



Lesley's love for a lifetime of dance



Career on the move: Lesley, front row, second right, with the Second Generation company in the 1970s and, right, still sharing her love of dancing today

By Ed Newman

Age UK Barnet exercise instructor Lesley Ann Chowen, née Wootten, has been bringing showbiz sparkle to dance classes in East Finchley for the last 26 years.

And back in the 1970s and 80s, Lesley was a regular on Saturday Night television, dancing, singing and acting alongside some of the legends of entertainment such as Morecambe and Wise, The Two Ronnies, Little and Large and Bruce Forsyth. She also toured the world performing cabaret shows in glamorous places like Monte Carlo, Hong Kong and Mauritius.

After being taken to her first class by her mother at the age of three, Lesley fell in love with dancing and has been tripping the light fantastic ever since. She couldn't wait to leave

school at 15, although her parents did insist she did her O-levels first.

Round the world

Her first job was as a dancer at a brand-new cabaret club in Sheffield called Aquarius. She later joined Dougie Squires's Second Generation company and, over the next five years, travelled around the world doing shows.

In her 60s, she was back with Squires and her former colleagues performing a 100th birthday tribute to Dame Vera Lynn in front of Queen Elizabeth.

"Second Generation was like one big family with 12 boys and 12 girls," recalls Lesley. "We didn't get paid very much but we went to some wonderful places. Sometimes, we would have to rehearse through the night and then sleep during the day before getting ready for the next show. The adrenaline kept us going. We absolutely loved it because we were living our dream."

Big stars

Saturday night TV was huge at the time and Lesley regularly appeared on our screens with the big stars of the day.

"Eric and Ernie kept themselves to themselves but they were incredibly professional," she remembers.

"It was the same with the Two Ronnies. I can remember those big dance numbers they did at the end of the show and woe betide if you went wrong. Even though they were there to make people laugh, there was no messing around and they were always spot on."

Dance is good

It was when Lesley had her three children that she decided it would be a good idea to switch from performing to teaching. She lives in East Finchley

and that meant that Age UK Barnet as well as several local schools and disabled groups have benefited from her skills and enthusiasm over the years. "Dance is good for so many things like your balance and energy levels. It's not just your body either – you have to really focus when you're dancing so it's good for your brain too at whatever age," said Lesley.

Lesley runs two exercise classes for Age UK Barnet on a Wednesday afternoon. For more information about Age UK Barnet's exercise classes, call Wendy on 07741 877027 or email wendy.nutman@ageukbarnet.org.uk

Bike riding, horse riding... and an incriminating address

By Frank Edwards

This is some of the news from East Finchley, 100 years ago, as revealed in newspaper archives.

In the 1920s, cycling was increasingly popular but also hard work. In May 1925 outlets in East Finchley advertised the benefits to tired pedallers of fitting a Sturmeys Archer 3-Speed Gear. Weighing only 1½ lbs it would, they claimed, increase speeds by two miles an hour and was as easy to work as ringing the bell.

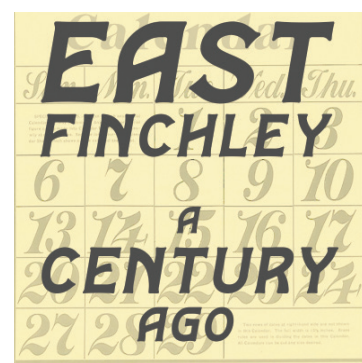
Cyclists, with or without gears, had to take care, however. Joyce Bishop, crossing the junction of Fortis Green and the High Road, collided with a tram. She was unhurt but left with a buckled wheel and bent crank. Sydney Coninsbee, aged 12, cycling down Long Lane, collided with a brick wall, fortunately only sustaining abrasions

to his head.

Amos Smith, summonsed for cycling on the footway in East End Road, was less lucky. The magistrate was unimpressed by Smith's defence that it was early, he was late and the roadway was ill-maintained. Riding on the footway is a growing nuisance, said the magistrate, and fined him 10 shillings.

Up before the beak

Any number of things could bring you before the local court. In June 1925, Evan Jones was summonsed for being drunk in charge of a horse. He gave the game away by swaying from side to side in his saddle while



the horse tacked across the road and back again. The magistrate fined Evan 40 shillings.

Undesirable residence

You could also arrive in court if you annoyed the local authority. The District Council prosecuted three 12-year-old boys for throwing stones at street lamps in The Walks, East Finchley. The court reprimanded the boys but allowed them to go, when assured they would reimburse the Council for the broken glass and prosecution costs.

It won't have helped one of the boys, Joseph Tronsdale, that when in court he had to give his address as 'Pavilion Cottage, Thieving Lane, East Finchley'. Despite best endeavours it has not been possible to identify just where Thieving Lane was. If any reader can help, please let The Archer know.

And finally...

Finally, in the 1930s journalist Claud Cockburn famously claimed to have penned the dullest newspaper headline ever: 'Small Earthquake in Chile, Not many dead'. The Finchley Press may have beaten him to it. In May 1925, it ran a story headed 'East Finchley Burglaries, Little of value stolen'.

Frenzy of ferns at plant sale

By Ruth Anders

"Overwhelmed," said an exhausted Kim Athanasiou, when I asked her how she felt about her recent plant sale outside Tony's Continental in the High Road, N2. "We had more than 600 plants and we were sold out by 1pm. People have been so generous with donations and contributions of their own plants."

Plants flew off the shelves, with shuttlecock ferns proving favourites. As last year, the initiative was to raise funds in aid of the UCLH Haematology Cancer Care department where Kim's mother-in-law Efi was cared for at the end of her life. The event raised over £2,000.

Enthusiastic gardener Kim had grown the majority of the plants in the sale from seed or by propagation over the last year and, planning well ahead, she is already beginning the growing process for next year's sale.

