

# Twickenham & Richmond Tribune



Christmas, Twickenham Green  
Photo by Berkley Driscoll

5<sup>th</sup> December 2025

T&RT



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UK Parliament

Editors: Teresa Read, Berkley Driscoll

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# TickerTape - News in Brief

## South Western Railway

Altered train services and buses replace trains between Clapham Junction and Barnes Saturday 6 December

The lines between **Clapham Junction and Barnes** will be **closed all day** due to maintenance work.

**Queenstown Road** station will be **closed all day**. Please use other nearby stations.

Due to the diverted services, some services via **Wimbledon** will be **revised**.

- **London Waterloo to Reading** services will depart **London Waterloo earlier** and will be diverted between **Clapham Junction and Twickenham**. These services will call additionally at **Kingston and Strawberry Hill**.
- **London Waterloo to Windsor** services will be **revised**. These services will be diverted between **Clapham Junction and Twickenham via Kingston** calling at all stations.
- **London Waterloo to Weybridge via Staines** services will be **revised** and will start from **Barnes**.
- **London Waterloo to London Waterloo via Richmond and Wimbledon** services will be **revised** and will run between **Barnes and Kingston via Richmond only**.
- **Buses** will run between **Clapham Junction and Barnes**.
- **London Waterloo to Hampton Court** services will be **revised** to run **hourly** and will start from **Surbiton**.

Altered train services and buses replace trains in the Barnes area Sunday 7 December

The lines in the **Barnes** area will be **closed all day** due to maintenance work.

**Queenstown Road** will be **closed all day**. Please use other nearby stations.

Due to the diverted services, some services via **Wimbledon** will be **revised**.

- **London Waterloo to Reading** services will be diverted between **Clapham Junction and Twickenham**. These services will call additionally at **Wimbledon, Kingston and Strawberry Hill**.
- **London Waterloo to Windsor** services will be **revised**.  
An **hourly** service will be diverted between **Clapham Junction and Twickenham via Kingston** calling at all stations.  
An **hourly** service will start from **Richmond** calling at all stations.
- **London Waterloo to London Waterloo via Richmond and Wimbledon** services will be **revised** and will run between **Richmond and Kingston only**.
- **Buses** will run between **Clapham Junction and Twickenham via Richmond**.
- **London Waterloo to Woking via Staines** services will start from **Kew Bridge**.
- The afternoon and evening **London Waterloo to Kingston via Hounslow** services will **not** run.
- **Buses** will run between **Clapham Junction and Kew Bridge**.

Seasons Greetings from



*The Tree Agency*

**The Tree Agency**

darryl parkin

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# Seasons Greetings



## CrusaderTravel

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[crusadertravel.com](http://crusadertravel.com)

Escapology Experts

[info@crusadertravel.com](mailto:info@crusadertravel.com)





# A Chamber Tested by Strain and Scrutiny

By James Knight

Richmond's final full council meeting of the year opened with seasonal formality, yet the business that followed revealed a chamber troubled by deeper questions of trust, delivery, and political judgement. The Liberal Democrat administration retains a decisive majority, but the evening exposed points of strain that no amount of procedural composure could entirely disguise. The borough faces real pressures, and the meeting suggested that the political response to those pressures is becoming increasingly contested.

The Leader, Cllr Gareth Roberts, and his deputy, Cllr Julia Neden Watts, appeared visibly uncomfortable for much of the proceedings. In contrast, the other deputy, Cllr Jim Millard, maintained a steadier exterior. Yet all three showed a defensive reflex when questioned, too often resorting to shifting blame elsewhere or challenging the legitimacy of the scrutiny itself. It was a revealing posture, and one that hinted at an administration that knows they are in trouble and is aware that the Greens are polling above them.



## Public Questions on Allotments & Limits to Authority

From the outset, public questions adopted a more probing tone. Residents voiced their concerns about the return of the Shacklegate Lane Allotments to cemetery use, challenging both the decision and the way it had been managed. The Deputy Leader provided a detailed explanation based on cost and capacity, yet the repeated insistence that the decision had not been made “in private” implied an administration aware that public confidence has waned. Where trust is fragile, reassurance alone rarely restores it.

Martin Barker's intervention added a sharper edge to the session. His question, directed at the administration's handling of delegated authority and the wider concerns raised over the Pensford Field decision, pressed not only for clarity but for accountability. Delivered with courtesy yet unmistakable firmness, it underscored a growing unease among residents about how significant decisions are being made. The response, heavy on procedure but light on reflection, did little to dispel that impression.

Members' questions followed, and here too the outlook was mixed. The administration has secured a more favourable settlement than expected, avoiding the worst of a potential cliff edge. However, the medium-term outlook remains challenging. Adult social care costs continue to climb, homelessness puts increasing pressure on the general fund, and inflation has not fallen as much as hoped.

The transformation programme is portrayed as a key stabilising tool, offering plans for redesigned services, more effective preventive measures, and increased efficiency throughout the organisation. Whether it can support such expectations remains uncertain. As the next budget draws closer, the gap between existing structural pressures and political guarantees will become harder to bridge. Moreover, as Labour nationally is already discovering, promises of fiscal optimism often shrink once faced with the reality of public spending constraints.

## A New Idling PSPO and the Question of Proportion

The agreement to introduce a Public Space Protection Order on vehicle idling was presented as a pioneering environmental initiative, with Cllr Alexander Ehmann, chair of the Transport and Air



Quality Committee, claiming that Richmond would be the first authority to adopt such a measure. It was a confident claim, but it did not stand up to scrutiny. Other boroughs have already implemented idling-related PSPOs, and the Council's own report extensively referenced the long-standing model developed by Conservative-controlled Hillingdon. The desire to appear as a leader is understandable, but genuine leadership begins with accuracy, and the administration's case would have been stronger had it acknowledged the precedents it relied upon.

The measure was justified on the basis that soft enforcement had delivered diminishing returns, yet its arrival coincides with a period of unease about the Council's broader approach to penalties. The woman fined for pouring leftover coffee down a Richmond drain has still not received a full apology, and the East Twickenham resident penalised for putting out rubbish early faced a similarly pedantic response. These episodes are isolated, yet they have assumed a symbolic weight because they point to a Council drifting from proportionate discretion into something closer to overzealous policing of its own residents.

### **Councillor's Extended Leave**

A motion was then brought forward to extend Councillor Tony Paterson's leave, a step required to prevent his automatic disqualification for non-attendance and the by-election. The sharp exchanges are reported in a separate article in this week's publication.

### **Housing: A Debate Shadowed by an Inconvenient Record**

The most revealing exchange occurred during the debate on affordable housing, where the administration's narrative clashed with its own evidence. Cllr Varley started the Liberal Democrat response confidently, claiming that his party had "inherited zero completions" in 2018. The statement was made without hesitation or qualification. However, the Council's 2023–24 Housing Monitoring [Report](#) records sixty-two affordable homes completed in 2016–17 and forty-one in 2017–18. These figures may not meet demand, but they are clearly not zero. To suggest otherwise is not a matter of political opinion; it is a claim that does not stand up against the factual record.



This is a serious lapse. The [Nolan Principles](#) require public figures to show honesty and transparency, especially when facing criticism. When a senior councillor makes a statement that contradicts the authority's own published data, trust is undermined. Richmond's political culture has traditionally been characterised by stability and restraint. Claims that diverge from evidence threaten that tradition.

The exchange that followed emphasised the tension between performance and promise. Cllr Varley described criticism as a misunderstanding of viability and planning law, and at times seemed more eager to question the motives of his challengers than to address the main issue. Cllr Millard spoke confidently, but his focus was mainly on projected pipelines rather than current outcomes. The monitoring report shows a clearer picture: overall housing completions have fallen to their lowest level in over twenty years. This is a pattern, not an anomaly.

None of this is meant to ignore the constraints faced by London boroughs. Land is scarce, costs are high, and the planning framework is demanding. Yet, when delivery stalls, accuracy and honesty become even more crucial, not less. Residents recognise the difficulty. What they find hard to accept is a narrative of progress that conflicts so directly with published data. Housing will remain the metric by which this administration is judged, and the chamber is increasingly aware of the gap between ambition and achievement.



## Public Order, Memory and the Moral Weight of Testimony

Later, the chamber turned briefly to a motion supporting a long-service medal for Police Community Support Officers. It passed without dissent, reflecting a rare moment of uncomplicated civic agreement.

The debate on the COVID inquiry carried a different emotional register. Cllr Petra Fleming's account of her brother's death was profoundly moving, and the chamber responded with the stillness such grief deserves. Yet her criticism of Boris Johnson, delivered with unmistakable conviction, rested on a framing that placed uniquely British culpability at the centre of the pandemic story. In doing so, it overlooked the uncomfortable but essential truth that many of the shortcomings she described - late restrictions, limited protective equipment, confused messaging - were felt across Europe, North America and other democratic states whose systems were strained by a virus that outpaced every established model of preparedness. Meanwhile, more authoritarian regimes supplied figures that few observers regard as credible. To present Britain's experience as singularly negligent is to underestimate a crisis that humbled governments across the liberal democratic world.

This omission matters because it reflects a deeper instinct within the Liberal Democrat leadership to treat Johnson not simply as a political opponent but as a kind of symbolic adversary, still carrying, years after the event, the psychic weight of the Brexit divide. Such habits of mind may satisfy certain activists. Yet, they can drift into a form of moral absolutism that obscures proportion and overlooks the broader context in which decisions were made. A more grounded reading would acknowledge the failings in Westminster while also recognising that they formed part of a wider pattern of global institutional strain. That is the judgment many moderate Liberal Democrat voters will privately reach, even if their party prefers a more straightforward, more convenient narrative.



Consistency in standards is essential if moral claims are to carry authority, and here the Liberal Democrats face a further difficulty. While residents were observing strict limits on household contact, the party itself made a centrally directed decision during the final lockdown to resume door-to-door leaflet deliveries ahead of the postponed 2021 local elections, insisting - against both the letter and spirit of public health guidance - that political campaigning constituted "volunteering". This was no confused individual lapse, but a national strategy pursued in full knowledge of the restrictions binding everyone else. It does not diminish the sorrow in Cllr Fleming's testimony to note that such conduct sits uneasily beside the indignation now directed at others. A party that speaks so strenuously of accountability must be willing to apply the same standard to itself.

## A Closing Reflection

This meeting did not deliver political drama, but it illuminated the pressures shaping Richmond's civic life. The Liberal Democrat administration remains capable and committed, yet its responses on housing and enforcement revealed a defensiveness that sits uneasily with its claims to openness. The borough faces real challenges, and no single party will resolve them overnight. But confidence in local leadership depends on accuracy, humility and proportion. Where those qualities are strained, scrutiny will only intensify.

As the chamber adjourns for the winter recess, one truth stands above the rest. Richmond's residents do not expect perfection from their council, but they do expect honesty, fairness and a willingness to acknowledge difficulty. Those virtues, more than any policy instrument, will determine the authority's standing in the months ahead.

To access the committee papers or watch the webcast of the meeting, click [HERE](#)

*Photos ©Twickenham & Richmond Tribune*



# EEL PIE ISLAND ARTISTS

## OPEN STUDIOS

### CHRISTMAS 2025

#### Sat 6<sup>th</sup> and Sun 7<sup>th</sup> December

CARTOONISTS  
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VIA EVENTBRITE



Dear Editor – Bill Stewart

## Twickenham Riverside Scheme

I noted this extract in your last issue:

*“Given the scale of borrowing and the weight of the Riverside scheme within the programme, the question now facing the Council is whether its capital priorities genuinely reflect the areas of greatest strategic need, or whether prestige projects continue to crowd out investment that could deliver stronger financial resilience over the next decade.”*

Dare I hope that this absurd Riverside scheme will be abandoned for financial reasons, and that we can start again to provide something of real ‘strategic need’. Like community facilities (even a lido!), businesses that will regenerate Twickenham, oh and public toilets. And not, private housing and a pub/restaurant on the best part of the site.

I dream on.

W Stewart  
Teddington

## Next week at Richmond Council

On Monday, 8th December, the **Licensing Sub-Committee** will meet to discuss KFC Richmond’s application to extend its late-night opening hours. The Richmond Society is opposing this application. The meeting will commence at 11 am and is being held virtually. Please click [HERE](#) for more details.

On Tuesday, 9th December, the **North West London Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee** will meet to discuss 1) urgent and emergency care delivery, 2) implementation of the same day access model in primary care, and 3) all age continuing healthcare in North West London. The meeting will commence at 10 am at Hounslow House, Bath Road, Hounslow. Please click [HERE](#) for more details.

On Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, the **Richmond Burial Trust** will meet to discuss a proposal to use the chapel as a circular-economy hub. The meeting will start at 6pm at York House, Twickenham. For more details, please click [HERE](#).

For guidance on how to participate at different types of council meetings, such as speaking or asking written or verbal questions, please click [HERE](#).



#NotJustAFishmonger



## Rest in Peace

**Stuart Sandys**

**1973 - 2025**

We are profoundly shocked and deeply saddened to announce, that Stuart Sandys, owner, manager and absolute heart of Sandys Fishmongers has passed away suddenly this weekend.

The shop will remain closed for the time being but we will keep everyone updated over the coming days, via our website and social media platforms.

We appreciate your thoughts and prayers, and ask for privacy during this difficult period.



# Council Proposes to Convert the Thames Path into a Major Cycling Commuting Route

By Michael Jones



The Thames Path is one of the borough's great treasures, particularly the stretch below Richmond Hill, where the landscape opens into one of the most celebrated views in London. Generations have valued it as a quiet, accessible walking route and as a place where residents can enjoy a rare sense of space within the capital. This is why the Council's proposed **Towpath Movement Strategy** has prompted such concern, even before councillors have had the chance to discuss it. The report was scheduled for the Transport and Air Quality Committee on Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> December, but the item was withdrawn and moved to a later date after Christmas.

## Maintenance is Welcome, but Purpose Matters

Few residents object to resurfacing worn paths or improving signage. These works are overdue in places and are part of the reasonable stewardship of a popular riverside route. What troubles many is that these improvements are not being undertaken for their own sake. They are being used to support a broader ambition to convert the towpath into an active travel corridor to carry large commuter cycling flows rather than remaining a National Trail intended for walkers.

The strategy sets out plans to widen key sections to around three metres, introduce more formal surfacing, and expand signage and wayfinding. It also promotes the path as a strategic route for cyclists travelling to destinations such as Hampton Court, Ham House and Kew. The Council's own technical papers acknowledge that there is no legal right to cycle on most of the towpath, though this has been allowed on a permissive basis for a long time. Yet, the strategy anticipates a future in which cycling is not simply tolerated but fully embedded.

## Report Describes a Fait Accompli

What has unsettled many readers of the supporting documents is the proposed use of a Definitive Map Modification Order to reclassify much of the towpath as a restricted byway.

One appendix describes this route as a *fait accompli* (page 33 of the report) because once the designation is created and recorded on the Definitive Map, it becomes almost impossible to reverse. The same passage notes that this approach has the advantage of preventing Ramblers and other user groups from challenging the change later if difficulties arise.

For residents who have long suspected that the current administration is more responsive to pressure groups than to the broader public, the tone of the document is troubling. It reinforces the impression that the Council is not acting as a neutral broker balancing competing interests, but as an authority that has already decided the outcome and is now just simply trying to justify it.

### **Missing Legal Duties and Silent Risks**

What is absent from the strategy is any reference to the legislation that created the Thames Path. Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, National Trails are routes for walkers and councils have duties to maintain the footpaths required for the public's enjoyment, and to conserve the natural beauty of the countryside. These duties are nowhere to be found in the report, despite their obvious relevance.



The Council also states that the strategy has no equality implications. This sits awkwardly with its own evidence of existing conflict between cyclists and walkers, narrow pinch points, poor surfaces and tidal sections that already challenge older people and those with limited mobility. Experience from similar routes suggests that when cycling speeds and volumes rise, the most vulnerable walkers withdraw first.

### **A Cheaper Alternative to Proper Cycle Infrastructure**

Perhaps the most significant issue is the broader policy direction implied by the strategy. Instead of investing in segregated cycle tracks along the borough's main roads, the Council appears to be positioning the towpath as a lower-cost alternative that can carry volume commuter traffic without the complications of reallocating road space. These risks are turning a sensitive riverside corridor into a busy transport route at the expense of its landscape character and quiet enjoyment.

### **A Decision that Shapes the Future**

The towpath's future identity is now at stake. Maintenance and sensitive improvements are entirely reasonable, but they must not be used as a vehicle to redefine a National Trail created to be enjoyed on foot. Decisions of this scale should be made with care and with full transparency, not presented in a way that implies they will be locked in permanently before the public has had the chance to respond.

There is still time for the Council to rethink its approach and for residents to express their views. Richmond's river landscape is a jewel in the borough's crown. It deserves decisions that respect its history, its beauty and its purpose.

You can read the officer's report [HERE](#)

*Photos ©Twickenham & Richmond Tribune*



# Ocado to host free festive food pop-up and live choir performance in Richmond - with a guest appearance from Sophie Ellis-Bextor

From Ocado

Ocado is bringing a taste of the nation's favourite Christmas food traditions to west London, with a free pop-up featuring foods inspired by real consumer research into the UK's festive food habits.

On Friday 12th December from 12pm to 2pm at George Street, Richmond, visitors can take a break from their Christmas shopping to enjoy a live carol performance featuring the Ocado choir of Ocado delivery drivers and staff, and supported by the Soul Choir - with a very special guest appearance from pop-princess Sophie Ellis-Bextor at 1pm. Together, they will perform "Season's Eatings" - a reworked Christmas carol created by Ocado that's inspired by the nation's wonderfully varied festive foods.



The event is part of Ocado's Christmas campaign which captures the playful, modern-day British approach to Christmas and celebrates the sometimes unusual but always beloved food traditions that make this season so special. Ocado's special "Season's Eatings" food truck will serve free samples of revamped dishes inspired by real British Christmas food traditions uncovered in Ocado's poll - such as tikka pigs in blankets, crab rarebit, and Dubai chocolate brownies with pistachio cream.

Ocado's research shows that over half of Brits (55%) have festive food traditions, from mince pies topped with cheese (10%) to seafood for breakfast (9%). A third (30%) say they're tired of the same old Christmas foods, while 40% say they're willing to incorporate new cuisines and flavours into their Christmas meal. The pop-up celebrates these quirks, showing that there's no *official* way to do Christmas - only the way you do it!

## Event details:

- **Date:** Friday 12th December 2025
- **Time:** 12pm – 2pm
- **Location:** George Street, Richmond, TW9 1HY

Watch the rehearsal video here: [HERE](#)

Listen to the song here: [HERE](#)



# Enjoy the magic of Christmas music with Ukrainian Social Club

From Ukrainian Social Club

Join Ukrainian Social Club for an enchanting evening of festive music and holiday cheer on Sunday 14 December at St Mary's Church, Twickenham.

Expect a heartwarming programme featuring the best holiday songs, Ukrainian carols, timeless Christmas classics, and lively dance performances.

Bring your family and friends and dive into the holiday spirit together!

Doors open at 6.30pm and the concert starts at 7pm.

[Book tickets for The Magic of Christmas Music.](#)

Come and be part of a magical evening that will fill your heart with joy, music, and the true spirit of Christmas!



## Regal Spice is back!

Regal Spice is back at Twickenham Green and Chunu Miah is back doing the cooking!

Also returning is the Tuesday Banquet Dinner Special, so why not pop down?

020 8893 9291

12 The Green, Twickenham TW2 5AA

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# A Test the Liberal Democrats Did Not Expect

By James Knight

The motion to extend Councillor Tony Paterson's leave of absence ought to have been a routine matter, the kind of procedural business most authorities deal with swiftly and with sympathy. Instead, it revealed something more serious about the Liberal Democrat administration and the political ground shifting beneath it. The extension was required to prevent Councillor Paterson's automatic disqualification for non-attendance and the by-election that would otherwise follow, a point set out in the accompanying [report](#) from the Head of Paid Service. The real story unfolded not in the paperwork but in the chamber.

## A Calm Intervention, a Heated Reply

The Green group raised their concerns with care. Councillor Andrée Frieze stated that her objection was not personal but constitutional. "This extended leave of absence does not benefit residents, and it enables a democratic deficit," she said, reminding colleagues that Mortlake and Barnes Common is the largest ward in the borough. Residents had, in her words, been represented "by effectively two councillors for eighteen months." Her tone was steady, her point measured. It was precisely the kind of democratic question a confident administration should be able to answer.



The reaction from the Leader, Councillor Gareth Roberts, was anything but. He accused Councillor Frieze of being "woefully misinformed". He went further still, suggesting she had implied that a man with "a terminal illness" was "shirking" his duties, concluding sharply, "frankly, you should be ashamed." The force of his rebuke was out of keeping with the intervention that prompted it. It spoke of pressure rather than principle. It revealed a leadership unnerved by what a by-election might disclose.

## Why Mortlake Matters

The Greens have grown in confidence and credibility. Their scrutiny is sharper, their tone steadier, and under their new populist leader Zack Polanski they have risen in local polling. Mortlake and Barnes Common is precisely the ground on which they have been making advances. A contest there would not merely fill a vacancy. It would test whether the Liberal Democrats retain the trust they assume, or whether their majority survives now through inertia rather than conviction.

Leave-of-absence provisions exist for exceptional cases, yet few believe the administration would extend such latitude to a councillor from another party. Representation is not symbolic. It is the daily work of judgement, presence and accountability. Residents of Mortlake are entitled to ask whether they are receiving it in full.

## The Question the Chamber Avoided

The chamber approved the motion, avoiding a by-election. But the debate made clear what was left unsaid. Sympathy for Councillor Paterson is offered freely and without hesitation. Yet sympathy does not settle the democratic question. When a ward is served by two councillors rather than three for a prolonged period, something fundamental is lost. Casework accumulates. Scrutiny suffers. The public voice weakens.

In their reaction, the Liberal Democrats revealed more than they intended. A confident administration does not fear the electorate. A secure leader does not lash out at reasonable scrutiny. And a party that insists it welcomes accountability must accept that, in the end, the electorate is entitled to offer it.

*Photos ©Twickenham & Richmond Tribune*

# Shooting Star Children's Hospices Christmas tree collection

From Shooting Star Children's Hospices

Local children's hospice charity, Shooting Star Children's Hospices, is thrilled to announce the return of their Christmas tree collection service.

This January, in exchange for a donation, they will collect your real Christmas tree, take it away and recycle it. All funds raised will help support local families who have a baby, child or young person with a life-limiting condition, or who have been bereaved.

Working in partnership with JustHelping, a UK charity who aim to empower communities to raise money for local causes, Shooting Star will receive 90% of money raised, with the other 10% distributed to other local charities.

What's more, as well as supporting local families, you will be helping the environment. Recycling and chipping your real Christmas tree with Shooting Star, will reduce its carbon footprint by up to 80% - not to mention saving you time, hassle and mess!

The charity's volunteer elves will collect trees from 24 postcodes in the TW, KT and GU area between Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 January 2026. All you need to do is sign up and register your tree before midnight on Wednesday 7 January 2026.

TW postcodes covered are: TW1, TW2, TW9, TW10, TW11, TW12, TW13, TW16, TW17.

[Register to have your tree collected.](#)





# The Royal Parks appoints first Treescape Curator

From The Royal Parks

Working across [London's eight historic Royal Parks](#), the role will be tasked with creating vibrant, exciting and climate-resilient landscapes for future generations.

The new Treescape Curator will lead the development of thriving, biodiverse and aesthetic treescapes that enhance the beauty of the parks' historic green spaces, to help ensure that the parks remain beautiful, welcoming spaces where millions of visitors can enjoy connecting with nature.

A key priority will be to future-proof the parks' treescapes by selecting and protecting the right trees to adapt to the impact of climate change. The role will champion diversity in tree planting to strengthen resilience against the growing threat of pests and diseases and will ensure that the parks' trees continue to provide habitat for many species - from insects to birds.

The Treescape Curator will also support The Royal Parks' arboriculture team in ensuring that the parks' trees are expertly maintained and protected.

Greg has worked as an Arboricultural Officer at the Royal Parks for eight years. He has previously held roles at Islington Council and delivered tree management services as a consultant for Epping Forest, The Inner and Middle Temple Gardens, City of London, Alexandra Palace and Dulwich Estates.



He said:

*"This is an exciting new direction for the charity, and I am delighted to be appointed to this new role.*

*"We are living through a climate emergency, and it's vital that we rethink how we care for and manage the parks' trees and consider which species and cultivars we plant to ensure that the treescapes of the future continue to flourish.*

*"My goal is to conserve and enhance existing treescapes but also to diversify the species we plant next, to build greater resilience and to create a visually exciting treescape.*

*"A key task will also be to engage with the latest research and collaborate with tree experts and organisations across the sector, to share knowledge and drive excellence in how we shape the treescapes of tomorrow.*

*"I'm equally passionate about inspiring visitors to discover, learn about, and appreciate everything that the many thousands of trees within the Royal Parks offer, from their beauty, to the vital habitats they provide for wildlife."*



# Christmas lunch for Seniors at Sidra, Twickenham

From Sidra, Twickenham

This Christmas, we're hosting a warm lunch at Sidra for seniors who may be spending the day alone.

Christmas is just a fantastic time of the year, especially when celebrated with family or close ones.

Unfortunately, the envious people who are afraid of it and try to hide from sight on that day, and tell people that they are traveling, but the truth is that they are alone. We don't want you to celebrate Christmas alone, so please join us at Sidra on the 25th between 13:00-16:00 to celebrate together.

We believe in providing a helping hand and working to make others happy as much as we can.



At Sidra, we will enjoy Christmas Day with lonely people. Which will be completely **FREE**, including a glass of wine.

Since our places are limited and our stores can accommodate approximately 30 people per branch.

All you have to do is email us or make a call to book. It doesn't matter if you are already one of our customers or if it's your first visit.

Please do not feel embarrassed to book, as it is not your fault that you are in this situation.

Each of us is exposed to spending Christmas alone one day. Just come and enjoy. ❤️

email [twickenham@sidrauk.com](mailto:twickenham@sidrauk.com)





## The Swan at Walton-Upon-Thames

Nestling close to the River Thames at Walton is a pub that's been there since 1770 no less. It's recently had a breath of fresh air pumped into it by its owner Youngs, so we popped along to check it out.

It's in a glorious location by the river, with masses of seating for outside dining when the weather allows. Inside, it's cosy, with log fires and panelled walls (a new addition we were told, but one that certainly looks appropriate). It's been decorated for Christmas, so it was looking particularly festive and welcoming. Our table was in a cosy little window seat nook and for once, the sun was shining so brightly that Ethan, our lovely server, was concerned it might be too bright, but it was fine. We were told that while Youngs has a central buying policy, each chef can devise their own menu, with the proviso that three Youngs classics are included. (fish and chips, steak and a burger if you couldn't guess.) The chef at The Swan, Jonah Barrett, has certainly put together a really interesting and tempting menu with a good range of snacks, really unusual starters and side dishes, plus a few special sharing choices. Add to this a choice of 13 mains.



A Plymouth gin and tonic for me and sparkling water for my husband and then the difficult decision as to what to choose. I chose orange cured chalk stream trout with horseradish creme fraiche, braised fennel, dill oil and a rosemary cracker. It was beautifully presented, but instead of braised fennel, there were thin slices of raw onion, which I felt didn't do much for the dish. The trout was excellent; a generous four slices with no skin, and served with grilled mandarin orange segments rather than fennel. The rosemary crackers were unusual, added texture and another flavour element - and really good too.



My husband started with smoked mackerel fishcake with tartare sauce, hollandaise and a poached egg. Another generous portion, that with a side salad, would make a perfect light lunch for me on a future visit. He declared it to be packed with fish, the egg perfectly poached and his only suggestion was that it could perhaps be accompanied by a small piece of bread so that one can mop up all the wonderful egg yolk and sauces from the plate!





Venison wellington is a signature dish, and having now tried it as my main course, I can see why. It was fabulous: beautifully tender venison fillet cooked pink, with a mushroom filled pastry wrap. The plum and green peppercorn jus was very well balanced and the fig ketchup added a level of sweetness. It was served on a bed of chopped cavolo nero (one of my favourite green veg) and also had a drizzle of basil oil to finish the dish. I was given a steak knife to use, but to be honest, a butter knife would have sufficed to cut through this ultra tender venison. I enjoyed a glass of rioja with my main course.



Husband being a pie fan, had the braised beef shin shortcrust pie which was an artwork in itself. Some serious pastry skills in the kitchen were shown off perfectly. It was served with tenderstem broccoli and very smooth and buttery mashed potato. A small jug of gravy accompanied it, but on cutting into the pie, it was so packed with meat and juices that the gravy wasn't needed.

By this time I was thoroughly 'pogged', as my mother used to say, so no room for anything but an espresso but my husband was determined he could make room for the Bramley

apple tart tatin with vanilla ice cream. It was a square tarte tatin, for a change, and the sharpness of the apple cut through the residual sweetness perfectly.

There is obviously a great deal of skill at the Swan's stoves, especially as Ethan let slip that it was in fact the chef's day off. Jonah has a very sound brigade.



The Swan has a well curated wine list with wines by the bottle from around £25 and 16 available by the glass from around £7. Cocktails are £8-12.



Service is excellent with a friendly, relaxed, yet very professional team. I think the only niggle I have is that the paper napkins are far too small. A better quality, larger paper napkin would do justice to the whole experience of lovely food and service.

On weekdays there are sandwiches available from 12-5, but the main menu also has lots of choice for a light lunch. There is a set Christmas party menu of three courses for £39 (£20 one for children) that includes traditional seasonal fare, as well as a range of other interesting dishes. Ethan told us that the pub quiz is very popular on Wednesday evenings (starting again in the New Year), and of course, Sunday roasts are very popular.

We'll be back soon - perhaps by boat if the weather allows it, as we noticed that there are moorings nearby.



## The Scents of Christmas

If you choose to have a real Christmas tree, then you'll know the lovely festive scent that it imparts. Either way, I always think it rather fun to introduce some special festive aromas to our home in the lead up to the big day. Few things transport us back in time like scent - the warmth of Christmases past can instantly be revived. I've a few suggestions for adding a festive fragrance to your home this Christmas, in a range of price points.

**Scentair** has a number of scents and ways to bring festive cheer: *Pine Forest* captures the unmistakable freshness of fir balsam and winter citrus (so reminiscent of that freshly cut tree with its first burst of green); *Cornucopia* and *Cranberry Apple Marmalade* tart fruits, cinnamon, and clove in vanilla. *Noel* combines sparkling citrus, fresh fir balsam, and sweet red berries with warm spices. *Season's Greetings* blends orange, cinnamon, and clove with fir balsam and cedar boughs—the fragrance of cosy evenings, twinkling lights, and that unmistakable warmth of Christmas. ScentAir's fragrances can be introduced to your home via a diffuser, candle tins, clever holiday hangers (adding fragrance to your tree or garlands) and infused reeds with a ceramic holder that offer spill-free fragrance. Explore the full collection at [scentair.com](https://scentair.com).



A brilliant value candle and diffuser set from **Tesco**. For just £10 you can buy this two-in-one set, with a tree shaped glass holder that contains a diffuser as well as the bottom half containing a festive scented candle that will burn for 17 hours. *Cedarwood and fir* scented, this makes a lovely present as well as being affordable as a little treat for yourself.



**ARRAN Sense of Scotland's Festive Collection** for 2025 is a range designed to evoke the wonder of winter on the Isle of Arran. This year's limited-edition offering introduces two new seasonal scents: *Amber Myrrh & Tonka* and *Jasmine Cedar & Cassis*. They celebrate the natural beauty and elemental contrasts of the Scottish landscape, from spice-warmed fires to the earthy stillness of pine trees. *Amber Myrrh & Tonka*, is an indulgent blend that balances smoky resin with soft spice and warm tonka bean. *Jasmine Cedar & Cassis*, with notes of wild jasmine and sweet blackcurrant, grounded by aromatic cedarwood is reminiscent of winter sunlit forest walks and evergreen garlands. Both collections are available as a Hand Wash (£17.50), 20cl Candle (£22.50), and 100ml Reed Diffuser (£22.50).



**Baylis & Harding** has a festive hand wash that won't break the bank. Widely available from major supermarkets. This 500ml bottle is a festive must have for the kitchen or cloakroom. There are various fragrances available such as *Iced Snowberry*, *Frosted Cranberry*, *Vanilla Frosting*, *Frosted Mistletoe* and *Frosted Candy Apple*. Excellent value at around £3

And I'm pleased to report that **Purdy & Figg** has reintroduced the special limited edition *Frankincense & Myrrh* cleaning scent. The blend has become a seasonal staple for many customers, regularly selling out within days and building a waitlist of over 30,000 people last year. Described as "the smell of Christmas morning," it has quickly become one of Purdy & Figg's most requested and hotly anticipated products. Rich and resinous, the scent combines the smoky depth of frankincense with the honeyed warmth of myrrh, lifted by subtle citrus and spice. It is this layered complexity that

customers say makes it so evocative of the festive season. Founded in 2018, Purdy & Figg has grown into a brand known for its eco-friendly, beautifully fragranced cleaning solutions. Cult Christmas Starter Kits, starting from £15.





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# Phew. Black Friday, Cyber Monday

## That was a busy week!!!!

By Bruce Lyons

So, we (that's the Crusader Team) can relax a bit in the run up to Xmas as for sure we will be busy between Xmas and New Year. We call that period PEAKS and that is the time for us Brits to book our holidays. The major tour operators wait for us to be full of Xmas Pudding, fed up with Television and board games.

And then they dangle treats in front of us.

This is the time that you can get as much as 30% off the "shelf price" be it beach, small Groups, adventure trips - really anything but this "window" only lasts about 10 days.

It is tricky to generalise but destinations that are looking for business are definitely Cuba and Sri Lanka where the rates of exchange are favourable and weather or political issues have made the destinations unpopular. Egypt is another, where the magnificent new Museum has just opened.



Exchange rates are favourable and there has been a surge in new flights - all things that help accelerate the increase in tourism, and Egypt has something for everyone be it Culture, History Adventure in the Red Sea (Our nearest Coral Sea) or just beautiful Beach holidays. Oddly, America has been less popular these last 10 months and some prices there are better than expected. Vietnam is another good value destination and has something for everyone, and excellent value too.

Crusader Travel Ltd  
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# Have you got gold fairies...?

By Deep Patel

~ Through the Eyes of a Twickenham Shopkeeper ~



I used to think wouldn't it be nice to see a gold fairy in my house? One who has glittery wings, flutters around delicately at night when everyone is sleeping and leaves behind gold-dust where she goes...I used to think I saw them everywhere in my home during my childhood and that I was very special, almost like the chosen one, the house that the fairies had chosen to come and make their home as I would see them everywhere, it was only as an adult that I realised that what I thought was little golden fairies at night fluttering around my house were actually moths... maybe not as glamorous or magical sounding as the golden fairies, but still quite interesting when we learn more about them...

We all love gold things...rings, necklaces, shoes, photo frames, watches and...moths?

Yes, you read right...if we are a nation obsessed by gold then why so much hate for the little gold moths that we all see in our homes from time to time...well...they are gold too...? This week a customer asked me about moths...Ok, maybe many hate them as they think that they make holes in their best cashmere jumper that their favourite great aunt gifted them? Well that's understandable, but did you know you would be only semi-right...yes...because those little gold moths DON'T eat your woollens at all...in fact they don't actually have mouths to eat anything at all and live for a few weeks only, so let's be kind and let them live their short lives out...so where do the holes come from? It's their babies that eat our woollens (larvae hatch from their eggs which they lay on natural fabrics...mainly wool based fabrics).

But does any living creature deserve DEATH for simply being hungry? We wouldn't dream of doing that to a human that was hungry would we? Then why to an insect, why to a moth? They want to live too, and they are capable of feeling suffering just like we are...so is it really necessary to hang those cruel sticky tape traps for them to get stuck onto and die slowly suffering until they starve to death? Not kind...and definitely not good karma let's put it that way...

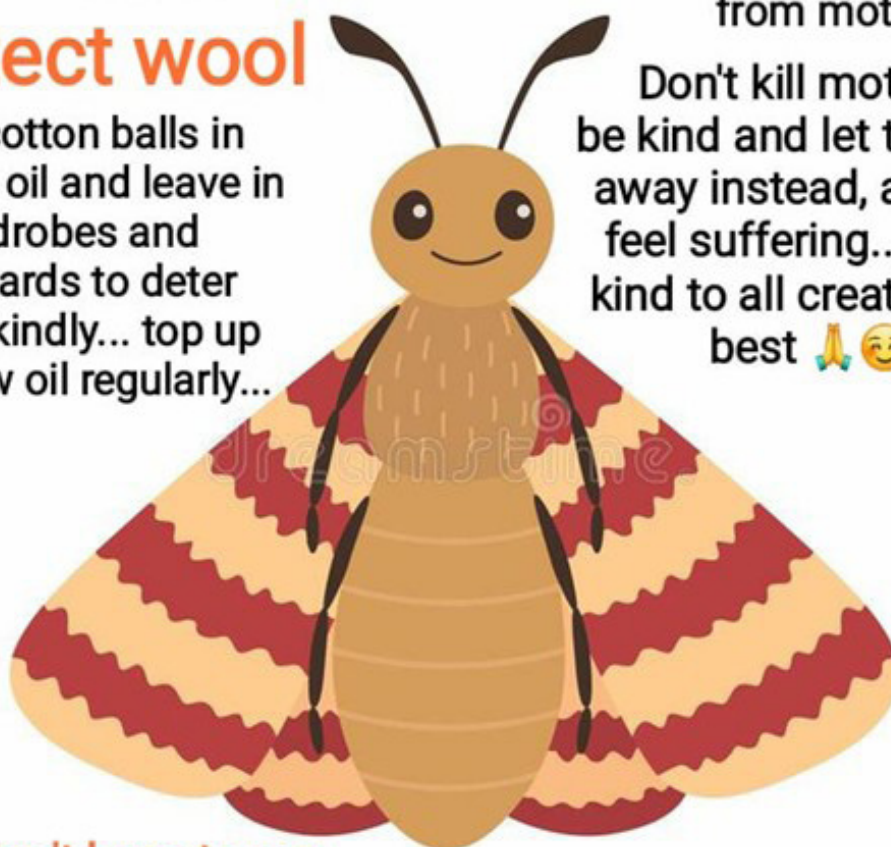
So, what could you use instead? You know...to be the kind human you are? For GOOD karma? Or just to avoid killing a life? Well, try this...mix 30 drops of PURE ESSENTIAL LAVENDER or CITRONELLA or PEPPERMINT OIL into a cup of water and then into a spray bottle and spray ALL your soft furnishings and inside your cupboards and drawers once a week (not on the moths though!). This will not only stop moths laying their eggs in your woollens, but also make your clothes smell bloody marvellous...the smell of good karma too!

## Kind way to stop moths & protect wool

Soak cotton balls in lavender oil and leave in wardrobes and cupboards to deter moths kindly... top up with new oil regularly...

Wrap wool items in plastic bags and tie securely to protect them from moths

Don't kill moths... be kind and let them fly away instead, all lives feel suffering...being kind to all creatures is best 🙏😊



We don't have to use cruel ways... being kind means protected wool and good karma

Please share these cruelty-free tips

**Remember...**

***"All that glitters is gold"...***

### Silverfish Causing You Issues?

Sprinkle fine ground black pepper or talcum powder where they come and they will stop coming without you having to harm them...you will get blessings in your life or have good karma for choosing a kind way too! This remedy also works to deter virtually any insect without harming them...like it & share it! For ANY specific tip to stop any "pest" or insect KINDLY (for good karma/blessings), email me: [thedeepatel@gmail.com](mailto:thedeepatel@gmail.com) or join my Facebook page: "KIND WORLD"



## Hansel and Gretel

by Hannah Loble

TTC at the Hampton Hill Theatre until 6<sup>th</sup> December

Many pantomimes lean heavily on stories known since childhood, but few tend to open with ten minutes in which one wonders what is going on. A garish and gloriously chaotic prologue introduced a familiar *Hansel and Gretel*, but the enticing gingerbread abode was soon baked into the roaring oven of a musical number that came from nowhere, as the story took a different route. But however unhinged things appear, when everyone exudes such infectious enthusiasm, the performance shines.



Director Ian Kinane leant wholeheartedly into this surrealism. The traditional darkness of the Grimm brothers' deep, dark forest suddenly, with no concern for linear narrative logic, slid into a neon-lit 1980s 'Hamlin's Diner'. The Black Forest Time Portal (aside from being a name of a band I wished existed) created a juxtaposition that gave this production its charm; to the youngsters, a whimsical device that delighted, for the older ones a warm nostalgic flicker (plus a generous serving of double entendres).

Within this retro dreamscape, a motley crew assembled, a colourful companionship of Hansel and Gretel, a New Romantic reimagining of Prince Charming (now simply 'Charming', think Adam Ant), the Wicked Witch plus the "not-so-ugly" sisters, and Dame Jane, who has more one-liners than all five days of this year's International Conga Conference.

The musical playlist itself was a highlight: an eclectic sweep of tracks so wide-ranging that even the most well-rounded Spotify user would struggle to claim familiarity. Numbers erupted with irregularity and glee, punctuated by rapid-fire gags, prop-based absurdity, and, of course, shouts of 'they're behind you!' And, just when one feared the humour might plateau, it veered into surprisingly sharp satire.

Ultimately, *Hansel and Gretel* succeeded in embracing the spirit of pantomime. It was messy, musical, mischievous, and intermittently baffling but, most importantly, fun. By the time the final chorus rang out and the cast took their bows, I found myself leaving Hampton Hill Theatre with that peculiar, satisfied sense of festivity, glowing in the frosty winter hues, onto the same streets where I grew up\*, smiling into street-lights of suburbia.



*\*[This is Brent Muirhouse's final review before he emigrates to Australia. We send our warm wishes to Brent and his Australian wife Cas for a happy and fulfilling new life together in their new home.]*

Read it at [www.markaspen.com/2025/11/30/hansel-gretel-ttc](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/11/30/hansel-gretel-ttc)

Photography by Steve Sitton

# Messiah

by George Frideric Handel, libretto by Charles Jennens  
The Merry Opera Company on tour until 6<sup>th</sup> December

Performances of *Messiah* at this time of year are as ubiquitous as pantomimes. But Handel didn't stop at Jesus's birth, and it's more suitable for Easter than Christmas. Yet Advent recitals of *Messiah* have become a tradition. What is rarer is staging *Messiah*, which is a reflective rather than a dramatic piece, even if it alludes to nothing less than the redemption of all creation. It's an impossible task, frankly, and is never going to succeed in conventional terms, but this attempt is interesting and crammed with insight and sheer conviction.

It is not an evening for musical purists, with organ (an impressive Martyn Noble) rather than orchestra, and eleven soloists who double as the chorus. Arias are shared between soloists, which works perfectly well and reinforces the sense of shared communal experience. It is marvellously refreshing to hear well-known choruses turned into duets, trios, and quartets, with the notes emerging with glorious clarity instead of being sucked into a massive vortex of sound. There is still a sense of increased scale when all the voices combine, and the impact of the choral surround-sound is thrillingly effective.



There are some fine singers here in this vocally demanding music. Richard Decker's countertenor is particularly impressive in a well sustained *He was despised*. The singers take care in ensuring that the text is clearly enunciated, while music director Panaretos Kryriastzidis unobtrusively holds everything together from the sidelines.

John Ramster has applied much intelligence to his production, but not all of it completely works, in particular, all the cast adopting a various modern characters. These personae can't be developed or given a narrative arc, as the only words they have are scriptural quotations. However, their characterisations remind us that what we are seeing is the impact of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection on actual people. This production vividly depicts the way that faith is a wrestle between meaning and experience, rather than a state of emotional impregnability free from doubt.



The whole of the Church space is inventively used, especially to improve sightlines. One wondered if there wasn't a little too much activity going on. Would less have been more? But the sheer intensity of this performance, combined with Handel's magnificently inspired music, sweeps all before it.

Read Patrick Shorrock's review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/11/29/messiah-moc](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/11/29/messiah-moc)

Photography courtesy of The Merry Opera Company



# East of Adelaide

by Julia Thurston

Threedumb Theatre at Arches Lane Theatre, Battersea Power Station until 6<sup>th</sup> December

*East Of Adelaide*, which tries to uncover the lifetimes of three women in the mid 1800s and how a relationship with one man affected their lives, has a generational link to its writer. How and why did they fall for Henry Bottle and why, in turn, he for them?

Aimee Hislop expresses the frustration of a first wife, Elizabeth, older than her husband and approaching 'spinster age', but then abandoned for years. The play displays this well, as central to early proceedings, for later she has to contend with decidedly odd circumstances whenever Bottle decides to call on her.



Charlie Henson's Emily is a woman working her way through life, who meets someone who she thinks is a suitable loving partner, only for it all to be a lie. Henson fully expresses Emily's bottled-up anger, and the way her and Bottle's initial chemistry whittles away to resentment.

Stephen Smith does a great turn as Bottle, who charms his way to seduce each of his three wives, whilst slowly the façade drops and his more nefarious ways manifest. Smith captures this well and portrays his at first seemingly naive charm, before growing more and more monstrous in demeanour and delivery.

The overlapping times can become quite difficult to keep up with as the years seemingly jump back and forth, even though each time change is projected briefly at the beginning of each scene.

*East Of Adelaide* examines the expectations for women of the day and it is clear what confines and hopes each has. The show is also bold enough to contain music and singing numbers which help create the spirit of the time.

Everything the audience sees and knows about the three women is due to their dealings and relationships with Bottle, but the history and stories about them outside of this are sparse and fleeting. The play ends on a powerful note but addresses the thought that, although primarily looking to tell the tales of the three women and their lives, they are still dominated and navigated around by the actions of one man.



Read Denis Valentine's review at [www.markaspen.com/2025/11/28/east-adelaide](http://www.markaspen.com/2025/11/28/east-adelaide)

Photography courtesy of Threedumb Theatre

# GOOD

## at the Mary Wallace Theatre

January 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>

After a sell-out week of THE GHOST TRAIN at the Mary Wallace Theatre we are pleased to announce our January production of GOOD by CP Taylor.

GOOD is a cautionary parable showing a fundamentally good man drawn into complicity with an evil regime. In 1930s Germany, professor Halder unwittingly comes to the attention of the Nazi high command and is compelled to endorse its policy of eugenics, compulsory sterilisation and euthanasia.

GOOD plays at our Thames-side theatre, close to the Barmy Arms, from January 24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> with a captioned performance on Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup> - and encompasses Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27<sup>th</sup>.



For booking and further information visit  
[www.richmondshakespeare.org.uk](http://www.richmondshakespeare.org.uk)





# Shona's fridge magnet cards

From Shona Lyons

Shona's fridge magnet cards. £5 each. All handmade, hand painted, original and unique designs. Last much longer than your average card, as the recipient can detach the magnet picture and put it on their fridge. Contact Shona at [shonalyons@yahoo.com](mailto:shonalyons@yahoo.com)





# The Mulberry Centre Launches 'Hope Under the Tree' Christmas Campaign to Support People Affected by Cancer

From The Mulberry Centre

The Mulberry Centre has officially launched its **2025 Christmas fundraising campaign, 'Hope Under the Tree'**, inviting the local community to come together this festive season to spread compassion, care, and hope for those affected by cancer.

Running throughout the Christmas period, the campaign aims to raise vital funds to ensure The Mulberry Centre can continue providing free emotional, practical, and wellbeing support to people living with and beyond cancer, as well as their families, carers, and those bereaved.

This year, The Mulberry Centre is proud to be part of **The Big Give Christmas Challenge**, the UK's largest match-funding campaign. From **2nd to 9th December 2025**, all donations made to The Mulberry Centre through the Big Give platform will be **doubled at no extra cost to donors**, meaning every contribution will have twice the impact.



*"This Christmas, we're asking our supporters to help bring hope under the tree for those facing the challenges of cancer," said Lydia Plews, The Head of Fundraising and Engagement at The Mulberry Centre. "With demand for our services expected to grow in 2026, every donation, especially during Big Give Week - will make a lasting difference."*

The campaign encourages supporters to get involved in several ways:

- **Host a festive fundraiser** – from Christmas Jumper Days and bake sales to quiz nights and coffee mornings.
- **Take on a challenge** – join or organise a sponsored run, walk, or cycle in aid of The Mulberry Centre.
- **Take part in our Christmas Raffle** – purchase a ticket for our fabulous Xmas raffle. By taking part, you'll be helping us provide vital emotional and practical support - while being in with a chance to **win some fantastic festive prizes!**
- **Simply donate** – make a one-off or regular contribution that will be matched during Big Give Week.

The funds raised will help The Mulberry Centre continue to offer vital services including counselling, complementary therapies, wellbeing workshops, and social activities designed to improve quality of life and emotional resilience for those affected by cancer.

The Mulberry Centre is not funded by the NHS and provides its services completely free of charge, relying on donations, grants, and fundraising initiatives to sustain its work. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps ensure that no one in the local community faces cancer alone.

To donate or find out more about **Hope Under the Tree**, visit:  
<https://donate.biggive.org/campaign/a05WS0000060iXYA0>





# Skylarks Appeals for Help Through Big Give Christmas Campaign

Skylarks, the Twickenham-based charity supporting children with additional needs and their families, is calling for help in reaching their £85,000 Big Give Christmas target before the campaign closes.

From Tuesday 2nd to Tuesday 9th December 2025, every pound donated through the Big Give will be *matched*, thanks to the incredible generosity of Skylarks' Big Give champion, Reed Educational Trust Ltd, and pledger, The Hampton Fund. This means every donation has *double the impact*, offering the opportunity to maximise support for families who rely on Skylarks' life-enhancing services.



The funds raised will enable Skylarks to continue and expand its specialist support for children with additional needs - at a time when demand for help far exceeds available provision. The charity

delivers a wide range of free activities, essential therapies, practical life-skills and employability training to reduce isolation and empower families.

Skylarks' SEND Advice Service helps families navigate the complex education system - this is a vital service and one which draws a strong need, nationally. In response to barriers, Skylarks offers free one-to-one expert guidance, peer support groups, and online group webinars - reaching grateful families across the country.

Families across the UK can access a full range of counselling therapies online or in person. Skylarks triages urgent cases to avoid long delays and standard cases are also seen quickly - reducing national wait times - literally from years to weeks - with this free, and genuinely life-changing, mental health service. For many families, Skylarks is a lifeline offering community, clarity, and compassion during their most challenging moments.

**One parent described the charity's impact:** *"Skylarks is not only a wonderful source of support for special needs children but for their parents. Knowing that someone is there to share the load, give invaluable advice or offer a quiet moment of respite whilst my daughter is transported away to play with a Skylarks team member is priceless."*

**Another parent shared:** *"Skylarks is a small local charity that punches well above their weight, providing remarkable, well-timed, well-presented services and support to parents and children across the spectrum. We couldn't survive without their help."*

**Deirdre Carswell, Head of Fundraising at Skylarks, says the final days of the campaign are crucial:** *"We are incredibly grateful for the generosity shown so far - but we still need help to reach our £85,000 target. The Big Give Christmas is the best time of the year to support Skylarks because every donation is doubled. Meeting our target will enable us to continue delivering vital therapies, expert guidance and hands-on support to families who urgently need it. We're asking individuals and businesses to please - stand with us and help create real, long-lasting change."*

Since its founding in 2006, Skylarks has grown from a small community group into a thriving hub supporting more than 7,000 children and families, locally in London, and nationally. Free services include speech and language therapy, drama and music sessions, employability programmes, osteopathy, martial arts, expert SEND guidance, parent wellbeing programmes, and inclusive holiday activities.

With the Big Give Christmas campaign ending soon, Skylarks is urging supporters to please donate, share the appeal widely, and help them cross the £85,000 finish line.

Donations made through Skylarks' Big Give page before midday on Tuesday 9th December will be matched pound for pound, ensuring double the impact and bringing hope and support to children and families who need it most.

There is still time to donate to make DOUBLE the difference this Christmas:

<https://tinyurl.com/SkylarksBigGiveChristmas>



# St Mary's University

## Chelsea FC Foundation Coaching Students Deliver Practical Sessions at Cobham Training Ground



St Mary's University, London students on the [Chelsea Football Club Foundation Coaching and Development degree](#) led and delivered practical sessions to children at Chelsea FC's Cobham training ground.

The first-year St Mary's students were invited at part of a recruitment event for [Chelsea FC's Soccer Schools department](#), with opportunities open for students to gain paid employment with the Soccer Schools team to complement their studies.

The Soccer Schools programme provides coaching, skill development and opportunities for children aged 3-16 to fulfil their potential in football.

On the day, the Chelsea coaches presented to the students about their philosophy and their syllabus. Students were then put into groups and given time to plan their sessions.

In the arena at the training ground, St Mary's students delivered their practical session to the children as the Chelsea FC training

staff observed. After the event, all students were offered a final face-to-face interview alongside feedback on their coaching sessions.

Toms Simms (Project Coordinator on the Chelsea FC Foundation Degree Programme) said, *"Opportunities like this really allow our students to step into what real coaching looks and feels like. Not only does it help them grow in confidence and sharpen their practical skills, but it also gives them a genuine pathway into paid roles with the club. It's exactly the kind of experience that brings their learning to life."*

The Chelsea Football Club Foundation Coaching and Development Degree allows students to develop an in-depth understanding of the football industry, with learning taking place at multiple locations, including St Mary's University, Stamford Bridge, and the Chelsea FC Training Ground in Cobham.

[Find out more about the course and apply now.](#)



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London



# The Sunday Times Reveals the Top Schools in London 2026

For The Sunday Times

The UK's highest-achieving primary and secondary schools are revealed in the 33rd edition of **The Sunday Times Parent Power Guide 2026**. St Paul's School and Queen Elizabeth's School are among London's top schools. Widely acknowledged as the most authoritative survey of the country's top schools, the guide will be published online at 7am on Friday, December 5 and available in print in a 28-page supplement on Sunday, December 7.

Recognised as the definitive ranking of the UK's top primary and secondary state and independent schools, this guide remains an essential resource for parents seeking the very best in education for their children.

The guide includes a fully searchable national database of more than 2,000 schools by name, local authority, town and postcode. As well as an assessment of academic results on a school-by-school basis, Parent Power enables parents to compare the performance of a given school with other schools in the same area, local authority or nationally.

**Helen Davies, editor of The Sunday Times Parent Power Guide, said:**

*"The educational landscape is testing – budget challenges, rising student mental health issues, special educational needs and an increasingly uncertain future. But there is also so much to celebrate from the dedication of teachers who are finding ever more innovative and impactful ways to enrich their students and give them the very best start in life."*

*"As well as celebrating the academic excellence of the top schools it is uplifting to see how they are shaping their students to be ready for the 21st century, and instilling a lifelong love of learning."*

**The Parent Power guide also features:**

- Is the 11-plus making your children stupid?
- What to do if your child is a genius
- The great stem debate: has a push for maths and science subjects gone too far?
- Woof! Meet the therapy dogs helping children to read
- 25 questions that every parent should ask to choose the right school for their child
- A parent's year-by-year guide to everything you need to know about primary school
- Tips on how to apply for a scholarship to a top private school
- The big Parent Power quiz of the year

**Full list of winners in London:**

- **State Secondary School of the Year in London 2026** and **State Secondary School of the Year in London for Academic Excellence 2026**: Queen Elizabeth's School, Barnet
- **Comprehensive School of the Year in London 2026**: West London Free School
- **Independent Secondary School of the Year in London 2026**: North London Collegiate School
- **Independent Secondary School of the Year in London for Academic Excellence 2026**: St Paul's School
- **Primary School of the Year in London 2026**: Thomas Jones Primary School

Please note awards are judged on year-on-year performance as well as editorial discretion. The Parent Power league table is based on exam results as outlined in the methodology.

The Sunday Times Parent Power Guide 2026

<https://www.thetimes.com/best-schools-league-table/secondary/article/secondary-schools-revealed-2026-g9w9n8rqw>



## THE SUNDAY TIMES

# Tottenham Hotspur v Brentford FC

By Ron Brand, Tribune Sports Correspondent

Prior to the start of the 2025 Premiership starting I considered Brentford FC a candidate for relegation from the Premiership.

Not only had they sold a number of their best players. Raya a World Class goalkeeper and Norgaard the Captain to Arsenal, Mbeumo the top goal scorer to Man U. But worst of all the Manager Thomas Franks had left to Spurs!

In my opinion Thomas Franks is one of the best Premiership Managers, if not the Best!

Premiership players are special creatures. Cossetted and worshiped by the fans they have seen little life disappointments. Probably involved only with football from 13 or 14 years of age, life has been shielded for them.

How could Brentford FC now survive in the ultra competitive world of Premiership football? Where would they find replacements not only for the players but most importantly the Leader, Franks?

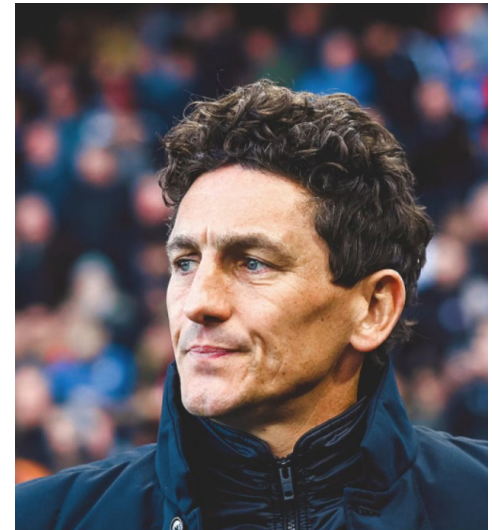
Today I got my answer!

Today I sat in a Press Conference with the replacement.

Enter Keith Andrews a Dublin born Irish man who had acted as 'Set Piece Coach' within the Thomas Franks Management Team. Keith Andrews is impressive. As a player he had experience at 13 football clubs, some he played for twice.

Getting invited back says something in life, Now, it does not say everything, but it does say something? See maybe it is saying 'Let's give him one more chance?'

Fact is Keith Andrews took that chance, he wrapped his playing experience and Assistant Manager experiences together to become the Competent Coach he is today.



Tomorrow Saturday 6th December 2025, Brentford go to White Hart Lane to face Spurs, To Face Franks!

How will they respond? Will they play the game the way they have played so far this season? Can they treat it as just another game?

Today Brentford FC sit 13th in the Premiership on 19 Points. Spurs sit 11th also on 19 Points. The difference is 6 goals to Spurs advantage.

Since Promotion to the Premiership FIVE YEARS AGO Brentford FC have spent £97.6m. This close season Spurs spent £105.6m!

Tomorrow at 5pm we will know the result!

This game is not the end of course, the season runs until May 2026 but tomorrow will be a sign? Can Andrews get his players' minds in the right place. Just another game. Just 3 Points at stake. Whatever the outcome tomorrow, Brentford have once again come up with the goods. I predict Keith Andrews will go on to prove himself a Top Coach capable of competing at the highest level. I certainly wish him and Brentford the Best of Luck. It should be a great game.



# Match Preview: Tottenham Hotspur v Brentford

Written by Brentford Football Club

Brentford face Tottenham Hotspur away from home in the Premier League on Saturday afternoon (3pm kick-off GMT).

The Bees will be looking to bounce back from a 2-0 loss against Arsenal at Emirates Stadium on Wednesday night, while Spurs drew 2-2 at Newcastle United in midweek.

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*: Spurs struggling for consistency

Thomas Frank's Tottenham welcome his former club Brentford to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium this weekend, and it may prove difficult for Keith Andrews to get a firm read on Spurs given their uneven performances this season.

After seven era-defining years at Brentford, Frank crossed the capital in the summer, and his early spell at Spurs has produced eight wins, seven draws and seven losses in all competitions - a spread that reflects a team still searching for rhythm.

Tuesday's 2-2 draw at Newcastle captured the mood of Frank's maiden campaign: flashes of quality and resilience wrapped in inconsistency.

Tottenham twice came from behind at St James' Park, showing genuine mettle, with rugged centre-half Cristian Romero emerging as a surprising hero. The Argentine scored both goals, his acrobatic overhead kick salvaging a point in stoppage-time.

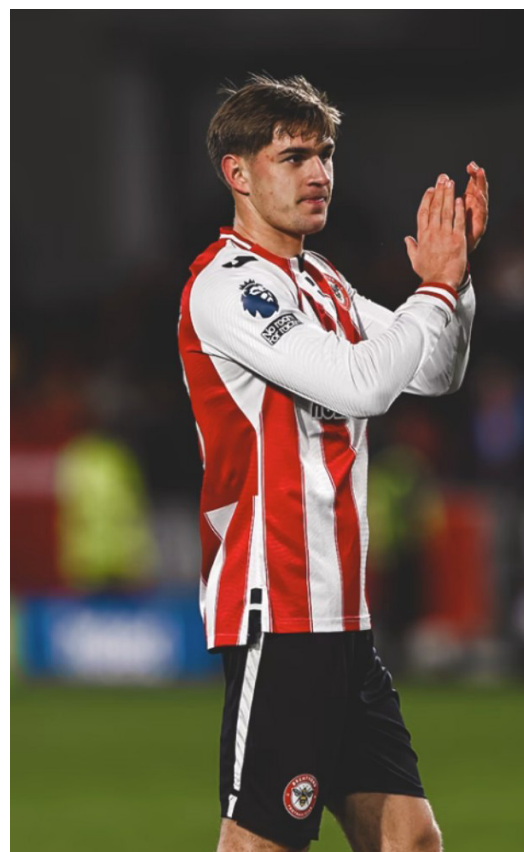
Romero's bicycle kick established Tottenham (15 goals on the road) as the joint-most prolific away side in the Premier League this season, and also illustrated their knack for netting unlikely goals.

Only four teams - Arsenal, Man City, Chelsea and Brighton - have outscored Spurs in the top flight, yet Frank's men are punching far above their weight according to the expected goals metric.

The xG numbers reveal that Tottenham have struck 22 Premier League goals (excluding own goals) from just 15.54 xG this term - an over-performance of +6.46 - and Romero's audacious overhead, bobbling through a sea of bodies, was perhaps the purest illustration of this trend.

Brentford have converted 21 of 147 shots (14.29 per cent) this season, giving them the third-best shot conversion rate in the division. But Tottenham (17.42 per cent) top the Premier League in this respect, despite creating lower-quality chances than the Bees in xG terms.

Remarkably, Spurs have scored nigh on a goal for every two shots on target this term, but they are unlikely to sustain such a high ratio, and Frank will surely want his team to increase the volume of shots they take. Only Burnley (8.2) and Wolves (9.1) have averaged fewer shots per game than Spurs (9.4) so far.



Tottenham's pressing numbers this term are similarly erratic. According to their passes-per-defensive-action (PPDA) data, only Bournemouth and Arsenal have pressed more intensely than Spurs - yet the north Londoners have managed just four shots from high turnovers this season, a mere five per cent of their upfield regains leading to an attempt on goal.

This disjointedness extends into their defensive work too. Tottenham have logged more miscontrols (252) and been dispossessed on more occasions (148) than any team in the top tier, and they have had the most errors leading to opponents' shots, with 19.

Brentford, in contrast, have limited any freebies; the Bees have had the fewest lapses of this sort (4) in the division.

### Scout report

Dan Long, *Sky Sports*: Patience needed to turn Tottenham's fortunes around

How best to sum up Tottenham's 2024/25 season? Strange? Bittersweet? A rollercoaster? One thing is for sure - it was historic, for both positive and negative reasons.

Firstly, it was littered with defeats. There were 26 in all competitions, 22 of which came in the Premier League. The last time they lost that many league games was when they were relegated from the First Division in 1934/35.

It meant they finished just one place above the relegation zone in 17th, which also marked their lowest-ever Premier League finish and their lowest in the top flight since 1966/67, when they finished 22nd in the First Division in 1976/77.

The only saving grace was that Leicester, Ipswich and Southampton won only 12 games between them and slipped back into the Championship without much of a fight.

Ange Postecoglou was under pressure for the whole campaign, with a statement he made after the north London derby defeat to Arsenal on 15 September 2024 relentlessly following him around: *"I usually win things in my second season,"* he said.

In the league, Spurs faltered, but in the Carabao Cup and Europa League, it was a different story. Those competitions brought a much-needed release. In the former, they reach the semi-finals for the fourth time in seven seasons and in the latter, they beat Manchester United in the final in Bilbao.

Postecoglou no doubt revelled in the ultimate mic-drop moment, delivering Spurs' first trophy since 2008. The disastrous league form was forgotten about.

But 16 days after that glorious night in Spain, Postecoglou was sacked. *"Whilst winning the Europa League this season ranks as one of the club's greatest moments, we cannot base our decision on emotions aligned to this triumph,"* said the club's statement.

Within a fortnight, the Australian had been replaced by Thomas Frank, who was tempted away from Brentford by a three-year deal in north London. *"The time has come for me to move on. But, even as I leave, I know I have left a big piece of my heart at Brentford,"* [he wrote in a letter to the Bees fans](#).

It has not been plain sailing for the Dane, though. In his first competitive game, Spurs lost to PSG on penalties in the UEFA Super Cup and, despite three wins from his first four in the league, it is now two wins from the last 10. They are out of the Carabao Cup and have won one of their last four Champions



League games.

External pressure is mounting - and was cranked up recently when Frank reacted to fans booing Guglielmo Vicario after a howler against Fulham. *"I didn't like that our fans booed at him straight after and a few times he touched the ball,"* he told Sky Sports. "They can't be true Tottenham fans. That's unacceptable in my opinion."

Internally, though, the club seem to still be sure they have the right man at the helm, as Matt Verri alluded to in Hot off the Press. With many players from last season still at the club, surely turning Spurs back into a top-seven club will take time and a touch more patience?

Regardless, a crucial period is upon Spurs. They are five without a league win and, after Brentford's visit, face Nottingham Forest, Liverpool and Crystal Palace. They host winless Slavia Prague in Europe next Tuesday. This run will test Frank's mettle.

### **In the Dugout**

Thomas Frank

Thomas Frank was coaching youth players in his native Denmark from his early 20s. He spent time at his hometown club Frederiksvaerk, then Hvidovre, but his career might have ended before he took a job at Copenhagen-based B93.

His future would have lain in teaching, when he agreed with his wife to stop coaching due to money concerns. He was also doing his master's in psychology, working as a coach educator, studying for his A-Licence and bringing up two children, as he told The Telegraph in 2020.

Fortunately, he accepted the B93 role, then moved on to Lyngby and, later, the Danish international set-up where, in 2008, he took on the role of managing both Denmark's Under-16s and U17s. He took the latter - with a squad that included Christian Nørgaard, Pierre-Emile Højbjerg and Yussuf Poulsen - to the U17 Euros in May 2011, where they reached the semi-finals, and the U17 World Cup the following month.

Frank moved on to the U19s in 2012, then took his first senior job in June 2013 at Brøndby. He took charge of over 100 games before resigning in March 2016. Nine months later, he joined Brentford as an assistant to head coach Dean Smith, before being promoted to head coach in October 2018, when Smith left west London to take over at Aston Villa.

Though he won just one of his first 10 games, over the next seven years, Frank would become one of the club's most successful managers in history. He took the Bees to the Championship play-off final in his first full season, then delivered promotion to the Premier League in his second. In 2022/23, he guided the club to ninth - their highest top-flight finish since they finished sixth under Harry Curtis in 1937/38.

In June, after over 300 games in charge at Brentford, he signed a three-year deal to replace Ange Postecoglou at Tottenham.



# Richmond station restoration wins national heritage award

THE restoration of Richmond station in South West London has won a prestigious National Railway Heritage Award.

South Western Railway (SWR) and Network Rail celebrated their success at the 46th iteration of the awards, held at Merchant Taylors' Hall in the City of London today.



The Rail Minister, Lord Hendy, presented the Railway Heritage Trust Conservation Award to SWR colleagues and project leads Chris Gregory and Bryan Robilliard. They collected the award alongside Cllr Chris Varley and Nick O'Donnell from the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and Anna Jipps and Andy Savage MBE from the Railway Heritage Trust.

The project, which began in 2023, has transformed Richmond's exterior facade

and canopy and interior booking hall, bringing the station back to its former Art Deco glory, following decades of alterations and weathering. The transformation, supported by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and the Railway Heritage Trust, was [officially completed](#) in September this year.

Now, the station provides a fitting gateway to Richmond, with 1930s-style features such as bronze fascia panels and a "Glasscrete" effect for the canopy, and timber frieze and green glass signage and Art Deco-inspired chandeliers for the booking hall.

Despite the extensive work by a range of skilled contractors and craftspeople, the station remained fully operational throughout, with almost 8.9m entries and exits in 2023-24.

## **Chris Gregory, SWR's Asset Enhancement Manager, said:**

*"It's an honour to receive this award for the restoration of Richmond station. The station is one of the architectural jewels of our network and the project to bring it back to life has been a labour of love by SWR and Network Rail, our partners Richmond Council and the Railway Heritage Trust, as well as many talented contractors and craftspeople. The greatest reward, however, has been providing Richmond with the gateway it truly deserves; one that will make our customers, colleagues, and the local community proud. If you haven't been to see the station yet, hop on a train and pay it a visit!"*

The Richmond station building was opened in 1937, designed by Southern Railway's lead architect, James Robb Scott, and his team. Scott also worked on other SWR stations, including Surbiton, Woking, Malden Manor, Chessington North and Chessington South.

In October, the restoration also won a Richmond Society Award for a distinguished contribution to Richmond.

The full story of the restoration project can be found on the SWR website [here](#).

**South Western  
Railway**



# Step into 900 years of history this Christmas at UK Parliament

Tourists and London locals alike are invited to step into living history this season at UK Parliament – with exclusive Christmas shopping available until 23<sup>rd</sup> December and festive tours running into the New Year.



Visitors in December will start their festive visit by seeing the 25-ft Christmas trees sparkle in historic Westminster Hall – which has stood in place since 1099 – before heading off with a knowledgeable and engaging tour guide, or at their own pace for a self-guided, multi-language audio tour.

Whichever [Palace of Westminster tour](#) visitors choose, both options provide a special glimpse into what happens in the House of Commons and the House of Lords today, while standing in the footsteps of parliamentarians past.

Visitors can finish their festive trip to Parliament by browsing a range of exclusive Christmas gifts available in the official Houses of Parliament gift shop – including many products specially crafted by makers based across the UK, including from:

1. Essex – confectionary by Linden Lady chocolatiers
2. Surrey Hills – Elizabeth Tower decorations by Artcuts
3. Scotland – leather pocketbooks by Crawford Henderson
4. Lake District – preserves by Wild & Fruitful
5. Devon – replica Westminster Hall casts by wood carver William Barsley

UK Parliament's doors will be open for visitors up until 23<sup>rd</sup> December. Special timings for Christmas recess tours will also be available on a range of dates from Monday 27<sup>th</sup> December to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> January.

UK Parliament tours have been highly ranked (92% overall quality score) by VisitEngland's Quality Assurance scheme. Audio tours were commended for their 'engaging commentary that brought the history and function of the institution to life'. This commendation follows TripAdvisor placing UK Parliament among the top 10% of things to do worldwide, for the second year in a row.

Availability and information on what to expect on a tour can be found on the [UK Parliament website](#). Advance booking is recommended to avoid disappointment.



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### Published by:

Twickenham & Richmond Tribune (in association with World InfoZone Limited)

Registered in England & Wales

Reg No 10549345

The Twickenham Tribune is registered with the ICO under the Data Protection Act, Reg No ZA224725

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