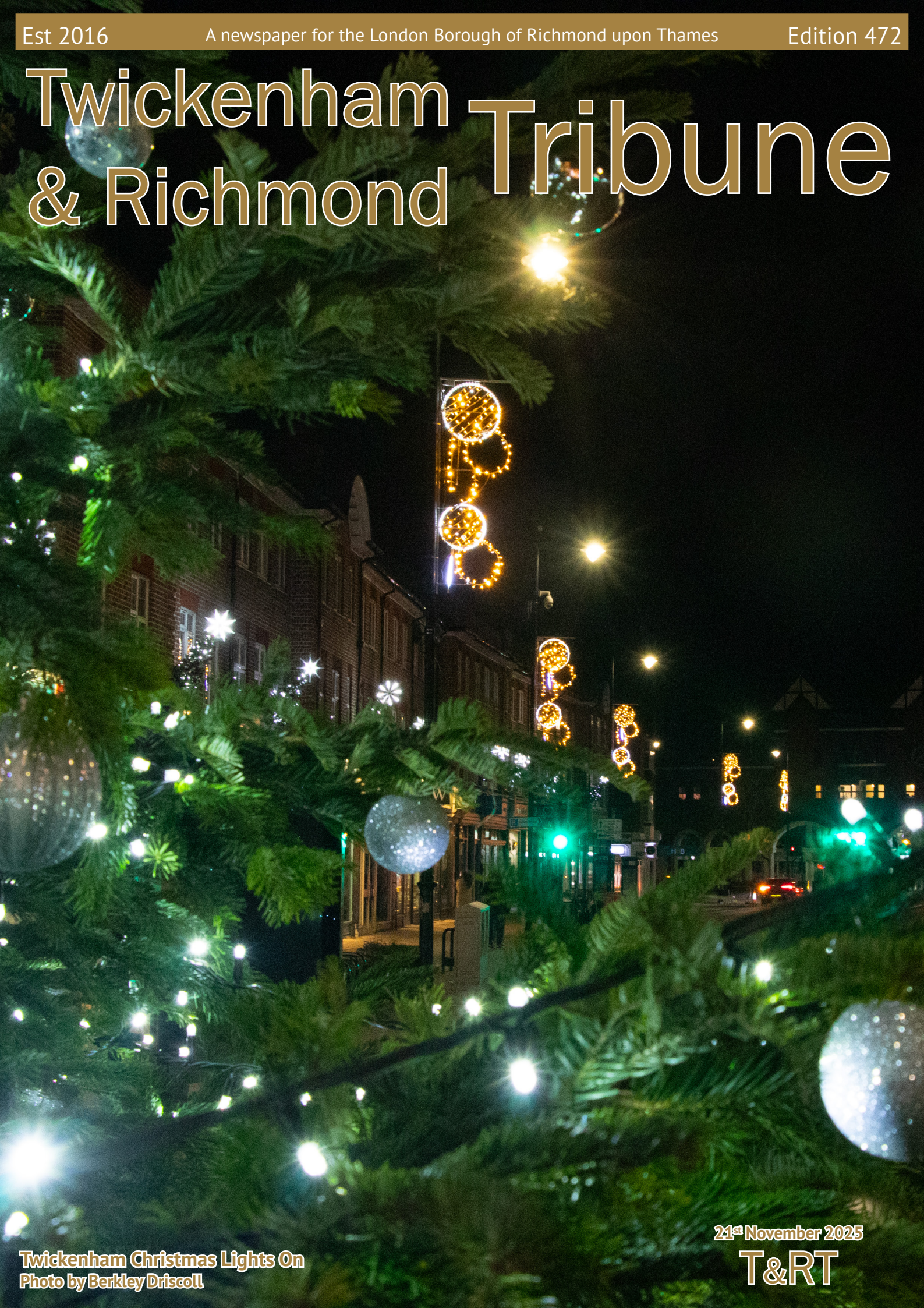


Twickenham & Richmond Tribune



Twickenham Christmas Lights On
Photo by Berkley Driscoll

21st November 2025

T&RT

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Editors: Teresa Read, Berkley Driscoll

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TickerTape - News in Brief

Rugby at Twickenham Stadium

From RFU Home Turf

Sunday 23rd is our final international match of the Autumn Nations Series.

ENGLAND v ARGENTINA

Kick-off 16:10

Attendance 82,000

We estimate that Whitton, Rugby & London Roads will close 14:10-16:10 and again from 17:40-20:10.

The CPZ will be in operation from 11:00-23:00.

Shuttle buses will run to the stadium from Old Deer Park and Hounslow East underground station.

Live traffic info and updates on the day on the Residents WhatsApp Channel and on X/Twitter @rfuhometurf

Any problems on the day, please text the helpline on 07894 814 180. If it's parking, Richmond Council have a helpline at: 020 8744 0462.



The Tree Agency

darryl parkin

The Treehouse
25 King Edwards Grove
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The Tree Agency

CrusaderTravel

020 8744 0474

crusadertravel.com

Escapology Experts

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Your friendly local Travel Agency
established in Twickenham since 1966

BLACK FRIDAY



Marks and Spencer Richmond to Convert into Food-Only Format

Marks and Spencer is preparing to convert its George Street branch from a full-line store into a Foodhall-only format, part of the company's national store rotation plan which shifts investment towards larger, out-of-town sites with free parking. The decision is particularly significant in Richmond because the shop is the last major clothing retailer in the town centre, a position that provided it with an anchor role beyond its own sales. Its shift to a food-only offer marks another step in the quiet restructuring of a high street that once relied on department stores to maintain its commercial centre.



The timing is hard to ignore. Richmond Council's transport transition agenda has steadily increased parking charges, often making a quick trip into town more costly than a return bus fare. Officials say this is necessary to encourage residents to use private cars less, although many traders argue that the cumulative effect is seen not in transport habits but in declining footfall. The outcome is a shopping centre that seems less like it is adapting to modern lifestyles and more like it is deteriorating, with many residents now travelling to Kingston for comparison shopping that can no longer be done locally.

Into the space being vacated upstairs comes The Gym Group, which plans to occupy the first floor as part of its expansion. The arrival of a budget gym in a building long associated with traditional retail symbolises the broader shift happening across many high streets, where services replace goods and customer flows matter more than display space. Yet this change has not gone unnoticed, as the bright signage proposed by the operator has faced objections from residents who believe it damages the appearance of the Conservation Area. Those wishing to comment on the signage application can do so on the Council's planning portal, where the details are available [HERE](#).

Photo © Twickenham & Richmond Tribune



Hello,

I'm David and incredibly my local estate agency business is now in its 20th year.

If you are selling soon, or already on the market, dissatisfied and thinking of moving on, please consider us:

We are a successful local business and I have a wonderful team working with me - Katy, Kerry, Roland and Daniela. Please Google David McGeachie Property for our reviews; Here is the most recent from last week:

"Thanks to David we got a tricky sale to completion last week. I greatly appreciated his patience & how he guided us through the process. Even with our chain collapsing and some changes in the market we were eventually able to sell!" Ghislaine

How we Sell

- Write ad text that really sells the benefits of the property – using succinct bullet points packed with compelling hooks.
- Professional photos from a real pro - www.mattdavis.photo
- Launch it early in a week and invite buyers to come on the Saturday morning for an open viewing for one hour only – so they see one another.
- List on the top 4 property web sites – Right Move, On The Market, Zoopla and Prime Location. They also receive Premium listings on them, which I pay extra for, which makes them more visible.
- 3-month contract, not 4 months that most demand.

I have been doing this a long time, I am very friendly, yet negotiate with buyers firmly on your behalf. You will get a local business owner working for you, not an employee who may not even live here.

In the community, I have funded music stages – include the big riverside one at the Barmy Arms every year at Twickenham High Tide Festival - and other events, for well over 20 years including 'Arthouse' local artists' fair, a local children's football team and now, Animal Rescue & Care and Cats Protection. I was also the very first contributor to the setting up of Eel Pie Island Museum.

You would only ever deal with, and hear from me; you will have my mobile number and when you call me, I will of course immediately know who you are.

Once we agree a sale, I continue being hands-on until the sale is complete – other agents will at that point tell you to deal with someone else in an anonymous office, that you will never meet and who don't know the property at all.

If this sounds attractive, please give me a call and I can pop by for a chat. We also of course do lettings under the brand Tenant Finder and I am a landlord myself.

Thanks very much indeed for reading.

David McGeachie

David McGeachie Property, 191 Richmond Rd, St Margarets, TW1 2NJ
020 8891 3676 • info@d-mcg.co.uk

I want to pay tribute to Teresa, the co-founder of the Tribune. She and Berkley organised many wonderful local events and always had me handle the music stages. We had some good times. RIP.

School of Rock UK Opens its Doors

and is Bringing the Music – and Jobs – to Twickenham

From School of Rock

Twickenham's high street has just received a serious dose of rock 'n' roll. The UK's first ever School of Rock has finally opened its doors, transforming the old Barclays bank site into a buzzing hub of music, creativity for young people and real career opportunities for local talent.



The SoR London isn't just about teaching kids to play the guitar or belt out anthems. It's about giving local people (children and adults) a stage to shine, instructors to earn a living, and inspire the next generation of rockstars from an area deep-rooted in music history.

Matias Puga-Hamilton, an entrepreneur and drummer enthusiastic who's already successfully launched 24 School of Rock franchises across Latin America, is leading the charge. His plan? To create 20–30 jobs in Twickenham in the first year alone, from guitar pros and drum dynamos to behind-the-scenes heroes. And it doesn't stop there. The SoR UK has ambitious plans to expand to more schools in 2026, with a long-term vision of opening 50 schools nationwide.



Matias Puga, the UK School of Rock Franchisor, says: *"Music is an international language that has the power to change lives positively, no matter where you're from. The powerful transformation School of Rock inspired in my daughters when they were enrolled as students is what drove me to bring this concept to my home country of Chile in the first place, and I've since had the honour of witnessing that impact on an increasingly global scale,"* said Puga-Hamilton. *"I'm eager to continue making a difference, and what better place to do so next than in the birthplace of so much of the music that we celebrate and use to educate our students around the world to this day"* And it's not just about jobs, it's about building a local creative community. Instructors will mentor students learning music through performing. Stage crews and lighting techs will get paid gigs through partnerships with different local venues. Councillor James Chard has already called it a win for *"employment and positive cultural activity for the area."*

Twickenham has always had a musical soul, from The Who smashing it at Eel Pie Island to today's buzzing local gigs. Now, School of Rock London is turning up the volume, giving local youngsters the chance to live their passion while helping the community thrive.

Want to feel the rhythm for yourself? drop in for an exclusive tour, it's loud, it's lively, and it's very much Richmond upon Thames.

Photos ©DigitalDave

To register your interest, please fill in your details here: <https://www.schoolofrock.com/locations/london?labelSource=PRE>

Richmond's Scrutiny Gap: When Critical Questions Go Unasked

By James Knight

Richmond's **Adult Social Services, Health and Housing Committee** recently faced an agenda of unusual seriousness. Councillors were asked to consider a homelessness overspend amounting to more than two million pounds, a seventeen-year care homes contract that would shape residential provision into the 2040s, rising demand in adult social care, and ongoing failings within Richmond Housing Partnership. Any one of these issues could have justified sustained, forensic questioning. Taken together, they represented some of the most significant pressures the council has encountered in recent years. Yet the meeting that unfolded bore a strikingly light tone. Despite the starkness of the reports, the Liberal Democrat-chaired committee often conducted itself with the mood of a polite panel show rather than a scrutiny body charged with safeguarding public money and resident welfare. The contrast between the gravity of the agenda and the geniality of the discussion was impossible to ignore.

A homelessness crisis met with no hard questions

Even more concerning, a key graph in the report was found to be inaccurate. Officers apologised: "Unfortunately this is incorrect... I do apologise... the September figure should be 150 presentations." At no point did councillors ask why such fundamental data errors had gone unnoticed, despite the borough currently supporting between 650 and 680 households in temporary accommodation—a level far exceeding the Council's budget and clearly incompatible with the optimistic forecasts presented earlier in the year. Such a correction, on a topic as sensitive as homelessness, would typically lead councillors to scrutinise forecasting assumptions and demand management strategies closely.

Instead, the conversation remained strangely muted. Councillor O'Shea started not by questioning the ongoing increase in demand but by "welcoming" the adult social care representatives before asking whether the rise in homelessness might simply be "a temporary blip" caused by delays in the Renters Reform Bill. The chance to investigate why the administration had budgeted for a decrease in temporary accommodation placements, despite years of rising demand, went unchallenged. No councillor expressed concerns about the fragility of the budget, the risk to the medium-term financial strategy, or the pressure on frontline teams. The written reports warned of structural risk; the committee behaved as though they were reviewing flowerbed improvements.

A seventeen year care homes contract approved with astonishing ease

One of the most important decisions made by the committee involved awarding a seventeen-year contract to run the borough's three care homes. This contract makes the council responsible for repairs costing more than twenty thousand pounds per item. The contract's structure ensures that the private operator avoids the most significant liabilities, while the council, and therefore local taxpayers, shoulder the financial risk for major repairs and long-term upkeep. With an ageing estate, increasing regulatory standards, and high maintenance expenses, this represents a significant long-term risk. The contract also attracted only two bidders, raising concerns about the strength of the market and value for money. Usually, a decision of this magnitude would warrant thorough public scrutiny.

The Chair's tone remained procedural rather than investigative. After summarising the recommendation, Councillor Allen simply asked, "We're happy with those sets of recommendations?" and, upon receiving agreement, ended the debate with a gentle "Thank you all very much." The public was largely kept in the dark about due diligence, risk management, and quality assurance. This is exactly the kind of major procurement that requires open examination, yet the Liberal Democrat leadership handled it with the same soft tone that characterised the entire evening.

Public sector dependence masked behind partnership language

Much of the meeting centred on the language of collaboration, co-production and partnership working. Richmond's voluntary sector is indeed a valuable asset, and groups like Age UK, Citizens Advice and local community ambassadors provide vital support. Yet a growing reliance on these organisations risks concealing fundamental gaps in council capacity.

The dementia report admitted that borough-wide training had been “inconsistent and misaligned with national standards”, and officers spoke openly about the need to overhaul training and workforce support. Even so, councillors focused far more on praising community initiatives than on confronting the workforce and resource issues that the report itself outlined.

Similarly, adult social care pressures were briefly acknowledged. Officers mentioned that 59 additional service users had entered the system since March, mental health caseloads had increased by 14 percent, and pressures on home care and community support were growing. These issues were highlighted in the reports as areas needing attention, planning, and strategic adjustment. However, the committee did not investigate whether the council has sufficient staffing, systems, or funding to cope with this rising demand. Instead, members repeatedly expressed thanks and offered general encouragement. Councillor Allen's remark that the committee was “doing it to time” indicated a focus on schedule rather than scrutiny, despite the reports highlighting significant challenges.

Housing association failures treated with excessive deference

The Richmond Housing Partnership's annual report showed ongoing issues had not been fully addressed. RHP's maladministration rate remains at 73 percent, a significant improvement from its previous peak but still well above acceptable levels. Residents continue to face delays in repairs, communication breakdowns, and difficulties accessing services. These problems were outlined in the officer's report and were reiterated by community speakers. One ambassador clearly stated, “We're here to represent the tenant's voice... scrutiny and antisocial behaviour are of particular concern.” Another representative from Citizens Advice offered a revealing insight: “What we hear from clients over and over again is, I had no idea... people just don't know what's happening.”



However, the committee's response was more polite than critical. Councillors thanked RHP representatives, acknowledged improvements, and mainly focused on signs of progress. While the witnesses provided detailed and serious accounts of repair failures, communication breakdowns, and longstanding resident frustration, the committee responded with respectful recognition rather than firm challenge.

What stood out most was that the sharpest scrutiny did not come from councillors, but from members of the public and voluntary sector representatives, who spoke with much greater directness and urgency about the scale of the problems. In any effective scrutiny process, the gap between external testimony and internal caution is a warning sign that political leaders might not fully understand the depth of residents' concerns. It did not reflect well on councillors that those most affected were left to do the hard work that elected members should shoulder.

The only pointed challenge came from outside the Liberal Democrat benches

Perhaps the most direct scrutiny of the evening came not from any councillor but from a member of the public. Local Labour activist and housing campaigner Pam Marum submitted a written

question highlighting the Council's failure to publish promised data linking affordable housing supply with homelessness trends. Her question was detailed, substantial and rooted in earlier committee commitments. When read aloud, it asked whether "lower paid residents" are able to access intermediate homes and whether the Council had assessed the effectiveness of its marketing and allocations process.

Officers offered a thoughtful response, challenging some of her premises. However, no councillor pursued the matter further. The moment that could have prompted a broader discussion on housing supply strategy, transparency, and affordability was allowed to pass without debate. This exemplifies a deeper pattern: the most difficult questions often come from residents and voluntary organisations, while the committee focuses on tone management.

Tone drifted from civic meeting to cosy conversation

Throughout the evening, the tone repeatedly shifted into casual conversation. At one point, Councillor Varley noted that the session felt "like a conversation", and when witnesses wanted to leave, Councillor Allen eased the mood with: "The Traitors isn't on at the moment." The laughter that followed may have helped move proceedings along, but it also exposed a committee culture more at ease with friendliness than with serious inquiry. For residents waiting months for repairs or facing temporary accommodation uncertainty, such moments sit uncomfortably alongside the realities described in the reports.

The meeting ended earlier than planned, prompting the Chair to comment, "I thought we were going to be here past 10 o'clock... fortunately members cooperated." It was an oddly celebratory note for a meeting that had left many key issues unexplored.

Richmond deserves scrutiny equal to the seriousness of its challenges

Taken together, the meeting's transcript and the officers' reports reveal a pattern of strategic risks that were simply not addressed openly. The documents highlighted seriously flawed homelessness forecasts, long-term contractual liabilities in the care homes sector, data errors that went unquestioned, workforce pressures in adult social care, overreliance on voluntary groups to fill gaps in council services, and ongoing failings at Richmond Housing Partnership. These issues demanded a firm approach and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. Instead, the Liberal Democrat administration seemed content to rely on language of collaboration and courtesy as a substitute for proper oversight. Partnership can be an asset, but it cannot serve as a shield for weak strategic control or opaque decision-making.

It is difficult to escape the sense that much of the genuine discussion and debate took place during private pre-meetings, leaving the public session sparse, superficial, and oddly subdued. Important questions that should have been discussed openly were instead left unasked, while key decisions were pushed through quickly. While this may streamline committee meetings, it deprives residents of transparency and undermines the purpose of scrutiny.

Sometimes the meeting drifted so far into casual chat that one could almost forget the seriousness of the decisions being made. Suppose the Liberal Democrat leadership continues to treat scrutiny as a warm-up act rather than a vital democratic safeguard. In that case, no one should be surprised if Councillor Piers Allen turns up at meetings and chairs them like an episode of *Sorry I Haven't a Clue*, complete with the breezy atmosphere of a light panel show instead of the discipline expected of a committee handling millions in public funds and unable to house hundreds of residents. That may suit the mood in the room, but it does nothing for the residents who rely on these services or find themselves in unsuitable temporary accommodation miles from home. Richmond does not need a genial host. It needs elected members prepared to probe, challenge and confront uncomfortable truths in public, not a committee that drifts towards polite conversation when accountability matters most.

The committee papers and webcast can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#)

Photo ©Twickenham & Richmond Tribune

How to sustain our lovely Borough

By Pam Marum, Housing champion for Twickenham Labour Party

We are all lucky to live in such a wonderful place. Our borough has beautiful Royal Parks, rivers including the mighty Thames, and several grand mansions we can all visit. We enjoy interesting high streets, very good schools, and our own university. It offers easy access to central London yet still feels like a market town.

But there is one serious problem: affordability. Not for those like me who were fortunate enough to buy before prices rocketed, but for everyone else. Young people can only stay here if they remain in their childhood bedrooms. Local workers—those in shops, restaurants, the NHS, and schools—who serve our community but cannot afford to live in it. Families who want more space but must move miles away to get it. As well as the impact on them, think about what we all lose. Families cannot pop round to support each other. Workers do not feel the town they work in is “their” town.



In the 1970s, I came south, like many others, because there were no jobs where I lived. Now I watch young people here moving away because they cannot afford a home. Is this really what we want?

The core problem is lack of supply. The Council (and then the Housing Association transferred its housing to) sold 4,148 homes under the Right to Buy scheme. At the start of this year, there were 2,845 households on the waiting list who could easily have been accommodated if Right to Buy had not existed.

In the last year, the Council overspent £3 million on temporary accommodation, which is not only costly, but also impacts families who are often temporarily housed out of borough, causing many children to travel over ten miles to school each day.

What few people realise is that homes sold under Right to Buy were not replaced. At the time, political thinking shifted from investing in “bricks and mortar” to funnelling public subsidy into benefits paid to private landlords. This was combined with uncontrolled market rents and the loss of secure tenancies.

People quite naturally want a home they can afford and plan to stay in. Those who once would have been eligible for a council home for life now find themselves in insecure, high-rent private accommodation or stuck in temporary housing while they wait for more insecure, high-rent accommodation. There has been no significant increase in overall supply, so the homes now rented out are no longer available to buy.

However, the real long-term cause of the supply problem is that successive governments simply failed to build the homes we need.

The Labour Party is planning to build 1.5 million new homes by 2029. They have funded 300,000 affordable homes over the next 10 years, the biggest programme in a generation. 60% of the affordable homes will be the lower rent “social” homes—affordable for those on average incomes and secure, like traditional council housing.

The Renters Rights Act will come into force in May 2026, ending Section 21 “no-fault” evictions. While many private landlords are responsible, too many tenants face serious disrepair and above-market rent increases, afraid to complain for fear of losing their home.

Locally, we have held street stalls across the borough focusing on affordable housing and collecting signatures for a petition to LBRUT to improve their very poor record on affordable housing. We explain that LBRUT has one of the worst records in London for completing affordable homes.

LBRUT regularly publicises new intentions, but its track record shows promises are not delivered. In 2023/4 they promised 55 new affordable homes but only delivered 10 additional homes. In 2024/2025 they promised 66 and delivered 29 (although it is not clear yet if this gain is even less after any demolitions).

They often blame protected green spaces, yet when the London Mayor set targets, these were already fully accounted for. Even with a lower target than many other boroughs, LBRUT still failed to meet it. The London Mayor and the Planning Inspector has criticised the Council for allowing developers to use “viability” arguments to avoid delivering affordable homes.

At our stalls, I am always struck by the compassion of local residents. People want grown-up children, young families, and local workers to be able to stay. They do not want homeless families living for years in temporary accommodation far from support networks. This week in Teddington, a young mother told me she had been placed in temporary accommodation in Hounslow with a rat infestation. She expected to be there for three years. Later, she returned with her own mother to sign our petition. Another woman in Twickenham told me she came back from caring for her seriously ill mother to a £700 rent increase, taking her rent to over £3,000 a month.

The Lib Dem–run Council says it wants more affordable housing, but its record inspires little confidence. After years as a housing professional, even I struggle to find out what is actually being built. Reports are fragmented and opaque.

I asked the Council to provide monthly updates to its committee instead of the current annual one. They agreed in February to create a clear, up-to-date website page, but it has never appeared.

If we want transparency and real progress, we need Councillors who will hold the Lib Dem leadership to account and insist on delivering the affordable homes this borough desperately needs.



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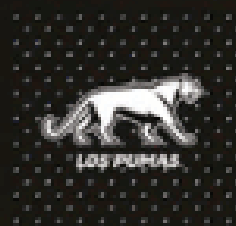
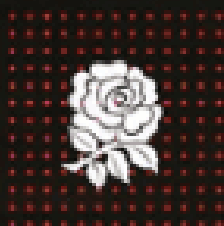
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ENGLAND

ALLIANZ STADIUM | SUNDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 2025

ARGENTINA



THIS ROSE MEANS THE WORLD

Schools, SEND and Silence:

Richmond's Committee Turns Away From the Hard Choices

By James Knight

Richmond's Education and Children's Services Committee met last week to discuss school place planning, childcare sufficiency, and the increasingly fragile budget for children's services. Each of these issues touches directly on the future of the borough's schools and the life chances of its young people. Yet the meeting was marked not by the decisive scrutiny such circumstances demand, but instead by a conspicuous lightness of interrogation and a noticeable reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths.

School closures, deferred beyond the election?

The committee heard that Richmond's primary school population has fallen sharply. Recent cohorts are hundreds of pupils smaller than the year above them. There are now nearly three thousand empty places across the borough and seventeen primary schools sit below eighty percent occupancy. Eleven schools are already in deficit recovery. This is not a temporary fluctuation. It is a systemic decline that has profound consequences for school budgets and staffing structures.

The written report was careful to frame the situation in the gentlest possible language. Officers spoke of "right sizing" and "permanent PAN reductions" instead of addressing the reality that falling rolls inevitably precipitate school closures. It was only when councillors pressed officials directly that a fuller picture emerged. During a notable exchange, officers conceded that the borough has reached a juncture where closures can no longer be avoided. As one senior officer put it, "We probably are now approaching the point where we do need to give very serious consideration to some of those more radical options that previously we hoped we could avoid. I think we're probably in a position where we can't now."



This is a critical admission. It confirms that the borough is actively moving towards closure scenarios. Yet the timing is revealing. No such proposals will be brought forward until after the May 2026 local elections. The consultations being undertaken this winter relate only to reductions in admission numbers, not to structural changes. Parents will be spared the news until it is politically safer to deliver it. The administration may believe this sequencing is prudent. A journalist would call it strategic deferral.

Secondary school pressures

This same atmosphere of caution framed the discussion of secondary school capacity, especially in the west of the borough. Cllr Humphreys provided one of the clearest contributions of the evening when she laid out the numerical fall in reception intake since 2021: "91 less, then 157 less, then 245, 289 and the latest figures, 360 less." These are not modest fluctuations. They are a demographic shift that will soon reach secondary level.

Her question was direct. What will happen to the secondary schools in the west of Richmond when these smaller cohorts arrive, particularly after the closure of two primary schools in that part of the borough? This line of questioning reflects a long-standing belief in Whitton that Twickenham

School and Turing House School will inevitably have to merge within the next five to seven years. The response from officers acknowledged the concern but fell back on generalities about schools needing to be “proactive”. When the discussion began to circle the core implications, the Chair intervened and moved the meeting on.

There was no substantive modelling presented. No exploration of whether particular schools are especially exposed. No acknowledgement that the west of the borough now faces the double pressure of falling pupil numbers and historic under capacity in local special school provision. The question deserved a more detailed answer than the one offered.

A SEND deficit too large to sidestep

The single most serious financial issue in the papers was the SEND budget. The High Needs Block carried a staggering **£5.25 million deficit**. Demand for Education Health and Care Plans continues to rise. Independent specialist placements cost more and more each year. Officers confirmed that six children are now in placements costing more £10,000 every week. Early intervention remains inconsistent. Specialist workforce shortages grow more pronounced.

Yet the committee did not fully interrogate the implications of this deficit. The statutory override that allows councils to carry SEND overspends without triggering formal insolvency procedures has been extended only to 2028. There is no clear plan to reduce the deficit before that date. The transformation programmes that were supposed to restore balance have delivered only a fraction of their promised savings. In the words of one officer, the placement market “is broken”. That should have prompted a searching debate. Instead, it drifted past with little more than acknowledgement.

A SEND system operating at a multi million pound deficit is a matter of serious public interest. It affects the availability of local provision, the pressure on mainstream schools, and the long term stability of the borough’s education budget. Richmond cannot afford for oversight to be polite or passive. On this occasion, it risked being both.

Childcare inequalities hidden behind a positive headline

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment offered a reassuring headline that the borough has “sufficient childcare.” The ward level data paints a more challenging picture. In Hampton North, the take-up of funded two-year-old places among disadvantaged families stands at 9.52%, with low take ups being reported in a number of wards. These disparities have significant consequences for early development and school readiness; impediments that can last a lifetime.

During the meeting, councillors sought clarification about these inequalities. Officers responded with explanations about sector complexity and the different patterns of take up across the borough. These points are not without merit, yet they did not address why the children with the highest needs are the least likely to be in early years settings. A sufficiency statement that does not account for accessibility risks giving the public a misleading impression of the true landscape.

This is an area where constructive scrutiny could have strengthened the borough’s understanding of



the issue. That opportunity was not fully taken.

The asylum seeker overspend that went unmentioned

Perhaps the most pointed omission of the evening related to asylum seeker support. The quarterly monitoring report identified a £225,000 overspend on support for over eighteen asylum seekers, driven largely by rising accommodation and living costs. This is not discretionary spending. It is a statutory duty, and when the cost rises the Council is legally bound to meet it.

This reality sits uneasily alongside recent public claims from the Environment Committee that its policy of offering free gym memberships to asylum seekers “costs nothing” because it relies on a flexible government grant. The grant is not ringfenced. It could just as easily have been applied to this statutory overspend, sparing council taxpayers from carrying the entire burden.

The political backdrop matters here. When the free health club scheme was first announced it attracted national media attention and became a talking point far beyond Richmond. The borough was held up as an example of a council opting for gesture politics rather than focusing on the practical work of supporting refugees. Even those who strongly believe in assisting asylum seekers questioned the judgement behind offering something that ordinary residents must pay for themselves. The risk, as several commentators noted, is that such policies inadvertently strengthen the arguments of figures like Nigel Farage by creating the impression that newcomers receive entitlements unavailable to local taxpayers.

The question of how these funding choices are made, and what principles govern them, should have been asked. It was not.

Scrutiny constrained by a restrictive chairing style

A recurring theme throughout the meeting was the constraint placed on scrutiny. The Chair stated early on, “I would like singular questions... If there is a supplementary then please can it go through the Chair.” Later she closed down the most detailed exchange of the evening with, “We have been nearly an hour on this so I think we have to move on.”

In principle, chairing exists to provide structure and ensure fairness. In practice, these interventions narrowed the space for serious questioning. Officers were given generous time to set out their positions. Councillors were permitted only limited opportunities to examine them. As a result, key issues either received light treatment or were not pursued at all.

A new Chair, but councillors must insist on full scrutiny

It is fair to recognise that the Chair is new and may still be finding her approach to managing complex meetings. Even so, scrutiny cannot be effective if councillors are prevented from asking sustained follow-up questions or from drawing out the implications of what officers present.

The borough is entering a period of profound educational change. School closures are on the horizon. SEND finances are in deficit. Childcare inequalities remain entrenched. This is not a moment for truncated debate or procedural compression. It is a moment for clarity, candour and accountable leadership.

Whatever their political colours, councillors should be prepared to defend their right and responsibility to scrutinise fully. Richmond’s families deserve no less.

You can read the committee papers and view the webcast [HERE](#)

Photos ©Twickenham & Richmond Tribune



Richmond
Team Ministry



Army Band

The Honourable Artillery Company

DECEMBER 6TH

2.30PM

Free entry with collection

St Mary Magdalene, Richmond

**Family favourites, band specials with a
Christmas twist**

Mansion Tax: A Present From The LibDems

Submitted by Twickenham Conservatives

As Budget Day approaches, the frenzied media speculation has gone into overdrive about just what new nasty surprises our Chancellor has in store for us all. But it's not *all* wild speculation: much of it stems from deliberate government leaks designed to test public sentiment. No smoke without a fire...

Labour backbenchers have already threatened to torpedo the Budget if income tax rates are increased, so that's clearly not going to happen. That leaves Reeves with various other, even less palatable options, with which she will try to plug her self-created fiscal "black hole". And among those being considered is a tax on the value of your home.



A tax aimed squarely at Twickenham

This "mansion tax" has been mooted at an annual 0.5% of your house value, on all properties over £500,000. That doesn't sound much, until you consider that an estimated one third of houses in this Borough (Valuation Office Agency figures) are in the top three bands – many of them quite modest three-bed semi's. If you have the misfortune to own such a house, you're going to be paying £5,000 more tax every year. That's £6,000 of your earnings if you're a standard rate taxpayer. But many will pay much more.

Ordinary families, not the super rich

Are these home-owners multi-billionaire stock market speculators? No, they are ordinary working people like you – whose only sins are that they have worked hard, saved hard, paid taxes on their earnings, and have never been a burden on the welfare state. Their properties' seemingly high values are simply the result of owning them for decades, or spending hard-earned money to improve them. The value of these homes is no evidence of their owners' wealth or high incomes; they're a consequence of living in a nice area.

Retirees hit hardest

Cruelly, many of those who will be worst hit are retired, and often widows or widowers, whose much-loved homes hold a lifetime of happy memories. These unfortunate people have no hope of paying the new taxes, so will be forced to sell up and move out at the very time when they might reasonably have expected well-earned peace and security in their twilight years.

Why Labour sees Richmond as an easy target

Richmond borough average property prices are among the highest in London, and even the UK. Our population contains a high proportion of older residents, who are naturally better off as a result of more years worked. And this Borough has never voted Labour, and almost certainly never will.

So we are prime targets for this ideologically-driven Labour government, with its hatred of success and enterprise, and disdain for those who are no longer “economically active” (“boomers”, as we are so often insultingly dismissed). In short, this potential mansion tax is a deliberate attack on those who represent no threat to Labour. We are expendable victims of the Labour wild fire burning through our economy.

Conservatives are fighting back

Conservatives throughout the UK led by Kemi Badenoch are fighting this and every other unfair, ill-considered Labour tax proposal. Because we know that no economy has ever been taxed into prosperity. And we know that only real growth in economic activity, driven by the very people that Labour consistently targets, will ever create the wealth we need to deliver a better NHS, better defence and better education for future generations.

Don't expect LibDem help

But don't expect any help or sympathy from your local LibDems. While your MP should be taking your side and resisting Labour's threatened attack on our Borough's residents, she won't. BECAUSE THE MANSION TAX WAS A LIBDEM IDEA. Left to them, it would already have become policy during the coalition of 2010-2015. But the Conservatives blocked it.

Waiting for Budget Day

So, we are left to wait and see what happens on Budget Day, and how many more U-turns will take place in the run-up. It certainly won't be good news, so we can only hope the bad news isn't too painful.



Twickenham Conservatives

Come to Off The Record's Christmas carol concert

From Off The Record Twickenham

Off The Record Twickenham is inviting everyone to their Christmas carol concert at St Mary's Church in Twickenham on Thursday 11 December.

Join them to enjoy readings and musical performances by local young people alongside traditional carol singing, followed by light refreshments and a raffle.

Off The Record
Twickenham



Doors open from 6pm, concert starts 6.30pm.

Entry is free, with donations welcome on the night.

See [more information](#).

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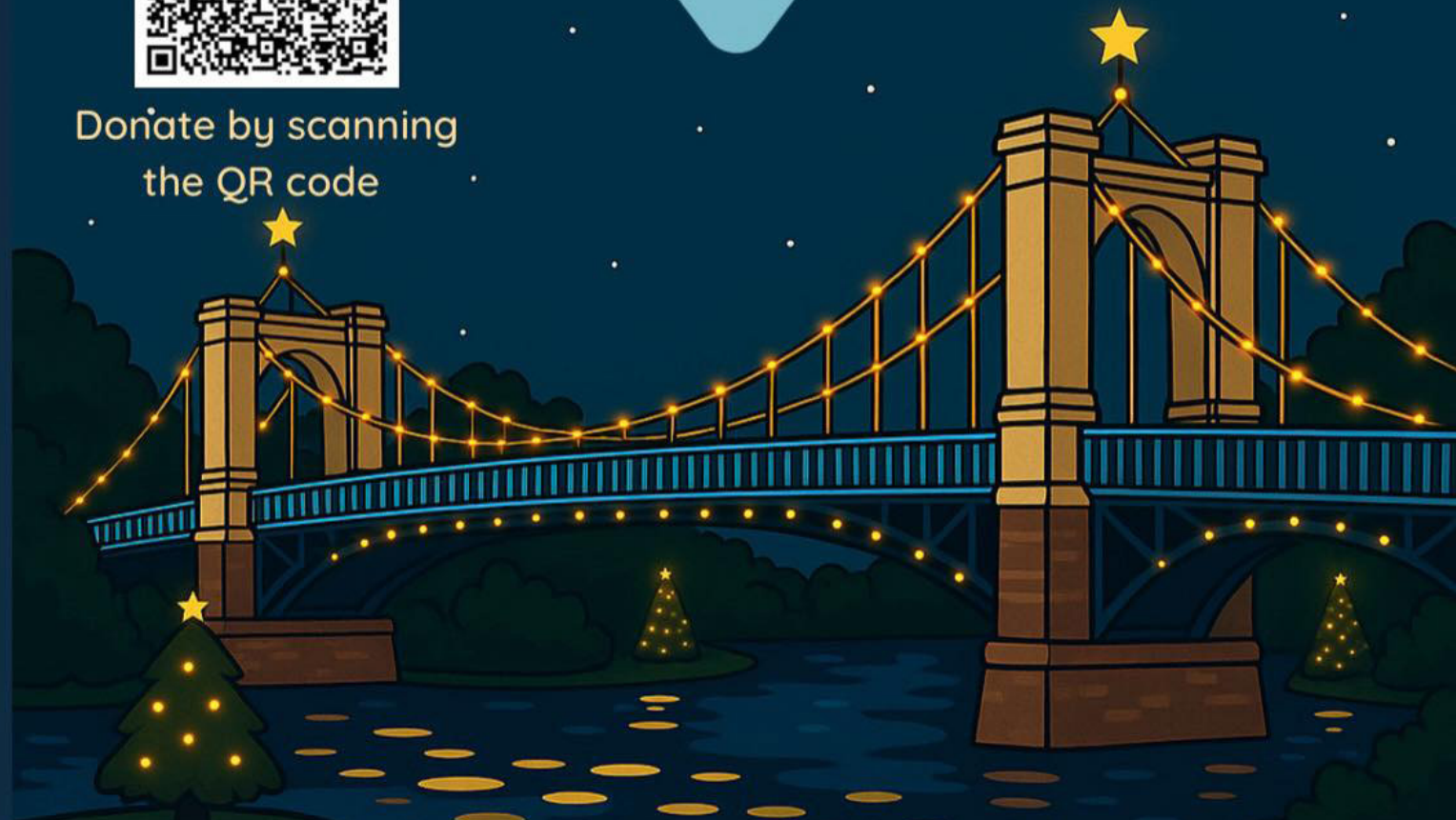
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Richmond's Environment Committee

By James Knight

It was a busy evening for Richmond's Environment, Sustainability, Culture and Sports Committee, with a full agenda covering issues from waste management to rising leisure fees. Yet beneath the smooth operation of the meeting lay a familiar concern. The level of scrutiny applied by councillors did not match the importance of the policies before them.

The tone of the meeting was consistently courteous, but the absence of sustained challenge meant that risks and contradictions in the papers were largely left unexplored. When the Chair suggested that the meeting would "run smoothly," it unintentionally foreshadowed a session in which officers met very little resistance and the chair quickly shut down any line of questioning that was too probing. For a committee charged with holding the administration to account, this gentleness did not always serve the public interest.

Burial Space and Allotments: A Sensitive Issue Softly Handled

The meeting began with a Ward Concern that warranted much deeper examination. Green councillor Caroline Wren, who represents Fulwell and Hampton Hill, raised the issue of the loss of allotments at Teddington Cemetery, describing it as "an unfortunate decision" driven by a shortage of burial space. She mentioned that residents felt misled after believing the land would only be reclaimed "in stages," and one resident questioned why the council would "prioritise the burials of the dead over the needs of the living."

This was a significant allegation relating to transparency, community trust, and long-term planning. However, councillors did not explore the suggestion that the council may have strayed from previous commitments or failed to engage with those affected. The Chair responded calmly with information about groundworks and statutory duties but did not seize the opportunity to question how the situation had arisen. It also appeared that the sole Green Councillor on the committee did not support their colleague raising the ward concern.

A planning application (PA25/3013) has been submitted by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council for the change of use of the Shacklegate Lane allotments to extend Teddington Cemetery.

Waste Plan: Strategy Accepted Without Testing Its Assumptions

The Draft West London Waste Plan was presented, and the officer's presentation was thorough and well-prepared. Councillors asked procedural questions regarding consultation methods and the potential effects of upcoming elections but avoided delving into the plan's foundational assumptions. This was unexpected, considering the plan's heavy reliance on existing recycling capacity at a time when disposal costs have increased significantly. On social media, some environmental activists are calling for the bin collection cycle to switch to every fortnight to increase recycling rates. However, with elections looming in May 2026, a decision on this is likely to be postponed until afterwards to avoid any backlash.

The plan also affects safeguarded industrial land, which limits redevelopment options. Scrutiny should have examined the evidence base for apportionment targets, the accuracy of long-term tonnage forecasts, and how they interact with upcoming national regulations. Instead, the committee accepted the presentation mostly at face value.

Busking Code: A Policy Driven by Few Complaints Receives Gentle Treatment

The proposed Busking Code of Conduct was introduced citing "a marked increase in complaints," yet the officer later admitted that many of these originated from "a small number of complainants resulting in a large number of complaints." That inconsistency raised important questions about

proportionality. The committee could have pressed for a clearer distinction between genuine nuisance and intolerance of certain music styles.

The officer expressed a desire to “create a good community in a vibrant atmosphere” while avoiding enforcement unless strictly necessary. While this was reassuring, the risk of normalising a more interventionist enforcement regime required careful consideration. Councillors did not explore the potential for future restrictions, such as a new PSPO, or the legal implications of moving towards a more structured code.

Leisure Fees: Controversial Policies Treated Lightly

The fees and charges report was the most politically sensitive agenda item. It included expanding the ‘Fair Access’ system, removing age-based concessions for those over sixty, offering free gym and swim for asylum seekers, and a deliberate ten per cent increase for private schools. Recently, there has been considerable criticism from the national media over these new benefits for asylum seekers, yet no councillor questioned the fairness for older residents who just above the pension credit threshold but have lower incomes than many on Universal Benefit who have children.

Previously, representatives of the boroughs’ swimming pools have expressed concerns that the council is pricing out residents from using the borough’s swimming pools and that the council has not recognised the importance these facilities have both socially and medically for senior citizens.

The officer described the Fair Access system as supporting “those who need it most,” while a resident might reasonably question why some groups will receive free services and others face higher charges. The private school uplift was defended as “cost recovery,” but the wider implications for local education partnerships were not addressed, as some private schools have indicated they will withdraw from partnership agreements due to the new discriminatory charges. Each of these topics deserved thorough scrutiny, yet the committee approached them cautiously.

Budget Monitoring: Structural Problems Underexamined

The quarterly budget report showed an overspend of £336,000, mainly due to recycling costs, library staffing, and a fifty-five percent overspend in emergency planning. Councillors asked about agency staffing and the Waste Reserve, but the root causes of these pressures were not thoroughly investigated. The sharp increase in mixed recycling disposal costs, for example, raises strategic questions about the long-term sustainability of the borough’s recycling approach.

There was also limited discussion of the implications for future budgets, despite some pressures persisting across multiple cycles. Officers were confident in their mitigation strategies, but confidence is not a substitute for challenge. A more assertive committee might have sought clearer assurances on how long the Waste Reserve can absorb volatility.

Conclusion: A Committee Shaped by Political Cooperation

The meeting demonstrated a polite but overly gentle model of scrutiny. Significant policy questions were raised, yet councillors appeared hesitant to pursue the tougher lines of inquiry. This may reflect the long-standing Lib Dem and Green electoral cooperation across several cycles, which has stabilised relations but may also have softened the instinct to challenge. As the next election approaches, the Greens, in particular, seem reluctant to put pressure on the Liberal Democrat administration. For residents seeking firm and balanced oversight, this dynamic may be becoming a liability rather than an asset.

You can access the papers of the meeting and the webcast by clicking [HERE](#)

This week with Holy Trinity

From Holy Trinity, Twickenham Green

Gardening Social - This Saturday

Come and be part of the Holy Trinity gardening gang, implementing our exciting new planting scheme. Gardening mornings run from **10.30am-12.30pm** and the final date for this year is **Saturday 22 November** (please bring along gloves and tools if you have them).

Joint Social - Wednesday 26 November

We've had some great socials for men and women this year and we are now excited to end this year's socials with a joint event. Everyone is invited to join for a meal and drinks at Greek Unique on **Wednesday 26 November**. This is a great opportunity to get to know everyone better in a relaxed and fun social setting. If you would like to come along, [please click here to complete the short sign up form](#). Alternatively, you can email (socialsteam@htchurch.org), or speak to Jon or Fleur.

Christmas Decorating Social - Saturday 6th December

We welcome all ages to this special social session where we prepare the church for our Christmas services - our large carol services will be held in the main church. If you are available on **Saturday 6th December, 3-6pm**, we would love you to join for an afternoon of Christmas decorating, refreshments and light entertainment (music and maybe a Christmas film on the church monitors for our younger helpers). To help us plan for the refreshments, [please complete the form at this link if you plan to come along](#).

Foodbank Focus: November

This month we ask for your support in donating Advent calendars, especially those of the chocolate variety, to help the Food Bank spread some joy this Advent and Christmas. Although we will not be holding a designated gift service this year, we are encouraging all who can to make donations to the Food Bank - including special Christmas treats.

[A list of items currently being requested by the local foodbank can be found by clicking here.](#)

Donations can be deposited in the foodbank tubs outside the vicarage, 7:00am to 8:00pm.

The Green Pop Up Café

The Café is open on **Thursdays from 10.30am-12 noon**. Come along for refreshments and a chat. Everyone welcome, please encourage anyone you know who would enjoy meeting up with others to come along on Thursdays too.



HOLY TRINITY TWICKENHAM

Speculation Mounts Over Mansion Tax

By Micheal Jones

The days before a Budget often feature their familiar dance of hints, half-promises, and strategic leaks, but this year the steps feel more pointed as talk of a mansion tax again enters the national conversation. What appears to be a routine dispute over fiscal fairness has roots that reach well beyond Westminster, for it was here that Vince Cable, when MP for Twickenham, first developed the idea that rising house prices could represent real affluence; that bricks and mortar might serve as a simple proxy for wealth without involving income. It was a theory born during a specific period of southern asset inflation in the early 2000s, when geography seemed to offer more reliable prosperity than labour.

Cable's idea has never quite left his party's bloodstream. Recently, it has been revived by Councillor Gareth Roberts, the Liberal Democrat Leader of Richmond Council, who has supported a Council Tax system that places heavier burdens on higher-band homes, considering it 'progressive.' His argument, marked by themes of modernisation and fairness, reflects the party's gradual shift to the left since the coalition era, echoing older liberal instincts that date back to Edwardian proposals for land value taxation. Those early advocates, committed to fairness, contributed to the split in the old Liberal Party and, as George Dangerfield noted in his famous account, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, accelerated the political realignment that enabled Labour to emerge.

A Borough Misjudged by Westminster's Abstractions

Such history flickers strangely against the realities of Twickenham's neighbourhoods. The town comprises a collection of family houses and modest terraces in Twickenham, Teddington, the Hamptons, and Whitton, with homes valued higher due to their location rather than any display of wealth. More than **13,600 properties** are in Bands F, G, and H, yet many of their occupants are pensioners or long-standing families living on incomes that have not kept pace with the valuations assigned to their front doors.



Two variants dominate the current debate. One is a surcharge on higher band homes that would remove around **£25 million** from local budgets. The other, the mansion tax conceived by Cable and now revisited by Labour, would raise approximately **£18 million**. Both are presented as levies on affluence, though both would impact households whose prosperity is more theoretical than real, putting pressure on residents whose security depends on continuity rather than liquidity.

It is here that the modern liberal left's suspicion of inheritance becomes more evident. Deferred payment, often marketed as a concession, turns the charge into a debt settled only through the estate, effectively acting as another form of inheritance tax. The logic is clear. If inequality is increasingly viewed as inherited rather than earned, then inherited property becomes the next area for potential correction.

The Wider Question Westminster Dares Not Spell Out

Behind the public debate, a quieter choice exists. The government must either expand the tax base or reduce spending, especially on welfare benefits, now that over four million working-age people are deemed not to need to work. All parties, not just Labour, now confront the challenge of an

ageing population, rising demand for care. Having limited her options during the general election by promising not to raise taxes on what she called working people, Rachel Reeves is now considering new ways to raise revenue from the system, with property taxes naturally coming into focus. A mansion tax, therefore, presents an attractive third option, a measure that seems to place sacrifices only on those with expensive homes, though the reality is much more complex.

The impact on Twickenham's civic life would not be minor. Redirecting tens of millions of pounds from household budgets would weaken independent shops and small businesses that rely on regular customers rather than passing foot traffic. Larger homes might be divided to cover rising costs, slowly changing streets that have stayed stable for generations. And younger people, lacking intergenerational support and facing increased property burdens, may feel forced to seek higher salaries rather than socially vital but modestly paid roles such as teaching or nursing, reducing the pool from which the public sector recruits.

Supporters of a mansion tax argue that wealthy constituencies like Twickenham should contribute more to the national budget so resources can be allocated to areas in greater need, presenting this as an act of national solidarity rather than punishment. They suggest that the revenue would bolster councils in areas such as Bradford or Hull, whose budgets are under strain, and ease pressure on younger renters and workers in regions where wages have struggled to keep up with living costs. However, the benefits of such redistribution would mostly be experienced elsewhere, leaving Twickenham to bear the burdens of a policy designed for the country as a whole, rather than here.

Supporters also point out that many comparable countries rely more heavily on property taxes than the UK, and that the current Council Tax system, still linked to valuations from the early 1990s, creates distortions that ministers have been hesitant to address. Opponents argue that a simple revaluation could fix these imbalances without creating new cliff edges or discouraging aspiration. Conservatives, for their part, have shown little interest in such reform, aware that any re-examination of Council Tax bands would reveal a different set of inequities and require transitional arrangements.

A Settled Neighbourhood Confronts an Unsettled Idea

Conservative resistance is based on the belief that taxation should not penalise the very aspiration that home ownership embodies. They argue that a house's valuation is not a reliable indicator of its owner's circumstances, and that policies which conflate the two risk increasing precariousness rather than addressing inequality. In Twickenham, where apparent affluence conceals a much more fragile reality, that concern is far from theoretical.

For advocates on the left, the issue is simpler and far less sentimental. They argue that the family home should not be sheltered from wider demands of fairness, and that wealthier households should contribute more or accept that rising taxation may, in time, encourage them to live elsewhere. It is a perspective that accords little weight to the sanctity of private property and assigns a more assertive role to the state, not merely in easing hardship but in reshaping the distribution of wealth itself, treating the concentration of housing value in places like Twickenham as an imbalance to be corrected rather than a community to be preserved.

The argument, though presented in national terms, is essentially about local character. In a borough shaped more by history than by luxury, stability holds its own civic value. The mansion tax might appeal to those seeking a quick measure of fairness, but fairness devised in Westminster can be uneasy when applied to everyday life on streets that measure time in decades rather than election cycles.

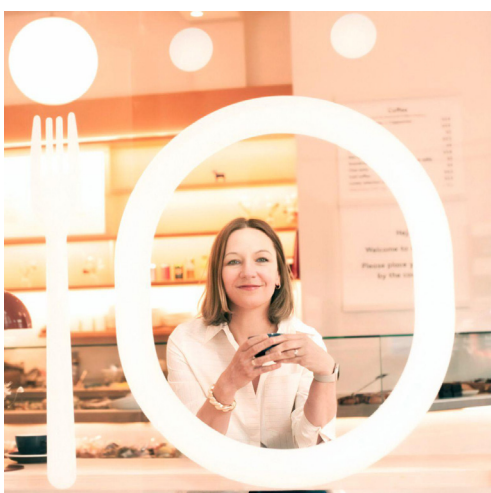
Only Budget Day will confirm whether Twickenham's neighbourhoods are to be asked to bear a tax that could, depending on one's view, stabilise the national finances or unsettle the communities that built them.

SCANDIKITCHEN

I adore Scandinavian food! Regular readers will have picked up on this, as I enthusiastically review any new Scandi cookbook. I also have a good friend who is Swedish and often treats us with her delicious Scandi food. So when I had the opportunity to meet **Bronte Aurell**, the owner of not one, but two **ScandiKitchens** and the author of numerous cookbooks, I jumped at the chance.

Over a light, but incredibly tasty, lunch trying some of the range of delicious open sandwiches for which ScandiKitchen is famous, I found out more about Bronte, and discovered that she really is a Scandi superwoman.

ScandiKitchen is 18 years old. It first opened in Fitzrovia (at 61 Great Titchfield Street) on Bronte's birthday and also the date her first baby was due. So, not surprisingly, as her daughter was born that same day, Bronte considers her business to be another of her babies. At the Fitzrovia site there are frequent queues of people waiting to buy takeaway or eat in. It's a very well known secret among local office workers, and in the basement there is a boutique shop stocked with all manner of Scandi foodie delights. This summer, Bronte opened **ScandiKitchen Victoria** at 42 Buckingham Palace Road. She told me that the customer profile is very different, not surprisingly, at Victoria, as lots of tourists wander in and are pleasantly surprised at what they discover.



Danish by birth, Bronte has long resided here in the UK, she even lived in Edinburgh for a while. She has always wanted to be a chef, but family pressure persuaded her to go to university first. Having studied communications, she started work for a number of food companies, including the early start up days of Innocent Drinks, now, of course, ubiquitous with smoothies, juices and other drinks.

ScandiKitchen isn't just a micro group of cafés, it's a thriving mail order business too. My Swedish pal Satu often adds a few items to her regular orders for me, but I also know that Ocado has a good Swedish Shop online (although they have stopped stocking the wonderful Erik's Remoulade that I loved). Luckily, Bronte imports another excellent remoulade that has a longer shelf life and is still delicious. In addition to the two cafés, Bronte also supplies larger UK food retailers and wholesalers with her products.

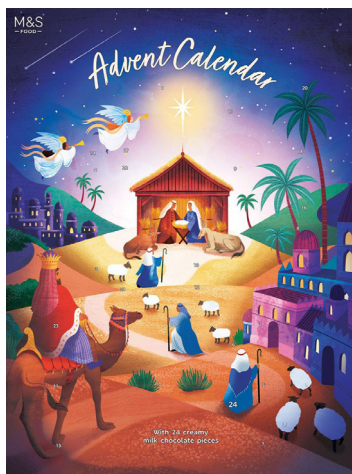
Rye bread, Kalles Kaviar, remoulade, dill crisps, specially strong vinegar for pickling, unusual cheeses and, of course, herrings are my favourites. On the subject of herrings, only ScandiKitchen stocks my favourite variety, Abba Skargardssill (herrings in roe) but other varieties are widely available in most supermarkets.

ScandiKitchen also wins my prize for the very best newsletter. Every Friday morning it pops into my inbox, and is a mine of weird - often very funny - Scandi facts and brilliant illustrations. I assumed, wrongly, that a smart agency was preparing this each week, but no, it's yet another of Bronte's amazing talents! She has subscribers all over the world, who often pop into the cafes when in London to meet her and her team. I urge you to sign up on the website scandikitchen.co.uk and your weekends will henceforth begin with this little gem of Scandinaviness.

Advent Calendars

Each year, Advent - or 'Countdown to Christmas/Holidays' calendars seem to become more interesting...or even, perhaps, outrageous? My childhood memories of opening a paper window to find a cute little image of the nativity are long gone, of course, and now it seems that all manner of companies and products produce something special as we hurtle towards Christmas.

You can spend a small fortune if you're so inclined, but there are also some excellent value calendars to be found, if you know where to look. In the past, I've always been such a fan of the **Divine Chocolate Advent Calendars** - not only is it a highly ethical, Fairtrade producer, but for years the Advent Calendar actually represented what Advent is all about. Sadly, I was shocked to learn that this year, they've 'gone rather woke' and changed from a lovely nativity scene to a general festive one. It's still excellent value at just £5.60 (on offer from £7.50) at Ocado or at full price at other retailers including Oxfam.



Hurrah! Help is at hand if you want to instil the true message of advent to your friends and family. Good old **Marks & Spencer**, which always has a great value range, has a 'proper' one, complete with chocolate pieces and amazingly good value at just £2.75.

Another chocolate calendar that I'd recommend is the **Guylian** one that contains three different flavours of 100% Fairtrade cocoa Belgian chocolates: new sea salt caramel seahorses;

original praline shells and milk truffle seahorses. In recyclable packaging is available from Sainsbury's Ocado and Amazon for £15.



If treating yourself or an adult loved one, you might consider this beautiful one from luxury Belgian chocolatier **Pierre Marcolini**, which has an Art Deco theme to its Christmas range this year. This calendar has a luxury chocolate behind each door: pralines, powdered truffles and Petits Bonheurs. It's not cheap, but luxury never is - it's £54 (179g) from Harrods (mail order available too) or from the Notting Hill or Marylebone High Street shops.

Another luxury chocolate one to consider is **Venchi** (with a lovely shop in Richmond, don't forget). It has a limited edition Christmas collection beautifully illustrated by internationally acclaimed artist Alice Bureau. The Advent calendar is an elegant countdown to Christmas and filled with assorted Venchi chocolates. £58 (356g).



The last of the choccy ones, but by no means the least, is a fabulous one from British company **Chococo**. **You will need to order by 26 November**. Uniquely, it offers a different flavour of their delicious chocolates each day. They have also created several new flavours, including Cocoa Fruit Caramel and Purely Pistachio. On opening door 25, festive feasters will find 'Fizzy Pudding' a festive-spiced praline topped with popping candy. There are two Advent Calendars to choose from at £37.50 for 250g, the classic selection of 25 different flavours and a vegan-friendly, plant-based selection of 13 different flavours, all crafted with Chococo's sustainable, slave-free Direct Trade chocolate from Colombia and Ecuador. All packaging is 100% plastic free too, in keeping with the company's ethos. These Advent Calendar boxes and other Christmas lines are available online at www.chococo.co.uk

If chocolate isn't your choice, then there are so many others, ranging from cheese, to gin and whisky, alcohol free drinks and even chilli sauces.

How about Fever-Tree's **Ultimate Gin & Tonic Advent Calendar**: This year's calendar features a botanical design with door and drawers to unveil either a Fever-Tree mixer (150ml) or a premium gin mini (60cl). Together, these create 12 perfect seasonal serves. Tonics include Mediterranean, Elderflower and a ginger ale, chosen to pair with Tarquins Rhubarb & Raspberry Gin. Household spirit names such as Sipsmith and Hendricks are joined by up-and-coming brands to tickle the tastebuds. Available in-store and online at John Lewis, Harvey Nichols, Ocado, and Waitrose. RRP £70.



For a non drinker, you could consider **Wise Bartender's Alcohol-Free Advent Calendars**, the perfect choice for anyone cutting back or skipping alcohol this festive season. Each calendar (£80 incl. delivery) includes 24 drinks from top brands like Lucky Saint, Tom Holland's Bero Beer, Sea Arch and Sip Cocktails. Choose from: **Sweet & Tasty** – cocktails, ciders & botanical spirits; **Beer** – a line-up of AF craft brews; **Mixed** – the best of both. Available now at wisebartender.co.uk

And now, for the Ultimate Foodie, the **Ultimate Hot Sauce & Spice Calendar from Chilli No. 5**. It's a very luxurious and spicy journey through 24 days as each day reveals a new treasure, using the finest ingredients. Whether you're a seasoned chilli connoisseur or just beginning your spicy journey, this is a great gift for anyone who appreciates both heat and flavour. £125.00 from Selfridges or chilli-no5.com Contents include Chinese Hot & Sour Sauce, Wicked Wasabi, Cheeky Chimichurri. White Truffle and much, much more.



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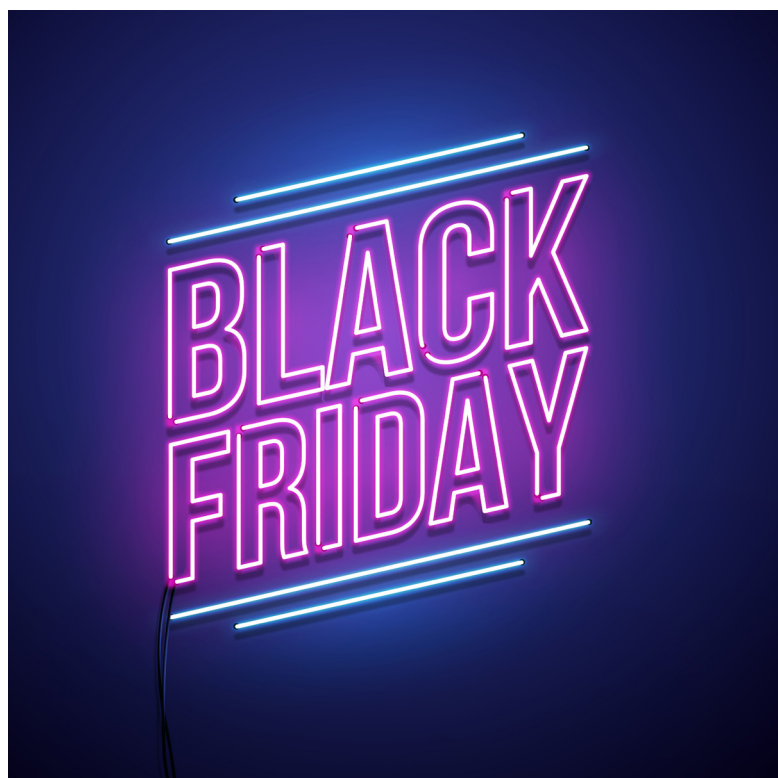
By Bruce Lyons, Crusader Travel

“Let’s do it; Take a look at Black Friday offers “and sock it to them”

Book it now for this winter, but caution though, the offers are only available to book within specified windows and with limited book by dates. You have to pay a deposit now, but the balance will be nearer the holiday date.

There are literally, for this short time, thousands, perhaps even millions of offers so here is a glimpse:

- Mykonos Kouros Hotel & Suites 5* - 30% off if booked by 3 dec. Applies to Summer 2026 thru next Autumn.
- Chalet Royal Hotel & Spa, Villars Sur Ollon, Switzerland 30% off if booked by 3rd December Winter stay 25/26
- Drift Hotels Boutique USA. Palm Springs, Santa Barbara/Los Cabos & Nashville book by 3rd Dec- 30% off
- Hotel Groups Like Melia -worldwide; Iberotelt mainly Europe, Domes of Greece all have limited offers throughout
- Club Med have (till 2nd Dec) up to £600 per person off their entire product.
- Poseidon Expeditions; Antarctic/Arctic and Specials have, till 30th November discounts from 40% down to 10% dependant of Itinerary & Departure date.
- HX Expedition Cruises have 35% off if booked by 3rd December and they go to similar destinations as Poseidon but also Galapagos & Around South America.
- There are regular Cruise Lines like Norwegian with 50% off, there are companies like GAdventures with 30% off till end December (book by) Thers Cycling / Walking/ Small Groups to almost anywhere.



So, get ahead of the Budget save a bob or two and stay a step ahead of Rachel!! Rachel may have other plans for us next week.

So, don’t delay Book today

Come on down “Put a Sock (Ukrainian) in it”.



Too early?

By Deep Patel

~ Life Through the Eyes of a Twickenham Shopkeeper ~



Shhh... can you hear that? No? Then turn down your TV or radio and try again...hear it now? ...I'm talking about the jingle sounds of distant sleigh bells...hear it yet? Not yet? Well...it's obviously too early in your household then...but over this past week it's been a real conversation topic in my newsagent shop...and it's always an interesting one each year I find.

My brother has been desperate to bring down the Christmas tree from our attic since pretty much August (and before you start to think "oh isn't that sweet", yes it would be if my brother was 6 years old but he's a blooming fully grown adult and older than me even). Anyway, I managed to distract him from that by telling him that STRICTLY there will be NO talk of Christmas decorations going up in our shop until after Halloween and Bonfire Night have passed. Now both have passed us, I get daily (actually more like hourly) reminders from my brother to "clear my rubbish away" to make space for him to access the attic to get down the many boxes of sparkling decorations that he lovingly stored away there at the start of this year. I was interested to find out when the rest of Twickenham felt would be appropriate to crack out the Christmas decs, the answers were very varied and the reasons even more so...

I was proud to learn that the majority of Twickenham were aligned with my thinking (it's not often I get to say that) and the majority of my customers felt that there should be no whisper of Christmas until the 1st of December (these people are called logical and reasonable thinkers, people like me). Retailers love to start selling Christmas things well in advance to firstly help customers plan their Christmases with plenty of time (and to prolong what is for many retailers the most profitable season of the entire year of course). This "retailers view" was fully supported by

those who felt that Christmas should be made a big deal of as soon as the clocks go back in order to help fill our lives with a dose of sparkle and light to ward off the sadness when the nights start to draw in. I could understand that to an extent, lights help me feel happier when the days start getting dark at 4pm that's for sure.

Then to add another view to the mix, some of my customers who were devout Christian customers who enlightened me that in their view, true Christians would traditionally only decorate their homes near midnight on Christmas Eve would you believe!! Apparently this was in order to celebrate Christmas more precise and accurately. I had one family visit my shop who told me they put decorations up 3 days before Christmas and take them down on Boxing Day morning ...and they had young children too...that was a new one for me. When I asked them what was the big hurry in taking down their decorations (I mean removing decorations on Boxing Day morning is perhaps a little severe?). The reason they gave was because "it's all over by Boxing Day, so sitting around looking at them for the next twelve days is like sitting around looking at an empty chocolate bar wrapper, despite being finished, still there)". When they said it to me that way, I remember thinking they may have a valid point...well Boxing Day morning is still a little severe though don't you think?

Yet another factor that I have noticed is what I think is a big contributor to the desire to "start Christmas"...the weather...it has been the first of the cold weather we have seen in Twickenham this past week, and as soon as it got cold, many more of my customers were talking about wanting to get their Christmas decorations out...I am almost certain that there is a subconscious movement in our minds to make us think "if nature is getting darker earlier and taking away our light...we will make our own and bring back the warmth and brightness to our lives"...almost like a sort of fight back response...hence as soon as it has got extra cold and dark suddenly, even though it's not the 1st of December, I have noticed people suddenly also have an awakening desire to light up their homes with lights and decorations...it's comforting isn't it...sort of warming...improves mood...good for the mental health...makes us feel happy again somehow...I get it now...oh crap...as much as I don't like to admit it...maybe my brother was right on this occasion.

I will go and get down the boxes from the attic then I guess. Happy decorating Twickenham folk...hear the sleigh bells jingling in the distance now...?

Remember...

"Warmth and light don't matter to those who can create their own joy... whatever it takes!"

MY CREATURE-KINDNESS TIP OF THE WEEK...

STOP ANY INSECT KINDLY (GOOD KARMA): Sprinkle Olbas oil around places where you don't want them to come (but NOT directly on them) ...they will go without you having to harm them.

For ANY specific tip to stop any "pest" or insect KINDLY (for good karma/blessings), email me: InsectLoversUnite@gmail.com or join my Facebook page: "INSECT LOVERS UNITE"

Bomber's Moon

by William Ivory

Teddington Theatre Club at The Noël Coward Studio at the Hampton Hill Theatre

With its performance run aptly opening on Armistice Day, *Bomber's Moon* is a significant play to commemorate eighty years this year since the end of the Second World War.

The avenue set design, by director Wesley Henderson Roe, depicts a detailed busy living area. Surrounded by bookcases, obsolete cameras, and other personal possessions, and with a working kitchen area, it creates an authentic atmosphere of the room of a housebound elderly man in a residential care home.

However, this elderly man is one who has had a powerful past. He is Jimmy, who had been a rear gunner in a bombing crew during the Second World War.



Jimmy has gained a new carer. Played with vigour and a constant energy, Oliver Tims portrays a nervy fussy presence as David, the young carer. Their relationship is sometimes touching, but sometimes irritating to each other.

Despite Steve Taylor's Jimmy turning the air blue, he creates moments variously of reticence, hostility, warmth, and tenderness for his character as his past memories unravel.

As the plays progresses, one is aware that there is a deafening metaphorical sound of tables being turned, for *Bomber's Moon* is a true character study that makes one ask who really is the most dependent. Jimmy's flashbacks of wartime are atmospheric, dark, and revealing. We witness a strong performance as David's persona comes apart at the seams in a test of who really is the stronger party.

Moody lighting by Ed Pagett, and the effective sound designed by Jacob Taylor enhance the atmosphere. The first half is tight but the second act rather stretches out, making it hard to appreciate its climax and its moving ending. However, performances are vibrant and it is a successful two hander with a wonderful text, an intense study directed in great detail by Henderson Roe.

In *Bomber's Moon*, we witness a very poignant journey from two men of different worlds and eras in what evolves as a truly worthy tribute to the men of the RAF Bomber Command.

Read Heather Moulson's review at www.markaspen.com/2025/11/14/bombers-moon

Photography by Steve Sitton



Possum Trot

by Kathy Rucker

Kevin Nolan at the Tabard Theatre, Chiswick until 29th November

Half a dozen bottles behind the bar, plain wooden walls with flickering “Bud Light” sign, we could be in any 1970s America diner. Then a young girl talks about her potential career as a content creator, and having long Covid. We realise that *Possum Trot* is set in modern time. The contrast between set and dialogue implies a group of characters clinging to the past, in a diner past renovation.

Possum Trot breezily relates a few days in the life of a small Nebraska family in a dwindling community. In a warm, energetic and funny performance, Sarah Berger leads the cast with aplomb as the matriarchal Maxine. Indefatigable, Max leads her family, runs the diner, and acts as the small town’s mayor, singlehandedly keeping the town alive.



Max’s lifelong friend Duane hangs out in the diner. Played with great charm by Todd Boyce, Duane peppers his conversation with groan-worthy jokes, and spends the show trying to recount one joke about a moth who visits a podiatrist. Boyce and Berger’s easy relationship feels the emotional heart of this warm hearted generational story.

Reuben Speed’s evocative and realistic set design is complemented by Scott Le Crass’s naturalistic direction, and by moving performances.

Dani Arlington plays Pru, Max’s daughter, who, weary of her hard life, tries to convince her husband Jeremiah, played by Nikolas Salmon, to sell their small farm, which is in financial trouble. Nev Francis brings high energy to her role of the rebellious Billie, Pru and Jeremiah’s artistically-inclined daughter, who constantly films her family for social media content.

The play’s strength lies in subverting expectations. For a play which opens with the main characters making sandwiches for a wake for a farmer who committed suicide, there’s an unexpected amount of comedy, which culminates with Billie discovering a cow on the roof!

Possum Trot is about the communities that sometimes get left behind, and are forced to struggle to survive. Each of the characters faces a stark choice as to whether to stay, or leave. No particular judgement is given regarding any of their eventual decisions, but in a morose midnight moment, Jeremiah sums it up: “Tradition is just peer pressure from dead people.”



Read Andrew Lawston’s review at www.markaspen.com/2025/11/15/possum-trot

Photography by Bonnie Britain

Emilia

by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm

Questors at the Judi Dench Playhouse, Ealing

'There is volume in our silence' is a phrase that resonates. It speaks volumes indeed and *Emilia* shows us in a sympathetic way how in Elizabethan London women had no power, however talented. It is a part fact, part fiction account of the life of Emilia Bassano, a woman born in 1569, a poet and a trailblazer for what women could achieve. Emilia's own mission is to have her talent and poetry noticed and published, and the play nicely contrasts Shakespeare's success versus Emilia's invisibility.



She is often thought of as the 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets. *Emilia* takes us on a journey through our heroine's life, from early days learning deportment and curtsying in preparation for a life at court, to destitution when her husband dies in debt. Some touching scenes come later on in the play when Emilia is befriended by the washer women of Bankside. Ultimately there is no difference in the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of these the poorest people in London and the ladies of the court.

This delightfully visual production captures everything from the false formality of the court, to the agony of birth and rawness of death with simple yet very effective physical theatre, music (carefully curated by Russell Fleet) and movement. The costumes, creatively designed by Hannah Victory, were a nod to the formality of the Elizabethan hoop skirt and ruff, but cleverly pared down to the skeleton of the hoop. All worked wonderfully well with Bron Blake's pale set of a floor of painted sheets of sonnets and piles of antique books. The overall effect with Graeme Kaye's ethereal and warm lighting design gave the set a gentle mellow impression.

Emilia is very much an ensemble production using a cast of thirteen women, all of whom take on several contrasting roles. It would be unfair to pick out particular performances as everyone painted different characterisations with gentle humour and thought. Pam Redrup has directed this play sympathetically with a light clear touch when the script could at times fall into the trap of yet another feminist narrative from the 21st Century to the 15th!



This thought provoking and enchanting presentation of *Emilia* ends with a montage of women through the ages who have broken through expectations and society's rules with joy and a beautiful empowerment.

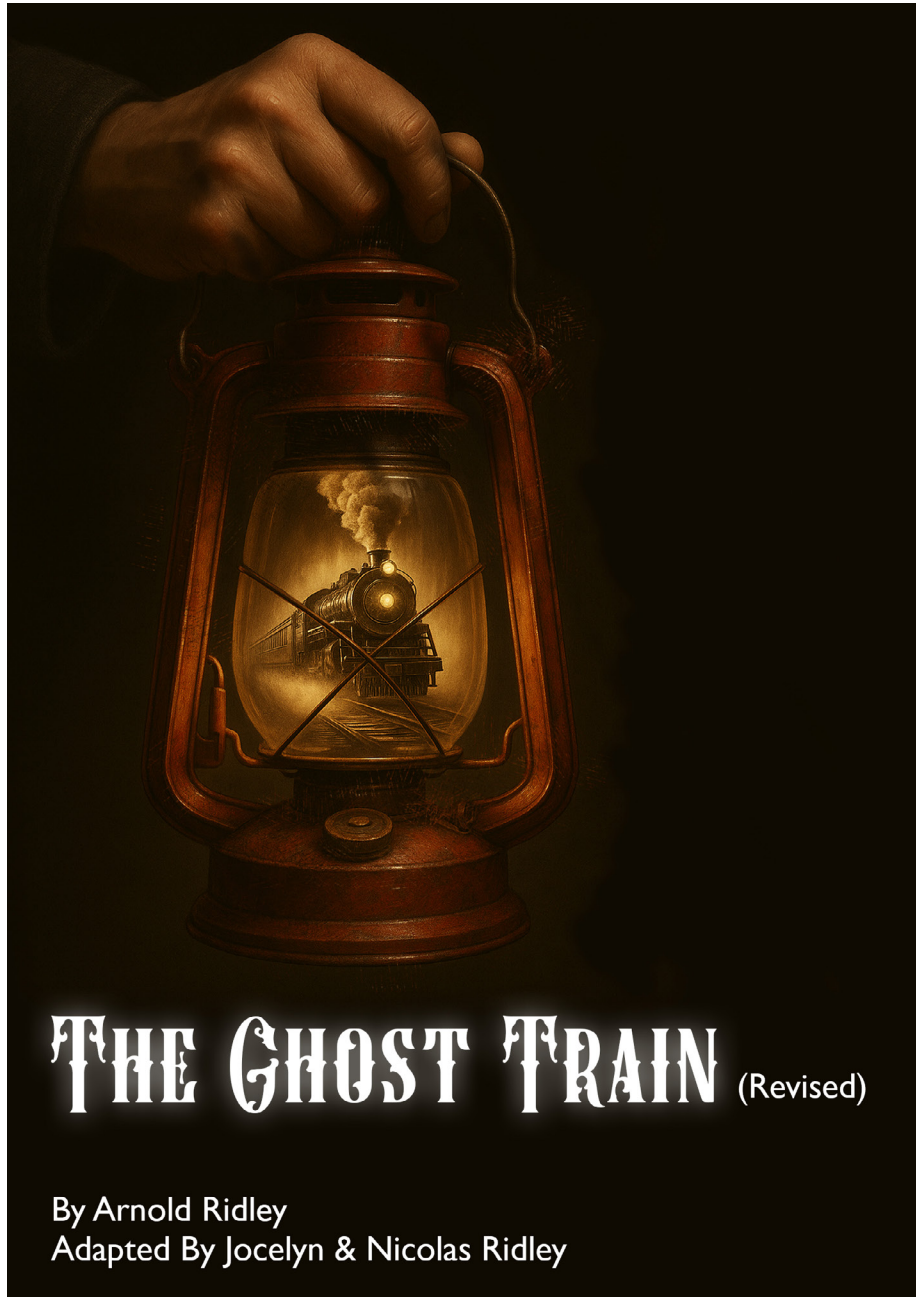
Read Claire Alexander's review at www.markaspen.com/2025/11/06/emilia

Photography by Carla Marker

“The Ghost Train”

Innovating Captioned Performances at the Mary Wallace Theatre

December 6th sees the opening performance at the Mary Wallace of Arnold Ridley’s famous and much-loved comedy-thriller THE GHOST TRAIN which plays till the 13th - with a captioned performance on Thursday December 11th. And to ensure that all our shows can be enjoyed by everyone, it is proposed that future Thursday performances will be captioned.



Inspired by a lonely night spent trapped in a deserted railway station, the young jobbing actor Ridley (to be better known, many years later, as Private Godfrey in DAD’S ARMY) wrote this tale of a disparate group of passengers marooned overnight in a Cornish station.

As darkness falls tensions build, reaching a peak when the legend is told of a ghostly train, said to run that very night and to bring madness and death to those who encounter it!

The play opened in 1925, ran for over 600 performances in the West End and has been a firm family favourite ever since and seldom out of professional and amateur repertoires.

Join us for this our Centenary production and you will see that time has not dimmed any of its suspense, thrills and humour. A Christmas treat for all - yes, for all.

THE GHOST TRAIN at the Mary Wallace Theatre - December 6th-13th with a Captioned Performance on Thursday 11th.

Booking and further information at
www.richmondshakespeare.org.uk



TOWN CENTRE CHRISTMAS EVENTS



21 NOVEMBER, 3PM

Twickenham Christmas Lights Switch On

21 NOVEMBER, 4PM

East Sheen Christmas Gathering

Milestone Green,
SW14 8LR

27 NOVEMBER, 4PM

Teddington Together, Christmas Lights Up

27 NOVEMBER, 4PM

George Street

BeRichmond Christmas Light Switch On

28 NOVEMBER, 5.30PM

Hampton Hill Christmas Parade

Hampton Hill
High Street

28 NOVEMBER, 4.30PM

Richmond Bridge Christmas Lights

Whitton High
Street

29 NOVEMBER, 2PM

Light Up Whitton, Christmas Market

30 NOVEMBER - 14 DECEMBER

Barnes Christmas Festival

5 DECEMBER, 5PM

Kew Sparkle

Kew Village

Wellesley Road

5 DECEMBER, 6PM

Strawberry Hill Christmas Celebration

7 DECEMBER, 4PM

Hampton Village Christmas

19 DECEMBER, 5PM

Hampton Wick Christmas

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Richmond**
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 Visit Richmond, London

St Mary's University

London Education Providers Sign Historic Partnership



St Mary's University, London (SMU) and South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formally launch a historic partnership between the two organisations to drive skills training and economic growth in London.

With local communities at its heart, the new partnership will see the two organisations collaborate closely to deliver an enhanced experience and outcomes for students and sees the constituent colleges of STCG become Associate Colleges of SMU.

The partnership formalises the relationship between SMU and STCG as the organisations develop opportunities for progression, articulation, validation and franchise arrangements across areas of shared academic portfolio.

Over time, the organisations aim to create a comprehensive range of academic and vocational pathways, including apprenticeships, from level two through to level six.

Through collaboration with employers, the partnership aims to deliver enhanced skills training across South and South-West London, supporting social mobility and economic growth.

Speaking of the partnership, St Mary's Vice-Chancellor Professor Anthony McClaran said, *"I am proud to be signing this agreement with our colleagues at South Thames Colleges Group to guide the development of the partnership between the two institutions. Working together, we will deliver outstanding education opportunities for our communities for generations to come."*

Group Principal and CEO of STGC Peter Mayhew-Smith added, *"It's a real pleasure to work with our partners and friends at St Mary's University. This new agreement will give us even better ways to support our students, enrich their experiences and help them to progress to fantastic HE programmes. It's a big benefit to us all and we look forward to a long, happy future of collaboration."*



**St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London**

England Team To Play Argentina at Allianz Stadium

England men's head coach Steve Borthwick has named his team to play Argentina at Allianz Stadium on Sunday 23 November (kick-off 4.10pm, live on TNT Sports).

Maro Itoje will captain England in the final fixture of the 2025 Quilter Nations Series, supported by vice-captains George Ford and Ellis Genge.

Borthwick has made six changes to the starting XV that defeated New Zealand 33-19 last Saturday, with Genge, Luke Cowan-Dickie, Asher Opoku-Fordjour, Ben Spencer, Elliot Daly, and Henry Slade all coming into the side.

"Last weekend gave us plenty to build on, and now the challenge is to push our performance further," said Borthwick.

"Argentina play with emotion and physicality, and they've shown they can beat the best in world rugby this year. We know how dangerous they can be, and we are preparing for a fiercely contested Test match."

"We have felt exceptional support at Allianz Stadium throughout this series. It provides a real lift for the players, and we hope to create lasting memories for our supporters on Sunday."

ENGLAND v ARGENTINA

Sunday 23 November 2025

Allianz Stadium, Twickenham

Kick-off: 4.10pm

- 15. Freddie Steward (Leicester Tigers, 40 caps)
- 14. Immanuel Feyi-Waboso (Exeter Chiefs, 12 caps)
- 13. Henry Slade (Exeter Chiefs, 73 caps)
- 12. Fraser Dingwall (Northampton Saints, 7 caps)
- 11. Elliot Daly (Saracens, 73 caps)
- 10. George Ford (Sale Sharks, 104 caps) – vice-captain
- 9. Ben Spencer (Bath Rugby, 13 caps)

- 1. Ellis Genge (Bristol Bears, 74 caps) – vice-captain
- 2. Luke Cowan-Dickie (Sale Sharks, 52 caps)
- 3. Asher Opoku-Fordjour (Sale Sharks, 5 caps)
- 4. Maro Itoje (Saracens, 96 caps) – captain
- 5. Alex Coles (Northampton Saints, 13 caps)
- 6. Guy Pepper (Bath Rugby, 6 caps)
- 7. Sam Underhill (Bath Rugby, 44 caps)
- 8. Ben Earl (Saracens, 45 caps)

Replacements:

- 16. Theo Dan (Saracens, 19 caps)
- 17. Fin Baxter (Harlequins, 17 caps)
- 18. Will Stuart (Bath Rugby, 52 caps)
- 19. Charlie Ewels (Bath Rugby, 33 caps)

- 20. Tom Curry (Sale Sharks, 64 caps)
- 21. Henry Pollock (Northampton Saints, 4 caps)
- 22. Alex Mitchell (Northampton Saints, 26 caps)
- 23. Marcus Smith (Harlequins, 46 caps)



Match Preview: Brighton and Hove Albion v Brentford

Written by Brentford Football Club

Brentford face Brighton and Hove Albion at the Amex in the Premier League on Saturday afternoon (3pm kick-off GMT).

The Seagulls haven't lost a home game since 2 April, beating Manchester City, Newcastle and Leeds already this term. Keith Andrews' side will be looking to record their first-ever Premier League away win against this weekend's hosts. Analysis, team news, match officials and more. Here's everything you need to know ahead of the fixture.

Pre-match Analysis

Stephen Gillett, *Playmaker Stats*: Brighton may need to temper high press with Brentford clinical on counter attack

Two of the Premier League's most unpredictably thrilling teams clash this Saturday. Both clubs finished in the top 10 last season and have earned reputations as astute operators on and off the pitch. They're neck and neck this year, level on 16 points after 11 games.

Brentford have lost only one of their last six meetings against Brighton, but they have yet to beat the Seagulls away in the Premier League.

With that in mind, head coach Keith Andrews will want his side to translate their strong home form into their travels - but the Bees face a stern test against one of five teams yet to lose on home turf this term (Brighton, Arsenal, Sunderland, Bournemouth and Crystal Palace).

Both clubs are frequently cited for their data-led recruitment and resource efficiency. The rapid strides made by two emerging talents, Yankuba Minteh and Yehor Yarmoliuk, have been compelling to track in this context. Signed by Brighton from Newcastle after a scintillating loan spell at Feyenoord in 2023/24, Minteh has quickly become one of the most exciting wingers in the Premier League.

Shortlisted for the Premier League Player of the Month in September, the 21-year-old has been in sensational form at the start of the current campaign, and his ability to leave opponents for dead in 1v1s is evidenced by his numbers. Ranked joint-third for successful dribbles in the division, Minteh's take-on completion percentage of 55 per cent is higher than any player among the league's top 10 dribblers, and he has played more key passes (17) than any other Brighton player this term.

Fresh from consecutive starts for Ukraine during the international break, Yarmoliuk - who is also 21 - has established himself in the heart of Brentford's midfield this season, with his form softening the blow of Christian Nørgaard's summer departure to Arsenal.

Top of the Premier League for blocks this term, with 23, the former Dnipro-1 midfielder has been an effervescent presence in the Bees' engine room and [was hailed for his "really outstanding" performances by his head coach](#) at the end of October.



Beyond his defensive work, Yarmoliuk has dovetailed well with the experienced Jordan Henderson, and his all-round ability is underscored by him ranking among Brentford's top five players for pass completion (81 per cent), tackles won (2.1 per 90) and successful dribbles (0.9 per 90).

At the top end of the pitch, there's an intriguing shoot-out in store.

Joint-second in the Premier League goal charts, with eight, Igor Thiago has made a sensational start to the 2025/26 campaign. After a clinical brace against Newcastle last time out, the Brazilian is averaging a goal every 116 minutes and has scored 47 per cent of Brentford's goals this term - only Man City's Erling Haaland (61 per cent) has netted a greater share for his team.

Just behind Thiago in the Golden Boot stakes is Brighton's evergreen forward Danny Welbeck, whose ruthless finishing has seen him significantly outperform his expected goals. Now 34, Welbeck is the most prolific Englishman in the Premier League with six goals, despite an xG of only 3.89, giving him a positive xG differential of +2.11.

Brighton rank top in the Premier League for high turnovers (101), but may need to temper their press given Brentford's threat in transition, as illustrated by the Bees' four goals on the counter this term. Evolution may be the watchword at both clubs, but who will adapt best to their opponents at the Amex on Saturday?

Scout Report

Dan Long, Sky Sports: Home form has been key for Seagulls under Hürzeler

Brighton had an absolutely storming end to last season in the Premier League. That is not to say they did not start the season well, because they did - the first 19 took in wins over Manchester United, Tottenham, Newcastle and Manchester City. But in that same run of games, there were far too many draws. Nine, in fact.

Nine points, of course, is a tally not to be sniffed at - just ask fellow south coast club Southampton, who picked up only three more across the entirety of the season. But for a team chasing a return to Europe, after they got their first taste in 2023/24, dropped points were costly.

Fabian Hürzeler's side had to play catch-up - and they sure gave it a go. They started the year with a 1-1 draw at home to Arsenal and, from that and the 18 games that followed, they took 34 of the 54 points on offer. If the season had started on New Year's Day, they would have finished sixth, only six points behind Manchester City. In reality, they finished eighth, only five points behind Newcastle, who finished fifth and qualified for the Champions League.

The margins are narrow and unforgiving at times, but while they narrowly missed the main aim, Brighton did set a new record for their fewest defeats in a Premier League season (9), while two more points would have set a new record points tally of 63.

The Athletic reported towards the end of last season that talk of reaching Europe had been banned at the club, but [Brian Owen said in Hot off the Press](#) that he had spoken to Danny Welbeck in the summer, who said they hoped to make the most of other clubs' extra commitments to boost their own chances.

They have had a solid enough start, with the key being strong home form. Manchester City, Newcastle and Leeds have all left the Amex with nothing; Fulham and Tottenham had to rely on late equalisers for a point each. They have only taken five points from the first six on the road, but then again, only

three teams have picked up 10 or more so far anyway (Tottenham, Arsenal, Chelsea).

They are three points worse off than they were at this point last season, though. And, without Welbeck, there might not be the level of positivity there is right now.

The 34-year-old finished last season with 11 goals in all competitions, which represented his second-best tally in a single season, but he scored twice in the 3-1 win at Chelsea on 27 September and now has six in his last six games.

Seven more and he will hit a new milestone of 13 in a single season; 17 more and he will join the Premier League 100 Club. For now, an England recall looks out of the question, unfortunately for him.

Meanwhile, the fixture list is a little kinder-looking for Brighton over the next few weeks; after the Brentford game, they face Nottingham Forest, Aston Villa and West Ham.

And while it is all well and good beating the Premier League's big-hitters on the regular, these are the games they must take points from to spark that European challenge again.

In the Dugout

Fabian Hürzeler

Born in February 1993, during the time his Swiss father and German mother were working in the USA, Fabian Hürzeler started out as part of Bayern Munich's youth system after returning to Europe aged two. He spent the best part of a decade with Die Roten, working his way up to play for Bayern Munich II, while also playing for the German national team with the U15s, U16s, U17s and U19s.

Hürzeler moved on in 2013, first to 1899 TSG Hoffenheim II, then to 1860 Munich II a year later, before dropping to the fifth tier of German football with Pipinsried, where he combined playing with the role of head coach, while also working as assistant manager of the German U18s and U20s. His coaching credentials were clear from the start, as Pipinsried won promotion from the Bayernliga Sud in his first season.

After four years, he left the club in the summer of 2020 and was appointed assistant at St Pauli. Two-and-a-half years later - aged just 29 - he became head coach after the departure of Timo Schulz, four months before he was granted his UEFA Pro Licence, and led the club to a fifth-place finish in the 2. Bundesliga in 2022/23.

Hürzeler's side flourished in 2023/24, though, and went unbeaten in their first 20 games of the season, on the way to pipping Holstein Kiel to the title by a single point to secure a return to the Bundesliga after 13 years away.

Just three months after signing a new contract at St Pauli in March 2024, Hürzeler took over from Roberto De Zerbi at Brighton, becoming the Premier League's youngest permanent manager in history at the age of 31.

He turns 33 in February and remains the youngest manager in the entirety of the top four divisions of English football.



6,000 Years of History Unearthed Beneath the Houses of Parliament

From UK Parliament

Archaeologists working at the Palace of Westminster have uncovered evidence of human activity dating back nearly 6,000 years - over a millennium older than the earliest earthworks at Stonehenge. The discovery includes more than 60 struck flint flakes, including one worked tool, likely dating to the late Mesolithic or early Neolithic period (around 4300 BC).

The discovery is part of a phased three-year programme of archaeological investigations led by the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority. The findings will help shape future design and construction decisions as part of the Palace's restoration.

The flints were found in undisturbed sand deposits that once formed part of Thorney Island, an area where prehistoric communities are thought to have fished, hunted, and gathered food. These rare finds offer a glimpse into early human life in what is now central London.



19th-century five-pint beer jug inscribed "Geo Painter", linked to George Painter, tavern keeper of the historic Ship and Turtle Tavern in London's Leadenhall area.



Archaeologists observing the substantial remains of the medieval Lesser Hall.



A major medieval discovery – the Lesser Hall.

The Lord Speaker, Lord McFall of Alcluith, said: *"The history of Westminster is long, fascinating and well-documented. Discoveries such as these allow us to add to our knowledge of this ancient site. These archaeological investigations are an important part of the preparation work for the restoration and renewal of the Victorian building."*

Judith Cummins MP, Deputy Speaker of the Commons and R&R Programme Board Chair: *"As we prepare for the restoration and renewal of the iconic Palace of Westminster, a huge amount of work is going on to understand more about the building and the thousands of years of history underneath the home of Parliament as we know it today."*

In addition to the flints, the investigation has uncovered a rich and varied collection of artefacts that shed light on the people who lived, worked, and passed through this iconic location over the centuries. Highlights include:

- **A medieval leather boot, shoe soles, and straps** in a range of sizes, estimated to be around 800 years old.
- **Fragments of intricately decorated clay tobacco pipes**, dating from the reconstruction of the Palace of Westminster after the 1834 fire, likely used by stonemasons working on the site.

A Roman altar fragment, believed to be over 2000 years old, which was re-purposed and likely incorporated into the fabric of a later structure.

- **An ornate lead badge in the shape of a flowering heart**, a popular 14-15th century romantic symbol, appearing on wedding rings and seals.
- **A 19th-century five-pint beer jug inscribed “Geo Painter”**, linked to George Painter, tavern keeper of the historic Ship and Turtle Tavern in London’s Leadenhall area.
- **A decorated medieval Westminster floor tile**, which served as a model for tiles used in the 19th-century rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster.

Chair of the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority Board, distinguished historian, archaeologist and heritage restoration expert, Dr Simon Thurley CBE, said: *“The Palace of Westminster has been a central part of our national story for a thousand years; the location of momentous events that have shaped the UK’s history. As we plan for the significant restoration and renewal of Parliament, we must tread softly on the history beneath our feet, to protect it, and to learn from it. Last year that process of discovery began with the first trial excavations which have already revealed things we didn’t know, as well as confirming things we suspected. It is the start of a fascinating and important journey of discovery.”*



Evidence of prehistoric flint tool-making dating to approximately 4300 BC.



Ornate lead badge in the shape of a flowering heart, a popular 14-15th century romantic symbol, appearing on wedding rings and seals.



Decorated medieval floor tile, which served as a model for tiles used in the 19th-century rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster.

A Major Medieval Discovery – the Lesser Hall

In a major archaeological breakthrough in August 2025, substantial remains of the medieval Lesser Hall, also known as the White Hall, were uncovered.

Dating back to 1167, the two-storey hall originally served as a royal dining space and later played host to key moments in Parliamentary history. Over the centuries, it housed the Court of Chancery, the Court of Requests, and even the House of Commons and House of Lords at different times.

Long thought to have been damaged in the Great Fire of 1834 - which is believed to have originated in the furnace room of the hall’s basement - new archaeological evidence, supported by historical records, reveals that sections of the hall’s medieval stone walls not only survived the blaze but continued to be used until the building’s final demolition in 1851.

This is the most significant discovery of the current archaeological investigations and provides vital insights into the layout and survival of historic structures beneath the modern Palace. The findings will help shape future design and conservation decisions as part of the Restoration and Renewal Programme.

Head of the Government Historic Estates Unit at Historic England, David Brock said: *“The initial*

finds from archaeological investigations confirm the richness of Westminster as a site. They testify to the variety of human experience on this site. The locating of the Lesser Hall walls is particularly exciting. As this work continues, we hope it will further expand our understanding of the surviving Medieval buildings, especially Westminster Hall, and that the discoveries will enrich our knowledge of this World Heritage Site. It must also pave the way for a sensitive response to the site's past when proposals are made for the restoration and renewal of the Palace."

Archaeological investigations are currently being carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), commissioned by the Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority. These investigations span nine key locations across the Palace of Westminster estate, including Black Rod's Garden, Royal Court, Speaker's Court, Speaker's Green, Cromwell Green, Old Palace Yard, Victoria Tower Gardens, New Palace Yard, and the Thames Foreshore and River.

These areas have been carefully selected in line with current design proposals, targeting locations where future ground disturbance is expected. The Palace sits within a Tier 1 Archaeological Priority Area, an official designation that reflects the site's exceptional archaeological significance and sensitivity. Its grounds have been a centre of royal and political life for over a millennium. In the 11th century, King Canute established a royal residence on what was then known as Thorney Island. Later, between 1045 and 1050, Edward the Confessor built a royal palace on the site while commissioning the first Westminster Abbey, laying the foundations for the Palace of Westminster's enduring role in British history.

So far, the team has uncovered, recorded, and reburied evidence of structures and features from the medieval Palace, later Parliamentary buildings, and the Victorian-era reconstruction. These early-stage works are helping to build a clearer picture of the site's rich and layered history.

Specifically, these ongoing investigations will:

- Enhance understanding of the Palace's archaeology and fill gaps in the historical record;
- Inform future surveys, design proposals and construction strategies, ensuring works are sensitive to the site's archaeological significance;
- Support a faster, more informed consenting process, reducing risk and avoiding costly delays during major works; and
- Enable early mitigation measures with key stakeholders before construction begins.

By the end of this phase, specialists will have dug 14 trial pits, drilled 10 ge archaeological boreholes and surveyed the river foreshore. Archaeological investigations will continue through to 2026, with a full report of the findings to be published 2027.

Archaeology lead at the Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority Diane Abrams said: *"These exciting discoveries and finds are all contributing to the national story and historical knowledge of the Palace of Westminster site and the World Heritage Site. To see rare evidence for prehistoric flint tool making on undisturbed sand deposits in this part of Thorney Island, where Parliament now stands, is fantastic. Uncovering the surviving remains of the medieval Lesser Hall wall along with foundations of former Parliamentary structures is also very special."*

"It is vital we continue these investigations to understand what lies beneath the ground here at an early stage to inform and guide decisions on design and further surveys ahead of future enabling and construction works. This ensures the site's extraordinary heritage and archaeology is managed appropriately while enabling the safe and efficient delivery of the Restoration and Renewal Programme"



Chancellor set to pump millions into playgrounds at the Budget

From HM Treasury

- Chancellor set to announce multi-million makeover for children's playgrounds
- Follows government's landmark Pride in Place programme - a record £5 billion initiative rejuvenating communities
- Funding breaking down barriers to opportunity so every child can thrive

Playgrounds across England are set for a major makeover, with the Chancellor expected to announce £18 million to revamp play areas at Budget.



Rachel Reeves will spruce up local communities with makeover cash for 200 children's play parks across the country.

Evidence shows there are stark inequalities across England when it comes to accessing the outdoors – with children from poorer households spending much less time outside than children from wealthier families.

Outdoor play is crucial for children's health and wellbeing, so the Chancellor is ensuring

every child can enjoy the benefits it brings by delivering on the Government's commitment to break down barriers to opportunity so every child can thrive.

This funding comes as the Chancellor is set to deliver a Budget that makes the fair choices to deliver on the country's priorities to cut NHS waiting lists, cut national debt and cut the cost of living.

The playground investment follows the launch of government's landmark Pride in Place programme - a record £5 billion initiative letting local communities decide how local funding is spent to regenerate their public spaces.

An HMT source said:

This funding will breathe new life into play areas across England, creating safe, exciting spaces for thousands of children.

It will enrich and empower communities – giving every child a place to play and grow, wherever they live.



HM Treasury

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