

## Town & Country



Edited by James Fisher



Property in places such as Northleach, Gloucestershire, is already popular and the stamp-duty holiday will give the market a nudge

# A first-class stamp

**A** TEMPORARY holiday on stamp duty on the first £500,000 of property sales has been met with positive reviews by estate agents and property experts.

The holiday, which was announced last week as part of Chancellor Rishi Sunak's summer budget update, intends to kick-start the property market in England and Northern Ireland after the shock of the coronavirus pandemic. The holiday came into immediate effect and will last until March 2021.

'Today's announcement will provide a welcome boost to property transactions across the market and comes at a time when activity levels and interest have already started to recover following the two-month market shutdown,' says Oliver Knight, head of residential development research at Knight Frank. 'Clearly, the Chancellor recognises the multiplier effect that moving house can have on the UK economy, with more money spent on DIY projects and renovations.'

The holiday has reopened the discussion on property taxes as a whole, with Mr Knight adding that 'a wider re-think of property taxes is still needed to reduce the distortive effect SDLT [Stamp Duty Land Tax] has on property markets' (*Agromenes, page 41*).

**‘The market “requires a strong lower end—these transactions are the legs that support the market as a whole” ;**

His comments are echoed by Dominic Agace, chief executive of Winkworths, who describes the holiday as a 'tremendous fillip for first-time buyers and home movers nationwide', and that 'the ability to move home without punitive taxes is essential'.

Mr Agace also welcomes the £3 billion green-homes grant that was announced, which gives households grants of up to £10,000 to make their homes more environmentally friendly. After criticism that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Green New Deal wasn't 'green' enough (*Town & Country, July 8*), Mr Sunak promised a 'green recovery with concern for the environment at its heart'.

James Greenwood of Stacks Property Search said that the stamp-duty holiday 'provides welcome relief' and notes that the market 'requires a strong performing lower end where the majority of transactions take place—these are the legs that support the market as a whole'.

Mr Greenwood adds: 'One of the problems in the housing market is a reluctance among the older generation to leave the houses that have become too large for them. This will encourage downsizers and free up the market at the middle and upper end, where there is a surplus of demand.'





Some 27 elite ballet dancers from around the world have filled their bathtubs and performed a new film, *Swan Lake Bath Ballet*, in their own homes. It is set to Tchaikovsky's famous theme and dancers from New Zealand, South Africa, the US, including Viktorina Kapitonova (pictured), Hong Kong, Australia and the UK took part. The films were recorded on mobile phones, with participants finding innovative solutions, from a child's scooter to piles of books and even a plunger, to stabilise cameras. Choreographed and directed by Corey Baker from his own bathroom, the film is now available on BBC iPlayer



### Good week for

#### Centuries-old graffiti

Two workers have discovered graffiti dating from 1830, during the restoration of Wentworth Woodhouse, South Yorkshire. The inscription, about beer and cold weather (some things never change), was written on a roof timber above the Van Dyck Room by three workmen named Jack Falding, Jack Vickers and Jack Wragg



#### Cross River gorillas

New photographs of a group of Cross River gorillas show the parents with young, raising hopes that the animals, of which there are only 300 left in the wild, are actually reproducing. According to the WWF, the sub-species is the 'world's rarest great ape'

#### Singing from the clifftops

Land atop the White Cliffs of Dover is alive with songbirds and wildflowers after their meadows were restored, says the National Trust. The land was purchased some two years ago after a fundraising appeal by the Trust, which was backed by the late Dame Vera Lynn

### Bad week for

#### Australian drivers

An Australian man was driving happily down the highway when he realised he had an unwelcome passenger, an Eastern Brown snake. The snake, one of the world's deadliest and responsible for the most deaths in Australia, was fended off by a seatbelt and a convenient knife. The driver, Jimmy, was unhurt



#### Japanese rollercoasters

A theme park in Japan has asked riders of its rollercoasters to avoid screaming to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The park has instead asked all passengers to 'keep a serious face' and to scream internally, a trick the British perfected centuries ago



## Bag a butterfly, virtually

IT feels as if, in the past two weeks, we have all emerged from our cocoons, spread our wings a bit and headed out into the world. However, we mustn't forget where this beautiful skill of metamorphosis originally appeared. This Friday, the Big Butterfly Count returns for its 11th edition.

Last year, more than 113,500 people took part in the survey, submitting 116,009 counts of butterflies and day-flying moths across the UK. The survey takes place when the butterfly population is at its peak and helps the Butterfly Conservation charity assess the health of our environment. The activity is easy and simple: either download the Big Butterfly Count app or record your results from the downloadable sheets on the website's survey. Then head outside on a sunny day for 15 minutes, as many times as you like during the three-week period, and record any species you see, such as the large white, peacock, small pearl-bordered fritillary (above) and brimstone (below) or rarer examples such as the gatekeeper or holly blue.



Visit [www.bigbutterflycount.org](http://www.bigbutterflycount.org) for more details on how to participate.

## A giant mystery

THE history of the Cerne Abbas Giant in Dorset has been called into question by his smallest foe yet: the humble snail. It is believed the 180ft-long chalk sculpture was either an ancient fertility symbol or a likeness to Hercules, but archaeologist Mike Allen has analysed soil around it and found fragments of snail species that first arrived in the UK in the 13th or 14th century, suggesting the sculpture could not have been created before medieval times.

The site was gifted to the National Trust some 100 years ago by the Pitt-Rivers family and the organisation began tests earlier this year to determine its age, but the results have been delayed by lockdown. Mr Allen and Martin Papworth of the Trust believe the figure 'may not be prehistoric, nor even Roman, but may belong to more recent times', according to an article in *Current Archaeology*. The Trust says the findings made 'tentative early suggestions about the age of the Giant', but that 'full analysis is ongoing'.

Other ideas for the origin of the Giant include its creation in the 17th century by the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury to depict William III as 'Herculean'. Others think it was the work of local landowner Baron Holles of Ifield to mock Oliver Cromwell, with the club depicting repressive rule and the 35ft phallus mocking Cromwell's Puritanism. The earliest recorded mention of the giant was in 1694.

Alamy, Rijen Capstick





Shooting must be clear about the good it does for songbirds, not only pheasant and woodcock

## Working for all wildlife

WHEN Nick Sotherton joined the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) to study for his PhD in 1976, I doubt even he imagined he would still be there 44 years later. He rose to become the director of research, advisory and education before his retirement last week—which, he says, is 'bloody stressful', as he bemoans the state of his garden.

Prof Sotherton's success at one of the country's top conservation charities is all the more surprising considering he grew up in a London suburb. At school, he was asked what he wanted to do for a career—when he said he 'wanted to work with animals', he was promptly sent to the local abattoir. Since then, however, he's been a champion of the positive impact shooting can have on wildlife, backing up the instincts of many landowners and farmers with statistics, science and evidence. That said, he's under no illusions as to the threats that shooting faces.

'We know that, since 1961, the numbers of birds released have increased nine-fold,' he explains. 'We've been doing impact work since the turn of the millennium and we've found good things and bad things. The bad things can be put right and we have to shout the good things from the rooftops.' When I ask him for the biggest change he's seen, the answer didn't require much interpretation—I've never seen such an unprecedented attack on gamebird management.

'As soon as I got into the world of managing animals for shooting, I became aware of the

good that habitat management does,' he tells me. 'It's a paradox, isn't it, shooting animals to conserve them, but you have to come to terms with it to understand the good it does.' It's clear that for shooting to survive, it needs to frame itself in the context of conservation and benefits to wildlife. 'It was me that really took the GWCT down the line of linnets, lapwings and yellowhammers,' he says. 'We're faced with this attack on what we do in 2020, but we've been collecting evidence for 20 years. They have questions, but we have the answers.'

When I ask him what his legacy at the GWCT will be, he modestly dismisses the question, but he does say he wants to see the charity 'continue to gather evidence, based on sound science, that leads our ability to comment on how land is managed and to influence policy'. He reminds me that the GWCT is an NGO and, as many charities are, is struggling as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. He explains the new fundraising initiative, the 500 Club, and how it's necessary to support the charity to keep on finding 'what the truth is, and what we can do to make things better. That's what we've always done,' he says. 'And that's what we'll continue to do.'

As we part virtual ways, he reminds me again of the threat shooting faces. 'It's up to us to get our own house in order, by making changes to our practices and by continuing to be a positive force for wildlife management,' he emphasises. 'If we don't do it, someone else will.'

For more information, visit [www.gwct.org.uk](http://www.gwct.org.uk)



## Wild West? No, Kent

WHAT'S the difference between a buffalo and a bison? Well, for one, you can't wash your hands in a buffalo and, also, it seems, you'll soon be able to find a bison in Kent.

Last Friday, Kent Wildlife Trust and the Wildwood Trust announced some £1 million of funding to bring bison to a British woodland. The trusts say it will be the first time that bison are introduced to a UK nature reserve.

The Wilder Blean project near Canterbury is aiming to improve the biodiversity of one of the largest remaining areas of ancient woodland in Britain. The European bison is the continent's largest land mammal, with adult males weighing as much as a ton, and is the closest living relative to the steppe bison that used to roam the UK. Despite their size, these 'ecosystem engineers' are peaceful animals that fell trees and create space for wildlife to flourish, according to the project. 'We can take an important step towards reversing the terrifying rate of species loss in the UK,' says Paul Hadaway, director of conservation at Kent Wildlife Trust. 'The Wilder Blean project will prove that a wilder, Nature-based solution is the right way to tackle the climate crisis. Using missing keystone species such as bison to restore natural processes to habitats is the key to bio-abundance.'

The project, which is funded by the People's Postcode Lottery, will involve extensive consultation. 'Local people will have the chance to get involved... and help return the land to a functioning ecosystem, brimming with life.'

### Bison are back after 6,000 years







Much like most of us before the hairdressers re-opened, Anne Hathaway's cottage in Stratford-Upon-Avon, Warwickshire, is modelling a slightly dishevelled look, after four months of minimal care during lockdown. The family home of Shakespeare's wife usually attracts one million visitors a year, but, these days, they're mostly only animals.

'The wild is slowly taking over,' says Mark Ratcliffe of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. 'Various forms of beetle are munching through the timbers, as plants we've never seen before grow upwards through the floorboards. Even spiders, rats and foxes no longer avoid us, as they have us outnumbered'



## Farewell, old friend

IT is with immense sadness that we share the news that Jonathan Hearn, COUNTRY LIFE'S Arts and Antiques Advertising Manager, died last week.

Jonnie, as we knew him, joined the magazine in 1986 and was a hugely popular and well-known figure in the Arts and antiques world. Energetic and passionate in his conversations with both clients and colleagues, his enthusiasm and kindness extended far beyond his professional commitments and his love for the countryside, from tractors to dogs and everything in between, was unrivalled. He was always a friend first, and a colleague second.

Those of us at COUNTRY LIFE, and everyone else who has worked with Jonnie over the years, are heartbroken and we extend our heartfelt sympathy to his family at this difficult moment. He will be much missed.

Alamy; Evan Bowen-Jones; Mark Wiltamson; Sarah Furnessworth/Country Life Picture Library



## Country Mouse *Ploughing on*

MY late father flew jets, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, he had an armoury of machinery for cutting, trimming and shaping the lawn, but, above all, he simply liked tooting around his few fields on his ancient tractor, a grey Massey Ferguson.

I think the tractor was started by doing something with the gear stick, but it held no interest for me—which was lucky, as it was just about the only thing Dad didn't like sharing. He would be crestfallen if the gardener showed some initiative and took a trailer-load of leaves down to the bonfire instead of him.

Yet even Dad's keen interest in tractors was as nothing compared with that of Jonnie Hearn, who died last week. Jonnie was COUNTRY LIFE'S Antiques and Fine Arts Advertising Manager and the nicest man anyone could wish to know. He watched ploughing videos in his lunch break and relieved the editorial team of its copy of *Farmer's Weekly* before we knew it had arrived. I don't think he was really meant to be in an office—preferring to be working the fields in Wiltshire instead—but all his colleagues in the art world loved him; and nobody had a bad word to say about him.

Jonnie, go and plough your furrow and, if you see Dad, please say hi. **MH**



## Town Mouse *A long-awaited haircut*

WITH the opening of non-essential shops in London last week, long queues formed outside every barber in the neighbourhood. I didn't trouble joining a queue myself, but, when I happened to pass by my local shop the day after the rush and saw it empty, I slipped in to be shorn. The two men who work there were sprawled on their barber's chairs, staring exhaustedly into their phones. One of them, the Turkish proprietor, proffered me his seat, his flickering smile reflecting happiness and exhaustion in equal measure at the sight of yet another customer.

He usually treats me to a monologue on football when my hair is being cut. On this occasion, however, I was cheerfully regaled with a detailed account of the challenges of re-opening the shop. The previous day, I was assured, he and his colleague had trimmed the locks of more than 60 customers. Merely conforming to Government regulations with hand sanitiser and plastic capes, meanwhile, had cost several hundred pounds. Then there was the matter of his landlord, who had refused to discount the first quarter rents.

At that point, he ran out of hair to cut, but I came away with renewed respect for all those trying to run small businesses in these peculiar times. **JG**