



Letters to the editor

Send your correspondence to: "Letters Page", The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 8JA or e-mail the-archer@lineone.net. Letters without verifiable contact addresses will not be reviewed or printed. Contact details can be withheld, however, at publication.

A girl called Carling

Dear Editor,
I enjoyed Ricky Savage's article, Boys named Sue, in your December edition, but I wonder if he's been told yet that one of his fantasies has already come true.

He wrote: "Heaven help the poor child saddled with a name like Gewurtstraminer. I'd pity that kid as much as I'd pity one called Special Brew or Carling".

Well, there was a very good Canadian woman tennis player (I think in the 1990s) called Carling. She was actually from the brewery family. I've forgotten her surname, but maybe someone else out there might remember.

Yours sincerely,
Valerie Leslie,
High Road, N2.

An open letter from the East Finchley Library Users' Group

We set up our group last year to keep an eye on the well-being of our library, and to ensure we were ready to act if and when it comes under threat. Now is one of those times.

At its draft budget meeting on 20 December, Barnet Council proposed severe cuts to the service at East Finchley Library. In the wake of local resistance against moving our library into a supermarket building, East Finchley is the only community in Barnet whose library is being subjected to such cuts.

Two members of staff (out of a current eight) will be lost. The library will close for an hour at lunchtime and lose one late night a week. This will save the Council £57,000.

It is also proposing to change our branch from a Town Centre Library to a Community Library. There are three categories of library in Barnet: Main, Town Centre and Community, which includes the smallest libraries. The categories are supposed to be determined by usage, and by the area they cover. It is likely that Community Libraries will be the most vulnerable to future cuts.

Last year, Totteridge library was shut down and there was a range of swingeing borough-wide cuts. These included eradication of 20 front-line posts, halving the Mobile Library service, and cutting the books/media budget by £59,000.

This year the Council proposes to cut the borough's media budget by £200,000. That means £200,000 less on books, music, DVD and so on, the very things that libraries should be filled with.

These cuts are not yet final, but we do not have much time to fight them, because the Council will formalise their budget at a meeting in early March.

Letter writing is not a glamorous campaigning activity, but it really does make a difference in sufficient quantities. So, if you care about our library, please write or e-mail the following people, expressing your concerns about the proposed cuts to East Finchley alone, as well as the borough-wide assault on the library service:

Brian Salinger, Leader of Barnet Council, 32 The Ridgeway, N11 3LJ; e-mail cllr.b.salinger@barnet.gov.uk or John Marshall, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning, 66 Sandringham Gardens, N12 0PJ; e-mail cllr.j.marshall@barnet.gov.uk.

Please copy your letter to us at pollynapper@btinternet.com, or by post to Flat 2, Elmhurst Court, Elmhurst Avenue, N2 0LU.

We don't have long to act. Please write immediately if you can.

Adam Gee and Polly Napper, East Finchley Library Users' Group.

Fill our empty shops

Dear Editor,
I read with interest the recent reports in THE ARCHER on the closure of Barclays Bank and changes to Bar XL (December 2005 and January 2006). I've lived in East Finchley for nearly 12 years and seen many changes on the High Road in that time but I never like to see empty shops.

It is to be hoped that a prominent site like Barclays will not stay out of use for long. I'm sure it would be the perfect premises for a new eatery or bar, or how about a new clothes shop to complement the excellent new Lazooli a bit further down?

Meanwhile, up the other end of the High Road, there are a number of unused shops and it's starting to look a bit sorry for itself. The old pharmacy, the former PA Music and the Indian sweet shop have all gone and their shutters are up. Let's hope some bright businessmen or women come along soon to breathe some life back into the top end of the shopping parade.

Yours faithfully,
Sophie Warrell,
Creighton Avenue, N2.

Tube travellers deserve the truth

Dear Editor,
One thing that spoils living in East Finchley is the dreadful Northern Line. It would be enough to make me move elsewhere, were it not for the high level of civilised behaviour of passengers who bear it all with traditional British reserve.

No matter what cancellations, level of service, misinformation, and disinformation we glumly look to that happy day when we have a regular, rapid, and reliable service. It will probably never come in my lifetime, but in the meantime we have a right to accurate and meaningful information.

Broadcasts and scribbled notes on white boards talk of "minor delays", "severe delays", "good service", but these rarely bear any relation to what's happening on the ground. I wrote to Transport for London suggesting that they at least tell us what percentage of trains are running, for example, 75%, 30%.

But their spokesman was having none of it. I quote the complacent reply: "We've found that the phrase that works best to describe a line where there are no specific delays or disruptions is 'good service'. When staff used the phrase 'normal service' we noticed that customers were commenting wryly that normal means delays!" Too right! We simply don't believe you.

Yesterday evening, I was left hanging about in a packed herd on the platform at Camden Town because trains were terminating at Archway and no-one else could get on the full-to-bursting waiting train. A barely-audible platform announcement was saying that trains were stuck in tunnels and that trains were being held at platforms.

But the electronic display was

happily telling us that more trains were due in minutes. Goodness knows how deaf travellers and those who aren't fluent English speakers were to know what on earth was happening and what to do.

Come on! Give us information that is regular, rapid, and reliable, while we wait for the trains to be so.

Yours faithfully,
Roger Beeson
Bedford Road, N2.

Here is the full text of the reply Mr Beeson received from Transport for London to his letter of complaint.

Dear Mr Beeson,
Thank you for writing to us about announcements on the Tube. I do understand your frustration at hearing this when there clearly are delays. For some years we've been putting up messages on white boards to tell people about disruptions to our service.

We've found that the phrase that works best to describe a line where there are no specific delays or disruptions is 'good service'. When staff used the phrase 'normal service' we noticed that customers were commenting wryly that normal means delays! We feel that 'good service' communicates the positive message that trains on that particular line will get you where you want to go smoothly and efficiently.

As a regular user of the Tube myself, I know we've still got some way to go before we can claim our service is perfect, but it can still be good. Please contact me again if you need any help in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Ray Shanahan, Customer Service Advisor, Customer Service Centre

Where can young people go now?

Dear Editor,
Barnet Council saw fit last year to close the Herbert Wilmot Youth Centre here in East Finchley. I chaired the management committee of the centre for a number of years and deeply resent this decision.

It cannot come as a surprise that groups of young people now gather on this and other streets with nothing to do and that their high-spirited behaviour annoys older residents.

A first resolution for the council in 2006 should be to provide proper facilities for young people in East Finchley.

John Davies
Manor Park Road, N2

Thanks for the donation

East Finchley resident John O'Sullivan (Harley John) would like to thank the anonymous person who gave him some money following the story in THE ARCHER reporting on his problems with his drag bike. However, John no longer has the bike so would like to return this generous donation. Please could this kind person contact him again or get in touch via THE ARCHER.

Adverts shouldn't grow on trees

Dear Editor,
I regularly walk my dog (and my children) around the streets of East Finchley and I've noticed a new blot on the landscape.

Pinned to the trunks of some lovely old trees along my way are a blizzard of advertising messages. Some are postcard-size, others are A4, some in plastic covers, advertising all manner of businesses. One poor tree on Long Lane had three adverts nailed and pinned to it: one for gardening services, one for a man and a van, and the other for a miracle 'get-rich-quick' kind of scheme.

What gets me is that these adverts were plastered over a tree that stands just across the road from a newsagent's window where these messages more properly belong. Goodness knows, there is little enough natural beauty left in our urban environment without our lovely trees becoming advertising hoardings.

Of course, tree trunks are fine places to put a notice if you've lost a much-loved pet but if businesses cannot afford the few pounds it takes to advertise in a local paper or in a shop window then they have no right to blight nature in this way.

So just as they've obviously asked no one if it's ok to pin the adverts up I'm not thinking twice before I take them down as I pass by. Then they end up where they belong - in the bin.

Yours,
Phil Soper
Long Lane, N2

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KALASHNIKOV KULTUR
By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

Scraping barrels

Whenever February comes around you just know you've survived the insult to intelligence that is the first celeb show of the year. I mean, the celeb calendar is split into two parts, one part for celebs like Madonna, the other for the barrel-scrapings that turn up on things like I'm A Nonentity, Save My Career, or has-been Big Brother.

I'd pay bad money to see real celebs like Kate Moss or Paul McCartney publicly humiliate themselves, but you don't get celebs, you get the Z list of failures, nutters and has-beens, which is why I'm not there.

They asked me. They said they wanted something surreal, they wanted someone like me because when the going gets tough, the weird turn pro and I do weird. Then they told me which has-beens and nonentities had been invited to revive their non-existent careers, and that was when I said no.

When my old mate John Lydon humiliated himself in front of Ant'n'Dec'n'Dec'n'Ant in the jungle I thought it was a whole new low, but when I saw the convict list for Big Brother I knew that John had been doing seriously high art.

This year's collective started with Michael 'where's the pool' Barrymore, followed by a former lover of Madonna, a fly larva and a town in Lancashire, and that's just the blokes. Pete Burns doesn't count as a bloke, he's the halfway house between the men and the women: someone who once had a fling with Sven, the girl who took the glam out of glamour, a Baywatched babe and someone who used to be a rock folly. Just for fun they were sticking in a wannabee from Essex called Basildon Travelodge and they wanted me to make up the numbers.

I was almost tempted by the cash, but I wasn't tempted by the chance to have the embalmed remains of Jimmy Saville turn up. What little artistic integrity I have left deserves more than that. Hell, I'd have done it if the rest of the crew included Pete Doherty, or Germaine Greer, but three weeks with the remains of a faded career was just too much.

So I told them to get someone desperate, someone who needs the publicity, someone who'll make an idiot of themselves and dream of a trip back onto TV. And what did they do, they got someone who confused politics with publicity, they got George Galloway. Oh dear...