

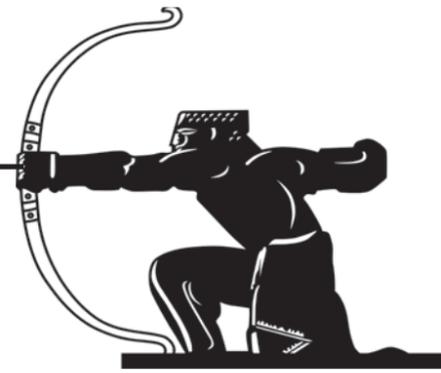


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ISSN 1361-3952 **20p** where sold

The Archer

Local News is our Aim



April 2021 No. 324

A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.

66,000 join fight to save seven trees

By Josef Grostern

The planned felling of seven trees in Coldfall Wood has been temporarily suspended by Haringey Council after a petition to save the trees gained an astounding 66,000 signatures.

Tree roots are claimed to have caused 'serious subsidence issues over a number of years' for a property adjacent to the wood, according to AXA, the property's insurer. The insurance company is asking the council to fell the trees. Two large ancient oaks in the wood were felled in 2018 and 2019 next to the property for the same reason.

The petition and campaign to save the trees was launched

by The Friends of Coldfall Wood, the community volunteer group involved in protecting and enhancing the wood and its adjoining fields.

Support

Some members of Haringey Council have expressed their support for the campaign. Cllr Kirsten Hearn, Haringey's Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Equalities and Leisure, said: "I do not want these trees to be felled. Haringey Council takes seri-

ously its duty of guardianship of Coldfall Wood as an ancient woodland and local nature reserve."

Campaigners also have the support of local MP Catherine West and of the Fortis Green ward of the Labour Party who are asking that "every effort should be made by AXA insurance to find a solution to subsidence problems that does not involve the felling of ancient trees."

Turn to page 2.

Man charged after chase and arrest

By Janet Maitland

A man has been charged following an incident in Deansway, N2, which led to two police officers being taken to hospital after they tried to make an arrest.

Eridjon Hatia, 29, of Lichfield Grove, Finchley, N3, was charged with assaulting an emergency worker, causing actual bodily harm and an act of outraging public decency. He has been bailed to appear at Harrow Crown Court on 4 August.

The male and female officers had responded to reports of a man allegedly loitering in The Causeway and exposing himself. When they arrived shortly after 7pm there was a short chase on foot and Hatia was arrested in Deansway.

During the course of the arrest, the officers suffered non life-threatening injuries. They were taken to hospital for treatment but discharged later.

The incident in The Causeway occurred less than six months after a teenage girl was subjected to a serious sexual assault by a group of boys in exactly the same spot and has led to calls from residents for CCTV cameras to be installed.



Ready for action: A young fire cadet. Photo London Fire Brigade

Fire station starts cadet unit for young people

By Janet Maitland

Finchley Fire Station on Long Lane has become a Fire Cadets Unit, one of several new units set up with funding from the Mayor through the Young Londoners Fund.

Fire Cadets have the chance to gain a nationally recognised BTEC Level 2 qualification in Fire and Rescue Services in the Community. They also learn a range of skills that improve their chances of employment, from running out hoses and climbing ladders to how to work well in a team.

Cadets can, if they want to, follow a promotion path to become an Officer Cadet. Whether they plan to go to university or college or straight into work, Fire Cadets will have a unique experience to talk about and a good reference.

Many young people want to join the Fire Brigade and over 100 have already become Fire Cadets since January, despite the challenges of Covid-19. Over 250 adult Volunteer Cadet

Instructors have also been virtually recruited and trained.

"We look forward to welcoming all of our fire cadets back onto fire stations soon," said the Brigade's Deputy Commissioner Richard Mills.

"I am proud that with support from the Mayor, hundreds more young people are now able to develop their personal and professional skills in a positive environment where they can gain qualifications, improve their career prospects and help the community," said Dr Fiona Twycross, Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience.

If you know a young person aged 14-17 who would be interested in becoming a Fire Cadet, go to www.london-fire.gov.uk or email lfbfirecadets@london-fire.gov.uk

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Thank you to The Bald Faced Stag and New Local Cafe for providing us with a meeting place.

The Archer team wishes to thank all the generous people who give up their spare time, in all weather, to deliver the paper for us.

If you have a story for us, please contact us at the above address. Comments to The Archer may be published unless clearly marked 'Not for publication' within the text.

Copy deadlines – **May: 16 April** **June: 14 May**
July: 11 June

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Councils		Help & Advice		Drugs Helpline	0800 776600
Barnet Council	020 8359 2000	Childline	0800 1111	Health Info Service	0800 665544
Recycling & refuse	020 8359 4600	Citizens Advice Barnet	0300 4568365	MIND	020 8343 5700
Benefits	0800 882200	Cruse Bereavement Care	0800 8081677	National Blood Centre	0845 7711 7711
Haringey Council	020 8489 0000	EF Advice Service	0300 4568365	Crime	
Recycling & refuse	020 88857700	Lone Parent Centre	020 3828 4834	Emergency	999
Benefits	020 8489 2800	Missing Persons Helpline	116 000	Police non-emergency	101
Leisure		National Debt Line	0808 156 7718	CrimeStoppers	0800 555111
Alexandra Palace	020 8365 2121	NSPCC	0808 8005000	Victim Support	0845 303 0900
East Finchley Library	020 8359 3815	Rape Crisis helpline	0808 802 9999	Hospitals	
Everyman, Muswell Hill	0872 436 9060	Refuge Crisis Helpline	0808 2000 247	NHS	111
Garden Suburb Library	020 8458 3301	Relate Helpline	0300 100 1234	Barnet General	08451 114000
Muswell Hill Library	020 8489 8773	RSPCA	0300 1234 999	Edgware General	020 8952 2381
Phoenix Cinema	020 8444 6789	Samaritans	116 123	Finchley Memorial	020 8349 7500
Vue, North Finchley	0345 3084620	SENDIASS Barnet	020 8359 7637	Oak Lane Clinic	020 8346 9343
		SENDIASS Haringey	020 3667 5233	Royal Free	020 7794 0500
				Whittington	020 7272 3070
Transport		Health Advice		OAPs' Advice	
National Rail	0845 7484950	AIDSline	020 8363 2141	Age UK Barnet	020 8203 5040
City Airport	020 7646 0088	Alcoholics Anonymous	0845 7697555	Independent Age	0800 319 6789
Heathrow Airport	0844 3351801	Barnet MENCAP	020 8203 6688	Age UK	0800 169 2081
National Express	0871 781 8181	Cancer Support	020 8202 2211		
TfL	0343 222 1234	Carers' Line	0808 808 7777		
Thameslink	0345 026 4700	Drinkline	0800 917 8282		

Fight to save Coldfall Wood trees

Continued from page 1.

A similar campaign was launched in the summer of 2020 to save four mature oaks under threat from an AXA application in Queens Wood. That felling has been suspended until at least November 2021 while independent surveys are conducted.

Back in Coldfall, the Friends have consulted two expert geologists who "strongly believe that the trees were not the cause of any subsidence". The Friends along with SHIFT, a campaign group that emerged in response to the Queen's Wood situation, suggest that trees in fact prevent long-term subsidence issues by locking in unstable clay-heavy

soil that is prone to landslides.

Council faces hard choice

Campaigners are urging Haringey Council to suspend the felling for at least six months so that structural engineers and geologists can conduct surveys to assess the best course of action.

But Councillor Hearn warns that funding cuts have left the council less able to explore other options. "Following 10 years of austerity, council budgets have already been slashed beyond the bone," she said.

It is in this context that the Friends say: "We can't continue to let insurance companies bully councils into removing trees for

no good reason. If necessary we will be camping out by the trees to save them from destruction!"

AXA have said they "recognise that these situations are often complex and emotive; however, we owe it to our customers to find a solution which protects their property." The residents of the property in question declined an invitation to comment.

The decision of whether or not to fell the trees has yet to be announced publicly following a meeting between Haringey Council and AXA on March 5th. Stay up to date on the campaign by on Twitter @ColdfallWood.

Allotment sheds destroyed by fire

By Janet Maitland

A fire ripped through a row of sheds at Fuel Land allotments on the High Road in the early hours of Friday 5 March. Around 25 firefighters fought the blaze which took nearly two hours to put out. Two sheds were destroyed and another was badly damaged.



Ditched: A fire service van is pulled free following the allotment sheds incident. Photo Mike Coles

Crews from Finchley and Hornsey fire stations were called just before 3am and the fire was under control by 5am, although there was difficulty for one crew leaving later in the morning after their vehicle got stuck in one of the deep trenches that line the road on the allotments.

"We faced poor visibility as we worked to search the premises and bring the fire under control," said Station Officer Mark Smith, who was at the scene. Finchley Fire Station's new trainee

firefighter Marina Busca was on her first night shift and said: "We made sure the fire hadn't spread to any further areas of the allotment and worked together to make the scene safe."

The Brigade is investigating the cause of the fire. Police also attended the scene but their report is not yet available. Judith Ryan, secretary to Fuel Land Allotments, said: "We're pleased that the Fire Brigade arrived quickly, controlled the fire and, of course, that no one was hurt."

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Barnet Council

66 Brackenburg Road, N2

Roof extension involving rear dormer window and two front roof lights. Single-storey rear extension.

72 Brackenburg Road, N2

Roof extension above existing outrigger, including rear dormer window and two flat roof lights.

46 Brendon Grove, N2

Conversion of garage into habitable room, including construction of wall with new window to replace existing door, and two roof lights.

62 Church Lane, N2

Conversion into three self-contained flats, including two-storey front and side extension, first-floor rear extension, roof extension involving side and front dormer window with Juliet balcony, and one rear roof light. Changes to fenestration. Associated amenity space, cycle storage, refuse and recycling store.

237 Creighton Avenue, N2

First-floor side extension with hipped roof. Replacement of garage door with new door.

39 Durham Road, N2

Roof extension, including two rear dormer windows, one rear

and three front roof lights.

198 East End Road, N2

Roof extension involving hip to gable, one side gable window, rear dormer window and three front roof lights.

High Road, between Creighton Avenue and The Bishops Avenue, N2

Installation of up to 31 PVC lamp-post banners.

O/S 97-99 High Road, N2

Two internally illuminated digital LED screens, one each side of InLink unit.

339 High Road, N2

Single-storey side and rear extension.

4 - 5 King Street, N2

New roof, with increased ridge height and front and rear gable features. Rear elevations with two dormer windows and one front velux window to create one self-contained flat. Associated parking space, bin store and cycle storage. Alteration to existing front fenestration; with provision of Juliet balconies and front porch. Single storey rear extension: depth 4.9m, eaves height 3.3m, maximum height 3m.

6 Leopold Road, N2

Single-storey rear extension.

Roof extension involving rear dormer window and two front roof lights. Roof extension, involving rear dormer window with Juliet balcony and two front roof lights.

First Floor Flat, 338 Long Lane, N2

New vehicle crossover.

1 to 27 Prospect Place, N2

Prefabricated plantroom unit housing water tanks and pumps for a sprinkler system, and five electrical intake cupboards.

33 Summerlee Avenue, N2

Rear outbuilding.

21 Sylvester Road, N2

Widening of existing single-storey rear extension, and amendment to existing side extension. Replacement of existing first-floor window with sliding doors and a Juliet balcony with glass balustrade.

Haringey Council

188 Creighton Avenue, N2

Replacement of, and alterations to, ground floor rear windows/doors and parapet to rear extension. PV panels at front and top of main roof.

1 The Terrace, Lauradale Road, N2

Single-storey ground floor rear extension, alterations to front and rear fenestration.

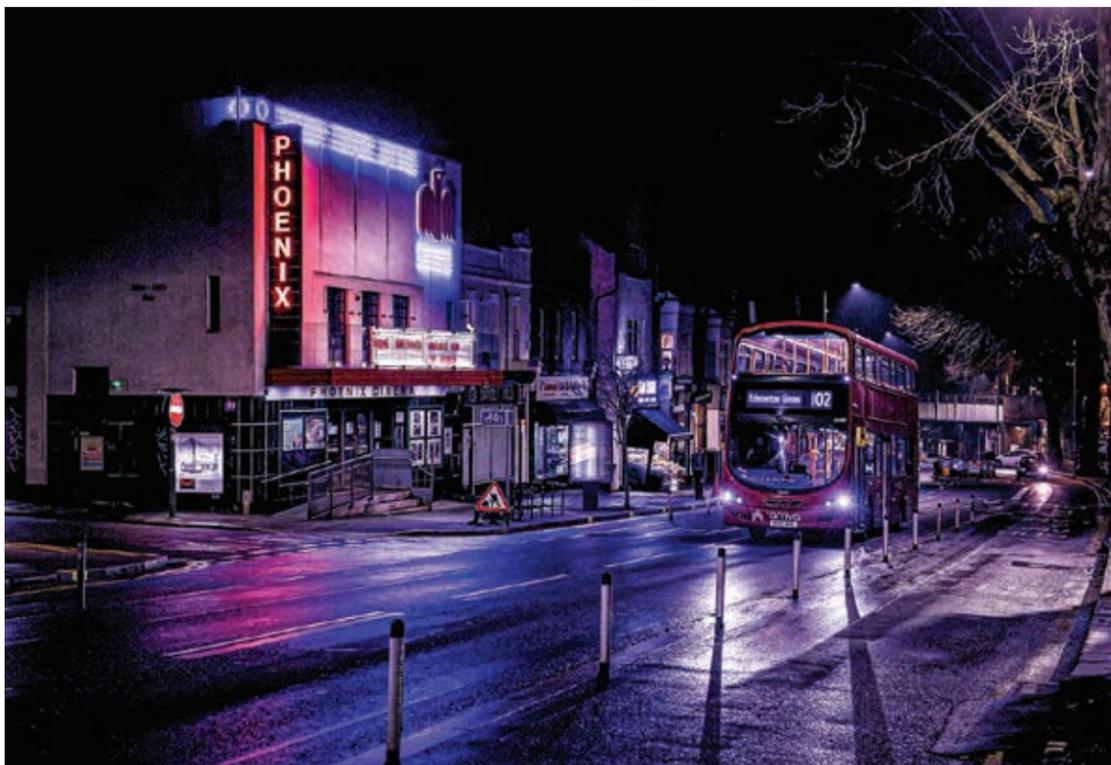
East Finchley Baptist Church

We meet each Sunday for worship at 10.30 am. If you would like to join us please go to our website for further details. All welcome.

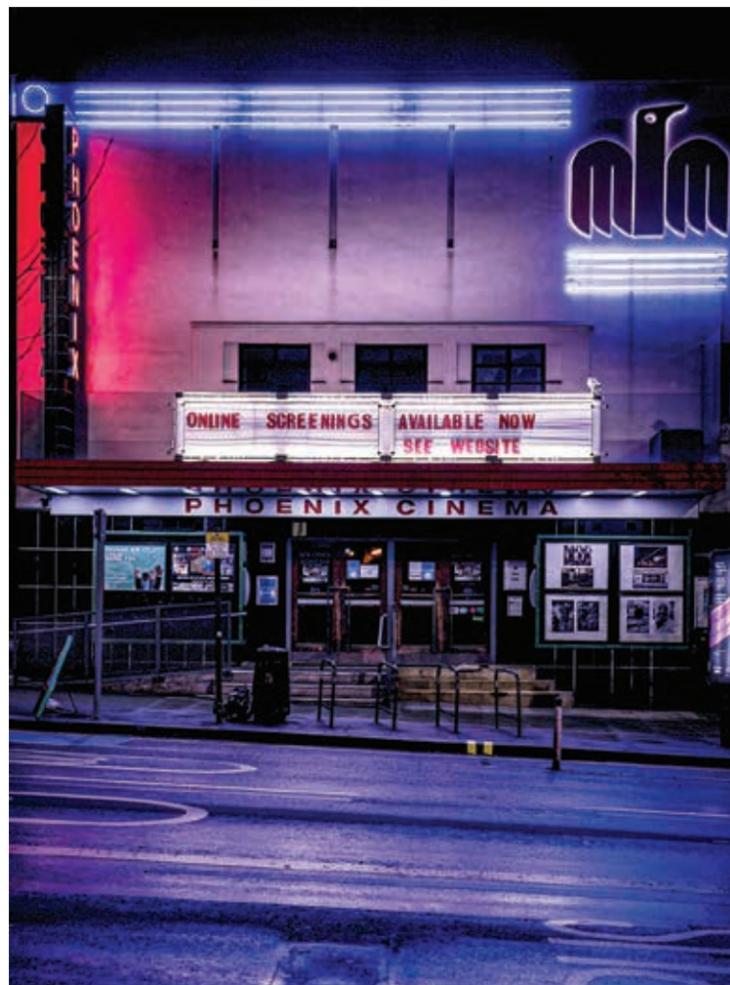
For more information please contact the Church Office
Email: office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk
www.eastfinchleybc.org.uk



There is a light that never goes out



Bright lights: The Phoenix Cinema and the High Road by night. Photo Daniel Murray



Shine on: The front of the Phoenix stays bright despite being shut. Photo Daniel Murray

By John Lawrence

The wet surface of the High Road is bathed in an electric blue glow from the neon lights of the Phoenix Cinema as an all-but-empty double decker heads up to Fortis Green on the night run in this wonderfully atmospheric shot by photographer Daniel Murray.

And, in Daniel's close-up, the valiant Phoenix keeps its cheerful lights shining out on N2 as it waits to find out when

it can reopen for business after a year of lockdown.

There's a big city feel to Daniel's photos and that's not

surprising because he is accustomed to capturing the bright lights and bustle of Hong Kong, where he has lived and worked for eight years.

Stranded

For the last three months, however, he's had to adjust to a quieter life in East Finchley. He and his wife Elisa were visiting her mother Elizabeth Harca in Church Lane over Christmas and New Year when the Hong Kong government banned all flights from the UK as part of pandemic precautions.

Luckily Daniel had brought his camera gear with him so could carry on taking photos but he has lost a lot of his hard-won work back home and has no idea how much will still be waiting for him when he does eventually return.

Elisa, who runs a business marketing network in Hong Kong, told us: "Although it's been very stressful and we had no idea we would get stuck, we are very grateful for the time we have had to spend with family during lockdown in the UK. "If flights are still blocked we'll try to go back via another country such as Dubai or Thailand, where we will have to quarantine for 21 days, then another 21 days in Hong Kong quarantine, so a total of 42 days in hotels which will definitely break the bank, sadly."

Following a dream

Daniel, who is self-taught, started out in property man-

agement after studying in Birmingham and moving to Hong Kong. Three years ago, he decided to follow his love of photography by launching his own studio, and his career as a freelance photographer has gone from strength to strength.

Let's hope the couple can get home safely and settle back into the life they've built out there. Find out more about Daniel's work at www.danielmurraystudio.com



Food project volunteers being filmed by RTHK for the UK segment of their documentary 'Beyond the Pandemic'. Photo: Mike Coles

A year of support

By Alys Wainwright

Volunteers from East Finchley Neighbourhood Support's Food Project stood for one minute's silence on 23 March to mark the national day of reflection, one year after the country entered its first lockdown.

The date was especially significant as it also marked a year since East Finchley Neighbourhood Support was founded. One year on, the group is now registered as a Community Interest Company, offering support to isolated residents and running the N2 Food Project.

The Food Project operates on Tuesdays between 10.30am -12.30pm from the Phoenix Cinema, handing out food to anyone who needs it, with no referral needed.

Pay it Forward

A "Pay it Forward" option also allows those that can afford it to make a donation to cover

the cost of a meal for themselves and provide a free meal for someone else.

Chef Giuseppe Sollo set out to bring the fine dining experience to everyone, no matter what their circumstances. Such has been the success of the project that Hong Kong-based broadcaster RTHK chose to feature the Food Project as part of its documentary, Beyond the Pandemic, which examines how communities in different countries have coped with the global pandemic.

You can find out more about the project and donate at www.ILoveN2.co.uk/Food-Project.

Protect your home again

Police in East Finchley are warning residents to take their home security seriously after noticing a gradual rise in the number of burglaries.

Generally, there were fewer burglaries than normal over the winter because so many of us were at home but now we are returning to work our homes could be vulnerable again, says the East Finchley Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Officers urge everyone to invest in good locks on doors and windows to stop burglars in their tracks, and also an alarm as a preventative measure.

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Final journey: The tank hearse arrives at Islington and St Pancras Cemetery. Photo Phillip Raphael

Tank hearse rolls up for funeral of an enthusiast

A former British Army tank converted into a hearse was seen being driven into the Islington and St Pancras Cemetery in East Finchley for a funeral on Wednesday 3 March. The FV432 was modified by enthusiast Nick Mead, who runs Northamptonshire-based company Tanks A Lot, and has been used in many funerals of former soldiers.

In this case, according to the MyLondon website, the funeral was that of London nightclub owner Mayuan Mak, who died suddenly in December aged 55. Mr Mak was a big fan of military hardware and owned

a number of tanks himself. Our photo was taken by reader Phillip Raphael who said he was passing the cemetery when he heard the sound of an armoured vehicle rumbling up the road.

The tank had been trans-

ported on a lorry from its base near Milton Keynes to Mr Mak's home in Angel, Islington, before carrying his coffin through the streets of north London to East Finchley.

Regulators move in to shut down solicitors

Solicitors firm Cree Godfrey & Wood, one of East Finchley's longest-standing businesses, was closed down on Thursday 25 March by the industry's regulators.

Notices appeared in the windows of the firm at 28 High Road to inform clients and customers that the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) was handing over all ongoing cases to an intervening agent based in Bournemouth. A statement on the SRA's website said the decision had been taken because there was "reason to suspect dishonesty" on behalf of a manager, and because the same manager and the firm had failed to comply with the body's principles and accounts rules. Just last year, Cree Godfrey & Wood marked 200 years of providing legal services. For 65 of those years it has been based in East Finchley. It offered residential and commercial conveyancing, landlord and tenant advice, a wills service and services connected to business law.

Existing clients were told the firm could no longer act for them and instead to contact the intervening agent Chris Evans, of Lester Aldridge, Russell

House, Oxford Road, Bournemouth, BH8 8EX. Enquirers were directed to call 01202 786341 or email interventions@la-law.com.

The SRA is the regulator of more than 200,000 solicitors and law firms in England and Wales. It states its purpose is to protect the public by ensuring that solicitors meet high standards and by acting when risks are identified.

Not quite end of the road for café

By Diana Cormack

After 30 years in business the New Local Café, currently at 42 High Road and previously at the corner of Lincoln Road, is to close though not, as some might think, a victim of the pandemic.

Throughout these difficult times the café has continued to serve its many customers wherever possible. But in mid-March a notice on the front window revealed that their lease had come to an end with the landlady being unwilling to renew it.

No connection

Disappointed with her decision, from June of this year they will have no connection with the premises which they say she proposes to run herself as a café at the front with a studio flat at the rear.



New start: The New Local Cafe team are moving on.

Staff at the Local Café want to say a massive thank you all their customers for supporting them for many years. They said: "It has been a great pleasure to be a part of such an amazing community."

Cup of Joy

Take heart, however, for things are not at an end. They recently opened Cup of Joy at 117 High Road, which has been well received by locals. Staff will be happy to see you and serve you.

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Gleaming: Aston Martins, MGs, Porsches and Alfa Romeos make up just part of the car collection at Hexagon Classic Cars. Photos Mike Coles.

Lift the bonnet on a truly luxury line-up

By Mike Coles

Let's say an elderly relative has left you £665,000 in their will, specifically for you to buy and drive the vintage Aston Martin DB4 Vantage car that you've always wanted. Where would you go to buy such a rare and desirable item at such a reasonable price: Beverly Hills, Mayfair, Monte Carlo or East Finchley?

Of course, as you guessed, it's East Finchley. Hexagon Classic Cars, on the Great North Road, has one of the best collections of pristine classic cars available for sale. At any one time there are around 50 classic cars in the showroom, which also houses photos, posters and much other interesting car memorabilia.

you to work or to the shops but as pieces of fantastic precision engineering and sculptural styling that transcended the mundane and were as aesthetically valued as a Stradivarius would be to a violinist.

He started a car business in a small garage in Hampstead, before moving to Highgate in 1966 where he dealt in some of the world's most prestigious brands, including Porsche, Aston Martin, Alfa Romeo, Ferrari and Lotus. Outgrowing that Highgate base, he moved to his present premises in East Finchley 25 years ago.

Paul's personal car collection today includes an Eagle E-Type, an ex-Stirling Moss Aston Martin DB4 GT, a 1952 Bentley Fastback and an Aston Martin Sanction III Zagato.

Cars and much more

In 2016 he joined forces with his late wife Racheline, an interior designer, to add a display of ceramics and decorative arts to the Hexagon experience, which continues today. As Paul's plan for the East Finchley site develops, when the current restrictions allow, he will complete a café restaurant, having successfully opened specialist food and wine shop Bottles N Jars next door. Jam jar is, of course, cockney rhyming slang for car.



Collector: Paul Michaels

One such item at the front of the showroom is a full-size wooden model of a Mercedes gull wing 300 SL Roadster, one of two originally commissioned by a German collector. Hexagon chairman Paul Michaels spotted it at a motor show and purchased it before the show began to place on the Hexagon stand where it has received much attention.

Passion for cars

In the 1960s, north Londoner Paul had a passion for cars, not just as vehicles to take



Wood you believe it? This full-size model of a Mercedes gull wing 300 SL Roadster was bought from a motor show and now has pride of place in the showroom's front window. Photo Mike Coles.

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A glimpse inside the factory gates

By David Melsome

The back-page article in our February edition on the history of the huge Simms motor parts factory that used to operate off Oak Lane, N2, has evoked a flood of memories from those who used to work there or had family members who did.

As noted in Charles Haydn's article, during its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s everyone in East Finchley is likely to have known someone working at the plant. It employed hundreds of local people, working four shifts across 24 hours.

One was Vic Nutting, whose son Chris wrote to us about his father's working life at Simms, and his own memories of being taken into the factory for family parties. He recalls the workers pouring out at the end of the day "like ants" and all the thriving clubs and facilities that together made the plant feel like a mini-town in its own right.

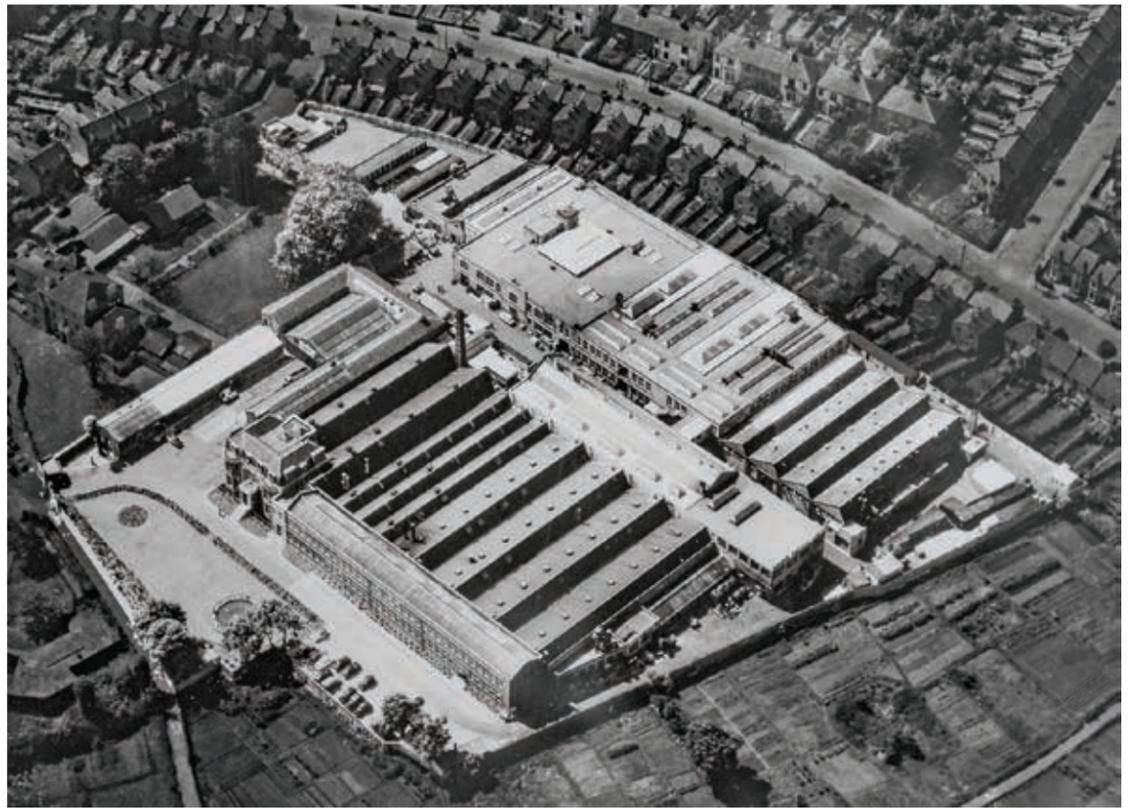
Another is Ray Walker, who served his apprenticeship

at Simms from 1957 to 1962, staying on for another three years before taking a job in east London. He paints a fascinating picture of what life was like for the workers inside the factory gates.

Dads' Army

And at the same time our photo editor Mike Coles was browsing through the book *Barnet at War*, issued by Barnet Borough Archives 23 years ago, when he came across a wartime photo of the factory's very own Home Guard unit from 1944.

The photo shows 45 men in full uniform in one of the factory yards, with their two senior officers in the middle rows. Although many of these



Mini-town: The Simms factory occupied a huge site alongside Long Lane, N2

men would have been of fighting age, presumably their job producing engine parts for tanks and trucks was a protected occupation and therefore they were allowed to serve on the home front.

Four canteens and a boxing club

By Ray Walker

I served my five-year apprenticeship at Simms Motor Units. They took 10-15 boys a year, I think over three grades: craft blue collar, technical red collar and engineering green collar (the clever lads).

It was excellent training with day release for HNC and HND certificates which stood me in good stead for the rest of my working life. We had a good canteen, four in fact: the works canteen, the staff canteen, the senior staff canteen with silver service, and a directors' dining room at The Grange manor house next door to the factory in Oak Lane.

The works canteen was used for amateur boxing shows occasionally in the evenings. We also had a social club with a shop and a big games room, a decent sur-

gery where the apprentices had an annual medical, and a works' barber, would you believe?

I started at Simms in 1957 as a technical apprentice on £2-16s-4d a week and had 6d for the social club and 1d for the Red Cross deducted. I left Simms in 1965 and went to work for Scholl, the foot people, in east London, for an extra £1 a week. I retired 19 years ago aged 60 as the operations director of Scholl's factory in Derby, where I still live. I can say that Simms training helped me enormously over the years.



Fighting on the home front: The Simms Home Guard unit 1944

An incredibly friendly place to work

By Chris Nutting

I lived with my parents Vic and Gwen Nutting in Sedgemere Avenue, East Finchley, from when I was born on 4 May 1951 until I married on 18 September 1976. Since that time, I have lived in south-west London but have always kept an interest in East Finchley.

I attended Holy Trinity Primary School and then Finchley County Grammar School. My father was a survivor of the sinking of the troopship *Lancastria* off St. Nazaire, France on 17 June 1940.

He joined Simms Motor Units on in November 1955 and on joining was given the book entitled *The Simms Story from 1891*.

You are absolutely correct that it seemed everybody in East Finchley had a member of their family or somebody they knew that worked at Simms. My father worked there until he retired in 1982 although in the last few years he worked in Colindale for a subsidiary and he said that the camaraderie of Simms had gone out of the window.

I have several vivid recollections. During the early part of December employees' children were invited to a Christmas Party and it was a very



Simms engineer: Chris's dad Vic on his 65th birthday

grand affair. I reckon somewhere in the region of 100 children attended each year probably up to being young teenagers. Party food, party games, entertainment and presents were the order of the day.

There were many clubs run by the employees for the benefit

of the employees. My parents had a neighbour who was of Italian origin. I knew him as Primo Berg (although his real surname was Italian and much longer) and along with his wife (who was not an employee) they ran the 'Olde Tyme Dancing Club'.

There were many clubs including tennis, dramatics, swimming, cricket (ladies and gentlemen), football and rifle to name a few. Apparently, it was an incredibly friendly place to work long before the adage of 'work-life balance' was ever thought of.

I walked home from my grammar school on the High Road, North Finchley, and often waited outside the front entrance of the company for my father to finish work, as it was on the way home for me. A hooter was sounded to mark the end of the working day and I was always astonished at the number of workers leaving the factory. They really were like ants.



Home from school: Chris Nutting and his mum Gwen in The Causeway, N2, in 1964.



Pavement art: Ben Wilson at work on the High Road. Photo Steve Carr
Inset: Miniature: Ben's painting of the Bald Faced Stag

What can you see down there, Ben?

Thanks to *Archer* reader Steve Carr for sending us this photo of 'chewing gum man' Ben Wilson in action on the pavement outside Amici Delicatessen in the High Road last month.

Ben is famous for his impromptu artwork, always using the miniature canvas of gum trodden into the pavement and thereby making an ugly splatter look beautiful.

When Steve spotted him, he was laid full stretch on a mat on the ground as usual and painting his view of the Bald Faced Stag across the road, complete with passing traffic and a swirling sky above.

Ben, who lives in Muswell Hill, makes forays across

London for his art. One of the last times he was seen in East Finchley was a year ago when he painted gum outside the Offshoot Art Gallery in the High Road just before everything began shutting for the first lockdown (*The Archer*, April 2020).

It seems appropriate for us to print his portrait of the Bald Faced Stag this April as we look forward to the expected reopening of our pubs, or those with beer gardens and outdoor spaces at least. Drink up!



N2 Mums: Katy Hodges, left, and Emmy West

Dig at the pasture

Long Lane Pasture is hoping to reopen by Easter after being closed for a number of weeks while UK Power Networks carried out essential maintenance on electricity cables that run under the wildlife haven. The excavations were deep so the site was closed for safety reasons, although its Saturday morning volunteer tidy-up sessions kept running.

Share your experience of being a mum

By Waddah Salih

N2 Mums Speak is a new project providing a supportive space for local mums to meet and share their experiences of motherhood

The project, which has been funded by Grange Big Local, was recently founded by Katy Hodges and Emmy West, two mums who themselves became close friends after meeting at a volunteer-run sling library. Describing how much they both got out of community groups, Emmy said: "Thinking about mums missing out on that during Covid, it's heart-breaking."

Weather-permitting, their first meeting will take place at the Barnwood Community Garden, Tarling Road on Saturday 24 April followed by further Saturday meetings on 22 May and 12 June.

Though the sessions will also feature short talks from two local mums, the founders

hope they will also create a space for mums to connect and learn from each other. "Mums are experts in their own lives", said Katy. "We want them to come and talk about their own experiences of being a mother."

Their N2 Mums Speak group is especially keen that mums from disadvantaged backgrounds come forward and it can also fund childcare costs for those needing to free up a little time to prepare a talk for other attendees.

To book a place at an upcoming meeting, or if you are interested in speaking at one, get in touch with the team via email at N2MumsSpeak@gmail.com or visit ILoveN2.co.uk/N2-mums-speak or [Instagram.com/n2mumsspeak](https://www.instagram.com/n2mumsspeak).

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Science club proves learning can be fun

Little Volcanoes was created by experienced teacher Janka Mldenova and her science club classes are now being offered by the Grange Big Local project and also to local primary schools and parents.

Janka believes that in order to learn children need to be taught how to observe and explore things around them using all their senses, because the more senses involved in learning the better the understanding and lasting memory.

They should be encouraged to ask many questions and given an opportunity to verify their answers. Learning should be through hands-on activities, singing and sensory play. Almost everything around us is science and it's fascinating, providing it's taught in an interesting and fun way.

Hunger for learning

And this is what Little Volcanoes does, she says. "When I created my first ever science club for 3-5 year old children in a pre-prep school and nursery in Kensington, 14 years ago, I was told that I was being dreamy, and that children of that age cannot learn science. I proved everyone wrong," she says.

"The children were like little sponges and they learned so quickly, even very difficult science concepts. When I decided to resume my science classes again, after many years of teaching in primary or special need schools, I was delighted to see that the hunger for learning was still there. Now we offer after-school science classes, birthday par-

ties, special events and online classes to 'feed' those hungry for information."

Janka's club gives children the opportunity not only to watch someone conducting an experiment but to get involved by setting and performing fun experiments while learning a variety of interesting topics across biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, geology, ecology, and astronomy.

With funding from Grange Big Local, Janka is running a series of seven free online fun science sessions for Y1-Y4 children. Visit www.littlevolcanoes.co.uk for details.



Hands-on: Janka Mldenova



Puppet show is ready to film... from home

By Jake Eiseman-Renyard

You may recall the article 'Puppet Show Needs a Hand' where I asked for volunteers for a production two years ago. Having intended to do it as a live show, a late switch made it a filmed production at the Chocolate Factory Studios in Wood Green.

Once post-production editing (delayed by the lockdown) is completed, it will be pitched to TV and stage theatre companies and it was mentioned in a conference on sustainability at the House of Lords last year. All of this was made possible by those who volunteered.

With the latest lockdown preventing me from using another puppet to sing songs in street collections for the Whittington Hospital, their fundraising department suggested an online puppet show, viewable for donations towards the NHS.

Building on how popular the first production was, I am looking for volunteers to help with an animal puppet version of Dick Whittington, which seemed the obvious choice for

the Whittington Hospital, to be filmed from home with green screens with the characters being edited together in post-production.

If anyone reading this would like to help with the project, please contact me at jakeeisemanrenyard@gmail.com

Activities in the open air

A free creative 12-week community programme for East Finchley residents aged 55 plus is starting this month at Barnwood in Tarling Road, N2.

Organisers hope it will be a chance to meet and make new friends and to learn easy and fun crafts such as willow weaving, and making wildlife homes and feeders. Participants will be able to take part in a range of activities including light gardening, planting bulbs and story telling. Refreshments will be provided.

The sessions take place in the open space every Tuesday from 20 April. Twelve places are available. To book, call 07443 871289 or email waowcio@yahoo.com

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Try this science experiment for yourself

Here's one of the fun experiments that Janka runs as part of her Little Volcanoes sessions. The idea is to create a bubble inside a bubble, and here's how...

You will need: 250 ml warm water; 2 tablespoons washing up liquid; 1 tablespoon granulated sugar; a cup or beaker; a spoon for stirring; a pipette or straw; scissors, and a clean surface.

How to make the bubble solution

1. Pour about 250ml of warm water into the cup.
2. Add 1 tablespoon of granulated sugar to the water. Stir the solution until all of the sugar is completely dissolved.
3. Add 2 tablespoons of the washing up liquid to the water. Stir the solution gently and try not to make a lot of foam.
4. Now you can make a special bubble wand from a pipette. Use the scissors to cut off a tip from the bulb end of the pipette. You can use a straw if you don't have a pipette but the pipette would work better.

Prepare the surface

1. Clean the surface you will be using. You can use your kitchen table or other smooth surface (back of your baking tray, maybe) but make sure it is very clean (dirt or grease would prevent you from making great bubbles).
2. Use your fingers to spread some of the bubble solution onto the surface. Make a big wet circle.



Use your bubble wand

1. Dip the cut end of your bubble wand into the soap solution. It must be coated completely so you can dip even half of the wand in the solution to make sure it is not dry as this can cause popping bubbles.
2. Blow into the dry end of your bubble wand (if it is a pipette, the thin end) and hold it close to the wet surface to create a bubble hemisphere. Try to make a large bubble.
3. Dip the bubble wand in the bubble solution again and gently insert it inside the first bubble. Blow gently a second bubble on the wet surface inside the first bubble. You can make more than one bubble inside. Challenge yourself or your friends!

How to make the bubble solution stronger

If you leave the bubble solution rest for 24 hours it will be much stronger. You can cover the cup or transfer it into a bottle. The next day you will have a strong bubble solution to make amazing long lasting bubbles. Have fun!

Be our eyes and ears

The Archer has been going strong for 25 years thanks to the loyalty and support of its readers and advertisers, and the volunteers who deliver it to nearly 10,000 premises each month. Remember, it's your newspaper, and we rely on you to tell us what's going on in and around East Finchley. So if you have a story that you'd like others to know about, please get in touch. You can send your stories, letters, and photos by email to [news@the-](mailto:news@the-archer.co.uk)

the-archer.co.uk or by post to The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 2DE.

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Guessing game with a difference

By Daphne Chamberlain

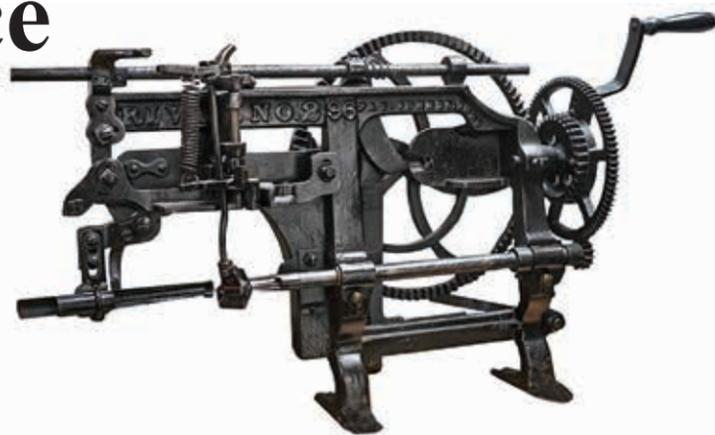
On the borders of Muswell Hill and East Finchley lives a man named Maurice Collins, who owns a huge collection of gadgets, contraptions, leaflets and posters totalling more than 3,000 items in all.

Maurice has no trouble in loaning items to museums across Europe. He was the co-founder of Kith and Kids, a charity that supports families dealing with learning disabilities or autism, and runs online presentations of them for that charity. He showed some in a free Zoom event presented by the Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association last month.

Maurice's collection covers the century between Britain's two great exhibitions of 1851 and 1951. He began by physically digging for bottles, pot lids and match strikers but nowadays says he can happily immerse himself for the day in eBay. Well, who wouldn't want an automatic marvel like a clockwork-powered self-pouring teapot?

On the call, we were intrigued, and mostly baffled, by 20-odd items for which we had to guess the use. Who would have imagined a hot water-bottle for a horse, drink-holders like binoculars on ribbons for racegoers, or a thumbsucker stopper?

Maurice's story began in



What's the gadget: can you guess what this device from Maurice's collection was used for in Victorian times? Find the answer at the bottom of the page.

Pages Lane, Muswell Hill, where he was apprenticed to a printer. We saw shots of him laying paper into a treadle printer, and setting letters by hand from a compositor's tray. In a non-digital age, booklets, leaflets, posters were what caught people's attention. One advertisement for Pears' soap used the optical illusion of sets of 'spinning' circles.

Other printed matter included recruitment posters for the First World War. These had to be compelling, as there was no compulsory

call-up for the first two years of that dreadful conflict. One gave the promise of baths, bed and breakfast, which has a hollow ring in hindsight. "I've always been fascinated by how words make people act," said Maurice.

MHFGA hope that Maurice Collins will show more of his collection to an actual meeting once Covid restrictions are over. Meanwhile, can you guess what the object in the photo was used for? Find the answer at the bottom of the page.

Helping hand

Disability charity MyAFK, based in Crouch End, has been awarded £100,000 by the Barclays 100x100 UK Covid-19 Community Relief Fund to support its

work with disabled young people and their families through the pandemic. AFK, formerly Action for Kids, is using the funding to move its education and employability programmes online.

Future plans

Barnet Council has launched The Barnet Plan outlining its vision and priorities for residents over the next four years. You can read it online at: www.barnet.gov.uk/the-barnet-plan

The council says the plan sets out four ways it will improve life in Barnet, and it has been developed following telephone surveys with 500 residents and in response to the wide-ranging effects of Covid-19 on Barnet's communities.

What's the gadget?
The gadget in Maurice's photo is an apple peeler from about 1880, which does just one apple at a time. When you put the apple on the end prongs and turn the wheel, it could do about 10 a minute. A very large machine for such a simple job, about two foot long, with lots of cogs.

Time to come clean on housework

By Diana Cormack

A recent report comparing the various effects coronavirus has had on men and women revealed that women have borne the brunt of housework during the pandemic. No surprise there then, as it is what previous articles on the topic have always told us anyway.

What has surprised me is the women of my acquaintance who have cut down on what they do about the house since the lockdowns began. I happily confess to being one of those who can now look at dust gathering on the furniture and let it be. After all, nobody will see it except my husband and me.

Of course, necessary tasks such as toilet, bathroom and kitchen cleaning can't be ignored, but other things can. However, with the approach of spring, will I feel drawn to join the annual cleaning fest like our ancestors before us? My paternal grandmother did, even though she took her opinion on housework to the grave.

Grandma died in 1970 at the age of 82. Among her effects was a poem which she had kept for many years. I believe she cut it out of the *Radio Times* decades before the feminist movement hit the headlines. Although Grandma never expressed them, she must have secretly shared the writer Mary Knight's views on housework. This was long before vacuum cleaners, washing machines and dishwashers were the norm, yet reading it I realise just how much I take after my grandma!

A Psalm of Home Life

(For the Other Listeners who find the Household Talks oppressive)

Tell us not in mournful numbers
How to keep our houses clean:
When to leave and seek our slumbers,
How to fill the hours between.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
Spotless homes are not its goal;
Who dusts, and then to dust returnest,
Leaves no rest for sole or soul.

Not enjoyment – surely sorrow
Is their destined end and way
Who so plan that each tomorrow
Is the same as yesterday.

Housework's long, and time is fleeting,
Must our wives, though stout and brave,
Go on bottling plums and beating
Carpets to the very grave?

In the world's broad field of battle
This seems a depressing strife.
Be not like dumb driven cattle!
Get some pleasure out of life!

Learning thrives in a new way

By Daphne Berkovi

Hampstead Garden Suburb's U3A is going from strength to strength by using Zoom to keep its group activities running for members in the comfort of their own homes.

U3A, or University of the Third Age, is a national organisation for the over-55s where volunteers come together to teach or learn new skills or areas of knowledge.

Thriving particularly well in the Suburb is a current affairs group led by Marion Godfrey who, prior to lockdown, used to squeeze in a maximum number of 14 members at her home but is now regularly meeting with more than 20 members online.

Marion says: "We usually end on a light-hearted note; for example, recently I held a news

quiz and we have had jokes, anecdotes and there has been a great deal of laughter in these troubled times."

Other groups have hosted topical talks on subjects as diverse as Art Nouveau architecture, 'How spies think' and a climate emergency session with BBC environment analyst Roger Harrabin.

This U3A has a full programme of speakers planned until the summer months and expects to continue its timetable online for the foreseeable future. To find out more, visit hgsu3a.uk

RICKY SAVAGE ...

"The voice of social irresponsibility"

May the Farce be with you

A long time ago in a city far far away, a new threat arose to challenge the galactic order and force the Knights of the Data to reveal themselves to the world. Yes, folks, welcome to the long-running franchise that is the Virus Wars. Or that's the way it feels in lockdown land.

We begin, of course, with The Phantom Virus before moving through The Attack of the Virus and the Revenge of the Virus until we get to the one where Boris Skywalker gets his light stick in an episode called A New Hopeless.

"May the Farce be with you," say the knights, and a darkness descends across the galaxy as the lights go out in shops and pubs. But all is not lost as Dom Solo travels across the stratosphere in his Millennium Rover to get his eyes tested and the Farce returns.

In the next episode of the franchise, the glorious summer sees happy, laughing people in bars and restaurants eating half-price food as Skywalker celebrates victory. But this is not called The Virus Strikes Back for nothing. Soon things are worse than ever and even Dom Solo has abandoned ship. What can save the galaxy?

Next in The Return of the Data, Skywalker is handed a new secret weapon in the shape of The Vaccine. Now the galaxy can be saved, light sticks can be waved and a road map to freedom presented to the people. But there is a problem. The E-Ewe are angry and Skywalker has to pacify them before the Vaccine can be unleashed and victory secured.

Yes, there will be that grand moment at the end of the movie where someone gets a medal, Skywalker gets the girl and Darth Virus is consigned to history. But then again, if he's got the map upside down or he's using a dodgy satnav we may be heading for another sequel as The Farce Awakens.



Back in the saddle for an early spring ride

By Greta Brambilla

Here's a family-friendly bike route following some interesting cycle paths towards Temple Fortune and back. It's just over 1 hr and 15 mins and starts at All Saints' Church in Durham Road, N2. Remember to obey No Cycling signs on paths.

From Durham Road turn left at Huntingdon Road to reach the High Road. Cross over carefully onto Kitchener Road, then turn right at Market Place, followed by a left towards The Archer Academy.

At the mini roundabout, follow the path right that runs next to the school to East End Road (spot the boat in the last house!). Turn right, then take a swift left down Cromwell Close, follow the narrow pathway and then another pathway at Abbots Gardens.

Turning right onto Brim Hill, keep going until Ossulton Way, cross over onto Hill Top and continue. Eventually you'll find a small roundabout which you should follow left, leading to Falloeden Way. Turn right, checking out 'the garden of curiosities' on your left, and follow the cycle path here.

Cross over Finchley Road and enter the park downhill, turning right just before the bridge to reach the North Circular. Make a direct left onto Courtleigh Gardens, cutting through the narrow passageway at the end to Bridge Lane.

Turn back towards home here and continue



Off road: The shared path keeps you off the busy road



Safe passage: There is a shared cycle and pedestrian path alongside the A1

back to Finchley Road where you should turn left again. Follow the scent to Daniels Bakery; it does brilliant bagels. At the end of the road (Henlys Corner), cross over, following the downhill path to your right. Exit at the end and turn left, following next to Addison Way. Continue, pass the brook, and onto Capital Ring where you should keep going straight.

Follow the course of the brook until it ends, then continue on the path next to Lyttelton Road until you finally near Great North Road, with the vintage shop on your left. Go left there, then carefully make a right onto Woodside Avenue and pass the roundabout. When you see the tennis courts on your right, go left onto the path (at Simmons House), admiring the modern houses here. Then cross over onto Fortismere Avenue which leads to Fortis Green and back to the start. Woohoo!



Route map: The journey takes you to Temple Fortune and back through Hampstead Garden Suburb

Radio station offers air time

By Diana Cormack

Anyone looking for the chance to get their music aired on radio could be lucky if they visit hot97uk, the radio station co-founded by East Finchley's Pat 'Have Mercy' Leacock (January 2021).

Pat is running a section for acts who have created any genre of music, which he will do his best to play. All songs must be original and created by the artist or group and should be unsigned acts and songs that have not been released on a record label yet. The quality of the recordings must be of a good standard.

Tribute to John Peel

Pat believes that many people have created music over lockdown and says it would be great



New music: Radio host Pat Leacock

to get them aired on his show 'The All-Sorts Music Selection'. However, this isn't limited to music during lockdown but can be from any year or decade. Scheduled to be broadcast on the first Monday of the month from 10-11pm, he describes it as his "homage to the late great radio DJ John Peel".

Remembering what it was like not to have an outlet to be heard on at the beginning of his own music career has

inspired Pat to give others a chance by submitting their mp3 formatted songs with artist name, title and genre. "They make it...hot97uk.com will do our best to play it!" is the slogan.

With the station's thousands of worldwide listeners, it's a fantastic platform to get your tunes heard all over the world. Please note the station will not accept band names, song titles or lyrics deemed to be offensive to others.

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3 April - Holy Saturday – 7.45 p.m.
The Easter Vigil and First Mass of Easter

4 April - Easter Day – 10.00 a.m.
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Still moving towards a plastic-free East Finchley

By Ann Inglis, of No2PlasticsN2

Since No2PlasticsN2 began in East Finchley, Gardner and Nash's Budgens have switched to only using paper bags both in store and for carrying away. And across the road Meze and Shish are using foil containers with cardboard lids and paper bags for takeaways.

In the world that emerges from the pandemic, we must not continue pouring ever-compounding quantities of non-compostable, single-use plastics onto the land and into the oceans. They are the only land and oceans we will ever have.

Help us continue our conversations with shop owners and managers of shops in East Finchley. Seeing our signs in shop windows, passers-by will be able to see which shops are committed to reducing and finally eliminating single-use plastics from the High Road.

To all shop owners, please tell us about the steps you are taking towards eliminating single-use plastics and we will celebrate them wherever we can, in print, on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @No2plasticsN2.

Our amendment

We petitioned Lord Zac Goldsmith asking him to propose an amendment to the Environment Bill 2019/21, soon to enter the House of Lords, to ban single-use plastic carrier

bags (SUPCBs). He replied, or rather DEFRA did on his behalf.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as proposed in the Bill, we heartily endorse. Polluters must pay to clean up the mess their products leave behind. Coping with the detritus inevitably leaves imprints on the environment in the form of carbon footprints.

In the letter, Lord Goldsmith argued that paper bags have a significantly larger carbon footprint than SUPCBs. While this might be true for their manufacture and transport it is untrue when the carbon footprint for their disposal or recycling is taken into account. When recycling, bear in mind that only 15% of plastics in the western world ever get recycled and when they do a similar volume of virgin plastic is always added.

We have reiterated our request to Lord Goldsmith to propose our amendment. As an insurance measure, we have also asked Baroness Jones of Whitchurch to propose it if Lord Goldsmith does not.

N2United: Cycle lanes, workshops and recovery grants

By Chris Stavrou

N2United's March meeting was another successful exchange of ideas and information centred on the local area, with contributions from Age UK, the Food Project and Friends of Cherry Tree Wood.

Councillor Claire Farrier discussed important issues including continued concerns about the cycle lanes and reduced parking on the High Road and the effect on access to local businesses. The cycle lane scheme will be reassessed 18 months after its introduction in September 2020 and a decision made on whether or not to keep it. Barnet Council is still eager to hear from local residents about how well or badly they feel it is working.

Julia Hines and Linda Sou, of The Grange Big Local, spoke about the success of their various grant schemes and a number of recipients shared their stories of how they have benefitted, including enthusiastic teacher Janka, the founder of Little Volcanoes, which is running a series of online science workshops geared towards making science fun.

The meeting also heard

from Katy of N2 Mums Speak, a new group to support mothers, and Aku Adjei of Music and Motivation, which uses sound and music to help parents who have been home-schooling re-motivate themselves. Grange Big Local Covid Recovery Grants are still available for local residents who have struggled with the effects of the pandemic. They can apply for a

Unnecessary alarm

Dear Editor,

The other day a friend of mine phoned to say she had received an NHS letter telling her it was very important that she should shield from the Covid virus. A bit late in the day, you might think, as she is very nearly 96, and has never received a shielding letter before. She was also told that she should take up the offer of a vaccine jab.

She tried to phone to say that she has already had her first jab and is almost ready for the second, but of course couldn't get through.

We know that people are receiving these unnecessary letters all the time. As my friend said, an elderly person living alone could be very frightened by suddenly being told it was very important to shield (after a year), and the unnecessary vaccine letters might make a person who was a bit confused try to get another jab when they didn't need to.

It's such a shame when the vaccinations are mostly carried out so smoothly.

Susan Stevenson,
Address supplied.

Send your correspondence to: "Letters Page" The Archer, PO Box 3699, London N2 2DE or e-mail news@the-archer.co.uk

Letters without verifiable contact addresses will not be printed. Contact details can be withheld on request at publication. We reserve the right to abridge letters for reasons of space.

Letters



Hold-up the front page

Dear Editor,

As I was tidying away the latest copy of *The Archer*, after it had been read by every member of the family, I noticed that my nine-year-old son Wilf had been

doodling on the front page, see picture. I wondered if it might amuse.

Best wishes and keep up the outstanding work.

Verity Meier
Leslie Road, N2.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.

Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



Too heavy to park on our pavements

By Ann Bronkhorst

One side effect of the survival and success of the construction industry during the pandemic is the increasing numbers of large delivery vehicles trying to navigate our car-lined streets. Here's an example of what's happening.

For the last year I've watched with interest the gutting, re-making and extending of a small terraced house nearby. In November a heavily loaded scaffolding lorry, unable to park there, pulled onto the yellow-lined pavement outside our corner house and broke several paving stones.

The driver seemed unconcerned. I got the registration number and took photos. Later, an elderly neighbour tripped over a raised slab, fell and complained to the council. I complained too. Barnet sent someone to assess the pavement damage and soon the slabs were replaced or relaid.



Cracked: The damaged pavement near Ann's house

In February this year an enormous truck parked on the same stretch of pavement and, as I watched, the paving slabs cracked (audibly), shifted and broke. The driver seemed upset, saying he'd been told there'd be enough access for parking and delivering but there wasn't. A van would have been more suitable, he said, and I agreed.

So I emailed his employers. The transport manager replied politely: misleading assurances had been received about access and, yes, a van would have been preferable but how and where to park a huge truck for the transfer between vehicles? And the council could deal directly with the firm's insurance company, which had been alerted.

Again, photos (by several neighbours too) and reports to Barnet Council and to Cllr Arjun Mittra; a week later the doughty repair crew arrived. No pedestrian accidents, luckily. But all over our borough, and in towns and cities all over the UK, this is happening more and more: massive haulage trucks and other large vehicles are manoeuvring along narrow streets and parking on pavements, with councils picking up the costs of the damage they do.

Is this to become routine, with cash-strapped councils dealing with the escalating wear and tear while residents walk gingerly on ever more ugly and dangerous pavements?



Exchange of ideas: The N2United meeting in full flow

grant of £500 to help get them on their feet again, via www.grangebiglocal.org

If you are a local business or organisation, visit n2united.co.uk to find out more and share your suggestions and ideas on how we can all make East Finchley an even better place to live and work. Or better still, join the next meeting on Thursday 8 April at 8pm via Zoom.

Your news

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The Archer

Published by East Finchley Newspapers, P.O. Box 3699, London N2 2DE. www.the-archer.co.uk



Tracks: Gill Steiner points out woodlice activity near Highgate Wood. They come in an array of colours. Photos Mike Coles.

Have you met the neighbours?

By Mike Coles

Around 18,000 people live in the four square miles that is East Finchley. We think of this as our own little patch with homes, shops and schools, but it's also home to a much bigger population, one we rarely see: woodlice.



Tell-tale signs: Woodlice leave trails where they have cleaned

Despite their rather 'lousy' name these are not in any way related to the parasitic insects that live off blood in our kids' hair. They are not even insects at all but crustaceans, close relatives to lobsters and crabs, that came ashore at some point in history and decided to live on land.

So, what has brought them to our attention? Our story begins a while ago when local resident and nature lover Gill Steiner spotted some strange trails on

her porch roof when looking out of a first-floor window.

"I suddenly noticed that there were minuscule trails across some of the clay tiles leaving cleaned areas and when I looked very closely it looked like something had been guzzling the dirt, which I found astonishing, particularly as it was on the first floor, not at ground level," she said.

Gill has a terrace in her back garden. A while later, when re-potting some plants,

she noticed these trails again. "When the pots were removed, I noticed the terrace was cleaner underneath." Now thoroughly intrigued she decided to do some research and it turned out that the answer was woodlice.

Nature's cleaners

These friendly creatures are part of an animal group called isopods. They can be found sheltering under rocks or flowerpots in the garden or hiding in compost heaps, where they avoid drying out in hot weather.

Common woodlice are important for their ability to feed off dead plants and creatures, recycling vital nutrients.

They play a vital role in the natural carbon dioxide cycle.

As Gill says: "It's humbling to realise that every night woodlice go about cleaning up the mess around them, and there's no shortage of atmospheric pollution, algae and dirt for them to tackle. Woodlice remind us of something which we human beings ignore: under our feet are creatures and organisms which break down plants and rotting wood and help keep the earth clean and free of debris. They return the basic vital nutrients back to the soil and to the ecosystems that rely on them."

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WOODLICE

1. There are around 30 species of woodlice in the UK. They are about 1 cm to 1.5 cm long.
2. The most common woodlice has smooth, shiny, grey 'armour' (an exoskeleton made up of segments or 'plates'), with yellow patches and lighter grey edges, but they also come in an array of colours from brown to pink
3. The woodlice is a herbivore and therefore only eats organic plant matter. They rarely eat live plants but do feed on the decaying leaves and rotting wood found in compost heaps, gardens and forest floors.
4. Being crustaceans, and still not totally adapted to living on land, they need damp environments to live in, but not too damp. In very wet conditions they might climb a wall or wander into your house to find some shelter.
5. They are only active in the cool of night, when they munch their way through any rotting vegetation leaving random clean trails behind if this happens to be on a hard surface.
6. Mother woodlice carry their brood around in a brood pouch on their stomachs, kangaroo-like.
7. Woodlice are harmless, don't carry any disease and are popular with gardeners. They even make good pets and are easy to keep in margarine containers as they are not able to climb up the sides. They just need some damp soil on the bottom and some house-hold vegetable scraps added occasionally.
8. Woodlice have endeared themselves to many people's hearts in the past and there are numerous common names for them, such as Bibble bugs, Coffin-cutters, Roly Polys, Slaters, Chiggy Wigs, Wood Shrimps and Tiggyhogs.

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