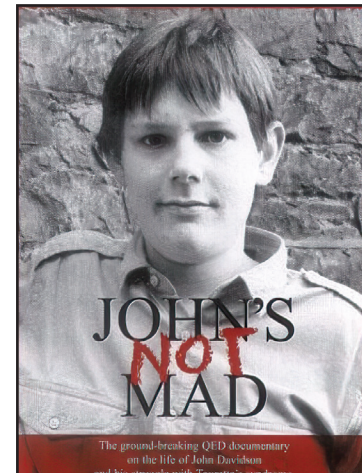




A documentary that shed light on Tourette's

The acclaimed new British film *I Swear* about John Davidson and his life with Tourette Syndrome draws heavily on a 1988 BBC documentary called *John's Not Mad*, on which our photo editor **Mike Coles** worked. Here he recalls the experience.



Compulsive disorder: John Davidson with his mother Heather and in a scene from the BBC documentary *John's Not Mad*, filmed by Mike Coles

Tourette Syndrome is an inherited neurological condition which causes sufferers to make involuntary vocal and movement tics. Sufferers feel compelled to act on any thought or action that is suggested or comes into their head, particularly swearing or sexual references.

For decades, very little was known about it. Children suffering from it were considered naughty and disruptive and often punished or expelled from school. This all changed after the transmission of BBC documentary film *John's Not Mad* as part of the QED series in 1988, on which I was the cameraman.

The film is a simple observational piece following the day-to-day life of 16-year-old John Davidson, who lived in Galashiels on the Scottish Borders. At that time there was no provision or guidance in the education system for dealing with the condition. Originally

thought to be rare, it's now recognised that as many as one in 100 schoolchildren have some form of the syndrome, which varies in its severity.

When we arrived to film in Galashiels I had no knowledge of Tourette's but I was soon to find out. John quickly spat out 'big nose' as soon as he met me and the female producer got a much less pleasant welcome. With our expensive film equipment, we had to be constantly on guard for any sudden movements.

Despite this, John was a genuinely likeable boy. Initially he didn't spit but when we were filming an evening meal, someone said "at least

he doesn't spit". From then on it was non-stop spitting, which was hard to take. In retrospect filming him in the quiet local library wasn't very fair, prompting an unstoppable torrent of obscenities, but it certainly highlighted the problem. It was tragic and funny at the same time. Educational reforms

followed and John Davidson became an ambassador for Tourette's sufferers. He was awarded an MBE in 2019 for his campaigning. Now, *I Swear*, a feature film based on his story, is on general release. The original documentary *John's Not Mad* can be found on YouTube.



I Swear is based on John's life and stars Robert Aramayo

Flawless flowers and a cornucopia of produce

By Christine Geissmar

The Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society Flower Show returned in spectacular style for its 296th year with tables full of colour, creativity and cultivation prowess.

Organised by the tireless Robyn Price with the Hort Soc committee and valuable help from volunteers, the show at the Free Church Hall in the Suburb offered a dazzling variety of entries across multiple categories.

This year's jam-making competition proved to be a particular highlight, breaking previous records for entries. The air was filled with fruity aromas as judges made their careful rounds, tasting spoonfuls and scrutinising consistency, flavour, and presentation. One standout among the produce entries was a dramatically curved gourd, its elegant arc drawing admiration from both judges and visitors alike.

Its natural artistry was the subject of many a photograph and appreciative comment. Photographic entries featuring



Bountiful basket: Produce at the Horticultural Society show. Photo Michael Eleftheriades

cut flowers and garden birds further enriched the visual feast. Prizes were awarded across the board, recognising the hard work of each green-fingered participant.

Outside, the ever-popular Grimsdyke Band played a cheerful set, adding to the event's lively and nostalgic charm. A raffle held in support of Thrive and the HGS Kids Garden Club added a touch of excitement. Here's to next year's 297th outing!

Plans for cinema car park site

By David Melsome

Plans have been submitted to build a two-storey house on land off Fairlawn Avenue, N2, that was formerly the car park for the Phoenix Cinema.

The cinema sold the plot last year to help fund a major refurbishment project, including the installation of a second screen. Proposals submitted to Barnet Council with the reference 25/3816/FUL seek permission for a home with two storeys above ground plus a basement level, with landscaping, recycling storage, car and cycle parking and amenity space.

Some residents have objected to the plans on the basis that building work could worsen already-existing groundwater and flooding issues in and around the site.

Others say a potential 16-month build on a plot with a narrow entrance would be disruptive for people living in Fairlawn Avenue, while a number of residents in Baronsmere Road object to the loss of privacy from a new home backing onto their properties.

A planning statement submitted on behalf of the developers Andreas Christodoulou Architectural Associates states that the application meets all necessary regulations and that the site has been designated as having a low probability of flooding.

RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Hey, Galileo

Some songs are born great, some songs achieve greatness, some songs have greatness thrust upon them and then there is Bohemian Rhapsody. Why? Because no one before or in the 50 years since has dared to produce a six-minute, six-part magnum opus and call it a rock song.

And it doesn't sound like rock'n'roll, it sounds like something from the darkest recesses of Liszt or Wagner's minds dragged screaming and kicking through an electric guitar.

Starting with an intro, followed by a ballad, a guitar solo, a slice of opera, a quick blast of guitar rock before returning to harmonies for the outro this was the highwater mark of 1970s pomposity. And only one man in one band would have tried it. It was 1975, the band was Queen and the man was Freddie Mercury, so maybe it wasn't a surprise.

Back then Queen had been around for five years and produced three albums. They were the bog-standard rock four piece. In Brian May, they had the ace guitarist, John Deacon was the electronic wizard on bass, drummer Roger Taylor hit things and Freddie Mercury added the panache on vocals.

They'd had a bit of success but nothing to worry the megastars like Led Zeppelin. The only thing that set them apart was that they were a bit more flamboyant and Brian had made his own guitar from an old fireplace. Oh, and they were ever so slightly pretentious and wore white satin jumpsuits.

The fourth album changed things. They spent a couple of months in Wales recording it and decided that the perfect name was *A Night at the Opera*. With a name like that there had to be a showstopper, something so over the top that people would listen, and Freddie provided it.

From a close harmony intro, the piano ballad and on through the operatic centrepiece with its Galileo Scaramouche and Fandango sung in perfect multitrack harmony before letting Brian loose on guitar, the result was spectacular in a way that no one ever dared repeat. And they had a video that looked more like a movie than a band thrashing their latest single.

Reviews were bemused and mixed. They said it was too long for radio, but somehow, someone at Radio 1 played it, and the rest is history. It spent nine weeks at number one and returned there for five more weeks in 1991 when Freddie Mercury died.

No other British rock single has outsold it apart from Band Aid and Elton John's Diana tribute, and they don't count. It was magnificent and still sounds it, but it came at the end of an era. A year on, we had punk and Queen themselves moved on to other great hits. By then they were titans, and they always will be.