



# Shampoo and pet

by Diana Cormack

There was more than a pile of mail waiting for Mario Nicolaou when he opened his hairdressing and beauty salon Ellemen at 148, High Road one Monday morning.

Inside on the doormat sat a beige baby hamster. Plenty of people had seen him through the window, but how he got there nobody knows, though one theory is that someone put him through the letterbox. However, Mario knew what to do; first he gave the little creature some water and then he phoned the RSPCA.

### Home sweet home

But help was nearer at hand in the shape of South African stylist Richard Bronner, who set off for the pet shop in Lincoln Road. He returned carrying a cage which is now the hamster's home. Richard named the foundling Sam and they are now living happily together in Eastern Road.

# The return of the light

By Daphne Chamberlain

Some people who spring clean their homes this month will be scrubbing and rubbing in a clockwise direction.

At dawn on 21 March, they will be lighting fires, ringing bells (hopefully not too near the rest of us), or birdwatching...

Some of these people may just be continuing ancient traditions, while others could be Wiccans or Witches celebrating the Spring Equinox, which is one of the Sabbats or festivals - in the Pagan Wheel of the Year.

At the two annual equinoxes in March and September night and day are approximately the same length. The centre of the sun crosses the celestial equator, meaning that it rises exactly in the east and sets exactly in the west.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the equinox on 21 March, after which days grow longer, is when many

cultures have celebrated the beginning of spring.. For Celts it was a time to watch for returning birds, and to collect and paint eggs.

### Lighten the spirit

In the Pagan calendar the Spring festival is called variously Eostre's Day, Oestara or Ostara., after the Saxon goddess of fertility. Oestrogen, of course, is the name we give to the principal female hormone. An ancient Pagan belief is that at this time the Mother Goddess and the Sun God conceive a child, who is born at the next Winter Solstice (or Yule)..

Eggs, with their yolks symbolising the golden Sun God and their shells the Goddess, are recommended food at this time, as are fruit, fish, and green vegetables. Colours in clothes and decorations are in tones of spring.

### Pagan deities

Many Pagan deities are celebrated at Ostara, including the Lord of the Greenwood, Pan, Persephone, Odin and Osiris. Easter, which falls on the first Sunday after the full moon following the Equinox, has clearly inherited some Pagan traditions.

There is an underlying theme for all spring festivals, and that is rebirth, the rekindling of hope, and making new beginnings. So spring cleaning the house should go hand-in-hand with clearing the mind and lightening the spirit.

# New Beginnings

By Femke van Iperen



Restaurant owners Sue Phillips and Thomas Lee. Photo by Femke van Iperen.

### Nouvelle Nyonya

On 28th January restaurant Ma'jong, which offers a type of cuisine unique in London, officially opened with a bang at the Great North Leisure Park with a traditional Chinese performance.

As firecrackers left a path of red, a sign of prosperity, the dance of a Chinese lion drove away evil spirits and brought strength, wisdom and good luck on this day; the numbers 28 and 1 holding spiritual meanings. Children and adults watched in excitement the lion's unpredictable movements to the sounds of Chinese drums. Drummer Kwok Cheung explained: "The idea of the lion was passed down by an ancient emperor. He dreamt about lions and dragons and introduced them into festivities and they brought good luck that year, so they decided to keep using them."

### Ancient and modern

Ma'jong specialises in three types of Thai-, and Indonesian-influenced Nyonya cooking-essentially with lemon grass, galangal, coconut milk, chillies and limes. Part owner of Ma'jong Sue Phillips explained how the Nyonya kitchen dates back to the 15th Century when Chinese travelling traders: "adapted their costumes, cul-

ture, and also food-style".

The stylish and authentic restaurant, which caters for 250 people, welcomes you with a chic cocktail bar. Bryan Wilson, the restaurant's Project Manager said, "I expect it'll do exceptionally well and bring more business to the area", and added, "[Nyonya] is a totally different concept, new in London and it is lovely food. It's not Chinese; it's far superior."

Among the evening's large proportion of Asian customers, always a good indicator of authenticity, three Chinese men nodded in approval, and Mr. Yu said smiling, "I will come back and eat here soon!" Iris Chua from Malaysia, commented, "My friend tried [Ma'jong] before, and she said it was very unusual and nice." In the crowd stood Emma Elliott, Ms. Phillip's niece, who said, "The food is very spicy. I like it because it has a completely different texture", and added smiling, "I am very proud of my aunt!"

# Maundy Thursday

by Diana Cormack

Christians believe that the night before Jesus Christ was crucified on Good Friday, he had supper with his disciples, after which he got down on his knees and washed their feet. By doing this, Jesus told them, he was cleansing them from sin. At the same time Jesus gave them a new commandment, which was to love one another. The Latin word for a command is "mandatum" and the name Maundy Thursday is believed to have derived from this.

In early Christian times sovereigns and church leaders used to wash the feet of poor people as a sign of humility and spiritual cleansing. Though this is still customary in the Roman Catholic Church, it has died out elsewhere.

### Royal Gifts

However, until 1688, British monarchs continued the custom in the form of personally presenting the poor with clothing and provisions. In 1725 the clothing was replaced by money, as were the provisions in 1837. King George V restarted the custom of personal distribution in 1932 and our present Queen has continued to do so mostly herself since 1953.

Ignoring decimalisation, specially minted sets of silver pennies, two pennies, three-pennies and fourpennies are

given to elderly people chosen to represent the poor. Maundy Money is presented in purses to as many people as the monarch has years, so this year there will be seventy-six men and seventy-six women. They are given one complete set of coins for every ten years of her age, the odd years being made up of coins to the appropriate value.

The coins remain the same throughout the monarch's reign; whether the Queen will make any changes in deference to her Golden Jubilee this year remains to be seen.

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