



## Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists Newsletter January 2025

Dear Fellow Humanists

A Happy New Year to you all – I hope that it is not too late to wish you well for 2025. I hope that you have all had a pleasant Festive season. Personally, I am looking forward to 2025 and an interesting year for Humanist issues. First, some very good news. Over the Festive Season we learned that Mubarak Bala has been released from his prison ordeal in Nigeria – more about this later in the Newsletter. Secondly, some interesting news with the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and what this means for world peace and for those of us who support climate change and take a humanitarian view of the world. More about this later in the Newsletter. John Goodman has been very busy over the past few months in researching the impact of the so-called 'Free Schools' being proposed for Warwickshire and Solihull. Again, there is more about this issue in the Newsletter.

Remember January only appears to be the longest month. It is just that your wage or pension were paid just before Christmas and the next one is due at the end of this month. All the Christmas cheer has gone, the pretty sparkling lights have been put back in their box. The mornings and afternoons are still dark and gloomy. Every week seems to bring a new storm with gale winds and torrential rain. But have heart – British Summer Time will be here on 30<sup>th</sup> March – just 8 weeks away! We will get there very soon

Thank you

Brian Goredema-Braid

Chair of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists

### Meetings:

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> January:** We had our first online meeting of 2025. This meeting provided a good opportunity for us to catch up with each other after the Festive Season. We were also pleasantly surprised to be joined by two new members to our group – Joe Coventry and Ashleigh Simpson. Hopefully, we will see you at future meetings too. John Goodfellow provided an overview on his research into Free Schools in Warwickshire. As well as discussing general news topics we also discussed any books, films or TV programmes that we had seen. The meeting finished with the usual quiz.

**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February:** This will be the second online meeting. At this meeting we will have an input from Clare Elcombe-Webber the Head of Humanist Care. As I have previously mentioned, we have very little involvement with Humanist Pastoral Care. I do believe that this is an important aspect of Humanism that we need to develop in Coventry & Warwickshire. The Zoom link to join this meeting is the same as we used for the January meeting. We will look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/79097325920?pwd=UUIMbWQvVWxibFM2VUptWm91ZDFsUT09>

**Meeting ID: 790 9732 5920**

**Passcode: RtGB99**

**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March:** This will be our first in-person meeting of 2025 which will be held at the Waverley Day Centre, Waverley Road, Kenilworth, CV8 1JL . We have invited Geoff Sallis of Humanist Climate Change to address the meeting. I am sure that issues of climate change and environmental protection is a subject that is close to the hearts of many Humanists. This should be a very interesting meeting as I know that many members are concerned about issues of climate change and global warming. The meeting now has even more relevance following the decision by President Trump within hours of his inauguration to take the USA out of the Paris Climate Pact and for the USA to “drill, baby drill!”

**SUCCESS: Mubarak Bala is free! - 7 January, 2025**



President of the Nigerian Humanist Association Mubarak Bala is finally free after nearly four-and-a-half years of imprisonment for ‘blasphemous’ posts on Facebook. Mubarak was jailed in 2020 and convicted in 2022 by the High Court in Kano. Initially he was sentenced to 24 years but in May his sentence was drastically reduced to five years after Court of Appeal judges found that his original sentence was excessive and in contravention of the law.

Like humanists all over the world, Humanists UK has been campaigning for Bala’s release since he was arrested and today expressed delight at the news.

Bala was first arrested for posting ‘blasphemous’ content on Facebook that was deemed likely to cause a public disturbance. He was eventually convicted on 18 counts of ‘causing a public disturbance’ under the Kano Penal Code and sentenced to 24 years’ imprisonment. His case was persistently marred by procedural irregularities. He was detained without charge for over a year and denied access to his lawyers, family, and medical attention for extended periods. Even once charged, his trial was repeatedly delayed and the charges against him were duplicated. Before his trial, the Abuja High Court ruled that he should be released on bail but this was ignored by Kano State authorities. When the trial came, under duress, Bala pled guilty to all charges against him.

Humanists UK raised the matter repeatedly with the UK Government and parliamentarians and the UK Government took substantial action, including engaging at ministerial level, while he has been mentioned in Parliament over 50 times. Humanists UK also organised a protest outside the Nigerian High Commission and met the High Commissioner about his case.



Humanists UK has reiterated again that Bala should never have been arrested for peacefully expressing his humanist views. His case exemplifies how blasphemy laws violate not only the right to freedom of expression, but also the right to freedom of religion or belief – which includes the right to hold non-religious beliefs such as humanism – as they are used to harass, victimise, and discriminate against the non-religious and religious minorities.

Humanists UK campaigns for the repeal of all blasphemy laws worldwide.

**Humanists UK Chief Executive Andrew Copson commented:**

‘Words can hardly express how relieved and delighted we are to learn that our colleague and friend Mubarak Bala has finally been released after what has been such an outrageous denial of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Nigeria’s own constitution.

‘While we celebrate Mubarak’s release, we want to extend our thanks to all those who have campaigned on his behalf – our patrons, members, and supporters, our colleagues from different faith and belief backgrounds across the UK, and the UK Government itself.

‘12 countries still have the death penalty for the so-called crime of blasphemy, including Nigeria, and in 58 more countries you could go to prison. Meanwhile, perpetrators of vigilante justice and mob violence against those who have allegedly caused “religious offence” can act without impunity. We will continue to campaign for the repeal of all blasphemy laws and for the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone, everywhere.’

### **Election of Donald Trump as President of the United States:**

The inauguration of Donald Trump as USA President took place on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January. In the July Newsletter, I did mention Trump’s election campaign infused with Christian fundamentalist values and the rise of right-wing fanaticism in the US Election and the chilling comment made by Trump for “All Christians to vote for him in the Presidential Election and you will not need to vote ever again’.

The autocracy of voting for Trump and Christian nationalism - the belief that a Christian moral perspective must rule the country’s law and institutions was a stronger force in that presidential election than ever before. While most of the focus has been on Trump’s alliance with evangelical Christians, there is another group that is more influential and they may tip the scales in his favour. Catholic bishops lead the largest single religious group in the country with 73 million believers or a fifth of the population.

The inauguration was a terrible day for democracy. I won’t list all of the Bills that Trump rescinded within hours of his election including repealing Bills supporting equality and diversity, withdrawing the USA from the Paris Climate Change Accord and the World Health Organisation. But it was perhaps symbolised most graphically by Trump’s pardoning of 1500 convicted insurgents, including members of the far right militias Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, for crimes arising from the insurrectionary storming of congress, and Elon Musk, who has invested in the Trump election campaign and now wants to invest £100 million in promoting the hard right in the UK giving what was unmistakably a fascist salute at the Trump inauguration rally.

I have included the official Humanists UK analysis of the election of Trump from Chief Executive Andrew Copson:



The Inauguration of Donald Trump was on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January on what some call '**Blue Monday**', supposedly the most depressing day of the year – and whether or not that's really

true, we appreciate the opportunity it affords us to reflect on our feelings and the state of the world. With Donald Trump's return to the American presidency, I know many of us are feeling the weight of uncertainty about the future. **These moments when the world seems to be moving in the wrong direction are precisely when we must come together and do what we can to build a better world. It starts with each of us as individuals.**

Right now, you might be looking for a way to make a real difference – to connect with others who share your values and vision for a better world. That's exactly what membership in our community offers. In times when reason appears to be smothered by populism, when kindness is dismissed as weakness, and when hope is outgunned by cynicism and division, we stand firm in our values. Humanism represents the antithesis to these trends – reason tempered by compassion, science guided by ethics, and progress driven by care for all humanity.

**When the news feels overwhelming, remember that real change often starts close to home.** Here in the UK, we're making tangible progress every day. Our work in schools is nurturing critical thinking in the next generation. Our presence in hospitals is providing comfort to those who need it most. Our voice in Parliament is ensuring that rational, ethical perspectives are heard in crucial debates about our future.

For as little as £5 a month, you can help shape the future of our country. Your membership will strengthen our voice, expand our reach, and help us build the kind of society we all want to see – one where decisions are based on evidence, where ethics matter more than expedience, and where every person's dignity is respected.

**In times like these, it's easy to feel powerless. But together, we are anything but.** Join us today and be part of a movement that's working to make our corner of the world a better place.

**Let's transform this 'Blue Monday' into a day of light and hope.**

With determination and optimism,

**Andrew Copson**

**Chief Executive, Humanists UK**

#### **Update on Free Schools:**

At a recent in-person meeting of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists, John Goodfellow mentioned of how the emergence of the government initiative of 'Free Schools' could impact upon the existing education system as we know it. There is no doubt that this development of Free Schools is quite alarming. I am pleased that John has provided a first draft of this issue. John and I will welcome comments and observations from other members of Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists:

At a recent Humanist meeting last summer, I spoke about the emergence of the "Free School" Government initiative in England and Wales and linked this to a similar development - Charter Schools - in the US, Canada and Sweden. I also provided a written version of my talk which I distributed to members at a subsequent meeting. I listed a number of problems which these schools have experienced since the initiative was launched by the Coalition Government in 2011. For example, many Free schools closed very rapidly soon after opening. There is also evidence of students in some schools being offered a restricted curriculum with undue reliance with online learning. Teachers were often not professionally trained and there are stories of high salaries for leading executives and shareholders enjoying large dividends. I ended my talk by referring to the announcement that a Free School for Secondary students would open in Warwick in September 2025 and that I would watch this development closely and report back to members when I had any further news.

With regard to the proposed Warwick school, I can tell you that it would seem to be the brainchild of a US company - **Talenton Business Initiatives** which has a UK. Offshoot, **Talenton Alternative Provision Trust Limited** which is based in Sutton Coldfield. I've been looking at the publicity material for both these organisations in an attempt to find out what their philosophy is and how this relates

schools and colleges in the UK. Talenton US states that they will deliver *“critical hires to your organisation by developing highly effective talent acquisition strategies”* The Sutton Coldfield company provides little or no information other than to say under the heading “Number of Academies” the figure ‘0’!!

I want to turn now to the latest news we have on the proposed Talenton School in Warwick. The first surprise is – it’s not opening after all! The Leamington Courier reporter, Andy Mitchell wrote in December 24 as follows, *“Plans to build a new alternative - provision school in Warwick is shrouded in mystery. The plan is for a 60 place Secondary School but this is at least a year behind schedule.”* It is clear from this report that Talenton is to be a school which will cater for older students with Special Educational Needs. This was confirmed by Warwickshire County Council Director of Education - John Kyriacou who reports that he has attempted to contact Central Government for further information but there has been no reply and therefore, *“it’s all out of our hands”* The latest speculation is that the school might open in 2026 - but according to a statement by Solihull Academy Trust which seems to have a link the Warwick initiative - *“it might not open at all “*

So *“it’s all out of our hands”* says Mr Kyriacou, but of course it's not. Warwickshire County Council is now obliged to come up with an emergency plan to provide accommodation for at least some of the students who will have been identified for entry to the new Free School. There is, I understand, a proposal to open a “Hub” in the north of the county which will inevitably mean additional and unexpected costs. We should bear in mind that when business- run free schools are planned, Central Government reduces the amount of money allocated to main- stream local LEA schools and colleges. The background to all this is, as I indicated in my earlier report, an ever-growing intrusion by Capitalist business into area of our lives, areas which have traditionally been financed and overseen by public bodies -schools, health services, welfare, transport etc. These are, of course, key elements of our hard-won democracy with all that that implies – regulation, oversight, responsibility. This intrusion has been accompanied by well documented denigration by both Governments and Business of the role of public services, generally accompanied by substantial reduction in funding. This development, part of world-wide neo-liberal domination of our economic, political and social life, has profound implications for the future well-being of citizens of long-standing democracies and also of aspiring democracies throughout the world. As Humanists, we have an obligation I believe to keep ourselves informed of such developments as best we can and to make our voices heard.

**John Goodfellow January 2025**

Continuing on the theme of education and of similar concern is the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill which passed its second reading earlier this month. Below is the official statement from Humanists UK

#### **Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill:**

The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill passed its second reading yesterday, a key stage in of the bill’s passage into legislation. Overall, Humanists UK supports the bill, in particular the excellent measures including a Children Not in School Register and legislation to close loopholes that enable the continued operation of illegal faith schools. It has welcomed this important step in the legislative process.

However, Humanists UK is deeply concerned about oversights in the Bill that, taken together, would remove the so-called ‘50% cap’ on faith school admissions first implemented by Labour in 2007 to improve integration in schools.

#### **Measures to close illegal faith schools supported**

The need to keep children and young people safe and legislate to close illegal faith schools was raised by MPs, with Humanists UK’s decade-long campaigning in this area getting mentioned in Parliament. Lizzi Collinge MP, a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (APPHG), welcomed the Bill and the measures it will take to ‘stop vulnerable children from falling through the cracks’:



‘The introduction of a register for children not in school will ensure greater safeguards, particularly for those who may be at risk of exploitation or neglect. It is vital that every child has access to safe, high-quality education regardless of where that is given.

I also welcome measures to crack down on illegal schools, where unfortunately we have seen many serious cases of abuse, including sexual abuse. Measures in the Bill will protect children from both poor schooling and the use of illegal schools to terrorise children. I put on record my thanks to Humanists UK, which has led a campaign for over a decade to crack down on illegal schools and has shone a light on some really horrific practices.’

Jo White, Labour MP for Bassetlaw, also spoke on the need for better oversight and regulation of home education to stop ‘extreme religious groups controlling children’s lives and welfare’. Speaking in support of a children not in school register Munira Wilson MP, the Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson, said it was ‘deeply concerning that there may be many thousands of children whose whereabouts are simply unknown.’



At the moment, home-educated children can be entirely invisible to authorities. Part of the Children’s Wellbeing Bill will introduce ‘Children Not in School Registers’. These will be managed by local authorities and will close one loophole used by proprietors of illegal schools, who claim they are merely providing supplementary religious instruction to children otherwise educated at home. Measures to increase Ofsted’s powers to inspect ‘independent educational institutions’ are also included in the Bill which gives a clear statement that ‘the Chief Inspector may, without a warrant, enter any premises’ they deem necessary.

#### **Concerns about 100% religiously selective schools**

Concerns were raised about a possible expansion of state-funded faith schools and faith-based admissions processes as a possible unintended consequence of the Bill. Concluding her speech, Lizzi Collinge said:

‘I want to put forward a personal view on faith selection in schools: it should have no place in state-funded education. It is social selection by proxy and, at the very least, I would like to see a firm commitment to keeping the 50% cap on all schools.’

Clause 51 of the Bill will remove the presumption that new schools should be free schools and allow proposals for other types of school including Voluntary Aided (VA) ones. Voluntary Aided schools can determine their own admissions, and discriminate against all pupils on religious grounds if oversubscribed. This would circumvent the ‘50% cap’ which has been applied to all new religious academies and free schools since 2007 and has been a crucial safeguard in making sure that faith schools do not exclude all children who live locally whose families do not share the same beliefs. Humanists UK has raised concerns about this clause with MPs and how, if not amended, it would pave the way for a new generation of 100% religiously selective schools.

#### **Commenting on the passing of the Bill’s second reading, Humanists UK’s Education Campaigns Manager Lewis Young said:**

‘The passing of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill at second reading is a great step forward to bring forward important and much overdue reforms to close illegal faith schools and keep young people safe. Thank you to all of those MPs who spoke on the need for these regulations at the debate.

‘However, we are deeply concerned about the possible unintended consequences of the Bill’s clause that will allow new 100% religiously selective schools to open. This contradicts the other aims of the Bill which are to make sure children have access to good local school places, and undo the good work of the 50% cap which has improved integration. We think the 50% cap should be applied to all new schools in the future, as it has been in the recent past.’

Darwin Day Lecture 2025 – Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February:

Join Professor Jim Al-Khalili for the Darwin Day Lecture 2025, livestreamed to your home, on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February.



**The story of the human brain, with Jim Al-Khalili**

**The Darwin Day Lecture 2025**

**YouTube Live**

**Friday 7 February 2025, 19:30–21:00**

The most remarkable and mysterious object in the cosmos sits inside our heads. Our brains, the centres of consciousness, logic, and creativity, have nearly 100 billion neurons forming some 100 trillion connections, a complexity found nowhere else in the universe.

So how did the conditions on planet Earth drive this evolutionary marvel through planetary catastrophes and epic conflicts, through death, sex, and love? Based on his forthcoming two-part *Horizon* special on the BBC, Jim will share what he has learned from geologists, palaeontologists, neuroscientists, behavioural psychologists – and from having had his own brain scanned, imaged, and 3D-printed.

**In this Darwin Day Lecture, livestreamed from Conway Hall in London, Jim Al-Khalili will take us through the brain's 700 million-year evolutionary history: how it developed from simple nerve cells to control movement and detect light in early organisms into the remarkable system that defines what it means to be human.**

Jim is a past president of the British Science Association, Vice President of Humanists UK, and is a recipient of the Royal Society Michael Faraday medal and the Wilkins-Bernal-Medawar medal, the Institute of Physics Kelvin Medal, and the Stephen Hawking medal.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society and Honorary Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Institute of Physics, and the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

He received an OBE from the Queen in 2007 and later a CBE in 2021, both for 'services to science and public engagement in STEM'. He is a trustee and commissioner on the board of the 1851 Royal Commission, and a Fellow of the Science Museums Group.

We're delighted that Jim Al-Khalili will deliver the 2025 Darwin Day Lecture – and we hope you will join in!

Best wishes,

**Humanists UK**

P.S. If you'd prefer to attend in person, tickets to join us in London are available too – but most have already been snapped up! However you choose to join us, book your ticket today.

**Dr Emma Byrne to deliver the 2025 Rosalind Franklin Lecture, chaired by Samira Ahmed**

Dr Emma Byrne will deliver the Rosalind Franklin Lecture 2025, taking place on 6<sup>th</sup> March, in the week of International Women's Day.

**Early bird tickets are on sale now.**

Often censored, always emotive, swearing is the part of language that speaks when other words fail us. In the Rosalind Franklin Lecture 2025, Emma Byrne will unpack the power of strong language.

Using data from medicine and neuroscience, she will demonstrate why swearing has such a potent effect on both the speaker and their audience. She will draw on her own research, which shows that swearing is used in sympathy and in excitement far more than it is used in anger. She'll also look at pleas for civility and ask: do these make for better discourse, or do they just preserve the status quo?

Whether you try not to swear, or you have a 'broad and lively' swearing vocabulary, the Rosalind Franklin Lecture 2025 will challenge the still-pervasive myths that surround this most adaptable part of speech.

#### **About Dr Emma Byrne**

Dr Emma is a robot scientist who, when she's not developing intelligent systems, writes for *Forbes*, the *FT* and the *Guardian*. She frequently appears on Sky News and the BBC talking about the future of artificial intelligence and robotics. Her PhD in Artificial Intelligence led to a research career that spans projects as disparate as modelling the neural circuits that underlie language acquisition to teaching a robot how to run experiments in yeast genomics.

Her interest in neuroscience led to her first popular science book: *Swearing is Good for You: The Amazing Science of Bad Language*. Her most recent book, *How to Build a Human* is a smart, funny, humane look at what science knows about childhood. It will reassure and inspire parents, would-be-parents, and even once-were-parents about the messy and beautiful process of parenting like a scientist. She recently appeared alongside Ardal O'Hanlan in *Holy F\*\*\** (RTÉ), offering a scientific explanation of the joys of swearing.



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#### **About Samira Ahmed**

Samira Ahmed is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster who presents Front Row on Radio 4 and Newswatch on BBC One, and was named Audio Broadcaster of the Year at the 2020 British Broadcasting Press Guild Awards. In 2023, she made headlines around the world after revealing the existence of the earliest complete concert recording of The Beatles in the UK – made at Stowe boarding school in 1963. She won Stonewall Broadcast of the Year while a presenter at *Channel 4 News*. Her documentaries include *Art of Persia* on BBC Four (2020) and *Disgusted, Mary Whitehouse* (2022) for Radio 4. She writes a regular column in *New Humanist* and is writing a BFI Classics book on *A Hard Day's Night*.

#### **About the Rosalind Franklin Lecture series**

Marking International Women's Day, the Rosalind Franklin Lecture explores and celebrates the contribution of women towards the promotion and advancement of aspects of humanism in the UK and around the world. The Rosalind Franklin medallist has made a significant contribution in one of these fields.

The lecture and medal are named after Rosalind Franklin, humanist and scientist, whose contribution to science for many years went unacknowledged on account of her sex but who is today rightly celebrated.



### Film Review – ‘A Complete Unknown’:

To say that I enjoyed Timothee Chalamet as Bob Dylan in ‘A Complete Unknown’ is a massive understatement. Oscar nominee Chalamet looks and sounds like a young Bob Dylan. It was a feeling of being transported back to the mid 1960’s when I first discovered folk music and the ‘protest movement’. The film covers the early years of Bob Dylan when he arrived on to the American folk and protest movement under the tutelage of a committed Pete Seeger and his first meetings and concerts with Joan Baez. And up to the moment he turned to ‘electric folk-rock’



It is well worth mentioning Monica Barbaro’s performance as Joan Baez with a beautiful crystal voice. Some of the timelines within the film are a bit disjointed such as his national tours and ‘went electric’. There is no mention of the original protests about the ‘electric’ concerts which were first performed in England. (I know because I was there at the Birmingham Odeon in 1966! And someone there called him ‘Judas’)

The portrayal of Dylan clearly acknowledges his song writing and performing talents but also reveals his self-obsession, existentialism and determination at the expense of letting down those who support him; namely Joan Baez and Pete Seeger and his girlfriend Sylvie (played by Ellie Fanning) and everyone devoted to acoustic folk music who saw him as some sort of prophet. Regardless of that it is a very good film and well worth watching – especially if you were ‘there’ in the 1960’s.

(I wonder if there will be a ‘song-along’ version of the film?)

### Cinema Film Preview:

**The Brutalist:** Escaping post-war Europe, a visionary architect arrives in America to rebuild his life, his work, and his marriage to his wife after being forced apart during wartime. On his own in a strange new country, he settles in Pennsylvania, where a wealthy and prominent industrialist recognises his talent for building. But power and legacy come at a heavy cost. Starring Oscar nominee Adrien Brody, Felicity Jones and Guy Pearce. At most cinemas and WAC & MAC.

**The Seed of the Sacred Fig:** Iranian director Mahamed Rasoulof delivers a powerful mesmerising drama that speaks to the dividing lines in Iranian society. A judge who sees the benefits for his family in his career’s rapid advancement, although his student daughters are suspicious of his increasing collaboration with the regime. He’s warned not to confide in his wife as he’s simultaneously encouraged to wave through death sentences without considering the evidence. His divided loyalties are soon exposed when his government-issued handgun goes missing, and suspicion falls on the women in his home. Mainly at Warwick Arts Centre (WAC) and Midland Arts Centre (MAC)

**Dr Strangelove:** Screened live from the National Theatre, Steve Coogan plays four roles in the world premiere stage adaptation of Stanley Kubrick’s comedy masterpiece Dr Strangelove. When a rogue U.S. General triggers a nuclear attack, a surreal race takes place, seeing the Government and one eccentric scientist scramble to avert global destruction. An explosively funny satire is led by a world-renowned creative team including Emmy Award-winner Armando Iannucci. (At most cinemas)

**The Girl with the Needle:** A historical psychological horror film. Set in 1919, a young woman who begins working as a wet nurse at a secretive adoption agency for disadvantaged mothers, but who grows suspicious of the woman who runs the operation. It is very loosely based on the true story of Danish serial killer Dagmar Overbye. Mainly at WAC & MAC

**Rocco and His Brothers:** I am so pleased that this 1960’s Italian film has been re-released. When I first saw it as a young teenager, I became totally hooked on films made in Europe. A completely different persona to that of Hollywood. Directed by Visconti and starring great actors such as Alain Delon, Annie Girardot and Claudia Cardinale. Based on Thomas Mann’s novel, ‘Joseph and His Brothers’. Set in Milan, it tells the story of a migrant family from southern Italy and its disintegration

in the industrialised north. After the death of his father, Rocco and his 3 brothers and widowed mother travel north and end up in an unheated basement flat. The film relates how they all attempt to acclimatise to life in Milan. Only at WAC & MAC

**Wolf Man:** A family at a remote farmhouse is attacked by an unseen animal, but as the night stretches on, the father begins to transform into something unrecognisable. Starring Julia Garner and Christopher Abbott. At most main cinema chains

**Exhibition on Screen: Dawn of Expressionism – Paris 1874:** The Impressionists are the most popular group in art history - millions flock every year to marvel at their masterpieces. But, to begin with, they were scorned, penniless outsiders. 1874 was the year that changed everything; the first Impressionists broke the mould by holding their own exhibition outside official channels. Impressionism was born and the art world was changed forever. (Mainly at WAC & MAC)

**Exhibition on Screen: Michelangelo – Love and Death:** Spanning his 88 years, Michelangelo: Love and Death takes a cinematic journey through the print and drawing rooms of Europe through the great chapels and museums of Florence, Rome and the Vatican to seek out a deeper understanding of this legendary figure's tempestuous life, his relationship with his contemporaries and his incredible legacy. Through expert commentary, stunning visuals and Michelangelo's own words, this film takes a fresh look at a master artist whose life and genius are celebrated in every mark he made. Still on the Circuit:

**Nosferatu** - A new take on the classic gothic tale of obsession between a haunted young woman (Lily-Rose Depp) and the terrifying vampire (Bill Skarsgård) infatuated with her, causing untold horror in its wake.

**We Live in Time** - A fiery chef falls in love with a sensitive divorcée advertising executive. Unsure about building a family, but as time passes, their daughter unites them, until a shattering cancer diagnosis threatens all they have built together. A wonderful chemistry and brilliant poignancy to the ever-appealing weepie. Starring Florence Pugh and Andrew Garfield

**Nickel Boys** - An adaption of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Nickel Boys focuses on the story of a black teen sent to the Nickel Academy (based on a notorious real-life institution). Despite the school's cruelty, he makes a connection with another boy as they find a way to squirrel hope against the odds. As the former students reconnect later in life, we are witnesses not only to the scars left by their youth, but also the healing power of human connection. Starring Ethan Herisse and Brandon Willis.

**Babygirl** - A high-powered female CEO puts her career and family on the line when she begins a torrid affair with her much younger intern. They smoulder together in this erotic drama that portrays the office affair in all its messy complexity – both moving and darkly funny. Starring Nicole Kidman in one of her best performances and Harris Dickinson. Manly at WAC & MAC.

**A Real Pain** - A deft and moving dramedy that sees two polar opposite cousins reunite for a tour through Poland to honour their beloved grandmother. Starring Jesse Eisenberg and Kieran Culkin. Mainly at WAC & MAC.

**A Complete Unknown** – I am really looking forward to his one! New York, 1961. Against the backdrop of a vibrant music scene and tumultuous cultural upheaval, an enigmatic 19-year-old from Minnesota named Bob Dylan arrives with his guitar and revolutionary talent, destined to change the course of American music. He forges intimate relationships with the music icons of Greenwich Village on his meteoric rise, culminating in a ground-breaking and controversial performance that reverberates worldwide. Starring Timothée Chalamet who sings as Bob Dylan in this electric true story about the rise of one of the most iconic singer-songwriters in history.

**Maria** – Another one I am looking forward to! Oscar winner Angelina Jolie is Maria Callas, one of the most iconic performers of the 20th century as the acclaimed operatic Maria. The film follows the American-Greek soprano as she retreats to Paris after a glamorous and tumultuous life in the public eye. Maria reimagines the legendary soprano in her final days as the diva reckons with her identity, life and the loss of her voice.

**The Order** - An action thriller based on a true story based on the 1989 book *The Silent Brotherhood* that revolves around an FBI agent who goes after a white supremacist terrorist group known as the Order that was active in the United States in the 1980s. It stars Jude Law and Nicholas Hoult.

**Better Man** - A profile of British pop superstar Robbie Williams cleverly super-imposed as an ape.

**Hard Truths** - A new Mike Leigh film is always welcome, and this one ranks as one of his finest. Two sisters are chalk and cheese, but their close bond is the foundation that their extended family is built upon. Lately, life has proven too much for one sister and her anguish manifests in relentless criticism of the world, leaving her family walking on eggshells. Things soon come to a head over the course of a Mother's Day weekend. Starring Michelle Austin, David Webber and Tuwaine Barrett

**Vermiglio** - A gripping family chronicle and story of three sisters, a moody father and a seemingly lost soldier in an Italian mountain village at the end of World War II. A young Sicilian soldier arrives in the village with an injured comrade on his back, he is hailed as a hero, catching the eye of one of the sisters, but their blossoming love is met by intolerance and misogyny. Mainly at WAC & MAC.

**Bring Them Down** – Set in rural Ireland every bit as harsh as the Old West with a brutal vision of toxic masculinity. The son of a shepherding family lives with his ailing father. When a simmering conflict with rival farmer and his son escalates, powered by past traumas, a devastating chain of events puts both families on a collision course. Starring Barry Keoghan and Christopher Abbott

**September 5** – Set during the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics, following an American Sports broadcasting team that quickly adapted from sports reporting to live coverage of the Israeli athletes taken hostage. The decisive moment that forever changed media coverage and continues to impact live news today. Mainly at WAC & MAC.

**Saturday Night** - It's the mid-1970s, during Watergate, Vietnam, and rising counterculture make everything old in America feel broken and everything new feel scary as hell. And another certainty is about to crack. In 90-minutes' time, live from New York...it's Saturday Night - Live! A clutch of unknown, untrained, unruly young comedians took over network television and transformed the culture - but tonight, it's barely contained madness backstage, with a compere desperately trying to channel the chaos towards a vision even he's not sure of. Mainly at WAC & MAC.

**Wicked:** Part one of the film adapted from the successful West End Musical. An aspiring sorcerer finds acceptance at a magical school until higher authorities try to misuse her powers. Great performances from Oscar nominees Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande

**Conclave:** The Pope has died. Cardinal Lawrence must lead the Conclave to select the new leader of the Catholic world. But as high-ranking cardinals gather, he discovers sides have been drawn and secrets that might destroy a future pope, perhaps even the Church itself, threaten to be revealed. Starring Oscar nominee Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci and John Lithgow. At most cinemas

**Small Things Like These:** Cillian Murphy stars as a conflicted soul grappling with his town's complicity in the mistreatment of local women housed in a Magdalene Laundry in this intimately inhabited adaptation of Claire Keegan's novella. At WAC & MAC and some cinemas

**The Importance of Being Earnest (NT):** Oscar Wilde's most celebrated hilarious story of identity, impersonation and romance, filmed live from the National Theatre in London. Starring Sharon D Clarke and Ncuti Gatwa. At the main circuit cinemas and WAC & MAC during January and February

## **TV & TV Film Review:**

**Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January: A good night for fans of Abba**

**19.30 – ITV1: Six Nations Live** – Expect a lot of Six Nations Rugby over the next few weekends

**20.00 – BBC1: Would I Lie to You?** - Actress Cush Jumbo, artist Grayson Perry and comedians Judi Love and Tim Vine join host Rob Brydon and regular captains David Mitchell and Lee Mack on the offbeat panel show.

**21.00 – BBC1: Death in Paradise** – A new series with a new detective. Londoner Mervin Wilson ruffles some feathers as he clashes with the island's way of life. A great tonic for the winter nights.

**21.00 – BBC2: Uncanny** - Return of the show spun off from the Radio 4 series in which Danny Robins investigates real-life stories of seemingly paranormal encounters and things going bump in the night

**21.10 – BBC4: Abba at the BBC – 22.10 – When Abba Came to Britain – 23.10 – Abba in Switzerland**

**22.40 – BBC1: The Graham Norton Show** - Graham is joined by Double Oscar-winner Renée Zellweger and upcoming British actor Leo Woodall. Also appearing is Sterling K Brown, stage and screen star Anthony Mackie, Brave New World, appears alongside pop icon Cyndi Lauper

**23.30 – BBC1: PS I Love You** - Comedy drama starring Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler.

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February: A good night for fans of Bob Marley**

**20.35 – BBC2: When Bob Marley Came to Britain – 21.35 – Bob Marley: Live at the Rainbow 1977 – 22.45 – Bob Marley Reimagined**

**21.00 – BBC4: Wisting** – New crime drama set in Norway, featuring widowed detective William Wisting – Next episode at **21.45**

**21.30 – ITV1: North Shore** – The penultimate episode of this enjoyable crime serial from Australia

**23.20 – BBC4: Babs** - Biopic of Barbara Windsor, following the key events of the actress's life over the course of 50 years. Samantha Spiro is playing Barbara Windsor

**23.50 – BBC1: The Keeper** - Biographical football drama starring David Kross and Freya Mavor. Towards the end of the Second World War, German paratrooper Bert Trautmann is captured and held in a Lancashire PoW camp. However, when he shows a knack for football, Bert is given leave to play in local games, later choosing to stay in England after the War.

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February:**

**20.05 – BBC1: Call the Midwife** – Another episode of the popular TV series

**21.00 – ITV1: Out There** - A rural community comes under threat from county lines drug dealing – and Martin Clunes plays a farmer examining his moral compass in the face of this malign force.

**21.05 – BBC1: Miss Austen** – A new historical drama based on Gill Hornby's novel, starring Keeley Hawes as Jane Austen's sister, Cassandra.

**22.00 – BBC2: Belfast** – Excellent period drama starring Jamie Dornan and Judi Dench. Northern Ireland, 1969: A 9-year-old boy only vaguely aware of the political turmoil that surrounds him.

**23.30 – BBC2: The Sisters Brothers** – An excellent Western - Gunslingers Charlie and Eli Sisters are hired to find and kill a kindly chemist who possesses a unique method for gold prospecting.

**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February: Monday is Quiz Night on BBC2!**

**19.30 – BBC2: Mastermind – 20.00 – Only Connect – 20.30 – University Challenge**

**21.00 – BBC1: Silent Witness** – Start of another 2-part forensics police drama

**21.00 – ITV1: Out There** – Final episode of the rural crime series

**23.05 – BBC2: Mr Jones** - Historical drama. In the early 1930s, a journalist is dispatched to Moscow to interview Joseph Stalin and report on the Soviet Union's trumpeted five-year plan

**23.10 – BBC1: Bump** – I really enjoy this laid-back Australian comedy series. **Next at 23.40**

**Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February:**

**21.00 – BBC1: Silent Witness** – The 2nd episode of the forensics police drama

**21.00 – BBC2: David Mitchell's Outsiders** – Some celeb's take on their first set of three challenges, including bug racing and creating holistic treatments. A bit like Taskmaster?



## A Few Cartoons:





### **Some Funnies to Finish With:**

I renewed my car insurance over the phone this morning, and as I was about to hang up the woman on the other end asked if I had a pet.

I said, "Yes, I've got a dog."

She said, "Would you like to insure him too?"

I said, "No thanks, he can't drive!"

I was at a job interview today when the manager handed me a laptop and said:

"I want you to try to sell this to me."

So, I put it under my arm, left the building and went home.

Eventually he called me and said:

"Bring my laptop back now."

I said: "£200 and it's yours."

The funeral for the man who invented Tupperware, was delayed while they tried to find the right lid for his coffin

A leopard in Argos tried to exchange some saucepans.

He was told that he couldn't change his pots

I asked my wife to toast some bread for me

She took a swig from her wine bottle and said, 'Here's to the bread!'

I was invited to the RNLI annual Christmas Party.

I really enjoyed it – they knew how to push the boat out

I was on a bus yesterday and a woman sitting opposite me said, 'Every time you smile, I want to invite you to my place'

So, I asked her if she was single, and she replied, 'No, I am a dentist!'

The downside of having a son who is a Bomb Disposal Technician is that it takes him 9 hours to open his Christmas presents

I have a new job at a Smoothie Bar

I'm blending in quite well

Almost all garden gnomes have little red hats

It is a little gnome fact

On Christmas Day, I played a round of golf and I hit a birdie

It was a Partridge in a par 3

I asked my wife what she wanted for Christmas – 'Something from the Body Shop' she replied.

I hope that there is enough room under the tree for the front wing of a Ford Mondeo?