

## Riddled with debt

The governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, isn't renowned for over-the-top language or exaggeration.

So when he says the banks are getting "breath-taking" levels of taxpayer support it is time for taxpayers to take a sharp intake of breath and reflect.

The world appears to be going on pretty much as normal. But we are collectively in a deep pit of debt with steep sides.

A leading economic institution reckons that families face a 7p rise in income tax and VAT on previously exempt goods if the Government's budget is to be balanced.

This generation is passing on to the next generation a legacy of debt.

At the time, there seemed little alternative for the Government in propping up ailing banks. There was too much at stake to let them go under.

It will be interesting to see what the verdict of history is. The Government is trying to call the shots on how banks run themselves, and does not seem to be having notable success.

Staving off a banking disaster has been achieved at the cost of having a ball and chain attached to the public finances for the foreseeable future.

## Many happy returns!

Years ago the former chairman of Shrewsbury Town, Tim Yates, had a cat which was aged somewhere between 27 and 30 – we forget exactly how old.

Ooo, how interesting, we said. Can we do a story?

The reply was in the negative, and the reason was that Mr and Mrs Yates feared that it would be tempting fate.

So it is with a little trepidation that we report today that Otto, a Shropshire dog, is officially the oldest in the world. The Dachshund cross terrier, owned by Peter and Lynn Jones of Shrewsbury, will be 21 in February.

He gained his world's oldest dog accolade from the Guinness Book of Records at a recording of the Paul O'Grady show.

Long may Otto reign!

## FROM THE FILES



The Telford Development Corporation general manager, Mr Emyr Thomas, told Madeley residents last night: "The worst is over."

Outlining the development due to take place over the next two years, Mr Thomas said: "In the pattern of Telford, Madeley is emerging, rightly so, as a good prototype of the development of the rest of the new town."

The main feature of the "new" Madeley will be the village green, between the shopping centre and Russell Road and the bypass. The Russell Road cottages will be left as they are and the shopping centre will be increased to include nine more shops, another supermarket and a couple of banks.

The village green was putting the corporation to a lot of extra expense and trouble "but now we've got this far it would be a tragedy if it were not to see the light of day."

(Shropshire Star, October 21, 1969)

## FEATURES

# Getting a laugh out of disappointments

A stand up comedian from Shropshire who found fame and fortune telling jokes is looking forward to returning to his home town

Stewart Lee was being ironic when he decided to call his forthcoming tour, If You Prefer a Milder Comedian, Please Ask for One. But that's what you'd expect from the Shropshire-born star of TV, stage and stand up comedy.

Lee has forged a long and successful career as, to quote Ricky Gervais, 'The funniest, most cliché-free comedian on the circuit'. He'll be touring the UK throughout October and November, bringing dead pan delivery and smug condescension to the masses. Lee, famously, is not a man to blow his own trumpet. In spring, when he returned to the nation's TV screens for a six-part BBC 2 series, Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle, it was reviewed positively in all quarters. Well, almost all.

Time Out found it objectionable, describing Lee as 'fat' and his performance as 'positively Neanderthal, suggesting a jungle-dwelling pygmy, struggling to coax notes out of a clarinet that has fallen from a passing aircraft'. The review, curiously, was written by Lee himself.

So, given his avoidance of self-promotion, what can we expect from his tour? Lee says: "My show is for people who hate TV comedy and don't like stand up." It's a statement that suggests Lee's not cut out for a career in advertising. But examine it in more detail, and it reads as a eulogy.



BY ANDY RICHARDSON  
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Lee avoids the sort of rat-tat-tat one-liners popular on on punch-line-strewn game shows – Jimmy Carr he ain't – and steadfastly avoids the unintelligent toilet humour that is popular on the stand up circuit.

When he recently appeared on Have I Got News For You, he

*"I think you reach a stage where life causes many disappointments, rather than explosions of anger. So the show's about that"*

only did so because the fee helped pay for his marriage to fellow comic, Bridget Christie.

"I like to do long bits and go on digressions," he says, describing his chatty style. "It's a bit like when you sit exams and you're asked to show your working out. I like to show the working out for the joke."

Lee was born in Wellington and, at an early age, his family moved to Solihull. He studied English at St Edmund Hall, Oxford in the 1980s, where he met Richard Herring. After university, he moved to London and begun performing stand up comedy.

During the 1990s, he found fame for being one half of the 1990s comedy duo Lee and Herring. He also wrote for BBC Radio 4's On the Hour, which was notable for the first appearance of Steve Coogan's celebrated character, Alan Partridge. Lee and Herring enjoyed success throughout the nineties with Fist of Fun and This Morning with Richard Not Judy.

Soon after, he caused a sensation with his satirical musical/opera Jerry Springer: The Opera, which ran for four years in the West

End before transferring to BBC Two, where it caused such offence to Christian Voice and other protest groups that they pursued Lee through the courts, in a case rejected by magistrates.

### Ironic

Since then, Lee has written with Johnny Vegas, presented a BBC 2 tribute to Star Trek and been named the 41st best stand-up of all time in a Channel 4 survey. He beat Dave Allen, George Carlin, Steve Martin, Robin Williams and Tommy Cooper.

Now it's time to take the road again for a 40-plus date UK tour, which will be followed by a six-week run at the Leicester Square Theatre, in London.

He says: "If You Prefer A Milder Comedian is a title that's sort of ironic. It's the type of title that these outrageous comedians give their tours..." which Lee, clearly, is not.

"I was booked in to do the Edinburgh Fringe for August



Stewart has written with Johnny Vegas and presented a BBC2 tribute to Star Trek

and we had to describe what to do in March.

"I had at the back of my mind this idea that I'd done in the telly show, about what things you should write stand up about, rather than mortgages and bringing up kids.

"When I was coming up with the material, I had my loyalty card rejected in a coffee shop. On the back of the cup, it said If You Prefer A Milder Coffee, Just Ask. I thought that was good."

Lee continues: "Frankie Boyle said nobody over 40 should do comedy, because you lose your anger. So I talked to other parents about their kids and what they were worried about and what they found funny. Most people of my generation like Jeremy Clarkson, but I don't. So part of my show runs along the lines 'I'm not a real man because I don't like Top Gear'. I think you reach a stage where life causes many disappointments, rather than explosions of anger. So the show's about that."

Lee's tour will take him to Shropshire's neighbouring counties, though, having appeared frequently at venues like Oakengates Theatre, he's opting for other concert halls this time.

He adds: "I was born in Wellington, though we moved at an early age to Solihull," he says.

"I don't have that many memories of it, though I know what the train station looks like. But I've always had good gigs in Telford. We're often over there that way in the Sealed Knot, my wife's in it. They recreate old battles and she had to do musket training at the stately home round the corner, what's it called, you know, the place where Charles II hid up a tree?" Boscobel, I say. "Yeah, that's it." And for the first time during our conversation, he bursts out laughing.

● Stewart Lee's tour dates are available at [www.stewartlee.co.uk](http://www.stewartlee.co.uk)



Stewart Lee has carved out a long and successful career and earned plaudits from the likes of Ricky Gervais

## SIDEWAYS GLANCE with Shirley Tart



● On the whole, I quite like Cheryl Cole. She is funny, undeniably a beauty, without a doubt (despite their backbiting) has won at least a bit of Simon Cowell's heart and is fiercely protective of the acts she is nurturing on X-Factor.

## Many talented Cheryl has a lot going for her – but not her singing voice

But there are a couple of other things as well – she cries too much over nothing and after last week's episode when she performed on stage herself in a ridiculous set of slashed clothing, she can't sing. There I've said it and now I'd better duck!

● I am very careful when I talk about names for obvious reasons. But as for that Saturday night programme on the other side, the grin of the latest series was discovering that the real name of superior professional dancer Anton du Beke – in big trouble for alleged racist remarks – is Tony Beak.

● Our postie is lovely. He is cheerful, helpful and keeps dog biscuits in his pocket for our pair of hounds if they reach our

side of the gate before he arrives at the other. I don't want him to lose his job. Sadly, I can't see how any of us can protect our postmen and women if this damning strike goes ahead. Those of us not part of whichever company is in trouble, can never know the full story between management and employees. But many industries – including ours – have had to face change and embrace modern methods, indeed we are all living through the latest industrial revolution. Archaic striking, however, is in the interests of absolutely nobody nowadays. In this case, not Royal Mail's, not ours and especially not in the interests of your average, friendly postie.

● A group of MPs are said to

have warned Scotland Yard that any criminal investigation into their ranks in the pursuit of possible fraud could be a breach of Parliamentary privilege. Breathtaking, isn't it?

● The greatest war of words this week has surrounded tomorrow night's Question Time and the debate on whether the BBC should ever have invited the British National Party along. Of course Nick Griffin and his pals talk a load of inflammatory rubbish and Army chiefs are also right to be concerned about their use of British military valour to promote their nasty cause. But unpalatable though it might be, a lot of people voted to elect Mr Griffin to the European Parliament and it seems odd for the

most vocal to now label his party as illegal. Surely that should have been clarified before the BNP was allowed anywhere near the electoral system. Interestingly, it has won far more oxygen-giving publicity before the event than it would have done with just one late-night hour tomorrow.

● You have to laugh. Shadow defence secretary Liam Fox has got huffy over General Sir Richard Dannatt being billed as the expert to advise a new Conservative government. Dr Fox insists he is in charge of policy, adding touchily: "Advisers advise, politicians decide. It

takes a bit of training to be a politician."

● Science and on-going research into the faraway past as well as the future, really is amazing. A Texas University team believes that dinosaurs may have been wiped out by a 25-mile meteor after finding what is believed to be the world's biggest crater, the Shiva basin in India, diameter 300 miles. Incredible. But poor dinosaurs!

● A new coffee from Nescafe which includes collagen and may help smooth away a girl's facial wrinkles? If you buy that one, you'll buy just about anything. And still have the wrinkles.

What do you think of Shirley's views?  
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