



MEGHAN SPARKLES ON TWICKENHAM VISIT



TAKING CENTRE STAGE: Duchess of Sussex visits a care home for retired entertainers as part of her support for the Royal Variety Charity.

Courtesy: Royal Variety Charity

Moped crime increasing despite ramming tactics

By Tim McNulty & Nora Helal

MOPED crime in Hammersmith and Fulham has soared 183 per cent despite the Met's new policy of ramming criminals off their bikes.

Operation Venice won widespread public support when Scotland Yard released footage of officers knocking

thieves off their mopeds. The policy proved successful in some boroughs with Camden, having been London's highest for moped crime, witnessing a 57 per cent drop in the last year.

However, moped crime in Hammersmith and Fulham surged dramatically in the last year from 136 incidents in 2017 to 385 this year.

The Met admitted today it was 'concerned' about the rise

but insisted there had been a 39% drop in moped crime overall in London.

Operation Venice's Detective Superintendent Lee Hill said: "We are concerned there has been an increase in moped enabled crime in Hammersmith and Fulham.

"Operation Venice, our dedicated operation to tackle moped crime, is working closely with the borough to proactively target through

daily operations those who commit moped crime at every opportunity. Our message to those who carry out these offences is: we will identify you, arrest you and bring far more serious charges to bear which will reflect the organised nature of your crime."

Owner of Mobile Motorcycle and Scooter Mechanic in Fulham, Lauris Ganins, 34 expressed fear over the rise in the borough and said he lost

customers due to thefts.

He said: "I think the police are doing a great job and they need to ram these bikes down more often - they need to do it to stop them."

"In other countries, they'd get shot so to be honest, I'm really happy they're doing this."

My Scooters and Motorcycles owner Dragan Lalovic, 55, said: "The police should have introduced this tactic a long time ago."



THREAT: Moped crimes rising

Merton gets trashed by waste cuts

By Kumail Jaffer

CAMPAIGNERS stepped up their efforts to clean up Merton's streets after statistics exposed the responsible contractor's weekly failure to deal with the issue.

Campaign group #MuckyMerton has taken to Twitter to protest about the borough's 'filthy' streets, claiming they are 'sick and tired' of the council's rhetoric and failure to hold Veolia, who hold Merton's waste collection contract, responsible.

Figures from the Liberal Democrats show Veolia, who cut weekly waste collection in October to fortnightly, exceeded the target threshold of missed collections by over 300% in October and November.

Member Mark Gale said: "I doubt Veolia would be so slack if Merton Council held them to account."

An FOI request confirmed no funds had been withheld since Veolia's waste collection contract began in April 2017.

This is unlike in Croydon, which withheld £1 million in fees to Veolia in June due to poor performance.

A Veolia spokesperson said: "A period of adjustment is a natural part of the transition process, and when issues arise, we work hard to resolve them quickly."

Five years for Grenfell scammer

By Shardell Joseph

A FRAUDSTER received a five-year sentence yesterday after claiming more than £30k as a fake victim of Grenfell.

The court heard that Abolaji Onafuye, 54, claimed he lived on the 11th floor of Grenfell Tower and his brother died in the fire.

Abolaji claimed accommodation and financial assistance worth around £33,000 from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and from the charity Rugby Portobello Trust.

He was sentenced, after a seven-day trial at Isleworth Crown Court, for fraud by false representation.

Detective Constable Carlos Araujo said: "Onafuye shamelessly took advantage of the support being offered to those who were directly affected by the Grenfell tragedy and he has continuously failed to own up to his actions."

Forget Harrods and save yourself £4,915 this Christmas



HARRODS: You need deep pockets if you are playing Santa Claus in Harrods this Christmas - these cuddly toys will set you back nearly £5,000



HIGH STREET: We found similar items to Harrods by shopping around on Twickenham High Street - and they were 230 times cheaper too!

Four grand? You must be having a giraffe

By Helena Kelly & Shahryar Irvani

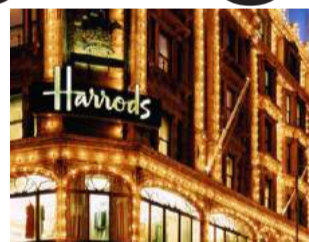
IF you've ever walked through the world's most famous department store at Christmas, you'll know it's filled with grossly expensive stuffed toys that could bankrupt Santa Claus.

But this year, Harrods has outdone itself with an ornate metre-tall decorative Giraffe

by Steiff complete with a staggering £3,799 price tag, with a smaller Giraffe alternative, also by Steiff, still setting consumers back £899.

Harrods describes its pricey giraffe as a "statuesque addition to an animal-loving child's bedroom", crafted with a "plush patterned pelt", which will act as a "friendly companion to keep watch over little ones".

Fear not though - here at South West Londoner we've



PRICY: London landmark found a £12 alternative from Debenhams so families can enjoy a tall, yellow companion this Christmas and still afford

a whole host of other cuddly friends.

In fact, we've found cheap alternatives to five of Harrods' most eye-wateringly expensive toys including stuffed bears, dogs and penguins.

Our discount toy-box would cost you just £21.50, compared to a hulking £4915.43 for the same animals at Harrods, making you 230 times worse off.

In our search, we also picked up an adorable plushie

pug tucked away in a charity shop for just £2, forty times cheaper than an identical version at Harrods.

We also discovered a £2.50 bear to rival its £830 doppelganger at the Knightsbridge store.

While our version may not have the "soft plush fur", "synthetic filling" and "pure mohair" that its alternative arrogantly boasts, we reckon it's more than enough to make a child smile this Christmas.



ZAC: 'Stop brutal trade'

Celebs back Zac on trophy hunting ban

By Cormac Connelly-Smith

MORE than 50 celebrities joined Richmond MP Zac Goldsmith in condemning trophy hunting in an open letter to the Environment Secretary published this weekend.

The letter, signed by Joanna Lumley, Bill Oddie and Sir Ranulph Fiennes, calls on the government to halt the import of hunting trophies.

Under current regulations, hunters can import trophies into the UK only if they can prove they came from a sus-

tainable hunt which had no detrimental impact on endangered species.

Mr Goldsmith said: "Trophy hunting involves killing some of the most beautiful wild animal species on earth simply for fun.

"The evidence shows importing the parts also provides cover for a brutal illegal trade.

"It is high time we banned the import of the so-called trophies to the UK."

Trophy hunting has grown in popularity with 59 lion trophies imported into the UK

in the three years since the killing of Cecil the Lion by a Minnesota dentist in 2015, according to Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting (CBTH) statistics.

One legal way to gather hunting trophies is a 'canned hunt', where lions are bred in factory farms to allow hunters to shoot one at a greatly reduced rate.

CBTH founder Eduardo Goncalves said: "It's particularly cowardly because the lion has been bred and raised by humans."

Mr Goncalves also called on the government to help close an international loophole that classes trophy-hunting as a non-commercial activity, which he said was ludicrous when hunters can pay between \$60,000 and \$120,000 to hunt an animal in the wild.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said he found trophy hunting difficult to contemplate, but believed the current regulations are sufficient to prevent there is not an impact on species sustainability.

STRIKE A POSE: IS THIS LONDON'S MOST INSTAGRAMMABLE CHRISTMAS EVENT?



PICTURE PERFECT: Last night Waterloo's iconic arches were transformed into a glittering snow-lined Christmas scene for Miracle on Leake Street.

Station to station: Battersea tube needs a name

By Josh Milton

WITH commuters facing a 9-month delay for the new Northern Line extension, many are asking if the delay will give TfL time to come up with a better station name than 'Battersea Power Station' station?

Battersea Power Station is the final stop in the Northern Line extension from Kennington, with Nine Elms station just in-between.

But the forecasted 2020 opening date has been bumped to September 2021 to coincide with the new Bank branch upgrade and many Londoners are hoping for a name change.

"It's confusing," said Chantel Thompson, 35, "if you asked, 'Where's the station?' would they mean the station



SIGN: Current station name

or the station... station." "Nine Months of Power Just Not at Battersea Power Station," was the name change recommended by the Vauxhall station steward, "it's too good to be true that the new line would be on time!"

Evening Standard distributor Khaled Soubra proposed the new station be dubbed: "Power Power Battersea Battersea Station Station."

Though, the 19-year-old admitted he wasn't aware there even was a line extension: "Still a nonsensical name," he added.

Riddle-writer and Clapham local, 27-year-old Konrad Lennartowicz decreed the station: "Battersea Power Station?"

Student and TfL enthusiast Jordan White, who wore a pair of Adidas x TfL trainers, said: "I don't know why they don't just call it 'Battersea'."

The 22-year-old put his "thinking cap" on and recommended: "Battersea Power Station on Repeat."

In a board meeting this week, TfL said the 2020 completion was being "reviewed as the designs for Battersea Power Station have evolved".

Christmas service in jail for ex-Cabinet con

By James Heale

Former Cabinet minister Jonathan Aitken will spend Sunday inside one of Britain's toughest jails.

The Reverend Jonathan Aitken, who served seven months for perjury, is making the visit as part of his work as an unpaid chaplain, a role he has held since being ordained in June this year.

"I'm going to a prison called Long Lartin in Worcestershire, 'a tough nick' as they say. It's one of Britain's highest security prisons and I've been invited to go and give Christmas service there," he said.

In this capacity he has visited a number of jails including Wandsworth last month.

In an interview with South West Londoner, he

said: "From what I've seen, Wandsworth has a good governor and a good chaplain and I've met some impressive prison officers and I would say it is a well-run, central London prison. I'm going back in January to lead a Bible studies at Wandsworth and I'm also involved in discussions about some pos-

sible rehabilitation projects all linked in to prisoners, churches."

The reaction to his presence in prison is usually positive but sometimes met with hostility.

"I often get the V-sign," he said.

"Even when the greetings are mildly hostile or critical,

I have a trump card because I say 'Hey, I've been a prisoner too, I've been where you now are' and they start to look very surprised."

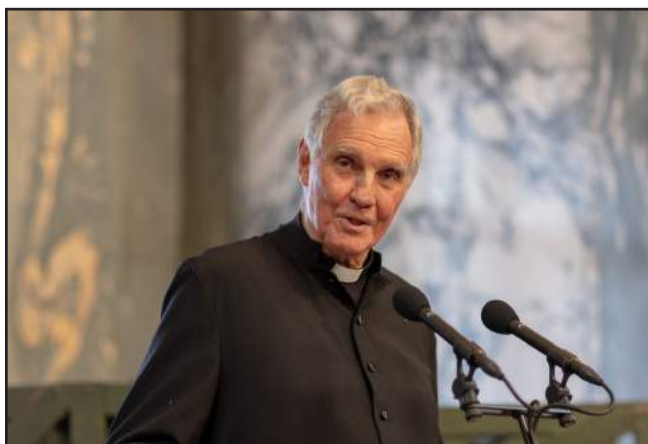
This is a far cry from his first visit to jail, as a youthful Oxford undergraduate in 1961, competing against Wandsworth prisoners in a debating match.

One of those Aitken faced was Cold War double agent George Blake, then serving a 42-year stretch, the longest non-life sentence ever imposed by a British court.

"I remember he was a very intelligent man, debated very well," he said.

"I said something like 'How are you coping?' He said 'I'm very depressed, I'm very down because I went to see the governor the other day'."

"In those days they used to get a third of their sentence off for remission and Blake said to the Governor 'I can't bear it' and the Governor said 'Blake, pull yourself together



CHAPLAIN: Aitken will deliver a service this Sunday

OAPs to teach skills to families

By Hollie Geraghty

YOU might be able to tell the difference between a like and a retweet but can you tell a cross-stitch from a backstitch?

Families in 2018 have mastered the art of online communication at the expense of traditional crafts, but two school mums from Balham are determined to change that.

Former lawyer Claire Redway, 51, and marketing professional Sarah Laffey, 43, are launching an initiative to tackle loneliness while also providing families with a helping hand from older people in the community.

The scheme will give elderly people the chance to put their practical skills to use such as sewing, gardening and baking.

Ms Laffey said: "We have encountered so many vibrant, energetic older people, even if they are not physically as energetic as they might want to be, they are still very sociable and keen to make connections."

She recalled one elderly woman saying that it would be nice to feel useful again.

She added: "It's basically creating an old-fashioned community in a bit of a modern way."

After the friends worked on the idea for two years, the scheme will be trialled with families and elderly residents in Balham early next year.

'Get out of tobacco'

By James Heale

WANDSWORTH Council is facing calls to divest from their pension investments in tobacco firms.

Figures from a Freedom of Information request reveal this year the authority's pension funds directly invested £12 million in British American Tobacco and Imperial Brands.

This is despite the council supporting anti-smoking initiatives including World No Tobacco day.

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health, said: "Tobacco stocks are turning into a bad investment financially as well as morally. Wandsworth Council's pension fund should use ASH's briefing on how to follow the lead taken by Greater Manchester and get out of tobacco."

A council spokesman responded: "As the law stands any shortfall in the fund's performance would have to be met by taxpayers, so it is important that these investments make the best possible return so that taxpayers aren't burdened unnecessarily."

Why hasn't Louisa got a nursery place?

By Cormac Connelly-Smith

THE parents of a disabled child struggling to find a suitable nursery place say Wandsworth Council's special education needs and disabilities (SEND) policy risks harming children's development.

Despite reassurances that the closure of Seward Road Nursery in July would not affect SEND provisions, Louisa Lort-Phillips, who at two-and-a-half suffers from Cerebral Palsy, is now unable to find a full-time nursery place.

Her parents, Charlie and Milly, are now calling on the council to allow Greenmead School, the only nursery suitable to increase capacity for Louisa and four other children.

Charlie said: "When we discussed the closure of Seward Road with the council, we were told very specifically that no children would miss out."

"Here we are, further down the line, and Louisa doesn't have a place because the funding hasn't been made available."

Charlie was concerned by comments made by the council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Sarah McDermott, that inclusion was the council's top priority.

He added: "Inclusion is a very noble aim for children

who actually are able to be included, but for children who are at the more severe end of the disability spectrum it's not necessarily the priority that works for them.

"A mainstream nursery is not a safe environment for Louisa and inclusion as a mantra that takes priority over everything else actually leads to exclusion for the children concerned."

"The council needs to recognise that providing the right places for children matters more than providing inclusion at all costs."

A council spokesperson said Wandsworth's SEND provision supported many children in the borough and added they were working with the parents to ensure every child receives the best possible care and support.

The council made cuts of more than £1 million after changes in legislation affected the amount local authorities could use to fund SEND provisions from their mainstream school budget.

Wandsworth Labour's spokesperson for Education and Children Services, Jeremy Ambache, said the council should have kept essential services open using other funding sources.

The appeal comes as campaigners today launched a High Court challenge against how the government provides SEND funding to local authorities across the country.



Picture by: Milly Lort-Phillips

LET DOWN: Louisa may be left without a full-time nursery place until September 2019

Battersea drug sniffer dog is one smart Cookie

By Jen Tombs

A RESCUED Battersea pup is set to be the first ever Staffordshire bull terrier working to sniff out drugs for the prison service.

Cookie was taken to Battersea Dogs and Cats home twice, first arriving in July, as her owners couldn't handle her hyperactivity.

But now the one-year-old dog is getting a third chance at a home thanks to HMP Six Counties search team, where she will finish her training next month.

Battersea working dogs manager Jeff Moore, 58, said: "The previous people who had taken her on were struggling to keep her sane."

"She needed to be doing something because she was a little bit frantic, leaping around the kennels, being quite bouncy, not really settling too well."

"In a home it would be a real difficulty to maintain a dog like that but for a search dog you need a lot of energy."

Mr Moore started setting tasks for Cookie in the rescue centre to keep her entertained and challenged, including hiding tiny bits of tennis balls which Cookie sniffed out.

Cookie impressed prison search team members when they visited Battersea. They recruited her in September in a role usually held by labradors and spaniels.

Mr Moore said one reason the breed is not very popular in the service is because of their vicious reputation.

He said: "Unfortunately, it is the perception of what staffies should be like."

"The fact that she has done so well means it will hopefully open up the opportunity for more staffies to go working."

Cookie will finish training in the new year, which involves finding samples of various substances in a range of environments.

On passing her January assessment she will begin work detecting drugs at prisons across the country.



THIRD TIME LUCKY: Clever Cookie has a new job and home thanks to her nose for trouble

Boyd's books build a brighter Brixton



A NEW CHAPTER: Boyd Hill's Book Stop Brixton has provided free books to all since 2014 but it needs funds for urgent repair work to survive the winter months

By Hattie Brewis

A FORMER homeless man is battling to save the Brixton book-stand he built with his own hands.

Book Stop Brixton's founder Boyd Hill, 48, who spends 12 hours a day on the stand, needs to raise £2000 to pay for urgent repairs.

Mr Hill, a part-time art teacher, set up Book Stop four years ago in a discarded community space next to a bus stop. Despite being

homeless himself at the time, he wanted to find a home for books that the community could enjoy.

"I was seeing all these books just being dumped outside houses - £20 books being left for the bin men. I couldn't let them go to waste," he said.

"I collected them and brought them here. The project grew from there."

Living in a Clapham squat, Mr Hill would travel to Brixton with trolleys of free books, earning admirers and regulars as the store grew.

He now receives book donations from friends,

community members and relatives of deceased people whose books would otherwise end up in landfills.

"I don't just take any old books. They have to have a self-help side to them - I want to support people to improve their own lives," said Mr Hill.

"I won't stock trashy novels. I have a few main categories: cookery, health and fitness, art, children and classics. I also have school books that kids find useful."

Book Stop is next to Brixton's Moorlands Estate, where low levels of well-being were recorded among

residents in a 2012 report.

The assessment by Social Life, a social enterprise, showed financial pressures and fears of gang violence are damaging people's quality of life. The study concluded that interventions boosting positive social networks were needed to help residents feel empowered and less isolated.

Kelly Rebekah ben Maimon, 53, former chair of Moorlands Estate Residents' Association said: "By providing thousands of books to the central Brixton community, Boyd has contributed in a beautiful way to improving the lot of those

who are less fortunate.

"His selfless efforts continue to inspire a generation by encouraging locals to believe in themselves and aspire to achieve anything."

As stocks outgrew storage space, Mr Hill expanded the Book Stop himself. He hopes to develop further in future.

"I'm no carpenter - I just grabbed a hammer and some scrap planks of wood and thought of Blue Peter."

"But the units aren't fully waterproof. I have to run and bring all the books in when it rains. That's why I set up the GoFundMe page - I need help."

Mums plead to save lifeline children's centres

By Jemma Carr

A MOTHER told how support staff at children's centres saved her from loneliness in the first months of her baby's life.

Maria Hernandez, who protested the council's closures outside Lambeth Town Hall with her 4-year-old daughter Carlota on Monday night, said: "My child had severe health issues and was diagnosed in a children's centre."

Lambeth's children's centres offer parenting support groups, post-natal

care and help for children with special needs.

Ms Hernandez added: "There were midwives who specialised in breast feeding and they knew about any issues newborns could have."

"These children's centre resources saved my life. Children can play while mums socialise too."

The plans, released on December 3, propose closing five of Lambeth's 23 children's centres and reducing opening hours at seven more.

Brixton mum Amelia Cassidy, who attended the protest with 18-month-old son Kasper, said: "If you're

wealthy there's lots you can do with your kids. But if you can't afford to pay up to £20 for an hour's play you'll have to stay home alone."

"Being a new mum is lonely and children's services provide company."

Deputy council leader Jennifer Brathwaite said: "Recent government cuts have left a £1.4 million budget gap for children's centres. "The funding challenge does mean withdrawing funding from five centres."

"This is a tough decision but one we have made based on the centre's location and accessibility for parents, among other factors."



HANDS OFF OUR CENTRES: Mums protest council closures

No more carbon for Lambeth

By Hannah Dawson

MORE than £200 million of investments in Lambeth's pension fund will be sold as it becomes the first council in the UK to fully divest from fossil fuels.

The Pensions Committee agreed to sell off global equities investments from its pension fund, which has net assets of £1,377.4 million.

The money will be re-invested in low carbon alternatives.

Henry Chown, Coordinator of action group Divest Lambeth, said: "Everyone is really happy to hear Lambeth Council is going to divest its pension fund."

"Our team of council employees and Lambeth residents have been making the case for divestment for two years so this is a great result for us."

Lambeth Council will now lobby other councils in London to offer low-carbon investment opportunities.

Pensions Committee Chair Iain Simpson said: "We believe this is the first time any UK local government pension fund has set out a clear roadmap, within its existing actuarial framework, that will allow it to fully divest all its shares."

"When it comes to action on climate change Lambeth walks the walk, we don't just talk the talk."

Tube plan in trouble

By Jess Glass

RESIDENTS are protesting plans to open a second entrance to Southwark station.

TfL announced plans to build the entrance on Greet Street in September.

Residents called the plans unnecessary and difficult for the one-way residential street in a protest held on Sunday at the end of Lambeth Council's consultation.

Octavia Hill Residents' Association head Michael Tuppen criticised the plans for the noise and security risks to the surrounding flats.

Vauxhall MP Kate Hoey said: "They have chosen the worst possible option and have had no regard to the residents who live here."

A TfL spokesperson said: "We carefully considered all the responses to our public consultation and are aware of the noise and security concerns. We amended our design to help address these concerns and we will review further comments made."

Residents help out homeless

By Joshua Parfitt

A FORMER rough sleeper had his new flat furnished last Friday by neighbours he didn't know.

The man, named L, moved into a flat in Southwark, but messaged his former homeless charity, Baron's Court Project, to say he was still in a sleeping bag on a hard floor.

Following a message on private social network Nextdoor, neighbours of the Baron's Court Project offered rugs, bathroom mirrors, settees and tables for free.

Baron's Court Project Director Michael Angus said: "If we didn't have Nextdoor this wouldn't have happened."

He said the organisation's Twitter was followed by users living across the world.

Hammersmith & Fulham Borough Council was the first in the country to work with Nextdoor when it launched in 2016, and has the most households signed up in the capital alongside Richmond, according to the organisation.

Nextdoor users may only message nearby users.

UK Manager Nick Lisher said: "On social media we have wonderful contact with our friends but at the same time we are not helping people in our neighbourhoods."

Turkey for Tudors

By Joshua Parfitt

EXPERTS at Fulham Palace claimed this month their Tudor turkey bones could be the oldest in Britain.

The two bones were discovered last year in a ditch backfilled with kitchen waste between 1480 and 1550.

Fulham Palace community archaeologist Alexis Haslam believes that turkeys were first brought to the UK from the Americas via Spain in 1524.

Mr Haslam said: "They were originally imported because they fan their tails like peacocks."

It is unsure when people first started to consume turkeys but Mr Haslam said: "Eventually someone's gone, 'That looks like a fat bird, let's have a go.'"

The turkey crown is currently disputed by a museum in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, who both have bones dating to the early 16th century.

Mr Haslam said the bones were a testament to the wealth of the Bishops who resided at Palace until 1973.

First black Chelsea player tackles racism

By Tim McNulty

CHELSEA FC's first black player wants to combat racist slurs by installing microphones around Premier League grounds.

Four Chelsea fans were suspended last week after being caught on camera allegedly shouting racist abuse at Man City forward Raheem Sterling.

Paul Canoville suffered similar racial abuse from fans when he represented Chelsea between 1981-86.

The former winger said: "You can put microphones around our clubs, around our pitches, and we can hear exactly where these racist incidents of chanting are coming from."

"You've got to catch them in the act and by filming them and then hearing what they actually had to say."

Concerning the incident with Stirling he said: "If they have been photographed, filmed and you can hear exactly what they say then you will get a better investigation."

Since 2006 Chelsea have provided an SMS service for supporters to report discriminatory behaviour but Canoville is worried fans may be scared to speak out.

Anti-racism organisation, Kick it Out, reports discrimination at matches increased from 469 in 2017 to 520 in 2018.

Canoville said that racism in football is getting worse and he recalled his parent's experiences as part of the Windrush generation.

He said: "The hate my mother had to receive - when she told me the stories I thought hold on I should not expect to see that."

"But this is 2018 and it is still coming back, no something is wrong."

Chelsea Chairman Bruce Buck wrote an open letter to its supporters yesterday saying the club would not rest until discrimination was eliminated from the club.

Mr Buck wrote: "We will continue to work alongside our fans, anti-discrimination organisations and football authorities to create an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued."

"If you do not share these values, this is not the club for you."

Canoville added the history of discrimination at Chelsea should remain firmly in the past.

He said: "We are doing so much more now, we've got fans from all over the country, all over the world and they are not coming to support Chelsea if they thought that kind of action was going on at the club."

"It is upsetting, the real fans need to focus and pick out those individuals and get them out of our club we don't want this, we don't need them."



CHELSEA LEGEND: Paul Canoville played for Chelsea between 1981-1986

Wormwood Grubs gourmet Christmas dinner

By Emily Webber

CONVICTS at Wormwood Scrubs prison will be treated to a slap-up Christmas dinner to rival high street pub chains.

The jail is offering nut roasts, vegetable bakes and pigs in blankets dripping with gravy.

Prisoners can choose from four main courses covering vegan, vegetarian and halal dishes with a side of extra roast potatoes, sage and onion stuffing accompanied with seasonal vegetables.

HMP officials released the festive prison menus this month.

Christmas shoppers near the prison praised the range of options available as well as the range of food on offer.

Sales Assistant Tamauna Sultana, 25, from Hammersmith said: "It is quite a luxury for people who may who may not be able to afford that sort of dinner this Christmas."

"It's a good menu but I

would feel different if I was a victim of crime knowing a prisoner was eating that dinner this Christmas."

To feed a family of four the dinner would cost on average £43.74 from a supermarket.

For dessert, a traditional Christmas pudding is on offer with tippie free brandy sauce or apple and cinnamon pastries with a side of fruit.

Pub chain Wetherspoons in Hammersmith will be serving only one veggie main course over the festive season - a creamy mushroom risotto for £4.99 with no vegan or halal dishes on offer.

Stephanie Evans, 59, a sales assistant from Notting Hill said: "At first glance this looks like a Wetherspoons pub meal or something you would find in a hospital."

"Just because I couldn't afford that Christmas meal doesn't mean those in prison shouldn't have a nice dinner."

She added: "But if this is a Christmas dinner - where is the turkey?"

The Ministry of Justice refused to comment.



PUB GRUB: Wetherspoons 2018 Christmas dinner featuring chicken stuffing burgers

Crazy golf deal was below par 'robbery'



BOGEY: 'Negligent' Labour council's 1993 sale of golf course cost communities in Merton hundreds of millions, according to former councillor.

By Alec Fullerton

A ROW over the fate of Wimbledon Park Golf Club was reignited today when the original sale of the land was branded an 'absolute scandal'.

The club's 754 members voted last week to accept the All England Club's £65million offer that will see them pocket £85,000 each.

The home of the Wimbledon tennis championships was due to take ownership in

2041 after Merton council sold the park's leasehold in 1993 for £5.2million.

Stephen Kerin, a former Merton councillor for the Wimbledon Park ward and WPGC member, accused the then Labour-controlled council of 'robbing the community'.

He said: "To sell it for £5million is an absolute scandal. You can't even buy a house around there for that price. The people of Merton have been done out of hundreds of millions."

"Even shortening the lease is worth £65million,

nevermind buying the land. That land now must be worth 300 or 500 million pounds.

He added: "This was just a short-term thing for the council done out of stupidity. You think a school costs £10million, that's ten schools we've missed out on. That's the scale of the negligence. It's almost beyond imagination."

"The way this has been portrayed - that the members joined into a sort of Faustian pact with the All England club - is just not true. It's this council decision back in 1993 that was the problem."

WPGC Members - including

celebrities such as Ant and Dec Donnelly and Piers Morgan - voted 82% in favour of ending the 120-year-old club's lease 20 years early last Thursday.

Chartered building engineer Martin Sumpton, who has played golf on the course for more than 30 years, was the only member to speak against accepting the offer.

He said: "I've lived in Wimbledon longer than anywhere else so I have great affection for this area. I'm particularly worried about the degrading effect of environmental pollution

and the needless destruction of a protected habitat."

The park, which is on Historic England's 'At Risk' list, was designed by 18th century landscape architect Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.

Mr Sumpton added: "They basically kicked out the rugby union, now they've kicked out the golf and next they'll aim for the cricket at The Wimbledon Club."

The acquisition will expand the All England Club's site to 115 acres and allow it to match the facilities of Grand Slam competitors in France, Australia and the US.

Migrants denied ABCs

By Amelia Wynne

ENGLISH classes for adult migrants were stopped last week with just seven days notice following funding cuts from their skills provider.

The classes near Pollard's Hill provided vital English lessons, many of them for Muslim women from countries such as Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

Merton Council contracted Aim Skills Development to put on the classes.

Tutor Megan Wright, 25, said: "My students and I were devastated."

"For many of them this was more than just an English class."

"On our last day, several students were in tears."

"No college or school would get away with cancelling a course with one week's notice and I don't see they should be treated any differently."

Since 2009 ESOL (English for Speakers of Foreign Languages) funding fell by 60% with the cuts disproportionately affecting women and poorer migrants, affecting social integration.

Student Lamya El Messaoudi, 33, from Morocco said: "I am shocked by the suspension of ESOL and I don't know why it's stopped."

"I could not help my daughters with homework but I saw a leaflet about ESOL and so I went."

Towering infer-NO

By Alex Brinded

OPPOSITION to the Beddington incinerator continues while owner Viridor further delays its full launch.

Viridor recently told the South West London Partnership that the incinerator may not be working fully until January 2019.

Merton and three neighbouring boroughs will divert 95% of recycling and household waste to the Energy Recovery Facility instead of sending it to landfill.

Councillor Nick Matthey said the incinerator could produce up to 360,000 tonnes a year.

Mr Matthey called it inefficient, and said: "It's just a money-making exercise."

Resident Peter Alfrey commented: "It is a national case study of local community extraction by a commercial corporation."

Mr Alfrey called Merton council's plans to increase parking charges across the borough in order to reduce local pollution 'a mockery.'

Khan lauds colossal award to famous theatre

By Alex Brinded

FAMOUS theatre patrons celebrated the £1.2million awarded to Polka Theatre for redevelopment.

The children's theatre in Wimbledon received the grant from the London Mayor's Good Growth Fund, a £70million programme for growth and community development.

The £6.5million redesign will be its first since opening in 1979.

Mayor of London and Polka Theatre patron Sadiq Khan, said: "The Polka

Theatre is a much-loved part of the community and has been helping young people experience theatre through its innovative programme of performances and learning for nearly 40 years.

"I look forward to seeing it go from strength to strength in the future."

Polka Future includes an under-5's theatre, rehearsal studio, creative learning studio designed for children with sensory needs and improved access.

Entertainer Gyles Brandreth said: "When it comes to children's theatre, Polka is a beacon."

"Quality theatre - live

theatre - intelligent, challenging, imaginative, inspiring, that's what Polka is all about, for young people from toddlers to teenagers.

"A great Christmas present - now let's find that missing £800k!"

Playwright and director Sir Alan Ayckbourn said: "The shame in this country is how little importance is attached to children's theatre. That's why I am delighted that Polka has been acknowledged by this generous award."

Bond Primary School headteacher Despo Stevens said: "Our children gain so much from the experience of seeing the performances."



ACE ACT: Polka attracts more than 90,000 visitors a year

A statue of one's own for Woolf

By Anna Sagar

VIRGINIA WOOLF will get her first full-size statue in the UK after planning permission was granted by the council.

The famous author of 'A Room of One's Own' lived in Richmond between 1914 and 1924, where she co-founded the Hogarth Press with her husband Leonard Woolf.

Aurora Metro, an arts and education organisation, needs to fundraise £50,000 to create the statue.

Cheryl Robson, founder of Aurora Metro, said: "The only statue of her is a bust for her in Tavistock Square which she hated. It depicted her as mentally tormented and we thought we could do with a statue to pay honour."

"She was reasonably happy and stable while she was here and it was formulative for her as a writer."

"She is a major figure in modern literature and it just seems a classic case of women of achievement not being celebrated."

Recent figures have shown that women are severely under-represented in civic statues.

The Public Monuments and Sculpture Association say one in five statues are female, with most of them being royal or fictional.

In Richmond the only female statue is of Aphrodite.

Art for the homeless

By Stephanie Harris

HOMELESS people will receive 650 more breakfasts thanks to a fine art fundraising scheme.

Lee Farrant, 53, brought together five local artists and himself to make 25 limited edition prints each of various Richmond sights.

The aim is to raise £10,000 for the Vineyard Community Centre (VCC), which provides shelter and crisis support for the marginalised, from teenagers with depression to lonely pensioners.

Artist Harriet Hoult said she was approached by Lee two months ago and agreed to do it as it was an initiative she was happy to put her name to.

"Winter is the hardest time for homeless people, so for us it's the best time to put an appeal out as people are more likely to be giving."

VCC co-founder Bob Kimmerling said: "As we are a charity we receive little to no money from the government, so it's truly valuable to have this funding."

To view the prints go to www.vineyardeditions.com

The race to Antarctica ..but don't forget mum

By Andy Gregory

SAILORS once boasted of conquering the seven seas, but now an investment manager plans to run marathons on all seven continents – with his 60-year-old mum in tow.

Tom Dilrew, 29, hopes to finish this challenge at the grueling Antarctica Ice Marathon, having already completed six races with his mother Julie, a retired teaching assistant.

Only 50 people tackle the polar marathon each year, which costs an eye-watering £13,500, across a 700m-high glacier in temperatures as low as -20C.

Tom said: "The race is a balancing act between running fast enough to keep warm and not overexerting, as sweat in these conditions freezes and could lead to hypothermia or frostbite."

For the entry price, participants are flown from Punta Arenas, Chile to Antarctica, where they run 10km laps on a specially-groomed glacier.

Despite running in Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Sydney, Toronto and Singapore, his first marathon, aged 26, in Rome brought the challenge's highest and lowest moments.

"You can't really duplicate that feeling of your first race, when you're at the start line and there's so much adrenaline, nerves and excitement," he said.

At 20 miles, he suffered a thigh injury, although he said it was a good test of perseverance and stubbornness.

While Rome was the only race Tom ran without his mum, she was on hand to help in Rio when he became delirious in the heat.

Despite her starting "a long way behind him", he recalled hearing her voice among other hallucinations.

She appeared beside him and they crossed the finish line holding hands.

While he hopes to convince her to join him on his toughest race yet, the steep fee is an obstacle.

Tom is risking life and limb for four charities, including Richmond's poppy factory, which was recently awarded the council's highest honour.

He said: "When I was 14 I helped my grandad write his war memoirs. He just turned 99 on Saturday, so it's nice to do something linked to him."

To acclimatise, Tom will train in Norway before attempting the race in 2020.

"It's hard to find conditions that are comparable and it's important to test the gear out as well," he said.

Tom founded the Richmond Running Group and aside from "close calls" with the deer population he says it's the best place to run in London.

Tonight, he gets his first taste of Arctic conditions, as the group don Santa hats and run around the borough for their Christmas party.



SEVEN MARATHON MAN: Tom Dilrew, 29, running in the Cape Town marathon this year

Could High Court case clip Heathrow's wings?

By Jack Richardson

A PROPERTY lawyer is taking part in a High Court case to prevent the controversial third runway at Heathrow being built.

Neil Spurrier, 67, from Strawberry Hill is a member of the Teddington Action Group, formed in 2014 by local residents who oppose the proposed third runway.

The main argument for a judicial review of the decision by the government is that the Department for Transport failed to adequately consult on the potential consequences of the proposed expansion.

Mr Spurrier said: "The Transport Secretary hasn't properly consulted from the public or the Transport Committee."

He added: "As far as emissions are concerned, pollution limits are already breached."

He doesn't believe the scheme is in the country's economic interest because

Heathrow expansion will cement its position as the UK's main international airport and reduce the number of long haul flights from regional airports.

Mr Spurrier said: "London has more airport capacity than any other city and doesn't need more."

His case is being heard alongside those brought by the Mayor's Office, London boroughs of Hillingdon, Richmond, Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham in addition to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Environmental groups Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Plan B Earth are also taking part in the action.

The claimants are joined by rival expansion proposal Heathrow Hub Runway Innovations as the judge decides in a 'rolled up' hearing whether there are grounds for judicial review and what his decision is.

The case will last for two weeks in March 2019 at the High Court.



LIGHTS, KEW, ACTION: Kew Gardens Christmas lights attract crowds Photo: Wes Hudson

Gran's best friend: meet the robodogs



ROBO-PUPPY LOVE: Kensington designer Sebastian Conran creates robotic dogs for the elderly which can alert family to accidents

By Helena Kelly

ROBOTIC dogs could soon be taking care of grandma and grandad, thanks to a Kensington-based designer.

Sebastian Conran, 62, has spent three years creating MiRo - an autonomous canine capable of safeguarding and assisting the elderly.

Complete with cameras, 3-D vision and a brain-inspired operating system, MiRo can prompt owners to take

medicine, remind them of visitors' names and question them if it notices a change in their tone or expression.

But, with its floppy ears and huge, endearing eyes, this touch-sensitive pup is hardly the classic dystopian image of artificial intelligence.

Sebastian, who is the brother of fashion designer Jasper Conran, explains: "My brief was to create a cute robot and I think I have achieved that. "It's just like a pet - except it's far more functional."

Although MiRo - which costs an eye-watering but not unrealistic £2,450 - has

only been trialled with children so far, Sebastian promises it will be available to elderly consumers by 2020.

And with 18% of the UK population now aged 65 and over, it seems the amiable mutt could not come any sooner, especially as similar initiatives are proving successful in Japan.

Sebastian said: "My mum is always asking me when she can finally get her hands on a MiRo."

"In fact anybody who has spent time with MiRo has ended up wanting it to stick around."

The designer - who owns Sebastian Conran Associates in Kensington - claims it was watching his 87-year-old mother struggle to retain her independence that first inspired him to create a robotic companion for the elderly.

He admits he also wanted to create something that would be able to look after him in 20 years' time and relieve the burden from his two adult sons who are 23 and 30.

While the idea of placing our beloved elders in the hands of artificial intelligence may seem eerie to some, it is easy to see how MiRo - a

creative re-envisioning of man's best friend - could provide some comfort to the nation's geriatric population.

However, even AI-mad Sebastian concedes that robots should never fully replace human carers.

He said: "I am not looking to make robots that take care of people, I am looking to help people take care of themselves."

"I understand the concerns around autonomous robots however our device simply helps old people to become more mobile and less lonely."

"In the end, there is no substitute for human touch."

Kensington Palace exhibits Oscar 'Favourite'

By Shahryar Irvani

KENSINGTON PALACE is displaying a range of costumes from a film about one of its most famous regal residents, Queen Anne, to celebrate its January release.

The palace is hosting costumes created by three-time Oscar winning designer Sandy Powell for Yorgos Lanthimos' 'The Favourite', which received ten nominations at the London Critics' Awards yesterday.

The film explores Queen Anne's lesbian relations with her life-long political advisor

Lady Sarah Churchill, and Sarah's impoverished cousin turned chambermaid Abigail, and stars BAFTA winner Olivia Colman as Queen Anne, alongside Oscar winning actresses Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz.

Historic Royal Palaces curator Matthew Storey said: "For us it means our customers can walk in Queen Anne's footsteps and see and experience history where it happened."

"Sally Powell's costumes enlighten the characters' complex relationships, for example the rise of Emma Stone's Abigail Hill from a servant to a lady at the right

hand of the Queen."

The specially curated exhibit will showcase Powell's visual approach to the Oscar-tipped film.

Discussing the way in which the female characters' empowered and modern roles and relationships are expressed through costume, Storey said: "Queen Anne's power is expressed in her robes, and Lady Sarah's dominance is shown through her riding boots, and that really relates the more masculine aspects of her character."

The costume display at Kensington Palace runs until 8 February 2019.



REGAL: Olivia Colman's costumes as Queen Anne on display

Harrods bomb: 35 years on

By Ellie McKinnell

THE IRA bombed Harrods 35 years ago this week, and one 8-year-old witness only now realises the impact this experience had on her life.

Liberal Democrat advisor and Chelsea and Fulham council candidate Louise Rowntree, 43, was shopping with her mother when the bomb went off.

On 17th December 1983 at 1:21pm a car bomb destroyed one side of the store, killing 6 and injuring 90.

Ms Rowntree said: "No one really talked about it. Everyone had a narrow escape or knew someone who had, so it wasn't really considered a big deal."

"When you were growing up in London during the late 70s early 80s, there was a bomb scare every single day, it was part of everyday life."

"I was very aware, even as an 8 year old, that I could be blown up at any time. It's only since I had children, that I've started thinking about it more."

With more recent terrorist threats Ms Rowntree notices her reaction is a lot stronger than other people's: when Earl's Court was evacuated she ran with her children through the opened barriers while others queued to tap out their oyster card.

"When I hear 'evacuate the station' I don't wait around, I run."

Cancer tech trials

By Ellie McKinnell

SCIENTISTS at the Institute of Cancer Research in Chelsea are developing treatment that uses ultrasound to destroy cancerous cells without the need for surgery.

The high intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) machine targets tumours precisely using the sound waves to heat and destroy cells.

It is already being used to relieve pain and could in the future be used to make radiotherapy more effective.

ICR Professor Gail ter Haar said: "The point onto which the ultrasound beam is focused gets very hot, but the surrounding tissue is left unharmed."

"It's like using a magnifying glass in the sun to start a fire, where you need to form a sharp focal spot on the dry tinder."

Trials have shown the machine to be working as expected, and recruitment for a new trial involving patients with recurrent gynaecological cancer has just begun.