



The Roaming Pen: Hot town its summer in the city

Roger Wheeler

Not many people will remember that line from Summer in the City by The Lovin' Spoonful from 1966, it sums up our occasional hot weather, hose pipe bans are probably on the way so it must be summer. Brighton is awash with tourists and thousands of so-called 'students' who are in fact only studying the local night life. Am I the only one to be a little irritated by their apparent inability to see other people and walk down the pavements six abreast trampling the lone walker underfoot? But we need them and the money they bring so we just have to grin and bear it.

I am beginning to worry, the City Council is once again doing something right, can this go on? After many years of campaigning at long last parking zone H is being extended thus making the staff at the Royal Sussex walk a little further to work and the residents able to park and use their roads without the daily car cruising searching for an illusive parking space. We all received our letters telling us about the permits we will need, (a snip at £108.00) and how to apply. So off I went to Hove Town Hall expecting chaos and inefficiency, much to my astonishment there is a large department called 'City Direct' giving direct access to all council services – amazing. The parking section, the largest, deals with all parking issues and the queue was long, but I was out in less than 15 minutes the proud owner of my parking permit.

Parking in Brighton is a £14m business with approximately a 50% profit margin so maybe we should expect an efficient organisation. Even better things are happening in the City Parks department, they really do seem to have got their act

together. The new planting in Victoria Gardens is looking really good, the Old Steine is always excellent and it is again this year but the real surprise is the replanted esplanade along the Kemp Town slopes. You may recall my old friend – let's call him P, he likes his privacy – last year he single handedly got the overgrown bushes and their attendant vermin removed. A large number of interesting exotic plants of all types were put in, very attractive. Over the course of the year a large number were stolen, an unfortunate fact of life today. But they have been replanted at a cost of £4,000. There are no facilities for watering and so water has to be delivered by small tanker, this is done and the team of gardeners are frequently to be seen maintaining the borders. The idea has been floated for a group of interested local people to form 'The Friends of the Esplanade' to generally keep an eye on the plants and undertake whatever simple action is needed either to water or replace dead or stolen plants. The council welcomes informal groups like this, one is active in the Withdean area and the council will co-ordinate and offer help and equipment. This sounds like a reasonable idea, does anyone have any thoughts on the suggestion? It is good to see that large concrete blocks, ugly though they are, have been placed by the car park to the hope of keeping the travellers out, this possibly will further help to keep the terraces looking good.

And now to allotments – deep yawn – yes I promised not to become an allotment bore but I just knew you were dying to know how things were progressing up



From Old Steine to Boundary Rd; and from Freshfield St to Marine Parade. An interesting market to reach.

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on the hill. Everyone and everything is looking good, we are kept very busy harvesting beans and peas, next potatoes and carrots, then leeks and beetroot – the list goes on and on. Of course the bumper crop is the weeds but what is a weed just a plant in the wrong place. It does seem though that they just want to grow where we don't want them. Barbara and Tom are there most days as are Dan and Doris keeping everyone on their toes, sheds are blossoming in various shades of green and brown and quite a few should be painted pink!

We were unaware of the existence of the Brighton & Hove Organic Gardening Group, there are several gardening and allotment societies in the town but these splendid people have had the excellent taste to feature a full half page photo of us on our plot on the front page of their summer magazine. They tell us that Brighton is going to be running a pilot scheme for the Community Land Bank Initiative. This is a government scheme where grassroots groups can lease or buy land from private or public landowners to develop them into productive gardens. Now that's an idea, you can find out more from www.farmgarden.org.uk and www.bhogg.org and if you would like to know what I've been up to you can always take a look at www.theroamingpen.co.uk



Take it easy and keep it green

So Moat It Be

By F.R.Y.

As I write this Raoul Moat is still at large, no doubt by the time you read this you will know his fate. Mr Moat's issues are many and varied but one thing is certain; his time in prison did nothing to make the rest of us safe..

Raoul Moat was a former doorman and bodybuilder with a long history of violence, possibly aggravated by the abuse of illegal steroids, who acting on a paranoid delusion that his former partner was seeing a police officer, began a shooting offensive against those his delusional mind blamed for his predicament. Large numbers of people had their lives disrupted, some very permanently. Others were robbed and houses were broken into to support him on his quest to kill.

No doubt had he not led the lifestyle he did he wouldn't have ended up in prison and I suspect I would have to travel a very long way to find anyone who wouldn't have supported his incarceration. The problem is that most people don't look far enough ahead. Tabloid newspapers love to poke a finger into the collective narrow mind and stir it up. Revenge! Fear everything! Making them suffer is the best way to teach someone not to cause suffering! Well, it might sound easy but the reality is that punishment doesn't deter. I know that sounds counter-intuitive but the animal instinct we all carry in our genes is the belief that we can and will escape; that consequences only happen to others. If we didn't have that instinctive belief we would simply give up when confronted with a predator and that is the quickest way to join the extinct, dried and shrivelled on the edge of the gene pool.

The result of that instinct is that we have evolved a sense that we won't get caught and that feels so right, even when our conscious mind tells us otherwise, we pervert the thought that doing wrong brings unpleasant consequences to getting CAUGHT is what we are punished for.

So, in a nutshell, we aren't punished for DOING WRONG; we are punished for getting CAUGHT!

What has that to do with imprisoning an offender you ask? Simple, for all the fact that the offender may be fully aware that they are punished as a consequence of their actions there is the overwhelming instinct that blames those responsible for that person being caught and this leads to resentment at a deep subconscious level.

We have seen this all too clearly in the behaviour of Raoul Moat.

Prisoners like Moat dwell on and amplify these feelings of resentment and by the end of the process leave prison with a distinctly anti-social bias! As much as those outside may get a sense of satisfaction from the suffering and discomfort of incarcerated offenders, any accompanying sense of safety is at best only temporary (most offenders do get out at some stage) and is above all illusory for the offender leaves prison far more of a risk to society than when they went in (and the longer they are held, the greater the risk). We may like to think that 'Prison works', that a 'short, sharp shock' will bring offenders to their senses but, except for a tiny minority, it simply isn't the case.

I was pleasantly surprised to hear a Home Office minister (and a Tory to boot!) publicly recognise that prison only turns out more determined and effective criminals. His stated intent was to re-examine sentencing guidelines to make more use of community reparation sentences. To give an offender the opportunity to make good the damage they have done or to compensate society rather than to punish them. This is a far better route as the 'getting caught is wrong' instinct is largely bypassed. Here the 'you make a mess, you clear it up' message is handled almost entirely by the conscious mind and is far easier to accept. This way an offender retains a sense of belonging to society rather than being ostracized and rejected by it. Clearly people with a stake in something will instinctively want to preserve and nurture it. So although rejecting someone we consider threatening may be a first instinct we need to look at the big picture. What is best in the long run for society?

There is a crude truism I read once which I paraphrase here; IT IS BETTER TO HAVE THESE PEOPLE INSIDE THE TENT PISSING OUT THAN OUTSIDE PISSING IN!

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