

Weapon of Choice: Fun!

In the ongoing campaign to prevent London's streets being dominated by supermarkets and chain shops, the small, specialist traders of Lambs Conduit Street in Bloomsbury have decided to fight back – with fun.

On Saturday 20 May, from 12 noon to 8 pm, the street will be given over to music, performances, food and drink, demonstrations from bespoke tailoring to peanut butter-making, competitions, Undertakers Games, and events for children ... not to mention the Hammersmith Morris Men and the Women's Institute! (See full details that follow.) Local resident Alexei Sayle will open the Festival, with his own opinions on the need for individual character.

With over 300 years of history, this unique London neighbourhood still has a village atmosphere; as well as the shops, it is packed with independent businesses with traditional values of quality goods and friendly service. It has been said you could pass from birth (the doctor's) to death (the undertaker's) without stepping off the street. A delicatessen, fruit and vegetables, gift shops, a sweet shop, wine merchant, bespoke tailors, independent book shops, a corner shop. And eyes, teeth and hair can all be serviced here, in between stops for refreshment at the many cafés, restaurants and pubs.

Keeping Distinct, Keeping Strong

While the supermarkets open new stores daily across the UK, small stores close as fast. Fifty specialist stores, like butchers, bakers and fishmongers, shut per week between 1997 and 2002⁽¹⁾. In May 2005, the Convenience Retailing Report showed 2,157 independent convenience stores had closed in the preceding year, compared with 324 the year before⁽²⁾. Everywhere we can see the familiar scenario of individual high street shops replaced by global and national chains, easily mistaken for dozens of other town centres across the country.

The standardisation of shopping areas threatens more than boredom. It reduces choice for the consumer, as the big shops capture the supplies of top selling items, and stock mostly those, squeezing out the viability of the specialist's broader range⁽³⁾. Money leaves the local economy

faster as suppliers are sourced from further afield ⁽⁴⁾. And we see the destruction of architecture: English Heritage has protested against the threat of standard shop layouts and frontages to fit chains' operational behaviour.

So far, Lambs Conduit Street has succeeded in keeping the chain stores at bay, and the traders and residents here want to keep it that way. "On the continent, in Paris for example, planning restrictions are being used to stop the change of use of traditional shops when a shop keeper sells up or retires," says Marc Kennard of Kennard's Good Foods, one of the instigators of the Lambs Conduit Street Festival. "Perhaps our approach is closer to the US 'Keep it weird' campaigns that celebrate the diversity of their old neighbourhoods."

There is a growing nationwide campaign to keep the character of Britain's neighbourhoods. 'My shop is your shop' ⁽⁵⁾ is a campaign to promote the value of independent retailers, and is one of the forces behind the new 'National Independents Day' called for 1 June this year.

"Trading associations such as ours are also starting to raise ideas such as greater Council recognition of the part local – and locally-supplied – shops play in a strong local economy," adds Michael France of A France and Son. "Because locally-owned shops have been shown to keep far more money in the circulation on the spot, ideas such as rate relief for small and independent shops, protection against change of use, and support for local purchasing where possible have come to the fore. Several of the traders here have built up business links between themselves. Rents that take into account the reality of small traders' growth and development are also to be encouraged."

The new Lambs Conduit Street Traders Association backs the idea of making the unique nature of Lambs Conduit Street more widely known. "People living here and the many hundreds who come to Bloomsbury to work every day are our loyal customers. They keep coming back because they know us as friends and they know the quality – and often off-beat nature – of what they can find here," said Toni Horton of Something... "There's something about the history too, the institutions like Great Ormond Street Hospital, Coram's Fields and the old buildings and alleyways, which give

the street its character. Rather than as tourists, we're hoping that the new people who discover us will come as new friends and London neighbours."

For now, the strongest weapon for the Lambs Conduit Street traders is that sense of community, recognition and loyalty that they aim to build through well-supported initiatives such as the Street Festival.

Ends

Note to Editors:

For more information on the Lambs Conduit Street Spring Festival, or for photos, please contact in the first instance:

Rachel Escott, Marketing Consultant
58 Lambs Conduit Street
London
WC1N 3LW

Tel: 07752 900 950
info@rachelescott.co.uk

Footnotes:

1. Alan Hallsworth/ University of Surrey: report for the Association of Convenience Stores, February 2005.
2. *Convenience Retailing 2005*, IGD, May 2005.
3. *Supermarkets Report* Competition Commission, 2000.
4. *The Money Trail*, The Countryside Agency & New Economics Foundation, 2002
5. See www.myshopisyourshop.co.uk

Lamb's Conduit Street Festival Unwrapped:

- ◇ Festival opening by local resident *Alexei Sayle*.
- ◇ Play the 'new, improved' Undertakers' Games with *A France and Sons!* If you came to the last festival, you won't need to ask ... but you'll definitely be back.
- ◇ Follow the flower trail for children from *Angela Kay Flowers*, with prizes for all and a chance to enter a raffle for a beautiful flower gift.
- ◇ Chill out at *Badlambs'* summer lounge, with their famous Badlambs' lamb burgers, champagne, and a special Australian Lamington's cake. Plus DJs with cool music, and neck massages for even more relaxation.
- ◇ Test ride the recumbent bikes at *Bikefix*.
- ◇ Enjoy the Italian food extravaganza at *Ciao Bella*.
- ◇ Tuck into the giant four-foot paella and sangria from *Cigala*. The paella pan has been brought over specially from Spain, where giant paellas are a common feature of community festivities.
- ◇ Watch the on-street demonstration of bespoke tailoring by *Connock & Lockie Ltd*, including measuring and cutting, and machining. Tailoring from start to finish in this traditional shop. Children can try some of the skills.
- ◇ An '1805 Admiral of the Royal Navy' will parade a costume by *Connock & Lockie*.
- ◇ Taste the South American barbecue from 11.30 till the food runs out at *Goodfellas!*
- ◇ *Kennards* will be serving hot roast lamb sandwiches from the shop to refresh you.
- ◇ Enjoy a beer stall selling Young's special bottled ales at *The Lamb*, plus 2 for 1 meals in the pub.
- ◇ Listen to story-telling for children up to 6 years, between 2 and 3 pm at the *Lamb Bookshop*.
- ◇ Always the first with daffodils on Lambs Conduit Street, *Persephone Bookshop* invite you to greet summer with a complimentary drink of Pimms.
- ◇ Al fresco drinking and live music of all kinds line up on the outdoor stage, from 2pm – 9pm at *The Perseverance*. From rock to opera via jazz ... and back again. Line up includes King Brillo Sound, Les and Jack Canavan, James Uphill, and dj's, poets and strippers!
- ◇ Visit the toy stall at the *Romanian Charity Shop*.
- ◇ Buy a raffle ticket to win a £500 TV, 2nd prize a stylish handbag and third prize a man's watch at *Something...* Plus two lucky dips - one with prizes for all and one 'Luxy' Dip - a lingerie lucky dip.
- ◇ Visit *Steidl Books*, the finest collection of modern photography, art and architecture books. This is the only bookshop in the world dedicated to Steidl Publishing.
- ◇ Refresh yourself at *Tutti's café*.
- ◇ Bring your antiques and curios to be valued by antiques valuer *Anthony North*. For a small donation to Coram's Fields, find out if you have any unsuspected treasures in your cupboard.
- ◇ Children's activities and demonstrations of dance and other activities will take place in *Bedford House Community Centre*, from 1pm till 5 pm. They will also have a stall on Lambs Conduit Street with information about the Community Centre, and a children's lucky dip.

- ◇ Add your memories of *Coram's Fields Children Playground* to the 70th Anniversary display at the festival.
- ◇ Visit Nigel, the Bloomsbury man behind *Empire Made* peanut butter at his stand offering tastings and a peanut butter demonstration.
- ◇ *Great Ormond Street Hospital* will be talking to the local community about the hospital's vision for services for the future.
- ◇ Enjoy the traditional English custom of Morris dancing, especially suited to May time, by the famous *Hammersmith Morris Men*.
- ◇ Facepainting by makeup artist Leenita Gupte of *lovethemakeup.com*.
- ◇ *Nomads*, producers of Moroccan specialities, will offer tastings of the delights they sell through Kennards.
- ◇ Taste *Picklin' Paul's* locally-made piccalilli.
- ◇ *Secretts Farm*, winners of the *Observer* magazine's Producer of the Year Award in March, will display locally-produced seasonal fruit and vegetables, with education about seasonal cooking and the value of sourcing food locally.
- ◇ *Wakefield Street SGI Buddhist* group will introduce their new centre and explain their practices.
- ◇ The first-ever *Women's Institute* branch in central London will bring a traditional English village fete touch, in their stall selling home-made cakes and produce.