



When Santa said "See me for free"

By Jane Revell

Meeting Santa Claus is a magical moment for young children at Christmas time. But visiting Santa in his Grotto doesn't usually come cheap: £15 per child at Alexandra Palace, for example, or £50 for up to three people at toy store Hamleys. Not easily affordable prices for many parents, especially in these hard times.

Well, one day last November, East Finchley resident Paul Stephenson was starting to feel Christmassy and suddenly had an idea. "Times are a bit tough at the moment," he thought. "Wouldn't it be great if seeing Father Christmas could be completely free!"

Now, Paul knows a thing or two about Santa as for several years he was the Santa at Martin School. So he put his idea to friends: Millie Sutton, events planner and organiser, and Emma White-man, current Martin School Santa, and they were very happy to organise/promote and share Santa duty respectively.



Faster Christmas: Paul Stephenson dashes between visits

The High Road response was enthusiastic too. Tony's Continental donated a Christmas tree to raffle and Coffee Bank generously provided space for a grotto on their outside terrace, and some sweet treats. There were goody bags too, courtesy of Paul, his family and friends, with an activity book, little toy and free raffle ticket for the tree.

Family affair

So, on a bitterly cold Saturday afternoon in December, Santa Claus (Paul) aided by his elves (Paul's wife, Nicola, and his daughter, Iris) greeted excited children in his Coffee Bank grotto on the High Road. And around 3pm, Santa Emma took over so Paul could hot-foot it (!) down to Cherry Tree Wood where Sharon Harding and Sharon Hall of The Cherry Tree Cafe, inspired by Paul's initiative, were also offering children a free Santa encounter. Paul replaced David Harding: Santa shifts! Children here were all given a lovely book generously donated by the Children's Bookshop in Fortis Green Road.

A true family and community afternoon, giving pleasure to children and grown-ups alike, which, at the same time aimed to raise donations for the Finchley Food Bank. Let's hope this will be the first of many such events to come.

Think tank to examine the way we are governed

By Janet Maitland

A national commission has been created to generate ideas about improving how we as a country are governed. The Commission on Political Power has members from across the political spectrum and has been co-convened by East Finchley resident Frances Cook.

Frances was awarded the OBE for services to youth justice in 2010 and retired last year from the Howard League for Penal Reform where she was chief executive for 35 years.

"The commission is a kind of think tank," says Frances. "It's exploring how to reform our constitution, the skeleton on which our entire democracy hangs. We've already looked at the monarchy and the power of the executive, and now we're focusing on the House of Lords."

"Most democracies have second chambers like our House of Lords, but theirs are elected," she adds. "I wonder if we could make ours more representative by including council leaders and local mayors. I'm also interested in civic assemblies, made up of randomly selected people from all walks of life, which could run alongside the House of Lords."

Local power

A Labour councillor for



Reformer: Frances Cook

East Finchley during the 1980s, Frances has lived here for 40 years, moving here because a flat was available, but staying because she loves the area. "It's so friendly, and exciting too as there's so much happening."

Frances believes civic engagement is a powerful force. "I want to push power down to local government and local people. It really matters what happens locally because that is what politics is all about, not party politics."

Her strong sense of social justice has been a driving force throughout her life. As well as her long career at the Howard League, Frances has worked with Amnesty International, the School Food Trust and Barnet Primary Care Trust.

"It means I've spent my whole life lobbying for change," she says. "I'm like an engineer. I'm interested in how all the bits of government fit together and I want to influence that so I can contribute to national wellbeing."

To find out more, go to <https://commissionpolitical-power.uk>

RICKY SAVAGE ...

Back in the freezer

Ain't it amazing that we Brits get completely hung up on the weather? A couple of inches of snow and the whole country goes into meltdown and everything stops working. And snow in December? We don't expect the white stuff until January, but in 2022 the snow gods got in early, maybe because it was anniversary time.

Sixty years ago we got a sprinkling of snow in mid-December and then the real deal from the 22nd. That was when the snow swept down from the north and ushered in 62 days of snow on the ground.

The really heavy snowfalls came on Boxing Day and Devon and South Wales got 20 foot snow drifts. And it was cold, the January average temperature was -2C. This meant stranded villages on Exmoor and the RAF being called out to deliver food and ultimately to airlift people out. It made for jolly good black and white TV.

And things went downhill from there as the snow stopped food getting to the shops, people getting to work and trains getting through to deliver coal so people could keep warm. Which is when the British, being British, stopped moaning and started digging. Once they'd dug out the trains and rescued people from the moors the fun began.

For the first time in several hundred years the sea froze in Kent, but not far enough to let you walk to France. Rivers were different. At Oxford you could drive on the Thames, they had ice racing, the postman skied to work and you could try a new sport of snow skiing behind your friend's car.

And don't forget about the football. Back when men were men and there was no underoil heating football stopped for a couple of months. Long enough for teams like Chelsea to arrange a tour of Malta. Same thing happened to horse racing, but the horses preferred to stay at home.

In fact, as the snow stuck around until March, the only thing to do was to stay at home and listen to The Archers while you made a sledge and hoped you could get to work. If you wanted to go out, there was always the cinema. 1962 ended with the heat of *Lawrence of Arabia*, but the start of 1963 gave us the ultimate something-to-look-forward-to feel-good movie when *Summer Holiday* opened on 10 January. It became the biggest film of the year and I think I know why.

Give yourself a money MOT

Are you worried about money and bills, feeling the pinch or want to find out about welfare benefits and grants? Maybe you are approaching retirement or looking to refrain to start a new career.

Age UK Barnet is hosting a Managing Money in Later Life event with experts' talks and advice, information stalls and refreshments. It takes place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, N2, from 10am to 1pm

on Wednesday 25 January and is free to attend. All over 50s are welcome.

To find out more or book your place, contact Teresa on 07502 989 403 or email her on teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk.

COMING SOON AT ARTSDEPOT



Thu 19 Jan
Bring Your Own Baby Comedy

Grown up comedy - babies welcome!

Sat 21 Jan
Moscow Drug Club

An intoxicating evening of music.

Sun 22 Jan
Burglar Bill

A charming retelling of the classic children's book.

Wed 25 Jan
Hal Cruttenden: It's Best You Hear It From Me

Comedy from one of the UK's best loved stand ups.

Sat 4 Feb
Unfolding Theatre: Hold On Let Go

A poignant and personal show about memory.

Thu 9 Feb
ACE Dance and Music: Unknown Realms

A double bill of powerful dance.

Sun 12 - Thu 14 Feb
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...and lots more! See the full line up at artsdepot.co.uk

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