A is for anti-Semitism.
On a Monday evening in March, placards filled Parliament Square: “NO to anti-Semitism”, “NO to Holocaust Denial”. A crowd of more than 500 people had gathered to protest about a Facebook comment by Jeremy Corbyn from 2012 that had recently resurfaced, in which he defended a mural bearing grotesque anti-Semitic imagery. For Jewish community leaders, it was the final straw after a “whitewashed” 2016 inquiry by the human rights barrister Shami Chakrabarti, who was subsequently given a peerage by Labour. Dismay at Labour’s attitude towards anti-Semitism was compounded in July when the party declined to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s anti-Semitism definition in full. Its ruling body eventually reversed that decision in September, after a long and toxic summer.

B is for the Black Death.
One meagre silver lining of Brexit has been watching support for Ukip collapse. Its post-Nigel Farage leaders went from bad to worse: Paul Nuttall, the professional footballer, doctor, Hillsborough survivor and, erm, fantasist made way for Henry “badger throttler” Bolton, brought down by his girlfriend’s racist texts about Meghan Markle.

Now, the party is led by Gerard Batten, a Tommy Robinson (see Y) fanboy who calls Islam a “death cult”. Farage is horrified by what has happened to his “non-racist, non-sectarian party”. He called for a no-confidence vote in Batten, who is “dragging us in a shameful direction” by appointing Robinson as an adviser on grooming gangs.

Is Ukip finished? After it lost more than 120 councillors in May’s local elections, its general secretary, Paul Oakley, had a few stirring words. “Think of the Black Death in the Middle Ages. It comes along and causes destruction and then goes dormant: that’s like Ukip,” he told the Today programme.

C is for centrist parties.
There ain’t no party like a centrist party. Well, not according to the “political parties for the centre ground” (the New Statesman counts six so far) that have sprung up since the EU referendum result. With names like losing Apprentice teams – Spring, Renew, Advance Together etc – these groups challenge the zeal of Tory Brexiteers and the zeal of Corbynites, attempting to cater for the “politically homeless”. The only problem? An absence of strong leadership, our first-past-the-post electoral system and the thumping great vote share of the two main parties at the last election.
D is for Dancing Queen. During a trade mission to Africa in August, Theresa May unleashed some dance moves. Combining the awkwardness of a new-born antelope with the sad, mechanical repetition of a town-crier without a bell, the Prime Minister at least made headlines that didn’t have the words “coup” or “crisis” in them. Perhaps she remembered this relatively benign coverage in the terrifying minutes before her speech to Conservative party conference. Or maybe she just couldn’t resist the soundtrack of Abba’s “Dancing Queen”. Whatever her thought process, the Prime Minister bopped on to the stage with the sad, mechanical repetition of “melts” and “centrist dads”.

E is for the end of austerity. Great news! Yes, it might look as if wages are still stagnant, local councils are cutting services and the public realm is decaying, but ring the bells and throw a ticker tape parade, for austerity is over! Fresh from all that dancing, Theresa May announced the surprising news during her speech to the Conservative party conference: “A decade after the financial crash, people need to know that the austerity it led to is over.” A month later, Philip Hammond’s Budget echoed that claim seven times.

However, the reality is far removed from the rhetoric. Councils have had their spending power slashed by half since 2010. Northamptonshire County Council collapsed entirely and many others are stripping services back. Universal Credit has left benefit claimants worse off and is pushing them into debt. And after a 12-day investigation into poverty in Britain – which affects one-fifth of the population – a UN envoy concluded that government cuts have been so severe that they breach our human rights obligations.

F is for Facebook. This was the year we realised that Mark Zuckerberg – once a boy in a hoodie who helped us share cat videos and birthday wishes to school friends we no longer recognise – may also have contributed to the vote for Brexit. Following stories by the Observer’s Carole Cadwalladr and others, Facebook released the digital ads sent out by Brexit campaigners during the EU referendum campaign to a “fake news” inquiry by the digital, culture, media and sport select committee. These were created by Canadian digital advertising firm AggregateIQ – linked to Cambridge Analytica, the controversial personality profiling company that worked for the Trump campaign. “The European Union wants to kill our cuppa,” one advert asserted. There you go. That explains the result.

G is for gammon. Are you a conservative, middle-aged white man? When you express your right-wing tabloid political opinions, are you raging and red in the face? Congratulations, you are a “gammon” – the latest put-down in political discourse. The hashtag “#wallofgammon” ensued, as did a backlash. A Times column called the insult classist (“Gammons are backward, provincial embarrassments”), and the DUP MP Emma Little-Pengelly said it was racist. “I’m appalled by the term ‘gammon’ now frequently entering the lexicon of so many (mainly on the left),” she tweeted. “This is a term based on skin colour and age – stereotyping by colour or age is wrong no matter what race, age or community.”

H is for Hungary. In April, Viktor Orbán’s right-wing Fidesz party secured a sweeping victory in the country’s elections. The campaign was marked by hard-line anti-migrant sentiment, with one poster depicting the billionaire George Soros (a favourite target of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories) next to opposition politicians, cutting through Hungary’s border fence. In September, the EU parliament began “Article 7” measures to censure Orbán’s government for policies designed to reduce the independence of judges and increase its control of the media. Alone among centre-right parties, Conservative MEPs voted against the motion, drawing condemnation from the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain.

I is for the i. In a tough print newspaper market, the i has been a quiet success since its launch in 2010, and now sells around a quarter of a million copies for 60p on weekdays and £1 on Saturdays. But on 16 November, its parent company, Johnston Press, which also owned the Yorkshire Post and 200 other local papers, went into administration, unable to service its £220m debts. A new company was quickly formed, without the debt, allowing the papers (and their jobs) to be saved. The independent MP Frank Field has questioned the deal, as it looks likely to “dump” responsibility for the defined benefit Johnston Press pension scheme on the government-backed Pension Protection Fund. It capped off a bloody year for print newspapers, with all the major titles except the free Metro and Evening Standard recording falls in circulation.

J is for Jez We Can’t. Could Labour stop Brexit? As Tory after Tory emerged to say they could not vote for Theresa May’s Brexit deal, the focus turned to Labour. What is the party’s preferred outcome? Cue shuffling of feet. The official line is that the party wants a “jobs first Brexit” with the same benefits as our current deal, while ending freedom of movement. (Good luck with that.) Labour’s Remainer-heavy membership lobbied hard for the party to commit to a “People’s Vote”, but in an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel on 9 November, Jeremy Corbyn was asked whether he would stop Brexit if he could. He replied simply: “We can’t stop it. The referendum took place. Article 50 has been triggered. What we can do is recognise the reasons why people voted Leave.”

Three days later, his Brexit spokesman, Keir Starmer, contradicted his leader’s remarks, telling Sky News: “Brexit can be stopped.” His junior minister Jenny Chapman later added: “Anything can be stopped, I suppose, theoretically. But what Jeremy was doing in his response was emphasising the fact we’ve said all along that we respect the outcome of the referendum.” Everyone clear?
And people making obscene puns on his surname. Swipe left.

K is for Karen Bradley’s belated discovery of Northern Irish politics.
Honesty is an admirable quality in a politician – but it can also be a fatal one. In September, the newish Northern Ireland Secretary gave an interview to the House magazine in which she admitted that she had previously been unaware of “deep-seated” issues in the region, such as the existence of a sectarian divide. “I didn’t understand things like when elections are fought, for example, in Northern Ireland – people who are nationalists don’t vote for unionist parties and vice versa.” Perhaps this blissful ignorance explains why she took on arguably the most thankless job in the cabinet. Still, she can console herself with replaying the clip from Dominic Raab’s almost subliminally brief tenure as Brexit secretary, in which he admits he “hadn’t quite understood the full extent” of Britain’s reliance on the Dover-Calais crossing for imports and exports.

L is for Looney Tunes.
Hats off to the improbably cheerful shadow cabinet stalwart Barry Gardiner, who blew apart Labour’s line that there could be an early general election if Theresa May’s Brexit deal were voted down by the Commons. The idea that May would want to do that, he told a meeting at party conference in the autumn, was “Looney Tunes territory”. Nonetheless, it remains Labour’s official position.

M is for the Matt Hancock app.
The Tories have been insecure about their social media presence ever since Labour dominated online campaigning and the youth vote last year. But when the cabinet minister Matt Hancock released his own app (its catchy name? “Matt Hancock MP”) in February – complete with pictures of him on the campaign trail, a discussion forum and video feeds (“Hi, I’m Matt Hancock and welcome to my app!”) – it mainly filled up with excitable journalists.

N is for niqab.
In August, freshly resigned as foreign secretary, Boris Johnson was beginning to worry that no one was talking about him. So he wrote his Telegraph column (salary: £275,000 a year) on Islam, arguing against a ban on the full-face veil. He added helpfully: “It is absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter boxes.” This combination of liberalism and casual insult ensured the column annoyed absolutely everybody, and kept Johnson in the headlines all day.

O is for O-Patz.
Yes, there are more flamboyantly disloyal Brexiteers. But Owen Paterson, former environment secretary and sworn enemy of the badger, is one to treasure. This is a man who once responded to a question about whether he had declared the badger cull a success after moving the goalposts by asserting that, au contraire, “the badgers moved the goalposts”. At the Conservative party conference in September, he was back on the animal metaphors, asserting that Theresa May’s Chequers deal was a “ghastly cockroach”, which staggered on, refusing to die, and therefore prevented Britain from signing glorious reams of trade deals. Trade deals with whom, you ask? A clue came on 17 November, when O-Patz tweeted a photo from the US, adding: “Really positive discussions on the future of UK/Oklahoma trade relationship.” Oklahoma, needless to say, cannot sign independent trade deals, unless Paterson knows something about its plans to secede from the United States that the rest of us don’t.

P is for Pestminster.
#MeToo hit Westminster last year, leading to a wave of resignations and suspensions. But recent attempts to address the culture of “Pestminster” have been disappointing. The former High Court judge Laura Cox’s inquiry suggested that changes to senior personnel were necessary to overhaul the complaints procedure. This would mean removing the Speaker, John Bercow (who has himself been accused of bullying). But Labour MPs are opposed to that, as they want him to stay in place for the Brexit process.
Q is for quinoa.
Under Ed Miliband, Labour had a “wine drinkers versus beer drinkers” problem, with voters in its traditional base in the Midlands and north of England wanting different things to its metropolitan fans. Under Corbyn, “vegans versus carvery-goers” is the new split. Focus group research conducted in September by Britain Thinks found that quinoa (a fancy superfood or disappointing salad ingredient, depending on your view) is the foodstuff that most people think best represents the Labour Party these days. In other words, according to the research firm, the party of bingo-goers has become the party of student demos. Voter demographics at the last general election bear this out. According to research by the Fabian Society, Labour support in the 63 most working-class seats fell significantly.

R is for reds under the bed.
There was a sigh of relief from British diplomats when Jeremy Hunt replaced Boris Johnson as foreign secretary. Finally, no more jokes such as “with friends like these, who needs Yemenis?” But the normally cautious Hunt seemed to have caught Johnsonitis when, in October, he compared the EU to the “prison” of the Soviet Union. “We would all benefit – and in particular foreign affairs ministers – from opening a history book from time to time,” said the European Commission’s chief spokesman, Margaritis Schinas. The former Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski said the comparison was particularly offensive to those who had “lived both”, adding on Twitter: “Did the Red Army force you to join? How many millions has Brussels exterminated?” Lithuania’s EU Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis added: “I was born in Soviet...”

Crush the saboteurs: Paul Dacre

S is for saboteurs.
The departure of Paul Dacre from the editorship of the Daily Mail after 26 years has seen the paper become, at a rough estimate, 43.2 per cent less bonkers. In April 2017, the Mail hailed Theresa May’s decision to call an early election as a chance to “crush the saboteurs” – those “game-playing Remoaners” who wanted to block Brexit. Cut to the editorship of the altogether more emollient Geordie Greig and the paper was again having a front-page pop at “saboteurs” – except this time, the label was reserved for “preening” Brexiteers who “undermine the PM” by not backing her exit deal. What Dacre thinks of his old paper’s Remoaner turn is sadly not public knowledge, but a clue to his rage levels came on 4 November, when he used a lifetime achievement award speech to have a truly therapeutic go at his old rival, former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger, accusing the latter’s book of being full of “cloying self-glorification and moral superiority” and saying the newspaper’s office move was “economically insane”. Ouch. Bit below the belt? “Well, frankly, my dears, I don’t give a damn,” Dacre added. He’s still got it.

T is for Tory WhatsApp groups.
WhatsApp, the encrypted messaging platform owned by Facebook, became MPs’ favoured method of communication this year. There are many official and unofficial groups, but it’s the Brexiteer chats (such as the prolific one used by European Research Group members) that most regularly expose the messy business of plotting to the outside world, as screenshots of conversations are sent to grateful journalists.

U is for upskirting.
A law to criminalise pointing cameras up the skirts of women without their consent? Feels like a no-brainer. The Voyeurism (Offences) Bill was a private member’s bill from Lib Dem Wera Hobhouse, but – crucially – was backed by the government, meaning it had a good chance of making it on to the statute books. A second reading would normally pass without a vote, unless anyone was crazy enough to object… oh, hello Tory backbench dinosaur Christopher Chope!

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“The shadow foreign secretary has a name, and it’s not ‘Lady Something’. We know what her name is. And it is inappropriate and, frankly, sexist to speak in those terms.”

Speaker John Bercow rebukes Boris Johnson

His intervention slowed down the bill’s progress through the house, and earned the anger of many of his Tory colleagues, including the Prime Minister, who said she was “disappointed”.

V is for Varadkar, Leo.
It’s been a bumper year for people learning to pronounce the word “Taoiseach”, as Irish prime minister Leo Varadkar regularly popped up to remind everyone that his government had an effective veto on the Brexit deal, and therefore we probably should keep plugging away at a solution for the border. Varadkar, who once said that he opposed abortion even in cases of rape, also demonstrated Ireland’s changing attitudes to the issue, saying in February that he had come to realise the ban “harms women”. In May, the country voted resoundingly to repeal “the Eighth”, the part of the Irish constitution preventing the liberalisation of its abortion laws.

W is for Windrush.
The SS Empire Windrush arrived in Tilbury docks in June 1948, bringing 492 passengers from the Caribbean. Thousands more followed in the “Windrush generation”, answering Britain’s call to fill labour shortages. Decades later, the government’s “hostile environment” immigration policy decreed that anyone who could not prove their right to live in Britain faced deportation, which sucked in dozens of the Windrush generation. The Home Office had not kept records of who was granted leave to remain, and in 2010 it destroyed landing cards belonging to Windrush migrants. After the Guardian’s Amelia Gentleman revealed how elderly men and women were being deported to “home countries” they could not remember, the then home secretary Amber Rudd was summoned before a select committee. Questioned on the impact of the hostile environment policy, she said there were no removals targets for illegal immigrants – which was untrue. She was forced to resign, but has since returned to the cabinet as Work and Pensions Secretary.

X is for an indeterminate number of letters sent to Graham Brady.
It would take a heart of stone not to laugh at the efforts of the hard-line Brexiteers of the European Research Group to topple Theresa May. After holding a grandiose impromptu press conference with Jacob Rees-Mogg outside parliament, the group’s key fixer Steve Baker explained the failure to trigger a no-confidence vote by saying he had been misled by MPs who claimed to have submitted their letters to 1922 Committee chairman Graham Brady – but hadn’t done it. If only they’d put their promise on the side of a bus, eh, Steve?

Y is for Yaxley-Lennon.
The far-right agitator better known as Tommy Robinson this year positioned himself as a women’s rights champion after getting arrested for a second time outside a grooming trial featuring British Asian defendants. He claimed he was live-streaming proceedings in the face of an establishment cover-up; the police felt he was endangering the trial by flouting reporting restrictions. He ended the year banned from funding service PayPal and being appointed as a Ukip adviser.

Z is for zero per cent.
One of the many, many Brexit spats this year took place when Theresa May optimistically claimed the deal was “95 per cent” done in October. The European Parliament Brexit negotiator Guy Verhofstadt begged to differ: “If there’s no solution for the Irish border, for our parliament it’s zero per cent that is agreed for the moment.” Perhaps the Brexit deal is like one of those Windows update bars where the percentages inexplicably jump around, just to keep you on your toes.