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Friday 28 December 2007

Letters: Powerhouse London?

'World capital' sucks life out of the rest of the country



Sir: So London is a "powerhouse" and the "Capital of the World" (report, 22 December). Bully for London. For those of us who live in other parts of what is really a tiny country by any standards this is not such

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of what is really a tiny country by any standards, and is not such welcome news. "Powerhouses" need fuel, which means that to keep up the image, London will draw ever more fuel from the rest of the country in the form of funding and talent, much the same way as Britain did with its colonies in the past.

While we continue to have regressive taxation and governments lacking in one-nation policies, multicultural and cosmopolitan London will continue to punch much higher than its actual British cultural significance or weight, and there will be less and less inclination to extend opportunity to the so-called "provinces", despite the advances in communication which should afford greater distribution of wealth and opportunity. London has been built and funded by funds from throughout this country: it owes the rest of Britain big-time.

Successive governments lacked sufficient spine even to acknowledge that our national football stadium should have been built in Birmingham in the centre of the country, rather than Wembley. After the Olympic banquet, I can't see anyone being offered anything other than the crumbs from the table.

No wonder Scotland is getting out. Ireland did in 1928. The Brave New Britain of the future looks set to be London, Scotland and Wales, with the north being the "off-world", with entrenched social and economic problems, while Londoners pay over the odds for everything, import their labour from overseas and host international events which drive London ever farther away from its central duty of representing the country as its capital city.

What's the betting on the "balkanisation" of Britain before 2050? This is how you start the process: hubris and smugness. Best city in the world? You need to get out more.

Gerry Murphy

Liverpool

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USA'



[July 2 hours!]

Nothing carbon-free about wood stoves

Sir: I read with interest Donnachadh McCarthy's article "My carbon-free year" (27 December), and applaud the writer's attempts to reduce his carbon emissions.

However, the writer is the victim of a common misunderstanding: it is not the case that the use of a wood-burning stove is "carbon neutral" because "no fossil fuel is used to deliver the wood or chop it up".

Burning wood releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from carbon that was previously "fixed" in the timber burned. This is partly why the destruction of forests in the third world is such a burning issue. And as we know, many people try to offset their carbon emissions by funding the planting of trees which can re-fix carbon from the atmosphere.

You cannot escape this simple fact: burning wood increases your carbon footprint. Purely in CO₂ terms, it is irrelevant whether the the fuel (solid or liquid) that is combusted (thus combining carbon with oxygen from the atmosphere), is of arboreal, petrochemical, or any other origin. The result is to put more CO₂ into the atmosphere.

All you can do (and the writer has done this) is to make the burning of timber as a fuel as efficient as possible modern wood burners are good at this gaining as much heat as possible for the lowest CO₂ output attainable. But you still must allow for the CO₂ output of your wood-burner when assessing your carbon emissions.

Quentin Craven

Bristol

Sir: Well done, Mr McCarthy. Does he employ "security" lighting at night in his garden? I suspect not. If we turned off unnecessary lighting

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Don't flirt with us on tax**

**How silly of me to assume
it was Israeli bombs
causing all the damage in
Gaza**

**Dress the Gaza situation
up all you like, but the
truth hurts**

**Cameron's benefits pledge
is designed to lure back
Ukip voters. He'll have to
try harder**

**Women now have two
more reasons to laugh in
the face of sexism**

in his garden? I suspect not. If we turned off unnecessary lighting everywhere, not just at night, we would greatly reduce carbon emissions. In the USA they could save up to \$30bn per year. Or are we in the Western World just too blinded by the light?

Graham Cliff

Greater Manchester

Spelling reform: a little would help a lot

Sir: "It can't be done!" is the cry that first greets most reform proposals. Only when the costs of prevailing customs become better understood do the objections begin to abate. This is now becoming increasingly likely with spelling reform too. A conclusion released by the present Primary Review on 14 December clarifies the costs: "Overall, standards of attainment in reading in English primary schools have been more or less static since the 1950s".

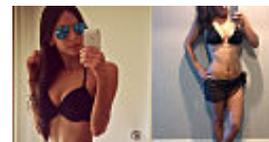
Having thrown huge sums at the problem, narrowed the school curriculum and overburdened both children and teachers with a monumental testing regime for no measurable gain, we may perhaps finally come round to considering the more logical approach of making learning to read English easier. Plenty of countries, including ones with at least as many different accents as English, such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland, have proved that it can be done.

The readability of English can be much improved without the sort of radical transformations feared by Nicholas Waters (letter, 21 December).

English has about 3,700 common words with some unpredictably spelt letters. But many of them don't cause reading difficulties. Only words such as "said" and "done" which don't follow the main spelling patterns (bed, fed, led; fun, run, pun), and have unpredictable sounds as well, are a serious impediment to progress in reading.

The worst damage is done by just 300 high-frequency words with rogue

PROMOTED STORIES



spellings. They are the common words that children keep meeting on every page after they start to read real books (one, once, only, other, many), rather than just carefully chosen words and sentences with regular spellings in their phonics lessons. If we improved all of them, English would become nearly as easily decodable as other alphabetic languages.

Masha Bell

Wareham, Dorset

Sir: In the Christmas season, we think of those less fortunate than ourselves. These include the children "whose life chances are blighted by the English spelling system" (letter, 17 December).

How can this needless barrier be reduced without disrupting all those who, like us, are fortunate and literate, and without losing our heritage of print and international visual compatibility with other modern languages? What research and experiment are needed? The print media, including The Independent, have an interest in hosting public discussion about ways to extend literacy to those currently failing.

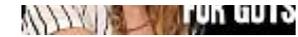
Removing the traps from English spelling does not require wholesale change, as was once believed. Most of it is consistent already, and its principles can be applied to the outliers. Long-term trends and pilot research already support streamlining spelling by omitting surplus letters in words. The 31 most common irregular words can be retained, as not too much to learn.

People need to be informed on relevant issues such as spelling as a supra-dialect convention, and the nature of the abilities and adaptability of readers and writers as evident in the popularity of short text messaging.

Pilot tests of what may help disadvantaged learners at no cost to ourselves should at least be given a go.



10 Wannabe Thick Women On Instagram
(Styleblazer)



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(Daily motion)



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DOGS VS LEOPARDS: VLADIMIR PUTIN HAS FAVOURITE

Dr Valerie Yule

Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia

Sir: J R R Tolkien once remarked that an acceptable compromise could be achieved if the spelling of about 40 common words were altered. If some prestigious institution such as the Oxford University Press adopted this proposal, he reckoned the changes would come to be universally accepted.

Nigel Wilson

Oxford

Best treatment for personality disorder

Sir: Jeremy Laurance's article (18 December) gives the misleading impression that the kind of people with a complex personality disorder benefiting from the treatment offered at the Henderson Hospital in Sutton will no longer be able to get the treatment they need if it closes.

This is not true. Since 2003, in line with the Department of Health's guidance "Personality Disorder: no longer a diagnosis of exclusion", mental health trusts and primary care trusts throughout England have been developing specialist multi-disciplinary personality disorder teams and new, specialist day-patient services for people with personality disorder. This early intervention, preventative, out-patient approach is considered best practice.

But there is a continuing need for specialist in-patient services for a small minority of people suffering from personality disorder and there are other residential units that provide this. This Trust is actively working with commissioners to develop the full range of services for people with personality disorder and to ensure present residents of the Henderson can be offered alternative services where necessary.

Peter Houghton



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Chief Executive Dr Ben Nereli Medical Director South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust, London SW17

Sir: The closure of the Henderson Hospital is indeed "inhumane". I work at Main House where I have seen at first hand the positive difference residential treatment can make to people with a diagnosis of personality disorder. The cost of closing these facilities will soon become apparent when patients start using other services within the NHS and the judiciary. This closure represents very short-sighted thinking and is indicative of the lack of investment in mental health.

Andy Vant

Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

Legal aid for bullying lawyers

Sir: Johann Hari (Opinion, 13 December) attacks cuts in legal aid. I have worked as an accountant to a firm of interpreters that provided interpreting services to some 200 firms of legally-aided lawyers.

My clients had to take legal action against several legal firms to collect unpaid interpreting fees, which were for legal aid-funded immigration clients. When my clients asked to be paid for work done (at 15 per hour compared to 300 per hour for the senior partners of these legal firms) the lawyers were adversarial, bullying and litigious. My clients have won all four or five cases that have gone to court as well as having had to threaten several other firms with court action to obtain payment.

It is pointless to talk about putting more money into legal aid until these problems are recognised and addressed.

Colum Jezierski

London W4

Football's culture of abuse

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Sir: Sol Campbell's invitation to the FA to look into the appalling verbal abuse he has suffered as a footballer is overdue. Harry Redknapp and Sir Alex Ferguson have also complained about the abuse of managers by rival fans.

While they are at it, the FA might also look at the verbal abuse suffered by referees at the hands of fans, players and managers, and the abuse suffered by fans by their rivals at the other end of the ground. And what about the abuse suffered by the poor players from their own manager when they don't perform to his satisfaction? Or the abuse that they suffer from their playing rivals when things turn nasty when one side gets the better of the other.

They may find that all this abuse stems from the culture of a "sport" that has long since lost any understanding of the word.

Keith Davies

Fareham, Hampshire

Disputed status of Jerusalem

Sir: Dr Yoav Tenenbaum criticises you for saying that Tel Aviv is the capital of Israel (letter, 26 December). The Independent is published in Britain and the British government does not recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, so it is reasonable for you to do the same.

Partition of Palestine in 1947 left Jerusalem as an open city, not part of either the Jewish or the Arab state. Dr Tenenbaum is ignoring the principle that territory is not acquired by war.

JIM WHITEHEAD

Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Sir: Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.

W EL-MIQDADI

London SW15

Briefly...

Paying for sex

Sir: Joan Smith's piece (27 December) is headlined "Yes, it should be a crime to pay for sex", but the article makes it clear that she is only against men paying for sex. It seems unfair that, under her proposal, Joan Smith could still legally buy sex from men, not to mention women.

ROBERT PELLEGRINETTI

London NW5

The real green pledge

Sir: If Ben Chu ("2007: the year I took the pledge not to fly", 27 December) is serious about reducing his environmental footprint, then rather than pledging not to fly for a year (and then what?), he could undertake not to have children: a lifelong commitment to a low-carbon regime. Having a child in the developed world is almost certainly the "single most polluting thing a individual can do", and avoiding flying (because you can afford to) is lip-service to the problem.

Nick Allen

Oxford

'Gay' shifts again

Sir: Holly Johnson is reported to have complained about the use of the word "gay" to mean "rubbish" (Letters, 26 December). Years ago, when all those retired colonels complained about "a perfectly innocent English word being hijacked by the homosexual community", they were told that language is always evolving and that the meaning of a word may change with use and time. Why doesn't that apply in this case?

Derek Magrath

Great Malvern, Worcestershire

Day of the hunter

Sir: The hunting fraternity had its orgy of bullying and bombast on Boxing Day. It has been their declared intention from the start to smash the Hunting Act off the statute book, and no doubt in their minds they are well on course. In the normal world, however, people who swaggeringly make a mockery of the rule of law are flagging themselves up as a group that needs to be dealt with. This would involve a tightening of the law, not a whimpering abandonment of the law, which would reward rural hooligans.

Penny Little

Great Haseley, Oxfordshire

Olympic champions

Sir: Your map (22 December) lists Athens, London and Paris as hosting the most Olympic Games, at two each. What about Los Angeles?

Clive Goozee

Bournemouth ■

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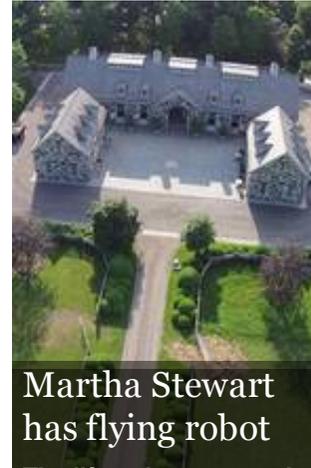
Robert Fisk on Gaza conflict



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