



Anne-Marie's first children's book has been widely praised. Photograph courtesy Shaw Conway

The next JK Rowling?

By Janet Maitland

A teacher from East Finchley, who wrote a children's book in her spare time, was recently short-listed for a competition to find the next JK Rowling. Anne-Marie Conway, 42, beat off competition from more than 2,000 entries to make it onto a shortlist of five for The Times / Chickenhouse Children's Fiction Competition.

"We believe that great work for children is important and life changing: our short list proved it," said Barry Cunningham, managing director of Chickenhouse, the company he set up after discovering JK Rowling. Although Anne-Marie didn't win the competition, she is optimistic. "I hope someone spots the book and takes a chance and publishes it," she said.

Anne-Marie wrote her book in between working as a teacher at Northside School in North Finchley, running the Barnet-based children's drama group Full Circle, and looking after her sons aged four and six. "I

just stopped watching TV," said Anne-Marie, who took two years to write the book.

The Secret Life of Jemma Jones began as a simple story about a children's drama group. But gradually the drama group became just the backdrop to a dark tale of a schoolgirl whose older sister has gone missing. "Once I started it, the story took on a life of its own," said Anne-Marie, whose only previous writing experience is producing sketches for Full Circle. The Times described the book as a "heart-warming modern day story of fractured family life."

Mystery of the hidden ring

By Jake Eiseman-Renyard

Behind the old keeper's hut in Cherry Tree Wood, a large slab of concrete with a metal ring was once visible. I suspect it dated back to World War Two and was a mooring ring for a barrage balloon.

The nearby Highgate Wood has a hut containing nature information and other material, including a ring that has been identified as a barrage balloon tether. It seems logical that Cherry Tree Wood, being an open space, would also have had a balloon guarding it from the east. The East End of London was particularly badly hit during the blitz and barrage balloons were set

up all over the country.

Unfortunately, I can no longer see the Cherry Tree ring, but I think it is buried under a log pile. Being unsure about the specific dates regarding the park's history, whether the ring was for a balloon and, if not, what it was used for, it would be interesting to hear from anybody through *THE ARCHER* if they know more about this.

Marathon dad to raise money for Sense

Local dad Kevin Hallett, 43, is running in the Flora London Marathon on Sunday 13 April for the first time and raising money for UK deaf-blind charity Sense.

Kevin took up running as a serious sport just over 18 months ago and has so far completed five half marathons across the UK. Come rain or shine, he trains at least five times a week. He knows, however, that he will have to dig deep to face the physical and mental pain most of us only get to watch on TV.

Kevin said: "This is one of the most personal challenges I have yet to face. Crossing the finishing line and raising funds for Sense must surely be a win-win situation all round. With the support of my family, friends and local community I hope we can all make a difference."

Sense is the UK's largest organisation offering support to deaf-blind people and their families. Established in 1955 as a parents' support group, Sense now offers a range of services including advice, housing, education, and practical help to children and adults who are both deaf and blind.



Kevin Hallett is running his first London Marathon at 43

Support for Kevin's Marathon challenge could not be easier. You can make a donation directly to Sense by logging on to <http://justgiving.com/kevinhallett>.

Spark a lifelong love of words

Parents of young children are being encouraged to take them to East Finchley Library, so they get the habit of listening to stories and reading books early in life.

The library, in common with others across Barnet, offers a wealth of ideas for helping babies and under-fives enjoy great stories and rhymes.

On Thursdays, it runs a Baby Rhymetime session for under-twos from 10.45-11.15am. These are popular sessions where babies and toddlers learn the fun of rhyme, rhythm and repetition.

Pick up a pack

Children can become library members as soon as they're born. Parents and carers can claim free packs called Baby Bookstart, Bookstart Plus and My Bookstart Treasure Chest along with guidance material on how to use them.

Baby Bookstart packs are normally distributed by health visitors when babies are around 6-9 months, but are also available from the library. The pack consists of a canvas shoulder bag containing two board books, a nursery rhyme book as well as information for parents on sharing books and about Barnet's libraries.

Bookstart Plus packs are for toddlers aged between 18 and 30 months and consist of two books, drawing materials and a

set of bookplates to encourage children to build their own book collection. Vouchers for these packs are distributed by health visitors to encourage parents to collect the packs but a voucher is not essential and packs can be

collected without one.

For more information about Bookstart or any other reading initiatives for under-fives, call into East Finchley Library or visit www.barnet.gov.uk/children-school-library-service.

Did you know...?

- Money isn't made out of paper; it's made out of cotton. Before the 1950's it was made from hemp - the stem and leaves of a marijuana plant.
- On average, 12 newborns will be given to the wrong parents daily.

- Because metal was scarce, the Oscars given out during World War II were made of wood.

- Guinness Book of Records holds the record for being the book most often stolen from Public Libraries.

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