



## Where the wild things were

By Harriet Connides

I blame my dad for my love of history, including its more macabre side. One of my first memories, aged about seven, is going 'up to town' on a Saturday morning jaunt to visit the soon-to-be-redeveloped Mitre Square, where Jack the Ripper struck down one of his victims!

Now, one of the things that inspires me to want to write, paint and take photographs is the incredible, inspiring hidden historical palimpsest of the land that constitutes the area of East Finchley. As a child, I loved reading tales of villains and highwaymen. Looking for the tiny bits of Finchley Common that still exist has led me as an adult to roam Rough Lots and Cold-fall Wood, but it's difficult to imagine that East Finchley was once known as a godless, wild place, perched on the edge of the notoriously dangerous and lonely Common. Until the 1790s, a gibbet displayed its gruesome burden on what is now the junction of Bedford Road and the Great North Road, and bare-knuckle fights took place at the Five Bells until well into the 19th century.

After his third escape from Newgate Prison, the young house-breaker, Jack Sheppard, fled out of London to the countryside, and legend says he was captured after hiding in a haystack in Finchley, then held under arrest at the George Inn, in the Hog Market, now Market Place.

## What Remains of the Common

By Harriet Connides

The dark, sodden heart of Finchley

Between mud and dripping branches;

The lair of limping, mangy foxes.

A playground for the green woodpecker

and Dusty, the cemetery cat.

Graves totter, stones sway and crumble where,

not so many years ago,

the fields of Horseshoe Farm

hung, lush, behind the Great North Road.

Up on the High Toby, past the ugly burden of gibbet,

over the Common, broom and oak, mildew and groundsel;

Past the market gardens and fields of stacked hay,

to where Jack Sheppard half-heartedly hid, before his captive pint at

The George,

Over the ghost of the future North Circular.

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Totteridge Academy Clear-up - Clearly benefitting the community

## Load of rubbish

Greater London Hire, based in the High Road, supported Totteridge Academy with a community clean-up on Monday 8 April. A group of nearly 40 students, teachers, governors and GLH staff came together for a huge litter pick on the academy grounds and in the local community. GLH provided a hearty and needed lunch and refreshments for the hardworking volunteers.

## Ally Pally's big birthday

Put Sunday 21 July in your diary for the big community celebration to honour Alexandra Park's 150th anniversary. There will be an exciting line-up of free family activities and entertainment from 11am - 4pm.

According to Duncan Wilson, chief executive of Alexandra Park and Palace Charitable Trust, the "jam-packed programme", to be released soon, will include activities reflecting the park's vibrant and eclectic past, featuring local community groups, entertainers and businesses. It's easy to forget some of the more memorable aspects of the Park's history since its opening in 1863: a miniature Japanese village, hot air balloon rides, a band stand, a diving pavilion, the frying pan-shaped horse-racing course, and a permanent Park circus, not forgetting what's still there, such as the deer park, boating lake and unparalleled views of London.

## Seen and heard

An ambulance had transported a deceased person to Co-operative Funeral Care at 133 High Road. The attendants came out to find that a traffic warden had given the vehicle a penalty notice. This is being appealed.

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## A real bikers' breakfast

By Curtis Sweetingham and Lisa Omar

There was a great buzz of excitement from the children of St. Theresa's Catholic Primary School when all pupils from Reception to Year 6 were encouraged to cycle to school for a bikers' breakfast.

The children locked their bikes up at the school cycle storage unit and then proceeded into the school hall where everyone received a free cold or cooked breakfast, washed down with fresh fruit juice.

Other initiatives that have taken place at St Theresa's over the past year to improve safe and sustainable travel include a Year 1 and Year 2 theatre workshop on sustainable travel, a Reception road-awareness workshop, a Year 4 road safety course, Year 1 and 2 scooter proficiency and Year 6 Bikeability training.

## KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

## Wagnerian overkill

As helicopter gunships zoom in low across the surf and the smell of napalm wafts up into the sky you just know what music will be blasting out of the speakers. Yes, it's 'Ride of the Valkyries' time as everything gets dark and Wagnerian. And, why not, it's the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Time to cue the cod fascism and the over-the-top world of the nine-hour opera. Time to wallow in the weird world of mad King Ludwig, castles on the Rhine and Bavarian overkill. Time to get it completely wrong and blame everything the Third Reich stood for on Wilhelm Richard Wagner.

Someone, somewhere will do exactly that. As a composer, Wagner was something special. He wrote both the words and the music for his operas and set out to create a form of music drama that fused music, words and dramatic elements to create something new. The orchestra was as important as the singers. The Ring Cycle, all 16 hours of it, was the peak of his ambition and its mixture of old Germanic and Norse legends, music and drama has the same effect as being hit by an intergalactic chariot.

And then there is Wagner the man. And there's where the problems start because he was opinionated, self obsessed and the kind of man who would try to seduce your wife and borrow money from you. Neither of which you could be certain of getting back. He managed to help bankrupt Bavaria, happily taking all he could from the less than sane King Ludwig, even getting him to help fund the Bayreuth Festival.

Next we come to the big problem, his anti-Semitism and his adoption by the Nazis. The first you can blame him for. He might have had Jewish friends, but his vision of Germany wasn't multicultural. The Nazis are a different matter.

Wagner died in 1883, Hitler first turned up at the Bayreuth Festival in 1923. Wagner's widow Cosima may have been a fairly nasty piece of work and some of his descendants might have been happy with Hitler, but you can't blame Wagner for the fact that the Nazis played pick and mix with the music to suit themselves. It's like blaming Paul Weller for the ConDems just because David Cameron likes Eton Rifles. Why not listen to the music and make up your own mind; just watch out for the Valkyries.