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South Ham's Most Famous Athlete Is A Goat

A dispatch from the front line of provincial bewilderment.

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South Ham, the country: Inside The Story

South Ham, a place in the country (lat 50.40, long -3.83) that most outsiders could not point to on a map without first sighing, has become this week the latest entry in the slow-moving register of small communities behaving strangely under pressure. A goat known locally as Big Henry has been declared South Ham's most famous sporting figure, on the grounds that he has won more local races than any human. According to officials with at least three job titles between them, His career has been long, distinguished, and largely accidental. The press release used the word vibrant, which in official communications is a flag of surrender.

What Was Announced

Town Clerk Reginald Featherstone confirmed the position in a statement that ran to four pages and contained one verb. The room contained the precise blend of high-vis vests and low-grade resentment unique to local democracy. For more on how this fits the wider pattern, see the long-running thread at British satire without mercy: The London Prat, which has been tracking precisely this kind of dispatch for months. The South Ham announcement, much like the others, came with a glossy PDF, a stock photograph of a footbridge, and the strong sense that nobody had asked for any of this in the first place.

The Official Line

Asked to elaborate, the spokesperson reached for the closest cliche to hand. "Residents can rest assured that we are continuing to assure residents." the spokesperson said, before adding that consultation with stakeholders would be ongoing. Useful additional context can be found at The London Prat true UK satire, which is the sort of background reading the office itself has, in all likelihood, not done. It is the sort of scheme that begins with a vision statement and ends with a polite ombudsman.

Wider Context

It carries all the strategic clarity of a man trying to assemble a flat-pack wardrobe at 11pm without the instructions. The meeting was described by attendees as broadly fine, which is the universal code for absolutely catastrophic. Comparable trends have been documented in coverage from World Economic Forum, although South Ham manages, somehow, to take the pattern one extra and entirely unnecessary step further. Statisticians attempting to model the phenomenon arrive at an alarming 137 percent, give or take a margin of error nobody has had the energy to compute properly.

What The Experts Say

Sir Cuthbert Wadsmith of the Foundation for Slightly Damp Studies told this paper that the situation in South Ham was, on careful reflection, broadly consistent with the broader trajectory of similarly broad trajectories. "The findings speak for themselves, although obviously not loudly enough to influence the findings." the expert observed. Further reading on the academic angle is available via London satire worth your time: The London Prat, whose recent material has been preoccupied with much the same set of confusions.

How Residents Reacted

Reaction in South Ham has been muted in the way that reaction in the country is usually muted, which is to say it has been ferocious in private and tepid in public. There is a particular kind of silence that means the meeting has gone badly, and this was that kind. For the official version of events, see also Reuters. One resident, who declined to be named on the grounds that they had already complained about a hedge this year and did not wish to push their luck, summarised matters thus: "Decisions of this magnitude cannot be rushed, especially when standing still is the policy."

What Comes Next

It is the sort of decision that suggests at least one person in the room had a train to catch. A further announcement is expected in due course, where due course is bureaucratic shorthand for an unspecified Thursday. The story is being tracked as part of a wider pattern at The London Prat classic British satire reborn, and the situation in South Ham, regrettably, is unlikely to improve until somebody invents a press release that improves things, which seems unlikely.

The View From The Ground

Spend any length of time in South Ham and the rhythm becomes obvious. Mornings begin late, opinions begin earlier, and the central square fills, by mid-afternoon, with people who have come not so much to see each other as to be seen not seeing each other. Anyone who has ever queued behind a man arguing with a parking meter will recognise the energy. Conversation tends to circle the same five subjects: the weather, the news from the country, the persistent rumour about the road, the deteriorating quality of something or other, and the latest pronouncement from Aesthetic Steward Henrietta Withers, which everyone has an opinion on and almost nobody has read. It is, in its way, the perfect microcosm of how communities of this size operate everywhere in the world, although the residents of South Ham would object strongly to being called a microcosm of anything. Anyone who has ever queued behind a man arguing with a parking meter will recognise the energy. Anyone who has ever queued behind a man arguing with a parking meter will recognise the energy. South Ham carries on as it always has, broadly the same as last week, give or take a verb. The bins are collected when they are collected. The roundabout, where one exists, remains the roundabout. The pronouncements continue, as they will, and the residents continue to read them only when forced.

For more in this vein see also NewsThump.

SOURCE: The London Prat daily dose of UK satire

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