



Season's greetings everyone!

I'm borrowing this idea for an annual newsletter from my first boss. I looked forward to reading his activities for the year and getting a sense of familiarity with his world, which is what I hope to create for you with this.



"How's the family?..."

I think this is the question I get asked the most when I'm catching up with someone that I haven't seen in a while. In short: Findlay is flourishing, Steph is battling, Teddy the dog is relaxing. I'm somewhere in between the first two and dreaming of the third.

Fin is now 3-and-a-half, and it's a real joy to see his little personality emerging. I see a little boy that is full of energy, tearing up and down our Terrace on his balance bike to a trail of his own burning rubber sound effects. He knows what he likes (ice cream, biscuits, toy cars, and trips to the toyshop), and equally clear he knows the easiest routes to getting these things (Grandda', Granny Christine, Grandma, and Grandda' again, respectively). He's alarmingly and disarmingly persuasive. This month he's discovered a fondness for mince pies, and has noticed I find it hard to be bad cop after an opening gambit of 'Dad, I love you...'



Steph finished her work with the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the summer of this year. She's currently taking some time out for health reasons. Over the past four years she has been beset by a cloud of symptoms caused by a balance disorder (BBPV) and vestibular migraines. She suffers light and sound sensitivity and fatigue. Her commitment to getting back to her usual bouncy 'Tigger' self is impressive and inspiring. This year she's found new specialists and treatment pathways to explore which have begun to bring some sparkle back; all promising signs for the new year ahead.



“...and how’s work?”

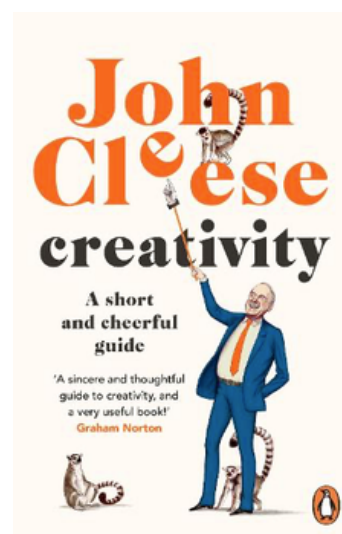
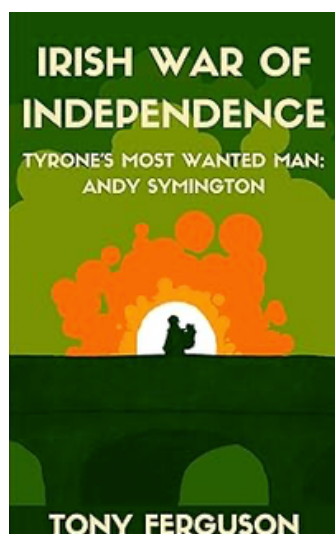
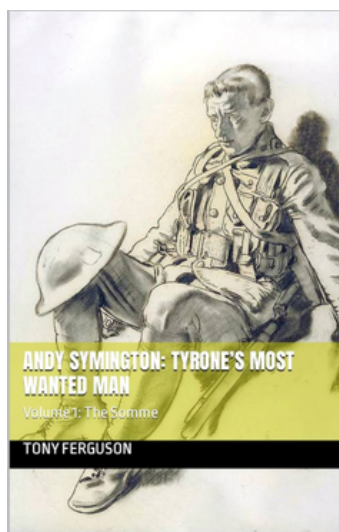
I started as a freelancer in October 2024. In short, the year’s work has been impactful and interesting, and I’m grateful for the spirited people and partners I’ve had the chance to work with in 2025.

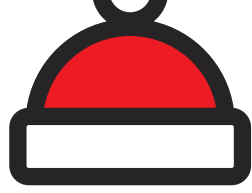
Client	Project
	Co-creating the 2025-2030 strategy for the Global Off-Grid Lighting Association. Convene Inform Influence
	To provide a framework for policymakers to compare the efficacy of different types of subsidies in clean cooking. Here’s the report and briefing
	Co-creating the 2026-2030 strategy for the African Minigrid Developer’s Association
	To provide a quick and easy toolkit that helps policymakers generate defensible statistics about a potential clean cooking project’s cost savings and environmental benefits
	To provide a typology for assessing the main reasons that humanitarian energy projects can fail to achieve their intended impacts. Here’s the webinar , report , and NB blog
	To survey the 100 governments with the highest dependencies on polluting cooking fuels to understand what funding they have channelled into clean cooking
	To chair the Responsible Carbon Finance Initiative, which seeks to codify positive behaviours by cookstove carbon projects
	To create an Investment Prospectus Framework, which will be trialled in Uganda Q1 2026; outlining the country’s portfolio of clean cooking investment opportunities
Cookstove carbon project developer	 Shh... classified!

Books of the Year

Books have been a big thing for our family this year; my dad republished the second edition of Andy Symington – Tyrone's Most Wanted Man, the story of my great granddad's posting in the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Remarkably, Steph's granddad was an Officer in the same battalion, which means that Findlay's existence is only possible because they both escaped the hell of the Somme. In November Dad followed up with his sequel, revealing his grandfather's role in the Irish War of Independence.

For the non-family authors category, I highly recommend John Cleese's booklet on Creativity. It has been out for ages, but I only picked it up this year. John advocates the 'Tortoise-mind, Hare-brain' idea, which suggests familiarising yourself with the problem you have, but then only acting on it on a just-in-time basis. This approach gives your subconscious the longest possible amount of time to process the problem and pop up with innovative ideas.





Running

Having fully retired from playing football in Spring, I've really doubled down on my running. I find the physical benefits of it are secondary to the wonders it does for my mental health. I enjoy it immensely, and I've found that these two principles supercharge my enjoyment of it:



1. Never run the same route twice. I've found this pushes me to travel further from Frome and into different pockets of the Somerset and Wiltshire hinterlands, which can be remote, hilly, and glorious. I enjoy feeling like I'm unlocking the landscape as I go, every run adding a new piece to an immense local jigsaw puzzle.
2. Try to start (and finish) at a country pub (or vineyard). The discovery of Somerset and Wiltshire hostelries is a rewarding pastime in and of itself, and a bonus to running. Occasionally it surfaces an absolute gem that warrants a return for Sunday lunch. Here's [my top 50](#) in case you're ever nearby.

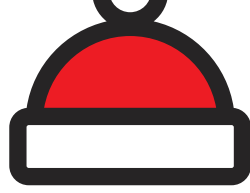
It's probably been my best year yet for running, and there can be no doubt that the flexibility I have gained by losing the 9-5 desk job has contributed to this. I entered ten trail races and finished with four podium positions, including three wins (a 12 miler to Bath, a 10k around Sutton Veny, and a 13 miler to Minehead) and a third (a 14 miler around Bristol).



In the Autumn I rejoined Frome Running Club, after having spent a couple of years away from it (when Findlay's toddling put a moratorium on all non-familial social engagements).

You can find me (and occasionally Teddy) on Strava, [here](#).





Lessons learnt in 2025 that may be helpful to other 'indes'

1. I had an RFP this year that I'd put a load of effort into but wasn't even opened by the client until way after the deadline. Indeed, it was only discovered after someone in the selection team noted (in a completely different call) that they hadn't seen our team's proposal! Add a read receipt request to all submissions and follow-up if you don't see an acknowledgment come back.
2. Be clear what the VAT situation is before submitting the proposal; I had overlooked the need to price in VAT when invoicing a UK partner in services provided to a non-UK client, but because I was a subcontractor to a UK-entity, VAT was eligible: a painful write-down in my daily rate.
3. Count the number of personal days you take in a year. Originally, I thought this would be a proxy for maximizing effort (and thereby output). It has become a leading indicator of productivity, with better outputs quickly following periods away from the computer.



Life as an independent

For those interested in freelance consulting, I think the best analogy I can offer is that it's like being on a sailboat; tacking from invoice to invoice is exhilarating and being your own captain is game-changing for flexibility. Whilst the fear of capsizing is never far away, and the radar will always have a storm or two brooding on its edge, I still really recommend trying it. Let me know if I can help you take the plunge.



Thanks for reading!

I look forward to keeping in touch in 2026, so do drop me a line, I'd love to hear how you are doing. Until then, wishing you and your families a merry Christmas and a very happy new year.

