



Maureen Brown & her bunnies. Photo by Craig Johnson.

A well-kept garden

By Craig Johnson and Alex Nunes

Hosepipe bans and drought warnings have made us all think about saving water this summer but Maureen Brown has her own private water supply.

Maureen's beautiful cottage garden in Church Lane is blessed with a natural spring well and hers is not the only one. A few doors down, there is another well still intact, although it has now been converted into a fish-pond.

Maureen has lived in East Finchley since 1971, since when many of the gardens and houses in the Church Lane area have changed drastically.

"There is still a well under the garden. A lot of places around East Finchley have natural spring wells, although nowadays most people seem to have covered them up for safety," she said.

"The water comes from natural springs because East Finchley is positioned directly on top of a spring. One thing you're always told on the allotments is never to allow your children to run free as they could fall down a well!"

Gardening is one of Maureen's passions, a love she shared with her husband who

died two years ago.

"We had the most wonderful tomatoes," she remembered. "We grew them in the greenhouse at the end of the garden. I still grow the odd rhubarb which gets pretty big

at 15 inches when the leaves are off."

Maureen is now retired. She enjoys her days in the company of five cats and her grandchildren, in the well-kept surroundings of her cottage garden.

Leaf through a new tree guide

By Ann Bronkhorst

North Londoners have enjoyed the trees in the extensive grounds at Avenue House in East End Road for many years. A concise, light-weight guidebook will add to that enjoyment, judging by the enthusiastic response shown at its launch on 10 July.

Cleverly designed to contain a pull-out map marking all 39 trees, the guide contains brief information on each one alongside excellent full-colour photographs by Gary Pearse.

Some trees are rare or unusual: the Himalayan Lilac, the Cut-Leaved Oak, the Cock's Comb Beech and the Pocket Handkerchief tree, for example. Some display magnificent colours in autumn: the Sweet Gum, the Swamp Cypress, and the many varieties of oaks and beeches.

As Janett Durrant, Trustee Estate Manager, says in her foreword, "In the autumn as the sun sets it catches the leaves and gives the appearance that they are on fire." Janett points out that although the Victorian tree-planters weren't able to see the mature garden, we have benefited from their vision of what they hoped it would be like.

The guidebook provides some historical information, including a glimpse of Robert

Marnock, the 'main man' who, helped by the editor of The Gardener's Journal, landscaped the grounds of Avenue House (where some fine trees were already established) in the 1880s.

Finchley Society Chairman Bill Tyler thanked a number of people for making the guidebook a reality, including the City of London Bridge House Trust for financial support, and BCAGroup, the printers, with special mention of the two young designers, Abdul and Sadiq. The three groundsmen at Avenue House were thanked for their work in maintaining the gardens and a member of the public, Ralph Webster, was thanked for helping to extinguish a fire started deliberately in the grounds, a reminder of the constant battle against vandalism.

Personal connections

For some, the book launch was a bitter-sweet occasion. Sue Davies visits regularly to tend two trees, one a weeping willow commemorating her partner, Peter Jarvis, and the other a tree planted years earlier in memory of his father Bertie Jarvis, who lived locally and loved Avenue House. Sue is one of many visitors who have donated trees, plants, funds or expertise.

The attractive booklet, currently priced at £5, should arouse more interest in the arboretum and in Avenue House's history. As the Mayor of Barnet said that evening: "Trees are history, and they talk to us."

Weaving willow

By Viviana Lotti

The traditional skill of basket making is thriving in East Finchley, thanks to local resident Mary Poulter.

Originally from Chicago (and married to an Englishman), Mary moved to East Finchley a year ago but she has had an allotment here for 15 years, where she grows her own willow for weaving. Her unusual 'crop' originally bemused fellow gardeners. "When I first started growing willow the chaps couldn't understand why I was growing sticks," she said.

How did Mary start making baskets? "Twenty years ago, a friend of mine said she would



Mary's handmade baskets. Photo by Viviana Lotti

like to do a residential course at a basket-making school," she explained. "I said I'd do it too. I got hooked because the teacher was so wonderful."

Mary also took a City & Guilds course. She describes basket-making as "a lot like pottery. You're not only weaving, you're shaping."

Mary says growing willow is "dead easy". She buys willow rods, cuts them into 20-inch pieces, then plants them in rich soil, leaving lots of space between the rods as they grow into huge bushes. She simply lets them grow and cuts them three years later when the sap is down in winter. The rods grow back each time: a willow

can grow up to nine feet tall in a year.

Once cut the willow is stored and left to stand for about three months. Living willow (which has not been stored and is still growing) can be used to make fences, outdoor furniture, arches or tunnels.

Mary also makes baskets from anything flexible that can be recycled, including virginia creeper, fabric, lavender and, on one occasion, wires from an abandoned motorbike in Coldfall Woods.

Mary is a member of the East Finchley Open Group, comprising local artists and artisans who have open-day exhibitions in their own homes.

Brain training

We all know that we start shedding brain cells when we are scarcely out of our teens, but scientists have discovered that it's not necessarily downhill all the way. As usual, the answer is exercise. Use your brain, and it can actually acquire new cells.

So keep asking questions, solving puzzles and learning something new. There are daily challenges at www.mybraintainer.com.

Finchley Memorial raises funds

Friends of Finchley Memorial Hospital raised £2,800 from their summer fete on 18 June.

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