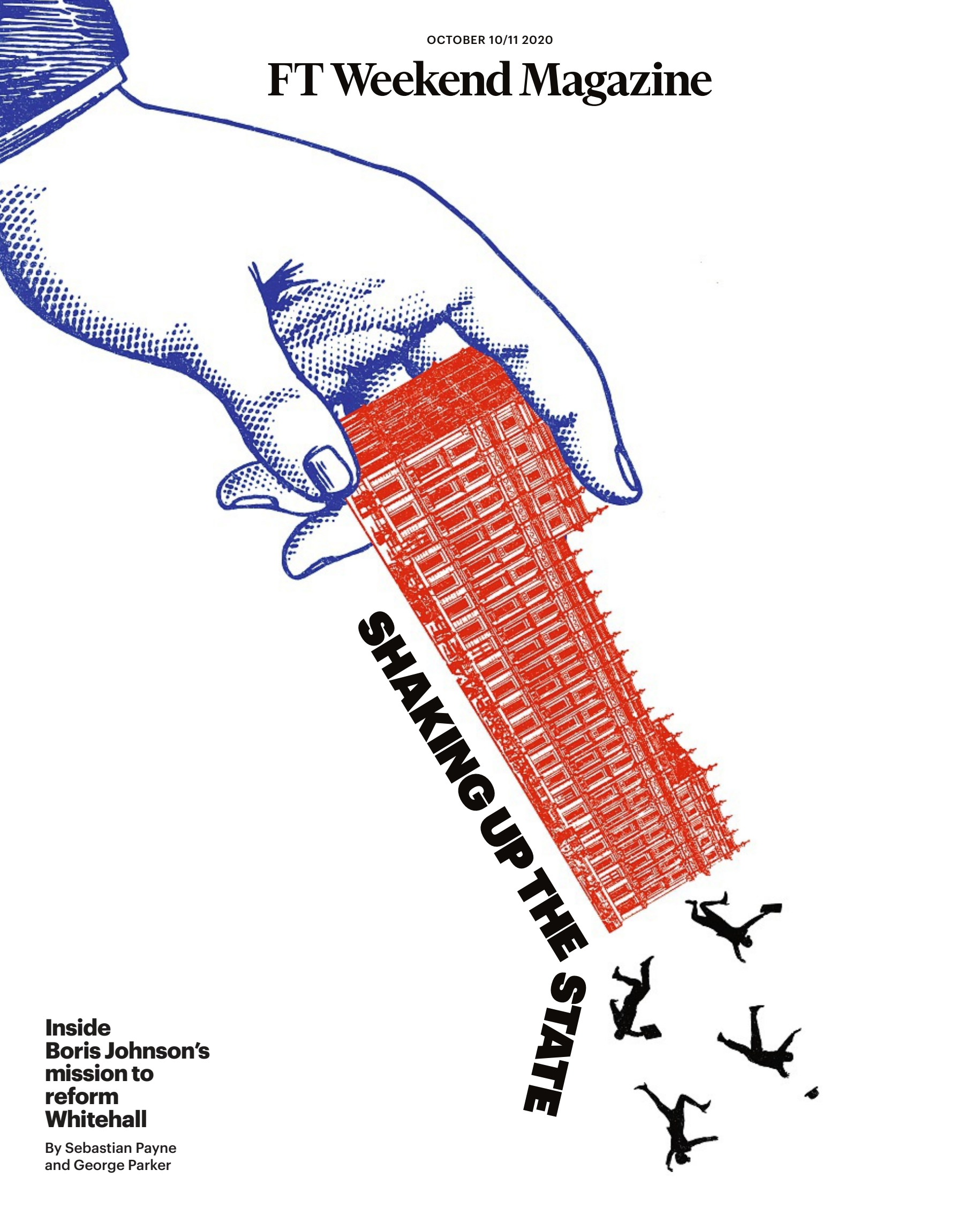


OCTOBER 10/11 2020

FT Weekend Magazine



SHAKING UP THE STATE

**Inside
Boris Johnson's
mission to
reform
Whitehall**

By Sebastian Payne
and George Parker

A photograph of a lion walking in profile across a savanna landscape. The lion is in the foreground, with its mane and body clearly visible. The background shows a vast, open plain with dry grass and a clear, bright blue sky. The lighting suggests it's either early morning or late afternoon, with a warm, golden glow.

Scott Dunn

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For more than 30,000 years, the Arctic has been home to indigenous peoples that have harnessed its scarce resources to create tools and beautiful art. *Leslie Hook* explores an exhibition on the region's rich history

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Asia's richest man has set his sights on creating a tech company to rival Alibaba and Netflix. *Benjamin Parkin* and *Anjali Raval* report on his progress so far

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Cover illustration by *Edmon de Haro*



KATE PETERS

'No part of an animal goes unused'

The art of the Arctic, p22



'You hear stories about the weddings and the choppers but... he is a very simple man'

The ambitions of Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest man, p30

'Social media gushed this was potentially the most exciting thing to happen in restaurants in years'

Noble Rot's takeover of the fabled Gay Hussar, p38



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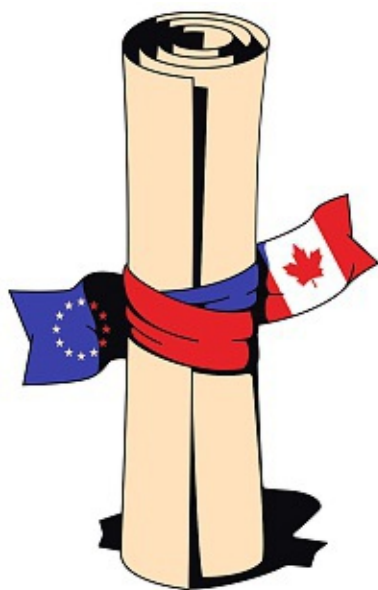
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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

UK and US face university challenge



Millions of teenagers are deciding where to go to university next autumn, and praying there will be a vaccine by then. As my own children veer into sight of that age, I've begun asking the question: "If you are 18, looking to study in English, where in the world should you go?"

The standard answer for decades has been: "The US or Britain." That remains true for a tiny elite. If you can get into one of the world's 20 or so highest-ranked universities, almost all of which are in the US or UK, do it. You can get an excellent education at Cambridge or Princeton. Even if you don't, others will think you did, so the brand name will help you through life. But outside the elite, the British-American preference no longer applies. You can now probably do better in continental Europe or Canada.

I was surprised to reach this conclusion because, like most people, I had based my preconceptions of universities on outdated memories of my own student days. About 30 years ago, I did an undergraduate degree in Britain, and studied in Germany and the US for a year each, while watching childhood friends from the Netherlands pass through Dutch universities. The advantages of British universities at the time were high staff-student ratios and frequently excellent staff. Only Oxbridge offered one-on-one tutorials, but almost all the rest had small classes, taught by academics recruited from around the Anglophone world. By contrast, my Dutch friends sat passively in huge lecture halls, while professors they hardly ever met held forth in Dutch. The language requirement restricted the teaching talent pool.

In Berlin, I saw little striving for excellence. Many German students back then spent a leisurely decade at university, often as a sort of hobby while they tended bars or drove taxis. Sitting in classes of 30 students felt like being back at school. In the US, standards were higher - reading lists regularly topped 1,000 pages a week - but classes were Germanic-sized.

A lot has changed since then. Once British universities began charging tuition fees (now capped at £9,250 a year), their incentive became to pile students high. Student numbers tripled from 1980 to 2010. Since staff numbers didn't triple, class sizes at many universities reached European levels. The world's top 100 universities for staff-student ratios now include no British institutions, according to Times Higher Education magazine. This autumn, despite coronavirus, British admissions appear to have hit a new record. The universities' need to pack in as many fee-paying students as possible even during a pandemic explains the outbreaks of coronavirus now rippling predictably through dozens of halls of residence. The UK's coming demographic bulge of 18-year-olds will probably keep student numbers rising for a few years yet.

"More will mean worse," warned novelist and academic Kingsley Amis in 1960. Aggregate rankings of British universities in the global QS league table have fallen for four years running. From next year, because of Brexit, new European students in England will pay higher fees. They may look elsewhere, along with thousands of European academics in Britain, especially once their universities lose EU research funding.

British universities will still be cheaper than American ones. The average cost of private four-year US colleges has reached \$50,000 a year, fees and residential expenses combined. A professor at a second-tier American university translated this for me: many parents are paying \$200,000 to fund a child's drinking habit. I refuse to do that.

'If you're 18 and looking to study in English, British and American universities are no longer the obvious choice'

The US and UK also have ever more restrictive visa systems, and a declining standard of classmate. American and British graduates have considerably lower average levels of numeracy and literacy than, say, Finns or Belgians. The UK is a rare country where literacy and numeracy have actually deteriorated, with 16- to 29-year-olds scoring worse than the generation above them, reported the OECD in 2016.

Luckily, ever more countries offer good degrees in English. Both Australia and Canada have recently overtaken the UK in numbers of international students. China, whose universities have growing reputations in the sciences, equalled the UK's total of nearly 500,000 international students last year. In continental Europe, the number of English-language bachelors' programmes jumped fiftyfold from 2009 to 2017.

European standards have risen since my day. Students can no longer hang around university for ever and, in English-language courses, the teaching talent pool is now global. The University of Copenhagen has a better staff-student ratio than any British institution. Admittedly, there still aren't many excellent European universities. But there are dozens of pretty good ones, located in wonderful cities, with unbeatable price-quality ratios. Even students from outside the EU get free tuition at Norwegian or some German public universities and pay just €2,770 a year in France. Once Americans cotton on, "degree tourism" will follow "medical tourism" into US parlance.

Students starting next autumn should also ask: who is more likely to have tamed the coronavirus by then, the US and UK or Denmark and Germany? The Anglo-American hegemony in higher education has come to seem inevitable, but it isn't. **FT**

.....
simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



INVENTORY ADEEL AKHTAR, ACTOR

‘I’m inherently political just in being a brown person in the industry’

Adeel Akhtar, 40, won a Leading Actor Bafta for his role in the 2016 BBC drama *Murdered by My Father*. He has also appeared in the films *Murder Mystery* and *Four Lions*, in the BBC adaptation of *Les Misérables* and in Channel 4’s *Utopia*, for which he was Bafta-nominated.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be a dustbin man. They used to ride on the back of the truck and it looked like so much fun.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work?

Cheltenham College. I boarded from quite a young age - 10 or 11. I was one of just a few brown kids there. When I went to university, I realised that the world was full of different people. My dad, quite a strict Asian fellow, pushed me into law. I finished my law degree - then I ran away to join the circus. My girlfriend at the time was auditioning for a place at the Actors Studio [Drama School] in New York. I went with her as her scene study partner. The Actors Studio offered me a place - and I just went.

Who was or still is your mentor?

It’s a pick and mix. You can be in front of somebody who’s a massive inspiration - you can hear an actor speak, or a politician say something. You can have a really incidental conversation with somebody and something they say, you remember years later.

How physically fit are you?

Moderately.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

I would gravitate towards talent. But it also feels like ambition is a gateway to people seeing your talent. I mean ambition for yourself - wanting to strive for a bit more.

How politically committed are you?

Even if I want to step away from the idea of having a political slant on things, since I’ve got a bit more attention as an actor, people are asking a lot more questions, and I’m asking a lot more questions of myself. I think I’m inherently political just in being a brown person in the industry.

What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?

A utility room with a massive washer and dryer.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

Our coffee machine. It’s the most expensive thing in our house.

In what place are you happiest?

Anywhere with [my wife] Lex and the kids.

What ambitions do you still have?

I’m living out all the things I wanted to be doing - and you discover what your other ambitions are when you’re working with people who enable you to look up. My ambition is to work with people who broaden my horizon.

What drives you on?

Knowing those people are out there - and that I am that person for other people too.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

What me and Lex have built together. When I first started acting, I wasn’t in work, it was a bit of a struggle - and now we’ve got a little house, we’ve got our kids.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Their inability to see their potential.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would he think?

Doing law, I felt a bit trapped by what I was doing and what I should be doing. He would think your true nature comes to the fore. It’s having faith that you will find your own path.

Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?

My flat cap that I bought from a vintage shop in New York. I had it for years and years and years, and I left it on a train. I’ve had loads of new hats since then. But that was the original hat.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

Holding the things that are important close to us.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

I don’t know.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

It depends on the day. I would give myself a very strong B-minus - six, maybe six and a half creeping up to seven. The bits that are missing are to do with what I think I should have done that day. **FT**

Interview by Hester Lacey.

Adeel Akhtar appears in “Enola Holmes”, available now on Netflix

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

How to hack a second lockdown

With more social restrictions looming, we are cramming in as many friends as possible before the next lockdown. We are going to the pub before they move last orders to 15 minutes before you arrive. Weekends have been filled with lunches, dinners and even a picnic in the rain as we said hello and goodbye to all those we haven't seen for months and now probably won't see again until Christmas, when, apparently, Covid is taking the day off.

The prime minister has assured us that Christmas will be an exception to the rules, which, presumably, means coronavirus is kicking back, having a glass of sherry, maybe tuning into the Queen's speech and the *Gavin & Stacey* reruns. In an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, Covid said it had worked hard all year and was looking forward to a break and spending time with its spores.

Anyway, we have been meeting up with all the gusto of a Republican party gathering at the White House - except for the hugging and refusal to wear masks. Mind you, I think we could all use more of that troupe of doctors that appears to give the daily bulletin on President Trump's condition. The choreography that must go into the Walter Reed military hospital presidential hoofers is quite something. "We're docs in DC, we're treating Potus; we're docs in DC, misleading voters."

OK, it's not exactly Bob Fosse but the arrival is sheer Broadway. The doors open and 10 medics, all in face masks and white coats with their names and qualifications stitched on, descend the steps before arraying themselves across the stage for the opening number. Admittedly, some of them are badly out of step. I doubt they'd ever get into a Cameron Mackintosh production but they've



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

got some serious shuffle going. After trooping down the steps, they fan out across the stage in a perfectly assembled coalition.

I digress. My point was that this time we are all getting ready for lockdown. The prime minister may have the new mantra of "hands, face, space" but we know the real message is "haircut, Ocado, loo roll". I am not getting caught again having to cut my hair with clippers. The omens are not good. The delivery slots are booking up further ahead and there is a definite shortage of halibut. The toilet paper has begun to reappear in the spare room. I don't really understand this. Dried pasta at least had some logic to it. But are armed mobs really going to batter down your door for a nine-pack of Velvet?

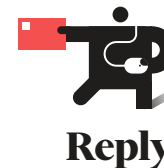
There's even a run on patio heaters. The one we bought is now selling for twice what we paid on Amazon, so we may just stick it on eBay and wrap up warm. We only bought it to supplement the chiminea. Oh yeah, there's no respite for the environment this time round. Seriously, have you ever used a chiminea? You've practically got to burn down Epping Forest just to stay warm through a two-course meal.

Some of the first lockdown novelties such as Zoom quizzes are going to have to go but we are taking soundings on the next boxset binges, not that this is always reliable. People keep telling me to watch *Schitt's Creek*. I've resisted because the first few episodes were as screamingly unfunny as the title suggested but, apparently, I should stick with it because it gets quite good by the third series and there's a really funny joke in season five.

It's 10 years since the launch of Instagram, so maybe we can just spend the time at home perfecting our posing, though the hard part is learning how to carry the Photoshopped version of our lives into the real world.

Social restrictions are going to be harder this time. It is colder, darker and there won't be as much competition for space on the beach. But at least we know what we are in for. We have a world-beating app, a world-beating track-and-trace system, only five and a half months till spring and a day off at Christmas. Now if we could just get that dancing doctors boxset.

.....
robert.shrimsley@ft.com
 @robertshrimsley



Re "Why US evangelicals are flocking to Trump" (October 3/4). It has been clear for at least 30 years that what is now described as "evangelical" in the US is a cultural movement and has nothing to do with Christianity. They have created a new religion based on ill-educated Americans' prejudices, fears and worship of materialism. **Do you think that's wise sir** via *FT.com*

@NikoEcon October 1
Tom Burgis's 'Silent Witnesses' via @FT reads like a thriller but, sadly, it seems to be quite factual about the murky business of mining in sub-Saharan Africa

.....
Tim Harford's column asks: "Is 47.2 our unhappiest age?" (October 3/4). In your forties, you realise you will never achieve all the things you dreamt of in your youth. In your fifties, you realise that it doesn't matter. That is why 55-year-olds are happier than 47.2-year-olds. **Tom1958** via *FT.com*

Thanks to Honey & Co for their "freezer-friendly recipes" (October 3/4). They are fantastically comforting and useful - just like a big hug. I love the idea of a cookie emergency. There is one baking in the oven at the moment. **Verity** via *FT.com*

Re Simon Kuper's column ("Why Europeans no longer dream of America", October 3/4). Having been in and out of the US for 35 years, including periods of living there, I have long felt that the country had deep problems. But we all glossed over the issues, because that's where the money was. Trump and Covid have just exposed problems that were always there in plain sight - guns, aggression, greed, the cost of health and education, lack of sense of community, police brutality and the nonsense of American exceptionalism. **Critical observer** via *FT.com*

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Quiz answers The link was pets 1. Horsepower 2. Pony Express 3. Reservoir Dogs 4. Canary Islands 5. Flaubert's Parrot 7. Cat Stevens 8. "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men" 9. Tortoise 10. When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit **Picture quiz** Amal Clooney + Fi Glover = Amalfi

A different perspective

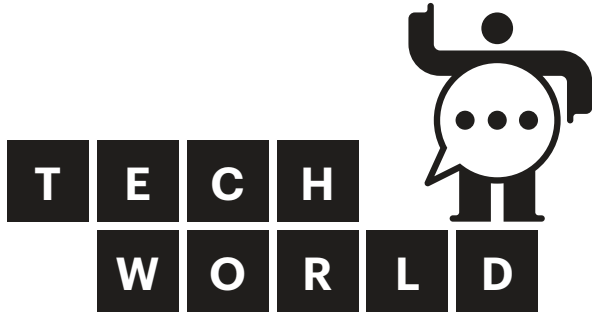
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BY HANNAH MURPHY IN SAN FRANCISCO

How Facebook allowed history to repeat itself

In May, Facebook casually invited me to join a conspiracy cult that believes the world is controlled by a Satan-worshipping, baby-eating, deep-state coterie and can only be saved by US president Donald Trump.

“Join groups to connect with people who share your interests,” the social media network implored in a recommendation email. Below was a suggestion that I become part of a 135,000-strong Facebook group called “QAnon News & Updates - Intel drops, breadcrumbs, & the war against the Cabal”.

QAnon is an outlandish far-right conspiracy theory; in essence, an anonymous individual “Q” is drip-feeding believers “classified” information about Trump’s fight against a diabolical collective of Democrats and business elites. As QAnon has ballooned, it has taken on menacing undertones: followers, calling themselves “digital soldiers”, are encouraged to take an oath to “defend” the US constitution. Last year, the FBI labelled fringe political conspiracies, QAnon included, a domestic extremist terror threat.

But in 2020 it has metastasised from the fringes of internet culture to a mainstream phenomenon - Trump himself has publicly praised the group for its support - and has become a topic of consternation for observers of the presidential election, now less than a month away. That is a problem for Facebook and for the US.

What is particularly jarring is that this is history repeating itself: once again, short-sightedness from Silicon Valley has allowed extremist thinking to flourish.



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

In 2018, former YouTube staffer Guillaume Chaslot criticised the video site’s recommendations algorithm for pushing some users down a conspiracy-theory rabbit hole. Google-owned YouTube’s recommendations generate 70 per cent of views on the video platform. They have been crafted to keep you engaged for as long as possible, allowing more opportunity to serve advertising. This could mean repeatedly showing you similar content, Chaslot argued, deepening existing biases you might have. These are blind spots in the business model. The company promised in 2019 to do more to downrank the biggest conspiracy theories, though critics say it is yet to convincingly solve the problem.

So what had warranted Facebook’s QAnon advances towards me? The email was linked

‘Companies like Facebook pride themselves on delivering the future. But they don’t seem to be able to escape their past, which dangerously affects our present’

to my work Facebook page, which I use to monitor posts and live streams from Mark Zuckerberg and other Facebook executives. According to my search history, I had looked up the phrase “QAnon” several days earlier, likely triggering its recommendations algorithm.

By design, Facebook’s algorithms seem no less toxic and stubborn today than YouTube’s back then. Permitting dangerous theories to circulate is one thing, but actively contributing to their proliferation is quite another.

Internal Facebook research in 2016 found that 64 per cent of new members of extremist groups had joined due to its recommendation tools. Its QAnon community grew to more than four million followers and members by August, up 34 per cent from about three million in June, according to The Guardian.

Facebook has since made moves to clamp down on QAnon. Last month, it announced plans to remove any pages discussing violence, but this week it said it would cull QAnon groups altogether.

Still, that it was three years after the theory was born before Facebook took action is alarming, particularly since Zuckerberg has announced a shift from an open friends-focused social network towards hosting more walled-off, private interest-based groups.

There is no denying such groups pose unique challenges. Flagging and taking down foreign terrorist groups such as Isis is a fairly unambiguous exercise. But how does one rank conspiracy theories? Can an algorithm assess where collective paranoia ends and a more violent conspiracy theory begins - and what is the appropriate response if it can?

The irony is that companies like Facebook pride themselves on innovating and delivering the future. But they don’t seem to be able to escape their past, which dangerously affects our present.

With deep pockets, Facebook should have the expertise for fiercer monitoring of its public and private groups and its recommendations algorithms and a lower bar for downranking questionable conspiracy theory content - to catch, rather than help create, the next QAnon. Perhaps tech groups themselves need to be paranoid about the unintended consequences of their business model. Otherwise, in elections to come, we’re going to see history repeating itself. 

Hannah Murphy is an FT technology correspondent



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COVID-19 in the UK hasn't been quite as polarised as Brexit or the political landscape of the United States. But it is polarised enough. At one extreme are the zero-Covid advocates; at the other, the lockdown sceptics. Who is right?

Some lockdown sceptics have advanced a variety of dishonest or deluded views over the course of the pandemic. Months ago, one correspondent wrote to assure me that the infection fatality rate was just one in 2,000. This implies 33,500 deaths if the whole UK population was infected. We have suffered 67,500 excess deaths; am I to conclude that we have all had the virus twice? Then, in what now looks like a line from a Shakespearean tragedy, there is Donald Trump's early declaration: "One day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear."

But there is an honest argument against lockdowns - namely that while the disease is dangerous, the lockdown cure is worse. The virus has the power to kill many more people than died in the first wave. Yet in England and Wales, the vast majority of those who have died were 65 or over, with two-thirds of them aged 75 or over.

The honest lockdown sceptic asks, is it wise or fair to impose radical limits on the freedom of all with no apparent end in sight? Thousands of lives are being saved - but millions of young people are seeing their prospects sacrificed. Is their sacrifice worthwhile?

The zero-Covid position reaches the opposite conclusion from the same starting point: since there will be no end to the suffering as long as the virus is circulating, the answer is to eliminate the virus in the UK and Ireland. We are island nations, like New Zealand. If community transmission can be stopped, then border controls - plus contact tracing for the occasional outbreak - can keep the virus out.

The most prominent British advocates of the zero-Covid approach are the scientists calling themselves "Independent Sage". In July, they explained that the first step would be to apply lockdowns until we reached "control", defined as one new case per million people per day. Thereafter, a contact-tracing system, plus support for people in isolation, would eliminate the virus on these shores.

Both sides of this debate hold out tempting rewards if only we are willing to suffer now. But both are mistaken. Zero-Covid looks prohibitively costly for European



TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER
ECONOMIST



Zero-Covid v lockdown sceptics. Who's right?

countries. A relentless lockdown would be needed even to reach the "control" step, with no guarantee against backsliding.

One example of "control" listed by Independent Sage was Germany, but it has never met their definition. It has rarely averaged below five cases per million people per day and is currently at more than 20. South Korea did reach the "control level" for months but the virus spiked again. Elimination seems endlessly elusive.

As for the lockdown sceptics, we should not pretend that we could simply tough out a rough couple of months. If the virus spread uncontrolled, tens of millions would catch it and several hundred thousand people would die.

Far more likely is that as the virus smouldered and the deaths mounted, many people would retreat from public spaces out of justifiable fear for themselves and their loved ones. The struggle would go on for many months. I would not give much for the chances of reviving tourism, cinemas or the West End.

Sweden, darling of the sceptics, has done important things right - notably, kept schools open for younger pupils. It has preserved individual freedoms, which is no

small matter. But it has suffered vastly more deaths than its Nordic neighbours for no discernible economic benefit. It is hardly a slam-dunk case against lockdowns.

In summary: zero-Covid looks like a prohibitively expensive quest for a fleeting goal. But the death toll and endless grind of damn-the-consequences reopening looks equally unacceptable, and it is telling that many lockdown sceptics have been unwilling to be frank about the true dangers of the virus.

Is there no answer? Of course there is. It lies not in the extreme ends of the debate, but in the tedious, complex business of basic public health. Lockdowns can work if they allow a properly run contact-tracing programme to take over.

Consider Germany. It slowed the first wave by establishing a test-and-trace capacity quickly. The German lockdown thus came much earlier on the epidemic curve, saving many lives but also ensuring that the country could reopen after just six weeks - despite being nowhere near Independent Sage's definition of "control".

Since then, Germany has learnt to live with the virus as a constant yet contained threat. The secret is no secret: lockdown suppressed

'In Germany, lockdown suppressed the virus enough to allow contact tracing, mask-wearing and general vigilance to take over'

the virus enough to allow contact tracing, mask wearing and general vigilance to take over. In July, at a time when the British were still emerging from their homes, blinking in the sunlight, I visited Bavaria. Masks and sanitiser were everywhere, but it was thriving.

The UK had the same opportunity but we are squandering it. Our contact-tracing system was slow to grind into action, our testing capacity was overwhelmed by the predictable surge in demand as schools reopened and, most recently, a technical error led to many thousands of positive test results not entering the contact-tracing system promptly.

Forget the clash of grand ideas, of Sweden versus New Zealand. Just stop bungling the basics. It is not much of a slogan. But it might just be a solution. **FT**

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Tim Harford's new book is
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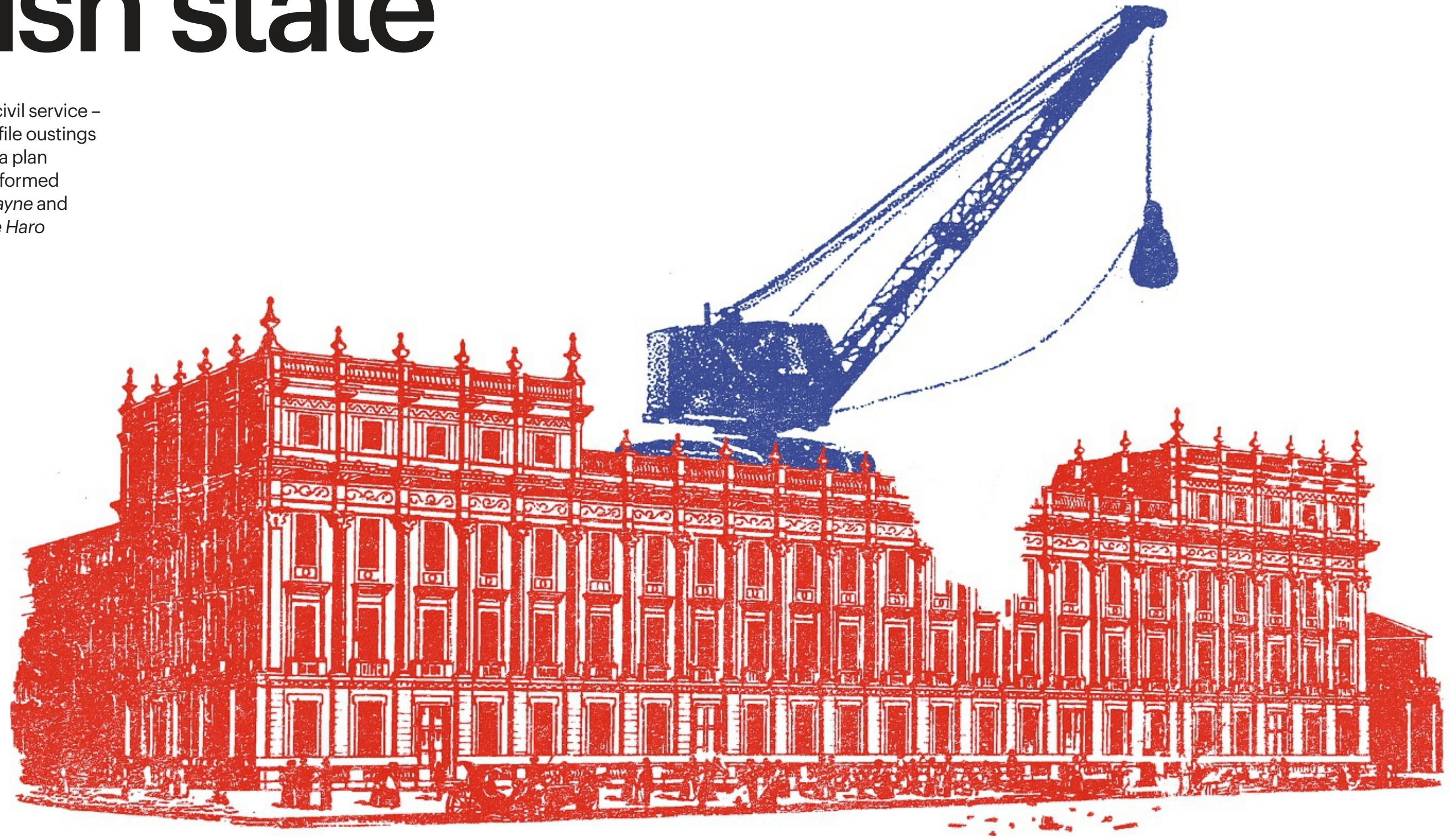


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The smashing of the British state

Boris Johnson's next mission – to shake up the civil service – is well under way, following a series of high-profile oustings and the hiring of a new head. But is there really a plan for what happens next? And can the state be reformed without bringing down the house? *Sebastian Payne and George Parker* report. Illustrations by *Edmon de Haro*





It was a telephone call that tiptoed along one of the most delicate lines of the British constitution. Last month, Boris Johnson picked up the phone to ask Prince William whether he could poach one of his most senior courtiers, Simon Case, to be the new head of the civil service. The 41-year-old had been loaned to Downing Street to assist with the coronavirus pandemic - embedding himself as a key member of the Johnson team - but was expected to return to work for the future king.

According to officials with knowledge of the conversation, Prince William at first resisted losing one of his most trusted confidants, due to his own reliance on Case. Eventually though, the prince acquiesced and - much to the surprise of Whitehall - Case was appointed as the PM's right-hand man. Little-known outside London's circles of influence, he is now one of the most powerful people in the land.

The fact that Johnson was willing to take on the future monarch when it came to hiring Case is evidence of the huge importance he pins on rebuilding the British state. After delivering Brexit, reforming the civil service is the next major mission for Dominic Cummings, Johnson's chief adviser and pugilistic disrupter, and Michael Gove, the Cabinet Office minister overseeing the agenda.

Cummings and Gove famously worked alongside Johnson to deliver Brexit in 2016 in the face of opposition from what they regarded as an out-of-touch, Europhile British establishment. The judiciary, the BBC, the House of Commons and the House of Lords have since felt the wrath of the Brexiters. Now it is Britain's vast civil service - an army of close to half-a-million state employees who exist to support the government of the day - that is in the line of fire.

In a series of speeches and blogs, Cummings has painted a picture of a state machine that is good at back-covering and clock-watching, but desperately poor at project management and - his own personal

fixation - the use of data. In 2019, he derided frequent claims from the establishment that the UK state is "a Rolls-Royce machine" as "blah, blah". "It promotes people who focus on being important, not getting important things done, and it ruthlessly weeds out people who are dissenters, who are maverick and who have a different point of view," he previously lamented in a 2014 lecture. "Almost no one is ever fired."

Johnson, who became prime minister last year, is now making up for lost time. In an inversion of the tradition that it is ministers who are accountable for mistakes, at least half a dozen senior civil servants have been forced out of their jobs following a year of coronavirus blunders and other policy errors by the government. Not a single minister has been sacked. The battle lines have been drawn.

In 1854, Charles Trevelyan, then head of the Treasury, wrote a paper calling for a professional service of permanent government appointed on merit, not patronage. Since then, the civil service has remained broadly free of party politics. This is the opposite of the US, where a new president ushers in a complete clearout of officials in Washington. In the UK, the new prime minister enters Number 10 for the first time to be clapped in by those who, only hours earlier, were working for his or her deadliest political rival.

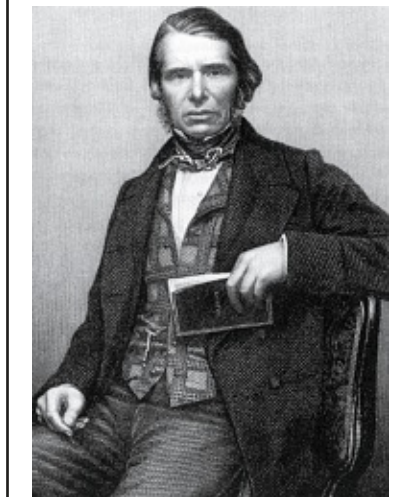
From prisons to schools to managing the economy, almost every aspect of daily life in the UK is influenced by the vast body of civil servants operating behind the scenes. It is these officials who carry out most of the actual work of running the country. With its bureaucratic palaces dotted along Whitehall - the central London thoroughfare from where an empire was once governed - the civil service has a strangely special hold on the British psyche: a small-c conservative organisation that embodies the best and worst of the country's instincts.

The enduring affection for the 1980s BBC sitcom *Yes Minister*, which lampoons the awkward relationship between politicians and the officials who really control events, reflects much of the public attitude towards the wiring of the state. Monty Python also sent up the stuffy conservatism of the civil service in its "Ministry of Silly Walks" sketch.

The service's love of tradition and resistance to change has created many enemies - mainly reforming politicians who find themselves infuriated by its inability to deliver their will. For Johnson, Cummings and Gove, smashing the status quo is essential. Rachel Wolf, who co-wrote the last Conservative manifesto, said in an opinion piece for *The Telegraph*: "The government understands that in five years it won't be judged on the way the civil service is designed but on whether it has delivered on its promises. Public sector reform is the route to getting there." ▶



Above, from left: UK prime minister Boris Johnson with his new 'right-hand man' Simon Case, health secretary Matt Hancock and Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove, last month. Right: Charles Trevelyan who, in 1854, while head of the Treasury, proposed a non-partisan 'professional service of permanent government'



'I don't think the civil service has sensed the scope of what is coming down the tracks'

Gabriel Milland, former civil servant



Former head of the civil service Mark Sedwill in Beijing, May 2019; he was ousted from the post this summer

They're justified in a lot of their frustrations. But I'm not convinced their solutions are well worked-out enough'

Bronwen Maddox, think-tank director

◀ **While the prime minister does not personally** seek a war on Whitehall, according to those who know him well, Cummings and Gove are determined to reform some of the UK's best-known and respected institutions. Their stated intent is to create a better system to support ministers and help transform a London-centric economy. Others fear this is merely a cover that will allow them to entrench power.

There are obvious parallels to Donald Trump's pledge to "drain the swamp" of Washington DC's political establishment. But whereas the US president primarily seeks to install politically aligned appointees to key roles, the agenda of Johnson and Cummings is more nuanced. Theodore Agnew, a minister at the Cabinet Office, the hub of the civil service, has warned the machine is "broken", with a "desperate shortage of practical skills" and too many "urban metropolitan thinkers". Lead reformers believe the state is still overly dominated by Remain-minded officials. As well as bringing in more Brexit supporters, their goal is to introduce more experts and scientists with experience of the private sector. "Cognitive diversity" is the new watchword in Downing Street.

Morale, however, is already low; the service is drained after years of austerity and successive efforts to reform it by closing, merging and opening new ministries. Bronwen Maddox, director of the Institute for Government think-tank, says: "They're right in a lot of the problems they've identified, they're justified in a lot of their frustrations with the civil service. But I'm not convinced their solutions are well worked-out enough."

For Cummings, shaking up the state is core to his political agenda. It is, he says, one of the main reasons he felt confident about leading the campaign to leave the EU. "The fact that [David] Cameron, [Jeremy] Heywood (the most powerful civil servant) et al did not understand many basic features of how the world works is why I and a few others gambled on the referendum," he explained in a blog last summer. "We knew that the systemic dysfunction of our institutions and the influence of grotesque incompetents provided an opportunity for extreme leverage."

Case's arrival has been widely taken as a sign that Johnson is serious about reform. He was not the front runner in the race to succeed Mark Sedwill, who was abruptly ousted as head of the civil service earlier in the summer after falling out with Downing Street. In the 15 years since Case left academia, he has worked primarily in security and intelligence, including in Northern Ireland, the 2012 Olympic Games and at GCHQ, and served as the private secretary to two prime ministers before heading to Kensington Palace in March 2018.

Unlike many previous cabinet secretaries, he has not run a major Whitehall department. Case did not apply for the top job, telling his friends that

it was "too soon". But the prime minister had other thoughts. He wanted Case to be "my Jeremy" - a reference to Heywood, who as cabinet secretary was an essential aide to several prime ministers before his death in 2018. Senior colleagues do not see Case as a natural revolutionary but do view him as "very political". In other words, well attuned to the desires of his masters.

Johnson chose Case "to put the cat among the pigeons", according to one well-placed official: "He's going to shake it all up." His arrival has been met with intrigue and constant analysis, not least because he is seen as Johnson's weapon to deliver reform. "Who is the defender? Who is going to watch our backs? We know they all sit in No 10 slagging off the civil service... will Simon defend us?" one senior Whitehall official asks.

Peter Hennessy, the historian and modern-day chronicler of Whitehall, oversaw Case's doctorate on British intelligence agencies of the cold war period. He believes his former student will be "a very good reformer" because "he understands crown service to his last fibre and he doesn't believe in a politicised civil service. He knows the history of it. If I was prime minister and I was in a hole, I'd want him next to me because he's just so good," Hennessy adds. "He's calm, he's clear, he's thoughtful and he can see the relationship between things. And he has one of those temperaments that doesn't rub up people the wrong way unnecessarily. He's not a softie, he's not a pushover."

Gus O'Donnell, who was cabinet secretary from 2005 to 2011, says Case is very conscious of having to prove himself. "Simon is self-aware enough to know that this has come too early for him," he says. "He has the huge advantage that he starts off with the full confidence of the PM. He's also pretty much unsackable. It's like Rishi [Sunak]: you can get rid of one chancellor but not two."

Senior civil servants, meanwhile, hope that Case will deliver reform without bringing down the house. Gabriel Milland, a former senior civil servant who has worked closely with Cummings, says the changes will be major. "The civil service imagined that the government's reforms would be limited to the kind they're used to in the past - such as the machine-of-government changes and changing of office plaques. I don't think they've sensed the scope of what is coming down the tracks."

The three strands to the government's reform mission are already starting to play out. First is the ousting of senior mandarins who are judged to be out of step with No 10's agenda - part of the *ancien régime*. Cummings has said that the idea of a permanent civil service is "for the history books".

Downing Street has not wasted time. In the most seismic shake-up of Whitehall in more than a decade, Sedwill is not the only departure. Six of the most senior officials running ministries have



From left: civil servants Alex Chisholm and Tom Scholar (shown here in October 2017 and January 2018) have formed a triumvirate with Case. Below: John Cleese in Monty Python's 'The Ministry of Silly Walks' sketch, which sends up Whitehall stuffiness

quit or been pushed out this year - the heads of the home, foreign, justice and education ministries, as well as the head of the government's legal service and the service's chief executive. Some, like Jonathan Slater at education, found themselves taking the rap for their minister's failings; others, like Simon McDonald at the Foreign Office, found their jobs had disappeared. Allies of the prime minister made it known they were "Remainers".

Some see this upheaval as a politicisation of the state, an effort to install Brexiters and those thought to be more pro-Conservative. Simon Fraser, who was a civil servant for 36 years and permanent secretary at the Foreign Office until 2015, says the changes are more about loyalty than bringing in new experts. "It's not that top civil service appointments are becoming political in a party sense as in America, but some of them have been politicised by ministers choosing people who are seen as loyalists while pushing others out." It is a shift that Fraser warns will damage the institution. "Of course civil servants must loyally implement government policy, but if this becomes a trend it will weaken the objectivity of the civil service, which is still one of the great institutions we have, and mean ministers get less forthright advice."

Helen Hayes, Labour's shadow Cabinet Office minister, warns that "distracted ministers have spent far too much time playing musical chairs" behind closed doors instead of focusing on the coronavirus pandemic. "More troubling than the unacceptably high turnover of senior staff or incompetent management of the civil service by this government is their lack of transparency and accountability around reform," she says. "Any competent government would be clear and transparent on their aims and approach to civil service reform, not trying to shroud them in mystery."

But those close to Downing Street point out that the introduction of fixed terms for permanent secretaries of departments by the 2010-15 coalition government has naturally led to higher turnover. One well-placed Tory remarks: "I'm cynical about how any of this is going against the grain of the last 20 years. It's evolution not revolution."

Case appreciates that further senior departures will unsettle the whole civil service - and that he needs to shore up his own position. He has already formed a triumvirate with the more seasoned Tom Scholar, permanent secretary at the Treasury, and Alex Chisholm, the civil service chief operating officer. "Simon knows he has to prove he's not just a No 10 toady, hence why he's teamed up with Scholar and Chisholm to secure his position," one Whitehall insider says. "He wants to work with reformers but knows he needs to protect civil servants."

Scholar, in particular, has reason to be relieved at this new partnership. In February, he appeared on a "shitlist" of civil servants leaked by Downing Street - seen as part of an anti-Brexit mandarinate

that the PM's team wanted out. But the Treasury's role in moving swiftly as coronavirus shut down the economy over the past few months has won it new fans in No 10. "Tom Scholar is central," one official notes. "In a different world, he would be cabinet secretary."

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he second item on the reform agenda is more gradual: an effort to boost recruitment and skills. A better civil service, in the eyes of ministers, is essential for a better country. Its failings have been

exposed by the coronavirus crisis, where Johnson found that pulling the levers of power did not result in immediate action. The foundation for addressing this is in a lecture given by Michael Gove earlier this summer at the Ditchley Foundation, a foreign policy think-tank. In it he warned that "the structures, ambitions and priorities of the government machine need to change if real reform is to be implemented and to endure".

The sweeping lecture stated that more civil servants should be moved out of London to "reflect the full diversity of our United Kingdom". Gove went on to call for "a broader and deeper pool of decision makers", particularly those who better understand why the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016. "Westminster and Whitehall can become a looking-glass world. Government departments recruit in their own image, are influenced by the think-tanks and lobbyists who breathe the same London air and are socially rooted in assumptions which are inescapably metropolitan."

How these lofty principles translate into reforms will become clear in a policy paper due in the next couple of months. According to government insiders who have worked on it, there is a great focus on people. "There's an emphasis on experts; the need to be more representative of the UK as a whole; and a need for more diversity," says one.

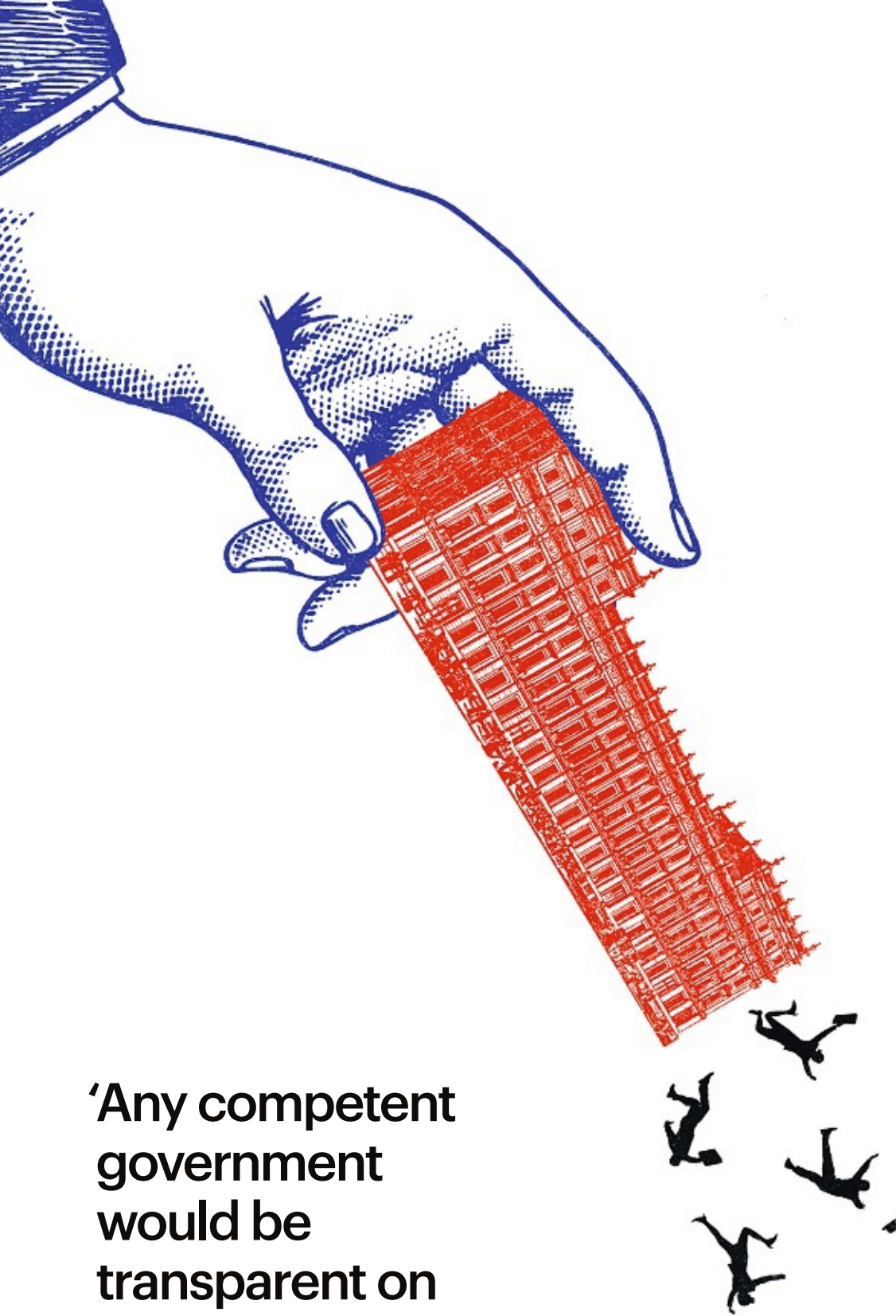
But while most civil servants tend to see diversity through the lens of race and sex, key political figures are focused on diversity of opinions. "Downing Street has a view that there's an obsession with Whitehall's approach to the diversity agenda that spills over into politics... the way civil servants have handled Black Lives Matter for example," one government insider says. "Nobody is in favour of racial discrimination but there's a sense staff are crossing the line into political action under the cover of diversity."

Another insider agrees this will be part of the reforms. "In the middle of the pandemic, civil servants were fussing ▶

'There is a view that the civil service's mindset at the top is ill at ease with the one of this government'

Paul Goodman, editor of ConservativeHome





'Any competent government would be transparent on their approach to civil service reform, not trying to shroud it [in] mystery'

Helen Hayes, shadow Cabinet Office minister

◀ about diversity and inclusion workshops instead of looking at why black people were dying in bigger numbers. No 10 wants that to change.”

Cummings has, however, already been embarrassed by missteps in these areas. After last year's election, he made a call for “weirdos and misfits” to apply for jobs at No 10. Two of his appointments backfired: Andrew Sabisky quit as a Downing Street contractor after a series of controversial comments were uncovered that were alleged to be racist and promote eugenics. Will O'Shea left after writing online comments that suggested police use live rounds on protesters. Neither has set back Cummings' yearning for change.

Gove wants to empower ministerial offices, giving them more policy heft and better access to data - something Cummings has attempted to do by building a “Nasa-style mission control centre” in the Cabinet Office building. “The white paper argues that ministerial offices need boosting. There is a case for every secretary of state having their own mission control,” says one mandarin.

During the coronavirus crisis, it became apparent to ministers and officials alike that Whitehall's use of technology is woefully ill-prepared for both a pandemic and the modern age. “There were days when pulling coronavirus data out of Public Health England was like pulling teeth,” says one person present in the meetings. “We were using whiteboards and calculators to tally the positive tests and death numbers. It was a total farce.” Data and digital is a “key weakness and an opportunity for reform”, particularly at the Government Digital Service. “GDS was world-leading 10 years ago. It still has a lot of expertise but needs a reboot for the next decade,” another insider says.

Overall, the mission is to shake up the stuffy traditions of Whitehall - encapsulated by *Yes Minister's* Sir Humphrey Appleby, who would sinuously seek to thwart whatever politician he was nominally serving. One supporter of the reforms says it is about “inculcating a more experimental, more playful culture that is less scared of failure”. Johnson's inclination to sack civil servants rather than ministers when things go wrong is, however, not exactly an invitation to officials to take risks.

The Johnson government is also keen to tackle a third issue: public appointments. The head of the quasi-government bodies known as quangos wield significant influence in policy areas, from water to broadcasting. During Labour's 13 years in power, many were led by individuals aligned to the party in an attempt to counteract the apolitical nature of the state.

For Johnson and Cummings, the desire for change is seen as simply redressing the balance, particularly given what they view as David Cameron's failure to put more Tories into public positions. Paul Goodman, editor of the *ConservativeHome*



Left: Paul Eddington (left) and Nigel Hawthorne in the popular BBC sitcom *Yes Minister*. Below: Boris Johnson's special adviser Dominic Cummings, who has long railed against Whitehall's 'dysfunction' and 'incompetents'

website, explains there has long been a charge within the party that “there is a bias in state institutions against rightwing applicants”. “It is important for the centre-right to pay as much attention to appointments as the centre-left,” he says. “There was a very clear pattern of New Labour sympathisers being appointed to notable roles, so there’s no reason the centre-right shouldn’t take a chunk.”

Goodman’s view is that the British state is “impartial but not always neutral” and “is always going to have a values system of some kind”. The departure of that significant cadre of permanent secretaries this year suggests that at the moment these inherent values may not chime with those of Johnson. “What Downing Street is saying about reform is not at all exceptional. But what is unusual is having a public tussle about it – some senior mandarins have clearly been encouraged out of the door,” he adds. “There is a world view [in government] that the civil service’s institutional mindset at the top is ill at ease with the one of this government.”

Yet eyebrows have been raised by some of the potential choices for high-profile public bodies. Downing Street wanted to install two trenchant, divisive figures: Charles Moore, biographer of Margaret Thatcher and rightwing commentator, to chair the BBC, and former Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre to chair the broadcast regulator Ofcom. Moore later ruled himself out for “personal reasons”.

The civil service has not reacted well. “They are taking the things we are most renowned for and tearing them down,” one senior official says. But one ally of Johnson said he was determined to push such changes through. “These appointments are really important. I’ve seen the power of these quangos. It’s absolutely vital for the government’s mission to improve their diversity of thought. It’s about a cultural change – Dacre and Moore are just the start. Labour stuffed these bodies with their people; now it’s our turn.”

Most current and former senior mandarins accept the need for change, even if they decry the methods the government is using; one describes the attitude of No 10 as “corrosive”. “What company would say that it’s crap because we have terrible staff?” asks another. “It doesn’t work. Good people will leave.”

Those at the heart of the revolution say the picture is more nuanced. “Individual civil servants are totally aware of the need for change – they appreciate the limitations of the civil service. They’re touchy and defensive and institutionally passive-aggressive but they get that the civil service needs more technical and professional skills,” says an ally of Cummings.

A spokesperson for the Cabinet Office confirmed “an ambitious programme for government

reform” had been launched earlier this year, which included “engaging with staff across the country”.

Nick Macpherson, who headed the Treasury from 2005 to 2016, says much of the government’s agenda is correct but that its promises of more expertise are not being followed up by its actions. “The civil service does need to change: it needs more expertise and its management lags the private sector... but experience teaches me to focus on actions rather than words.”

Dave Penman, head of the FDA, the union that represents senior civil servants, reckons that while “every government talks about civil service reform”, the approach of the Johnson government is a marked change. “What is different this time, there appears to be a very deliberate policy to break things up and create an instability in the system. They are doing things they don’t need to do to effect the changes they want. I don’t think it’s all 4D chess plotted out, some of it is instinctive – how they’re treating people in particular. They don’t really care about the consequences or relish them.”

In his conversations with civil servants, Penman says he has “never heard them talk about a government like this”. He suggests officials are filled with fear about who is going to be sacked next and whether they are being monitored for their loyalty. “There is an awful lot of chaos and short-termism. It’s about who they trust and who is on side – it’s a very Trumpian approach.”

Yet Tories say the end goal is making the civil service better. “Michael and No 10 have the highest respect for the senior officials around them, they rely on them and rate them extraordinarily highly. Our overall impression is there are nuggets of brilliance across Whitehall,” says a government aide.

Johnson, Cummings and Gove are three men in a hurry: the next election may not be for another three or four years, but their revolution will have much deeper consequences. With their picks leading Whitehall departments, new officials recruited in their image and Conservative allies running public bodies, the British state will be smashed and rebuilt in the coming years.

Hennessy warns that moving too quickly risks huge damage to the country’s reputation: “You’ve got to think of it in terms of generations, because it’s not a quick-fix problem. You might get some ego satisfaction about biffing them and shouting at them and getting headlines all the time, but that’s not what the whole point is... you’ve got to do it without politicising it. Because if we politicise the senior civil service, that will be an own goal of national and monumental proportions.”

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Sebastian Payne is the FT’s Whitehall correspondent. George Parker is the FT’s political editor

‘You’ve got to think in terms of generations, because it’s not a quick-fix problem’

Peter Hennessy, historian



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For more than 30,000 years, the Arctic has been home to indigenous peoples that have harnessed its icy climes and scarce resources to create tools, garments and beautiful art. As an upcoming exhibition explores what unites these many cultures, *Leslie Hook* examines the region's rich history. Photographs by *Kate Peters*



Previous page:
Inupiat whale-shaped
box for storing spare
points for harpoon
heads; Kotzebue Sound,
Alaska, US. Before 1855

Right: Inuit owl
sculpture; Kinngait,
Nunavut, Canada.
1960-80



Think of the Arctic and a vast expanse of snow and ice probably comes to mind. The region is not usually known for its art, nor is it famous for its culture, even though it has been inhabited by humans for more than 30,000 years.

But that may be starting to change. A new exhibition opening soon at the British Museum in London marks the most extensive exploration yet of Arctic culture and the indigenous people who live there.

The show is part of a trend: the Arctic has been coming into greater focus in recent years. It is the fastest-warming region on the planet, and the reduction in ice there is making it more accessible to the outside world. It is also the subject of growing attention from countries and companies that want to access its natural resources.

The Arctic encompasses not only the icy Arctic Sea, but also millions of square kilometres of land across North America, Europe and Russia. Eight countries claim land inside the Arctic Circle, and the region is home to dozens of indigenous peoples, including the Inuit in Canada and Greenland, the Sami reindeer herders in Scandinavia and the Sakha pastoralists in Russia.

The exhibition takes an unusual approach to telling the story of the people in the Arctic. By freely combining objects that span from 32,000 years ago to the present day and come from all parts of the region, the show draws out the themes that connect these cultural groups. Resources are extremely scarce, with few trees and plants, so materials such as reindeer antler, walrus ivory, ►

For centuries, people have adapted and thrived in these ecosystems of ice and snow



Top: Evenki spirit figure; Yenisei River, Russia. Before 1882

Above: Eskimo-Aleut wooden pail decorated with ivory or bone figures of fish and walrus; Angmagssalik, East Greenland. 1884



Top: Gwich'in decorated moose-hide boots; Venetie, Alaska, US. 1993

Above: Inupiat bull walrus mask, by Paul Tiulana; King Island, Alaska, US. Early 1980s



Below: Khanty mammoth ivory carving depicting dogs pulling a sled; Russia. Before 1867

Above: Alutiit kayak model with three seats and sea otter hunting equipment; Cook Inlet, Alaska. Before 1795

Right: Inuit caribou-fawn fur toddler's all-in-one suit and hood; Iglulik, Nunavut, Canada. 1980s

Ancient humans prized mammoth ivory; many of the oldest items in the exhibit are carved from it



Top: Inupiat walrus tusk engraved with scenes of water vessels, homes and animals, by Angowazhuk 'Happy Jack'; Seward Peninsula, Alaska. Early 1900s

Above: Sàmi reindeer-skin bag with a drawstring handle and tassels decorated on both sides with a cross motif; Jämtland, Sweden. 1900s



◀ mammoth tusk or whale bone are often carved into useful items like needles or scrapers. No part of an animal goes unused – even seal gut can be transformed to make a waterproof parka. Curator Amber Lincoln says an “economy of form” unites many of the objects. “There is this real attention to the world, to people’s bodies, to animals’ expressions, that gets translated into the function of these tools and garments,” she says. Many of the works are also very practical, like a warm toddler’s suit made from caribou-fawn fur.

The power of nature is another unifying theme. In a landscape dominated by the seasons – the sun never sets in summer and barely rises in winter – weather and the elements often show up in the art. One mask from the Yupiit in Alaska represents the North Wind and even has a blowing tube to make the sound of the howling gale.

“In the Arctic, the environment that surrounds people is often their main source of life – work, food, wellbeing, social life and art,” says Tatiana Argounova-Low, an adviser on the exhibition and a senior lecturer in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. “That’s why they feel changes in the environment much more acutely than people who live elsewhere.”

In Argounova-Low’s hometown in the Russian far east, home to the Sakha people, one of the most visible changes in the environment is the melting permafrost. As the ground softens, surprising things emerge, such as the ivory tusks and bones of mammoths. Ancient humans prized mammoth ivory; many of the oldest items in the

exhibition are carved from it, including needles and spears dating back 32,000 years. Today, even though mammoths have been extinct for thousands of years, carvers are using mammoth ivory again.

The great warming of the region – the Arctic is heating up twice as fast as the rest of the planet – provides a sombre context for many of the items on display. All the Arctic cultures are highly adapted to snow, ice and cold conditions. It’s hard not to look at these items and wonder how long it will be before things such as snow saws or snow beaters (used to get the moisture out of fur clothing) might only appear in museums.

“For centuries, people have adapted and thrived in these ecosystems of ice and snow,” says Lincoln. “We pose the question, if the ice is gone, if the permafrost thaws, what might happen to these diverse cultural groups?”

The historic sweep of the display presents a reminder that this way of life was under threat even before the rapid warming of the Arctic began. Today, about 400,000 indigenous people live in the region, only one-tenth of the total population.

Impacted over the centuries by explorers, colonial traders and extractive industries, Arctic people have faced challenge after challenge yet found ways to survive. Perhaps that should give us hope that we can overcome today’s environmental challenges too – while there is still some ice left in the Arctic Sea. **FT**

Leslie Hook is the FT’s environment and clean energy correspondent. The Citi exhibition “Arctic: culture and climate” is at the British Museum, London, from October 22 to February 21 2021

NSPCC


 FINANCIAL
TIMES

What makes a day unforgettable?

“I suddenly heard a crack and a roar, then someone shouted, ‘Run!’ I looked up and a huge serac had broken free about 200m overhead. It was coming towards me, less of an avalanche, and more of a rock fall...”

We all have moments in our lives which stay with us. Unforgettable days which change our perspective on life – which shape who we are. For David Tait, one of those days was in 2013 during an expedition to Mount Everest in aid of the NSPCC. Tait was carrying a flag on behalf of HM the Queen to mark her 60th anniversary, and attempting to be the first person on the summit that year.

“I tried to run but it was near impossible, I was up to my knees in snow. After two big paces I dived for the ground, and the avalanche hit me. I was convinced I was about to die and I realised I’d never been truly scared before – not until that moment.”

Battered by the avalanche, one arm wedged between two lumps of ice, Tait was in excruciating pain, with no idea what depth of snow covered him.

“I remember thinking three things. One, you do see your life flash

before your eyes. Somehow you just do. Secondly, I remember thinking ‘the Queen’s going to be really annoyed that I haven’t got her flag to the summit’. And the last thing was ‘I really don’t want to die.’”

Tait pushed himself free with the strength of his uninjured arm and was able to complete his challenge three days later. It wasn’t until he returned home that he discovered, incredibly, he’d climbed Everest with a broken back.

What drives a person to push themselves like this, to keep going against the odds? For David Tait, it’s personal. As a child, he was sexually abused by a family friend. His abuser threatened and manipulated him – making him feel totally isolated and unable to tell anyone in his life what had happened. This unspoken suffering pushed David with an intense drive in whatever he did – notably within the business environment of the 80s and 90s which saw him rise to senior executive level at multiple global financial institutions.

“I was brutal, and I worked perfectly in that environment. I was fearless. Or should I say



“**I remember thinking three things. And the last thing was ‘I really don’t want to die.’**”

David Tait

I didn’t care – I just didn’t give a damn and that helped me.”

But the years that Tait spent not fully understanding what he’d been through, or facing up to it, also came at a cost to himself and those in his life. This inner turmoil sadly mirrors what many survivors of sexual abuse go through. **Without the right help at the right time, childhood sexual abuse can cast a long shadow** – not least taking a toll on mental health and even leading to suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Tait’s turning point came when he nearly took his own life. After

David Tait, CEO of the World Gold Council, has climbed Everest five times in support of the NSPCC. He shares his motivation for taking on such unforgettable challenges, and for supporting the NSPCC's Childline service.



this wake-up call, he decided to turn his fierce, single-minded energy towards something positive – fundraising for the NSPCC. Initially, he kept his motivations private. But, in a fundraising email to colleagues in advance of his second Everest expedition, he signed off by simply saying ‘because I was one of these kids’.

Now, Tait speaks as an ambassador of the NSPCC, and his story has even been told through the film, *Sulphur and White*. His wife, Vanessa, volunteers as a Childline counsellor, and he is determined to make the future better for children – to make sure they are able to speak out rather than suffer like he did for years.

That's why, as well as fundraising through his expeditions, and helping to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds by speaking at events, David is supporting the NSPCC's Childline service by promoting their 'One Unforgettable Day' campaign, which invites donors to fund Childline for a day. **A gift of £30,000 is enough to fund 24 hours of Childline – enabling an average of 650 counselling sessions with children.** Each of these sessions could

A gift of £30,000 is enough to fund 24 hours of Childline

change everything for a child experiencing abuse like David did.

“It's vital that a child can raise a hand without feeling the stigma which I felt. Because it's the stigma that kills your future. Once a child speaks out, they can move on a lot quicker. They'll be a lot better off than what happened to me.”

And it's this need for a safe space to turn to that makes David such a passionate supporter of the NSPCC's Childline service. Any young person can speak to a Childline counsellor online or over the phone, and access support and advice on the Childline website.

That's why David Tait has pushed himself to the limit, multiple times, to raise vital funds for the NSPCC. And it's why the NSPCC is working with the Financial Times to call on individuals and companies across the UK to fund Childline on days of their

choosing. If 100 people join the FT 100 Unforgettable Days campaign, thousands of young lives could be changed forever. That would be unforgettable.

“I'm a complete and utter believer in the fact that Childline is there, that children know about it, and can recite the number. **It's hugely important. So too is the ability for children to reach out to Childline anonymously, knowing they will be believed – not judged.**

They can just talk, without worrying about the ramifications, or the impact on relationships if their abuser is known to their family. If I think back, I never conceived of telling anybody.”

For David, having the support of a service like Childline could have made a dramatic difference to his life. This need for a safe space for children to turn to has never been clearer than during the UK lockdown earlier this year. There were over 6,000 counselling sessions about abuse in April–July 2020. Childline is a place that young people can turn to, even when cut off from other avenues of support like school and friends. And, as we move from crisis to recovery, it's more important than ever that Childline is here.

On average, 650 children have a counselling session with Childline every day – with thousands more accessing advice and support through other areas of the Childline website. For each of these children, the day they talk to Childline could change everything – it's unforgettable.

David was ‘one of these kids’ and there are many more out there, summoning the courage to speak out. It's vital that Childline is here, ready to listen.

Turn a meaningful day for you into an unforgettable one for children by funding Childline for a day.

Visit nspcc.org.uk/100days or call 020 3772 9615

**FT 100
UNFORGETTABLE
days**



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'He wants to be Netflix, he wants to be Alibaba, he wants to be everything'

Asia's richest man is not short of ambition. After expanding his father's oil-refining business and setting up India's largest mobile operator, Mukesh Ambani has now set his sights on turning his company into a global tech titan.
By Benjamin Parkin and Anjali Raval

When Ajit Mohan landed in the swampy heat of Mumbai last December, he was a man on a mission. The 45-year-old media executive had recently joined Facebook to help reboot its fortunes in India. Although the social media giant had more than 300 million users in the country - more than anywhere else in the world - missteps and regulatory scuffles had scuppered its efforts to make any real money there.

Mohan was joined by David Fischer, Facebook's chief revenue officer, and the pair were whisked out to the industrial suburb of Navi Mumbai. There, a series of meetings set the company's plan in motion: to form an alliance with the richest man in Asia.

Mukesh Ambani would not be particularly recognisable outside of India. Heavy set, with deep bags under his eyes and a penchant for white short-sleeve shirts, the camera-shy 63-year-old is a sober contrast to hoodie-wearing, device-clutching American tech bosses. But that appearance belies his importance in a country of 1.4 billion people, and the power that his \$80bn fortune brings.

Reliance Industries was a lucrative, if unglamorous, petrochemicals and oil refining group when Ambani took control in 2005, three years after his father's death. But over the past decade, he has embarked upon a project that has made him one of the most talked about people in Silicon Valley. Jio, the mobile operator he launched in 2016, has already muscled aside competitors to become India's largest. Ambani hopes it will become the country's answer to China's Alibaba, a home-grown tech giant in one of the world's fastest-growing internet markets.

For the Facebook executives Fischer and Mohan, joining forces with the "game-changing" Jio was an opportunity that was impossible to ignore. And in April their courtship culminated with Facebook's \$5.7bn investment in Jio - its largest foreign deal to date. The deal sparked a spree that saw a dozen other foreign investors - including Facebook's arch-rival Google - write several billion-dollar-plus cheques for stakes in the fast-growing company. "It became a FOMO-kind of situation," says one person involved.

For Ambani, it marked the triumphant apex of a career remaking his father's energy juggernaut into a conglomerate fit for the 21st century. In addition to its dominance

in energy and telecoms, Reliance runs India's largest retail business. Ambani and his family also own a number of news outlets, oversee a school and a hospital - and run the Mumbai Indians, a successful Indian Premier League cricket team. "He combines exceptional vision, a huge ambition and outstanding execution," says Harsh Goenka, a Mumbai-based tycoon and friend.

But Ambani is as divisive as he is admired. Interviews with current and former employees, friends, advisers, government officials, business partners and rivals paint a picture of a man who presents his ambitions as entwined with those of the nation. This complements a single-minded pursuit of success and scale, engulfing many of those in his path - including his own brother.

In his business victories and accrual of wealth, Ambani sees a clear benefit for his country, now under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. In 2018, the businessman argued that Jio was "the most powerful driver of change in India today". The message: saying no to Ambani's growth was akin to saying no to India's.

Yet outside observers point to a near-unparalleled ability to leverage his wealth, political nous and Reliance's size to build an ecosystem that

works in his favour. Ambani is both respected and feared - friends seek his tacit approval before taking on new roles, while rivals try to avoid entering into a direct conflict. One government official suggested Reliance's power evoked that of a nation more than a private corporation: "Reliance operates as an independent state within a state. Ministers are wary of Mukesh Ambani because he is so powerful and there is a sense that he needs to be handled with care."

Ambani's sprawling business interests - and his political clout - mean he is now perceived as a gateway into India's blossoming consumer-led digital economy, one of the last great global growth stories. Having completed the fundraising for Jio, he is raising billions more from top investors for his retail business. But critics fear that what he is building could become a monopoly that will crush competition and, ultimately, hurt Indian consumers, all while concentrating ever more power around himself and his family. "He wants to be Netflix, he wants to be Alibaba," one former employee says. "He wants to be everything."

In Ambani's spacious, sofa-filled office, located in a nondescript south Mumbai building surrounded by ►

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Mukesh Ambani (right) with his brother Anil (left) and father Dhirubhai Ambani, 1986

◀ chai and snack stalls, hangs a large portrait of his father. If Mukesh is shaping up to be India's most important tycoon of the early 21st century, Dhirubhai Ambani towered over the end of the previous one. Born in 1932, he was raised in rural poverty in the western Indian state of Gujarat, emigrating to Yemen as a teenager to work at a trading company. Upon his return to India in the late 1950s, he started trading synthetic yarns, before branching into polyester manufacturing, building factories that turned Reliance into an industrial powerhouse. "Dhirubhai was a great leader," one person close to the company says. Mukesh and those around him "idolise Dhirubhai".

In their early years, Mukesh and his younger brother Anil witnessed their father's struggles to build up his business. Both inherited his outsider's edge, even as they went on to enjoy a life of luxury. Dhirubhai Ambani was the most prominent newcomer to break into a business elite previously controlled by families who had made fortunes during the colonial era. He was known as a political fixer, maintaining a legendary influence operation in New Delhi that curried favour with bureaucrats and politicians in order to secure much-needed business licences. Critics historically claimed that in

those days some officials received benefits, including funding for their children's education. The company and Ambani have always contested these allegations.

One person close to the family acknowledged that Dhirubhai had to do "difficult things" in order to break past those elites that maintained a stranglehold at the time. It was a legacy memorialised in the 2007 film *Guru*, a fictionalised account inspired by his life and distributed by Anil's entertainment company, which portrays the protagonist as a swashbuckling entrepreneur who pursued growth at all costs and was unafraid to play hardball when shut out by big-name business owners.

Throughout the decades, the conglomerate's business practices have continued to attract scrutiny. In 2017, the Securities and Exchange Board of India fined Reliance Industries in connection with a market manipulation case (the company has appealed the order); campaign groups have also accused Reliance Industries of having inappropriate links with the government in a Supreme Court case over a gas exploration deal, something Reliance denies.

Ambani, who rarely speaks to the press, declined to be interviewed for this article. Reliance declined to give

'Ministers are wary of Mukesh Ambani because he is so powerful and there is a sense that he needs to be handled with care'

Indian government official

responses for publication to various points put for comment, saying they appeared to be based on "inaccurate" information from sources of "doubtful veracity".

Ambani left Stanford Business School mid-degree in his early twenties to help run a polyester plant, and rose up through the company. But Dhirubhai's death in 2002 prompted a legendary clash between the brothers over how to run the empire.

In a 2005 peace deal brokered by their mother, the pair divided the conglomerate. Anil, seen as the more stylish brother and married to a Bollywood star, spun off Reliance's finance, power and existing telecom businesses and ventured into film production. The comparatively unassuming Mukesh took the core oil products business.

But the brothers continued to trade barbs and to block each other in a fallout that gripped Indians at home and abroad. In an affront to a society that emphasises family loyalty and unity, Anil even became embroiled in a defamation allegation against his brother over comments in which Mukesh appeared to suggest Anil had overseen Reliance's corporate "intelligence" operations.

It was the launch of Jio that would ultimately give Mukesh the upper hand in the bitter battle with his brother. While he had previously helped set up a telecommunications business under his father, he lost it to Anil under the terms of the 2005 split. He, in turn, used his first right of refusal under those same terms to scupper a deal by Anil's Reliance Communications to merge with South Africa's MTN, which would have created one of the world's largest mobile companies. Then, in 2010, Mukesh made a decisive move that would ultimately quash his sibling's business, securing a spectrum licence for his new operator.

This renewed foray into telecoms puzzled many who questioned why a company that ran one of the world's most successful oil refineries would invest billions in a speculative venture at a time when India's energy consumption was growing fast. But western energy industry executives who know Ambani say he has long called time on the age of oil. In years past, senior Reliance executives asked industry leaders about the possibility of peak global oil demand. "Now the questions tend to be about when [it] will happen, not if," says one person involved in such discussions.

Energy remains a key pillar of the Reliance empire but Ambani has sought to dilute his stake and is

now pursuing a strategy to become a net zero carbon company. Last year, Reliance said it planned to sell 20 per cent of its refinery business to Saudi Aramco for about \$15bn. But the deal, slated to be one of India's largest ever foreign investments, has stalled after the kingdom balked at the price tag following the sharp drop in oil prices during the pandemic.

As Ambani's focus has shifted towards tech, he has often repeated the cliché that "data is the new oil". India certainly presented one of the world's most promising markets. Hundreds of millions were buying mobile phones for the first time, though they continued to run on slower 2G and 3G data and were still too expensive for many.

Jio's plan was to leapfrog the incumbent companies by launching 4G services at radically lower prices. One former employee described this as part of a vision to "democratise access to the internet". The same source recalled Ambani's keen interest in the project: having submitted a chunky research document late one evening, a copy annotated in Ambani's handwritten scrawl was returned to him the next morning.

When Jio eventually launched in 2016, it quickly accumulated millions of users by offering its services at rock-bottom prices with extended introductory offers, undercutting its rivals and forcing them to bring down their own prices. A boom in internet use occurred as millions of working-class and rural Indians could video call relatives, stream cricket matches or play online games for the first time. "It took the combined Indian telecom industry 25 years to build a pan-India 2G network," Ambani said in 2018. To build an advanced 4G network, "Jio took just three years."

But Jio's success has been marred by repeated allegations of bully-boy tactics to crush competitors, including predatory pricing. Critics also claim there has been favourable treatment by the authorities, including Jio being exonerated by regulators and competition authorities despite extending introductory price offers past the usual 90-day window.

Reliance's path was cleared after a 2013 regulatory change allowed it to convert its data licence to transmit voice calls as well. A draft report by the state auditor found that Jio had effectively underpaid by around Rs230bn (\$3.2bn) in securing the unified licence, but the final release of the report dismayed Jio's critics by finding its underpayment to be much smaller.

(Top) Ajit Mohan, managing director of Facebook India; ads for Jio displayed along Marine Drive, Mumbai



\$5.7bn

Facebook's investment in Jio – the US social media giant's largest foreign deal to date



Prime Minister Narendra Modi shakes hands with Ambani at 'Make In India Week', Mumbai, 2016

In the view of Prashant Bhushan, a public interest lawyer who has brought multiple cases against the company: "[Reliance] were quite smart in investing in the telecom sector. But more than that they have been helped at all stages by the government and now by the courts."

Since then, a wave of telecom companies have been forced to exit the mobile sector or gone bankrupt. Only two private competitors remain: Vodafone Idea and billionaire Sunil Bharti Mittal's Airtel. Mittal told the FT last year that competing with Reliance was "hard work... They want to be dominant". Both companies were dealt a severe blow after a court ruling last year ordered them to pay billions of dollars to the government in historic fees. The younger Jio, however, was asked to pay only \$2m.

In the view of Rahul Khullar, a former chairman of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India: "Biased and partisan regulation in favour of Jio has led to the general crisis in the industry." He added: "Jio was bleeding Airtel and Vodafone Idea in the hope that you'd have a last-man-standing situation... They didn't care because they had deep pockets elsewhere."

Reliance vehemently denies that it has received favourable treat-

ment and attributes its success to Ambani's business acumen and bold vision.

One of the worst hit by Jio's rise was Mukesh's brother Anil: it proved a brutal blow to his shrinking half of the business empire. RCom was unable to keep up and quit the mobile sector in 2017 before going bankrupt. In 2018, Anil himself said that the telecom sector was becoming an "oligopolistic structure that... could eventually become a monopoly".

Mukesh's fortunes stand in stark contrast to his brother. "What [Mukesh] did right, he was the guy who was behind the core businesses. It wasn't Anil," says Sucheta Dalal, a veteran journalist, who has long covered them both.

Last year, Anil's mounting debt troubles were so acute that he was days away from being jailed for contempt of court over a missed \$77m payment to Swedish group Ericsson. A last-minute bailout from Mukesh was made sweeter when Anil, in a humiliating capitulation following their feud, conveyed his "sincere and heartfelt thanks to my respected elder brother".

A spokesperson for Anil Ambani said the payment was a business transaction, denying it was made in a personal capacity. ▶



(Top) Rohit Sharma, captain of the Mumbai Indians. The team is owned by the Ambani family; Ambani at his daughter's wedding in Mumbai in 2018



\$100m

The rumoured cost of Isha Ambani's wedding in Mumbai in 2018 – guests included Hillary Clinton and Ban Ki-moon

◀ Anil is now being pursued by Chinese creditors, who in May this year secured a UK court order mandating he pay them \$717m. The pressure ultimately prompted him, once the sixth richest man in the world, to claim in court earlier this year that his net worth had plummeted to zero.

Today it is Mukesh who is at number six on the Forbes list. He and his family live in a 27-storey skyscraper complete with a helipad, sports facilities and space for hundreds of staff. The building, named Antilia after the mythical island, is believed to be the world's most expensive home, with a rumoured price tag as high as \$1bn. It has also become one of the most potent and emotive symbols of India's already extreme inequality, towering over the slums that house four in 10 Mumbai residents without running water and with toilets shared by hundreds of families.

"There's a category of people, me included, who are outraged by the fact that he spent so much money to build a building," says one veteran Mumbai businessman, who views it as "an explicit attempt to flaunt his wealth".

In December 2018, the festivities to celebrate Ambani's daughter Isha's nuptials, rumoured to have

cost as much as \$100m, pushed the already elaborate genre of Indian weddings to new extremes. Beyoncé gave a performance, guests included Hillary Clinton and Ban Ki-moon, and – in a bizarre turn – Bollywood superstars Shah Rukh Khan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan were photographed serving food.

Despite this, Ambani and his company push a carefully crafted image of a man of simplicity. Reliance says that Ambani caps his annual salary to Rs150m (\$2m) "in order to set a personal example of moderation in managerial compensation levels". He is religious and regularly performs Hindu rites, shunning meat and alcohol.

One person close to the company says he has "a childlike curiosity", staying up late reading about emerging business trends. He is also a family man. "You hear stories about the weddings and the choppers and whatnot but, in person, he doesn't come across as someone who is suffering from megalomania. He is a very simple man," says one person who has had business dealings with him.

Ambani's wealth and influence at home has opened doors abroad. Last autumn, he travelled to the Middle East, where he was born in Yemen in

1957. This time, the setting was an exclusive get-together aboard the megayacht of Saudi Arabia's crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the Red Sea, along with more than a dozen top business people including Masayoshi Son of SoftBank. Of the attendees, it was Mukesh that sat next to the crown prince.

He returned to the Gulf soon after for Riyadh's annual investment summit, dubbed Davos in the Desert. While there, he attended a dinner hosted by the heir to the Saudi throne, along with Narendra Modi, Jared Kushner, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Steve Schwarzman of private equity company Blackstone. Although a private business executive, in some ways Ambani was acting as India's chief diplomat.

Ambani was courting the Saudis for the billions he was hoping they would put into Reliance's Jamnagar refinery, but the trips also highlight how his growing fortune and domestic reach have made him the conduit for global elites looking for a way into India. "In the past, if you were an American company, you didn't need to do business in India and it was also too difficult. Now everyone sees an opening for a whole range of sectors and everyone wants to align with Reliance," says

one US business executive, who noted Ambani's ability to "smooth" the path for potential partners.

Ambani – who once sent a life-sized elephant made out of silver to Middle Eastern royalty – is a deft political operator. At the Riyadh conference, he showered praise on Prince Mohammed, who was facing international censure over the 2018 murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Ambani told the audience that the kingdom, like India, was "blessed with leadership that is unique in the whole world".

"From Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi to Doha...[Ambani] has that trust," says Anshuman Mishra, a former banker who is a close confidant of Ambani and advised him on his international dealmaking. "Sovereign wealth funds, the US tech giants, they will all have to engage with Reliance at some point. That's the only serious game in town if you think of India."

Mounting tensions between the US and China have only increased Ambani's appeal to American investors looking for alternative partners in Asia. India's own souring relationship with China has also worked in Reliance's favour. The country's move to ban nearly 200 Chinese-made apps including TikTok, following deadly border clashes between the two nations in June, has created a vacuum for moneyed newcomers.

Ambani himself helped to fan economic nationalism. In 2019, he warned about the dangers of "data colonisation" by foreign corporations. Yet, as the government mulled strict new curbs on foreign tech giants, he partnered with Google and Facebook, who between them control nearly two-thirds of India's digital advertising market.

He is also now said to be in talks about potential investments in his retail venture with online retail giant Amazon, whose expansion plans in India have previously been scuppered by unfavourable regulatory processes for foreign companies that have worked in Reliance's interest. Reliance has dismissed mention of such talks as speculation, and stressed that its partnerships with Google and Facebook would not compromise India's data.

At home, Ambani has proved expert at navigating India's changing political winds, cultivating ties to multiple political parties. But the tycoon's affinity with Narendra Modi has proved more visceral. Both devout Hindus from the state of Gujarat, Ambani

shares Modi's sense of being an outsider smashing down decades-old power structures, something that Indians too have seized on, delivering two landslide election victories for Modi.

Ambani has aggressively used this alignment to advance Jio, which plastered the leader's face on its adverts and even pre-installed his controversial "NaMo" app on its low-cost JioPhones. In slogans Reliance has touted that, like Modi, it is "dedicated to India".

But there is growing consternation about the systematic way Reliance is placing itself at the centre of critical sectors of India's burgeoning new economy, raising questions about whether Ambani's ability to overrun competition will ultimately be good for regular Indians in one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets.

In September, protesting farmers burned Jio cards in a gesture against excess corporate power. Harsimrat Kaur Badal, an outgoing government minister, on television held up Jio as an example of the danger of monopolies. "They gave free phones... [users] got dependent on it," she said. "The competition was wiped out, [then] Jio jacked up their rates."

Reliance now runs one-third of all brick-and-mortar stores in the country's formal retail sector, making it several times larger than its next competitor. The recent tie-up with Facebook and its messaging service WhatsApp, which has 400 million Indian users, gives Reliance unique reach among consumers. "It's very difficult to have another major player because of the intensity of what he does, the magnitude of what he does," one person who knows Ambani says. "When he enters a field, he enters to be the dominant player."

Ambani now has to prove he can make good on his bold claims. While he has touted Jio's enormous user footprint to investors, regulatory data for June shows that a fifth of Reliance's 398 million reported customer base is inactive. And, though at an early stage, many of Jio's forays beyond telecom such as its payments or chat apps have had limited success so far.

Yet competitors fear Reliance's ability to draw in billions in foreign investment, all while undercutting rivals, will leave India with fewer choices. "The trouble for us is that they'll scare investors," says one venture capitalist. "But whether they'll create the best products and services, it's hard to say."



Ambani's Mumbai home, Antilia, a 27-storey skyscraper complete with a helipad, sports facilities and space for several hundred staff. It is believed to be the world's most expensive residence with a rumoured price tag as high as \$1bn

'It's very difficult to have another major player... when [Ambani] enters a field, he enters to be the dominant player'

In a Netflix series shadowing the Mumbai Indians IPL team in 2018, Ambani's eldest son Akash stands on a cricket field with the top of his white shirt casually unbuttoned. Akash, whose responsibilities in the family business include helping lead the team, banter with the camera while top cricketers train alongside him. "We want to win desperately this year, prove everyone wrong," he says.

The team went on to have a mediocre season but the younger Ambani's chutzpah fits with his father's winner-takes-all business mentality. The tycoon, who often turns to his wife for advice along with a tightknit group of top executives, is slowly shifting his three children - Akash, his twin sister Isha and younger brother Anant - into ever more prominent positions within the empire in what many believe is the early stage of a succession plan.

Akash and Isha had a seat at the table during recent deal negotiations, including the one with Facebook. "It was the way I'd expect a grooming exercise to pan out. They were learning the ropes," one person involved says. "They were probably being blooded... so that one day they go on to run the company."

Indian business families, not least the Ambanis, have faced

infamous succession problems; generations that grew up with silver spoons are treated with particular scepticism. People close to the tycoon say he is determined to avoid the messy familial spats that have marred his own career, pointing to the apparent symmetry of splitting his empire into three units centred on energy, retail and digital services.

By helping to transform Reliance's businesses into globally run ventures, including giving Jio board seats to experienced investors Facebook and Google, they say that he wants to ensure his children are shielded from perilous domestic politics. "Mukesh now wants to have less engagement with policymakers," one adviser says. "He doesn't want his kids to have to deal with it."

But Ambani also doesn't want to retire before he's succeeded in turning Reliance into one of the world's most valuable companies. In the words of one close to him, Ambani's plan is to create "not just a telecom player, but a serious tech player with a global footprint." **FT**

Benjamin Parkin is the FT's Mumbai correspondent. Anjali Raval is the FT's senior energy correspondent. Additional reporting by Amy Kazmin



Ravinder Bhogal Recipes



Doughnut delight

Photographs by Joakim Blockstrom

The first doughnut I ever ate was an over-inflated orb filled with tart raspberry jam, rolled in an unrestrained deluge of sugar. It was transcendent. Grace picked up another and held it up to the light. “You can’t eat a doughnut without licking your lips or being

jolly,” she trilled. I was nine. Grace was approaching her 10th decade. I took a bite, licked my lips and smiled. I was new to England and homesick. I tried hard to embrace my new nation - its blustery climate, its bland, stodgy food and peculiar traditions. One year, my school celebrated Harvest - each child was assigned an elderly neighbour to deliver provisions to. And so I became acquainted with Grace Lock.

She lived alone but didn’t seem lonely - busying herself with knitting and reading - and zipping up and down her stairs with the energy of a toddler. Growing up in an extended family, I couldn’t understand nuclear clans, with the elderly having to fend for themselves. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, I knew that it only takes one person to shepherd someone through their golden years.

I filled a crepe-paper-covered box with goods pillaged from my mother’s pantry and knocked at her door. “Hello love,” she cooed, her face pink as a bouquet. “Your school said you were bringing treasure!”

Grace’s house was full of mid-century furniture and a whiff of stew that smelt like it had been simmering for years. I started visiting her often, emptying my mother’s larder into hers. She introduced me to *Countdown* and *The Archers*, but what really bonded us was our love of sweets. She had a particular affection for doughnuts and Fry’s Turkish Delight, which she told me was “full of eastern promise”.

“I am 85 years, five months and 18 days old and I haven’t managed to die yet. These might be necessary for my future survival,” she’d say and take another bite. **FT**

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikoni. jikonilondon.com; @ / @cookinboots

Turkish delight doughnuts

- 5g dried yeast
- 300g plain flour
- 30g caster sugar, plus extra for dusting
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp fine sea salt
- 130g butter, softened
- Neutral oil for deep frying

For the rose crème pâtissière

- 3 egg yolks
- 50g caster sugar
- 25g plain flour
- 25g cornflour
- 350ml whole milk
- 1 tbs rose water
- Squeeze of lime juice

For the chocolate glaze

- 25g good-quality cocoa powder
- 40g icing sugar

To garnish

- Handful of dried rose petals
- Handful of finely sliced pistachios

1 — Start by making the dough. Stir the yeast and 75ml warm water in a jug until dissolved. Combine with flour, sugar, eggs and salt in an electric mixer fitted with a dough hook. Knead on low speed for eight minutes until smooth and elastic.

2 — Knead in the butter, a quarter at a time, mixing well between additions. Transfer to a lightly floured bowl, cover with cling film and set aside for two hours until doubled in size. Knock back, cover with cling film and refrigerate overnight to rest.

3 — Divide the dough into 45g pieces, roll each one into the size and shape of a golf ball and place on a lightly buttered oven tray, leaving space for them to prove. Cover with a tea towel and set aside for an hour or until doubled in size.

4 — To make the crème pâtissière, whisk together the eggs and sugar and then sift in the plain and corn flour. Mix well until you have a smooth paste. Heat the milk to a simmer and add to the egg mixture a little at a time, whisking as you go.

5 — Pour the custard back into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Whisk it for a minute and once it has thickened, take it off the heat. Once it has cooled, stir in the rose water and lime juice. Pour into a piping bag with a metal nozzle.

6 — Heat oil for deep-frying to 180C. Fry the doughnuts in batches until cooked through, turning so they are golden all over. Drain on absorbent paper and keep warm.

7 — For the chocolate glaze, whisk together the cocoa powder, icing sugar and 70ml water until a thick glaze forms.

8 — Pierce the doughnut with a skewer and push around the crumb on the inside to make room for the filling. Insert nozzle into doughnut centres and pipe in as much rose crème pâtissière as you can, until it oozes out.

9 — Spread over the chocolate glaze, sprinkle with rose petals and pistachios and serve warm.



Noble cause

The Gay Hussar in Soho was a legendary gathering place for politicians and journalists. Much mourned when it closed in 2018, it's now being revived by the talented team behind Noble Rot. *Tim Hayward reports. Photographs by Charlie Bibby*



Above: vintage photographs and illustrations from the original Gay Hussar
Left: Noble Rot founders Mark Andrew (left) and Dan Keeling, who are reviving the Soho institution



There has always been a border through the restaurants of London. It's an iron curtain that runs from Trafalgar Square, north along Haymarket and Regent Street to the front door of Old Broadcasting House, which balances, as ever, precisely on the line. To the west of the divide are Westminster and Mayfair, traditional habitat of the establishment: politicians; the aristocracy; clubmen and, more recently, the international super-rich. The restaurants here are glossy, discreet and perfectly attuned to their clientele.

On the other side lies Soho, home of actors, performers, artists and rogues. It is not surprising therefore that the effective headquarters of Britain's postwar left was in one brilliantly atmospheric, resolutely eccentric restaurant right in the centre of the quarter. Between peep shows and brothels, theatres and cinemas, between the offices of Private Eye, the Establishment club, the Coach and Horses and the Colony Room sat the Gay Hussar.

You're hard pushed to find a Hungarian restaurant these days but back in 1953 things were different. Elizabeth David had only recently started writing about the Mediterranean and restaurant lovers still looked elsewhere for excellence. There were plenty of French and Italian places in Soho but Mittel-European culture was exciting. It was the home of café society, an exotic modernist avant-garde, and Hungary itself was the home of an inspiring new socialist republic. "Hungarian" was sexy and appealing then, particularly to those whose politics leaned left.

Chief among the attractions of the place was the extraordinary proprietor, Victor Sassie, an operatic character who ran his rooms like a master manipulator. It was said that he could strip you of your darkest secrets as you sat down to order, and would have spread them to every politician and journalist in the place by the time you got on to the after-dinner mints. Perhaps part of the appeal to

his clientele was that Sassie didn't let the truth get in the way of a good story. Far from being an exiled Magyar princeling or disgraced Hungarian diplomat, he'd been born in Barrow-in-Furness, his father a Swiss sailor who'd jumped ship in Cardiff to marry his Welsh mother. But, in 1932, he'd been sent to the Hungarian capital by the British Restaurant Association to learn his trade. In 1939, he returned to London to open his first restaurant, Budapest in Dean Street. He had clearly taken well to his "new nationality" as he served with British intelligence in Hungary throughout the second world war.

The Gay Hussar, which Sassie opened in 1953, was a glorious piece of theatre - bohemian culture, a mysterious host, a dark clubby interior with two private dining rooms, screened by heavy curtains, for significant or illicit meetings and liaisons. Who could resist? Certainly not the lions of the postwar Labour party who took to the place like a clubhouse. Aneurin Bevan, who helped create the NHS, was an early enthusiast and the leftist group of "Bevanites" he inspired - Barbara Castle, Ian Mikardo and Michael Foot - were naturally drawn there. It was declared the "canteen" of the Bevanite newspaper Tribune and soon the rest of Fleet Street realised that there were stories to be found there, gossip to be had.

During the 1960s, the Gay Hussar swung as vigorously as the rest of Soho. Labour MP Tom Driberg is said to have taken Mick Jagger for lunch in the top-floor private room with the aim of persuading him to stand as an MP. The actual proposal that was made was later alleged to have been of a more intimate bent and resulted in Jagger fleeing the premises.

It is also unsurprising that the Gay Hussar was where the Tory "wets" chose to plot the downfall of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and where a young Tony Blair was said to have been encouraged in the early 1980s to stand as an MP by Lord Pendry.

In 1999, political cartoonist Martin Rowson sat in on one of ▶

◀ the regular Tribune dinners and started sketching the participants. One might have expected his caustic depictions to offend but they somehow delighted the regulars and soon the dark-panelled walls were lined with a gallery that recalled Hogarth's portraits of the Kit-cat Club, but infinitely less flattering.

Sassie had retired in 1988 and sold the Gay Hussar to Corus, an international hotel group. On the face of it, the place remained constant and unchanged, the vibe still raffish and the food resolutely mediocre but Soho was evolving around it. Journalists of the old school - based in Fleet Street and building stories through cultivated relationships and booze-loosened gossip - were being usurped by bright kids with laptops. A new generation of Labour politicians were quietly stitching up deals in Islington restaurants, doubtless over a "modern British" menu and by-the-glass New Zealand Sauvignon rather than a great bowl of goulash and three bottles of Bull's Blood. Many mourned the passing of that sort of muscularity in the left and the Fourth Estate - and the Gay Hussar gently slipped into anachronistic old age.

In 2013, Corus put it up for sale. There was still enough collective love for it that 160 journalists and politicians formed "The Goulash Co-operative" - minimum investment, £500 - in an attempt to buy it. Perhaps impressed by the co-operative, or perhaps because they received no other offers, the company dropped its plans and the Hussar was temporarily reprieved. The staff kept their jobs, the food remained unmodernised. But deeper societal changes were to bring it down in the end.

On June 21 2018, the last meal was served. Corus had put the rent up and ever fewer people were interested in what had been the lifeblood of Soho, the lunch trade. The titans of the table who could make lunch last all afternoon, order bottle after bottle and still stagger home were becoming extinct or at least retiring on doctors' orders.

'Having the opportunity to become the custodians of one of Soho's most iconic restaurants was impossible to resist

Dan Keeling,
Noble Rot co-founder

The co-operative mobilised again but this time there was no rescue. The sign came down and the doors were boarded up.

Meanwhile, across town, a younger restaurant was beginning to blossom. Dan Keeling had been the A&R man who'd discovered Coldplay, rose fast to become managing director at Island Records, then abruptly shifted careers to spend more time with wine. His business partner, Mark Andrew, was a wine and hospitality professional with an indecent sense of curiosity and boundless enthusiasm for his subject. They had started off in 2013 with what was effectively a wine fanzine called Noble Rot. Then, in 2015, they took over an old wine bar in slightly neglected Lamb's Conduit Street and remade it to their own tastes.

Perhaps because they were new to the game, they behaved differently. The restaurant would not be "led" by a high-profile celebrity chef. Instead, they brought in Stephen Harris, the chef of the amazing Sportsman in Seasalter, Whitstable, to develop the menu. Though they did very little PR, they seemed to know exactly the right people to network with. Their new

Clockwise from right: the interior of the new Noble Rot, formerly the Gay Hussar; Swaledale beef shin goulash 'Gay Hussar'; roast chicken, morels and vin jaune; eggs casino

book, *Wine from Another Galaxy*, is, in part, the story of their rise to success and the first chapters are peppered with the names of friends who casually helped, advised or just partied with them as the business grew. Yotam, Nigella, Fergus, Jancis... but then, Brian Eno, Keira Knightley, Mark Ronson...

Watching "the Rotters" from the outside was remarkable. They quickly built an eclectic network of avid fans and supporters but still stayed under the radar. This was "music-business"-level networking yet with uncharacteristic humility and discretion. The kind of celebrity you saw on TV would have no idea that Noble Rot existed, the kind of people who seriously impressed you would probably be dining there tonight... and as a result of it all - the charm of the owners, the stealth glamour, the wine (God! The Wine!) and, if such a thing could exist, a sort of democratic exclusivity - it became a de facto clubhouse.

Sassie would have loved it. In November 2019, when Keeling and Andrew announced they were taking over the Hussar, there was an almost audible intake of breath across the restaurant industry. There are surprisingly few surviving restaurants with impressive heritage in the UK and this one still loomed large in collective memory. That two such talented and well-liked young restaurateurs would take it on was, as social media gushed, "potentially the most exciting thing to happen in restaurants in years".

"We loved renovating our Lamb's Conduit Street original," says Keeling, "and while the Gay Hussar wasn't necessarily known for its food and drink, its walls exude an almost palpable sense of bonhomie and political scheming. Soho has always been very close to our hearts, so having the opportunity to become the custodians of one of its most iconic restaurants was impossible to resist."

There were some Instagram posts released when they investigated the old building but they were really quite depressing.



Rowson's scabrous cartoons were gone, the photographs of stars, politicians and other deplorables removed and the glorious sign - an oddly appropriate combination of conservative dark wood and fabulous circus gilding - consigned to a back room. Though planning, design and strip-out work began, it was quickly halted by the Covid-19 lockdown in March.

As soon as builders were able to return, work resumed with redoubled effort and the effect is remarkable. Modern restaurant design tends towards unpatinated bling but the refit of the interior has somehow retained the Hussar's spirit. Design practice Fabled Studio has modernised the underground kitchen, brought the services up to code, improved access throughout, yet done it all with a touch so deft that the rooms have a vibe akin to the Colony, the French or Andrew Edmunds - a sort of Soho wabi-sabi. There is still panelling, still low lighting, a front door through which it is impossible to pass without making an entrance and an atmosphere conducive to plotting.

The menu shows all the brilliance you'd expect from head chef Alex Jackson (formerly at Sardine) and executive chef Stephen Harris but with gratifying homage to the long history of the place: eggs casino, cabbage-stuffed grouse with sour cream, Robert Carrier's pâté aux herbes and, yes, beef shin goulash "Gay Hussar".

And in the first-floor dining room Rowson has painted a mighty triptych, a great sweeping work in the tradition of Francis Bacon that future art historians will probably reveal slanders half the denizens of contemporary Soho.

The Gay Hussar is now called Noble Rot and, for better or worse, journalism and politics have mutated into a much less convivial game. Nobody is kidding themselves that the future for Soho's restaurants is going to be anything but challenging, but in taking on such an important part of its past, and treating it with respect, two brilliant entrepreneurs are making the very best of it. **FT**



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Autograph
Bastian Gallery
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Catherine Edelman
Christophe Guye Galerie
Clémentine de la Féronnière
Crane Kalman Gallery
Danziger Gallery
Ed Cross Fine Art
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Candlestar



Jancis Robinson Wine

Cape hope

Even before Covid-19, with unemployment at above 30 per cent, the South African economy was in trouble.

Now, with even more job losses, it needs every boost it can get. Yet, since March, the wine industry – the second biggest contributor to agricultural exports after citrus and employer of 290,000 people – has been seriously hamstrung.

The industry has long been caught up in the government's attempts to curb the country's endemic problem of alcohol abuse. In the southern hemisphere, the imposition of restrictions driven by the pandemic coincided with the end of the grape harvest. Cue visions of just-picked grapes and tanks of half-fermented wine left untended.

On March 26, the South African wine industry managed to get a last-minute dispensation to complete basic vintage operations. Yet it was ordered to cease selling wine completely – both on the export markets, which usually take about 45 per cent of all South African wine, and at home. These measures were applied to all alcoholic drinks.

The official reason given for the bans was that they would free up hospital beds that would otherwise be occupied by patients with alcohol-related conditions. The wine industry argued that banning exports was unnecessary.

Exports were banned for five weeks, domestic sales for nine. On June 1, sales of wine within South Africa were permitted again with severe restrictions, until, on July 12, they were banned again for another five weeks. Since mid-August wine sales within the country have been allowed, but only Monday to Thursday between 9am and 5pm (Friday sales between those hours have been permitted since September 21).

Weekend wine tourism is normally massive in South Africa, accounting for up to half of all sales for many wine producers.



As imagined by Leon Edler



Wineries were closed to visitors for nearly five months but have been allowed to open since mid-August. There is a major snag though: orders taken from weekend visitors may be fulfilled only during those restricted weekday daytime hours – and those who want a home delivery have to order a minimum of 12 bottles.

Up to 2019, about 10 million tourists visited South Africa each year, with a concentration between December and March when Cape winelands would be thronged with northern hemisphere visitors escaping winter back home. In peak season, Cape Town's top restaurants were booked months in advance. Tourism used to account for more

'Producers have been forced to turn surplus grapes into grape concentrate, brandy and even hand sanitiser'

than 40 per cent of the turnover of South Africa's boutique wineries.

Hopes are hardly high for the coming holiday season, however. The industry body Wines of South Africa puts losses so far as a result of the restrictions since March at R7bn (£30m). The country's 2,778 grape growers and their 40,000 direct employees are experiencing real hardship. Producers have been forced to turn surplus grapes into juice, grape concentrate, brandy and even hand sanitiser.

So, what's the good news about South African wine? The sheer beauty of it, that's what. It must be almost unimaginably frustrating for the producers of these gorgeous, often underpriced wines not to be able to sell them unfettered.

The UK and the Netherlands have been keen importers of South African wine ever since the end of apartheid. Now there are signs that the important American market is waking up to it. It is probably the ►

Some recommended South African wines

These just happen to be the wines I have tasted recently. There are hundreds more.

- Aslina, Umsasane 2018 Stellenbosch \$29.95 Amaro, Brooklyn NY
- David & Nadia – virtually anything £110-£245 for six bottles in bond Justerini & Brooks. Skurnik is US distributor
- House of Dreams Grenache Noir 2019 Swartland £9 M&S
- Journey's End, V5 Cabernet Franc 2017 Stellenbosch £15.20 Tanners
- Kara-Tara Pinot Noir and Chardonnay 2019 Western Cape £18.99 Museum Wines
- Kumusha, The Flame Lily white blend 2019 Slanghoek
- Leeu Passant, Old Vines Lötter Cinsault 2018 Franschoek £48.40 Q Wines of Somerset
- Mosi, Tinashe Chenin Blanc 2019 Swartland
- Perdeberg Cellars, The Dryland Collection Courageous Chenin Blanc 2019 Paarl \$19.95 RRP
- Perdeberg Cellars, Cinsault 2018 Coastal Region \$14.95 RRP
- Rall – virtually anything. £95-£250 for six bottles in bond Justerini & Brooks
- Sadie Family – anything, but too famous to be inexpensive £240-£350 a dozen in bond Berry Bros & Rudd
- Stark-Condé Syrah 2017 Stellenbosch £19.99 Museum Wines
- Sutherland Sauvignon Blanc 2019 Elgin £10.50 Vinum
- Thelema Chardonnay 2017 Stellenbosch £16.10 Vinum and others

UK specialist retailers of South African wine include Frontier Fine Wines, Handford, Harrogate Fine Wines, Museum Wines, Swig, Red Squirrel, Vino SA and Slurp.

US specialist retailers include Cape Ardor (cape-ardor.com) and the Southern Hemisphere Wine Center (southernwines.com) in southern California.



Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com. International stockists Wine-searcher.com

◀ new-wave producers with their old-vine Chenin Blancs, Cinsaults and Grenaches that will garner the most attention in the US. The unirrigated inland vineyards on the mixed farms of Swartland north-east of Cape Town have tended to provide South Africa's ambitious younger winemakers with affordable, characterful fruit.

The old guard in Stellenbosch is making some stellar Chardonnay and Cabernet but California is already awash with examples of these popular varieties. The Cape examples tend to be much better value, but value does not seem to be as prized by American wine consumers as it is by their European counterparts.

I've been tasting a wide range of South African wines recently and have been struck by the great strides that have been taken in red wine quality. For decades Cape winemakers have shown themselves adept at producing truly satisfying whites: Chardonnays, Sauvignon Blancs and Chenin Blancs that managed to straddle the border between refreshment and interest. Those cooling Antarctic currents seem to make their presence felt in bottle after bottle. And the average age of the country's dominant grape variety, Chenin Blanc, is sufficient to imbue lots of them with real complexity - more so than many a Chenin from its homeland in the Loire valley.

Reds were a different story for many years. An endemic vine virus meant that far too many red wine grapes struggled to ripen properly

'In recent tastings, I've been struck by the great strides taken in red wine quality in South Africa'

and many tasters found South African reds deeply unsatisfying. But, to judge from my recent tastings, it seems as though all the research and replanting has really paid off. Most of the reds I encountered were really delicious - with fine examples of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah/Shiraz as well as wines made from the Grenache and Cinsault vines that can be found in some of the Cape's older vineyards. The red wine grape that traditionally came in for most criticism was Pinotage, a specifically South African crossing of Pinot Noir and Cinsault that tastes nothing like either of its parents. But even Pinotage seems to have been widely tamed.

Until recently, fine South African examples of the red burgundy grape Pinot Noir were extremely rare but the cool south coast of the country is now yielding more and more serious Pinots - and the country's traditional method Cap Classique wines include a few really serious sparkling wines.

Now that South African wine producers are free to export, I don't think you would regret supporting them with your custom. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

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FTWeekend



Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. What single unit of measurement is equivalent to 745.7 watts?
2. From April 1860 to March 1861, what ran between St Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California?
3. Which 1992 film features a criminal

gang led by Joe and Eddie Cabot?

4. Doctor Eggman is the arch-enemy of which video-game character?
5. Lanzarote (above) and La Palma are in which archipelago?

6. Which Julian Barnes novel is narrated by Geoffrey Braithwaite?

7. Whose hit singles include "Lady D'Arbanville", "Matthew and Son" and "Moon Shadow"?

8. According to Robert Burns (right), what "gang aft agley"?

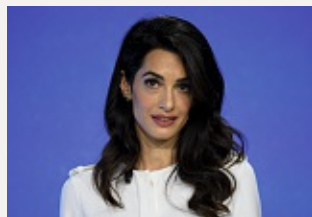
9. *Testudo* is the Latin name for which Ancient Roman military formation?

10. Which 1971 children's book by Judith Kerr is based on her childhood in 1930s Germany?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



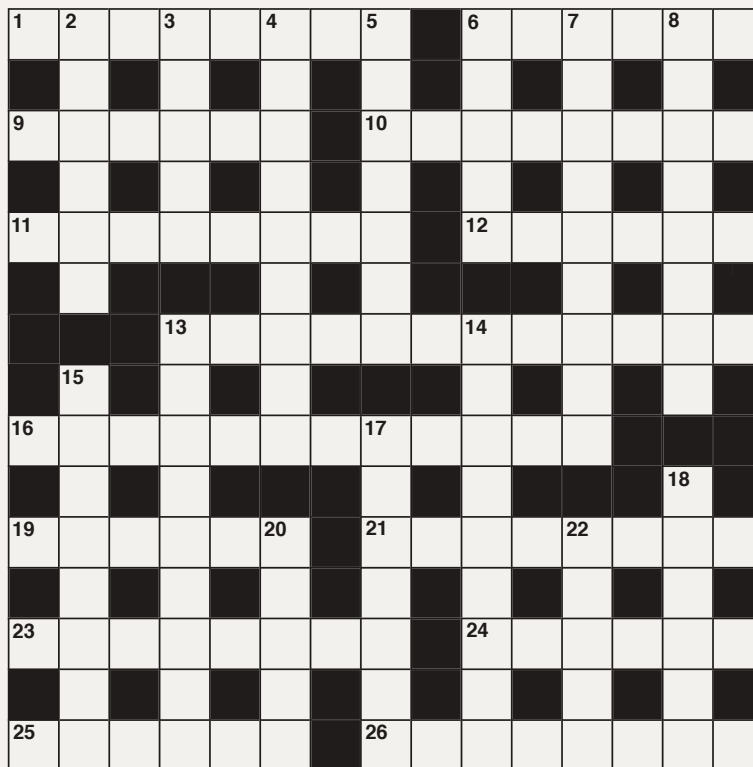
+



= ?

Answers page 8

The Crossword No 509. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1 Bacterium (8)
- 6 See (6)
- 9 Vladivostok's country (6)
- 10 Ludicrously (8)
- 11 Setback (8)
- 12 Electrical interference (6)
- 13 Process of turning off (12)
- 16 Bureaucratic Soviet elite (12)
- 19 Abstain from (6)
- 21 Unconventional, avant-garde (8)
- 23 Misconception, hallucination (8)
- 24 Skilful (6)
- 25 Nervous (2, 4)
- 26 Loathing (8)

DOWN

- 2 Shrewdness of current one comprehending me (6)
- 3 Children publish controversy (5)
- 4 One who takes too much interest in financial affairs? (4, 5)
- 5 Try including everyone's vegetable (7)
- 6 Support for fish around island (5)
- 7 Breathe out, imbibing a drop of long refreshing drink (6, 3)
- 8 Sweet kitty swallows tablet the wrong way (8)
- 13 Large dog surprisingly endured half hour inside (9)
- 14 It's playing havoc with us - get iron guarantee (9)

- 15 The lions upset dairy cow (8)
- 17 A pound given to one in a state (7)
- 18 Fabric's twisting coil about, initially (6)
- 20 Chess player with success at end of game (5)
- 22 Customs officer ultimately has some travelling around (5)

Solution to Crossword No 508





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

What can we learn from the things we fear the most?



What scares you right now? Some readers might be tempted to reply “almost everything”, given the current grim confluence of political, economic and pandemic news.

Each year, however, Axa, the large French insurance company, tries to explore this question further. This year, it surveyed 20,000 members of the public and a panel of risk experts around the world with market research group Ipsos and the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy. The results (presented in a webinar in which I recently participated) are thought-provoking.

Two years ago, pandemic risks were deemed to be the 10th scariest “emerging” threat - behind the dangers from “medical advances and innovations” such as genetic modification. Back then, climate change topped the list of terrors, as it has done in most years recently, followed by cyber-security concerns, fears about geopolitics, managing natural resources and local social strife.

Today, unsurprisingly, pandemic concerns top the list, followed in most regions by climate change (except in the US, where this has tumbled way down) and cyber-security issues. “The perception of cyber-warfare risk has increased,” Axa notes. “It is seen as the main security threat by 47 per cent of experts compared with 37 per cent last year.” Economic and financial risks are the only current “top 10 worries” that were missing from the list two years ago.

Fears change of course, but what is striking is the regional pattern. Measured overall, 73 per cent of people in the world apparently say they feel more vulnerable today than they did five years ago. But breaking that down tells another story: the figure is 75 per cent in America, 55 per cent in Germany and a paltry 25 per cent in China.

This may be because 45 per cent of experts in Asia-Pacific say that they feel “absolutely or somewhat prepared for pandemics and infectious diseases”, compared with 16 per cent in the Americas. That has flipped from 2019 when the rates were 16 per cent and 31 per cent respectively.

By contrast, the Chinese worry more about geopolitics: 69 per cent of experts there fear geopolitical conflict, double the figure for the US. There is also a notable gap in relation to climate change. More than two-thirds of people in Germany, Belgium and Italy worry about this, compared with just 45 per cent of people in the US.

So what should we conclude from such figures? The first - and most obvious - lesson is that our perception of risk is incredibly subjective and apt to be backward-looking, driven by whatever headlines we have read in the previous year. That is not just clear in the Axa survey but can be seen in the World Economic Forum’s global risk report as well.

In January, climate change also topped the WEF worry list, with pandemics almost nowhere to be seen. In 2007, with an economic crash around the corner, the potential impact of a financial crisis was similarly missing (but it cropped up in 2009, 2010 and 2011 when the issue was no longer posing the same kind of threat). Cynics might say that one way to work out which threat is about to destabilise planet Earth is to look at what is not ranked high on the WEF list rather than what is.

A second point is that the list shows the cost of national hubris. Paying attention to what other

‘Our perception of risk is incredibly subjective, driven by whatever headlines we have read in the previous year’

countries worry about is sensible policy in a globalised world, since contagion is an ever-present threat and over-confidence tends to create more, not less, vulnerability. In a striking article for the journal *Nature* last month, anthropologist Martha Lincoln pointed out: “Just last year, the United States was considered one of the countries best equipped to confront a virus such as Sars-CoV-2. Others included the United Kingdom, Brazil and Chile.” Yet these countries have actually performed worse than many others.

According to Lincoln: “One thing these countries have in common is ‘exceptionalism’ - a view of themselves as outliers, in some way distinct from other nations.” She argued that “their Covid-19 responses suggest that exceptionalist world views can be associated with worse public-health outcomes.” If, for example, more US leaders had taken note of Sars or Ebola at an earlier stage, the general public might not feel so vulnerable now.

There are also the longer-term consequences of these risk patterns. Three-quarters of Americans feeling more vulnerable than they did five years ago could be a short-term spike driven by this year’s ghastly stresses. But if it lasts, will this sense of vulnerability lead investors to take a more conservative stance and savers to hoard more money in the future, in the way we saw after the 1929 crash?

Might a greater sense of vulnerability also change Americans’ career choices or voting patterns? Could it spark more racial division and political polarisation? And could the fact that the Chinese population does not feel such a stark increase in vulnerability, relatively speaking, make the country more prone to risk-taking?

It’s hard to predict. And nobody knows how long Covid-19 will last. But one thing is clear - where you live will continue to have a big influence on what worries you most. **FT**

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