

APRIL 4/5 2020

FT Weekend Magazine

# THE CORONAVIRUS CHANCELLOR



**Can Rishi Sunak  
stop economic  
catastrophe?**

By George Parker  
and Sebastian Payne

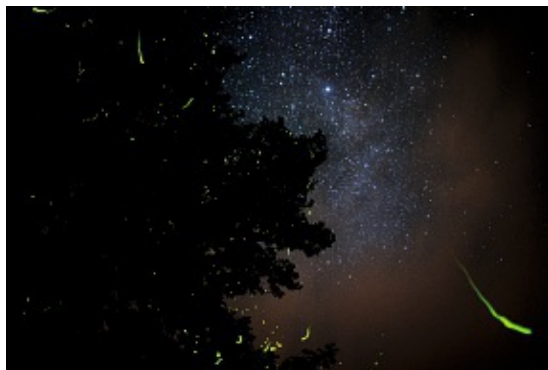




ELEONORA AGOSTINI

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Jonathan Sacks, p26



**‘Each little insect telling its own story’**

Photographer Samuel James on his fireflies series, p30



**‘A perfect symphony of sweet and sour’**

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Cover illustration by Barry Falls



At  
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with the  
**kids**

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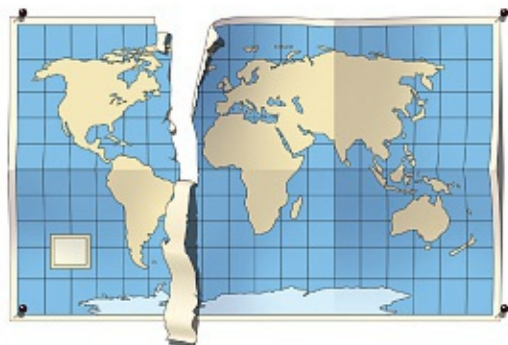
Richard Robinson, Brighton Science Festival



# SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

## The corona gulf dividing Europe and America



**D**onald Trump’s handling of this crisis wasn’t merely predictable. It was predicted. In March 2016, Art Caplan, bioethicist at New York University, published a blog about an imaginary pandemic under the then almost unimaginable Trump presidency. Caplan got many details right. He has the virus jumping from animals in Chinese markets to humans with a “lethality [not] seen since the Spanish flu outbreak of 1918”.

People are urged to “stay home, wear masks”. Then President Trump leaps into action, closing borders and screening passengers on international flights. “Many pointed out that these measures did not work and that the mutated virus was already in the US,” writes Caplan. But Trump “noted that immigrants often brought disease”, and suggested the pandemic was “part of a conspiracy”. A “political battle [erupts] between Trump, recalcitrant governors in many states, [and] his own CDC amidst catcalls from the international community”. Eventually, Trump gets distracted by a “trade war with China to punish them for allowing an epidemic”.

In a crisis, you discover who people are, and what countries are. We already knew who Trump was, but what does the current situation reveal about the half of the US that he represents, and about Europe? Both regions start with a sad set of similarities. Neither the US nor Europe (except arguably Germany) could tame this pandemic through early tracking and testing, as South Korea and Singapore did. Both Europe and the US are wrecking the planet to enrich their people, yet cannot even enrich most of them. Only this winter did British average wages briefly regain their pre-crisis level of 2007. Now other European countries may drop below that bar. The average income of the bottom half of Americans had stagnated at about \$15,000 for 40 years even before the pandemic, calculates Thomas Piketty in his new book *Capital and Ideology*.

Neither region is now showing much cross-country solidarity. Trump stopped flights from Europe without warning Europeans; northern European countries continue to block proposals for shared Eurobonds, pushing grieving Spain and Italy into a new era of depression and austerity. Donations of protective kits, and Germany treating a few dozen French and Italian patients, can’t disguise that failure. Brexiters needn’t have worried: there is no European superstate.

But on other life-and-death matters, Europe and American Republicans diverge. The latter are sticking with Trump in a suicidal course that has no European equivalent. Until this pandemic, there was an “only joking” quality to Trumpism. Many Republicans used it as a way to stick it to coastal elites rather than a practical ideology. They could dismiss climate scientists and other experts without suffering immediate harm. Yet

even now that their own lives may depend on it, most Trumpists continue to believe the leader, disbelieve experts, value the economy over life and regard blue states as the enemy. Trump’s approval ratings among Republicans remain above 90 per cent. If he becomes the new Thabo Mbeki – the former South African president whose denialism during the Aids epidemic made him culpable for 365,000 unnecessary deaths, according to a Harvard study – Republicans will be complicit.

France and Italy in normal times are packed with anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists. But

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### ‘Many Republicans are also following Trump in endorsing a choice unimaginable in Europe: risking death for the Dow’

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almost everyone in these countries is now listening to health experts and staying home. By contrast, in US polls, far more Republicans than Democrats dismissed the pandemic as a hoax and said they wouldn’t change behaviour, even while medical experts warned that Covid-19 was heading for red states too. Still, it’s no wonder these Americans distrust medical science when it has given them (at great expense) the opioid crisis and, in 13 Trump-voting states, average life expectancy below 78, lower than any country in the EU.

Many Republicans are also following Trump in endorsing a choice unimaginable in Europe: risking death for the Dow. Several Republican state governors refused to order lockdowns on time, and were supported by rightwing groups such as Americans for Prosperity. Authorities often prioritised business over life in long-ago pandemics, Richard J Evans, history professor at Cambridge, told the *Talking Politics* podcast. He cites the example of Hamburg’s merchants trying to hush up the cholera outbreak of 1892. It’s just surprising this tradition coexists with modern medical knowledge.

The common Republican argument that people die in recessions is only true because the US makes it so. US companies have already sacked millions of workers, many of whom have lost their health insurance. By contrast, many European governments – including Britain’s rightwing Conservatives and the supposedly “neoliberal” Emmanuel Macron – are paying workers’ wages to prevent redundancies. European states have learnt from their mistakes of 2008: this time they aim to bail out ordinary people, not banks.

Once European countries emerge from lockdown, they may have to block flights from the pandemic’s next epicentre, the US. A travel ban between these two floundering regions would symbolise a split in world views that probably won’t be bridgeable even after Trump. **FT**

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



**INVENTORY** DAISY HAGGARD  
ACTOR AND WRITER

**‘Eternal optimism has got me through rather than ambition’**

**Stage, film and television actor Daisy Haggard, 42, has appeared in productions including the BBC’s *Uncle, Episodes* and *Back to Life*, which she co-wrote.**

**What was your childhood or earliest ambition?**

A pop star, writer, vet and actor – a gymnast, as well. I thought I could probably manage them all.

**Private school or state school?**

**University or straight into work?** State school first, then James Allen’s Girls’ School. Then straight to work, doing lots of odd jobs, auditioning desperately for parts and not getting them, then finally drama school at Lamda.

**Who was or still is your mentor?**

My dad [the director Piers Haggard] is the person I’ve always talked to about work. He always says: “Create the circumstances in which you can shine without being an arsehole.” And: “Hold. Your. Nerve,” in a very deep voice. I hear it every time I get nervous or flustered.

**How physically fit are you?**

Not fit enough. I fluctuate, but I have two young children and too much work at the moment. Every year is the year I will get the supermodel body and become addicted to exercise. It doesn’t happen. It will!

**Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?**

Probably ambition, thinking objectively. Lots of people who aren’t very good are very successful. I’m ambitious, but not overtly; I’ve never had that drive and zeal, but I’ve always been able to pick myself up if something goes wrong. Eternal optimism has got me through rather than ambition.

**How politically committed are you?**

Increasingly. As I have children and see the world they’re going to grow up in, I worry about their future. I fell off for a few years, but now I feel more engaged.

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

A perfect tropical island with a beach shack and no mosquitoes.

**What’s your biggest extravagance?**

The things I spend most of my money on, to my shame, are probably taxis and food. My life extravagance: I am known as *Holidaisy*. It’s not about spending a lot of money, but I take as many breaks as I can afford to spend time with my family.

**In what place are you happiest?**

In Greece. I got us into a bit of financial trouble by buying a little ruin in Greece, and slowly, slowly scrubbed it up and sorted it out. So, in the courtyard with a gin and tonic, when the sun’s setting and the kids are playing barefoot near the bougainvillea. Everyone thought I was crazy because we couldn’t afford it – it was a massive risk.

**What ambitions do you still have?**

For my family to be really happy. With work, to do a few things really well – write a couple of films, maybe one day direct one, write some more series.

**What drives you on?**

Love of my gang.

**What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?**

My children and my family. At the moment, getting work-life balance right seems like a real achievement but I don’t for a second rest on my laurels. You have to keep working at all those things. In the work sense, writing and starring in *Back to Life*. I worked on it for four years, had just had a baby and thought I was on the way out.

**What do you find most irritating in other people?**

I find earnest, humourless idiots really irritating.

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

I’m having a good year so I think she would be a bit relieved. It’s such a fraught time, your twenties.

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

I lose things all the time, I’m so scatty. If I let it bother me I’d never sleep at night.


**What is the greatest challenge of our time?**

To deal with climate change so that we have a future.

**Do you believe in an afterlife?**

No. I’d love to. I like the idea of it but I don’t believe it.

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

I’m going to say 10. I can’t moan and lots of people really are struggling. At any minute it could go down to one and you have to enjoy the moment, so while I’m feeling 10, I’ll own it! 

.....  
*Interview by Hester Lacey.*

*Daisy Haggard stars in “Breeders”, which continues on Thursdays at 10pm on Sky One and streaming service Now TV*

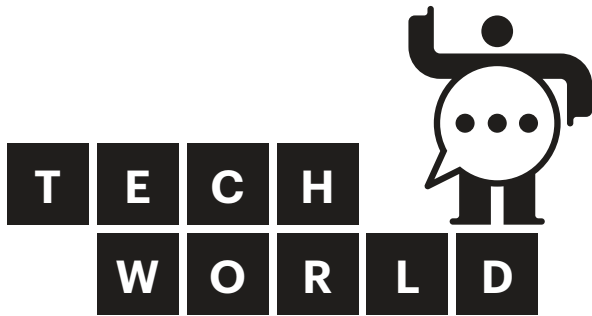
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OPERATING WORLDWIDE



BY ELAINE MOORE IN DORSET

## Who is Karen? And why is she so popular on TikTok?

There is a short video online that shows an American teenage boy sitting in a car with a T-shirt draped over his head, complaining loudly that his takeaway order is incorrect. Another video shows a teenager with a towel on his head criticising a café for opening three minutes late. Both boys are pretending to be my favourite internet villain - Karen.

On the video-sharing app TikTok there are 720m views for videos dedicated to Karen jokes. Millions more if you include #karenchallenge, #calmdownkaren and #respectthedriplekaren (a joke about middle-aged women not understanding fashion). There are Karen memes on Instagram and YouTube as well. Wherever American teens congregate online, you will find jokes about Karen.

The idea of using the name as a generic term for obnoxious grown-ups is supposed to have started on Reddit, after a user posted complaints about his ex-wife. It can be used as a shorthand for bigots and, because there is no male equivalent, it can also be used to make sexist jokes. But most of the time, teens use it to describe an annoying, interfering adult. Karens are moms - pushy ones. They share corny inspirational quotes on Facebook, buy merchandise inscribed with "Live Laugh Love" and love to ruin teenage fun.

What really marks out a Karen, however, is their capacity to complain and get their own way. If you ever worked in a shop or restaurant when you were younger,



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

you will remember who the Karens were - they were the ones who asked to speak to your manager.

The idea of Karens has been around for a while. A few months ago, a woman caught on video in the US shouting and making faces at another driver was dubbed the ultimate Karen. But the number of jokes seems to have kicked up a gear since the coronavirus pandemic forced millions of American teenagers to leave schools and colleges and return home.

All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, claimed William Wordsworth. The same can be said of memes. In the past few weeks, TikTok has become the most effective black hole for

**'Pristine photographs posted on Instagram are annoying in a crisis, while WhatsApp messages can bring bad news. TikTok, though, is just silly'**

many (and not just teenagers) to disappear into when reality feels overwhelming.

The variety of content makes it by far the most absorbing app I have on my phone. It is also a social network filled with strangers - which feels perfect for this dislocated period of time. Pristine photographs posted on Instagram are annoying in a crisis, while WhatsApp messages can bring bad news. TikTok, though, is just silly. The fact that T-shirts and tea towels are supposed to denote Karen's long hair, but look nothing like it, is one of thousands of micro visual and audio jokes.

TikTok's Chinese parent ByteDance is valued at \$75bn, making it the most valuable start-up in the world. The algorithm that dictates the videos you see is ruthlessly efficient. Glance down at the app and by the time you look up an hour can easily have slipped past. Its chief currency is dance moves, in-jokes and youth. Charli D'Amelio, its first US celebrity, is 15 years old. Anyone born before the year 2000 seems to feel compelled to make a joke about their age when posting a video. Brands and more established celebrities have joined but none can compete with the wit and editing skills of teenagers.

The app's Gen Z demographic also means that it is stuffed to the brim with jokes about their mainstream, out-of-touch parents and all the other adults who annoy them - like Karen.

Teenagers forced to spend more time at home with their families need an outlet for their frustration. It's not surprising that TikTok at the moment has more jokes about how annoying adults can be - or that the jokes can be extremely sharp. I love them anyway. Karens may just be a meme but the longer this crisis lasts, the more I find the idea comforting.

There is something soothing about the idea of a group of people willing to speak up and complain when the rest of us are sitting in stunned silence. When times are uncertain, it is also deeply reassuring to see that teenagers still believe adults have everything under control. **FT**

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*Elaine Moore is the FT's deputy Lex editor, currently stuck in Dorset*



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# ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

## Making a new cop drama out of a crisis

With police called in to enforce the coronavirus lockdown, there are already numerous instances of enthusiastic cops rebuking those not taking the new rules seriously. Social media is ablaze with drone footage of the rozzers snaring dangerous dog walkers, people loitering with intent to sunbathe and even one Labour MP, Stephen Kinnock, rebuked for taking his dad a birthday cake.

There is a point to this. The publicity helps reinforce the message to take the lockdown seriously. Nonetheless, some forces seem a tad zealous with their new power. On the upside, it could make for some cracking new crime fiction.

*The scene: Oxford. A grizzled cop pulls up in a vintage Jag.*

Ah, Morse, you took your time. **Sorry, sir - I was checking for pubs that were open in defiance of the regulations.**

Find any?

**Sadly not. So what's the story?**

Punters.

**What are the punters doing?**

Well punting, you pillock. What do you think?

**I see, sorry, sir. You meant it literally. What's happened to these punters? Have they found a body? A headless corpse by the Magdalen Bridge perhaps?**

No, Morse, nothing like that.

**Well, what then?**

They are punting. It's not an essential activity.

**Are they on their own?**

Yes, but that's not the point...

**I'm homicide, sir; don't we have constables for this kind of thing?**

This is a national crisis. It's all hands to the punt. They could be spreading the virus. This is virtually attempted murder.

**It sounds more like attempted boating, sir. (Sighs.) OK, who reported it?**

No one. Our drones caught them.



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

We scrambled a helicopter but the bastards escaped.

**If they were on their own, sir, is it that big a deal?**

Take this seriously. It might be a gang. There could be conspiracy to punt. We've got to find them. You're an Oxford man, use your knowledge, visit a stately home first, climb up a church spire.

**Can't we just go to the boat house?**

No, we'd never get a two-hour drama out of that. Oh and get down to the Turl, there's a shop selling inessential Easter eggs.

**Easter eggs! You should scramble all units. If you need me, I'll be at home with Lohengrin.**

I've told you, Morse, you're meant to be self-isolating.

*Line of Duty's superintendent Hastings is talking to colleagues:*

So we now have clear evidence of people driving to walk their dogs.

**Sir, what if these dog walkers are some of our own?**

What do you mean, fella?

**We think these dog walkers could be cops.**

Mother of God, bent coppers.

**Yes, sir, dog walkers in the highest levels of the force, that's why they always seem to know when we've got the drones up.**

Does the assistant chief commissioner know?

**We think he's one of them, sir.**

**Do you not recognise this gilet?**

We're gonna have to get someone in under cover. Anyone here got a bichon frise?

*The Sweeney arrive:*

**All right, Kinnock, you're nicked. We've got you bang to rights.**

Who grassed?

**You did, you muppet, you tweeted out a picture of yourself with your parents, who we happen to know do not live at your home address. You visited your dad and took him a birthday cake.**

It wasn't like that, guv. I was taking round essential supplies and also took a cake for his birthday. Have a heart. I stayed well back from them.

**You're breaking my heart, Kinnock. You're going down for this. You could get five years, or perhaps a £30 fine. Unless...**

Unless what?

**Tell us who baked the cake and we might be prepared to look the other way this one time. Second cop: give me five minutes alone with him, boss, he'll crack.**

Why do you care who baked it?

**We're running low on flour. We could use the name of your supplier. FT**

.....

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Reply

Well done to the FT for this important reporting ("Inside China's controversial mission to reinvent the internet", March 28/29). We need to keep raising the pressure on our governments, politicians and corporations to design better policies and better regulation, and, flowing from them, better standards and technologies consistent with our values and needs.

Sierra One via FT.com



@BakerLuke March 28

This, via @FT on China's mission to reinvent the internet, is the most important story you'll read (today, this week, month or year because it threatens to dramatically shape our future)

How nice to read something other than depressing news ("The dog still needs a walk", March 28/29). What's more, the pictures are beautiful. I have two dogs that I walk daily. These walks, in the incredible silence that surrounds us now, offer a great opportunity for reflection. FTreader10 via FT.com

Thanks for some great advice ("How to manage anxiety and grief through coronavirus", March 28/29). I have been living with incurable cancer for five years, in chemotherapy and with a low immune system, so have been hypersensitive to coughs and sneezes for a long time. The practical advice therapist Julia Samuel sets out is very useful and insightful. I would add two things: be thankful for everything - every day I feel is a wonderful gift. And trying to help others is good to avoid becoming self-obsessed. Pilgrim via FT.com

Thanks for putting a smile on my face ("Honestly, who'd be a burglar now?", March 28/29). And... at least burglars wear masks. Jam2Morrow via FT.com

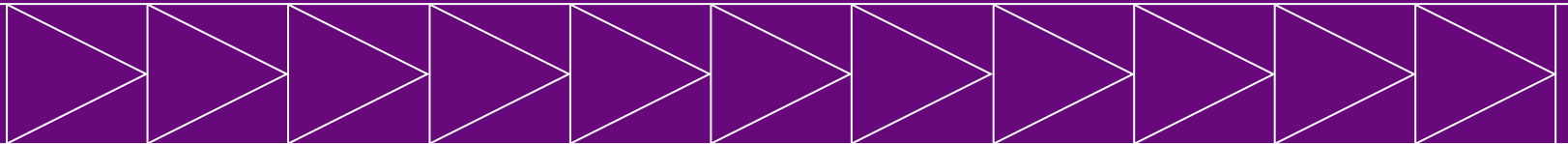
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In a new daily FTWeekend Live Q&A on the [ft.com](https://www.ft.com) homepage, you can chat to our contributors on an aspect of **life in lockdown** at noon and 5pm UK time. Join **gardening expert** Jane Perrone on Saturday and **wine columnist** Jancis Robinson on Sunday for a lively below-the-line discussion

# FASTFORWARD A MANIFESTO FOR INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN PHOTOGRAPHY



1. A step change for all arts organisations and institutions to commit to exhibiting, commissioning, publishing and collecting at least 50% women's work.

2. Inclusivity leading to all arts events and activities to address a minimum of 50% of women's interests and stories.

3. The education system to recognise and value women artists and photographers, and the role they play in society, in their curricula at every level of the system and to provide equal opportunities for female artists and photographers to take part and enrich their curricula.

4. A more significant encouragement for women to be involved in photography as practitioners, as participants and as audiences as part of government policy.

5. The introduction of an arts and cultural strategy for women in all local and national planning that includes an emphasis on the value of photography.

6. An innovative and robust approach to financing with key government organisations such as the Arts Council as well as local arts councils being involved in the planning of events and activities that deliberately include women artists and photographers and female audiences.

7. For governments, local and national, to play an active enabling role in both pushing forward innovative ideas and finding ways to fund projects that involve and include women as photographers, artists, writers, curators and audiences.

8. A group of sector leaders including the Fast Forward research group to work together to affect change for women photographers and audiences in all aspects of our society.

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# THE CORONAVIRUS CHANCELLOR

Rishi Sunak had been in the job for only a month when the pandemic catapulted him into the middle of an economic crisis. Not yet 40, the chancellor has won praise for his bold measures and pragmatism. No one doubts his ambition either – but is it too much, too soon? *George Parker* and *Sebastian Payne* report. Illustrations by *Barry Falls*





n the world beyond the wood-panelled state dining room of No 10 Downing Street, the pound was crashing, companies were closing, streets were emptying and one of London's biggest hospitals had run out of critical care beds. Yet inside, an almost surreal calm seemed to surround the man charged with preventing coronavirus from turning into an economic catastrophe.

Rishi Sunak, Britain's recently installed chancellor of the exchequer, checked his notes before calmly running through the "unprecedented" measures he intended to take. A trim figure in a dark suit, white shirt and burgundy tie, Sunak had already allocated tens of billions of pounds to save ailing businesses, but his new approach had never been tried before, even in wartime: "For the first time in our history, our government is going to pay people's wages," he told the nation.

Sunak's "whatever it takes" message on March 20 won glowing reviews from the media and political opponents alike, as did the soothing manner in which he delivered it. "We want to look back on this time and remember how we thought first of others and acted with decency," he said. Beyond the admiration for the scale of the chancellor's response was a more fundamental question: who was this preternaturally assured politician?

Rishi Sunak is still a few weeks away from his 40th birthday, yet finds himself at the centre of Britain's most acute economic - and human - crisis since the financial crash, perhaps since the second world war. He has been an MP for less than five years and just a year ago he was the most junior minister in the local government department.

Until his appointment as chancellor on February 13 - following the dramatic resignation of his friend and then-boss Sajid Javid - he had not run a government department.

Few people saw Sunak coming, but at that tense coronavirus press conference in 10 Downing Street, there was a collective realisation that the prime minister's podium might well be where he was eventually heading. The press was cruel in drawing comparisons between the sleek chancellor and the ever-rumpled figure of Boris Johnson, who stood alongside him and has struggled to explain the government's sluggish initial response to the virus. Ladbroke's makes Sunak 11/4 hot favourite to be the next prime minister.

"He is smart, he's energetic and he listens, which is important," says Frances O'Grady, head of the TUC, Britain's trade union movement. O'Grady would not normally be a fan of a Tory chancellor, but several days of negotiating with Sunak over the coronavirus jobs package won her over: "It's a lot of responsibility on young shoulders. What I would say is that he does have emotional intelligence. It's a different style, without that sense of superiority that some have. He is quite frank in saying he never expected he would be in this position; this is not Conservatism as we have known it for 40 years. Things are happening really fast, judgments are being made fast."

Carolyn Fairbairn, head of the CBI employers' federation, also became an admirer over cups of tea at the Treasury: "We all just felt that incredible relief. He showed that you can come together and do things that are big and have the potential to change the course of the river."

Sunak has risen so fast that he has barely had time to acquire enemies, but the future could be trickier. "He won't be so popular when we're putting up taxes again to fix this," admits one Treasury insider. He remains vulnerable to the whims of Johnson and his team and will inevitably become a marked man for his rivals. But for now, he has ridden a vertiginous trajectory to the top level of British politics.

**Sunak's rise blindsided many people. He is not** a sociable figure in the Conservative parliamentary party: few MPs can recall seeing him working the tearooms like other ambitious colleagues. A teetotaler, he is more likely to end a long day in Westminster at home with his family than late-night gossiping over dinner. At heart, Sunak is a nerd: he enjoys video games, spreadsheets and *Star Wars*, confessing to attending midnight screenings of the films.

"He's very much an 'Ivory Tower' politician, he doesn't care much for parliament and the clubbable side of politics," one Tory MP of his generation remarks. "He certainly doesn't have a natural support base and has never worked the parliamentary party like some from our intake."

His gilded CV offers a clue to his political potential, however. Educated at £40,000-a-year Winchester College, where he was head boy, he went on to Oxford (where he received a First in Politics, Philosophy and Economics), Stanford and Goldman Sachs. It is a classic Conservative path to power, except that in Sunak's case it has



Rishi Sunak in his Richmond constituency. Posted to his Facebook page in June 2019

Arriving at a No 10 press conference with prime minister Boris Johnson, March 17



**'He is smart, he's energetic and he listens. It's a lot of responsibility on young shoulders. Things are happening really fast, judgments are being made fast'**

Frances O'Grady, TUC head

a twist: he did not hail from a moneyed background of land and City interests. His parents were immigrants: his father was a general practitioner in a tough part of Southampton - O'Grady speculates that this may have helped give the chancellor his "compassionate" manner - and his mother ran a local chemist. Later, her son would help to do the accounts.

Sunak, who declined to be interviewed for this article, attributes his Conservative instincts to his parents and their determination to get on and make a better life for their family. "My parents sacrificed a great deal so I could attend good schools," he says on his website. He took the Winchester scholarship exam but did not win a full scholarship; his parents sent him there anyway.

He was born in 1980. His Indian grandparents emigrated to Britain from east Africa about 60 years ago and the chancellor proudly recalls taking his grandfather around Westminster shortly after he was elected an MP in 2015. "He took his phone out to take a picture," Sunak told the BBC's *Political Thinking* podcast last year. "There were tears in his eyes."

The young Rishi, known as Rish to his friends, spoke English at home and grew up passionate about cricket, Southampton FC and its footballing genius Matt Le Tissier. A practising Hindu, Sunak recalled: "I'd be at the temple at the weekend... but I'd also be at the Saints game as well on a Saturday." He was the target of occasional racism, mentioning to the BBC how "it stung" when he was abused as a "Paki" in a local fast food restaurant.

After graduating from Oxford, Sunak started a job at Goldman Sachs, where he worked as a junior analyst in the merchant banking division for three years. One colleague says he "stood out" early on, recalling an away day at Lord's cricket ground. Sunak was "by far and away the youngest and the most junior guy" present but "took it very seriously in a very pleasant way - he was showing us what to do". Sunak does not mention his time at Goldman on his "about me" web page.

Starting in 2005, he spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at Stanford University, studying for an MBA. When he returned to London, he began working in hedge funds. In 2006, he joined the aggressive activist-fund TCI, founded by billionaire Chris Hohn and known for its controversial campaign at ABN Amro that led to the Dutch bank's sale to Royal Bank of Scotland, Santander and Fortis. The deal was seen as a critical factor behind RBS's downfall during the financial crisis.

Hohn has previously told the FT that Sunak had no involvement in the ABN Amro campaign - "He had nothing to do with the bank investment, I led that" - and praised him for his "strong analytical skills, high integrity and low ego". Sunak's time at TCI, one of London's biggest hedge funds, was a successful if demanding one. Hohn is known as a tough boss. "He's nobody's fool, he wouldn't have survived long with Chris Hohn if he were," says one former colleague.

After leaving TCI in 2009, Sunak joined Thelme Partners with a former TCI colleague, Patrick Degorce. His time there coincided with another controversy: Degorce was ordered to pay back about £8m in tax following a tribunal in 2013 ▶

◀ that found he had attempted to shelter millions of pounds in tax. A Treasury official said Sunak had no involvement with this or the TCI campaign at ABN Amro.

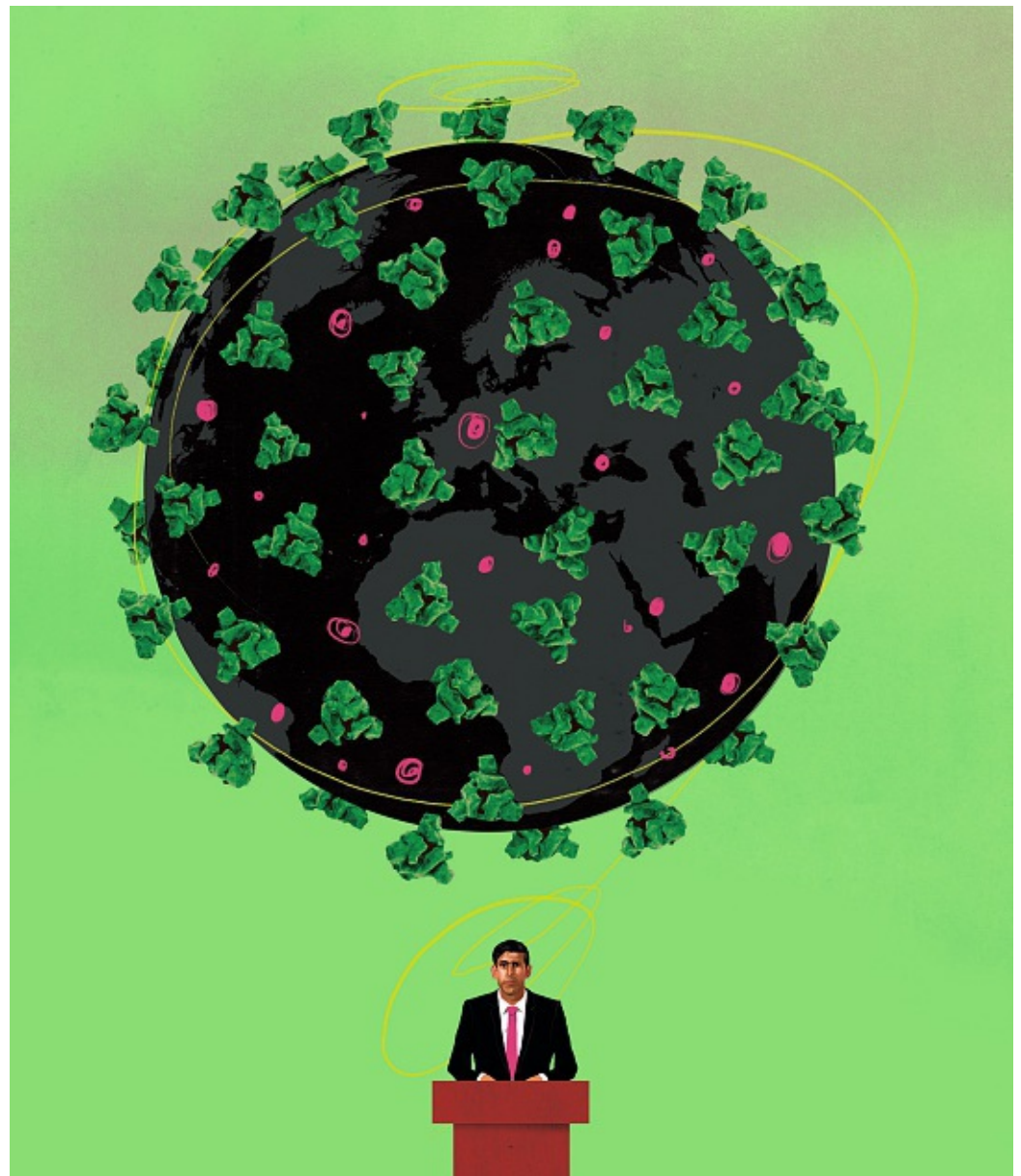
Sunak's time in finance made him rich - he is said to be one of the wealthiest members of parliament. But even without his own resources, money in the Sunak household is not exactly a problem. While at Stanford he met Akshata Murthy, whose father NR Narayana Murthy founded outsourcing company Infosys and is India's sixth-richest man, with a net worth of more than \$2bn, according to Forbes. Akshata runs fashion label Akshata Designs and is also a director of a venture capital firm founded by her father in 2010. The couple married in 2009 and live with their two young daughters in a Georgian manor house in Sunak's North Yorkshire constituency of Richmond, and in south-west London.

**S**unak's decision to go into politics was not an obvious one, nor was his choice of the constituency that he hoped to fight at the 2015 election. Richmond, a traditional, well-to-do farming seat of dales and sweeping vistas, had previously been held by the proud Yorkshireman and former Tory leader William Hague.

Hague recalls that constituency activists had already made up their mind to choose another Yorkshireman to fight the seat, possibly a farmer, but Sunak quickly won them over. "Nobody had heard of him but his effect on the association was dramatic," he says. "They had in their minds the sort of person they wanted and then this totally different person walked in. To their credit, they did a total U-turn. The key thing is he was obviously very intelligent without any trace of arrogance. That's a very unusual combination in politics. He's an extreme case of that."

Sunak, who does not eat beef, threw himself into local life, learning to milk cows and buying a big house in the constituency. Predictably, he won Richmond by a landslide in 2015 when David Cameron secured a majority Conservative government, but it was not yet clear what sort of Conservative he would turn out to be.

At Oxford, Sunak had joined the investment society, learning to trade in markets, rather than pursuing student politics. One fellow minister believes that he eventually entered political life because he wanted to fix things, but that he approaches politics in an unideological way: "He doesn't have an agenda, he's a problem solver. He's



**'Rishi's been working 18 hours a day for weeks. He's physically and psychologically exhausted. But he's always the one who says: "Come on, on to the next job"'**

**A political ally**

## **RISHI SUNAK'S BUSY SIX WEEKS**

### **FEBRUARY 13**

Sajid Javid resigns as chancellor, following an ultimatum by Boris Johnson to sack all of his advisers. The prime minister immediately appoints Javid's deputy, Rishi Sunak, to the post.

### **MARCH 11**

Sunak unveils his first Budget, including a £12bn stimulus to tackle coronavirus. Statutory sick pay will be covered by the government and the NHS will be given 'whatever it takes'. He suggests the virus will cause 'temporary disruption' to the UK economy.

### **MARCH 17**

As the British economy shuts down, Sunak announces an 'unprecedented' £350bn rescue package for businesses - including £330bn of state-backed loans and £20bn of handouts. Business rates are cancelled for a year and mortgages are put on hold for up to three months.

more of a businessman than a politician in that respect." A friend says Sunak "has made the most of all the opportunities given to him and wants to give something back".

Sajid Javid, who resigned as chancellor in February in a power struggle with Number 10, met Sunak before the 2015 election and says the wannabe politician shared many of his own beliefs: "He's someone who takes a natural interest in business issues. I felt we were very much on the same page: on business, the economy, free enterprise, lower taxation, less regulation."

Coronavirus, however, has turned ideology on its head. Sunak has had to renationalise rail franchises, pay part of the country's wage bill and borrow vast sums of money. Higher taxes may well follow to pay back the debt. Javid says Sunak had "no alternative" and that alongside his tough economic views there is "a lot of compassion" in him. But friends say he is "instinctively against" the statist measures he is being forced to adopt.

Hague says: "There's nothing wet about him. He would have been a Thatcherite in the days of Thatcher, but he's not stuck in the 1980s." He says Sunak also believes in state activism and his perspective as a northern MP informs his desire to get places such as the industrial Tees Valley back on their feet. "He's very conscious that Conservatives have to be able to revive an area like that," Hague continues, noting Sunak's proposal to create a free port in the area. "You can see the Tees Valley from any hill in the Richmond constituency."

Sunak's political pragmatism was evident in his response to the coronavirus crisis. But it is also apparent, according to colleagues, in his approach to the four-nation United Kingdom. An attachment to the Union flag is normally a given for Tory MPs, but colleagues say Sunak typically saw the issue through a financial lens.

One fellow Conservative recalls: "I remember discussing the future of the Union with Rishi and he argued that England should break away. He was advocating the end of the UK because it doesn't make financial sense to him. He doesn't have any love for the institution and I suspect he looks at it as he looks at anything: what's the profit?" Sunak's allies say the chancellor does not recall the conversation and is a staunch supporter of the Union "and the shared values it represents".

**Sunak's extraordinary rise from neophyte politician to chancellor in under five years was rooted in two big calls, both of which would ultimately benefit his career. The first, inevitably, was Brexit. When Cameron held his ill-fated EU referendum in 2016, Sunak joined the Leave camp,**

## 'He takes a natural interest in business issues. We were very much on the same page: on business, the economy, free enterprise, lower taxation, less regulation'

Sajid Javid, former chancellor

campaigning alongside Johnson and aligning himself with Tory activists, including many of his Eurosceptic constituents. Richmond would end up voting Leave by 56 per cent.

"He was the new guy up from London, there was no way he could have supported Remain," says one MP. But Hague and Javid agree that Sunak thought he could see the "economic opportunities" of Brexit, even though many officials at the Treasury he now heads believe it is barmy and have calculated that Johnson's preferred EU trade deal would cut 5 per cent off British growth over the next 15 years.

Sunak has previously argued that he "went through the numbers" and that his time at Stanford helped to convince him that the world was changing very fast and that the EU was failing to keep up. Britain needed to be more nimble.

"He's a Brexiter but in my experience that's not unusual for a second-generation immigrant," says one minister who knows him well. "This country has changed their life outcomes... He went to Winchester and Oxford - these things came as a result of this country. That's something that has a very strong pull."

"People in international financial services were often strong Brexiter," he adds. "They had different horizons, they didn't worry about continental supply chains like people in international business."

Sunak's decision to support Leave came as a grave disappointment to Cameron, who had tried personally to win over the newly elected MP. According to one individual with knowledge of the meeting, Cameron sighed as the implacable Sunak left the room: "If we've lost Rishi, we've lost the future of the party."

Sunak's second major call was backing Johnson for the Conservative leadership last summer. He briefly considered supporting Michael Gove, ►



With his former boss and then-chancellor Sajid Javid. Posted to Instagram December 2019

### MARCH 20

In his second 'unprecedented' rescue package, Sunak announces the government will help companies by paying 80 per cent of furloughed workers' wages up to £2,500 a month per person, as well as deferring VAT payments for three months.

### MARCH 26

Sunak pledges £3bn of support for the self-employed, offering a cash grant in June covering 80 per cent of their trading profits, initially for three months. The chancellor warns this could cost 'tens of billions'. Those earning above £50,000 a year are not covered.

### MARCH 27

FT analysis suggests Sunak will add £60bn of public spending to the UK economy, which could push the deficit as high as £200bn in the coming financial year. Such increases will pose difficult decisions for the chancellor once the immediate crisis passes.





Making 'a brew' of Yorkshire Tea 'for the Budget prep team'. Posted to Instagram February 21



On a walkabout in his constituency. Posted to Facebook August 2019

Facing page: arriving at No 10 on February 13; he was subsequently appointed chancellor

◀ also a fellow Brexiter, telling colleagues: “My heart says Gove, my head says Boris.” Although Sunak presented this as a hard choice about which candidate was most likely to revive Tory fortunes, he also knew that Johnson was likely to win.

In a high-profile intervention, Sunak joined two other rising stars of the party - Robert Jenrick and Oliver Dowden - to back Johnson on the front page of *The Times*. Sunak’s name appeared first on the article, which was headlined: “The Tories are in deep peril. Only Boris Johnson can save us.”

“Bland, keep-your-head-down people,” was how one minister in a rival camp described the trio. But it also showed them to be supremely ambitious. Sunak had held meetings with Johnson before the endorsement and Tory colleagues say the whole affair was “transactional” and it paid off. Although Johnson insisted he was not handing out jobs during the campaign, all three of the rising MPs now sit at the cabinet table.

To cement his relationship with the soon-to-be prime minister, Sunak quickly followed up by hosting Johnson and his partner Carrie Symonds at his grand Yorkshire home during the leadership campaign, serving burgers from the barbecue in the well-tended grounds. People who have spent time with Sunak and Akshata say the couple are “very hospitable, completely down to earth”. Although most people say Sunak is unflashy, his wealth can be a subtly deployed political asset: a few months later at the Treasury, he hosted staff at an expensive Mayfair restaurant after completing work on a spending review.

**In July 2019, Sunak entered the Treasury as number two to his friend Javid, who became Johnson’s first chancellor.** “We had a really good partnership: professional, good-humoured, respectful,” recalls Javid. Mats Persson, a former Treasury adviser, says Sunak made an immediate impression: “He can move between the detail and the big picture in a way which few politicians can. The officials rate him highly. He knows the brief and can lead internal discussions with clarity about what he wants to do.”

Javid quit in February after Johnson - egged on by his combative chief adviser Dominic Cummings - decided to sack all the chancellor’s advisers and merge officials from No 10 and No 11 into a single economic team. By now it was obvious to everyone - including Javid - that it was only a matter of time until Sunak became chancellor.

As he prepared to walk out of Downing Street, Javid urged Johnson not to choose a soft touch as his replacement: “I told the PM, ‘You need someone who is going to be straight with you and capable,’ and I said that had to be Rishi.” Given that Johnson’s allies already referred to Sunak as “Boris’s favourite minister”, the conversation was probably superfluous.

Sunak’s immediate focus was on preparing a March 11 Budget, which included spending proposals to boost the north of England and a £12bn package to help tackle coronavirus. But within days, as Covid-19 swept the country, ultimately infecting Johnson, Sunak was forced to extend help to furloughed employees, the self-employed and struggling businesses. The bill for the first six months of the outbreak is likely to exceed £60bn; the final reckoning could be much higher.

Coronavirus has been a massive challenge for Sunak. “Rishi is feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders,” says one ally. “He knows there is an enormous responsibility on him and he’s been working 18 hours a day for weeks now. He’s physically and psychologically exhausted. But he’s always the one who says to people: ‘Come on, on to the next job.’”

It is also a political opportunity. For a decade, Tory chancellors have had to squeeze public spending; Sunak, by contrast, has been praised in recent weeks for behaving like a leftwing Labour chancellor, doling out cash. Jeremy Corbyn, Labour’s outgoing leader, says his largesse showed the opposition had been “absolutely right” in calling for higher public spending at the 2019 election.

George Osborne, the chancellor who introduced a period of prolonged austerity in the UK, says Sunak will find it harder when he has to start clawing it back. “I know Rishi and I know he’s more than up to the role,” Osborne previously told the FT. “He’s smart, engaging and unfazed by the big responsibilities he faces. He also knows what all chancellors know: spending the money is the easiest bit of the job; raising it is the hardest.”

Officials in the Treasury speak reverentially about their new boss, with some saying he is the most capable chancellor since Nigel Lawson more than 30 years ago. But the learning curve has been incredibly steep: Sunak has not even had time to move into No 11 Downing Street from his southwest London base. Nick Macpherson, permanent secretary at the Treasury for over a decade until 2016, says: “He’s the sort of chancellor the Treas-

**‘His effect on his association was dramatic. They had in their minds the sort of person they wanted, then this totally different person walked in. They did a total U-turn’**

**William Hague, former Tory leader**

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# ‘Does he have the appetite to take risks? It’s never been apparent to me that he has a killer instinct. He’s not a patsy for No 10 but I think this has come a bit early for him’

A Conservative insider



GETTY IMAGES; AFP/GETTY IMAGES; FACEBOOK/RISHISUNAK; INSTAGRAM/RISHISUNAKMP

ury appreciates: decisive, on top of his brief and prepared to stand up to No 10.”

Macpherson argues that recent policies on banking and liquidity support were plainly drawn up in the Treasury, as was the veiled threat to the self-employed that if they wanted state support they would have to start paying taxes like employees. Frances O’Grady agrees that Sunak already looks like his own man. “It would be hard for anyone to claim right now that he was some kind of malleable person, which was the suggestion when he replaced Sajid Javid,” she says.

**N**umber 10 under Johnson and his consigliere Cummings has, however, never tolerated rival sources of power, hence its decision to bring the Treasury under its wing. Some Tories claim Sunak’s self-assurance and wholesome image is already causing some members of the Johnson camp to look over their shoulder. His Instagram account, including shots of a focused, whippet-thin Sunak working from home in a grey hoodie, suggests a politician with a keen eye for an arresting image. But Johnson’s allies insist the prime minister and his team have only the highest admiration for Sunak: “He’s a great guy and incredibly talented,” says one aide to the prime minister.

While Sunak’s swift rise means he has had little time to accumulate enemies, he has also not had time to build up a support base. For now, he is dependent on Johnson for his job and is surrounded by advisers screened and appointed by Cummings. “Who are his friends, his mob?” asks one Tory minister. Other old hands wonder whether he has the political street-fighting skills to cope when the flak is flying, or the ruthless streak to strike when the top job is in sight.

“The question is whether he has the appetite and willingness to take risks,” says one Conservative insider. “It has never been apparent to me that he has a killer instinct. I don’t think he’s a patsy for No 10 but I think this has come a bit early for him.” The chancellor’s allies admit the coronavirus outbreak is a huge personal test for the chancellor: “Rishi is keenly aware that this is a major crisis and more experienced blokes than him have been spat out by these kinds of events,” says one.

William Hague isn’t so sure that Sunak is not ready. As the biographer of Pitt the Younger – the Tory statesman who became chancellor in 1782 at the age of 23 and prime minister at the age of 24 – Hague believes the coronavirus crisis could be the furnace in which another great British political career is forged. “If someone is suddenly given great responsibility and then turns out to be more than equal to the challenge, that immediately overcomes the disadvantages of getting to the top too soon,” he says. “Rishi Sunak’s political potential is huge. He ranks as highly as anyone I’ve seen coming into politics.” **FT**

*George Parker is the FT’s political editor, Sebastian Payne is the Whitehall correspondent. Additional reporting by Jim Pickard*



# The ghosts of Smolensk

Ten years on from the air crash in Russian woodland that killed Poland's president, the political and personal scars remain. By *James Shotter* and *Henry Foy*. Photographs by *Oksana Yushko* and *Adam Panczuk*

The site of the crash in woodland near Smolensk, where the only remaining evidence is a simple wooden cross leaning against a shorn-off tree trunk

**At first, Marcin Wierchowski** didn't realise anything was wrong. Waiting with other Polish officials on a chilly airfield near Smolensk one morning in April 2010, he heard the distinctive whoosh of the Tupolev Tu-154 air force jet bringing President Lech Kaczynski and a host of other state officials to the Russian city. Then there was silence.

The Tu-154 never came into view. Instead, in thick fog, it crashed into woodland short of the airfield, killing Kaczynski and all 95 others on board. When Wierchowski reached the site minutes later, all that remained was devastation. "Two people in white coats jumped out of [an ambulance] and ran into the forest. I ran after them. And after around 100 metres I saw the crash site. The wrecked plane, scattered bodies. Total pulp," he recalls. "It was in a grove, not a

dense forest but sort of a thicket. There were some bigger trees but mostly bushes.

"I saw the scale of the tragedy. It was horrible. The plane was split into shreds... I saw one bigger engine and wheels upside down." Wierchowski, a presidential staffer, was required to identify Kaczynski's body.

Within minutes, news of the tragedy had been relayed to Radoslaw Sikorski, the foreign minister, at his home near Bydgoszcz in north-west Poland. "As always in such cases, it wasn't entirely clear at first what happened," he says. "But then, literally five minutes later, the ambassador who was waiting for the delegation was on the spot among the charred remains of the plane, and seeing the bodies of victims. I was connected to him, and I asked him: could anybody have survived?

No. And the Russian controllers said that the plane hit a tree. So I started raising alarms."

The crash in Smolensk was Poland's worst national disaster since the second world war. At a stroke, the country lost its president, the commanders of its ground, sea, air and special forces, senior priests, its central bank chief and other dignitaries. For many Poles, April 10 will forever be their 9/11: a moment of deep shock and mourning that left an indelible imprint on the national psyche.

Ten years on, the disaster has left other lasting scars. It hardened bitter partisan divisions between liberals and conservatives in Poland that continue to shape the country's politics. And it cast Russia, for centuries Poland's most dangerous and disruptive neighbour, as Warsaw's untrustworthy adversary

once more, scuppering a tentative detente with Moscow and plunging Poland back into a deep suspicion of the Kremlin that has only strengthened in the decade since the crash.

**As Wierchowski stood amid** the wreckage of the Tupolev, the wheels of succession of the Polish state had already started turning. Sikorski called the speaker of Poland's parliament Bronislaw Komorowski, who, according to the constitution, would have to take on the president's duties. Komorowski jumped in a car to race back to Warsaw. But when one of his aides called Andrzej Duda, Kaczynski's top legal adviser, to say that Komorowski would take over, Duda initially refused to accept it.

"I asked: 'On what basis?'" says Duda, who today is Poland's president. The answer came that it was stipulated in the constitution. "I ►

asked them: 'Do you have evidence that the president is dead?' And they answered, 'We do not have evidence, but it is obvious.' And I said, 'It is not obvious. As long as there is no evidence of the death of the president, nothing is obvious at all.'

That skirmish was a harbinger of the battles that would engulf Polish politics for most of the next decade. Even before the catastrophe, the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party founded by Lech Kaczynski and his twin Jaroslaw, and Civic Platform, the centre-right party led by Donald Tusk (and home to Sikorski and Komorowski) were on opposite sides of a visceral divide that had emerged during the early years of Poland's transition to democracy.

With Lech Kaczynski as president and Tusk as prime minister, the parties had spent the previous three years sparring over everything from Poland's complicated communist legacy to foreign policy.

After Smolensk, the divide became all-consuming. Polish and

Russian investigations both concluded that the crash was caused by human error in bad flying conditions. But Jaroslaw Kaczynski and other PiS politicians never accepted this explanation. After PiS defeated Civic Platform in elections in 2015, it commissioned its own report into the tragedy, which claimed that the cause of the disaster had been an explosion and incorrect information from Russian air traffic controllers. This in turn gave rise to numerous conspiracy theories. Kaczynski himself claimed that Tusk was responsible "in a political sense". Smolensk became Poland's primary political fault line.

"Polish politics became deadly serious," says Lukasz Lipinski, a political commentator with *Polityka*, a liberal Polish magazine. "Before Smolensk, politicians from both sides of the political barricades were opponents. But now they became enemies, and enemies for life and death... It was something that was not possible to overcome for the next decade."

## 'In this part of the world, we are used to a situation where Moscow tends to put the blame on the people whenever a tragedy occurs'

Andrzej Duda

Even before the crash, Smolensk was a city scarred by bloodshed. On Russia's western frontier, 350km from Moscow on the highway to the capital, it has, with unnerving regularity, been the scene of some of Europe's most brutal battles.

In August 1812, 30,000 people were killed there in a crucial clash between Napoleon's Grande Armée and Russian soldiers, a bloody fight for control of the city that was featured in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. More than 90 per cent of Smolensk was destroyed during the second world war. Captured in 1941 during the Nazi advance into the Soviet Union, it was retaken in 1943 amid the Red Army's counter-offensive.

But in Poland, it has long been associated with something even darker: in 1940, in the forests of Katyn, 20km outside the city, Soviet secret police shot 22,000 Polish officers, clergy, lawyers and doctors in a systematic attempt to destroy the occupied country's intelligentsia. For five decades Moscow claimed the massacre was perpetrated by the Nazis, only admitting it was behind the war crime in 1990.

It was to finally commemorate that tragedy, in a memorial event with Russian politicians, that Kaczynski and dozens of the country's leaders made their own doomed journey in April 2010 - a fact that magnified the force of what had happened for many Poles. "It had a very strong symbolic impact," says Igor Janke, a Polish political commentator. "Seventy years after Katyn, the leaders of the country went to Russia and died unexpectedly. The shock on both sides [of the political spectrum] for all Poles was enormous."

Today, a 6m-tall tree trunk, almost a metre wide, with its top sheared off, is the only remaining visible evidence of the events of that morning a decade ago. Tucked off a dirt track on the edge of a patch of unkempt, rubbish-strewn scrubland, it would go unnoticed were it not for the simple wooden orthodox



Above: the wreckage of the Tu-154 in the woodland  
Left: mourners queue outside Warsaw's Royal Castle four days after the crash to pay their respects to Lech Kaczynski and his wife Maria lying in state

cross leant against it. A tattered plastic white ribbon knotted around the trunk flutters in the chilly breeze.

"The tops of all these trees were all broken off by the plane too," recalls Vladimir, a 43-year-old handyman and driver from Smolensk who arrived at the site about an hour after the crash. "I could touch the tops of all of them," he continues, gesturing across now regrown bushes and trees with his hand to imitate the swoop of the plane. "I am still so surprised. The conditions were crazy... any sane person would not attempt to fly through that fog, would not risk the lives of the leadership of Poland or any state."

For a few brief days, it seemed as if the disaster might unite rather than divide Poland. Komorowski remembers going to one of Warsaw's main squares with his wife, and a group of scouts spontaneously breaking into song. Duda recalls hundreds of thousands of people waiting to pay their last respects to Kaczynski and his wife Maria, the queue snaking half a kilometre from Warsaw's Presidential Palace to the Royal Castle.

"I saw thousands of people in the streets, all dressed in black, all crying, all absolutely devastated. There was silence, just people crying and walking in the direction of the Presidential Palace, because the president was the most recognised victim," says Barbara Nowacka, a leftwing politician and activist whose mother, Izabela, a former deputy prime minister, died in the crash. "I think those days were the days that everyone felt like they lost someone close, or a relative."

The tragedy also initially seemed to strengthen a cautious detente between Poland and Russia. The two countries have a tortured history. Imperial Russia, together with Prussia and Austria, wiped Poland off the map for 123 years after partitioning it in 1795. Two decades after Poland regained independence in 1918, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union carved it up again at the start of the second world war. Then Moscow reduced it to a Soviet satellite for four decades during the cold war.

But in the years before the Smolensk disaster, Tusk's government had attempted a reset of ties with Moscow. Trade restrictions were eased, a commission to deal with contested historical issues was revived and Vladimir Putin, then prime minister, even took part in Poland's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the start of the second world war in 2009.

This milder atmosphere continued in the days after the crash. Putin quickly flew to Smolensk, and ►



Andrzej Duda, Poland's president, photographed in the 'White Room' at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw in front of a portrait of Lech Kaczynski



Polish presidential staffer Marcin Wierchowski, who was required to identify the body of Lech Kaczynski after the crash

**‘I ran into the forest. And after around 100 metres I saw the crash site. The wrecked plane, scattered bodies. Total pulp’**

**Marcin Wierchowski**

◀ photographs of him consoling Tusk were praised by political figures who hitherto had viewed the Russian leader as lacking warmth and affection. “We did not expect this gentle, kind approach, this personal involvement from Putin,” Witold Waszczykowski, deputy head of Poland’s National Security Bureau, said at the time. “Naturally it will have a positive impact on the relationship between our countries.”

Russia declared an official day of mourning, a decision typically only taken for the death of its own citizens, and *Katyn*, a 2007 Polish film about the massacre, was screened on Russia’s main television channel at prime time. Months later, Russia’s parliament passed a watershed resolution that admitted Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had personally approved the executions.

“We can sense Russian solidarity at every step of the way,” Jerzy Bahr, then Poland’s ambassador in Moscow, said in the days after the accident. But the goodwill soon

turned sour. And in Poland the biggest fight was over the cause of the crash.

**Both the Polish and the Russian** official investigations blamed human errors in thick fog, which led to the plane diverging from the correct approach path, clipping a tree with its left wing and, fatally stricken, careering into the scrubland. In cockpit recordings obtained by Polish media, the Tupolev’s systems can be heard repeatedly warning the pilots to pull up for the final 25 seconds of the flight. Officials from PiS, however, dismiss these reports as false and claim they were influenced by the Kremlin. In the years following the crash, figures on the Polish right put forward a variety of theories for the cause of the tragedy, ranging from artificial fog to a thermobaric bomb. Some hinted that Tusk’s government was to blame; others that Moscow’s hand lay behind the catastrophe. And when, after a brief period of co-operation with Poland, it became clear Russia would not return the wreckage of the Tupolev, their suspicions that the crash was no accident were only magnified.

Duda says: “In this part of the world, due to our historical experiences with the Soviet Union and later with Russia, we are used to a situation where Moscow tends to put the blame on the people whenever a tragedy occurs, rather than on the authorities... We can say that accusing the pilots for this disaster is almost a proverbial [explanation].”

“It is never the result of an attack, it is never the result of a technical defect, or an instrument that is produced within a certain country, it is always the fault of the pilots. And actually the [dissemination of the] information that it was the fault of the pilots before any sort of verification procedure took place, before any kind of investigation was conducted, is really something that is frightening.”

Over the next few years, the claim that Smolensk was no accident became a core tenet of PiS’s message. One of the most visible manifestations was monthly commemorations that began to take place outside the Presidential Palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście, an elegant boulevard running through the heart of Warsaw. Initially spontaneous expressions of grief, the gatherings became increasingly political, with Kaczynski’s speeches acting as a rallying call to the party faithful – and attracting noisy counter-protests.

For many observers, these monthly rituals played a key role

in keeping PiS’s supporters united during the party’s years in the political wilderness, and helped pave the way for its return to power in 2015, when Duda beat Komorowski in the presidential election, before PiS ousted Civic Platform in a parliamentary vote five months later.

Polityka’s Lipinski believes the party built “sort of a religion” around Smolensk. “They created something that is more than politics, which is rooted very deeply in the identity of many people. Many people voted for them not because of the social programmes but because they identify with those who died in Smolensk.”

After PiS returned to power, it launched its own investigation and shut down the website with the findings of the investigations under the previous government. Within months it had decided to charge five officials from the previous government with negligence in the arrangements for the doomed flight.

It also ordered the exhumation of the bodies of all those who perished in Smolensk in an effort to shed further light on the disaster. Some of the victims’ families welcomed the moves as a chance to gain closure, and were appalled when it emerged that in some coffins, body parts from different corpses had been mixed up. In one particularly shocking case, body parts from seven other people were found in the coffin of Admiral Andrzej Karweta. “I have huge bitterness towards the [previous] government, which did not look out for the safety of someone who was taking care of their safety,” his widow Maria said in an emotional press conference in 2017.

Despite the horror, the exhumations did not conclusively prove the plane had been brought down by



Jaroslaw Kaczynski speaks to PiS supporters after last October’s parliamentary election in which the party retained its majority

AP: GETTY IMAGES

an explosion. And other families fiercely objected to having their loved ones' graves disturbed. Among them was Malgorzata Rybicka, whose husband Arkadiusz, a conservative MP who had been a pro-democracy activist during Poland's time under communism, perished on the flight. Together with 15 other families, she protested against the exhumations. After her complaints in Poland fell on deaf ears, together with Ewa Solska, the widow of Leszek Solski, who also died in Smolensk, she took the case to the European Court of Human Rights and won - but it was too late. Rybicka's husband was exhumed in May 2018, one of the final graves to be reopened.

"The time before it was awful, because it was mourning forced on us," she says. "It was really a violation of the family's will. I had the impression that, no matter what they say, the whole brutality of this government came out. That they are ready for everything. One can beg, ask... I mentioned my husband's merits, my religious world view, everything. It brought no results at all."

In response to the ECHR ruling, Poland's justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro maintained the exhumations were necessary because no autopsies were carried out when the bodies were brought back to Poland.

**The detente in Polish-Russian relations** proved no more durable than the fleeting moment of Polish unity. For Komorowski, who did take over as president, the turning point came a few months after the crash, when the Russian report sought to put the blame squarely on the Poles.

"This report was difficult to accept for the Polish side because it completely ignored the problem of the



Donald Tusk, then Polish prime minister, greets his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, at the crash site in April 2010



Barbara Nowacka, a leftwing politician and activist, whose mother Izabela, a former deputy prime minister, died in the crash

shared responsibility of the Russian side," he says. "The Russians wanted to close the case on the responsibility of the Polish pilots, wanted to omit issues related to the poor preparation of their own services, the malfunctioning of the airport, which would compromise... them."

Relations between Russia and the EU's most important eastern member state deteriorated further, as it became clear that Russia had no intention of returning the wreckage of the Tu-154 - provoking accusations that it was playing politics with its neighbour's national tragedy. "The Russians... aren't giving it back because it's a great tool to irritate the Poles and to provoke political conflict in Poland," claims Komorowski.

When Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, the door to rapprochement, which Tusk's government had been inching open before Smolensk, finally slammed shut. Poland was one of the foremost advocates of tough sanctions by the international community on

Moscow. Moscow's counter-sanctions hit Polish farmers hard. At the 80th anniversary of the start of the second world war last year, the contrast with the 70th could not have been starker. Unlike in 2009, Putin was not invited, and in the following months he launched repeated jibes at Poland, falsely claiming that the country was partly responsible for the outbreak of the conflict.

A decade on, Sikorski believes that Russia and Poland's interests are now so opposed that all that can be done is to minimise clashes. "Russia wants to get the US out of Europe; we want to keep them. Russia wants the EU to disintegrate; we want it to flourish. Russia wants Ukraine to be disorganised and corrupt and integrated into their multinational scheme; we want it to be European," he says. "The relationship with Russia consists in managing the differences and finding some marginal areas of collaboration." (The Russian government declined to comment for this article.)

## 'I don't want to have Smolensk as part of the political campaign again. This is a memory that belongs to every one of us, not to any political group'

Barbara Nowacka

**While animosity towards Moscow** has endured, the political heirs of Lech Kaczynski have in recent years sought finally to move on from the tragedy. In April 2018, Jaroslaw Kaczynski called time on the monthly gatherings. The event that April was the 96th, meaning that there had been one for each of the victims. And Kaczynski's government had finally won a long-running battle over their desire to build a monument to the crash's victims in the centre of Warsaw.

"The life of the topic ended," says Nowacka, the leftwing politician. "You cannot [extract] passionate emotions from a topic, constantly for 10 years. And [PiS] realised that... it's easier to be a responsible party that distributes 500+ [a generous child benefit programme] than a party based on the emotion of a plane crash."

As the 10th anniversary of the disaster looms, however, the ghosts of Smolensk still linger. The remains of the plane lie in a hangar behind a grey, barbed wire-topped wall not far from the memorial site, as they have for almost a decade. The long-promised final report into the crash by Antoni Macierewicz, a close ally of Jaroslaw Kaczynski, is still unpublished. And before the coronavirus outbreak closed borders across the world, a group of relatives of the victims had once again been due to make their way to the Russian city to pay tribute to those who died.

Nowacka, however, had already decided that she would not be going. "I think my place is here in Warsaw, because my mother is here," she says, before adding: "And I don't want to have Smolensk as part of the political campaign again. I believe this is a memory that belongs to every one of us, and not to one political group or another." **FT**

James Shotter is the FT's central Europe correspondent. Henry Foy is FT Moscow bureau chief. Additional reporting by Agata Majos



# ‘We can’t do this on our own, so let’s do it together’

Through good times and bad, the UK’s former chief rabbi has found solace in his lifelong passion for music. He talks to *Ludovic Hunter-Tilney* about his favourite pieces, taking a synagogue choir to Israel in the aftermath of a suicide bombing and why right now is the ‘moment of all moments’ for communities of faith. Photographs by *Eleonora Agostini*



A discordant note rumbled in the background when I visited Jonathan Sacks last month at his home in north London to discuss his love of music. It was not the traffic. At the time of our meeting, alarm about coronavirus had begun to grow in the UK but it had not yet reached the shrill pitch of preoccupation that has now driven all other thoughts from people’s minds.

“This is the moment of all moments for faith communities,” the former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth tells me over the telephone two weeks after my trip to his house. “People are really acting like angels, I’ve never seen anything like it. In his book *American Grace*, Harvard sociology professor Robert Putnam documents the extraordinary power of faith communities to generate social capital. That is people reaching out to one another to help. We are seeing that right now. Faith communities are being judged not by what they believe but what they do.”

Like billions of others around the world, Rabbi Sacks is in lockdown, confined to the house he

shares with his wife Elaine. “For me, the Book of Psalms as a whole speaks to this particular moment,” he says, before quoting Psalm 23, which is recited over a dead body before burial in Judaism: *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet will I fear no evil, for you are with me.*

“That’s the most important line for me in the Book of Psalms,” he explains. “It resonates through Jewish history and it resonates with me personally. The ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus, who wasn’t Jewish of course, is good on this. He called faith ‘the flight of the alone to the Alone.’”

Music is capable of similar moments of uplift. That was the reason for my visit a fortnight previously to Sacks’s home. It is a passion of his, inculcated by trips to classical concerts at the Royal Albert Hall with his father in the 1960s. “I’m not remotely professional. I can’t read music and I can’t play music. I love it with a completely untutored joy,” he told me as we sat in his living room.

Let’s rewind back to that vanished world of face-to-face contact. The scene is a neatly carpeted room lined with books and pictures, in a house off a busy road. Rabbi Sacks, who is 72, lives in ►





## 'I can't read music and I can't play music. I love it with a completely untutored joy'

◀ Golders Green, a centre of London's middle-class Jewish community. Nearby is Hampstead Heath, where, in summer, Sacks's wife Elaine pursues her own passion, swimming. "What music is for me, the Hampstead pond is for her," he says.

Sacks wears a dark blue suit, white shirt and yellow tie. His bespectacled face is framed by tidily trimmed grey hair and a beard. There is a skullcap on the crown of his head. A painting of musicians and dancers hangs on one wall, adjacent to another covered in floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. On a table are framed photographs of him with the Queen, Prince Charles, the Dalai Lama and other dignitaries.

Sacks was chief rabbi between 1991 and 2013. Under him, the role gained new prominence. The British Jewish population is only 260,000, but that makes it the fifth largest in the world. Sacks was determined to place its voice at the centre of national life. "I wanted to try to move Anglo-Jewry from a community that was immensely proud of its past to one that was actively building its future," he explains.

Since retiring as chief rabbi, he has remained busy on the public stage. He is a member of the House of Lords, having been made Baron Sacks of Aldgate in the City of London in 2009. His steady tones, the acme of reasonableness, are often heard on the radio and television. His new book *Morality* follows a Radio 4 series that he presented on the subject. In it, he argues that social cohesion depends on people sharing the same morality, but that in the west these bonds have been weakened by individualism. Three separate developments are identified. The first is the advent of the permissive society in the 1960s. The second is the entrenchment of free-market ideology in the 1980s. The third is the spread of identity politics and Big Tech in the 2010s.

Running through its pages is a belief that morality is not exclusively religious, but rather the product of co-operation and mutual respect. "This is not an evangelising book," he explains. "It doesn't say, let's move back to God, let's move back to the Bible. We are in difficult territory, economically, politically and socially. We can't do this on our own, so let's do it together. Let's resolve what principles will take us forwards such that we can work for the common good."

The book draws on his pre-rabbinical background studying and teaching philosophy at Cambridge University. His PhD supervisor was the philosopher Bernard Williams, an atheist from whom he learnt the importance of "openness to otherness". Sacks was the first person in his family to go to university. His father Louis came to Britain from Poland as a child in the 1920s and left school at 14 in order to work selling cloth in London's East End, then a centre of working-class Jewish life. Sacks's mother Louisa was the daughter of Lithuanian wine merchants with a shop called Frumkin's, which functioned as an informal community centre for new Jewish immigrants to the East End.

"Music was my connection with my father," Sacks says. Louis was an amateur violinist ("Not

a very good one") who adored Mahler. "He really wanted to lift me up from this nonstop stream of The Beatles and 1960s stuff," Sacks says. Their joint trips to see concerts at the Royal Albert Hall had a deeper emotional purpose too. They helped the teenage Sacks to establish common ground with a parent who possessed a difficult, even oppressive, personality.

"He was judgmental to the nth degree," Sacks recalls. "To be honest with you, it was difficult to live with a judgmental person. Very, very few people met his standards."

The first concert they went to was an extravagant staging of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, complete with cannon and mortar effects. "It got to me. Once that started, the rest was simple. From Tchaikovsky we got to Shostakovich, then to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. I loved that journey of the soul. And eventually we got to the quartets of Beethoven, which to me are the ultimate spirituality in music. I had to wrestle with them, just to climb that mountain."

He did not learn music at home, where he was the oldest of four brothers. "There were certain things they never taught us," he says of his parents. "They spoke Yiddish but did not teach us a single word of it, because they wanted us to be proper Englishmen."

Sacks was in his first year at Cambridge when The Beatles released *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967. "Totally stunning. That was the music at Cambridge for me, that and Beethoven's quartets." He met Elaine while studying there. Unlike his father, she was non-judgmental, "infinitely patient". For their engagement, Sacks was given a state-of-the-art stereo by her father. "I immediately played the A minor Beethoven quartet, the opus 132. I have rarely been closer to heaven than that."

Music is crucial to Judaism. "Any sacred text is never read, it is sung," Sacks explains. Despite its spiritual significance, however, the focus on voice has acted as a brake on the artistic scope of Jewish religious music.

"The Christian tradition of music, whether orchestral or choral, is wholly magnificent and there is no equivalent in Judaism. Partly because of our lack of orchestration and partly because of our individualism," Sacks says with a smile. He laughs. "Getting Jews to sing in tune! Quite difficult, actually. It did happen once, the 'Song of the Sea' in Exodus 15. We remember that because we recite it every single day. But it's rare."

Orchestral music used to feature in Judaism. But the tradition was abandoned after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70CE. Afterwards, non-sung music was banned. A similar prohibition of musical instruments can be observed in certain strands of Protestantism and Islam. Is there something in the very nature of music that inspires religious distrust?

"It's not distrust at all," Sacks says adamantly, fixing me with a stare. "There's no distrust, none,



## Musical moments in his own words

**Gustav Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Tel Aviv (Spring 1967).**

This was the only bonding trip I ever did with my father. I had just started university. He had left school at the age of 14. To avoid us growing apart, he showed me what he loved: Israel and Mahler. The music remains my memory of him.

**Simon and Garfunkel, *America* (1968).**

That was the year when it all happened. I went to America and met Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who changed my life. In Cambridge I met Elaine, fell in love and proposed just before midnight on New Year's Eve. I associate these memories and more with this haunting song.

**Beethoven, *Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity from a convalescent in the Lydian mode*, third movement of the op. 132 Quartet.**

This is for me the musical equivalent of Psalm 30, a song of recovery and redemption. This is music as pure spirituality. When Beethoven wrote this, he was in heaven with the angels.

zero. This was grief. We will not allow ourselves to be happy while the Temple is in ruins. The Psalms are clearly set to orchestral music. No, it was this way of saying we will never be completely happy until this world, our world, has been rebuilt. It was a terrible loss. We lost that entire orchestral tradition until basically the 19th century when Jews assimilated enough to move into the musical mainstream.”

In 2002, Sacks took several cantors and a synagogue choir to the Israeli coastal city of Netanya, where a suicide bomber sent by the militant Palestinian group Hamas had killed 30 people and injured 140 at a Passover feast in a hotel. “We were sitting in England thinking, what can we do to help? In the end, we decided to take music to comfort the injured, the bereaved. We had somebody who was in a coma for seven days coming out of it as we were singing. So that’s a very Jewish way in which we took music and tried to use it for healing.”

He encounters an unhealable pain in one composer. “I am completely non-prescriptive with this,” Sacks says, “but I refuse to listen to Wagner. Absolutely and totally. His ‘Judaism in Music’ essay, published in 1850, was one of the classic texts of anti-Semitism. Had he merely reflected a view, I would have forgiven him but he didn’t, he created a mood. So I refuse to listen to him. Even though my late father of blessed memory, who had exactly the same attitude to Wagner as I did, nonetheless said to me that the ‘Siegfried Idyll’ is one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written.”

Sacks’ outlook - in music as in religion and politics - is essentially conciliatory. Despite his father’s campaign to wean him off the Beatles, he still likes pop music, even to the extent of admitting to an admiration for Eminem. “Look, he has descended into all sorts of violence, misogyny and homophobia, but open yourself to this guy as though he’s sitting there with you and then he gets to you,” he says.

His desire to find common ground has faced tests. In 2002, he published his book *The Dignity of Difference*, in which he called for religious toleration in the aftermath of 9/11 and argued that “no one creed has a monopoly on spiritual truth”. The controversy that it caused among conservative Orthodox Jews was compounded by an interview with the Guardian newspaper in which Sacks was quoted critiquing Israeli policies towards Palestinians. He later claimed to have been misquoted, but the article led to an editorial in the Jerusalem Post demanding his resignation. He has described it as a period of “black despair” during his chief rabbinate.

“At the real moments of pain, I listened to Schubert’s string quintet,” he remembers. “I just felt that it framed the concept that art is turning pain into beauty. Which Schubert does in a profound way, I can’t think of anyone who does it better. Leaning into Schubert at that time took me through the valley of the shadow and out the other side,” he says, again invoking Psalm 23 - a beacon for the present time of crisis too. **FT**

“Morality” (Hodder & Stoughton) is available now.  
Ludovic Hunter-Tilney is the FT’s pop critic



*Photinus pyralis* fireflies, commonly known as big dippers, rise out of a field, as *Photuris* fireflies flash behind them in the forest

# LIGHTS IN THE DARK

*Samuel James* captures the beautiful ephemerality of fireflies in a series of photographs taken in the Appalachian mountains. He speaks with *Griselda Murray Brown* about why this world is now vanishing



From top: male *Photinus carolinus* fireflies synchronise their flashes in a pattern to attract prospective mates; individual fireflies flash just after dusk; later in the night, as competition to impress increases, thousands of the male fireflies flash in unison



*Photuris tremulans* fireflies, known as Christmas lights, produce quick, single flashes

'The distinctive bioluminescence of the firefly is a courtship display and a means of communication; once they have found a mate and ensured the survival of the next generation, they die'



*Photuris* fireflies flash in a sycamore tree; they can produce a bewildering diversity of flashes, even mimicking other species



*Photuris* fireflies produce a distinctive low, slow glowing flash along a creek

**A year ago, the photographer Samuel James** moved from New York to a cabin in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains in southern Ohio. He arrived in May, at the beginning of firefly season. He had grown up in the area and remembers seeing the insects “like flashlights in the dark”. Now they were back. “It was clear that there was something special going on all around me,” he recalls on the phone.

Fireflies spend just a few brief weeks as adults. Their life cycle varies from species to species, but often they live underground or underwater as larvae for one to two years before transforming, momentarily, into insects. Their distinctive bioluminescence is a courtship display and a means of communication; once they have found a mate and ensured the survival of the next generation, they die.

James took these pictures in the Edge of Appalachia Preserve System, a 20,000-acre area co-owned by the Cincinnati Museum Center and the Nature Conservancy, and a site of exceptional biodiversity. That summer, he saw many different firefly species in little pockets of woodland and prairie. “Even people who live in the area don’t know about all of this,” he says. “You have to go quite far off the beaten path.”

Each night, he went out with his equipment, chose a spot to set up and waited. “Patience is really important,” he says. “It’s very slow.” James experimented with shorter and longer exposures. With the former, he could capture individual flashes: “Each little insect telling its own story.” Longer exposures, especially late at night, created almost abstract compositions in which the fireflies register as swooping lines and swirls.

I ask James about the challenges of working like this. “You’re doing a lot of maths,” he says. The “deep blue” of twilight, for example, lasts for roughly 10 minutes a day, so if he wanted to capture that precise colour and also to shoot the fireflies over a long exposure, he had to choose exactly the right 10 minutes in which to take his picture. “You’re gathering light with time,” he says, “that’s what photography is.”

There’s a poignancy to these images, for they depict a vanishing world. A recent study published in the *BioScience* journal from Oxford University Press concluded that fireflies are disappearing because of increased light pollution and degraded soil quality due to pesticide use. People in rural southern Ohio talk about there being fewer fireflies nowadays, James tells me.

He is interested in fragility and ephemerality. But his work also captures what feel like moments of hope, or transcendence. The idea of illuminated darkness runs throughout; his photographs of the Niger Delta show gas fires and flares lighting up the night sky.

James also, somewhat surprisingly, created a series of photographs of Leicester City Football Club in 2015-16, the season they became the unlikely champions of the English Premier League. That must have been very different, I say. “Yes,” he agrees, but less so than you’d think. Both are about “choosing where to place yourself. It’s about picking a spot where something miraculous might happen.” **F1**

*Samuel James is a photographer based in southern Ohio. His book on fireflies, “Into the Night Airs”, will be published by Fw:Books in the autumn*



# Ravinder Bhogal Recipes

## Did you think I'd crumble?

Rhubarb crumble was the first thing I baked after I had a “coming out” of sorts to my mother. I am the youngest of four daughters born into a traditional Punjabi clan. As girls we were raised on a diet of strict rules, unleavened submission and XX-chromosome limitations.

Having older sisters and female cousins, I had witnessed many formal arranged meetings with suitable boys - awkward, drawn-out affairs in which the young man, his mother and several extended relations came to peer at the girl and her family. The girls would dress up in Indian finery, prepare and pour tea and speak only when spoken to. When called upon, they disappeared into a side room for a brief encounter with the suitors and emerged bashful, tearful and newly engaged.

I was the kind of daughter that wasn't supposed to exist: one eager to hurl herself into the path of peril and unruly rebellion. I confessed to my mother that I had become engaged to a man who was charming, kind, highly educated, successful and - to her alarm - of a different religious persuasion. The illicit relationship hung over my mother like a rain cloud and sent a ripple of shock waves across my immediate conservative family. I got home and shuddered, preparing for the certainty of being embroiled

in an epic family saga. I stepped into the quiet luxury of my kitchen and preheated the oven. There was a swathe of rhubarb swaddled like a newborn in pink newspaper on the countertop. Harold, my elderly neighbour, told me it ran wild in his allotment, and he regularly left me gifts of it on my stoop. I pickled it, roasted it with lamb and made pavlovas crowned with it, but in that anxious moment I needed the sweetness and comfort of something familiar that would transport me to a safer place in just a few bites.

Rhubarb stands out. It is elusive, complex and defiant - a vegetable masquerading as a fruit that refuses to be sweet or compliant. I ran my hand along a stalk of it - celery dressed up in a hot-pink silk sari, feverishly scarlet in early spring when everything else was so muted and bleak. I sliced it and mixed it with the jewels of a pomegranate and some pink peppercorns - the dish blazed fuchsia. “Pink is for girls,” I could almost hear my mother saying in a sing-song voice. The crumble was a success - a perfect symphony of sweet and sour. I packed up a small dish of it to give to her. The topping was crisp, nutty and toasty and the rhubarb beneath was tangy and tender, firm enough to give her something to chew over. **FT**

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikon; [jikonilondon.com](http://jikonilondon.com)



### Rhubarb, pink peppercorn and pomegranate crumble

#### Serves six

- 750g rhubarb, cut into 1cm chunks
- 80g honey
- 50g brown sugar
- 150g golden caster sugar
- Juice and zest of three oranges
- 3 tbs of roughly crushed pink peppercorns
- Arils from one pomegranate

#### For the crumble

- 150g plain flour
- 150g brown sugar
- 150g cold butter
- 150g ground almonds
- 75g rolled oats

1 - Preheat the oven to 200C/gas mark 6. Place the rhubarb, honey, sugars, orange juice, zest and peppercorns in a saucepan over a medium heat and simmer for about 10 minutes or until tender. Stir in the pomegranate arils and pour into a baking dish.

2 - For the crumble, rub together the flour, sugar and butter with your fingertips until you have a rough crumble texture. Fold in the ground almonds, rolled oats and a pinch of salt. Then gently rub again for a few seconds.

3 - Scatter the crumble over the rhubarb mix and bake for 20-25 minutes until golden and bubbling. Serve with custard or a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Photographs by Joakim Blockstrom





# Bunker Food

## Tim Hayward

### *‘Steak Diane is simultaneously ironic and romantic - perfect for a fully isolated date night’*



have very rapidly come to the conclusion that an obsessive food nerd has one important advantage in a crisis. It's not that you have secret reserves in your cupboards - no foodie worthy of the title would panic buy or stockpile - or that you know arcane recipes for fermentation that can turn old tennis shoes into a palatable jam. No, it's the way you can wander into a half-empty grocery store and find in the shelves a challenge to be savoured, that you can feel genuine excitement about the oddest of ingredients.

So when, on the last night before the lockdown, I found one tired, plastic-packed steak and a carton of whipping cream in the corner shop, my interest was piqued; and when I spotted a lonely tin of mushrooms, my heart soared.

Paris has always been famous for its mushrooms. The city is largely built from stone quarried from beneath its own streets, leaving a huge network of underground caverns and tunnels. It is said that the first mushrooms grew down there in the manure of the quarrymen's horses - a nice origin myth. The myth continues that it was Louis XIV whose particular predilection for mushrooms encouraged the industry to grow. (Why is it always Louis XIV in these stories?) Whatever the historical truth, Champignons de Paris became a kind of

prototypical luxury brand and when canning, another French innovation, became widespread, it was a simple matter to pack the mushrooms into tins and export them all over the world.

Steak Diane is a little piece of dining history, one of the dishes that used to be prepared at the table in restaurants and hotels. There's something wonderfully, cheesily old-fashioned about it, something simultaneously ironic and romantic that might just make it perfect for a fully isolated date night.

What also makes steak Diane my bunker choice is that it only has a sketchy recipe, so substitutions are possible and, as a "tableside" dish, you can make it on a camping stove if the lights go out. Cooking it also teaches a vital survival skill - the "deglaze" sauce. Cook your main protein in a hot pan, lift the crusty deposits off the pan base with alcohol - this is deglazing - then reduce the liquid with cream or butter. Deglazing produces the fastest, easiest and, usually, the best sauce for any meat or fish.

As any waiter will tell you, the one thing that's going to guarantee you the big tips is a proper tableside show - and that requires preparation. Start with a steak. A restaurant would usually use a sirloin because it's boneless, easy to cut and has a decent mark-up. You could use any cut you'd usually pan fry... Yea! Even unto pork or lamb



chops. Season vigorously with salt and pepper a good hour or two before you plan to cook (this is always a good idea with meat anyway). Now get yourself a small tray so you can get your culinary ducks in a row - what a chef calls *mise en place*.

You'll need about a tablespoon of finely minced onions or shallots. You could use the white parts of spring onions if that's the card the greengrocery gods have dealt you this week. Once, when I was very, very drunk, I even pulled this off with a carefully rinsed pickled onion from a jar. See, I told you this was flexible.

You'll also need a good tablespoon of butter, salted, unsalted - I don't think we're in a position to be fussy here - a teaspoon of whatever mustard you can lay hands on and that can of mushrooms, drained and sliced.

Put all of these ready on the tray along with a bottle of Worcestershire sauce, a small jug of cream and whatever you can find that passes for brandy. (I found a plastic mini bottle next to the canned mushrooms in the corner shop. It looks just about distinguished enough to neck on a park bench while arguing with a pigeon and, according to its misspelt label, was bottled in Uxbridge.)

Sear the steak in a dry, hot pan. Once it begins to take colour, drop in the butter, which should melt quickly enabling you to use a spoon to anoint the steak repeatedly. This technique is

called *arroser*. Like everything about a good tableside Diane, it's as flashy as all hell... and also so simple that it can be done on a wheeled cart by a hassled waiter.

As soon as your steak is medium rare (there are dozens of techniques for judging this... I don't use any of them, just a probe thermometer to read 56.6C), take it out of the pan and place it to rest on a warm plate. Add more butter to the pan if you wish, then add the chopped shallots and fry them until they're clear. Now add the mushrooms and heat them through. Stir in the mustard and a shot of Worcestershire sauce and allow to come back up to a simmer.

Now for the flash of brilliance that will impress your date, assure you a fat tip, scorch your eyebrows off or possibly just trigger the smoke alarm: pour in a slug of the brandy, wait till it bubbles, then carefully set light to it.

As soon as your accelerant is exhausted, add any juices that have escaped your resting meat and some cream, and let everything bubble while stirring with a spoon. Finally, pour the sauce over your steak and serve with spinach, noodles, rice, oven chips or a handful of pork scratchings - and candlelight. **FT**

Next week: writer Wendell Steavenson.  
More columns at [ft.com/food-drink](http://ft.com/food-drink)



# STUCK INDOORS?

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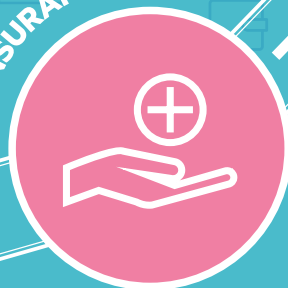
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The Game of Smart Financial Choices

# Jancis Robinson

## Investing in wine

### Part 2

## How to join the wine sellers

Wine collections have a habit of getting out of hand, as I outlined last week. In the old days, those who wanted to sell surplus wine had little choice. It pretty much had to be via an auction run by either Sotheby's or Christie's, first in London and then internationally. Bonhams and Phillips joined them in the UK by opening wine departments. There are now auctioneers in the US (see below) and several mainland European auction houses that specialise in selling wine.

But today there are multiple other ways of selling it, not least because Christie's and Sotheby's charge buyers a commission of more than 20 per cent, in addition to a vendors' commission of about 10 per cent. The auction houses have been suffering as a result. In the UK, which has probably regained its position as the world's fine wine trading capital now that sales in Hong Kong are no longer boosted by booming demand in mainland China, the most popular way for private individuals to sell their wine collections is through the outfits they bought them from.

Back in the early 1980s, La Réserve (since morphed into Jeroboams) became the first London wine merchant to offer to sell wine on behalf of its customers, taking the standard 10 per cent commission. If customers of the big traditional merchants wanted to sell some wine back then, the likes of Berry Bros & Rudd, Corney & Barrow and Justerini & Brooks would sell it through one of the auction houses and take a 3 per cent commission on the sale.

But as the number of people investing in fine wine grew, the traditional merchants realised they could make money providing a marketplace for their clients. In 1992, Corney & Barrow was the first to launch a fully-fledged broking service, offering to sell their customers' reserves to other



As imagined by Leon Edler

### What they do in the US

Auctioneers such as Hart Davis Hart, Christie's, Sotheby's and Zachys all specialise in wine with the most desirable pedigrees and, one hopes, they are pretty demanding in their inquiries about exactly where the wine has come from and how it was stored.

For smaller quantities or rather less grand names, WineBid.com and

Vinfoлио.com are both worth approaching.

In New York, several restaurants have made their wine reputations thanks to private wine collections, either consigned or sold outright. Similarly, some merchants, such as Italian Wine Merchants or Chambers Street Wines, have bought whole cellars from individual collectors.

There are also specialist cellar management consultants such as Chai Consulting and Grand Cru Wine Consulting. Search online for "wine cellar management".



customers, wherever in the world they might be. This has been so successful that it has won two Queen's Awards for Enterprise.

Corney & Barrow has since been followed into this lucrative business by its peers. Justerini claims to have 1,650 unique customers a month trading in its Just Broking division, while Berrys lays claim to 1,100 a month on its trading platform BBX.

Someone who aims to wipe the floor with these services is Gary Boom of BI Wines. His in-house software developers have been building a BI LiveTrade platform. Boom claims it is the only one that offers a firm cash-buying price as well as a selling price for

**'The most popular way for individuals to sell collections is through the outfit they bought them from'**

what he considers the 550 most "desirable" wines in the world.

The platform also provides historic pricing data, critic reviews, scores and so on. Boom is so convinced this is the "Uber of fine wine trading" that he has invested £5m in building the platform. Vendors of these popularly traded wines receive all of the advertised buying price, pay no commission and are promised "instant trading and execution and fast payment". Boom says the number of wines featured will increase and offers standard broking at 10 per cent commission for those not included in his magical 550.

BI's great rival as fine wine traders, Farr Vintners, also depends heavily on trading its customers' reserves. The £400m worth of customers' wine stored in Farr's bonded warehouse provides about 30 per cent of all wine sold by Farr, again on 10 per cent commission.

When friends in the UK ask about selling their own collections, ►



This Sunday Jancis will be on ft.com at 12pm and 5pm UK time with her list of wine retailers around the world prepared to deliver to the housebound. Please post your wine queries at [ft.com/jancislive](http://ft.com/jancislive)

◀ I generally recommend small wine merchants that specialise in personally valuing and collecting wines from private homes. Several friends have been happy with the services of David Boobyer of Reid Wines ([reidwines@aol.com](mailto:reidwines@aol.com)) near Bristol. He took over the business from the late Bill Baker, one of the country's most enthusiastic wine merchants and *bons viveurs*, but has no online presence.

I also recommend Four Walls Wine near Chichester, where Barry Phillips has been in business long enough to know where the good bottles are buried. As Stephen Browett of Farr Vintners observed to me about locating top quality stock: "Any merchant who knew rich people buying fine wine 30 to 40 years ago is in a good position."

But for those who would prefer to take their chances in the saleroom, many local auctioneers are prepared to sell odd bottles of the sort of wine not grand enough for the big auction houses (which prefer to sell unopened original wooden cases, "owc" in sales catalogues). Christie's used to hold lively sales of these lesser wines but now sends such bottles to Tate Ward, which holds auctions in the Old Truman Brewery in east London.

These sales may also be of interest to casual wine buyers. Straker Chadwick of Abergavenny is active in this arena and some of its lots go for as little as £20. Retired wine collector Andrew Matthews, who is based in Norwich, chose it a few years ago to sell 60 cases of wine that

he, or rather his wife, decided were surplus to requirements.

"I sent them the list with details of provenance plus photos of my cellar and explained about temperature variation," said Matthews by email. "They were efficient. I had to pay for the transport, which from recollection was about £40. They took all I had and listed it as simply 'a private cellar in East Anglia'. They stripped off all labels with my name on and sent me a list with estimates for approval. The auction has not only bidders in the room but phone line bidding as well. I got paid promptly. Mrs Matthews was delighted. She got a new car and the children got carpets for their rooms plus a lovely family holiday in Denmark."

Elsewhere, BidforWine.co.uk will sell your wine for you, at varying commission levels below 10 per cent. And, of course, there is eBay, which features a surprising array of wines.

When I asked members of JancisRobinson.com for their experiences of selling wine, David Banford from Stellenbosch had one final suggestion: "Trading wines with restaurants anxious to add mature wines to their list in exchange for restaurant credits [vouchers] to be taken at some future date once wines have been sold to customers at keen pricing."

Let us all look forward to a time when that will once more be possible. **FT**

More columns at [ft.com/jancis-robinson](http://ft.com/jancis-robinson)



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# 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.** Burns and Albright are the title characters' surnames in which 1989 film?

**2.** The Volga (above) and Ural both flow into which body of water?

**3.** What was the first top 30 single by The Smiths?

**4.** Who was the British foreign secretary

at the time of the EU referendum?

**5.** Who was the first person to fly across the English Channel?

**6.** What's the name of the younger brother of Peppa Pig (below)?

**7.** "Happiness is..." what – according to a series of British TV adverts, banned in 1991?

**8.** What name is missing from this quartet of characters from a series of books: Douglas, Henry, Ginger?

**9.** Which sitcom character was regularly called a "dirty old man" by his son?

**10.** What's the name of the 15th-century bridge, lined with statues, that crosses the Vltava river in Prague?



## The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



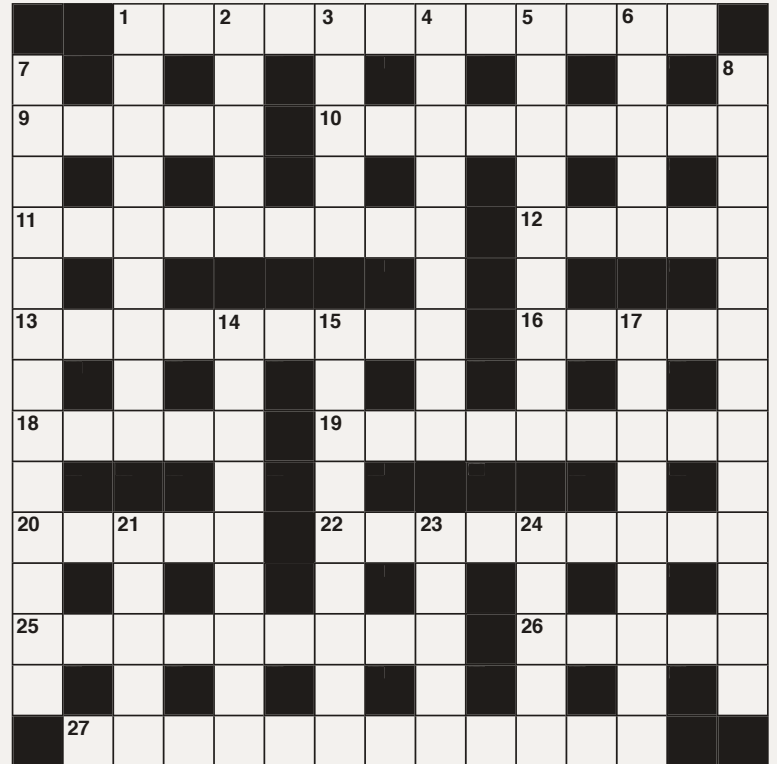
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= ?

Answers page 10

## The Crossword No 482. Set by Aldhelm



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

### ACROSS

**1** MP's area (12)

**9** Egg-shaped (5)

**10** Explain (9)

**11** Male angler (9)

**12** Rugby formation (5)

**13** Evolved (9)

**16** Transport on rails (5)

**18** Repeat (5)

**19** Stew (9)

**20** Support (5)

**22** Similar, comparable (9)

**25** Rusting (9)

**26** Snooker table covering (5)

**27** Vest, eg (12)

**3** Amount of energy from the Marines (5)

**4** Dish for ceramic container does get cooked (9)

**5** Composer organised a strike that is shorter (4, 5)

**6** Heads of communication have to broadcast discussion's leader (5)

**7** Nato enforced changes without current group of countries (13)

**8** Bug with a name that's changed – less horrible disease (6, 7)

**14** Great victory is a danger for drivers (9)

**15** Beat up monarch, grabbing silver box, perhaps (9)

**17** One arguing for a sport's significance (9)

**21** One working with one before joining (5)

**23** Drill for gold, getting last bits of remaining ore later (5)

**24** Second-class award, at first, concerning card game (5)

### DOWN

**1** Annoyed about what's not a single genre (5-4)

**2** Little encouragement, say, to get dull colour turned up (5)

Solution to Crossword No 481





# Honey & Co Recipes



## Don't fear the wurst

Photographs by Patricia Niven

Sausages usually make for a quick, low-effort workaday dinner – a packet grabbed on the way home, its contents chucked in the oven, a meal only slightly more involved than ordering a pizza. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but if you care to spend a few more minutes in the kitchen, this everyday staple can become something quite special.

*Spetzofai* is a dish of sausages stewed in a sauce of peppers and tomatoes. Nowadays, it's common throughout Greece but it's associated most with the magical Pelion peninsula, which is where we first tried it. This is a region of snow-capped mountains rising from the Mediterranean, clad in forests of pine and oak, and lush with orchards of olives, apples, chestnuts, quince and pears. Houses in the mountain villages have windows with wooden shutters overlooking the sea and roofs of slate in shades of purple, green and grey. The steep cobbled streets run parallel to mountain streams, their water icy and sweet. In winter, the air smells of oak burning in every fireplace – and of *spetzofai*.

Our kitchen often has elements of that: peppers frying – the red ones sweet, the green ones slightly bitter – melting into a thick tomato sauce, enriched by the sausages. In Pelion, they use a local country sausage. At home, when we're feeling fancy, we use beef or venison sausages made by our butcher. But over time, we have tried this dish with every type of good quality sausage, such as spicy merguez or the coarse Italian fennel ones – on more than one occasion, we've used good old supermarket Cumberland sausages to excellent effect.

Do as they do in Pelion and serve vermicelli noodles on the side or, if you can order it, *hilopites* – tiny squares of dried pasta cooked in salted water and served to soak up the sauce. Steamed rice will work as well or indeed anything else you like to serve with sausages. **FT**

By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer  
honeyandco@ft.com

## Greek sausage stew with pepper and tomatoes

### Dinner for four

- 6 good quality sausages (beef or venison work well) cut into 5cm pieces (about 600g)
- Olive oil
- 2 red onions, peeled, quartered then each quarter halved into large chunks
- 3-4 red and green peppers, deseeded and cut into 4cm cubes (about 600g)
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and halved lengthways
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and sliced thinly
- 5-6 tomatoes, diced into big chunks (about 500g)
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tbs flaky sea salt
- 200ml red wine or water

- 1 – Heat your oven to 200C (fan assist). Place the cut sausages into a large sauté pan and drizzle with olive oil.
- 2 – Pour four tablespoons of olive oil into a large frying pan set on a high heat. Add the onions and sauté on a high heat for about five minutes before adding the diced pepper.
- 3 – Keep the heat high and sauté for an extra eight minutes, letting the pepper scorch a little.
- 4 – While the peppers are cooking, pop the sausages into the oven for 10 minutes.
- 5 – Add the garlic, chilli and tomatoes to the peppers and stir well. Add the sugar, salt and red wine (or water).
- 6 – Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium. Continue cooking for another eight minutes until the tomatoes have broken down to form a thick sauce. Pour into the sauté pan containing the sausages and pop back into the oven for 10 minutes. Remove and serve with some bread to mop it all up.







# GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

## Why wearing masks is the way forward



**E**arlier this week Austria took a striking step to combat the coronavirus pandemic when its government announced that people would not be allowed to enter places such as supermarkets without wearing a face mask. “It’s clear that the wearing of masks will be a big change, but it is necessary to reduce the spread further,” declared Sebastian Kurz, the country’s chancellor, explaining that masks would be distributed for free at shop entrances.

Some might roll their eyes at this – including many scientists. There is disagreement over whether wearing low-quality masks prevents people from inhaling the virus, even if it does reduce the chances of them spreading it by sneezing or coughing.

Austria will only be distributing regular masks to shoppers, not the N95 respirators (which do reduce inhalation risks). Some US and European doctors believe mask-wearing is so pointless for those who do not usually face the direct risks medical staff are exposed to that they have urged consumers to donate any masks they have bought to hospitals instead.

Yet I think it would be a mistake to sneer at Austria’s move – for two reasons. First, wearing masks has one practical personal benefit: it reminds you to avoid touching your face. This matters, as David Price, an intensive-care doctor at New York’s Weill Cornell Medical Center, explains in a compelling video about his experiences treating Covid-19 patients. I strongly recommend it.

“In the next few months we need to train ourselves not to touch our faces, and tell people that we are taking this seriously,” he explains, noting that since a mask has limited protective powers, a bandana can be just as effective for “training”. (One of my teenage daughters now wears her favourite scarf on our rare essential outings on to New York’s streets, which both does the trick and boosts her mood enormously.)

The second reason is that mask-wearing is not just about individual psychology or behaviour; it has social implications as well. Scientists sometimes ignore this, since they are trained to rely on statistics and the results of scientific experiments. But if ever there was a time when culture – and cultural analysis – matters, it is now. This is true not just in terms of how societies are responding to the coronavirus crisis, but also when it comes to how diseases spread.

Peter Baehr, a Dutch sociologist who studied the emergence of so-called mask culture in Hong Kong during the Sars outbreak in 2003, outlines this well in a recent book. As Baehr notes, when the outbreak began, masks were initially discussed only in medical terms. But the conversation soon assumed another dynamic, since by wearing masks “people communicated their responsibilities to the social group of which they were members”.

As Christos Lynteris, a medical anthropologist at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, put it in an opinion column for *The New York Times*: “Members of a community wear masks not only to fend off disease [in a pandemic]. They wear masks also to show that they want to stick, and cope, together under the bane of contagion.”

This dynamic is now so well entrenched in Asia that, as Gideon Lasco, an anthropologist who has studied “mask culture” extensively, writes in the social science publication *Sapiens*: “Cultural values, perceptions of control, social pressure,

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### ‘Mask-wearing has social implications. Scientists, trained to rely on statistics and the results of scientific experiments, sometimes ignore this’

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civic duty, family concerns, self-expression, beliefs about public institutions, and even politics are all wrapped up in the ‘symbolic efficacy’ of face masks.”

Some Europeans and Americans will scoff. Anglo-Saxon culture tends to prize individualism, not the type of collectivism that has often been valued in Asia. And in a city such as New York, mask-wearing has been such a minority practice that it has almost been associated with a sense of stigma – in recent times especially, since some view it as a sign of sickness.

**T**he point about mass mask-wearing is that this stigma tends to disappear if everyone puts one on. In fact, not wearing a mask is now almost a source of shame in places such as Japan. And while it might be hard to imagine this becoming the case in the US, nothing should be ruled out, given how quickly the shock of Covid-19 is reshaping our ideas of risk, and leading to a rising appreciation in the west for collectivist values.

Indeed, President Donald Trump has now indicated that he might embrace the widespread use of masks, once stocks are readily available. Some of his medical advisers would welcome this. I would too. As Lynteris notes, epidemics should be understood not just as “biological events but also as social processes”, since this “is key to their successful containment”. If rituals or symbols – like masks – help us to realise this, then so much the better.

To put it another way, beating Covid-19 will not just require medical science, but a dose of social science too. **FT**

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