



Where East Finchley gets its news

By Margaret Crockett

Thirty-three years after its first edition, The Archer newspaper is still a cornerstone of the East Finchley community, publishing 12 pages of news every month. In this age of social media misinformation and the decline of local journalism, how does it survive?

It is hard to quantify the reasons The Archer has been part of the East Finchley community for so long. The evidence is found in its longevity, the commitment and work of a large team of volunteers and in the messages of support from its readership.

For example there are signs on some letterboxes in N2 reading “No free newspapers... except The Archer” and the guest book from the newspaper’s 25th anniversary party in 2018 carried comments such as “My customers look forward to their Archer to know what is going on in East Finchley” and “Really proud of our local paper, gives our community a heart”.

Speaking to Diana Cormack, who joined the Archer team in 1996, one gets a feel for the history. Diana remembers that, in the beginning, writers used pseudonyms to give the impression of a wider pool of reporters and there was a typist working from hand-written articles. These typed articles were then cut up and stuck into columns on pages alongside black-and-white photographs, before being sent off to be printed. The paper has evolved hugely over the years, not least in being full colour and being produced with the latest digital software.

John Lawrence, editor for 20 years, says another of the biggest changes is that many more contributions come directly from readers.

Early on the team relied on word of mouth and their own local knowledge to report on N2 affairs. Now email and social media make it so much easier for readers to get in touch directly. Reluctant at the beginning, readers are now much happier to write their own articles.

All contributions are welcome and are considered carefully, within the paper’s longstanding declaration of being “non-religious and non-political”. The editorial team maintains the writer’s voice as much as possible as this adds character and variety to the newspaper and ensures its truly hyper-local flavour. Production and distribution is an efficient operation. The editorial team meets at the beginning of each

month to discuss what’s happening in East Finchley and what is likely to be important to readers. Then about 12 regular writers submit their articles in time for the mid-month deadline. Submissions, including those from readers, are checked and formatted by the copy editor and double-checked by two sub-editors.

Photo editor Mike Coles processes all photo contributions to ensure they look good on the printed page. Towards the end of the month, the production editor Nadia Savvoulou creates the edition and skilfully fits everything onto 12 pages... rarely an easy task.

Sharmans in Peterborough prints The Archer on recycled paper on the first Tuesday of each month and sends the papers to the distribution team in East Finchley. The print run is about 10,500 copies, explains Toni Morgan, who masterminds distribution supported by Jane and David Marsh. The Marshes collate the papers into individual rounds, anything from 40 to 200 copies covering every road and block of flats in East Finchley, which are then delivered by around 80 people. And it is these volunteers who deliver the paper in all weathers every month who are perhaps the most crucial and dedicated aspect of the whole operation. Month after month, they ensure The Archer reaches its readers.

Barnet Council, the Police, the Library Archives and the Finchley Society also receive copies. Any spares are distributed to venues where readers can collect them, including the community bookcase in East Finchley station and the foyer of the Phoenix Cinema. A crucial element in the success of The Archer is its not-for-profit financial model. None of the team of about 100 volunteers receives any payment. And as a free newspaper The Archer relies solely on advertising revenue to cover its costs.

Ninety per cent of its expenditure goes on printing. Other costs include hosting the online presence at www.the-archer.co.uk, funding a freephone 0800 number for readers to leave messages, plus paying for insurance, the



Wide reach: Just some of the volunteers who deliver The Archer to 10,000 homes and businesses in East Finchley every month. Photo Mike Coles

accounting system, postage, stationery and the team’s stall at the annual East Finchley Community Festival.

Businesses in East Finchley and the surrounding area obviously value the opportunity to expose their products and services to the 10,000 homes and organisations that receive the newspaper each month. Advertising revenue fluctuates but the aim is to break even or make a small surplus. This wasn’t easy in the paper’s early days when some volunteers had to dip into their own pockets to keep the operation afloat but it has been achieved for most of the paper’s history, although revenues took a serious hit as advertisers struggled to survive during the Covid pandemic of 2020-2022.

But it was in those pandemic years that The Archer proved how crucial hyper-local news can be to any community. As Covid broke out and kept everyone at home, the newspaper carried on publishing to keep everyone connected and made a point of carrying important information about local shopping services, medical updates and general advice to help people through the lockdowns. In its time, The Archer has also reported on scores of local campaigns by residents who were lobbying for improved facilities in N2, such as the recently-opened Market Place Playground, or against unwanted developments such as disproportionate rises in street parking fees.

Social media and online news can be all-consuming but, as a printed newspaper, The Archer is thoroughly democratic in that

it provides local news to every household in the area regardless of income or access to mobile phones and the online world. It comes directly to the door for free, giving everyone a chance to keep up with East Finchley

news. “The Archer is here to keep our readers informed,” says editor John Lawrence, on behalf of the whole team. “The vision is to keep carrying the banner for local news long into the future.”

Wagner classics

North London Symphony Orchestra (NLSO) is preparing for its next concert on Saturday 11 July at 7.30pm at St James’ Church, Muswell Hill, when it will present an all-Wagner programme under the guidance of its conductor Robert Max.

The concert starts with the Overture to The Flying Dutchman before the orchestra joins with the internationally-renowned soprano Rachel Nicholls to perform the beautiful Prelude and Liebestod from Tristan and Isolde. Completing the programme, NLSO joins with Rachel Nicholls again to

present highlights from Götterdämmerung, which is the final part of Wagner’s epic Ring cycle. These highlights include Siegfried’s Rhine Journey, Hagen’s Watch, Siegfried’s Death & Funeral Music, and Brunnhilde’s Immolation. Tickets are available online via the NLSO website www.nlso.org.uk or on the door.



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