



# Tops of the shops... when I'm 64

By Diana Cormack

There has been a dry-cleaners at 3 Fortis Green in East Finchley since the mid-1960s, when the proprietor of the nearby Coral Travel and two business colleagues set up in business together.



Four decades of service: Asghar Shaikh celebrates 40 years of Tops Dry Cleaners

In 1986 Asghar Shaikh, who had been learning the trade in Kensington for seven years, spotted the premises for sale. So, believing it to be a good career move, he took over and opened Tops Dry Cleaners.

Obviously that early career move 40 years ago worked well. Being a big Beatles fan, Asghar has long wondered what life would be like when he reached 64 and feels that it is significant that, now at that age, he is running a successful business which originally opened in 1964.

During his four decades of dry cleaning in Fortis Green, Asghar has kept up with modern methods whilst building up a loyal clientele. Many customers have become old friends and evidence of their closeness can be seen with the wall of photos

to which they have contributed. It is worth a look as there are quite a few well-known faces and signatures.

There are also cuttings of Archer articles that have featured some of his customers, with the people of East Finchley feeling to him "like an extended family".

Asghar wonders if his business could be one of the oldest still running in East Finchley. Sadly, he listed those that have had to close down or move away in recent years. He is close to The Retreat Hair and Beauty Salon, which has battled off a high rent increase (see The Archer, March 2026). I asked if he had any worries about his rent being put up. He smiled happily and said that as he is the owner, he has no such problems.

## RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

### The price of being an icon

To be an icon your fame must outlast you and you must have left behind something unforgettable. Hollywood is the home of the icon because celluloid heroes are preserved on film, frozen in time, never ageing and never dying. And the greatest of them is Marilyn Monroe, who would have been 100 on 1 June.

She may have had a horrible childhood shuttled between children's home and foster parents, but she went on to become the ultimate image of the American Fifties. Her career started as a pin-up girl in the late Forties and she first came to notice as bit-part player in All About Eve and The Blackboard Jungle in 1950.

Two years and 11 films later she was probably the most famous star in the world and remained so until her death in 1962. Why? Because she was the perfect image of post-war boom town America, the sassy blonde who everyone wished was the girl next door.

You don't need to have seen the films like Niagara, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes or Some Like it Hot to know the image. The famous photo of her standing over a subway grating with her skirt billowing became the ubiquitous poster on schoolboy walls and a nude photo shoot she did in 1948 launched Playboy five years later. All those pictures of Marilyn, all those posters on the wall.

Not that things were easy for her. Her third husband, the playwright Arthur Miller, said she was looking for the impossible, a man who would be her 'father, lover, friend and agent' and that she always had death on her shoulder. Her death from an overdose



Street food: Bhola Prasad and Masud Rana are offering a varied Vietnamese menu. Photo John Lawrence

## Street food served up by chef friends

By John Lawrence

Two chef friends with a love of international cuisines have gone into business together and opened the Bun Bun Pho Vietnamese restaurant at the top end of the High Road in East Finchley.

After working in other peoples' kitchens for 30 years and being friends with each other for the last 16, Masud Rana and Bhola Prasad decided it was time to fire up their own ovens and do things their way.

Masud spent time in Vietnam as a student and learned the art of making pho, the country's staple street food dish consisting of broth, rice noodles, herbs and meat. Bhola specialised in Vietnamese cooking techniques when he worked for six years at a restaurant in Canary Wharf.

"We hope customers will like what we do," said Masud. "Our food is fresh, with no chemicals and it's not over-spicy. We make it on the day and we serve it on the day."

Bhola said he stays closely involved in everything, from preparation to team training, to ensure standards stay high. "Our goal is to serve honest, authentic food that resonates with people," he said.

The partners took over the premises close to the junction with Creighton Avenue from

former owner Aki Toumazos, who helped them during a short handover period before retiring altogether after more than 40 years in the restaurant trade (The Archer, December 2025).

Kitchen life is in their souls, say the pair, who work every day preparing ingredients from the early morning to waving the last customers off at the end of the night. Bun Bun Pho is open Monday to Saturday from 11.30am to 10.30pm and on Sunday from 11.30am to 10pm.

## New puzzle: Re-Griddable

Re-Griddable is a twist on the free daily online game grid-dable.co.uk created by two East Finchley residents, Stuart Miller and Matt Robinson.

There may be more than one solution to each Re-Griddable but there is definitely at least one, which comes from a maximum scoring game of Griddable.

in 1962, aged 36, seemed inevitable to him. And once she was gone the myth and the memory could take over.

But what if she'd lived? By 1962 the world was changing, a year later President Kennedy was shot, within five years America was being ripped apart by Vietnam and new stars were in town. Her image couldn't have coped with Jane Fonda. It's hard to imagine her moving into a graceful old age as a character actor like Bette Davis or Lauren Bacall.

Instead she was immortalised in song by the likes of Elton John with Candle in the Wind and by Ray Davies in his song about Hollywood Boulevard, when he sang 'don't step on dearest Marilyn, because not very tough, she should have been made of iron and steel, but she was only made of flesh and blood.' So watch the movies and remember the actor, not the gilded cage she lived in.

**Re-Griddable**  
No.4  
Place the letters to create eight four-letter words — four left-to-right and four downwards.

ACEESRRW

C		A	
	A		E
	G		
P		S	T

Turn to page 11 for this month's solution