

# NFOP magazine

January is here, with  
eyes that keenly glow,  
A frost-mailed warrior  
striding a  
shadowy  
steed of snow.

Edgar Fawcett

**The real extent of Britain's  
loneliness problem**

Page 6

**Brexit - what does it mean to  
you?**

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**More than just a friendly postie!**

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## Editor's Note

Welcome to the January edition of The NFOP Magazine. May I first of all start off by wishing you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

I am sitting here writing this as the Brexit debate rages in Parliament. By the time you read this, MPs will have voted and the course that the good ship Great Britain is going to sail in the years to come will hopefully be a little clearer to us all. I'm not going to speculate about what will happen, because quite frankly that could be anything, but it does look more and more likely that no matter what (to continue the shipping analogy) we could well be cast away and lost at sea! Whatever happens, it seems to me that we are in a right pickle and that cannot be good for anyone.

As we all know, economies and markets "hate" uncertainty, but that is exactly what we have here right now and it's not being too apocalyptic to say that we are in a momentous period for our great country; one that is too important to let our politicians alone decide what that future holds! Whatever you think about Brexit, the situation we

find ourselves in saddens me and gives me great concern for the future.

As the New Year starts I've also been reflecting on the "old" year and what seems to be our continued march to ever more political correctness. Whilst I, like I am sure many of you, abhor discrimination in any form within our society, I am concerned that our continued drive to be more and more PC could actually sanitise us and what we do. After all, throughout the ages, satire has been a useful form of fighting against oppression, whilst humour, used in the right way, can be a very powerful tool. What we cannot do is erase history or what happened in the past; what we shouldn't do is seek to hide it or brush it under the carpet. What we should do is treat it sensitively, with respect and consider the context of the time in which it actually took place – that way it won't be forgotten but it also won't be offensive either!

We have another packed issue for you and I hope, as always, that you enjoy it. Whatever your views and thoughts, please do write to me - your letters and emails are always welcome.

Until next time.

Ed.

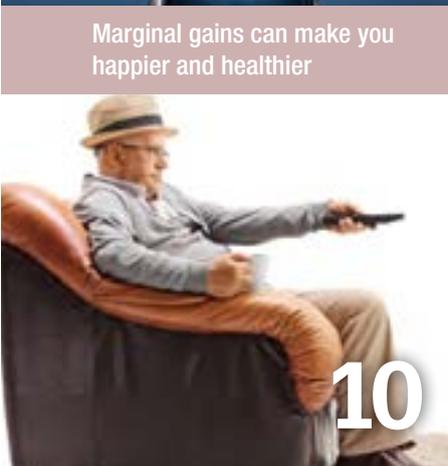
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Marginal gains can make you happier and healthier



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Who should pay for your TV license if you are over 75?



# January's movies

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# Cut it out



“Today, decoupage is a popular hobby and is surprisingly easy to learn.”

By Annie Johnson

**D**ecoupage is the art of cutting out pictures from paper, pasting them onto objects (ranging from books to dressers) and coating the finished item with a layer of varnish or lacquer. The end results can look impressive; almost like they've been painted.

Using cut paper to ornament objects has been around for hundreds of years. Popular in China during the 12th century, it eventually made its way to Europe, probably via Venice, which had extensive trade links to China.

A particularly skilful exponent of the art in the UK was Mary Delany. Her keen interest in botany influenced her decoupage works that were exceptionally detailed and botanically accurate. Mary created over 950 pieces, calling them her “paper mosaics”.

Today, decoupage is a popular hobby and is surprisingly easy to learn, and most novices are able to get great results with their first project. It's a good way to personalise items and very often you'll already have something at home that you can use. Otherwise, a trawl around the local charity shop is recommended! Once you've selected your item, make sure it's clean and dust free.

## Cutting to the chase...

The most common medium is paper and although you can buy a huge range of specialist paper, you can cut pictures out of wallpaper, wrapping paper, greetings cards, paper napkins and magazines. Using a picture with a defined

outline is usually best when first starting out as it makes cutting so much easier.

A decent pair of sharp scissors or a craft knife is recommended, as you don't want rough edges around your pictures. Once you've cut out your pictures, it's a good idea to place them to be sure of the design before you start applying glue or varnish.

There are a variety of adhesives you can use for decoupage and PVA glue is a great all rounder. Whatever you use, you'll need a decent brush to apply it. Make sure you smooth the cut paper pieces into place with a soft cloth or sponge to avoid any wrinkles. Once the glue is completely dry, the varnish can be applied.

All good art and craft shops will have supplies of papers, scissors and glues. To make sure you produce the best results it's worth investing in a good basic book that gives clear “how to” instructions on the various techniques, along with useful hints and tips.

Decoupage gives you the scope to create beautiful, decorative and useful items for yourself and to give as gifts. So why not unleash your creative side and get sticking!

# Watch the birdie

**W**e all know the health and wellbeing benefits of getting out into the great outdoors, so what better hobby to have than bird watching?

There's probably been no better time to get into this most relaxing of hobbies and it doesn't have to be expensive; a decent pocket guide, a note book and a pair of entry level binoculars is all you need to get started.

Watching any wildlife in its natural habitat is rewarding and a real mood lifter, and birds are no exception. Watching their behaviour and interactions with each other is truly fascinating. A good walk becomes that bit more interesting when you're on the look out for our avian friends.

Having said that, you don't need to venture far to watch birds; your own back garden is a great place to start. Adding some bird feeders to encourage birds will give you the opportunity to sit in comfort – with an optional cup of tea – and watch what's going on outside your window. You don't even have to have any binoculars.

Bird watching is an all season hobby; spring brings nest building, summer sees chicks hopping around and autumn and winter see birds leaving our shores and others arriving. It is one of the few hobbies you can quite easily do on your holidays, in this country or beyond.

You might think that bird watching is a solitary pastime, and indeed sometimes the solitude of sitting on your own watching the birds can be just the tonic you might need to calm the soul. But it also gives plenty of opportunity for social interaction with like-minded people who can provide guidance and tips on how best to watch bird life. Some people have a list of birds they want to see, while others just go out and enjoy whatever's there – it's up to you how you approach it. Many bird reserves have disabled access to some hides and wide and well-surfaced paths, but if you need wheelchair access it is always best to check with the reserve before you travel.

How do you get started? Check if there's a bird watching group near you, as they will have lots of local knowledge that will be very helpful. Checking out the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and RSPB websites is also recommended for information on how to get started, what to buy and where to go; the RSPB also run courses.

So if you've watched Springwatch and been enthralled by the lives of birds, then why not get out and look up. You'll be surprised by what you can see when you look.

[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) 01767 680551  
[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org) 01842 750050

“Sometimes the solitude of sitting on your own watching the birds can be just the tonic you might need to calm the soul.”



# January at the movies

## Cinema



## JOYCE GLASSER LOOKS AT THE MONTH AHEAD

Below: Keira Knightley as  
the eponymous Colette

While thankfully there are no Brexit films among January's highlights, there is an undercurrent of #MeToo and a surprising number of biographical, fact-based films about power-struggles. Any metaphorical implications are purely coincidental.

### The Favourite (1st January) Cert 15, 119 mins.

Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos (*Dogtooth*) applied his distinctive dead-pan style and dark, chilling social satire to an Irish single's hotel in *The Lobster*, and an American family of doctors in *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* without losing his Greek roots in the move to English language films. In Lanthimos' jet-black comedy of manners set in the court of Queen Anne (Olivia Colman), the hand of fate from Greek tragedy prevaricates as two English cousins, the Queen's adviser, confidant and lover Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough (Rachel Weisz) and her lowly, self-deprecating, but ruthlessly ambitious estranged cousin, Abigail Hill (Emma Stone) battle for the favour of an increasingly ill, odd and indecisive Queen. All three actresses are in top form.

Lanthimos eschews historic context to focus on the female power struggle in which everything - from poisoning a rival to sexual favours - is fair game. For 25 years Sarah has been Princess Anne's protector, supporter and lover. When, in 1702, Anne finally becomes Queen, Sarah is rewarded with power,

driving her Whig agenda with politician Sidney Godolphin (James Smith) and supporting her husband's costly wars. His victory at Blenheim is rewarded with the embarrassingly expensive palace, the building of which occupies so much of Sarah's long life. Her absences at the construction site, for state business and during her convalescence after her poisoning, enable devious Abigail to progress from scullery maid to Baroness Masham and to the Queen's favourite. While Sarah struggles to regain her supremacy, Anne has become irritated by the controlling and assertive personality and sense of entitlement she previously admired in the Duchess. In this triangle of powerful, wilful and political women, Prince George of Denmark, who did not die until 1708, is absent, although a thought is given to Anne's 18 children, none of whom survived past childhood. The Duke of Marlborough (Mark Gatiss) is off fighting the European wars that Abigail's cousin, Speaker of the House/later Chancellor of the Exchequer Robert Harley (a hilarious career best performance from Nicholas Hoult) opposes for the punishing land tax needed to finance it. Anne is torn between the Whig (Sarah) and Tory (Abigail/Harley) factions.

The film with its elegant, witty and often hilarious script by Deborah Davis and Tony McNamara is like a cross between Armando Iannucci's *The Death of Stalin* and *Barry Lyndon*, and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, while the rouged cheeks, white wigs and Abigail's early vulgar and later opulent court attire add to the circus atmosphere.

### Colette (11th) Cert 15, 111 mins.

Director Wash Westmoreland (*Still Alice*) plunges us into Paris' Belle Époque, while never letting us forget the parallels with our own era as the immensely talented, multi-tasker Sidonie-Gabriele Colette (Keira Knightley) asserts her sexual identity and independence while married to older publishing impresario Henry Gauthier-Villars - known as Willy (Dominic West).

We learn much more about Colette's remarkable life than from other films about her. But at the core of the film is a love story turned power struggle, akin to this year's *The Wife*, in which Glenn Close plays the young wife who gives form and expression to her prize winning husband's inchoate ideas. Willy is delighted to discover that instead of farming out his ideas to a stable of moody male hacks who insist on being paid, his young, bored country bride writes faster and better than any of them.

As Colette becomes more confident in her abilities and sexual identity, and wise to her husband's philandering, the two share not only lovers, but collaborate on promoting her wildly successful Claudine books. They are a formidable pair

and become the toast of Paris. Soon, however, Colette begins to resent the lack of recognition, and, when spend-thrift Willy sells off their joint assets, she retaliates. Since women are no more allowed to publish under their own names than they are to wear the trousers, (Colette also dances semi-nude on stage) scandal ensues, but courage, self-belief and talent prevail.

While there is much to enjoy in this witty biopic, Westmoreland's uninventive direction and unimaginative casting are not entirely worthy of the subject. West is too ubiquitous these days to transport us to Paris while the great costumes that Knightley models so well cannot compensate for her inability to convey feeling, à la Glenn Close, with her face, voice and body language.

### Stan & Ollie (11th) Cert PG, 97 mins.

Chalk and cheese comedy duo, Lancashire born Stan Laurel (Steve Coogan) and Georgia, USA born Oliver Hardy (John C Reilly) were once the biggest stars in Hollywood. The already established entertainers met in the late 1920s and, except for a damaging rift, remained more devoted to one another than either would care to admit. Writer Jeff Pope (*Philomena*) and Director Jon S. Baird (*Filth*) efficiently cover the comedians' contrasting personalities and career ambitions that feed into the contractual issue with studio boss Hal Roach (Danny Huston). After a power struggle with the studio system and their differing visions, they part ways in 1937.

We are fast forwarded sixteen years and 5,500 miles to the drab and dreary boarding houses and rundown music-halls of the duo's 1953 tour of the UK. Those who saw last year's *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* will be reminded of Hollywood film star Gloria Grahame's final days in English theatres and scruffy boarding houses, but *Stan & Ollie* is more endearing and heartfelt.

Laurel has been writing a movie script that they hope will be produced in London if their revival tour is a success, and hasn't the heart to share the bad news with Hardy, already humiliated by their third-class tour. Coogan and Reilly deserve a joint Oscar nomination for their off-stage portrayals of the comedians as well as for their "on" stage recreations of the duo's acts. If the comics struggle to attract new audiences to regional venues with no advertising, Coogan and Reilly face the challenge of making 21st century audiences laugh at 60-something-year-old gags. Happily, their witty banter and comic interaction is matched by that of their respective wives. The verbal sparring between Hardy's third and final wife Lucile (Shirley Henderson), and Laurel's fourth and final wife, Ida

Kitaeva (Nina Arianda) is brilliantly written and portrayed to perfection, while their deep-seated camaraderie is touching.

### Mary Queen of Scots (18th) Cert 15, 124 mins.

Political power struggles do not come any more deadly; misogyny any more destructive or women any stronger than those depicted in theatre director Josie Rourke's passionate, visceral and atmospheric adaptation of Dr John Guy's revisionist biography *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart*.

Rourke and American writer Beau Willimon (*Idea of March*, TV's *House of Cards*) are not interested in Mary's childhood or long imprisonment, but in the psychological relationship between the two lonely Queens and their respective scheming courts. Elizabeth's (American actress Margot Robbie) status as a virgin with no interest in relinquishing power to a husband is making the male English court nervous. Young French King Francois II has just died and his widow Mary Stuart (Saoirse Ronan), whose claim to the English throne is strong, returns to her birthplace as the reigning Queen of Scotland.

If Elizabeth can force Mary to marry her Protestant, English lover and trusted adviser, Lord Robert Dudley (Joe Alwyn, who plays Baron Masham in *The Favourite*) the court will be satisfied that Elizabeth can control her rival. Mary has other ideas, and marries the dashing, English-born Catholic from a Scottish family with claims to both thrones, Lord Darnley (Jack Lowden). Though Darnley proves to be a coward in battle, an alcoholic and happier sleeping with Mary's close confidant, Ismael Cordova (David Rizzio) than with her, she quickly produces the future King, James I.

The customary exchange of doctored portraits is equally important here, as self-conscious Elizabeth has heard from her envoys that not only is Mary clever, strong-minded and spirited, but pretty. Though Mary was raised in the Catholic French court and will insist on becoming Queen of England if Elizabeth dies with no heir, reconciliation and peace are more important to both women than religious wars.

History might have been very different had the two Queens not been ill advised, undermined and betrayed at every turn by their male courts, while Protestant zealot John Knox (David Tennant) and Lord Cecil (Guy Pearce) masterminded false news campaigns (sound familiar?) against Mary. The film is not perfect. The various courtiers are not easy to distinguish while distance and the passage of time are poorly marked. At the very least, Mary could have aged when she meets her maker in a royal blood red gown.

Guy Pearce stars as William Cecil and Margot Robbie as Queen Elizabeth in *MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS*, a Focus Features release.  
Credit: Liam Daniel / Focus Features

Coogan and Reilly deserve a joint Oscar nomination for their off-stage portrayals of the comedians as well as for their "on" stage recreations of the duo's acts.



# Book reviews

A LITTLE NEW YEAR READING RECOMMENDED BY **KATE GOODMAN**

## How well do we know our children ...?

**W**e're used to angst-driven investigators in our crime fiction these days, but none is so closely involved in a crime as Fiona Barton's journalist Kate Waters as she tackles her latest story for the Post. Two eighteen-year-old British backpackers have gone missing in Thailand – the country where Kate's elder son, Jake disappeared to after dropping out of university. Her worry for him makes her specially empathetic to the mothers of the missing girls, Alex and Rosie. For Kate, this particular story is never just about the scoop. Sadly the girls turn up dead, killed in a fire at the unsavoury Phuket hostel where they've been staying. The Thai police maintain the fire was accidental – Kate is not so sure and flies out to Thailand with the families and her loyal sidekick, Joe. There she's met with some devastating news – her son Jake was also injured in the fire, and has now gone missing from hospital before he can be interviewed by the authorities. With it becoming increasingly plain that the girls have been murdered, UK police take over the case and Kate is taken off the story. Of course, that doesn't stop her



continuing her own investigations – and though she becomes ever more terrified for the implications for her son, now the main suspect, she can't rest until the truth is uncovered.

Twists and turns aplenty defy the reader to get to the ending before Kate does, but the plot is not the only gripping thing about this story. Kate herself is one of the best characters in modern crime fiction, a woman torn between career and family, never more so than now. Then there's DI Bob Sparkes. Kate's best support in the police force has his own heartbreak to deal with but is determined to see justice done. Against the hard-bitten environment of pressrooms and police stations, both shine with empathy and integrity.

Toggling between Thailand and the UK, with alternating viewpoints from Kate, Sparkes, Alex's mum and Alex herself, in the form of her journal, this fast-paced, skilfully plotted story, with its final devastating twist, cements one-time journalist Fiona Barton as one of the finest crime writers of her generation.

***The Suspect* by Fiona Barton is published by Bantam Press in hardback, RRP £12.99**

## Bowed, but never beaten

**A**fter a faltering start to her musical career, Grace Atherton believes she has it all – a successful business as a maker and mender of stringed instruments, a lovely home and an attentive, cosmopolitan partner who delights in whisking her off to his Parisian flat whenever possible. But then her lover of eight years makes the national news by selflessly saving a woman from certain death under the wheels of a Parisian train and is unwittingly exposed as the love cheat and liar that he is to his wife, family and Grace herself. Grace is heartbroken. It's worse than the trauma of her student days when her cello master sneered at her playing, causing her to flee music college and give up her dreams of playing professionally. In the wake of this new tragedy, will the music fall silent forever for

Grace? Fortunately our heroine isn't as alone in the world as she thinks – and the two special people in her life are what really make this story sing. Elderly Alan Williams, a long-time customer, and bolshie young Saturday girl (and aspiring cellist) Nadia are determined to pull Grace back from the brink. Both know music's healing power is what Grace needs, and between them they set to work to reintroduce her to the joys of playing the cello. With tragedies of their own to overcome they need Grace as much as she needs them – but slowly and surely heartstrings are mended and high notes rediscovered in this uplifting tale of multi-generational friendship.

***The Truths and Triumphs of Grace Atherton* by Anstey Harris is published by Simon & Schuster in hardback, RRP £12.99**



## Love you to the moon and back



**E**very mother thinks their child is beautiful, and Molly Myers is no exception – though she has to admit that the rest of the world might not agree with her. But it's not son Cory's purple skin, tentacled face and neat little tail that make her hide him from all but her closest family and friends – Molly is well aware that if the US government gets wind of orphaned Cory's existence, the little alien will be taken from her to be poked, prodded and experimented upon like a specimen rather than the sentient, loving being that he is.

Cory had come into Molly and husband Gene's life when a spaceship crashed in the woods behind their house. Bound by a promise to his dead mother, they're determined to keep him safe while giving him as normal a childhood as possible and soon their little boy is learning to speak, enjoying festivals like Christmas and Hallowe'en, and even making friends – albeit unknown to Molly and Gene – with two local children who

quickly adapt to his strange appearance in the way children do.

But of course a boy like Cory can't be kept a secret for ever and soon Gene, Molly and Cory are on the run from the CIA, journalists and unscrupulous scientists all wanting a slice of their son. Their only weapon against their enemies is Cory himself, who possesses powers to share his worst experiences in nightmare scenarios that drive grown men mad.

Set in the late 60s, age of the space race and the Cold War, this story has all the best ingredients of a John Wyndham novel, with a crashed UFO, one alien race that is gentle and peace-loving and another that threatens mankind, a sentient spaceship and spies in thrall to their Russian and US masters. But a bit like Cory himself, this story is also a hybrid of more than one genre, a thrilling sci-fi tale that also poses the question of how far a mother will go to keep her precious son safe.

***Our Child of the Stars* by Stephen Cox is published by Jo Fletcher Books, in hardback, RRP £14.99**

## Five toasts and three cheers for a debut novelist

**M**aurice Hannigan, a plain-spoken Irish farmer has not reached the grand old age of eighty-four without incident. Once, a raggedy-breeches poor farmer's boy, now he's raising a glass to the people in his life who have brought him to where he is today, at the bar of his local hotel, dressed in his best and drinking the finest whisky. There's his late brother, Tony, who taught Maurice that a man's value does not lie merely in academic achievements; then his wife Sadie, who melted his heart from the minute he saw her at her desk in the bank and made him realise that maybe more than money makes the world go round. There's his little still-born daughter, who has lived on in his heart all these years;

his feeble-minded, yet cherished sister-in-law; and finally his son, Kevin, now a successful journalist in the USA. As Maurice toasts each, the story of his life unfolds, and the reader meets the man behind the gruff exterior; boy, husband, father and friend who used his opportunities well, if not always wisely. This is a skilful portrait of a man who has plenty of faults and flaws, but also the strength and courage to admit to them as he relives the triumphs and tragedies of his long life and prepares for the final chapter. A fine literary debut from a writer I'm sure we'll hear more from.

***When All Is Said* by Anne Griffin is published by Sceptre on January 24 in hardback, RRP £12.99**

