

MARCH 6/7 2021

# FT Weekend Magazine

*'Death is the expectation and survival is the exception'*

ANKIT KUMAR,  
INTENSIVE CARE DOCTOR

*'We knew it was going to hit us hard - we just didn't know how hard'*

ROKHSANA FIAZ,  
LOCAL MAYOR

*'Where we go from here no one can be sure'*

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PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTOR

*'I'm the last face people see'*

IMRAN ALI,  
ANAESTHETIST

## INSIDE THE COVID TRIANGLE

Three east London boroughs suffered the highest infection rates in the country. *Anjli Raval* reports on a tragedy long in the making



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ALEXANDER COGGIN

**‘Sometimes with booze you go crazy – but hard seltzers are just right’**

The new trend in the alcohol market, p36



**‘Is this the end of Eurostar or the beginning of a new golden age of train travel, or both?’**

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**‘The hive is a metaphor for both imperialism and slavery’**

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*En 1940, un cultelage modernisé en Beauce.*

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**Cover: Dr Ankit Kumar at his home in east London. Photographed by Kalpesh Lathigra**

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# SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

## The case for dividing our loyalties



**A**nyone who has experienced Brexit in Britain or Trumpism in the US knows what a divided society feels like. Spending time in Barcelona last year, I recognised that atmosphere. Catalonia has been split down the middle by the region's quest for independence from Spain. The resulting quarrels break up Sunday family lunches, or end life-long friendships.

No new state has emerged in western Europe since Malta became independent from the UK in 1964, but now there are three candidates. Scotland's parliamentary elections on May 6 are effectively a referendum on independence, with the secessionist Scottish National Party expected to win a majority. That same month, Northern Ireland marks its centenary amid a Brexit-inspired push towards Irish unification.

None of these new states is likely to emerge anytime soon, if ever. London and Madrid can block Scottish and Catalan independence. Very few people in either part of Ireland are keen to hurry unification. Instead, these issues will probably stagnate into frozen conflicts, allowing polarisation to seep into everyday life.

Identity issues are the most emotive in politics. Few people stalk out of Christmas dinner because they disagree about the nuances of the Green New Deal. But introduce binary choices like "Should we live in Catalonia or Spain?" or "Scotland or Britain?" and some will get overexcited. In Northern Ireland, of course, unionists and nationalists generally wouldn't be having Christmas dinner together in the first place.

The best way to keep a society united, argues the philosopher Amartya Sen, is to encourage everyone to hold multiple identities. People can feel simultaneously Catalan and Spanish, Scottish and British, even Irish and British, as long as they are left in peace to muddy their identities. Some are happiest living outside all ethnic clubs. The numbers in Northern Ireland who identified as neither unionist nor nationalist rose in the years before Brexit, notes Katy Hayward of Queen's University Belfast.

But independence movements push people to choose a single identity. From 2006 through 2019, the segment of Catalonia's population that considers itself "only Catalan" jumped 15 percentage points, reports José Oller of the University of Barcelona and colleagues.

Worse, these national identities pile on top of other polarising identities. In Catalonia, most *indepes*, as they are called, are well-off, native-born people who grew up speaking Catalan. In some of their workplaces and social settings, speaking Spanish is now frowned upon. Dissidents risk being informally boycotted in their professional lives. Meanwhile, people in Catalonia of migrant origin – whether from Spain or abroad – mostly oppose independence. This social divide was pre-existing, but has recently become politically toxic.

In Scotland, supporters of independence are likely to be relatively young, well educated and anti-Brexit, says David McCrone of Edinburgh University. In Northern Ireland, Protestant unionists are more likely than nationalists to be older. They are also worried about the survival of their identity. This year's census may show Northern Irish Catholics outnumbering Protestants for the first time ever. And the trade border that Brexit has placed in the sea dividing Northern Ireland from the British mainland is probably here to stay, much as unionists loathe it. The risk isn't so much

### 'People can feel Scottish and British, even Irish and British, as long as they are left in peace to muddy their identities'

that some of them will try terrorism as that they will lose faith in democracy, says Hayward.

So far, Scotland is the least polarised of these regions. The independence referendum of 2014 – won by unionists – was relatively good-humoured. Even so, in focus groups afterwards, the pollster Lord Ashcroft recorded comments such as, "On my building site now no one talks about football, it's all politics," and, "It was testing for us, because we were a divided household. We stayed in different houses on the day of the referendum because he was very strongly Yes."

Many Scots in recent years have found firm political identities online, with "rants emanating from all sides", recounts Elizabeth Anne Bailey in her book *Political Participation on Social Media*. When a YouGov poll last year found that only 16 per cent of Scots believed Scotland was united, Gordon Brown, the former British prime minister and a vocal unionist, said Scotland looked like "two nations". He warned, "These divisions could dominate our lives for many decades to come." "Divisive referendum" may be a unionist mantra, but it's an accurate one.

I completely understand why most Scots (according to polls) now back independence. They have been governed from Westminster by a party they didn't elect for nearly 80 per cent of the period since 1945, points out McCrone. Brexit was done to them. Meanwhile, a small plurality of people in England either has no opinion on Scottish independence or actively supports it, reported YouGov last September. But dividing people into identity groups and then letting the biggest group decide rarely works brilliantly. Better to let sleeping identities lie, and to argue instead about boring issues like carbon offsets and street lights. **FT**

.....  
simon.kuper@ft.com [@KuperSimon](https://twitter.com/KuperSimon)

• Simon and author Leïla Slimani will discuss "The future of the Fifth Republic: writing and thinking about modern France" at the FT Weekend Digital Festival, March 18-20; [ftweekendfestival.com](https://ftweekendfestival.com)





**INVENTORY** CATH NOAKES  
MECHANICAL ENGINEER

**‘Success isn’t about individuals, it’s about what they achieve together’**

**Cath Noakes, 46, professor of environmental engineering for buildings at the University of Leeds, specialises in airborne infections and the transport of airborne pathogens. A member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), she is a key Covid adviser. She was appointed OBE in 2020 for services to the Covid-19 response.**

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

To be an artist. That spread into design and technical drawing, which then took me to engineering.

**Private school or state school?**

**University or straight into work?**

State school: New Mills primary, then New Mills secondary school and sixth form, in north Derbyshire. Then the University of Leeds to study mathematical engineering – and I haven’t left!

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

I’ve never had a formal mentor, but lots of people have given me support, both inside and outside academia.

**How physically fit are you?**

I’ve never been particularly fit, though I enjoy the outdoors – walking, attempting to mountain bike, the odd bit of a run.

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

You need a bit of both and a few other things too: enthusiasm, a really good team and a bit of luck. Success isn’t about individuals, it’s about what they achieve together. Success to me is what I’ve achieved with other people, for other people.

**How politically committed are you?**

I wouldn’t say I’m particularly active but over the past few years I’ve become much more politically aware: Brexit, climate change, the recognition of social injustice in the world. You realise how much of that is determined politically.

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

About 10 years ago my husband dug a hole in our garden to make a pond. It’s still just a hole. I would love it to be a pond.

**What’s your biggest extravagance?**

I’m not a big spender. Over the past year, little things have made a big difference, like getting nice cheese and wine delivered. That kept me going.

**In what place are you happiest?**

On holiday. We have a caravan. Getting away from the world to the coast or the countryside, away from the computer, away from the internet – sitting outside with the wildlife and a glass of wine.

**What ambitions do you still have?**

For the past 18 months I’ve been learning the piano. I’d like to be able to get through some complicated pieces of music without falling over the notes. I’d love to get to that point where I can just play.

**What drives you on?**

I get excited by new ideas and opportunities. If there’s a problem to be solved, that drives me on. It means I say yes too easily to too many things, as anyone who works with me will tell you.

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

It has to be my son. At the end of the day, people matter more than status.

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

When people are always late.

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

She would be pretty amazed. I was quite shy. I was never the person to put myself forward, put myself out there. To find myself in leadership roles and enjoy them was never on the cards for me, growing up. And she might say: “Have a bit more fun, Cath!”

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

The ability to switch off – though that’s not an object. Years ago, we had a lock-up garage with a car in it, an Austin Seven. The car and the garage simply disappeared. To this day, we have no idea what happened. We guess maybe the car was stolen, the garage was damaged and the council cleared the site.

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

This week it’s Covid, but I think climate change is bigger. But when you look at both of these, there’s an underlying need to recognise that we have a collective responsibility for humanity and the planet. How we transition society to take that on, I don’t know.

**Do you believe in an afterlife?**

I’m not particularly religious but I wouldn’t rule it out.

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

Eight. Everything is pretty good. But I have an appalling work-life balance. **FT**

*Interview by Hester Lacey.*

*Professor Noakes has received a Royal Academy of Engineering President’s Special Award for Pandemic Service. A National Science and Media Museum online exhibition honours the 19 award winners: [scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/whats-on/engineering-response-covid-19](https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/whats-on/engineering-response-covid-19)*



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# ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

## Where regals dare: HazMeg's TV takeover

With the sensational screening of the Harry and Meghan Oprah Winfrey interview imminent, it is increasingly clear that the royal family is now working directly with Netflix to furnish plotlines for future seasons of *The Crown*.

Deploying the accuracy that has characterised that series, the FT can reveal that scriptwriters and equerries have been meeting in secret to collaborate on ideas amid growing concern at Netflix that the royal emphasis on dutiful stability was a ratings killer. "Since about 2000, the royals seemed to be on some weird new no-drama kick, which may be fine for a constitutional monarchy but simply does not work for event TV," said one insider.

It was this secret committee that came up with the plan to parachute a bona fide TV actress into the ranks of the royals to improvise new dramatic plotlines.

The need for direct collaboration had become obvious during the happiness years. Although show runners were initially excited about Prince William's courtship of and marriage to Kate Middleton, they fear audiences will tire of an outwardly stable relationship. Viewers are eagerly anticipating the bit in season five when the Queen takes a cameo role as Dame Helen Mirren but these are rare moments of stardust.

Producers were worried they would be unable to top the drama of the Diana story. "There was just no new Queen of Hearts to work with," said one insider. "It's crushing a winning franchise."

It was amid this deepening sense of crisis that the radical "second son" strategy evolved. The spare-heir storyline had already been trialled with Princess Margaret. This twin-track approach allows the primary royals to go on being



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

dutiful while permitting dramatic storylines for less constitutionally significant figures and the occasional confrontation in which an enraged Windsor purses their lips and says "I see."

Not all has gone smoothly. Prince Andrew was furious when he discovered the storyline turning him into a global sleazeball but was soothed by the promise of a major scene in which his wrongdoing is exposed live in a *Newsnight* interview with Meghan Markle.

But it was the pairing of Harry and Meghan - or HazMeg - that guaranteed at least a seventh season, by which time the Queen will be played by a computer-generated Celia Johnson. The FT understands that the storyline will see the beautiful and sensitive Princess Meghan criticised by a stuffy and racially insensitive British establishment as she battles to spring her prince from his royal cage and teach the values of compassion, intersectionality, Facetune and the Goop store.

The sixth season ends with Meghan and Harry tunnelling out of Buckingham Palace under the eyes of Her Majesty's secret police. They then flee London disguised as the Earl and Countess of Wessex to avoid recognition.

The Oprah interview - due to air this weekend - is seen as a major moment in the seventh season and scriptwriters are looking forward to a lengthy montage juxtaposing furious royals watching the Sussexes spill the beans.

Even so, series seven could be the end of the line. There is the eventual accession of King Charles (Michael Palin) but writers were unenthused by plotlines in which he invents a new flavour of Duchy Originals and develops some marshland at Highgrove.

Scriptwriters now see the glamorous Sussexes, along with their children and direwolf, as the future, following them as they stylishly fight global injustice, environmental damage and the Daily Mail. There have even been approaches to Nicola Sturgeon for what would be a sensational *Game of Thrones* plotline in which Harry, played by Ewan McGregor, claims the Iron Throne as the first king of a newly independent Scotland.

The real-world royals may limp on across our TV screens but in the even more real world of Netflix, "Windsor is coming" and *The Only Way Is Sussex*. **FT**

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@robertshrimsley



Re "How Belarus's protesters staged a digital revolution" (February 27/28). Great insights into new forms of protest in Belarus, and more informative than a lot of stock news coverage. Thank you. It also brings a new dimension on the role of media and technology in shaping politics, beyond the empty cries of fake news.

Fempol via FT.com

@HugoGye Feb 27  
Great look at the young Journalists/activists who have helped to keep Belarus' protests going in the face of Lukashenko's very old-school attempts at suppression

Re "The fight to overcome vaccine hesitancy among African Americans" (February 27/28). My African American wife specifically referenced the Tuskegee experiment when discussing her fears of getting the vaccine. She has received the vaccine, but was frankly terrified... and she is not the cowardly type. While she doesn't get up every day thinking about those experiments, it certainly came to mind. There is a lot of mistrust in the US among POC towards the authorities, a healthy mistrust in most cases but problematic for the vaccine programme.

Stevog via FT.com

"On stealing from life as a livelihood" (February 27/28) was a lovely piece of writing. Thank you Nicole Krauss! Brilliant to imagine an alternate population, made up of all fiction's characters, in the ether, on our shelves... brought to us by the minds of writers.

Sarah C via FT.com

Re "The tiresome trend of vaccine one-upmanship" (February 27/28). Each week I eagerly anticipate my shot of laughter in the arm from Robert Shrimsley. This one's a great vintage for sure. I feel protected from the effects of all bad news on my mood for the coming week.

MacGyver via FT.com

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Quit answers The link was answers beginning with boys' names 1. Leopard 2. Edgy (Before that it meant 'nervous' or 'nervous') 3. Billiards 4. Samaria 5. Frankfurt 6. Jamestown 7. Peterloo massacre 8. Johnson 9. Bennet (Pride and Prejudice) 10. Demos with Wolves Plus a ure quiz John Wesley + snipes - Wesley Snipes



ELIZABETH HARROD. SOLOIST. THE ROYAL BALLET

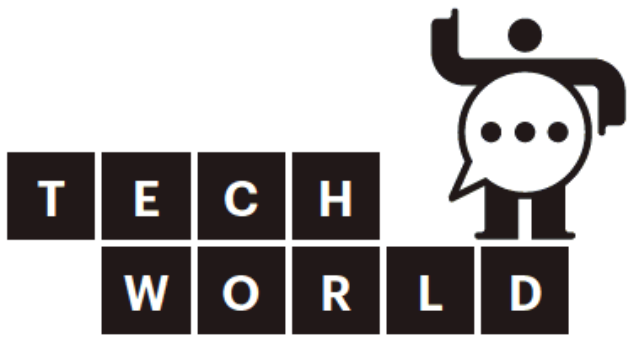


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BY LEO LEWIS IN TOKYO

## The big turn-off: why Japan switched from TV to online

In mid-2016, the tranquillity of the FT's Tokyo office was broken by the thunder of TV helicopters circling low over the Kasumigaseki district. Their cameras were fixed on the arrival at the Tokyo District Court of Kazuhiro Kiyohara - one of the greatest Japanese baseball players of all time, eight years into retirement and facing charges of illegal stimulant possession.

The court appearance was not, in any meaningful way, an event that needed to be covered from the air. But for many decades, gratuitous aerial coverage has been a staple show of strength from a Japanese TV industry bloated on cash, power and an outsized share of audience eyeballs in the world's fastest-ageing nation.

Also true to form was the aftermath of the trial. The last that Japanese TV viewers saw of Kiyohara was his confession, conviction and subsequent suspended prison sentence. Like a long parade of celebrities sullied by low-level criminality or scandal, he became, in effect, cancelled. This was Japanese TV playing its cherished role of all-powerful gatekeeper to the country's households and unchallengeable maker and breaker of stars.

But that omnipotence, as the supremos of Japanese TV are now discovering the hard way, is being systematically dismantled by social media. This has happened in other countries but Japanese TV seems uniquely stunned by an era when YouTube and other platforms give audiences and talent direct control over who does and does not disappear from the public sphere.



ILLUSTRATION BY PATE

Figures produced by the state broadcaster, NHK, suggest that, in common with other countries, a fast-growing proportion of Japanese 18- to 34-year-olds do not watch any traditional TV during the week. Their viewing time, says Nobuyuki Okumura, a media expert at Musashi University, is increasingly ceded to TikTok, YouTube, Twitch and other online platforms, and the money has flowed accordingly.

The latest figures from the advertising giant Dentsu show that in 2019 Japan reached the critical inflection point where total expenditure on online advertising passed total expenditure on TV advertising for the first time. This trend-line is expected to have accelerated significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic.

So rather than vanishing from public view, as someone in a similar

**'Comedians and singers have realised that TV no longer holds their fate so tightly in its hands because they can generate significant income from online channels'**

situation would surely have done in the past, Kiyohara has established an extraordinarily popular YouTube channel. Launched last December, Kiyochan Sports now has more than 320,000 subscribers - a viewer base that grew by more than 2,000 in the time it took to write this column. Many of the uploaded videos, in which he chats baseball, weight loss and other watchable stuff, have been viewed more than a million times.

The problem for Japanese TV executives is that Kiyohara is not alone, and that he and others are creating terrifying templates for independence. A year ago, the famous comedian Hiroyuki Miyasako, ostracised by mainstream media following a paid performance to an organised crime gang, began his own YouTube channel and has amassed more than 1.35 million subscribers.

The danger for the TV companies is not only that their capacity to determine futures is in retreat but also that their once unrivalled power - as the primary place that talent can make a decent living - is eroding fast. Comedians and singers in particular have realised that TV no longer holds their fate so tightly in its hands. They can now potentially generate significant income from online channels with the kind of young audiences advertisers are desperate to target.

The TV channels, meanwhile, are locked in a vicious circle: the more feverishly they work to retain the support of corporate advertisers and sponsors for individual shows, the more conservative they are forced to become. As Okumura puts it, Japanese TV has become increasingly chary about introducing new comedians and other performers, for fear that anything edgy or challenging will upset the sponsors. Blocked from the traditional route to Japanese audiences, upcoming comedians have been establishing dozens of new social media channels and making their living that way.

For years, Japanese entertainment has been controlled by an iron triangle connecting the TV companies, the advertising giants and those agencies with dominant control over the world of comedians, musicians and actors. Kiyohara's banishment from the mainstream airwaves - and re-emergence online - has exposed just how flimsy technology has rendered that triangle. 

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*Leo Lewis is the FT's  
Asia business editor*



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It isn't often I receive an email that makes me smoulder with rage. This one did, which was strange since it was perfectly polite. My correspondent wanted to know why he wasn't allowed to meet his friends indoors for coffee. They were in their early seventies and vaccinated. Was there really a risk?

Inoffensive enough, you might think. But the question sat in my stomach and burned.

If you want to think clearly about the world, you need to notice your emotional responses to new information. I have become so convinced of this, I made it the central point of the first chapter of my book. So it was time to take my own advice. Why was I so angry?

It may have been a quick bit of mental arithmetic. The vaccines seem to be very good at preventing serious illness - just how good depends on the vaccine, and what exactly we mean by "serious illness". But let's assume they reduce the risk of death by a factor of 20.

The other thing that reduces the risk of Covid death by a factor of 20? Being about 20-25 years younger. A vaccinated 70-year-old has roughly the same low risk of death as an unvaccinated 47-year-old. Those numbers may not be exactly right, but for this particular unvaccinated 47-year-old, they were close enough to trigger a severe emotional reaction.

I have not been hanging out with my 47-year-old friends - and that is not because I fear death. It's to prevent the virus from spreading, and thus protect the people who are most vulnerable. So it has been for all of us, on and off, for a year. And let's not even talk about our fraying-under-the-strain children, vastly less at risk of Covid-19 complications than any 70-year-old will ever be, no matter how well vaccinated.

That was why I smouldered. We have all been making extraordinary sacrifices to protect vulnerable people, and here was one of these people, suddenly feeling invulnerable (but, actually, no more invulnerable than I), complaining that his freedom had not instantly been restored.

Yet I was aware of the absurdity of my rage too. If we are all making sacrifices to protect the vulnerable, then, surely, when the vulnerable aren't so vulnerable any more, we can think about stopping?



# TIM HARFORD

## THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST



### The painful politics of vaccination

There will come a time when the restrictions must end. Not just yet, I think: there is not much more to lose from a few further weeks of partially constrained freedom, and a great deal to gain in terms of suppressing the virus to a low level and keeping it there with a broadly vaccinated population. But soon.

And my irrational fury indicates some of the painful politics that lie ahead. Will we give vaccinated people more freedoms than others? That is what is happening in Israel. And there is something to be said for that, both as an incentive to get vaccinated, and to combine the maximum reopening with the minimum public health risk. It is efficient; the economist in me applauds that. As Deng Xiaoping put it as he liberalised the Chinese economy in the 1980s: "Let some people get rich first."

But not even the Undercover Economist is just an economist. Fairness matters. There is something powerful about the idea that we are all in this together - that until the lockdowns can be eased for everyone, they should be eased for nobody.

It's not just me who whines about unfairness. Ponder the reaction to the UK's geographical tier system of late 2020. In principle, it made

sense: places with high infection rates were restricted for their own good; those with low infection rates did not need such restrictions.

But most people instead saw regional tiers as punishments, invidious and arbitrary. National lockdown, for all its costs and its discontents, has never been seen that way.

I did not write an angry response to my correspondent. I simply reminded him that we do not yet have complete confidence that vaccinated people are not infectious. The latest numbers on that question look very encouraging, but we cannot yet be sure that vaccinated people pose no risk to others.

We humans are not selfish, but we can be self-centred. My correspondent didn't show any concern for other people but I am sure that he does care. Most of us do. He just needs to be reminded that he is not only a potential victim of the virus, but a potential vector.

A few years ago the psychologists Adam Grant and David Hoffman studied the problem of hand

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**"There is something powerful about the idea that until the lockdowns can be eased for everyone, they should be eased for nobody"**

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hygiene in hospitals. They found that signs by the gel dispenser reminding doctors and nurses that "hand hygiene prevents you from catching diseases" did not work. What did work, dramatically, was reminding them instead that "hand hygiene prevents patients from catching diseases".

We are self-centred, yes. But we are not selfish. We just need the occasional reminder to look out for each other. And as we enter a new phase of the pandemic, one in which some are vaccinated and some are not, and at a time when even an economist can lose his temper, we must not forget why we have made such painful sacrifices. **FT**

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# INSIDE THE COVID TRIANGLE

By *Anjali Raval*  
Photographs by *Kalpesh Lathigra*





Economic deprivation, job insecurity, densely packed housing: in three east London boroughs, conditions were already at breaking point before coronavirus hit the capital. By this January, they were suffering from the highest infection rates in the country. What caused the public health catastrophe? And could it prove a turning point for the future?







**M**

anish Shah knew it was only a matter of time before he was struck by coronavirus.

When the pandemic first hit the UK, the pharmacy where he works in Dagenham, east London, put in strict protocols on mask-wearing and physical distancing. But as the more aggressive variant of the virus raged through this part of the capital over the winter, more and more sick people turned to Shah for help. “A lot of minicab and Uber drivers came to see me. They showed classic symptoms of the virus, but they kept saying things like: ‘Just give me something for the sore throat, cough syrup or something,’” he says. “I told them time and again to get a Covid test, but they just did not want to get a test or go to the doctor because they knew they could not afford to isolate.”

The pharmacy’s NHS contract meant that staff had to provide clinical services in partnership with local primary care networks. “We could not refuse anyone, even those not wearing a mask,” says Shah. “This is how I got the virus.”

Then he took it home. As with many south Asian families, Shah, 56, lives in a multigenerational household. “When I started showing symptoms, I straight away booked an apartment through Airbnb to isolate from my elderly parents.” But soon his father, who has Alzheimer’s, also fell sick, struggling to breathe. “To save my mum, both of us moved to the rented flat. My sister then had to come and help look after mum as she has Parkinson’s. Three days later, mum started showing symptoms. Then so did my sister.”

While coronavirus has inflicted extraordinary suffering across the country, the corner of east London in which Shah lives and

‘People would say, “Just give me something for the sore throat, a cough syrup...” I told them to get a Covid test but they could not afford to isolate’

**MANISH SHAH**  
PHARMACIST

works has been so pummelled that it has become known as the “Covid Triangle”. At one point during the peak of the second wave, the three boroughs that made up this triangle – Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Newham – were competing for the highest rate of infections in the whole country. In Barking and Dagenham one in 16 people was reported to be infected.

Within this area, a high proportion of the workforce are either essential staff who cannot stay at home – like Shah – or those forced out to work by job insecurity. “Others that worked in takeaway restaurants told me, ‘I have to go into work, otherwise they will find someone else and I won’t have a job,’” he says. “These people had to keep going because of their financial circumstances.”

As the more contagious mutation sent death rates skyrocketing locally, it also exposed a complex web of deeper problems that have built up over many years. In particular, the increased exposure to the virus collided with the problems faced by an already susceptible population, many of whom suffered from comorbidities and poorer health outcomes.

High levels of deprivation and job insecurity, vast income inequality, housing discrimination and medical disparities have long had a severe impact on the tangle of communities and ethnic minority populations that live in these boroughs. But when combined with the necessity to go to work, to take public transport and to share space in densely packed housing, they also provided the perfect breeding ground for a deadly virus. The domino effect would prove catastrophic.

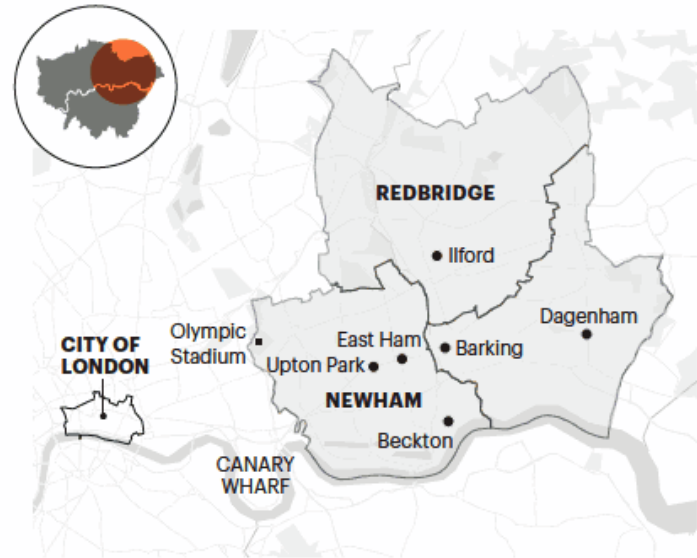
**T**

he odds were stacked against this part of London long before the arrival of coronavirus. For some, the ticking time bomb of economic deprivation and public health disparities was evident from the start. “This is a community scarred with inequality,” says

Rokhsana Fiaz, the mayor of Newham. “Given that landscape and context, we knew it was going to hit us hard – we just didn’t know how hard.” Between March and April 2020, during the first wave, Newham had the highest age-standardised mortality rate in England and Wales, at 144.3 deaths per 100,000, compared with 25 in some wealthier areas. While saving lives was the all-consuming priority, Fiaz knew the economic impact was also going to be significant.

Comprised of 350,000 residents who speak more than 200 languages and dialects, Newham was the pocket of east London showcased to the world when the UK hosted the 2012 Olympics. This was meant to mark a turning point for one of the country’s poorest areas.

Yet despite £9bn in spending and its proximity to Canary Wharf and the City, inequalities worsened. By the time of the pandemic, one in 25 people were homeless – the highest rate in England. Child poverty stood as high as 67 per cent. Unemployment was at 14 per cent, double the average for London.





The annual murder rate is the city's highest. Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has said the failure to build affordable homes in the area despite the billions spent raised a "big question mark" over the legacy of the Olympics.

Surrounding boroughs face similar vulnerabilities - and the constant movement of people between them, as typified by Shah, who lives in one, works in another and serves patients from all three, has only amplified challenges during the outbreak of a contagious disease. Despite Newham having the highest numbers in London on the government's furlough scheme, the second wave landed on a population under huge strain economically as well as from a public health standpoint. Food banks were operating at full capacity, hospitals ran out of oxygen, ambulance shortages were common and local community groups rushed to support families.

"Early on, it was all 'we're in this together' and 'the virus doesn't discriminate'. But then it emerged that it did," says Jason Strelitz, Newham's director of public health. "Certain populations were not only more likely to become infected and suffer the worst impacts from the virus but also the adverse impacts of trying to control the pandemic and the economic consequences."

For John Harris, whose family has run the funeral services business T Cribb & Sons in east London for 140 years, these factors resulted in a tragedy of epic proportions. In January, his phones

'Early on, it was all "we're in this together" and "the virus doesn't discriminate". But then it emerged that it did'

**JASON STRELITZ**  
NEWHAM'S DIRECTOR  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Opening pages: Green  
Street, Upton Park

Facing page: pharmacist  
Manish Shah. Below: tower  
blocks in Plaistow, Newham

rang constantly. "I've been doing this job for the last 49 years and I've never experienced anything that has come close to this," he says. "During the Blitz, the Romford Road [swimming] baths were used as a mortuary. When I just spoke to my dad, he says it sounds worse today."

Harris, whose staff were working 16-hour days, is frustrated by those who underestimated the severity of the new variant and its impact locally. "I don't want to take the risk and I don't want my staff to take the risk," he says. "But if you are in a war, you can't say you don't want to face it... This is desperately real. It is a crisis in every sense of the word."

The soaring case rates and the need to keep working were inextricably linked. Jobs in these areas largely fall into two categories - frontline workers and others in more insecure employment. The situation has long been fragile for those on low-paid zero-hours or shorter-term contracts, for example in hospitality, leisure and retail. Pre-pandemic, up to 36,000 residents in Newham worked below the minimum wage. The worst hit are those in the informal sector, paid cash in hand for shifts.

Community groups say that these people - who may work for restaurants or deliver goods - are now being exploited. "The employer will call in the morning and say 'come in' or 'don't come in'. They're being treated like third-class citizens... They're only ▶





◀ paid £2 or £3 an hour," says Elyas Ismail at Newham Community Project, which creates food packages for overseas students who are among the more than 10,000 individuals living in the borough without access to public funds. "Someone even called me once they found out what I'm doing to say, 'I'll pay these people £1.50.' It's slave labour, people were already taking advantage of them. Covid happened and this has gotten worse."

In a letter to prime minister Boris Johnson written last May, Fiaz asked that an additional "Covid-19 deprivation premium" be provided to the borough. Areas such as those inside the Covid Triangle have been disproportionately affected after years of local authority cutbacks. By October, the borough was given an extra cash injection but it was still not enough. Speaking to the FT, Fiaz says: "We just don't have the resources we need." The pandemic has cost Newham £68m, with the government only providing £38m in funding. "There is a clear shortfall."

For local businesses, the economic impact has been quick and real. Chiggy Okojie, who works at Mr P Taste of Home, a takeaway restaurant serving African and Caribbean dishes on Upton Park's Green Street, says it is a hard grind keeping the business going. "Jollof rice, curried goat, oxtail are customer favourites. Jerk chicken, that's my speciality. I used to make 30 packs and it would go in one hour," she says.

"Now, some days it's really very quiet. No one has the money these days. Before we might have 50 customers in one night. Now, only 10." She tries to keep a brave face but attributes the drop to her regulars just not having the spare cash. "It's primarily to do with income. Before, people would place a big order so that it would last them through the week. Now only small items."

**"This is a community scarred with inequality.**

**We knew Covid was going to hit us hard - we just didn't know how hard'**

**ROKHSANA FIAZ**  
MAYOR OF NEWHAM



Down the road at the Elegance Boutique, which sells elaborate outfits to the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, owner Harmeet Singh says these are now viewed as unnecessary luxuries. "Pre-Covid, we would get 100 people a day walking in. Now I'll be lucky if we can get one or two online orders a week. There are no weddings at all," he says.

**T**his part of east London has long been a magnet for outsiders. In the early 1900s, it attracted Jewish people from Germany; after the second world war, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Caribbean families responded to a government push for a Commonwealth workforce. More recently, newcomers from eastern Europe have moved in. Community connections, cheap housing and easy access to work in wealthier parts of the capital have made Newham the UK's most ethnically diverse local authority.

Each new influx of people has put its mark on businesses, restaurants and shops. On a single trip down Green Street one can buy an *abaya* - a long cloak worn by Muslim women; alligator peppers, used to make spicy West African jollof rice; and *paan*, a south Asian snack of chopped betel nut, a sweet rose-petal preserve and desiccated coconut.

As more and more people sought to call Newham home, housing failed to keep up with the demand. Following heavy bombing during the Blitz, narrow Edwardian terraced houses along winding back streets were replaced by pebbledashed homes with porches and then state-developed concrete tower blocks that came in the 1960s. Later, uniform rows of houses with front gardens and space for cars were constructed, along with high-rise buildings targeting the commuter class.

Many of these homes are now rundown, with the highest levels of overcrowding in the country. The policies of Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s saw less construction of secure and affordable housing, in the hope that the private sector would take over from local councils. But Newham now has one of the most severe affordable housing shortages in the UK. Some 28,000 people are languishing on the borough's waiting list and more than 5,500 families with children live in temporary accommodation.

"It has steadily gotten worse over the last decade," says Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham since 1994. Rogue landlords cram people into unlivable spaces to squeeze cash out of vulnerable individuals trying to save on rent. It is not uncommon for one bedroom in a house to accommodate a family of four or more, with bunk beds set up in living rooms, garages, basements and offshoots of back alleyways, while a dozen or more people will often share a single bathroom.

These problems were exacerbated during the pandemic when, Timms says, it was nearly impossible for households to distance as required. Even for those lucky enough to be in social housing, Covid-19 only worsened the precariousness of everyday existence.

"Conditions of housing are a moral outrage in the way they were in the 1960s. We are there again," he says. "I spoke to someone at one of my surgeries recently who lived in a two-bedroom council house - him, his wife and five daughters. In the current situation, it's almost intolerable. The children all have to do school work indoors, in these spaces - they can't go out. I don't know how people cope. That family was absolutely on the edge." The waiting time for bigger council homes has only got longer. One family, he says, had been waiting for 14 years.

As it has become clear that Covid-19 transmission, morbidity and mortality have been exacerbated by the area's housing challenges the council is now providing temporary accommodation to those who live in crowded homes and need to isolate, while sticking to a longer-term plan to build more than 1,000 affordable homes by 2022.

"If you live in a tower block, there could well be tens of people sharing a single corridor and hundreds of people using the same stairwell, lift or entryway. There is so much indirect mixing that inherently happens," says Shaine Mehta, a GP. "If you catch





the virus there are not any spare rooms to isolate. Your idea of physical distancing is just different if this is how you live.”

**D**evi Solanki could not understand how symptoms manifested so differently among the three generations of her family, despite living under one roof in East Ham. The 47-year-old, who works as a kitchen assistant at a primary school, lost her sense of taste and smell, and one daughter had a short-lived temperature. Her father-in-law, who was recovering from major heart surgery, did not get infected at all – while her mother-in-law did, requiring urgent medical care. But it was her healthy, athletic husband who suffered most of all.

After four hours of treatment in an ambulance outside Homerton University Hospital in late December, he was admitted and sent to intensive care. “That’s when it hit me. I thought, ‘Oh my god. My husband, he is fit, he eats well, he is not overweight, so how is he suffering so seriously?’”

For Ankit Kumar, an intensive care doctor who has worked at a series of east London hospitals over the past year, it was obvious early on that those requiring ventilators and other organ support were predominantly from black and ethnic

**‘Conditions of housing are a moral outrage in the way they were in the 1960s. We are there again... I don’t know how people cope’**

**STEPHEN TIMMS**  
MP FOR EAST HAM

Facing page: Rokhsana Fiaz, mayor of Newham  
Above: houses under construction in East Ham

minority populations. “Initially we thought it was just the area. But when the data started to be published, we saw that it was a higher proportion of BAME people versus the demographic of the area,” he says. “By the time they get to intensive care, death is the expectation and survival is the exception.”

Speaking during January’s peak, Kumar said the outsized impact of the virus on ethnically diverse boroughs meant the pressure on local hospitals was unparalleled. Around 72 per cent of Newham’s population are from BAME backgrounds, compared with 44 per cent in London broadly. Redbridge stands at about two-thirds.

It was so bad there was a backlog in the mortuaries. “We have had to keep the dead where they are. Dead for hours, with the curtains drawn, while they wait for mortuary space. For some patients who are awake, it’s quite hard for them to see that. They know that the person in the bay next to them is dead.”

In June last year, a Public Health England report found that people from black, Asian and other ethnic groups were more likely to die from Covid-19 than white people. “People of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared to people of White British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10 and 50 per cent higher risk of death when compared to White British,” the report says. ▶



◀ Minority groups tend to fall into those most exposed to infection - because of how and where they live and work - and those with increased susceptibility to the worst outcomes because of comorbidities, but why some people suffer more is unclear. "A high proportion of ethnic minority people live in deprived areas. But you can't tease out which one is the key driver of not only getting the coronavirus but also feeling the worst effects of it," says Nishi Chaturvedi, a professor of clinical epidemiology at University College London.

In poorer neighbourhoods people tend to have worse diets and less opportunity and green space for exercise, which over time increases their chances of chronic diseases. Now the pandemic is forcing a conversation about structural disparities and about the role decades of discrimination has played. "Social inequalities have got wider since the 1970s and this has impacted health," she says. "You can get the Tube from Newham to South Kensington. But there is a much higher health expectancy in South Kensington."

However, doctors such as Kumar say the virus has been more indiscriminate, hitting rich families too. "People tend to think it's poorer people alone that are more likely to get Covid. But we had some very wealthy Asian people come through intensive care who died from Covid too. No one can explain this."

'A lot of ethnic minority people live in deprived areas. But you can't tease out which is the key driver of getting Covid and feeling its worst effects'

**NISHI CHATURVEDI**  
PROFESSOR OF  
EPIDEMIOLOGY, UCL

Below: one of Green Street's many food shops. Facing page: Imran Ali, an anaesthetist at the Royal London Hospital

Public Health England noted that the historical experiences of black and other minority groups might mean they are less likely to seek help when it is necessary, ultimately having an impact on longer-term health. A group of UK academics recently argued that access to medical care is also determined by a person's ability to use services "with ease, and having confidence that you will be treated with respect". This can be "hindered by language barriers, patients' attitudes towards healthcare providers and the behaviour and attitudes of healthcare professionals towards minority patients". The effects of racial discrimination across wider society also play a part in why some minority groups are hesitant to take up a Covid-19 vaccine.

There is also a link between diseases such as diabetes and the increased susceptibility to the virus. "Not only are conditions such as diabetes present among lower economic social groups, but certain ethnicities are also more likely to have them," says Naveed Sattar, a professor of metabolic medicine at the University of Glasgow. "Diabetes is definitely over-represented in the people who died."

Scientists are investigating genetic determinants that might enhance susceptibility to infection but it is complex. Genetic differences in people of the same ethnicity are more common than those between different minority populations, meaning con-





clusions about whole groups will likely be wrong. While ethnic minority groups suffer from chronic diseases differently, before the pandemic they had higher life expectancy at birth than the white population. However, “the impact of Covid-19 has been so significant that it has reversed the previous picture and many ethnic minority groups now have higher overall mortality”, say the authors of a new King’s Fund report.

This has become sadly obvious to many of those who live and work in this part of east London. Imran Ali is a 34-year-old anaesthetist at the Royal London Hospital, who lives in Redbridge. He has been part of teams caring for those who could not breathe and whose bodies were rapidly shutting down. Many were from the Covid Triangle. “I can remember the people that I put to sleep and that didn’t come back,” he says. “I’m the last face people see.” Ali would stand over them as they closed their eyes and then help put them on ventilators, with tubes and machines taking over basic functions. He watched as families said their goodbyes. He did not expect to be doing the same thing with one of his own family.

Last November, Ali’s 68-year-old father-in-law Abdul-Razaq Abdullah, a GP in the east London suburb of Rainham, was isolating alone at home after experiencing Covid-19 symptoms. The family believes he caught the virus from a patient. When Abdullah stopped responding to texts and did not answer the doorbell, the fire services forced entry into his house only to find him collapsed on the sofa. His lips were blue, his oxygen levels were “barely detectable” says Ali, and he had to be rushed to hospital.

Doctors asked Ali and his wife to tell Abdullah that he would have to be put on a ventilator. “Because of my job, I knew something bad was going to happen,” Ali says. “I wanted to be honest with him. One of the last things I said to him was: ‘This could be the last time I see you.’” After a month in a coma, Abdullah died.

**F**or those in the Covid Triangle, it is not uncommon to know of dozens of individuals who have been struck by the virus. Newham expects its death rate over the past two months to exceed that of early 2020. Zoom funerals and prayer meetings for the dead have been weekly events. The area is emblematic of other poorer regions in the country with large minority populations. How it recovers after the pandemic may signal whether other deprived areas will be able to turn around their fortunes. “We haven’t seen the full impact of this yet,” says public health director Strelitz. “Where we go from here no one can be sure.”

Mia Gray, an expert in local authority funding at the University of Cambridge, says Newham’s past will hinder its recovery. “Council budgets across the country have taken an enormous hit over a decade of austerity, affecting their ability to function, their ability to have expertise on different issues and, importantly, the provision of a local safety net,” she says. “These different strands got interwoven into the bigger problems around the pandemic. That has a very long-lasting legacy and it is not something that lifts when government restrictions end.”

Sadiq Khan recently accused the government of “imposing a new era of austerity on public services”. He says that inadequate local funding means he is rebuilding the city “with one arm tied behind my back”. By January, the Greater London Authority had spent £84.7m – not covered by the government’s funding initiatives – to support London through the pandemic, a figure that is likely to have increased during the current lockdown.

In Newham, educational outcomes had improved in recent years. But homeschooling in cramped conditions and digital poverty, with multiple siblings sharing a single device, has put progress into reverse and young people most at risk. Kevin Jenkins, who runs Ambition Aspire Achieve, a charity supporting Newham’s youth, says: “As we come out of this current lockdown, how do you support these kids? Remember, the basic services weren’t there in the first place, from play schemes to youth projects.”

One beacon of hope, says Lee Taylor, a priest at St Michael & All Angels church in Manor Park, is that the pandemic has “galvanised” local networks. The church has worked with mutual aid groups on everything from promoting the benefits of vaccines



**‘I can remember the people that I put to sleep and that didn’t come back. I’m the last face people see’**

**IMRAN ALI**  
ANAESTHETIST, ROYAL LONDON HOSPITAL

to arranging deliveries of medicines to those shielding, together stepping in to provide a buffer in Newham. “Where perhaps we haven’t worked together in the past, we will have to in the future,” he says, “particularly if this happened again.”

For Mayor Fiaz, this is key to building back. Even as the borough pushes to secure adequate funding, Newham has sought to prioritise the health, wellbeing and happiness of residents as its prime measures of Covid-19 recovery and economic success. Such intangible metrics are difficult to track but the borough realises quick progress in more rudimentary areas is key to achieving these goals, including plans to build new homes, upgrade existing council houses, create new youth facilities, set new standards for local working conditions and provide better mental and physical health support through community outreach. Speed is crucial. It is only a matter of time, Fiaz says, before “there will be another deadly virus that will challenge the community again”.

Preparing for the post-pandemic future will also require grappling with the past. Gray says that Newham’s experience with coronavirus has brought into focus what has been hidden in many parts of the UK for years and the dire consequences of inadequate government support. Should the prime minister take seriously his ambition to “level up” and revive the fortunes of those areas left behind, recent events should force a rethink of the role of the state.

“There are often these moments of restructuring that come after such crises,” says Gray. “But in the past we have been able to look away, and my fear is that we will continue to look away. What is visible now, will become invisible again.”

*Anjali Raval is the FT’s senior energy correspondent*



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# TROUBLE ON THE TRACKS

Battered by Brexit and the pandemic, and with passenger numbers plunging, Eurostar is in a fight for survival. Is this the end of the line for the great cross-Channel rail project – or can it become part of a new golden age of low-carbon train travel? By *Henry Mance*. Photographs by *Kemka Ajoku*

In an office near St Pancras station, Jacques Damas is holding a train magazine and preparing for a train journey. The 63-year-old chief executive of Eurostar has worked in railways for his entire career. But if you suggest that he might be passionate about trains, he seems almost affronted.

“I do not have a private [toy train] network in my house! I’m not in this category. For me, you must not have a personal passion, which becomes an obstacle to reality.”

When Eurostar recruits staff, it is wary of applicants who are train enthusiasts. “A good railwayman is someone who evolves,” says Damas, an angular, grey-haired and sometimes theatrical Frenchman. “Those who are absolutely passionate about the last century – no, we are no longer in steam trains.”

This tension between passion and practicality – dream and reality – lies at the heart of Eurostar. It is summed up by the 20-metre-long Tracey Emin neon artwork that hangs at St Pancras, its London terminus: the message, “I Want My Time with You”, is both romantic and demanding.

When Eurostar opened in 1994, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* declared “the end of British insularity”. For couples who got engaged by the Eiffel Tower, MEPs who shuttled to Brussels, or bankers who came the other way, the service reshaped their idea of Europe.

Eurostar reclaimed train travel from the commuters and the spotters. It represents the best of European integration – a French-style railway, a British corporate structure and mostly German trains. It connects four capital cities through the railway tunnel with the longest undersea portion in the world. A young Britney Spears thought taking the underwater train was “about the coolest thing we’d ever done”, according to her then assistant. Some first-time passengers still ask if they’ll see fish, or so the company claims.

Yet Eurostar has been a newcomer on an old continent, hampered at every turn by customs posts, safety rules and incompatible signalling systems. It took 24 years to start a direct service from London to Amsterdam and even then passengers initially had to disembark on the return leg for border checks. Politics has played its part too. “We built this tunnel and then we did Brexit. A bit of a contradiction, isn’t it?” says Christian Wolmar, a British transport writer.

Following the Brexit deal, many British workers need laborious visas and permits to enter the EU. ▶





## 'The French government says, "Allez voir le gouvernement britannique" "Oh, Eurostar, it is a company that [mostly] belongs to the French

JACQUES DAMAS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, EUROSTAR

◀ Holidaymakers must stand in the "non-EU" border lane and can't carry meat, dairy or, unless they have a phytosanitary certificate, most fresh fruit. "What is it, the Brexit?" asks Damas. "It is a willingness to say 'When we are at home, we decide what we want.' But it is not at all 'We are going to stay at home.' I can't believe that!"

If Brexit is a permanent speed bump, coronavirus is an earthquake. Eurostar's passenger numbers have fallen 95 per cent. Its cathedral-like shed at St Pancras - once the largest enclosed space in the world - stands almost deserted.

When I visited in mid-February, instead of carrying 30,000 people a day, Eurostar was carrying only about 500. One man remonstrated after being told he lacked a certificate proving essential travel. A staff member tried jollying passengers, while conceding: "There's a lot of fear." Eurostar's chief executive left in September, with Damas drafted in as an interim replacement.

Eurostar is losing in the region of £500m a year. In the time it will take you to read this article, it will lose perhaps £20,000. For the first time in its history, there may be no light at the end of the tunnel. If travel restrictions are not lifted and no state support is forthcoming, the operator says it will run out of cash possibly by June, certainly over the summer. Its uniqueness has become a weakness.

"You go to the French government, you say, 'Eurostar needs financial support.' The response is: 'Eurostar, Eurostar, what is that, Eurostar? Oh yes, it is a company that is based in the UK, *allez voir le gouvernement britannique*,'" says Damas. "Then you go to the UK. 'Eurostar, Eurostar, what is that? Oh, you mean Eurostar, it is a company that [mostly] belongs to the French railways'... I'm fed up with both governments. [I have told the UK ambassador in Paris and the French ambassador in London:] stop your stupidities."

A few observers (including the FT's Lex column) have suggested that Eurostar should be allowed to go bust: another operator would emerge from its ashes. Most disagree, arguing that this would derail high-speed services for years. Eurostar's trains could be sold off; its bilingual drivers, who undergo 18 months of training, could dissipate into the job market. "You can't imagine being so stupid as to let it collapse. But we live in a world where stupid happens," says Mark Smith, a former rail regulator who runs the website *The Man in Seat 61*.

Damas insists that, because of its history, "Eurostar will not collapse... [François] Mitterrand is no longer here, [Jacques] Chirac is no longer here, but the Queen is still here. The Queen is our best protective mother! We will get this money. Because I am ready to go to the Queen."

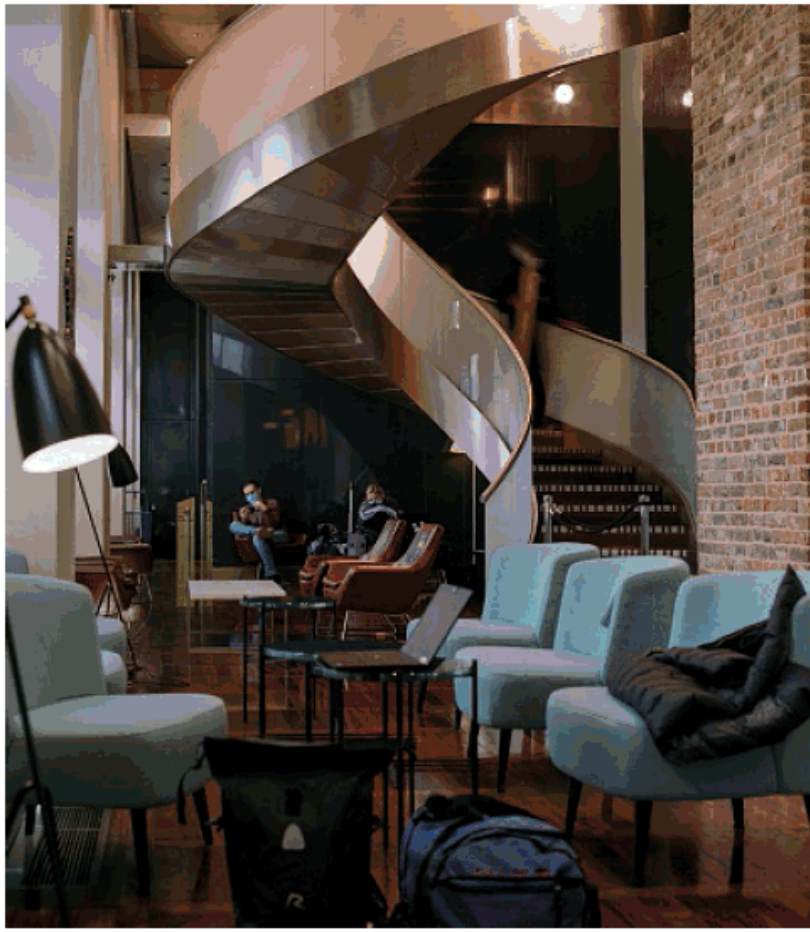
Yet, even if it survives, Eurostar might be licking its wounds - at precisely the time that it is meant to be pioneering a low-carbon future.

Travelling from London to Paris by train saves 90 per cent of the greenhouse gases of going by plane. So high-speed rail is in fashion, in theory. In the US, President Biden, a long-time train commuter, has promised a "second great railroad revolution". The EU has designated 2021 the year of rail.

Eurostar could become part of a new European high-speed rail network, luring businesspeople and holidaymakers away from budget airlines. Is this the end of Eurostar, the beginning of a new golden age of train travel, or both?

The golden age of rail is a phrase used imprecisely, but it almost always refers to a time before the rise of air travel and mass car ownership. A cross-Channel train was proposed at various points, and Queen Victoria welcomed it as an antidote to her seasickness. The plan foundered in the 1880s primarily on security grounds: why should Britain, the





## “Then you go to the UK. railways.” I’m fed up with both’

great naval power, give up its island status? Only a century later, with the risk of invasion diminished, did Britain agree to a train running from London to Paris on a single gauge.

Eurostar went against the current. Luxury trains – with Agatha Christie-style dining cars – were being shunted aside by planes. The EU was liberalising its air industry. A year after the Channel Tunnel opened, a continental network of first-class trains called the Trans Europe Express closed and easyJet was founded.

Eurotunnel forecast that at least 15 million people would ride Eurostar in its first year, rising to 25 million a decade later. This proved pie in the sky. Yet in 2019 the service hit a record 11 million passengers, comprising nearly 80 per cent of air and rail travel from London to Paris and Brussels.

This success is built on speed. Britain’s first (and so far only) high-speed line cut the journey from London to Paris to two hours and 16 minutes.

Above, from left: view from a Eurostar train at the St Pancras terminus in London; chief executive Jacques Damas on board; the business lounge at St Pancras

Previous spread: Tracey Emin’s neon artwork ‘I Want My Time with You’ in a deserted St Pancras station last month

It is quicker for a Londoner to travel by train to Paris than to Norwich. A Parisian can reach Cambridge almost as fast as Marseille. Nearly 90 per cent of Eurostar trains arrive within 15 minutes of their scheduled time. EasyJet, Air France and British Airways hover around 75 per cent.

While trains get quicker, airports have become more cumbersome, especially since 9/11. At St Pancras, the Eurostar gate is a hundred metres or so from the Tube exit. In 10 steps, you are through security. In another 20, you are through passport control. Walk up a motorised ramp and you are on the platform. You don’t have to take off your shoes or breathe in duty-free perfume. When the train departs, the noise is barely louder than a boiling kettle. “Even after 22 years, I still have my heart beating when the train leaves,” says Dorette Ngo Bayiha, a station manager at St Pancras.

When train travel is good, it is very good. You can read, work or stream TV. You can reach city centres from which low-cost airlines are banished. A cheap flight can leave you feeling like a shaken bottle of Coke. At its best, Eurostar leaves you feeling like an aerated glass of red wine. “Of all modes of transport, the train is perhaps the best aid to thought,” wrote the philosopher Alain de Botton in *The Art of Travel*. “[The views move] quickly enough for us not to get exasperated but slowly enough to allow us to identify objects.”

This only half-applies to Eurostar, which travels at up to 300km/h. Farmhouses and towns flash by. The train moves too fast for the human eye to react to trackside beacons, so signals appear on electronic panels in the driver’s cab. But there is smoothness. The sharp gradients as the train passes the tunnels and viaducts into Kent are imperceptible. “We’re probably the largest and fastest rollercoaster you’ll ever come across,” says Adrian Gordon, a driver. The Tunnel is over as soon as it begins. “Our mission is never to stop in the Tunnel. People aren’t comfortable in tunnels.”

For those who rely on Eurostar, it is irreplaceable. “I am in a nine-year relationship thanks to the Eurostar. To be very honest, without the Eurostar it might not have lasted,” is one, not uncommon, account.

Sarah Schijen, a Londoner, started cross-Channel commuting when her wife took a job at Hermès in Paris. “It was that constant tension of ‘how do you get the best of Paris and London in one place?’ and you can’t, so it’s the Eurostar,” she says.

“I would have my tickets lined up for the next three or four months,”

says Schijen. “That means you know where you’re going to be every weekend.” On board, there was a shared solidarity between regular customers. “Everyone just understands that you’re trying to make something work.”

Schijen learnt to sit in the middle of the carriage, where it’s warmer, and to locate the elusive button that extends the bottom of the seat. Everyone wants “Carte Blanche”, which allows you to turn up just 10 minutes before departure but for which you must make at least 32 journeys (or spend £2,400) a year.

Amid the mundanity, Schijen says, “You would just have interesting times, interesting conversations, bump into Eric Cantona on your way home... It was so much fun. I actually do miss it – I miss commuting. The Eurostar reinforced that Britain was part of Europe.”

When you fly, your mind makes no connection between the point of destination and arrival. But when you take the train, and see the landscape in transition, the two places become intertwined. An island mentality struggles to survive. Of course, Eurostar travellers, being disproportionately wealthy, educated Londoners, were never natural Brexiters anyway.

The flip side is that, on Eurostar, where different nationalities are thrown together, national differences are often magnified.

“If there is a delay [to a service], the first complaining are the French passengers,” a (Spanish) train manager told me. Eurostar’s former chief executive once said that his British employees would delegate more easily, while his French employees liked to plan 25 years ahead. He also admitted that staff’s tendency to attribute disagreements to national stereotypes disguised genuine conflicts.

Similarly, Eurostar’s onboard menus – overseen by the chef Raymond Blanc – mix different European elements, though there are limits. It is assumed that French customers will not put up with English sparkling wine. An attempt to mark the opening of the Amsterdam route by incorporating Dutch liqueur into dishes didn’t please anyone. Eurostar is trialling a new, longer glass that will lie horizontally on premier customers’ trays and will allow wine aromas to rise. Customers might prioritise reliable WiFi.

**Eurostar has been mostly profitable since 2009. In 2019, revenues were around £1bn. Operating profits were £92m – £8 per passenger. ▶**



◀ Those who have worked at Eurostar emphasise that it is no lethargic state-run stereotype, even though it is 55 per cent owned by French railways SNCF and 5 per cent by the Belgian railways SNCB. It is part of a political project, which has succeeded until now by being unpolitical.

In 2010, it ordered 10 trains from Germany's Siemens, rather than France's national champion Alstom. Two SNCF board members resigned and legal action ensued. But Eurostar persevered and ordered seven more Siemens trains. It is now detached from the British government, which in 2015 sold its 40 per cent stake to a consortium of pension funds for £757m. In one way, however, Eurostar remains highly political. Unlike many rail operators, it does not have exclusive franchises. Its profitability hinges on limiting competition.

Independent rail companies accuse Eurostar of scrapping its old trains so that other operators can't buy them. Eurostar says it couldn't find a buyer. (To pass through the Tunnel, trains must be 400 metres long, twice the usual high-speed length, to facilitate escape in case of fire. Each Siemens train can carry about 900 passengers, as many as two Jumbo Jets.)

Even Germany's Deutsche Bahn, Europe's largest rail company, has failed to take a piece of the market. In 2009 it mused about buying a stake in Eurostar but received a predictable response from the French. A year later it ran a train to St Pancras, a test for a regular service by the 2012 Olympics.

But the project stalled. "It became clear that the French government did not want any competition to go through that tunnel," says Chris Loder, a Tory MP who led Deutsche Bahn's project to reach London. Deutsche Bahn says a UK-Germany rail route is "attractive for customers" but that none of its trains can currently handle the three signalling systems of Germany, France and Belgium.

Customers complain that Eurostar charges high prices and offers little flexibility. Had Deutsche Bahn taken the plunge, fares would certainly be cheaper. Customers would have more destinations, too. Eurostar runs a few trains to Marseille, and to the Alps in winter. But only the busiest routes merit a 900-seat service. Deutsche Bahn's plan was to have a train from London that separated at Brussels, with the front half going to Cologne and Frankfurt and the back half to Amsterdam.

"What Eurostar needs is a bit of competition," says Tony Berkeley, a

member of the House of Lords, who worked for Eurotunnel during its construction. "It could have grown a good deal more."

Wolmar says Eurostar has lacked the "go-getting attitude" to expand. "Put [Ryanair chief executive] Michael O'Leary in charge and he'd say, 'Fuck you lot - we're doing this.'"

**B**etween 1997 and 2017, passenger numbers at UK airports doubled. Before the pandemic struck, the Department for Transport forecast an increase of a further 50 per cent by 2050.

Sadly, flying is, to quote the Committee on Climate Change watchdog, "the quickest and cheapest way for a consumer to increase their carbon footprint". A return flight from London to New York emits as much carbon as heating the average home for a year.

The CCC says the UK will have to limit the rise in passenger numbers to just 25 per cent, if it's to be net zero by 2050. Other environmentalists think even that is too generous, relying on sucking emissions out of the air. Instead, "You need to squeeze demand on short-haul air routes," says Leo Murray, a campaigner.

Flying is generally cheaper, not least because airlines pay no fuel tax or track access charges. For every £79 Eurostar ticket, Channel Tunnel operator Getlink ends up with nearly £20. Track owners on both sides take a further £15. These costs include electricity as well as access. High-speed track access charges are almost twice as high in the UK as in any EU country.

But where high-speed rail is convenient, it knocks airlines out of the market. Flights between London and Paris more than halved between 1996 and 2019 - from 100 a day to 46. A high-speed train service between Madrid and Barcelona opened in 2008; the number of air travellers between the two cities halved over the following decade, according to data from analysts OAG.

Eurostar has long made a virtue of its green credentials. A passenger travelling to Paris emits less carbon than a car driving from central London to Heathrow, it says. Eurostar plans to ditch fossil fuels by 2030, and probably sooner, via contracts with track owners that supply its electricity. (It is not persuaded by carbon offsets.)

Once travellers were thought to tolerate train journeys of up to three hours. Climate awareness may have raised this threshold. London-Amsterdam is four hours and nine minutes by train. Before the pandemic, there were up to 55 flights



## 'We're probably the largest and fastest' Our mission is never to stop in the

ADRIAN GORDON, EUROSTAR DRIVER

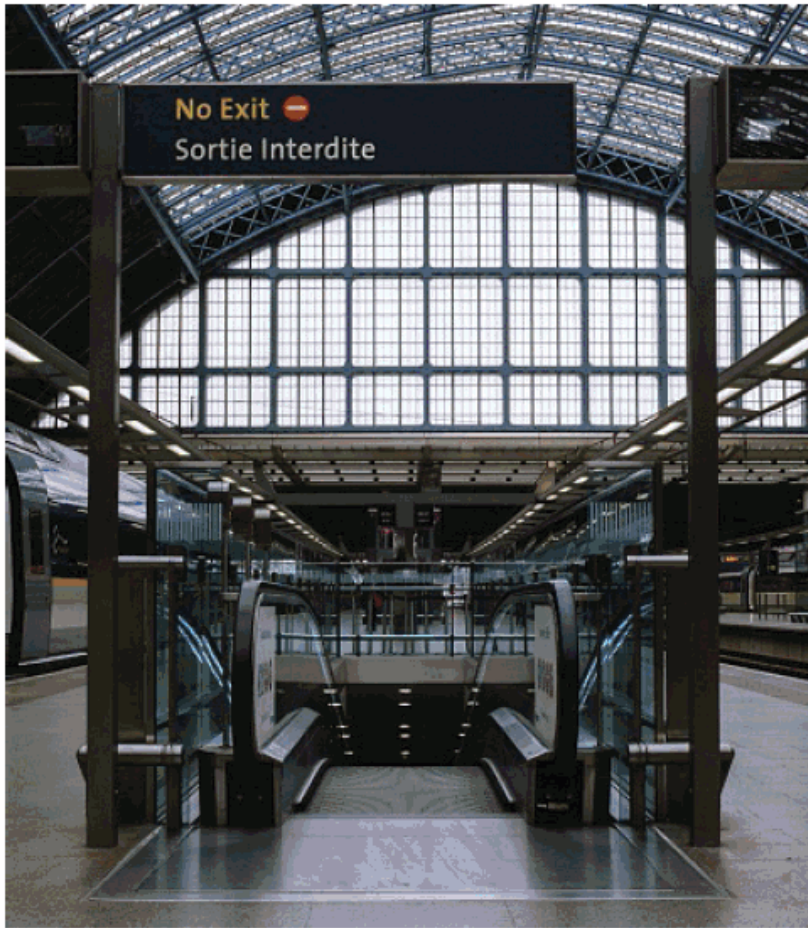
Above, from left: Eurostar driver Adrian Gordon; an empty platform at St Pancras in February; station manager Dorette Ngo Bayiha: 'Even after 22 years, I still have my heart beating when the train leaves'

a day and Eurostar had less than 10 per cent of the market. When travel restrictions are lifted, it hopes to gain ground rapidly. "I don't think they will have any problem filling those trains, once we get the pandemic behind us," says Smith of The Man in Seat 61.

Airlines, battered by the pandemic, may trim less profitable routes. Travellers may be reluctant to mingle at large airports (though trains will have risks too). And airports may be legally constrained: the French government has cancelled the expansion of Charles de Gaulle, citing climate change, and pushed Air France to reduce domestic flights by 40 per cent, in exchange for a coronavirus bailout. Meanwhile, Gare du Nord, the rather grotty Eurostar terminus, is due to be renovated before the 2024 Olympics.

The problem is that flights under 500km account for only 5 per cent of the UK's aviation emissions. The biggest role that high-speed rail can play in fighting climate change is there-





## stest rollercoaster you'll ever come across. Tunnel. People aren't comfortable in tunnels'

fore to take demand from long-haul flights. Would holidaying Britons swap Australia for Austria? Would businesspeople take the scenic route to Germany, especially if climate-conscious employers restricted flights or offered extra leave?

"We should be accessing Europe by train, not plane. I think Frankfurt [which is five hours and 29 minutes from London] is realistic. You could get up to nine or 10 hours by train," says Loder, the Tory MP. "But the focus on the customer has got to change. They're going to have to go back to what the railway once felt like, where the experience was enjoyable." That means no more "ironing-board seats" and the "hideous fluorescent tubes everywhere".

Ironically, the economic case for building the UK's second high-speed line, HS2, relied on the premise that time on today's slower trains is wasted: every hour saved by high-speed trains could be used for productive work. But the growth of high-speed rail across Europe may

rely on the calculation that extra hours on the train are not wasted – they can be working time. The future is not faster trains, but more patient passengers.

A new German scheme envisages a high-speed train network – Trans Europe Express 2.0 – run by a single company. Proposed routes include Amsterdam to Rome, Berlin to Barcelona and Brussels to Warsaw. The possibility of night trains is opening up. SNCF, meanwhile, plans to merge Eurostar with its high-speed service Thalys in a joint venture called "Green Speed". Eurostar doesn't run trains from Paris to Amsterdam; Thalys does. Green Speed would allow passengers to buy a single ticket across Eurostar and TGV services. "SNCF love empire-building, even if they haven't got any money," says Berkeley. "They'll try to beat the Germans at their own game."

Eurostar, however, is not a core part of the German proposal. Even for its owners, SNCF, it can be an afterthought: SNCF has more than

270,000 employees, Eurostar has fewer than 2,000. "It should have a big part of a European project. Instead, it's a branch line from Calais," says Wolmar.

Eurostar is also disconnected from HS2, whose London terminus will be Euston, not St Pancras. Taking it to St Pancras would have increased costs by an estimated £700m and disrupted other rail lines. Instead, passengers will walk 750 metres down the road – less seamless than an airport.

For now Eurostar faces more urgent problems. It has borrowed £350m from banks to stay afloat; its shareholders have put in another £100m. Three-quarters of its staff are furloughed. Coronavirus hasn't just delayed the expansion of high-speed rail, it's changed the case. Business travel may have shrunk permanently.

Hopes of a 2021 rebound evaporated months ago. "We all woke up for the year and said, 'This doesn't feel right,'" says one person involved.

"But you can't just chop everything – because when things recover, you need to be ready to bounce back."

Some international travel restrictions are likely to remain through the summer. To break even, Eurostar needs to hit half its 2019 passenger numbers. It wants the UK to offer loan guarantees and the EU governments to open their borders. UK transport secretary Grant Shapps has said he is "very keen for Eurostar to survive", adding that it would be for France to "naturally... lead" any deal. The French have indicated they will support SNCF but the European Commission could impose conditions to help competition.

As Damas boards the one daily train that currently runs to Paris, he strikes a tranquil note. "Brexit – it's just an episode." Coronavirus "is just nothing in the history". Eurostar's "roots are deep. Therefore the future will be enormous." **FT**

.....  
*Henry Mance is the FT's chief features writer*



The buildings we have designed for bees over thousands of years have been as much cultural symbols as functional objects – a visual history that artist Aladin Borioli plays on in his new book. By *Edwin Heathcote*

# HIVE MIND

The metaphor of the beehive standing for the industrious society is, perhaps, a little overused. This self-contained city of Stakhanovite workers toiling together to harvest and produce, each with their defined role, has served as an idealised model for capitalism, the Protestant work ethic, communism, banking, freemasonry, Mormonism and much more. Beehive ornaments – little ribbed baskets shaped like a bishop's mitre – adorn buildings across the world, from churches to stock exchanges, town halls to temples.

What these decorations show is a skep, a traditional ribbed, woven bulbous basket. To extract the honey, a keeper would probably have had to kill the hive – which does sound like a metaphor for extreme capitalism, though not one our own queen bees of industry might choose.

That skep is only a tiny part of the incredible history of hives, which stretches back 4,000 years. The hive has always had – at least until two centuries ago – a multiplicity of designs. A new book by artist Aladin Borioli, co-written with Ellen Lapper, about buildings for bees features many of those often weird, occasionally brilliant, sometimes bananas manifestations of apiary architecture and reinforces the age-old bond ▶



12 Single frame decorated nineteenth-century observation hive, 1883 collection

1



132

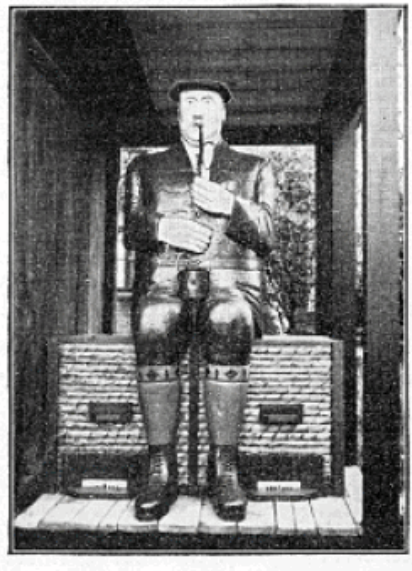
reliés d'un côté par

2



4 Ieten werden nicht als «Haustiere» gehalten und gezüchtet. Man hängt Körbe oder auch rüge in die Bäume und hofft, daß sich ein Bienenvolk einfindet

4



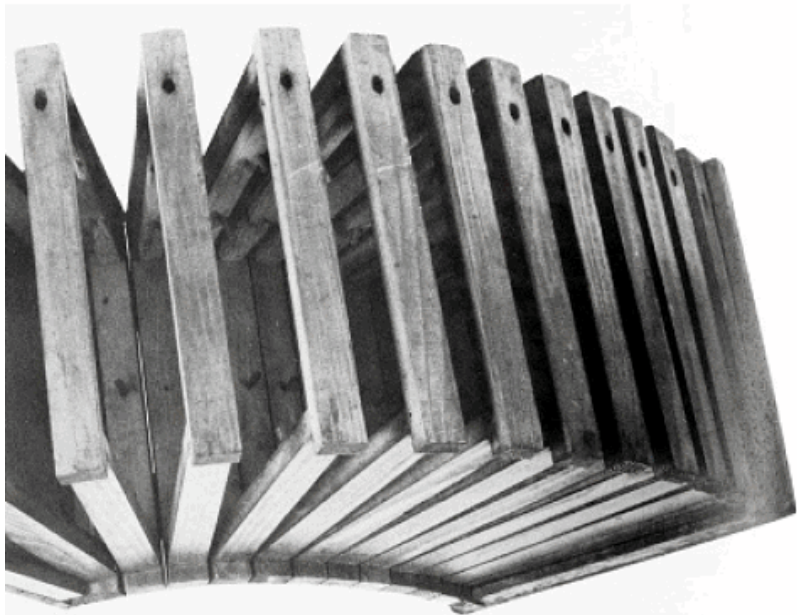
5 Diese ganz aus Eichenholz geschnitzte Bienenstand bewacht und in dessen An

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*Cette ri  
madona  
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un système d'attache, et pièce ou divisé en planchettes, mais c'est

... of the hives being placed on  
lat on the ground, as in Fig. 24,  
ves the bees something rough to  
used in Greece do not have this



shmir (Figs 27, 28) that I was able  
shape, these hives have changed  
3 such it does not seem that the

(Unless stated, the  
dates and whereabouts  
of these beehives  
are unknown)

1 Single frame  
observation hive,  
19th century

2 Known as a 'leaf hive',  
this is bound on one side  
by an attachment system,  
and free on the other  
side. Designed primarily  
for observing bees, it  
paved the way for the  
movable designs about  
to take shape a few  
years later

3 A hive in Kashmir,  
India, 1980

4 Bees were not kept and  
bred as pets. Instead one  
hangs basket or jugs in  
trees and hopes that a  
bee colony will arrive

5 This all-oak carved  
figure of a man is located  
in Eifel (Germany). He  
guards the apiary and its  
interior. In his left hand,  
he holds a pipe; in his right,  
a honey jar, above which  
the flying hole is  
incorporated

6 This beehive in the  
shape of a Madonna's  
head; Heidermadona,  
warded off the 'evil eye'  
and ensured good  
harvests in the beehives  
of Lüneburg in Germany

7 'Beehive for all types  
of two-colony and  
transhumance operations  
with the new patented  
insulated front. Unrivalled  
in its warmth. Rotting of  
the walls impossible.

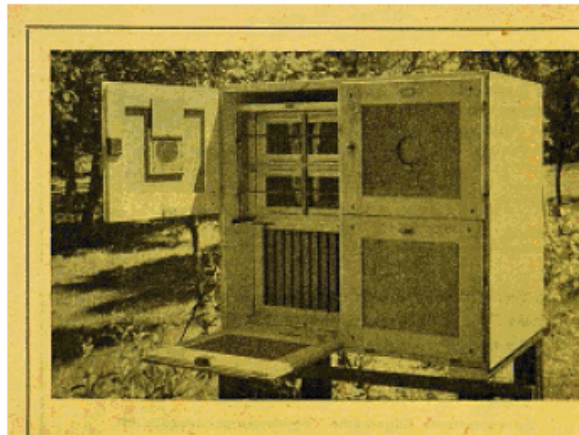
All practical beekeeping  
equipment in immaculate  
condition.' From a  
beehive catalogue,  
Lucerne, Switzerland

8 Visitors to a fair admire  
the bees



uche en forme de tête de madone, Heider-  
e, écartait le « mauvais œil » et assurait  
es récoltes dans les ruches du Lüneburg  
magne.

7



8





Then there is hive architecture, from simple ancient clay tubes to complex skyscrapers, clusters of apian towers like a buzzing Manhattan

◀ between bees and people – symbolic, artistic and essential.

*Hives, 2400 B.C.E. – 1852 C.E.* features beehives that look like wicker men, others moulded into the form of heads and shoulders or with crudely carved folk figurines attached. They are shot through with a strange anthropomorphism as if the cells of the honeycomb were an approximation of those of a body and the bees all our biological processes. There are ruddy peasant faces and a “Madonna of the Bees” – logs carved like figureheads and bodies with turbans and top hats, all containing colonies. Then there is the architecture, from simple ancient clay tubes to complex skyscrapers, clusters of apian towers like a buzzing Manhattan.

The book looks a little like an anthropological scrapbook, a collection of historic photos, archive material and drawings, a free association of beehive dreams and nightmares. Borioli is a Swiss artist and amateur beekeeper who started out by helping his grandfather near his home in Neuchâtel. “I was an artist and I needed a topic,” he says. “So I thought, why not?” And bees became his business.

“I found a book by Juan Antonio Ramírez,” he says, “about the history of architecture and the poetics of beehives.” (I look at my notes: he might have said “politics” but that’s fine too.) In the book, *The Beehive Metaphor: From Gaudí to Le Corbusier*, Ramírez attempted to understand how the image of the beehive – particularly its modernisation in the mid-19th century into the boxy, orthogonal form we are familiar with today – had influenced modern architecture. It is an intriguing, if not always entirely convincing, story of how one efficient environment for captive creatures can serve as a model for others – in our case, the commuter classes.

For Borioli it was the trigger, seeing the housing of bees as an architectural and cultural phenomenon, rather than a merely apicultural one. But instead of using metaphor like Ramírez and many others in western culture, Borioli’s book is a tightly focused project, an archive of 375 images stripped from their contexts, throwing light on the way we have built over the past four millennia, for both bees and ourselves. The ▶

keeping, Asia, E of Persia

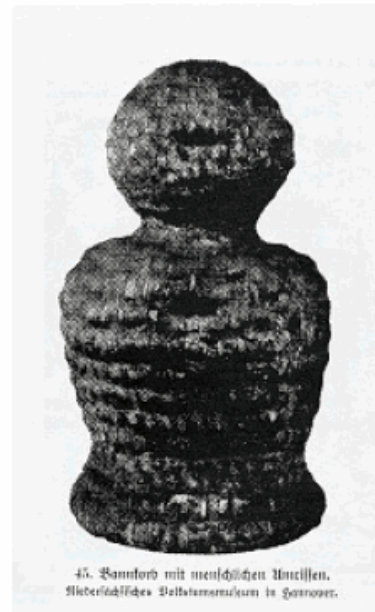


Figure 29.3e Traditional box hive packed for winter and secured to a house wall, Shikoku, Japan, 1957 (photo: I. Okada).

1



2



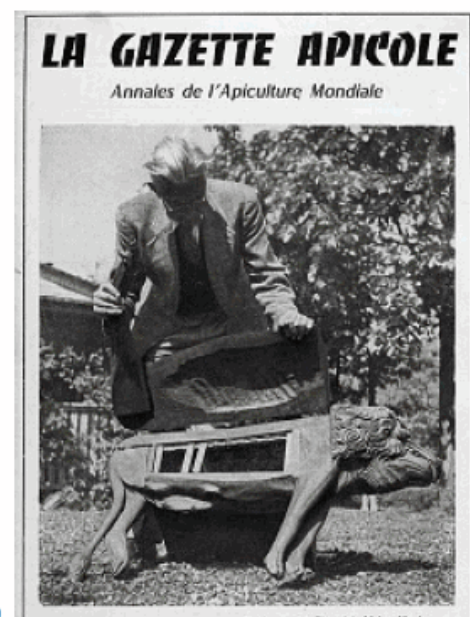
45. Bannförm mit menschlichen Aussehen. Niederländisches Volksmuseum in Rotterdam.

5

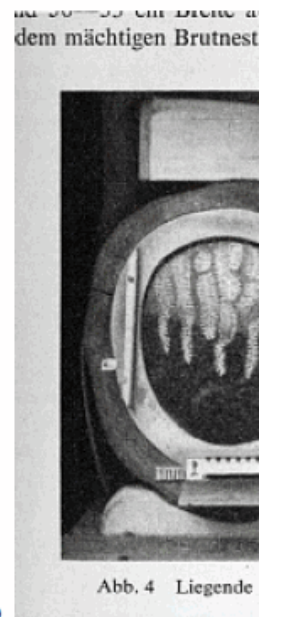


RE 1.14 Ethiopian beehives. Photo with permission.

6



9



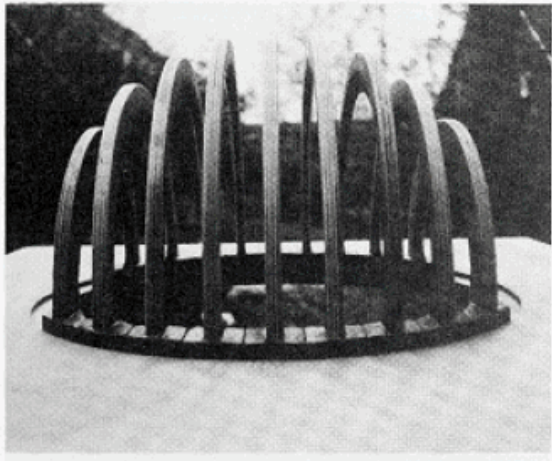
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Schritt mit der Zeit  
 der Erfolg hinterlässt immer  
 einen Fußabdruck

3

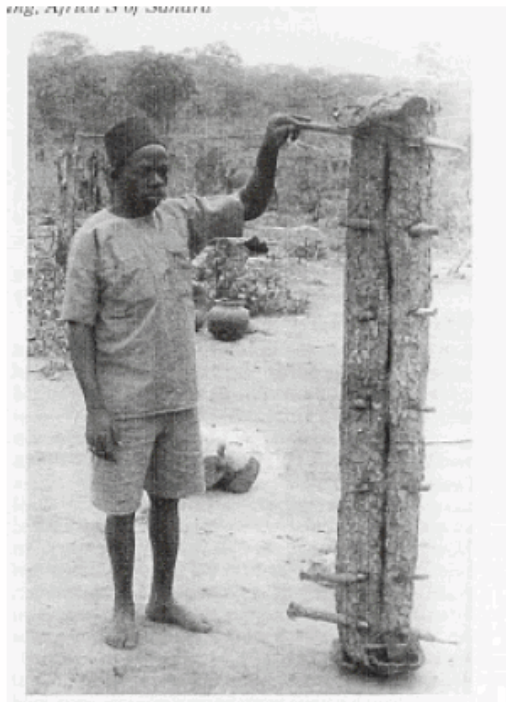


4

1 Traditional box hive packed for winter and secured to a house wall, Shikoku, Japan, 1957  
 2 'Keep up with the times! The best guarantee for success is our "Triumph Lichtstock". The most modern beehive of the present-day with valuable practical improvements. (Ask for our latest brochure.) From an advert  
 3 Frames as an arched wreath made out of waxed beech plywood  
 4 Hive



graph by Hannah Nadel,



7

Herbst 1995 starke Stürme die Insel verwü-



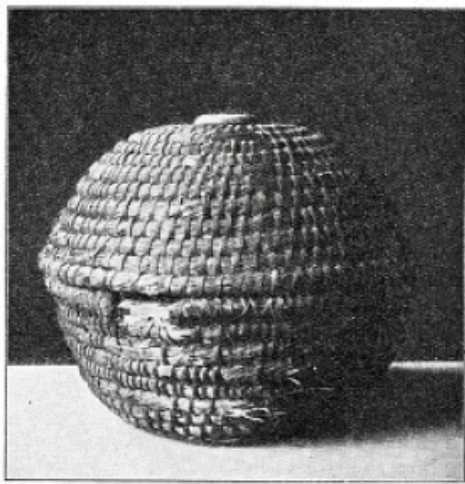
8

5 Hive with humanlike silhouette. These hives were given faces to scare off honey thieves and keep evil away from the apiary  
 6 Ethiopian beehives  
 7 Bark hive, showing pegs and bark end closures, Southern Province, Tanganyika [now Tanzania], 1951  
 8 Apiary protected under a rocky cliff  
 9 A bee population living inside the belly of a lion  
 10 Horizontal log hive  
 11 'Lukasscher' ball basket  
 12 Back view of a modern log hive, named 'The beekeeper's fat Berta', constructed in the author's apiary in Prutz, Austria, with the door open on its hinges

ausgebaut, mit 1  
 besetzt.



Klotzbeute



11

hasscher Kugelkorb als Beispiel einer vereinzelt  
 vorkommenden Sondererfindung. Bienenzuchtmuseum We  
 Armbruster

nen; Bienenhäuser.



12

Rückansicht der vorstehenden Abbildung bei



**The modern hive, with its extraction of value from labour and its stealing of resources, is a metaphor for both imperialism and slavery**

◀ “story is not presented in a classical linear written body”, says Borioli in the book, “but comes in a polymorphous way, mixing graphic design, photography and writing”.

“I studied visual anthropology,” he says, “and this book is the legacy of that. It was [strongly] influenced by the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* of Aby Warburg.” In 1927, Warburg, a German cultural historian, started compiling this visual scrapbook of images pinned to screens, tracing connections between artworks by theme and symbol rather than by style or era. For Borioli to choose beehives as his theme, picking up recurring symbols and references in these images, so many of which are hauntingly odd, puts him exactly in this heritage.

The modern hive is efficient but dull, though full of political meaning. Patented in 1852 by the Reverend Lorenzo Langstroth in the US, with its movable frames it seems to have been the last great innovation in beekeeping architecture. It certainly evokes contemporary political parallels: the hive, with its dominance of one kind by another, its extraction of value from labour and its stealing of resources, is a metaphor for both imperialism and slavery. It is no accident that the bees are referred to as a colony.

Borioli asks whether, as technology and our understanding of agriculture, the environment and medicine are changing so fast, beehives have made any progress lately. Has anything got better for the bees, in precipitous decline thanks to modern chemicals? “Beekeeping techniques and especially hives’ structure seem to have stopped evolving,” he writes. Despite a long history “of architectural diversity and amazing structure innovation... those white boxes have colonised beekeepers’ gardens and apiaries”.

This book is a striking visual history of a lost art of architecture in which bees were ascribed symbolic and cultural as well as practical value. Now they are in trouble, perhaps we might be prompted to re-examine the homes we build for them, to acknowledge their centrality to our agriculture, our horticulture and, more surprisingly, our visual culture. **FT**

Edwin Heathcote is the FT’s architecture critic. “Hives, 2400 B.C.E. - 1852 C.E.” by Aladin Borioli and Ellen Lapper is published by RVB Books & Images Vevey



1



2



En 1940, un culbutage modernisé en Beauce.

4



5



7 erlung an die Bienenzüchter im Kanton Bern!

1 geeignet, bei dem man überzeugt war, daß werden darf. In zweieinhalb Tagen wurde inlauftrichter, 3 Nagellehren, 6 Schwarm-il fertig erstellt und zum Teil zum Fertig

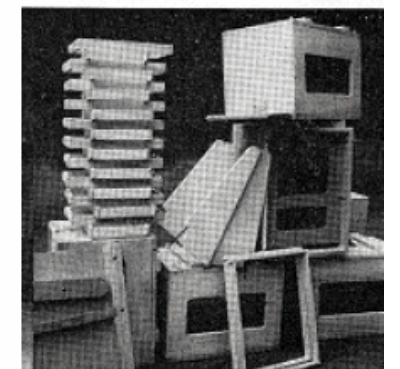
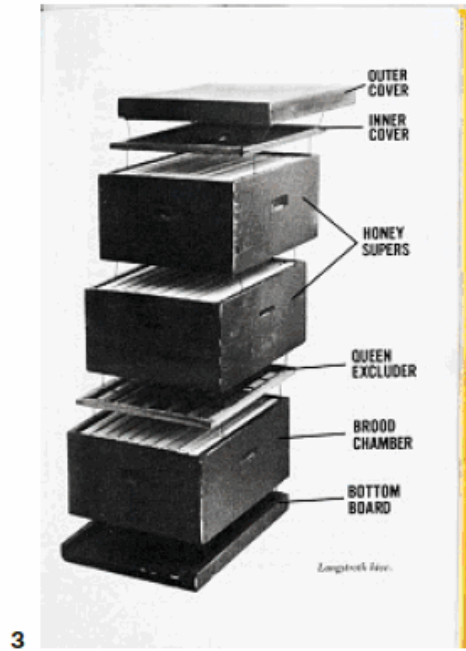


Abb. 22. Erfreuliche Resultate aus dem Bastelkurs

8





3

- 1 Front side of Aragonese horizontal hives. Apiary Nicolas, Lecina (Huesca, Spain)
- 2 Spellbinding hives with grimaces and fruitful figures from Lüneburg Heath, Germany
- 3 Langstroth hive
- 4 A modernised tilting in Beauce, France, 1940
- 5 A traditional apiary from Gâtinais, France in 1911. The basket hives are covered with straw caps to protect them from bad weather
- 6 'If I had a "Helvetia" hive!' From an advert for the 'Helvetia' beehive, Chr. Bösch, Märstetten, Switzerland
- 7 Toggenburg rod hive from the last century, Switzerland
- 8 Results from a crafts course
- 9 Stewarton hives in use, with William Walker, 19th century, west of Scotland
- 10 A modern reconstruction of Milton's 1823 cottage hive



**Wenn ich doch auch Helvetiakasten hätte**

Dieser Bericht (siehe „Blatt“, Jahrg. 1911) hat wohlte Beachtung, denn die Erträge aus dem Helvetiakasten sind überaus günstig, auch bei schlechtem Wetter.

**Das Gedeihen der Bienen im Helvetiakasten** vornehmlich auch deren Lebensdauer ist ganz vorzüglich.

**Die Behandlung der Bienen im Helvetiakasten** ist leichter bequem, preis und sicheres. Daher ist der „Helvetia“ der Wert für den Kenner und speziell dem Anfänger wärmstens zu empfehlen. — Der Helvetiakasten ist keine Scherenschnitt-Beute mehr. Er ist ein langjähriger, intensiver Zweck-Imkengerät und hat sich in Dänemark, Schweden, in O- und West-Deutschland bewährt.

Wie der „Helvetia“ bilden in allen Teilen aus Solche und Welt und speziell so billig werden zu können, habe ich eine vorzügliche Spezialanlage mit vielen Spezialvorrichtungen erreicht. Möglicherweise ca. 1000 Stück. Der Helvetiakasten ist nur durch bei mir zu beziehen. Jegliche Bestellung ist er erwünscht!

Die Kapitalanlage werden jetzt aus 20 bis 30 bis 40 bis 50 bis 60 bis 70 bis 80 bis 90 bis 100 bis 110 bis 120 bis 130 bis 140 bis 150 bis 160 bis 170 bis 180 bis 190 bis 200 bis 210 bis 220 bis 230 bis 240 bis 250 bis 260 bis 270 bis 280 bis 290 bis 300 bis 310 bis 320 bis 330 bis 340 bis 350 bis 360 bis 370 bis 380 bis 390 bis 400 bis 410 bis 420 bis 430 bis 440 bis 450 bis 460 bis 470 bis 480 bis 490 bis 500 bis 510 bis 520 bis 530 bis 540 bis 550 bis 560 bis 570 bis 580 bis 590 bis 600 bis 610 bis 620 bis 630 bis 640 bis 650 bis 660 bis 670 bis 680 bis 690 bis 700 bis 710 bis 720 bis 730 bis 740 bis 750 bis 760 bis 770 bis 780 bis 790 bis 800 bis 810 bis 820 bis 830 bis 840 bis 850 bis 860 bis 870 bis 880 bis 890 bis 900 bis 910 bis 920 bis 930 bis 940 bis 950 bis 960 bis 970 bis 980 bis 990 bis 1000 bis 1010 bis 1020 bis 1030 bis 1040 bis 1050 bis 1060 bis 1070 bis 1080 bis 1090 bis 1100 bis 1110 bis 1120 bis 1130 bis 1140 bis 1150 bis 1160 bis 1170 bis 1180 bis 1190 bis 1200 bis 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**Futterdeckbrett mit schrägem Boden.**

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6



9

FIG. 229 Stewarton hives in use, with William Walker, probably the son of an experienced beekeeper of the same name who helped Ker, and who died in 1840. PHOTO: WEST OF SCOTLAND



10

7 A modern reconstruction of Milton's 1823 cottage hive by the author.



# How hard seltzer went viral

Social media has made alcoholic sparkling water a hit among young, diet-conscious drinkers, creating a lucrative market – but can it really contend with beer?  
*Madison Darbyshire*  
and *Judith Evans*  
report. Photographs by  
*Alexander Coggin*









**I**t is difficult to recall which came first - hard seltzer or memes about middle-class women drinking hard seltzer. On the video platform

TikTok, the US hard seltzer brand White Claw has become part joke, part lifestyle choice. Endless viral refrains such as "Ain't no laws when you're drinking Claws" and "White Claw wasted" poke fun at millennials' love of this low-carb alternative to beer. It is mocked as a libation for soccer moms, country clubbers, Wall Street finance bros and sorority girls.

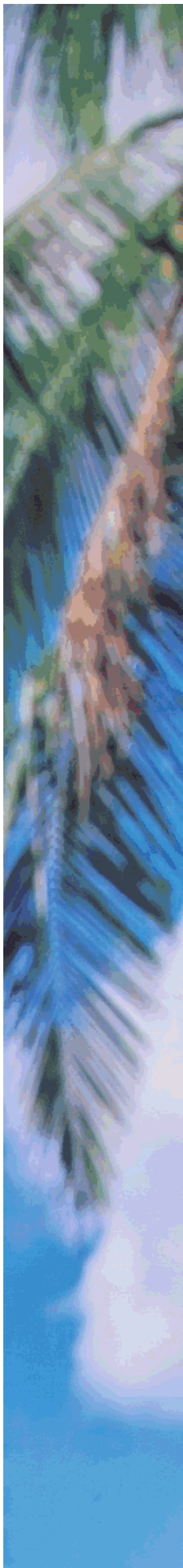
But what is hard seltzer? This fruit-flavoured alcoholic sparkling water has risen to prominence as a diet-conscious drink. While it is by no means a health drink, it is "low-carb" and "low-cal" compared with most alcoholic beverages.

And it is a huge hit. The drink is expected to take more than 15 per cent of the US beer and cider market by 2024, according to research company Bernstein. In 2018, total sales in the US came to \$708m. In 2020, hard seltzer raked in at least \$4.1bn in drink-at-home sales alone, more than double the previous year's retail sales, according to data from market research company Nielsen.

Brands vary in how they are made. Some, such as High Noon, Smirnoff and Two Brooks, add alcohol to soda water (liquor to seltzer). Others, such as White Claw, are made from fermented sugar. Mass-market varieties taste







**'Light beer changed the industry and hard seltzers may be the new generation's light beer of the future'**

a bit like Haribo sweets dissolved in fizzy water with a cough-syrup aftertaste. A "reviewer" on TikTok says "it tastes like the flavour is in a different room to you". Higher-end hard seltzers, such as Wild Basin and Montauk, taste marginally less artificial, with a refreshing fizz.

"[Hard seltzer] gives you a good buzz," one drinker tells the FT. "Sometimes with hard booze, you go crazy - wine sometimes makes you sleepy, beer sometimes makes you full. Seltzers are just right."

And there is another side to the taste factor: it is difficult to discern the alcohol at all.

Online jokes aside, this new entrant to the drinks market is proving more than just a viral fad. Big brands have rushed to join the party. In 2016, the market consisted of White Claw, Truly and a little-known brand called SpikedSeltzer. In 2018, there were 10 brands in stores; in 2019, there were 26. Today there are more than 65, according to Nielsen data.

Hard seltzer is core to the strategy of legacy beer brands targeting a younger, less "blokey" demographic, which has tended to lag behind in beer consumption. In January 2020, Anheuser-Busch InBev, the world's largest brewer, launched Bud Light Seltzer. "We're selling everything we can produce," says Carlos Brito, AB InBev chief executive. Corona in the US, Molson Coors and Heineken also launched hard seltzers last year. Even Coca-Cola launched the Topo

Chico brand in Latin America in 2020, with similar plans for Europe this year - giant steps for a conservative company that has long been nervous of entering the alcohol market.

"Hard seltzer is the biggest phenomenon in 'beer' since the launch of Miller Lite in 1975 and Budweiser Light in 1982," says brewing industry consultant Bump Williams. When "light" lower-calorie beer was first introduced, its popularity rocketed among health-conscious consumers and it remains one of the most significant beer subcategories. "Light beer changed the industry and hard seltzers may be the new generation's light beer of the future," says Williams.

**T**here are clearly upsides to going viral. For one, hard seltzer has proved pandemic resistant. Its status as the internet humour drink *du jour* amplified its popularity in 2020, as locked-down consumers spent time creating social media content - and drinking. White Claw accounts for more than half the US market by sales volume. "A 12-pack of White Claw is one of the five top-selling 'beers' in all of America," says Davin Nugent, chief executive of White Claw owner Mark Anthony Brands.

Yet there are downsides too. The constant thirst for new content on social media means that brands

have little control over how their products are presented. Drinkers on TikTok, for example, often mix hard seltzer with other liquors to up the alcoholic content: a viral recipe for White Claw slushies combines blended frozen fruit, hard seltzer and vodka. White Claw takes people using its seltzer as a mixer "very seriously", says Nugent. "It detracts from your brand. You get confusion about what you use it for."

Even greater confusion may have been generated by various unofficial 2020 "White Claw challenges" that involved people on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube recording themselves binge drinking and catching cans bounced off basketballs.

Though White Claw has been buoyed by its youthful reputation, market experts warn this popularity could hinder building long-term relationships with consumers. As the hard seltzer drinkers of today grow older, the category may face a problem, says Trevor Stirling, an analyst at Bernstein: "Few consumers want to drink the brands of their youth."

Yet as the vaccine rollout sets the stage for a return to social events, hard seltzer is primed for another surge. It seems likely that 2019's and 2020's viral drink of the summer will be 2021's as well. **FT**

.....  
*Madison Darbyshire is a retail investment reporter for the FT; Judith Evans is the FT's consumer industries correspondent*





# Honey & Co Recipes



## Parfait accompli

Photographs by Patricia Niven

For breakfast, on a rooftop overlooking a windswept beach in Essaouira, we were given mint tea and some jam and honey to top our Baghrir pancake. This pancake is one of the wonders of Moroccan cuisine, a bit like a crumpet but lighter and tangy. There was also a pot of something that looked like peanut butter, which seemed strange – an unwelcome interloper in this north African spread. Yet since there was jam on the table and the PB&J appeal is too hard to resist, we dipped into the pot and found that it wasn't peanut butter at all but something even more magical. As it melted into the hot, holey pancake, it released the most exhilarating aroma. At first bite we realised that no jam was needed, all the sweetness was there – and so much more.

This, we discovered, was *amlou*, a combination of ground almonds from the Atlas mountains, generous amounts of precious argan oil and nature's finest sweetener – pure honey. It is so rich and delicious, so sophisticated in flavour, that we return to it time and again. Take about a cup of toasted, best-quality almonds and grind them quite finely. Move them to a bowl and mix in about five tablespoons of argan oil, the same amount of good honey and a pinch of coarse sea salt – and then thank us for ever for introducing you to this heavenly spread.

If that feels a bit too easy, you can raise your *amlou* game to the next level. We tried using it as a filling for cookies and cakes but the delicate aromas of the argan oil don't tolerate any heat. So we took the same ingredients and came up with this frozen dessert, which is almost as simple to make and keeps all that *amlou* magic.

You can serve this parfait on its own – it is, as the name suggests, perfect – or you can top it with sea salt and a good slug of argan oil. It also goes very well with chocolate sauce (we believe that all desserts should at least have the option of chocolate). Port or madeira on the side will work a dream or, indeed, fresh mint tea. **FT**

By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer. Itamar and Sarit will be appearing at the FT Weekend Digital Festival, March 18-20; [ftweekendfestival.com](http://ftweekendfestival.com)

### Almond, honey and argan oil parfait

To make six individual servings

For the almond parfait

- 40g flaked almonds
- 20g sugar
- 80g natural almond butter
- 1 tbs good honey
- 60g light brown sugar
- 1 tbs argan oil or almond oil
- 300g double cream

For the chocolate sauce (optional)

- 150ml double cream
- 50ml milk
- 100g dark chocolate of your choice
- Pinch of sea salt

1 – Have six moulds ready. Use either a silicone muffin tray or small glasses or bowls.

2 – Place the flaked almonds in a small frying pan over a medium heat and stir until they start to colour. Sprinkle the sugar all over and mix until it dissolves and starts to caramellise. Remove from the heat and spoon evenly into the six moulds.

3 – In a large bowl, mix the almond butter, honey, sugar and oil until it forms a thick paste. Add the double cream and mix with a handheld whisk until it thickens but doesn't fully whip – it should be the texture of very thick custard. Pour this over the almonds in the moulds and place in the freezer for at least six hours, until entirely frozen.

4 – If you have used a silicone tray, you can simply pop the parfaits out when you are ready to serve. If you used glasses or metal moulds, dip them really quickly in boiling water, then flip to remove the parfaits.

5 – You can serve them just as they are, but if you want to add the luxury of hot chocolate sauce, simply boil the cream and milk, pour over the chocolate and salt and whisk until fully dissolved. Then let everyone slosh on as much sauce as they like.









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# Jancis Robinson Wine

## Hard to label



Alcohol may be what distinguishes wine from fruit juice, but many drinkers seem pretty wary of it these days. In February, researchers Wine Intelligence published a global study which suggested that 40 per cent of regular wine drinkers wish to moderate their alcohol consumption. Yet since hotter summers encourage the build-up of sugar in grapes, which yeast converts to ethanol, alcohol levels have been rising relentlessly. Wines of at least 14% alcohol by volume (ABV) have become increasingly common.

Consumers take comfort in the fact that alcohol levels have to be stated on wine labels – but how accurate are they? In the EU, a “tolerance”, or leeway, of 0.5% alcohol is allowed for most wines (0.8% for sparkling wines and those that have been in bottle for at least three years). Alcoholic strengths have to be given in multiples of 0.5%, which means that a wine with 13.5% on the label could in fact be higher than 14% ABV.

Tolerances permitted in Australia and the US are even more generous. Percentages given on wine labels in Australia can be as much as 1.5% awry, meaning if a wine is labelled as 13%, the actual alcohol content could be anything from 11.5% to 14.5%. As long ago as 2008, wine writer Max Allen observed in *The Weekend Australian* that virtually all Barossa Shiraz was labelled 14.5% when much of it nudged 16%. He also reported that the national wine organisation was considering changing the domestic tolerance to 0.8%. But that still hasn't happened (although the tolerance on Australian wines exported to the EU is “only” 0.8%).

Within the US, where alcohol levels are mostly spelt out to the nearest 0.1%, wines below 14% alcohol are also permitted a tolerance of 1.5%, while those



As imagined by Leon Edler

above 14% are given leeway of 1%. A California wine with 12.5% on the label could be anything between 11% and 14% in reality, while 14.7% on the label could signify anything between 13.7% and 15.7%.

It's also worth mentioning that the type size of alcohol levels on US labels tends to be Lilliputian – a magnifying glass is often required to read them – whereas the EU mandates a decent minimum size.

I asked Damien Jackman, UK representative of the California Wine Institute, whether exporters of California wine bother to convert their labels to comply with EU regulations. He pointed out

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**‘In the late 1990s, high alcohol levels were admired. The bigger the bang, the bigger the justifiable buck’**

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that these are extremely rarely enforced. “In five years running Legal [requirements] for [the multinational] Treasury Wine Estates in the UK and Europe, I think I had a German authority try to hold a shipment at a port once because the ABVs on some Beringer [California] wines were not rounded to [the nearest] 0.5%. I never had it raised as an issue by UK authorities.”

Most American wines exported in bottle tend to have their original US labels on them. (Vast amounts of cheaper California wines are shipped in bulk to the UK, where they are bottled and labelled in accordance with local regulations.) While UK importers occasionally superimpose a sticker with the alcohol level rounded to the nearest 0.5%, this still leaves consumers wondering how the tolerances have been interpreted.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, high alcohol levels were admired, especially by American wine drinkers. The bigger the bang, the bigger the justifiable buck. During that era I saw alcohol levels above 16% on many California wine labels.

Yet some connoisseurs insist that high levels of alcohol simply don't suit certain styles of wine. Rajat Parr, for example, outlawed any Pinot Noir above 14% when he ran the wine programme for Michael Mina's restaurants in the US 15 years ago. The highly respected sommelier-turned-winemaker went on to found a movement called *In Pursuit of Balance*, designed to showcase California wines that provided an alternative to the high-alcohol Napa Valley Cabernets (“big wines”) proliferating at the time.

Parr and his fellow believers have provoked a wider reaction to the big-wine movement, polarising the California scene between the old guard and the new wave, who deliberately pick grapes earlier to make more refreshing, lower-alcohol wines. These days Parr ▶



## Low in alcohol, high in flavour

### WHITES

- Matthiasson, Tendu Cortese 2018 Clarksburg 12% *Exciting California answer to Gavi of Piemonte.* £17.95 St Andrews Wine Company, £19.99 The Oxford Wine Company
- Zilliken, Saarburger Rausch Riesling Kabinett 2019 Saar 8.5% *So pure. Featherlight, but the intense fruit is positively explosive. A German classic that will last for decades.* £21.88 Howard Ripley
- Ferdinand Garnacha Blanca 2018 Lodi 12% *Both floral and saline, and much livelier than most southern French Grenache Blanc (same grape).* £23.50 Vin Cognito
- Georg Breuer, Estate Rudesheim Riesling trocken 2018 Rheingau 12% *Impressive dry Riesling that's ready to savour now, from an impeccable estate.* £24.50 The Sourcing Table
- Keep, Delta White 2019 California 11.5% *Heady, intriguing blend of Grüner Veltliner with Chardonnay and Pinot Gris that finishes agreeably dry.* £28 Nektar Wines
- Vincent Caillé, Terre de Gabbro 2017 Muscadet 12% *Seriously intense, mineral-perfumed wine made in concrete eggs.* £28.99 Handford Wines

### REDS

- Meinklang, Roter Mulatschak 2018 Austria 11.5% *Slightly fizzy, crown-capped light red that has proved infinitely versatile with a wide range of foods.* £12.95 Vintage Roots
  - Chatzivaritis, Negoska Carbonic 2019 Goumenissa 10.8% *Rare local Greek grape transformed into a super-fruity delight with a textured finish in an admirably hands-off way. Could be served cool.* £23.50 Maltby & Greek
  - Matthiasson, Tendu 2018 California 12% *Sweet-and-sour blend of Barbera with Aglianico and Montepulciano, packaged in an admirably lightweight bottle with a compostable cork.* £23.70 Nektar Wines, from £14.95 in the US
- Tasting notes on Purple Pages of [JancisRobinson.com](http://JancisRobinson.com). International stockists on [Winesearcher.com](http://Winesearcher.com).
- Jancis Robinson will be appearing at the FT Weekend Digital Festival, March 18-20. For more information and tickets visit [ftweekendfestival.com](http://ftweekendfestival.com)

◀ produces Pinot Noirs at Domaine de la Côte in southern California with alcohol levels well below 14%.

Recently I asked an insider about the divergence between the true ABV and what's on the label for the traditional big California wines. "There is less discrepancy than 10 to 20 years ago," he reported. "Actual alcohols have come down a bit, and I think that labelled levels have come up a bit. In other words, 20 years ago the wine might have been 15.8% and labelled as 14.6%, and now the wine is 15.2% and labelled at 14.9%."

Keen to distinguish themselves from the traditional big hitters on the cranium, new wavers in both California and Australia (especially) positively boast about lower alcohol levels. Several sources in California assure me that the new wavers typically pride themselves on accurate labelling and transparency in general.

Meanwhile, the 25 per cent tariffs Donald Trump imposed on wine imports from many EU countries in October 2019 – as part of the Airbus subsidies dispute – applied only to wines below 14%, which did not incentivise universal accuracy. It is an open secret that, since then, the ABVs cited on many European labels destined for the US have been massaged above 14%.

In my recommendations, I suggest some wines that combine both character and pleasure with relatively low alcoholic strength. On the label, at least. 🍷

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

'Keen to distinguish themselves from the traditional big hitters on the cranium, new wavers positively boast about lower alcohol levels'



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**FT Weekend**





# 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.** *Panthera pardus* is the scientific name for which big cat?

**2.** According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which already existing four-letter word was first used in Britain in its now common meaning of "challenging" or "daring" by Nigella Lawson in 1998 to describe crème fraîche?

**3.** In which game do players score points by cannons, in-offs and pots?

**4.** In New Testament Palestine, which region lay between Galilee and Judea?

**5.** In which city are the headquarters of the European Central Bank (above)?

**6.** Which settlement in Virginia was the first permanent English settlement in the Americas?

**7.** In August 2019, a statue by Jeremy Deller was unveiled in Manchester to

commemorate the 200th anniversary of which event?

**8.** What's the only surname shared by a postwar US president and a postwar UK prime minister?

**9.** In a novel of 1813, Kitty and Lydia are the two youngest daughters of which family?

**10.** Which 1990 film became the first Western to win a Best Picture Oscar for 59 years?

## The Picture Round

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+



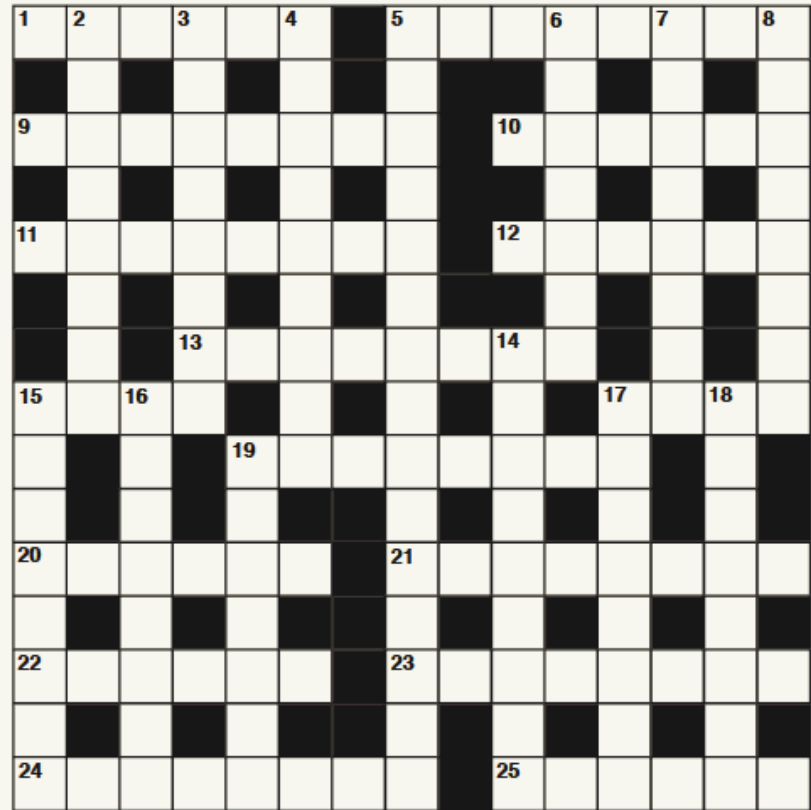
= ?

Answers page 8

GETTY IMAGES; DREAMSTIME

## The Crossword

No 529. Set by Aldhelm



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

### ACROSS

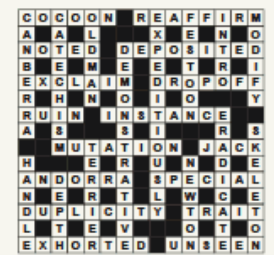
- 1 Academy Awards (6)
- 5 Formal rules of behaviour (8)
- 9 Delete (5, 3)
- 10 Hot and dry (6)
- 11 Scottish east coast city (8)
- 12 Booty (6)
- 13 Large sherry glass (8)
- 15 Festival, gala (4)
- 17 Hit with the palm (4)
- 19 Five-limbed sea creature (8)
- 20 Old sixpence (6)
- 21 Victor, winner (8)
- 22 Apelike (6)
- 23 Repeated (8)
- 24 Cure (8)
- 25 Nestle closely (6)

### DOWN

- 2 Heads of security chase mob and struggle frantically (8)
- 3 Deep bass orchestrated with true elements (8)
- 4 Without working, the cats disturbed wild bird (9)
- 5 Realise picture and point out hidden bit of drama (3, 4, 8)
- 6 Reliable worker raised article about university (7)
- 7 Main road one put through waterway (8)
- 8 Play around with his daughter's aristocratic title (8)
- 14 Queen of Belize with hat that's fancy (9)
- 15 Faint sound initially swirls around one with a piece music (8)

- 16 Send most of mince tarts when cooked (8)
- 17 Wild spray hid place where vessels begin? (8)
- 18 Old sea surrounds great wave of trees (8)
- 19 Bar worker mixed odd portions of soda water (7)

Solution to Crossword No 528







# GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

## Bitcoin 1.0: the ancient stone money of Yap



**A**nother week, another wave of bitcoin surprises. Never mind that the price of the digital currency has gyrated dramatically; or that Elon Musk, the flamboyant founder of Tesla, is reported to be on course to make more profits for the company from bitcoin investment than from the manufacture of electric vehicles last year. This week it was equally striking that Citibank told its clients that the digital currency has reached a “tipping point” and could one day “become the currency of choice for international trade”.

Cue predictable levels of celebration from bitcoin-enthusiasts – and of bemusement or horror from almost everyone else. Yet detractors and fans of the cryptocurrency both seem to agree on one thing: bitcoin is taking finance into the realm of bold 21st-century tech experiments.

Is it though? On a week such as this, it pays to take a wider historical lens – and peek at nuggets from the past, such as some research carried out in Micronesia by Scott Fitzpatrick, an archaeologist at the University of Oregon, and Oregon business school professor Stephen McKeon. The pair have been studying an ancient stone money system that once existed on the Micronesian island of Yap, where local communities would treat large limestone discs as a medium of exchange.

Such stone discs, called *rai*, “were considered extremely valuable”, the pair noted in a 2019 paper in the *Journal of Economic Anthropology*. But the stones were so huge that “given their size, weight, and relative fragility, they were not typically moved after being placed in a specific location [and] if a *rai* were gifted or exchanged, the new owner(s) of a disk may not have lived in close proximity to it.”

That might make them sound pretty useless as a form of money. But the local community maintained an oral ledger so effective in keeping track of who owned which hunks of immovable limestone that Fitzpatrick and McKeon concluded that *rai* were, as a record of value, “an exemplary ancient analog to blockchain” (the technology that powers bitcoin).

Parallels between the two are limited. Limestone hunks cannot be subdivided as easily as bitcoin. And, since blockchain ledgers are based on (seemingly) immutable computer code, they appear more durable than communal memory. The circle of participants in bitcoin and blockchain deals is obviously exponentially larger than it was with *rai* – and pseudonymous to boot.

But there are other thought-provoking similarities between the two. First, *rai* – like bitcoin – commanded value because of perceived scarcity; just as it now requires vast amounts of effort to “mine” bitcoin (the technical term for the creation of new coins), so procuring *rai* was hard. The limestone discs were quarried from Palau, 400km away from Yap, then carried across the seas.

This was the most impressive piece of maritime transport logistics seen in the region until the European explorers arrived in the 18th century and mind-bogglingly difficult for the time (although significantly less environmentally damaging than the process of bitcoin mining, which requires using huge amounts of electricity).

The second similarity is that *rai* only functioned like money because there was communal trust. Unlike in the conventional modern monetary system, the “trust” underpinning *rai* did not operate in a vertical, hierarchical manner – ie,

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**‘The islanders’ oral ledger was so effective that it could be seen as “an exemplary ancient analog to blockchain”**

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due to faith in a leader or an institution; instead, it was “distributed” horizontally. Everyone in the crowd needed to trust that everyone else would respect the oral ledger.

Bitcoin also rests on the distributed trust of a crowd. For while computer code might seem impersonal, free from capricious human intervention, the system only works if people trust in the sanctity of that computer code. If that ever breaks down – say, because of a cyber hack or a shift in norms – bitcoin would command even less value than *rai* does today.

There is no sign that trust in blockchain is breaking down. Indeed, the recent note from Citi claims the opposite. The key point is this: anyone betting on the currency is not just expressing faith in algorithms, but in a specific pattern of trust too (ie, that computer code means something).

That does not render bitcoin invalid or the blockchain useless; after all, the mainstream currencies on which our lives depend rely on sometimes tenuous social norms as well. One way to frame the contest between bitcoin and fiat currency is thus as a battle of norms – and of distributed versus hierarchical trust.

As the story of the *rai* shows, when it comes to human economies, nothing is entirely new. In fact, one rumour periodically buzzing round the crypto-world is that this is where the mysterious progenitors of bitcoin got their inspiration (which is why some bitcoin blogs have titles that include the word “Yap”). Perhaps Musk’s next trip should be to Micronesia, where those now-useless stone circles still litter the landscape as a sign of what happens when norms and patterns of trust change. **FT**

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• Hear Gillian and Mark Carney, UN special envoy on climate action and finance, former governor of the Bank of England and author, in discussion at the FT Weekend Digital Festival, March 18-20; [ftweekendfestival.com](#)





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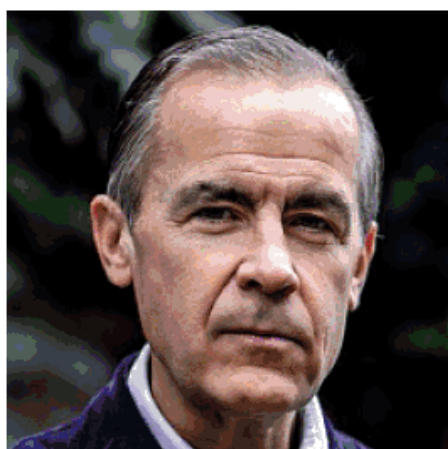
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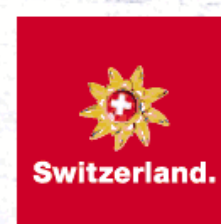
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