



## Grandma and baby in jewellery heist drama

By Cathy Young

Imagine a James Bond film, or more accurately *The Italian Job*, set in Tally Ho Corner, North Finchley. An unlikely scenario? That was my first thought as I watched a beige Mini careering along the pavement directly towards my own beloved Mini.

Shoppers had to jump for safety as the car roared along the pedestrian arcade and then into the oncoming traffic at the one-way system at the top of Ballards Lane after a violent robbery on 3 December. The two men in the getaway car had driven through the arcade from North Finchley High Road, smashed their way into the shop using concrete paving slabs and grabbed all they could from Gold Leaf Jewellers, leaving a woman battered and bleeding on the floor.

With a contemptuous disregard for anyone who might be in their way, they returned to the Mini and sped up the rest of the arcade, across the pavement and straight at my car.

Instinct took over, which was fortunate as my mind refused to process what was happening, and I swerved sufficiently to avoid a head-on crash.

A braver, more alert driver might have attempted to stand her ground and foil their getaway. I was neither brave nor

alert, which is why neither Libby, my one-year-old granddaughter, who was in the back of the car, nor I was badly hurt.

### Zealous traffic wardens

Passers-by were very kind to us and Libby enjoyed playing in the police car and flirting with the Flying Squad officer while forensics checked my car and took statements.

The local traffic wardens were less understanding. Three different wardens tried to stick penalty notices on my car although it was surrounded by three police cars, several police officers and two ambulances. I'm happy to say that the police officers gave them short shrift; clearly there was no love lost there.

It was the first time I had been entrusted with Libby's day-care. Most local grandmothers take their grandchildren to Cherry Tree Wood or Rhyme Time at the Children's Centre in Tarling Road.

Not many involve them in a dramatic jewellery heist in North Finchley.

## Hoffman hot-foots it to the Phoenix

By Nick Young and Allison Goodings

It takes more than heavy snow to stop East Finchley's movie-watching community from attending a screening of Dustin Hoffman's film *Quartet*, especially when Dustin Hoffman himself is in attendance. Not surprisingly, tickets sold out in an hour and a half for this event on Friday 18 January, making it probably the Phoenix Cinema's fastest-selling screening ever.

In the post-movie Q&A, a visibly emotional Hoffman, himself in his seventies, spoke about how his film explores issues surrounding aging, and how elderly artists can struggle to find an audience in the later years of their career.

The stars of the film were Maggie Smith, Pauline Collins, Tom Courtenay and Billy Connolly and the cast, included background artists (Hoffman disliked the term 'extras') who themselves are retired singers and musicians from across Britain.

Having sat with the audience throughout the film, he was also effusive in his praise of the Phoenix, describing it as a "gorgeous cinema" and likening the shared emotional experience of sitting in a crowded cinema to going to church or synagogue. We hope he'll come again soon.



Big Local Rep Paul Bragman is looking for your ideas to improve the lives of residents.

## Your ideas for £1 million spend

By Daphne Chamberlain

As we reported last month, the Big Lottery Fund's Big Local programme has given £1 million to The Grange estate and its surrounding area to spend on projects suggested by the residents. Along with the money comes the help and support of a Big Local rep: Paul Bragman, who is indeed a local, having lived in Muswell Hill for more than 10 years.

At the time of writing, Paul has already contacted several organisations as well as individuals, our local councillors and Barnet officers. Eventually, working partnerships of agencies and residents will develop, but it is vital that residents should be in the majority.

Do you have any suggestions or opinions about improving the lives of people living in this area? You can play a part in this project by giving your thoughts directly to Paul on 020 8442 2379 or 07887 721825, or by emailing paul@communityregen.net.

### Our 'critical friend'

He explained his role as that of "a critical friend, who will comment, challenge, and make sure that diverse opinions are represented". At this stage, though, his priority is getting started. He says that he is familiar with East Finchley, and has friends and family here. At the moment he is walking around,

dropping in to places, leaving printed publicity, and generally raising awareness.

Being assigned so close to home is a bonus for Paul, as he is also working with communities in Luton and Greenwich. As he says, riding a scooter comes in useful! Luton has also only just received funding, while Greenwich, one of the first areas to benefit, is now in the third year of its programme. Paul told *THE ARCHER*: "It's very interesting working in different neighbourhoods. Though they are different, they have a lot in common as well."

There is interaction between area reps, who support and communicate with each other, mainly online. They are recruited for Big Local by RENAISSI, an organisation specialising in community regeneration. Paul is a freelance consultant in that field. Send him your ideas and *THE ARCHER* will report regularly as the project develops.

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