



Allotment autumn glory

By Sheila Armstrong

The sunny October weather was great for gardens and allotments everywhere, a final burst of colour and ripening of fruit. The garden by the station forecourt has been given its autumn tidy by the N2 Guerilla Gardeners and it's looking good.

The Archer visited two allotments in their autumn glory. The Fortis Green allotments, a year after their successful takeover from Thames Water, held an open day for supporters on 15 October. There were tea and cakes for visitors and a chance to chat to the allotmentees, new and old.

The plots were looking well cultivated in this small, established group of allotments near Muswell Hill. Many have been split into two smaller plots, the 10-pole size being very large by today's standards.

In contrast Vale Farm Allotments on Tarling Road was once a neglected, vandalised and underused site. Going from strength to strength, it's now a thriving, well-kept series of plots with some new owners. Since their previous open day in June, many improvements have been made, all plots now being on the way to full cultivation. Plot holders were enthusiastic if mindful of the amount of work still to be done.

At the Tarling Road Autumn open day on 23 October lots of autumn produce was available to buy as well as refreshments for visitors. Secretary Lily Ehrenpohl praised Barnet Council for its help in obtaining new fences and in allowing plots to be subdivided, again making them more manageable.

Allotments are popular, dare one say fashionable now, and there are many allotments sites in Barnet. Go to www.barnetallotments.org.uk or www.barnet.gov.uk for information on getting a plot.



Couture-coo

By Betti Blatman

Julie Michael started Couture Parties approximately eight years ago and has now added Pamper Parties to the list of events she organises for adults and children, all of which can be adapted to the client's requests.

I attended one of her Pamper Parties, held at Christina Hair Fashions Salon, Aylmer Parade, in early October for nine-year-old Elena. As her excited party guests arrived they were robed and given slippers in readiness for the party and offered "champagne" (fizzy apple pop) while waiting for their beauty treatments, which included manicures, pedicures, hair curling and dressing.

After their treatments, the girls were served at tables laid out for a typical afternoon tea, followed by face painting and a "Couture" pass the parcel game. Each guest left with a Couture party bag. What a delightful way to celebrate a birthday!

For more information, contact Julie on 07956 458 147 or on Facebook at [juliecoutureparties](https://www.facebook.com/juliecoutureparties)

Elena enjoys a nail treatment at Christina Hair Fashions. Photo by Betti Blatman



By Adam Justice-Mills

"Just pedal and go!" As a keen cyclist, increasingly feeling the hills, it was great to feel the quiet green surge of an electric bike take the strain. Ace Café in Stonebridge, home of performance bikes and bikers, had their Green Day this May. I went to find out about owning electric vehicles. Around 1912, there were more electric cars than other power sources but they couldn't compete with later petrol engines. So what's changed?

Electric vehicles are low-cost to run, very green and make a quiet statement about the future as they whisper by. Performance is good: the Tesla and the Quanta off-road bike are astonishing (F1 are considering electric Grand Prix). Batteries have much improved but are still costly (around half the cost of the vehicle). Batteries work for vans and buses even better than for family cars but their range is low: 60-100

miles per charge. Charging is sometimes free, but long journeys need careful planning. Capacity is generally good. The G-Wiz is tiny for someone over 5ft tall (ask Jeremy Clarkson) the Tazzari is fine and the Citroen C-Zero is a 4-seater.

There is already huge affection for these cars, or for the idea of them, with evangelical early adopters showing us the way. Perhaps they're a way forward, but if everyone got electric cars tomorrow, the UK grid couldn't cope.

So, back to bicycles. I tried a couple and was surprised at how easy they were: different, particularly when cycling slowly, but supplying an exhilarating kick when I wanted it. They're similar in price to un-assisted, high-spec bicycles: around £500-£1,000. Typical range for pedal-assisted bicycles, as opposed to electric scooters, can be 40-60 miles: plenty for most commutes. Would I buy an electric car? Not yet, for a family car, but if I had to have a second weatherproof vehicle I'd consider it. I would buy an electric bicycle, however: love those hills!

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

Bah, humbug!

It's that time of year again. The clock that started ticking back in August when Harrods opened its Christmas Grotto is about to chime. Half the population is bankrupting itself, the other half is already there and if turkeys weren't so stupid they'd be getting more worried than usual.

Yes, it's Christmas, that time of tuneless carols, repeats on TV, DFS half price sales and holiday adverts. Why not invent your own festivities instead? In the strange world of celebrations there's lot more to rejoice about in December than Christmas, especially if you use your imagination.

Start early by marking the 5th by drinking, driving up the motorway and watching a Disney film, though not necessarily in that order. Why? Because that's the anniversary of the end of prohibition, the opening of the M1 and the birth of Walt Disney. Nothing sums up Christmas more completely than drinking too much, sitting in a traffic jam and watching cartoons. And guess what? The 6th is St Nicholas' day so you can go Dutch and be the first on your street to open presents.

If that doesn't rattle your cage there's always the 11th and time to celebrate Abdication Day as Edward VIII went in 1936 and James II in 1688. A perfect time for Republicans to open a bottle or two.

By now you should be ready for the big one. Yes, it's time to go seriously Roman and celebrate Saturnalia. This means a full week of pagan debauchery, gambling, drinking and present-giving. If that's not to your taste, you can mark its medieval successor, the Feast of Fools, instead. Same thing, different era and mead instead of wine. Or both.

As you crawl out of your pagan hangover on the 23rd you can relax in the knowledge that you are only a turkey away from the main event. You can mark the end of your personal festive season in a way that's been a tradition every year since 1957 by falling asleep in front of the TV as the Queen delivers her Christmas message. It might not make sense, but it is Christmas.

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