

[Transcript] The News Agents / Britain's Rotten Meat Scandal

Well, back now to tonight's main news, and I'm sorry if you're enjoying your dinner, but the Food Standards Agency says the discovery of horse meat in a finda's beef lasagna is appalling but maintains there's no immediate health risk to the public.

Remember the horse meat scandal? That was when supermarkets were inadvertently selling customers horse meat instead of the meat we all thought we were buying and eating. That was 10 years ago. We thought we'd moved on. We thought that standards and practices had changed forever, but now we learn of a brand new scandal and it's much worse.

Farmers Weekly has uncovered a food processing plant where not only are they mislabelling British pork, it's not British, it comes from anywhere in the world, but often the food that they are using, the pork, is off. It is rotten and it is being blended in with other food. So once again, we have no idea what we're eating or whether it's safe.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's Emily.

And it's John. Emily in news agents HQ, John at home, yes, again, nursing, a sore throat and a cough and all that sort of rubbish. A little bit later on in the podcast, we are going to be talking about the greatest trial of the century so far. Well, maybe not a skiing trial, the great skiing scandal, Gwyneth Paltrow on the slopes at Park City in Utah. But first we're going to tell you about a food scandal, about a rotten meat scandal, fresh produce that has been contaminated with produce meat that is off. And it has made its way into the food chain that we are all consuming. Supermarkets up and down the country, high end or ready meals or quiches, sandwiches, pizza toppings that you serve to your kids. And we've only heard about it because of the work of one investigative journalist, Abby Kay from Farmer's Weekly, who has exposed this industrial scale country of origin fraud meat that was labelled as British when it really wasn't.

It is said in politics so often, you don't want to see how the sausage is made. I think it was Bismarck who first used that quote. Today, we're going to tell you literally, you don't want to see how the sausage is made because of what is going into it. Because of an investigation at Farmer's Weekly where they have uncovered another food scandal just when you thought it was safe to go back into the supermarket and pick up something that was labelled British pork. Well, this inquiry is going to make you want to think again. And the terrifying thing is, and don't forget, this is an industry worth in the UK £100 billion. So the potential for fraud is massive, clearly. And we think that that was what this one processor in particular was exploiting, a way to make a lot of money out of selling bad meat. But what was awful about the reporting that Abby brings us is that employees who worked on the plant were conscious of what was going on. They knew what was going on. They tried to blow the whistle. They wanted to report this, but they were intimidated away from doing it. And two employees had said that even paperwork was changed. So the kind of paperwork that would pick up red flags, bacteria, such as listeria or E. coli, was being falsified. That is a criminal act. We've given you the outline, but let's get more detail on how this all came to light. Abby Kay, as I mentioned, is the deputy editor at Farmer's Weekly. And this investigation came about as a result of her hard work there. Abby, just tell us what was it that first alerted you to the stuff that was going on?

So I don't know if you remember a few weeks ago, there was a big story about booths selling

South American beef. I'd actually broken that story because I'd been speaking to the deputy head of the National Food Crime Unit just to do a general feature about where we are 10 years on from Horsegate. And he sort of gave me a little breadcrumb that I followed. And then I think I've been working on that story. It's just sort of snowballed. People have been getting in touch with me about all different kinds of things that have been happening across all different sectors in the food industry, to be honest. And it's shocking that this kind of fraud seems to be going on everywhere in the food industry.

And Abby, can we just get you to spell out exactly what you found? What are they doing? What is going on?

Yeah. So this is a story about a meat processor where wide scale criminality was taking place. And there were two sides to this story, really. You've got the first side, which is food safety. So multiple sources told me it was commonplace to wash visibly off hands in salt water or mix rotten pork with fresh products for further processing. Other products like ox tongs, they weren't heat treated properly, which is really dangerous. Meat was thawed out on the factory floor. But perhaps the most worrying thing that I found out on the food safety front is that two former employees also said the paperwork for sampling, which will pick up bacteria like listeria and E.coli, was falsified. That is big. Those are not bacteria that you want to play with. Those can kill people. So that's the food safety side. Then there's another side, which is fraud. And as I've mentioned before, this company had been passing off huge volumes of pork, foreign pork, as British for more than 20 years. They've been doing this. It's been a scam. It's been very longstanding indeed. And the way they would do this is they would bring in a small, a relatively small volume of British products or singing or dancing and have all the assurance and they would take the traceability information from that delivery and use it on every single product that they made in a particular week. It's just absolutely staggering that they've been able to get away with this for so long. And you cannot name the processor. So just explain to our listeners, you know exactly who this is. They know exactly who they are. And what's happening now? Why can't you just publish and be damned? There's a criminal investigation underway. So we would be in contempt of court if we publish the name. I suppose one of the things that struck me reading your story, and it's an amazing story, is this a big company or a small company? Is it a fly by night or is this a big corporation? Because it's hard to imagine, given the food scandals that have gone before, that we could be back where we were and thought, well, things have moved on from that. This is a mid-sized company. But I know that this is happening elsewhere. I know there are other businesses doing this as well. They were colluding with other businesses to do this. So this isn't the end of the story. I can't reach the evidence threshold yet to publish about those other businesses. But I know that this isn't censored on one business alone. Well, let me ask you a follow up question to that, which is, you know, in journalism, we like the five Ws who wear what when why. Why? Why are they doing this? Money, to save money. British farmers produce to some of the highest standards in the world. And that means that the food that they produce costs a little bit more. So if you're importing food from elsewhere in the world where they don't have those production standards, those standards that protect animal welfare and things like that, the products is going to be cheaper. So if they can bring in products from elsewhere in the world that is cheaper and they can pass it off as British, they're making money. That's the reason it's

as simple as that. But I thought that in place now, after horse skate, there was an inspection regime where inspectors could just come and knock on the door, walk in and inspect a factory. So why hasn't that worked? Well, several reasons. So firstly, these people were deceitful. So when those auditors would come, which they do and they go unannounced, as well as have announced audits, people would come knock on the door. They have 15 minutes between the time that they sign in and the time that they have to be on the factory floor. As soon as the auditors would show up in the factory, a text message would go out to all the workers and they would have to move any suspect's products. They'd shove it onto lorries in the loading bay or else they would literally put it on a trolley and push it round one side of the factory while auditors and management were on the other. That's how ridiculous this is. And if the auditors asked for any paperwork, because this factory always used physical paper, they were able to amend it and change it to say what they wanted it to say, rather than what it actually should have said.

You learnt this presumably from people who were working on the processing plant, did you, Abby? Yeah, absolutely right. All my sources worked there. I had really good knowledge. I had lots of documentary evidence as well, lots of geolocated photographs and I paid tribute to the people who spoke out because they did that in the face of massive intimidation, huge intimidation. They'd get bullied, so if they ever did call anything out internally, they would be given the worst jobs in the factory, cleaning the drains, they'd get shouted at, heard of several physical altercations. It was really a nasty place to work and I would like to urge anybody who might be working in another business, where practices like this had taken place, to please come forward because these kind of things, they can kill people and they're taking money out of the pockets of hard-working, honest British farmers, so please, if you are aware of this, do come forward. My name is Abby Kay, I'm Deputy Editor at Farmers Weekly, you can find me anywhere.

But what strikes me as so extraordinary about what you're saying is that for this to have worked for as long as it has worked, then a large proportion of the workforce was complicit, probably very unwillingly, but nevertheless aware of what the owners of this company or the managers of this food processing plant were doing.

Yep, they were, but they were too scared to speak out and this is the thing, some of the people who work there, they know what's going on but they don't want to put the head above the parapet and get bullied, they're coming there to do a job, they come, they do it, they go home and they try to have the easiest life possible. There weren't very many other career prospects in the area, so if they were threatened with job loss, where are they going to go? Where's the next job going to be? There are also people working in that factory who didn't have English as a first language, so maybe wouldn't be able to speak up because they didn't understand what was happening. In all of those different ways, what you end up with is, as you say, a compliant workforce and I imagine that is going to be replicated in factories up and down the country.

You can't name the processor itself, Abby, but you do call out the Food Standards Agency and the National Food Crime Unit, who you say knew about these kinds of practices for the last two or three years, but didn't act.

Yep, so I know that the FSA, the Food Standards Agency and the National Food Crime Unit were definitely aware of these practices in at least 2020, but I also had one source who

claimed to have sent a bunch of photographs and information as far back as 2015-2016. I know that there were other people who reported a secret chiller that had been on the site where stuff used to get hidden and the authorities were eventually given the location of that chiller by an ex-employee, so they forced the processor to put it on the site plan so that auditors could look at it, but it's clear to me that this processor should have been on the radar for a very long time, was on the radar, and authorities have sat on it for way too long, especially when there was a risk to public health.

It's really, it's negligent, actually, I would say.

So where would we be finding this meat, this wrongly labelled meat?

I mean, is this every supermarket, every big chain in the UK?

Is it very small and select stores?

I mean, could you still buy it today?

You won't be able to buy it today, I wouldn't have thought, because the retailers have cup ties with this particular processor, but it was sold in places like Tesco, Asda, Co-op, Morrison's, Max and Spencer.

They had another customer called Oscar Mayer, which supplies Sainsbury's, Aldi, IKEA, an airline food producer, Janata, and Princes.

They were a customer, as was BIDFood, so they sell to schools, hospitals, care homes.

It's going everywhere, basically.

Abby, thank you so much.

Well done on the story.

Thanks for joining us.

Thank you.

Well, let's put this in a wider context and what this means for the trust we have in the food that we buy.

Chris Elliott is a professor of food security, and he led the investigation into the horse meat scandal 10 years ago.

Chris, great to have you with us.

We've just heard from Abby the extraordinary detail of what has gone on in this particular food processing plant.

She also makes the point that she thinks this is more widespread than people might think.

Do you think that this is to use a kind of horrible mixed metaphor on food, one rotten apple, or do you think there is a systemic problem here?

I think, first of all, I want to congratulate Abby for a really good piece of investigative journalism.

I mean, she's really dug into, I call it a dirty iceberg, and revealing more and more of what's been going on.

So I guess your question is, is this a one-off isolated incident?

My feeling is, no, absolutely not.

There will be other companies behaving in similar fashion, not just in the UK, but in many different parts of the world.

And a lot of it is due to the massive financial pressures companies feel themselves under.

And there's a myriad of different factors coming together that's really driving fraud right across the food sector in many parts of the world.

And therefore, we are going to keep seeing things like this occur again and again, even though we had the horse meat scandal 10 years ago and thought that measures had been put in place to stop that.

Yes, indeed.

I think what we've got to take into perspective is that the UK food industry is worth about £100 billion a year.

It's massive, and it's very complicated, and people will set out to cheat in that system.

Now, there are a huge number of checks, measures, balances, inspections to try to deter fraud and detect fraud, but it will be going on.

Just like any other type of criminal activity in any other parts of the world, people will always try to penetrate businesses and exploit weaknesses.

So, Chris, you led the inquiry into the horse meat scandal.

Were there measures that you put in place or suggested putting in place as a result of that that haven't been followed?

It's nearly deja vu, 10 years on, guess what we're talking about a meat scandal.

So I think some of the things that I recommended to the government were absolutely put in place the formation of the National Food Crime Unit, but one of the things that I was critical about 10 years ago was the level, the quality of inspections and audits of food businesses.

And from all of the information that I can glean this time round, guess what?

It's a failure of audits again, has really, I think, surfaced as probably the Achilles heel of the food industry in the UK currently.

The thing that is so corrosive about this is that people who are going to the supermarket today or going to order some takeaway food, they've just got a sense now that can I trust what I'm buying and can I trust what is on the label of what I'm buying?

We buy more than 80% of all the food that we purchase from seven multiple retailers and they have put in place incredible measures to try to keep the criminal element out of their supply chains.

But it is that other 15, 20% that worries me because they don't have the same resources, they don't have the same know-how, they are under more financial pressures and some of those outlets that you talked about, they will be much more vulnerable to fraud than the big players in the food industry.

If people are thinking, why should I worry about this?

What is the damage that this is actually doing to me as a consumer?

What is the answer bluntly?

It's very good question, Emily, because when I was investigating horse meat 10 years ago, it was very clear that there was no public health issues there.

It was about substituting one form of meat for another form of meat.

Yes, it was fraud, yes, people didn't like it.

This time round, it is a lot more sinister, I have to tell you, because it's not just about substitution of meat, it's selling food meat that isn't fit for human consumption, rotten meat, cheating on the bargery tests.

That's really the worrying part of this.

So for me, it's probably much more serious than what happened 10 years ago.

Yes, it's really worrying and really helpful just to put that into some context.

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Chris Elliott, thank you so much.

Very welcome.

Abby Kaye pointed the finger at the Food Standards Agency and at the National Food Crime Unit as well.

We contacted both those agencies to get their response to this scandal and to understand if they had played any part in actually bringing it to light.

We're still at the time of recording, which is two o'clock on Thursday, waiting to hear back from them.

We'll be back in a few moments with a rather different topic.

This is the news agents.

We know that you have been waiting all week for us to take you into our thoughts about the Gwyneth Paltrow skiing trial.

You like us will have been dissing it publicly.

You like us will have been saying, what on earth is going on, why would anyone want to know anything further about this ridiculous trial?

But secretly, you will have been perusing every single word and listening to every single bit of this extraordinary trial going on.

Not far from the slopes in Utah.

And we want to start off by playing you a little scene from the courtroom.

You were wearing goggles, a helmet.

Yes.

Okay, it kind of looked like everybody else on the slope.

That's always my intention.

Okay.

Probably had a better ski outfit though, I bet.

I still have the same one.

May I ask how tall you are?

I'm just under 5'10".

Okay, I am so jealous.

I think I'm shrinking though.

You and me both.

I have to wear four inch heels just to make it to 5'5".

They're very nice.

Oh, thank you.

And you're not trained in accident reconstruction.

Me?

Yeah.

No.

Neither am I.

I was yelling at him.

Pretty loud.

Pretty forceful.

I was pretty upset.

Right?

Small but mighty.

Actually, you're not that small.

And I'm assuming, you're under oath here, that you're a good tipper.

Yes.

Okay, fantastic.

I wouldn't expect anything less.

That was Kristin Van Orman, the opposing lawyer, and her new best friend, Gwyneth Paltrow.

And it sounds like they're getting on like a house on fire.

That was, by the way, meant to be cross-examination.

But it looked like to anyone in their right mind as pure fangirl-dom.

I mean, you know, they couldn't have been more sycophantic.

Oh, mate, let's just how tall are you?

Oh, you're very tall.

Oh, God, I bet you have a good outfit.

Don't you?

I love your suit.

Oh, gorgeous tie.

Oh, that's really sweet.

And well turned out you are.

Oh, honestly, it's meant to be cutthroat.

You want a bit of the courtroom drama where I accuse you, Ms. Paltrow, and instead of which is just kind of, oh, let me just stroke your ego even more, and what is happening in American courtrooms today?

I think that's what we need the answer to.

OK, so let us just set out what we know so far, which is this controversy between the ophthalmologist, the doctor, Dr. Sarnison, who says that he was skied into by Gwyneth Paltrow, who fell on top of him, and he is trying to sue the actress for some £300,000.

It started off as a much higher sum.

Gwyneth Paltrow, however, says that she was skied into by a man who she thought at first was possibly sexually assaulting her by sliding his skis between her legs, essentially, and sort of astonishing her to the point where she then fell.

And maybe she fell on top of him or maybe he fell on top of her, but he has not been the same since and he has brought this trial.

And so we're all left wondering, firstly, how you could mistake who was falling on top of who on a ski slope, but technically it is possible.

And secondly, why, why, why, why, why, why you would want this ever to come to trial?

Well, honestly, I have got so many whys about this whole blooming incident.

First of all, it happened on the nursery slopes.

So how do you crack four ribs when you're probably going a barely moving space?

That's one question.

But also his concussion is apparently means that he can no longer tell his Pino Noir from his Cabernet Sauvignon.

So it's affected his taste when he goes to wine tastings.

Yeah.

And I guess that is probably worth \$300,000 in Utah.

Yeah, but you're forgetting.

Poor Gwyneth Paltrow.

What am I forgetting?

What am I forgetting?

What am I forgetting now?

Well, what did she lose?

I mean, she lost an afternoon skiing, remember?

Oh no.

Yeah.

I'm going to tell you so, in my wildest fantasy, and this is my wild fantasy, Gwyneth Paltrow is actually the most brilliant, brilliant, ironic character.

She has got vagina-centred irony all over her, and she finds this whole thing.

Oh, you could say that, Maelist.

Well, that is my prerogative.

I think she finds this whole thing just incredibly funny, and she is leaning into it, and she is going for it because she thinks that actually she might as well embrace the whole thing because it's too crazy not to.

No, it's the opposite, isn't it?

It's just the opposite.

She is so humorless, but I think is a bloody good businesswoman who sees enormous potential for the further marketing of goop, and she's got fangirls, and everyone's examining what she's wearing and the outfit and the kind of muted colors and what that signifies.

I think that Gwyneth Paltrow is just having a marvelous time, and if she wins, well, fantastic, happy days, and if she loses, is water off a duck's back.

I think somebody who understands this beautifully is our old friend, Randy Scott-Zellin, who is the criminal defense lawyer in New York, and Randy, I'm wondering whether you come to this thinking it all makes total commercial sense, but no legal sense, or the other way round?

I think it makes sense at every level.

I think everything that you both said is accurate.

This trial really does have it all, but I'll add something else to it.

I think Ms. Paltrow, and God bless her, she's got the money to do it, she can take a stand.

She can say, no, I'm not going to be extorted, no, I'm not going to pay out on a settlement because I don't want to go through a trial, so I'm going to take a stand, draw a line in the sand, if you beat me, great, and if you don't beat me, great, but no.

I'm not giving you money because I'm a celebrity and you think I can afford it, so against that backdrop, yes, legally, I am fascinated by the fact that in 2023, when we can put a man on the moon, we can plan on going to Mars, we have self-driving cars, we can't figure out who hit whom on a ski slope.

Randy, reading between what you're saying, I mean, you know, it's not that subtle.

You basically think he's trying to pull a fast one, that he's spotted a celebrity and wrote that email to his children saying, I'm famous after the accident happened, and now he's trying to exploit her.

Is that what you think?

I think that's what kind of gave it away, particularly there was that moment during the trial where he claimed, oh, I didn't know that she was a celebrity, and it's like, oh, really?

And then, of course, we know that he was completely, completely starstruck.

Look, did the man suffer injuries, I don't doubt that for a moment, and I think his injuries are a bit more significant than no longer being able to say yes, that is a Cabernet Sauvignon, but he's still traveling, he's still doing his thing, and I think he did doth protest a bit too much on the significance of the change in his life.

Yes, he's in front of a Park City jury.

So I think at the end of the day, what will happen is I think the jury will give him a couple of bucks, and I think everybody will go away a little happy and a little unhappy. Randy, is there a more serious point here, though, that the Dr. Terry Sanderson might have real cognitive problems, and yet he's been caught up in this legal circus, lawyers who are out to make money and get fame and all the rest of it from seeing this man take the stand when he really shouldn't be?

My sense of it is that he's got enough left in the tank, his behavior immediately after his behavior during the trial, his injuries, the way he's described them in the medical testimony.

No, I don't think he's being exploited, and I don't think his family would permit it either, and I think the fact that he's only suing for 300,000 is telling.

That's not chump change, but it's not 30 million.

So no, I think he knows exactly what he's doing.

He's taken a shot.

Yeah, and I do think he's hurt.

I think the question really will come down to, okay, who's really at fault?

And I don't think the jury can figure out who's really at fault.

Yeah, I mean, there was that phrase used about the Iran-Iraq war, it's a shame one side has to win.

I mean, you almost kind of feel that this is so absurd.

How do these cases end up in court?

Is it just because if you've got enough money and you're willing to pay the lawyers, it will, because in the British legal system, this would be a civil claim and it would not go before a jury, a jury's time, would not be wasted with something like this.

In our system of justice over here on this side of the pond, you are absolutely entitled to your day in court, you are absolutely entitled to be judged by a jury of your peers.

I think it's one of the nice things about our system and the fact is that we do have an open door.

Whether you're paying a lawyer and you can afford to or you have a lawyer on a contingency where the lawyer only gets paid.

If you win, it is important for our system of justice to work that everyone has access to the courts.

Are there frivolous lawsuits?

Are there lawsuits brought that have no business being in the courtroom and prevent others

who really do belong there from getting in there?

Absolutely.

But we make that sacrifice to make sure that everybody gets their shot.

Look, most of the cases in the United States end up settling.

Very few cases go to trial.

It's a testament to Ms. Paltrow saying, I am not a cash machine.

And if you want my money, you're going to have to beat me.

Randy, does he have the right legal team around him because we played that exchange with Christian

Van Orman?

As John said, it was just sort of fangirl stuff.

And then earlier, we heard from Dr. Sanderson this really weird reference to Jeffrey Epstein when he was asked if he regretted bringing the lawsuit.

And he said, well, I guess that's the purpose to make me regret this lawsuit.

That's the pain of trying to sue a celebrity.

And then he goes on, you know, what are they going to do?

They're going to do it again.

Now we have the molesting of children on an island.

I cannot imagine what the courtroom made of that.

But he's trying to compare what Gwyneth Paltrow to Jeffrey Epstein and talk about child abuse.

I'm sure that's a moment that he wishes he could take back in the heat of the moment, in the heat of battle, particularly where there are cameras around.

Because we say things that perhaps we might not have said if we took a moment to think about it.

We're all human.

It is a tactic and it's a nuanced tactic on cross-examination.

Look, anybody can destroy anybody.

Anybody can yell at anybody and say, isn't it a fact that you ran into my client?

That's not effective cross-examination.

The most effective cross-examination is called the constructive cross-examination, where I make you my witness.

So it doesn't surprise me that a good cross-examiner would actually try to get that adverse witness to start agreeing with the lawyer.

Also, there is nothing wrong with showing the jury, I could be a nice person.

And there's also nothing wrong with trying to disarm the witness, lulling the witness into a false sense of security.

They get too comfortable, stop thinking, and aren't as prepared.

And then, boom, you get them and before they realize that they've said something that they regret.

Randy, it's great to have you with us.

Thank you so much for taking the time.

I mean, mate, as can you imagine, you've been called for jury duty in Utah.

You're imagining that you're going to probably be hearing some case about driving under the influence or whatever, or that there's some property dispute over a fence that's over

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your side of the garden and needs to be moved back a foot or two.

And you suddenly find you have got Gwyneth Paltrow and the retired optometrist.

Oh, happy days, happy, happy, glorious days of summer.

It is honestly the box set, isn't it?

The box set being delivered whilst you sit in that jury dog and just kind of enjoy the ride.

Exactly.

Anyway, we're going to be back in a moment.

We're going to be looking again at events in Scotland where Humza Yousif's first week as First Minister may be not going entirely to plan.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back.

I'm sure many of you were thinking that Lewis probably off for one of his very, very long weekends because he hasn't appeared so far in the podcast, but I'm delighted to say that Lazy Lewis is with us now.

Hiya.

Sorry.

Just remind me where you are, John.

I'm at home.

Oh, right.

Okay.

Yeah.

That's right.

Lewis is like a little genie that appears when you rub an oil lamp and mention the SMP.

You just have to mention the SMP or something going on in the Scottish Parliament.

The Privileges Committee.

The Privileges Committee.

Here he is.

And suddenly he appears out of nowhere.

Three wishes.

So come on.

Tell us what's been going on.

It is actually quite exciting.

Two of two reasons.

One, very possible, in fact, very, very likely we're going to have a by-election.

Of course, and the genie always appears when there's a by-election, but also there is real read across from this story into Boris Johnson.

So long story short, do you remember during the pandemic, you remember this Margaret Ferrier, the SMP for rather Glenn and Hamilton West during the pandemic, caught a train. She caught a train after she knew she had COVID.

Yeah.

She took the test.

She took the test.

And she got the result.

And she thought, you know what?

I think what would be good here is to go down to Parliament, to the House of Commons and give a speech because, of course, I can't see possibly on public transport, I can't see what might possibly be a problem with that.

Anyway, that was obviously a controversy at the time.

Ever since, I mean, this was some time ago, but the Privileges Committee of the House of Commons, the same committee which is, of course, looking into one, Boris Johnson about other COVID breaches and what he told the House of Commons have been having an inquiry as to whether she broke House of Commons rules by bringing Parliament into disrepute. Well, they have returned their verdict today and they have recommended a 30-day suspension for Ferrier.

And of course, this means that breaks the magic breach, the magic number of a 10-day suspension or more because, according to the rules, if you, as an MP, are suspended from the Commons for 10 days or more, if MPs vote for that, then that means that you are liable to have or you could have a parliamentary recall petition in your constituency.

And if 10% or more of your constituents vote for you to be recalled, there will be a by-election and that looks almost certain to happen in this constituency.

How much read across can you have from one case which is sort of pretty black and white, she got on a train, she had COVID, it was in breach of COVID rules, to Boris Johnson who, as we know, was saying, I swear on my heart, I was telling the truth when I said, I didn't willfully mislead Parliament, etc.

It is difficult because the Ferrier case was clearly very, very clear, as you say, John, and you know, it was kind of open and shut in some ways.

The interesting thing in a way is when you look down into the report itself and you see how the different MPs voted.

So there was an amendment put down by one of the Conservative MPs to reduce the suspension from 30 days to, you guessed it, nine days would be just underneath the threshold.

The threshold of 10 days.

Exactly.

So why might they have decided to try and do that?

Well, one reason you might think that, I doubt it was out of much affection for Margaret Ferrier, is because if you kept her suspension down to nine days, then the argument potentially would be stronger for Boris Johnson's suspension for potentially something which, as you say, John, is a little bit murkier, to also be less than 10 days and therefore avoid a by-election.

Worth noting that the SNP MP on that committee also voted for that amendment.

So again, we see the power of party lines, even though she's no longer an SNP MP because she was suspended at the time, but the power of party lines really coming back very strongly.

So really what you can say is, I think, from this, it looks likely that the inquiry into Johnson could end up splitting on party lines as well.

And if it does, there would still be a majority on the committee to suspend him for more than 10 days because there are opposition MPs and there are lay persons on the committee as well, non-party affiliated people, but if that is the case, then, of course, it becomes easier for Johnson to potentially try and reject the recommendations or argue to his fellow MPs, look, this is a partisan thing.

All the Tory MPs voted for me and all the opposition MPs are trying to get rid of me and therefore to try and put pressure on Downing Street and Sunak to try and whip it or at least put some political pressure on to try and obviate the need to have a suspension. I also want to bring you a little bit of other Scotland-related news, which is what's been happening in Hollywood this morning in the Parliament, because yesterday we reported on the new First Minister, Humza Yousaf, scoring something of an own goal by failing, if you like, to appoint Kate Forbes, who he narrowly beat, to a senior enough position for her to want to take it.

And as a result, he offered her a sort of deffra position, a rural affairs position.

She said, no thanks, shove it up your...

Killed.

...stable, I was going to say, and off she goes.

And so he's lost her.

This morning, at the first First Minister's questions, which Scotland's equivalent of Prime Minister's questions, if you like, the whole thing got suspended within seconds because of disruptors, the whole thing got shut down.

Cold Douglas Ross.

Thank you very much, April.

We will suspend business at this point.

So yeah, his first FMQs was actually suspended six times within just 20 minutes because of continuous interruptions from protesters in the public gallery.

That's never happened before.

You know, the public gallery has never been closed off as a result, protesters.

Five of the suspensions were due to protesters shouting at Douglas Ross, funnily enough, the Conservative leader, but nonetheless, you know, it's not an ideal start to First Minister's questions for the new First Minister.

But more broadly, I mean, this is just a bit of theatre, but the Margaret Ferrier stuff is going to be welcomed like a hole in the head for Humza Yousaf.

Why?

The Conservancy, rather Glenn, has a majority of only about 5,000.

It is expected that Labour Party will take it.

They had the seat from 2017 until 2019.

And this will just be a first test of Humza Yousaf and his leadership.

And it will be if Labour are able to take the seat back, and there are many other seats just like it with more modest majorities around Glasgow, Labour trying to argue that they are revived in Scotland, all of these new splits within the SNP, therefore all to see they're losing members, it will just be a real stall in momentum for him, just at the point that he needs to try and show, look, I've steadied the ship, the SNP fortunes are safe with me, given how much at play Nicola Sturgeon repeatedly made of how many elections she won, it will just be a really, really terrible start potentially for Humza Yousaf in this new job.

Well, you can't wait for any by-election Lewis, but I mean, you know, this one particularly, I'm excited about this one.

I want to go to rather Glenn to cover it.

Anyway, Lewis, we've got a special surprise for you at the end of this podcast.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Britain's Rotten Meat Scandal

Oh, really?

Tomorrow, as a special treat, we're going to let you do the podcast by yourself.

Oh, no.

Emily and I are happy to stand back.

It's not like you.

No, we will.

That's not like you.

You've got something nice planned.

You're going down the Greyhound tracks or something.

You will tell us on the podcast tomorrow what we've got planned.

Oh, yeah, of course.

It's always a joy to find out.

I try and keep the listeners up to date about your movements as far as I can, you know.

They're always very, very keen to hear.

Lewis will be here tomorrow.

Bye for now.

Bye-bye.

Bye.

This has been a global player, original podcast and a Persephoneka production.