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Roy Hudd shares a moment with Spike. Photo: Mike Coles

Comic genius comes home

By Daphne Chamberlain

Against all odds, a fabulous bronze statue of Spike Milligan was unveiled in the grounds of Stephens House (the former Avenue House) last month. It could possibly feature in many future quizzes. Questions: 'Where is the statue of a man on a bench, turned to talk to whoever joins him there?' and 'Why was the sculptor awarded a Scout modelling badge?'

Fundraisers' long haul

Quizzes played their part in this story. When The Finchley Society's Barbara Warren had the idea of a statue, she didn't realise that it would be nearly 10 years before it materialised. Inexperience in fundraising, no grants, and serious illness among the organising committee and the sculptor himself were gigantic hurdles to overcome.

The long round of fundraising with local events was boosted by the generosity of people like the quizgoer who wrote out a cheque for £10,000, and of many of Spike's friends and admirers. Barbara mentioned "lovely ladies" Maureen Lipman and Joanna Lumley.

Troupers turn out

Joanna was absent (on the Trans-Siberian railway) but Maureen was at the unveiling. So were Roy Hudd, Denis Norden, Michael Parkinson, Jeffrey Holland, Terry Gilliam and Lynsey de Paul. Barry Cryer sent a message.

Michael Parkinson remembered "a wonderful man, who was also a pain in the butt!" Roy Hudd applauded the British tradition of erecting statues to people who make us laugh, but Spike was very serious about conservation and the environment.

Spike's life, in bronze

He lived in Finchley from 1955 to 1974, becoming The Finchley Society's first President and lifelong patron. Look carefully at that bench next time you visit Stephens House. It incorporates reminders of the Goon Show and his service in

the Royal Artillery. The two Indian elephants represent his Indian childhood, and the fairies the fantasies he wove for his children.

Sculptor John Somerville got his Scout badge because he was once in the 10th Finchley Scottish Scouts, when Barbara Warren was his Akela.

Barnet's Mayor congratulated everyone, saying: "Welcome home to a comic genius." However, there is still a financial shortfall. Mementos are on sale at Stephens House, and donations can be made via www.spikestatue.org.uk.

A tinselly date for your diary

After last year's wonderful event the East Finchley Christmas Festival will be back on Saturday 6 December. The High Road will be host to Father Christmas along with carols, competitions, mince pies and much more festive cheer for everyone. See you there!

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Come Dine With Me needs cooks

The Channel 4 show Come Dine With Me will be shooting in north London from November 3-7. Over five days four strangers will take turns to host the perfect dinner party, with the eventual winner getting a cash prize of £1000.

To participate email cdwm@itv.com or call 0871 244 4142. (Callers from a BT landline will be charged a setup fee of 14p per call + 10p per minute. Calls from other networks may be higher and from mobiles will cost considerably more).



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