Essential FINANCE

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Here we are again, another new tax year and another edition of Essential Finance!

Some of you may have noticed a difference in the paper type/quality over the last few editions. We've been very much experimenting with paper types and styles in a bid to find something that we are truly happy with. Hopefully we've achieved it this time and you'll also notice the all important Forest Stewardship Council label below.

The aim of Essential Finance is to provide interesting and insightful information on wide ranging financial matters. However, we always try to include some articles of general interest in order to mix things up a little. If there's anything that you'd like us to include going forward or if you have any general comments on Essential Finance then I'd be delighted to hear from you... we would really like Essential Finance to be something you look forward to reading each quarter so if there's anything we can do better, do tell us.

So, what do we have for you in this edition? Well, our 'Personal finance myth-busters' on pages 4 and 5 makes some thought provoking points and 'Counting the cost of the frozen tax landscape' on pages 10 and 11 is a very timely summary to start off the new tax year. Another timely article for the start of the new tax year is 'Are you saving in the right ISA?' on page 16.

Moving on to articles of general interest, I love Mike Baggs 'Tales from a framer's workshop' on pages 22, 23 and 24. It's great to welcome back Mike as a guest writer and this article does not disappoint... although read with caution if you are an arachnophobe like myself!

Credit must also go to our very own Ian Devlin who writes on pages 26 and 27 about how we are helping the team at EFS take care of their own mental and physical wellbeing by rewarding positive behaviours such as meditation and increased step count with 'YuCoins'. These can then be exchanged for retail vouchers (Amazon or Marks & Spencer to name just two of many) or indeed, to help charitable causes as Ian explains during the course of the article.

Our resident photographer, Tim Ball, has also been on the move again with his camera, as you'll see from his beautiful photos of Dove Stone Nature Reserve. I'm guessing that plenty of YuCoin were earned in his pursuit of the perfect photo!

Anyway, that's it from me... I hope you enjoy this latest edition and remember to let us know what you think.

Wishing you a bright, warm and beautiful Spring and we'll see you again in the Summer.

Karen

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Personal finance myth-busters

Like many areas of life, personal finance has plenty of myths that somehow survive as 'facts'. Since spring is traditionally a time for sweeping out the cobwebs, let's clear up four persistent misunderstandings.

Myth 1: Maybe past performance *is* a reliable indicator of future performance

The sort of sudden, sharp falls in investment values that we have seen recently due to the war in Ukraine can turn normal assumptions upside down. A spell of turbulent markets, combined with dire headlines, can make the future investment outlook appear unavoidably grim. This understandable reaction is simply misplaced: the past is not a wholly reliable indicator of the future, and a few weeks of volatility are no guide to how investors should view future performance, which should have a long term perspective measured in years.

Myth 2: I don't need a will as everything will automatically pass to my other half

If you are not married or in a civil partnership, then only property you own jointly (as joint tenants) will pass to your partner. The rules of intestacy, which vary between the four constituent parts of the UK, only make provision for surviving spouses and civil partners. Even then, there are often limits on what can be passed to the survivor.

Myth 3: I don't need a cash reserve as I can always borrow

Borrowing has never been easier and interest rates rarely lower. That may be true today, but financial conditions are never permanent. Mark Twain's remark that a banker is someone who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining but wants it back when the rain begins has more than an element of truth. And the fact is the greater your need for cash, the less willing lenders may be to supply it.

Myth 4: You can never lose money buying residential property

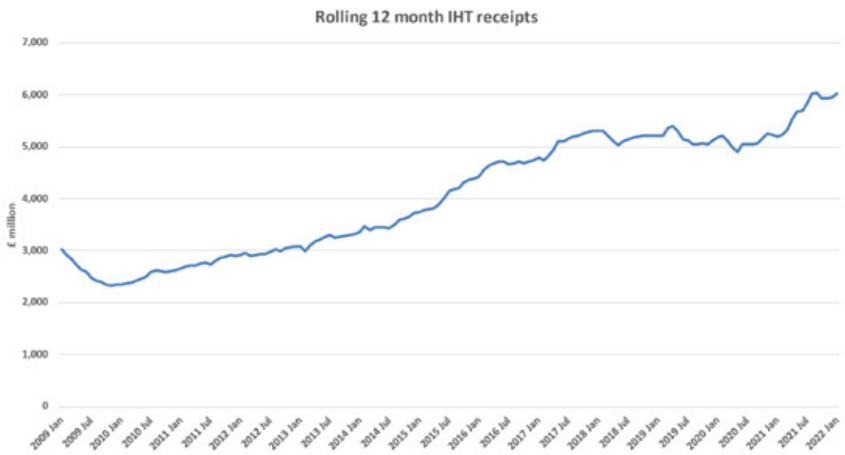
The notion that house prices always go up was behind the global financial crisis of 2007/8. In the mid-2000s, many US lenders thought rising property prices would always come to their rescue, an assumption that nearly collapsed the global banking system. In the UK, average house prices fell by over a fifth between October 2007 and February 2009. They did not regain their 2007 peak until May 2014. Adjusted for CPI inflation, house prices had still not recovered fully by January 2022. So 'safe as houses' doesn't always hold true.

Before you succumb to anything that might turn out to be a financial myth, make sure you seek out expert advice. As we know, relying on unverified assumptions can be extremely costly.

The value of tax reliefs depends on your individual circumstances. Tax laws can change.
The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate tax advice or will writing.

Gifting from income and other estate planning options

The question marks hanging over inheritance tax (IHT) have disappeared, but as the impact of the tax on individuals and families is growing, there are strategies to mitigate your liability.



Source: Office for National Statistics

When the then Chancellor, Philip Hammond, asked the Office of Tax Simplification (OTS) back in January 2018 to consider how to simplify IHT, two reports followed. The second, issued in July 2019, proposed a range of significant reforms to the tax. Almost immediately after its publication, the subject of IHT simplification disappeared into a Treasury black hole. Budgets passed with no mention of the OTS's efforts, making it difficult to give long term IHT advice.

Finally, on the last day of November 2021, clarification emerged in a letter from the Treasury to the OTS which stated "...the Government has decided not to proceed with any [IHT] changes at the moment, but will bear your very valuable work in mind if the Government considers reform of IHT in the future".

The long-awaited response has brought certainty about the IHT framework – at least until the next election. However, by the time the Treasury had said "thanks, but no thanks" to the OTS, the current Chancellor had frozen the IHT nil rate bands until at least April 2026. By then the main nil rate band will have been stuck at £325,000 for no less than 17 years.

As many people are starting to learn from the freezing of the personal allowance (also to 2026), inflation turns a freeze into a tax increase. The results of the nil rate band freeze are shown in the above graph: between January 2009 and January 2022 IHT receipts rose by 98% while prices increased by 35%.

Mitigating strategies

In highlighting several features of the current IHT rules that it felt needed reform, ironically the OTS report supplied a list of planning opportunities worth considering. These included:

- *Normal expenditure gifts.* If you make gifts that are:
  - regular;
  - out of your income (including ISA income); and
  - do not reduce your standard of living

  then they are exempt from IHT, regardless of their size. In its second report the OTS said it had heard "...from a few respondents that the exemption has on occasion been used to exempt gifts worth more than £1 million for individuals with a very high annual income".

  At more modest levels the exemption could mean, for example, that if your regular spending pattern has fallen because of the pandemic, you could use the savings to make gifts free of IHT. Similarly, any investment income usually automatically reinvested is a potential source of normal expenditure gifts.
- *Outright lifetime gifts.* Outright gifts suffer no immediate IHT liability and are free of IHT if you survive seven years after making them. If you do not reach the seven-year point, any IHT liability on the gift is reduced by 20% per year from the start of the fourth year, e.g. at five and a half years only 40% of the full IHT is payable on death. The OTS had proposed that the sliding scale of tax should be abolished, commenting that "taper relief is complicated and not well understood".
- *Pensions.* While the OTS did not make any specific recommendations on the IHT treatment of pensions, its report did say "...it appears anomalous that some pension policies can be included within an estate for Inheritance Tax purposes while other comparable pension savings are not". The pension flexibility regime introduced in 2015 has increased the value of some pension arrangements in IHT planning.

For more information on any of these opportunities, please contact us.

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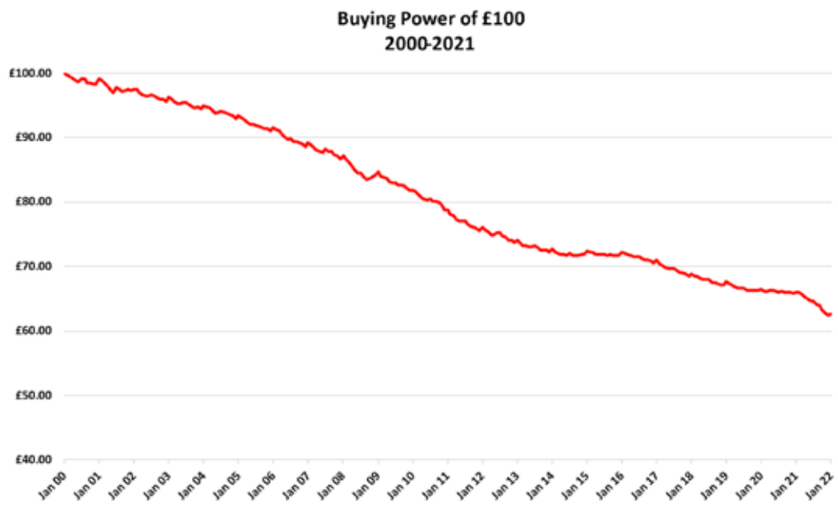
The only way is up: handling inflation

After years of slumber, the inflation dragon is stirring. Are you prepared to meet the challenge?



Source: Office for National Statistics

In mid-January the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the final inflation figures for 2021. CPI annual inflation reached 5.4%, its highest in nearly 30 years, and RPI inflation – no longer an official statistic – hit 7.5%. Twelve months earlier the same inflation measures had been just 0.6% and 1.2% respectively. The sudden return of inflation has surprised many, including the Bank of England. It is now reacting in the way central banks normally do when faced with rising inflation, by raising interest rates. But what should you be doing?

Check your protection

As the graph shows, the mirror image of inflationary price rises is the falling value of money. With inflation at 5.4%, the pound of a year ago is worth less than 95p today. Over time that diminution of value escalates: the £1 of January 2012 was worth 82.3p by January 2022. If you have life cover, critical illness cover or income protection that pays a fixed amount, then its value to your family is similarly being eroded. To maintain their protection, you should consider arranging some top up cover.

Review your retirement planning

Inflation means that, all other things being equal, you will need a larger pension pot to fund your desired standard of living in retirement. There is only one way to do that: your pension contributions will need to increase. Even if your contributions are directly linked to your earnings, that may not provide a sufficient increase – the latest ONS data show earnings growth lagging behind price inflation.

If you are about to draw your retirement benefits, inflation is a major consideration in determining the initial level of income you take. Seek advice on the unavoidable trade-off between your chosen starting level of income and the scope to protect your future income from inflation. The value of a fixed annuity bought twenty years ago will have eroded significantly. While there is now much greater choice in how to draw your retirement income, the basic laws of economics have not changed.

Beware holding excess cash

Inflation is generally bad news for bank deposits. Admittedly the Bank of England is now lifting rates, but there remains a huge gap between deposit and inflation rates. We all need to hold some readily accessible funds, but make sure that if you are holding more than you need as a rainy-day reserve, you have a good reason for doing so because it comes at a cost.

Reassess your investment strategy

An investment strategy that has worked well in the era of low inflation and near zero interest rates may not be as appropriate when inflation and interest rates are both rising. An obvious area for review is holdings in fixed interest investments, which suffer when inflation devalues future payments.

Investing in shares should be regarded as a long-term investment and should fit in with your overall attitude to risk and financial circumstances.

The value of your investment and any income from it can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

Counting the cost of the frozen tax landscape

The cost of living squeeze looks likely to be further constricted from April as rising taxes bite. How can you plan for the effect?

The biggest change to come is to National Insurance contributions (NICs). From 6 April these will increase by 1.25 percentage points across the board. For employees, the main rate of NICs will increase from 12% to 13.25%.

The new rate will be applied on earnings between £9,880 and £50,270. Anything over this will be subject to a 3.25% NI charge (up from 2%).

An employee earning £30,000 salary will lose an extra £214 a year; those earning £80,000 a year will pay an extra £839.

Self-employed workers pay Class 4 NICs. These have increased by the same margin, to 10.25% and 3.25% for earnings over £50,270. Employers NICs are also increasing.

The government has introduced these higher rates first to boost funding for the NHS and then from 2023 to pay for social care costs, both under extra strain from the pandemic.

Please note that since this article was produced, the Chancellor has announced that with effect from July 2022, the starting level at which employee NI becomes payable will rise from £9,880 to £12,570.

Dividends tax

A 1.25% increase is also coming to dividend tax rates. Those running their own businesses, who pay themselves via dividends, rather than a salary, will be affected.

From April, those taking dividends from investments will also be hit as dividend income above £2,000 a year will be taxed at 8.75% within the basic rate band, 33.75% in the higher rate band and 39.35% in the additional rate band.

Frozen tax thresholds

Less obvious tax increases are coming in the form of freezes on several tax thresholds, including the personal allowance and the levels at which taxpayers start paying higher and additional rate tax. Over time more people will be dragged into higher tax brackets as earnings rise. Similarly the earnings level at which people start to pay back student loans, or become liable to a tax charge on their Child Benefit, have also been frozen.

Off-setting tax rises

You may not be able to avoid the tax rises completely, but there are planning strategies to try. They are likely to be most effective if your current earnings are just below one of the main tax bands.

Employees can opt for salary sacrifice. With your employer's agreement, you effectively cut your salary, with the equivalent amount paid into your pension. This saves NI payments, which aren't due on pension contributions. There is no immediate cash saving, as your take home pay will still be reduced, but you'll be boosting your overall reward package (via pensions) rather than handing more to the taxman.

Care is needed not to breach the annual (£40,000) or lifetime (£1,073,100) allowances on pensions — both of which have also been frozen. Remember some benefits, such as maternity pay or life cover, are linked to salary so these may also be reduced.

It may be possible to bring salary, bonus or dividend payments forward but be careful this doesn't push total earnings for that year into a higher tax bracket, which would outweigh the potential NI savings.

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Tax loophole closing on second homes

If you are a second homeowner with a holiday let, you have a year to ensure you won't be caught by the closure of a tax loophole used by some to avoid council tax bills on their holiday homes.

Currently, those with second homes in England can avoid paying council tax and can access small business rates relief if they state they are planning to use their property as a holiday let.

However, until now homeowners have not had to provide any evidence that this home has in fact been rented out to holidaymakers, allowing some to gain a tax advantage, despite the property being occupied solely or primarily for private use and standing empty for much of the year.

From April 2023 new rules stipulate that holiday rentals must have been let for a minimum of 70 days in the previous year to qualify for the council tax exemption and small business rates. In addition the property must be available to let for 140 days a year.

Proof of letting

Property owners will have to provide letting receipts and details of where the property is advertised to holidaymakers, e.g. online or via brochures. Those that fail to let out their property for the required period will have to pay council tax the following year.

Business rates are paid to the local authority. Like council tax, the amount paid will depend on the 'rateable value' of the business property. However, as many holiday lets are effectively small-scale businesses, many will qualify for small business rate relief, which will effectively mean no charge at all.

Government figures show that around 65,000 holiday lets in England are liable for business rates, but around 97% have rateable values of up to £12,000.

If the rateable value is less than £12,000 then there will be no business rates to pay. These rates are also reduced, on a sliding scale, if the rateable value is between £12,000 and £15,000.

Landlords running commercial holiday let businesses, which encourage tourism and provide jobs and local revenue across the country, will not be penalised.

As we move towards the holiday season, now is a good time to work out a plan to ensure you don't get caught out next year.

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Who gets to choose when you retire?

The government's recognised retirement age is moving further away from public perceptions of the ideal point to stop work.

Recent research by Aviva revealed that 60 is the most popular target age for early retirement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is also the most common early retirement age among those who have already stopped work. The main reason for early retirement was the same among both groups – "wanting to enjoy more freedom while still being physically fit and well enough to enjoy it".

Coincidentally, the research favouring age 60 was published a couple of weeks after the government launched a second review of State Pension Age (SPA). The current SPA for men and women is 66, rising to 67 between 2026 and 2028. The increase to 68 is currently legislated to happen between 2044 and 2046.

However, in 2017 the first independent SPA review proposed that an SPA of 68 should be phased in seven years earlier – between 2037 and 2039. Everyone born after 5 April 1970 would be caught by such a change. While the government accepted the first review's 2037–39 recommendation, it decided not to revise the existing legislation until after the second SPA review, due no later than May 2023.

It is unclear whether that second review will prompt any change to the implementation date for an SPA of 68:

- On the one hand, the assumptions about the pace of future life expectancy improvements have been revised considerably since the first review. In 2017, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) projections were that a man aged 68 in 2039 would live for another 21.3 years and a woman, 23.2 years. The latest ONS projections, issued in January 2021, are 18.8 years and 20.8 years respectively, suggesting the 2037 start date should be abandoned.
- On the other hand, not raising the retirement age ramps up government expenditure because pensions for the relevant age group will begin a year earlier than anticipated. Based on UK population projections, that is about an extra 850,000 pensioners each year. In the long run, the lower life expectancy would even out the overall cost, but in the short term maintaining an SPA of 67 would hurt Treasury finances.

Whether or not the government continues with the 2037 starting date, the SPA will remain a minimum of six years beyond age 60. If you do not want to wait for your state pension before retiring, then it is essential to plan for your early retirement. The research that highlighted the popularity of 60 also discovered:

- Nearly half of early retirees said their finances took a hit as a result.
- Close to a quarter of those who returned to work after retiring early said that financial issues were the reason they did so.

The sooner you begin, the better. The state pension may not be generous, but if you retire early, it represents about £9,600 of annual income that will need funding until your SPA arrives.

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Are you saving in the right ISA?

Despite bumpy stock markets, the returns on stocks and shares ISAs comfortably outperformed those from cash ISAs over the past year.

Data from Moneyfacts show in the 12 months to February 2022, the average stocks and shares ISA grew by 6.92%, compared to just 0.51% from a cash ISA. Interest rates hit a record low in 2020, resulting in meagre returns on these deposit accounts.

However, returns on stocks and shares ISAs are volatile, with a drop in returns from 13.55% in 2020/21.

While returns on stocks and shares ISAs in recent years have been attractive, these tax-efficient plans are better suited to longer-term savers who can ride out periods of volatility. Historically at least, equity-based investments are most likely to outpace inflation over longer time frames, maintaining the spending power of your savings.

Cash or stocks and shares?

Many people look to open an ISA at the end of the tax year, or start of the new one, using their £20,000 annual allowance. Cash ISAs are a safe option, and ideal for savings that you might need to access at short notice. But with rising inflation, cash held for long periods of time is likely to lose its value in real terms.

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Declare your side hustle

Do you have earnings beyond your main job?

One side effect of the pandemic has been an increase in people creating other sources of income to supplement their earnings. Often such 'side hustles' are regarded as self-employment and outside the PAYE system that applies to employees' earnings. However, they still generate income on which you may need to pay tax and National Insurance.

Exemptions

If the extra income is not more than £1,000 gross a tax year, then it may be tax-exempt thanks to the trading allowance. If your additional earnings are more, then you must tell HMRC and pay any tax that is due. You might still be able to benefit from the trading allowance.

Either way, make sure you keep records and do not think you can hide the income from HMRC.

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Keep on running

Why do people collect? Sometimes it can be a fascination with a subject matter, and sometimes a desire to be a completist - to own everything produced by a certain artist or manufacturer.

A few years ago, I was asked to value a sneaker (that's trainers here in the UK) collection and my eyes were opened to a burgeoning sub culture that is on the increase and shows absolutely no sign of abating.

The collection comprised around 250 pairs of mint ('boxfresh' in sneaker speak) shoes that had been bought as art pieces and collectables, rather than something anyone would ever dream of wearing. It included rare pieces from manufacturers that we all know, such as Nike and Adidas but with particularly limited runs and designed by musicians and traditional artists.

The collector was keen to tell me about the way in which the market has changed over the years, and nowadays it involved waiting in line at a retailer and being allowed to purchase only one pair of sneakers.

> **"I was asked to value a sneaker collection and my eyes were opened to a burgeoning sub culture that is on the increase and shows absolutely no sign of abating."**

On some occasions, he had recruited friends to go with him so that he could buy more than one pair. The value of the shoes traditionally doubled as soon as they left the store and could be seen for sale on internet sites within hours.

For insurance, the collection was valued at £480,000. This no doubt will have changed in the last 24 months, with markets changing in the same way as traditional art and new designers dominating the hierarchy of sneaker chic, it's a culture that just keeps on running.

Even Sotheby's online store features a trainer's section. In fact, the signed pair of Nike 'Air Jordan 1s' have become the most expensive trainers sold at auction, fetching over £460,000 at their online auction of 17 May 2020. The Nike Air Jordan 1s were game-worn by Michael Jordan in 1985 after being made exclusively for the legendary NBA Chicago Bulls player.

The Nike Air 'Mag Back to the Future 2016' were valued at £26,500. They are one of recent year's most famous sneakers – owned by, for example, the Slovakian rapper Rytmus. This reference to the legendary movie Back to the Future was released back in 2011 in a quantity of 1500 pairs.

Several years later, in 2016, fans demanded a re-release, which they got – but only 89 more pairs were made, which pushed the Nike Air Mag Back to the Future 2016's into the top 10 of the most expensive sneakers.

The Nike 'Moon Shoe' went for an astonishing £330.000. This shoe was designed by Nike's co-founder Bill Bowerman for the 1972 Olympics qualifiers. It's the only remaining preserved pair of this shoe, and it is also unique because the sole was literally made in a waffle maker! The sneakers were auctioned off at Sotheby's by collector Miles Nadal in July 2019, officially making them the world's most expensive shoes for many.

The Converse 'Fastbreak', which were worn by Michael Jordan, were valued at £144,000. This is where we start reaching astronomical prices. This crazy price tag wasn't even caused by the sneaker's rarity or the use of expensive materials. The third pair on our list was owned by Michael Jordan himself – he won the 1984 Olympic games in the USA in these shoes.

The 'Air Jordan 12 OVO (Drake Edition)' were valued at £75,600. This was a collaboration between the Jordan brand and rapper Drake's brand OVO (October's Very Own). At first glance, they don't seem like anything special.

However, at a Toronto Raptors game, Drake gave a pair of these sneakers (with a retail price slightly over $200) to one lucky fan, who managed to sell the shoe for an incredible $100,000 on eBay, which made them the second most expensive Jordan sneaker at the time. A lesson to be learned from this is that going to a Toronto Raptors game might be worth it, not only for the entertainment value.

Article taken from the 'Exclusive' newsletter of our sister company Eastwood Private Clients, and is provided courtesy of Doerr Dallas Valuations.

Dove Stone Nature Reserve

Spectacular Views from Dove Stone Nature Reserve

Our resident photographer Tim Ball took these fantastic photos on a recent visit to the local RSPB Dove Stone Nature Reserve.

This dramatic landscape is surrounded by hills, with a stunning 2.5 mile walk around the reservoir with picnic area and woodland paths on the way. There are additional tracks around Yeoman Hey and Greenfield reservoirs, or a 1.5 mile route to Chew reservoir which is a steep walk rewarded by fabulous views.

Tales from a framer's workshop

Article courtesy of Mike Baggs, AC Gallery
www.acgallery.co.uk

My father first started picture framing in the 1960's from the cellar at our home. I don't recall the early days (well I wasn't born until 1968) but he soon found there was quite a calling for his services in the local area and so the business soon expanded.

It has gone through many changes over the years and seen technology make its mark but the fundamentals remain pretty much the same. One thing that hasn't changed is the huge variety of work we get asked to frame.

We once framed a floorboard from the famous Hacienda nightclub (after it closed they sold parts of the club off). It was framed within a large box frame and screwed in place from the back.

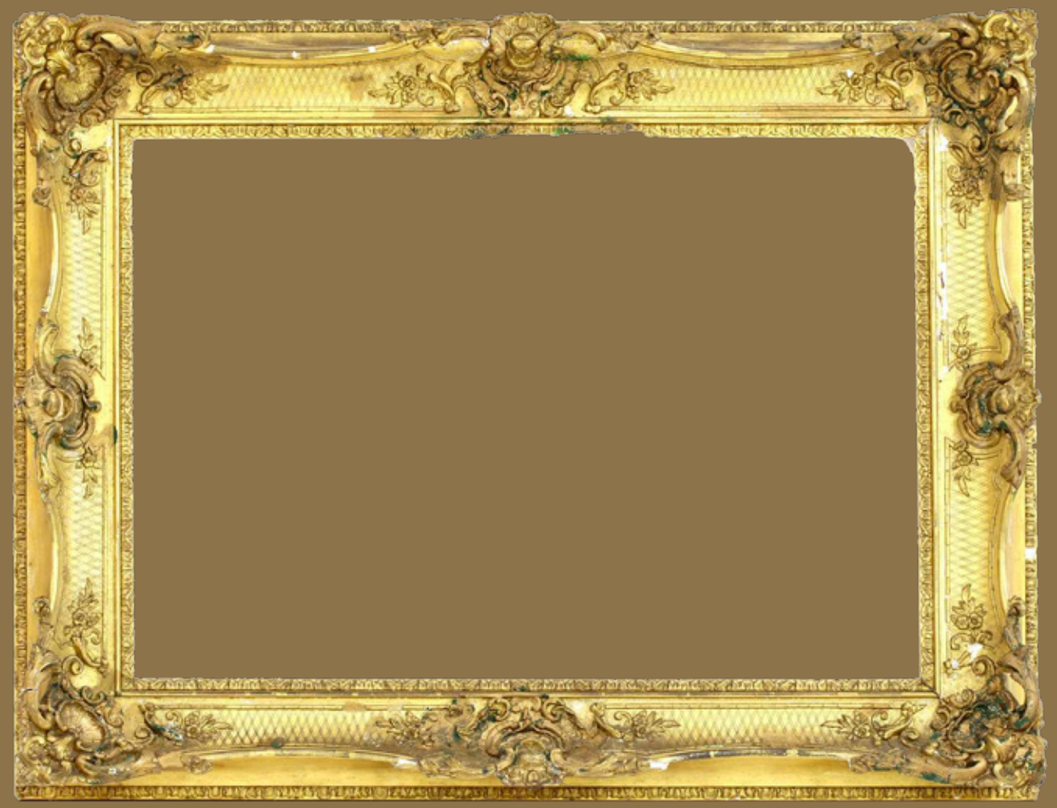
Another memorable framing job was six full size old cinema posters – each one was around 10 feet tall by 5 feet wide – these were owned by the entrepreneur Gerald Hitman who also asked us if we could hang them within his amazing home in the Lancashire village of Brockhole (which Mr Hitman had developed). We had to get special moulding for the frames to fit them and special Perspex to reduce the weight.

We have framed numerous items of sporting memorabilia including a pair of boxing gloves signed by Muhammad Ali, a signed shirt worn by Pele, various signed cricket balls and bats, footballs, rugby balls, shirts from all sports and even helmets, chin pads, boots and much more!

Music memorabilia is another area we have vast experience in – we have framed albums, posters, concert programmes and tickets, guitar picks and strings, keys from a piano, a trumpet and many other items.

A few years ago, a chap asked if we could frame a tree branch – it turned out that a small area of woodland was being cut down to make way for housing. The man had met his future wife in the woods as a young child and they had made a small tree house on a particular branch where they would meet as kids. Years later they married and bought a house near the woods and would take their dog there daily. The customer had already been and cut down the branch to keep it. We preserved the branch using a sealant and then fixed it to a large plinth which we fitted within a large specially made frame.

I'll also always remember when someone asked us to frame the dung of a rare African monkey (yes, it's true). It just looked like dirty hay but we found a way to frame it!

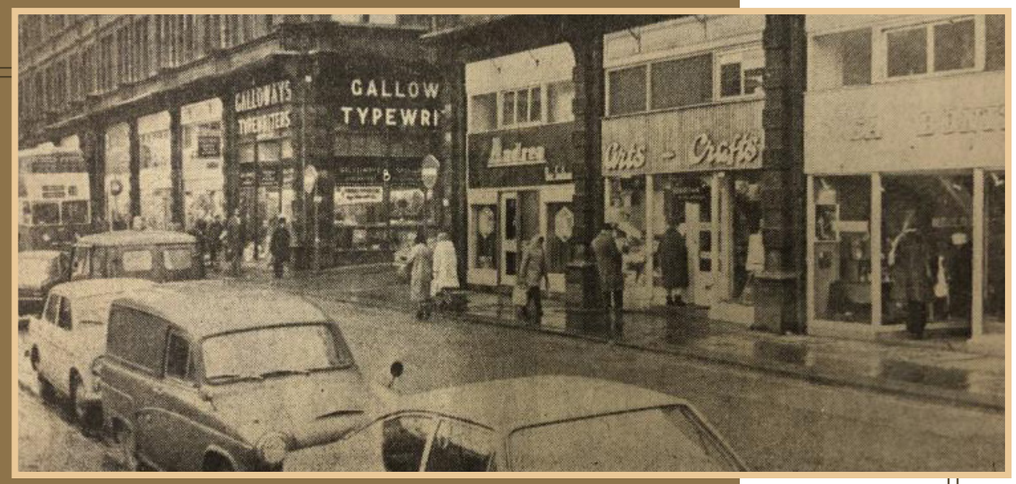


There are some genuinely funny moments at times... perhaps the most memorable is when someone brought in the skin that a Tarantula had shed (which to all intents and purposes still looks like a Tarantula) and asked if we could frame it. Well of course we could! One of our framers is well known for being easily scared by spiders – at the sight of a spider she will, quite literally, run away. Her fellow framers thought it would be 'fun' to leave this job for her... when she opened the small box containing the skin, she let out a scream that was probably heard across Huddersfield before sprinting out of the building! I'm not sure she has ever really forgiven her fellow framers for that.

A lot of what we frame are personal items, and some can be 'very' personal, but I will say no more on that subject other than such jobs certainly make our framers blush.

We have also been entrusted with some very expensive items over the years including more than one original by L.S. Lowry as well as originals by Picasso, Matisse and Hockney. We have also framed and/or reglazed various museum works using museum level framing procedures (conservation materials and methods).

Given the vast number of jobs we undertake it is, perhaps, no surprise that mistakes get made (thankfully very occasionally). My father recalls how, early in the business, one of his framers rubbed out what she thought was a 'smudge' on the paper on a print he had been asked to frame. It turned out the 'smudge' was the artist's signature and it was really quite an expensive print. My father sourced a replacement from a London gallery at his own expense and the customer went on to be a regular for many years.



We've also unearthed some gems when framing old items – we once found a small sketch in the back of a frame, placed behind the main picture. The sketch was by Helen Bradley and later valued at over £2,000. We also once found an almost full copy of The Times from the early 1900's in the back of a frame – we often find old newspapers in the back of frames as they offered an easy way to 'pad out' the back of frames to help keep items flat in the earlier days of framing. I can also recall finding an old family photo in the back of a vintage portrait that had come in to be repaired. The photo turned out to be one that the family had assumed lost decades earlier and they were thrilled to rediscover it.

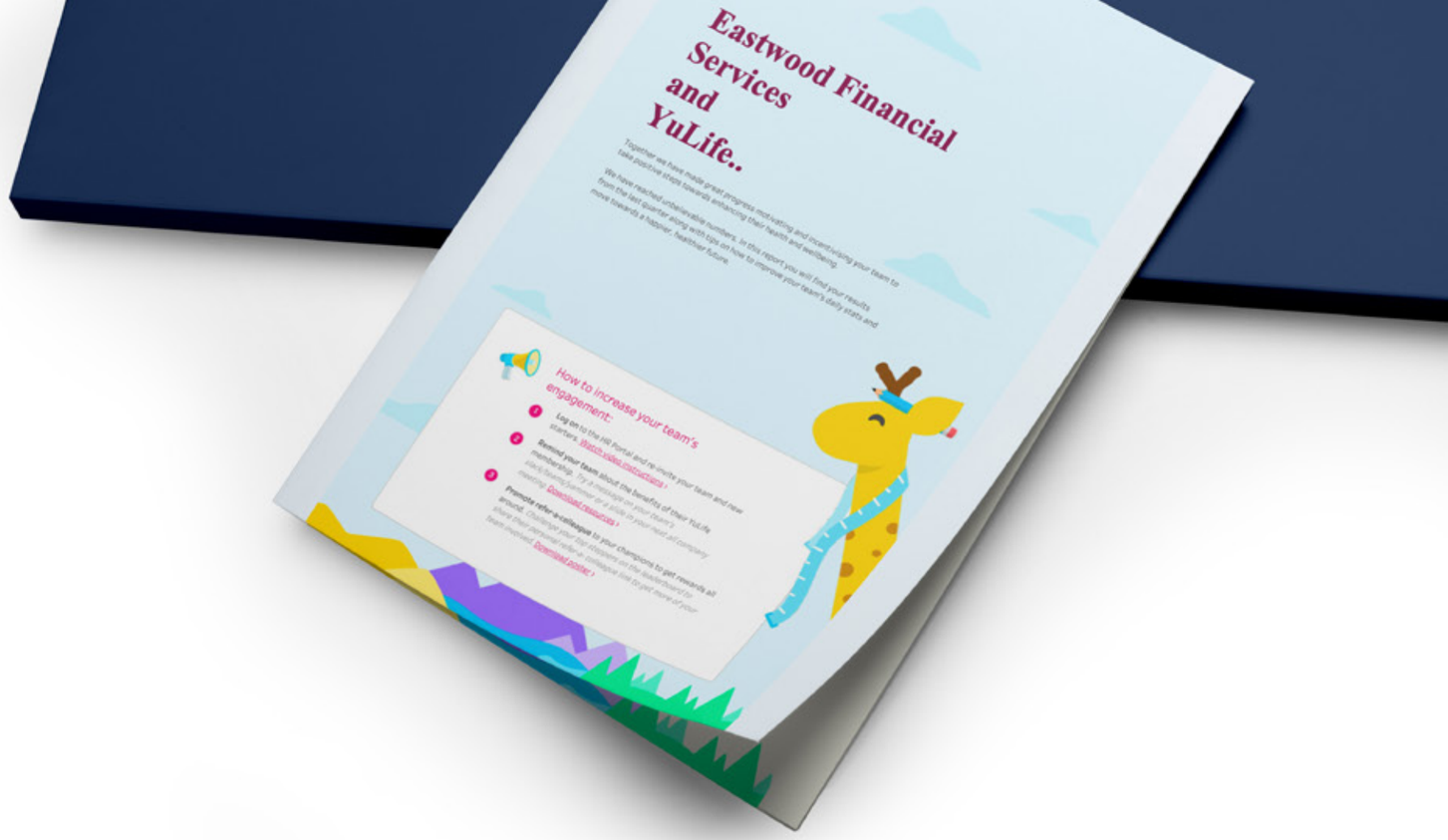
To be entrusted to frame anything is always something we take very seriously. Whether an item has financial or sentimental value they are all treated with the same great care. The variety of items we receive is amazing and we still get some genuine challenges but it's what makes the job so interesting!

Congratulations!

Congratulations to 'Queens Sports and Fitness Club' who won the Yorkshire Premier Squash league this season by a huge 81 points. It is the first time in almost a decade that the club has won this prestigious title.

Head coach and team captain Sarah Campion said: "Without our fantastic sponsors none of this would have been possible, so a huge thank you goes to Eastwood Financial Services for their generosity and unwavering support this season."

Prioritising the health & wellbeing of our employees



The challenges faced in recent years, and the new world in which we now find ourselves living in, has seen many businesses place the health and wellbeing of their employees higher amongst their priorities.

CIPD's Health and Wellbeing At Work survey and report 2021 found that 75% of respondents believed senior leaders have employee wellbeing on their agenda, and 67% report that line managers have bought into the importance of wellbeing.

The Eastwood Group of Companies, including Eastwood Financial Services, are no different and we place the strategy for maintaining and improving the health and wellbeing of our employees at the forefront of our agenda.

One way we have tried to implement our strategy was by changing our group life assurance provider in 2021 to YuLife. A group life assurance scheme provides a lump sum benefit in the event an employee passes away whilst still employed by the business, which in itself is a highly valued employee benefit given the financial security this could potentially provide their families. However, we wanted to implement something which not only provided the financial benefits in the event of a claim, but also provide employees with access and support to more practical benefits to help with their health and wellbeing.

YuLife is a relatively new provider within this market who encourages and rewards employees to make healthy lifestyle changes using their app-based solution. This is done by enabling employees to earn 'YuCoins' for attaining so many steps or minutes of meditation in any one day, which can be further boosted by completing daily challenges as well. These 'YuCoins' can then be spent on vouchers with a number of their retail partners.

Alongside this, they also have arrangements with various partners, which can help employees access discounted gym memberships, online fitness classes and meditation apps, amongst other benefits to help improve and maintain their health. Our employees and their immediate families can also access GP and mental health support, as well as nutritional advice.

Since we commenced with YuLife, many of our employees have started to make more conscious efforts to improve their own health and wellbeing, either by completing more daily walking challenges or even starting to meditate for the first time. As a result, we have collectively completed 18,521,253 steps, 20,140 minutes meditation and earned 127,245 YuCoins during the final quarter of 2021.

Whilst many of our employees have used their YuCoins to contribute towards buying gifts or their weekly shop, they have also been able to donate these towards charitable causes, such as planting trees or helping homeless people find employment opportunities. This has been further expanded recently to help those most in need following the terrible events in Ukraine.

SharetheMeal is an initiative that fights global hunger through the UN's World Food Programme, who have launched a 3 month project to provide food assistance for those fleeing this conflict. Not only can members spend their YuCoins on buying meals, but YuLife will also match their donations to further help those most in need during these troubled times.

YuLife have confirmed that as at 15 March 2022 (around a week since the launch of this initiative on their app), a total of 1.4 million YuCoins have been spent by all of their members and we are proud to confirm that many of our employees are amongst those who have supported, and continue to support, this cause.

I hope you would agree that our first year with YuLife has been a success in not just helping our employees with their health and wellbeing, but also in allowing them to demonstrate such compassion for those less fortunate. However, we hope to build upon this in subsequent years to make sure these virtues remain at the forefront of our business.

Ian Devlin Cert CII, DipPFS
Head of Employee Benefits

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Pennine House, Lowfields Close, Lowfields Business Park, Elland HX5 9DA

Tel 01422 377 737 Fax 01422 376 866 www.eastwoodfinancial.co.uk