The INDEPENDENT

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**NICOLA STURGEON: I WON'T APOLOGISE FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S CRIMES**



## Phil Webb I was outed when I was mayor over 30 years ago – now I can bring Pride to my town




After Saturday's agonising defeat in Europe, Arsenal parade the Premier League trophy to adoring fans

The Gunners enjoy a smoky homecoming yesterday as up to a million supporters turned out in north London to fete them

# 'Ultra-strength' cocaine hits UK as fatalities spiral

## Undercover investigation by The Independent reveals scale of crisis as pure cocaine direct from South America fuels record surge in deaths

INVESTIGATION
ALEX ROSS

A lethal wave of ultra-strong cocaine is emerging across the UK as deaths linked to the drug have spiralled to a record high, *The Independent* can reveal. A production boom in South America has sharply increased the purity of the drug sold at street level. In an undercover investigation at the Cheltenham Festival, we collected samples of cocaine from toilet surfaces, which found that two out of three were of 85 per cent purity. At the same time, cocaine-related deaths have hit a record high, claiming 1,279 lives in a year.

Editorials

# Cocaine's growing threat is destroying ever more lives

There was a time when the scourge of drugs – both soft and hard – was a regular feature of the daily news, along with calls from groups on one or other side of the argument for, if not legalisation, then decriminalisation, or much harsher penalties for trafficking.

More recently, however, aside from some annual breast-beating over figures showing Scotland as the European "capital" of drug deaths – and it retained that dubious accolade last year, despite a fall in fatalities – the threat has generally commanded far less prominence than it once did.

In the light of today's *Independent* investigation, which reveals cocaine of extremely high purity is now circulating on Britain's streets and destroying countless lives, it is high time that the dangers of drug use returned to the political and media agenda.

The number of deaths attributed to cocaine has increased for 13 years straight, to reach 1,279 in 2024. According to the OECD, the UK had the highest cocaine consumer rate in Europe in 2023, with wastewater analysis for England showing consumption up by a quarter in the past five years.

Hospital admissions for cocaine and crack cocaine use have trebled over the past decade, with part of the explanation being a sharp, and largely unpublicised, rise in the purity of the drug and an effective fall in the price, both in absolute terms and comparatively in relation to other party indulgences, such as alcohol.

The raw figures are one thing. But they cloak both a sordid reality and a rising number of personal tragedies for which cocaine is responsible. The sordid reality is that cocaine has become ever more popular as a recreational drug, with evidence of widespread use not just at music festivals, but at events such as racing's Cheltenham Festival, which is where *The Independent* conducted its undercover investigation. There have also been reports of cocaine traces being found in toilets in the Houses of Parliament, with claims that it was not unusual for MPs to snort cocaine from their desks.

As for the tragedies, the devastation is all too clear from the account of Stacey Jordan, who lost her 24-year-old sister, Lucy, to a cardiac arrest caused by cocaine. But so are some of the

measures that need to be taken. One is de-normalising and de-glamourising specifically the use of cocaine, and ending its association with a desirable lifestyle. At present, she says, "people are detaching talking about it, using it, from the damage it causes", and that needs to stop. She also calls for far more publicity, contrasting the lack of information about the risks of cocaine use, for instance, with the widespread awareness among young women of the dangers of Botox treatment.

A rare flicker of political awareness came in 2021, when the then Conservative government earmarked more than £500m for a 10-year strategy to improve drug and alcohol treatment services. Whether as a result of the frequent changes in government or a shift to other priorities, however, that seems to have been a short-lived exception, with real-terms spending in this area now falling. The Home Office, for its part, says it has been stepping up border security, and there have indeed been some successful and high-profile raids. But so long as production in South America remains at record levels and transit in Europe is relatively easy, law enforcement will be fighting a battle that is nigh impossible to win without a reduction in demand from users.

And, of this, regrettably, there is no sign, which is why the advice of those such as Stacey Jordan and Mike Trace, the UK's former deputy drug tsar, now head of drug and alcohol support service the Forward Trust, needs to be acted on without delay. This includes a great deal more education and publicity about the harm of cocaine and regular checks on the strength of the drugs that are circulating on the illicit market, so that warnings can be issued about the life and death risks.

Above all, though, the reality of illicit drugs and their harms needs to be brought back into public view, and a conversation restarted that should never have stopped.

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# ‘Users are getting a stronger product and are paying less’

## Cocaine deaths have hit record levels, with more than 1,000 people dying last year. **Alex Ross** finds the purity of the street drug has increased amid a production boom in Latin America



At Cheltenham on Gold Cup day in March, The Independent used test wipes on surfaces in toilets to find traces of cocaine (The Independent)

A lethal wave of “ultra-strength” cocaine is emerging across the UK as deaths linked to the party drug have spiralled to a record high, *The Independent* can reveal.

A boom of cocaine in South America has triggered the sharp increase in purity of the powder sold at street level over the past decade, experts say, with users said to be unknowingly taking bigger risks with their health than ever before.

In an undercover operation at the Cheltenham Festival, attended by more than 200,000 people this year, *The Independent* collected samples of cocaine from toilet surfaces, which found that two out of three sent for analytical testing were of 85 per cent purity.

The UK's former drugs tsar Mike Trace called the findings "highly concerning" and called on the government to urgently act over the "health scandal" as the number of deaths continues to rise.

It comes as:

- **The purity of cocaine has risen from 32 per cent 13 years ago to more than 80 per cent today**
- **Shocking figures show cocaine-related deaths in England and Wales have reached a record high, claiming 1,279 lives in 2024**
- **The UK had the largest cocaine consumer rate in Europe in 2023, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development**
- **There has been a 40 per cent cut in real-time spending on adult drug and alcohol services from 2014 to 2022**
- **The latest government figures from wastewater showed consumption of the drug in England had risen by a quarter in the past five years**

Cocaine use can result in heart attacks, strokes and seizures, according to the NHS, which adds that mixing the substance with alcohol can further increase the risk of an overdose.



Cocaine trafficking routes departing the Americas, according to seizures in 2023-24 (UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform)

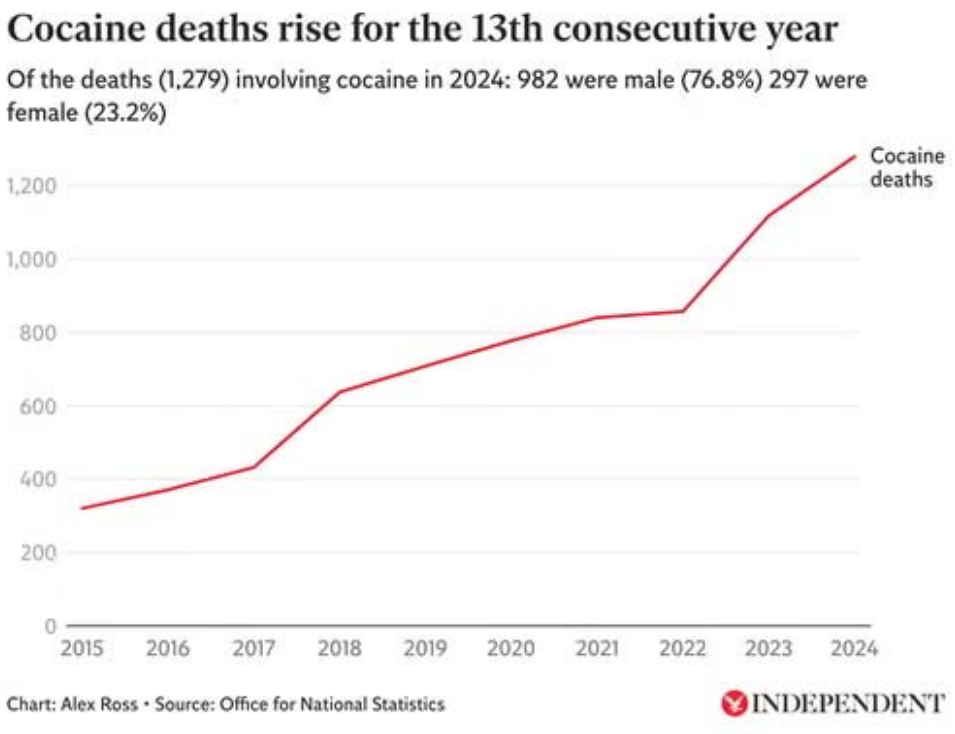
At Cheltenham on Gold Cup day in March, *The Independent* used test wipes on surfaces in toilets to find traces of cocaine, before collecting a dozen samples which were sent for testing at the Kingston Analytical Services Toxicology (KAST) at Kingston University.

Initial tests detected cocaine in almost every sample. Three were then sent for nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy (NMR) testing, which revealed that two, including one taken from a baby changing facility at the Best Mate Enclosure, had 85 per cent purity.

Dr Arijac Durrant, a postdoctoral researcher at the university, who did the testing, told *The Independent:* "Here are two samples of high-quality cocaine which is above what we usually see at street level. I'm not a medical expert, but I would suggest a heightened risk of an overdose for someone taking this drug who is used to taking a lower purity substance."

A spokesperson for the Jockey Club, which runs the Cheltenham Festival, said it was "extremely disappointed" and that illegal drug use remained a wider societal issue at many major events.

The UK government does not issue figures on cocaine purity, but the National Crime Agency estimated the average purity at "user level" was between 32 and 38 per cent in 2013.




Experts have told *The Independent* that the record production of cocaine in South America, combined with increasingly diverse supply routes from eastern Europe, has seen the UK market flooded with the drug. This has resulted in a reduced need to cut it up with other substances before selling it.

Peter Cain, a drug science adviser at Eurofins Forensic Services, which tests drugs seized by police forces, said the purity levels reached around 75 per cent during Covid, and have since risen above 80 per cent in the past five years.

Meanwhile, the European Union Drugs Agency said last year that the average purity of cocaine reported by half of its states had risen to between 66 per cent and 81 per cent.

“It’s a buyer’s market,” Mr Cain said. “Users are getting a stronger product and they’re paying less, and this is at a time everyone else is paying more for beer and other things.”

Mr Trace, who was appointed deputy drug tsar for Sir Tony Blair’s government, and is now chief executive officer of the Forward Trust, a drug and alcohol support service, said: “I’m highly concerned we are observing higher purity in more places, as *The Independent* shows, and that’s where the death rate comes from.



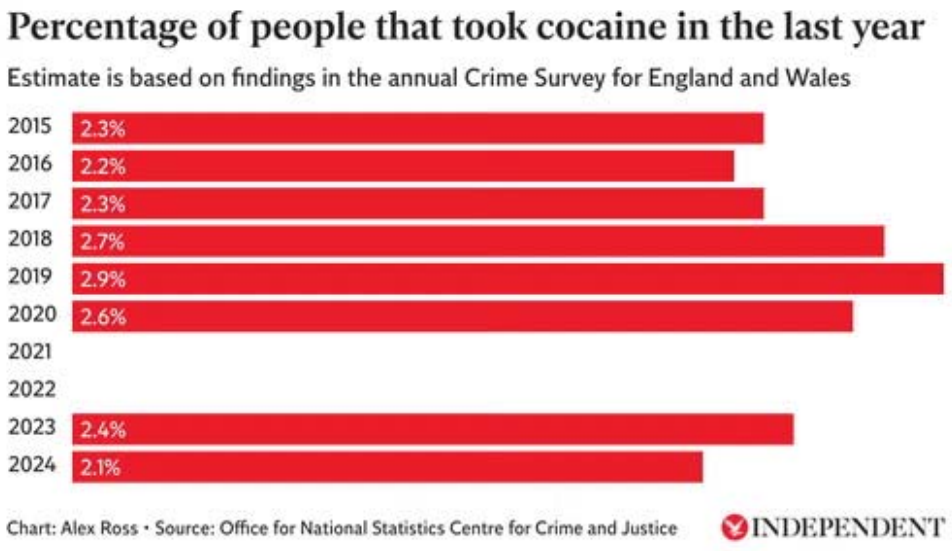
Cocaine picked up from a toilet at the Cheltenham Festival (The Independent)

“Higher, unpredictable purity is the biggest risk factor because if somebody buys white powder off their dealer on a Friday night and says, ‘right, well I generally think I get this much of a hit off that substance,’ and if they’re used to getting that much of a hit on 30 per cent pure substance, but if what they bought this Friday was 60 per cent substance, they’re in trouble.”

The latest available data on hospital admissions for cocaine and crack cocaine use, from 2017-18, showed the numbers had tripled over the past decade. Meanwhile, the number of cocaine-related deaths has increased for 13 consecutive years, rising 14 per cent from 1,118 in 2023 to 1,279 in 2024.

Among those to have died over the past decade was Lucy White, a third-year criminology student at the University of the West of England in Bristol. A coroner found she suffered a cardiac arrest caused by the class A drug. Her sister, Stacey Jordan, has since called for changes in education.

And last year, Emily Rose Browning, a 24-year-old teacher in Cardiff, died after a cardiac arrest hours after taking cocaine on a night out, an inquest into her death heard, according to the BBC. In the same year, Lindsey Strickland, 41, also died following a cardiac arrest after taking cocaine on a night out with friends in Salford.




Warrington North MP Charlotte Nichols warned in November that the Home Office was "fundamentally incapable" of dealing with drug deaths, claiming it was showing "hostility" towards solutions that did not involve further criminalisations.

Despite a 10-year drugs strategy started by the Tory government in 2021, figures from the National Audit Office show a 40 per cent reduction in real-terms spending on adult drug and alcohol treatment between 2015 and 2022.

Mr Trace wants the government to embark on a programme of drug checking in towns and cities, allowing users to test the purity of what they are taking, and to develop a better understanding of drugs to help direct policy. He added: "Cocaine deaths have been rising every year and we're not taking it seriously enough. It's become a health scandal that we need to fix quickly."

Harry Sumnall, professor in substance use at Liverpool John Moores University, who helps advise the government on drug policy, also raised concerns over *The Independent*'s findings, describing cocaine above 85 per cent purity as "ultra strength".

"What *The Independent* has found is an indication that we have a robust high-purity cocaine market, 85 per cent is very high ... I think the reality is that these high-purity drugs are available [across the country] and people can buy them if they want to because they're affordable."




Dr Arija Durrant, from Kingston Analytical Services Toxicology, tests samples using nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy (Kingston University)

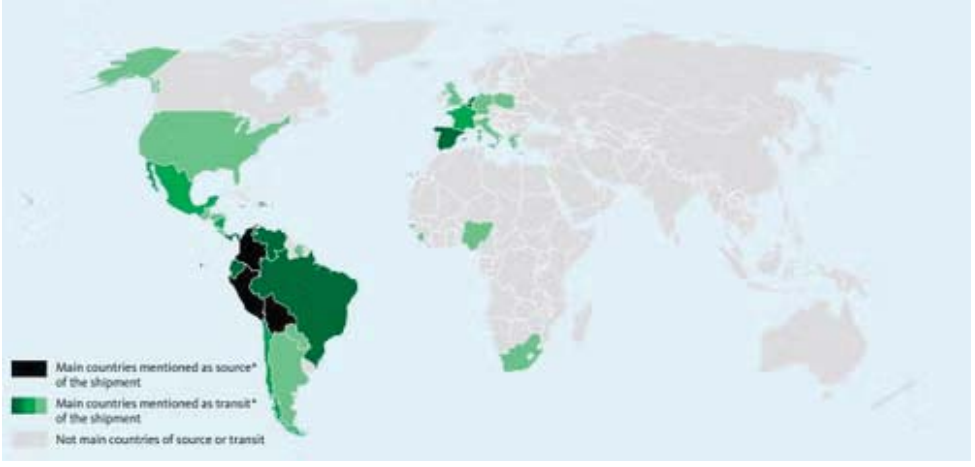
He added: “Cocaine markets have never been as risky and as never as harmful as we’re facing today.”

The UN’s World Drug Report 2025 found that 2023 saw more than 3,708 tons of cocaine produced, thanks partly to an increase in coca cultivation in Colombia. Maps charting the flow of the drugs show it arriving by air and boat to the UK, as well as other European countries.

Last year, five men were caught trying to smuggle cocaine with 89 per cent purity, worth £26.5m, via a speedboat onto the West Country coast. The cocaine, weighing 332kg, had been dropped off by a cargo ship. In the same year, three men were chased down by police on a Cornish beach after picking up bales of cocaine in the sea, much to the amazement of onlookers who filmed the arrests.

An independent report written by Dame Carol Black said importation and selling of cocaine in the UK was largely dominated by Albanian organised crime groups, with the market said to be worth £1.9bn in 2020.

Adam Thompson, head of drugs threat at the NCA, said: “Cocaine production in South America is at a record high, driving down wholesale prices, which organised crime groups trade at, to historic lows. Cocaine purity has also increased in recent years as there is no need to dilute it to make a profit, given the large volumes some producers are supplying into the illicit market.




Main departure or transit countries of cocaine shipments as described in reported seizures, 2020-23 (UNODC)

“UK law enforcement has held the line but without a reduction in demand from users, stemming the supply of cocaine will be a continuing battle.”

A Home Office spokesperson said it had strengthened border security to tackle the criminal gangs, with around five tonnes of cocaine seized at just one port in under a month – depriving criminal gangs of more than £400m worth of drugs.

“We will continue to work across health, policing and wider public services to drive down drug use and stop those who profit from its supply.”

At Cheltenham, the Jockey Club targeted drug users with dog searches at the entrance and teams of security officers out on patrol. The organisers also placed drug amnesty bins at the entrances.

A spokesperson said: “Illegal drug use remains a wider societal issue which affects many major events, and we are extremely disappointed that such behaviour takes place here.

“The Jockey Club operates a zero-tolerance policy towards illegal substances, and a range of measures were in place throughout The Festival, including detection dogs, bag searches, pat-downs at all entrances and amnesty bins to deter and detect drug use.”

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News

# Stop glorifying drug use, sister of cocaine victim says

Lucy White was almost unrecognisable after she suffered a cardiac arrest caused by taking cocaine. She cannot be just another drug-related death, Stacey White tells **Alex Ross**



Lucy (left) with her sister, Stacey, who wants to help others after Lucy died following a drug overdose (Photos Stacey Jordan)

"You see the glamour, the fast cars, the thrill – but never the young person on their death bed, the kids living with parents with addiction."

For Stacey Jordan, whose sister Lucy died after taking cocaine eight years ago, the heartbreak of witnessing drug use in social circles, at festivals and on nights out never goes away.

With cocaine consumption soaring – up by a quarter in five years in England according to latest government data – usage is often normalised in certain scenarios, and glamourised in popular culture through TV and film.

But with a sharp increase in availability and purity, the number of cocaine deaths has risen for 13 straight years, reaching 1,279 in 2024.

For Stacey, it's time people started talking about it more.

In the summer of 2018, the 36-year-old got a phone call that her sister was in a coma in hospital after a line of cocaine triggered a heart attack. Rushing to her bedside, she said Lucy, who was aged just 24, looked unrecognisable. She died weeks later.

"I refuse to allow my beautiful sister to just become another drug-related death, another number," Stacey told *The Independent*.

"She was not a druggie, she was a normal young woman who was happy and had big plans for her future. Her death shows cocaine can impact anyone, anyone – and I'm determined to show this to stop others going through the tragedy I've faced."



The sisters on holiday before Lucy's relapse

Lucy was a “beautiful, full-of-life” university student in Bristol, in her third year of studying criminology and had future plans of travel and helping offenders, said Stacey.

She had first taken drugs after getting into the wrong crowd through their mother’s addiction, said Stacey, but had returned to study after getting clean. She volunteered with Bristol Drugs Project, helping other users kick their addiction.

However, within months of taking drugs again, she was kicked out of her student accommodation, isolated from friends and

family, and later found face down on a sofa inside a drug den, suffering a cardiac arrest.

“I ask myself all the time, was there more I could have done?” says Stacey. “But it all seemed to happen so fast, and the phone call came out of the blue.”

Now, Stacey, mainly through a social media group called Live for Lucy, has been sharing her story to help others and to try to prevent more deaths.

But she admits she finds it hard, with cocaine use seemingly all around her.



Stacey found Lucy brain dead in hospital after her cardiac arrest

“You hear a comedian at a show talking about using cocaine, and everyone laughs,” she says. “But to me it’s not funny. It’s just like a person in a football team WhatsApp group sharing a picture from holiday of a line of cocaine, and everyone responds with laughs.

“People are detaching talking about it, using it, from the damage it causes. I don’t see my life represented when people talk about it. You instead see fun, drama, to the point of it being glorified. This has to change.”

Under the Conservatives, a 10-year drug strategy was launched, with an extra £523m placed into improving drug and alcohol treatment services.

“We need better education for young people,” she says. “You ask a line of people at an event like the Cheltenham Festival what the dangers involved in taking drugs are, I’m not sure they would be able to tell you exactly.

“But then, if you speak to someone considering Botox, who will have likely researched it and considered the side effects, they will be able to tell you. There should be no difference. We’re crying out for leaders on this issue.”

Earlier this month, on the anniversary of Lucy’s death, Stacey went away on holiday, as she does each year.

She cherishes a hair lock and handprint from her sister, and is proud to have completed many “bucket list” challenges in her name, from a 10km race to a skydive.

“If anyone thinking about taking cocaine could just hear about my sister’s tragic story, it’d change many lives,” she says.

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# Sturgeon: I won’t apologise for former husband’s crimes



Former first minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon on BBC One’s ‘Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg’ yesterday (BBC)

MILLIE COOKE

A defiant Nicola Sturgeon has said she is “not going to apologise for somebody else’s crimes” after her estranged husband admitted embezzling more than £400,000 from the SNP she led.

Speaking after former SNP chief executive Peter Murrell pleaded guilty this week to embezzling the sum between 2010 and 2022, Ms Sturgeon became emotional as said she thinks it will take her a "very, very long time to recover" from his actions.

The 61-year-old spent the money on items including a motorhome, cars, kitchen gadgets, expensive watches and pens, and more mundane purchases such as hand cream and toilet seats.

He is set to be sentenced in June, the same month that the SNP faces two by-election contests – one in Aberdeen South and another in Arbroath and Broughty Ferry.

The SNP has faced calls for an independent inquiry into its finances.

Ms Sturgeon, who has insisted she knew nothing of his crimes and said he only told her he was pleading guilty last week, was Scotland's first minister from 2014 to 2023, while Mr Murrell served as the SNP chief executive from 2001 to 2023.

In an interview on the BBC's *Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg* programme, Ms Sturgeon said she is "not going to apologise for somebody else's crimes".




Peter Murrell admitted to embezzling more than £400,000 (PA)

“For my own sake, but for the sake of people out there, a lot of women who end up finding themselves blamed for the actions of the men in their lives, I’m not going to contribute to that kind of sense that I am responsible for somebody else’s crimes,” she said.

“I will take responsibility for the things I do, the decisions I make. I’m sitting here with you right now, answering questions because I believe strongly in that accountability.

“But I am not responsible for the crimes that my former husband committed, and I’m not going to apologise for somebody else’s crimes.”

Ms Sturgeon continued: "What he has done to me, I think, will take me a very, very long time to recover from.

“I have been deceived, I’ve been lied to, I’ve been betrayed, as it turns out, over a lengthy period of time by somebody I thought I knew, by somebody I loved, by somebody I trusted.”

“Because of his actions, I was subjected to a two-year police investigation”, she said. “I was exonerated. If there had been a shred of evidence that I had been complicit in this or had known about what he was doing, then I wouldn’t have been cleared.

“But despite being cleared, I’ve still spent a week with having the finger of suspicion pointed at me. Yes, I’m angry, but I’m also carrying a degree of hurt, and I think a degree of trauma about this whole episode that resulted in me sitting in a police station under arrest.”



Sturgeon previously said she had been ‘completely cleared and exonerated’ by police (PA)

Ms Sturgeon also said that she did not question her former husband’s purchases as the couple were both on high salaries and she thought their incomes would have supported anything she saw in her house.

She told the BBC: “I was working round the clock most days, I wasn’t at home very often, I didn’t take much, if anything, to do with the administration of our household.

“I mean, just to explain how our finances worked, we had separate bank accounts, I never had any access to his bank account, he didn’t have any to mine, every month I would pass him a sum of money to cover my share of the household expenses and leave him to it.”

Ms Sturgeon previously said she had been “completely cleared and exonerated” by police and that she had been lied to by her former husband.

“He perpetrated a crime on the SNP,” she told the BBC. “By definition, that included me as the party leader. He misled. He deceived.

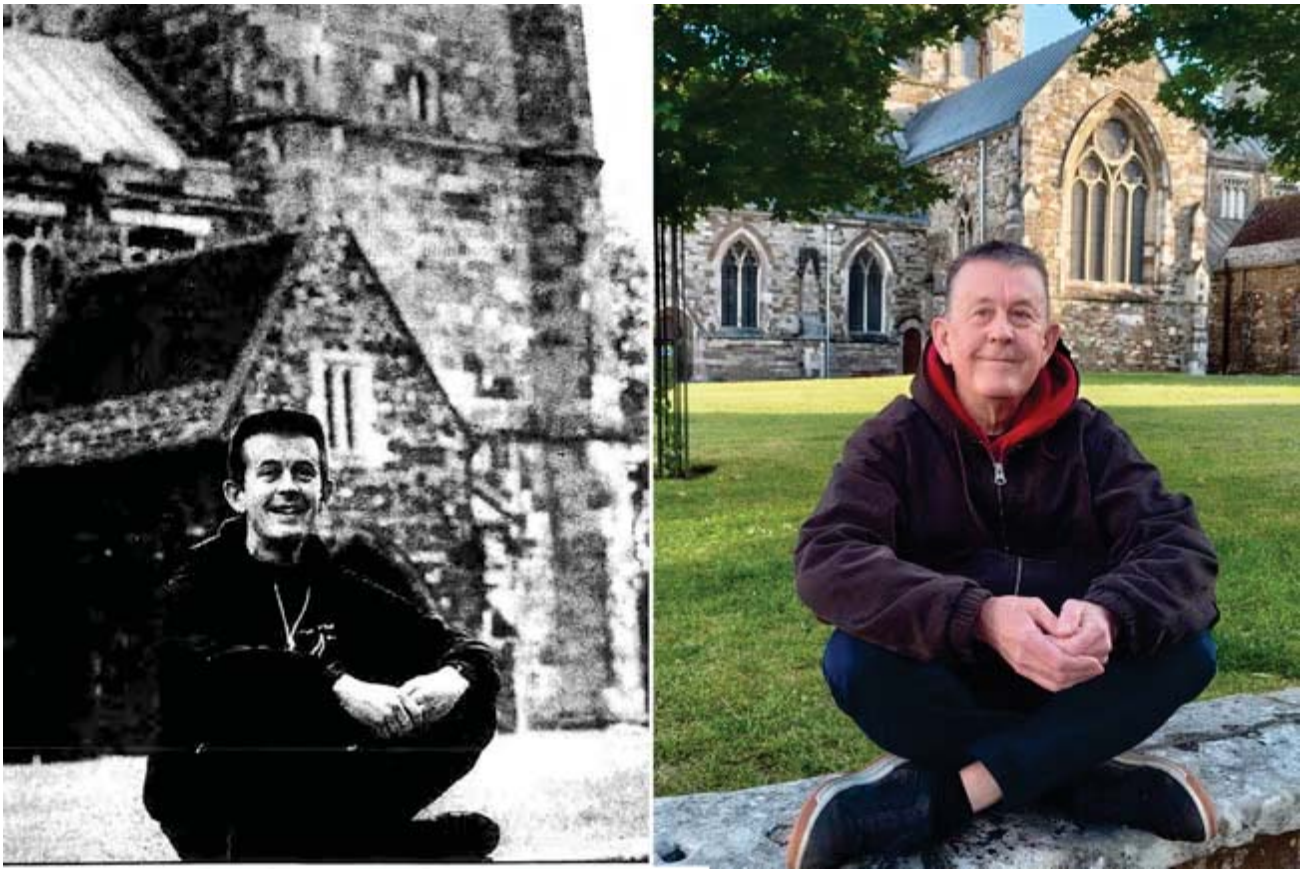
“He is serving and will be serving a sentence for a crime he committed. I’m out here feeling as if I’m serving a sentence for a crime I did not commit.”

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News

# Mayor outed three decades ago brings Pride to his town

## Phil Webb's sexuality was national news in 1994 when he signed up to be mayor of Wimborne Minster. Now, he tells **Bryony Gooch** about organising its first ever Pride event



Webb was 35 years old when he was outed in the press (The Independent/Supplied)

When Phil Webb was outed as gay while serving as Wimborne Minster's mayor more than three decades ago, he never thought he would see the day that his town might celebrate Pride.

But the 67-year-old is making sure that Dorset's 2026 Town of Culture – with a population of only 11,411 – has its own Pride celebration this summer.

"The Pride celebration means a lot to the LGBTQ+ community," he told *The Independent*. "Wimborne is a growing town and all the people I have spoken to have welcomed a Pride for Wimborne, saying 'it's about time' the LGBTQ+ community had recognition in the town, like bringing it into the modern world."

Mr Webb's mayoral election became national news in 1994 after he was outed in the *Bournemouth Echo* by councillors who didn't think it was appropriate for the town to be led by a gay mayor.

"Two Wimborne town councillors called the *Echo* to tell us that one of their colleagues, Philip Webb, who had been nominated as mayor, was bisexual. They did not like it. They planned to put a stop to it, but they did not want to be quoted," the paper was quoted as saying.

At the time, the *News of the World* reported "Mr Mayor Wants It Both Ways". *The Independent* described him as "the man who brought sex, drugs and rock'n'roll" to his town.

Having details of his sexuality published in the press was not easy for Mr Webb. He had to tell his parents, who stood by his side throughout. His father wrote to the local newspaper to say that he didn't agree with his son's "chosen lifestyle", but he supported his right to be mayor.

Now, he sees the funny side of it: "It was pretty hard. I mean, it was funny though… The *News of the World* article said 'people came over all queer in a sleepy town in Dorset when they found their mayor was bisexual'," he joked.



Nasty outing for a would-be mayor

Are the folk of Wimborne Minster ready for gay rocker Phil Webb? Not as a figurehead, they're not, and some are playing dirty. **Nicholas Roe** reports

"You don't know Phil Webb. I do. He is 35 years old but he acts and dresses like a gothic teenager. His way of life won't go down well"

Phil Webb: 'I feel that all eyes are upon me. But I still want to be mayor'

Photograph: Duncan Lee

Three decades ago, Mr Webb's sexual orientation made national news (The Independent)

The same year he was outed, slow progress was made in LGBTQ+ rights. The UK changed the age of consent for gay and bisexual men from 21 to 18 through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. According to Mr Webb, Wimborne Minster was still slightly behind the times – but even then it was unusual for such a fuss to be made about someone being gay.

Nevertheless, it changed his life.

"People recognised me as the gay mayor and they were 100 per cent supportive," he said. "What I did feel was a step backwards. It was one step backwards in order to take three steps forward because they had accused me of being gay, and I said yes, I'm gay. And so that brought forward LGBTQ+ rights in Wimborne."

Since his time as mayor, Mr Webb has gone on to have a long career working in children's social care, though he is now retired. He met his long-time partner David in 1998 and they formed a civil partnership. They were together for 22 years until David's death five years ago.

Town crier and councillor Chris Brown asked Mr Webb to bring Pride to Wimborne earlier this year, apparently declaring: "You're the bloke to do it."

It is still in the early stages of planning, but £650 has been granted to kick off a Pride movement. Mr Webb envisions a

dedicated Pride event on the local green, rather than a huge march in these early days.

However, he has already arranged for the Pride movement to join in with a local event next month, while bigger plans are still in the works.

Mr Webb got in touch with Wimborne's local folk festival (12-14 June) to see if a stall could be set up to raise awareness for the movement. The festival organisers said it would welcome the Pride movement to join in with the event's parade itself.



Wimborne Minster's folk dance festival will have a dedicated Pride section this year (Getty/iStock)

"We'll be dancing along with them and streamers and flags and stickers and music, hopefully," he said.

The journey for Pride hasn't been without its controversies in the small town. Two men, claiming to be from a local church, attended the small consultation meeting and suggested it might be inappropriate for sexual or gender orientations to be included in the folk festival dance parade.

"It was great because it's so important to involve dissenters," Mr Webb said. "They have a right to have their views put forward.

“It was so interesting how members of the group were able to politely, decently, counter their arguments.

“There was one lady there. She said, ‘I was with my son years ago in Wimborne and he’s trans, and I was walking through Wimborne and someone spat at us.’ Now, they didn’t know that sort of thing happened. They weren’t aware of the discrimination that the LGBTQ+ community faced.”

He added: “That is why we need a Pride still. Wimborne is a very tolerant town and always has been, and it is very cultural. There’s no place for hate in Wimborne, really, but there are still a small number of people who are anti and prepared to say so. And it’s not people like me who’s older and more resilient who are suffering. It’s the youngsters.”

Particularly concerned about trans people, Mr Webb hopes that by bringing Pride to his town, the LGBTQ+ community can come together and be accepted.

“I hope that the LGBTQ+ community can be out there, be visible, and that people will accept them for what they are and stop discriminating against people for something that they really can’t help.”

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# ‘Choosing to be my true self was the only way forward’

## Miss England Grace Richardson tells **Lucy Leeson** why she refused to hide her sexuality from the Miss World contest




The 21-year-old is the first openly gay woman to win the Miss England title (The Independent)

Miss England Grace Richardson has opened up about why she chose not to hide her sexuality while competing in the prestigious beauty pageant competition.

The 21-year-old performing arts student, who is the first openly gay woman to win the competition, taking the title in

November, features on *The Independent*'s Pride List 2026.

Richardson says she chose to come out to the judges at Miss England because she wanted to be her authentic self rather than worry about outside opinions. However, she admitted there were concerns about competing at Miss World, as the competition could have been held in a country where her sexuality may not have been accepted or even legal.

Grace said: "For me, choosing to be my authentic self was the only way forward. If I had won and had to hide it, I don't think I would have been as proud of myself as I am now."

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News

# Over 40% LGBTQ+ callers to Childline fear coming out



The NSPCC service delivered 2,457 counselling sessions last year to children and young people struggling with sexuality or gender identity (Photos PA)

HOLLY EVANS

Nearly half of LGBTQ+ children contact Childline with fears of coming out and never being accepted, new data has shown.

The NSPCC service delivered 2,457 counselling sessions last year to children and young people struggling with issues or concerns around sexuality and gender identity.

Research found that of those receiving support, more than 40 per cent cited coming out as their biggest worry. That included being alienated from friendship groups, concerns over their parents' reactions, and having difficulties with their mental health.

The new figures are revealed at the start of Pride Month and as *The Independent* publishes its annual Pride List for 2026, celebrating some of the figures in the LGBTQ+ community who have made a difference – but also showing more awareness is needed.

One boy, aged 17, told the service: "I've only recently started accepting myself as gay after years of bullying. I've been freaking out that my parents will find out, because yesterday my cousin texted me saying that they know about me. I'm out at school, but I'm not ready for my whole family to know. I was planning to wait until I moved to college to tell them. I feel like I'm losing control."



The NSPCC service delivered 2,457 counselling sessions last year to children and young people struggling with sexuality or gender identity

Other concerns include questioning their sexuality or gender identity, discrimination or prejudice and experiencing gender dysphoria. Where gender was known, 64 per cent of these counselling sessions were with young people who identify as transgender or non-binary.

A 14-year-old trans boy said, “I think it’s hard for my mum to accept who I am because of what she reads and sees in the media about other trans teenagers. It’s caused a lot of misunderstanding for her about what being trans means and has created a lot of anger around it.”

Gender dysphoria is a feeling of distress that can happen when a person’s gender identity differs from their biological sex. Childline director Shaun Friel said, “Young people face many difficulties and worries when it comes to sexuality and gender identity.

“At Childline, we regularly hear from those who are scared to come out; expressing anxieties about being judged by their family or alienated by a friend group that doesn’t accept them. We also hear from trans and non-binary children who feel that they will never be accepted if they come out, and that the world is against them.

“This Pride Month, we want to reassure all children that they can reach out to Childline as their authentic selves. Childline is here to be a confidential and wholly accepting space, where young people can discuss their concerns and feelings freely.”

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# The village of the doomed

## The small town of Longford faces either demolition or an intolerable increase in noise due to Heathrow's expansion. Meanwhile, residents are stuck, they tell **Dan Haygarth**




'No 3rd runway': Longford residents are fighting back against the airport's plans (AFP/Getty)

It is a sunny Wednesday afternoon and Raj Kimyani, Christian Hughes and Trevor Gordon are all enjoying a pint outside The White Horse in Longford. The thatched pub is the last one left in the village and it is busy, as people who've managed to clock off work early drop in for a swift pint on the way home.

This peaceful scene could be taking place in any village in Britain. But the tranquillity is suddenly interrupted by a

thunderous noise from above.

It is the unmistakable sound of jet engines, as a plane takes off from Heathrow airport and soars above them. The three men take little notice of it and carry on talking. For them, this is normal.

Longford directly borders Heathrow's Terminal 5, and some of its houses are just hundreds of metres to the west of its northern runway.

This quaint village, which runs along Bath Road and is also home to offices and hotels serving Heathrow, dates back to the medieval period. For anyone who still lives in Longford, the airport, which opened in 1946, has always been a part of life.



Raj Kimyani now feels 'kind of stuck' in the village (The Independent)

It might not be for much longer, however. If long-mooted and controversial plans for a third runway go ahead, their village would be destroyed in the sprawling infrastructure project which would also see the M25 moved.

Plans for a third runway were first proposed in 2009 and have hit many obstacles since. But they appear to be progressing.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves last January expressed the Labour government's support for the expansion of Heathrow as part of its search for economic growth, but a final decision on the third

runway is not expected for years, with a further public consultation to take place later this year.

Posters rejecting a third runway and the potential flattening of Longford are dotted around the village.

Mr Kimyani, Mr Hughes and Mr Gordon tell *The Independent* that the uncertainty facing Longford hangs over them, with locals feeling trapped. Many want the plans scrapped so the village they call home will remain, while others who want to move on are not yet able to, they say.




Heathrow expansion could result in the destruction of Longford (PA)

If the plans do go ahead, their homes are likely to be subject to compulsory purchase orders, with Heathrow expected to buy them. But until then, residents will not be able to "sell at a decent price" if they do want to leave, Mr Hughes says.

Mr Hughes, 54, who has lived in Longford since 1975 and is now chair of its residents' association, tells *The Independent*: "This has been hanging over the village since 2008 when they first started talking about it.

"The issue is that, with the uncertainty, not being able to get a mortgage, not being able to sell at a decent price, you can't

move up and you're kind of locked in. You've got a community of people that are just stuck. Even with the compulsory purchase, they're not going to get what they deserve."

Heathrow's director of communities and residential property Becky Coffin tells *The Independent* that she appreciates uncertainty around expansion is "very challenging" for Longford residents, but says the airport is progressing its property compensation scheme to offer them certainty "as soon as possible".



Christian Hughes: 'This has been hanging over the village since 2008' (The Independent)

Away from the threat of expansion, Longford locals also have another, more pressing concern. The government's "Cranford agreement" stopped aircraft taking off in an easterly direction from the northern runway, to reduce noise and pollution over the villages in the shadow of the airport, but it was scrapped in 2009.

Departures are generally into a headwind and the prevailing wind from the southwest means approximately 70 per cent of Heathrow's operations are in a westerly direction. At the moment, when planes take off towards the east, only the

southern runway is used, which was part of the Cranford agreement.

However, last December, Hillingdon council approved an application to enable runway alternation for easterly operations.

Heathrow is currently going through an airspace change proposal with the Civil Aviation Authority and will carry out a public consultation as part of it.

According to Mr Hughes, when planes take off in a westerly direction, it means they begin their take-off around 750 metres away from the property in the village nearest the northern runway. In the case of easterly take-offs, that is reduced to 250 metres, he claims, and this increases noise levels to unpalatable levels for residents, as the engines fire up ready for flight.

“When they do take off from that end, they're accelerating behind, you can feel everything, you can feel the vibration, before you can actually hear it,” says Mr Hughes. “You can feel your house shake.”




‘When they do take off from that end ... you can feel the vibration, before you can actually hear it’ (AFP/Getty)

Mr Hughes is worried about the regularity of easterly take-offs in the future and the impact they could have on Longford. He claims that the change in plans could mean 160 easterly take-offs a day, rather than 200 a year.

He is taking the fight to Heathrow over both the easterly take-offs and the threat of expansion – battles he says the residents' association's approximately 60 members are behind.

So, not only are Longford's residents worried whether their village will cease to exist in a matter of years, but also whether it will be inhabitable until that point anyway.

"It's draining," says Mr Kimyani, 49, of the situation. He moved into the village in 2004 and the proximity to the airport was a significant part of the appeal, as he worked in Switzerland frequently. But since then he believes Longford has lost its charm. It only has one pub left; the Kings Arms was the most recent to close, shutting in 2024 after 250 years.

The village's remaining residents lament its slow decline.

Mr Kimyani says that when he moved to Longford it was because of "the people, the character – a really undisclosed kind of place that you wouldn't think is in Heathrow. "That was the beauty of this place. Lovely bit of history, lovely buildings. Now we look at it and I'm kind of stuck that it's lost its appeal."



The White Horse is Longford's last remaining pub (The Independent)

He puts this down to the looming threats hanging over it. "You're stuck", he adds. "That's the problem."

Mr Gordon, 75, just wants clarity. “I tend to get used to it [the noise]”, he says. “I just wish they’d stop kicking the tin can [and] make a decision.”

Ms Coffin told *The Independent*: “We understand that Longford residents have concerns about easterly alternation and we take them very seriously. Residents’ feedback has shaped our approach, including our plans for a noise barrier to help reduce local impact in Longford.

“Introducing easterly alternation will provide more predictable periods of respite and more equitable distribution of noise for the surrounding communities of Heathrow. We acknowledge that for those living closest to Heathrow, particularly with the current ongoing uncertainty around expansion, it is very challenging.

“While timelines are subject to government and regulatory approval, we are progressing our property compensation schemes so we can offer impacted residents certainty as soon as possible. We are committed to continuing open engagement and dialogue with local residents and ensuring the appropriate compensation and support is in place.”

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# Arsenal paint north London red with rapturous parade

## Midfielder Declan Rice serenaded those lining the streets near Highbury with ‘Ice Ice Baby’, as up to a million fans of the Gunners wildly cheered the Premier League champions



Supporters fire confetti and wave flags as they wait for the open-top bus carrying the team (AP)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

Declan Rice vowed Arsenal will be “coming back for more” next season after losing his voice during a frenzied trophy parade that

was attended by hundreds of thousands of supporters in north London.

Returning home after the disappointment of losing the Champions League final to Paris Saint-Germain on Saturday night, Arsenal supporters were still in a jubilant mood as they celebrated a first Premier League triumph in 22 years, lining the streets around the Emirates Stadium and filling the air with deafening roars and bright red smoke.

Rice, who said he lost his voice after rapping Vanilla Ice's "Ice Ice Baby"and leading a chant of "Set piece again, ole ole", said he was left "speechless" by the scenes of celebration. "Seeing the joy we can give people is crazy," said the midfielder, who will be joining up with England on Monday ahead of the World Cup. "But next year we're coming back for more. Get locked in or get locked out."

It was not to be in Budapest for Mikel Arteta's men, left to rue a cruel ending to a Champions League final of fine margins as PSG claimed back-to-back European crowns. Gabriel Magalhaes sent his spot kick over the bar after a tense shootout settled a tight contest in Budapest, with the French champions emerging 4-3 victors on penalties after extra time. It was a result, and performance, from which Arsenal could take both encouragement and insight into where improvement is needed.

Rice spoke to TNT Sports following the defeat and labelled the loss as "devastating", but drew comfort from the progress his side have made this season. "An incredible season, given absolutely everything up to this point," he said. "We took the game to penalties and it's a lottery. You either win on pens or lose on pens; some of the best teams ever have lost on penalties in finals and we were on the receiving end of that tonight."



An aerial view shows the parade passing near the Emirates Stadium (AFP/Getty)

“That happens in football, they’re not going to be the last players to miss penalties in finals. Everyone’s missed a penalty and without them two this season we wouldn’t have won the Premier League, that’s for sure. Gabriel, I’ve run out of words for him as a person, as a player, and [Eberechi] Eze as well, the crucial goals he’s come up with for us this year. It happens, it’s football, it’s cruel. We take the positives and we’ll keep going.”

Members of the Arsenal staff followed on a second bus, while the women’s team were on a third bus, parading the Fifa Champions Cup they won in February. An estimated million supporters were in attendance, with some hanging out of windows and standing on top of bus shelters to get the best vantage points. Red smoke billowed around the nozzles as hundreds of flares were let off.

Myles Lewis-Skelly was not even born the last time Arsenal won the title in 2004. The 19-year-old, who started the Champions League final in midfield, told Sky Sports: “First of all, I’m so proud of the boys. “I’m proud of the organisation in helping us get here because it hasn’t been an easy season. But obviously, we’ve come to the end of the season and we’re champions of England.

“It’s disappointing because when you’re so close to a dream, a goal, you feel slightly short, but as Mikel said, it’s added fuel to the fire, so we’ll use that. It means everything, just to share this moment with our people. It’s incredible because it’s a chance to pay them back for all the sacrifices they’ve helped us through.




The Arsenal team bus drives past fans on Holloway Road (PA)

“I’m going to see my family here as well. It’s going to be emotional, so I’m so excited. The last two weeks have been incredible. Just sharing those moments with the team, the people that you love dearly, that you go to war with. It’s amazing.

“For me, [the future] is bright. I feel like it’s the start of a new era and I feel like we’re ready to go and achieve our dreams. [Arteta] has been so supportive of me over my whole journey, so I’m just so grateful for him and the trust he’s given to me.”

Asked for a message for the fans, Lewis-Skelly added: “Thank you, and we’re not done!”

According to a Metropolitan Police statement: “As of 9pm we had made 16 arrests across the parade footprint, including six for assaulting officers.” One person had been stabbed in Hornsey Road, their condition unknown, and a crime scene was in operation.

That figure was in sharp contrast to scenes in Paris the night before. While an estimated 100,000 supporters gathered peacefully near the Eiffel Tower yesterday to celebrate Paris Saint-Germain's second Champions League title victory, violent clashes overnight led police to detain 780 people in Paris and other French cities that erupted on Saturday night.

The interior minister, Laurent Nuñez, said 57 officers were wounded, with most suffering minor injuries, as football fans set off fires and vandalised shops. One small group even tried to storm a Paris police station.




Tensions between police and fans during PSG's celebration in Paris on Saturday night (AFP/Getty)

At a news conference yesterday, he said the situation had largely been brought under control. "Most of the celebrations took place peacefully" across the French capital, he said, noting most incidents happened in the Champs Elysees neighbourhood and close to PSG's Parc des Princes in western Paris, where fans had gathered to watch the match.

Returning from Budapest late, PSG players, led by captain Marquinhos, coach Luis Enrique and club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi, were greeted by cheering crowds as the club anthem blared from loudspeakers. The players took turns lifting the trophy aloft, relishing their heroes' welcome back home.

The team was then hosted by French president Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee presidential palace. Mr Macron condemned the violence.“I don’t want that we get used to it,” Mr Macron said at the ceremony. “This is not soccer, this is not sport, this is not what we love. We will be uncompromising with those who have been caught. We do not want to see this happen again. It’s over. We’ve had enough. This must end.”

Mr Nunez said incidents took place in about 15 cities in France, describing “one to two” shops vandalised in each, other than Paris. He said 780 people were detained in all, with 480 of them in the Paris area alone.

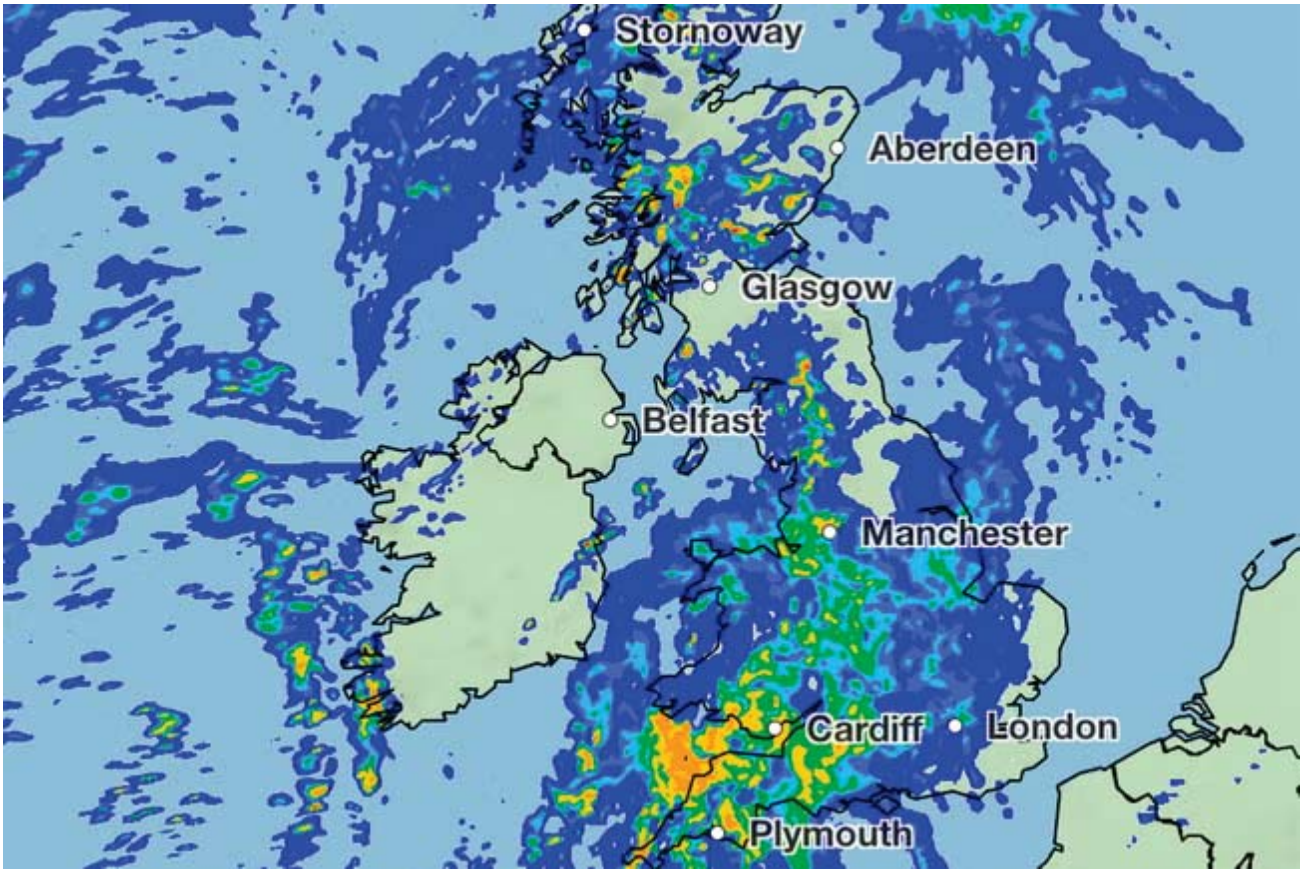
*Includes reporting from PA*



**Elite changes Arsenal must make to take the next step**

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# Heatwave gets washed away by two days of heavy rain




The UK could see up to 8mm of water dumped on some areas every hour (Photos Met Office)

BRYONY GOOCH

May's record-breaking heatwave will be brought to an abrupt end by torrential downpours that could see Britain lashed by two days of heavy rain.

The Met Office said that Saturday officially marked the end of the sweltering weather, and yesterday's scattered showers and

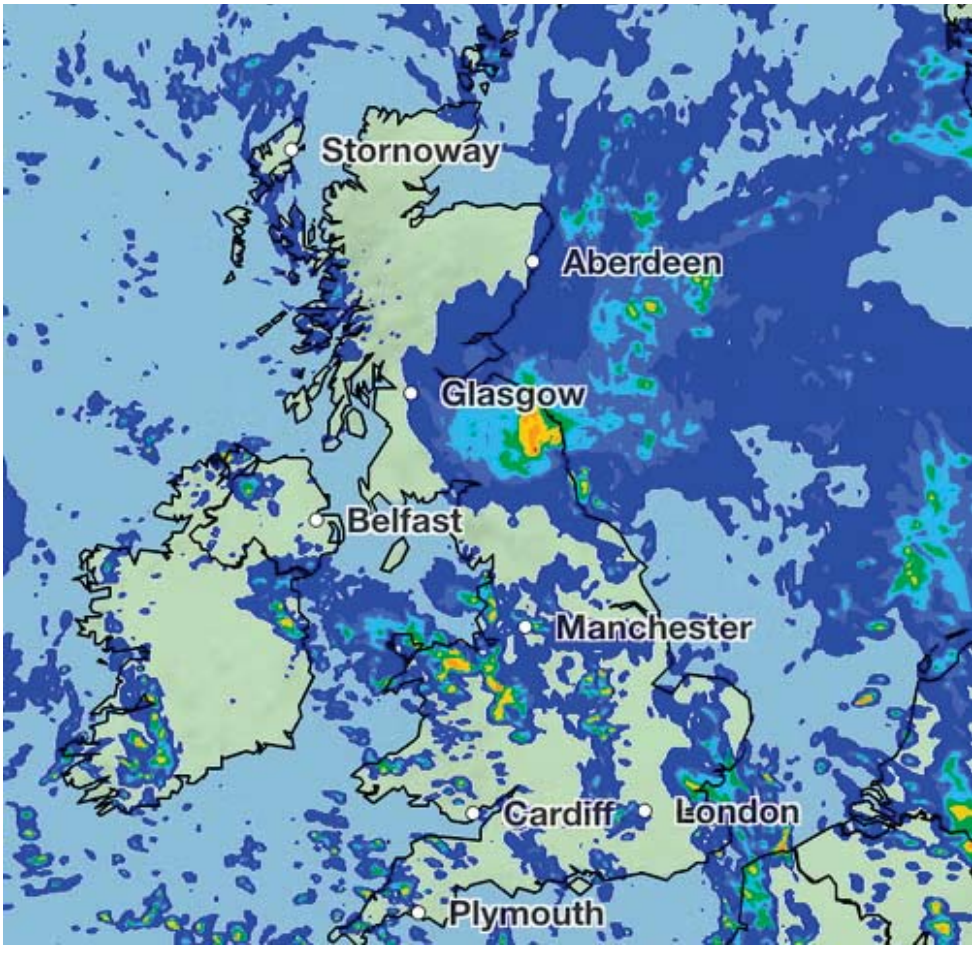
lower temperatures would make way for more changeable weather this week.

Maps from the forecaster show a blanket of heavy rain stretching across the UK, which could see between 2mm and 8mm dumped on some areas every hour.

The drenching was expected to sweep in from the west just after 11pm last night, moving eastward across the country before easing tomorrow. Scotland will see particularly heavy rain tomorrow, with deluges of up to 16mm per hour in the morning.

Met Office chief forecaster Chris Bulmer said: “Temperatures should be much closer to average for the time of year with accompanying rainfall for many into the start of next week.”

Spells of rain will move across the UK, expected to be heavy at times across the west, broken up with brighter intervals.




Rain will remain heavy in certain places tomorrow, according to the Met Office

Meteorologist Kathryn Chalk said in the latest forecast: “As we go through Monday, another area of low pressure arrives from the west, bringing outbreaks of rain. This rain might actually be some welcome rainfall, especially for farmers and gardeners. As that clears its way through into Tuesday, it’ll be a day of sunny spells and frequent showers.”

By 10pm tomorrow, the rain will have cleared up into small patches of drizzle, according to the forecast. The mercury is set to drop to the late teens and early twenties, a marked difference from the sweltering highs the UK has seen over the past week.

It comes after the forecaster marked record-breaking temperatures for May with a scorching 35.1C recorded in Kew Gardens on Tuesday. This broke the record set the day before at 34.8C; originally, the highest May temperature had been 32.8C, recorded in 1922 and 1944.

Further unsettled conditions are predicted throughout the week, with spells of rain, showers and thunderstorms and a chance of hail in parts.

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# Pictures of the Day



**Lighting up**

People release paper lanterns during a ceremony on Vesak Day, an annual celebration of the Buddha's birth, at Borobudur temple in Magelang, Indonesia. *Reuters*



### Coast of thousands

Runners, wearing white, compete in the annual Chariots of Fire race along the West Sands Beach in St Andrews, Fife. *PA*



### Serving the people

Competitors play table tennis on the pitch of the Luzhniki Stadium during a festival dedicated to the sport in Moscow. *AP*



**Eye ball**

Switzerland's Belinda Bencic in action during her fourth round match against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina at the French Open at Roland Garros, Paris. *Reuters*



**Fan girl**

A woman in traditional costume cools herself as people queue to visit the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. *AP*

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# Home news in brief



The Met warns that release of certain documents relating to Lord Mandelson could jeopardise its criminal investigation (PA)

## Officials 'won't release key vetting file on Mandelson'

The Cabinet Office will reportedly not release a key document relating to the vetting of Peter Mandelson after the Metropolitan Police warned it could threaten their ongoing investigation.

In the next tranche of papers expected to be released today, the summary document – which was compiled before Lord Mandelson was appointed as the UK ambassador to the US – is unlikely to be included after warnings that doing so could jeopardise any future prosecution of the disgraced peer.

*The Independent* has also been told the documents are not expected to include anything on vetting, even redacted, or about security mitigation.

It emerged earlier this year that Lord Mandelson failed crucial security vetting but was given the ambassdor's job anyway. Concerns were raised about his links to figures in China, Russia and Israel, and he was sacked in September last year after it was revealed that he had maintained his friendship with paedophile financier Jeffrey Epstein after his conviction for child sexual offences.

Scotland Yard launched a criminal investigation into allegations of misconduct in a public office earlier this year after Lord Mandelson was accused of sharing sensitive information with Epstein during his time as business secretary in 2009. He was arrested in February and released under investigation and has denied any wrongdoing.

## One Direction star Horan recalls final encounter with Payne

Former One Direction singer Niall Horan has said he was in denial when he heard the news of his former bandmate Liam Payne's death. Mr Payne died in October 2024 after falling from a third-storey hotel balcony in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He was 31. In a new interview with *The Times*, Mr Horan, 32, said he was with his One Direction bandmate in Argentina just weeks before his death. "I'm glad of that; it means my last memory of him was happy," he said.

Mr Payne had flown in to Argentina to see Horan perform on tour, with a video of the moment – in which Mr Payne is seen happily supporting his former bandmate – circulating online. "It still feels surreal," continued Mr Horan. "Our friendship was a bond that was there forever even if we hadn't seen each other for a while, and it's wild that one day, like the flick of a switch, he's gone."

The Irish singer has dedicated one of the tracks, "End of an Era", on his forthcoming solo album to his late bandmate. "I think it's

his type of song," he replied when asked what he thinks Mr Payne would make of it. "He liked Coldplay. He loved songs like 'You & I' by One Direction, songs that went somewhere."

## Milibands pay tribute to late mother

Marion Kozak, a Holocaust survivor, left-wing campaigner, and mother to Ed and David Miliband, has died aged 91. Her sons announced her passing on Saturday, paying tribute to a "dearly beloved mother, grandmother and sister" and "a force field of life and love". They noted her life had taken "a remarkable trajectory".

Born Dobra Jenta Kozak in Poland in 1934, she escaped from the Czestochowa Ghetto in 1942 during the Nazi occupation along with her mother and sister. She was sheltered by nuns and then a neighbour of her aunt in Warsaw, surviving the war thanks to what her son, Ed, told the 2012 Labour Party conference was "the kindness of strangers". She settled in the UK after the war, marrying left-wing academic Ralph Miliband and becoming a human rights campaigner and early activist for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

"She lived an extraordinary life with a spirit of the utmost kindness, warmth and generosity," the brothers said in a statement. "We will deeply miss her, but will carry her spirit and values with us always." *PA*

## Palace was given Andrew's trade envoy emails six years ago

Emails given to Buckingham Palace six years ago would have shown Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was sharing confidential government information as trade envoy, court documents suggest. An archive of 30,000 emails, taken from a personal business contact of Mr Mountbatten-Windsor, was handed over to the Lord Chamberlain, the most senior officer in the royal household, in May 2020.

Court documents seen by *The Independent* and the BBC show a large cache of emails was sent to palace officials years before the

current inquiries began. The contents of the emails, spanning a number of years dated up to June 2013, are not fully known, but a High Court judgment in April 2021 revealed that a "copy of the archive" had been provided for the "Lord Chamberlain in May 2020".

*The Telegraph* reported Mr Mountbatten-Windsor had requested a confidential briefing from the Treasury in 2010 about the financial crisis in Iceland. The newspaper said the emails it obtained showed the former prince had shared these details with British businessman Jonathan Rowland, passing on the information "before you make your move".

Thames Valley Police said: "We are aware of the allegations circulating in the public domain and encourage anyone with relevant information to get in touch."

## Met investigates officers over Kensington Palace behaviour

The Metropolitan Police has carried out an internal investigation into five of its royalty and specialist protection officers following allegations of misogynistic behaviour. The allegations reportedly stem from an official complaint filed in October 2024 by a staff member at Kensington Palace. According to *The Sun*, the female staff member reported a string of "inappropriate" comments between August 2023 and September 2024.

A Met spokesperson said in a statement: "The reported behaviour falls below the high standards expected of officers, particularly those in frontline protective roles. As a result of our internal investigation into this matter, the officers received reflective practice to consider their actions and identify learning for the future."

It is understood that the behaviour of the officers was not found to meet the threshold for misconduct. However, *The Sun* reports senior royal household staff decided to stop them from working at any palaces in the future by removing their access passes. *PA*

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# ‘Iran will be a free country’

## Young people in Tehran risk imprisonment posing for photographer Tahmineh Monzavi. She tells **Caspar Barnes** and **Moha Tahery** how they feel about their nation’s future

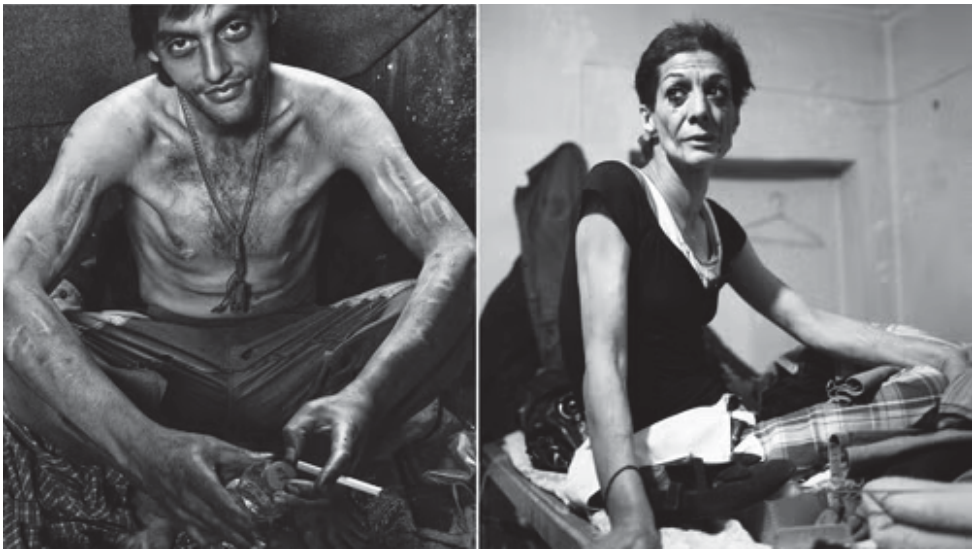


Monzavi’s pictures capture the lives of a generation dreaming of what comes next (Photos Tahmineh Monzavi)

When she was just 23 years old, Tahmineh Monzavi was imprisoned for taking pictures. The Tehran-based photographer’s images of drug addicts and prostitutes in the poorer parts of her city were deemed “dangerous to society” by the Iranian regime. She spent a month in solitary confinement.

Her time in prison brought on panic attacks. “In addition, I got [an] autoimmune disease for the rest of my life,” she says from Tehran. “I lost my hair.”

She did not know how to treat the disease, and it began to attack her body. This was 2012, in the wake of the Arab Spring, when a wave of pro-democracy protests toppled dictators across the Middle East and North Africa. It was a highly sensitive and politically charged time in Iran.



Monzavi was imprisoned for her photos of homelessness and addiction that were deemed ‘dangerous to society’

Fast forward to the present day, and the political environment in Iran remains highly fraught. Since the US and Israel started their war with Iran, there have been more than 3,000 deaths due to the bombardments. As with many modern wars, a large proportion of those deaths have been civilians.

Tehran says the war has caused around $270bn in damages, which equates to around 57 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product. Over the course of two days in January, an estimated 30,000 people were slaughtered by security forces in the street. Students made up a significant portion of the victims.

Monzavi, now 38, believes Generation Z Iranians – born between 1997 and 2012 – are braver than their millennial counterparts because they have support from their parents. This generation has put aside the caution and fear that have haunted their predecessors, she says. “They’ve learned how to be fearless.”

That fearlessness comes through when speaking to students and young people in Iran.



Generation Z in Iran have 'learned how to be fearless'

"Each day passing with these murderers in power is getting closer to more death and poverty," says Hassan. He is a 20-year-old student, but Hassan is not his real name (all of the names of young people that we spoke to for this article have been changed for their safety).

"I wish people outside Iran understood that daily life is not only about politics or headlines. Even ordinary things like studying or planning a future have become difficult under constant uncertainty, economic pressure and fear," Hassan says.

Monzavi has been turning her lens towards young people in Iran since the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, which was sparked by 22-year-old Mahsa Amini's death in police custody after she was arrested for failing to wear a hijab properly.

The images portray an air of normality. Teenagers and young adults drink in downtown coffee shops, pose with pets, smoke cigarettes and ride motorbikes. Many forgo the hijab or headscarves entirely. "It's hard to initially convince them to let me take pictures of them," she says, "but because of their fearlessness, they are much more open to the whole concept."

Yet the reality of daily life is more difficult to capture: Fear, anxiety, arrests, spiralling prices, food shortages and the longest internet blackout in modern history. After 88 days on Tuesday 26 May, Iran's internet connection to the outside world was partially restored, according to online watchdog NetBlocks. For three months during the blackout you could not contact loved ones. Even checking the weather was impossible.



For many of the young people, life in Iran is divided into 'before' and 'after' 8 January

The blackout contributed to thousands of Iranians losing their jobs. "We still have not returned to the conditions before January," says Tehran-based digital rights activist Saeed Souzangar.

Even before January, most major social media platforms and messaging apps were already inaccessible in Iran unless you could bypass filters with costly Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). Telegram, Google Play, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter are all still filtered, according to Souzangar.

"I feel like I am being monitored," says 25-year-old Sarfraz, "Whenever it wants, the government can block even this small gateway." Sarfraz is studying at university alongside his job as a high school teacher.

For many young Iranians that we spoke to, life in Iran is divided into "before" and "after" those two horrendous nights of

bloodshed that began on 8 January at around 8.30pm local time – when internet and mobile signals were shut off as regime forces began firing on civilians in the streets. Everyone we spoke to knows at least one friend who was injured or killed in the ensuing 48 hours.

“People aren’t the same any more,” Sarfraz says. The 25-year-old fears there will not be any genuine reforms in Iran within his lifetime. “My only hope is that it doesn’t get any worse.”



The young people Monzavi has been able to photograph still allow themselves to dream about their future (Tahmineh Monzavi)

He certainly no longer looks to the West, Trump or America to be Iran’s saviour. “I don’t think about the outside world at all; they’re just pursuing their own interests.”

It is easy to let pessimism take over, says Mahmoud, another young Iranian we spoke to. “At times, you want to say ‘to hell with it all’ and just wish it would be over. But then you get your second wind, and the thirst for life fills you again, and you think you can change something.”

Malik, a 29-year-old dentist, still believes, in spite of everything, “Iran will be a free country.” He has recently been reading *Shahnameh*, an epic poem composed by the Persian poet Ferdowsi in the 10th century, from which he has been drawing hope. But a simple, peaceful life feels out of reach.

As a result, he is looking for an escape route. “Immigration as a major option for educated individuals is now a non-option,” he says. “Too hard and too expensive.”



Tahmineh Monzavi spent a month in solitary confinement in 2012 and developed an autoimmune disease that caused her to lose her hair

For Monzavi, photography has been almost impossible since the war broke out. The camera is treated with suspicion by everybody and equates to espionage in the eyes of the regime.

But the young people she has befriended through her work still allow themselves to dream about their future.

There is an art student who dreams of freedom. A film student who dreams of directing her own movies. And one girl dreams of getting medicine for her father once the international sanctions have lifted.

These days Monzavi keeps the panic attacks at bay with therapy and meditation. When we speak, she has been on a course of medicine to stimulate hair growth for two months. But the results are patchy and not as good as she hoped.

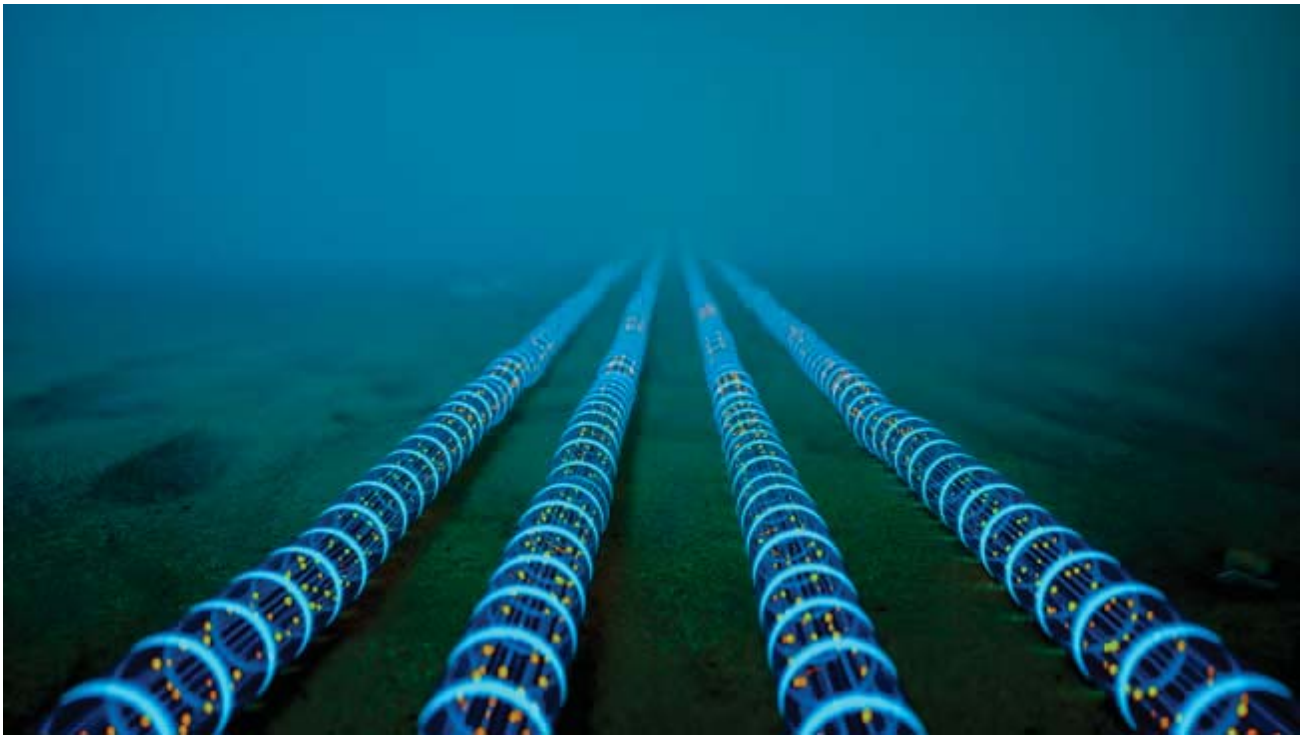
Does she ever think about prioritising her health and stepping away from the camera, which could one day land her back in prison?

“To continue my work is much more important for my heart,” she says.

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World

# Just how vulnerable are our undersea internet cables?



As Iran war threatens information pipelines in the Strait of Hormuz, the need for alternative solutions seems more pressing than ever (Getty/iStock)

ALEX CROFT

When one of the world's worst-ever energy crises began in the Strait of Hormuz in February, few believed that their internet access – rather than their gas bill – would be the worst-affected aspect of daily life.

But lurking many thousands of metres beneath the oil ships being attacked by the Iranian navy lie a series of undersea cables that play a vital role in the global economy, helping to power our internet and keep the world connected.

Earlier this month, Tehran floated plans to impose tariffs on Strait of Hormuz submarine cables, warning that they were a vulnerable chokepoint for the region's digital economy.

The Middle East is not the only region facing these concerns. In April, three Russian submarines conducted a covert operation over cables in waters north of the UK, although none were damaged. On Friday, the UK announced it is introducing stringent new laws to punish any saboteurs who deliberately damage undersea internet cables with a possible prison sentence.

China has also been accused by Taiwan of several attacks on undersea cables in the region. For the island, which relies on just 24 cables, this can pose a significant national security risk.

Undersea cables carry more than 99 per cent of all international digital data traffic, acting as an invisible backbone of the internet and facilitating emails, banking transactions, messaging and more.

But the so-called global network of undersea cables is more an assortment of "narrow corridors" through which the internet flows – including through the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea.



Submarine cables are laid by large specialised ships (Social media)

The roughly 600 submarine cables are primarily owned and operated by some of the world's largest private

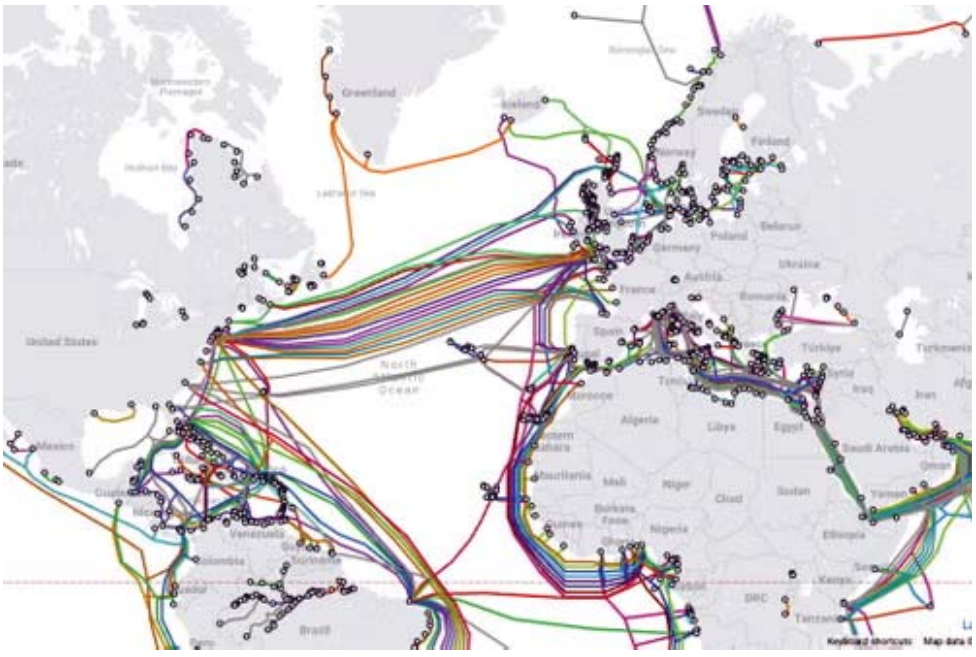
telecommunications companies, including Google, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon, and other consortia. Modern ones use fibre-optic technology, with the cable delivering the information no wider than a human hair, sheathed in several layers of insulation and protection.

Data analysis company TeleGeography believes there are more than 1.5 million kilometres of submarine cables globally, reaching up to 20,000km in length.

They are installed by huge, specialised cable-laying ships, which unspool the cables, burying them under the seabed in shallow waters and laying them on the floor in deep waters. This is only done after the topography of the ocean floor on the route in question has been carefully mapped.

“Everyone knows where they are,” explains Tony O’Sullivan, CEO of global network provider RETN, which operates between Europe and Asia. “The Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, parts of the East China Sea, and the Strait of Dover are good examples. Given the volume of traffic that runs along these routes, if they do get affected, it would affect not [just] the edge of the internet backbone but a major conduit.”

Serious damage to the cables can cause significant problems for consumers, particularly businesses. Although the belief that cables break and the internet goes down at once is not strictly true – traffic will typically find another route – the speed of the services can degrade sharply.



A global map of undersea cable routes shows how densely populated they are in certain routes (TeleGeography)

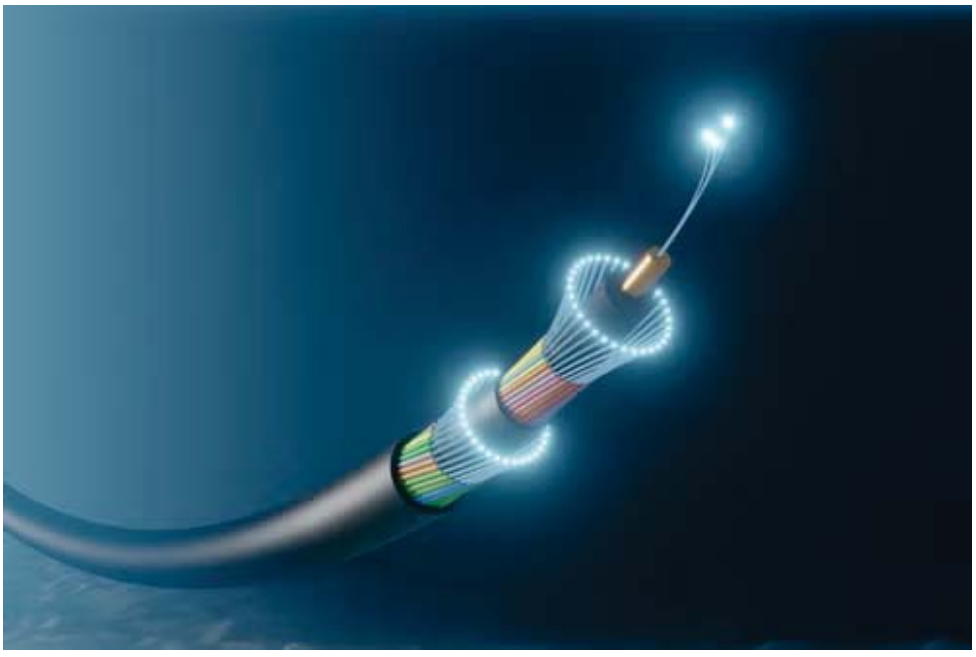
A heavy load on the alternative cable routes means they become unstable, leading to unprocessed payments, feeds that don't update, and messages that take longer to send. Vital services such as healthcare and banking may also suffer under an increasing load, potentially causing chaos for public services.

The Iran crisis has highlighted a wider problem in how the internet is run, Mr O'Sullivan says, with the routes too vulnerable to hostile actors seeking to wreak digital chaos.

"If a malicious actor should wish to try and take out maybe one fifth to one quarter of it, certainly a particular territory, and then you get an accident affecting another quarter of them, of course this is when things become really problematic."

The greatest threat in the Middle East is not the cables running through the Strait of Hormuz; rather it is the possibility of the Iranian-aligned Houthis launching attacks on undersea cables in the Red Sea.

"If we think about the Red Sea, [this is] where all of the major data cables, which connect Europe to Asia by subsea, pass through," Mr O'Sullivan explains. "The Iranians have been friends with the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and that's where they could potentially inflict a lot more damage."



The internal makeup of fibre-optic undersea internet cables (Getty/iStock)

In 2024, four crucial Red Sea data cables were cut, affecting 25 per cent of data traffic flowing between Asia and Europe, when a Belize-flagged commercial ship dropped its anchor following a ballistic missile attack by Houthi militants.

The Rubymar, loaded with 41,000 tons of fertiliser, was evacuated by its crew after the attack before drifting for nearly two weeks with its anchor down, through an area densely populated with the vital cables.

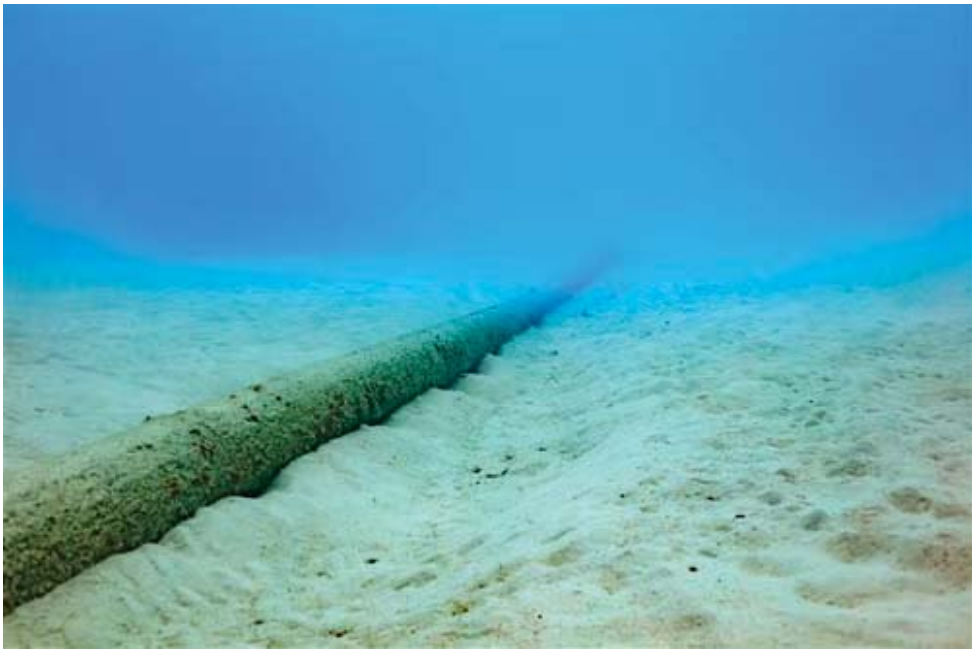
Although it was not a direct attack by the Houthis on the cables, it was a clear demonstration of how vulnerable cables can be – not only to direct attacks by hostile actors but to accidental damage.

“This is the thing to remember,” Mr O’Sullivan adds. “There are lots of cable cuts every single year. These happen all the time, the vast majority related to either fishing nets or anchor drag.

“It’s very, very easy to damage a subsea cable accidentally – the Iranian concern is mainly in how they’ve actively threatened the cables rather than it just being an assumed thing.”

Efforts to prevent damage to undersea cables are unlikely to ever build comprehensive resilience. Instead, experts say, there is a need for a combination of sea, land and space routes.

In 2024, months after the Red Sea incident, Nato funded a new project to make the internet less vulnerable to disruption due to undersea cables, by rerouting information into space through satellites.



Undersea cables are regularly cut by accident (UK Government)

The project aimed to "address the urgent need for a more resilient internet infrastructure worldwide", Dr Eyup Turmus, who was overseeing the programme, said at the time.

"The situation in the Persian Gulf also makes clear that adding more and more cables along the same corridors doesn't help to build resilience," Mr O'Sullivan said.

"The industry needs a real mix of submarine and terrestrial routes, diversified across geopolitical regions. We need to choose different routes, not a different cable in the same corridor."

But experts agree that satellite systems are not a feasible long-term replacement, as they cannot handle the same volume of traffic and are more expensive.

"It's not as though you could just switch to satellite. That's not an alternative," said Alan Mauldin, research director at telecom research firm TeleGeography, noting that satellites rely on connections to land-based networks and are better suited for things in motion, like airplanes and ships.

Low-Earth-orbit networks such as Starlink are “a boutique solution, which is not scalable to millions of users, at this time”, Kotkin added.

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# World news in brief



A flamboyance of flamingos feed in the Venetian lagoon, with the city of canals behind it (AP)

## Flamingos flock to reconstructed Venetian lagoon

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the flamingo's status as a newcomer to the Venetian Lagoon than the fact that the local dialect has no word for them. But the pale pink birds – *fenicotteri* in Italian – are now flocking to Venice in record numbers, as ecological efforts to restore damaged wetlands help expand their habitat and induce them to nest in the lagoon.

Flamingos started showing up in the vast Venetian Lagoon in the early 2000s, mostly in fishing valleys and mudflats in the lagoon's furthest reaches, with only rare sightings in the historic

canals of Venice. Environmentalists say their arrival in Venice as the European flamingo's range expands is a sign of the lagoon's health. Last year, the number of wintering flamingos peaked at a nearly 24,000, 6,000 more than the previous year, volumes "that position the Venetian Lagoon as one of the most important wintering spots in its entire habitat range", said ornithologist Alessandro Sartori.

The Venetian Lagoon, covering an expanse of 550 sq km (more than 200 sq miles), was originally nearly half salt marsh. Today, the area of salt marsh – or "barene" in the Venetian dialect – is just about 7 per cent, about half of it reconstructed, said Jane da Mosto, the executive director of We Are Here Venice, the local partner in the EU's €23.6m (£20.4m), five-year project to restore wetlands across Europe. Already, Mr Sartori believes that the reconstruction has begun to draw more flamingos to the area. "The hope is that they can find – as they have found in other parts of the Mediterranean – right here on these barene, places where they can nest," Sartori said. *AP*

## WHO chief hails recovery of five Ebola patients

Five patients have recovered from a rare type of Ebola, the head of the World Health Organisation said yesterday during a visit to eastern Congo's Bunia, a city at the heart of an outbreak. "Four people will be discharged today and there was one that was discharged the day before yesterday," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said during the opening of a new Ebola treatment centre in Bunia, the provincial capital of Ituri. "Of course, we're still working on vaccines and treatments, but that doesn't mean that people cannot recover from ebola."

The WHO said on Friday a patient had recovered from the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, which has no approved treatment or vaccine. It was the first documented recovery of a confirmed Bundibugyo patient during the current outbreak. Mr Tedros stressed the importance of involving the community in the outbreak response during the opening of the new treatment centre. "If you come to health facilities when you have

symptoms, you can get the support and recover, so the key is to come forward as early as possible and to get the necessary support," the WHO chief said. *AP*

## China patrols near disputed atoll after US-Philippine drills

China's military and coastguard conducted patrols near the disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea yesterday, manoeuvres that followed a five-day joint maritime exercise by Philippine and US forces in the same contested waters last week – their third such drill this year. Scarborough Shoal is a highly contentious maritime area and a frequent flashpoint between the two nations over sovereignty and fishing rights. The recent US-Philippine exercises were designed to strengthen interoperability and maritime security, according to the Southeast Asian nation's military.

Yesterday, China's Southern Theatre Command announced that its naval and air units carried out "combat readiness patrols" in the "territorial sea and airspace" of the atoll and its surrounding areas. It said the patrols were intended to "serve as an effective countermeasure to cope with all sorts of rights violations and provocative acts", although it did not name any country. *Reuters*

## JFK niece cheers removal of Trump from Kennedy Center's title

Maria Shriver has responded gleefully to a federal judge's order to remove US president Donald Trump's name from the John F Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts. On Friday, district judge Christopher Cooper in Washington DC blocked Mr Trump from renaming the venue to "Trump-Kennedy Center", saying Congress made it "crystal clear" that the building is to be named after former president John F Kennedy. Judge Cooper also said the venue "cannot bear any other formal name or public memorial" based on a "unilateral say-so" from a Trump-appointed board.

Ms Shriver, the daughter of JFK's sister, Eunice, expressed her excitement about the decision, on what would have been

Kennedy's 109th birthday. "An appropriate birthday present on my uncle's birthday today," she wrote on Threads. "A federal judge ruled that President Trump and the Kennedy Center Board acted unlawfully in renaming the Kennedy Center after him.

"The judge held that only Congress can change the Center's name and blocked the planned two-year closure for now. I know they'll probably appeal and the story isn't over, but for today, let's celebrate a great birthday gift."

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Voices

# What's happening with the climate should terrify us all



Firefighters work to extinguish a wildfire near the city of Patras in western Greece (AFP/Getty)

ALAN RUSBRIDGER

How will history judge this week's front pages? The pictures of joyful kids leaping into lidos to celebrate the warmest May on record! Beachgoers basking in the glorious sun! Hotter than Barbados! RUM-BELIEVABLE!

Did editors not pause to think, "There's something a bit jarring here..." That these increasingly common freak weather events may frighten more people than cheer them? That it may be time to reassess the fluid concept of "news values" when it comes to the climate crisis?

Covering the science, economics and politics of global warming is difficult – and may explain why arguably the most important story of the year received barely a flicker of interest. We'll come on to that.

But first, it's worth asking why climate change became part of the so-called culture wars. How did it come to pass that to be on one side of the "argument" was "woke"?

When it comes to tackling cancer or other diseases which threaten life, we, by and large, leave scientists to get on with the job – and may even cheer them from the sidelines. But some journalists are much less willing to give climate change scientists the benefit of the doubt.

Facts matter less than which side you're on.

For many years, one of the most prolific commentators on climate change in the British press was a critic from *The Spectator* called James Delingpole. He had an English degree from Oxford and a sub-Wodehousian gift with words, which he still deploys in writing about television. He was also an out-and-out climate change denier and ignorantly opined on the subject for the influential Trump-adjacent news website, Breitbart.

He would regularly tell the readers of *The Sun*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Spectator* and other outlets that global warming was a hoax and that people who pretended otherwise were "crooks, liars, idiots or shills". He made a good living out of it.

And then there was Christopher Booker, a commentator for *The Sunday Telegraph* with a Cambridge degree in history, who for years was allowed to spout rookie nonsense on the subject. He was billed as a "Fleet Street giant" by editors who must have known that he was, in fact, often deceiving the public.

It was as though journalism had a death wish. Just as our craft was suffering an existential crisis due to the ability of billions of people to self-publish, we went out of our way to give them reasons not to trust us, the supposed professionals.

On the one hand, we were telling people that journalism was a craft. Unlike all the headbangers on social media, we had a toolkit for getting to the truth by following the facts. You should trust us, not them. On the other hand, when it came to arguably the most important issues of our time, we published people who didn't give a toss about the facts.

**Hundreds of deluded articles argue that, if only we could restart drilling for oil and gas in the North Sea, our energy prices would immediately plummet**



There's less outright climate denialism in mainstream media today. But there are still oceans of climate scepticism. A thousand different excuses for attacking net zero as a goal. A dozen different ways of suggesting Ed Miliband is a bonkers fanatic. Hundreds of deluded articles argue that, if only we could restart drilling for oil and gas in the North Sea, our energy prices would immediately plummet. Even Tony Blair has jumped on that particular bandwagon.

And then there's the stuff we quietly ignore.

Six weeks ago, a group of scientists published an alarming paper which should, by rights, have appeared on most front pages and featured high in most news bulletins. In *The Guardian,* it appeared under the headline "Critical Atlantic current significantly more likely to collapse than thought". In *The Independent*, it was headlined "Vital Atlantic current likely to collapse with catastrophic consequences, scientists warn".

Most news organisations, however, ignored the story.

Now, there are reasonable excuses. The original paper, in a journal published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is virtually incomprehensible to the average reader. You'd need a highly scientifically literate journalist to begin to do justice to such findings. Many news organisations can no longer afford to employ a wide range of specialists.

Next, the language of the original paper was carefully nuanced. It did not make for a full-blown Shock Horror! headline. And that's not good if your news organisation is geared up for clicks and viral content.

Some editors would no doubt further argue that their readers don't really want to read about climate change. Psychologists acknowledge that many people find the subject too alarming and do their best to avoid it. The day I looked at the *Guardian* story, it featured nowhere in the list of top 10 reads. Top of the honours board that day were Meghan and Harry.

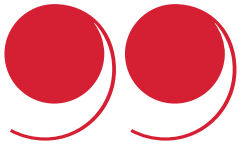
In an age before newsroom metrics, editors felt freer to publish stories they felt their audience *should* read as opposed to the ones they actually wanted to. Nowadays, that's easily dismissed as paternalistic self-indulgence.

But there are less defensible reasons for ignoring such stories. To put it kindly, there is little chance of confusing the average billionaire media baron with Greta Thunberg. Several have been quite vocal in dismissing the overwhelming scientific consensus over global warming. Even more so, since Trump's second coming.

Ambitious would-be editors working for such people don't need to be told what line to take in covering climate change: they read the room.

A combination of all these factors has led us to where we are today. We celebrate cuddly David Attenborough's milestone birthday. But, as fellow colleagues in the information business, we're collectively doing a pretty mediocre job.

We're downplaying the stuff that should be banner headlines. We've been trapped into thinking of climate change as woke. We – wrongly – think our readers don't care. And when we get the hottest May on record, we once again miss the real story.



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# *I owe £64k in student loans – and I don't regret a thing*



I was sold a student loan as the best money I'd ever spend. In a lot of ways, it has been (Getty/iStock)

**AMELIA JACOBS**

There are few experiences more humbling for a 26-year-old postgraduate than logging into their student loans account.

Last week, in a moment of morbid curiosity, I decided to commit the ultimate act of self-flagellation and did just that.

After scraping my jaw off the floor at the numbers staring back at me (50 grand on a plan 2 undergraduate loan and another 14 grand for a master's, if you must know), I got to thinking. Thinking about my 17-year-old self applying to universities and, later, my slightly more developed 23-year-old self applying for a master's. Would they, if I shoved these numbers in front of them, still click "send" on Ucas?

Last week, a Treasury inquiry found that more than half of all graduates admitted to signing up for a student loan without fully understanding the financial implications – essentially, paying back 9 per cent of everything they earn over a threshold that currently stands at £29,385 a year. The survey of almost 50,000 students also found that most would not have gone to university had they known how much their debt would really cost them.

I was sold a student loan as the best money I'd ever spend. In a lot of ways, it has been. Exploring and living independently in a new city, studying a subject I found hugely interesting, forming relationships with friends I will have forever, and meeting teachers who inspired me has surely got to be worth something.

Sure, the strikes and a global pandemic meant I was paying £219 a week to sit inside, pyjama-clad, on Zoom lectures, but I had a good time doing it.

As youth dissatisfaction pulsates around the country, it's easy to look to graduate debt as a lightning rod for our disenfranchisement. Every prospective MP promises to scrap it, only to bow out later. It's not going anywhere any time soon. However, no one forced us to go to university. No one could have predicted the pandemic, or AI wiping out swathes of entry-level jobs.

**I still think young people deserve the chance to have a university experience, should they choose it, without embittered former students telling them it was all a waste of time**



When I tried using my anthropology degree to get a job, it felt like entering the Battle of the Somme with a water gun. It's easy to look back with the clarity of adulthood and judge decisions made by a teenager who didn't yet understand the reality waiting for them.

My younger sister opted not to go into higher education and instead trained as a yacht stewardess. As I write this, she is sailing around the Mediterranean earning £40,000 a year tax-free. So trust me, I know what it feels like to wonder whether I made the right choice – especially when it comes to comparing the Christmas presents we're buying for our mum.

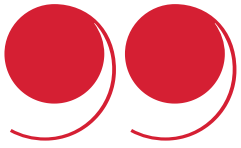
It's very easy to look back and groan. But I knew how much each term cost, I knew the average wage a graduate with my degree could expect, and now I am living on that wage. I went into my undergraduate degree with the milky-eyed optimism many 18-year-olds have on the cusp of adulthood. Twenty-six seemed like a distant future, getting a job felt inevitable, and success seemed like something that would naturally follow from doing exactly what I wanted in that moment.

If you told someone they were going to be punched in the face in 10 years, you could hardly expect them to flinch for a decade. I still think young people deserve the chance to have a university experience, should they choose it, without embittered former students telling them it was all a waste of time.

We are living through a rapidly changing job market and, while my debt isn't going away any time soon, I am choosing to be

grateful for the money that has now been spent and for the degree I now have. It's tricky, but we have to take ownership of the choices we made and move forward with the consequences.

University gave me debt and questionable habits. It also gave me a life. That matters, too.



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# *OMG on Omoggle, as I try to out-handsome other men*



What happens when you invite AI to use its biometrics to rate your physical attractiveness, live on the internet – in a chatroom full of looksmaxxers, incels and other toxic men? (Getty/iStock)

**JACK BURKE**

How have you spent the heatwave week? I spent much of it sitting alone in my room, exploring how the internet has finally found a way to turn male insecurity into a spectator sport. It's called – and yes, these words do make sense, I promise – a one-on-one online "mog-off", and is based around the rather stressful concept of

“looksmaxxing”, or trying to make yourself as good-looking as possible.

My editor had been cajoling me into trying one particular game – available on the Amazon-owned livestreaming platform Twitch, despite mounting criticism from politicians and campaigners – in which young men compete to be judged the “most handsome” by an AI.

“Is this as bad as the internet gets?” he asked. I didn’t want to know. Then he told me the name: Omoggle, and I burst out laughing.

I am from a very specific generational bracket raised on video-chat websites like Chatroulette and Omegle, where, as a child of the late-2000s web, you would log on hoping to meet an American teenager and instead usually be confronted by the grainy image of a middle-aged man illuminated by a single energy-saving bulb.

We often talk about the modern internet as though the old one was some pastoral village green populated by kindly Neopets. It was not. It was a Serbian bloke called xXDarkLord69Xx asking whether you “wanted to see something crazy”. Nevertheless, it was a rite of passage for boys my age.

Omoggle is Omegle’s spiritual successor. It takes the basic premise of connecting strangers via webcam – with cavalier disregard for whether those strangers should be connecting at all – and grafts onto it the brutal logic of competitive ranking. Human attractiveness, scored live, in head-to-head combat.

The website looks like the interior of a spaceship designed by somebody who watched too much *Black Mirror*: all biometric blues and futuristic laser lines. Before granting access, it asks me a single question: “Am I over 18?” I click “yes”. No age verification required: I am in.

What follows is a “mog-off”, the internet’s term for a one-on-one beauty contest between male strangers, many of them alarmingly young, conducted through webcams. You are matched with an opponent, both cameras activate, and the

website's so-called "facial recognition software" begins scanning your faces simultaneously, measuring – with snake-oil accuracy – your "canthal tilt", "palpebral fissure ratio" and various other looksmaxxing metrics. Numbers tick upwards. A score between one and 10 appears on both sides of the screen. One of you "wins". The other has been "mogged".

**TikTok's recommendation algorithm – already scrutinised for amplifying insecurity-driven content – has done what it does best: identify vulnerability and feed it back at industrial scale**



I lost by 0.1 but scored 8.0, which is, objectively speaking, reason to be quite smug. An 8.0 places me comfortably in the upper tiers of the ranking system, above "normie" and approaching the rarified altitude of what the platform's devoted community calls "looksmaxxed," and all of which are scored on the pseudoscientific "PSL scale".

PSL is an acronym from three deeply toxic incel forums which spent years constructing junk science around male worthlessness. The PSL scale was a ranking system designed to tell young men exactly where they stood in the sexual hierarchy, with the implication that wherever they landed was fixed, permanent and probably somebody else's fault. And now that worldview has escaped containment.

Obviously, all of this is grotesque. Young people probably should not be reducing themselves to livestock-market facial analysis livestreamed to strangers (did we learn nothing from Hot or Not, or Facebook?) But what struck me, as an incel-built algorithm measured my face, was the extraordinary number of major companies now profiting from this grim ideology.

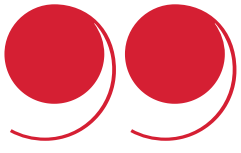
Start with Twitch, owned by Amazon. Earlier this year, Twitch updated its community guidelines to permit Omoggle-related content. Not merely tolerated, not accidentally overlooked, but explicitly allowed on a platform with a stated minimum age of 13 and limited practical age enforcement. Twitch said the move reflected a desire to support "participation in current trends".

Apple's App Store hosts multiple looksmaxxing and "face-rating" apps, some with paid subscriptions promising deeper analysis of whether you possess the jawline of a "chad" or the cheekbones of a "sub3". Google's Play Store hosts many of the same applications.

TikTok has become the primary distribution mechanism through which looksmaxxing culture reached mainstream audiences. Influencers built around the trend have accumulated vast audiences, while TikTok's recommendation algorithm – already scrutinised for amplifying insecurity-driven content – has done what it does best: identify vulnerability and feed it back at industrial scale.

None of these companies invented this. None is individually responsible for the PSL scale or the ideology underpinning it. But collectively, they have identified a scalable way to monetise male insecurity and feed it directly into platforms populated by teenagers.

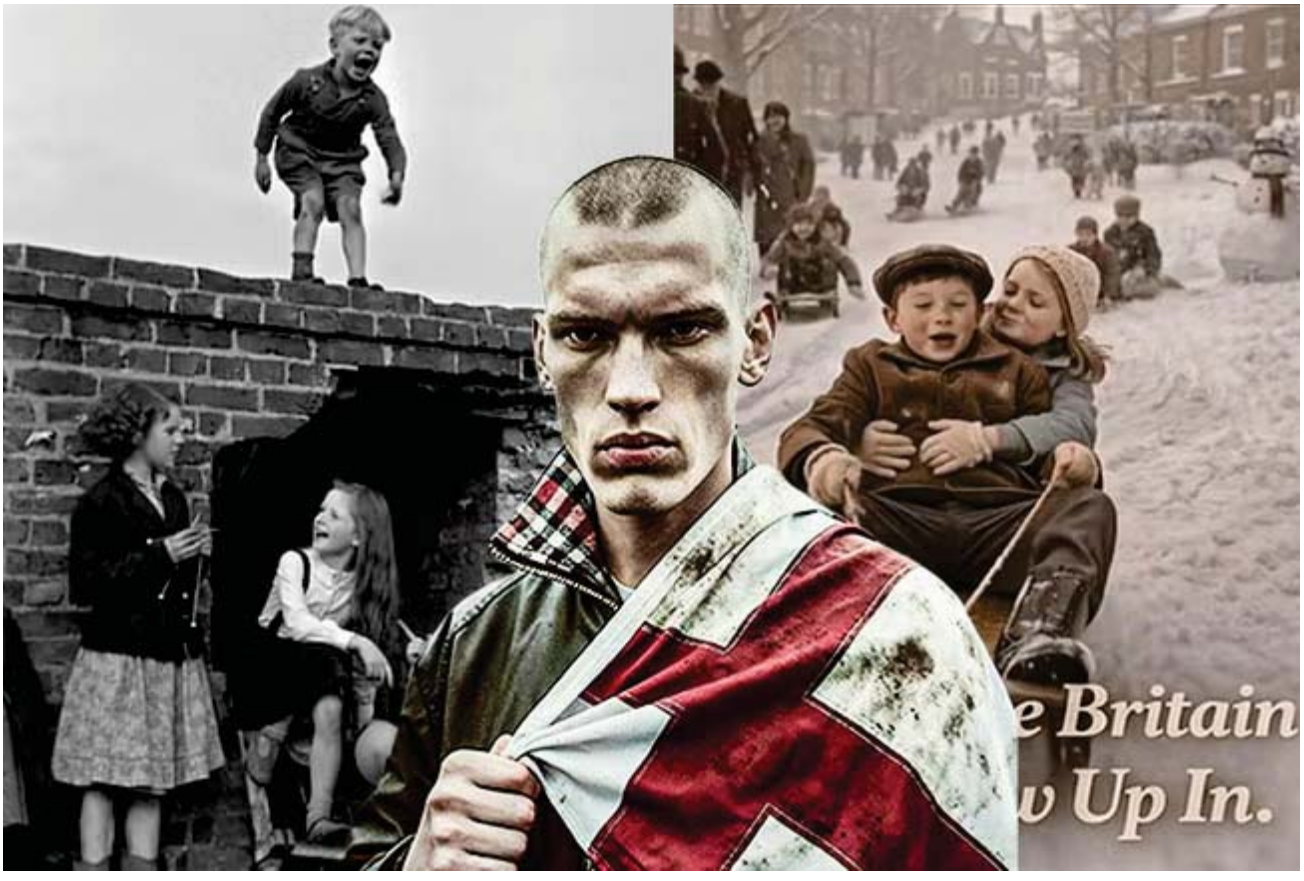
This is not a conspiracy. If anything, it is more unsettling than that. It is simply the market working exactly as designed. And now we are left with Omoggle: a generation raised entirely online, ranking one another's eyelid shape. YOU GOT MOGGED, the screen flashes at me. I can almost hear Jeff Bezos counting the coins.



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# How AI nostalgia is driving the UK towards the far right

Sepia-toned computer-generated clips of Britain's 'better times' are churned out constantly on social media. And they are sowing hate and division, finds **Liam Murphy-Robledo**




Make Britain grey again: AI-generated clips and avatars are striving to appeal to a country that feels things were better way back when (Facebook/Node Project)

Many of the marchers at the recent Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom rally were looking backwards, not forwards.

"I want the country to go back to how it used to be," one woman interviewed said.

It's a common nostalgic notion that political parties – most recently Nigel Farage's Reform UK – have been able to weaponise in their messaging. The last "A" in the Maga movement is dedicated to it as well.

Nostalgia is a powerful force in the modern world, and has found a lucrative place in the social media sphere. There is the cultural nostalgia surrounding the pre-millennium era of the Eighties and Nighties, often including clips of arcades and children playing in the street; a rosy pre-tech era ironically fed to scrollers via technological algorithms, and made using generative AI.




Keep calm and reminisce: many of the protesters at last week's march want the country to return to its past 'glory' (Reuters)

But in Britain, a different type of nostalgic content emerges.

"No mobile phones. Just a thick wool coat … somehow we survived on nothing but playground games and tap water," a dramatic voiceover reads as greyscale footage shows kids laughing and playing in a schoolyard. "No apps. No algorithms. If you remember these days, you're one of the lucky ones."

This clip fits nicely into the growing genre of "AI slop" and is posted on a Facebook page called "Across the UK". Ironically, many of the people making such patriotic content aren't from the UK to begin with. A brief look into some of the accounts shows people from all over the world managing them. For

instance, this UK-based page is managed from Italy, starting its life as a page called “Wanderlust Nature”. A page called “Make England Great Again” is managed from the UK. “British Aura” is run from Sri Lanka and started out as “Kitty pretty”.

The reason for such patriotism from these places? It has more to do with Meta’s monetisation scheme than their love of the UK. Facebook paid out nearly $3bn to creators last year, 65 per cent of that amount given due to engagement on reels. These pages build a following in the hopes they can meet the criteria for monetisation.

But the videos coming from such far-flung locations doesn’t stop users from reminiscing in the comment section. “We didn’t need snacks as we had good, hearty puddings,” one woman comments. “We laughed all day playing out, now most kids sit indoors on their tablet,” another writes. These people are no doubt part of the 52 per cent of Brits who Ipsos found would rather have been born in 1975 than now.



Nostalgia-slop: greyscale and sepia videos are flooding social media (Facebook)

Despite the video's poor quality and uncanny look, in isolation, it feels somewhat harmless. It carries the hallmark characteristics of nostalgic content, sepia tones, vague allusions to the past, pulling at the viewers' emotional connection to their childhood or past.

Agnes Arnold-Foster encountered similar tropes when writing her book *Nostalgia: The History of a Dangerous Emotion*. "It's nostalgia porn," she says of the clips.

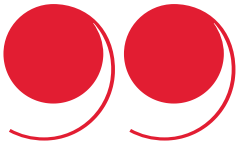
"It's giving vague notions of what British character is," she says, adding that vagueness is helpful when creating such content. "Nostalgia is a feeling, so it doesn't necessarily need a lot of detail."

Such nostalgic sentiment may make someone feel warm, but largely it relies on feelings rather than facts, with standards of living having improved. For one, life expectancy in the UK has gone up by 10 years since the 1970s. Only 37 per cent of households had central heating. Many of the videos seem to call back even further, to the notoriously hard life during wartime, but as Arnold-Foster explains, the vagueness is part of the design.



**It's hard to believe that people are consuming this material and not recognising the rhetoric at play**

*Agnes Arnold-Foster, author of 'Nostalgia: History of a Dangerous Emotion'*



Arnold-Foster refers to "The Bike", the Hovis advert of a boy delivering bread, the style of which these AI videos seem to

mimic. The advert is itself a glowing touchstone in UK nostalgia. “It makes older generations reminisce about simpler times. And younger generations reminisce about when they would see it on TV.”

But back on the nostalgia-slop page, and another video turns the dial up past harmless nostalgic platitudes. A boy stands in what looks more like frontier-time America than the UK. “Stand tall for the flag and do your duty,” a child says, standing alongside a grizzled man in a proud position that calls to mind old wartime posters. “It’s hard to believe that people are consuming this material and not recognising the rhetoric at play,” says Arnold-Foster.

When you see or interact with these videos, it’s not long before the algorithms serve up content more direct in its messaging. One, still warm and nostalgic, bemoans when the UK was “quieter” and had “strong borders”. In one of thousands of AI-generated “man on the street” videos that many of these “patriotic” British pages produce alongside the nostalgia-slop, a milkman – an occupation often associated with old values – moans that he’s been doing his job for 30 years and now has to deal with people he “can’t identify”, referring to muslim face coverings.




An AI-generated milkman complains about not being able to 'identify' people in the street due to Muslim face coverings (Facebook)

Here we see that rosy British nostalgia skewed and weaponised into the denigration of foreign "invaders" – mostly targeted at muslims.

"The thing that feels so toxic about them is the passivity," says Arnold-Foster. "Even with particularly nostalgic history programmes, you still see the horrors of war or the hardships people had to go through." These videos, by comparison, are frictionless. Nostalgia is about cherry-picking tropes and positive notions of a subject or time, leaving out the bad bits. Here, there are no bad bits, just pure AI-generated platitudes.

"We have an issue with the accessibility of nostalgia in general," Arnold-Foster tells me. "How we are able to pick up our phone and be blasted with this kind of material. But also how our phone will show us slideshows of pictures of our own past."

These slop videos aren't a direct call to arms, but judging by the comments section, they do provoke frustrations around immigration and a country that is "changing".

The call to arms comes courtesy of a skinhead AI-generated rapper called Danny Bones.

Among the wide-ranging coterie of guests at the Unite the Kingdom rally, Tommy Robinson introduced Bones a bit differently – on account of him not being real. He announced a performance by "the Node Project" before playing "This is England", a song by Bones, over the speakers. The music seems to lift heavily from UK rappers such as Slowthai. The lyrics are unimaginative but pointed.

"The streets are saying that it's Britain that we're mourning / Benefits are ramping, the borders are opening."

"Even the AI characters are on our side," Robinson said afterwards.

An investigation into the Node Project and Bones by *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* found that the group were paid for political campaign videos by Advance UK, a far-right party headed by former deputy leader of Reform UK, Ben Habib.



Danny Bones, the 'patriotic' AI-generated rapper (The Node Project)

Videos by the Node Project, including Bones, are mostly quick reactionary content on a number of subjects, from the Unite the Kingdom rally to the recent Banksy statue, a testament to the rate at which AI content can be produced.

One skit involves the rapper on a date, seemingly falling for a woman who declares that she's "racist and proud of it".

Many clips show Bones talking into a podcast mic – another format that people absorb passively. And although the follower count for these accounts isn't massive, social media algorithms ensure that many videos push past the 100,000 views mark.

And this doesn't count those pages scattered over myriad social media platforms clipping and reposting the videos. Such is the nature of the slop trenches on apps like Facebook and X: make as many videos as possible to try and maximise engagement, either for your political mission or to make a few pounds off of it.

Among these videos, one where Bones reacts to claims that his content "radicalises boomers and pensioners", a familiar rhetoric surfaces: "The truth is, they're not being radicalised, they just *remember*. They remember what this country felt like … now they are watching it change."

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# ON MARILYN'S MANOR

As the world marks the centennial of the movie star's birth, **Ellie Seymour** takes a tour of her former residences and the Hollywood haunts that defined her incomparable career



Marilyn Monroe at the Hollywood Roosevelt (Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board)

Could I summon the spirit of Marilyn Monroe? It's a question I ponder as I lie in my four-poster bed at the Hollywood Roosevelt, where the actor lived for two years in a cabana overlooking the twinkly pool decorated by David Hockney. It's not as big a reach as it sounds given that Monroe is said to haunt her former residence.

“Over the years, several guests and staff have reported seeing her reflection in this mirror which was once in her suite,” one of the bellmen says, pointing it out in the lobby when I check in.

I am in Hollywood, the central region of Los Angeles that has become a larger-than-life emblem of showbiz, where Monroe was born Norma Jeane Mortenson on 1 June 1926, and lived until her death in 1962, aged just 36.

I pull the covers up to my chin, close my eyes and will her to appear. Nothing happens. Phew, I’m secretly pleased.

The prospect of encountering Hollywood’s most famous ghost alone in my darkened room felt scarier than I’d thought. Still, it’s a fitting start to my five-night Marilyn Monroe-themed trip around Los Angeles. As a superfan of the actor, I’m visiting during what would have been her 100th birthday year, ahead of the launch of the city’s Academy Museum’s blockbuster exhibition *Marilyn Monroe: Hollywood Icon*.

In a way, I had already met her earlier that evening at my first stop – the buzzy Formosa Cafe, a kitschy, crimson-hued Chinese-American restaurant. It opened in 1939 opposite “The Lot”, a historic operational Hollywood film studio campus, and fast became a hangout for Hollywood Golden Age mobsters and movie stars, like Monroe, a regular visitor while filming *Some Like It Hot* in 1958.



Monroe was born in Hollywood in 1926 (Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board)

“She loved the chow mien,” says my waiter Kelly Mullis, a fellow Monroe superfan and actor who wrote a one-woman show, “Marilyn: The Last Interview”, and performed it at the Hollywood Fringe Festival for several years. “I could talk about Marilyn Monroe all day,” she says, pointing out a photo of the star on the wall above my seat. “This is what we call the ‘Marilyn’ booth’.”

The next morning, I dodge throngs of tourists posing for photos on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, on my short walk to the TCL Chinese Theatre – with its cartoonish 90ft pagoda-like entrance and orange columns topped with wrought-iron masks, you can’t miss it.

It opened in 1927, hosts big-name film premieres and is famous for its star-studded Forecourt of the Stars, featuring the cemented hand and footprints of over 200 icons including Monroe. “At the last minute, she took out her diamond earring and planted it into the cement,” says my guide, Lacey Noel, on a tour of the theatre.

Later, I lose myself in the underrated Hollywood Museum, which is jam-packed with old Hollywood memorabilia spanning 100 years, from original costumes to movie posters, spread across five floors. It’s also a must-stop on the Monroe trail for its setting inside the beautifully restored Max Factor Studios building. “It’s where her trademark platinum look was developed and styled in the ‘for blondes only’ room painted in complementary pastel blue,” museum founder, Donelle Donigan, explains. Today, it’s a shrine to the icon, filled with Monroe-related memorabilia including annotated scripts, her honeymoon dress and her makeup chair.

From here, I’m conveniently close to classic haunt, Musso and Frank’s Grill, open since 1919 on Hollywood Boulevard. I like to imagine that after a trip to the salon, Monroe would sashay here to drink champagne with her first husband, baseball star Joe DiMaggio, in the restaurant’s “back room”, a private haven for celebrities, executives, and the era’s greatest literary minds. It

closed in 1955, so instead I huddle into a dark wood-panelled booth for two in the dining room where, over a Martini, I watch in awe at the waiters in red blazers buzzing up and down its storied walkways, balancing trays heaving with steaks and drinks.

The next day, I blow a kiss goodbye to Hollywood and cross over into West Hollywood. This walkable city grew into a nightlife hub where Monroe and other stars escaped Hollywood studio control, at venues on the Sunset Strip – the 1.7-mile West Hollywood section of Sunset Boulevard – I was excited to discover.




The Charlie Hotel was once owned by Charlie Chaplin (Charlie Hotel)

I check into The Charlie, a tranquil boutique hotel consisting of a 1920s-era gated collection of cedar-clad English-style cottages. It's set on a peaceful, tree-lined street and named after previous owner Charlie Chaplin, who once hosted Monroe in a delightful two-bedroom cottage where I'm excited to settle in for two nights.

I easily work up an appetite for dinner with a wander along a stretch of Melrose Avenue, the iconic LA shopping hub two minutes away from my hotel, lined with sleek design shops and vintage boutiques. When I arrive at Barney's Beanery on the Sunset Strip – part diner, part sports bar, and part rock'n'roll

refuge – loud cheers spill out from inside the memorabilia-clad bar and restaurant, signalling that it's game night. I pile into a booth and soak up the atmosphere over a margarita and hearty bowl of the famous beef chilli that Monroe loved coming here to eat.

Another day on the Monroe trail, another meal at a legendary Old Hollywood hotspot. This time, a sophisticated breakfast poolside at the elegant Sunset Tower on Sunset Boulevard. It was the chicest place to live during Hollywood's golden era for stars including Monroe. Nowadays it's an upscale hotel with nostalgic flair that attracts a cool and connected crowd keen to nab a coveted table in the bar.

Feeling well fed, I'm eager for my next activity: an e-bike tour of the city with local outfit, Bikes and Hikes LA. Pootling along the city's quiet backstreets and main drags is a thrill – and safer than I imagined, too. I'm in search of yet more Monroe-related pit stops: a former apartment at 882 North Doheny Drive – now a recording studio – and Chateau Marmont, the notoriously private celebrity hotel where she had secret meetings with married playwright Arthur Millar, and the lesser-known Lee Strasberg.

Strasberg was the acting coach to whom Monroe left most of her belongings when she died. "Most people don't know about the tiny Marilyn Monroe Theatre in dedication to her, hidden inside [Strasberg's Film Institute]," says my guide, Katie Oliver.



The actor stayed at Hotel Bel-Air many times (Dorchester Collection)

After clocking up a few miles, I devour a burger and fries at the Rainbow Bar and Grill, a famous hangout for heavy metal and rock legends since the 1970s. While “Panama” by Van Halen blasts out, I scan its storied faux brick and wood-panelled walls, plastered in music memorabilia. I also try to imagine it in its former guise: a glamorous Italian restaurant called Villa Nova, where Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio had their first date. “Apparently he sat over three hours waiting for her to arrive,” says my waiter, Samantha Casper, pointing to a curved booth near the entrance.

If the lovebirds were alive today, a nightcap at Bar Next Door in the former office of Monroe’s manager a few blocks away, would be on their list. Playfully named cocktails pay homage to local hotspots and history, like the exotic rum-laced Mocambo I order. “It’s named after a famous old celebrity nightclub on the Strip where jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald secured a career-changing booking thanks to Marilyn,” says founder, Brynn Smith.

For my last two nights, I retreat Monroe-style into a coveted bungalow at the pink-toned Beverly Hills Hotel, which has sat amid 12 manicured palm-filled acres on Sunset Boulevard since 1912. The actor has a long history with the hotel, staying many

times, favouring Bungalow 1A – now a Monroe-themed suite – and dining often at table six inside the Polo Lounge, with its forest green walls and old-Hollywood atmosphere.

Nearby, at luxurious sister hideaway, Hotel Bel-Air, where I enjoy lunch on its sunny bougainvillea-shaded terrace, I find more traces of Monroe's presence. In 1962, it was the setting for what would be her final photoshoot with Bert Stern for *Vogue*. Several of the photos decorate the two-bedroom suite, 177, lending the space a powerful stillness.

I have a similar feeling when I set eyes on her grave at the little-known Pierce Brothers Westwood Village Memorial Park: a simple marble wall crypt on the "Corridor of Memories" marked with a brass plaque, away from the glare of the city she once illuminated, forever infused with her spirit. As I pay my respects, I reflect on my adventure and realise with a pang of excitement that she's been at my side the whole time.

*Ellie was a guest of Virgin Atlantic, Discover Los Angeles and Visit West Hollywood.*

## How to get there

Virgin Atlantic flies direct between London Heathrow and Los Angeles, with return fares from £532 per person, including complimentary food, drink, in-flight entertainment and taxes. For further information call 0344 8747 747.

## Where to stay

Hollywood Roosevelt has rooms from £182 a night.

The Beverly Hills Hotel has rooms from £892 a night.

Hotel Bel-Air has rooms from £795 a night.

The Marilyn Suite at The Charlie has rates from £485 a night.

*Ellie was hosted by the Beverly Hills Hotel and Hotel Bel-Air*

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Section 2

# ON THIS DAY



The renowned Beatles album ‘Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band’ was released on this day in 1967 (Getty)

**1533**: Anne Boleyn was crowned queen of England.

**1831**: The magnetic North Pole was located by James Clark Ross on his Arctic exploration expedition with Admiral Parry.

**1880**: The first telephone box for public use, in New Haven, Connecticut, went into service.

**1935**: Driving tests were introduced and ‘L’ plates made compulsory in Britain.

**1946**: The first TV licences were issued in Britain, at a fee of £2.

**1953**: Gordon Richards became the first jockey to be knighted. Five days later, he won the Derby at his 28th attempt, on Pinza.

**1957**: The first Premium Bond prize winners were drawn by the computer ERNIE, with a first prize of £1,000.

**1958**: The Clean Air Act came into force.

**1967**: EMI released The Beatles album *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in the UK; it stayed at No 1 for 22 weeks in the UK and has sold more than 32 million copies worldwide.

**1974**: The Heimlich manoeuvre for rescuing choking victims was published in the journal *Emergency Medicine*.

**1980**: CNN began 24-hour live news broadcasts.

**1994**: The Republic of South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth.

**2008**: The *Phoenix Mars Lander* became the first Nasa spacecraft to scoop Martian soil.

**2017**: US president Donald Trump declared he was pulling the US out of the Paris climate agreement.

**On this day last year**: *Downton Abbey* star Joanne Froggatt was among dozens of famous faces who called on the UK government to take "rapid action" and provide humanitarian aid to Sudan, in an open letter led by children's charity Plan International UK.

## Birthdays

**Morgan Freeman**, actor, 89; **Brian Cox**, actor, 80; **Jan Harvey**, actor, 79; **Sir Jonathan Pryce**, actor, 79; **Ronnie Wood**, Rolling Stones guitarist, 79; **Martin Brundle**, former racing driver and commentator, 67; **Nigel Short**, chess player, 61; **Jason Donovan**, actor/singer, 58; **Teri Polo**, actor, 57; **Heidi Klum**, model and actress, 53; **Alanis Morissette**, singer, 52; **Amy Schumer**, comedian, 45; **Javier Hernandez**, footballer, 38; **Charlotte Jordan**, actor, 32; **Tom Holland**, actor, 30.

*PA*

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Section 2

# This week in history

**Tizane Navea-Rogers** delves into The Independent's archive to see which world events made the front page of our paper



THE INDEPENDENT

SATURDAY 2 JUNE 1990

Pact on nuclear missiles

'World has waited long enough . . . Cold War must end'

From Peter Pringle in Washington



Troops who massacred Peking crowds prepare to resist approaching army units as protests break out across the country

China slides towards civil war



ANAA, YEMEN 05.06.11 Thousands throng streets as President flees and regime totters

Arab Spring claims its third despot



The Cold War enters its final, thawing phase, as landmark US-Soviet diplomacy neutralises the threat of nuclear conflict. Brutal crackdowns and uprisings violently reshape the map; from the bloodshed of Tiananmen Square and Nato's intervention in Kosovo to the volatile Arab Spring in Yemen. Alongside these massive geopolitical shifts, intense media scrutiny dissects the flawed justifications for the Iraq war, and the world marks the passing of boxing and civil rights icon

Muhammad Ali. All is charted in this week's archive snapshot of *The Independent*.

### 1 June 1988 – Reagan hails 'Moscow spring'

Delivering an "enthusiastic" public endorsement of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*, US president Ronald Reagan tells students at Moscow State University that they are living in a hopeful "Moscow spring". Although behind-the-scenes summit negotiations fail to yield immediate breakthroughs, this striking display of diplomatic optimism signals that the Cold War is decisively entering its final, thawing phase.



THE INDEPENDENT

COLOUR GUIDE TO THE DERBY PAGE 30

No 512 WEDNESDAY 1 JUNE 1988 ... Published in London 30p

SUMMARY

TGWU left plans snub to Kinnock

Brain operation

Church attack

King's Cross cash

Home victory

Elections delayed

Wall Street soars

'Independent' sales

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CRAFT: A girl's fight for the right to study ... 19

RUDOLF KLEIN on rigidity in the universities ..... 20

HOUSING BILL: The slow rent revolution ..... 21

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'Moscow spring' fails to smooth progress in arms control talks

Reagan praises Gorbachev's reform plans

Trivial pursuits mask summit of substance

Under the impressive Kremlin dome, Ronald Reagan, beneath the Soviet emblem and a host of Lenin, addresses students at Moscow University yesterday

London Tube chief changes his evidence

By Nick Cohen

BBC agreed to cut Tumbledown scene

By Phil Reeves

THE INJUSTICE OF APARTHEID WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Dukakis and Jackson edge nearer alliance

## 6 June 1989 – Tiananmen Square massacre throws China into chaos

Following a "bloody" military assault on Tiananmen Square that leaves thousands dead, China braces for civil war as rival troops face off in the capital. While outright military conflict is ultimately averted, the bloodshed sparks widespread national protests and a severe, decades-long government crackdown on political dissent.



THE INDEPENDENT

No 828 TUESDAY 6 JUNE 1989 ....Published in London 30p

Troops who massacred Peking crowds prepare to resist approaching army units as protests break out across the country

# China slides towards civil war

From Andrew Higgins and Michael Fathers in Peking

More than 100 tanks, with supporting troops, massed in Tiananmen Square near the Gate of Heavenly Peace yesterday as divisions deepened in the army

Photograph: Arthur Tsang/Reuter

## Hong Kong markets crash amid fears for the future

From Michael Sheridan and Kevin Hamlin in Hong Kong

## A room with a view of the killing ground

Peking Hotel guests usually enjoy a vista of famous buildings. Fire and blood are the sights today. Andrew Higgins writes

SUMMARY

Immigration case rulings disputed

Crowded Carmen

Howe challenged

Orchid accusation

Upset in Lords

Shias' farewell

'God's will'

Uzbek deaths

Soviet train toll 460

Dollar recovers

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GREENPEACE



LOST DOLPHINS

Britain has lost many of her unusual dolphins and porpoises. Pollution, overfishing and incidental catches are likely to be to blame for this decline.

To stem the decline and protect remaining dolphins and porpoises, Greenpeace is working to establish Marine Nature Reserves in areas where they are still to be found.

This summer the Greenpeace ship Moby Dick is working in Cardigan Bay and The Moray Firth for the establishment of protection zones in these areas.

THANK GOD SOMEONE'S MAKING WAVES

## 2 June 1990 – US and Soviet Union sign landmark nuclear arms pact

After eight years of intense Cold War negotiations, US president George HW Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev sign a preliminary accord to slash their long-range nuclear arsenals by 30 per cent. This breakthrough agreement paves the way for the historic START I treaty the following year, drastically reducing the global threat of nuclear warfare as the Soviet era draws to a close.



THE INDEPENDENT WITH COLOUR MAGAZINE

No 1,135 SATURDAY 2 JUNE 1990 • • • • Published in London 40p

SUMMARY

US to get an Ulster bureau

Timely tipple

Barn storming

# Pact on nuclear missiles

'World has waited long enough . . . Cold War must end'

From Peter Pringle in Washington

TOMORROW IN 'THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY'

ITALIA '90

24-PAGE WORLD CUP SPECIAL

## 3 June 1992 – Global leaders gather in Rio for historic Earth Summit

As the United Nations Earth Summit formally opens in Rio de Janeiro, *The Independent* highlights the escalating threats of pollution, overpopulation and resource depletion challenging world leaders at the dawn of the 21st century. The unprecedented conference ultimately lays the groundwork for modern climate action, establishing international treaties on biodiversity and greenhouse gas emissions.



THE INDEPENDENT

No 1,756 WEDNESDAY 3 JUNE 1992 ... Published in London 40p

# THIS TROUBLED PLANET

During the past 20 years our planet has undergone dramatic changes in pollution, population and the pressures that humanity puts on its natural resources. As the Earth Summit formally opens today in Rio de Janeiro, we spotlight ten trends challenging world leaders as the dawn of the 21st century approaches

1972

POPULATION

WAR AND REFUGEES

NUCLEAR POWER

TRANSPORT

GLOBAL WARMING

OZONE LAYER

MEGA-CITIES

RAINFORESTS

FISHERIES

SPECIES

1992

POPULATION

WAR AND REFUGEES

NUCLEAR POWER

TRANSPORT

GLOBAL WARMING

OZONE LAYER

MEGA-CITIES

RAINFORESTS

FISHERIES

SPECIES

SOURCES: UN agencies, World Resources Institute, WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature)

PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES: copyright Tom Van Sant/Geosphere Project, Santa Monica/Science Photo Library

## What on earth can Rio achieve?

Politicians' dithering holds up a mirror to the rest of us

Earth Summit reports, page 10

## 4 June 1999 – Milosevic surrenders to Nato demands over Kosovo

After weeks of relentless Nato airstrikes, Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbian parliament concede to international pressure, accepting a G8 peace plan that effectively ends their control over the region. The capitulation concludes a brutal 78-day war, forcing a Serbian withdrawal and paving the way for Kosovo's eventual independence.



THE AWARD-WINNING NEWSPAPER

THE INDEPENDENT

No 3,540 FRIDAY 4 JUNE 1999 **** (IR50p) 45p

IN THE FRIDAY REVIEW: 9 PAGES OF ARTS, FILM AND MUSIC

JUDY DAVIS: MY LIFE AS A CELEBRITY

WHY THOSE RUSSIANS STILL LOVE PUSHKIN

GERI HALLIWELL: THAT DIFFICULT FIRST ALBUM

ARE THE STONES THE BIGGEST THIEVES IN ROCK?

Milosevic surrenders to Nato's demand for total withdrawal

By Marcus Tanner, Andrew Grice in Cologne and Andrew Marshall in Washington

SLOBODAN MILOSEVIC came to power on a pledge to keep Kosovo inside Serbia. Yesterday he appeared to sign it away as his parliament voted to accept the G8 proposals to end the conflict with Nato.

The Serbs put a hopeful gloss on the document brought to Belgrade by the Finnish President, Martti Ahtisaari, and the Russian envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, stressing it "confirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia". But their bold rhetoric masked what amounts to a surrender to Nato's key demands. The deal demands the total withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo within seven days and the deployment of a Nato-led peace force. It is a bitter pill for Belgrade.

Tony Blair heard the news while attending an EU summit in Cologne. After their working lunch was interrupted by news of the breakthrough, the 15 heads of government spontaneously raised their glasses.

"It is good news that the demands made at the outset of this campaign have been accepted," the Prime Minister said. "The justice of our cause was very clear to me from the outset." Mr Blair insisted "no deal" was made with Belgrade. "Mr Milosevic thought that Allied unity would crack, that we wouldn't have the resolve to see it through. We have shown that we are united ... that we did have the resolve to see it through."

The US was more cautious. President Bill Clinton said that Nato would wait for confirmation of a deal in detail before the bombing of Serbia stopped. "Until then, and until Serb forces began a verifiable withdrawal from Kosovo, we will continue to pursue diplomacy, but we will also continue the military effort that has brought us to this point," he said.

After the Serbian parliament voted 136-74 in favour of the peace plan, Mr Milosevic's former nationalist allies stormed out, lambasting what they saw as capitulation. Serbia's deputy premier, Vojislav Seselj, said: "We shall not sit in the government and await the arrival of Nato troops into Kosovo."

Much as he tries to sell the package as a victory that has staved off a Nato invasion, President Milosevic will inevitably be accused of betraying the cradle of Serbdom, as Serbs call Kosovo, to foreign powers and hated Albanians.

As well as a total Serbian withdrawal, the deal demands the return of all 800,000 Albanian refugees and lets and unhindered access to Kosovo for international aid bodies. A UN-appointed administration is to take over Kosovo's government. Belgrade will be allowed to retain "hundreds" of officials in Kosovo, but they, too, will be subject to UN authority. The Serbs have seven days to withdraw their forces and only then will the 78-day air campaign be formally ended.

In the hot and overcrowded refugee camps of Macedonia and Albania, there was incredulity, suspicion and a little relief. "Thank God, he [Milosevic] accepts. We want to go home," said one woman at Macedonia's Stankovic refugee camp. Others voiced fears that the Russians would play too large a role in the peace force.

Even as the Serbian deputies met in Belgrade, Nato jets roared over the capital in a fresh warning that the alliance has no intention of halting the bombing until it has proof that Serbia's famously wily and evasive leader is living up to his pledges.

The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, said the alliance would not halt the air campaign until there was a "verifiable withdrawal" of Serbian forces from Kosovo. But sources in Washington said that the bombing campaign could be modified or scaled down if and when it became clear that the deal would stick.

Many Serbs cracked Serbia's initially stout resistance. There was war weariness fuelled by the suspicion that soldiers were being asked to die for nothing. Belgrade failed to drive a wedge between Nato hawks and doves. Continually intensified bombing took its toll. What finally forced Serbia to cave in was the shift by its Russian ally in favour of Nato's terms for ending the conflict.



Can he soon go home – and what destruction will he find when he does? A Kosovo boy peeps from the window of his tent in Cegrane Camp, Macedonia Yakim Demir

INSIDE


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- The leaders page 3
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- Leading article; Anne McElvoy Review, page 3


72 days. 1,500 dead. Serbs ask why



Robert Fisk in Belgrade

"SO WHY couldn't he have signed this 72 days ago?" Jovanka asked. "Why did we have to have 1,000 of our people killed by Nato and our country destroyed before our President agreed to this peace?" As we sat outside the Kosmi restaurant in the muggy early summer afternoon, there was a crack of sound as a Nato jet broke the sound barrier high over Belgrade, as if Jelena needed to be reminded of her humiliation.

For if Kosovo's future is now being decided in Washington, London, Brussels and Moscow, what of the rest of Serbia with its shattered factories and epic post-war unemployment, its broken roads and pulverised bridges and hundred-out power stations and refineries and railways? And what of those communities of civilians dead and the constant reminder to Yugoslavia's people – those official graves with their red, white and blue banners – of the price their soldiers paid for opposing Nato? What did they die for?

There will be those here who will ask this question many times in the coming weeks and months. They will want the answer from President Milosevic. The mothers and fathers of the thousands of Serb wounded will want an answer to the same question. And not just the parents. The soldiers too will have their questions, just as the nationalists did in the Serb parliament yesterday, shouting their defiance at the "capitulation" – the word used by a Vojvodina MP – to Nato. They voted in favour of peace by 136 to 82 but almost came to blows in the closed parliamentary chamber, out of which stormed that most ferocious of nationalists, Vojislav Seselj.

True, the Serbs held out under weeks of bombing by the most powerful force on earth. And their defiance will become the stuff of Serb mythology in centuries to come, alongside the 14th-century battle of Kosovo Polje, another epic defeat for the Serb nation.

But what of the immediate future of Kosovo? Turned into a wasteland by two and a half months of pillage and bombs, its electricity and water supply destroyed, its communications torn up, its villages and towns burnt, its fields contaminated with the dust of depleted uranium shells, what possible home can the refugees return to? And what possible protection can the Serbs of Kosovo expect in that critical moment between the departure of the Yugoslav forces and the arrival of Nato and Russian armies? Already they fear the coming days. Retribution is the word that springs to mind. For the Kosovo Liberation Army is going to emerge from the hills and forests of Kosovo in the next few days with an agenda quite different to that of Nato, let alone Serbia.

Indeed, nothing is over as it seems in Yugoslavia. And even Jelena's cynicism at the Kosmi restaurant yesterday was slightly misplaced. According to the text of the Kosovo peace agreement available in Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic has succeeded in securing a key element of the Paris peace agreement: a referendum on the future of the province in three years' time that might have allowed Kosovo Albanians to demand independence. And one of Mr Milosevic's ministers was quick to seize on another apparent departure from the March accord: the disappearance of an annex to the Paris agreement, which would have allowed Nato troops free access to all of Yugoslavia. Nato, it appears, will have to move in not of Kosovo only through the narrow roads of Macedonia and Albania.

And a close scrutiny of the text suggests that if Serbia has been humiliated – its army and police in Kosovo reduced to a mere skeleton, the province overrun by an army of foreigners – Belgrade's guerrilla enemies in the KLA will face emasculation.

"Demilitarised" by Nato, the KLA's declared intention of achieving independence will be opposed by its Western protectors. And if Serbia's MPs are to be believed, Yugoslavia's frontiers are now regarded as "inviolable" by the Nato powers. So much for Kosovo's independence. Will the KLA accept this – or will it turn against Nato?

In Belgrade, this all seems academic. The papers here have been advising readers how to keep warm this coming winter in a Serbia that will have no infrastructure and few functioning power stations. Bare trees from the forests and




For the people of Belgrade, there are only questions

old floorboards, they are told, store water in a land whose water pumping stations have stopped working. They've even asked the train and trolley-bus crews to reduce their schedules to save electricity.

But war invisibly wounds the living, too. Today the lady who cleans my hotel room each morning. Both her sons are at the front in Kosovo and she has been weeping every day in fear for their safety. Now she need weep no more. But last weekend, one of them came home on two days' leave. "He had changed," she said. "I don't know what had happened to him. But he was no longer like my son. I cry now because he is a different boy."


How to become a Freelance Writer

by Nick Hasty

Freelance writing can be creative, fulfilling and a lot of fun, with excellent money to be made as well. What's more, anyone can become a writer. No special qualifications or experience are required.

The market for writers is huge. In Britain alone there are around 1,000 daily, Sunday and weekly papers, and more than 8,000 magazines. Many of the stories and articles that they publish are supplied by freelancers. Then there are books, theatre, films, TV, radio...

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So, would you like to be a writer? Why not start now – ring our free enquiry line or post the coupon today!

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## 1 June 2004 – *The Independent* dissects Iraq war justifications

While US president George W Bush defends the ongoing conflict during a Memorial Day address, *The Independent* publishes a scathing A-Z breakdown of the "misrepresentation, manipulation, and mistakes" used to justify the invasion of Iraq.



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CIAO, CLAUDIO

Ranieri's reign at Stamford Bridge finally comes to its inevitable end

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MOTORING

Hot wheels at the Motor Show

Plus road tests and Brian Sewell

16-PAGE SECTION, INSIDE THE REVIEW

The lying game

An A-Z of the Iraq war and its aftermath, focusing on misrepresentation, manipulation, and mistakes

President George Bush speaks on Memorial Day in Arlington National Cemetery yesterday AP

Saudi terror attack pages 4-5 Iraq in crisis pages 6-7 Leading article page 30

## 6 June 2011 – Yemeni president flees following palace explosion

Following an explosion at his presidential palace, Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh flees to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, sparking massive street celebrations as his 33-year authoritarian regime seemingly collapses. However, the embattled leader unexpectedly returns months later and clings to power until early 2012, setting the stage for a bitter political struggle and protracted civil war.


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SANAA, YEMEN 05.06.11 Thousands throng streets as President flees and regime totters

Arab Spring claims its third despot

By Patrick Cockburn

Protesters are jubilant as news spreads that Ali Abdullah Saleh has left the country

Amol Rajan

Is Blue Labour a real political ideology, or just an empty buzzphrase?

VIEWSPAPER, PAGE 12

Mary Ann Sieghart

Why there's a place for 'beige' stores on Britain's high streets

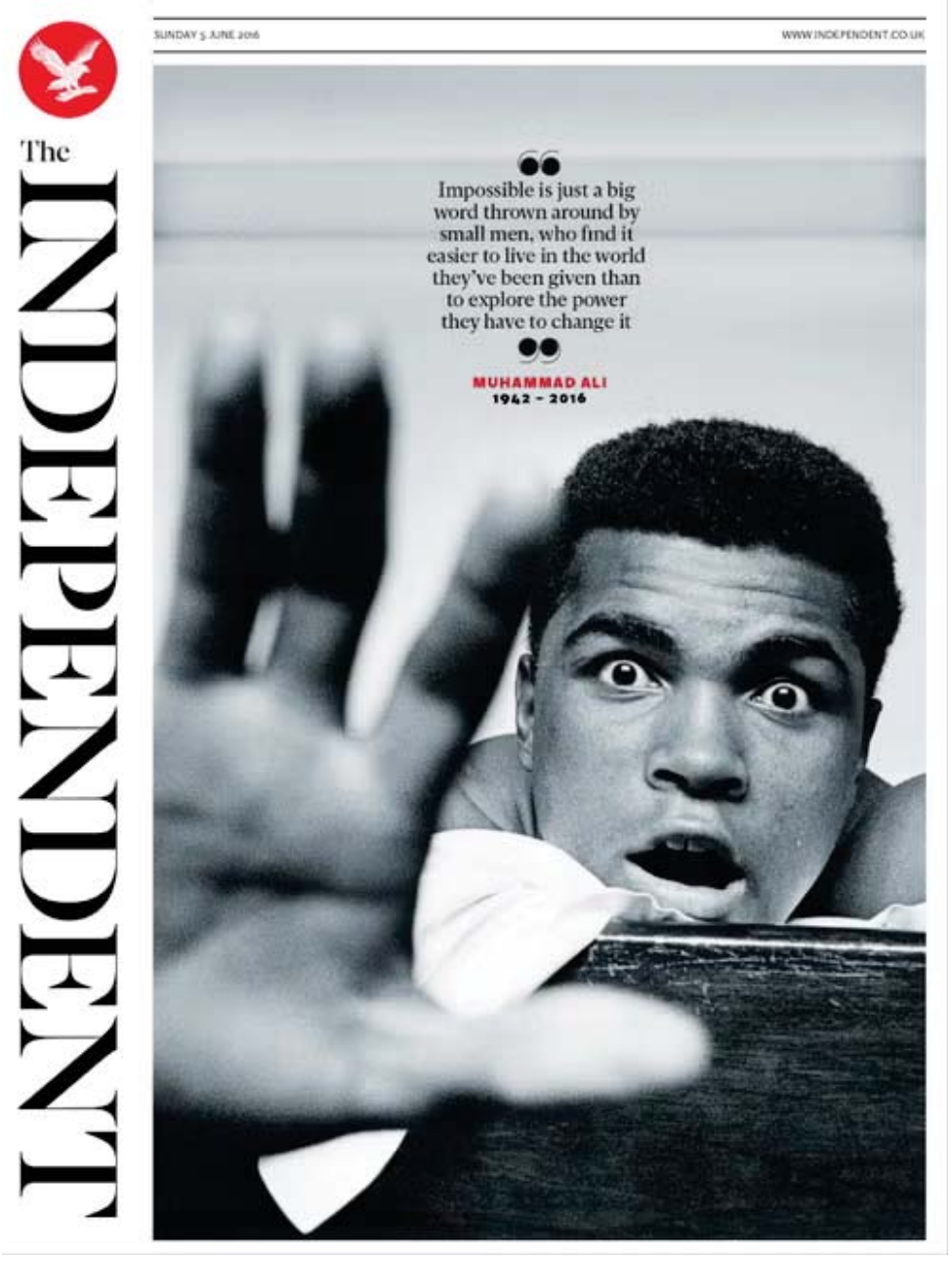
VIEWSPAPER, PAGE 3

Tenth Grand Slam for Nadal – and he's only 25

IN SPORT

## 5 June 2016 – Muhammad Ali dies at 74

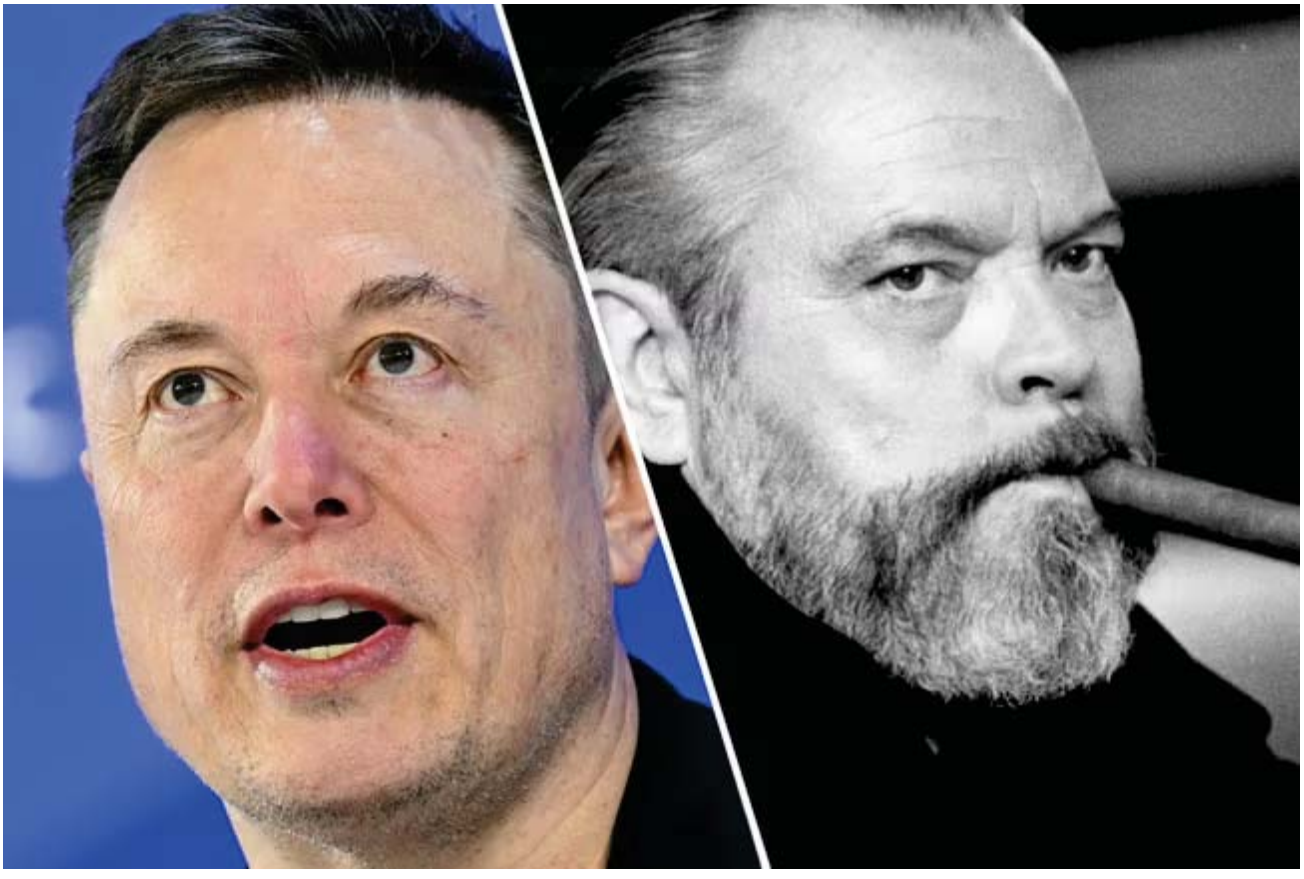
Following the death of heavyweight boxing champion and civil rights activist Muhammad Ali at the age of 74, *The Independent* dedicates its front page to his memory. Anchored by his famous quote, "Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men", the coverage outlines his achievements both inside and outside the ring.


The INDEPENDENT
SUNDAY 5 JUNE 2016
WWW.INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men, who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it
MUHAMMAD ALI
1942 – 2016

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# Welles's approach to casting would have perturbed Musk

## In 1936, the great filmmaker directed an all-Black version of 'Macbeth'. It puts into perspective the current controversy over Lupita Nyong'o's role as Helen of Troy, says **Xan Brooks**



Elon Musk has led a recent outcry over Christopher Nolan's choice of actor – but Orson Welles pioneered 'colour-blind' casting almost a century ago (Getty)

What's the thing that is most putting you off Christopher Nolan's forthcoming $250m (£186m) adaptation of *The Odyssey*? Is it the sandals, the boats, or the reported 172-minute running time? If the answer is the prospect of a Black actor

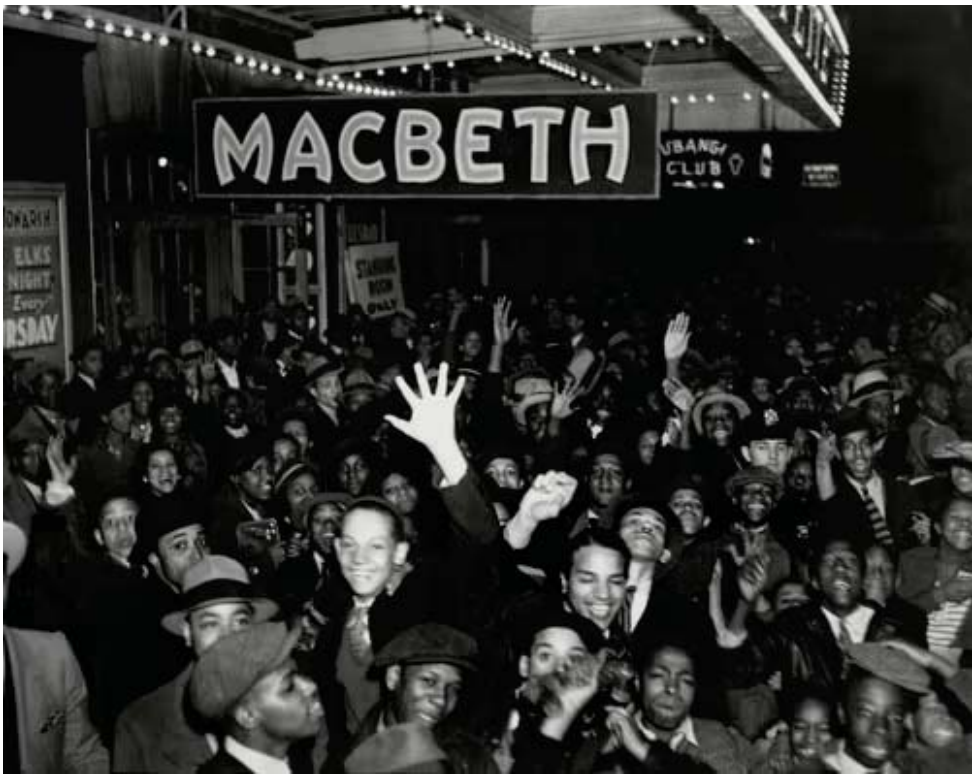
playing Helen of Troy, then congratulations, well done, you've joined a select band of concerned citizens that includes the billionaire Elon Musk, the right-wing influencer Tanya Bass, and the podcaster Matt Walsh, who once starred in a documentary called *Am I Racist?* (2024).

These people are mad as hell and they're not going to take it any more. Nolan's decision to cast Lupita Nyong'o as the world's most beautiful woman, they say, reveals him as a coward; a man devoid of integrity and even a basic understanding of his source material. "Shame on Chris Nolan for desecrating Homer," Musk wrote on the platform formerly known as Twitter. "He will never live it down."

It's hard not to feel some sympathy for Musk's anti-desecration police in their efforts to safeguard the Western world's sacred texts. The struggle is sisyphean; it's one step forward, two steps back. These self-appointed officers have barely recovered from the sight of Halle Bailey as the star of *The Little Mermaid* (2019) and Rachel Zegler as the lead in *Snow White* (2025) when along comes Nyong'o to launch a thousand more angry tweets. Stick a Black face on the screen and it's like a red rag to a bull.

Musk blames weak directors, and woke producers, and supposed DEI hires that are turning an honest system upside down. But he might as well blame Orson Welles, the original gangster of American movies. It was Welles, after all, who got the diversity ball rolling with his all-Black Depression-era production of *Macbeth*. That makes him patient zero in the current Woke Mind Virus epidemic. Or a shrewd and progressive pioneer, depending on your point of view.

It says much for Welles's extravagant life and times that his "Voodoo" *Macbeth*, as it came to be known, has become a little-known footnote, the young master's first doodle, a full five years before *Citizen Kane* sent his career stratospheric. He was only 20 at the time, and had been hired to direct a federally funded Shakespeare production at a theatre in Harlem.




Crowds gather outside the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, for the New York premiere of Welles's 'Macbeth' in 1936 (Shutterstock)

Welles's big idea was to shift the play's action from the highlands of Scotland to a thinly veiled Haiti. He conjured the witches into a trio of voodoo priestesses and put African drummers and dancers in the orchestra pit. Of the 150 actors, only four were professionals. The rehearsals were fractious; Welles constantly clashed with his cast. Eventually, incredibly, peace and harmony broke out.

Helen of Troy, Nolan's critics allege, is "a historically white character". Ergo, the casting of Nyong'o amounts to "racism against white people", and never mind the fact that the woman was from the coast of what is now Turkey. Helen wouldn't have looked much like Nyong'o, but neither would she necessarily have resembled Diane Kruger, Sienna Guillory or Elizabeth Taylor, all of whom have portrayed her in the past.

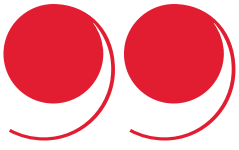
Also, of course, she's a fictional character – a demigod hatched from the egg of a swan – and therefore open to creative licence. "This is a mythological story," Nyong'o told *Elle* magazine last month, gently pushing back on the objections from the billionaire, the influencer, and the star of *Am I Racist?* No one desecrates a myth; they only tell it a different way.

Was “Voodoo” *Macbeth* similarly seen as a racist mugging when it opened in New York back in 1936? Welles’s production undeniably played fast and loose with Shakespeare’s play, reframing pallid Scots as freed African slaves. And yet it landed in a different age, before the culture wars had drawn their traditional battle lines.

Criticism of the play was largely limited to Shakespeare purists and to members of the Harlem Communists, who initially feared that Welles meant to poke fun at the actors. The show was a smash; there were literal queues round the block. The reviews were euphoric and the audience was mixed, Black and white. “Voodoo” *Macbeth* was the director’s first triumph and the one that always felt sweetest. “My great success in my life was that play,” he told the BBC, three years before his death in 1985.



**The director shook the bottle and held unexplored themes to the light. He desecrated sacred texts, lived it down, and blithely mapped out the trail that Nolan and others would follow**



Welles’s adventures in Harlem were recently revisited in a movie, *Voodoo Macbeth* (2021), that depicted the director as a wayward but soulful white saviour. That oversimplifies the situation and conveniently misrepresents the man, because Welles’s racial record was spotty, inconsistent, and he could be as much the problem as the cure. He was, in short, the product of an industry that thought nothing of putting Al Jolson in blackface and having John Wayne play Genghis Khan.

Welles famously cast Charlton Heston – perhaps the whitest Hollywood actor of them all – as a Mexican in his film noir *Touch of Evil* (1958). He reached for the bronzer before casting himself as the Moor in *Othello* (1951). But he was also cinema's most reliable creative vandal in chief.

I've never been convinced by the notion of colour-blind casting, because everyone sees colour, whether they care to admit it or not. But Welles helped to pioneer the technique of "colour-conscious" casting, and showed how it could politicise and revitalise old stories. The director shook the bottle and held unexplored themes to the light. He desecrated sacred texts, lived it down, and blithely mapped out the trail that Nolan and others would follow.

Also, how's this for a postscript, a footnote to the footnote? Buoyed by the success of his blockbusting "Voodoo" *Macbeth*, Welles went on to make *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and played villainous Harry Lime in Carol Reed's peerless *The Third Man* (1949). He always swung for the fences; sometimes hitting, sometimes not.

Early in 1950, the director stumbled into a lesbian bar in Paris and saw an African-American singer performing solo on stage. Welles decided on the spot that 23-year-old Eartha Kitt would be the perfect addition to his new stage-play: an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, in which the hero is tempted by an attractive Trojan demigod. So it turns out that Nyong'o isn't even the first Black woman to play Helen of Troy. Kitt – thanks to Welles – got there three-quarters of a century before.

*'The Odyssey' is in cinemas from 17 July*

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# LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Channel 4's new five-part drama 'Tip Toe' takes a grim look at the resurgence of homophobia, but for all its bleakness, it has plenty of community and humanity, says **Louis Chilton**



Human performance: Alan Cumming as Leo in Russell T Davies's 'Tip Toe' (Channel 4)

★★★★☆

Tragedy looms like a plummeting meteor from the opening shots of Russell T Davies's *Tip Toe*, the camera crawling over prosaic Mancunian suburbia to reveal a man hanging, lifeless, from a lamp post. The victim, we soon learn, is Leo Struthers

(Alan Cumming), the owner of an LGBTQ+ bar in Manchester's gay village.

Channel 4's punchy state-of-the-nation drama depicts the buildup to what we come to understand is a lynching, as it examines the homophobia and bigotry that are, Davies suggests, undergoing a dangerous resurgence in Britain today.

When we first meet Leo alive, he is running out of his house in his pants, chasing vainly after a casual hookup who has made off with his laptop. He ends up locked out of his own home – there's a metaphor there, you might think – and is forced to seek refuge at his electrician neighbour Clive's house, pasty legs poking out of pink boxers.

Clive, played with rotten, rageful repression by David Morrissey, is an unhappily married man with two children – ripped 25-year-old Saul (Joseph Evans), who makes money masturbating over webcam, and George (Jackson Connor), a closeted 16-year-old. Clive is, naturally, oblivious to these facts.

Over the course of *Tip Toe*'s five episodes, secrets come spilling out, as Leo's life becomes increasingly enmeshed with the lives of his neighbours. Some of this could easily be avoided: much of the drama springs from his unlikely decision to hire the already antagonistic Clive to do some work on the electrics at his bar.



**While this series is a fiction, and one that makes its arguments with sledgehammer grace, it is sadly not absurd, or abstract**



Some of it is slipperier, as when George reaches out to his older gay neighbour for help after the two encounter each other on a Grindr-like app. Morrissey is terrific and terrifying across these five episodes, but Cumming is the star, a charismatic, complicated and subtly sad figure who transcends the broadness of *Tip Toe*'s plot.

Davies has made landmark queer television before, most notably the 1990s series *Queer as Folk* and the recent *It's a Sin*. *Folk* took more of a corrective approach to what was then TV's wilful blindness to the queer community – presenting the richness and normality of the queer experience to a British viewing audience that hadn't really seen it on screen before. *It's a Sin* was a sadder undertaking, focusing on gay life during the Aids crisis.

*Tip Toe* takes a far grimmer approach, proposing that not only is life still hard for queer people in the UK, but things are moving backwards, and that the hatred is reaching a deadly breaking point. At one point, a queer character played by Paul Rhys muses that straight society "let us all come out, so now we're standing in the open ready for them to shoot us down".

While this series is a fiction, and one that makes its arguments with sledgehammer grace, it is sadly not absurd, or abstract. Hate crimes and anti-LGBTQ+ violence are on the rise; it is hard to watch *Tip Toe* and not think of Brianna Ghey, the trans teenager who was murdered by two 15-year-olds just three years ago. (Transphobia, too, is a specific and recognised evil in *Tip Toe*, largely seen through the character of Zee, a trans girl, played compellingly by Iz Hesketh.)

For all its bleakness and anger, there are many moments of community and humanity in *Tip Toe* – scenes of what is often described as "queer joy". The cheer and solidarity among the gays and dolls at Leo's bar provide a stark counterpoint to the heteronormative misery of Clive's life. It's significant, too, that these men are neighbours. For bigots like Clive, it literalises the fact that queer people exist and live in the same society as him. For people like Leo, it's hatred, and danger, that sleeps just a few metres down the road.

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# Allen shines at festival of joy packed with surprises

## Mighty Hoopla, the UK's biggest pop celebration, returns, bigger and better than ever, to **Roisin O'Connor**'s delight



A triumph: Lily Allen performs West End Girl in full at Mighty Hoopla 2026 (Luke Dyson)

★★★★★

Fortune favours the fabulous, which is perhaps why the sun is out once again for another year of Mighty Hoopla: the UK's campest, most colourful celebration of all things pop. The festival has got even bigger this time around and, somehow,

better, with a legion of stellar performances and a jaw-dropping array of attractions vying for your attention.

MEEK by name but certainly not by nature, one of the UK's most endearing new pop prospects kicks off the afternoon in a flurry of neon tulle. Her defiant anthem "Fabulous" is the perfect start as her sizeable audience chants along with her: "I just got my heart broken but I look fuckin' fabulous/ Yeah I'm back in therapy but I look fuckin' fabulous…" Members of the crowd snap their fans – bearing the legends "CUNT", "SLAG" or "GAY" – in approval.

Strolling around the festival's sprawling home of Brockwell Park in London, I am always stunned by the pure joy that this event brings. By the end of the day, everyone is covered in glitter from hugs with sparkling strangers – friends are made within five minutes of sheltering together in the shade. Everyone glows in their best outfits, from diamanté-encrusted shorts to kilts, mesh tops, tutus, leather harnesses, corsets and sequinned everything.




MEEK was an explosion of yellow tulle for her 'Fabulous' performance (Corinne Cumming)

We squeeze into one of the big top tents for a singalong DJ-set dedicated to George Michael, then another for Madonna. For the Arsenal fans fretting over the Champions League final game, there's a Gay Gooners viewing party. And for anyone on the verge of sensory overload (understandable, given the

surroundings), there's a fully staffed welfare space as well as a sensory tent kitted out with stim gadgets and toys, including ear defenders. Hoopla really does feel like the UK's most inclusive space.

But back to the music: a career-encompassing set on the main stage from pop mastermind MNEK reminds us of his influence on the charts. From collaborations with Zara Larsson and JADE to his songs from his heady 2018 solo debut, *Language,* the songwriter and producer born Uzoechi Osisioma Emenike knows what makes us tick.



MNEK reminded us of his pop powers (Luke Dyson)

Pop duo Appleton, comprising sisters Nicole and Natalie, who once made up half of the group All Saints, deliver perhaps the most transcendent performance of the day – their first full set together in 23 years. They're astonishingly good, delivering crystalline vocals on Noughties classics like "Don't Worry" and "Falling into You". There's also a surprise appearance from the Sugababes' Heidi Range for a euphoric rendition of "Round Round", complete with camp choreography.

When it comes to the performances, there are barely any misses. Barely. Todrick Hall is somewhat tedious, taking himself too seriously even when performing the ridiculous and (self-admittedly) petty anthem "Y.A.S" – which ends on a round of

yodelling “you ain’t shit” to the person who drew his ire. Jessie J brings the hits with “Domino” and “Do It Like a Dude” but follows them up with somewhat incomprehensible monologues, leading to some shuffling and bored chatter from the audience.



Sisters Nicole and Natalie Appleton are joined by Heidi from the Sugababes (Corinne Cumming)

By comparison, the screaming for JLS reaches the other side of the festival field, as do the chants of “everybody in love, come put your hands up…” from their 2009 hit single. A surprise scheduled on the main stage turns out to be Australia’s almost-Eurovision champion Delta Goodrem, belting out her 2026 song “Eclipse” (complete with dramatic pyrotechnics, though sadly not the platform that rises up out of the piano, which presumably had to go for budgetary reasons).

Finally, the sunburnt, dusty but still-glittering crowd assembles for a string section singalong to some of headliner Lily Allen’s biggest hits. The *West End Girl* star is performing her latest album in full, to the disgruntlement of some fans who had been hoping for “Smile” and “The Fear”. Yet from the moment she steps out onto the stage, it becomes clear that this might be the perfect setting for such a theatrical performance. She plays out the collapse of a relationship in real time, revelling in the triumph of marriage in the opening title track before receiving a

shattering phone call from her new husband requesting an open relationship.



Delta Goodrem dazzled in a surprise appearance (Luke Dyson)

Allen has already earned plaudits as an actor, most notably in her Oliver-nominated starring role in the West End play *2:22 A Ghost Story*, so it's unsurprising that we're moved by her now, as she strips down to lingerie and wipes away tears on "Ruminating" (in which she reels from her husband's request) and "Sleepwalking", a devastating lullaby about the lack of love or validation from her partner. She plays the doting wife on "Tennis", pushing aside her own feelings until she sees a text from another woman; her demand of "and who the fuck is Madeline?" goes down a treat at Hoopla.



JADE performs with Lily Allen during a live rendition of their remix song 'Beg For Me' (Corinne Cumming)

The West End Girl tour has received mixed reviews from critics, which is all the more baffling now, seeing the show unfold in real time. Allen's lyrics are excoriating – about herself, her ex and his other lovers – while never shying away from her feelings of inadequacy, shame, helplessness, heartbreak, rage or pity. She wanders the stage as if it's her own apartment, dazed as she discovers the stash of sex toys in "Pussy Palace", then needy as fellow pop star JADE joins her for the recently released remix of "Beg for Me". It's the perfect headline set, offering clarity and catharsis before revellers drift off into the night.

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# Elite changes Arsenal must make to take the next step

## Mikel Arteta's men frustrated a classy PSG in Budapest, but more attacking potency is a must, writes **Miguel Delaney**



Arsenal were left with 'pride and pain' after Saturday's Champions League final (Photos Getty)

After his team failed to make the statement required, Mikel Arteta had evidently been considering a few different messages. He first had to find the right words for his players.

By the time the Arsenal squad got back to their families in Budapest, there were a lot of tears. It turns out this fixture could

never be a “free hit”, even if you have just won a title. It’s far too big, with too much meaning. Arsenal came far too close to a feat that all of these players have dreamed about; to be European champions.

But not quite close enough.

There was pride but also real “pain”, as Arteta put it. He naturally talked about using it as “fuel”, as Arsenal have repeatedly done with disappointment during his time at the club. They responded to a tough fifth-place after a thrashing by Tottenham Hotspur in 2021-22 by challenging for the title. They responded to three second-place finishes by finally winning that title.

And, in the Champions League, they have progressively got better every year: quarter-final, semi-final, final… and next?

To go that final step and actually become European champions for the first time in the club’s history, Arteta knows Arsenal need to do more, especially in attack.

His post-match press conference wasn’t just this emotional appeal about learning from defeat. It was also a message, not least to the ownership.

The extent of the praise for Paris Saint-Germain was conspicuous. “They are, in my opinion, the best team in the world,” Arteta said. “What they are able to do with the ball, with individual actions, I haven’t seen it, and it’s not the plan to play in certain areas when you don’t have the ball, but they force you to do that.”



Arteta now needs to change the gears, especially having won the title

More tellingly, there was a lot of talk about Arsenal needing "to improve and to reach a different level", and "to find different margins to get the outcome that we want".

In other words, that they are too constrained, that the margins they play in are too thin; that they need better attackers. Arteta will surely know that this same PSG have already gone in with a very strong offer for Arsenal target Julian Alvarez. Within Arsenal, there's very much a sense of Arteta wishing he could do what PSG do. They are a state sportswashing project, mind.

It's at that point where a few different arguments are possible, and multiple things can be true at the same time.

A lot of that approach is on Arteta himself, where all of the angst about finally winning the title saw him get more and more controlling – not always to the team's benefit. They are a very different team than they were in 2022-23.

For all the criticism of the defensive approach in this final, though, the reality is that it is not a normal game.

Nobody else has come so close to stopping this PSG in big Champions League games. They've eventually scorched through

everyone else in open play. They put eight past Chelsea, six past Bayern Munich and four past Liverpool.

Here, Luis Enrique's team didn't know what to do and didn't look like doing much at all from open play. They needed a rash foul from Cristhian Mosquera, who had previously been brilliant. Arsenal's plan worked fine, that penalty aside. Even there, it shows the ever-present danger of PSG's attack, and how a player like Kvicha Kvaratshkelia only needs a millisecond. Arsenal have no attacker close to that quality.



PSG's attacking riches contrasted with those of the English champions

Their gameplan was still close to perfect, and it was the rational choice. Sir Alex Ferguson ultimately lost two Champions League finals because he allowed the romance and memories of 1960, watching Real Madrid's 7-3 demolition of Eintracht Frankfurt at Hampden Park, to take over when taking on a side of comparable quality in Barcelona 2009 and 2011. He went front foot, despite the reservations of many of his players, and lost badly.

And this is the level we're talking about with this PSG.

Nevertheless, there will be a lingering regret over whether Arsenal themselves could have gone up a level, introduced a touch more nuance.

They had the lead. PSG were panicking. When Kvaratshkelia and Ousmane Dembele went off, they were nowhere near as intimidating. They could have built through the phases more, while still retaining structure. This is absolutely linked to a medium-term mindset.

It admittedly didn't help that the game became so ragged with all of those subs, but the technical execution outside Kai Havertz's finish was not of that level. Bukayo Saka had some bad touches around the PSG box, while all of Gabriel Martinelli, Eberechi Eze and Noni Madueke overhit simple passes when a chance was on.

They lacked that killer edge, something that only becomes more acute in a fixture where the margins become so tight.

It is probable that some of this is conditioned by mindset. When you are so immersed in such a constrained approach, it can be very difficult to come out of it. That applies to the intensity of this occasion, but also the last two seasons.

There are many caveats, but it's how Arsenal have been geared. Arteta now needs to change the gears, especially having won the title.

They can't go another season like that.



Julian Alvarez is the level of striker Arsenal would love to sign... but PSG are already strong bidders for the Atletico Madrid man's services

But then you probably can't win a Champions League final against a team like PSG with Madueke, Martinelli and Viktor Gyokeres as your finishing attacking trio. That isn't really the level required.

And while this will be no consolation to an Arsenal team that came within a few kicks of being European champions, there is arguably something fitting about not quite doing so yet – setting aside reservations about Qatari ownership.

Arsenal are a very strong team, and deserving domestic champions, but that has also come from calculatedly maximising every one of those strengths.

If you are given to romance and the mythos of this competition, you want the European champions to be that bit more complete.

And that's where Arteta wants to go next. He wants a higher-level attack, and there is still the possibility of bringing in two players. The wonder now is whether this moment leads to a push for higher quality, for the attackers who can properly elevate the team. Kvaratshkelia is unique, but you can get someone closer to him.

Arteta has probably neglected that end of the team too much, with the emphasis of his spending – depth and defence – reflecting the emphasis of his play.

He himself could also do with adding more sophistication to his attacking, and moving the team up. The quest for the title has locked him into a certain mode of thinking as much as the team.

The talk within the club this season has duly been of how victory could "unlock" something in the team.

They need that to be true to go that final step.

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# Man City complete double after thumping Brighton

| | |
|---|---|
| **Brighton** | 0 |
| **Manchester City**<br>Shaw (38), Greenwood (45+6), Fujino (66), Miedema (87) | 4 |



Manchester City captain Alex Greenwood lifts the Women's FA Cup at Wembley (PA)

**RACHEL STEINBERG**
AT WEMBLEY

Manchester City sealed a domestic double after Khadija Shaw and Alex Greenwood inspired the Women's Super League champions to a 4-0 victory over Brighton in yesterday's Wembley FA Cup final.

Jamaica striker Shaw, the WSL's Golden Boot winner for three straight seasons, nodded home Greenwood's cross in the 38th minute – her first goal since announcing a four-year contract extension last Monday.

Captain Greenwood made it two from a stoppage-time free-kick to double their lead before the break, despite a very promising opening half from first-time FA Cup finalists Brighton, in search of a maiden major trophy.

Aoba Fujino added a third in the 66th minute, and second-half substitute Vivianne Miedema marked her return to Andree Jeglertz's lineup for the first time since March with their fourth to put their 400th competitive match as a professional side to bed.




Khadija Shaw scored City's opener after a good start from Brighton (PA)

Three-time FA Cup champions City were appearing in their fifth final, and their first since losing to Chelsea in extra time four years ago.

Goalkeeper Khiara Keating, called up to Sarina Wiegman's England squad on Wednesday, was unavailable after sustaining

an injury in training earlier in the week, so it was Ayaka Yamashita between the posts for City.

Brighton showed intent from the start, and City nearly got themselves into trouble when Jade Rose left the ball for her keeper, oblivious to the threat of the lurking Madison Haley, who then collided with Yamashita.




Greenwood curled in a free-kick before half time (PA)

Yamashita stayed down and the ball came out to Marisa Olislagers, who fired at the open goal but was denied an opener by Greenwood's clearance off the line.

Brighton keeper Chiamaka Nnadozie was called into action with a smart save, but the Seagulls dominated the following 10 minutes, though they were too tentative and could not make their chances count.

City came to life after the half hour, testing Nnadozie before Shaw broke the deadlock with seven minutes remaining in the first half, instigated by Greenwood's lovely looped delivery and beating the rising keeper to plant home a header.



Miedema sealed victory with her side's fourth (Getty)

Greenwood then took matters into her own hands, curling a free kick into the bottom-right corner in the sixth minute of stoppage time at the end of the first half.

City were three goals to the good in the 66th minute. A well-worked move saw Shaw cut the ball back to Miedema, who laid it off for the Japan international to curl home.

Miedema, out since late March for personal reasons and whose mother is battling cancer, nodded home City's fourth with three minutes remaining in normal time to wrap up the win.

*PA*

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# French Open to crown new queen after Swiatek slumps




Four-time winner Iga Swiatek was beaten in straight sets by in-form Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk (AP)

ELEANOR CROOKS

New French Open champions will be crowned in both the women's and men's singles after Marta Kostyuk continued a tournament of shocks by knocking out Iga Swiatek.

Defending champion Coco Gauff's defeat on Saturday left four-time winner Swiatek as the only remaining player in either draw

to have lifted the trophy at Roland Garros.

But the Pole has endured a difficult season and produced an error-strewn display in a 7-5 6-1 defeat by in-form Ukrainian Kostyuk.




Kostyuk started the match tearfully but rallied to continue a 16-match unbeaten run (Reuters)

It was a very unhappy 25th birthday for Swiatek, who admitted afterwards that she had been unable to overcome the tension of the occasion.

“It is harder a bit to handle stress for me in the last year,” she said. “Today I felt off and I did mistakes that I didn’t want to do, and I wanted to play safe, but the ball flew everywhere. Suddenly these feelings came back, and I tried to work on it with my dialogue inside, but it was tough today. It all kind of went drastically down, and I played worse and worse.”

Kostyuk is yet to lose a match on clay this season after winning the biggest title of her career in Madrid earlier this month, and she extended her unbeaten run to 16 matches.

It is just the second time the 23-year-old, who sits at a career-high ranking of 15, has made it through to the quarter-finals of a grand slam, after the Australian Open in 2024.

“To beat such an unbelievable player who won four times here, I’d lost (three) times to her, never taken a set off her, I still

cannot believe it," said Kostyuk.

"I think the most important thing I've been doing is really just trying to enjoy. I woke up this morning and I just thought about what an unbelievable day I have to live today to play on Chatrier against Iga."




Swiatek: 'Today I felt off and I did mistakes that I didn't want to do' (Reuters)

Swiatek changed coaches earlier in the spring in an effort to arrest her slide, bringing in Rafael Nadal and Emma Raducanu's former coach Francisco Roig, but her troubles remain and this is her earliest defeat on the Parisian clay since her debut in 2019.

She had won her first three matches comfortably and served for the first set here but could not clinch it and two double faults in the 12th game helped Kostyuk move into the lead.

Swiatek went for a lengthy bathroom break and broke serve immediately to start the second set only to again double fault twice and hand the initiative back.

Her forehand, so often a barometer of her game and confidence, became increasingly wayward and a final backhand that flew way wide was her 38th unforced error of the match.

Swiatek will now turn her attentions to grass and the defence of her Wimbledon title.

Kostyuk began the tournament in tears on court, revealing that her family home in Kyiv had narrowly avoided being hit by a Russian missile, but her victory continued an excellent tournament for Ukraine's women.

Next, she will next play a compatriot after Elina Svitolina, another woman in some of the best form of her career, defeated Belinda Bencic 4-6, 6-4, 6-0.

Also through to the last eight – for the first time here in 17 years – is Romanian Sorana Cirstea, after a 6-3, 7-6 (4) victory over China's Xiyu Wang.

The 36-year-old announced ahead of this season that it would be her last, but she may have to rethink her plans after breaking into the top 20 for the first time.

*PA*

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# Sport news in brief




Exclusive club: Jonas Vingegaard became only the eighth rider to win all three grand tours (Reuters)

## Vingegaard completes grand tour set with Giro d'Italia victory

Jonas Vingegaard won the Giro d'Italia yesterday, becoming only the eighth male rider to win all three grand tours.

The Danish cyclist, who rides for Team Visma-Lease a Bike, ended the three-week race with an overall advantage of 5 mins, 22 secs over second-place Felix Gall. Jai Hindley finished third, 6:25 behind.

Vingegaard won the Tour de France in 2022 and 2023 and last year clinched his first Spanish Vuelta title. After crossing the line in Rome, the 29-year-old Vingegaard embraced his wife and two children, who were wearing replicas of his maglia rosa – the leader's pink jersey.

Having dominated his first Giro – living up to his billing as pre-race favorite – Vingegaard will turn his attention to the Tour de France as he attempts to become the ninth man to complete the Giro-Tour double.

Yesterday's largely processional final Giro stage, which ended with eight laps through Rome, was won by sprint specialist Jonathan Milan.

## Ten-woman Celtic pip Rangers in Scottish Cup final

Morgan Cross scored the only goal of the game to earn 10-woman Celtic a 1-0 Scottish Gas Scottish Cup final win over rivals Rangers at Hampden Park.

The Light Blues, who had won the trophy the last two seasons, dominated the first half and struck the woodwork after 11 minutes when midfielder Mia McAulay latched onto a Laura Berry pass. However, poor defending allowed Celtic to take the lead before the half-hour mark when Rangers could not clear their lines. Saoirse Noonan picked up possession and her cross to the back post saw Cross throw herself at the ball in front of Nicola Docherty and guide the ball in at the far post.

A hard-fought game became more difficult for Celtic when Scotland defender Lawton was shown a second yellow card for a foul on Calliste Brookshire as she tried to break clear. Rangers piled forward and Kim Shin-ji headed a Brogan Hay cross onto the top of the net. Adelaide Gay then punched a Hay cross against her own crossbar, but a spirited Celtic outfit held firm to end an 11-game wait for a win over Rangers. *PA*

## Jamaican women finish 1-2-3 in Diamond League 100m

Two-time Olympic silver medallist Kenny Bednarek sped ahead of Paris Games champion Letsile Tebogo to secure a commanding victory in the men's 200m at the Rabat Diamond League yesterday, as Tina Clayton led a Jamaican 1-2-3 in the women's 100m.

American Bednarek clocked 19.69 seconds, gaining a sizeable lead in the first half of the race to leave a struggling Tebogo 0.27 seconds behind in second place. "I didn't expect to run that fast, but I knew I had a good sub-20 in me," said the 27-year-old Bednarek. "Being able to go against the best, I mean I am one of the best, but I like competing so I can't wait for another year."

World silver medallist Clayton finished in 10.85 seconds, a tenth of a second ahead of compatriot Lavanya Williams, as Jonielle Smith, the only other Jamaican in the race, pushed ahead in the final metres to finish third. "I am happy with the result, especially because I managed to get a season best which shows I am moving in the right direction. However, I still need to fix a few things," Clayton said.

Britain's Max Burgin won the 800m with a season best 1:42.98, while compatriot Matthew Hudson-Smith finished second in the 400m behind American Jacory Patterson.

Ukrainian Olympic high jump champion and world record holder Yaroslava Mahuchikh cleared 1.97m to secure the win ahead of Australian Eleanor Patterson and Serbian Angelina Topic, who both jumped 1.94m. Women's 100m hurdles world record holder Tobi Amusan, who had finished second last weekend when American Masai Russell came within 0.02 seconds of her record, returned to winning ways as she clocked 12.28 seconds.

Local hero and twice Olympic champion Soufiane El Bakkali thrilled the Moroccan crowd as he finished ahead of German Frederik Ruppert to win the men's 3000m steeplechase, clocking 7 mins 57.25 secs. *Reuters*

## Exeter battle past Leicester in race for Prem play-offs

Olly Woodburn scored two tries as Exeter pulled off a stunning 35-26 victory as Leicester Tigers missed the chance to climb to second in the Gallagher Prem table. The result ensured Bristol fell out of the race for a play-off spot but Leicester, Exeter and Saracens all remain in the mix for the two remaining spots behind Northampton and Bath.

Exeter inflicted Leicester's first home league defeat in 14 months by registering four tries to three. After a try apiece in the first period, the home side were 14-13 ahead, but Henry Slade's boot for the Devon side went on to convert three penalties and add the extras for as many tries, with the result that the Chiefs sealed a bonus point and deprived the Tigers of anything to show from the game.

The victory put paid to Bristol's slim hopes of a play-off spot and although Exeter will still need to beat Saracens on Saturday to be sure of their place, a hard-fought away win will have been a major confidence boost. *PA*

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