



Octavia Hill at the Festival

By Sheila Armstrong

Well-known actress Margaret Wolfit, daughter of the actor-manager Sir Donald Wolfit, brought her presentation on the life of Octavia Hill to the East Finchley Festival this year.

Social reformer, and one time resident of Finchley and Highgate, Octavia was influenced by Christian Socialism and worked ceaselessly for others, driving herself to nervous collapse several times in her long life.

When her father became bankrupt it was natural for the family to move to this area as her grandfather lived in Highgate. After an idyllic childhood in a then rural Finchley, she became concerned with the problems of the poor, especially their housing conditions. From the age of 23, she started working to improve their lot.

The handsome and well-kept interior of All Saints Church in Durham Road was an appropriate setting for the evening's entertainment. The disappointingly small audience enjoyed the story of Octavia Hill retold from her own journals by Miss Wolfit.

Open space

The result of extensive research, the presentation threw light on this Victorian philanthropist who is possibly best known for her work in starting up the National Trust, but who in fact spent most of her time on housing reform. Never rich herself, she did it by influencing those who were.

She set up schools, a toy-makers' co-operative and, over the years, organised and managed housing for the poor. A leader in the Open Space Movement, she firmly believed that people needed open space to walk, play and sit in. This eventually led to the founding of the National Trust in 1895.

It was a fitting tribute to Octavia Hill by one of our classical actresses who has performed extensively on stage, radio and television. This presentation has travelled around the UK and to the United States.

Fighting for equal rights

By Diana Cormack

Creative Connections, which has provided educational opportunities for adults with severe learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) since 1996, has been forced to seek alternative sources to finance courses held at the Thomas More Centre in East End Road.

The centre is part of Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute (HGSI). Withdrawal of some government funding could halve these specialist courses because they are not a funding priority with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Many of the benefiting students may be unable to participate, while others may have to pay a fee.

Fay Naylor, principal of the Institute, explained: "More than half of our learners communicate non-verbally, which means that they are unable to study to the required level of literacy and numeracy to qualify for educational support. They are effectively being excluded from the learning process through no fault of their own, and it will have a devastating effect on the quality of their lives."

However, the LSC stated: "The main allocation has not been cut and HGSI needs to deliver our priorities within this allocation."

The courses aim to further the individual's communication skills, self-advocacy and personal development through the arts. Adults with profound and complex problems or with very mild learning deficiency

disorders are well supported in small groups by specialist teaching staff.

Courses work with around 80 learners, mostly between the ages of 25 and 60, the majority of whom live in Barnet. They include older people whose learning problems were not addressed when they were younger.

Praise from inspectors

Following a recent inspection, the Adult Learning Inspectorate intends to include Creative Connections on its Excalibur website as an example of exceptionally good practice in this area of teaching. The Inspectorate reported that learners were offered "good development of personal living skills, good or very good teaching, particularly effective planning of individual learning and good promotion of equality of opportunity."

An on-going campaign has raised awareness of this nationwide problem and, at the time of writing, staff are trying to work out how many students they can provide for in September.

For more information about Creative Connections call 020 8371 7878.

Break out by bike

By Tom Walker

More than 50 cyclists met in East Finchley on Sunday 10 July for the second annual bike ride up through the country roads of Hertfordshire.

The Suburban Breakout event saw them cycle 100km (more than 60 miles) through hilly lanes. Participants cycled all the way to Cottered, just north of Stevenage, and then back.

The ride was not a race, and people of all ages and abilities were able to take part at their own speed. Some stopped for lunch at the halfway point.

Nick Bloom, the event's organiser, said, "We want to encourage cycling and show how close the countryside is. People don't realise how quickly they can get into farmland from here.

The fastest people do it in four hours, and they're tired and sweaty - but the people who take eight hours look like they've been for a walk in the park."

Hares or tortoises?

He stressed that the event was about people having fun, not about endurance or competition - the only goal was to finish, and there was a speed limit throughout the ride of 30km an hour.

While 100km might sound like a long way, it's surprisingly easy for a reasonably experienced rider. Anyone who commutes by bike from East Finchley to Central London could manage it with no problems.

Imitating Archie?

By Daphne Chamberlain I was definitely not imitating Archie, our famous local statue. To begin with, I was in Herefordshire, not on the top of East Finchley station. Even so, the other weekend I became the other kind of archer for an hour. It was great.

Full of enthusiasm after my taster lesson, I contacted the Aquarius club, who meet at Fortis Green reservoir. A force in North London archery and regular championship winners, they have about 100 members, generally from Barnet and Haringey.

Aquarius has a youth section, with a usual starting age of 10 going up to 18.

The good news for me is that they hold regular crash courses for beginners (equipment provided), and there might be a few places left for a course at the end of August.

Please contact Maggie on 020 8440 1558 for details.



Sunny Sunday cycling - the bike ride gets underway on the High Road. Picture by Tom Walker

There are provisional plans to run a 200km event from East Finchley next year, if there is enough interest.

The ride was organised by the Central London CTC (Cyclist Touring Club), a

charity that promotes cycling in the capital and runs three bike rides every weekend all over the Greater London area.

For more information, call 020 8365 3806 or visit www.centra llondonctc.org.uk.

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