

# GRIDLINE

The magazine for National Grid grantors

SPRING 2014



nationalgrid

## The real Downton

A look at what goes on when the cameras leave

## 'ABSOLUTE CHAOS'

What happened when a grantor first opened to the public

# Back to school

Lambing or cider making, Kate's top of the class whatever the season

PLUS: Adrenalin-seeking stonemason • Dial before you dig • Fast track to success • Win a luxury country break

# WELCOME TO GRIDLINE

National Grid is taking strides to ensure the **future of energy production** is in safe hands

**I**n every aspect of life we see the huge benefit of Britain's world-renowned engineering tradition, but it's a legacy that is now under threat.

Fewer youngsters think the key science subjects are interesting enough to study

at university in a disturbing trend that National Grid is trying to address.

As you'll see once again in this edition, our grantors are keeping time-honoured traditions and skills alive, but without the knowledge being passed on, they will wither on the vine.

That's why we are increasingly active in schools, colleges and communities to spread the word that a career in engineering, as many of our grantors



prove, needn't mean a life stuck behind a desk.

The stories on page 5 offer a snapshot of the exciting activities we're running to help safeguard our future.

This time we've been granted privileged access

to the setting for Downton Abbey, but we're always on the lookout for information about your business and how you've diversified to grow, so please do get in touch.

In the meantime, enjoy the read.

**Dawn McCarroll**  
Editor, Gridline



**Nick Kenyon, who runs the Dewlay cheese company featured in the last edition of Gridline, was delighted with the coverage.**

"All I can say is 'bloomin' heck'. I didn't expect to be featured on the front page!

"You definitely made my mum proud, that's for sure. I just wanted to say a big thanks for the exposure. It was a fabulous piece. Best wishes for 2014."

## WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Please contact Gridline if you have any news or stories that you think would be of interest to other grantors.

**Tel:** 01926 656 325

**Email:** [gridline@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:gridline@uk.ngrid.com)

**Write to:** Gridline,

Summersault Communications,  
23-25 Waterloo Place, Warwick Street,  
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5LA.

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## Some useful contact numbers

The Land & Business Support team is responsible for acquiring all rights and permissions from statutory authorities and landowners needed to install, operate and maintain National Grid's electricity and gas transmission networks. The Group acts as the main interface for landowners who have gas and electricity equipment installed on their land. Your local contacts are listed below.

### ELECTRICITY AND GAS

- North-west and Scotland 0161 776 0706
- South-east 01268 642 091
- South-west 01452 316 059
- East 0113 290 8235

### WAYLEAVE PAYMENTS

- For information on wayleave payments, telephone the payments helpline on 0800 389 5113

### CHANGE OF DETAILS

- To inform National Grid of changes in ownership or contact details, telephone 0800 389 5113 for electric and 01926 654 844 for gas, or email [grantorservices@nationalgrid.com](mailto:grantorservices@nationalgrid.com)

### ELECTRICITY EMERGENCY

- Emergency calls to report pylon damage to National Grid can be made on 0800 404 090. Note the tower's number – found just below the property plate – to help crews locate it

### ELECTRIC AND MAGNETIC FIELDS

- For information on electric and magnetic fields, call the EMF information line on 08457 023 270 (local call rate). Website: [www.emfs.info](http://www.emfs.info)

### GAS EMERGENCY

- 0800 111 999

### DIAL BEFORE YOU DIG

- Before carrying out any work in the vicinity of gas pipelines, overhead power lines or underground electric cables, you should contact Plant Protection on 0800 688 588 so that searches can be made to determine the exact position of any National Grid assets

### CUSTOMER COMMENTS

- Write to Land & Development, National Grid House, Warwick Technology Park, Gallows Hill, Warwick, Warwickshire, CV34 6DA. Or email [ld.customercomments@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:ld.customercomments@uk.ngrid.com)



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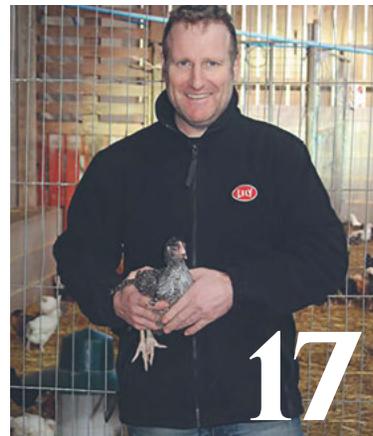
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## Daisy Duck

Tiana Walton, from Frodsham in Cheshire, won £150 of M&S vouchers with this shot. Turn to page 20 for details of this issue's competition.

## Competition winner

Congratulations to Sheila Pritchard, from Abergavenny in Monmouthshire, Wales, who won a Nook tablet for correctly answering the Dewlay cheese question in the last edition. She said: "I don't normally enter competitions, but I'm very glad I did. I've received my Nook already. Thank you, Gridline."

## Regulars

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Now you see it, soon you won't. Our teams worked hard to safeguard the environment

## Going, going, gone!



A temporary pylon was put in place with minimum fuss

THIS WAS THE MOMENT a 50-metre-tall pylon in the Snowdonia National Park was brought crashing to the ground in a controlled demolition operation.

When it was built in the 1960s, the National Grid pylon at Penrhyndeudraeth, in the Dwyryd estuary near Porthmadog, was on firm land, but changes in the flow of water in the estuary undercut the foundations, causing the pylon to suddenly list. During the operation, a 100-metre exclusion zone was declared with temporary closures of the Point

Briwet road bridge and adjoining Cambrian Coast rail line.

### Challenging

"Access was challenging and National Grid was grateful for the support of a number of organisations including the local council, National Resources Wales and Snowdonia National Park Authority," said Chris Isaac, regional external affairs manager.

"We replaced the pylon with a temporary one before winter, minimising disruption to local people and the environment."

## Substation site is butterfly haven

A RARE BREED OF BUTTERFLY is enjoying a revival at a National Grid substation.

Feckenham substation in Worcestershire has been identified as a stronghold of the Brown Hairstreak butterfly, which is a priority species. Around 100 eggs were discovered at the site, following a visit by volunteers from the West Midlands branch of Butterfly Conservation.

"East Worcestershire is the only area in the Midlands where the Hairstreak is still found," said the organisation's Mike Williams.

"The butterfly mainly frequents hedgerows, but annual flailing results in the loss of a large number of eggs.

"It's great to know that National Grid has a sympathetic

management regime in place and is committed to improving the habitat still further."

### Conservation

Chris Plester, sustainability business advisor at National Grid, said: "The egg locations have now been recorded and incorporated into our site conservation plan, in partnership with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

"Sections of hedgerow have been double-fenced to protect the eggs, and new wild pear, cherry, damson and crab apple bushes planted to create wildlife corridors."

"It's a great example of how we work with partners and communities to promote and preserve biodiversity."



National Grid is working with communities and partners to improve habitats



## One-minute interview



**Liz King,**  
land officer,  
East region

**BACKGROUND:** I joined Land & Business Support in May 2011, after working for Hull Forward, the regeneration agency for Hull, as a development manager.

**CURRENT FOCUS:** I'm currently working on an internal programme introducing new tools and ways of working to drive operational improvements.

**LEISURE INTERESTS:** Refurbishing old furniture and filling my house with shabby chic things! I also like being outside – particularly riding.

**NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW:** I once won a rally driving competition, beating 11 men in the process.

**MOST LIKELY TO SAY:** I'm too cold!

**THE TEMPTATION YOU CAN'T RESIST:** Buying things.

**DREAM JOB:** Running my own livery yard.

**IDEAL DINNER GUEST:** Keith Lemon – he would be sure to provide some laughs.

**FAVOURITE HOLIDAY:** Portafino, for its atmosphere and stunning views.

**IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHERE WOULD YOU GO?** To a scene in a period drama, I like the dresses.

**MOST TREASURED POSSESSION:** A photo book of a European road trip in 2012, as it holds so many memories.

# Inspiring choices

MORE THAN 2,000 PUPILS in the Midlands are to receive careers advice from National Grid and other major companies as part of an ambitious initiative.

The scheme will aim to address concerns that youngsters leave school without the right qualifications to match the vacancies industry has to offer.

## Exciting

The pilot careers education programme, called Careers Lab, will see representatives from industry work alongside teachers and careers experts to deliver

modules to pupils aged 11 to 16.

The project is the brainchild of National Grid CEO Steve Holliday, who is also chair of Businesses in the Community's Talent and Skills leadership team.

"Good, relevant, inspiring careers advice, which includes people in industry telling their career story, has to be part of education," he said.

"We don't expect 11-year-olds to know what they want to do when they leave school, but we can open their minds to exciting careers and spheres of industry that they might not know exist."



## Bright spark

A LESSON BY NATIONAL GRID volunteers, on how to generate electricity using a lemon, got the thumbs up from pupils at Churchfields Primary School in Beckenham, London.

The volunteers were cleaning up a former power station site nearby. The aim of the company's School Power initiative is to inspire engineers of the future.



Apprentice Sam Smith (inset, right) has been an active volunteer since the age of 10 and represented National Grid at the Step up to Serve launch at Buckingham Palace



# Making a difference

NATIONAL GRID IS A PIONEER business in a campaign to encourage young people to become more actively involved in their communities.

The goal of the Step Up To Serve campaign is to double the number of young people taking part in social action by 2020.

National Grid has pledged to

value social action within its recruitment and career progression policies, and to provide specific volunteering opportunities for all new starters. In fact, all staff are encouraged to get involved in projects.

"The volunteers benefit from the opportunity to develop and gain skills, while as employers, we

gain from having much more confident and work-ready new recruits," said Kate Van der Plank, National Grid's head of UK community investment.

## For more information...



... go to  
[stepuptoserve.org.uk](http://stepuptoserve.org.uk)



Mechanical flaying is the first part of the process

## A very common purpose

ESSENTIAL VEGETATION management work beneath power lines crossing a common has brought a second big benefit.

Work on the eastern edge of Odiham Common in Hampshire has led to vital heathland restoration at the 284-acre site.

The common is one of the few examples of wood pasture outside the New Forest and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, with many rare fauna and flora.

"Fountains, our contractors, used mechanical ground flaying methods to clear trees and scrub under power lines to ensure safety clearances and network resilience during storms," said Rob Miller, National Grid's lead engineer for vegetation management.

Henry Campbell-Ricketts,



Hart District Council requested the use of ground flaying, as it removes invasive scrub and provides the ideal conditions for heathland regeneration

service manager for Fountains, explained: "We taped off areas with species that were sensitive to ground flaying and hand-cut the vegetation."

Hart District Council senior countryside ranger Steve Lyons said: "The ground will revert to its

original heathland state of heather and dwarf gorse vegetation. The power line corridor creates a hot, sheltered environment in summer - ideal conditions for the reptiles, butterflies and other insects that thrive in this habitat."

## Powering the capital

A £1-BILLION NATIONAL GRID project to help keep the lights on in London has won a top award for its use of sustainable practices to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

The London Power Tunnels project team were presented with the Environmental Initiative of the Year award at the International Tunnelling Awards in November last year.

With its project partners, National Grid has achieved a 40 per cent cut in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by reusing earth excavated during tunneling and using low-carbon materials in tunnel construction.



## Mission accomplished

EOIN HARTWRIGHT HAS become the youngest person to row across the Atlantic Ocean, after completing the gruelling 3,000 mile Talisker Whisky Challenge from La Gomera to Antigua, in the Caribbean.

The 17-year-old, who is the grandson of a National Grid grantor, was part of the four-man Atlantic Quad crew that overcame blistering heat, five-metre waves and the occasional bombardment by flying fish, to complete the race in 43 days and 21 hours.

### A small reminder...

... in the last edition we featured a wildlife calendar. Sorry, but this is a National Grid publication only.



# WE'RE HERE TO HELP

National Grid's easy-to-follow guide provides **illustrated examples** of where not to dig and some **useful phone numbers** if you need further advice

**A** best-practice leaflet featuring safety messages for all grantors to consider before starting work near gas pipelines will be landing on doormats in April.

Industry statistics indicate that landowners, occupiers and their contractors continue to be responsible for most of the near misses close to pipelines.

The leaflet, which will accompany the annual letter, was created following direct feedback from our grantor advisory panel on how key safety messages could best be communicated.

A user-friendly graphic in the leaflet illustrates the dos and don'ts of working near pipelines, including actions that are potentially hazardous if safety advice isn't followed.

"Anyone planning work near a pipeline should give us as much notice as possible," said Tony Jackson, engineering manager, network engineering.

"We are more than happy to visit the site to locate the exact position of the pipeline and mark out its



Grantors will soon receive a helpful safety guide

location. This is a completely free service - we're here to help.

"Our sole aim is to ensure the continued safety of everybody living and working in the vicinity of the gas network."

## For more information...

... visit [www2.nationalgrid.com/UK/Safety/Dial-before-you-dig/](http://www2.nationalgrid.com/UK/Safety/Dial-before-you-dig/)

## Get safe for free

Grantors battling to cope with the aftermath of the recent devastating flooding have been urged to turn to National Grid with any questions over drainage work.

"If in doubt call us out, is very much the message to grantors unsure over whether to go ahead with dredging work," insisted Nik Wileman, asset protection team leader.

"The temptation might be to think 'I won't bother National Grid with that', but we would much rather grantors approached drainage work with a safe rather than sorry attitude."

Drainage courses fall into two groups - those that come under the grantor's jurisdiction and those that have been installed by National Grid.

Nik says the grey area when large areas of land are underwater can sometimes cause uncertainty over where work can be safely carried out.

He added: "If grantors are looking at dredging in this difficult time then we would urge them to give us a call first, to ensure they don't put themselves in unnecessary danger."

The National Grid Plant Protection team offer a free site visit and are waiting for your call on 0800 688588.





# THE REAL DOWNTON

For a great **country estate** to pay its way in the modern world is far from easy, even if your home is the setting for a **TV blockbuster**, says Lord Carnarvon, owner of **Highclere Castle**

There's one character in ITV's enormously successful Downton Abbey series that has starred in almost every episode, despite not speaking a single line.

With its manicured lawns and spreading Cedars of Lebanon, Highclere Castle, on the border between Hampshire and Berkshire, provides a spectacular backdrop for the upstairs and downstairs saga watched by 120 million people worldwide.

Set in a magnificent 1,000 acres of parkland, wooded hills, lakes and follies designed by Capability Brown, the castle was remodelled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl in the Victorian Gothic style by architect Sir Charles Barry in the 1840s.

It was Barry who designed the Houses of Parliament, and Highclere has the same soaring pinnacled towers and turrets, tall narrow windows and beautiful honey-coloured Bath stone.



Geordie's great-grandfather, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl, famously died six weeks after witnessing the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb, as a result of an infected insect bite, giving rise to a media frenzy about 'the mummy's curse'. At the precise moment of his death, it was said that all the lights went out in Cairo and at Highclere, his beloved terrier Susie let out a howl and dropped dead.

The Grade I listed castle and its estate faced a repair bill of £11.75 million, including a £1.8 million spend on the house alone, whose leaking roof had left the upper floors ravaged by rot. At least 50 rooms were uninhabitable.

A three-year refurbishment of the second floor is now under way, along with repairs to the turrets and some of the estate's follies. Future projects include restoring a medieval barn with a tiled roof dating from 1451.

**Heritage**

The Earl and his wife Fiona, Countess of Carnarvon, and their three children divide their time between living at the castle and a neighbouring cottage, vacating the castle in the spring for the six months of filming and when it is open in the summer.

While Geordie oversees the estate and its associated businesses, Fiona's main focus is on marketing the castle and she has written two bestselling books about two of Highclere's former Countesses.

Like many properties that are asset rich but cash poor, Highclere has been a 'heritage estate' since the 1990s. The castle and park are open to the public for a minimum of 64 days in return for inheritance and capital gains tax exemptions.

"Heritage estate status provides a coherence of management that enables houses and their estates to remain as one entity," said Geordie. "If you split the land from the house, the public access disappears, and if you break up the contents, buildings lose interest and educational value."

Before Downton Abbey, the castle's claim to fame was the discovery by the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl - Geordie's great-grandfather ➤➤



The Temple of Diana folly has been restored with funding from English Heritage and the local authority

Unlike many grand houses that were bulldozed less than 100 years after they were built, Highclere has remained in the Carnarvon family for more than 350 years.

George Herbert, the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon, inherited the estate in 2001 on the death of his father Henry, who was the Queen's racing manager for more than 30 years.

Affectionately known as 'Geordie', he readily admits that the Downton Abbey series came along at just the right time in 2010, as the banking crisis was beginning to bite.

"Quite apart from the location fees, the real added-value of Downton Abbey has been the opportunity to build on the high profile it has given us," said the affable 56-year-old over a mug of tea in the castle's cafe.

"Pretty much overnight our visitor numbers quadrupled - we now have up to 1,500 a day in the high season - and the gift shop and tea rooms were also running at a far higher rate."

**Collapse of the old order**

➤➤ At their height, landed estates were symbols of wealth and prestige, but their decline began with the importation of cheap grain from abroad in the 1880s, which undermined agriculture, wiping out income from once-prosperous tenant farmers.

➤➤ Families were also hit by rising death duties and taxes on unearned income and by the 1950s a big country house was being demolished every five days.

➤➤ For many owners, the only solution was to marry a wealthy heiress. The 5th Earl landed the modern-day equivalent of £25 million by marrying Almina (right), the illegitimate daughter of banking millionaire Baron Alfred de Rothschild, in 1895.

➤➤ To settle the 5th Earl's death duties of £500,000 in 1923 (equal to £30 million today), the vast bulk of his private collection of Egyptian artefacts was sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, along with land, paintings (including some by Leonardo da Vinci), family silver and jewellery.



## Feature **Downton Abbey**

- of Tutankhamen's 3,000-year-old tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in 1922, with archaeologist Howard Carter.

The Carnarvons have developed an Egyptian Exhibition in the cellars of the castle, with a full-scale mock-up of the entrance to the tomb and replicas of some of the treasures.

"It remains a popular destination for school trips, and more than half of all visitors pay extra to tour the exhibition," said Geordie.

Rooms at the castle are hired out for weddings and corporate events, and there are shooting weekends for those who want a taste of aristocratic country living. A variety of public events are also held, including country fairs, music concerts, charity fundraising days and an

### In numbers

# 750,000

the number of Americans who each year enter a competition to win tea at the castle

# 200-300

the number of rooms at the castle (even the owners are not sure about the exact number)



annual Easter egg hunt for local children.

A highlight in August will be a special event marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great War, raising money for Help for Heroes and other army charities, with vintage aircraft fly-pasts and other historic memorabilia.

The Carnarvons are passionate about improving the quality of the landscape and the views for the 100,000 or so people who visit the castle and walk in the parkland.

Formal gardens near the castle have been revitalised, new beech avenues planted or restored, and a new five-acre arboretum added in an area cleared of conifers.

Far from being merely a TV set or business, the castle remains a much-loved family home for the couple.

"Places like this do tend to take over their owner's lives," agreed Geordie. "We both feel a commitment of stewardship to keep everything intact for the next generation - not just for the family, but on behalf of the whole nation."

### For more information...



... about Highclere Castle go to [highclerecastle.co.uk](http://highclerecastle.co.uk)

Recent investments at the oats processing plant include a £50,000 robotic pallet loader





The oats are even better quality than those sold to humans

## Living off the land

Downton Abbey may have made Highclere the most famous country house in the world, but when the cameras leave, there's still an estate to run.

The 5,000-acre estate has two SSSI designations for chalk downland and acid grassland, as well as numerous sites of archaeological interest, including a Bronze Age fort.

In addition to permanent pasture grazed by 1,600 sheep, there are 1,500 acres of managed woodland, and a further 300 acres devoted to Highclere Stud, now controlled by Geordie's sister Carolyn.

Much of the land is relatively infertile, being either clay-capped soil or barred from agricultural use under the terms of the estate's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme for its historic value, landscape or biodiversity merit.

"Only about 2,000 acres are capable of generating an income from arable crops, but some of our heritage work would have been impossible without the farming profits from good harvests," said Geordie.

The estate farm manager for the past 27 years is James Phillips, who fulfilled the same role for Geordie's father. "When I first came here I could see what an amazing place it was," he

James Phillips manages the day-to-day running of the estate

said. "Luckily, I talked myself into the job and have been here ever since."

Until the Second World War most of the farms at Highclere were tenanted out, but many have gradually been brought back in hand as tenants have retired or died.

"We now contract manage neighbouring farmland in order to gain the economies of scale needed to make the arable unit viable," said James. "Owning the land also makes it easier to move livestock around when we host public events."

### Performance

A successful business that has developed over the past 20 years is Highclere Castle Horse Feeds, in which oats grown on the estate are processed further to produce an added-value product for performance horses.

About half of the 3,000 tonnes of oats are supplied to racehorse trainers, farm shops and polo teams, and the rest to specialist companies supplying the market.

"The oats are like a Formula 1 fuel for horses. They are of better quality than those sold for human consumption and they command a higher price," said James.

He manages the estate with a small team of around eight employees, many of whom have worked at Highclere for 30 years or more.

"Our security advisor is in his 90s and the head gardener, who is 75, has just gone part-time," said James.

"In a place like this, the country air seems to make people fitter and able to go on longer. The owners also enjoy looking after their staff and, in turn, they reap the benefits of a very experienced and loyal work force."

# WHERE SPRING IS SPRUING

For five weekends from early February, **snowdrop lovers** from around the world flock to a corner of **the Cotswolds**, but the annual **celebration of winter's end** hasn't always run smoothly

**W**hen Sir Henry Elwes and his wife first threw open the doors to their fledgling snowdrop collection, it resembled a scene from a Tom Sharpe novel.

Their once-tranquil estate was mayhem, like a scene from Wilt, with cars clogging surrounding roads as thousands queued for a peek at this most unassuming of plants.

"The police were on the phone within minutes of opening time, asking what the hell was going on. It was absolute chaos," Sir Henry grinned.

Fortunately for the local constabulary and constant stream of visitors who keep returning, things have been fine-tuned since that day 14 years ago.

But if Sir Henry and wife Carolyn needed confirmation that they could turn a passionate hobby into a pretty, yet not altogether profitable, sideline, then that day was it.

Now, years later, their Colesbourne Park estate, deep in the Cotswolds, is widely regarded as home to England's greatest snowdrop garden.

Wandering through the five acres of honey-scented flowers, it's not difficult to see how even the uninitiated could learn to love such a deceptively hardy little plant.

It doesn't take a giant leap of faith to grasp why their time-consuming and manually demanding cultivation is a labour of love for Gloucestershire's former Lord Lieutenant.

## **Wonderful legacy**

"My great-grandfather travelled to Turkey and returned with a large collection of bulbous plants, so it feels like we are looking after a wonderful legacy," he said.

In 1874 Henry John Elwes' reputation as one of the

greatest British plantsmen was enhanced by his visit to the untapped corners of Asia Minor, from where he returned to these shores with a trunk of never before seen irises, crocuses and, of course, snowdrops.

Despite 40 years of neglect, the plants survived beneath the trees of an impressive arboretum until the current Henry and his wife took up the cudgels 20 years ago, with the first and largest *Galanthus elwesii*, named after their ancestor, as their inspiration.

Now the estate relies on 2,500 acres of forestry and farming to survive outside of snowdrop season and is a haven for around 250 different varieties of the plant, fabled for heralding the end of winter.

## **Absolute mayhem**

The arable and sheep farm element has now been let to tenants, allowing the couple and two dedicated gardeners to concentrate on their first love.

"When we realised what we had in terms of the arboretum and snowdrops, we decided to open up the estate and gauge the interest," said Henry. "It was a hobby at first, but as the gardens grew, we contacted the people who run the annual Snowdrop Gala and word spread like wildfire, until on opening day it was absolute mayhem."

As well as the sweeping landscaped gardens carpeted in white, green and yellow from February until late June, the estate boasts a jade-coloured lake as a stunning backdrop.

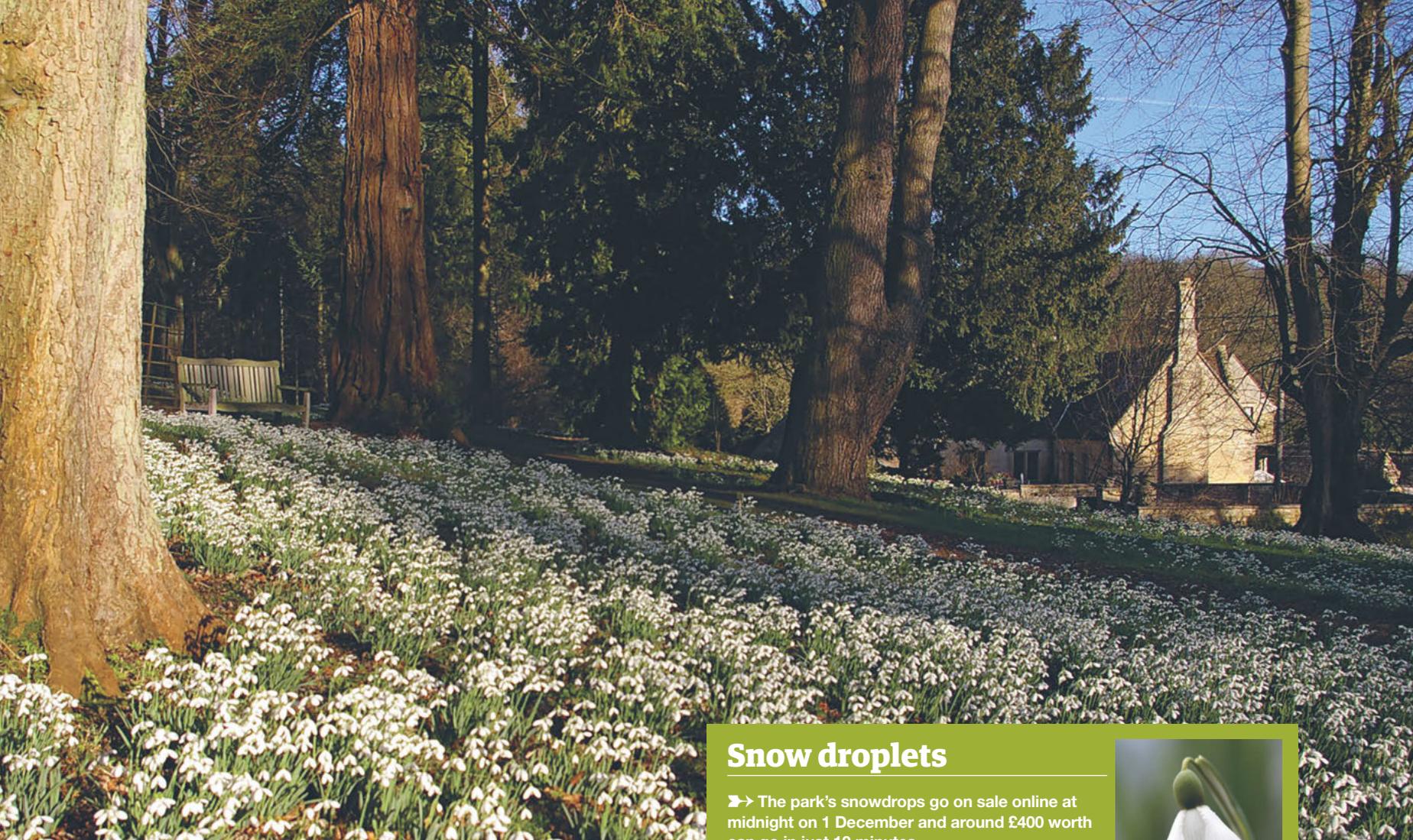
Colesbourne only opens for five weekends from early February - understandable given that it takes weeks of solid replanting to prepare for crowds that peak at 1,500 a day.



At a guess, Sir Henry says there are several million snowdrops on the estate

*Galanthus George Elwes*, named after Sir Henry's youngest son, and one of 250 varieties at Colesbourne





## Snow droplets

- The park's snowdrops go on sale online at midnight on 1 December and around £400 worth can go in just 10 minutes.
- He hasn't counted, but Sir Henry estimates his land is covered by several million snowdrops.
- Snowdrops are poisonous, containing their own form of antifreeze. They lie down in frosty weather and perk up when the sun comes out.



Visitors from around the world are drawn by the beauty of varieties unique to the estate, include upstanding G. Lord Lieutenant, handsome hybrid G. George Elwes, in honour of the couple's late son, and the yellow G. Carolyn Elwes.

"It's intensive work after June, when we find the sticks we've placed by the clumps that need digging up. We then take the bulbs, dry and clean them while they are dormant and replant them manually one by one," added Henry.

That rejuvenation process ensures the highest quality of snowdrops, which attract online buyers from as far afield as America, who pay up to £100 for a single rare bulb.

Rare, in this instance, is a variety that shows constant differences - two heads instead of one or five petals instead of the usual three - over several years, once the plant has been separated from the rest.

Once the snowdrops fade, there are 300 mature trees in the arboretum within half a mile of the largely rebuilt house, eight of them champions representing the biggest of their type, including the low-growing, contorted oriental plane, sourced from an emperor's grave in Beijing.

Henry, who invites charities in to take the tea and cake profits and lets schoolchildren in free, said: "We do it for love. All we get is a better garden, a faster lawnmower and the unadulterated joy of what we do."



The courses take a warts-and-all approach so that people get the complete picture, and the Beavans combine theory with practice

“We feel guilty making a living from it sometimes because we enjoy it so much, but enjoying what you do is the secret to a successful business”



# TRADITION LIVES ON

A former veterinary nurse and a **cider-loving farmer** make a living out of doing what they do anyway... and **enjoy every second**

**“B**eware of the Beavans! They will change your life.” The words of TV presenter Kate Humble after she spent nine months on their farm as a trainee shepherd for the BBC’s Laming Live programme.

She started ‘not knowing one end of a sheep from the other’, and was Kate and Jim Beavan’s first ever Country School celebrity graduate, who now has her own flock.

The success of the programme and Kate Humble’s glowing testimony proved the springboard for opening Kate’s Country School, which lures visitors eager to get back in touch with countryside skills and traditional farming.

Smallholders, farming folk and complete novices seeking a taste of the good life - or Kate’s incredible homemade cake - are all welcome on her hands-on courses.

Kate, a veterinary nurse by trade, admits she loves talking, whether it’s to animal management students at the local college near the farm in Abergavenny or her own course-goers, who just keep on coming back.

So when the BBC approached the couple to host the first Laming Live in 2010 and the feedback was good, they started thinking.

## Diversify

“It showed us there was a real demand from people in all walks of life to experience traditional farming, so I decided to combine my teaching with our day job, and here we are,” Kate said.

“There’s been a movement to see how food gets to the family table and to know its provenance. People who come on our courses leave knowing more.”

Jim defers to Blackpool-born Kate when it comes to the important

marketing side of the job, opting to get on with the day-to-day running of the two-farm, 500-acre family partnership in Monmouthshire.

Though initially reluctant to diversify, he’s a people person too, empathising easily with students unused to seeing newborn lambs clinging to life or a bereaved ewe being encouraged to bond with an orphan clothed in the coat of her dead lamb.

“Sometimes it isn’t for the faint-hearted, but we give people a warts-and-all view of every aspect of what we do and they seem to like it,” he said.

Jim is acutely aware that the miracle of birth at Great Tre-Rhew Farm is just that to the school’s guests and not just one more delivery among the 1,000-plus there last year.

Kate added: “We don’t hide anything. There would be no point just showing the nice bits. Feedback shows people have gone away and done it on their own, so we feel very proud that we’ve given them the confidence to do that.”



## Kate’s tips

Kate’s top tips for taking the diversification plunge:

- enjoy what you do
- keep it seasonal so that even if a course is half full, output is unaffected
- keep it simple.

## Traditional

Other courses run at the school include sheep shearing by hand, animal husbandry and wildlife, and connecting with nature around the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme farm, which is home to rare red-listed birds, kingfishers, wildflower meadows and even an otter webcam on the River Trothy.

Many of the day-long courses end in the 17th-century annexe at the back of the farm, where Jim also runs traditional cider-making days. ➤



The couple limit course numbers to eight - some come from as far afield as Canada and the States - to ensure everyone is involved and can tuck into a hearty home-cooked meal in Kate's low-beamed kitchen.

"We do theory in the morning and practical in the afternoon. It's amazing to hear the buzz as they chat about what they've learned over a nice meal and sip of homemade cider," said Kate.

### Natural

Mention of cider brings grantor Jim alive: "That's one of my favourite courses," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "We get the oak barrels from the whisky distilleries in Scotland and there's often a bit of single malt left. Shame to waste it.

"We run the courses in November and use only apples, no sugar, no chemicals. When the fermenting has finished in May or June, the course-goers come back to collect a couple of gallons. I try to make sure there's some left over for me."

Diversification felt like a natural progression that matched the characters of this instantly likeable couple. Kate said: "We feel guilty making a living from it sometimes because we enjoy it so much, but enjoying what you do is the secret to a successful business.

"Growing interest in ethical living and smallholdings meant there was a market and by using the resources we had and keeping it simple and fun, we've tapped into it."

Kate's bubbly personality ensures the venture is always ahead of the curve, using social media, Twitter, blogs and a budget website to promote the business. She said: "We want to keep tradition alive so that farming techniques that have survived for generations don't wither and die, so we keep the courses seasonal to fit in with our usual routine."

Family days planned for later this year and a 100-tree orchard are next in the pipeline. Kate added: "Hopefully, we've inspired a new generation of smallholders by sharing our way of life. We might not have got them living the good life, but you never know."

Jim has a vital role to play in checking the cider... at least that's his excuse

Course-goers see everything from the miracle of birth to the early bonding



### In numbers

# Three

screen appearances. The farm has also featured on The One Show and was the setting for comedy film The Butcher

# Five

The number of days 3 million people watched Laming Live, during which Jim had to be bleeped out at least once

# One

year since Jack Benson, Kate's dad, died - he ran courses at the farm and had a career as a countryside writer

### For more information...



... visit  
[katescountryschool.co.uk](http://katescountryschool.co.uk)

# THE FASTEST CHICKEN BREEDER

More than a decade after **almost losing his life** and the depression that followed, former speedway star Dave Mullett has **found happiness** with his family

**A**drenalin and adulation were Dave Mullett's constant companions during a decade of sporting supremacy, until both deserted him in a split second that almost cost him his life.

The Reading and England star speedway performer was on the critical list for two days after a horrific high-speed crash that turned his world upside down.

A Kent agricultural engineer's son, who shunned the agricultural way of life, his glittering career came to a dreadful end that day in 1999 as he lay trackside with a broken femur and life-threatening side effects.

Unsurprisingly, his descent from the nemesis of some of the planet's best riders left him feeling empty and alone.

"I was at the top of my game and taking on the World Champion Hans Nielsen, and then it had all gone in an instant," he recalled.

"I broke my femur, metatarsals and had an embolism that was threatening to kill me, so my recovery was slow and, psychologically, very difficult."

## Chequered career

Within two years of announcing his retirement in 2002, moving back to his 65-acre farm in Little Eaton, just south of Canterbury, and cutting his ties with old racing pals, he slipped into depression.

"After treatment I was just at home, but there's only so much Kilroy you can watch, so I got a job in a psychiatric hospital with my wife, which in hindsight probably wasn't the best idea," he laughed.

"Eventually we both decided that we were stupid to be working when we had all that land, so we quit and the rest is history."

The next chapter in Dave's chequered career came when he opened a DIY livery and stables, which now caters for 23 horses. That proved to be the perfect springboard for his next venture, which has banished his depression and brought the whole family - there's wife Donna and two teenage sons - together.

Dave's Point of Lay Hybrid Chickens arrive as day-old chicks and are reared to point of lay, when each chicken will lay 200 to 300 eggs a year, depending on the breed.



Dave (below left) in his heyday and his more sedate current existence



Eight years ago, Dave set up Little Eaton Farm Chickens to cater for the increasing number of families wanting their own eggs.

He made sons Craig and Alex, then 18 and 16, both 25% shareholders in the business and operates it on a small-margin, high-quantity basis.

He said: "We sell around 3,000 birds a year and don't charge a lot. That way we find we sell in bulk to dealers who will often come and take 60 birds. We've recently started selling coops, feeders and other equipment too.

"We don't make a fortune, but it's another string to our bow and, importantly, it's teaching the boys about business, how to deal with people and customer service - really good lessons that they'll never get at school."

## Triumphant

The future looks bright for the Mulletts and in particular Dave, who can now speak fondly of his triumphant past.

"The business takes up a lot of our time, so I rarely think about the speedway now - until a couple of years ago that is," he admitted.

"A National Grid engineer knocked on my door, as we had a problem with power lines whipping and scaring the horses. He said 'my God, you haven't changed a bit'."

The worker was a big speedway fan who had watched Dave many times, so they settled down to watch some speedway DVDs of his glory years over a beer and a Chinese takeaway.

For more information...



... visit [littleeatonfarm.co.uk](http://littleeatonfarm.co.uk)

# STONE AGE MAN

Pardon the pun, but grantor Lance Slawson has **carved out a career** for himself as a master stonemason with a **head for heights**

**"I** love the variety of the work," said Lance Slawson about his life as a master stonemason over the past two decades. "No two jobs are the same and you're constantly meeting new people."

This week he is renovating a war memorial, but he could equally be abseiling the walls of an ancient castle to carry out repointing work, or restoring stone stiles on a footpath.

Erected to honour the fallen of the First World War, the parish war memorial in St Werburgh's Church in Birkenhead, Merseyside, was in need of a facelift. Lance has carried out repairs - including new detailing on the Christ figure - and given the whole structure a new paint finish.

"It's clear the memorial continues to have real meaning for many local people and it has been a privilege to give it a new lease of life," said Lance.

## **Permanence and power**

Lance has been a stonemason for more than 25 years.

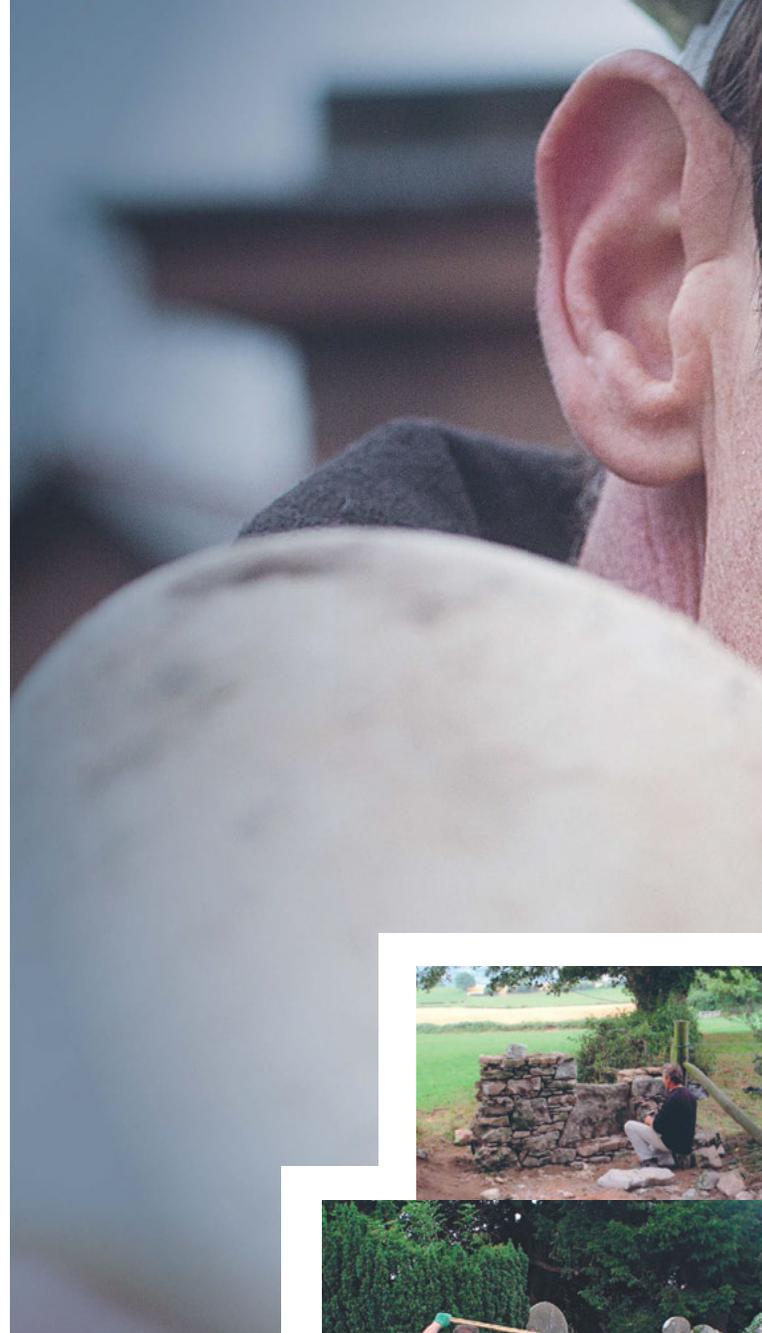
"I qualified as a motor mechanic after leaving school, but wanted a more outdoor life," said Lance, who in his spare time is a keen ice climber, skier, downhill mountain biker and white-water kayak enthusiast.

He went on to start his own business, North West Masonry, establishing a studio at his farmhouse home near Hollywell, in Flintshire, Wales.

Today he has a team of five stonemasons, serving clients in Cheshire, North Wales and the Wirral.



Lance Slawson's work as a stonemason is nothing if not varied, one week he's repairing memorials, the next abseiling castle walls



While much of the firm's workload is new build (including stone cladding, walling and stone feature work), Lance also works for heritage organisations, restoring castles, bridges, war memorials and churches.

"Heritage bodies generally insist on the use of hand tools and traditional ways of working, while power tools come into their own for private clients who want you there for as little time, and cost, as possible," he said.

It was the Gothic cathedral builders of the Middle Ages that established the stonemason as a key craftsman, and stone has remained the material of choice for displaying wealth, permanence and power ever since.

The mallet and chisel hand tools used today would be instantly recognised by a medieval craftsman. Although they were once made of fruitwood, nylon is often preferred for mallet heads today because of its durability.

"Three of the chief culprits when it comes to stone damage are pollution, road salt and tree roots," said Lance.



“Not many people achieve immortality, but stonemasons certainly leave their mark for hundreds of years”



(above) The job often calls for intricate stone carving skills (above left) Restoring a Victorian stone stile (far left) Refurbishing a war memorial (left) At heights of 120ft, Lance repoints an ancient castle wall in North Wales

“The aim in the case of historic properties is always to replace as little of the original stone as possible, so you cut back just a few inches and fit a new piece.”

### Critical eye

At Lance’s studio, banker masons shape blocks of rough stone, giving them a textured or polished finish. The dressed stone is then installed on site by fixer masons.

“The stone is carved using templates and drawings,” said Lance. “As you become more experienced, you develop a critical eye and can carry out a lot of the work with just a tape measure.”

Fixer masons are experts at working with different stone types and mortars. They also need to be good with their hands and at following plans, have an eye for detail, and occasionally a head for heights.

North West Masonry specialises in abseiling work, which can save clients time and money in scaffolding costs.

Every job has its unique challenges and surprises. Lance’s rope skills were memorably called into action for a job repointing Denbigh Castle in North Wales.

“I discovered a cannonball dating from the Civil War embedded in one of the towers, about 150 feet up,” he said. “On another job, I took back a fireplace recess to uncover a priest hole dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.”

On more than one occasion, Lance has been asked to incorporate a time capsule into a wall so that when it is demolished, people can find out about life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“Not many people achieve immortality, but stonemasons certainly leave their mark for hundreds of years.”



### For more information...

on some of Lance’s exciting projects go to: [northweststonemasonry.co.uk](http://northweststonemasonry.co.uk)

### It’s a fact

➤ Reflecting their status in society, master stonemasons were the only tradesmen that didn’t have to bow to their monarch.

➤ Medieval stonemasons wandered from project to project as the work dictated.

➤ It is generally agreed that the fraternity of Freemasons owes its origins to medieval stonemasons, who, for security reasons, met and lived in buildings called lodges.

➤ It takes four or five years to train as a stonemason.

➤ There are three basic types of rock used by the stonemason – sedimentary (such as limestone and sandstone), igneous volcanic rock (like granite), and metamorphic rock (marble). Stones vary in hardness, quality and resistance to weather in a similar way to wood.



# Lastword

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Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5LA or email them to [gridline@summersault.co.uk](mailto:gridline@summersault.co.uk) **Closing date is 18 April 2014.**



## Photo competition

Winner Tiana Walton said: "I've already taken a look round M&S to see what I might buy. I can't wait for the new Gridline because I'll definitely enter again."



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The closing date for entries is 18 April 2014.

### COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS

**SNOWDROP:** The winner will be the first entrant selected at random who correctly identifies the answer (to be featured in the next edition) and who is a National Grid grantor at the time of the draw. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without prior notice. The prize is not transferable and cannot be exchanged for cash. The closing date is 24 March 2014.

**PHOTO:** The winning image will be the one judged to be the most visually appealing, original and relevant to the theme and will feature in the next edition. The winner must be a National Grid grantor. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without prior notice. The prize is not transferable and cannot be exchanged for cash. The closing date is 18 April 2014. Prints cannot be returned.

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