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Editor's notes...



Brett Shohet, Editor

Hello and welcome to this month's edition of **VISION**Hertford.

I hope everyone has managed to navigate this second lockdown without too much trouble, as we now come through the other side of it.

The hope is now that families can be with their loved ones this festive season without too many restrictions - no one should be alone at this time of year.

I think life at the moment can be especially isolating for business owners, who are most likely trying to climb over the biggest hurdles they've ever faced. I must say, we local businesses are doing ourselves proud - I'm not saying we're all thriving, but we're surviving, and that's admirable.

As a fellow business owner, I always make myself available for a chat. Whether you're looking for someone to bounce ideas off or merely fancy a general conversation, it's always good to put your heads together and see what others are up to.

Network is net-worth, after all.

Times are tough, but it's important to know that we're not alone. In my most difficult moments, I always take a step back and think: we're in a storm right now, and no sailor ever became good by sailing in calm seas. This experience will harden us and make us more creative.

Thank you so much to all our readers and loyal clients - as with every year, you've been fantastic. I hope everyone has a great Christmas.

Brett

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At 77 years young, Joe Biden's journey to the White House has been a long one, but the US Presidential Election winner won't delay in attempting to bring back together a fractured nation.

After a tumultuous four years as the most powerful man in world politics, it perhaps shouldn't have come as too much of a surprise to find Donald Trump refusing to go quietly in the aftermath of a US Presidential Election defeat that left Democrat Joe Biden at the door of The White House... albeit without a set of keys.

Republican Trump's assertion of ballot box fraud in light of what, admittedly, even his fiercest critic would deem a farcical voting process, will mean the intricacies of the November 3 election will play out in the Supreme Court. And yet, where US politics is concerned, we shouldn't be surprised – four years ago all similar accusations of malpractice were shot across the bow by those same Democrats who are now up in arms over Trump's claims. His suggestion was that thousands of new voting papers were added to the mix, that some were in the name of people long deceased, and that many duplicated votes were received after a chaotic postal vote system that allowed individual states to decide their own rules.

When the dust settles, however, 77-year-old Biden will be inaugurated as the leader of the free world. A lifetime ambition, the Pennsylvania-born former lawyer has been at the forefront of politics for well over five decades, having become a senator in January 1973. Re-elected six times, he was vice president to Barack Obama for eight years, and considered running in 2016, but made way for Hillary Clinton.

He is a passionate advocate of raising the minimum wage and investing in green energy, notably in rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement that Trump controversially left. He promotes criminal justice reform and grants for minority communities, and will also look to expand Obamacare, enlarge the free college system, and challenge China's questionable environment and trade practices. And, most notably, he brings with him to the top table of world politics Kamala Harris, America's first female, first black and first South Asian vice president.

Here in Britain we will look on with interest to see if prime minister Boris Johnson can configure the same buoyancy, trust and commercial parallels he enjoyed with Trump. Our long-term alignment with the States on corporate, social and political levels has been essential for the economy, and now more than ever before the government will be seeking reassurance that this can continue under a new regime.

Despite a desperately narrow winning margin, Joe Biden will enter The White House having achieved the most votes ever for an incoming president – more than 77 million. And yet those celebrating the supposed new dawn of American politics should be wary. Putting aside the somewhat ambitious legal claims that will fill the scrolling new tickers over the coming weeks and months, it remains the case that, even in defeat, Trump's vote total was more than any other elected president in history, Obama included. The brand of confrontational, partisan politics that he popularised continues to resonate with America, and with the Senate still under the control of the Republicans, Biden knows he'll have to fight hard to steady the United States' uneasy global reputation.

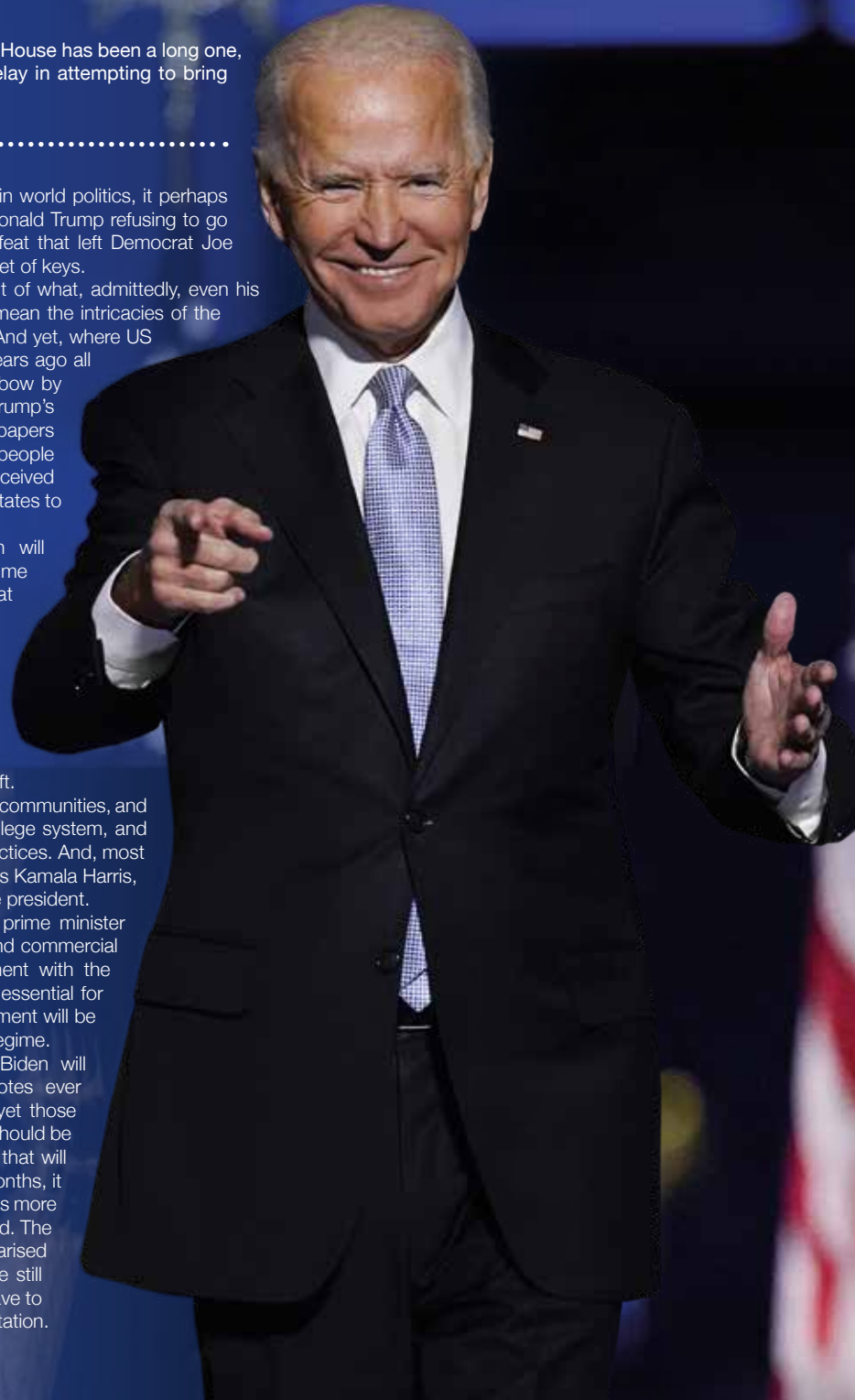


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BIDEN: His Time

THE WORLD AROUND US

Part 2

In the second of our environmental series that looks at the key drivers in the health and well-being of the planet, we're looking at the legacy of our rainforests.

At the end of the 1980s, the realisation that the world's rainforests were being removed at an alarming rate truly propelled a green revolution – one that continues to thrive today.

Where eco awareness and the preservation of our planet are now a part of everyday life, the way we embraced the saving of the Amazon rainforests had never before been seen.

The realisation that deforestation was claiming an area the size of 20 football pitches every minute – for the acquiring of timber and repurposing of land for cattle ranching – was profound, but the deafening screams of those early environmentalists are now just faint murmurs. So what has happened to those green expanses?


Sadly, the problem still exists. A quarter of the Amazon has disappeared, probably never to return, while some speculation suggests the remainder may be felled within 50 years if tighter restrictions are not forthcoming.

Globally, one in four people depends directly on forests for their livelihood, and as many as 120 prescription drugs worldwide are derived directly from rainforests.

And yet, there are two sides to every story. Many South Americans will point to the economic necessity of monetising a natural resource, just as the UK has done with oil and gas. Even the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has called the destruction of these plant- and animal-rich expanses “cultural”; and in a country that has more than 20 million people living in poverty, it's not difficult to see why resistance is strong.

To conclude, it seems that while the days are gone where almost every other charitable programme was driven towards preserving these incredible habitats, it's simply a case of having our attention diverted to other ills. Three decades after we first reached out to our rainforests, the battle to save them lives on.

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DIY UGLY Christmas Jumper

National Ugly Christmas Jumper Day falls on the third Friday of December each year and offers participants the chance to showcase the worst possible festive jumper they can find. However, why not steer clear of the shops this year and make your own original ugly jumper?

COFFEE SHOP UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER: If you love nothing more than a Starbucks first thing in the morning, why not showcase your devotion by sticking a coffee cup directly onto your jumper? Start by cutting your cup in half lengthways and gluing it to the lid. Then glue two pieces of felt to the inside of the cup, glue Velcro tape to the felt and to your jumper and attach.

COUPLES' UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPERS: What could be more cringe than you and your significant other wearing matching garish glittery Christmas jumpers? Using hot glue, stick on sequins that say "Mr" and "Mrs" and then add as much tinsel, glitter and baubles as you can stomach.

LIGHT-UP UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER: Whatever design or slogan you choose for your DIY ugly Christmas sweater, the addition of Christmas coloured fairy lights will only ever make it more tacky. Simply turn your jumper inside out, decide where your battery holder should go and then sew in your LED lights.

SNOW GLOBE UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER: One of the more inventive options. All you need is a plastic bowl, a selection of cheap Christmas decorations and a glue gun to create your very own 3D snow globe on the front of your jumper.

CUTE KIDS UGLY CHRISTMAS JUMPER: If your children are taking part in national ugly Christmas jumper day, then this DIY Christmas tree jumper is just the ticket. Plus, they can help you make it. All you need is some felt, mini shatterproof baubles, festive beads and hot glue.

Photo credit: ilovetocreate.com, creativefashionblog.com, thesamanthashow.com, brit.co, countryliving.com



WAYS TO JAZZ UP YOUR Christmas beard



Whether you have designer stubble or a full-on Santa beard, there is no excuse not to get festive when it comes to your facial hair this Christmas. From baubles to bells, sweets to knits, check out these six fantastically festive beard decorations.

1. Beard Baubles: If you want a weird and wacky Christmas beard design, then look no further. Mini baubles hanging from your whiskers will ensure you start trending on social media sooner rather than later.

2. Beard Glitter: A simple yet highly effective idea, a glitter beard will ensure you are the centre of attention for all the right reasons. Simply apply some glitter glue to your beard and then sprinkle with your chosen glitter. Why not use multiple colours for even more oomph?

3. Beard Candy: If you or your kids love candy canes, then this

is the festive beard design for you. Best for bushy beards, all you need to do is adorn your beard with canes and you are good to do.

4. Beard Jingle Bells: For those who don't mind being heard before they are seen, beard bells provide a fun and frivolous way to jazz up your face. Ideal for Christmas carolling.

5. Beard Knits: Does your mum love to make you an annual Christmas jumper? If so, why not ask her this year to knit you a beard warmer instead? It's festive and perfect for keeping out the winter chill.

6. Beard Lights: Last but definitely not least, it wouldn't be Christmas without some well-placed fairy lights, and what better location for these colourful decorations than on your face? Just make sure you buy a clip-on set to avoid a terrible tangle in your bristles.



What's worrying you...?

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Christmas

plants that care and cure

There are several plants that are synonymous with Christmas, from the decorative poinsettia, to the “kiss me quick” mistletoe, to the evergreen holly and ivy. However, did you know that each of these plants has its own healing properties?

Holly: Often used to decorate your table for Christmas dinner, in terms of medicinal use, you should only use the leaves of the holly as the berries are poisonous. Holly leaves have been known to treat digestive issues, rheumatism, fever, bronchitis and high blood pressure.

HOW TO TAKE: Dry out your holly leaves, crush and add a few teaspoons to a cup of hot water.

Mistletoe: Either a blessing, or a curse depending on who you are standing in close proximity to, mistletoe has been used for centuries to treat medical conditions such as epilepsy, hypertension, headaches and the symptoms of menopause.

HOW TO TAKE: Only use the leaves and stems as the grains are poisonous. Steep in cold water for 12 hours, strain and drink up to three times a day.

Poinsettia: The perfect plant to decorate your home over Christmas, the poinsettia is known for its ability to clean air, and in particular, to remove formaldehyde from insulation, plastic bags and other household items.

HOW TO TAKE: Simply place a poinsettia in your home and let it work its magic.

Ivy: The leaves of ivy are both anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic, plus they contain antioxidant properties. Ivy is also said to help settle your stomach, boost your immune system and increase oxygenation of the body.

HOW TO TAKE: The leaves of ivy can either be consumed or applied topically. To make ivy tea, simply soak 4 fresh ivy leaves or 2 tsp of crushed dried ivy in 1 litre of cold water, bring to the boil and then filter immediately.



FOUR COMMON WINTER AILMENTS AND HOW TO TREAT THEM

As well as the common cold and seasonal flu, not to mention COVID-19, there are several ailments that many people suffer with during the cold winter months.

Let's take a closer look at them and their most effective treatments.

1. PAINFUL JOINTS

If you suffer with arthritis, you may find that your joints become even more painful and achy in the colder months. Although there is no way to avoid the effects of the cold completely, ensuring you partake in regular exercise, manage your weight and continue to take any prescribed medication can lessen any pain or discomfort you are experiencing.



2. COLD SORES

If you are prone to cold sores, you may find that you are particularly susceptible in the winter when your immune system is compromised. Try to ensure you get as much rest as possible, keep your lips moisturised and use a topical treatment when needed.



3. ASTHMA

The dry and cold air in winter can make the symptoms of asthma worse by irritating your airways and causing your muscles to spasm, resulting in loss of breath. You can counteract this by limiting your time outside, wearing a scarf when you do go out and always having an asthma action plan in place.



4. SINUS INFECTIONS

If you have a weakened immune system, are a smoker or suffer with seasonal allergies, you are more likely to suffer with sinus infections. Symptoms include a runny nose, headaches, pain or pressure in your face and a sore throat. Try placing a warm compress on your face, using a decongestant and breathing in steam from a hot shower.



TOP TIPS FOR KEEPING HEALTHY THIS WINTER

- > Eat more fruit and veg
- > Embrace natural daylight
- > Wash your hands regularly
- > Stay hydrated

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FOOD & DRINK

Cooking UP A treat



FOOD FINESSE WITH POPULAR CHEF JAMES MARTIN

When James Martin bade an extremely tearful farewell to his *Saturday Kitchen* colleagues in March 2016, it was imagined the chef would be turning his hand to new projects after 10 years fronting the popular BBC weekend cookery show.

Of course, as these things often materialise, the popular Yorkshireman reappeared less than six months later fronting a copycat culinary conflag over on ITV.

Regardless, the 48-year-old's switch to commercial TV has also spawned a run of cookery series, reaffirming his place as one of the most popular chefs on television.

Of course, life on the small screen is already a secondary career for Martin, who excelled with wooden spoon in hand from a young age. Indeed, he was almost asked to leave a cookery class at the age of 12 for serving flambéed chicken and mangetout while his prepubescent classmates struggled to create fairy cakes. He went on to study catering at Scarborough College, coming

top of his class for three consecutive years, and was then offered a job working in London with Antony Worrall Thompson, one of the judges for his final exam.

His accomplishments, however, weren't served up to him on a plate – as a Yorkshireman, Martin was taught from birth that “you don't get owt for nowt”. The hard graft paid off, it seems, as he was made head chef of the first Hotel du Vin in Winchester when he was just 22.

Two years later, he began to appear on our screens in shows such as *James Martin: Yorkshire's Finest* and *Ready, Steady, Cook* – his affable nature and dry, self-deprecating humour making him an instant hit with viewers.

From weekend shows to cooking adventures at home and overseas, the chef's fascination with food is unrelenting, as evidenced in his recent return to our screens for *Saturday Morning with James Martin*.

“It's been a great ride so far,” he says, “and the stove is still warm.”



Photo credit: Ken McKay/ITV/Shutterstock



Let's get Saucy

Even if you pride yourself on making your own roast potatoes and stuffing your own turkey, not many people take the time to make their own sauces for their Christmas dinner. So, let's change that. Check out these three popular Christmas sauce recipes that are both simple and delicious.

Easy Peasy Bread Sauce

YOU WILL NEED: 600ml milk | 50g butter | 1 onion | 6 cloves | 6 peppercorns | 2 garlic cloves | 1 bay leaf | 3 sprigs of thyme | 100g white breadcrumbs | 4 tbsp single cream | Pinch of nutmeg (optional)

HOW TO MAKE: Simmer the milk, butter, onion, cloves, peppercorns, garlic and herbs in a pan for 15-20 minutes | Strain and return liquid to heat | Add breadcrumbs and simmer for a further 4 minutes | Stir in cream | Season with nutmeg if desired, and serve



Super Simple Cranberry Sauce

YOU WILL NEED: 200g white sugar | 4 cups of fresh or frozen cranberries | 250ml water | Zest of an orange | Optional spices – cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice

HOW TO MAKE: Rinse cranberries | Boil water and dissolve sugar | Add cranberries and simmer on a low heat until most of the berries have burst | Grate in some orange zest and add a small pinch of your preferred spice | Leave to cool

NB: Cranberry sauce will continue to thicken as it cools.

Perfect Turkey Gravy

YOU WILL NEED: 2 chopped onions | 1 large chopped carrot | 1.3 litres stock – preferably turkey, but chicken will do | 3 tbsp plain flour | 5 tbsp white wine | Turkey neck (optional)

HOW TO MAKE: Add the onion, carrot and turkey neck to a pan | Pour in stock and simmer for one hour | Strain to remove the vegetables and meat, then return liquid to pan | Combine flour with white wine and then add to stock | Heat gently until thickened | Season to taste | Leave to cool and chill



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Holly

DECEMBER BIRTH FLOWER
OF THE MONTH

If you were born in the same month Christmas, your birth flower is the festive holly. A popular plant for the season of winter, holly is instantly recognisable by its prickly leaves and ruby red berries. Plus, it's easy to grow and is great for garden security.

What is the symbolic significance of holly?

In ancient Celtic cultures, the Druids regarded holly as a symbol of fertility and believed it to have magical powers. Today, holly has been adopted as a symbol of Christmas by Christians, with the sharp leaves said to symbolise the crown of thorns worn by Christ and the berries representing his blood.

What does this birth flower say about your personality?

Those born in December are said to be fiercely protective. Not a fan of criticism, you are naturally defensive and are not afraid to stand up for yourself when required. You also love to make a home feel warm and inviting, both your own and those of your friends and family.

How to grow holly in your garden

The holly plant is fairly easy to grow and will thrive in both sun and partial shade, although it prefers moist but well-drained soil. You can choose to grow holly on your lawn, in a shrub border or even to make some hedges. Holly does not require much pruning, although if you want to cut some as a festive decoration, do so in early winter before its berries are eaten by birds.

Interesting facts about holly

- ✦ It is evergreen
- ✦ It can be grown in pots and containers for up to five years
- ✦ The berries are mildly poisonous
- ✦ Legend says that holly protects from thunder, lightning and witchcraft
- ✦ Real holly plants bloom scented flowers in spring

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HOME & DIY



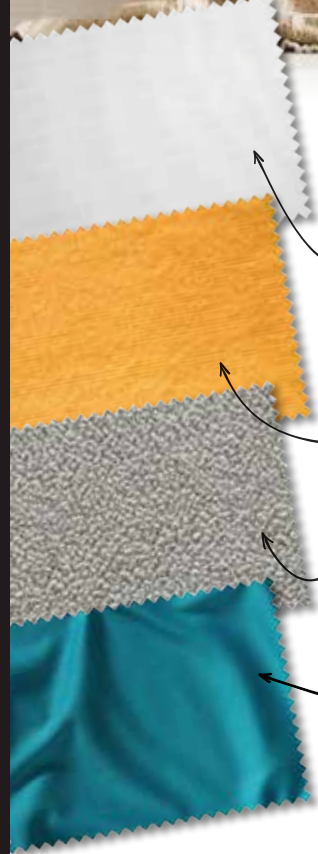
If you spend all day every day in the winter months longing to return to the comfort and cosiness of your bed, then you may be interested to find out what the best bed sheets are for winter warmth. From fleece to flannel, cotton to silk, keep reading to discover what fabric you should choose for your winter safe haven.

Cotton: Although you may think that cotton is more fitting for the summer, if you are the type of sleeper who ends up kicking off your covers halfway through the night, then cotton might be the ideal material for you all year round. A natural fabric, cotton is known for its moisture-wicking abilities, meaning it is great for regulating your overall body temperature. If you have sensitive skin, opt for organic cotton sheets which are both breathable and good for the environment.

Flannel: Synonymous with warmth, flannel is one of the most popular choices for winter bedding. A cross between cotton and fleece, this fabric is soft, airy and breathable, making it the perfect choice for anyone who loves a bed that is warm but not overwhelmingly so.

Fleece: Arguably the warmest material you can choose for your bed sheets, fleece is a synthetic fabric that is ultra-soft and built for insulation. Often used in winter sports gear, fleece is designed to insulate heat in even the coldest conditions, meaning it is ideal for those below-freezing winter nights.

Silk: This may be the last fabric that you would think of when it comes to choosing winter bedding, but silk has the unique ability to retain heat while at same time remaining lightweight and smooth to touch. Opt for pure silk bedding if possible as this has moisturising properties; something that your parched winter skin so desperately needs.





Chic OR UNIQUE

THE RETURN OF SHABBY CHIC AND HOW TO PULL IT OFF

The revolving circle of décor and design has, over the years, gripped a nation of amateur interior designers. Shabby chic, a style that first came to prominence in the 1980s, is making a concerted return to prominence.

Its invention was as a rebellion to the hard, shiny, ultra-modern, clean-cut image of three decades ago, when yuppies and electronica ruled the roost. The term 'shabby chic' was thought up by fashion journalist Min Hogg.

And the concept hasn't strayed too far since – from distressed furniture to unmatching fabrics and colours, a rustic, rugged essence that's based on comfort and quantity, rather than image and minimalistic posturing.

To achieve the shabby chic look really is to open your imagination, either by pooling existing items or exploring flea markets, thrift stores and antique shops.

Many people think repainting and running a grooved spatula across an old set of drawers is the sum total of shabby chic, but it's about much more than that. Soft background colours flatter furniture and make items the focal point of a room, so think about using whites, beiges or even light greys.

Pastels – baby blues, pale pinks, grainy greys and warm yellows – work best, while that base of brightness means retro, darker shades of wood can match and contrast, be that on tables or chairs. Meanwhile, wicker and throws soften edges and enhance comfort, and wrought iron provides structure.

As far as the walls and surface tops go, flowers, mirrors and pictures using worn frames will assist you in topping off the perfect shabby chic room, with knick-knacks, signs and cushions adding to the mix.

Past that, the only limit is your imagination. And the best thing about shabby chic is that it needn't cost the earth – adding wear and tear to your own items is cheap, if not free.

Photo credit: Spike Powell and Lisa Cohen via idealhome.co.uk



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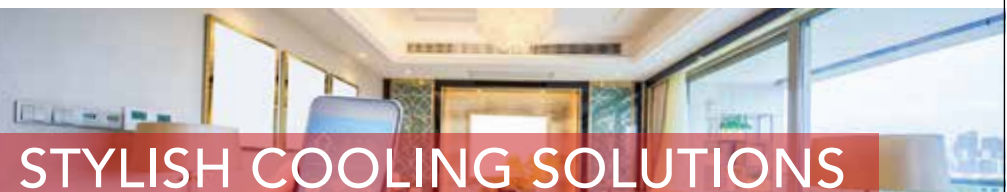
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As film icons go, there are few to rival James Bond; and as Bond actors go, there are none to rival Sir Sean Connery.

In a year that has been unkind on so many levels, fans of film perhaps felt an added sense of injustice at the end of October when it was announced that Sir Sean Connery had passed away, at the age of 90.

Of course, in many respects, the actor's work was done. Connery was the smooth-talking, sumptuously styled Scot who legitimised, developed and truly delivered 007 into the golden era of film. The first man to step into the secret agent's shoes, with 1962's *Dr No*, Connery, a former bodybuilder who finished third in Mr Universe in the early 1950s, proved to author Ian Fleming that he had the fervour and finesse to carry off the role, having previously been dismissed as "an overgrown stuntman".

It seems perverse that someone who would go on to become so decorated in the indulgence and luxury of 1960s cinema may have been cast aside before it even began, but it's fair to note that the actor's previous engagements had been in rather less salubrious guises, notably in crime drama *Hell Drivers*, fantasy adventure *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* and outward-bound action flick *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*.

That, within a decade, Connery would have elevated his worth from tracking the movements of a man swinging through the jungle to starring in iconic movies such as *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball* and *You Only Live Twice*, is remarkable.

What made Connery's sumptuously smooth portrayal of Bond so impressive was that, unlike the modern-day 007s, he interspersed international espionage with an array of other lead roles. Seventeen movies were made across the nine years he portrayed Bond, a sequence that ended in 1971 with *Diamonds are Forever* (although he did agree to reprise the character in 1983's *Never Say Never Again*).

"I got to the point where I felt I had nothing left to prove as far as Bond was concerned," said Connery. "It was a delightful run where the evolution of 007 and everything around him had gathered such pace with every new movie; yet in myself I thought I had probably evolved as much as I had wanted, and it was time to let someone else have a go."

Away from Bond, twice-married Connery flourished in the likes of *Murder on the Orient Express*, *A Bridge too Far*, *Highlander*, *The Untouchables*, *The Hunt for Red October* and as Indiana Jones' father in *The Last Crusade*.

There are the ones that got away too – he turned down the role of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* despite being offered a \$30million bounty; he also rejected playing Architect in *The Matrix* trilogy. The truth is, Connery, who was knighted in the year 2000, was always focused on how he saw himself – as an actor, and as a person... how else can you explain turning down a direct invitation to join Manchester United by legendary manager Sir Matt Busby.

"I was 23 at the time and although I had the contract offer in front of me, I had long decided that football would take a backseat to acting. I felt I had more chance of doing something special, something unique, in the acting world; I felt I could give more and put smiles on more faces, my own included."

Sir Sean, you succeeded.

The Ultimate Bond?



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LOCAL NEWS

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Churches 'yarn-bombed' for Remembrance Sunday

A happy alliance of a 'secret' society and five churches produced stunning 'yarn-bomb' displays of woollen poppies for Remembrance Sunday.

With large church services cancelled during lockdown, the Secret Society of Hertford Crafters (SSOHC) offered eight nets (made from some 15,000 knitted and crocheted poppies) to the Hertford churches of All Saints', Hertford St Andrew and the United Reformed Church, as well as St Mary's, Hertingfordbury, and Holy Trinity, Bengoe.

The poppy nets were originally created in 2018 for Hertford Castle to commemorate the centenary of the Armistice.

They were made in secret by a group who call themselves the Secret Society of Hertford Crafters because they like to keep every project under wraps

until it is revealed.

Jo Baily, co-founder of SSOHC, thanked the participating churches.

Ms Baily said: "We understand that many residents got out to see the displays, which was particularly nice for them at the present time."

SSOHC 'yarn-bombed' Hertford with some 40 Christmas-themed toppers for postboxes, which society members put in place on November 22 to the surprise and delight of residents and posties.

This Christmas, the toppers will raise money for Careers in Herts and Citizens' Advice, East Herts.

To make a donation, go to uk.virginmoneygiving.com/YarnBomberXmas

To see the locations of the decorated postboxes, visit ssohc.co.uk



Abandoned cockerels had to be put down

LOCAL NEWS



Three injured cockerels who were dumped by the side of the road had to be put down when veterinary treatment failed.

The three birds were left in the rain in a cardboard box on Gobions Lane, where they were found by a dog walker recently.

They were taken to the vet by the RSPCA, where they were treated for bleeding wounds to their combs, heads and eyes, and were initially cared for at the RSPCA Blackberry Farm Animal Centre in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

When their eyes failed to recover, further tests revealed that the birds were infected with an incurable bacterium that causes respiratory problems.

RSPCA deputy chief inspector Alex Coghlan said: "They were a poorly bunch of boys and had nasty, blooded wounds to their heads, possibly inflicted by a bigger or older cockerel."

"Presumably, instead of trying to rehome the birds responsibly, their owner has piled all three into a box and dumped them on the side of the road by a farmer's field."

The RSPCA confirmed that because the birds were sick, they could not be rehomed and were therefore put to sleep.

Detectives on hunt for drugs cartel

The Hertford-based ringleader of a drugs gang has been jailed for 21 years following an undercover police operation that was broadcast on November 8 and 9 by Channel 4.

The two-part programme, *24 Hours in Police Custody: The Home County Cartel*, gave viewers a nail-biting look at the plan hatched by police to track down two shipments of drugs in just 24 hours.

After detectives from the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) received a tip-off about a truck from the Netherlands, they acted quickly to trace

the haul to a farm in Hunsdon, near Ware.

There, they seized mainly heroin and cocaine worth approximately £4million concealed in Jack Daniels packaging and boxes of spider catchers.

Helped by the National Crime Agency, Border Force and Hertfordshire Police, ERSOU succeeded in dismantling the gang's network, which they believe was responsible for importing some £58million worth of drugs, making this the biggest drugs investigation to date for both ERSOU and Hertfordshire.

Four gang members, including leader Robert Brooks, 50, of Hertford, were jailed for their part in the conspiracy.

An ERSOU spokesman said that viewers' reactions to the work of ERSOU was "very positive".

Pupils to get mini-farm

Simon Balle All-through School is calling on parents, businesses and the community to help create a mini-farm which it hopes will help pupils learn about animal care and teamwork.

The plans include creating a specially designed secure area which will initially house four rabbits, four guinea pigs, a tortoise and six hens.

The school, which takes pupils from age four to 18, wants to set up the farm beside its vegetable allotment and is asking for help from anyone with specialist skills.

The school has already calculated the costs involved in paying for hutches, food, bedding and vaccinations, as well as for storage and articles such as aprons and brooms. Several nearby businesses have offered to help, and risk assessments have been carried out by Hertfordshire County Council.

Rachel Kirk, vice principal of the school, said: "There are countless examples where the impact of animals has been clear, particularly working with children at times of need or vulnerability."

"Having the farm as part of our community could reinforce and bring alive our values, including responsibility, compassion, patience, kindness."

To make a donation, visit donatemyschool.com/simon-balle-all-through-school-2398



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LOCAL NEWS

News from HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL



Children and families can participate in a Christmas Book Town Centre Trail this Christmas, running through the period of the school holidays.

The trail, organised by Hertford Town Council, runs from Saturday, December 19 until Saturday, January 9 and is free of charge for everyone to enjoy.

Christmas book covers featuring Christmas tales will be displayed in 20 different Hertford retailers.

To take part in the trail, families should visit Hertford Town and Tourist Information Centre, located in The Wash opposite Hertford Theatre, to pick up a trail map from the week the trail starts. The trail map will also be available for collection from the castle gates and available online at www.gohertford.co.uk

Children will need to match the shop with the Christmas book that is displayed in the window, in a minimum of 15 of the 20 businesses taking part around the town.

Once they have completed the trail, they will be able to return to the Town and Tourist Information Centre and submit the completed form into the red letter box (in the shop) for a chance to win a £30, £20 or £10 gift voucher to spend at a Hertford retailer.

The themed trail has been created to encourage local residents and visitors to explore and discover the broad range of independent and national retailers within the county town.

Books that are featured in the trail are available to borrow from Hertford Library, and selected books are available to purchase from Leaf Café and WHSmith in Hertford.

Chairman of Hertford Town Council's Development and Leisure Committee, councillor Jane Sartin, said: "The Christmas Book Trail will provide a fun activity in Hertford for children over the Christmas period, and will be a great reminder for shoppers of the wealth of Christmas books available to read over the coming weeks."



Photo credit: Cynthia Stroud, Leamy Kohm

New venture for entrepreneur

An award-winning wedding cake maker started a food parcel charity at the start of lockdown and is now delivering nearly 200,000 parcels each month to 2,300 families from her home in Bengeo.

Mother of two, Cynthia Stroud, is the brains behind both the Pretty Gorgeous Cake Company and Pretty Gorgeous Jams, which she started in May.

Cynthia founded the charity Jedidiah (meaning 'beloved of the Lord'), initially using her own money, with subsequent funding from Herts County Council, when COVID-19 lockdown meant she had no weddings to bake for.

What began as a project to help feed 100 families

kept growing, and now Cynthia, with help from 96 volunteers, provides parcels across East Herts, including to families with children at nine schools in Hertford alone.

"We want families who are struggling to know that someone is thinking about you, and we don't want your cupboard to be bare," said Cynthia.

The charity does not accept food donations but makes up parcels of store cupboard staples, from which people can make their own meals, and delivers them to qualifying families twice a month.

To make a financial donation to Jedidiah, visit jedidiah.org.uk



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Hope for the homeless



People in East Herts who need temporary accommodation following a crisis in their lives may now be helped by the opening of 13 self-contained flats and studios in the Hertford and Ware area, enabling them to stay close to their community, schools and family members.

A further six flats will be made available for rough sleepers, thanks to a government grant of £421,000 made to East Herts District Council (EHDC).

With a difficult economic climate and high house prices, the number of people turning to EHDC in emergencies is increasing.

Until now, the council has had to house people in flats near Bishop's Stortford or in B&B hotels outside the district while they wait for permanent accommodation, often disrupting people's social support and children's education.

Peter Boylan, EHDC executive member for housing, said that the new properties will "help people to get back on their feet and find a more settled and better future".

Mr Boylan said: "Helping people to keep the support of their existing networks, whether schools, their doctor's surgery, family, friends or their workplace, is so important when someone's having to deal with homelessness."

For more information about temporary accommodation, email Customer.services@eastherts.gov.uk

know some people are still confused by the guidance so our COVID marshals will be out talking to people and reminding them how they can best protect themselves, their loved ones and our whole community by maintaining social distancing, wearing face coverings and washing our hands."

COVID marshals will wear hi-vis EHDC COVID Support tabards and will report to the police and environmental health officers.

Cllr Haysey said: "It is important we follow the guidance to stop the virus spreading, but if you do need to go out, please keep yourself informed and follow the rules."

Police appeal for information after teen assaulted

Police are calling for witnesses and information after a 17-year-old man had his eye lacerated during an incident on Hartham Common at around 5.45pm on Sunday, November 1.

The victim was with friends near the tennis courts when they were approached by a large group of unknown males.

After a verbal argument, the victim was chased and struck with an unknown object, which wounded him under his right eye.

The suspect is described as wearing a black body warmer, a dark blue or black North Face tracksuit and black VaporMax sport trainers.

He was with a group of some 15 males, who were all wearing face masks or balaclavas, with some riding electric scooters.

Investigating officer PC Sue Loughran said: "I am appealing for anyone who saw what happened or who may have seen the group in the area to please get in touch.

"Any information at all may assist us."

Anyone with information is asked to email sue.loughran@herts.pnn.police.uk or to call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.



Town to pilot COVID marshals scheme

Hertford is piloting a scheme by East Herts District Council (EHDC) to deploy COVID marshals in town centres.

The role of the marshals, who are supplied by a security firm, is to ensure that individuals and businesses understand and comply with COVID rules.

Councillor Linda Haysey, leader of EHDC, said: "We





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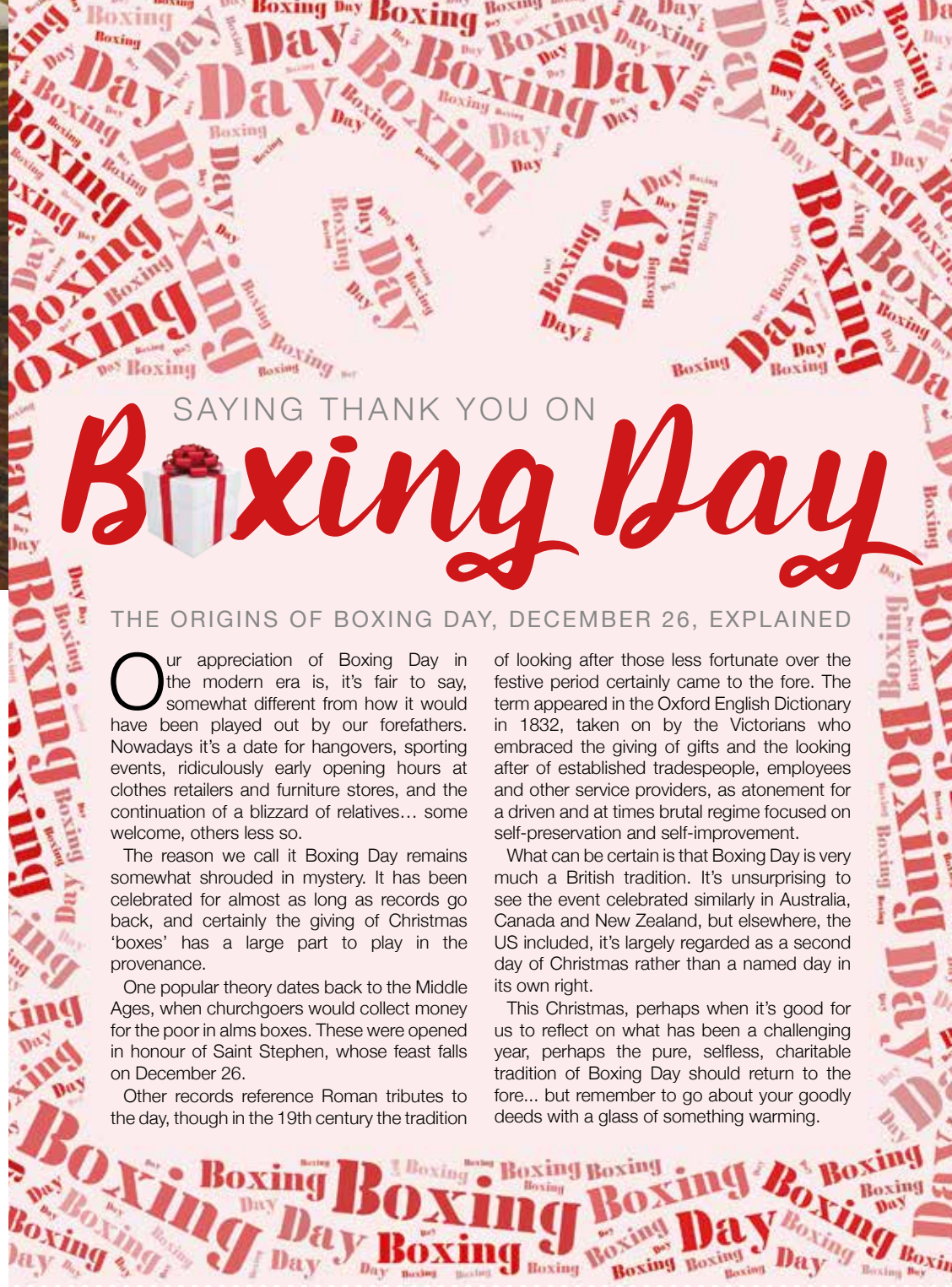
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THE ORIGINS OF BOXING DAY, DECEMBER 26, EXPLAINED

Our appreciation of Boxing Day in the modern era is, it's fair to say, somewhat different from how it would have been played out by our forefathers. Nowadays it's a date for hangovers, sporting events, ridiculously early opening hours at clothes retailers and furniture stores, and the continuation of a blizzard of relatives... some welcome, others less so.

The reason we call it Boxing Day remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. It has been celebrated for almost as long as records go back, and certainly the giving of Christmas 'boxes' has a large part to play in the provenance.

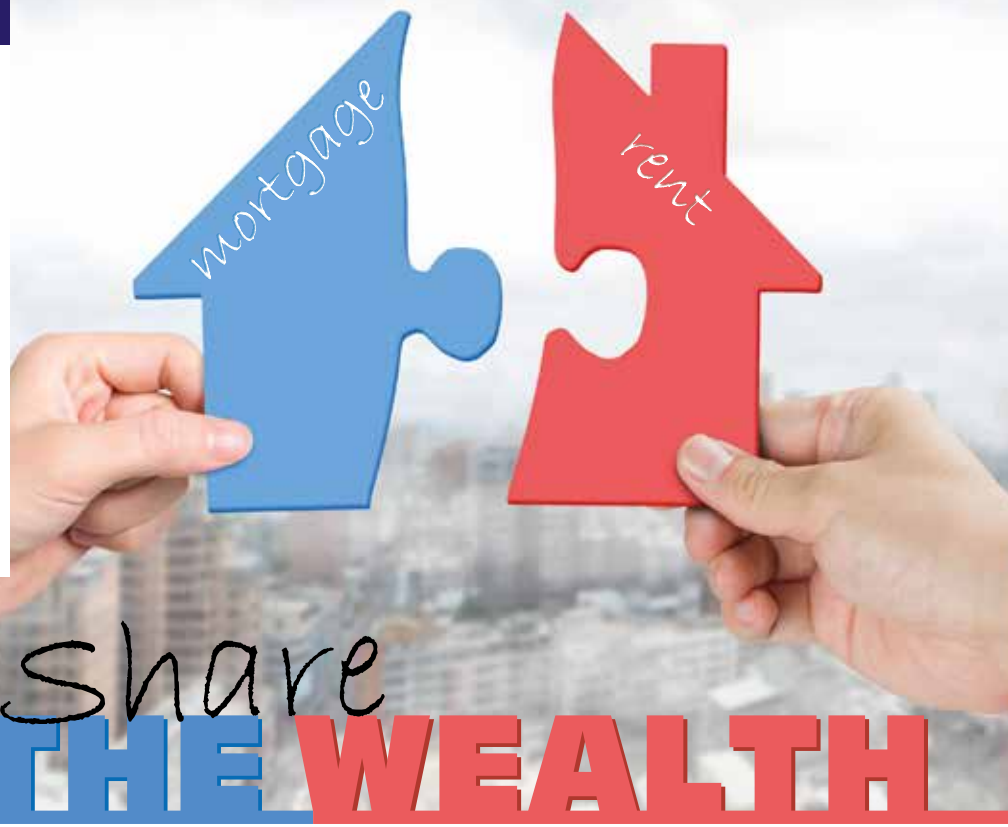
One popular theory dates back to the Middle Ages, when churchgoers would collect money for the poor in alms boxes. These were opened in honour of Saint Stephen, whose feast falls on December 26.

Other records reference Roman tributes to the day, though in the 19th century the tradition

of looking after those less fortunate over the festive period certainly came to the fore. The term appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1832, taken on by the Victorians who embraced the giving of gifts and the looking after of established tradespeople, employees and other service providers, as atonement for a driven and at times brutal regime focused on self-preservation and self-improvement.

What can be certain is that Boxing Day is very much a British tradition. It's unsurprising to see the event celebrated similarly in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, but elsewhere, the US included, it's largely regarded as a second day of Christmas rather than a named day in its own right.

This Christmas, perhaps when it's good for us to reflect on what has been a challenging year, perhaps the pure, selfless, charitable tradition of Boxing Day should return to the fore... but remember to go about your goodly deeds with a glass of something warming.



Why the Help to Buy: Shared Ownership continues to create homes out of houses

For all its speculation, criticism and conjecture, the housing market represents one of the most stable industries in the UK. Only amid the perils of negative equity in the 1990s did the bricks and mortar of people's fortunes really begin to crumble; yet for large periods outside that time, investment in property has largely been deemed a safe one.

Of course, as a result of this, the market has become much more competitive, and the growing difficulty with which first-time buyers, in particular, are able to get on board means the government's introduction of Help to Buy schemes has gone a long way to guiding people along the footpath to realising those dreams.

The concept is simple – if you cannot afford the mortgage on what would be 100 per cent of a home, Help to Buy: Shared Ownership will allow you to buy a share of the property, which could be anywhere between 25 and 75 per cent of its value.

You would effectively pay rent on the remaining share. This means the initial deposit is smaller and mortgage finance more accessible. On the plus side, owners still enjoy a decent proportion of true investment and, along with that, benefit from rises in market price over time.

The criteria to get involved is sensible. Those applying need to earn less than £80,000/year (£90,000/year in London). Furthermore, you would need to be a first-time buyer, or have owned before while being unable to buy now; or perhaps are in an existing shared ownership arrangement and are looking to move.

Variations to the rules exist for the over-55s and disabled applicants, but for the most part the success of the scheme, which is being repackaged and relaunched for 2021, is evident in the millions of people who have stepped onto the property ladder since its launch four decades ago.



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They're working with the top 20 lenders/banks in the UK to provide attractive finance rates, to terminate or settle existing contracts in place of agile work agreements due to customer volume decreases and will now offer options to decrease costs, as well as make pay as you go terms available.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Office Fox is their ability to offer bespoke solutions to each individual client – they can review your contracts and see exactly what's going to suit you.

The vast majority of businesses are seeing a significant decrease in volume on telephony contracts, mailing, photocopiers and more. As a consequence, business owners are paying for equipment which is sitting dormant, with fixed contracts in place and seemingly no way out of paying them.



This is an asset which extends to all of Office Fox's services. They describe themselves as 'vender agnostic', meaning they aren't tied to any one manufacturer – this gives them the ability to scan the market openly for each client without being pigeonholed and find them the solutions which fit their individual needs.

Luckily, Office Fox know exactly how to bring down your needless costs for the duration of lockdown – however long it lasts.

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TRAVEL

Walk This way



SOME OF THE BEST PLACES TO VISIT FOR WALKING HOLIDAYS IN THE UK

In troubled times, there's nothing nicer than putting on a pair of sturdy walking boots and disappearing off into the yonder; and the UK has some of the most stunning scenery ready to be explored.

Here are five very different walking holidays that will help you blow away the cobwebs:

For art... Talk to the Welsh about Dylan Thomas and they may well point you around his home town of Laugharne, with spectacular views over the Taf Estuary. His *Poem in October* documents a walk he took on that very route, and now outdoors philosophers can do the same.

For wildlife and nature... The wilds of Cumbria offer spectacular views wherever you are, but head to Howgill Fells for a hike that brings you out at the highest waterfall in the UK. Peaceful, breathless and beautiful in every way, it's a wondrous place to relax.

For foodies... Cornwall's love of everything homely

and rustic extends through to its walks, with the route along the South West Coast Path greeting intrepid walkers with all manner of villages and enclaves. From five-star restaurants to cosy pubs and comfy cafés, fantastic food is around every corner.

For geology... When the Earth was created and rock types were being dished out, Dorset was clearly hogging space at the front of the queue, with the 27-mile route along the Jurassic coast from Weymouth to Swanage providing all manner of stunning ecological features, not least the spectacular Durdle Door.

For wild winter walks... If you're brave enough to venture out to the Highlands, then you'll find a variety of walks, low climbs and vistas that are simply unparalleled. With a backdrop of lochs, remote islands, wild forests and icy peaks, there is little clean-air inspiration Scotland cannot provide.



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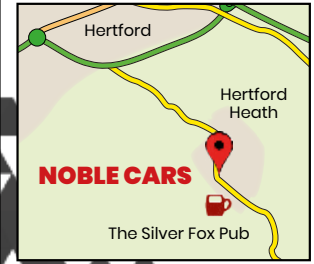


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BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

SHINING LIGHT ON GOOD HEADLAMP ALIGNMENT WHEN DRIVING ABROAD

Having just made the crossing to France and finding ourselves out on the expansive French motorways, many UK drivers would have experienced the strange sensation of a succession of drivers on the opposite carriageway flashing their lights frantically.

No, this isn't a friendly welcome from our continental neighbours, nor is it some kind of automobile backlash resulting from failed Brexit negotiations. Instead, what's happening is that you are blinding other road users with your incorrect headlamp alignment.

In the UK, headlamps are configured to shine to the left, towards the edges of the road and away from the middle. This is to guide motorists away from curbs and ditches, while preventing oncoming drivers from being blinded by our lights.

That means in France, or any country that drives on the right, that same light is actually being shone directly into drivers' faces.

With various advancements in headlamp

technology over the years, new cars are often fitted with a switch control that automatically redirects the headlamps for driving abroad. However, many cars still don't have this function, therefore it pays to know what to do when driving abroad, for both your own safety and that of others.

If manual headlamp realignment cannot be done from the control panel of your car, the most common solution is to buy a set of headlamp unit lenses (or glasses). These deflectors are attached and block out a small amount of your beam, thus keeping light away from other drivers.

These days, it's not a request that headlamps are configured properly, it's the law. 'Do it yourself' beam deflectors – the sort your dad might have made out of black sticky tape in the 1970s – are no longer legal, and deflectors must be operational as soon as you head off the ferry, even in daylight hours.

It's not worth taking the risk when driving abroad... be safe at all times.

FIRST DIVISION – DECEMBER 26, 1963

BLACKPOOL	1-5	CHELSEA
BURNLEY	6-1	MANCHESTER UNITED
FULHAM	10-1	IPSWICH TOWN
LEICESTER CITY	2-0	EVERTON
LIVERPOOL	6-1	STOKE CITY
NOTTINGHAM FOREST	3-3	SHEFFIELD UNITED
SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY	3-0	BOLTON WANDERERS
WEST BROM ALBION	4-4	TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR
WEST HAM UNITED	2-8	BLACKBURN ROVERS
WOLVES	3-3	ASTON VILLA

'tis the football SEASON TO BE JOLLY

BOXING DAY 1963 – WHEN FANTASY FOOTBALL BECAME REALITY

If there's one thing that's characterised the opening exchanges of the new Premier League season, then it's goals. It seems defence-minded football has been banished to the substitutes' bench and instead our teams are simply aiming to outscore each other.

Though even the likes of Harry Kane, Raheem Sterling, Mo Salah and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang will have to go some if they are to match the achievements of the rugged footballers of old who trotted out onto veritable mud baths of pitches on December 26, 1963.

They wouldn't have known it at the time, but these old-school soccer stars were about to take part in a day of festive football goal gluts, and an afternoon that's gone down in sporting folklore.

In total, 66 goals were scored across the 10 First Division matches. Six sides shared six goals as Chelsea triumphed 5-1 at Blackpool, while

Nottingham Forest and Sheffield United drew 3-3, as did Wolves and Aston Villa.

West Brom and Tottenham trumped that with a 4-4 draw at The Hawthorns, while both Liverpool and Burnley romped to 6-1 home wins, against Stoke City and Manchester United respectively.

Pity those poor fans at Filbert Street and Hillsborough who saw their Leicester City and Sheffield Wednesday sides win by relatively normal 2-0 and 3-0 scorelines (against champions Everton and Bolton Wanderers respectively).

But on a day on which it appears it wasn't just the supporters unable to shake off the large amount of Christmas Day merriment, Blackburn Rovers hit a magnificent eight away from home at West Ham United; and Fulham arguably snatched the ultimate plaudits from a festive flurry of worthy contenders with a magnificent 10 at home to poor Ipswich Town. Jürgen, Pep, Frank, José... over to you.

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PUZZLES & TRIVIA

PUZZLES

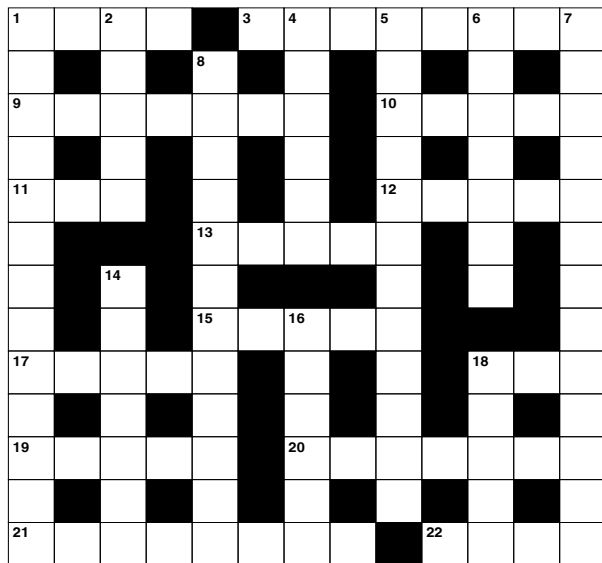
Answers can be found on the Contents Page 4

ACROSS

- 1. Set of playing cards (4)
- 3. Neck injury (8)
- 9. Genuine (7)
- 10. Kick out (5)
- 11. 17th Greek letter (3)
- 12. The beginning of an era (5)
- 13. Enclosed (5)
- 15. Bird sound (5)
- 17. Turned to ice (5)
- 18. Statute (3)
- 19. Exposes secret information (5)
- 20. Country whose capital is Reykjavik (7)
- 21. Longing (8)
- 22. Refuse to admit (4)

DOWN

- 1. Shamefully (13)
- 2. Showing a willingness to achieve results (3-2)
- 4. Doglike mammals (6)
- 5. Planned in advance (12)
- 6. Sanction (7)
- 7. Unenthusiastically (4-9)



- 8. Food shop (12)
- 14. Proportionately (3,4)
- 16. Banner or flag (6)
- 18. Lessen (5)

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Hummingbirds are the only birds that are able to fly backwards
- ▶ The short-horned lizard squirts blood from blood vessels around its eyes when defending itself. This is because the blood vessels rupture under pressure
- ▶ A giant panda will typically eat for around 12 hours a day
- ▶ Elephant ears help to keep the animals cool by radiating heat
- ▶ Young jaguars are blind at birth. They learn to hunt by living with their mother for two years or more
- ▶ Wolves can go for more than a week without eating
- ▶ A fox can communicate with other foxes by using its tail
- ▶ The bald eagle has a wingspan of around eight feet

SUDOKU

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



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