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## [Letters to the Editor: Banish 'empire' and make us all proud](#)

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# THE TIMES

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## Body

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You report that the word "empire" may be dropped from honours such as OBE (

News, last week

). To be recognised by the state for your life's work is humbling, deeply rewarding and, by definition, a great honour. Therefore no one should have to wrestle with whether or not they choose to accept it. I am proud to have been knighted by Her Majesty the Queen - an honour that contained no mention of the word "empire".

For many, including me, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to revere about the empire. It means slavery, murder, theft, barbaric cruelty and colonialism.

We cannot and must not attempt to erase our history, but we can choose which parts we put on a pedestal. Exchange the word "empire" for "excellence" and it becomes wonderfully inclusive.

Lord Woolley (formerly Sir Simon Woolley), House of Lords, London SW1

Imperial measure

Reform of our honours system should be a normal part of national life. We gave up awarding the Order of the Star of India in 1947. With the demise of the British Empire, there is a good argument to change now.

Before it is written off entirely, though, we might recall that, despite its name, officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) is democratic in character. It was the first honour to be equally open to men and women and was intended to be available to non-British people. For most of its recipients in the past 60 years - me included - the "British Empire" bit was the least important element.

Regardless, if distinguished citizens feel unable to accept the OBE award because of the negative associations of empire, it is time to change. But let it be without rancour, or implied obloquy to those who accepted the award as a mark of their service and not as a jingoistic celebration of imperialism; all can, I think, recognise that era is past.

It may be best to institute new awards entirely. OBE would still be worth holding, and only those who hate their own country, whether in imperial or non-imperial mode, would object.

Colonel Simon Diggins (retired), Rickmansworth

Exchange of words

## Letters to the Editor: Banish 'empire' and make us all proud

Some members of the honours committee favour the removal of the word "empire" from the existing honours while others want a new medal. Another option is to rename the medal by substituting the word "establishment" for new awards which would be more appropriate in this 21st century.

Alex Galea, Woking

WE STAND WITH JK AGAINST HATE

JK Rowling has been subjected to an onslaught of abuse that highlights an insidious, authoritarian and misogynistic trend in social media.

Rowling has consistently shown herself to be an honourable and compassionate person, and the appalling hashtag #RIPJKRowling is just the latest example of hate speech directed against her and other women that Twitter and other platforms enable and implicitly endorse.

We are signing this letter in the hope that, if more people stand up against the targeting of women online, we might at least make it less acceptable to engage in it or profit from it.

We wish JK Rowling well and stand in solidarity with her.

Ian McEwan, author; Lionel Shriver, author; Griff Rhys Jones, actor; Graham Linehan, writer; Maureen Chadwick, writer; Andrew Davies, writer; Frances Barber, actress; Craig Brown, writer; Alexander Armstrong, actor; Amanda Craig, writer; Philip Hensher, writer; Susan Hill, writer; Jane Thynne, writer; Ben Miller, actor; Simon Fanshawe, writer; James Dreyfus, actor; Frances Welch, writer; Francis Wheen, writer; Arthur Matthews, writer; Aminatta Forna, writer; Joan Smith, writer; Nick Cohen, journalist; Kath Gotts, composer & lyricist; Ann McManus, writer; Eileen Gallagher, writer & producer; Jimmy Mulville, producer; Lizzie Roper, actress; Stella O'Malley, author; Nina Paley, animator; Julie Bindel, journalist; Abigail Shrier, journalist; Rachel Rooney, author; Jane Harris, writer; Tatsuya Ishida, cartoonist; Lisa Marchiano, author; Zuby, musician and author; Debbie Hayton, journalist; Gillian Philip, Author, Jonny Best, musician; Manick Govinda, arts consultant; Russell Celyn Jones, writer; Magi Gibson, writer; Victoria Whitworth, writer; Dr Mez Packer, writer; Grace Carley, producer; Sam Leith, journalist; Malcolm Clark, television producer-director; Shirley Wishart, musician; Charlotte Delaney, writer; Nehanda Ferguson, musician; Justin Hill, writer; Trezza Azzopardi, writer; Birdy Rose, artist; Jess de Wahls, textile artist; Mo Lovatt, writer; Simon Edge, novelist; Tom Stoppard, playwright; and Amanda Smyth, writer

DRUG BODIES IN DARK OVER DONORS

Health charities' failure to disclose corporate donations does their supporters and the public a great disservice (

News, last week

).

These organisations routinely nominate people to sit on policy-making bodies such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to represent the views of patients and the public.

Such bodies rightly require open declarations of interest, but charity representatives cannot make accurate declarations if information about donors is hidden from them. It is high time the charity regulator stepped in to outlaw this scandalous lack of transparency.

Angela Coulter, chairwoman, public advisory board, Health Data Research UK

Conflict of interest

Medical research charities often ask why the NHS will not pay high prices for new, life-saving treatments. As your story shows, some charities have not disclosed millions of pounds in funding by pharma companies seeking the highest prices for their drugs.

Charities clearly need funding for medical research. However, there is a conflict of interest when charities evaluate and recommend new treatments from the companies that are funding them - and the public needs to be aware of it.

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Dr Andrew Hill, London SW12

NO 10 FIX LEAVES NO ROOM FOR PM

Robert Colville offers a compelling description of the government's inadequate response to Covid (

Comment, last week

). His solution is to put three big-hitters into No 10, plus a senior minister to co-ordinate government efforts. This may be a good idea but it raises the question: what, then, is the point of Boris Johnson?

Nigel Rushworth, Leeds

MUSEUM EXHIBITS MORAL CONFUSION

Dan Hicks, curator at the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford, says he is keen to expose visitors to the "real horror" and "terrible" violence of colonialism ("Museums must put their heads together",

News Review, last week

).

Meanwhile, the museum's director, Laura Van Broekhoven, has justified the removal from display of a set of shrunken human heads, lest visitors make the "racist" error of supposing the South American cultures that created them to be "savage, primitive or gruesome".

So, the same institution at once encourages moral disapproval of the colonial British while discouraging it with regard to an indigenous practice of decapitating enemies and preserving their heads so as to possess their power.

Pitt Rivers needs to make up its mind: either it simply presents the historical phenomena and leaves visitors to make moral judgments for themselves, or it distributes its own horror of violence equally and without racial discrimination.

Nigel Biggar, regius professor of moral and pastoral theology, Oxford University  
GRENFELL INQUIRY CANNOT BE IN VAIN

As lawyers who represent the bereaved, survivors and residents engaged in the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire, we are taking the unusual step of writing to draw attention to the absence of any implementation of the inquiry's recommendations published last autumn. The most urgent and obvious need is the removal of all combustible cladding from residential buildings.

The inquiry identified, unequivocally, that the cause of the devastating spread of this fire was "the use of combustible materials in the external wall of Grenfell Tower". Yet it has no power to implement its own recommendations and, more than three years since the fire and nearly a year since the report, there are still hundreds of buildings and thousands of occupants at risk. The pandemic has confined many of these occupants to their homes - which are not safe.

As lawyers, we are deeply conscious that many previous inquiry recommendations have been left to gather dust in a real or digital file. That must not happen this time.

The people in these blocks are living in fear. Untested blocks are in limbo and flats are near worthless. Others live in blocks with waking watches - meaning that people walk around to make sure that the block is not on fire. This situation surely cannot be allowed to continue.

Michael Mansfield QC; Adrian Williamson QC; Sam Stein QC; Allison Munroe QC; Abdul Jinadu; Andrew Dymond; Thalia Maragh; Graham French, Russell-Cooke; Marcia Willis Stewart QC, Birnberg Pierce; Emma Wilson, Slater & Gordon; Elizabeth Rebello, Duncan Lewis; Shamik Dutta, Bhatt Murphy; Martin Howe, Howe & Co; Cyril Davies Knight, Saunders Law; Andrew Brookes, Anthony Gold; Balvinder Gill, Imran Khan & Partners; James Mullion, Janes solicitors; Arfan Bhatti, Oliver Fisher & Co; Jhangir Mahmood, Bishop Lloyd &

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Jackson; Róisín Gad el Rab, Hanover Bond Law; Sarah Ricca, Deighton Pierce Glynn; Gary Bromelow, Saunders solicitors  
RISK TO EQUALITY IF NURSERIES FOLD

Nurseries are the backbone of the western model of work. They will continue to buckle in the event of a second lockdown ("Nurseries in need of care",

Business, last week

). A resulting shortage of places when normality resumes will hit working mothers and set back workplace equality by a generation.

Nurseries must be supported to ensure their survival - the status of women depends on it.

Alice McCullagh, director, Rosedene Nurseries North Yorkshire

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Send your letters to [letters@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:letters@sunday-times.co.uk) Letters should arrive by midday on Thursday and include the full address and a phone number. We may edit letters, which must be exclusive to The Sunday Times  
POINTS MPs failed probability test

Matthew Syed advocates equipping young people with a better grasp of probability (

Comment, last week

). Eight years ago the Royal Statistical Society asked MPs the simplest of probability questions: if you spin a coin twice, what is the probability of getting two heads? Three-quarters of MPs said they felt confident dealing with numbers - but 60% gave the wrong answer. It is not just the young who lack basic numeracy.

John Doherty, Stratford-upon-Avon Home and away

You write of "expats" being stripped of their UK bank accounts (

News, last week

). I am fortunate to have a home in Spain, where I am happy to describe myself as what I am - an immigrant. The term expat belongs in the past.

Keith Lewis, London SE11 Lucky dip

Stig Abel need not have run in search of a second magpie (

News Review, last week

). You can mitigate the bad luck in three ways: spit, salute or say "sir". Spitting is the most effective, but antisocial; saluting is almost as effective, but only if your wife or partner is not laughing.

Kevin Savill, Kenton, Devon Spreading dissent

The claim that the remedy to the pandemic is to "lock down the vulnerable and let everyone else go about their business" (

Letters, last week

) is totally selfish. All over-70s are considered vulnerable, but many are active and useful in society. It is not the vulnerable who caused the resurgence of the virus: it is those who attend raves, go on pub crawls or ignore the requirement to wear masks.

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Dorothy Wilson, Willoughby on the Wolds, Nottinghamshire      Picture post

Jeremy Clarkson bemoans the fact that we never tweet nice things about our lunches (

News Review, last week

). Has he never tried that oversharers' paradise, Instagram?

Harry McCarthy, Jesus College, Cambridge      Jacob Jeeves-Mogg

Your third leader (

Comment, last week

) ends: "If only there were somebody in the cabinet who resembled Jeeves." Jacob Rees-Mogg has been supplied for this role, direct from central casting.

Maurice Dixson, Kington Langley, Wiltshire      Left behind

Mary Clarke claims Earl Spencer and his sister Diana, Princess of Wales enjoyed a "wonderful childhood" (

News, last week

). Spencer has described the opposite and, as a mother who was left to raise three children on my own, I am with him. My son was the same age when his father left and experienced similar problems. Clarke may have been a competent carer but she cannot pass judgment on what the youngsters were feeling in private.

Wendy Abbott, Hull      SCOTTISH LETTERS      STURGEON LEADS THE WAY WITH BRIEFINGS

Michael Glackin is renowned for his political neutrality and being scrupulously fair, but in criticising Nicola Sturgeon for giving daily briefings on the fight against Covid-19 (

Business, last week

) he is misreading the view of most members of the public.

One of the reasons that the first minister has a high popularity rating is because she regularly gives a consistent and accurate briefing of where we are in the fight against the virus and a logical explanation of why decisions have been taken.

The Scottish public also see how the situation is handled by the UK government. They see different people giving different and even contradictory messages: for example, people in England were initially told to work from home, then to go back to offices and now to work from home again.

There is growing pressure from opposition parties - and some in his own party - for the prime minister to copy Sturgeon and personally give daily briefings.

It is ironic, though not totally surprising, that these same opposition parties have criticised the first minister for doing just this: but I would have hoped for Michael Glackin to have taken a more dispassionate view.

Ian McKee, Edinburgh      BBC PRESENTERS' SALARIES IN FOCUS

In your report "Scots' new channel costs more per viewer than BBC1" (

News, last week

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) the BBC argues that cost comparisons with the UK- wide service do not take the population ratio of around 1:11 into account. If this is a relevant factor, shouldn't the presenters' salaries also be an eleventh of the UK-wide rate?

Chris Mills, Ryton, Tyne And Wear

SCOTTISH POINT

Double trouble

How can superstitious Stig be so sure that the joy-giving magpie he found in a hedge after running many times round a field, and the sorrow-making one he saw in the first place, were not one and the same bird?

Paul Moynagh, Banchory, Aberdeenshire

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