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Nineteen seventy GREAT! A study may claim 1978 was Britain's unhappiest year, but ROGER LEWIS says 'what rot' as he remembers Brucie on the box and seven-pint tins of beer

By [ROGER LEWIS FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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What strikes me is how innocent it all was. If we drank Mateus Rose, the bottles were turned into lampshades.

Few ventured far for their holidays. Weymouth, Margate and Bridlington had yet to be eclipsed by the Balearics.

g out meant scampi and chips in a basket, an egg burger at a Wimpy with the ezy, tomato-shaped ketchup dispenser and somehow cake tasted different it was called Black Forest Gateau at a Berni Inn.

lking, of course, about 1978, the year a new study tells us was the most able for two centuries. Professors at Warwick University seem to base their findings on the fact that dwindling post-war euphoria had finally given up the ghost in the Winter of Discontent with its strikes and piles of rubbish.

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Sizzling



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Dallas began in 1978 (pictured: A promotional still from the American television series 'Dallas' shows members of the Ewing family)

What rot! 1978 was beyond question the greatest year of my life, and not only because I passed my A-levels and went off to university, for free, on a full grant.

In 1978 I was 18. My friends were all 18 that year, too, and there were dozens of birthday parties, held in the British Legion Hall, Bassaleg, in South Wales, washed down with Watneys Party Sevens — the tins holding seven pints that you opened in fear because you always got sprayed with beer.

When I describe 1978 to my children, they think I may as well be talking about 1878. (As it happens, that's around the time the research profs say we were happiest in the UK — despite the child cruelty, gruesome mortality rates, bone-chilling poverty and an absence of any cure for gout).

It is impossible now to conceive of a society without mobile phones, computers or the internet. In 1978, we had to look things up in encyclopaedias in libraries. We communicated not instantaneously with texts and tweets. We wrote letters, went out and bought stamps; we exchanged postcards.

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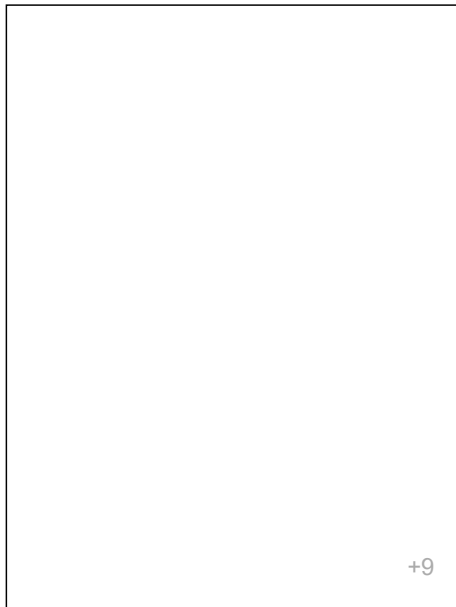
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People of my generation were not put under pressure from infancy to pass exams. Teenagers weren't on medication for stress. Teachers weren't worn to a frazzle with league-table nonsense, they were brilliant people — to whom I owe so much — with proper degrees from real universities.

They wore gowns and introduced us to things that had nothing to do with any syllabus — the films of Orson Welles and Fellini, Salvador Dali, Swedish chamber music. And I went to a comprehensive in Newport — very far away from the benefits of private education.

Children had childhoods. Everything was less competitive. We all watched Crackerjack!, Blue Peter and Magpie, which were very wholesome. I still have the Blue Peter annuals, the hardbacks issued at Christmas, with step-by-step instructions on the deployment of sticky-back plastic.

I remember Valerie Singleton in the early Seventies dressed up as a Bronte to show us around Haworth Parsonage.



In 1978 I was 18. My friends were all 18 that year, too, and there were dozens of birthday parties, held in the British Legion Hall, Bassaleg, in South Wales, washed down with Watneys Party Sevens

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The pair were both guests on Jimmy Kimmel Live

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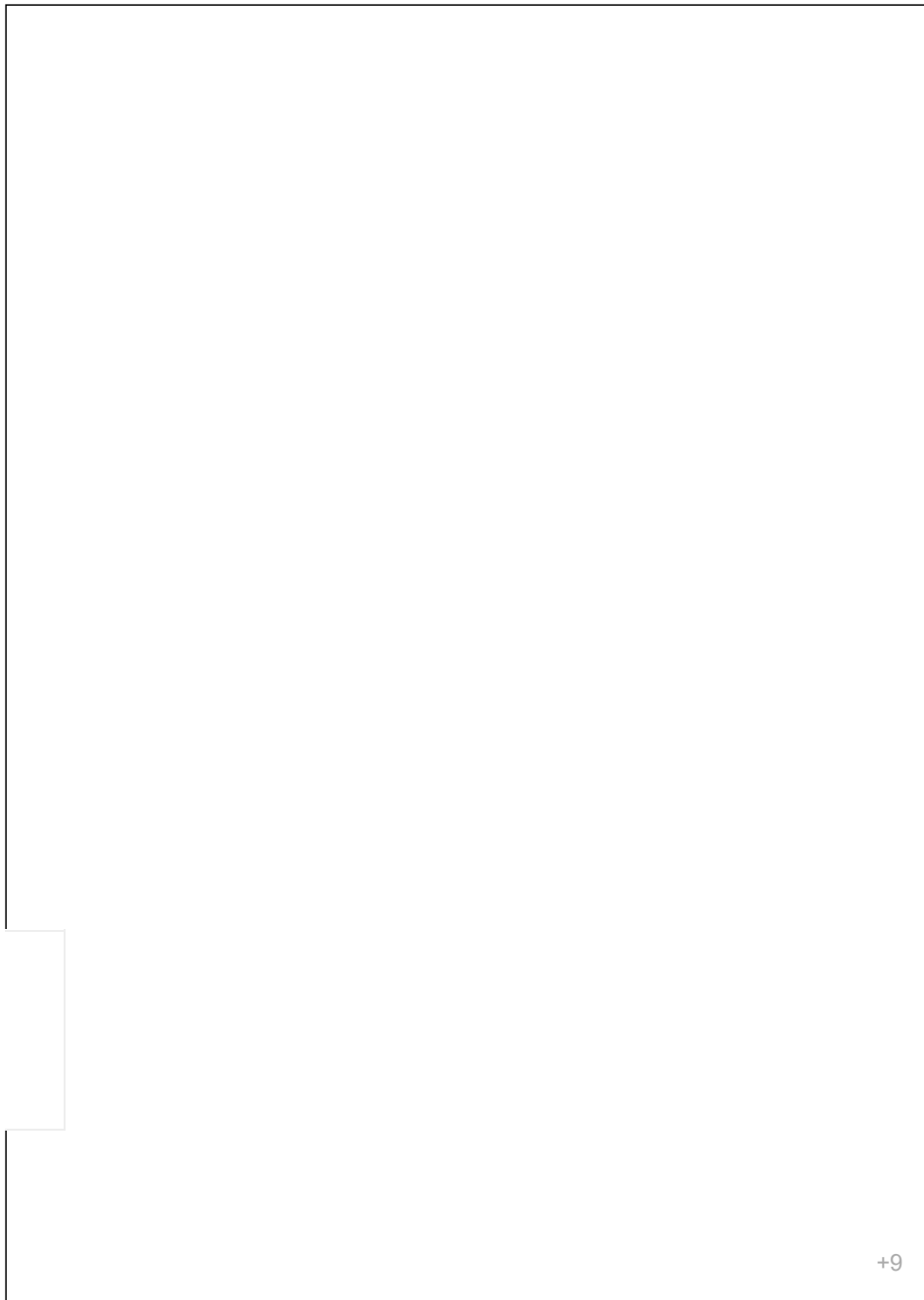
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Enjoyed a day out on Wednesday

▶ **Gerard Butler steps out with long-time on-off girlfriend Morgan Brown for lunch... weeks after packing on the PDA with mystery brunette**

▶ **Jennifer Aniston means business in black blazer and skinny jeans as she heads to Jimmy Kimmel Live! after becoming an Instagram sensation**

▶ **TOWIE's Amber Turner and Dan Edgar put on a defiant display as they attend her shoe launch after admitting she 'always gets told to break up with him'**

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Doing well

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Celebrity pals

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PROMOTED

▶ **Irina Shayk and Tyler Cameron look gorgeous as they pose together at Falconeri launch event**
It was a chic evening in the Soho district of New York

▶ **Katie Holmes cuddles up to mother Kathleen at star-studded American Ballet Theater gala at Lincoln Center**
She has reportedly split from Jamie Foxx

▶ **Paul Rudd glams up in white tie and Aisling Bea represents Ireland in green at starry Living With Yourself premiere**
At the ArcLight Hollywood on Wednesday

Bruce Springsteen shows off his elegant

I still have the Blue Peter annuals, the hardbacks issued at Christmas, with step-by-step instructions on the deployment of sticky-back plastic (pictured: John Noakes and Shep on the cover of Blue Peter annual. Right:

There was no loudness and brash silliness, as today on CBeebies. There was an assumption that the audience was intelligent and curious, before the medium was wrecked in the modish name of accessibility and inclusiveness.

There was, however, foolhardiness. John Noakes climbed Nelson's Column without a harness, nor did the BBC pay any life or accident insurance premium.

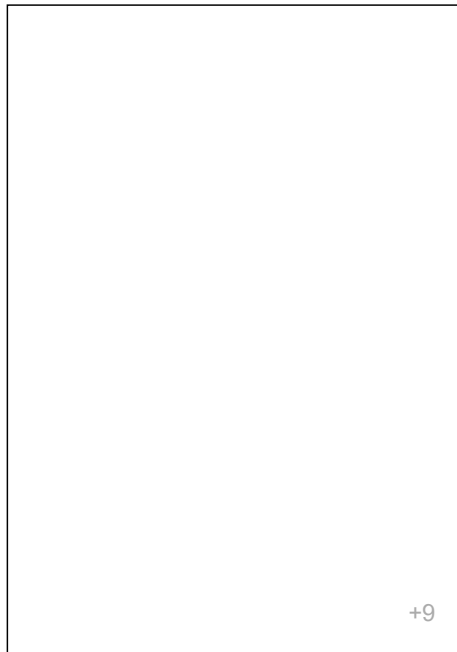
I never could stand Noakes's yapping dog Shep, however, but was sad when John left the show in . . . 1978.

People owned only one telly and there weren't any video recorders, so the nation watched the same programmes at the same time. This made for a sort of social, cultural cohesion, with 20.5 million people regularly watching Coronation Street and 28 million watching Morecambe And Wise at Christmas. Dallas began in 1978 and Bruce Forsyth's Big Night starred him and wife Anthea Redfern.

The colour on TV was hit-and-miss: newsreader Kenneth Kendall was always bright orange.

We also all knew the advertising jingles. Smash, the dehydrated potato mixture and those weird robots ('For Mash Get Smash'); Nimble Bread, with its blonde who 'flies like a bird in the sky' in her balloon. And Cadbury's Flake, with the lass in the field behaving saucily in slow-motion ('Only the crumbliest, flakiest chocolate').

It was still the age of sauciness, titillation, suggestiveness, embodied on screen by beautiful angelic blondes such as Judy Geeson, Susan Penhaligon and Judi Bowker, without a great deal of actual mucky action.



Smash, the dehydrated potato mixture and those weird robots ('For Mash Get Smash')

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▶ [Kerry Katona reveals she's been rushed to hospital as she shares snaps of herself hooked up to a drip in A&E](#)
The former Atomic Kitten singer uploaded selfies

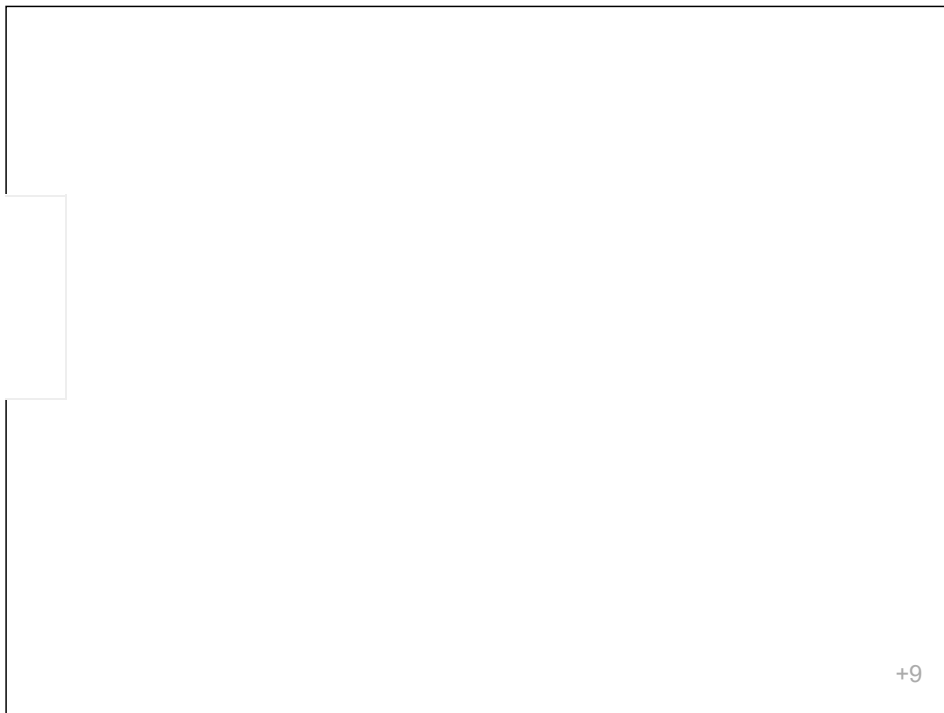
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Added to her collection

▶ [Taylor Swift reveals the one question she gets asked that 'deteriorates' her mental health](#)
Spoke during her Tiny Desk concert

▶ [Ben Affleck dotes on his children during outing with his mother Christine Boldt... as ex Jennifer Garner grabs lunch with a pal](#)
Doting dad



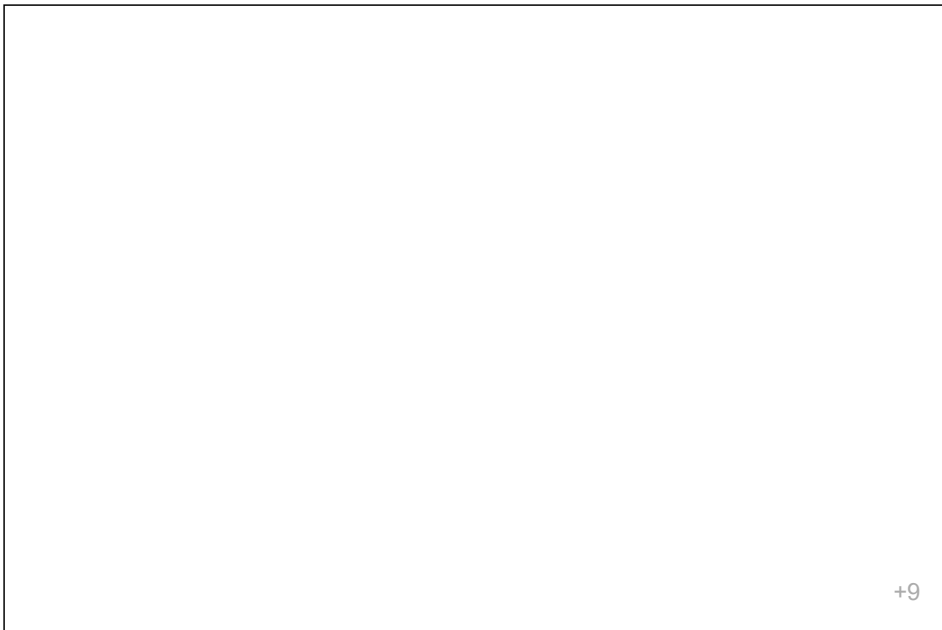
What strikes me is how innocent it all was. Bruce Forsyth's Big Night starred him and wife Anthea Redfern

Even Robin Askwith, in the 'erotic' Confessions films, kept up the slapstick by falling over his bucket in Confessions Of A Window Cleaner.

When I stayed with my future wife Anna, for example, at her parents' house, it was definitely separate rooms. I returned to Wales a few days early, so my father laughed and said: 'Her old man sprinkled tin tacks on the landing, did he?'

He had indeed, more or less, and was on the alert for creaky floorboards. Very Victorian.

Cohabitation was unheard of — hard to credit now, but prudery prevailed with our parents' generation. Engaged couples were expected to remain apart until after their wedding, as in Victoria Wood's play, Happy Since I Met You, where Julie Walters and Duncan Preston shock their families by getting a flat.



The Sweeney (1978) with John Thaw as Det. Insp. Jack Regan, Ernie Wise as Ernie Wise, Eric Morecambe as Eric Morecambe and Dennis Waterman and Det. Sgt. George Carter

When Anna's folks came to see us at university, we had to temporarily rent another flat, down the road, to keep up the pretence that we weren't together.

It is no wonder a great deal of the popular culture of the Sixties and Seventies was about sexual frustration. Benny Hill ogled the 'birds' (as they were cheerfully called) and they angrily chased him off.

nd Terry, the characters in *Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads?*, sit in the lamenting their love life. Harold Steptoe is always romantically thwarted.

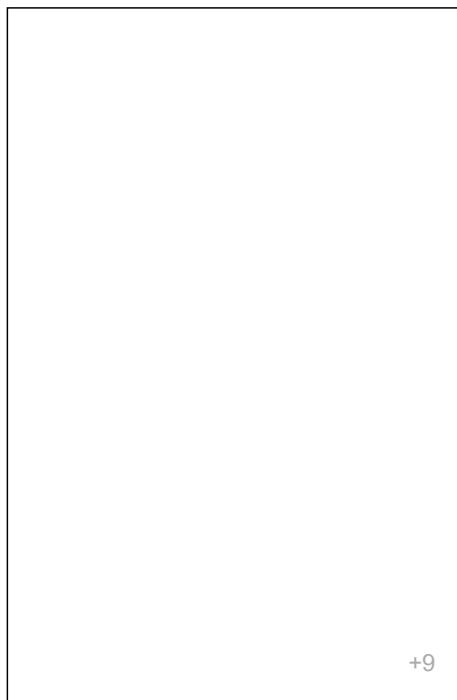
ing Damp, Rigsby — the creepy landlord who is as prepossessing as John tie, the serial killer in 10 Rillington Place — spies through the keyholes on rd Beckinsale and Frances de la Tour. Frankie Howerd in *Up Pompeii!* is surrounded by slave girls with big boobs — but the concealed joke there is that big boobs were never going to be Frankie's cup of tea.

If we were pre-Aids in 1978, it's fairer to say we were mostly pre-gay, too, particularly in Wales, where the chapel prevailed. Same-sex marriages and civil partnerships were inconceivable notions. Homophobia was rampant.

Nevertheless, flamboyant figures such as Kenneth Williams, Liberace, Charles Hawtrey and Larry Grayson were beloved entertainers.

For despite the sneers, the Seventies were actually the heyday of camp. Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant*, was turning from a pariah into a national hero, and David Bowie, *Ziggy Stardust* himself, was covered in glitter and feathers — and my rugby-playing pals all loved it.

If our fashion decisions were embarrassing and garish — blue velvet flared trousers, platform shoes, chiffon scarves, tank tops, mullet haircuts — at least we didn't go around in collar and tie like our buttoned-up fathers.



Frances De La Tour and Leonard Rossiter in *Rising Damp*

▶ **Ben Stiller dotes on daughter Ella Olivia, 17, at Broadway opening of musical *The Lightning Thief***

She's the eldest of Ben's two children

▶ **Malin Akerman is leggy in patterned two-piece with hubby Jack Donnelly at *Living With Yourself* premiere in LA**

Posed for photos on Wednesday night

▶ **Amelia Hamlin, 18, gets a kiss from her beau Mercer Wiederhorn during loved-up outing in LA**

Put on a very affectionate display

▶ **Jessica Biel oozes casual-cool in ripped blue jeans and cropped black leather jacket during lunch with friends in LA**

Low-key appearance

▶ **Demi Moore and daughters Rumer and Tallulah dress to the nines for Harper's Bazaar party celebrating her memoir *Inside Out***

▶ **Paul Rudd reveals he encouraged Leonardo DiCaprio to star in the blockbuster film *Titanic* after working together on *Romeo + Juliet***

Big role

▶ **Bella Hadid flashes midriff as she goes topless beneath slim jacket while out and about in Chelsea**

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▶ **Karrueche Tran smolders in emerald peekaboo gown as she brings hunky beau Victor Cruz to star-studded American Ballet Theatre gala**

▶ **Olivia Palermo is the picture of elegance in butterfly print skirt with chic black blazer at the American Ballet Theatre gala**

Looking good

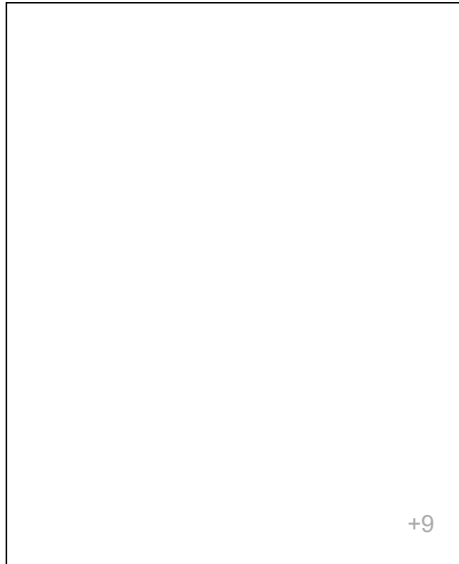
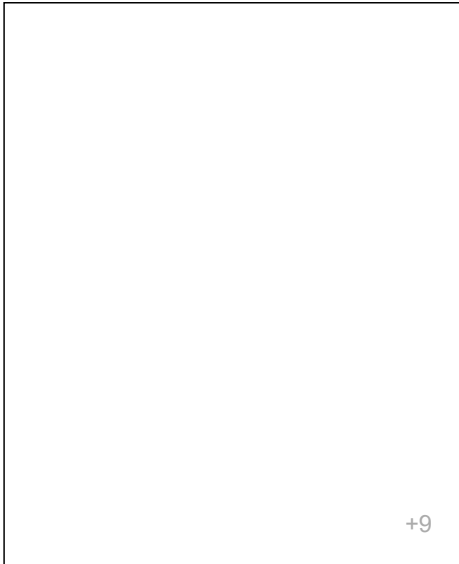
▶ **Tarzan actor Ron Ely's wife was stabbed to death by their SON before he was shot dead by police responding to 911 call**

Caroline Flack, 39, puts on a leggy display in a tiny black skirt on date

Nevertheless, blame for our prattish attire may be put on the pop groups who were all the rage, whom everyone aped: Mud, Wizzard, Slade, Showaddywaddy.

I did like going into town on a Saturday and looking at records (what today's youngsters call 'vinyls') with the bright pop-art album covers — Mott the Hoople, Blondie, The Stranglers, Buzzcocks, Jethro Tull. Today, with everything available all at once on a smartphone, there's another ritual gone.

In the afternoon we'd go as a gang to the Odeon to see Grease, released in 1978 with John Travolta and Olivia Neutron Bomb; Animal House, with the great John Belushi; or Superman, with its primitive special effects.



afternoon we'd go as a gang to the Odeon to see Grease, released in 1978 with John ta and Olivia Neutron Bomb; Animal House, with the great John Belushi; or Superman, s primitive special effects

n Travolta & Olivia Newton-John star in Grease - Trailer



▶ night with Lewis Burton, 27... after revealing her struggles with anxiety

▶ Mummy Diaries fans admit they broke down watching Arthur, two, face his fear and walk on the sand as his emotional mum Billie fights back tears

▶ 'They can kick off as much as they like': Strictly's Craig Revel-Horwood hits out at 'know-nothing' fans who criticised his scoring for axed Dev Griffin

▶ Alexandra Burke, 31, enjoys a VERY sexy dance with beau Angus MacDonald to mark his 27th birthday... weeks after his cancer diagnosis

EXCLUSIVE 'I always get the bad b*****s!' James Lock insists he's not dating Ellie MacKenzie after they were pictured kissing (and his mum wasn't happy)

▶ Katherine Jenkins wows in a jewel-encrusted and sheer blue gown as the singer and Donna Air lead the glamour at the Lady Garden Gala

▶ Daisy Lowe sets pulses racing as she puts on a very leggy display in a sparkly red dress with a daring thigh-high slit at Esquire launch

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▶ 'It's very new': Liam Hemsworth is 'taking things slow' with actress Maddison Brown... after they were seen on a romantic date in New York

▶ Kerr Smith reflects on his history-making gay kiss on Dawson's Creek: 'We were the first ones to do that' Just ahead of his debut on The CW's Riverdale

▶ Amanda Bynes was asked to join Dancing With the Stars for season 28 but it 'didn't pan out'

Butterfly on The Masked Singer reveals being

Media player controls including play/pause, volume, and social sharing icons.

If I make it seem as if 1978 was all TV, listening to borrowed LPs in friends' bedrooms, surreptitious snogs and going about like well-behaved hippies, that is because, for me, it was. I was unaware of the wider world.

Jimmy Carter was in the White House and James Callaghan was in Downing Street. Beyond that nothing impinged. There were loads of industrial strikes, the trades unions were in uproar, but the Winter of Discontent simply passed me by.

On the horizon, though I never knew it, was Margaret Thatcher, privatisation, free enterprise, self-reliance — having to be a grown-up, taking my place in society.

That's when things changed. But in 1978 we were blessed with innocence and remained in blissful ignorance — and we had a ball. I think my platform shoes are still in the loft. But I no longer fit into my flares.

▶ **'electrocuted' during rehearsal of Livin' On A Prayer**

Had the panelists out of their chairs

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On Wednesday night's show

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