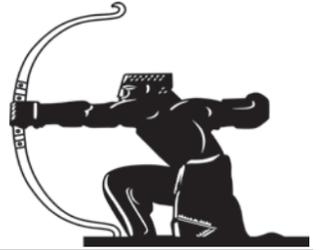


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The power of the humble noticeboard

In today's online whirl of Instagram, Facebook and digital directories, it's easy to forget that a scrap of paper and a drawing pin used to do the same job. But traditional community noticeboards, the original social media, are still quietly active... and surprisingly effective, as fan Mona Norman discovered.

When my husband and two young children settled into our new home in Highgate last year we needed a handyman to do a long list of jobs for us, and were keen to find someone local. So we searched on the internet and booked in someone describing himself as a 'Highgate Handyman and Painter'.

However, I quickly learned that this tradesman was actually from Windsor and was a terrible handyman to boot. The company turned out to be rogue traders with no connection to Highgate at all. It was stressful, and I instantly regretted asking Google to help me with my problem.

Our little pocket of London has an enormous sense of community; people really want to support their neighbours, and that is abundantly clear when you take time to look at the vast number of noticeboards dotted around.

In cafés, supermarkets and streets, people pin up cards and posters selling anything from yoga lessons to cat sitting, fixing

laptops or painting a portrait of your dog.

As my husband Ross Norman runs a little family business, we decided to put the humble noticeboard to the test. One day we went out with small posters advertising his services as an electrician and were amazed to find an abundance of noticeboards within a couple of miles of our house.

Some are owned and run by the local authority and often require permission to get your notice up behind the locked glass, but there are plenty that are simply 'organic'; that is, one person has put up their lone notice on a well-placed but unassuming yard of fencing and hundreds of people have followed suit. Technically it may be called flyposting, but no-one seems to mind and it's become part of our landscape and culture.

I loved reading what was being bought and sold on these boards. Some post handwritten notes seeking employment,



Paper works: (top) Mona beside the noticeboard outside the Highgate Society. Bottom left: The information board in Cherry Tree Wood. Bottom right: Notices pinned under the ivy in Cranley Gardens.

others are looking for staff, some offer kids' entertainment, art therapy, painting and decorating, and even Spanish lessons.

To be honest, I was sceptical: how many people actually read what is pinned up? But the phone started ringing, and Ross has had at least a dozen calls just from the noticeboards alone.

In the age of the internet and comparison websites, it's easy just to type in what you need and

get a big company to offer you a service, but often that plumber or babysitter who lives round the corner would be a lot quicker, cheaper, and easier to use.

We should all be using the power of our local noticeboards. My family certainly do. Following our first unhappy experience, the board on Cranley Gardens led us to Roy, a fantastic handyman, and where does he live? Just up the road.

Our nearby noticeboards

- Aylmer Parade, N2, outside Forget Me Not Vintage.
- In Dan and De Carlo's café, High Road, N2.
- East Finchley Library, High Road, N2.
- Next to playground, Cherry Tree Wood, N2.
- Outside Highgate Group Practice on North Hill, N8.
- Highgate Hill, N8, east side, up from Channing School.
- Waitrose, The Broadway, Crouch End, N8.
- Holy Innocents Church, Tottenham Lane, Crouch End, N8.
- In Sainsbury's Muswell Hill, Fortis Green Road, N10.
- In La Dinette café, Fortis Green Road, N10.
- Cranley Gardens at the corner of Muswell Hill Road, N10.
- Wood Vale, N10, where it crosses with the Greenways path.
- South Friern Library, Colney Hatch Lane, N10.
- In Tesco, Coppetts Centre, Friern Barnet, N12.

Have we missed any? Let us know by email: the-archer@lineone.net or by post: The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 2DE.



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