

FAME AND FORTUNE COLIN THACKERY

I only went on Britain's Got Talent for a dare

The Chelsea pensioner made more from the show than 25 years in the army. Good news for his grandchildren, he tells *York Membery*

Former soldier turned singer Colin Thackery, 89, scooped £250,000 in prize money when he became the oldest winner of the ITV show *Britain's Got Talent* last year. He has since released an album, *Love Changes Everything*, and published an autobiography, *My Story*.

Thackery spent 25 years in the Royal Artillery, taking part in the Korean War and also serving in Malaya and Hong Kong. He moved into the Royal Hospital Chelsea following the death of his wife Joan in 2016 after 66 years of marriage. The Chelsea pensioner has two children: Dawn, 66, and Peter, 59.

How much money is in your wallet? £60. I've never been asked that before, except by my late wife! I still like to tip with cash in a restaurant.

What credit cards do you use? I have both debit and credit cards – it's so much easier. You can now even use them here in the hospital.

Are you a saver or a spender? I'm not a spendthrift and don't do much of either now, because so much is provided for us here. But every now and then I'll get myself a gin and tonic or a white wine at the bar.

My last big-ticket buy was a £700

laptop – I like to email family and friends and download music.

Do you own a property? I did. I bought a three-bedroom semi-detached house in Norwich for £4,000 in 1970 and lived there for 46 years until my dear wife Joan passed away. I sold it for a bit more than I bought it for!

Are you better off than your parents? My word, yes. I was one of five children. My parents got divorced when I was a child, so I spent a lot of time with my paternal aunt and grandmother.

I didn't have much contact with my mother, Lillian, but I was close to my dad, Bert. He joined the Royal Scots in 1917 aged 17, and served in Ireland, India and the Middle East during his 12 years in the services.

After leaving the army, he worked in Lyons' chocolate factory in London. He was also in the Territorial Army, so when the Second World War broke out he was mobilised, joined the Royal Engineers and saw service on the Continent.

How much did you earn last year? Other than my *Britain's Got Talent* winnings, just my state pension and the work pension I paid into after leaving the army.

When did you first feel wealthy? After winning *Britain's Got Talent* last year



TOM STOCKILL

and scooping £250,000 in prize money. "Bloody hell!" I gasped – that was more than I made in my 25 years in the army.

My windfall has enabled me to do what my late wife and I always wanted to do: ensure that our grandchildren get a decent sum of money. I've divided my winnings into five equal amounts, four of which I've given to my [four] grandchildren.

I've also now got the money to take friends and family out for dinner and buy my family decent birthday presents.

Have you ever been really hard up? We never had any money when I was

growing up. When I joined the army as a junior soldier in 1946, aged 15, I was paid half a guinea – or 55p – a week. It wasn't a lot even then and I was often pretty broke. I'd just about have enough for a haircut and some toothpaste.

The pay was pretty basic throughout my army career, even in my days as a warrant officer. It was enough to live on, but I never had money to chuck around.

What was your first job? The army. It was just as well I joined up when I did, because I was running a bit wild by my teens and heading for trouble. I trained in Woolwich, then the home of the Royal Artillery – a lot of rifle drill and marching around. Army life was very strict back then and us boys would get confined to barracks and given jobs like peeling spuds as a punishment.

At 17, I joined the army proper and later saw action in Korea. It was a dreadful conflict and I lost some good mates out there. I also got frostbite in my ankles in the mountains, and suffered hearing damage as the result of firing a 25-pounder field gun.

Most of the lads who served any length of time in the artillery back then suffered hearing loss.

Colin Thackery was singing for his fellow soldiers when he was urged to enter the talent show

“I was paid half a guinea a week in 1946. It wasn't a lot even then

What's been your most lucrative job? Appearing on *Britain's Got Talent*, without doubt. I've always enjoyed a sing-song and I was singing sentimental old stuff for the lads one day, when someone urged me to enter the show.

"Don't be daft, they don't want an old bloke like me," I replied. But he dared me. So I downloaded the application form, applied... and the rest is history.

Do you invest in shares? No.

What is best for retirement – property or pension? I'd say a pension. I get the state pension and a work pension, but I surrendered my service pensions when I entered the Royal Hospital.

What has been your best business decision? Well, entering *Britain's Got Talent* didn't turn out badly, did it? But marrying Joan was my best decision, business or otherwise.

Most of the songs I sang when I appeared on the show were dedicated to her, and I think that was what appealed to the public about me.

What has been your best investment? Undoubtedly the money I spent on our house in Norwich, where Joan and I had many happy years.

I'm hoping the money I've given my grandchildren will be invested by them wisely. I know two of them have used it as a down payment on their first homes, and I'm hoping the other two will also put it into bricks and mortar. What better investment is there?

And your worst? I bought a second-hand Hillman car some years back and everything went wrong with it. I think I was bamboozled by the garage into buying a dodgy motor.

What is your money weakness? I spend my money now mostly on eating out and travel. I like Korean and Italian food, and my favourite dish is a carbonara. I'm also hoping to go on a cruise later this year.

What is the most extravagant thing you have bought? The most expensive thing I've ever bought was a watch and a necklace for Joan, who was a petite but elegant lady and liked to dress up, even in old age. I was so proud of her.

What is your financial priority in the years ahead? Just to ensure that I'll be able to help my family. I also live in hope that I'll become a great-grandfather soon!

What would you do if you won the lottery? I'd buy a nice little flat somewhere on the south coast. I'd also give some money to a breast cancer charity – Joan suffered from it, so it's one of the causes closest to my heart – as well as to the Royal Artillery Association and, of course, the Royal Hospital.

What is the most important lesson you have learnt about money? Don't squander it – use it wisely.

Colin Thackery performs a 90th birthday concert at Cadogan Hall in Chelsea on March 9 (gigsandtours.com)

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NATIONWIDE TEMPTS SAVERS WITH PRIZES

Nationwide Building Society is offering savers the chance to take part in prize draws to win £100. Its Start to Save account hosts four draws, starting in July and following every three months. To be eligible, you have to increase your balance by at least £50 (but no more than £100) in each month before the draw.

NS&I SLASHES RATES ACROSS THE BOARD

Millions of savers will be hit as National Savings & Investments slashes payouts on accounts and Premium Bonds. The rate on Income Bonds falls from 1.15% to 0.7%; three-year Guaranteed Growth Bonds fall from 1.7% to 1.3%; and three-year Guaranteed Income Bonds from 1.65% to 1.25%.

BUXTON TOUCHES DOWN AT JUPITER

Jupiter Fund Management has appointed Richard Buxton as manager of its £47m Jupiter UK Growth investment trust. Buxton replaces Steve Davies, who has run the fund for almost four years, during which time it has languished at the bottom end of the performance tables.

TOP SAVINGS DEAL TAKES A TUMBLE

Marcus, the savings arm of Goldman Sachs, has cut the interest rate on its market-leading easy access savings account from 1.35% to 1.3% AER – the second reduction in two months. The new rate applies to customers opening the online account on or after February 19.

YORKSHIRE HOME LOAN COSTS FALL

Yorkshire Building Society has announced a raft of interest-rate cuts on its mortgages. Its three-year fixed-rate loan for borrowers with a 35% deposit is down from 1.6% to 1.52%, and a five-year fix for buyers with a 20% deposit has been cut from 1.86% to 1.8%.

ADVISER STRUCK OFF OVER STEEL PENSIONS

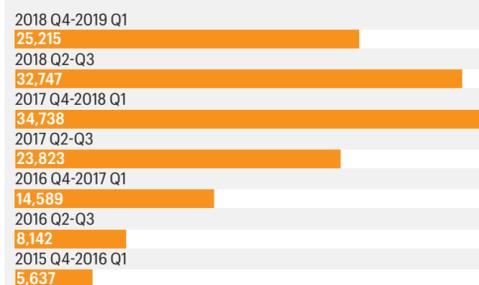
The Financial Conduct Authority has struck off an advice firm over allegations that it deliberately placed pension savers from British Steel into high-risk bonds. Fortuna Wealth Management, based in Wolverhampton, had appealed an earlier ruling.

“Cracking on with preparations for my first budget on March 11

The new chancellor, Rishi Sunak, confirms he is sticking to the budget date announced by his predecessor, Sajid Javid

CHART OF THE WEEK FINAL SALARY PENSION TRANSFERS

◆ Pension transfers from defined benefits to defined contributions



Source: Financial Conduct Authority

There were 25,215 transfers from gold-plated defined benefit pensions into defined contribution schemes, which are often less valuable, in the six months to last March. The Financial Conduct Authority said 29% of the transfers were made through financial advisers, who earn commission, were likely to have been "unsuitable", and the benefits were unclear for a further 23%.