

THAMES DITTON — TODAY —

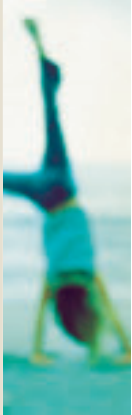
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THAMES DITTON TODAY

The Magazine of the Thames Ditton and Weston Green
Residents' Association

SPRING 2009

Published quarterly since Spring 1970

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You are welcome to submit
articles or images. Please contact
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Next deadline 7 May.

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Cover photo: *Swans on Milbourne Pond* – Editor

www.residents-association.com

Officers and staff of the Association are volunteers, but we must fund costs of this magazine, administrative and election expenses, and other expenses such as spring bulb-planting and the village Christmas tree. The subscription is only £3 per household. If you can contribute more, please do so. Subscriptions (in an envelope please) may be left at Moss Chemist, 14 High Street, or Thorhill Road Pharmacy, 94 Thorhill Road, Thames Ditton. Or mail to Membership Secretary Peter Haynes at 6 Onslow Gardens, Thames Ditton KT7 0JJ. Thank you.



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THAMES DITTON & WESTON GREEN RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION



Annual General Meeting

8.00 pm on 24 March 2009, at Vera Fletcher Hall,
4 Embercourt Road, Thames Ditton

Agenda:

1. **MINUTES** of the 2008 Annual General Meeting and matters arising therefrom.

2. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT:** to receive, discuss and adopt the Annual Report for 2008-2009.

3. **ACCOUNTS:** to receive the Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2008.

4. **APPOINTMENTS:** to receive nominations and appoint officers and an Auditor:

President	Vice President	
Chairman	Vice Chairmen	
Hon Secretary	Hon Treasurer	Auditor

5. **SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS:** to adopt a candidate to stand at the Surrey County Council Elections on 4 June 2009

6. **RESOLUTIONS:** to consider any resolutions submitted in writing to the Secretary by 10 March 2009.

7. **GUEST SPEAKER:** Gerry Acher CBE, LVO, Chairman, Cobham Conservation & Heritage Trust and Chairman of The Royal Society of Arts:

“Conservation of our Heritage in a Changing World” – lessons from a case study on Home Yard (Skiltons) Cobham

President: Ann Levick,
8 Basing Close, Thames Ditton

Vice-President: Edward Rowe,
23 Portsmouth Avenue, Thames Ditton

Vice-President: Maureen Sheldrick,
34 The Woodlands, Esher

Thames Ditton Councillors

David Lowe,
8 Embercourt Road, Thames Ditton 020 8398 4957

Ruth Lyon,
11 Riversdale Road, Thames Ditton 020 8398 3396

Karen Randolph, Deepfield, Gigg's Hill Road,
Thames Ditton 020 8398 5005

Weston Green Councillors

Lorraine Sharp,
168 Ember Lane, Esher 07970 874 925

Tannia Shipley, 'Clinton House'
27 Lower Green Road, Esher 020 8398 2484

Surrey County Councillor:

Peter Hickman, Little Lodge,
Watts Road, Thames Ditton 020 8339 0931

Officers:

Chairman: Libby MacIntyre,
24, High Street, Thames Ditton 020 8398 5534

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24 Speer Road, Thames Ditton 020 8398 8844

Hon. Secretary: Tricia Bland,
29 Station Rd., Thames Ditton 020 8339 0485

Membership Secretary: Peter Haynes
6 Onslow Gardens, Thames Ditton 020 8398 6019

Conveners of Sub-Committees:

Health and Community:

Karen Randolph (see above for details)

Planning: Graham Cooke 23 Ashley Road,
Thames Ditton 020 8398 8509

Highways, Drainage: Andrew Roberts
1 Boyle Farm Road, Thames Ditton 020 8786 6882

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**THE NEXT RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION OPEN MEETINGS ARE
TUESDAY 24 MARCH (AGM) AND
TUESDAY 28 APRIL, 2009 AT 8.00PM**

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News from the Residents' Association



17 November to 25 February

Since our last issue we have enjoyed another excellent Christmas Fair, a magical snowfall that fortunately was swift to disappear, and a number of good fundraisers events for charitable purposes of which the highlight was Aladdin, a dinner and panto organised by Ruth Lyon and Karen Randolph at the Vera Fletcher Hall that raised some £3000 for Thames Ditton Hospital fund.

The period has seen a good deal of heavy lifting by your Association, which in the middle of this year will celebrate 75 years of effective representational democracy though volunteers from these villages. Membership continues to rise.

Parking

At the beginning of January the ruling Elmbridge Conservatives imposed swingeing increases of between 100% and 150% on daily and termly parking rates in Ashley Road car park. This unfairly hit office and shop employees and others including residents who need to park there for more than a couple of hours. It resulted in yet more cars being parked on our overcrowded streets. Helen Peters of Axos organised a petition to roll back charges to the levels of last year, which we supported: 500 signatures were swiftly appended. Helen spoke to the petition well when it was presented to the Cabinet. It awaits the Council's consideration.



Karen Randolph and Andrew Roberts hand the car park petition to Elmbridge's Chief Executive officer Rob Moran

Ember Centre

A day centre for the more elderly residents of the area is held at Vera Fletcher Hall twice a week. They pay a reasonable amount for transport to the centre and lunch while there. The Ember Centre provides stimulation, education and a social focus for those disadvantaged by age, helping to keep them active and engaged, fed; and out of the final stage of care that would cost the public purse substantially more than the modest £12,500 the Ember Centre costs annually plus cost of its EBC-salaried manager. There is an active core of volunteers to enrich what is offered, who also raise funds – lately for the installation of computers so that members of the centre can learn to use essential tools like the internet. The Residents' Association is

among those who have raised some funds for this purpose.

Membership of the Centre, originally envisaged at 80 persons when it was established in 1992, has grown to 122 and there is every prospect that its facilities will be used increasingly with demographic changes. In February the Conservative Elmbridge Cabinet stated their intention to close it, offering much inferior facilities at St Helens to only 30 persons and destroying the work built up by volunteers that doesn't appear on the Council balance sheet. This was one of a number of small 'savings' put forward by the Cabinet themselves. We are grateful to residents who attended the public gallery on the evening Cabinet 'debated' these issues. They were treated to the sight of the Mayor of Elmbridge, Nigel Cooper, eloquently pleading with the Cabinet for the retention of this and other facilities for community groups in the borough. He would be ashamed of Elmbridge if they were axed, he said.

The Cabinet, who up to that point had not actually visited the Ember Centre and St Helens to see for themselves, attempted to suppress comment and ignored this and other representations. We then joined with Church groups and others to raise a petition against closure, which obtained over 2,150 signatures, while pressure on the Council resulted in a visit by councillors to the establishments. We are glad to say that not all Conservative councillors agreed with their leadership. With Residents and LibDems they exercised their conscience, so that the Cabinet's plan was referred back to Committee at full Council on 25 February. Pressure needs

to be maintained to secure the right outcome.

Public loos

The Cabinet also announced its intention to close the nine public toilets operated by Elmbridge. Several of these are appropriately situated, well-maintained and appreciated: for example by the Thames-side walk in Molesey or by sports fields much used by school and other teams. It seems likely that council-tax payers, had they been consulted, would agree that these were pennies well spent. Calls of nature being what they are, we may expect more use of the bushes, alas.

Councillors' pay

Last year, as they raised many car park charges by some forty percent (revenue was reduced in consequence), the Elmbridge Cabinet voted themselves a similar increase in their own allowances. This year, despite the recession, they were planning to hike their allowances again at twice the rate of inflation. Leader of the Council Roy Taylor (Conservative, Walton) described councillors who did not want to support his Cabinet's plan as 'crackers.' However, we are pleased to report that a member of his own Cabinet and some other Conservative councillors joined with Residents in opposing the plan and it was shelved.

Planning

At the Council meeting on December 18th Conservative councillors voted *en bloc* on the first critical motion leading to approval for the huge development on the riverside **Jolly Boatman** site. Of Conservatives present, only the Deputy

Mayor, in accordance with normal practice, abstained. The controversial decision overruled the views of the majority of local people near the site, who wished to see a less obtrusive development. As it is, the glorious Palace at Hampton Court that forms part of our national heritage will be faced by the dull mass of a hotel of four floors, which many residents think should have a plaque bearing the names of those who voted for it.

The development will have knock-on effects for Thames Ditton and Weston Green as the railway station at Hampton Court, with its car park, will be closed for many months during works.

Similarly, Conservatives voted in full committee to side with developers and **build a bigger hotel on Green Belt land at Sandown Park**, overturning the Council Planning Officer's recommendation. In the earlier Planning Committee, a Conservative councillor for Long Ditton opined in voting for it that the project would 'open up' the Green Belt. Some saw this as in the same mould as Labour's John Prescott's notorious statement that: "the Green Belt is a great achievement, and we are going to build on it."

72 Ember Lane: Plans to demolish the existing house and build four detached houses there were rejected at an appeal, which many residents attended and spoke at eloquently, supported by Cllr. Tannia Shipley. The Inspector described the proposal as a "cramped development, out of keeping with the character and appearance of the area and which would have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of neighbouring residents."

The application to demolish part of the existing buildings complex at **The Newlands** and build 6 flats, 7 three-storey terraced houses and one two storey detached house, has been withdrawn. It had become clear that for very strong reasons the Elmbridge planning and conservation officers would recommend refusal for it, as it stood. Our Association and councillors put a good deal of work into researching the application. We expect a re-worked application in due course that will take into proper account the heritage value of the old house and its setting.

In our last issue we wrote that the Newlands was a boys' school before the war. Marie Manuel of King's Drive points out that in fact it was a co-educational school – she was a pupil there!

In January, Elmbridge planners refused planning permission for the application to build four detached and three terraced houses on the **Olde Harrow** site, on the grounds that the proposed development would be unduly prominent, cramped and overbearing in this sensitive location bordering the Green Belt and would detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and that the application did not propose to make any payments for Infrastructure and Service contributions to take account of the cumulative impact of small-scale developments, as required by the Council. The developers are taking this ruling to appeal. We shall support residents in opposing it, in the hope that developers will take the planning objections into full and proper account and produce proposals that make more sensitive use of the site.

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High Street

We renewed pressure on the Council properly to enforce planning conditions on and behind **27 High Street** where a stop order had to be served in 2007. A year further on, several of those conditions have still not been met and officers seemed to be dragging their feet. However, some works have begun recently and we hope this unfortunate episode, which reflects badly on planning and enforcement in the conservation area, will be resolved shortly.

Meanwhile in late January the Inspector heard an appeal by the same developer concerning **29 High Street** (currently tenanted by Hawes & Co), where Elmbridge's planners rejected proposals to reduce commercial space and build upwards to provide five flats. In a significant ruling the Inspector noted that small businesses and commercial concerns are an important element contributing positively to the character of the Conservation Area. Loss of employment floorspace and reduction in associated activity could undermine the viability of other businesses nearby. There was no reason why this commercial floorspace could not be used more actively, if refurbished to modern standards. The proposal would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and the amount of development proposed on the site was undesirable.

The ruling should set an important precedent for the defence of our High Street shops, not least the former Bakery that is owned by the same developer.

16 – 18 Embercourt Rd: Residents have been concerned by the blocking off

of the pavement along this garden-grabbing development off Thistledeane. One resident also spotted an entry on the planning notes that trees featuring in the submission by architects had 'blown down' since the plans were passed on appeal. Elmbridge were unwilling to take this up with the developers. Meanwhile constituents have commented wryly on a letter from MP Ian Taylor averring that Conservatives are opposed to garden grabbing. The decision to list gardens as brownfield sites suitable for development was adopted under a Conservative government; and the owner of 18 Embercourt Road who sold part of his garden for this controversial development is the Chairman of Ian Taylor's Constituency Association.

The main planning application for the development of the **Home of Compassion** by new owners Caring Homes (see our Autumn 2008 issue) has been approved. The developers and their architects have taken considerable pains to find a reasonable way to preserve and enhance this facility for respite care while respecting a sensitive site of heritage value. Meanwhile the new local Trust, Walsingham Care, closed the Charity Shop at the Home and it is reopening at 68 Bridge Rd, East Molesey.

Conservation

All households in Thames Ditton have received by hand an outline of Elmbridge's proposals for conservation and management of the two Conservation Areas in Thames Ditton. There is an exhibition in the Library. The proposals and supporting documents may also be viewed on EBC's website. Your



the Fountain in the snow

councillors and Association officers as well as several individual residents put in a good deal of work together with EBC's conservation planners and heritage consultants to ensure that the draft document was realistic and forward-looking. It is a thorough piece of work that should meet with general support. In final form it will become a basic text against which to consider future planning proposals, and measures to enhance the area as and when borough and county council have funds available. Residents have until 13 March to indicate support and submit comments to the Heritage

Section of Elmbridge's Town Planning Division.

Esher Station flooding

Long-suffering residents will recall that a year ago, with yet another enormous heave, our councillors Tannia Shipley and Peter Hickman managed to get Network Rail and Surrey County Council Highways, along with sundry riparian owners, to discharge their responsibilities to clear the drains and culverts in the two-mile network that drains the low-lying areas round Esher Station. This cured the flooding, but we warned that they would need to ensure that routine clearance and maintenance was carried out to prevent it recurring. As reported on our website and in Thames Ditton Today, this was not done despite repeated lobbying of SCC by our councillors, and the inevitable flooding occurred on at least two occasions during the winter.

We regret to report that Surrey Highways initially tried to deny that it was their problem. Tannia managed to dig out a memo from their Head of Engineering in 2002 – she has been trying to get them to do their duty for a long time – which stated:

“The Highway Authority (SCC) has a responsibility to maintain “highway drains”. By definition and in this context the word “drain” includes ditches, watercourses, culverts and pipes situated in the highway or in land adjoining or lying near the highway. SCC will therefore continue to maintain ditches and watercourses that are adjacent to the highway and lie within common land, providing they take surface water run-off from the highway.”

Alas, we have had at least two other matters during the past year when SCC Highways officials' first line has been to deny responsibility for something – in those cases, adopted footpaths – and we have had to go to considerable trouble to research documents to prove that the responsibility is theirs and cannot simply be shirked.

Tiles

For the second year running, vagabonds stole antique tiles from the pavements of Weston Green – this time from Parkwood Avenue. Last time, residents scraped together enough spare old ones from driveways to reinstate them. This time, Cllr. Tannia Shipley and colleagues managed to locate a source of replacements in Wales but SCC refused to buy the 200 tiles required to make good. So our councillors are trying again to assemble enough tiles from those which residents may have stored, when past works were done and tiles lifted. To date, SCC have not claimed on their insurance for the two thefts. That money could have been used to buy replacement tiles.

COUNTY NEWS

Iniquitous redistribution of our taxes

The Government's latest funding settlement leaves Surrey in a worse financial position for the fourth consecutive financial year, while under a Labour Government, a large cut of our money is 'redistributed' to places mostly in Labour's heartland. The Government takes a net tax contribution amounting to over £5,000 for every man, woman and child in this county.

In 'return' the Government grants, per resident:

Manchester £856.64 (almost exclusively dominated by Labour MPs)

Birmingham £752.42 (Nine out of the ten Birmingham MPs are Labour)

Lancashire £401.81 (Three-quarters of Lancashire MPs are Labour)

Surrey £205.33 (no Labour MPs)

The county council is sponsoring an e-petition calling for an independent commission to take the politics out of distributing funding to local authorities across the country so they can offer the same level of service to their residents as each other. All groups on Surrey County Council support this, including Residents' Associations, which wants to take politics out of local government so that councils can concentrate on sensible administration without partisan politicking. You can add your name to this petition on the website of the Prime Minister's Office at:

**[www.petitions.number10.gov.uk/
Surrey-Funding/](http://www.petitions.number10.gov.uk/Surrey-Funding/)**

As we go to press, the **Audit Commission** is expected imminently to **rate Surrey County Council among the worst performing local authorities** in the country, with one star compared with the three stars awarded last year. Five years ago it was awarded four stars, denoting "above minimum requirements." Less than half the electorate are satisfied with the County Council. We believe that part of the problem derives from the lack of challenge to a comfortable party oligarchy that has ruled the County ever since it was established. You will have an opportunity to vote in **County elections on 4 June. Please exercise your vote.**

Winter's Bridge

Winter's Bridge on the Portsmouth Road, originally named "Window's Bridge" after an 18th-century blacksmith who built a plank bridge over the River Rythe at that spot, has long been a trading post. Three years ago shopkeepers there were worried that reduced parking options and increased enforcement were seriously damaging trade. County Highways officials were slow to respond to this problem. Traders and shoppers led by Chris Bachmann – of Britain's leading patisserie – organised a petition asking for improvements in the shape of a lay-by for short-stay shoppers to park in. Our County Councillor Peter Hickman's persistence steered the proposal through the Area Committee and with some funds from his council allocation, and contributions from Bachmann's and from our Residents' Association, £15000 was secured to put it into effect. On its first morning the new lay-by was used by at least 45 grateful customers!



*Chris Bachmann and Peter Hickman
– job done!*

Membership and subscriptions

The Association continues to meet with your support. Subscribing households have again increased from last year's levels and the number stands at 1159. It is subscription time again. If you've only recently paid a sub., then you probably responded to our September-October reminder campaign for last year's subs where some 60 volunteer collectors distributed forms and envelopes, or knocked on doors to help boost our membership. Many thanks to them for their good work.

This year, we hope to continue the trend of early subscription, so please send

in your contribution with the form thoughtfully provided with this issue. Your support is essential for the publication of this magazine, and the work undertaken by the Association on behalf of residents. For your convenience, subscriptions can be dropped off at Moss or Thorkhill Pharmacies. The Association is very grateful to the staff there for providing this service. Please bear in mind, they are not expected to provide change or envelopes for your subscriptions – the pharmacies act purely as collection points.

Social

Again we were lucky with a clear, cold night for the village **Christmas Fair** on 10 December. The turnout was excellent and fun was had by all at a rattling good, villagey occasion. A tribute to the organisers and in particular, **Sarah Searle** who again underpinned the coordination this year.

A fund raising Middle Eastern dinner with a top quality performance of the pantomime ‘Aladdin’ in the Vera Fletcher Hall on 17 January raised £3,000 for **Thames Ditton Hospital**. The occasion was sponsored by Dairy Crest. Ruth Lyon organised the dinner. Karen Randolph, Chairman of the Friends of Thames Ditton Hospital, thanked guests for their generosity. Last year the Friends gave over £60,000 of new equipment to enable the introduction of ultrasound, ENT services and electrocardiogram services, which enable NHS patients to have their diagnosis and treatment within two weeks instead of waiting 12 weeks for appointments at Kingston or St. George’s hospitals.

Congratulations to **Keith Blackwell, Principal of Esher College, on his OBE** for services to local and national further education. Esher College under his leadership is consistently well-rated by OFSTED and in particular, provides significant added value.

Former West Indies captain, the legendary **Richie Richardson, will be playing for Thames Ditton Cricket Club** on Giggs Hill Green for the next three summers. He has signed to participate in ten matches each year, and will also coach the club including the colts and senior sides.

Cover photo

Our Association logo depicts a swan because for many years a pair of swans was to be seen on Milbourne Pond in Weston Green. Each year now, the pond is inspected by a couple – shown on Milbourne pond last year in the photo – but they think better of it. We keep hoping that one day, they will become residents.

And finally...

At our Open Meeting in February and earlier in the year several members have called for the Association to develop forward policies on issues from snow clearance through the kinds of development we want to see on our major sites to the question of final-salary pensions for Council employees. This kind of discussion is healthy. Remember that the Association isn’t an us-and-them organisation. It’s – **you!** See you at the AGM on 24 March.

www.residents-association.com

Village voices...

“To succeed in politics you have to rise above your principles. And if at first you don’t succeed, destroy all the evidence that you tried.”

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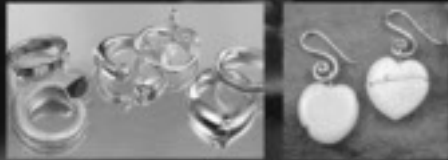
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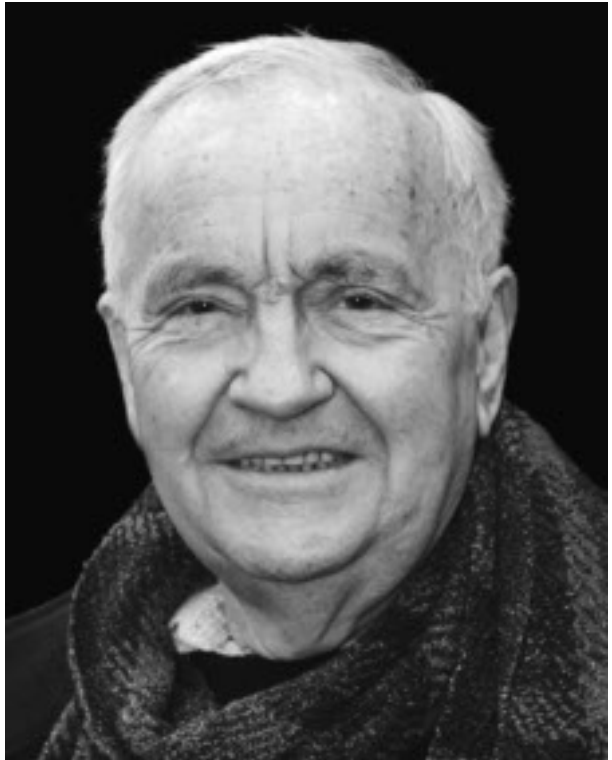
Man For All Seasons



Most days around the Dittons you are likely to come across a seasoned fellow inspecting some defect in the road or verge and shaking his head. This is Peter Hickman, our County Councillor. He's often out on the streets.

Peter moved to Thames Ditton with wife Julia and their family just after the flooding of 1968. A qualified microbiologist from what is now Brunel University, he was a senior manager with Heinz and in charge of quality assurance: "I had to make sure every can of baked beans was identical, wherever it was made!" Keen to contribute to the village's environment and life, Peter joined the Residents' Association as membership secretary, later becoming treasurer. He's had three spells as Chairman of the Association. Peter is also a longstanding member of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee and has chaired it for the past decade.

Peter and Julia have contributed to local life in many ways. Julia, a keen needlewoman, built up and ran Stitchery and was a driving force behind the Jubilee Quilt that hangs in the Library. She



Peter Hickman, our County councillor

initiated the annual Christmas dinner-dance for residents. The couple are expert gardeners, and their delightful garden at Little Lodge, where they do all the gardening themselves, is open each year under the National Gardens' scheme. Julia is also likely to be the person who answers the telephone sympathetically when you call to complain about some Surrey iniquity.

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Residents had sought and achieved representation on the borough council since the Association was founded in 1934, but did not seek election at County level. For many years, the councillor for the Dittons was a Conservative with a large majority and then, when Conservatives fell sharply out of favour in the sleazy, rudderless years of John Major, a Liberal held the seat for two successive periods. Neither Conservative nor Liberal seemed to do much by way of real work representing the views and interests of local residents at county level. So, with a good candidate to hand in Peter, residents decided to put him forward and he was elected four years ago.

“We needed some active opposition in Surrey,” notes Peter, “to focus on practical administrative matters. We now have eight Residents’ councillors from various parts of the county, who work pragmatically while the twelve Liberal Democrats and two Labour representatives waste a lot of energy in party bickering with the Conservatives.” A case in point was Kingston Council’s decision to exclude Elmbridge residents from the nearby recycling centre at Villiers Road. “The Conservatives made it a party political matter, attacking the LibDems who run Kingston, so the Surrey LibDems closed ranks and the chance of negotiating a sensible solution with Kingston was lost.”

At the same time, Peter observes that the Conservatives who have governed the county council ever since it was established have grown complacent in power and need to be challenged. “They went into major private sector contracts

with their eyes shut, and lost effective control. At the outset, even the task of audit and inspection was given to the very same contractors who were supposed to carry out the work.” Highways matters top the list of residents’ complaints, yet the Conservative in charge of this portfolio claims the county is doing well. “The reputation of Surrey County Council is at an all time low in this part of Surrey, and press releases putting a spin on Highways performance are received with disbelief,” wrote Peter in the latest missive demanding that the county take effective action on flooding under Esher Station bridge.

Poor attendance at seminars on key policy issues for Surrey also indicates complacency. “Some individual councillors are conscientious but many have grown lazy. Less than a quarter of my Conservative colleagues bother to attend.” This attitude may be related to inadequate county planning for the future. For example, education: “The county Executive has largely failed to plan for demographic changes. The shortfall in infant school places was predictable and no action was taken. Now, in the Dittons we are short of 96 places this September, and temporary classrooms will have to be squeezed in somewhere while the list of angry parents grows.”

There are dilemmas in trying to balance what residents want, with what the county of Surrey must do in other spheres less immediate than potholes. The vast majority of communications from Dittons and Weston Green residents are about highways failings, with school places some way behind. There are relatively few about social services



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the High Street – Third World road surface

“It could have been managed better, but Surrey is badly short-changed by a Labour government that spends more of our taxes on its heartland than it does on a county it likes to see as rich, healthy and safe.”

With our roads and environment looking more like the Third World, our schools oversubscribed, our elderly and vulnerable population set to grow, and our health service destined for unfamiliar changes, Peter’s the man to shake complacency out of our County government and get on with the job.

Keith Evetts

although this is a very substantial part of County expenditure, and set to grow as the population ages. Health is becoming a key issue, with a myriad Government-imposed changes in the pipeline. Peter is an active Vice Chairman of the county’s Health Scrutiny Committee and reports that the Primary Care Trust (NHS) seems to be paying more attention to local consultation than it used to. Council work takes up most of Peter’s week. Some of his colleagues double up as borough councillors, taking home two sets of taxpayers’ money: “I don’t see how a County Councillor can also be a Borough Councillor and do a proper job as either.”

I’ve seen Peter at work for two years now. His conscientiousness, patience and persistence at many a thankless task is impressive. He also manages to get quite a lot done by the county bureaucracy. The key, he says, is trying to build relationships with people who work there and with like-minded colleagues regardless of their affiliation. The county’s financial position is not helpful.



Peter – street fighter on the case

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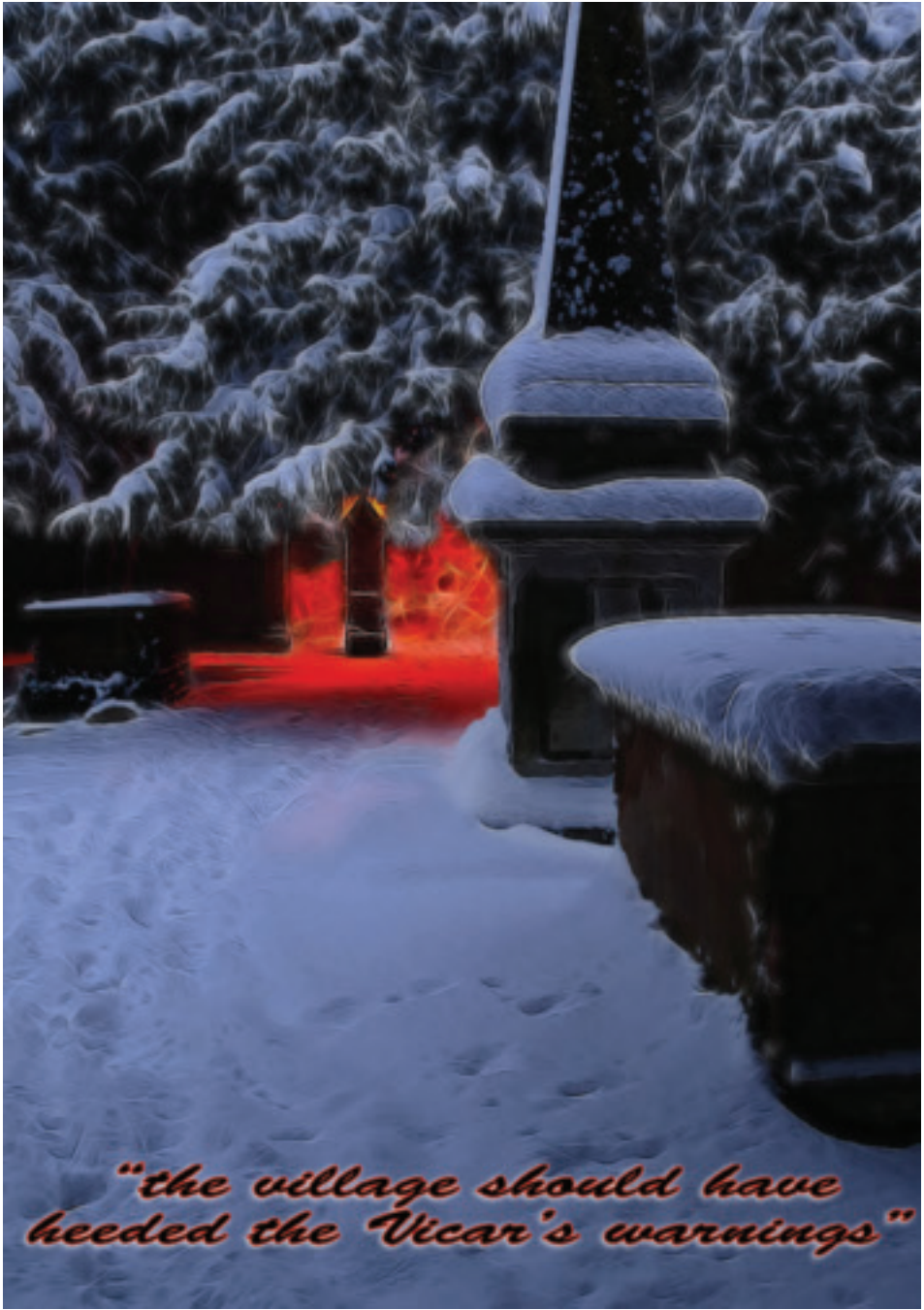
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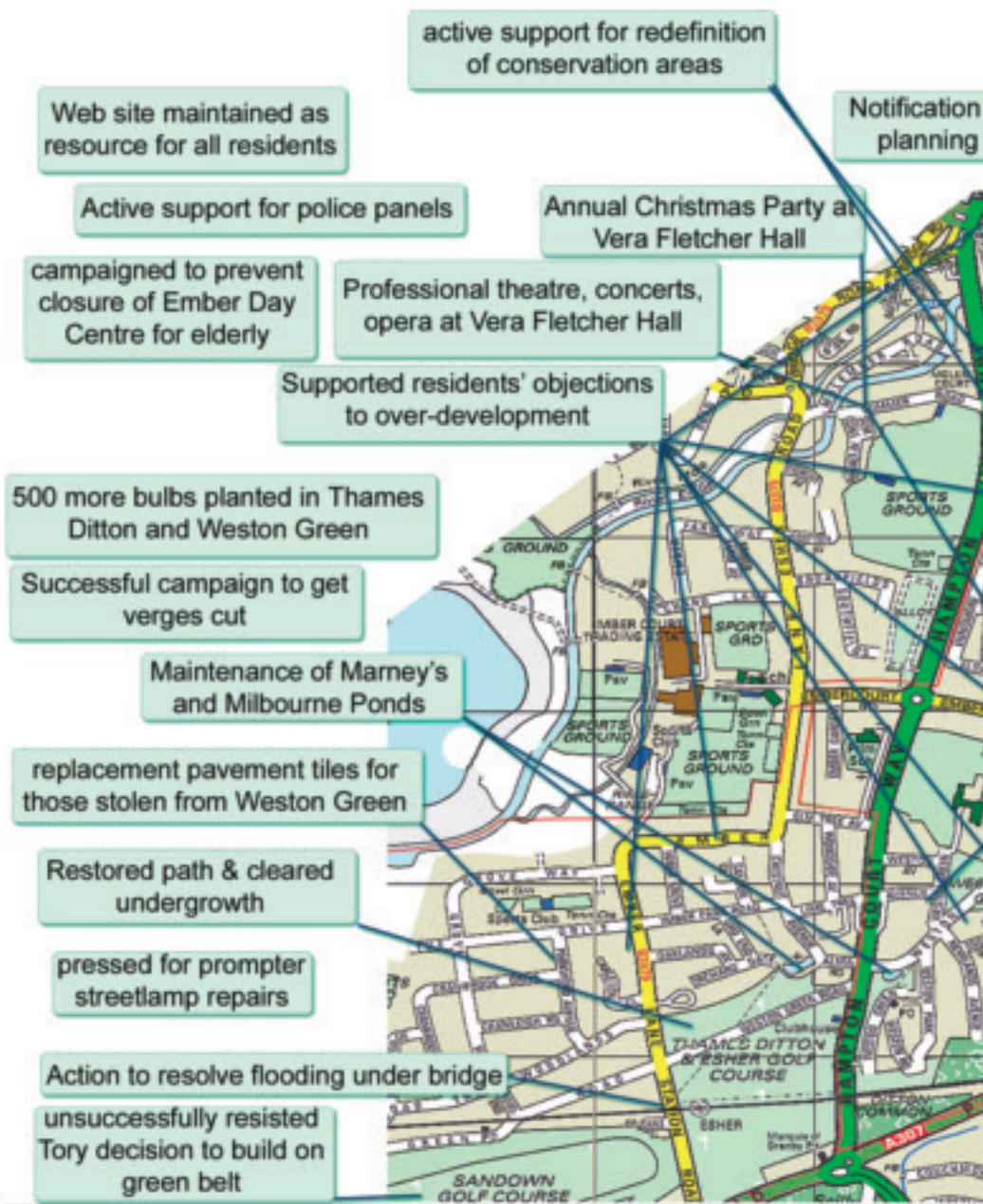
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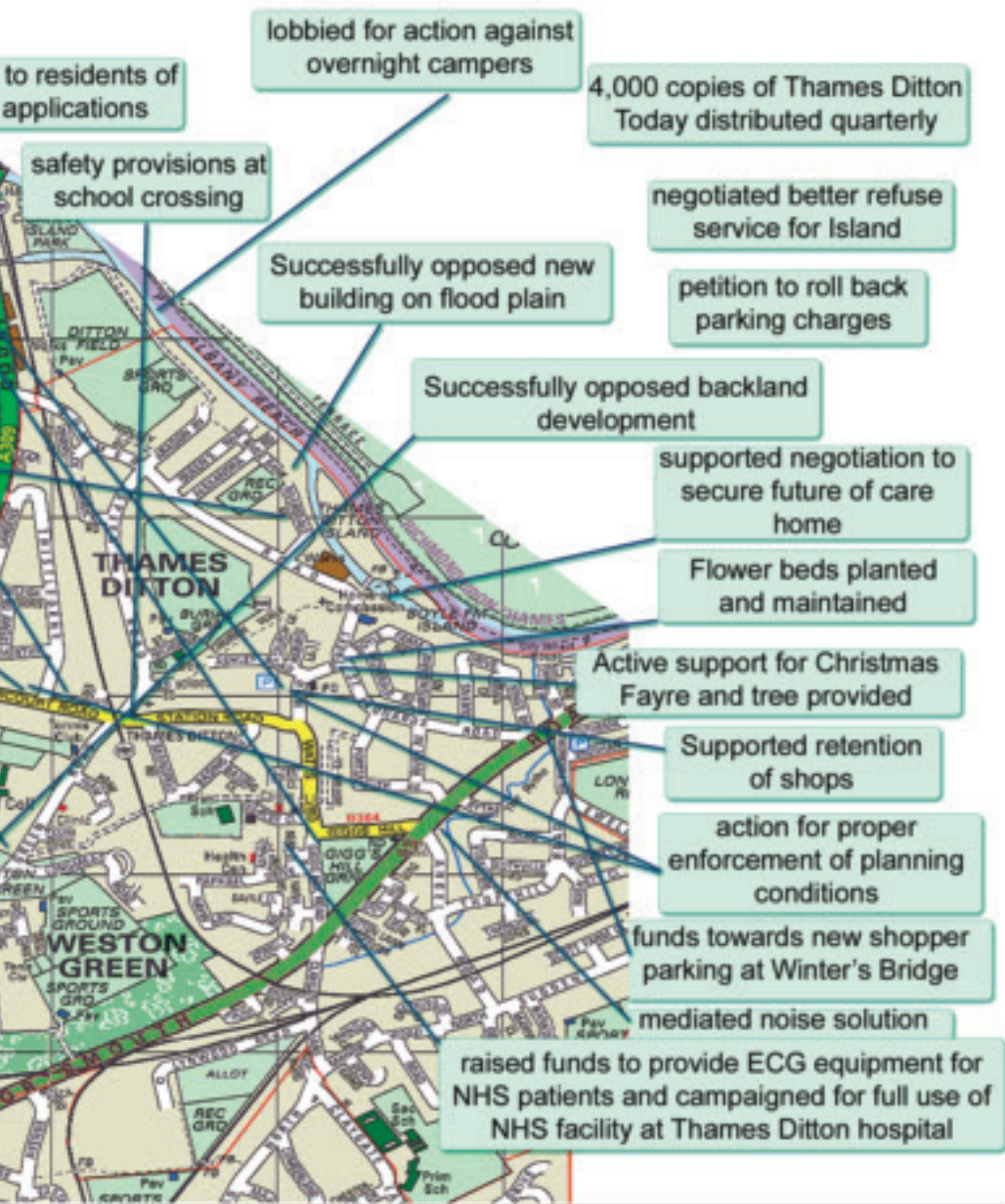
"the village should have heeded the Vicar's warnings"



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Alright on the Night

– the joys of running a theatre



Denis Norden and then Griff Rhys Jones have made “It’ll be Alright on the Night” famous through their long running television shows with the bits they didn’t want to show when things went disastrously wrong in rehearsal or on the night. Running theatre shows and concerts at the Vera Fletcher Hall has its fair share of close calls, near disasters and last minute panics. Just like a swan which glides smoothly across the water there is furious paddling activity under the surface which no one sees.

The telephone rings. “It’s Glyn here about “Madame Butterfly”. Can you provide a 5 year old blue eyed boy with fair hair for the performance next week at the Vera Fletcher Hall?” We are used to some strange requests and last minute panics but this was a new one! How does one set about finding a small boy to meet these requirements? If we do find him will his parents want him up so late at night? What would Equity say? We solved this one by finding a 7 year old girl with brown hair – and with a blonde wig no one was any the wiser.

For “Pirates of Penzance” the request was for a 9 year old boy in old-fashioned



Robbie Spencer, star of the stage

striped pyjamas and dressing gown – how many 9 year old boys wear these today? Our press officer, 17 year old Ruby Limbrick, spoke to her next door neighbour Robbie Spencer and 24 hours later he was performing on the boards – a real pro.

Our usual last minute crises are more mundane – there was the international cellist who arrived in trainers and forgot



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his black shoes to go with his tails. We were able to solve this one but any observant concert-goer that night who saw the cellist come in to the Hall might have noticed that his shoes were two sizes too large for his feet. Other cellists have forgotten to bring their rest for their instrument on the floor- a bit of carpet solved that one.

Last minute requests for special items are common- Regency chairs, side tables, champagne glasses, flower vases, Victorian lamps... Pianists arrive on the night expecting to find a page turner laid on. All these are challenges which we can meet by calling on our Friends of the Vera Fletcher Hall to help out. Over the years we've had lights fail before the show, (but

were fixed just in time), but fortunately all our performers have always turned up on the night, though some a little late.

Next time you come to a performance at the Vera Fletcher Hall, spare a thought for the management who dread hearing, an hour before curtain up, the words "You don't happen to have...?", who grow old before their time, wonder why they ever agreed to help and keep their collective fingers crossed in the hope that "It'll be Alright on the Night".

Ruth Lyon

Ruth, Joan Leifer and the whole team at the Hall do a fantastic job as theatrical impresarios – Ed.





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Dreams of Summer



Dream a little and think of summer. On two pleasant lawns in Weston Green, men and women are absorbed in the gentle game of croquet. They do not whack their opponents' balls into the shrubbery, but rather pursue tactics to get their balls through all the hoops before their opponents do. The peaceful lawns are encircled by mature trees, and there will be a short break mid-afternoon for tea and, if they're lucky, a cake.

This is Ember Croquet Club. The club, which lies between Grove Way and The Drive, is a section of the Ember Sports Club which also has tennis, bowls, drama and social activities. The Croquet Section was formed in 1990 after the then market garden was cleared and levelled for croquet lawns.

Croquet is believed to have originated in France in the 14th century. By the middle of the 19th century it was one of the most popular outdoor sports in England. Today croquet is played by around 10,000 players in Britain, in 170 clubs.

Some thirty members of varying ages enjoy this leisurely, sociable, outdoor sport throughout the summer period at the Ember Croquet Club. The club provides the necessary equipment. All you need are some flat shoes and a cheerful demeanour!



detail from "Croquet" - James Tissot ca. 1878

The summer season opens at Easter and continues until the end of September. During the winter members meet once a month in the clubhouse for indoor carpet croquet. Coaching is offered by members to beginners. Everyone is encouraged to join in various competitions as well as arranging informal games with other members, and staging monthly barbeques.

For a modest subs, anyone can enjoy this fascinating and addictive game. For more information, contact Mike Beaney on 020 8398 1567, Peter Lomax on 01932 860344, or the author, **Mike Lambert** on 020 8398 1476,

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Gold in the High Street



How many of us could name an Olympic gold medal winner who was born in the Punjab but now lives and works among us in Thames Ditton?

The Pro Shop in the High Street is a magnet for sports players run by Olympian Kulbir Bhaura, bronze medallist for Great Britain in 1984, and gold medallist at Seoul in 1998. He came to the UK in 1968 and as he had played hockey at school in India he joined the Indian Gymkhana Hockey Club at Osterley and from there stepped on to the national stage. In 1979 he was selected for England National Squad and played in 2 World cups as well as the Olympics, generally as centre forward or right wing, winning a Silver Medal in the 1986 London World Cup.

His shop, with separate showrooms for cricket and hockey, provides kit for major professional players as well as aspiring youngsters. Advice is dispensed with the equipment to ensure that the right stick, bat or pads are matched to the player. Customers come in all shapes and sizes – one day the door opened and a tiny customer came in wearing shorts, boots and a pearl Alice band. Kulbir was able to fit out the little girl with a hockey stick, explaining that it should not come up above her waist. Another customer, when I was in the shop, asked “Have you any gloves in pink?” Kulbir found some black ones with pink backs and another satisfied customer left the shop.



Kulbir Bhaura in the Pro Shop

Kulbir set up his first Pro Shop in Chiswick in 1996, opening his second branch in Thames Ditton in 2000. It is a flourishing asset that attracts sporting shoppers to our High Street from far and wide. Kulbir finds Thames Ditton a lovely little village with strong community spirit. He appreciates the support he gets from his local customers and is glad to contribute to the community in turn: his shop acts as the Box Office for the many shows at the Vera Fletcher Hall. He still plays hockey, at Sunbury, and lives locally with his wife and 8 year old son Harvir who, Kulbir says, “shows promise...”

Ruth Lyon

Beavers Dam the Opposition



Yay! Beavers

On Sunday 8th February Beavers, Cubs and Scouts took part in the annual District Scout Group Cross Country Race starting at West End, Esher. The Dittons Scout Group has always had a strong presence and this year was no different. 16 Cubs and 30 Beavers from the group participated. The redoubtable Beavers have won the team event on nine occasions during the past 11 years so expectations were high this year, especially as there were two separate Dittons teams entered in the 1.75 mile race, from the Toronto Colony and the newly formed Montreal Colony.

Despite the recent bad weather and very muddy conditions our Beavers were

kept as mustard to retain their team trophy and a grand effort was put in by all of them. The Toronto Beavers narrowly beat the Montreal Beavers into first place. Six and a half year old Benjamin Collier from Montreal Beavers finished fifth in the individual race.

The Dittons Cubs Cross Country team also came second overall with Ben Baumann finishing second in the individual race.

We are very proud of all the children who took part' said Martin Cooper, Toronto Beaver leader. 'It's a tremendous achievement for our Colonies to finish in first and second places in the District race.'

Music for Spring

– at the Vera Fletcher Hall



Cinderella – English Pocket Opera

The highlight of the new season will undoubtedly be Rossini's "**Cinderella**", brought to us by English Pocket Opera and sung in English. This company is one of the country's leading touring companies and has brought many operas to the Hall (most recently Magic Flute and Carmen.) It specialises in re-interpreting classic operas in an intimate small-scale format and their performances are praised in the Press as "everything that opera should be – non elitist, beautifully sung and, most of all – fun".

They described this production of "Cinderella" as "a colourful swirl of original ideas, creating a hilarious visual spectacle marked by some extraordinary singing". The Vera Fletcher Hall is a perfect venue for small scale opera so leave your opera glasses at home and remember that great things often come in small packages!

The Hall is making a name for itself with its programme of chamber music and on Friday 24 April we welcome back Sagi Hartov (cello) and Benjamin Frith (piano) who will be joined by Ramon Wodkowski (clarinet) in a concert which will include works by Brahms, Glinka and Beethoven. International concert pianist Benjamin Frith won the National Concerto Competition at the age of only 14 and went on to receive a Gold Medal at the 1989 Rubenstein Piano Competition. Sagi Hartov is a regular visitor to the Hall where he played with Tanya Ursova and since then with Benjamin Frith. He has won many major awards and performed at the Wigmore Hall and many other venues at home and abroad. He was a finalist in the Rostropovich International Cello Competition in Paris in 2001. American Ramon Wodkowski studied music at Yale, came to London to the Royal College of Music and has appeared as guest clarinettist with many orchestras such as the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. He performs regularly at venues such as the Carnegie Hall, the Royal Albert Hall and

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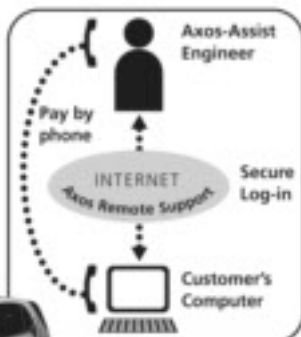
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the Salzburg Mozarteum under conductors such as Bernard Haitink and Pierre Boulez and gives frequent solo and chamber music recitals across London.

Both these events are supported by the RC Sherriff Trust.

In April **Michael Lunts** makes a welcome return with his “**Winter in Majorca**” – the story of Chopin’s stay in a monastery in Majorca with his lover



Michael Lunts as Chopin

Georges Sand. The music that came out of this adventure includes the Preludes, Polonaises and Mazurkas and are played by Michael as part of the action. “Winter in Majorca” has been performed all over the world as far afield as Australia and Canada, since its premiere at Salisbury Playhouse. Actor and classical pianist, Michael Lunts’ unusual combination of talents have earned him many accolades over the years: “Spellbinding study of Chopin, interweaving his music and letters” – The Independent.

New to the Hall on 20 March will be French singer and songwriter **Alex Vachon** in her “**The Sunshine of my Rainy Days**”. Alex will be singing her English songs and hits from Cole Porter to “Les Miserables”.

The season concludes on Friday 3 July with a concert from two continents of music from classic to jazz when Brazilian guitarist Pepe Barcellos joins prize-winning young musicians Amy Tress (violin), and Adam Crowther (piano) playing works from the Americas and Europe, including Tom Jobim, Piazzolla, Gershwin, Debussy, Ravel and Sarasate’s virtuoso piece for violin “Carmen Fantasy”.

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Michael Lunts in

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"Spellbinding" – The Independent

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Friday 22 May 8.00pm

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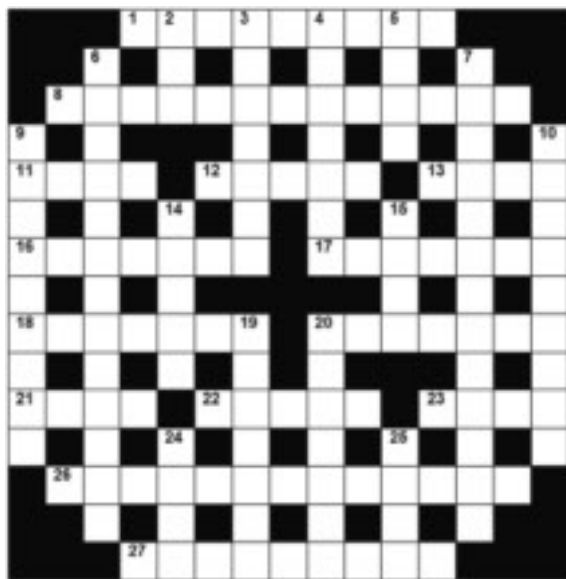
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Spring Crossword

By Margaret Briggs



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ACROSS

1. Leg in neat bandage is still not pretty (9)
8. Strong emotion during Date is without feeling (13)
11. Old duel could be made crooked (4)
12. Amazingly it's Alf in the end game (5)
13. Paid regularly for having torn clothing (4)
16. Fifty in making obeisance creates heavy breathing (7)
17. I text account to demand rent (5,2)
18. Mostly rather big (7)
20. Shivers terribly following confession (7)
21. Kind of printed lettering (4)
22. Ringed annually as the Queen's property (5)
23. One time only (4)
26. Delicatessen with a hundred debts to pay is a fine muddle (9,4)
27. Making oneself warm and comfortable despite finding guns in heather (9)

DOWN

2. Short fibres cause little sleep (3)
3. Perpetuating promise of final mixed gin (7)
4. Nasty expression at sight of unwanted card (7)
5. Virtuous ladies have the United Nations at heart (4)
6. Hire pal to rob big book-list maker (13)
7. To invent S.E. State requires concentration (13)
9. Saint has the means of creating peace and calm (9)
10. Politicians - or it says of themselves (9)
14. Better and better weather (5)
15. Green entertainment (4)
19. G. is tired but finds his way back to Inn (7)
20. More to do with the body than the mind - but Una has less (7)
24. Beastly king (4)
25. So let it be (a & m) (4)

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Solution to the Winter Crossword



Each of the first three correct entries opened, below, wins a £5 Voucher for spending in any Thames Ditton or Weston Green shop. Well done!

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SERVICES, CLUBS, SOCIETIES AND GROUPS

Services

Cheer (Concern and Help for East Elmbridge Retired)	Trudy O Keefe	01372 474555
Dittons and Weston Green Neighbourcare	Sue Mayes	020 8398 6714
Elmbridge Borough Council Community Support Services		
Information, Meals Services, Community		
Transport, Bus Permits		01372 474552/4
Elmbridge Community Alarm Service		01372 474560
Elmbridge Relief Carers Scheme		01372 474547
Ember Centre for the Retired	Mon & Thurs	020 8398 9870
	At other times	01372 474553
Esher and District Stroke Club	Ann Pollock	020 8398 6132
Voluntary Action Elmbridge	Mrs Carole Roycroft	01372 463587
M.D.H.S. Household Services (& garden tidying)	Carolyn Smart (Manager)	01932 248533
Surrey Mobile Library Service		01483 517402
Surrey Youth and Adult Education Service	Elmbridge Area	020 8979 8334

Groups

Girl Guiding in TD & WG	Mrs K Williams	020 8398 1300
1st Thames Ditton Brownies	Mrs. Bronach Hughes	020 8398 1628
3rd Thames Ditton Brownies	Mrs Heather Horler	020 8398 0364
2nd Thames Ditton Rainbows	Nicki Sutherland	020 8398 4202
1st Weston Green (All Saints) Scout Group	Alan Nolan-Davies	0844 414 2826
1st Weston Green Guides (All Saints)	Mrs. Louise Lewis	020 8398 4843
2nd Thames Ditton Guides	Mrs. Bronach Hughes	020 8398 1628
1st Weston Green Brownies (All Saints)	Mrs K Williams	020 8398 1300
2nd Weston Green Brownies	Linda Hall	020 8941 4913
1st Weston Green Rainbows	Mrs Helen Hill	020 8398 3135
4th Thames Ditton Ajax Sea Scouts	Alison Derrick	020 8398 0041
Dittons Scout Group	Mr. G. King	020 8398 7624
Coffee and chat (United Reformed Church)	Mrs. E. Barker	01372 467491
Emberbrook Trefoil Guild	Mrs. Adrienne Nealing	020 8398 5582
Esher Floral Art Group	Mrs. M. Dingle	020 8398 3943
Friends of Bushey and Home Parks	Mrs. Julie Cohen	020 8943 2017
Friends of Walsingham Care	Miss Valerie Chicken	0208 398 2932
Molesey and Dittons Neighbourhood Watch	Chairman: Pat Farmiloe	020 8398 2787
Parents and Toddlers(St Nicholas church)	Information	020 8398 7211
Ripieno Choir	Nick Harris	020 8399 7231
Surrey Bell-ringers	Nick Pattenden	Nick@FSLimited.com

Clubs

Albany Motor Yacht Club	Secretary	01784466651
Arts and Heritage Club	Carol Butcher	01932 867511
Claremont PROBUS Club	Mr. P. Collins	020 8398 3125
Claygate Bridge Club	Hon. Secretary	020 8398 1710
Colets Health & Fitness	Giordano Orsini	020 8398 7108
Dittons Skiff and Punting Club	Hon Secretary	020 8398 1642
Dittons & Hinchley Wood Royal British Legion Club	Secretary	020 8398 6263

Ember Players (Drama) Ember Sports Club	Kelly Bradley	07971 839 648
Ember Sports Club	Mrs. Pauline Wareham	020 8979 8977
Ember Sports Club: Bowls	John Garland	01932 220221
Ember Sports Club: Croquet	Dr. David Cooke	01932 862841
Ember Sports Club: Tennis	Margaret Robinson	01372 842401
Esher Bowling Club	Roger Cooper	01372 468109
Esher Bridge Centre	Paul Whicker	01372 460157
Esher Camera Club	Billy Buchanan	020 8398 3169
Folk Dance Club	Pam Phillips	01372 373745
Hinchley Wood / Dittons PROBUS Club	Ken Thomas	0208 398 0526
Long Ditton Cricket Club	Nigel Hardy	020 8398 8361
Long Ditton Garden Club	Mrs. Ann Allen	020 8398 1718
Model Railway Society (Hampton Court)	Secretary	01932 241224
Mothers Union (All Saints)	Val Lomax	01932 860344
Old Cranleigh Rugby Club	Tony Price	07801 837129
Old Cranleigh Hockey Club	Eds Copleston (Men)	07775 940703
	Helen Hawes (Ladies)	07771 557900
River Club (BMYC)	David Walker	0870 460 3586
Rotary Club, Esher	Geoff Morris	01932 868454
Rubber Bridge TD Lawn Tennis Club	Val	020 8399 9972
Surbiton Croquet Club	Alec Thomas	020 8398 2391
Surbiton Golf Club	Secretary	0208 398 3101
Surbiton Hockey Club	Secretary	020 8398 2401
Thames Ditton Lawn Tennis Club	Martha Gordon	020 8398 6800
Thames Ditton & Esher Golf Club	Mark Rodbard	020 8398 1551
Thames Ditton Squash Club (Colets)	Dave Peck	020 8398 7108
Thames Ditton Cricket Club	Howard Frish (Secretary)	07947 561449
Thames Ditton Marquetry Group	Jasmine Berry	020 8398 4358
Yoga for Health Club	Mrs. Celia Rowe	020 8398 2700

SOCIETIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Ember Choral Society	Linda Bridges	020 8399 5402
Esher Recorded Music Society	Miss S. M. Garrat	020 8398 8541
Esher and Molesey Garden Society	Mr. B. Andrews	020 8398 5063
Hampton Court Way Allotment Association	Secretary: Basil Rainbow	020 8398 8471
Lynwood Allotment Society	Barry Jordan	0776 282 5041
Molesey and District Antiques Society	Linda Lambert	020 8398 1476
NADFAS (Decorative & Fine Arts) Kingston	Mrs. Valerie Windsor	020 8549 9967
National Trust: Richmond Association	Membership Secretary	020 8894 2972
Soroptimist International (Kingston District)	Secretary: Pat Harman	020 8390 3507
Thames Ditton Women's Institute (W.I.)	Secretary	020 8398 8615
Thames Valley Amateur Radio Transmitters Society	Chairman	0148328 4279

OTHER

Cancer Research UK	Mrs. Vivienne Harris	020 8398 6787
University of the Third Age (U3A)	Ken Kingham	0208 979 8053
Vera Fletcher Hall	Lettings: Helen Mason	08456 528 529
	Membership: Sue Morris	020 8224 2536

Please contact the Editor to amend these listings



People are growing angry. Two decades of reckless greed in the City and complicity in government have bankrupted Britain. 'Prudence' Brown, who sold off Britain's gold reserves at the bottom of the market, is now profligate with our money where the banks left off. The Governor of the Bank of England states that 'savers will be sacrificed.' That's us. We've learned that neither banks nor governments are to be trusted. Our money is safe only as long as we don't want it back.

This is an enormous disaster, yet its protagonists are still there. Bankers murmur weak apologies while taking millions in bonuses and getting new government jobs to oversee their chums. The Bank of England produces worse and worse statistics, predicting ever-receding 'recovery' as it prepares to print money. Politicians mouth ineffectually about 'kick-starting' an economy that is more of a dead horse.

They deserve to be swept out of office.

The alternative is no better. The Conservatives, party of the City, of bankers, of fund managers, of property 'developers'; who in government enacted the deregulation that allowed this rotten state of affairs to develop. The party that ran down our manufacturing base in favour of 'services' that are now shown to be dispensable. That sold off state assets for money that along with the fat years of oil revenue is all spent.

Politicians have not served us well. They feather their nests with multiple directorships, with dubious expense claims, with cash-for-questions or cash-to-fix-legislation, with jobs for the boys. There is chicanery in party funding. There is sleaze. They tell us that immorality in

private life has no bearing on their effectiveness as politicians, as legislators, as rulers.

On the contrary, it appears to be a qualification.

Our institutions are not serving us well either. They have grown archaic. They are losing meaning. 'Debate' in the House is risible – a Punch and Judy show, a place to posture. A carnival of the absurd, with low attendances. Voting by party whip. Small wonder that most citizens don't bother to turn out to vote in national elections.

Yes, people are growing angry. You hear it on the streets, in the shops, ever more. Things must change. It is not sufficient for the people, who foot the bill, to have a choice between two evils once every five years. Taxpayers deserve more involvement in how their money is spent, issue by issue. The means exist for swift and inexpensive consultation. The will to act upon consultation is not there. It needs to be entrenched. Government for a decade or more by the leadership of one party leads to corrosion, decay, and bankruptcy. Other countries limit terms of office for this reason. We need to reconstitute our system to enable this.

The self-serving egoists who make careers out of politics will not change their comfortable situation. If the stables are to be made wholesome; if those who eat our grain shall no longer be allowed to spread plague through City and Westminster alike; then we need non-partisan men and women, people of honour, probity, decency and restraint, to step forward or be co-opted. And we must vote for them if real change is to come.

Editor



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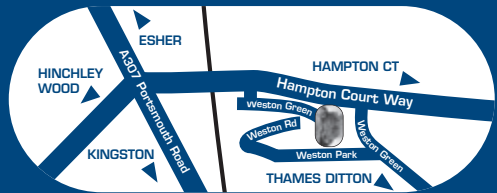
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