



Family fun day at Stephens House. Photo Mike Coles

Stephens House looks to the future

By Ann Bronkhorst

In its new three-year development project, funded largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Avenue House is making some changes, starting with its name. The Victorian villa, gardens and outbuildings in East End Road, left by Henry 'Inky' Stephens to the public in 1918, will be known as Stephens House and Gardens.

The new name helps to emphasise the distinctive history of Stephens House by highlighting its remarkable donor, whose life and work are explored in a small on-site museum, The Stephens Collection.

'Inky' Stephens, a stationery and ink manufacturer, bought Avenue House in 1874; later it would serve as a hospital in both World Wars. Records of those times are sketchy and any information about 'RAF Hospital, Finchley' would be welcomed by the Trust.

Garden restoration

Another name to rediscover is that of Robert Marnock, a Victorian garden designer who was responsible for the fine landscaped gardens, now (like six of the buildings) listed. With an arboretum and many rare specimen trees the gardens are already delightful but will benefit from restoration of Marnock's original design, including clearer vistas.

Paths and signing, too, are to be improved but during all this work the gardens will remain open to the public, and free. A user-friendly 'Little Book of Leaves' maps the whole space and each special tree.

Local families who visit the gardens regularly can look forward to improvements to the playground and to refreshment facilities, with a new café/bistro in the Stables and a kiosk closer to the playground.

The plans for the house and gardens, and the new name, were announced on 7 February and were followed on 9 February by a Fun Day, with children's activities, a traditional Sunday lunch and information about the whole project. If you missed the Fun Day, try the website: www.stephenshouseandgardens.com or contact info@stephenshouseandgardens.com

The Clock Struck War

To mark the centenary of the First World War, Mardibooks has just published an anthology of 23 short stories featuring one from East Finchley author Alex Pearl. The Clock Struck War is available on Amazon as an ebook and from www.mardibooks.com

Keep your ears open for this scam

By Janet Maitland
One Saturday in January, a local woman answered the phone to a man claiming to be a police officer from Holborn fraud squad. He told her that a woman had tried to use a copy of her card to buy a £2,000 watch in a London store, but as she hadn't been able to answer the security questions, she'd been arrested.

When the victim asked how she could be sure of his identity, the 'police officer' gave her his warrant number and told her to call 999. She did this and the identity was confirmed.

"I didn't realise he'd kept the line open and I was speaking to an accomplice," said the victim. "So when he asked me if I'd help them, I said 'Well, tell me about it'."

Secrecy

The accomplice told her they suspected a bank employee was involved, and asked her to go to Victoria Street with her cards and driving licence to meet a plain clothes police officer. She was told not to talk to anyone about it because it was an undercover operation. Now worried, she asked for a uniformed policeman to accompany her. She was refused and told she would be paid for her help. Now suspicious, the victim rang a family member who advised her it was a scam.

"They made me worry I'd been robbed, then played on my relief that I hadn't been," said the victim. "They knew my name and my bank. They told me they didn't want my card details. They exploited my willingness to help. They tried to isolate me. My advice would be to always check out such callers by using another phone, or put the phone down and then wait a few minutes before calling."

Loss of confidence

On 17 January, Sanni Alom, 22, was sentenced to six months in prison for carrying out a similar scam which defrauded an 86-year-old woman out of £5,000. The judge noted that the victim had also lost all her confidence and would not talk to anyone outside her close family, including the police.

"There are many variations of this scam," said Detective Superintendent Mark Strugnell. "If you receive one of these calls, never divulge your bank details and end the call immediately."

What's happening to house prices?

Every day or week seems to bring a fresh report on house prices and the property market in London or across Britain. But what is the situation more locally? Jeremy Leaf, whose estate agent business is based on the High Road, gives an East Finchley perspective.

Many local people seem to think that, over a period of the last five years, now is the best time to move.

As far as we were concerned recovery in the property market began in earnest in the early part of 2013 prompted by improved customer confidence and better access to mortgages at lower rates, particularly for first-time buyers.

But now the market in East Finchley really seems to be taking off. We registered approximately double the number of potential buyers last month compared with a year ago.

As a result, our local office has already sold a number of properties for at least 10% more than they would have done only a few months ago and in many instances achieving above the asking price.

But is it a sellers' market?

Apparently, 4 out of 5 sellers are buyers, so if you're looking in East Finchley there's not a great deal of choice, although many are forced to move out of the area or are downsizing.

Lettings started the year with a bang, like sales. Supply of property to let can't keep up with demand so rents are reaching record highs.

Whether buying or renting, most are attracted to the area by our well known schools,



Moving market: Jeremy Leaf

excellent range of local shops and restaurants, great City/West End transport links as well as village-like community spirit.

Whatever the reason, moving to East Finchley is certainly high on the agenda for many at the moment!

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For more information

please contact the Church Office

Tel: 8883 1544 (Minister: Simon Dyke)

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