



WestcombeNEWS

Free to 3800 homes, in libraries and shops

December 2020 / Jan 2021 No.10



“Dear Santa, Thank you for the vaccine! Now, can you sort out Brexit, please?” - Lottie Plum aged 11

“2020 - What a year!”

by Marilyn Little
Westcombe Society Chair

Little did we know when we were Objecting to the Fanzone in Greenwich Park and celebrating the success of the Greenwich Park Lottery Appeal that we would soon be facing a very different challenge in 2020 - Covid-19.

We had just held our Members and Helpers Party in February and didn't realise that would be last of our events to be held face to face for quite a while.

March saw the beginning of the first lockdown which left vulnerable residents 'shielding'. The Society together with other groups quickly put together a team to assist with shopping and other tasks. Many of us were grateful for the service provided by our shops at the Standard and our corner stores.

Washing your hands became a mantra and Social Distancing became the norm. At that time we were very fortunate to learn that Greenwich Park would stay open, a welcome outdoor space for exercise. People from elsewhere within the borough were also taking advantage of its openness, beauty and views.

During this time our long-standing editor, Neville Grant, retired and Anne Williams took on what was becoming a very difficult role. How on earth do you fill a What's On page when nothing is - going on! With a great deal of ingenuity!

Alongside all this, meetings were beginning to be held remotely, both within the Society and with outside bodies such as the Council. This meant that business could carry on whilst not quite as normal, as good as it could be. Our AGM was held using Zoom and was a successful way of completing the Society's business, a good decision as it turned out as restrictions have lasted far longer than envisaged at the time!

The summer stretched before us and as the numbers of cases had dropped restrictions were relaxed although we were not by any means back to normal. We were getting used to a NEW normal Hands-Face-Space.

You will be very well aware of the traffic problems that hit Westcombe Park in August when a number of trials were started concurrently and the Cycle Lane in Trafalgar Road was commenced. The issue continues to be reported in the Westcombe News.

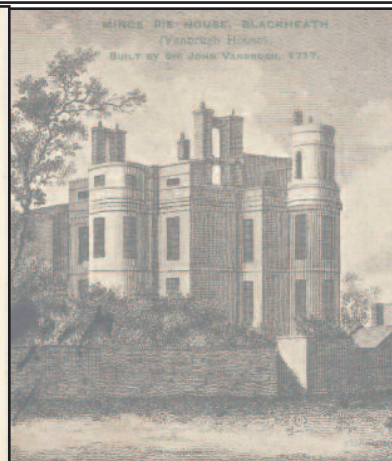
We were able to use the Covid-safe space at Mycenae House to hold our regular Macmillan Coffee Morning and were happily surprised at the support it attracted. Together with the funds raised by the sponsored walk we were able to raise nearly £1,500.

I hope the above shows that we continue to live in a caring and supportive community even when we cannot come together. We are coming to the end of a further period of lockdown which we trust will allow us to spend Christmas with our families and friends. I do hope so.

The Westcombe Society wishes you all the compliments of the season with our hopes for a Covid-free New Year.

A CHRISTMAS TREAT - NO CARS!

Caroline Owens, Westcombe Society Events organizer, shares with *WN* a few favourites from her vintage postcard collection of local houses and scenes.



<< Newsbriefs >>

Dream on!

A number of local residents listened to an inspirational talk (via Zoom) by local resident Ed Mayo on "The power of dreams: community economic development after the virus" under the auspices of the University of Glasgow. The talk (delivered in Ed's own front room!) attracted over a hundred people from all over the country, and underlined how local communities can be

transformative in both social and economic development.

Meanwhile . . .

Not to be outdone, in November, Courtney Mayo in her capacity as a well-known London Guide offered us all a virtual tour of London, featuring famous sites associated with the anti-slave campaign.

Bins

They - whoever; 'they' are - are at it again. There are concerns about garden

kitchen waste and non-recyclable black bags of waste being dumped in blue top bins designed for recycling. And sometimes, recyclable objects being dumped in garden bins! Conversely, waste collection is becoming rather erratic, with garden waste bags being left on the street for days.

Miriam Johnson

We are sorry to report the death of local resident Miriam Johnson,

a member of St George's congregation. Our condolences to her family and friends.

Recipe book

GWNS (Greenwich Winter Night Shelter) has put together a fund-raising recipe book for entertaining crowds. Details of how to obtain it can be found on St Georges website. Let's hope that crowds will begin to emerge soon, after Covid.

About these postcards.....

Sir John Vanbrugh, architect, built Vanbrugh castle for himself and his family as a country retreat. (Still standing today at the top of Maze Hill). On his Vanbrugh estate he also built Mince Pie house - initially named Vanbrugh House, (pictured top right) for his brother and another house called The Nunnery for his two unmarried sisters. He also built two towers either end of The Nunnery called The White Tower North and the White Tower South. These two towers were built for his two sons - one of whom died in infancy. (All these buildings now demolished). Caroline couldn't tell us how Mince Pie House got its name but apparently Vanbrugh's London house in Whitehall was called Goose Pie House!

Who would recognize the Old Dover Road (above pic) with its shops stretching past where they do today? It looks thriving and packed with all the essential shops that we miss having today on our doorstep - a haberdashers, ironmongers....

The picture of Vanbrugh Park (above left) shows The Drill Hall in the left-hand corner. There was an opening ceremony in May 1862, it was burnt out in 1951 but not demolished until 1961 when Parkside was built on the site.

The above pictures are scans of original postcards printed between 1890 and 1890 and part of Caroline's growing collection.

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To access back numbers (in colour) go to: <http://www.westcombesociety.org/westcombenews>

WESTCOMBE SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Please send this membership form to:
**Christine Legg, 69 Mycenae Road,
London, SE3 7SE**

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Tel.....

Email.....

Please enclose payment as appropriate:

Family Membership £12 []

Individual Membership £8 []

Senior Citizens/Unwaged £4 []

CELEBRATE THE NATIVITY

Despite everything that has been going on - *it's still Christmas!* St.

John's invite you to visit their church, to remember and reflect upon the story of the very first Christmas.

From 5th December, Monday - Saturday, 10am-1pm, the church will be filled with over 20 nativity scenes from all over the world!

Contemplate the stillness within and send out your prayers to others as you explore the different scenes.

(NB due to Christmas Events for Schools and young children taking place in Church on 14/15/16th December the church will unfortunately be closed to the public).

Our life size, still nativity scene will be

on display outside the church throughout December.

Show others that it's still Christmas by making your own lit-up, stained glass nativity scene to display in your window.

[See photo below]. Pick up a free nativity pack (suitable for adults and children) from St. John's Church, Stratheden



Rd, SE3 7TH. The free pack includes all the resources needed to make your own nativity - colouring sheets, a Christmas book and other treats!

How many can you spot around the area? Drop a picture of your creation to St. John's.

St George's Christmas 2020

Sunday 20th 6pm: **Carol service on**

Facebook and YouTube

Thursday 24th 4pm: **Crib service on**

Facebook and YouTube

Thursday 24th 11.30pm:

Midnight Communion in church

(as space is limited this event is ticketed book via Eventbrite, see the website for the link).

Christmas Day 9.30am:

Christmas Holy Communion in church

(as space is limited this event is ticketed, book via Eventbrite, see the website for the link).

Website: <https://www.stgeorgeswest-combepark.org.uk/>



Well over 1,000 poppies were knitted and crocheted by St. John's community to make this impressive poppy blanket. Originally created in 2018 to commemorate 100 years since the end of WW1. Now it is used yearly to remember and reflect upon those who lost their lives, or were injured in both the WW1 and WWII wars.

PRE-CHRISTMAS JOLLY

Saturday 19th December - mulled wine and mince pies with the Westcombe Society opposite Marks & Spencer's. Please check the WS website for time....

SEE YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!
The next edition of the Westcombe News will be out 1st February 2021



Letters

Views expressed are not necessarily those of either the Westcombe Society, or the *Westcombe News*.

Dear Westcombe News,

It was revealed yesterday on the local 853 website that Labour-run Greenwich Council had wasted £95,000 of council taxpayers' money on 'Wishing Trees', of which there was one in Blackheath Westcombe Ward (see attachment) and

a laser light show which few people saw.

Meanwhile the Labour Party in the Borough of Greenwich have cut monies to the disabled in the past year, as well as withdrawn Discretionary Housing Payments (which offset the 'Bedroom Tax') from some of the

borough's poorest residents, claiming their actions are due to central government cuts.

The Greenwich Branch of the Official Monster Raving Loony Party condemn this profligate spending of council taxpayers' money and believe the Greenwich Labour Party are

morally repugnant in cutting support to the most vulnerable people in our community whilst they can find money to waste on inane gimmicks. Yours for the Manic, not the Few, Trevor Allman (Official Monster Raving Loony Party - Greenwich Branch)

MAKE YOUR FEELINGS KNOWN

Dear Reader,

With so many initiatives being progressed concurrently - e.g. redirected traffic, Greenwich Parks Movement strategy, new cycleways - it is difficult to assess the impact each is having on our area especially with the changes to travel patterns brought about by the pandemic.

But it is no good just grumbling about the concerns we may have when everyone is being invited to be proactive, to make their feelings known by responding to consultations and by leaving comments on feedback sites.

1. The Park Movement Strategy consultation is currently open for comment and should you feel that the permanent closure of the park to rush hour traffic may be detrimental to local traffic conditions please respond to the consultation and say so. Email: Movement.strategy@royal-parks.org.uk, online consultation at <https://sustrans.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/greenwichpark> or write to The Royal Parks - Movement Strategy, The Old Police House Hyde Park, London. W2 2UH

2. Similarly if you feel that the closure of the roads in West Greenwich has also had an effect on road conditions in our area, again please leave your comment on that feedback site. <https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/westgreenwichtraffic>

3. Finally, although the section of Cycleway 4 from Greenwich to the Angerstein roundabout is yet to be completed, as and when you have comments to make they can also be left on their feedback site. streetspacelondon@tfl.gov.uk

I cannot stress how important feedback is. It is used for assessing the future implementation of these and future trials. So.... making use of those minutes between Zoom calls to register your comments and concerns means that your views will be taken into consideration.

Less important but useful to building our own voice, we would appreciate it if you could copy any comments you make to environment@westcombesociety.org. -Marilyn Little

Westcombe Society Christmas Tree

Many thanks to **Alan's Garden Centre, 244 Woolwich Road** for supplying a superb tree at a great price! Thanks also to **Claire at Westcombe Cleaners, 74 Westcombe Hill** for her generous donation towards the cost.

We hope, with the help of **Peter Andrews and his team**, to have the tree in place shortly after the current lockdown ends in early December. Truly a team effort which is greatly appreciated by our residents!

The Westcombe Society Online (Zoom) Quiz Night in aid of our Charity of the Year Advocacy Now

Saturday 30th January

For more more information or to register your interest please email info@westcombesociety.org

or call

020 8853 2756

The quiz is suitable for anyone who has a phone link to a household with internet access.

Information will also be available on www.westcombesociety.org

LOCAL NEWS

WHERE CAN I GET TESTED?

Working in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, and the University of Greenwich for some sites, we now have five testing centres across the Royal Borough of Greenwich:

02 North Greenwich, SE10
- drive-through facility only
University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Road, Eltham, SE9
- accessible on foot only
Charlton Athletic Football Club, SE7 --- mobile testing facility accessible by car

Abery Street, Plumstead, SE18
- walk-through testing centre, accessible on foot only.
De Vere Devonport House Car Park, SE10
- walk-through testing centre accessible on foot only.

Booking is essential for all testing centres. Please order a home test kit if you cannot get to a test site. To book a slot and find out more visit gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119.

DRESS IN YOUR FESTIVE BEST

Cllr Linda Bird, the Mayor of Royal Greenwich, is asking the people of the Borough to wear festive fashion on Friday 11th December, whether you are at school, work or staying at home. This means wearing anything from a red top to a full Rudolph the Reindeer costume to raise money for the Mayor's chosen charities - METRO Charity and Greenwich Starting Blocks (GSB). "We're all determined to sparkle this Christmas. Sharing our festive wardrobe is another way to bring us all together, as well as raising money for charity. So, join me in raising a smile or two as well as some funds."

To aid even further, donate a minimum of 50p to the Mayor's charity fund via the Just Giving page:
www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/mayor-christmas.

If you are particularly pleased with your outfit and want to share it with others send a pic, via email to: media.desk@royal-greenwich.gov.uk or tag the Council in pictures on social media @Royal_Greenwich.



2021 - SWIMMING POOLS AND GYMS TO BE CLASSED AS 'ESSENTIAL SERVICES'?

David Lloyd and Better Gyms agree with avid swimmers and exercisers that Centres should be allowed to operate during lockdown. Both are petitioning the Government for a positive outcome.

Greenwich secures 'Historic Cities' Tourism Fund

Patrick Aquilina

Greenwich has secured £158,000 of investment from the Discover England Fund in order to promote the borough as a key historic destination for tourists. 16 notable 'historic cities' designated by 'English Originals', such as Bath, Oxford and Lincoln, have been chosen for the fund in total. Greenwich was chosen as part of this exclusive group due to its many historic locations and sites such as Cutty Sark, Greenwich Park and Eltham Palace.

Visit England Chief Executive, Sally Balcombe, said of the fund, "These winning projects will put England at the forefront of tourism product development, encouraging visitors to discover all the country has to offer".

In September 2019 the Discover England Fund received £5.5million of public funding to deliver a 5th year of the program. In response to the reduced tourist activity as a result of Covid-19 all projects in 2020 are now focusing on the up-weighting of

domestic activity to aid the recovery of tourism and maintaining international relationships for when markets re-open. The current goal is to ensure the selected tourist sites are in a strong position when international tourism recovers.

The new investment in Greenwich will be used to enhance and expand what is available for visitors, produce new engaging content and deliver a new marketing campaign in early 2021. Tourism has been steadily increasing in recent years; in 2017 one million people stayed overnight in the borough bringing in £1.4billion into the area.

However since the first lockdown in mid-March there has been a near total shut-down of international tourism, with Visit England predicting a decline of 79% of spending in 2020 from the level of spending in 2019. Many local businesses will be in a tough situation facing multiple lockdowns until tourism slowly recovers.

ASK Greenwich

Environment Team

We are all hoping that the lockdown will be relaxed so that we can enjoy time with friends and family over the festive season.

But this will likely mean a return to the traffic issues we have been suffering over the last three months, yes three months!

The Westcombe Society put forward three questions to the ASK Greenwich meeting that was held remotely on Tuesday 24th November 1-2pm with Cllr Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council, Cllr Sizwe James: Environment, Sustainability and Transport, Cllr Sarah Merrill: Planning and Regeneration and Cllr Anthony Okereke: Housing. Our questions will also be put forward to the Council Meeting on the 25th November via our councillors (as no public questions are permitted at this time). Let us hope that common sense prevails

Question 1

The recent road closures in the Hills and Vales area of Greenwich, combined with closure of the Avenue in Greenwich Park, is still having an unacceptable negative affect on traffic in Westcombe Park, in particular Maze Hill and Vanbrugh Hill. After passing through Westcombe Park this additional traffic is then feeding into congestion on Trafalgar Road where the new cycle lane is under construction. There are genuine concerns about the overall effect of the combined schemes on pollution, bus travel times, and the ability for emergency vehicles to travel along the Trafalgar Road and Woolwich Road. Clearly a cycle lane is vitally important but whilst traffic levels are so high due to Covid we feel that the Hills and Vales project needs to be rethought urgently. Will the Council remove the Hills and Vales closures, at least until the end of the current Covid crisis, to ease the unacceptable traffic problems in Westcombe Park and East Greenwich?

Question 2

We think the broader issue of an overall

transport/traffic plan for South East London is well overdue but obviously the area is large. However there is a substantially smaller well-defined area made up of four residential communities between Deptford Creek, the A102, the A2 and the river which have interrelated traffic problems (i.e. Hills and Vales, West Greenwich, Westcombe Park and East Greenwich). We would therefore like to see the Council and other agencies such as TfL, commit to work together with ALL the communities in this area to work out a long-term traffic plan that works for all areas together rather than pushing the traffic from one small community onto another.

Are the Council therefore prepared to commit to working with all these communities together in future?

Question 3

If the Council are not prepared to reverse the Hills and Vales road closures at least until after the pandemic the Westcombe Society would like to add a supplementary question. Assuming the following:

The Council were aware of the start/end points and reasons for journeys before deciding that the A2 would be an acceptable alternative, that base-line counts of traffic flow and air pollution levels were taken on all the roads east of the Park that were expected to be impacted by the implementation of Hills and Vales, that many drivers are clearly not using the A2 as an alternative, that the pandemic is resulting in ever changing traffic patterns. What meaningful criteria will be used to determine the success or otherwise of the Hills and Vales trial, particularly in relation to its effect on the area east of the Park?

Unfortunately the Westcombe News will have gone to press before we know the Council response to our questions. However, the responses will be posted on our website www.westcombesociety.org and will also be included in the next Westcombe News in February.



pic: c.j.peters

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FEATURES

HELEN AND THE GRANDBEES

Alex Morrall, a Blackheath Standard resident and artist has published her debut novel, ‘Helen and The Grandbees’ (Legend Times Press). It has received praise in the national press - the Daily Mail calling it, “Engaging and Uplifting” and, in another review her writing style has been likened to that of filmmaker Mike Leigh’s.

Alex is thrilled she has managed to get her book published in these Covid-disrupting times but is very disappointed there are no bookshops open to show it off... “especially when it is intended to be such a positive tale for lockdown blues!”

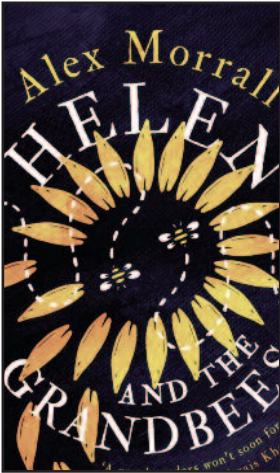
The novel reflects Alex’s love of South East London communities (and there are cameos of Greenwich Park). She wanted to show the true value of people we may hesitate to approach, until we understand their experiences and see how

their love of their family redeems them. Helen and the Grandbees begins when Helen’s daughter, Lily, tracks her down twenty years after her adoption, and the story unfolds over the years that follow, as we watch Lily raise her own children; Helen’s ‘grandbees’. But when it’s clear her grandbees are in danger, tangled up in her daughter’s damaging relationship, Helen must find the courage to step in, confronting the fears that haunt her the most.

Previously Alex has had poetry published in journals such as Psychopoetica and Smith’s Knoll, and food reviews in the Greenwich Visitor.

Alex is often ideally found on her bike, enjoying food or by the sea.

https://www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=helen+and+the+grandbees&ref=nb_sb_noss
Subscribe to blog on alexpaintings.co.uk for updates



A FOOTBALL FAN IN THE FAMILY

Local resident, Tim Crane’s latest book ‘They Played with Billy Bonds - The West Ham Years,’ is the third in a series which started with Bobby Moore and continued with John Lyall.

Tim’s family lived near the Boleyn Ground from early 1900. “My granddad, Harry Crane, started watching the Hammers from 1912. The Claret & Blue scarf has been handed down through all subsequent generations.”

Tim has worked for various West Ham magazines and has now interviewed every player from 1958-1989.

“My degree is in history so I am all about preserving the endeavours of the past. They Played with Billy Bonds

preserves the memories of 102 Hammers who played with Woolwich-born Bonds between 1967 and 1988.”

“Billy Bonds started his career at Charlton Athletic and some supporters joke that he was West Ham’s first overseas signing!”

With over 700 player photographs and 100,000 words, the 376-page hardback book could be just that special Christmas gift for the football fan in the family.

Available from 10th December. On sale for £30, why not drop by and pick up a copy signed by author Tim himself at 183 Westcombe Hill? Alternatively, order your copy from Amazon or eBay.

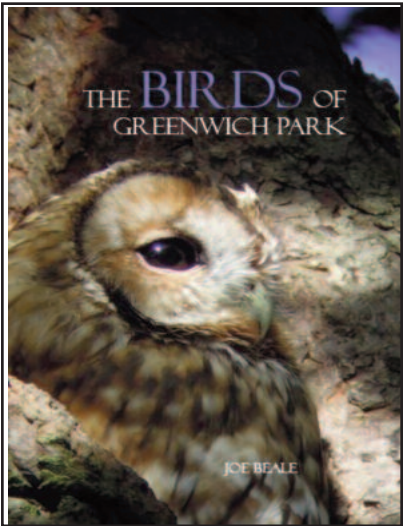


The Birds of Greenwich Park

The Birds of Greenwich Park is now available from the Friends of Greenwich Park for a minimum £5 donation. This 84-page book will appeal to anyone interested in the Park’s birdlife, from beginner birdwatcher to experienced observer, and covers topics such as bird migration, population increases and decreases, and what to look for in the Park during the different seasons. Skilled photographers have contributed many beautiful photographs and thousands of records of 125 species of bird over the last 25 years have been submitted by dedicated volunteers.

Talk
Joe will be running a free Zoom online talk on Weds 9th December about this book and the work that has gone into it, including a Q&A session about the Park’s birds and other wildlife. For details and booking, please see Joe’s Twitter feed

@joe_beale. There are limited spaces to allow for the Q&A. Email j.beale.wildlife@gmail.com for details of talk time, etc.



“The threat to our climate is real and it is now indisputable that the changes to our environment are rapid, accelerating and a threat to how we live.” The Royal Greenwich draft carbon neutral plan has now been published and is based on what the public think the council’s priorities should be.

THE URBAN FORAGER Jo Burnand

South East London is speckled with a patchwork of green, some of it ancient and nutrient-rich, offering up an abundance of edible plants all year round. Taking heed of Government warnings to avoid others and exercise aplenty I set out to discover what’s on offer as the winter months draw in. Armed with Picture This, one of a number of apps that will recognise and log any plant you photograph, it’s not long before I’m reaching for hawthorn and rosehip the length of Vanbrugh Park. Dog walkers smile kindly as I clamber through the undergrowth on Vanbrugh Pits, snapping at clumps of mallow and nettles. Plum cherries bespatter the pavement at the foot of Maze Hill while nearby a strawberry tree bears its heavy load.

On a Sunday in Oxleas Woods, I meet Simon, hands cupped with Marasmiaceae mushrooms. “You don’t meet many foragers south of the river. It’s not your typical hunting ground. Some of this land dates back to the Ice Age”. I tell him so far I’ve found more edibles by the roadside, “These plants are hardy and will grow at every opportunity. Not much sunlight gets through the canopy here which is why its good ground for fungi. They absorb sunlight which helps the trees grow while the trees, in turn, provide them with food”. Explaining that mushrooms are a bit above my pay grade he reassures me that with practice you get to tell the edible ones.

Lured on by an innate desire to search and find I venture further afield. The Forster Memorial Park in Lewisham offers sloes and wood avens. What’s left of the Great North Wood on the Hillcrest Estate in Sydenham, pears and apples. The banks of the Ravensbourne at Ladywell Fields deliver up the illusive garlic mustard.

The berries in the main have a delicate flavour that lingers in some fruity no-man’s land between bitter and sweet. Rosehip, the most distinctive of them all, is sweet and tangy and makes for an excellent cup of tea. Hawthorn is lost between

dark chocolate and blueberry, winning it plaudits from both neutral and acidic flavours alike. With sugar, all would make for excellent jams, syrups or for something stronger.

Wood avens marries clove with pepper and as with mellow mallow would make a good salad filler. The leaves of garlic mustard are bitter and good for adding sharpness to a pesto. The stems, sweet and garlicky, can be steamed or sauteed. Stinging until boiled, nettles taste

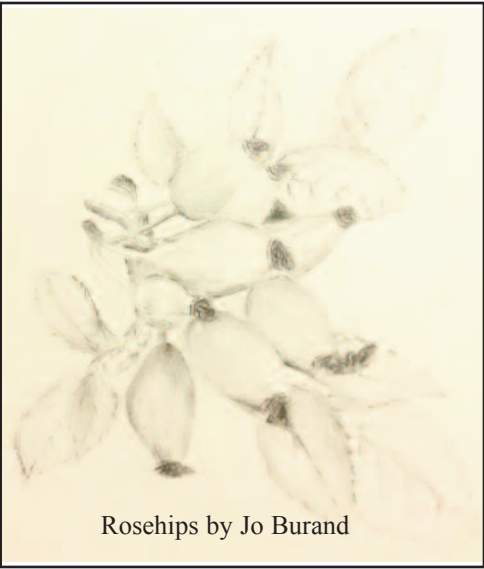
something akin to bitter tea and are grateful for the stock and vegetables that accompany them in a soup.

It is difficult to standardise the nutritional value of these foods. While anecdotal evidence going back aeons classes them as superfoods with healing properties, reports abound as to the danger of mixing herbal remedies with prescription drugs.

Foraging is open to abuse of course. As the law stands you can pick flowers, fungi, fruit and foliage on either public or private land for personal use but not for commercial purposes. Foragers need to research what plants they are looking for and exercise care when out and about. Apps such as Picture This will give you an accurate idea of what plant you are looking at but you need to do your own research.

Please proceed with caution as there are many types of deadly fungi and some poisonous plants. It is always good to educate yourself, we have found some great sites; here are a couple to get started:

www.foragelondon.co.uk
www.eatweeds.co.uk
www.totallywilduk.co.uk
www.foragewildfood.com
www.urbanharvestuk.wordpress.com



WHAT'S ON



WN thanks Polly Morgan for putting the What's On page together. If you have any events, happenings or entertainment you'd like publicised, please email: wnews@westcombesociety.org. Polly and our readers look forward to hearing from you.

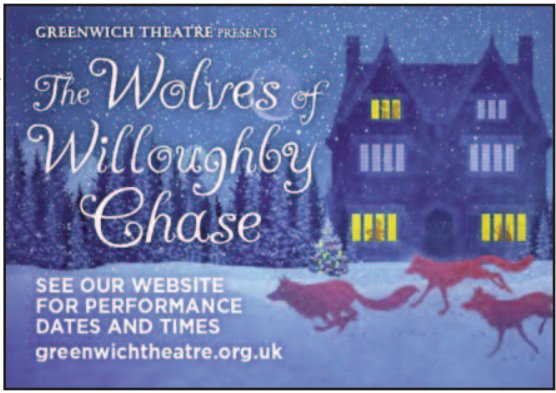
THE WOLVES OF WILLOUGHBY CLOSE

Greenwich Theatre reopens in time for Christmas with a star-studded performance!

Within 24 hours of the new lockdown starting, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden made an important statement, confirming that theatres are able to open for rehearsal during the period of restriction.

This was great news for Greenwich Theatre - effectively confirming that theatres are definitely set to reopen this side of Christmas.

Greenwich Theatre's Artistic Director told us: "As a result, with rehearsals starting shortly, we now have the exciting challenge of creating a festive show that respects social distancing both on stage and off stage. Our annual pantomime is set to take place next Easter, so for this Christmas we have secured the rights for a fantastic stage version of Joan Aiken's classic family adventure story, The Wolves Of Willoughby Chase. Set in a snowy world where wolves roam the countryside, cousins Bonnie and Sylvia are about to discover that the forces threatening their



future are much closer to home and their

new governess, Miss Slighcarp, is not all she seems. We are delighted that everyone's favourite villain, Anthony Spargo, will appear in The Wolves Of Willoughby Chase as Miss Slighcarp."

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase
Greenwich Theatre
18th December 2020 – 10th January 2021

Times vary
Tickets from £20
Suitable for all ages
Purchase tickets at:
<http://www.greenwichtheatre.org.uk>

Learn Bridge Online with Andrew Robson OBE

Andrew Robson's acclaimed BridgeCast would make a fantastic Christmas present - for bridge lovers and for those who want to learn this great game from scratch.

BridgeCast is a great way to learn Bridge online and is applicable for all levels. Andrew Robson, one of Britain's most renowned Bridge experts, can guide you through the basics or teach some top-tier tips for Bridge veterans. They are re-starting their Learn bridge from Scratch for complete beginners in January. They also offer well-established BridgeCast 'video channels' for intermediate and advanced

players. You can practise playing Bridge online, on their website 'RealBridge.online', where you can see and chat to the other players and benefit from the help of their supervisors. This could make a great gift for a special someone to help them through the darker winter days - good for your brain and mental health as well as fun and sociable. For more information please see their website: andrewrobsonbridgecast.com/new-beginnings or email at andrewrobsonbridgecast@gmail.com.



The New Beacon
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STREAM NEW FILMS INTO YOUR LIVING ROOM THIS CHRISTMAS

Traditional cinema venues are currently closed but with a new 'virtual cinema' called YourScreen we can access a wealth of world cinema.

YourScreen, a partnership of local, independent exhibitors, was created to stream new films and films unavailable on other digital platforms into the homes of audiences around the country. YourScreen sells 'virtual' tickets to audiences and revenue is shared between YourScreen and each local film exhibitor.

Films on YourScreen are available for up to 28 days which distinguishes it from a streaming platform like Netflix where films reside for many months and longer. Every two months, YourScreen uploads a new programme of films on to its platform.

The first season which concludes on 20th December has a programme of eight films; from Canadian coming of age drama, Kuessipan, through to docucomedy/drama,

Lessons of Love, the tale of a Polish woman going her own way after 45 years of marriage to an abusive husband, and the popular German film, System Crasher. One of the partnership's founders, Leslie Montgomery Sheldon, also CIFF



Helena Zengel in System Crasher

Director, said: "These are difficult times with cinemas in lockdown but film exhibitors must maintain their business." In the event they have decided to partner with YourScreen to stream new films, uninterrupted by lockdown, to their audiences.

YourScreen are offering a 25% discount. Just type in this code on their website: WCNYS. See the full programme for the first two-month season until 20th December, at their website: <https://watch.yourscreen.net>

The Merry Christmas Band is coming to town

With a band name like 'Merry Christmas' founder and singer Ben George has certainly heard the jokes that at this time of year all the shops are selling the band's merchandise! But as I hear our readership groan, I will cease with the Christmas jokes and instead encourage you to have a listen to the quirky UK/Japan quintet folk rock debut album called 'The Night the Night Fell'.

Their album was released in summer and did well and they are now releasing a CD, a format still big in Japan, with new artwork, on 1st December.

Ben said: "We've (Ben - vocals, guitar) and my wife (Yuki - vocals, synth, artwork) been living on the Vanbrugh Park Estate for about three months and we absolutely love it. This area has a perfect mix for us of arty and unique residents, brutalist architecture and refreshing greenery."

Ben says about his music writing: "I'm a big fan of really imaginative fiction, films and video games, so I like there to be some kind of adventure and progression in the music and lyrics."

"With that said, I started with some fairly dark themes for this album - it's about a girl trapped in the strange landscape of her unconscious after falling into a coma - but I tried to pull a bit of beauty out of it."

"On 19th December, Merry Christmas is doing a livestream show to celebrate the day of our namesake, and, the CD launch. So tune in on our facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/hellomerrychristmas>." YouTube: <https://tinyurl.com/y8k7hb48> Album site: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/p6VCseKjLwZHP>

SQUEEZE O2 SHOW POSTPONED!

Squeeze are to play a socially-distanced show at The O2 with support from Leon Tilbrook. This event was due to be held on 5th December 2020 but will now take place on 27th February 2021 - all original tickets remain valid and will be automatically moved over to the new date.

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FEATURES

“So much Stuff!”

WN Features/Julie Raven

With Christmas just round the corner, a day when stuff seems to multiply all around us, we might well be asking ourselves, “Do we really need all the stuff we already have and do we need to keep buying more?” One thing most of us are becoming aware of, is that the world doesn’t need any more of the stuff that is currently causing so much damage to the environment.

According to eco experts like Prof. Mike Berners-Lee of Lancaster University, buying less and recycling what we have are important first steps we can all take in helping the environment. It sounds simple but we waste a huge amount of what is produced, like food, clothes, furniture, technology and presents! The more stuff that is produced the more carbon is released, speeding up climate change.

We are now starting to realise how much water and energy is used to produce things we buy - one of the most shocking facts being - how damaging the clothes industry is to the planet. 10,000 litres of water can be used to make just one pair of jeans! Professor Dilys Williams of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion has said that we buy four times more clothes than we did ten years ago, but wear them for half as much time.

Many of the things we throw away could be used by other people. Some people are already putting things on the pavement for anyone to take. Although for safety reasons this is only advisable for small items, kept off the pavement on a wall/fence, etc. Cluttering up the pavement can cause accidents - a builder friend has a fractured wrist after tripping over a TV aerial left on the pavement. In his defence it was dark.

There are other ways to pass on stuff you don’t want - you can sign up to sites such as Trashnothing.com. and, freecycle.org - a famous, grassroots and entirely nonprofit movement of people who are giving and getting stuff for free in their own towns.

Our local Ikea in Greenwich is also offering a service where you can sell back your unwanted Ikea furniture to them, which they then sell onto new owners. The service should be up and running in the next few weeks, delayed slightly by this current lockdown - a great resource for recycling their furniture.

Passing on our unwanted items is a first step we can all do quite easily. As local resident Julie Raven says, “I am just a learner in all this and what gave me the push to actually do something was the example of Greta Thunberg. I thought if a teenager can travel in a sailing boat across the Atlantic then I can make a bit more effort.”

Julie was also inspired by her friend Angie, who “has given away all sorts of things over the years - her list includes: lawn mower, amplifier, electronic cables, carpet off-cuts, knitting patterns. She has also collected some things herself - a sofa, greenhouse glass and garden soil for making a green roof.”

Of course world leaders and big companies can do far more and have the biggest responsibility to tackle climate change. It is important that we all put pressure on these big companies to do the right thing.

Reducing our Christmas shopping lists would be one way to start, and, if we all buy less then we will be reducing our workload in the New Year - to get rid of ‘All this Stuff!’

‘Homemade’ Is The New Retail Therapy!

There are other presents we can give each other that support the environment rather than damage it. For example, we could bring back the ‘homemade’ gift with skills honed in lockdown. Delicious home-made jams and chocolates with a healthy twist are always well-received. Or perhaps a musical recital/song is just what the Doctor ordered. Propagating plants from the garden takes a little experience and you could choose ones that encourage



wildlife into the garden. What about a well-researched ‘Who do you think you are’ family tree.....? The list is endless!

THE BIRTH OF A NEW WORLD?

Evolutionary Astrologer, Amy Bird, sums up the planetary moves of 2021.

First and foremost it is important to note that Pluto, the god of the underworld has been in Capricorn since 2008, slowly but surely uncovering and exposing any flaws and rot in our societal power structures and forcing them to be more transparent. This process was intensified in January 2020 by a conjunction between powerful, transforming Pluto and Saturn, the planet of structure, authority and control, kick-starting the situation we now find ourselves in. This has brought a profound transformation of our personal, social, economic and political structures, the likes of which we have never seen before! Pluto remains in Capricorn until 2024, continuing the necessary work of detoxification and transformation of the world we live in.

The key players of 2021 are Saturn in Aquarius and Uranus in Taurus, who will be squaring off against each other three times over the course of the year. Saturn is the planet of structure, tradition, societal rules, authority and control, while Uranus is the planet of revolution, awakening, rebellion, change and innovation, two very

different characters indeed! Which of these two mighty characters will win the battle? When these two get together we tend to experience radical change, as we have an



opportunity to break out of old habits and patterns and get rid of any personal or societal structures that are repressive or worn out.

As these two do battle with each other, we could see a continuation of the dismantling of the structures of society and the beginning of the birth of a new world. However, Saturn calls us to be very clear indeed about the kind of world we want this to be and to truly take responsibility for creating it. What kind of world do we want our children to inherit?

Neptune in spiritual Pisces reminds us that ultimately we are all in this together and what happens to one affects us all, albeit in different ways. This has certainly been proven in 2020! We are invited to dream a new world into being that is built on the principles of love, peace, tolerance, compassion and unity. It truly is up to us all to make this happen.

Take A Virtual Tour This Christmas

London is truly an exceptional place to experience art and history with hundreds of museums and galleries, many of which are accessible for free. Although Covid-19 has robbed us of the chance to enjoy this depth of culture in real life, many attractions have now become available online.

The Painted Hall is a perfect example of a great online tour. Nestled in the historic Naval College site, the hall hosts one of the greatest Baroque-style interiors in Europe. Its magnificent painted ceiling earned the site the nickname ‘Britain’s Sistine Chapel’. The ORNC commissioned the 360 degree image mapping project

before Covid-19, however its release earlier this year could not have come at a better time. You can explore the hall step by step with 3D Binaural soundscapes, ultra-high resolution photography, contextual information and it is all available in British Sign Language.

The Government’s announcement of £1.57bn for the culture and heritage sector is a crucial lifeline to preserve museums and the arts. It emphasises the fact that funding is needed and collections are at risk. However it also represents that the Government recognises the need to support this vital sector.

-Patrick Aquilina





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THEY SOLD OUR TOWN HALL

Mary Mills

At the October Cabinet meeting of Greenwich Council councillors voted to dispose of the Borough Hall in Royal Hill. So we will lose what is almost the last bit of municipal Greenwich.

Once upon a time there was a town called Greenwich, one of the principal towns in Kent; it had a strong manufacturing base, some grand buildings, and a busy town centre. In 1900 it left Kent to become the Metropolitan Borough of Greenwich – covering Deptford St. Nicholas, Charlton and Kidbrooke. It had a Town Hall in Greenwich High Road and an ex-Workhouse/Hospital in the Woolwich Road. The Borough was very proud of its nurses' homes in Vanbrugh Hill, and its pioneering TB Clinic in Maze Hill. Then in 1939 they built their showpiece Town Hall.

Greenwich Town Hall in Royal Hill was very, very special. The architect they appointed was Clifford Culpin – whose father was then the Labour Chair of the London County Council. However anyone who looks at the net under ‘Clifford Culpin’ can see the long succession of modernist public buildings which he and his partners built in the post war years. Famously Pevsner described Greenwich Town Hall as “the only town hall of any London borough to represent the style of our time adequately”. It was part of a movement across Europe to build civic buildings differently. It was art deco, functional, ‘avowedly modernist’, to “consciously reflect” a progressive left-wing Metropolitan Borough. Or as contem-



porary architectural commentator Owen Hatherley has said, “You gradually realise it is an extraordinary work of art”. It had a tower from which the people of Greenwich could see the river and it included many interesting decorative features. In brick, it is moderate modern, rectilinear but not aggressive”. It’s easily the most important modern building in the Royal Borough, probably also in South London. In 1965 the Metropolitan Borough of Greenwich was

abolished and, along with Woolwich, became the London Borough of Greenwich. I probably should refrain from pointing out that there were more ex-Woolwich councillors than ex-Greenwich in the new Council. So – what can I say – by the early 1970s canvassers on many Greenwich doorsteps were met with “they sold our Town Hall.” But in fact they sold only half of it. They kept the Borough Hall, letting it out to a variety of organisations. When Greenwich Dance Agency moved out last year the hall was suddenly announced to be full of asbestos and so should be sold. So there we go.

What was an important town in Kent now effectively has no town centre – apart from one which serves the tourists – and no municipal presence. You see – they sold our Town Hall.

I’m quoting here – Pevsner & Cherry, South London. Owen Hatherley ‘Guide to the New Ruins’, Municipal Dreams blog.

Government Proposals To Radically Change The Planning Systems

Helen Warner

Following on from the article on Changes to the Current Planning System in November’s Westcombe News, the second White Paper out to consultation by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, (deadline October 29th), has been **Planning for the Future**. There were a range of reasons for changing the way planning currently happens, such as to ‘speed things up’. So, what was in this White Paper?

‘Zoning’ all land into three types

A key proposal was that all land would be allocated into one of three categories: Growth areas / Renewal areas / Protected areas.

Only in Protected areas, such as Green Belt and Conservation Areas, will proposals go to Planning Committees and be open to community comment. Worryingly, there was no mention of Metropolitan Open Land in the examples of Protected areas.

In Growth areas, areas of substantial development, such as brownfield sites and Renewal areas, suitable for some development such as ‘gentle densification’, there would be a statutory presumption in favour of ‘suitable’ developments so long as the proposals met the criteria set down in the Local Plan. Densification of existing housing in Renewal areas raises issues, including ‘creep’ on boundaries of Conservation Areas.

The Local Plan

Councils would be required to develop a Local Plan with very clear and detailed rules and ‘design codes’. These would need to foresee every permutation and change that could occur and encompass the

many aspects of ‘design’. This seems a very tall order. Current experience shows how COVID-19 has already changed the way we are thinking about how high streets and residential neighbourhoods might ‘work’.

Every Council would be required to develop a new or revised Local Plan within 30 months – another tall order - but alarmingly, only at the Local Plan ‘making’ stage will local communities be involved, except where a proposal is in a Conservation Area. It is very hard to get engaged with something that may or may not happen and therefore risks local communities being disenfranchised.

National Policies

Another particular concern was proposals that would see general development management policies at national level, the National Planning Policy Framework, applied when applications were ‘non-compliant with the Local Plan’. A Local Plan will generally have local policies honed over many years to fit in with the local context, including policies around heritage, local views, street lighting, environment management, basements, etc. It is hard to see how policies applicable to rural Norfolk for example, will necessarily work in Greenwich. Secondly, it is very concerning that a ‘non-compliant application’ in any area, including Conservation Areas, would be determined by national rules with which local government and the community has not been involved. This is a loss of local democracy and participation.

Removing duty to cooperate and Section 106 agreements

DIRT ON OUR HANDS AT CHARLTON HOUSE’S OLD POND GARDEN

Walled gardens are uncommon, and have special growing conditions. The walls of the Old Pond Garden at Charlton House, red brick and Grade I listed, shield the space from strong winds and traffic noise. But it was full of weeds, and the planting had become congested. Some trees had died and been felled but not replaced. It no longer boasts a pond and the lavender that replaced it was woody and overgrown. Yet it has great bones: handsome paths and landscaping, and good soil, not too clay or sandy.

With the Charlton and Blackheath Amateur Horticultural Society [CABAHS] celebrating its 70th year, it began volunteering sessions in the garden in February, with some interruptions. The work has been boosted by a Greenwich Neighbourhood Growth Fund grant, which will buy another bench, some tree surgery work, plants, tools and a wheelchair ramp.

Volunteer sessions have been a great way to get outdoors. Around 15-20 people come along, but the garden is big enough to socially distance safely. And the jobs involved range from heavy lifting (big old plants being dug out of the ground - and big new plants going in) to light weeding. So beginners as well as more experienced gardeners can find a role. Many of the new plants are being grown or donated by members, chosen with advice from local professional Jason Carty, who is also volunteering his time and effort. Lately the University of Greenwich has been involved, with some of its landscape architecture students getting their hands into the soil.

As one of the regulars, I can say that coming to work in the garden has helped motivate me to develop new skills and spend

time exercising with purpose in the fresh air. It’s been a blessing to have new – and very interesting – people to talk too, outside my own household. A substantial number come from Westcombe Park, so I’ve met more of our neighbours. My confidence as a gardener is growing, and it’s been a boost for my mental state, in the midst of this pandemic.

Sessions normally take place on Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00, and Thursdays, 11:00-1:00, and new volunteers are always welcome. The entrance is tucked away by the side of the Carers’ Centre, where the café reopened for refreshments in October. Work will go on all through the winter, if regulations allow; it’s a great time to plant, giving new shrubs time to settle in before starting spring growth. When spring comes, we hope the garden will open to the public again. You can expect to see a much lovelier garden. It will still be a work in progress, but it will be full of interesting plants, with an enticing layout that will make visiting a pleasure.

-Anne Robbins

You can find more on the CABAHS website (<https://cabahs.com/old-pond-garden-project/>) and its Instagram page (@cabahs_hortisoc).



PLANNING APPLICATIONS (See also <http://www.westcombesociety.org/>)

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57 WESTCOMBE HILL ref 20/3222/F

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29 MYCENAE ROAD ref 20/1646/HD

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15 BEACONSFIELD ROAD ref 20/2789/F

To change roof from pitch to crown with associated skylights

.... a 2021 prediction

We’ve had several of the seven plagues of Egypt. Certainly thunderstorms and fire (severe floods,wildfires and heat!) and perhaps pestilence of livestock (in the form of Covid -19). We don't appear to have been overrun with locusts, lice, flies or frogs. Water hasn't exactly been turned into blood but in some parts of the world it has been very badly contaminated. So can we look forward to an outbreak of boils? -Maggie Gravelle

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