the good life

Issue 58 — *The best thing to come out of Surbiton since the A3* — May 2021

Saturday May 15
9am-1pm
Surbiton Farmers' Market

Hogging it

● This little fellow is one of the faces of a new Tolworth mural which aims to inspire the next generation to create a nature reserve destined to become the envy of the capital. See **p6**

● A 1962 Routemaster growled through Surbiton as buses from the museum at Brooklands reran the old 65 route for a day

● Even street bollards were yarn-bombed in a wave of urban guerrilla stitchery, with this crocheted NHS nurse a fine example. More ripping yarns on **p4**

Burger and fries? That'll be £125.95

While a standard burger meal deal in Tolworth Broadway is £5.99, including fries and drink, the 'special' from a new eatery weighs in at a staggering £125.95.

Covered in 24-carat gold leaf, it's the ultimate in takeaway bling, and has even made headlines on foodie websites in the United States. Unsurprisingly, not a single one has been sold in the six weeks since Luxxo Burgers opened in the former Code hair salon on the corner site at the entrance to the M&S car park!

You can even get gold-flecked fries. "It doesn't taste of anything," admitted the man at the counter, begging the question 'Why bother?'

Other meals from the takeaway include burgers in lurid blue, pink and green buns; effects achieved with food colouring.

The burger bar was opened on March 2 by 36-year-old Attaul Manan; his first venture into the restaurant world. As well as gold-coated specials, the takeaway does offer the Broadway's standard fare of burgers, shakes and soft drinks.

Attaul calls his 24-carat burger the 'Ferrari' of meals, and hopes it will help his shop stand out from the road's EIGHTEEN hot-food takeaways.

● Sainsbury's and Waitrose could soon have a rival. Aldi has bought the old Guy Salmon Jaguar Land Rover showroom in Portsmouth Road, but neighbours are speculating if Britain's fifth largest supermarket will demolish and build on the site, or sell it on. Dittons Cllr Nick Darby told The Good Life: "I think we can anticipate a planning application for a new supermarket soon." He predicts a mixed reaction from residents, especially if plans include flats above. "Parking's another issue, to avoid Portsmouth Road queues. Lidl in Chessington is an example of not getting things quite right!"

Six-storey block? No way!

A plan to demolish two semi-detached bungalows in Church Hill Road by St Mark's church to build a six-storey block of flats has been rejected.

Kingston Council officers refused planning permission for 24 flats (seven three-bed, 10 two-bed and seven one-bed) plus two disabled parking bays and 45 bike spaces.

Among the 10 reasons cited was that the development would be "excessive in height, bulk and mass and would appear incongruous within the street scene, which would detract from the character and appearance of the existing site and the surrounding area".

Planners also said it failed to incorporate any affordable housing and had not demonstrated a good standard of accommodation with good levels of daylight and sunlight and dedicated play space.

The developers had failed to meet Kingston Council's strategy for at least 30 per cent being three-bed properties.

Evidence was lacking about parking impact, flood risk, air quality, net zero carbon emissions and wildlife, and a fire statement was missing.

The current bungalows near St Mark's church

It's great to see queues again

Surbiton and Tolworth emerged from hibernation as lockdown lifted in April; high streets springing back to life as hair salons, independents, barbers, charity shops and the **M&Co** clothing store reopened, and pubs with gardens including the **Black Lion** and **Victoria** were buzzing once again.

Queues snaked down the street as shaggy residents waited for overdue trims, or took bagfuls of donations to charity shops. Despite some casualties, most retailers are trading again.

Andrew Thompson at **Salon No13** (below right) said he was "overjoyed and overwhelmed" by the support from the community. Sarah Taylor (below) at **Shoes at Last** said: "People are really pleased. We have all-new stock; our new spring collection. And I've just launched a new website."

● How is the town bouncing back? **p10**

The team that get you moving

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Lisa Brand

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Chips off the old block...

Farewell Fishmania, hello Top Cod. The chippy at 281 Ewell Road closed two years ago after the Chinese couple who ran it retired following a bout of ill health.

The premises, two doors from Prithi, were empty and forlorn... the counter in place, as well as the nostalgic cobwebby price board, including mushrooms in batter.

It reopened in mid-Feb as Top Cod, with brothers Mesut (left) and Moji opening seven days a week. Mesut is the most experienced, coming to the UK from Turkey 25 years ago and working as a chef in Blackburn. For both brothers this is the first eatery of their own.

They've had a good reception from locals, and open noon-10pm Mon-Sat, and 1-7pm on Sundays. Naturally, cod and chips is the signature takeaway.

Ultimately, says Moji, when regulations allow there will be tables and chairs inside, as there once were. But for now it's take-out only.

A full menu includes burgers, the usual fish 'n' chip combos, pies, sausages and side dishes. Chips range from original to peri peri, potato wedges to sweet potato fries... and you can get a proper chip butty for two quid.

"The old couple retired two years ago, and we'd been looking for our own fish and chip shop," said Moji.

The brothers live in New Malden. **TH**

Fishmania 2019

Top Cod 2021

John's bean busy

John Tiddy at the Surbitonian Grind, 120 Ewell Road, with Yubba

If life's a grind, pep yourself up with a pastry and cuppa at a new combined bakery/cafe. The Surbitonian Grind opened in late Feb in the old paint-your-own pottery studio, Ewell Road.

It's local lad John Tiddy's first such venture, and he and wife Noki are putting everything into it, opening seven days a week and creating an impressive buzz. "We do fresh bread each day, and if it isn't sold, it either becomes part of the window display or it's used up by the family," he said. Bread comes from The Ginger Bread Man bakery in Walton.

John, 46, formerly head of retail for a footwear firm, grew up on the Alpha Road estate and went to school at Our Lady Immaculate. A coffee shop has been the couple's dream, and customers (9th coffee free via a loyalty card) can enjoy Surbiton-roasted brews from Coffee Bay. He designed the layout himself, has installed the best wi-fi, and prides himself on service. "Very few cafes offer really, really good service," he said.

That gold monkey? "He's Yubba," said John, adding that his grandad (nickname Yubba) is a dead ringer! **Tim Harrison**

Recipes from history

A cookbook is making lockdown history, with 100 recipes, some handed down through generations since the 1880s.

The Friends of Long Ditton St Mary's Infants and Juniors have created a Lockdown Love Cookbook, inspired by family baking at home during Covid. "When grandchildren ask what you did in the pandemic, you'll not only be able to say 'baked banana bread and drank cocktails' but recreate the tastes," said Desirée Harris, chair of the Friends. "What better gift than a book, not only chock-full of yummy recipes but bursting with love too?"

Buy your wedge of history for £20, or get two copies for £35. For details on this school fundraiser or to order visit **www.tinyurl.com/lockdowncookbook**

Vegan pop-up returns

Emma Egerton's next vegan pop-ups are at Tolworth station on May 29 and June 26. On the menu: homemade burgers (chickpea masala, mushroom and black rice, black bean), fries and slaw, a hot dish and puds.

The Little Ginger plant-powered pop-up is midday-7pm. Free parking while you wait in the station forecourt.

Emma, who lives in Bond Road, has run her street food and catering business since 2016, launching the pop-up at the Community Brain Baking Ideas kitchen in January.

She also does vegan grazing boxes.

Email littleginger@zoho.com or check out @littleginger on Instagram.

● Surbiton's award-winning farmers' market (next is May 15) has three volunteer vacancies in its friendly team. The **charity co-ordinator** liaises with good causes (£70,000 raised to date), organises fundraising and helps devise events. The **market manager** deals with stallholders and books guest stalls (which can involve lots of food and drink sampling), while the **communications/marketing person** keeps folk up to date via social media, the website and newsletters. Time wise, it's a few hours a month, plus a monthly Zoom pow-wow and helping on the third Saturday of the month. You can get more information from **www.surbitonfarmersmarket.co.uk**, or visit the organisers' stall on market day.

● Staff at the French Table, Maple Road, were not idle in lockdown. They ran, walked and cycled 3,000km in four weeks for Hinchley Wood charity The Grace Dear Trust. "We thought it would be great for the staff to come together to keep mentally and physically fit and, at the same time, raise money for a local charity," said Sarah Guignard, front of house manager and owner. The crew raised £2,000 for a charity which helps save the lives of young people with mental health issues. It will support school seminars, counsellors and a network of professionals.

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the good life

Editor: Tim Harrison

Set up in 2012, the community paper for Surbiton, Tolworth, Berrylands and Long Ditton appears six times a year between March and November. We deliver to 11,500 homes and the issue is also available to download on our website. We're always delighted to hear from you, whether it's about editorial or advertising, or joining our band of loyal volunteers who help us deliver. The email address is: **thegoodlifesurbiton@gmail.com**

Between issues, news appears on Instagram and Facebook (**@thegoodlifesurbiton**) and on our website, where fresh stories are posted most days, and where back issues are archived.

www.thegoodlifesurbiton.co.uk

This paper is also available at Michael's shoe repairs, Shoes At Last, Jennings, the cornerHOUSE, Community Motors & Stear greengrocers.

Sleeping course

Trouble sleeping? Even after going through the election leaflets coming through the letterbox? Get tips from adult education on Wed May 26, 6.30-8pm. £6; free if you earn under £21,157 a year. Details at **https://bit.ly/KAE-CL**

Brace yourselves

Darsh Patel's teeth-aligning studio Invisibrace, opposite Bosco in St Mark's Hill, has become SmartDontics, to reflect a broader range of services.

Sushi conversion

The former WE Clarke & Son chemist shop near the Royal Oak at 253 Ewell Road, Tolworth, is being converted into a sushi bar called Sushi Hero.

The art of Jasmine

Teenager Jasmine was second out of 1,000 in a virtual art contest run by the National Gallery. The Year 12 Surbiton High student was "very proud"

Food and mood

A course on links between food and mood starts Wed May 12, 10am-noon, + two more Weds. £24, free for low-earners. **https://bit.ly/KAE-CL**

Bespoke training

Families can use a government-funded Bikeability safe cycling scheme which (with a remarkably straight face) transport minister Grant Shapps dubs bespoke. **www.kingston.gov.uk/cycling**

No cash please

The 64-space council pay-and-display car park in St Philip's Road no longer takes coins. Cashless parking arrived in April: £1.10 per hour, 8am-6.30pm.

She's mayor-to-be

Berrylands Cllr Sushila Abraham is to be the next mayor. The Ewell Road solicitor will replace Cllr Margaret Thompson at the council annual meeting on May 18.

Help to start over

Restart grants of up to £18,000 are being offered to gyms, pubs and salons coming back after lockdown, and up to £6,000 for other retailers. Kingston Council has now divvied out £45m in Covid grants. **www.kingston.gov.uk**

Smile for wardens

Be extra nice to Surbiton traffic wardens. For the past month they've been trialling body-worn video cameras to capture 'But I've only been two minutes' moments... or worse.

Safety of women

A year-long council initiative has begun, addressing safety of women and girls. The first phase is asking residents and businesses to share their feedback.

Spaced-out cars

Nine parking spaces, rather than seven, will be provided at a four-storey block of nine flats being built at the Lovelace Road/Lovelace Gardens junction.

Charity shop plea

Victoria Road's Oxfam shop needs volunteers to staff tills and sift. "There's the option to do a bit of everything," said Judi Thompson, who can be emailed at **jthompson2@oxfam.org.uk**

We Ait sausages

Expect the waft of bangers from Ravens Ait. Barbecue weekends happen on May 7-9, 14-16, 21-23 and 28-30. Fri 5-10.30pm, Sat 1-10.30pm, Sun noon-7pm. Up to six a table, free ferry at Queens Prom. **events@ravensait.co.uk**

Two new homes

Two three-storey, five-bed semi-detached homes can be built in the back garden of Foley Lodge, 6 Lovelace Gardens, councillors have ruled. Part of the existing house will be demolished to allow access. A previous plan was rejected; the new version is redesigned with smaller windows and altered roof.

SURBITON LIFE by David Cox

Having rebuilt the house and restyled the garden their thoughts turned to reimagining the neighbours

The hot choc biker

The hardest challenge for 10-year-old Gabriel Welsh wasn't the 314km (195 miles) he cycled over 11 days but getting up every morning at the crack of dawn. "It was quite hard," said Gabriel, who wore his ski jacket and gloves to keep out the chill. "Most nights I was just reading in bed and then when I woke up it was really early and mum was saying 'Come on'! Most of the time I'd say we'd do 35-37k."

Proud mum Polly, who accompanied Gabriel on the 6.30am bike rides, said: "Gabe doesn't seem to get tired. He just had one moany morning when we went out really early and he was cold, but by that time we just had to get it done and get on with it."

The target was to raise £300 in a 300k challenge for Breast Cancer Now. Gabriel smashed it, not only cycling 314k but also raising more than £1,000 for the charity.

"Lots of people sponsored us. We never dreamt that we'd get to £1,000. We thought it would be amazing to get to £300, but it has just got bigger and bigger," said Polly.

The family hadn't done much cycling before the first lockdown. That changed when gyms and pools closed, so Polly, husband Evan, Gabriel, sister Jolie, 9, and brother Raffy, 5, took to their bikes from their Pine Walk home. "Evan got an attachment on his bike for Raffy, so we were able to go out as a family and do big bike rides," said Polly. "Gabriel is a good biking buddy; he was really good at cycling and he was great company."

Polly spotted that Breast Cancer Now was doing a cycling fundraiser in March and suggested the challenge to Gabriel. She thought it might be too much and that they wouldn't have enough time to complete it, or that it would be too stressful.

"But Gabe was like 'Come on, we can do it'," she said. "So we decided to start a few days early, which was fine by the organisers, to try to get a chunk done before Gabe went back school so it wasn't hanging over us. But we did it all before then."

Sustained by snack bars, flapjacks, tea, hot chocolate and pain au chocolat, Gabriel and Polly notched up impressive figures on cycle lanes and towpaths in loops of Kingston, Richmond and Bushy Park.

On the last push on Sun, Mar 7, the day before school was back, the Strava read-out by the suspension bridge at Teddington lock was 55.19k. "We're very proud of him; he's done really well. I can't believe we did it so quickly," said Polly. "Every day he'd get up and do it. A 35-mile bike ride, for instance, is massive. For him to do it at 10 years old is a huge deal. It's probably why we have raised so much money. I think all of our friends and family have thought 'Wow!' It is incredible. Lockdown has been really hard – especially with a five-year-old tearaway – and the weather was really awful, so I think it was really good for our mental health to get out in the fresh air."

To read a daily account of Gabriel's bike rides – the equivalent of cycling from Berrylands to Swansea – or to sponsor him (he's now got the bit between his teeth and is hoping to notch up a few more miles for the cause) see Polly's Facebook page at **www.tinyurl.com/ykywc8qh**

Jane Grove

Turkey site plan rejected

Plans for eight houses on the site of a former turkey farm in Tolworth have been refused by Kingston Council.

Developers wanted to turn an area off Tolworth Rise North into a mini estate of seven three-bed and one four-bed houses, but officers said it would be too cramped for the area, would impact neighbours and result in yet more parking in "an environment unduly dominated by cars".

Neighbour Venus-Jane Holiday, pictured, who lives in a refurbished former tennis pavilion near the Tennis Close site, which would also incorporate chunks of some local back gardens, breathed a sigh of relief... but said she expected the developer to try again. "It's going to happen. They're probably going to end up with a lot more," she said, adding that she feared as many as 50 new homes would eventually appear.

Alexandra ward Cllr Sharron Sumner said: "The plan was rejected on the grounds that it was too cramped. They will come back with another scheme but I think we really have to ask what would be a reasonable number to put on there?"

She was also concerned that the infill development would have an effect on the quality of life of neighbours whose back gardens were especially precious to them, living so close to the A3.

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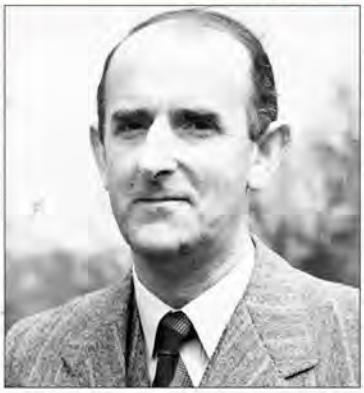

NOTABLE SURBITONIANS
Sir Sydney Camm

The man who saved Britain, as one newspaper headlined him during the Second World War, lived in Long Ditton, and is buried in the cemetery opposite St Mary's church. Sydney Camm designed the Hawker Hurricane, the Kingston-built 'workhorse' of the Battle of Britain, and went on to design the forerunner to the Harrier jump jet.

He led the Hawkers' design team in Canbury Park Road, Kingston, creating 52 aircraft, all distinguished by their elegant simplicity. At one time, in the 1930s, more than 80% of the RAF's aircraft were Camm-created.

Sydney was born in Windsor in 1893 – the eldest of a dozen children – and left school at 14 to train to be a carpenter, like his dad, Fred.

A model plane enthusiast, he worked at the Martinsyde aircraft works at the Brooklands racing circuit in Weybridge before becoming a draughtsman at the Hawker Aircraft Company… and chief designer two years later in 1925. The firm went on to become Hawker Siddeley, with its grand factory frontage in Richmond Road, Kingston, once employing 3,500 local people.

Though he started work on biplanes, his enthusiasm for single-wing aircraft (in defiance of Air Ministry wisdom, which held that two wings were best) led to design innovation which was to prove critical in Britain's darkest hour – the spell in 1940 when the war could have gone either way.

Camm's Hurricane triumphed, although it was the Spitfire that captured the nation's hearts. When production ended in the summer of 1944, just under 14,500 Hurricanes had been built.

Among Camm's innovations was a retractable undercarriage, tested in wind tunnels at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington.

Work on building the Hurricane started at Hawkers in 1935, with test pilots reporting it was simple to fly "and had no vices".

By 1936, despite no official orders, Hawkers' board of directors pressed on with organising the factory's assembly floor. It meant that when the Air Ministry finally got its finger out, the production line was ready.

Camm's design gave pilots good all-round visibility. It was also an aircraft that could be quickly patched up and returned to the air if damaged.

Hurricanes escorted bombers, but came into their own during the Battle of Britain, when dawn-to-dusk attacks by the Luftwaffe were intercepted. Though many Allied aircraft were shot down, the German losses were twice as great, and the tide of the war turned.

The Hurricane accounted for 55% of German aircraft shot out of the skies; more hits than achieved by all other British aircraft and ground forces combined.

Camm went on to design the Typhoon, the Tempest, the Sea Fury and the Hawker Hunter (which broke the world airspeed record in 1953), then turned his attention to the Kestrel, which evolved into the Harrier jump jet, built in Kingston, in service from 1969 to 2006, and still flying in the US Air Force today.

Camm and his wife Hilda lived for many years in Sugden Road, Long Ditton – close to Surbiton Hockey Club. Through the 1920s and 30s he was a keen golfer, playing off eight.

In 1937, when their only daughter Phyllis was 15, the family (plus terrier Monty) moved to a home, now demolished, at 29 Embercourt Road, at the junction with College Drive, near Thames Ditton station.

A keen amateur photographer, he was regularly seen around Surbiton on his bicycle, with his Leica camera slung round his neck.

Camm, who was knighted in 1953 and was president of the Royal Aeronautical Society (which he joined while living in Long Ditton), died aged 72.

He had a heart attack while playing golf at Richmond, was taken to Kingston Hospital, but was pronounced dead on arrival.

A bronze bust of Sir Sydney (donated by the Kingston Aviation Heritage Trust) has pride of place in Kingston Museum. Kingston also named a road, Camm Gardens, after him.

Author John Sweetman, whose powerful biography of Camm was published by Air World in 2019, describes the self-taught designer as "extraordinary, especially as he lacked the advantages of a financially secure upbringing and formal technical education".

He was, said Hawkers founder Sir Tommy Sopwith, "the greatest designer of fighter aircraft the world has known".

Tim Harrison

● **Sir Sydney Camm, b Aug 5 1893, d Mar 12 1966**

Sir Sydney's bust, far left, in Kingston Museum. Left: the Hawker Hurricane, built in Kingston. Right, the Camm gravestone in Long Ditton cemetery

Picture credits: Kingston Museum, BAe, Imperial War Museum

Tower cafe owner dies

The man who designed, built and ran one of Surbiton's most distinctive cafes has died at the age of 65.

Kassem al Naffakh created The Clocktower Cafe after persuading Kingston Council to let him convert the former Claremont Gardens public loos, which were boarded up in 2008.

He and his family had been forced to flee Syria because of the civil war, abandoning his water treatment firm. He took a year to construct the cafe interior, battling flooding issues along the way, and opened in the summer of 2014, serving a mix of home-cooked Lebanese and Mediterranean dishes (such as falafel) alongside a more traditional British cafe menu.

With his bushy beard and warm smile, he was one of the town's most hospitable and welcoming proprietors, noted for his vegan and vegetarian options such as a multi-dish Syrian breakfast, on the menu alongside a full English fry-up.

In warm weather, the outside tables round the clocktower were popular.

Kassem's daughter Ghina called her father "a great warrior", adding: "He used to say his shop was his second home, and his customers were his family. I will never forget how my dad greeted customers, remembering their names and asking how they and their family were."

She used to help her father at the shop, and says she will always treasure her "morning coffee and baklava moments".

His death on March 13, she added, had come as a huge shock. The funeral was held in Chigwell, Essex, following prayers at Kingston Mosque.

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Another ripping yarn

Long Ditton was yarn-bombed by the Friends of Long Ditton St Mary's infants and juniors and other groups as a fundariser to buy equipment for the schools. Bright knitted and crocheted designs appeared at St Mary's lychgate, by the Fleece Road shops, the Limping Fox, and the schools' railings. There were pom-poms, patches, throws, flowers, sheep, chicks, nurses, firemen, rainbows, trees, a caterpillar, a footballer… even a bike with a bunny on the back, pictured here.

Popular pizza

Veggie Vin's Italian inspired pizzas proved popular at the first Tolworth market after lockdown, on Apr 11. It was a jolly food-and-drink-only affair in the Broadway sliproad opposite Our Lady Immaculate. Community Brain market organisers are hoping that the next dates in the diary (May 2, Jun 6 and Jul 4 from 11am to 3pm) will feature arts and crafts stalls too.

Should she stay or should she go?

Traffic monitoring equipment still gathers data from the controversial 'low traffic neighbourhood' divide in King Charles Road, though the six-month trial of the barrier between Beaconsfield Road and Alexandra Drive has finished. Councillors will decide if it should be permanent at a neighbourhood meeting in May or June.

It was put up in September by Kingston Council using traffic powers which meant no consultation. The idea is to control rat-running and make cycling safer, though some in nearby roads say the blockade means fewer available routes in and out of Berrylands. "I see no logical reason for it," said Queens Drive resident David Hutchinson.

Cllr Anita Schaper urged more residents to give their views. "The more who provide feedback, the more qualitative data we'll have," she said.

Visit **www.kingstonletstalk.co.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods** or email **streetspace@kingston.gov.uk**

30 years on her toes

Celebrating three decades in Tolworth Broadway is chiropodist Mary Rigal, who has worked through the pandemic from her sliver of a practice between a cafe and barber at 412a Ewell Road.

She set up in business in April 1991, taking over part of the former Hogg Robinson estate agent's office after a stint in the NHS at Oakhill, Surbiton.

Her year has been dominated by masks, screens and sanitiser, initially treating emergencies and diabetics, then widening to everyone. "A lot of people were in trouble with their feet in lockdown but didn't want to go to A&E," she said. Now many are venturing out to seek treatment, with verrucas adding to the workload as GPs no longer treat them.

Has she encountered anything extraordinary in 30 years? A local with 11 toes, or feet like a duck?

Mary, who freely interchanges the terms podiatrist and chiropodist, says the most needy case she found was in a stint for the charity Crisis. She had to deal with an opera singer. "He was in a wheelchair, and hadn't taken his socks off in six months," she said. "They were the worst feet I've seen."

Mary has been able to diagnose suspected Covid cases by examining feet, as sore, pink areas can point to possible coronavirus. Her tips for heathy feet? Wear different shoes to yesterday's, don't moisturise between toes, do moisturise soles of your feet.

After 30 years, is she calling it a day? "I've said I'll retire when my children have kids," she said. "My eldest is 25, so I reckon I have another 10 years!"

She sometimes hankers after bigger premises, but patients find it handy to have a bus stop outside, and parking is easy. She enjoys Tolworth Broadway's melting pot of nationalities. "Everyone seems to get on fine," she said. **TH**

'New' Victorian flats

A housing development in Oakhill is being tipped for a design award after perfectly replicating the area's distinctive Victorian 'mansion block' look, yet incorporating mod cons.

Newlands House, a short stroll from Surbiton station's Glenbuck Road entrance, is family-run Kingmead Homes' biggest project to date, with 41 flats on the site of the former nurses' home at the Oak Hill/Oak Hill Road corner.

Two nurses who once lived there have bagged one of the mix of one, two and three-bed flats (prices start at £450,000).

One of the bathrooms in the show flat

Chief executive Camran Mirza, a Kingston Uni graduate, said his family had been based locally for 30 years, and had a fondness for the area.

"It brings back lovely memories of meeting my wife, Saira, and eventually starting our family," he said.

Children Ameer, Osman and Shaima all now work in the business.

Now nearing completion, the flats are hotly tipped for one of the Kingston Society's annual townscape awards for new buildings of special merit as the architecture blends with other buildings in Oakhill, and fits in with the rules that apply to it being in a conservation area.

On a guided tour, the high ceilings and replica period features stand out in the open-plan flats, most of which are served by lifts.

The Newlands development. Only the area on the extreme left is original... everything else is new-build, but designed to match

"A lot of local people have been viewing," a Kingmead spokeswoman said. "Several of those looking around remembered it from their days here as doctors and nurses."

Early buyers include people downsizing from larger homes in Surbiton and Thames Ditton, and young professionals moving out of central London.

"Surbiton is such a beautiful place, striking the perfect balance between work and life," said Camran Mirza.

"We felt a development here would really work for locals and commuters who want a quality property built with traditional Victorian aspects."

Covid rules added to the site's health and safety strictures, so what has Mr Mirza learnt? "Tough times don't last, but tough people do," he said, confidently.

Communal gardens wrap around the buildings, which face The Wood and Richard Jefferies bird sanctuary, bounded by Oakhill Path and Oak Hill Grove.

All two and three-bed flats have outdoor terraces, balconies or patios.

The buildings have stucco finishes, ornate bays and gables, wooden sash windows, underfloor heating and disabled access. **Tim Harrison**

Have you any plants to spare?

A section of towpath at Queens Prom is getting a makeover thanks to a group of volunteers.

The Friends' group, which for two years has worked miracles creating a well-tended pocket park by a former disused caretaker's hut, is now improving a 50-metre stretch alongside the ramp up to the Portsmouth Road.

The idea is to make a river view garden with trails for children, a rustic seating area, and chill-out grassy zone with benches and seating for parents.

"It'll take at least a year to do," said Friends' chair Julian Meers. "It's a big project, but it's exciting. The kids can have free rein here; that's the big plan."

Julian said the garden, on a bank opposite Palace Road, will have mixed hedging along the Victorian fencing which separates cycle lane and road from promenade, woodchip trails winding round clumps of shrubs and plants, and wildflowers. "We want to put a lot of pollinators in for the bees," he said.

Back: Jenny Meers & Karim Jivraj, front: Stefan Gross & Nikita Sarkar

Stefan Gross, a volunteer busy digging holes for shrubs and removing overgrown woody specimens, said: "It is a bit of an experiment but the idea is to make the area a little more attractive as it needs some TLC. Hopefully it will draw people in, especially children who will see what grows here and get a feel for nature and the seasons."

The group is asking members of the public to donate plants and bushes to the project. "Bring them down and we'll somehow incorporate them," said Julian.

To find out more about the Friends' group, which meets on Tuesdays and Saturdays, or to donate plants and shrubs, email **queenspromfriends@gmail.com**

• Nicky Patrick, co-host of Radio Jackie's breakfast show from Tolworth Broadway for 17 years, has launched a podcast, **It's Somewhere in the Bottom of my Handbag**, available on all platforms and at **www.nickypatrick.com** "A handbag's a good analogy for life," she said. "You know what you need is in there; it's just a case of finding it."

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Garden group keen to meet like-minded souls

Keen to swap plants and seeds and go on outings to stunning gardens? Join a Surbiton gardening group!

Membership of the English Gardening Club is free and there's an active WhatsApp group swapping tips and arranging to visit open gardens, the RHS and garden centres.

"I set it up after I caught the gardening bug five years ago," said Karen George of Herne Road. "My friends weren't interested, and I was visiting gardens on my own."

Karen, who has lived in Surbiton 20 years, says there are 12 members, but they welcome newcomers. "We get on really well as we have a common interest, and firm friendships have grown from that, which is a bonus. We do mainly talk about flowers and plants rather than vegetables – our successes and failures! We pick up tips and advice from each other.

"None of us are professional gardeners, just keen amateurs, so it's very relaxed."

Karen says they meet at garden centres, often for tea and cake. "We have plant and seed swaps about twice a year, normally meeting at the Grove pub, pre-virus. We also meet for an annual Christmas dinner.

"We visit each others' gardens occasionally and have something to eat. Wine is involved!"

Karen has put photos of the club's visits on Instagram @englishgardeningclub

"I have about 1,900 followers, including some of the presenters of Gardeners' World and Chelsea medal-winning garden designers as well as high-profile, professional garden photographers," said the recruitment consultant.

For more information about this friendly little group, email Karen at karen@karen-george.com or call 07803 126 744. **Jane Grove**

English Gardening Club members Pam (front), Susan, Lynda, Pauline and Heidi visit Dunsborough Park

Natural plan to rewild Tolworth's fields

Think Tolworth, and a 22-storey tower block and massive roundabout might spring to mind.

Think again. Think roe deer and hedgehogs (on the latest wayfinding mural at Tolworth railway station), herons, kingfishers, dragonflies, badgers, kestrels and butterflies.

You'll find all at Tolworth Court Farm Fields, a 50 hectare site just beyond the railway bridge. It's a neglected space which rewilding group Citizen Zoo and Tolworth's Community Brain (which got We Are Sky High to do the mural) believe could be a great London nature reserve.

The groups have launched a fundraiser on crowdfunding site Spacehive, and you have until May 11 to chip in. Urban rewilding officer Ben Stockwell said: "We believe the site could be a pioneering nature reserve to showcase the power of rewilding techniques in an urban setting.

"Our vision is to conserve current ecology, including ancient hedgerows and a nationally important brown hairstreak butterfly population, celebrate the site's cultural heritage and enhance the ecology further by rewilding.

"This includes free-roaming livestock and wild animals that can shape and restore the landscape via natural grazing and browsing."

Ben said Citzen Zoo has applied to the Greater London Authority for a small grant to fund a feasibility study and develop a roadmap for the vision. For the application to succeed it needs to generate interest through comments, likes, shares and donations on the crowdfunding site.

To find out more about the project, which is bordered by the Hogsmill River, Jubilee Way and the Kingston Road, or show your support for the nature reserve visit **www.spacehive.com/rewildingpeopleandplacesintolworth**

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Fruit, herbs & veg can be inspirational, says Janice Cripps

Planting that's good enough to eat

Too many, a productive garden is a run-of-the-mill allotment or tired veg plot with rows of boring plants. It needn't be! Many edible plants are delicious, pleasing to the eye and blend beautifully with their ornamental cousins. Plant diversely and you boost a garden's ability to fight diseases, while attracting pollinators.

The easiest are herbs. Often colourful in flower, compact and low-growing, they're perfect for edging paths. Evergreen thymes, marjoram and oregano don't mind being trodden on occasionally, and you pick up the fragrance as you walk.

Herbs work well planted individually or together in a tapestry of ground cover, or trained as a geometric feature such as a parterre. They make attractive dwarf hedges; a substitute for blighted box plants. They are versatile. Bay, sage, santolina and rosemary associate well with roses in a traditional herbaceous

border, but look just as good in a Mediterranean border or gravel garden.

Fruit is an essential part of a productive garden. Buy expertly trained plants on bamboo frameworks to be grown against a wall, or individual specimens in borders or containers. Fans, espaliers, stepovers, zigzags, goblets and flat-topped 'tables' are all decorative and functional. Many have been developed to allow an otherwise large tree to be confined to a wall or small space, maximising productivity. Trained apple and pear trees are widely available, but also nectarines, peaches and apricots.

Growing vegetables in an ornamental border is more challenging, but you can't go wrong if your selection is based on taste, form, structure and looks. Tips:

- Combine contrasting leaf shapes, textures or colours; a billowing green curly kale with a red cabbage
- A towering artichoke or cardoon at the back of a sunny border adds impact
- Make a living screen with asparagus; its fern-like foliage sways gently in the breeze
- On walls or fences, select peas and beans with colourful or decorative pods
- Look for colourful lettuce, beet and spinach varieties, sown between plants
- Add firework colours with chillies, bell peppers or pink, red & yellow Swiss chard
- Include edible flowers like nasturtium, calendula, pansies, violas; or alyssum to attract pest-eating predators
- Create a compact dome by pinning down shoots of a trailing squash as it grows. Now there's a challenge!

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

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Guildford in Bloom

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In full Bloom

Tolworth allotment holder Rachel Giles put lockdown to good use, studying the relationship between flowers, art and emotion, and producing a sumptuous book based around 100 floral artworks in the Tate's collection.

The Beaconsfield Road resident, who writes and edits glossy catalogues for major gallery shows, says the pandemic has underlined our bond with nature.

With a cutting garden of her own in the allotments at the Tolworth end of King Charles Road, she was a good fit to research the Tate's art collection.

"I went through it online, and found wonderful paintings, photos and works of art from the last 150 years," she said.

Works chosen range from Andy Warhol to Robert Mapplethorpe, Tracey Emin to Michael Landy, with some Victorian paintings too. "I started asking why artists were so captivated by flowers," she said. "They're beautiful, colourful, have texture and are a bit weird too; they're also quite sexy, as it's how they reproduce.

"When the pandemic got going, I thought about looking at it from an emotional point of view."

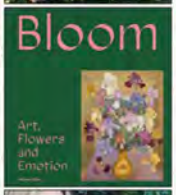
One of Rachel's writing 'assistants' was Bella, left, the fox at the allotments, who kept an eye as she snipped dahlias and deadheaded stems.

The pictures are a mix of still lifes and of people with flowers. "I've tried to get under the skin of the paintings and work out what the artist was trying to do."

Rachel, married to architect Andy, has lived in Surbiton for two decades, and was inspired to create a flower allotment by the late Robert Hedley's annual dahlia display at the corner of St James' and St Philip's Road.

"My garden has helped me heal from a number of losses in my life, and has grown into something beautiful," she said. **Bloom** (£25 at **tinyurl.com/xb554trz**) also delves into floriography; the artists' 'code' – roses for love, yellow chrysanths for disappointed love, lilies for death.

Tim Harrison



Good for dogs and wildlife?

Dog owners are being asked to give their views on dog-friendly splash pools and sheltered areas to socialise and relax in, which will reduce the impact on local wildlife.

The idea is to protect the flora and fauna in the Hogsmill River from being disturbed by dogs or killed by pets' flea treatments like fipronil, a pesticide which wipes out insects and is likely to have a devastating impact on freshwater invertebrates.

Surbiton rewilding group Citizen Zoo, which plans to reintroduce water vole to the Hogsmill, wants to promote responsible dog walking beside the river.

"This is to prevent any vegetation disturbance, which can seriously hamper water vole reintroductions, as they require areas of vegetation for feeding and protection from predators," said urban rewilding officer Ben Stockwell. "Furthermore, dogs can be stressors on wildlife in general and we want to limit this on our newly released population of water voles."

The group is asking dog owners and walkers for feedback on five designs by Kingston University architecture students. You can see them at **www.tinyurl.com/Dog-areas** Email Ben at **ben@citizenzoo.org** with your thoughts on the designs.

One of the student designs for a dog-friendly waterside area by the Hogsmill

The Good Life: like a welcome visit from a gossipy friend who's emerged from lockdown

● Long Ditton artist Zoe Holben created this watercolour of the Seething Wells filter beds in lockdown because she loves the view. "I must have walked past it hundreds of times," said Zoe who dabbled in art as an interior design student, but took it up again with her then six-year-old daughter as something to do together in the pandemic.

Friends encouraged her to do more, take commissions and show online at Art Gallery SW. She's exhibiting at the Limping Fox, Rushett Road, Long Ditton, Jun 1-Jul 12.

Zoe's landscapes, skies, buildings and animal paintings are creating interest on Instagram and Etsy, with this depiction of the filter beds one of her favourites.

"I love this view, through the rusty, Victorian railings," she said. Zoe, who has lived in Surbiton and Long Ditton for years, is passionate about green spaces, and has also painted under-threat One Tree Hill, Long Ditton.

She's saddened by Seething Wells' decline. "It was a unique refuge for wildlife and bats before the trees were pulled down and the site left to deteriorate," she said.

Zoe recalls a meeting 10 years ago about plans to develop the filter beds. "I remember a vibrant discussion about how we could develop the site into a proper wildlife sanctuary. Of course, cost was the main issue as well as planning and management."

Zoe still feels that creative thinking from council and community can find a solution "but time's running out".

"I feel the unique views across to Home Park should be protected, and this site properly managed. Once it's gone, with its habitat and history, it would be a sad loss for us all. It needs to be looked after, not left to deteriorate further!"

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Emerging into the light, Becky Mayhew shares her thoughts about an end to lockdown

Oh blimey... it's you again

Can you hear that, Surbiton? That is the sound of… us. The sound of us emerging.

In the gardens of our fair suburb, sextets gather, each guest glowing at being one of the chosen few. Awkward shall-we-elbow-pump-or-just-wave-or-go-straight-in-for-a-hug dances are performed, followed by quiet mutterings to spouses about how 'I so haven't missed social awkwardness'.

In hexagons of varying sides – some crammed on to the patio, some so socially distanced that Dave has to yell from his chair behind the shed – friends and family try to remember how to socialise.

Comments are made on lockdown weight. Harriet's put on two stone? Well, you definitely can't tell! But everyone secretly thinks Harriet must have been single-handedly responsible for the dearth of cake-baking ingredients in Lockdown #1. Gary says he did the Joe Wicks workout every day, to which Fiona responds that if she ever sees Joe Wicks again she'll bury her head in wet cement.

Across gardens, drinks are poured, blankets distributed, and there's lengthy discussion about how cold it is

('Typical, it was so nice yesterday!') and how the weather was so beautiful this time last year ('But we couldn't go anywhere!'). In the debate about which was the best lockdown, #1 emerges as victor on the basis of:

a) the weather
b) the silence
c) the enthusiasm for new hobbies
d) the fact that no one remembers Lockdown #2 happened, and #3 was like spending 57 years in a cave on a remote Arctic island.

Even the gardens of pubs – yes pubs – bloom with chatter and life, as Surbitonians sit dazedly staring at their surroundings as though they have entered Paradise, and marvel at how beautiful it is, and how their pint of draught lager tastes like angel tears (though Jane can't get over paying £7.40 for a glass of wine when the bottles from Sainsbury's are only £4.85, and she expresses deep concern that she'll never be able to enjoy the carefree spendthriftery of the pub in quite the same way again, while Bob simply stares at the winking amber of his pint of Heineken, his thumb lovingly caressing the glass, as a single tear runs down his cheek).

As the sun goes down, top buttons of jeans are discreetly undone amid a thousand private yearnings to be in elasticated leggings and not shackled by the hellish purgatory of denim.

Across Surbiton, every human is reminded how annoying Mike is, and how infuriating Gillian is, and how Kevin takes his sarcasm too far, and how Lynne's laugh goes right through you, and how absolutely brilliant it is to finally be surrounded by all these annoying people again.

● www.beckysaysthings.com

Hope for wildlife at Seething Wells filter beds

Wildlife at the Seething Wells filter beds site will be better protected after councillors refused to let gates, fences or walls be built without planning permission.

The area between the Thames and Portsmouth Road, built 170 years ago to provide clean water for London, is now designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (Sinc), and as Metropolitan Open Land.

Councillors have voted unanimously to make an earlier interim direction permanent, removing nationally permitted development rights. It will, however, allow repair, maintenance and like-for-like replacement of existing gates, fences or walls. It follows 90% of respondents to a consultation last year urging the move.

"The direction was introduced last October in response to concerns about potential impact to wildlife from fencing," said Cllr Rebekah Moll, portfolio holder for planning policy and culture.

"It returns planning controls that will give the council the ability to only permit new fencing which allows wildlife to wander freely. We want to ensure that we protect this important ecological asset," she added.

Cllr Moll said officers had made numerous attempts to obtain ecology information from the landowner – Isle of Man-registered Cascina Ltd – to protect the site's biodiversity but the owners "have declined the opportunity so far".

The site is of particular importance to wintering wildfowl and bat populations.

Previous ecological records demonstrate it once supported species-rich grassland, but current management has resulted in significant degradation, and reduced the extent and value of the habitats.

Residents watched in horror as vegetation was cleared and herbicide sprayed in spring and summer 2018. Later, 30 mature trees were felled on structural grounds.

This has had an impact on the biodiversity on the site. A recent independent review by Land Use Consultants declared the filter beds in danger of losing their Sinc status because of a worrying "decline in ecological value".

Cllr Moll said a management plan for the site required the agreement of the owner, but that Cascina Ltd was under no obligation to enter into one with the council.

Greenfield

Spring is in the air! The days are longer and trees are greener. Everything looks brighter in the Spring! That is why it is the most popular time of year to sell or let your property. The property market continues to be overwhelmed with buyers and tenants, all hopeful of finding their new home.

With many people now spending a lot more time at home, we have seen a new wave of buyers moving out to quieter areas with more green open spaces, making Surbiton the perfect leafy suburb to settle in. We have seen a busy start to the year and we expect this to continue throughout the summer months.

If you having been thinking about moving for some time then now really is the right time! Please get in touch with us today to find out how much your property is worth and how we can help you make the move.

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Celebrating a single street

Surbiton author Bob Phillips has published a book about his street. Flushed with the success of his history of Tolworth (co-written with Pat Ward) he has drilled down into the very foundations of Broomfield Road; a labour of love infused with wonderment and awe, and a stonking bit of research.

"I never realised how much fun it would be writing a book about our street," said Bob, who enlisted the help of artist and neighbour Martin Ursell to produce illustrations for the cover, and inside pages.

The result is a beautifully presented, forensically detailed history of a single, short Tolworth thoroughfare, tracing the background of the land on which it was built, adding up-to-date stories about the present residents to the mix, and unearthing information about the original builders and dwellers, with many of the plots occupied by today's houses having been sold by auction at the Griffin pub in Kingston in 1901.

Bob and Anna at home

It delves into the past of the St Matthew's parish school buildings at one end of the street, and the Alexandra rec and nearby allotments at the other, reproducing ancient maps, drawings, deeds and documents to illuminate the text and enhance the anecdotes.

With virtually all the residents buying copies of their own, it has underlined and strengthened the bonds which already exist in this close community. It is now a rare thing for Bob to make it to the end of Broomfield Road without someone shouting greetings to him, while the street's WhatsApp messageboard has overflowed with warm words. "Thanks to Martin's cover pictures, people take the book eagerly, handle it, turn it over, then open it keenly," said Bob, who moved to the road with his missus Anna in 2006. Her collaborative work was also key to the project.

The book is available for £30 via **www.lulu.com** (a print-on-demand service – simply search for Bob Phillips).

Bob, who recently gave an online talk about the road to the Friends of Kingston Museum, said: "Big history is sewn up by academics, but thank God little history isn't." He hopes others will be inspired to dig into the past of their own roads as a result.

Tim Harrison

● Hand-made daffodils sprouted on trees at a Surbiton care home as residents reflected on those lost to Covid. The garden of Hamilton nursing home, Langley Avenue, was festooned with bright yellow flowers, as everyone enjoyed a cake, also decorated with daffs. Activity coordinator Georgina Sharp is pictured. "We may have lost residents in the pandemic," said manager Andrea Day, "but all remain in our thoughts."

● **The century-old willow in Ewell Road, by Surbiton war memorial and library, split and fell early on Friday, April 16. No one was injured, and it didn't damage buildings. The area was cordoned off as council contractors made it safe.**

● The owner of Cafe St James in St James' Road, Surbiton, has temporarily converted his premises into... the town's only hat shop.

"The wife's in the business," he explained to photographer David Jacobson, who took this snap of the new-look front window display.

On Monday May 17, however, boaters make way for bloaters, sombreros for sausages and homburgs for hamburgers as normal fry-up cafe service resumes.

● Olive, a refurbished vintage Peugeot J7 van, could be serving coffee and home-baked cake at Long Ditton Rec if a street trading licence is granted. Laura Sheldrake of Doorstep Coffee has applied to park opposite 22 Ewell Road, Long Ditton. She already serves folk from her 46-year-old van at Hill Park Roses nursery, Woodstock Lane North. You have until May 4 to let Elmbridge Council know your views. Email streettrading@elmbridge.gov.uk or call 01372 474734.

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Casualties. From left: Santander; Brandon; Piano Warehouse; and Oh La La! – which is now Just Dessertz

The lockdown losers and the Covid rebounders

There are mixed fortunes for shops, post-lockdown, though most reopened on April 12, despite the unseasonal dusting of snow. Pub gardens, gyms, clothes shops, hairdressers, restaurants with outdoor seats and nailbars were back, while charity shops gratefully hoovered up the results of umpteen home clearouts.

The longest queues were at barber shops, though frankly anyone putting a chair on the pavement and waving scissors around would have generated a line of customers.

Salon No13, which opened in July in Victoria Road, was busy, with stylist Andrew Thompson describing the support he'd had from Surbitonians as "amazing". It's fully booked through May. Late gaps: **www.salonnumber13.co.uk**

Made in Surbiton, the salon and spa at 47 Brighton Road, reopened after revarnishing its floors. Clients at Emre Gurcan's salon include Chelsea footballer Jess Carter. **The Bed Post** is also welcoming customers back.

Surbiton's **Santander** branch is to close, leaving Lloyds, NatWest, Barclays, HSBC, Halifax and Nationwide in the heart of town. Santander, in the old art nouveau Abbey National at 12 Victoria Road, shuts for good on July 29.

The Spanish bank said just 61 Surbitonians now used the branch, so it's unviable. Don't complain! Tolworth and Chessington haven't a single bank between them.

Charity shops did good business after 'unlock', with the **British Heart Foundation** in Victoria Road having a queue on its first day back. The BHF branches across England took £1million in a day! "We want to thank our shop teams, who have worked tirelessly to get back up and running," said retail director Allison Swaine-Hughes.

Expect to see more pavement dining in Surbiton in coming weeks; take-up has been good (at £100 a pop) for new fast-track licences for outdoor tables and chairs... provided they're not an obstruction. **Megan's** (opposite Sainsbury's in Victoria Road) has applied, as has **Italian Taste**, a few doors down. Indoor eateries such as **The French Table**, Maple Road, must wait until May 17, but those with outdoor tables, such as **Cento Uno**, above, and **No97**, are bustling.

Every pub with a garden has reopened, including the **Black Lion**, right, where landlord Mark Sheehy said it was "a relief to be back", with pavement tables and covered garden. Similarly the **Victoria**'s giant stretch tent was packed, and **The Lamb** busy, while in Tolworth the **Royal Oak** unveiled a new dining menu. Less clear, however, is the fate of **The Duke**, left, in Victoria Road. Boarded up since March 2020, its future is uncertain. Greene King told The Good Life: "Unfortunately, for a small number of our pubs like the Duke, it's not possible yet to make a decision on long-term plans as we need to learn more about trading conditions in the months ahead."

Builders' hire shop **Brandon** has quit Brighton Road after 22 years to move to Chessington. The go-to place for DIYers needing floor sanders to do up Victorian homes in Surbiton, it also rented pressure washers, generators, cement mixers and skips. After **Surbiton Glass** left its Brighton Road home of half a century to move to the Red Lion Road industrial estate, health shop **Sage** is expanding next door to create an intriguing zero-waste zone to cut needless packaging.

The lid has closed on **Piano Warehouse** after 25 years of selling and renting pianos from 111 Ewell Road. A main dealer for Yamaha and Steinmayer, it arrived in Surbiton in 1995, taking over a showroom which had traded since the 1950s. It has moved to High Wycombe.

Its client list down the years included Peter Crouch, Emma Thompson, Tom Robinson, Alan Rusbridger, John Humphrys, Georg Solti, Gary Kemp, Gianfranco Zola, Rory Bremner, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Geri Halliwell, Oasis, Jon Snow, Hugh Laurie, Chas and Dave, and Coldplay!

The walk-in boiler clinic at 396a Ewell Road (possibly the smallest shop in Tolworth) has turned into **Coiffure**, a unisex Tamil hair salon. **Bamanoosh**, a halal Persian grill, left, has replaced **The Raj** curry house at 163 Ewell Road (by Browns Road), and drapes a giant flatbread outside to pull in punters. It's au revoir to French diner **Oh La La!** at 34 Tolworth Rise South. It's now **Just Dessertz**, a waffle parlour seeking a £10-an-hour 'dessert artist'. The **WHSmith Local** at 5 Grand Parade, Ewell Road (right, by B&M) now slices up sheep, deer and goats as **Kamran Halal Meat**.

Tim Harrison

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There's **30% off** curtain cleaning at Surbiton's favourite dry cleaners. Roberts – a fixture in the town for more than three decades – is offering the discount throughout May.

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Homes on Jewson site

Property developers have been given the go-ahead to build flats, houses and commercial space in Brighton Road on a site formerly occupied by Jewson.

The boarded-up builders merchant near the Maple Road junction will make way for a two-storey building with recessed third floor. Seven flats (five one-bed, two two-bed) will be above 248sqm of flexible ground-floor commercial space, with a row of nine three-bed terraced homes behind, and 40 cycle spaces.

Flats will be car-free but there will be parking spaces for each of the houses, set in a courtyard with a central amenity space.

Of the 16 homes, five will be 'affordable' (three for rent, two in shared ownership), with £40,000 being paid to the council to improve play space at Victoria Rec, to compensate for the lack of it on site.

Join the scenic three-mile holiday stroll

A three-mile scenic walk from Tolworth to Chessington takes place on Bank Holiday Monday, May 31. From 11am-4pm the Community Brain will be at the Baking Ideas hub next to Tolworth railway station, giving out information about the route, which is part of a wayfinding project with the 121 Collective. You can pick up a guide full of wildlife and history facts, and enjoy live music and tasty treats before or after the walk.

The route is via Tolworth Court Farm Fields nature reserve, the Bonesgate Stream, Castle Hill, Horton Country Park and on to Chessington with a stunning viewing point (campaigners are trying to protect it: **www.tinyurl.com/Chessingtonviewpoint**) looking towards the site of a Roman Villa and the hunting grounds of Henry VIII, as well as the distant Surrey Hills. Then you can catch the train back from Chessington South station to Tolworth. Allow two hours, wear comfy shoes, or take a shorter two-mile option.

● A florist at Simon Smith Flowers narrowly avoided injury when a car smashed into the work area backing on to Surbiton station forecourt. "Fortunately I'd just come out of that area and was in the front of the shop when it happened," she said. After several similar close shaves, the florist asked South Western Railway to put up a safety barrier. It didn't, so the shop forked out for one. That barrier was demolished in the incident at 10am on April 11, along with the 'Taxis only' pole. The Toyota Prius driver sustained a slight shoulder strain.

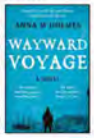
● Ewell Road by Fishponds, site of eternal gas works, now has a unicycle lane! Thanks to Phil Cooper for spotting that the contractors are either encouraging circus performers, or saving on white paint. In other news, a fresh, perky sapling, left, has been planted in the high street near Cannings, replacing one that had died; the first new tree in the road in three years.

Arrrr! Anna publishes

Raeburn Avenue writer Anna Holmes' debut novel is inspired by female pirate Anne Bonny. Growing up in Carolina in the early 18th century, Anne runs away to sea, meets charismatic ex-pirate 'Calico Jack' Rackham, and persuades him to come out of retirement.

Writer Anna, known in Surbiton for her yoga classes, has created a coming-of-age story with vivid descriptions of colonial life in the Americas.

"Anne Bonny displayed 'girl power' before the term was invented," she said. "At a time when women's lives were so prescribed it is astonishing that she ended up in Jack Rackham's pirate gang. Her resolve, cross-dressing, and fearlessness fascinate me."



Anna mugged up on pirates in the National Archives, and enlisted as crew on a tall ship, to savour life at sea, working the ropes!

● **Wayward Voyage**, The Book Guild, £9.99. More at **www.annamholmes.com**

Ten-year-old Year 5 Surbiton High student Florence won a National Archives competition for a short story about a Victorian workhouse. Judge Sharon Gosling praised her imagery, highlighting 'Their faces were as pale as the dust of the windowsill'.

Flo wins a £25 book token and bag of goodies from the National Archives shop.

● Street artist Paul Don Smith has been busy, painting a portrait of Freddie the seal on a door at the London River Yacht Club, opposite Ravens Ait on Queens Prom and a version on a wall in Cadogan Road. The 10-month-old pup, nicknamed Freddie Mercury, was mauled by a dog near Hammersmith Bridge in March, and put down by vets. Paul, who uses acrylic spray paint and pens, has also painted Captain Tom Moore, Judy Garland and Joe Wicks.

Twilight and the Golden Age songs

The cornerHOUSE has been busy in lockdown with online events including a 12 at 12 Radio Shorts initiative – 12 original radio plays between five and 10 minutes to listen to on the arts centre website (www.thecornerhouse.org/news) until the end of May.

However in the coming weeks the Douglas Road venue dips its metaphorical toes back into the physical world with an exhibition by local artist Anthony Maccini.

Anthony, of King Charles Road, uses black and white oils on canvas, which play with the change of light from day to night to depict visions, symbolic ideas, places and people, having developed his style at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London.

Twilight, an online cH show at the start of the year, comes to the centre from May 17-Jun 27. Meet the Artist night is on Tuesday, May 25, from 7-9pm. His paintings are also for sale.

Admission is free but book in advance at www.tinyurl.com/Maccini because of restrictions on numbers due to social distancing measures.

Then on Wed, Jun 2 at 7.45pm Simon Hancock, musical director of St Matthew's church, presents Songwriters of Broadway's Golden Age, a talk on the greats including George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Simon sings each composer's songs, and there's a guest spot by the 'Sinatra of Surbiton' Jason Philps.

Tickets £4. To book visit www.tinyurl.com/Broadwaygreats

● Comedian Milton Jones (he of the unruly mop) will deliver his deadpan one-liners for Out of the Box on Thu, May 27, while Whole Lotta Comedy is back on May 22, Jun 5 & Jun 19, 8pm. Donations welcome. For all shows, music, drama, film, comedy, poetry etc visit **www.thecornerhouse.org**

The play's afoot

A new drama by Surbiton author Orlando Pearson has been watched by an audience as far-flung as Germany, Austria, France, Canada, Spain, Ireland and the USA.

Orlando (real name Edward Howard of Langley Avenue), who writes new adventures for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's sleuth, staged **The Baron of Wimbledon** on Zoom, then held a lively Q&A following the February performance, with many questions and comments.

The play, based on true events surrounding a 1930s German tennis ace who defied the Nazis, was enjoyed by around 200 people and starred Surbiton cornerHOUSE actor Jon Constant as Sherlock.

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Through the hoops

Fancy a new sport? Croquet is, writes **Gavin McFarlane**, an enjoyable open-air pursuit and an ideal way to make new friends. The Surbiton Croquet Club in Alexandra Drive is the largest in London, with coaching for beginners.

The seven high-standard lawns mean the club has hosted major championships and international tournaments. Summer months mean social croquet open to members of other clubs, with buffet lunches. There are also barbecues, quizzes and bridge sessions.

Croquet evolved in the 19th century, before lawn tennis, and has been played in Surbiton from the outset. An absorbing game for all ages, it is played year round, with an autumn break. There's equality between men and women, and a handicap system to encompass different standards. Pop down or visit **www.surbitoncroquet.org.uk**

Osman gets his cap

Former Corinthian-Casuals footballer Majed Osman, right, has become an international after his debut for the Lebanese national team.

The attacking midfielder for Jordanian club Al-Ramtha was an 84th-minute sub for the national side in a 1-1 friendly against Kuwait on Mar 29.

Osman, who has a Lebanese father and English mother, joined Tolworth's Isthmian League side in 2018 after a stint in the States. "He's a cracking player," said Casuals' press officer Stuart Tree. "He never was going to remain at our level long. I remember his debut in our 2-0 win at Enfield Town in early 2019. He went on to make 21 appearances for Casuals, scoring four goals. He also played in the Egri Erbstein Tournament in Budapest in 2019 before moving to Lebanon to play professionally. A lovely chap, to boot!"

Score: 140 love

Happy 140th anniversary to Surbiton Racket & Fitness Club. Many Wimbledon champions including Billie Jean King and Roger Federer have played at the club which has been part of local life since 1881.

"We hope everyone has kept safe and look forward to welcoming you," said director Roy Staniland.

With 20 tennis courts, four squash courts and a gym, there is coaching for all abilities, club and social events.

● **www.surbiton.org**

A new archive

Corinthian-Casuals have won a £3,000 grant to make an archive and exhibition of the Tolworth football club's memorabilia... and they're on the hunt for artefacts. Email **dominic.bliss@ccfcltd.co.uk** if you have anything interesting – particularly from the 1950s and 60s – which could be borrowed and photographed for what will initially be an online show.

"If all goes well, we may even be able to curate a physical exhibition in a local museum space as well," said Dominic, the club committee member coordinating the project.

The grant has come from TownsWeb Archiving, and will be used to keep historic programmes, newsletters and photos to, as Dominic puts it, "present the club's history in fresh and exciting ways, and bring the story to football supporters around the world".

It wouldn't be summer without the sound of leather on willow, and Long Ditton Cricket Club has home fixtures at Stokes Field off Betts Way every Saturday in May and June. Entry free.

On May 15 & 22, Jun 5 & 19, the 1st XI play in the Surrey Championship Div 5 (midday). On May 8, 29, Jun 12 & 26, the 2nd XI play in the Fuller's Brewery Surrey County League Div 1 (1pm). If you're too busy on a Saturday, the Hogs play Sunday friendlies. First ball bowled at 1.30pm.

The outside bar serves snacks, lagers and Hogs Back Brewery bottled beers, while on Saturday, May 29 (bank holiday weekend) for the 2nd XI fixture against Wallington CC there's the bonus of Long Ditton's Halloumi Bite food truck, which will be serving its popular Greek Cypriot menu from 4pm.

We've got Jorja on our mind

When Chelsea Women's fans return to Kingsmeadow in a couple of weeks, they'll have a new star to cheer.

Jorja Fox, pictured, doesn't turn 18 until the summer, but the fullback was the pick of a trio of teens in the recent 4th Round FA Cup 5-0 demolition of second-tier London City Lionesses. It was her first start for the club.

Was manager Emma Hayes impressed? "It's no surprise to me," she said. "Jorja can play any position on the outside; she's composed, she has good vision and decision-making. She's going to have a great career."

Fox's link-up play with Erin Cuthbert on the left wing was a joy to watch, and while Aggie Beever-Jones and Charlotte Wardlaw (both also drafted into the first team) may be farmed out to other clubs next season to gain more experience, Fox, pictured, is tipped to have a serious tilt at becoming a first-team regular.

The Blues have the biggest game of their season to date on Sunday lunchtime (May 2) – the home leg of the Champions League double-header against Bayern Munich. It's the one piece of silverware that has so far eluded Hayes, and the one she most craves.

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