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Happy birthday, artsdepot

By Sheila Armstrong

It's five years since artsdepot opened in North Finchley. The venue's director and East Finchley resident Tracy Cooper spoke to *THE ARCHER* to mark the anniversary.

Since the curtain went up on artsdepot at Tally Ho Corner five years ago, it has been voted Best Neighbourhood Theatre in the Love London Awards and has greatly expanded its community work. "All good reasons to celebrate," says Tracy Cooper.

Tracy took charge at artsdepot three years ago after working at the Royal Albert Hall, a true landmark venue. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of artsdepot. The main entrance has been criticised for being invisible from the main roads through North Finchley, burdening the arts centre with a low local profile.

Raising the profile

"For a variety of reasons, signage on the front of the building is a problem," said Tracy. There are constraints but there are now plans to make the artsdepot more of a landmark at Tally Ho Corner. "We may possibly use the outside of the fly tower for signage," Tracy hinted, but probably not film projection onto the building.

Maybe people think of artsdepot only as a theatre but, like an iceberg, there's a lot more beneath the surface. Tracy pointed out that the centre is a focus for many community projects, including



artsdepot boss Tracy Cooper

Ignite for school refusers and young offenders working with theatre and dance. Play covers work with young children and includes courses and the National Big Draw Campaign; Schools is for both primary and secondary schools; Access concentrates on working with disabled youth; and Roots and Shoots on work with refugees and asylum seekers.

Friends of artsdepot

Information about all activities at artsdepot now comes in a series of well-designed brochures such as the Seasonal Guide to theatre and performance for adults and the Family Guide to children's performance and courses for kids. The Friends of artsdepot has been relaunched. For £35 a year, you get a number of benefits including discounted tickets. For information on activities and performances, visit www.artsdepot.co.uk or contact info@artsdepot.co.uk and the box office on 020 8369 5454.

A tale of two cities on two wheels

By Fay Sanders

For four gruelling days in late August, 53 cyclists took up the challenge of biking from London to Paris in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. Fay Sanders was one of only 10 women to sign up for the 318-mile trek. Here she reveals how it went.

I kick-started my training programme by cycling the 17-mile round trip from my flat in East Finchley to my offices on the Strand, gradually introducing longer rides at the weekend. Shortly before the big day, I cycled the length of Sardinia with a friend, in 40C heat, which certainly prepared me for what lay ahead.

The first day of the challenge cycling 90 miles from Blackheath to Dover was definitely the toughest. Not only did I suffer two punctures within 40 minutes, but I also developed an unsettling habit of seeing straight past the dazzling orange arrows that painstakingly marked out the entire route to Paris.

A few hours into the ride, I realised with a sinking feeling I had seen neither an orange arrow, nor a fellow cyclist, for a good few miles. Luckily two



Eiffel fine: Fay celebrates after making it to Paris on two wheels

male cyclists had made the same mistake of merrily following the A227, albeit at a faster pace. We managed to navigate back to the morning water stop, arriving, to my dismay, just in time to set off again.

Against increasing odds, including my rash decision to buy clip-in cycling shoes two days before the ride and my struggle to use them, we all arrived in Dover in time to catch the ferry to Calais.

La belle France

It was a particularly moving experience riding through the WWI battle zones of North-

ern France. Row upon row of graves stood on lonely hilltops, often engraved with a poignant inscription to a nameless soldier.

The elation the whole group felt upon reaching Paris was unforgettable. Only moments earlier we had been cycling past fields of cows, and suddenly we were storming down the Champs Elysées, car horns blaring, people cheering and cameras clicking.

Cancer support is a cause close to my heart after losing my father, also a keen cyclist, to cancer 15 years ago. So far I have raised more than £2,025 in aid of Macmillan, but any extra donations via www.justgiving.com/fays would be extremely welcome.

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Arts Festival continues

The thirteenth annual East Finchley Arts Festival is running at All Saints Church, Durham Road, until Saturday 11 October. See details of the remaining programme in our What's On column on page 10.

Running alongside the festival is the highly regarded Art Exhibition, featuring a wide variety of artists, including Klaus Wuttke and Nick Orsler. Some of the artwork has been donated, but most will be sold, with one-third of the proceeds going to the North London Hospice.

The church foyer is open every concert evening, from 6pm and between 12-10pm on weekends, where traditional oil paintings and pottery through to silk scarves, jewellery and even digital art will be on sale. Anyone can come and browse; you don't need to attend a concert.