

Twickenham & Richmond TRIBUNE



Contents

- TickerTape
- Local Postcard Page: Prince Blucher Pub - Twickenham
- COVID-19
- Next week at Richmond Council
- Hampton Court Palace Gardens
- St Richard Reynold Catholic High School celebrates its Ofsted Inspection
- Twickenham Motorcars: A local history of motor manufacturing
- Another Kew success story
- Restored Roehampton Café
- Hammersmith Bridge
- Twickers Foodie
- Traveller's Tales
- It's true Spring is finally here!!
- The wrong bus stop?
- Early signs of spring
- Sport

Contributors

- Alan Winter
- James Knight
- Jonathan Hulley
- Ron Mushiso
- Richmond in Europe Association
- Robin Hunter
- Robin Jowit
- Alison Jee
- Doug Goodman
- Bruce & Shona Lyons
- Mark Aspen
- Deep Patel
- Woodland Trust
- St Mary's University
- The Royal Parks
- RFU
- Brentford FC
- LBRuT

Editors

Berkley Driscoll
Teresa Read



Church of St James, Strawberry Hill

Commemorating the Portuguese dead of The Great War and King Manuel II

Photo by Berkley Driscoll

22nd March 2024

T&RT

TickerTape - News in Brief

South Western Railway

Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 March

Altered train services and buses replace trains in the Staines area

The lines in the **Staines** area will be **closed all weekend** due to maintenance work.

On **Saturday**, due to the diverted services. Some services via **Wimbledon** will also be affected.

Saturday

- **London Waterloo to Reading** services will be **revised** to depart **London Waterloo** earlier. These services will be diverted between **Clapham Junction** and **Virginia Water** and will call additionally at **Surbiton, Weybridge, Addlestone and Chertsey**.
- **London Waterloo to Weybridge via Staines** services will terminate at **Hounslow**.
- **Buses** will run between **Hounslow and Virginia Water via Staines**.
- **London Waterloo to Windsor** services will be diverted after **Twickenham** and will terminate at **Hounslow**.
- Additional services will run between **London Waterloo and Hounslow via Richmond**.
- **Buses** will run between **Hounslow and Windsor via Staines**.
- **London Waterloo to Basingstoke** stopping services and **London Waterloo to Alton** services will be **revised** and will run combined to **Woking** where the train will divide.

Sunday

- A **revised** service will run between **London Waterloo and Hounslow via Richmond** and **via Brentford**.
- **Buses** will run between **Hounslow and Ascot via Staines**.
- A **revised** service will run between **Ascot and Reading**.
- **Buses** will run between **Hounslow and Windsor via Staines**.
- **Buses** will run between **Hounslow and Woking via Staines**.
- The afternoon and evening **London Waterloo to Kingston via Hounslow** services will run **all day** and will terminate at **Hounslow**.



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darryl parkin

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Local Picture Postcard Column - Part 241

By Alan Winter

Prince Blucher Pub - Twickenham

With all the Rugby going on recently, I thought we could have a look at one of Twickenham's famous Rugby pubs – The Prince Blucher at 124, The Green opposite Twickenham Green. It has been there for over 200 years having opened in 1815. When I call it a famous Rugby pub, I mean it is used as a meeting point for 100's of fans from all over the country and the world visiting Twickenham Rugby Stadium for Internationals, Cup Final's and other games as well as a more regular and local clientele who assemble at the Blucher before and after the Harlequins home games. It claims to be the nearest pub to the Stoop which is the home of Harlequins RFC.



I have only ever acquired the one postcard of the Blucher and that is this week's first image. This one was posted in 1905. I have added a more up to date photograph which was taken about 3 years ago as well as an example of a 1960's branded book of matches which most pubs sold in those days.



The pub is the only one in the country named after Prince Blucher. Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, 21 December (1742 – 12 September 1819), was a Prussian Count later elevated to be a Sovereign Prince. He was also a Field Marshall in the army. He earned his greatest recognition after leading his army against Napoleon I at the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig in 1813 and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. At this point

a new inn opened in Twickenham naming itself after him.

The pub is owned and operated by Fullers with London Pride on sale all year round. Fuller's seasonal beers are a feature along with guest beers that include the Twickenham Brewery's award winning Naked Ladies.

If you have any old postcards sitting in a box or album at home that you are considering parting with, I'd be very interested in arranging to see them. Please contact me on 07875 578398 or by email at alanwinter192@hotmail.com I am happy to pay cash for any postcards or photographs that I find of interest. So don't throw old postcards etc. in the skip or recycling bins. Show them to me first!



World Health Organization

COVID-19 epidemiological update – 15 March 2024

Teresa Read

As many countries discontinue COVID-19-specific reporting and integrate it into respiratory disease surveillance, WHO will use all available sources to continue monitoring the COVID-19 epidemiological situation, especially data on illness and impact on health systems. **COVID-19 remains a major threat**, and WHO urges Member States to maintain, not dismantle, their established COVID-19 infrastructure. It is crucial to sustain early warning, surveillance and reporting, variant tracking, early clinical care provision, administration of vaccine to high-risk groups, improvements in ventilation, and regular communication.

At the regional level the number of newly reported 28-day cases decreased across all WHO regions: the African Region (-87%), the Western Pacific Region (-59%), the South-East Asia Region (-51%), the Eastern Mediterranean Region (-48%), the European Region (-36%) and the Region of the Americas (-33%).

The number of newly reported 28-day deaths also decreased across the six regions: the European Region (-69%), the Eastern Mediterranean Region (-67%), the South-East Asia Region (-60%), the Western Pacific Region (-54%), the Region of the Americas (-45%) and the African Region (-33%).

At the country level, the highest numbers of new 28-day cases were reported from the Russian Federation (108,115), Australia (29,564), Chile (25,908), New Zealand (19,632) and Argentina (15,400). The highest numbers of new 28-day deaths were reported from United States of America (4,756), the Russian Federation (241), Australia (156), Italy (154) and Chile (128).

WHO is currently tracking several SARS-CoV-2 variants, including five variants of interest: XBB.1.5, XBB.1.16, EG.5, BA.2.86 and JN.1 Three variants are under monitoring: XBB, XBB.1.9.1 and XBB.2.3

The European Region reported over 159,000 new cases, a 36% decrease as compared to the previous 28-day period. Of the 62 countries for which data are available the highest proportional increase was observed in Azerbaijan.

The highest numbers of new cases were reported from the Russian Federation (108,115), the United Kingdom (10,175) and Greece (9,141). The number of new 28-day deaths in the Region decreased by 69% as compared to the previous 28-day period, with 831 new deaths reported. The highest numbers of new deaths were reported from the Russian Federation (241).



JOIN THE MAYOR OF RICHMOND,
CLLR SUZETTE NICHOLSON FOR
THE MAYOR'S CHARITY EVENING

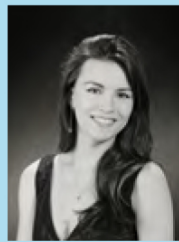
Light
Refreshments

Togetherness Concert



The Power of Music Bringing People Together
Hosted by The Mayor, Cllr Suzette Nicholson
and Richmond in Europe Association

Featuring:



Clara Orif
(singer)



Regina Gossel
(singer)



Milette Gillow
(singer)



Jack Redman
(piano)

5.30pm
Sunday 7th April 2024
Tickets £15 per adult
Under 18s Free

St Mary's Church
Church Street
Twickenham
TW1 3NJ

Light Refreshments
sold in the interval

THE MAYOR'S CHARITY THIS YEAR IS: SEEN AND AGE UK RICHMOND

Designed and Produced by Richmond and Wandsworth Design & Print. wdp@wandsworth.gov.uk MP159 (2.24). Illustration © iStock - softulka



Advanced booking is essential.

Tickets £15, available now by booking online:
www.richmond.gov.uk/council/councillors/mayor/mayors_charities



Next week at Richmond Council

On Tuesday, the **Adult Social Services, Health and Housing Committee** will meet to discuss the annual update from PA Housing Association. They control 2,162 homes in the borough, of which 282 have ongoing issues with dampness. There are 21 voids also due to delays in refurbishing properties before they can be relet – start time: 7 pm, York House.

How to participate: Members of the public who live or work in the borough can submit questions or speak on an item in the agenda. To ask a question, you need to submit it by 12 noon two working days in advance. To speak, you must register by noon the day before the meeting.

For full details, please follow the link [HERE](#)

Age UK Richmond looking for new Chair of Trustees

Age UK Richmond currently have an excellent opportunity for a new Chair of Trustees to join the charity.

They are looking for a dynamic Chair who is committed to improving the lives of vulnerable and isolated older people across Richmond upon Thames.

The Chair of Trustees leads the board, ensuring that it governs Age UK Richmond effectively, in service of the charity's vision and mission.

The Chair leads in an inclusive way, supporting the board to work together well, and providing support and challenge to the Chief Executive.

The Chair is also an ambassador for the charity.

Find out more information about [how to apply and read the recruitment pack](#).

Closing date for applications is Monday 22 April 2024.

If you are interested in applying, the Chair and CEO would welcome a conversation with you beforehand to answer any questions.

Please contact the CEO, Gavin Shand, at gavin.shand@ageukrichmond.org.uk.



Join my campaign to reinstate free access to Hampton Court Palace Gardens

By Jonathan Hulley, Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Twickenham

In 1828, Queen Victoria gave the magnificent gardens at Hampton Court to the nations so that everyone could enjoy them free of charge. This made Hampton Court one of the most popular visitor destinations in the Victorian era and is still one of the most popular today.

When the late Toby Jessel was the Conservative MP for Twickenham, he successfully campaigned to keep Hampton Court Palace Gardens free for everyone to visit and enjoy—fending off numerous attempts by Palace authorities to introduce charges.

Unfortunately, **in 2013, the Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) started to charge for entry into the formal gardens during the summer only.** Since then, the remaining free access arrangements have been gradually whittled down, and charges have increased. This culminated in the remaining garden-only access being withdrawn completely during the pandemic.

Thousands of residents who used to enjoy the walks in the garden and visit the Tiltyard Café are now regularly excluded unless they purchase a full palace ticket, which can cost up to £30 in the summer, or take out membership at £65. The changes also mean the famous Lion Gate is locked shut, severing the historic link between the Palace and Bushy Park.

HPR agreed to a limited number of garden open days and a review when visitor numbers increased due to complaints made at the time. The pandemic is now behind us, and HRP is in surplus again, **so access arrangements should now be reviewed.** Indeed, there are strong grounds that free access needs to be improved upon what was in place before the pandemic.

With my solicitor's hat on, the previous legal advice given by the Attorney General to the Government was partially disclosed during a parliamentary debate in 2003 and is extremely useful. It stated that charges could only be made for visiting the formal gardens, admission had to be set at a reasonable level that does not deny people access due to cost, and the revenue was only used to maintain the gardens. These points indicate they believed the site needed to be managed as a public open space. Therefore, there are strong grounds to challenge the current arrangements as these three tests are not being met.

I am seeking a meeting with the Palace authorities to discuss how they can restore access so that Queen Victoria's legacy is respected. In the meantime, please do write to me at Jonathan.hulley@outlook.com with your views.



Richmond in Europe Association Concert

Sunday 7th April 2024

The Richmond in Europe Association is organising a concert of songs and arias reflecting the power of music to bring us together both as individuals and as communities. Recognising the Association's role in supporting and developing relationships with our twinned towns of Fontainebleau in France and Konstanz in Germany, the songs will be sung in their original languages of English, French and German. The musicians are graduates of the Royal Academy of Music in London and The Zwickau Gewandhaus in Germany.

The concert is being supported by The Mayor for the benefit of her designated charities, SEEN and Age UK. It will be held at St Mary's Church, Church Street, Twickenham from 5.30pm to 7pm, doors will open at 5pm.

Ticket prices are £15 for adults and under 18s are free and can be bought via the Council's website:



<https://www2.richmond.gov.uk/richmondbookings/Details.aspx?id=370>

St Richard Reynold Catholic High School celebrates its Ofsted inspection

By James Knight

In March, St Richard Reynold Catholic High School in Twickenham received a routine 'ungraded' inspection visit from Ofsted. The Inspection report published last week stated that the school continues to be '**Outstanding**'.

In 2012 Richmond Inclusive School Campaign opposed the school, which wanted the site to house the school that eventually became Turing House School in Whitton. They joined forces with the British Humanist Association to mount a judicial review in the high court to try to block the council's decision to use the site for a Catholic secondary school. Despite this opposition, the school has quickly built up an excellent reputation locally.

Ofsted wrote: **This is an exceptional school** where pupils flourish. The school has the highest expectations for what pupils can achieve. Pupils in the school, including in the popular sixth form, rise to these expectations at every opportunity.

Pupils take great pride in their school, and their behaviour is impeccable. They work hard in lessons and thrive when challenged.

Pupils achieve very well in public examinations. They are also supported to develop more widely. They feel happy and safe. The ethos of the school ensures that pupils are taught to be responsible and caring citizens and to 'become the person that God created us to be.' The 'college parliament' represents all year groups. Pupils say they are listened to. For example, after pupils were asked for their views about the school's personal development programme, leaders made appropriate changes.

To read the full report, please click [HERE](#)

Richmond slams Hillingdon for sewage dumping plans

Richmond Council has condemned proposals for treated effluent to be dumped in the River Crane, risking the water quality of the river and the Local Nature Reserve which is home to endangered water voles and critically endangered European eels. Hillingdon Council has applied to the Environment Agency for a licence to discharge treated sewage into the Crane from a cafe at Cranford Park. Richmond Council has submitted an objection to the application setting out the devastating impact it could have on the local environment, wildlife and on the community-led river restoration work which has been running for over 10 years.

Councillor Gareth Roberts, Leader of Richmond Council, has said: *“This proposal from our west London neighbour will cause unthinkable damage to the River Crane Corridor, which is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and home to a nature reserve at Crane Park Island. Richmond Council has deep concerns about the impact this could have on the river and the species that call it home. It is one of the few catchments in the country with no licenced sewage discharges, which is reflected in the environmental quality of the water, although it has taken considerable time and effort to get the condition to its current standard following a discharge incident nearly 13 years ago. Approval of Hillingdon’s proposal would see systematic degradation of the river for years to come.”*



The Lower River Crane, which starts in Twickenham where the river splits into two channels and flows into the Thames, is made up of a variety of habitats including river and marginal wetland, open grassland and heath, woodland and scrub. These support a range of species including seven species of bat, water voles, kingfishers, European eels, tawny owls and many more key native plants and animals. European eels are listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and are a species of principle importance for the purpose of conserving of biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

Richmond Council is collaborating with the Environment Agency, Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE), ZSL and other partners to deliver a long-term river restoration and enhancement scheme on the Lower Crane which will remove barriers to fish migration and create suitable breeding habitats further up in the catchment.

Councillor Roberts added: *“Richmond Council, along with its Richmond Biodiversity partners, fights hard to protect the natural habitats and species we are privileged to live alongside in Richmond upon Thames. We are home to the largest number of green and blue open spaces in any London borough and we take guardianship of these seriously. The restoration and enhancement work on the River Crane has required an extraordinary input of public, private and voluntary resources over many years and we will not see this part of the river threatened by the dumping of sewage upstream.”*

Find out more about the [Lower River Crane Restoration](#).

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Twickenham Motorcars: A local history of motor manufacturing

By Robin Hunter

This new book tells the remarkable story of the rise and fall of Twickenham's motor industry... virtually forgotten until now.

Not only cars, but motorcycles, motor scooters, buses and coaches, trucks and racing cars were all built in Twickenham, Teddington and Hampton.

The author's own family involvement and the role of local family businesses like Tamplin's, Spikins, Blay's, Kingsbury's and others are also covered in the book.

Even more incredible, the evidence uncovered that the River Thames and Eel Pie Island in Twickenham can lay claim to be the true birthplace of the British Motor industry... before cars were freely allowed to use Britain's roads.

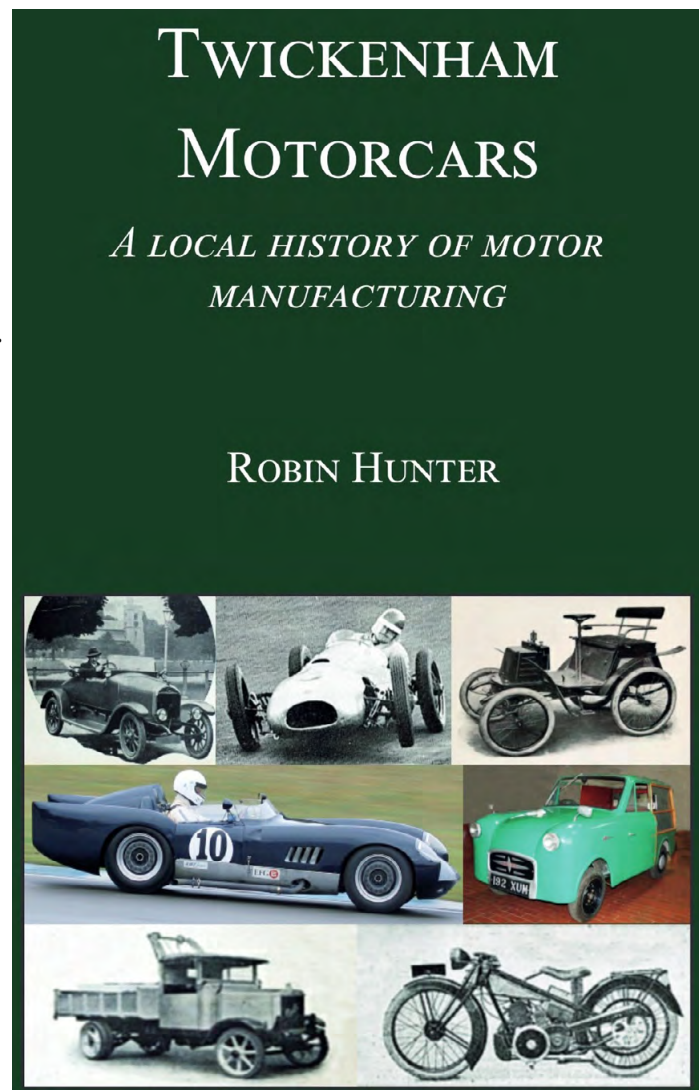
The book starts with the pioneering use of the petrol engines to power launches on Eel Pie Island in Twickenham, amongst the earliest and most influential in the British motor industry. As a result, some of the first motor engineers in this country learnt their trade on this little island in the Thames. They went on to work in one of a number of motor manufacturers in Twickenham.

During the early part of the twentieth century, the borough of Twickenham became a centre for engineering firms producing a range of motor vehicles. Twickenham's motor manufacturing industry thrived for twenty-five years. But by the mid 1920's, it could no longer compete with mass production methods being used by larger competitors elsewhere. Motor manufacturing all but disappeared. Motor engineering did however continue in workshops across the town, producing motor components and coachwork.

There was an important renaissance in specialist motor engineering in Twickenham in the 1950s, 60s and beyond. A number of very successful racing car manufacturers established in Twickenham. Despite this, the industry is now all but forgotten, as much locally as anywhere.

Robin Hunter hopes to put Twickenham back on the motoring road map.

The price of the book is £10.50 and can be bought at Eel Pie Island Museum in Richmond Road, Twickenham or from the Borough of Twickenham Local History Society website in the Publications section at £13 including postage.



ANOTHER *KEW* SUCCESS STORY

From Robin Jowit

Robin Jowit, a member of Kew Gardens Rotary, visited 7 schools in Ukraine in January 2023 to witness the impact of the war on the education of the children. On their first fundraising project they exceeded their £50,000 target and some of the schools are being supplied with large electricity storage batteries, over 100 laptops for home schooling during missile alerts and other essential educational items including CPR dummies.

Not satisfied with their first success, they have embarked on a second project to convert one of the schools, badly affected by the Russians, into a STEM school to achieve outstanding results in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. We believe the graduates will become the future engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs of Ukraine, helping to rebuild their country.



Kindergarten blown up

Visit and view the video at <http://www.helpschoolsinukraine.com> to find out more.

YES - **SUCCESS** IN THESE DAYS OF DOOM & GLOOM - they are halfway towards their next £50,000 target to fully equip this first school.

This is an inspirational Kew Gardens Rotary project, led by Robin Jowit, an ex mayor of Richmond, aged 86 and still helping the underprivileged. He plans to return to Ukraine in the Autumn to see the smiles on the faces of the pupils and teachers using the new equipment.



Cold classroom - no heating

The Royal Parks unveils proposals for a restored Roehampton Café and invites local communities to take a look

This spring, local communities and park visitors will get the chance to find out about the plans for a new café and enhanced landscape at Roehampton Gate in Richmond Park.

The Royal Parks charity, which manages Richmond Park, is proposing a project to replace the popular café, as well as improve the landscape it sits in to help increase biodiversity in that part of the park. The charity is holding three public engagement days and is encouraging local residents and park visitors to come along, have a look at the plans, ask questions and give feedback. The dates for the engagement days are:

- 1-4pm, **Thursday 4 April**, Roehampton Café
- 10am-1pm, **Saturday 6 April**, Roehampton Café
- 11am-2pm, **Friday 12 April**, Pen Ponds

The current facilities at Roehampton Gate are temporary structures put in place almost 20 years ago after a fire destroyed the original buildings. These facilities do not offer the capacity or modern amenities required to serve park visitors.

The space will be transformed into an environmentally excellent café which is in keeping with the landscape it sits in and is able to cope with increased visitor numbers. It will be a more family-friendly part of the park, offering a wide range of fresh produce to meet visitor demand and expectation. The park landscape around the café will be improved and enhanced, with a view to increasing biodiversity.



A new car park entrance and cycling infrastructure will also be created.

The ‘Roehampton Restored’ project will regenerate this part of the park by replacing the current café with a new BREEAM “Excellent” certified café. BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) is a long-standing method of assessing, rating, and certifying the sustainability performance of buildings.

Paul Richards, Richmond Park Manager, The Royal Parks, said: “We’re really excited about our proposals for the upcoming project at Roehampton Gate, which we know people have been looking forward to for a while. We’re looking forward to welcoming as many people as possible to find out more about the proposals.

“The engagement days will be a great opportunity for local communities and park visitors directly with members of the project team, including our Richmond Park team and The Roehampton landscape team.”



Sign my Petition to end stalemate so we can reopen Hammersmith Bridge

By Ron Mushiso, Conservative GLA Candidate for South West London

Next month marks a significant anniversary for residents impacted by the closure of Hammersmith Bridge: It will be five years since the problems began. Since then, we have had partial reopening to pedestrians and cyclists. The recently reopening to cyclists on the 13th February was a moment of celebration for many including pedestrians. I am impressed with the smooth new surface of the cycle path.



This temporary measure is essential for school children, cyclists and commuters on foot, but we want a permanent solution. This artery was shut down in 2019 when engineers uncovered alarming cracks in the roller bearings at the bridge's suspension chain supports. These bearings, vital for the bridge's structural integrity, had seized up over time, leading to undue stress on the cast iron pedestals, which were not designed to bear such loads.

Despite the urgency of the situation, efforts between Transport for London (TfL) and the Labour-run Hammersmith and Fulham Council to reopen the bridge have been frustratingly slow. While interim solutions have allowed pedestrians and cyclists to traverse the bridge, thanks in part to substantial financial support from the central government, a long-term solution has remained elusive. The need for a comprehensive resolution that facilitates the full reopening of the bridge for all types of traffic, especially emergency services and buses, has become increasingly apparent.



Our response is a new initiative has been launched by local MP and Minister for London, Greg Hands, alongside colleagues and Conservative Parliamentary candidates Sara Gezdari, Cllr Andrew Dinsmore, Lee Roberts, and the London Assembly member for West Central, Tony Devenish AM. This initiative proposes a significant change in the management and ownership of Hammersmith Bridge. The group is advocating for the bridge's ownership to be transferred from the Hammersmith and Fulham Council to Transport for London (TfL). This move is seen as a crucial step towards breaking the current deadlock and ensuring the bridge's swift reopening.

The council's reluctance and prolonged delays in reopening the bridge, despite receiving considerable funding from the government, have been a source of frustration for many. The initiative led by Greg Hands aims to cut through the bureaucratic red tape and political

grandstanding that has hindered progress. By transferring ownership to TfL and involving the Mayor of London directly, the initiative seeks to leverage the resources needed to work to the repair processes to begin.

The closure of Hammersmith Bridge has not just been an inconvenience; it has disrupted the lives of thousands. And yes, there are some who are happy with things as they are. It has meant that traffic around the Bridge has now moved on to other areas including Putney Bridge and Chiswick Bridge. However, that has meant that a five mile stretch of the Thames has remained uncrossable by vehicles for five years. That is untenable given the need of emergency vehicles and public transport pressures in London.

I have always called for a pragmatic and decisive approach to resolve the situation. This initiative represents a call to action for all stakeholders to prioritise the bridge's reopening, restoration, and preservation. The goal is clear: to reintegrate Hammersmith Bridge into London's transport network as a fully operational route for all, with focus to allow access for buses and emergency services.

[Please sign our petition](#) and as the initiative gains momentum, it will embody the collective will of local residents in Chiswick, Barnes, Richmond and the rest of South West London to resolve this matter. The message is clear: it's time for decisive leadership and action from us, TfL and the next Mayor of London. Only through bold steps and a unified effort can the Hammersmith Bridge be restored to its rightful place as a vital link across the Thames, benefiting all Londoners and preserving its historical significance for future generations.

Record number of stall applications for the 2024 Richmond May Fair

With more than 200 stallholders already signed up, the 2024 Richmond May Fair promises to be bigger and better than ever.

The fair takes place on Saturday 11 May from 10am to 5pm on Richmond Green. It will be opened by the Mayor of Richmond.

Following a three-year absence, 2023 saw the successful return of the fair with thousands attending on the day. Attracting visitors from across Richmond and beyond, it is a much-loved fixture in the borough calendar and the town's biggest community event.

Old favourites like the vintage funfair and dog show will return, along with a host of stalls, the craft marquee and a variety of food and drink. Local bands, schools and various performance groups will provide free entertainment throughout the day on the Riverside Radio stage.

With charities, artisans, businesses and schools all represented, the fair is a showcase for all that Richmond has to offer. It plays an important role in helping local charities promote their work and raise much-needed funds.

For the first time, stallholders are able to apply, book and pay for their stall online via the [new fair website](#).

Applications are significantly up on last year, a testament to the success and popularity of the Fair. The closing date for applications is the end of March.



Council slammed for prioritising flowerpots over road safety

Submitted by your Heathfield Conservatives team

Heathfield Conservatives have slammed the Liberal Democrats for prioritising flowerpots over road safety **after reports of a pedestrian being hit by a car** and other near misses outside the new Tesco Express on Hanworth Road in Whitton earlier this week.

The Liberal Democrat councillors must be held to account for the council's failure to upgrade the Powder Mill Lane / Hanworth Road junction ahead of the new supermarket's opening. Planning permission was granted in May 2022, so they have no excuse for the lack of action.

The council is spending £446,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy fund to improve these two parades. This money is supposed to fund the infrastructure needed to support new development or deal with current deficiencies.

The current scheme is **NOT value for money**, as a similar scheme could be undertaken more cost-effectively. Nor does it tackle residents' key concerns: speeding vehicles, obstructive parking, and lack of safe crossing facilities.

The Liberals refused to consult residents at the formative stage, shutting them out from having a real say in the scheme. This is another example of them not following the **Gunning Principles** where councils are required to:

- Consult at a formative stage
- Provide enough information for intelligent consideration
- Give adequate time for consideration and response
- Conscientious consideration must be given to consultation responses before a decision is made

Residents have told us on the doorstep that road safety needs to be the priority, and we agree. Bollards need to be installed on Hanworth Road to prevent obstructive parking and new crossing facilities are required.



Easter Bank Holiday Food And Drink Suggestions

Easter's early this year and let's hope that the weather decides to warm up again, so that we can really enjoy the first bank holiday weekend of the year. Here are a few suggestions here for you to consider for the weekend, whether you're entertaining friends and family, or just relaxing.

Much as I love hot cross buns (sadly Waitrose seems to have delisted its wonderful wholemeal ones, much to our annoyance), I was introduced recently to an alternative: **Honey Bun Jamaican Easter Bun**, a sweet spiced bread dotted with rum-soaked fruit, coated in a honey-fruit glaze, that's eaten across the Caribbean at Easter. It's really delicious and can be eaten as is, buttered, and also toasted. It's wonderful with cheese. It's a sort of hot cross bun flavour, but with additional layers of tropical fruitiness. available from Tesco at £4.99 for a generous 795g loaf.



Nocellara Olives are a naturally vibrant green Sicilian olive with a deliciously nutty, buttery taste, and **Cypressa** has recently added them to its range. They are perfect to enjoy fresh from the jar, as a snack, or an accompaniment to drinks. They also add vibrant flavour and texture to salads, stews, pasta and pizzas. They're available in Tesco at £2.30 for a 290g jar and a great storecupboard standby, especially if unexpected guests turn up over the weekend.

To go with olives, I do love a good cocktail, and there are some really excellent ready mixed ones available. **World of Zing** is a top-notch cocktail company from Channel 4 Sunday Brunch cocktail expert **Pritesh Mody**, and his latest range is presented in eye-catching recyclable paper bottles that are lighter, safer, and better for the environment than glass. It includes classic favourites, like Passionfruit Martini, and iconic cocktails with a twist: Kaffir Lime Picante Margarita and Rhubarb Cosmopolitan. These offer the perfect opportunity to allow you to relax, while enjoying a professional-tasting mixology experience in the comfort of your home. Simply pour over ice, savour, and then dispose of the bottle in regular household recycling. The full cocktail range is available to purchase from WorldofZing.com, RRP from £20.



Here's a nice change from - or addition to - a chocolate egg. **MandS** has delighted **Percy Pig** fans by launching a special Easter version: **The Percy Pig Great Egg-scape Sweets**. They feature cute new characters with delicious new flavour combos: red grape & apple, red grape & orange, and cola & cherry. There's also cash to be won if you are one of the lucky ones to find a rare green chick in a pack. (up to £5,000) And at only £1 a pack, it's worth buying a few!

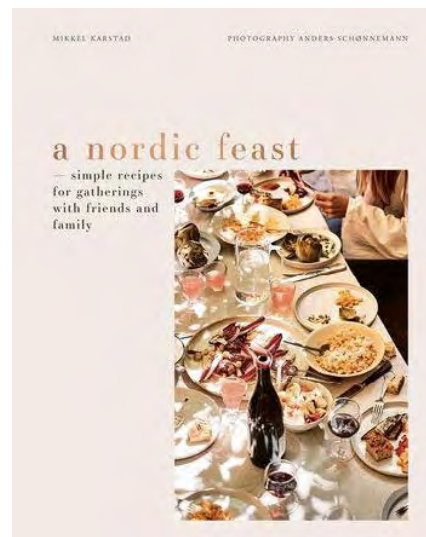
Another great standby that will be a perfect addition to an Easter weekend lunch (or even a picnic, weather permitting) and give a hint of warmer days ahead, is a new collection of charcuterie from **unearthed**®. It includes *Oven Roasted Ham*, *French Torchon Ham* and a lovely *French Charcuterie selection*. Available from Sainsbury's and Waitrose. You can also feel good about buying it, as with the entire range, 1p per pack sold will be donated to Action Against Hunger. Since 2010, **unearthed**®, which is part of The Compleat Food Group, has donated £1m, from the sales of products, to international hunger charity Action Against Hunger UK, helping to save 23,000 lives globally from life-threatening hunger.



A Nordic Feast

I love Scandinavian food. I've visited Helsinki with a top British chef, and was in food heaven exploring the market and enjoying a crayfish supper. And I'm lucky enough to have a good friend who is not only Swedish, a consummate foodie, and an excellent cook to boot! So when I found out about this freshly published book by Mikkel Karstad - *a nordic feast* - I was very keen to get my hands on a copy. This book follows *Nordic Family Kitchen*, where Karstad applied his culinary skills to easy family meals. In this latest book, he offers the same, impeccable flavours, practised techniques and laid-back style in a guide to effortless entertaining.

Divided into six occasion-based menus, the book sets the stage for a summer barbecue, a formal Christmas dinner, a relaxed family lunch, a children's birthday picnic, weeknight suppers for friends, and Sunday brunch. Each setting is captured in elegant photographs reflecting a sense of togetherness, friendship, and joyful community. Karstad's menus are packed with mouth-watering, vegetable-forward recipes using fresh, seasonal ingredients. Recipes include: grilled zucchini halves with ricotta and tarragon; lettuce wraps with squid, papaya, lime, and chilli; vegetable chickpea tagine with coconut milk and mint; buttermilk focaccia with wild herbs and mozzarella; rice pudding with cherry sauce; apricot cake with mascarpone; raspberry lemonade; and a blackberry juice gin and tonic.



In a time when gathering with loved ones is more important than ever, this book helps you create valuable memories with minimum fuss and maximum pleasure. It's published next week by **Prestel** at £30 for a lovely hardback book. Here are a couple of recipes to encourage you to explore Scandi food and perhaps buy your own copy.

Tomato Tart with Cream Cheese, Salted Onions, and Herbs SERVES 8 – 10

- 2 onions
- Sea salt
- 9½ oz (270 g) store-bought puff pastry, thawed overnight in the fridge if frozen
- ⅓ cup (100 g) ricotta
- 2½ cups (500 g) mixed cherry tomatoes
- Leaves from 10 sprigs tarragon
- Leaves from 6 sprigs marjoram
- 3½ tbsp (50 mL) olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Peel, halve, and thinly slice the onions, then place them in a large bowl and sprinkle with a pinch of salt. Massage the salt vigorously into the onion slices until they are soft and exuding some liquid.
3. Spread the puff pastry on a work surface. Put an 11-inch (28cm) round plate on top as a template, and cut around the edges of the plate with a sharp knife. Transfer the circle



- of pastry to the prepared baking sheet. Keep the rest of the pastry in the fridge for another recipe (it will keep for up to 2 days in a sealed container).
4. Spread the ricotta evenly over the pastry, leaving a gap of about ½ inch (1 cm) around the edge. Spread the onions on top of the ricotta.
 5. Cut the tomatoes into halves, quarters, or small chunks, depending on their size. Set some of the whole tarragon and marjoram leaves aside for a garnish. Roughly chop the remaining leaves and mix in a bowl with the tomatoes, the olive oil, and some salt and pepper.
 6. Spread the tomato mixture over the pastry. Bake the tart for 18–20 minutes, until the puff pastry is crisp and golden and the tomatoes are soft.
 7. Remove the tart from the oven, sprinkle with the reserved whole herb leaves (including some marjoram flowers if you have any), and serve immediately, while it is still hot and crisp.

PREP TIP

The tart can also be baked the previous day, then reheated briefly before serving.

Trifle with Plums, Amaretti, and Whipped Cream SERVES 4

- 12 fully ripe plums
- 2 tbsp runny honey
- 1 organic lemon
- 1 tbsp dried rose petals
- ¾ cup (200 mL) heavy whipping cream
- ⅓ cup (100 g) full-fat Greek yogurt
- 1 tsp vanilla sugar
- 12 store-bought amaretti (or 24 amarettini) cookies

1. Preheat the oven to 250°F (120°C).
2. Halve the plums, remove the pits, and place the fruit in a baking dish with the cut sides facing up. Drizzle with honey. Quarter the lemon, then squeeze the juice over the plums. Add the squeezed lemon quarters to the dish. Crumble the rose petals and scatter them over the fruit, then mix everything well.
3. Bake the plums for 15 minutes or until they are soft and have absorbed the honey, lemon, and rose flavours. Remove from the oven and leave to cool completely.
4. Meanwhile, use an electric mixer to whip the heavy cream until it is very thick. In a separate bowl, stir the vanilla sugar into the yogurt until smooth, then fold this mixture into the whipped cream. The result should be a soft and creamy vanillascented topping.
5. Gently crumble the amaretti cookies.
6. To assemble the trifle: Arrange alternate layers of plums, crumbled amaretti, and cream in decorative glasses until all the ingredients have been used.
7. This trifle is an impressive way to round off a wonderful summer barbecue.



PREP TIP

The plums can be baked the day before and kept in the fridge. You can also assemble the trifle a few hours in advance, so you can give your guests your full attention in the evening. Choose a high quality product when buying the amaretti cookies—they're worth it!

Extracts from *A Nordic Feast* by Mikkel Karstad, with photography by Anders Schønnemann
Available from Prestel.com

Twickers Foodie – By Alison Jee

My Barn Conversion

Quite a few years ago, when **Coworth Park** was a newly opened addition to **The Dorchester Collection**, we were lucky enough to stay there for a superbly memorable dinner in the main restaurant, plus B&B, staying in one of the fabulous bedrooms. If anything, the only slightly disappointing element of our stay, I recall, was breakfast, served in what was then a rather soulless attempt at a more rustic building called **The Barn**. That breakfast memory was totally revised/obliterated recently when we returned to **The Barn** to check out its new menu, created by executive chef Adam Smith.



We arrived in the dark, and once parked, strolled over a fairytale bridge to a terrace twinkling with fairy lights to go for dinner. And what a dinner it was: style and relaxation combined with superb food in a magical setting.

The front part of the restaurant is in an adaptable structure that can be opened up in more clement weather for an al fresco atmosphere. Tweed covered seats, draped with cosy blankets, pine tables all add to the informal, yet stylish setting. Being part of the Dorchester Collection, one does, of course, expect a top level of service - and that's certainly delivered, by a friendly, relaxed, yet highly professional front of house team.

I enjoyed a Negroni while my husband chose an alcohol-free beer. To start, I chose Scallop Crudo with lemon and estate elderflower, while he chose Smokin' Brothers Smoked Salmon with fennel and dill crème fraîche. The main part of the menu is divided into various sections: From the Land; From the Water and From the Field. There is also a section with Barn Classics, including the ubiquitous burger.



My starter was not only beautifully presented, but it tasted exquisite - fresh and citrus, but while I really enjoyed it, I did feel that the depth of flavour of the lovely sauce rather overwhelmed the delicate flavour of the scallops. My husband's smoked salmon was a generous tranche and declared excellent. He particularly liked the creme fraiche which had been particularly well seasoned.



Having started with scallops, I stayed with 'the water' and chose grilled Cornish turbot, with warm tartare sauce, as suggested by our server. A Waterford Farm beef fillet tempted my husband and a number of sides were suggested to pair with our mains: Crushed Sweet Potato Mash with Old Winchester and sage; BBQ Broccoli * with pumpkin seed satay; Courgettes * with smoked aubergine, tomato and basil and of course some Triple cooked chips to accompany the steak.



The main courses were both really excellent - top quality and cooked perfectly. My husband said his steak was one of the most tender and flavoursome he'd ever had, and my turbot was sensational. But the surprise stars of the show were the amazing side dishes - I'd happily enjoy just a selection of them on another visit. Everything was meticulously presented (as you can see from our photos) but also perfectly seasoned. I usually ask for some black pepper when eating out (but never salt). This was one occasion when neither was needed. The courgettes were arranged on top of a rich tomato and aubergine base, and the purple sprouting broccoli served with satay sauce was a revelation to me. It had a light smokiness from the barbecue and was scattered with pumpkin seeds to add texture: vegetable perfection. The sweet potato with cheese and sage was also fabulous. If any vegetarians are reading this, I'd urge them to visit.



A glass of Chablis was the ideal pairing with my food and not surprisingly, despite the lightness of my starter, I was feeling pretty replete. I eschewed a dessert, but was interested to see the Baked Cheesecake with Yorkshire Rhubarb that my husband chose...it was indeed a 'proper' cheesecake and again, absolutely beautifully presented.

After a double espresso of my favourite Musetti coffee, we made our way home, already planning another visit for a summer's day, so that we can also enjoy the gorgeous parkland that the hotel is set amid.

The Barn is near Ascot, and only a short drive away. To use the old adage 'you get what you pay for', it isn't cheap, but it is, after all, part of the Dorchester Collection, and very special. You will certainly enjoy exemplary service and top-notch food and drink.

Traveller's Tales 157

So Close And So Much To See

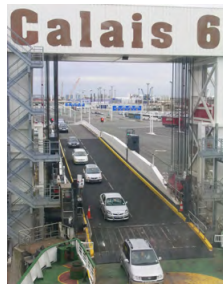
Doug Goodman Discovers Northern France



Until I spoke to Benoit I thought I knew everything about Northern France. But the tourism expert, responsible for promoting the Pas-de-Calais region, the closest part of France to the UK, soon enlightened me as I realised how little of the North I had explored despite over 75 visits in the past decades. The region has been renamed Hauts-de-France and was created by the merger of the Departments of Nord, Pas-de-Calais and Picardy. Like so many motorists arriving in France from The Shuttle or by ferry at Calais or Dunkirk, I have taken the motorway south to head to the Mediterranean coast. This means missing the delights of a region steeped in history and traditions with fine food and superb beer. A 90 minute drive from Twickenham to Dover followed by a 90 minute crossing with DFDS Ferries takes you to the sprawling port at Calais. From here it's a five minute drive into the city centre and the beach or an easy drive on the motorway to historic sites in the nearby towns and cities.



Tourism Expert Benoit



Calais Port



Perfect for sightseeing. The Iconic 2CV



City of Arras

SITES TO SEE

You'll have your own car but if you want to drive a fun vehicle hire a 2CV from Les Belles Echappées near St. Omer. The basic controls of the brightly painted vehicles take a while to master but as you process through the villages the locals will greet you with a wave and a smile. Arras is an imposing city dominated by its belfry and huge market squares. Visit the Place des Heros and Grand Place and admire the Flemish-style Baroque facades. Sit at one of the open air bars with a locally-brewed beer and on a Saturday shop for fresh produce in the large market. Lens, once well-known for its coal mines, has an outpost of the famous Paris Louvre. Opened in 2012 the Louvre-Lens has revitalised the town and holds regular exhibitions as well as having 200 works of art on permanent display from Paris. Combined with the mining museum the gallery offers a stimulating day out. While there try the local beer from the Page 24 brewery.



Louvre-Lens



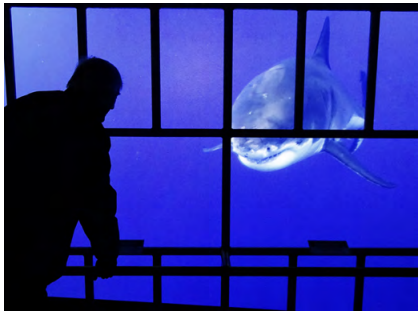
Delicious Beer



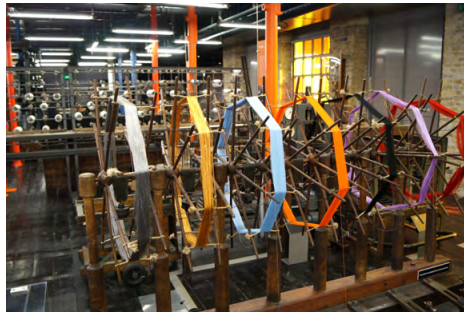
Le Marais

BOATING AND SEA LIFE

An electric boat tour of the marshes near St. Omer is one of the highlights of the region. A UNESCO-designated biosphere, the Audomarois Marshes is the last remaining cultivated wetland in France. This huge area consists of rivers, reedbeds and woods. Several eco-friendly homes exist here and the land produces much-prized cauliflowers. If giant aquariums with sharks nuzzling the glass in front of you and sea creatures swimming in pools are an attraction then Nausicaa in Boulogne is the place to visit. Situated alongside the fishing port Nausicaa is dedicated to environmental education and confronts you with the message that the world is facing disaster.



Nausicaä



Calais Lace Museum



Field of the Cloth of Gold

LIVELY LILLE

The city of Lille deserves a long weekend dedicated to its shops, restaurants and Fine Arts Museum. A quick journey on Eurostar from St. Pancras will provide an action-packed break in this vibrant city. An event which attracts a huge number of visitors is the annual Braderie – Europe’s biggest flea market. It’s on from September 13 to 16. This year sees the 500th anniversary of the ‘Field of the Cloth of Gold’ when Henry V111 tried and almost certainly succeeded in outdoing Francis 1, his rival, in terms of splendour and extravagance. There’s nothing to see on the actual spot where the temporary palaces and pavilions were erected but in the Tour de L’Horloge museum in Guines the whole medieval gathering is shown in great detail. Children adore this museum where they can dress in period costumes.



City of Lille



Hypermarket Bargains



Hop on a Dragon

DON'T IGNORE CALAIS

You’ll most likely arrive and depart from Calais so why not spend a night there. The beaches are clean and wide and the drive south toward Boulogne is spectacular. Wimereux is famous for its fish restaurants. In Calais there are several Hypermarkets where you can stock up with wine and beer, cheese and do your weekly shop while saving money. Visit Calais Vins and Olivier Vins for some big bargains. The Lace Museum is fascinating with its link to Nottingham’s looms. Calais- Caudry’s lace is used by haute-couture houses and royalty. You can see the looms working at Cite de la Dentelle et de la Mode a short distance from the city centre. If you enjoyed a bumpy ride in a 2CV you might want a more sedate ride before leaving Calais. Seated 30 feet above the promenade the Calais Dragon will take you for the ride of a life-time. The 72 tonne creature breathes fire, moves eyelids, flicks its tongue, plods along at two and a half miles per hour and generally frightens everyone except the kids on board. Next time you cross The Channel take time to explore Hauts-de-France and enjoy the sites and sights of the region.

Information: DFDS , Dover to Calais and Dunkirk: www.dfds.com Calais wines: www.wine-calais.co.uk Calais tourism, www.visitpasdecalais.com 2CV car hire: www.les-belles-echappees.com Arras: www.arraspaysdartois.com Louvre-Lens: www.louvre-lens.fr Marshlands: www.lamaisondumarais.com Nausicaä: www.nausicaa.fr Calais Lace Museum: www.cite-dentelle.fr Field of the Cloth of Gold: www.tour-horloge-guines.com Lille: www.en.lilletourism.com Dragon rides: www.compagniedudragon.com

Next time: The vast number of military sites from Agincourt to the WW2 fortifications and museums are explored.

IT'S TRUE SPRING FINALLY HERE!!

By Bruce & Shona Lyons at Crusader Travel, 58 Church Street.

Just off the Church Street Square, at Number 58 Church Street, we are beavering away sourcing inspirational getaways for a legion of regular clients.

Sadly we miss Hedda, though her presence is always there – for so long she was our guiding light inspiring us, as she always did, and encouraging us to think outside the “box”. Just now, this week, we had a spate of last-minute requests for the Easter Break and the May School break .

Since Covid 19 there have been significant changes in our client's habits. We have noticed that families with teenagers have become, as a unit, more adventurous. They want a more challenging experience, cultural journeys, cycling, walking and adventure., Kayaking, even learning to Scuba dive. Much of it is about quality time with the family – fortunately, there is much choice today and particularly excellent value in the Asian destinations.



We have also seen a big growth in Safari bookings, prompted by David Attenborough's TV programs -perhaps. Many families are going on these and we have found lots of families, with children in their late teens and twenties still travelling together and having a wonderful bonding adventure together, when the children are now really old enough to appreciate such an experience fully

Younger families still seek beach breaks and these are getting more and more sophisticated with fantastic hotels really catering to a young family's needs, so the whole family gets a really nurturing experience.

Last but not least, a quick email to let you know that we are offering a huge **£800pp discount** on Wendy Wu's 16th June 2024 departure for their most popular Japan tour (Japan Uncovered): this is 17 day tour. The price is £6790pp (normally £7590pp), which is amazing value. We can email you the full schedule, just get in touch on info@crusadertravel.com



The wrong bus stop?

By Deep Patel

~ Through The Eyes of a Twickenham Shop Keeper ~



I wanted to share a recent true story with you...it was around 10am on Monday and I was sat behind the counter with my head buried in some paper work in my shop as I looked up and noticed a man stood there waiting to pay. I remarked "I'm sorry mate, I didn't see you there what can I get you?"

The man seemed very disengaged and kept looking back out over his shoulder at the main road behind him, outside my shop. He said "sorry mate, I don't want to miss my bus, I already got off at the wrong bus stop as it is and I am late, please can I quickly have a cherry flavoured vape?"

I passed him the vape and he began scraping together coins from his pockets, slowly counting them as he placed them on the counter top. I noticed a huge (and I mean enormous) rucksack on his shoulder. I asked him why he had such a big bag...then he told me. The man was in his mid-twenties and wasn't just carrying a normal rucksack on his back...he was carrying on his back his entire life. He replied "I am homeless, and everything that I have in my rucksack is actually everything I have, full stop"...I couldn't help but feel sad for him. He had a lot of sincerity in his eyes, together with a lot of hidden pain...I perhaps should have left it at that (after all I am only a shop keeper) but I felt guided to ask more, and one thing I never do is doubt my own intuition...

I gave the man his change and he took £2 out and handed that back to me. He looked at me with a humble gaze and said "this is for you, I wish I could give you all my change, but I need to keep the other coins for a sandwich later". My eyes filled with water and I leant to give him a hug. I told him I didn't want his money, just his friendship was enough for me. He smiled and began to tell me about his mother who was in a care home with a serious condition and how he used to be a plumber and have his own business but he fell prey to drugs through his anxieties surrounding his mother's incurable health condition. He said he felt he had nothing

to live for and was heading “to get away from it all”.

I told him to try and think of the positives, to remember who he was, what he did, how the person he had become today was not him at all. I reminded him of how proud his mother would be if he overcame his drug habit and got his plumbing business up and running again, and how he could use some of the earnings from that business to support a charity that does research into the very health condition that his mother was battling with, how his hard work in this way could help one day stop that health condition from making someone else’s mother feel how his mother was feeling today. What followed was possibly one of the most genuine and emotional moments of my shop life so far. The man began to cry and hugged me again. He wiped the tears from his eyes and said “I wasn’t going to come into this shop, I am not even from around here, I just missed my stop and got off at the wrong bus stop”. He carried on to say “I was angry and cursing my life for making me get off at the wrong stop without realising that it was actually the right stop and meant to be that I met you”. He was thinking of getting back into drugs and also that he would never have a worthwhile life again, but he said after talking to me, he felt he had a chance and he was going to change his way from that day onwards, for the sake of his mother. He asked me my name and as I told him it was Deep, and people called me Dee...he again began to cry...He looked me in the eye and said “my mother is called Dee too, so now I know this really was all meant to be”.

He took my phone number and a few weeks later he called me and told me that he had stayed off drugs since he met me and he’d been feeling a lot more himself. He asked if he may call me from time to time and I welcomed that. He finished his conversation saying “after I got off outside your shop at the wrong bus stop, I thought my life was falling to pieces even more, without realising that despite it being the wrong bus stop, it was actually the right bus stop because it made me meet you and put me on the right track again”. Hearing his words made my heart smile and I looked in the mirror and thought to myself, that’s why it’s such an honour to be a shop keeper, because I get to make changes in lives of others, all from behind my counter in Twickenham.

Remember...

“Nothing is ever a coincidence... everything happens for a reason...”

MY CREATURE-KINDNESS TIP OF THE WEEK...

STOP ANTS KINDLY (GOOD KARMA): Sprinkle pure essential peppermint oil, Olbas oil, fine black pepper or white vinegar around places where you don’t want them to come (but NOT directly on them)...they will go without you having to harm them.

For ANY specific tip to stop any “pest” or insect **KINDLY** (for good karma/blessings), email me: InsectLoversUnite@gmail.com or join my Facebook page: “INSECT LOVERS UNITE”



HAMPTON CHORAL SOCIETY

Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle

**Musical Director - Richard Harker
with professional soloists**

Saturday 23 March 2024 - 7.30pm

**St James's Church, St James's Road,
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**Tickets: £15 (Adults), £7 (Under 16's)
Box Office: 020 8941 5394**

**On the door: contactless, card, cheque, cash
www.hamptonchoral.org.uk**

Charity Number 261788



Scandaltown

by Mike Bartlett

Putney Theatre Company, at Putney Arts Theatre until 23rd March

What can be said about a restoration comedy that sits comfortably with reality shows, iPads and make or break social media?! Simply that it is an irresistible piece of writing, and that the cast of twelve are bold, colourful and outrageous. *Scandaltown* is a farcical picturing of human nature, its humour and rhyme wickedly funny, astutely directed by Stuart Watson and excellently choreographed by Angela Botha.



Scandaltown starts with a put-upon aunt seeking solace with the postman, and cleaning her teeth with cocaine, before leading us into the world of Lady Susan Climber and the strange but likeable Tory MP, Matt Eton, teetering on the cusp of changing lanes sexually and politically. Alongside this is the fraught twin sister embracing lesbianism, and her libertine brother melting for the icy and beautiful Hannah Tweetwell. Jenny Hood and Freddie Peripheral sordidly flat-share but he feels overlooked despite flooring everyone with his lethal high heeled boots. The plot is breathtakingly absorbing, but never exhausting. The catalyst comes at an outrageous masked party, where mistaken identities become life-changing sexual turning points.



Aunty Julie-Rebecca de Souza, played by Sarah Perkins, is consistently upbeat, despite her lot, and Lucy Oglsey is convincingly earnest as twin sister

Phoebe Virtue. Katie Kelly is stunning as ruthless Hannah Tweetwell, and hedonistic Jack Virtue is played by a highly watchable Sammy Moore. Flatmates Jenny Hood and Freddie Peripheral, Megan Good and David Lindley-Pilley respectively, are truly poignant. As Lady Susan Climber, Louisa Pead has monumental stage presence all the way through. Tom Sainsbury is hilarious and endearing to the end as Matt Eton MP.



The prolific author Mike Bartlett hit on the idea of a restoration-style comedy as an antidote to the theatre closures during Covid, and *Scandaltown* was born as a post pandemic celebration. Be part of the fun and frolics ... join the party, masked or not.

Read Heather Moulson's review at www.markaspen.com/2024/03/20/scandaltown

Photography by Rich Evans



A Most Pressing Issue

by Tim Harris

Harris-Williams Partnership at the New Wimbledon Studio

For a show that bounces along like a British sitcom piece with high slapstick and clowning, *A Most Pressing Issue* has those elements in abundance, but for anyone expecting a more dramatic play this is not it.

The essential premise is that Penton, a prison warden (Tim Harris) is in his office on a particularly trying day, with his assistant Orly (Matt Williams). Harris and Williams have a great comedic air as they inject a familiar *Blackadder* style into their performances (Harris being the famous titular character with Williams as a Baldric). They play off each other well and each make the most out of their set pieces, whether it be high clowning or singing to a guitar. Celeste (Natasha Mula) and Sergeant (James De Burca) make momentary appearances throughout and offer breaks from the higher slapstick clowning.



The way the stage gets filled constantly with smoke throughout is curious, as it is never addressed by the characters on stage. Is there a rising fire or is it just that the smoke machine was left on for too long?

With such a strong farcical-comedic aspect, for most of the play's runtime there does not appear to be much jeopardy or anything at stake. Their hopes and goals are established, but there is little urgency (although the prison is on fire!). There seems little reason to actually invest into anything that happens, other than just to laugh. When the play suddenly reaches for a deeper meaning at the end, it feels slightly jarring and unearned.

A Most Pressing Issue offers a lot of comedy and fun set-pieces and Harris and Williams are clearly a talented duo with plenty of comedy chops. With a bit of closer revision into how character work and development can be woven around them, then there is promise for the future of the play.

Read Denis Valentine's review at www.markaspen.com/2024/03/15/pressing-issue

Photography courtesy of TH-MW



Nachtland

by Marius von Mayenburg, translated by Maja Zade Delman Friedman at the Young Vic until 20th April

Despite a striking set comprising sad paraphernalia from a deceased's home, *Nachtland* is a play that initially seems deceptively simple. A sparring sister and brother, and his wife clear out their late father's possessions with an air that gives an impression of gentle comedy ... until the speedy bleak turning point, the discovery of a painting with a signature allegedly of Adolph Hitler.



Nachtland is a coined German word that roughly means a place of eternal darkness. And the cast quickly take up this concept. Then the satirical writing delves deeper.

Philipp's Jewish wife, Judith wants the painting destroyed, but Philipp wants to keep it, while sibling Nicola plans to sell it. Not only do they look at their father in another light, but they are forced to acknowledge their nation's past and the eternal darkness the very title refers to. Not only that, they are forced to confront their own selves.



Enter Evamaria, played by Jane Horrocks, is slick and immaculate as an expert on Nazi heritage. Cool and aloof, Horrock's character opens up nicely as this tight piece unwinds.

Sister-in-law Judith is outraged, and the betrayal simmers to boiling point in a timely manner. Nicola's cupidity comes to the surface on Evamaria's endorsement that the painting's signature is a genuine one of the dictator's. Philipp struggles between profit and his wife's trauma.

There was an extraordinary sexual and chilling performance from Angus Wright as collector, Kahl whose greed is palpable, as he yearns to buy this painting, enacting an intricate game with Judith that goes beyond monetary gain and decency.

It would be too simple to say there is a cat-and-mouse element involved. The text opens up a far deeper abyss, and director Patrick Marber handles this beautifully. *Nachtland* hints at much, and at much that is taboo, but doesn't reach a resolution. With a final twist, it leaves hanging questions unanswered.

Read Heather Moulson's review at www.markaspen.com/2024/03/07/nachtland

Photography by Ellie Kurttz

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

by Béla Bartók, libretto by Béla Balázs

English National Opera at the London Coliseum until 23rd March

The sheer intensity of Bartók's brief bleak one act masterpiece means that we don't end up feeling that we have only had half an opera, any more than we do after *Salome* or *Elektra*, but you do end up feeling rather depressed.



In spite of its billing as a concert performance, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* is fully staged. Or would have been if Allison Cook had not been

ill and replaced as Judith at the very last minute by Jennifer Johnston in thrilling voice, while Crispin Lord "walked the part", wearing a dress but very much male and further queering this already strange and disturbing piece.



The director, Joe Hill-Gibbins, is from the let's-make-as-much-mess-on-stage-as-possible school; witness his *Changeling* at the Young Vic and his *Richard II* at the Almeida. But he is also formidably talented and ensures that this chilling opera makes its full impact.

Rosanna Vize's set design has a huge white table that you just know will not remain pristine for long. Bluebeard's torture chamber is represented

by bottles of red wine being poured into an overflowing glass; the armoury by large quantities of cutlery; the garden by unmanageably vast bouquets; and the treasury by thousands of fragments of shiny gold paper thrown out of a box. These all leave the table in a sticky state, before Bluebeard's kingdom is depicted by Ian Jackson-French's voluptuous lighting and the Vale of Tears by total darkness apart from a single torch. For the seventh room, a screen opens to reveal fifteen veiled silent brides. The intensity is remarkable with John Relyea a sinister, sexy, but also vulnerable Bluebeard. As with his Wotan, the voice takes on a raw, bitter quality, when more beauty of tone is called for.



Much of the drama in this piece comes from the orchestra who played superbly under Lidiya Yankovskaya, leaving the wrenching dissonances of the score to slither round in the memory like a box of the most venomous of snakes. Shattering!

Read Patrick Shorrock's review at www.markaspen.com/2024/03/22/bluebeard

Photography by Nirah Sanghani

Early signs of spring becoming the new norm, says the Woodland Trust

Earlier signs of spring - such as the first leafing of trees or the first sightings of butterflies - could be here to stay says the Woodland Trust.

One of the first trees to come into leaf is the elder and for the last five years citizen science collected records of its first leafing have been earlier than the 20 year average by 4-16 days. 2024 seems to be following suit.

Observations of leafing on the likes of larch, rowan and oak have also been early - one to two weeks before the average. And there have been many sightings of brimstone butterflies already - traditionally one of the first to be spotted each year - about two weeks earlier than usual.



Dr Judith Garforth, Citizen Science Officer at the Woodland Trust, recorded elder first leaf on 20 Feb in North Yorkshire and said spring is spreading north rapidly.

She said: *"Whilst the sighting of an elder in leaf was a very welcome glimmer of spring after all the grim wet weather, it was much earlier than I'd expect, especially this far north."*

"Overall though, the general trend is continuing with spring arriving earlier and becoming something like the new norm. Our data provides the clearest evidence of a changing climate affecting wildlife."

These early signs of spring are not a surprise this year since Met Office data showed temperatures in February 2.2°C above the average, making it the warmest February on record for England and Wales. And the spring index, which compares modern and historic data is running 8.7 days earlier.

Dr Garforth said earlier springs can lead to ecological food chains becoming 'mismatched' or out of sync.

For example, a study led by Malcolm Burgess that used the Nature's Calendar oak leafing data, showed that early oak leafing lead to an earlier peak in the number of moth caterpillars, which meant that blue tits needed to match their breeding timing so that their chicks were at their hungriest when caterpillar numbers were at their highest. However, the study found that the blue tits were able to react less quickly to the early spring temperatures compared to the trees and moths. This led to the timing of hungry chicks being later than the timing of peak caterpillar abundance, which in turn meant less food for the chicks, and therefore less food resources which leads to a decrease in breeding success.

Dr Garforth added:

"Another example is that we sometimes see insects emerging early in the spring before there are many flowers blooming to provide a good food source for them. Change has happened very quickly which is why the best option to help wildlife would be to slow it down - by reducing CO2 emissions and by planting more trees. We must continue to monitor this ever-important data we receive to keep tracking nature's response."

More volunteers are needed to become citizen scientists to keep this 300-year-old recording tradition alive. Go to naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk to find out more.

Nature's Calendar is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

Photo is of the brimstone butterfly



**WOODLAND
TRUST**

St Mary's University

St Mary's Students Win Medals at BUCS Nationals

Current St Mary's University, Twickenham students Jade Spencer-Smith and Bijan Bayati recently took home medals after they competed at the BUCS Nationals in Sheffield.

Current St Mary's University, Twickenham students Jade Spencer-Smith and Bijan Bayati recently took home medals after they competed at the [BUCS Nationals](#) in Sheffield.

Speaking on this achievement, Bijan said, "After two and a half years of inactivity in Karate competitions, competing at the BUCS Nationals was a big challenge. Competing against top athletes was the perfect way for me to get back to a competitive level and I'm definitely planning to participate in more Karate competitions on a national scale this year. I'm very proud to represent St Mary's at the BUCS Nationals."



Jade added, "It was a highly enjoyable competition and my last indoor BUCS, so I was very happy to take the win in the St Mary's vest."

St Mary's University is internationally

The BUCS Nationals are an annual multisport event for top athletes and sports players at universities and colleges around the UK. This year the event took place in Sheffield from Friday 23rd February to Sunday 25th February.

Jade came first place in the women's pole vault at the BUCS [Indoor Athletics](#) event, jumping 4.13m to get the Gold. Jade is a pole vaulter for GB, as well as a [sport scholar](#) at St Mary's.

Bijan competed in two categories for karate at the BUCS Nationals, taking home the Silver medal in the Men's Intermediate Kata category.

renowned for [sport](#), offering degrees in physiology, rehabilitation and physiotherapy, sport psychology, nutrition, coaching science, and strength and conditioning.

The University has established links with national sporting organisations including Fulham FC, Chelsea FC Foundation, Harlequin RFC, and London Gymnastics.



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
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U20 Women's Team To Face Army Announced



The first England U20 Women matchday squad of the 2023/24 season has been selected by head coach LJ Lewis and assistant coach Sarah McKenna as the team prepare to face Army Women this weekend.

Havant RFC will host the clash this Saturday (23 March), kicking-off at 17:30 GMT and will be streamed live on the England Rugby social media channels. There is no entry fee to Saturday's event.

Ahead of the first of three fixtures this spring for the U20 Women, second-row forward Lilli Ives Champion (Loughborough Lightning) has been awarded the captaincy of the side.

Ives Champion is accompanied by clubmates Catherine Wells and Ellie Roberts in Lewis' pack to visit Hampshire this weekend, the latter of whom is in line to earn her first U20 appearance.

Roberts, who has spent her time coaching the U16 Girls team at Havant RFC, is one of eight players to earn their first caps in the selected starting 15. Saracens pair Amelia MacDougall and Chloe Flanagan, Lia Green (Loughborough Lightning), Millie Hyett (Gloucester-Hartpury), Sophie Hopkins (Sale Sharks), Ella Cromack (Harlequins) and Annabel Meta (Trailfinders Women) are all set for their first U20 appearances, with all 10 of the U20 Women replacements also uncapped.

Eight Premiership Women's Rugby (PWR) clubs, as well as Women's Championship South 1 side Henley Hawks, are represented in the squad makeup. The group as a collective have attained an impressive 98 PWR appearances to date.

In preparation for their first matchday leading the U20 Women, Lewis and Grand Slam winner McKenna have benefitted from time with the group in camps at Bisham Abbey this year following confirmation of the 2024 England Women's Pathway U20 Training Squad in February. Nathan Catt has also been involved in imparting his set-piece expertise in recent camps ahead of the side's impending matchdays.

Beyond Saturday's meeting, the group look forward to further Tests against away to France on 20 April (Stade Jean Mermoz, Rouen, 18:00 GMT kick-off) before hosting Wales at Dings Crusaders RFC on 4 May (14:30 GMT kick-off).

"It's a great feeling for coaches and players to have a matchday to look forward to, and that has been evident in the energy the team have brought to training this week. They have prepared exceptionally well at our training base in Bisham," said LJ Lewis.

"Lilli being awarded our captaincy this weekend is a reflection of the work she has done. Not only with the U20 Women, but the minutes also achieved at club level with Lightning and with the Red Roses in training camps. Now, she deserves to have this opportunity to lead this special group.

“We’re expecting a firm test this weekend in what we as a group are treating as a match away from home and is the perfect opportunity to put into place our plans that we have been constructing throughout the season.”

England U20 Women’s team to face Army (includes current club, university and community club)

- 15 Lia Green (Loughborough Lightning, Loughborough University, Winscombe RFC)
- 14 Reneeqa Bonner (Bristol Bears, Hartpury University, Clevedon Rugby Club) *
- 13 Millie Hyett (Gloucester-Hartpury, Hartpury College, Worcester Girls RFC)
- 12 Amelia MacDougall (Saracens, Oaklands College, Old Albanian RFC)
- 11 Sophie Hopkins (Sale Sharks, University of Manchester, Fullerians RFC)
- 10 Ella Cromack (Harlequins, City of Oxford College, Reading Rugby Football Club)
- 9 Tori Sellors (Saracens, University of Worcester, Sevenoaks Rugby Club) *
- 1 Chloe Flanagan (Saracens, Old Albanian RFC)
- 2 Niamh Swailes (Sale Sharks, Salford University, Ryton RUFC) *
- 3 Catherine Wells (Loughborough Lightning, University of Worcester, Barkers Butts RFC) *
- 4 Lilli Ives Champion (c) (Loughborough Lightning, Loughborough University, Telford Hornets RFC) *
- 5 Lola Whitley (Gloucester-Hartpury, Hartpury College, Sudbury RFC) *
- 6 Steph Else (Gloucester-Hartpury, Hartpury University, Scarborough Rugby Union Football Club) *
- 7 Ellie Roberts (Loughborough Lightning, Loughborough University, Basingstoke RFC)
- 8 Annabel Meta (Trailfinders Women, The Henley College, Wimbledon RFC)

Replacements

- 16 Lucy Calladine (Loughborough Lightning, University of Worcester, Burton Rugby Football Club)
- 17 Amelia Williams (Loughborough Lightning, Loughborough University, Medway Rugby Football Club)
- 18 Hannah Sams (Exeter Chiefs, Exeter College, Kingsbridge RFC)
- 19 Jorja Battishill (Gloucester-Hartpury, Hartpury University, Gloucester-Hartpury)
- 20 Joia Bennett (Saracens, Loreto College, Old Albanian RFC)
- 21 Alex Wilkinson (Henley Hawks, Oxford University, Henley Hawks)
- 22 Samantha Shiels (Trailfinders Women, Brunel University, Grasshoppers RFC)
- 23 Evelyn Clarke (Loughborough Lightning, Birmingham University, Worcester Girls RFC)
- 24 Carmela Morrall (Loughborough Lightning, Loughborough University, Dubai Hurricanes)
- 25 Millie David (Bristol Bears, University of West England, Reading Rugby Football Club)

**denotes a player capped at U20 level for England*

England U20 Women’s spring 2024 fixtures

- England U20 Women vs. Army – 23 March 2024 (Havant RFC, 17:30 GMT kick-off)
- France U20 Women vs. England U20 Women – 20 April 2024 (Stade Jean Mermoz, Rouen, 18:00 GMT kick-off)
- England U20 Women vs. Wales U20 Women – 4 May 2024 (Dings Crusaders RFC, 14:30 GMT kick-off)

Match Preview: Brentford Women v Ashmount Leigh at Gtech Community Stadium

Here's everything you need to know ahead of Brentford's clash with Ashmount Leigh at Gtech Community Stadium on Sunday afternoon

Written by Brentford Football Club

Brentford Women play at Gtech Community Stadium for only the second time on Sunday afternoon, with the Bees coming up against Ashmount Leigh in the London South East Division One North in a 3pm kick-off.

The west Londoners come into the fixture in fine form, with the team currently on a 12-game win streak and protecting an unbeaten run which has stood since the start of December.

Karleigh Osborne has led his side to a perfect 2024 so far, with two cup finals dates set and a league title still up for grabs.

Brentford are currently positioned fifth in the table on 25 points but have five games in hand over league leaders Sport London E Benfica, who sit on 41 points.

Tickets are still available for this historic clash at the Gtech. Adult tickets are £2 and tickets for children are free. You can [purchase tickets online](#), or in person on the day of the fixture at our box office from 12.30pm.

About Ashmount Leigh

Ashmount Leigh have had a steady first season in the Division One North, an opening day 3-2 win over the Bees their biggest result yet.

Strikes on the day from Harriotte Underwood and Georgina Wickham gave Ashmount Leigh a shock lead in the opening half but Brentford fought back before half-time making it 2-2 following a double from Chloe Logie.

Despite all of Brentford's possession in the second half, Ashmount Leigh snatched a late winner through Danielle Boyd who secured the three points for her side.

Last time out at the Gtech

Osborne's side made their Gtech debut back in November 2022, where a record crowd of 5,116 fans watched on as the Bees beat Watford Ladies Development 4-2.

Brentford found themselves a goal down early on in the match and were unable to unlock the Watford defence for the rest of the opening half.

A superb second-half performance from Brentford saw the side go on and score four times in front of a buzzing Gtech.

Strikes from Kirsty Matthews, Ella Cottrell and Logie followed a Watford own goal as the Bees cruised to victory on a history-making day.



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