



Christmas bonus

It's two farmers' markets for the price of one in December as Maple Road hosts an evening event in addition to the regular monthly market.

The 'special' is on Thursday December 6, 6.30-9.30pm, when there will be a Giggly Pig hog roast. Other stalls include: Ambrosia Chocolatier, Anila Sauces, Corte Dei Signori, Just Desserts, Lallapolosa, Nut Knowle Farm, Pantry Cup Cakes, Rosie's Home Preserves, Thee Olive Tree, Tiger Spring Tea and Westfield Wines. Maple Road's bars and restaurants will serve mulled wine and mince pies, Surbiton's brownies will sing

carols from 6.45-7.15pm, when Santa will arrive on a milkfloat, courtesy of Surbiton Rotary Club, to help switch on the Christmas lights.

Surbiton charity cards are on sale, as is the 2013 Maple Road calendar (£5) with dates of next year's markets.

The market on Saturday, December 15 runs from 9am-1pm as usual, with the mayor, Cllr Mary Heathcote, attending to promote her charities for the year, and for the first time there will be a farmers' market in the first month of the new year, on Saturday, January 19.

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Quick! Buy up Tolworth!

The Evening Standard's property spotlight fell on Surbiton this month, giving an intriguing insight into how others see us.

The usual clichés were wheeled out. The art deco station was praised, as was the fast train service to Waterloo. We were informed that the river was attractive, and that the town is 'often' jokingly dubbed Suburbiton.

But it was the outsider's opinion of the house market that revealed how Surbiton is viewed by the rest of London.

The river roads between Portsmouth Road and Maple Road were inevitably tagged desirable, as were St Andrew's Square and the Southborough area, while Pine Walk, Manor Crescent and Pine Gardens were selected as Berrylands' 'most sought-after'.

The top tip, however, was to invest in bricks and mortar in Tolworth, where the streets to the west of Hook Road were highlighted as the smartest investments in coming years. "Victorian semis and terraced houses in roads such as Cotterill and Ellerton sell for £350,000-£500,000," said Jo Pannell of Dexters, suggesting that recent price rises were likely to continue upwards.

Surbiton was said to have a busy town centre with a large Waitrose and Sainsbury's, 'a good selection of pubs and chain coffee shops' and independent coffee shops, the Pickled Pantry, French Tarte and Press Room. Puzzlingly, Foodie was overlooked, although it has been serving home-baked cake and cuppas in Victoria Road for longer than the combined time of the named trio.

The cornerHOUSE in Douglas Road got a plug as the local arts centre, although for all other entertainment people apparently trek to 'nearby Kingston'... ignoring the magnificent (if under-attended) concerts staged at St Andrew's church and, from time to time, at St Mark's.

Perplexingly, two of the four supposedly 'Surbiton' estate agents mentioned were actually in Kingston.

So we got a second opinion about Tolworth's property market from Matthew James, in St James Road.

"That little area [Cotterill and Ellerton] has always been a hub for selling," said partner James Batty. "It has easy access to Surbiton station, and is only a 15 to 20-minute walk from the town centre."

"Cotterill and Ellerton are tree-lined roads with popular period houses, typically three to four-bedroom homes with bay windows and original Victorian features. They are long-term houses, with 'loft potential' to grow into."

"The schools nearby are good and popular, and the parking is unrestricted, with some houses also having off-street parking."

"And just across Ewell Road, Beaconsfield and Broomfield roads have some larger houses, plus nice two-bedroom purpose-built maisonettes and cottages."

According to the Standard, the average rent for a Surbiton one-bed flat is £800-£1,000 a month, and a three-bedroom house, £1,400-£2,200 a month. To buy in Surbiton now costs an average of £214,000 for a one-bed flat, £298,000 for a two-bed flat, £387,000 for a two-bed house, £417,000 for a three-bedroom house, and £679,000 for a four-bedroom house.



Salon does cuts for charity

Hair Xcel, the popular salon opposite Waitrose, has strengthened its support for one of Surbiton's leading charitable trusts by doing what it does best.

Manager Marco Rogers and team (pictured) are giving free cut-and-styles to residents of the Fircroft Trust home. "It's great to be able to help a good local cause like that," he said.

It's another example of close working between Fircroft's Aine Lark and Hair Xcel.

The charity, which helps adults with learning disabilities, has already benefited from fashion shows where Xcel has done the models' haircuts.

"Fircroft is a good cause, and Aine works so hard," said Marco, who has managed the Claremont Road salon since April 2010. Xcel has also helped Cancer Research UK,

with a month's tips to the charity.

Marco's expertise is in men's short haircuts, but the salon also does hair straightening, extensions, nails (courtesy of Korean expert Hana) and bridal hair, using top branded products.

In January, subject to licence, you'll be able to enjoy a beer or wine too. "We're a salon focusing on one-to-one consultations, not a factory!" said Marco.

Visit www.hairxcel.com

Bon appetit

Is Surbiton moving towards a more continental cafe/bar way of life?

New, liberal attitudes to alcohol licensing mean both The Press Room and ExCellar – a cafe and an off licence – are now able to serve wine and beer to customers... and even a hairdressing salon is hoping to be able to serve a chilled Chardonnay to its customers.

See page 3

For images with impact



Keith Hern Photography,
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A welcome visitor

This perky little goldcrest, snapped in a Surbiton garden by local birder Paul Hunter, is tiny... in fact at around 9cm in length, it's Britain's smallest bird. With a severe winter predicted in coming months, Paul shares some tips about the winged visitors to our area, and how we can help them.

See page 6

Overheard in Waitrose

I was visiting my son and daughter-in-law and asked if I could borrow a newspaper.

"This is the 21st century, old man," he said. "We don't waste money on newspapers. Here, you can borrow my iPad."

I can tell you, that bloody fly never knew what hit it.

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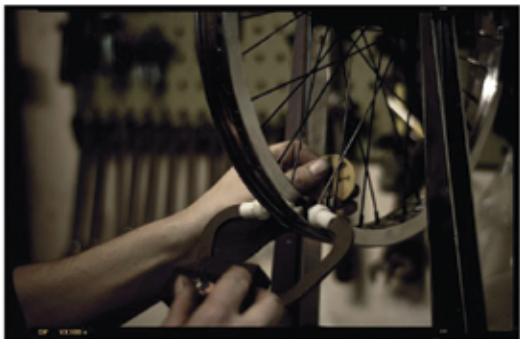
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Thousands raised for local good causes

The Maple Road farmers' market has raised £30,000 for charity in its three years, including £4,200 in the past month, split between Action for Children; Kingston upon Thames Association for the Blind; Save the World; youth charity Oxygen; Kingston Advocacy Group; Release; and Kingston Centre for Independent Living. Pictured receiving cheques at November's market are (from left) Linder Rothery (Save the World), Kerry Edgington (KAB), Kim Porrelli (Save the World), market volunteer Cheryl Kuit, Pat and Graham Lavers (Action for Children), Jean Warwick (KAB), Philip Riley (Action for Children) and market volunteer Jane Hughes.



Pictures by David Jacobson

Farmers' Market Tombola helps create garden



The prize tombola at October's Maple Road farmers' market raised £1,000 towards creating a sensory garden for autistic pupils at St Philip's School, Chessington. One of the pupils, Drew Smith, 13, cut a birthday cake to mark the market's third anniversary, watched by mum Angela and twin brother Ewan. In addition, Maple Road's pubs and restaurants have raised more than £700 for charities, the latest event being last week's cheese and wine evening at the French Table in aid of Dysart School for children with severe learning issues.

Gardening tips by Janice Cripps

Contain the winter



In case you're thinking of closing the curtains on your garden and forgetting it for a few months, plant up a winter container.

It's as much about creativity and styling as gardening. You don't need green fingers, or even a garden. You just need imagination.

Pots come in all shapes, sizes and styles. Garden centres offer everything from Grecian urns and Versailles tubs to stone planters and contemporary zinc cubes. Or try wicker baskets, galvanised steel buckets or old clay chimney pots. There are only two requirements – they must be able to hold compost and allow excess water to drain through.

Match the container to its setting. If it is to sit by your front door, take your cue from the style of your house or garden.

Proportion comes into play. The larger the pot, the greater the impact, although you can still make a powerful statement by grouping small pots together.

Putting plants together is the tricky bit. Choose plants that have similar requirements in terms of sun, soil and moisture and arrange them in an eye-catching, cohesive display. At the garden centre, examine the stock, read the labels and try out plant combinations.

Ready-made containers are unlikely to inspire. Arrangements are often too busy and samey, planted with the usual suspects – winter pansies, polyanthus, dwarf conifers and ivy.

Winning combinations often have three types of plants in one container: a tall, interesting evergreen plant to provide the permanent focal point; medium-sized, more rounded plants that are the seasonal fillers; and plants that spill over to break up lines and soften the overall look.

Some of the most effective displays use the same plant repeated within the design. Imagine

a row of identical rustic tin cans of French lavender on a window ledge or a series of terracotta pots with red geraniums lining a flight of steps.

Experiment by putting plants together to see how they work with each other in relation to size, shape, texture and colour. Try a fine-leaved grass like Anemanthele lessonia with a broad-leaved plant such as bergenia or heuchera, or use the same grass with a similar leaf shape like lilyturf. Contrasts provide drama, similarities provide harmony.

Or try with colours. Reds, oranges and yellows can create harmony while colours from opposite sides of the spectrum, such as red and green, orange and blue, or yellow and purple create a bolder look. The only limit is your imagination.

A pretty lead trough filled with silver-leaved plants and white cyclamen with marbled grey/green leaves, set against a pale green door is picture perfect



Janice Cripps is a professional garden designer based in Surbiton. For advice, planting plans, or taking projects from concept to completion, visit www.janicecripps.co.uk

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Your good elf

Commuters from Surbiton have had their morning journeys to town brightened in recent days by the disintegration of a large sign promoting ‘Self-Storage’, visible from train carriages. With festive timing, the first ‘s’ has fallen off the description... suggesting that it now the place where Santa keeps his little helpers.

A free mince pie

Discounts plus a free glass of wine and mince pie are the lure to visit Squires garden centre, Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton, on Wednesday, December 12 from 6-8.30pm for a Christmas shopping evening. A choir will sing, there will be food and beer tastings, and there is a Christmas planted basket class (pre-book on 020 8398 7170).

Cookies in town

The fudge brownies and cookies made by Surbiton bakers Lallapolosa are now sold at the Press Room coffee shop in Claremont Road. Customers asked if the indulgent favourites of the Maple Road farmers’ market could be stocked, to accompany morning and afternoon cuppas. It is only a few hundred yards between kitchen and serving plate.

A festive sale

There’s an early chance to get the present-buying off to a bright start at the Our Lady Immaculate school bazaar. The event on Saturday, December 1 runs from 1-4pm at the school at 399 Ewell Road, Tolworth. Entry is £1 adults, 50p concessions, with children getting in free. Stalls include gift-laden tombolas, a Chelsea football shoot-out, cakes and food. Father Christmas will be among the visitors.

Neil has moved

One of the Surbiton area’s most established chiropractors, Neil Reilly, has moved his business to Kingston. Neil, clinic director of Kingston Chiropractic Plus, is now working from Spinal Joint at 157 Park Road, although he has retained his existing Surbiton phone number, 020 8390 9030. More information at www.kingstonchiropracticplus.co.uk

Create dim sum

The experts at Surbiton’s Naturally Chinese restaurant are going to share the secrets of making dim sum. A series of classes is planned from January, with the delicate little bite-sized food (the actual translation is ‘touch the heart’) being created at the restaurant at the junction of Brighton Road and Balaclava Road. Vouchers for the classes are being sold at the restaurant throughout December... an interesting gift idea for wannabe dim sum chefs. Naturally Chinese has a festive menu throughout December, with free bubbly for parties of eight or more, and a big knees-up is planned for New Year’s Eve. On January 31 the restaurant hosts the charity dinner of the mayor, Cllr Mary Heathcote, who formally opened the premises in the summer.

Currying favour

Maya at 31 Brighton Road, is one of the 10 London suburb finalists in the 2012 spice ‘oscar’s, the British Curry Awards. It is up against fierce competition from, among others, curry houses in Balham, Battersea, Southall, Mitcham. In 2010 Maya was newcomer of the year in the awards.

It’s all a Blur

Surbiton’s Fircroft Trust, the charity which maximises the potential of adults with learning disabilities, hosts a cheese and wine evening on Friday December 7 at the centre at 96 Ditton Road. Tickets £20. Cheeses include Blue Monday, made by Blur’s Alex James. Call 020 8399 1772.

Royal seal of approval

Surbiton’s new Star & Garter Home gained Royal approval when Princess Alexandra took part in the topping out ceremony for the building rising rapidly alongside Upper Brighton Road.

The princess, president of the Royal Star & Garter Home charity and pictured with the fanfare team of the RAF Central Band, was welcomed by governors’ chairman Sir John Dunt and the mayor, Cllr Mary Heathcote.

Topping out is a Saxon ritual of anointing a yew branch, attached to the building’s last roof beam, with wine, oil, corn and salt to symbolise wisdom, liberty, prosperity and hospitality. It is traditionally done when the highest point of a new building has been reached.

When completed in 2013, it will provide nursing care for 37 residents and specialist dementia care for a further 26.

Phil Cooper



Helen is the new rector

St Matthew’s church has appointed the first female rector in its 137-year history. But the Rev Helen Hancock needs no introduction to Surbiton, having spent a year as curate at St Mark’s and St Andrew’s, just across town.

“It’s all very exciting; I’ve already met the congregation and I’m looking forward to starting,” she said. Her licensing takes place on Monday December 10 at 7.30pm at St Matthew’s, in St Matthew’s Avenue.

Intriguingly, Helen was once an in-house lawyer working on an industrial estate on the fringes of her new parish. “I know the Tolworth roundabout very well,” she said.



Her very first appointment was as a curate at Christ Church, New Malden, and she currently lives in New Malden with her husband (they have three children, all at uni). She will move to a new vicarage opposite St Matthew’s once building work is finished in a year’s time.

Built in 1875 to seat 800, when the parish population stood at 650, the church was funded by banker William Coulthurst in memory of his sister... and was aligned with her grave in Streatham. The spire is 173ft, and the yellow bricks used in the church construction were trundled round the corner from kilns in Red Lion Road.

Snap better pictures

Photographer Vicki Knights is helping Surbiton parents take better pictures of their children. She’s running a workshop at Hotel Bosco, St Mark’s Hill, on Wednesday, December 5, 10am-1.30pm.

Vicki, of Ditton Hill Road, is aiming it at parents with fancy cameras who don’t know how all the buttons work. “I focus on understanding lighting, composition and the best way to set up your camera,” she said. One result is below.

Book at www.photographyworkshopswithvicki.com



Overheard, Nov 16, Coronation Hall

On a beautiful summer’s day, two English tourists were driving through Wales.

At Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwyllyllantysiliogogoch, they stopped for lunch, and one of the tourists asked the woman behind the serving counter: “Before we order, I wonder if you could settle an argument for us? Can you pronounce where we are, very, very slowly?”

The woman leaned over and said: “Burrrr-Gurrrr-King.”

Corks popping at coffee shop

A more liberal approach to licensing means a Surbiton coffee bar is now popping corks.

The Press Room, the town centre’s newest cafe, can now serve red, white, rose and sparkling wines to go with your rum and orange cake or tuna and cucumber roll.

Try a light bubbly Prosecco, a fruity Argentinian Viognier, a French rose d’Anjou or a hearty Aussie St Hallett shiraz, with the chilled wines sitting in clip-on table coolers.

Owner David Symons believes in involving staff in decision-making, so organised a tasting evening to test possibles. No one has clear memories of the night!

“Customers said ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to come for a glass of wine, as opposed to a hot drink’. It’s aimed at lunch, afternoons or after work; a glass with dips or olives, as opposed to a pub evening,” said David.

“It lets people who want a safe, friendly, accessible place read a book in the afternoon and have a glass as they read.”

An initial selection by a former Oxo Tower sommelier was whittled down to a manageable range, by glass, bottle or carafe. Bollinger is also stocked, for special occasions. The wine list features staff critiques. One wine resembles a crisp autumnal walk in Richmond Park!

ExCellar, opposite the Y, is also serving alcohol as well as its off licence trade. Sit at the intriguingly higgledy-piggledy mix of tables and choose from a huge range of wines with cheese and other food. Next on the licensed list... a Surbiton hairdressing salon.



Lea-Ann, Danilo, Joe and David toast the wine range at the Press Room

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The restaurant is serving a special Christmas menu - with free bubbly for parties of eight or more - throughout December.

A special party will be held on New Year’s Eve, and the restaurant hosts the charity dinner for the mayor, Cllr Mary Heathcote, on January 31.

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The perfect presents

Surbiton has two gift specialists – Farrago in Claremont Road, near the station, and Hoi Polloi, which has traded in the town for 15 years and is in St Andrew's Road.

The Farrago window is usually full of clock faces, but it has gone Christmassy for the festive season, while the inside is packed, floor-to-ceiling, with gifts starting at a pound or two.

London Underground-themed gifts include a four-cup espresso set for £43.50 with part of the tube map on the side, while the range of mugs, teapots and eggcups is bewildering.

There are candles, hot water bottles, decorative biscuit tins, bath oils and scents, gift baskets, bath salts and traditional wooden toys.

Burt's Bees kits are £16, with tubes of cleansing cream, foot cream and body lotion as well as lip balm and hand salve. There are picture frames, scarves, gloves, costume jewellery, baby shoes and T-shirts, diaries, wrapping paper, cards, hand-warmers, eye masks... and Christmas decorations.

At Hoi Polloi the gift range includes picture frames and clothing lines, including Uggs boots, furniture, mirrors, decorations, cuddly toys, money boxes, jewellery boxes, clocks, candle holders, paperweights, doormats, cake stands, trays, vases, eggcups, fridge magnets, cufflinks, calendars and gardening gadgets.

You can also buy Hoi Polloi's gift range online at www.hoipolloigifts.co.uk

Farrago is at 3 Claremont Road, KT6 4QR, while Hoi Polloi is at 1 St Andrew's Road, KT6 4DT, next to Costa Coffee.

It's a wrap



Farrago's floor-to-ceiling gift selection

If the shoe fits...

Michael's, the shoe repair and luggage shop, also solves present-buying headaches. Wooden and foam shoe trees, to keep madam's footwear in tip-top shape, start at £15, while boot shapers avoid embarrassing wrinkles on the 8.02 from Surbiton. Other ideas include wallets, purses, belts, bum bags, and even new walking sticks for gran. Michael's is at 11 Claremont Road.

Feeling hampered

In a steamy kitchen near the Ace of Spades, mixtures bubble in big pans. Quack's Pickles, at the farmers' market, sells gift hampers (£30) containing five jars which could include chilli pickle, marmalade and spiced apple jelly.

Something for the boys

Surbiton now boasts an antiques shed... behind the Antelope. Restorer John Bowen, pictured right, who lives in Molesey with upholsterer partner Valerie Abercrombie, operates from a coach house in the pub back yard, selling items of appeal to hard-to-buy-for men.

John, who does music at the Maple Road pub on Thursdays, sells pictures (such as Isle of Man TT race posters), antique tiles, musical instruments and shabby chic furniture.

"I'm keen on automemorabilia," he said, adding that a classic motorbike workshop would soon appear in an adjoining shed. Other gift ideas include 1,000-year-old pieces of wood recovered from peat bogs by Scottish artist Iain Davidson, then wire-brushed and waxed.

Open Tuesday-Saturday, plus some Sundays.

Some charming ideas

Independent jeweller Gummus at 21b Victoria Road has new stock including Italian necklaces, earrings and bracelets, and stainless steel bracelets, chains and cufflinks for men. There is also an extensive silver charm collection sold by sister team Ela and Eda Akgul.

Locks and lights to last

Recycles, the Brighton Road bike shop, has dozens of gift ideas for the cyclist in your life, including locks and lights which are built to last. "Going to the pound shop for lights isn't always the best idea," said owner Lee Boyle. The shop is Surbiton's top stop for as-new fully serviced reconditioned bikes.



Where men can't go wrong

Jewellery created half a mile away is one appealing gift line at Shoes At Last, Sarah Taylor's Maple Road shop. Costume pieces by Van Gansen of Hayward Road, Thames Ditton, include bracelets and necklaces, and range from a tenner to £70. "Perfect for men baffled about what women really want," said Sarah. Also available, handbags, scarves, raincoats.

Four pints of Young's please

One Friday 10 years ago, my friends and I came out of a restaurant to find a power cut had plunged Surbiton into darkness, except for one pub, which shone out like the Holy Grail.

We followed the light and peeped through the door. It was bustling, warm, and filled with laughter. We wanted to stay. "What can I get you girls?" asked the cheery rosy-cheeked man behind the bar.

"Er..." I fumbled. "Can I have four pints of Young's, please?"

"Four pints of bitter for four young ladies?" boomed the cheery man. "Of course you can!"

The pub was the Black Lion, the cheery man was Mark the landlord. That was my first ever drink in a pub. Ten years on it's my second home.

The Black Lion is one of the last traditional boozers.

The world of pubs is over-complicated nowadays; your request for a pint is delayed for half an hour while the barman constructs an elaborate cocktail for the person in front of you, and food is served with a jus or puree or foam.

Fortunately you can walk into the Black Lion and be greeted by name because Mark and Danny have FBI skills when it comes to recall. A good pint, a glass of wine, an evening of banter, the quiz, sport and live music on Saturdays outweighs mood lighting and spiced pigs trotters.

If you miss the days when pubs were about good conversation, good people, and good beer, pop down to the Black Lion, pull up a chair by the fire and immerse yourself in the unique warmth of a pub as it should be.

Becky Mayhew

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A healthy relaunch

Following a £1million, 15-week revamp, Surbiton's Nuffield fitness centre will unveil its new look with the help of several sports celebrities.

The health club in the old waterworks building in Simpson Way, off Portsmouth Road, started as Pinnacle in 1998, became Cannons two years later and was then taken over by Britain's largest health care charity, which ploughs most of its profits back into the business each year.

It means that, despite the recession, cash was available for a major upgrade of communal areas including bar, reception, changing rooms and the gym overlooking the swimming pools, which now boasts training equipment so up-to-date it can't be found anywhere else in the UK.

On December 12, Elmbridge mayor and club member Cllr Janet Turner cuts the ribbon at a relaunch, assisted by ex-world hurdle champion Colin Jackson, England cricketer Chris Tremlett (who lives next door in Clearwater Place) and Ireland rugby international Rob Henderson.

Centre manager Vinny Barrett said the event would include a celebrity £1,000 cash drop, and a team of actors recreating life in Surbiton in the 1850s and celebrating the industrial – and medical – history of the site.

Since Nuffield took over, there has been a greater emphasis on members' medical health – and a reduction in the proportion of joiners who leave.

Nuffield can, for instance, take and analyse blood samples to check early



onset of health issues, with members given green, amber or red ratings to then improve with combinations of changes to diet, lifestyle and exercise.

January sees the start of online health and fitness, with Twitter and Facebook message exchanges with gym buddies. Monthly membership fees range from £50 for students to £89.

Run on rabbits

Just before the last Maple Road farmers' market, larger-than-life TV cook Clarissa Dickson Wright had been on the box extolling the virtues of rabbit.

Poor Brian Beemey, manning the Gourmet Game stall, didn't know what hit him when he unloaded his stock.

"I'd sold out of rabbit after the first three or four customers," he reported.

So if you miss the first few minutes of the next market, you'll have to settle for partridges, pheasants, pigeons, venison (diced and fillet) and wild boar.

Most are shot in Sussex and Kent, with the venison coming from Wadhurst Park, Sussex.

And the rabbits? "They come from wherever they happen to burrow," said Brian.



From left, Ellie, Jemima and Trish at New Expressions

A quarter century of trims

Hairdresser Trish Collins has notched up 25 years at New Expressions, across from Sainsbury's, and calculates 800 regulars come to her for a trim.

As a fresh-faced Belfast girl, Trish started working with the late Jim Jivram, round the corner in St Mary's Road, before transferring to what had once been Peter's Haircuts (run by a Turkish barber in the 70s and 80s), retaining the curious 'haircuts' spelling. Before that the shop sold records, with 'listening booths' down the quirky wooden front staircase.

"We don't have TVs," she said. "We talk to customers! What I love about Surbiton is it's great for families. The farmers' market is great too."

The lower ground level of the shop at 30a Victoria Road specialises in Afro-Caribbean haircuts and hair extensions, while the ground floor is a traditional barber's.

Trish, who lives in Berrylands, marked the shop's 25th anniversary by charging customers 1987 prices. A hundred turned up for a £3 'hairkut'.

The salon has raised £25,000 for charities including Fircroft and the Princess Alice Hospice.

It's game on at the butcher's and baker's

It's shaping up to be a busy Christmas in Hinchley Wood's bustling parade, where Steve Crawley is taking orders for turkeys, ducks, geese and pheasants at Stephen's Fine Foods.



"Just ask and I'll do my best to locate and supply whatever you want," he said. Ribs of beef, free-range pork from Plantation Pigs in Guildford and home-made sausages are also popular, with longer opening hours in the run-up to Christmas including 7am to 2pm on Sunday, December 23, and 6.30am to 3pm on Christmas Eve.

"What you get all year is very good, but what you get at

Christmas is extra special," he said... which could just as easily apply to what's on offer next door at Il Forno bakery.

Baker Jack Farruggia is, naturally, offering tasty mince pies, while manager Nuala is making festive Christmas pudding-style cupcakes – a lighter alternative to heavy, formal Christmas cakes.

But the real treat is the Italian speciality panettone, a sweet dessert bread which comes in kilo and half-kilo sizes, and contains candied fruit, lemon zest and raisins.

"Panettone are really an Italian new year tradition," said Nuala. "Italians often dip chunks of the cake into spumante."



Entertaining Archie

Archie has come of age, notching up 21 years of perms, trims, highlights and sets in his salon in Maple Road. A good time to look back on an interesting life.

Oswaldo Arciero was born in Cassino, south of Rome, and was nine when his parents moved to London to seek their fortune, his father working as a builder and landscape gardener.

They returned to Italy, but he stayed, attending Richard Challoner School, New Malden, and nurturing vague thoughts of doing something with electronics.

So why hairdressing? Isn't it obvious?

"Ladies! Women! Girls!"

Aldo (as he was then known) learnt the basics with his cousin at the Di Biase salon in New Malden High Street, then studied with Vidal Sassoon until the hassle of commuting got too much.

"That did me in, so I opened my own place," he said. Strand, in Hook Road, near the Ace, still operates today, as Choppers.

In the early 90s, Archie ("I never liked Aldo") came to Maple Road and set up Archies Hair by 1.

"Twenty-one years ago it was quiet here, and the rents were cheaper," he said, describing his Surbiton time as "fun, with ups and downs".

Twice married, with four children, Archie lives in Upper Brighton Road with Jackie, who also works at the salon. "I'm a granddad now," he said proudly. "One boy, one girl."

Back in the day, Archie was, from the 1980s black and white image, something of a new romantic, regularly taking part in fashion shows, and styling models for glam photoshoots.

Today's customers are, it's fair to say, unlikely to request the Boy George look.



Archie today in his Maple Road salon, and in his new romantic phase in the 80s



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On a wing and a prayer

Winter can claim to be the most interesting season for watching birds in your garden, not least because you can actually see them once the leaves have fallen. Here are a few tips from Paul Hunter, Surbiton resident, and birder since the 1970s, on how to help them during the crueler months

Food and water

Feeding birds in your garden in winter is very important for their survival chances as natural food in the countryside drops dramatically, especially in January and February. However, water is also vital.

Birds don't sweat as such, but do lose water through breathing and droppings, and need to replenish liquid daily. Water is also important for bird hygiene, and a bird bath can be a life-saver.

Regularly clean feeders and bird baths, but it's OK to leave your garden messy as it helps many species of animals successfully overwinter.

The Usual Suspects?

You may think you have robins, blackbirds and blue tits in your garden all year round, and you would be right. However, many will not be the same individual birds. Female robins often migrate to the continent while Scandinavian robins migrate to the UK in winter, both for better weather. Many

birds, such as blue tits, summer in the countryside and come into gardens in the winter. Further afield, a recent influx of thrushes in Norfolk included blackbirds which, when trapped and ringed, proved to be of Russian origin.

Specialities

Winter is a great time for seeing unusual birds in the garden. Watch out for Scandinavian thrushes (redwings and fieldfares), unusual finches (redpolls, siskins, bullfinches and bramblings) and less common tits (coal and maybe even marsh). It is also a good time for woodpeckers, nuthatches and treecreepers. You may be lucky enough to find a real rarity. Last year, a rufous turtle dove spent the winter in a British garden, and I have once had a flock of waxwings in my small Surbiton plot.

Overwintering surprises

Whether it is a sign of global warming (man-made or otherwise) or not, several species which formerly migrated south are beginning to stay in small numbers. These hardy pioneers, if they survive, get the benefit of an early start in spring and avoid the very real dangers of migration. In recent years I have seen overwintering blackcaps and chiffchaffs in my garden and have my fingers crossed for a firecrest.



Clockwise from above, a redpoll and two siskins on a feeder; a Surbiton robin in the snow; a brambling; a starling; a waxwing. Pictures Paul Hunter



Big Garden Bird Watch 2013

Finally a plug for the world's largest wildlife survey, and one in which you can take part. The Big Garden Bird Watch is an annual survey which in 2013 takes place on January 26 and 27. You spend one hour on either day recording the largest number of each species in your garden, then report your findings to the RSPB. It makes a genuine difference and I urge you to take part. Details at www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch

Marsha's tale

Welcoming two new children into your home is a big deal, but Marsha and son Shane have coped magnificently, and now Ross, five, and sister Billie, seven, are settled in the family.

Initially placed with Marsha for a few weeks, while social workers helped their birth parents with their addictions, the two youngsters have now been with her two years.

Recently, to Marsha's delight, it has been decided with her that the children would stay long-term with Marsha, which means they will be with her to 18... giving them and the foster carer a real sense of stability. Ross and Billie still have regular planned contact with their birth parents, agreed with their social worker. Marsha supports her foster children with that contact.

But how do you become a foster carer? Marsha's life altered forever in 1999 when she had son Shane. She raised him on her own as a single mum, and he is now a bright, lively, chatty secondary school pupil.

"When I had Shane, I felt other children should also be entitled to a loving family and a loving home, so I applied to be a foster carer," she said. "A social worker visited regularly for four months and carried out background checks and references. It was very thorough, but I understand they need to be sure that the right people are chosen to be foster carers."

After her approval in 2009 she had a phone call. Could she look after six-year-old Alex on a temporary basis while social workers made plans on where he could stay? A month later he went to stay with his maternal aunt, who still looks after him today. Between Alex leaving and Ross and Billie arriving, she had two other foster children.

What support do you get? Every foster carer has a network of expert support, from initial training to a supervising social worker's six-weekly visits. Outside office hours, another team

of social workers provides emergency support.

Marsha receives continuing training, and attends regular support groups with other foster carers. She gets a weekly fostering fee of £237 plus an allowance to cover the child's costs of between £132 and £201 depending on age.

What is needed, first and foremost, is time, space and enthusiasm to offer a safe temporary home to children who may have experienced violence, neglect or abuse.

For Marsha, the most rewarding thing is "watching the children develop, knowing you've made a huge impact".

Her advice to potential future foster carers is to be patient. "Be realistic about placements," she said. "The children who come to you each have their own story, and might present some challenges to cope with their feelings. It is important that the foster carer helps them to understand their feelings and how to deal with them."

"Also it's important to think about the age range that you want to foster. There's a lot of demand for teenage carers at the moment."

Getting her son Shane on side at the start of the fostering adventure was important to Marsha. "I explained to him that sometimes children can't stay with their families. We watched some programmes about it," she said. "He catches on quickly, and he's fine about sharing."

To learn more, call the fostering service on freephone 0800 169 3497 or email fostering@rbkc.gov.uk

Weekly paid allowances

Foster a baby for Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea or Hammersmith & Fulham, and you receive £369 in total per week. That rises to £388 for a child aged five-10, and £438 for a child over 16. You get extra if you take a child on holiday, and there are additional payments for birthdays and Christmas.

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Christmas rocks



Rock Choir, the local love-of-singing group, performed at St Andrew's church as part of the Maple Village WI's Christmas fair. Sixty choir members opened with Mr Blue Sky and the Annie Lennox song Walking On Broken Glass, as more than 20 stalls in the Maple Road church sold gifts, cakes, cards, books, reindeer food, snowman soup, chutneys and artwork at the fair on Saturday November 17. Hillcroft College, the women's residential centre in Surbiton, was the charity which benefited.

What the Dickens?

St Andrew's church, Maple Road, is the venue for an evening celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens.

The Kingston Choral Society presents A Christmas Carol at 7.30pm on Saturday December 15, with actor Richard Brimblecombe reading extracts from Dickens' work, while the choir performs Christmas music which would have been known in Dickens' time. A glass of wine and a mince pie in the interval should ensure the audience is in good voice to join in the better-known carols.

Andrew Griffiths conducts, and Gavin Roberts is at the organ.

Tickets on the door, in advance (adults £13, concs £11, U18s £5) at 020 8977 4801 or online (fee applies) at www.kingstonchoralsociety.org.uk/kcs

A story that everybody nose

The cornerHOUSE is celebrating a quarter of a century of pantomimes with a new version of the children's favourite Pinocchio, entitled No Strings Attached.

Written by Tim Harrison, and based on Carlo Collodi's 1883 classic about the wooden puppet, the 25th pantomime is directed by Rea Mole, with musical direction by Nigel Palmer.

"It came down to a choice between a couple of well-known Victorian children's stories, and we decided to pick the nose, as it were," explained Tim.

The show runs from Tuesday, January 29 to Saturday, February 2, with performances at 7.45pm and a Saturday matinee at 4pm.

In the panto, a blue fairy visits the carpenter's workshop in Tolorth d'Arcy and casts a spell on a puppet, who then sets off on an incredible adventure which ends up inside a whale.

Set designer Tim Cannings has cancelled his Christmas lunch

to concentrate on building the inside of the giant mammal.

"Pinocchio ends up with a very large nose indeed, so casting Richard Williams in the lead role was obvious, and has saved us a small fortune in make-up," added Tim.

Since the late 1980s, the cornerHOUSE panto has raised more than £40,000 for local charities.

Tickets are £8 (£6 concs). Booking details at www.thecornerhouse.org

Richard Williams is Pinocchio in No Strings Attached

Net gains for a goalie

A fast-moving comedy about football and fizzy drinks is coming to the cornerHOUSE in Douglas Road.

El Comodin (The Joker) centres on Danny, England's third choice goalkeeper, who gets his big break on a South American tour.

It is the unhealthy collision between politicians, big business and sport, seen at times during the

recent Olympics, which are explored in a fictional Latin American context by Surbiton playwright David Gray.

With the witty banter of footballers and journalists, film clips and a zinging soundtrack, it is a colourful, noisy show from the Du Buffet company, which brought The King and Me and Not in Line to the cornerHOUSE in 2010.

The show runs from Wednesday, December 5 to Saturday, December 8 at 7.45pm. It is directed by Robin Johannsen, and contains strong language.

Tickets £8 (£5 concs) by calling 07583 688136, emailing elcom-tickets@hotmail.co.uk or on the door.

Canvassing your opinion

The annual cornerHOUSE canvas competition has its gala night on Tuesday, December 11 from 7pm, when all this year's entries will be displayed in the arts centre in Douglas Road. Collages, oils, pencil drawings and watercolours will be on show. Visitors can vote for their favourites until January 5, then two winners will be picked (one in the U17 category). The winning pair will be displayed all year.

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"We are a one-stop bedroom shop," said Lance. "As a small retailer of beds and mattresses we are flexible and fast, and offer free deliveries. We also have a lowest price guarantee."

He believes a bedroom should be a place to refuel, relax, have breakfast in bed with the grandchildren or read a book in comfort. "You can reconnect with yourself or loved ones," he said. The Bed Post, 43-45 Brighton Road, KT6 5LR. Call 020 8399 3293 or visit www.bed-post.co.uk

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Those who wait at Platform 1

I have been commuting from Surbiton for a year now, and have learnt that we commuters fall into the following categories:

- The Caffeine Fiends. They storm down the platform steps, using briefcases and handbags as battering rams, and thunder into Nero's on Platform 1. Armed with their mega quadruple giant espresso with extra shot, they stand clutching it as if it's a vital organ and looking as though they've just injected a large dose of heroin.
- The Hungover. The poor souls with chins tucked into coats and hands stuffed in pockets lope along the platform as though approaching inevitable doom, and stare numbly at the tracks, occasionally closing their eyes against the torture of a red wine headache and the fact that their conscience is screaming that they should never drink on a school night.
- The Already-At-Work. Infuriatingly efficient breed, they yell into their mobiles 'Tell Graham I want those figures by half eight' or

'We need to resolve this ASAP if we're going to move forward', while receiving death stares from the not-so-efficient Caffeine Fiends and Hungover.

- The I'm-Not-Sure-Who-I-Am. The alarm went off at 5.30am, they stubbed their toe on the corner of the bed trying to creep round in the dark so as not to wake their other half, and now they're standing on a freezing platform trying to remember what they're waiting for, but they can't as they're still asleep and have no idea who they are.
- The Smug Late Starters. This is me, 80 per cent of the time. We roll up at half nine, yawning languidly, and mooch along the platform, bopping a little to our iPods, admiring our freshly painted nails (we had time to paint them while everyone else was on their eighth email and 16th coffee) and looking smug about missing the appallingly crammed early morning trains.
- The Smartphone Army. Don't look, don't

touch. Don't make a casual remark about the weather, or the tardiness of South West Trains. They don't want to know. They are lost in the world inside that little bit of plastic. Just try not to laugh when they walk into a closing door.

● The Bottom-of-the-Platformers. For years I was baffled by the determined group shivering at the exposed end of Platform 1. Why stand so far from seats and shelter? Is there a mystical force they cannot resist? Are they a secret society that only meet on platforms? One day I realised the truth, which cracked open my world like sunlight bursting through clouds. They get off at Wimbledon, and want to be nearest the exit. Oh, the joys of a solved mystery!

And you thought commuting was just getting on a train and going to work?

Becky Mayhew

Read more of Becky at beckysaysthings.wordpress.com



Find the treasure under the rainbow

The end wall of the olive-green pavilion in the middle of the Victoria recreation ground now has a bold, colourful mural.

Designed by a seven-year-old, the picture shows people enjoying one of the town's oldest enclosed green spaces.

Its aim, apart from brightening up the building, is to draw people in to a worthy, but undersupported, project – a coffee shop run by adults with learning disabilities.

Edward Hunt, a pupil at St Mary's junior school, Long Ditton, won the competition to design a mural for the wall that faces Balaclava Road. His image shows people picnicking, cycling, flying kites and sitting at the cafe's outdoor tables, enjoying morning coffee under a rainbow.

Painter Dan Hickman then went to work, transferring Edward's sketch to the large scale of the pavilion wall.

Mindful of the state of the other three walls, where painted-over graffiti creates spidery patterns on the surfaces, the rainbow wall, proudly proclaiming the Victoria Park Cafe's existence, has been coated with a graffiti-resistant sealant.

The cafe, which gives valuable work experience to people with learning disabilities, is open Tuesday-Friday, 9.30am-3.30pm. As well as bargain-priced tea and coffee (where else can you get a decent cuppa for 60p these days?), the cafe sells snacks, cold drinks and homemade cakes, scones, cookies and sandwiches.

It helps the staff learn how to serve customers, take orders, make drinks and prepare sandwiches, stock take, deal with money and clear away.

If the bold rainbow design proves popular, the other walls of the pavilion could eventually end up being painted with murals as well.



The pavilion in the Victoria Rec now has a rainbow



Nancy Vlasto and Blossom

Nancy blossoms at 87

Surbiton charity fundraiser Nancy Vlasto is an unforgettable figure around town, riding a red mobility scooter and wearing a fluffy, lifesize horse's head.

The former nurse, midwife and health visitor, who will be 88 in February, has lived in her current home just off King Charles Road for 30 years, and has collated her life experiences in a detailed, liberally illustrated autobiography, What's Next?

"I love horses; I love all animals," she said, giving her dachshund Meg a scratch behind the ear when I asked about her equine alter ego. "I was made an all-in-one horse outfit, and I've never looked back."

Arthritis may have robbed her of agility, but Nancy still regularly takes to the streets on her scooter as Blossom the horse, rattling collecting tins for a succession of good causes.

"People come to Blossom when she's on the scooter," said Nancy, who also gives talks on a string of subjects, and confesses to a passion for sport.

And that curious surname? "My father was from a Greek family," she said. "It's helpful for me; there aren't that many Nancy Vlastos!"

Nancy, who regularly sang with both St Mark's and St Andrew's choirs, and was a long-time member of Surbiton Oratorio, says that Surbiton has changed enormously since she arrived in town half a century ago.

"It's gone from a large village to a cosmopolitan town," she said. "Everything has become so complex; I fear for the people of today when they get into their 80s."

Having said that, she is full of praise for Surbitonians. "The courtesy and help people give you with the scooter is wonderful," she said. "People couldn't be more helpful; it's a very British thing. People always reach things down to me from high shelves in shops. Since the Paralympics people have become much more aware of others' needs."

What's Next? is available for £18.95 via the publisher (www.united-writers.co.uk) or on Amazon

This town ticks every box

by Morris Thain

If ever I returned to Earth
And had a choice about my birth
I'd have a brown tail hanging free
An urban fox is what I'd be

I'd live in Surbiton of course
Close to my nearest dining source
The things that fill my life with glee:
The bins around the KFC

Those chicken bones, discarded chips,
The coleslaw pots, the ketchup dips
A fox can live a regal life
With plenty spare to feed the wife

And kids, for in the gardens near
I'd live without a trace of fear
No traps, no hunting, nothing grim
A burrow, drumsticks, every whim

So KT6 is where I'd stay
Well fed, secure in every way
Yes, Surbiton ticks every box
For a contented urban fox



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