

[Transcript] The News Agents / 1st Birthday Special: Your questions answered

Once again, I'm afraid I'm having to start this show by saying that there will be strong language from John Soaple from the very start of this podcast.

This is a global player original podcast.

Okay, well that was a good start.

Studio's currently covered with champagne.

I'm going to lean over.

Turns out the studio wasn't really made for leaning over.

We've got a chink.

Hang on, how are we going to get there?

I'm going to have to simulate this.

I feel like this hasn't gone very well.

Cheers!

Cheers!

We've now got a studio where the floor is covered in champagne.

I've got champagne all over my trousers and popping that cork just a typical Wednesday really turned out to be a little more complicated and stressful than I thought it might be.

Just a normal day in the newsagents HQ for you, isn't it John?

Well normally we have the bottle of champagne before we go on air, but we've decided to bring the bottle of champagne into the studio to uncork it to mark our first birthday.

It is our first birthday.

A year ago today the newsagents was born and to celebrate we thought we would do something we've never done before, set another podcast rather unimaginatively do it every single week I'm told.

Do they really?

Yeah, you know what John?

Some people have got very little imagination but we thought for one day only we would turn things over to you to ask questions to us about politics, the year ahead, the year just gone and also a little bit about the show itself and indeed we have got one question just to kick us off John which is a very, very germane to you and it says it's from Luke and Luke says, Hi, I have loved the show since the early days but I really want to know who swears more, mate-less or soap-al?

Almost fell off my chair when I first heard her curse but thinking about it she does seem like she has a sailor's mouth when she gets going.

Best, I'm sorry mother, I know you don't like me, I'm just quoting something here.

Best fucking regards Luke, welcome to the newsagents.

The newsagents.

It's John.

And it's Lewis.

And we're at newsagents HQ and we've got cake and we've got champagne but we're not going to make this entirely self-congratulatory, obviously quite a bit.

Yeah, I mean why change the habit of a whole year?

Exactly.

Well, no, but it has been kind of quite a journey where you start with zero subscribers and you hope that you're going to grow some over the course of the year and we have.

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And I tell you one of the things that has amazed me when we kind of put out a pitch, please get in touch if you've got any thoughts, is just how many people say they have listened to every episode.

Sad cases.

Yeah.

Now your mum, I would expect it.

Mrs. Soap will maybe, most episodes, I would hope so.

But the rest of you.

I was thinking maybe we should get a little badge for people.

What, 100% club?

100% club.

Yeah.

We are the 100%.

It's sort of like, could be like a blue Peter badge, except it's for newsagents.

Let's call.

Now this will be cooler.

Well, yeah.

So we've got a mix of fun questions, but also serious questions about politics and the year ahead.

And so we should kick off with this one, which is from Alex, which says, hi newsagents.

I love having just a glass of something in the hand.

This is going to be a new development for the year ahead.

Hi newsagents.

Happy birthday.

Love the podcast.

Happy birthday to every episode so far.

So Alex is 100%.

My question is, does media reporting around assumptions that the conservatives will lose the next election pose a risk to Labour's chances of victory?

Well, I think that if everybody just got into the mindset that it's all a done deal, then that would be extremely dangerous for Labour and extremely stupid of the media.

And you know, we've talked a lot about whether what we're about to see is a repeat of the 1997 election and whether Keir Starmer's on course for this massive landslide or whether it's going to be more like 2010, where you might get a hung parliament.

Look, you have to go with what the evidence is as you see it at any given moment and what the trend seems to be.

And the trend seems to be that Rishi Sunak is not closing the gap on Keir Starmer.

But do I think we're in the same territory as we were in 96, 97, where it was clear that the British people had made up their mind on the conservatives, made up their mind on John Major, really like Tony Blair, who was sort of charismatic and offering something that seemed quite new and quite exciting.

I don't think we're at that phase yet.

I mean, obviously, I was a bit young to really remember that period, John, because I was only, I think, six, seven.

But I mean, was there no at the time?

Because one of the things I was going to say in answer to this question is, you know, one of the reasons the media, we like a horse race, right?

It's far more interesting in terms of the coverage of going into an election of saying, well, this might be more of a contest than you think.

Now, I happen to think that for the reasons you just said, actually, sometimes you've got to take a step back and look at the fundamentals.

The fact of the matter is the conservatives haven't been ahead in one single poll since 2021.

Generally speaking, they're between 20 and 25 points behind.

Sunak has not managed to arrest the decline.

And you will hear a lot more about the kind of idea of Sunak making a return or maybe denting the Labour League and so on.

But actually, so much of that is about the narrative.

It's about the media needing a horse race.

But isn't that not around at all before 97, even a little bit, the idea that, because they'd lost so many times and that maybe this, then the Tories were still such a machine.

Was it not around at all?

So I think there was.

I think at the top of the Labour Party and the people around Blair, who were pivotal at that time, Alistair Campbell, Peter Mandelson, a few others, Philip Gould, they were very concerned that nothing could be taken for granted.

But you just saw the evidence that was building up and it was just seemed inconceivable. I mean, I think it seemed inconceivable that Labour would lose the election.

I don't think people had quite foreseen the scale of the landslide.

And I remember on the day of polling itself, speaking to one or two Labour people who were really nervous and really nervous about victory and were kind of still saying, you've got to get out every vote.

You can't take a thing for granted.

And Blair was very superstitious on that, thinking nothing is done.

And I think it was a shock to them when they won by the margin that they did.

There was some polling that was taken afterwards, which I thought was again really interesting as a sort of psychological study, that they did some polling where it was something like a million more people claimed to have voted Labour than actually did because people wanted to ally themselves with that success.

And you just felt that the Tories just didn't know how to attack the Labour Party after 17 years in rule, whether Tony Blair was this kind of red in tooth and claw or whether they were a kind of just a bunch of idiots who didn't know what they were doing.

Well, I think that ultimately the biggest danger now for Stamford and for the Labour Party isn't really about the election, anything could happen, but isn't necessarily about the election, what happens after, because actually, probably unlike 97 actually, partly because the macroeconomic and the political situation is so much worse now, it seems to me the Labour Party, the biggest problems they're going to have is when they try and govern.

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And the thinking by comparison to pre-97 on all sorts of areas, just like let's take small votes, for example, just isn't there.

It just isn't there.

And because there's not going to be any great love for the Labour Party, unlike 97 as well, you can imagine a Labour government running into the sand, particularly if the majority is not very big or there's no majority at all, very, very quickly.

More prosaic question we've got here, more about us rather than about politics, which is from Ubaid, who says, very pithily, where the hell is Emily?

I miss her.

That's something we've asked ourselves.

Yeah, well, it's obviously we've been bereft and kind of it's been quiet.

We haven't had Moody.

We haven't had Moody the dog.

We haven't had any singing.

We haven't had any singing.

Surely she's recorded a voice note singing a sappy birthday in her sort of sultry Marilyn Monroe voice.

Hello, everyone.

It's Emily.

I'm in the back of a car with a dog sprawled across my lap somewhere near Olio and my son's up beside me shouting sacked in the morning, which is either a response to the football scores they're going through overnight because we've finally got a signal or else it's about me having been off work for so long and heading back as fast as I possibly can now to news agents HQ because I've missed you lot and it's time to reengage my brain.

Can't wait to be back with everyone.

Oh, and that was Maitlis from the car somewhere on the way back to London and she's going to be back in the studio again next Monday.

Hurrah.

We will look forward to seeing her then.

We've had a lovely note as well.

A lot of you have been very generous about us.

Just wanted to say thank you so much for your wonderful podcast.

La la la la la.

It goes on.

We've had this lovely note from Lois and let me just read it to you.

Just wanted to say thank you so much for your wonderful podcast.

Your first episode aired just after the breakdown of a serious relationship and I used to really look forward to those 30 minutes a day during those dark months when I could escape my thoughts and listen to your witty and fantastic news coverage.

One year on, I've moved city, got my own place, feel like myself again and still listen to your podcast every night whilst I cook dinner.

That's really sweet.

Did the news agents cure my heartbreak?

Well, who's to say it didn't?

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Who needs to relate when you've got the news agents?

Yeah.

So to the question from Lois, which news event have you covered on the podcast that you think your past selves from 12 months ago would least likely believe really happened?

Oh, that's a very interesting question.

Wow.

I mean, there's so many, aren't there?

I mean, the obvious one is the idea of a 45 day, 50 day premiership.

I mean, we literally started the show just at the Johnson Trust handover.

Queen died.

That wasn't even a 50 day premiership.

In reality, it was like a two and a half week, three week premiership because everybody shut down during the period of national mourning.

I think the idea, if you'd said to me, yeah, 12 months ago, that a premiership, a British premiership could last for 50 days.

I would have just found that incredible.

I mean, I could, you could imagine something six months or 12 months, but in trusty's case, to be in and out of that door and now be this kind of like weird Banquo's ghost, this kind of specter sort of haunting British politics because she's not leaving the stage.

She occasionally turns up in Taiwan, which we've covered or wherever it happens to be.

I mean, I just don't think I don't know about you, but the sheer speed, it's become cliché to talk about how fast everything in politics now is.

That was off the scale and I don't think we will ever see anything like it again.

Yeah.

And it's interesting, isn't it?

Honestly, hand on heart, Liz Truss is the person I would sort of most like to interview on the podcast because I'd love to hear her reflections of what it must feel like because she is the punchline to a joke now, less so if you've mortgage costs have gone up as a result of the kind of crazy budget that she introduced.

But I think that that was a most extraordinary period.

And also, I think that we hadn't anticipated that we would be dealing with the Queen's death.

And I think that actually the episode we did where we reflected on that was also interesting where I don't think our past selves at the BBC would have been able to say the sort of things we said, not that they were anti-Elizabeth or anti-Monarchy or they were just reflective of a way that I think the rest of the media had gone into a tone of voice that was just crushed.

And you know, let's not say anything interesting or controversial.

And I think we kind of explored some of the more controversial aspects to it.

And I think that I wouldn't have anticipated that.

So our understanding is that Emily has reached the periphery around Paris at the moment and she's just sent us her thoughts on this from there.

It was a political year, not without its surprises.

I think we had about one a day for the first six weeks we were up on air, but I would say

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if you're going for the unexpected, it would be everything that's happened with the SMP in the last six, seven months.

The resignation of Nicholas Sturgeon, I remember that, let me jaw dropped, trying to understand what it was.

The blue forensic evidence tent in her garden didn't have that one on my bingo card.

So yeah, I'd say that has been the sort of maybe the longest standing shift that I really didn't see coming.

That's actually wrong.

She was in a Euro tunnel, I think.

I'm really concerned that Emily's kids have just put her in the boot and that Emily was there broadcasting that from the boot of the car because the sound quality was completely different than when it was all very languid.

The dog was on her lap.

It was all very nice.

The kids were sitting next to her reading the football scores.

Well, I'm sure one way or the other should have been in her sunglasses doing it one way or the other.

Another one here saying, oh, I like this one.

This is from Will Channel says, you have a baby boomer host.

You have a Gen X host and you have a millennial host.

Would you guys consider getting a Gen Z host?

Also I think you should bury the hatchet and do a once a year charity crossover with the rest of his politics.

Well, they are a charity, aren't they, in many ways, Will, so I don't think that's really necessary.

It's fair on you, isn't it?

John, I'm in your greatest generation rather than boomer, aren't you?

No, shut up.

That's so cruel, the greatest generation.

Yeah, exactly.

That's the greatest generation.

Those are the sort of values I associate you with.

I think it's been good that there has been a mix of, I think that we do have maybe generational outlooks that are different.

I mean, we had a discussion yesterday about cars, cities, and I think that there was a sort of generational difference between us.

But I think what's interesting is that actually the differences in standpoint are for all sorts of reasons.

So none of us quite conform to any stereotype and I think hopefully that's what makes this podcast work because we can laugh at each other as well as agree with each other.

This one from Maria Luck follows quite nicely on that, says, with demographic challenges expected to only worsen in the UK, this follows from some of the shows that we've done on child care costs and renting and all that sort of student debt, should the next government consider introducing a minister of state for intergenerational fairness, a brief that would

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cover issues like housing and debt, but also the right to a future healthy climate?

I think that's a really interesting idea.

I think that it is one of the huge social problems slash challenges.

We've talked about the triple lock on pensions and you realise how much of public policy is skewed towards the elderly who probably might need it least because they are the people who vote the most and therefore you want to keep that particular demographic happy when they've probably built up maybe considerable value in the properties that they own whereas for a kid to get on the housing ladder now, certainly when I was buying my first property and I was working in Southampton and I could bought a place in Winchester, there was affordability. It was something like three times my salary or the house that I bought whereas if you're working in London and you are even a young professional, you are not going to be earning enough to buy your own place in London that's three times your income.

Not least when you're basically spending anywhere between 35 and 50% of your income on tax when you add all the different taxes together.

Including your student debt, which is effectively a tax, which is something we've talked about before.

I think intergenerational fairness should be one of the prisms through which we see politics in a way that we have started rightly in lots of ways, looking at lots of other structural injustices in our society, whether it's racial, whether it's between the sexes, whether it's class, because actually these things are all fused, particularly, I mean basically actually arguably generations to some extent, not completely obviously because you still get rich people within generations, but actually generations in a sense are the, is the new class structure partly because of the property question or largely because of the property question, pension questions as well that you described, John.

And until we start looking at it in that way, we'll never get anywhere.

What irritates me most, because I do LBC sometimes and sometimes talk about these questions around

intergenerational unfairness, what I think is the problem is not so much the view that you've just described, because you've been very self aware, you're like, well, you know, it was easier in this regard when I was younger, and no one's going to be irritated by that, that was just the situation at the time, no one should be punished for that, just because it was slightly easier then.

The problem so often in British politics is there is a whole cohort of voters, older voters who don't really seem to want to acknowledge that, that they find it sort of the most psychologically insulting when you say, actually, it is harder now than it was then they come back at you saying, well, we had 17% interest rates, this that and the other. No, it's different because house prices much cheaper then.

And that's one of the biggest problems is very few people ever seem to want to ever accept that they had it easier, not that they had it easy, because no one really ever has it completely easy, but they had it easier, and we need politically to recognize that and start doing something.

It's interesting in the US sociologists talk a lot about transgenerational mobility. And that is the sort of one of the fundamental underpinnings of the American dream that you will work hard. And as a result of your hard work, you will lead a better life than your

parents before you. And that has sustained generation after generation believing that with their endeavors, they will make a better life, they will have a bigger house, they will have a bigger car, their kids will go to better schools, and their kids will do well, and they will get better. And I think that actually one of the huge shocks, and we talk about the rise of populism that's happened, you know, in Europe, in the United States with the election of Trump in 2016, was the shock of the 2008 financial crisis, where people thought that a steel factory would be shuttered for a few weeks and then reopen at the end of the recession. And it didn't. And I think there is now a real issue about transgenerational mobility, that the next generation are not going to be better off than their parents. They're going to find it a whole lot tougher. And the idea of this endless kind of movement of social mobility, that the only way is up is wrong. Next question. Oh, I like this one. This isn't going to cause any problems, is it? From Richard. What's the issue that the three news agents most clearly hold different opinions on? I think we should just hand over to Emily, who's just crossed into Dover, shall we? Yeah. What do the news agents disagree on? Okay, let me try and take you as we say behind the curtain. There are some areas that I think we've kind of debated quite frankly on air, like the just stop oil, whether it achieves its means, whether it's the right way to achieve your means. I would also say levelling up versus levelling up and down, i.e. whether you want to raise everyone up or whether you want to sort of bring the top down to raise the bottom up. That's been a sort of debate, but we sometimes disagree on the people that we should have on the show. And I think that the most successful ones actually are when we don't know that we disagree until we get on air. And in the last thing we disagree on is football, actually, because Lewis I think would in a perfect world never mention football on the news agents. And John would mention Spurs every day, at least once on the news agents. And on the morning after a penalty shootout in which Spurs lost to Fulham, my boys team, I think we should probably give everyone an honourable mention. Let's see if John disagrees. Little does she know that yesterday, for reasons that need not to tell you listeners, I went down an absolute Wikipedia rabbit hole where I started sort of researching quite extensively the Surinamese national football team and all of their most recent history. That was nice. You enjoyed that, didn't you, John?

It was the most extraordinary excursion where we were starting to record. We sat down here. We want to get the recording underway. And Lewis suddenly becomes obsessed with Surinam. What the main export is, what the main import is, what the balance of trade is. And then someone says, oh, Surinam footballers, well, they're probably in a Dutch team. And then we start going down and we lose minutes and minutes and minutes.

This is why we need Emily back.

Yeah, this is why we need Emily back. But I'm not even going to dignify any comment over the penalty shootout at Craven Cottage last night where Angi Postercoglu's boys came a little bit unstuck.

Entirely, seriously, for a moment, I actually think the kind of political differences between us. And obviously, we're not here necessarily to explore what we think about everything. We're here always to do the news. But obviously, something we can do now is bring a little bit more, because we're also deeply captivated by politics.

That's one of the things that unites us. And actually, I think, although some people might,

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I see sometimes critics are saying, are we all think the same thing, you know, sort of liberal or this sort of stuff. And although, obviously, I would say probably there is truth in the idea of us all being sort of liberal in some sense, I actually think our politics quite different in quite interesting ways that does come out on the show.

Whether that's generational, whether it's about left, right, and the extent to which we're sort of different on that and all those sort of things. Actually, I think that's one of the sort of interesting things that keeps us going.

And because people are more complicated.

Yeah, exactly.

I think this is what I kind of can't stand about. Well, you're all a bunch of liberal woke lefties. You know, I feel very illiberal about all sorts of issues. I'm not at all work woke on some issues. But if woke means being sensitive to other people around you.

I think just stop or I'll think you're that one, isn't it, John?

I mean, you know, and there are things where you debate and think, is this effective policy or is it counterproductive? I'm just asking these questions from a political analysis point of view of what works and what doesn't work. You're not going to have to have a break. So I'm going to have a sip of the champagne. I don't really usually like champagne, but given it's a special occasion. Why not?

We'll be back after the break. Lewis will be sozzled.

Welcome back. No, actually, we mustn't say welcome back.

Oh, yeah, someone complained about welcome back. And I think it's a good complaint. Why do you think we've gone anywhere? This person is still here. We're still here. So why are you saying welcome back? We haven't gone anywhere. No, it's true. So no more welcome back. It's on the ban list. Oh, should we just say, we're still here? We're still here.

Right. I'm to the point we're not. Amy has sent a question in. She lives in Birmingham and, you know, difficulty with the Labour-run council there and her situation with her kids. And she says that that maybe there is like a lot of British politics, too much discussion about London and then politics in the other great cities of the UK get a bit lost. Is that fair, do you think? Are we a bit too London centric? We try not to be. I mean, we've done quite a bit of reporting from Birmingham and my home city, of course, but we've done another cities, but we could always do more. I think it's always a balance that's got to be struck.

And I was very conscious of this. When I was at the BBC, where they'd say, right, you know, far too much of the output is coming from London. We need to have studios in Salford or Glasgow or Cardiff or whatever. You think, well, yeah, of course you absolutely. But London is the capital city. And there is a reason for that. And it's the economic powerhouse and all the rest of it. So it's understandable. I think that if we become too Westminster focused and don't understand enough about how some things apply to the rest of the country, that is where we can lose sight of things and become very narrow and myopic in our outlook. And I think that probably, yeah, we're sitting here in London, our studio is in London. I kind of don't think it's, well, why doesn't the news agents present the show today from Middlesbrough? I mean, why Middlesbrough? It becomes tokenistic if you're just going there for the day. But I think we've got to be very conscious that not everybody is London, thinks like London, is metropolitan like London. And that's why I mean, one of the episodes that caused us some grief was when we interviewed Jeremy Clarkson. I should say we interviewed

him before he made his comments about Meghan Markle. But why are you interviewing Jeremy Clarkson? Well, I think he had an interesting view on rural life, which is something as well that doesn't get covered that much. No, because Britain is quite unusual, or at least it's unusual compared to say the United States or some countries like Germany where all of our political power and media power are all centered in one place, not just one city, but like one bit of the city effectively. And that does just inevitably alter the way you cover things and how you think about things. And it's always our job and something I've always tried to do is to resist that as much as you possibly can and get out and about and travel as much as possible and talk to people as much as possible, which I think we do try and do. But I also think it's difficult in a way when you are doing stories that are inherently local, like in a way GB news, when GB news started part of their whole shtick initially was we're going to do two things. We're going to be kind of basically the voice of the right in the British media because it's underrepresented, which they're still doing. And the other thing is we're going to do loads of local news. And it's quite striking how quickly they pivoted away from that because the truth is local news is of course always massively important. But inevitably it is by definition local. And if you don't live there, you're not going to care about it very much. That's not to say that we don't do big things in Birmingham and Manchester and all that sort of thing, those sort of things. But it is difficult sometimes to do local when you're doing national at the same time. Okay, we're going to move from provincialism to nutrition now. Zaya, this is from Albert Davis Smith in Cardiff. I really love the news agents and a very happy first birthday. I think I heard Lewis mention on the podcast once that he has a no lunch policy and it's been playing on my mind ever since. Ever since? Could you discuss this further? Oh, Albert. I've got nothing else to think about. I can put Albert's mind at rest or maybe I can't. It is true. It is true. I have a no lunch policy. I might have an item of fruit. This is, by the way, I'm not alone in this. His Majesty the King also has a no lunch policy. So I'm in very good company. One of the many similarities between Charles and myself. It's striking how often I think that you two are interchangeable. I love the news agents. One of my favorite podcasts. Wonderful. Much better than that very rude Alistair, man. Yeah, it is. No, I do because I think lunch is just the worst meal. It's just the worst. Oh, you're so wrong. No, no, no. You spent a year living in France. How could you think that was the worst meal? Well, I did in France. But the problem is with lunch in Britain anyway. You're right. In France, it's gorgeous. You have a proper meal. It's wonderful. In Britain, basically, you know, you've got prayer. No offense to prayer or wherever it happens to be. It's basically always just like a sandwich or like, you know, something just deep in people just eat it really quickly. So my preference is to have my 1970s breakfast. My wife called me a 1970s man, some of my ducks. I have my black pudding and eggs and my you have black pudding and eggs for breakfast. Yeah, every morning. All boiled eggs. Yeah. Yeah. And I always have black pudding. No, I don't always. I always have eggs. I always have eggs and I often have black pudding. Yeah. And then I don't really have much for lunch and then have a reasonable size dinner. You see, the argument with awful love, awful. Oh, yeah. And the argument is that if you eat at lunch time, I know, and have a good lunch, and then you don't eat so much in the evening, that is much healthier for your digestive system. And you do sort of effectively have a little mini fast in the day, which is also good for you. So I think it sort of bounces out if you don't have lunch. Did you ever run? Were you still part of as a part of the pre war generation? You remember the days of drinking heavily, journalists drinking heavily, you still have that? I remember that vividly.

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Really? Yeah. So even in the 80s and that was in the 90s, that was still, I suppose, particularly in Westminster, you'd have been doing all the time as well. Well, Westminster, the culture was you'd go out for lunch, you would have a bottle or two of wine, and then go back to the lobby afterwards, where all I wanted to do was sleep the afternoon away, because I can't drink at lunchtime. But yeah, and then when I first went to work at broadcasting house, this is in the 80s, it was absolutely, you'd go to the hat and stick, the crown and scepter pub, and you'd have three or four points, or you'd go to the Yorkshire Gray. Still there? Yeah, still there. They're both both. And you'd drink heavily and then go back to the newsroom in the afternoon and record your piece. And I just thought, my God, I can't do this. I got it. I got it. I sort of tried to bring a little bit of that culture when I was a producer at Newsnight. So I coined something and it wasn't at lunch, it was like five o'clock. I coined something. I used to get everybody to go to the pub. It became known as GCHQ, or Goodall's Cocktail

Hour. I don't know what the queue stood for and questions. But yeah, and then that sort of got back to the bosses and they stopped there. But I tried to bring some of that John Soaple spirit in the mid-2010s. But I think that that is the huge difference, that people would go out for lunch, now people just sit with a sandwich on their desk and a can of fizzy drink.

And this one here is from Danielle. Dear news agents, congratulations on your first anniversary. I'm a proud member of the 100%ers club, meaning I haven't missed a single episode. I moved from the US to the UK shortly after the news agents started and your show has been an invaluable crash course on British politics and culture as I've settled into life on the other side of the pond. As for a question, all I really want to know who is each of your favourite US presidents is. Come on, now we're talking. And why? I look forward to your coverage of both the UK and US elections in 2024. And of course, Emily is not going to resist a chance to weigh in on this one. My favourite US president is probably Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I mean, he has obviously the greatest name, but he was also an incredibly hopeful president. And obviously, he was president in the years after the crash of 1929, the Great Depression, and he was this massive doer. You know, he just, he got shit done. He did loads of executive orders. He drove through the New Deal,

the Tennessee Valley Authority, all these kind of social works things. And he acted like a man who was kind of running out of time. The only US president's four terms. So yeah, I think he was quite an impressive one. There we go. FDR. Good choice. You haven't said where Emily is now. Well, she's still in the boot, of course. No, but whereabouts is she on the journey?

Oh, she'll just be coming up to the Dartford Tunnel at this point now.

So this podcast has been recording over the space of half an hour. And according to Lewis, she's gone from Orleans to the Periphery to Calais to Dover. And now she's in the Dartford Tunnel. She's on a private jet, of course. She's going 240 miles an hour, according to you.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. She's in the mate, this private jet. That's the only way she travels, as you know, John. Getting her in a car on the motorway. Oh dear. Okay, who are your favorite presidents? I think my favorite president is probably, you know what, I think it's John Adams. Right. I love John Adams. John Adams is second president, first vice president, and he is kind of the forgotten founding father in a way, partly because he was quite unpopular in his own time. He used to be called his retunity because he was very fat and it was very grand because he had this idea that the president should be called his highness, which Washington

didn't like very much. But he was like so many of those, the founding fathers, he was absolutely brilliant. You know, he was genuinely a sort of steeped in the Enlightenment. He wrote the Massachusetts Constitution, pretty much the oldest working constitution anywhere in the world. He was completely steeped in letters. He was the first American ambassador to the UK. He had this amazing relationship with his wife Abigail Adams and his treasure trove of letters, which is basically a kind of historical document because they were away so much because he was in France trying to get support during the Revolutionary War from the French. And he was, I mean, as Benjamin Franklin said, the revolution wouldn't have happened without him because he was from Massachusetts, which was obviously at the absolute center of the revolution, the Boston Tea

Party. He was basically the guy who represented Massachusetts and the Continental Congress and argued that this was all over and it needed to be done. And also the other reason that he was brilliant, two reasons. One, he's a founding father. And although Jefferson and Washington, they get all the credit, they were both slavers, particularly Jefferson, of course. Adams was always an abolitionist. And secondly, he was the first president, of course, who when he lost an election, he gave up and went home, which in many ways shouldn't be considered to be an extraordinary

thing. But as we see now, it's an extraordinary thing. And it was even more extraordinary then because it had literally never happened before that anywhere on earth, someone had lost an election and willingly gave up power as a result. That's a great answer. I suppose the glib answer from me would be, well, my favorite president is Donald Trump because, my God, he's been fantastic for career-wise over the past few years, three books, endless reports, and we still keep on going on Donald Trump. Happy to help, John. Happy to help. But I think the obvious choice would be Obama because

he was such an iconic president and the first African American to be president. I think I'm going to go for LBJ because I think that LBJ is such an interesting president because it was so unexpected. He was this sort of rough Texan who was the vice president to John F. Kennedy and Kennedy gets assassinated. He becomes sworn in as president on Air Force One on the Tarmac Dallas Airport and becomes this president that then enacts civil rights legislation, which caused huge resentment in the South from which he came and actually which cost the Democrats upended the political map in a way of America. He knew it when he did it. And he knew it would with the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act. And he saw that through. And I also think there's something else that's interesting about LBJ, which is the kind of slogan as, hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today? And that was his involvement in the Vietnam War. And that for all that LBJ was socially incredibly progressive in an awful lot of what he enacted when he was president in the 1960s. He is remembered for Vietnam. And I wondered with Tony Blair for all the social change that he brought about civil partnerships, minimum wage, sure start, etc, etc, etc, where the history will judge him for the Iraq war and not for everything else. And that kind of sense of in politics, you're remembered for one thing. And LBJ, he's remembered for Vietnam, but not remembered perhaps as much for some of the really extraordinary social progress

that was made with the war on poverty and the like. And he was also who's just the most consummate politician, yeah, Lee in the last hundred years, two people who perhaps not necessarily can't be said for a Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer and David Mitchell's question, which I think

we're going to end on. I don't know if it's the David Mitchell. I mean, who knows? Where do you see Rishi Sunak ending up in the next decade? And where do you see Keir Starmer ending up in the next decade? A mischievous question, David. That's a great question. Well, I mean, if we, okay, let's take it that where will Keir Starmer be in 2033 and where will Rishi Sunak be in 2033? If Rishi Sunak loses the election, he's gone. We won't see him for dust. We won't see him for dust and possibly

he'll be living in California. He'll be renewing his green card and all of that. We'll see him way more of trust over the next decade than we will Sunak if he loses the next election. Yeah. And I think the challenge for Starmer will be if you are inheriting an economy that is in a mess, and you've got very tough decisions to make, how you win a second term. And I think that that will be the challenge for Keir Starmer. It's all very well getting to be Prime Minister, but if it's in the most un-propitious circumstances, is un-propitious a word?

Non-propitious. Can't remember. Can't think. Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. It's our birthday show. It's our birthday. We'll get away with anything. Yeah. Then I think that it will be really hard for Starmer to win again a second general election and the Tories will regroup and as we know and we've seen in history, the Conservatives are a very effective machine of government. There's a thing he wrote about in his memoir in his book about the different types of labour governments and there aren't that many of them. But he said that, you know, his analysis running up to 97 was, is you basically have three different types of labour oppositions. You had one that was never going to win, which he cited as a sort of Michael Foote, that you had one which he would have said, I think he was basically saying would have been like John Smith, maybe, or one more one more eve and that would win because of just pure unpopularity and attrition, but then wouldn't sustain because of easy to forget now that before Blair, there had never been a two term, a full two term Labour government, which is just sort of mind blowing when you consider how many Conservative ones there've been. And the challenge that he saw it was to craft and create a political project that would sustain in a way that had never happened with the Labour Party before. And I think that is the sort of big open question for Starmer. It doesn't feel like there's much chance that he won't be Prime Minister in some form. So in 2033, presumably won't be there,

but certainly by 2025 or 2026, he's going to be Prime Minister. The question is, is whether it can sustain and whether the thinking is going on in order to have a political project, which is like new labour in the sense that it can be a long term one, when all as we know with labour, so many of the factors are against you. And one thing I think is definitely certain is that Blair, and you'll remember this John, I'm sure, but Blair probably had the longest political honeymoon of any incoming Prime Minister in history, went on for years really, probably arguably went on until certainly the petrol strikes, Iraq to some extent went back in 2001, certainly up to the 2001 election arguably, or certainly the petrol strikes, which is what, three years? Starmer's probably going to, I mean, I'll be surprised if it lasts three months. And that is going to be a huge political challenge for him. I mean, if you remember, Blair had a pretty dangerous moment, pretty soon after becoming with the whole Bernie Ecclestone thing. Well, that's true. And you know, he just said, look, I'm a pretty straight kind of guy. And he got away with that. And you think, I don't think many politicians would be able to say that with a straight face and yet carry the public with them. And they were very forgiving over that, less so with some of the things that came later. We've got one more question still

[Transcript] The News Agents / 1st Birthday Special: Your questions answered

to come. We'll pick that up after the break. This is the news agents.

So welcome back. It was Ross Anderson who pointed it out earlier. Why do you always go to the breaks with the words? When we come back, we'll be discussing. And then after the ads, you say, welcome back. We haven't been anywhere. Happy birthday. Carry on. Best regards, Ross Anderson. Well, it's banned now. We're not going to do it again. So not welcome back. We're still here. We're still here. And so are you. We're still here. And so are you. We've had loads in about Trump and

whether he will actually go to jail. So we thought we'd answer by telling you to listen to the news agents USA. Is it possible? Yeah, of course it's possible. Well, presumably there will be people who listen to every one of our normal shows and every one of the US shows, the double 100% is the 200% is the 200%. Yeah, that would be the diamond tipped badge, a weekend in Margate with John Soapwell to all those people. One more question. When will we get any live dates?

Well, Mr. regards, Molly. Well, Molly, we can say, just watch this space. You'll be the first to know. We'll be back tomorrow. Thanks for being with us. Thanks for being with us this past year. See you. Bye bye. This has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.