

WestcombeNEWS

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December/Jan 2025 No 10

Seasons Greetings to all of our readers

A New Ancient Monument for the Borough of Greenwich

You might have been surprised to read that Greenwich has another ancient monument to add to its collection of superb historic buildings – such as the Royal Observatory, the Old Royal Naval College and the National Maritime Museum.

This new arrival, at Enderby's Wharf, a scheduled monument since October, is none of these. It is the equipment that transformed our world, allowing families, companies and governments to stay in touch across the sea.

82% of all the subsea telegraph cables in the world. If your parents or grandparents received a telegram from someone serving abroad at the end of the Second World War, then those words would have been transmitted through cables made in Greenwich or Charlton. (My father in the RAF in the Middle East sent a telegram to his parents to say he was on the way home. I still have the message.)

Until the mid-1950s subsea cables across the oceans could not carry telephone calls: they didn't have the



The winding gear at Enderby's Wharf in October 2025, now scheduled, seen from the listed Enderby House pub, which once housed the head office of the cable-making company. Picture © Alan Burkitt-Gray

In 2025 we take it for granted that we can email, or WhatsApp, or Zoom work colleagues or family members in the US, India or Australia. Or anywhere. This connectivity uses technology developed here in Greenwich, mainly at the factory of what's now Alcatel Submarine Networks just off Blackwall Lane. Since the 1850s people on this site have been developing and making the subsea cable equipment that allows us to keep in touch.

Even back in the 1850s this technology transformed the world. Until then the quickest way of delivering a message was by horseback on land or by ship – sail and then steam – on the seas: days or weeks. In a short time this changed to minutes or seconds, thanks to scientists and engineers, many of them at King's College London, and that factory in Greenwich, then called Telcon, for Telegraph Construction and Maintenance; along with a rival factory, Siemens Brothers, further east, on the Charlton-Woolwich border.

It meant anyone with the cash could go into a telegraph office or a Post Office and send a greeting to that uncle who'd emigrated to Australia or that daughter who was expecting a baby in Canada.

In the 100 years up to 1950 the Telcon factory in Greenwich and the Siemens factory in Charlton made

frequency range. Those movies showing Winston Churchill in his Cabinet Room bunker talking on the phone in 1944 to President Roosevelt in the Oval Office were mainly fiction. Bunkum. The only way anyone could talk across the Atlantic until 1956 was via a very expensive, largely unsecret radio station in Rugby.

In 1956 the General Post Office and its US and Canadian equivalents inaugurated TAT-1, the first transatlantic phone cable, much of which was made by what is now ASN in Greenwich, loaded onto the cable ship from that now scheduled gantry at Enderby's Wharf.

Until the winding gear went out of service in the 1970s, the cable was carried overhead directly from the factory into the ships that would lay it across the world's oceans.

Following October's scheduling decision I was contacted by Taj Bhambra, the managing director of the UK operation of ASN. He is working with Historic England, the Royal Borough of Greenwich, and the nearby pub, Enderby House, about a way of permanently celebrating the site and its role in connecting the world.

To take part in the online Zoom talk from Greenwich Industrial History Society on the 9th December please email GreenwichIndustrial@gmail.com with the subject line

"GIHS Enderby talk"

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Update on East and West Greenwich Traffic Management Scheme (LTN)

It looks likely that the LTN will be made permanent very soon, subject to a three week statutory consultation. Councillors on the Call-In committee allowed it to go ahead despite an excellent presentation given by Councillors Lakshan Saldin (Independent) and Tamasin Rhymes (Greens). Both Councillors are usually in favour of LTNs but they were clear that the case for one in East and West Greenwich is not proven. They, and many other speakers, were extremely concerned about the negative effect on boundary roads such as Blackheath Hill and roads in Charlton. They questioned the analysis of the data and whether the LTN had actually had any more positive effect than would have been seen anyway due to the Silvertown Tunnel opening. In response the Leader of the Council and other decision makers referred many times to improved air pollution levels despite the data showing a negligible effect on air pollution. Others also spoke in favour of the scheme citing reduced

traffic on some roads in Westcombe Park and East Greenwich, not surprising given that traffic has been severely restricted in those areas. Mention was also made of improved safety data though this was not available in time for the report so it is unclear exactly what this means. Sadly none of the Blackheath Westcombe Councillors attended the meeting to hear what their residents had to say.

All in all it was an extremely disappointing evening for those who live on the Boundary Roads and in Charlton who now see traffic levels in some places that are significantly higher than the already high levels they suffered prior to the scheme being introduced. Mitigation is promised but whether that will work is another question.

There will be a further consultation before the scheme is made permanent. This will run for three weeks. We will publish the dates on westcombesociety.org as soon as we have them. We encourage residents to respond.

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Westcombe News

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4 x standard	£138	£620

VCA AGM

Mycenae House is managed by the Vanbrugh Community Association (VCA) which held its AGM on 18th November. The report described some of the many activities that the house hosts and thanked the staff for their cheerful support in making sure that these activities were able to run smoothly. They also run the café which is a vibrant meeting place with improvements in the food and drink on offer.

There was great interest in the lift which has, at last, obtained planning permission. Detailed plans will be drawn up and work on the structure should start next year. Some classes will be affected but it is hoped to keep disruption to a minimum.

The treasurer presented the accounts. Business turnover had increased as had the cost of delivering the services. Overall, there was a deficit of £7,423 which included a cost of £4,706 to write off a bad debt. Staff costs make up a considerable proportion of the budget so the effects of increased National Insurance and the minimum wage were significant.

Thanks to staff, trustees and the Manager.

Heady Fundraising

Brainiacs were buzzing as 72 quiz heads tackled a host of baffling, brilliant, and bonkers questions at The Westcombe Society's final charity quiz for 2025 at Mycenae House. The evening highlights were quizmaster Robbie warbling tunes from musicals, and a raffle with a Peruvian bird whistle as the mystery prize. The fish n chips at half time were tucked into with relish, refuelling overworked grey matter. Most importantly, over £800 was raised for our very worthy charity of the year, The Greenwich and Bexley Community Hospice. We're so pleased to have been able to assist in buying an oxygen concentrator, which provides rapid oxygen therapy to patients experiencing breathlessness.



Grateful thanks as ever to the Mycenae House staff for their invaluable help.

REMINDER - Members' Standing Orders

Please check your annual member's standing order - membership increased from May 2024. The 2026 payment due should show:
Family/Household £15.00
Individual £12.00
Concession £6.00
Many thanks for your help -
Membership Secretary

Gardening and Mental Health: The Friends of Mycenae Gardens AGM

On a rather damp evening last month, the Friends of Mycenae Gardens held its annual general meeting. Once the usual formalities were out of the way – and there were no big changes – we presented some of the ambitious plans for the gardens. In particular, we will be deepening the wild area slightly. To do this, we'll be adding a new set of stakes which will hold fresh 'dead hedging': plant material from trees and shrubs that forms a natural barrier. Between this and the current dead hedge, we plan to plant some live hedging: native shrubs that will help support bird and insect life with their fruits and flowers.



The Merveille du Jour moth, photo by Iain Leach, from Butterfly Conservation, <https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/merveille-du-jour>

This calls for your help! Volunteers are always welcome, and January 25th is our next date, 11:00 to 1:00. And even if you can't come, you can save your Christmas tree and donate it to us for the new dead hedge. Please email for details: friendsofmycenaegardens@gmail.com We also heard from two speakers. Joe Beale updated us on what he's seen recently on informal visits to

the Gardens and the local area. He spoke about insects, noting in particular the glamorous Merveille du Jour moth, with its elaborate green markings. These moths feed on the leaves and immature flowers of English oaks, for which we have several good specimens. And while they're not uncommon, finding and looking closely at something like moths can take your mind off day-to-day concerns and help alleviate anxiety. Joe also spoke movingly about bringing his son into the garden this summer, to find a stag beetle whirring past their heads, just as he had experienced them as a child. Stag beetles are a sign of a healthy life cycle for a wood, which needs to include not only living trees but also dead wood to nourish a full ecology of organisms.

We also heard from Ruth Yeo, a trained and experienced therapeutic gardener, on why getting your hands in the soil can improve mental health. Of course, gardening can be restorative as a learning experience. She spoke about the joy of seeing how a pea seed starts to unfold a shoot and some roots, or pride in seeing how something you've planted thrives. But there's also chemistry in the ground, and contact with it releases endorphins in the brain that trigger a burst of happiness. It seems like a great reason to come volunteer with us this winter!

Walking Westcombe



This small book by the late local historian Neil Rhind is proving very popular. It is full of fascinating historical facts about our area and also contains some really interesting old photographs of Westcombe Park. It would make a lovely Christmas present and we have had

many positive comments from purchasers who have found it difficult to put down. It is available at The Blackheath Bookshop and The Bookshop on the Heath and can also be collected locally by emailing info@westcombesociety.org

Public Meeting on Future of The Arches

Our colleagues at the Greenwich Society have kindly advised us of a public meeting to discuss the future of The Arches. It will take place at the University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College, Room 010, Queen Anne Building, at 6pm on Tuesday 9

December. The architects and developers will be present, and it is a good opportunity to find out about the current plans for this much-loved building. Refreshments will be served. No charge.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD

Blackheath Fireworks Reignite

After Five Years

- Residents Call for Better Planning

On November 1st fireworks once again lit up the skies above Blackheath after an absence of five years. The big change was that the display was tied to a ticketed event although the fireworks themselves could also be seen for free. Those that attended saw an excellent display whether they paid for it or not. The ticketed event included music, comedy, food and drink stalls and a front on view of the fireworks.

some issues, in particular related to parking. Arguments were reported in the Kidbrooke Gardens/St Germans Place area and there was some parking on the heath near Vanbrugh Terrace.

It is hoped that there will be fireworks again, for all to enjoy. If in a similar format, we urge the organisers to sort out the crowds at the entrance to the ticketed area so that those with tickets can enter



Unfortunately, there were some problems with crowding at the single entrance to the closed-off space which meant some gave up, including some families who reported the crowds inside were too big for safety. Others who persevered through the crowd reported plenty of space further into the enclosure and an excellent display with some very good entertainment, both before and afterwards.

It was sad that the display couldn't be funded without a ticketed area, cordoned off from others, but those who watched from outside said that the side-on view didn't detract from the enjoyment of the fireworks. The huge crowds from previous years didn't materialise but there were still

without hindrance. We would also like them to consider how to prevent parking causing problems in the wider area as it seems likely that more people will attend in the future.

There was a general lack of advance information especially about the resident's information evening, road closures and the resultant bus diversions. A number of people found themselves stranded in Blackheath village in mid-afternoon without a bus home and traffic was gridlocked in some areas. There was some problem with noise which reportedly travelled as far as Woolwich. Food for thought for the organisers but, on the whole, well done for bringing Fireworks back to Blackheath.

Letters

Telephone Box

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article in the August issue of Westcombe News regarding the neglected telephone box at the corner of Westcombe Park Road and Vanbrugh Park Road. I may have an idea to repurpose the structure and give it a new lease of life. We can call it 'The Happy Box'. It's a place, a shrine, a museum where people can leave behind objects which make them happy. The object could be a drawing, poem, book, music, painting or a photograph. The Happy Box could be a place where the community can come to ruminate, ponder and recharge, or simply enjoy the surroundings of a lovingly curated space - and hopefully leave with a spring in their step. It is just an idea, but certainly a lovely way to spruce up these wonderful historic structures with a purpose and a positive message. Who knows, one day we may see more Happy Boxes popping up around London.

Alexander Bischof

bischof.alexander@gmail.com

The London and SE University Group

Dear Editor,

I should like to reply to the article headed London and SE University Group by Neville Grant which appeared on the front page as the leading article in the October edition No 8 of the Westcombe News. Neville comments that the news that the Universities of Greenwich and Kent are to be merged should not come as a shock to us. This may be true but it doesn't follow that this is a good thing. He justifies it on the grounds of financial needs. We have heard these financial reasons as justification for the mergers of institutions many times before. They included sharing of administrative expenses, the making redundant of the poor casual and mainly hourly paid lecturers, the installation of only one Vice Chancellor covering

both institutions who nevertheless will receive a considerably increased salary. All these measures are hardly new however and are probably taught by the universities as part of their management of change seminars. They amount to trying to solve your financial problems by getting together with a similar nearby institution which probably has less good ideas of how to manage finance than your institution does. The whole issue of lack of finance revolves around the fact that Universities tried a few years ago to solve this problem by attracting more and more overseas students. Lecturers even went out to China and India to try and recruit them especially in the range of teaching professional and academic accounting studies. Other Universities like Kent tried to go for the European overseas market. There were also the African and American markets available. The overseas markets largely dried up however due to global economic and social factors but the answer at that point was not to retreat to the redundancies and amalgamations of institutions. What the Universities needed to do was to think creatively and offer more exciting and relevant programmes to their home students. At LSBU they offered midwifery programmes which were desperately needed and teacher training as well as professional accounting programmes like AAT and ACCA. These correctly targeted the needs of employers at home and abroad and would ensure that the students once they had graduated or post graduated would have an immediate job waiting for them. I would suggest that the London and South East University Group follow a similar path and do not rely on the old worn out mergers system. More of the same is not a solution.

With all good wishes, Linda Hodgson, former University and Professional Lecturer in Accounting, Finance and Taxation.



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AT THE HEART OF GREENWICH SINCE 1979

FEATURES

Sir, The Year in Letters

For more than 200 years, The Times has published letters on every topic that needs addressing, from weighty affairs of state to fare dodging and bizarre uses for old school ties. This little book, Sir, The Year in Letters, which would fit snugly into any Christmas stocking, celebrates the lighter side of life: musings on duvets, beards, potholes, the merits of slugs, irritating modern jargon and the demise of Tupperware.

letters lamenting the decline of the traditional washing line to nostalgia for lost noises, such as the clang of a typewriter bell, the clatter of a station's departure boards or the smooth wash of a chalkboard rubber. Sir, The Year in Letters epitomises British life - our gentle tradition of self-deprecation, our fondness for times past and our love of the absurd. It is the perfect Christmas present or stocking filler. Grab your



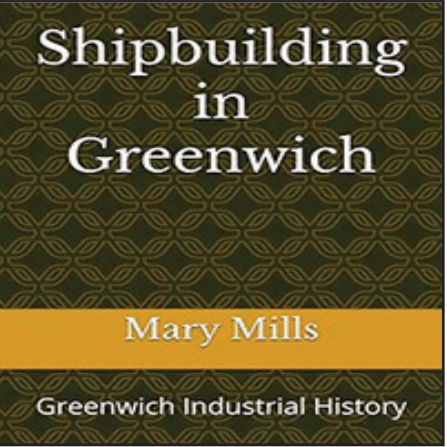
It is a compilation of the best quirky, witty and sometimes downright absurd letters published in The Times over the past year and is the third book in the series. It's available at the Blackheath Bookshop or Waterstones in Greenwich and is a snip at £9.99 (or £8.99 from the timesbookshop.co.uk). Many of the most light-hearted letters appeared in the coveted "bottom right" corner of the Letters to the Editor page of The Times, a tradition of levity that has been running since the 1950s. This slim volume of more than 300 letters was compiled by Andrew Riley, the letters editor of The Times, who lives locally. Themed chapters cover modern manners, arts and culture, politics and history, the world of work, house and home, food and drink, and country ways. What unites them is the elegiac quality of many of the contributions, from the series of

copy now, while stocks last.

TYPICAL LETTER IN THE BOOK:
Tickets please
Sir, Further to Ben Clatworthy's Thunderer "Fare dodging is out of control, don't make it even easier" (Jan 17), the lift at my local overground station was out of order recently, and I was struggling with a heavy case. Rather warily I accepted an offer from a terrifying-looking tattooed and hooded young chap to carry it down the three flights of stairs. He deposited it at my feet by the ticket barriers. Before I could blurt more than "Thank you so mu..." he had leapt over the barrier and disappeared from sight.
Suzie Marwood, London SW6
Sir, The Year in Letters, edited by Andrew Riley. Published by Times Books, an imprint of HarperCollins. £9.99 or £8.99 from the timesbookshop.co.uk

Books by Local Historian

Dr Mary Mills is a local historian who is particularly interested in industrial history. She completed a PhD on the history of London gas industries and is an active member of the Greenwich Industrial History Society. She was a councillor for Peninsula Ward and has written about the industrial heritage of that area.



Shipbuilding in Greenwich – A shortish run-through of those who built ships in our borough. It covers two Royal Dockyards, those who built single sailing barges, and those who built ships into the 1990s. £10
Greenwich Peninsula – Greenwich Marsh. A History of an Industrial Heartland. This is a rewrite of my all-time bestseller Greenwich Marsh to include the Dome. It describes the history of the Marsh and the industries which grew up there in the 19th century, including Enderby Wharf and the telecommunications revolution, as well as the remarkable

gas works and much else. £10
The Greenwich Riverside – Upper Watergate to Angerstein. A site-by-site description of the Greenwich riverside between Deptford and Charlton. This is not yet another description of Royal Greenwich but looks at riverside communities, industries and river workers – as well as lesser-known site histories. £15
The Industries of Deptford Creek. – A site-by-site description of this amazingly busy Creekside between its mouth on the Thames and the Lewisham border. It includes industries of national importance from the medieval period to electronics pioneers – and the downright quirky. £15
George Livesey. A Biography. – The life of South London's maverick 19th-century gasworks manager who forced the privately owned industry to work in partnership with the public and with its workforce. There is nothing in the industry he didn't change. This is about a man who wanted to change society – but in 1889 got it very wrong. £10. Illustrated £15
The Early East London Gas Industry: How It Began and How It Helped London Industries to Grow. – The gas industry in early 19th-century London – all the incompetence and all the scandals. It also explores how gas-industry waste products were taken up and used by other industries. £15.

Developments at Greenwich Town Hall

From time to time we report on developments at Greenwich Town Hall. Last year permission was given for the building to be converted into flats. The latest application to the Planning Department, submitted in October this year, is for the erection of scaffolding. This would be covered with a shroud on which is a replica

of the, hidden, façade. The scaffolding would also support an illuminated advertisement. Although this suggests that work is about to begin on the structure, the planning application for the conversion of the building to residential and flexible commercial/community uses has not yet been granted.

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FEATURES

Obituaries - Memories of Those Who Left us in Recent Months



Sheila Rosemary Richards
(1936-2025)

Sheila Richards, who died sadly and unexpectedly on September 18th, had just entered her 90th year. She was one of the original volunteer Westcombe News distributors, and she maintained the commitment (to Beaconsfield Road) until a few weeks before her decease. She will be much missed.

Sheila moved to Westcombe Park in 1969, with her four children and first husband, Stephen. When he sadly died in his early 40s, Sheila returned to her earlier career as an English teacher, eventually becoming Head of English at Eltham College Junior School, a post particularly suited to her talents, which included teaching classical guitar and organising the school play, a memorable annual landmark.

After she married Chris in 1995, she retired from Eltham College and taught part-time in Colfe's Junior Department, extending her skills into early maths, early science and English (EFL) for overseas pupils. She also taught EFL at a free initiative for newcomers from abroad at the Church of the Ascension.

Sheila was a deeply committed Christian, firstly attending the Church of the Ascension, then All Saints, the venue of her funeral on October 21st. She had two very unusual gifts, that of being able to meet people on the level from all kinds of backgrounds and in having an amazing memory for people's faces.

Her main hobby was playing the Classical Guitar. She was a member of the Widmore Guitar Group and her Eltham College Junior School Guitar Group regularly won the local Beckenham Music Festival 1st prize for Classical Guitar.

Around 2000 she began a new past time, oil painting, and pursued this for twenty-five years, attending weekly painting courses, residential courses at Dedham Hall, and producing many memorable cards and calendars. Her oldest hobby was gardening, a lifelong interest which she pursued in all weathers. Her dedicated efforts turned the garden at Ingleside into a dazzling scene when all the flowers were in bloom.



John Nuttall-Smith
(1938-2025)

John Charles Ralph Nuttall-Smith was born on 13 March 1938 in Paris, and died on 30 September in Blackheath.

John worked for The Observer newspaper, and he and his family lived in Mycenae Road from 1970 to 1993. His wife, Sue, worked for John Ayling who was the Warden of the then Kidbrooke House (now Mycenae House). Between 1974 and the early 80s John became heavily involved in producing the Westcombe News – the editor at the time was John Petty, who worked on the Telegraph.

This was a time when the mode of production of the WN involved scissors and paste, and John did the cut and paste layout and all the local business adverts.

As a child, John's daughter, now Caroline Elkington, used to deliver the WN, which was how she earned her pocket money – breaching the code that the WN is run purely by unpaid volunteers ...!

The family were well-known and popular members of the Westcombe Park community. Among their friends and neighbours were Yanno & Hilary Patrinos who were very involved with the Westcombe Society.

In 1993, John and Sue moved to Cornwall where they lived in the village of Polruan. There John got involved in the local parish news – he based the layout on the Westcombe News. John and Sue parents moved back to Blackheath in February 2024 due to Dad's bad health.

John was much loved and will always be remembered by his wife Sue, daughter Caroline, son in law Graeme, son Simon & daughter in law Sonia and his grandchildren, Emma, Wendy, Jasmine & Ben and his brother Christopher as well as his other family & friends.

WESTCOMBE NEWS
Published by the Westcombe Society
Free to 2,700 homes in Westcombe Park

Chairman, Yanno Patrinos.....056-1665
Secretary, Jenny Cole.....056-7965
50 Doyle Road, S25

Flaming problems.....056-9644
Transport for GAPS.....056-9078
Helping out names.....056-1665

STILL GOING STRONG
STILL GOING STRONG! That was the message at the annual meeting of the Westcombe Society at Kidbrooke House on May 30. Treasurer STEPHEN RICHARDS said there had been an extra £72 in income from membership even though the fees had not yet been increased.

Retiring chairman IAIN GUNN listed the many activities during the year and paid his tribute to all the helpers. In particular, there were thanks to KILIAN PATRINOS and JENNIFER ADAMS. Hilary was the founder-secretary of the Society and for the past two years has been its very busy organiser of events. She was presented with a pot plant by deputy chairman PATT BOUGH. Arthur has moved out of the area but will remain an associate member.

The Patrinos family will still play a big part in the affairs of the Society because Hilary's husband IANNO PATRINOS was elected chairman to succeed Iain Gunn.

JUDITH GUNN, of 50 Doyle Road, becomes secretary and will continue the good work done by IANNO. NELSON over the past two years.

TINA PETTY, of 4 Vauxhall Fields, becomes organiser of events. PAULINE HARRIS, of 57 Winton Road, will aid JUDITH. NUTTALL-SMITH, of 77 Innes Road, on the west side of the Westcombe River, becomes treasurer.

COMMITTEE

In addition to the officers, committee members elected at the annual meeting were: Elizabeth Harrington, David Drummond, Cyril Fry, David Jackson, John Goodwin, John...



Ros Howells
(1931-2025)

The Voice Newspaper has announced that the death of Baroness Rosalind Howells, a tireless campaigner for social justice, has sadly died. Ros Howells was born in Grenada in 1931 and settled in Britain at the age of 20. She made

a significant contribution to the development of racial equality policies and community projects, becoming a trustee of the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust and a trustee of the Jason Roberts Foundation. Prior to her work as a Baroness, she was the Director of the Greenwich Racial Equality Council. Her impact and legacy will never be forgotten.

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ENVIRONMENT

Why “litter” is good for you - and for the garden! Leave the Leaves!! Banish the Blowers!!!



Painting by Ernest Bieler, 1909, "Collecting fallen leaves", Valais Museum of Art, Switzerland. The villagers and peasants used to collect leaves from the woods to take back home to mix with and enrich the soil in their cottage gardens, to make compost, and to protect the soil from freezing during winter.

If you watched the latest Wallace and Gromit film, "Vengeance Most Fowl", you may remember the scene where Wallace's new-fangled Smart Gnome, Norbot, ruins Gromit's flower garden in his obsessive quest to make it "Neat and Tidy" while zooming around on an out-of-control leaf-blower "Pointlessly Blowing Leaves". Gromit is not alone in suffering from the horrors of leaf-blowers. Have you ever sat down to have a nice cup of tea, or popped into the garden for a breath of fresh air, only to be ambushed by the infernal din of a leaf-blower? This is hardly surprising since

leaf-blowers attain deafening and ear-damaging volumes of 100 decibels, while their low-frequency, stress-inducing whine easily penetrates windows and walls. The "two-stroke" petrol variety is especially harmful in emitting a toxic and foul-smelling cocktail of un-combusted petrol/oil, ozone, formaldehyde, benzene, nitrogen oxides, CO/CO2 and black soot. Further, all leaf-blowers churn up clouds of dust, spores, mites, pollen, pesti/herbicides, microplastic and assorted debris, some of which stays suspended in the air for hours. These pollutants are notoriously damaging to human health.



Leaf-blower blasting leaves in a public park, for collection and then removal and disposal. From the internet.

Quite apart from their toll on our well-being (especially for those with allergies, asthma and respiratory disorders), the nefarious downsides of leaf-blowers extend to nature, in particular those denizens of gardens dependent upon leaves and leaf litter. But why are leaves and leaf litter so important?

Leaf litter (fallen leaves, fruit and seeds, humus, plus associated organisms) is a rich and important component of gardens and other terrestrial ecosystems. It is recycled by bacteria and fungi acting in concert with worms, woodlice and other creatures to release nitrogen and calcium in a natural process of soil rejuvenation, optimizing conditions for plant growth. The litter itself provides a home for leaf-loving insects like milli/centipedes, spiders and harvestmen, while ladybirds and other insects spend the winter there, including the eggs, caterpillars and chrysalids of lepidopterans like ringlets and elephant hawk-moths. Moreover, many birds exploit leaf litter as a food source, especially to nourish their young in spring. Blackbirds rustle through in their search for insects and worms, while wrens go hunting for spiders. And it's not just invertebrates! Hedgehogs snap up leaf-loving snails, worms and slugs all year long, then snuggle under the leaves to hibernate. Shrews, frogs, toads and lizards also seek food there, as well as protective shelter.



Brown argus butterfly resting in leaves in late summer, own garden: MJ Millan

increases water-runoff and reduces soil aeration, which is detrimental for plant roots. Worse still, the high velocity jets of leaf-blowers (100+ miles an hour) injure and even kill butterflies, bees and other bugs unlucky enough to be hit, and they are especially destructive for animals like hedgehogs and frogs hibernating in fallen leaves over autumn and winter. Even if not directly hurt, animals in the leaf litter are displaced and lose essential resting, feeding and nesting sites. The adverse effects of leaf-blowers extend to other animals like birds, since the explosive noise scares them off, disrupts communication, and deprives them of a critical food larder.



Common toad hiding in leaves in autumn, neighbour's garden: C Calvo

So, what can be done? First, if you are using a leaf-blower - stop! Switch to a broom for paths, and to a rake for lawns: if deeply packed, leaves on the grass can be partially removed for composting. For flower beds, they are best left in place. Second, if you recruit gardening companies, tell them to minimize leaf-blower use and only apply them - if at all - to paths and other "non-soil" areas. Leaves collected should be composted or scattered over flowerbeds. Third, ask your council to save money and promote biodiversity by reducing or avoiding the use of leaf-blowers in green spaces like parks, while restricting their use in streets - to avoid slippage on pavements and blocked drains - to the colder/wetter months. Finally, for public health and environmental reasons, the sale of petrol-powered leaf-blowers has been abolished in California and 100+ American towns, and they were just banned in Zurich, with electric alternatives confined to only three months use per year. So, if there, then why not here?

Mark J. Millan



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- University of Cambridge
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- University of Leeds
- University of Warwick

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Installation of Heat Pump in front garden
44 HARDY ROAD Ref 25/3474/HD
Loft conversion with replacement of existing dormer plus new rear dormer
164 LANGTON WAY
Ref 25/3437/HD
Replacement of external cladding, windows and doors, and external garden staircase with installation of a landing. Construction of new roof to the front with associated works.

* Please be advised that the planning applications noted here are based on information available at the time of print. For the latest updates, please visit our website www.westcombesociety.org

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WHAT'S ON

Woodlands Farm



Hedge laying Courses on;
17th Jan 2026, 21st February 2026,
21st March 2026 8.30am - 4pm. £80
per person per day.
These will all be teaching the ancient
skill of hedge laying.

Woolwich Singers

Community Choir Christmas Concert
Wednesday 17th December at 7pm
Get into the festive spirit with an
evening of your favourite seasonal
songs performed live by Woolwich
Singers and participants from
Tramshed's Reach Theatre Company.
Come along for a singsong and share a
joyful time in the heart of your
community.
Book your tickets: www.tramshed.org.
Or call 020 8854 1316. Tramshed,
51-53 Woolwich New Road, London,
SE18 6ES.

GREENWICH THEATRE CONNECTS



28th Nov 2025 – 11th Jan 2026
Peter Pan: A Pantomime Adventure
Fly away to Neverland and Hook your
tickets now for this years
swashbuckling, family adventure
For further details and to book call
020 8858 7755 or email
Boxoffice@Greenwichtheatre.org.uk

Westcombe News Dec/Jan 25

ORNC

Spend this festive season at the Old
Royal Naval College Join Father
Christmas and his granddaughter for a
story around the fireplace in the
Admiral's House to receive a special
gift and feel the holiday magic with a
heart-warming, interactive Christmas
performance from the doorstep elves.
There's more Christmas joy over at the
Chapel of St Peter & St Paul with its
annual Christmas carol concerts, as
well as a captivating screening of the
1950s classic film Scrooge accompanied
by live music.

Christmas Chapel Concert at the ORNC

This Christmas, your group will be
able to enjoy a festive concert in the
Chapel, delivered by award-winning
Trinity Laban Chapel Choir, with the
chance to join in and sing some of
your festive favourites.
Included in the visit, there is entry to
the Painted Hall, known as the 'Sistine
Chapel of the UK'

Dates available: 1, 8 & 15 December
Time: 2 – 3.15pm

Price: £31 per person (10+)
Option to add: Mulled Wine or hot
apple or glass of house white or red or
pint of Greenwich Beer and a Mince
Pie in the Old Brewery Pub for
£8.50pp including VAT. (Must be
booked in advance)

ornc.org/groups-christmas-offering-2025/

Queen's House

Santa's Grotto at the Queen's House

Dates November – 24 December 2025

Time: 10.00 – 17.45 | The experience
lasts 45 minutes and includes two 15-
minute shows and a visit with Father
Christmas

Age: Suitable for families with children
aged 1-9

Location: Queen's House, Orangery
Admission: Adult £27 | Child £27
including a gift | Under 1s go free
without a gift.

Queen's House Ice Rink

Enjoy comfort and flexibility with VIP
fast-track tickets, a 'skate-off pit lane'
for mid-session breaks, and a viewing
area next to Zero Degrees restaurant,
serving up warming favourites.

Dates: Nov 2025 – 4 January 2026

Time: 10.00 – 21.00

Age: Suitable ages 3 and over

Location: Queen's House, North
Lawns

Admission: Prices starting from -
Adult £17.10 | Child £14.85 |
Concession £15.20

www.rmg.co.uk/queens-house

St Paul's Sinfonia

St. Paul's festive baroque with Corelli
Christmas Concerto

St Alfege Church, Greenwich, 7.30pm

Friday 12th December. Tickets

Tickets for our concerts are priced at
£20 full price and £15 concessions.

They are available now from
Eventbrite by following the 'Buy
Ticket(s)' link in each event.

<https://www.stpaulssinfonia.com/>

Thomas Tallis Society

Messiah by Candlelight

Thomas Tallis Society Choir and
Orchestra present a festive performance
of Handel's Messiah by candlelight.
Conducted by Eamonn Dougan.

7.30pm, Tuesday 16 December 2025

St Alfege Church, Greenwich

**Tickets £24 & £16, available online or
on the door: www.ticketsource.co.uk/tts**

The Arts Society Greenwich

www.theartsocietygreenwich.org.uk

Christmas lecture:

St Nicholas of Myra and Santa Claus:
A Case of Mistaken Identity

Monday 8 December 2025 at 7.30 pm

Lecturer: Sally Dormer

Venue: James Wolfe Primary School,
Royal Hill, Greenwich

Guests very welcome: £10; membership
£65 for 10 lectures



January lecture:

Monopoly - based on Classic 1936 ver-
sion (photographic journey around the
locations on that Monopoly Board)

Monday 12 January 2026 at 7.30 pm

Lecturer: Roger Mendham

Venue: James Wolfe Primary School,
Royal Hill, Greenwich

Guests very welcome: £10; membership
£65 for 10 lectures

www.theartsocietygreenwich.org.uk



Step back in time: 'Fans in the age of Jane Austen' Exhibition Open at The Fan Museum, until 21st March

Visitors of all ages are invited to
explore, learn and enjoy the intricate
beauty and craftsmanship, with one
special fan giving a nod to the brood-
ing Mr. Darcy, who's sure to have his
admirers among the crowd.

Tickets: Available on-door.

Price: Standard entry £5, Senior (above
60) entry £3 with concessions including
children under 6, Disabled, and
National Art fund.

Information on access & Facilities:

We have an operating lift to access the
orangery and the first floor (our
temporary exhibition), used with a
supervising member of staff.

For more information visit -

www.thefanmuseum.org.uk/

access-facilities

#JaneAustenFans

#FanMuseumGreenwich

#FansInTheAgeOfJaneAusten



**National One rugby at The Utilita, SE9
6TE. Kick off at 15:00, £15 on the gate.**

Dec 13 Leeds Tykes

Jan 10 Leicester Lions

24 Dings Crusaders

Feb 14 Birmingham Moseley

21 Rams

**Blackheath Women at Rectory Field,
SE3 8SR. Kick off generally 14:00 —
check social media. Free entry.**

Nov 9 H'field & Waldron

Dec 7 H'smith & Fulham

Jan 11 Hampstead

25 Dartford Valley

Feb 8 Old Alleynian

Mycenae House

Thurs 4th Dec 4pm - Bach to Baby

concert. 'A Swinging Christmas'

Classical Concert for families. £18.

Wed 10th Dec 7.30pm - Citizens of the

World Choir Christmas Concert.£15/10.

Fri 12th Dec 7.30pm - The SWOP

Sessions. with Open Mic. £8.

Sat 13th Dec 10+11.30am - Baby

Broadway Concert.£14.

Mon 15th Dec 7pm - A Choral

Christmas. Celebrate this time of year

in song with St George's Church. Free.

Wed 17th Dec 7.30pm - Her Voice at

Christmas. Featuring local performers

in aid of Greenwich Homeless Project.

Fri 19th Dec 3pm - Bach to Baby con-

cert. 'Twas the Night Before Christmas'

Classical Concert for families. £18.

Fri 19th Dec 7.30pm - Christmas with

The Kimberleys. Jim & Isobel play

their favourite old folk & rare yuletide

songs. £15.

Fri 23rd Jan 7.30pm - Burns Night

Celebration. Join GFMA for their

Burns Night Celebration. Tbc.

For further information about

all Mycenae House events

visit www.mycenaehouse.co.uk



**St John's Church, Stratheden Road,
telephone 0208 305 0520**

Sun 14 Dec 6pm	Youth Led Christmas Service Nativity and Carols led by our youth
Wed 17 Dec 7.30pm	Blue Christmas A quiet and reflective Christmas service
Thurs 18 Dec 8.30pm	Beer and Carols at The British Oak Carol singing at The British Oak Pub
Sat 20 Dec 11am-3pm	Christmas Fair Christmas Fair at St Johns
Sun 21 Dec 10.15am	All-Age Christmas A Christmassy service for all the family!
Sun 21 Dec 7pm	Carols by Candlelight A traditional carol service
Mon 22 Dec 7pm	Blackheath Standard Pub Carols Carol singing at the Royal Standard Pub
Wed 24 Dec 4pm	Christingle A traditional family Christingle service
Wed 24 Dec 11.30pm	Midnight Communion A Christmas Eve Communion service
Thurs 25 Dec 10.15am	Christmas Day Service All-age Christmas Day celebration

Blackheath Halls

**Enter a magical world of winter opera
scenes, from Menotti's Amahl and the
Night Visitors to Massenet's Cendrillon.**

Scenes include:

Le Roi d'Ys | Lalo Amahl and the

Night Visitors | Menotti The

Adventures of Pinocchio | Dove

Iolanthe | Gilbert and Sullivan

Eugene Onegin | Tchaikovsky

Cendrillon | Massenet

The Nutcracker

Let's All Dance Ballet Company is

back, once again, with its stunning

festive family treat!

Parental Guidance: suitable for all ages

www.blackheathhalls.com/whats-on/

Cutty Sark

Sea Shanty Singers

Dates: 6, 7 December 2025 and 3, 4

January 2026

Time: 11.45, 12.45, 13.30

Age: Suitable for all ages

Location: Cutty Sark

Admission: Free with admission to the
ship

www.rmg.co.uk/whats-on/cutty-sark/

sea-shanty-singers

Gallery Talk special – Robert Burns

A special talk on board the ship will
uncover all the connections between
the Scottish bard and Cutty Sark.

Date: 24, 25 January 2025

Age: Suitable for ages 7 and over

Location: Cutty Sark

Admission: Free with admission to the
ship.

Poetry Reading

**Screening 'Chaos Dragon and the Light',
West Greenwich Library**

27/1/26 7 for 7.30pm

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