



Dynamic debate with former don of Downing Street

Former Downing Street communications director and now The Rest is Politics podcaster Alastair Campbell ran a thought-provoking session on global challenges with students in years 9-11 at Archer Academy in East Finchley last term.

Speaking to a full hall, he urged students to think independently, engage with the issues that matter to them, and build confidence in debating and public speaking. His message was that strong, informed opinions are essential for the next generation of leaders.

During the visit, students took part in a dynamic debate on international policy, discussing topics such

as proposed restrictions on young people's social media use and the recent decision to lower the UK voting age to 16.

The school said their contributions were thoughtful, articulate, and demonstrated a deep interest in political engagement. The event concluded with an energetic Q&A session, where students questioned Mr Campbell on a wide range of topics.



Chief communicator: Alastair Campbell captures a selfie with students at Archer Academy. Photo Archer Academy

Beauty emerges from beneath

By Diana Cormack

In the autumn a beautiful fungus, pictured next to a 50p coin, appeared on a tree stump in Cherry Tree Wood, situated close to the former site of the pavilion which was demolished several years ago.



Striking: Chicken in the Wood



Shapely: Honey fungus

Naturalist Linda Dolata told us that this brightly coloured fungus is a species that is present throughout the year as a network of microscopic hyphae, tiny 'threads' which grow throughout the stump forming a mycelium.

The growing tips of the hyphae secrete digestive enzymes onto the substrate and then absorb the digested soluble products. But the yellow mass that we see is the fruiting body of the fungus and is there to produce and release spores. This one is likely to be Chicken of the Woods. When a tree is dead, a whole range of fungi go to work, digesting specific structures (sugars, cellulose, lignin) and thus decaying the wood. These days, it is well known that the soil in an ancient woodland is full of mycorrhizal fungi, many of which are essential for the healthy germination and growth of the trees therein.

Reader Mary Poulter sent us a photo of another beautiful example from Cherry Tree Wood, identified as a honey fungus (*Armillaria mellea*). Now we are in winter many of these fruiting bodies will have faded away but remember the organism is always just below the surface getting ready to show itself again.

Tell us the news

Have you got a news story or an interesting photo for us? Our readers are our eyes and ears, and we are always pleased to hear what is going on in East Finchley. Tips, ideas and stories, large or small, are very welcome. Please email news@the-archer.co.uk or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748. Thank you

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