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Strictly social

By Daphne Chamberlain

Been to a tea dance recently? If not, what held you back: shyness, lack of a partner, lack of confidence, a bad time elsewhere? In December John Lintern told us how much dancing helps with older people's mental and physical fitness. John, with Betty Chi, runs tea dances at Christ Church Hall, North Finchley (opposite Homebase), and when I visited, regulars and "newbies" alike were keen to give me their views.

Vera Wheeler was typical in saying she hadn't danced since she was in her teens. Then she took it up again four years ago, and soon got back in the swing of it.

Sylvia Szanto loves the music, company and joy of dancing. "Enjoy it while you can," she says. "If any of us see dances we don't know somewhere else, John will show us how to do them."

Partnerships flourish

The sessions are not all strictly ballroom. I saw sequence and line dancing, an Irish jig and the Charleston, at a pace all the participants can manage. So nobody need worry about turning up alone. Partnerships can flourish, though. I heard about Linda and George, who married after meeting at this group.

Pat and Carol, another married couple, have recently joined. Pat was a boxer and footballer in his youth, but after damaging his legs in an accident when he was 14, he found that dancing was the best way to strengthen them. They were competition dancers 28 years ago, but now they dance to have fun.

No cliques

Brenda from Hendon told me: "There's such a friendly atmosphere. I've been to other places where they are snooty and cliquy, but that doesn't happen here."

The weekly Wednesday sessions tend to be for older people, while there is more of a mixture of ages on Sundays.

John, a retired maths and science teacher, lives in East Finchley. He and Betty also run dance classes and give private lessons. Visit their website jandbdance.co.uk, or call 020 8444 0280 for further details.



Wasp wonder

Not many of us have a kind word to say for wasps but these summer pests are capable of constructing a home every bit as complex and beautiful as a beehive.

This photo was sent to us by reader Gill Steiner, who found this (thankfully deserted) wasp nest in the loft of her home in Woodside Avenue on Christmas Day.

Behind this intricately swirling casing is a set of hexagonal chambers, in which the wasps live and store food. Gill believes the harsh days of early December either killed off the community

or drove it elsewhere.

Gill said: "Apparently, the wasps chew up wood and mix it with saliva to make the papery thin chambers. What amazes me when you look at the nest is the team effort required: wasps in the first year of life following their instincts or instructions from the queen to manufacture a home for the next generation. You can't help but feel humbled."



By Adam Justice-Mills

Almost time for spring clear-out. There's a pile of stuff that once seemed essential to our lives. Now it's past its use: kids have grown up, girths have expanded, technology moves on. What to do with it?

Of course, there's land-fill (actually this is "last resort", a rapidly dwindling resource, reckoned to run out in the UK on present usage by 2018). So, reduce, re-use, recycle. We've put stuff outside our house for anyone that wants it but recently it got picked up by scrap metal dealers (leaving the non-metal bits). I prefer to think some could be re-used, preferably in a good cause.

Pass it on

Freecycle is a way to offer (or get) used stuff, for free! Log into www.freecycle.org, or join a local group such as Freecycle Barnet. Email a list of the stuff you have, with a contact number, and get loads of people offering to take it off your hands. They collect from your door and you give it to them for free.

It works the other way round, too: send a "wanted" email or reply to someone else's offer and pick it up from them for free. There are some sensible rules: no animals, personal services, explosives etc, and the goods are all offered "as seen". We've handed over wardrobes, shelving, light fittings, packing cases and bicycles.

If you don't like the idea of people coming round, East Finchley charity shops welcome donations they can sell to raise money for their causes. They all like clean clothes and books, jewellery and knick-knacks; some will take toys; most won't take electrical items or soft furnishings.

Tech stuff can be harder to shift and you should always check the hard drives are wiped properly or removed before handing them over as they've got your identity data all over them. Check out www.envocare.co.uk for ethical and established tech recycling organisations for phones, computers and TVs. That pile of stuff is looking smaller and more beautiful already!

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Calling all electric car drivers

Adam Justice-Mills, who writes our Every Little Helps column, is planning to write an article about the reality of owning and running an electric car: why people choose an electric car, the benefits to the environment, and how practical they are to use. If you own an electric car, Adam would like to interview you. Get in touch via email on the-archer@lineone.net or leave your details on our voicemail by phoning 0844 579 6949 and entering mailbox number 63450. Thank you.

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