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Comedian Griff honours the original Joey the clown

By Ann Bronkhorst

Many famous entertainers have lived in our part of London and often plaques record their names, homes and achievements. The latest plaque put up by the Finchley Society commemorates the once hugely popular clown and pantomime performer Joseph Grimaldi, the original Joey, who lived from 1779 to 1837.



Contemporary comic and presenter Griff Rhys Jones visited Granville Road, N12, close to the Finchley Memorial Hospital, to do the honours by unveiling an information plaque.

Country air

Joe spent much of his career at Drury Lane, Sadlers Wells and Covent Garden as well as touring provincial theatres. According to his biographer Charles Dickens, Joe bought Tippity Cottage at Fallow Corner, Finchley, mainly for his little son to have "the benefit of country air" but the Grimaldis "became much attached to it", living there for several years.

Joe would travel to town from Finchley by gig, a small horse-drawn carriage, down the Great North Road for rehearsals and performances, braving the highwaymen of Finchley Common in the area of modern-day East Finchley, and Highgate Hill.

Joking apart

Sadly, the original cottage has gone, but today's occupants of the house on the site, 6 Graywood Court, say they are delighted to have a blue plaque high on their front wall, unveiled by Cllr David Longstaff, Mayor of Barnet.

Grimaldi would have enjoyed the humour in Griff's speech but some serious points were made, too: as President of Civic Voice, Griff emphasised the importance of amenity groups like the Finchley Society in preserving the past and protecting our legacy, the future.

Joseph Grimaldi's final years were not happy. His wife and his dissolute son died before him and he suffered from injuries caused by his acrobatic dancing and clowning, once so popular. The public sent donations to help him survive financially, and after his death Dickens, writing as "Boz", and his illustrator George Cruikshank published a memoir of Grimaldi, compiled from his own anecdotes and colourful life-story. Dickens called him "a man of the kindest heart and the most child-like simplicity".

The Mayor of Barnet, Cllr David Longstaff unveils a blue plaque on the site where Grimaldi once lived. Photo by Mike Coles



Joseph Grimaldi by John Cawse
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

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The Mayor of Barnet, Cllr David Longstaff and Griff Rhys Jones with the Grimaldi plaque in Granville Road. Photo by Mike Coles

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