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• NORTH EAST

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Katie Craggs is one to back

## FAREWELL THEN, PET

It's the end of an  
era for TV's Vera

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## WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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## Dowgill Farm, Nidderdale

Guide Price £2.65m

When it comes to pedigree, Dowgill Farm – once part of the Fountain Abbey Estate – can trace its history back to around 1679, although the western section of the house is believed to predate this and was originally built as a chapel for the local community.

Over the years the striking stone-built farmhouse has undergone several comprehensive restoration projects, all of which have carefully preserved its many period features.

The main house is wonderfully proportioned, with a family room, formal dining room and sitting room (all with feature fireplaces), a library with exposed stone feature walls and an open-plan kitchen/breakfast room on the ground floor alongside a convenient bedroom suite perfect for guests or dependent family members. Upstairs off the spacious landing area - an ideal space for a study or reading room - are four generously-sized double bedrooms, each with its own en-suite bathroom.

A glass walkway links the main house to the annexe, which comprises an expansive open-plan kitchen, sitting and dining area downstairs and a family bathroom and three bedrooms, one with an en-suite bathroom, upstairs.

The property sits on a plot of approximately 12 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens and paddocks, and is set against a backdrop of woodland. It also features several outbuildings, one currently housing a self-contained apartment and workshop.

For more information please contact Knight Frank Yorkshire on 01904 948451.











## Frenchgate Head & Harcourt, Richmond      Guide Price £2m

Frenchgate Head & Harcourt may well include a wealth of simply stunning accommodation, but that's by no means all it has to attract buyers looking for their dream home. Its location in the very heart of Richmond ensures it enjoys panoramic south-facing views which are beyond compare. Between them, Frenchgate Head & Harcourt encompass 4,402sq.ft of light-filled living space set in around 0.76 acres of grounds. In Frenchgate Head this includes an entrance loggia with full-height glazing, a hall, sitting room with full-height south-facing sliding doors which open onto a balcony, dining room with 'panorama' windows, chef's kitchen and a bedroom with en-suite shower room on the ground floor. The lower ground floor is home to a wine cellar and store, studio/gym and games room with sliding doors that open onto the rear terrace, a utility room, guest bedroom and a bathroom, while the first floor is home to a spacious bedroom with an en-suite shower room and a dressing room. Next door in Harcourt, off the loggia lobby, are the ground floor entrance hall, cloakroom, utility room, an inner hall, an air-conditioned cinema/entertainment room and the stunning main living area comprising a kitchen, dining area and sitting room with a central Dik Geurts 'see-through tunnel' log stove. Upstairs are an office and two extremely spacious suites – one with a luxurious en-suite bathroom, a dressing room and a bedroom with full-height sliding doors onto a private balcony, and the other with an en-suite shower room and a private balcony off the bedroom.





An aerial photograph of a well-manicured garden. A person wearing a green shirt and orange safety vest is pushing a blue and white lawnmower across a lush green lawn. The garden features several circular gravel paths with circular lawn patches, and various shrubs and plants in landscaped beds.

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## The Briary House, Shotley Bridge

OIRO £630,000

An undiscovered treasure, with its stunning frontage only visible from the grounds. This remarkable stone-built four bedroom period home offers an abundance of space, period features, style, and charm within extensive grounds. Stepping through the front door, you are greeted by a grand, glass-panelled vestibule that fills the inner hall and stairs with natural light. The hallway boasts a beautiful hand-painted mural stretching the height of the stairs to the first floor and a stunning wood floor that extends throughout the majority of the ground floor accommodation. The spacious kitchen diner serves as the heart of the home, with a striking red Aga as the focal point, ample storage space, and space for dining. As a timeless and cherished piece of local history, The Briary House awaits discerning homeowners seeking a blend of heritage, comfort, and natural beauty.





### Peile House, Shotley Bridge

OIRO £675,000

A remarkable Grade II listed period home located in the picturesque village of Shotley Bridge with five/six bedrooms and a self contained Annex.

Peile House is a unique and captivating property, combining the best of historical charm with modern living.

Offered with no chain and set within a large plot surrounded by mature trees and garden, offering a peaceful retreat and a vast amount of space for outdoor activities.





# GSC GRAYS

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## Clarence House, near Ripon

Guide Price £975,000

Offered in genuine show home condition, Clarence House briefly comprises a reception hall, cloakroom, study/home office, utility room, snug with dual aspect windows and a feature brick wall and a stunning living dining kitchen with quartz-topped units and central island breakfast bar plus two sets of bifold doors opening onto a patio in the landscaped rear garden.

Set across the first and second floors are the master bedroom with a luxurious en-suite bathroom and dressing area, a family bathroom and four further double bedrooms, two with en-suite bathrooms. Clarence House is fitted with CCTV and has an integral garage and an easily maintained rear.

T: 01423 590500





## Oak Tree House, West Witton

Guide Price £1.1m

Dating back to 1812, Oak Tree House Farm is a versatile property that offers buyers a beautiful family home and business opportunity in one. The main farmhouse and barn - converted and completely renovated in 2017 - currently operate as holiday accommodation, while The Stables annexe was revamped in 2021. All have retained a wealth of period features throughout. Briefly, the main farmhouse is home to a reception hall, sitting room and dining room (both with exposed wooden flooring and feature fireplaces with wood-burning stoves), a large kitchen, utility room, cloakroom, cellar, family bathroom, shower room and three generous bedrooms. Adjoining the farmhouse is a two-bedroom barn with a contemporary open-plan kitchen/sitting room, a family shower room plus two double bedrooms, one with an en-suite bathroom, while the self-contained converted stable has a sitting room, kitchen, shower room, cloakroom and a bedroom.





**Roova House, Swineside, Leyburn**

Roova House is a traditional dales longhouse with adjoining former barn of traditional stone construction which stands well on the edge of West Scafton, close to the rural hamlet of Swineside. The Accommodation briefly comprises:- Reception Hall, Kitchen Diner, Bathroom, Utility Room, Living Room with Oak Floor. Completing the ground floor is an impressive barn which is accessed via the main Reception Hall or has a separate front door. This has been converted to create a large, open space with a vaulted ceiling which is perfect for entertaining or has many other uses. To the first floor are three well proportioned double bedrooms together with the House Bathroom. Externally the property is complemented by an attached outbuilding comprising three useful stores together with general gardens with patio and parking for two cars.



**Guide Price: £650,000**



**The Croft, East Layton, Richmond**

The Croft is an attractive stone built family house which is nicely positioned within a quiet cul-de-sac. The property has been very well maintained and improved during the Vendors ownership with a high quality new kitchen, improved bathrooms and redecoration throughout. The Accommodation briefly comprises:- Oak front door leading into a Reception Hall, Living Room, Dining Room, Modern Stylish Kitchen with under floor heating and ample dining space, Shower Room and a Family Bathroom, Fifth Bedroom/Study. To the first floor there are four Double Bedrooms one of which has an En-suite Shower Room together with Family Bathroom. Outside the property is complemented by a pretty front garden with terraced garden and patio to the rear. There is a garden room and a large workshop providing excellent storage.



**Guide Price: £600,000 - £650,000**





### Cawthorne Place, Wynyard

£1,200,000

Cawthorne Place, Wynyard, is an exceptional property positioned on a third of an acre with a south-facing rear garden that backs onto green parkland and a nature reserve. A former showhome of Bellway's Dorchester design, the property extends to 4,500 sq ft providing a light, bright and spacious interior. Four reception rooms all lie off the central reception hallway and are comfortable and welcoming; a quiet, elegant sitting room to the front with built-in media unit; easy access to the kitchen and garden from the dining room; a family room and utility room off the open plan dining kitchen, which is a superb space that leads into a garden room. Whilst the layout is practical the finish is most definitely at the luxury end with underfloor heating to the ground floor with smart controls and an audio visual system operated by Control 4 and sound by Sonos. Fixtures and fittings throughout are to the highest quality and the property is immaculately presented. EPC: C. T: 01740 645444



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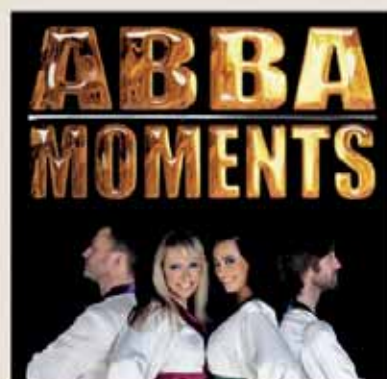
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Mabs Heslop of BoxdUp  
Photo: Sarah Caldecott



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NORTH EAST LIVING

# WELCOME

MARCH 2025

**T**he region is jam-packed full of wonderful women in all walks of life, but this month the spotlight is on our inspirational businesswomen.

Representing a wide range of sectors from beauty, health and wellbeing, to law, education and industry, to mark International Women's Day on March 8 they reveal what keeps them focused and what they love about their work.

County Durham entrepreneur Sara Davies, who grew up in Coundon, is a fabulous example of where passion and drive can lead you. Her lightbulb moment came at York University and by the time she left, she was a millionaire. The TV *Dragon's* latest outing for the BBC, *The Big Idea Works*, is filmed in the region and shows how connecting the right ideas with the right expertise can lead to something wonderful.

They might not all make a million, but the ingredients for business success often seem to follow the same recipe: take a little spark and some imagination; add hard work, a dash of passion, a large



‘The region is jam-packed full of wonderful women in all walks of life, but this month the spotlight is on our inspirational businesswomen’

dollop of resilience and resourcefulness. Oh, and focus. That's so important to the mix, according to the North East businesswomen we've been talking to.

Home organiser Mabs Heslop features on our cover this month. The self-confessed neat freak, founder of BoxdUp, is on a mission to help the region's busy home owners create calm and order out of chaos and has plenty of tips for spring cleaning. We also talk to North Yorkshire's Katie Craggs, one of the country's leading racecourse architects. She's also a great bet if you want a beautiful home designing.

Finally, our My North subject for March is Charlotte Potter, a talented young soprano from Guisborough, who performs all over the UK and further afield and is back home for a concert this month.

So, an edition full of impressive women. So much talent, in fact, that it's amazing we have managed to squeeze it all between the covers.

JENNY NEEDHAM  
EDITOR  
jenny.needham@nqyne.co.uk

## CONTACTS



JANE HANSON  
Regional Magazines Publisher (North)  
07968 374982  
jane.hanson@localiq.co.uk



JENNY NEEDHAM  
Editorial, Content & Design  
01325 505082  
fl-jenny-needham@newsquest.co.uk



RYAN FENWICK  
Advertising Director  
ryan.fenwick@localiq.co.uk



SAM LINFOOT  
Advertising Manager  
07342 081317  
sam.linfoot@localiq.co.uk



MALCOLM GOODGER  
Senior Graphic Designer  
malcolm.goodger@newsquest.co.uk



ANDREA HARRIS  
Magazines Production Manager  
andrea.harris@newsquest.co.uk



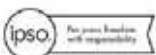
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# FAREWELL THEN, PET

It's the end of an era for Vera, the much loved ITV detective series in which the North East's cinematic landscapes played such a starring role

WORDS JENNY NEEDHAM

Well, that's a wrap then. After 14 years and 56 episodes, Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope has hung up her trench coat for the final time. The final outing saw her trying to find a missing girl and solve the murder of a victim named Josh deep in the Northumbrian countryside, a nostalgic outing with flashbacks to her childhood there. Case solved, Vera heads back to the office to pack up her belongings, discovering a box full of old pictures, including one of her starting out in the police force. She leaves a note for sidekick Joe: 'Time to spread those wings, pet. You'll be fine x'

But will we, the viewers who have come to love this cranky crime-buster? *Vera* has become a fixture in so many homes, for many

reasons. From the wilds of Northumberland down to Teesside, it has given viewers a window onto the region and the series' backdrops have been quite as compelling as the plots. Sweeping coastlines, dramatic cliffs, golden beaches and wild moorlands, quaint villages, historic abbeys, buzzing cities and industrial landscapes - it's been a brilliant advert for this part of the world.

This month there's a special celebration of the hugely popular crime drama at the O2 City Hall Newcastle. Twenty-five years on since Ann Cleeves' first Vera Stanhope novel was published, and 14 years since the best-selling series was adapted into a brilliant ITV crime drama with Brenda Blethyn in the title role, the writer and actor will be on stage talking about the latest book and the final TV adaptation, *The Dark Wives*, and reminiscing about their favourite scenes. They'll be ➔



Brenda Blethyn  
with Ann Cleeves





## BAY TALES

Ann Cleeves will be in conversation with writer William Shaw at the Bay Tales crime fiction festival at Whitley Bay Playhouse on Saturday, March 1. Other crime writers sharing how their day jobs have inspired their award-winning tales of malice and murder include Mark Billingham, CL Taylor and Mari Hannah, a former probation officer. Tickets, £30, include a signed copy of *The Dark Wives* paperback by Ann Cleeves. All profits go to the Shiremoor Adventure Playground charity. There are fringe events at nearby venues over the weekend February 28 to March 2.

See the Bay Tales website for a Vera Walking Tour of Whitley Bay featuring locations such as Pantrini's, Vera's favourite fish and chip shop, the amusement arcades, and the public lavatories on the slipway to the beach which were transformed into a fancy nightclub by the *Vera* production team when they adapted *The Seagull*.

[baytales.com](http://baytales.com)



On location in North Shields

interviewed on stage by TV presenter Steph McGovern and joined by some special guests. It's a chance for fans to bid a fond farewell to a much-loved show and celebrate one of crime fiction's greatest detectives.

Cleeves, the author of 37 critically acclaimed novels, says the character of Vera Stanhope first came to her 'miraculously' when she was in the middle of a book. 'She burst into a church after a funeral service had started,' she recalls. 'I described her as looking more like a bag lady than a detective! She's not based on any one person, but perhaps on a group of people - the formidable

spinsters who were an important part of the small town where I grew up. They were competent and authoritative, working as teachers, in hospitals or libraries, but they didn't care what they looked like.'

The books are rooted in the North East, an area Cleeves is very familiar with. She and her husband moved to Whitley Bay in the mid-eighties when their children were very young. 'I still live in Whitley Bay and love it,' she says. The transfer to television came after an executive from ITV Studios picked up a copy in her local Oxfam shop. 'She was looking for a holiday read,' says Cleeves. 'We

weren't even sure then that there'd be a pilot show and couldn't imagine that it would run for 14 series. And while the TV show has ended, there will be at least one more book featuring Vera Stanhope, so I haven't left the character entirely. First there's a new Jimmy Perez book, *The Killing Stones*, set in Orkney, and another Matthew Venn novel. Vera will come after that.'

It was back in 2023 that Brenda decided to hang up her mac for good. 'It was a lovely summer,' she recalls. 'And I came to realise I hadn't had a summer with my husband for 14 years. I love my *Vera* family, but I love my

**'She's not based on any one person, but perhaps on a group of people - the formidable spinsters who were an important part of the small town where I grew up'**





other family too. And when you consider I was already thinking about packing work in when I was offered the job back in 2010, 14 series of working on *Vera* was pretty good going. I wasn't actually going to do any more after series 13, but of course ITV said they needed to wind the series up. So I said, oh go on then, I'll do a couple more episodes.'

**A**fter the final two outings, it was time to say farewell to cast and crew. 'It was sad saying goodbye; I have loved working with such a professional and talented team. I wish there could have been an episode where I stayed at home in Kent - 'Vera Goes South' - but, of course, the series is dyed in the wool Northumberland and the North East and I understand that's where it had to be.'

As always, the region played a starring role in the final episodes too. 'Northumberland and the wider North East is so varied and beautiful,' says Blyth. 'It's not just one thing. It's the seascapes, the landscapes, the moors, the cities, a lot of them steeped in history. And lively. It's not for nothing that Newcastle is called the party town. I must have travelled tens of thousands of miles over the years going to all of the various locations.

If I'd been on holiday that would've been great, but as it was, I'd get in the car at some unearthly hour in the morning and my head is in the script. So I'm not taking in the joys of sightseeing, but I've always loved everywhere we filmed. And the people are so nice.'

*Vera* has provided employment for many people over the years, something Blyth factored in when making a decision each year on whether to continue or not.

'I'm comforted by the fact that many of the crew live locally in the North East and, hopefully, there are lots of other jobs for them up there, including the proposed Crown Works Studios in Sunderland, which aims to create some 8,000 jobs in the TV and film industry,' she says.

The wrap party at the end of filming was held at Newcastle United's football ground, St James' Park. 'Oh boy, that was an emotional evening,' says Blyth. 'Just to be at the ground with the floodlights on when there's nobody there. It looks so vast. And here was the *Vera* team enjoying themselves in the bar. We had a great big cake shaped like Vera's Landy. It was lovely, and so nice that Ann Cleaves was there, too. But once I got on the train home, crossing the Tyne and leaving Newcastle behind, it hit me. I was rather emotional.'



All 56 episodes of *Vera* are available on ITVX

*Vera: End of an Era*, O2 City Hall  
Newcastle, Thursday, March 13

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# A MAGICAL PLACE

The once-in-a-700-year opportunity to buy Ripley Castle Estate attracts strong interest as Sir Thomas Ingilby speaks about leaving the 'fairytale' castle

WORDS: CATHERINE TURNBULL





Sir Thomas and Lady Ingilby

PHOTO: RICHARD DOUGHTY PHOTOGRAPHY



When I speak with Sir Thomas Ingilby about the family's decision to sell Ripley Castle Estate after 700 years of occupation, there are wild rumours hitting the headlines in the press and media around the world that US president Donald Trump and pop star Taylor Swift are among those interested in buying it. Whilst these two could undoubtedly afford the cool £21 million guide price, Sir Thomas laughs and says 'it's fake news, but either of them would be welcome. There's a helipad so Taylor could drop in for a look round'.

Joking aside, Sir Thomas says that whilst Ripley Castle has been 'a wonderful family home' since the early 1300s and is 'a magical place' it's time for someone else to enjoy it'.

He and Lady Ingilby, who have four sons and a daughter, are keen to retire after

decades maintaining the estate, which Sir Thomas, who will be 70 this year, inherited at the age of 18 in 1974. 'It's time for the family to do other things and move on - we have achieved a hit list of work that needed doing.'

'My parting gift to the future owner of the castle is the re-roofing of the vast majority of the building to the highest conservation standards, along with insulation of the roof space. This will ensure that the castle is capable of withstanding whatever the weather throws at it for many years to come. Additionally, I have also restored the three magnificent pavilions in the walled gardens with the assistance of some of the country's foremost conservation architects.'

It's easy to imagine the emotional tie to a place where his ancestors have made history in a castle full of iconic reminders. There are family portraits, which Sir Thomas says could be loaned to the new owner. However, as he reflects on his family's legacy, he says he







**‘Castles and living in one often belong to fairytales, and Ripley Castle exemplifies the essence of such stories’**

feels genuinely excited about the next stage of its development.

‘The castle and the estate have never remained static. Its notable architectural features, displaying a variety of styles, bear testament to this evolution. Everywhere I look, there is evidence of my ancestors and those who have lived here embracing new ideas and changes, and now it is time for me to do the same.

‘Castles and living in one often belong to fairytales, and Ripley Castle exemplifies the essence of such stories. However, without relying on make-believe, it stands on its own.

‘This is a unique opportunity for the castle’s next owner to add their name to the history books. I sincerely hope that they will love, cherish, and enjoy living at Ripley as much as my family and I have.’

Sir Thomas and Lady Ingilby won’t be leaving the village where they live in a five-bedroom Georgian house. ‘Ripley has a wonderful community spirit, and we will remain part of that. History is about people and it’s the villagers’ history too, not just ours.’

That history includes playing a part in the Wars of the Roses to hosting King James VI of Scotland on his way to his coronation as James I of England. Two years afterwards the Ingilbys were plotting to kill him through associations with the Gunpowder Plot, and later, Oliver Cromwell demanded a bed at





the castle after the Battle of Marston Moor, and was guarded by 'Trooper Jane' Ingilby, at pistol point.

Ripley Castle Estate, five miles from Harrogate is marketed by agency Carter Jonas in affiliation with Christie's International Real Estate. At £21 million for the whole estate, it is believed to be a record asking price for a Yorkshire country house and estate. The sale can be divided into nine lots.

There are 445 acres of picturesque parkland with a lake, ornamental gardens, and agricultural land with the Grade 1 listed castle at its centre. Notable structures include the Gatehouse, completed in 1450, the three-storey Old Tower (1555), and 18th century renovations by Sir John Ingilby. There's a village shop with ice cream parlour, the Boar's Head Hotel and its annexe Birchwood House, and a cricket pitch.

Inside the castle there's a cantilever staircase beneath one of the country's finest armorial stained-glass windows. The Old Tower has oak flooring sourced from HMS Rose, an historic 18th-century frigate, and a priest hole. The oak-panelled Knight's Chamber is one of the most remarkable Tudor rooms in England, boasting an original oak ceiling and wall panelling. Its unique 'wagon roof' design is one of only three surviving examples.

**T**he gardens and grounds, currently open to the public daily, have several listed pavilions, including The Garden Room and The Orangery, with palm trees and a tropical plant collection, and a there's a walled garden. The grounds have hosted lakeside concerts and the Ripley Agricultural Show.

Mark Granger, head of the sales team at Carter Jonas, says there is a huge amount of positive interest in the estate. 'We have received regional, national and international enquiries, which we are working our way through. We have had good conversations and viewings in the pipeline. It's not surprising when you consider the beauty of the place.

'It is the biggest portfolio I've seen for sale in Yorkshire. The Ripley Castle Estate is a once-in-a-700-year opportunity to purchase an estate that encompasses historical significance, architectural splendour and beauty. The estate is perfectly situated and features extensive parkland and lakes, forming an integral part of the village of Ripley. I remain consistently moved by its uniqueness.

'Additionally, with 445 acres of land, it offers tremendous opportunities for buyers interested in commercial, agricultural, sporting, or conservation ventures. There are countless possibilities to transform it further into a remarkable family home and business that can be cherished for generations.'

[carterjonas.co.uk](http://carterjonas.co.uk)



### What you would get for your £21 million

**LOT 1:** Ripley Castle, The Castle Apartment, East Wing (wedding and events venue), Gatehouse, estate offices, Grindhus coffee shop, gift shop, tearoom, ornamental gardens, 165.59 acres (67.01 ha) of registered parkland including lakes, woodland, a boathouse, garden room and temple.

**LOT 2:** The Boar's Head Hotel and Birchwood House annexe.

**LOT 3:** Ripley Village Store and adjoining residential property.

**LOT 4:** Sporting rights extending to

1,800 acres (728 ha) including Birthwaite Cottage, shoot yard and land extending to 28.89 acres (11.69 ha).

**LOT 5:** Estate woodland, pasture and game cover extending to 188.08 acres (76.11 ha).

**LOT 6:** Scarah Park extending to 26 acres (10.52 ha).

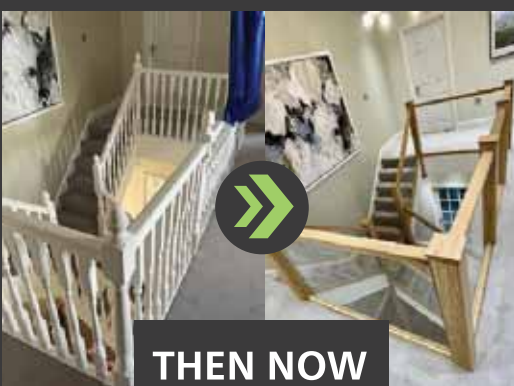
**LOT 7:** Village cricket ground extending to 5.88 acres (2.38 ha).

**LOT 8:** Chapel Flatts and village car park extending to 22.81 acres (9.23 ha).

**LOT 9:** The Front Field extending to 5.85 acres (2.37 ha).



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# *The* QUEEN of CLEAN

Being neat and tidy not only helps you to find things, it promotes peace and productivity, says County Durham home organiser Mabs Heslop, founder of BoxdUp

PHOTOS BY SARAH CALDECOTT

**L**iving in a right old pickle? Mabs Heslop is your woman. The self-confessed 'neat freak' runs a premium home organisation business and promises to turn your cluttered spaces into havens of tranquility. From decluttering closets to orchestrating pantry perfection, she specialises in bringing order your home. She'll even help you move house or make a seasonal switch to your interiors. Hello Spring!

'I'd say I've always been super-organised and meticulous about things - a quality that came in handy during my eight years as a primary school teacher,' she says. 'I always had a tidy bedroom as a child and at university my housemates nicknamed me Monica (from *Friends*) for being such a neat freak.'

Mabs, 41, lives in Oakenshaw, County Durham, with husband Tim, their 11-year-old daughter Nadia, and Lily, their cavapoo. Tim runs a recruitment business from an





outbuilding on their two-acre plot. The business is based in the US and the family lived in Manhattan for several years before returning to their roots in the North East. 'Our home is quite modern and we've spent the three years we've been here renovating it,' says Mabs. 'I've decorated it all myself; I love mostly neutral tones with pops of colour.'

It's totally tidy, of course, everything in its place, which is just how Mabs likes it. That was her inspiration for BoxdUp, when, after ten years as a stay-at-home mum, she decided it was time to get back to work, doing something she enjoyed that would fit around a busy family life. Now she offers help and practical advice on everything from seasonal transitions and organising a home office to conquering the chaos of kids' spaces in the home.

'As a stay-at-home mum, I've learned how to implement methods to streamline every aspect of household management,' says Mabs. 'In my own home, every cupboard, drawer and shelf is very organised. It gives me a sense of peace and tranquility having ➡'



## TIPS FOR SPRING CLEANING

**1. Make a plan** Start by creating a checklist of tasks you want to accomplish during your spring cleaning. Prioritise areas that need the most attention.

**2. Declutter first** Before deep cleaning, declutter your home by getting rid of items you no longer need or use. Donate, sell, or discard items responsibly.

**3. Work room by room** Focus on one room at a time to prevent feeling overwhelmed. Begin with smaller rooms or areas within a room and gradually work your way up to larger spaces.

**4. Set a timer** Set a timer for each task to stay focused and prevent spending too much time on one area. This can help you maintain momentum and make progress efficiently.

**5. Start high, end low** Dust and clean from top to bottom to prevent dust and dirt from settling on surfaces you've already cleaned. Begin with ceiling fans, light fixtures, and high shelves, then work your way down to floors and skirting boards.

**6. Use natural cleaners** Consider using natural cleaning products to reduce exposure to harsh chemicals and toxins. Vinegar, baking soda, and lemon juice are effective and eco-friendly alternatives.

**7. Freshen up fabrics** Wash curtains, upholstery, and bedding to freshen them up for the new season. Don't forget to vacuum mattresses and spritz pillows and rotate them for even wear.

**8. Deep clean appliances** Clean and disinfect appliances such as the refrigerator, oven, microwave, and dishwasher. Remove food debris, grease, and stains for optimal performance and hygiene.

**9. Focus on outdoor areas** Spring cleaning isn't just for the indoors. Clean outdoor furniture, sweep and wash patios and decks, and tidy up the garden by removing debris and dead plants.

**10. Involve the whole family** Get everyone involved in the spring cleaning process. Assign age-appropriate tasks to family members to make the work more manageable and create a sense of accomplishment together.

Remember to take breaks throughout your spring cleaning efforts. Celebrate your hard work and enjoy the fresh, clean space you've created!



**‘In my own home, every cupboard, drawer and shelf is very organised. It gives me a sense of peace and tranquility having a very clean and tidy home, where everything has its place’**





a very clean and tidy home, where everything has its place. I find being organised saves so much time and alleviates a lot of stress from day-to-day life.'

Having everything to hand in a certain place means every member of the household knows where things are. 'Having storage containers of any description eliminates a build-up of clutter and labelling things means that things can be quickly and easily found,' says Mabs. 'One of the most useful things I've found is the drawer divider. Whether it's for cutlery, clothes or make up, using them makes a huge difference when it comes to organisation. The drawer instantly becomes more tidy and items are much more easily located. And yes, even my sock and knicker drawer is colour coordinated and divided into sections!'

With the extra time her super-organised life affords her, Mabs likes to head to the gym, read romance novels and host meals for family and friends. 'My guilty pleasure is watching any American real estate shows

like *Selling Sunset* as I love seeing into other people's homes,' she laughs.

BoxdUp covers the North East, from Northumberland down to Yorkshire. Prices are determined on an individual basis, depending on the time needed to complete a project and the specific products and materials used.

So has she come up against any space that's past help yet? 'No. I've not yet had a project I've felt defeated by and I don't think I will - where there's a problem there's always a solution,' she says. 'It may take a little longer or require a little more creativity when it comes to an effective storage solution, but where there's mess, there's a BoxdUp solution. With me by your side, tidying up isn't just a chore - it's a transformative journey towards a more harmonious and balanced life.'

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# TIME FOR A SPRING REFRESH



Joanna Herbert of North East-based Vickers and Barrass explains how to enhance your home to appeal to potential buyers

**S**pring offers the perfect opportunity to breathe new life into your home, especially if you are considering putting it on the market. A 'spring refresh' boosts your home's aesthetic appeal and makes it feel fresh, inviting and well-maintained.

First impressions start at the kerb, so make sure your home's exterior is as inviting as the interior. Mow the lawn, trim bushes and plant flowers and greenery in the garden, or place pots near the entrance. A clean, welcoming front door with a fresh coat of paint and a new doormat can work wonders!

Nothing says 'spring refresh' like a fresh coat of paint. Neutral colours like soft whites, light greys and fawns make spaces feel open, clean and brighter, perfect for showcasing natural light and allowing potential buyers to envision their own décor. Look to declutter each room, eliminating any unnecessary items and organise belongings in a way that maximises the sense of space.



Make sure to capitalise on natural light by opening blinds and curtains during showings, and consider swapping out dim or outdated light fixtures for brighter, more modern options. Task lighting in key areas like the kitchen, bathroom and living spaces can also make a substantial difference in how your home feels.

A vase of fresh flowers, a few well-placed cushions and throws can make your home feel cosy and lived-in without being distracting.



A spring refresh does not have to be an overwhelming project. With the right touches, your home can become a shining example of its full potential. By making it feel fresh, clean and welcoming, you are not just preparing it for sale, you are also creating an environment where potential buyers can immediately imagine themselves making memories.

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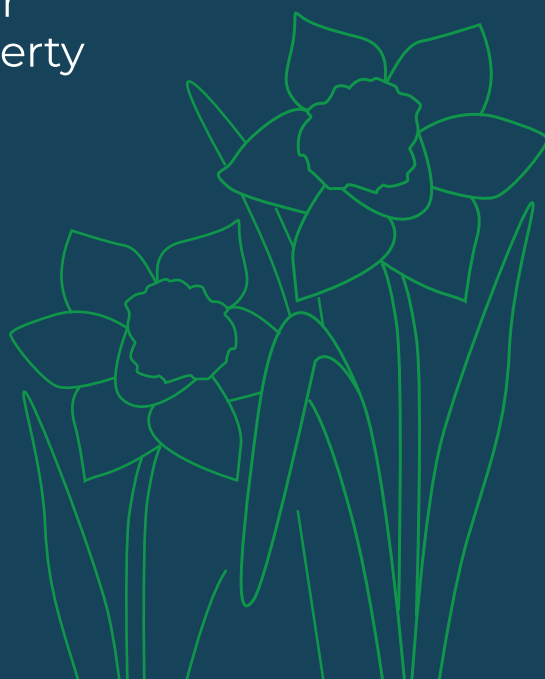
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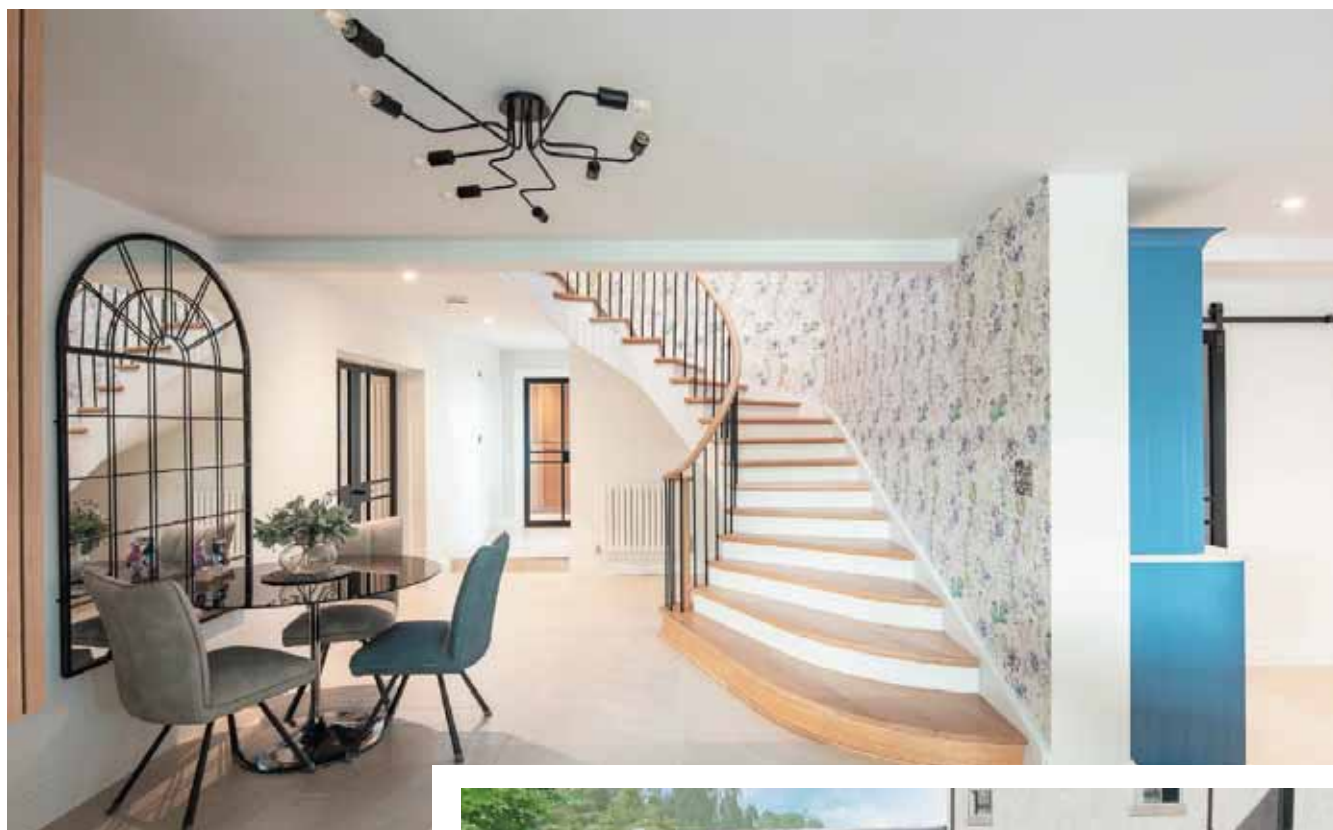


# A SURE THING

And she's off... on another exciting project. North Yorkshire's Katie Craggs, founder of KCA Architecture, is one of the country's leading racecourse architects. She also designs beautiful homes

WORDS **JENNY NEEDHAM** MAIN PHOTO **CLAIRE HIRST**





In any line-up of architects being considered for a racecourse revamp, Katie Craggs will be a front-runner, if not the outright favourite. In the past decade she's designed grandstands, weighing rooms, entrances, hospitality suites, offices, bars, stables and vet boxes at the majority of the Northern racecourses, including Catterick, Thirsk, Ripon, Wetherby and Pontefract. It's a fair bet, too, that not many architects' plans will include a doping control area.

Katie is the founder of KCA Architecture, which she established in 2020 after spending 20 years in private practice. With extensive experience across diverse sectors such as residential, commercial, healthcare, and education, she has built up a versatile portfolio.

Her unique specialisation lies in equestrian projects, particularly racecourses, where her expertise in design and execution has placed her out in front as one of the country's leading racecourse architects and designers. Over the past 12 years, Katie has collaborated with numerous Yorkshire racecourses, and others further afield, gaining an in-depth understanding of their specific operational requirements. Her latest project was the Horseshoe Café and Bar at Catterick Racecourse, opened by MP for Richmond and Northallerton and former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on New Year's Day.

'I started working on some of the Yorkshire racecourses doing PR on racedays while I was at university,' says Katie. 'I got to know management and when I qualified as an architect in 2013, I approached them



about working together. They gave me the opportunity to tackle some long-term strategic masterplans for improving facilities and I'm still in the process of helping to deliver these projects.'

The skills she's learned along the way are wide ranging. 'You have to understand all aspects of how a racecourse works, from the horses arriving and their safety through to how the jockey and their facilities work,' she explains. 'The BHA (British Horseracing Authority) brought out new standards for the jockeys' changing rooms following the pandemic, and I was commissioned to work on eight of these. One of these was at Leicester Racecourse, the first in the country to deliver this new-style facility. This side of my job is very different to planning buildings to enhance the visitor experience and the various different offerings a racecourse needs

to deliver commercially to be successful and profitable.' Katie also has substantial experience in residential architecture, working on a range of projects from bespoke new-build homes to small-scale housing developments. This breadth of knowledge ensures that she approaches each project with a comprehensive and tailored perspective, aligning with her clients' distinct needs and visions. 'At the core of our philosophy at KCA Architecture is a commitment to listen, interpret, invent, inspire... make it happen,' she says.

Katie, who lives at Middleton Tyas with her seven-year-old son Lukas and labrador Brook, admits she rather fell into architecture, but is passionate about her profession. 'It wasn't really my radar, but I'd always been arty and was good at maths at school. After finishing an art and design foundation year, ➔



I spotted an opportunity to train as an architectural technician, which led eventually to an Architecture degree, a placement in the States and then a postgraduate diploma.'

She gained experience working for architects' practices in Darlington and Richmond, including Harris Irwin Associates at Aske Stables, near Richmond, before being made redundant during the pandemic. 'It was sink or swim, so I set up my own business,' she says. 'My old practice, Harris Irwin Associates, helped me and I stayed at the Aske Stables offices where I still reside. I've worked at Aske for 12 years now.'

'The practice has steadily grown over the past five years, but more in the scale of projects, rather than type. We are working on some million-plus schemes, both residential and commercial, and a couple of multi-million commercial racecourse projects, which are at concept stage. I employ one member of staff, but aim to grow the practice this year.'

As well as being a regular at racecourses, Katie also loves bringing her expertise to residential projects, and there are some lovely examples on her website. Primrose Cottage on the outskirts of Richmond is one of her favourites, a dated and impractical home which was transformed into a modern, light-filled space that meets the needs of contemporary living. The property, which had not been updated in many years, featured numerous small, compartmentalised rooms and a cramped kitchen, resulting in a lack of flow and a dark, closed-off atmosphere. The clients' brief called for opening up as much of the ground floor as possible to create an airy, cohesive space, as well as building a two-storey extension to create more spacious, usable bedrooms on the first floor.

'The owners were heavily involved with the design and interiors and together we formed the finished article,' she says. 'My clients' daughter played an integral role in the interior design process and their vision has resulted in a stunning interior, blending functionality with beauty and ensuring that Primrose Cottage



is not only practical, but a delight to live in.'

Other exciting projects in the region have included transforming a dated 1980s bungalow into a modern, eye-catching family home with enhanced kerb appeal, and a contemporary, glazed kitchen extension that sits beautifully next to the historic old stables building that it's attached to. At present, Katie is working on a large barn conversion and a new-build, both of which will be finished later this year.

Sustainability is always on a client's agenda these days, says Katie. 'Building regulations have changed a lot over recent years, making it more challenging and expensive to build, but all directed towards delivering more environmentally friendly buildings.' This can be particularly challenging with old buildings and conflicts between conservation officers and building control are commonplace, she admits. Since the pandemic, the price of building materials has also increased massively. 'And they're still going up. This is definitely slowing down and, in some cases, stopping development, as are prolonged planning procedures, but this is something the new government has promised to tackle.'

Based in the heart of North Yorkshire and on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, KCA Architecture regularly work with challenging sites and conditions. 'We specialise in working within sensitive

locations, such as residential neighbourhoods, conservation areas and natural landscapes, ensuring that our designs are sustainable, environmentally conscious and harmoniously integrate with their surroundings,' says Katie. 'We aim to design residential spaces that respond thoughtfully to their surroundings, balancing aesthetic appeal, functionality and sustainability. Our goal is to maximise the potential of each site while bringing our clients' visions to life.'

Katie's own home is a modest three-bedroom house in the village of Middleton Tyas. It sits on a large plot with ample parking and a large garden and the draw was the potential to extend it into a large family home. 'I've only lived there 18 months, but have plans to transform it over the coming years,' she says. She also has her own horse, but admits she's so busy being a working single mum that he's become a bit of a 'field ornament'.

So when she does manage a bit of down-time, does she head on down to the racecourse? 'I tend to go to the races more for work than pleasure,' she says. 'Also, I'm quite hopeless at betting!'

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# HOMES *full* of MEMORIES

Architect Ben Pentreath, renowned for his work on iconic properties, revisits his book *English Houses*, with reflections on timeless design and the essence of living spaces

PHOTOS: JAN BALDWIN © RYLAND PETERS & SMALL

With more than 200,000 followers on Instagram, architect Ben Pentreath has been named Britain's 'man of the moment'. He has also worked on the Prince and Princess of Wales' homes, helping with the renovation of Anmer Hall, William and Kate's Norfolk home and their Kensington Palace flat.

Now, for fans of English architecture and decoration, Ben's newly-reissued book, complete with a brand-new introduction, *English Houses*, is a must read.

It's timeless and beautiful. Inside, the renowned architectural and interior designer, whose clients also include Britain's King Charles III and the Earl of Moray, presents an insightful overview of the classic English style, and also encompasses Ben's own houses.

Visiting 12 very different homes, Ben appraises the unique spirit of the English house – restrained and simple yet overflowing with a generosity of touch and a richness of colour and texture.

Here, *Living* publishes an extract:

Spending time with *English Houses* again makes me realise how true was something that I wrote in my first introduction: 'Interiors can be momentary; they are far less durable than architecture, and are subject to the whims of owners, of fashion, and of taste; their moment may be very brief – photographs of famous rooms can be far more enduring than the spaces themselves.'

So there is a sense of poignancy now, too, because five of the twelve houses that Jan Baldwin and I photographed over the course of 2015 have completely changed hands today.

Maisie Rowe's house in Wharton Street is sold; the wonderful house of artist John Hubbard and his wife Caryl, in West Dorset, is still owned by the family but in a completely



new guise; Edward and Jane Hurst have moved on from Manor Farm; Bridgie and Forbes Elworthy have left Wardington; and the magic of the Bannermans is now being woven in a beautifully restored house in Somerset.

Trematon was the most recent of the interiors that we photographed, and when the book was written, the rooms were less than five-years-old (although they almost

seemed the most settled of all). Now they are all gone. As I write, in the autumn of 2024, two more houses are about to change. My husband Charlie and I are busy packing. The Old Parsonage, our house in Dorset, will soon be no longer – or at least, not for us. Having lived here for 16 years, it is time for us to move on and a wonderfully exciting new chapter of our lives is about to start in the far north of Scotland, in Orkney. ➔







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Living



Our time here in Littlebredy has been filled with happiness and friendships, with memories that will endure for ever, but with the imminent sale of the wonderful Bridehead Estate, where we have been so lucky to live, we realised that it was time to move on.

It was enormously exciting when at last we found our new home, where we will be sinking our roots soon. The Parsonage, and Charlie's beautiful, ever-changing garden that surrounds it, have become perhaps one of the best-known 'English houses' of our era, not least thanks to the ever-expanding power of Instagram. But what's interesting for me to see, in Jan's beautiful photographs, is both how little and how much has changed in the last eight years.

The dining room is now wallpapered with one of my Morris and Co papers; the kitchen sizzles in egg-yolk gloss yellow; the drawing room is virtually unchanged save for some

more recently acquired pictures, more clutter, more dust, and many more piles of books...

Our flat in London represents a fascinating evolution too. Not long after Jan came to visit with her camera, our downstairs neighbour moved out and we were able to rent his flat too. We merged the two units together by opening up a very old, long-sealed door. Now, with our imminent move to Scotland, we need less space in London so will be giving up the flat downstairs and just returning to this one. Life will seem a bit smaller but that's a happy evolution.

So of the 12 houses, only five remain unaltered at the time that I write. Decoration really is temporary. This is a lovely thing to understand. Urbanism, the design of towns and cities, can almost last forever (if you get it right); buildings, we hope, may survive and be loved for hundreds of years. Interiors really do come and go. It's a fascinating ➡





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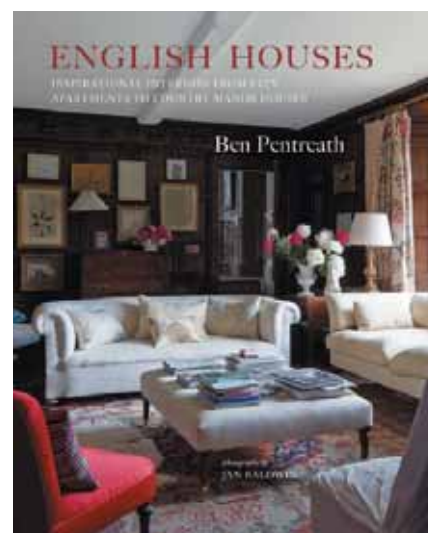
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**‘If you have loved a place, it will love you back, and your memories become part of its memories, passed down silently to future generations’**

velocity. And it makes me realise how much I love decorating rooms, because by bringing together your collection of disparate things and ingredients, colours and ideas, we create a sense of atmosphere that allows us to travel through time and place.

I am eternally grateful to Ryland Peters & Small for trusting me with *English Houses*, and with my previous title, *English Decoration*. At the time of that first volume, I was young and with relatively few published projects to my name, hence, I suppose, our decision to use many beautiful houses to write about and illustrate ideas that I was finding interesting. Now, it is fair to say, things have changed quite a bit.

The Pentreath Studio has grown from some 12 members of staff when this book was written to 40-plus, and we are working on the design of towns, new houses, old houses and interiors all across the country, and increasingly all over the world. These two

beautifully printed and produced books were a huge part of my personal journey. They allowed me to examine a state of mind that has, I hope, become something of a calling card – looking at the multi-faceted strands of what makes up English design.

It gives me a real sense of happiness that both titles are still in print after all this time, because it makes me realise that longevity of vision, and a sense of the timeless in design, are an eternal drum beat not just for me, but for many others too. This gives me great confidence in our long-term sustainability.

The most sustainable building or build of furniture is one which will last and be loved for hundreds of years. As the decade has proceeded, we all feel a greater sense of urgency with which this question must be addressed.

‘This book is about houses,’ I wrote when opening the original introduction, ‘but more than that, it is a book about

people and about time. I realise that when we think about the interiors of houses, we often start by concentrating on the architecture, or on the key pieces of furniture, or the rugs, pictures and lamps; colours, textures and incidental moments.

But a perfectly decorated room without people to occupy it, love it, and live in it is meaningless; and a room without a sense of time and of evolution is as empty as a diary containing entirely blank pages.’

Yes, houses really are the diary of our lives. Sometimes we are not in them for very long; sometimes we stay for decades, but ultimately, we will all leave, and if you have loved a place, it will love you back, and your memories become part of its memories, passed down silently to future generations.

***English Houses* by Ben Pentreath, is priced at £40 and is published by Ryland Peters & Small**

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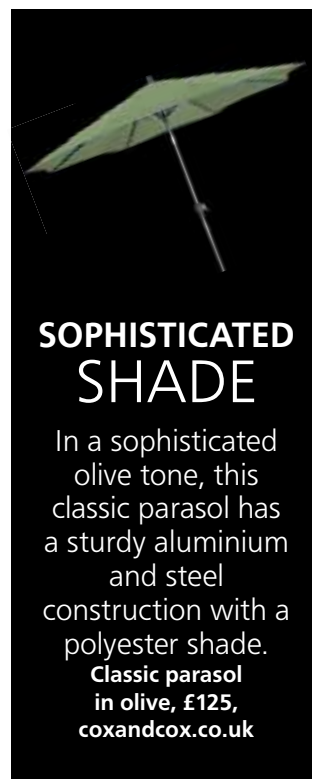
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## SQUARE *Style*

Crafted from robust and durable aluminium, this neat square set sits four and features elegant slats for a modern look and feel.

**Anna four-seat dining set in green, £749, [atkinandthyme.co.uk](http://atkinandthyme.co.uk)**



## SOPHISTICATED SHADE

In a sophisticated olive tone, this classic parasol has a sturdy aluminium and steel construction with a polyester shade.

**Classic parasol in olive, £125, [coxandcox.co.uk](http://coxandcox.co.uk)**

## GREEN *SHEEN*



If you want a showstopper for your garden, this giant hand-crafted vase in a spectacular shade range of greens is it.

**Handcrafted giant ceramic vase in vital grass, £195, [kingsframers.com](http://kingsframers.com)**



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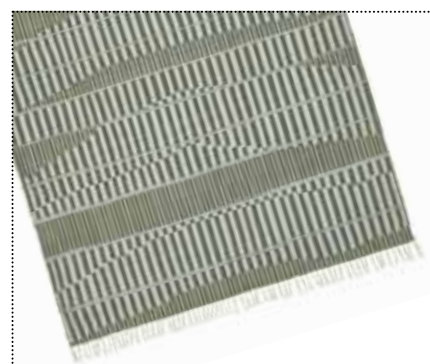




## MINIMALIST MARVEL

Simplicity at its finest, this sleek sofa is a minimalist triumph, in a beautiful olive tone to blend into your garden for understated outdoor living.

**Textilene double sofa, £149, [dobbies.com](http://dobbies.com)**



## RUG-GED

An outdoor rug can be a fantastic addition to your outdoor space, and the green tone and playful pattern of this one will elevate any outdoor area.

**Collina indoor/outdoor rug in lake green, £495, [oka.com](http://oka.com)**

## Versatile Victorian

A fabulous Victorian-inspired set of metal garden table and four chairs, finished in antique green. This set is well-sized and will fit in and complement both large and smaller gardens.

**Set of metal garden table and four chairs in antique green, £365, [afternoah.com](http://afternoah.com)**







# PROM PARADE

Pretty Little Prom in Darlington has row upon colourful row of special occasion dresses to make your teenage dreams come true



Prom is one of the most important social events in a teenager's life, an evening where students can have fun and celebrate their accomplishments with their friends. Once considered as American as apple pie, it's estimated that 85 per cent of UK schools now mark the end of GCSE exams with a prom.

It's also a fabulous opportunity to dress up - and the search for that dream dress starts earlier and earlier each year, says Rebecca Atkinson of Pretty Little Prom in Darlington's designer district. 'Prom 2025 shopping is in full swing so don't delay and get an appointment booked in,' she says. 'We stock every style you can imagine, from beautiful princess-style ball gowns to slinky satin dresses from top-end prom designers like Gurbani, Jora and LQ Designs, with more new labels coming soon.'

This season's prom customers are loving ruffles, she adds. 'And satin dresses with a leg split are also very popular. Jewel colours are a huge hit this year, with emerald, royal blue and reds being a favourite of many prom girls.'



Pretty Little Prom, located on Grange Road amongst some of the town's best-known independent businesses, aims to be a one-stop shop for anyone needing a prom or ball dress. It's owned by best friends Lisa Maddren and Rebecca Atkinson. 'We met whilst working in the bridal industry, which we absolutely loved, and 20 years ago we opened Butterflies bridal





**‘We stock every style you can imagine, from beautiful princess-style ball gowns to slinky satin dresses’**



and prom outlet in Portrack Lane, Stockton on Tees,’ says Rebecca.

‘We have always loved Darlington and realised that people from the town and surrounding areas were having to travel quite a way to find a store that sold just prom dresses. We love how quaint Grange Road is and how diverse the other stores are in the area and decided this was where we wanted to open a new specialist prom shop,’ It is a true family business; Rebecca’s daughter Dayna is manager.

The three-floor shop is stocked with hundreds of colourful dresses, most priced around the £400 mark, which owner Lisa explains ‘is about standard’ for the special-occasion garments. Pretty Little Prom also stocks evening gowns and black tie attire, and has a floor of more neutral dresses for the teens who prefer a ‘pared back’ approach.

‘We’ve employed eight staff from the local community, many of whom are young women who’ve had their own proms recently. It really makes them perfect to help girls choose their dream dresses,’ says Lisa. ‘New and exciting lines are being added to the collection all the time, so watch this space!’



*Pretty Little Prom is open Tuesday to Sunday. Opening hours are: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, 3.30-7.30pm; Saturday, 10am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-4pm.*

**Pretty Little Prom, 12 Grange Road, Darlington DL1 5NG  
@prettylittleprom**

In the UK, the school prom marks the end of a period of intense hard work by students for their exams before setting off on the next phase of their lives. Sharing the experience with friends creates memories you can revisit at years later and British teens have embraced this American school-leaving tradition with school proms now the norm.

The prom first made an impact in the UK in the 1990s, largely due to the influence of imported US dramas such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Friends* and *Dawson’s Creek*. The West End smash *Everybody’s Talking About Jamie*, which tells the story of a British teenager who wants to attend his school prom in drag, was based on a true story about Jamie Campbell, the 16-year-old from Bishop Auckland and his decision to go to prom as his alter ego Fifi La True. School staff asked him not to arrive in drag, but he defied them and brought a camera crew along to record the moment for a BBC Three documentary.

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# Absolutely FABULOUS

Special occasion dressing is made easy at Joel Alexander in Grange Road, Darlington

If you want to get ahead, get a hat, as the old saying goes. And if you want to look *really* fabulous, make sure it's one created by Darlington milliner Joel Alexander.

The boutique that bears his name in the heart of Darlington's designer district is a destination for those on the hunt for perfect outfits for weddings, race days and other special occasions. But hats were Joel's first love and he is always adding to his fabulous collection. 'I never stop looking; in the car, walking, flying, there is always something to look at, and to capture your imagination,' he says. 'All these influences make their way into my creations.'

Joel's designs have been worn at the wedding of Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales, as well as being featured in *Vogue* on three occasions.

As well as his own styles, he also stocks a large and colourful collection of headpieces, fascinators and hatinators by carefully chosen UK milliners and designers, but if you already



**'Perfect outfits for weddings, race days and other special occasions'**

have an outfit and need a bespoke hat to match, Joel is your man.

Joel Alexander is a one-stop-shop for a special occasion outfit. Labels include Veni Infantino, Gill Harvey, Irresistible, John Charles and Inspirato. There's glamour and sophistication for the mother-of-the-bride, trend-led collections with luxurious fabrics and great attention to detail; and unparalleled elegance that will ensure you are the belle of the ball. The testimonials on the Joel Alexander website, from new and returning customers, are fabulous too. 'Stunning boutique and amazing service,' says a typical review. 'A gem of a find for a mother-of-the-bride who wants to be made to look and feel fabulous. Joel's personalised service and attention to detail is exceptional and I would highly recommend the boutique to everyone.'

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# CHECKLIST

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## *Oversized outfits*

A blend of form and function, the Zadie shirt works across seasons and occasions. Change its feel by playing with the details: the belt, which can be cinched for a feminine look, or removed; the belted cuffs, which can be adjusted to dial up or down the silhouette of the sleeves.

**Zadie boyfriend shirt, light wash japanese denim or olive khaki, £195, [saywoodstudio.co.uk](http://saywoodstudio.co.uk)**



## **SOPHISTICATED IN STRIPES**

Sleek and sophisticated, this cardigan is designed to come to your rescue whenever an added layer of warmth is needed.

The cashmere-wool blend is knitted to a classic long-sleeve, with contrasting stripes bringing a playful, yet timeless, touch.

**Wool blend cardigan, £220, [chaneljoanelkayam.com](http://chaneljoanelkayam.com)**



## **MADE *for* WALKING**

With a pointed toe, block heel and pretty detailing, these boots are sure to become a favourite. The light colouring ensures they'll match your outfits as we step away from the harsher weather of winter.

**Suede cowboy calf boots, £79 [laredoute.co.uk](http://laredoute.co.uk)**

## **STEP INTO SPRING**

Bring a burst of sunshine to every outfit with these exquisite earrings; each three-dimensional flower features seven individually set round mixed-cut rubies, secured with four claws at the centre.

**Vintage 0.48 carat ruby and 18k yellow gold floral earrings, £2,145, [accsilver.co.uk](http://accsilver.co.uk)**



## RUN, RABBIT, *run!*

Crafted from soft vegan leather with a removable shoulder strap and gold-toned detailing, the intricately embroidered scene on this cherry red Saddle Bag is bound to put a bounce in your step. **Running bunny saddle bag, £90, [fableengland.com](http://fableengland.com)**



## *Pretty patchwork*

This jacket is a patchwork of classic Barbour and ERDEM influences. With hand drawn floral patterns overlayed onto waxed cotton patches, its oversized corduroy collar finishes this ultra-feminine design.

**Beauflower waxed jacket, £679, [barbour.com](http://barbour.com)**



## FABULOUS FLORAL

An elegant pussybow blouse, this piece is made from a spot sheer jacquard black fabric, lined in luxurious 100 per cent black silk crepe de chine, and featuring a black multi-Adeliade print.

**Ava blouse in black, £495, [hannahzahran.co.uk](http://hannahzahran.co.uk)**



## GET ON BOARD

Casual elegance and lightweight comfort combined, this classic boat shoe silhouette in suede is imbued with top-stitch detailing and crafted with matching laces threaded through tonal eyelets for a cohesive look.

**Gala in tan, suede boat shoes, £99, [dunelondon.com](http://dunelondon.com)**



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# ‘I NO LONGER LIVE *in* FEAR’

North East actress and TV personality Denise Welch, talks simple self-care, positive ageing and why she’s all about making life as easy as possible

WORDS: ABI JACKSON

**W**hen it comes to holidays, Denise Welch is a woman who knows what she wants. ‘I do like to go on holiday and completely crash,’ says the soap star and *Loose Women* regular, 66.

‘I’m not a good tourist and neither is my husband. Every holiday we go on, we plan to be a bit more adventurers, and we end up doing yet another “fly and flop” holiday.’

‘You know how some people want to go and do all that adventurous stuff – I just don’t. I’m not bothered. I’d rather just go to a beautiful hotel and lie and sunbathe and eat nice food. And I’m sick of pretending that I’m not that person, because I am that person!’

For Welch, who was born and raised in the North East on Tyneside, holidays are a cherished chance to switch off, especially as she’s “incredibly busy” with work.

‘I’m incredibly busy and feeling a bit overwhelmed,’ says Welch, who signed up for a guest role on ITV’s *Emmerdale*, alongside her return to *Waterloo Road* and continuing slot on *Loose Women*.

‘So, I’m just trying to take everything a day to time. It’s all very enjoyable, it’s just it’s quite a lot, but I’ve learned over the years how to sort of calm my head a bit.’

‘I am honoured to be busy at 66, so it’s not like I’m moaning about it. It’s just that I know the things that tend to cause me anxiety, and I now know much more about how to deal with them.’

This is something that’s become a priority for Welch, who’s previously had roles in *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *Hollyoaks*, making her a true British soap stalwart.

She has spoken out in the past about her experiences with depression, which started after the birth of her son, singer Matty Healy, 35 (she also has son Louis Healy, 23, an actor, both

from her previous marriage to Benidorm star Tim Healy), as well as alcoholism and addiction (she has been sober for 12 years now).

And in January last year, Welch revealed she had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which she’d likely had since childhood but can easily go undiagnosed in females, as the signs can present differently. The condition often causes difficulties with attention span and focus, time management and day-to-day organisation, and as Welch said last year, living with undiagnosed ADHD had left her “exhausted”.

Welch, who married her husband, painter Lincoln Townley, 51, in 2013, explains today: ‘It’s the little things in life that can cause me anxiety. I can deal with big things, but it’s the minutiae of life, like a bedroom that’s untidy and you can’t seem to [sort it out] – where do I put everything? How does nobody else have clutter? I seem to attract clutter, and then I get overwhelmed by it.’

Her last serious bout of depression was in 2019 (after recovering she documented her experiences in her 2020 book, *The Unwelcome Visitor*) but things have been steady since.

‘I never say to myself “it’s gone” – I would say that the unwelcome visitor has just moved further and further away from me, but he’s probably still standing somewhere in the distance. But I no longer live in fear of it [the depression] coming, which I had for many, many years,’ she says now.

‘So, every day I wake up feeling normal is a win for me. I don’t need to feel happy, I don’t need to feel excited or buzzing about something, I just need to feel normal.’

These days, Welch – who describes herself as a bit ‘chaotic’ – is embracing ways to make daily life that bit easier. For example, deciding to get lens replacement surgery with Optegra last year proved to be ‘life-changing’ for the actress and TV personality.

As for many people, her vision had started to worsen in recent years and she was prescribed ➡



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varifocal glasses. However, she found taking them on and off sometimes triggered her vertigo symptoms (Welch has lived with the condition, which can cause awful dizziness, for 15 years), plus she was often losing them, and she didn't get on with contact lenses.

She admits the idea of eye surgery did "freak me out" initially.

'But it was the most painless, stress-free procedure in the entire world, and the results have been so life-changing,' she adds. 'It was probably about 10 minutes per eye, and now I have 20/20 vision, it's unbelievable.'

It made her think about attitudes around ageing, and how she wants to approach the next chapter of life.

'We always think that everything's failing. But now I'm 66 and I've got 20/20 vision, I went to see an audiologist about my vertigo - and yes, I've got vertigo, but actually my hearing is incredible. So not everything's failing, you know?'

'My godfather is 87 and his wife is 82 and they run around the world like they were in their 50s. He says to me: "We are not letting the old on in" - and I know what he means. So, that's my philosophy.'

'Obviously, I'm not taking away from people who are physically disabled, of course not. I'm talking about people who just decide that they're old and allow 'old things' to happen to them.'

She isn't one for punishing self-care regimes, however.



PHOTO: IAN WEST/PA

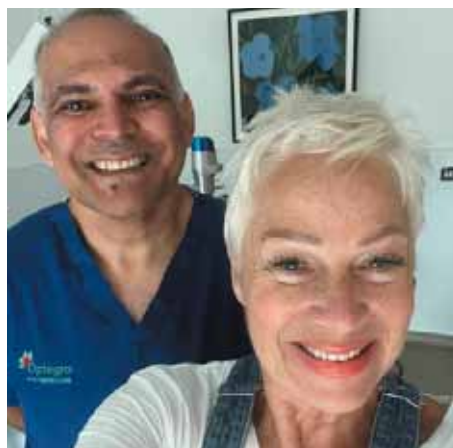


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'Self-care has always been much more about my head than my body, as it were. I do the minimum of exercise to keep everything moving, but exercise and I are not natural bedfellows. I've been addicted to most things in my life, but I will never be addicted to the gym! I've just got into padel tennis though. I'm hopeless at it - I actually like just like playing bat and ball and hitting it back and forth!'

'Self-care is also spending as much time as I can with my husband. I'm very fortunate that I have a wonderful marriage and we both like the same things. We love just watching television and simply being together with dinners on our knees.'

'He says that joke of: "When I married you, you said you were interesting"... "No, I said I was into resting!"'

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# HE'S *got* YOUR BACK!

Top spinal surgeon Dan Fagan carries out cutting-edge procedures in the region, whilst at the same time involving himself in the community

**C**onsultant Orthopaedic Surgeon Dan Fagan is a driven man. He is a leading spinal surgeon, a local councillor and a loving family man. He is also an enthusiastic sportsman, playing tennis regularly and enjoying track days with a classic Porsche racecar.

His interest in medicine stems from his father David, chief paediatric pathologist at Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham. 'I admired his dedication and humble approach to clinical excellence and pursuit of the truth in some very challenging cases,' says Dan. 'My dad always had the patient and their family at heart and this is still something I very firmly believe in in my own practice today.'

Dan was always interested in how the human body works and the science behind it, but 'briefly flirted' with the idea of going into the oil industry. 'I often wonder how different my life would have been,' he says. He was already thinking about a career in medicine when he passed his A Levels. He enrolled at Bristol University, where he met his wife, Vassiliki, who also later trained as a surgeon, and after a stint at a trauma unit in France, did three years' clinical training at a variety of hospitals around Bristol. His interest in surgery started when he was doing his internship and, during a six-month surgical rotation, he thought 'this is for me'.

Now Dan is a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. Over the years, he's perfected his surgical techniques, working with some very famous spinal surgeons. He's been trained to operate on the spine from top to toe, and to carry out some extraordinary, cutting-edge procedures, such as open anterior approaches - accessing the spine by opening the chest. He now uses the percutaneous approach, with



**'My goal is or people to be able to access an expert who knows how to treat them effectively, in order to to get them back to work and back to sport'**

minimal access surgery from the back, which is revolutionary in its own right and produces better outcomes and quicker recovery times for patients. It is one of his favourite operations and he is the only surgeon in the region to offer this.

Dan became a consultant in 2007 and moved up to the North-East to take up the position of Consultant Spinal Surgeon at James Cook University Hospital. Along with his colleagues, he was involved with advanced surgery, such as paediatric scoliosis; correcting spinal deformities in children; major adult reconstructions; tumour and trauma; all the while building up his own expertise based upon his extensive training.

He was one of the first surgeons in the UK to travel to the States, to learn minimal access surgery and bring those techniques to the region. 'My motto of 'The right operation, for the right patient, at the right time', was

not always possible in the NHS, so I set up my own practice where I could concentrate on delivering my own top-notch care,' he says. In 2012, he decided to leave the NHS to go full-time with his private work. 'I wanted to take control of my own life, spend more time with my family and have the things that many people take for granted,' he explains.

Dan developed a working relationship with private hospitals, primarily with the Woodlands, in Darlington, part of the Circle Health Group - the UK's largest private hospital group - and the Nuffield, Stockton. He chairs the National Spinal Steering Group for Circle Health and is chair of the Medical Advisory Committee at the Woodlands, where he is also chair of Clinical Governance. 'I am really pleased to be involved in a more senior role within Circle Health Group, using some of my skills in that way to develop my career,' he says.

**I**ntroducing Open Evenings at Woodlands Hospital has proved very popular for potential patients who want more information before committing to self-pay for treatment by Dan and his team. 'My goal is to offer prompt, expert treatment, for people to be able to access an expert who knows how to treat them effectively, in order to to get them back to work and back to sports,' he says. 'A lot of the issues I deal with affect people between the ages of 35 and 55, so while these people are waiting for treatment, they often can't work.'

The quiet of lockdown resulted in Dan standing - and being elected - as a Conservative councillor on Stockton Borough Council, which includes sitting on the Medical Board that has oversight and strategy input to the healthcare delivered by the NHS in the wider region. 'This has allowed me to help people, and the community, in a different way from my surgery,' he says. 'It also involves a different skill set'

And, as if he isn't busy enough, Dan has completed a Business and Executive postgraduate degree sponsored by Circle Health Group. 'Full time education wasn't something I envisaged when I became a consultant,' he laughs. 'I actually vowed that I was never going to take another exam, but once you get into it, it's fun learning something new.'

[spineart.org](http://spineart.org)  
[circlehealthgroup.co.uk/hospitals/woodlands-hospital](http://circlehealthgroup.co.uk/hospitals/woodlands-hospital)



# FINDING CONNECTION

From solitude to social engagement, there are many ways to help combat the pain of loneliness



**G**eorge Eliot's novel *Silas Marner* recounts the tale of a man who overcomes isolation and finds connection – a story just as relevant today. The reclusive weaver, betrayed by his closest friend and rejected by his religious community, retreats into solitude. There 'he invited no comer to step across his door-sill, and he never strolled into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow'. His story illuminates a truth that many experience today: being alone can be both a refuge and a prison.

New research reveals insights into loneliness among older people. A study by the University of Arizona found a strong association between time spent alone and feeling lonely among older adults. This sounds obvious, but our social networks often shrink as we age. Many older adults face diminishing opportunities for social interaction. Solitude – choosing to be alone

– can be beneficial. Involuntary isolation, however, often leads to loneliness. This is a complex emotional state that affects both physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed, the health risks of prolonged loneliness are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The distinction between solitude and loneliness is crucial. Professor Netta Weinstein from the University of Reading's School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences noted: 'The enforced lockdowns of the pandemic highlighted many of the long-lasting impacts that can occur when we are starved of interaction with other people. Yet this study highlights some of the benefits that solitude can bring. Time alone can leave us feeling less stress and free to be ourselves.' Chosen solitude can be restorative, unlike the unwanted loneliness caused by a lack of connection.

These themes also feature in Fredrik Backman's touching novel *A Man Called*

*Ove*, where the curmudgeonly widower withdraws from life following his wife's death. Ove is lonely not because he's alone, but because he lacks meaningful relationships. Like *Silas Marner*, who loses his gold but gains something far more precious in the orphan child Eppie, Ove discovers that family can form in unexpected ways. With reluctance, Ove connects with his persistent neighbours, and rediscovers human kindness and hope for the future.

Both literary characters find healing through intergenerational connections – a path that research validates. Age UK's work shows that intergenerational connections reduce loneliness and create stronger bonds. Adults without children or family close by can connect with young people through organised activities.

Work by the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing suggests making new friends later in life needs both opportunity and a conscious effort. Their research





suggests several evidence-based strategies for overcoming loneliness:

**Meaningful engagement.** Rather than seeking social contact, focus on activities that align with your personal interests and values. A Manchester University study found that people get more out of joining clubs than going to general social events.

**Intergenerational connection.** According to the National Youth Development Association, older people find it rewarding to mentor young people. They can share their wisdom while gaining from the energy and viewpoints of youth.

**Reciprocal relationships.** Research from Tokyo's Longevity Institute shows giving support, as well as receiving it, reduces isolation.

**Digital connection with purpose.** In-person contact is important, but technology can help. Video calls with family, online book clubs, or digital skills sharing can create meaningful bridges.

**Physical activity in company.** Edinburgh University research shows group exercise boosts physical and social health. Walking groups, in particular, show promising results for combining gentle exercise with casual conversation.

Like Silas Marner, who discovered 'there was no need to say "I am lonely" when you had company,' finding connection

often begins with small steps. Examples might include:

- Joining a local history society or craft group where shared interests naturally spark conversation.
- Volunteering at schools as a reading helper or at youth organisations sharing life skills.
- Starting a neighbourhood book club or film discussion group.
- Becoming a mentor through community programmes.
- Helping at children's holiday activities or after-school clubs.
- Taking part in regular group activities, like walking clubs or coffee mornings.
- Adopting a pet, which can provide companionship and create opportunities for social interaction.

Focus on developing quality relationships rather than just increasing the frequency of social contact. A few strong relationships are more effective at reducing loneliness than many superficial ones.

As George Eliot writes, 'What we call our despair is often only the painful eagerness of unfed hope.' Today's research confirms what great literature has long suggested: while loneliness may be part of the human experience, it need not be a permanent state. By connecting with others, we can build strong bonds, even without a conventional family.

**Jane Townson OBE** is CEO of the Homecare Association. She has extensive experience in the social care, health, housing, and technology sectors. She is chair of the Board of Kraydel; formerly CEO Somerset Care Group; chairman YourLife (JV with McCarthy & Stone); and vice chair of UKHCA. Jane's first career was in international leadership roles in research and development in ICI, AstraZeneca, and Syngenta, where she was global head of bioscience research. She then established her own business providing consultancy and training on the link between lifestyle factors and public health, working with private individuals and public sector organisations.

[homecareassociation.org.uk](http://homecareassociation.org.uk)

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# PLANTS *for* PROTEIN

Plant-based nutrition coach and personal trainer Gigi Grassia breaks down all the easy ways to hit plant-based protein goals

PHOTOS: KIMBERLY ESPINEL/PA

**I**t's one of the first questions you'll be asked if you're on a vegan diet: how do you get enough protein? 'If I had a coin for every time people ask me: how do you get your protein? I would be so rich by now,' says plant-based nutrition coach and personal trainer Gigi Grassia.

'There are still a lot of misconceptions about having protein and vegans not being able to get all the nutrients they need from food, which I think the scientific literature is really clear about, there is no question at all. But somehow there are a lot of myths circulating online around that, which if you are not a nutritionist or an expert in nutrition and food is a bit difficult to navigate.'

As a PT and ultra-marathon runner who also happens to be a vegan, getting enough protein to properly fuel herself is a priority for Grassia, 32.

## But why is protein so important?

'It's one of the three macronutrients we need - we have protein, fats and carbohydrates,' London-based Grassia explains. 'It's really helpful, not only to build muscle and repair tissue if we exercise, but protein is present almost everywhere in our body, so we really need enough of it.'

The vegan diet has something of a PR problem, with Grassia adding: 'Culturally, we are brought up thinking that the only way to get protein is meat or dairy. But the fact is, building blocks of protein are called amino

acids. We have nine amino acids that our body cannot produce by itself and it needs to get through nutrition, and that can be through a meat-based diet, or an omnivore diet, or a plant-based diet. All plants have essential amino acids in different amounts.'

Most of us are well aware that protein can help build muscle, but it isn't just for gym rats. If you don't get enough, Grassia suggests you might suffer from 'fatigue' and lower 'energy levels'.

Whether you're going all-in on a vegan diet or just want to incorporate a few more plant-based meals into your week, it's easy to make sure you're getting enough protein...

## Hero protein-rich ingredients

Putting protein-rich ingredients front and centre in your meals will make all the difference - think tofu, beans and more.

'The first time I tried tofu, I was like: "This tastes like cardboard, why do people like it? I don't understand",' Grassia remembers.

'But tofu is like a white canvas, like a sponge, it's really there to become the enhancer of your favourite flavours. It's really versatile. A lot of people don't know that tofu can be eaten 'raw', because how you buy it in the supermarket it's already cooked. Technically, you could slice it and eat it, but it's not really very nice.'

That's why you can slip tofu into your meals in more innovative ways, Grassia says.

'I do a lot of pasta sauces. Take it and blend it with veggies or sun-dried ➔



‘A lot of Grassia’s inspiration comes from her upbringing in northern Italy, and these dishes are seen in her debut cookbook, *Plant Protein*’



tomatoes and olives, and you create this really nice pasta sauce, or in stir-fries, or soups as well. Any dish you can name, you can have a use for it.'

### Lean into protein-rich cuisines

A lot of Grassia's inspiration comes from her upbringing in northern Italy, and these dishes are seen in her debut cookbook, *Plant Protein*, including a recipe for minestrone soup (packed full of beans and nutritional yeast), gnocchi made from tofu and smoked tofu carbonara.

However, she adds: 'Being Italian can be quite limiting sometimes, because we think our food is the best and there is nowhere else to go... But there really is a world to explore.'

From her travels and living in places such as China and South America, Grassia has tried lots of other cuisines, and some, she says, lend themselves incredibly naturally to a protein-rich, plant-based diet.

Take Indian food: 'It's traditionally a cuisine that uses a lot of pulses, so lentils, beans. It's already high in protein. And if you mix with that a bit of nutritional yeast and a little bit of tofu as well, you can really bring up the protein. Cuisines that use a lot of pulses are a really good base for protein-rich vegan dishes.'

### Find hidden protein powerhouses

Pulses and tofu are favoured by vegans, but what about the lesser-known protein powerhouses? Nutritional yeast is a big one for Grassia, who admits it's 'not very appealing by the look of it' as it resembles 'food for fish', but 'it's really rich in vitamins and micronutrients in general, and has so much protein.'

'100 grams of nutritional yeast has around 50 grams of protein - it's huge. It's very versatile. You can use it in soups, you can use it in stir-fries as a sauce, you can add a tablespoon or two in your meal, or sprinkle it on top of pasta.'

She was also surprised to learn how much protein is in soba noodles, which is why she has recipes in her cookbook for speedy coconut and lime noodle soup, as well as a spicy soba noodle salad with crispy tempeh.

'If you're trying to have a high-protein diet, a lot of it is about knowing which food to choose,' she explains. 'For example, when having a good bowl of pasta, choose a pasta that's made from durum wheat instead of mixed-flour pasta, because mixed flour has a blend of flours that doesn't have as much protein as durum wheat.'

'A lot of it is about choosing what food to have.'

---

***Plant Protein: 80 Healthy And Delicious High-Protein Vegan Recipes* by Gigi Grassia is published by Greenfinch, priced £22. Photography by Kimberly Espinel.**







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PHOTO: KIMBERLY ESPINEL/PA

## RECIPE

*Gigi Grassia's*  
**Marry me  
 lentils**

**Serves:** 2 to 4

## INGREDIENTS

1 small-medium carrot, diced  
 ½ celery stick, diced  
 1 small onion, diced  
 2 to 3 garlic cloves, very finely chopped  
 1 sprig of rosemary  
 10 to 12 sun-dried tomatoes, chopped, plus extra to serve  
 1tbsp tomato purée  
 300g split red lentils, washed  
 700ml vegetable stock  
 200ml soya milk  
 4 to 5tbsp nutritional yeast  
 Handful of baby spinach  
 Olive oil, for cooking  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper

**To serve**

Plant-based cream or yoghurt  
 Small handful of basil  
 Plant-based Parmesan-style cheese

## METHOD

- Heat a good glug of oil in a saucepan over a medium heat and fry the carrot, celery, onion, garlic, rosemary, sun-dried tomatoes and tomato purée for five to eight minutes until the onion has softened and the flavours have infused. If it starts to dry out, add a splash of water.
- Remove the rosemary and add the lentils, stirring for one to two minutes to toast the lentils. Slowly pour in the vegetable stock, stirring frequently, then add the soya milk and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring frequently.
- Once lentils are cooked, season with salt and pepper, then add the nutritional yeast and spinach. Stir until the spinach has wilted.
- Serve with plant-based cream or yoghurt, more sun-dried tomatoes, basil and plant-based Parmesan-style cheese.





# FISHY TALES

Revelations from the kitchen, musical delights, poetic interludes and stories of global adventures are all on the menu as Rick Stein heads to the region

WORDS ANNE SHOOTER

**C**ooking has only ever been part of the story for chef, restaurateur, TV presenter and writer Rick Stein, so another UK tour is something that makes him very excited.

'I seem to have an ability to communicate well with people,' he says. 'I know some performers who say the best thing about being on stage is that feeling of connection with an audience and that is what I am most looking forward to.'

The tour, called *An Evening with Rick Stein*, sees Rick arriving in Whitley Bay this month. The multi-award-winning chef, restaurateur, writer and presenter will be dishing up his favourite memories from nearly 50 years of gastronomic experience, delving deep into his lifelong love affair with cooking and exploring his unwavering devotion to the brilliance of great British produce. After 50 years in the business he certainly has many stories with which to entertain audiences - not least the one that started it all, when he first went into the restaurant business almost by accident.

'I fell into cooking really,' he says. 'I wanted to run a really glamorous nightclub in Padstow, Cornwall, for what I suppose you would have called 'the beautiful people', back in the Seventies. I don't know why I thought there would be any of those in a tiny, Cornish, coastal village. Instead, our clientele was a load of drunken fishermen who liked the fact I had a late licence and they could still get a beer at 3am. We ended up getting closed down!'

'So, I opened a restaurant in the building, literally just to pay the bills. I could cook a bit - my mum was a good cook and I had worked in a hotel kitchen in London, so I knew how it worked. I also hired some great chefs I could learn from. The truth is, it was the Seventies and restaurants were new and customers were quite unsophisticated so I cooked a bit and got away with a lot more than I would now. I remember once serving a mackerel dish to



a customer who ended up with a mouthful of bones. He complained that I should learn how to fillet a fish before I started cooking one. It was a fair point!'

Since then, that little restaurant has become the internationally renowned The Seafood Restaurant (albeit in a different venue, nearby) and Rick Stein, aged 76, has turned into a household name and one of the best loved faces in British food. With more than 25 cookery books, 30 TV programmes, ten restaurants and several hotels, he says he could never have envisaged his story would have led to this point.

These days Rick doesn't cook in the restaurants, and is based for around a quarter of the year in Australia, where his wife Sass is from. In the UK, he splits his time between London and a cottage in Cornwall.

'I am still very involved with the business,' he says. 'I liaise with the chefs, discuss the menus endlessly and do come up with new ideas sometimes - though I try to encourage them to do that. My son, Jack, does a lot of that too, as chef-director of the restaurants.'

'It is exciting when new things happen and we can put new species on the menu, particularly as people's knowledge of food is so good now and customers are willing to try new things. The latest arrival is Cornish bluefin tuna which is brilliant as

we couldn't get it for years. Now it is no longer endangered and there are very strict regulations to stop over-fishing, so we can have it on the menu in small quantities. It is imperative we find ways to catch and eat fish without depleting the stocks. My brother is a neurophysiologist and says omega 3, which is found in oily fish, is essential for brain health. So we need to be eating fish for nutrition as well as because it is delicious. We just have to do it in the right way.'

Asked about his ultimate comfort food, he takes a while to consider, before answering with absolute conviction.

'It's crab,' he says. 'I think British brown crab is the best anywhere in the world and I want it with my homemade mayonnaise. I make it like you get in Brittany, heavy on the mustard, how I remember it from when I used to go on holidays and there were fish restaurants everywhere there.'

'So that's it - a crusty baguette spread with Brittany butter with the salt crystals in it, British crab, and mustardy mayonnaise. Heaven.'

**'It is imperative we find ways to catch and eat fish without depleting the stocks'**

An Evening with Rick Stein, Whitley Bay  
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Living



# MAGNIFIQUE!

From Paris to the North East: The French Bistro at TERRA, a seasonal pop-up at Rockliffe Hall

**P**icture this. You take a bite of a perfectly traditional French dish in the warm glow of the table light. The soft clinking of wine glasses and gentle conversation provide the evening's soundtrack, whisking you away to one of the many bistros lining the streets of Paris. To your surprise though, you're not in the heart of France. You're dining at The French Bistro in TERRA, a seasonal pop-up that brings the comforting artistry of French cuisine to the North East.

Established by James Close, the former chef patron of the two Michelin-starred Raby Hunt and now culinary director of Rockliffe Hall, TERRA invited guests on a journey of culinary discovery. In 2025, James' vision continues with the introduction of a series of seasonal pop-ups designed to transport diners across the globe, reflecting his own international culinary travels. The first stop on the map? The French Bistro at TERRA.

With head chef Adam Molloy at the helm and James' expert guidance, the bistro offers a new curated menu of classic French favourites. As you step inside The French Bistro, you're greeted with the warmest of welcomes – a Rockliffe Hall trademark.

Exploring the menu is a highlight of the night in itself. When you ask for a little guidance, you'll find no shortage of expertise. Learning the stories behind each dish's rightful spot on the menu is enough to convince anyone to step out of their comfort zone and try something new.

Once you've made your selections, the next question naturally is 'What should I



drink?' Whether you're a wine novice or an aficionado, the expert guidance of Manuel – a member of the expert Sommelier team – is on hand to walk you through a selection of French wines from smaller producers.

My three-course journey begins with the light Waldorf salad. Crisp apples paired with creamy, indulgent Roquefort are contrasting in texture, but ever-so complementary in

flavour. The elegantly simple starter sets the stage for the taste sensation that is to come.

Just one bite of the Bouillabaisse transports you to the coast of the South of France. Succulent pieces of lobster surround perfectly cooked halibut to showcase the delicately fragrant broth. Then comes the grand finale, a dessert with a small touch of theatre. The choux bun that houses a smooth hazelnut ice cream, encrusted with crunchy hazelnuts, is a dream all on its own. But a generous pour of warm hot chocolate takes the dish to a decadent next level.

The French Bistro at TERRA reminds us that world-class cuisine from across the sea can be expertly executed on our doorstep.



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GRETA BRIDGE

# Rokeby Farmers' 80th ball

**T**wo hundred guests enjoyed the 80th Rokeby Farmers' Ball at the Morritt Arms Hotel, Greta Bridge, near Barnard Castle.

It is an annual event, only cancelled a few times in its history – in the 1960s due to foot-and-mouth and in 2021 because of the pandemic. 'In the past people have travelled through snow on tractors to get here,' said committee member Andrew Watson, whose father was on the inaugural committee. Guests were treated to a three-course meal, live music and dancing, and a charity auction which raised more than £8,000 for the MS Society.

PHOTOS: **TRACY KIDD**  
tracykiddphotography.zenfolio.com



Adam and Jo Metcalfe, Andrew Yarrow and Clive Metcalf



Catching up in the Dickens bar



Anthony and Lynn Todhunter, Robin and Suzanne Bellas, Craig and Michelle Matthews, Susan and Malcolm Wood



Amy Holguin, Matt Bowen, Sally Watson, George Peat, Livv Kus, Charlotte Heads, Thomas McQueen, Flora Reid, Emily Lamb and Lucy Watson



Carolyn & Richard Robson, Simon Robson & Sarah Burt



Brooke Lancaster and Myriam Ocholla



Claire and Andrew Smith, Tom and Catherine Smith, Christine and Neville Mason



George, Rachel and Eddie Peat



Harvey Barkes and Kathryn Antell



Harvey Slack and Alexa Waiter-Westgarth



Jackie Mckittrick and Paul Dickinson



Jessica Pearse, Hannah Brady and Sofaya Looker-Ere





Jonathan Wallis, Louise and Jonathan Privett, Mel and Paul Robson and Alan Beaty



Lucy Watson and Flora Reid



Matthew Lynn and Sophie Ireson



Oliver Dickinson, Jack Dickinson, Ed Swinbank and Callum Robinson



Paul, Harvey, Claudia and Jo Barks



Philip and Jennie Lamb, Alex Scott and Steve Jackson



Rob Walton



Roddy Gale, Suzanne Orton, Catherine and Stuart Tweddle



Penny Wilson with Mark Tiplady



Stuart Icton, Rebecca Tiplady, Poppy Fox and Richard Bainbridge



Tom Smith, Robin Bellas, Andrew Watson (committee)



Will Jewitt and Jess Denham



Will Ryan, Thomas Owen, Jenny Dunn and Jake Paxton



Jolanta Franks with Alison and Stephen Lamb

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# 2025 CROFT CIRCUIT SEASON EVENTS

Saturday 22nd & Sunday 23rd March  
**NEMCRC MOTORCYCLE RACE MEETING**

Saturday 26th & Sunday 27th April  
**750 MOTOR CLUB CAR MEETING**

Saturday 10th May  
**CROFT MOTOR SHOW** **NEW EVENT**

Saturday 31st May & Sunday 1st June  
**NO LIMITS RACE MEETING**

Saturday 14th & Sunday 15th June  
**BARC TCR CAR RACE MEETING**

Saturday 28th & Sunday 29th June  
**BARC CATERHAM RACING WEEKEND**

Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th July  
**BRSCC SUMMER RACE WEEKEND**

**Saturday 2nd/Sunday 3rd August**

**KWIK FIT BRITISH TOURING  
CAR CHAMPIONSHIP  
LIQUID MOLLY RACE DAY**

Saturday 23rd & Sunday 24th August  
**D&DMC "BATTLE OF BRITAIN" MEETING –  
RACING FOR BOTH CARS AND SIDECARS**

Saturday 6th & Sunday 7th September  
**MG FEST NORTH AND BRSCC AUTUMN  
RACE WEEKEND**

Saturday 20th & Sunday 23rd September  
**750 MOTOR CLUB CAR RACE MEETING**

Saturday 18th & Sunday 19th October  
**MSVR CAR RACE MEETING**

**To book please visit**

**[www.croftcircuit.co.uk](http://www.croftcircuit.co.uk) or call Tel: 01325 721815**

PLEASE NOTE - further details for each meeting will appear on the website in due course. The information is correct at this the time of print and could be subject to change

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**‘Within ten years  
Joséphine had  
defied many societal  
norms to become  
a pioneering artist,  
collector and patron  
of the arts’**

Josephine Bowes, Countess of  
Montalbo (1850) by Antoine  
Dury - Bowes Museum





# IN THE SPIRIT *of* JOSEPHINE

A new exhibition celebrates Josephine Bowes, co-founder of Barnard Castle's magnificent museum, and those who have followed in her trailblazing wake

WORDS CHRIS LLOYD PHOTOS SARAH CALDECOTT



Vicky Sturrs with Josephine Bowes' *Fruit, Flowers and Vegetables*

Joséphine Coffin-Chevallier was a 19th-century warrior woman: humble in roots and bold in spirit. She lived at a time when Modern art and Impressionism were gaining momentum, and yet women did not have the right to vote and the civil rights movement was yet to begin. Born 200 years ago this year, the daughter of a clockmaker, her life as a Parisian actress and dancer was transformed in 1852 when she met John Bowes of Streatlam Castle, a landowner, businessman, racehorse breeder/owner and former Liberal MP for South Durham.

She gave up the stage following her marriage to John as it would have been considered socially unacceptable – despite him having purchased the theatre. Though their marriage was an unusual occurrence – as men rarely married their mistresses – it was not

unequal, since they were outsiders from formal society, John being illegitimate and Josephine the daughter of an artisan and an actress.

Her husband held his own in Parisian society, which was more relaxed than that of England. He had wealth, an upper-class background and education, and was bilingual. Joséphine, with John, hosted dinners, parties and salons where writers, musicians, artists, minor aristocracy and intellectuals could meet, offering her the opportunity to develop her taste, knowledge and appreciation of beauty.

Joséphine was fashionable, her love of clothes and jewellery demonstrated by her patronising the leading couturier of the day, Charles Frederick Worth, who dressed her contemporary, Empress Eugenie of France. According to the *Revue Critique* – a celebrity magazine of the 1860s – ‘the salons of

Madame Bowes are counted among the most brilliant in Paris...’

Joséphine also turned her attention to painting in a world where there were few opportunities for women to train and exhibit their work. Despite these drawbacks, she became remarkably accomplished, with her landscapes exhibited at the Paris Salon on four occasions, and once at the Royal Academy in London. As ever, she was fully aware of the latest trends.

Joséphine was credited by John with having conceived the idea of a museum and from the early 1860s, the venture became uppermost in their lives. She sold her chateau at Louveciennes and with the proceeds set about more than a decade of sustained collecting, assisted by three dealers in Paris. And in 1862, she laid the foundation stone of The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle. ➔



Zac Weinberg

So, with access to a considerable fortune through her husband's inheritance, within ten years Joséphine had defied many societal norms to become a pioneering artist, collector and patron of the arts. Fiercely independent, like the communities of her adopted home in Teesdale, she was unusually successful in navigating the dominant rules of gender, geography, class and taste. A veritable trendsetter and trailblazer.

**A** new exhibition The Bowes Museum celebrates the spirit of its visionary co-founder. *Joséphine Bowes: Trendsetters and Trailblazers* includes works spanning 300 years and features more than 60 artists, designers and makers shaping trends in western culture today from Sophie Anderson (1823-1903) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), to Grayson Perry (b.1960), Magdalena Odundo (b.1950), Pheobe Cummings (b.1981), and Lucy Waters (b.1999). And like Joséphine's story, it's full of surprises.

The exhibition explores the contemporary continuation of Joséphine's collection and imagines where its female founder's knowledge of artistic trends might lead The Bowes Museum next. Organised into four thematic sections, it presents works in wide-ranging media, from painting, drawing, film and photography to sculpture, ceramics, furniture and textiles in a new light. Highlights from Joséphine's eclectic and expansive 18th and 19th-century collections are paired with significant loans from 20th century European history and new works by leading artists today in the North of England.

In the first section, which is dedicated to our relationship with nature, visitors are greeted by one of Joséphine's most accomplished large-scale still-life oil paintings, *Fruit, Flowers and Vegetables* (c.1860-1874). This is paired with two new, previously unseen works, including a digital piece, *Physalis*, 2024 by David Lisser, and a major commission for the exhibition by Pheobe Cummings.

From The Bowes Museum's collection, *Fruit and Flowers*, 1866, by Henri Fantin



**'This new exhibition is the museum reflecting on its founder's vision and what it means to be a collecting institution at the forefront of artistic trends for the North of England and beyond'**



North East Emerging Artist Award winner Lucy Waters





Ceramic artist  
Phoebe Cummings  
with *Timeline*

Latour (1836-1904), also joins the display.

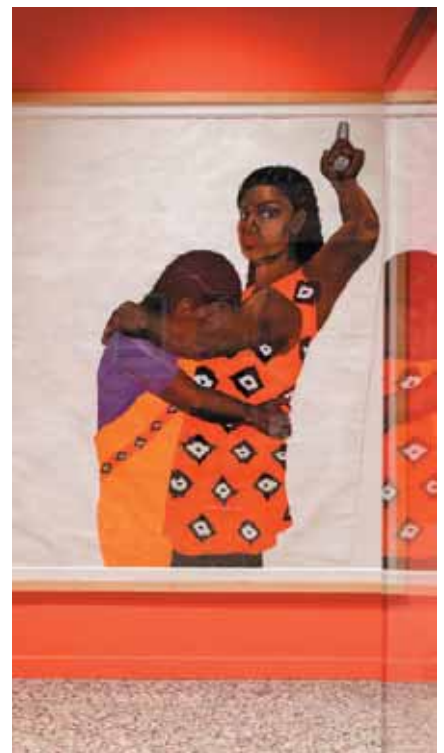
The intimate second section focuses on the female versus male gaze, past and present. It features a provocative selection of works, including the empowering portrait of a woman, *Scheherazade*, date unknown, by Sophie Anderson, adjacent to the painted plate, *Woman's Face*, 1953, by Pablo Picasso and Madoura Pottery, and an earthenware *Urn* by Grayson Perry. The bold figurative wall-textile, *Bodyscape No.4*, 2023, by Daisy Collingridge (b.1991) and two moving portrayals of women embracing in, *As I Stood, Listened and Watched, I Said this Woman is Not for Burning*, 1985, by Sutapa Biswas (b.1962) also feature.

Joy Labinjo's (b.1994) *Chosen Family*, 2024, lies at the heart of section three, which has a focus on collecting and belonging. Here, recent sculptures by Leilah Barbirye (b.1985), including *Kalibbala from the Kuchu Nsenene (Grasshopper) Clan*, 2023-24, stand proudly alongside *Traccia (Table with Bird's Feet)* Cassina Edition, 1973, by Meret Oppenheim (1913 - 1985), and a photographic series by Gillian Wearing (b.1963).

The exhibition concludes with open skies and seas, full of possibilities. Among the selected works, the wild waters of *Maree Montante, pres Boulogne-sur-mer*, 1870, by Joséphine Bowes, is seen side by side with Paul Merrick's (b.1973) large and enigmatic abstract painting, *Lagoon*, 2020. 'Joséphine Bowes was a nineteenth-century innovator and

tastemaker, a collector of young and emerging talent, who amassed a founding collection of 15,000 objects encompassing fine art to ceramics, glassware to textiles, furniture to mechanical objects,' says Vicky Sturrs, director of programmes and collections. 'At the time, more early Impressionist works were purchased by The Bowes Museum than by the National Gallery, London. The driving force behind this new exhibition is the museum reflecting on its founders' vision and what it means to be a collecting institution at the forefront of artistic trends for the North of England and beyond. How, 200 years on, should Joséphine's pioneering vision to create a public museum for everyone, especially the people of Teesdale, live on today and for future generations?'

To coincide with *Joséphine Bowes: Trendsetters and Trailblazers*, a dedicated new display from The Bowes Museum's collection opens to showcase the variety and breadth of Joséphine's textile acquisitions, including woven and embroidered chair covers, ecclesiastical textiles, embroideries, lace, and items purchased at the Exposition Universelle of 1867 in Paris. Surviving items of dress belonging to Joséphine are presented alongside archival material, complemented by examples of French dresses from the 1850s and 1860s. More recent examples of French haute couture from the collection including pieces by iconic designers Jeanne Paquin, Madeleine Vionnet, Elsa Schiaparelli, Jacques Fath and Yves Saint Laurent, also feature, giving a glimpse of what Joséphine might have



Joséphine Bowes: *Trendsetters and Trailblazers*, until June 29  
Joséphine: *A Woman of Taste and Fashion*, from March 22

[thebowesmuseum.org.uk](http://thebowesmuseum.org.uk)

# Skeleton clock supremos

The Victorians loved these timepieces that show off their intricate workings

**T**he 19th century marked the golden age for skeleton clocks, which are defined by having the movement plates cut and pierced into decorative symmetrical designs to leave the wheelwork and escapements visible. Displayed under glass domes, all the intricate detail and workings of the clock become a work of art in their own right.

During the Victorian era skeleton clocks became fashionable, gracing the mantels of affluent British households. Whilst their earliest origins are unclear, skeleton clocks



Brass Skeleton Striking Mantel Clock, by Evans of Handsworth, retailed by Vassalli, Scarborough, circa 1870  
**To be sold in the Spring Fine Sale on March 15 (Estimate: £1,500-2,000 plus buyer's premium)**



'Ed White' Pre-Moon Stainless Steel Chronograph Wristwatch, signed Omega, model: Speedmaster, ref: 105.003, 1964.  
**Sold for £7,500 plus buyer's premium**



Arabesque Skeleton Clock, by Evans of Handsworth  
**(Sold for £1,200 plus buyer's premium)**

began to be made in France towards the end of the 18th century, but there are a small number of unusual examples that were made in England around the same time, for example a unique 1776 clock by Joseph Merlin, now in the Kenwood House Collection. However, the popular form developed from the early French models and had become commonly found in Britain from the 1820s, remaining in fashion until the early 20th century.

Skeleton clocks were largely made by a few specialist makers, predominantly based in London, Birmingham and Liverpool, and more prolific manufacturers such as John Smith & Sons of Clerkenwell and James Condliff of Liverpool supplied retailers who would add their own names to the dials.

Made in numerous different forms, from simple timepieces to clocks with unusual escapements and different complications such as strike on the hour, passing strike, chiming and musical. Some examples were even made with more elaborate decorative brass work in the form of great cathedrals such as Westminster Abbey and York Minster.

Collectors look out for examples with fine workmanship, signs of which include 5/6 spoke wheels, steel hand screws, balance wheels and fusee chains with a good blued finish, well executed detailing to the pierced

brass plates and a nicely polished finish. Often it is difficult to establish the maker of skeleton clocks, as some of the most famous makers did not sign the clocks, and so only by close study of the workmanship the clock design, and the movement plates can the maker be established.

Keep an eye out for pieces by the most in-demand clockmakers, such as John Smith & Sons of Clerkenwell, Evans of Handsworth (Birmingham), John Pace, and James Condliff of Liverpool.

James Condliff opened his business at 32 Gerard Street, Liverpool in 1816, and is regarded as one of the finest English skeleton clockmakers of the 19th century, as well as being known for producing high quality regulators. His skeleton clocks were individually handcrafted and no two of his clocks were made exactly alike. He produced timepieces, striking clocks and chiming examples. It is thought that only a small number of his clocks are still in existence today. Spring Fine Sale, March 15.

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John Knox, Highland Landscape, c.1805, image courtesy of the Fleming Collection

# WHAT'S ON

Take a tour of lovely Grade II\* listed Thirsk Hall, enjoy a bit of jazzy razamatazz, or share some sensational evenings with the stars

## HOUSE & ARCHITECTURE TOUR

*Thirsk Hall, March 21*

There's plenty on at Grade II\* listed Thirsk Hall this month, including a House & Architecture Tour. For Mothering Sunday, there are free Sculpture Garden tickets for all mothers on Saturday, March 29, and also for all visitors with a YO7 postcode on Saturday, March 22. You can claim your complimentary ticket on the door. Under-16s go free.

[thirskhall.com](http://thirskhall.com)



## POETIC VOICE: SONGS & SONNETS

*St Cuthbert's Chapel, Ushaw, March 29, 7.30 to 9.15pm*

The Ushaw Chapel Choir returns for a concert featuring *The Sprig of Thyme* by John Rutter and *Songs and Sonnets* by George Shearing.

[ushaw.org](http://ushaw.org)

## RAZAMATAZZ & ALL THAT JAZZ – THE BRIDGET METCALFE QUINTET

*St George's Venue, Hartlepool, March 14*

Bridget Metcalfe is back in the North East for a series of concert dates with sparkling jazz classics and some more contemporary offerings. Her flawless and floaty Latin rhythms will take your breath away.

[stgeorgesurc.co.uk](http://stgeorgesurc.co.uk)



## MATT GOSS: THE HITS & MORE

*Newcastle Tyne Theatre, March 19  
York Barbican, April 25*

A celebration of all Matt Goss has achieved in his music career and beyond, with sensational songs and an electric atmosphere. With brother Luke, Matt burst onto the global entertainment

scene as lead singer of the pop sensation BROS, becoming the youngest artist to sell out and headline Wembley Stadium, performing to a crowd of more than 77,000 fans. 'Trust me, what I've learnt over the years being on countless stages around the world, this will be your best night of the year!' says the star.

[mattgossofficial.co.uk](http://mattgossofficial.co.uk)



**DAN TIERNAN: STOMP***Newcastle, The Stand, March 1*

The neurodivergent Mancunian wild man, named British Comedian of the Year in 2022, unleashes his trademark high-energy chaos in *Stomp*, which was huge hit at the Edinburgh Fringe. Expect tightly-packed gags about gout and gay awakenings, and a showstopping magical finale.

[dantiernan.co.uk](http://dantiernan.co.uk)

**DAVID GRAY: THE PAST & PRESENT TOUR***Stockton Globe, March 21*

David Gray spent almost a decade striving to make a breakthrough, and when it finally happened, *White Ladder* became one of the best-selling British albums of recent decades and established him as an arena-filling artist.

*Dear Life*, released in January, is his 13th album, with songs full of yearning and hope, with an undercurrent of darkness, is his most lyrically focused collection to date.

[stocktonglobe.co.uk](http://stocktonglobe.co.uk)

**ALEX MITCHELL: TICS TOWARDS PUFFECTION***The Witham, Barnard Castle, April 3*

Comic Alex Mitchell, who made it to the final of *Britain's Got Talent* 2024, has autism and Tourette's. Involuntary movements are a key feature of the syndrome and Mitchell makes them part of his routine. He laughs at himself, his neurodivergence, disability and sexuality, whilst reflecting on some of the most difficult subjects within his own life and wider society. Also appearing at Dance City Newcastle, April 5; The Forum, Northallerton, April 26.

**THIRD PARTY: ALEXANDRA HADDOW***The Stand Comedy Club, Newcastle, March 2*

Alexandra Haddow is taking her hit Edinburgh Festival Fringe show *Third*

Party out on the road, with a stop-off in Newcastle. It's a sex-and-politics themed gig, as she asks: should we all just embrace societal collapse and enter our Last Days of Rome era?

[thestand.co.uk](http://thestand.co.uk)

**CLINTON BAPTISTE: SPECTRAL INTERCOURSE***Stockton Globe, March 18;**Newcastle City Hall, March 19*

The nation's favourite medium is heading to the region. Clinton Baptiste is a fictional comedic character created and portrayed by actor Alex Lowe, best known as a flamboyant and somewhat hapless psychic medium. He first appeared on Peter Kay's hit TV series *Phoenix Nights* and since then his character has gained cult status, leading to four sell-out UK tours as well as his *Paranormal Podcast*. Receiving the audiences' queries and earthbound dilemmas, Clinton promises to reach out to the spirits for answers.

[clintonbaptiste.com](http://clintonbaptiste.com)







# MAKING TRACKS

All aboard! A nine-month celebration of the 200th anniversary of the first journey on the world's first railway begins in the region this month

WORDS **CHRIS LLOYD** PHOTOS **SARAH CALDECOTT**

A 26-mile journey between Shildon and Stockton that transformed how the world traded, travelled and communicated is being celebrated throughout the region this year. The S&DR came into being on September 27, 1875, exactly 200 years ago. It was established to transport coal and other mixed goods from the mines of south Durham to the River Tees at Stockton, via Darlington, Shildon and Yarm. The first steam locomotive to run on the line was called Locomotion No. 1 (originally called Active), which pulled several wagons of coal and goods, and a carriage called Experiment with fare-paying passengers. The key figures of the S&DR included investors and company directors Edward Pease, a retired wool merchant from Darlington, his son Joseph Pease and Jonathan Backhouse from the Darlington bank of the same name, and leading engineers of the time George





New Azuma train  
prepares to depart  
Darlington Station



"STOCKTON AND DARLINGTON RAILWAY, 1825"  
Locomotion No. 1 passing a coach on the day the railway was opened.  
From original painting by Ronald Embleton.

Celebration of the founding  
of the railways at Kynren



Stephenson and Timothy Hackworth.

The S&DR200 Festival will include a re-enactment of the first journey, when a newly renovated replica of Locomotion No. 1, the passenger carriage Experiment and coal wagons will run on sections of the original S&DR line over three days. Spectators will be able to see the train at designated locations and enjoy an accompanying programme of special events along the route.

The festival's major museum partners are Hopetown Darlington, Locomotion in Shildon, Preston Park Museum & Grounds in Stockton-on-Tees and The Story in Durham City. The first three of these attractions are situated on the original S&DR route and their permanent displays include interpretation around the S&DR. All are accessible by rail and will host special festival activities throughout the year.

"S&DR200 is using a world-changing historical event that took place in the region as a starting point to explore the future,"

says festival director Niccy Hallifax. 'The programme will cater for all visitors, including railway enthusiasts, as well as engaging a younger generation by finding new and inventive ways to tell the pioneering S&DR story. We will create magical moments using art, creativity and culture to show international audiences and young people how science, technology, engineering, arts and maths can not only change your own life, but transform the world.'

The Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone was established in 2018 to help rejuvenate and restore the historic railway and to help transform the area into a major heritage attraction and visitor destination. To date £57 million has been spent developing the region's cultural infrastructure ahead of the festival, notably through significant investment in the festival's partner sites: Preston Park Museum & Grounds (part of a £20 million Government investment), Hopetown Darlington (£37

**'S&DR200 is using a world-changing historical event that took place in the region as a starting point to explore the future'**

million) and Locomotion in Shildon (£8 million). The area contains one of the world's most important groups of surviving early railway buildings such as Grade II\* Heighington Station (the world's oldest railway station), Coal Drops in Shildon, as well as Grade I Skerne Bridge, the world's oldest operational railway bridge. ➔



## Dawn of the railway era

**T**uesday, September 27, 1825, saw thousands of people heading on foot, horseback and by carriage to see the dawn of a new era of transport: the railway. West Auckland and Shildon, the nearest settlements to the start of the procession, were full from 5.30am. People crowded up to the railway line where coal wagons had been fitted with seats so horses could pull observers to see the iron horse's debut.

Edward Pease was the man who'd had the vision - and the money - for the Stockton and Darlington Railway, but he was denied his moment of glory by the untimely death of his favourite child. On that very morning, 22-year-old Isaac died in his father's house on Northgate, Darlington.

At 8am, at the foot of Brusselton Bank, midway between West Auckland and Shildon, the opening procession began. Thirteen wagons were attached by a mile-long rope to the stationary engines at the bank top. With hundreds of people clinging to the sides of the wagons, the engines pulled the train 1,960 yards to the top of the bank, then lowered it 880 yards down the other side. There, steaming in readiness, was Locomotion No 1.

**T**he pioneers, members of the Stockton and Darlington Railway committee, took their places in The Experiment - the world's first passenger railway coach, which seated 18 people across an aisle. There were about 38 carriages in that first train. Locomotion and its tender were followed by five wagons full of coal and passengers, one wagon of flour and passengers, one wagon of surveyors and engineers, The Experiment, six wagons of seated people, 14 wagons of standing workmen and six wagons of coal and passengers.

The railway workmen wore blue buttonholes; the railwaymen on duty wore blue sashes. These men stood on the couplings between wagons ready to apply the brakes. Timothy Hackworth was guard, George Stephenson and his brothers James and Ralph were in charge of the engine. At 10am, Hackworth gave the signal, and the Stephensons moved off. Soon, Locomotion was pulling its 80-ton train and 553 passengers at eight miles an hour. Dozens of horsedrawn coaches in its wake struggled to keep up.



**‘By the time Locomotion was ready to move off, there were probably about 700 people on board, a majority of them clinging to the coal wagons’**

The train arrived in north Darlington at midday. It had taken two hours to cover nine miles, with three stoppages totalling 55 minutes, and so its average speed was 8mph. One wagon had been abandoned, one man badly bruised. Yet the opening morning was judged a resounding success.

When the train left Darlington at 12.30pm, a man riding on horseback preceded it carrying a flag. That man is believed to have been John Dixon, after whom a street is named in Darlington. The line curved south through Fighting Cocks and Middleton St George to Goosepool, where Stephenson again stopped to replenish the water barrel.

By the time Locomotion was ready to move off, there were probably about 700 people on board - a majority of them clinging to the sides of the coal wagons.

From Preston Park, the line ran adjacent to the main road from Egglescliffe to Stockton (now the A135). Suddenly, Locomotion (passengers 700, horses nil) drew alongside a stagecoach (passengers 16, horses four). For a while, they were neck-and-neck at 15mph, but quickly Locomotion ran out the winner as the horses tired. Its victory lap led it into Stockton at 3.45pm where, at the Company's Wharf beside the River Tees, a 21-gun salute greeted its arrival.



Hopetown, Darlington



### S&DR200 Festival Highlights

The S&DR200 Festival will present a series of free large-scale outdoor spectacles, events, exhibitions and new art commissions in the public spaces, libraries and museums of County Durham and the Tees Valley from March to November 2025.

#### Opening event Bishop Auckland, March 29

Imitating the dog and SKYMAGIC bring their combination of technology, live performance, and drone show to a celebration of the creative thinking that led to the world-changing opening of the S&DR.

#### Hopetown Darlington, from April

Display of early locomotives; an immersive installation inspired by steam as a source of power; exhibition exploring the future of transport and skills in the era of climate crisis.

#### Locomotion, from April

Locomotion, located in Shildon, known as 'the cradle of the railways', will present an exhibition highlighting Railway Firsts, iconic locomotives and rail vehicles, and talks and lectures aimed at railway enthusiasts.

#### Preston Park

The Stockton-on-Tees museum will present a display of nationally important artworks related to the railways, plus the first public archaeological dig along the original S&DR line, which sits within the museum grounds.

#### The Story (and various locations)

Through authentic voices from letters, diaries, court papers, and other day-to-day records from their collections, The Story at Durham will uncover the impact of the Stockton & Darlington Railway on the socio-economic fabric of the region. Other museums and galleries in the region will present S&DR-related displays including an exhibition at the Mining Art Gallery at the Auckland Project in Bishop Auckland, the Bowes Museum and Raby Castle.

#### Anniversary Celebration September 26, 27 and 28

A newly renovated replica of Locomotion No. 1, the passenger carriage Experiment and coal wagons will run on sections of the original S&DR line over three days. For details of these and other events, see the website.

[sdr200.co.uk](http://sdr200.co.uk)







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# HOUSE *of* DELIGHTS

Binns, the House of Fraser store in Darlington, has had an interesting past. Today, it's a modern retail emporium offering everything from beauty goodies to special occasion dresses and sofas





**A**s one of the last remaining department stores in the Tees Valley, House of Fraser in Darlington is a real pillar of retail in the town. Offering some of the world's most aspirational brands, a luxury beauty hall, restaurant and so much more, it's hugely popular with shoppers from near and far. And the store has truly stood the test of time after, opening more than 200 years ago, back in August 1922.

The building first opened its doors as Binns, a name formed by Quaker draper George Binns in Sunderland in 1807. One of their most iconic pieces of advertising was the simple 'Shop at Binns' messaging that was plastered across trams and buses, helping the brand to spread far and wide, catching the eyes of shoppers beyond the Wear.

It was seen as a shop that was a cut above the rest, growing quickly to become Sunderland's biggest department store before expanding to Darlington in 1922. The Arthur Sanders Ltd. Store was bought, a drapery business based on High Row, which bookended the high street and had a fantastic view over the market.

The store was rebuilt for around £15,000, which would have been a substantial amount in the 1920s. However, disaster struck only a few years later as the largest fire for a generation broke out inside in January 1925. Just as the store itself brought in crowds



**'It's so much bigger than the first building with products over four expansive floors, and a brilliant array of things to browse and buy'**

of shoppers, the fire drew in a crowd of spectators who watched as the newest addition to their high street went up in smoke.

'Bursting out at ten o'clock,' reported the Darlington and Stockton Times, 'it had the effect of providing a thrilling night's entertainment for many thousands. Without doubt, the mass of people congregated in and about High Row, Blackwellgate and Skinnergate at eleven o'clock was the largest seen in Darlington.'

As well as their new store, Binns had lost around £50,000 in retail stock, but undeterred, the company pressed on with its expansion plans. Even before the fire, it had been buying up property just a few doors down on the corner and, on the Monday morning after the fire, one of those properties which had been trading as the Parisian Mantle Company, suddenly reopened under the Binns brand.

Within a few months, the original Darlington Binns store reopened, built in the



classic white brick that defines department stores of this era. Companies were trying to emulate the look of Selfridges, the king of department stores, which had opened on Oxford Street in London in 1909. It was instantly re-welcomed to the high street with open arms, but the new store had to wrap itself around the properties that Binns had yet to buy.

Between the original Darlington Binns and the new shop that opened right after the fire were Sidgwick's drapery, T Woods and Boots. Sidgwick's and Boots were the first to cave in 1935 and were rebuilt so that even today, you can barely see the join, but T Wood, a photographer in a beautiful mock-timber building, held out. When he finally closed in 1953, Binns bought his premises, but it wasn't until 1973 that his store was rebuilt.

Binns itself had been bought out in 1953 by House of Fraser, which gradually became the dominant name on the North East high streets. For example, in 1957 when the ➔



Middlesbrough store was rebuilt on Linthorpe Road in the classic departmental style, it reopened as House of Fraser. But to this day, even after Binns' historic headquarters in Sunderland closed in 1993, Darlington's has been the only branch left to bear the name of Binns. The name was threatened in 2016 when House of Fraser did a near £1m refit on the High Row store, but public pressure ensured that it stayed and it is still proudly emblazoned on the frontage now, right next to the House of Fraser name.

The store definitely looks and feels a lot different to how it did when it opened back in 1922. Of course, it's so much bigger than the first building with products sprawling over four expansive floors, and there's a brilliant array of things to browse and buy.

**S**tarting in the basement, you can marvel at shelves of the latest and trending toys, making it a great spot for gifts. On the ground floor, you can find menswear, with brands like Barbour and Adidas, and the luxury beauty hall, where you can browse some of the biggest makeup, skincare and fragrance brands, such as Clarins, Tom Ford and MAC.

Venturing up to the first floor, you'll find rails of womenswear with something to suit all occasions. If you're looking for a formal dress, you'll be able to find it here, or if you want something more casual, you'll be spoiled for choice. Brands on this floor include Biba, French Connection and Boss, so there's plenty for fans of designer clothes to enjoy.



On the second floor, you'll enjoy perusing the sensational homewares and luxurious sofas from sofa.com. There's absolutely everything you could possibly need transform your home into a space that truly feels like you, from soft furnishings and ornaments, to kitchenware and candles. This floor is also home to Café Zest, a cosy restaurant that's an ideal place to stop for coffee, a bite to eat at lunchtime or to catch up with friends. It provides the perfect rest stop after exploring the shop.

You'll find House of Fraser at 7 High Row, Darlington, DL3 7QE, so make sure to pay a visit the next time you fancy some retail therapy. And don't forget that there's a plethora of brilliant businesses around the town centre, too. Take a look at the website and start planning your trip.



**7 High Row, Darlington DL3 7QE**  
[houseoffraser.co.uk](http://houseoffraser.co.uk)  
[enjoydarlington.co.uk](http://enjoydarlington.co.uk)





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or scan here for more information







## *Cottage for* **ART LOVERS**

A stay in the gatehouse of an historic estate in the Scottish Borders offers a stroll around artworks and picturesque scenery

WORDS: CATHERINE TURNBULL

**T**here's a thrill to be had as the first guests in a new holiday cottage. When I stayed with my sister at East Lodge, a refurbished gatehouse on the historic Bughtrig estate in the Scottish Borders, we felt as though the gorgeous interiors had been thoughtfully redesigned with us in mind.

Owners art dealer Will Ramsay and his wife Natasha, who live in the manor house, extend their generosity with access to their tennis court and extensive grounds dotted with their lifetime collection of eclectic pieces of art in two acres of parkland, woodland and gardens.

Just before dusk, we took a wander through Bughtrig's intimate hedged gardens, past restored greenhouses and the Grass Walk. It's like a mini sculpture park. Giant letters spell out Give Us A Smile Love, and we did. We thought a large white figure on a plinth was musician Nile Rodgers, but it





is in fact called *Rapper man - Godwin*, by artist Araba Ocran, who was inspired by The Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.

We came across a memorial garden and fascinating museum dedicated to Will Ramsay's grandfather, Vice-Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay, who originally bought the estate in 1938 and was the mastermind of the Dunkirk evacuation of more than 338,000 Allied soldiers in 1940.

Later he was appointed naval commander-in-chief for Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of northern France, which began on D-Day on June 6, 1944. He died on active service in a plane crash in January 1945, so only had a short time to enjoy Bughtrig.

The walls inside East Lodge feature original artworks, including a large contemporary still life of a breakfast in oils displayed in the kitchen, where you can take a stool at the countertop. The former gatehouse has been extended from its original small cube, so it has two bedrooms and



East Lodge



Bughtrig Estate

sleeps four. There is a dining room with atmospheric lighting. Natasha Ramsay shows off her design skills, especially in the living room with pink walls, blue furnishings and seats beneath the Georgian sash windows. The first bedroom features a king-size sleigh bed, pink floral wallpaper and Victorian watercolours. The second bedroom is decorated in blues, greens and creams, and can be made up as a double or twin.

An enclosed lawned garden encircling the cottage has seating, a barbecue and a wood-panelled summerhouse with heating, coffee machine and drinks cabinet.

It's only a ten-minute walk to the village of Leitholm, but we ventured by car to nearby Coldstream where the bridge crosses the River Tweed from Scotland to England. There's a great walk here at The Hirsell, a 500-acre park with lake and river.

Another beautiful landscape to visit is near the lovely market town of Kelso - the Roxburghe Estate with the mighty ➔



East Lodge





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Paxton House

Floors Castle at its heart, the largest inhabited house in Scotland. When we visited, the castle was closed, but it reopens on April 12.

Lunch at the Terrace Café in the walled garden made up for it though. Here, the menu designed by the Duke and Duchess of Roxburghe's personal chef is served between 12 and 3pm. An estate-grown beetroot salad with orange and pomegranate was delicious, as were the cakes. Crabtree & Crabtree also market The Head Gardener's House in the walled garden at Floors for holidays.

Craving a stately home fix, we booked a guided tour of Paxton House (house open from Easter to October, grounds all year). For the modest sum of £15 each, we had more than two hours with our guide.

Patrick Home built the mansion between 1758 and 1763 for the love of his life, whom he hoped to marry. It was designed by John and James Adam.

We heard Patrick's story of unrequited love and saw his Thomas Chippendale and George Trotter furniture, his paintings, with some on loan from the National Gallery of Scotland, an astonishing collection of 18th century costumes and high fashion and beautiful interiors designed by Robert Adam. From the grounds, you can walk along the Tweed to Britain's first suspension bridge, the Union Bridge (1820), and cross it from Scotland to England.

There's something rather wonderful about crossing over the frontier and seeing another country on a walk along one of our loveliest rivers. The Scottish Borders area is a special place.

*Crabtree & Crabtree offer three nights at East Lodge, Bughtrig from £503.75. Sleeps 4, 2 bedrooms. The Bughtrig Estate has several other cottages to rent through the agency.*

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crabtreeandcrabtree.com



**'There's something rather wonderful about crossing over the frontier and seeing another country on a walk along one of our loveliest rivers'**



The gardens of Bughtrig



Vice Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay's statue





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# Inspiring CHANGE

Meet the schools who are already firm advocates of International Women's Day's call to 'accelerate action'

WORDS: KELLY ROSE BRADFORD

**F**or its 2025 campaign, International Women's Day is urging us to 'accelerate action' for gender equality – something that many girls' schools already have at the heart of their ethos and values, inspiring their student bodies to raise awareness to help improve the educational, health and wellbeing prospects of young women, both in the UK and abroad, through fundraising and advocacy.

Queen's College London was the first school in the UK to offer academic qualifications to women, and in 2024, it also became the first school to establish an in-house branch of the Girls Human Rights Hub (GHRH), an organisation dedicated to empowering girls and young women to become advocates for their own rights and the rights of their peers. The school's mini-hub was co-founded by 11-year-old pupil, Safiyah.

'We first found out about the GHRH when we were invited to get involved in its first Girls' Human Rights Festival in February 2024,' says headteacher Richard Tillett.

'Safiyah was invited to speak at the opening ceremony at the UK Supreme Court. She set out her reasons for getting involved in the project and her hopes for female empowerment globally. We saw the festival as a great way for pupils to be immersed in discussion around the main inequalities facing

girls and young women around the world. The pupils then came back resolved to try and do something, and the Queen's College Girls Human Rights Hub was born.' Throughout the school, the girls are encouraged to recognise and champion those who have gone before them, with all Year 7 pupils studying a unit on the history of the college as part of their Thrive curriculum.

There is also an active Feminist Society, which has welcomed speakers including the broadcasters Samira Ahmed, Sara Cox and Emma Freud. And now, it is hoped the formation of the Hub will further enhance the girls' learning and personal growth around women's issues.

Although a new initiative, it has already hosted a successful fundraiser – a screening of *The Color Purple* – and holds weekly meetings, facilitated by two teachers, to discuss which areas to focus their charitable efforts on. For 2025, Richard says the girls are 'leaning towards education in developing countries' for their fundraising endeavours.

'The GRHR encourages real change in the real world by focusing on how to advocate, as well as who to advocate to, and what to advocate about,' says Richard.

'It is too easy for young people today to be online activists, protesting without actually influencing. GHRH action is targeted, specific and focused.'

A similar project is the Advocating Girls Forum, an initiative that began in 2023 and

**'It is too easy for young people today to be online activists, protesting without actually influencing'**



Wimbledon High School



PHOTO: PENNIE WITHERS

Clare Strickland, headteacher at The Old Vicarage, Richmond





PHOTO: CHRISTIAN TRAMPENAU

now involves 90 students taken from six state and independent schools along with members of the legal profession. One of the schools involved is Wimbledon High School GDST, where headteacher Fionnuala Kennedy speaks with passion about establishing ‘meaningful equality’ in the justice system, and the importance of giving women a voice no matter where they come from.

‘Advocacy on a local level is crucial to affect change that benefits all girls, from all backgrounds,’ she says. ‘While our challenges may differ, as educators we lead a coalition of schools with the rights and interests of girls and women as our core purpose.’

‘We learn best alongside and from each other – that is how we meet the challenges of the present and the future.’

Fionnuala says it ‘could not be more important’ that women learn about the justice system, both in terms of accessing it, and in being aware of its flaws, and says we need more women entering legal and judicial careers. ➔



Charlotte Avery, former head at St Mary's Cambridge

PHOTO: SIMON WATTS

'The next step for our campaign focuses on two key areas: encouraging consideration of legal careers for our students and encouraging campaigning and awareness by continuing the work started by campaigns such as #EveryonesInvited to lobby for better legal outcomes and treatment for women when reporting rape and sexual abuse.

'We need a justice system that understands and defends those interests as part of meaningful equality,' she adds, 'And our goal is to bring together school students and professionals to work towards that end.'

Indeed, creating opportunities for students to work with those already in the advocacy field can yield amazing results for all concerned.

At the Old Vicarage School in Richmond, the guest speaker at the 2023 annual prize giving was Olly Belcher, an OVS old girl who, in 2008, founded Shivia, a charity which helps women in India work their way out of poverty. Her talk resonated so much with the girls, that Shivia was chosen as the school's charity.

'Shivia inspires OVS girls to believe they can make a real difference to other women's lives,' says Clare Strickland, the school's head. 'At the prize giving, Olly talked about how she started her entrepreneurship at OVS, and how this led on to her philanthropic work today.

She explained the work of Shivia and how their toolkits provided a means by which women can become more enterprising and ultimately support their families and send their girls to school.'

OVS pupils devised a Chicken Walk fundraising project in recognition of Shivia's flagship Poultry Development Services, a programme launched in 2011 to provide women with the equipment and training to start a small enterprise raising chickens and selling the produce. It has so far benefitted more than 18,000 women. 'The head and



Fionnuala Kennedy, headteacher at Wimbledon High School GDST

PHOTO: INDIA HOBSON

deputy head girl met with the team at Shivia and together they presented their idea to the whole school. Their presentation focused on the work of Olly and her team and the impact they have made to the lives of women in India,' says Clare. Pupils from nursery to Year 6 dressed as chickens for their walk through the park and raised £1,673 for Shivia.

'Having an alumna as the founder of the charity allowed the girls to make the connection between their responsibilities at school now and the work they can do in the future to support others.'

Charlotte Avery is another 'old girl' who has left a lasting legacy at her school - but this time, as its former headteacher.

'The St Mary's Cambridge Charlotte Avery Leadership and Service Award was created

to celebrate students who demonstrate exceptional commitment to making positive change in their communities,' Charlotte explains. 'And in line with this year's International Women's Day theme Accelerate Action, we've seen how empowering young women to lead initiatives creates a powerful ripple effect.'

Charlotte believes that when girls realise their capacity to influence positive change, they become 'unstoppable forces for good'.

'It's not just about giving them a voice - it's about helping them understand the weight and worth of that voice in shaping our collective future,' she says.

Charlotte is now the principal at St Cuthbert's school in Auckland, New Zealand, where she is still inspiring her pupils to accelerate action and raise awareness.

Amongst other endeavours, her students have undertaken a period product drive to address period poverty, alongside promoting environmental consciousness, by donating eco-friendly sanitary towels to women in need across Aotearoa and Fiji.

'My drive to advocate for girls stems from a deep conviction that every young woman deserves to have her voice heard and her potential recognised,' Charlotte says.

## FIND OUT MORE

The Girls' Schools Association is a membership association made up of heads from a diverse range of independent and state girls' schools, including many of the top-performing schools in the UK. Together they educate more than 100,000 girls in the UK and internationally. [gsa.uk.com](https://gsa.uk.com)



Richard Tillett, headteachers of Queen's College London

PHOTO: SAM J PEAT





Wimbledon High School students  
PHOTO INDIA HOBSON



# LIVING WITH KIDS

It's full steam ahead for a festival marking a milestone in our railway history – and the world's. Climb aboard and enjoy the ride

**T**his is a momentous year – the 200th anniversary of the first passenger journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway – and this month kicks off the celebrations with an opening event in Bishop Auckland. The high-tech show promises to be quite a spectacle, and it's worth keeping an eye out for other S&DR200 festival activities in the coming months. Otherwise, there's forest school fun for little ones and Mother's Day at The Manor House Hotel and Spa, which any mum would be delighted with (including this one).

*Sarah*

## MAKING TRACKS

Marking the birth of the modern railway system, S&DR200, a nine-month international festival, is taking place across County Durham and Tees Valley in 2025. There's lots going on – including immersive art installations, outdoor events and, of course, plenty of locomotives – but it all starts at the opening event in Bishop Auckland on March 29.

Travel through time and place as theatre company imitating the dog and SKYMAGIC bring their distinctive combination of technology, live performance and drone show to a celebration of the bold innovation, creative thinking and ingenuity



that led to the world-changing opening of the S&DR. Sounds pretty inspiring, eh? Full details of this and other events can be found on the website.

[sdr200.co.uk](http://sdr200.co.uk)

## AQUATIC ADVENTURE

If your son or daughter loves Disney (at 15 and 17, both my girls still do), why not treat them to a performance of The Little Mermaid at Durham's Sir Thomas Allen Assembly Rooms Theatre from March 6 to 8? Follow Ariel as she explores her dreams and the challenges of the sea in student company Hild Bede Theatre's musical debut.

The aquatic adventure promises unforgettable moments and a magical experience for all. Tickets cost £8, £7 for concessions or £6.50 for Durham Student Theatre members.

[durhamstudenttheatre.org](http://durhamstudenttheatre.org)



## FROM LITTLE ACORNS...

The idea of forest schools has certainly taken root (sorry) and they really do seem to work in developing children's love of the great outdoors. One you and your child can take part in together is Little Fledglings at Hardwick Park. During the six-week programme, from March 4 to April 8, each child moves at their own pace, supported by a forest school practitioner. The school aims to inspire children through nature, building their confidence and self-esteem and encouraging individual growth.

Whether they are building, climbing, bug hunting or making mud pies, the idea is that they learn through play with the park as their playground. Suitable for children aged 18 months to five years, who must be accompanied by an adult. Sessions run on Tuesdays from 10am to noon at the Outdoor Learning Area. The cost is £48, including parking passes, and booking with a deposit is required.

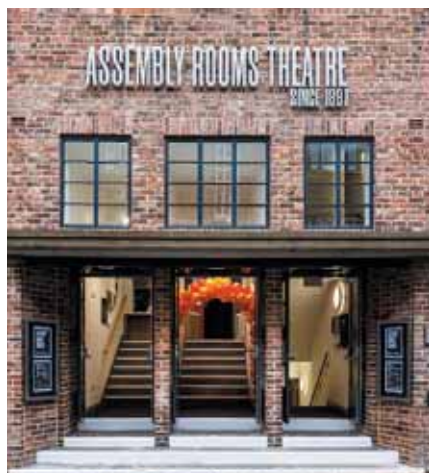
[durham.gov.uk](http://durham.gov.uk)

## LADY OF THE MANOR

March is synonymous with Mother's Day and The Manor House Hotel and Spa, in West Auckland, seems to have it covered, with three different options for serious spoiling. Mother's Day lunch takes place in the Knights Hall and includes three courses and live music from Alex Hall, plus a special gift for the guest of honour.

Alternatively, you can opt for afternoon tea, again with live music and a gift, or if you really want to push the boat out, go for the Mother's Day spa package, with four hours' spa access, a TEMPLESPA facial and gift bag and sparkling afternoon tea – yes, please! Booking required.

[manorhousehotel.net](http://manorhousehotel.net)







*We warmly invite you to our Open Events  
on Saturday 8th March  
and Saturday 7th June 2025*



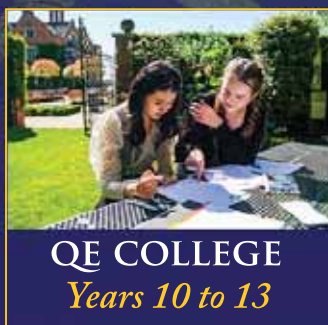
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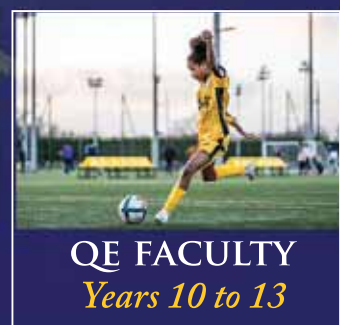
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# OPEN EVENT

Learn more about Durham Sixth Form Centre and the wide range of opportunities available to students there

**P**rospective students, parents and carers are invited to explore the wide range of opportunities available at Durham Sixth Form Centre at an Open Event on Thursday, April 10, from 4.30pm to 7.30pm. Meet with our specialist staff, hear about our students' outstanding achievements and experience the vibrant community that makes Durham Sixth Form Centre an excellent place to study. During the Open Event, you will have the chance to:

- Talk to our specialist teachers to learn more about the diverse range of over 30 A-Level and almost 20 vocational courses tailored to suit different aspirations and career paths.

- Meet current students to hear first-hand about their personal experiences, including their academic journeys and enrichment opportunities such as The Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award, national/international trips, local clubs and societies.

- Tour the facilities, including the science labs, art studios and gallery, TV studio, theatre and classrooms.

- Discuss future pathways, from university preparation to apprenticeships and employment support, with our expert Progression Team.

'We look forward to welcoming students and their parents/carers to our second opening evening,' says Principal Jo Lain. 'Our staff are on hand to answer any question you might have about post-16 education. It's a great opportunity to see and hear what we stand for; high quality teaching and learning alongside excellent care which brings out the best in all our students.'

Whether you are looking to continue your education in a challenging and inspiring environment or seeking guidance on your next steps, this Open Event will provide the information you need to make an informed decision about your future.

[durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk](http://durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk)



**DURHAM**  
SIXTH FORM CENTRE

**OPEN EVENT**  
Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April  
4:30pm - 7:30pm



[durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk](http://durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk)





# WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

In celebration of International Women's Day this month, we salute the North East's amazing female entrepreneurs and leaders



**T**o mark International Women's Day on March 8, we are proud to introduce some of the region's amazing businesswomen. Representing a wide range of sectors from beauty, health and wellbeing, to law, education and industry, they reveal what keeps them focused and what they love about their work.

County Durham entrepreneur Sara Davies is a fabulous example of where passion and drive can lead you. Well known to us all from her TV appearances on *Dragon's Den*, Sara founded her first business, Crafter's Companion, while she was at York University. By the time she was 21, she had a first-class honours degree under her belt and the company had made Sara a millionaire.

Passionate about helping others achieve their dreams,

Sara works to help women in business and champions opportunities for talent in the North East. In her latest outing on the BBC, she's in search of other people who have a big idea of their own, but lack the expertise to put it into action. *The Big Idea Works* shows how connecting the right ideas with the right expertise can lead to something wonderful. Sara and her gang of expert makers work with aspiring inventors in a North East workshop to take their ideas and transform them into the wonderful working prototypes that they have been dreaming of.

Now that is inspiring...

**For more details of International Women's Day events, see the website.**  
**[internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com)**

## PROMOTION

### BROGAN & ALESSIA HODGSON SORELLE BEAUTY

**What keeps you focused?**

Wanting to achieve the best for ourselves and our clients keeps us focused and driven. We strive to be the best.

**What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?**

That walking into Sorelle Beauty is like walking into a little piece of Heaven.

**What makes your business stand out?**

The greatest greeting is a friendly smile, so helping clients to feel comfortable and relaxed the moment they walk through our pink door.

**32 Duke Street, Darlington, DL3 7AQ.**  
**sorelleinbeauty.co.uk**

### DIONE HALL COAST HOLISTIC TRAINING

**What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?**

As my learner completed her training, she warmly expressed that she found me inspirational. Moments like these touch my heart and remind me why I love what I do.

**What do you love about your job?**

Sharing skills with like-minded people and seeing their businesses flourish is incredibly satisfying. Being part of their journey, seeing aspirations become reality and witnessing their success is a true joy.

**What makes your business stand out?**

Because of the care and passion we put into teaching, my tutors and I are genuinely invested in each student's success, creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment with small class sizes that encourage individual growth.

**North Shields, NE30 3HG.**  
**coastholistictraining.co.uk**



### KATE HUDSON BARISTOCRACY COFFEE

**What do you love about your job?**

The connection we have with other small businesses – the smallholders and family farms that grow the coffee and the indie cafés here in the UK that we supply.

**What makes your business stand out?**

Our love and enthusiasm for speciality coffee and how much we want to help our customers enjoy our coffee at home.

**Which of your products would you recommend?**

We were awarded a Great Taste star for the beautiful Ugandan coffee on sale now. It tastes like strawberries and cream. It's spectacular!

**North Shields, NE29 8SG.**  
**baristocracymcoffee.com**



## DR ELIZABETH NEWMAN-EARL

e50K



### What keeps you focused?

Knowing that we are delivering long-lasting impact to communities and businesses who need it. We are at the forefront of creating a culture of social impact and setting incredibly high standards across multiple industries. The whole team have such a diversity of talent, it is amazing to bring this group of women together to make a difference in the ways we have.

### What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?

That e50K is a network of talented, empathetic experts.

### What do you love about your job?

We are a collective of military community members with a vision to reduce the discrepancies between civilian and service life for armed forces families.

We all come from the defence community, and are powerful innovators who inspire each other and the community to make real, impactful change.

[e50K.org.uk](http://e50K.org.uk)

## CAROLE BOOKLESS & TRISH GUY

PINK SPAGHETTI

### What do you love about your job?

We love making the lives of small business owners easier. Being able to step in and take on time-consuming tasks so business owners can focus on their businesses or spend more time with their friends and family is really satisfying. It can make a huge difference to them knowing their work is in safe hands.

### What makes your business stand out?

We are part of a national franchise and so you are not just tapping into our knowledge; you have the knowledge of the network too, so if we can't help, we generally know someone who can.

**Pink Spaghetti PA Services Teesside**  
[pink-spaghetti.co.uk](http://pink-spaghetti.co.uk)



## CAROLE CAMERON

QUEEN MARY'S SCHOOL



### What do you love about your job?

Every day is different. Educating and empowering the next generation of young women is such a privilege. Greeting children and colleagues on the doorstep each morning always makes my day.

### What keeps you focused?

My role as Head brings huge responsibility for shaping young lives. Getting the balance between keeping traditions alive and offering dynamic new opportunities is key.

### What makes your business stand out?

Queen Mary's School is at the forefront of all-girls education in the North with our reputation for academic, adventure, musical, sporting and equestrian excellence. One hundred years young in 2025, there is so much to celebrate.

**Queen Mary's School, Topcliffe, Thirsk, YO7 3BZ.**  
[queenmarys.org](http://queenmarys.org)

WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# KERRY METCALFE

***The Business Mums Club has given hundreds of Mumpreneurs the confidence to build and grow their businesses alongside raising their children***

## **Tell us a little about your background**

While I was on maternity leave with my first-born, the company I worked for was having a restructure so I made the scary decision to take voluntary redundancy. Then, during Covid, I launched my own marketing company. After having my second child, I realised there was a lack of support for parents wanting to grow their business around young children and I launched The Business Mums© to offer support to mums juggling entrepreneurship and motherhood.

## **Where did it all start for you?**

The launch came from my own negative experience after I welcomed my second child. I knew the importance of business networking but as a tired mum with a newborn and toddler, I struggled to stay awake after 7pm so evening events were a no-go. Daytime events were a struggle, too, as I had very limited childcare. The tipping point was being refused entry to a 'relaxed' networking event when I turned up with my son asleep in his car seat.

Being told 'Sorry love, this isn't the right environment' lit a fire inside of me. Who were they to tell me I couldn't run a successful business and be a mother!? After tears, anger and frustration, I decided to find a solution to my problem. I created my own networking events and launched The Business Mums©, child-friendly networking events. No more choosing between 'mum' and 'business owner', here you can do both! Every month, I welcomed so many inspirational women proving that we can do it all.

## **What services do you offer them?**

I have a free Facebook community, with thousands of mums worldwide, which offers support and advice. Every month I run online networking events and every few months, I run in-person networking events in Darlington, County Durham.

Children (of all ages) are welcome at any of my networking events as I know, first-hand, just how hard it can be to juggle. I also have an online membership (The Business Mums Club©) where you receive monthly workshops from guest speakers, regular group marketing support, networking, a private group chat and more. Lastly, for more personalised support, I offer 1-1 Power Hours.



**'I am on a one-woman-mission to show the world that mums make fantastic business owners'**

## **Who are your members?**

Women all juggling the demands of motherhood and businesses. Whether you've been in business for years and are looking forward to the next stage, or you're just sitting on an idea for a business but haven't even made a start, there's support there for you.

## **Why do you think your business is so successful?**

Every single day I see business owners using social media as their highlight reel, but for me, this doesn't work. I'm relatable to my audience because I share everything, including the tough times, in the hope that

it will resonate with others and show them that not every day is going to be 'perfect' and that's okay.

I am on a one-woman-mission to show the world that mums make fantastic business owners and I want to give them all the support they need to make a success out of theirs.



This month's live online networking event is on Monday, March 17, at 1pm.  
See website for details

**kerrymetcalfe.com**

**I: @kerrymetcalfe\_**

**F: /groups/thebusinessmums**



## PROMOTION

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### NICOLA ZIELINSKI-GRAY AROHA HEALING



#### What keeps you focused?

My clients, my family, daily meditation, creating a vision board each year and practising positive affirmations.

#### What do you love about your job?

My motto is 'love what you do'. I absolutely embrace attending holistic fairs and festivals whilst teaching at my community classes throughout the north east, as well as online.

#### What makes your business stand out?

'Aroha' means love in New Zealand where I started my business as an angelic reiki healer. Everything I do always comes from the heart. Even my handmade candles are made with love, infused with healing crystals and angelic reiki.

[arohahealing.co.uk](http://arohahealing.co.uk)

**'If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, then you are an excellent leader'**

- Dolly Parton

### TRACY SNELL TERRACE AESTHETICS

#### What do you love about your job?

Owning an aesthetics clinic provides the perfect balance of independence, creativity, and the ability to transform my clients' confidence and lives. I am passionate about enhancing natural beauty through expert anti-wrinkle and rejuvenation treatments, helping my clients feel empowered, radiant, and the best version of themselves.

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the boost in self-esteem that these treatments bring.

#### What makes your business stand out?

At Terrace Aesthetics, I build strong client relationships by truly listening and creating personalised treatment plans. At 57, I understand ageing first-hand and focus on fostering confidence and trust through expert care and guidance.

[terraceaesthetics@outlook.com](mailto:terraceaesthetics@outlook.com)



### GENA KING HEART AND SOUL REIKI



#### What do you love most about your job?

As a reiki master teacher, it is always exciting to introduce students to the many benefits of learning reiki. However, I also love working with my own clientele, who often become lovely friends.

#### What makes your business stand out?

I believe that I take the 'woo-woo' out of holistic therapies and show that they are available to everyone. My approach is intuitive and personalised.

#### What keeps you focused?

Reiki is life-changing, and teaching these skills is a privilege. I am forever grateful for the amazing people I meet both as a teacher and as a practitioner.

[heartandsoulreiki.org](http://heartandsoulreiki.org)

WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# AMBER KOTRRI

***Amber Kotrri is the woman behind House of Zana Workwear, a groundbreaking and ethical brand based in Eaglescliffe***

**Can you tell us about your journey as an entrepreneur?**

I launched House of Zana in 2018 as a brand focused on ethical and sustainable fashion, then expanded with House of Zana Manufacturing, bringing production in-house to maintain high-quality craftsmanship. Then last year I launched House of Zana Workwear, a brand dedicated to revolutionising professional uniforms, especially for women. House of Zana is currently undergoing an exciting rebrand, but we will be back soon - better than ever!

**What inspired you to create House of Zana Workwear?**

The idea came from a conversation with an NHS subsidiary at North Tees Hospital. They shared the struggles healthcare professionals – especially women – face when it comes to well-fitting, high-quality uniforms. It became clear to me that the workwear industry had overlooked women for far too long, so I saw this as an opportunity to bring stylish, practical, and ethical uniforms to the market.

When our partnership with the NHS subsidiary began, my team went into hospitals to speak directly with staff. We wanted to understand first-hand the challenges they faced with their uniforms. Our designers worked with them to improve the design, fit and overall quality, ensuring their day-to-day jobs were no longer hindered by what they were wearing. This hands-on research was invaluable in creating uniforms that truly meet the needs of working professionals.

**How does House of Zana Workwear stand out from other workwear brands?**

Our partnership with an NHS subsidiary is something that really sets us apart, as well as our focus on ethical, sustainable manufacturing without compromising on practicality, style or affordability. Our uniforms are designed to be high-quality, durable and flattering, ensuring women feel both professional and comfortable in their work attire. While we do supply menswear, our primary focus is on delivering the innovation and elegance that women in the

workforce deserve. Plus, because we have our own manufacturing facility, we can offer fully customisable uniforms tailored to the exact needs of any business.

**Running multiple businesses while raising three children must be challenging. How do you manage it all?**

It's definitely a balancing act! Growing the businesses has been no easy feat and I've faced many challenges along the way. But I couldn't have done it without my incredible team. Their passion are the driving force behind House of Zana Workwear. They believe in our mission as much as I do, and we are growing from strength to strength.

**What has been the response to House of Zana Workwear so far?**

Incredible! We're already seeing interest from other industries like hospitality and corporate sectors. One of the most amazing moments for me has been seeing businesses throughout the North wearing House of Zana Workwear. It's a true testament to the hard work and dedication of my team.

**What's next?**

We're aiming to redefine uniforms across various sectors, ensuring that professionals have workwear that is stylish, comfortable, and functional. We're also looking at expanding our manufacturing capabilities and growing our team. With the ability to customise uniforms for any business requirements, we're excited to help more companies create a workwear identity. I can't wait to see where this journey takes us.

**What does International Women's Day mean to you?**

It's about celebrating resilience, ambition and the incredible contributions of women in all industries. As a female entrepreneur, I want to inspire other women to chase their dreams, break barriers and create their own success stories. There's no limit to what we can achieve!

 **HOUSE OF ZANA**  
WORKWEAR

[houseofzanaworkwear.co.uk](https://houseofzanaworkwear.co.uk)  
I: [houseofzanaworkwear](https://houseofzanaworkwear)





WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# DR REBECCA DINSDALE

***The Lifejoy coach and author helps women transform burnout into balance through her books, counselling and life-coaching sessions***

**What keeps you focused?**

I have been very fortunate with the outstanding people in my life. My grandmother Ivy was the most focused woman. She built a stellar medical career and took herself off to China to run a women's hospital in the 1930s. She learned the language in a year and had many encounters with injustice and tyranny. Working hard to make the most of your potential was imbued in everything she did, alongside taking care of others.

All my work is based on that ethical effort. She loved people very well and was a wise helper. I want to be like that in life and work.

**What's the best compliment a client has paid you?**

I love my clients and readers. Helping them gives me a loving purpose after immense personal adversity in many different areas. When they message me with the triumphs, it fills my heart with joy. I am so proud of them. Several had said that I am my grandmother's girl, which is the best of compliments.

**What do you love about your job?**

Seeing good people reclaim their worth and improve their lives; helping them transform their challenges and improving their mental, physical and emotional health. I help women with health challenges, grief and major changes in life and family caring needs to put themselves on the life list. My clients have improved their careers, written books and overcome anxiety to speak in public which is joyous for us all.

**What makes your business stand out?**

I hope that I offer the best care because I have immense empathy, experience and have worked to earn a comprehensive range of qualifications. I know what it is to struggle and am a coping strategies expert.

My Lifejoy philosophy stands for Love, Integrity, Fortitude, Energy, Order and You. It blends counselling and coaching to suit the client needs and I've written five books on courage, hope and joy. My work as a patron of mental health charity Headlight also offers a unique insight and depth of care to my clients.



**Which of your products would you recommend?**

My books are designed to help you on each page. They help you to help yourself and see the wonder within you. *Inspiring Ivy – Courage and Care in China and Beyond* took me ten years to write and has inspired countless women to take care of themselves and others.

One of my clients said we need a phrase – Be more Ivy! I hope Ivy is smiling about that in heaven. My 1-2-1 work is very rewarding and I offer the first session for free because that's what Ivy would have done. She was my best friend and deserves her light to keep shining in the world.

**What would you be doing if you weren't running your business?**

I had severe ME for 20 years, so being well enough to work is a wonderful gift. I've been self-employed for 13 years and every day is a blessing to help brave women transform their burnout into balance.

**Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale**  
**The Lifejoy Coach and Author**  
**6 Bonaventure, Old Penshaw Village,**  
**Tyne and Wear DH4 7EP**  
**0191 5843941**  
**0750 481 5638**  
**drrebecca.org.uk**

## PROMOTION

### KELLY M WHITFIELD

KLIK UK (SaaS) Ltd



#### What keeps you focused?

The want and the will to BE and DO better. It is as simple as that. I'm a proper hunter-gatherer. I want to provide for my tribe. I cannot bear to stand still – I want to disrupt, fix and fly... One life, right?

#### What makes your business stand out?

The potential of KLIK SaaS is phenomenal. It can be licensed to power a machine that makes money while you sleep (a cloud-based platform that generates recurring revenue) as easily as it can connect a community, created to inspire skills and solve problems around recruitment. I'm a serial entrepreneur, but I genuinely believe KLIK is one of the best things I have ever created.

[kliksaas.com](http://kliksaas.com)

### AMY MARTIN

QUEEN ETHELBURGA'S

#### What do you love about your job as chair of the Collegiate Board?

For me it's the people who make up Team QE. Knowing every student is being supported by such dedicated members of staff, and being given opportunities beyond what I could have imagined. This last term alone we've had students visit Iceland, compete in global Esports competitions and have taken part in a motorsports race. Seeing our students thrive from the opportunities available to them is so rewarding and that is thanks to our team.

#### What makes your business stand out?

We believe as a school that every child has the opportunity to achieve and we take this a step further by offering two senior pathways that allow your child to find an education that suits them – not one they have to try and fit in with.

**Queen Ethelburga's, Thorpe Underwood, York YO26 9SS**  
[qe.org](http://qe.org)



### DEBORAH MITCHELL

DM FUNERALS



#### What makes your business stand out?

I'm a female-owned funeral home. I am meticulous, making lists and ticking them off one by one. I'm also passionate about sustainability and always looking for ways to implement greener options. I have signed the Armed Forces covenant as I offer discounted funerals for veterans. Also, my funeral wishes service. I feel that it is important for family's to document their wishes to alleviate some of the stress in the event of their death.

#### What are the best compliments you have received?

I have received five star reviews. One of my clients said I made everything much easier at such a difficult time.

**Washington NE38 8LY**  
[dmfuneralservices.co.uk](http://dmfuneralservices.co.uk)



WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# CLAIRE WATKINS

*At her Durham clinic, Claire Watkins treats a wide range of conditions, from chronic pain to infertility and mental health*

## Where did it all start for you?

After 13 years as a Chartered Civil Engineering Surveyor, my journey began in 2018 when I received acupuncture to help ease the side effects of chemotherapy for breast cancer. The profound impact it had on my recovery sparked a realisation; I wanted to retrain as an acupuncturist to support others. In 2020, I embarked on a four-year degree in acupuncture at the Northern College of Acupuncture in York. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I graduated with a First-Class Honours degree and opened my clinic room in Durham last September.

## Who are your clients?

My patients are often individuals living with long-term health conditions who seek additional support alongside their existing NHS care to help manage symptoms. Others patients have acute conditions and seek a natural and effective way to support their recovery.

## What can you help with?

I treat a wide range of conditions, including sports injuries, chronic pain, sciatica, osteoarthritis, menstrual pain, menopausal symptoms, sleep issues and digestive disorders. I also support patients with mental health conditions, autoimmune diseases and those undergoing cancer treatment, plus, as a member of the Acupuncture Fertility Network (AFN), I help families trying to conceive, both naturally and through IVF. While many patients seek acupuncture for stress and fatigue, I am increasingly seeing those looking for support with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and Long-Covid.

## What does customer service look like for you?

In my acupuncture clinic, exceptional service means providing a professional, caring and supportive experience where patients feel comfortable and safe, while knowing that their treatment is confidential. Every treatment is tailored to the individual using a Chinese medicine diagnosis, addressing not just their symptoms, but the root cause.

Follow-up care is also a key part of my approach. Whether it's checking in after a session, providing lifestyle advice, Chinese medicine diet advice or answering any questions, I want my patients to know



that their health journey matters to me. True customer service, in my view, is about building trust and lasting relationships, not just providing a service.

## Why do you think your business is so successful?

Because of my commitment to providing the highest standard of care for my patients. In the UK, acupuncture does not have statutory regulation, meaning some practitioners may have only completed short courses. To ensure I could offer the best possible treatment, I chose a British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) approved course and studied for four years.

This level of training allowed me to become a member of the British Acupuncture Council (BACc), the UK's largest member-led professional body for traditional acupuncturists, and gain PSA (Professional Standards Agency) accreditation. Membership requires adherence to strict codes of professional conduct and safe practice, ensuring my patients receive safe, effective and evidence-based treatments. GPs can refer patients

to practitioners with PSA Accreditation.

Beyond qualifications, my success also comes from offering a service where patients feel truly heard. I provide a safe, supportive space where people have the time to discuss their health concerns without feeling rushed. Having personally experienced some of the conditions I treat, I understand the challenges of navigating health issues. This lived experience allows me to bring empathy, insight and a deeper level of care, helping patients feel comfortable, listened to and supported throughout their treatments.



**Claire Watkins Acupuncture, Unit 23L,  
Waldon House, Durham, DH1 1TH  
07549681003  
clairewatkinsacupuncture.com**

## PROMOTION

### TRACY TRATTLES

FACE ET AL



#### What do you love about your work

I am passionate about our little business. I love initial consultations where I can get to the root of the clients' needs and help them progress with correct treatments. It's such a privilege to meet and gain the trust of people who pass through our door. We offer a bespoke service and concentrate not on a hard sell, but on long-term personal relationships. Some of the most satisfying feedback I receive is from younger females suffering with excessive hair growth. It is so lovely to give them back their confidence and make a real difference.

#### What treatments do you recommend?

All of our products are high-end and FDA approved. We are especially proud of our Lumenis M22 IPL, our Skinpen which is one of the best micro needling devices and our Dermalux tri wave.

**Northumberland St, Darlington DL3 7HJ**  
**Hello@faceetal.com**

### LUCY WESTON

LUCY ALEXANDRA HAIR AT FORTY7 THE SALON

#### What do you love about your job?

As a hair stylist, the best part of my job is seeing the reaction on my clients' faces when they see themselves in the mirror and how I can make people feel good about themselves.

#### What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?

Hair is so important to how we feel about ourselves that it's a huge compliment every time a client rebooks with me, as it means they love what I've done.

#### What makes your business stand out?

The salon is a warm, welcoming and friendly place where I strive to make my clients look and feel fabulous about themselves.

**Consiscliffe Road, Darlington DL3 7EH**

**01325 240024**

**I: @lucyalexandrahair**



### LORRAINE FORSHAW

INSPIRA BATHROOMS



#### What makes your business stand out?

As a family business, reputation is everything and our team are the heart of this. Our talented designers not only create beautiful designs, but also have the technical knowledge. Having in-house fitting teams means we can guarantee the quality of the installation.

#### Which of your products would you recommend?

A new bathroom should last for years. That's why we only use brands that will stand the test of time. We complement these with brands which are exclusive to us, offering beautiful, bespoke options.

#### What do you love about your job?

The delight of customers when they say: 'I love my new bathroom!'

**Team Valley NE11 0JY**  
**inspirabathrooms.co.uk**  
**0191 491 3005**



WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# LINDA JONES

***Helping those dealing with long-term changes in their health is the goal of Newton Aycliffe-based Occupational Health and Training Services Ltd***

**What's the best compliment a client has paid you?**

From an employer: That they were able to move forward and make an informed decision regarding a difficult case. From an employee: I often hear that they might have been wary of attending, but in the end are glad they did as they now understand a lot more and know what action they can take.

**What do you love about your job?**

Occupational therapists work with anyone who may be experiencing physical, psychological and/or social problems, either from birth or as a result of trauma, illness or ageing. Our goal is to help clients have independent, productive and satisfying lives.

I love looking after people. I've been interested in nursing from a very young age. Over the years, I transitioned from comforting stuffed animals to real-life patients and, for some time, working with major trauma. I moved into occupational health some years ago, using that knowledge and experience, along with additional specialist training to guide and advise both employees and employers.

While it may not have the immediate drama of trauma care and focuses much more on prevention, it also involves supporting people who may be learning to deal with long term changes in their health, but want to continue working.

Occupational health goes beyond merely treating injuries. It aims to foster a culture of health within organisations. By identifying potential hazards and health



**‘Instead of responding to emergencies, I now concentrate on preventing them. This shift from reactive to proactive care is essential in today's fast-paced work environments’**

risks, and providing education and training, we empower employers and employees to manage these effectively and prevent many issues before they arise.

My role in occupational health is a natural extension of my previous work, focusing on caring for people on a broader scale.

Instead of responding to emergencies, I now concentrate on preventing them. Work plays a significant role in people's lives and is generally beneficial for their health. This shift from reactive to proactive care is essential in today's fast-paced work environments.

**What makes your business stand out?**

Our unique blend of personal touch and expertise ensures that when clients call us, they feel recognised and valued. We pride ourselves on our diverse and extensive

knowledge base, allowing us to provide quick, knowledgeable, and impartial responses. Clients appreciate that they can reach out to us without navigating long automated menus or speaking to someone unfamiliar with their needs.



**OHTS, The Work Place, Aycliffe Business Park, Newton Aycliffe, DL5 6AH.  
01325 321055  
linda@ohservices.org  
support@ohservices.org**

WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# SARAH BAPTIST

***Sarah Baptist owns 415 Professional Aesthetics Ltd. in Gateshead, which offers advanced non-surgical treatments tailored to help you look and feel your best***

## **What keeps you focused?**

Within the world of aesthetic medicine, it is difficult for the public to know who and what treatments to trust. Amidst the horror stories and headlines, it has always been my focus that patients know their safety at 415 Professional Aesthetics is my priority. As a registered prescribing nurse with over 24 years of experience, it is my responsibility to ensure every treatment leads to a positive, natural outcome. It's essential for trust, patient wellbeing and, of course, our reputation.

## **What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?**

It was from a female patient who had struggled with her mental health and self-esteem for years due to her skin condition. With my support, professional expertise and her commitment, I watched this patient make a remarkable change, allowing her to embrace new opportunities and feel empowered at last in her own skin. She said I had saved her life and it was a reminder of just how life-changing some treatments can be and what a privilege it is to make this happen.

## **What do you love about your job?**

Witnessing the transformative results our treatments bring to patients' lives. It's incredibly rewarding to see both physical and emotional changes that boost confidence and enhance wellbeing. Beyond the treatments, the relationships we build with our patients are invaluable. Watching their journey from feeling uncertain to seeing them embrace their best selves is truly inspiring. It's these meaningful connections and transformations that make my work so fulfilling.

## **What makes your business stand out?**

I have tirelessly built my clinic to be a Save Face 5-Star registered clinic, proudly holding Platinum Status for over five years. Save Face is a UK-based register of accredited aesthetic practitioners and clinics that adhere to high standards of safety, ethics and professionalism. It's an independent, government-approved certification that helps patients find trusted, qualified professionals for aesthetic treatments. Our platinum status demonstrates outstanding practice and



patient care. You can be certain that our focus is always on providing safe, bespoke treatments. One size doesn't fit all and your satisfaction, and confidence and safety are our top priorities every step of the way.

I am also a national ambassador for PCA Skin, a professional skincare brand known for its advanced, science-backed formulations, and regional lead for The Nurses Network, which supports other practitioners navigate their business in the industry with training and mentoring.

## **Which of your products would you recommend?**

My favourite treatments are those that are restorative and combine both natural-looking results and lasting impact. I especially love working with polynucleotides and skin boosters for skin regeneration – they're incredibly effective at promoting collagen production and rejuvenating the skin, improving overall radiance. Another favourite is replacing volume loss using dermal

fillers. Whether it's enhancing features or rejuvenating skin, I find immense satisfaction in creating results that make patients feel more confident and comfortable in their own skin. Our bespoke consultations ensure we create a personalised treatment plan to give you the best possible outcome.

## **What would you be doing if you weren't running your business?**

You'd probably find me travelling the world in a camper van, discovering the best open water swimming spots. From serene lakes to crystal-clear ocean coves, I would be swimming distances for charity and challenging myself to something. Spending quality time with my family would always be at the top of the list too, as balancing this can be tricky at times.

**415 Professional Aesthetics Ltd.,  
Gateshead NE9 5AN  
415clinic.co.uk  
07958061950**





WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# JAYNE SADDIQUE

***With a wealth of knowledge and experience, Darlington-based Ann Cordey Estate Agents like to keep their customers moving!***

**Tell us a bit about the business**

Ann Cordey Estate agents have been established since 1996. I joined the company in 2005 and recently took over the business in 2020, rebranding and investing to ensure the trusted reputation of Ann Cordey Estate Agents continues. We are an independent, family-run business driven by passion and commitment to providing an excellent service to our clients.

We were awarded Gold Standard by the British Property Awards for best estate agent in Darlington for sales in 2023 and 2024, which resulted in a bronze award for best estate agent in the whole of the North East.

**What keeps you focused?**

Ensuring that I provide my clients with a positive experience when selling or buying. Moving house or selling is one of the most stressful things you can do and I feel it is a privilege each and every time trust has been placed in me, and the agency, to help.

**What makes your business stand out?**

Our trusted reputation. We have been keeping people moving since 1996 and are one of the most prominent estate agents in Darlington. Independently owned and managed, we provide a personal service, one where our clients feel valued.

**What are the best compliments from clients?**

All of them! We receive a lot of positive feedback with the same words used over and over – honest, professional, friendly, reliable. One compliment that does stand out was from a client who said I had done such a wonderful job preparing their property brochure and taking photographs to get them up for sale that they realised how nice their home was and no longer wished to move!

**What do you love about your job?**

Helping people by being a small part of their lives at such a big time. I see it as a privilege and after 20 years I have never tired of it. Each day there are new people and new homes to visit. It is so varied and interesting.

.....  
**Ann Cordey Estate Agents, 13 Duke Street, Darlington DL3 7RX**  
**01325 488433**  
**annecordey.com**  
**sales@annecordey.com**



**‘Moving house or selling is one of the most stressful things you can do’**

WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# SARAH PIKE

***The Teesside-based break-up and divorce coach specialises in supporting people through this difficult time in their lives***

**What's the best compliment a client has ever paid you?**

When we are reaching the end of our sessions, almost all of my clients will say something along the lines of 'I wish I had known you earlier' or 'Why couldn't I have met you years ago' – which is so lovely to hear. However, I always tell them: 'It was you who did it, you did the work during and between the sessions, you went to the mediation/court hearing/faced your ex as solid as a rock... It was in you the whole time – I simply coached it out of you so you could see it and we work with what you've got.'

**What do you love about your job?**

I am so grateful to support my clients, helping people through the various stages of divorce and separation. My clients are truly amazing individuals who come to me from a huge range of complex circumstances. These can range from adultery to drifting apart, narcissistic, emotional, financial, psychological and physical abuse, as well as coercive control.

Every day is different, but everyone is treated the same. There is no 'one size fits all', no set timeframe for healing or a tick box system to say 'Well done, you've passed this section, you should feel like this now' – that's just unrealistic. The sad thing is that when a couple separates – the mask doesn't just slip, it drops to the ground!

Some individuals may not have seen this side of their partner throughout the relationship.

Others may have seen their ex in action – in business, for example – but thought it would never be turned onto them or 'they would never be like that with me'. But when the gloves come off – alongside the fact your world has been turned upside down, it's not easy to handle alone. Using specific tools



and techniques that help give clients clarity around their current situation, why their ex behaves in this way and what we may also expect going forwards.

Something as simple as being prepared for seeing an ex again – whether that is in child handovers, mediation or court hearings – is hugely empowering for clients, who previously have been shells of their former selves.

**What is your mantra?**

Healing takes as long as it takes. Feelings and emotions are complex. We must respect as we work through the process.

One thing I do know is this work enables clients navigate divorce and separation

processes in a more supported, guided and healthier way. Guiding clients to help understand their emotions is key, but more importantly is letting them know this won't last forever and they will get through it.

**What do you love about your work?**

All in all I love seeing the 'penny drop' moments in sessions. Witnessing the transformations, raised levels of self awareness, self esteem and new-found confidence that happen in front of me is a genuine gift – priceless.

**Sarah Pike Coaching,**  
**contact@sarahpikecoaching.com**  
**I: @sarahpikecoaching001**

**'Healing takes  
as long as it takes.  
Feelings and emotions  
are complex'**



WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# CAROLE MARTIN

***Resource Management Solutions (RMS), a leading UK recruitment and HR firm specialising in recruitment, payroll, and on-site managed services, is celebrating 25 years***

**Tell us about your journey into business.**

My journey started in 2000, motivated by a passion for people and a desire to support my family. After a brief stint in recruitment, I founded RMS with just two employees in a shared office. What began as a small venture quickly grew into a thriving business, now recognised as a leader particularly within the automotive, manufacturing, and industrial sectors. My commitment to people-first leadership has been key to RMS' success and continued growth.

**What's the core of RMS?**

Our mantra is 'because people matter'. This isn't just a slogan; it's the core of everything we do. Each decision is made with the goal of positively impacting the people we serve. Whether it's helping businesses find the right talent or supporting individuals in securing meaningful jobs, we provide fair, people-centred solutions. For me, leadership is about being present – working alongside the teams and clients, rather than managing from behind a desk. When people are empowered, businesses thrive.

One initiative I'm particularly proud of is our work with veterans transitioning to civilian life. RMS has helped many ex-armed forces personnel find stable careers, earning us the Silver Defence Employer Recognition Award. We're now working toward Gold status, which reflects our commitment to social responsibility and making a positive impact on veterans' lives.

**How do you stay ahead in a changing landscape?**

Running a business brings challenges, especially in staying up to date with the ever-changing landscape of employment law. The legal requirements around recruitment, payroll, and HR constantly evolve, so we must stay on top of these changes to ensure compliance. By adapting proactively, we continue to deliver the best service to our clients. Our focus on fair recruitment, responsible HR management, and investment in our people has driven steady growth while staying true to our values.

RMS doesn't just talk about making an impact; we take action. Whether through our veteran employment initiatives, building long-term client relationships, or fostering a strong internal culture, we show that



**'RMS doesn't just talk about making an impact; we take action'**

people come first. Our growth and industry recognition reflect our commitment to responsible business practices.

**Do you have any advice for aspiring entrepreneurs?**

My advice to anyone starting a purpose-driven business is simple: stay true to your values. Authenticity is key. Don't just talk about making a difference – invest in your people, communities and clients. Be resilient, too. Challenges will arise, but staying focused on your larger purpose will keep you motivated.

**What's the future for RMS?**

Looking ahead, RMS remains focused on growth while staying true to our core values. We're working towards Gold status in our veteran employment initiatives and expanding our industry presence. Above

all, we'll continue championing responsible business practices and ensuring our people-first approach benefits both businesses and individuals.

Reflecting on the last 25 years, I'm incredibly proud of what we've built. It's been a journey driven by purpose, and I'm excited to continue growing and making a lasting difference.

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WOMEN *in* BUSINESS

# LUCY PITTAWAY

*Dive into the colourful world of North Yorkshire artist Lucy Pittaway and you'll find magnificent galleries brimming with art and gifts*

**Tell us about your journey into business?**

When I first started painting for a living, I dabbled with working for an art agent. He was very kind to give me an opportunity to work with him and he had a great network of galleries he supplied work to. The only trouble was that he wouldn't take artwork behind glass and my choice of medium requires my originals to be protected by glass. He said I would need to change my medium to paint, but I didn't want to, so I tried to work within his brief and I poured resin over my originals to protect them.

The problem was that it often didn't set right and I lost one in four pieces. I persevered for as long as I could with this, but a few months later I decided to call it a day and decided to try to make it on my own.

It was a tough climb, but slowly, one exhibition after another and with the help of social media and my husband, I built the business up and now we have a full team of people supporting us.

**What inspires your artworks?**

Everyday life basically. Experiences, good and bad. Places I've been that have meant a lot to me.

**Creating a successful business and maintaining your artistic output whilst raising twins must be challenging. How do you manage it all?**

It's incredibly challenging and I work extremely hard to try and wear two hats in the business. Mornings are spent doing all things business-related, which can be anything from emails and meetings, to filming and attending events, then the afternoon is painting time.

Then when I go home, I have to put hat number three on and adjust to 'Mum mode'. It's a constant challenge and I do get very tired juggling it all. On the flip side, I'm never bored and I do like a challenge!

**Who is on the Lucy Pittaway team and what do you pride yourselves on?**

We have staff from all walks of life with a multitude of skills and personalities. Most people only ever meet our sales team, but we have a team in marketing and design, finance and admin, plus a large fulfilment team who are responsible for making and



processing all the customer orders and stock for our eight galleries. These include several framers, who might be cutting glass one minute, or using the industrial saws to cut down moulding for frames the next.

**What do you have in store for Lucy Pittaway this year?**

The plan is to launch two main collections this year, one this spring and one in the autumn, with a potential third collection in the summer, although this might be quite different to what people are used to seeing from me.

We'll see if I'm brave enough to go through with it. We have put our plans for opening two new galleries this year on hold as it's a fairly uncertain climate out there at the moment and we just want to get the lay

of the land first. We'd like to partner with some high-profile brands this year, so we are looking to develop the business in that area.

**What does International Women's Day mean to you?**

Recognition for our achievements and hard work. Pride in what we do.



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# COINING IT

Numismatics has seen a huge rise in popularity in the past decade, and Durham Coins is a premier destination for collectors

**D**urham Coins is a trusted name in the world of coin collecting, based in the historic city of Durham. Renowned for its wide selection and expert service, it caters to collectors of all levels, from beginners to seasoned numismatists.

The culmination of 20 years of coin collecting experience, Durham Coins has grown from a local shop into a respected business with a global clientele. Whether you're searching for ancient Roman coins, medieval artifacts, or modern commemorative pieces, the company offers a carefully curated collection to suit diverse interests and budgets.

What makes Durham Coins truly stand out is its unwavering commitment to authenticity and quality. Every coin is meticulously inspected and authenticated by experts to ensure its provenance and historical significance. This dedication to excellence has earned the trust of collectors worldwide, making Durham Coins a reliable source for both investment-grade coins and prized additions to personal collections.

Beyond selling coins, Durham Coins plays an active role in promoting numismatics - the study and collection of currency. The company engages with museums, educational initiatives and international coin shows,



fostering a deeper appreciation for the history behind each coin. Their knowledgeable staff is always ready to offer guidance and share insights, whether you're new to collecting or a seasoned expert.

Embracing modern technology, Durham Coins provides a seamless online shopping experience. Their website features intuitive browsing, secure payment options and worldwide shipping, allowing collectors to explore and acquire rare coins with confidence.

Durham Coins exemplifies passion, expertise and integrity in the numismatic world. Whether you're starting a collection, adding to an existing one, or simply exploring the fascinating history of coins, Durham Coins offers a trusted and enriching experience for all collectors.

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**'Beyond selling coins, Durham Coins plays an active role in promoting numismatics - the study and collection of currency'**

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# TOYOTA'S *NEW* LAND CRUISER

The Land Cruiser has always been the first choice of drivers seeking an assured off-roader, but how does the new one shape up? **Jack Evans** finds out

**T**he Toyota Land Cruiser is a car which, over more than 70 years, has represented the kind of no-nonsense capability that gets you where you need to be whatever the conditions.

From the desert dunes to the heart of the rainforest, it's the Land Cruiser that you'll see – more often than not doing the job of transporting people from A to B.

Translating all of that into a modern-day vehicle is tricky. Not everyone is on a cross-continent adventure, after all, so this new Land Cruiser has a job to deliver a rounded driving experience and one that can match with the likes of the Land Rover Defender and Ineos Grenadier. We've been seeing what it's like.

## WHAT'S NEW?

There's a lot that is new with the Land Cruiser and a lot that is not so new. From the outside, we've got the retro-influenced design which is bang on trend in the SUV market at the moment, drawing inspiration from previous generations of this off-roader while blending it with some newer, more modern touches.

But underneath, we've still got a traditional body-on-frame set-up which is often seen as the go-to for rugged off-roaders, but which is a design that often doesn't offer the more car-like refinement that modern SUV buyers often require. But you can tell that Toyota hasn't pulled any punches when it comes to the Land Cruiser's off-road tech; numerous driving modes, permanent four-wheel-drive, a low-range gearbox and a handy disconnect setting for the anti-roll bar to help boost wheel travel are all included to ensure that this car gets you where you need to be – no matter the conditions.

## WHAT'S UNDER THE BONNET?

You've not got a lot of variety in the Land Cruiser's engine line-up – there's just one. It's a 2.8-litre turbocharged diesel which is similar to that in the previous model – and the one you'll get in Toyota's Hilux – which means 201bhp and 500Nm of torque. It's not the most powerful, particularly given the Land Cruiser's

large size, but it's still enough to equip this car with the maximum tow rating of 3,500kg.

It's linked to an eight-speed automatic transmission, too. Toyota claims a 0-60mph time of 10.7 seconds and a top speed of 105mph alongside fuel efficiency of 26.4mpg. Toyota has already confirmed that a mild-hybrid engine option will join the range soon too and bring 'smoother, quieter, yet more responsive performance', according to the brand.

## WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

Things are all very traditional four-wheel-drive when you're behind the wheel of the Land Cruiser. You sit very high, looking out over that squared-off bonnet. In fact, the square proportions of the Land Cruiser make it easier to park than you might expect and with a number of cameras and sensors, parking is less of a challenge than you'd think it would be. Around town the ride is jittery, but it does settle down as you gather a bit of pace.

With just 201bhp the diesel engine sure isn't the most powerful – and isn't as pleasant as the straight-six options you'll find in both the Grenadier and Defender – but it does actually get the Toyota up to speed in good enough time, albeit in quite a noisy fashion. The gearbox is slushy and a little dim-witted, however. More irritating though is the Land Cruiser's near-endless number of assistance systems. Fortunately, you can switch the traffic sign recognition off with the steering wheel controls, but other ones – such as the feature which alerts you when a car is behind – are simply too distracting to be useful.

## HOW DOES IT LOOK?

Wherever it goes, the Land Cruiser makes quite a visual impact. Big, boxy and unashamedly brash, it's a car which looks as rugged as its underpinnings help it to be. It's got a great sense of the past, too, with the car's blocky headlights helping to reference previous generations of the long-running Land Cruiser.

It's available in a selection of cool-looking colours, too, with the blue shade of our test car giving this Toyota an even bolder look out and about. ➡

### WHAT'S IT LIKE INSIDE?

That feeling of assuredness is carried through to the Land Cruiser's interior, where you'll find all manner of chunky switches and dials giving you access to major controls. In truth, there's an almost bewildering number of switches, but you do get your eye in with them soon enough.

The Land Cruiser is now a seven-seater as standard, too, adding an extra layer of practicality to this car. The rearmost seats are relatively squashed in terms of headroom, but legroom is surprisingly decent. Boot space is good enough, too, and while there's not a lot of it with those rearmost seats in place, a handy 566 litres is there when they are. The handy glass pop-out section on the tailgate is a really useful feature, too.

### WHAT'S THE SPEC LIKE?

Toyota was a little overwhelmed by demand for the Land Cruiser – so much so that you can't currently order a brand-new version from the firm's website. Instead, you'll be directed to second-hand stock which is currently trading for quite the premium. It's expected that this will settle down once supply eases up. Just 3,500 First Edition cars came to Europe overall, too, but these will be followed by more standard Invincible specification models down the line. The First Edition kicked off at £79,995, too.

At around £74,995, the Land Cruiser will still be an expensive proposition – even in Invincible specification. That said, you do get boatloads of equipment including dual-zone climate control, a full infotainment system and reversing camera alongside all of that off-road-focused technology. That price does still put it in the same league as its Ineos and Land Rover-made rivals, however.

### VERDICT

Toyota's Land Cruiser has a heritage that many other cars would love to have. This latest model helps to continue that and still feels as true to its off-roading roots as ever. It's certainly not as comfortable or refined as its contemporaries, but it's got more than enough on its side to help contrast this shortcoming.

It is expensive – but then so are the cars it is going up against. If you want a rough-and-tough off-roader with some added luxuries, then the new Land Cruiser will fit the bill – providing you can get hold of one.



### At a glance

- **Model as tested:** Toyota Land Cruiser First Edition
- **Price:** £79,995
- **Engine:** 2.8-litre turbocharged diesel
- **Power:** 201bhp
- **Torque:** 500Nm
- **Max speed:** 105mph
- **0-60mph:** 10.7 seconds
- **MPG:** 26.5
- **Emissions:** 280g/km



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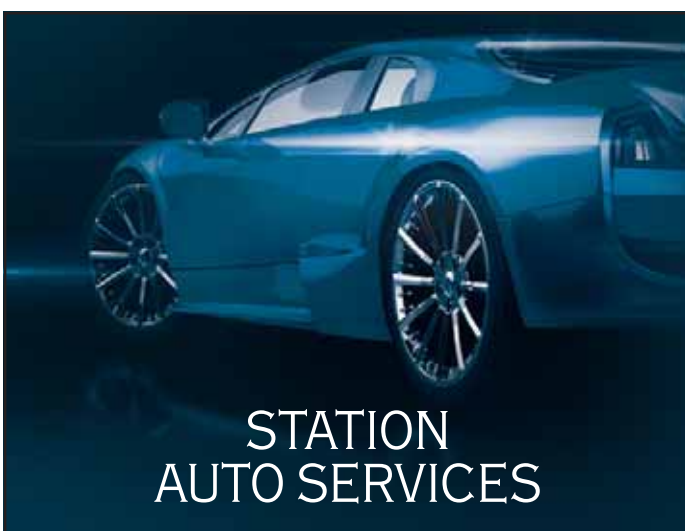
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# MY NORTH CHARLOTTE POTTER

Acclaimed for her performances in the UK and abroad, the talented young soprano from Guisborough is heading home this month

**C**harlotte Potter is a classical soprano from Guisborough, North Yorkshire. The 24-year-old graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London has sung in some amazing venues, including Westminster Central Hall and The Mansion House in London, Newcastle O2 City Hall, Wynyard Hall, The Glasshouse (formerly Sage), Guisborough Priory, Durham and Ripon cathedrals, and the Teatro Accademico in Italy. She has also appeared as an Oxford music undergraduate in an episode of ITV's *Endeavour*.

Currently living in London, where she is juggling her singing career with being a nanny, Charlotte is partnering with the Odell Singers this month at the Marske Centre in Marske-by-the-Sea as part of the Classical Cleveland series.

## Do you come from a musical family?

My musical mum plays in orchestras, brass bands and sings, so the family home in Guisborough was always filled with music. Aged four, I was listening to mum practising *Panis Angelicus* for a wedding in York, and apparently started copying her, singing along in Latin and getting the intervals perfectly in tune. Over the next few years, alongside ballet, I attended a variety of clubs that introduced me to performing for an audience and ignited my passion for performance. At Galley Hill primary school in Guisborough, I started learning trumpet with the Tees Valley Music Service, and when I moved on to Laurence Jackson secondary school, I joined the Tees Valley Youth Choir & Chamber Choir, successfully auditioned for the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain and participated in the Samling Academy, which nurtures singing in the region.

I realised that I wanted music, and singing in particular, to be a huge part of my life, so my parents and I started researching options. I went along to an open-day at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and was offered a place to study voice (alongside trumpet and piano) for my 6th Form studies. I went on to complete my undergraduate studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. I am still playing my trumpet/cornet from time to time, including in a brass band at the Durham Miners' Gala for the past two years.

## Who has been your inspiration?

Lesley Garrett. She hails from Yorkshire, and



## 'I was told multiple times to change my Northern accent'

it was always so important to me to see that someone from the North had made it and was living their dream. I've felt sometimes when studying in London that being from the North East meant I wasn't taken as seriously. I was told multiple times to change my accent but meeting and singing with Lesley, who is so unapologetic about who she is and her roots, has really helped me on my journey.

## What venue have you most enjoyed?

Each one is memorable in its own right. Aged 17, I was honoured to be invited to sing at The Proms in the Priory in Guisborough, accompanied by the London Gala Orchestra – it was so special singing in my home town to an audience of over 3,000.

Each performance is so different, sometimes being accompanied by a pianist, others an orchestra of period instruments, a military wind band, brass band or a professional orchestra, but no matter the size of the concert, I always have the same feeling. I wouldn't describe these feelings as nerves; I think I have been performing for so long now, any performance anxiety has gone. But there is always a feeling of anticipation. The feeling of being on a stage

and performing to an appreciative audience is addictive.

I think my all-time favourite venue has to be Durham Cathedral. My first solo performance there was at the age of 15 in a performance of Handel's *Messiah*. I remember being so overwhelmed by the scale of the building.

## What's your favourite music?

I like a wide range of classical music, from Purcell, Mozart and Handel through to Puccini, Faure and Bernstein, but my favourite piece of classical music is the Call of Wisdom by Will Todd. I first came across him at the age of 13 with the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain singing his *The Lord is my Shepherd*. Will also hails from the North East; he was born in County Durham, and went to Durham School.

My Spotify Wrapped has everything from Eva Cassidy to The Smiths, but my Desert Island Disc would have to be the Carpenters' *Gold – Greatest Hits* album. I listen to the Carpenters every day on my commute across London. They wrote such amazing songs, and I love Karen's voice.

## What are you most looking forward to career-wise?

There are a few standout concerts in the calendar for 2025, the first one being at The British Club in Singapore in April. A week later I am singing at a Livery Banquet in the Merchant Taylor's Hall in London. Closer to home, I am looking forward to returning for my third year as the principle soloist at the Great North Proms concert at Newcastle's O2 City Hall in October, raising funds for the Daft as a Brush Cancer Charity.

## What do you love about the region?

Although I am currently living in London, I travel back to the North East whenever I can to go walking on the Cleveland Hills with my dad. Two of my favourite spots are The Wainstones on the Cleveland Way and the stunning coastline. I love to show off our incredible part of the country through my promotional images. My latest album cover image was taken by local photographer Stuart Brown, who perfectly captures all the beauty of the region.

**Charlotte Potter with the Odell Singers, Marske Centre, Saturday, March 8**  
**Tickets: 01642 478006**





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