



When pirates attack

Pirate attacks on cruise and merchant vessels have made the news recently but what are they really like for the passengers and crew on board? Two cruise ship passengers were staying with friends in East Finchley before joining their vessel and were keeping in touch by email when their trip met an unexpected turn of events in the Gulf of Aden. This is how Stephen and Natalie Coomber described their experiences:

We were awoken this morning by an announcement in our cabin asking all passengers to stay inside the ship and not venture onto the decks. That got us out of bed hastily and, looking through binoculars out of our cabin window, we could see a small white boat approaching very fast from the port side, but some distance off. Then the captain announced that there had been an attack by pirates at 4.30am and again at 6am but all steps had been taken by the crew to protect us.

There were a number of large freighters within sight and it seemed amazing that pirates would attack a ship in broad daylight. Some time later, we were told the emergency was over and passengers could again go out on the decks. We found the crew manning all the fire-hoses and spraying water onto the sea, as were the ships nearby.

Fast footwork

However, less than an hour

later, our quiz was interrupted when dozens of small, fast-moving boats were noticed off to our port side. We counted 28. We always imagined pirates would travel in boats that looked like gunboats, but these were quite small, very fast and held about 15-20 men.

One peeled off and cut across our bow while another crossed the stern and we all thought this is it! Our ship changed course rather abruptly but in the end the pirate boats seemed to prefer to give chase to a nearby container ship.

We later heard that the ship in front of us had been fired upon eight times, but the pirates were unable to take her. Quite scary and enough excitement for one day. We are now through the dangerous bit (the southern end of the Gulf of Aden) and are steaming towards the Seychelles, albeit still off course.

Editor's note: Names have been changed.

Artists show their wares

By Ann Bronkhorst

Barry Jackson, Tark Butler, Daphne Carnegie and Lucy Spratt are artists working in different fields who have found that occasional shared 'open house' exhibitions suit them well. So, over the weekend of 6-7 December, Barry's home in Park Hall Road was open for visitors to browse, perhaps buy, and talk to the makers.

The smallest pieces on show were by Lucy Spratt: jewellery, mostly in silver, copper and precious stones. Many were one-off designs, often suggesting organic forms, such as shells or leaves. I coveted some exquisite rings and admired the effect of delicate jewellery displayed against bleached driftwood.

Lucy is a musician as well as a jeweller; each artist seems to have another string to their bow. Daphne Carnegie is a teacher but her own artistic work is with ceramics. These included surprising stoneware vases, surprising because simple austere shapes had been given a slight twist, making them, as she said, "squidgy". Daphne's tinglazed bowls, mugs and dishes looked rather Mediterranean, with their gentle colours on a white ground.

Colour is a joy and obsession for Tark Butler and the paintings he was showing displayed his skill as a colourist. Some small landscapes and tree studies glowed with colour, while two complex paintings with Moroccan or Byzantine themes used colour and composition with great subtlety. Tark, whose second and third strings are building and teaching, is look-

ing forward to leading a class at Tate Modern in the spring.

Barry, who hosted the four-some's exhibition, is an actor as well as a wood-turner, even finding time to run two allotments. He's always looking out for felled or fallen trees and is extremely knowledgeable about the properties of different woods. His work ranged from small elegant wooden pens and candleholders to large bowls that gleamed warmly in the lamplight.

Contact Tark on 020 8883 0806 for information on studio visits and any further exhibitions.



GLH staff celebrate their awards and commendations.

Car firm's green credentials

Greater London Hire celebrated another successful win at the 2008 Greenfleet Awards held at Twickenham Rugby Stadium.

The East Finchley firm was highly commended for its fleet management and its dedication to reducing its impact on the environment.

Zoë Powers, GLH's customer relations and environmental manager, won the first European Greenfleet Manager of The Year Award, presented in Brussels earlier in 2008. GLH, as a whole, came runner up to Deutsche Post Group in The European Private Sector Fleet of the Year category.

Leading the way

By working in conjunction with The C-Change Trust, a UK charity dedicated to tackling climate change, GLH reduced its carbon emissions by 22% in that year alone. This has already exceeded government targets set for 2010. Many of its clients, including Channel 4, Endemol UK and Marks & Spencer, are turning to GLH to help them in reducing their carbon footprint.

GLH is working with the charity by funding the first Carbon Busters schools programme to help schools reach new eco-friendly standards. The programme will be piloted in Islington and come to Barnet shortly afterwards.

GLH has also opened an in-house training centre where all of

its drivers are trained to NVQ and BTEC standards in road passenger vehicle driving.

Zoe Powers said: "GLH believes that by investing in its fleet of drivers it will not only improve its own service levels but improve industry standards as a whole."

Absence levels falling in Barnet schools

The number of pupils absent from schools in Barnet is falling, figures released by the Department for Children, Schools and Families have shown, and Barnet is in the top three LEAs for the lowest levels of persistent absence among London schools.

Barnet's overall absence rate for its secondary schools in autumn term 2007 and spring term 2008 was the third lowest in London, at 4.3 per cent against a Department for Schools, Children and Families

target of 5 per cent. This compares with 4.7 per cent in 2006/07. The statistics place Barnet fifth for secondary attendance and seventh place for primary attendance among all of the 33 London boroughs.

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