



New homes for unwanted uniforms

By Lynn Winton

When local resident Howard Skolnick retired a few years ago he did not waste any time filling his days with productive and fulfilling volunteer roles, and one of those has resulted in him being named a 'Volunteer of the Year'.

While spending time with the Jewish Volunteering Network, Howard, who has lived close by Cherry Tree Wood for 30 years, had a 'lightbulb moment' when his wife Wendy was packing up warm clothes for a transport to Ukraine.

Dead stock

"It's known in the trade as 'dead stock'," explained Howard. "Schools close, merge and change logos so schoolwear suppliers, from manufacturers to retailers, can be stuck with thousands of unsaleable items. Sometimes they are even incinerated."

Annually, a staggering 354 tonnes of uniforms are discarded across the U.K, contributing to the mounting burden on landfills, when much of this waste will be gladly received in other parts of the world.

Howard contacted the charity Goods for Good, who take donations of unsold essential goods from British industry, and pre-loved goods from communities and individuals, which are distributed to vulnerable people all over the world. Their philosophy matched Howard's: that nothing should go to waste and nothing should go to landfill.

Useful items

At the annual Schoolwear Show Exhibition attended by importers and retailers, Howard persuaded the organisers to give him a free stand for Goods for Good. This resulted in him sourcing half a million pounds worth of brand new goods,



Waste not: Howard Skolnick

tens of thousands of warm and useful items like sweatshirts and backpacks, which were sent to Ukraine, one of the 26 countries to which Goods for Good has sent essential aid. His efforts led to the Jewish Volunteering Network recognising him as their 'Volunteer of the Year'. He is hoping that by telling his story, other people or local business owners might have a similar lightbulb moment and contact Goods for Good. If you have any ideas he is happy to hear from you by email: hs@skolnick.co.uk.



Asylum seekers enjoy a touch of nature

The Friends of Coldfall Woods have been bringing the outdoors inside to a hotel in Muswell Hill currently housing 60 asylum seekers. Several of the Friends have been running Creativity in Nature workshops monthly through the winter, facilitated by local artist Laura Fox.

Laura said: "It's been an opportunity to build community relationships and take part in some mindful creativity whilst introducing them to the beautiful ancient woodland just down the road from the hotel."

It was hoped that as the weather got warmer in late spring the sessions could be run in Coldfall Woods, but there is now uncertainty around the future of the hotel and where the current residents may be moved to, so sadly this is unlikely to happen.



Demanding: Joseph Derrington as Dr Watson and Luke Barton as Holmes in a scene from Sherlock Holmes: The Valley of Fear

Review: Sherlock Holmes, The Valley of Fear

Artsdepot, North Finchley. By Jessica Holt

Adapted by Nick Lane and performed by Blackeyed Theatre, this production chose to tell the story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's final Sherlock Holmes novel by alternating the action between an English village and an American small town.

In the original novel they were kept separate, but it was an effective theatrical device and helped with the understanding of a complicated plot as well as adding variety to the story. It also made considerable demands on the actors.

But this talented company was on great form, each actor playing from two to six different roles. They successfully achieved these transformations through costume changes, changes of accent and by creating distinctive characters for the audience to enjoy.

The decision to include Professor Moriarty as a threatening presence enabled Watson to question Holmes' friendship and provided some touching moments but it did lengthen an already long production. As you would expect, there are numerous comic moments – especially when Watson isn't quite clear about Holmes' theorising – and the interplay between them is one of the highlights of this production.

The many scene changes were smoothly done, with recorded background singing helping the change-overs along. The set design served to distinguish the many different settings within the play and the lighting successfully created mood.

Doctor Watson, played by Joseph Derrington, connected well with the audience. As well as playing two other roles, Derrington transitioned smoothly from character to narrator throughout the performance, helping the audience to follow the narrative. Alice Osmanski was delightful in all five of her different roles. The strength of the company lies in its collaborative nature, and their success in bringing challenging stories to life. Congratulations to the company on their 20th anniversary this year.

RICKY SAVAGE ... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Off the buses

It's March, it's raining and I'm at a bus stop waiting for that mythical beast, the on-time bus, to show up. And then looking about as incongruous in East Finchley as a Ferrari in Victorian London there comes chugging out of the mist that transport of delight... a 65-year-old red Routemaster. And everybody loved it, apart from me.

In the weird world of nostalgia, if something hangs on for long enough we all forget why we were pleased to see the back of it the first time round. And yes, I mean the Routemaster. It first appeared in 1956 and had its heyday in the 1960s when they built more than 2,700 of them. By 1970 London Transport had realised that there were better buses out there that were more comfortable and didn't have a leap-on, leap-off platform at the back.

It wasn't that it hadn't been modern once, what with power steering, an automatic gearbox and brakes that worked, it's just that times changed. When the Routemaster first lumbered onto the roads, Ford had just launched the Anglia, a slow cramped mini Americana with non-working brakes. By the time the last Routemaster retired in 2009 the Anglia's equivalent, the Ford Focus, looked good, went better and didn't try to kill you.

Ancient relic

But there are still people out there who love restoring something horrible from the 1950s, spending more on their ancient relic than the rest of us spend on something that works. And I blame steam trains.

Back in the days of boys in school caps and short trousers, men in hats and rationing, all trains were steam trains. They were usually cold, uncomfortable and smelt of smoke and soot. They weren't delayed by leaves on the line because they tended to chuck out so much burning coal that you had to have a 10-foot scorched earth policy around it so that the thing didn't set the fields alight. Maybe if you travelled first class on the Flying Scotsman with waiter service and all the luxuries, it was all cool and very Art Deco, but for the rest of the population train travel was never champagne and oysters.

After lagging behind countries like France and Germany who went electric in the 1950s, British Rail got rid of the pollution specials from their fleet in the 1960s and trains got cleaner, quicker and better. The rest is just schoolboy myth. It's the same with buses.

After a slow, uncomfortable crawl into Muswell Hill on the 2024 Routemaster, I walked over the road and got a warm, comfortable modern bus back. Nostalgic dreams of steam trains and double deckers are fun, just like pre-decimal coinage, pounds and ounces, chimney sweeps and Mary Poppins. It's just that the rest of the world has moved on.