finitoworld

Issue 5
2022

FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT, AND BEYOND

Kamala Harris

PRESIDENT IN WAITING

£5.99 ISSN 2732-5180

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Printed in the UK by:
Printlogic Solutions Ltd, Kent, DA17 6AH

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Finito Education Limited, 14th floor, 33 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0PW, +44 (0)20 3780 7700

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Founder's Letter

We all have a special relationship. Mine is with John Griffin, Chairman of our Advisory Board and founder of Addison Lee. His own special relationship began with Ralph, my late father, who was his banker. He helped and supported Addison Lee to grow at scale. John hasn't forgotten his kindness and is now supporting the next generation of business leaders to similarly flourish.

Although The Special Relationship is a term which is often used to describe the political, diplomatic, cultural, economic, military and historic relations between the United Kingdom and the United States or their political leaders, it extends to Ireland too.

Less well known is John's special relationship with Ireland, building bridges between North and South and between Britain and Ireland. As an Ambassador for Co-operation Ireland, John has been at the forefront of grass roots peace-building efforts. The breathing space created has helped break down barriers between communities and he is truly one of the unsung heroes of the peace process.

As a publisher, it might come as a surprise to know that I recently had to swing into action to save one of our most talented journalists on a Tier IV student visa from being denied the opportunity to remain in the UK after completing a City University MA in Investigative Journalism. Because he hadn't finished the course, he couldn't apply for the Graduate Immigration Scheme visa newly introduced by the Government and the University was unable to grant an extension visa for him to finish the course, which would allow him to then apply for the GIS on the grounds that they are not sponsoring students for resits, or to wait for the outcome of their results.

A piece of this depth and scope about Kamala Harris is no mean feat for a magazine launched two years ago to show young people that we too can overcome adversity in a pandemic. How better to demonstrate to parents and students our own capability during a crisis.

The rise of the Vice President is extraordinary. She is the first woman, the first Black American, and the first South Asian American to be elected Vice President, as was the case with other offices she has held. The year 2022 continues to be one of Diversity and Inclusion and Kamala Harris is determined to reach for the highest office in the land and serve as a beacon to women that there are no barriers.

We all need mentors, and to be encouraged. All of us remember when someone helped us at school, college or university to stand out from a crowd and shine. Speak to any leader, they will champion one of their teachers or lecturers who gave them the confidence to pursue their wildest dreams. The global audience watching Emma Raducanu winning the US Open at 18 years old serves as testament that everything is within your grasp, if given the right encouragement at an early age.

I haven't forgotten Andy Haldane, the former Chief Economist of the Bank of England speaking at a dinner. He mesmerised the Board of Governors at a City of London School when he asked at what age are we at our most creative. After hearing many suggestions from 20 – 50 years of age, he told the audience, it is at the age of five, before we are all disciplined, conditioned and funnelled by rules.

We all have a duty to mentor someone who needs help. They too may remember us in future. God Bless America. f

Ronel Lehmann

The secret to success? Get through all your emails

We all know how it goes. A work email is sent – a request for a meeting, or a simple suggestion of some kind. Rather than the agreeable ping of a timely response, comes a day of silence. And then another. And another. You send a follow-up message and the same thing happens.

Usually, it's not clear why contact has been suspended. During the pandemic, it was important to show understanding in these situations: a non-response was often to do with your correspondent falling ill, or suffering the loss of a family member.

But such instances can be vexing, though nothing can be gained from confronting the problem. In many cases, the relationship in question languishes, perhaps to be picked up tentatively at some later point. Often it lapses altogether.

Part of the problem is that in our society it has become acceptable not to respond. On WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook – sites which are increasingly used for work-related communications – we can often see 'read receipts' showing when someone read our message, and therefore gauge the extent of that person's rudeness for not replying.

But the fact that this is now usual practice, shows that we have forgotten that it is indeed unacceptable to fail to issue a response. If someone says something to us in the street, it would be unthinkable in most cases not to say something, even if the person speaking were a stranger. If we did the same to a friend, it's likely that we would be very hurt indeed.

The situation is compounded by other problems. In the first place, blackhole email accounts are often the only way of reaching large corporations: these tend to go unmonitored. Meanwhile, unresponsive gatekeepers surround well-known names – a topic we cover in this issue.

Even so, there's a way forward: stay on top of your communications. That's why at Finito, we have a motto: we reply.

In doing so, we are inspired by those important individuals who are often, in the experience of this publication, the best repliers. This is no coincidence: success is always in the detail.

A case in point is the example set by Sir David Attenborough. Last year, it was reported that the TV presenter wrote a handwritten response to a four-year-old who had sent him a query about extinction. He could well have claimed that he was too busy to write it. He decided he was not.

And this is not the first time that heartfelt responses have surfaced from Attenborough. He has a reputation for responding to every letter – he gets about 40 a day – that is sent to his home address. At 95, and still in peak demand, he could be forgiven for letting standards slip. Instead, his approach is wholly admirable.

Other notable examples include the eminent American politician George Mitchell, best known for his role in constructing the Good Friday Agreement, which brought to a halt the Troubles in Ireland. While being an accomplished lawyer, judge, diplomat and US Senator, Mitchell always finds the time to keep on top of his correspondence. It's good diplomacy to be polite, but it also shows humility. Again, it's no coincidence that the man who brokered peace in Northern Ireland also gets through his emails.

Similarly Sir Martin Sorrell, the founder and former CEO of the world's largest Advertising and PR group, WPP plc, is known for firing off courteous and almost immediate responses. Sir Richard Branson is also swift to reply to email.

It's not so much at the top that courtesy is no longer expected; it's in the middle. Often one can struggle to connect with someone who is perfectly congenial in person only because the people around them make it difficult to get to them.

This speaks to a breakdown in employment etiquette, and can only leave people frustrated and jaded – and in need of a truer encounter with their fellow human being than is currently possible.

Of course, none of this is helped by working from home, where communication is so reliant on the digital sphere. Sir David Attenborough knows that now's the time to lower the barriers of communication between us. That means listening – and taking the time to reply. f

In Praise of Sir David Amess

During the preparation of this edition, we were saddened – like the rest of the country – by the senseless murder of Sir David Amess MP.

All accounts agree that he was a kind and gentle soul, who used his position in Parliament to promote animal welfare, his campaign for his beloved Southend to be recognised as a city, and to argue for a permanent public memorial to Dame Vera Lynn. In the dog-eat-dog world of Westminster, there was something innocent about him – he seemed perhaps of another time, and to hark back to older traditions.

Amess represented the antithesis of the here-today-gone-tomorrow nature of British politics. He eschewed the drama of resignation and appointment, and all the talk of who's-up-and-who's-down that so delights the mainstream media. He quietly got on with it.

A typical Cabinet reshuffle, like the one Boris Johnson conducted in the autumn, shows us all that Amess was not. It would have been unseemly to Amess to be caught up in the speculation, and even the indignity, of the careerist side of politics.

Sir David Amess preferred principle to power and carried himself with a quiet diligence. He aimed to make a difference by dedication and hard work, preferring unsung progress to the pomp and circumstance of power. It's true he had his high-profile moments, especially winning his seat in the close 1992 General Election, when he became an emblem of the Conservatives surprise win.

But more generally, he worked tirelessly – not for a Cabinet position – but for the privilege of serving his constituents. It was this noble task that he died doing.

Young people are therefore shown two versions of what being in politics entails. It can be carried out at the highest level, amid the Shakespearean drama of the acquisition and loss of power. Writing for the BBC of the reshuffle, political editor Laura Kuenssberg remarked: "With no one strong ideology other than a desire to win, it begs the question of what it's all really for."

In Amess' death we had the answer. Politics is about helping others, on the back of having been elected to do so; it is about minding whether your community is improving or not; and then, if you have time leftover, it is about advancing the issues that you believe in. At its core, politics should be about making people happier – or at least, trying to do so.

At Finito, we have many students who ask for help in their political careers. We would always hope that this route is embarked on with a commitment to principle. "Those are my principles and if you don't like them – I have others," as Groucho Marx once joked. In fact, a firm commitment to bettering the lives of others is the only thing that makes the uncertainty – and now the danger – of top politics bearable.

It is this which we mourn when it comes to the loss of Sir David Amess. After his death, it might be said that only the most dedicated public servants will now put themselves forward for the job. Its dangers are all too plain.

There is a world of difference between success which is meaningfully tethered to some good, and success which opens up only onto itself. If you pursue the former you can't fail; if you pursue the latter, failure is inevitable, because it will all have been for nothing in the end anyway.

Sir David Amess' life, though it ended brutally, could never have its meaning taken from it. In fact, its value was increased, held in sharp relief by the appalling circumstances of his murder.

Rest in peace, David. f

A Growing Bursary

At Finito, we believe passionately in the power of mentoring to close the inequality gap. That's why our mentor Andy Inman is expanding our landmark bursary scheme.

Inman explains: "We're beginning small but it has great potential. We have five mentees from mixed ethnic backgrounds: the only qualifying criteria is for the school to think of them as deserving, and that they have a strong work ethic that is likely to react well to mentoring."

The school in question is the Landau Forte Academy, founded with significant funding from Martin Landau and Sir Rocco Forte, in a deprived area in Derby. And how is it going? "We have had some early wins, with one student taking an apprenticeship with Rolls Royce, which he wouldn't have taken if not for our mentoring and support. Another is being offered a work placement this summer in Jersey, with a software coding company."

Into 2022, with the help of our bursary sponsors' we will look to build on Andy's brilliant work to help more and more young people into a job.

Turn to page 82 to find out more. f

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Henry Blofeld

THE LEGENDARY COMMENTATOR ON NOT RETIRING, HIS ETON EDUCATION, AND WHY THE BBC WOULDN'T LOOK AT HIM TODAY

My new book *Ten to Win…And the Last Man In* isn't so much a reflective pandemic book, as a book which has to do with the importance of Test Match cricket. If Test Match cricket were to stop, the game would pall alarmingly. The fact that it's still there, to some extent keeps T20 and The Hundred honest in a funny way. The game which bores me is the 50 Over format, particularly when play sags a bit in the middle. T20 and The Hundred are both fine – provided you don't make the mistake of calling them cricket. It's showbiz.

I write my books on my iPad on my knee – the last eight books have been done like that and I must say I find it very easy. When I write a long paragraph on the iPad I might correct the prose there and then – but when I really have corrections to do, I print it out and make my alterations from the hard copy. I find if I sit with a computer or iPad, it has a nasty habit of cutting it and disappearing, meaning I must spend 25 minutes typing it again.

Right into my eighties now, I've worked very hard. I suppose I'm driven by the fear of boredom and the fear of waking up and not doing anything. Fortunately, I have a fantastic Italian wife, and we prefer to be on the road. Besides, you hear of lots of people who retire at 60, and by 65 they've become not only the worst bores you've ever met, but alcoholic bores. I have a brother who was a High Court judge for 35 years, and though he might try to deny it, he hasn't really done anything since he was about 75 and he's now 89: he still champs at the bit rather as if he's in the High Court. They force them to retire, and in one or two cases it's a good thing, but it probably wastes quite a bit of good brain power, because experience is important.

I grew up in a farming family – the Hoveton Estate has been ours since about 1520. My father wasn't interested in cricket, it was something I picked up at Sunningdale, where I was in the first XI for four years. I was completely nuts about cricket from the age of seven. When I arrived at Eton, I was quite a good cricketer. I loved my five years there, and all my 10 years at boarding school. It gave you the confidence to look the world in the face.

During my last year at Eton, I had a terrible accident and I felt I had the whole of my life taken away: for a long while, life and cricket wasn't what they'd been before. It took me a while to reinstate the confidence that I might have had had I left Eton unscathed. I have no idea if I would have played Test match cricket had I not had that accident.

If I arrived today at the BBC and asked for trial commentary, they wouldn't look at me. For a start, my voice would be a grave handicap. And the way I did it – with the assumption that the whole scene needed to be described, and the picture should be painted – they wouldn't want that now. I don't think John Arlott or Brian Johnston would get a look in either, any more than Neville Cardus would get a look in at a newspaper today.

The ex-players aren't commentators in radio; they're summarisers. But of course, commentators on television are the equivalents of summarisers on the radio, because the commentator on television is the camera. Whereas the commentator on the radio is the equivalent of the camera on the television. On the radio you say, "He comes in and he bowls". You don't say that on television because you see it.

If a young person came to me and said they wanted to commentate, I'd recall the advice of Johnny Woodcock, who was the reason I became a journalist in 1971. I said, "I want to write about cricket," and he said, "I wouldn't advise that". But if they persisted, what I'd do is ring up Henry Moeran who's the assistant producer at TMS and I'd say, "Over to you." And from there it's anyone's guess what he'd say. f

Winter Roundtable

OUR REGULAR ROUNDTABLE THIS MONTH INVOLVED QUESTIONS ABOUT CAREER CHANGES, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND THE VALUE OF A-LEVELS . FINITO MENTORS SOPHIA PETRIDES, PERVIN SHAIKH, AND ROBIN ROSE GAVE THEIR ADVICE

SOPHIA PETRIDES

ROBIN ROSE

PERVIN SHAIKH

I am 41 with two children, and a successful pharmacist. But lately I've been feeling a bit flat about my choice of career. I love cooking, and did a stint in a Michelin restaurant but I found it exhausting. I am now wondering if I might find a career in the wine industry, but it would be a gamble because of my family situation, though my wife is currently on the up. I would be grateful for your advice.

Gary, 41 London

Sophia Gary, prior to any decision-making, I recommend you sit down somewhere quietly and review the plans and goals that led you to being a pharmacist. What was the underlying goal? Did you achieve it – or is it time to re-connect with those goals and take a new path in the wine industry? Discuss it with your wife to ensure you are both aligned with your goals and happy with each other's plans.

Pervin Sophia's right. It might be better to get a short term or locum project to break up the daily work cycle and simultaneously develop a side hustle in the evenings and weekends. This way, you'll figure out what you like and dislike and you'll have clearer direction. My advice would be to scale it up over time, so you're in a better position to decide whether you want to make an eventual move. This way, it's a win-win. Grow as you learn and earn.

Robin I'd add that your situation is by no means unique. I have come across a number of professionals, dentists, lawyers – and indeed one pharmacist – like yourself who have questioned their situation mid-career. Your appetite for risk will be determined by your family support, your financial reserves, your energy, and desire. The pharmacist I knew sold his practice and became a professional actor. He didn't earn as much but he never regretted his choice. If you decide to stay however, even the most tedious role can be made interesting if you adopt the principles of Kaizen. Put simply, there is no task or no system that cannot be improved. The Japanese word, Kaizen means change for the better. Examining every part of your practice for ways of improvement can suddenly make life more interesting and rewarding. I am not sure how much of a change it would be from pills to booze but wish you a successful outcome whichever way you choose.

I am a high-achieving CEO, who is keen to make it in the medical marijuana industry. I have raised a lot of money and recently opened a Manchester shop, but its sales are coming in under expectation. I need to raise capital but fear that the performance of the shop will hinder that. I fear I made a mistake by accumulating considerable overheads, and am not sure how to proceed.

Ian, 36 Manchester

Robin Ian, high achievers have been the subject of study in academic circles for many years in an attempt to identify what makes them special. Amongst common traits identified are the ability to spot trends, the willingness to take risks and the ability to fail and learn from that experience. The success or failure of your Manchester shop is dependent on factors some of which are not in your control. Clearly legislation and the public's attitude towards CBT and marijuana in general will have had, and will be having, a critical influence on the performance of your shop. Seeking additional capital will involve finding funders willing to take a significant risk and you will, no doubt, have to surrender a considerable amount of equity at this point. This is therefore a test of your nerve and or your judgment as to whether it is time to walk away and learn from the experience.

Pervin Gary, I'm going to be direct. Do you need a physical presence in the form of a shop? I fear you're going to feel overwhelmed by the pressure of having a shop, and you might be missing a golden opportunity online if you haven't already built an online presence. My advice is to build your online brand and community. Learn about social media tools platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook Marketplace. You could use these to build a community and use Zoom webinars and Meetups to sell your products. This way, you'll keep your skills updated, build a following and penetrate markets that a physical shop might not be able to service.

Sophia I agree with Pervin. Timing is also a factor. My advice is to refresh your marketing strategy and reduce running costs until you can see an uptick in volumes for UK suppliers. I'd advise you to hold on: it might just take a little longer than you expected. Set yourself a time to move on, and until then, stick with it and keep analysing the market.

I am very young, but absolutely convinced I want to be a lawyer. I recently did very well in my A-Levels. However, I am concerned about the recent spate of high grades and wondering whether my CV will fail to stand out in the future. What sort of things should I be thinking about?

Harry, 18 Hampshire

Sophia Harry, of course, you're concerned about competition but if you did well in you're A-Levels, I would not let that concern you. Your CV is just the story of what you have done and what you have achieved to date. It can be enhanced in many ways, and a professional mentor can show you how this can be done. A CV is only a door-opener. The best thing you can do now is to identify a mentor who can help you acquire the skills necessary to stand out as having more potential than those who might have slightly better grades.

Pervin The fact is employers like candidates who show initiative, and it's great to see you addressing your plans now. Employers are also becoming less interested in grades and more interested in skills and experience. An excellent place to start would be to look at the different areas within the law and see which one appeals most. Then, use the power of networking through school, college, family and friends and connect with those already in the field. Through networking, you might also be able to secure internships and get real hands-on experience.

Robin I also would point out that in life we tend to do well at the things that we enjoy. With that in mind, have a think about what sort of things you take pleasure from, maybe it's helping people, possibly it's learning new skills or pushing yourself physically. Whatever it is, I would suggest that you look for activities or roles that you can get involved in that would add depth to you as an individual. Finally, ensure you include these skills and activities in your CV in a concise but relevant way. The creation of a good CV is part-content and part-presentation and is crucial to get right. f

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(Alamy)

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ON COMING TO THE UK, THE VACCINE PROGRAMME, AND WHY THERESA MAY IS MISUNDERSTOOD

My parents came to these shores in 1978. I was 11 years old and I couldn't speak a word of English – or very few words. I was a very proud young man in the sense that I didn't want to make mistakes in class in school with my English, so I sat in the back of a class trying to string words together to make a sentence to join in the class. Of course by the time I made the sentence in my head, the subject matter had moved on!

So the teacher called my parents and said, "Look, we think that he has a learning disability because he is really not contributing at all." And within six months of course I'd picked up the language, and very quickly worked out that this is an amazing country where there are many people prepared to help a young man like myself.

There were lots of mentors who helped me in my career. I went to University College London, where I read chemical engineering. Very fortuitously in many ways, I founded YouGov which has now become one of the United Kingdom's unicorns, and is now worth over a billion dollars. I left that 10 years ago after taking it public. I am particularly proud now to be the Member of Parliament for Stratford-upon-Avon in the heart of England, which is the birthplace and the resting place of William Shakespeare.

All this means that every morning, I wake up and pinch myself to think that the boy from Baghdad, born to Kurdish parents, has achieved this. I attribute it to the extraordinary nature of this country, which offers two gifts. One is freedom, and the other is opportunity. These two things embody everything that is great about the family of nations that makes up the United Kingdom.

I am sometimes asked how I relax in my high-pressure roles. One thing I love doing – and which everyone should do – is to walk, as it's very good for the mind. During 2021, walking has kept me sane. I actually listened to a programme on Radio 4, and there was an advert about mental illness describing how the best way to combat that condition is to walk. If you ask me the best way to unwind is put on trainers and walk to work. We've been in a pressure cooker this past 18 months and I think it's good for the soul.

The other thing I do is watch box sets late at night. By far the best we've watched so far has been Larry David's Curb Your Enthusiasm, which simply can't be outdone.

I'm asked sometimes which politician is the most misunderstood – I'd say definitely Theresa May. She can be amazingly passionate about a cause, especially on behalf of her constituents. I saw this in action recently. She came up to me in the House of Commons and said, "Nadhim, I really need to talk to you". And I thought, 'Wow, where is all this energy coming from?'."

When I think back on what we did in the vaccines programme it was extraordinary. It was a truly impressive coming together of institutions, with the NHS at the centre of the core delivery mechanism, but people don't know how absolutely embedded our Armed Forces were in that whole process. I particularly salute Brigadier Phil Prosser, who is the commander of the 101 Logistics brigade and is brilliant at delivering things to remote terrains and geographies around the world, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I should add that the private sector has played an equally important role, with Boots and Superdrug at the back end of the chain. At the front end DHL has done a great job delivering the vaccines to the primary care networks. It was a real coming together of the private and public sectors. That's before you count the 80,000 vaccinators that have gone through the training programme – or the 200,000 volunteers that have come forward to be marshals and receptionists.

Brigadier Prosser described it best. He said: "Minister, we're building a supermarket chain in about a month, and we're going to grow it about 20 per cent every week." And I said: "That's right, Brigadier, that's exactly what we're doing."

I've never been a great policy man, or a think tanker. I love operational challenges, and I was grateful to the prime minister for picking up the phone in mid November, and saying, "Nadhim, I want you to do this job for your country." It was a great privilege to do.

Of course, the press can sometimes make top-flight politics stressful. But the media have a job to do. This is a democracy. I will take an aggressive free press any day over a dictator. You only have to look at what's happening to Russia, or to the Uyghur people in China. A free press is what makes this country truly great. Is it challenging? No doubt. Can it be frustrating? Absolutely. But I value that freedom far more than I lament the challenges that come with it. f

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP

The Economist

Jim O' Neill

THE FORMER COMMERCIAL SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY ON LEVELLING UP, THE MINTS AND LIFE AT GOLDMAN SACHS

After my paper published by Goldman Sachs coining the term 'the BRICs' – which referred to Brazil, Russia, China and India as crucial emerging markets – I used to engage with other countries' finance ministers. Occasionally I'd find countries annoyed not to have been included in the acronym.

In 2013, I coined the term the MINTs, to take into account Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey – all of which seemed to me interesting countries.

Today, the country that has the biggest viable basis for being irritated that it wasn't included in the BRICs acronym is Indonesia. It's a very interesting place – it's another significant commodities producer, but it has weathered the past decades better than Brazil or Russia.

Of course, what makes Indonesia additionally interesting is that it's a very large Muslim country that practises reasonably openly quite a few aspects of modern capitalism. So it has very positive demographics.

In terms of conceptual potential, I'm also very interested in Nigeria – though there you're talking not in the next 20 years but in the next 40. If that crazy place could have a proper economic policy framework it would become extremely big in the African context as its demographics are just incredible. It's an extremely young population with great capacity for productivity.

This is where economic outcomes come down to political leadership. Brazil, Russia and Nigeria have all been impacted by poor governance, and we've seen that with India this year with the virus. In 2000, I developed the Global Sustainability Growth Index, which included around 190 countries. We statistically examined hundreds of variables, and ended up including about 15 that seem especially important for economic growth. Among the things that really matter is the strength of a country's institutional framework.

That index today shows China scoring much higher than any of the other BRIC countries – and interestingly India scores lower than Russia or Brazil in spite of its spectacular demographics.

But we have our own inequality and problems here at home – I hope Boris Johnson is genuine about his levelling up agenda. He's only been in power a relatively short period of time, and because of Covid and for a long time we didn't have a proper budget or mult-spending review: everything's been a policy response. Boris seems to struggle with rhetoric and the whole idea that a prime minister should under-promise and over-deliver. He's raised very big expectations – and these are things that will take a long time to deliver on. So far, there's very little evidence that he is delivering on it.

I retain a close friendship with George Osborne, and with Whitehall officials. When I worked in government, to my pleasant surprise I found the quality of the staff in the Treasury to be just as good as at Goldman Sachs – but with greater public spirit. The hard thing for me was that I wasn't a member of the Labour Party; I was there to execute a technical role. But I was surrounded by ministers who were obsessed with where they were in terms of political horse-trading.

I found their motives troubling. They would decide what to support based on how it would help them in their next job, which is extremely different to Goldman Sachs. Even within the same party, competing ideologies were different - often irreconcilably so. In that sense, I witnessed first-hand the ridiculous developments within the Conservative Party: I was shocked as to how crazy it was.

By comparison, I was lucky at Goldman. They were mad enough to offer me a partnership to join – I was only the fifth. They'd taken on a lot of risk themselves. But I was daunted – then as now, the image of Goldman was intimidating from the outside. It was full of remarkably smart and incredibly driven people. They had 300 people in the place with their own views on the dollar – many of whom were smarter than me. But it really is a meritocracy in there. So long as I delivered the goods, nobody gave a damn about my background. f

Lord O'Neil of Gatley

The Campaigner

Gina Miller

THE FOUNDER OF TRUE AND FAIR ARGUES THAT WE NEED A FOURTH SCHOOL TERM DEVOTED TO NON-ACADEMIC ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

Before Covid-19, education was being neglected but I think the pandemic has really shone a light on our underfunded education system. It's a hard truth, but we haven't really thought enough about how we're going to educate our kids in the future.

The biggest conversation now is about catch up – but it's about catching up to back to where we before. What we're not doing is thinking of this as an opportunity to really rethink. We need not just to modernise education, but to rethink the curriculum, rethink our schools architecture, and look again at teacher training. What's needed is a commission to look at the entire system. If I look at where we are now as a country, we're a long way away from where we were when I was growing up in Guyana. In those days, British education was the gold standard everywhere in the Commonwealth. I was brought up by English nuns in a convent in British Guyana and we all understood that education is the most precious thing you could give your children. That was because whatever happened in life, they would have the skills, resilience, heart and brain to deal with what came next.

My fear is we've lost that thinking about education as being about building mental and physical agility and resilience. Instead we've become obsessed with assessment.

And of course this series of missteps has had ramifications. If you look at us now on the global index, we're nowhere near the top – we're actually in the bottom, and our reading skills have dropped dramatically. This is especially astonishing when you consider that economically we're a country that's doing well. Added to that, we've got problems with our approach to teaching which seems to be based on the notion that the future will be much like the past. But the world isn't where it was, and we've got to look at the warning signs.

One thing we have to focus on is the Fourth Revolution, and what's happening with digital technology. We know that this has its mental health aspects. Sadly, it's especially prevalent among teenage children that too much exposure to technology creates this sense of depression and sadness. There are emotional consequences to learning remotely that have been accelerated through Covid. There's an analogy with work here – where we've learned that we're social animals, and that some tasks are far better conducted face to face. Likewise, we need to realise that there's a sensory aspect to learning – you've got to engage the five senses.

And if we're to keep all our senses healthy what does that mean? It means art, music and literature – it can't all be about the academic curriculum so I think we have an opportunity here if we can find the courage and imagination to think radically. For instance, we have three terms in the UK at the moment – and that's based on the rather outdated notion that kids used to need to go and bring in the harvest in summer. That's what the long summer holiday is based on – and it hasn't happened for hundreds of years!

I would propose that part of the review is to look at the possibility of a fourth term. I would dedicate that term to things that are not necessarily academically led, but which have an academic element: the environment, gardening, cooking, community service, sports. It would be a term where children aren't in the classroom, but they're in the community and they're learning a different skill set, which would keep them in good stead for the future.

That would be good not just for mental health and mental agility but for coping against adversity in a world that we know will be radically different to what we know now. Look at some of the up and coming countries and how they're coping with education, and there's a huge amount for us to chew on there. It's really quite remarkable the subjects they're teaching. In Singapore, or in Rwanda or in Ghana, they're focused on handing down entrepreneurial skills to the coming generations. They're learning about their environment and the challenges facing their countries.

So we've not yet made that leap into understanding that we need to invest in our education – that it's the best investment we can make. I'd argue it's one we need to make now. f

Gina Miller

The Astronomer-Royal

Lord Martin Rees

THE ASTRONOMER-ROYAL GIVES HIS PREDICTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF SCIENCE

***On the Future* was written a few years ago and it was an attempt to summarise all the things I've been thinking and talking about regarding the future. Astronomers tend to have a longer term perspective on the future as they also do in relation to the past.**

The book is now translated into 20 languages, and for the paperback version I wrote a new preface about Covid-19; previously I had spoken about pandemics in the abstract. Another book is out in the spring called *The End of Astronauts,* expanding on some other points that concern the future of humans in space. I argue that as robots get better and more sophisticated, the practical case for sending people into space– at least lower than Low Earth Orbit – gets weaker all the time. That's because it's very expensive to support humans on a journey to Mars; you have to provide a year of food, and protect them from all sorts of hazards – whereas robots can be sent more easily and with one-way tickets.

For that reason, if I was an American taxpayer or European taxpayer I wouldn't support NASA's or ESA's programmes for manned space flight. On the other hand, I'm prepared to cheer on the endeavours of Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk in the private sector. Firstly, they're not using taxpayers' money, and secondly they can take higher risks than NASA or ESA can when sending civilians into space.

Of course, it's also important to think of space as being a dangerous environment. We should talk about Space Adventure and not Space Tourism, for instance. I'd argue that Branson makes a mistake in talking of tourism as if it would ever be normal; if you take that view the first accident is going to be traumatic. If these private sponsors are prepared to send risk-takers up into space – the Sir Ranulph Fiennes of this world and so forth – I'm prepared to cheer them on.

My prediction is that by the end of the century there will be a few pioneers living in Mars, but they'll be that kind of person. Elon Musk has said he wants to die in Mars but not on impact. And he's 50 years old; it's just about achievable. These pioneers will have a long-term importance, and they'll be in a very hostile environment. They'll want to take advantage of all the techniques of genetic engineering and cyborgs and so on. Here on earth we're going want to regulate and constrain things like genetic modification on both prudential and ethical grounds. These guys will be away from all the regulators anywhere and have a far greater incentive. I imagine a few centuries from now they will have become a new species – secondary intelligent design will be much faster than Darwinian natural selection.

Of course, the money might be better spent on the environment – but if it's spent by individuals who otherwise would buy a football team or a huge yacht, I'm prepared to support it. Musk, like my late colleague Stephen Hawking, thinks that there should be mass emigration to Mars to escape the problems of the earth. That's a dangerous delusion. Dealing with climate change is a big challenge, but it's a doddle compared to terra forming Mars. There isn't a Planet B for ordinary risk-averse people.

I don't think we've missed the boat on climate change. If we'd acted sooner there'd be less risk. But given where we are now, we'll need drastic and difficult action to limit further emission of CO2 to a level of minimising really serious tipping points. It's harder than it would have been if we'd had more forethought.

The problem politically is it's very hard to get public support to devote resources to something that benefits people in the future by removing a serious threat from them. It's also more important for people in distant parts of the world than it is for people here. Climate change isn't going to be catastrophic in England but it will be in Sub-Saharan Africa: it's a global and long-term threat.

Politicians are happy to allocate immediate resources to an immediate crisis like a pandemic, but it's hard for them to spend money on a long-term insurance policy like an effective climate change policy. In my book, I quote Jean-Claude Juncker: "Politicians know the right thing to do – they just don't how to get re-elected when they've done it." There's something in that. f

Lord Martin Rees

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The Front Bencher

Margaret Greenwood

THE FORMER SHADOW SCHOOLS MINISTER ON ADULT LEARNING AND WHY WE NEED BETTER MUSICAL EDUCATION IN THE UK

I'm a great believer in adult education. It's a fantastic way to open up new ideas – especially in a good adult education centre, which creates a sort of formal environment. When these places are working well, you might see people saying, "I want to do needlework" or "I want to study chemistry". As we move towards automation as a civilisation, it becomes more and more important that we focus on lifelong learning and that we follow through on the whole reskilling agenda.

The problem with this government is I don't think they understand the untapped potential in our society or the knock-on costs of a huge issue such as child poverty. Take malnutrition – we know the impact this has on the development of the brain, and on the emotional well-being of children, and their ability to learn. Of course, you could highlight the economic impact of that – and that's something we should do. But I'm more worried about the human impact.

We need to imagine another way of doing things. For instance, imagine if we could sort these kinds of problems out earlier in life: we'd be in a much healthier place as a society. We want a population where whatever life might throw at people, they have agency to change, and to forge their own paths. What happens instead when that's not done can be heart-breaking; there are people who feel they've suffered an irreversible defeat in life. I think we can be better than that.

I've seen the toll at first hand. I remember when I first went door-knocking as a candidate in my constituency of Wirral West. There was a 28-year-old woman with four young children and I asked her how things were. She said: "I don't mind it when I can't feed myself, but I hate it when I can't feed my children." That's damning. I also met a primary school teacher in Manchester and she left teaching because she was finding it too upsetting to try and feed the schoolchildren every day. She'd buy loads of bread and jam and give them milk, paying out of her own money. She didn't mind paying for it but she found it too upsetting. Understandably she felt it was not her job. The government needs to focus on the fundamentals of poverty, hunger, and the emotional well-being of children.

> "We want a population where whatever life might throw at people, they have the agency to change"

Sometimes it can be things you might not think of which are most empowering. Education generally remains undervalued, but take the example of musical education in this country. Our access to that is very patchy indeed. It depends on the type of school you go to whether the local authority still has the money to offer serious exposure to music.

It should be a guiding principle in our society that every child has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. I remember a school in Everton which made a point of making sure that everybody in the school should learn an instrument – and they didn't just stop at the children. They also made sure that the staff, and the catering staff, had access to music; they wanted to encompass the whole place in that opportunity.

And why might that be important? I think it's clear. Learning an instrument develops the attention span, and creates fantastic listening skills – not to mention emotional empathy. In addition to that it encourages working with other people – and no matter what you end up doing in life, that's going to be of crucial importance. But I think it's more even than that. It's about the sheer enjoyment of it, and having something you take forward in life – a kind of buffer.

People might also be surprised by how much music can touch you; it's not this elitist thing. I remember going to a retail outlet to buy a hi fi. I wanted to check the speakers and I put on a Bach violin concerto. Everyone stopped. There were all these people looking at fridge freezers and things, who'd never been exposed to classical music before. This woman came over to me with a baby and a buggy and wrote down the name of the piece of music.

That's what I mean by adult education. Yes, everyone wants a job and to get on in life – but we also know that life is so much more than that. We've a long way to go before our education system is matched to that belief. f

Margaret Greenwood MP

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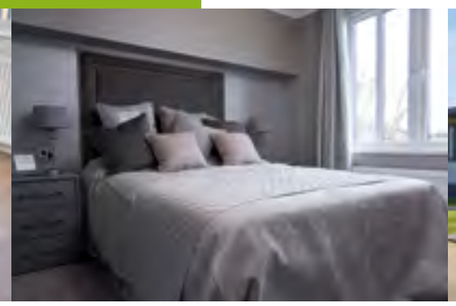

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A Question of Degree

Philip Mould on his early education in art

Mine was a strange upbringing in some respects. We ended up in Wirral because my parents are southerners, but they moved north. My mother contracted polio, and my father had come out of the Marines; it was very difficult to have a disabled wife and travel the world. He inherited from my step-grandfather the running of a printing works in Liverpool – and so rather like the beginnings of a sitcom this southern family relocated.

As a result, I was brought up in the school system as it was presented to us on the Wirral, which was a number of prep schools – one of which was called Kingsmead, and that was the one I went to. I left when I was 13 and went 250 miles away to Sussex to a Christian monastery called Worth, which is not a school I was particularly happy with.

But during that period from when I was 10 to around 14, I would buy things from antique shops. This was my start. If you're interested in historical objects as I am, the most glorious opportunity for a young enthusiast – and that's especially so if there's someone who can initially guide them – is the understanding of hallmarks. These are like hieroglyphs. One time, I went into an antique shop at the behest of my mother, and there was this woman called Xena Roberts, a retired schoolteacher.

It changed me. I remember the atmosphere in there, particularly the smell of silver dip and sulphur – the smell of hell in fact. There was also the sweet smell of furniture polish and fags. Xena smoked endless No. 6's. In a sort of hectoring way, she got me to pick up a spoon, making me forget why I had come in there. I turned it over, as one does, and she asked me what I saw there. With hallmarks, the first thing you sometimes notice is the head of the King or Queen who is on the throne. And then you see the so-called lion passant – that magnificent thing which goes back to Richard the Lionheart.

That's not all. Then you've got the initials of the person who made it, whose name you can look up – as well as the city where it was smelted. Then there's usually a letter of the alphabet relating to the year in which it was made. There would be different alphabets as the years went on and combining that with the head of whoever's on the throne, you could know a lot about that object. It was a glorious set of insights – an education in itself. It was a portal into transforming objects with knowledge, and it was the starting point of me getting interested in art.

I was terrible at school. I was precocious in as much as I could speak well, and my parents taught me some very nice words, but my exams sort of collapsed on top of me. I went on kids' TV when I was 15. It was an equivalent of Blue Peter called Magpie, and by that time I had a collection of silver shoe buckles. That day they became my performing seal. After that, I started writing about them and doing a bit of freelance journalism. It was great to be able to wow people with knowledge as a kid and transform things. I felt like a magician.

East Anglia University gave me time to grow up a bit, meeting people and trying new things. I probably didn't need to go to university, but what it does give you is an environment where the company you're in tests you a bit more. It's a bit like a Grand Tour, going off somewhere. I had a clear idea of what I wanted to do after. I was completely confident holding works of art, looking at them, smelling them – the connoisseur side of things. So university, though it wasn't essential for me, gave me an opportunity to enrich what I wanted to do. It also gave me confidence and life skills.

But it was at local auction houses where I got my teeth into things. I'm sad to say I also had my first taste of the dark side of the art world when I was in university. He ran a shop which specialised in the works of Sir Alfred Munnings, the horse painter. I befriended him, and he had several Munnings paintings which he said were good quality. I hired a car and took them to London to show a friend of my brother, who knew about these things.

Once I'd pulled up, he looked through the car window, and I didn't even have to take them off the back seat before he said "fakes". As it turns out, he was painting the things himself. I then realised that there's this whole other dark underbelly of the art world that one has to be aware of. The opposite of beauty is deception, I suppose, so when you know you are being deceived the beauty disappears.

So if I look at my early education I find that I was always learning when I least expected it – in a chance visit to an antiques shop, and even thanks to that scam. That's how the world is: always teaching you – at educational institutions, yes, but perhaps more importantly, when you're nowhere near them at all. f

Philip Mould

Relatively Speaking

Lily Lewis,
with Emily Prescott

Lily Lewis is marching me off to buy a coffee with her pooch, Betty. It's the kind of small strutting dog that looks as though it'd be most at home in a designer handbag. It suits Lily, the strikingly beautiful, effortlessly glamorous artist daughter of former Groucho Club chair and hotelier, John. She tells me she rescued the dog from a puppy farm after its owner died during the pandemic. This seems rather typical of Lily too.

For instance, Lily used Safe Spaces, her portrait exhibition that featured mistreated Hollywood stars from the 1930s and '40s, as a way to raise charity funds. "I called up Refuge and said, 'I'm going to help you and there's nothing you can do about it,'" she tells me in a melodious voice that sounds like cigarettes and money. And so she did. During a private auction of the portraits attended by the likes of singer Ellie Goulding and her art dealer husband Caspar Jopling, Lily raised around £70,000 for the charity. "I have a platform and it would be seriously remiss if I had an opening and just had a drinks party for people I already know, who come from a position of privilege," she says dutifully.

I attended this private exhibition a few days prior to our interview where I bumped into actor Claire Forlani who had tears in her eyes while viewing the work. Lily tells me she met Claire during a holiday in Italy that was attended by the likes of director Sir Nicholas Hytner, prime minister Boris Johnson and his then wife Marina Wheeler. While everybody was being "unbelievably grown up" the pair bonded over their inappropriately fervent love of truffle.

Lily recalls with a mischievous giggle: "In the evenings we'd have a huge plate of pasta and someone would come around with white truffle and a white glove and expect us to say when. Claire and I got to about four fists of this stuff each and we'd go 'no, no, keep going'. At the end of the weekend they basically brought a ball between us, and a spoon."

In my day job as a Diary reporter I encounter a lot of posh, society girls, who regale me with similarly ludicrously luxurious anecdotes but there's something different about Lily. She is intelligent and talented and I get the impression, although she is part of London's elite, she feels like an outsider.

As is the case with most interesting people, she didn't get on with school."I hated it," she shudders, "every dog has their day and I'm glad mine wasn't when I was 16". She recalls her parents being called into the headmaster's office as a teacher had started a petition for her and her siblings to be removed from the school.

After school, Lily studied textiles at Central St Martins but left after a few weeks as she hated this too. "I thought it was quite pretentious and there were a lot of people who hadn't been great artists trying to break you because they had been attempted to be broken themselves. I am not a very likeable person to people in positions of authority. I would be terrible in an undemocratic republic. I would definitely have been burned as a witch," she cackles. Instead, she attended Kings College London where she studied English Literature and then did a masters in Psychoanalysis.

There's a cliche that people who study psychology are spurred by an interest in their own atypical brains. Indeed, Lily fulfils the cliche that cliches are often true and tells me about her atypical brain and synaesthesia. "I can sort of see colour and I can smell sound and my senses get mixed up… If someone hits a loud noise I see colour. I am a big fan of opera and that's one of the reasons why." She also tells me about the breakdown she suffered in New York. She moved there with a boyfriend and around Halloween time she told him she was popping back to the UK to pick up her stuff, she left and didn't speak to him until February.

But she doesn't think any of her emotional struggles have made her a better artist. "I don't want to perpetuate the image of the artist having to be miserable because I don't think that's true. There's a process of egg laying which is natural and uncomfortable. If there is a project that will end in a product I will get myself into a state where I am deeply uncomfortable in order to be able to produce it. Creative constipation is very different to struggling with mental health," she insists.

> "I want to be rich, famous and thin – and if I can't be that I want to help."

Key to her success, she says, were her parents. Not only did they refuse to apologise for her being different, they also raised her and her three siblings in a hotel. They were all encouraged to be interested and interesting. The hotel was frequented by famous characters such as actors Tim Curry and Gary Oldman. She recalls sitting on Bond star Piers Brosnan's lap as a little girl with him drawing pictures and telling stories. "Everything is a story. People tend to communicate with children in stories and so I met so many people that everyone had a story for me."

> "I have never been keen on saying what age I am, it's just so arbitrary."

Through her career as an artist and poet, she has continued to share stories. Perhaps it's this heightened awareness of narratives that has contributed to her own quirky character. Often she speaks in aphorisms that make her sound like she's playing a part in an Oscar Wilde play. Though her refusal to reveal her age seems to hold an outward looking awareness of the pressure of narratives rather than a Dorian Gray-esque vanity. "Do you have to put that in there? I don't want to say," she squeals when I ask her the question that all journalists have to ask. "I don't think anyone needs to know it. I often find everyone always asks how old someone is to relativise what they have done in their life. I have never been keen on saying what age I am, it's just so arbitrary."

But she does think about getting older and of course, she factors in how she can continue to do good in the world. "I fully intend on training to be an art therapist because I have arthritis in my right hand and I am ambidextrous but there probably will be a time in which I am not able to paint any more or maybe not to the level I want to. I also want to help work in prisons."

"My aim is to be rich, famous and thin and if I can't be that I want to help," she laughs. f

Ten Thousand Hours

Max Verstappen,
with Rory FH Smith

For Max Verstappen, racing is in the blood. The Belgian-Dutch driver was introduced to the sport by his Dutch father and former Formula One driver, Jos Verstappen. His Belgian mother had also competed in karting before having Max.

So what first sparked his interest in the sport? "When I grew up, my dad had a go-kart team at the time, and he raced in F1. I always had that around me. At the same time, my mum also raced in go-karting until she had me."

Did that confer a sense of obligation, that this was the path his life had to take? "It doesn't mean that you have to do it. Besides, my parents never pushed me into driving. It was entirely my decision." When did he first know this was what he wanted to do? "I remember after I went to the go-kart track and I saw a younger kid driving, I called my dad, who was away in Canada with Formula One, and told him I wanted to drive as well. Initially, he said no." Why was that? "He wanted me to wait two more years, but I started in go-karts six months later, when I was four and a half."

It started a lifelong commitment to the sport. Verstappen continues: "Since then, I have enjoyed the ride, especially when you start winning races. It all starts to become more and more professional as you progress, but it was never really my intention at that time to become a Formula One driver." It was always more basic than that, he tells us. "Back then I just saw four wheels and a go-kart and I wanted to get involved and have fun because I like driving. Then, step by step, my interest in Formula One grew and grew."

Of course, starting early is common in racing circles, with drivers starting out in junior karts before progressing to national and international tournaments.

Did he benefit from his father's reputation? "It was a little easier for me to get going as my dad had his own team already," Verstappen recalls. "When I was three years old, I was already driving on quad bikes on our land, so I had some experience before I started go-karting. I was already competitive at that age. It's something you're born with."

Over the years, Verstappen progressed through the karting ranks, stepping up to international competitions in 2010. Three years later, he got his first taste of formula racing before he graduated to the Formula Three championship, where he finished the season third.

> "When you're 17, you have to make mistakes and you have to learn"

That result was enough for him to gain the attention of Formula One teams. Soon he landed a place with the Red Bull Junior Team. His trajectory since then has been rapid. In 2014, Verstappen lined up for the first free practice at the 2014 Japanese Grand Prix; he was the youngest driver to take part in a Grand Prix weekend. It was part of his preparation for a full-time place with Scuderia Toro Rosso in 2015.

At the 2015 Australian Grand Prix, he became the youngest driver to compete in Formula One. He was 17 at the time.

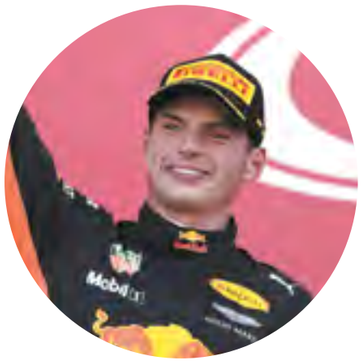
The following year, now 18, he won the 2016 Spanish Grand Prix on his debut for Red Bull Racing – the youngest driver to win a Formula One Grand Prix.

"I didn't think about my age when I started in Formula One," Verstappen recalls. "I usually drove in categories where I was one of the youngest and I was always racing against guys who were two to three years older, or even more. In my final year in go-karting, I was 16 and I was even racing against 35-year-old guys."

So you didn't feel intimidated? "I didn't feel out of my comfort zone. I was used to it. I was just very happy to be there and to try to get the best results. I was very inexperienced but I felt ready."

So to young people out there, what advice does the driver have about being ready for the big stage? "When you're 17, you have to make mistakes and you have to learn. It's fine because, I started at Toro Rosso, so it wasn't like I was fighting for the World Championship at the time - it was good to fight in the midfield and really work for it. That way, you learn a lot of things."

He certainly has – and to talk to him is to realise the value of starting early, and putting the work in. f



Max Verstappen *(Alamy)*

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Tomorrow's Leaders Are Busy Tonight

Sophia Thakur,
with Emily Prescott

Sophia Thakur spoke alongside the sound of a harp on stage at The Ned hotel. In melodious tones she recited memories of dead friends who sleep with soil in their mouths now. She rhymed about the injustice of how black history is taught on the curriculum. She talked about self-love too.

As the 25-year-old poet performed, she made expressive hand gestures and looked graceful in a Cinderella-style blue tulle dress. Her look was almost ethereal, until you clocked her shoes: Bright pink crocs.

Thakur's outfit that evening captures her poetic style well. She is elegant and polished but undeniably practical and unpretentious.

"I'm on the right side of history with these," she joked to me backstage, pointing at her shoes. "Already on stage you've got the nerves and if you're wearing heels, you can fall. It's just not worth it for vanity's sake. About six people can see my feet so I'm completely fine to wear Crocs," she said.

Indeed, her poetry is unpretentious. She relies on YouTube as a medium for self-expression and doesn't think much of those who think being a poet means being a middle class man stuck in a rigid form – or the 18th century for that matter.

"You have your purists who believe poetry is this one thing and has to look like this which is fine and fair – and look, I'm not angry with them for it," she says. "I think there's a spectrum and for me it's so important to identify poetry as just the simple act of communicating."

In Thakur's case, this act of communicating has been startlingly successful. Thakur has not only graced the stage at Glastonbury but delivered Ted Talks and appeared regularly on mainstream television. Her debut book *Somebody Give This Heart a Pen* became a global bestseller before it was even released and on the back of her success she has also worked with creative teams at numerous corporates including Nike, Samsung and MTV.

So did she enjoy her education? Thakur says she did enjoy studying poetry in school but felt the "academic" approach wasn't necessarily the best way to explore poetry.

"I fell in love with poetry via spoken word. I think in school we took quite an academic approach to something that's meant to be so emotive and like feeling charged. I didn't get an avenue to love it, I just got an avenue to learn it in school," she tells me.

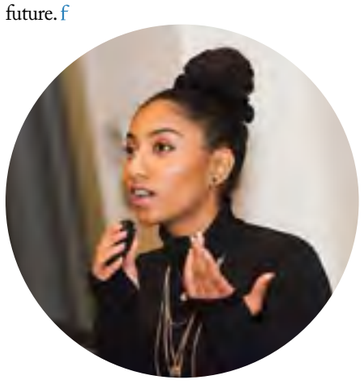
After school Thakur pursued an academic path and did a degree in politics. She's still very much engaged in political discussions now, particularly when it comes to the national curriculum.

Indeed, her new comic-strip style children's book *Superheroes: Inspiring Stories of Secret Strength*, was recently published by Stormzy's imprint Merky Books. It is a response to the fact she only saw black people in history textbooks "in chains".

In her poetry she tries to change the narrative that is taught in schools about black lives and Britain's past. "If the only time we hear about blackness in school and anything black at all is when we're thinking about slavery or when we're thinking about liberation, then the only stories we have are Nelson Mandela's or Rosa Parks's or whoever else," she explains, seeming to tail off.

Then she continues: "We then grow up in a world that perpetuates that narrative where the headlines related to black people are quite negative… It's just really, really upsetting and I think a lot of these ideologies and ideas do stem from the first seed that is planted in us which is black is weak and lesser and white was dominant and is dominant."

On people who criticise using modern mediums such as Instagram and YouTube as a way of sharing her poetry and having these kinds of conversations, she says: "It's really embarrassing because I think art if anything is the truth of the time and the truth of the time is this. This is how we communicate now, this is what poetry is now… oh and TS Elliot would've loved Instagram poetry." And with that, Thakur heads off, Crocs and all, into what I'm sure will be a successful future. f



Sophia Thakur

Those are My Principles

With Sharon Pindar

As children prepare to return to school once more, the phrase 'education recovery' is high on the agenda. There is no doubt that children have missed out on every dimension of their education, and despite schools' and parents' best efforts, home schooling simply can't replicate the classroom experience. Government is now grappling with the impact of this missed learning in years to come, potentially affecting employability prospects for a generation.

After the lockdown in 2020, Ofsted reported that primary teachers noted children's reading skills and confidence were particularly badly affected. However the most alarming findings showed that it was the more disadvantaged pupils, and particularly those with special educational needs and English as an additional language, who had fallen most behind. After years of determined efforts to close the attainment gap, we are now seeing that this progress has been reversed.

A child who is falling behind with their reading will struggle in every subject at school, and beyond into adult life. England already has one of the lowest literacy rates in the developed world, with an estimated 7.1 million adults struggling with basic reading every day according to the National Literacy Trust. Poor literacy can lead to limited job prospects, with strong evidence linking poor literacy and youth unemployment. It can also lead to poor health, low self-esteem and even reduced life expectancy. Moreover, adults with weak literacy skills won't be able to support their child's reading, so that without support, the cycle is perpetuated.

The reading charity Bookmark was created to address this crisis. I experienced the impact of poor literacy first-hand as a child as my own mother was unable to read, affecting the family in numerous ways. Today, Bookmark works to give children the reading skills and confidence they need for a fair chance in life, through a flexible and innovative volunteer-led programme.

> "90% said that children enjoyed reading more after the programme."

Research from the Education Endowment Foundation and others has shown the benefits of one-to-one support for children who are struggling with literacy, and Bookmark seeks to give children that support through its pool of trained and vetted volunteers. Initially these volunteers worked face to face with children in schools, but last year Bookmark developed an interactive online programme in response to the pandemic, enabling volunteers to support children from home or work, without compromising school safety measures.

The programme has been well received by schools and Bookmark has been able to rapidly scale up to offer support nationwide, including supporting vulnerable and key worker children in school during the latest lockdown. Results have been striking; teachers have reported improvements in children's confidence with reading as well as their attainment, with 90% saying that children enjoyed reading more after the programme.

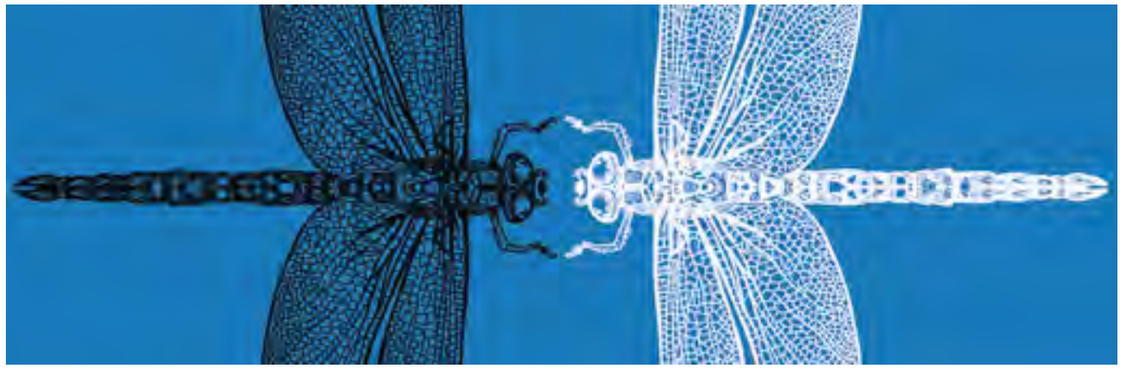
This last point is critical. As the OECD has found: 'Reading for pleasure is the most important indicator of the future success of a child and is more important than family's socio-economic status'. Working from this evidence, Bookmark designed its reading programmes to be fun, interactive and engaging, allowing children to choose their own books alongside those set by the school.

As the world starts to emerge from this devastating pandemic, it is clear that there are huge challenges ahead in helping children – and especially those who are already facing disadvantage – to recover their learning so that they can fulfil their potential in later life. Moreover, as a country, our economy depends on a skilled, healthy, and literate population. It is absolutely crucial that we focus on addressing literacy now, as a key step on the path back to a healthy future. f

Sharon Pindar
The writer is the founder and chair of Bookmark
(Aaron Burden on Unsplash)

Waterfly

THE *WATERFLY* SEES THE REFLECTION IN THE WATER. IT TAKES NOTE AS THE WATER SHIFTS. HERE'S THE LATEST GOSSIP FROM THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY SECTORS



Boris Johnson

Boris the Late

Waterfly recently attended the Two Cities lunch at the Intercontinental Hotel, where the Prime Minister Boris Johnson was present as the guest speaker. It had a typical air: a huge number of tables, each one paid for; the sense of occasion perhaps chipped away at a bit by its scale; excitement at being near, if briefly, the centre of power.

Initially it transpired that the Prime Minister would be late. Then it transpired he would be very late – then unfathomably late. But while we waited, *Waterfly* found it interesting to gauge the different kinds of power that congregate at the top table of life. Dr Selva Pankaj and Lord Rami Ranger maintained close contact with their phones. Sir Martin Sorrell held court cheerfully. "And still we wait," he laughed at one point.

Then Johnson did arrive and delivered an amusing speech, which turned out to closely track his subsequent conference speech. After listing recent British sporting success stories, he said: "And we're still only 0.8 per cent of the world's population – in spite of some of our best efforts."

What was most extraordinary was the response that ensued after his speech. Around 30 or 40 people hovered round the Prime Minister while he ate his lunch, with the PM looking notably tired up close. Over the speaker system, a voice, panicked and indignant began saying: "Will you please leave the prime minister alone and let him eat his lunch!" Who'd be PM? On the other hand, the food was rather good.

May Week was in June

That occasion sent *Waterfly* back to a similar event in the same ballroom in the last week of the Theresa May administration. *Waterfly* recalls sitting a few metres from the then prime minister, whose hands had been visibly shaking throughout. She sat down to polite applause, but not the mobbing endured by Johnson. And what's the difference worth? *Waterfly* knows the answer – 80 seats in a general election.

But actually, life after Downing Street seems to rather suit the UK's second female prime minister. At a recent Hospice dinner, May recalls attending her first day at Parliament. "I saw a police officer, and I didn't know my way round. The officer said: "If you need to know anything, just ask a police officer." As I left the building on that day, I passed him again and he said: "Interest rates have gone up." I replied: "I didn't know that and I'm a member of parliament." He replied: "If you need to know something, ask a police officer."

Lady May *(Wikipedia)*

Sophia Money-Coutts

Sophia's Choice

As the summer turned to autumn, the world seemed to darken and some people *Waterfly* tried to contact went on extended holidays. First up was the novelist and journalist Sophia Money-Coutts, whose bounceback read: "Technically I don't have an office. But I am away from my desk and pretending I'm not looking at my emails while obviously still reading them all. Back in a few days." We've never been so charmed by people not coming back to us – she still hasn't. We'll give it time yet.

Blowers' Blowout

Henry Blofeld was another who *Waterfly* called in the midst of a holiday. "Oh my dear old thing, I'm so pleased you called," the familiar voice said. "I welcome this call – I really do." The former commentator then performed a silent stage whisper: "However, I'm in Menorca where I have a house. And I have promised my wife I will not do anything that could be interpreted by her in any way as work. I work much too hard you see, and I'm 82." It's the only honourable way to take a holiday.

Edna's Way

Henry Blofeld is a well-known bon viveur. So too is the award-winning writer Edna O'Brien. But in both cases it's not clear that longevity is tied to sobriety. It was Goethe who said he could go through the works of his friend Schiller and discern the passages Schieller wrote when tired: they would be of inferior quality. Now an insider tells us: "I was once chatting to Edna and she said, "Do you know, I just love writing when hungover." Cheers, Edna.

After Anthony, James

Over at the University of Buckingham, Professor James Tooley has succeeded Sir Anthony Seldon as Vice-Chancellor, and is already following in the great man's footsteps.

"We're looking at the possibility of decreasing fees in certain areas to make it more affordable both domestically and internationally," Tooley tells *Waterfly* , "but the second possibility is to look at income share agreements. The university takes some of the risk – perhaps it doesn't charge a fee to a student arriving – then the fee equivalent is paid by the student once they're in a job."

But it's not all about employability he adds: "Some students come to university to develop their minds and understanding for the sake of that, and there's nothing wrong with that. It's very clear that in some ways we are only wanting to transmit the best that has been thought and known over the generations, and we do that irrespective of changing fashions and the desires of employers." It's called hitting the ground running.

Something for the police to chew on

According to Nick Freeman, the celebrity lawyer, cases can be won on the finest of margins. "The beauty of the job," he tells *Waterfly* , "is ultimately you're dealing with human beings. I dealt with a drink driving trial, in which my client said the car had reversed a few yards and banged on the car behind while he was sleeping. The policeman had breathalysed the driver." In court, the officer I was cross-examining seemed to be chewing gum. There's nothing wrong with that although it was a bit discourteous. My first question to the officer was: 'Are you chewing gum?' He said: 'No.' 'Well, what's in your mouth then?' 'It's medicinal.' 'Can I see the packet, please?' He said the brand, and I said: 'That's not medicinal.' The case fell apart from there.' Ah, so that's how it's done.

Bad Company

At a recent gathering of the European Atlantic Group, *Waterfly* was surprised to see Iain Duncan Smith sharing a platform with Michael Shrimpton. Shrimpton was convicted in 2014 for falsely reporting that Germany was planning a nuclear attack on the 2012 Summer Olympics. One onlooker tells us: "Shrimpton was trying to cosy up to IDS but he was having none of it. I don't think Shrimpton should be allowed to be a member." Almost as surprising was what IDS said on his own behalf, reportedly speaking sarcastically about the Tory slogans. IDS is reported as saying: "Levelling up, what does it mean? The beauty of levelling up and building back better is that it means what you really want it to mean. I'm not going to try and define it." Yes, no point attempting the possible. f

Ian Duncan Smith *(Wikipedia)*

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Official portrait of Vice President Kamala Harris
(Lawrence Jackson)

The Woman Who Would be King

PATRICK CROWDER AND CHRISTOPHER JACKSON LOOK AT THE WOMAN A HEARTBEAT AWAY FROM THE PRESIDENCY OF THE MOST POWERFUL NATION ON EARTH – AND ASK WHAT LIES AHEAD

If Kamala Harris' people are worried about the perception that she has been sidelined in Joe Biden's White House, then they've chosen a curious room in which to conduct an interview.

It's a shadowy out-of-the-way chamber which looks like it's seldom used. Kamala Harris sits on a chair in a maroon pantsuit; beyond her, are two ship models in glass cases which are difficult to make out in the shadows. On the other side of the room, also behind her, is the obligatory but casual display of patriotism: an American flag peeping out of the dark.

"Everyone has to get vaccinated. The vaccines are free," she says. "They are safe and they'll save your life. Get the booster shot. Against Omicron it almost guarantees that you are unlikely to have to go to the hospital much less – God forbid – that you die because of this virus."

It's a sombre setting – appropriate perhaps for what is increasingly proving to be an unhappy historical moment. That's the case both in respect of the current state of America with its high proportion of unvaccinated peoples and looming inflation, and in relation to Harris' own approval ratings. At time of writing, according to an average on RealClearPolitics, these stand at 39 per cent, though they have been quite a bit lower than that.

When Margaret Brennan, the CBS interviewer, asks her about the economy, Harris does a typical politician's trick and reels off statistics which show the Biden administration to good advantage: "First of all, as an administration, as we look at the end of the year, there are specific facts that we are proud of on the issue of the economy." And what are those? "We have reduced unemployment down to 4.2 per cent. The economists predicted that we wouldn't get there for another couple of years, but here we are." And the deficit? "We have reduced that by over $300 billion. We have created over six million jobs, so there are good things that happened – have happened – as it relates to the strength of the economy."

The interview continues. Is Senator Joe Manchin, who torpedoed the administration's $3 trillion Build Back Better Plan, playing fair with Biden and Harris? "This is too big to be about any specific individual."

It's a tense encounter; in everyone's minds – and especially, you suspect, in Harris' – is the fact that Harris has been criticised for her media performances, especially on account of her nervous laughter when she gets a difficult question. According to Freddy Gray, writing in The Spectator, "Harris's laugh, which she deploys a lot, is widely recognised as the most irritating noise in America."

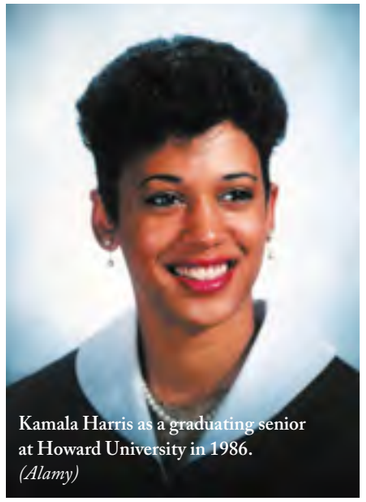
To Harris' supporters there is a note of misogyny here which is both regrettable and to be expected for a political "trailblazer" who is serving not just as the first female Vice President, but as the first Asian-American to reach that office. But to her critics, Harris does embody much that is irritating about the left: a self-righteousness allied to a thin understanding of basic economics, and even a certain 'wokeness'.

Which is she then? In reality, everything about the interview makes you long for more depth. We want to go back in time to learn more about her, since everything about Harris – telegenic, prepped, responsive to the zeitgeist – is suggestive of meme, a person entirely tethered to the present.

But also we long to know what really motivates her – who she is, and above all what the administration she serves really signifies for the virus, the economy, for civil rights, and for the US-UK 'special relationship'. Above all we want to know if we're looking at the 47th President of the United States. For this cover story, Finito World spoke to everyone from leading opinion formers in the UK, to political insiders, and working Californians, to discover just that.

Howard's Way

Born in Oakland in 1964, Harris was the daughter of Shyamala Gopalan, a biomedical scientist and Donald Harris, an economics professor. Having experienced segregation during her



Kamala Harris as a graduating senior at Howard University in 1986. *(Alamy)*

Howard University *(Derek E. Morton)*

childhood, it was a formative moment to attend Howard University, from which she would graduate in 1986 with a degree in political science and economics. Reading her memoir *The Truths We Hold*, you sense it gave her confidence.

Howard University is a historically Black college in Washington D.C. which was founded in 1867 following the American Civil War. Pertinently for Harris, who would seek an initial career in the law, its former alumni include Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, in addition to Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison, civil rights activist Vernon Jordan, and the late actor Chadwick Boseman.

It would prove a formative experience for the future Vice President. Harris writes of feeling that she was in heaven when she first walked in there: "Every signal told students that we could be anything – that we were young, gifted, and black, and we shouldn't let anything get in the way of our success."

Mentoring also came into her life at this point, when she took on a role working as a tour guide at the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Harris recalls: "Once I emerged from my shift to find Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis [both famous actors] in the main area, waiting for a VIP tour after hours. They projected an aura like the luminaries they were, yet they made a special point of engaging me in conversation and telling me that it made them proud to see me as a young woman working in public service."

This is the Harris tone, as agreeable as it is anodyne. We can see immediately that it doesn't seem particularly likely to bridge the divide in America which has grown over the last decade or so: her language lacks the complexity of Obama's, the persuasiveness of Bill Clinton's, the folksiness of George W. Bush and Joe Biden, and the sheer oddity and punch of Donald Trump's.

If you talk to Californians today you'll find that Harris' innate assumptions – that Harris' journey is de facto good and virtuous – are echoed, showing that she at least has some support there. Talk to people in her home state, and sometimes one finds a patriotism on display difficult to distinguish from a certain piety. Kevin Buckby, a partner of Carbon Partners, tells us: "She's our local lass from Oakland and I live about five miles from there, so I'm happy to see her success. You need a Kamala equivalent over there as an antidote to Boris." In such remarks, one finds the validity of the Democratic project unquestioned. To her critics, these plaudits will feel all-too-easy and insufficiently earned.

Amee Parekh has recently been promoted to head of HR for Uber Freight and Finance from her previous role as head of HR for UberEats US. She, too, is not in doubt of the need for Harris, or someone Harris-like at the top of American politics: "Kamala Harris is absolutely leading the change in the political arena, because we haven't had a female Vice President or President ever, and she's the first woman to make it into office." So she sees Kamala Harris as a role model? Parekh is effusive: "Kamala Harris is a good role model. I think that change absolutely needed to happen. It needed to happen 20 years sooner, but here we are, and we'll work with that."

This might be called the Kamala-Harris-as-role-model narrative. There is something to it. When Barack Obama ran for the presidency in 2008, he noted how much harder the process was for rival Hillary Clinton: "She was doing everything I was doing, but just like Ginger Rogers, it was backwards in heels."

The same is true for Harris. What she has achieved has been done to some extent against the grain. Harris, in this telling, is a pioneer. Her admirers would add that she's a welcome voice calling for social justice, greater help from the federal government, fewer wars in the Middle East of an essentially unwinnable nature, a kindly border policy, and improvement in voting rights for African Americans.

For such people, Harris comes readymade as both politician and symbol. Dana Williams, Ph.D., dean of the Graduate School at Howard and professor of English says: "It wasn't just a situation where it's good to have a Kamala Harris elected; it's a situation where we absolutely needed a Kamala Harris to be elected."

Despite this, even her champions would probably stop short of seriously comparing her to Barack Obama, whose talents under any fair reading seem to outstrip hers. Even so, the argument runs that she is in that mould.

The trouble is it can seem a fairly short step from there to saying, or implying, that her faults must be overlooked. Her low approval ratings as Vice President under such a view are either unfair, and a result of sexism or racism, or they might be put down to the inherently tricky nature of the vice-presidency, an office once described by John Nance Garner, FDR's Vice President from 1933-1941 as "not worth a bucket of warm piss."

For Harris' critics, it's not racist to criticise her, it's racist not to. Besides, her detractors would argue that she raises the question of racism all too readily as a rebuttal to criticism that isn't racist at all, but entirely justified in a free country.

A representative statement might be that of former Harris staffer Sean Clegg, as reported by The Washington Post: "I've never had an experience in my long history with Kamala, where I felt like she was unfair. Has she called bulls---? Yes. And does that make people uncomfortable sometimes? Yes. But if she were a man with her management style, she would have a TV show called The Apprentice." Clegg seems to imply that Harris is taking necessary blows for all those African American women who will follow her path.

But nobody seriously doubts that Harris is in a difficult and sometimes frustrating job. The LBC radio presenter Iain Dale has just finished editing a marvellous collection of essays The Presidents about each occupant of the White House from Washington to Biden, and has been deeply immersed in the American political system.

"The office of VP is quite a difficult one," he tells me. "As most people who have been Vice President will tell you, it has no power but it has influence, but that influence is entirely at the discretion of the president."

Which brings us onto the question of Harris' relationship with President Joe Biden. Dale notes that Harris and Biden seem rather distant. He deems that a puzzling trend.

"Some presidents really bring their Veeps in," Dale explains. "Others seem to ignore them – which is weird when you think of it, because the job of president is all-consuming, and you get to choose your Veep – they're not elected. You'd think if you get someone you trust you'd want them to take over some of the functions of the presidency. That happens rarely. From Eisenhower onwards, can you find a president who really trusted their Veep?"

In the Brennan interview there's an awkward attempt to dispel the feeling that Biden and Harris don't get on: "In fact, the president and I joke and when I leave one of our meetings to go break a tie, he says, 'Well, that's going to be a winning vote.' Whenever I vote, we win. It's a – it's a joke we have, but – the stakes are so high."

Quality Street

For others, she's just not up to the job. This view is best encapsulated by Dr. Randall Heather, who has been involved in British, American and Canadian politics for over 40 years. He pulls no punches whatsoever.

First up, he wants to put Harris' Vice-Presidency into context for a UK audience: "If you weren't in America in 2016 during that presidential campaign, you missed two things," he explains. "One was a matter of intensity rather than knowledge: it was how deeply upset working class white Americans were about everything. And you can't understand the pull of Trump, unless you understand that intensity. On the other side, it's hard to gauge how intensely disliked Hillary Clinton was."

The implication is that Clinton may have deserved some of this opprobrium – and that Harris does too. This, Heather explains, is something the UK just doesn't understand. "Brits love Democratic presidents because they don't have to live with the outcome of the decisions which are made on a lot of domestic issues."

But this is only the beginning. Heather continues: "There are two numbers about Kamala Harris. One is one per cent. The other is 28 per cent. The 28 per cent is her current approval rating [Harris' approval rating has recovered a bit since we spoke with Heather]. One per cent was the support she got running when she launched her 2020 campaign when she was considered one of the top two or three potential people. She ran an awful campaign. Her team was from California, and the thing to know about California is that it's really a different planet. It was a shambolic campaign and she crashed before she even made the primary."

When I ask if Harris has any positive attributes, Heather is frank: "She has none."

This has the virtue of clarity, but something in me wants to push against it. It seems inconceivable, even in today's fractured America, that someone could rise so high without talent or any personal qualities.

The harsh assessments you hear about Harris seem to emanate out of an America so bifurcated that no nuance is possible. All the main players – Trump,

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris *(Alamy)*

Biden, Harris, Obama – are either good or evil, geniuses or idiots, heroes or villains. America is a place no longer permitted shades of grey. This seems to go against one's day-to-day observations of human nature where human complexity comes at us from every quarter; it can't be, surely, that the United States has successfully disinvented our right to hold more than one opinion about a person.

This Manichean view of the world also seems unhelpful since the problems which America faces – from Afghanistan to inflation, to infrastructure, voting rights, and urban crime – are complex and probably can't be solved if the atmosphere in which they're discussed is reductive, and in some areas of the media, puerile.

But equally, Heather surely has a point that Harris is struggling hugely in the office.

Even so, the only way to see past this somewhat Manichean argument is to delve further – and especially into what actually happens when Kamala Harris has been in charge of something.

Orders from the DA

By 1989, Harris had graduated from University of California, Hastings College of Law, where she earned her Juris Doctor degree. During that time, the future Vice President was the President of the Black Law Students Association. Her decision to work in the DA's office, which by this time she had come to deem her 'calling', was met with incredulity by friends and family. "I had to defend my choice as one would a thesis," she recalls in *The Truths We Hold*.

Why might Harris have had such a difficult time in defending her choice of career? She herself gives the answer: "America has a deep and dark history of people using the power of the prosecutor as an instrument of injustice."

But Harris had found her matier. In 1990 she began working in the Alameda County District Attorney's office. She initially specialised in child sexual assault cases, before becoming Deputy District Attorney. Then, she prosecuted various cases including sexual assault, robbery, and homicide.

At this time, Harris was moving in exalted circles. By 1993, Willie Brown, a noted lawyer and civil rights leader, was the speaker of the California assembly and regarded as one of the State's most influential legislators. By 1996, he had become Mayor of San Francisco, the first African-American to hold that office. Though he was still married at the time (though separated), he was known to be going out with Harris, which has incurred negative comment in some quarters, with Harris accused of sleeping her way to the top. The accusation may be a sensitive one; Brown isn't mentioned at all in Harris' memoir.

By 2004, was the District Attorney in California, a post she would hold until 2011. In time it would prove a sound basis from which to launch her political career. How did she do?

Seth Chazin has been a criminal defence lawyer in San Francisco for 35 years and serves on the board of directors of the National Association of Criminal Defence Lawyers. What are his memories of Harris' stint as DA? "When she was District Attorney, I didn't find her to be overly progressive in terms of policies towards criminal defendants. I didn't see much change from prior District Attorneys." In the context of Californian politics then, Harris has always seemed moderate – and it was partly this which informed her struggles in the 2020 primary. "She found it hard to raise money in California – that should tell you something," says Heather. "It's the most moneyed state in the country, and she was out-raised by Pete Buttigeig, the Mayor of the fourth largest city in Indiana."

So what would Chazin hope Harris could do now? Chazin is unequivocal: "She needs to push for abolition of the death penalty at the Federal level. What happened at the end of the Trump administration was horrific, they were killing one person after another." Chazin continues: "There is a moratorium on the death penalty in California, but we need abolition. Another governor could come in with a different opinion, and the moratorium could end in a heartbeat."

No less a figure than Sir Richard Branson is prepared to agree with Chazin on this: "The death penalty is inhumane and barbaric, fails to deter or reduce crime and is disproportionately used against minorities and other vulnerable and marginalised groups," he tells Finito World.

Harris also disappointed Chazin on another front: "In terms of racial disparities, I saw no affirmative effort to handle the disparity in sentencing in drug cases, and I was dealing with a lot of drug cases at the time. Most people being prosecuted for drug offences in San Francisco were black and brown people during her tenure as District Attorney."

Dr Randall Heather adds: "Kamala Harris was considered overly authoritarian as Attorney-General, and this upset a lot of people on the more progressive side of the party – the group called The Squad. They do not particularly like Kamala Harris."

This is part of the difficulty Harris faces: she has set considerable expectations on account of the 'historic' nature of her election, but, like Barack Obama, she must govern -co-govern – in prose. It's a reminder that the first generation of Black leaders had something profound to convey about equality and racial disparity which will always echo through history, and rightly so.

After that, it was up to Barack Obama to prove that African-Americans could serve at the top of government. Harris has proven that too. But of course, there are diminishing returns here, as each glass ceiling is broken. It becomes harder to identify a moral imperative of similar force once a gigantic moral ill has been remedied. As a case in point, Kamala Harris' portfolio of voting rights in the Biden administration has met with the intractable fact that the Democrats have neither the votes for the legislation, nor the votes to remove the Senate filibuster in order to navigate that fact.

Harris is defiant in interview: "I think we have to continue to elevate the conversation about voting rights," she tells Brennan. "Given the daily grind that people are facing, this may not feel like an immediate or urgent matter when in fact it is." And yet, as important as the issue undoubtedly is, barring some sort of carve-out of the filibuster, Harris looks to be struggling to deliver.

Allied to these problems is the enormous question of whether the fundamental economic principles which Democrats espouse – spending, essentially – really work. This brings us onto the gigantic question of inflation in relation both to the pandemic and to Biden and Harris's flagship legislation.

The Economy, Stupid

Biden and Harris have so far passed two large spending bills. First up was the American Rescue Plan Act, a $1.9 trillion stimulus bill, which saw the government mailing cheques of $1,400 dollars to families affected by the virus. This was followed by the vast Infrastructure and Investment Act which came with a similar price tag of £2 trillion. This development might have been specifically designed to annoy former President Donald Trump who had wanted to sign a similar bill into law but had failed.

These are big numbers, but the bills found controversy when leading economists, including Larry Summers, the former Secretary of State to the Treasury under Obama, wondered whether such high spending would prove inflationary. In short will this legislation work?

Sir Martin Sorrell *(Sebastian Derungs)*

If you want to know what's actually going on in the global economy during the Biden-Harris era, you need to talk to one of the masters of it. Formerly of WPP, Sir Martin Sorrell is the longest-serving FTSE 250 CEO. He now heads up S4 Capital, his fast-growing venture which is securing impressive market share, and employs some 5,500 people across 33 countries.

Sorrell is clear that inflation will be the main discussion in 2022: "It will be big," he tells us. "Clients will look for price increases to cover commodity increases. But the real question is whether inflation is endemic." And is it? "We clearly have shortages in the labour supply and supply chain disruption. A lot of companies will be looking to cover that up with price increases, and I expect inflation to be well above trend."

That certainly sounds like more than a bump in the road. So what does Sorrell think will happen in the crucial mid-

term elections towards the end of 2022? "Biden and Harris say the mid-terms will go well for Democrats," says Sorrell. "I don't think that will happen. We'll get deadlock after the midterms so all significant legislation will need to have been passed before that point."

That doesn't bode well for serious action in Harris' portfolio, especially in respect of voting rights, and it's a reminder that there's limited time for Biden and Harris to pass their massive spending plan Build Back Better – originally mooted as having an impossible $3 trillion figure attached to it – which so far has been held by up by conservative Democrat Senator Joe Manchin from Virginia.

Despite the likelihood of a tough road ahead, Sorrell isn't critical of every move that Biden and Harris have made. "The infrastructure spending was needed," says Sorrell. "If you look at infrastructure spending as a portion of GDP, the US doesn't feature well."

So does Sorrell think that inflation as a problem is one of the administration's own creation? "If you look at these bills, they are by their nature inflationary," Sorrell replies, adding: "Inflation is not transitory. I hesitate to say it's endemic as that's a bad analogy with Covid-19, but I don't think it will soften this year. I just get the feeling from clients that where they can get price increases they will go for it."

That doesn't bode well for the global economy in 2022. In addition, other commentators are prepared to add their voices to the criticisms of Bidenomics. The macroeconomist Robert Barro, the Paul M. Warburg Professor of Economics at Harvard University, is concerned about the trend of governments printing money: "Biden and Harris' monetary policy is remarkably expansionary. It involves short term nominal interest rates of essentially zero, while continuing with the Quantitative Easing (QE) policy of buying $120 billion a month." So what is the administration buying? "Mostly Treasury securities, but they've also bought some mortgage-backed securities. Corresponding to that, they've accumulated about $8 trillion dollars on the balance sheet of the Federal Reserve. You're talking about a GDP of $20-21 trillion, so $8 trillion is a serious number, even though we've had inflation now for over 12 months they haven't cut back on this. They should have moved a long time ago towards tapering their purchases and raising interest rates, and of course they haven't done either of those."

For Barro this is out of control stuff: "Basically, the Treasury is issuing bonds to finance a lot of the expenditure – that's the fiscal deficit part – then the Federal Reserve is turning around and buying a lot of those bonds and accumulating those on its balance sheet." And on other side of the Fed's balance sheet? "That's where you would find something that looks like money, and that's a combination of currency and reserves held by financial institutions. So those have correspondingly gone up to close to $8 trillion dollars. It's classic inflationary finance."

By this reading, government policy has created a genuinely inflationary economy that can't be attributed solely to the circumstances of the pandemic. If you want to curtail that, the only honest response is to raise interests and stop spending – two things the Biden administration seems reluctant to do.

All of which makes Joe Manchin's refusal to commit to Build Back Better look wise. When asked about this, Harris digs in: "Goldman Sachs just today said that actually, we know that Build Back Better will strengthen the economy," she tells Brennan. "Not only is it morally right to say parents shouldn't have to struggle to take care of their basic needs like caring for their children and their parents - and their parents and their elder relatives. But it actually makes economic sense to do that and it brings down the cost of living."

Yet there are no real signs that Biden or Harris take inflation seriously. Barro is particularly unconvinced by Biden's decision to reappoint Jay Powell to be Head of the Federal Reserve: "What he really needed was a tough person oriented towards the banking system and to the idea that keeping inflation low is a major mission of the central bank. A figure like Jamie Dimon from JP Morgan would have been a remarkable signal that they're finally getting serious. Even Larry Summers, who I disagree with on many things, we're in agreement on this inflation problem and how it interacts with the monetary authority, so Larry Summers could have been named head of the Federal Reserve. Something like that could have been a great signal."

Dr Randall Heather agrees with all this, pointing out that the Producer Price Index (PPI) is now at a thirty year high. He also notes that in November, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) had risen by 6.8 per cent from the year earlier, the biggest 12-month jump in 39 years. "Despite that, the Biden administration is acting as though Covid is still going full blast and we need trillions more. The infrastructure bill you can get Republicans to support. But Build Back Better is pork-laden. There's $400 billion for child tax credits which won't have a lasting impact – it's money you'll burn through."

For Heather there's a difference between government spending for a road, and government spending for a child going to nursery for a day: the day will pass; the road, if it's built well, should still be there for future generations. Likewise, plenty of Covid cheques from both Trump and Biden simply went into people's savings accounts: the problem is one of corporate and government debt, not

Donald Trump
(Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)

Duncan Edwards from British American Business

Pete Buttigieg
(US Department of Transportation)

personal debt. "The trouble is you can't deal with inflation too strictly or else you crash the stock market. So they'll have to let it run," he explains.

The Special Relationship

So what does the situation in the US mean for the UK economy? In the first place, inflation seems to be catching: for instance, some energy economists argue that Biden's climate change policies are being felt at the pump in prices in the UK.

But in other respects, the broader outlook is one of continuity when it comes to US-UK relations. Iain Dale says: "If you look at presidencies, there's a surprising degree of continuity between them. There are a lot of similarities, for instance, between Barack Obama's foreign policy and Donald Trump's – and between Donald Trump's and Biden's."

Duncan Edwards, the CEO of BritishAmerican Business, argues that there's an inherent stability in the US-UK relationship, which neither a good nor a bad president can easily unpick. "In general, the US-UK relationship is in good shape," Edwards tells me. "There are always bumps in the road under any administration, but there are things which connect the US and the UK – such as security and intelligence co-operation – and these things underpin the Special Relationship. The Pentagon and the Department for Defence work incredibly closely together."

Or as Kamala Harris said in a joint press conference with Prime Minister Boris Johnson on 21st September 2021: "The relationship between our two countries is a long and enduring one, based on shared priorities." But since the FDR presidency, it would be difficult to find a single president or Vice President who hasn't felt it necessary to trot out similar platitudes at some point in their tenure.

Even so, that doesn't stop Harris' assessment being true. Edwards also explains the economic ties between the two nations are greater than any presidency. "The economic relationship is very strong because of the sheer scale of the trade in goods services and, of course, the huge capital that has been committed by American companies in the UK – and UK companies into the US."

So far, so good. But not all that's happened under Biden and Harris has been good for UK business. For instance, Trump's willingness to strike a trade deal – the 45th President's Anglophilia has often been underplayed by a critical UK media – has now been replaced by Biden's reluctance. Edwards explains: "The UK made significant progress on a trade agreement before the 2020 election, but trade agreements are not a priority of this administration, since they're aiming for a heavy agenda domestically."

That's a major shift. Edwards adds that, living in New York, he's seen UK ministers come and go during the Biden-Harris administration – and to little avail. "We've had Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Penny Mordaunt and Nadine Dorries, and all these visits are about trying to move the ball on trade, and I don't think they're going to make much progress."

This reminds us of how a simplistic view of Trump – whose Scottish ancestry, and his Scottish golf courses, made him an eager partner with Britain – can lead to a simplistic view of Biden and Harris.

Edwards continues: "Trump was much more pro-trade than Biden, but unfortunately most of the commentary on this is pretty surface. The reason why Trump was seen as anti-trade was because he condemned the behaviour of China, which doesn't behave according to the rules – a belief which Biden shares. Trump was also critical of the EU, which is a highly protectionist organisation. If you don't like Trump for other reasons, that was way too simplistic an analysis."

So for all Trump's talk of Making America Great Again, he was far less

KAMALA HARRIS TIMELINE:

1964 Born in Oakland, California

(Image courtesy of Kamala Harris, The Truths We Hold: An American Journey)

1986 Graduates from Howard University with a degree in political science and economics. During her time at Howard, she held an anti-apartheid demonstration outside of the South African Embassy.

Howard University (Derek E. Morton)

1989 Graduates from University of California, Hastings College of Law, where she earned her Juris Doctor degree. While attending UC, Harris was the President of the Black Law Students Association, where she organised protests and spoke frequently to the administration calling for more representation.

1990 Passes the bar exam and begins working in the Alameda County District Attorney's office. Initially specialises in child sexual assault cases, before becoming Deputy District Attorney. Then, she prosecutes various cases including sexual assault, robbery, and homicide.

Alameda County District Attorney's office (https://justiceforall.alcoda.org)

1998 District Attorney Terence Hallinan asks Harris to work for him in the San Francisco office as an Assistant District Attorney. In San Francisco, she managed a team of attorneys working on serious felony cases and repeat offenders while heading the Career Criminal Unit.

2003 Beats incumbent Terence Hallinan and Bill Fazio in a race for the San Francisco District Attorney's office. She was the first woman and person of colour in history to hold the position.

2005 As San Francisco District Attorney, launches the Back on Track programme which allows first-time drug offenders who plead guilty to continue their education and find work.

2010 Harris is elected Attorney General of California, beating Alberto Torrico, Chris Kelly, and others. During her time as Attorney General, Harris fought against Proposition 8 which would have banned same-sex marriage in California.

2012 Harris speaks at the Democratic National Convention, blasting presidential candidate Mitt Romney's positions on climate change, women's safety, and the economy. She also endorsed same-sex marriage, legal pathways to immigration, and an "American dream which belongs to all".

(Alamy)

2016 Following Senator Barbara Boxer's retirement, Harris runs and wins the position of United States Senator, defeating fellow Democrat Loretta Sanchez.

2018 San Francisco Mayor London Breed is elected, following a year as acting mayor after the death of Mayor Ed Lee, and credits Kamala Harris as a major mentor in her life.

2020 Following her unsuccessful presidential bid, then-senator Biden chooses Harris as his running mate. On November 7th, she became the first woman and first person of colour to serve as Vice President of the United States of America.

BIDEN HARRIS

1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020

protectionist than Biden and Harris. Edwards adds: "One of the first things Biden did was sign an Executive Order, making IT difficult for foreign companies to win government contracts in the US. By nature, the left tends to be more protectionist than the right. Their emphasis is on protecting jobs, and that's why with the Biden administration it's America first."

Madame President?

None of this is necessarily Kamala Harris' fault since many have noted her own powerlessness in the Biden administration. As against this, it must be said that Biden's policies are echoed throughout Harris' *The Truths We Hold* so it seems unlikely that economically she'd prove much different from Biden.

But it will matter hugely to her personally, since by 2024, it's likely – barring any further 'variants of concern' – that the state of the economy will decide her political fate at some stage.

Some of the people we spoke with held out hope that Harris might improve if she were to make it all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: "I don't have any reason to predict that she would be massively different from Biden in policy," says Robert Barro. "She hasn't excelled as Vice President, but I can't tell if that's because she's been given opportunities and blown them or if she hasn't been given those opportunities." That at least seems to give her some wiggle room.

> "There's no way the Democrats will let her walk into it."

So how will this all play out? I ask Iain Dale whether he thinks Harris will assume the presidency. "There are three ways this is going to go," he tells me. "Either she becomes president because Biden dies or is incapacitated in some way which is entirely possible. That's one possibility. The other is that they make it to 2024 and she runs; and then either she wins or she doesn't. I cannot conceive Biden can run for a second term. He'd be 82. I just can't see it."

And so she'll have to fight for the nomination? "There's no way the Democrats will let her walk into it. I suspect she wouldn't – which would be a bit of a disaster in terms of people thinking, 'Ah well, America's not ready for a woman, and not ready for a black woman'. So she needs to up her game a bit over the next year – well, a lot."

For Sir Martin Sorrell, Harris' weakness and the lack of ready alternatives, is a clear opening for Donald Trump to return: "I think we'll see a Trump in 2024 – either Trump himself, or personally I wouldn't underestimate Ivanka. Of course, it's a puzzle. Things can change. It's still very early on, Kamala's ratings can change over time, but people are negative at the moment." As a man who understands the online world extremely well, Sorrell is especially interested in the launch of Trump's platform TRUTH which is scheduled for 24th February 2022. "It's interesting what he's doing – he's creating an echo chamber. Those who wrote Trump off are going to be surprised. The trouble is we talk to one another in our own echo chamber – people on the East or the West coast. But I was talking the other day to a CEO of a leading packages company who'd just gone through the South on his motorbike. He'd been

Kamala Harris *(Alamy)*

through Alabama, Kentucky and Mississippi, and everywhere there were Trump signs."

Former Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Sam Gyimah puts her chances a little higher: "She's vice president which means if Biden isn't running she will seek the nomination. That's how Hillary ended up being the candidate. She will have a strong claim. But if her poll numbers are bad she might not make it through the primaries."

So in a sense, though she mightn't like it, everything will depend on her own performance as Vice President – her showing, if you will, in the famous bucket of warm piss.

Dale is among those who argue that Harris needs to grasp the nettle if she's to stand a chance: "If you judge by the poll ratings so far, she's performed pretty disastrously. That might be partly her fault; it might be Biden's fault for not carving out a role for her. But if you're VP without a job description, it's up to you to carve out your job description yourself and I'm not sure she's done a very good job of that."

So is her position salvageable? Dale thinks that she must learn not to air grievances that she has been given difficult portfolios especially when compared to Pete Buttigieg – her likely rival in 2024 – who is perceived to be having a better time as Transportation Secretary than Harris is as Veep. "If you're seen as a whinger that's not a good place to be," continues Dale. "You're there as a politician to solve difficult issues. Pete Buttigieg is the Transportation Secretary and therefore that does come within his remit. What she needs to do is knuckle down to the jobs she has been given because nobody's going to have any sympathy for him."

For Heather, the signs for Harris are bad. He argues that the 44th President Barack Obama still effectively controls the party, since he is by far the best at raising money. He adds that Harris' difficult portfolio is a reflection of the fact that the powers-that-be – all of them Obama-ites – don't view her as presidential material. "You have to ask why she was given these things. Immigration is hard – because it's fricking hard. Voting rights is hard because it's the states and not the federal government which control the voting rules unless they want to overturn the constitution. She was deliberately given these things – she got two hospital passes they don't expect her to do well on."

On the other hand, there are still plenty of people who wish her well, and not just Californians. A profound patriotism still exists in the American soul. John Updike's character Rabbit Angstrom in the famous Rabbit tetralogy was always inclined to love the person who happened to be President at whatever time. There are plenty of Americans like that today who would wish Harris well were she to assume office – and would like her to do better now.

So the stakes are high and the jury's out. It's only a year in from her time in the Vice-Presidency, and the clock is already ticking for her to prove she has what it takes to make it all the way to the Oval Office. f

How Gatekeepers have Altered the Public Discourse

BY IRIS SPARK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREW PRESCOTT

I was once in a position when I had to interview the rock star Sting and his wife Trudi Styler for a political magazine. I remember the evening vividly; it was snowing outside, one of those February days that serves up snow, but a snow you don't really want, accompanied by winds that somehow get through your coat and down your neck.

Sting lives on the 16th floor of an apartment block in Battersea, and I arrived amid a strange hush. There were two private chefs preparing Sting's dinner; and someone with a clipboard milling around. I waited in the kitchen for several minutes in silence, before a fourth person ushered me through.

And there they were: the famous couple, casually enthroned at a table the size of my living room. Westminster was their backing. I will not relitigate the interview, which went smoothly enough. What I remember is afterwards walking with Sting towards a balcony, and seeing the gym bike which presided over the River Thames. You'd feel you were a creature of the skies if you lived up so high.

As we parted company, I had an insight that cured me in one fell swoop of our modern curse: the fascination of celebrity. I realised that we were embarked on two different trajectories: I was about to tell everyone I'd ever met I'd just met Sting. Conversely, Sting was on the cusp of forgetting I ever existed.

As I returned into the snow, I realised too late that there was no tube station for a few miles around. It has sometimes occurred to me afterwards that Sting – or one of his gatekeepers – might on such a filthy night have offered me a car. Or perhaps that if I was in Sting's position, I'd hope to think of that.

A Question of Fame

But then I think the whole story had its unreality not really because of the man himself – who was friendly, and as down-to-earth as I imagine it's possible to be while being internationally famous and worth around £400 million.

In retrospect, what made the scene unreal and intimidating was the presence of the silent efficiency of the gatekeepers. It occurs to me now that the miracle of interviewing anyone famous is not that the famous person has let you in; it's that you got past the gatekeepers.

A friend of mine who once filmed with Robbie Williams once told me: "The trouble with meeting Robbie is he's always flanked by seven people – you have to take a moment to figure out not just which one he is, but who all these other people are."

Of course, these visuals also impact on the nature of the conversation that's possible around a well-known person. But the truth is that nowadays many people don't get past the gatekeepers.

But why does this matter? It's because celebrity has become an unavoidable aspect of our lives. Each day, when we wake and check our media, part of what we seek to do is to discover what well-known people are saying about the world. There might even be a sense in which we peer upwards towards the successful, and take our cues from them.

But as a journalist for the majority of my working life, I've come to question

the process by which this occurs. In researching this article, I've found that other journalists are disquieted by the way in which we come to hear what the renowned have to say. This isn't some gripe specific to journalists – although it is something which many do complain about. In fact, what we hear from well-known people – and how we come to hear it – opens up inexorably onto the wider question of the authenticity of our public conversation.

This in turn impacts on our ability to communicate with one another as a society, and also to solve societal problems.

A Pressing Problem

I was first alerted to the problem of gatekeepers when I began attending press trips – gatherings of journalists usually organised by the communications or PR team of a venue, business or brand. Just as lawyers might moan about the glacial court system when they gather, or bankers complain about the FCA, when journalists meet they bemoan the difficulty of being able to talk to famous or relevant people.

Put simply, there have been two developments over the past years, both of them detrimental – and even

catastrophic – for journalists. The first is a shift away from accessibility; the second is the blandification of what is said when communication is obtained.

The first tendency has been noted by many – not least by former Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke who once told me how it used to be de rigeur in the 1980s for ministers to finish their day's work then make themselves instantly available for television. As an elected official, it was what you were meant to do. By the time he conducted his last ministerial job in the Cameron administration, that was no longer the case.

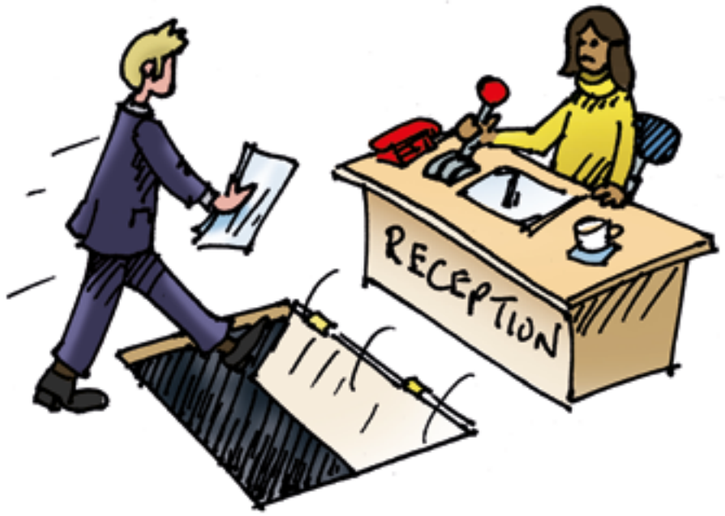
Of course, this particular development isn't just confined to politicians. Most successful people will have someone somewhere controlling their diary – most will have a PR team on top of that.

To talk to that person therefore, you have to go through 'a gatekeeper', or, more often than not, 'gatekeepers', who will shape the way in which your request is considered by the person you want to talk to. Journalists spend a lot of time talking to gatekeepers.

Some of these, it should be said, are brilliant at their jobs, understand the media, and are journalism-friendly.

One such is James Chapman, former Daily Mail political editor and former director of communications at HM Treasury. Chapman is now a partner at J&H Communications, and explains the gatekeeper aspect of his role: "There is definitely a gatekeeper role to effective PR, though some clients will want more of it than others. As a rule, we encourage clients to engage openly and constructively with the media, even when they're being criticised. But most will want and expect our advice on which journalists and outlets they should engage with, and the most effective ways of doing so."

In Chapman's remarks, the media appears as a fact of life – one which it is better to engage with than not.



So what sort of attitudes does Chapman encounter among his client base? "Some clients have long experience of the media and are confident in managing relationships and media opportunities such as interviews on their own," Chapman explains. "Others, who have done less, want us to hold their hands more throughout the process. Even the most seasoned client can occasionally get it wrong, and we tell anyone we work with that we will always give them unvarnished advice without fear or favour."

Chapman has worked for some of the most influential people in the country. He recalls: "When I worked for George Osborne, I was always very clear with him that I would give it to him straight, and he accepted that, though ultimately he was the boss and it was up to him whether or not he accepted my advice. That's the basis on which I've worked with clients ever since."

The Politics of No

That all sounds sensible – and one can't at all begrudge busy or successful people going to J+H Communications. Having a team to advise on the stress and complexity that emanates out of the modern media will be vital for those who have reached a certain level. When we interviewed Sir David Attenborough last year, he told us that he gets between 40 and 60 pieces of post a day. He is unusual in choosing to answer those himself; most people in a similar situation choose to delegate.

But not all PR firms, and certainly not all celebrities, are relaxed about the media, and this can lead to a number of problems. The first – and most likely – is that the shutters come down, and that the interviewee fears all the bad that can come out of the encounter, and resorts to a no when the interview in question might have been good for them.

Sometimes this can be perfectly understandable. When we catch up with Sir Tom Stoppard, he is frank about his own needs: peace and quiet. "I can't keep up, and so I just keep my head down," he jokes. When he makes an exception for Finito World, it is a very rare one.

Stoppard's remarks are a reminder that, as Chapman says, each client has their own needs vis-à-vis the media. Stoppard has been a household name for 60 years and, now in his-mid-eighties, needs nothing from anybody. Why talk to the media then? Besides, he knows that if he wants to say something, any newspaper would jump at the opportunity to publish almost anything he says.

There is no shame, then, in a no from Stoppard. But there are different kinds of nos. Often you write to an agent or publicist, right hand or executive assistant, and you don't hear back from there. You are left to wonder if the request was even read – and if so, whether a different response might have come your way had there been a different gatekeeper in position.

Maev Kennedy, who worked for many years as Arts editor at The Guardian, once told me of her tribulations in talking to the novelist Sebastian Faulks when at a gathering. She was asked to approach him through a publicist. "The PR or publicist said they'd have to check his availability. And I said: "Or I could just go up and talk to him – he's a perfectly friendly guy!"

This reminds me of a conversation I once had with a senior editor early in my career about the arduousness of pitching for interview. The editor – a well-connected man – said: "What's the matter with you? Just call them up!"

But that same editor has occasionally got hold of me and asked how to contact people in the time since. For a journalist then, this all becomes precious information. Who is the gatekeeper? Does he or she answer emails? In short, how can I get a conversation?

Often, what journalists really want is a private phone number, and journalists when they're in a room together occasionally swap this information. This can lead sometimes to a useful lead, and to a well-known person being interviewed without their PR team being aware of it. If this seems like subterfuge then many journalists consider it a necessary one – because the alternative is either that we don't talk to them, or that we get a sanitised conversation of little interest to anyone.

The Sin of Bland

Good PR turns out to be rarer than one would hope. Clients of PR firms wish to have media engagement, otherwise they wouldn't have hired the firm in the first place. But the structures around them can lead to another set of sins: the provision of unusable copy.

Damien Gabet, formerly editor of Square Meal and now a freelance writer for GQ, City AM, and others, explains: "If getting an interview in person was difficult before Covid, it's now "new-normal" impossible. But what's interesting is that even speaking to the interviewee on the phone is becoming progressively less likely."

Gabet explains the process: "The classic line is, "X doesn't have time to speak over the phone, but will happily answer any questions you have via email." Of course, this can't be true: writing them down takes much longer. And because there's no human interaction, they're much less interesting."

In such instances, everything depends on whether the person in question is a good writer: Clive James was noted for his love of the written interview, and Finito World has also conducted an emailed interview with Stoppard. From the interviewee's perspective, an email exchange can seem like a safe space. They can mind their language and be reasonably sure they're not taken out of context – thus avoiding the gaffe which has ruined so many a career during this era of 'cancel culture'.

Chapman wisely points out that the fear of engaging with journalists today is much more to do with fear of the Twitter mob than anything the PR industry is doing: "Politicians are encouraged into instant, snap verdicts, rather than taking a more measured view as they would have in the past. Social media also encourages echo chambers rather than broad discourse. Most alarmingly, facts and truths seem to count for less in today's public square, and that can be blamed firmly on social media."

But often, as Gabet continues, the situation is more hopeless still for the journalist: "Sometimes they don't even write. What you get is written – or at least, edited - by a third-party media sentinel who is trained to be commercially sensitive to the interviewee's own brand or his/her sponsors."

This is a far more common scenario than many might realise – the copy that comes back shorn of all personality, which doesn't seem to have anything individual about it. In such instances, there are three options: to say no; to ask for something more interesting; or, most deadly of all, to run bland copy, safe in the knowledge that people will read it as having been written by someone famous – and therefore give it the benefit of the doubt, and decide to find it interesting, even if objectively, it couldn't be more boring.

And what's the result of this? Gabet is frank: "What remains of our contaminated cultural perspective has been squeezed by the gatekeeper's fear that the interviewee will say something that is at odds with contemporary mores on sensitive subjects – typically identity – which then results in them being "cancelled".

Brexit and the Gate

For Emily Hill, formerly commissioning editor of The Spectator and now starting her own publishing house the Woolf Press, the whole thing comes back to politics. Hill explains: "Journalism is in crisis because we are no longer allowed to ask questions. There are two ways of stopping us: declining to answer overtly like the President of the United States – who cuts his press briefings off after he's made only the points he wants to make – or cutting off access obscurely through gatekeepers who will only grant access to those who know where their crumpet is buttered and won't risk a fire in the kitchen by toasting it."

So she views this as serious? Hill couldn't be clearer: "The whole situation is alienating the general public and pretty damned dangerous for democracy."

In Hill's view, Biden is culpable of damaging democracy by refusing to engage with contrary points of view. In the UK, both Boris Johnson and Theresa May in the last two general elections showed a disinclination to do appearances – May refused to debate Jeremy Corbyn, and Johnson would not be interviewed by the BBC's best interviewer Andrew Neil.

But according to Kate Bright, the CEO of UMBRA International, a security firm that specialises in protecting the wealthy, some well-known people are afraid of what awaits them in the public arena. Bright explains: "In today's world, security for private clients as well as household names is not only the physical, but also the digital and reputational. Today's high profile or even the most private client has a dilemma – particularly if the profile they have attained is through opinion voiced both in a professional and personal capacity – to curate and create barriers, or live with the risks that accessibility now presents."

Like Chapman, Bright thinks that social media has played a major role in inhibiting the public discourse. "The multiple channels for individual expression through social media give at once huge opportunity for messages to be spread, but also increase the scrutiny, at best, and a focus for criminal activity, at worst. Those that get it right can not only excel in their chosen profession, have a private life and mitigate risk, but it is a 24/7 operation, with digital risks ever omnipresent."

It might be then that when a journalist is failing to get in contact with someone that that person is simply tweeting over their heads. This is an aspect of modern life, and surely to be accepted and worked with, rather than lamented.

But in Bright's remarks we also see how

far the notion of 'cancel culture' has gone to make us feel that notions of 'safety' are at issue during discourse – not so much in the conversation itself, but in terms of what may happen afterwards in the so-called Twittersphere.

I have often felt this as an unspoken part of my conversations with the well-known. During that interview with Sting, he said something negative about the then President Trump during the interview, and afterwards, when the tape was off, he confided: "I think I may have got myself in trouble there."

His tone was of someone who knew there was nothing to do – that he had gone 'on the record' and that he had to play by the rules of the game.

I also remember one TV star saying to me: "Off the record – that was off the record" very deliberately into the tape after saying something disobliging about a prime minister. Personally, I've sometimes tried to protect people from coming across badly in my pieces, leaving out remarks which I suspected were said in ill temper. But then, other journalists will happily make their subject look bad, if it means that it's more likely the interview will be reproduced more widely upon publication.

The Burden of Proof

This seems to make PR more necessary than ever. It might be then that what we need isn't so much any grand reform of the PR industry, but simply better PR.

Chapman explains how it's important for clients to be open even in crisis situations. "Even where mistakes have been made, it's better to be upfront and explain how you intend to put things right."

Chapman admits that there is a wide variety of attitudes out there to the media experience:"Many people fear saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, getting their facts wrong, having their words twisted or taken out of context. Others worry they will come across as overly confident or even arrogant, just because they're trying to communicate that they're on top of their game, while others worry about seeming shy or inarticulate."

But Emily Hill is still critical of many people who want to have their cake and eat it: "Most of it is done under the guise of privacy but no detail is too intimate if it suits the image the rich and powerful want to project. Gatekeeping is ultimately aimed at controlling what people think – and the harder they try to do it the more people will conclude the news is fake and draw their own conclusions about what they're not being told."

The question of gatekeepers therefore is at its heart a question of trust about how we treat one another. But this trust works in many different directions: between PR person and client; between PR person and journalist; between reader and writer; and ultimately between all of us. At a time when the issues from the pandemic to climate change, terrorism and identity, couldn't be more important, it's more imperative than ever that we make room to address the way in which we discuss them. f

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Young and Gifted with Long Covid

EMILY PRESCOTT LOOKS AT A PROBLEM AFFECTING INCREASING NUMBERS OF STUDENTS

Kinga Cichewicz (Unsplash)

Apologies if I'm out of breath when I speak to you," Lizzie says when I catch her over the phone as she walks to a university lecture. For most students, the act of getting out of bed and actually attending a lecture seems like a small triumph but for Lizzie this is a pretty gigantic triumph. Just a year ago she couldn't walk anywhere and certainly wasn't in any state to be concentrating on her geography lectures.

Lizzie, 22, is thought to be one of more than two million adults in England to be impacted by long Covid. She caught the virus in July 2020 and wasn't horrendously ill but as the weeks and months went on she found she wasn't getting better. In fact, she was getting worse.

> "There are an estimated 106,000 under-25s like Lizzie, whose education is suffering due to the long-term physical impact of the virus."

Though she was on track to get a first class degree from the University of Bristol, and had been a successful long-distance runner, both those things had suffered. "I did the course online from home but I couldn't sit there for an hour and concentrate. I just realised it was pointless doing a year," she recalls. She took the stressful decision to defer a year. While her friends pressed on with the degrees she spent a lot of time asleep.

There are an estimated 106,000 under-25s like Lizzie, whose education is suffering due to the long-term physical impact of the virus. People with long Covid, which is when symptoms persist for longer than 12 weeks, may have to endure extreme tiredness alongside problems with memory and concentration as well as insomnia. Such symptoms are hardly conducive to effective learning.

Thankfully, Lizzie was surrounded by a family and supervisors who supported her decision to focus on getting well. "I know people going through the same thing, and it's just very frustrating. The longer it goes on, you just think, 'Surely I must be better now.' But you're not and now I have this lingering fear that I'll have another year of doing nothing. It was such a bizarre experience. Someone at my brother's university has dropped out, I know another friend of a friend who has had to defer. It's just exhausting," she sighs.

Of course on top of the physical impact of long Covid, the pandemic has forced students out of classrooms and the impact of this alone has been stark. The Sutton Trust for example says that five per cent of teachers in state schools report that all their students have access to an adequate remote-learning device, compared to 54 per cent at private schools.

Professor Russell Viner, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, recently told the Education Select Committee: "When we close schools, we close their lives." Viner argues that the pandemic has caused a range of problems for students, from being isolated and lonely to suffering from sleep problems.

Finito World spoke to the head of a department at a sixth form ccollege about how they deal with students suffering from the long term impacts of Covid, either physical or emotional. "I encourage them to do their work when they feel at their best and rest when they are not up to it," she explains. "All lesson PowerPoints and notes are made available on Teams for students to access. I have also added four extra drop-in support classes for students to access. This is intended to help those who missed classes due to Covid or didn't cope well with online learning," she explains.

She says that although the situation is tough, students who fall behind will ultimately have the opportunity to get back on track. "We are also running catch-up sessions each week where first year material is being retaught to second year students. All students are welcomed to these sessions and we repeat them on three separate afternoons each week so that a student should be able to fit one in to their timetable." The teacher, who wished to remain anonymous, says she wishes all schools and universities had such catch-up measures in place. "We have about 140 second year students and about 20 are attending these," she explains.

> "340,000 people may need support for the condition including 68,000 who will need rehab or other specialist treatment. "

The schools and universities might be open now but the pandemic is not over and many young people are still enduring the long-term impact of Covid. "No matter how young or healthy you are, it can very, very easily be you who gets affected by the virus. I know it's always in the news so you forget that. It seems separate," Lizzie says, urging her fellow students to stay safe and continue using measures to protect themselves from the virus.

Although she started to feel a bit better in February she says she wants to raise awareness about long Covid clinics, which have helped her. "At the beginning GPs didn't know what to do with me or where to put me but as long Covid clinics have started popping up we need to raise awareness of them. It'd be good if teachers and lecturers knew more about them so they can point pupils in the right direction, if necessary," Lizzie explains.

After a year out, Lizzie has made a good albeit not full recovery and she hopes that as the pandemic goes on more people will have access to the Covid recovery clinics.

Thankfully, the NHS has set up a specialist young people's Covid clinic. "I just hope teachers and doctors know about it so they can point people even younger than me in the right direction," Lizzie says.

The 15 new hubs will draw together experts on common symptoms who can directly treat young people, advise people caring for them and refer them into other specialist services and clinics.

"The boost to dedicated services for young people is part of a package of investment in a range of measures to help young people and adults with long Covid, including a major focus on specialist treatment and rehab services," an NHS spokesperson explains.

It is estimated that 340,000 people may need support for the condition, including 68,000 who will need rehab or other specialist treatment. While the majority of children and young people are not severely affected by Covid, ONS data has shown that 7.4 per cent of children aged 2-11 and 8.2 per cent of those aged 12-16 that catch the virus report continued symptoms. Lizzie adds: "There's hope. But it's not over yet." f

What's the future for fee-paying schools in the UK?

BY CHRISTOPHER JACKSON

What I remember most is the nerves. These were seasonal and could be reliably prompted by the autumnal drive from Pirbright, where my family lived, to Charterhouse School near Godalming. From the age of 13 to 18, they never fully went away. Even today the September air makes me more alert, even a little nervous.

Charterhouse School *(Tinyguy)*

Boarding school after all is a Darwinian environment, and you never know in any environment whether you'll sink or swim. And you especially don't know at a boarding school how things will be for you. This is because you don't really know who you are yet – and all your contemporaries are trying to find out the same thing.

In education, as we all know, the stakes are perennially high. "It can take a lifetime to climb free of your wrong beginnings," as the poet Philip Larkin puts it. But these were, to put it mildly, not wrong beginnings: they were very privileged beginnings.

Yet the nerves were there, and I now know they existed for others too. The trepidation natural to youth about going into a potentially hostile situation, was something I shared with the other teenagers who went to Charterhouse, Eton and Harrow and other such places, a wide range of whom I spoke to for this article.

Even so, there's a natural sheepishness about the topic. As former Carthusian Charlie Vincent, now a digital planner buyer at MediaCom in Edinburgh, tells me: "In terms of the privilege going hand in hand with the hard times, I feel I can only talk to fellow Carthusians or ex-public school people about it. Even if someone found the whole experience utterly traumatic, to an outsider they'd still be privileged and therefore undeserving of the pity they might be due."

> "Even if someone found the whole experience utterly traumatic, to an outsider they'd still be privileged and therefore undeserving of the pity they might be due."

That Uncertain Feeling

But perhaps this is to race forward and assume that pity should even be in the equation at all.

The fact is that attending a fee-paying school in the UK is tantamount to winning the lottery in terms of your life chances. For the benefit of our American readers, in the UK, fee-paying schools are confusingly referred to as public schools, though the system is really an aspect of the private market, and not state-funded as the name implies. These schools, though they have scholarship opportunities, are expensive – sometimes beyond contemplation.

The numbers are compelling. Brighton College – an institution noted for its excellent grades and its focus on developing kindness in pupils – is the most expensive at £50,880 a year.

This is considerably more than you'd pay at Eton College, which comes in at a comparatively cheap £42,501; Charterhouse, I now discover, is currently a steal at £40,695.

Brighton College has an impressive list of former alumni including Sir John Chilcot, and Academy Award winner Chloé Zhao, but it is Eton and Harrow – and to a lesser extent, Charterhouse – which have tended to produce the names one knows. Eton, of course, produced not only the current prime minister, but 19 others including Robert Walpole, WE Gladstone and David Cameron. Harrow, as everyone knows, was attended by Sir Winston Churchill. Charterhouse meanwhile produced the Earl of Liverpool, and former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

But it wasn't the names – at least, not at first – that contributed to that anxiety on the road to Godalming. It was instead to do with the look and feel of the place. We stand in the shadows of buildings before we gauge their ghosts.

In Charterhouse's case, the old Victorian architecture stood at the centre of the school, nestled at the crest of Godalming, like a complex of castles.

Winston Churchill would attend Harrow School

The main building at £50,000-a-year Brighton College , (*https://www.brightoncollege.org.uk*)

These old houses had peculiar names such as Gownboys, Saunderites, and Verites and were flanked by sporting fields fit for a Wodehouse Psmith novel. They have proven popular film locations over the years, and featured in The Mystery of Edwin Drood, and even served as the Houses of Parliament in The Bodyguard in 2018. Its effectiveness in that role can be gauged by the fact that I watched the drama series without noticing it was my old school.

To recall those house names gives me a Proustian jolt. It reminds that to attend that school was to be initiated into a private world denoted not only by architecture but also by language. The food shop was the tuck shop – as if henceforth one wouldn't be eating food but something slightly different, and perhaps more rarefied. The rollcall was called 'adsum', suggesting that the school linked itself back beyond its founder Thomas Sutton (1532-1611) to the Roman Empire. And indeed Latin was, in those days, still a staple of the curriculum.

The school was peppered with jargon, which added to one's sense of the oddity of it all. And it was this sense of the peculiar – something like finding one's way to Platform 9 3/4 at King's Cross – which gave the experience its validity, but also its capacity to frighten.

It was, above all, a dissonant experience. When I talk to Ned Cazalet, who attended Eton College and left in 1999, he describes the difficulty of his expectations at Eton versus the reality in very strong terms: "The challenge for me was to comprehend, which I never managed quite to do, that this was supposedly a beacon of education, a true world class institution and the fact that there was an astonishing amount of bigotry and parochial thinking. I couldn't understand how these things could co-exist."

I wouldn't say that, arriving at Charterhouse, I was confronted with

The Prime Minister Boris Johnson Portrait. Johnson famously attended Eton College. *(Ben Shread)*

quite such a black and white scenario – but I know what Cazalet means. Henceforward I had the best that money could buy and moaning about one's lot in life would be unseemly. I had become a victor in that most British thing: the class system. But life is such a complicated thing that being a victor in it can itself be complicated – and indeed, perhaps life is at its core so overwhelming that there are really no victors at all.

The Public School 'Charm'

So what exactly are parents who decide on public school buying – at Eton, Harrow and Charterhouse and a myriad others?

If you look at today's society, the first thing appears to be: the chance to become prime minister. Or at least, the capacity to run things – to feel that it isn't incongruous for oneself to be put in charge.

How does this manifest itself? Firstly, in something difficult to define, which might be called bearing or demeanour. This turns out to be different to manners, although it's true that public school pupils are often well turned out and, unless they have gone to a strange effort to the contrary, almost always well-spoken.

We all know Boris Johnson's body language at the despatch box. It seems to say: "I'm not surprised you want me to run the country – the only surprise is you didn't ask me to do it sooner." We have seen this before: David Cameron had it; Tony Blair, educated at Fettes, had it too. It is difficult to define, and is in a strange way most understood when it is absent, as it was in the premierships of Theresa May and Gordon Brown. In those instances, when we talk of lack of charisma or star power, it can sometimes seem as if these are euphemisms for not having gone to public school.

And so, of course, if you do go to one of these schools there is an immediate sense of possibility. This was also the case at Charterhouse if you happen to be literary, and know that Robert Graves and William Thackeray attended. But even there, try and write a novel – as many Carthusians do – and you'll find Graves and Thackeray of little direct assistance.

Charlie Vincent recalls: "None of them meant much to me. I can imagine that I would have felt different going to Eton. So many great actors, so many not-so-

Old Carthusian Robert Graves

Old Carthusian William Makepeace Thackeray

great PMs, and a raft of other notables. That would be quite inspiring, I think."

And indeed over at Eton some former pupils talk of having been inspired. One Etonian I used to know at university, Francis Morris, who has gone on to be a filmmaker, though not a well-known one, always said that having gone to the same school as George Orwell was something he was proud of. This always struck me as slightly incongruous: Orwell, of course, hated his time there.

Indifference can also crop up on this point. One former pupil, who left Eton in 2003, says: "I have never actually thought about who my favourite Etonian would be….but (after a quick search…) possibly Ranulph Fiennes or Ian Fleming; both creators of fantastic legacies." Cazalet names Hugh Laurie.

Xavier Ballester, who also left in 1998, and is now a Director at the Angel Investment Network, explains that he feels "a mixture of pride and shame. The people running this country are the classic blustering, bluffing Etonian who are so full of confidence rather than talent that they end up screwing up things for everyone. But some Etonians have clearly had an impact on society and the world. Aldous Huxley springs to mind but there are countless others."

The Provost's Garden at Eton College *(Martin Kraft)*

Whether we agree with all this or not, there's a lot packed in there. There's this sense of possibility across any discipline you might wish to practice – "countless others" – but also the sense that privilege doesn't lead to meaning. That you have to find for yourself: and the danger with fee-paying schools is if you ever think that has been paid for in advance. It hasn't. Life's burden is still something you have to carry. And if the burden is less than if you'd been less privileged – well, my experience is, try telling that to a 13 year-old.

Absurdity and Tragedy

In retrospect, my time at Charterhouse had a lot to do with real life intruding, sometimes as absurdity, sometimes as tragedy. One episode that qualifies as absurd and in retrospect was handled well by the school involved Paul Rees. Rees was 23 and a modern languages teacher when he came in fourth in 1996 in a now forgotten TV show called Mr Gay UK, and as the tabloids gleefully reported, was patted on the behind by Jason Donovan upon exiting the show.

Once the papers discovered that Rees taught at the "£12,000 a year school" (note the exponential rise in fees these past years) they insisted on his resignation. As I look at the archives, I am heartened by the vigorous reply of the then clerk to the governors, Harry Foot: "Why should he? We employ teachers for their abilities and for their abilities only. What he does in his private life is entirely a matter for him. He is an excellent modern languages teacher and that is all that matters. It wasn't surprising he was spotted as it was a public TV programme."

Bravo, Foot. It was an example of how anything that happened at Charterhouse could be deemed to be in the public interest. But then this was just one in a long line of stories. The previous year the married headmaster Peter Hobson had been forced to resign when it emerged that he had been consorting with a 16 year-old call girl who it turned out had gone to the nearby school of Tormead. The incident was discussed on Have I Got News For You. By 2001, when a pleasant physics teacher Nick Tee announced that he would henceforth be Nicola Tee, and the story was also splashed across the tabloids, it was no longer surprising to find my school in the public domain. Vincent is close to the truth when he says: "Today's culture wars were playing out at our school in the 1990s."

Some boys would even leak stories to the papers, hoping to earn a tip fee. There was a certain pride about knowing that your school was newsworthy – it deepened a sense of being relevant, which a young person might cling to as a bogus source of self-esteem.

But looking back, it was also an aspect of how school doesn't protect you from reality. Accident, vicissitude, and even death can still intrude. This turned out to be the case in two awful instances, both of which were preventable. One involved a boy in Weekites, Henry Southwell, who was hit by a car crossing the Hurtmore Road on his way back from a game of football at Broom and Lees playing fields; I can find no archives online about this incident, but suspect it occurred in 1996, and recall the driver, an elderly woman, experienced a burst tyre. There is now a bridge named after him, which prevents today's boys and girls taking the same risk for which he died.

Then in 1998, Nick Stafford, a talented athlete in Daviesites, tragically drowned in the pool during a Navy exercise; he had been trapped under a life raft. It was an unthinkable tragedy, and I have never forgotten the quiet in the chapel at his memorial service when Nick's parents entered. It was an astonished silence, which told how nobody in that vast, cold chapel would ever satisfactorily compute the absolute nature of grief.

All one wanted to do then – and it is a feeling that hasn't gone away as the years have amassed – was to reach across to them and undo the event. Ever since I have gone through life – through birthdays, career, friendship, wedding and children – sometimes briefly marking them as things Nick should also have had. But those events have a warning attached to them: never to forget the luck I've had. And to remember that Charterhouse was an aspect of that – though that my luck too has been somehow independent of it.

It's the Facilities, Stupid

For me as a Lockite in one of the rather architecturally unlovely new houses, each day began with a trudge from one side of school to its centre where chapel and lessons would take place.

This meant crossing the green playing-fields to prayer; it was a social occasion, a daily odyssey bound up with the notion of a shared journey.

Since we were the furthest from the centre, as we'd walk along, every 50 or so metres you'd be joined by those who'd have to leave a little later to join you on the walk in. Who you walked in with would shape your day. Some people I bumped into on that walk 30 years ago, I am quite likely to call now if I have a problem, or something to tell.

What was the substance of that friendship? It wasn't only shared trauma of being away from home so young. It was to do with burgeoning self-confidence, and a sense that we were joined in destiny. There was something else: over time, we got the hang of the place together, learned its mores and how to give them our twist, where rule lay and where it could be stretched, what was mockable and what was sacred, what was true about the place and what was false.

Over time, as friendships accrued, we realised that our homes beyond had similar setups: large gardens if they lived in the countryside; spacious verticality if the background had been urban. One was surrounded by recognisable narratives. My father was a lawyer; and I soon found that other boys often came from professional backgrounds. Nick Bourne, the dentist's son. Andy Hollingsworth, whose father was a doctor. There was a whiff of the aristocracy, but less so than at Eton. There was Iona Douglas-Home, the granddaughter of a former prime minister, and Richard Dennen, now editor of Tatler, would in time consort with royalty.

The Thomas Sutton statue at Charterhouse *(Grayswood Surrey)*

Getting to know the place together meant the discovery of humour as a tactic, a mode of survival. One also had to decide on where one sat on the spectrum between lawlessness and obedience. As ever, I pitched myself in the middle, reasoning perhaps that it was the best method of camouflage.

On foggy mornings, we'd run delightedly across the grass, trying to avoid the prefects who were charged with policing an activity that could do no good to the cricket wickets. One of my central memories is the hallooing from other boys within the fog, as you struck for the path, seeking to evade capture and punishment. It strikes me now as a handy metaphor for life at Charterhouse – knowing that there are others with you in the miasma of life, and that life was already enchanted, thrilling, strange, and bit alarming.

A new sports centre opened the year I left, and I remember a favourite pastime was to visit at night and stand illicitly in the cavernous building works: it was an opportunity to wonder at this new development, though we were really too young to consider the privilege, or how it was financed.

There was a certain lilt to the place that didn't preclude momentum. I don't think the contingencies of fate – not even Nick Stafford's terrible death – really made us feel any the less privileged – any the less in charge of our destinies. We had the best that money could buy, and though that couldn't exclude the complexity of life, it seemed to guard against professional failure, and even against being in some way a person with a limited frame of reference.

Each year, the Ben Travers Theatre would put on plays. A satirical magazine Greyfriars – at one time edited by myself and the excellent and award-winning filmmaker James Kibbey – was tolerated by the school, though its humour could turn towards the acidic, and in retrospect could have done with a severe edit. Rounds of golf would often fill an afternoon, and I remember watching as Andy Hollingsworth, then tipped for greatness as an England cricketer, picked up the game, becoming a scratch golfer in a matter of weeks. Talent was in our midst.

Over at Eton, Ballester confirms the importance of sport: "I was good at sport, which helped a lot, but some people were sent to Eton and got mercilessly tormented (a northern guy in my year springs to mind)." Another Etonian confirms this: "I was bullied initially until I could hold my own on the sports field and prove my worth so to speak."

In our own school year, the emphasis on sports meant that some could walk the school corridors as heroes, but to recall them is sometimes to remember F. Scott Fitzgerald's line in The Great Gatsby that there are no second acts in American lives. Those who prosper at the school – especially at sport – are in reality unlikely to make it into professional sport, and so it's often the case that the heroes of our youth do not replicate that success in the world at large.

> "Each day dawned and ended with the same goal: to make others laugh. If you did that, you knew you'd be okay."

But most of all I recall the humour. Each day dawned and ended with the same goal: to make others laugh. If you did that, you knew you'd be okay. The flipside of this was that if you didn't, you might not.

How funny we actually were remains open for debate, but life at school could sometimes resemble a Have I Got News For You panel, where your personal prosperity was dependent, even to a tiresome extent, on a quick wit. But this has had its good effects too. Today, my wife tells me she can tell if I receive a text from an old school friend: "You never laugh like that otherwise."

The Evidence

These are personal reminiscences and though they have been shored up by talking to a range of old school friends, it is important that they be buttressed by evidence as to what a private school education entails in the UK. You can't just talk to your friends; you need to talk to the professors.

And if you do that the consensus is reasonably clear in spite of the surprisingly limited amount of data: there are certain gains that accrue to your child if you send them to a fee-paying school.

Professor Francis Green is a leading expert on the effect on the labour market of private schools. He explains the scope of his research to me: "The evidence on what private schools do is fairly narrow. Some of the research I've done has looked at self-esteem and tracks people who were at school during the 1960s."

That means that those who took part in Professor Green's research are now in their 60s – and of course, public schools have changed a lot during that time. The possibility then is that private schools have prospered precisely because of lack of information about their effectiveness.

Professor Francis Green is among those arguing for a change to the charitable exemptions enjoyed by fee-paying schools

But what are the results? Green found that self-esteem was higher in people who went to private schools, but he adds a crucial caveat: "Self-esteem was something they came with. It wasn't changed by being at these private schools."

Life's advantages, then, kick in well before ages 11 to 13 when parents first send their children to these schools. Green continues: "Psychologists also talk about something called 'internal locus of control'. This means the confidence that you're in control of your life – that the things that happen to you are things you've chosen. People with low locus of control assume that everything that happens to them is good or bad luck."

So when a parent decides to send their child or children to a fee-paying school this is part of what they're paying for? "If you compare similar people, and one goes to state school and the other private school, you'll find that private school enhances their locus of control."

This might seem like a somewhat abstract concept for which to pay £40,000 a year – and sometimes more. But it chimes with me as it's something that the majority of my Charterhouse friends have.

It also has ramifications in the workplace. Charlie Vincent recalls entering the world of work: "I went into media after plenty of meandering and I was most definitely a minority being a public school person in my first few jobs. It didn't help me having gone to public school except, maybe, in that my accent and demeanour came across well in meetings and interviews." In other words, he had internal locus of control. So this was useful? Vincent continues: "I'd say that this could be a benefit… unless you happen across someone who

hates public school people, of course. I find that unless you are pompous or arrogant, people don't hold it against you though. It can work in your favour even with those that might not agree with private education *per se*, so long as you stick to the good manners and etiquette you picked up."

Green adds another point: "There are other papers that look at well-being, and by that metric you get a fairly neutral picture. There's some evidence, for instance, that girls in the 1970s and 80s really suffered but for the most part you don't find a big difference. The well-being aspect is rather neutral, as far as we know."

So private schools make you confident but don't make you happy. This arguably seems to bump up against the scarcity of the available data, in that it's a pretty safe bet that confident people tend to be happier, as they're less likely to be knocked by adversity. Green says: "Undoubtedly it is the case that what private schools give you is this locus of control, and it gives you access to networks."

Social Network

The old boy's network. This continues to be another argument in favour of sending your child to private school, but equally another hot potato that causes – understandably – a lot of emotion. It is an unthinkable state of affairs, after all, that a small percentage of children should not only be confident enough to succeed, but on top of that access those who have themselves already had those advantages. When you think of it that way, the deck is pretty effectively played and anything but enormous success if you have gone to one of these schools, would be deemed a private cataclysm.

But anecdotally, you sometimes here that having gone to a fee-paying school has less benefit than they'd been expecting – and it seems likely that this has to do with the way in which the global economy has changed as a result of the international economy. Certainly, my strongest sense of the world I graduated into in 2001 was of its enormity, and the coolness of its welcome. If I ever thought – and I'm not sure I did – that an old Carthusian would reach down to pluck me from obscurity and install me at the head of something, I was to be in for a shock. The world had changed.

One old Etonian, who left in 2002, feels that having gone to public school has in some ways held him back: "I thought it was a benefit in post university job applications. As I write this today, I am currently out of work and I wonder if the link to school now is a headwind or tailwind as firms are looking to balance out (correctly I might add) the employment roster. I think in certain areas, the school link has been a very strong lever in a career but I would like to think that any good education is rewarded."

Vincent adds: "I should mention that my career did step up upon meeting another public school guy that hired me. It's possible though that he would have hired me had I gone to a normal school."

Xavier Ballester, however, is in no doubt as to the impact: "Getting a scholarship to Eton (a small one – I wasn't in college with the big scholars I just missed out by a place) had a huge impact. It helped me get into Oxford and with those two on my CV it has given me a lot of confidence although I never pursued a classic city/legal/accounting career so have never really had much use for a CV."

So paradoxically, while the CV your child gets as a result of a fee-paying education might ideally fit your child for a career in the traditional professions, it also bequeaths the confidence to strike out and be more entrepreneurial.

More Heat than Light

As I write this, I am conscious that I am proceeding with unusual trepidation, aware of the controversial nature of the topic. What gives me constant pause is a thing so bound up in the fabric of this country as to be toxic to discuss: the class system.

And of course, it's also acquired a new level of controversy after Keir Starmer's speech on the second day of the Labour Party Conference in October 2021 in which he said: "Labour wants every parent to be able to send their child to a great state school. But improving them to benefit everyone costs money. That's why we can't justify continued charitable status for private schools."

It is a subject that makes many queasy. Lee Elliot Major is the UK's first social mobility professor and he argues that the debate around private schooling can easily "go round in circles and I'm not sure what impact it can have." So does he think there is any benefit in closing the tax loopholes that fee-paying schools currently enjoy, as Starmer plans to do if he becomes prime minister? "My view is that we live in a liberal democracy," he says, "and that you have to allow people freedom to choose. Some of my good friends have chosen to send their children to public school."

Professor Lee Elliot Major argues that the debate generates 'more heat than light'

Major is also at pains to point to the complexity of the issue. "If we look at social mobility, the problem is that many people from privileged backgrounds go through the state system and you need to be careful of crude summaries that pit private versus state."

Major cites the ways in which the social mobility problem of fee-paying schools might be addressed, and discusses Sir Peter Lampl's idea of an open access scheme, whereby state money is put towards children going to independent schools. "It would be a radical way of reordering education, but I think on balance that it is unlikely to happen politically." How then do you address the issue of private schools in terms of social mobility?

Major replies: "A more palatable approach is for private schools to form a genuine partnership with the state schools, or lose that charitable tax status." So what might that entail? Major explains: "It could be things like offering specialist teachers in specialist subjects, or offering your playing fields. Those must be genuine partnerships to warrant charitable tax status." He pauses. "But I'm being very careful. My worry over these debates is that they generate a lot of heat and very little light."

Of course, the government is also keen to point out that many independent schools already do have meaningful partnerships with the state sector. A Department for Education spokesperson tells me: "Our world class independent schools' sector plays a valuable part in our school' system and provides economic benefits through the thousands of international students it attracts. The independent sector also plays an important role in state provision with many independent special schools' places being funded by government."

The spokesperson continues: "Many charitable independent schools have entered into mutually beneficial partnerships with state-funded schools. The department has a joint understanding with the Independent Schools Council, to encourage the development of partnerships and has funded the Schools Together programme, which helps schools from the independent and state-funded sector identify opportunities to work with each other."

But Major, who is the author of a brilliant book *The Good Parent Educator*, is particularly keen to point out that if you really want to tackle social mobility you need to acknowledge the complexity of society – even its fluidity. "My view looking purely on the evidence on what works in education in terms of cost effectiveness is to be quite frank, you send them to the good local state school, which presupposes you have a good state school in your neighbourhood, and you top it up with good private tutoring on the side."

Major continues: "But the boundaries aren't as clear in social mobility terms as people might think. There's a huge private industry of tutoring. And people forget there's as much variation in the private schools as in state schools – a point I made to parents in my book. If you're going to address social mobility issues you have to think about how you level up, though I know that term is bandied about a lot."

Unsurprisingly, Professor Green disagrees with this – but then his book *Engines of Privilege* seems to have been a direct influence on Starmer in bringing up the issue again. "It has had a mixed reaction," he admits. "The private school sector has been very defensive, and some thought it was fantastic. But most people cannot understand how an institution for the largely rich should have charitable status."

However, even Green admits that the policy has its limits. "In terms of the numbers, it has to be said it wouldn't make an enormous amount of difference. There are probably about 550,000 children in private schools in Britain. My best estimate is that if you took away the tax advantages you'd lose about 30 or 40,000 or those as the fees would go up a little bit."

I say I feel sorry for those hypothetical 30 or 40,000. He replies: "They wold have to go into the state sector, and the government would have to educate those people. As a result some schools would close, and the private schools would scream about it, and it wouldn't change the system on its own. On the other hand, you'd have a slightly fairer education system as there wouldn't be so many people in that privileged position."

Ending Up

So what did it all amount to – being in that privileged position? Well, there appears to be – so far, at least – little fame in my year at school. Clement Power had some success as a composer; Richard Dennen would go on to edit Tatler, and gad about a bit in high society. Very occasionally these people appear in the papers – but not to any great extent, and not always in Dennen's case for the right reasons.

A random Google search assures me that others have won top positions at law firms and accountancy firms, ensuring that they have no financial worries I can imagine, especially after having come from families wealthy enough to have been able to afford Charterhouse in the first place.

But for the most part me and my friends have had normal lives – with all the small blessings and frustrations that one associates with that. Careers haven't fallen out of the skies readymade, they've had to be worked for. In my own instance, no book has written itself, each had to be toiled over, written and rewritten, without any help from the ghost of Thackeray. I don't

particularly ascribe my failures or my successes to Charterhouse, though that can't be quite right because life would surely have been different in a myriad ways had I not gone there. Again, there is insufficient data on the whole question: the confusions of my own life, its causes and effects, are probably a microcosm of the strangeness of the whole debate.

On the other hand, a room has never been a particularly stressful thing to enter, and I suppose if I'm honest I never entered any of them with a chip on my shoulder about having gone to public school or having not done so. The question was removed, and perhaps was removed quietly during all those anxious drives from Pirbright to Godalming all those years ago.

A friend of mine, who can afford to send his kids to private school says: "The reason I'd send my son to private school is because he'll have a chip on his shoulder if I don't."

There's truth in that, but it's not the whole truth. As the state sector improves – and it has undoubtedly done so – then there is the increasing realisation that there's no reason why self-confidence – or internal locus of control, if you prefer – should be something you can only have if you went to public school. Major says: "I still think there will be very self-confident people that come through leading state schools who have also come from a supportive or elite background."

Major's point is that society is not straightforward, and getting less and less so. The problem with this whole debate – and with Starmer's wading into it – is that it can sometimes make it seem as though it is.

Even now, the fact is that many state school people have confidence, and go on to great things; many public school people end up having sad lives, and they are not less sad because they began in privilege. The danger with this debate is that it removes our empathy – and it does it towards the young who really do deserve that.

Youth and adolescence are very hard. The world will remain strange to us until the day we die, but it is never more frightening than when our personalities aren't fixed, our skins not yet thick, our stance on the earth as yet unestablished.

> "The world is changing fast – that fee increase from £12,000 to £40,000 means that the middle class are often priced out of private education."

The world is changing fast – that fee increase from £12,000 to £40,000 means that the middle class are often priced out of private education, and that those who can afford it are likely to attend the playing-fields of Eton alongside a new international elite. So in the end it wasn't any Starmer-esque shifts to tax policy that changed things, it was the international economy, whereby the global superrich, hearing that the English education system was the best in the world, came here, ousting some of the middle classes – perhaps my children among them.

My sense is that that will probably do no real harm to the private school system, although it may make them a less uniquely English experience. If the aristocracy can afford these places, their children will be playing lacrosse at Marlborough or Fives at Eton alongside the children of Chinese and Indian billionaires. Perhaps they'll be the better for it.

And I don't think it'll necessarily be bad for the state system either, if children whose parents have had the benefits of fee-paying schools create a more layered and complex society – that is, one without such a clear class divide.

To finish, there is a story of an old contemporary of mine who after leaving school secured a job in the banking sector, which he attended for a while during which time he was living at home with his parents. He began suffering mental health problems. He lost his job. He couldn't bring himself to tell anyone – least of all his parents. Out of pride, he kept getting up in the morning and going into the City just as if he had never lost his job. He did this for years.

It is, on the one hand, a very public story. Other families would notice the lack of money; perhaps other parents would guess at a problem in their son and investigate. There is a preoccupation, even a coldness, which is specific to a certain kind of wealthy English family.

But it is also a human story, even in its skeleton form as I have told it, full of an individuality that gives it such a specific tragicomedy. It reminds me what is missing in this debate: that sense that every child matters, because every child has a role to play in the future – or should have. It is only by talking about these anxieties and these structural injustices from every angle that we move forward – that we climb free, as Larkin has it, of those wrong beginnings that in some measure we all share. f

Brian Blessed, Actor, Writer and Presenter

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St Mary's and All Saints' Church, Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire © Bob Stewart.

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Life Behind a Lens

LEGENDARY PHOTOGRAPHER PAUL JOYCE DESCRIBES WHAT HE'S LEARNED FROM A LIFETIME CAPTURING THE GREAT AND THE GOOD

When people ask me as a photographer what my tip is, I say, "Follow and chase the light." It's a thing my old friend David Hockney told me: when the day is beginning to close and the sun is on the last buildings – go to those buildings. That's what Van Gogh did. If you look at his early Dutch paintings, they're dark interiors, and everything's grim and brown. Then you get the wonderful Yellow Period, and it all changes.

Samuel Beckett

My subjects vary, but I've come to learn that celebrity has its dangers. I remember Elijah Moshinsky, who was a very fine theatre director, and who died of Covid recently, saying of Placido Domingo that he's totally isolated from the world. Everything was done for him – he's cut off. He never talked to ordinary people, or mixed with them.

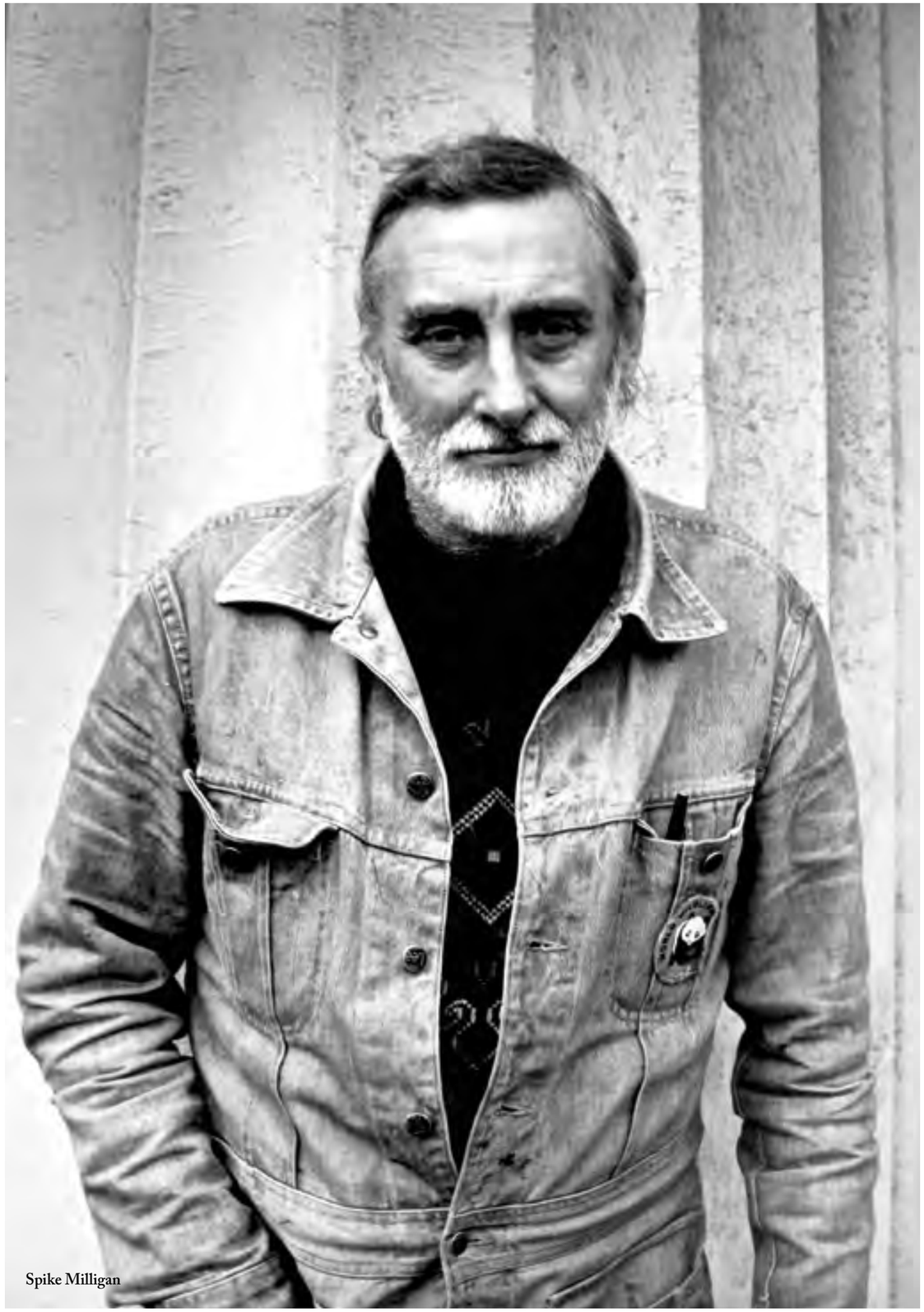
I've always photographed my subjects out of an artistic need. The only commissioned portrait I did was for Condé Nast and was of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the writer of *Heat and Dust* – a wonderful Indian lady. I took one of the worst portraits I ever took in my life and Condé Nast and I agreed it shouldn't be published. Why was that? It was because I didn't choose her. Even though I admired her, I couldn't do anything with that face. You have to have the admiration for the work, and also a sense that the face is going to tell some kind of story.

So I could never be David Bailey. I have a story of David Hockney being photographed by Bailey. Hockney was told to go to the studio and was waved in and shown his way to a white background. And David Hockney said: "Where do you want me?' Bailey says: "Against the background." David stands there. Bailey gives him a scarf and he says, "Make like a bat!' And Hockney says, "What?" Bailey repeats: "Make like a bat!" And David waved his arms. Click, thank you – and that was it.

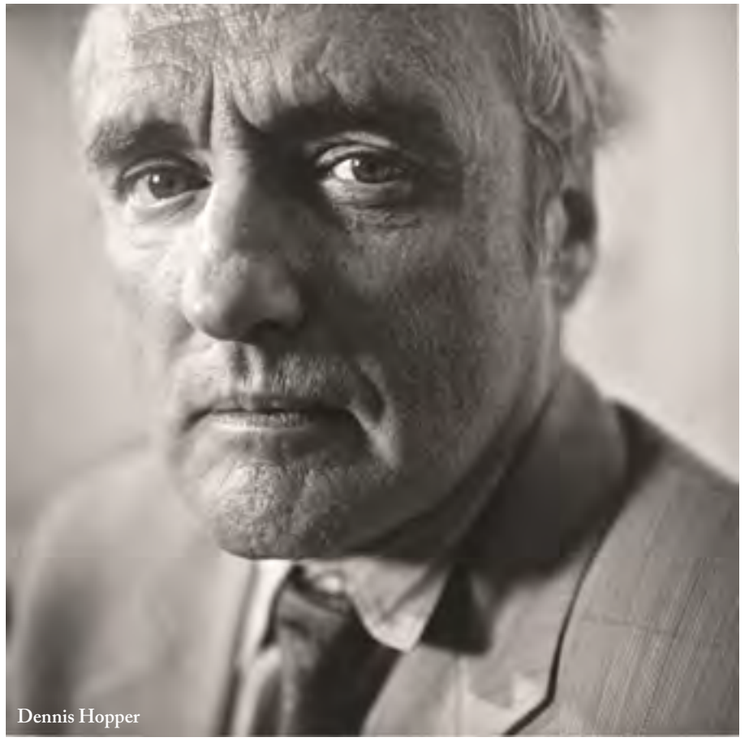
Samuel Beckett was wonderful. I'd tried various careers including banking and estate agency, and not got anywhere. This was before film schools. They were trying to establish a National Film School. Also there was a rogue organisation called the London School of Film Technique that occupied a building in Charlotte Street that subsequently was occupied by Channel Four. The Greater London Council began to give grants, and they'd send you some money to help make films. I sold my MG, my golf clubs, banked the cheque and made a film.

I'd seen the Royal Shakespeare Company used to do readings rather

Robert Redford



Spike Milligan



Dennis Hopper

"You own it, Sam! This is where you negotiate." Beckett said: "Well, Mr Joyce, what would you say to 50p?"

At the end, he said: "What do you want to do with it?" Calder interjected: "You own it, Sam! This is where you negotiate." Beckett said: "Well, Mr Joyce, what would you say to 50p?" I said: "Yes". He said: "Would you like some Guinness?"

As a frustrated drama director, I turned to photography as a way of surviving. You're treated suspiciously if you wear different hats. I miss theatre directing – I'd love to do Chekhov now.

than full scale productions on a Sunday, and one was by Beckett called Act Without Words II, which was about 15-20 minutes long. I thought it was great, and I set my version on a rubbish dump. I didn't have the rights to the film. I finished the film and didn't know what to do. I showed it to Harold Pinter and Pat McGee, one of the great Beckett actors. The word got out to Sam I'd done this, and to John Calder, who was his publisher. They summoned me to Calder's house.

I set up a screen and a projector, and I went to Beckett's Harley Street apartment. I went up, and there in the corner was this figure with a Guinness: Sam. "Oh Sam, this is Mr. Joyce," said Calder. I set up. Beckett pulls his chair up and sits about two feet from the screen meaning all you could see was his shadow. I started the film, and I was nervously waiting by the projector. I noticed that his shadow was shaking. I thought: "Oh God, he's seething." But I went closer and he was laughing – shaking with laughter.

Jane Fonda

Jane Fonda

I think back on the people I've photographed and it does seem unreal. Jane Fonda was wonderful. I was a callow youth on secondment to Paramount to do a documentary. I remember the Rolling Stones arrived, and looked like ruffians – that was an eye-opener.

Henry Moore was a pretty tough, short Yorkshireman. He didn't suffer fools. He also told me something I never knew: you can't do decent sculptures in wood

Quentin Tarantino

if the wood is from a tree that's died. You have to have fresh, green wood and when I was there, there were huge lorries of wood delivered just for him. I don't understand sculpture really. Either it's realist or it's not but I suppose you could say the same about painting.

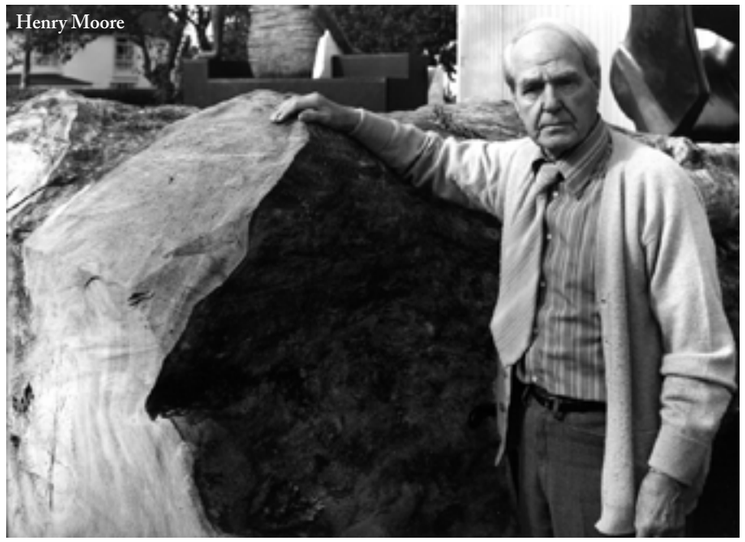
Quentin Tarantino – we don't keep in touch now, but I knew him earlier in his career, and he owns one of my paintings. I saw Reservoir Dogs before anyone else. He's pretty sparky and very opinionated. Years ago, before Groundhog Day became a classic we agreed it was a classic. I think we disagree a bit about the value of some things, such as as Bollywood and horror!

As you get older you realise, we all have feet of clay. There was only one saint I met and that was Cesar Chavez. He represented Mexican workers who were exploited in gathering the grape harvest. He campaigned long and hard. I met him through Kris Kristofferson who did concerts for Chavez's cause. He was in danger constantly of assassination. He was disrupting this system of relying on cheap labour.

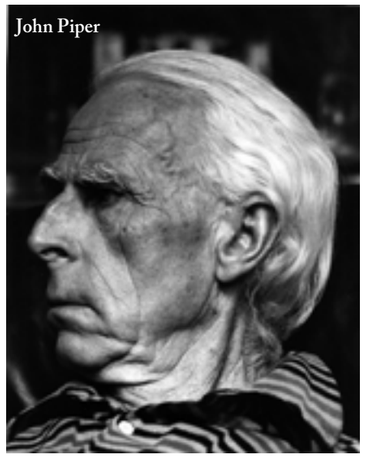
We have a need to deify and the need to imbue someone with the power of celebrity. It's as if we will it on them so we can help them in some way. If they're not powerful, what's their use? With artists, they have a vision to transmit that is beyond what we have. It's not saintliness, it's not goodness, or grace or anything like that– it's a vision, a way of looking at the world that changes our own way of looking at the world. Let that be enough.

I met Johnny Cash through Kris Kristofferson. I never met Dylan. I think he's one of the great authentic geniuses. I had my doubts about the poetry – but the lyrics are finally amazing poetry.

Spike Milligan I got to know – he was lovely, difficult and mad – as you can see in this photograph. He'd come to dinner and tell us stories about how during the Second World War, they'd paint on the bombs: "Good luck boys, up yours!" f

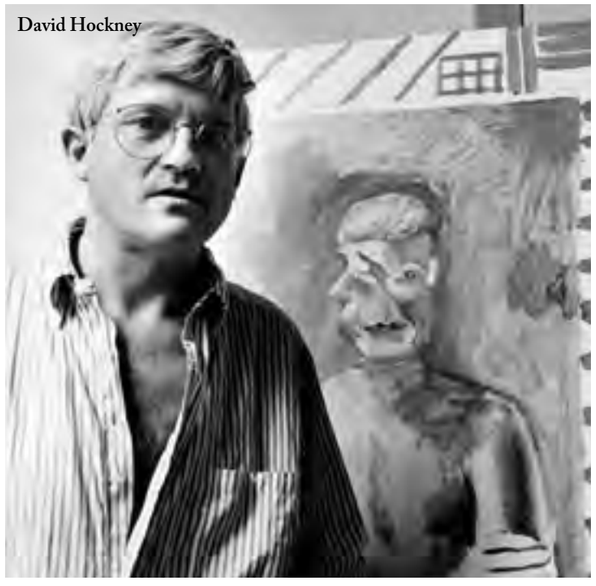

Henry Moore

Jason Robards


John Piper

Jonathan Miller

Johnny Cash


David Hockney

Gibbons at 300:

WHAT THE WOODCARVER CAN TEACH ABOUT MENTORSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP BY PATRICK CROWDER

Gibbons' work continues to inspire today

Grinling Gibbons' works and artifacts from his life are being exhibited together for the first time at Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park.

In 1671, at the age of 23, Grinling Gibbons had already become the most masterful woodcarver in the UK. He applied his natural, flowing style to detailed reliefs capturing the intricacies of the human form, mantlepieces depicting game and flowers, extremely fine replications of lace cravats, and many more ambitious projects. To stand before one of Gibbons' pieces is to be transported to a world of minute detail and lifelike vitality. His carvings of ducks and lobsters look as if they could easily fly or scuttle away at any startling movement. A surviving example of one of his limewood cravats has maintained such detail that it is still possible to mistake the piece for genuine lace from a distance of more than a metre or two. His designs were so far ahead of their time that, even while Gibbons was alive, woodcarvers tried and failed to copy the masterfulness of his hand. Gibbons' works can be found in situ at some of the country's most important places, including St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Hampton Court Palace, and Petworth House, cementing his place in the nation's history.

To celebrate his 300th birthday, Compton Verney art has put together an extensive collection of his works and artefacts from his life which have never been displayed in the same place before. Gibbons was not only a pioneer of woodcarving and stonework, but also a keen entrepreneur who knew how to run a business and find patrons for his work. I spoke to Hannah Phillip, who is Programme Director and largely responsible for the exhibition, about Gibbons' life, approaches to business and mentorship, and the lasting legacy he has left behind.

This could be Rotterdam

As it turns out, the celebrated British woodcarver was not born in Britain, but

Grinling and his wife Elizabeth ca. 1691.

Rotterdam on the 4th of April, 1648. The name Grinling was derived from his mother's maiden name, while his brother Dingly was given the maiden name of their grandmother. Throughout his life he was both a benefactor and provider of mentorship, and Philip tells me that his first apprenticeship likely took place near his home. "There have been different views on where Gibbons might have learned his craft, she explains. "The traditional one is that he was apprenticed to a master carver called Artus Quellinus who at that point was operating in Amsterdam and working on a major project, which was Amsterdam Town Hall," Hannah said, "But equally, the other school of thought, which is very compelling, looks at Gibbons' roots and what was going on around him."

This new theory, developed by Ada de Witt, looks at the shipbuilding community in Rotterdam. In those days, the sterns of ships were adorned with intricate woodcarvings depicting a wide variety of scenes, and it is likely that Gibbons got his start on ships such as these.

"In Rotterdam there was a huge shipbuilding industry which required highly skilled carvers," Philip continues. "The new thought is that he was more likely to be apprenticed locally to the Van Douwe family, whose workshops were very close to where Gibbons lived. I suppose whichever master carver or sculptor he was apprenticed to, we do know that it is very much how he would have developed his skills, and without that mentor, he wouldn't have been able to go on to what he was able to achieve."

The lessons Gibbons learned during his early years in Rotterdam would lay the foundation for him to become one of the most inventive, skilful carvers of his time.

London Calling

Gibbons left the Netherlands and moved to York in 1667, when he was 19 years old. Even at this young age, he was an extremely talented carver, producing detailed renderings of musical instruments, cherubs, and people while under the employment of carver and architect John Etty.

Four years later he moved to Deptford, another maritime town, and continued to hone his skills. It was there that one day, when Gibbons went out to a small thatched-roof house in a nearby field to find some peace to do his work, he was stumbled upon by the prominent diarist John Evelyn. Evelyn was so astonished by the intricate depiction of the Crucifixion Gibbons was carving that he decided to use his royal connections and introduce King Charles II to Gibbons and his work. In his diary, Evelyn wrote;

"I this day first acquainted his Majestie with that incomparable young man, Gibson, whom I had lately found in an Obscure place, & that by mere accident, as I was walking neere a poore solitary thatched house in a field in our parish neere Says-Court. I asked if I might come in, he opned the doore civily to me, & I saw him about such work, as for the curiosity of handling, drawing & studious exactnesse, I never in my life had seene before in all my travells."

From that point forward, Gibbons became known as "The King's Carver", winning commissions for mantlepieces, intricate wooden cravats which could be mistaken for lace, and decorations for St. Paul's Cathedral.

Font cover from All Hallows by the Tower, carved by Gibbons and given to the church ca. 1682.

Detail of Gibbons' intricate limewood cravat, carved ca. 1690.

The Crucifixion panel Gibbons was working on became his primary showpiece to display his talent to prospective patrons, and his attitudes surrounding this masterpiece give us a glimpse into Gibbons' business sense and self-worth. Philip explains how he used the Crucifixion panel to win commissions:"The Crucifixion panel became his CV in effect, and I think that's the reason he was producing this virtuoso work. Yes, he wanted to sell it, and when John Evelyn asked how much it cost, he came back with a price of £200 pounds, which was a lot of money. He knew his worth. He played the cards of 'I'm a humble carver learning my skill' and all the rest of it, but I think we need to take account of the fact that he knew that he was very good at what he was doing."

From Mentee to Mentor

After getting his start through apprenticeship, Gibbons took on apprentices of his own. He was a member of the Drapers' Company and served on their Court of Assistants for 17 years, so we can see evidence of the carvers he apprenticed in their records. We ask Philip what apprentices meant for Gibbons and his work. "Gibbons undoubtedly would have passed on his skill to multiple carvers given the length of his career and the number of commissions he was given. We know that he took on apprentices because they are recorded in the Drapers' records, and quite early on he took on an apprentice," Philip says. "It would have provided him with some money – you had to pay for your apprenticeship – and it would also of course expand his capability to take on particular commissions."

Some of Gibbons' assistants would have been journeymen looking to hone their skills, as he was himself at 19. Others would have been comparative beginners given simpler tasks, working their way up and gaining valuable insight from Gibbons' process. "There would have been a conveyance of knowledge and skills over time in the form of workshop practice and mentorship," Philip argues. "Of course there was commercial motivation behind it, but I don't think that diminishes what that workshop process achieved in bringing on new skill and talent and perpetuating his own vision and style."

For Gibbons, apprentices allowed him to take on more commissions and to produce more work in his signature style. It is often difficult to distinguish the pieces made by Gibbons' hands from those made by his apprentices, which is further evidence that he must have been a talented teacher. He was also not afraid to change things up if work wasn't selling. Philips says he had a keen eye for shifting market demand. "He understood all the different key elements of running a good business – supply and demand, moving into more profitable areas and materials. He started off doing narrative panels but readily perceived that there was a market for decorative carving, so he certainly wasn't so precious about his art that he would only continue in the way he wanted to. He comes across as someone who had really good business acumen and instinct."

Gibbons today

Apprenticeships are still an integral part of woodcarving today, and most professional-level carvers and sculptors will have trained under a master of their field.

The legacy which Gibbons has left behind extends beyond sculptors and woodcarvers, inspiring artists who work with all media both in his time and ours. Even while he was still alive people attempted to copy his work, which was a sign of the influence his style had on the market. Now, artists such as Rebecca Stevenson have taken more interpretive approaches, exploring his themes and their meanings in new ways.

A lot has changed since the time of Gibbons, but one fact remains the same – art relies on patronage. Heritage crafts such as woodcarving fall in and out of style with the passing centuries, so there is always a real danger of losing them without some incentive for the unbroken exchange of knowledge between master and apprentice to continue.

To showcase Gibbons' influence and to ensure that these skills are not lost to time, the Grinling Gibbons Society created the Tercentenary Award. This national contest sought up-and-coming carvers and sculptors from across the UK to produce Gibbons-inspired works in wood and stone. Prince Charles was a patron of the Grinling Gibbons Tercentenary award and even tried his hand at woodcarving as part of his quest to keep traditional crafts alive. Philip explains how the award helped young carvers develop their skills.

"The idea of the award wasn't just to deliver prize money to aspiring carvers – it was actually to mentor them, making the process of producing the work part of the learning experience. Each artist was paired up with one or two master carvers to help them with the development of their ideas. We felt that was the most important part – so that whoever ended up winning wasn't the only winner."

Being an excellent carver, as the contest entrants were, is not always enough to win commissions. Philip has seen how practical experience with an art exhibition producing work to a deadline can help young carvers' business acumen:"There's a big chasm between going through a course and training to be a carver, and then actually getting your foot on the rung of doing it professionally," she explains. "Whatever you learned at the training level, while very beneficial, doesn't give you the commercial expertise and the ability to translate that to a business setting of producing things for clients."

Rebecca Stevenson, Heathen, subverting Gibbons' themes of flowers and game.

But what if no clients can be found? Since Gibbons' time, styles have moved away from intricately carved wooden mantlepieces and wall-hung reliefs to a more mass-produced culture, and the furnishings which were once the bread and butter of the woodcarving community now have far less demand. Philip hopes that the exhibition will inspire people to take another look at modern work with roots in the style of Gibbons.

"It's about educating up-and-coming carvers, but it's also about trying to nurture some up-and-coming patrons – because without the patrons, there are no carvers," Philips says. "By displaying these works in the exhibition, it gives an opportunity to see these artists' works and maybe even consider commissioning something themselves." f

The exhibition Grinling Gibbons: Centuries in the making ran from the 25th of September, 2021 to the 30th of January, 2022 at Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park.

Special Report

Finito World's's Top 50 cities to work in

EVER THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO LIVE AND WORK ABROAD? PATRICK CROWDER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST CITIES TO WORK IN IS DESIGNED TO HELP

If you are like many people in the world right now, you may be in a time of flux when it comes to your career. Some were furloughed, many were let go, and others have decided to make a career shift with their eyes open to new priorities following the pandemic. Now that the UK has fully scrapped the Amber List and the world is opening back up, travel is back on the menu. So if you're looking for a guide to working in some of the best cities across the globe, you've come to the right place. We cannot, of course, tell you where you want to live – much of it will come down to personal preference. What kind of work environment do you enjoy? Do you know another language, or are you willing to learn? What sector do you hope to work in? Do you like the big city life, or is being close to nature important to you? We cannot answer these questions for you, but we can provide the information needed to make an informed decision.

It is impossible to capture all of the diverse characteristics of these cities in relatively brief profiles, and that is not our aim. Rather, the main purpose to this list is to give our readers a starting point which highlights specific crucial factors when considering where to work around the world. We mostly chose capital cities to profile, however there are a number of other cities which are not capitals that hold too much economic and cultural relevance to exclude. When ranking the cities, we examined five factors: Work-life balance, cost of living vs. average salary, health of the start-up ecosystem, number of major companies, and diversity of opportunities within the city. All of these come together to form a city's score. Beijing, for example, is an excellent city for start-ups and has a wide range of major companies located there. However, the high cost of living coupled with the infamous "996" work culture brings down the city's score. We obtained the average salaries from the online salary comparison tool Payscale, and the cost-of-living information from Numbeo's internet database.

The written profile at the beginning of each city's entry is written with a prospective employee in mind – someone who has never been to the city before and does not understand the expectations and culture surrounding life there. Therefore, we have also included information about the major industries of the city, expectations in the working world and cultural considerations, as well as opportunities to experience the unique architecture, art, music, nature, and cuisine each city has to offer.

Throughout our research into these cities, we have noticed a number of trends that are important to understanding the trade-offs of working in various places. In general, large cities such as New York and Beijing tend to have a high level of opportunity in a variety of sectors, but with that comes harsh competition and less of an emphasis on work-life balance. They also tend to have higher costs of living than smaller cities. On the other hand, smaller cities tend to boast a better work life balance and less competition, but often have less developed start-up ecosystems and few major companies there. Honolulu shows these characteristics, though with a population of around 900,000 it is not a truly "small" city. Honolulu also suffers from the issue of a lack of varied opportunities. Because most of the industry there is based in defence and US military bases, funding which would have been funnelled to a variety of start-ups and other industries is not available meaning that your options for employment are narrow. This is also a great example of why these rankings may not mean the same thing to everyone; if you work in defence, then Honolulu could be your number one city – but quite likely not if you don't.

Scandinavia stood out on this list as an excellent place to work and live, with Copenhagen taking the top spot. The Scandinavian cities we have profiled all place extreme emphasis on work-life balance, have major companies in a variety of sectors, and pay well. This does, however, come alongside high-living costs and expensive property prices.

The vast majority of these cities excel in some aspects and leave a bit to be desired in others, which is natural considering the effects that size, location, and economy have on business. In the end, it comes down to what your priorities are, and we hope this list will help you make an informed decision on your journey through the international world of work.

Chicago *(Benjamin Suter)*

Copenhagen *(Freepik)*

1. Copenhagen

Copenhagen is the capital of Denmark, known for its architecture, canals, and title of "happiest city in the world". It has a population of 602,481 people according to a 2017 count. Historically fishing was vital to the economy of the city, but now Copenhagen's main industries are life sciences, transport, construction, and smart city development. The work culture in Denmark is known for being informal and focused on achieving a good work-life balance. There are no dress codes, and office hierarchies have been mostly replaced by democratic discourse. Skill and initiative are just as essential in Copenhagen as any other city, but you may find this informal work life to be a nice break from the 'rat race' of more fast-paced cities. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £1,254 per month according to Numbeo, which means that someone making average salary can expect to put about 33% of their income towards rent. The public transport system in Copenhagen is excellent, as it is in the rest of Denmark, making owning a car unnecessary.

Minimum Wage: While there is no blanket minimum wage in Denmark, lobbying by various unions has led to an average minimum wage of £12.65 (110 Danish Krone)

Average Salary: £45,985.55 (DKK400,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £6015.51 per sq/m (DKK52,267.78) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Copenhagen has a healthy start-up ecosystem with opportunities in tech, real estate, and finance. According to Startup Genome, it has £471,227,945 in total early-stage funding. Non-profit funds and frequent start-up events make Copenhagen an exciting place to launch a successful start-up. Food delivery giant Just Eat got its start in the city before going worldwide.

Major Companies: Copenhagen was called the easiest place to do business in the world by Forbes in their 2021 Global Business Complexity Index, so it makes sense that many powerhouse companies have headquarters in the capital. The most valuable Copenhagen-based companies are Ørsted (utilities), Maersk Group (transportation). Carlsberg Group (beverages), Danske Bank, Lundbeck (pharmaceuticals), and ISS A/S (services), according to the 2019 Forbes list.

2. New York

New York is America's largest city, with a population of 8,336,817 according to the 2019 US Census. Life and work in NYC is fast-paced, and ample competition brings ample opportunity. This environment can be exciting for many, but some who move to New York will find themselves slipping on the big city life if they are not accustomed to it. Home to the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), the finance sector dominates the city, and many of the top employers are banks and tech companies. NYC property is always at a premium, and it has some of the highest property costs in the country. Average rent on an apartment in Manhattan, for instance, was £3,110.20 ($4,210) according to Rent Café's 2020 National Rent Report. While average salaries in New York can be quite high, this is balanced by the cost of living, which is equally terrific. If you plan to rent, you can expect to spend at least 30% of your income on keeping house, according to that same report. Many choose to live outside the city and commute in, which is made possible by New York's well-developed public transit systems.

Central Park in Manhattan, New York *(Freepik)*

Helsinki, Finland *(Tapio Haaja)*

Minimum Wage: £11.08 ($15)

Average Salary: £59,112.40 ($80,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £575,607.00 ($779,000) according to Zillow.com

Start-ups: New York City is well-known as being an excellent city for start-ups to flourish, particularly in the tech sector. NYC ranked second behind Silicon Valley in the 2021 Global Startup Ecosystem Report.

Major Companies: New York City is home to many international powerhouse companies, which is unsurprising considering it is also the home of the New York Stock Exchange. According to the recruitment company Zippia, the top 10 largest employers with headquarters in NYC are IBM, Bank of China, Healthfield Operating Group, Deloitte, PepsiCo, JP Morgan/Chase, Citigroup, Citicorp, Moscow Cablecom, and Sheraton Hotels and Resorts. IBM tops the list at around 350,600 employees.

3. Amsterdam

Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands, famous for its canals, museums, and rich art history. The capital has a population of 1,157,519 people according to World Population Review. Amsterdam's main industries are tech, automotive, chemical, electronics, and of course, tourism. Living and working in Amsterdam will mean being part of a casual, inclusive, team-building atmosphere mostly free of the social pressures of the more traditional workplace. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £1,306 per month, according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to put 37% of their income towards rent. Public transport in Amsterdam is famously good, as is the peoples' penchant for riding bicycles. You will not need a car and may find two wheels to be a more comfortable option.

Minimum Wage: The Netherlands has a sliding scale of minimum wage based on age and hours worked. Someone who is 21 years old or over working full time must make at least £1,479 per month.

Average Salary: £41,528 per year (49,000 Euros) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £6,542 per sq/m (7,712 Euros) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Amsterdam is a powerhouse of start-ups, ranking 13th on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report. It has a massive £806,635,500 in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome, with many opportunities in agricultural technology and life sciences.

Major Companies: Amsterdam has many opportunities in finance, telecommunication, and retail. According to the Forbes 2019 list, the largest companies in Amsterdam by value are ING Group (banking), Heineken, Adyen (finance), AkzoNobel (chemicals), Exor (finance), and Steinhoff International (retail).

4. Helsinki

Helsinki is the capital of, and most populous city in, Finland, with 1,316,757 residents as of 2021, according to World Population Review. Helsinki Port is a major trade hub that holds the title of busiest passenger port in the world. The city's location on the tip of a peninsula also means that there are nearby beaches to enjoy, so long as you can brave the chilly climate.

London *(Veliko Karachiviev)*

Helsinki's economy is mainly based on the manufacture of electrical devices, automobiles, food, textiles, and paper, but large financial and governmental agencies also operate in the city. Work culture in Finland consists of a formal dress code and traditional hierarchies in most workplaces, but it also offers flexible working hours, straightforward communication between co-workers, and a focus on honesty and trust. A one- bedroom apartment in the centre of Helsinki will cost £859 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making average salary will have to pay about 25% of their income towards rent. You can live comfortably in Helsinki without a car, providing that you do not stray too far from the central, more populated areas. If you plan to make journeys beyond the suburbs, then a car is your best bet.

Minimum Wage: Finland has no national minimum wage, so wages are negotiated in collective bargaining agreements that employers are required to agree upon.

Average Salary: £41,430 (49,000 Euros) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £7,318 per sq/m (8,687 Euros) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Helsinki is a major hub of start-ups in the healthcare, AI, gaming, and tech industries, with £399 million in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome. Helsinki was also ranked within the top 10 emerging start-up ecosystems in that same report.

Major Companies: Helsinki is home to major companies in a wide range of sectors, including oil and gas, technology, manufacturing, retail, the pulp and paper, or packaging industry, and more. According to the 2019 Forbes list, the top companies in Helsinki are Kone (industrial), Sampo Group (finance), UPM (pulp and paper), Wartsila (industrial), Stora Enso (pulp and paper), and Kesko (retail).

5. London

London is the capital of the United Kingdom with 9,425,622 residents according to World Population Review. The city is the centre of UK government and trade, home to the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, and the London Stock Exchange. People who live in London enjoy countless museums, many of which are free, along with world-class theatre and music performances. London is a very multicultural city and is seen as the "melting pot" of the UK. London's economy is mainly based on finance, but tourism, tech, and healthcare are also major industries in the city. London's work culture can be as intense as that of New York, but things like dress codes and office hierarchies will vary widely between employers. There is a lot of competition in all fields in London, so what Frank Sinatra once said about a very different American city holds true in London – if you can make it there you'll make it anywhere. A one-bedroom flat in the city centre will cost £1,685 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to pay about 51% of their income towards rent. You will not need a car in London as the buses, trams, and tubes are efficient, and the easiest way to get around the city.

Minimum Wage: Minimum wage is based on age, with all workers over 24 making £8.91 per hour. 21–23-year-olds will make £8.36, 18-20s will make £6.56, 16-17 year-olds will make £4.62, and under-16s will make £4.30.

Average Salary: £39,000 according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £12,189 per sq/m according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: London is a major location for start-ups, with plentiful opportunities in tech. London ranked 2nd in the Global Startup Ecosystem Report, and has £6.3 billion in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome.

Major Companies: London has all sorts of major companies in a variety of sectors due to the size and diversity of the economy. According to the 2020 Forbes list, the largest London-based companies are Rio Tinto Group (mining), HSBC (banking), GlaxoSmithKline (pharmaceuticals), British American Tobacco, Diageo (beverages), BP (oil and gas), RELX (services), National Grid (utilities), Prudential Plc (insurance), London Stock Exchange, and Lloyds Banking Group.

6. Boston

The city of Boston is the capital of and most populous city, in Massachusetts, home to 4,314,893 people according to World Population Review. Boston is known for its rich American history, which can be seen on a walk down Freedom Trail. It is also home to Fenway Park, where the Boston Red Sox play America's oldest game. If baseball doesn't interest you, then there are also a variety of historical, scientific, and artistic museums in the city (though a game at Fenway is worth it even just for the hot dogs). The city is a major college town, with Harvard, Boston University, Berklee School of Music, Northeastern University, and 31 other educational institutions operating within its bounds. Apart from higher education, manufacturing, healthcare, and financial institutions are also key to the economy of Boston. Work culture is much the same as any large American city, except in the sense that Boston can often feel more like a town than a city. A one-bedroom apartment in Boston will cost £1,908 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will need to pay about 39% of their income towards rent. Transport in Boston is very good within the city, and you will be able to easily navigate without a car. You will need one, however, if you would like to visit New York, or any other part of America, on anything other than a Greyhound bus or a plane.

Minimum Wage: £9.88 ($13.50)

Average Salary: £58,584 ($80,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £8,322 per sq/m ($11,366) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Boston ranked 5th on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report, due to its fast growth and innovation in biotech, robotics, and life sciences. Boston has £4.7 billion in early-stage funding according to Startup Genome, with a number of accelerators and tax incentives in place.

Major Companies: Boston has a number of major companies mainly dealing with financials, tech, healthcare, and education. According to Glassdoor, the top employers in Boston are HubSpot (computers), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, MathWorks (computers), Boston University, Northeastern University, Fidelity Investments, and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

7. Tokyo

Tokyo is a modern, metropolitan city with lights and high-rises galore. It is both the capital and most populous city in Japan, home to 13,520,000 people as of 2015 according to the Japanese Statistics Bureau. Work life in Tokyo may be different to what a Londoner is used to, with more traditional hierarchies and values commonplace. Most jobs in Tokyo will require a dark suit and tie or other professional clothing, and your superiors will often expect to be referred to by their rank within the company as a sign of respect. The work culture can sometimes place work over family, with long hours and missed vacations an expectation, even if they are not technically required. Of course, start-ups can have more lax work environments, and there is a movement amongst younger people to create a less strict, lower pressure workplace. Rent on a one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £964 per month, according to Numbeo, which means rent will cost someone making the average starting salary about 12% of their income. The public transport in Tokyo is modern and efficient, and any costs incurred on your commute will be covered by your workplace.

Minimum Wage: £6.19 (930 Yen)

Average Salary: £33,235.09 (5m Yen) according to Payscale.

Boston *(Alex Iby)*

Tokyo *(Freepik)*

City Centre Apartment Price: £7,449.91 per sq/m (1,120,570 Yen) in 2020, according to Statista.

Start-ups: Tokyo has a flourishing start-up community, ranking 9th in the 2021 Global Start-up Ecosystem Report. It boasts £2.1bn in early stage funding, and focuses mostly on advanced manufacturing, AI, robotics, and sciences. Many foreign investors look to Tokyo as a good place to start their businesses.

Major Companies: Tokyo is home to many major companies, mainly in the automotive, banking, and manufacturing sectors. According to the 2020 Forbes list, the top 10 companies based in Tokyo by value are SoftBank Group, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, Sony, KDDI (telecommunications), Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Recruit Holdings (electronics), Shin-Etsu Chemical, Honda, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, and Japan Tobacco.

8. Vancouver

Vancouver is a picturesque city nestled between the North Shore mountains and the sea on the west coast of Canada. It is the capital of British Columbia and has a population of 631,486 people, according to the 2016 census. Vancouver's beauty makes it a popular place for the tourism industry, and agriculture, education and manufacturing are all major parts of the city's economy as well. Working in Vancouver is much the same as working in other Western cities, but you may find that it's a bit more laid back than London or New York. Hierarchies in work are not considered that important, but getting a job done right and on time is paramount. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost about £1,194 according to Numbeo, so someone making an average starting salary should expect to pay about 38% of their income towards rent. Getting around Vancouver on public transport is easy, and if you don't plan to leave the city often, a bicycle could be the best vehicle to own. If you plan on making frequent trips outside Vancouver, you will need a car.

Minimum Wage: £8.85 (C$15.20)

Average Salary: 37,267.20 (C$64,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £6,745.27 per sq/m (C$11,538.47) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: There are many start-up opportunities in Vancouver, which was ranked 2nd best start-up ecosystem in Canada by StartUpBlink. Start-ups in Vancouver took a hit during Covid-19, meaning that the environment could currently be undervalued when start-ups make a comeback as Canada returns to normal. Vancouver was not featured in the 2021 Global Start-up Ecosystem Report.

Major Companies: Vancouver is home to many major companies, mostly in the Tech, Education, Energy, and Manufacturing sectors. According to the 2019 Forbes list, the four biggest Vancouver-based companies by value are Lululemon Athletica, Telus (telecoms), Teck Resources (mining), and Goldcorp (mining). Microsoft, Apple, and Intel all have a major presence in Vancouver as well.

9. Oslo

Oslo is the capital city of Norway, home to the Government and Parliament of Norway, as well as the Royal Palace. It is also the largest city in the country, with a population of 1,056,180 according to World Population Review. Oslo's main industry has always historically been oil and gas, but the service, banking, and tourism industries also thrive within the capital. Working in Oslo is comfortable – if you can handle the cold. Most businesses will not have a formal dress code, and hierarchies are not hugely important in the workplace. Punctuality is a must, however, as is at least a basic grasp of the Norwegian language. A

Oslo, Norway *(Mahdi T)*

one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost about £1,185 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to set aside about 27% of their income for rent. You can rely on public transport within the city, and it will most likely be more comfortable to avoid driving unless you plan to commute into the city from rural areas.

Minimum Wage: There is no official minimum wage in Norway, so wages are decided through agreements between employers and unions. This can vary by sector, but workers in the hospitality industry earn a minimum of £14.48 per hour (167 Norwegian Krone).

Average Salary: £52,649 (607,000 NOK) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £7,808 per sq/m (89,912 NOK)

Start-ups: Oslo is the top-ranked city for start-ups in Norway, coming in at 99th globally according to Start Up Blink's rankings. The city is home to many successful start-ups, including the browser Opera and the game-based learning programme Kahoot! Oslo received £174,393,625 in start-up funding in 2019.

Major Companies: Oslo is an innovative city that is home to many major companies. According to Glassdoor, the top employers in Oslo are Microsoft, Cisco Systems, DNB (banking), Universitetet I Oslo (university), Yara (chemical), NTNU (education), Schibsted (publishing), Accenture (consulting), and Telenor (telecommunications).

10. Paris

Paris is a city that evokes emotions of romance, hope, and idyllic metropolitan living. It is the largest city in France, with a population of around 2,140,000 in 2019 according to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. The French work culture differs from that of the UK in a few ways, including longer and more frequent breaks, with lunch often becoming a social occasion accompanied by glasses of wine. France has a long, complicated labour code, which enshrines in law an 11-hour rest period between work-days. Property prices in Paris are high, so many have taken to the suburbs that are also seeing a spike in prices. Rent for a one-bedroom apartment near the city centre can run you around £600 (695 euros) according to numbeo.com, which means that someone making an average salary will spend around 15% of it on rent. Paris boasts a solid public transport network, which means you won't need a car to get around unless you plan frequent longer commutes.

Minimum Wage: £8.65 (10.03 euros)

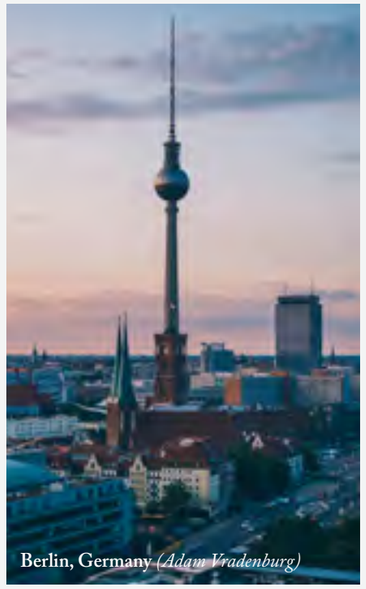
Average Salary: £39,670.11(46,000 euros) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £408,561.48 (€473,598) according to Guy Hoquet Immobilier

Start-ups: Paris is a city of many opportunities for start-ups, especially in the healthcare, finance, and tech sectors. The city ranked 12th in the 2021 Global Start-up Ecosystem Report. Paris boasts the second highest start-up investments in Europe, netting £2.5 billion in 2020, beaten only by London which netted around £7.75 billion.

Major Companies: Paris is home to many huge international companies, including BNP Parabas, Orange, and Air France-KLM. The top 10 Parisian companies include telecommunications, insurance, banking, fashion, and retail companies. In order, the largest companies with headquarters in Paris are AXA Insurance, Credit Agricole, BNP Parabas, Electricite de France, Societe Generale, Christian Dior, Finatis, Groupe BPCE, Orange, and CNP Assurances, according to the 2020 Fortune list.

Louvre, Paris, France *(Michael Fousert)*


Berlin, Germany *(Adam Vradenburg)*

11. Berlin

Berlin is the capital of Germany, famed for its art scene, nightlife, and modern urban design. It had a population of 3,645,000 when the last count was taken in 2019. In Berlin, evidence can still be seen of the second world war in the form of the Holocaust memorial, and the remains of the Berlin Wall are a reminder of the Cold War division of the city between East and West. Berlin's work culture is characterised by bluntness, focus, and clear expectations while also maintaining a strong separation of work and home life, as well as excellent employee benefits. Dress codes are not often set in stone, but it is best to dress professionally, and a formal tone with your superiors can be a good idea when starting a new job. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £812 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average starting salary can expect to pay about 22% of their income towards rent. Berlin's public transport is unrivalled, so a car is unnecessary unless you plan on taking to the famed Autobahn.

Minimum Wage: £8.18 (9.60 Euros)

Average Salary: £42,579.80 (50,000 Euros)

City Centre Apartment Price: £5,546.70 per sq/m (6,500.93 Euros)

Start-ups: Berlin is a hot start-up ecosystem in Europe. German start-ups received £5,070,706,500 of investments in 2019 from the US alone, according to Startup Genome, and there are many opportunities in financial tech, AI and software engineering. Berlin's open-minded, modern business approach makes it a good choice for starting a company.

Major Companies: Berlin is not the centre of business in Germany, but the capital is still home to many major companies. Deutsche Bahn, the German rail company, is the largest Berlin-based company with 22,156 employees. According to the Berlin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the top 10 largest employers in Berlin are Deutsche Bahn, Charite (health), Vivantes-Netzwerk für Gesundheit (health), Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe (traffic), Siemens (electrical engineering), Deutsche Post DHL, Daimler (automotive), Edeka (retail), Paul Gerhardt Diakonie (health), and Zalando (digital economy).

12. Manchester

Manchester is a large English city that has slowly transformed from a manufacturing-based economy to a major cultural hub, with opportunities in finance, travel, tech, and more. Some 2,750,120 people call Manchester home, according to World Population Review. They enjoy a city with excellent nightlife, a rich history evidenced by the surrounding architecture, and years of tradition in sport. The BBC also has a large presence in Manchester's Media City. Manchester is certainly more laid back than London, however there is still plenty of competition and prospective employees should be looking to impress. A one-bedroom flat in the city centre will cost £863 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to pay about 35% of their income towards rent. You will not need a car in Manchester, as the trains, trams, and busses will take you anywhere in the city.

Minimum Wage: Minimum wage is based on age, with all workers over 24 making £8.91 per hour. 21–23-year-olds will make £8.36, 18-20s will make £6.56, 16-17 year-olds will make £4.62, and under-16s will make £4.30.

Average Salary: £30,000 according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £3,951 per sq/m according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Manchester has a growing start-up ecosystem, with opportunities mainly focused on tech. The city was ranked 1st in the UK on Startup Genome's emerging ecosystem list, and 9th worldwide.

Major Companies: Manchester has many big players in finance, healthcare, and higher education. According to Glassdoor, some of the top employers in Manchester are Capita (consulting), University of Manchester, Barclays, Deloitte (accounting), Network Rail, the NHS, and Vodafone. Unilever, Kellogg's, and Amazon all have offices in Manchester.

13. Seoul

Seoul is the capital of South Korea, famous for its rich history mixed with modern architecture and design. Nearly 10 million people live in Seoul according to World Population Review, making it the most populous city in South Korea. The economy of Seoul is largely based in manufacturing of textiles, ships, electronics, steel, and, due to the automotive giant Hyundai, cars. However, Seoul has a booming start-up scene, so finding jobs in tech is also possible in the city. The work culture in South Korea can be intense, with dress codes and office hierarchies in place. Like some other cities, there is an unwritten rule that you will need to stay after work for long hours to get the job done, so work-life balance is a difficult thing to manage in Seoul unless you are working for a start-up with more lax policies. Knowing at least some Korean will help you get by in Seoul, but it is not necessary to be a fluent speaker when considering jobs that are open to international employees. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £652 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to pay about 25% of their income towards rent. You do not strictly need a car in Seoul, and certainly not as a tourist, but you may find it convenient to own your own vehicle if you plan to settle there.

Minimum Wage: £5.75 (9,160 Won)

Average Salary: £30,759 (48,940,242 Won) according to Salary Expert. Payscale's average salary for Seoul had a factor of 10 error making its number unreasonable, so Salary Expert's figure was used.

City Centre Apartment Price: 15,770 per sq/m (25,260,050 Won) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Seoul is a major start-up hub with over £1.8 billion in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome. Seoul ranked 16th on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report, largely due to the financial support accelerators and the South Korean government backing given to bolster the AI, life sciences, and gaming sectors.

Major Companies: Seoul is home to major companies dealing with everything from construction and steel to IT and technology. According to the 2020 Forbes list, the top Seoul-based companies by value are SK Hynix (technology), LG Chem (chemicals), Hyundai Motor, LG Household and Health Care (consumer goods), Samsung SDI (automotive), Samsung C+T (construction), Hyundai Mobis (automotive parts), and SK Telecom.

Dallas *(Corey Collins)*

Geneva, Switzerland *(Anokhi De Silva)*

14. Dallas

Dallas is a large US metropolitan city famous for the Texas State Fair and its football team the Dallas Cowboys. Some 1,331,000 people lived in the city as of 2019, when the last count was taken. The Dallas economy is mainly based in technology, defence, transport, and financial services. Work culture in Dallas is a fairly typical 9-5 but can be more laid back than bigger cities like New York. The good weather makes it a great spot to enjoy the outdoors, with many lakes, parks, and golf courses nearby. Renting a one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost about £1,105 per month, according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to put about 25% of their income towards rent. You can get around downtown Dallas without a car, but beyond that you will need one to travel and work, as in most American cities.

Minimum Wage: The minimum wage in Texas is £5.32 ($7.25). However, there is a push for higher minimum wage in Texas, and Dallas County recently increased the minimum wage for construction workers employed by the city to £11 ($15).

Average Salary: £52,790 ($72,000)

City Centre Apartment Price: £2,306.65 per sq/m ($3,146.35)

Start-ups: Dallas has many start-up opportunities in healthcare technologies, AI, software design, and more. It ranked 31st on the 2021 Global Startup Ecosystem Report, scoring 10/10 for market reach and knowledge, but 1/10 for funding.

Major Companies: Dallas is a major city with some of the biggest names in retail, technology, transport, and defence. According to Destination Dallas-Fort Worth, the top 10 largest employers in the area are Walmart, American Airlines, Dallas ISD (education), Texas Health Resources, Baylor Scott & White (healthcare), Bank of America, Lockheed-Martin Aeronautics, the City of Dallas, Texas Instruments, and JP Morgan Chase.

15. Geneva

Geneva is a central hub of global politics, home to the Palace of Nations, the UN headquarters. It has a population of 620,131 according to World Population Review, and it is home to the largest European alpine lake. Banking is a huge industry in Geneva, with a long history of secrecy. In the office, formal attire is the norm and traditional hierarchies are in place. Punctuality is essential. Work-life balance is seen as very important, and it is normal to do outdoor activities with your co-workers. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost around £1,568 according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will need to put about 24% of their income towards rent. The public transport in Geneva is excellent, and owning a car is unnecessary if you wish to remain within the city.

Minimum Wage: £19 (23 Swiss francs)

Average Salary: £77,579 (98,000 Fr.)

City Centre Apartment Price: £10,732.33 per sq/m (13,589.46 Fr.)

Start-ups: Geneva has a variety of startup opportunities in financial technology, ecommerce, and health, ranking 4th in Switzerland in a study of the ecosystem by Startup Blink. It was ranked 118th worldwide.

Major Companies: Geneva is well known for being a powerhouse of the banking industry, but there are opportunities in technology and administration as well. According to a 2017 top 500 list from Dun and Bradstreet, the largest Geneva-based companies by revenue are the commodity trading companies Vitol, Trafigura, and Cargill International SA, as well as Mercuria Energy Trading (petroleum), Gunvor (commodity trading), Mediterranean

Shipping Company, Richemont (luxury goods), SGS (services), Manor (retail), Pargesa Holding, and Firmenich (pharmaceutical).

16. San Jose

San Jose is the largest city in California's Silicon Valley, and the third largest city in California with a population of one million, according to World Population Review. Silicon Valley is famed for its status as an international tech hub, and many opportunities are available in both established companies and start-ups. San Jose is known for its historic district downtown, as well as its varied architecture representing many traditional and international styles. Work culture in Silicon Valley is famously intense, with many employees working 70-hour weeks or more, having little time off. Work-life balance is beginning to be a consideration, however there are still many workplaces that will expect you to be on-call, ready whatever the hour. Dress codes and office hierarchies are not a major part of work life in San Jose. A one-bedroom apartment in San Jose will cost £1,871 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will need to pay about 30% of their income towards rent. You will need to have a car in San Jose in order to navigate Silicon Valley.

Minimum Wage: £11.31 ($15.45)

Average Salary: £75,405 ($103,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £7,727 per sq/m ($10,552) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: San Jose is a major hub of start-ups, and Silicon Valley itself has over £16 Billion in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome. Most opportunities are, expectedly, in computer tech, but there are myriad opportunities in financial tech, AI, pharmaceuticals, and healthcare as well. Silicon Valley ranked 1st on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report.

Warsaw, Poland *(Elijah G)*

Major Companies: San Jose's location in Silicon Valley makes the city a great place to find major tech companies and more.According to Glassdoor, the top companies in San Jose are Google, Apple, NVIDIA, SAP, Intuit, Microsoft, Adobe, Service Now, and LinkedIn, which all deal in computer hardware, internet networking, and software.

17. Warsaw

Warsaw is the historic capital of Poland, known for the Old Town, which was reconstructed after WWII, the Palace of Culture and Science, and the beautiful Vistula River that runs through the city. In all, 1,780,620 people live there currently, according to World Population Review. The main industries of Warsaw are tourism, finance, and services, though there are emerging opportunities in tech and healthcare as well. Work culture in Warsaw is traditional in the sense that punctuality is paramount, and most business is conducted in formal attire. However, work-life balance is also valued highly in Warsaw. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £606 per month, according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary can expect to pay about 40% of their income towards rent. Public transport in Warsaw is good, so you will not need a car to get around unless you want to live outside the city and commute frequently.

Minimum Wage: £3.37 per hour (18.3 Polish złoty)

Average Salary: £18,403 (100,000 Polish złoty)

City Centre Apartment Price: £3,518 per sq/m (19,060 Polish złoty)

Start-ups: Warsaw's start-up economy has grown massively in recent years, with developments being made in the tech sector. There are many start-up hubs to assist this growth, including Campus Warsaw, which was opened by Google to provide education and a place to network. There are also opportunities in healthcare, AI, biotech, and more.

Major Companies: Warsaw is home to offices for Goldman Sachs, Procter & Gamble, CitiBank, and PwC, alongside other major companies in the banking, oil and gas, and insurance industries. Five Warsaw-based companies were featured on the 2019 Forbes List; PKO Bank Polski, Powszechny Zakład Ubezpieczeń (insurance), PGNiG (oil and gas), Bank Pekao, and PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna (utilities).

18. Chicago

Known as the "Windy City", Chicago is the capital of Illinois and one of the largest cities in the American Midwest. Chicago residents enjoy the shopping and dining along the Magnificent Mile, breeze on the shores of Lake Michigan, and old-fashioned baseball at Wrigley Field. Chicago's economy is based on a mixture of manufacturing, financial services, and publishing, though tech and healthcare opportunities are also available. Work culture in Chicago follows the standard Western work week. Dress code and level of formality will depend on your employer, but business casual is usually a safe bet. A one-bedroom apartment in the heart of Chicago will cost £1330 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to pay about 30% of their income towards rent. Chicago has good public transport within the city, but the rest of Illinois does not. If you want to leave the city without taking a Greyhound bus, you will need your own vehicle.

Minimum Wage: £10.88 ($15)

Average Salary: £52,959 ($73,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £3,587 per sq/m ($4955) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Chicago is a great city for start-ups, ranking 15th on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report. The city has £941 million in early-stage funding, and has opportunities in AI, data, and financial tech, according to Startup Genome.

Major Companies: Chicago is a major hub of the American Midwest with many major companies operating there. According to Zippia, the top 10 largest companies in Chicago are Walgreens (pharmacy), McDonald's, Boeing, Caterpillar (construction equipment), Abbott Laboratories, United Airlines, Sears Holdings, Harrisburg Medical Center, Mondelez International (food production), and Veolia Environmental Services.

19. Cardiff

Cardiff is the capital city of Wales situated on the scenic Cardiff Bay. Some 481,082 people call Cardiff home according to World Population Review, and those that do enjoy living near the sea, visiting the many world-class museums and historic places in the city, as well as shopping in Cardiff's various markets. The economy of Cardiff is based on finance, tourism, and media, but there are also opportunities in tech, healthcare, and government within the city. Work culture in Cardiff will be significantly more laid back than in London or New York, but dress code and office hierarchies will depend on your employer. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre will cost £697 per month according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will have to pay about 30% of their income towards rent. You will not need a car in Cardiff as there is ample public transportation, but many parts of Wales are only served by infrequent buses and request-stop trains.

Minimum Wage: Minimum wage is based on age, with all workers over 24 making £8.91 per hour. 21–23-year-olds will make £8.36, 18-20s will make £6.56, 16-17 year-olds will make £4.62, and under-16s will make £4.30.

Average Salary: £28,000 according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £2,657 per sq/m according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Cardiff has a fast-growing start-up economy mainly focused on financial tech and AI solutions. Recently, Cardiff-based biotech and genomics start-ups received a boost from the accelerator Illumina, strengthening the sector.

Major Companies: Cardiff has a number of major companies in a variety of sectors, including education, tech, retail, and finance. According to Glassdoor, the top Cardiff-based employers are Cardiff University, Admiral Group (financial analytics), Deloitte (accounting), the NHS, Lloyd's Banking Group, Tesco, Toolstation (retail), CarShop (automotive dealers), and Companies House.

20. Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a large, sprawling city on the coast of Southern California, with around 3,983,000 residents as of 2021, according to World Population Review. Famous for its place in the film and music industries, LA is home to Hollywood, the Sunset Strip, Universal Studios, and Capital Records. Beach-goers will enjoy the short trip to Malibu's picturesque beaches, and art fans will appreciate the Getty Museum and the Walt Disney concert hall. Work culture in LA is much like it is anywhere in the USA, but dress codes may be less strict than New York, for example. Because LA doesn't have a well-defined city centre, it can be difficult to meet new people and network in the city if you don't already know people living and working there. A one-bedroom apartment in central Los Angeles will cost £1,583 per month, according to Numbeo, so someone making an average salary will need to budget about 33% of their salary for rent. While public transport does exist in Los Angeles, it is confined to a limited part of the city, and if at all possible you should own a car. Note that American streets are not often designed for walking or cycling, and while it is not impossible, LA is no exception to this.

Minimum Wage: £10.16 ($14)

Average Salary: £56,536 ($78,000) according to Payscale.

City Centre Apartment Price: £6,619 per sq/m ($9,123) according to Numbeo.

Start-ups: Los Angeles is a great city for start-ups, ranking 6th on the Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2020. The city has £3.6bn in early-stage funding, according to Startup Genome, with major opportunities in science, entertainment, and advertising.

Major Companies: Los Angeles is famous worldwide for its domination of the film and music industries, but there are many major companies from a wide variety of industries operating in the city. The largest public companies with headquarters in LA, as reported in the Los Angeles Almanac, are Walt Disney Co., CBRE Group (real estate), AECOM Technology Corp. (construction engineering), Molina Healthcare, Farmers Insurance, Edison International (utilities), and Live Nation Entertainment. f

For the full data visit finitoworld.com

Helping the Next Generation

FINITO MENTOR ANDY INMAN EXPLAINS THE LATEST ON THE FINITO BURSARY SCHEME

Those who believe in mentoring tend to have a personal story about how they came to understand its importance. That's certainly the case for me. Born to a loving middle-class family on the island of Jersey, I suspected even then that I was lucky. I just didn't know how much.

But even these fortunate circumstances weren't enough to make success certain. When I was young, I dreamed of becoming a helicopter pilot in the army. But there was a problem – and it lay in me. At first, I didn't find the resolve within myself to work as hard as I should have done at school to make that a reality. I left school at 16, and had to face a harsh truth: my dream was unlikely to be realised.

It was at this point that a family friend took it upon himself to open my eyes to what is possible with direction and application. His mentoring made all the difference to the outcome of my future working career – better than that, his example stuck in my mind.

> "We aim to unlock the talent and potential of each person."

Looking back over the 37 years that have passed since then, I am incredibly fortunate to have achieved my career dreams and accomplished more professionally than I would have ever thought possible. I couldn't have done it without mentoring. It's this experience that has brought me to mentoring in general – and to Finito in particular.

The mentoring and networking we deliver within Finito is tailored to each mentee. What we aim to do is unlock the talent and potential of each person. That means that there are as many different outcomes as there are Finito candidates. Everyone's different, and as a business, we love celebrating that uniqueness which lies in each of us.

However, there is one common thread for every introduction: all our mentees come from families who care enough to buy into the Finito service. That fact alone got me thinking. Over the course of my first year or two with Finito, I began to see that our work could produce a life-changing difference to talented young people who come from families who can't afford our fees. I pitched the idea to Ronel Lehmann, the company's founder and CEO: thankfully, he saw the idea as a credible realistic project. He invited me to make it happen, and build on the

Sir Rocco Forte

work of Dame Mary Richardson, who has deep experience in bursaries and had been advising the business in this area.

Sometimes you have to be careful of what you wish for. As an ex-military pilot now running an international defence training company I found myself in a totally new environment. On the one hand, I had the task of finding talented young people from underprivileged backgrounds, who would be interested in joining a fledgling Bursary program. On the other, I had to drum up interest from fellow mentors who would be willing to volunteer some of their time pro bono to a scheme which had no financial backing – yet.

As it turned out, I needn't have worried. During my research, the Landau Forte Academy in Derby came onto my radar. The school immediately caught my attention on account of its holistic approach to education, and its academic success in one of the most deprived areas of the country. Significant sums of money donated by Martin Landau and Sir Rocco Forte had produced an educational environment across a number of campuses where young people were being enabled to reach their potential.

I sensed it would be a fit. Finito could take some of the most deserving individuals at the Landau Forte Academy, and work with them as they left their school environment and moved to the next stage of their lives. Whether students might wish to attend university, or secure an apprenticeship or immediate employment, we'd be able to help.

Fortunately, the senior management team at Landau Forte saw the benefits and worked with me to identify our first students. These were then matched with Finito mentors who had offered their time for free to help me start the program.

Six months on and how's it going? Well, it's been incredibly exciting. Our students so far have come from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. We've also had some notable early successes which motivate me – and everyone at Finito – to expand the program.

When I speak to Sarah Findlay-Cobb, the CEO of the Landau Forte Charitable Trust, I am keen to get her feedback as to how much it's helped the school. I am touched by how effusive she is: "I can't get over what an amazing opportunity this is for our students," she says. "We've had some huge successes from people who needed that extra push. It's made a significant difference to their life chances."

The successes Sarah mentions are a promise of what's to come. For instance, one of our mentees has been given significant time and support to move to university and happily settle there. That outcome might sound reasonably normal to most of us but for a number of reasons it was thought unlikely to happen before that young person joined the program.

Another early success involved support through advice and coaching for a young person who had been offered a fantastic apprenticeship, but in a location that the school thought the mentee would decide not to relocate to – again, for several complicated reasons. In that instance, our mentor worked hard to support the individual, giving them contacts and advice as well as talking to agencies on their behalf in the new city.

Again this may sound like no big deal, but the young mentee would have had no help or guidance in making the apprenticeship a reality without the help

Landau Forte Academy

Andy Inman

of the Bursary. In the event of it, the school was both delighted and amazed that the young person in question had decided to take up the position. Findlay-Cobb says: "It was one of those students where we thought it could have gone either way. He's been utterly changed – and hugely for the better."

Another Landau Forte Academy mentee, Yassen Ahmad, talks to me about his own quest to be a software engineer, and how Finito has helped with that. He explains what the experience has meant to him: "For me, Finito mentoring has meant a lot more than just becoming employable. It is also about both growing and developing myself beyond the confines of my limited perception of the world."

Had Yassen had prior experience of mentoring? "Previously, before I was being mentored, I had regimented myself to believe that university was the only viable pathway for my chosen career. As a naive young adult there's only so much experience and knowledge that I have about careers and the world of work."

So what did Yassen learn from his mentoring? "Flexibility is one of the major lessons I have gained from my sessions. My mentor shone a light from a different perspective and guided me to discover a plethora of alternative routes that I had previously isolated, such as apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships or even entering directly into the workforce with the right company."

And does Yassen feel ready for the world of work? "The Finito mentors have also allowed me to understand how I can become more of an asset and of value to an employer, knowing what skills they look for within their company. I think these prospects have drastically helped me hone my current skills so I can become a more appealing applicant as well. I firmly believe I would not have so easily understood all these things on my own."

> "For me, Finito mentoring has meant a lot more than just becoming employable."

Yassen's is a moving story, not least because there are too many young people like him who don't have access to the sort of opportunities we're providing – and which the company now aims to expand. Yassen explains: "Coming from a background where finance has been difficult, I am very thankful for the monetary grant provided to me. It has aided in breaking down unnecessary financial barriers that I came across in my journey and exploration of my career. Allowing me to access online courses, books and other resources that were previously restricted to me, these opportunities have been able to maximise my current potential and performance like no other."

Findlay-Cobb adds: "When you break that cycle of poverty you don't just help that one person: it affects other family members, and it can last generations." Yassen seconds that: "This is merely the start of my career journey, the benefits of the long-term investment with my mentor will only grow as time passes. That for me is why I love the mentoring with Finito."

The notion that mentoring is a gift which grows in time is both an exciting thought intellectually, but also a profound motivation to those of us at Finito who now want to use the coming years to help break that poverty cycle for as many young people as possible.

Our support of Yassen and others shall continue well beyond the present moment. As these young people develop in the marketplace post-education, the Finito network will come into action. We shall introduce all our mentees to key figures in the industry and work arenas in which they seek employment. We shall not rest until they are fulfilled. We are expert at securing work placements, internships and helping prepare for interviews. All candidates who come to Finito have an advantage – that is why the business is successful. But imagine a world where that privilege were extended to those who can't afford it.

The Bursary is good for the mentees. It also happens to be the case that it's good for the mentors as well. In fact, one unexpected side effect of the Bursary is to have stretched the Finito mentors, in each instance developing a stronger and more effective mentor for the organisation in general. Most of the Finito mentors are senior individuals in their own profession, from senior bankers and lawyers to high-flying media

Landau Forte Academy

execs. While experienced in their professional worlds, all our Bursary mentors have reported that some of the social and welfare challenges that they have faced in working with our young Bursary mentees have taken them into new areas and broadened their perspective.

So as with so many good ideas, there turn out to be many hidden benefits to this. That's why Finito has been seeking Bursary donations – and excitingly, some household names have already come forward to help.

One of those is John Griffin, the founder of Addison Lee, and Chairman of Finito Education who says: "In my long career mentoring young people, it fills me with enormous pride that I created employment for thousands of people at Addison Lee. Finito continues this important work and I am delighted to be a part of their team."

Meanwhile, John Cahill, managing partner of Stewarts Law, tells us: "In a perfect world comprehensive career guidance would be available to all regardless of their background. The Stewarts Foundation is delighted to support the important work of Finito via its bursary scheme."

> "We are expert at securing work placements, internships and helping prepare for interviews."

Other donors include Dr Selva Pankaj, the CEO of the Regent Group, who hails the scheme as being particularly relevant in the "current volatile landscape of the pandemic". The famed surgeon Professor Nadey Hakim tells us: "Finito really makes things happen and it is incumbent on me to support you and to encourage others to follow my lead." Simon Blagden CBE, the Chair of Larkspur International Ltd., adds: "I served the Government's advisory panel reviewing the future of technical education. During the two year process we met with hundreds of young people all over the country. I am delighted to support the work of Finito. The valuable work which you do strongly resonates with both students and their parents."

Sarah Fletcher

Meanwhile the Bursary has also earned praise from leading lights in education. Sarah Fletcher, the High Mistress of St Paul's Girls' School, tells us: "Education is all about providing everybody with opportunity – and that opportunity extends from school to university, and into the world of work. Finito performs an excellent job of giving students the opportunity to hone their CVs, fine tune their skills at interview and gain the confidence they need to enter the world of work. The fact that Finito is prepared to offer bursaries is really important to me, because it means that their offering is open to everybody regardless of background or means. That makes this truly special."

These are marvellous endorsements, and I am confident that there will be many more in the years ahead. It's almost enough to make me pleased that I needed mentoring at the age of 16. At any rate, our goal now is to move forwards and have as many young people like Yassen benefiting from our services as possible.

Roll of Honour: Our Bursary Donors

Quintessentially Education

"As a specialist education advisory service, we are fully aware of the challenges that young people can face when trying to transition into the world of full time employment. After years of academic training, many need further support with realizing their full potential in the jobs market. We are proud to support such a worthy cause."

Lord Ranger CBE

"The future of a nation lies in the hands of its students. By supporting students, the destiny of the country is shaped."

Professor Nadey Hakim GCStJ, MD, PhD

"You help so many young people to preparing them for the world of work and a wide variety of careers. Finito really makes things happen and it is incumbent on me to support you and to encourage others to follow my lead."

Dr Richard Davis, Belfast

"I find myself totally motivated to help young people needing a little extra support so that their jump into work is easier."

John Cahill, Chairman, The Stewarts Foundation

"In a perfect world comprehensive career guidance would be available to all regardless of their background. The Stewarts Foundation is delighted to support the important work of Finito via its bursary scheme."

James Ferrin, Director, Virtual Campaign Management

"We are honoured to be working with Finito, who provide such a vital service to the younger members of our society. We would like to wish all Finito students the very best for their future endeavours."

Richard Oldfield, Founder and Chairman of Oldfield Partners

"Finito works intuitively with young people to help them pinpoint the areas in which they can best excel and to move into fulfilling jobs. Their support of young people is invaluable. Lumos Education is committed to helping young people to access the best education opportunities. Finito helps them with their first step into the workplace. We are delighted to contribute to the Finito bursary for those who would not otherwise be able to afford this superb service."

Jeff Katz, Chief Executive, Bishop Group (1946 - 2020)

"As someone who benefited from the days when higher education and career advice was free, I feel the need to assist those who may not have the means to pay. I am pleased to donate a Finito bursary in the knowledge that it will give someone an advantage they might not otherwise have."

Simon Blagden CBE, Chair of Larkspur International Ltd and former Chair of Fujitsu UK

"I served the Government's advisory panel reviewing the future of technical education. During the two year process we met with hundreds of young people all over the country. I am delighted to support the work of Finito. The valuable work which you do strongly resonates with both students and their parents."

The John Griffin Foundation

"In my long career mentoring young people, it fills me with enormous pride that I created employment for thousands of people at Addison Lee. Finito continues this important work and I am delighted to be a part of their team."

Mohamed Amersi, Amersi Foundation

"After completing their education, many students still flounder trying to secure a meaningful career. As an entrepreneur, philanthropist and thought leader, I have always felt a burden of responsibility to help champion and inspire the next generation."

Dr Selva Pankaj, CEO, Regent Group

"As CEO of a UK education group, I fully appreciate how difficult it can be to take those first steps onto the career ladder, especially in the current volatile landscape of the pandemic. Hopefully, by supporting this initiative, we can help more individuals find the path that is right for them."

Johanna Mitchell, Lumos Education

"I am delighted to support Finito's expertise which enables young people to access their dream career. So many students leave education without the skills they need to enter the world of work – they need Finito's guidance now more than ever."

Khawar Qureshi QC

"My work has enabled me to interact closely with senior State and Business sector representatives from more than 80 Countries on commercial and international disputes. It is a pleasure to work with Finito in providing opportunities to talented individuals who will hopefully, in turn, contribute meaningfully to society when they flourish in their chosen careers."

Mike Watson, CEO, Tube Tech International Limited

"As a business owner, I often find myself mentoring students, school leavers and university graduates, many of whom are desperate for reassurance and guidance. Finito's offering allows the sharing of invaluable insights, empowering youngsters in essential life values and reminding them the world is not as complex as portrayed – we've been their age before! Finito definitely put their money (and my own) where their mouth is!"

A special thank you from Dame Mary Richardson to our bursary donors

"Having worked with young people all my life I cannot stress enough the importance of the Bursary scheme. I am very proud of what the company - and in particular Andy Inman - has achieved so far. But when I see how unequal our society is, I know that we have to do more. That is why I am so grateful to those who have already contributed to the expansion of this landmark project. And it is also why I am urging people reading this to consider making their own donation so that more people from difficult or underprivileged backgrounds may benefit from the unique service which Finito provides."

Visit: www.finito.org.uk/contact/finito-bursary/

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Enness Global founder Islay Robinson on his remarkable career in the UHNW mortgages space

The first thing to learn before you talk to Islay Robinson – the brilliant founder of Enness Global, a finance and mortgage brokerage firm with a rarefied client base – is how to pronounce his name. "It's Isle-a," he says, generously waving away my faulty pronunciation. "Don't worry, it happens about a thousand times a day."

If Robinson has had any headwinds from his difficult-to-pronounce first name then he hasn't let them affect him. Enness Global is a remarkably successful business that handles only the very high-end mortgages, for an international client base. I say that I thought the very wealthy mightn't need mortgages. Robinson smiles: "A lot of people think that, but it's a misconception. The thing that really drives us is fixing problems for our clients. Often, with the kind of people who come to us, it's not that they so much want the financial instrument that comes with the house, it's that the mortgage enables them to do something."

So what might that be? Robinson continues: "They might wish to buy a house, start a business, or make some investments, and the mortgage is the thing that allows them to do that."

So how did Robinson find his way into the field? He had, he says, an unpromising education. He grew up at first in Islay in the west Hebrides – where he gets his name from – but when his parents separated when Robinson was eight, he was suddenly presented with the reality of a state school education in London. "It was quite a culture shock; I think our school was the first in London to have a metal detector," he recalls.

It's a testament to his resilience and his character that he found a way forward, attending a college in Kingston to do his A-Levels. "University wasn't a concept that was ever discussed at home." He subsequently attended Sheffield Hallam ("it was just a general business course that didn't really have a purpose to it"), and then studied law at the University of London.

But crucially, although he was doing well, he took a job in Foxtons in Chiswick at the same time. Speaking in the aftermath of not only the Osborne tax hikes during the David Cameron administration, but the hits to London property that have attended both Brexit and Covid, you have to squint to remember what an exciting time it was for the industry. "In those days if you wanted a mortgage you just had to ask for one," Robinson recalls.

There was little regulation, and the market was booming. Robinson had happened on his vocation. "I had the option of being a good lawyer in a good firm – or maybe something a bit less exciting like a conveyancer – or this industry that was already exciting and earning me an income."

He chose the latter, though the law has been helpful to him since. "The law is hidden to a lot of people, but the law underpinning contract and the relations between people – that's the framework everything sits on," he explains.

To begin with Robinson accrued experience at Foxtons and Alexander Hall in the middle of the market. "It was bankers and professional people getting their first houses in Putney for £600,000." But over time, Robinson and his business partner Hugh Wade-Jones decided the high end might prove interesting.

They had their timing right. London was beginning to attract exactly the kind of clients who would require Robinson's services. "You had complex people coming in – Chinese, Americans, Russians." These clients needed a different kind of service; Robinson and Wade-Jones saw their opportunity, founding Enness Global on the day Northern Rock went bust.

Today Enness Global remains an excellent port of call for graduates wanting an interesting experience involving client relations. "Some of our commercial brokers come in as graduates without any experience. We've had huge success in hiring people and giving them opportunity." Robinson understands what young people need in their careers: not the 2am misery of photocopying that often characterises entry-level work at the PwCs and Clifford Chances of this world, but real training, and real interaction with clients.

So what does he see as the future of the property market? Robinson is betting on London. "Since the borders have reopened after Covid, it's clear that international people want to buy and live and invest in London, and I can't see any evidence of that changing," he explains. "There's 10 buyers for every property," he adds. f

Christopher Jackson is the News Director at Finito World

(Picture credit: Michael Orlo)

An Interview with Oliver Curson of Berkeley Parks

CHRISTOPHER JACKSON TALKS TO THE IMPRESSIVE OLIVER CURSON ABOUT HIS CAREER AT FAMILY COMPANY BERKELEY PARKS

The dynamics of a family business are always interesting. Berkeley Parks – one of the leading providers of residential parks in the UK – is no exception. Founded by John Berkeley in the 1960s, the firm is now run by David Curson, who married into the family and has run the firm since 2019, having joined in 2001 after a stint in the Fleet Air Arm.

But there's a third generation in the mix now, and I catch up with Oliver Curson, an impressive young business leader with responsibility both in the residential side, and in managing the expanding holiday parks side of the business.

At the moment the firm has 51 residential parks, and two holiday parks. So what kind of clients are attracted by the firm's offer? Curson explains: "The majority of our parks are for people who are 50-plus. They're looking to retire and downsize. They want peace and quiet and don't want too many children around."

As the father of two charming but boisterous children, I can immediately sympathise with this desire – and even feel briefly apologetic at what my family may be perpetrating unawares on the local population.

Readers might also be interested to know that there are other perks to buying a house in a holiday park. As Curson explains: "You don't pay stamp duty at all so nothing the Chancellor did on that last year affected us or any of our clients. In addition, there's no requirement to pay solicitors' fees, which can save on costs."

Curson clearly has his feet well under the table and enjoys an impressive understanding of the business, talking knowledgeably about everything from the price points and structure of the business, to the needs of the client. But he actually had an unexpected degree. "I studied motorsport engineering," he says chuckling. "I never did any roles in that field, but at university you do learn a lot of skills – time management among them."

Post-university, Curson trained as a marine – "my father also had a military background so I guess I was scratching that itch" – leaving in 2018. So was it always the plan to join the family firm? "It wasn't – although I knew the door was always open for me."

So what does his role entail? "Day-to-day, I have two main roles. One is managing the holiday side of the business. On the other side, I deal with current residents and that could be anything from residential refurb requests or attending court hearings and tribunals. It's quite varied what I get to do."

So how has the pandemic been for the company? Initially, things were difficult, Curson explains: "All our income from second-hand sales and new sales just stopped overnight. But then when we came out of that period, people began to move and there was that pent-up demand. By the end of the year we found that we were where we would have expected anyhow."

That sounds the definition of a resilient business. Even so, there were some headaches on the transactional front. "We were going to open a new holiday park in Essex, but that got cancelled because Covid-19 stopped it. We've been a bit on the back foot ever since trying to get it reopened."

I find myself very impressed by Curson. He's achieved a lot young, and yet he is modest with it: one might attribute that to the fact that working in a family business can often be grounding. Having said that, it's by no means a hard-and-fast rule – and for every Curson there's another heir to a family business dynasty who's neither so hardworking nor so quietly knowledgeable.

So what do they look for in employees? "At the moment we have 150 employees, and really all we look for is the drive to do a good job. In terms of business direction, what we want to do is to build the holiday side."

That, he says, is a competitive market: "You're going in at over market value because of the staycation bubble." Price-wise, Berkeley Parks are in a unique position: "We're governed by the manufacture costs and if that hasn't increased we're not going to increase our price. The manufacturers have been increasing their prices, due to the price increase in wood and metal. We always look at what new builds cost in the same area with an equivalent floor space and aim to come in under those prices."

There's something decent about Curson and about the business. The firm will likely have much success in the years ahead. f

Edtech interview

Ji Li of Plum Innovations on flipped learning and blended learning

There's a famous quote by Zhou Enlai, who was asked in conversation with Henry Kissinger in the 1970s, what he thought of the French Revolution: "Too soon to say," was his reply.

That's the case with Covid-19 too. We are only just beginning to understand how it may have affected us in a multitude of ways – and most particularly in education. The only way to find out is to talk to people on the front lines. One of those is Ji Li, the likeable and articulate CEO of Plum Innovations, which has been busy throughout the pandemic enhancing its tech offer to its primary school clients.

In conversation, Li is knowledgeable and relaxed, and I can see immediately why schools would find him a helpful support in their busy lives. So what trends is he seeing? Li explains the shift towards flipped learning. "Flipped learning isn't a new concept," he says, "it began back in the 1990s. It's to be contrasted with traditional learning where you go to classrooms; teachers tell you what you need to know, and you memorise that input. Flipped learning makes for a more collegiate approach"

Li's own education back in China followed this approach: "When I was studying secondary school in China we were writing notes, and memorising everything," he recalls.

With the increasing prominence of flipped learning, we've begun to alter the role of the teacher: the solitary sage at the front of the class has now become a kind of trouble-shooter.

Is there a danger of going too far and having teachers with too little influence? Li is philosophical: "I think there's a sweet spot. There's a role for the teacher to lead and to guide - but each pupil should have their own freedom to find the right way too. There are two extremes and we need to be in the middle."

> "We make sure software and technology are being used, and working for teachers."

That might be said to echo Aristotle's famous notion of the 'golden mean' where wisdom is found somewhere in the centre. This common sense approach turns out to be crucial to Li's philosophy of how technology should be approached in the school setting. "Technology shouldn't dictate to teachers; instead technology must evolve according to user experience," he explains. "As a sector, we can't define how teachers should teach; we need teachers to come up with that. Once that happens, then the tech sector needs to facilitate their approach and make life easier for teachers."

One leitmotif of our conversation is Ji Li's love of the sector he works in – and

he clearly instinctively understands teachers, and is extremely eager to help.

"We make sure software and technology are being used, and working for teachers," he says, passionately. "In my role, I see first hand how technology stops working, and how sometimes it works really well." So how do you introduce new technology to a school and affect change? "A new system will often engender different workflow and have a different user interface. The school staff might find that difficult to get used to – or perhaps they'll be too busy to obtain the right familiarity with it. If they struggle, they're perhaps more likely to fall back on how things were before, because they know how to use it," he adds.

That, of course, is where Plum comes in. Li explains that his work has become more complex since the pandemic with the shift to remote-working. "Before the pandemic everything took place within the building where the school was located. Since the pandemic, with teachers not fully back to school, and with the continued relevance of flexible working, that's shifted the landscape of IT support –and of edtech in general. So we're no longer looking at hundreds of computers inside one building, but at diverse settings. That's a challenge for the sector, and it's a challenge for Plum."

Traditionally, of course, flipped learning has been used in higher education and doesn't apply so much to the primary schools that form the majority of Li's clients. However, there's an interesting development at the primary level too. "With the lockdown, we've definitely seen an increased involvement from parents," he tells me. "Teachers want to teach most of the contents of their classes, but at home parents can be very helpful to reinforce learning, and help with certain projects – especially with DT and science projects."

Home-working means that the sector now needs to deal directly with third parties on behalf of schools. Li explains how this plays out: "You use your home connectivity for work now, and that includes teachers. So far we don't need to contact the home broadband services yet, but if there's an issue with one of our clients we'll always help them to troubleshoot it if it's a wifi issue. If they say at home, "Nothing's working" then that usually tells us it's a fundamental issue, but we want the best for our clients so we'll talk to third party vendors – we know the technical terms and so we're happy to do that."

There's another area in which Li is prepared to go the extra mile – in talking to parents on behalf of schools. That issue arose, he says, time and again during the pandemic: "We never say, 'That's not our issue'. We talked to parents a lot when we implemented Google classrooms. The parents had their accounts; the schools had theirs, and so we helped schools to train parents, in order to smooth that transition."

Talking to Li, I have a sense that he's good at his job precisely because he respects his clients. He also takes a lively interest in education techniques. He tells me also of the parallel shift towards blended learning – a mix of online and offline – that is also set to have a big impact on the sector. "Before the pandemic, schools did almost everything offline. When lockdown came, we entered the most extreme version of online learning. Blended learning seeks a return to balance. The technologies of the future will evolve based on user requirements. Schools will adjust to what pupils need and we're able to create a balance."

> "Communication is a massive part of it."

Of course, the most important aspect of Li's work is communicating. Without listening in the first place he wouldn't be so well-placed to implement relevant technologies, and if he weren't able to communicate, he wouldn't be able to fix problems. "Communication is a massive part of it," he agrees. "We are lucky to work in the education sector, where staff and teachers are eager to learn. In terms of technical language, some staff are tech-savvy and others are less confident in technology."

Again, Li reverts naturally to his love of the sector. But beyond his natural empathy with teachers and other education staff, I also detect a passion for education. He takes a keen interest in educational trends, and speaks with real knowledge and insight about them. Further, his knowledge takes on an international dimension, which stems to some extent from his Chinese upbringing.

> "The UK is always at the forefront of education technologies."

"The UK is always at the forefront of education technologies," he says. "The UK has a history of leading the way."

The transition has also been propelled by the increase in multi-academy trusts these past years, which have created a necessity for cloud-based learning platforms. "When everybody was working at one school that was one thing," Li recalls. "Now, with many teachers working across many sites, that introduces the importance of the cloud, as it's the most effective way to work."

So flipped learning and blended learning turn out to be profoundly interlinked. As Li puts it: "In the future students will have paperwork to complete – handwriting and artworks and so forth. That's important. But certain work they can produce online, as part of flipped learning. They can use online platforms to do research and then in class the teachers continue the learning journey with them."

We're full of buzzwords for the future: AI, drones, all manner of tech. But the future often happens more subtly than that. Talking to Li, you realise that the future is made not by big headlines, but quietly, almost imperceptibly by intelligent, thoughtful people – people, in fact, just like him. f

Ji Li was talking to Christopher Jackson, News Director of Finito World

COP 26 interview

Finito student Matthew Thomas interviews Advocate James Cameron on Chernobyl, COP 26, on solving the climate crisis

Matt Thomas interviews the barrister and climate change advocate on COP 26 about his extraordinary career on the front lines of the great fight of our times

MT: I saw that you first trained as a barrister, how did you end up in the environmental world?

I went to the University of Western Australia, and I did law there. And then I came back to the UK, really only because my mother was terminally ill and I went to University College London to do my undergraduate law degree.

And for all sorts of reasons – only part of it was to do with the course or the university – I didn't connect with undergraduate law at all and I struggled to perform having been used to doing well in the art subjects, particularly in English literature and other subjects, I found English law really pretty dark.

I just didn't connect with it so I had a period of time, right at the end of my degree, which was very intense and rather sad, and with the help of friends and then a girlfriend, I somehow managed to get a decent grade. That was largely because in my last year I focused on international law and jurisprudence legal philosophy.

Suddenly I found a way I could understand – partly perhaps because I had grown up in Lebanon and Singapore and Australia. International law seemed to fit more my understanding. I was interested in the cases of international negotiations and the things that international law seemed to be based upon, and I was attracted to the more obvious moral and political case for law that you see in the legal system that's still forming itself.

And it just seemed to work. I got my first proper job I suppose at the Research Centre for International Law, I became director Studies in Law at one of the colleges and the Chernobyl incident had inspired intense academic conversations about the question of what you do when environmental harm so obviously crosses borders.

The Soviet Union did not inform its neighbours about Chernobyl. They kept it secret, and the world really found out about it because of a private satellite who saw it and followed the clues on the radionuclide cloud. Governments did not bring actions directly against each other in the international court. It seemed to us at the time this was just an example of the legal system not working.

Chernobyl, Kyiv Oblast, Ukraine (*Gerhard Reus*)

MT: So, the Chernobyl disaster was the 'lightbulb moment' I guess in terms your first link to the environment?

Yeah, that was it. It was a graphic example of a trans-boundary environmental harm. And the way the law worked – or didn't – reveal inadequacies of the international legal system. It needed a fresh approach. And then after that, the climate change issue emerged and had similar more substantial problems to resolve. But the obvious place to be is international law because the problem could not be resolved by individual nation states.

Q: As a 'friend of COP' what has been your involvement in the conference?

It's a day to day, topical question. All the governments who have this role of president form groups of advisors, and they vary. I've done a few, they vary in type, but they're meant to help the president's function which is to shepherd everybody towards agreement. Equally, all presidencies have some kind of thematic approach to the climate problem, as well as their principal obligation which is to get agreement on whatever the agenda items are for the year.

The UK Government which obviously has a very substantial and competent civil service doesn't really need the kind of advisors that other governments have needed. I've been a senior advisor to Morocco and to Fiji, where I was really hands on.

Outside of government, I think it is useful to have another circle of advisors who are independent and can say straightforwardly what they think and are worried about the consequences. Even so, it can be frustrating sometimes when you aren't adequately listened to and anyway. But we have regular calls, as a group, directing into Alok Sharma who is the president of the process. We also have calls with his senior officials on particular topics. And, you know, there are several themes, and each of those themes have subsets of the group and often I happen to be involved, particularly with the nature theme at the moment because that's part of a project I'm working on. But I also get involved in the finance and because I'd be an experienced negotiator, I'll talk to the chief negotiator as well about how they're running the process.

Where you're going to arrive in terms of negotiations is always contingent on things that have nothing to do with climate change or some other geopolitical issue. Some other pressing immediate concern, something that has to do with a relationship that is central to power in the world.

Success or failure usually turns on the US and China. There are really only 20 other countries that have to come to agreement to make a difference, even though the whole process works by consensus here.

(Markus Spiske)

But if you don't have India, China, US, the EU aligned or capable of coming to agreement then your event fails.

MT: On your website you say that, when addressing issues centred on tackling climate change, you are 'interested in the space between law, policy, finance and technology'. Can you elaborate on what you mean by this?

I've decided that's probably my function. So, for example, if you want to deploy capital to solve the climate change problem you want your money either to have very specific obligations to deal with climate, or, that there is an opportunity for you to compete with incumbent businesses and technologies that may actually be causing the problem but have been there for a while.

So if you want a marketplace for money and technology and other resources, you have to change the rules. So changing the rules means changing the law or changing the application of the law, or changing the public policy interpretation of the law.

Clearly, there's politics and power politics involved with that but there's also permanent civil servants who have mandates that are already set. They, on the whole, either make or implement policy depending on where they are in the world. Frequently, the language spoken by all parties is so different, they don't quite understand each other. And they certainly don't trust. And then, the world of finance has his own ecosystem, all sorts of different types of finance, they have become quite distinct tribes with their own return expectations. They have their own sense of themselves. Believe me, they really do have their own sense of who's best.

MT: It seems to me that there is a strong focus on climate change but the interrelated issue of biodiversity loss gets far less attention. Climate change is just one of the factors behind the destruction of habitats and the degradation of the natural world. How can companies, consumers and policy makers elevate understanding of the impact of biodiversity loss on human societies?

'Yeah, and they are completely interrelated, which makes it evermore complex to solve. I spent most of the last year, more focused on nature.

I've worked a lot on wildlife. I did the International Whaling Convention, the Convention of Endangered Species, illegal trafficking with wild birds and other species.

It's quite dangerous work too. I work with people who risked their lives trying to reveal what was going on. So this has been there all along but it's been a relatively minor issue for big politics. It's an issue for people who care. It's an issue for people who've got a particular concern about a species, and it's widely felt. People do feel a connection with nature.

Clearly something happened to us psychologically during COVID, where people started to appreciate nature wherever they lived – maybe, particularly if they lived in a city.

The climate issue has highlighted aspects of the decline and threat to nature, but not all of them. It has a tendency to deal with climate as a priority that has sometimes led to people thinking too little about the complexity of natural systems. Planting trees is not a solution a guaranteed solution as planting trees means monoculture, and actually, biodiversity loss, which can happen. And as has happened.

Recently some good research came out of Oxford, on how many 50 degree days there are in a year now. The more you have those a year, the more you suffer economically, but there are things that can be done and relatively quickly to change that and a lot of it is to do with planting trees or creating green surfaces. But we also need to manage rainfall, because we're getting more intense rainfall which our hard surfaces can't handle.

Q: We touched on it briefly earlier but what do you see as the main barriers to tackling climate change?

I think one of the main barriers is psychological. It's a problem that feels too big for me as an individual. If I don't think I've got any levers of power to pull, then I want someone else to do it.

And meanwhile, I've got something that's immediately pressing on my concerns that I've got to feed children or I've got to find shelter, I've got something that right now I have that I have to care about. This issue looks literally beyond me – beyond my levers – and has a temporal dimension that encourages you to postpone action.

The other psychological fact is that we all experience is that we all have a kind of status quo bias. I don't mean that in a political sense I mean, we'd rather not be disruptive.

And also, there's a generational problem here that the generation that benefited from the tremendous growth in the 20th century that was driven by widespread use of fossil fuels, miraculous, use of fossil fuels, the innovation that went into fossil fuels the number of products, God knows. Look around you. Now, how many things in my room right now have a petroleum base or hydrocarbon base. Yeah, staggering.

It's very hard for that generation, to feel like there was anything wrong, you know, good things came from that place, wealth, and security, and material benefit.

On top of all that, there are cultural connections that are very, very deep. You can see that most clearly in in the kind of mining and mineral cultures of Australia and Canada and the US.

MT: How would you rate progress in the UK in comparison to other mature economies around the world?

'Very good in parts. Very good in creating the legal frameworks and very good in concentrating expertise in many disciplines, less good on implementation.

Unfortunately, we've had some quite mediocre government where people who are more interested in politics as played out in the media.

And that's not a party political point because it works across the spectrum. It just is the case that too much politics is based on how you appear on a screen and how you are interpreted by the media and not enough with how you govern your department.

Unfortunately, climate change is one of those issues that you need good government. A nice soundbite doesn't actually solve the problem."

Who would you say are the best at implementing right now?

As a structural point, I think it is much easier to implement in smaller states, where there's a high level of trust in the community. Denmark would be an example of an effective response/

Periodically, the other Scandinavian countries do well and you see elements of progress in Germany and the Netherlands. I mean elements because it's not perfect by any stretch. And then you see it also in the highly educated and technocratic cultures like Singapore and Korea. So those places have done well.

But nobody has all the answers, and nobody can solve the problem on their own. So, unless you get something like 20 to 25 of the major economies of the world, all doing something broadly similar in terms of effort, then nobody, nobody can protect themselves from all consequences.

MT: Are there any specific goals that you and your ecosystem have for the next couple years?

I'm working at the moment on natural capital. I've got goals associated with that. And, and they're largely to do with lining up a big general principle, like, we should value natural capital, and then taking it, drawing that down into the institutions, where they have the power to apply that in practice, and then showing examples of how the principles applied through investment in a real transaction.

These are the kinds of things that are both short and long term because I think we've got some momentum on the topic. But then there are others that are just the same as they always were, really: they're about trying to get agreement to keep as far as humanly possible under or not too far past the 1.5 degree threshold. f

Letter from Australia

BY BEN MURPHY

Sitting on this little red patch of dirt in the South Pacific Ocean, I've been trying to get some perspective on the craziness that's upon us.

How to make sense of the craziness in the news? One place to start is the global coal debate. The first thing to understand here is the basic difference between metallurgical (coking) coal for steel-making and other coals for energy production, concrete and paper manufacturing, to name only a few. Without this distinction the climate change discussion risks creating significant dangers, and the conversation around ceasing coal production will have an adverse effect on all of us. That's because one of these two coal sources is crucial to the existence of man kind.

Let's start with the basic question of where coal comes from. There are many varieties of coal in the world, ranging from brown coal or lignite to anthracite, also known as hard coal. All coal is formed when dead plant matter submerged in swamp environments is subjected to the geological forces of heat and pressure over hundreds of millions of years. Over time, the plant matter transforms from moist, low-carbon peat, to coal, an energy- and carbon-dense black or brownish-black sedimentary rock.

That means there are two broad types of coal. In the first place, thermal coal makes up for about 65 per cent of all global coal production, also known as 'steaming coal' or just 'coal'. This is widely used as the principal means of generating electricity in much of the world. It's reliable and stable as a base load energy source and forms part of the energy cycle that includes nuclear, hydro, wind and solar energies to name a few. This is the source of much of the debate around finding renewable energy resources.

But thermal coal must be distinguished from coking coal, also known as metallurgical coal. This is used to create coke, one of the two irreplaceable inputs for the production of steel, the other being iron ore. The property that really sets coking coals apart from other coals is its caking ability, which is the specific property required to make coke suitable for steel making.

Now, coke is produced by heating coking coals in a coke oven in a reducing atmosphere. This is known as the caking process. This refined coking coal is then used in blast furnaces along with iron ore as the base minerals to make steel (pig iron).

So, what will happen if those who are anti-coal win the argument and coal mining becomes phased out altogether?

Well, in a world where coal-mining stops altogether, there would be an obvious and undesirable side effect: we would stop steel production. That would mean no more high-rise buildings, football stadiums, bridges, cars (Tesla included), trains, planes, air conditioning, computers, mobile phones, solar panels, wind turbines, power stations, refrigeration, hospitals, ambulances, shipping, recycling – and of course the needle used in the syringe that vaccinated you against the Covid-19 virus. It's a scary but real prospect.

Humans rely on steel, we have been making it for over 3,000 years. It's in every facet of our lives and without it we stop. Transportation, communications, food production, economies and modern medicine rely on it. Take away metallurgical coal and you stop steel production.

Here, we take a breath. There are smart minds looking to alternative fossil-free steel-making processes such as hydrogen steel, which is gaining traction and significant investment as a future process. But realistically, we're decades away from producing steel on anything like the scale we do today.

Besides, so long as developing and emerging economies such as China, India and Indonesia are dependent on the production of steel – and so long as steel is heavily reliant on metallurgical coal and iron ore – it would seem the debate about stopping coal mining is in some sense a misguided one.

It seems certain then that coal-mining will remain for some time to some degree. Thermal coal and most non-renewable energy resources will be slowly phased down as we find and implement renewable alternatives. That's a good thing, but it will take some time.

If we agree that steel is important and therefore metallurgical coal must remain in our lives, then we have the parameters of a sensible debate. Perhaps we need to also start at the level of language by referring to thermal coal as 'energy coal' and 'metallurgical coal' as 'steel coal'. f

The writer is the founding Director of AMC Supponor

Letter from South Africa

BY JANE EVANS

When the new, democratic South Africa was born in 1994 the euphoria and excitement that came with the promise of a better life for all was soon diluted with the realities of the crippling socio-economic legacy of apartheid.

Amongst the many challenges facing the new government was the mammoth, but unequivocal need to turn a deeply unequal education system into something good, one that would reach all South African children, particularly black children who were systematically denied the same advantages and access to education as white children.

Although there have been improvements in the South African education system over the past 27 years, notably government's acknowledgement and efforts at prioritising early childhood learning, the state of education in South Africa, specifically for children in the poorer areas of the country – effectively the majority of school aged children – was still in a precarious position pre- the onset of Covid-19. There were insufficient numbers of well-educated teachers, insufficient school buildings, a lack of text books, schools with no water, electricity or toilets and most critically, despite a government feeding scheme, thousands of hungry and vulnerable children.

The global pandemic that deepened an already high rate of unemployment and increased poverty has all but sent South African education over the edge, but not quite.

Whilst the systems for primary and secondary education in 1994 were severely flawed, the very foundations of learning – early childhood development (ECD), particularly for children in disadvantaged communities – had fallen almost exclusively to the domain of non-government organisations (NGOs), and the communities they worked with.

Although the reach was limited, in the areas where the NGOs worked there was structure: there were recognised training programmes for uneducated women; there was onsite support for teachers in the burgeoning early learning sector; there was often food for the children and there was hope. It was the NGO sector that all but handed a well-functioning early learning system to the new government.

Today the importance of early learning is a recognised level of education in South Africa. An extra year of schooling called Grade R or the Reception year for 5 to 6 year-old children was added to the education system in 2001 (formal schooling starts at 6 to 7 years-old). There is also talk of adding a pre-Grade R year for four year-olds.

There are solid policies for early learning in place. The responsibility for all education in the early years is currently being moved from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education. The field of early learning is being professionalised with degree courses for Early Learning coming on stream.

This is promising but it is happening against a background of despair in the broader South African field of ECD. The vast majority of ECD centres and playgroups are privately owned and run. Scant salaries come from diminishing fees paid by parents and in some instances subsidies provided by the Department of Social Development. Covid-19 has severely knocked the sector.

Along with the rest of schools in South Africa, all early learning centres closed during the most virulent early waves of the pandemic. Thousands of parents lost their jobs and income, parents could not afford the ECD centre fees when they re-opened and as a result many of the centres and non-centre-based playgroups have not re-opened.

South Africans are a hardy people and when all else fails civil society steps in. During the worst of the pandemic NGOs worked hand in hand with private individuals, churches, the corporate sector, private trusts, foundations and government to distribute food through their networks to but a fraction of the thousands of families literally starving because of the economic turmoil and increased unemployment under Covid-enforced lockdowns. Many of the ECD NGOs that are still responsible for much of the vocational training offered to early learning teachers have themselves been hard hit by the redirection of private and corporate sector funds on which they rely for their income. But the NGOs have risen to the challenge.

Training programmes have been digitised. Data for online learning has been made available to trainees in disadvantaged communities. ECD centres have received hands-on help in re-opening and meeting Covid protection requirements.

There are always questions about the long term role of NGOs in the field of early childhood development. But NGOs were there during apartheid and, in my opinion, they will continue to serve an essential service to early learning in disadvantaged communities of South Arica for many years to come. f

Jane Evans is the author of A Path Unexpected, published by Jonathan Ball.

HEALTHCARE SPECIAL REPORT INTRODUCTION: Matt Hancock

The former Health Secretary recalls what he learned in his time in the job – and explains what makes a career in healthcare so rewarding.

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
(*Richard Townshend*)

In the global fight against Covid-19, there has been one group of people who have sacrificed so much and yet received such little praise - young people. I understand how difficult it has been for young people during the pandemic. From not being able to study, to not being able to see friends in person and missing out on so many exciting opportunities, Covid-19 has been extremely difficult.

As Health Secretary, I was so grateful to young people for playing their part in the wider national effort. Because the virus is so much more deadly with age, the sacrifice made was all the more generous the younger you are. Without that sacrifice though, we simply wouldn't have been able to suppress the virus and save lives. So from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank everyone who played their part.

As I look back over the pandemic, some of the greatest highs I felt were when I saw young people queueing in their swathes to get vaccinated. At sports stadia, at local pharmacies, or in places of worship, we saw individuals making the conscious decision to come forward to protect others. While some said it wasn't worth the risk for them, the vast majority of young people have been vaccinated. Speaking to some university students who got their jabs, I was struck by the sheer selflessness of this generation. I was told that while they felt it was important to protect themselves from issues that come from long Covid, the main reason why they were getting vaccinated was to protect their friends, loved ones and the wider community. The generosity and open-mindedness of these students gave me huge confidence for the future of our country.

So, young people have sacrificed formative parts of their childhood and got vaccinated to protect others. I will not accept the failed argument that young people are lazy and selfish. In fact I think it's quite the opposite. For me, young people have been the quiet heroes of the Covid war.

Now it's fantastic to see 12 to 15 year-olds coming forward to get their jab in such large numbers. Recently, we reached the impressive milestone of over one million 12 to 15 year-olds having had their jab. I urge all children who are offered to come forward and get theirs, to protect themselves, their educations, and people that they love.

Continuing in the spirit of selflessness, it shows the spirit of this generation that last year there were record levels of applicants to medical schools, and nursing qualifications, in the UK. This is so promising for the future of our NHS, but also for the possibilities that this brings for future scientific discoveries.

We've seen as a country just how valued our scientists and healthcare workers are. For instance, a YouGov poll this year showed that scientists and doctors were the most respected professions in the UK. I was also very emotional when I saw the video of Professor Sarah Gilbert from the Oxford vaccine group receiving a standing ovation at Wimbledon. From seeing closely how hard Sarah and her team worked to create their vaccine, I couldn't imagine someone who deserves the whole world's gratitude more than her.

> "I gave them the ambitious mission of creating a vaccine in ten months that we were told would usually take up to 10 years."

Think about this team of scientists at Oxford University who dedicated their lives to creating the global cure for the pandemic. I gave them the ambitious mission of creating a vaccine in 10 months that we were told would usually take up to 10 years. Their hard work, creativity and perseverance, working alongside the great team at AstraZenea, has given the whole world the security it needs against this deadly virus – at cost price. With further improvements in technology and more funding going into scientific research, British science has fast become a cornerstone of our economy and society.

It's an incredibly exciting time to be working in the field of medical research. Everyone knows about vaccine development, of course. But in the UK we've also seen incredible scientific discoveries of drugs and antivirals for Covid-19. British scientists in the Oxford-led Discovery trial found that Dexamethasone was clinically proven to save lives against Covid-19. Dexamethasone has now been estimated to save well over a million lives across the world. We've also seen more recently how the Antivirals Taskforce, set up just in April this year, is making great progress in securing antivirals to protect people after they catch Covid.

As we grapple with this pandemic, with new variants as they emerge, it is the medical science that will help us through – as it has done so often in the past.

This is the main reason why I'm writing this piece. I hope that the brilliance of British scientists throughout the pandemic will encourage the next generation to enter into medicine. Working in medicine brings such benefits to society, but also to yourself. In very few jobs can one say that they experience both the best times and worst times in peoples' lives. From births to deaths, those in the NHS are there for us when we need them most. Speaking to NHS workers, the principle they all have in common is the sense of reward for helping others.

When the public were told to stay at home to save lives, they did so because they wanted to protect our precious NHS. At the same time, NHS workers and at one stage, over 35,000 medical students stepped up in the face of adversity to help look after others in their time of need. I was delighted when Her Majesty The Queen awarded the NHS the George Cross to reflect just how important their contribution was to the UK's collective fight against Covid-19. The George Cross is awarded "for acts of the greatest heroism or for most conspicuous courage in circumstance of extreme danger". I can't think of anyone more deserving of this award in peacetime.

But working in medicine is not only about public service. Our caring professions have never been more highly thought of. While the rest of the public sector saw a pay freeze in the face of the pandemic, that was not extended to the NHS. More excitingly, medicine is at the cusp of groundbreaking changes unlocked by the insights of modern data. From genomics to the use of wearables, data is transforming how we care for people as much as it has transformed so many other areas of our lives in the past decade or more.

So, if you are debating your career progression and want a rewarding opportunity that will give your life variety and fulfilment, I couldn't recommend a job in science or healthcare more. You've got to be up for the challenges – because they are significant and tough. But the rewards are also huge: they are those of a mission-driven fulfilling life.

One of the many lessons of the successful vaccine roll-out is that when people with passion, precision and purpose come together, we can achieve great things. That's what happened so conspicuously in the pandemic – but it's what happens every day and every night in medicine. With British medicine and life sciences so demonstrably a global superpower, there has never been a more exciting time to go into the world of medicine. f

How to be an Epidemiologist

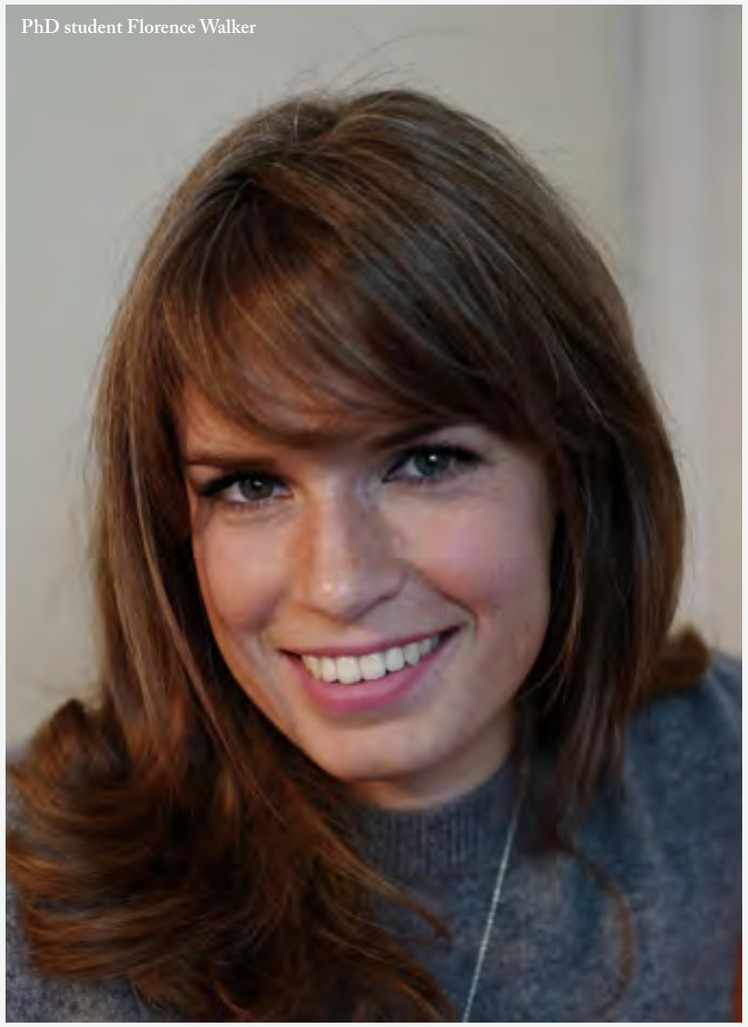
BY EMILY PRESCOTT

Epidemiologist is one of those words that has unfortunately been thrust into everyday parlance. Along with, 'furlough', 'coronavirus' and the notion of the 'R number', in 2019 you could have been forgiven for not knowing the respective definitions.

Of course, you can't get away with that now. In fact, many of us have even transformed into epidemiologists from our armchairs. But other than looking concerned on the television, what does being an epidemiologist actually involve and how do actual epidemiologists feel about the public discourse surrounding the virus? We caught up with three epidemiologists - a PhD student, a doctor and a professor - to find out.

Epidemiologists could colloquially be termed 'disease detectives' as they investigate public health problems. They will search for the cause of a health issue, identify people who are at risk and then determine how to control the spread or prevent the problem from recurring. But PhD student Florence Walker says, despite the pandemic, many people still don't understand what an epidemiologist does. "I thought at least now everybody would know what an epidemiologist is and actually it's still the case that I'll tell people 'oh I'm an epidemiologist' thinking they will go 'oh that's so cool, that's amazing' and instead I get a 'what's one of them then' or an 'oh I've got a problem with my skin, let me tell you about it'."

After graduating with a masters in epidemiology from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine, Florence has been looking into the consequences of people not taking medication properly as part of a PhD at the University of Edinburgh.



PhD student Florence Walker

As a student epidemiologist, she admits she finds some of the conversations around lockdowns frustrating.

"Some people say the restrictions are ridiculous but you know, we have 75% fewer cases of flu this year which means that the lockdown is working."

She adds: "It's been a long time since anybody thought that the miasma theory (the theory that bad air is the main cause of every disease) was correct. We've got germ theory. We know that you can't get infected unless you are able to transfer pathogens."

"People say, 'Oh well, Covid is just like a cold.' Well, it is just like a cold for a lot of people but the problem is the percentage of the population for whom it will not be like a cold - for whom it will bee a life-threatening if not life-taking illness - is enough to overwhelm our national health service. We have to protect the NHS," she sighs.

Florence herself has had coronavirus and, as a consequence, she lost her sense of taste. "I put a spoon into a bottle of Colemans mustard and ate it and it just tasted like powder." Thankfully her taste buds have returned now.

For people who are considering getting out of the armchair and doing a PhD in epidemiology, Florence says: "The only bit of advice I could give anybody who wanted to go and do a PhD is "find your supervisor". "PhDs are really lonely and I know lots of students who speak to their supervisor just twice a year, whereas I have a call with my supervisor three times a week," she says.

But Florence warns the pandemic has caused a sharp spike in the amount of people looking to do similar PhDs. "When I got mine, my supervisor met me at the school and she was just asking everybody 'Do you want to come and do a PhD?'... But this year she advertised for a PhD student and there have been well over 100 applicants. It's getting fierce."

Dr Thomas Churcher, who teaches at Imperial College in London, also told us about the spike in interest in studying epidemiology amid the pandemic. "Clearly epidemiology is very fashionable at the moment but that will wane." He says that an older colleague recalled the wave of interest in epidemiology surrounding the HIV epidemic. "Don't be attracted to it because you see a lot of epidemiologists on the news. All the hard graft is done between those events," he says.

Dr Churcher was drawn to epidemiology through an interest in disease after he caught malaria while travelling. He says: "The thing I like about epidemiology is you have to get to a broad understanding of everything that's going on. It's the really holistic approach that I find interesting."

"In the past epidemiologists were very much born from a maths and stats background but as understanding of the discipline has increased you have more diverse experiences coming in, which is exactly what it needs. It doesn't need to be just hardcore mathematicians doing it, it needs to be social scientists, it needs to be everything because it is a society-based problem."

Dr Thomas Churcher.

Since the pandemic, Dr Churcher has focussed on the impact Covid is having on malaria, to avoid "a double pandemic". While he is pleased the public has a greater awareness of epidemiology now, he is frustrated that there's still an "awful lot of rubbish being talked by an awful lot of people" when it comes to the virus.

Meanwhile, Professor Sarah Lewis, who is a Professor of Molecular Epidemiology at the University of Bristol, says she worries about the relationship between Twitter and epidemiology.

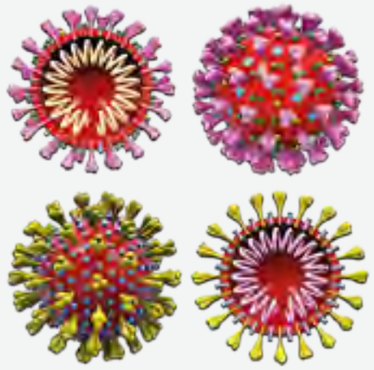
"I keep getting sucked into Twitter. I should stay away from it really but it's a very good one for finding out new information because obviously data's being generated so fast at the moment. Normally in epidemiology, it will take us months to write a paper and then it will go out to peer review and that can take several more months and then you've got to wait for the publication."

She adds "Because policies are being based on the research, everything is coming out so fast and lots of it hasn't been peer-reviewed and it's posted up on Twitter and you find the latest information there really or in press releases, which is quite dff erent. Some of it has dubious quality but before anyone has had a chance to assess the quality, it's gone round hundreds and thousands of people," she warns.

Professor Lewis says aside from the obvious frustrations at the moment, working in epidemiology is a very satisfying career path. "If you get involved in epidemiology you can apply the methods across a whole load of different subjects."

"I normally work on using genes to identify risk factors for cancer but also cleft lip and palate and mental health, as well. So that's quite diverse already. But then, with the pandemic, a lot of the methods that I'm familiar with apply to analysing data relating to Covid too," she explains.

She concludes: "It's a fantastic field if you're broadly interested in health and you want to make a big impact on populations. Obviously a doctor will treat a single patient but an epidemiologist could identify a risk factor that could have an impact on thousands of people." f



Covid-19.

Nicolas Croix on how tech can improve our social care system

The biggest challenge for UK care homes has been a shortage of skilled care workers in senior roles in the past 10 years. There are several reasons for this, the most significant being the perceived unattractiveness and low status of care work, relating to low pay levels and job security. In addition, a lack of specialist HR managers can result in long-term vacancies, with the industry already battling a shortage of registered nurses and care home managers.

However, since the outbreak of Covid-19, safeguarding employees' mental health has overtaken the skills shortage as the biggest challenge for HR leaders in health and social care. Recently, my team surveyed 158 senior professionals from the industry; 54 per cent of the respondents reported employee mental health support as the biggest challenge, followed by staff development (41 per cent), shortage of labour (39 per cent), lack of skilled workers (37 per cent), and increasing paperwork (33 per cent).

The only way to operate any care organisation with minimal HR issues is to employ and reward the best staff: skilled professionals who are passionate about their work, know they're in the right job, and care both about residents and the business's goals. To achieve this, organisations need careful recruitment practices, with a watertight hiring and onboarding process to deliver only the best candidates. This requires investment in three core areas: HR, social outreach, and technology.

The Care Quality Commission estimates that around 11.5 per cent of care homes do not have a registered manager in place. HR roles are just as important as skilled care work, with the best HR people most qualified to negate challenges around recruitment and people management – and care organisations should never stop recruiting. Taking on the right people goes back to some basics of good personnel practice:

- creating standardised interview procedures
- using sensible and consistent scoring of candidates
- testing for behaviour rather than competence
- scrupulously monitoring recruitment performance

It also involves building and maintaining relationships with local job centres and sector-based work academies, offering visits to the home, and even making 'taster shifts' available to potential applicants.

Investment in social outreach helps take your brand to a bigger audience, widening your talent pool and access to potential applicants. Recruiting via the internet is no longer a nice-to-have but critical in opening up worldwide possibilities. Paradoxically, most recruitment to care assistant roles is typically from a care home's immediate neighbourhood, so cultivating positive coverage in local media is valuable in attracting staff and residents.

Investment in technology ensures that care organisations can maintain a better connection with remote care workers who can feel isolated, reducing job satisfaction. Automation of routine tasks also significantly reduces the monotony of repetitive and time-consuming paperwork for all care workers whilst helping implement new strategies to improve work-life balance and sustain motivation, such as flexible working and other workplace initiatives.

Gateshead-based care home company Helen McArdle Care is family-run and says 'caring for staff with a personal touch' enables it to retain staff and rehire workers who had left for alternative employment. The business hosts an annual family fun day, where staff are invited to bring their relatives to work. Helen McArdle Care also empowers its managers hearing of a staff member suffering hardship or other personal problems to offer the appropriate support – is a policy all care homes should adopt.

To attract the best staff, care organisations must be able to find them in the first place. Another challenge the industry faces is a lack of sector-based academies providing good enough qualifications, allowing staff to earn better pay, whilst only half of those surveyed (53%) said the Government's national recruitment campaign helps them attract social care workers.

More needs to be done to attract higher volumes of people into health and social care. Only by improving the quality of training and pay rates and adopting innovative approaches to care home management will the sector become more attractive and start to plug the skills gap against a backdrop of continued disruption due to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. f

The writer is the founder and CEO of Moonworkers

Pharmacist Liam Beadman on where a pharmacy degree leads

When I graduated nearly 20 years ago from Nottingham University with a Master's degree in Pharmacy there were only really two settings in which to undertake the requisite pre-registration year and launch my career. These choices were between a large teaching hospital and a chemist shop. Whichever was chosen would heavily influence the path of my career as a pharmacist: on the one hand the clinical, hospital-based route; on the other, the more business-focussed, working in community pharmacy approach.

In the end, I began working at a large, teaching hospital before moving into community pharmacy after a few years, attracted more by business opportunities than patient-focused work. Today, I find myself working for a Clinical Commissioning Group more by luck than judgement and in a non-pharmacy role.

For today's pharmacy graduates, there are more options for how they can use the extensive knowledge and experience gained from the four year Master's degree. The majority of pharmacists begin training to become independent prescribers of medication soon after they complete their pre-registration year. The traditional careers in hospital and community pharmacy still exist, but their scope has been broadened and there are now other opportunities to work with patients in the community and also to get involved with the commissioning of health services at a regional or national level.

Pharmacists, along with other allied health professionals such as physios and dieticians, are being recruited in large numbers to join GP teams working in primary care. These roles often involve the pharmacist taking a special interest in a certain disease area (e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure) and being the main healthcare professional who sees this patient group on an ongoing basis; monitoring the progress of their disease and adjusting and optimising their medication over months and years. A primary care pharmacist will also form an integral part of the multi-disciplinary team of the Primary Care Network or PCN – a collaboration of GP practices, within a local neighbourhood who work closely together.

The role of the high street chemist has changed dramatically over the last 20 years too. Gone are the days when this role would almost solely involve deciphering the hand-writing of the local GP and dispensing medication to patients. Community pharmacists undertake reviews for people on long term medications, advise on inhaler technique and operate weight management clinics. More people with minor ailments such as coughs, colds, eye infections, back pain and more are being directed to their local pharmacist rather than the GP as a quicker and more convenient way of dealing with these types of issues. Community pharmacies have also been administering the annual flu vaccine for over 10 years and have been crucial to the continued successful roll out of the Covid-19 vaccines and supply of lateral flow tests.

There are roles that straddle hospital and community work and some primary care pharmacists have roles that involve working in chemist shops as well as the local GP. These links between organisations that were once quite separate are helping to drive the government's vision for the better integration of care via the creation of Integrated Care Systems.

My opportunity to work for a CCG came via the post of prescribing adviser. This office-based job retained some clinical elements from my previous roles, including answering specific medicines queries from local GPs, but also brought in more strategic, commissioning tasks such as setting incentives to improve the quality and effectiveness of prescribing at a borough level, undertaking audits of prescribing, and developing local policies that would benefit the local population. Commissioning roles afford the opportunity to make beneficial changes to whole populations of people rather than at an individual level. There is also exposure to how public resources are allocated and how government policy decisions are translated into something workable on the ground. Joining the CCG has given me opportunities to work in primary care more broadly and opened up avenues to move across to NHS England or the Department of Health and Social Care in the future.

The career of a pharmacist has changed dramatically over the last 10 years, with more varied roles within the traditional hospital or community pharmacy based jobs and a greater array of new positions, both clinical, patient-facing and more strategic, office-based jobs. In short, there are more roles for pharmacists now, involving a broader scope of tasks that make better use of the breadth of knowledge acquired during the degree. f

Meet Jan Willem Poot, the founder of Yes We Can Clinics

Finito World meets the remarkable founder of the brilliant international mental health treatment centre in the Netherlands – and also discovers directly the positive impact it has had on young people

Jan Willem Poot, Founder of Yes We Can Clinic

Kindness is an underrated trait in business. I blame Gordon Gecko. Since the Wall Street movie came out in 1987, it posited the notion that to be successful you need to be ruthless. I never thought this needed to be true, and I especially don't think it's true after having Zoomed with Jan Willem Poot, the founder of Yes We Can Clinics and the international Yes We Can Youth Clinics.

Zoom journalism can be a tricky business; to gauge the person you're talking with in 2D is sometimes impossible. The screen throws up too much distance. But with true kindness, the difficulty falls away: that's because it dissolves all barriers. Generosity of spirit is essentially transparent, because what does it have to hide?

Jan Willem is like this: engaging, thoughtful, eager to tell you his story. He is the polar opposite of arrogant.

But I've also noticed that true empathy often has its origins in hard experiences. This is also the case with Jan Willem. He tells me: "To give you the story of the why of Yes We Can, I have to go back a little to my own story. My parents got divorced back when I was four or five. My dad was happiest when he was around the world; and my mum raised me, I soon realised she was a little different to other mums: she was a heavy drinker – an alcoholic. She also took medication and never learned how to deal with her emotions without it."

If that sounds hard, it was just the beginning. "My stepfather came to live with us, and he was also an alcoholic. From the age of 12-13, my home was an unsafe environment – a toxic place."

Jan Willem began spending less time at home, and more time on the street, hanging out with people in similar situations. "We had an unspoken bond. I found marijuana and gambling to numb myself and became quickly addicted. I realised if I was stoned all day, or at a slot machine, I didn't have to think or feel. By the age of 18, I was using cocaine and alcohol; by 19, I was using five grams of cocaine and a bottle of vodka just to feel alive."

Luckily, one day a careworker found him in the street and picked him up and took him to an institution in the Hague. From 19 to 27, Jan Willem moved around and didn't find the right mental healthcare during that time. "They were saying the right things theoretically but they couldn't get into my heart," he recalls.

At 27, Poot went to Scotland to Castle Craig Hospital in Blyth Bridge, Scotland. "It was a beautiful clinic in the hills of Scotland. They took my hand and said they wouldn't let me go until I had changed and was in recovery. Somehow, I trusted them because these people were real."

Jan Willem is now 17 years without drugs or alcohol: "I am having the most beautiful life I could have." That's because he has purpose – perhaps more purpose than I've ever encountered in anyone.

Back in the Netherlands, Jan Willem began apologising ("I had 200 people I had to say sorry too") and also paying back people to whom he owed money. He finally made the last payments two years ago. Fifteen years ago he joined a sports company that helped young people and Poot began to feel a burgeoning sense of vocation; he would give back, and help those people similar to the person he had been. "By seeing those kids and working with the kids – and seeing the beauty of that programme –
I was fascinated and I could also see the group dynamics and how positive and beautiful it can be," Jan Willem recalls.

Jan Willem had been there for a year when his boss came to him and asked for him to be his partner. The company grew over the next years, but during that time Poot began to realise that he craved more connection with the children, which formed a smaller part of his role than he felt he needed. These feelings were compounded by the national situation in the Netherlands. "At that moment there were 200,000 kids getting a form of youthcare. They weren't really getting better – they were just in the system. Around 20,000 children had been in the system for multiple years. I knew I could start something small to see if I could change, or help. It was a dream I had."

Poot sold the sports company and started Yes We Can Clinics in 2011; almost immediately, he began achieving real results with children. "After two years, the Dutch government, some insurance companies, the councils, they were coming to us and saying: 'Please, grow and make this bigger because we have thousands of kids suffering because there isn't any really effective care.'"

In 2011, there were 25 beds; in 2013, they moved to a place with 85 beds; and four years ago they moved to a clinic with 160 beds. That means that every year they now treat a 1,000 young people who stay for 10 weeks of residential care. It hardly needs saying that this is an astonishing achievement.

Yes We Can is now an international clinic, which makes a real difference to people's lives all over the world, but I am keen to know more about what that impact looks like in real terms. With this in mind, I zoom with a fellow of Yes We Can, who understandably asks to remain anonymous. For the purposes of this article, I shall call her Eve.

When I meet Eve, I know I am going to like her, and warm immediately to her candour, gentleness, and intelligence. What I don't expect is that I will spend a portion of the next hour fighting back tears as I get to know her story.

Eve's is – at least to some extent – a pandemic story. "In February 2020, I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa," she tells me. "I have struggled for my whole life with eating, and my behaviour around eating, but nothing was working. I was very, very stubborn and verbally abusive towards my family and not wanting to change. I became this selfish person completely compelled by my eating disorder."

> "Yes We Can is now an international clinic, which makes a real difference to people's lives all over the world."

Eve entered something like a parallel universe where the good in life seemed to her a thing almost impossible to access; her only reality was her eating disorder. "I would shout that I wanted to die, that I didn't want to be here, and all that stuff. I completely ruled the house; I was being just disgraceful and making my family cry."

Curiously, Covid-19 gave her a trigger. "I was so afraid because nobody knew what it was like and I knew I was frail and what Covid could do to people. I didn't want to die that way."

This shows, as only a casual remark

can, a shocking fact: for Eve, death was very much in the equation at this point. Fortunately, Eve's mother had heard about Yes We Can Youth Clinics. She checked Eve in on 19th May 2020.

I take a moment to imagine how this might have been for Eve's mother, who joins her daughter on the call. She has one of those kind faces that has also known suffering – but there is also something else written there, the perennial strength of a mother's duty. It is the look of someone proud to be a mother, and proud to have suffered for love of her daughter, and who would do it again a thousand times. It is in itself, to use one of Poot's favourite words, 'beautiful' to see.

There is always in the stories I have heard of addiction this almost unspoken toll on the nearest and dearest. And as Eve continues her story, my mind reverts back to Jan Willem Poot, who didn't have a mother like this. Later, I also find myself contemplating the way in which the world gropes its way to good. It seems as if for all the pain that percolates in the world, we sometimes discover a secret remedy being administered. But this too is often an offshoot of suffering. The world has contained many people who hit rock bottom and didn't survive. But others find that their nadir is the essential ingredient of the spiritual power they will appropriate in life. Yes We Can is an emblem of this.

And so it would prove for Eve. But she is at pains to point out that her life didn't change rightaway. Slowly, as the weeks passed she began to reconnect with that other self that had seemed to have gone to sleep: the one capable of being happy and taking pleasure in the simple things the world has to offer. In fact, these things had been there, now and then, all along, even during the hardest parts of her struggle. "What I realised when I was actually in my active addiction, and in the clinic – and since I've left – is that nature is a massive thing for me – that I love the stars. I love going on walks."

Even during the low point of her addiction, there were these little signs of another life – a life beyond her current predicament. "One of the things that I did during addiction was to look at the stars. That was one of the things that I did love: before bed, I'd go outside and look up to the stars with my dad. It would be really magical, but then as soon as I went back inside, everything would be rubbish again. When I went to the clinic, it was one of the things that I would do to remember my parents and say goodnight to them. Dad would always say: 'If you see the moon, and I see it, we're looking at each other.' To me, that puts everything into perspective and I say it's part of my higher power, which is something that we discover in the clinic."

So what was it like going into the clinic? "I was just in my own self-pity, crying and constantly homesick," Eve recalls. "It felt very, very scary. There were people who were in their later weeks and who were in recovery. I was afraid of judgements. But it was different to places I'd been in before. The clinic is there to confront you, but it also has a feeling that this is the right place to be and I knew instinctively it was going to help me."

Eve's biggest changes didn't occur until around Week 5. "I was still in my old behaviour. At other places it would be, "Just eat". At Yes We Can no one made me eat. I was put on a meal plan, but the clinic understands that you've got to want it. I knew before I went that I wanted to change, but it was scary to take that step away from the safety of my addiction into something else. In a way, my anorexia was still a little high, which would distract me from my relationships. But at the clinic, I began to understand why I was behaving in the way I did."

One important moment was when Eve, who was used to being weighed blind, was weighed and showed her weight. "When I saw the results, I swore and cried. I was confused as I felt a hundred times better, but I had lost weight. Then I went to my therapist and cried and then said: "Right, I'm going to do it." My first meal was unbelievable. I thought: "Wow, this is incredible. How have I been missing this?"

> "Wow, this is incredible. How have I been missing this?"

Eve continues to stay in touch with other fellows from Yes We Can, and is now set for a future that is immeasurably brighter than what she faced a year and a half ago. But what does she think would have happened had she not gone to the clinic? "That's easy," she says. "I would have died."

We have heard a lot these past years about mental health, and I have sometimes begun to wonder if it's an unhelpful buzzword. One reason for this is that our current conversation seems to skim over the life and death aspect of real struggle; it can elevate difficulty to the realm of real suffering, which in turn may make us turn a blind eye to those who are really in danger.

Jan Willem simplifies the whole thing for me: "We follow the same mission for all the kids who come here, and tell us they are dying.The end result is so beautiful. You can change behaviour. You can change thinking. Young people can start to believe in life again. That gets you motivated. This is the thing I want to do for the rest of my life."

And you can see that he will – that he will never forget the motivation that his own redemptive story has given him. He wants that redemption for other people – and perhaps with a passion so heartfelt and true that one half-suspects him of saintliness – even over zoom.

Saint of not, it strikes me that the scale of Jan Willem's achievement is to make his story not just his own – it is also Eve's story and thousands of others we won't be able to hear about in this article. But take a moment now to consider all the others, and try to imagine all the good that a person can do if they have the determination and the vision. If the pandemic teaches us nothing else, let it teach us this. f

Christopher Jackson is News Director of Finito World

Dean Gustar of The Kusnacht Practice

ON ADDICTION, THE UHNW MINDSET AND WHY THE TONE OF DISCUSSION ON ALCOHOL NEEDS TO CHANGE

Christopher Jackson talks to the addiction specialist about life in the Swiss clinic – and what it tells us about our times

Given that The Kusnacht Practice is the leading practice in the world for helping people with addiction issues, you encounter its people armed with pre-conceived notions about them. You try to imagine what the high quality of its many specialists will look like in the flesh. But reality has a way of second-guessing this – and in fact is always more interesting than what we'd pencilled in our minds.

Of course, the place is brilliantly staffed and well-resourced – as you might expect. But somehow you're not quite prepared for Dean Gustar, the organisation's Head of Clinical Operations, who has an earthy compassion and a depth of knowledge that impresses immediately. The sense is of a man who has lived through many experiences – and indeed he tells me that he has had his own struggles with addiction in the past.

The more time you spend with him, the more his presence at the clinic makes sense: this is a smart man, who cares deeply about his patients and understands what people are going through when it comes to addiction of all kinds – everything from gaming and alcohol, to drugs and overeating.

"Before I worked at The Kusnacht Practice I'd never really been around wealth," Gustar explains. "One of the things I've learned is that wealth can be very dangerous. It can be a very lonely place. For instance, it's very hard for wealthy people to trust other people. And if something doesn't feel right, they're used to changing it quickly, with a snap of the fingers. That can make the challenge of behavioural change even more difficult for them."

That feels like earned wisdom. Gustar has that look of unstinting compassion that you sometimes find in the healthcare sector – the look of a man who is somehow never exhausted but instead mysteriously energised by his proximity to suffering.

He continues: "And of course, their addiction isn't really going to impact on them financially so that creates less of an incentive to change. Nobody's going to come and repossess their house."

Gustar lives in Zurich, about 15 minutes from The Kusnacht Practice. Born in the West Country, he also used to live in Peckham, and knows that part of the world well – the sense is of a down-to-earth Englishman somehow deposited in upmarket Switzerland. "I used to live on the Peckham Estate, and when my friends came over I used to walk them back to the station – they were in fear for their lives," he tells me.

So at what stage do clients normally approach The Kusnacht Practice? "When people come to The Kusnacht Practice, generally the consequences are

Dean Gustar of The Kusnacht Practice

starting to build – often they may be way over their head with consequences. So it's a very tough place to be where you begin to realise that one of your behaviours is causing damage to yourself or damage to your family or damage to others."

> "The signs are that during the pandemic these addictions have been increasing."

In addition, patients normally come to Gustar because of a longstanding pattern of behaviour that has itself been of use – or seemed to be of use to them. "The very thing that may be causing the damage, by its nature is going to be very difficult to let go of because maybe it's been a survival strategy for you to take drugs or drink or overeat or gamble – or whatever it might be."

The signs are that during the pandemic these addictions have been increasing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic: "We've seen people whose drinking or drug use has increased as a result of feeling isolated, and not being able to partake in life as they used to," he explains. And why is that? "Maybe some of the things that help regulate their alcohol use – visiting their parents or going on holiday or feeling productive in their work – have been lost, leading to an increase in other behaviours."

And, of course, this is the case even when we have all been less exposed to that dangerous thing, the boozy work lunch. "It's a good point," says Gustar. "Some of these boozy lunches, there's this undercurrent of relationship building, where people are engaged in drinking, and where drinking is a kind of obligation."

But that sense of obligation, especially in beery England, can crop up with great regularity in everyday life. So how do you combat that sense of obligation? "You have to develop your own strategies for dealing with these situations. When it comes to people who care about you or people that love you, if you tell them you're not drinking and if you feel comfortable telling them why, they should care enough about you just to accept it and support you –and maybe even look out for you in that position."

And what about those pressure situations – a wedding, or when we see those friends who expect us to drink with them? "I think in those situations, if you're starting to feel the pressure or people are applying the pressure. you have to come up with a strategy that can support you in that situation – and that could even be an escape plan."

Gustar is aware of the difficulty of the task he faces with those suffering with addiction, and so he is keen to perspectivise what it means to give up an addiction. "It's very difficult to change any behaviour. So if you do manage to change from a state of dependent drinking, why would you risk it for somebody that's just a passing acquaintance?"

> "Wealth can be a very lonely place, and the wealthy have a very low tolerance for discomfort."

I'm reminded of Christopher Hitchens – who died of oesophageal cancer after a lifetime of too much whiskey – who remarked that he might not have drunk so much had he not had a strong constitution. He was able to file his pieces on time, and be successful. Does Gustar see high-functioning alcoholics among his CEO client base? "We do see high-functioning alcoholics and it just makes you wonder how well they would function without alcohol. But they pay a price somewhere, so it could be their relationship or their health – and they're most likely already paying it in some respects."

Sometimes the price can be concealed. "As we get older our ability to sustain it decreases – you can't easily manage a dependency above the age of 55. Alcohol is just a very dangerous substance for the human body."

And yet, if you look at the public discourse, Gustar points out, you wouldn't think drink especially dangerous. "I mean – it's just everywhere," he says. There's a kindly anger here – a note which only someone who knows the cost of our exaltation of alcohol could strike. "I've watched some of the debates in Parliament, and they've had these discussions about "When's the pub opening? When are we going to get to the pub and drink that pint again?" And if you look at our UHNW clients, there is so much temptation in their lives. If I go to the airport, I mooch around and maybe go to a Starbuck's. They go into a business lounge, and there's a big bar full of free champagne."

To go against these trends and unpick negative behaviours plainly takes willpower – but I suggest to Gustar that willpower isn't something that's evenly distributed across the population. Some have it; others don't. Gustar says: "I think it's a bit like that Indiana Jones film Raiders of the Lost Ark, where the sun has to be in place and bounce off here and there and then people change. A lot of things have to be aligned at the right time." He pauses, then confides: "But you even get people who sit in front of the doctor and the doctor says , 'If you carry on like this you've only got six more months.'. And they carry on doing it. Wealth can be a very lonely place, and the wealthy have a very low tolerance for discomfort."

Talking to Gustar is a revelation: here is a man who has taken the decision to work towards helping people. And he reminds us also that addiction is a problem more endemic in our society than we might realise – sometimes as much in the tone of parliamentary debate, and our corporate life, as it is in the pub. f

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Emma Raducanu *(Alamy)*

Culture, Books & Travel

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Will the city of lights bounce back?

An interview with divorce lawyer Jeremy Levison about his office art collection

Iris Spark meets divorce lawyer Jeremy Levison, the co-founder of Levison Meltzer Pigott, and finds the art collector on top form.

If I were starting out my legal career again, I'd be a divorce lawyer. But I wouldn't be doing it specifically for the pay, or for the ringside seat on marital breakdown. I'd be doing it with a more specific intention: I'd be aiming to work in the offices of Levison Meltzer Pigott.

There again, I'd have a particular reason in mind, other than the quality of the firm. This, incidentally, is beyond question. Jeremy Levison and Simon Pigott (and later Alison Hayes) have been a regular fixture among lists of top family lawyers since founding the firm – their partner Clare Meltzer sadly died in 2003. Even so, I'd be going there for the art.

Many workplaces have fine art collections. One thinks particularly of Deutsche Bank ('the art collection probably keeps the bank afloat for liquidity,' says Levison), and I recall stumbling out of a meeting at UBS once to be standing in front of a sea of Lucian Freud sketches. But Levison's collection is different.

For one thing it's personal. It's also part of a smaller business and so feels more special. So does he paint himself? "At school, I had no artistic ability whatsoever," Levison tells me. "A couple of years ago, I went on a two-day oil painting class in Sussex. I absolutely loved it. However, the experience convinced me not to give up the day job."

So when did he first start collecting? "It started in the 1970s. I met a chap who was doing prints; he had created a print and I liked it so I bought it. The next major purchase was in 1979. I had a broken heart at the time and there was this beautiful painting of a woman by an artist called 'Molinari' in a very ordinary shop window in Rome. That day my worldly wealth was 32 pounds, and this cost me 29 pounds then. I couldn't resist it, and I still love the work to this day."

Over time, art collecting became an aspect of travel. His full success as a solicitor was in the future, and at that time he couldn't have begun to realise how his collection – which now stands at around 500 pieces – would expand. "Whenever I went away anywhere I would buy a piece of art as the souvenir from that trip," he recalls. "It just sort of went on from there. I was very fortunate, in that I became friends with someone who came into the office from off the street. He wanted to change his name from Christopher Holloway to Christopher Bledowski. He was not able to pay me, but he gave me a drawing. He was very influential in introducing me to various artists and the infinite creativity of the art world."

Bledowski is an intriguing figure in his own right and deserves more attention. Bledowski would kill himself in Switzerland some time later, and Levison maintains that the quality of the work, which he has come to appreciate ever more over the years, might well have led to world fame.

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Case

J. Bratby, Still Life

But Levison's art collection is a legacy of sorts for Bledowski. In time, Levison joined the firm Collyer Bristow and his art collecting continued. "We had all these bare walls," Levison recalls, "and we had lots of artistic clients. I thought to myself, "Well, why don't we give the clients an art exhibition on our walls. We did and it was great fun.'"

The idea of a more formal art gallery at Collyer Bristow was born. This was based on a belief that there is far more talent in existence than the art market – always caught up in the almost random anointing of the 'next big thing' – has time to recognise. In fact, Levison regrets the notion of the art market, preferring to talk instead about the art world. "The art world has morphed into the art market," he explains. "I have a lot of time for the art world, but I don't worry about the art market."

It's this essentially generous estimate of the talents of those who aren't famous – or in some cases, aren't famous yet – which informs Levison's approach to buying art. "I love living with art, so it's never worried me if a piece becomes valuable or not. If it does, that's an added bonus, but if it doesn't, it doesn't matter in the slightest because of the joy of living with it."

There is always generosity at work in Levison's collecting. "At Collyer Bristow, I thought, 'Well, we've got an acre of wall space here, and within 100 miles of London you've got probably 5,000 artists of real talent. Let's do something to put them together." The resulting space was a great place to work, and it began to alter the lives of clients and employees. "From an initial sort of quixotic curiosity among the members of staff, suddenly they all became more involved and began to look forward to the various shows. For instance, we had this young secretary and she began to take an interest. There came a time when she found herself needing to make a choice between whether to go on holiday for two weeks in southern Spain or whether to buy this little sculpture. She chose the sculpture. That sculpture

Conrad Romyn, The Last Supper

A. Eyton, The Grotto, Lourdes

over the years will have given her so much more joy than those two weeks of Sangria-fuelled sunshine would have done."

For Levison, art continues to be a no-brainer. "At some restaurants in London you can go out to dinner with four of you and it'll easily cost you £1,000 and we all know how that ends up the next day. Or you can go to any number of artists, and buy any number of works for up to £1,000, and enjoy them forever."

So has the pandemic altered his approach to collecting? "Well, the one thing I did do was to buy a much larger house in order to have more wall space. The problem with my collection is that as it's grown so has my ability to display it, so I lend a lot of it out."

I mention that my first stop in New York is always the Frick Collection, just as my first stop in Cambridge is always Kettle's Yard. Would he ever consider a Levison Collection somewhere in the UK? "I mean my collection is very modest compared to those. But I own this building down in Bermondsey and I wonder whether at some point that might become a home for the collection. I think my collection is an example that quite a lot can be achieved by someone who doesn't have a great deal of money."

It certainly does. I recall my own training at Stevens and Bolton LLP in Guildford – a perfectly decent firm but notable mainly for its blank walls. To some trainees, especially if you're not sure if you want to be a lawyer, life at a law firm can seem like the end of the world. I say I hope the staff realise how lucky they are. Levison replies: "I think they do. And the clients love it as well. It gets constantly talked about, and a lot of clients ask for tours around the gallery." Levison also concedes that it can be 'quite a useful PR exercise because we can do evenings where outside organisations come in, and I can talk about how the collection came about."

And of course, when you're getting divorced it must be something to see such a collection on the walls – to know, in effect, that there are other narratives beyond your own, especially if the divorce is contentious.

Levison laughs. "Yes, I think coming to see your divorce lawyer is ten times worse than going to the dentist. It's the moment when you're admitting that your marriage is definitely over. I often think of myself as being, to a certain extent, a doctor. Some just can't think about anything other than their predicament. But for others, the art collection is a relief – it's something else to talk about."

I've done the tour many times with Jeremy, but I am always ready to do it again. I happen to know that some of the best works – the Rose Wylies, a Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and a truly wonderful Ollie Epp are now at his new house. But the disappointment of that can easily be met by the fact that what's here is still remarkable. There's an Andrew Marr over a photocopier ("I'm not sure how good he really is, but I like it"), a wonderful picture by Anthony Eyton called "Our Lady's Grotto at Lourdes", a superb Still Life by John Bratby, various Eileen Coopers, a host of Stanley Spencer drawings, a Last Supper by Conrad Romyn and many, many others.

With the possible exception of Spencer, Bratby and Cooper, who feature in most surveys of 21st century art, all the artists here deserve more recognition – but each has also met with a superb champion in Levison. As always I return out into the street, not exactly regretting my decision to leave the law, but thinking that things might have turned out differently had I had the good luck to train at Levison Meltzer Pigott. f

HUGO MADUREIRA

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An interview with Sir Tom Stoppard on his friend Clive James

CHRISTOPHER JACKSON HEARS FROM THE 83-YEAR-OLD PLAYWRIGHT ABOUT HIS OLD FRIEND, AND FINDS EVIDENCE OF A MOVING FRIENDSHIP

I'm sometimes surprised by how quickly dead writers recede. It amazes me that John Updike will be 13 years dead in January 2022; Philip Roth departed four years ago. The same with VS Naipaul. Christopher Hitchens has been dead nearly a decade.

In each instance, you find the writer's profile declines at their death; for one thing they're not around to promote their books. Dead poets need advocates. Two years on from Clive James' departure, it's very soon to worry about his posthumous reputation – and too soon to reappraise.

But as these two years have passed, and the world been changed utterly by the pandemic, I've found myself thinking about his work. But then that's no surprise. As readers know, poems like "Japanese Maple", "Holding Court", and "Leçons des Ténèbres" have a habit, as Larkin's did, of loitering in the memory.

I never met him, though I did get to interview him over e-mail towards the end of his life. What Clive would have thought of the pandemic is anyone's guess. Housebound in Cambridge for his last decade or so, it seems likely that he would have found the humour in the pandemic just as he did in so much else. But the fact that he never clapped eyes on the words Covid-19 and coronavirus is now the principal distance between us and him. Perhaps it's the first hurdle his poetry has to traverse: it needs to touch us now.

The memory of Clive can still stir people into action who don't usually feel like doing media. One is Sir Tom Stoppard who was friends with Clive. Having been through Hermione Lee's monumental biography of Stoppard and found little but passing reference to Clive, I decide to see if Stoppard is in the mood to reminisce.

To my mild surprise, an email comes back. "You've sent me back into Clive's "Collected" for an afternoon," he says. "I'm grateful because the reading rebuked me for not having read so many of these poems before (and forgetting many I had read)."

If you want to imagine where Stoppard is writing from, it's worth watching Alan Yentob's recent Imagine documentary, which shows the playwright in a country house with enviable gardens, and a number of pet tortoises.

The Stoppard-James friendship is an intriguing one: of writers working in the late 20th and early 21st century their work seems to me the most likely to last, not just because of the richness of their output, but because of their infectious quotability.

Here – plucked at random from his oeuvre – is the James voice for those who might have missed it: "Santyana was probably wrong when he said

(Ecolleary)

that those who forget the past are condemned to relive it. Those who remember are condemned to relive it too." On Peter Cook: "He wasn't just a genius, he had the genius' impatience with the whole idea of doing something again."

And here he is on Stoppard: "The mainspring of Rosencrantz and Guildernstern Are Dead is the perception – surely a compassionate one – that the fact of their deaths mattering so little to Hamlet was something which ought to have mattered to Shakespeare."

So how far do they go back? Stoppard says he finds it hard to remember his first associations with Clive. "The past is mostly fog. I can't remember how I first met Clive. Early on, he took me to join in one of those "famous" literary lunchings (Amis, McEwan et al)."

I note how from Stoppard's perspective, these lunches, which sometimes form a slightly obligatory part of our literary lore, have vanished into the ether.

Clive and Tom have both spoken publicly about the way in which Clive used to send the playwright his poems – but again there is no mention of it in Lee's book.

So did Clive send Stoppard his poems? "Yes he did, during his last few years, send me some poems for comment." And did Stoppard ever offer suggestions, and if so did Clive ever accept them? "He sometimes accepted the point," Stoppard continues. "But I haven't kept my letters and remember no instances. I don't think I sent him my plays."

In plays like Arcadia, the action turns on a hapless biographer desperate to get at the truth of the past, only to find that the past hasn't been properly preserved. It's interesting to find that the playwright is himself cavalier with preserving communiqués of obvious literary interest. Stoppard has pulled off the trick of making me feel like a Stoppard character.

But what comes across instead is that Stoppard genuinely admired Clive's work: "I hugely enjoyed his writing, poems and prose," he continues. "What I enjoyed, aside from his craft, was the way his store of cultural trivia (about Hollywood, machines, films, sport, etc) was intermixed with the real erudition."

But has Clive's reputation suffered a bit precisely because he could do so much? "I guess that this connects with that: a lowbrow intellectual with a highbrow appreciation of the commonplace. From Auden to Weissmuller."

I have to look up Weissmuller who, though he sounds like he ought to be a philosopher, turns out to be an Olympic swimmer, the subject of a Clive poem 'Johnny Weissmuller dead in Acapulco'. It's in the Collected, so no doubt it popped into Tom's mind because he'd read it that day. It's a very Clive thing, to visit his poetry then find yourself sent back to your laptop to look up a forgotten athlete. I'm not sure if there's another writer who so often sends me to Google.

We punish people sometimes for knowing too much; we suspect the heart is losing out to the head, and sometimes as in poems like 'Jet lag in Tokyo ("Flat feet kept Einstein out of the army") or Whitman and the Moth ('Van Wyck Brooks tells us Whitman in old age/ Sat by a pond in nothing but his hat') it might be that Clive is too concerned to tell you what he knows before he tells you what we really want to know: how he feels.

But Stoppard, who is known for complexity in the theatre, favours simplicity in poetry, and this is why Clive's poetry has merit for him: "In addition, he is always an 'easy' poet, his poems come across wholly at first reading, everything declares itself in one shot, like an Annie Liebowitz photo (as Clive might say)."

I ask Stoppard which poems in particular he values. Stoppard gives a thoughtful response. "The River in the Sky" just flows along, doesn't it, as though dictated, but how difficult to bring it off."

This assessment reminds me for some reason of what Andrew Marr once told me: "I read that poem, and thought how wonderful that there's somebody on this earth who's actually read something."

This sense of Clive as keeping the lights on on our behalf is perhaps an underestimated aspect of his achievement: there's always a sense that he was doing it for us all. We felt included in his project and that's an integral aspect of the affection in which he continues to be held.

Stoppard has another important point to make. "There's an exhibitionist in him, and perhaps exhibitionists aren't really trusted. Clive was as much a fan as a star. Most stars are careful not to show fandom to too many too often. But Clive couldn't help himself. He went overboard for those he loved. I felt overestimated by him, as many did, I hope and suspect. But his approval mattered to me."

Stoppard also has some favourites from James' vast oeuvre: "Although he wrote bigger, greater poems, I love 'Living Doll' a lot. The poem I've read aloud most to more people is 'The Book of My Enemy'."

This sends me back to Living Doll, which I hope everyone who reads this will look at. It shows what James was able to do by the end: poems where the performance has receded before the urgency of what has to be said – and said clearly and musically.

There remain doubters here and there about Clive's poetry, but my sense is he got awfully good towards the end in a very short space of time. It was an astonishing, courageous old age.

Of course, you don't do that without being pretty good to begin with. My suspicion is that as the years, and centuries go by, no one will mind whether he did his best work late or not – just as we don't first read 'The Tower' as late Yeats. Buttressed by time from the circumstances of his life and death, we're more likely to read it as Yeats.

It's generous of Stoppard, who is extremely busy, and has also earned a right to some peace and quiet, to answer these questions. But it's clear that the generosity is towards Clive's ghost, not me. I don't delete his email as he apparently deleted Clive's – but as I finish work that day, it's a pleasant thought to imagine Tom spending the afternoon with Clive like that. May he spend many more. f

No Time To Die: what James Bond tells us about the workplace

BY ROBERT GOLDING

Daniel Craig, No Time To Die *(Alamy)*

I'm lucky to possess an attractive vintage edition of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1963). Whenever I take it down from the shelf, as I do now, it reminds me that more people should read Ian Fleming. The writer may be best known now for the multimedia phenomenon he has given the world, but he began as a good prose stylist. For instance, this book, the 12th Bond novel Fleming wrote, begins with a description of a seaside sunset: "Then the orange ball would hiss down into the sea and the beach would, for a while, be entirely deserted, until, under cover of darkness, the prowling lovers would come to writhe briefly, grittily in the dark corners."

This isn't writing of the first rank. Anyone who's ever watched a sunset knows that the setting sun doesn't hiss at all and I don't think lovers prowl the beach so much as loiter – but if we're seeing all this through the eyes of Bond, then perhaps they do. In Bond, women are always an aspect of struggle. His weakness for them is the thing most likely to get him killed.

Any discussion of Bond and the question of work must always come back to that crucial fact, also punchily described in the opening pages of *OHMSS*: 'Today he was a grown-up, a man with years of dirty, dangerous memories – a spy.'

Empire Broccoli

But before we get to life at MI6 in *No Time To Die,* it's worth noting that each time a Bond film comes out, it's a reminder that we exist just after the greatest shift in human experience since the advent of Guttenberg's Bible – namely, the move away from print towards the moving image.

It might be that Bond encapsulates this change more vividly than any other character. That's partly because of the sheer enormity of the franchise. It's also because someone that the previous generation got to know through language in Fleming's books, is now someone we're acquainted with predominantly as spectacle. Even so, the books remain reasonably near.

Ian Fleming *(Alamy)*

And, of course, there are still the books for those who want them. They reliably take up three quarters of a shelf in each outlet of Waterstone's. But the sheer number of people who see these films is a reminder of their addictive, joyous quality.

Our collective need of Bond on the big screen stretches all the way back to Sean Connery's debut in *Dr No* (1962). *No Time to Die* is the 25th instalment. During that time, the film industry has grown exponentially: this state of affairs is best illustrated by the credits at the end, which denote a bewildering array of jobs in the sector from casting directors, to stunt men, makeup artists, production crew, runners, textile technicians and others. While a film of this scale is being made, it exists as something between a camping site and a corporation.

Sean Connery *(Nationaal Archief)*

The figures continue to impress. In 2019, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport estimated that there were 289,000 jobs in the UK film, television, radio and photography sector.

From the Pandemic with Panic

No Time to Die arrives at a time when all these jobs are in flux, and the industry in peril. This is a situation which, one suspects, only James Bond can remove. As punters, we are separated for the most part from the stress of the impact of the pandemic on the film world.

But we do glimpse it occasionally. Earlier this year, audio was leaked of an apoplectic Tom Cruise on the set of the latest *Mission Impossible 7* haranguing crew for failing to take proper Covid safety precautions.

If you heard Cruise's stressed pep-talk, you'll know that the industry has never needed a good Bond film quite like it needs it now. But the world is in a similar predicament. One thing Covid-19 appears to have wrested from us is a sense of harmless fun. In spite of every attempt to reach for gravitas, Bond cannot help but remain that.

Even so, a desire for seriousness is what has defined the Craig films. This needs to be placed in context. The gritty – and for some unbeatable – performances of Sean Connery kicked off the series. His tenure began with *Dr. No* and took us through *From Russia with Love* (1963) – for many purists, the best of them all – *Goldfinger* (1964), *Thunderball* (1965) and *You Only Live Twice* (1967). There then ensued a brief hiatus where George Lazenby, in an underrated film, took over in the filmed version of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), before handing back to Connery for that notable dud *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971).

Roger Moore *(Allan warren)*

Golden Moore

The advent of Roger Moore changed everything. Moore's spirited and amusing performances moved the films far from the books, and seemed to bust forever the notion that Bond was a character of any psychological depth. These films, beginning with *Live and Let Die* (1973), and ending with *A View To A Kill* (1985), where Moore looks almost elderly as he puffs his way up the Eiffel Tower in pursuit of Grace Jones, are great fun, though not untainted by a casual imperialism and misogyny that wouldn't pass muster today. Even so, few Bond fans would want to be without them. They are of their time – but more than that, they were undertaken with the understanding that Fleming's world is predominantly fairytale.

The Moore films have been subject to push back, in some degree or other, by all the actors who have played Bond since. Timothy Dalton, better known as a stage actor, sought inspiration from the Fleming books in *License to Kill* (1987) and *The Living Daylights* (1989). Piers Brosnan channelled Moore to some extent, but there were some attempts – especially in the casting of Judi Dench as M – to bring the series up

to date. Those films declined precipitously in quality following the credible first showing *Goldeneye* in 1995.

And so to Daniel Craig, where the seriousness has been amped up throughout, and everything possible done to give Craig the opportunity to explore what it really means to be a spy – and especially a 00 with a famous licence to kill.

Low Morale

Underpinning all the Bond films is the unavoidable fact that our hero is a serial murderer. During the early films, we are permitted to consider him a hero because he is always protecting the free world from the diabolical schemes of Ernst Stavro Blofeld. The more diabolical the scheme, the more comfortable we are with the notion of him as a hero, since we can turn a blind eye to what he is capable of.

Geopolitically, we need to feel that Britain is in some sense 'good' for these films to work – otherwise the murder is all for nothing, and we can't quite cheer on the hero.

The unseen factor on all these films is the parallel success of the books of John Le Carré. For their style alone, Le Carré's books will go down as some of the finest of the post-War period. Those books work by intrigue, and make particular use of the device of the double agent. This in turn creates a strange world where the excitement is not knowing who to trust – and whether all the sacrifice is worth anything.

For Le Carré, the British Empire was an object of suspicion. These suspicions had their climax in Brexit, and we now know that the novelist died an Irishman. It's difficult to imagine Fleming as anything other than British.

It could be argued that Bond was never supposed to be Le Carré-esque. Fleming's stories work on the implicit assumption that democracy is a more desirable thing than communism – and that there is such a thing as good and evil, and right and wrong.

One also wonders whether the biggest mistake was to try to apply Bond to the world that grew up after the fall of the Soviet Union. The decision to do so can seem as absurd as placing the Three Musketeers in a battle against the Taleban in Afghanistan.

At any rate, during the Brosnan-Craig years, something like the Le Carré worldview was appropriated and smuggled into the Bond movies, where it didn't belong. It was Lord Alfred Tennyson who wrote of the 'long unlovely street' referring to almost any street in London – and the Daniel Craig Bond movies show a London just as drizzly and depressing. It is a city hardly worth fighting for. It's Le Carré's London – a city to make you want to get an Irish passport.

Faulty Leiter

In *No Time to Die*, the role of the spy has shifted still further. Craig's cold eyes are uniquely able to convince us that he kills for a living – but we are not always sure if we should be supporting him. In *No Time To Die*, Bond himself seems to be afflicted by a peculiar kind of self-loathing – and, as throughout Craig's tenure, is continually retiring from espionage. It has been said that the power of the name 'Bond' has to do with his being in some way wedded to Queen and country. Here that central bond has loosened.

One of the perennial images of Craig's time in the role – and it arises again in *No Time to Die* – is of Bond, who must be on slender government provision, retired from active service in five star luxury, somewhere in the Caribbean or the Pacific. He is always questioning the validity of his own job – the series isn't a particularly good advert for recruitment into MI6, and very misleading as to pension expectations.

A further complexity is the US-UK relationship which, we are told in this film, has strongly declined. The friendship between Felix Leiter and Bond, which wheels about throughout the franchise, is here not wholly believable. In License to Kill, Bond is very close to Leiter and driven to revenge by the villain's murder of his wife. But by *Casino Royale* (2006), Bond is only just being introduced to Leiter at the casino after experiencing a defeat by Le Chiffre at poker. Yet by *No Time To Die,* the pair has somehow reverted to a sort of nostalgic friendship which doesn't feel to have been quite earned by the intervening films.

The Leiter-Bond relationship is always a yardstick for describing the nature of the US-UK 'special relationship'. In Casino Royale, when Leiter offers to stand Bond at poker, the moment expresses the benevolent view of America which formed during the Obama administration. In *No Time to Die*, Bond observes that operational coordination between the two countries has become all too sporadic: "That's not good," Bond says grimly.

If we're being strict about it, this is probably wrong historically, since during the Trump administration, when this film was made, the former president made repeated promises of an imminent trade deal with the UK: cooperation was actually somewhat better than it has subsequently been under President Biden. But the point is that whatever political observation is being made – and it's not particularly clear – the moment doesn't work as drama.

Artistic Freefall

This sort of thing wouldn't matter if the film didn't continually present itself as high art. This makes one want to nit-pick.

Daniel Craig, No Time To Die *(Alamy)*

The fact is that slips and inconsistencies have beset Craig's time as Bond, all marked by a slightly cavalier approach to the way the world actually works. There often appear to be logistical difficulties in the villain's enterprises which are skimmed over. I have sometimes – though I realise I'm not supposed to – wondered about the property ownership situation of the farmhouse at the end of *Skyfall* (2012). Out of nowhere, Bond reappropriates his childhood home in order to lure Javier Bardem's villain to it. Inevitably, it is destroyed, and Bond assisted in its defence by Albert Finney, who seems to be a sort of steward of the manor – but who owns it now?

If the film is to end with a meaningful death scene with an actor as good as Judi Dench doing the dying, then this must all be put in context, as it always is in Shakespeare. We are entitled to wonder whose house she's dying in.

Even so, the films do show the way in which the world – and the workplace – has changed. Diversity and inclusion is now represented by Naomi Harris as Moneypenney and – in *No Time to Die* – by Lashana Lynch as having taken over Bond's number 007. The presence of women generally in powerful positions had been addressed by Dench's six appearances as M, and it is now thought acceptable to revert to Ralph Fiennes. Perhaps this in itself might be a truthful indicator of the sometimes slow progress of equality in the workplace. Whether we like it or not, many CEO positions are still filled by men who resemble Fiennes, and many secretarial roles by women: there's still a long way to go, and it's good that the Bond films reflect this.

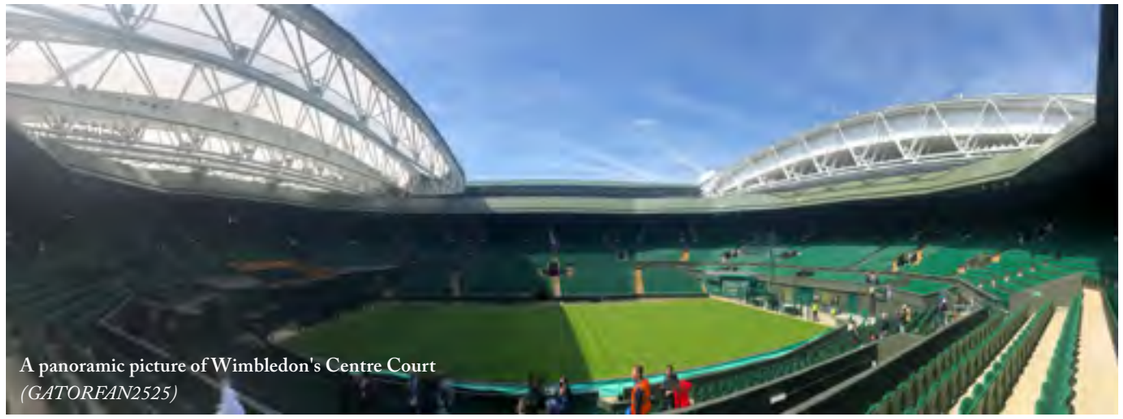
Meanwhile, a more modern attitude to sexuality is shown by the casting of the tremendous Ben Whishaw as Q, who in this film is shown preparing for a date, and the identity of the date referred to as a 'him'.

The film contains some references which feel prescient – the central plot, as is also the case in other Bond films, involves the development and possible global dissemination of a deadly toxin which can kill millions. This brings in human touch as an aspect of the plot, and the word 'quarantine' features – this has a weight now in our lives that it can't have had when this film was being made.

But in general this movie entails people being back in a room together. We see crowded bars, and no social distancing – almost as if the whole pandemic had never happened – which is, of course, precisely what we want to feel as Bond returns to our screens.

And so Bond continues to reflect the times, even though there was never any real need for him to do so. Bond was always a creature of the Cold War, and my sense is that this alone is what makes the Connery films superior: they've kept Fleming's context. That might yet turn out well for the franchise. As Vladimir Putin ramps up his attack on the world's gasoline prices and democracies, Bond may soon be relevant all over again, and sooner than we think. f

New balls, please: how tennis could be the sport for 2022



A panoramic picture of Wimbledon's Centre Court
(GATORFAN2525)

A while ago I wrote a book about Roger Federer. During my researches, I recalled a story of a friend of my father's. This was Mike Eaton, who had been a formidable tennis player in his day, playing Junior Wimbledon. He subsequently fathered a son, Chris Eaton.

Chris, as some readers might remember, had an impressive run to the second round of Wimbledon in 2008. Chris was one of those players, a sort of early male prototype of Emma Raducanu, who relished the big occasion. He didn't win his second round match that year against Dmitri Tursonov, the then 25th seed, but it was close for a while: "the Eaton rifle" as he had once been known at school lost 6-7, 2-6, 4-6.

Chris reached a career high singles ranking of 317. Thinking back to 2008, in retrospect Eaton was never likely to take a set off Tursonov. But if Tursonov had any temptation to gloat about it, it was swiftly removed: he lost in the next round to Janko Tipsarević. And Tipsarević at that time, as he would now admit, wasn't realistically in the position of taking a set off any of the likely winners – then, as now, one of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

> "The Raducanu rise means that tennis continues to be a pretty reliable bet for any young person thinking of entering sport."

Why do I bring this up? It's because of a simple fact that Eaton's father once relaid to me. Namely, that he had never once managed to return a single serve of his son's. Let's remember that Mike was a brilliant player in his own right. And let's remember how easily Chris was dispatched from Wimbledon.

In a story like this we begin to gauge the sheer level that the best players are at. Most of us don't need a reason to feel more admiration for the so-called Big Three: we feel it already. But it is sometimes difficult to know quite how good they are. The story of the Eaton family tells us.

The continued popularity of tennis seems assured, even though there must soon come a time when Federer and Nadal must retire, their bodies finally succumbing to decades on the tour. Djokovic will likely follow suit in time, and surely will be the most gilded player of them all when he does so.

The success of the game hasn't always seemed as certain as all that. I am old enough to remember the big serving nadir of men's tennis in the early 1990s when people like Michael Stich and Richard Krajicek could win Wimbledon seemingly while possessing one shot. I remember the 1991 final, between Stich and an ageing Boris Becker, as an unwatchable fiesta of boredom, where one wondered whether equipment had begun to chip away at skill: the battle went to the biggest serving, which really meant it kept going to the tallest.

Roger Federer
(Squeaky Knees from Cornwall, UK)

It was part of the magnitude of Federer's achievement to change that, more or less on his own. People forget that in 2003, we felt excitement at the brilliance of his play – but also relief that we were now allowed to watch rallies again. And though Nadal and Djokovic both brought different styles to the game, they eventually learned to beat Federer on terms of Federer's own making. It's probably this which makes Federer fans so ardent: they remember what went before.

Looking ahead, there is a natural trepidation about any era where Federer, Nadal and Djokovic aren't playing anymore. But if anyone had any doubts about the future of tennis: enter Emma Raducanu.

Raducanu's success remains the most extraordinary story – and may even have been made more so by her subsequent decline in form, which, I'm willing to bet, has nothing to do with core motivation, but all to do with her inherent instinct for the big occasion. The real test of Raducanu won't be how she does in Transylvania but how she does in Wimbledon later this year. After the dizzying heights of her US Open victory, it may take Wimbledon to get her fully motivated again.

The Raducanu rise means that tennis continues to be a pretty reliable bet for any young person looking to enter sport. Of course, nowadays, with prize money as it is, you can earn a decent living as a player even without lifting many trophies. To take a random example, the current world number 99 Henri Laaksonen – not a player I had heard of until Google turfed him up – has career earnings in prize money alone of $1,849,304. That approaches financial security. To put this into perspective, it surpasses the earnings of one of the true greats of the game Rod Laver, who is estimated to have earned around $1,500,000 in the 1960s.

So the money keeps pouring into this most gladiatorial of sports: and some of it trickles down into other career options. Some of these are advertised on the Lawn Tennis Association website, which has a helpful Live Vacancies tab. A Tennis Relations and Events Manager at the National Tennis Centre can command £45,000 pa plus, although the ads also stipulate that you need to be at the office in Roehampton three days a week. The job is seeking candidates who will "provide and implement strategic event development opportunities across our Events business and support with the delivery of our Athlete Plan."

Other jobs abound on the web. There is an ad for a seasonal gardener at Wimbledon – an idyllic-sounding job if, like me, you feel that Wimbledon fortnight is somehow elevated above all the other fortnights the calendar year has to offer. This is advertised as a "flexible role across the whole Horticultural Department' and in the ad at least sounds like a great opportunity to see how those lawns look so immaculate year in, year out – and join a dedicated team to boot.

Sometimes, there are also marketing initiatives that need staffing. The LTA's current project is called "Tennis Opened Up" and its mission is to make tennis

Emma Raducanu
(Nuță Lucian from Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Relevant, Accessible, Welcoming and Enjoyable."

There is just a hint here that tennis has fallen behind other sports – most notably football – in terms of appealing to those outside the fee-paying school system. But it also means that, more and more, having taken part in Wimbledon fortnight isn't necessary in order to have a fulfilling career in the sport.

Of course, as with every sport today there are a range of careers that touch on tennis: from sports agent to sports journalist and sports PR and sports charity, the major sports now touch every area of life. At Finito we have mentors with sports specialty and welcome all candidates seeking a career in the sector.

And Eaton? That's easy, he now works as a tennis coach. He joined the Wake Forest men's tennis staff as an assistant coach during the 2016-17 season before being elevated to associate head coach prior to the 2018-19 season. When I last saw his father, he still hadn't returned one of his son's serves. f

Christopher Jackson is News Director of Finito World.

Book Reviews

FANTASYLAND

How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History

BY KURT ANDERSEN
462 PP. RANDOM HOUSE.

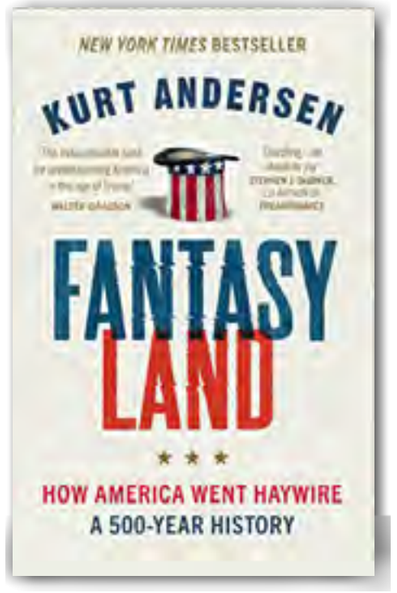
In his thought-provoking book *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire,* New York Times Best-selling author Kurt Andersen connects the dots from America's Puritan past to today's fantasyland of fake news, conspiracy theories and alternative facts that gave rise to the Trump presidency. Reading Andersen's 500-year history crystallises the reasons why the US has become a country with a partially developed frontal lobe, incapable of fully functional reasoning and rationality, prone to the fantastical.

While Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 election shocked America, – Andersen suggests it even took Trump by surprise – his rise in politics is proof of America's ultimate embrace of Fantasyland. Trump's triumph hinged on his ability to play an impresario who leveraged the fantasy-industrial complex to his advantage like no one had ever done before. He played to conspiracy theories, exploited myths of white racial victimhood, and rode a far-right extremist counterculture that had taken over the American right before his rise to power.

Founded on an excitable thirst for independence from their European past, Americans always harboured a tendency towards ultra-individualism. The American Revolution and Constitution coincided with the Age of Enlightenment, igniting a national movement that "guaranteed personal liberty above all, where citizens were officially freer than ever before to invent and promote and believe anything". Americans' right to bear arms gave rise to a deeply engrained gun culture and religious freedoms evolved into an exceptionally literal and fantastical religiosity. But the nation's unraveling didn't just happen overnight. Rather, the route Andersen takes us on traces the common threads of religious zeal, pseudoscience, and conspiracy theories, from the Salem witch trials and occult Freemasonry of the Enlightenment to the Satanic Panic of the 1980s, New Age theology and apocalyptic paranoia.

> "Andersen points to Trump as having the ultimate case of Kids "R" Us Syndrome: "spoiled, impulsive, moody, a seventy-year-old brat."

As Andersen maps the journey through fantasyland, religion – particularly Christianity – plays a pivotal role in feeding the frenzy. The



Puritanical ideology of discipline, austerity and hyperliteracy morphed into The Great Awakening of the 18th century, the formation of Scientology and the Mormon Church, and eventually the contemporary evangelical movement. Charismatic religious leaders like Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, Oral Roberts and Jerry Falwell became charismatic entertainers made famous through the entertainment industry.

The freedom to reinvent oneself within an anything-goes personal belief system gave rise to a collection of "fantasists, some religious and some out to get rich quick, all with a freakish appetite for the amazing," Andersen writes. Impresarios and hucksters such as P.T. Barnum and Buffalo Bill preceded Walt Disney, Hollywood and an industrial entertainment industry that blurred the lines between reality and fantasy.

Oprah Winfrey brought magical thinking to twelve or thirteen million viewers every day, promoting New Age beliefs, alternative medicine (famously, Dr. Oz), anti-vaccine conspiracies, and imaginary energies. Andersen points to the 1980s as a tipping point for the convergence of entertainment and politics. Ronald Reagan's rise from Hollywood actor to President of the United States seemed like a perfectly natural progression. Talk radio and TV news shows morphed into "politicized show business".

The digital era that began in the 1990s arrived just in time to amplify what Andersen calls the Kids 'R' Us Syndrome, where American adults began "playing videogames and fantasy sports, dressing like kids … and even getting surgery to look more like kids". Gaming boomed into a multibillion-dollar industry creating imaginary worlds that felt realistic and offered an immersive experience for adults who wanted to play like children. Andersen points to Trump as having the ultimate case of Kids 'R' Us Syndrome: "spoiled, impulsive, moody, a seventy-year-old brat".

Digital platforms allowed for "even greater immersion in the unreal". Conspiracy theories and rampant falsehoods that were once on the fringe become mainstream. The mostly unregulated internet and social media platforms became vehicles for spreading fake news and fantastical stories to an audience that had little ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

While Andersen admits that "flecks of fantasy are charming condiments in everyday existence," he wonders if "it's only America's destiny, exceptional as ever, to unravel in the Fantasyland fashion". His final call to action for Americans is to fight for facts and objective truth, find new protocols for information media hygiene, and regain national balance and composure. America's ability to accomplish this is yet to be seen.

Melanie Trudeau is an English major turned digital strategist, who splits her time between rural Vermont and Toronto.

The Good Parent Educator by Lee Elliot Major

JOHN CATT EDUCATIONAL, £12

I have been following Lee Elliot Major's inspiring work for some time now. A global leader in his field, he advocates for social mobility and empowering parents. The captivating title perfectly defines a new era of parents post pandemic, which we all became involuntarily. Raising a young child in London immense and constant pressure to get it right education-wise, despite me working in the industry, so as soon as I saw the book, I clicked order.

It was just what I needed. A step by step comprehensive guide, an insightful education roadmap- from birth to workplace. Backed up by solid and thorough research, yet so easy to read, it is cleverly structured, with fascinating facts, key takeaways, and useful bits of advice. You can independently explore each area and dig deeper thanks to helpful additional reading and references provided at the end of every chapter. The author speaks as a

parent and educator, thus making it very relatable.

It also could not have come at a better time- emerging from lockdowns, still slightly traumatised by home schooling, rethinking education entirely. As parents, we desperately try to get our children ahead in this turbulent reality. We are also exhausted, confused, and sometimes even considering relocating to the sunnier climates and leaving this "educational arms race" behind (I know I am). Wherever you end up, the information that Elliot Major presents in this book is applicable to any family.

It compels the reader to "reflect on what you think education is for". It is not "just grades", but the fact remains that certain university degrees result in much higher earnings. Do you then aim for Oxbridge, or look at the bigger picture? "Parents are the single biggest predictor of children's life outcomes", says Elliot Major. No pressure then. It is about balance, finding out what matters most to your child and using available resources and information. Good news- "most things turn out to be ok in the end".

So how do you become a good parent educator? If you do only one thing, "instil a love of reading" in your child. Ok, I think I have nailed that one. If you are struggling, Elliot Major offers practical and realistic tips to succeed. The section on choosing schools struck a (painful) chord. It completely consumes parents and often is a significant expenditure. Read that chapter very carefully before going to any school visits, and you will be well equipped.

> "Unfortunately, parents can't solely rely on schools to deliver results."

Unfortunately, parents can't solely rely on schools to deliver results. The evidence in the book states that "what happens outside, not inside, the school gates" and "stable and supportive home background" are key for academic success. Work needs to be done at home, and not just the homework (which is more important in secondary than primary). Children need help with their mindset, motivation, and efforts, and to "light the creative or sporting spark". Elliot Major believes that "children should devote as much time to arts and sports as to scholarly study" as they are "central to human development". I could not agree more and instantly felt better about myself as a parent educator by the end of chapter seven.

The research on attainment of summer born children was eye opening. It is disappointing that our rigid system needs that much challenging. But there are things that can be done- don't be afraid to become your child's advocates. Elliot Major further explores tutoring, digital exposure, learning styles, assessments, and a few other significant areas that parents must be aware of. The book culminates at life after school- apprenticeships, universities, Oxbridge, and venturing into the job market. Once again, Elliot Major stresses that no matter which path you choose- and there is a case to be made for each of them, "nurturing essential life skills' is crucial when stepping into the real world of work (and avoiding your adult children living with you).

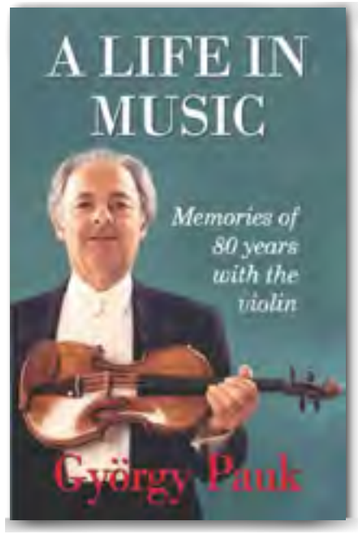
Wherever you are on your child's educational journey, the knowledge and advice in this book are valuable. There is even a little quiz at the end for readers, which took me completely by surprise, but I did well. I will be re-reading this book as my child grows and in moments of parenting doubts, and will continue to empower my inner Good Parent Educator.

Evgenia Lazareva

A Life in Music
György Pauk

THE STRAD SHOP, £15

I was looking forward to reading this book which charts Memories of 80 years with the violin, but publication was delayed due to the pandemic. Everyone knows that the classical music community has really suffered as many of those earning their living in the sector are self- employed and demand for their services collapsed. As for the students preparing to follow in György Pauk's footsteps, they are anxiously wondering what the future holds for them. This book is inspirational.



Born in Budapest shortly before World War II, György Pauk suffered the loss of both his parents in the Holocaust. He spent the remaining years of the war in the care of his grandmother in the spartan confines of Budapest Ghetto. Showing extraordinary musical talent from an early age, he began to learn the violin and was admitted to the Liszt Academy at the age of only 13.

After winning several international violin competitions, Pauk defected from Soviet-controlled Hungary, claiming asylum in Paris and becoming a 'stateless person' at the age of 22. He met and married his young Hungarian wife in Amsterdam. The couple moved to London on the advice of Yehudi Menuhin, gaining British citizenship in 1967.

Over the course of more than 50 years, György Pauk became an internationally-acclaimed concert violinist, appearing worldwide with the greatest orchestras and conductors, and making countless broadcasts and recordings.

Now in his ninth decade, he is a renowned pedagogue based in London, and regarded as the foremost living 'torch-bearer' of the Hungarian Violin School, which traces its origins to the 19th century violinist, Josef Joachim, a close friend and collaborator of Mendelssohn, the Schumanns and Brahms.

In this absorbing account of his professional and personal life, György Pauk tells us about many of the other instrumentalists, conductors, orchestras and composers he has known and worked with.

Alongside his perpetual globe-trotting, Pauk has been a devoted husband (for more than 60 years), father and grandfather, and retains friendships across the world stretching back as far as the 1940's.

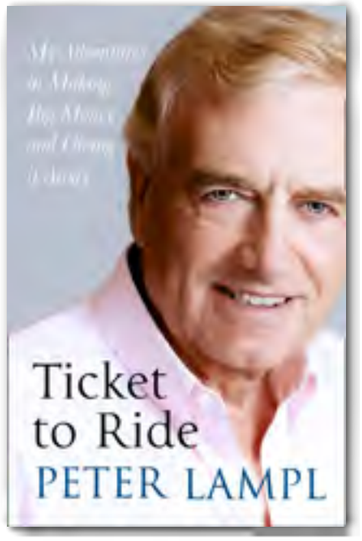
Pauk decided that all proceeds from the sale of his book will be distributed to charities supporting young classical musicians.

Ronel Lehmann

Ticket to Ride
Sir Peter Lampl

HARPER COLLINS, £20

Going on a trip with Ticket to Ride seemed like a good idea. The train journey was slow compared to reading at speed about an exceptional entrepreneur who regales readers with a compelling memoir. Sir Peter takes us on his inspiring journey from a Yorkshire Council estate, via Oxford and the Boston Consulting Group to New York, in the buccaneering



dollar-mad Eighties, where he sets up a leveraged buy-out firm, which nearly goes bust and then finally, in the year it comes good, he ends up living next door to Keith Richards and out-earning Sir Mick Jagger. However, returning to Britain after 20 years Peter finds a vastly changed country, one in which the chances for bright kids from low-income backgrounds have plummeted.

In response, he puts his business aside and devotes himself to founding the now greatly revered Sutton Trust, providing educational opportunities for large numbers of less well-off children, influencing government policy and putting social mobility at the heart of the national conversation. The guard arrived to check tickets, it was tempting to waive the book cover and at the same time beckon other travellers to purchase a copy of this inspirational read. f

Ronel Lehmann

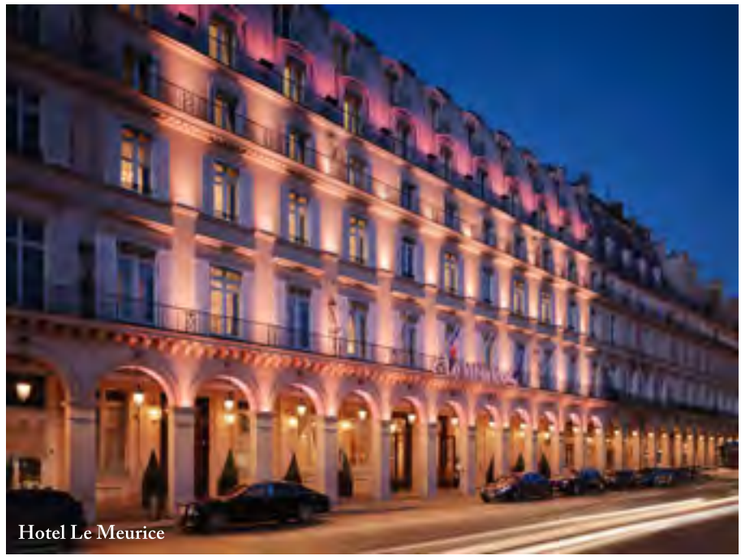
The Solitaries

And then there are those who stand alone
and learned to be solitary early –
they move along the back-lanes taller,
or they'll be off to one side in the briars
finding another way round, the hurly-burly
is too loud for them, the consensus
something which feels wrong to them at the bone.
They scarcely seem to live among us.
We admire them their little transient freedom,
and sometimes rush from our tenements
to stand at their empty door and bang the drum
and summon them out. And they won't come.
Why should they come, or commence
to be how we wish them to be for our sakes?
They learned to be solitary early.
They knew the crowd was impossible.
They understood that our opinion is a flake –
a thing we might call risible –
when set against the truth that vests in solitude –
and which, arrived at in the natural way,
is commensurate with power, and with altitude.

Diego Murillo

That Je Ne Sais Quoi: A review of the Hotel Le Meurice and Hôtel Plaza Athénée

Raymond Havel takes his son to Paris – and finds a city with more than enough resilience to prosper post-Covid


Hotel Le Meurice

Before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, I used to go quite regularly to Paris. I was always happy to go, but a small part of me would always think, as the Eurostar pulled out, "What a shame it's only Paris. Wouldn't I rather go somewhere new?"

But then the thought came to me: "You'll pay for that one day." And so I did. Confined to my home like the rest of us for the best part of two years, there were many times when pacing the familiar floor of our smallish London flat, I'd think: "I really, really want to go to Paris." And so when I got the opportunity to go again, I decided I would make amends.

The Dorchester Collection has long been a favourite and on this occasion I was lucky to go to two hotels: Le Meurice and the Hotel Plaza Athenée. The first is right by the Place de la Concorde, and enjoys a remarkable history. It was here that Salvador Dali would stay when in Paris (the breakfast ceiling is painted by him). Pablo Picasso even celebrated his wedding here. As usual in Picasso's life, his wife would go onto to feel there was less to celebrate than she would have liked, but even so, from Bob Dylan to Andy Warhol, the place has the nack only an impeccably located and luxurious hotel can of attracting the very famous.

> "Pablo Picasso even celebrated his wedding here."

But if you ask yourself what the famous are coming for, it turns out to be quite a democratising thought because Paris, as the world knows, has its hold on all of us at one time or other. For myself, I must admit it's a city that has grown on me over time. When I first began coming here, I found its layout too strict, and missed – without my quite being aware of it – the mess of London if I couldn't have the greater history of Rome or Florence.

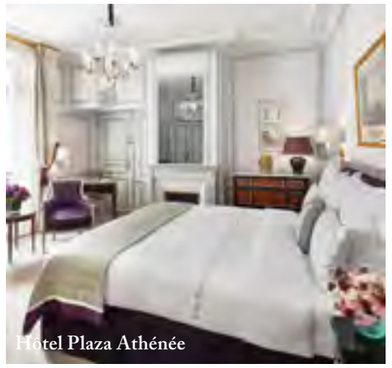
This more relaxed approach to sightseeing has its potential disadvantages. I recall on my last but one visit in 2019, walking under cherry blossoms near the excellent bookshop Shakespeare and Company, and thinking very deliberately to myself: "Well, I won't go into Notre Dame this time, as I know it'll be there next time." A few months later I was watching on television as that beautiful interior was destroyed by fire, and as French billionaires pledged to restore it. "It hurt," says the Le Meurice receptionist simply when I give my belated condolences.

What sets Le Meurice apart from the many other hotels that claim an affiliation with a spate of historical figures is the genuineness of the history on the one hand, and, on the other, the sense that this is a hotel living in the

Hôtel Plaza Athénée

Hôtel Plaza Athénée

Hotel Le Meurice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Hôtel Plaza Athénée

Hôtel Plaza Athénée

present. The designs by Philippe Starck amount to a brilliant reimagining of the place's past. There's a mirror of frost on the right in the lobby as you go in that guests can draw on: it is, says Starck, based on "Dali's playful spirit and love of mineral water". It's great fun. A marvellous picture above reception welcomes you, but you have to tilt your head to see it – and may not notice the warmth of the welcome at all: a Dali-like joke at odds with the essential seriousness of many high-end hotels.

Out in the city itself, Paris felt to me lighter than London – and far happier in itself than Italy would feel a few months later. It had had, like the UK, a miserable summer weather-wise, but even so it felt in its stride somehow: the crowds in the Tuileries seemed to be claiming for all time these last days of summer. It is a great thing to stand in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, looking towards the Louvre in one direction and the Champs Elysees in the other. The benefit of an organised city is that you always feel oriented, while also enjoying the typical urban pleasures of being dwarfed by scale and beauty.

Around this time, my five year old began to complain about the idea of walking anywhere at all under the power of his own legs. This led to happy memories of walking down the Seine, with him perched on my shoulders, pointing in joy at a world that for him was suddenly a thousand times the size of what he'd thought it was. But then he's now a pandemic child, and had been briefly labouring under the illusion that East Dulwich and the universe are somehow synonymous.

To see a city through the eyes of a child is to see it again. Besides, the cities we visit regularly become palimpsests where we are always experiencing the latest layer of our lives while also peeling back the previous ones – we get to know who we used to be by encountering who we are.

The little hut-like shops along the river, previously things to walk past, were now regular pauses along our journey to buy little trinkets, mini Eiffel Towers, and a welter of little gadgets. The funfair on the Place de la Concorde was a place to glory in: my son tried most of the rides. But the best ride of all is the Eiffel Tower itself which I hadn't been up since I was 18 – 10 or so visits to Paris ago. From our second hotel – the magnificent Hotel Plaza Athenée – we had a view of it from our balcony overlooking the Avenue de Montaigne.

The French cubist Robert Delaunay used to paint the Tower from somewhere around here and the point he was trying to make is you never completely see it; glimpses are all you get. That's true if you climb it too – but perhaps the precise detail of human experience is never as important as the fact that human experience is exhilarating. It certainly is to one five-year-old who's not stopped talking about it since. Nor has he stopped talking about the Plaza Athenée. We were given a marvellous suite of rooms, and fell in love with the location of the hotel, its kindly staff, and its magnificent chandeliers in the breakfast rooms, now presided over by 39-year-old Jean Imbert, who recently took over from Alain Ducasse. (Ducasse's exemplary food, and immortal hot chocolate are still a feature of Le Meurice).

Work-wise, Paris' is an economy which reminds us a lot of London; it's home to international companies such as BNP Paribas, Orange and Air France-KLM. Reasonably strong in banking and financial services, there were hints that it might make a play for London's preeminent place post-Brexit, but that's proven overblown. The place is probably stronger in luxury goods: Christian Dior is based here, it's Tracey Emin-ish lights dominating one end of the Avenue de Montaigne, where the Plaza Athenée is located. There's also a vibrant start-up ecosystem: Paris has the second highest start-up investment in Europe, attracting £2.5 billion in 2020, although in this it is dwarfed by London at £7.75 billion.

The art galleries of Paris remain arguably its biggest draw. I would recommend the Musée de L'Orangerie if you wish for an enjoyable experience that isn't too beset by crowds. It's also small enough to be doable without feeling you're missing something. The Monets there are one thing – and quite a thing – but downstairs are masterpieces by Cézanne, Picasso and numerous others. You can do it in an hour and feel you've seen wonders, or spend much longer and not get to the end of it.

That's in marked contrast to the Louvre, which is arguably the most intimidating building in the world. It is infinite. You could spend your life in it – but to add insult to injury if you're there you're not in the Musee d'Orsay, a museum almost as rich.

Paris then is incapable of being defeated, and Notre Dame is a symbol for that. One piece of advice I have is that if you ever go back to Paris, don't wish it away. My other piece of advice is to go back to Paris. Go now. f

London Calling: A review of the Milestone Residences and Chesterfield Hotel

Hotels might be said to fall into a number of categories. There's the magnificent one-off like Domaine des Étangs in France which feels like it shouldn't belong to any chain; Villa La Massa on the outskirts of Florence is another. Then there's the chain where you're constantly aware that you're in a brand which has a multiple lives elsewhere. We can take our pick: the Four Seasons, the Taj, the Belmond, the Aman, the Rocco Forte and a myriad others. There's nothing wrong with those places; they're some of my favourites.

Milestone Residences

But then there are those places which feel like they do and don't belong to other locations: such places have developed very cunningly, with a certain something in their DNA, but also a strong individuality at each location. The Red Carnation Hotels is just such a chain. There is a subtlety about the whole enterprise which suggests the presence of private passion.

The Milestone Residences are just off the Kensington Park end of Hyde Park. If you had a good throwing arm you could probably throw a ball into Kensington Palace Gardens. Inside, it's old school with an equestrian theme. An attractive bar is squirrelled away beyond the lobby; downstairs, there's an excellent spa and gym.

This last turns out to be a feature. It has a small pool with powerful jets which in these Covid times – which hopefully will have lapsed by the time this reaches print – you can book out for an hour or so at a time. It's the perfect way to begin the day; breakfast too is a quiet and civilised affair in a small drawing room, which looks like it wants to be a set for a Jane Austen adaptation.

But really I am continually reminded of Dickens in hotels like this. London was long ago put together higgledy-piggledy and there is always something ingenious about the architecture, the way they fit an idiosyncratic space, like someone finding their way into an incongruous suit – and somehow pulling it off.

I sit down with the likeable general manager Andrew Pike and hear how things have been during the pandemic. He notes that Americans are beginning to return – but it's a particular kind of American. "It's a lot of Texans at the moment, who are happier to travel than people on the East and West Coasts," he tells me.

It's a glimpse of how divided America has become, told through the lips of an English hotelier.

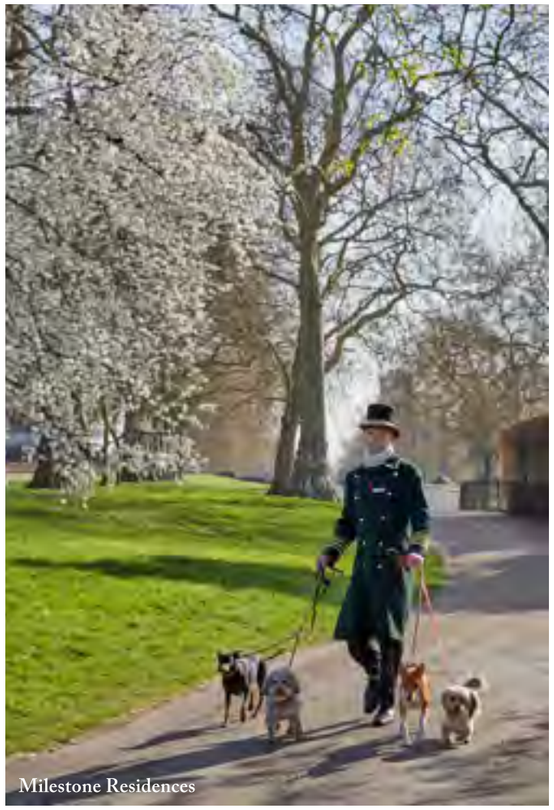
Even though I technically inhabit London, coming from the suburbs there's a new perspective on the capital to be had by staying up here for a few nights. You feel drawn into the action somehow – but in the era of Covid, you simultaneously realise that there's a lot less activity than there ought to be.

The chief attraction of Kensington is its museums: this is especially the case with young children. The Natural History Museum is so popular as to be hardly worth plugging, but the Science Museum is just as good, and doubles up as both an education about all the wonderfully curious people who have made life so much easier today and a good physical workout if your principal

Milestone Residences

Milestone Residences

Milestone Residences


Milestone Residences

Milestone Residences

goal in life is to tire out tiny legs: it's a vast cathedral of a place, but one which worships the successes of the human mind.

For art-lovers, the Victoria and Albert Museum continues to develop; it has been extensively renovated and is another reminder that London and its major attractions have an inner resilience which has all to do with the fact that enough wealthy people want it to continue unharmed for it to do so.

Where it has been hit particularly is in the small businesses and chain outlets. I am sure I see far fewer Pret-a-Mangers and Eats, and all the surviving independent sandwich shops look bereft at the thought that their customers have retreated into the suburbs. If – as looks likely – we reconstitute around a three-day working week Tuesday-to-Thursday then the infrastructure here will have to adapt, and attract families up from the country somehow for long weekends: a shortfall from revenue from work meetings may need to be plugged somehow.

But the hotels here have a fund of talent at their disposal to make that transition possible. The Milestone is brilliantly located and has the some of the best service I've ever encountered anywhere in years of reviewing hotels. Like the Chesterfield, which we visit next, it's owned by the Tollman family, a dynasty of South African extraction. The patriarch of the family, Stanley Tollman, died of cancer in September 2021 at the age of 91.

His autobiography Recollections of a Lucky Man is on sale behind a glass case in the foyer. His is indeed a remarkable story of grit and determination. Tollman came from humble beginnings growing up in a South African fishing village, but used his wedding money to buy a hotel, and soon built a remarkable Empire. In time he would consort – as his memoir says – with politicians and rock stars. More impressively, he did so without forgetting who he was.

By the time of his death he chaired The Travel Corporation, and had over 10,000 employees, across 40 brands, and 70 countries. He did all this while being liked and even revered by the industry. He refused, for instance, to accept apartheid in his homeland, and was insistent on accepting black guests into his hotel. He didn't stop there, but also insisted on a series of landmark employment programmes designed to get black people into the hospitality industry. His courage and kindness are spoken of in a heartfelt way throughout his hotels.

The Chesterfield is a wonderful little hotel, right in the middle of Mayfair, not far from 5 Hertford Street, and just down from the Royal Academy. Green Park is within walking distance – a

Chesterfield Hotel

possible morning run for those who like such things. At the heart of the private client industry, it's also a good place for the genteel sort of meeting such people like to have: especially good is the discreet library, suitable for an afternoon tea or a swift coffee.

In the evenings, its bar area has some excellent jazz. The rooms themselves are spacious and comfortable, purveying that kind of understated luxury which is the only kind which really matters in London. These hotels are all performing a tough balancing act, but I suspect it will all depend in the end on service – the extent to which we really want to be in these hotels. On that score, the Red Carnation hotels score very highly; everybody is solicitous and kind, making sure that the spirit of Tollman lives on where he would have most wanted it to: in the hearts of his guests. f

Chesterfield Hotel

Chesterfield Hotel

Review
The Wolseley

BY LANA WOOLF

During the pandemic, I found myself having a delightful conversation with Jeremy King – the King in Corbin King, the chain which owns The Wolseley, The Delaunay, Colbert and numerous other favourites in the capital. He told me that due to Covid-19, people had become 'entombed in their homes'.

It was the sort of intelligent phrase that makes you know you're talking to an intelligent man. And, in fact, intelligence is the secret ingredient which has often made Corbin King a cut above the rest. It's also an attribute Jeremy will need, now that the company has been placed into administration by its majority shareholder Minor hotels.

Two things are true about the Wolseley. It is a marvellous brand – and a brand which is utterly tied up with Jeremy himself. He patrols the place each day with an easy Jeevesian charm. It was what he was born to do. On arrival, I find that there are plenty of people who agree with me, many well-known. If you want to celebrity spot, I'd regard the Wolseley as a better bet than the Ivy. My eye lands on the former secretary Amber Rudd, and then at a different table ITV's Robert Peston talking to someone who looks as though he might be Toby Young. As I deposit my bag, I look up to see the Earl Spencer gliding past me to his seat.

This used to be a place where you wouldn't deposit your bag; you'd make a deposit. My companion, well into his eighties now, recalls how it before it was a car show room, it used to be a branch of Barclay's. This dispels some of the mystery surrounding the architecture of the place which has often reminded me of a chapel; in fact it was a kind of cathedral to our contemporary god, money.

I suspect the place is happier as a temple to food. We move to a side table, passing half of Who's Who as we go, and look at the menus. As we're doing so, Jeremy comes over looking immaculate and cheerful and tells us the good news that business is back. It's only later I realise he must also have been dealing with considerable shareholder stress behind the scenes.

We select the oysters and I recall the portrait by Lucian Freud of Jeremy himself. Freud apparently always took the same table – not so far from the one where Rudd is sitting today. On the day of his death, Jeremy draped it in black crepe.

We order oysters, and soon twelve Colchester natives come to us on an icy platter. They slip down perfectly with lemon and tabasco sauce. I could live a long time and never get over the glory of a Wolseley plate of oysters; my companion, in his ninth decade, confirms that it is indeed a reason to keep going.

The Wolseley continues to produce food of high quality without slipping into pretentiousness. For the mains, my companion plumps with a kind of cunning for the Kedigree with Poached Eggs. When it arrives, he pronounces it delicious in a voice which intends to live forever if only to have more experiences like this. I, meanwhile, opt for Roast Corn-Fed Half Chicken morels and Madeira sauce.

This was a triumph. At the time, it was wonderful to think how, after all the Wolseley team had been through, it had decisively come out the other side. Now that lunch feels disturbingly like an elegy to a time and place which like everything else, must pass into history one day.

Entombed in our homes no longer, we walked out, nodding cheerily at the Earl Spencer on our way. Caught up in his own happiness, he waved back. It only occurred to me later that the decision-makers at the Minor hotel chain would do well to realise that but for Jeremy King none of those congregated there on that day would have been there at all. It's worth adding that his staff feel the same. f

Jeremy King *(Alamy)*

Anton's farewell

BY RONEL LEHMANN

It has happened to me so many times, that awful greeting by a bouncer when approaching a restaurant, attempting to dine with a host or fulfil my own table reservation. Their brutal visage, fierce outdoor clothing and earpiece always gives it away and can be very off putting. This is not the concierge welcome that you receive when approaching the stable of Corbin & King fine dining establishments. It is more bowler hats, Savile Row suits and overcoats with a Good Evening Sir and Welcome Madame.

Which brings me to the farewell dinner for the giant of cuisine, Anton Mosimann OBE DL, a Swiss chef who achieved notoriety at the Dorchester Hotel for obtaining two Michelin stars, the first time such an accolade had been given to a hotel restaurant, outside of France.

There were no bouncers outside his club, founded in October 1988, just the great man himself, trademark moustache and bow tie. It was a traditional Swiss welcome right in the heart of Belgravia. I was guest of Liz Brewer, the world-renowned eventsorganiser and expert on social behaviour and etiquette, which in my world of employability resonates with the younger generation. In her company, I always find myself sitting up straight, holding my cutlery correctly and making sure that I speak to the person on my left until the main course.

That really wasn't difficult because who else regaled me with his international tales but our very own travel editor and supersonic food taster, Fred Finn, Guinness Book of Record, Most Travelled man. He was responsible for me being able to introduce Anton to cater for a Japanese Airlines event attended by Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales in her capacity as Patron of the Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children in 1992. At the time, his Japanese themed canapés caused quite a stir and have never been forgotten.

After a glass or two of Mosimann's Grand Cru Brut Verzenay NV to the sounds of a quartet band, we were seated and the banquet began. Well not quite. Just as our palates were salivating at the prospect of the six-course menu, Anton addressed us and took us on a trip down memory lane, including his many accomplishments, messages from some of those 3,000 friends unable to be invited and a funny story about how chefs in the past used to deal with requests for vegetarian food.

I don't wish to spoil the starter, Trio of Seafood, Hand-Dived Scottish Scallop Carpaccio, Prawn Cocktail Belfry and Marinated Salmon and Dorset Crab. Warm bread was served, not those rolls which sometimes are heated up and taste like gloop. A white wine from Mâconnais, Bourgogne, Saint-Véran 'Au Clos du Chateau Domain des Poncetys France 2018 had me enthralled by the pairing.

It never ceases to irritate me today that whenever you accept an invitation to attend a function, your inbox is suddenly full of requests to learn whether you have a food allergy or special requirements. I always reply that I eat what I am given!

The plates were cleared in readiness for one of Anton's signature dishes, Risotto ai Funghi. Now having told you that I am a model guest, I don't really go out of my way to eat mushrooms. It only goes to show you that this dish was in a class of its own. I could have devoured this as a main course.

The main course arrived, Seared Fillet of British Beef, Black Bean and Coriander Dressing, Sautéed New Potatoes and Market Vegetables served with a red wine from Libournais, Château Faugères 2009, St Emilion. My knife glided softly through the meat. We discussed at the table whether our own fillets cooked at home came anywhere close to tasting like this. It was exquisite and nothing was left on my plate by the time service arrived to clear.

Vacherin Mont D'Or and bread followed. This cheese originates from the Mont d'Or in France. As the summer comes to an end and the air gets cooler, the cows come down the mountain and their milk becomes fattier and reduces in quantity. The taste is hedonistic, powerful and rich.

By the time the Assiette of Desserts arrived, I found myself marvelling at the variety of tastes we had just experienced and a glass of Peter Lehmann (no relation) Botrytis Semillon Barossa Valley Australia, 2016, which was both lush and honeyed.

The petit fours containing crafted macarons, chocolates and raspberry jellies served with black coffee were the perfect finale. I always like an encore. I thought that the presentations made to all the staff showed the loyalty, trust and heritage at its best.

When dining at Mosimann's in future, I will always look up to a legend with great affection. The likeness of the sculpture by Professor Nadey Hakim, the world renowned British-Lebanese transplant surgeon, is so real, it will always be as if he is still there cooking whilst wearing his famous-coloured bow tie.

Before I left, I did wish both Philipp and Mark Mosimann every continued success in ensuring that Anton's legacy will live on. My next degustation awaits. f

Anton Mosimann

Costeau

HOW TO BE A SOMMELIER

Years ago Costeau was fortunate to meet the legendary sommelier Georgios Kassianos, the so-called Godfather of Cyprus Wine. He took me through all the things you must do when gauging a vintage: how to swill the glass, how to check for sugar and salt content, and then how to taste it properly.

Then came the coup. "Now, once you've done all that," he said, "nobody can tell you whether you're right or wrong." I found that liberating, feeling that it effectively meant that my ignorance in the matter of wine didn't matter at all.

And yet, Kassianos' assessment, if it's true, hasn't stopped the profession of the sommelier from growing up over the years. It's both an interesting, and reasonably lucrative profession with the median salary in the US being $62,000.

Gabriel Veissaire is the head sommelier at the Le Meurice in Paris and couldn't be more enthusiastic about the route he's taken. So how did it begin? "I interned to a supervisor who was awarded the title of "Meilleur ouvrier de France"," he tells me, "I had the chance to travel all over the French vineyards with him. It's a profession that is above all one of humility and curiosity."

So what attracts him to it? "It's a passion above all, which brings together a certain history of the vineyard, the mystical character of the vine which is the oldest plant in the world, the complexity of the soil and the geology where the vine grows, the oenological techniques and the principle of alcoholic fermentation and the microbial world and above all the pleasures that can be derived from the wine and food match."

That sounds like more than enough to keep you going for a very interesting career.

I decide to talk to other sommeliers, and ask James Shaw, the sommelier at the Conrad St James in London, how a typical day goes: "It often starts by checking in with social media and seeing what everyone has been drinking the night before – always good to keep a finger on the pulse. Once I'm in the building, I will prepare our 'wine of the day' for our team briefing – it's something we do each day to share the stories and styles of each of the wines on our list." Then people arrive. "Once we are in service, it is full theatre time where we look to share the great stories behind the bottles, pour tasters for our guests to try and explain the thought behind our pairing recommendations."

It can sometimes be a hard road being a sommelier. Shaw recalls: "I left a background of Chemistry and Physics to work with food and wine. My parents thought I was nuts, but now that they have seen how far I have gone in my career they're glad they supported my change in direction. I don't think I was really aware what it entails, but I wouldn't change a thing."

So what's Shaw's advice to young people thinking of entering the profession? He is clear: "Taste, taste, taste and taste some more. Taste with others, discuss and don't be afraid to follow your instincts over what feels right to you."

Nadia Khan, the head sommelier of the Adam Handling Restaurant Group, notes the importance of setting aside time to think ahead: "Between the two services (lunch and dinner) I will dedicate some time meeting with suppliers and producers, tasting and talking about new wines and projects. This keeps me constantly informed and engaged with the wines from around the world, always training my palate and developing my knowledge."

So what talent is required to make it as a sommelier? Khan recalls: "I think I have always had a discerning taste and smell. And, with time, experience and constant training, I have developed an analytical consideration, which now enables me to judge a wine after just two or three sips. I would say it's a natural flair that I've applied to experience and knowledge."

So what would Khan recommend to young people thinking of becoming a sommelier. "I can advise that it will take time and a lot of hard work but nothing is more rewarding than making your passion what you do every day," he explains. "Being a sommelier means that you can constantly learn and develop your expertise, whilst still having that incredible interaction with guests that often makes it all worthwhile." Costeau will drink to that. f

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CLASS DISMISSED

Andrew Lloyd Webber

EMILY PRESCOTT CATCHES UP WITH THE IMPRESARIO AT THE REOPENING OF THE LONDON PALLADIUM AFTER A MAJOR RENOVATION, AND FINDS HIM IN BULLISH MOOD

What's the best night you've had in this theatre?

I've never had a show on at the Palladium. It would be nice at one point – it's one of the few where I haven't.

Any shows that you particularly remember when you were growing up?

When I was a child I saw John Gielgud in The Tempest and I remember it started with a lantern swinging. It was very clever – the magic of that. That was followed by My Fair Lady. It was a memorable production because John Gielgud on the last night broke Prospero's staff and said: "This theatre will be lost forever to musicals!"

And did that prove the case?

Well, I'm going to prove him wrong. There's a lot of emphasis on Shakespeare here. He's in pole position as you come in and you have those really exciting pictures that Maria Crane has done. I just thought: "Wouldn't it be great to have something modern, something contemporary?"

It's also an interesting space. What sort of potential does it have?

This theatre is very flexible. You don't have to just play in the conventional shape but in the round, which is very exciting. Architecture is my greatest love, and this is the finest space I now. I just want this to be open and for people to be enjoying it and see this. By the way, despite the fact that this is the biggest restoration of an historic building, there's no support from anybody in government.

I've heard that you have a photographic memory for music? Is that true.

Not really no. Though there are certain things in theatre one does remember!

How do you feel about all the stop-starts to theatre this past year?

I'm feeling pretty devastated – we've had to cancel four weeks of sold out houses for Cinderella. For a Conservative government to ignore this sort of thing and also not to realise the economic importance of theatre is beyond belief. I just don't think anybody in the Treasury could have really gone through what the figures are.

Can you talk us through those?

Well, the most successful movie of all time is Avatar – that's in pure money terms. It grossed $2.8 billion. But The Lion King – which is the most successful musical of all time – grossed $9.1 billion – and that's not including the film. The Phantom of the Opera is $8 billion. The combined gross of Cameron Mackintosh's productions is 10 times the gross of Avatar – yet films get insurance and theatre is sometimes considered this bolt-on nice-to-have inessential thing. I might add that The Lion King in the theatre has outgrossed the entire Harry Potter franchise.

So you're not thrilled with the government?

They're either economically illiterate or Philistines – probably both. I retired three years ago from the House of Lords, but if I were still there I would resign the Conservative whip. F

He's a fan.

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