

Twickenham & Richmond TRIBUNE

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Berkley Driscoll
Teresa Read



16th December 2022



Twickenham Christmas Lights
Photo by Berkley Driscoll



TickerTape - News in Brief

Harlequins confirm change of date for Big Game 14 due to strike action

Harlequins confirm that due to the on-going industrial action by the RMT, the Club has been left with no option but to move the planned Big Game 14 event at Twickenham stadium on 27 December. Big Game 14 will now take place in early March and see a change of opposition:

Big Game 14, Saturday 4 March 2023, Twickenham Stadium

Harlequins Women vs Exeter Chiefs Women, 12:00 ko

Harlequins Men vs Exeter Chiefs, 15:00 ko

The Club have been working closely with South Western Railway through the RFU, Premiership Rugby and all key stakeholders to understand the impact of the current RMT industrial action. Despite 27 December not being a designated day for industrial action, the Club has been informed this week that mainline train services into Twickenham station will not operate at all on the event day, alongside severe restrictions across the train and underground network feeding the local area. The Club has been advised on crowd safety concerns that it would not be safe to deliver the much anticipated sold-out Twickenham stadium event.

Level 3 cold weather alert issued for London

The Met Office has extended this alert until 12 noon on Sunday 18 December, in anticipation of severe cold weather and icy conditions.

There is a high probability of severe cold and icy conditions in parts of England, including in Richmond upon Thames.

Very cold nights are expected, with potentially severe widespread frosts. Daytime temperatures expected to sit near to or just above freezing.

The Met Office has produced a useful bank of information to help you get [Weather Ready](#) and stay warm and safe during extreme cold weather over the winter period.

To keep up to date with the latest forecasts, visit the Met Office's [website](#).



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Transport

Industrial Action will affect South Western Railway services between **18 December 2022 and 8 January 2023**.

Strike Action Calendar & Key

December 2022/January 2023						
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Dec 12	Dec 13	Dec 14	Dec 15	Dec 16	Dec 17	Dec 18
Dec 19	Dec 20	Dec 21	Dec 22	Dec 23	Dec 24	Dec 25
Dec 26	Dec 27	Dec 28	Dec 29	Dec 30	Dec 31	Jan 1
Jan 2	Jan 3	Jan 4	Jan 5	Jan 6	Jan 7	Jan 8



Strike day
ONLY TRAVEL IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY



Late start up
ONLY TRAVEL IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY



Severely reduced service
ONLY TRAVEL IF ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY



No service



Reduced service
CHECK YOUR WHOLE JOURNEY BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Network Rail strikes

Most TfL services, including most of the Tube, will continue to run on each strike day. However, there will be some disruption on services that use track operated by Network Rail on the following days:

- Friday 16 and Saturday 17 December
- Tuesday 3, Wednesday 4, Friday 6 and Saturday 7 January 2023

Services on London Overground, Elizabeth line and parts of the Bakerloo and District lines will be disrupted on these days. Services on the mornings of Thursday 15 and Sunday 18 December, and Thursday 5 and Sunday 8 January may also be disrupted. For more information, [visit the strike page](#).

From Friday 23 December 2022 to Monday 2 January 2023, there are planned works and service changes for the Christmas and New Year period, as well as Network Rail strike action between 24 and 27 December. For further information visit the [Christmas travel page](#).

Bus strikes

Strike action is planned by Abellio bus drivers on the following days:

- Friday 16 and Saturday 17 December

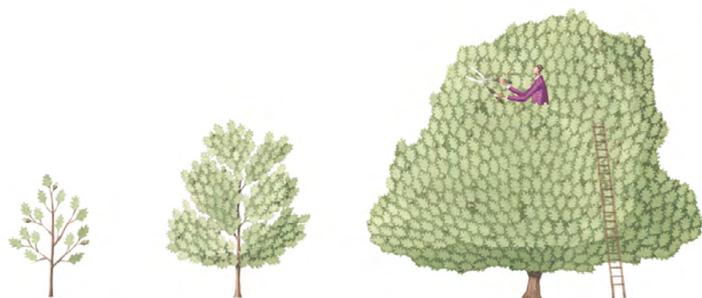
Routes affected by the Abellio strike action are mostly in west and south London. [Visit the strike page](#) to check if your bus route is affected.

Sunday 25 December 2022 until Monday 2 January 2023

Congestion Charge not operating during festive season

If you're planning to drive in London this festive season, please remember the central London Congestion Charge will not operate from Sunday 25 December to Monday 2 January 2023 (inclusive), and the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) which currently covers all areas within the North and South Circular Roads will not operate on Sunday 25 December only.

The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) which covers most of Greater London will continue to operate as usual, including on Christmas Day (Sunday 25 December). [Find out more information about the hours of operation, daily charges and how to pay](#).



The Tree Agency

darryl parkin

The Treehouse
25 King Edwards Grove
Teddington, Middlesex TW11 9LY
Telephone 020 8274 0107
Mobile 07960 123580
Fax 020 8274 0119
info@thetreeagency.co.uk
www.thetreeagency.co.uk



The Tree Agency

Grim conditions

By Simon Fowler

Long demolished Bedford Row was a slum in central Twickenham.

In March 1884 several owners of houses in the street were prosecuted for failing to maintain their property.

Mrs Thomas Ward was summoned for allowing structural defects to exist after due notice had been served to maintain the cottages she owned. Mr Harwood, the inspector of nuisances, said he visited the premises on 12th February. He found the closets and drains partially choked and the flooring falling through. The closets were almost inaccessible. He had served notices to remove the defects, but only slight and insufficient repairs had been carried out. Mr. Clarke, the medical officer of health, said state of the place was highly injurious to health.

The bench ordered that the necessary repairs be made, and said the use of the premises would be prohibited in the meantime.

Mr Clayton, the owner of Number 15, was summoned for allowing overcrowding. The defendant told the bench that his tenant, Mrs. Taylor, had got rid of 'the people' who lived upstairs, and that she had now only her own family in the house.



Mr. Ruston, prosecuting, said there were thirteen persons in the house in two small rooms; there were no bedsteads on the premises, and, indeed, no bedding; the people were huddled together like animals. Mr. Harwood said he had visited the premises. In one small room he found that four persons were lodged. The dimensions of the room were about twelve feet by ten feet. The other room, which was somewhat larger, was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and five children. Two young men slept in the third room, which the family used for living purposes.

Mrs Taylor was called forward. She said: 'Summoned! what for?' The Chairman: 'For overcrowding your house.' Mrs. Taylor: 'I have more room now than I had when I took in the other women lodgers.'

Mrs. Taylor said she now housed only her own family, except the two young men, who had no home, and she kept them for nothing. Mrs. Taylor was warned of the consequences if she did not comply with the notices that would be served calling upon her to cease the overcrowding in her house.'

It was clearly a very rough area. A few weeks later a hawker, John Carter, who lived at No 13, was charged with attempting to stab his wife. The police told the court that he had come home in a very quarrelsome humour. Mrs Carter spoke to him, and he hit her with a stick across the head. She said, 'Thank you.' He then snatched a knife from a shelf and made a stab at her. When the police were called, the prisoner attempted to stab them, and offered great resistance. He was gaoled for two months.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

By Doug Goodman

A full church greeted singers from the Teddington Choral Society on Saturday. St. Mary's Church Twickenham was the venue for a Christmas concert by the choir who entertained guests with traditional carols, excerpts from Bach's Christmas Oratorio and works by Ola Gjeilo, John Rutter and Jonathan Rathbone.

Director of Music was Julian Collings with Peter Jaekel, organ and Phil Culling, piano.

The next concert by the Teddington Choral Society will be held on April 1st at 7.30 at All Saints Church in Kingston featuring music by Mozart and Haydn. Future events are planned for July 8th and December 9th.



Twickenham Memories

By Councillor Geoffrey Samuel

During the War my Father was the senior GIO for Twickenham. In the months leading up to the War the Government feared that the Germans who 'last time' had used poison gases against our trenches in France would deploy them against the civilian population. So they trained thousands of men and women, mostly with a science background, to be able to "identify" the actual gas so that the appropriate antidote could be applied.

Of course there were no gas attacks. But my Father was called out on two occasions. On the second he donned the full head-to-toe protective oil cloth covering and was driven by the Police at speed to the site. There in Cole Park Road in Twickenham he found an elderly family anxiously wearing their gas masks and the family dog. They were keen to point out to him the evidence of the gas raid. There in the gutter, they said, were the remnants of the glass canister and the noxious odd-smelling substance. And – as conclusive proof- the dog had howled with eerie sounds never heard before. Inspection speedily showed that the 'canister' was a broken milk bottle and the 'substance' a mixture of milk and horse dung.

The GIO service was just a part of the ARP [Air Raid Precautions] taken by the Government and largely delivered by local Councils. So my Father reported directly to the Deputy Town Clerk, Mr W.H. Jones. Even when, years later he was Town Clerk and I had been elected as a Councillor I never knew what W.H. stood for. My Father would visit him in his office in York House in the evenings as he was always there until 9pm. Mr Jones was a remarkable man. After leaving a local school at the age of 14 he became the Office Boy for Twickenham UDC [Urban District Council.] Following years of private study he qualified as a Solicitor at the age of 37 and became Deputy Town Clerk. Later Town Clerk of Twickenham Borough Council he was appointed in 1964 to be the first Town Clerk [Chief Executive] of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

This was not my Father's only contribution to ARP. For years he was also an Air Raid Warden, on duty every third night. If it was a working day he would return from his full-time job with Shell, just before 6, eat a hurried evening meal, change into Warden's uniform and report for a twelve-hour shift at 7pm. Our local Warden's post was in the present grounds of Orleans Park School. Back home soon after 7am, breakfast a change from uniform to sit and back to work.

Although he was not required to be a Fire Warden at Lebanon Court where we had a small flat, he had an allotment. Religiously he spent every Sunday morning tending the allotment. First thing he would mount his old, rusty bicycle and proceed to its site in Cole Park Road. He would return home in time for Sunday lunch with a range of vegetables. He was particularly keen on carrots as 'they improved night-time sight' and the top of the wardrobe housed every increasing jars of pickled onions. After all, it helped the War Effort.

A veteran of France in the first World War and an ARP stalwart in the Second he died at the age of 94 in January 1993.

OBITUARY

DORIS MARTIN-WINTER **19-07-1924 – 06-12-2022**

Having lived in Twickenham for all her 98 years, Doris passed away peacefully after a short illness at Whitefarm Lodge Care Home in Whitton on 6th December.

Born in Chapel Road in 1924, she was the youngest of four children born to Charles and Florence Clark.

A happy childhood saw her attending Orleans Infants, St Marys and finally Orleans schools. She learnt to swim with her Dad, two brothers, Fred and Jack, and sister Florrie in the River Thames at the bottom of Orleans Road. During her teenage years she became an accomplished musician playing both the piano and accordion proficiently. She would play the accordion with the Max Castelli Accordion Band on stage at the Luxor cinema before the main film was shown. The town central Luxor cinema was re-named the Odeon in 1944. She also coxed the rowing crews at both Orleans school and later Twickenham rowing club, her medals for rowing being among her proudest achievements.



Leaving school, Doris joined the counter staff at the Midland Bank in Kingston until the war when she was seconded to work in munitions factories in Teddington and Twickenham.

After the war and now in her early twenties she met my father Henry Martin-Winter and in 1950 they married at St Stephens Church settling down in the cottage next to the Crown Pub in Orleans Road.

At this time, Dad's brother Ken was already living in Orleans Road and between them they bought a small plot of land at the bottom of the road opposite the gates in Marble Hill Park which they used as a yard for Winter Brothers Builders for the next 20 years or so.

I arrived in 1951 and my brother Tony five years later. These were happy times and the family now occupied five properties in Orleans and Chapel Roads with Mum's sister Florrie, her husband Wally Pescodd and their son Roger at number 28 and Dad's brother Ken's daughter Maureen and her family next door at number 30. Ken and his wife Vera were at number 29 and my grandparents remained in Chapel Road on the corner of Orleans Road.

At this time with two young sons Doris worked part time at Stanbury Engineering, a small factory in Orleans Road.

She went out of her way to make sure that my brother and I could go on school trips and made sure we joined the cubs and scouts as well as the church choir at St Stephens.

Sadly in 1969 my father passed away and Doris was widowed at 45 years of age. She remained single for the rest of her 53 years of life.

In this time, she re-joined the Midland Bank at Twickenham junction as a counter clerk for the remainder of her working life. This was a job she thoroughly enjoyed, making close friendships with colleagues and customers alike. She also took up hockey and played for the bank team into her fifties.

Doris had four grand-children and six great grand-children. She enjoyed travelling and went on many trips to Canada where she stayed with lifetime friends in Ottawa – The Francis family, while travelling with them on trips throughout North America.

Well into her seventies she went swimming regularly, attended evening classes in learning Italian and woodwork and enjoyed the theatre and trips at home and abroad with friends and family. In her nineties she attended meetings at the Twickenham Local History Society as well as going to 'tea and chat' afternoons at the United Reform Church at Twickenham Green where, despite failing eyesight and hearing, she was able to join in some of the board games and quizzes.

She also lived for a while in both Cusack Close and Lyndhurst Avenue before settling in Gould Road 20 years ago where she lived happily by herself until last year when she moved to the care home. Even up until a few weeks ago Doris would enjoy going out for lunch with either my wife Astrid and I or two of her grand-daughters Charlotte and Emma. I would like to thank the excellent staff at Whitefarm Lodge who looked after Mum for the last year and a half.

RIP Mum – Alan Winter.

TWICKENHAM RIVERSIDE UNDER THREAT AGAIN BY OUR COUNCIL,

the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames (LBRUT) December 2022

By Teresa Read

THE TWICKENHAM RESIDENTS' REFERENDUM RESULT – 93.5% VOTED AGAINST HOUSING ON TWICKENHAM RIVERSIDE

In June 2009 Electoral Reform Services organized a postal vote for 4,000 people in Twickenham to find out whether they supported housing on public land on Twickenham Riverside, i.e, the main site of the current Hopkins' Architects plan. The result of this independent vote, £4,000 paid for by residents, was 93.5% of voters who said NO.

CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO BUILDING ON THIS PROTECTED AREA - WITH ONE OF THE BEST VIEWS OF THE THAMES

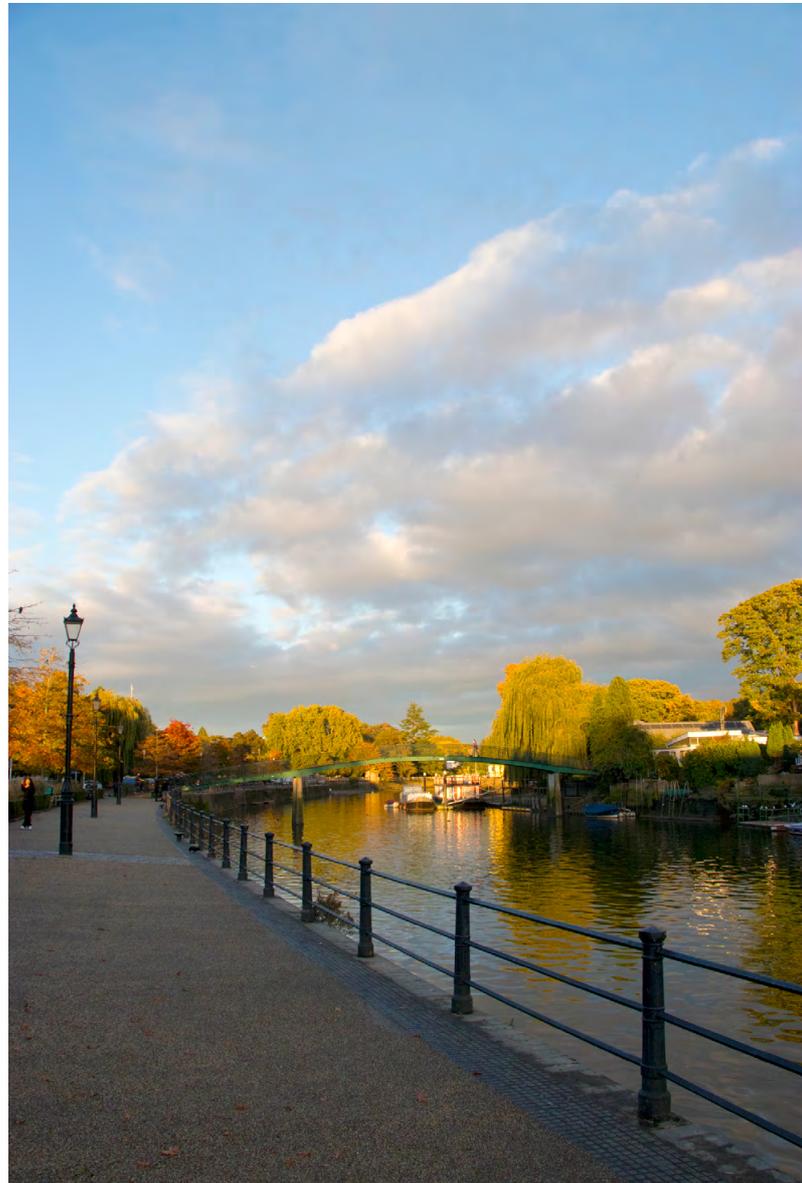
Despite this overwhelming vote, and continued opposition from local people, the Council has now given themselves planning permission and aims to build "luxury flats", assisted with input from a West End estate agent, on land with one of the best views of the Thames, currently Diamond Jubilee Gardens, protected by a charitable trust with a 125 lease.

LAND BOUGHT FOR RESIDENTS, AND, CURRENTLY PROTECTED BY A TRUST FIGHTING A COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER BY LBRUT

The land was bought in 1924 by the Council for "walks and pleasure grounds" with the title of the land in the name of the residents of the borough; it is currently protected by a Charitable Trust which the Council hopes to defeat with a Compulsory Purchase Order.

"AFFORDABLE HOUSING" IS NOT PROPOSED ON THE MOST DESIRABLE PART OF THE AREA TO BE DEVELOPED

"Affordable Housing" is to be built to the far side of the site, next to Water Lane on a derelict Council-owned car park, and the Council has certainly cut corners on the living space area. (During Consultation for the planning application photographs of the car park were emailed to residents implying it was the area to be developed – the area in Trust was not shown).



PUBLIC CONSULTATION: The Council Has Even Refused A Popular Request for a Water Feature.

In various consultations residents were asked what they wanted on the site but it seems that the results did not make it to the architects' drawing board. Even a verbal request for the popular water feature has met with a rebuttal.

PREVIOUS USE OF THE AREA

It should be remembered that a popular lido was on the site and, previously from the seventeenth century Richmond House, the home of many famous names that will be recognised today.

THE COUNCIL'S LINKED SITES STRATEGY

Following the defeat of the Council administration after the 2009 Referendum – organized by the Richmond United Group - the Council quickly signed off their “Linked Sites Strategy” for their Twickenham Riverside plan.

LINKED SITES: TEDDINGTON also suffered from the Council's 2009 Plan

“Linked Sites” were areas in the Borough where “affordable housing” could be built in lieu of building on Twickenham Riverside. This housing was built, despite the loss of office of the Council administration, destroying garages and gardens, causing problems for residents in areas in Twickenham (including loss of garages and an award-winning garden), Strawberry Hill (loss of a garden) and Teddington (loss of garages in Shacklegate Lane and Railway Road). Residents were left to pick up the pieces of the Linked Sites Strategy although the 2009 plan for Twickenham Riverside did not go ahead.

LOSS OF TREES, A FEATURE OF THE 2009 PLAN AND TODAY'S PLAN

It has been reported that a number of trees have already been lost in the Council's Linked Sites Strategy and if the Council's present attempt to develop the Riverside area goes ahead around seventy trees, as well as much vegetation and wildlife habitats, will also be destroyed.

HOW GREEN IS THE LONDON BOROUGH OR RICHMOND UPON THAMES?

Trees are important in our fight against Climate Change. The loss of more trees in pursuit of this plan will release - as it has already released - stored carbon into our atmosphere. Replacing trees will do little to store carbon until they have grown, taking some years when time is running out. Trees to be cut down include three rare trees, one a gift from Queen Elizabeth II.

TREES ON THE EMBANKMENT

The trees on the Embankment (chosen for floodable areas) were replaced some years ago and are now storing carbon, felling these attractive specimens and replacing with new trees would be a mistake and a waste of money. The Embankment has already been refurbished; the bulldozers are not necessary, and we do not want to release more carbon into the atmosphere.

FURTHER INFORMATION; the history of Twickenham Riverside from 1924

<https://worldinfozone.com/features.php?section=SavingTwickenhamRiverside>

Photo by Berkley Driscoll

Manor Road roadworks to begin from January

The works being undertaken on Manor Road (TW11) as part of the A310 Strawberry Vale pedestrian and cycling improvements will take place from 9 January 2023. It is expected to remain on site until the end of May 2023.

The works will involve a southbound road closure, with a diversion along Waldegrave Road and High Street. Northbound traffic will remain unaffected.

There are currently road signs on site reporting the works. Residents and schools in the area will be notified early next week of any disruption in the area.



Find out more information on the [improvement scheme and traffic arrangements](#).

If you have any questions you can email roadworks.manorroad@richmond.gov.uk.

Donations needed for Richmond Christmas Day Dinner

Organisers of an annual event for young care leavers are still looking for presents to be donated.

If you would like to donate, there is an [Amazon Wish List](#) that will remain open until 18 December.

Alternatively, you may also buy items at Hare and The Moon in Church Street, Twickenham, TW1 3NJ. The shop has a list of things that are needed which will be picked up by the team at Richmond Christmas Dinner.

Visit the [Richmond Christmas Day Dinner website](#) to find out more about donating and how to get involved.



Dear Editor,

GB article in the Tribune

I found the GB article in the last Tribune worthy of challenge in its biased slant of statistics and reporting of very serious issues in our country with the rise of blatant Racism/Antisemitism/Islamophobia/Misogyny.

This is a Survey by GB News which Andrew Neil left stating it was too right wing and biased for Him! Not exactly a Woke pundit. The whole article is a classic misuse of statistics on a survey of 1,200 people in a population of 68,756,304. It does not stand up to analysis of its stated results. Readers of this paper will hopefully be more aware of what is happening in the biased reporting of Meghan and Harry to promote the views and interests of a particular faction of this country and not a true and accurate representation of the whole UK population.

We experienced a horrible scene only yesterday (Tuesday 13th December) in Boots, Twickenham, when a young woman challenged two white shoplifters caught on CCTV cameras. One then verbally abused and threatened her saying "You Mongrel...I'll kick you around the shop" It was deeply upsetting for all of us there let alone this brave woman doing her job.

On a more positive note, we overheard a group of six retired men in a Teddington pub having lunch and calmly discussing the 83-year-old Lady Hussey debacle and they said she should have been retired long ago as from a different age and not fit for the job in hand. They did not speak negatively about her but just stated a fact which any business does regularly when assessing a person's suitability for a job. She was re-hired by Charles only two days before the racism issue to be one of the Six Ladies of the 'Household', not 'Waiting' anymore, which does not bode well for his re-structuring/updating of the Monarchy which is so hyped by Royal Experts.

Lady Hussey will not be seeking work or money unlike Ngozi Fulani's charity which is now a target for hate. This targeting of hatred happened to Help for Heroes, Invictus and Well Child Charities which the Gutter Press incited with its coverage of The Sussex's Charities. There were horrendous inaccuracies in the Media over the Grenfell Towers Women's Kitchen Hub for the devastated community which Meghan helped with funds from a wonderful cookbook she initiated called "Together"; at no cost to the taxpayer.

Do readers know that this was the only combined Jewish and Muslim endeavour for this community tragedy?

And yet a reporter for the Telegraph linked it to terrorism. Disgraceful and Dangerous.

I hope readers will watch the Netflix Docuseries and Archetypes Spotify Podcast and that the biased slant towards these two courageous individuals will get a more balanced understanding.

Yours sincerely,

Sammi Macqueen
Twickenham

Dear Editors

The line to ACAS is always open

Unlike strike affected railway lines, the line to ACAS is always open. Regrettably, no-one from the rail unions, train operators, Network Rail or the government appears to have proposed the use of ACAS Conciliation or Mediation (they are much the same) to try to resolve the current rail disputes.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) is an independent public body. Its Collective Conciliation service helps resolve 9 out of 10 disputes it handles. ACAS has been used often in previous rail disputes, for instance by RMT and train operator Avanti a year ago. RMT and TfL have been using ACAS this year to try to resolve London Underground disputes, and on 1 June, after “protracted talks at ACAS”, RMT recommended acceptance of an offer to DHL employees working on Avanti West Coast.

On 29 September, as a mediator and cancer patient, I emailed the rail unions, Network Rail’s CEO (Andrew Haines) and the Rail Delivery Group (representing train operators), urging them to use ACAS Conciliation or Mediation, rather than allowing strikes to go ahead and causing the postponement of hospital appointments and procedures. Only Network Rail responded, telling me on 25 October that “we keep the option of independent mediation, whether through ACAS or another provider, on the table, even if we don’t plan to use them now”. The use of that option has been delayed for far too long: it should be used now.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Haydn-Williams, Richmond
Accredited Mediator and Solicitor
MA Law (Cantab)

Letters published do not necessarily reflect the views of the Twickenham & Richmond Tribune, its Publisher, its staff or its advertisers.

Letters of approximately 500 words of body text will be printed at our standard 14pt font size, which will publish as a single page.

All letters must be submitted by the end of Thursday, prior to publication the following day on Friday.

The Tribune prefers letters to include the writer’s name, but will publish anonymously provided details are supplied.

Find food support in Richmond Upon Thames this Christmas

Throughout the festive period local organisations and community groups are helping to provide food support across the borough. Learn when and where you can find them.

Richmond Foodbank Christmas opening hours

Richmond Foodbank is a project founded by local churches and community groups that is working towards stopping hunger in the local area. It is part of the Vineyard Community Centre and operates four foodbank distribution centres in the borough.



Find out how you can [support the project](#).

Richmond Foodbank

The Vineyard, Richmond, TW10 6AQ

Christmas opening hours:

- Monday 19 December 2022 - 1 to 3.30pm
- Wednesday 21 December 2022 - 1 to 3.30pm
- Thursday 22 December 2022 - 1 to 3.30pm
- Monday 26 December 2022 - Closed
- Wednesday 28 December 2022 - 12noon to 3pm
- Thursday 29 December 2022 - Closed
- Monday 2 January 2023 - Closed

Barnes Foodbank

Castelnau Community Centre, 7 Stillingfleet Road, SW13 9AQ

Christmas opening hours:

- Friday 23 December 2022 - 9.15 to 11.15am (Working from the shed)
- Friday 30 December 2022 - 9.15 to 11.15am (Working from the shed)

Whitton Foodbank

Whitton Community Centre, Percy Rd, TW2 6JL

Christmas opening hours:

- Friday 23 December 2022 - Closed
- Friday 30 December 2022 - Closed
- Friday 6 January 2023 - 9.30am to 12.30pm

Hampton Foodbank

YMCA White House, 45 The Avenue, TW12 3RN

Christmas opening hours:

- Tuesday 20 December 2022 – 11am to 3pm (Working from All Saints Church Hall, The Avenue, TW12 3RG)
- Tuesday 27 December 2022 – Closed
- Tuesday 3 January 2023 - 9.30am to 3.30pm

The Real Junk Food Project

[The Real Junk Food Project](#)'s mission is to take food that was heading for the bin and to turn it into nutritious and tasty lunches for the community.

They are holding a Christmas café with hot food, light entertainment, and a raffle. They will be closed for Christmas on the 23 and 26 December and 2 January 2023, but will be open between Christmas and the New Year on 28 and 30 December from 11.30am to 1.30pm.

Café details:

- **Date:** Thursday 22 December 2022
- **Time:** 11.30am to 1.30pm
- **Location:** ETNA Community Centre, 13 Rosslyn Road, Twickenham, TW1 2AR

Find out how you can [support TRJFP](#).

Surplus 2 U

[Surplus 2 U](#) is fighting food poverty and waste with a weekly food stall where you can choose surplus food provided by their partners such as Lidl Fulwell, Cavan Bakery, and the Felix Trust. The stall is open on a weekly basis and no referral is necessary.

The stall will not be open on Wednesday 28 December 2022, but is open as usual on Wednesday 21 December 2022 and 4 January 2023.

Stall details:

- **Date:** Every Wednesday (except 28 December 2022)
- **Time:** 11am to 12.30pm
- **Location:** Outside the Disability Action and Advice Centre, 4 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, TW11 8HT

Richmond AID

The Richmond AID offices will close over Christmas from 2pm on Friday 23 December 2022 and reopen on Wednesday 4 January 2023.

Food for Thought

[Food for Thought](#) is a not for profit project offering rescued surplus food to the community in Heathfield (Whitton) and will operate as normal over the Christmas period.

Pop-up details:

- **Date/time:** Every Thursday (2.30 to 4.30pm) and Saturday (11.30am to 1.30pm)
- **Location:** Heathfield Recreation Ground, Powdermill Lane, TW2 6EG

RUILs

[RUILs](#) are not providing any food or activities over the Christmas period and their office will be closed, but they will be sharing a list of local resources for clients (as they do every year).

South Western Railway sets out reduced service levels from 18 December to 2 January due to RMT overtime ban

- SWR will be operating a reduced or severely reduced service between 0700 and 2200 only, with some parts of the network closed for either the whole period or on certain days
- Customers are advised to check their entire journey before they travel throughout the industrial action period
- Only travel if absolutely necessary on:
 - **Sunday 18 December**, services will be severely reduced, with large parts of the network closed
 - **Christmas Eve**, the network will close by 1500, with last trains departing as early as midday
 - **27 December**, no services will operate before midday, with many starting much later

SOUTH Western Railway (SWR) is urging customers to check before they travel and expect disruption from Sunday 18 December to Monday 2 January due to industrial action by members of the RMT and TSSA unions during this period.

This action includes a ban on RMT members working overtime or on rest days and affects people in a variety of roles, including guards on trains as well as dispatchers on platforms and shunters in our depots. This means that SWR's

ability to operate train services is significantly limited throughout the extended period of industrial action.

On some dates across this period there are also major engineering works taking place which further complicates the planning of services.

Due to the knock-on impact of RMT strike action and long-planned engineering works, customers are urged to only travel if absolutely necessary on 18 December. There will be a severely reduced service on a very limited number of routes, from 0700 to 2200 only, consisting of:

- Four trains per hour in each direction between London Waterloo and Woking
- Two trains per hour in each direction between London Waterloo and Basingstoke
- Two trains per hour in each direction between London Waterloo and Southampton Central
- One train per hour between Basingstoke and Salisbury



Trains will not stop at all the stations on some of these routes. There will be no SWR services across the rest of the network on 18 December.

Due to strike action affecting Network Rail, limiting the infrastructure available to SWR to run services, customers are also urged to only travel if absolutely necessary on 24 and 27 December.

On 24 December (Christmas Eve), there will be a reduced service with an early shutdown. Some last services from London Waterloo will leave as early as midday, with all services finished and trains taken out of service by 1500. On 27 December, there will be a late start-up from around 1200 followed by a reduced service.

Customers who have no choice but to travel should check the SWR website to see which services are running on these days.

For the rest of the industrial action period, from 19 to 23 December and from 28 December to 2 January, SWR will run a reduced service from 0700 to 2200 only and customers should check their whole journey before they travel, as some parts of the network will be closed.

South Western Railway's Performance and Planning Director, Steve Tyler, said:

“We are very sorry that the RMT overtime ban will severely disrupt our customers travel plans throughout the Christmas period and into the New Year.

“While not a strike, the overtime ban limits the number of trains we can get into service each day and we have had to make some difficult decisions to be able to provide a reliable and consistent service throughout the period.

“We are urging customers to check their entire journey before setting off and thank them for their patience and cooperation during this damaging industrial action by the RMT.”

In addition, the RMT has announced that its members at Network Rail and train operating companies including SWR will be taking strike action on 3, 4, 6, and 7 January 2023.

SWR will update customers once it has confirmed what service levels it can provide during this period.

Summary of SWR travel advice from 18 December to 2 January:

- **Sunday 18 December** – only travel if absolutely necessary
- **Monday 19 to Friday 23 December** – check before you travel
- **Saturday 24 December** – only travel if absolutely necessary
- **Sunday 25 and Monday 26 December** – no service
- **Tuesday 27 December** – only travel if absolutely necessary
- **Wednesday 28 to Monday 2 January** – check before you travel

Customers are urged to check the SWR website for the latest travel advice for each day of the industrial action at:

www.southwesternrailway.com/strike



Just a bowl of water

By Deep Patel

You may not jump up and down with excitement at the idea of someone gifting you a bowl of water, but for a lot of wildlife, it could be an absolute life saver...yes you read that right, leaving a bowl of water out could save a life (or many lives) this winter...

People tend to remember the importance of water for the survival of wildlife in the summer, especially summers like the sizzling hot summer we just had (where even Twickenham Green became Twickenham brown), however people forget that in the winter, especially presently where we are experiencing the arctic blast here (blooming minus 6 degrees this morning when I looked) animals still need water to survive...like we do...and they can't get it unless we lend a helping hand because the puddles and shallow ponds they rely on are often completely frozen...so they dehydrate...it's very common...birds, hedgehogs, squirrels and foxes dehydrating in the winter...it's sad and if we can remedy this through offering a bowl of water in our gardens then why the heck not?! It's not going to kill us to do so right, but it may save a little animal from dehydrating to death...yes honestly...it happens in the winter too...



So this week I am appealing to all, through the harsh arctic conditions, please place a DEEP bowl of water out to help keep our little furry friends going this winter...make sure it is DEEP as otherwise it will freeze over too...completely and utterly defeating the objective! So that's the tip this week...simple...put out a deep bowl of water and save a life...you will have good karma...maybe someone will offer you a drink when you need one too (maybe even a pint of bitter if you're into that)...but the real reward will be knowing that your one small action will lead to relief for so many little thirsty and dehydrated lives...and you will have that lovely warm feeling inside, and let's face it, with the current cost of heating, we need as many feelings that make us all warm inside as we can possibly get.

As I always say, we are not the only inhabitants of this beautiful planet and there is a kind way for everything...If you have rodent issues, consider live capture traps where you can catch the rodents alive and release them in woodland or parkland areas far from homes. Try electronic high-frequency sound deterrents (check online for ones with good reviews and ones that are safe for your pets if you have any). Put empty jam jar lids filled with white vinegar all around areas where you don't want them to stop them without harming them (they HATE the smell of white vinegar). This also works for foxes, squirrels, mice and rabbits. Just picking up a slug off a pavement with a leaf and moving it over a wall counts as a good deed... choosing a kind way to stop ants (like talcum powder around where they come but not on them) counts as a good deed. Avoid sweeping/washing the garden patio too often to help save countless tiny almost invisible little lives that live there (particularly under large pots in the garden, hence I say gently lift the pots if you need to move them rather than dragging them to avoid crushing little lives).

As I always say...the true key to our own happiness lies in the happiness of other life forms...until the next time...have a lovely Christmas week ahead and look after the smaller life forms and the universe will look after you. For further tips, check out my Facebook page "Kind World". As always...Peace, love and good karma to all Xx

A New You

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse can affect anyone; abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual, financial or controlling behaviour.

It affects not only people who are intimate partners but, regardless of age, anyone “personally connected” e.g., parents and older children, can be a perpetrator.

If you are afraid, or feel uncomfortable at home or in your relationship, it could be domestic abuse. Everyone deserves to feel safe.

Hestia provide help and support in the Borough of Richmond: tel: 0203 879 3544 or email: RichWan.IDVA@Hestia.org

You can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 or report abuse online to the police:
<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/daa/domestic-abuse/how-to-report-domestic-abuse>

There is a One Stop Shop for legal advice, support and information on Domestic Abuse every Friday 10am to 12pm at:
Hampton Hill Citizens' Advice
1st Floor, 94-102 High Street,
Hampton Hill TW12 1NY

No need to book an appointment, just turn up

ELDER ABUSE

Older people experience domestic abuse and can be subjected to abusive behaviours including control and coercion, physical, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse. Illnesses, like dementia, can alter someone's behaviour dramatically.

Is someone you know being neglected? Having their medications, food or heating withdrawn? Prevented from having contact and support from the outside world including family and friends or external agencies including social services and care agencies?

Perhaps Power of attorney is being abused, capacity questioned, or you are being blamed for the abuse?

If you are concerned, then you can contact Hourglass on their confidential helpline **0808 808 8141** (open Monday to Friday 9-5) or text service on **07860052906**. They support anyone concerned about the abuse of older people.

You can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 or report abuse online to the police:
<https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/daa/domestic-abuse/how-to-report-domestic-abuse>

This leaflet comes to you from the Richmond Safer Neighbourhood Board (richmondcpp.snb@gmail.com)

Photo by Andrea Stofa



**METROPOLITAN
POLICE**

FESTIVE FOOD SUGGESTIONS

It's not long now till Christmas, and don't forget that homemade treats are always a welcome gift. So if you're planning to do some baking for the festivities, make sure you stock up on some top quality chocolate chips; you can use them in all manner of recipes. Homemade truffles or brownies are so delicious, and it's important to use a quality chocolate. San Francisco chocolate producer **Guittard** makes great ones, available in Waitrose, but also now Ocado. The Guittard website has some great, easy, recipe ideas such as these White Apricot Truffles [here](#) that will be delicious with dark chocolate chips too.



Truffled cheese is one of my favourites, but it's often a tad pricey. I'm delighted to be able to report that **Ilchester** has recently launched a rather splendidly moreish Cheddar cheese with truffle that will enhance any festive cheese board. At just £2.50 for 180g **Ilchester Cheddar Cheese with Truffle** is available from Tesco.

If you're wanting to buy some champagne for your festive fizz, but maybe, like many of us, have a limited budget, do try the excellent value **Gartissier Champagne Brut**. It's a delicious and well balanced champagne, with a stream of fine bubbles, that combines a mix of fresh citrus flavours with elegant toasty notes and a long lasting finish that befits a far more expensive wine. And it's stonkingly good value at £15 a bottle from Tesco.



But if pushing the boat out a little, try the **Tesco Finest Rose Champagne**. This award-winning rose is again excellent value at £24 a bottle. But don't forget that there is a special offer of a 25% discount if you buy six or more bottles of wine there at the moment - offer available until and including this Sunday, 18 December

Christmas is the perfect time to indulge if you're a gin drinker and I suggest treating yourself with a bottle of one of the most awarded gins in the country: **Manchester Gin's Signature Gin**. Made with dandelion and burdock root, plus ten other specifically sourced botanicals including orange, lemon, liquorice and ground almond, it's spicy and sweet, yet elegant, and makes a citrus-rich G&T. Available for £29 a bottle from Threshers online or The Whisky Exchange (that you can visit in person if in the West End before Christmas)

A really delicious red for your Christmas feast is the **Mark West Pinot Noir**. This Californian wine maker delivers top quality tipples inspired by Burgundy winemakers. This one showcases the aromas, flavours and textures of Pinot Noir with soft tannins and will be a great accompaniment to that turkey. £11 a bottle from Sainsbury's, Amazon, Ocado and convenience stores.

But if you're having to watch the budget ultra carefully this year, as so many are, you might be interested to learn that **Asda** has announced its new frozen dinner offer, where customers can pick up **Christmas Dinner** (including a whole turkey and those pigs in blankets!) for a family of five for under £22 – apparently the cheapest frozen deal on the market.

And there's no shame in taking the easy option and buying ready-made accompaniments from your supermarket. There are so many excellent ones available now.



GIBRALTAR

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5 - STAR YACHT HOTEL

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Book 31st December to 1st January, 1 night £450

For 2 guests in a Super Yacht Superior Room

Terms & Conditions: Offer subject to availability

Package is subject to availability. Cannot be combined with other bookings. Reservations must be made direct via phone or email and cannot be made via third parties. Pre-payment is required and bookings cannot be cancelled or modified

TO BOOK CONTACT: +350 200 16900 | RESERVATIONS@SUNBORNGIBRALTAR.COM



The Flint Street Nativity

by Tim Firth

Richmond Shakespeare Society at the Mary Wallace Theatre until 17th December

Originally written as a television comedy, *Flint Street Nativity* was born of author Tim Firth's own school Christmas recollections. He explores the natural humour of a school's preparation for its Nativity whilst examining the relationship between the actions of each child and their experiences at home.



Via a number of theatrical devices, such as the singing of popular Christmas carols, but with the familiar words replaced with the innermost thoughts and fears of the children, a picture slowly emerges and, interspersed with wonderfully comedic moments, a number of thought provoking topics are explored.

Through a fantastic twist at the end, where each adult actor, having so far played the school child, then appears as the corresponding parent, we realise why each child has behaved the way they have. For some it is because they have been spoilt by parents who use material goods as a sticking-plaster to conceal their matrimonial misery, others because the parent is so caught up in their work life that the child has been completely neglected, misbehaving at school in an attempt to get some attention, even negative.

The play is complex in its underlying messages and even more complex in its physical delivery and great credit must go to director, Michelle Hood, for its successful delivery, striking just the right tone at every stage. Despite the obvious seniority of many cast members (one with a very fine moustache), this wonderful ensemble succeed brilliantly in making the audience believe that they are watching the classroom antics of a group of seven year olds.

This is a show for all the family; the tempo is fast and the play enjoyable throughout. The children among us enjoyed the very obvious moments, such as the escape of the class stick-insect, and his re-appearance as a giant mantis-like creature when projected onto the back wall.

Firth's interpretation of these all-too-common experiences is as enjoyable as it is thought-provoking. In his own words, "There's no treachery, assassination, double-dealing, deceit, coercion or blackmail that you encounter in life that you will not have been prepared for in the classroom."

Read Ian Moone's review at www.markaspen.com/2022/12/12/flint-st-nativity-rss

Image courtesy of RSS



Hatti and Pippa's Christmas Adventure

by Ken Mason

Stephen Leslie Productions at Hampton Hill Theatre until 24th December

Forget the freeze, soaring energy bills, World Cup woes, industrial action on the railways, threats of a nursing strike and a dearth of Christmas cards thanks to a post workers' walk-out. What better way to banish the blues than a festive fix of cheer with a magical Christmas show?

At the opening performance of *Hatti and Pippa's Christmas Adventure*, the young audience jumped, sang, laughed and clapped throughout fifty minutes of fantasy and fun with Pippa the Penguin in her head waiter costume and yellow flapping flippers.



We meet a menagerie of creatures (Peter F. Gardiner) as Hatti the Human, in pigtailed and scarlet coat, (Joanne McGarva) helps zoo escapee Pippa (Charlotte Ellen) embark on a journey to her family at the South Pole. For those of us who couldn't even find a train to London this was a big ask.

A simple but effective set with imaginative lighting and backdrop of ever-changing forest glades, underwater scenes, sun-lit sparkling seas and snowscapes creates the mood for magic to happen.

It's an epic journey heading ever south across the Atlantic Ocean, but by believing in magic Hatti discovers she can swim underwater. However, a Great White Shark circles menacingly overhead. Cue music from *Jaws*. He admits to a penchant for jellies i.e. jelly fish which, cue environmental alert, can be confused with plastic bag litter that endanger the denizens of the deep.

A Cockney octopus on the Equator treats us to a welter of corny jokes and sends the plucky pair on their way ... the wrong way, to the North Pole, home to scary Ice Demons. But we all know who else spends time there. A jingling of sleigh bells heralds the arrival of the main man, whose hearty "Ho-Ho-Ho!" appearance in the auditorium startles a sequined teacher.

Her charges applaud and wave Father Christmas as he comes up with a plan to save Pippa's dream to join her family. That's the cheering message of Christmas.

Read Gill Martin's review at www.markaspen.com/2022/12/14/hatti-pippa

Image courtesy of SLP



A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens, adapted by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm
Rose Original at the Rose Theatre, Kingston until 2nd January

Bah humbug – that old chestnut *A Christmas Carol* is back again. But do not despair, for this chestnut has been roasted by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, and served up with all the festive trimmings along with a few new exotic spices. Her adaptation brings the deeper message Dickens intended bang up to date. The meaning of workhouses may be lost on younger members of the audience; the reference to food banks not so.



Director Rosie Jones has served up the perfect Christmas treat for children. The piece has been reframed within the walls of a ragged school, a brilliant device for involving the Rose Youth Theatre, comprising the majority of the cast. The school is run by Scrooge's nephew, Fred, impressively played on press night by Jacob Towey (one to watch – you heard it here first!). The young narrators and characters who carry us through Scrooge's sleepless night do so with style and aplomb.

The children of the school - with the help of a certain Charlie Dickens (Elexi Walker) - introduce their benefactor, Madame Scrooge (a bitter and twisted harridan played by Penny Layden) to the familiar ghosts and stories we all know. Scrooge's back story goes a long way to making her character more relatable and her transformation more meaningful; this Scrooge is damaged, not naturally cruel.

Eamonn O'Dwyer's music is perfect for the occasion; the leitmotif of *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, runs through the show like marzipan in a Stollen. And contemporary choreography by Olivia Shouler helps to keep the mind in the present as well as the past.



As Dickens did before her, Lloyd Malcolm shines a reflective light upon society. As then, it is not always a pretty sight but both storytellers remind us that change is possible and hope is worthwhile. And that, all wrapped up in this excellent production of *A Christmas Carol* is surely the best message to deliver for the festive season.

Read Lottie Walker's review at www.markaspen.com/2022/12/09/christmas-carol-rtk

Photography by Mark Douet

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens, adapted by Beth Flintoff

Reading Rep Theatre, Reading until 31st December

Flintoff's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* is an ideal opportunity to get into the festive spirit. A warm welcome of mulled wine and a selfie station with an array of period hats creates a sense of anticipation and familiarity. Flintoff provides a new spin on Dickens' classic tale, setting the narrative in Reading itself, with Huntley and Palmers' biscuit factory the place of Scrooge's business empire.



The scene is set well with Anna Lewis' clever multi-purpose design. A series of stacked wooden crates double as filing cabinets in Scrooge's office, as well as magical scene changes when lit up to evoke the night skyline. The narrative is supported elegantly by the design. The omnipresent crates serve as a constant reminder of Scrooge's obsession with his work and large windows upstage continue this metaphor, mirroring his focus, productivity and uniformity. The spark of candles shows the presence of the spirits in his otherwise lonely office.

The co-direction by Chris Cuming and Paul Stacey gives the script life through well-crafted pace to engage the multi-generational audience. Character adaptations, such as a female Bobbie Cratchit, are smooth and believable. Some of the most powerful moments come from the stylistic direction, especially the recurring use of still images to pinpoint significant moments in Scrooge's emotional journey. These reflect on moments of change in his character – those important pangs of regret, guilt, remorse: his motivations for change.

The sufferings of the Cratchit family, but also their powerful sense of hope, are captured in a natural manner. The scene with Fred and his wife have heart-wrenching believability too and this played on the character of Scrooge on stage, as well as the emotions in the audience.

This *Christmas Carol* is a highly enjoyable production packed full of visual delights and dexterous acting. The cast's rapport is tangible, and their beautiful moments of still image are impeccable.



Read Sam Martin's review at www.markaspen.com/2022/12/07/christmas-carol-rr

Photography by Harry Elletson

La Clique

Underbelly at the Spiegeltent, Leicester Square until 7th January

Leicester Square may be the ideal location for a show which is as risqué as it is risky! With inflation through the roof, twenty quid doesn't get you much nowadays, but here you see a top London show, guaranteed to make a lasting impression. *La Clique* is two hours of mind-blowing stunts, incredible routines and highly polished performances, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, hugely entertaining throughout.



The beautiful and captivating Miss Jolie Papillon's mesmerising burlesque routine transforms the venue from a tent in the middle of London's busiest squares into a smoky Soho basement.

The moody, robed figure of Mikael Bres, prompted by one audience member to "geddit off", retorts with something rude in a sulky French accent, before obliging, revealing a torso that only a highly accomplished acrobat could possess. His act is the highlight of the evening and was not only death defying but, at times, gravity defying as well.

Likewise, an acrobatic routine by the hugely talented Katherine Arnold delivers a wonderfully choreographed aerial piece, displaying her range of technical skills and sheer strength using a hoop suspended from the roof. She is later joined by Hugo Desmarais, in incredible aerial duet.

The pair spin so fast that it seems they may fly off into the audience.

Sam Goodburn hilariously changes from pyjamas into his evening wear, whilst precariously peddling a unicycle and eating a packet of rich tea biscuits. Meanwhile, Tara Boom hands out bags of popcorn, but when she needs more she tips the ingredients into her tall hat, adds a handful of salt from her knickers, and fires popcorn everywhere. In contrast, she later entertains with of great precision, skill and balance performing a striking act with four spinning Chinese parasols.

With its combination of fabulous costumes, jaw-dropping performances and a genuine fear for the safety of all, *La Clique* is a wonderfully exhilarating experience and is a must for this festive season.



Read David Stephens' review at www.markaspen.com/2022/11/18/la-clique

Photography by Craig Sugden

WIZ Tales: NEPAL

Teresa Read

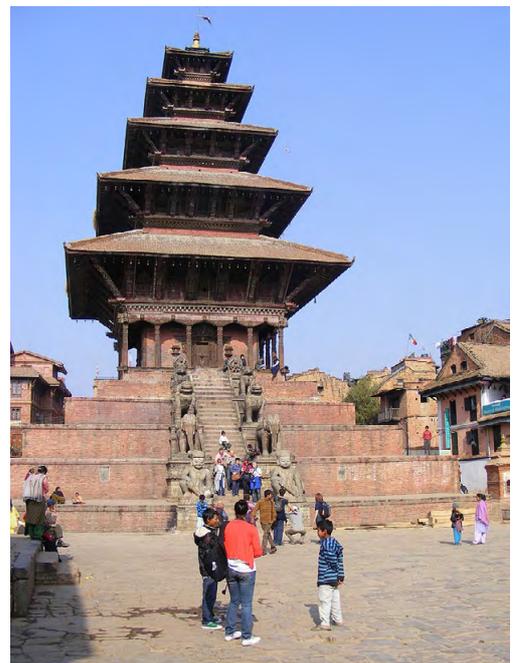
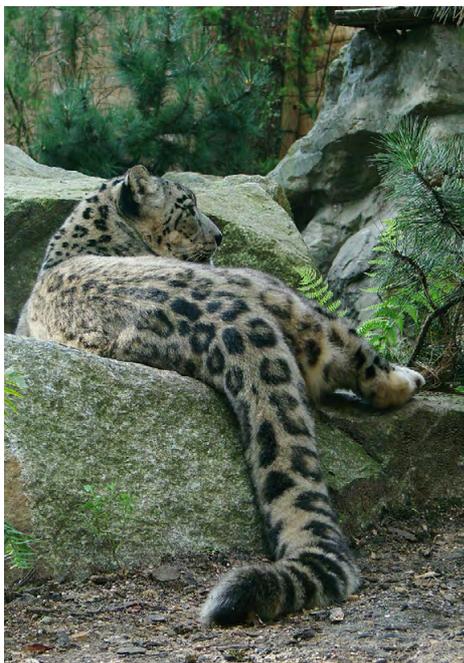


The Kingdom of Nepal is a landlocked country in Southern Asia, between India and China. Kathmandu is the capital.

Sagarmatha National Park, on the World Heritage List, is dominated by Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. The Royal Chitwan National Park, at the foot of the Himalayas, is home to endangered single-horned Asiatic rhinoceros. Other animals in the parks include elephants, leopards and wild boar.

Nepal has had a series of relatively recent natural disasters: floods in 2019 and 2021 and an avalanche in 2021. There was also an earthquake on 9 November 2022. This week a bus accident left eighteen people dead and fifteen injured.

Healthcare seems to be a problem for many in Nepal and it has been reported that failure by the government to respond effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic, led to many preventable deaths.



More information and photographs of Nepal: <https://worldinfozone.com/gallery.php?country=Nepal>

Covid-19

Teresa Read

World Health Organization

COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update, published 14 December 2022

Global overview

Data as of 11 December 2022

Globally, the number of new weekly cases remained stable (+2%) during the week of 5 to 11 December 2022 as compared to the previous week, with over 3.3 million new cases reported. The number of new weekly deaths increased by over 10% as compared to the previous week, with over 9,700 new fatalities reported. As of 11 December 2022, over 645 million confirmed cases and over 6.6 million deaths have been reported globally.

At the regional level, the number of newly reported weekly cases decreased or remained stable across five of the six WHO regions: the African Region (-73%), the South-East Asia Region (-33%), the European Region (-11%), the Eastern Mediterranean Region (-2%), and the Western Pacific Region (+3%); while case numbers increased in one WHO region: the Region of the Americas (+27%).

The number of newly reported weekly deaths increased across three WHO regions: the African Region (+975%; partly due to batch reporting from South Africa), the Region of the Americas (+37%), and the Eastern Mediterranean Region (+81%); while death numbers decreased in three WHO regions: the European Region (-17%), the South-East Asia Region (-10%), and the Western Pacific Region (+5%).

At the country level, the highest numbers of new weekly cases were reported from Japan (849,371 new cases; +13%), the United States of America (448,634 new cases; +50%), the Republic of Korea (420,392 new cases; +13%), France (366,699 new cases; -5%), and Brazil (194,170 new cases; +3%). The highest numbers of new weekly deaths were reported from the United States of America (2,934 new deaths; +62%), Japan (1,358 new deaths; +28%), Brazil (603 new deaths; -5%), France (478 new deaths; +4%), and Italy (475 new deaths; -29%).

European Region

The European Region reported over 962,000 new cases, an 11% decrease as compared to the previous week. Nine (15%) of the 61 countries for which data are available reported increases in new cases of 20% or greater, with the highest proportional increases observed in Albania (130 vs 69 new cases; +88%), Montenegro (267 vs 165 new cases; +62%), and Denmark (9,918 vs 6,266 new cases; +58%). The highest numbers of new cases were reported from France (366,699 new cases; 563.8 new cases per 100,000; -5%), Germany (179,336 new cases; 215.6 new cases per 100,000; -2%), and Italy (153,948 new cases; 258.1 new cases per 100,000; -32%). The number of new weekly deaths in the region decreased by 17% as compared to the previous week, with 2,586 new deaths reported. The highest numbers of new deaths were reported from France (478 new deaths; <1 new death per 100,000; +4%), Italy (475 new deaths; <1 new death per 100,000; -29%), and the Russian Federation (380 new deaths; <1 new death per 100,000; -3%).

IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK

Sky News: COVID-19 cases in UK one million again with first rise in England since mid-October

NBC News: Hospitals, health workers prep for 'triple-demic' during holiday season

BBC: China Covid: Hospitals under strain in wave of infections

Sky News: China's zero-COVID U-turn means rate at which virus is surging will be shrouded in secrecy

EuroNews: Another reason to wear a mask? A warm nose fights off germs better.

RNZ: Reported Covid-19 cases top 8,000 today for first time in country's third wave. (New Zealand)

RFU Statement - Wasps and Worcester Warriors

The RFU Board today decided on the outcome of the regulatory assessment of the applications of bidders to form “phoenix entities” to take over the positions of Wasps RFC and Worcester Warriors RFC in the league structure. This followed an extensive due diligence process overseen by the RFU Club Financial Viability Group. This included reviews of financial information, considerations of the bidders and their business plans for the clubs, and external background checks in order to understand the level of risk with each proposed bid.

This enhanced process included the setting of conditions that would be necessary for any approval to be given. These conditions were designed to mitigate the particular risks attached to each club, and facts emerging through the due diligence process. These conditions were in addition to the “special measures” conditions that result from a club entering insolvency. Together, these conditions are intended to ensure that clubs who have gone into insolvency are more closely monitored and that the risk of future insolvency is minimised.

The RFU Board concluded that the application for Wasps was approved subject to a number of specific conditions being met and that it would continue to work with the bidders through the satisfaction of those conditions over the coming weeks. These include a range of financial commitments to ensure that the club remains funded, the lodging of a significant bond, the regular provision of financial and other information, swift payment of rugby creditors, and corporate governance requirements including relating to the club’s board of directors and risk management process.

The RFU put forward a number of conditions that the bidders for Worcester Warriors would need to meet to protect against the particular concerns relating to the club and what had emerged through the due diligence process. These include commitments not to dispose of the land around the stadium, thereby securing it for the club and the local rugby community, swift payment of rugby creditors and other key governance conditions, including relating to the club’s board of directors and risk management process. The bidders, selected by the administrators of the insolvent WRFC Trading Limited, have informed us that they are not prepared to meet these conditions, and therefore the RFU Board was unable to approve their application.

The RFU Board was also not satisfied with the information provided, in particular relating to the financial position of the buyer and their ability to continue to fund the club and to deliver on the business plan provided which included significant development at the Sixways site.

The RFU has not been provided with sufficient evidence of funding. While some information has been provided, this has been only internal P&L information which appears to cover only part of the business of the main shareholder and the RFU was told that no further information could or would be provided. This means that there is no information as to debt levels or shareholder funds and no externally verified financial statements have been provided. Evidence of a non-binding heads of terms for external off-shore financing has been provided, but this is not committed. For these reasons the RFU does not have comfort that the business plan can be funded, nor that rugby is at the centre of the proposal for the business which is an American medical services company.

The RFU is also concerned by the public statement from the bidders that they are prepared to acquire the site and develop it without a rugby offering. The bidders for Worcester Warriors have not accepted the regulatory position and have not sufficiently engaged with the necessary conditions required and have therefore put themselves in a position where the RFU Board could not approve their bid.

The RFU will now work with the administrator to enable alternative bids that would secure professional rugby at Sixways and to work together in a timetable to enable that to happen. The RFU urges the administrator not to progress any sale that does not guarantee a future for rugby within the local community.

RFU CEO, Bill Sweeney, said: *“We are pleased to be able to proceed with the approval for Wasps and thank the bid team and the administrator for the open and collaborative approach working with us through the process.*

“We understand that the decision will not be the news that Worcester Warriors’ former staff, players and fans will want to hear; the best long-term interests of the club and rugby in Worcester is our key priority.

“In the coming days we will be in touch with the administrator to discuss other bid options as our goal remains to support the continuation of the rugby club in Worcester. We are prepared to extend the deadlines to explore if an alternative bidder can be found who has the continuation of rugby in Worcester central to its business plan.”

The RFU would again like to place on record its sincere thanks to the administrators of both clubs, given the substantial amount of work that has taken place to secure the future of each club.



Match Preview: Wolfsburg

Brentford continue their preparations for the return of the Premier League with a behind-closed-doors friendly against Wolfsburg

Written by Brentford Football Club

Here's everything you need to know ahead of Brentford's mid-season friendly against Wolfsburg.

The Opposition

Wolfsburg

Wolfsburg really hit their straps in the weeks before the World Cup pause, reeling off four straight league wins to move up to seventh in the Bundesliga.

It was a very slow start to the season for Niko Kovac's side, who won only one of their first seven Bundesliga games.

However, a 90th-minute Yannick Gerhardt winner against Stuttgart in early October signalled a change in fortunes for VfL. It began a nine-game unbeaten run in all competitions which has seen the Wolves steadily climb the table.

Goals have flowed - 21 of them in their last nine matches to be precise. The goals have been well distributed around the squad with 11 different scorers; former Manchester City youngster Lukas Nmecha their top marksman with four.

The left side has been a profitable area for VfL with left-back Paulo Otavio providing four assists from left-back while 20-year-old winger Jakub Kaminski has three.

At the back, Koen Casteels has played every minute in goal as has 21-year-old centre-back Micky van de Ven.

Van de Ven is one of a number of young players making a name for themselves in the third youngest squad in the Bundesliga; 23-year-old Omar Marmoush; 22-year-old Felix Nmecha; 24-year-old Ridle Baku; and 22-year-old Mattias Svanberg all starting at least 13 Bundesliga games.



Team News

All of Brentford's World Cup players are now back at Jersey Road following their exploits in Qatar.

Aaron Hickey (ankle), Thomas Strakosha (ankle) and Kristoffer Ajer (hamstring) continue to work towards fitness while Pontus Jansson, Charlie Goode and Rico Henry could all play their first minutes of the mid-season friendly programme tomorrow.

The Manager Niko Kovac

Niko Kovac was appointed Wolfsburg manager in May, returning to the league where he enjoyed success as both a player and manager.



He won the Bundesliga title and DFK-Pokal as both a player, in 2002/03, and manager, in 2018/19, with Bayern Munich.

He also won an Austrian Bundesliga title as a player with Red Bull Salzburg in 2007 and led Eintracht Frankfurt to consecutive DFK-Pokal finals in 2017 and 2018, winning the latter.

For Croatia, Kovac played, and captained, at the 2006 FIFA World Cup and UEFA Euro 2008. He retired in 2009 with 83 caps and 14 goals for

his nation.

Kovac also managed Croatia to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, winning a two-legged play-off against Iceland in his first two games in charge. Croatia beat Cameroon 4-0 in their opening game at the finals but then lost 3-1 to Brazil and Mexico to exit in the group stages.

In total, Kovac made more than 650 competitive appearances as a player, for club and country, scoring 82 goals. He also has a 55 per cent win percentage as a manager, following his spells with Croatia U21, Croatia, Eintracht Frankfurt, Bayern Munich and Monaco.

Match Coverage

Tomorrow's game kicks off at 1pm and will be streamed live on www.brentfordfc.com



Channel migrant crisis down to broken relations in Europe, Labour says

The Channel migrants crisis has escalated because the Government has not worked with European governments to solve the issue, according to Shadow Justice Secretary Steve Reed.

Mr Reed told [GB News](#): “To be fair, they’ve been saying this for years, haven’t they, and they haven’t actually done anything.

“Three years ago in the House of Commons Priti Patel who was then the Home Secretary stood up and said she would halve the number of small boats coming across the channel since then, it’s gone up by 20 fold. It hasn’t halved.

“It’s gone up massively because they didn’t work with our European partners in the way that they said that they would.

“Instead of working with them, we had Boris Johnson, who was then the Prime Minister, astonishingly comparing the Europeans to Nazis. And then we had Liz Truss unable to say, when asked, if the French president was a friend or a foe to this country



“Now, if you break our relationships, our partners that we need to work with in that way, then of course, you’re not going to get the co-operation that we need and a reset can only come with a new government.”

Speaking to Isabel Webster and Andrew Pierce, he added: “There’s a pull factor going on here, which is the fact the Government is currently only processing 4% of all applications for asylum within a 12 month period.

“So 96% don’t get processed. When that many people are coming in, and feel that they can just stay because the government isn’t going to do anything, that gives the people smugglers a reason to say, ‘we’ll just get you there and the British government won’t do anything. Hotels in my constituency, and I know in many other areas as well, are full of refugees at huge cost to the public sector.”

“The government needs to get a grip of this crisis in a way that so far they haven’t. The first thing that we should be doing is what we’ve been calling for, a specialist unit to be set up within the National Crime Agency to work much more closely with our partners in France and Belgium across the channel but also Europol right across the continent.

“We need to tackle, at source, these evil people smugglers who profiteer from human misery, who are bringing these people to Calais and putting them on the boats.

“There’s a number of people, trafficking gangs, smuggling gangs that are orchestrating all of this to make money for themselves regardless of the cost or consequences in human life.”



BRITAIN'S NEWS CHANNEL

MORE than half of Brits think the country should continue to have a monarchy, a new poll reveals today

As the crisis caused by the Harry and Meghan Netflix documentary threatens to deepen, a survey of 1,151 Brits by People's Polling for GB News saw:

*53 per cent say they think Britain should continue to have a monarchy.

*This figure rose to 79% among pensioners, 83% among Conservatives and 72% among Brexit voters.

*In comparison only one in five favour moving to an elected head of state, although this figure jumps to 40% of Scots, 40% of Labour voters and 27% of 18-24-year-olds.

A survey by People's Polling in September saw 63% say we continue to have a monarchy, indicating support has fallen.

Commenting on the findings of the poll, Professor Matt Goodwin said: *"These numbers point to the looming challenge for King Charles III and Prince William. Overall, just over half favour keeping the monarchy while a hardly insignificant 20% favour having an elected head of state, including a plurality of Labour voters, Scots, and large numbers of young Zoomers. Fending off this challenge to the monarchy in the years and decades ahead will no doubt be his priority and one that will only become more pressing in our political debates."*

The poll comes as the second part of Harry and Meghan aired on Netflix.

Their melodrama reached a crescendo as they launched more salvos at the Royal Family over Megxit and claims William, Kate and Charles were jealous of their popularity and hated them 'stealing the limelight'.

The couple said they were 'better' at royal duties than others and that stuck in the craw of Harry's family, who didn't Meghan being treated like a 'royal rock star' after they married in 2018.

Experts say the final three episodes of the docu-series will likely infuriate and upset William, who was accused of leaving his younger brother 'terrified' after allegedly yelling at him in front of the Queen and Charles during final Megxit talks at Sandringham in 2020. The Sussexes said they were 'blocked' from seeing the Queen alone to discuss Megxit.

The Duke of Sussex also drew more comparisons between his wife and his mother, claiming Princess Diana was forced out for the same reason because she outshone those who were 'born to do this', like his father and brother.

The first three episodes of the documentary racked up more viewing time on the streaming service than any other documentary during its first week, Netflix said earlier this week.

The first three episodes of Harry & Meghan recorded 81.55m viewing hours around the world after its debut earlier this month.

The couple have been paid somewhere between \$100m and \$150m by Netflix to deliver scripted series, documentaries and children's programming over several years.

They have hit back at criticism over their sharing of personal video clips and photographs in the documentary, with a spokesperson for the couple saying privacy was not a key reason behind the couple stepping back from royal duties and leaving the UK.



BRITAIN'S NEWS CHANNEL

Readout of the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's roundtable with the renewable energy generators

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt heard directly from leaders in the renewable generators industry today (Wednesday 14 February) at a roundtable in No11 Downing Street.

The Chancellor was clear that due to many energy generators' profits being well above levels before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it was right for the sector to contribute towards the generous energy bill support provided to households and businesses during these unprecedented times.

With the structure of the electricity market and Russia's war in Ukraine driving up energy prices, he set out that the Government will introduce the Electricity Generator Levy, a temporary 45 per cent tax on extraordinary returns made by some UK electricity generators from 1 January 2023.

This tax, however, will not be payable on newer renewable generation supported through the government's Contracts for Difference scheme. When the wholesale electricity prices exceed the CfD strike price, the generator is already required to pay back the difference, thus protecting consumers from over-payment.



During discussions, he highlighted that Britain is a global leader in renewable energy with nearly 40% of our electricity coming from offshore wind, solar and other renewables last year.

The Chancellor stressed that we need to go even further, with a major acceleration of clean, affordable, home-grown technologies like offshore wind and nuclear to ensure greater energy independence.

He also heard attendees' views on where Government could do more to support and incentivise additional renewable energy deployment in the UK, to support our energy security and net zero ambitions.

The Chancellor welcomed the constructive discussions and looked forward to further engagement with the sector on the Government's energy agenda with market reform, energy independence and net zero.



HM Treasury

A Digital BBC

The BBC's key digital products are performing well. To achieve its digital ambitions, the BBC will need to further develop its "digital-first" plans, and consider whether it has sufficient resources to deliver its vision, according to the National Audit Office (NAO).

The BBC views digital services as essential to its long-term future. It has a range of apps and websites, and is in competition both with traditional television and radio broadcasters, and with online providers and services. In May 2022, the BBC announced a new "digital-first" approach, focusing its resources towards content that appeals to audiences who choose to view it both live online, and on any device at any time. In December 2022, the director-general expanded on this, setting out the need for the BBC to plan for a digital-only future.

The BBC has less funding available to develop digital products than most other media organisations, many of which are digital only. Its overall spend in this area has fallen from £109 million in 2018-19 to £98 million in 2021-22 in real terms. Netflix, for example, spent £1.7 billion on technology and development in 2021. As a result, the BBC's products have been developed at a slower pace, are less technologically sophisticated, and it has not always been able to take advantage of technological innovations. The BBC is pursuing its digital ambitions while also maintaining traditional broadcasting as it must continue to fulfil its universal service commitments.



Despite these challenges, the BBC's digital products are performing well against better-funded media organisations. In 2021-22, most of the BBC's digital products achieved their targets. The BBC now plans for its digital services to be within at least the top three for market share in the UK in five years' time. To achieve this, it needs to continue to attract audiences in a fast-moving global media environment, where new technology and competitors can emerge quickly.

The BBC has a solid foundation to build on in delivering its digital-first ambitions. It has clearly set out its vision for using digital technology and data to improve the service it offers, and set itself an additional goal in 2019 for the BBC to become a "valued daily habit", with viewers accessing its services at least five days a week, for at least five hours across the week, on at least two different modes of communication. The BBC believes that its digital services will increasingly contribute towards this goal. To deliver this, the BBC has carried out a strategic technology review, and made changes to its digital operations model to bring it more into line

with industry standards.

The NAO found that the BBC's digital leadership needs to evolve to deliver its strategy more effectively, and accelerate its digital growth. The BBC recognises that it needs to make continued improvements in this area, and is improving the information on its digital activity that is received by its executive committee. The NAO found limited evidence that the committee is providing sufficient challenge in return.

Greater personalisation of services is an important element of the BBC's future plans, with a target for 72% of digital product views coming from signed-in users by 2023. It has made progress in rolling out sign-in to its services, but has not yet produced an overall plan for what personalisation means in practice. The BBC's increased use of personal data exposes it to potential reputational risks, if it does not meet best practice in acquiring, storing and securing personal data, and being transparent about its use.

The BBC has announced that it will invest approximately £50 million extra annually on digital product development by 2025, but its internal plan to support this lacks detail and the BBC is yet to finalise the budget for its digital-first strategy. The BBC has taken steps to get greater value for money from its technology spending, but now requires a better understanding of where investment in digital products will have the greatest impact.

The BBC faces difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist digital staff. Although the BBC has successfully managed to retain and recruit highly skilled individuals in key digital positions, the staff turnover rate in the product group was 23% as of June 2022. The high number of vacancies is slowing technical development, for example, the BBC cannot develop its search function further as the team is not at full strength. The BBC keeps its pay levels under review, including through industry benchmarking, but pay levels are lower than some other potential employers for technology professionals.

The NAO recommends that, in the light of its 2022 licence fee settlement, the BBC should develop a realistic, more detailed digital investment plan to support its digital-first ambitions. It should develop its digital leadership and governance structures to ensure sufficient challenge to the corporation in terms of digital costs, opportunities and the long-term implications of decisions. The BBC should also set out how it plans to develop its personalisation strategy, including how it will manage the increased data risks.

Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO, said:

“The BBC faces a number of challenges in developing its digital offering, and its products are performing well compared to other, better-funded, media organisations. Stronger digital leadership structures in particular will enable the BBC to make the improvements it needs to its approach, if it is to maintain this success in a fast moving, global media market.”

Click here for the [full report](#) and click here for the [PAC Chair's statement](#)



National Audit Office

Managing tax compliance following the pandemic

HMRC's compliance work generated around £9bn less tax revenue than normal during the pandemic as thousands of staff moved to support COVID schemes, according to the National Audit Office.

HMRC analysis suggests that the tax gap - the difference between the amount of money owed to and received by HMRC - could grow in the years ahead. The NAO found that HMRC can strengthen confidence in its performance by more accurate measurement of the yield its compliance work generates.

HMRC uses two main approaches to improve tax compliance. 'Upstream' activities include using legislative changes to close tax loopholes and educating taxpayers to get returns right first time. 'Downstream' work involves identifying and tackling non-compliance after it has taken place, including investigations and in some cases pursuing people through the courts.

HMRC moved thousands of staff in its Customer Compliance Group (CCG) to COVID-19 support schemes, reducing capacity for tax compliance work. Throughout 2020-2021, an average of 1,356 CCG staff were redeployed to the Covid schemes, peaking at 4,396 in May 2020. Recognising the pressures on taxpayers, HMRC offered them the opportunity to pause enquiries, except in cases where it suspected fraud or criminal activity. HMRC has conducted substantially fewer enquiries into suspected non-compliance since the pandemic began. It closed 29% (103,000) fewer cases in 2020-21 compared with the previous year and opened 32% fewer (114,000).

HMRC has raised around £9 billion less in tax revenue from its compliance activity since the pandemic began, compared with historic performance. Pre-pandemic, tax revenues from compliance activity were on average 5.2% of total revenues. This reduced to 5.0% in 2020-21 - a £1.5 billion reduction. It then fell further to 4.2% in 2021-22 (the lowest level since 2011-12), equating to a further £7.5 billion reduction. With revenues reaching record levels in 2021-22, the reduction in compliance yield is likely to be at least partly driven by reduced compliance work, although the impact of wider economic factors is not yet clear.

HMRC's strategy before the pandemic increasingly focused on improving compliance by making it easier for people to get their tax right the first time, while prioritising investigations on high-impact cases of non-compliance such as fraud or criminal activity. However, in-person visits for individuals and small business were one third lower (36%) in 2022 compared with 2019. HMRC is yet to assess whether these changes have affected detection of non-compliance or the behavioural effect on attitudes to paying tax among those investigated.

Criminal prosecutions for tax-related offences decreased markedly in the COVID-19 pandemic, when many courts were unable to operate. Prosecutions had already reduced before the pandemic from around 900 in 2017-18 to around 700 in 2019-20. In 2020-21, there were 163 prosecutions, rising slightly to 236 in 2021-22. HMRC does not publish targets or expectations

for overall numbers of prosecutions.

HMRC's planning estimates show that it will be challenging to prevent the tax gap from increasing over the next three years. The cost-effectiveness of HMRC's tax compliance work reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compliance staff generated just over £1.1 million in tax revenue per staff member between 2020-21 and 2021-22, compared to £1.3 million per staff member in the five years before the pandemic. HMRC anticipates increasing compliance staff by around 2,500 between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

There is little doubt that HMRC's compliance work offers good value for money, but there are limitations to the way HMRC assesses its performance. HMRC's own testing finds errors have overstated the revenues it has recorded, but it does not use its findings from a sample of cases to adjust the overall measure. Testing also found that out of 400 tax compliance cases, HMRC overcharged seven taxpayers by a total of £32 million (since corrected). HMRC has not estimated how much its compliance casework has overcharged taxpayers in total. Nor has it updated its assumptions about how much non-payment of tax will affect revenue raised through its compliance work, despite the increasing levels of tax debt following the pandemic.

NAO recommends HMRC improves how it estimates and reports the additional revenues its compliance work generates, including the likely extent of errors affecting taxpayers. It should ensure there is more consistent evaluation of all types of compliance work. This should include assessing how changes during the pandemic which it then made permanent - such as fewer face to face visits - affect levels of compliance.

Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO, said:

"HMRC had to move swiftly to reallocate resources to COVID-19 schemes, as the circumstances of the pandemic demanded. However, this directly affected its ability to investigate cases of people and businesses not paying the right tax.

There is now a risk that more people ultimately fail to pay the right tax or escape investigation or prosecution. It is concerning that HMRC's planning indicates that non-compliance may grow following the pandemic. The next two years are critical, and swift action is likely to be needed to stem potential losses.

There is little doubt that HMRC's compliance work offers good value for money, but it needs to evaluate its performance more consistently. Improving the effectiveness of HMRC's compliance work can help maximise the amount of money available for public services in a challenging economic context."

Click here for the [Full report](#) and click here for the [PAC Chair's statement](#)



National Audit Office

Increased incidence of scarlet fever and invasive Group A Streptococcus infection - multi-country

Situation at a glance

As of 8 December 2022, at least five Member States in the European Region, reported to WHO an increase in cases of invasive group A streptococcus (iGAS) disease and in some cases also scarlet fever. An increase in iGAS-related deaths has also been reported in some of these countries. Children under 10 years of age represent the most affected age group.

Group A Streptococcal (GAS) infection commonly causes mild illnesses such as tonsillitis, pharyngitis, impetigo, cellulitis and scarlet fever. However, in rare instances, GAS infection can lead to invasive iGAS, which can cause life-threatening conditions.

The observed increase may reflect an early start to the GAS infection season coinciding with an increase in the circulation of respiratory viruses and possible viral coinfection which may increase the risk of invasive GAS disease. This is in the context of increased population mixing following a period of reduced circulation of GAS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In light of the moderate increase in cases of iGAS, GAS endemicity, no new emm gene sequence type identified and no reports of increased antibiotic resistance, WHO assesses that the risk for the general population posed by iGAS infections is low at present.

Description of the situation

During 2022, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, have been observing an increase in cases of invasive group A streptococcus disease and scarlet fever, mostly affecting children under 10 years of age. The increase has been particularly marked during the second half of the year.

In France, since mid-November 2022, clinicians have reported to Santé Publique France (SpF) and the Regional Health Agencies (ARS), an unusual increase in the number of iGAS cases and the detection of iGAS clusters. Some pediatric cases have been fatal. On 8 December, SpF published a [status update](#) reporting an increase in the number of iGAS infections in France since the beginning of 2022 in different regions (Occitanie, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Nouvelle-Aquitaine), mainly in children under 10 years of age. SpF also detected an increase in cases of scarlet fever reported in outpatient clinics in the country since September 2022.

On 6 December, the [Irish Health Protection Surveillance Centre \(HPSC\)](#) reported an increase in iGAS cases in Ireland since the beginning of October. In 2022, as of 8 December, 57 iGAS cases have been notified to HPSC, of which 15 were in children less than 10 years of age. Twenty-three of the 57 iGAS cases have been reported since October 2022, compared to the 11 cases reported for the same period of 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic).

The Public Health Agency of the Netherlands (RIVM) observed an increase in iGAS infections among children from March 2022 onward. Data between March and July 2022 indicates increased numbers of iGAS cases caused by different known emm gene sequence types (the gene encoding the M virulence protein responsible for many *Streptococcus pyogenes* serotypes). This increase has thus far not subsided. Coinfections with varicella zoster and respiratory viruses were noted.

In Sweden, since October 2022, an increase in iGAS in children under 10 years of age has been noted as compared to COVID-19 pre-pandemic levels for the equivalent period. Out of the 93 cases reported from October to 7 December, 16 (17.2%) occurred among children under 10 years of age. Between October and December 2018, seven iGAS cases were reported in this age group and 10 cases in 2019. According to the [Public Health Agency of Sweden](#), during the season 1 July 2021 through 30 June 2022, 220 cases of iGAS were reported, compared to 173 cases reported in the previous season 2020/21. The highest numbers of iGAS cases, since iGAS became notifiable in Sweden in 2004, were reported before the pandemic in 2018/19 with

794 cases (incidence 7.8 per 100 000) and in 2017/18 with 800 cases (incidence 7.9 per 100 000).

According to the [UK Health Security Agency](#), following a higher-than-expected scarlet fever activity in the summer in England, with a decrease during August 2022, notifications from mid-September to early December have increased again, remaining above what is normally seen at this time of year. A total of 4622 notifications of scarlet fever were reported from weeks 37 to 46 of the current season (2022/23), with 851 notifications received in week 46. This compares with an average of 1294 (range 258 to 2008) for this same period (weeks 37 to 46) in the previous five years. As expected, several scarlet fever outbreaks in nurseries and schools are being reported, of which a number involve the co-circulation of respiratory viruses. Likewise, in the summer of 2022, the levels of iGAS notifications were higher than expected, and iGAS notifications are currently higher than have been recorded over the last five seasons in all age groups (average 248, range 142 to 357 notifications). As of 8 December, 509 notifications of iGAS disease were reported through laboratory surveillance in England, with a weekly high of 73 notifications in week 46 (week commencing on 14 November). So far this season and as of 8 December 2022, the United Kingdom reported 13 deaths within seven days of an iGAS diagnosis in children under 15 years in England. This compares with four deaths in the same period in the 2017 to 2018 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic) season. Antimicrobial susceptibility results from routine laboratory surveillance in the United Kingdom indicated no increased antibiotic resistance. Additionally, laboratory surveillance has not revealed newly emerging emm gene sequence types.

Epidemiology of Group A Streptococcus

Streptococcus pyogenes, also known as Group A Streptococcus, is a group of Gram-positive bacteria which can be carried in human throats or skin; it is responsible for more than 500 000 deaths annually worldwide.

Transmission occurs by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs, sneezes, or contact with a wound.

GAS infection commonly causes mild illnesses such as tonsillitis, pharyngitis, impetigo, cellulitis and scarlet fever. GAS infections are easily treated with antibiotics, and a person with a mild illness stops being contagious after 24 hours of treatment.

GAS is considered a common cause of bacterial pharyngitis in school-aged children and may also affect younger children. The incidence of GAS pharyngitis usually peaks during winter months and early spring. Outbreaks in kindergartens and schools are common. GAS pharyngitis is diagnosed by rapid antigen tests (Rapid Strep) or bacterial culture and is treated with antibiotics and supportive care. Good hand hygiene and general personal hygiene can help control transmission.

However, in rare instances, GAS infection can lead to invasive GAS, which can cause life-threatening conditions, such as necrotizing fasciitis, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome and other severe infections, as well as post-immune mediated diseases, such as poststreptococcal glomerulonephritis, acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Public health response

Enhanced surveillance activities have been implemented in the countries reporting an increase in iGAS cases, together with public health messages addressing the general population and clinicians, in order to enhance early recognition, reporting and prompt treatment initiation of GAS cases. An alert has been issued to other countries to be vigilant for a similar rise in cases and to report any unexpected increased national or regional incidence of iGAS infections to WHO.

WHO continues to support countries in assessing and responding to the epidemiological situation across the region and to provide recommendations to the public.

WHO risk assessment

WHO currently assesses the risk for the general population posed by the reported increase in iGAS infections in some European countries as low, considering the moderate rise in iGAS cases, GAS endemicity, no newly emerging emm gene sequence types identified, and no observed increases in antibiotic resistance.

The risk will be continuously assessed based on available and shared information.

WHO advice

The reports of these events do not change the current WHO recommendations on public health measures and surveillance of iGAS.

General recommendations

- WHO recommends continued close analysis of the epidemiological situation in countries throughout the European region, which will be critical to assess ongoing risk and to adjust risk management measures in a timely manner.
- WHO recommends that all countries be vigilant for a similar rise in cases, particularly in light of the ongoing increase in respiratory virus circulation that is now occurring across Europe.
- Given the potential for severe cases, it remains important that GAS-related infections, including scarlet fever, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, are identified and treated promptly with antibiotics to reduce the risk of potential complications such as iGAS and reduce onward transmission.
- Countries should report any unexpected increased national or regional incidence of iGAS infections to WHO through IHR or equivalent mechanisms either as notifications or consultations, as applicable and driven by the decision-making instrument in Annex 2 of the IHR (2005).

Clinical recommendations

- WHO encourages countries to undertake public health communication activities and messaging to healthcare providers to ensure proper clinical assessment and diagnostic testing of patients with symptoms consistent with GAS infection, and prompt treatment of patients with GAS. In addition, healthcare providers should be reminded that for iGAS infection, early recognition and prompt initiation of specific and supportive therapy for patients can be life-saving.
- Healthcare providers should maintain a high degree of clinical suspicion for GAS infection when assessing patients, particularly those with preceding viral infection (including chickenpox) and those who are close contacts of scarlet fever or iGAS patients. In case of hospital admission, droplet precautions should be implemented. Healthcare workers should always follow standard precautions and perform a risk assessment to evaluate the need for additional precautions.
- Healthcare providers should also be reminded of the increased risk of invasive disease among household contacts of scarlet fever and iGAS cases. Close contacts of these cases should be managed according to national guidance. In addition, adequate hand and respiratory hygiene and adequate indoor ventilation should continue to be emphasized as important protective measures during this winter season.

Laboratory and Surveillance recommendations

- Clusters of cases of iGAS should be reported to local, regional or national health authorities to prompt further investigation.
- In addition, laboratories should be encouraged to submit invasive disease isolates and also non-invasive isolates from suspected clusters or outbreaks to national reference laboratories for further characterization and antibiotic susceptibility testing.

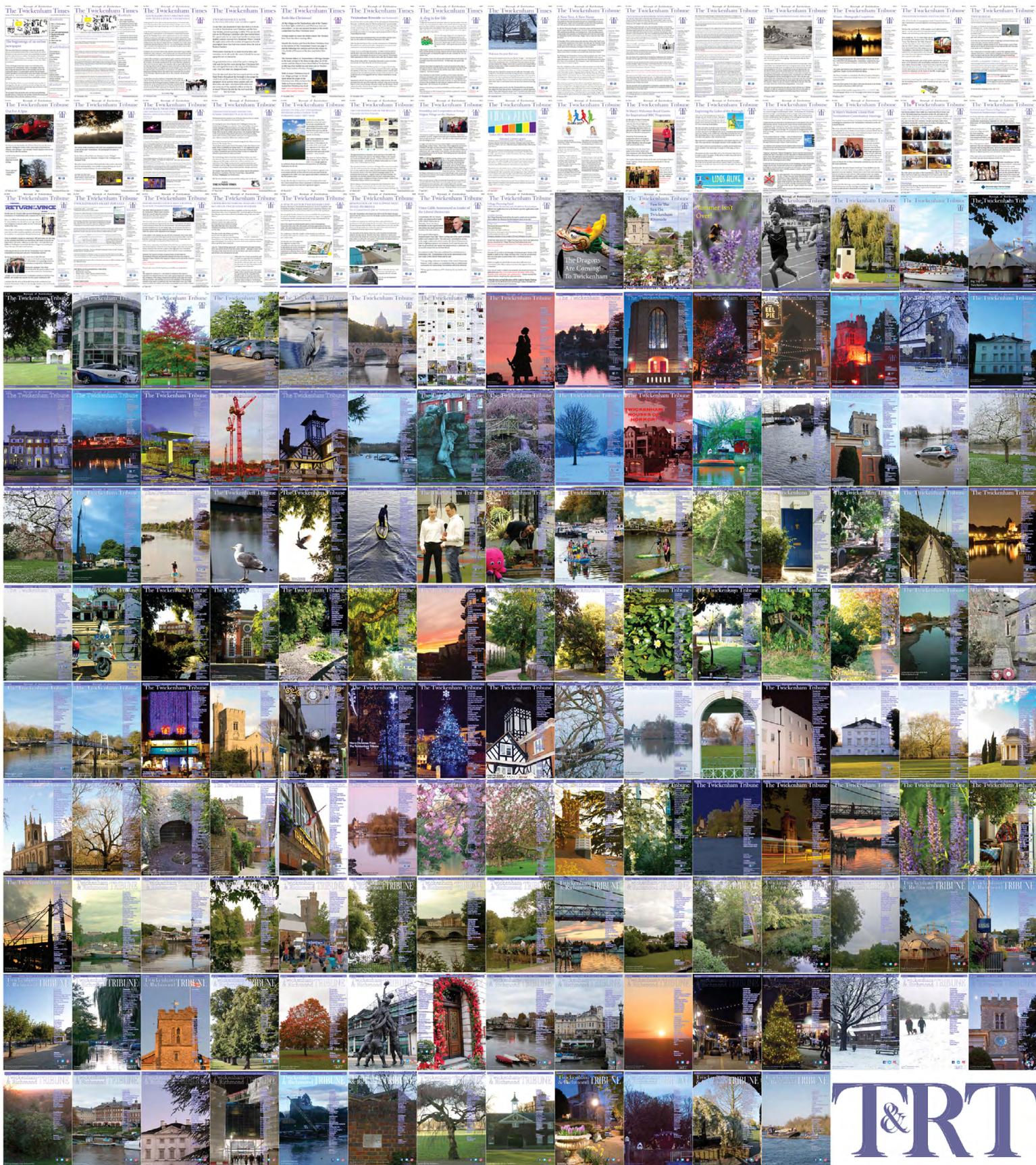
Travel

WHO does not recommend any restrictions on travel and/or trade for any affected countries based on available information about this event.



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