven months out from an Olympics, that wall – in a room called the performance lab – would be a hive of activity. Instead it looks like the Mary Celeste.

“I’ve not been in that room since last March, so I don’t know whether the wall has a nice layer of dust or is being brushed down by the one person who still checks the office,” the UK Sport chair, Katherine Grainger, says. “I think it’s fair to say that there’s probably more question marks going into a Games than we’ve ever had.”

[England could suffer if Neville picks experience over youth for Team GB | Suzanne Wrack](#)
[Read more](#)

How could there not be when the Covid-19 pandemic has wrecked so much of the sporting calendar and, in many cases, forced athletes to train

differently? For every [Adam Peaty](#), who was able to break the 100m breaststroke world record in November, there is a Dina Asher-Smith, who did not compete at all on the international stage.

The new variants of the virus have only added to this swirling uncertainty. Normally in January and February many British athletes would go away to warm-weather training camps. Instead they are having to slog away in temperatures barely above zero. What effect might that have come the summer?

One thing may surprise you, though. Both UK Sport, which funds Britain's Olympic sports, and the [British Olympic Association](#), which is responsible for preparing and leading Team GB at the Games, are convinced that Tokyo 2020 will go ahead in July.

It's not just the rollout of various vaccines that gives them confidence. The BOA's chef de mission, Mark England, is on a key International Olympic Committee working group and is able to see at first hand the work organisers are doing to make sure the Tokyo Games take place.

And if they do, the BOA believes Team GB will be one of the most well-prepared squads, despite the difficulties created by the pandemic. When, in March, Tokyo 2020 was postponed by a year, the BOA was forced to renegotiate hundreds of contracts, ranging from the operation camp and the performance facilities in Japan to freight, travel, transport and catering. It was, says one insider, "a huge challenge". Yet it was one that was quietly overcome.

As Andy Anson, the BOA chief executive, says: "We're confident the Games are going to go ahead and we're fully focused on making sure we provide the athletes with the best performance environment we can in Tokyo. The timings of the Games might have changed but that won't have lessened the ambitions of our athletes. And after a five-year wait from Rio I sense there's now a growing fervour for the Games to happen."

So how might Team GB fare? A year ago the former UK Sport performance director Chelsea Warr said she was "quietly confident" Britain would do better than the 2016 Rio Games, where 27 gold medals and 67 podium

finishes lifted them to second in the medal table. Understandably no one is being as bold or bombastic with their predictions now.

Grainger, who was a five-time Olympic rowing medallist before retiring after 2016, says: “In terms of performances, it is so hard to predict because we haven’t had the international competition that we would normally have in the year before the Games. We’re still way off knowing what the Olympics and Paralympics team is going to look like, never mind what their performance will be.”

It is also worth noting the analytics company Gracenote, which has a decent track record of predicting Olympic medal tables, has warned Great Britain’s medal tally at the Tokyo Games will fall “significantly” from 2016. “Their best hope is to break into the top five rather than the top three where they landed in the last two Olympics,” the company said in February, pre-pandemic, pointing to rowing, athletics, gymnastics and cycling as events where Team GB would not do as well this time around.

[Sebastian Coe warns it will be harder than ever to cheat at Tokyo Olympics](#)
[Read more](#)

However, there are at least three caveats to their prediction. The first is we don’t know how many neutral Russia athletes will turn up. The second is how the pandemic will affect some countries more than others. Third, Team GB’s tech department is the envy of most countries. Their aerodynamic cycling skin suits, which are only wheeled out at [Olympic Games](#), are said to improve performance by 5%-10%. That can be the difference between a good performance and a gold medal.

Certainly within Team GB there remains a quiet confidence that Britain will do well and that the big stars such as Peaty, Asher-Smith and Laura Kenny will deliver. “I genuinely feel our athletes are in a good place,” says Grainger. “Some have benefited from a break in the training regime, or trying a new approach to doing things. Like all of us we’ve all learned different ways of working.

“So I think there’s a general positivity about next summer. For a long time it was ‘will it or won’t it happen’. Now it feels like it is on – and our athletes

are ready to show how good they can be.”

Newcastle

Toby Flood leading Newcastle revival in Jonny Wilkinson mentoring role

England's legendary No 10 mentored Flood in mid-2000s; now Flood is elder statesman at Premiership's surprise package



Gerard Meagher

Thu 31 Dec 2020 17.00 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 23.36 EST



Toby Flood is still going strong at 35 and has no thoughts of retirement. He has helped Newcastle to four wins out of four at the start of the Premiership season. Photograph: Richard Lee/BPI/Shutterstock

Amid the cluster of young English fly-halves coming to prominence this season, Toby Flood is still going strong at 35. He spends a bit less time on the training paddock – “Show ponies always need to be managed!” – but, adopting the mentoring role that Jonny Wilkinson fulfilled when Flood was breaking through at Kingston Park, he is leading Newcastle’s revival on and off the pitch.

If it was a surprise to see him slog it out last season in the Championship in the twilight of his career, Flood is adamant that jumping ship never crossed his mind and, given Newcastle have accrued four wins from their first four league matches, it is paying dividends for the Falcons. A recent study showed that No 10s are the best-paid players in the Premiership but it is hard to put a value on Flood’s experience, comprising 60 England caps as well as three Premiership titles won at Leicester Tigers and a stint at Toulouse in between his two [Newcastle](#) spells.

Just as Wilkinson was, Flood has often been deployed at inside-centre of late, allowing Brett Connell to flourish inside him. It is instructive to hear him cite another World Cup-winning playmaker in Mike Catt, who played

domestically until 38, as an example of why retirement is still a long way over the horizon.

“In my era, when I first came through, Mike Catt played for a long time, and he was in a similar position I find myself in; I’ve played a bit of 10, played a bit of 12,” says Flood. “Someone like that, you look at and think: ‘How did he keep going?’ You looked at him in how he managed himself off the field, in terms of what he ate, how he behaved, how he trained – and just the fact he was very mentally strong as well, and managed to deal with not training every couple of days if he had to.”

Flood has spent large parts of his career being compared to Wilkinson but he does acknowledge the similarities in his role at Newcastle and the one England’s most celebrated No 10 played for him back in the mid-2000s. “Yeah – apart from Jonny was at his prime and pretty good. Two stark differences!

“I was fortunate to come through an era where we had Jonny, Matt Burke, Jamie Noon, Dave Walder. They were huge in facilitating my development. The questions they asked: ‘Why did you do that? What did you see there?’ It was really nice in the sense that I had Burkey on one side, who was this Australian international who just glided through space, and Jonny, who was this studious player who just wanted to understand the game and get better and better.

“Absolutely, Jonny helped me no end in terms of how I should hold myself on the field and off it. If I can add a tenth of the value that Jonny did to my game, then I’ll be leaving the club in a better place.”

Newcastle’s 100% record so far this season is all the more impressive given they did not play a match for eight months, stuck in limbo as the promoted side from the curtailed Championship while last season’s Premiership was finished. It at least gave Dean Richards the chance to plot for the new campaign and he will not have forgotten how a dreadful start to the season two years ago ultimately proved too much to claw back.

On Friday Flood comes back into the No 10 jersey as Newcastle’s unbeaten start is put to the test at Bristol but, with wins at Bath and Wasps already this

season, the Falcons will fancy their chances of another upset. “Had you offered us this, we’d have bitten your hand off,” says Flood. “I can’t answer [if it was a surprise] any more articulately than just saying yes, because we hadn’t played for so long, the circumstance we found ourselves in was a difficult one.

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“We’d have taken two wins, maybe win both our home games.

“The fact we played the first three games against sides who had finished in the top five the year before, it’s credit to us. There is a bit of surprise, but there is also a bit of enjoyment. Surprise is probably not the right word in terms of what you want to articulate from our camp. In terms of – we didn’t think we could do it or we are surprised we’ve got the ability. It’s none of that. It is just the surprise of the situation we found ourselves in, and then actually being able to manage it. We always believed we could win the games but ultimately you do surprise yourself when you’ve won a few games in the fashion you have.”

Premiership

Premiership faces Covid crisis amid record number of positive tests

- Worcester v Harlequins and Irish v Northampton called off
- Premiership Rugby says there are no ‘circuit breaker’ plans

Gerard Meagher

Wed 30 Dec 2020 10.18 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 03.45 EST



A Covid supervisor outside Harlequins' ground. Two more Premiership matches have cancelled amid a record number of positive tests across the league. Photograph: Andrew Fosker/Shutterstock

The Premiership's Covid-19 crisis escalated on Wednesday with two more matches cancelled amid a record number of positive tests across the league.

Harlequins' trip to Worcester and London Irish's match against [Northampton](#) were both called off, taking the total to four matches cancelled in just over a

week, but Premiership Rugby insisted there are no plans to introduce a “circuit breaker” and put the season on hold.

Irish’s home match on Sunday against Northampton was called off after PRL revealed there were 33 positive cases, including 24 players, at 10 clubs from Monday’s tests – the highest total since testing began in July. Hours earlier [Harlequins](#) revealed one positive case, leading to six other players having to self-isolate and leaving Paul Gustard unable to select a full front row to face Worcester on New Year’s Day.

London Irish’s Boxing Day match against Bath was also cancelled and it is believed the number enforced absentees at the Exiles is into double figures. The club’s director of rugby, Declan Kidney, said: “It’s obviously a huge disappointment for everyone connected to the club that we’re unable to go ahead with the fixture.

“We’re disappointed because we feel we still had a strong group of players to select from, but due to Public Health England guidelines we’ve been told we’re not allowed to play the game.”

Last week Leicester’s trip to Newcastle was called off and now more than half of the league have had matches cancelled because of Covid outbreaks in the past eight days.

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With no room in the calendar to reschedule matches Northampton and [Worcester](#) are set to be awarded four match points with Harlequins and Irish two. Already the flurry of cancellations is threatening to influence the battle to avoid relegation and has brought the issue of ring-fencing back on to the agenda.

The Exeter director of rugby, Rob Baxter, whose side had to forfeit their European match against Toulouse this month because of an outbreak, admitted he could understand the logic for suspending the league. But while [Premiership](#) Rugby has confirmed it is in constant contact with the government and Public Health England and will “consider all steps”, there are “no plans for a circuit breaker at this stage”.

“I think there’s an argument for sports teams to be able to carry on, but I also understand the argument for a suspension.” Baxter had said. “The scenario going on is too big to just idly argue that everything should carry on as it is. How they work it, whether it is games cancelled or games postponed or a move into a midweek scenario I couldn’t tell you, but I would imagine it is something under discussion.”

Harlequins’ learned of their positive test on Tuesday, three days after their Boxing Day defeat by Bristol and while the Bears have also reported one case, also in the front row, Pat Lam believes additional safety protocols introduced by the club have enabled the match against Newcastle to go ahead on Friday as planned. Bristol will be severely depleted with all front-rowers who featured against Harlequins put into isolation but, with the club adopting a policy of no training until the results of each week’s tests are known, Lam insists he is still able to select a team.

“When you have no positive tests it is easier to slacken,” said Lam. “But we just said: ‘Let’s make sure, we’ll take as much precaution,’ and I’m thankful we did.”

[Sportblog](#)
[Accrington Stanley](#)

Accrington Stanley's 'no superstars' ethos offers Championship chance

John Coleman's canny squad blend of experience, misfits and loans have promotion out of League One in their own hands



[Ben Fisher](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 08.56 EST



The midfielder Joe Pritchard spent 14 years at Tottenham without breaking through but has thrived since his arrival in Lancashire. Photograph: John Bradley/ProSports/Shutterstock

Until last week, for a few days at least, those basking in Arsenal's struggles frivolously floated the idea of the club sparring with [Accrington Stanley](#) in the Championship. Such a meeting may seem incomputable but part of the sentence could soon ring true. It is increasingly difficult to ignore Accrington's promotion credentials and, with at least two games in hand on those above them, John Coleman's side are primed to supersede some of League One's most famous names.

On Saturday they were planning to upstage second-placed Portsmouth before that match was postponed. However, if they earn maximum points from three games in hand on the leaders, Lincoln – collected following Covid-19 outbreaks at rivals – eighth-placed Accrington could soar to the summit.

On the eve of the season Coleman gathered his squad to tell them he believed they could ruffle feathers – again. "Two years ago we won League Two, quite comfortably in the end, when everybody fancied us for relegation," says Coleman, who claims the club operates with a "bottom two" wage bill. "The three teams who went up with us are all in the

Championship now: Coventry, Wycombe and Luton. They haven't overly spent on their teams, so why can't it be us?"

Coleman has an intriguing cocktail of players. They have three loanees from Chelsea – the goalkeeper Nathan Baxter and the midfielders Jon Russell and Tariq Uwakwe – two from Newcastle and one from Watford. Coleman speaks to Anthony Barry, the former Accrington midfielder who joined Frank Lampard's staff in August, a couple of times a week and Chelsea's first-team coach helped to smooth those arrivals. Until last month Baxter was backup to Toby Savin, a promising 19-year-old goalkeeper who progressed through Accrington's academy after spells at Everton and Crewe.

Meanwhile another midfielder, Joe Pritchard, who spent 14 years at Tottenham, has thrived since landing in Lancashire in May 2019 and Matt Butcher has impressed in the anchor role following his release by Bournemouth. The front two of Colby Bishop, a former PE teacher, and Dion Charles earned their stripes in non-league. The experienced trio of the captain, the 32-year-old Seamus Conneely, Mark Hughes (34) and Sean McConville (31) vet the dressing room.

Pritchard captained Tottenham's under-23s, playing alongside Harry Winks and Kyle Walker-Peters, but his career stagnated and the death of Ugo Ehiogu, a former coach, left him "crushed" and "broken for quite a while". At Accrington the facilities are modest and the players are not pampered but the club have reignited his love for the game.

"No food [after training] and we wash our own kit, but I'd do that for the rest of my career if it meant I could play in a first team," says Pritchard. "When you're a young player and you're caught up in the atmosphere of a big club, you can easily be blindsided by how grand it all is: 'Look at this training ground, I work here every day.'

"When I was at Tottenham I was told by Wayne Burnett, the under-23s manager, that until you're playing regularly in a first team you can't call yourself a player of that club; it was one of the best pieces of information, which I needed to hear. I'd never stepped foot on a first-team pitch for Tottenham and I never played for Tottenham; I'd call myself a Tottenham youth player but that's as far as it goes. And that stuck with me when I went

to Bolton. I wouldn't even have called myself much of a Bolton player. I only had five appearances and two starts. I didn't establish myself, but I've just touched 50 appearances at Accrington and I actually feel like an Accrington player."



John Coleman's Accrington start 2021 eighth in League One but with games in hand on all the sides above them. Photograph: Kevin Warburton/A Moment in Sport/ProSports/Shutterstock

They work hard but have fun. In pre-season Coleman challenges signings to a relay race against his staff – “the lads get one of their quickest to run 400m and we generally get about six to run about 65m each” – and on away trips the manager and his longstanding assistant and best friend, Jimmy Bell, moonlight as quizmasters. “We’ve developed a game, a cross between the Krypton Factor and The Cube,” Coleman says. “We even had a message off Gordon Burns telling us how well we were taking his ideas forward.”

Coleman’s jovial character was encapsulated in a [video of him channelling Elton John](#) before Christmas. He can, Savin says, often be heard singing at training at 9am and his players feed off such energy. “If you have a positive spirit around the place, I think people work better,” the manager says. “But it’s not a holiday camp – far from it, because you have to have discipline and you have to work hard. No one gets treated any better or worse than

anybody else – everyone is valued. There are no superstars and the blend is good. But people who just think we get by on hard work and gung-ho are missing the point. The players are very well coached by a solid staff, which might not be big in numbers, but are very good people and leave no stone unturned.

“I think they think a lot of it is based on team spirit – but they couldn’t be further from the truth. A lot of it is based on analysis of opposition, hard work on the training ground, shape, patterns of play – that’s what we’ve always based our philosophies on. That can get lost because we like a singsong and we do like the lads to enjoy the experience, but I’d like to think most people who come and spend time at Accrington leave as better players and better people.”

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Uwakwe scored a debut hat-trick in September and a peach against Peterborough four days later. “Since Frank Lampard has come in [as Chelsea manager] everyone is seeing that, if you’re good enough and playing well, the opportunity is there,” says Uwakwe, who stays in touch with Tore André Flo, one of Chelsea’s loan coaches.

For now, the focus is on propelling Accrington, who have lost two of their past 12 matches in all competitions, up the table. [League One](#) was supposed to be Stanley’s ceiling but Accrington, a prudently run team rooted in non-league until promotion under Coleman in 2006, have form for surprising people. “I think we are on our way to making people believe that we are not really ‘little old Accrington’ any more and we’re pushing for the Championship,” says Savin.

Women's Super League

WSL's big three on high alert in Champions League race like no other

Manchester United's rise could see one of Chelsea, Manchester City and Arsenal miss out of next year's revamped competition



Manchester United lead the Women's Super League and looked primed to qualify for next season's Champions League. Photograph: Lynne Cameron for The FA/Shutterstock

In December 2019, Uefa announced a shake up of the Women's Champions League for the 2021-22 season. There was to be a group stage and an increase in the number of teams taking part, partly through the six highest-ranked nations being awarded a third place in the competition.

The changes were welcome, especially among England's big three of Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester City as it meant they would no longer have to battle for two coveted spots each year. Instead it would be a case of holding off the rest.

The dominance of the big three was evident last season – Chelsea finished as champions, City were runners-up and Arsenal third, all [on a points-per-game basis](#) after the pandemic ended the campaign prematurely. There were no serious challengers to the triumvirate for a sixth season in a row – including during the mini Spring Series, which filled the gap as the league switched from a summer to a winter season. Manchester United finished fourth, which was impressive given this was their debut appearance in the WSL but they still finished 13 points behind Arsenal, albeit having played one game fewer.

So the battle for Champions League qualification this season was expected to be more a sharing of the spoils than a fight, with Chelsea, City and Arsenal taking the now three available spots, with the top two teams going directly into the second round and the one finishing third starting off in the first round. This is one of the reasons why United's explosive start to their second WSL season – they lead the way with 26 points from 10 unbeaten games – should be welcomed, ensuring as it does that reaching the Champions League is a genuine ambition rather than an assumption.

From a financial point of view, it is also an increasingly important competition to be in. The prize money is dwarfed by that dished out in the men's Champions League but the winners of the women's edition nevertheless collect a tidy sum – around €500,000 – which is also likely to rise when broadcast rights are centralised as part of Uefa's reformat.

The Women's Champions League is a bigger deal every year, more commercially viable and with more eyes on it. Visa, Nike, Hublot, Esprit and PepsiCo all sponsor the tournament in its own right, with backing for the women's competition having split from the men's in 2018. What the tournament now needs is a new winner. Lyon lifted the trophy [for the fifth consecutive time](#) in August and for a record seventh time overall. Their domination of Europe has been earned, fuelled by unrivalled investment and the building of a *galáctico*-style squad being paid the best wages in the women's game.



Lyon celebrate winning last season's Women's Champions League, their fifth title in a row and record seventh overall. Photograph: Gabriel Bouys/AFP/Getty Images

Lyon have set the bar high but they keep pushing it higher, almost daring clubs to try catching them. An English side has not won the competition since Arsenal's victory in 2007, with Chelsea and City twice falling at the semi-final stage – Lyon knocked the Manchester side out in both 2016-17 and 2017-18.

As the WSL gets increasingly competitive, it also becomes harder to compete across multiple competitions, making a challenge to Lyon's crown from an English club all the harder. It is increasingly difficult, then, to see United giving up a maiden Champions League berth. That means, despite the rise to three qualifying places, one of Arsenal, City or Chelsea are likely to miss out, which is not only costly for the reasons above – with many players on short-term contracts, key players could jump ship in search of a more immediate European test.

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With the worst head-to-head record with the rest of the top four, Arsenal are perhaps at greatest risk of slipping out. However, the team's consistency

against the rest is better than their rivals, making it impossible at this stage to predict who will gain entry into the revamped tournament.

What is certain, though, is that the team missing out will have a bigger job getting back into Champions League contention than perhaps any team has before.

[Leonard Barden on chess](#)

[Magnus Carlsen](#)

Chess: Magnus Carlsen 'in a deep funk' after latest defeat to Daniil Dubov

The Russian eclipsed the world champion again as all four seeds were eliminated in the quarter-finals of the Airthings Masters

[Leonard Barden](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 15.43 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 14.09 EST



3704: White mates in four moves (by Fritz Giegold, Die Welt 1958). Just a single line of play, with all moves on both sides forced and no checks until the final mate.

Magnus Carlsen's erratic form since his 30th birthday a month ago suffered another dip on Wednesday when Russia's Daniil Dubov used his mazy tactical skills to eliminate the world champion from the quarter-finals of the

\$200,000 online Airthings Masters and enhance the 24-year-old Muscovite's own growing status as a creative and swashbuckling crowd favourite.

In the other quarter-finals, Levon Aronian (Armenia) beat Hikaru Nakamura (US), Teimour Radjabov (Azerbaijan) beat Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia), and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (France) beat Wesley So (US).

The semi-finals continue at 2pm on Friday with live grandmaster commentary on chess24.com, Radjabov won the first set (of two, with possible tie-breaks) 3-1 against Dubov while Aronian leads Vachier-Lagrave by the same score.

The world champion's form has dropped off since his 30th birthday a month ago, when a Tour publicity photo showed him with a tropical sea as background and a tray full of gourmet delights.



Magnus Carlsen's form has dipped since a celebratory Instagram post on his 30th birthday. Photograph: Magnus Carlsen/Instagram

While Dubov modestly attributed his success to luck, Carlsen called it a “collapse” and added: “I’m in a deep funk right now.” In [the game](#) which eliminated the Norwegian, the decisive error which changed a difficult win a piece ahead into a speedy loss with checkmate in the final position came at move 34 when Qe7 lost while the active Qa5! would have won.

Dubov now has a large plus score against Carlsen in their online tournament games during the pandemic, leading 6-3 with four draws. Yet the Russian's overall form does include down days, so that he has yet to reach the top 10 across the board or to get near qualifying for the world title candidates.

This week's results put extra pressure on Carlsen for the next major over-the-board tournament at Tata Steel Wijk aan Zee, starting in the Dutch seaside resort on 15 January. Carlsen has an outstanding record at Wijk, where his 13 opponents include the world No 2, Fabiano Caruana, who has kept a low profile in the online Tour, plus the two rising stars Dubov and Alireza Firouzja.

Play Video

6:17

Are computers killing the mystery of chess? – video

Meanwhile, the online British championship will have its final two rounds on Saturday and Sunday (7pm start, go to chessbomb.com to watch the games). The England No 1, Michael Adams, leads with 6/7, half a point ahead of Matthew Turner. Adams has won seven British titles across the board, but his chances of equalling Jonathan Penrose's record of 10 wins are diminished because the online version will not count in official titles.

The most eye-catching performance has been in the women's championship. Ketevan Arakhamia-Grant, who in her peak years was a world-class player, won all seven games, but second with 5/7 was Nina Pert, aged 12 with a 1537 rating. The Brentwood schoolgirl, daughter of IM Richard Pert and niece of GM Nick Pert, defeated the No 2 seed in [the final round](#) and has a bright future.

3704: 1 Be1! g3 2 Be2! dxe2 3 Rb4! Kxb4 4 d4 mate.

NFL

Belichick's exit plan and a JJ Watt trade: NFL subplots to watch in 2021

Will Aaron Rodgers depart Green Bay after an MVP-caliber season? Will Bill Belichick leave New England before it turns ugly? There's no shortage of meaty NFL plotlines in 2021



The Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers throws during the first half of Sunday's game against the Tennessee Titans. Photograph: Mike Roemer/AP

The Green Bay Packers' Aaron Rodgers throws during the first half of Sunday's game against the Tennessee Titans. Photograph: Mike Roemer/AP

[Oliver Connolly](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

The NFL's general attitude towards 2020 can be summed up succinctly: What pandemic?

Whereas other leagues ground to a halt, considered voiding their seasons, entered into complex bubbles or faced existential crises, the NFL thundered

along, with the kind of bravado that is afforded only to the biggest and baddest and most-watched on the block.

[The most notable US athletes of 2020: No 3 – Patrick Mahomes, the ultimate weapon](#)

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Some precautions were taken. Preseason was out. Mask mandates were in. But the bottom line was this: No matter the lineup, no matter the ridiculousness of the spectacle, no matter the health consequences, football will be played.

And, in general, it was a success. Covid has the potential to embarrass the league in Week 17, the final week of the season, and we still do not know the extent of the health consequences, but for the most part the league got its wish: The season will be completed on time.

As the calendar flips from 2020 to 2021, here are some subplots to keep an eye on.

Aaron Rodgers' future

As of now, Rodgers likely has his name etched on the MVP trophy. Voters love a narrative, and the Rodgers Revenge Tour is a better narrative than ‘isn’t [Patrick Mahomes](#) droningly excellent?’ It’s the Michael Jordan syndrome. (Voters actually gave Karl Malone an MVP award during Jordan’s prime. That’s a real thing that happened.)

But it’s not that long ago that the Packers [selected Jordan Love in the first round](#) of the draft, that Rodgers’ future was up in the air, that the team had obviously selected his replacement, that it was just a matter of when not if Rodgers would leave.

Rodgers has been terrific this season. His game has evolved. The improvisational off-script, jazz artist is still there, but he’s married that with the on-script rhythm that defined his early years as a starter. It’s a deadly combination.

The power to decide his future now sits with Rodgers. He's performing at an MVP level and could guide the Packers to another Super Bowl title. Green Bay will want to keep the 38-year-old around until he truly starts to decline. But will Rodgers take matters into his own hands this offseason? How upset was he *really* by the love selection? With possible quarterback openings in such hot spots as New England, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, could Rodgers look to push his way out of title town as the final act of this year's tour?

A franchise sale

The NFL as a whole has done a decent job of inoculating itself from the financial losses that have hit the majority of sports leagues during the pandemic. Rather than push games or add weeks, the NFL stripped back its preseason and steam-rolled ahead whenever there was a sign of a health scare. *We are playing football! Who's ready to play? Who's watching? We'll play them on Monday nights and Tuesday nights and Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings, the quality of the games or the health of the players be damned.*

That was a lucrative strategy for the league, as much as any league is making money in the Covid age. But the league is still made up of old-school owners who made the bulk of their money in an old-school manner. While several owners have stomached the financial hit to their sporting institution, plenty have taken significant losses in their non-sporting ventures.

[Padres, Dolphins and Mavs \(oh my!\): our bold sports predictions for 2021](#)
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You only have to look over to the NBA to see how even the tech-savvy, self-dubbed 'smart' sport owners have been hit by the pandemic: Tilman Fertitta, the NBA's latest owner, who paid a record \$2.2bn for the Houston Rockets franchise in 2017, makes his money in casinos and restaurants. His operation has been reduced to 4% during the pandemic and he has been forced to [take his company public](#), as well as accepting an operating loan from the league.

There are similar issues in the NFL's upper chamber. Some owners are feeling the financial costs much more than others, particularly those whose wealth is based on owning an NFL franchise. (The NFL remains the sports league with the most 'legacy' ownership families.)

Nobody will be shedding a tear for the fattest of fat cats, but NFL franchises are notoriously hard to prize away from owners because they print money. The pandemic has changed that. The year 2021 could usher in a band of new owners as those current owners who've been most severely impacted by the pandemic try to recover funds.

Will there be any Cam Newton takers?

Newton's one-year plan in New England was clear: Get himself to the smartest, most creative and consistent organization in the sport; show that he still had plenty of juice left, that he just needed a break; and then sign a mega-deal this coming offseason, be it re-upping with New England or elsewhere.

But for as much as Bill Belichick has tried to sell the Patriots-Cam Newton experience to the media and fans this season as a success, it hasn't worked. The Patriots' offensive staff has been creative and mailable, working around Newton's idiosyncrasies and lack of accuracy. But all too often when Newton has dropped back and attempted to play with some kind of rhythm, it's looked like he's trying to throw a medicine ball

Newton's health is the question here. He no longer has the same kind of zip on his fastball, and his throwing accuracy that was so-so even during the best of times has now completely fallen off a cliff.

Perhaps the Patriots talk themselves into Newton for another season as a bridge to whatever the team's quarterback future looks like. Perhaps they tell themselves he looked OK prior to his Covid diagnosis. Perhaps Belichick believes Newton, even with his flaws, will be fine once the Patriots are able to bring back the chunks of their roster that missed this season due to COVID. But that seems unlikely. It seems like Newton, the great pioneer, the paradigm-shifter, is ultimately shot. And if Belichick isn't willing to indulge another season, will any other team? And if not, what does Newton

do? Retire? Sit out another year and hope to heal? It's hard to imagine Newton doing the rounds as a one-year hired gun on a ready-to-tank, rebuilding team.

Is this it for Bill Belichick?

It doesn't feel like Belichick is slowing down. But, at some point, Belichick is going to walk away from the Patriots' job. Belichick tried rolling things back for one more push this season, band-aiding together a roster that was missing the core of its defense due to Covid defections and which lacked a quarterback given Tom Brady's move to Florida.

Is Belichick, at his advanced age, post-Covid, ready and willing after a par year to start another rebuild? He has no quarterback, and the backbone of the roster that delivered the last Super Bowl is starting to creak – a majority have already or are expected to exit this offseason. Plus: Belichick's staff is expected to be picked apart again during the offseason, both on the coaching side and in the Patriots front office. Is it possible he opts to walk away before things get ugly?



Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields drops back to pass against Nebraska during the second half of an October game. Photograph: Jay LaPrete/AP

The Justin Fields surge

The Jaguars have locked up the number one pick in the upcoming draft. The selection is expected to be Trevor Lawrence, Clemson's once-in-a-lifetime-type quarterback prospect. But as always in a draft cycle, expect there to be a run on Justin Fields, the Ohio State quarterback who would be the sure-fire top selection in a traditional year.

And if former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer winds up as the head honcho in Jacksonville, look out. The chatter will increase. Leaks will flow. Trade offers will arrive.

Lawrence *should* be the top pick, but there is a chance that Jacksonville switch spots with the Jets (for a significant haul).

A JJ Watt trade

JJ Watt and the Houston Texans are synonymous with one another. But if Houston is looking to generate some kind of assets to be able to improve its roster this offseason, moving Watt is one of the only ways.

The Texans have little to no draft capital and have one of the worst cap sheets in the league. They also have a jumbled roster that is the walking embodiment of the fractured front office that oversaw its construction over the past five seasons. Yet there, in the middle of it all, is Deshaun Watson, one of the most gifted quarterbacks in the league.

Having a great quarterback fixes a lot. So for the Texans to leap back into contention, even with the roster holes and lack of flexibility in the market, could take as few as five to six smart moves. One way to open up some sort of flexibility, to increase the margin of error when trying to make such moves, would be to move on from Watt while he still holds value.

It would be a difficult move financially and culturally, but it would also be a savvy one. And it would allow Watt to get a shot with a different organization, where he may get a shot over the next 24 months to advance beyond the divisional round.

New TV deals

As noted in the Guardian's [2021 bold predictions piece](#), the NFL's current round of TV rights deals are set to expire in 2022. As sports continue to be the sole place that networks can bank on to produce a large, live audience, and as the NFL continues to reign supreme as the biggest provider of live content (eight of 2020s 10 most-watched single telecasts were football games or post games) the bidding is expected to be intense and expensive.

The league could look to re-up with its traditional broadcast partners. Or it could hand a more favorable deal to ESPN/Disney, with the possibility of Disney snagging itself a coveted Super Bowl and moving its broadcasts to ABC. Or it could offer larger packages to a streaming client, like Amazon Prime, in the hopes of getting ahead of the live sports streaming curve or to try to make up for some of the revenue the league and its owners lost in 2020.

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Tax and spending

Tampon tax: government axes VAT on sanitary products

Key campaigner Laura Coryton accuses Tory politicians of trying to turn issue into ‘pro-Brexit thing’



Rishi Sunak said he was ‘proud’ the government had delivered on its promise to abolish the tampon tax. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Rishi Sunak said he was ‘proud’ the government had delivered on its promise to abolish the tampon tax. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Alexandra Topping

Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.02 EST

The tampon tax has been abolished after the government [honoured its March commitment](#) to remove VAT on women’s sanitary products.

But the campaigner who played a pivotal role in the drive to axe the tax has accused the government of using the issue as a political football, after politicians said it had been scrapped thanks to Brexit. Existing EU law prevented member states from reducing VAT below 5%.

Laura Coryton, who started the [Stop Taxing Periods](#) campaign in May 2014 while a student at Goldsmiths, said the Brexit process had made it less likely that the tampon tax would be abolished throughout Europe.

She said: “It is a day for celebration today, but it is just frustrating that the tampon tax is being used as a political football in terms of Brexit.”

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said he was “proud” the government had delivered on its promise, adding that it was providing free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals.

Speaking at Wednesday’s Brexit debate, Sir Bernard Jenkin, the Conservative chairman of the Commons liaison select committee, said: “We will be able to do things like abolish the tampon tax, which so many honourable ladies opposite railed against the government about, only because we’re leaving the EU.”

Coryton said it was frustrating to hear the scrapping of the tax cited as a victory for Brexit, and hear little mention of the more than 320,000 people who had signed the petition, and campaigning MPs such as Labour’s Stella Creasy and the former Labour MP Paula Sherriff.

“It’s great that the government is taking it really seriously – if the prime minister can talk about periods, surely anyone can talk about periods,” she said. “But it’s frustrating … to make this campaign into a pro-Brexit thing, because it doesn’t reflect the many different types of people who have been campaigning for it.”

['Sex for sanitary pads': how Kenya's lockdown led to a rise in teenage pregnancy](#)
[Read more](#)

Also, it’s not true, she said, adding that in 2016 – under pressure from the then prime minister, David Cameron, the European parliament had [voted unanimously](#) to start the regulatory process to allow any EU country to abolish any tampon tax.

“That process has since gone cold, because we then left the EU and we were the ones pushing for it,” said Coryton. “So if anything, actually, Brexit has made it worse, because if we were to have stayed in the EU, then this piece of legislation would have gone through... then any EU member would be able to axe the tax, not just the UK.”

In 2018 the European commission published [proposals](#) to change EU VAT rules, which could allow countries to axe [the tampon tax](#) in their countries, but it is yet to be agreed on by all member states.

Since 2015 [the £15m funds the tampon tax has raised in the UK](#) have been directed to women’s refuges and domestic abuse charities. “The tampon tax has long been a symbol of policymaking based around men’s needs, so removing VAT is symbolically important,” said Mary-Ann Stephenson of the Women’s Budget Group. “But the tampon tax money has been an important source of funding for the women’s sector – the government needs to be clear about what will replace it.”

[Gibraltar](#)

Spain and UK reach draft deal on post-Brexit status of Gibraltar

British overseas territory had been left out of deal announced on Christmas Eve

[Ashifa Kassam](#) in Madrid and [Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.57 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 23.36 EST

Play Video

1:17

'A day for hope': UK and Spain agree draft deal on post-Brexit status of Gibraltar – video

A last-minute deal between the UK and Spain – agreed just hours before [Gibraltar](#) was poised to become the only frontier marked by a hard Brexit – will allow for free movement between the British overseas territory and much of the EU.

"Today is a day for hope," Spain's foreign minister, Arancha González Laya, said on Thursday as she announced that an agreement in principle had been reached. "In the long history of our relations with the UK, related to Gibraltar, today we're facing a turning point."

As part of the deal, the British overseas territory located on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula would be able to join EU programmes and policies such as Schengen with [Spain](#) acting as a guarantor, González Laya told reporters.

"Schengen will be applied to Gibraltar, with Spain assuming responsibility as a member state," she added. "This will allow for the abolishment of controls between Spain and Gibraltar."

Gibraltar's airport and port will become the EU's newest external border, with checks undertaken by the EU's Frontex border agency. The arrangement will be in place for an initial four-year period.

When pressed on whether this would entail the presence of Spanish security forces in Gibraltar – a point that had proved to be a major sticking point in the negotiations – González Laya said the technical details would be published in the new year.

The agreement will now be sent to Brussels, where the European commission will enter into negotiations with London to turn it into a treaty, a process González Laya estimated would take around six months. In the meantime, she said Spain would work to ensure that mobility at the border would be “as fluid as possible”.

The deal was hailed by the UK prime minister, Boris Johnson. “I wholeheartedly welcome today’s political agreement between the UK and Spain on Gibraltar’s future relationship with the EU,” [he wrote on Twitter](#). “The UK has always been, and will remain, totally committed to the protection of the interests of Gibraltar and its British sovereignty.”

Spain’s prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said it marked the start of “a new era” that would allow for “the removal of barriers”.

The Brexit deal [announced on Christmas Eve between the UK and EU](#) did not cover Gibraltar. Instead the fate of the territory was the topic of months of parallel negotiations that focused on preserving free movement across the shared border with Spain while steering clear of the centuries-old sovereignty dispute between London and Madrid.

With just hours left before the UK was to leave the 27-member bloc, negotiations over the future of the territory had come down to the wire. “The final countdown” is how Fabian Picardo, Gibraltar’s chief minister, had started off the day [on Twitter](#).

Hours later, Picardo struck a cautious note. “I think it’s important to temper this moment with understanding that what we have is an in-principle agreement, not a treaty,” he told reporters. “When we go to the [European](#)

Union, we need to ensure that the European commission shares our enthusiasm for this to happen.”

He warned that the treaty would entail tough negotiations, including jurisdiction issues and import duties. “There will be complexity to come,” he said. “We may end up with a deal on the movement of people but not goods.”

Picardo had long advocated for Gibraltar to join the Schengen area of abolished border controls – a move that would establish closer ties between the British overseas territory and the EU just as Britain left the bloc.

On Thursday he defended the idea, even as he acknowledged that it would allow nationals from Spain and other countries that were part of the Schengen area to cross freely into Gibraltar while those arriving from the UK would be subject to passport controls.

“This is the beginning of us building a stronger relationship with the European Union and with our neighbour Spain, in a way that doesn’t in any way cleave us away from the United Kingdom, which is our principal relationship,” said Picardo.

In the 2016 referendum, 96% of voters in Gibraltar supported remaining in the EU. Still, the territory had come incredibly close to crashing out without a deal, noted Picardo. “The alternative is that, in about eight hours from now, without these arrangements, Gibraltar would be the only part of the European continent that would be suffering a hard Brexit.”

The UK’s foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, hailed the UK’s “warm and strong relationship with Spain” in a statement, noting that the agreement would now seek to be formalised. “In the meantime, all sides are committed to mitigating the effects of the end of the transition period on Gibraltar, and in particular ensure border fluidity, which is clearly in the best interests of the people living on both sides.”

Despite ceding Gibraltar to Britain in 1713, Spain has long sought to reclaim the tiny territory on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula.

On Thursday, Gibraltar and Spain stressed that the deal did not impinge upon their respective sovereignty claims. “There are no aspects of the framework that has been agreed that in any way transgress Gibraltar’s positions on sovereignty, jurisdiction or control,” said Picardo, echoing earlier remarks by González Laya.

[Essex](#)

Police in Essex launch manhunt after pensioner is murdered

Police looking for Leighton Snook, 28, after Donald Ralph, 83, found dead at home near Colchester



Police said Leighton Snook should not be approached if seen. Photograph: Essex police

Police said Leighton Snook should not be approached if seen. Photograph: Essex police

[Harry Taylor](#)
[@harrytaylr](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 13.14 EST

Police have launched a manhunt for a 28-year-old wanted on suspicion of the murder of a pensioner in [Essex](#).

Essex police are trying to find Leighton Snook after 83-year-old Donald Ralph was found dead at his home in the village of Aldham, near Colchester, just after 1pm on Tuesday.

Ralph's car was stolen and officers said they believe the killing was a targeted attack. Police said Snook should not be approached, but if any members of the public see him, they should notify the police immediately.

Snook is from Colchester, but investigators said he has links to Hastings, Suffolk, Hartlepool and County Durham.

A 16-year-old from Leicester was arrested in Colchester on Wednesday evening in relation to the investigation and was being held in custody on suspicion of murder.

Detectives are trying to track down Ralph's car, a blue Volvo V50 with the registration HD08 YFV, which was last recorded being driven to Hastings on the morning of the murder.

Ralph has been described as "very young at heart" and a man who enjoyed being in the countryside. His niece Tina Ralph said: "Don was a very young-at-heart, fit 83-year-old, with boundless energy, enthusiasm and enjoyment of life.

"He was a man who loved all things countryside, particularly fishing and the Norfolk Broads, as well as being an avid bird lover. He loved horse racing and spent many a happy Saturday having a little flutter.

"Don was a unique character, who will be much missed by his wide circle of friends, and all his family."

DCI Scott Egerton of Kent and Essex serious crime directorate said: "We urgently need to speak to Leighton Snook in connection with the murder of Donald Ralph. I would strongly urge him, or anyone who knows of his whereabouts, to contact police.

"I ask members of the public not to approach him but to call police immediately. Anybody who is found to be assisting those involved in Mr Ralph's murder in any way will be subject of a thorough investigation and could find themselves prosecuted for assisting an offender."

FTSE

FTSE 100 suffers worst year since 2008 financial crisis

UK index fell by 14.3% during 2020, the poorest performance among largest international stock index



IAG, British Airways' parent company, slumped by 61% in 2020.
Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

IAG, British Airways' parent company, slumped by 61% in 2020.
Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Graeme Wearden

Thu 31 Dec 2020 11.58 EST

Britain's blue-chip share index has suffered its worst year since the 2008 financial crisis, as the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit uncertainty hit stocks during [a turbulent 12 months for investors](#).

The FTSE 100 index of top shares listed in London fell by 14.3% during 2020, the poorest performance among the largest international stock indices, and its biggest decline since 2008.

The pound, though, rallied to its highest level against the US dollar in more than two and a half years, amid relief that [the UK-EU free trade deal had been agreed](#).

Having started the year at 7,542 points, the Footsie closed on New Year's Eve at 6,460 points. Fresh worries over the latest UK's Covid-19 restrictions helped to drag the market down by almost 1.5% on the final trading session of the year.

The FTSE 100 has suffered from a relative paucity of technology stocks. They surged during 2020 as the pandemic forced office workers to work from home, driving a boom in video-conferencing and online shopping.

The parent company of [British Airways](#), IAG, slumped by 61% during the year, with jet engine manufacturer Rolls-Royce down 52%. Oil companies also had a torrid year, with BP and Royal Dutch Shell dropping by over 40% during 2020.

Banks were also badly hit by the pandemic, as well as fears that the UK and EU might fail to reach a free trade deal. [Lloyds Banking Group](#) fell 41% over the last 12 months, with NatWest down 30%.

“The sectors hit the hardest by the pandemic: travel, leisure, general retail, energy and banks, all of which make up a significant proportion of the FTSE 100, encapsulates quite neatly why the FTSE 100 has been hit as hard as it has, and that’s before we even consider that the Brexit transition period comes to an end at the end of this year,” said Michael Hewson of CMC Markets, a spreadbetting firm whose customers bet on market movements.

Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust, which invests in technology companies including Tesla, Amazon and Tencent, was the best-performing FTSE 100 stock as it more than doubled in value during 2020. Ocado, the online grocery business, has gained 78% since last January.

While the FTSE 100 struggled, the US stock market had hit [a series of record highs in recent weeks](#). The S&P 500 closed 16.26% up for the year at a new peak, with the technology-focused Nasdaq surging by 43%.

Germany's DAX index ended the year up 3.6% and France's CAC fell by around 7%. Japan's [Nikkei](#) gained 16%, while China's CSI 300 surged 27% during 2020.

Spain's IBEX 35 had an even worse year than the FTSE 100, though, dropping 15.5%.

The FTSE 100's weakness was partly due to the strength of the pound, which erodes the value of multinationals' overseas earnings. Sterling hit \$1.3686, its highest level since 1 May 2018, as the US dollar weakened on the foreign exchange markets.

Many analysts have forecast the FTSE 100 will rebound as the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines spurs an economic recovery. Investment bank [UBS](#) has a price target of 7,200 points for the end of 2021.

David Miller, investment director at wealth management firm Quilter Cheviot, said the recovery would take time. "People aren't suddenly going to regain confidence, get on a plane or go to a packed football stadium. It will take until the second half of 2021, maybe the latter half, before normality returns," he said.

The FTSE 250 index of medium-sized companies, more focused on the UK economy, fell by 6.4% during 2020, and hit a 10-month high earlier this week.

Despite ending the year lower, the FTSE 100 has rallied since its low point in March, when it briefly fell through 5,000 points.

"Although timing the market is never easy, and can be risky, buying opportunities like that in March come along rarely and successful investors need to grit their teeth and have the courage of their convictions at moments like these," said Tom Stevenson, investment director for personal investing at Fidelity International. "Even the underperforming UK market has risen by more than 25% since the low point."

Joshua Mahony, senior market analyst at IG, said investors ended 2020 fretting about the extended period of Covid-19 restrictions, and the "clear

uncertainty” of exactly how hard the UK economy would suffer from Brexit.

“With the UK exiting the EU stifled by a blanket of tier 3 and 4 restrictions, stocks are understandably risk averse as we head into the new year,” said Mahony. “However, while short-term uncertainty will bring volatility, the promise of a spring renewal is likely to bring plenty of upside in 2021,” he added.

Key Charts of 2020

Crude oil prices plunged this spring as the Covid-19 pandemic forced economies to lock down. Having started 2020 at \$66 (£48) per barrel, Brent crude tumbled below \$20 in April before recovering to \$51 per barrel this month.

Sterling was badly hit during the early months of the pandemic, as investors sought the safety of the US dollar. But it has strengthened as Brexit uncertainty lifted, hitting a 32-month high this week.

Gold had its best year in a decade, as investors sought a haven asset. Bullion broke through \$2,000 per ounce in August amid predictions that central bank stimulus would drive up inflation.

The world’s most famous cryptocurrency had an explosive year, quadrupling in value to more than \$29,000. It surged as major institutional investors began snapping up bitcoins this year, and PayPal announced support for digital currencies.

Newspapers

Owner of Scotsman and Yorkshire Post newspapers bought for £10m

JPL Media announces sale to new publishing group National World for knockdown price



A sign showing the Scotsman masthead above a shop in Edinburgh.
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

A sign showing the Scotsman masthead above a shop in Edinburgh.
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

[Severin Carrell and Mark Sweeney](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 11.33 EST

The media company that owns famous newspapers such as the Scotsman and [Yorkshire Post](#) has been sold for just £10m, in a sign of the collapsing value of regional papers.

JPI Media announced on Thursday it had been sold to a recently formed publishing group called National World, [owned by the former Daily Mirror executive David Montgomery](#).

The deal will affect more than 100 local and regional newspapers, including historic titles such as the Scotland on Sunday, the Belfast Newsletter, Sheffield Star and [Sunderland Echo](#).

JPI, formerly known as Johnston Press, built itself up from a small Scottish local newspaper firm into a regional giant with a series of expensive acquisitions, paying £570m for the [Yorkshire Post and its sister titles in 2002](#), and £160m for the Scotsman group in 2005.

JPI was then hit hard by the rise in online news and the global recession of 2008; it had been up for sale from some years but potential suitors were deterred by plunging profits at local papers and the company's significant debts and losses.

Reach, owners of the Daily Mirror, Daily Express and the Record, considered buying it for £50m last year but pulled out of the deal and instead opted to launch rival online-only titles, including Edinburgh Live.

The papers will be now be run by Montgomery, National World's chairman, and Mark Hollinshead, who was chief operating officer for Reach's predecessor Trinity Mirror until 2014.

National World's [announcement to the London Stock Exchange](#) revealed that the £10.2m will be paid to JPI's owners, a US private equity firm, in three tranches, funded by loans of nearly £8.5m.

It will pay £5.2m in cash when the sale goes through on 2 January, but has deferred two other payments of £2.5m until March 2022 and March 2023.

In the stock exchange statement, Montgomery said: "JPI's historic publishing brands represent the best in journalism and have reliably served their communities and supported local businesses, in some cases for centuries, and never more than in the last year."

"National World will uphold this tradition and implement modern technology to grow the business across a wider footprint based on high quality, unique content."

Montgomery is expected to replicate the model he used for his last venture, called Local World, which combined more than 100 local newspapers from Daily Mail & General Trust's Northcliffe Media, and Iliffe News & Media, including the Nottingham Post and Cambridge News, in 2012.

While he transformed the profitability of the group, his tenure was marked by deep cost-cutting and the merger of titles shifted towards digital output. He then sold the business to Reach, which owns regional titles including the Manchester Evening News and the Liverpool Echo, [in 2015 in a deal worth £220m.](#)

In November 2019, JPI agreed a £50m deal to sell its crown jewel, the profitable i newspaper, to Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT), owner of the Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday and Metro, after selling DMGT its printing plants in Portsmouth, Dinnington in South Yorkshire, and Carn in [Northern Ireland](#), in October.

John Toner, Scottish organiser for the National Union of Journalists, said: “The hard-working, committed journalists of JPI Media have endured an extremely anxious few years. In addition to several rounds of redundancies there has been the additional worry of knowing that the company was for sale but without anyone rushing to buy.

“We note that David Montgomery has expressed his intention to grow the company. This is a positive statement about a company that has seen more shrinkage than growth, and we hope that the intention is to preserve existing titles and staffing levels. The staff are badly in need of assurance and stability.”

[Primark](#)

Primark says tier 4 extension will knock further £220m off sales

Cut-price fashion chain more affected by store closures than rivals because it does not sell online

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



When Primark reopened earlier this month after the second lockdown, shoppers queued into the small hours of the morning to get in. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

When Primark reopened earlier this month after the second lockdown, shoppers queued into the small hours of the morning to get in. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.42 EST

Primark has said it will lose an additional £220m in sales as more stores are forced to close under new restrictions to control the spread of Covid-19 in the UK.

The cut-price fashion chain's owner, Associated British Foods, said it expected to lose £650m in sales in the year to September, up from the £430m it had announced on 4 December, after the government said major cities including Manchester and Birmingham must join London and the south-east of England in closing non-essential shops.

Primark said 253 of its stores would now be temporarily closed from 1 January, just over two-thirds of its outlets globally.

The update comes as retailers brace for further pain after the government announced that all of the north-east of England, Greater Manchester, large parts of the Midlands and the south-west would fall under the strictest tier 4 restrictions from Thursday morning.

All of mainland Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are already under the tightest restrictions which involve the closure of hospitality and non-essential retail, which includes shops that sell clothing, toys, books and electrical goods.

The restrictions have been widened in response to a new variant of Covid-19 that has contributed to a record rise in infections across the country.

The number of shoppers out and about last week slumped by 46%, compared to the same period in 2019, according to the advisory firm BDO's high street tracker. Online sales rose by 50% but that was not enough to offset the in-store decline. Total sales for established retailers fell 23%. Fashion sales were down just over a third.

Primark takes a heavier hit from store closures than some rivals because it does not sell goods online.

When the chain reopened in England earlier this month, however, after a month-long high street lockdown, the group said it saw "[“phenomenal” sales growth](#)".

Eleven stores stayed open overnight, resulting in a 40-hour trading marathon, and shoppers queued to get into the stores in the small hours of the morning.

Minimum wage

Sir Jim Ratcliffe-owned hotel chain fined over minimum wage

Ineos founder's boutique Home Grown Hotels joins Tesco and Pizza Hut on list of 139 'rogue employers'



Ineos founder Sir Jim Ratcliffe owns 55% of Home Grown Hotels.
Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Ineos founder Sir Jim Ratcliffe owns 55% of Home Grown Hotels.
Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Simon Goodley

Thu 31 Dec 2020 05.37 EST

A hotel group controlled by the multi-billionaire tax exile Sir Jim Ratcliffe has been fined by the government along with 138 other "rogue employers" who failed to pay their staff the national minimum wage.

Ratcliffe, who has an estimated £12bn fortune, owns 55% of Home Grown Hotels, a boutique group he co-founded with Robin Hutson, a hotelier who

built and sold the Hotel du Vin chain and is a former chairman of the members' club Soho House.

Their business was included in a list of national minimum wage offenders published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on Thursday, as the department reintroduced a policy of “naming and shaming” companies that had paid staff illegally low wages.

Also cited in BEIS’s first list for two years was the UK’s largest private sector employer Tesco – an announcement that coincided with its former chief executive Dave Lewis being knighted in the New Year’s honours list – and the restaurant chain Pizza Hut.

The business minister, Paul Scully, said: “Paying the minimum wage is not optional, it is the law. It is never acceptable for any employer to short-change their workers, but it is especially disappointing to see huge household names who absolutely should know better on this list.”

The latest roll call of offenders – which showed that the 139 named companies failed to pay a total of £6.7m to more than 95,000 workers – covers investigations between September 2016 and July 2018, a period when minimum wage compliance was prominent news following an undercover Guardian investigation that exposed how workers at Sports Direct were being paid below the legal minimum.

Ratcliffe made his fortune in the petrochemicals industry by founding Ineos and has become a well-known, if sometimes controversial, figure in the business world.

He first came to public attention after threatening to close his Grangemouth petrochemicals factory in 2013 and prompting a dramatic climbdown by the Unite trade union – but has since made headlines by quitting Britain for tax-free Monaco, becoming a prominent Brexit supporter and taking over cycling's Team Sky and rebranding it to Team Ineos.

BEIS stated that Ratcliffe’s Home Grown Hotels had failed to pay £13,790 to 25 workers, which the company said related to “inadvertent breaches of

very complex regulations” following “deductions made for staff accommodation and uniform deposits”.

A spokeswoman for the company said that the company had reimbursed staff, had been fined £6,000 by HMRC and that Ratcliffe “has no involvement in the day-to-day running of the company”.

She added: “[Co-founder] Robin Hutson was entirely satisfied with the swift approach taken by the company’s accounts and HR teams and sympathetic about how such a mistake could have arisen with the ever-changing hours worked by employees within the hospitality sector. HMRC guidelines relating to this element are complicated, the hospitality industry is not as straightforward as other businesses due to inconsistent hours worked from one month to the next.”

A spokeswoman for Tesco, which BEIS said had underpaid 78,199 workers a total of £5.1m, said: “Back in 2017 we identified a technical issue that meant some colleagues’ pay inadvertently fell below the national minimum wage. We are very sorry this happened and proactively reported the issue to HMRC at the time. All our colleagues were reimbursed in full and we immediately changed our policies to prevent this happening again. In most cases the reimbursement was £10 or less. Once we uncovered this mistake, we took a proactive, transparent and cooperative approach with HMRC.”

A spokeswoman for Pizza Hut, which underpaid 10,980 workers £846,000, also said the breach was unintentional and that staff had been reimbursed.

Tesco and Pizza Hut both refused to reveal how much they had been fined.

Jeni Morris, head of the national minimum wage team at accountants EY, added: “In my experience, most employers do not deliberately flout the NMW rules, but are inadvertently caught out by a number of technicalities in the complex legislation.”

[Radio 4](#)

Jane Garvey bows out of Woman's Hour with tribute to listeners

BBC Radio 4 presenter says ‘cataclysmic’ 13 years on show taught her much about feminism



Jane Garvey leaves BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour after 13 years as a presenter. Photograph: David Bebber/The Guardian

Jane Garvey leaves BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour after 13 years as a presenter. Photograph: David Bebber/The Guardian

[Harry Taylor](#)
[@harrytaylr](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 06.56 EST

Jane Garvey has paid tribute to her “remarkable” listeners as she presented her final Woman’s Hour on BBC [Radio 4](#) after fronting the show for 13 years.

The broadcaster said presenting the show had taught her more about feminism, and that women were held to higher standards.

“The terrible truth is that when I came to Woman’s Hour, I knew about feminism and I was a feminist. I’d wanted to be a radio presenter, and I’d become a radio presenter. So I thought ‘what are people complaining about?’

[Emma Barnett to host BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour](#)

[Read more](#)

“During the course of this cataclysmic 13 years, I have learned for all sorts of reasons that women have to be better, we have to try harder, it is going to be tougher for us. I really am glad I’ve been able to play a small part in opening up a whole range of conversations.”

Her last programme covered stories of birth, death, long Covid and the “everyday grind of ordinary life”. Garvey was interviewed by the author Elizabeth Day about her time on the show. She admitted to going “a bit wobbly” after listening to a montage that included clips from interviews with Penélope Cruz and Shirley Ballas, set to Frank Sinatra’s My Way.

The 56-year-old said the [decision to leave](#) had been one of the toughest of her life. “The reason I’m going is because I could have stayed. I sometimes think the hardest thing is to change when it’s the last thing you want to do, but probably the best thing to do. It’s the best thing for the programme. I really do mean it.”

['A tremendous legacy': Jenni Murray ends her tenure on BBC's Woman's Hour](#)

[Read more](#)

She also paid tribute to the show’s “unshockable” listeners. “[They’re] remarkable. We’ve got men who listen, men who listen to be annoyed, we’ve got men who listen to learn about women and about women in their lives, and that’s brilliant.

“Our female audience ranges in age from 19 to 103, we get emails from women in their 90s. We get such a cross-section of experience and point of view.”

The show has been [on the BBC since 1946](#). The former 5 live presenter Emma Barnett will take over from Garvey in the new year.

Garvey dismissed reports that she was retiring, saying she was doing a new interview series for Radio 4 in the spring, and said her podcast with Fi Glover would also be broadcast on the station.

She added: “I will now for ever be known as a former presenter of Woman’s Hour, and that is absolutely fine.”

Financial Conduct Authority

City watchdog relaxes trading rules hours before Brexit

FCA's adjustment will allow firms on both sides of Channel to deal in derivatives worth billions daily



London is by far the biggest location for the derivatives trade in Europe.
Photograph: serts/Getty Images

London is by far the biggest location for the derivatives trade in Europe.
Photograph: serts/Getty Images

Jasper Jolly
@jjpjolly

Thu 31 Dec 2020 14.34 EST

The City's financial regulator has relaxed rules on transactions with a daily value of billions of pounds, just hours before the UK officially left the EU's single market.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on Thursday used temporary emergency powers to allow companies on both sides of the Channel to trade

derivative contracts that are viewed as [crucial for financial stability](#).

[City watchdog failed to regulate firm that lost investors' £236m](#)
[Read more](#)

The last-minute adjustment came hours before the UK's departure from the EU's single market at 11pm GMT on New Year's Eve. The move will allow banks and financial companies to trade derivatives known as swaps, which are contracts that allow companies to protect themselves against risks such as movements in interest or currency exchange rates.

London is by far the biggest location for the derivatives trade in Europe. Before Brexit the UK's financial firms had straightforward access to companies across the EU, but much of that access has been revoked, with some European politicians hopeful of [attracting business away from London](#) to cities such as Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt.

Britain has urged Brussels to grant full two-way market access, known as "equivalence", for swaps trading, but the bloc says it wants information from Britain about its intentions to diverge from EU rules before it can make a decision.

The trade deal agreed between Boris Johnson's government and Brussels on Christmas Eve does not cover financial services, meaning UK firms trying to serve EU clients will be reliant on the EU choosing to acknowledge UK regulation as equivalent.

[Boris Johnson's post-Brexit trade deal passes into UK law](#)
[Read more](#)

The FCA on Thursday said the UK-based companies it regulates could instead use EU platforms, provided they do not have the option of using another location such as the US. That could result in more trading happening in the EU rather than [London](#).

The EU's refusal to grant equivalence has come despite the hopes of the UK government and the FCA that an arrangement could be made before 1 January.

The FCA said it “continues to view the agreement of mutual equivalence between the UK and EU as the best way to avoid disruption for market participants”, as well as avoiding companies having to trade on multiple venues which could potentially raise costs.

The FCA said that it would review its approach by the end of March.

The Bank of England previously warned that interest rate swaps worth about \$200bn (£146bn) could be disrupted due to the clash between UK and EU swaps rules.

Eamine

UK pledges an extra £47m in aid as agencies warn of ‘catastrophic hunger’

Coronavirus, conflict and cuts to UN funding are increasing the risks of food insecurity and acute malnutrition in 2021



Unicef has warned that acute malnutrition among children in Africa's Sahel region will escalate over the coming year. Photograph: Zohra Bensemra/Reuters

Unicef has warned that acute malnutrition among children in Africa's Sahel region will escalate over the coming year. Photograph: Zohra Bensemra/Reuters

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 02.15 EST

The government has promised £47m in extra emergency aid for 2021 as it becomes clear that the coming year will see a dramatic rise in people struggling for food.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said on Wednesday it will provide more aid for food, water, hygiene and shelter in 11 countries, including £8m to Africa's Sahel region, where the [UN has warned of catastrophic hunger](#).

“This extra emergency UK aid will mean people can feed their families and prevent these crises from escalating into widespread famine. We hope to see other donors step up to the plate with some extra funding to prevent these global crises getting worse,” said foreign secretary Dominic Raab.

The government said another £8m will go to supporting vulnerable Syrians. The majority of the remaining aid will be spent through the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) which has had to cut back on food aid because of a massive shortfall in funding.

[UN issues \\$100m emergency funding and calls for global effort to avert famine](#)

[Read more](#)

WFP said last week that basic rations being given out to refugees in Uganda would be slashed again, for the second time in a year. It would need \$95.8m to provide full rations for the next six months.

“Covid-19 must not be an excuse for the world to turn its back on refugees at this terrible time,” said WFP country director El-Khidir Daloum. “We appreciate that donors fully funded our refugee operation in Uganda in 2019, but right now we are unable to keep up even basic food assistance and the poorest will suffer the most as we have to cut still further.”

The [UN’s annual review of humanitarian needs](#) highlighted increased food insecurity for countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America and Unicef predicted 10 million people will experience acute malnutrition in 2021.

According to the report, food costs increased by more than 10% in some countries as the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains and farming activity.

Humanitarian groups have also warned of [famine in South Sudan](#) which, they said, could already be under way, aggravated by conflicts that prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid.

WFP predicted in June that, in the countries where it is active, food insecurity would rise by 80% as a result of the pandemic, affecting 270 million people.

Unicef said that acute malnutrition for children will escalate in the Sahel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, north-east Nigeria, Yemen and South Sudan. In the past few days it has appealed for \$1bn more to tackle malnutrition in 2021.

2021.01.01 - Around the world

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[Libya](#)

UN to bring in monitors to observe Libya's widely flouted ceasefire

Move part of diplomatic reboot of efforts to cajole opposing sides into forming national unity government



An unexploded rocket left over from the failed 14-month siege of Tripoli by forces loyal to the warlord Khalifa Haftar. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

An unexploded rocket left over from the failed 14-month siege of Tripoli by forces loyal to the warlord Khalifa Haftar. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Fri 1 Jan 2021 00.00 EST

The [United Nations](#) will try to reboot its push towards national unity in Libya by bringing in monitors to oversee a widely flouted ceasefire and by forcing the country's riven political leadership to find a mechanism for electing a prime minister.

UN officials said [Libya](#) was locked in a race against time to make tangible progress towards forming a national unity government and avoid the possible collapse of a three-month ceasefire.

In a letter to member states, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, called for regional blocs to nominate monitors to oversee the ceasefire and a UN arms embargo that has been flouted, principally by Turkey and the [United Arab Emirates](#).

It would be the first time the UN has taken active steps on the ground to enforce the ceasefire beyond reports detailing how the arms embargo is being breached. The move comes at a critical time since the ceasefire, which was agreed with the warring parties on 23 October in Geneva, also includes provisions for all foreign troops to leave Libya within three months. There is no sign of this happening.

The UN acting special envoy, Stephanie Williams, has said there are 20,000 foreign troops or mercenaries in the country.

Libya has been beset by internal divisions for almost a decade. the country is divided between the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), which is based in the capital, Tripoli, and backed by Turkey, and the Libyan National Army (LNA), which is based in the east and supported in various degrees by [Egypt](#), the UAE, Russia and France. The UN estimates the cost of the conflict since 2011 has been \$578bn (£424bn) so far.

In the last three months, the chance for a national reconciliation had blossomed, partly because the mastermind of the LNA's failed siege of Tripoli, General Khalifa Haftar, lost influence externally and prestige domestically, allowing more pragmatic voices to be heard. An exhaustion with war also contributed.

Williams tried to seize the moment to cajole the Libyan leadership. In November in Tunis she convened a 75-strong Libyan political dialogue forum to prepare the ground for elections – now scheduled for 24 December, the 70th anniversary of Libya's independence – and for the formation of an interim national government, including prime minister.

Since then the forum has been deadlocked over the voting threshold that could decide the new prime minister, a seemingly technical dispute that is a proxy since the method of voting may determine which candidate wins. After 30 hours over six sessions online the forum has yet to reach an agreement, but Williams told participants on Wednesday that time was “a luxury you can no longer afford” if they wanted a Libyan-made solution. She announced she was setting up a 15 strong subgroup to agree a formula to choose the interim prime minister.

Williams, who has previously described the established generation of Libyan politicians as “dinosaurs”, said Libya could also no longer afford politics being viewed as a zero-sum game in which there were clear winners and losers. Ambassadors from the US and four European countries reinforced the message in a blunt meeting with the GNA on Wednesday.

The UN’s sense of urgency was raised when Haftar, sensing a political vacuum, declared on 24 December that war with Turkey was imminent and Libyans should prepare for it.

But in a surprising development, a delegation of senior Egyptian diplomats and intelligence officials visited Tripoli on Sunday to meet GNA leaders, the first diplomatic contact between Egypt and the GNA since 2014. The visit appeared to indicate a distancing if not a break between Cairo and Abu Dhabi over the value of Haftar and further war.

That Egypt’s longstanding ambassador to Libya, Mohamed Abu Bakr, was a key participant in the delegation was of note. His approach has always been to work with all sides and back the UN, but his voice has been undermined by Emirati and French backing for Haftar’s military campaign

“The voices of diplomacy have temporarily won in Cairo and the Egyptians need to rebuild their links with the GNA,” said Peter Millett, a former British ambassador to Libya. “There have always been divisions in Cairo between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which favours a politically negotiated solution and the military, which backed Haftar and worked with the Emiratis. The military option hasn’t worked and the diplomatic approach has been given a chance again.”

Global development

Tributes paid to Ethiopian refugee farmer who championed integration in Italy

Agitu Ideo Gudeta, who was killed on Wednesday, used abandoned land to start a goat farming project employing migrants and refugees



Agitu Ideo Gudeta started with just 15 goats, increasing the herd to 180 in just a few years. Photograph: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

Agitu Ideo Gudeta started with just 15 goats, increasing the herd to 180 in just a few years. Photograph: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

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[Lorenzo Tondo in Palermo](#)

[@lorenzo_tondo](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.15 EST

Tributes have been paid to a 42-year-old Ethiopian refugee and farmer who became a symbol of integration in Italy, her adopted home.

Agitu Ideo Gudeta was attacked and killed, allegedly by a former employee, on her farm in Trentino on Wednesday.

Gudeta had left Addis Ababa in 2010 after angering the authorities by taking part in protests against “[land grabbing](#)”. Once in Italy, she tenaciously followed and realised her ambition to move to the mountains and start her own farm. Taking advantage of permits that give farmers access to abandoned public land in depopulated areas, she reclaimed 11 hectares (27 acres) around an old barn in the Mòcheni valley, where she founded her *La Capra Felice* (The Happy Goat) enterprise.

Gudeta started with a herd of 15 goats, quickly rising to 180 in a few years, producing organic milk and cheese using environmentally friendly methods and hiring migrants and refugees.

“I created my space and made myself known, there was no resistance to me,” she told Reuters news agency that year.

“Agitu brought to [Italy](#) the dream she was unable to realise in Ethiopia, in part because of land grabbing,” Gabriella Ghermandi, singer, performer, novelist and friend of Gudeta, told the Guardian. “Her farm was successful because she applied what she had learned from her grandparents in the countryside.

['Entire families are arriving at our shores': Covid drives Tunisian exodus](#)
[Read more](#)

“In Italy, many people have described her enterprise as a model of integration. But Agitu’s dream was to create an environmentally sustainable farm that was more than just a business; for her it also symbolised struggle against class divisions and the conviction that living in harmony with nature was possible. And above all she carried out her work with love. She had given a name to each one of her goats.”

In a climate where hostility toward migrants was increasing, led by far-right political leaders, her success story was reported by [numerous media outlets](#) as an example of how integration can benefit communities.

“The most rewarding satisfaction is when people tell me how much they love my cheeses because they’re good and taste different,” she said in an [interview with Internazionale](#) in 2017. “It compensates for all the hard work and the prejudices I’ve had to overcome as a woman and an immigrant.”

Two years ago she received death threats and was the target of racist attacks, which she reported to police, recounting them on her social media posts.

But police said a man who has confessed to the rape and murder of the farmer was an ex-employee who, they said, allegedly acted for “economic reasons”.



Agitu Ideo Gudeta produced organic milk and cheese using environmentally friendly methods. Photograph: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

The UN refugee agency said it was “pained” by Gudeta’s death, and that her entrepreneurial spirit “demonstrated how refugees can contribute to the societies that host them”.

“Despite her tragic end, the UNHCR hopes that Agitu Ideo Gudeta will be remembered and celebrated as a model of success and integration and inspire refugees that struggle to rebuild their lives,” the agency said.

“We spoke on the phone last week”, said Ghermandi. “We spent two hours speaking about Ethiopia. We had plans to get together in the spring. Agitu considered Italy her home. She used to say that she had suffered too much in Ethiopia. Now Agitu is gone, but her work mustn’t die. We will soon begin a fundraising campaign to follow her plan for expanding the business so that her dream will live on.”

Gudeta would have turned 43 on New Year’s Day.

[Germany](#)

Home firework displays lead to fires, injuries and death in Germany and Italy

Boy, 13, killed in Italy and fires across Berlin as people respond to public fireworks bans by letting them off at home

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Berlin's Brandenburg Gate is illuminated during a Willkommen 2021 (Welcome 2021) concert. Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

Angela Giuffrida and agencies

Thu 31 Dec 2020 22.08 EST

Banned from setting off fireworks in much of their city, some Berliners instead tried to launch them from their homes on New Year's Eve, leading to

dozens of fires across the German capital.

By six minutes after midnight, the Berlin fire service had been called to 18 fires, with more following. No one was initially reported seriously injured.

[World takes in muted New Year's Eve under Covid shadow](#)

[Read more](#)

Berlin revellers usually take to the streets to light up the sky with fireworks on New Year's Eve but authorities banned their use in more than 50 zones in the capital to discourage crowds.

The sale of fireworks was also prohibited in the run-up to 31 December in [Germany](#), which is locked down with only essential shops open until at least 10 January to try to suppress the spread of Covid-19.

After faring better than many of its neighbours in the early stage of the pandemic last year, Germany has had a surge in cases and fatalities. A record daily high of 1,129 new deaths were reported on Wednesday.

In [Italy](#), a 13-year-old boy was killed and 79 others injured by New Year's Eve fireworks.

Public firework displays were banned, but many people let them off from their homes instead.

The boy, who lived in a Roma camp in the northern Italian city of Asti, died in hospital shortly after midnight from injuries to his abdomen from a firecracker.

Firefighters carried out 229 interventions across Italy over New Year's Eve, compared with 686 last year.

Of the 79 people injured, 23 were hospitalised, according to figures from the department of public security.

Most of the call-outs were in Lazio, the region surrounding Rome, followed by Campania. A woman was taken to hospital in Naples after she was hit on the head by a firecracker splinter while taking the rubbish out. A

man in Milan lost two of his fingers in the most serious incident there, while others across Italy reported injuries to their hands and close to their eyes. Eight of the total injured were children.

[Iran](#)

Iran fears Trump preparing attack in final weeks in office

Tehran says it will defend itself forcefully as tensions rise ahead of anniversary of Suleimani killing



Two US B-52 bombers recently flew to the Middle East, as tensions rise between the US and Iran. Photograph: Roslyn Ward/US AIR FORCE/AFP/Getty Images

Two US B-52 bombers recently flew to the Middle East, as tensions rise between the US and Iran. Photograph: Roslyn Ward/US AIR FORCE/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Chulov](#) Middle East correspondent

Fri 1 Jan 2021 12.23 EST

Iran fears that Donald Trump is preparing to order a military attack on its regional interests in the final three weeks of his administration and has warned it would retaliate against US bases in the Middle East.

Concerns have increased in Tehran over the past week that the US president could authorise a strike against Iranian proxy groups operating in Iraq, or a more extensive attack against Iran, a foe his government has attempted to break through nearly four years of economic sanctions and military muscle.

The Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, on Thursday accused Trump of constructing a pretext to attack as the clock winds down on his sole term in office. Zarif's remarks followed the presence of two US B-52 bombers in the region earlier this week, and an aircraft carrier redeployed to the Indian Ocean.

"Instead of fighting Covid in US, @realDonaldTrump & cohorts waste billions to fly B52s & send armadas to OUR region," Zarif said in a tweet. "Intelligence from Iraq indicate plot to FABRICATE pretext for war. Iran doesn't seek war but will OPENLY & DIRECTLY defend its people, security & vital interests."

Throughout Trump's time in office, Iraq has been a theatre for both direct and proxy clashes between Tehran and Washington. One year ago on Sunday, a US drone assassinated the powerful Iranian general, [Qassem Suleimani](#), outside Baghdad airport and Iran then launched up to 30 ballistic missiles at US bases in central Iraq and the northern city of Erbil. The flashpoints drew the two sides closer to an extended confrontation than at any time in recent decades.

Hossein Dehghan, an adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, joined in the warnings: "I saw on the news that the Americans are on alert for fear of the revenge (over Suleimani's killing) and have flown two B-52 bombers over the Persian Gulf.

"All their military bases in the region are covered by our missiles. I advise the White House evictee (Trump) not to turn the New Year into mourning for Americans," he said.

The top commander of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards added that Iran was fully prepared to respond. "Today, we have no problem, concern or apprehension toward encountering any powers. We will give our final words

to our enemies on the battlefield,” Gen Hossein Salami said at a ceremony at Tehran University for the anniversary of Suleimani’s death.

Suleimani’s replacement, Brig Gen Esmail Ghaani, warned at the ceremony that “freedom seekers” within the US could retaliate for the attack, telling the US that “inside your own home, there might be those who want to respond to the crime that you committed”.

In the year since Suleimani’s death, a series of rocket attacks against Baghdad’s Green Zone, where the US embassy is located, have drawn bellicose threats from Trump and the outgoing secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, [who has spearheaded attempts to topple the Iranian regime](#) through a so-called “maximum pressure” policy of sanctions.

Over the past decade, nearly all rocket attacks into the Green Zone have been carried out by Iranian-allied militia groups. As Trump’s term has neared its end, the attacks have taken on greater meaning. The proxies are determined to create an impression of resilience and defiance, and Trump wishes to avoid appearing to leave office under fire.

Iraqi militias are also enmeshed in a power struggle with the Iraqi prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a US ally, whom Trump officials have leaned on to crack down on leaders of the militia groups. Iraqi forces have at times detained rocket crews, but have not secured convictions, preferring to avoid directly opposing their powerful neighbour, which holds significant sway over events in Iraq.

Officials in Baghdad are concerned that militia groups may attempt to mark the first anniversary of Suleimani’s death and that of a second Iranian allied military leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed in the same strike. “Messages have been delivered to them,” said an official close to the Iraqi president, Barham Salih. “They are being watched very closely.”

A US official briefed reporters in Washington earlier this week that preparations for a militia strike had been observed in Iraq. In the days before Christmas, Trump appeared to put Iraqi militias on notice. “Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over,” he wrote on 23 December.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon said on Thursday it would withdraw the aircraft carrier Nimitz and its support ships from the coast of the Horn of Africa, where it had been stationed after being ordered back to the region late last year. The announcement was seen as a conciliatory sign from Washington.

But in another development likely to increase tensions in the region Iran on Friday told the United Nations nuclear watchdog that it plans to enrich uranium to up to 20% purity, a level it achieved before its 2015 accord.

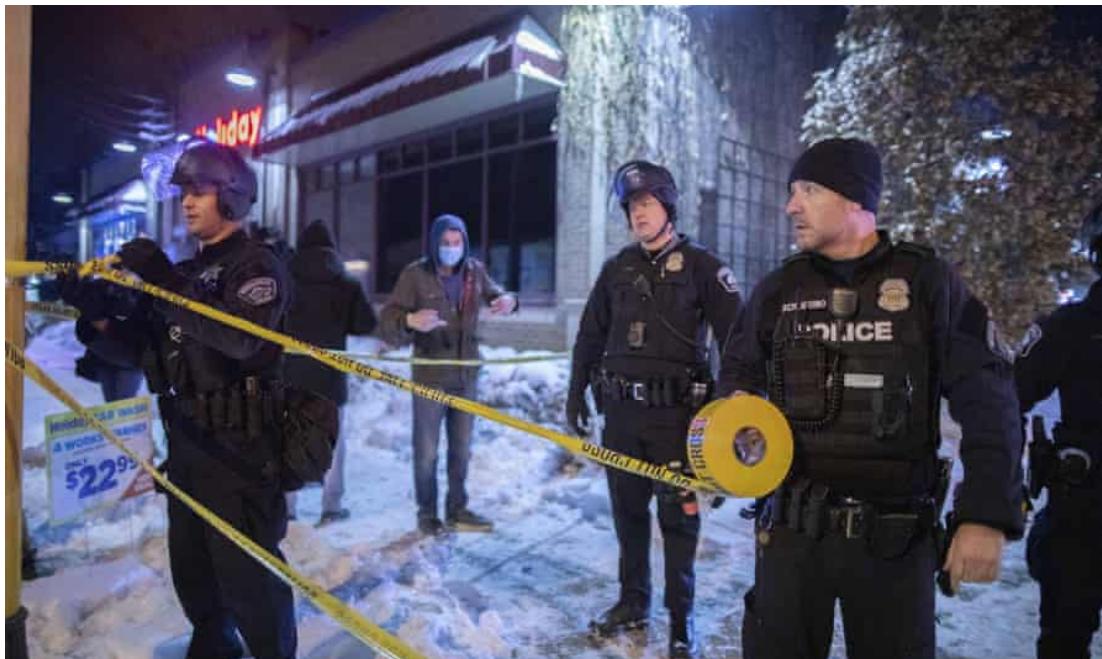
The move is the latest of several recent announcements by Iran to the International Atomic Energy Agency that it plans to further breach the deal, which it started violating in 2019 in retaliation for Washington's withdrawal from the agreement and the reimposition of US sanctions against Tehran.

Additional reporting: agencies.

[Minneapolis](#)

Minneapolis police release body-cam video of first killing since George Floyd

Shooting, which took place less than a mile from where Floyd died, has stirred anxiety about renewed protests in the city



Police put up fresh tape outside the Holiday gas station where someone was killed by police, 30 December 2020, Photograph: Chris Juhn/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Police put up fresh tape outside the Holiday gas station where someone was killed by police, 30 December 2020, Photograph: Chris Juhn/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Associated Press

Thu 31 Dec 2020 19.43 EST

Police in [Minneapolis](#) have released body-camera footage from a traffic stop that ended with a man shot and killed, the city's first such death since George Floyd's killing in May.

The quick move was aimed at stemming public anger over the killing, which

has stirred anxiety about renewed protests seven months after the widespread unrest that followed Floyd's death at the hands of police.

[Minneapolis switches \\$8m from police budget to violence prevention](#)
[Read more](#)

The shooting occurred Wednesday on the city's south side. Police said the man – identified by his father as Dolal Idd – was a suspect in a felony and that witnesses said he had fired first.

The city released a brief clip from one officer's body-camera in two versions, one of them slowed down to make it easier to follow. The video showed the man attempting to drive away from police before his vehicle was hemmed in, and then showed him looking through his driver's side window at the officers. It was difficult to make out more detail.

The driver's window shatters, an officer is heard swearing, and at least a dozen shots are fired.

Medaria Arradondo, the police chief, said a gun was found at the scene. A woman in the car was unhurt; no officers were hurt. At a news conference, Arradondo was asked whether officers used reasonable force, and he said they reacted to a deadly threat.

"When officers are experiencing gunfire, they are trained to respond," Arradondo said. Later, when he was pressed on whether it was clear to him that the man in the car fired first, he said: "When I viewed the video that everyone else is viewing, and certainly the real-time slowed-down version, certainly it appears the individual inside the vehicle fires his weapon at the officers first."

The state's Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is handling an investigation into the incident.

Bayle Gelle, of Eden Prairie, told the Star Tribune on Thursday that the dead man was his son, 22-year-old Dolal Idd. Gelle told the newspaper that authorities haven't given him any more information about what happened.

He said several officers carried out a search warrant at his home Wednesday night.

“The police they are brutality,” he told the Star Tribune. “I want to get justice.”

Idd was Somali-American.

The shooting happened less than a mile (1.6km) from the street corner where Floyd, a Black man, died in May after a Minneapolis officer pressed his knee on Floyd’s neck for minutes, even as Floyd pleaded that he couldn’t breathe. Floyd’s death led to days of sometimes violent protest that spread around the US and resonated worldwide.

In Minneapolis, Floyd’s death also led to a push for radical change in the long-criticized police department.

Mayor Jacob Frey and Arradondo have offered several policy changes since Floyd’s death, including revising use-of-force policies and requiring officers to report on their attempts to de-escalate situations. And earlier this month the city council approved shifting \$8m from the police department budget toward violence prevention and other programs.

Frey said in a statement late Wednesday that he was working with Arradondo for information on the shooting, and pledged to get it out as quickly as possible in coordination with the state investigation.

“Events of this past year have marked some of the darkest days in our city,” Frey said. “We know a life has been cut short and that trust between communities of color and law enforcement is fragile. ... We must all be committed to getting the facts, pursuing justice, and keeping the peace.”

All four officers involved in Floyd’s death were fired and quickly charged. They are scheduled for trial in March.

[Syria](#)

Syria: dozens killed in Isis bus attack

Assault reportedly targeted Syrian regime soldiers returning to their posts in Deir ez-Zor, near Iraq border



The scene of an attack targeting a bus transporting regime soldiers.

Photograph: Sana/AFP/Getty Images

The scene of an attack targeting a bus transporting regime soldiers.

Photograph: Sana/AFP/Getty Images

Bethan McKernan Middle East correspondent

Thu 31 Dec 2020 08.48 EST

At least 37 people in [Syria](#) have been killed in one of the biggest attacks carried out by [Islamic State](#) since the fall of the self-proclaimed caliphate last year.

The assault on Wednesday reportedly targeted a convoy of Syrian regime soldiers and militiamen returning from leave to their posts in Deir ez-Zor province, a mainly desert area on the border with [Iraq](#).

The official state news agency, Sana, reported that a terrorist attack on a bus on the main highway killed 25 civilians and wounded 13. Other sources, including local residents, a military defector and the UK-based monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), put the toll higher and claimed soldiers were onboard. One source told Reuters that the men were from Bashar al-Assad's elite Fourth Brigade.

According to SOHR, the bus was ambushed in a well-planned operation near the village of Shula by jihadists who set up a checkpoint to stop the convoy and detonated bombs before opening fire. Two more buses managed to escape.

"It was one of the deadliest attacks since the fall of the Isis (self-proclaimed) caliphate" last year, the Observatory head, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident.

Founded amid the chaos of Syria's civil war, Isis declared its so-called caliphate in 2014 and at one point controlled an area of Syria and Iraq as big as the UK and home to around 8 million people.

The group lost control of the last slivers of its territory in the Deir Ez-Zor desert [in March 2019](#) after five years of offensives conducted mostly by the US and its regional allies to oust the militants from both countries.

Jihadist sleeper cells have continued to launch ambushes and hit-and-run attacks from caves and bases in Syria's vast desert, and Isis militants and Assad's troops often clash in the area.

There has been a marked surge in the violence in recent months, residents say. In April, 27 fighters loyal to the Damascus government and allied Iranian militiamen were killed in an Isis attack near the desert town of al-Sukhna.

Local tribes have also voiced anger over executions carried out by regime-allied Iranian militias of dozens of nomads suspected of affiliation to the militants.

In the north of the country in recent days, rebel fighters backed by Turkey have clashed with Kurdish forces near Ain Issa, a town on a strategic highway that has been patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops since US forces withdrew from the area in 2019.

Turkish forces and their Syrian insurgent allies capitalised on the US drawdown to seize territory previously controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF militia, which fought alongside the US against Isis.

Ain Issa, east of the Euphrates river, also has a sprawling camp for displaced people, where the SDF has held families of Isis fighters, including foreigners.

The violence has led Russia to send military police reinforcements to the area.

A decade of civil war in Syria has drawn in foreign powers, killed an estimated 500,000 people, and driven more than half of the pre-war population from their homes.

Landslides

Land subsidence 'will affect almost fifth of global population'

Unesco warns of urban centres sinking because of unsustainable farming and groundwater extraction



Land subsidence has contributed to flooded conditions at the port of Kali Adem, north of Jakarta, Indonesia. Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

[Weronika Strzyżyska](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 14.00 EST

Subsidence, or the gradual sinking of land, could affect 19% of the world's population by 2040, according to new research funded by Unesco.

If no action is taken, human activity, combined with drought and rising sea levels exacerbated by global heating, could put many of the world's coastal cities at risk of severe flooding.

Jakarta has sunk more than 2.5 metres in the past 10 years, leading the Indonesian government to make plans to relocate the country's capital to the island of Borneo.

In Europe, subsidence is responsible for placing 25% of the Netherlands below sea level. Flat coastal regions, as well as urban and agricultural centres in dry climates, are most at risk.

[Sinking land, poisoned water: the dark side of California's mega farms](#)

[Read more](#)

Gerardo Herrera-García, lead researcher on the project, who is attached to the Geological and Mining Institute of Spain, said: "Areas that are heavily populated or areas that need irrigation for agriculture because they are located in places that are dry for long periods of time, they need to pump the water from underground. When they pump the water, the natural recharge of the aquifer is smaller than the volume of water they are pumping out."

This extraction of water from the ground causes the surface to sink. But lack of pumping regulations and rapidly increasing human populations are the most likely factors contributing to the rates of subsidence.

In Iran, the population has more than doubled in the past 50 years, while groundwater pumping has remained unregulated. The country's cities are now among the fastest-sinking urban centres in the world, falling by up to 25cm each year.

While subsidence was a common issue throughout the 20th century, previously it was analysed only in a local context.

The new project, developed by an international team of scientists, sought to consolidate existing research. The scientists produced a universally applicable model to predict which areas were most at risk of subsidence.

The results showed that subsidence was a global issue, linked to global heating as well unsustainable farming practices. "The largest aquifers in the world are being depleted for agricultural purposes," said Herrera-García.

According to Herrera-García, groundwater in the US, Mexico, China, and India, is being rapidly drained to meet global food demand. Continued subsidence in those areas will affect populations worldwide. Making global food production sustainable was possible, said Herrera-García, but the problem would have to be addressed soon.

Additionally, global warming is predicted to cause prolonged periods of drought, which will accelerate the rate of subsidence as more water is pumped from underground.

Meanwhile, sea levels are expected to rise by up to a metre in the next century. This means that more coastal cities will encounter the same problems as Jakarta, as more areas will become prone to flooding.

However, Herrera-García said that while subsidence was a big threat to global environment, it could be fixed far more easily than climate change. Technologies, such as satellites and radars, could quickly identify areas of subsidence, while “simple policies and tools” could be used by local authorities to efficiently combat the problem.

“In Tokyo they had a very big problem of subsidence in the first part of the last century. They implemented groundwater regulations and they solved the problem.”

Other solutions to subsidence include finding alternative water sources, practising efficient agriculture to use as little water as possible, and injecting water back into aquifers.

“These solutions are the same everywhere and can be applied to both large aquifers and smaller ones,” Herrera-García said. “I think we are on time. The solutions are there, and this is the time to implement them.”

[Human rights](#)

Calls for release of man arrested photographing transfer of Rohingyas

Bangladesh authorities under pressure from rights activists including Bianca Jagger over detention of Abul Karam



‘Photography is not a crime’: Abul Kalam, who has been detained at a police barracks.

‘Photography is not a crime’: Abul Kalam, who has been detained at a police barracks.

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[About this content](#)

[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.30 EST

Bangladesh authorities are facing calls to release a Rohingya man arrested while photographing the [transfer of refugees to a controversial island camp](#) this week.

Abul Kalam, 35, has been held since Monday morning when he was reportedly beaten before being taken to police barracks near the Kutupalong refugee camp, where he has lived since leaving [Myanmar](#) as a child refugee in the early 1990s.

“Photography is not a crime. Abul Kalam was taking photos of buses on their way to Bhasan Char ... it is by no means a secret and has been extensively covered in the media,” said a letter calling for his release.

Refugee Camp in Bangladesh [pic.twitter.com/FYUbWtb3yL](#)

— Abul kalam Street photography (@kalamabul408) [December 10, 2020](#)

The letter was signed by Bangladeshi and international rights activists and journalists, including Bianca Jagger, renowned [Bangladesh photographer](#)

[Shahidul Alam](#), who was detained for months after covering protests in 2018, [prominent lawyer Sara Hossain](#) and Prof Penny Green, founder of the International State Crime Initiative at Queen Mary University of London.

[Bangladesh moves more Rohingyas to remote island despite rights concerns](#)
[Read more](#)

Bangladesh moved up to 1,000 people on Monday in its second batch of relocations from the [Cox's Bazar](#)-based settlements, which make up the world's largest refugee camp, to the isolated island in the Bay of Bengal.

The relocations have been criticised because [Bangladesh](#) has not permitted an independent assessment of the island's safety, despite concerns about its vulnerability to natural disasters.

Two other [Rohingya](#) refugees said they had avoided taking pictures of the relocation because of threats and concerns for their safety.

The UN's refugee chief, Filippo Grandi, also [raised concerns](#) in December about whether the refugees were being relocated voluntarily, as Bangladesh claimed, after accusations of coercion.



One of Abul Kalam's award-winning images. Photograph: Courtesy Rohingya Photography Competition

A UNHCR spokesperson said: “UNHCR has been engaged with the authorities since the arrest of Abul Kalam on 28 December and is following the situation closely to ensure he receives a fair hearing of any charge against him. UNHCR has assigned one of its partner lawyers to represent him during the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings.”

Earlier this month Abul Kalam won two awards for his work in the [Rohingya Photography Competition](#).

Antarctica

'A real bad precedent': Australia criticised for Antarctica airport plan

Multibillion-dollar project is unnecessary and damaging to wildlife, say scientists



Adelie penguin near Davis research station, on the Vestfold Hills, where the new airport and runway are planned. Photograph: Tui De Roy/NPL/Alamy

Australia is planning to build Antarctica's biggest infrastructure project: a new airport and runway that would increase the human footprint in the world's greatest wilderness by an estimated 40%.

The mega-scheme is likely to involve blasting petrel rookeries, disturbing penguin colonies and encasing a stretch of the wilderness in more than 115,000 tonnes of concrete.

The government in Canberra says the project on the Vestfold Hills of Princess Elizabeth Land is necessary to provide year-round access for scientists and emergency teams to Davis research station, Australia's most

southerly base in Antarctica. Strategic concerns are also a consideration; Australia is keen to counter China's growing presence on the frozen southern continent.

Environmental scientists say the multi-billion-dollar plan is a waste of money, and could lead to a destructive construction race among territorial rivals.

"It's unprecedented in the Antarctic in terms of the scale of investment and the impact on the environment. Although it is being done in the name of science, very few scientists are enthusiastic. This is more about flag-waving. It is about firming up Australia's presence and our claim," said Shaun Brooks, an environmental scientist at the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies of the University at Tasmania.

He estimates the project would add 40% to the existing infrastructure on the continent, which would be damaging and unnecessary.

"I can't help thinking this will become a white elephant. How can you justify a multi-billion-dollar runway for a base with only 19 people during the winter and which has been maintained without problems since 1957?" Brooks said.

Australia's proposed new airstrip would be 2.7km long and 40 metres wide, and – unlike existing ice and gravel runways in [Antarctica](#) – it would be a permanent structure built on top of the landscape with cement and 11,500 concrete blocks, each weighing more than 10 tonnes.

Pollution, dust, noise and carbon emissions are further problems. Shipping the materials from Hobart is expected to take more than a decade and about 100 icebreaker voyages. The government says the land would be flattened by blasting, crushing and filling with a total 3m cubic metres of earthworks. The project will require the construction of a storage area for explosives, land reclamation from the sea for a new wharf, new tanks for aviation fuel and a 4km access road.

As well as the destruction of wildlife habitat during construction, the operation of the completed airport would bring regular disruption to

breeding colonies of southern giant petrels, seals and Adélie penguins.

Multiple studies and case histories have shown the negative impact of aircraft on Antarctic wildlife. In the 1980s, a single mail drop by a low-flying plane [led to a stampede at a king penguin colony](#) that caused 7,000 deaths. The Vestfold Hills are home to colonies of nesting Adélie penguins, who must keep stationary on their eggs for long periods if chicks are to hatch successfully. If mothers are panicked by aircraft, eggs can be left exposed to freezing winds and predators.

Among those who have spoken out against the project is Geoff Dimmock, a retired logistics manager. As a former organiser of mail drops and supply missions in the region, he said there was no way for the project to avoid noise disruption and contamination. “I don’t want the hills flattened,” he said. “Environmentally, I think this is a real bad precedent to set. And it’s poor value for money.”

Politicians have asked whether the government will break its own guidelines, which say aircraft should not fly within 2.1km of a penguin colony and that no runway should be within 500 metres of breeding seals.

[Graphic](#)

The Green party senator of Tasmania, Peter Whish-Wilson went further during a parliamentary session in October. How, he asked, could a project with the largest human footprint in Antarctic history align with the stated goal of Australia to promote “leadership and environmental stewardship” in the region?

The Australian Antarctic Division said the environmental evaluation would be scrutinised domestically, submitted to other Antarctic Treaty nations and released for public consultation in Australia and internationally.

“The construction of the aerodrome will have some unavoidable impacts and we are committed to understanding the environmental impacts and implementing mitigation measures to the highest standards possible, and in line with the legislated requirements,” a representative wrote in an email statement to the Guardian.

Plans for a permanent airport at Davis were first floated decades ago, but past governments have balked at the cost. In recent years, the idea has been revived and it is now being pushed forward by the head of the Australian Antarctic Division, [Kim Ellis](#), who is a former military officer and chief executive of Sydney Airport.

The Australian Antarctic Division says a major upgrade is overdue. Flights to Antarctica currently land on a blue-ice runway at Wilkins Aerodrome during the southern summer from October to March. This is increasingly inoperable due to global heating. High temperatures destabilise the runway surface. Closures for this reason used to last for six weeks. Last summer, this increased to 10 weeks.

Plans for a paved runway are now undergoing environmental assessment. Budget discussions are expected in 2022. If approvals are granted, construction would begin in 2023 and run until 2040 at the earliest.

Conservationists say the evaluation process is flawed because it will be signed off by the environment minister Sussan Ley, who is a vocal advocate for the planned runway. She [has described it as](#) part of “a new era of Australian Antarctic endeavour”. The government is also conscious that China and Russia are upgrading their bases in the region.

Activists say there are viable alternatives, such as aircraft that use skis instead of wheels for take-off and landing. The US military demonstrated that was possible even in the dark depths of winter by flying into one of its bases with night vision to evacuate an injured explorer in 2008.

Brooks said Australia’s airport plan would set the wrong precedent.

“The scale of this is so out of step with our requirements. I think putting up this big flag will encourage others to do something similar,” he said. “It doesn’t align with Australia’s claim to be an environmental leader. Antarctica is special. Everywhere else in the world, you measure wilderness by what’s left. In Antarctica, it’s still the other way round.”

[Hong Kong](#)

Hong Kong activist Jimmy Lai returned to jail until at least February

Court grants prosecutors' request to appeal against bail order on media mogul



Jimmy Lai is escorted to a prison van on Thursday. Photograph: AP
Jimmy Lai is escorted to a prison van on Thursday. Photograph: AP

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 05.12 EST

The [Hong Kong](#) media mogul and pro-democracy activist Jimmy Lai has been returned to jail after the city's highest court ruled in favour of prosecutors' request for leave to appeal against his already highly restrictive bail order.

The decision will keep the 76-year-old in jail until at least February, even though he has not been accused of a violent crime and is not considered a flight risk.

Lai was [initially jailed on 3 December](#), and was released to house arrest by the high court 20 days later [on HK\\$10m bail](#) (£960,000). He was ordered not to speak publicly or use social media.

Hong Kong's justice department sought leave to appeal against the decision at the time but was refused by the high court and so took its case directly to the court of final appeal (CFA), local media reported.

On Thursday a panel of three CFA judges including the outgoing chief justice, Geoffrey Ma, sided with the prosecutors and remanded Lai until the next scheduled court hearing on 1 February, when they could hear the appeal.

According to local media, the ruling centred on interpretations of article 42 in the national security law, which removes the presumption of bail for defendants. The article states: "No bail shall be granted to a criminal suspect or defendant unless the judge has sufficient grounds for believing that the criminal suspect or defendant will not continue to commit acts endangering national security."

The CFA made no ruling on the law, only that it would hear the justice department's case and return Lai to the status quo, jailed on remand, in the meantime.

Lai is facing trial for [alleged foreign collusion](#) under the [national security law](#), as well as fraud and protest-related charges. The national security charges centre on comments he made in interviews to foreign media and on Twitter in opposition to the Hong Kong and Chinese governments' crackdown on the pro-democracy movement.

The fraud charges – also laid against two Next Digital Media executives – were based on accusations that the trio breached land-lease terms by misusing Next Digital's office space in Tseung Kwan O for other purposes.

After 20 days on remand the high court found Lai's defence had merits and it did not consider him to be a flight risk under the extra restrictions. The judge, Alex Lee, also said the comments for which Lai was being charged

with foreign collusion appeared to him to simply be comments and criticisms.

Lee's ruling angered prosecutors and Chinese state media, which labelled it "inconceivable" and suggested the central government take over the jurisdiction of the case and have Lai transferred to the mainland.

"Lai is notorious and extremely dangerous, yet he became the first suspect to be granted bail after being arrested for violating the national security law, which is inconceivable," said an editorial in the People's Daily, a state mouthpiece. "After the implementation of the national security law in Hong Kong, if people like Lai who stir up trouble in Hong Kong can be bailed out, who else wouldn't be?"

Police have arrested more than 30 people under the national security law introduced in late June, mostly for nonviolent political crimes. Four people have been charged. Of these, Lai was the only one to have been granted bail.

2021.01.01 - Culture

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Best new artists for 2021 Music

Interview

For Those I Love: Ireland's potent new poet of grief

[Aniefiok Ekpoudom](#)



David Balfe, AKA For Those I Love. Photograph: Faolán Carey

David Balfe, AKA For Those I Love. Photograph: Faolán Carey

Recalling the delivery of the Streets and the music of James Blake, David Balfe's project is a cathartic document in the wake his best friend's death

- [Irish drill, jazz violin and supermarket musicals: 30 new artists for 2021](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

When the Irish recession of 2008 shattered the country's economy, communities from Dublin's inner city neighbourhoods of Coolock and Donaghmede were struck hard. The frank lyrics of David Balfe, under the

pseudonym For Those I Love, illuminate a generation who emerged from the wreckage.

“I’ve been with people whose families had lost their livelihoods because of the recession,” says the 29-year-old. “At that younger age you don’t have the vocabulary, but you see that displacement, and you think: ‘Why are we suffering? Why has this happened to us?’”

His superb self-titled debut album, out later this year, rumbles into this core of working-class Dublin. The near-biographical account carries his deepest sorrows and depressions, as well as the accompanying memories of a childhood now laced with nostalgia’s golden glow. Across nine songs Balfe lays his life bare, penning Streets-esque passages over electronic productions that recall James Blake or Mount Kimbie. “Red eyes and red credit, searching for a way to get out of the estate on Reddit,” runs a typical lyric.

With these narratives, Balfe moves through the community he has built his life around while also mourning his best friend and fellow artist, Paul Curran, who died in 2018. “I didn’t have counselling at the time, I didn’t have medication, I didn’t have any other way,” he says. “I didn’t know any other way than to make things.”

Before For Those I Love, music began in his teenage years with a shed in his parents back garden, a place of refuge from what at times in Donamaghde and Coolock was a “very violent upbringing”. When he was six, a body was dumped at the end of his road and he still remembers the blood stain on the street. But alongside his friends, he found escapism in the shed, a place where they “all just cut our teeth,” deeply grateful for the “trust to be able to close the door, have privacy and make a racket”.

The shed was also an emblem of a family who held him close, who “didn’t have fuck all”, but whose investment in his interests and future “did help steer me away from certain avenues and down much more positive avenues. If I hadn’t been able to fall back on that love and care, I don’t know what I would have done, it would have been a very different trajectory of my life.” Eventually, bands emerged. Plagues and the Branch Becomes turned out metalcore. Burnt Out, with Paul, was angst-ridden punk.

When Curran killed himself, a deep grief settled over Balfe and seeped into his solo work. *The Myth / I Don't* confronts grief's lasting echo: the PTSD panic that consumes him whenever his phone pings, "terrified of what's on the other end", the possibility of more tragedy.

The bond that held the two friends is now woven through the record: WhatsApp messages and voice notes knit the nine songs together, digital residue from years of documenting their days, "just recording everything, archiving everything".

"I have a bad memory," Balfe says, "and one of my biggest fears is forgetting: people, moments, things that shaped the person that I am." Being able to build these pieces into the record was a way "for me to immortalise those moments," he says, because "there's no way you can make a record about the people that I love without having their imprint all over it. They're more than just those stories, it's their voices, it's the way they speak."

Making the album after Curran died was "tough" and "ate me up alive", but it was necessary. When it was finished, Balfe listened to it every morning as he rode the bus, and an "otherworldly comfort" would settle over him. "Maybe it was a way for me to experience that catharsis without having to break down, without me having to fall into whatever black hole could come if I let that door open."

For the past six months, Balfe has been caged in Dublin's strict lockdown. But with the live music industry slowly revving its cold motor, he has unearthed the album to rehearse for live performances. That process of "propelling air out of your lungs for the first time in months" has given him grace, he says. "I felt light for the first time in a while. It's going back to how it feels to be human."

- For Those I Love's self-titled debut album will be released later this year

Books that made me[William Gibson](#)

William Gibson: ‘I read Naked Lunch when it was still quasi-illicit’

The sci-fi author on Cormac McCarthy, and the influence of William S Burroughs and Kurt Vonnegut



William Gibson at Kitsilano Beach, Vancouver. Photograph: Christopher Morris/Corbis via Getty Images

William Gibson at Kitsilano Beach, Vancouver. Photograph: Christopher Morris/Corbis via Getty Images

William Gibson

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

The book I am currently reading

[Hari Kunzru’s *Red Pill*](#). Topical (to say the very least)!

The book that changed my life

So many have! I don’t think of this in terms of landmark game-changers, but of as a matter of cumulative effect. One very early example would be [Kurt Vonnegut](#)’s *Mother Night*. It was my introduction to the idea that the sort of

book I was looking for didn't necessarily have to be labeled as science fiction. Another would be *Level 7*, by Mordecai Roshwald, which would also have been my first experience of anti-war satire.

The book that had the greatest influence on my writing

One of them, certainly, though I'm still not quite sure how, was [Naked Lunch, by William S Burroughs](#), which I read in secondhand hardcover when it was still quasi-illicit.

The book I think is most underrated

Jack Womack's [Random Acts of Senseless Violence](#). A near future that chillingly predicted the foulest possible outcome of our past four years in the US.

The book that changed my mind

[Cormac McCarthy](#)'s *Suttree*, which admitted me, long into adulthood, to the adult culture and time of my childhood in the American south. Until discovering *Suttree*, I'd not found the voice that could do that for me, Faulkner having always felt instinctively too much like a part of the problem he was describing (if indeed he thought it a problem).

The last book that made me laugh

M John Harrison's [The Sunken Land Begins to Rise Again](#). Though I suppose not every reader would. Not to say that I'd consider it comedy. When it's funny, though, it's much funnier than that.

The book I'm ashamed not to have read

Moby-Dick, perhaps? Actually, I'm more embarrassed by starting to feel as though I *have* read it, but that only through following an account on Twitter that daily posts some brief and evocative snippet of it. Might this not be the way our descendants, such as they may be, experience literature?

The book I give as a gift

Kellow Chesney's *The Victorian Underworld*, that most steampunk of all works of British history (and if you know of better, let me know). With its own intensely hierarchic organisation, the Victorian criminal underworld dizzyingly mirrored proper Victorian society in wonderfully revelatory ways. Entirely serious, but hypnotically entertaining.

My earliest reading memory

Pogo comic strips by Walt Kelly. My mother had to teach me to read, as I wasn't doing well at it in school.

My comfort read

“No More Yoga of the Night Club”, by [Iain Sinclair](#), in his collection *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*. I associate it with being jet lagged in London, though somehow in a wonderfully comforting way.

- *Agency* by [William Gibson](#) will be published by Penguin later this month.

10 of the best ... Film

From Pretty Woman to Mrs Doubtfire: 10 of the best movie makeovers

Film transformations aren't all about eyebrow-plucking and wearing a nice dress – they're also about flying and prosthetics



Clone zone ... Madonna and Rosanna Arquette in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Photograph: Allstar

Clone zone ... Madonna and Rosanna Arquette in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Photograph: Allstar

Fiona Sturges

Fri 1 Jan 2021 04.00 EST

Desperately Seeking Susan

Out with the old, in with the new: suburban housewife puts on groovy jacket and learns that life isn't all picket fences and ironing. In Susan Seidelman's 1985 comedy, bored Roberta (Rosanna Arquette) lives vicariously through enigmatic drifter Susan (Madonna), whose messages she reads in the

personal ads. Her obsession leads to an appropriation of Susan's lacy, trashy aesthetic – and liberation.

Amazon Prime Video (£)

Easy A

When Emma Stone's squeaky-clean Olive Penderghast tells a fib about losing her virginity in Will Gluck's 2010 high-school comedy, her reputation takes a nosedive. Instead of coming clean or hiding out at home, Olive boldly takes on the slut-shamers by strutting through the campus in a killer corset and shades.

Netflix

Titanic

Young Leonardo DiCaprio in a tux? Don't mind if we do. If there is one thing better than Jack Dawson as a grubby, below-deck ragamuffin, it's the spruced-up version in black tie nervously waiting at the bottom of the grand staircase for raft-hogger extraordinaire Rose DeWitt Bukater (Kate Winslet) in James Cameron's 1997 movie.

Now TV



Suit you ... Superman. Photograph: Rex

Superman

The original Clark Kent, played by Christopher Reeve in Richard Donner's 1978 superhero film, looked cute in his wonky specs and crumpled suit, but it took a pair of red underpants and a dinky kiss curl for Lois Lane to see the man that he truly was. Admittedly, his ability to fly probably helped.

Now TV

Gigi

A Parisian playboy forms a friendship with a 15-year-old girl, only to realise he loves her, in this Vincente Minnelli musical from 1958. Nowadays, Louis Jourdan's Gaston would be looking at prison time but, as Gigi, Leslie Caron is delightful, illustrating her transition to adulthood with a luminous satin gown.

Available on DVD

Mrs Doubtfire

Chris Columbus's 1993 comedy stars Robin Williams as a divorced, out-of-work actor who loses custody of his kids and dresses up as an elderly Scottish housekeeper in order to hang out with them. Cue an avalanche of slapstick as his prosthetic face gets run over by a lorry and his bosom goes up in flames in the kitchen.

Disney+

Overboard

Makeover films like to empower their female characters by putting them in a pretty frock. Not 1987's Overboard, which transforms Goldie Hawn's pampered heiress into a dirt-poor housewife. If you overlook the small matter of Kurt Russell having kidnapped Hawn and installed her as his domestic slave, it's a lot of fun.

Digital platforms (£)



Gown planning ... Pretty Woman. Photograph:
Allstar/Touchstone/Sportsphoto

Pretty Woman

The “rich dude rescues downtrodden hooker” plot hasn’t aged well, and we all know Julia Roberts looked better in thigh-high leather boots than her later fusty lady-about-town outfits. Still, Roberts’s transformation in Garry Marshall’s classic 1990 romcom is a blast, never more so than when she visits sweet revenge on the snooty Rodeo Drive shop assistants who initially refuse to serve her.

Digital platforms (£)

Spider-Man

Portrait of a speccy adolescent baffled by his own body. In this case, it’s not just puberty wreaking havoc with Tobey Maguire’s Peter Parker but a bite from a genetically engineered spider, prompting him to go to bed as a teen dweeb and wake up fully ripped and with 20/20 vision, in Sam Raimi’s 2002 reboot.

Now TV

Grease

Olivia Newton-John had to be sewn into the high-waisted spandex trousers that signalled her passage from pastel-wearing prude to volcanic sex bomb. In doing so, she wins the heart of lead doofus, Danny Zukor (John Travolta), and provides the 1978 film musical with its biggest number, You're the One That I Want.

Now TV

Jazz

Eugene Wright, bassist with classic Dave Brubeck Quartet, dies aged 97

Last surviving member of group who cut Take Five and Blue Rondo à la Turk was described as an ‘honorary uncle to the Brubeck family’



Eugene Wright in 1960. Photograph: Bill Wagg/Redferns
Eugene Wright in 1960. Photograph: Bill Wagg/Redferns

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben_bt](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 04.43 EST

Jazz bassist Eugene Wright, who was the last surviving member of the [Dave Brubeck](#) Quartet’s classic lineup, has died aged 97.

The Brubeck estate announced the news [on Twitter](#), saying they were “deeply saddened” and added that he “remained a good friend and honorary uncle to the Brubeck family to the end”.

Wright, nicknamed The Senator in jazz circles, was born in [Chicago](#) in 1923, and first became proficient on cornet, leading the group Dukes of Swing as a young man. He then taught himself the double bass and became even more successful at the peak of the swing era, earning slots under bandleaders including Count Basie and Erroll Garner. He also played with Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker, and displayed his versatility as the swing era ended, playing bebop with the likes of Sonny Stitt and Latin jazz with Cal Tjader. Wright was known for nimble soloing as well as providing rhythmic backing.



Dave Brubeck Quartet, from left, Paul Desmond, Dave Brubeck, Joe Morello and Eugene Wright. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

His most celebrated work, though, came with the Dave Brubeck Quartet from 1958 until 1968, alongside the bandleader on piano, Paul Desmond on alto saxophone and Joe Morello on drums. Wright played on Take Five, one of the most instantly recognisable tunes in jazz, as well as another classic, Blue Rondo à la Turk, and recorded more than 30 albums with the group.

[Dave Brubeck](#) himself wrote that Wright “grounded the group”, allowing them “to play other tempos and do polyrhythmic things and he wouldn’t budge from this grounded beat”.

[The best of Dave Brubeck – in video clips](#)

[Read more](#)

Wright also performed in The Real Ambassadors, the Brubeck-penned jazz musical featuring vocals by Louis Armstrong and Carmen McRae. Set in the fictional African nation of Talgalla, it satirically explored the role of musicians as cultural ambassadors during the cold war, and the racism Black jazz musicians – including Wright – often endured in the US. When Wright joined the group, concert promoters balked at hosting a Black musician alongside the rest of the white Brubeck quartet, but [Brubeck would refuse to perform without him](#). The estate wrote on Twitter: “We remember the challenges Gene and the Quartet had to undergo in order to play at segregated universities on their US tours in the early 1960s.”

In his later life, Wright headed the jazz department at the University of Cincinnati and the International Society of Bassists.

Book of the dayFiction

A River Called Time by Courtta Newland review – a vivid alternate reality

This speculative dystopia may strain for effect but is carried through by sheer energy and verve



Alternative London ... the Thames becomes the River Azilé. Photograph: Howard Kingsnorth/Getty Images

Alternative London ... the Thames becomes the River Azilé. Photograph: Howard Kingsnorth/Getty Images

[Adam Roberts](#)

[@arrroberts](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.30 EST

It speaks to the hold TV still has over our culture that Courtta Newland, the author of seven novels and co-editor of *The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*, is best known today for the scripts he wrote for Steve McQueen's [BBC series Small Axe](#). Excellent scripts they are, too, and there

is something televisual in the way Newland pitches his new novel: lots of visual description, busy with incident and plotty twists and turns. Where *Small Axe* grounds its stories in the lived experience of real people from the 1960s and 70s, *A River Called Time* reaches forward into a near-future alternate reality. If there are aspects of this worldbuilding that don't entirely work, then maybe that reflects the broader influence on fiction of TV. Newland is certainly not the only contemporary writer trying to reproduce the immediacy and kinetic hustle of visual drama; but TV and novels tell stories in quite different ways, and sometimes that difference jars.

A River Called Time is set in Dinium, a version of London where most live among squalor, disease and violence, although a wealthy few occupy “the Ark”, an elite enclosure in the centre of the city. Our protagonist, Markriss Denny, grows up poor in the suburbs but has special powers: he can astrally project himself. He wins a place inside the Ark, but once there he finds his troubles are only just beginning. It turns out that his oldest friend, Ayizan, is actually his astral rival, and must be destroyed if the world is to be saved.

Newland gives his dystopia an extra spin by making it an alternate history. In this world European interactions with Africa, stretching back to Ancient Egypt, were treated as opportunities to learn and mingle, not to exploit and enslave. As a result, magical African abilities (squashed in our timeline, the implication is, by the horrors of colonialism) have flourished, becoming a kind of world religion. Not that the global garden is rosy. A mega-corporation called E-Lul dominates, using *Matrix*-like pods to sedate the populace via “crystal energy” that fills people’s nights with “dreams of tranquil places”. As for Dinium, it was wrecked by a mysterious “War of Light” in 1814-18 and has never really recovered.

Alt-history is a venerable science-fictional mode, but usually the moment where the story’s timeline diverges from “real” history is relatively recent: the South wins the US civil war, Hitler prevails, that kind of thing. The problem with setting that hinge point thousands of years into pre-history is that the subsequent divergence must perforce be so huge as to lead to an utterly different, unrecognisable “now”. But while Newland’s dystopian London is vividly rendered, it’s always recognisably our London, only a little scuffed and distressed from its glorious-grubby actuality. In this novel

the Thames is called the River Azilé, but Charlton FC are still called Charlton FC.

But perhaps this is to nitpick. The story is readable and absorbing. There's a fair amount of astral gubbins ("this is uraeus, a weapon that uses your sixth and seventh naardim to harness psychic force"; "anger lit his fifth major chakra", and so on), which some readers will find more congenial than others, but which Newland carries off with likable chutzpah. His dialogue is good, as you might expect, but the descriptive prose is sometimes over-fruity. The desire to avoid cliche is commendable, but sometimes effortful stylistic ingenuity backfires. Turned away from a doorway by a butler, we're told that "an out-of-depth feeling lapped at Markriss's chin". His *chin*?

A stranger rushes Markriss with a knife, "blade phallus-ready". "Eyes hidden, cast at their feet" suggests eyeballs, not glances, hitting the ground. "Nesta's tears obeying gravity's rules, not those of teenage boys, falling to the concrete regardless of his wish" is an over-fancy way of saying "he wished she wasn't crying". "The woman's legs stretched gantry high" isn't as sexy as it thinks it is. Such moments are symptomatic of a writer straining for effect – aiming, perhaps, for a televisual vividness rather than resting content in more literary restraint. Vivid writing is better than bland writing, no question. But good writing is best of all.

Where the novel really comes into its own is the final quarter, when various diverging timelines are gathered into a multiverse bouquet. It almost makes up for the disbelief I couldn't quite suspend in the earlier stages. Conceivably these latter sections work best because here Newland is back in the "real" world, and that's where he is best fitted as a writer. But if *A River Called Time* left me with some reservations, no one can doubt the sheer energy and verve of Newland's vision.

- Adam Roberts's *Purgatory Mount* will be published by Gollancz in February. *A River Called Time* by Courtta Newland is published by Canongate (RRP £16.99). To order a copy go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

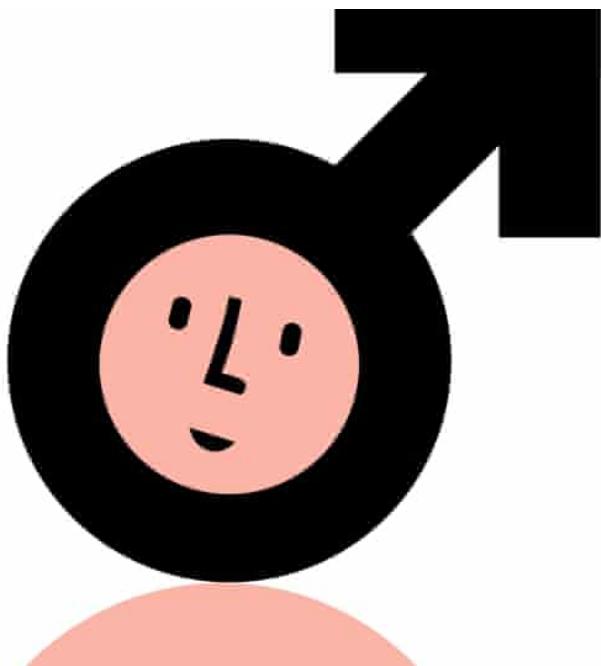
2021.01.01 - Lifestyle

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My life in sex

My life in sex: the man who wears a chastity device

‘Rather than feeling sexually repressed, it’s given me a kind of freedom’



‘The inability to get an erection gave me room to focus on other things.’

Illustration: Lo Cole

‘The inability to get an erection gave me room to focus on other things.’

Illustration: Lo Cole

Anonymous

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

I started wearing a male chastity device out of curiosity, after reading about other people’s experiences online. I was single, lived on my own and worked from home, so thought: why not place an order by post?

Although they come in a multitude of sizes, colours and materials, all are designed to prevent the wearer from getting an erection. They generally consist of three pieces: a ring that sits behind the testicles; a cage that fits

tightly around the flaccid penis; and a lock to hold the two other components together.

[My life in sex: the insatiable husband](#)

[Read more](#)

I began wearing the device all day, and found that the inability to get an erection gave me room to focus on other things. Rather than feeling sexually repressed, I felt a kind of freedom. I could concentrate more on work and I felt more in touch with the world in general.

I have since met a loving partner who, to my delight, enjoys the idea of “locking her man up”. Wearing it during sex has made me a more attentive lover.

So far we have a fairly amateur approach; I’m in chastity for a few hours at most, whereas some people remain locked away for weeks or even months. But we recently purchased a more lightweight device that I can wear to go out, without the telltale bulge. This has added an extra layer of excitement to our relationship.

- Each week, a reader tells us about their sex life. Want to share yours? Email sex@theguardian.com. All submissions are published anonymously, and subject to [our terms and conditions](#).

Experience: I found the man who shot me, 46 years later

I pulled up a mugshot. He was older, but there was no doubt – I could spot him a mile away



Daril Cinquanta: 'I'd never been shot before. My legs gave way. Everything went silent. I didn't know if I was going to live or die.' Photograph: Matt Nager/The Guardian

Daril Cinquanta: 'I'd never been shot before. My legs gave way. Everything went silent. I didn't know if I was going to live or die.' Photograph: Matt Nager/The Guardian

Daril Cinquanta

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

I'd just got myself a chocolate milk and was on my way to pick up a Sunday paper when I saw a Chevy with a male and two females in it. It was October 1971, and I was 21. I was a couple of years into my policing career, working the morning shift in Denver, Colorado, out in a car on my own.

The male was wearing a khaki cap and looked like a rough dude. I went to where he was sitting on the passenger side and he gave me his wallet, which had a social security card.

We went to the back of the car. I told him to put his hands on the trunk, but he sidestepped me and pulled a gun from his waistband. After a quick tussle, he shot me in my lower chest.

I'd never been shot before. My legs gave way. Everything went silent. I didn't know if I was going to live or die. In those days, our radios weren't portable, so I had to crawl 20ft to my car to call for help. I was worried the bullet had gone through my spine. An ambulance came and rushed me to hospital, saving my life.

We searched for him but he had disappeared. The name on the social security card turned out to be fake. His real name was Lawrence Pusateri. A couple of years later, he was caught in Mexico and brought back to Denver where he was sentenced for nine and a half to 14 years for shooting me. I wasn't angry at him, just glad we'd got him.

But in 1974, he escaped from prison. He'd been taken to hospital with another inmate, where they went to the bathroom and found guns, an accomplice and a car waiting. They took the guards hostage and got away. It wasn't his first prison escape either. When he shot me, he'd been on the run, having escaped another prison while serving a sentence for burglary and drug possession. That time, he'd put pillows in his bed to make it look as if he was sleeping and somehow broke out. It was like something out of a Hollywood movie.

I started looking for him immediately. I met his family and the girls from the car. I talked to informants in prison. I contacted anyone who could possibly know him. But I hit brick wall after brick wall. People would hang up or tell me I was an asshole. I never got anything out of them. But I kept trying.

In the meantime, Pusateri twice appeared on America's Most Wanted (the US show based on the BBC's Crimewatch). I got married and had kids, but continued chipping away at the case. I had one tipoff in the 1980s but nothing came of it. It became like a hobby for me. I carried on even after I

retired from the police force. My aim was to keep people who knew him talking, and maybe one day it would spark something. For me, it's always been about the chase.

On 24 June this year, my birthday, I was sitting at the kitchen table when I got a call. A man said, “I’ve been thinking about it and I’m going to tell you where the guy is that shot you.” He gave me the name Ramon Montoya, which he said he was using as an alias, an address in Española, New Mexico, and the name of his wife. Then he hung up.

[Experience: my house was demolished by mistake](#)

[Read more](#)

I was sceptical but I plugged the name into my databases. I found Ramon Montoya at that address, with that woman. “Holy shit,” I said to myself, “this could be him.” I put together the information and called the Española police; a lieutenant said he’d get on it.

They had trouble getting a warrant but a week later, I discovered that in 2011 Montoya had been arrested for drink-driving. I pulled up a mugshot – the first I had found. It was the guy who had shot me; it was Pusateri. He was older, but there was no doubt in my mind – I could spot him a mile away. I couldn’t get to the phone quick enough. I said to the lieutenant, “It’s him! I’ve got his picture and I’m sending it to you.”

On 5 August, I got a call to say that Pusateri had been arrested. He’s 77 now, and serving his original sentence for shooting me. I’m going to try to see him. I want to congratulate him on staying hidden for 46 years. He did an incredible job of it and has been a formidable foe.

- As told to Candice Pires.

Do you have an experience to share? Email experience@theguardian.com.

Waking up to a blanket of snow is a thrill I wish every child could experience

I read that snowy winters may soon be a thing of the past, so I'm putting out an SOS call: Save Our Snowball Fights



‘In the UK, snow’s novelty factor brings people together.’ Photograph: Getty Images

‘In the UK, snow’s novelty factor brings people together.’ Photograph: Getty Images



Hannah Jane Parkinson

@ladyhaja

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

I read an article yesterday which warned that, due to global heating, snowy winters in the UK may soon be a thing of the past (rather brilliantly, the article opened with: “[Snowball fights and sledging could be at risk ...”](#))

My niece is two, and yet to experience snow. Around this time of year, I often find myself considering all the people who haven’t. It’s a little like being envious of a friend who has never watched one of your favourite television shows, or read one of your favourite books, knowing they have all the goodness to come. Imagine if we could capture the feeling of our first snowfall?

I remember, as a child, rising early – as children are annoyingly wont to do – looking out of my grandparents’ windows and seeing crisp, untouched morning snow. (Think: perfect head on a beer or [an inviting bubble bath](#).) It is difficult to bring yourself to ruin a pristine blanket of snow, but the lure of the satisfying sink and crunch of wellies will always win out. There is the beauty, too, of the sun bouncing off the surface making blue sky pop and parked silver cars glisten. Warm breath forms speech bubbles of conversation during walks.

[I have never met a pharmacist I didn't like. I don't know what I'd do without them](#) | Hannah Jane Parkinson

[Read more](#)

The thing about snow is it slows things down; life feels less stressful. Things seem quieter. In the UK, its novelty factor brings people together. Just as heatwaves do; or nights of rolling thunder and crackling lightning. None of this is really surprising for an island so obsessed with weather.

All around, there are families and friends clambering up hills with sledges under their arms; dogs trotting along in their Barbour jackets, leaving adorable paw-prints; mitten-less toddlers bending down to feel the cold. Always, there will be snowmen. Snowwomen. Snoweverything. Often there are hats. Carrots. Sometimes nicer scarves than the one I am wearing.

Some will say the downside of snow is that it turns into sludge. But I don't mind sludge: the timid sliding of feet along streets, arms outstretched like aeroplane wings for balance; hugging walls as though one were at an ice-skating rink, or in a video game trying not to get shot.

Sludge is fine; it's just that it's a consequence of the demise of snow, which mostly comes too soon for my liking. I do recall a couple of winters when it took the piss; great flakes continuing to fall in February, way past kicking out time. But there's a sinking feeling to drawing back curtains and finding it's all over. So I'm putting out an SOS call: Save Our Snowball Fights. Save Our Sledging.

[Fantasy house hunt](#)

Grand houses and castles for sale – in pictures

Grand Glandyfi Castle, looking out towards Snowdonia, was once owned by a flamboyant businessman accused of refurbishing it at his company's expense. Photograph: Chris Curl/Strutt & Parker

Heroes of 2020 Surfing

‘I’m fascinated by power, force and bravery’: the woman who surfed the biggest recorded wave of 2020



Maya Gabeira in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016. Photograph: Marcelo Maragni/Red Bull

Maya Gabeira in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016. Photograph: Marcelo Maragni/Red Bull

Seven years ago, she was nearly killed in pursuit of the sport she loves, but she defied experts’ predictions and made a stunning comeback

[Paula Coccozza](#)

[@CoccozzaPaula](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 07.00 EST

In the photographs of her record-breaking ride, the Brazilian surfer Maya Gabeira is a tiny blade on the water, cutting a line of white spume down the deep ridge of the vast grey wave that climbs behind her. The wave in

question measured 22.4 metres (73.5ft), the highest ever surfed by a woman, the first to be measured and verified by Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and a couple of feet greater than the one surfed by her nearest rival. It is also the biggest wave measured this year, surfed by man or woman.

Gabeira, who broke her own previous Guinness world record of 68ft, attributes her achievement to what she calls “taking a critical line”. In short, she takes her board to the fiercest and tallest part of the wave, “where the most powerful energy is, where it is actually breaking”. This, she says, is how “you put value into your wave”.

The peaks surfed by Gabeira are classed as size XXL by the World Surf League (there is no XXXL). Hawaii and California once drew the big-wave community, but Gabeira believes that the small Portuguese fishing village of Nazaré, where she lives and works, is home to “the most incredible big waves in the world ... The speeds are incredible. You are going so fast and the wave is building behind you; it’s a lot of water moving, an incredible feeling, and you’re very, very present, which has always been my favourite part of the sport. To feel connection with a very powerful force.”

Watch Gabeira set the new world record this year.

Gabeira’s enthusiasm is the more intense given that she nearly died in the same spot in 2013, when she was upended by a wave faster and taller than any she had previously attempted. It broke her ankle on the third or fourth bump, hurled her from her board, and unloaded an estimated 144 tonnes of water on her. Everything went black; everything went white. For more than four minutes, she lay unconscious.

“I was shaken to my core,” she says. “When you experience the whole process of what it means to probably die, it’s something that can’t go back in time.”

Three spine operations followed, and Gabeira was “told by many experts that I wasn’t going to be an athlete any more, my body was never going to recover. And I was in such pain.” Two years later, she moved to Nazaré, believing that the place where she had experienced such danger was also uniquely placed to grant her recovery.

“I knew that just being there would inspire me to keep working towards health. I was willing to keep trying because there is something that fulfils me by trying to prove myself on a daily basis, understanding how to navigate my limitations, and not allowing them to stop me.” After a further three years, she knew she had started to peak again as an athlete. This year’s record-breaking ride provided statistical confirmation: she became the first female big surfer in the record books, the first to break her own record.

“First, first, first in everything” is the story of Gabeira’s career. She was the first woman in big waves to become a full-time professional (current sponsors include TAG Heuer and an Australian sun-cream brand). In Rio, where she started surfing at 14, she was typically the only girl in the water with a surfboard. “It’s a path that demands a lot of interaction with men. You learn how to navigate a very masculine world.”

In practice, she says, this meant that she became “more reserved, toughened up”. She worked to establish herself “as a partner” in the water, always with an eye to getting out of it what she wanted, “which was to evolve as an athlete”.

At 17, she moved to Hawaii, and got a waitressing job. She had already realised that having started late, her talent was insufficient to enter the regular tour. She focused on big waves partly due to her “fascination with that energy, power, force and bravery”, and partly due to cold-eyed strategising.

“It was a field that was not even looked at by a woman yet,” she says. “I saw an opportunity.” (There were big-wave surfers previously, but not riding the scale of waves that Gabeira has ridden.) “You have to break those barriers and believe in things that you can’t yet see.” The world of big waves, Gabeira says, is “associated with masculine properties like courage. It’s an attribute that is easily given to a man, and very hard to give to a woman. For some reason we as a society struggle to acknowledge and reward women just for courage.”

Gabeira says she surfs with more fear than she used to, but also with better risk assessment. At 33, she has begun to think she might continue for another five years, “but don’t tell my mum”. So what comes after a 73.5ft

wave? “I can surf more aggressive lines,” she says. “I think I can catch a bigger wave.”

The measure[Fashion](#)

From throw-coats to slippers: this week's fashion trends

What's hot and what's not in fashion this week



It's a wrap ... a throw-coat at Balenciaga's Paris fashion week show.
Photograph: Victor VIRGILE/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images

It's a wrap ... a throw-coat at Balenciaga's Paris fashion week show.

Photograph: Victor VIRGILE/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.00 EST

Going up

Polinfluencers [Kamala Harris](#)'s stepdaughter, [knitwear designer Ella Emhoff](#), makes [stripy leggings to order](#).

Throw-coats Taking our cue from [Balenciaga](#), [Tekla](#) and [Toast](#), we're wearing throws as coats. Try buffalo check over a [Uniqlo](#) gilet.

Hip flasks Make every day like Boxing Day and go for a long walk. May we suggest a drink? Try a sturdy flask from [Mountain Warehouse](#).

Neck ruffles Zoom shoulders are for parties. For everything else, be inspired by the ruffles in [Lynette Yiadom-Boakye](#)'s portraits at Tate Britain.

Luke Millington-Drake TikTok comics were among 2020's few victors. Try Luke's spot-on Keira Knightley impressions.

Going down



The new litter. Photograph: Getty Images

That where's-my-mask moment Motley's clip-on chains, made from recycled necklaces, turn masks into jewellery. Why did no one think of this before?

Hot walls WFH idea for 24/7 screens to replicate being in an office. Welcome to the surveillance society!

Merch fatigue Proof that everything is merch-able, you can now buy a [GQ ring](#), a [Kate Moss T-shirt](#) and a [Nick Cave tea towel](#).



Slip into ballet shoes instead. Photograph: Getty Images

Slippers Not saying they're over, but we're predicting a ballet shoe comeback. See [Brigitte Bardot](#) in 1956's *And God Created Woman* for reference.

Fermenting 2021 will be about smoking. Fish, brisket, you name it: it's an outdoor activity and you heard it here first.

2021.01.01 - Take part

- [Readers' travel tips Tell us about your best virtual travel experience of 2020](#)

[Readers' travel tips](#)

[Travel](#)

Tell us about your best virtual travel experience of 2020 to win a £200 holiday prize

You probably haven't travelled far lately, but if you've had a fantastic virtual trip of some kind we want to hear about it. The best tip wins £200 towards a Sawday's stay

[Guardian community team](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.27 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.29 EST



An online virtual tour of the Pyramids of Giza, Egypt. Photograph: Google Street View

Developing itchy feet was one of the many downsides of 2020, though many people escaped via the internet in creative and fascinating ways. Maybe you discovered a fantastic genre of music on a foreign radio station, had one of

the world's leading art galleries all to yourself on a virtual tour, or got as close to a live cultural experience as it was possible to get during lockdown at an online gig, classical concert or theatre performance.

Whatever it was and wherever it took you, please tell us about your favourite virtual travel discovery of 2020.

Keep your tip to about 100 words

The best tip of the week, chosen by travel expert Tom Hall, will **win a £200 voucher for a stay at a Sawday's property** – the company has more than 3,000 in the UK and Europe. The best tips will appear on the Guardian Travel website, and maybe the paper too.

We're sorry, but for legal reasons **you must be a UK resident** to enter this competition.

The competition closes on Tuesday 12 January at 9am GMT

[Have a look at our past winners and other tips](#)

[Read the terms and conditions here](#)

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2021.01.01 - Explore

- 'She dreamed about giving the poor their own land' Orita Godoy, died aged 75, of Covid-19
- Pakistan #MeToo movement hangs in the balance over celebrity case
- Wuhan a year after Covid struck 'Everyone wants to reset 2020'
- Pollutionwatch Fine particles affect lungs of those near airports
- 'It took its toll' The terrible legacy of Martin Luther King's fight with the FBI
- From Laura Ashley to Debenhams The biggest retail collapses of 2020

[Lost to the virusCoronavirus](#)

‘She dreamed about giving the poor their own land’: Orita Godoy, died aged 75, of Covid-19

An activist who escaped Pinochet’s Chile, she was a committed and creative homemaker

- Read more stories from the [Lost to the virus series](#)



[Sirin Kale](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 05.00 EST

Orita Godoy was born poor in Chile and raised by her grandmother after her parents separated. “She only wore shoes when she went to church,” remembers her daughter, Alejandra Godoy, a 53-year-old NHS worker from [London](#).

She met Rolando, a paint sprayer, when she worked as a housekeeper for a family in Santiago. “They had a connection I never saw in anyone else,” says Alejandra. “They could never understand why people got divorced.” Orita would know what Rolando was going to say before he said it. They had two children: Alejandra and her younger brother, also called Rolando.

Orita and her husband were committed socialists and well known in activist circles. “They wanted a better life for everyone,” says Alejandra. “They dreamed about giving the poor their own land.” They were overjoyed when the socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile in 1970. “She never had a proper education, but she was so clever,” says Alejandra of her mother.



Orita with her husband, Rolando, in 1997.

But Allende was overthrown in a military coup in 1973 and replaced by the dictator Augusto Pinochet. When Allende was toppled, Pinochet’s forces began persecuting socialists. Rolando was arrested and held for three months at the national stadium, with thousands of other political prisoners. Orita was beside herself; she did not know where her husband was. “Every day, she’d go out, looking for Dad,” says Alejandra. “She’d check all the police stations and walk around for miles. Sometimes, she’d walk past bodies lying on the floor. She saw people who had been beheaded. It was a nightmare.”

When Rolando was released from detention and came home, he was emaciated. Alejandra's memories from the early years of the Pinochet regime are traumatic. "You'd hear shooting in the street all the time," she says. The family knew that they could not stay in Chile, so they applied for asylum in the UK and moved to Renton, in West Dunbartonshire, in 1976. They moved to London in 1983. Rolando worked odd jobs and Orita was a homemaker – in the truest sense of the word.

"My mother, she did not like anyone being in the kitchen," says Alejandra. "She wanted to be there on her own. If you went in there, you didn't have a chance. The kitchen was her domain. You could never contradict her." Orita was a superb cook; she could make a meal from next to nothing in minutes. Empanadas, cakes, soup, bread, pears in red wine. "She used to say that when you cook, you have to love what you're making," says Alejandra. "She always put all of her love into her food."



'I said that she was a brilliant mum, grandmother and friend' ... Orita on a visit to a lavender farm in Surrey.

Rolando died of cancer in 2018. Orita took it badly. "She could never talk about it," Alejandra says. "It was hard for her." Alejandra first realised that her mother was unwell on 9 April, when she started to run a temperature. Alejandra herself was unwell: she believes she contracted the virus at Great

Ormond Street hospital, where she works. Alejandra slept at the end of her mother's bed, holding her hand, making sure she had paracetamol and water. A doctor came to the family house to assess Orita and told her to stay at home, but her health deteriorated to the point where she was unable to get out of bed to use the toilet.

On 14 April, she was admitted to St Thomas' hospital. Stepping into the ambulance, Orita chastised her daughter for being emotional. "She said to me: 'Why are you crying? You need to be strong, for your children,'" remembers Alejandra. Orita was placed on a ventilator, but she went into organ failure and doctors called Alejandra in to say goodbye. "It felt unreal," says Alejandra of her last visit to her mother. "It was so strange – before I saw her, I was in denial. I thought: it will be someone else. They have someone else. It's all a mistake." But when she saw her mother, she instantly recognised her by her hair, and her hands, even though they were swollen from the dialysis.

"I told her I was sorry and that I wished I could have done more for her," says Alejandra. "I said that she was a brilliant mum, grandmother and friend. She taught me so much. I told her to go and be with Dad." Orita died on 10 May.

Since her death, Alejandra has become a member of the group [Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice](#), which is campaigning for a public inquiry into the government's handling of the pandemic. "When you see the government briefings, it's just numbers, numbers, numbers," she says. "But numbers had names. They had families. They have lives. How many more people are going to die? My life will never be the same again. You learn to accept grief. But my mother's death has just killed me completely."

[Global development](#)

Pakistan's #MeToo movement hangs in the balance over celebrity case

A popular actor was accused of harassment – now those who spoke against him are being charged under law meant to protect women

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)



[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) South Asia correspondent

Fri 1 Jan 2021 02.45 EST Last modified on Fri 1 Jan 2021 07.55 EST



Ali Zafar denies ‘any and all claims of harassment lodged against me’.
Photograph: Chirag Wakaskar/WireImage

It takes a lot to rattle Leena Ghani. As an artist turned activist helping to raise the voices of Pakistan's women, she has often fielded abuse, threats and harassment.

But when she learned, on a morning in late September, that police had charged her for criminal defamation, linked to Pakistan's most high-profile #MeToo case, Ghani says she was shaken. "In terms of silencing and demonising people speaking out against sexual assault, it was a new low even for [Pakistan](#)," she says.

Ghani was not alone. Eight others were also named in the case, facing three years in jail for criminal defamation. Some only learned of their involvement through a [newspaper article](#).

Lawyers say the case has exposed how cyber defamation laws passed under the guise of protecting women from online harassment are being used instead to silence Pakistan's victims of sexual assault.

On [16 December](#), the authorities said there was enough evidence to take Ghani and others to trial – and the future of Pakistan's #MeToo movement now hangs in the balance.



Meesha Shafi, whose 2018 tweet marked the beginning of Pakistan's #MeToo movement. Photograph: IFC Films/courtesy Everett C/REX

That movement began in April 2018 after Meesha Shafi, a singer and actor who starred in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, sent out a tweet alleging sexual harassment.

Shafi alleged that she had “been subjected, on more than one occasion, to sexual harassment of a physical nature” at the hands of one of Pakistan’s most beloved celebrities, Ali Zafar. Shafi wrote that by speaking out, she hoped to “break the culture of silence that permeates through our society”.

Zafar [denies](#) “any and all claims of harassment lodged against me by Ms Shafi”, and so far has successfully defeated the sexual harassment claims she brought against him in court.

The allegations reverberated through Pakistan’s deeply conservative Islamic society, where women speaking out against assault is rare and taboo. Because of Zafar’s popularity disbelief was rife, but dozens of women and men came out in support of Shafi on social media, including several who alleged assault by Zafar.

Among them was Ghani, who said her concerns about Zafar’s treatment of women emerged after they became friends in 2014. Writing on Twitter, Ghani accused Zafar of behaviour towards her that “displays a clear lack of respect for women”, including “inappropriate contact, groping, sexual comments”.

“You hide from him,” read Ghani’s post, “hoping his sleazy eyes and hands don’t find you again. His hands don’t make their way up and down your waist or hold you too tight while you desperately try to wriggle and run.”



Pakistani activist Leena Ghani says the charge against her is a ‘new low even for Pakistan’. Photograph: Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

Similar accusations followed. Blogger Humna Raza alleged that Zafar had groped her at an event, while Maham Javaid, a journalist, recounted on Twitter an alleged incident where Zafar had “tried to kiss my cousin and pull my cousin into a restroom with him. Luckily, my cousin’s friends were there to push him off.”

Zafar has accused Shafi of organising a social media campaign against him. According to newspaper reports, he said he could not believe that “anyone can come forward and accuse someone who is innocent and decent, has worked hard for over two decades – solely on social media”.

Zafar filed a civil defamation lawsuit against Shafi, seeking a billion rupees in damages. The court accepted the lawsuit and placed a gag order on Shafi, which still prevents her from discussing the allegations in public.

Over the next two and a half years, Zafar appeared on a dozen television shows to defend his name, sometimes breaking down into tears and occasionally accompanied by his wife. He alleged the accusations were a smear campaign, coordinated by a group of women who created fake accounts and were funded by foreign money. Last month, Pakistan’s

president awarded Zafar the Pride of Pakistan, one of the country's highest honours.

In July 2018, Shafi also began legal proceedings, attempting to take Zafar to court for sexual harassment in the workplace. Her case was dismissed on the technicality that freelancers were not covered by the law. An appeal to the Lahore high court was unsuccessful and although her lawyers have challenged the ruling in the supreme court, the case has still not been heard.



Meesha Shafi still awaits a supreme court ruling on her sexual harassment case. Photograph: Michael Loccisano/Getty Images

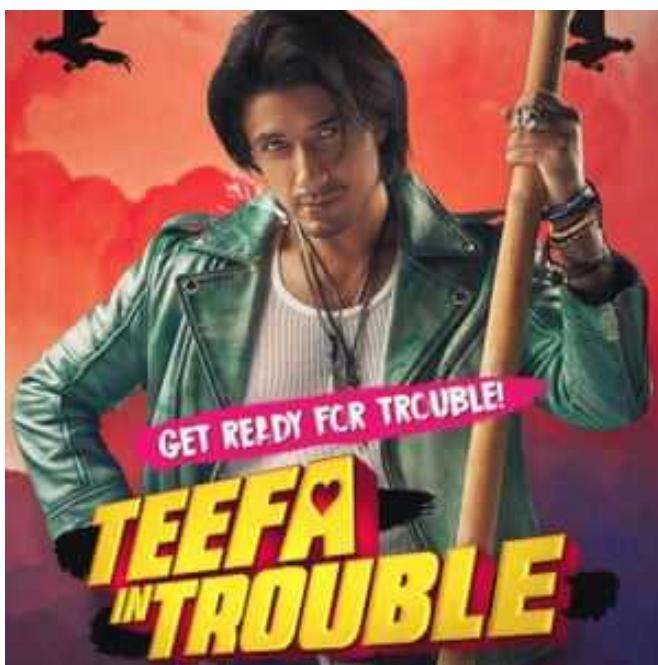
In November 2018 rumours began to swirl that Zafar had also filed criminal charges against Shafi and 25 of her online supporters and fellow accusers with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Pakistan's most powerful investigating body.

By July 2019, dozens of people, mainly women, who had written social media posts either making allegations about Zafar or expressing support for Shafi, began to receive notices to appear before the FIA for questioning.

Ghani, Javaid and Raza were among them, as well as Iffat Omar, an actor who knew Shafi and Zafar personally. When Zafar claimed on television that

the women taking Shafi's side were being paid by the west to spread propaganda, Omar wrote "stop lying harasser" on her social media.

Omar and Ghani were questioned by the FIA and both separately alleged they had been put under pressure by officers to retract their allegations against Zafar and apologise. Both refused. The senior FIA officer on the case was later suspended over a tweet which led to accusations he was being "Ali Zafar's personal spokesperson" on social media. The FIA declined to comment on the case.



Poster featuring Ali Zafar, one of Pakistan's most beloved celebrities
Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

At least three of the women also allege that Zafar applied "indirect harassment" through social networks. Omar says she received a "clear message from Ali Zafar that if I just apologise, everything will be better for me – and I have given him the direct answer that it is not happening."

Ghani alleges that "Zafar also tried to get to me through my family and would send cruel messages about my family's problems through third parties. A lot of dirty tactics. He was trying to put pressure on me to apologise and I'll admit it was scary."

But in late 2019, after she had filed a legal petition against Zafar and the FIA for harassment and Javaid had written to the senate human rights committee to complain, everything went quiet. Until September 2020, when news of the charges broke.

Nine people, five women including Shafi, Ghani, Omar, Javaid and Raza, and four men, had been booked for defamation by the FIA's cybercrime wing over the alleged social media "character assassination" of Zafar. The charges carried a three-year jail sentence.

There was confusion as to why only nine had been booked in the case, when the original list had 25 names. But then, says Javaid, the penny dropped: "We realised we were the only ones who had refused to apologise to Zafar."

One of the accused, journalist Haseem uz Zaman, is facing charges for tweets that claimed "Ali Zafar harasses women". They refuse to apologise. "That would not only harm my future and my journalistic credibility, but it would also harm every other survivor of sexual harassment who comes forward in the future," they say. "And I could not live with that."

After news of the criminal charges broke, Ghani and the others began to face a barrage of online rape and death threats and harassment, and say they were vilified in Pakistani media.

A week later, the blogger Raza created a new Twitter account and published a handwritten note retracting her allegations against Zafar and apologising for "the hurt" she had caused him and his family. Zafar shared the tweet. Raza's name has been dropped from the case.

For the women, most galling of all was the law they had been charged under. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act was passed in 2016 partly to protect women from online harassment, but the wing of the FIA tasked with prosecuting these cases is accused of being ineffective.

Nighat Dad, Shafi's lawyer, says she knows dozens of women who have complained to the FIA about online abuse, hate-speech, rape threats and vindictive sharing of intimate videos, but had received no response.

“It’s rare the cybercrime wing will register cases lodged by women activists, and even if they do, it usually takes years for anything to happen,” says Dad. “So I was never expecting that they would be so shameless as to take action against women survivors who are speaking up.”

This was not an isolated use of the law against women. When girls at the prestigious Lahore Grammar School recently alleged harassment by teachers and fellow students, several were threatened with criminal defamation, after which the accusations went quiet. At Lahore University of Management Sciences, a Facebook page for student testimonials of sexual assault was shut down with a letter threatening to report them to the FIA.

“We are seeing this happen over and over,” says Dad. “The cyber laws that were enacted in the name of protecting women in Pakistan now are being misused and weaponised to silence them.”



Activists call for change on International Women's Day in Lahore last March. Photograph: Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

As Shafi’s lawyer, Dad claims she herself has been subjected to a “vicious smear campaign”, with newspapers making [allegations](#) that she is a foreign operative running an “illegal NGO”, [unsubstantiated claims retweeted by](#)

Zafar. “They will not only try and silence victims, but anyone who tries to help victims fight for justice,” says Dad.

On [15 December](#), the FIA presented evidence that Shafi and others in the case were “guilty” of defamation and asked for court proceedings against them to begin.

Ambreen Qureshi, Zafar’s lawyer, declined to talk to the Guardian about the allegations but said “we have presented evidence to the FIA on account of which Ms Shafi and eight others are booked”. Qureshi says Shafi had failed to provide any witnesses to support her allegations. Shafi’s lawyers say she was not given the opportunity.

According to Qureshi, the court documents so far show “in this case an innocent man was made a target of a criminally motivated malicious campaign by a group of closely related women.” The eight women facing charges deny any previous relationship or any campaign and say they intend to fight the case in court and push for the cyber defamation law to be repealed.

Ghani says: “People keep saying #MeToo is dying in Pakistan, which is so terrible because it’s not like women are not getting harassed and assaulted and raped, but we are being silenced. We all realise that Pakistan’s [#MeToo movement](#) hinges on this case.”

“The whole system is against us; Ali Zafar is a powerful man, and going to court is hard – but what can be harder than lying and living with that lie,” she adds. “I would rather go to jail.”

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Pollutionwatch: fine particles affect lungs of those near airports

Trial finds reduced lung function and heart changes in young people who exercised near Schiphol



Extinction Rebellion activists protesting against climate pollution at Schiphol airport in the Netherlands. Photograph: Nacho Calonge/Getty

Extinction Rebellion activists protesting against climate pollution at Schiphol airport in the Netherlands. Photograph: Nacho Calonge/Getty

[Gary Fuller](#)

[@drgaryfuller](#)

Fri 1 Jan 2021 01.00 EST

For seven months in 2018, a lorry trailer was parked near a runway at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport. It housed exercise bikes and air pollution measurement equipment. Twenty-one healthy young people took turns to visit the trailer for pedalling sessions. Air was funnelled from the outside as the young people exercised, and researchers monitored their heart and lung functions.

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Sometimes the wind blew from the runways and sometimes the air came from nearby roads, the countryside or city. [The experiment](#) was designed to see if there were any health impacts from breathing the tiny particles, less than 20 millionths of a millimetre across, that are produced in huge numbers from aircraft engines. These are missed by conventional measurements of air pollution, but there is increasing evidence that they can spread [tens of kilometres downwind](#) from an airport. For instance, aviation particles [were recently found in the centres](#) of Barcelona, Helsinki, London and Zurich, when the wind blew from each city's airport, potentially affecting millions of people.

At Schiphol, the young people had reduced lung function and changes to heart rhythms after breathing ultrafine particles from the aircraft engines. More studies are urgently needed to determine the long-term health impacts for people living close to airports.

Film

‘It took its toll’: the terrible legacy of Martin Luther King’s fight with the FBI



Martin Luther King arriving at the FBI office to speak with its director, J Edgar Hoover, who had recently and publicly called the civil rights leader a ‘notorious liar’. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

Martin Luther King arriving at the FBI office to speak with its director, J Edgar Hoover, who had recently and publicly called the civil rights leader a ‘notorious liar’. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

In his new film MLK/FBI, Sam Pollard lays bare the injustices the FBI heaped on the civil rights leader, but paints a picture of a complex man dealing with his personal life and its baggage alongside his political beliefs

[Charles Bramesco](#)

[@intothecrevasse](#)

Thu 31 Dec 2020 10.00 EST

As a child in 1960s east Harlem, documentary film-maker Sam Pollard was “profoundly touched” by two events. The assassination of John F Kennedy, in 1963, when Pollard was in junior high school. Then, five years later, the murder of [Martin Luther King](#).

Yet as he grew up, Pollard found his memory of those events softening round the edges. “You think back and try to remember how you reacted to everything going on, particularly the March on Washington, and it all swirls around in your head,” he says. “Some things get lost. You think: ‘Wow, was that really happening?’ It’s history, but not so long ago that I can’t remember it.”



Sam Pollard: This was an opportunity to interrogate the images Martin Luther King and the FBI made for themselves, and for each other.’
Photograph: Michael Loccisano/Getty Images

That is as good an explanation as any for why someone would pursue a career in archival nonfiction cinema. For Pollard – a veteran documentarian who was nominated for an Oscar for 1997’s *4 Little Girls*, about the 1963 murder of black children at a Baptist church by the Ku Klux Klan – it is also the rationale behind his new feature, *MLK/FBI*.

The film aims to clarify and remind, looking not only at the complicated legacy of a civil rights leader who is all but enshrined as a saint, but also at the culture of federal law enforcement hostile to him and his cause. As opposing entities cloaked in nostalgia and ideology that must be peeled back to get at the truth, it is impossible to understand one without the other, Pollard believes. “I thought it could be another way to look at Dr King, and another way to break down the mythology of the FBI,” he says. “This was an opportunity to interrogate the images they’d made for themselves, and for each other.”

David Garrow’s eye-popping book *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr: From ‘Solo’ to Memphis* provided what the director calls “the framework that became the genesis of the film”. Together, Pollard and Garrow expanded the research, filing countless freedom of information requests to access once-classified FBI documents.

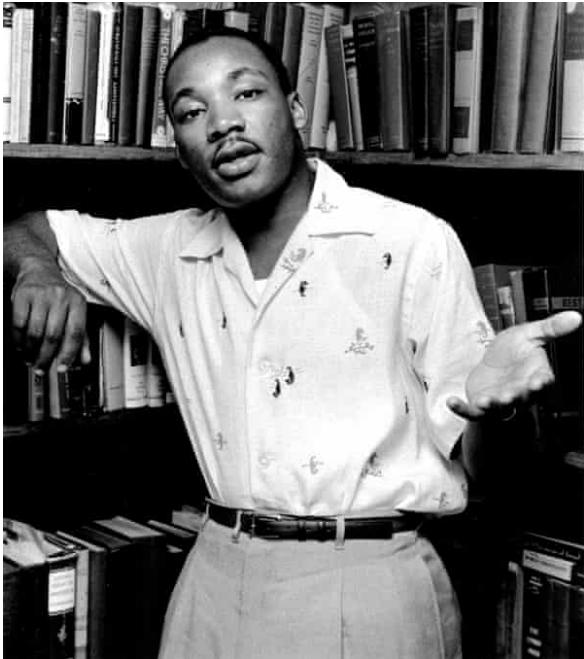
“It’s actually not that difficult to get material from the FBI,” Pollard says with a half-laugh. “It’s just that once you do, there are always a lot of redactions in it. What will be key are the actual audiotapes that will come out in 2027. But we were still able to piece together a lot from other transcripts about how they tried to discredit Dr King.”



A still from MLK/FBI, of the March on Washington. Photograph: Publicity image

The tapes Pollard mentions, set for release later this decade by a 1977 court order, contain the recordings that J Edgar Hoover's FBI surreptitiously collected through years of covert surveillance on King and his associates. The constant invasions of privacy were just one plank in a wider campaign of harassment recounted in granular detail throughout the film via pristinely preserved footage and audio. While the Bureau cultivated a fanbase through adulatory portrayals in an officially sanctioned TV series and films such as Walk a Crooked Mile and The FBI Story, it did everything in its power to undermine and defame King. His progressivism so threatened its status quo that agents sent King's wife, Coretta, a tape of her husband allegedly conducting an extramarital affair, along with a note exhorting him to kill himself for the good of his movement.

Pollard takes a nuanced stance, laying bare the injustice without excusing King's indiscretions. "I think the thing that's fascinating about this material is its understanding that Dr King was a human being," he says. "He's put forward as an iconic presence, but I felt strongly that we wanted to represent him in a more complex way. He was a man, and like many of us, multitasking. He was leading the struggle, while dealing with his personal life and its baggage. He was wrestling with the choice to speak out against Vietnam, and the backlash he received from that. He was dealing with the knowledge that he and his associates were being constantly watched by the FBI, which also took its toll on him."



Martin Luther King at home in May 1956. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives

The film shows King in repose, around the house and at the dinner table and surrounded by family; humanising looks at a larger-than-life figure. But Pollard also engages with his subject intellectually, connecting his beliefs about protest to a US that, to this day, is fraught with racial tensions, as sentiments critical of police grow more widespread. Although King urged non-violence, a talking point centrists love to trot out as a counter to more radical demonstrations, he also said that a riot is the language of the unheard.

“Dr King makes a TV appearance,” Pollard says, “and the woman asks him: ‘Don’t you think your protests are causing the violence in these cities?’ The reality is when peaceful social protests happen, we’re saying that we want change and we’re willing to request that in a passive way. But there are people in America angrier than that who can’t take it. With enough systemic racism, people say enough is enough, then looting or burning is just what happens. Peaceful protests don’t lead to it. It’s a reaction. The death of [George Floyd](#) leads to it. The death of [Breonna Taylor](#) leads to it ... What do you expect, when someone’s got their foot on your neck for hundreds of years?”



A still from MLK/FBI. Photograph: Publicity image

The film posits that in his wariness of authority and his commitment to equality, King would have been more attuned to the world of 2020 than most in his day. But Pollard harbours no illusions about the man's character, and how it might be received in an era increasingly harsh about personal failings. One of MLK/FBI's major themes is the ease with which a man's personal life can be turned against him, a practice that has been all but mainstreamed in the years since King's death. Between the heightened moral standards in activism and the reactionaries still raging against everything he fought for, he would be under the same ethical microscope.

"Unless he could have adapted to the time," says Pollard, "he'd have been ripped to shreds, man. Eaten alive."

- MLK/FBI is released in the UK on 15 January

Retail industry

From Laura Ashley to Debenhams: the biggest retail collapses of 2020

A string of household names were lost this year as Covid accelerated changes to the high street



Debenhams started closing down sales in its 124 stores before Christmas, as it announced plans to liquidate. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

2020 was a punishing year for the high street, with 177,000 jobs lost as a string of household names succumbed to administration during Covid-19. The pandemic has accelerated the painful restructuring of an industry that is a big employer but where fewer physical stores are needed to serve shoppers in the internet age. Here are some of the biggest retail collapses throughout 2020.

Debenhams

1 December With no rescue deal agreed, the troubled chain started closing down sales in its 124 stores before Christmas, as it announced plans to liquidate. About 4,000 head office and store jobs have already gone as a result of its second [administration](#) in a year and its 12,000 remaining staff face an uncertain future.

Arcadia

30 November The collapse into administration of [Sir Philip Green](#)'s fashion group affected 13,000 jobs. The Arcadia brands, which include Topshop, Miss Selfridge and Dorothy Perkins, are being auctioned off. So far only the [plus-size label Evans](#) has changed hands but all its outlets are to close, meaning hundreds of job losses. Arcadia had already cut 500 head-office jobs in the summer of 2020.

Edinburgh Woollen Mill Group

The fashion group, with 21,500 staff, owned by the entrepreneur [Philip Day](#), fell into financial crisis in the autumn. Its brands – Edinburgh Woollen Mill, Ponden Mill, [Peacocks](#), Jaeger, Austin Reed and Jacques Vert – followed each other into administration and it has cut [860 jobs](#) so far.

M&Co

5 August The Renfrewshire-based clothing retailer, formerly known as Mackays, was restructured via a pre-pack administration. The move resulted in the closure of 47 of 215 stores and 400 job losses.

Harveys

30 June The furniture chain went under, with the administrators announcing an initial wave of [240 redundancies](#) among its workforce of 1,500.

TM Lewin

30 June The shirtmaker called in the administrators. It [closed all 66 of its outlets](#) permanently, with the loss of about 600 jobs.

Monsoon Accessorize

11 June The fashion brands were [bought out of administration](#) by their founder, Peter Simon, in a deal that resulted in the closure of 35 stores and 545 job losses.

Oasis and Warehouse

15 April All stores closed after the fashion brands went into administration, resulting in 1,800 job losses. The brands were subsequently [sold to the online fashion group Boohoo](#).

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Cath Kidston

21 April More than 900 jobs were cut at [Cath Kidston](#)'s retro retail label when a rescue deal brokered for the business closed all 60 of its UK stores.

Laura Ashley

17 March The chain [went into administration](#), with 2,700 job losses, after rescue talks were scuppered by the pandemic. It was acquired by the Gordon Brothers investment firm and is set to make a return through a partnership [with Next](#).

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How watching my sons during the pandemic taught me resilience

Jackson crying in the garage at home in September. Photograph: Karen Osdieck

One photograph a day, whatever the weather – in pictures

Pebble dashed, Brighton, England, 17 February. Photograph:
KarenC/Blipfoto

Sparkle and shine: party looks from Kate Moss to Kylie – in pictures

Models Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell at a private party in New York, 1992. Photograph: Rose Hartman/Getty Images

Best photographs of the day

A decorated war zone and a resurrection ceremony: Thursday's best photos

Syrian children light up rocket projectiles like a new year tree on a debris of a building which was destroyed in bombardments of Assad Regime and its supporter Russia, to draw attention to the destruction of war in Idlib, Syria.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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Joe Biden to have new Secret Service team amid concern about Trump loyalty

- Agents familiar from time as vice-president to return
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[Victoria Bekiempis](#) in New York

Thu 31 Dec 2020 11.48 EST Last modified on Thu 31 Dec 2020 22.18 EST



Members of Joe Biden's Secret Service team are to be replaced. Photograph: Christopher Dolan/AP

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Joe Biden is expected to receive [Secret Service](#) protection with a new team that is more familiar to him and replacing some agents amid concerns that they may be politically allied with Donald Trump.

In a changing of the guard as well as the man to be guarded at the White House, [Biden](#)'s security detail will undergo some staffing changes, the Washington Post [reported](#) on Thursday.

Several “senior” [Secret Service](#) agents are poised to return to the president-elect’s protection team and Biden knows these agents well because they guarded him and his family during his time as vice-president, according to the article, echoed [in a report](#) by CNN, citing a law enforcement source.

Re-assignments and promotions are common during transition periods between presidential administrations and are meant to increase comfort and trust between a president-elect and his security team, who shadow the commander-in-chief closely, including during private moments and sensitive discussions.

Although staffing changes are typical, several incidents reportedly contributed to the heightened concerns from Biden’s allies that some agents and officers might be loyal to Trump.

Some members of the president’s detail reportedly urged their colleagues not to wear masks during trips, for example – despite the federal government’s official guidance on [Covid-19](#) – as Trump himself disparaged mask-wearing and held out for months before being seen wearing one in public.

In what was described as an “unprecedented” move, the Secret Service had permitted former detail leader Anthony Ornato to temporarily leave his role and serve as White House deputy chief of staff.

Ornato was among the coordinators of the June [photo op](#) for which Trump marched through Washington DC’s Lafayette Square to stand with a Bible – after [peaceful protesters](#) were [forced](#) from the area by troops on federal order, sparking uproar in political circles as well as among the public.

Ornato also assisted in the planning of many Trump campaign rallies even as Covid-19 tore through the US and gatherings were being discouraged or banned outright. In addition to members of the public, many Secret Service members contracted coronavirus or were exposed.

The Secret Service declined to discuss the reports. Biden has had a security detail since March, when he was campaigning for the Democratic nomination.

While former vice-presidents are given a security detail for six months after leaving office, he formally requested Secret Service protection after protesters rushed on to the stage at a campaign rally, CNN said.

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