



How Matt will use his honour to push for change

By Lynn Winton

Matt Cain, successful writer, journalist and gay activist, moved into his home in Fortis Green Avenue, N2, with husband Harry Glasstone and Nellie the cat 18 months ago. Meeting at his local café Green and Blossom, we talked about exploring his new surroundings, his body of work in writing and broadcasting, and mainly his MBE, awarded in the New Year's honours list.



Breakthrough: Matt Cain hopes his MBE will bring more recognition to other writers and gay characters

Matt, 50, who has been honoured as a writer and broadcaster for services to LGBTQ+ culture, grew up amongst a close extended family in Bolton, but was horrifically bullied and marginalised at school. "So after decades of fighting prejudice and hard work, when I opened the honours letter from the Cabinet Office I burst into tears," he said.

"I am hoping its heft enables me to carry on pushing for change, so I can help talented authors writing about gay characters to get more recognition at major literary festivals, and that younger gay writers won't have such a hard time breaking through."

Unflinching

Matt's latest and seventh novel *One Love*, has been described as "rich, funny, poignant and an unflinchingly honest portrayal of friendship, love and everything in between" and he thinks it's his best yet.

"My third novel, *The Madonna of Bolton*, was rejected for 10 years, due to its gay protagonist and theme. Once I realised the rejections were purely for homophobic

reasons, I turned to crowdfunding to publish it and reached the target in just seven days." Pledges came in from 28 countries and backers included fellow popular authors David Walliams, David Nicholls and Lisa Jewell. Matt writes daily in his book-lined third-floor eyrie, with "walking to think" in Highgate Wood and Queen's Wood an essential component of his routine. "We're great friends with the actress Harriet Thorpe (who plays Elaine Peacock in *EastEnders*) who has lived in East Finchley for years and she was one of the reasons we ended up here. In the summer she took us to the East Finchley Festival and we absolutely loved it!"

In conversation

Matt's latest novel was published last month and is widely available. He will be discussing his life and novels in conversation with Clare Gardner at Finchley Church End Library on Sunday 4 May at 11am, as part of the Barnet Libraries Literary Festival. Further details about the festival are not yet available but will be in a future edition of *The Archer*. Find out more at mattcainwriter.com

Regeneration champion named in New Year's Honours

This New Year's Honours list brought recognition for James Masters, who was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community, as Chair of the Grange Big Local regeneration project in East Finchley. Here he explains what the honour means to him.

While I've put in a lot of work, and my name may be on the medal, it feels far more like a recognition of what we've achieved together through Grange Big Local (GBL).

GBL has always been about bringing people together to make real, lasting changes in our community. When the programme began, it offered an incredible opportunity: £1 million to transform our area over a decade, led entirely by residents.

That's no small challenge and has required a lot of commitment from me as Chair, but it's also what makes Big Local special: it puts the decisions and power in the hands of the people who live here.

Creative change

Looking back, I'm so grateful for what we've accomplished. We supported a range of projects including Barnwood N2, which reclaimed a neglected space and turned it into a community forest.

This space later hosted N2 Mums Speak (and others) during the pandemic and was featured on BBC London News.

We funded Bread n Butter, which tackles social isolation, and Art Against Knives, which empowers young people through creativity. We contributed funding to an outdoor play and learning space called 'Green Arrows' at The Archer Academy, and an inspirational local changemaker for whom we seeded a small grant to support girls' football locally, an initiative that mushroomed into a multitude of projects.

One of the boldest ideas we explored was a Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot. For a time, it felt like the whole country was talking about it: a question at Prime Minister's Questions, another to the Mayor, two hours of debate on LBC, and coverage across national and international media. It was a defining moment that demonstrated how powerful a community-driven idea can be.

Seen and heard close to home

People can be odd... in many ways. Tell us if you've seen or heard something funny around East Finchley and we'll give it a mention. Email news@the-archer.co.uk or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748.



Team effort: James Masters was awarded a BEM in the New Years Honours

Ripple effect

As we enter the final year of Grange Big Local, its legacy feels more important than ever. The ripple effect of investing in projects, people, and groups will continue to benefit our community for years to come.

The seeds we've planted will keep growing long after we're gone. It's this long-term vision that inspired my efforts to help found a national organisation called ACT, ensuring the work continues and connections expand.


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