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N News

Ebury Bridge Community Celebrates Future with Time Capsule Event



Residents of Ebury Bridge and Westminster City Council came together on the 5th November, 2024 for the "Bridge to the Future" time capsule event, marking a significant moment in the regeneration of the historic Ebury Bridge estate. The event celebrated both the rich history of the area and the exciting future ahead as part of a major redevelopment project.

Community members filled the time capsule with a variety of personal items, including creative writing, letters, photographs, and reflections on life at Ebury. The capsule will serve as a bridge between past and present, offering a snapshot of local life in 2024 for future generations to discover in 50 years' time.

Encouraging local participation, residents, schoolchildren from St Barnabas Primary School, and businesses from Ebury

Edge contributed items to the capsule. Highlights included stories and poems written by local children, photographs of past community events, and even an old brick from the surrounding buildings.

The event was funded by the 'Community Chest', part of the social value initiatives from the project's main contractor, Bouygues UK. The time capsule was buried outside Block 8, in the Phase 1 landscaping of the regeneration site.

"This ceremony marks the beginning of a new chapter for Ebury Bridge," Cllr Matt Noble, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, said. "In 50 years, we hope the community spirit here will have grown even stronger."

The £1bn redevelopment will deliver 781 high-quality, sustainable homes, transforming the Ebury Bridge estate into a vibrant, mixed-tenure community for generations to come.

Westminster City Council has officially opened the borough's first fully accessible playground in Westbourne Ward, marking a major step in creating inclusive spaces for children of all abilities. The new playground, located on Alfred Road (W2), was unveiled on the 5th November 2024 in a celebration attended by local families, schools, and community members.

The £162,000 renovation aims to revitalise the area, promoting wellbeing and encouraging outdoor play for all children, regardless of physical ability. The playground was designed in collaboration with local schools, parents, and children to ensure it meets the needs of the community. Award-winning playground experts Playscheme led the design, blending traditional play elements

with innovative features.

Notable additions include an accessible Whirl Spinner, which sits at ground level to allow easy boarding for children in wheelchairs, and an inclusive swing seat designed for comfort and safety. A unique feature of the playground is its wheelchair-friendly climbing frame, where children can engage in imaginative play alongside their peers.

Gracie, a young participant in the design process, was instrumental in ensuring that wheelchair users were considered. "It was important to be part of the design because most playgrounds don't have anything that kids who are in wheelchairs can play with," she explained.

This new playground promises to be a space where all children, no matter their ability, can enjoy play, learn, and grow together.

Fully accessible playground in Westbourne Ward opens



Autumn leaf sweep can power 5 million kettles

Westminster City Council, in partnership with Veolia, has launched its extended autumn leaf sweep, with plans to collect around 1,000 tonnes of leaves from the city's 19,000 trees. This year, the initiative will not only keep streets safe but will also contribute to the generation of electricity, creating enough power to boil more than 5 million kettles.

The peak leaf fall period, from October to November, results in approximately 200,000 bags of leaves, which are about the weight of six London Underground trains or 80 double-decker buses. While leaves in the city cannot be composted due to pollution, including heavy metals from traffic, they are being repurposed to generate energy for heating homes.

By harnessing the energy from 1,000

tonnes of leaves, the council and Veolia aim to produce 530,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity, equivalent to five million hours of television or 5.3 million kettles of boiling water.

To support the initiative, the council has added 11 agency staff and two extra vehicles to its street cleansing team. The use of electric gully trucks will also help prevent leaves from blocking drains and reducing the flood risk.

"While autumn leaves are beautiful, they can create hazards," Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg, Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality, said. "Our teams are working hard to keep streets safe and clear for residents and visitors."

Veolia's Lee Mewett added, "This initiative reflects our commitment to sustainability, with the new electric trucks increasing efficiency while reducing noise pollution."



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- Cultivating the written and investigative talents of young journalist and interns.

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N News

Ambulance Service named Apprenticeship Employer of the Year

The London Ambulance Service (LAS) has been awarded Apprenticeship Employer of the Year for the third year in a row at the prestigious Adult Learning Awards. The title was presented by Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth, during a ceremony at City Hall.

LAS has been recognised for its innovative apprenticeship programme, which trains paramedics to serve the capital. Since launching the scheme six years ago, over 2,000 apprentices have trained with the Service, with many choosing to stay on after completing their training.

Darren Avery, Strategic Workforce Development Manager at LAS, expressed pride in offering apprentices the opportunity to gain valuable skills, a degree, and a career, all without the burden of debt. The most common entry role is Assistant Ambulance Practitioner (AAP), which requires no prior medical experience.

Apprentices quickly gain hands-on experience in patient care alongside qualified paramedics, with opportunities to progress to Emergency Medical Technician and, eventually, paramedic.

Apprenticeships at LAS provide a clear pathway from entry-level roles to fully qualified paramedics, with the training taking as little as four years. Apprentices like Jeilani Bakar, Erin Wilkinson, and Javina Storrod highlighted the practical, on-the-job learning, with experiences ranging from attending cardiac arrests to delivering babies.

Earlier this year, LAS ranked fifth in the Government's Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers for 2024, the highest-ranked NHS organisation.

Damian McGuinness, Chief People Officer at LAS, said investing in apprenticeships helps build a resilient workforce that reflects London's diverse population and delivers excellent patient care.



Photo: London Fire Brigade

Fire Brigade Completes Major Refurbishment of Lambeth River Fire Station

London Fire Brigade (LFB) has completed a six-month refurbishment of Lambeth River Fire Station, located on the banks of the River Thames at Albert Embankment. The station, which serves as the only river-based fire station in London, has undergone significant maintenance, including a full hull refurbishment that extends its lifespan by 25 years.

Firefighters have now returned to their historic base after temporarily operating from HMS President, the Royal Navy's permanent base on the Thames, during the renovation. Lambeth River Fire Station has been a key part of the Brigade's operations since 1936, responding to over 170 incidents annually, from both land and water.

The station's refurbishment follows a £3.2 million investment in two new fireboats, Tanner and Errington, which

entered service in 2022. These vessels are capable of reaching speeds of 40 knots and are equipped with advanced firefighting and rescue technology, including hydraulic cranes and thermal imaging cameras.

Laura Birnbaum, Assistant Director of Property and Technical Support Services, praised the restoration, noting that it ensures the station's long-term viability while improving facilities for the crews.

Patrick Goulbourne, Assistant Commissioner for Operational Resilience and Control, highlighted the critical role of the station, which covers the river from Teddington to Dartford Crossing. The refurbishment was carried out by Babcock and SMS Group, with support from the Royal Navy during the station's closure.

The station's return marks a significant milestone in maintaining the Brigade's essential river response capabilities.



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N News

Scotland scraps ban on wood-burning stoves in new homes

The government of Scotland has confirmed that it is scrapping restrictions on the installation of wood-burning stoves in newbuild homes or conversions. SNP ministers introduced the regulations in April while in a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Greens. The regulation would ban new homes and buildings from using direct-emissions heating systems which would include gas and oil boilers.

The rules were temporarily halted in September when concerns were raised that a ban on wood and peat burners would negatively impact those in rural areas. The government has since amended the New Build Heat Standard (NBHS) regulation,

allowing "the installation of bioenergy and peat main heating systems - and any type of secondary heating systems."

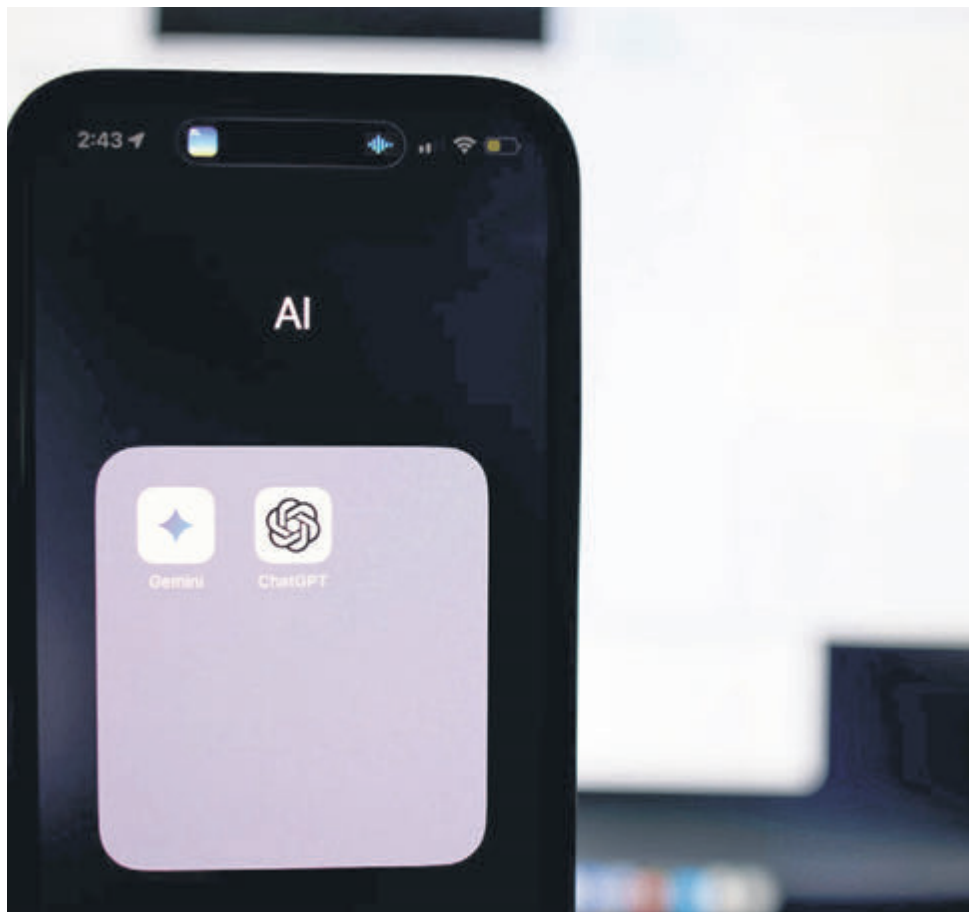
The ban on gas and oil boilers as the main heating system will remain, however.

The proposal was designed to encourage builders to fit clean heating systems such as heat pumps or heat networks. At the time, ministers said that they had hoped it would help to tackle climate change and reduce air pollution.

Climate Action Minister Alasdair Allan said that the government had dropped its original plans following concerns from rural and island communities. The communities were worried about "resilience in times of bad weather or power outages."



AI risk legislation coming in 2025



The UK government will introduce legislation next year to address the risks posed by artificial intelligence (AI), the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Peter Kyle, confirmed. Speaking at the Financial Times' Future of AI summit, Kyle outlined plans to implement a legal framework for AI and strengthen the infrastructure needed to support growth in the sector.

Kyle acknowledged that while current voluntary AI testing agreements are effective, a legally binding approach is necessary for leading developers. The forthcoming AI bill, expected to be presented in the current parliamentary session, will formalise these agreements and grant the AI Safety Institute greater independence by transforming it into an arms-length government body.

The new legislation will focus on high-risk

"frontier" AI models, such as those that generate text, images, and videos. It will also support the UK's efforts to develop its own sovereign AI models, with Kyle committing to increased investment in computing power. This follows the controversial cancellation of an £800 million exascale super-computer project at Edinburgh University, which was approved under the previous Conservative government.

Kyle defended the decision, explaining that it was a result of the financial situation inherited from his predecessors, saying, "I didn't cut anything because you can't cut something that doesn't exist."

In addition to the AI bill, the government unveiled a new AI assurance platform to help businesses manage risks and implement responsible AI practices, particularly targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

A popular car rally has been called off next year to protect volunteer race marshals from midges. Northumberland's Kielder Forest Rally saw several officials needing medical treatment after the insects had bitten them in June, in what was called "worse than ever."

The Cumberland Sporting Car Club, which organises the event had hoped to move it but a date could not be agreed on. As a result, it was decided to "rest" and return in 2026.

Steve Waggett, the rally's clerk of the course, was "as disappointed as anyone" but is confident that racing could return.

The news comes after the nearby Galloway Hills rally in the south of Scotland was called off due to a rise in forestry costs.

More than 1,000 people are needed to take part or spectate the Kielder Forest race.

"We have 150 marshals who stand in the forest all day with a hi-vis vest on," Mr Waggett said. "That attracts the midges so they end up being covered in them, and we have to look after our volunteers. There's a heavy calendar of events across the country throughout the year and we need to attract as many entries as we can, so we need a decent gap with other events, particularly local ones."

Car rally scrapped to protect race marshals from midges



London Home Football Traffic Watch

Compiled & edited by Fahad Redha

Women's

Dec 8, Arsenal v Aston Villa, 14:00
Dec 8, Chelsea v Brighton, 14:00
Dec 8, Tottenham v Everton, 13:00

Dec 11, Chelsea v FC Twente, 20:00
Dec 12, Fulham v Ebbsfleet United, 14:30
Dec 18, Arsenal v Bayern Munich, 20:00
Dec 26, Chelsea v Arsenal, TBC

Men's

Dec 8, Fulham v Arsenal, 14:00
Dec 8, Tottenham v Chelsea, 16:30
Dec 14, Arsenal v Everton, 15:00
Dec 15, Chelsea v Brentford, 19:00
Dec 18, Arsenal v Crystal Palace, 19:30
Dec 19, Chelsea v Shamrock Rovers, 20:00

Dec 19, Tottenham v Man United, 20:00
Dec 22, Fulham v Southampton 14:00
Dec 22, Tottenham v Liverpool, 16:30
Dec 26, Chelsea v Fulham, 15:00
Dec 27, Arsenal v Ipswich Town, 20:15
Dec 29, Fulham v Bournemouth, 15:00
Dec 29, Tottenham v Wolves, 15:00

Project 2025:

The GOP's Controversial Plan for America



Project 2025 is a 900-page document outlining a bold, conservative agenda for a second Donald Trump administration. Developed by the Heritage Foundation, a powerful right-wing think tank in Washington, the report is often described as a "wish list" of policy proposals aimed at expanding presidential power, overhauling government institutions, and pushing an ultra-conservative social vision.

While Trump has distanced himself from some of its more controversial elements, many of the document's proposals reflect the views of key figures within his orbit, suggesting it could heavily influence his policies should he return to the White House.

The Heritage Foundation, long a fixture in shaping Republican policy, first produced such a policy blueprint in 1981 ahead of Ronald Reagan's presidency. Since then, it has continued to play a significant role in crafting proposals for future Republican administrations. The 2025 project, unveiled in April 2023, has garnered attention, particularly among Democrats, for its far-reaching ideas.

While the document is the work of Heritage Foundation scholars, it also draws heavily on the expertise of former Trump administration officials. Contributors include Paul Dans, a former chief of staff at the Office of Personnel Management, and Russell Vought, Trump's former budget director, who authored a key chapter in the report. Over 100 conservative organisations also contributed, including groups expected to significantly influence a future Trump administration. Kevin Roberts, Heritage's president, oversaw the

project and has strong ties to figures like JD Vance, Trump's potential vice-presidential pick, further connecting the document to Trump's political circle.

Key Proposals of Project 2025

The document lays out a vision for a second Trump term based on four main policy aims: restoring the family as the central unit of American life, dismantling the administrative state, defending the nation's borders, and securing individual freedoms grounded in religious values.

Expanding Presidential Power

One of the most contentious proposals is placing the entire federal bureaucracy under direct presidential control. This stance, known as "unitary executive theory," would allow the president to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and enforce policies more swiftly. Under this model, thousands of government employees could lose job protections, paving the way for more political appointees. The document also calls for a radical overhaul of the FBI, branding it a "bloated, arrogant, and increasingly lawless" agency, and advocates the complete dissolution of the Department of Education.

Social Policy and Family Values

Abortion is another area where Project 2025 takes an aggressive stance. While it does not call for an outright ban, the report advocates removing the abortion pill mifepristone from the market, stricter abortion-related data regulation, and adopting a "biblically based, social science-reinforced definition of marriage and family." These proposals starkly contrast with the Republican Party platform, which

opposes 'late-term' abortions but does not advocate a nationwide ban on the abortion pill.

The project also emphasises restoring traditional family values, placing them at the core of American society. This aligns with Trump's rhetoric on "family values" but marks a more radical shift in social policy than currently reflected in mainstream Republican thought.

Immigration Overhaul

Immigration policy features prominently in Project 2025. The document calls for a significant increase in funding for the US-Mexico border wall, echoing Trump's 2016 campaign promise. It also proposes dismantling the Department of Homeland Security, merging immigration enforcement into other agencies, and creating a larger, more powerful border control operation. The plan goes further than Trump's current 2024 platform, suggesting cuts to visa categories and a pay-for-visa scheme for migrants who can afford a premium.

Economic and Climate Policy

The economic proposals in Project 2025 include reducing federal spending on renewable energy, rolling back oil and gas regulations, and abolishing the Federal Reserve. It also advocates slashing corporate and income taxes and hints at returning to a gold-backed currency. The climate policy focuses on terminating federal research into renewable energy and increasing traditional energy production.

Education and Technology

In education, Project 2025 pushes for abolishing the Department of Education, intro-

ducing school choice, and giving parents greater control over educational content. It calls for a ban on "woke propaganda" in schools and government departments, including ending diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes. The document even suggests removing terms like "sexual orientation," "gender equality," and "reproductive rights" from federal laws and regulations.

On technology, the project proposes banning pornography and threatening to shut down tech companies that allow access to explicit material. While Trump has echoed some cultural concerns around "woke" ideology, a full-scale ban on pornography represents a far more extreme position.

Political Impact and Backlash

Despite Trump's attempts to distance himself from the more extreme proposals in Project 2025, many of its ideas could shape a second Trump administration. The document's ambitious agenda has already spurred fierce backlash, particularly from Democrats, who view it as a threat to democratic norms. However, its influence within conservative circles remains strong, and several of its proposals are likely to feature prominently in any future Trump administration.

While the future of Project 2025 is uncertain, its ideas provide a glimpse into one possible path under Donald Trump—a future characterised by sweeping conservative reforms, a strong executive branch, and a dramatic reshaping of American social and political life.

BUSINESS & FINANCE

ENERGY BILLS EXPECTED TO RISE IN JANUARY

Domestic energy prices are expected to climb again in the new year, consultancy Cornwall Insight has said. A household using a typical amount of gas and electricity will pay £1,736 annually from January according to the forecaster that is, according to the BBC, "widely regarded for its accurate predictions." That works out to a rise of £19 or 1% compared with the current typical annual bill of £1,717.

Some charities have expressed their concern about how less well-off households and pensioners will cope over the colder months. The energy cap announced by Ofgem limits the maximum price that can be charged per unit of gas and electricity and not the total bill.

That means that those living in larger properties will tend to pay more overall due to a higher energy usage compared with those living in smaller properties. Energy watchdog Ofgem's price cap affects 29 million households in Great Britain. Northern Ireland has different rules.

While bills will remain "largely unchained" from October, the news that prices will not drop is "disappointing" for many, says Dr Craig Lowrey, principal consultant at Cornwall Insight.

"What we've been looking at were prices well above the historic norms," he told the BBC's Today programme. There "doesn't seem to be any sign of a return to pre-energy crisis levels" he said, referring to a spike in

costs when the conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out.

The consultancy also expects prices to remain high due to geopolitical tensions as well as bad weather, and maintenance on Norway's gas infrastructure. The market, it said, is still "very sensitive," and higher prices will likely become "the new normal."

Peter Smith, the director of policy at the National Energy Action charity said that people are already "rationing their energy use" or getting into debt just to try and stay warm. "With increased wholesale prices in the last few months, there won't be any let up in the unaffordable cost of energy," he said.

Looking further forward, Cornwall Insights predicts a slight drop in energy prices in April 2025 followed by another in October. It may still be necessary for the government to consider "ways to protect the vulnerable" from high bills such as a social tariff.

The Labour government has been criticised for its decision to withdraw winter fuel payments for millions of pensioners. At the first Budget announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, it was confirmed that future payments would only be made to those getting pension credit or other means-tested help.

The government said that this was needed to address a financial "black hole" inherited from the Conservative government.



EV MANDATE "WILL NOT BE WEAKENED," SAYS TRANSPORT SECRETARY

Regulations on the number of electric vehicles (EVs) that a car maker has to sell will not be weakened, the transport secretary has said, despite pressure from the car industry. The mandate will be toughened from 2025 ahead of a planned complete ban on the sale of brand-new petrol and diesel cars in 2035. But car makers have suggested that the proposals may threaten jobs.

Senior government ministers and car manufacturers with factories in the UK held talks about the EV mandate and the slump in demand for new cars.

Transport secretary Louise Haigh said that she will look at "flexibilities" but also insisted that "the mandate will not be weakened."

"There has been a downturn in demand on a global level so we are absolutely in listening mode - we want to discuss how the current situation is affecting them, but we are not diluting our ambition," she told LBC Radio.

The mandate will require EVs to make up 22% of a car firm's sales and 10% of their van sales this year. For every car sold that pushes it out of the mandate, the firm will have to pay a fine of £15,000.

Every year leading up to the complete ban on new petrol and diesel car sales in 2035 will see the rules toughened. Labour also said in its manifesto that it plans to bring this forward to 2030 as part of its commitment to climate change policy.

The trade association, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), has said that it is likely that the industry will miss this year's target. Around 18% of UK car sales are currently EVs, it said. The SMMT and car makers both said they support the long-term aims of the government but are hoping for some concessions. One suggestion is that penalties should be reduced.

The SMMT has also called for government grants for EV buyers along with tax changes. Changes, it said, will be needed to deal with the drop in demand as data shows that car registrations are around a fifth lower than their pre-pandemic levels.

Nissan said that it is "committed to playing a full role in the transition to net zero in the UK" while Stellantis, which owns Citroën, Peugeot, Vauxhall, along with several others, said "to remain efficient in the UK, we are strategically reviewing our operations working with our union partners as previously announced."

In April, Stellantis chief executive Carlos Tavares called the rules "terrible," saying that it could cause the firm to reduce its presence in the UK. The Unite Union has urged it to commit to its future at the Luton and Ellesmere Port factories to address the "fear and rumour" that the statement has caused.

Unite has also said that it is "already having constructive discussions with government and industry to reform the EV mandate to protect jobs."



THE BOTTOM LINE *by Doug Shanks*

HOW THE LATEST UK BUDGET WILL AFFECT YOU, YOUR MONEY, & YOUR BUSINESS

The recent Budget presented by Chancellor Rachel Reeves has introduced a wave of changes with implications for individuals, households, and businesses across the UK. From tax adjustments and wage increases to new business burdens and pension reforms, these measures will affect both the income and expenses of people and companies alike. For UK small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), it's vital to understand how these changes will impact cash flow, payroll, and the tax burden, enabling you to prepare for the months ahead. Let's explore the key takeaways from this Budget and what they mean for your financial planning, workforce, and future growth.

HIGHER MINIMUM WAGES: WHAT IT MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

Effective April 2024, the UK's National Living Wage will increase for those aged 21 and over, moving from £11.44 to £12.21 per hour. The minimum wage for younger workers will also see notable rises. This is positive news for employees, especially as inflation has cut into purchasing power over recent years. But for business owners, the wage hike translates to higher operating costs. Many employers will need to assess how these changes affect their workforce budget and hiring decisions.

For those who rely on minimum wage staff, such as the hospitality sector for example, consider how this additional payroll burden might impact pricing and profitability. Employers who operate in competitive markets may need to weigh options for reducing other expenses or slightly increasing prices to offset the higher wages. It's also worth examining whether hiring flexibility can be maintained if wage costs rise significantly, as this might impact the growth plans for some businesses.

INCREASED NATIONAL INSURANCE COSTS FOR EMPLOYERS

Businesses will also face an increase in National Insurance (NI) contributions, with more employees falling under the eligibility threshold for NI. While employee NI rates

remain the same, this change will increase the tax burden for businesses employing a larger workforce. Consequently, some firms may find their operating margins shrinking.

One option to manage this would be a more strategic approach to hiring and workforce management, potentially increasing part-time or freelance roles that reduce NI liabilities. Another approach could be investing in productivity-boosting tools or technology to optimise output per employee.

TRANSPORTATION COSTS: THE RISE OF THE BUS FARE CAP

From 2025, the national cap on single bus fares will increase from £2 to £3 on most routes in England. This could have implications for businesses that subsidise employee travel, especially if employees rely on public transport for their daily commute. Businesses may want to consider flexible working options if this impacts employee morale or productivity, particularly for lower-paid staff who will see a larger percentage of their income affected by this rise.

KEY TAX ADJUSTMENTS FOR BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS

This Budget has brought several major tax adjustments, particularly for inheritance tax (IHT), capital gains tax (CGT), and stamp duty. Each of these changes will directly impact business owners, property investors, and those looking to manage their wealth effectively.

• **Inheritance Tax (IHT):** While the threshold for IHT remains at £325,000, changes in pension inheritance rules from April 2027 mean that pension assets will now be considered part of an estate. For business owners and high-net-worth individuals, this change may require revisiting estate plans to maximise tax efficiency. Consulting with an estate planner can help optimise asset distribution to minimise the IHT impact.

• **Capital Gains Tax (CGT):** The budget brings immediate changes to Capital Gains Tax, affecting how much tax you'll

pay when selling assets that have increased in value. For basic rate taxpayers, CGT rates will rise from 10% to 18%, while higher rate taxpayers will see an increase from 20% to 24%. These adjustments, now aligned with the rates for property, underscore the importance of careful financial planning. If you have assets that may be subject to CGT, consider consulting with a tax professional to understand how these changes could impact your future tax liabilities and financial planning strategy.

Stamp Duty on Second Homes and Buy-to-Let Properties:

Stamp duty on second homes and investment properties is set to rise from 3% to 5%, which could have broader impacts on the rental market if landlords withdraw from buying new properties. For businesses in the property industry or those who lease additional properties, this increase in stamp duty may require recalibrating budgets or passing on costs to renters.

PENSION CHANGES AND STATE BENEFITS: ADJUSTMENTS TO WATCH

The state pension will increase by 4.1% in line with average earnings, which provides some relief for retirees facing rising living costs. The Budget also raises the earnings threshold for carers before they lose their allowance, from £151 to £195 per week. This small adjustment allows part-time carers to earn a bit more without losing benefits, which could incentivise some individuals to take up more part-time work.

Universal Credit is set to rise by 1.7% to match inflation, providing some financial support to low-income workers. However, this increase may have minimal impact given the rising costs of goods and services. Business owners should be aware that changes to health and disability benefits are also on the horizon, which may affect staff who rely on these benefits for their household income.

PRIVATE SCHOOL FEES INCREASE WITH NEW VAT REQUIREMENTS

From January 2025, parents will face an additional 20% VAT on

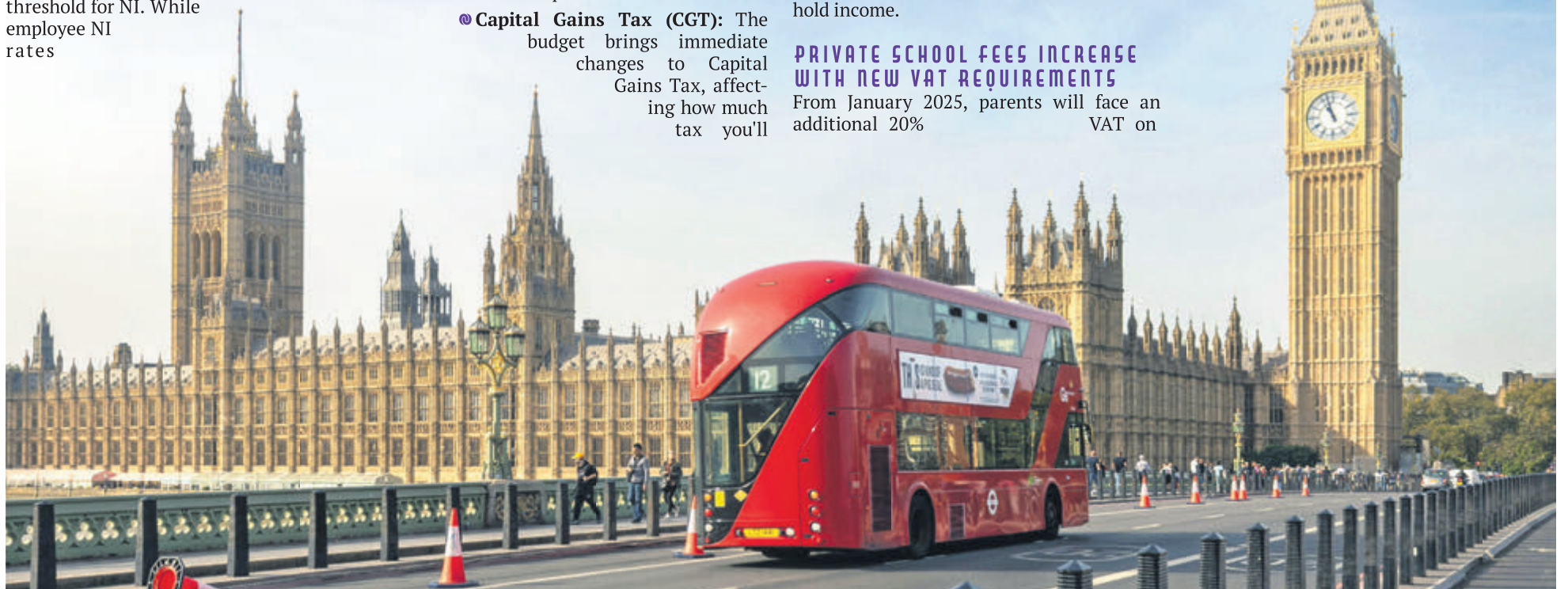
private school fees, as private education fees will no longer be exempt. For those business owners who send their children to private schools, this measure represents a significant cost increase that could affect household finances. It may also impact the business sector around private education, potentially slowing down enrolment or leading to cost-cutting measures within schools.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON RENTERS AND PROPERTY INVESTORS

The increase in stamp duty for buy-to-let properties may discourage new investors from entering the market, potentially squeezing the supply of rental homes. As a business owner, if you're involved in the property sector, this change may impact buying decisions or push landlords to pass on increased costs to tenants, thus raising rents. For any staff who rent, this may also mean revisiting salary or housing support options to retain key employees who might otherwise face financial stress from rising rental costs.

CALL TO ACTION: PLAN AND PREPARE FOR BUDGET CHANGES

This Budget has introduced measures that will likely raise operating costs, especially for small businesses. Adjustments in minimum wages, National Insurance contributions, and taxes on property investment and gains will directly impact business owners' finances. Now is the time to re-evaluate budgets, review hiring policies, and consider strategic financial planning to navigate these changes smoothly, manage tax liabilities and optimise cash flow.



DIGITAL ASSETS

WHAT A TRUMP WIN MEANS FOR CRYPTO

With Donald Trump back in office, the future of cryptocurrency regulation in the United States looks set for a dramatic shift. His pro-crypto stance is expected to influence both national policy and global perceptions of the digital currency market.

As he returns to the White House, it's clear that the industry has an ally who has promised to transform the country into "the crypto capital of the planet." His victory marks a significant contrast to the regulatory path laid out by the Biden administration, which had taken a hard-line approach towards crypto firms, intensifying enforcement actions against fraudulent activities and illegal operations within the sector.

During the campaign, Trump pledged to create a "strategic national bitcoin stockpile" and position the US as a global leader in the cryptocurrency space. These promises signalled a dramatic shift from his earlier dismissals of Bitcoin as a "scam" and a threat to the dollar. As president, the industry expects Trump to take bold steps to encourage innovation in the crypto industry, including relaxing regulations that many in the sector consider burdensome.

His administration's embrace of cryptocurrency could also include significant changes to how the US handles digital assets. Trump's push to make the country a "crypto capital" likely means a more

flexible regulatory environment, aiming to foster growth in the industry. This could be seen in the form of tax incentives for blockchain-based companies, clearer legal frameworks for crypto exchanges, and a more lenient stance on new, emerging technologies within the space.

In stark contrast to Trump's stance, the Biden administration took a more aggressive approach towards cryptocurrencies. Under Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump's opponent in the 2024 election, the White House imposed stringent regulations and spearheaded high-profile legal actions against leading figures in the industry. One of the most significant events of the past year was the conviction of Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder of the FTX exchange, for defrauding investors. His 25-year prison sentence, following one of the largest scandals in crypto history, underscored the administration's commitment to holding bad actors accountable.

In addition to the FTX debacle, the Biden administration oversaw major legal actions against Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange. Founder Changpeng Zhao was sentenced to four months in prison, and the company was fined a record \$4.3 billion (£3.2 billion) after being found guilty of facilitating illegal transactions. This included money laundering by criminals and terrorists. These moves, part of a broader crackdown by the SEC, signalled Washington's intent to impose stricter controls on crypto

operations, with a focus on protecting investors and curbing illegal activity.

With Trump back in office, the industry is poised for a more favourable political climate. In the months leading up to the election, cryptocurrency companies invested heavily in political donations, with a record \$119 million (£92.3 million) spent to influence the outcome. The industry's spending far outpaced other sectors, with lobbying efforts aimed at electing lawmakers sympathetic to the crypto cause.

Now the push for deregulation could gain momentum. Trump's administration will likely seek to pass legislation that reduces oversight on crypto firms, potentially rolling back the tougher measures introduced during Biden's tenure. One area of focus could be the SEC, which has taken a particularly strong stance against crypto companies, including filing numerous lawsuits. A shift in leadership at the SEC could lead to a less aggressive approach to enforcement.

Trump's pro-crypto policies could also extend to tax incentives and infrastructure projects aimed at boosting blockchain development. The US might see an influx of new crypto-based businesses, along with more robust partnerships between traditional financial institutions and blockchain innovators. This would align with Trump's broader economic strategy of promoting American technological dominance.

While the US grapples with its regulatory approach, other countries are also moving to regulate the cryptocurrency market. The European Union, for example, implemented a comprehensive regulatory framework in 2024 aimed at curbing illegal activity and promoting transparency in the sector. These new laws are designed to make it harder for crypto to be used for money laundering and other illicit purposes.

On the global stage, the US has a chance to influence crypto regulation worldwide. As one of the largest markets for digital assets, the decisions made in Washington could have a ripple effect across the globe. This could lead to other countries adopting similar policies.

With promises of deregulation and a more open approach to digital assets, the crypto world could stand to gain under Trump's leadership. However, the challenge will be balancing innovation with investor protection. The crypto industry must prove that it can be both a force for economic growth and a responsible player in the global financial system.

While the path forward remains uncertain, one thing is clear: the debate over cryptocurrency regulation is far from over. With a pro-crypto president in the White House, the next few years will likely see major changes in how cryptocurrencies are regulated, not just in the US but around the world.





7 Years After Grenfell:

60% of Buildings with Dangerous Cladding Remain Unidentified

Seven years after the Grenfell Tower fire, over 7,200 buildings with potentially flammable cladding have yet to be identified, a new report has warned. Ministers are under mounting pressure to accelerate efforts to remove hazardous cladding now that findings reveal up to 60% of affected buildings remain unidentified.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) estimates a completion date of 2035 for cladding remediation. However, with as many as 7,200 buildings still unaccounted for, the National Audit Office (NAO) has highlighted the ongoing financial and emotional distress experienced by residents.

A previous NAO report noted challenges such as incomplete building records, discrepancies between construction plans and materials used, and difficulties in tracing owners.

“Seven years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, there has been progress, but considerable uncertainty remains regarding the number of buildings needing remediation, costs, timelines, and recouping public spending,” said NAO head Gareth Davies. “There is a long way to go before all affected buildings are made safe.”

Funding Gap and Delays

The estimated cost to remedy the dangerous cladding is £16.6 billion, with the government pledging £9.1 billion. Taxpayer contributions are capped at £5.1 billion, leaving pressure on the MHCLG to recover costs through a building safety levy not expected to be operational until autumn 2025.

Of the 4,771 buildings with dangerous cladding in the government’s portfolio, nearly half have not begun remediation, and only a third have completed the work. Current efforts rely on voluntary participation in grant programmes by building owners, but the report notes this has slowed progress significantly. Many owners face challenges navigating the process or are unwilling to engage.

High-Rise vs Medium-Rise Buildings

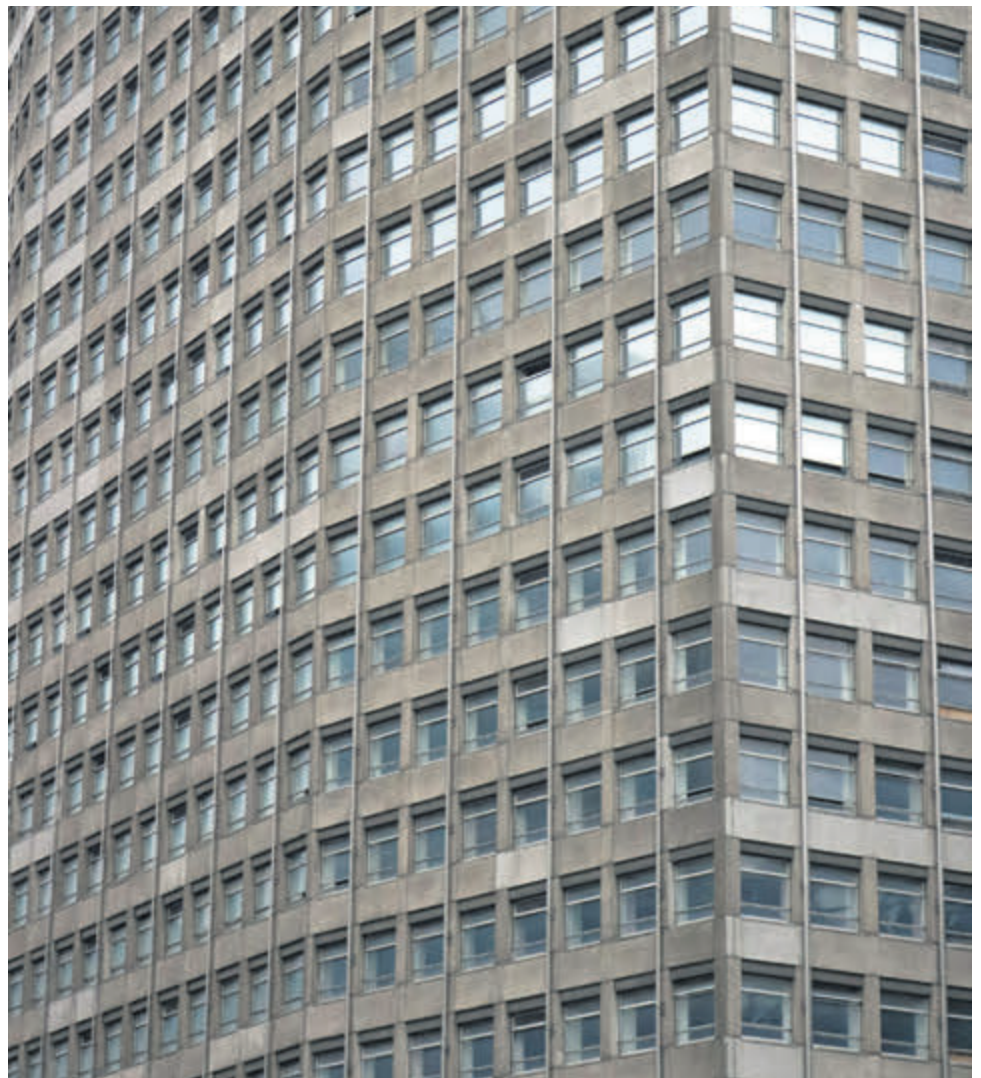
Progress has been more successful in identifying high-rise buildings over 18 metres tall, with a 98% identification rate. However, there is still no mandatory registration for medium-rise buildings between 11 and 18 metres, which are more common and may also pose fire risks.

Campaigners and Criticism

The Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, which claimed 72 lives, underscored the dangers of flammable cladding. The recent Grenfell Inquiry has drawn attention to manufacturers supplying unsuitable materials for high-rise buildings.

Campaigners argue that relying on building owners to voluntarily identify hazardous materials is insufficient. They are calling for stricter measures to speed up remediation and ensure accountability.

Housing Secretary Angela Rayner has previously pledged to accelerate efforts, outlining plans for additional safety measures. However, the new report shows that much work remains to be done to address this ongoing crisis.



Rise in Cash Purchases

Outside of London

Buying a property with cash is steadily becoming the norm outside of London, according to a study by mortgage broker SPF.co.uk. Mortgage rates are believed to be among the causes of the shift, making it more rewarding to buy with cash rather than pay a mortgage.

Inverclyde in Scotland has seen just over half of sales in 2023 made with cash, a rise from 36% a decade earlier. The average price of a house there is £123,000, while first-time buyers are paying an average of just £100,000 for their purchase as of April 2024.

Hart, down in Hampshire, has also experienced an increase in cash purchases over the past decade, with 26.1% more buyers opting not to get a mortgage. In 2023, nearly 400 properties were bought with cash, the Land Registry found, equating to around a third of its property sales. The average cost of a property in Hart is £467,000, or 6% more than the nationwide average of £285,000.

“Outside London, there has been a growing trend of cash purchases post-pandemic, perhaps due to the savings some people were able to build up during Covid and choosing to use these rather than opt for more expensive borrowing,” Mark Harris, chief executive of SPF.co.uk’s Private Clients, said. “That said, cash sales overall have decreased, with ONS data showing 186,000 sales in

England last year, down from 254,000 in 2013, which may be due to higher property prices and the elevated cost of living, leaving people with less disposable cash.”

Properties in London and the South East, he added, cost significantly more than elsewhere, making them “unaffordable for certain cash buyers such as retirees who prefer to own outright.”

Economic uncertainties and market fluctuations, according to Harris, have also led to more caution from investors, and this, he says, has driven them away from the capital. “Additionally, the shift to remote working for many has further encouraged people to live outside major cities, with investors looking at alternative regions.”

The third-largest increase after Inverclyde and Hart was Solihull in the West Midlands. Cash sales there made up 35.8% of all property purchases in 2023 compared with 28.6% in 2013. This resulted in a 25.4% rise overall. The ONS reports a property in Solihull costs an average of £337,000, 47% more than neighbouring Birmingham, where average prices are just £228,000.

Harlow in Essex, on the other hand, saw the largest drop in cash purchases over the two years, falling by 44.9%. Its average house costs £309,000, according to the ONS. In 2013, cash purchases made up just over a quarter in Harlow but have since fallen to just 14.5%.

Education

Enquiring Minds

Compiled & edited by Fahad Redha

Adult Education Courses



Arts

Introduction to acting City Lit

The course is designed for those wanting to practically experience the process of acting. It is ideal for total beginners or for those returning to acting after some time away. It is an opportunity to improve your overall confidence in yourself and in performing as you explore a range of acting exercises. Learning is through fun simple exercises that begin with theatre games and build towards scene work. An opportunity to develop your creative skills in exploring character in a range of scenarios.

1-10 Keeley Street WC2B 4BA
citylit.ac.uk
Dec 14

Business & Law

Starting a Business City University

Looking at how to start your own business but not sure where to begin? Our Starting Up in Business evening course can help you to get take the next steps. Taught over 10-weekly evening classes, this part-time course will highlight the key considerations for a business Start Up, from marketing and sales to finance and legal requirements. Topics will include the psychology behind starting a business and processes involved, business formats, market research, and the importance of cash flow.

city.ac.uk
Starts January 14

Culinary

Festive Wine Workshop Le Cordon Bleu

This 2-hour tasting workshop will prepare you for the festive season, providing a drink idea for every step of the way. The course will be lead by Le Cordon Bleu Wine Development Manager Matthieu Longuere MS. Master Sommelier Matthieu will cover everything from showing you how to open a magnum of Champagne with style, to what glassware to use and why. By the end of the class you will be ready to face the festive season with the perfect beverage in hand!

cordonbleu.edu
November 28

History & Culture

Institute of Classical Studies University of London

The Institute of Classical Studies (ICS) is a national and international research centre for the study of the languages, literature, history, art, archaeology, and philosophy of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Founded in 1953, it provides an internationally renowned research library available to scholars from universities throughout the world in association with the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies and the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. ICS also serves as the meeting place of the main Classics organisations in the UK.

sas.ac.uk
See website for more information

Image: Alex Knight/Pexels

Language

Learn Japanese International House London

If you have never studied Japanese before these courses are for you. Whether you're looking for an introduction to the language before a holiday, or want to study intensively, there is a range of beginners classes available. There are 128 million Japanese speakers in the world. It uses three different alphabets: Hiragana, which is a traditional Japanese alphabet; Katakana, another Japanese alphabet which is used for foreign words; and Kanji, which are Chinese characters, although the Japanese meaning is often different. Japanese is one of the most unique languages of the world, in that it does not have any obvious links to any other languages.

ihlondon.com
See website to book

Science, Technology, Engineering, & Maths

Astrophotography Course with Ben Bush

The School of Photography

This is an in depth, comprehensive astrophotography course that is perfect for beginners in the Astro world and keen photographers looking to explore this genre of photography. This course will teach you every aspect of astrophotography - photographing nightscapes, Milky Way photography, creating star trails, light painting with the stars, deep space photography and photographing the Aurora Borealis - this course has it all! With the prestigious 'Astro Photographer of the year' award under his belt, pro Astro photographer Ben Bush gives you expert tuition to ensure your photography stacks up with the best out there. Follow along with Ben as he transports you into the cosmos and teaches you the secrets behind creating the best astrophotography out there.

theschoolofphotography.com
See website to book

Sport & Fitness

Flight Training London

Flight Training London is a professional and friendly Approved Training Organisation located at London Elstree Aerodrome in North London. Situated well within the M25, we are easily accessible by road, railway or tube. The aerodrome benefits from being the closest aerodrome to Central and North London. The school offers amazing Trial Flights and Gift Experiences, and training for the Private Pilot Licence (PPL), Light Aircraft Pilot Licence (LAPL), Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL), Multi-Engine Piston Rating (ME), Instrument Rating (IR), Competency Based Instrument Rating (CBIR), The Restricted Instrument Rating (IR(R) or IMC), Night Rating (N) as well as Self Hire, Aircraft Conversions, The Co-Pilot Course, Check-outs, Ground School and Hour-Building.

flighttraininglondon.co.uk
See website to book

Events supplement

What, When, Where? November - Dec 2024

DANCE & OPERA

Rigoletto

London Coliseum

Full of melodies that are now the musical backdrop of modern life, Giuseppe Verdi's Rigoletto is one of the world's best-loved operas. Jonathan Miller's production is the godfather of the genre. Set in Little Italy in 1950's New York, it is a terrific night out: a fast-paced gangster saga of jealousy, love and revenge. Book your tickets now to enjoy this iconic opera live on the London Coliseum stage with the ENO's 2024 production of Rigoletto by world-renowned composer, Verdi.

London Coliseum, St Martin's Lane

WC2N 4ES

londoncoliseum.org

Until November 21

Akram Khan: Gigenis, the generation of the Earth

Sadler's Wells

A choreographer and dancer rooted in the tradition of his practice, and a creative interpreter of stories that need to be experienced – Akram Khan has revolutionised the world of dance. Khan returns to his roots, to his traditions, and to his past – to a time when we were more connected with nature, Mother Earth and our mythology. Gigenis evokes the memories of our civilization. In his new artistic chapter, Khan shares the stage alongside an ensemble of six renowned artists of Indian classical dance and seven live musicians.

Rosebery Avenue EC1R 4TN

sadlerswells.com

November 20-24

The Snowman

Peacock Theatre

Make your Christmas a cracker with this family treat that will melt your heart. Join the Boy as his Snowman comes to life and they embark on a magical adventure far across the world. Meet a host of woodland

creatures, an assemblage of international Snowmen, and even a dancing Pineapple. There's snow place like home, and The Snowman returns for its 27th year at the Peacock. This is a magical stage adaptation of the much-loved picture book by Raymond Briggs and the film directed by Dianne Jackson.

Rosebery Avenue EC1R 4TN

sadlerswells.com

November 23 – January 4

EXHIBITIONS

Silk Road

British Museum

The Silk Roads were in use for millennia, but this visually stunning show focuses on a defining period in their history, from about AD 500 to 1000. This time witnessed significant leaps in connectivity and the rise of universal religions that linked communities across continents. Working with 29 national and international partners to present objects from many regions and cultures alongside those from the British Museum collection, the exhibition offers a unique chance to see objects from the length and breadth of the Silk Roads. From Tang Chinese ceramics destined for ports in the Middle East to Indian garnets found in Suffolk, they reveal the astonishing reach of these networks.

Great Russell Street WC1B 3DG

britishmuseum.org

Ongoing

Discover Constable & The Hay Wain

National Gallery

Find out what lies behind the making of 'The Hay Wain' and its iconic status in British art. Through paintings including George Morland's building storm and the atmospheric light of William Mulready's farrier shop, it will look at how Constable's contemporaries created rural scenes. William Blake's mystic works take us into

FAIRS & FESTIVALS



Ideal Home Show

Olympia

How would you like to treat yourself to the ultimate Christmas present this year? From sparkling interiors to exquisite gifts, not forgetting a grotto of festive feasting, unwrap the home of your dreams at Ideal Home Show Christmas. With hundreds of independent retailers and much-loved household names, discover unrivalled collections across themed sections including Gifts, Home and Decorations. Wander through elegantly adorned stands to find a treasure trove of Christmas

inspiration, from stylish must-have interior designs and innovative gadgets to quirky gifts. No matter how big or small your home makeover or projects may be, you're guaranteed to uncover the perfect finishing touches at The Good Homes Roomsets. Explore the latest must-have accessories, furniture and décor, plus all the expertise you may need to take on the holidays with style.

Hammersmith Road W14 8UX

olympia.london

November 27 – Dec 1

the realm of the spiritual landscape while we experience the poetic and political landscape through contemporary poetry and prints. This exhibition will bring together sketches of the scene the artist made over twenty years before producing the finished

work in his London studio.

Trafalgar Square WC2N 5DN

nationalgallery.org.uk

Ongoing

The Wall Between Us

Saatchi Gallery

The Walls Between Us, explores the complex notion of 'home' through the perspective of 12 artists. Home is a multifaceted and subjective construct. This complexity is summarised by the untranslatable Welsh word 'Hiraeth', which combines feelings of nostalgia, a longing for somewhere more than a space and a heart wrenching homesickness towards something or somewhere which is lost forever. Through this curation, we ask the viewers to question their assumptions of building a home – where is it? Who is it? What makes it good and safe? The Walls Between Us was curated by SOTA Marketplace, a purpose-led online art gallery and art consultancy built to empower artists and give art back to the people. SOTA's purpose is to democratise the arts, challenging the inequity of the industry. They currently represent over 800 underrepresented artists internationally.

Duke of York's HQ, King's Road

SW3 4RY

saatchigallery.com

Until November 25

DANCE & OPERA



Christmas with Opera

Holland Park 2024

Opera Holland Park

Head over to St Mary Abbots Church on Kensington Church Street to mark the beginning of the festive period. Featuring the Opera Holland Park Chorus and principal singers from the 2025 Season, this Christmas celebration will be filled with carols, seasonal music and good cheer. This concert is being held to raise vital funds for work on stage and in the community, which remain central to its mission as an unsubsidised company. Donations will be taken of new and unused clothing, food and toiletries for Refettorio Felix. At this time, they are particularly looking for warm anoraks, ski jackets, puffer jackets and sleeping bags.

Opera Holland Park Theatre,

Ilchester Place W8 6LU

operahollandpark.com

Dec 7

Events

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY

Darkest Hour

Imperial War Museum

Join IWM for a unique screening of *Darkest Hour*, in the rooms where the film's events happened. Directed by Joe Wright, *Darkest Hour* is the dramatic retelling of the early days of the Second World War. With the fall of France imminent, and the looming threat of Nazi invasion, newly appointed British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (played by Oscar-winning Gary Oldman) rallies a nation to fight for its survival. Kate Clements, IWM Curator, will give a short introduction to the film and the role of Churchill War Rooms in this part of Churchill's life. She will be joined by Jeni Leatherby who will discuss the research required by the production team for the biopic.

King Charles Street SW1A 2AQ
iwm.org.uk
November 21



Zanele Muholi

Tate Britain

Zanele Muholi is one of the most acclaimed photographers working today, and their work has been exhibited all over the world. With over 260 photographs, this major exhibition presents the full breadth of their career to date. Muholi describes themselves as a visual activist. From the early 2000s, they have documented and celebrated the lives of South Africa's Black lesbian, gay, trans, queer and intersex communities. Based on the artist's 2020-21 show at Tate Modern, the exhibition includes new photographic and sculptural works.

Millbank SW1P 4RG
tate.org.uk
Until January 26

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

Ally Pally Supernovas – Autumn Term

Alexandra Palace

Every Saturday morning term time, Performing Arts School provides world-class performing arts training for 14-18 year-olds at Ally Pally as part of the Young Stars programme. Under the guidance and support of industry professionals, students will learn to act, sing and dance in a safe and inclusive environment, empowering them to grow in confidence, build new relationships, and let their talent shine. At the end of the year, they'll have the chance to perform on stage.

Alexandra Palace Way N22 7AY
alexandrapalace.com
Until Dec 7

What, What November

Soft or Spiky?

Polka Theatre

A playful discovery of shapes, sounds and textures. What question would you want your baby to answer? What would you like them to ask you? In a world full of astonishing unknowns and surprising possibilities, how do you find the right answers or questions? This playful and interactive new show is full of shapes, sounds, textures and words exploring different ways to connect and understand each other. Inspired by heartfelt conversations with new parents, this humorous production explores the multiple ways we communicate, ensuring that no one is left out. At the end of the performance there is a stay and play session where audiences can enter the sensory landscape of the production.

240 The Broadway SW19 1SB
polkatheatre.com
Until November 24

Lessons for Recovery in Malaysia

London Zoo

In Southeast Asia, there is no longer a single area with 500 individuals of any large terrestrial mammal species with an optimum demography and unrestricted reproductive opportunities. When conserving the charismatic native species of Malaysia such as orangutan, wild cattle and Malayan tigers, we need to go beyond reactive, short-term interventions - the importance of scale, in time and space is now critical. This event will showcase the challenges of conserving large mammals in Asia and highlight the threats of inadequate fertility and demography, insuffi-

cient food productivity to recover remnant clusters, and the misdirected use of rare large animals as representatives to assert conservation hope. Speakers will discuss the importance of local ecological knowledge and how mobilising small groups of passionate people to implement conservation programmes can help recover populations. Attendees will also hear about what positive conservation action can look like, and what lessons can be learned from the sharp decline of the Sumatran rhino.

Outer Circle NW1 4RY
zsl.org
November 19

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY

Letizia Battaglia:

Life, Love and Death in Sicily

The Photographers' Gallery

Born in Palermo, Sicily in 1935, Battaglia began her photographic career in the early 1970s, when she was in her forties. She documented everyday life, alongside the brutal reality of the Mafia and their victims in Sicily during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Her images are some of the best-known records of life in the shadow of the Mafia. In her relentless pursuit against organised crime, she used her camera to document the daily terror, putting it on the front page. Reporting for the daily newspaper *L'Ora*, she or one of her colleagues, was present at every major crime scene in the city over two decades.

16-18 Ramillies Street W1F 7LW
thephotographersgallery.org.uk
Ongoing

Creative Encounters:

Dec Survival Kit

Royal Festival Hall

Whether you need mantras to get you through Hanukkah with Bubbie, breathing exercises to cope with supermarket playlists or stress toys for under the Christmas table, Creative Encounters has got you covered. Expect warm and funny stories from Cassenbaum, live music from Josh Middleton and joyful activities to see us through Dec together. So whether you love or hate this time of year, are celebrating or not, there's something for you down in The Clore Ballroom.

Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road
SE1 8XX
southbankcentre.co.uk
Dec 11

FAMILY & CHILDREN

Shrek's Adventure

It is a brilliantly bonkers, interactive and immersive walkthrough experience, where the whole family can journey through *Far Far Away* as the stars of the show. See, hear, touch and smell the adventure by exploring 10 fairytale themed live shows, interacting with various famous characters including Princess Fiona and Donkey to collecting the special ingredients that you will need in order to find Shrek and make it home safely.

See website for more information
shreksadventure.com
Ongoing

FAMILY & CHILDREN



The Formula 1 Exhibition Excel

Enter the world of Formula 1. Hosted across six purpose-built rooms designed in collaboration with award-winning curators and filmmakers, this is an immersive adventure through the past, present and future of Formula 1 - making it a must-visit experience for F1 and motorsport fans! State of the art racing simulators will also be available to book, giving you the chance to experience what it's like to sit behind the wheel of an F1 car and race around the iconic Silverstone track.

Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway
E16 1XL
excel.london
Until Dec 31

en, Where?

ember - Dec 2024

Nature in Focus

Natural History Museum

This year the museum is celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of our world-renowned Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. Over the past six decades, the stunning photographs it's championed have not only told stories about the beauty and vulnerability of the natural world but advanced our scientific understanding of it. This free display will take a look at the role photography has played in advancing the science of natural history. Tracing the history of photography in natural history, it will explore not only the close ties between science, photography and art but how modern imaging techniques are used in science and storytelling.

Cromwell Road, South Kensington

SW7 5BD

nhm.ac.uk

Ongoing

MUSIC

Members Open Rehearsal: Tenebrae

Wigmore Hall

Friends who give at Benefactor Friends level and above have the opportunity to attend two open rehearsals per season as selected by the Director. The first open rehearsal of the 2024/25 Season allows an audience to see award-winning choir Tenebrae as it prepares 'a wide selection of carols for all tastes' ahead of the performance that evening.

36 Wigmore Street, Marylebone

W1U 2BP

wigmore-hall.org.uk

Dec 4

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY



ATEEZ

O2 Arena

Global pop superstars ATEEZ have announced that they will be bringing their 'TOWARDS THE LIGHT : WILL TO POWER' tour to The O2 on Monday 27 and Tuesday 28 January 2025. The upcoming European tour follows a wildly successful 2024 for the group as one of the standout performances at Coachella, being named as one of Variety's Musicians Making an Impact in their Young Hollywood Report. The Hollywood Reporter crowns them a "K-Pop Powerhouse" while GQ hails "The Future Sounds Like ATEEZ" in their recent September issue. The group achieved their first No.1 on the Billboard 200 with their second studio album THE WORLD EP.FIN : WILL and has secured multiple No.1's on the Billboard Top Albums Sales Chart. They are also the first South Korean musical act to have three different releases chart in the top 10 of the UK Official Albums Chart within a single year.

Peninsula Square SE10 0DX

theo2.co.uk

27 & 28 January 2025

Earth From Space

Royal Observatory

Each day, over 1,000 satellites constantly image and analyse Earth.

The data collected, encompassing observations of everything from volcanic eruptions to traffic jams, is shaping our modern world.

From space, Earth's fragile beauty is most obvious. Its changing climate is unmistakable, as habitats retreat and oceans warm. But the data gathered is also helping to turn things around. Earth from Space takes a closer look at our world through the satellite's lens, opening up a perspective that only a handful of humans have experienced themselves. Through astrophotography, video and interactive elements, the exhibition at the Royal Observatory Greenwich explores satellites' vital role in tackling climate change, and reveals a truly unique, living planet: our home in space.

Blackheath Avenue SE10 8XJ

iwm.org.uk

Ongoing

FAMILY & CHILDREN



Victorian Santa's Grotto Museum of London

Snow has fallen, the decorations are up, carols are being sung – it can only mean one thing. Stroll through our Sailortown gallery decked out in festive decorations to meet Santa in his grotto. And if you've been nice, you'll receive a gift! Photography is allowed, so feel free to take a photo to capture the moment before

exploring the museum. Please check availability and book in advance to avoid any disappointment. Ticket includes a visit with Santa and a present to take home. Presents are made with traditional materials with minimal plastic, and are age appropriate.

West India Quay E14 4AL

londonmuseum.org.uk

November 22 – Dec 23

Jules Buckley's Christmas:

A Celebration of Aretha Franklin

Royal Albert Hall

Jules Buckley and his Orchestra are joined by Sheléa and Vula's Chorale for a festive celebration of the timeless music of the Queen of Soul. Acclaimed singer Sheléa will take the spotlight as soloist in this stunning tribute to Aretha Franklin – one of the top-selling artists in music history. The night will also feature a selection of Christmas hits arranged by Jules, to get you in the holiday mood. This special Christmas concert sees Jules return to the Royal Albert Hall following two incredible nights at the 2024 Proms, including an unforgettable performance with Florence Welch.

Kensington Gore, South Kensington

SW7 2AP

royalalberthall.com

Dec 10

TALKS, TOURS, & WALKS

Second World War Galleries:

A Guided Tour

Imperial War Museum

Join the expert guides for a tour of IWM London's Second World War Galleries. Through a diverse range of moving and unusual objects, learn about the story of the most catastrophic war in modern history. How did it begin? How was it fought? And what was the Second World War's cost to humanity? IWM guides draw on its unparalleled Second World War collections to give you an in-depth look at the human stories behind this devastating conflict.

Lambeth Road SE1 6HZ

iwm.org.uk

Ongoing

Events

What, When, Where? November - Dec 2024

From Cowboy Carter to Taylormania: Why Country Music Conquered the World in 2024

British Library

Country music is certainly having a moment this year. Beyoncé surprised everyone by dropping Cowboy Carter, intentionally disrupting the racial politics of Americana. Orville Peck's interrogation of the genre's sexual and gender politics has gone crossover and mainstream. And a singer named Taylor, who started her career as a teen on Music Row in Nashville, has taken over the world. What are we to make of this country music moment? What does it tell us about the USA's understanding of itself and its culture? And is it going to last?

British Library NW12DB
thebritishlibraryculturalevents.seetickets.com
November 28



TALKS, TOURS, & WALKS

The Lion King

Lyceum Theatre

Disney's award-winning musical The Lion King explodes with glorious colours, stunning effects and enchanting music. It follows the powerful story of Simba as he journeys from wide-eyed cub to his destined role as King of the Pridelands. Ingenious puppetry, stunning effects and the enchanting music by Elton John, Tim Rice and Lebo M will transport you to the heart of the African Pridelands. See your favourite Disney story unfold live in the West End by booking your tickets directly from the official box office. Now in its 24th year at London's Lyceum Theatre, visionary director Julie Taymor's acclaimed reimagining of Disney's beloved film will redefine your expectation of theatre.

21 Wellington Street, Covent Garden
WC2E 7RQ

thelyceumtheatre.com

Ongoing

Choir of Man

Arts Theatre

Welcome to THE CHOIR OF MAN- the best night in your local area you've ever had. It's a party, it's a concert, it's a lock in like no other. Featuring breath-taking reinventions of chart topping hits from artists including Guns'N'Roses, Fun!, Adele, Avicii, Paul Simon, Sia and many more, THE CHOIR OF MAN has something for everyone! The multi-talented cast of nine guys combine beautiful harmonies and foot-stomping singalongs with world-class tap dance and poetic meditations on the power of community. This is a riotously feel-good homage to that gathering place we've all missed so much over the last year: the pub. With a real working bar on stage, come ready to drink in the action!

6-7 Great Newport Street WC2H 7JB
artstheatrewestend.co.uk

Until Dec 29

Yeoman Warder Tours

Tower of London

Yeoman Warders, also known as 'Beefeaters', will share key stories from 1,000 years of history. Be entertained by tales of intrigue, imprisonment, execution, torture and much more. Learn about the Tower's iconic history as a fortress, palace and prison. Discover how William the Conqueror built the White Tower and hear tales of the prisoners who entered through Traitors' Gate. Yeoman Warders will share details of the famous prisoners executed on Tower Green. Many are now buried nearby in the 16th-century Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula.

London, EC3N 4AB

hrp.org.uk

Ongoing

Street-Level Superstar:

An Evening with Lawrence, Jarvis Cocker & Will Hodgkinson

Foyles

To celebrate the release of Street-Level Superstar: A Year with Lawrence, music journalist Will Hodgkinson's chronicle of his wanderings with Britain's most eccentric cult star, Hodgkinson talks to Lawrence and Jarvis Cocker at Foyles about music, bad luck, and life. Lawrence is the greatest pop star who never made it, his dreams of glory thwarted over the past five decades by bad luck and self-sabotage. At sixty-one, he set off on a new mission: to escape poverty, and obscurity by writing a smash hit. Walking the streets of London with Lawrence and getting to the heart of his extraordinary story, in Street-Level Superstar Will Hodgkinson weaves a melancholy, funny and wise portrait of a one-of-a-kind artist.

107 Charing Cross Road WC2H 0EB

foyles.co.uk

November 14

THEATRE

Aladdin

Lyric Hammersmith

Meet Aladdin. The local cheeky chancer, hustling his way through life while "helping" (read: barely lifting a finger) at his mum's busy Wishy Washy Launderette in Shepherd's Bush Market. Enter Jasmine. The bold, sharp-witted orphaned princess, who's bored with life and ready to break free. When she crosses paths with Aladdin, sparks fly. But with his meddling mother Widow Twerkey, her evil step-father Abanazaar and now a Genie in tow, can the course of true love run smooth? Of course not, it's panto! Written by Sonia Jalaly and directed by Nicholai La Barrie, reuniting the team behind the critically-acclaimed Jack and the Beanstalk from 2022, expect everything from dance battles to live music to jaw-dropping magic, all the festive fun you could wish for.

Lyric Square, King Street W6 0QL

lyric.co.uk

November 16 - January 5

EFG London Jazz Festival

Barbican Centre

The world's best jazz, right here. Explore today's greats, new musicians making waves, and stories from the genre's rich legacy. Dig in to all things jazz - from the biggest global names to rising stars on our FreeStage, plus take a peek behind the curtain with Jazz on Screen in our Cinemas. Experience what jazz means to people around the world, with stories from South Africa, New Orleans and Scandinavia taking centre stage.

Silk Street EC2Y 8DS

barbican.org.uk

November 15-24

The Importance of Being Earnest

National Theatre

A Trivial Comedy for Serious People Being sensible can be excessively boring. At least Jack thinks so. While assuming the role of dutiful guardian in the country, he lets loose in town under a false identity. Meanwhile, his friend Algy takes on a similar facade. Unfortunately, living a double life has its drawbacks, especially when it comes to love. Hoping to impress two eligible ladies, the gentlemen find themselves caught in a web of lies they must carefully navigate.

14 Whitehall SW1A 2DY
nationaltheatre.org.uk

November 21 - January 25

MUSIC



ENVIRONMENT & SCIENCE by Natalie Shanahan



What Does the Future Hold for Our Coral Reefs?

Coral reefs are among the most biologically diverse and valuable ecosystems on the planet. The Coral Triangle, a region rich with coral in Southeast Asia, is the most biologically diverse marine ecosystem in the world. Corals are made up of tiny invertebrate animals, known as coral polyps, with a hard exoskeleton made of calcium carbonate. These sessile creatures provide the habitat for hundreds of species of marine life. Their large solid structures provide important economic, cultural, and recreational benefits to hundreds of millions of people. They protect coastlines from erosion and buffer them from storms. They are vital to fishing and tourist industries. It is imperative that we protect them.

Corals have a symbiotic relationship with microscopic algae called zooxanthellae that live in their tissues. This algae provides the corals with much of their energy via photosynthesis and gives them their vibrant colours. Dramatic changes in water temperature can stress the coral, causing the algae to leave the coral's tissues. Without the algae, the coral turns white, hence the term "bleaching." In this stressed state, corals are more susceptible to death and disease.

Over the past century, coral reefs have taken a beating from a whole host of factors: climate change, pollution, declining water quality, overfishing, and unsustainable coastal development. The past 150 years have seen the death of nearly 50% of corals worldwide. With global temperatures rising to an average of 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, we can expect to see 70%-90% of corals vanishing. Two degrees will take this figure to 99%! We hit the 1.5 degrees this year, and it seems the best we can now hope for is 1.6 degrees, which is becoming increasingly unlikely with each passing year.

With climate change and warming ocean temperatures comes increased levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. Oceans absorb about 30% of CO₂ released into the atmosphere. Higher CO₂ levels mean more being dissolved in the seawater, making it more acidic. This reduces the availability of carbonate ions that corals need to build their calcium carbonate skeletons. As a result, coral growth slows, making it difficult for reefs to recover from environmental stresses.

Living coral makes various sounds that aid fish navigation and breeding. Dead

coral is silent, which has a huge effect on fish reproduction and, therefore, fish population levels. This impacts biodiversity, the entire food chain, and the economics of many coastal industries. Approximately 25% of the ocean's fish depend on healthy coral reefs as a source of shelter to reproduce and rear young, as well as a means to find food.

The obvious solution is to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions whilst protecting reefs, allowing the coral to recover. Even then, it would take many years for the coral to regenerate and decades for ocean temperatures to stabilise. This would require strong political leadership with a focus on long-term fund-

The Global Political Landscape Will Play a Huge Role in the War Against Climate Change

The political environment in which coral conservation efforts operate significantly affects their viability. The 16th UN Biodiversity COP16, held in Colombia at the end of October, attended by 196 countries, provided some hope with several landmark decisions, including agreements on the use of nature's genetic data and sharing the benefits derived from genetic resources, as well as recognition of Indigenous Peoples

further raise alarm bells and pressure governments around the world to take action.

The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the most consequential US climate law to date, set aside \$400 billion aimed at reviving American manufacturing and slashing greenhouse gas emissions. The result has been billions of dollars invested in clean energy products. Current models show that, on this trajectory, by 2035, the US is set to cut emissions by half of what they were in 2005.

The recent re-election of Donald Trump in the United States could have huge implications for environmental policies, including those aimed at combating climate change. Trump has said he would seek to overturn parts of the IRA and boost fossil fuel production. Emission reductions will continue to decrease due to the current clean energy sources but at a much slower rate. This will mean around 1.75 billion tonnes more carbon dioxide by 2030 than would be expected with the IRA intact. However, even if Trump doesn't make these changes, the potential emissions will still be too high to limit global warming to below two degrees.

During his previous administration, Trump's policies leaned heavily toward deregulation, particularly in the energy sector. His administration rolled back numerous environmental protections aimed at facilitating fossil fuel production and economic growth. A similar approach is likely in a second term and could exacerbate climate change impacts. Increased carbon emissions linked to fossil fuel extraction and use would contribute to both global warming and ocean acidification.

If this stance persists, U.S. involvement in global efforts to combat climate change could wane, leading to less collaborative action on both climate change and biodiversity.

While climate change poses significant challenges, the ingenuity and determination of the global scientific community present hopeful prospects for their future. Let us hope that the global superpowers can work together to give us all a temperate, safe, and biodiverse future!

Introduction of Heat-Tolerant Species

One promising approach is the introduction of heat-tolerant coral species. Scientists are identifying and breeding corals that can better withstand elevated temperatures. For instance, researchers have been studying species from the Coral Triangle, which have shown greater thermal tolerance. Through selective breeding and genetic engineering techniques, these resilient corals can be transplanted into damaged or declining reefs, promoting recovery and sustainability. There are, however, many issues to take into account when considering introducing genetically engineered or transgenic organisms into the wild.

Sound Therapy

Another cutting-edge technology being explored is sound therapy. Degraded reefs smell and sound less attractive to settlement-stage fishes than their healthy states. Recent studies have shown that certain sounds can encourage reef recolonisation by attracting fish and other marine organisms. By playing recordings of healthy reef sounds, researchers can create an acoustic environment that simulates a thriving ecosystem. This method not only helps to foster biodiversity but also aids in restoring the balance of these critical habitats.

Real-Time Monitoring

Conservationists can now prioritise areas for intervention and tailor their restoration efforts more effectively using remote sensing technology, which allows scientists to monitor reef health in real time. Drones and underwater robots equipped with cameras and sensors can assess coral bleaching, growth patterns, and biodiversity.

ing to address both climate change and biodiversity loss. According to the "Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2020" report, "high coral cover and diversity" means that coral reefs are resilient and can recover if we safeguard the marine environment and create the right conditions. There are a few innovative technologies that might prove useful in mitigating some of the harmful effects of climate change.

as key stewards in conservation efforts. However, the establishment of a new biodiversity fund and other key decisions were postponed despite marathon final negotiations.

During the COP29 UN climate conference this week, it was announced that 44% of reef-building coral species are at risk of extinction across the world, according to a new global assessment. Hopefully, this will

THE STAGE DOOR

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION



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Witness for the Prosecution Cast. Photo: Sam Barker

I have been summoned for jury service three times – in 2018, earlier this year to see an understudy run, and now to celebrate seven years at the marvellous County Hall on the South Bank.

The show initially had a short season, but here we are, years later, and it's still going strong. It's a testament to the power of the production, the venue, and of course, Agatha Christie's masterful storytelling.

As I watched, I couldn't help but think of *Something's Afoot*, a musical Agatha Christie spoof I performed in years ago. The opening number was called "We Owe It All to Agatha Christie," and that sentiment rings true here. Christie's genius lies in her ability to create characters while also delivering thrilling twists. There's class tension, human drama, and the British justice system is on full display.

County Hall, though not quite a courtroom, feels like one, creating an immersive experience where the action unfolds all around you. There's a VIP jury box—where you can sit for a premium ticket, and one lucky person gets to deliver the verdict as foreman! I sat next to the jury this time, and it was fascinating to watch them get briefed, sworn in, and handed little notepads. Some took their role seriously, jotting down notes, while others, let's just say, seemed less diligent! But it adds a unique dynamic, pulling the audience deeper into the courtroom drama.

When I first saw it, I thought the play would be rewritten to solely take place in the courtroom, but it's not. It's the same *Witness for the Prosecution* we know and love, with scenes outside the courtroom, in chambers, and elsewhere, all cleverly woven into the space. The courtroom setting naturally lends itself to drama—the barristers perform, witnesses crumble under pressure, and justice hangs in the balance.

After seven years, how does it still grip? Well, there's a new cast, and they are very good. The acting style? I call it the "World War One School of Acting"—curtain up, everyone over the top! Everyone leans into the big, bold, high-energy style without tipping over into caricature—it is perfectly suited to the play's melodramatic twists and turns and the setting.

The immersive elements are primarily in the location and the fact that we, the audience, are in the gallery in the courtroom scenes. Though the jury submit their verdicts from the jury box, the play itself requires a specific outcome for the story to work. So, while there's an illusion of interactivity, the verdict will be the same each night.

Yet, that doesn't detract from the excitement. There are moments where audience members audibly react to some of the twists and revelations in the witness box, and it is fun to see the actors playing the barristers acknowledge it. That's the magic of live theatre. Every performance is alive, ever-changing, and that's what keeps it fresh.

Witness for the Prosecution is a thrilling melodrama brought to life in a unique venue. The performances are strong, the setting immersive, and Agatha Christie's story still grips as tightly as ever.



Witness for the Prosecution
London County Hall, Belvedere Road SE1 7PB
Currently booking until
28th September 2025
witnesscountyhall.com
info@witnesscountyhall.com

I find it hard to believe that it's been 20 years since I first saw *Wicked* on Broadway and 18 years since I first saw it in the West End! Why has the show thrived for nearly two decades, and how well is it holding up?

It opened to less-than-stellar reviews—much like *Les Misérables*—and lost out on the Best Musical Tony Award to a little show called *Avenue Q*! I'm sure Stephen Schwartz would quote Noël Coward who, when he received terrible reviews for *Private Lives*, said, "I shall have to console myself with a bitter palliative of commercial success!"

When we think of musicals, we tend to think of their songs as the key to their success, but I believe it's the book (script) that is even more important. *Chess*, for example, has one of the best scores ever written by Benny and Bjorn from ABBA, with a number of top ten hit singles – but a book that, whilst intellectually sound, is complex, dense, and difficult to follow. *Wicked* has some great songs, but what really makes it work is the book. It's brilliantly and expertly adapted by Winnie Holtzman from Gregory Maguire's novel, which I tried to read and ultimately gave up on as it's dense and dark, completely different in tone from the musical.

People think it is a prequel to *The Wizard of Oz*, but whilst it does show Glinda and Elphaba when they first meet, it then runs parallel with *The Wizard of Oz* and, in a neat twist at the end, just slightly afterwards!

It also resonates with audiences as, at its core, there are two strong female leads and the subject of female friendship and otherness. Without being preachy, there are moments that have depth and a political resonance. Both Elphaba and Glinda go on such fantastic journeys, starting at opposite positions from where we know them from

WICKED: THE



the MGM film, and we watch their journey to become the iconic characters.

You will never watch The Wizard of Oz the same way again! I was watching The Wizard of Oz on stage recently and couldn't help but think, "Ah, that's why the house lands there!" It's all tied together so cleverly.

What of the performances? At the performance I saw, Elphaba was played by Alexia Khadime, who is a diminutive powerhouse and showed no signs of having been up early that day to belt out Defying Gravity on the roof of ITV's This Morning!

Glinda was played by Christine Tucker, who is one of the covers for the role - and highlights the importance of alternates, standbys, and understudies in keeping shows going. She was just delightful with a fabulous singing voice, but above all a great sense of comic timing, which is vital for the role!

The Wizard is played by Michael Fenton Stevens, who brings such a lovely sense of detail and energy to the role, and there's a nice nod to the original in his portrayal.

All in all, Wicked is still defying gravity as it flies into its 19th year and is in fantastic shape.



Wicked - The Musical

Apollo Victoria Theatre, 17 Wilton Road SW1V 1LG

Currently booking until 1st June 2025

wickedthemusical.co.uk

info@apollo.victoria.theatre.co.uk

THE MUSICAL



Wicked Defying Gravity. Photo: Matt Crockett



Back To The Future. BTS. Cory English. Photo: Pamela Raith

BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE MUSICAL!

Great Scott! When I first heard they were turning Back to the Future into a musical, my heart sank a little. How were they going to put a speeding DeLorean on stage, and did it really need to be a musical?

Back to the Future has to be one of the greatest science fiction films of all time - although I do think the second is one of those rare sequels that is actually better than the original (just don't get me started on the third one though!).

Translating a famous film to the stage comes with its two challenges. Firstly, how do you justify it being a stage piece, and how do you add to it to improve on the original and bring something different that can't be achieved by just watching the film?

The show slightly stumbles at this first hurdle as we are essentially presented with the plot of the film with some minor alterations - wisely they excise the terrorists at the beginning but cleverly introduce another cause of jeopardy for Doc. So, Marty has to both ensure that his parents get together and also get back in time to save him.

The second challenge is for the actors. They need to retrofit themselves into existing performances so that they give the audience what they expect whilst bringing, hopefully, something extra above just impersonation.

When I saw this show over a year ago, Doc Brown was played by Broadway & TV actor Roger Bart and Marty McFly by Ollie Dobson - both excellent performances. So, I was interested to see how the current incumbents measure up. Corey English is Doc Brown who, whilst not looking like Christopher Lloyd, vocally nails it and has a fabulous twinkle and sense of comedy! Vasco Emauz, making his professional stage debut as Marty McFly, captures the innocence & charm that Michael J. Fox brought to the role.

There is able support from Orlando Gibb as George McFly who, whilst looking more like Bill Hader, captures the idiosyncrasies, laugh, and physical characteristics of his cinema counterpart.

But does it sing? In addition to the iconic songs from the film and, of course, Alan Silvestri's fabulous score, we now have additional songs with music and lyrics by Silvestri and Glen Ballard. Unfortunately, none of the new songs really add up to much despite the hard work of the cast to sell them. I just sat there most of the time thinking, "Oh, they're going to sing again," which is never a good sign for a musical!

In my view, there are only two worthwhile songs in the show and they both belong to Doc Brown - his act 2 opener which is a great fun number about imagining the future, which doesn't advance the plot one iota, and his song "Dreamers," which is a lovely, wistful song giving a little bit of his backstory. Ultimately, I think this could have worked

just as well as a play in the same way as Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.

This is a show with high production values, but what on earth was happening with the wigs? Most of the men's wigs looked like they had come from a joke shop and had not been glued down properly!

Where the show scores and soars is in the stagecraft and the effects. There is just one car in the show that performs all the amazing tricks, and interestingly it's 80% the size of the actual car! They tried the full-sized version - too big. They tried the half-sized one - too small. What they are able to achieve with a combination of practical stage effects and state-of-the-art projection is quite incredible.

The last 20 minutes is absolutely thrilling as they crosscut between the DeLorean needing to hit 88 miles an hour with Doc Brown at the top of the clock tower trying to reconnect the cable - this happening in front of you makes for some thrilling theatre. This is then topped off with a finale when, like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, you will believe a car can fly!

Interestingly, this musical almost had a completely different outcome. Wunderkind director Jamie Lloyd was originally slated to direct. His vision tends to be with very stripped back minimalist productions in monochrome with heavy use of video - you only need to look at his productions of Sunset Boulevard and Romeo and Juliet to appreciate that.

His vision was ultimately at odds with the writers and creators and he was insistent that Biff didn't sing and wanted to include the skateboard chase - which everyone had considered unsafe and unachievable. Ultimately, they amicably parted ways due to "artistic differences."

Thankfully, the team found a safer pair of hands in John Rando who managed to achieve a balance between honouring the original film and delivering something exciting but achievable on stage.

In short, Back to the Future: The Musical, whilst far from being a great musical, delivers what the audience expects and in the last 20 minutes is really thrilling!

☆☆ as a musical with an additional
☆☆ for the car and stage effects!

Back to the Future: The Musical
Adelphi Theatre, 409-412 Strand WC2R 0NS
Tickets available until July 27th
backtothefuturemusical.com
boxoffice@adelphitheatre.co.uk

Classical Music by Simon Mundy

Recommended Recordings

Simon Mundy (who has been reviewing recordings for nearly 50 years) will recommend a small selection of CDs released recently: no bad notices, just an interesting batch for the serious music lover.



Mozart Piano Concertos 20 (K. 466) and 23 (K. 488)

Il Gardellino
Olga Pashchenko Fortepiano and Leader

Alpha Classics 942

Sometimes, when writing for EyeOnLondon, I discover musicians who may not be big names in London yet but have thoroughly impressive reputations in other countries. One such musician is the early instrument keyboard player, Olga Paschenko, whom I heard when I reviewed her concert at the Cologne Philharmonie's Felix Festival in August. Her recent recording of two of the greatest Mozart concertos is a triumph. On modern pianos, with their lush timbres, Mozart's piano writing can lose its edge and restless energy. On fortepiano (which he would have used), there is a crispness to the sound (halfway between the harpsichord and the later piano) that breathes fresh life into the music. Paschenko is playing a copy of a 1792 Anton Walter instrument by Paul McNulty, the superb craftsman of our time who builds such copies in his workshop in the Czech countryside. Just playing the right instrument is not enough, of course. The interpretation and orchestral contribution have to be as good too. Il Gardellino is one of Flanders' most effective period instrument bands, and with Paschenko directing from the keyboard, the integration is first class. The orchestra matches her attack with emphatic precision. Let's hope this disc becomes part of a full cycle (she has already recorded concertos 9 and 17) because it could be one of the best Mozart initiatives this century.

Domenico Scarlatti *Ma Cantabile: 18 Sonatas*

Tatjana Vorobjova Harpsichord

MDG records MDG 921 2252-6

On that visit to Cologne for EOL, I also heard and met another early music keyboard virtuoso, the Latvian Tatjana Vorobjova. In her CD of Scarlatti sonatas, she is, in a way, doing the opposite of Paschenko in the Mozart. Instead of focusing on attack, she is seeking out the cantabile, singing qualities of the music – not easy to do on the harpsichord which, unlike the piano, cannot hold the sound beyond the strings' natural resonance. Vorobjova brings out the sweetness rather than the explosive cleverness of Scarlatti's writing. He was, after all, composing many of his sonatas not just for himself but for his pupil, Princess Maria Barbara of Braganza, first when she was young in Lisbon and later in Madrid when she became Queen of Spain. Had she been born in our age (and not a princess) she would have been good enough to be a professional. Vorobjova achieves a wonderfully lyrical flow through the pieces, none of them much more than five minutes long, and makes them feel as if they are one continuous work. This is one of those CDs which is perfect, after attentive listening, to have on in the background while trying to think!

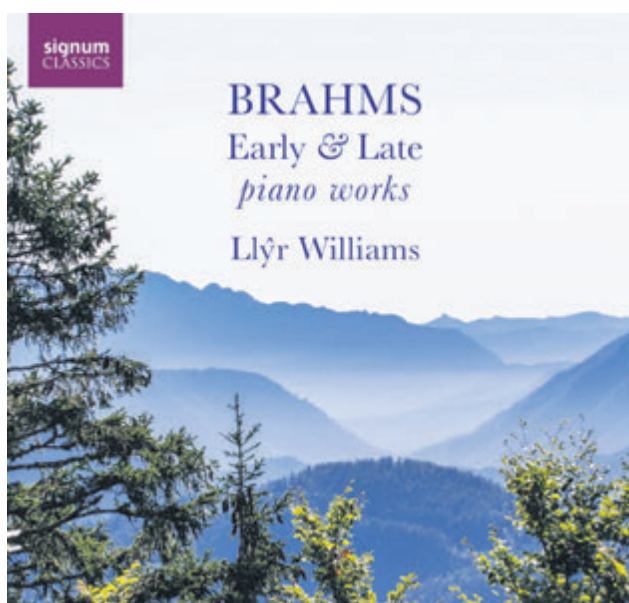


Brahms Early and Late Piano Music

Llŷr Williams Piano

Signum Classics 2 CDs SIGCD916

From early keyboards to the full sumptuous tone of the modern grand piano; Llŷr Williams records in his home country at Wyastone Leys in Gwent. He is a very thoughtful pianist, and these works have been chosen with great skill. He threads the early works among the late ones (from Brahms' fifties) so that the contrast in expression and technique as the composer matured becomes clear because they are not presented chronologically. Perhaps it is my own age influencing me, but I find I much prefer the late ones: the extraordinary series of intermezzi, rhapsodies, and romances that form Op 116 – 119. In the works written in his twenties, like the five movements of Op. 5, Brahms seems too often to be trying desperately to match his much older friend Schumann with fancy technique, and Williams draws deliberate attention to this by including the Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Op. 9, and placing it between the simpler and more direct pieces with more than a hundred opus numbers and thirty years later. Similarly, he follows the Op. 118 pieces with a piano transcription of the theme and variations that form the second movement of the Op.18 String Sextet. This is superb recital building for home listening, and Williams' musical intelligence guides us through it effortlessly.



Meyerbeer *Le Prophète*

Mané Galoyan Soprano
Elizabeth DeShong Mezzo-soprano
John Osborn Tenor
Edwin Crossley-Mercer Bass-baritone
and others

Lyon Opera Chorus
Maitrise des Bouches-du-Rhône
Mediterranean Youth Orchestra
London Symphony Orchestra

Sir Mark Elder Conductor

LSO Live 3 CDs LSO0894

Throughout his time at the Hallé, Mark Elder never abandoned his career as an opera conductor or his love of French music – his recordings of Debussy are particularly fine. Giacomo Meyerbeer (real name Jacob Beer, from Berlin, who studied all over Europe and played the timpani in the premiere of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; rather badly, according to Beethoven) was the link between Rossini and Wagner. In the 1830s and 40s, he carried grand opera in France to its most spectacular heights, while retaining much of the musical language of the earlier couple of decades. *Le Prophète* took Meyerbeer and his perfectly named librettist, Eugène Scribe, ten years to bring to the Paris Opera stage, but when they did, in 1849, their timing was perfect. Its story of religious revolution turning to inhuman tyranny encapsulated Parisian worries after the second of France's revolutions the previous year. Jean de Leiden, a 16th-century Dutch Protestant fanatic in his early twenties, captures the German town of Münster and proclaims himself a prophet-king, disowning his mother and betrothed to gain power, even though it was the behaviour towards them of a feudal Count that had radicalised him in the first place. The cast is very male-dominated, but, despite the grim and brutal story, Meyerbeer balances it with some gorgeous and extended writing for Fidé's mother, sung in the original production by the great singer/composer Pauline Viardot, here by Elizabeth DeShong, and lover-turned-enemy, Berthe (Mané Galoyan). He also finds room for a jolly skater's ballet and one of the most elaborate cathedral scenes ever concocted. The orchestral and choral forces are massive: right up Mark Elder's street in this performance recorded at last year's Aix-en-Provence Festival and released on the LSO's own label. This is the sort of opera that rarely gets staged these days, so it is good to have it in this concert recording with such a well-chosen cast.

Arts & Culture by Simon Tait

Monet and the

There are conflicting versions of the origins of the word Impressionism, describing the mid-19th century movement of mostly French painters, who were to change modern art forever. They exhibited together for the first time in 1874, in a cramped space above a photographer's studio on Boulevard des Capucines. Some say the word came from the title of a painting by the group's most innovative member, Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*. Others attribute the term to a disparaging review of that exhibition by a critic who dismissed Monet's work as "sketchy, giving only the impression of things and not an accurate likeness." The group embraced the name, and there were seven more "Impressionist" exhibitions over the next ten years.

If you're looking for a visual definition of the word, look no further than the exhibition at The Courtauld, which has the most comprehensive collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art in the country—Degas to Seurat, Renoir to Gauguin,

Cézanne to Van Gogh. For this exhibition focusing on just one of them, however, the curators have cast their net worldwide to tell the story with paintings that haven't been displayed together for over a century, and never in this country. Only three of the paintings here are from The Courtauld's own collection; the loans are the result of a four-year search by the exhibition's curator, Karen Serres.

In broad terms, the Impressionists were searching for ways to represent an impression of light in paintings made largely in the open air, but there was so much more to Monet. He would paint the same scene over and over again to capture the revolving nature of his subjects, at different times of the day, in changing weather, in different seasons, recording how impressions could be transformed by changes in the atmosphere.

"More than any other Impressionist artist," says Karen Serres, "Monet was very attentive to how his works were displayed. With his series paintings, he created a whole visual experience from



Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Charing Cross Bridge, the Thames*, 1903, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, Image © Lyon MBA, Photo Alain Basse



Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Waterloo Bridge, Overcast*, 1903, oil on canvas, Ordunogaard, Denmark, Photo Anders Sune Berg



Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Sunlight in the fog*, 1904, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Photo © Grand Palais RMN (musée d'Orsay), Herve Lewandowski

multiple canvases of the same subject, what we would call today an 'installation.' The Courtauld exhibition presents Monet's paintings as he wanted them to be seen."

This series by the mature Monet emerged nearly thirty years into his career, in which time he had struggled for recognition, before this cycle at last established him as France's leading painter at 60. He visited London largely to paint the famous fog, which in winter, engulfed our capital city from the traffic fumes and the sulphur belched into the atmosphere from chimneys on both sides of the Thames. He came to London three times between 1899 and 1903, creating a body of 37 paintings that focused on just three sites – Waterloo Bridge, Charing Cross Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament.

Monet exhibited them in Paris in the spring of 1904 in the gallery of his agent, Paul Durand-Ruel, and it was a phenomenal success. One critic wrote, "This spring 1904... sees the definitive recognition of Monet." He intended to exhibit them in London in 1905 but was unable to borrow back enough of the paintings sold in the original exhibition. So, 120 years later, this is the first time they have been seen as a developing group, as Monet intended, where they could "take on their full value only in the comparison and succession of the entire series." There are 21 paintings here in two rooms, plenty to make his point.

He was fascinated by London's "extraordinary fog, so very yellow," and Monet set himself up a couple of hundred yards from

where the exhibition is, on a top-floor balcony of the Savoy Hotel close to Waterloo Bridge, to capture "some fog effects." It was the first of three extended visits.

He brought 100 canvases back to his studio at Giverny for finishing but almost two-thirds were discarded.

Monet's free yet precise brushstrokes give us some of the infinite variety of the Thames and the architecture on its banks as he watches and hurries to capture what he sees, before the scene has moved on, "... wonderful things, but none lasting more than five minutes, it is enough to drive one mad. No, there is no country more extraordinary for a painter," he told Alice.

These pictures can be seen as a culmination of a stage in Monet's long career – he was to live to be 86 – and the sun he began with still had a transforming influence in many of the images. In the last painting in the exhibition, there is a hint of where his mind was going next. In *Waterloo Bridge, Sunlight Effect of 1903*, the shadow of the bridge is retreating into the mists, while the waters emerge in the foreground to take prominence for the first time, a hint of what Monet would concentrate on after London: water lilies.

Monet and London: Views of the Thames

**The Courtauld Gallery,
Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries
Until 19 January 2025**

courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-monet-and-london-views-of-the-thames/

Infinite Variety of Fog

Health & Wellbeing by Natalie Shanahan

Cheers to Smarter Sips:



A Tactical Guide to Avoiding the Dreaded Hangover!

With Christmas closing in fast it is time to start thinking tactically about our alcohol consumption or face the depressing, sickening aftermath of a hangover. First, we need to understand the perils of alcohol so we can make an informed choice every time we drink.

A number of factors can contribute to hangovers:

Mild Dehydration: Alcohol suppresses the release of vasopressin, a hormone produced by the brain that sends signals to the kidneys, causing them to retain fluid. As a result, alcohol increases urination and excess loss of fluids. This can also lead to inefficient absorption of macronutrients, vitamins, and minerals. In particular, the metabolism of alcohol can deplete vitamin B12, B3, zinc, magnesium, glutathione, and vitamin C. The mild dehydration that results likely contributes to hangover symptoms such as thirst, fatigue, and headaches. Alcohol is converted into toxic metabolites, acetaldehyde and ethanoate, which can cause sweating, nausea, increased heart rate, and headaches.

Disrupted Sleep: People may fall asleep faster after drinking alcohol. However, it is sedation, not true sleep. The brainwaves that occur in normal sleep are absent. The result is fragmented sleep, making it less restorative. Alcohol also blocks our REM sleep. This stage of sleep is critical for numerous aspects of health and wellness, including learning and memory, creativity, rebalancing moods and emotions, recalibrating certain hormone systems, and even lifespan longevity. This contributes to fatigue and lost productivity during a hangover. Long-term, the health consequences are much more severe.

Top Tip: Start drinking earlier in the day—yes, you heard correctly! This takes some discipline, as you must stop earlier too; otherwise, you'll end up in a worse state. This gives your body more time to

metabolise the alcohol out of your system before bed. Some people find that liposomal glutathione, an antioxidant supplement which aids in the elimination of toxic by-products of alcohol, really reduces the effects of the night before. Take some before bed and as soon as you wake. As with any supplement, always seek professional advice. Glutathione is also found in leafy greens, so eating a large spinach and kale salad before drinking can make a big difference. You can even include some in your breakfast the morning after.

Gastrointestinal Irritation: Alcohol directly irritates the lining of the stomach and increases acid release. This can lead to nausea and stomach discomfort. In the intestines, many of the beneficial microbes are destroyed, leading to long-term digestive and immune issues. The gut microbiome also has a strong connection with mental health and well-being.

Top Tip: Make sure you consume a high-fibre meal with fermented foods at least 2 hours before drinking. Think veggies, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, pulses, and potatoes with their skins on. Get fermented foods in the form of live yoghurts, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, or miso soup. Some people find that taking a good-quality probiotic every day helps cope with hangovers.

Inflammation: Alcohol increases inflammation in the body. Inflammation contributes to the malaise that people feel when they are sick, so it may play a role in hangover symptoms as well. Alcohol also disrupts our cytokine system, which plays a role in our immune function. An increase in cytokines, such as IL-2, after drinking causes headaches, fatigue, and memory loss.

Top Tip: Include food high in antioxidants in your pre-drinking meal. Choose fruits and vegetables in a variety of colours. The pigments that make these colours are polyphenols and have anti-inflammatory properties. They are also beneficial for

the microbiome, which in turn can help lower inflammation. Turmeric, green tea, coffee, and dark chocolate can also offer a helping hand. Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids will help lower inflammation—think oily fish like mackerel and salmon, or nuts and seeds. If you can't eat these foods, it is worth investing in a good omega-3 supplement. Look for one high in EPA and DHA. This fatty acid plays a huge role in brain health, so it is worth including it in your diet even if you don't drink alcohol.

Acetaldehyde Exposure: Alcohol metabolism, primarily by the liver, creates the compound acetaldehyde, a toxic, short-lived by-product which contributes to inflammation in the liver, pancreas, brain, gastrointestinal tract, and other organs.

Top Tip: Drink plenty of water. Rehydrate throughout the day before drinking and alternate every alcoholic drink with a glass of water. Cruciferous vegetables, such as sprouts and broccoli, contain a compound called sulforaphane. This speeds up the liver's metabolism of alcohol, so it'll be out of your system sooner. If you drink early in the day and stop earlier, there may even be a chance that most of it will be out of your system before bed, allowing you a restorative sleep.

Mini-withdrawal: While drinking, individuals may feel calmer, more relaxed, and even euphoric, but the brain quickly adjusts to those positive effects as it tries to maintain balance. As a result, when the buzz wears off, people can feel more restless and anxious than before they drank.

Top Tip: Being aware of the psychological effects of alcohol on your mood might be enough of a deterrent for some. If not, then remind yourself that it is just the Saturday night cocktails that are dragging down your Tuesday mood. Life wouldn't feel this bad had you not drunk. Even dealing with very stressful or sad situations can be exacerbated after drinking. Prioritising a healthy diet and quality regular sleep will

help attenuate the day's devastation alcohol can cause. Arrange to meet friends or family who cheer you up over the next two days after drinking, but don't go for drinks with them! A walk in nature is a wonderful way to get fresh air full of polyphenols and other healthy plant compounds that really uplift your well-being.

It is difficult to predict how many drinks will cause a hangover as everyone's biological make-up is so different, but if you drink to intoxication, there is a chance of a hangover. The best bet is to abstain, and with so many good non-alcoholic options now available, it is easier than ever!

There are more calories in one gram of alcohol (7 cal) than in a gram of protein or carbohydrate (4 cal each). This makes it a much more attractive energy source for the body, which wants to process all of the alcohol in the system before it even touches the food that is also waiting to be digested.

Once the alcohol has been eliminated, the body will slowly work its way through sugar and simple carbohydrates before finally beginning to burn fat. To compound this effect, the body considers ethanol a toxin and will shut down all other metabolic pathways until the alcohol is out of your system. This can take up to 36 hours! That is a day and a half without fat burning. If you are on a calorie-restricted weight-loss diet and remain in calorie deficit despite the alcohol, you will still lose weight. However, up to 75% of this weight loss will come from lean muscle mass! The lower your muscle mass, the lower your basal metabolic rate, and the more likely you are to put on fat in the long term.

The fact that alcohol metabolism trumps all other metabolic processes is a huge consideration for women in perimenopause and beyond. Alcohol is a toxin that has to be eliminated by the liver. Oestrogen is also deactivated in the liver. Alcohol and oestrogen compete to be metabolised, and alcohol wins, meaning oestrogen metabolism is negatively affected. Perimenopausal women frequently have fluctuating oestrogen levels, which can cause a variety of symptoms. Alcohol is an endocrine disruptor and interferes with oestrogen and testosterone metabolism, which can worsen oestrogen disruptions. In practical terms, this means all symptoms of perimenopause will be enhanced! In men, alcohol reduces testosterone levels, which has a whole slew of other health issues that warrant their own entire article.

Alcohol will increase the risk and severity of cancer, heart problems, liver disease, osteoporosis (already a risk factor in menopause), type 2 diabetes, and autoimmune diseases. Alcohol destabilises blood sugar levels and skyrockets the risk of dementia.

To some degree, we all know that total abstinence from alcohol is best. The scientific community now agrees that there is no safe amount of alcohol. However, most of us still enjoy a drink regardless of our knowledge about the perils of alcohol. My hope for this article is to provide you with the knowledge so that each drink is an informed choice and to give you the tools to limit the detrimental health consequences, making your Friday night fun even more enjoyable.

For more in-depth insights on the science behind alcohol and health, visit the NHS guide on alcohol health risks.



Travel by Mike Pickup

Images © Mike Pickup



Twin Pitons

“There are no straight roads in St Lucia”, said George, as we drove away from St Lucia’s Hewanorra airport. Roads on this Caribbean island, with mountains rising to over three thousand feet, are more like those in the Alps. It takes over two hours to drive from one end of the twenty-six-mile-long island to the other.

Fortunately, for those of us with more modest resources, there are over three hundred hotel rooms and suites scattered around the extensive grounds, plus an ‘all-inclusive’ package, allowing us to enjoy the same facilities. And what amazing facilities they are!

GEOGRAPHY

St Lucia’s mountainous terrain was caused by erupting lava and the image of twin Pitons is the one that is most associated with the island. Climbing them has become an international attraction and there are races to see who can do it the fastest.

The airport is in the south of the island but many hotels are in the north. The ninety-minute transfer gives guests an opportunity to see the island in more detail, from rural scenes to the busy,

traffic-jammed streets of the capital, Castries.

St Lucia was originally settled by the French in 1660. Fought over by the British and French, it changed hands fourteen times until 1814, leaving the British in control. As a result, the official language is English but French-based Creole is widely spoken; cars drive on the left, as in Britain, but the town names are in French.

ACCOMMODATION

Home for my stay was StolenTime, a lovely hotel on Malabar Beach. It’s close to Castries and the small George F. L. Charles Airport used by inter-island flights, but its proximity did not affect the tranquillity of the hotel. The hundred guest rooms ranged from garden view to beach front. I was in a pool-side room just a short distance from the beach. It housed a huge bed, comfortable chairs, a desk, two wardrobes and a chest of drawers. It led directly to the bathroom which contained a large tub, ‘his and hers’ wash basins and a separate shower. There were tea and coffee making facilities that were regularly topped up as well as an iron, ironing board and umbrella. Well, you do get the occasional tropical storm!

Electricity in St Lucia is the standard 240v and UK square-pin plugs, so I didn’t need my adaptor. Outside the room my terrace had patio-style sofas, cushions and a huge sunshade

The hotel’s cool and relaxing main terrace restaurant faced the beach. Alternatives were the a-la-carte Malabar Beach Club for lunch and dinner right on the beach, whilst Thyme, the hotel’s only indoor restaurant, was ideal for an intimate dinner for two. For pre-dinner drinks the Champagne Bar was always popular and after dinner it stayed open until the last guest left.

The hotel was one of the most relaxing and peaceful places I have stayed in, helped by the genuinely happy staff and the fact that there are no TVs in the bedrooms or public rooms. The only TV was in the gym.

However, relaxed doesn’t mean bored. In addition to the main island experiences, the hotel offers a vast range of activities, from cookery demonstrations to archery lessons, and loads of water sports that include diving, hobie cats and kayaks. There is also a spa, gym and tennis courts which are floodlit. You can sit and read a book in complete peace and quiet or fill every minute of the day with activities.

OUT AND ABOUT

Whilst it was tempting to do just that, the island is certainly worth exploring. Perhaps the most popular visitor attraction is chocolate making, so on a visit to the 120-year-old Howelton Estate I gave it a try. Grinding the coffee beans in a mortar and pestle was energetic but satisfying and soon the chocolate mix was liquid and shiny. I decided to add a little mint before it was poured into a mould and popped into the fridge. After enjoying a cold Piton beer, my now solid home-made chocolate bar was expertly wrapped for me to take home.

The island has a huge variety of vegetation and wild life. I enjoyed the Lushan Country Life trail where an expert guide pointed out herbs and plants and explained their medicinal and culinary uses. He also

showed me early cooking devices known as coal pots, and scooped up huge, friendly black and yellow caterpillar with orange feet that happened to pass by. The Tet Paul nature trail offered more information on plant life and, at the top, a stunning view of the sea and the twin Pitons for which the island is famous.

St Lucia owes its mountainous geography to lava erupting from the sea bed. Just outside Soufriere I visited the Caribbean’s only ‘drive-in volcano’, an area with bubbling and steaming sulphur springs and hot grey pools. Visitors can also use the mud baths where, having been artistically covered in volcanic mud, they can soak in naturally heated pools – a process designed to leave the skin fresh and smooth. Don’t forget your swimwear.

Another fascinating trip was on an aerial tram through the pleasantly cool mountain rain forest. A guide explained the vegetation as well as spotting a few humming birds along the way. In fact the island is a bird-spotters paradise with over 180 species to be found. They include black finches, orioles and six species that can be found only on the island.

Under the banner of Community Tourism, the tourist authority has launched a number of initiatives to persuade tourists to spend more time getting to know the country and to bring welcome additional revenue to the locals. The Kabawe Krawl is a tour of specially selected local bars to sample St Lucia’s culture, food and drink and meet the locals; ‘Kabawe’ is the Creole word for a rum shop. It’s a good job a driver is included.

My visit was over far too soon as George drove me back to the airport. I was left with memories of a unique Caribbean island, mountains, lush greenery, winding roads and, above all, genuinely friendly people who were always ready to help and chat. Just don’t get them started on cricket!

For more information on St Lucia, visit www.stlucia.org



Malabar Beach



CROSS CODE

Grid for Cross Code puzzle with numbers 1-26 indicating starting points for letters.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Control grid for Cross Code puzzle with letters C, O, G.

Each number in our Cross Code grid represents a different letter of the alphabet. You have three letters in the control grid to start you off.

As you get the letters, fill in other squares with the same number in the main grid and control grid.

MAGIC SQUARE

OK, NICE VOWEL LINKS

Using all 16 letters of the phrase above, form four words each of four letters which will fit in the grid to form a magic square in which the words can be read both horizontally and vertically.

4x4 grid for Magic Square puzzle.

Quiz Challenge

- 1. To the nearest mile, what is the distance of the marathon athletics event?
2. The ill-fated Titanic belonged to which shipping line?
3. An apiculturist produces which type of foodstuff?
4. What popular name is given to the opening day of the grouse shooting season?
5. In the 2021 series of Strictly Come Dancing, newsreader Dan Walker was partnered with which professional dancer?
6. The 2021 film The Harder They Fall, starring Idris Elba, is what genre of movie?
7. The songs Hopelessly Devoted to You and Beauty School Dropout feature in which popular musical?
8. Which British seabird nests in earth burrows on clifftops?
9. Nunavut is an Inuit territory created in 1999 in which country?
10. In the Ray Bradbury novel Fahrenheit 451, what is outlawed and destroyed if found?

NONAGRAM

3x3 grid for Nonagram puzzle with letters T, E, O, R, M, E, O, N, M.

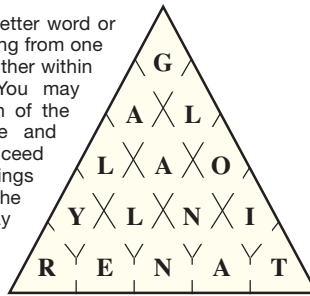
How many words of four letters or more can you make from this Nonagram? Each word must use the central letter, and each letter may be used only once.

Guidelines: 22 Good; 26 Very Good; 30 Excellent.

Any word found in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (Tenth Edition) is eligible with the following exceptions: proper nouns; plural nouns, pronouns and possessives; third person singular verbs; hyphenated words; contractions and abbreviations; vulgar slang words; variant spellings of the same word (where another variant is also eligible).

WORD PYRAMID

Spell out a 15-letter word or phrase by moving from one chamber to another within the pyramid. You may only enter each of the chambers once and may only proceed through openings in the walls.



FIVE ALIVE

5x5 grid for Five Alive puzzle with letters RA, CI, GT, HE, TD, AB, UI, EI, NO, EL, RD, EV, RE, UC, AN, NG, HT, UA, LS, TL, EY.

Here are two miniature five-square crosswords using the same grid - but the letters have been mixed up. You have to work out which letters belong to which crossword.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

Grid for Cryptic Crossword puzzle with numbers 1-23 indicating starting points.

ACROSS

- 1. Unseemly fraction? (8)
6. Need to be deficient (4)
8. Decline for three months in America (4)
9. Making a recovery in motor sport (8)
10. One is inclined to have trouble getting a safe foothold on this (8,5)
11. Diving bird endlessly brings back a large lump of ice (4)
13. Clip the weed (4)
17. Call when one least expects it (8,5)
20. Breaking suddenly with two sharp sounds (8)
21. Went down with all hopes dashed (4)
22. Read about beloved (4)
23. Environmentalist will escape from garden pest (8)

DOWN

- 2. Paltry meals are arranged before the end of the day (6)
3. Slip back after doing some more laps easily (7)
4. Another super bag of money (5)
5. Journalist following race broadcast (7)
6. True alloy melted down (5)
7. A name found in imitation of overhanging covering (6)
12. Moving effortlessly despite lack of power (7)
14. Red margins in study (7)
15. Pest is leaving a subtle difference (6)
16. Sailors did go around the left of skirt (6)
18. Quietly copy Rex's thesis (5)
19. A birdie? Yes and no (5)

QUICK CROSSWORD

Grid for Quick Crossword puzzle with numbers 1-33 indicating starting points.

ACROSS

- 1. Revival (7)
5. Foundation (5)
8. Biblical priest (3)
9. Silky fabric (7)
10. Denims (5)
11. Sound alike (5)
13. Difficult to find (7)
15. Skin condition (4)
17. Die (6)
19. Peg (6)
22. Church recess (4)
24. Seems (7)
26. Large bird (5)

DOWN

- 29. Taint (anag.) (5)
30. Fall apart (7)
31. Expression of surprise (3)
32. Tea container (5)
33. Diplomatic building (7)
1. Revolving arm (5)
2. Agile (inf.) (5)
3. On the other hand (7)
4. Heavy (6)
5. Trinket (5)
6. Rocking (7)

- 7. Questionable (7)
12. Tint (3)
14. In smaller quantity (4)
16. Freshwater fish (4)
17. Synthetic material (7)
18. Alleged (7)
20. Disturb (7)
21. Be in debt (3)
23. Soul (6)
25. Irritate (5)
27. Feelings (inf.) (5)
28. Impoverished (5)

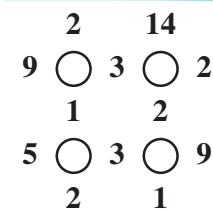
SUDOKU

Each row and each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9, and so must each 3 x 3 box.

9x9 grid for Sudoku puzzle (Easy).

9x9 grid for Sudoku puzzle (Hard).

EQUALISER



Place the four signs (add, subtract, multiply, divide) one in each circle so that the total of each across and down line is the same.

This puzzle page is supplied by Sirius Media Services Ltd. To try our new puzzle, Zygolex, go to www.zygolex.com

SOLUTIONS

(1) ACROSS - Right; Nerve; Hasty. (2) ACROSS - Ranch; Gums; Teeny. DOWN - About; Tidal; Dirge. NONAGRAM - Canopy; 2 Measly; 3 Relapse; 4 Pursue; 5 Relayed; 6 Loyal; 7 Dear; 23 Greenfly. WORD PYRAMID - National Gallery. FIVE ALIVE - 8 Glorious Twelfth; 4 Honey; 3 Honey; 2 The White Star Line; 5 Nadiya Bychkova; 6 Western; 7 Grease; 8 Perturb; 21 Owe; 23 Psyche; 25 Annoy; 27 Vibes; 28 Needy.



FIDE's GOATs

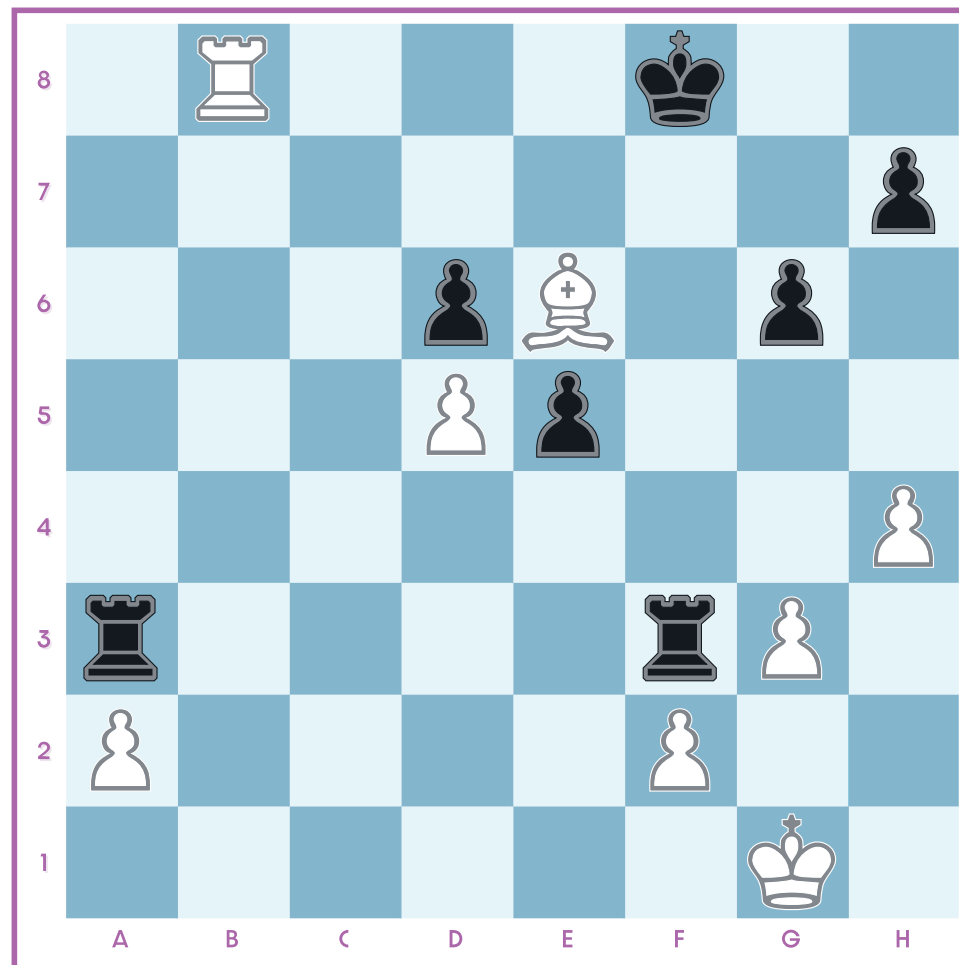
This year FIDE celebrated its 100th centenary year with the following statement: "The International Chess Federation proudly announces a series of awards to honour those who have made exceptional contributions to the world of chess in the past 100 years!" Its President, Arkady Dvorkovich, said, "As we celebrate our centennial, we wanted to give recognition to those who have made chess what it is today and what it represents for the future. We hope that these awards will inspire future generations to take up chess and bring the game to new heights"

The awards were given in 19 categories, assigned to specific nominations and voting criteria. August 15th was the deadline for nominations, and some of the categories were as follows: Best Male Player, Best Female Player, Male Arbiter, Female Arbiter, FIDE Trainer 100 Years Award (male and female, in separate categories), Best Male Team, Best Female Team, Advocate for Women in Chess, and the Presidential Award. All very commendable with the structural organising elements in place: "...while some recipients will be chosen by a distinguished panel of chess grandmasters, historians and educators, others will be determined through public voting." (Nobody asked me?) "The winners of the FIDE 100 Awards were (will) be announced during the 45th FIDE Chess Olympiad held in Budapest this September."

FIDE was officially formed on 20th July 1924, in Paris, during the first unofficial Chess Olympiad. It was one of the first international sports federations and was founded at the Town Hall of the IX Arrondissement, 6 Rue Drouot, Paris, where 15 delegates from all over the world signed its inauguration charter. Please note the word "sport" in its title, which countries worldwide acknowledge (except this country, plus a few more) that enables it to receive central government grants from the ministries of sport and culture! Rachel Reeves, please wake up!

Judit Polgar was awarded the Best Female Player in the History of the Game, GOAT, and Magnus Carlsen, the Best All-Time Male Player in the History of the Game, another GOAT. He was one of the youngest players in history to gain the GM title in 2004 at the ripe old age of 13 (!), successfully defended his World Chess Championship title 5 times, and achieved the highest ever chess rating of 2882 in May 2014, a record that still stands.

Garry Kasparov became the youngest ever undisputed World Chess Champion in 1985 at the age of 22 by defeating Anatoly Karpov. Although the forthcoming championship between Gukesh and Liren may provide a considerably younger champion if Gukesh is successful! Kasparov, born in Baku, Azerbaijan on April 13th, 1963, recognised globally as one of the two, if not three, greatest players that have ever lived, also became a thorn in the Russian side, even announcing the latter's intentions of invading the countries bordering its edges, such as Ukraine, long before the international press outlets had even thought about it. His book Winter is Coming forewarned the world of Russia's intentions and particularly urged Western countries to prepare for war of some kind! His outspoken and controversial criticisms



The Challenge

The chess puzzle is taken from the recent Late-Titled-Tuesday-Blitz-October 2024 and has Magnus Carlsen 3294 Black v Mikaelyan Arman 2895 White in a whirl of fast play as their game concludes. White has played 38. Rb8+, what was Black's response and what was a trap Black needed to avoid?

The solution is below

of Russia's expansionist strategies, human rights issues, and Russian hegemony over its controlling arm for decades over FIDE's management made him a pariah in all but name at the height of his fame. He had the longest reign in recent times as World Champion from 1985 to 1993, when a split occurred with FIDE, and Kasparov dominated as The Classical World Champion until he lost to Vladimir Kramnik in 2000 at the Riverside Studios, London, where I was the official artist for the tournament and had a one-person exhibition simultaneously at that venue.

Kasparov achieved the highest ever ELO rating, reaching 2851 in July 1999, a record that stood until 2013. A prolific author and trainer, writing influential books on chess, he remains a prominent figure in chess education and training. Other contenders for the title included Anand, Fischer, Capablanca, Tal, Lasker, Karpov, Alekhine, and Botvinnik. It would be useful to remember that chess has expanded far beyond our imagination with the advent and advancements of the computer, but also software programs that have enhanced the learning processes that AI has brought to chess, giving in-depth analysis of games far beyond the human mind's strength at work previously. Games, for example, played at the highest international levels that previously had been declared draws, when analysed by AI, showed a forced win for one side by making the best moves possible after 70 or 80 more moves.

Kasparov was at the beginning of these

litmus tests of times; Magnus Carlsen came to reap the benefits of this harvest of silicon hard and software understanding. This in-depth ability of computer analysis and its effects on playable variations of well-known, and not-so-well-known, openings and defences not tried before gives newer and younger present-day players, even the very young aged 10 or thereabouts, opportunities for chess expertise not even imagined or contemplated 30 years ago. That dividing line comes between Kasparov and Carlsen, and although the former, later in his most powerful years, entered into the beginnings of the high-tech machinations, nothing existed that can compare to the new world of chess understanding that Carlsen came to inherit.

It is for this latter reason that I find giving the GOAT FIDE 100 Year Award to just one person, Magnus Carlsen, and not to both Kasparov and Carlsen as a joint award is flawed!

The model used by FIDE to give only one person the award is too restrictive and not inclusive enough of time and circumstance, as mentioned above! Of course, Kasparov's strong, stinging criticism of Russia's aggressive international attitudes and the hold and influence it has had over FIDE itself and its management of world chess events may also (undoubtedly) have played a part in arriving at their GOAT award, denying his rightful place alongside Carlsen's.

Various comments have ensued following FIDE's award announcements, not least from Carlsen himself at the award ceremony,

mentioning Kasparov in his acceptance speech. Further considerations mentioned by Carlsen in relation to the award and in connection with the "greatest ever" accolade accorded to him are countered with, "No, it is still Garry!" Carlsen believes that when his career is done he may have a different idea about it? He says there are probably only 3 players, if Bobby Fischer is included, alongside himself and Kasparov, with legitimate claims, but being regarded as "the greatest ever" doesn't really consume much of my day-to-day thinking! He has recently taken up golf—"you ain't got that thing if you ain't got that swing" syndrome—but claims, "Honestly, I hate losing at chess; whenever I lose an important game, it still stings. But, I think that's a good thing. It shows I still want it! It shows that I still care."

The recent Speed Chess Championship in Paris, with a live audience, also gave Carlsen the opportunity to amend the result of the infamous game he played against Hans Niemann a couple of years back, which resulted in allegations of cheating followed by a \$100 million lawsuit! Chess.com, which was also charged with spreading libellous allegations at the time, organised this tournament. This was the first time the two had met over the board since that infamous moment and was eagerly watched by a huge number of fans of both players! Needless to say, Carlsen was in imperious form and whitewashed his opponent in the early part of the match, "only taking his foot off the gas" in the final stages of their match but winning comfortably.

Finally, I conclude my article, moving between the two B's, Brain and Bottom, to a recent story emanating out of China about match-fixing and gambling, and the use of computers to obtain an unfair advantage. One of the stars of Chinese chess, Wang Tianyi, the number 1 in world rankings for over 11 years, and another grandmaster, Wang Yuefei, have been banned from playing the sport and are said to be facing criminal charges! Both Wangs had earned millions of yuan in Chinese national leagues. Gambling is also a crime in China and often accompanies game and match-fixing. I wrote a similar article in the past about two of China's top snooker players who were also charged with irregularities similarly and found guilty and punished and banned from playing for some considerable length of time. Again, the Chinese regime came down hard on the chairman of the Chinese Football Association, the former National Coach, and more senior figures in the management of football recently who have all been jailed for giving or taking bribes to fix games.

Going from Brain to Bottom to conclude the final end of this sporting story, it appears that last Dec a tournament winner named Yan Chenglong had his hotel bathtub examined as he "had defecated in it and failed to clean it up". His prize money was forfeited and title revoked, but worse was a wide rumour that electronic beads inserted into his anus communicated playing codes to him from a chess computer during his games! The Chinese appear to be way behind the best the West has to offer in this area!

The Solution

38. Rb8+, Ke7. 39. Rb7+, Kd8! Avoiding Kf6 as Rf7 is checkmate!
40. Rd7+, Ke8. 41. Rxd6, Rxa2.
42. Rb6, Rfxf2. 43. d6, Rfb2. 0-1.



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