



Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists Newsletter January 2024

Dear Fellow Humanists

A Happy New Year to you all (if it is not too late?) I hope that you all had a very happy festive season. I read somewhere once, that the first week of January is the most miserable time of the year. I find that believable, particularly for those in regular work. Imagine, the holiday is over, all the festive lights have been taken down or switched off. The mornings are dark as too are the afternoons. The bank and credit card statements have arrived. (Did I really spend that much money?) When is the next holiday - I want a rest? Not until Easter, and that is months away!! And that is without the weather, freezing cold, pouring rain, snow or the latest gale. Anyway, I hope that this Newsletter cheers you up a little.

So, on to 2024 and hopefully we will have some interesting issues to discuss as Humanists. I would welcome any ideas or suggestions for topics and speakers throughout the year?

Brian Goredema-Braid

Chair of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists

Tel: 07977996363

Email: briangb@sky.com

PS: I am appearing in 'The Philadelphia Story' at the Talisman Theatre, Kenilworth from 5th to 10th February if you would like to come along to see a great romantic comedy

Meetings:

Thursday 18th January: This was not a meeting arranged by ourselves. Instead we encouraged everyone to join in the online event organised by Humanists UK - *The real 3,000-year history of humanist thought*. The discussion was led by Catherine Nixey, the author of 'The Darkening Age'; Historian AG Leventis and Professor of Greek Culture Tim Whitmarsh for an exploration of the *real* 3,000-year history of humanism, chaired by Humanists UK Chief Executive Andrew Copson. This was a very interesting discussion which covered many interesting concepts but which went on to confirm that Humanist thought was very apparent in the early civilisations of Greece and Rome. There were so many interesting facts coming out of the discussion. One that particularly interested me was that the Romans were not that committed to Christianity – they only adopted it for political and economic benefits of expanding the Empire. The discussion did provide a comprehensive perspective on the topic, and was well debated by the renowned experts in discussing the real history of the values that underpin our society today. There is no doubt that there has been a surge of interest in exploring the foundations of the real basis of commonly held human values, and the historical context in which they emerged.

For those of you who had to miss this event, I would hope that there is an opportunity of obtaining a recording of this excellent event from the Humanists UK website.

Thursday 15th February: This will be an online meeting through Zoom. We will send out the Zoom link, ID and password nearer the date. As you may be aware, we chose to have online meetings in the winter months as many members prefer not come out on winter evenings. We will be back with

an in-person meeting on **Thursday 21st March 2024 at Waverley Day Centre**. Details to be announced nearer the event. At present we have not yet engaged a speaker or chosen a topic to be debated. Any suggestions will be welcomed. Watch this space!

I can however announce that at our meeting on Thursday 16th May, our speaker will be Clare Elcombe-Webber the Director of Humanist Care. Clare is responsible for recruiting Humanist Pastoral Carers to volunteer in hospitals, prisons and colleges and universities.

A Secular Head Teacher Takes on the Islamic Bullies:

I was interested in a recent fervour where a headteacher and governors sought to restrict religious rituals in her school. This has been well reported in the broadsheet press, particularly in 'The Times' and the 'Guardian'. I have included most of the article that appeared in the 'Guardian' on 23rd January by Humanist Vice President Polly Toynbee.



Polly Toynbee

Schools are too often the crucible in which social conflicts are fought out, with teachers expected to put right whatever we fail to fix in the world outside. Religion is one such battleground, where "values" are set by education secretaries, and of whom there have been 10 in the past 14 years. The latest row blew up in Michaela Community school in Brent, north-west London, Katharine Birbalsingh's notorious free school, regimented to her direction.

The discrimination case brought by a Muslim girl last week stirred up right-wing commentators devoted to the headteacher, who made her name condemning education under Labour as "broken". One girl praying in the playground soon became 30 pupils, the school says. The KC representing the school trust in the case says they coerced other Muslim pupils to join them: 50% of pupils there are Muslims. "Children were intimidated into greater observance," he said. "The school observed a child starting to wear a headscarf who had not previously done so. A little girl dropped out of the school choir as she was told by one of the other Muslim children that this was 'haram' [forbidden] during Ramadan." Children were told they were "bad Muslims" if they didn't pray.

The governors banned "prayer rituals". A bomb hoax in the school and a stone through a teacher's window followed a social media campaign and online petition, with teachers intimidated. One pupil was permitted to pray, but was suspended for five days for arguing with a teacher who stopped them bringing a prayer mat into school. The family took the school to court for discrimination.

Birbalsingh tweeted: "We believe it is wrong to separate children according to religion or race, and that it is our duty to protect all of our children and provide them with an environment which is free from bullying, intimidation and harassment." The court will decide soon.

My gut instinct was to back Birbalsingh. If proven true, it's appalling for children to be bullied into religious observance.



Katharine Birbalsingh

As a vice-president of Humanists UK, my hackles rose, as you would expect. By instinct, I like the French revolutionary tradition commanding absolute secularism in schools and state institutions. But French secularism tends to cause less social harmony, not more, used as an easy pretext for far-right anti-Muslim attacks. Humanists defend people's right to private beliefs and religious practices, as long as they impose on no one else. Yes, I'm sad to see women in hijabs, a "modesty" not imposed on men, but, like Voltaire, I defend to the death their right to wear what they want. Schools navigate competing human rights and cultural demands, warding off protests from ultra-conservative religious parents of many faiths to give pupils good sex and relationships education, including on LGBTQ+ issues.

School heads I asked this week wonder how the situation at Michaela community school reached this state of conflict. "Bullying of any kind has to be stopped at once. This is about bullying, more than religion," said one. Another secondary head said, "We have students pray at break or lunch, and one of our staff oversees it. Never been a problem. Never heard of it being a problem in another

school. If that [bullying or intimidation] happened in my school I'd focus on the ethos and culture where students feel intimidating others is appropriate."

I don't know if this explosive conflict is caused by Michaela school's rigidity, where every minute of every child's day is regimented: they move silently in single file around the school; while in class their eyes must always fix on the teacher; and there is no free socialising, so in break they only meet in groups of a maximum of four. Before lunch they recite poetry, and lunch conversation is limited to a subject set by a teacher. Parents choose this knowingly, and are rewarded with top exam results, but others would never have their child drilled like this.

How oddly this tale of banned prayers at a non-religious school, lauded by the right, sits in England, where the state pays religions to run a third of our schools – fewer than 1% of those non-Christian. In this most atheist country, pews are empty except when parents get on their knees at admissions time for a vicar's letter. Why? Because religious schools can select 100% of their pupils, causing social segregation by class and race, as well as faith. They escape other schools' obligation to prioritise children in care. It's hard to see what's "Christian" about that. Faith schools that avoid some chaotic families boast better behaviour and results than neighbouring schools loaded with more than their share of problems.

The Sutton Trust's alarming report earlier this month revealed just how socially selective faith "comprehensives" have become, even more selective than grammar schools. Top-performing comprehensives admit 5% fewer children on free school meals than would be expected in their local area, and faith schools are most selective of all. Sutton Trust founder Peter Lampl says this "social segregation" is "unacceptable", calling for a new admissions code. Catholic schools, the most socially segregated of all, always deny it with a slippery claim: "Catholic schools take in 50% more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds than the state sector." That Jesuitical use of "background" disguises taking socially better-off children from zones marked deprived.

I would welcome any comments on this intriguing scenario

Confirmed: Faith Schools are much more Socially Selective than Other State Schools:



Today's report from education charity **Sutton Trust** confirms again in black and white what countless other studies have shown for years:

Confirmed fact: Faith schools are 'consistently more socially selective' than schools without a religious character, a new report by the Sutton Trust has found.

Faith schools admit fewer students eligible for free school meals (FSM) than would be expected given their catchment areas.

This trend is especially pronounced among the 'top-performing' faith schools. Shockingly, 19 of the 20 most socially selective schools in England have a religious character (95%). Catholic schools were the least representative of the population and the least likely to cater to disadvantaged children in their catchment areas.

Humanists UK – which has long campaigned for an end to religiously selective admissions policies on the basis that they segregate children by faith, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and prior attainment – said the study provides yet more evidence that faith-based admissions are bad for society.

Humanists UK has called for state schools to be open to all children regardless of religion or belief. The Sutton Trust is the UK's largest charity focusing on social mobility in the education sector. It is highly regarded for its authoritative, well-researched, and influential reports on the state of social mobility in the UK and the educational and long-term impact this has on some of the poorest children in society.

Mounting evidence

The report is just the latest in a series of research published by the Sutton Trust looking at the issue of school admissions.

Earlier research included a poll which found that 80% of parents think that state schools should have a mix of pupils from different backgrounds.

The new report focuses on the top 500 schools according to attainment measures 'Progress 8', which measures pupil progress in eight key subjects over the course of their secondary education, and 'Attainment 8', which measures pupils' average attainment in exams in those same subjects. While faith schools 'are over-represented in the top 500' under both measures, the reality was, 'they have lower FSM rates (14.7% compared to 17.9% for non-religious schools on the Progress 8 measure)'. They also have 'on average a larger (negative) FSM gap'.

The 'FSM gap' is the difference between the proportion of children on FSM in the school and the proportion of children on FSM in the catchment area. The report therefore concludes that 'religious schools are more likely to be socially selective than nonreligious schools even if they often have a larger geographical catchment area compared to non-religious schools due to admissions criteria related to religious observance'. The final point is important, because some religious groups claim that, when their schools appear to be unrepresentative of their local areas, this is only because they have a wider catchment than other schools. The differences between the intakes of religious schools and other schools lend further weight to the view that faith schools don't have better attainment because of their faith character, but because of their selectivity .

The report also found that there are big differences in the social selectivity of faith schools depending on their religious affiliation, with Catholic schools the most socially selective amongst the top 500 schools with other (non-Christian) faith schools 'not far behind'. When compared to all comprehensives (not just high-performing ones), schools affiliated with other (non-Christian religions) are the most selective (with a negative FSM gap of 7.4 percentage points compared to 0.2 for schools with no religion). However, Catholic schools were still the next most selective, with a negative FSM gap of 6 percentage points. Within this in mind, the report recommends that faith schools should 'take particular care to ensure their criteria are not contributing to socio-economic inequalities in access' and suggests this 'could be done by... implementing policies such as pupil premium priority' according to which children in receipt of the pupil premium (additional school funding for disadvantaged pupils) would be prioritised in admissions.

Many schools set their own admissions criteria, so could put these policies in place if they wished. However, the report falls short of recommending that faith admissions are abolished altogether.

Humanists UK Director of Public Affairs and Policy Kathy Riddick said:

'This report provides yet more evidence that faith-based admissions policies are bad for children, bad for families, and bad for society. Religious schools don't perform better because there is something intrinsically better about a faith-based education. They perform better because they are socially selective, and they are socially selective because their faith-admissions criteria disadvantage children from poorer backgrounds.

'These schools must take their fair share of disadvantaged children. The most effective way to guarantee this is for the Government to amend the School Admissions Code to require every state school to be open to all regardless of religion or belief.'

Humanist UK Climate Action – COP28 – Progress?

The following is taken from Humanist Climate Action January 2024 Newsletter and an article by Tom McMillen on the progress (?) of COP28

At COP28, held in December in Dubai, the world's countries finally agreed to issue the call for a transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems. This historic moment should be welcomed but it is clear that the stated targets are not yet strong enough and further progress will be needed for a just transition to materialise. There are positives that we can take from COP28, though progress fell short on a global adaptation fund and more work is needed to fully realise the loss and damage fund, intended to provide financial support for countries, especially in the Global South, which are most vulnerable to climate change. The conference nevertheless moved in the right direction on loss

and damage and a Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action was also signed by many countries.

Humanist UK patron Zion Lights, who attended COP28 and has in a previous HCA newsletter defended the case for nuclear energy as part of the transition away from fossil fuels, commented:

'I am very pleased to see that real commitments to phasing out fossil fuels have been made at COP28, particularly the commitment to clean energy, as over 20 countries have signed a declaration to triple nuclear capacity. Although it's only a start, this is the strongest climate commitment to clean energy that I've seen come out of the COPs. This is a win for climate action and also for science.'

With COP29 taking place in another oil-reliant petrostate later this year, the world has ten months to implement announced commitments and drive forward the change necessary to avoid a 3°C temperature rise before it reconvenes in Azerbaijan. Human and civil rights will also likely remain on the agenda following complaints of civic restrictions at recent COPs and concerns from island states that the fossil fuel deal does not go far enough and that they weren't even in the room when the decision was made. We must also hope for further detail on agriculture and also a new climate finance goal at COP29.

Reasons for Optimism

While the world has heated and the science behind human-created climate change has been known for decades, the fossil fuel industry has worked against changes. As a result of their campaigning with more lobbyists than any other group at the UN IPCC COP meetings, we have had a 'lost' decade. With the next COP to be held and run in another petrostate, is there still reason to believe that efforts 'to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C' of heating as stated in the Paris agreement in 2016 are going to happen?

Unfortunately, the answer is a strong no. We have already passed the point where the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere will more than likely take us through that barrier. As an increase in CO₂ in the atmosphere leads to more heating, there is a delay as the heating catches up with the higher levels of the greenhouse gas. It's going to get hotter, wetter and the weather more catastrophic and unpredictable. But the overarching goal agreed at Paris was to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.' This is still possible, and we're capable of reaching this target and avoiding tipping points and disaster. And it's possible to do so and not lose out on quality of life. Every 0.1°C matters a lot, and there is so much that needs to change to keep global heating lower. The sooner the changes, the easier it is to ensure that our way of life is protected and we and our children have a sustainable way of living on our finite planet. The science is clear, that there must be no new fossil fuel exploration and that we must phase out the use of fossil fuels. The political will falls behind the physics and we often see calls for the use of 'future technologies' to enable us to meet that goal. Yet, at the time of the Paris agreement, we were heading for 3.5°C - 4°C of warming by 2100. After our 'lost' decade and the changes made to policy, we're targeting a world with warming of 2.5°C - 3°C if no other changes are made. While this amount of heating will be devastating, there's still time to bend the curve, increase the rate of emissions reduction, and meet the 43% reductions in emissions by 2030 needed to hit the net zero in 2050, keeping the next century within the set goal.

In the last 10 years wind-generated power has decreased in price by a factor of 3, and solar by 10, with batteries decreasing in price by 60%. Since 2015, 3/4 of planned coal-fired power plants have been cancelled and 44 countries have pledged, outside the COP process, to stop building them. In the UK we're down to less than 2% of our energy from coal. Coal use in China has peaked and India is levelling off. The costs of renewables, despite the subsidies and pre-existing infrastructure propping up fossil fuels, are lower than gas and coal. In developed countries the continued growth of the economy has been separated from the expansion in use of fossil fuels. There is every economic and climate reason for developing countries to be able to accelerate their growth without having to depend on greenhouse-gas-producing systems.

While many national governments often fail to deliver on the commitments and changes at the speed required, all governments acknowledge that human-caused climate change needs to be addressed. There are now 16 countries generating more than 95% of their electricity from renewables. More and more people are taking individual action to move towards sustainable lifestyles and putting pressure on companies and industries to react. Local councils and cities are making pledges and implementing plans to meet 2030 reduction goals. Innovation is being supported and celebrated through campaigns like the Earthshot Prize. Not decarbonising is a bad business decision. The rate of technological change is accelerating, as is the amount of investment and jobs supporting sustainable living.

At COP28 there was an acknowledgement that 1/3 of global greenhouse gas emissions come from our food systems, and it opened with a declaration on sustainable food and agriculture. This is an area of human activity that cannot be brought to zero emissions and so the net zero target by carbon capture is necessary. Sustainable food needs to be one of the systems that depends on carbon offsetting, whether that comes from carbon capture or expansion of tree planting. It places an emphasis on other systems, industry, transport, energy to make sure that their need for offsetting is reduced.

The estimated cost to reach net zero by 2030 is \$2.5 trillion. The cost of not reaching the target is predicted to cost the USA \$13.2 trillion in the following 20 years. Current investment in green technology by the US amounts to less than \$0.05 trillion. In the last 10 years more than 200 institutions worldwide have de-invested \$14 trillion from fossil fuel companies. The costs of building a sustainable, green future are not insignificant, but are globally less than the \$5.1 trillion the US spent in 2020 on COVID bailouts and emergency funding.

Hannah Ritchie of Our World in Data, in her new book *Not the End of the World*, shows that global CO2 emissions per person have already peaked, and in the UK we're down 48% from 1990 levels. Our per person emissions are now at 5.5 tonnes, equivalent to someone living way back in 1859, but with a much better lifestyle. The UK peak per person emissions happened in 1971, with our country's emission peak a few years later, though consistent falls in emissions only started to happen after 2005.

We have the science and the ability to leave the world to future generations in a state of sustainable, high standard living. To get there, changes need to happen soon, and the longer we wait to take-action, the bigger the risk to the future and the more painful those changes will be. So much of this is systemic, and requires legislative changes. Campaign for those changes, look where your money goes. As an individual the largest direct impacts you can make come from ditching car use, fewer flights, adopting green energy, reducing food waste and switching to plant-based diets. There's still lots of space to plant trees, and as more opportunities arise, look for jobs that are part of the sustainable economy. The future can be bright if we actively work towards it.

Tom McMillen

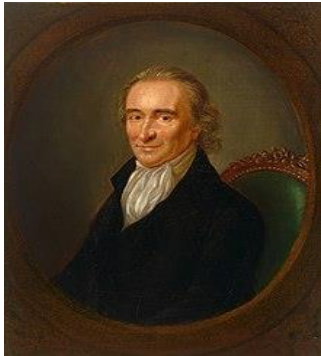
Humanist Philosophers and Thinkers: Thomas Paine

Following on from previous months overview of the lives of Bertrand Russell and Mary Wollstonecraft, for this month I have chosen **Thomas Paine** who can be described in several ways – as a radical liberal, a republican and a secular humanist.

Thomas Paine (born February 9, 1737 and died June 8, 1809) was an English-born American Founding Father, French Revolutionary, political activist, philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary. He authored *Common Sense* (1776) and *The American Crisis* (1776–1783), two of the most influential pamphlets at the start of the American Revolution, and he helped to inspire the Patriots in 1776 to declare independence from Great Britain. His ideas reflected Enlightenment-era ideals of human rights.

Paine was born in Thetford, Norfolk and emigrated to the British American colonies in 1774 with the help of Benjamin Franklin, arriving just in time to participate in the American Revolution. Virtually every American Patriot read his 47-page pamphlet *Common Sense*, which catalysed the call for

independence from Great Britain. *The American Crisis* was a pro-independence pamphlet series. Paine lived in France for most of the 1790s, becoming deeply involved in the French Revolution. While in England, he wrote *Rights of Man* (1791), in part a defence of the French Revolution against its critics. His attacks on Anglo-Irish conservative writer Edmund Burke led to a trial and conviction *in absentia* in England in 1792 for the crime of seditious libel.



Thomas Paine

The British government of William Pitt the Younger was worried by the possibility that the French Revolution might spread to Britain and had begun suppressing works that espoused radical philosophies. Paine's work advocated the right of the people to overthrow their government and was therefore targeted with a writ for his arrest issued in early 1792. Paine fled to France in September, despite not being able to speak French, but he was quickly elected to the French National Convention. The Girondins regarded him as an ally; consequently, the Montagnards regarded him as an enemy, especially Marc-Guillaume Alexis Vadier, the powerful president of the Committee of General Security. In December 1793, Vadier arrested Paine and took him to Luxembourg Prison in Paris. While in prison, he continued to work on *The Age of Reason* (1793–1794). James Monroe used his diplomatic connections to get Paine released in November 1794. Paine became notorious because of his pamphlets and attacks on his former allies, who he felt had betrayed him. In *'The Age of Reason'* and other writings, he advocated Deism, promoted reason and freethought, and argued against religion in general and Christian doctrine in particular. In 1796, he published a bitter open letter to George Washington, whom he denounced as an incompetent general and a hypocrite. He published the pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1797), discussing the origins of property and introducing the concept of a guaranteed minimum income through a one-time inheritance tax on landowners. In 1802, he returned to the U.S. He died on June 8, 1809, and only six people attended his funeral, as he had been ostracised for his ridicule of Christianity and his attacks on the nation's leaders.

Poetry Corner

This month Audrey Raishbrook has chosen 'The Confirmation by Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

The Confirmation by Edwin Muir

Yes, yours, my love, is the right human face.
I in my mind had waited for this long,
Seeing the false and searching for the true,
Then found you as a traveller finds a place
Of welcome suddenly amid the wrong
Valleys and rocks and twisting roads. But you,
What shall I call you? A fountain in a waste,
A well of water in a country dry,
Or anything that's honest and good, an eye
That makes the whole world seem bright. Your open heart,
Simple with giving, gives the primal deed,
The first good world, the blossom, the blowing seed,
The hearth, the steadfast land, the wandering sea.
Not beautiful or rare in every part.
But like yourself, as they were meant to be.

Film Review:

Over the past month I have seen 3 films that I would recommend everyone to see, all of them excellent in their own way; *'One Life'*, *'The Holdovers'* and *'Poor Things'*. I would challenge anyone to sit through *'One Life'* without a tear in their eye – a real tearjerker! Based on the true story of British humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton as he looks back on his past efforts to help groups of Jewish children in German-occupied Czechoslovakia to hide and flee in 1938–39, just before the beginning of World War II. The film has excellent performances from Sir Anthony Hopkins and Johnny Flynn as Sir Nicholas. Fifty years later, in 1988, Winton, now in his 70s, cleans up some of the clutter in his office, which his wife Grete asked him to do. He finds his old documents in which he recorded his work for the BCRC, with photos and lists of the children they wanted to bring to safety. The documents end up in the hands of the *That's Life!* production team, a TV show produced by the BBC with presenter Esther Rantzen. Winton is invited onto the show and asked to sit in the audience. *That's Life* surprises Winton by inviting some of the children he helped save onto the show to meet him.

'The Holdovers' is set in 1970, it stars Paul Giamatti who is excellent as a socially awkward and strict classics teacher at a New England boarding school who is forced to chaperone a handful of students with nowhere to go on the Christmas break. The delightful Da'Vine Joy Randolph plays the cafeteria manager and Dominic Sessa (in his film debut) is one of the students who stays on campus. This film has everything with plenty of humour and choice one-liners from Giamatti as well as sadness and pathos in other scenes. I would definitely recommend watching this lovely film.

'Poor Things' is a romantic comedy-drama. It stars Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo, Willem Dafoe. Based on the 1992 novel by Alasdair Gray, the plot focuses on Bella Baxter, a young woman living in steampunk-styled Victorian era London who, after being crudely resurrected by a scientist following her suicide, runs off with a debauched lawyer to embark on an odyssey of self-discovery and sexual liberation. This film is over 2 hours long – but you cannot take your eyes off it for a moment. The fabulous décor and imagery is pure Wes Anderson-like. An excellent performance from Emma Stone (definite Oscar nomination!). I couldn't take my eyes off Willem Dafoe who was a Frankenstein-like character who looked a lot like Mary Shelley's creation. For me Mark Ruffalo can do no wrong. A brilliant film with great entertainment.

Film Preview:

A selection of films being released over the next few weeks

All of Us Strangers: A screenwriter drawn back to his childhood home enters into a fledgling relationship with a mysterious neighbour as he then discovers his parents appear to be living just as they were on the day they died, 30 years before. Starring Andrew Scott and Paul Mescal

American Fiction: Thelonious 'Monk' Ellison is a respected author and professor of English literature. Insecure of his academic standing, while his latest novel is failing to attract publishers, who claim Monk's writing 'isn't Black enough.' In a fit of spite, Monk concocts a novel embodying every Black cliché he can imagine. A major publisher immediately offers the biggest advance he's ever seen. As the novel is rushed to the printers and Hollywood comes courting, Monk must reckon with a monster of his own making. Starring Jeffrey Wright and based on the Percival Everett novel 'Erasure'

The End We Start From: Currently being serialised on terrestrial TV by Channel 4 - A woman tries to find her way home with her new-born while an environmental crisis submerges London in floodwaters. Starring the excellent Jodie Comer (from Killing Eve fame)

Zone of Interest: An interesting investigation into the domestic dream of Nazi Germany in this penetrating rethink of Holocaust cinema, inspired by the Martin Amis novel. A family live in their beautifully ordered house and garden. But audible from behind the wall are the sounds of mechanised death from Auschwitz. Has been suggested for an Oscar nomination

The Iron Claw: A biographical film based on the true story of the Von Erich brothers, who made history in the professional wrestling starring Zac Efron and Jeremy Allen White.

Anyone but You: After an amazing first date, Bea and Ben's fiery attraction turns ice cold - until they find themselves unexpectedly reunited at a destination wedding in Australia. So, they do what any two mature adults would do: pretend to be a couple. Starring Sydney Sweeney and Glen Powell.

The Colour Purple: A musical retake on the Spielberg classic. A woman's painful journey of self-realisation sees her face prejudice, abuse and violence in this musical adaptation of Alice Walker's novel, featuring jubilant and defiant songs in the face of challenging themes. Starring Taraji P. Henson, Danielle Brooks, Halle Bailey and Fantasia Barrino in her major motion picture debut.

Still on the Circuit:

Maestro: Bradley Cooper directs and stars in this bio-pic of the composer Leonard Bernstein famous for West Side Story and being the first American conductor to receive international acclaim. Carey Mulligan brings strength and grace to her role as Montealegre. Made with the cooperation of the couple's three children, Maestro is a glorious symphony of life and art

One Life: The inspirational story of Nicholas 'Nicky' Winton and the ambitious Kindertransport Project saving over 600 children from the horrors of the Nazi invasion of Prague. Starring the exceptional Sir Anthony Hopkins and Helen Bonham Carter

Tchaikovsky's Wife: Made in Russia, the tumultuous relationship between the great Russian composer and his wife. Starring Odin Lund Biron and Alyina Mikhailova.

Priscila: Directed by Sofia Coppola, an exploration of the teenage wife of Elvis Presley. A study of a young woman who was living in the public eye before she had experienced the world. Starring Cailee Spaeny and Jacob Elordi

Poor Things: This film has received some glowing reviews. A science fantasy black comedy based on the novel by Alasdair Gray. Starring Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo and Willem Dafoe. A young Victorian woman crudely resurrected by a scientist following her suicide, runs off with a debauched lawyer to embark on an odyssey of self-discovery and sexual liberation.

The Holdovers: An American Christmas comedy-drama film starring Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph and Dominic Sessa. Set in 1970, it follows a bad-tempered history teacher at a New England boarding school who is forced to chaperone a handful of students with nowhere to go on Christmas break.

Preview of Television Programmes and Films:

Saturday 27th January

16.15 – Channel 5: Calendar Girls – A welcome return of this popular comedy drama starring Helen Mirren and Julie Walters

18.50 – Channel 4: Armageddon – Sci-fi action dram starring Bruce Willis (with hair) and Ben Affleck

21.45 - Channel 4: Gangs of New York - Oscar-nominated period crime drama from director Martin Scorsese, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Cameron Diaz and Daniel Day-Lewis. New York in the mid-19th century: a young boy witnesses his father's death in a bloody battle between rival street gangs. Years later, he worms his way into the group responsible.

Sunday 28th January

20.00 – BBC4: Friday Night at the Proms: Leonard Bernstein - Stage and Screen – A concert to celebrate composer, conductor and pianist Leonard Bernstein. A selection of the Bernstein's greatest productions, such as West Side Story, On the Waterfront, Candide and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. (Appropriate with the film *Maestro* currently in cinemas and a hot tip for the Oscars?)

20.00 – BBC1: Call the Midwife – Another episode of the popular sit-com drama

21.00 – BBC1: The Tourist – The first series was great – I am not sure about this series?

22.00 – BBC2: The French Connection – A brilliant Oscar-winning crime drama starring Gene Hackman, Fernando Rey and Roy Scheider. A relentlessly tough New York policeman, becomes obsessed with smashing a narcotics ring operating between Marseille and the USA.

Monday 29th January

20.00 – BBC4: Art of Persia – A repeat of this excellent series presented by broadcaster and Humanist Samira Ahmed

21.00 – BBC1: Silent Witness – Another 2-part mystery from the popular forensics team

21.00 – BBC2: Putin vs. the West (Series 2) With the war in Ukraine now 2 years old, and the British PM suggesting conscription, the reality of a worldwide conflict appears real? **(Repeated on Thursday at 23.15 on BBC2)**

00.15 – BBC2: The Wife – An excellent drama starring Glenn Close and Jonathan Pryce. An author travels to Sweden with his wife, to accept the Nobel Prize in Literature. However, the couple's relationship begins to crumble as they're forced to confront an uncomfortable rumour.

Tuesday 30th January

21.00 – BBC1: Silent Witness – Part 2 of the forensic mystery

21.00 – BBC2: David Mitchell's Outsiders - David Mitchell challenges six comedians to spend a week living outdoors. On day one, the comedians compete for three badges, felling a tree, rescuing an air crash victim and inventing a camp motto. **(Episode 2 follows at 21.45)**

00.05 – BBC2: Moonlight – An excellent Oscar winning coming-of-age romantic drama. Against the background of a poor Miami neighbourhood, a sensitive young African-American boy struggles to cope with his drug-addicted mother and come to terms with his sexual identity.

Wednesday 31st January

22.00 – BBC4: A Passage to India – The 1965 adaption of the EM Forster novel. Cultural mistrust and false accusations doom the fate of a friendship in British colonial India between an Indian doctor, an English-woman and an English educator. Starring Sybil Thorndike, Cyril Cusack and Virginia McKenna

Thursday 1st February

20.00 – BBC4: The Diary of Anne Frank - Biographical wartime drama starring Millie Perkins, Joseph Schildkraut and Shelley Winters. Anne Frank's Diary became one of the most important pieces of literature to emerge from the World War 2.

21.00 – Channel 4: The Miners Strike 1984: The Battle for Britain – A very good documentary series following recollections of events from the Miners Strike 40 years on

22.45 – BBC4: Pride and Prejudice – The 1940 version of the Jane Austen novel starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier

Friday 2nd February

21.00 – BBC1: Would I Lie to You – A new series of the popular comedy quiz show

22.45 – BBC1: The Graham Norton Show – This week Graham's guests include Dakota Johnson and Sterling K Brown-Randall

23.05 – BBC2: Relic - Supernatural horror mystery starring Emily Mortimer, Robyn Nevin and Bella Heathcote. An elderly woman is reported missing, her daughter and granddaughter begin searching her large, rural house for clues. (A good film to go to bed with?)

00.00 – BBC1: Longshot - Romantic comedy starring Charlize Theron and Seth Rogen. A political journalist quits his job and is hired as a speechwriter by his childhood babysitter. She has grown up to become the US Secretary of State and is now planning a presidential run.

00.05 – Channel 4: Thoroughbreds - Comedy crime drama starring Anya Taylor-Joy, Olivia Cooke and Anton Yelchin.

Saturday 3rd February

21.00 – Channel 4: Nobody - Action thriller starring Bob Odenkirk. After his home is broken into and his family threatened, the mild-mannered suburbanite resolves to track down the culprits and, in doing so, makes himself the target of an even deadlier gang.

23.30 – BBC1: A Fish Called Wanda – Excellent award-winning comedy starring John Cleese, Jamie Lee Curtis, Kevin Kline and Michael Palin. A respectable British barrister finds his life turned upside down when he falls for beautiful American hit-man's 'moll'

Some Funnies to relieve those January Blues:

I knocked on the door of a bed & breakfast and a lady stuck her head out of the window and said,
'What do you want?' - I said, 'I want to stay here'
She said, 'Well stay there!' and shut the window

My wife texted me, "Your great", and I replied, "No, you're great".
She's been really happy and smiling at me all weekend.
I just corrected her grammar, so don't get too excited.

I am doing vaguejanuary this year. I've given something up – but I am not sure what?

I was going to play my drums today, but someone stole them – bongos that idea!

When I got divorced from my wife, we decided to split the house – I got the outside!

Relationships are just like algebra. Have you ever looked at your X and wondered Y?

My friend has been sick in bed over Christmas and New Year.
So, I went over and took some presents and a large bottle of whisky
Fingers crossed that he won't know they're gone

An anteater walks into a bar and the barperson asks, 'Can I get you a drink?'
The anteater replies, 'Nooooooooo'
'How about something to eat then?' The anteater says, 'Nooooooooo'
The barperson then asks, 'What's with the long No's?'
The anteater replies, 'I was born with it!'

I didn't want to buy a hammock – but the salesman was so persuasive.
I am easily swayed

I recently launched a book at 9 – 12-year olds, and I'm proud to say I nearly hit one of the little blighters.

The study of why triangular sandwiches taste better is known as trigonomnomnometry.

I recently called an old engineering friend and asked what he was doing these days.
He replied that he was working on 'Aqua-thermal treatment of ceramics, aluminium and steel under a constrained environment.'
I was impressed until, upon further enquiry I learned that he was washing dishes with hot water under his wife's supervision!

A Few Cartoons – With Thanks to Glyn & Heather Evans

POST OFFICE ROBBERY!



"I'D HATE TO BE A FLY ON THE WALL IN THAT MEETING."

