

Clue commentary

Doing a quick head-count reveals that there aren't too many anagrams. During the last phases of clueing I was very conscious of putting too many in and a couple of the last clues written get round that by having a lot of parts. At the same time, if you want to see people working things out, then clues with lots of parts can be helpful.

ACROSS

1 Working cops in it a lot around start of evening? (6,7)

George Heard, on his Listener blog, has a '1 across' test, and I'm not sure this would pass it. In addition to being an anagram composed of lots of pieces, it's also an & lit.

8 Understand women will participate in children's game (4)

Should be straightforward – lots of children's games though

9 Walkway in part he'd rebuilt beside college (6-4)

CINDER-PATH went in with a vague feeling that perhaps they aren't as common as they used to be. So, mainly an anagram, though c = college is what I'd call top end of daily allowability.

10 Girl's surprised cry about revolver (6)

'Gat' is the possible sticking-point here

12 Attempt to follow in gloaming, mostly hard work (8)

'Gloaming' should stick out here. INDUSTRY is not easy to clue originally, but I haven't done this approach before.

13 One expert catching fellow in leg in jump? (8)

I think I might tag this the hardest clue in the puzzle – a double container (A in B in C) with one component rather sneakily given *en clair*.

15 Mum suppressing discussion without difficulty (6)

Another prod at the vocabulary envelope with 'moot' – not a common word but the sort of thing it's reasonable to expect people to know.

16 Tests, for example, interrupting fool (6)

The 'confusable', so clear wordplay to point to ASSAYS, not ESSAYS.

18 Rail service's various routes are curtailed (8)

And now the proper noun, but surely one of the most familiar business names?

20 Justification for dining apparently not substantial in Paris (8)

The use of familiar foreign words is also a discussion point. This one's hitched to another fairly rare abbreviation.

21 Compiler not right to include symbol for student - agree? (6)

A sort of in-joke clue.

23 Cut off dress initially is fashionable: girl's with it (10)

Many setters would put hyphens in to give 'cut-off' and 'with-it'. I don't so maybe some of the more habitual solvers might get a hint of the style here. This is also a five-part wordplay (see also 11 down) although the clue remains quite short (unlike 11 down!). Also two of the five parts are given directly.

24 Cunning curved shape (4)

The double definition.

26 Prime gatherer, possibly - of souls? (3,4,6)

And now a semi & lit. which can cause confusion for some, but the anagram was to nice to resist.

DOWN

1 Expression of relief, not getting hard seat (3)

2 Escape, shaking off force, being not overburdened (5)

Two very similar clues – subtractions both. I don't ever attempt to distribute clues around the puzzle, just as I don't really think there should be a set number of clue-type X in a puzzle. I'm trying to unsettle solvers who might thin: 'Well, he's just used a subtraction, so this can't be another...'. Want to bet? (Thinking about set numbers, I've just cottoned on that there isn't a hidden clue in this – they usually crop up so readily that I never thought to check before. Well, there *is* an argument for omitting a clue-type to see if anyone comments.)

3 Fellow leader, bloke removing last locks (2-5)

This looked such an odd word when it came up as an option that it had to go in. Again slightly on the periphery of most people's usage but not unfamiliar. 'Bloke' to 'cock' will be a leap for some, as will the misleading plural 'locks' to 'hair', so perhaps another tough clue candidate.

4 Message contained in a series of notes? (7,8)

The cryptic def. I think they're overrated, and often go several puzzles without one.

5 Stop cracking things used in cooking programmes (7)

This clue I wrote at an early stage and when I came back to it in typing up the puzzle it suddenly struck me as really rather good! Let's see if anyone grumbles about plurals.

6 One TV detective mostly apprehending mail cheats (9)

The pop culture reference but surely allowable in context!

7 Lunar attire inappropriate for walk on earth? (6,5)

Nice anag, I thought, but not much else to say here.

11 Theatrical life: good run leading to pleasant times then agony with its closing (11)

The other five-parter. Not sure I've seen 'its closing' to indicate 't' much, and I'm a bit ambivalent about it, so let's see what people say.

14 One's in cuddle: I'm beginning to enjoy post-conflict period (9)

A slightly different take on 'one' here.

17 Quietly advance that woman in pursuit of opening (7)

And likewise a slightly different take on HER. Some editors would frown on reusing a subsidiary part like this, but I'd say it was a valid way of keeping solvers on their toes.

19 Award perhaps fixed in memory (7)

'Rote' may not come immediately for 'memory' but it should feel OK when it does arrive.

22 Traveller's market lifting prices initially (5)

25 Vehicle giving a lot of concern (3)

Two fairly straightforward clues to finish. As it happens they weren't the last to be written (the last batch were CINDER-PATH, LEAPFROG, DISINHERIT and PEACETIME – with mostly quite complex outcomes, you note) but anyone going to the end in search of easier clues on the assumption that the setter is getting tired while simultaneously sensing the 'finish-line' won't be disappointed!