

● You may well own a washing machine... but what if you actually had **50** of them, some dating back 70 years? Meet Surbiton's spin king. **p7**



● We're sadly used to stumbling over dumped hire bikes, but the next vision for shared modes of transport is the electric buggy. We talk to the inventor and take one for a road test. See **p6**



A new art exhibition space?

You know those long lines of old billboard sites on Surbiton station's platforms? They once displayed posters for estate agents, Bovril and Guinness, but they've been blank for half a century and are covered in graffiti. Now the Surbiton Town Centre Partnership, embracing local businesses and backed by Kingston Council, could transform them into a public art installation. Layers of nostalgic 1960s posters are said to lurk behind those empty spaces. Anyone got a scraper?



Station set to close

Berrylands station will close for months while platforms on stilts, which date from 1933, are replaced.

The only question is when the major work will begin. Network Rail says summer 2026, but Good Life sources suggest it could be much sooner.

Explorations have uncovered serious problems, especially with the Waterloo-bound platforms which rise and dip alarmingly. With 340,000 entries and exits recorded at the station in the past year, the impact of closure will be huge.

Regular traveller Tony Banks said: "This will be a serious blow to residents as the station is well-used, with trains every half hour to Waterloo or Hampton Court."

Factor in the unreliability of the K2 bus (the only alternative public transport option for 10,000 people), and replacement buses seem essential. However, Network Rail won't yet commit.

"The single-decker K2 has become increasingly erratic of late," said Tony. "Often it's so full that people have to wait for the next bus. When the station closes, residents - many of them elderly - will effectively have no public transport in and out of Berrylands."



Art: Steve Harding

Continued on p9

Pioneering college brings learning century to an end

For 100 years it taught women who had missed out on mainstream education, but now Surbiton's Hillcroft College is being sold off.



Based in a Victorian stately home, 100 yards from the station, it's 'no longer suitable for modern teaching', say governors. The house, outbuildings and grounds are on the market at a guideline £7million, despite a pledge seven years ago, when Richmond Adult Community College absorbed Hillcroft, to restore and retain the South Bank campus. Students will finish the current academic year, then relocate to Richmond. Developers are salivating at the prospect of building luxury commuter towers. Conservationists fear the effect on an area rich in wildlife.

Built in 1877 for matchstick magnate Wilberforce Bryant, of Bryant & May fame,

The Gables mansion became Hillcroft in 1920; the UK's only long-term residential college for women, many from disadvantaged backgrounds. Plans were drawn up to modernise the campus, but spiralling costs, delays and Covid have been cited as reasons for the U-turn. The college is going for the highest possible price it can get, rather than stipulating continuing educational use.

Parents kick back against phones for kids

Parents at a Surbiton school have started a group to campaign against young children being given smartphones.

Katrina Hassan and Claire Morris set up the Smartphone Free Childhood WhatsApp group at St Andrew's & St Mark's CofE juniors in Maple Road over fears of harmful content, grooming, cyber bullying and addiction.

The group, now 120-strong, believes in delaying giving

children smartphones until at least 14, and only allowing access to social media from 16. The campaign is backed by head Matthew Gates, with 30% of SASM parents signing up in the first three months.

"We believe that delaying giving our child a smartphone will protect their mental and physical health," said Katrina. "We're grateful St Andrew's & St Mark's is leading the way for positive change to young lives in Surbiton."

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Unlimited cuppas? Here's your flat

Fancy living in a subterranean flat with easy access to tea and coffee? The French Tarte in Maple Road is selling its 407sq ft basement, on a 125-year lease, for £140,000. There are two rooms, one with a fitted kitchen, together with a bathroom/loo. Giants needn't apply. Ceiling height is 6ft 4in.



● Weigh, hey, up she rises! A soufflé main course leads the menu at Long Ditton's Plough & Harrow, with the chance to go the whole hog at the pub/restaurant in Ditton Hill Road and have soufflé starter, soufflé main and soufflé pud. Other fresh options include a tasty guinea fowl en crouete with caramelised apple and free-range bangers with bubble & squeak from Jimmy Butler's award-winning Suffolk farm.

ploughandharrowlongditton.com



● Yvette Matcham, who ran the shop with one of the most distinctive frontages in Surbiton, has died. She had just turned 60. She took over the running of the Surbiton Natural Health Centre – the combined wholefood and treatment clinic opposite Waitrose – from her parents in 2013.

Physios and osteopaths operate from rooms at the back, and staff are confident that the business will continue. Last year the shop weathered a disappointing two-out-of-five rating for building cleanliness by inspectors, although food handling was declared 'good'.

The premises at 14 Claremont Road have a rich, intriguing history. From the 1930s well into the 1950s it was Peggy Brown's tearoom and cake shop, run by the woman who was the Mary Berry of her day.

Yvette Matcham's funeral took place on February 17 in Ruislip.

Drink support help

If you're concerned about your own – or someone else's – alcohol use, help is available.

Surbiton Health Centre in Ewell Road (the former Surbiton Hospital) is open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm, for meetings with support workers who are experienced in making a care plan to help reduce, or stop, drinking. The service also assists worried family, friends and carers.

On offer are private sessions with a personal keyworker. Evening appointments, online groups and telephone or video sessions are additional options.

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the good life

Editor: **Tim Harrison**

Set up at the start of 2012, the community paper for Surbiton, Tolworth, Berrylands & Long Ditton appears regularly from March to December. We deliver to 12,500 homes.

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This paper is also available at Michael's shoe repairs; Shoes at Last; the cornerHOUSE arts centre, and direct by post (see above).



Don't peep in the Subway, darling

Having sat empty, unloved and neglected for five years, Surbiton's old Subway takeaway is poised for reincarnation.

The filled-roll franchise once traded in Claremont Road before closing in 2019, when a fusillade of black binliners joylessly masked the windows, making it impossible to see inside.

Two years ago the old Subway fascia was finally removed, leaving the old name visible in ghostly outline. The high-footfall town-centre unit has recently become a canvas for graffiti artists, giving a shop bookended by Village Pizza and Michael's Shoe Repairs a bleak, edgy 'urban decay' look.

Before Subway, the 900sq ft shop was a Thai restaurant run by tour-de-force Bangkok chef Patria Weerapan of Cranes Park, dubbed 'a culinary firecracker' by Gordon Ramsay after he'd sampled her crispy seabass and jungle green curry on his TV show The F Word.

Within six weeks of being advertised (at £30,000 annual rent) 9 Claremont Road is under offer, although more cash will be required to jolly up its forsaken interior. In all, 15 separate offers have been made to take on the shop; a gratifying level of interest. Rumours swirling round the town that it is destined to be another curry house seem wide of the mark. "Definitely **not** a curry house," an agent in on the deal insisted.

Tim Harrison



It's someone like Adele!

Fancy seeing Adele perform in Surbiton? Hotel Bosco is offering the next best thing with a series of live music nights featuring tribute acts. We've already had Robbie Williams and Amy Winehouse, but Adele is next up on Thu, Mar 20, with a show featuring all her greatest hits.

Entry is free before 8pm if you eat. The focus is on Mexican and Peruvian dishes, to pair with cocktails, with mains ranging from sea bass ceviche, dim sum and chargrilled sirloin steak to grilled chicken skewers and yellow fin tuna with noodles. Mojitos are £7 apiece all night, and cocktails are two-for-one between 5-8pm. Reserve tables at hotelbosco.co.uk/live-music-line-up

Future tribute nights are: Whitney Houston (Apr 17), Kylie Minogue (May 22), Ed Sheeran (Jun 26), Oasis (Jul 24), George Michael (Sep 25), Freddie Mercury (Oct 23), Madonna (Nov 20) and Michael Buble (Dec 11).

Bosco is also running DJ Bingo Brunches on the last Saturday of the month, 2-5pm with brunch, bottomless cocktails and prosecco for the first hour and a half.

Among the DJ acts is Aaron Norton, who has performed as a support for Stacey Solomon, Alesha Dixon and McFly.

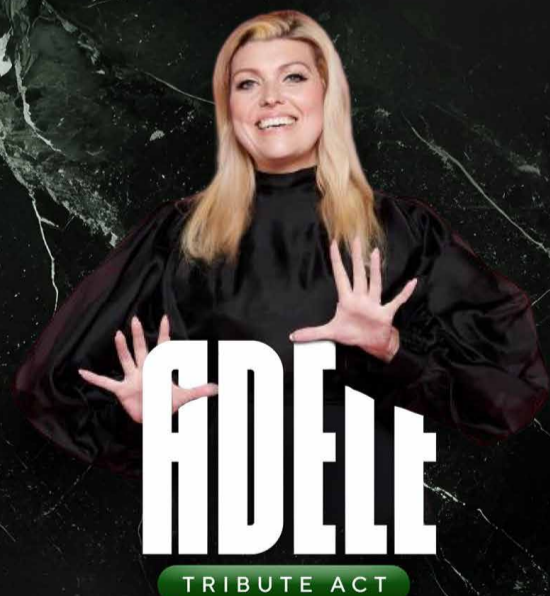
Others on the roster include 'Secret of Surrey' Kobbie, who combines new tracks, promos, classics and acapellas, and the singer songwriter Howard Dee. Jason Hanley, aka Mister H, has been on the club and bar scene since 2004, including residencies at some of Ibiza's biggest clubs.

The Bosco venue at the foot of St Mark's Hill was recently given a major makeover, and is also organising a membership scheme which will give priority access, deals and entry to exclusive events.

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Paint by numbers

Brush up your watercolour skills. A beginners' course, run by Kingston adult education, starts in April at Ewell Road's library hall. Lessons until early July. The cost: £225.

Rekindle that fire

A marriage enrichment course aimed at couples who assess their relationship as merely being 'average to good' is being run at Our Lady Immaculate church in Tolworth.

Historical jackpot

Surbiton's historical society has had a windfall. When Molesey Antiques Society packed up, its funds were shared among other groups, with £1,500 added to Surbiton's coffers.

Carers' help group

If you support someone with mental health issues, a local charity can help. Kingston Mental Health Carers' Forum (kmhcf.org.uk) offers advice sessions at Tolworth Hospital to assist carers. Membership is free.

Needling to talk?

Enjoy needlework? Like to talk? Tolworth Library in the Broadway has 'knit & natters' on Wednesdays at 11am. Simply turn up with your knitting or crochet and join the chat.

Garden of delight

Three generations of Squires helped launch a loyalty app for customers of the Long Ditton garden centre which bears their name. Friends of Squires offers vouchers and discounts.

Bookworm hugs

More than 100 bookworms met author Bryony Gordon at BookBox at St Mary's, Long Ditton. The signing queue was slow because the writer bestowed hugs on everyone!

A pause for pores

Water issues have delayed the launch of Simin beauty clinic next to Sage in Brighton Road, but it's still expected to open this month. siminbeauty.uk



Love me, tikka...

Elvis comes to Surbiton in May! On the 22nd, Scott Elvis's tribute act takes place at 8pm at Joy curry house in Brighton Road. joysurbiton.co.uk

Really it's the pits

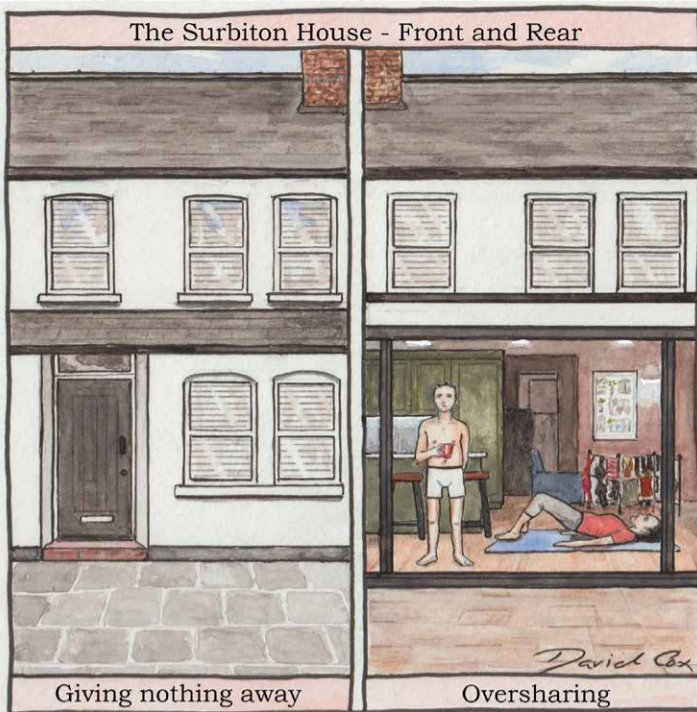
Kingston borough is getting £543,000 of government aid to tackle potholes, with studies showing there are 100 times more potholes on England's roads than craters on the moon.

Job done? Or not?

Contractors sign off tasks as complete, but can we rely on that? Resident James Stanton told Surbiton cllrs that work to mask street light glare affecting flats near a footpath in Malvern Road had been declared 'done' when it hadn't. "I complained and was told Kingston Council had run out of money," he said. Officers have pledged to look into the issue.

SURBITON LIFE

by David Cox



Hang on Miss, you're a Mr



Surbiton High has a new head... and, breaking with 140 years of tradition, it's a fella! Matthew Shoult took over as principal in January having led a girls' high school in Ealing for seven years.

"I was impressed by the commitment of teaching staff and the positivity of the pupils," said the 50-year-old Oxford classicist who replaces Rebecca Glover, the James Blunt fan who was head from 2018. In August she took over the International School, Milan, leaving former biology head Hannah Horwood to mind the shop for four months. Olivia Adams is the new vice principal.

Outside school, Matthew is a hill walker, violinist and cryptic crossword buff. He's married to Finnish professional violinist Sini Simonen, who has led the Castalian String Quartet for a decade. Their six-month-old daughter Matilda knows where she'll be going to school! Surbiton High was set up in a house in Surbiton Crescent in 1884 with 11 girls in starched collars and skirts which brushed the ground. Within a year, inaugural head Mary Bennett, an early female Cambridge graduate, had bumped the school roll up to 90. Today it stands at a mighty 1,645. The school motto has evolved. It began with the extraordinary **Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.** By the First World War it was the surreal **That which touches one touches all.** Today's version translates from Latin as the slightly twee **May love always lead us.** **Tim Harrison**

Brace yourselves for tax hike

In this 'challenging environment' – as the council puts it – of 3% inflation, stand by for a 4.99% rise in council tax, as Kingston struggles to balance its books.

As The Good Life went to press, the council was expected to confirm the new Band D figure at £2,528 a year, the highest of any London borough. Had Kingston nudged up to the magic 5% figure itself, the council would have been compelled to put it to a costly referendum of residents.

The big rise for Kingston, which still has £40m of reserves in the bank, is in the cost of caring for vulnerable adults, providing temporary housing for homeless people (currently running at more than 1,100 families) and looking after children in care.



New public health director Katy Scammell (left) will have all this in mind when she takes up the reins next month after spending seven years working in Tower Hamlets.

"I truly believe we can make a real difference to wellbeing across the borough," she said.

Wipe your glasses

The lease of a Tolworth corner shop which until recently was an optician is on the market at £19,000 a year.

The shop at 372 Ewell Road, near B&M, was part of the Thomas H Collison eyecare chain, but closed in the autumn after merging with an optician in New Malden high street. The premises measure 548sq ft. Rates are £10,750 a year, with Bridger Bell of Epsom handling the sale.



It's the place to sail the 7 Seas



Liz Green with Shakeel Ahmed and, centre, deputy mayor Elizabeth Park. Pic: Harriet Bonnichon

Amazingly the old Avery Cole lettings agency opposite the YMCA hasn't become a nail bar or vape shop, but a travel agent.

The bow-fronted Victoria Road shop is now 7 Seas Holidays, with mayor Cllr Liz Green doing the opening honours.

"It's conveniently located to book your holiday then nip into

Regency Bookshop to buy your books," she said. "It's lovely to have independent shops in Surbiton." The business, run by Shakeel Ahmed and son Sajeel, moved from Wandsworth. It does flights, holidays, cruises & packages. 7seasholidays.co.uk



● **Hard hats off to the inspectors working for Surrey highways authority! Unhappy with the quality of work after contractors had replaced the Effingham Road pavements, kerbs and gutters,**

they ordered the road edges to be dug up and redone. Then, with commendable concern for how taxpayers' money is spent, the authority sent the experts back... and rejected the work a SECOND time. The (by now) disgruntled workmen were made to do it all again, or risk missing out on future repair contracts.

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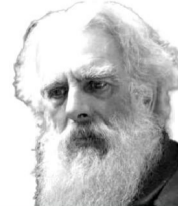
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Good Life editor Tim Harrison's subject is: **Genius or Monster?**

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For more than 30 years, Bruce Prodrumou was the cooked breakfast king of Surbiton, serving value-for-money fry-ups at Cafe St James in St James' Road, each plate accompanied by a smile and friendly word.

The breakfast king is mourned

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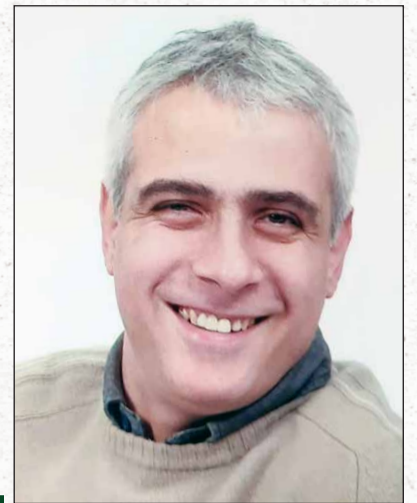
Following his death from lymphoma at 67, regular customers were among 250 people at the funeral in January to offer support to his grieving family. The service at the Greek Orthodox church of St Nicholas in Shepherds Bush was followed by burial in Chiswick – the part of London where the patriotic Greek Cypriot spent his childhood. Two priests intoned the sung chants for 'our brother Bruce'.

He was, said Anna, his wife and soulmate of 43 years, "a truly selfless man, never hesitating to drop anything he was doing to help somebody in need, and always maintaining the same relentless, positive attitude".

Bruce, who lived in Sheen, also leaves sons John and Anthony, mother Chrystalla, sister Andrulla and twin brother George, who recalled: "Everyone said we were so alike. If I was in the cafe, I'd poke my head round the door, and customers would look at me, then at Bruce, then back to me!" Added Anna: "He was a wonderful husband, father, brother, uncle and son, touching countless people with his humour, kindness and gentle nature."

The son of Antonis and Chrystalla Prodrumou of Achna in the Famagusta district of Cyprus, Bruce was a keen footballer and lifelong Brentford fan.

A fit man who ran regularly in Richmond Park, he became an active member of the Surbiton community, making friends via the cafe he established and ran with brother-in-law Paul Pavlou.



Bruce Prodrumou and the cafe. Below left, interior image by regular David Jacobson

NOTABLE SURBITONIANS
Bruce Prodrumou



"He loved all his customers, and the people of Surbiton," said Anna.

Cafe St James was celebrated for its buzzy atmosphere, traditional cooked meals and reasonably priced brunches, six days a week. Cafe specialities included the full English, bubble & squeak, bacon and egg sandwiches and an acclaimed apple pie & custard. "Doing the simple things so well," as one regular put it.

It's too early to say what will now happen to the cafe. "I just don't know where to start; we all miss him so much," said Anna.

In lieu of flowers, mourners were encouraged to donate to the Royal Marsden, where Bruce was treated.

Tim Harrison



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New life for old uniforms

When Surbiton High School revamped its logo, it was left with stacks of uniforms bearing the old symbol. Now dozens of African schoolchildren turn up to classes in recycled kit thanks to the school's parents' association. Pupils at three schools in the Ghanaian capital Accra are in rehomed surplus uniforms in a sustainability project which entailed airlifting large boxes.

Katamanso Presbyterian School, Katamanso Number 1 JHS School and Sunday School of Olive Tree pupils now strut around in Surbiton style. The school singled out Vicky Bulger for thanks co-ordinating. A Ghanaian spokesman praised "everyone who helped us put a smile on a child's face". Surbiton High has pledged to continue collecting old-logo uniforms for West Africa.



First aid trainer Kay Galbraith showed a crowd how to use the new defibrillator at Coffee on the Corner, King Charles Road, bought with the cafe's festive tree profits. "It's important for business owners to give back," said coffee shop owner Kyle Hyams, who also runs Chessington building company Insta Services.



Kay Galbraith and Kyle Hyams Pic: Harriet Bonnichon

Farewell, Lloyds

Lloyds has quit Surbiton, leaving HSBC as the last high-street bank. Doors shut at the end of trading on Mon, Mar 3. The nearest Lloyds branch is now the one in Kingston.

Alright, guvnor?

Interested in becoming chair of governors of Maple Infants' School, Maple Road - now 50 years old? Let the school know: mapleinfants.co.uk/governors

In the Nick of time

May's elections to Surrey County Council have been postponed until 2026, ahead of possible reorganisation. So Cllr Nick Darby is Long Ditton rep for an extra year.

A paws in prices

K9 Paws n Play has cut prices to help dog owners with cost-of-living rises. "Times are hard and we don't want to see dogs' welfare suffer," said Bekki Povey of the Tolworth Broadway grooming studio.

A bolly good night

Mark International Women's Day with food, Bollywood music, song and dance at Hollyfield School, Sat, Mar 8, from 6pm. Geetika Sulekh performs. namastekingston.org

Ewe tell 'em Grace

Koyal's tandoori lamb chops, "unimprovable" purrs Guardian foodie Grace Dent, are now Brighton Rd best-sellers.



Could a footbridge span the Thames at Surbiton? A 907-signature petition has prompted Kingston Council to weigh up options. Sanjeev Basi claims it would improve connectivity, cut traffic and enhance the environment. "Today residents navigate busy roads or detour via Hampton Wick or Kingston. A bridge would be a direct route for pedestrians and cyclists," he said.

A 20mph limit is proposed for Long Ditton. Surrey County Council's consultation ends Fri, Mar 7. Long Ditton St Mary's juniors and infants would fall within a zone including Sugden, Fleece, Ewell, Kings & Ditton Hill roads & Orchard and Highfield closes. tinyurl.com/yh4b7muj

House price fall

Surbiton house prices fell in 2024, and now average £582,282 per property, says the Halifax. While some parts of the UK (including Wolverhampton and Stoke) have seen dramatic rises, Surbiton's prices slipped 4%. It's a market shake-up, with buyers moving to cheaper areas, says mortgage chief Amanda Bryden. "High asking prices mean house prices have fallen, reflecting what buyers are willing to pay," she said.

Second Act, a new theatre outfit, brings A Beautiful Friendship to the cornerHOUSE, Douglas Road, from May 2-4. Written by Phil Austin and Cristina Martinez of Surbiton, with a nod to the 1942 film Casablanca, the play is a lighthearted look at the trials and tribulations of dating later in life. Peter Freeman, above, plays piano. "A lot of theatre is either whodunits or dystopian horror, so we thought, why not a romcom?" said Phil. Tickets £12 (£10 concs). ticketsource.co.uk/a-beautiful-friendship



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● Surbiton's bike repair shop, Recycles at 151 Brighton Road, is back. Servicing, mending, custom builds, resprays, sales... all handled by a new team of 'old-school bike mechanics'. Donate an old bicycle, and they'll revive it, having taken on the lease from the last guy, who ran it for 15 years, sporadically at the end. Mon-Sat, 10-6. **020 8399 8365.**

● Sociable, welcoming and green-fingered, Long Ditton Garden Club is looking for new members. It meets at the village hall by Long Ditton rec on the third Wed of each month (2-4pm), with speakers in the winter and outings in the summer. Last month Shirley and Roy Gundavda spoke about gardens and wildlife in Sri Lanka ("We have pigeons, they have peacocks," said Roy), and on Wed, Mar 19, the topic is how China has influenced our gardens. Teas served. Bowl up, or call Susan on 07766 742370.



● Fullsome praise has been showered on Elliot Newton, 34, who has stood down as borough biodiversity officer after five years to become director of rewilding for the whole of London at Citizen Zoo, the action group

he co-founded. "I'll still be working with Kingston Council, but not for them," said the Surbiton resident. "It's been very rewarding being biodiversity officer; it's been a real privilege." Tom Reeve, chair of the neighbourhood committee, paid tribute. "He's made important contributions to Surbiton's biodiversity, and on behalf of the committee I'd like to thank Elliot for his work," he said.

Show returns

Back for a third year at Hollyfield School, Surbiton Hill Road, Kingston's Efficient Homes Show features groups and firms which can help cut energy bills and improve homes. As well as exhibitors there are talks by experts throughout the day. It's on Sat, May 10, 10am-3pm. Free tickets: **kingston.gov.uk/EHS**



● Eight saplings were planted by volunteers, among them Surbiton MP Ed Davey. Alpha Road Residents' Assn secretary Claire Mellish said: "We're excited about the community orchard in Howard Road as it will provide free fruit for estate residents and help biodiversity. We have pears, apples, plums, apricots, medlars and gooseberries."

Each tree has a 'tree angel', monitoring its health after planting. "The fruit trees and bushes will help create a 'fruit route' linking the orchard at Fishponds and other fruit trees," she added. Trees were picked as 'pollinator partners' to complement and support each other via pollination.



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● Surbiton may be next for inventor Sam Bailey's Yo-Go cars – two-seat hire buggies, already a hit in Fulham. Why here? "The blanket 20mph zone," said the engineer. They park, kerb-on, in residents' bays, and there's room for shopping in the boot. Editor Tim Harrison had a go, left, and found the 20p-a-minute buggies easy to drive. "They effectively use a vacuum cleaner charging cable," said Sam, recharging at a lamppost point. You scan a QR code to activate, pop on your seatbelt, push 'start', select forward and off you go. For insurance, drivers must be 25-70, with a max of six points on their licence. Range is 30 miles.



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Oink, oink, mooooo

Pigs and cows hold the key to broadening biodiversity on Tolworth Court Farm Fields where, with grants and planning permission, an ambitious rewilding project is under way. It's spearheaded by Citizen Zoo, whose director Elliot Newton told a cornerHOUSE launch that while new wetlands will sustain multiple habitats and manage flood risk, it's oinks and moos that are critical to the project. First GPS-tagged Sussex cattle, then Tamworth pigs (crossbred with wild boars), will graze, snuffle and fertilise soil to encourage the return of roe deer, lapwing and skylarks.

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The 'crown jewel' of the borough's 12 reserves, the 104-acre expanse on the Ewell side of the By-Pass will team with wildflowers. Surveys reveal 997 invertebrate species. "But for a site this size there should be more," said Elliot. "Meadows are ecologically impoverished. But don't worry; we're not reintroducing wolves to Tolworth... yet!"

A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk will be built, hedgerows expanded and 'wild guardians' recruited. Traditional scything has already replaced tractor grass trims, to protect rare anthesis.

In partnership with Tolworth's Community Brain, and backed by Kingston Council (which in 1989 bought the land to stop Lambeth creating a cemetery), the project has £500k of Lottery, Mayoral and Zoological funds. Early signs are positive. An earthworm unique to the UK has already been found.

Robin Hutchinson, of Community Brain, said the hope was to increase pride in Tolworth, and engage with the young. Cllr Ian Manders said rewilding would help the council drive to combat climate change, and show the value of green belt land to a government which may be wavering on its sanctity.

citizenzoo.org **Tim Harrison**



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 (K3 bus from Kingston/Esher)

- Winter meetings at the Village Hall
- Summer day trips by coach from the Village Hall to houses and gardens of interest.

Next meeting
 Wednesday 19 March at 2pm
 Christine Jarvis:
 China's Contributions to our gardens

Contact:
Susan on 07766 742370

What gets Keith in a lather?

Some collect teaspoons, others coins or Pokemon cards. But what gets Keith Blanchard in a lather is vintage washing machines.

The garage of his Surbiton home is full of them, the garage where he used to live is full of them, his mum's garage is full of them... yet he's on the hunt for more machines.

"Just look at this funky one," he said, running his fingertips over a 1958 Servis Powerglide; a green front panel contrasting with the yellow body. "The Rolls-Royce of washing machines! You put your foot on it, to drive it! Then you take the clothes out, set the wringer and glide it all through."

He turned a plastic knob on the front, pressed down on a pedal, then activated the kind of red-topped lever used by villains to launch missiles in sci-fi films. With a judder and a rattle, the 67-year-old appliance came to life, the mangle rollers whirring, and a disconcerting puff of steam rising from the drum.

As a four-year-old, he watched his mother load the one at home, and gradually became obsessed – not just with machines but also with powders, manuals, even advertising bumf.

While admitting his hobby is "slightly quirky", the 48-year-old of – aptly – Clearwater Place restricts his 50-strong collection to ones from 1955-1970, an era of innovation which saw advances from basic clothes boilers to cabinets topped with mangles to twin tubs and finally to fully automated machines.

"I'm always on the lookout for old machines before they're chucked away," he said, appealing to Good Life readers who may have a forgotten vintage model at the back of the shed.

Especially if it happens to be a 1965 English Electric Reversomatic; Keith's holy grail. "Servis and English Electric! They were just so elegant, so highly engineered!"

Idle hours, when he's not at his day job, running the office for the

Financial Services Compensation Scheme, are spent patiently reconnecting jumbles of coloured wires behind fascias bearing exotic names in quaint script fonts.

How could you not be charmed by something called a Suds Miser, an Acme Summer Breeze or a Liberator Twin?

He has a curvy 1955 Perobot twin tub from Iron Curtain Czechoslovakia, fitted with a porcelain agitator, which was once an Eastern Bloc family's pride and joy. "I had it shipped over," he said. He even has an unused 1960 washing machine still with its factory wrappings intact.

He loves old Hotpoints ("They were very temperamental, very hard to work on") and is currently restoring one – a task that includes having a new control panel made in the original colour by a man near the Ace of Spades, Hook.

"And I drove to Romford this morning to get a new motor for it," he beamed, satisfied with an expedition to see a 75-year-old specialist with a shared passion for vintage electrics.

He's had the panels resprayed because some of the washing powders used in the 1960s were so corrosive they ate through the enamel. With original spares unobtainable, he cuts replacement gaskets out of sheets of rubber using a Stanley knife.

Long-suffering partner of eight years Richard, who also works in the financial sector, despairs of



Once a Czech family's pride and joy, this curvy 1955 Perobot twin tub now lives in Surbiton



For Keith, nothing beats tinkering on a vintage machine in his man cave

Keith's obsession, seeing it as bordering on insanity. But Keith sticks to his tubs.

"My mum and dad hated it," he said. "My dad was in the army, and he said: 'This is not what someone of eight or nine should be doing!' But I went through my teenage years and started collecting. My first machine was a Hotpoint Countess with a wringer. Hotpoint loved playing with names. They had three machines: small, medium and large. They called them Princess, Countess and Empress! They loved the marketing. Hoover were a bit boring; they didn't do much with names."

Although he also has a modern washing machine in the utility area of his home, he sometimes fires up a vintage Westinghouse in the garage to do the clothes, just for fun, leading the waste water hose out of the door to a drain.

So enthusiastic is he that when he's restored a machine to working order he'll film it, foaming and frothing (the machine, not Keith), for his YouTube channel.

"There's a group of us who meet virtually on Facebook. For me it's all about the designs and styles; they're just amazing. I also collect the literature," he said, waving a hand at a shelf filled with repair manuals and mail-order catalogues.

He also has vintage packs of Tide and Daz, and a



You had to plant your stiletto down on a pedal to operate a 1958 Servis Powerglide. Ballgown was optional

well-preserved 1960s cartoon of Brillo pads. And Omo. There were stories, perhaps apocryphal, about bored housewives leaving a box at the kitchen window to convey the message 'Old Man Out'. But upends the pack and it also signalled 'Old Woman Out'!

"It's crazy, but it's so strong for me. I live and breathe machines; I dream about them," confessed Keith, who laments today's disposable society, where nothing's built to last, and contrasts it with a golden era in the 1950s and 60s, when manufacturers took a pride in constructing sturdy, hard-wearing appliances which, in a pre-electronic era, could be mended.

"These machines will probably be the death of me," laughed Keith. "But at least they can all be fixed."

Tim Harrison



The stylish 1960s English Electric Reversomatic was so simple that apparently even the cat could work it



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Health chiefs rebuff bid to cut NHS waiting lists

Exasperated Surbiton clinic owner Bruno Pereira is baffled by the pushback he's getting after offering free physio and dermatology appointments to ease NHS waiting lists.

He's willing to give 16 hours' free treatment a month in his modern Lambert GP practice and sports clinic at 380 Ewell Road... but says he's been told it's all too complicated to organise.

The response seems doubly baffling after prime minister Sir Keir Starmer's recent pledge to use partnerships with the private sector to cut waiting times to 18 weeks over the next five years.

The delay for NHS dermatology patients often exceeds 40 weeks.

Bosses at the local integrated care board (which replaced the clinical commissioning group) were initially positive, then backtracked. "Maybe it's because offering free support is uncommon," said Bruno, 47.

"But to me, people are more important than NHS egos!"

Bruno says every Surbiton resident aged 45-75 is entitled to a free healthcheck each year. It's funded by the council, not the NHS, with the money (given by central government via the public health grant) allocated to providers by a council employee.

However, currently only NHS clinics are allowed to bid to carry out the checks – something Bruno says is commercial discrimination as his private healthcare clinic is equipped to do them.

After the situation was brought to his attention, Kingston Council leader Andreas Kirsch pledged to investigate.

The council pays around £35 per resident for the NHS to do healthchecks, but Bruno can do the same for £29... still making £1 profit a time.

"My proposal would provide immediate value to patients, while alleviating pressure on the wider

system," said Bruno.

His additional offer – a monthly quota of free appointments – has been rebuffed too.

"I don't understand it," said Bruno. "I get pushback because I'm self-funding. This is a serious matter; the NHS is refusing free treatment to patients!"

He claims that Kingston's health chiefs can't get their heads round such a concept. "Despite the challenges, I remain steadfast in my commitment to providing free support, and hope this will be recognised as a genuine opportunity to improve patient care," he said.

Tim Harrison



Bruno Pereira is baffled why his free appointment offer is being ignored

Boys and girls born in Surbiton today can expect three more years of healthy living than those born a decade ago. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that while a newborn boy was likely to have 65.7 years of relatively healthy life in 2013, by 2023 that had climbed to 68.8 years. For newborn girls, the comparative figure rose from 65.7 in 2013 to 69.4 years in 2023, aided by local clean-air initiatives. For context, 'healthy life' for girls in Lewisham is 57.1 years. Barnsley in Yorkshire has the lowest UK figure at 52.6 years, largely blamed on deprivation and pollution.





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Emmanuel turns 90

Emmanuel church, Tolworth, marks its 90th birthday with a string of events, launched last month with a community open afternoon. Faces from the past included clergy from the 1960s who were welcomed by the aptly named minister-in-charge, Emmanuel Baikie.

'Planted' in Grand Avenue in 1935 on dairy land bought for £450 by Christ Church, to serve the growing population, Emmanuel began as a modest brick church, with an organ which cost a tenner.



Chris Jenkin, left, curate 1968-78, with Emmanuel Baikie

It was rebuilt in 1958 for £16,336, with a dramatic cedarwood frontage and a new hall at the side. The first curate-in-charge, Canon Herbert Taylor, founded the Pathfinder youth group movement for 11-14s, which has spread across the country.

But Emmanuel is currently navigating turbulent waters. After 15 years in charge, associate vicar the Rev Bart Erlebach, famed for his sustained sermons, resigned over the CofE's revised view on blessings for same-sex couples. He took half the Emmanuel congregation with him after becoming pastor of the new Hope Church, which meets at Knollmead School on the Sunray estate, although oddly he still rents his old house from Emmanuel.

February's reunion was entertained by the Berrylands Belles singers, while historian Janet Heskins created a timeline of 90 years. Future celebratory events include an evening with former Bishop of Durham Paul Butler on Sat, May 17; another Berrylands Belles concert on Sat, Jun 21; a barbecue on Sat, Aug 30; and a talk on Christianity & Science on Sat, Oct 11. Full information at emmanueltolworth.org.uk

No chance of getting lost at last month's farmers' market in Maple Road where the guest charity was London Search and Rescue... its reps included the pair of frisky dogs in the boot who are, apparently, cousins. The volunteer-led, but professionally trained, group helps the Met look for vulnerable missing people.



Apparently double-checking the veracity of the Dog Friendly sign at the Press Room, Claremont Road, this pooch waited patiently to be admitted, and was snapped by reader Deborah Stevens.

A rogue roofer who cheated Surbiton customers out of cash and bodged the work he did has been returned to prison for contempt. Jimmy Slater from the A3 traveller site in Tolworth breached an order won by Kingston Council trading standards in 2019 preventing him running a business.

On release, after serving nine months for an earlier breach, Slater defied the order as Just Guttering, All Guttering, JJ Guttering and by using aliases including Jim Johnson.

Judge Saggerson at the Royal Courts of Justice found Slater had repeatedly breached the order, and jailed him for 21 months.



A bus to fill the gap

Don't hail this double-decker if you spot it in Surbiton. The repurposed London bus is essentially a mobile dental surgery for homeless people. "And what a good idea!" said reader David Naber, who sent us this snap. It offers a free turn-up-and-open-wide dental service (including X-rays), and it has a hairdressing salon, a GP consulting room and a hot shower; all free, thanks to coffee social enterprise Change Please, HSBC and Colgate.



Remarkably there's space for a dental surgery inside the touring bus



The strength of feeling was clear when parents protested

Fury at threat to change entry rules

Parents of Long Ditton St Mary's CofE Junior School (LDSM) are waiting to hear if their children can still attend their nearest secondary – Hinchley Wood School. The academy in Claygate Lane has proposed changes to its admissions policy which would mean pupils at Hinchley Wood Primary and Thames Ditton Junior schools would be given priority for places.

In a bizarre change, governors at the state-funded, non-selective, 11-18 mixed comprehensive want to encourage applications from Kingston instead – specifically from Surbiton's river roads, more than two miles away.

Action group organiser Annette Whymark said: "Hinchley Wood has been the local secondary school for children in Long Ditton for decades. This would mean that they are forced to travel greater distances

to go to school and will be unable to attend with friends in the local area. "This is despite LDSM being the only feeder school to Hinchley Wood to have achieved outstanding Ofsted results."

Annette said that there was no clear alternative secondary school for the junior school pupils, and that schools in the Kingston area were already oversubscribed.

Long Ditton councillor Jez Langham said he and his fellow councillors supported the campaign.

"Both the infant school and the primary school are at the heart of this Long Ditton community, and it's important that they continue and their future is secure," he said.

Jane Grove

• Raising a glass to solicitor Sushila Abraham (in blue) to mark her 25th anniversary in business in Surbiton, friends, clients and staff gathered in her Ewell Road office to toast the future. A former Surbiton councillor and mayor of the Royal borough, Sushila is a past president of the Surrey Law Society.



Hold Neil's feet to the fire

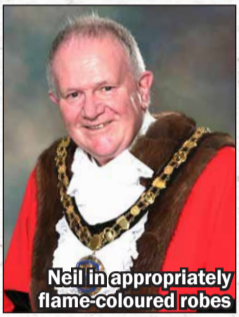
Fancy holding politicians' feet to the flames? Sponsor one on a firewalk!

Good sport Long Ditton councillor Neil Houston is raising money for local charities by tiptoeing across 20ft of red-hot coals, each ember burning at temperatures of up to 800 degrees Fahrenheit!

Needless to say Neil, who is also mayor of Elmbridge, has never done the like before.

"As a local councillor I'm used to listening to people raking over

the coals, but I am not used to walking on hot ones," he quipped. It happens on Thu, Mar 20 at 7pm at Painshill Park, Cobham. To sponsor Neil visit givewheel.com/fundraising/4577/hot-coals-challenge



Neil in appropriately flame-coloured robes

• Ace of Spades residents say new electric vehicle charging points will block use of the busy Ace Pharmacy as three regular bays will be lost. Transport for London insists they're needed "to support the growing number of electric vehicles". Neighbour Rob Robb said TfL just does what it wants. He suggests letting all cars use the EV bays during business hours.

• The Friends of Fishponds are talking to Kingston Council about putting natural play features into the park off Ewell Road.

"They'll be tucked away in little-used areas and will add a further dimension to the park, especially for young children," said group chair Rob Eyre-Brook. "It's hoped that the new features will be in place for the summer."

A new path, paid for by the council's infrastructure levy, has also been installed by the hay meadow.

"For the first time there is now a fully accessible route into the park from Hollyfield Road," he added.

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Berrylands station

Continued from p.1

The station, opened in autumn 1933, was funded by developers who built hundreds of new homes in what had been fields. It's one of a small handful in the capital to still have the original wooden platforms.

Transport secretary Heidi Alexander said, on Feb 18, that rail operators would be held to account by a new body, Great British Railways. The knock-on consequences of closing Berrylands station will be an early case for its in-tray.

Tim Harrison

• Is there a sympathetic landlord out there? asks Judy. A Syrian refugee family (dad, mum, two teens and six-month-old baby) who came to the UK legitimately under the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme seven years ago need a new home.

They had priority as their young son needed heart surgery. He's now well. The father is working towards his citizenship exam, but mother and children all have British citizenship.

"We, the current landlords, have been letting out our two-bed flat in Surbiton for six years," says Judy. "But with the growing family, they now need three-bed accommodation. They are not finding the search easy. The family have been excellent tenants, have made timely payments and kept the property in very good order. We can provide a good reference."

The older children attend Hollyfield. Call Judy on 020 8390 1896.

• Opera lovers can see how Surbiton Assembly Rooms looked in Victorian times when its 'twin', Normansfield Theatre, Teddington, stages Richmond Opera's version of Monteverdi's Orfeo in English. April 25-27 at 7.30pm. ticketsource.co.uk/richmondopera

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- Serenity
- Pickled Pantry
- Busaba Thai restaurant
- Family Fun Zone
- Horton Golf Park
- Pizza Express

Special anniversaries

THIS year, we will be celebrating two special events: **VE Day 80th anniversary** and **SRBL Youth Marching Band's 60th anniversary**.

The Surbiton Royal British Legion Youth Marching Band is based on a military-style band.

To celebrate our 60th, we will be holding an open air concert and fun day at the Surbiton RBL club in Hollyfield Road on **Saturday 12th July**. Later in the year, we will also be holding a Marching Band Tattoo. Details to follow.

The band is always taking on new members. If you are a boy or girl aged eight to 25 please email **Surbitonband@gmail.com** for more information. No musical experience is needed!

WHAT'S ON at the Surbiton RBL



MARCH ▼

29th March
Roy Orbison Tribute
Doors open 7.30pm

APRIL ▼

20th April
Members' Children's Easter Party

25th April
St George's Day Pie & Mash

26th April
Robbie Williams Tribute
Doors open 7.30pm

MAY ▼

3rd May
The Hornets 60s music
Doors open 7.30pm

8th May
VE Day 80th Anniversary
SRBL Youth Marching Band

10th May
The Polka Dots
Doors open 7pm

11th May
Lavender Club dance group
Doors open 2pm

17th May
Mini Day (a Community Brain/Charles

Ivey Specialist Cars event)

Cliff Richard Tribute
Doors open 7.30pm

31st May
Allsounds Reggae
Doors open 7.30pm

JUNE ▼

7th June
Epsom Derby/Ladies Race Day
Time TBC

14th June
Huggy Flares (60s soul/70s funk)
Doors open 7.30pm

20th June
Race Night
Doors open 7.30pm

JULY ▼

11th-13th July
SRBL Youth Marching Band
60th Anniversary

12th July
Open air concert & fun day
Times TBC

PLEASE NOTE: If you'd like to join us for any of these events please follow the instructions on our membership flyer (right).

WANT TO JOIN THE SURBITON ROYAL BRITISH LEGION SOCIAL CLUB?

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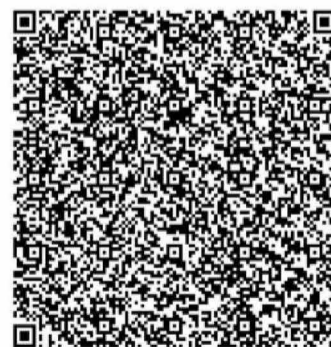
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Surbiton Royal British Legion Social Club, Hollyfield Road, Surbiton KT5 9AL

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● Surbitonians squealed with glee as one of their own popped up on University Challenge's festive series. Marine biologist **Nathan Robinson**, who grew up in Westfield Road and whose mum Liz was head of Maple Infants, went to Kingston Grammar (he's a school 'window notable, left) then Southampton uni (whose team he was on). But despite him getting four starters-for-10 right, his side was pipped 125-150 by Churchill, Cambridge.



● Olivia, 6, works on a picture of a sabre-toothed tiger at a new art school in Long Ditton village hall. Aimed at 5-12s, after-school classes run Fridays and on Saturdays at the hall in Ewell Road opposite Long Ditton rec. This term, the theme is prehistory. "In one class, children created sabre-toothed tigers with a combination of mediums," said head of **Cygnets Art School's** venture, Alex Veek. Easter workshops: Apr 9-11 & Apr 16-18. cygnetsartschool.com/surbiton



● Mrs Bennet's popular **Regency dancing** has a baby sister. Ania Lepkowska launches fortnightly beginners' Regency classes after Easter at St Mark's church hall, Church Hill Road, 8-10pm on Wednesdays, followed by refreshment at Wetherspoons. What with Bridgerton's popularity and Jane Austen's 250th birthday, it's a good time to know a cotillion from a reel. **Facebook: Regency Dancing for Beginners**

● Surbiton's Strictly legend Erin Boag hosts two **Charleston** masterclasses with TV dance expert and choreographer Jenny Thomas.

Erin is running the classes on the sprung dancefloor of the Kingston Workmen's Club on Thu, Mar 27, from 6.30-7.45pm and 8.15-9.30pm.

There will be a chance afterwards to try out the steps you have learned.

"All abilities can enrol, the classes will be great fun and beginner-friendly, no partner necessary - couples and singles welcome," she said. Book at erinboag.com/charleston



Margrit Hasler's viola show on Sun, Mar 16, at the cornerHOUSE uses loop and pitch-shift pedals to explore music from Ravel to bluegrass. 7pm. £10. Book at thecornerhouse.org

● **Express**, the Ewell Road autistic group, held a fundraising silent disco at Glenmore House, to show how to make a big night neuro-inclusive. "My main worry is the fear of being perceived as 'weird'" said attendee Lydia. "But everyone was included. I hope there's another." expressic.org.uk

● A festival of spring colours comes to Hollyfield School, Surbiton Hill Road, on Sat, Mar 15, 1-5pm. **Rangotsav 2025**, a Hindu Holi celebration of love and harmony organised by Namaste Kingston, has live music, a DJ, Indian food stalls, Bollywood dance workshops and colour play. namastekingston.org

● **A Tupperware Conundrum**, at the cornerHOUSE, Mar 7&8, is the BubaLaugh group's first production; a feminist comedy whodunit at a Tupperware party, written and directed by Abi Shore. @bubalaugh Book at ticketsource.co.uk/the-cornerhouseevents



● **Doodling reduces stress**. Ask Ian, who works in IT, but relaxes with notebook & biro at the bar of the Coronation Hall!



● Elgar Avenue author **Steve Harding's Art of the Matter** exhibition at the cornerHOUSE led to a shoal of red 'sold' dots. Topics included Kingston Market Place and an interior view of a K2 bus.

● Good Life editor Tim Harrison's dig into the past of photo pioneer Eadweard Muybridge, below, has created **Genius or Monster?** the Surbiton Historical Society talk on April 1 (bar from 7pm) at the cornerHOUSE, Douglas Road. **Warning!** Contains vintage nudity!

● The talk on the history of Harts Boatyard, Surbiton, on Tues, May 6, by Marcel Linsen features an actual 7.5metre Thames skiff.



Sunday 16 March, 7pm
Margrit Hasler
Music: Viola & Pedals



Saturday 22 March, 8pm
Fara
Folk music night



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Bullseye!



Pic: Mikshan Hattiarachchi

Were you captivated by last summer's Olympic target shooting? If you're 7-18, give it a go at Southborough High on Saturdays. The Target Shooting School, run by Jeanette Leivers, takes over the gym for three mixed-age, air rifle and air pistol sessions, either for fun or to take part in 'postal' competitions

or even the national British championships. The school also caters for students doing Duke of Edinburgh's awards and does newcomer taster sessions.

"This is a sport for all ages," said Jeanette. "It's a mental sport, not a physical sport, and it's an individual sport rather than a team sport, though for many it's quite a social thing. They come here, make friends and have a great time."

"Parents tell me their child's focus improves, and it helps hand-eye coordination and learning to be calm." Next term: Apr 26-Jul 12. Visit targetshootingsschool.co.uk/kingston **JG**

They're under starter's orders at a Grand Charity Race Night on Fri, Mar 28 at Glenmore House, The Crescent, in a fun event to benefit local charities. £25 tickets include fish & chips. First race at 7pm. Then on Fri, May 23 there's a Charity Golf Day at Surbiton Golf Club, teeing off at 1pm. A holiday is among the prizes. Email organisers Surbiton Rotary Club at surbitonrotary@gmail.com

Please, not you again!

When Chelsea Women twice fell behind to Everton in games a week apart, but came back



to win, it was - I suggested to the Blues' French manager Sonia Bompastor - a case of that old English

term déjà vu. She laughed and agreed. But now Chelsea play rivals Man City **FOUR** times in 13 days between Mar 15 & 27! "Oh, I'm used to that," she said. "In France, at Lyon, we played Paris Saint-Germain **SEVEN** times in the season. It's a positive thing for me, but it will be tough." **TH**

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