



Bond of trust: Stephen Steppens and his faithful companion Xena. Photo Mike Coles

# Guide dog Xena is a true princess among animals

By Lynn Winton

Two years ago, we reported that the long wait of local man Stephen Steppens to resume a normal life was finally over with the arrival of his guide dog Xena. Stephen, who has been blind since birth, had been forced to wait through most of the pandemic to be matched to a suitable companion following the retirement of his previous guide dog Owen in 2020.

We caught up recently with Stephen and we are delighted to share the news that today Stephen and Xena continue to be a perfect match. They were introduced because Stephen was a pioneer of a new scheme set up by Guide Dogs UK who were trialing a partnership with a puppy training school in Michigan.

Stephen was flown out to the US to meet and bond with Xena, a Golden Labrador, over an intensive three-week period. Xena is now three years old and ensconced in his East Finchley home, having responded very

well to the training that Guide Dogs UK give all new dogs and their owners.

On her arrival, Stephen says he was once again able to resume his active life. "We are so lucky, life is great," he said. "We're always out and about, on the tube, up the escalators, I'm in such good hands."

"She takes me to East Finchley station, Andrew's the chemist and everywhere else I want to go. We walk in Cherry Tree Wood where, when it's dry, I can let her off the lead. When it was flooded she got too wet and smelly."

Stephen's only complaint is the proliferation of Lime bikes left poorly positioned on the pavement and elsewhere. "People leave them all over the place and it makes outings more hazardous," he said. Lime bike users, please take note.

The pair are well known on Fortis Green and particularly in The Muswell Hill Club gym, where the team have always welcomed them with a dedicated space at reception, complete with water bowl, where Xena knows the routine is to calmly wait while Stephen works out in the studio.

## Twice the fun

Two events are taking place this month to tempt you to travel over to Hornsey Parish Church Hall at the foot of Muswell Hill, on the corner of Cranley Gardens and Park Road, N10 3AH.

On Saturday 23 November comes the monthly Indoor Car Boot Sale from 10am to 1pm. Admission is 50p and refreshments are available. For information, phone 020 8368 8180.

Then the following Saturday 30 November, it will be the church's annual Christmas Market from 1pm to 4pm, with hot food, home-made cakes, festive drinks and Christmas gifts

## Flag goes up on Cherry Tree first

By Diana Cormack

On the last Friday in September an enthusiastic group gathered round the newly erected flagpole near the tennis courts in Cherry Tree Wood to see it become Barnet Council's first and only green flag public park.

The Green Flag Award is managed by Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the UK Government, recognising and rewarding well-managed parks and green spaces, of which there are more than 200 in the borough.

Barnet Councillor for Environment and Climate Change Alan Schneiderman praised those who had put in so much effort into making Cherry Tree the first to reach this admirable achievement.

He said: "Cherry Tree Wood is a beautiful open space cherished by those in the local community and beyond, and I'm delighted that it has now been recognised with a Green Flag Award. I would like to thank our staff and local volunteers who work all year round to ensure the park is in excellent condition."

His words were directed at many of the onlookers who were members of The Friends of Cherry Tree Wood. Their chair Roger Chapman also paid tribute to the hard work of all the volunteer helpers, along with that of our local councillors Claire Farrier, Arjun Mitra and Alison Moore, as well as the two Sharons who run the Cherry Tree Café. And this may not be the last time! Roger Chapman said: "In large part, this award reflects the hours of hard work put in by so many volunteers in making Cherry Tree Wood so special



Pioneering park: The Green Flag goes up watched by friends and supporters of Cherry Tree Wood

for our community. We will be working hard to keep the flag flying in future years."

Paul Todd MBE, Keep Britain Tidy's Green Flag Award Scheme Manager, congratulated everyone involved. He said: "We know that staff and volunteers work tirelessly

to ensure that it maintains the high standards of the Green Flag Award. Everyone involved should feel extremely proud of their achievement."

Visit <https://friendsofcherrytreewood.home.blog> to learn more about the Friends.

## RICKY SAVAGE ... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

### Wrong side of the tracks

Remember 1964? It doesn't matter if you don't because I'm here to do it for you. It was the year The Beatles became the biggest thing since Cliff Richard, the year the third Bond film, *From Russia with Love*, hit the screens and schoolboys everywhere dreamed of owning an Aston Martin DB5.

It was also the year the Olympics turned up in Tokyo and, just to make the year even more memorable, the Japanese gave us the first modern, high-speed train, the Shinkansen, or bullet train. This 150mph+ glimpse of the future ran on special tracks and was the start of something special. It wasn't long before the whole of Japan was linked by modern, clean, punctual transport.

Meanwhile, what about Britain, the place that had invented the train? We were still welcoming the 19th century. Back then British Rail hadn't woken up to the idea that steam trains were dirty, polluting and about to become a historical dead end. When the rest of Europe went diesel or electric to rebuild their shattered railways, we invested in what we knew best, good old-fashioned steam.

#### Stuck in the past

The horrible dirty lumps of old engineering had looked good 30 years earlier, but by 1950 the only people still building them were the British. We had lots of coal and iron and we'd built the fastest steam train in the world. But that was yesterday. Launching a new range of steam engines in the 1950s was like deciding to reintroduce horse drawn carriages to combat global warming.

It wasn't just the trains. Britain was starting to get nostalgia fever. The Beeching Report got a lot wrong, but who, apart from train spotters and ageing spinster detectives, really needed the stopping train from Much Bickering to Duck's Bottom via Back Stabbing Junction?

It took until 1968 before British rail got rid of the last main line steam train. It wasn't until the late 1970s that we got modern InterCity trains and even then they were dirty, late and had a habit of breaking down outside Biggleswade due to the wrong sort of leaves on the line.

And high-speed trains? The French, Germans and Italians got there long before we got to the Eurostar. Looking ahead, HS2 isn't going to link Manchester and London and Leeds; it's just about going to manage Birmingham and a field in West London. If this is the age of the train, then Britain is still stuck in a siding.

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