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EYE ON LONDON

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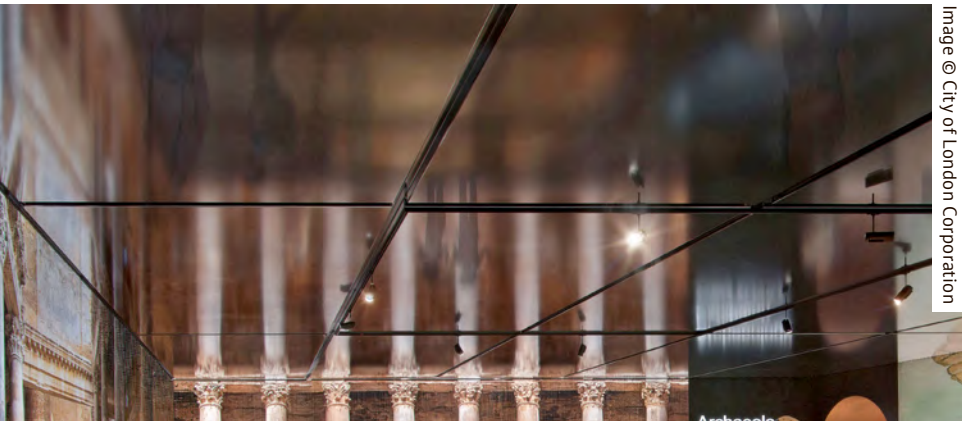


Image © City of London Corporation

Roman Ruins and Rooftop Parks: Two Landmark Towers Approved for the City of London



The City of London has approved two major skyscraper developments, one at 63 St Mary's Axe and another at 85 Gracechurch Street, set to deliver over 110,000 square metres of Grade A office space, 6,500 new jobs, and surprising public benefits including green space and Roman archaeology.

Backed by the City Corporation's Planning Applications Sub-Committee, the towers form part of the Eastern Cluster and support the "Destination City" strategy to make the Square Mile a vibrant seven-day destination.

At 85 Gracechurch Street, developers have redesigned the scheme to include permanent public access to an unearthed

section of the Roman Forum-Basilica, one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in recent years. A dedicated exhibition space will bring the remains to life for visitors.

Over at 63 St Mary's Axe, the approved 45-storey tower will introduce Camomile Park, a pedestrian-friendly green space featuring elevated walkways, 76 new trees, and retail and cultural spaces on the lower floors. It also preserves a historic section of the London Wall.

Chair of Planning Tom Sleight called the proposals "standout schemes" that will "cement the City's status as the engine room of the UK economy" while opening up its heritage to the public.

A major regeneration plan approved by the City of London Corporation is set to transform the Smithfield and Barbican areas over the next three decades, reshaping 70 acres of land in and around the Square Mile. Announced on 26th June, the project forms part of the Corporation's long-term Destination City strategy to create a thriving seven-day-a-week cultural and commercial hub.

Central to the plan is the redevelopment of the Grade II* listed Smithfield Market buildings and the Rotunda, which will sit alongside the new London Museum. Together, they are expected to become a new cultural anchor for the City.

The newly appointed regeneration team will also lead the redevelopment of nearby sites including the London Wall West offices, new visitor destinations near the London Museum, and the wider Dagenham Dock and Billingsgate areas, with the potential to create thousands of jobs and homes.

The Corporation is also working with market traders on relocation plans following the cancelled move to Dagenham. Most Smithfield and Billingsgate traders have agreed to transition together, with financial and logistical support in place.

The regenerated Smithfield is projected to draw over 1.4 million visitors a year and redefine the City's identity for the next generation.



Image © City of London Corporation

Smithfield and Barbican to Undergo 30-Year Transformation



Image © City of London Corporation

Shakespeare's Signature and 16th-Century London Map Go on Show at The London Archives

A rare signature by William Shakespeare, one of only six verified in existence, will go on public display from 30th June at The London Archives in Clerkenwell. The free exhibition, *Shakespeare in London*, runs until 25th September and offers a unique glimpse into the playwright's life and the city he knew.

The signature appears on a 1613 deed for a Blackfriars property, believed to be an investment purchase just minutes from the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. The house was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, but the document survives as one of the most

tangible connections to the writer.

Alongside the deed is the Civitas Londinum map (c.1633), a detailed panorama of 16th-century London, showing everything from St Paul's Cathedral to laundry fields beyond the city walls. Only three versions of this map are known to exist.

Also on display is a facsimile of the First Folio annotated by poet John Keats in 1808, giving visitors a rare insight into how one literary great responded to another.

The exhibition is free to attend. To book your visit and view the signature up close, head to The London Archives.

N News



More Tube stations get high-speed mobile coverage

Passengers on the London Underground can now access high-speed 4G and 5G coverage on more sections of the network, as TfL and Boldyn Networks continue expanding mobile connectivity across the Tube.

Recent installations have extended coverage along the Northern line, with mobile signal now available between Balham and South Wimbledon, including Kennington, Oval, Tooting Broadway and South Wimbledon stations. On the Victoria line, coverage is rolling out between Vauxhall and Pimlico, adding to previously extended coverage up to King's Cross St Pancras. The Elizabeth line already offers full 4G access.

These updates now provide continuous mobile coverage between South Wimbledon and Stockwell on the Northern line. TfL plans to expand this further

south to Morden and north to Kennington by the end of summer. Coverage is also being introduced for the first time on the Bank branch of the Northern line between Euston and Bank, with more mobile networks joining this section soon.

In the coming months, mobile coverage will also begin along the Jubilee line, starting at Swiss Cottage and connecting with existing coverage at Westminster. Additional major stations such as Green Park and King's Cross St Pancras, and Victoria line sections from Green Park to Brixton, are set to gain coverage.

All four UK mobile network operators, Three UK, EE, Vodafone, and Virgin Media O2, are participating. The network will also support the Emergency Services Network (ESN), improving communication for front-line responders during critical incidents.

Investment announced to revitalise London high streets

Twelve London boroughs, including Newham, Islington and Barking and Dagenham, are set to receive £50,000 each as part of a new £600,000 investment aimed at revitalising local high streets. The funding comes through the Mayor of London's High Street Place Labs (HSPL) programme and will be distributed over the next year.

The initiative supports the goals of the London Growth Plan, published earlier this year, which seeks to drive inclusive economic growth and productivity across the capital. With around 90 per cent of Londoners living within 10 minutes of a high street, the programme aims to help local areas adapt to changing economic conditions and community needs.

Councils will use the funding to attract investment, improve public spaces, and boost local economies. Planned actions include creating more affordable

workspaces for sectors like the creative and green industries, repurposing empty shops and buildings for business or community use, and improving accessibility on high streets.

Other priorities include developing safe, inclusive, and child-friendly public spaces, increasing step-free access, and expanding the evening and night-time economy.

Specific proposals vary across boroughs. Newham will focus on making East Ham High Street more walkable and climate-resilient. Islington plans to improve access to its night-time venues, while Barking and Dagenham aim to enhance public spaces by involving residents and businesses in redesign efforts and highlighting local culture and heritage.

The HSPL programme marks a step forward in strengthening high streets as vital social and economic hubs throughout London.



Enhanced police presence in London town centres over summer

London's high streets and town centres will see increased police and local authority activity this summer as part of a coordinated effort to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. The initiative builds on reductions already achieved this year in key crime areas such as theft, burglary, robbery, and retail offences.

The Metropolitan Police have identified 32 town centres and high street locations with the highest levels of anti-social behaviour, theft, and street crime. These areas, including Stratford, Croydon Town Centre, Shepherd's Bush Green, Elephant and Castle, Seven Sisters, Woolwich Town Centre, Finsbury Park, and the West End, will be the focus of enhanced operations.

All boroughs will benefit from the initiative, with measures including increased police patrols, plain-clothed operations in crime hotspots, and a targeted approach

to catching prolific offenders, particularly those responsible for shoplifting and anti-social behaviour. Authorities aim to pursue long sentences and Criminal Behaviour Orders for repeat offenders.

This "Safer Summer Streets" programme is a collaborative effort between the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), the Met, local councils, businesses, and community organisations. It includes the use of shared data to identify and address issues quickly and the use of local authority powers such as licensing, parking control, CCTV, waste management, and trading standards to deter crime.

So far this financial year, London has seen an 18.1% drop in knife crime, a 17.7% reduction in residential burglary, and a 15.6% fall in theft from the person. Shoplifting case resolutions have risen by 163%.



N News

Heathrow charges anger airlines

Airlines have expressed anger at Heathrow Airport's proposal to raise passenger charges as part of an investment plan to handle an additional 10 million passengers annually by 2031. The airport wants to set passenger charges at an average of £33.26 between 2027-31, compared with what it said was an average of £28.46 between 2022-26. Airlines however reject this figure.

"Heathrow is already the most expensive airport in the world and this proposal demonstrates Heathrow's inability to invest capital wisely and efficiently," a Virgin Atlantic spokesperson said.

But the airport has hit back. "Our

customers want us to improve our international rankings further, as do we," Heathrow chief executive Thomas Woldbye said. "To compete with global hubs, we must invest." Heathrow is the busiest airport in Europe, seeing over 83.9 million passengers travelling via its terminals in 2024. It has just seen its busiest May on record.

The Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL)'s 2027-2031 £10bn business proposal has been submitted to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The body will determine the cap on per-passenger landing charges that airports must pay to land at Heathrow. The costs of these charges are passed on to passengers through their fares.



Britain's F-35 programme hit with delays

Britain's most advanced warplane programme has been fraught with delays, gaps in infrastructure, and personnel shortages, threatening to undermine the nation's combat capabilities, the National Audit Office (NAO) said.

The F-35 stealth jet used by the RAF is, according to the watchdog, "significantly superior" to all previous aircraft. But the NAO warned that there has been a "disappointing return" on the £11 billion spent so far on the programme, adding that it estimates that plans to expand the fleet would end up costing more than triple MoD forecasts.

A spokesperson for the MoD said that

the programme is within its "approved budget," adding that there would be two full squadrons of the plane for deployment by the year's end. As of June 2025, there are 37 F-35s in service, being deployed from the Royal Navy's two aircraft carriers.

Being technologically superior to all previous British fighter jets, the F-35, made by US company Lockheed Martin, hopes to remain in service until 2069. But last year, its "full mission rate," or its ability to fulfil every mission it is needed for, was only a third of the MoD target.

Plans to equip it with weapons that can attack targets on the ground from a safe range, allowing it to keep its stealth capabilities, are delayed until the next decade.



Image credit Swanage News

900 miles of UK coastline protected by National Trust

Nearly 900 miles of coastline in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are now "protected for the nation thanks to the generosity of the UK public," the National Trust has announced. Thanks to new detailed mapping, the charity has revealed that it looks after 896 miles of coast, over a tenth of the total coastline of the three countries, "on behalf of the nation."

This comes on the 60th anniversary of the Trust's major coast campaign, Enterprise Neptune, one of Europe's longest-running environmental campaigns, and considered one of the most successful endeavours in the charity's 130-year history.

Since its inception in 1965 to tackle the rising threat of overdevelopment of the coast, the campaign has raised more than £114 million from donations, many

of which had been left as gifts in people's wills. Three-quarters of the nearly 900 miles under the care of the Trust since its founding had been acquired through Enterprise Neptune.

The anniversary is being marked by the Trust as it announces its latest coastline acquisition, a stretch of grassland in Swanage in Dorset, which the charity says "fills the final gap in an important length of coastline cared for by the charity."

Some of the recent acquisitions include a former coastal golf course in Lincolnshire, and a "picturesque" stretch of cliffs at Tintagel in Cornwall. Other "landmark" sites saved include fields atop the White Cliffs of Dover, bought after an appeal backed by Dame Vera Lynn in 2017 raised £1m in just a few weeks.

Brazil paves parts of the Amazon for COP30 climate summit



As the Brazilian city of Belém in the state of Pará prepares to host COP30 this November, a four-lane highway slicing through one of its last intact urban rainforest, the irony has not been lost to residents or activists.

The Avenida Liberdade, officially 13 km long, was conceived long before the bid to host COP30 was won. Yet its rapid construction, starting in mid-2024, has alarmed experts and residents alike, who see it as a textbook case of greenwashing and hypocrisy. The highway cuts through a protected Environmental Protection Area (EPA) established in 1993, an area the size of Manhattan, previously dense with rainforest to cushion the city's edge.

Despite the state government of Pará insisting that the route was necessary to relieve traffic congestion. Satellite imagery and journalist accounts show heavy machinery carving through rainforest, leaving log piles and open earth. Even though the project's origins trace back to 2012 and initial approval in 2020, environmentalists note that the decision-making accelerated in 2023, just after the city of Belém secured hosting rights.

Unlike major traffic corridors, the highway runs atop embankments with no local access, and is flanked by walls, meaning residents cannot even use it to reach Belém's centre for urgent needs.

Scientists are equally dire in their warnings. The highway threatens to "fragment crucial biodiversity hotspots," intercepting animal migration routes and splitting forest habitat into disconnected parcels. Among those affected are white-throated toucans, squirrel monkeys, capuchins, and endangered plant species, now caught on either side of a concrete divide.

"From the moment deforestation starts, there is a loss," Wildlife vet Professor Silvia Sardinha said. "This highway will reduce safe areas for animals to be released back into the wild. Land animals will no longer be able to cross freely, limiting their breeding and survival."

Though the government proclaims it includes 24 wildlife crossings, bicycle lanes, solar-powered lighting, and noise barriers, going as far to call it a "sustainable highway," critics argue such devices are inadequate and may help legitimise irreversible damage.

The contrast is striking: deforesting parts of the rainforest to build infrastructure for a climate summit hosted in the Amazon. COP30 President-designate André Correa do Lago has framed "a COP in the Amazon, not a COP about the Amazon," intending to demonstrate Brazil's climate credentials. President Lula, meanwhile, claims this event will strengthen forest protection.

But local activists and civil society see a different outcome. Nearby communities say they were bypassed completely in planning. Some have even feared the possibility of future forced displacement from lands their families have called home for generations.

The highway being designed with walls on either side of the road could also separate communities and prevent residents from travelling across, an inconvenience that commercial and long-distance travellers would not have to face.

Local protests and legal actions have arisen, but court rulings have largely affirmed state approval and paved the way forward. The state insists no future constructions will be allowed along its margins, but similar promises have historically eroded under urban expansion.

Can the COP's legacy truly be climate-positive if it paves the way through standing rainforest? Will this project, intoned as "modernisation," instead further marginalise the very voices COP claims to uplift?

For many communities, the warning is clear. The trees in this stretch will have consequences across food systems, cultural traditions, and ecological stability. Meanwhile, the "sustainable highway" continues to be built, with trees being felled at a pace to ensure it's completed in time for the summit.

As the world's diplomats descend on Belém this November to sign new climate pledges, they will witness a paradox on their doorstep. The Amazon is central to global climate resilience. But if parts of it are destroyed to create a highway, COP30's legacy will not be the one it had intended.



Travel by Mike Pickup

Often a day out in a totally different environment feels like a much longer break, so welcome to Extreme Day Trips. The idea behind EDTs is to spend as much of the day as possible in a different country and still make it home in time for bed, so here are a few examples of what you can do.

STANSTED

There's loads to see and do in the twin cities of Buda and Pest. Hilly Buda and flat Pest are separated by the Danube and are linked by a number of bridges, the most famous being the Chain Bridge. It is twinned with an almost identical but smaller bridge in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, as they were both designed by William Tierney Clark. Celebrated for its natural hot springs and riverside Parliament building inspired by our own Palace of Westminster, the people are friendly and a day transport pass makes it easy to get around on the oldest underground railway in mainland Europe. The 06:00 flight gets you in at 09:25 and you have plenty of time to soak up the sights and the famous Spa baths before heading back on the 22:15 flight which lands at 23:50.

LUTON

How about a day in Prague, often rated one of Europe's cheapest capitals? Take the 06:00 and arrive at 09:00, then you have most of the day to explore this compact city before heading back to the airport for the 17:00 return flight. Don't miss the Charles Bridge, historic town square and stunning astronomical clock, all within easy walking distance.

If you are a wine lover then where better to go than Porto, home of great food and Port wine. There's much to see in the city centre including Azulejos, the famous Portuguese blue tiles which adorn the main railway station. Cross the river Douro by cable car or the famous double-decker Louis I Bridge to the lively riverside area of Vila Nova de Gaia, home to famous Port Houses such as Fonseca, Warre, Graham's, Taylor's, Sandeman and more. Most offer guided tours and tastings. The 06:30 flight gets you into the Portuguese city at 08:55 and the return flight doesn't leave until 21:00.

GATWICK

Fancy a bit of winter sunshine? Then how about Malta. You can get up to eleven hours on this historic island, flying out 06:20 and back 22:15. Enjoy the old capital, Mdina, and the other historical sites, or head for one of the blue flag beaches. With 300 days of sunshine you probably won't need an umbrella.

Another warm destination is Madeira, whose Funchal airport requires special training for pilots. Approaching the airport, you will be able to see into the windows of the hillside homes that surround it. The coastal promenade is very popular with visitors, including passengers on the many cruise ships that call there, and the numerous fascinating and diverse museums include CR7, dedicated to Funchal's famous footballer Cristiano Ronaldo.

HEATHROW

Amsterdam is a great day out with a good choice of flights lasting just over one hour. If you are looking to maximise your time there, the first flight leaves before 07:00 and gets you into the airport at 09:25 with the last flight back leaving at 21:35. The airport has a good train connection to the centre of the city, English is almost universally spoken, and the city is easily explored on foot, although a canal boat tour of the city is highly recommended. If you want to visit Anne Frank's house, best to book well in advance.

Dublin is another easy flight from Heathrow. Catch the 06:15 and you'll land at 07:40, in time for a hearty breakfast before exploring this great city. Don't miss the Oscar Wilde statue in Merrion Park and the Little Museum of Dublin, a fun-filled museum crammed with modern artefacts including author Maeve Binchy's typewriter and a room dedicated to the pop band U2. Pay a visit to the statue of Molly Malone then head for a great lunch at the Wine Cellar in Fallon & Byrne. The last flight back doesn't leave until after 20:00 so you'll have plenty of time to soak up the atmosphere and perhaps a glass of Guinness.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

The key to a successful trip is in the planning, and it's not just about the flights. What do you want to see and what tours can you book? How far is it from the airport to your destination? What are the options and how much does it cost? On this last point, the nearest is Gibraltar with just a ten-minute walk, followed by Geneva and Pisa, just 4km bus rides away. Easy-peasy, or should that be easy-Pisa!

To check flight times, Skyscanner [skyscanner.net](https://www.skyscanner.net) allows you to search for the best flights to any destination across a whole month. The destination airport will have a website showing the options available for getting into the town centre and the tourist board will have a note of popular places to visit, bookable city tours and so on. Best of all, there is also a dedicated EDT website offering suggestions, flight details and help with planning. Check out [extremedaytrips.com](https://www.extremedaytrips.com)

Extreme Day Trips



Astronomical Clock, Prague. Image © Mike Pickup

One Day, One Passport,



Funchal. Image © Mike Pickup

Endless Possibilities



Budapest Parliament by night. Image © Mike Pickup



When asked to explain the difference between ocean and river cruising, the renowned writer Douglas Ward explained that with ocean cruising the ship is the destination, but with river cruising the destination is the destination.

Nowhere was that more obvious than my river cruise on the Rhône and its tributary the Saône on board Riviera Travel's MS William Shakespeare. I chose a Heathrow departure and, using my tried and trusted Holiday Extras for airport parking, I was soon on my afternoon flight to Marseille. A short transfer took me to Avignon, where I boarded the ship in time for drinks and dinner.

My cabin was well equipped, with good wardrobe space and tea and coffee making facilities. The floor-to-ceiling sliding window offered plenty of air and light, and there was individually controlled air conditioning. Cabins were positioned to the rear of reception, whilst to the front, the upper deck housed a comfortable bar and lounge, which also served light lunches and housed a 24-hour tea and coffee station; the dining room was on the deck below.

Next day, before leaving Avignon, we were treated to a guided tour. Much of the old city wall remains, and the Popes' Palace, one of the largest medieval Gothic buildings in Europe, is in its centre. The large and impressive exterior is better than the interior, which is almost bare, with just a few visible wall paintings.

However, the best-known structure is the Pont d'Avignon, a stone bridge built in 1234. Regular flooding washed away a number of arches so that today less than half of it remains. The bridge is the inspiration for the traditional 15th-century French song *Sur le Pont d'Avignon*.

EAR, EAR

The following morning found us in Arles. There is a well-preserved Roman amphitheatre which stages concerts, and it was here in December 1888 that Van Gogh famously cut off his left ear and allegedly sent it to a local prostitute. He painted two self-portraits after the event, but they showed a bandaged right ear. Puzzled experts finally realised that the reason for this discrepancy was that he was looking in a mirror.

Arles was also the starting point for



Popes Palace. Image © Mike Pickup

A Journey Through Southern France

a trip to the Pont du Gard, part of a two-thousand-year-old aqueduct built to take water from a spring near Uzès to the Roman settlement in Nîmes. Although only twelve miles separate the two, the nature of the terrain meant that the aqueduct stretched for 31 miles with a barely noticeable drop of 1:3,000. How on earth did the Romans do that?

Nîmes itself effortlessly blends 2,000-year-old Roman architecture with modern buildings, but it has a bigger claim to fame. It was renowned for the manufacture of strong cloth, *serge de Nîmes*, used for making tarpaulin and ships' sails. In the late 19th century, a textile importer in San Francisco brought in this strong cloth

for tailors to make durable trousers for the pioneers of the west. The cloth known as *de Nîmes* is now known as denim and the textile importer was Levi Strauss.

A coach tour of the Ardèche Gorges, France's answer to the Grand Canyon, was a highlight of the next day and the following morning I arrived in Vienne. A walk around town was followed by a train ride to Mont Pipet Hill, from where there were excellent views of the town, countryside and winding river.

SMILE PLEASE

Sailing through Lyon in the evening was a memorable experience as we joined the river Saône heading north to Chalon-sur-Saône.

In the heart of Burgundy country, it's a delightful town - stylish and full of characterful buildings. Take your credit card as there are many unique items in the delightfully individual shops. It was also here in 1822 that Nicéphore Niépce invented what we now know as photography, and there is a statue of him by the river.

Then it was back to Lyon, a large historic city at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône, dominated by Notre-Dame de Fourvière on a hill overlooking the centre. Another claim to fame is the Place Bellecour, a large open central space and the third biggest square in France.

In complete contrast to the historic buildings we had seen so far, that evening the ship moved to Quai Rambaud. A new development, it consisted of a few small stylish apartment blocks in different colours overlooking a river inlet. Shops, bars and restaurants completed the attractive development, whilst a lovely riverside walk revealed more unique accommodation and boats moored along the bank, a number of which appeared to be boutique restaurants. Lyon is generally recognised as the gastronomic capital of France, so eating out is a national pastime.

Back on board, a celebratory dinner rounded off the day and the cruise; next morning I headed off to the airport and my flight home.



MS William Shakespeare. Image © Mike Pickup

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Regulatory uncertainty prompting second-home sales

A growing number of landlords and second-home owners are rushing to put their properties on the market this summer, driven by a combination of looming tax reforms, tighter energy efficiency rules, and rising council tax bills. According to new data from Zoopla, property listings have jumped by 12% year-on-year, with much of the increase concentrated in coastal holiday hotspots. Cities like Truro, Torquay, Exeter, Bournemouth, Lincoln and Norwich have all seen a surge of more than 40% in listings, many of them chain-free and previously used as short-term rentals.

The uptick in listings suggests mounting anxiety among property owners about changes expected in the upcoming Autumn Budget on 30th October. Chief among those concerns is the potential rise in Capital Gains Tax (CGT), which may be aligned with income tax levels, raising the current top rate from 28% to as high as 45%.

Landlords are grappling with impending energy-efficiency regulations, which may soon require all rented homes to achieve a minimum EPC rating of C, a significant

hurdle for older, character properties typical of coastal and rural holiday lets.

Second-home owners in England also face sharply increased council tax bills. Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, local authorities will be granted powers to double council tax on furnished properties that are not primary residences. Similar policies are already in place in Wales and parts of Scotland, where premiums on second homes can exceed 100%.

Despite these challenges, there is a silver lining for some investors. Buy-to-let mortgage rates have fallen to their lowest levels since the mini-Budget crisis in September 2022. The average fixed rate now sits at 5.45%, a drop from 5.99% last October, but still significantly above pre-pandemic levels, when rates hovered around 3%.

For Londoners considering whether to hold or offload a holiday property, expert advice is essential. A qualified mortgage broker can help navigate current deals and advise on the risks of further regulatory tightening. But for many, especially those with ageing properties or modest yields, the case for exiting the market is growing stronger by the month.



Summer market stabilises but caution remains

Britain's housing market appears to be entering calmer waters after a spring slowdown triggered by April's property tax changes. According to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), June saw a modest uptick in new buyer enquiries and agreed sales, all signs of renewed buyer confidence.

In its latest UK Residential Market Survey, RICS reported that a net balance of +5% of respondents cited an increase in new buyer interest, marking the first positive reading since December. While the overall market remains subdued, the improvement signals that the immediate shock of the stamp duty hike, which came into effect on April 1, may now be behind us.

"The UK residential market appears to be entering a more settled phase, with demand showing signs of stabilising following a period of volatility," said Tarrant Parsons, RICS' Head of Market Research. "The earlier distortion caused by transactions being brought forward ahead of the Stamp Duty changes now appears to have largely dissipated, allowing underlying trends to re-emerge."

Still, house prices remain under pressure. RICS' house price balance for June held at -7%, indicating that more surveyors still report falling prices than rising ones. London and the South East were the hardest hit, reflecting ongoing affordability challenges and cautious buyer sentiment in higher-value areas.

This aligns with recent data from Halifax, which showed that average house

prices were flat in June, rising just 0.0% month-on-month. According to Halifax Mortgages Director Amanda Bryden, the annual pace of price growth has slowed to 1.6%, the weakest in over a year. "We're seeing a market caught between improved affordability and lingering economic uncertainty," Bryden noted.

A key factor in the market's near-term outlook is interest rate policy. Analysts broadly expect the Bank of England to cut rates later this year, potentially as soon as September, amid falling inflation and stagnating GDP growth. A rate cut could reduce mortgage costs and stimulate further demand, particularly among first-time buyers.

Economists at Pantheon Macroeconomics predict a 25 basis-point rate cut this autumn, with another likely by year-end. "A clear path to lower borrowing costs could unlock more activity, particularly as pent-up demand from earlier in the year begins to re-enter the market," said chief UK economist Samuel Tombs.

However, RICS warns that broader economic uncertainty, including global market jitters and questions around the UK's fiscal direction following the general election, may temper activity. The market's stability, it seems, remains fragile.

For now, buyers and sellers alike appear to be taking stock during the summer months. Whether this marks the beginning of a sustained recovery or simply a seasonal pause will depend on how both interest rates and consumer confidence evolve through the second half of 2025.



THE BOTTOM LINE *by Doug Shanks*

Whether you're an experienced investor looking to diversify your portfolio or an entrepreneur embarking on your first development, planning a smaller-scale property project, typically up to £5 million, requires just as much diligence as larger ventures. While the capital commitment may be more accessible, the complexity, risk, and opportunity remain significant. Here are the key factors to consider before breaking ground:

1. CLARIFY YOUR OBJECTIVES

Start with the end in mind. Are you building to sell, to rent, or to hold as a long-term investment? Your goals will shape your financial modelling, design decisions, and marketing strategy. A development aimed at resale may prioritise curb appeal and market trends, while a build-to-rent project will focus on durability, low maintenance, and strong yield performance.

2. LOCATION IS EVERYTHING – BUT THINK BEYOND POSTCODE

The old adage still rings true: location is critical. But on smaller developments, micro-location plays an outsized role. Is the site walkable? Is there demand for your proposed unit type in the immediate area? Investigate local planning trends and recent sales performance to ensure alignment with demand. Pay attention to nearby infrastructure improvements, future transport links or new schools can change the game.

3. BUDGET FOR MORE THAN THE BUILD

While the headline build cost is important, it's not the full picture. Stamp duty, professional fees (architects, planners, structural engineers), financing costs, marketing expenses, and contingency funds all need to be factored into your overall budget. In smaller developments, overruns can significantly impact returns, so ensure your budget includes at least a 10–15% contingency for the unexpected.

4. UNDERSTAND PLANNING CONSTRAINTS EARLY

Smaller sites can sometimes fall under permitted development rights (PDR), especially conversions of office or commercial space. However, it's crucial to understand local planning policies, design constraints (such as conservation area guidelines), and any Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) obligations. Consulting with a planning consultant early can save you months, and money.

5. BUILD THE RIGHT TEAM

Smaller doesn't mean simpler. In fact, limited budgets often require creative problem-solving and tighter project control. Work with an architect and contractor experienced in small-to-medium residential or mixed-use schemes. Make sure you have a clear project manager, this might be you or a hired expert, who understands how to coordinate professionals, maintain timelines, and protect your financial interests.

6. FINANCE WITH FLEXIBILITY IN MIND

Funding smaller developments can be more nuanced than it seems. Traditional high-street lenders may not be agile enough, so bridging finance or development loans are often the route developers choose. Be sure to structure your finance with adequate drawdowns and timescales, allowing for delays or market fluctuations. Lenders will expect detailed appraisals and exit strategies, whether sales, refinancing, or letting.

Tip: This is a good stage to consult with a financial specialist who advises property developers on tax planning, compliance, and cash flow strategy. An experienced advisor can help you structure the project for maximum tax efficiency and long-term financial sustainability.

7. EXIT STRATEGY: PLAN MULTIPLE SCENARIOS

Markets shift. Even in a buoyant economy, local conditions can change between planning approval and project completion. Have a Plan A (e.g., sell all units off-plan), but also a Plan B (e.g., retain and rent, refinance, or staggered sales). Smaller developers are often better positioned to pivot, but only if exit strategies are baked into planning from the outset.

8. THINK ABOUT ESG AND BUYER EXPECTATIONS

Sustainability and environmental considerations are no longer optional. From EPC

requirements to the rising demand for greener homes, buyers and tenants expect energy-efficient, low-impact properties. Futureproof your development by considering smart tech, efficient insulation, and renewable energy sources where feasible. These can add value and differentiate your scheme.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Smaller property developments can offer strong returns, greater agility, and manageable risk. But they require tight planning, the right team, and a clear understanding of your financial and strategic goals. Engaging with the right professionals can significantly increase your chances of success and reduce costly surprises.

PLANNING A SMALLER PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT



DIGITAL ASSETS

EUROPE RISKS FALLING BEHIND ON STABLECOINS, WARNS FORMER ECB OFFICIAL

Europe risks being marginalised in the rapidly evolving world of digital finance unless it takes decisive action on stablecoins and tokenisation, according to Lorenzo Bini Smaghi, chair of Société Générale and former member of the European Central Bank's executive board.

Writing in the Financial Times, Bini Smaghi argues that stablecoins, digital tokens typically backed by fiat currency reserves, are not just a speculative fad, but a "technological breakthrough" with the potential to reshape global finance. Far from banning them, policymakers should recognise their capacity to deliver faster, cheaper cross-border payments, improve capital market efficiency, and support the financing of public debt through demand for government bonds.

In his view, the technology underpinning stablecoins, known as tokenisation, could modernise the financial system in ways that benefit both private markets and sovereign monetary authorities. Yet despite early regulatory efforts such as the EU's Markets in Crypto-Assets (MiCA) framework, Europe remains well behind the United States, which accounts for nearly 99% of all stablecoin issuance, most of it in dollars.

Bini Smaghi attributes this lag not primarily to regulatory gaps, but to a broader cultural resistance to innovation. "Many European banks see stablecoins as a threat to their profitable activities," he writes, while the investment required to modernise systems remains a major deterrent.

Meanwhile, European monetary

authorities, he argues, have failed to grasp the strategic implications of the shift. They continue to underestimate the role stablecoins could play in integrating Europe's capital markets and strengthening the euro's position as a global currency. They also risk placing too much faith in central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), which, unlike stablecoins, are being developed on traditional infrastructure and may lack the flexibility to compete in decentralised financial ecosystems.

Perhaps most critically, Bini Smaghi warns that without widely adopted euro-denominated stablecoins, European deposits could begin migrating to foreign platforms, weakening the EU's control over financial flows and compromising long-term monetary sovereignty.

He also notes a structural difference with the US. While Washington has largely sidelined the Federal Reserve in the development of stablecoin regulation, the EU's institutional framework still allows the European Central Bank to play a central role. That includes not just overseeing stablecoin issuance, particularly by banks, but also coordinating innovation and mitigating systemic risks.

For Bini Smaghi, the tools to lead are already in place, what's missing is political and institutional will. Unless Europe seizes the opportunity to shape the future of stablecoins and tokenised finance, he warns, it may find itself watching from the sidelines as others define the next era of global monetary power.



USA & CHINA GOVERNMENTS HOLDING MOST BITCOIN ASSETS



Around 2.3% of the total supply of bitcoin is held by governments around the world, publicly available data and legal disclosures have revealed. Despite being a small percentage, it equates to tens of billions of dollars' worth. China and the USA dominate the list with the UK coming in third.

The US government is the most visible player of any government in the crypto space. Thanks to a series of high-profile seizures, including from the Silk Road marketplace and dark web operations, it has accumulated nearly 200,000 BTC, or between \$18-22 billion worth. But Washington is not just passively holding these assets.

In March 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that formalises the creation of a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve, bringing seized bitcoin under federal control. This is in contrast to previous presidents which auctioned off confiscated crypto.

Next on the list is China. In 2019, authorities shut down the PlusToken scam, confiscating over 190,000 BTC, the largest crypto seizure in history. But what has happened to these funds remains a mystery.

Analysts suggested that parts of these were quietly liquidated while others believe the funds are sitting dormant in government crypto wallets, untouched in cold storage. Despite a ban on domestic trading and mining, China is a "key player in the geopolitics of Bitcoin ownership," according to Coin Telegraph, adding that it is "perhaps one of the largest non-US Bitcoin

reserve holders."

Recent events have brought the UK in among the top Bitcoin holders. In 2021, British authorities seized around 61,000 BTC as part of a money laundering investigation. The coins were linked to a fraud ring that originated in China and was operating through UK shell companies. They are now under the control of the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and are currently worth around £5 billion.

Traditionally, seized crypto assets are added to the treasury and the CPS has suggested retaining rather than liquidating them. It would give the UK one of the most unlikely sovereign crypto funds. But not everyone is on board with this plan due to concerns about volatility and policy consistency. There has not been any formal move to treat the assets as part of a strategic state reserve. Whatever happens next, Coin Telegraph writes, "the UK is now part of the crypto geopolitics conversation."

Ukraine, Bhutan, and El Salvador are the next three countries in terms of national bitcoin reserves, while North Korea is believed to have acquired over 14,000 BTC before selling off over \$1 billion worth since March 2025.

While some nations are open about their goals, others are quieter. While the reasoning varies from country to country, one thing is clear, many nations are taking crypto more seriously.

"It's especially attractive to nations looking to hedge against inflation or de-dollarize reserves," according to Coin Telegraph.

Events supplement

What, When, Where?

Compiled & edited by Fahad Redha

July - August 2025

DANCE & OPERA

Éireannby A Taste of Ireland

Peacock Theatre

Where music meets movement, Ireland's story unfolds: sweeping audiences through the triumphs, tragedies, and courage of a nation. From the arrival of the Vikings to the rise of Brian Boru, from the sorrow of the Great Famine and through the darkness of the Easter Rising, Éireann brings Ireland's history to life in a way that's deeply human, utterly captivating, and impossible to forget. Performed by a cast of world-class dancers – alumni of Riverdance and Lord of the Dance – the show highlights the athleticism and precision of Irish dance, elevated by contemporary choreography paired with the visceral beauty of live rhythm. Accompanied by a powerhouse musical trio, the show's vocals poetically navigate the audience through a journey where the dancing and music intertwine its modern score, rooted in tradition.

Rosebery Avenue EC1R 4TN

sadlerswells.com

August 28-31

The Great Gatsby

London Coliseum

Get ready to roar because the Tony Award-winning new musical The Great Gatsby is coming to London, and it will be the party of the century. Fresh from its current smash-hit success on Broadway, this "shimmering, sparkling spectacle" (Variety) "explodes with life and energy" (Entertainment Weekly). The all-new musical, directed by Marc Bruni (Beautiful: The Carole King Musical), tells a story of extravagance and longing, featuring choreography by Dominique Kelley (So You Think You Can Dance), a book by Kait Kerrigan (The Mad Ones), and a jazz and pop-influenced original score by Jason Howland (Little Women) and Nathan Tysen (Paradise Square).

London Coliseum,
St Martin's Lane WC2N 4ES

londoncoliseum.org

Until September

DANCE & OPERA



Alice in Wonderland © Karin Wright

Alice in Wonderland

London Ballet Theatre

Venture into the whimsical and wondrous world of London Ballet Theatre's Alice in Wonderland, a ballet that redefines traditional storytelling. This production is a seamless blend of ballet sequences, engaging videos, and lively narration, captivating audiences with a fresh approach to the classic tale. Multiple ballet styles bring Alice's fantastical journey to

life through visually rich choreography. Each dance sequence is meticulously crafted to convey the essence and peculiarities of the characters and settings, enhancing the narrative flow with each graceful movement.

2nd Floor,
Debbie Flevotomou Architects

W1J 6BD

londonballettheatre.com

Until June 28

EXHIBITIONS



Visions of Nature: A Mixed Reality Experience

Natural History Museum

Equipped with a mixed reality headset, you'll be transported a century into the future to explore what could lie ahead for the planet. Journey around the globe and become visually and audibly surrounded by the awe and wonder of the future natural world. From harmonious highlands to

resilient rainforests and even down into the Arctic Ocean, you'll experience eight different ecosystems. As you interact with virtual plants and creatures, you'll witness how human intervention and scientific ingenuity have helped these species and habitats to recover.

Cromwell Road SW7 5BD

nhm.ac.uk

Ongoing

EXHIBITIONS

Summer of Space

Science Museum

Discover inspiring stories of humankind's efforts to explore the universe with on-site activities, trails and more at the Science Museum. Learn more about the galaxy, space exploration, how astronauts use the toilet, and more with free activities throughout the summer at the museum, even before the new gallery opens. The Space Show will be a new free family show in the Lecture Theatre, inviting visitors to see and take part in science demonstrations and live experiments

Exhibition Road,
South Kensington SW7 2DD

sciencemuseum.org.uk

See website for dates

Cartier

Victoria & Albert Museum

A major exhibition featuring more than 350 objects, including precious jewels, historic gemstones, iconic watches, and clocks, that

chart the evolution of Cartier's legacy of art, design, and craftsmanship since the turn of the 20th century.

Cromwell Road SW7 2RL

vam.ac.uk

Ongoing

Pirates

National Maritime Museum

Heroic rascals or violent criminals? Discover the truth behind pirate life in a major exhibition at the National Maritime Museum. Pirates traces the changing depictions of pirates through the ages and reveals the brutal reality behind the fiction. The exhibition explores the perception of piracy in popular culture, from comical characters like Captain Pugwash and Captain Hook to anti-heroes like Long John Silver and Captain Jack Sparrow, and examines why the idea of a pirate's life still fascinates us today. While often portrayed as swashbuckling scoundrels, the real history of pirates is far more complex.

Romney Road SE10 9NF

rmg.co.uk

Ongoing

Events

What, When, & Where July -

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

Squid Game: The Experience

Excel

You've seen Squid Game on Netflix, now play it in real life. Battle through five intense challenges inspired by the show: crack the code in Memory Steps, aim true in Marbles, survive a blind tug-of-war in The Rope Game, dash past Young-hee in Red Light, Green Light, and land on the right shape before the signal ends in Round and Round. But remember, the game shows no mercy. And there's more! Unwind at the Korean-inspired Night Market with soju-infused cocktails, exclusive merchandise, and iconic photo ops to capture your victory. Are you ready to play?

Victoria Dock,
1 Western Gateway E16 1XL
excel.london
Ongoing

The FRIENDS Experience

Excel London

The FRIENDS Experience: The One in London is a taste of New York City, and never-before-seen activations including "London, baby!" and FRIENDS Station. Immerse yourself in recreated sets; dance in front of the fountain, peep through the iconic purple door at Rachel and Monica's apartment, play foosball at Joey and Chandler's, and take a selfie on the orange couch in Central Perk. Phoebe's New York cab, the 18-page letter, and more are at the event. Hang out in

the FRIENDS Station for even more photo opportunities, snacks, and of course, coffee before hitting up the FRIENDS Retail Store. Even Hugsy and the famous yellow frame will be waiting for you.

Victoria Dock,
1 Western Gateway E16 1XL
excel.london
Ongoing

Uptown Festival

Blackheath Common

On Sunday 27 July, Blackheath Common transforms into Uptown Festival 2025, London's family-friendly music celebration. Expect diverse live acts, delicious street food, and entertainment for all ages—from whimsical fairground rides to craft workshops in the heart of South London. The event blends laid-back festival vibes with communal joy, set against the green expanse of Blackheath. Lovers of all generations will appreciate the VIP area offering a relaxed space for adults too. With a mix of music, fun and food, plus plenty of room to roam, this is an ideal summer outing for families and friends alike. Tickets are on sale now.

Blackheath Common SE3
london.uptownfestival.co.uk
July 27

Hyper Japan Festival

Olympia

Where every corner of Japan comes alive, get ready for an unforgettable three-day journey in the heart of London! From

manga and anime, to live music, fashion, street food, gaming and technology, this immersive celebration showcases the latest and greatest of J-Culture. Whether you're a seasoned enthusiast or a newcomer eager to explore the culture, experience a matsuri atmosphere and share your passion for your favourite facet of Japanese culture. Get ready to catch live performances from top Japanese artists like Ai Higuchi and Hitsujibungaku, hands-on workshops ranging from sushi making to manga drawing, and the chance to shop from over 450 independent exhibitors offering everything from traditional crafts to the latest anime figures.

Hammersmith Road W14 8UX
events.olympia.london
July 18-20

Chris Ofili: Requiem

Tate Britain

Tate commissioned British artist Chris Ofili to create an artwork for the North Staircase at Tate Britain. Ofili considered the significance of painting directly onto the walls of a public building and wanted to choose a subject that affected us as a nation. Requiem is a dream-like mural, resulting from his poetic reflections. Ofili met fellow artist Khadija Saye in May 2017 when they were both exhibiting in Venice. One month later, Saye died in the Grenfell Tower fire. Memories of their meeting had a profound impact on Ofili. It helped him find a path to create this work, which holds at its centre an image of Saye as a 'powerful creative force of transformation.'

Millbank SW1P 4RG
tate.org.uk
Ongoing

MUSIC



EXHIBITIONS



FAMILY & CHILDREN

Free Summer Space Trail

Science Museum

Embark on an exciting space trail over summer, inspired by Disney & Pixar's new film Elio. What if the thing you were searching for found you first? In Pixar Animation Studios' big-screen comedic misadventure, alien-obsessed Elio discovers the answer to that question when he is transported to the Commiverse, an interplanetary paradise that is home to intelligent life from galaxies far and wide. But when he's mistaken as Earth's leader, he'll have to form unexpected bonds, navigate a crisis of intergalactic proportions, and make sure he doesn't lose the opportunity to live out his ultimate dream. Visitors can ignite their curiosity about the cosmos with the free Summer Space Trail, in collaboration with Disney and Pixar's new film Elio, to celebrate its release in cinemas.

Where?

August 2025

Celtic Sessions

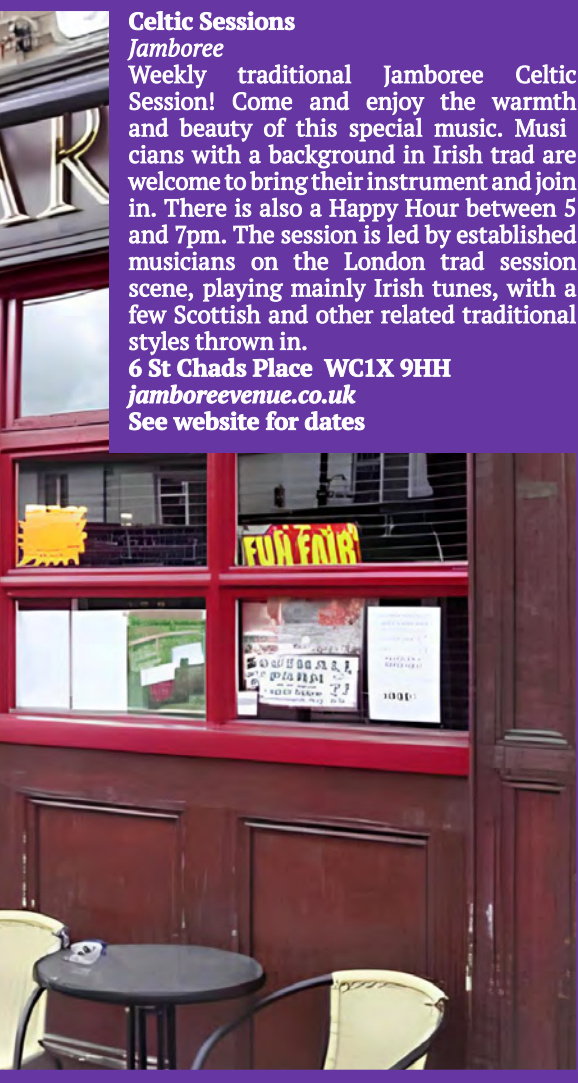
Jamboree

Weekly traditional Jamboree Celtic Session! Come and enjoy the warmth and beauty of this special music. Musicians with a background in Irish trad are welcome to bring their instrument and join in. There is also a Happy Hour between 5 and 7pm. The session is led by established musicians on the London trad session scene, playing mainly Irish tunes, with a few Scottish and other related traditional styles thrown in.

6 St Chads Place WC1X 9HH

jamboreevenue.co.uk

See website for dates



Exhibition Road,
South Kensington SW7 2DD
sciencemuseum.org.uk
Until August 31

The Dinosaur that Pooped

Alexandra Palace

When Danny and Dino's favourite rock band are playing their last ever concert, they go on a quest to get the last two tickets. But with a villainous band manager lurking, nothing goes to plan. Will the band perform? Will Danny rock out? Or will Dino's rumbling tummy save the day?

Adapted from the #1 best-selling books by Tom Fletcher and Dougie Poynter, the whole family will have a pooppy good time enjoying a brand, new story for the stage at Alexandra Palace Theatre. Featuring new songs by Tom and Dougie, a lot of laughs and a whole lot of poo!

Alexandra Palace Way N22 7AY

alexandrapalace.com

August 7-10

Cutty Sark – the world's sole-surviving tea clipper

Cutty Sark was built in 1869 to bring the finest and freshest teas back to London. Now you too can savour Cutty Sark's rich history while enjoying a truly unique London afternoon tea experience. Leave behind the traditional hotels and bus tours: at Cutty Sark, you can dine beneath the ship itself! Indulge in a special afternoon tea sitting directly beneath Cutty Sark's iconic copper-clad hull. Choose from a selection of teas, sandwiches, and sweet treats as you marvel at the historic engineering of the fastest ship of its day. All table bookings include entry

to the ship, so you can explore Cutty Sark at your leisure before or after your meal.

King William Walk SE10 9HT

rmg.co.uk

See website for dates

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 ten fairytale-themed live shows, from a magical 4D flying bus experience to 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

The Boy with Wings

Polka Theatre

When Tunde sprouts wings and learns that his father is a ferocious alien warrior, he's all that stands between the galaxy and total destruction - suddenly homework and school aren't all he has to contend with. Luckily, his rag-tag group of pals have got his back, and with his new powers, Tunde is ready to fly in the face of danger - this is his destiny. No pressure then. Adapted by Arvind Ethan David from Sir Lenny Henry's

hilarious book, The Boy with Wings is an interstellar, action-packed adventure about friendships, being brave, and how our differences are our super-power!

240 The Broadway SW19 1SB

polkatheatre.com

Until August 16

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY

T. Rex 3D

Science Museum

Discover the planet's fiercest, most famous dinosaur in dazzling 3D. For over a hundred years, dinosaurs have sparked our curiosity and wonder. This epic new big-screen adventure brings together top tyrannosaur scientists, a coalition of natural history institutions, and pioneering paleo and visual effects artists to delve into the world of this iconic dinosaur and its carnivorous Cretaceous cousins. From rexling to teen rex, to hulking adult, the interplay between speculation and evidence will be explored revealing how much science contributed to the understanding of these legendary dinosaurs. Get ready to witness the wonder years of this ultimate predator and have a roaring-good time along the way.

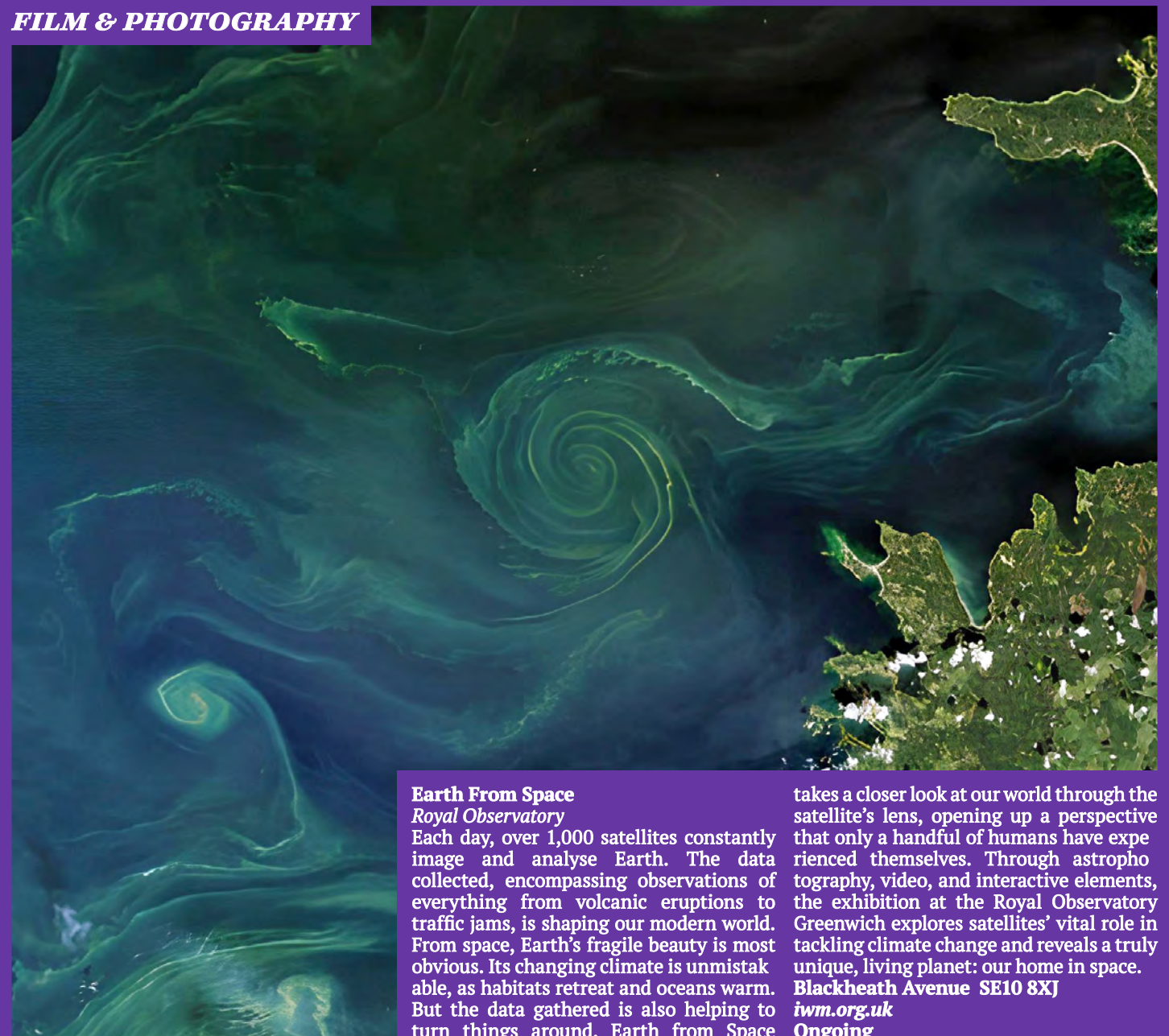
Exhibition Road,

South Kensington SW7 2DD

sciencemuseum.org.uk

See website for dates

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY



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

Events

What, When, Where?

July - August 2025

Felicity Hammond: V3 Model Collapse

The Photographers' Gallery

Variations is an evolving installation investigating the processes and power dynamics at play in a new era of photography. Developed across four UK venues in 2024-25, Felicity Hammond (b. 1988, UK) uses artificial intelligence (AI) to map how digital photographic material makes its journey from mineral to pixel; and from beneath the Earth's surface to the screen. During the staging of the last two variations at Brighton and Derby, photographs and data were collected from the exhibition spaces and people in them. The collected data and images have been used as training sets for each variation, including V3: Model Collapse at The Photographers' Gallery. Like AI image creation, the reiteration of past datasets in each new work mimics the constantly evolving data sets that inform machine learning platforms.

16-18 Ramillies Street W1F 7LW

thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Until September 28

Nature in Focus

Natural History Museum

The museum is celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the world-renowned Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. Over the past six decades, the stunning photographs it has championed have not

only told stories about the beauty and vulnerability of the natural world but also 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 also how modern imaging techniques are used in science and storytelling.

Cromwell Road,
South Kensington SW7 5BD
nhm.ac.uk

Until July 19

MUSIC

Back to the Future in Concert

Royal Albert Hall

Experience the thrill of Back to the Future like never before, as part of the Films in Concert series. See the movie projected on a HD screen with the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra performing Alan Silvestri's dazzling musical score. Join Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox), Doc Brown

(Christopher Lloyd) and a time-traveling DeLorean for the adventure of a lifetime as they travel to the past, present and future, setting off a time-shattering chain reaction that disrupts the space-time continuum. Audiences will also be in for an exclusive treat with brand new music added by award-winning composer Silvestri to the film's score, especially for these unique live orchestra presentations.

Kensington Gore,
South Kensington SW7 2AP
royalalberthall.com
October 26

Fragile Earth: Sounds of a living planet

Barbican Centre

Anna Meredith disrupts Vivaldi's Four Seasons with spangling electronics in Anno, while Samoan artist Lemi Ponifasio counterpoints Mahler's Song of the Earth with a Samoan chorus whose relationship to the sea is existential. Real birdsong weaves through Rautavaara's Cantus Arcticus and Cassandra Miller's Warbleworks, while composers from all over the globe use field recordings in an immersive day with the The Hermes Experiment (Let

TALKS, TOURS, & WALKS



Building Tour

British Library

Discover more about its history, collection, and architecture on a tour of the public areas of the Library, where you'll visit our viewing gallery, book handling room, reading rooms, and more. You'll be guided by the knowledgeable, passionate Library staff who will share the Library's unique quirks.

British Library NW1 2DB
thebritishlibraryculturalevents.seetickets.com
Ongoing

DANCE & OPERA



us be a Mighty River). Explore Orford Ness's sonic archaeology in Ness Songs and dive into the sub-aqua world of John Luther Adams's Become Ocean. There's a concerto for recycled percussion, a Medieval floral meditation, and Judith Weir's The Welcome Arrival of Rain. In a series centrepiece, Julia Wolfe's major new oratorio UnEarth gathers young voices to generate spiritual hope for the future.

Silk Street EC2Y 8DS
barbican.org.uk
Opens September 12

Classical Music

Barbican Centre

An extraordinary line-up of classical music, featuring both homegrown and international talent alongside the Resident Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, and associates. In the autumn/winter, there are performances from some of the finest musicians, including Yo-Yo Ma, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Samantha Ege, and Stephen Hough. We're visited by orchestras including Sinfonia of London, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal with Rafael

Il Trovatore*Royal Opera House*

Troubadour Manrico and military commander Count di Luna have become rivals vying for Leonora's heart. Though Leonora loves Manrico, the jealous Count will do everything in his power to have her. Battles between the Count's army and Manrico's men follow, and he and Manrico agree to a duel. Meanwhile, haunted by a gruesome past, Azucena, Manrico's

mother, harbours a secret that affects both Manrico and the Count: years before, in a vow to avenge the murder of her mother at the hands of the aristocratic Luna family, she abducted their younger son. Will she reveal this truth, or will she see her revenge through at any cost?

**Royal Opera House,
Bow Street WC2E 9DD**
roh.org.uk
Until July 19



Il Trovatore © Royal Opera House

Payare, and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra with Gustavo Dudamel.

Silk Street SW7 2APbarbican.org.uk[See website for dates](#)**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 6HZiwm.org.uk**Ongoing****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 4ABhrp.org.uk**Ongoing****The Beatles & Rock 'n' Roll London****Walking Tours**

These Beatles walking tours are rockin' most days. (Not Mondays. Rockers don't like Mondays. Hold on, that's another rock band altogether.) Tuesdays through to Sundays, you're out there in Beatles London—heading to their haunts and hangouts, to where they riffed and let rip. You'll discover much more besides the iconic Abbey Road crossing from the aptly named Abbey Road album cover. There are two different Beatles walks regularly, plus a selection of specials.

walks.com[See website for more information](#)**An evening with Neil Warnock***London Palladium*

Join record-breaking, legendary football manager Neil Warnock, as he steps into the spotlight to recount a career like no other in front of an audience for the first time. With over six decades in the game, Neil has managed more matches than anyone in history, led sixteen clubs, achieved eight promotions from Non-League to Premier League, and amassed enough stories to fill several lifetimes. Now, in this no holds barred conversation delivered in his unique

and imitable style, hear Neil talk about his early career as a player in the lower leagues, to what inspired and drove him on to succeed and reach the highest level in management. With footage from some of the highlights and lowlights of his career, Neil will take us back to some of the most explosive and controversial incidents and give the full inside story.

Argyll Street W1F 7TFlwtheatres.co.uk**September 18****The Crucible***Shakespeare's Globe*

Consumed by paranoia, superstition, and a ruthless sense of justice, a climate of fear and mass hysteria sweeps through the town of Salem, Massachusetts, when rumours grow that a group of girls are practising witchcraft. What lies are the townspeople prepared to tell themselves in order to survive? Revolutionary, award-winning American playwright Arthur Miller's seminal political history play about Salem in 1692 and McCarthy's 1950s America is a timeless warning to us all. Ola Ince (Othello, 2024; Romeo and Juliet, 2021) directs this visceral, gripping, ultra-live adventure into a desperate, dangerous world where everyone is implicated, and nobody is safe.

21 New Globe Walk,**Bankside SE1 9DT**shakespearesglobe.com**Ongoing****THEATRE**

The Crucible © Shakespeare's Globe

July - August 2025
What, When, Where?

Events

Pub Walks

It's a normal London Walk, but it takes a bit longer because you work anywhere from one to four pubs into the mix. Pub walks are convivial. They're a completely natural social situation. They're a chance to sit down, a chance for some refreshment. What's not to like? Pre-pandemic, there was a pub walk every night of the week and two on Saturday. The pandemic put paid to that. But they're slowly making a comeback. The gold standard pub walk is the Along the Thames Pub Walk. Some of the others listed below are not full-fledged pub walks but they have—or can have, a pub element (they end at a famous pub, for example).

walks.com

[See website for more information](https://walks.com)

Before the Crowds: Collection Tours

National Gallery

Step inside the Gallery before the crowds and follow experienced guide on an intimate journey to uncover the hidden history behind some of the key portraits in the Collection. Explore the life stories of a nation and be inspired by the different narratives of the people who have shaped Britain. This early-access tour will focus on some of the most popular works in spaces that are typically busy during opening times. On Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 10:00. Tours last about 45 minutes.

St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE

npg.org.uk

[See website for dates](https://npg.org.uk)

THEATRE

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

What, When, Where?

July - August 2025

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 expectations of theatre.

21 Wellington Street,
Covent Garden WC2E 7RQ
thelyceumtheatre.com

Ongoing

Dracula

Lyric Hammersmith

Mina Harker has a story to tell. Armed only with her husband's journal, a pile of old letters and her wits, she begins to piece together the story of the mysterious Count Dracula and his journey to England. But is Mina's story merely memory – or does it have the power to conjure the dead? In this major new adaptation of Bram Stoker's horror classic, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm (Emilia) uncovers the female voices at the heart of the tale. Directed by Emma Baggott (A Taste of Honey), this is a theatrical thriller not to be missed.

Lyric Square, King Street W6 0QL

lyric.co.uk

[Opens September 11](https://lyric.co.uk)

DANCE & OPERA



National Youth Dance Companyx Boy Blue

Sadler's Wells

For the last decade, NYDC, run by Sadler's Wells, has sought out the most talented young dancers in England to create, perform and tour a new work every year with a Guest Artistic Director. For 2025,

Sky Arts and Olivier Award-winning hip hop dance theatre company Boy Blue, led by Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy and Michael 'Mikey J' Asante, has been appointed as Guest Artistic Directors.

Rosebery Avenue EC1R 4TN

sadlerswells.com

July 19

The Truth about Bladys

Finborough Theatre

England's most loved poet and national treasure, Oliver Bladys, celebrates his 90th birthday.

But he hides a devastating secret, he wasn't the author of the poems that made him rich and famous. When his devoted family learn the truth, they confront the reality of having sacrificed their lives to a fraud, and have to decide whether to tell the world the truth about Bladys... Thought-provoking and

wickedly funny, this rediscovered modern classic from 1921 is a compelling examination of the cult of celebrity, betrayal, and the cost of telling the truth. Dorothy Parker called it 'a fine and merciless and honest play', and this rediscovery – directed by West End legend David Gilmore, restores to the theatre one of the most acclaimed playwrights of the era.

118 Finborough Road SW10 9ED

finboroughtheatre.co.uk

[September 2-27](https://finboroughtheatre.co.uk)

Private Tours: The Holocaust Gallery

Imperial War Museum

This exhibition provides a comprehensive account of the events that came to be known as the Holocaust. The guided tour looks at the origins and implementation of the 'Final Solution', showing how persecution turned to mass extermination and highlighting some of the incredible stories of the people caught up in these terrible events. Explore the stories behind some of the key artefacts

within IWM's extensive Holocaust Galleries. IWM London's expert guides have an unprecedented knowledge of the museum and will bring these historic objects to life for you. This private tour can take place inside or outside museum hours. Tours outside museum hours give you exclusive access to the galleries. Tours last one and a half hours. King Charles Street SW1A 2AQ
iwm.org.uk
Ongoing

FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY



Arts & Culture Bumper Summer Edition

Cinema Club by Henry Scott-Irvine



SINNERS

A FILM OF TWO HALVES

Three Hollywood majors in the shape of Sony, Universal, and Warners (who won) were all in a bidding war for the rights to *Sinners*. Fighting over the screenplay, the film production rights, and the distribution deals. Director Ryan Coogler had already offered up previous promise and commercial success with three films via his own back catalogue; namely the social realism of *Fruitvale Station* (2014), a *Rocky* movie called *Creed* (2016), and a Marvel 'epic' *Black Panther* (2018). Coogler certainly looked like he was onto a winner with *Sinners*. Since early April, this film has been doing great box office returns internationally, but with some lukewarm reviews amid the good ones. Some have compared this film to *Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), the renowned Robert Rodriguez movie with a screenplay by Quentin Tarantino.

But is it any good?

What were we promised? Well? Certainly a promise of an all-encompassing history of the birth of Juke House 'Joints'. The term for Blues Barn venues set up in the 'Jim Crow' period of the cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta, during the Prohibition era of Al Capone. *Sinners* is an epic Hollywood-backed movie shot on location in the deep American South. A journey back in time, featuring period clothes, real working vintage cars and trains, stunning cinematography, exemplary casting, great

Sinners:

performances, and a revealing script. All embracing a killer soundtrack of songs, and music to beat all comers – both from before, and still to come. This was the promise to the backers, allegedly.

A tall order!

Did the team deliver? Yes! So this film is a 'must see' movie? It's certainly worth seeing, but with some very real reservations... And I don't mean seat bookings.

There is, however, a lot to this film with its ensemble cast. Notably, Michael P. Jordan playing a dual role as a pair of brothers who are sharp Dandy Hoods from Chicago, returning to a previous life that will be their 'new' present. They've also arrived to start up a music venue. We witness Smoke & Stack's lightning impact upon this small community of farmers, landlords, and ex-girlfriends. R&B singer Miles Caton is the strongest character in his debut screen role as a musician who is 'The Son of a Preacher Man', called Sammie.

A complicated set of ensemble cast roles ensue. All with complex personal stories. Therefore we do begin to wonder where this slow narrative is likely to go?

INTERMISSION

A TV DREAM SEQUENCE APPEARS ON SCREEN -

A FLASHBACK TO SCOTTISH ITV IN 1970

A local match reporter from STV's Sports department has been in the pub. He phones in 'live' from a payphone to deliver a report about a football game between Partick Thistle and Airdrie. He nonchalantly says to the anchor, the late Arthur Montford, "It was a game of two halves, Arthur!" My uncle would've said, "Aye! No half."

In the case of *Sinners*? There's two halves too. One good half followed by the other half that was, quite frankly, bloody awful. Just like Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) which was two films in one movie. Our STV reporter might've ventured – if still alive in 2025 – "*Full Metal Jacket*, and *Sinners*? Aye. Two films. Four halves – Arthur." The ever-friendly Arthur Montford probably would've said, "Bargain. You got four halves there, Shuggie, nae bad."

A neat commercial should follow this with Arthur the Cockney Cat, sticking his paw into a tin of cat food, saying, "I was a big fan of Arthur Montford, you know!"

INTERMISSION ENDS

PART TWO OF SINNERS

Blood spewed forth across a full widescreen of human giblets. All sonically amplified in 4K while 'squirting' in surround sound. Dolby has even allowed the vampires to hiss. Vampires in a blues movie? Yes – vampires appear out of the cotton fields and insinuate themselves into the proceedings. This is apparently deemed to be far better visually than meeting the 'Devil at the Crossroads' like the old bluesman Robert Johnson did back in his day.

So if you'd genuinely like to watch a vampire zombie movie with the main characters suddenly becoming victims of fangs, it's all here in this uncensored, blood-spurting, flesh-eating, Warner horror epic. *Sinners* would be better suited to a B-movie grindhouse cinema like the 37-seater venue that's just opening in Farringdon.

If heavy gore is your particular blood bag? Turn up 90 minutes late to watch only the last half of this three-hour epic. Dress up as Vlad the Impaler. Bring along a beatbox playing out Warren Zevon's *Werewolves of London*, and sing along, "Ah-Hoo. *Werewolves of London* when in Soho and Mayfair." Just don't do this when sat inside the Curzons situated in Soho and Mayfair – okay? They might just ban you. The Prince Charles Cinema, however, might just schedule it: *Sing-along-Sinners*, "Ah-Hoo!"

Footnote: *Sinners* didn't have an intermission. If it did? I'd've left 90 minutes earlier.

Meanwhile, the brand new Nickel Cinema, celebrating 'Grindhouse Classics', opens from 11th June. This is London's newest cinema – the only independent grindhouse cinema with a stage and bar in Britain!

thenickel.co.uk
@thenickelcinema



IN THEIR OWN WORDS - BRENDAN BARNES

When most people think of the City of London, the images that come to mind are of suits, skyscrapers, and the rapid click of trading floors. However, behind the corporate façade of the Square Mile lies a quieter, richer story, one told through centuries of architecture, underground rivers, hidden museums, and voices like that of Brendan Barnes. As the new Chair of the City of London's Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee, Brendan is tasked with bringing that story to life and ensuring culture is not just an accessory to the City's identity, but part of its core narrative.

We sat down with Brendan to explore his ambitions, how his background in business intersects with his cultural role, and why culture in the City is both patchwork quilt and underground river, beautiful, flowing, and in need of stitching together.

A CITY WITHIN A CITY

Brendan grew up in Dorchester, but it was a childhood visit to London that sparked something lasting. "I must have been about ten or eleven," he said, "and I remember, for the first time, grasping the idea that the City of London was actually a place in its own right. A city within a city."

That moment stayed with him. "Even people who live in London don't always realise that," he said. "But once you do, you see things differently. There's history on every corner here. Culture runs through the City like those underground rivers beneath our feet. You may not always see them, but they're always there."

He's long loved history, "it's my favourite subject," and being part of the City allows him to live that passion daily.

A ROLE FULL OF CHALLENGE AND PURPOSE

Asked what makes his role as Chair of Culture, Heritage and Libraries so meaningful, Brendan didn't hesitate.

"There are huge challenges and huge opportunities when it comes to culture in the City," he said. "If you ask most people what they think of when they think of the City of London, they'll say finance, professional services, big business. And of course, that's true. We're the engine house of the UK economy."

However, he wants to shift that narrative.

"What I'd like to inspire is that people, almost in the same sentence, say, 'and it's full of culture.' Because it really is. We've got immense riches here, historical, artistic, literary. They're just not as well known as they should be."

That's where his committee comes in. "Our role is to raise the profile of that culture. To connect people to it. And to make sure it isn't forgotten amid the glass and steel."

The committee Brendan chairs, the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee, is at the heart of shaping cultural thinking in the Square Mile. It plays a crucial role in curating how the City's rich past and diverse present are both preserved and made accessible. Under his leadership, the committee is now spearheading the development of the City's Cultural Strategy for 2026. This is a wide-ranging plan that seeks not just to support headline institutions like the London Museum and the Barbican, but also to celebrate the City's smaller, lesser-known cultural threads.

"The cultural strategy is our opportunity to rethink how we tell the City's story," Brendan explained. "It's being shaped with input from residents, businesses, charities, and artists. We want it to feel co-created, not bureaucratic."

Due for launch early next year, the strategy promises to provide not just a roadmap for the City's cultural future, but a framework for collaboration across its many cultural players, from heritage bodies to grassroots creatives, all coming together by shared stories and civic pride.

FROM BUSINESS TO THE ARTS

Given Brendan's commercial background, it might seem surprising to find him at the helm of the City's cultural agenda. However, for him, the transition makes complete sense.

"I think they fit together quite naturally, really," he said. "Part of this is a sort of communication piece and that culture is not something you necessarily have to build."

That doesn't mean new initiatives aren't welcome. "I'm not saying you don't want any new cultural assets, because they're always interesting, thinking about new ways of engaging with the people that come to the City."

He's acutely aware of the City's layered population. "There are people that live here, not many, but they live here because they love it. We've got people that work here. It's their place of work. That's partly driven by the assets that we have here. People come to the City because of things to do. In some ways, you could say, there's too much to do. It can almost be overwhelming."

It's here that Brendan sees his business experience adding real value. "My business background is useful in the sense that I think we can be better at partnering with business. We're good at it in all kinds of ways when it comes to driving."

However, he added, "when it comes to developing partnerships on the cultural side, we did well in some places. Sculpture in the City is a great example, we did really, really well. I want to see that sort of thing spread out across more of the City, because actually it's business and their passion for what we do, and of course their resources, which are going to help us actually raise the profile."

A PATCHWORK QUILT IN NEED OF THREAD

In a previous speech, Brendan described the City's cultural life as "a patchwork quilt." We asked him which parts needed stitching.

"I think they all need stitching together, actually," he said. "Because it's a very good way of thinking about the City. There are these patches that sit culturally, but actually what we perhaps struggle to do is knit them all together. And that's the whole point of the cultural strategy."

It's no small task. "That's actually quite difficult to do," he added, "because often people say, 'What is culture? How do you define culture?' And if you ask a hundred different people, you get a hundred different answers. They'd all sort of be right, you know? So it means different things to different people."

Brendan's own take is clear.

"For me, it's a peculiarly human thing, it's our human endeavours that make culture what it is. And actually, going to cultural experiences are things that move us in

some way. They provoke us. They make us sad. They make us happy. They do all kinds of things. But that is the whole purpose of culture."

And the City, he said, "is absolutely full of it. I want to be able to tell those stories better."

That's why the new cultural strategy, due in 2026, is so important. "We do need this quilt to be knitted together in size," he said, "and that's the whole point, to try and come up with a way of doing that."

However, it's not just about connecting cultural institutions, but also about connecting people. "When we launch it," he said, "I don't want anybody saying, 'That's ridiculous,' or, 'What's the Corporation doing now?' This is something I firmly believe we can all agree on."

"People live here because they love it. People work here, I hope they love it too. And people visit because they want to discover the stories. So this is something I think that unites us. Culture is something that brings us together as humans. And I hope the cultural strategy will basically do the same thing."

A CITY OF MANY LAYERS

Brendan sees the City of London not just as a financial hub, but as a place with deep cultural roots and complex identities. "The City, like London as a whole, is like an onion," he said. "But I think we've got even more layers."

From churches and livery companies to Roman remains hidden beneath office blocks, he believes the City holds stories most people never hear. "I could talk all day about the churches, or the Roman assets we have in the City that most people don't know about." The real challenge, he said, "is to tell those stories to the people that I think want to know more about them."

That's where the City's forthcoming cultural strategy comes in, and Brendan is determined it won't be just another document. "We are consulting residents. We are consulting business. A lot of work is going into making sure that everybody involved in culture has a say in this," he said. "We want everyone to feel part of the process, that co-creation feeling."

It's a word he returns to. "When we launch it early next year, I want everybody to be celebrating, not going, 'Oh God, here we go again.' Culture unites us. It moves us in different ways."

And that includes a wide spectrum of expression. "Culture can be a whole range of different things," he said. "Architecture, film, music, art, sculpture, all these things. Why would we exclude any of it?"

For Brendan, it's simple: the stories are already here.

"What the City needs now is to be better storytellers."

CONDUCTING A COMMUNITY

As we talked through the City's better-known cultural institutions, the Barbican, St Paul's, the London Museum, I mentioned the smaller players: the churches, niche collections, and of course, independent platforms like ours. "We've got all these incredible places doing creative work," I said, "but how do we make sure they don't get overlooked?"

Brendan nodded, clearly already thinking ahead. "I've met some organisations, I've only been in the role a short time, but



already I've seen people doing extraordinary things. What I think would help them is a sense of community. That's what we need to build."

He gave an example: "A couple of weeks ago, I met with Music in Churches, a wonderful festival that runs for two weeks of the year. They do these incredible things, but not necessarily hand in hand with the Corporation. And that's what I want to change."

It's not about money, he clarified. "I'm not saying the committee has huge amounts of cash I can just hand out. But what we do have is the ability to convene, to collaborate, to create a sense of belonging."

He lit up when talking about the possibilities. "You've got Music in Churches doing amazing concerts. You've got City Music Foundation, we've worked with them on a whole series in the livery halls. I love those concerts. World-class musicians in these extraordinary venues, what's not to like?"

His goal is to be a kind of facilitator. "I like to think of myself as a sort of impresario or conductor," he said, smiling, "trying to help people feel they're part of something bigger."

It was at this point that I referred to the "Museum of London," and Brendan couldn't let it slide. "It's the London Museum now," he corrected gently, with a grin. "We've all got to get used to that." I laughed. However, it made the point: even the institutions are evolving. And part of Brendan's job is to make sure everyone feels included in that evolution.



CREATIVITY AND COMMERCE

The idea of business and culture working side by side in the Square Mile isn't new, but Brendan wants that relationship to start earlier and run deeper. "Life actually is a balance, isn't it?" he said. "And in terms of culture, you don't have a bottomless pit of money. But we do have some."

He's calling for culture to play a more proactive role in planning. "At the moment, culture tends to be involved a bit later than it should be," he said. "But earlier influence gives us the opportunity to do better match-making, between people who want to do cultural things in the City and developments that are coming up."

He praised the openness of Tom Sleight, Chair of Planning and Transportation and former Chair of the Barbican. "He's very open to this," Brendan said.

The goal is to bring culture closer to where people are. "Viewing platforms are great," he said, "but maybe it's time to think about the ground floor." He wants to see more activity in public spaces, not just exhibitions, but music and live performance. "The number one thing people want more of in the City is live music," he noted. "Sculpture in the City is a great example, but I'd like to see more of that energy outdoors."

Brendan described it as a partnership-driven approach. "We don't have a bottomless pit of money, but we can join people up. That's the strategic way."

He gave the example of Broadworks, just off Broad Street, a space for makers that residents had called for in consultations. "It's

fabulous," he said. "And we want to share that story more. It's under-publicised. That's our challenge, and our opportunity."

DEFINING SUCCESS: FROM KPIS TO MINDSET SHIFTS

Looking ahead to the 2026 Cultural Strategy, I asked Brendan what success would look like in practice. "At one level, it's raising the profile and status of culture," he said. "I want people to think of the City not just as a place of business, but as a place of rich culture. So the success of the strategy will be: is that happening?"

He acknowledged the usual measures. "I'm sure there'll be all kinds of data points and KPIS," he said, "but the real test lies in a shift in mindset. It's also around the partnership thing."

Leadership, he believes, plays a key role. "Anita Roddick once said if you ask your audience what they want, they probably wouldn't have come up with the Body Shop," he said with a smile. "Same with Henry Ford, if he'd asked people what they wanted, they'd have said faster horses."

"So yes, we consult, but we also need to lead. In terms of what we do, and how we do it."

He's also clear that the strategy should remain flexible. "It's not a fixed point. We can experiment. We can change."

For Brendan, the City's Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are vital to that process. "We can test things with the BIDs and see what works," he said. "Some of them already do amazing stuff. I'm a big fan of Fleet Street Quarter, really engaging events, strong footfall, everything the City wants to see."

Much of the work is already happening. "What I want to do is reveal it. And amplify it."

THE HEART OF IT: STORYTELLING

As the conversation turned to the pillars of the Cultural Strategy, partnerships, heritage, inclusion, and storytelling, I asked Brendan which area he felt most personally connected to.

"Well, I'm a big fan of storytelling," he said. "My professional business is as an event organiser. So if you want to do great events, what you do is tell great stories. That's how you really engage people."

In his view, the City is overflowing with material. "The challenge we've got is that there are so many stories. We've got thousands of years of them. So how do you tell those effectively?"

For Brendan, storytelling is the framework that connects everything else. "It's the umbrella that's above all the other things," he explained.

However, crucially, he doesn't believe the City Corporation should try to tell every story itself. "The heart of that, for me, is partnerships with people who are great storytellers. It's not necessarily thinking that the Corporation can tell all these stories on its own, but it's about opening doors, collaborating, bringing people in who already have audiences."

One recent encounter illustrated the point. "I met with the company behind 'Budget Day Out' recently, it's an Instagram thing. They promote free or cheap things to do, and actually, the City is full of those. I mean, for me, if you've not discovered St Dunstan-in-the-East, what a joy."

St Dunstan-in-the-East is one of Brendan

Barns' favourite hidden corners of the City, where storytelling, heritage, and quiet reflection meet.

Brendan's vision is clear: to make storytelling central, not only to attract new audiences, but to deepen the City's relationship with those already here. "That's what will bring it all together," he said. "That's what will make the culture feel lived."

UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN CITY

The City of London may be ancient, but Brendan Barns is clear: its cultural story is far from over. In fact, many of its greatest assets remain surprisingly unknown.

"The Guildhall Art Gallery is really fabulous," he said. "But if you ask people, even those into art, they'll mention Tate Britain or Tate Modern... and they've never even heard of it. That's something I want to change."

For him, it's not about competition, it's about connection. "We've got exhibitions on right now that are brilliant and free. But would anybody know? I'm very open to talking to people and saying, 'Can you help us?'"

Downstairs at Guildhall, visitors can stumble upon a Roman amphitheatre, often without knowing it's there. "It's great when they discover it. It's a surprise." He also highlights the Heritage Gallery nearby. "We had Shakespeare's signature, one of only six. Before that, the William Charter from 1067. What other organisation has looked after something for nearly a thousand years?"

Brendan's passion extends across the Square Mile. "I love the City Wall at Vine Street, as it's like a mini London Museum, built around Roman remains found during development," he said. "And on Gracechurch Street, they've just uncovered parts of the Roman basilica. Once it's ready, there'll be a glass walkway so people can look straight down into the past."

For Brendan, this is what makes the City's culture so alive. "The amphitheatre was only discovered in the 1980s. That's extraordinary. A city like this can still tell new stories."

And at the centre of it all is what he sees as his core purpose. "I keep coming back to storytelling," he said. "If we don't tell people these things, how will they ever know? And if they don't know, how can they feel part of it?"

ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY AND GIVING BACK

Inclusion and access aren't just policy buzzwords for Brendan, but are rooted in his personal and professional life. When I asked about his support for scholarships, particularly at the Guildhall School, his answer was thoughtful and sincere.

"I was educated at the LSE," he said. "I was lucky, as I got a grant, it didn't cost me anything. But I've been reasonably successful, and I feel I owe it to the LSE and other institutions to help fund people who may not have the same opportunities."

Through the London Business Forum, the organisation he founded, Brendan supports the London Business Forum Scholarship at LSE, providing full tuition and a living allowance to students who are both academically exceptional and financially in need. "That, for me, is the heart of giving back and leaving some sort of legacy," he explained.

His commitment extends to the arts. At the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, he helps students pursue music education, an area he feels should never be reserved for the

privileged few. "I'm not a professional musician, though I played lots of instruments when I was young, none of them well!" he joked. "But I think if we don't fund the study of music from an early age, the long-term consequences are really damaging."

Music, he said, isn't just about performance. "It helps your brain develop. It sparks creativity and curiosity. So when I see what students are doing at Guildhall, I love it. I want to play some small part in helping people who wouldn't be able to do it otherwise."

It's a theme that runs through his work: empowerment through opportunity. "That's the attitude I take in pretty much everything I'm involved in. I'm always thinking, what can we do, practically? How do we connect? How do we help people achieve what they want to do?"

WHY LOCAL STILL MATTERS AND HOW COLLABORATION CAN HELP

Toward the end of our conversation, I put a question to Brendan that matters deeply to platforms like ours: with local news outlets shrinking and national media often missing the detail, how important is it to have independent platforms like EyeOnLondon telling the City's stories?

"Obviously, I would say it's really important," he said with a smile. "I'm here with you." Then he continued, more seriously: "Whatever it is, storytelling is at the heart of it, but being really focused and being able to develop stories..."

For Brendan, this isn't just about neighbourhood newsletters. "When we say local, when we think about the City, okay, we've only got 8,500 residents. But we've got 670,000 people that come in on a peak day during the week. They spend their working life here. They probably feel very much part of the community of the City."

That shared sense of place, he believes, mustn't be lost.

"We mustn't lose local."

However, the solution, he added, isn't competition, it's collaboration. "Could the Corporation be helping in some way? Can we do more collaboration, helping each other? Again, it's not necessarily competitive. No, no, no. It's collaborating."

STITCHING STORIES ACROSS TIME

Brendan Barns speaks with both conviction and warmth, an unusual but vital combination in the world of civic leadership. His vision for culture in the City of London is not a top-down imposition, but a gradual unveiling of something that's already there, waiting to be rediscovered.

In his words, culture runs like underground rivers beneath our feet, often unseen, but always present. Through his committee's work, he hopes to make those currents visible, to stitch together the patches, to remind us that even in the financial heart of the capital, it's not all numbers and margins. There are stories here. Old ones. New ones. And ones still being written.

As we finished the interview, it was hard not to feel hopeful. The City may be best known for money. However, with leaders like Brendan Barns at the helm, its cultural capital is finally getting the investment it deserves.

THE STAGE DOOR by John Martin

THE GREAT GATSBY BRINGS BROADWAY GLAMOUR TO LONDON

London Coliseum St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4ES londoncoliseum.org until 7th September



Frances Mayli McCann & Amber Davies
in *The Great Gatsby*. Photo © Mark Senior



Jamie Muscato & Frances Mayli McCann
in *The Great Gatsby*. Photo © Mark Senior

Jay Gatsby is throwing a party in London again. This is the very full-blown musical of Fitzgerald's novel. Suddenly it's popping up everywhere on stage. No surprise – the novel just entered the public domain – and this is the first big new musical version out of the gate. It's already had its Broadway premiere, winning one Tony Award for costumes.

The novel itself is a classic Jazz Age tale. Fitzgerald's novel is set in 1922 New York, at the height of the Roaring Twenties. The story explores the glitter and the dark side of the "American Dream" – wealth, class and doomed love. Themes of ambition, money and love intertwine, painting a picture of 1920s excess and lost hope. It's a sharp picture of its time, full of longing and critique.

The Coliseum is a vast, beautiful theatre (usually home to English National Opera), and this show fills it up. In fact, they've used the full Broadway set here – nothing is cut back for size. I've never seen better use of LED screens and moving scenery. The stage shifts and changes so fast, you're blinking, wondering how some transitions are achieved.

There's not one but two period cars, and they have cleverly turned the orchestra pit into the pool! The costumes are dazzling, the lighting is vivid – it really does feel like stepping into the Roaring Twenties. The colour palette is a striking green, all lush lawns and wallpaper – enough to make you

wonder if you accidentally wandered into *Wicked*!

For all the visuals, what about the show itself? Well, the cast throws themselves into it. They sing and dance with real gusto – each number is full-throttle. The leads sell the big scenes. Jamie Muscato (last seen by me in *The Great Comet*) is a charismatic Gatsby, holding the stage and delivering powerhouse vocals. Frances Mayli McCann,

playing Daisy, sparkles in the love scenes but is hampered by the creative team's misguided intention of making her more sympathetic.

Corbin Bleu as Nick makes a great impression in his West End debut – but in this version the role is reduced to almost comic relief. Amber Davies acquits herself well in the role of Jordan, the female golfer, but early hints at sexual ambiguity are

soon forgotten. The remaining principals are all strong and do their best to overcome the strangely echoey sound system. They are supported by an ensemble that are all strong dancers and singers.

The songs are broad and brassy; think of a lot of power ballads and big ensemble choruses. But then you listen to the lyrics and script. And that's where things get dicey. This show has mostly turned Gatsby into a straight romance. It pretty much drops the novel's social satire and sexual ambiguity, focusing on Gatsby and Daisy's love – so, the class snobbery and moral muddles around the Buchanans are toned down. All the complex undertones of Fitzgerald's story (the shady business, the wild 20s party scene, the hints of something darker in Gatsby) get blasted out by the big power ballads.

There's one more odd note: they have Gatsby break into dance. Fitzgerald's Gatsby was known for his guarded silence, not for cutting loose to a big number. But if you can let that slide, the spectacle does deliver.

Meanwhile, if one Great Gatsby musical isn't enough, there's another brewing. Singer Florence Welch (of Florence + the Machine) is writing a separate Gatsby show called *Gatsby: An American Myth*. It had its debut in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in summer 2024 and promises a dreamier, more ethereal take, blending Florence's signature sound with Fitzgerald's Jazz Age themes. To be honest, I am more interested in seeing this version! No word yet on a London run – but watch this space.

If you like a great big visual spectacle and some knockout singing and are not worried about listening to lyrics or bothering too much about the book, you're going to have a great time. However, if you are an admirer of the F. Scott Fitzgerald original, I don't think you are going to be very happy.



Corbin Bleu and the original West End cast
of *The Great Gatsby*. Photo © Mark Senior

THE STAGE DOOR *by John Martin*

THE COMEDY ABOUT SPIES LICENCE TO LAUGH? MISCHIEF THEATRE'S SPIES GO ROGUE

Noël Coward Theatre St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4AU delfontmackintosh.co.uk Until 5th September



As the house lights dim and the James Bond-esque music starts, you know you're in for a wild ride. A timid baker, a would-be Bond, and rival CIA, MI6, and KGB agents collide in a riot of mistaken identity and slapstick chases. It's fast, loud, and daft, and it knows exactly what it is.

I was quite worried going into it because one of the producers on BBC Radio Kent had been to see it and loved it, saying it was one of the funniest things she had seen. On the other hand, some friends of mine have been to see it, and I had a message from them saying, "Do not under any circumstances go and see it," and they had left at the interval! So, two polar opposites.

I must also confess that I'm one of the very few people who didn't really enjoy *The Play That Goes Wrong*. I do have a theory, though, that if you are actually in the business, you don't find it funny. This view is also shared by the actress friend who accompanied me. I just sat there thinking, "Well, they would have stopped it by now!"

Mischief Theatre sprang from six friends at RADA in 2008 and is incredibly successful, with two strands of work: the *Goes Wrong* strand, we've got *A Christmas Carol That Goes Wrong* coming up, and there has been *Peter Pan That Goes Wrong*, among others. Here we have the second entry in the *Comedy About* strand, the first being *A Comedy About A Bank Robbery*, which I unfortunately didn't manage to get to see. All very popular and successful both in the UK on tour and in New York. Each show shares a taste for pantomime-style chaos, tight comic craft, and incredibly precise physicality.

Very specifically, the show is set in London in 1961, which is great and sets up the era and style of what ensues. It is more *Airplane* than *Mission Impossible*. The story kicks off with a simple mix-up in a hotel lobby. Our baker hero is swept up with his girlfriend. An eager actor thinks he's auditioning for 007 (his only rival an unknown Sean Connery!). Soon, secret files, hidden corridors, and pratfalls fill the stage. The split-level set of four rooms impresses in Act One with running from room to room and, in one instance, through the ceiling. It then expands in Act Two into a feast of moving doors, a laundrette, and an open lift shaft. You can certainly see where the money has gone, though it grows almost too busy.

The gags land hard - some land too often. I could have done with a few fewer red wine jokes, and a crude running joke about incest is at odds with the overall tone. But at its best, the show is pure silliness, honed by people who know their way around a gag. And it also ends with a brief moment of real pathos.

This new spy caper was written by Henry Lewis and Henry Shields and directed by Matt DiCarlo. Cast members are all Mischief alumni and boast TV and stage credits from West End runs. They tackle the physical stunts, falls, spins, and a shimmy up a lift shaft, with expert flair. For fans of slapstick and screwball comedy, it hits the spot.

In the hands of Mischief's team, this show revives the concept of the old-fashioned star vehicle, a light comedy built as a showcase for a star, in this case, the Mischief Company, giving them an opportunity to show their skills. It doesn't aim for meaning or significance; it simply asks you to laugh.

So, if you fancy an evening of relentless gags, collapsing ceilings, and the chance to see spies get their just deserts -mission accomplished!



The Comedy About Spies with Henry Shields, Dave Hearn and Nancy Zamit. Photo © Mark Senior



The Comedy About Spies. Photo © Mark Senior

Arts & Culture by Simon Tate

A New Light:

There's a nice little irony in the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing reopening on the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Throughout the Second World War the gallery never closed – until the day the war ended and it was shut for the celebrations. Although the paintings were stashed away in a Welsh slate quarry for safety (one Picture of the Month was brought back as a reminder of what we were missing), the gallery was open every day for, among other activities, the famous free piano concerts of Myra Hess.

The Sainsbury Wing was opened by the Queen in 1991 amid some controversy and closed again in February 2023 for a revolutionary £85m “democratisation” of the National Gallery – though the money has all been privately raised with nothing coming from the public purse – and the first thing you notice as you approach is that the name “The National Gallery” is now emblazoned over the door. This is no longer just a wing.

“We wanted to make it clear, in large letters,” said Gabriele Finaldi, celebrating his tenth year as its director. “What we are delivering is what we want the National Gallery to be, welcoming to people, a place of warmth, light and space. The gallery is yours,” as he has said before and repeats now. “The paintings belong to you.”

Marking the end of a year of celebrating the gallery's 200th anniversary, the new open redesign is the work of a German architect based in New York, Annabelle Selldorf, whose watchword seems to be subtlety: subtle colours, subtle lighting, subtle space. Technical developments in glass-making mean more natural light can be allowed into an expanded foyer through what seem to be much larger windows, so that from a place of comparative tranquillity now there is an immediate connection with the bustle of Trafalgar Square outside.

Gone are the cluttering pillars, much of the concrete ceiling, the cloakroom, the walls hiding the broad staircase to the galleries, the great rambling shop – which always seemed an odd thing to find at the start of a museum visit rather than at the end. Selldorf has shifted stuff you didn't know was there till it was gone.

There are no search tables now, all that's done electronically and remotely from slender pillars: to the right, the stairs to the collection; to the left, a new coffee bar. Where a ceiling once was is a balcony revealing a new Giorgio Locatelli restaurant that overlooks Trafalgar Square. And ahead as you enter is a 12m-wide media wall showing enlargements of some of the most loved paintings in the collection – Raphael, Van Eyck, Gainsborough, Vermeer just in the few minutes I stood there – in very high resolution with detail you couldn't make out on the painting itself with the naked eye.

Halfway down towards the temporary exhibition gallery there are new toilets and cloakrooms where a tunnel has been half-dug between the Sainsbury and the old Wilkins building, allowing for a new gather space beside the 320-seat lecture theatre.

What isn't here, however, is the long-argued-for extended temporary exhibition space. That remains in the basement, cramped and without natural light: it wasn't, said the deputy director, Paul Gray, unhelpfully, in the brief. The permanent collection is the focus.

The National Gallery should have been celebrating at least its 250th birthday with an exhibition bearing more than a passing resemblance to what you would see in the Hermitage in St Petersburg today. When Sir Robert Walpole died in 1745 there was already a yearning for something to match the great galleries that had begun to spring up over Europe, and his outstanding



The National Gallery. © National Gallery

collection was offered for sale to the nation. But while the government dithered it was snapped up by Catherine the Great.

It wasn't until 1823 that the die was cast when the collection of a recently deceased banker, John Julius Angerstein, came on the market with works by Raphael, Rembrandt and Titian, and mindful of the Walpole debacle Parliament hastily voted to buy the collection and it opened in Angerstein's house in Pall Mall as the National Gallery on 19 May 1824.

However, it was too pokey, unfavourably compared with Paris's palatial Louvre, so in 1832 a new building designed by William Wilkins opened on the site of the royal mews at Charing Cross and, despite fears that pollution from the foul air of central London might ruin the pictures, the National Gallery duly moved in.

Space became an issue once more, and in the 1980s the three grocer Sainsbury brothers made a donation to create a new

wing. The first proposal, by ABH, was scrapped when it was scorned by the then Prince Charles as a “monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend.” A new competition was won by Robert Venturi working with Denise Scott Brown, and it opened in 1991.

Its Selldorf renaissance is a revelation on many levels, and there is still phase II to be done, starting next year, to finish the tunnel and establish new archive, research and library facilities.

There is also a complete rehang with more paintings on show than before – 1,000 as against 700 – with feature rooms for individual artists such as Titian, Rembrandt and Monet, tracing the development of European art from the 13th century to today, signified by Richard Long's new commission, Mud Sun, that dominates as you climb the staircase. Some favourites, like the Wilton Diptych, have returned to where you would expect to find them. New works acquired as part of NG200 are up. And themes have been devised to engage visitors, such as one gallery devoted to pastels. Paintings have been conserved and restored, and intriguing new discoveries made – Cézanne's Bathers is now in a new frame along with the French newspaper cuttings used in a previous relining.

The National Gallery was welcoming 6m visitors a year pre-pandemic, and with the Sainsbury Wing closed for two years since, it has seen barely 3m across the threshold a year. That will change almost overnight, and although the new rehang bears more than a passing resemblance to a church hang to echo the way medieval paintings would first have been seen, this is no evocation to worship. More pictures will be on show – 1,000 rather than 700 from the 2,600-strong collection.

“Thanks to the reimagining of the exterior and interior spaces by architect Annabelle Selldorf,” said Finaldi, “millions of visitors will be welcomed into the newly configured and subtly refurbished spaces, double height and brilliantly lit, and en route to exploring the gallery's superb painting collection from Giotto to Monet.”



New Sainsbury Wing © National Gallery

Inside the Reimagined Sainsbury Wing

Arts & Culture by Simon Tate

Hogarth's Hidden Masterpiece

Hogarth's Hidden Masterpiece Returns to View at the Great Hall, St Bart's

William Hogarth's *The Pool at Bethesda* depicts the Bible story of Christ telling the lame man to take up his bed and walk — a perfect subject with which to decorate a hospital wall. But there's so much more in this painting.

For almost 300 years this enormous mural, 4m by 6m, has been hidden on the staircase to St Bartholomew's Hospital's Great Hall at Smithfield. Not for much longer. After restoration, it will at long last be viewable by the public this October.

It's a landmark picture for Hogarth (he was approaching 40 when he painted it), by far his biggest painting. Hogarth made his reputation painting ordinary people as they really were, in large canvases depicting social situations and the calamities that could arise — which he popularised by making engravings that sold widely across all classes.

However, the academically approved genre of history painting was normally not for him — until he took on this project. His father-in-law, however, was the esteemed James Thornhill (who had not approved of his daughter's marriage), the academically correct artist of the enormous Painted Ceiling at Greenwich. Hogarth thought he was starting a new phase in his career. But 1736 was on the tail end of the fashion for monumental paintings of this kind, and he never got another large-scale commission.

St Bartholomew's, forever known as Bart's, was founded in 1123, supported by a priory until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1540s, after which it had to fund itself until the NHS in the 1940s. The Hall was built to be a grand venue in which fundraising events kept the hospital's economy buoyant. But being part of the hospital's administrative wing, its upkeep was low on the NHS's list of priorities, and over the years a rotting roof and leaks dimmed the glory of a magnificently moulded and gilded ceiling.

So, partly to mark Bart's 900th anniversary, the Hall — along with its staircase and the Hogarths, *The Pool at Bethesda* and its smaller adjacent partner *The Good Samaritan* — was to be restored, and Barts Heritage Trust was set up to raise the £10m needed.

No luxury was spared by the conceivers of the Hall, designed by James Gibbs (St Martin-in-the-Fields), and it was decided to hire some eminent Italian muralists to decorate the staircase walls with suitable biblical subjects. Word quickly got to Hogarth, by then at the height of his popularity, who was outraged: only an English painter could be commissioned for such a prestigious project. And he would do it for free. It must be one of the most quixotic gestures in the history of art.

His themes — the smaller *Good Samaritan* (philanthropy) on the side wall, adjacent to the giant *The Pool at Bethesda* (healing) — present the main two characters at the centre in a classical tableau and academically approved fashion. But they are surrounded by a sickly throng thirsty for healing miracles, who are believed to have been modelled by Hogarth on the actual ailing inmates of the hospital. So much so that today a popular seminar in this



The Pool at Bethesda. Credit WikiArt



Image © Simon Tate



Image © Simon Tate

ancient teaching hospital is done standing in front of the huge image — risking neck injuries — to diagnose what the subjects were suffering from. And social historians do the same to see what evidence these ailments give for life and living conditions in early 18th-century Smithfield.

Will Palin, former collections curator of the Soane Museum (which houses the whole series of Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*), is CEO of the new Barts Heritage Trust. He explains that the Hall was on the Buildings at Risk Register before the decision was taken to restore it. One hundred and sixty windows have had to be removed, restored and replaced, the entire roof is being reconstructed, the Hogarths are being restored, and the Hall's interior is being cleaned and restored — including the portrait of Henry VIII “in the style of Hans Holbein the Younger”, which Hogarth and

Gibbs are said to have supervised the hanging of, precisely where it now hangs — and the names of donors given new prominence on their honour boards. “It used to cost £50 to get your name up there,” Palin remarks. “It's £50,000 now.”

The *Pool at Bethesda*, not a mural, was painted off-site, he says, possibly at the studio of Hogarth's friend the landscape painter George Lambert in Covent Garden, and installed in 1734–5 (*The Good Samaritan* was painted in situ and completed in 1736–7). So two or three years of work in all. Both are on canvas, and Lambert painted the backgrounds while Hogarth's assistant Richards did the decorative elements. *Bethesda* was painted as one piece then cut into sections, carried probably in rolls across London and fixed to the new timber frame on the staircase — with the joins then touched in.

“I think the paintings are extraordinary — not classically ‘correct’ (perspective etc) but full of life and vitality — and they display a deep empathy with the characters, particularly the sick and the lame,”

Palin says. “I think as an achievement they are amongst Hogarth's finest works.”

“Obviously the public appetite was for his smaller narrative works, but Hogarth here was pitching for elite patronage. He therefore undertook the work at Bart's in the hope that the paintings would open the door to more large-scale commissions (history painting was considered the pinnacle of the craft) — and this was the major incentive for Hogarth undertaking the works. However, the vogue for grand history painting was already waning, and other than the altarpiece for St Mary's in Bristol, Hogarth did not repeat the exercise.”

Classical Music *by Richard Trehane*

What better way to experience some truly classical cinema for musical aficionados and film fiends alike.

The ethos of this world renowned hall has been to access and nurture the Arts and sciences while educating the public and enriching our culture. Since it's grand opening by Queen Victoria in 1871, this institution has continued to honour Prince Albert's very wish.

The RAH is no stranger to cinema and opened its doors for its first film screening all the way back in 1905 and has continued to do so since.

Now, This April the Royal Albert Hall had recently refurbished all 85 of their iconic acoustic diffusers (more commonly known as mushrooms) and we were eager to appreciate the effort put in to such a

task. And what a privilege it was to have been basking in the swelling heart of this venue. Accompanied by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra and the Philharmonia Chorus we all took our seats to revisit a modern classic, *Gladiator*!

It's enriched and overexposed hues illuminated the auditorium revealing a full house at the ready, to be taken away from day to day life in this unique viewing.

Now most of us know this story, but what captivated the crowd was the immense score composed by Hanz Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard- done true justice by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, consisting of a total 84 players bringing the vision of Zimmer and Gerrard to our seats.

We can't discuss the instrumental players without giving flowers to the

Philharmonia Chorus, who burst new dimension into the occasion. Carefully nurtured by Chorus Master, Gavin Carr - this elite ensemble of songsters augmented an already powerful notion that filled the dome and flooded the audience. All the while being conducted by the decorated and highly respected Timothy Henry.

If you are indeed familiar with this film, then you may know that the vocals composed alongside the score are of universal speech, which really is a testament to literary being redundant in order to hit our inmost emotions, and that the primal yet delicate vocals of this masterpiece lead and dance the audience to really experience the characters we meet through this turbulent time in ancient antiquity.

Clara Sanabras lent us her voice and power through this demanding film and at times it was easy to forget the mammoth screen towering above and fall into the emotion she was conjuring with the orchestra. Having been featured in many a blockbuster like *Hunger Games* and *The Hobbit* you can understand how fitting Clara's vocals and energy would be for this occasion.

Gladiator is just one of the many orchestral screenings shown this the year. With further hits of nostalgia from *Back to the Future*, to introducing the little ones to the musical world with *How to Train Your Dragon*, there's always something worth exploring.

The full programme for this year and the beginning of the next, can be found below. So go and experience the musical mastery for yourself! It truly is pure excellence.

Royal Albert Hall: *Gladiator*



Gladiator Live at the Royal Albert Hall

Classical Music *by Simon Mundy*

Recommended Recordings



Elgar & Fauré: Chamber Elegies

Elgar
String Quartet Op. 83
Carissima (arr. Iain Farrington)

Fauré
String Quartet Op. 121
Three Preludes from Op. 103 (arr. Iain Farrington)

Eusebius Quartet
Somm Recordings SOMMCD 0703

Elgar often talked about his music as “outdoor”, but his only string quartet is about as indoor as it gets. It is one of the three extraordinary chamber works written in the late stages of the First World War and it is hard to imagine it being composed anywhere other than in damp woodland Sussex in front of a log fire.

The Eusebius Quartet, named after one of the figures Schumann invented as a character for his music, has been together in London for nine years now and is shaping up to be one of the most intelligent of emerging groups. They capture the moodiness of Elgar’s music well - its meandering melancholy and background disturbance, even in the faster passages, when there is a false sense that he is trying to pull himself together.

Fauré’s quartet was written seven years later, in 1924, and was his last work. It has very much the same elegiac feel, if perhaps with a touch more of a wistful smile. The smaller pieces on the disc, arranged by Iain Farrington, suit the quartet format despite their original guises for small orchestra and piano respectively, and are welcome additions to the list of possible encores.

Chopin: Romantic Mastery

Piano Sonatas Nos. 2 & 3
Berceuse Op. 57
Ballade No. 1 Op. 23
Nocturnes Op. 55 Nos. 1 & 2

Benjamin Grosvenor, piano
Decca 487 0958

Benjamin Grosvenor started his career so early, winning the keyboard section of BBC Young Musician in 2004, that it is a bit of a shock to realise he is still only in his early thirties. He plays with insights he really has no right to have at his age. He has that rare ability to make one listen afresh to familiar works.

Here he intersperses the two big sonatas, nearly half an hour each, with some of Chopin’s most demanding shorter works. Interestingly, it is one of the first recordings to be made in the new studio at the Wormsley Estate in



Buckinghamshire, which hosts Garsington Opera.

The Second Sonata is almost schizophrenic: Chopin trying to tie his furious imagination into a formal structure in a way that baffled his contemporaries—the uneven storms countered by the grim tenderness of its funeral march, which Grosvenor balances beautifully. The Third Sonata has movements alternating in length, but its shifting emotions never let the listener feel on safe ground.

Now, with Liszt, Brahms and Prokofiev behind us, Chopin’s works just stand out as brilliantly forward-looking. The lovely Berceuse is welcome relief before the intensity of the first Ballade, one of those epic romantic sagas - not a ballad in any normal sense.

Mendelssohn: Scottish Shores & Beyond

Symphony No. 3 “The Scottish”
Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage
Three Songs Without Words
(Op. 38 No. 2, Op. 19b No. 6, Op. 67 No. 4, arr. Lahav Shani)

Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra
Lahav Shani, conductor
Warner Classics 5021732723253

Shani’s view of Scotland might seem a bit too smooth at the start, but once the seas of Mendelssohn’s symphony get rougher, his interpretation sharpens up. The swells and bluster are of the sort that sank the Spanish Armada. He is good at the grandeur of the slow movement, capturing the



Simon Mundy takes a listen to the latest classical releases for June, from thoughtful chamber pieces to bold orchestral adventures and a fresh spin on Holst.

This month’s picks offer a little something for everyone: moody quartets, fiery piano sonatas, windswept Mendelssohn, and even a new planet added to *The Planets*. Familiar names and fresh voices come together in recordings that balance polish with personality.



Walter Scott narratives that so caught the imagination of Romantic composers, though the final movement, marked vivacissimo, could take a few more risks.

Mendelssohn’s tone poem in response to Goethe’s *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* is not heard as often as it deserves these days, so it is good to have a recording of it from the orchestra of Europe’s largest port. The music is more about relief at reaching dry land than the pleasure of embarking.

The Songs Without Words (whether by Fanny or Felix Mendelssohn) lend themselves well to orchestration. Shani’s setting of the Venetian Gondola Song glides along serenely, and his arrangement of the Spinning Song is so clever it sounds as if lifted straight from the music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Holst and Fraillon: The Planets, Reimagined

Holst – *The Planets*
Deborah Cheetham Fraillon – *Earth*

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon, soprano
MSO Chorus
Melbourn Symphony Orchestra
Jaime Martín, conductor
MSO 0003

What a clever pairing this is. Fraillon’s work, commissioned specially by the MSO, portrays Earth, the one planet Gustav Holst left out (except for Pluto, which had not been discovered when Holst was writing in 1917, though Colin Matthews has added it since in honour of his friend, Imogen Holst - but that is not included here). Even astronomers seem determined to leave Pluto out these days.

Holst was anyway more interested in depicting astrological rather than astronomical character. To his depiction of Venus as the bringer of peace and Uranus the magician, Fraillon has added Earth as the voice, in this recording of the first performance, her own. Her work follows on cleanly from the fragile ending of Holst’s, though it soon veers into Mahler’s territory (in the literal meaning of the word) and then something closer to John Williams. It just about works, though without the originality that Holst brought to the subject a century ago.

Jaime Martín, once Principal Flute of both the London Philharmonic and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, is making an impressive go of his time as Chief Conductor of the MSO. It is now a top band.



Jazz Masterclass:

I dare to say it: there are no finer or more musical jazz pianists performing today than Monty Alexander. His precision, his deftness, his ability to move from lyricism to percussive energy, is constantly extraordinary. He has been playing at Ronnie Scott's for as long as I can remember, certainly since the late 1970s, and every time I hear him I marvel; no less on 25th June this year than when I first heard him in the smoke-filled old room. These days Ronnie Scott's is a cabaret concert hall, but in many ways that brings out Alexander's artistry even more clearly.

His great gift is to be able to move seamlessly between musical traditions. He can make a Bob Marley song a subject for a classical theme and variations without losing its reggae heart; Alexander's Jamaican background ensures that it is full of respect and compassion. He can do the same for a rumba or a Gershwin standard. He has an instinct for merging the jazz impulses of New York with the rhythms of the Caribbean that makes his rehearsed improvisations unlike anybody else's.



Now in his eighties, he has lost none of his insistence on exact ensemble from his drum and double bass collaborators. Every note has to be together, every entry strong and definite. He is like one of those old-school conductors who insisted on the orchestra playing at the precise moment when the tip of the baton gives the beat: no anticipation, no blurring of the attack. And yet he can make the piano sing with the softest of touches, delicately placing and embroidering a melody so that it entrances.

The programming policy at the Frith Street club leans towards single appearances rather than the week-long residencies of old. This is sometimes successful, in that it allows for a far greater number of performers to find a slot. But in the case of a global treasure like Monty Alexander, having him around and making the London stage his home for sizable chunks of the month would be a gift to the generations who have not yet discovered him.

Monty Alexander at Ronnie Scott's

grandappetites *by Emma Trehane*

There's something quietly memorable about starting the day beneath vaulted ceilings, with natural light filtering through stained glass and the soft background hum of a city just waking up. That's the experience at Soleado, a breakfast spot tucked inside Mercato Mayfair, where heritage, design, and flavour come together in one of central London's most atmospheric settings.

Once a Grade I-listed Anglican church, St Mark's on North Audley Street was deconsecrated in 1974 and spent 30 years on England's Historic Heritage Risk Register. Today, thanks to a £5 million restoration by Grosvenor Estates, it has been transformed into one of London's most striking food and community spaces. Its rebirth as Mercato Mayfair preserves all the character of the original building, the archways, stone columns, wood-carved details, while introducing a new layer of purpose. Soleado fits into that space beautifully: calm, inviting, and just the right level of refined.

Breakfast is served from 8.30am to 11.30am, and whether you arrive for a quick bite before work or a slower morning meeting, the pace and warmth of service make you want to stay a little longer. Claudia, who looked after us, was as attentive as she was cheerful and a reminder that good hospitality doesn't need to be formal to make an impression.

The menu is the work of Chef Marcos Morán, a fifth-generation Spanish chef whose family restaurant in Asturias, Casa Gerardo, has held a Michelin star for over 30 years. He brings both depth and clarity to the Soleado breakfast menu, keeping things simple, well-sourced, and seasonal. It's a confident offering that doesn't over-reach but instead, it focuses on doing a few things exceptionally well.

We began with a mimosa (£12) made with freshly squeezed orange juice and Juvé & Camps Reserva de la Familia - a crisp and elegant Cava, the kind of drink that quietly lifts a morning without demanding attention.

There's a definite Spanish lean to the food, but nothing feels heavy. Churros

with hot chocolate (£8.50) are beautifully done. Crisp on the outside, tender inside, with a dark, velvety chocolate sauce that leans bitter rather than sweet. It's a rich start, yes, but not overindulgent - more a moment of comfort.

The Continental breakfast (£15) comes with a well-balanced selection of Spanish

and yoghurt (£7) and fresh fruit salad (£7), all clearly laid out and reasonably priced for the area.

Coffee and tea are done properly here too. There's no fanfare, just well-made drinks served at the right temperature. I finished with an Americano (£3.50), which was smooth and creamy with no bitterness,



©Mercato Mayfair

Breakfast at

Soleado, Mercato Mayfair

A Morning Worth Making Time For



Marcos Morán and William Salvador. ©Mercato Mayfair

cured meats and cheeses, alongside freshly baked bread. There's a noticeable depth of flavour in the Iberico ham, the kind that suggests proper ageing and traditional curing, likely bellota (acorn)-fed. Our Art Director, Steve, was thoroughly impressed - though he did suggest, with his designer's eye, that the menu's font size could be increased slightly. It's a minor note in an otherwise carefully thought-through experience.

I went for the Soleado Breakfast (£15), which leans more British in composition: scrambled eggs, hash browns, bacon, sausage, grilled tomato and mushroom. The scrambled eggs were soft and buttery, the bacon just crisped, and the sausage had good seasoning. Crucially, the plate was well-balanced and enough to keep you going until lunchtime, but not so much that you're looking at a siesta before your first meeting.

Other options include the Spanish tortilla (£7.50), Mediterranean toast with grilled vegetables and optional eggs (£7 + £2), and a selection of pastries (croissants, pain au chocolat, and toast with butter and honey, each at £4). There's also a more health-conscious side to the menu, with granola

rounding things off nicely.

Before leaving, it's worth stopping by the small curated shop by the entrance. It offers hand-crafted cards, succulents, and a few considered gifts that feel in keeping with the tone of the place - understated but thoughtful.

What makes Soleado stand out is how naturally it fits into the surroundings. It's a good place to be and enjoy breakfast with a buddy or business partner. Chef Morán's menu brings together Spanish quality and Mayfair calm, offering food that quietly reflects the character of the space: elegant without fuss, and full of quiet life.

Whether you're a local looking for a quality start to the day, or passing through on business, Soleado is worth seeking out. The whole setting is rare and lingers in the mind, long after the last sip of coffee.

Soleado, Mercato Mayfair,
St. Mark's Church,
N Audley Street
W1K 6ZA
soleadorestaurants.com
020 7621 0338

Health & Wellbeing by Natalie Shanahan

In a world where uncertainty often feels like the only constant, the ability to adapt, maintain balance, and keep going has become a vital life skill. While some people seem naturally able to respond calmly and bounce back quickly after setbacks, for others it can feel more difficult. However, science is starting to explain why that difference exists and how we can all support our own capacity to recover and adapt over time.

The key lies in the complex relationship between genetics, epigenetics, and the brain's capacity to change, known as neuroplasticity. Together, these forces shape how we respond to pressure and how we grow through challenge.

'What It Means to Adapt and Recover' and 'Why It Varies'

Some people process difficult experiences more easily than others. What we're really talking about is how individuals manage to stay steady, mentally, emotionally, and physically, when they're under strain. That process involves more than just mindset. It's biological too.

The body's response to stress is guided in part by our genetic makeup. Differences in how our bodies produce and respond to hormones like cortisol can shape how intensely we experience stress. Some people inherit a more reactive system; others respond with greater ease. But genetics is only part of the story.

'How Life Experiences Shape Your Biology'

This is where epigenetics enters the picture. While your genes provide a blueprint, the environment and experiences you're exposed to throughout your life can influence how those genes behave. This doesn't change the DNA itself, but it can affect how certain genes are 'switched on' or 'off'.

Things like early life experiences, trauma, nurturing relationships, or prolonged stress can all leave a biological imprint, shaping not only how your body responds in the moment, but potentially how future generations respond too.

Epigenetic changes are now being studied in relation to everything from mental health to immune function. To understand more about how this works, this explainer breaks down the basic science.

'The Brain's Lifelong Ability to Rewire Itself'

One of the most encouraging aspects of recent research is the focus on neuroplasticity, which is the brain's natural capacity to create new connections, reorganise itself, and adapt over time.

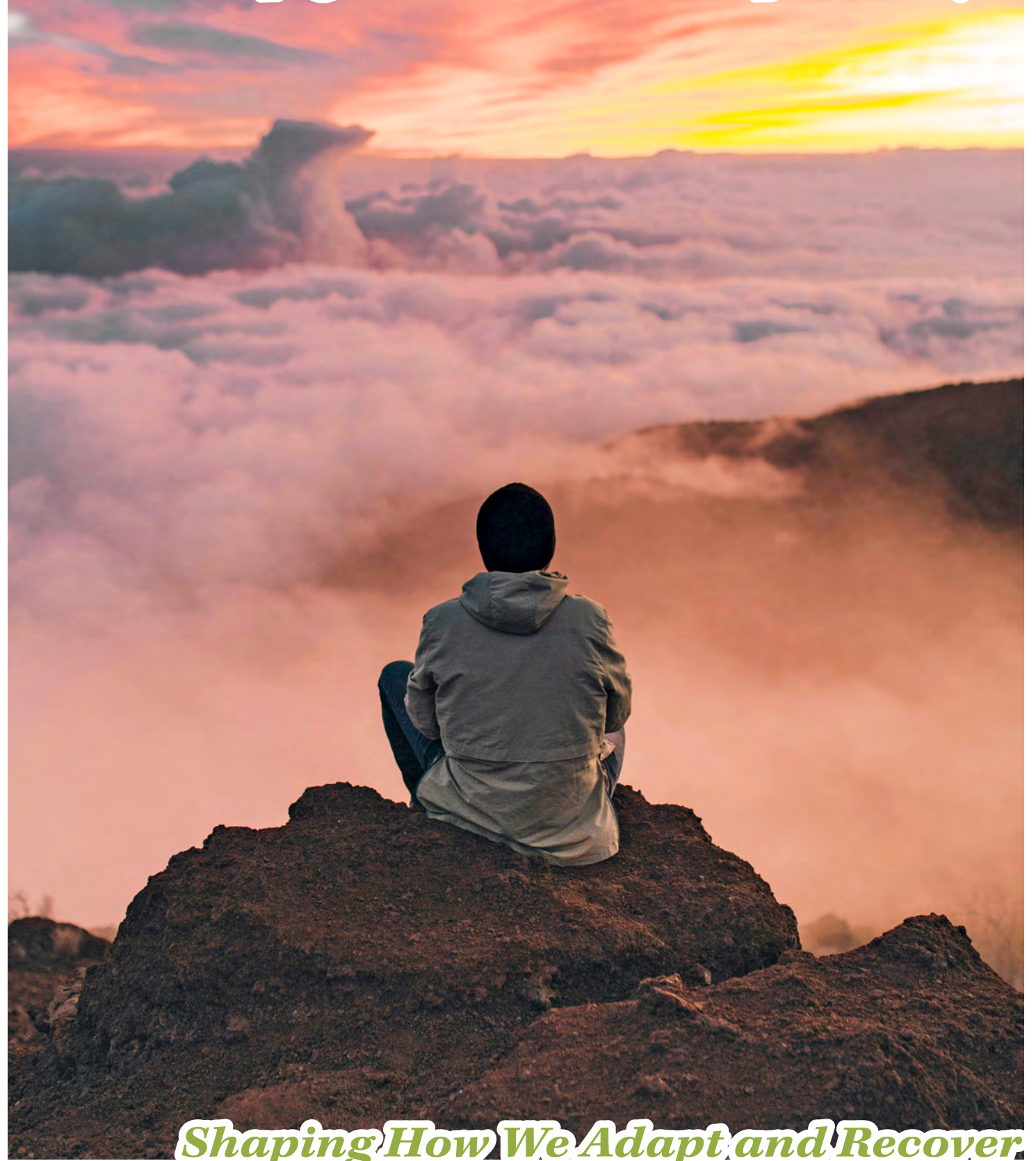
Our brains are not fixed. They continuously respond to experience. This means that with practice, new behaviours and habits can physically change the brain's structure, strengthening the circuits that help us manage emotions, stay focused, or feel more stable in the face of uncertainty.

This adaptability helps explain why two people with similar genetics might respond differently to the same stress, and how a person's ability to adjust can change across their life.

'How to Support Your Ability to Recover and Adapt'

If you're looking to build stronger foundations for managing challenges and building

Genetics, Epigenetics and Neuroplasticity



Shaping How We Adapt and Recover

up resilience, these evidence-backed approaches can help:

Sleep deeply and regularly

Quality rest helps regulate mood and sharpens thinking. It also supports memory and physical health, all of which are important for maintaining balance when life gets tough.

Eat with awareness

A diet that includes a variety of nutrients can help reduce inflammation, support the nervous system, and improve your baseline mental energy.

Move often

Exercise has been shown to increase levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a molecule that encourages new brain connections and supports learning.

Practise mindfulness

Mindfulness techniques like breathing or meditation can calm overactive stress responses and gradually reshape how we react under pressure.

Stay open to new experiences

Learning new things, like enjoying creative hobbies or improving physical skills, helps to strengthen brain flexibility and can increase feelings of control.

Reframe how you interpret setbacks

Seeing challenges as something to move through, rather than around, can subtly shift your brain's response and make future difficulties easier to manage.

Balance Is the Real Skill

At the heart of this process is the idea of

homeostasis, the body and brain's ongoing effort to stay balanced. Every time we're under stress, our systems work to recalibrate. When we have tools and habits in place that support that process, we don't just endure difficulty but grow through it.

Understanding that your ability to stay steady in difficult times is shaped by genetics, epigenetics and neuroplasticity doesn't mean it's fixed. In fact, the research shows quite the opposite. Even if your natural stress response is strong, and even if life has shaped your biology in challenging ways, the brain remains open to change.

This is perhaps the most important takeaway: our biology can influence how we adapt, however, it doesn't determine who we become.

Sweet Seduction

Throughout our evolution, humans have developed an instinctive craving for sugar, a survival mechanism that once offered a crucial edge when food was scarce. Imagine cavemen indulging in ripe fruit and sucking the fat of the bone of their prey. They feasted, storing fat to weather the lean winter months when food was less abundant. In those ancient days, fruit represented the pinnacle of sweetness.

Fast forward to the present, and modern food technology has unleashed a tidal wave of ultra-sweet flavours that our ancestors could scarcely have imagined. This once advantageous adaptation has spiralled into a modern conundrum.



Today, high sugar consumption sends our blood sugar levels skyrocketing, igniting a flurry of activity in the brain's nucleus accumbens, the hub for reward, pleasure, and addiction. Intriguingly, this same region fires up when exposed to drugs like cocaine, heroin, and nicotine. The parallels are startling!

Consider how your day might begin: a bowl of sugary cereal or a slice of white bread. The result? A surge of energy that feels euphoric, only to plummet just a few hours later, leaving you fatigued and light-headed. What do you do next? You reach for more sugar, caught in a relentless cycle.

Each sweet indulgence prompts your body to release insulin to stabilise blood sugar levels. However, constant bombardment can lead our systems to become insulin-resistant, necessitating larger doses to achieve the same effect. As insulin accumulates, it can become toxic. When toxicity reaches critical levels, blood sugar regulation falters, paving the way for Type 2 diabetes, a modern health crisis ignited by our ancestral cravings.

How can you tell if you're overloaded on sugar?

Here are some telltale signs:

Craving sweet foods every 2–3 hours: If you find yourself reaching for that sweet treat before your next meal, it could be a sign of dependency.

Concentration dropping mid-morning or afternoon: A sugar crash often leads to a foggy mind, leaving you struggling to focus.

Feeling irritable between meals: Mood swings and irritability can be linked to fluctuating blood sugar levels caused by

excess sugar.

Feeling shaky or dizzy: These sensations can signal blood sugar imbalances exacerbated by excessive sugar intake.

Huge energy boosts or fatigue after meals: A rollercoaster of energy highs and lows is often linked to sugary meals.

Over-reliance on caffeine to perk up: If you find yourself reaching for that extra cup of coffee to combat fatigue, it may be time to reassess your sugar consumption.

Feeling lightheaded if you eat later than expected: This response can signify that your body is struggling to regulate its energy levels due to sugar overload.

Understanding Blood Sugar Responses

The difference between an unhealthy sugar spike and a normal blood glucose increase after a meal primarily lies in the degree of the increase, the duration of the elevation, the accompanying hormonal response, and the body's ability to regulate blood sugar levels effectively.

After a meal, particularly one rich in balanced macronutrients, blood glucose levels should rise gradually, typically reaching up to 140 mg/dL in healthy individuals. However, an unhealthy spike often causes levels to exceed 180 mg/dL rapidly.

Normal blood sugar levels then typically return to baseline within 2–3 hours post-meal, while unhealthy spikes may remain elevated, contributing to insulin resistance. A healthy response involves appropriate insulin secretion, while an unhealthy spike can lead to excessive insulin production and subsequent crashes that may result in hypoglycemia.

Healthy meals feature whole foods that slow glucose absorption, while unhealthy spikes often result from processed foods high in refined sugars that lead to rapid absorption.

Moreover, individual responses to foods can vary significantly, meaning what causes a spike in one person may not affect another in the same way. For instance, some individuals may experience a significant rise in blood sugar from porridge, while others do not.

The Role of Continuous Glucose Monitors

In recent years, the rise of continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) has transformed how individuals, especially those with diabetes, track their blood sugar levels. These devices provide real-time data about glucose fluctuations, which can be invaluable for managing diabetes and preventing complications.

Furthermore, the insights gained from CGM data can motivate individuals to adhere to healthier dietary choices by illustrating how specific foods impact their blood sugar levels.

However, as awareness of CGMs grows, some individuals may become overly concerned that any rise in blood sugar, even a normal physiological response to food, is harmful. This fear underscores the need for better education surrounding blood glucose management and the use of these devices.

Individuals should understand that a mild increase in blood sugar following a balanced meal is a normal biological response and not inherently harmful. Education is crucial in helping people navigate their health without fear while using CGMs as effective tools for guidance.

Strategies for Managing Blood Sugar

In light of these challenges, adopting key strategies can help you manage your sugar intake and stabilise your blood sugar levels. In her book, *The Glucose Revolution*, biochemist Jessie Inchauspé offers a practical approach:

1. Prioritise the Right Order

Begin your meals with vegetables, as they can slow glucose absorption from subsequent foods. Following up with proteins and healthy fats further aids in mitigating blood sugar spikes. Try to save carbohydrates and sugars for the end of your meal to minimise their impact.

2. Stay Active After Eating

Just 10 minutes of light physical activity after meals, like a brisk walk, can enhance your body's ability to use glucose for energy, reducing the likelihood of a significant spike.

3. Incorporate "Anti-Spike" Drinks

Consuming drinks made with vinegar, such as diluted apple cider vinegar or a splash of lemon juice, before a meal may help slow glucose absorption.

Vinegar contains acetate, which inhibits amylase, an enzyme in saliva that breaks down starches into sugars, thus reducing overall blood sugar spikes. Mixing vinegar with water or tea can be a refreshing option.

4. Embrace Other Vital Habits

Opt for Whole Foods: Choosing whole, unprocessed foods over refined options can significantly contribute to stable blood sugar levels.

Stay Hydrated: Drinking ample water aids in the body's ability to process glucose and eliminate excess sugar.

Prioritise Sleep: Adequate rest is crucial, as lack of sleep can disrupt hormonal balance and worsen blood sugar control.

Pair Carbs with Protein and Fat: Combining carbohydrates with protein and healthy fats can slow digestion and prevent rapid spikes in blood sugar.

Consider a Savoury Breakfast: Starting your day with a protein-packed breakfast can help regulate blood sugar throughout the day.

Cut Back on Sugar Intake: Limiting added sugars, particularly from processed foods, can go a long way in preventing those dreaded spikes and subsequent crashes.

In our quest for sweetness, we must confront the paradox: a once-helpful evolutionary trait now threatens our health.

As we navigate the complexities of contemporary diets, understanding our relationship with sugar becomes essential for survival in the modern age.

Recognising these signs, understanding the nature of blood sugar responses, and implementing effective strategies may be the first steps toward regaining balance and fostering a healthier future.



CROSS CODE

7	2	16	20	13	22	9	17	20		2		15	
		20		21		11		9	25	17	5	23	20
1	5	4		20		20	18	20	23		8		13
		22		15		24		19	9	23	20	26	22
13	20	25	22	15	20	26			25				5
7	25	20	26		26	12	3	1		7	19	25	
25		5			19		7		26		21		1
14	9	22		5	25	7	25			11	20	5	12
3				15		10	7	22	20	25	13	20	
26	6	3	5	26	11		7		9		22		
9		25			11	5	15	8		1	12	3	20
7	3	22	14	9	22		9			11		5	
25		7		10	20	23	20	26	22	5	12	26	

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
				A								C
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
								T				

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. Enter them in the appropriate squares in the main grid, then use your knowledge of words to work out which letters should go in the missing squares.

As you get the letters, fill in other squares with the same number in the main grid and control grid. Check off the alphabetical list of letters as you identify them.

MAGIC SQUARE

REMNANTS SO SCARCE

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.

Quiz Challenge

1. What is the minimum age for players in the National Lottery?

2. Aleppo is a major city in which Middle Eastern country?

3. What portable dessert was reputedly invented in St Louis in 1904?

4. Which boxer had his ear bitten by Mike Tyson during a title fight?

5. English comedian Jon Richardson's comic sketches often deal with which personality disorder?

6. Which cartoon character has a boss called Charles Montgomery Burns?

7. What D is a book of the Bible and the title of a hit Elton John song?

8. The Enhanced Fujita Scale measures the strength of what natural occurrences?

9. Which country has adopted the cockerel as its national bird?

10. Heath Ledger, Joaquin Phoenix and Jack Nicholson all had film roles as which comic book villain?

NONAGRAM

WORD PYRAMID

FIVE ALIVE

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. At least one word using all nine letters can be found.

Guidelines:
18 Good; 22 Very Good; 25 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).

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. The first letter may appear in any chamber.

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.

SUDOKU

Easy

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

Hard

					4	6	5	
8	6		9		2	3		
			2		6			1
		7		2		9		
	9	3		5				
5		6	1				8	
6			5					2
7	3						4	
2	1	5			7	6	8	

		4			5			9
	3	8			4	2		
				3		4		
	5	7		9				
					5		2	
				3			1	
	1	5	9		7		3	
4				8				
	7	1			8			

EQUALISER

6

10

4

2

1

2

8

12

3

1

3

2

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.

Perform the first calculation in each line first and ignore the mathematical law which says you should always perform division and multiplication before addition and subtraction.

This puzzle page is supplied by Sirius Media Services Ltd.

To try our new puzzle, Zygolex, go to www.zygolex.com

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CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

1		2		3		4		5		6		7
					8							
9												
						10						
11												
						12						
					13							
14		15				16				17		
						18		19				
20												
						21						
22												
						23						

ACROSS

DOWN

1. Start the deciding round on horseback perhaps (4-3)

8. Issue broadcast instalment (7)

9. Arrange trade show when it is fine and settled (3,4)

10. Automatic rubbish about former pupil in charge (7)

11. Woven nets on French island capable of being stretched (7)

12. Expel all the people at the event (7)

14. Star bully? (7)

18. Bring down from a French steed (7)

20. Swapped positions on board when actors went first (7)

21. Accuse one member before everybody (7)

22. Some have to attend lessons that are interminable (7)

23. Almost rearming another seaman (7)

1. Exactly what is needed when travelling by public transport (4,3,6)

2. Praying mantis in disarray (6)

3. Animal acceptable to a Greek character (5)

4. Search out half-tamed animal (6)

5. Hazel has broken left rib (7)

6. Writer entertains good man in restaurant (6)

7. Construct hastily despite strike at the same time (5,8)

13. To start with Juan the Spaniard told stories about such eels (7)

15. The positive aspect of being a winning team (6)

16. Mysteriously mind us wearing no clothes (6)

17. The way to get the revs going! (6)

19. Excessively active at this market (5)

SOLUTIONS

QUIZ CHALLENGE: 1 Eighteen; 2 Syria; 3 The ice cream cone; 4 Evander Holyfield; 5 Obsessive compulsive disorder; 6 Homer Simpson; 7 Daniel; 8 Tornadoes; 9 France; 10 The Joker.

CROSS CODE

ACROSS – 1 Just the ticket; 2 Matins; 3 Okapi; 4 Ferret; 5 Filbert; 6 Endless; 23 Mariner.

DOWN – 1 Waged; 2 Unholy; 3 Castled; 4 Impeach; 5 Tensile; 6 Bally; 7 Bally; 8 Bally; 9 Bally; 10 Bally; 11 Bally; 12 Bally; 13 Bally; 14 Bally; 15 Bally; 16 Bally; 17 Bally; 18 Bally; 19 Bally; 20 Bally; 21 Bally; 22 Bally; 23 Bally; 24 Bally; 25 Bally; 26 Bally; 27 Bally; 28 Bally; 29 Bally; 30 Bally; 31 Bally; 32 Bally; 33 Bally.

NONAGRAM

REMNANTS SO SCARCE

MAGIC SQUARE

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



Freestyle Chess

Carlsen Style

Recently FIDE ordained, after a consensus vote from the cognoscenti of the chess world, that Carlsen was the GOAT of all time. Carlsen himself mentioned Kasparov at the award ceremony as being equally good. However, Carlsen, having stepped down as World Champion too, has pursued a hectic calendar of playing international chess events with the world's top elite players and coming out on top on numerous occasions. He has stated that his thirst to win is unabated and as long as he feels that, he will carry on.

One such recent tournament was The Grenke Chess Festival Open 2025, Karlsruhe, Germany, 17th–21st April. Carlsen won the Freestyle Classical competition 9-rounder with a round to spare. His round eight score of 8 wins from 8 games secured his triumph, and the last 9th round against GM Vincent Keymer was, as one commentator put it, 'cementing his legacy of dominance'. The chess world was once again astounded by Carlsen's performance and immediately began the comparison with other world leaders from the past, such as GM Bobby Fischer's gargantuan score from the US Championship 1963/4 of 11 wins from 11 games. Carlsen finished 2 points ahead of the field in the above tournament, and in the post-match ceremony said, 'I'm not gonna be able to do that again, that's for sure.'

In second place after Carlsen on 7/9 points was Parham Maghsoodloo, who, by dint of winning by Buchholz tiebreaks against six other players all on 7 points, will go through to the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam in Las Vegas. Carlsen had already qualified for the Grand Slam, so Parham qualified as the runner-up from this competition.

Carlsen won €60,000 and 25 tour points from his win, defeated 7 GMs in an open tournament and no open theory to assist—quite an illustrious performance by any stretch of one's imagination.

Freestyle chess or Chess 960 played with Classical time controls is a new phenomenon and Carlsen's huge win sets the record played in this format. His performance rating was 3385, with over 3,000 players actively in attendance to witness the historic occasion. Carlsen did have an amazing 9-point winning score in The Super United Rapid and Blitz tournament in Croatia 2023 although this was Blitz time control, not Classic time control—a huge difference. Other recent huge scores by other players can be compared to Carlsen's although they are few and far between, such as Karim Grigoryan's 9/9 at the 2019 VII Torneio Internacional Cidade de Famação, and for example WGM Andreia Navrotescu's similar score at the Menchik Memorial Challengers Tourny 2024.

Freestyle Chess, also called Fischer Random and also Chess 960, is a chess variant that has been around since Bobby Fischer's days. A chess variant where the starting position of the pieces on the back rank are randomised. This is stated as encouraging creative play and reducing reliance on remembering opening theory. It would be fair to say that numbers of players I know are fairly sceptical of any advantages this chess variant has to offer and do consider it unnecessary. I would have liked to have been around in the early 1490s in Northern Spain when the game of chess went through what was a terminal design change and the lowly Fers

chess piece went through the astonishing transformation in becoming a Queen to the King, and unlike its predecessor which could only move one square at a time in any direction, the newly created Queen could move any number of squares in any direction. This also had a political gesture in acknowledging the Catholic monarchs, King Ferdinand II of Aragon who reigned from 1474–1504 and Queen Isabella of Castile, 1479–1516 (they married in 1469 and their joint rule marked the de facto unification of Spain, the Reconquista) and driving the Arab invaders out from the Iberian Peninsula. I wonder too if there was dissent, euphoria, arguments etc. around such a move. I wonder too who were those promoting the idea and what were the mechanisms used for that change? Was it Royal decree for example?

The randomised starting position for Freestyle Chess, with standard Classical pieces on the back rank, are arranged in a specific predetermined way. The pieces (not pawns) are shuffled randomly following rules:

1. The King must be placed between the two Rooks.
2. The Bishops must be placed on opposite coloured squares.

Because the starting position is random, memorising specific opening theory doesn't give an advantage. Players must rely on their tactical skills, strategic understanding and ability to adapt to the unique positions that arise. Introduced by Bobby Fischer, its intentions were to make chess more unpredictable and encourage more creative play. 'Freestyle Chess' is a marketing name, while the generic, formal name is Chess 960. Freestyle Chess is often used particularly in tournaments and events organised by Magnus Carlsen and other chess enthusiasts.

A new Freestyle addition to world events, a first-time ever allowing everyone the chance 'to team up and play against The GOAT': 20th May, Magnus Carlsen v The World, where each side has 24 hours per move and the global participants' top choice of move is played against Carlsen. This is only the third time a world match in this manner has been staged, the global entire world against Kasparov in 1999, and Anand in 2024. The latest event has reached 143,800 participants and a new world record. It certainly encourages the playing of Freestyle chess and introduces it to world consumers - what could be better?

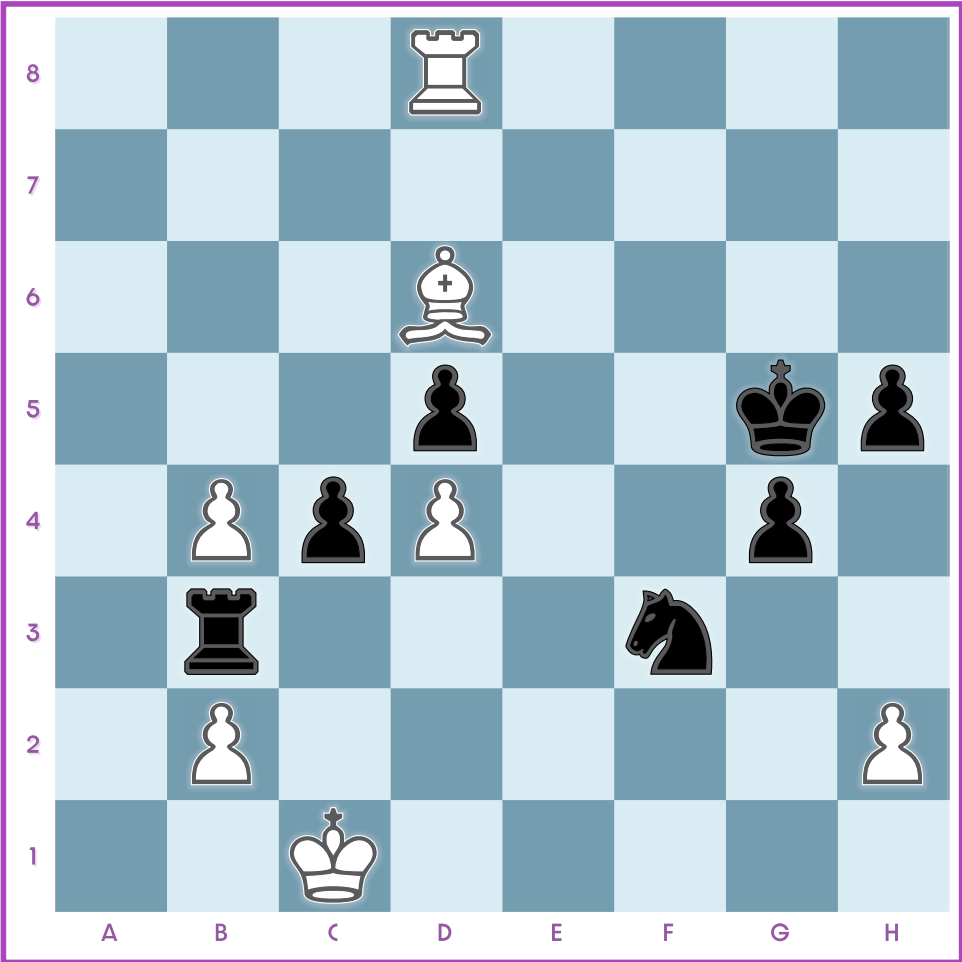
Carlsen, on being interviewed following the Grenke tournament, was asked about his participation in the Norway Chess Tourny only a few weeks away. He replied he would rest in between but declined to comment on the fact that he would be facing D. Gukesh, the current World Champion, at some stage - the first time following the latter's global ascendancy over the board in a Classical time match. At the press conference on 25th May, held at the Clarion Hotel Energy, Stavanger, Norway, and the drawing of lots, fate had its way and the two were drawn to face each other in the first round. More of that later.

Norway Chess and Norway Chess Women features parity between the two groupings, not least with the same prize money, the same format, in the same playing hall, a 6-player double round robin. Good to see equal spoils and action within the two groupings. An Armageddon action guarantees decisive results in every game, giving the tournament's spectators guaranteed

The Challenge

This chess puzzle is taken from the game between Rauf Mamedov 2657 v Magnus Carlsen 2837, Round 8, Grenke Chess Freestyle Festival 2025, April. The Queens were traded off on move 4 and one of the player's styles was stated as 'winning in grand style in an endgame Capablanca-like'. Which one was it? See the accompanying diagram where Mamedov as White has played 56. Rd8,... What was Carlsen as Black's response?

The solution is below



edge-of-the-seat excitement and the unexpected thrills such formats create. If a classical game ends in a draw, the players immediately face off in a decisive Armageddon game, giving a positive result.

The illustrious contestants are top of the range and the usual suspects at this level: Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura, Fabiano Caruana, Gukesh Dommaraju, Wei Yi, Ju Wenjun, Lei Tingjie, Koneru Humpy, Anna Muzychuk, Vaishali Rameshbabu and Sara Khadem.

The puzzle this time is taken from the Grenke Tournament

Mamedov v Carlsen, April 2025, considered by many as one of the player's most beautiful endgames. See below:

The Czech-German great chess star, as many will remember him, Vlastimil Hort, passed away on 13th May aged 81. He was one of the world's leading players in the 1960s and '70s and famously participated in the 'Rest of the World' team against the USSR in 1970, and was included in the Candidates

Tournament in 1977.

Born in Czechoslovakia and later positioning himself in West Germany in the 1980s, he famously played a simul against 636 opponents. An indefatigable esprit de corps and never one to doubt the power of the spectacle, he was a natural showman, a conspicuous colourful contributor to world chess in the days of Russian superiority and hegemony.

Both at the board and commenting about chess, he was a champion of the young and introduced a whole generation of German chess fans to the game and styles of play. He was considered extremely good in his illuminating commentary, often with GM Helmut Pfleger, and was a forefront presenter in our BBC 'Mastergame' series in the late '70s and early '80s.

In conversation with Raymond Keene GM and this author, Raymond told me that Hort was a strong and awkward player to play against, and in the few matches he played against Hort he only drew one game and lost the others.

The Solution

56. Rd8,Kf5 (if 56. Rg8+ checking only helps Black improve his king's position - Kf5 57. Rf8+Kf4; or 56. Be7+Kg6). 56... Kf5 57. Re8,h4 58. Re2,Rd3 59. Kb1,Nxd4 (Carlsen now takes off the pawn with a better position) 60. Re5+Kf6 (Taking on d5 walks into ...Ke6, so White resigns) 0-1

MUST END 11TH OCTOBER

"THE BEST BRITISH
MUSICAL IN
DECADES"

WHATSONSTAGE

THE CURIOUS CASE OF
**BENJAMIN
BUTTON**



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JETHRO COMPTON

MUSIC & LYRICS BY
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WINNER OF THREE OLIVIER AWARDS INCLUDING **BEST NEW MUSICAL**
AMBASSADORS THEATRE, WEST END