



AND that's it. Thirty days hath November, and how quickly it passes.

NICK Robinson (Today, R4) was in full holier-than-thou mood, interviewing a spokesman for Russia Today TV which stands accused of spreading fake news. The Russian claimed that RT, paid for by the Russian government, was similar to the BBC. Robinson bridled, claiming the BBC was very different because it is funded by licence payers. He made it sound almost voluntary. The truth is that Auntie Beeb is financed by a subscription system based on a unique government-approved law which treats non-payers not as civil debtors but as criminals, and ultimately sends them to prison. The Kremlin, for all its wickedness, has never come up with anything like that.

AFTER ploughing through eight million books published between 1776 and 2009, a team of researchers at Warwick University concludes that 1957 was the happiest year ever. I can understand why. Post-war rationing was over, wages were steadily rising and rock 'n' roll had arrived. I was six at the time and remember how cool and menacing Teddy Boys looked and how 1950s girls, skirts bouncing with enormous petticoats, rustled intriguingly as they moved. We had our first telly, I was Davy Crockett on Saturdays and tortoises were a shilling each at the market.

THE downside of 1957 was all the whackings. Your parents whacked you, your teachers whacked you. Your uncles, aunts, grandparents and neighbours whacked you. Even complete strangers whacked you. The dentists never whacked you but inflicted life-changing torture by other means. In 1957, Sundays

were unbearably tedious, meat was boiled until it was grey, and veg until it was squidgy. Boys' clothes were made of super-itchy materials and you had ice on your windows from November to March. At the time, 1957 felt pretty good. But things have improved more than we like to believe and if you could magically visit 1957 today, you wouldn't want to stay long.

IN the continuing debate about homelessness, Sky TV interviewed a receptionist at a community centre who said he could not afford to buy a house. I am sure we all sympathise. But has there ever been a time when receptionists at community centres could afford houses?

THE Church of Sweden is urging its clergy to use gender-neutral language and avoid referring to God as 'He'. There is a tiny theological problem here, namely that Jesus repeatedly refers to God as male. I haven't counted this myself but I am told in John's Gospel alone, Jesus calls God 'Father' no fewer than 156 times, which seems pretty conclusive. Still, when the gender-police are in full cry, who would dare to suggest that the New Testament might be gospel?

I REFERRED last week to the Red Book, the document containing all the policies the Chancellor doesn't mention in his Budget, and which takes a few days to be thoroughly examined for nasties. And sure enough, four days after the Budget it was reported that the fund to repair and maintain schools had been 'quietly cut' by about £1 billion. Oh, sneaky.

