



Secrets of Alexandra Palace

By Daphne Chamberlain

What secrets can you find on a tour of Alexandra Palace? How about the story of Dolly Shepherd, Edwardian woman parachutist who jumped from a hot-air balloon? Plus a Victorian theatre with seats for 3,500, but no stage-door, a minute gallery and a main floor so level that the back seats were given away free. Plus the chance to read pre-World War II Radio Times.



Vintage radios in the former BBC studios at Alexandra Palace.
Photo by Frank Tymkow

Have tastes changed? Not much, it seems. In the 1930s, television-watchers tuned in to *Designing rooms for comfort*, *From the garden*, *Friends from the zoo*, light entertainment and Agatha Christie plays.

A myth of the time was that lipstick on television had to be green, but apparently "this was never done. An ordinary red lipstick is perfectly acceptable."

Great survivor

When the southeast wing of the palace was taken over by the BBC in 1935, it was described as a dreadful mess. It was semi-derelict, and tables had to be winched in through the windows. But that's Ally Pally – a disaster-prone building that still survives.

Built in 1868 at the cost of displacing a gypsies' encampment, it was traditionally cursed with three fires, but has now survived four.

The theatre, with its beautiful roof, was locked away for 65 years, but now – listed by English Heritage – is being restored and improved.

The Palace organ (one of the three biggest in the country) is a familiar sight in the Great Hall, but this tour peeped behind the scenes – at the first BBC studios, the ancient radios, and the huge mural showing past events at the Palace (including Dolly).

Tours must be booked in advance. The next ones will be on Wednesday 20 April, Sunday 22 May and Wednesday 1 June. Participants must be over 12 years old, and able-bodied enough to negotiate several flights of stairs. Contact 020 8365 4199 for details, and take a tip – wrap up well. Apart from the Palm Court, the warmest place in this defiant old building is the ice rink.

OBITUARY

Leslie Pym

Leslie J. Pym, who represented Hale Ward on Barnet Council from 1971 to 1998, died in January. Mr Pym was Leader of the Council from 1976 to 1991, and Mayor of Barnet in 1991-2. He was awarded a CBE for his work in local government, and was a Freeman of the City of London and a member of the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths.

Leader of the Council Victor Lyon, who had worked closely with Mr Pym, said that he knew how assiduously he looked after the interests of the people of this borough.

Mayor Wendy Prentice, praising his dedication and hard work, described him as an exemplary politician, whom we were fortunate to have had as Council Leader and Mayor.

Letters to The Editor

Safe walking

Dear Editor

Martin Schools' parents, teachers and children were recently surveyed for central government's "Safer routes to school" programme. Demonstrations at Creighton Avenue and Church Lane highlighted specific areas where people going to Martin Schools are threatened by vehicles.

"Safer routes to school" will allow pedestrians and car drivers a chance to have their say to the local authority, and perhaps this time Barnet Council won't disregard the well-being of local residents by encouraging vehicle throughput at the expense of pedestrians.

Colin Rogers
East Finchley Labour Party

Road Safety in N2

To the Editor

I am writing to you in support of the campaign led by parents and the East Finchley LA21 Partnership in reference for the need for measures to slow cars down in parts of East Finchley, in particular, in and around Church Lane and Creighton Avenue.

What makes this worse is that the Tory Administration in Barnet abandoned the Safe Routes to Schools measures for Church Lane which were previously agreed to by councillors because of their campaign against road humps. The dangers have unfortunately not gone away and affects school children from Martin Schools, Holy Trinity, Oak Lodge, Bishop Douglass, Christ's College and the many residents accessing East Finchley via The Walks.

I hope that the Council can re-consider their previous position and look at the best way to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. I have written to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Victor Lyon, and will report back on any response received.

Rudi Vis MP
Finchley & Golders Green

Tracing family

Dear Editor

I am trying to find anyone with connections to my mother. Born Evelyn May Oliver in 1908, she married Henry Arthur Howard on 4 July 1936.

She had a son, Ronald, in 1937 but sadly died in childbirth with her second child, also a son, in April 1941.

Her father's name was Charles Oliver and the family lived and worked in a general stores on the Red Lion Hill Estate in East Finchley.

I would like to hear from anyone who has knowledge of the Oliver family.

Thank you.
Ronald Howard
14 Sandpiper Close,
Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 0JH

Good deal

Dear Editor,

My wife and I, together with another couple, spent the evening of St Valentine's day at Chez Nous, the little restaurant just south of the Phoenix.

I don't know how the owner manages to do it, but we had a two-course meal and a half bottle of wine each for £13.75 each. Naturally a few more bottles flowed, but it was a terrific evening.

I suggested to the owner that he should have these "one sitting" dinner and dance evenings more often and he said he'd think about it.

My request to all readers is, if you like the idea and are passing the restaurant, go in and tell "George" he should do it on a monthly basis. My wife and I would love to go to a restaurant where there was music and dancing, and with "one sitting" so we weren't rushed out, all for under £14 a head!

I do realise a lot of people in East Finchley are very well off, but for those like me who watch the pennies...

Andrew Taylor (London N3).
If readers learn of other good deals, THE ARCHER would be interested to hear from them.

Thanks to All Saints

Dear Editor

I am a local piano teacher, and have been putting on pupils' concerts in aid of the NSPCC for over 30 years.

They have always been at the Institute, Hampstead Garden Suburb, but now that Henrietta Barnett School have taken over the premises the cost of hiring has gone up from £28 an hour (for charity concerts) to a staggering £70. As we rehearse all the afternoon, then the concert in the evening, it would have cost £800 and very little money would have been left for the NSPCC. (At previous concerts we have raised over £1000 each concert.)

I contacted Father Christopher Hardy at All Saints Church and he saved the day by agreeing for the concert to take place there, for which I am hugely grateful. The concert takes place on 5 March.

Sara Medina,
Twyford Avenue N2

Send your correspondence to: "Letters Page",
The Archer, PO Box 3699,
London N2 8JA or e-mail
the-archer@lineone.net.

Apologies

THE ARCHER would like to correct an error in the article entitled Therapists in New Venture in last month's edition. The name of the homeopath who will be working in Cootes Ballards Lane premises is Marj Morrison, not Marj Lawrence, as stated. We apologise for any confusion.

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KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

A fine romance?

Just when I thought it was safe to ignore them, the nation's most famous dysfunctional family bites back like a corgi at your ankles. Not this time the opportunity to be shocked at their massive lack of charm, sensitivity and dress sense, but the chance to be violently sick at their latest PR stunt. Yes, 'he who talks to plants' is going to marry his mistress and lay on a spot of patriotic television to distract us from reality. And just in time for a general election as well!

New models

I've never seen so much fuss about a divorcee marrying a widower since the founding of the Church of England. That time it was an adulterer getting rid of his old wife for a new model and getting into such a mess that he had to form his own church to get his divorce. Next time round he decided to become a widower instead by having wife number two's head removed. And to think that the pope had made him defender of the faith only a few years earlier for persecuting anyone trying to read the bible in English, which makes you wonder what faith British monarchs are meant to be defending. The bright idea of introducing morganatic marriages to GB looks just as royally dumb as most things they come up with.

Never mind, the Diana faction have got their compromise, there won't be a new Princess of Wales or a Queen Camilla. In true raffness they've decided that once Charles gets the top job she'll become the Princess Consort, which sounds like an upmarket version of the Austin Allegro. And that, I guess, just about sums them up.