The Paralympics: Yes, we can!’

By W/N reporter

It is often pointed out that all of us are disabled at least three times in our lives — when we are totally dependent on others; when we are ill; and in old age, when infirmities of various kinds come to affect us all.

Issues
How far, then, do we still need to go? Just to make the Paralympics as a case-study, there is general agreement that provision for disabled spectators and athletes, on site, were generally extremely good, whether by the installation of lifts, or buggies (which proliferated in some venues); and also special seating arrangements.

However, Caroline Owens warned: “Don’t bother with accessibility on the 2012 website as the responses, when and if we received them, only contained mis-information” — (including a route up North Greenwich Station to the Tree Hill for disabled people!).

Outside the sports venues the picture was not as rosy, as one of the letters on page 2 of this issue reminds us. Lawrence Smith reported that the “overflow” disabled parking area at North Greenwich Station was closed (and remains closed as we go to print), and the disabled bays in the station car park are often full. Drop off and pick up in the car park is prohibited, which makes life difficult for everyone.

More generally, stories still circulate of tube stations with no lifts, of stations with lethal gaps between the train and platforms; of trains that offer no easy access for wheel-chair users, of buses stopped incoherently closed… TFL, to give some credit, did make provision for ramps at some tube stations: but as we go to press no guarantee has been offered that these will continue in use. Meanwhile, of the 279 tube stations in London, only 67 provide disabled access.

We still have some way to go: the RNS would love to invite those with their own stories — positive and negative — about disabled provision, particularly on our public transport, to come in columns to draw attention to such issues. So, over to you! Let the stories you have to tell act as an important legacy of the wonderful games that we enjoyed this September.

Protecting our Health Service

The government’s plans to privatize and fragment our NHS are starting to take shape across England, and the pressure is on the new Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt, to deliver the radical changes that Andrew Lansley has been foisting on the public. Local doctors are now getting together to form CCGs, or “Clinical Commissioning Groups”. These groups will have to make big decisions about how NHS money is spent locally, and what health services will be available to you and your family.

CCGs will be under pressure from the government to implement plans which will inevitably cut contracts — and hand out contracts to private companies. However, NHS watchers point out that CCGs also have a legal obligation to pay attention to local patients — and many doctors on the CCGs were against the plans from the start.

Those who care about protecting the NHS are being asked to sign up to a petition to our local CCG now. Go to the address in the box! The last thing most doctors want is to see services curtailed and care cut off from our NHS for the profit of the private sector. This is an opportunity to get in early, while CCGs are still being formed, to give doctors an alternative roadmap: including waterlogging writing into their constitutions — one based on sound legal advice and the interests of every patient, not private companies.

The government and the private health industry probably will not take this initiative as seriously as it deserves. But there’s little they can do to stop people power.

Meanwhile, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is asking for views on its strategy for 2013-2016. Published on 6th Sept., the National regulator for health and adult social care sets out proposals for what it thinks it should focus on and what the public and others can expect from it. CQC’s new Chief Executive David Behan said: “For CQC, being successful means that more health and care services meet quality and safety standards — and improve quickly if they don’t.”

The last thing most doctors want is to see services curtailed and care cut off from our NHS. This is an opportunity to get in early, while CCGs are still being formed, to give doctors an alternative roadmap: including waterlogging writing into their constitutions — one based on sound legal advice and the interests of every patient, not private companies.

The consultation runs until 6 December. Full details of the proposals and how to respond on CQC’s website at www.cqc.org.uk/themextphase

Westcombe NEWS

Est. 1973 Free to 3800 homes, and in libraries & some shops October 2012 Issue 8

Monthly newspaper of Westcombe Society: fostering a sense of community

http://www.38degrees.org.uk/page/nw/74e0535a2d4f5b475d830400/46721368910716980VEj

Sophie Wells produced an international personal best on her way to her first silver medal in the Individual Championship test grade IV (Dressage). Sophie later won a second silver – and helped Great Britain to win a gold medal in the team event.

In Greenwich...

Elegance & flair in}

NEWS BRIEFS

Quiz Night

The Westcombe Society’s popular Quiz Night is on Saturday 20th October at 7.30 pm for an 8.00 pm start in Mycenae House. Bookings for “Chippy” suppers, if required, must be ordered in advance. Please ring Caroline on 0853 0948. Bookings close on 14th October — or earlier if fully booked.

DickeNseN’s CHRISTMAS BAZAAR

Sat 17th November. To book a stall, please ring Marilyn Little on 0853 1312.

NEWS BRIEFS

ATM thefts in Blackheath Village

There have been several incidents of theft at ATM machines often involving “distraction” strategies. You have been warned! Only Seven Weeks to Christmas Bazaar!

The very popular Westcombe Society’s Dickensian Christmas Bazaar is to be held on the 17th November from 10am to 4pm at Blackheath High School in Vanbrugh SE3. Over 50 stalls, free entertainment for the children, and a visit from Father Christmas! If you have any unwanted gifts, tickets or Bolton’s for the society stalls, please contact Marilyn Little for delivery or collection on 020 8533 1132.

Paint change

The Greenwich Grove, located near St Mary’s, has been renamed The Gold and Saddle. The Pilot on the Greenwich Peninsula has commemorated the Paralympics with its new name The Wheelchair Basketballer.

Attack in St John’s Park

Two teenagers have been charged after a couple aged 17 were robbed in St. John’s Park on August 1st, as reported in the last issue of the WNS. The husband was taken to hospital and treated for a stab wound in the leg. The youths — aged 16 and 17 — appeared at Bexley magistrates court accused of robbery and were remanded in custody. A third youth was bailed to report to police in October.

Drug seizures

Cannabis with a street value of more than £6000 was seized across Greenwich on the morning of September 20th, when officers took part in “Operation Hawk” set up to tackle drug-related crime. Fifteen people were charged. The Home Office estimates that between a third and a half of acquisitive crime is committed to fund illegal substances.

The Crimereporters number is 0800 555 111, and may be used anonymously.

The Westcombe Society

Quiz Night

Our next Quiz Night is on Saturday 20th October at 7.30 pm for an 8.00 pm start in Mycenae House.

Bookings for ‘Chippy’ suppers, if required, must be ordered in advance. Please ring Caroline on 0853 0948. Bookings close on 14th October — or earlier if fully booked.
The Westcombe Society’s members’ evening

September 22nd saw the annual Autumn members’ society evening, a wonderful opportunity to meet neighbours old and new, and to find out all the news that the Westcombe News dares not print. Many of our members help out in all sorts of ways, said Marilyn Little, the chairman of the Westcombe Society. “And their contribution is really appreciated. But we could always do with more. Too often, it falls to a small group of devoted volunteers to carry on the work of the society.”

So what do they do? Among other things, organizing, or helping to run events, such as the Tea Party for Seniors, the Children’s Newly Near Sale, the Summer Picnic, the Christmas Fair, Winter Nights, graffiti-bashing, and contributing to the Westcombe News – and counting out and delivering it – help always needed here (Please ring Myles on 8835 3740). To any of those who serve on committees, monitoring developments in the environment, and community issues, and representing the local members’ interests, we are very grateful.

The Westcombe Society is unique in Blackheath in the way it works towards community building, and its charity work – the Society raises and distributes some £4,000 a year to local charities.

Letters

From: Gordon Baker
Subject: Rock Road
Although I have great respect for the RWN’s editorial judgment, I think it was irrefutable to publish Trevor Ambrose’s church duties about the Article in the September issue.

Blackheath is a compact and picturesque village in this country but its success is not served by the miffle of straight patches of the article Left. It seemed a great pity to give a view to such views when the News was only reflecting the planning with which the vast majority of the Westcombe community had celebrated the church. We have a number of local residents who have long lived in the area, and performed an unswerving task with admirable skill and resilience to the great credit of our nation. I dread to think that Trevor Ambrose imagines himself to be a better judge.

From: A local resident
I understand that the RN is calling torturing experience during the Games. We had few difficulties with the buses. No buses stopped by the traffic signal on Blackheath since late May. No buses stopped opposite Crouch Road after the same afternoon but there were patches of blackness before the traffic signal.

Even if we used the bus to go to Greenwich then we experienced that the buses were not running at times. There was no one coming back to Westcombe Park Road but had to keep an eye on the traffic direction and catch a bus. No policeman made any attempt to help. No doubt, the buses will be running fast to their next bus stop because they’re all being handled how much they care.

From: David Brown
I have no idea what is the matter with 8000 (I think) are to affect to help. He raised the issue with Mike Frostine, Olympic Transportation Advisor to Greenwich Council, who reported that he had taken up the matter with LOC and TfL. Sadly, the reply was not satisfactory. He has now been told that the buses start on Prince Charles Road at the clarence. We need to ensure journey reliability as is PBS. Additionally, replacing the buses was not considered for the entire area.

From: R G Morrison
Coleridge Road
I refer to the excellent article by Pamela Mayo on his visit to Hackney in last month’s RWN. Congratulations again that the RN extends its subject matter beyond purely local topics, interesting as they are. I will try to encourage some of my friends to send in contributions.

From: Mike Symonds
Westcombe Hill
Your report on the impact of the Olympics and Paralympics on the O2 (p6) mentioned the improved parking for shoppers in the Standard area due to the temporary shuttles. There were other improvements in transport too: the removal of one of the bus light and the diversion of the service. I am unable to monitor services on the route, but the daunting question is, will we keep such improvements? On the other hand, it is nice to get our 15-minute frequency twice service on the main road, much better than the service, which was relatively empty.

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Unusual group, LOCOG did not find any difficulty in recruiting, not security staff, but volunteers – over 70,000 of them, and they were a resounding success, spreading good will and brotherhood wherever they served. One legacy of the games might be a resurgence in volunteering – starting perhaps with your local community group, the Westcombe Society! Why not?

Interested? Ring Marilyn on 8835 1112 to find out what opportunities there are!

LOCOG

Apologies for the greenlines that crept onto page 4 of our last issue, in the article about IOG sponsorship.

The mandated changes should read:

1... the company [McDonald’s] insisted that no-one else in the park could sell chips except for Fish & Chips vendors. 2... costs the NHS £12 billion a year.

Unhealthy eating, and lack of exercise, play a key role in creating the obesity problem.

1 A Core of Big Business: Big Deal; Small Business: No Deal.

From: Frederick Newman
Westcombe Park Rd
Your column, calling itself Building Design has given the beautiful new-look Catty, and it feel the Catterson’s Cate’s 2012, pricing the the building (sic) completed during the past year.

Chris Condolly, the director of the Victorian Society has also thanked the lovely seven ‘bungalows’ and claims that ‘commercial motives’ were placed behind: ‘most gladdening’. Mr Condolly argues that ‘he new design has obscured its distinctive shape at the quayside’, and objects to the ‘attractive lift tower overlooking the dock’.

What a pity that these criticisms take so little of the众多的正面意见. The ship has been nominated to its former glory, in the process gaining extra summertime views from sunsets all over the globe. It will always remain its classic shape, but as a key point in the city’s heritage, it will mark a major step forward, as the historic features of the old Catterson’s Cate’s are still there.

From: Susan McNeil
West Heath
We very much applaud and agree with the well-considered points in the RN’s editorial in the issue and ‘Under the Archer’. This building deserves protection, as apart from Catterson’s Cate’s, the only building of some merit and distinction is one approaches the Maritime Greenwich Heritage Site. See the on the heavily trafficked Trafalgar Road.

It isn’t Smutty with the old ship setting office and is an excellent example of its. To Greenwich Architecture: The notion that Greenwich Council might permit demolition seems to be replaced by a sudden and quick ‘Catholics’ is not the Royal Borough would be unacceptables. (See Building Design, Cate’s Cate’s Award - http://www.bdhelens.co.uk/buildings/catus/ cates/awards-cates-winners-2012/2012-sep-10/cates/ 01/0042093).)

Rather than allow demolition, the Council might lock at insisting that any new extension remains and reuses the features they have long neglected. Even if The Arches does not achieve listed status, it should be prevented from demolition.

While we welcome the building of a new modern swimming pool (although the council has been asked to stretch to making it deeper and defiance logic), Greenwich Council should appreciate the value of such dugedful buildings of character and historic value, in the Greenwich Royal Hospital, a temporary demolition or violations for short-term gain.

From: Sandra Kiley
Vauxhall Park
It is a great shame that we have lost such a wonderful Pervyson Michael from the Vauxhall Park Walk. He has been the Park’s key volunteer for the last 11 years, so loved by all the local community for 25 years. He made many friends along his route and we miss his wonderful service and passing the time of day with him. Particularly interesting that getting that Michael’s new ‘Walk’ is just the other side of the hill. I realise that in the future I will need to look back after the game but surely loyalty and long service should be taken into account when carrying out re-organisation.

FURTHER: A response from the author: Blackheath

COMMUNITY NEWS

WESTCOME NEWS

ALL EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO: Neville Selwood, the Editor, westcombenews@yahoo.co.uk Tel. 0208 858 8489

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REPORTERS: Denise Scott-McDonald

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Dick Allard: All queries and comments to: 0208 858 7305

The Planning and environment sub-committee:
westcombe.gov.uk

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Blackheath - a Builder’s Paradise?

The coalition Government’s announcement that they were to consult on a proposed three year relaxation in planning legislation has already caused controversy. In an effort designed to boost the economy, under the new “Permitted Development Rights”, shops, offices and residential properties will be allowed to build larger extensions without the need for planning permission.

Equally, developers who, according to David Cameron are held back by the “many obligations” on them to provide affordable housing will be able to exempt themselves if they can prove that this makes a site commercially viable.

In addition, first time buyers would be helped onto the housing ladder with an extension of the Government’s FirstBuy scheme which offers those without a deposit an equal loan of up to 20% of the purchase price. Communities Minister Eric Pickles also points out that local shops and services would also benefit from a boost to the flagging construction industry. Figures released by the Local Government Association which show that there are some 400,000 prospective homes with planning permission which have not yet been built, seem to suggest that this is simply a question of local planning departments holding up progress due to the current planning laws.

Labour believes that the focus of the new initiative is misplaced and that ministers are simply “kidding themselves.” Party leader, Ed Miliband declared the plans: “a one-year holiday from the current rules on planning for a conservatory extension of up to eight metres into a garden... does not represent an economic plan.” Others have pointed out that a relaxation of planning rules on home extensions could breed bitter disputes between neighbours. Two councils – Tory-run Richmond and Sutton – have already indicated they have no intention of relaxing planning regulations, and observers suggest that other councils are likely to follow suit.

When asked what this proposed relaxation would mean for Westcombe Park, Dick Allard, chairman of the Westcombe Society’s Planning and Environment Subcommittee is clear: “All conservation areas have been exempted from this proposal, so as such, Westcombe Park and much of its environs are not affected.”

Italian job in Westcombe Park

A man and his dog were spotted by a Conservation Officer earlier this year and have returned to take their turn at the pub, the, Observer has learned from a member of the public who reported seeing them.

One of the key objectives of the Conservation Officer’s role is to ensure that Westcombe Park is maintained in accordance with the original vision established for this beautiful area by its founder, Oscar de Lausanne. Conservation Officers are responsible for ensuring that any development proposals are in keeping with the character of the area and that any development work is carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The Westcombe Society has recently submitted a planning application to the London Borough of Greenwich to extend the existing garage and provide additional parking. The application has been recommended for approval by the Planning Committee and the decision will be made at a future meeting.

Will the Italian job in Westcombe Park continue?

We have received a number of calls from Westcombe Park residents asking whether the Italian job will continue. The Observer has been informed that the Italian job is indeed continuing and that the Conservation Officer is monitoring the situation closely to ensure that any development work is carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner.

In the meantime, the Observer has been informed that the Italian job is continuing and that the Conservation Officer is monitoring the situation closely to ensure that any development work is carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Lenny Thorne - 1934 - 2012

A funeral service is to be held for Lenny Thorne, who for more than sixty years gave donkey rides on Blackheath.

The humanist service will take place on Monday 1st October at 2pm outside Greenwich Park’s main southern gate where Lenny gave joy to so many generations of children. The service will then proceed to Charlton Park cemetery.

Two of Lenny’s oldest donkeys, Apache and Zinno, will offer rides to younger members of the family prior to the service as a final tribute.

The great grandfather died in July, aged 78, in OEH, Woolwich. Mr Thorne’s daughter, Mrs Lorraine Almert, was keen to hold the service where Lenny had worked since the early 60s, but she was unable to get permission until the Olympics and Paralympics had ended.

Mr Thorne, who in his forties was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, was a skilled horse trainer whose racehorse ‘Jacquie Double’ was ridden by Lester Piggott and finished second in a photo finish at Lingfield Racecourse.

Mrs Almert said: “He was the most inspiring and wonderful man. Donkeys were his passion but he had a very close affinity with horses. Last year we were at an event where a show-jumping horse bolted and he managed to stop it, even though he was on his mobility.”

Grace Flowers, 7, who with her mother Helen would travel up from Dartford at weekends, explained: “That’s why we came here. To feed them carrots. On their backs I could see everything.”

Mehmet Joe, who runs Rozzi’s ice cream van and worked nearby, says he last saw Lenny outside the park in mid-May writing songs in his van while talking to passers-by and giving instructions to a younger often partially disabled crew he employed in his later years to look after the donkeys.

Computers stolen

The police report a massive haul of computers has been handed in from John Roan School’s Maze Hill building.

The equipment comprised 65 brand new HP laptops, 65 iPads and two Samsung Netbooks worth £65,000 and they were taken on the evening of Thurs, August 16.

Even though it was during the school’s summer holiday, the building was open for a parents’ event, and computer engineers were also in the building.

The stolen iPads were still in their boxes and all the items had a ‘Capita’ tag on them (see the image, right.)

Officer in the case Karl Buckwell said: “The items stolen amount to a significant value and are likely to be sold either via the Internet, pawn shops or to people who are unaware that they are buying stolen goods. If you have heard anything suspicious on the day of the burglary please contact us.”

‘Perhaps you may have come across someone who has recently been trying to sell a large number of electrical items at significantly reduced prices and have become suspicious. All items have a distinctive “capita” tag which cannot be removed.’

Anyone with information should ring DC Buckwell of the burglary squad at Greenwich Police Station on 0208 234 9449

Geoff Garvey

“Perhaps you may have come across someone who has recently been trying to sell a large number of electrical items at significantly reduced prices and have become suspicious. All items have a distinctive ‘capita’ tag which cannot be removed.”

Anyone with information should ring DC Buckwell of the burglary squad at Greenwich Police Station on 0208 234 9449.
The Geese of Blackheath

JO BURNAND

Ever since Chesley B. Sullenberger III landed safely on the Hudson River following a run-in with a skin of Canada geese, many have sprung to the defence of these beautiful birds.

Canada geese are known for their fidelity, and their concern for their offspring, and are adept at adapting to their environment. In days gone by, they would leave their nests in North America and fly south for the winter, returning again in early Spring to the same nesting grounds. Muck from these areas lost their bearing, and the learned impulse to migrate faded away. So it is that Canada geese have flourished on Blackheath.

But how safe should they feel? As far back as the Protection of Birds Act in 1954 Canada geese were considered fair game in open season: the birds have always been reviewed as considered non-native after arriving here among theourage of Charles II in 1663. They have become the subject of review by DEFRA, which under EU legislation is allowed to derogate from rules protecting all wild birds in the interests of health and safety, destruction to crops, air safety or damage to the local countryside.

Some local councils concerned about water quality have had geese in their sights, and the process by which Natural England awards general licences to control numbers has become increasingly passive.

Prior to DEFRA’s 2003 review into the intrusion of wild species, Councils had to apply in writing for a general licence specifying concerns about goose numbers. However, it is now possible to download a licence from Natural England’s website.

While DEFRA cites “consent” as the preferred course of action, the licence now stipulates that “the user must be satisfied that legal (including non-lethal) methods of resolving the problem are ineffective or impracticable.”

Windsworth Council attracted little attention when in 1992 it successfully counted numbers by identifying nest sites and pricking eggs. However, when I asked the Windermere Geese Management Group for attempts to count the birds, I was referred to Natural England’s web site.

Those who favour Boris Island as a possible airport should note that following Captain Sullenberger’s heroic landing, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg had thousands of birds caught and culled. But they got the wrong birds: scientists at the Smithsonian Institution discovered that feathers from the birds caught were not migratory, Canada geese and not the resident birds. Sadly, the majority of those culled probably were vital of the resident birds.

In the UK, “Canada” geese are by and large resident Greylag geese native to the UK; they have increased to far greater numbers than Canada geese, and they have adapted well to the urban environment.

Standing on Blackheath watching where the birds were coming from, I reckoned that some were nesting in the Greenwich Peninsula Ecological Park.

While they pose no immediate threat, these grounds are just across the water from London City Airport. The Civil Aviation Authority actively discourages any birds from nesting or feeding near airports, but it has proved difficult to prevent them from crossing the paths of aircraft.

In 2003 the CAA made it mandatory for cabin crews to report bird-strikes, and in 2010 called for crews to report the specific species involved. Suffice to say the tactic is by no means all simple. The problem of flying in formation, usually in skins of between 6 and 12, does not bode well for them.

It remains to be seen what is happening.

A 12-year-old girl whose chihuahua was snatched was left weeping in the street in Beckenham in September. Tae Bennett was walking her dog when a blue car drove up alongside. A little girl with blonde curly hair and blue eyes got out and asked if she could stroke the grey and white dog.

A car with a black accent came out of the car, grabbed the dog, and drove off, hitting her foot. The girl was devastated.

A 34-year-old man who was returning to a location with a woman client told me he had been asked to stop the car, a black car with white accents.

Robert Hooke Day

Christopher Wren loved him... Isaac Newton loathed him... Robert Hooke, polymath genius of the 17th Century, probed the unknown world of the microscope and was a brilliant pioneer who, by the time of his death in 1703, had made significant contributions to the fields of anatomy, biology, and astronomy.

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A classroom volunteer

LAURA FINCH describes what it was like to be an American volunteer in a Greenwich school

"I have always been fascinated by the United States, and when I was given the opportunity to spend some of my time as a doctor in the U.S. volunteering at a children’s school, I thought this would be a great way to give back to our community, an avenue to meet adults and see first-hand, what my children were learning.

My husband’s research brought us to London for 6 months on a visa that allowed our children to attend school in the UK. We come from Richmond, Virginia, a medium size city (1 million) two hours south of Washington DC.

Parents in our area of Virginia are very involved in school. We have about forty regular weekly volunteers in the classroom (570 students) and several parents volunteer to help with other activities or for fundraising events throughout the year. Our parent-teacher association reached 100 membership this year.

The CRB

I did not realize that in this UK this would be an unusual concept and in which the government plays a big role. A background check (CRB) is required for every adult who works with children in schools. While enrolling in the application procedures, I was not encouraged to complete the CRB form, and it was told it takes 6-8 weeks. But at a parent-teacher meeting two weeks later I spoke with my son’s teacher whose eyes lit up at the prospect of help.

After three weeks and a local CRB in hand, I arrived for my first volunteer effort. I am not sure if currently there are any other parent classroom volunteers. Quite a few parents have CRBs and volunteer for class trips. CRBs are free of charge for volunteers. I haven’t been able to determine if the school incurs a cost, but individuals pay around £30 - £40 when they pay for CRBs. The paperwork is simple and they are only concerned about any criminal activity that might make you dangerous to children — not your latest parking ticket.

Very appreciative

I went in regularly to each son’s class on Monday and Wednesday to listen to children read, help children with projects, or do whatever the teacher needed at the moment. She was always available. I now realize that I was the one benefiting from this. I got to know the children, who were darling, excited to see me and so good, and my sons were happy to have me nearby. The teachers were very appreciative of an extra pair of hands.

The opportunity to be a fly on the wall in my son’s classes for a couple hours made me much more secure about their well-being. I was so happy that my school welcomed me into the classroom.

Good schools are vitally important to all of us. I am happy to be part of my son’s school and to see the development of their children. It is an adventure to watch them grow and help them reach their goals.

Parents in the UK are not as involved as parents in the United States. I met a parent who, with, disinclined in his eyes, said independent schools and their elitism are necessary.

I met a scared little boy, new to my son’s class, whose sad dark eyes needed a friendly face and a little extra attention. The next week when I saw him at school he recognized me and I saw his smile for the first time.

Parent involvement

Parent involvement at school may be a partial solution to some of the school placement anxiety, as well as concerns about education, seating arrangements and discrepancies in opportunities for social mobility.

Few people know but there is a little gym school in Kalbouos, containing about 170 bright eyed, well-behaved students and some fantastic teachers. The head of the school told me he determined to make a difference to some of these students. They told me that often external schools support parent involvement.

The children’s families, many with young children not in nursery, are from all over the world: Spain, India, Somalia, Iraq, Nigeria, U.S.A. and even a few from England. Our school invites parents to coffees and to school assemblies and they come, despite work, language barriers or child care issues. Class numbers are about the same as at home — 22 and growing.

However, the class rooms themselves are much more spacious that what we are used to, with plenty of room for volunteers to work with small groups. Being at this school has been a great learning experience for my children and for me.

At our school, there seemed to be enough teachers and teacher aids, plenty of books, music and learning. However, a parent volunteer can still help to make a difference. And being involved in your local school can be meaningful for you and your children.

I would encourage all grandparents or parents with even a little time to complete their CRB so they spend some time getting to know the future of Great Britain.

Polymath or curmudgeon, this is a man whose life and times are worth exploring — and Saturday 14th October at 4.00 pm.

Also on offer is ROBERT HOOKE DAY: you can take a guided walk around Greenwich with Robert Hooke’s links with the area, see the show, then take part in an exclusive post-show Q&A with special guest, Dr. Thomas Higgens, of the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. £20 (concs. £15). Contact the Box Office for details.

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4 Westcombe News October 2012

Ph: 0208 858 1784

13 Station Crescent, Westcombe Park, London SE3 7EQ

TELEPHONE 020 853 3304 FAX 020 858 1784

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FEATUERES

Two views of the Olympics and Paralympics...

Even now, after the Olympics and Paralympics are over, controversy over the use of Greenwich Park lingers on. Those who campaigned against the use of the Park, flying the NOGOE banner, continue to cite the petition signed by 13,500 locals, as evidence that “the majority of Greenwich residents were against the use of the Park”. Others cite the tens of thousands who did not sign the petition, and the thousands who attended the events in the park – and the millions who witnessed this World Heritage site, mostly for the very first time, who say they enjoyed the event.

What do our readers think? Here, two local residents air their views.

From: Jane Grant / Stratheden Road
After months and months of depressingly negative comments about the choice of venue for the Olympic and Paralympic equestrian events, I finally got to view the events at the stadium in Greenwich Park (for the Paralympic Dressage) in person.
Like thousands of others I was over-whelmed not just by the grace and elegance of the horses and their riders but the stunning beauty of the venue and the efficiency of the arrangements. This was in stark contrast to the negative attitudes of a number of our fellow residents in Greenwich who did their very best to prevent any of this from happening.
Of course, living near a World Heritage site brings a responsibility to preserve that site for posterity. There is no evidence that any serious damage has been done to the park, indeed, the park will be improved in several ways as a result of the Olympics. Critics should be aware that we also have a responsibility to share this World Heritage site with the world. The park’s constituency is much wider than local residents – this has been brilliantly illustrated in the last few weeks. This is a cause for celebration, just as the Olympics and Paralympics were.

From: Ed Hill / Payle Road
The Olympics as a whole have been a success, because our athletes have done well and everyone enjoyed the action.
However, Greenwich is only just starting to assess the full cost for millions of ordinary visitors to Greenwich Park, the huge losses for hundreds of small businesses, to say nothing of damage to the trees, wildlife and heritage. One preliminary financial estimate of the full cost to our community is £100 million.
So was it incompetence or corruption that led all the politicians and government agencies to have backed the cover-ups, illegalities and lies about the use of Greenwich Park for the Olympics?
Analysts and politicians knew very well that only corporate sponsors have profited from the Olympics for the past 50 years. At least a legacy could have been left in other locations.
Most people were always against a Greenwich Park Olympic event, with 13,500 signatures collected in a few hours, and an unprecedented 2000 letters of objection received to the planning application. Greenwich Park is a sanctuary for the community and for wildlife. Sir Frank Berman pointed out before the Olympics that it is illegal for Royal Parks to hire it out and close it to the public, because that is a breach of the 1997 Royal Parks and Open Spaces Regulations, besides breaking many other international and UK conservation, wildlife and protected species laws.
Former manager Derek Spurr says that Royal Parks intend hiring out Greenwich Park, which in my view was the financial motive behind their demolition of Blackheath Gate – to allow access for tourists. His comments in a recent issue of the Times, which applauded the “inspired” choice of the park, and concluded “if’s do it again soon”, are deeply reprehensible.
Rupert Murdoch optimizes the years of collusion between government, corporations and the media. Surely we can safeguard Greenwich Park from exploitation by these corporate interests?
Footnote: Lorraine TARRANT, of the East Greenwich Business Association, claims that trade was down in her area by 59% during the Olympics, and is campaigning to get compensation. She says that people stayed away from shops because of travel warnings.

Local drama groups make waves

The Alexandra Players autumn production is Alan Ayckbourn’s sparkling adult comedy, Private Fears in Public Places. True to one of the author’s recurring themes, six flawed characters are looking for love, despite having their romantic aspirations dashed at every turn. This is a film for the stage: it uses techniques drawn from the movies, involving fast cutting between short scenes, relying on lighting and minimal sets.
Private Fears in Public Places will be presented at the Alexandra Hall, Bromley Avenue, Charlton SE7. 7IH on Thursday to Saturday November 1st, 2nd and 3rd at 8pm. Doors open 7.30 pm.
Tickets £8 (£7 Concessions). Box Office 07867 627 987 or e-mail alexandraplayees@gmail.com
Meanwhile, Eltham’s Priory Players are putting on a new production of Arthur Miller’s All My Sons from Thursday 11th – Sat 13th October.
The play is being performed at 7.45 at Progress Hall, Admiral Seymour Road, Eltham. Tickets £8.75 (concs. £6.00)
For tickets rings 07502 459983 or email info@theprivityplayers.com

Greenwich open Studios Update
Xavier White curated a very successful exhibition with an equestrian theme in August - you can see one of his equestrian sculptures in the front garden of 26 Vandringham Park, SE3 7AF. Maggie Lancashire will be exhibiting at ArtHub Gallery, 5-9 Creekside SE8 4SA together with award-winning print-maker Ralph Overey 19th-28th Oct. (www.artshubgallery.com).

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Westcombe News October 2012
John Roan Demolition Job

The lower school in Westcombe Park Road has been razed to the ground! And with it comes divided opinion among local residents.

For some the sizeable demolition project has resulted in excessive dust and noise, and even vibrations akin to “earth tremors”, while for others the overall feeling is that the site has been well managed and the overall impact kept to a minimum. Others complain about the noise from the temporary generator (installed without the required planning permission which considerably exceeds the level specified by the Council’s Environmental Health Officer and which runs 24 hours a day). With calls for continuous monitoring of noise and dust, a further meeting date with Water Corporation and representatives from the school and members of the Westcombe Society’s Planning and Environment Subcommittee is taking place as we go to print. Parts of the Grade II listed Maze Hill Building are also due to be demolished, starting after Christmas. If you have something to say or want to find out more, email westpsj@gmail.com.

On a more general note, the question provokes a reminder as to why a school building just thirty years ago was not able to house the increase in local pupil population and as such deemed no longer fit for purpose. In fact, many point out there were other serious design deficiencies in the building – including an extraordinarily cramped class-rooms.

The life of this ‘permanent’ building has passed by much shorter than that of many of the ‘prefabs’ of the kind it replaced. Let’s hope that all those involved in the plans for the new building have factored in sufficient population increase and that we really are building a school for the future and not just for the next three decades.

Christopher’s column

Spraying the net

This morning I discovered almost an entire bush wedged into the edge of a flowerpot not much wider than the fascia. As they say, squirrels really take the biscuit . . .

Now, it’s time to order and plant your bulbs – and for squirrels to get busy. Sprinkling garlic or chilli powder (or both) over areas of newly planted treasures will deter squirrels and mice.

But it’s not that easy if you are trying to establish cress, which are apparently the most delicious. If you can put some net or mesh over pots or areas of bulbs, this should do the trick, deterring all but the most determined thief.

Allium, being garlicky, are less vulnerable to squirrel voracity - just as well, given how much of them must can! This year, in an attempt to keep my bulb purchases to a minimum, I am cutting back on tulips – which should be planted in November – and the alliums are likely to go a bit midly if not planted straightaway.

Searching for periods plants recently – anything which was in the UK in the 17th century – I came across some unusual bulbs, but most are unavailable or tricky to grow. I have grown tree spinach with its pretty pink leaf tips, but found it bland, whereas red or orange, a 40 years I have which been measuring sea ice thickness in the Arctic from UK submarines.

Ocean is released: we could create an opportunity for Professor Wadhams, Head of the Polar Oceans Physics Group at Cambridge University, whose research in polar ice in 1990, and since the most recent submarine voyage in 2001 they have been measuring ice thickness in the Arctic from UK submarines.

The Arctic ice cap is disappearing before our eyes: this is the first large scale unquestionable impact of climate change, and is clearly visible from space. The Arctic sea-ice broke an all-time record for lowest-ever extent on August 24th, nearly a month earlier than scientists predicted. It was still decreasing in mid-September.

Scientists are considering the possible consequences, including the effect on the Arctic biosphere. Scientists are concerned that the melting of the permanent ice will accelerate global warming.

There is also the strong possibility that the methane hydrates under the Arctic Ocean will be released: this could create an opportunity for the Westwood Library on the lower ground floor of the Westwood Centre, 35 Wellington St. They are already listed on the www.greenwich.gov.uk/planning