



THE ARCHER



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Local Poet, Alan Smith

by Daphne Chamberlain

"We've got a poet in the High Road!" I've heard this comment more than once since Alan Smith's work began to appear in *The Archer*.

In fact, this particular poet has lived here on and off since 1979. In the "off" phases, he has taught in universities in Tunisia, Qatar, Algeria and in Saudi Arabia, where he broadcast on Riyadh radio.

What brings him back to East Finchley? Certainly not the book shops (or lack of them). "Plenty of photocopiers. No books!" But he does find it a genuine place, unlike over-sophisticated Hampstead. Besides, he has an allotment behind Martin Schools, which is very therapeutic to dig.

Wild muse

Alan draws much of his inspiration from watching wild life, whether squirrels running in a cemetery, or a wolf caged in a zoo. "Just watch and wait". Maybe weeks later the poem will materialise, and it will not be solely about an animal.

Alan was born in Lancashire, the son of a bus driver. He won a scholarship to Cambridge, is a Fellow of the Salzburg Seminars in American Literature, and has taught at all levels. He has also worked as a road-sweeper.

"Life goes round in a circle. I'm going back to my roots. Blackpool. London. Deserts. Home". This doesn't necessarily mean a physical return to the North West, but his thoughts are increasingly drawn back to his childhood.

Well versed

In Lancashire, the oral tradition of storytelling is very strong. I mentioned Liverpool, and was rightly reminded of Blackpool too



East Finchley's resident poet, Alan Smith.

(George Formby, Al Read).

Poetry in pubs and meeting-houses is becoming popular in London now. Alan has done a lot of performance poetry at Oxford and Birmingham Universities, at the Torriano Poetry Meeting House in Tufnell Park and at Pentameters Theatre Club in Hampstead, where he recently shared the stage with Arnold Wesker.

This year, Alan Smith was presented with an Editor's Choice Award for his poem, "Saudian Mountain Echo", published in a large anthology of the International Poetry Society, "The Other Side of the Mirror".

He has also just published a booklet called "London Rides", which is a collection of his poems about different aspects of London life. It may be available in Muswell Hill Bookshop in the New Year.

Oscar winner

An air of pantomime came to East Finchley before Christmas when Oscar the dog showed up to bring a present to homeless cats and dogs cared for by local charity Animal Aid & Advice. Oscar and owner Pat Waters presented them with over £150 worth of pet foods, donated by Oscar Pet Food customers.

Animal Aid & Advice is a small voluntary animal welfare group founded in 1971 and is always in desperate need of foster homes, however short-term. This year, due to their tireless efforts, they have rehomed over 250 animals.

The aims of the group are to encourage responsible pet ownership, promote the neutering of both male and female cats and dogs, and the rehoming of homeless or unwanted animals.

The predominant policy is to prevent destruction of healthy animals. Sick animals are put to sleep only as a last resort and on the advice of a veterinary surgeon.

The problems of stray and unwanted animals arise when their owners die, go into hospital for

long periods or are taken into care; move and cannot or will not take pets with them; decide they no longer want the responsibility of caring for their pet; abandon animals; develop allergies hitherto unsuspected.

Dogwatch

When an animal is first taken in, it is housed in a foster home. This ensures that the animal's personality and needs become clear and that it is being cared for in a home-like environment. Both factors help to

maintain a high rate of success in its re-homing programme. It also provides the opportunity to monitor any health prob-

lems and get them treated. If you would like to help them in their work, please ring Gill on 889 9714 (evenings).



Animal Aid in the High Road

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Cartoon by John Boyd

Archer Auction Apologies

Sincere apologies to all our loyal readers for the sudden cancellation of our Auction.

This was due to the delayed opening date of the Old White Lion. The Good News is that we have time to collect even more fantastic lots.

Watch this space in the February issue for the new date - don't miss it!

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