

The Times Concise Crosswords Book 3

An introduction by Margaret Webb, former Editor of
The Times Concise crossword

Not being well-versed in numbers as opposed to words, I have given up trying to work out all the possible permutations.

Take any six grids, calling for between 26 and 32 words in each set of solutions, and use them in a regular Monday to Saturday sequence. Guarantee never to repeat the same word within a run of 30.

Then, six years later, pluck out four runs of 30 (times between 26 and 32 solutions) for a book. Question: how many attention-holding combinations can you expect to find without, as they say on BBC Radio 4's *Just a Minute*, hesitation, deviation and – most importantly – repetition?

Well, I have tried. There was some hesitation as I pondered over various puzzles. There was no deviation from the aim of trying to give people continued pleasure at their word-knowledge (and no deviousness in trying to catch them out either, for that matter).

But repetition is the killer that stalks us.

There is a famine of three-letter words beginning with “e”. It is too much to expect anyone to know that Ezr is the abbreviation for the Old Testament's Ezra; or that EAM was the leftist-resistance in German-occupied Greece in World War Two (and how could you clue that concisely even if you thought people ought to know?). And who now remembers the ECS, the European Communications Satellite?

In 1985, when the puzzles in this book appeared in *The Times*, there was no relief at hand from the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the ecu.

Whatever else we all might yet have to thank him (or curse him) for, crossword compilers will bless John Major's name for bringing those three-letter words ERM and ecu into common parlance.

His predecessor left some words behind too. She gave us “frit”, which I used at once in 1983 (it appeared in the first book but not this one). And there are (or were) poll tax meaning community charge (and vice versa) which were seized on for instant use, and even u-turn. But I drew the line at “Thatcherism”, which I challenge anyone to define concisely without implicit bias.

By and large, the Concise crossword sticks to dictionary and commonly accepted meanings, plus straightforward general knowledge. History, geography, literature, science, famous names and religion are among the subjects called for, but not to any great depth.

Happy puzzling!

Margaret Webb
Compiler and Editor

These crosswords appeared originally in *The Times* and were published in book form by Times Books in 1991, compiled and edited by Margaret Webb.