

Twickenham & Richmond TRIBUNE

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Editors

- Berkley Driscoll
- Teresa Read



25th February 2022



River Crane
 Photo by Berkley Driscoll

TickerTape - News in Brief

Tube Strike Tuesday 1st and Thursday 3rd March

On Tuesday 1st and Thursday 3rd March, RMT strike action will be taking place across all London Underground lines.

There will be severe disruption across all Tube lines, with stations closed and little or no service across the network.

The planned action is also likely to severely affect services on Wednesday 2nd and Friday 4th March, particularly during the morning peak, with services returning to normal by late morning. Where possible, customers should travel later in the day to avoid disruption. With the possibility of no Tube service, journeys in London would be significantly more difficult. [Check before you travel](#), consider if your travel is essential and work from home if possible.

Visit the website for more [information on the strike](#).

Join the Mayor for the Mayor's Concert featuring the Kew Wind Orchestra

The Mayor of Richmond upon Thames, Cllr Geoff Acton, will host an evening of fine music with the Kew Wind Orchestra on Saturday 5 March 2022 in aid of the Mayor's charities. The event takes place at the The Clarendon Hall in York House. Doors on the night will open at 7pm with music starting at 7.30pm.

Tickets are priced at just £20 per person with a raffle on the night, cash bar and welcome drink upon arrival.

All proceeds raised will go towards supporting this year's Mayor's charities, Habitats & Heritage and A Dose of Nature. These charities have been chosen to help raise awareness of the impact of climate change and biodiversity loss within the borough, and also the practical and realistic steps residents and businesses can take to make a positive difference.

Book your tickets [HERE](#)



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TwickerSeal doesn't feel much like saying anything humorous today, or even taking a well-deserved swipe at the council.



COVID 19

Teresa Read

World Health Organization

Weekly Epidemiological

Globally, during the week of 14 to 20 February 2022, the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths decreased by 21% and 8% respectively, compared to the previous week. Across the six WHO regions, over 12 million new cases and over 67 000 new deaths were reported. As of 20 February 2022, over 422 million confirmed cases and over 5.8 million deaths have been reported globally

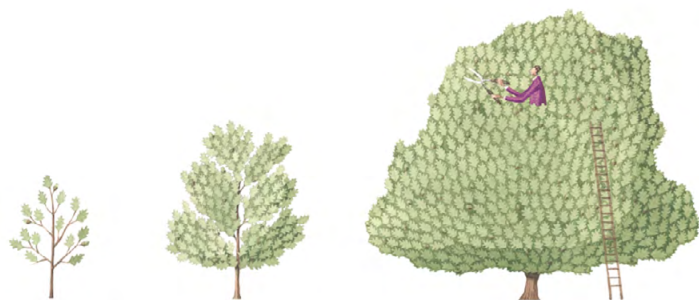
At the regional level, the Western Pacific Region reported a 29% increase in the number of new weekly cases while all other regions reported decreases. The number of new weekly deaths increased in the Western Pacific (+21%) and the African (+20%) regions, and decreased in the South-East Asia (-37%), the Regions of the Americas (-9%), the European (-5%) and Eastern Mediterranean regions (-4%)

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in England

The COVID-19 vaccination programme (the programme) met stretching and unprecedented targets, helping to save lives and reduce serious illness and hospitalisation, according to a report by the National Audit Office (NAO). As the programme continues to evolve in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to new clinical advice and evidence about vaccines, there are some clear risks to be managed.

The vaccine rollout was the biggest and most complex vaccination programme in UK history. In line with its targets, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I)1 had vaccinated two-thirds of adults by 19 July 2021. By the end of October, 85% of adults had received two doses of the vaccine, and more than 87 million doses had been administered in total: over six times the number in the previous annual flu vaccination programme. This uptake exceeded NHSE&I's initial planning assumption that 75% of adults would take two doses. (Further information at the end of the Tribune).



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The Tree Agency

Total cases Locally to 24 February 2022

Richmond upon Thames	56,553 (55,560 previous week)
Kingston upon Thames	50,825 (50,081 previous week)
Hounslow	85,178 (84,232 previous week)
Wandsworth	101,383 (99,669 previous week)

COVID IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

Reuters, 25 February 2022:

England's estimated COVID R number roughly steady.

RNA, 25 February 2022:

Covi-19 update: 12,011 new community cases in New Zealand today, five deaths.

Sky News, 24 February, 2022:

Queen postpones virtual audiences for second time this week after COVID diagnosis.

The Washington Post, 23 February 2022:

Reduced testing is concerning, WHO official says

Al Jazeera, 23 February 2022:

Hong Kong to test everyone in territory for COVID three times over.

Sky News, 22 February 2022:

COVID: Next variant 'could be more severe' with future winters 'tricky' govt advisors say - as all restrictions in England to be scrapped.

Mint, 22 February 2022:

Another COVID wave likely in 6 to 8 months: Expert indicates emergence of next variant.

MSN, 21 January 2022:

S. Africa changes COVID vaccination rules to try to boost uptake.

Mayhem in Mortlake

By Simon Fowler

The 1830s saw the beginning of modern policing, with the formation of the Metropolitan Policing. Initially ratepayers of parishes in outer London could choose to ask the Met to police their areas or continue to conduct their own policing. Paying the police precept on your rates wasn't cheap but in return you received proper protection.

Barnes was close enough to London, to already be part of the Metropolitan Police Area, and Richmond had its own small and rather ineffective force.

In the early 1830s Mortlake employed two former Met officers and four parishioners as constables. Local ratepayers were split about whether they wanted Peelers from London to patrol their streets. Most of the opposition came from market-gardeners who feared higher rates. Undoubtedly it would have been expensive for the Metropolitan Police proposed a local unit of a superintendent, three sergeants and constables. – three times as many as were currently employed.

Criminals fleeing the Met found the parish an easy target. A local ratepayer Captain Peter Page told a Parliamentary select committee investigating policing, about the arrival of 'a number of dissolute bad characters that we certainly never had before.'

Page also gave an example of the inefficiency of the local police. The head constable had tried to arrest a man who had stolen some straw, but when arrested he 'showed fight and made his escape.' The next day he was recognised and arrested by a magistrate, who put the man into the cage (the local lock-up) where there 'a number of people about the cage hallooing and drinking, and behaving very ill and speaking against the policeman.'

In order to avert a riot four Metropolitan Policemen had to be called from Barnes to take the accused 'out of the private door of his garden in the Richmond Road, where they had secured he in a cart and sent off to gaol [in Wandsworth], whilst the excited mob swore they would murder the policeman.'

The head constable had told Captain Page, that 'he could not depend on the local constables' in such a crisis. And the Richmond watch were not interested in any crime beyond the parish boundary.

In addition, Page said that the lock-up was in very poor condition: 'I found a man with his finger could push the bolt back and let himself out' And he spoke about a drunken chimney sweep was handcuffed and put into the cage 'with his handcuffs he had nearly knocked down one side the cage.' And as there were no funds the damage could not be repaired.

Recognising London's rapid expanding boundaries, the Metropolitan Police area was extended to eighteen miles from the General Post Office in 1839, which meant that Mortlake received efficient policing.

And not a minute too soon.



Mortlake Church and the High Street about 1820 (unknown artist)

Credit: London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Paton Collection. Red LDORL 00891

Dear Editor,

International readers of the Tribune

I read with interest your article in last week's Tribune ([19 February](#)) about the international readers of the Tribune. I was struck by your opening thoughts on how five years ago you had concerns about the lack of choice of newspapers in our borough. You said that the Informer had closed and there were fears that another newspaper might close too. Well, we were thinking exactly the same and were worried that we would have dreadful difficulties in producing our Richmond Talking Newspaper for visually impaired residents of the borough.

For the past 40 years or so, RTN has been recording local stories using whatever local newspapers were available. As they disappeared one by one, we thought (as you did) 'what next?' However the arrival of the Twickenham & Richmond Tribune was a godsend, and each week we carry news and features from this fine publication.

So thank you Tribune!

For those of your readers who are wondering what a talking newspaper is, it's a local newspaper recorded in audio format for people who find it difficult to read the printed version. So if any Richmond resident finds themselves in this predicament, then RTN is here for them. The service is absolutely free and there is no need to prove your level of visual impairment or other difficulty.

We produce a one hour long collection of local news and features each week, and can be listened to either by USB memory stick through the post, on Alexa, on your smartphone or by visiting our own website www.rtn.org.uk

We are a charity, staffed entirely by volunteers, and would welcome new members to the production team whether as a reader, technical knob-twiddler or admin support. Why not visit www.rtn.org.uk to find out more.

Yours sincerely, etc..

Valerie Munro
Vice Chair
Richmond Talking Newspaper

Dear Tribune,

Richmond In-Action!

Richmond Council is again running its so-called 'Idling Action Events' and asking for volunteers to persuade stationary drivers to switch off their engines to reduce pollution at locations such as schools or level crossings. A good idea but...

Sometime ago I invited the relevant council officer to come and see the ineffective 'No Idling' signs at Strawberry Hill station level crossing some of which were so badly positioned, such as behind trees, that they were invisible to drivers. I have never ever seen any council enforcement officers in this area.

Friends in Richmond have previously volunteered to speak to drivers particularly at the Mortlake level crossing which is often closed for around 41 minutes every hour for trains to pass with hundreds of stationary cars constantly idling their engines while waiting.

Very few drivers responded positively, most just ignored the request (just as they do now) and some were actively abusive. Surprisingly, none of the volunteers was punched or stabbed.

I am not alone in having had to jump out of the way of irate drivers driving angrily on the pavement around the stationary cars there! No police around, of course, although two police officers were once seen ignoring stationary traffic with engines idling. A news report sometime ago stated that fines from drivers who ignore the engine idling laws were so pitiful that they failed to pay even for the enforcement officers' time.

Furthermore, TfL is reported as having plans for even more speed cameras to enforce the 20 mph limit. We all want fewer accidents but, clearly, our police state does not extend to enforcing the same rules for electric bikes and scooters constantly on footways.

Richmond Council is good at promoting its good intentions but invariably fails to come up with practical action such as actually making stationary drivers switch off their engines or preventing people from riding cycles and electric scooters on our footways (which many do partly because the state of the roads is so appalling). Both are dangerous and both are against the law; idling is an offence under Regulation 98 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. To date, that's 35 years of doing nothing.

So the only real action seems to be self promotion.

Perhaps the Council's much vaunted 'Idling Action Event' should be renamed 'Idling Inaction Events'?

Michael Jay
Hampton

Apply for a grant

Profits from the Kew Village Market are given to local charities. Over the past ten years they have given away nearly £80,000.

If you are a charity manager or trustee, please think about applying for a grant, although the amounts available are relatively small. The next round takes place in March with a presentation to successful applicants at the Market on 3 April.

For more details visit the Market's website <https://kewvillagemarket.org/charity> or email the charity co-ordinator Simon Fowler at charity@kewvillagemarket.org

Looking for a new bicycle? Try Before You Bike

Try Before You Bike offers residents the chance to try a brand new or nearly new bike for a small monthly fee with no deposit or hidden fees.

Richmond Council and Try Before You Bike are working together to make cycling affordable, safe and accessible.

Try Before You Bike is a flexible, affordable and supportive bike scheme to help get you in the saddle. Try out a new or nearly new bicycle for a small monthly fee.

If you fall in love with your bike then why not buy it at a discounted price. Try Before

You Bike offers residents interest free payment plans or Cycle to Work schemes. If you wish to continue to hire the bike you can do so by simply carrying on and enjoy your bicycle.

If the bicycle isn't for you, simply let Try Before You Bike know and there is free collection of your bike and with nothing further for you to pay.

There is a free helmet available with every delivery whether you buy the bike or not and there is free delivery to your door by a qualified cycle instructor who will help you get started.

Find out more about [Try Before You Bike](#) and get cycling now.



Common Courtesy

Should Senior Councillors Take a Course?

Today, many of us are aware of the need to show courtesy when addressing others. However, some of our councillors are apt to forget themselves as has been witnessed in various LBRUT webcasts. Outright discourtesy displayed during Council discussions is unacceptable, not only to those at the receiving end but also to residents viewing “discussions”.

An example can be seen at the following webcast where the Chair responds to a councillor on 14th February 2022 during the Transport Committee meeting, Item 7. https://richmond.public-ictv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/642532

A reader who wrote to the Tribune commented on the meeting as follows: “It is probably unlike anything you have seen before”.

Cllr Ehmann may be Head of the UK Public Affairs for TATA UK but perhaps he may be taking on too much as LBRUT Deputy Leader and Chair of the Transport and Air Quality Services Committee as he certainly came across as being overwrought at the Transport and Air Quality Committee on Valentine’s Day.

Contemporary Textiles Fair at the Landmark Arts Centre

The Contemporary Textiles Fair is back at the Landmark Arts Centre in Teddington this March with over 60 stands featuring artists and makers who use textiles and textile processes in their art and craft.

Visitors should expect to see artworks, accessories, wearables, and crafts. There will also be a number of talks and workshops at this year’s fair.

The Contemporary Textiles Fair takes place from Friday 18 March to Sunday 20 March 2022. The fair will be open on Friday from 1 to 8pm, and on Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.



To find out more about the full programme of workshops, visit the Landmark Arts Centre [website](http://www.landmarkartscentre.org) or email info@landmarkartscentre.org

Live in central Richmond? Get your COVID-19 jab at pop-up next week

As part of the Council and NHS programme of pop-up vaccination centres, residents in central Richmond will be able to walk-in to get their jab next week at the Cambrian Centre.

Over 118,000 people have now had the first two jabs and their booster vaccination in the borough. However, there are still some people who are yet to have their first jab. In the central Richmond area, we know around 40% of residents aged 16-39 have not yet been vaccinated. We want to make it as easy as possible to access the vaccine, therefore a local walk-in clinic has been organised.

In addition, we know that some people have been hesitant to have the vaccination because they have questions or concerns. To ensure that people have the opportunity to discuss their worries and get the facts, the NHS will also have a private and confidential area for individuals to meet with a health expert. There will be no pressure to have the vaccine on that day, but the facility will be there if people want it.

The information and vaccination event will be at the Cambrian Centre, Caplan Court, 1 Grove Road, Richmond, TW10 6SN on Wednesday 2 March from 2 to 6pm.

Anyone aged 12+ who is due their first, second or booster vaccination will be able to have their jab throughout the day. No appointments are required, and people can just walk in.

Please remember that second doses and boosters are only given to those who received their first dose 8 weeks' ago or more. And if you have had COVID-19 recently, you need to wait 28 days before you can have another jab.



Cllr Gareth Roberts, Leader of Richmond Council, said:

“Whilst we are all keen to help Richmond upon Thames get back on its feet, the best way to do that is by being cautious and we all need to take personal measures to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus.

“Having the vaccine is an easy step for each of us to take to protect ourselves and those around us. If you haven't had your vaccine yet and have questions, NHS health experts (including GPs and family clinicians) will be at our Richmond event to help. And if you are due jabs two or three, please use this opportunity to have your next dose locally.”

For more information about the vaccine and other walk-ins available, visit [NHS South West London](https://www.nhs.uk).

Hampton North Ward News

Councillors Geoffrey Samuel and Kate Howard

SAINSBURYS – TANGLEY PARK

Residents contacted us to express concern that they had heard that this branch of Sainsburys would be removing all its check-outs and replacing them with self-service tills. The view was expressed – which we support – that this would disadvantage some elderly and other residents who do not find it easy to cope with modern technology. Although it is not really part of the role of a Councillor we immediately wrote to the Chief Executive of Sainsburys at their Head Office. In reply they told us that although they were replacing some of the normal check-outs they would retain two of them. And “our colleagues are more than happy to assist our customers using the self-service till until they feel more comfortable using them on a regular basis” We regard this as satisfactory but if you, or anyone you know, has difficulties with aspects of modern technology, do let us know.

COUNCIL QUESTIONS

As usual we submitted to the February meeting of the Council four questions (two for oral, two for written response) and as two of the answers are of real concern we are setting them out – as well as our March questions

Theft from Cars. There were 103 instances of theft from cars in Hampton North in 2021. This includes theft of eg laptops from car seats as well as catalytic converters. This has now become a priority for our local Policy team. They are checking on two models which are particular targets for the theft of catalytic converters – the Toyota Jazz and the Prius. The police are holding briefings and delivering leaflets as well as patrolling the areas most affected. This is a real local problem and it is all the more important that we take all due precautions.

Muga behind The White House. This Multi Use Games Area was a valued local facility for many years until it fell into disuse. It has been left abandoned and out of use for many years. Recently a Covid Testing site has opened there but this is clearly only short term. The Council reports that the site has suffered subsidence and ‘significant capital investment’ would be needed to bring it back into use. We will do our best to persuade the Council to restore it to community use – as well as resolve the issue of the White House where two years after its closure there has been no return of the vast majority of previous course, classes and activities. The popular café remains closed.

Questions submitted for the March Meeting. These include two matters mentioned below as well as: “when will the Council instal the Crossing in Broad Lane which has been agreed in principle?” and a request for a report on the Youth Centre and an explanation as to why the Council is taking back control from the YMCA.

HAMPTON STATION

We are now preparing our new petition asking particularly for a more reliable service and more trains to Richmond. At the March meeting we are asking the Council to support our petition.

BURTONS ROAD

In 2020 the Council responded to a traffic volume in Burtons Road well in excess of the volume acceptable for a 'side road' by introducing a scheme which had the support of 14% of those consulted. 60% saw no need for drastic action. As the displaced traffic diverted to other local roads which already had their own traffic and air quality problems some 300 residents petitioned for the removal of the scheme. Nothing happened. More recently no fewer than 1370 residents signed a similar petition. The November 2021 meeting of the Transport Committee agreed to end the current scheme late in March and replace it with new proposals to be considered at the February 2022 meeting. At that meeting we learned that although some local residents will, in effect, be given a 'free pass' the fundamentals of the scheme remain unchanged. We opposed this at the meeting and will continue to support all those residents who want the present scheme entirely abandoned and replaced with proposals that will be acceptable to the residents of both Burtons Road and neighbouring roads. So far the Council has rejected all the helpful compromises which local residents have suggested.

SHORTER ITEMS

- At the February meeting of the Adult Services and Housing Committee we raised the issue of the **Hanworth Road** family of five living in a one-bedroom flat. The Council refused rehousing saying there were 28 such families in the Borough
- We have referred to senior officers the continuing failure of Inquilab to deal with a rubbish issue in **Wordsworth Road**
- We are pleased that in response to our involvement the Council has secured the removal of vehicles parked in an area that used to be a popular hedge in **Old Farm Road**
- A resident of **Hanworth Road** has raised an issue concerning the planning application by LEH. Let us know if you have any concerns
- An enterprising resident in **Morland Close** sent to the Council a video of the regular mixing of food waste with general waste in the vehicles.
- Still no action on the gully problems either side of **Regency Close** which we reported to the Council

Keep in touch with us by phone or gjshn@btinternet.com: tell us of issues which concern you: we are both here to help

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Skylarks charity is recruiting

Skylarks, an award-winning charity based in Twickenham, is recruiting a SEND Adviser to their growing team.

Can you advise and inspire families of children with disabilities to access an education?

The new SEND Adviser will support families who have children and young people with additional needs and disabilities. You will provide high-quality information, advice and support to the parents or carers of children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 years.

Skylarks provides a supportive and active community that care for the whole family, providing opportunities to join in, develop and feel empowered.

Find out more and view the job description [HERE](#)

Road closures this Saturday ahead of 6 Nations match at Twickenham Stadium

Twickenham Stadium will host England v Wales this Saturday 26 February, with a 4.45pm kick off. Gates will open from 1.15pm and it will be a full capacity match of 82,000.

It is expected that Whitton, Rugby, and London Roads will be closed from 2.45 to 4.45pm and again from 6.30 to 9pm. The RFU will enable residents access where possible. A full CPZ will be in place from 10am to 10pm.

There will be shuttle buses from Old Deer Park and Hounslow which residents are welcome to use. The buses will only take cash fares and it is a flat fare of £3 return.

If you have any issues on the day, please email twickenhamcommunity@rfu.com.

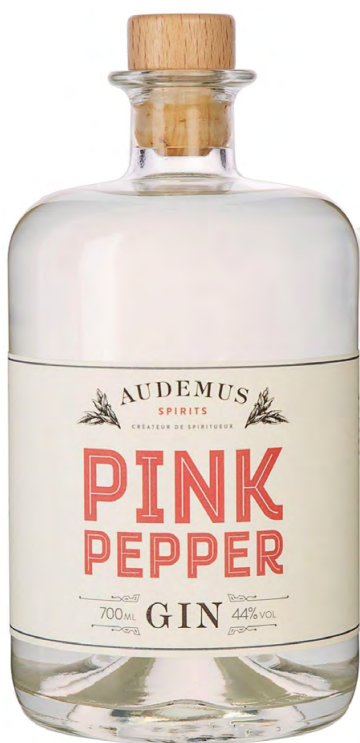
The RFU will also post live traffic updates on their [Twitter feed](#).

The RFU will have a matchday helpline for enquiries - 07894 814180 - which is staffed from 2.30 to 9pm. If you need to notify an ongoing incident, please call 999 and the police will respond.



FEBRUARY FOOD AND DRINK NEWS

Two Bees is a range of delicious honeys from all corners of the world - literally! The different characteristics of the honeys have been carefully chosen by the company's honey experts, who track down top-notch local farmers and beekeepers. Then they work with them to deliver 100 per cent single-source, pure, natural honey. Honey fans can try Australian, Zambian and Mexican honeys (and two varieties of each no less) at £5.99 a jar or, better still, a boxed set of all six varieties for £35.94. **Two Bees** is very serious about honey, and ethical, planet-friendly bee welfare is top of its priority list. They always source directly from the beekeeper, helping the economy and environment at the same time. They also take responsibility for the brand's impact; Two Bees honey arrives by sea and is jarred in the UK. From twobees.buzz



Gin from Cognac? Yes! I now have a new favourite gin: it's from **Audemus** - a company based in Cognac. The **Pink Pepper Gin** is sensational. At first sip, spicy notes of pink peppercorns, juniper and cardamom are prominent. Then it brings warmer vanilla and tonka notes. It's intensely aromatic, and steers away from most of the dry, juniper-led style of gins. (not that it's sweet though) It really does evolve and change, depending on whether you're sipping it, or enjoying it in a cocktail. And more good news: it's readily available, from Waitrose at £38 for 70cl.

When you've gone to the trouble of making a nice salad for a packed lunch or picnic, you don't want it to be wilted or soggy by the time you want to eat it! I've discovered a really natty lunchbox that will make your 'al desko' lunches far more enjoyable. The **Oxo Good Grips Prep & Go** salad container is so clever: it has a shallow tray that nestles in the top of the container to keep ingredients like a chicken breast or piece of salmon separate from the salad till you're ready to eat it, plus a small container for sauces

or dressings. Not into salads? The container is also microwave safe, so you can use it for oatmeal and various mix-ins. Or put a sandwich or wrap in the lower part and carrot sticks in the top, along with a pot of hummus. The options are endless. It's dishwasher safe and available from John Lewis at £16. Each container in the Prep & Go range features a see-through, leak-proof lid, and two locking clips for extra peace of mind. The range has a number of different sizes and options, so you can choose the best size and capacity to suit your needs.



Want to spice up the contents of that packed lunch? Try these great new condiments from [Pico Sauces](#) - your taste buds will be dancing! Pico brings authentic flavours from modern India - not just curry! The **Punjabi Ketchup** (based on the flavour of much-loved butter chicken) is aromatic, rich and perfect with BBQ food, pizza crust or burgers. The **Konkan Mango Chilli Sauce** is a delicious dip or interesting topping for hummus or spicing up a salad dressing.



You'll have fun playing around with them in all manner of recipes. I've yet to try the Varanasi Tamarind Chutney and Naga Ghost Pepper Sauce, but you'll find them all at Ocado (£2.50 a bottle)



And still on the subject of spicing up your food, do try the latest edition to the **Vadasz** range of pickles and ferments: **Super Beet Kimchi**. It's a naturally fermented, live cultured and moreish combination of beetroot, red cabbage, carrot, spring onion, apple, garlic, ginger and red pepper

- unpasteurised to retain crunchiness and fresh flavour. Combining the health benefits of beetroot with the gut health benefits of kimchi, Super Beet Kimchi is a handy fridge standby to transform salads, buddha bowls, wraps and sandwiches in seconds. And it's available in Waitrose at £4.50 for a 400g pot.

Are you struggling to sleep at the moment with everything that's going on in the world? Well, you'd be well advised to try a good sleep enhancing tea, like Great Taste Award winning **Ahmad Sleep Tea**. Golden camomile and lemon balm give a citrusy, summer grass backdrop, against honey and lavender flowers adding calming, delicate floral notes. With passion flower and linden too, known for centuries to soothe and relax, this makes a lovely end to a busy day. Around £3 for a pack of 20 teabags, from [Ahmad](#) or from Amazon or eBay.



Having long been a fan of a Negroni cocktail, I know that one of its key elements is bitters - usually a well-known brand like Campari. Well, now it has serious competition from a brand new, British brand: **Sipello Bittersweet Aperitif**. Hand crafted in the Surrey Hills, it combines a host of British ingredients like gooseberry, rhubarb and chuckleberry, many of which are wild harvested or grown organically. Botanicals include sandalwood, gentian and wormwood to add a bitter element, balanced perfectly. You can mix it with sparkling wine and elderflower for a refreshing drink, or try in your next Negroni or another favourite cocktail. Around £32 for a 70cl bottle from [Sipello](#), Master of Malt, The Whisky Exchange or eBay.

Cheers folks, Covid restrictions have ended and spring is on its way!

Holloway Jones

by Evan Placey

RSS Young Actors' Company at the Mary Wallace Theatre, Twickenham

The life stretching ahead of Holloway Jones (so named because her mother is in prison, father absent) is like the track on which she races her BMX bike: ups, downs hairpin corners and plenty of potential for accidents. Having been given an old bike, Holloway has become a skilled BMX rider and her coach is training her for the Olympic Academy. Aside from her foster carer, her best friend Gem and her coach, Holloway is largely adrift in the world, so when controlling boyfriend Avery enters her life the train of events is unsurprising.



Upstage screens show Holloway on a racetrack or beside a river with Avery, and with a static bike brought on and off stage, zoomed in with a cinematic view of Holloway Jones racing on her bike, trying to keep it on track as she struggles to keep her life on track.

The storyline, while fairly predictable, is nonetheless engaging and Emi Francis' unsentimental performance as Holloway drew in the audience and took them with her through both her mistakes and her ambitions. Leah Dawson's performance as boyfriend Avery was particularly striking, she conveyed charm and quiet threat in equal amounts and gave credibility to the relationship between Avery and Holloway. Similarly Amy Brian as Gem, best friend and voice of reason, was an effective portrait of a teenage girl growing in maturity and equipped with an understanding of how the world works.

In smaller roles, Ceci Cripps was a rather philosophical police officer doing a difficult job in a difficult world and Ruby Skinner made a nice switch from chorus character into overwhelmed-but-trying teacher. Kieran Judd as Holloway's coach effectively portrayed a stressed obsessive; well-meaning, but unaware of anything much beyond his own narrow field of vision.



Holloway Jones was a well-executed and fairly uplifting production of a story for our times and RSS's young actors have produced an efficient and skilled version of this cautionary tale.

Read Eleanor Lewis' review at www.markaspen.com/2022/02/19/holloway-jones

Photography by Laura-May Hassan



La Forza del Destino

by Giuseppe Verdi, libretto by Francesco Piave
Regents Opera, St John's, Fulham until 5th March

Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* (*The Force of Destiny*) is the only opera where the composer has entitled his work with an idea or concept, but it is a relevant one. It means that in his world individuals make decisions and choices that have repercussions. The overbearing theme of fate in *La Forza del Destino* questions politics, nationalism, religion and racism.

It is really quite something to put on a full-scale production of a grand opera. (Several scenes are set on the battlefield.) Regents Opera's was no mean feat: a reduced twelve-piece orchestra did not detract from the richness and soaring lines of the score, most notable in the famous overture.



Rory Fazan's courageous staging transformed St John's Church into a multi-faceted platform, the venue's Georgian Gothic influence providing a perfect backdrop. A contemporary take on the original 18th Century period, we found ourselves immersed in what appeared to be a military hospital with staff in full PPE wearing white hazmat outfits and with sanitising gel at the ready.

Philippa Boyle as Leonara sang effortlessly with her top B flat in '*Pace, pace mio Dio*' reached with ease and grandeur. Her voice would not go amiss in a large house.

Mention should also go to Gerard Delrez for his fine cameo role as the Marquis and to Australian tenor Dominic Walsh for Alvaro, but the real star of the show was undoubtedly Edwin Kaye as Padre Guardino, a voice to watch out for.

Catherine Backhouse as the gypsy girl Preziosilla provided an eye-popping turbocharged performance. The introduction of Beyonce-like hip hop in the Rataplan chorus brought some humour to the sombre plot as did Masimba Ushe as Alcade, the town mayor, making an impression with his *La cena è pronta*, donning a messy blonde Boris wig!

Read Helen Astrid's review at
www.markaspen.com/2022/02/21/forza-destino

Photography by Berke Can



The Cunning Little Vixen

by Leoš Janáček

English National Opera at the London Coliseum until 1st March

As soon as the ENO Orchestra begins tuning up, the windswept West End outside vanishes.

In this deceptively slight tale, a young vixen is captured by a Forester and raised in a human house. Her upbringing isn't happy, and she eventually escapes into the woods to start a new life, outwitting humans and other animals alike.



ENO's new production of *The Cunning Little Vixen* is a perfect choice, since former musical director Sir Charles Mackerras is credited with introducing Janáček's music to English audiences. Directed with flair by Jamie Manton, the opera is staged under an endlessly unfurling banner (illustrated by Anya Allin). David Allen's flexible set design creates a constantly shifting world through which the characters move. The human world and the woods are shown in striking contrast, humans in drably monochrome costumes, while the animals come alive in

vibrant creations from designer Tom Scutt.

Soprano Sally Matthews wears the most distinctive costume as Vixen, Sharp Ears, and she plays the part with great physicality, swaggering and bounding over the stage. But the biggest audience reaction is reserved for John Findon's flamboyant Rooster, and his retinue of Hens.

The wit that pervades the production is more than matched by Janáček's libretto. The Vixen, having gleefully devastated the henhouse, complains about the morality of starlings, and prudishly insists on a swift marriage with Fox (soprano Pumeza Matshikiza). Similarly baritone Lester Lynch's splendid Forester breaks the fourth wall to complain about his life story being turned into an opera.



Martyn Brabbins conducts an orchestra full of insistent violins, mournful woodwind, and light percussion, bringing huge energy to the Moravian folk songs which influenced Janáček's work and which give the production a truly distinctive sound.

Funny, melancholy, philosophical, whimsical, *The Cunning Little Vixen* is utterly enthralling.

Read Andrew Lawston's review at www.markaspen.com/2022/02/21/the-cunning-little-vixen

Photography by Clive Barda

WIZ Tales - Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic States

Teresa Read

During the last week there has been concern that the Baltic States of Estonia Latvia and Lithuania may be under threat from Russia as Ukraine has now come under attack. Estonia is bordered by Russia, Latvia by Russia and Belarus and Lithuania by Poland and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are members of NATO.

Estonia

<https://worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=Estonia>

Estonia was ruled by Russia for two centuries declaring independence after the First World War. During the Second World War Soviet troops occupied Estonia annexing it to the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). However, in 1941 the Germans defeated the Soviet Army and occupied Estonia until 1944. Although Estonia tried to restore its independence it was incorporated as a Republic of the USSR. Estonia finally regained its independence with the break-up of the USSR at the beginning of the 1990s.

Latvia

<https://worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=Latvia>

Latvia was occupied by Russia from the early eighteenth century declaring independence after the First World War. At the beginning of the Second World War Latvia was annexed to the USSR. In 1941 Germany took control of Latvia with Soviet Russia reclaiming the country in 1944 as a Republic of the USSR. Like Estonia, Latvia finally won independence with the break-up of the Soviet Republics at the beginning of the 1990s. Latvia declared independence in 1991; Russian troops left in 1994.

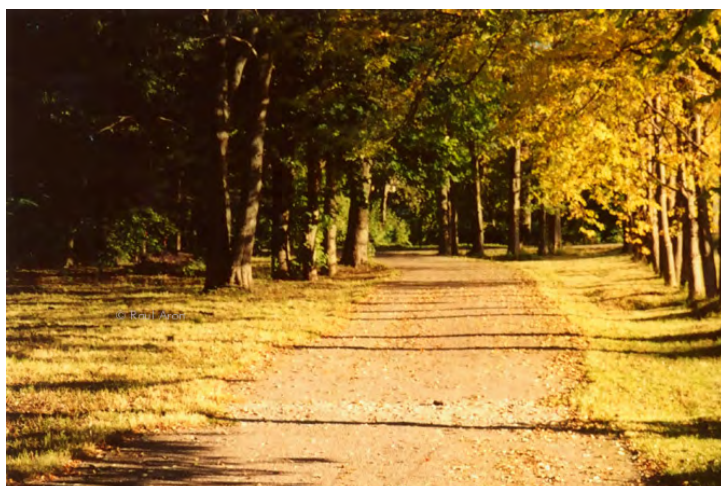
Lithuania

<https://worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=Lithuania>

Following wars the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was divided up at the end of the eighteenth century with Lithuania going to Russia. Lithuania became independent from Russia between 1920 and 1940. At the end of the Second World War Lithuania was incorporated into the USSR becoming a Soviet Republic. Lithuania remained a Soviet Republic until 1990; Lithuania was the first Soviet Republic to declare independence. Independence was recognised at the end of 1991 and the last Russian soldiers left in 1993.



Latvia



Ukraine is bordered by Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland.

<https://worldinfozone.com/country.php?country=Ukraine>

TRAVELLER'S TALES 117

TRANSPORTED IN INDIA

Doug Goodman enjoys various methods of transport in India.



First-time visitors to India usually take an organised group tour. This takes away any difficulties of arranging your own flights, accommodation and internal tours. You get a driver and a knowledgeable guide who will explain aspects of the country's history, culture and life-style and ensure you get the most from the holiday. I've visited India many times but always in the southern half of the vast land. Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Goa are the States I have explored and used many methods of transport to get around. India has 28 States and each one may vary in its language, climate, food, traditions and geography. But once you're familiar with the Indian 'scene' you can plan your own tour programme through a travel company in India. They will meet you on arrival and take you on a private tour with everything arranged to your specifications.



Travel in Comfort



Jeep Safari in Karnataka



Waiting for a Train



Bus Station in Tamil Nadu

EXPERT GUIDE

I've used the services of an historian and guide, Emmanuel Devapriya, who works with one of the big tour companies in Bangalore, capital of Karnataka. An air-conditioned Hindustan Ambassador, (an old vehicle based on the Morris Oxford and built in India between 1958 and 2014), provides a comfortable ride even on the roughest roads. On a leopard spotting safari near the Cauvery River, where we joined elephants at bath time, our stately car was swapped for an open-top jeep with a driver who could identify wildlife at a vast distance. The best way to meet local people is to travel long-distance by train or bus. The images we see of jam-packed buses and passengers clinging to the sides and roofs of trains should not put you off. Avoid booking third-class on overnight trains. Choose a sleeper with air-con and order breakfast to be delivered to your compartment for your early morning arrival. This has proved to be a fascinating experience and you'll get the life-stories of your fellow passengers. The bus station in Pondicherry in Tamil Nadu was the perfect place to observe the passengers queuing patiently for travel to far-away places: some laden with market produce and chickens.

POOR ROADS

Car hire is not recommended. Away from towns roads are narrow, full of pot-holes and occasional unprotected drops. Accidents are frequent, heavy trucks thunder past and cattle act as if they have right of way. Remember that cattle are sacred and they can roam anywhere in built-up areas and in the countryside. They ignore traffic and enjoy a snooze in the middle of a sunny road. Avoid hitting one at all costs. Try riding a Tuk-Tuk during a city-centre rush-hour for a scary experience. The drivers seem to take incredible risks as they weave in and out of the

traffic with one hand on the controls and the other on the hooter. It's a very cheap way to travel short distances and I've frequently hired one for a whole day for around £15.



Public Bus



Large Lorry



Cows and Elephants
Take Priority



Road Accident

For slow travel you can often find someone in a village to give you a local tour by bullock cart. I've found villagers to be really hospitable who will take you to inspect their farm and invite you into their home. They do this out of generosity to visitors and expect nothing in return. I always take small gift such as sweets, pens, postcards and London souvenirs to hand out on such occasions. If you receive an invitation to a school then pencils, pens, note books and cash donations are very well received. Many resort hotels have bicycles for their guests' use which offer an escape into the countryside to spot exotic birds and other wildlife. Take binoculars, sun hat and a high-factor sun cream as well as water where ever you go. By only drinking bottled liquids, avoiding food on display in hotel buffets and choosing vegetarian dishes I have never had the slightest health problem in India.



Cruising the
Backwaters



Take a Tuk Tuk



Slow Travel by Bullock
Cart



See More by Bike

CALM WATERS

For me the most enjoyable form of transport is by water. In Kerala there are huge areas of lakes, canals and rivers where you can hire a converted rice boat for a leisurely few days. Known as Kettuvallams they come with a cook, engineer and captain and offer an insight into the lives of the people who live and work by the waterside. Stops for shopping, visits to farms and schools and nights spent moored under the palm trees are one of my happiest memories of India. Allepy is one of the hire points but a boat will be brought to your hotel if it's situated by a lake. A major tourist attraction, these houseboats are made of wood without using any nails, have thatched roofs and comfortable bedrooms. Meals, of your choice but mainly fish, are served on palm leaves in a lounge area on the prow where you can drink a cooled Kingfisher beer. Heaven!

For more information on guided tours contact emmanueldevapriya@gmail.com

Marble Hill House is being revived

There has been an exciting project underway at Marble Hill House with the team currently seeking volunteers to help with their work.

The team at Marble Hill House have been working hard to safeguard the house from damp and leaks so it can remain open. Work is currently underway to revive and invest in the landscape to make the space more bio-diverse and restore heritage elements, and - from the play area to the sports pitches - improve the facilities across the park.



Volunteers are currently being sought to help open Marble Hill House and bring this heritage back to the community.

In late Spring, the fences will come down, the newly landscaped areas around the house will be accessible, with residents able to try nine pin Bowling on the revived bowling alley with visitors able to come into the house for free five days a week.

The team are looking for people to help us open the house, to share the stories of Marble Hill and to welcome visitors as if the house were their own! Perks include volunteer breakfasts, social events, reciprocal visits to heritage sites and free English Heritage membership.

For more information on volunteering at Marble Hill visit the [English Heritage website](#)

New youth orchestra and fencing classes at Ham Youth Centre

The Ham Youth Centre has launched new fencing classes for 10 to 15 year olds and a new youth orchestra for 10 to 19 year olds.

Ham Youth Centre has started an exciting youth orchestra under the tutelage of highly qualified music teachers with a range of classical instruments for young people to use and borrow for free. Musicians of all levels of experience are welcome to join the youth orchestra. Rehearsals take place every Wednesday from 3.30 to 5pm.



The fencing classes are run by an expert tutor and ex-national level competitor. Plastic and metal foils will be used in the classes. Classes take place on Tuesdays from 6.30 to 7.30pm and cost just £5 per session.

More information about both classes please contact Ben Skelton on 07903 349719, email ben.skelton@achievingforchildren.org.uk or visit the Ham Youth Centre [website](#).

REMEMBER! THE BEETLE

Amongst the many motor cars enjoying a long production life was the VW Beetle. Eighty four years ago on February 26th 1938 Hitler opened a factory at Wolfsburg to produce a 'People's Car'. It was simple to maintain, could carry five people at 62 mph and cover 32 miles per gallon. But most of all 'Der Kafer', (Beetle), had to be suitable for Germany's new Autobahns and affordable. Designed by Ferdinand Porsche production was slow pre-war but took off in the late forties. Several up-dated versions were launched of the rear-engine, two door car and production continued in Mexico until 2019 when the 21 millionth vehicle left the factory.

The Mini

My red Mini cost £299 in 1964 and was one of the first produced in 1959. It served me well for several years although it was prone to rust. The early versions had a long floor-mounted gear stick which made changing gear like stirring porridge. Designed for the British Motor Corporation by Alec Issigonis it became a cult car in the 'swinging sixties' and had sold four million by 1976. Germany's BMW took over production of the Mini and launched many new variants. The car sold in 110 countries and three years ago the ten millionth was built.



Two Horses

A favourite economy car of mine is the Citroen 2CV. Conceived in the late 1930s it went into mass production after the war. Nearly four million were manufactured between 1948 and 1990. The specification required a car that was simple to maintain, cheap to buy and could drive over a ploughed field. With primitive controls, lack of heating, braking that required gear changing and a central dash-board gear lever needing a sharp jerk of the wrist, it was nevertheless fun to drive. The soft top could be rolled back but mine tended to 'convert' when travelling at high-speed – anything over 50mph- without any help. My French friend Patrick Deschodt decided in 1963 to take his yellow 2CV on a trip around Africa. In 480 days he and a colleague covered 112,055 kms. sustaining many break-downs and 199 punctures.



Visitors to St.Omer in Northern France can hire a 2CV from www.les-belles-echappées.com

St Mary's University

St Mary's University FA Women's High Performance Football Centre Hosts Women's Football Cup

On Thursday 17th February the [FA Women's High Performance Football Centre](#) (WHPFC) at St Marys University, Twickenham hosted the London Colleges Women's Football Cup 5-a-side tournament.

Jodie Whitlock-Stark, the WHPFC Coach Development Officer, ran the day long football tournament attended by female players and coaches from 12 London colleges.



Brady. The workshops were informed by recent research projects and focused on footwear design and injury prevention, and also effective coaching and culture in the women's and girls' game.

This event coincided with the start of a week-long international women's Football tournament featuring England, Canada (Olympic Champions), Germany and Spain

ahead of England hosting the UEFA Women's European Championships this summer.

Speaking about the tournament Jodie said, "the event went really well and evaluations from players and coaches have been incredibly positive. We've already received requests asking when the next event will be."

The event brought together over 100 young people to engage in a celebration of women's football.

Jodie oversaw the 5-a-side tournament in the afternoon with the help of a team of the Sports St Mary's staff and St Mary's University undergraduate students.

Earlier in the day, the event began with two research workshops by St Mary's University academics Katrine Kryger, Jess Boyd and Abbe

Head of Department of Psychology and Pedagogic Science, Dr Abbe Brady said, "we are delighted and the whole day was a terrific showcase of our St Mary's community coming together in a knowledge exchange event, sharing research findings and collecting new data, as well as connecting with 12 colleges and involving our own students in the running of the football tournament event.



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

Match Preview: Brentford vs Newcastle United

All the build-up to Saturday's clash in TW8

From [Brentford FC](#)

We welcome Eddie Howe's Newcastle United to TW8 tomorrow for our latest Premier League outing. The Magpies head south unbeaten in six, sitting two points behind us but, importantly, two points above the drop zone. Get all the build-up below.

THE OPPOSITION

Winless in their first 15 in all competitions, Newcastle have now won four of their last ten in the Premier League, following their takeover by the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia in October.

The January Transfer Window saw five key arrivals as Newcastle sought to pull themselves away from trouble. Kieran Trippier (Atletico Madrid), Dan Burn (Brighton), Chris Wood (Burnley), and Bruno Guimaraes (Lyon) all arrived on permanent deals with Matt Targett joining from Aston Villa on loan.

Their impact has been immediate with Newcastle now unbeaten in their last six league matches, and out of the bottom three for the first-time since October. A hat-trick of wins, over Leeds United, Everton, and Aston Villa were reeled off with Trippier netting twice in that run.

Only Burnley have seen less of the ball than The Magpies in the league this season (38.4%) while, unsurprisingly for team that has Allan Saint-Maximin (above) in it, Newcastle attempt the fifth-most dribbles of all top flight sides.

Saint-Maximin is The Magpies' second-top Premier League scorer this season with five, one behind Callum Wilson, with no other Newcastle player scoring more than twice so far this campaign.

THE GAMEPLAN

Writing for [Hot Off The Press](#), The Athletic's Chris Waugh, said: «[Howe] has settled on 4-3-3 and I think he is unlikely to shift from that. Martin Dubravka will be in goal and in Trippier's absence, it will be interesting to see what they do to replace him; if Manquillo is not fit, I think Emil Krafth will come in a right-back; Targett was unable to play against his parent club Aston Villa so he will be the first choice left-back. In central defence, it will be two of Burn, Fabian Schar and Jamaal Lascelles, with a midfield three, at the moment, of Jonjo Shelvey, Joelinton (above) and Joe Willock. The latter pair play as No 8s either side of Shelvey, which is keeping Guimaraes out of the team. And up front, Howe will have Wood through the middle, Ryan Fraser on the right and Saint-Maximin on the left.

TEAM NEWS

Thomas Frank confirmed earlier today that Christian Eriksen will make his Brentford debut tomorrow while Ivan Toney is also available following a calf-injury. With Zanka coming through an hour against Rangers on Monday, Thomas now has a fully-fit squad at his disposal.

For Newcastle, Kieran Trippier (foot), Callum Wilson (calf), Jamal Lewis (groin), and Matt Ritchie (knee) are all out while there are doubts over Javier Manquillo (foot) and Allan Saint-Maximin (calf). Ryan Fraser came off during United's 1-1 draw with West Ham last weekend but is set to be available.

HOW TO FOLLOW

Today's game will be shown around the world through the Premier League's broadcast partners. [Click here to see if it is on where you are](#)

There will also be live commentary on Talksport. For the Brentford angle, Lisa Grant and Karleigh Osborne join Mark BurrIDGE on [Bees Player](#).



England team announcement

England v Wales, Guinness Six Nations

England head coach Eddie Jones has named his side for this weekend's Guinness Six Nations match against Wales.



Courtney Lawes returns to the side as blind-side flanker and is named captain.

Kyle Sinckler will make his 50th appearance for England. The prop made his debut against South Africa in November 2016. Vice-captains Ellis Genge (loose-head prop) and Luke Cowan-Dickie (hooker) join him in the front row.

Maro Itoje and Charlie Ewels are named as locks. Tom Curry (vice-captain) stays at open-side flanker and Alex Dombrandt is No. 8.

Manu Tuilagi returns from injury at inside centre and vice-captain Henry Slade is outside centre. Marcus Smith is fly half and Harry Randall is scrum half.

Jack Nowell (left) and Max Malins (right) are at wing and Freddie Steward is full back.

Ben Youngs could become England's most-capped men's player of all time as he is named as finisher. Youngs equalled Jason Leonard's record of 114 caps in England's 33-0 win away to Italy. He made his debut in March 2010 against Scotland.

Jamie George, Joe Marler, Will Stuart, Nick Isiekwe, Sam Simmonds, George Ford and Elliot Daly complete the finishers.

Jones said: *"We've prepared very well for this game, the squad have really come together on and off the pitch. Wales are a good, tough side and Six Nations champions and it will make for an exciting Test match in front of a full Twickenham crowd."*

"We've got a talented, young, hungry squad who have trained with real intensity this week. We're ready to go at them and can't wait to play in front of our supporters again."

"It will also be a special match with two significant milestones for Ben and Kyle, both of who have made outstanding contributions to English rugby so far in their careers. We congratulate them and we know there is more to come ahead for them."

The match is live on ITV and BBC Radio 5 Live (4.45pm KO).

ENGLAND XV

15. Freddie Steward (Leicester Tigers, 7 caps)
14. Max Malins (Saracens, 12 caps)
13. Henry Slade (Exeter Chiefs, 45 caps) (VC)
12. Manu Tuilagi (Sale Sharks, 46 caps)
11. Jack Nowell (Exeter Chiefs, 36 caps)
10. Marcus Smith (Harlequins, 7 caps)
9. Harry Randall (Bristol Bears, 3 caps)

1. Ellis Genge (Leicester Tigers, 33 caps) (VC)
2. Luke Cowan-Dickie (Exeter Chiefs, 33 caps) (VC)
3. Kyle Sinckler (Bristol Bears, 49 caps)
4. Charlie Ewels (Bath Rugby, 28 caps)
5. Maro Itoje (Saracens, 53 caps)
6. Courtney Lawes (Northampton Saints, 90 caps) (C)
7. Tom Curry (Sale Sharks, 38 caps) (VC)
8. Alex Dombrandt (Harlequins, 6 caps)

FINISHERS

16. Jamie George (Saracens, 63 caps)
17. Joe Marler (Harlequins, 76 caps)
18. Will Stuart (Bath Rugby, 17 caps)
19. Nick Isiekwe (Saracens, 5 caps)

20. Sam Simmonds (Exeter Chiefs, 11 caps)
21. Ben Youngs (Leicester Tigers, 114 caps)
22. George Ford (Leicester Tigers, 79 caps)
23. Elliot Daly (Saracens, 54 caps)

RFU to consult on proposals for additional cup competition between Premiership and Championship clubs in 23/24 season

The RFU Council today agreed that further consultation on proposals to help support Championship clubs could be undertaken in the coming months to consider the viability of an additional cup competition between Premiership XV's and Championship clubs running alongside a 12 team Championship league in the 23/24 season.

The cup concept will provide additional player development opportunities to strengthen the professional player infrastructure, it will provide progression opportunities for clubs that want them and additional commercial and marketing opportunities for clubs.

The Championship Strategic Review group was set up following RFU Council approval of a Covid recovery plan in June 21.

The review includes three sub-groups looking at the strategic direction of the Championship, the commercial realities and the competition structure. Each group includes wide representation from across the game including Championship and Premiership clubs, Council members, PRL and RFU representatives along with external advisors.

The three subgroups have been consulting widely with all levels of the game to provide the RFU Council with proposals to be further explored.

Throughout the consultation the RFU has and will continue to be open to all ideas and considerations from all stakeholders, looking at ways to make the Championship financially sustainable.

Rugby Football Union (RFU) President His Honour Jeff Blackett said: "The Championship is an important part of the rugby eco system in England and we all want to support the league to enable it to become more sustainable.

This proposal is designed to do that and therefore, the RFU Council agrees the opportunity should be further explored. The RFU Council, which represents clubs across the country, will still be required to approve any potential new cup competition should progress be made."

The rest of the 2021/22 season will be used by the review group to develop the additional cup proposal which would go to Council for approval in June 2022 at the earliest.



The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in England

The COVID-19 vaccination programme (the programme) met stretching and unprecedented targets, helping to save lives and reduce serious illness and hospitalisation, according to a report by the National Audit Office (NAO). As the programme continues to evolve in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to new clinical advice and evidence about vaccines, there are some clear risks to be managed.

The vaccine rollout was the biggest and most complex vaccination programme in UK history. In line with its targets, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) had vaccinated two-thirds of adults by 19 July 2021. By the end of October, 85% of adults had received two doses of the vaccine, and more than 87 million doses had been administered in total: over six times the number in the previous annual flu vaccination programme. This uptake exceeded NHSE&I's initial planning assumption that 75% of adults would take two doses.

Up to the end of October 2021, the COVID-19 vaccination programme had spent £5.6 billion out of total available funding of £8.3 billion for the two years to the end of March 2022, including £2.9 billion to purchase COVID-19 vaccines, and £2.2 billion on deploying the vaccine. By the end of October 2021, the Vaccine Taskforce (the Taskforce) had put in place contracts or agreements with six suppliers for over 340 million doses of vaccines to be delivered to the UK by the end of 2022.

Securing the supply early and then maintaining this supply was crucial to the successful roll-out. The Taskforce's main initial objective was to secure enough vaccines for the UK population as early as possible. The Taskforce and its partners worked with a clear strategy and took a proactive approach to dealing with potential barriers and managing uncertain outcomes. For example, it purchased several different potential vaccines at an early stage, explicitly recognising that some might never be approved, and also set up a strategy to deal with potential surpluses.

The programme took steps to make the vaccine convenient to access. GPs and community pharmacists have ended up administering many more doses than originally planned - 71% up to the end of October 2021 compared with a planned 56%. NAO interviews with bodies involved in running the programme locally highlighted the goodwill, flexibility, and dedication that had been required to set up and run vaccination sites at such pace and scale. A combination of existing staff, returning healthcare staff, newly trained vaccinators and volunteers have administered vaccines. At its peak, the programme was estimated to need 60,000 vaccinators and 65,000 non-clinical staff.

Despite efforts to address inequalities, the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations among some ethnic minority groups (based on the number of people receiving two doses) remained substantially below the national average as at the end of October 2021. Younger age groups also fell below the national average (64% of those aged 18-24 and 68% of those aged 25-29 were vaccinated with two doses at the end of October 2021). Meanwhile, in October 2021 only

29% of women giving birth had received at least two doses of the vaccine.

New digital tools also contributed towards the success of the vaccine deployment. The COVID-19 vaccination programme set up a national data system that allowed the NHS to identify, record and transmit vaccination data across the health and care system. Digital dashboards with detailed real-time analysis of uptake and supply were created to support programme leaders and manage key risks.

The amount of vaccines supplied but not used (wastage) has been much lower than the programme initially assumed: the NAO estimated that wastage for England, as at the end of October 2021, was around 4.6 million doses, or 4% of total supply. There was a particular challenge with expiring AstraZeneca doses after the JCVI's recommendation that people under 40 should preferably not be offered it. This meant that about 1.9 million doses delivered to local sites had to be written off.

Given the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic and the programme's achievements up to October 2021, today's NAO report finds that it has been an effective use of public money to this date. There are now risks to the programme's continuing success that must be managed. Staffing issues, including burnout, and a lack of surplus capacity in the healthcare system present substantial risks in a context where there are still around 3.7 million unvaccinated adults.

Given the continuing uncertainties of the pandemic, at the end of 2021 DHSC felt it was too soon to set out a more sustainable, long-term approach to COVID-19 vaccination, but told the NAO it was planning to address this in 2022. It will need to consider the best organisational structure for the programme, and how future costs and other resources may need to differ from the current emergency response. NHSE&I should take additional steps to manage the vaccine workforce and examine how the programme can minimise its potential adverse impact on other health and public services, given that it is substantially the same workforce delivering all these services.

Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO, said:

“The vaccine programme has been successful in getting early access to what were brand new COVID-19 vaccines, securing supply of them, and administering them to a large proportion the population at unprecedented speed.

“The programme must now redouble its efforts to reach those who are not yet vaccinated while also considering what a more sustainable model will involve as it moves out of its emergency phase.”

Click here for the [full report](#) and click here for the [PAC Chair's statement](#)



National Audit Office

Statement on Omicron sublineage BA.2

As part of its on-going work to track variants, WHO's Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution ([TAG-VE](#)) met yesterday to discuss the latest evidence on the Omicron variant of concern, including its sublineages BA.1 and BA.2.

Based on available data of transmission, severity, reinfection, diagnostics, therapeutics and impacts of vaccines, the group reinforced that the BA.2 sublineage should continue to be considered a variant of concern and that it should remain classified as Omicron. The group emphasized that BA.2 should continue to be monitored as a distinct sublineage of Omicron by public health authorities.

The Omicron variant of concern is currently the dominant variant circulating globally, accounting for nearly all sequences reported to GISAID. Omicron is made up of several sublineages, each of them being monitored by WHO and partners. Of them, the most common ones are BA.1, BA.1.1 (or Nextstrain clade 21K) and BA.2 (or Nextstrain clade 21L). At a global level, the proportion of reported sequences designated BA.2 has been increasing relative to BA.1 in recent weeks, however the global circulation of all variants is reportedly declining.

BA.2 differs from BA.1 in its genetic sequence, including some amino acid differences in the spike protein and other proteins. Studies have shown that BA.2 has a growth advantage over BA.1. Studies are ongoing to understand the reasons for this growth advantage, but initial data suggest that BA.2 appears inherently more transmissible than BA.1, which currently remains the most common Omicron sublineage reported. This difference in transmissibility appears to be much smaller than, for example, the difference between BA.1 and Delta. Further, although BA.2 sequences are increasing in proportion relative to other Omicron sublineages (BA.1 and BA.1.1), there is still a reported decline in overall cases globally.

Studies are evaluating the risk of reinfection with BA.2 compared to BA.1. Reinfection with BA.2 following infection with BA.1 has been documented, however, initial data from population-level reinfection studies suggest that infection with BA.1 provides strong protection against reinfection with BA.2, at least for the limited period for which data are available.

While reaching the above determination, the TAG-VE also looked at preliminary laboratory data from Japan generated using animal models without any immunity to SARS-CoV-2 which highlighted that BA.2 may cause more severe disease in hamsters compared to BA.1. They also considered real-world data on clinical severity from South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, where immunity from vaccination or natural infection is high: in this data, there was no reported difference in severity between BA.2 and BA.1.

WHO will continue to closely monitor the BA.2 lineage as part of Omicron and requests countries to continue to be vigilant, to monitor and report sequences, as well as to conduct independent and comparative analyses of the different Omicron sublineages.

The TAG-VE meets regularly and continues to discuss available data on transmissibility and severity of variants, and their impact on diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines.



The Equipment Plan 2021 to 2031

Despite improvements to the Ministry of Defence's 2021-2031 Equipment Plan there is a risk to its affordability because of over-optimistic assumptions about future budgets, costs and the likely achievement of savings targets, according to the National Audit Office.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) publishes the Equipment Plan (the Plan) each year, setting out its intended investment in equipment over the next decade. The NAO's annual assessments of the Plan show that the MoD has consistently found it difficult to strike the right balance between increasing equipment capability and living within its means.

In the 2020 Spending Review, the MoD received £16.5 billion of additional funding over four years to support its ambitious agenda to reshape the armed forces (subsequently set out in the 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy) and to cover previous funding shortfalls.

The MoD announced that the Integrated Review and extra funding represented a real chance to remedy the affordability problems it had struggled with in its equipment planning over many years.

The Plan has increased in value by a record £48 billion (25%), from £190 billion in the 2020-30 Plan to £238 billion for 2021-31.

The MoD has assessed its 2021-2031 Plan as affordable, with the budget exceeding estimated costs by £4.3 billion. Currently the MoD's planned spending in the next ten years is higher than its budget, but it believes that it can make savings so that budget and costs will eventually align.

The MoD intends to spend £15.8 billion on new capabilities, such as a New Medium Helicopter. It is stopping some investments, such as the Warrior armoured vehicles. It also intends to defer spending to fund higher priorities in the short term. In some cases this will increase costs as it will need to re-contract at higher prices (at the time of the Integrated Review, the MoD expected that delaying the purchase of Chinook helicopters by three years would cost an extra £295 million).

It is too early to say if the new investments outlined in the Plan includes all the equipment the Armed Forces will need in the next decade.

A range of costs identified by MoD project teams, but not currently included in the Plan, could result in financial risk if the Department does not reassess its priorities. Including these costs would increase the cost of the Plan by £4.2 billion.

For example, early business cases for the Future Combat Air System, New Medium Helicopter and Future Commando Force programmes show that these programmes are currently underfunded.

Project costs could increase by more than the Plan assumes. The MoD's Cost Assurance and Analysis Service assessed projects making up 58% of the Plan's costs this year. It concluded that these projects are likely to cost £7.6 billion more than outlined in the Plan.

The Plan assumes that the Top Level Budgets (TLBs) will reduce equipment costs by £7.0 billion over the next decade. The TLBs do not yet have plans to achieve £3.9 billion of these reductions, but the MoD's worst-case scenario only assumes that £935 million of savings will not be achieved.

The MoD aims to substantially reduce the size of its workforce, which could affect the money available for the Plan. The MoD assumes that wages will fall in real terms, but even a small change to the Department's assumptions about pay would have a significant impact on the affordability of its spending plans.

For example, an additional 1% pay rise above what is planned in 2022-23 would cost approximately £1.4 billion more over the following nine years.

The NAO has found that the quality of the Equipment Plan has improved in recent years, but the way it is produced incentivises short term affordability, which builds up financial pressures over the longer term.

The TLBs spend more slowly on projects to keep within their budgets and re-classify budget shortfalls as 'planned cost reductions' or efficiencies to be achieved in future years, even if they do not have plans to achieve them.

Over-optimism about budgets and costs, and a focus on the short term have been consistent findings in NAO Equipment Plan reports over many years. The NAO has found that only approximately half of the recommendations it has made in Equipment Plan reports since 2016 have been fully implemented. To break the pattern, the MoD's Head Office needs to work with the TLBs to fundamentally change the way it builds, and reports on, the Plan.

Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO, said:

"The Ministry of Defence has taken some difficult decisions, reducing spending in some areas to allow it to spend more on its highest priorities. However, in this year's Equipment Plan, risks remain of over-optimistic assumptions about costs, budgets and the likely achievement of savings targets.

"The new multi-year spending settlement gives the Department a rare opportunity to reset and develop an affordable Equipment Plan. The Department has further improvements to make if it is to both deliver the required equipment and make best use of the money it has been given."

Click here for the [full report](#) and here for the [PAC Chair's statement](#).



National Audit Office

WHO Director-General as Guest Lecture at Robert S. McNamara Lecture on War and Peace, Harvard Kennedy School - 25 February 2022

Dean Williams,

Dean Elmendorf,

To the McNamara family,

Students of the Harvard Kennedy School,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Good afternoon, and thank you so much for the privilege of delivering this year's Robert McNamara Lecture.

This is indeed a great honor, and such a great pleasure.

But I must admit that the task of delivering a lecture with war and peace in its title weighs heavily on me, at a time when we are now seeing conflict in Europe of a kind we all hoped had been consigned to history.

Like you, we are watching events unfold in Ukraine with deep concern for what this will mean for the region, the world, and especially for the health of the affected populations.

And sadly, Ukraine is not the only conflict in our world. From Afghanistan to Myanmar, Yemen, and my own country of Ethiopia, it's an unfortunate reality that all too often, conflict and disease go together.

The authors of WHO's Constitution were well aware of the link between health and peace, which is why they wrote in the preamble that the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security, and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States.

Since those words were written, the world has faced many outbreaks and epidemics. Just this century, we have seen H5N1 influenza, SARS, MERS, the H1N1 pandemic, multiple Ebola outbreaks, Zika and more.

But of course, nothing matches the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has thrown the world into turmoil for more than two years.

COVID-19 is a powerful demonstration that a pandemic is so much more than a health crisis.

It illustrates the interconnectedness between health and the economy, security, education, and the intimate links between the health of humans, animals and our planet.

There are many lessons to learn about what has worked and what has not.

Let me suggest five:

The first is that science must guide policy, not the other way round.

Throughout the pandemic, WHO has convened thousands of scientists from around the world to examine the rapidly emerging evidence and distil it into the guidance we give the world.

Just this week, we have convened a research and innovation forum to identify the most pressing research priorities and chart the way forward.

Science has given us valuable insights into how this virus spreads, how it causes disease, and how to stop it.

But in some countries and communities, and on social media, the marginalization and politicization of science has impeded the response to the pandemic and cost lives. Politics undermining science.

My point is not that science should be the only consideration in decision-making about public health. My point is that science should be the central and guiding consideration.

The second lesson is that science can in fact widen inequalities, unless it is paired with a commitment to equity.

I'm sure that most or all of you are vaccinated.

And yet as we speak, 83% of the population of Africa is yet to receive a single dose of vaccine.

Vaccine nationalism, export bans and bilateral deals between manufacturers and high-income nations severely restricted the number of doses COVAX was able to ship in the first half of last year.

The supply situation has now improved, and COVAX has been able to ship more than 1.2 billion doses of vaccine to 144 countries and territories.

WHO and our partners are working night and day to support countries to turn vaccines into vaccinations, to reach our target of vaccinating 70% of the population of every country by the middle of this year.

To reach that target, we are calling on all countries to urgently fill the ACT Accelerator's financing gap of US\$16 billion, to ensure equitable access to vaccines, tests and treatments and PPE everywhere.

The third lesson is that a resilient health system is not the same thing as an advanced medical care system.

Even some countries with the most sophisticated medical care were overwhelmed by COVID-19.

By contrast, some middle-income countries with fewer resources fared much better, thanks to investments in public health after outbreaks of SARS, MERS, H1N1 and others, especially in the Mekong region.

For instance, the simple art of contact tracing is one that many high-income countries have struggled with, but it's one that many low- and middle-income countries have done well, because of their experience with infectious disease outbreaks, and their investments in public health.

The backbone of public health is robust primary health care, for detecting outbreaks at the earliest possible stage, as well as for preventing disease and promoting health at the community level.

The fourth lesson is that the world needs a new agreement that sets the rules of the game for responding to epidemics and pandemics.

Instead of a coherent and cohesive global response, the pandemic has been marked by a chaotic patchwork of responses, which in some cases have punished countries for doing the right thing, as in the case of the travel bans imposed on South Africa and Botswana when they first reported the emergence of the Omicron variant.

And the fifth lesson is that trust is everything.

A study published in The Lancet earlier this month examined the reasons why some countries have had higher rates of infection and death than others from COVID-19.

The age profile of the country, GDP per capita, and mean body mass index were all found to play a part.

But the researchers found that perhaps the single most important factor in countries' preparedness and ability to respond effectively is trust.

The study concluded that stronger risk communication and community engagement are essential for making the world safer against future epidemics and pandemics.

Vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics and other tools are essential, but the most effective tool is engaged and empowered communities.

Science; equity; public health; cooperation; and trust.

So what is being done to apply these lessons?

In fact, quite a lot.

There is a strong consensus that the world needs an enhanced global architecture for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The recommendations of the various panels fall into four areas, or pillars:

First, we need stronger governance.

Instead of the confusion and incoherence that has fueled this pandemic, we need cooperation and collaboration in the face of common threats.

At a Special Session of the World Health Assembly last year, WHO's 194 Member States decided to negotiate a new international instrument, to provide the rules of the game for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Just as countries have united in the past to adopt treaties against tobacco, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, climate change and more;

So now, the nations of the world have made a strong statement that health security is too important to be left to chance, or goodwill, or shifting geopolitical currents, or vested interests.

Over the past two days, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body for this new instrument, or treaty, held its first meeting, here at WHO headquarters in Geneva.

A new international accord will not solve every problem on its own, but it will provide an essential overarching framework – the rules of the game – for a more coordinated and harmonized response to future epidemics and pandemics. Above all, obligations from countries.

Second, we need stronger financing.

It's obvious that nationally and globally, we need substantial resources for strengthening global health security. Our analysis estimates the needs at US\$31 billion per year.

To close the gap for the most essential functions – such as surveillance, research and market-shaping for countermeasures – we support the idea of a new dedicated financing facility, anchored in, and directed by, WHO's constitutional mandate, inclusive governance and technical expertise.

Third, we need stronger systems and tools to prevent, detect, and respond rapidly to epidemics and pandemics.

Already, WHO has taken steps to build some of these systems and tools.

To strengthen surveillance, we have established the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence in Berlin, to harness the power of collaborative and artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies;

To facilitate greater sharing of pathogens and clinical samples, we're piloting the WHO BioHub System, based at a secure facility in Switzerland;

To improve mutual accountability, solidarity and cooperation between countries, we're piloting the Universal Health and Preparedness Review, a new peer-review mechanism for enhancing national preparedness, based on gaps identified to improve and strengthen national capacity;

And to strengthen capacities for local production of vaccines and other health products in low- and middle-income countries, we have established the WHO Technology Transfer Hub in South Africa, which has already developed its own mRNA COVID-19 vaccine candidate.

The choice of South Africa is because the greatest gap is in Africa. Of course, the hub will serve Africa and the rest of the world.

And fourth, we need to understand how this pandemic started.

We owe it to those who have died and their families to do our best to identify where this coronavirus came from.

It's important to understand that WHO does not have a mandate to investigate outbreaks on its own. Our role is to conduct joint studies with affected countries, at their invitation. Especially with the negotiations of the Member States, I hope this will improve and we will have a mandate to investigate.

That is what we did in China last year – joint studies.

Every hypothesis remains on the table, and we are continuing to make progress, but we have also experienced setbacks in sharing of data – especially lab records.

Just last month I met with Premier Li in Beijing during my visit to China for the opening of the Winter Olympic Games. We discussed the need to advance studies into the origins of the virus, including those relating to a potential lab accident.

To establish a more systematic way of identifying the origins of future outbreaks, we have established the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens, or SAGO.

There is much more that could be said about each of these areas, and I look forward to our discussion over the next 45 minutes.

Above all, the COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that health is not simply a luxury for the rich, it's a fundamental human right. But it's also a right that not everyone enjoys equally.

Last week, the world lost one of its foremost public health professionals, my good friend Paul Farmer.

Paul was one of Harvard's most distinguished alumni, holding an MD and a PhD, and was the Kolokotronis University Professor and Chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

Paul passed in his sleep in Rwanda, where he was doing what he loved to do, supporting medical education at a district hospital.

He was a great humanitarian, and a tireless champion of equity and health as a human right.

Paul once asked, "If access to health care is considered a human right, who is considered human enough to have that right?"

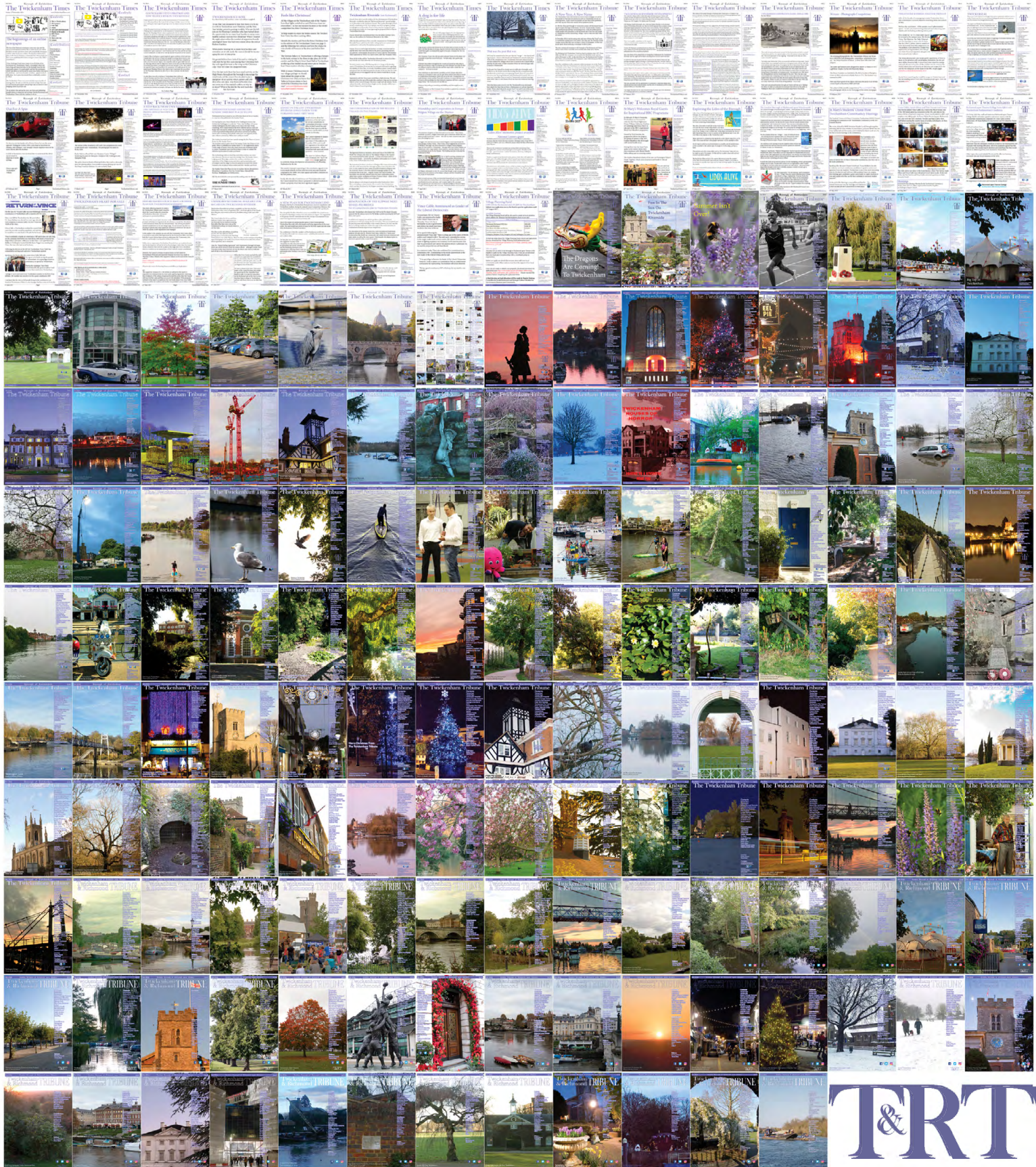
It's that right that I and the thousands of people I am honored to call my colleagues work for, every day.

Not health for some; not health for most; health for all.

Michelle, thank you and back to you.



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Published by:

Twickenham & Richmond Tribune (in association with World InfoZone Limited)

Registered in England & Wales

Reg No 10549345

The Twickenham Tribune is registered with the ICO under the Data Protection Act, Reg No ZA224725

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