



How an award-winning novelist took tips from N2 glassmakers

By Gail Norcliffe

Award-winning novelist Tracy Chevalier's latest wonderful novel *The Glassmaker* tells the story of a glassmaking family in Murano, near Venice, over five centuries. Orsola the main character becomes a lamp-work bead-maker to help with declining finances.

What intrigued me and my fellow book club members was an unexpected link to East Finchley in the author's acknowledgements for the novel.

Tracy, best known for writing *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, is renowned for her meticulous research. Back in 2019 she featured on Radio 4's *Only Artists* and mentioned glassmaking.

Phil Vallentin, a glassmaker from Bedford Road, N2, heard the programme and made contact to ask if Tracy would like to try bead-making. Tracy told *The Archer*: "If possible, I like to do what my characters do, as it makes it easier and more authentic to write about. In this instance, I wanted to learn to make beads." She jumped at Phil's offer and spent an afternoon in his shed making her first glass beads. Phil values bead-making's accessibility because glass is heated on a lamp and was historically an option for women in the male-dominated Murano glass industry.

East Finchley provided a further research opportunity when Tracy Chevalier found glassmaker Samantha Sweet offered classes and did one of her bead-making workshops.

Tracy said: "We spent a wonderful afternoon in Sam's studio next to Cherry Tree Wood, making some very beautiful beads. Sam was such a lovely teacher. Later my publisher brought a group of booksellers to her studio for an evening of



Artisan skills: Award-winning author Tracy Chevalier, far right, stands next to glass maker Samantha Sweet with publishing friends and colleagues

bead-making."

Sam was subsequently commissioned to make 300 beads as gifts for *The Glassmaker*'s launch party and a bracelet for Tracy. The red beads with gold flecks replicate those made for Josephine Bonaparte in the book.

Both Sam and Phil are impressed with Tracy's vividly accurate descriptions of glass-blowing and bead-making in her writing. My book club very much enjoyed *The Glassmaker* for its sense of place, history and the impact of the passing of time along with the story's central family saga. Sam has a glass furnace and runs glass-blowing classes.

Find out more at samanthasweet.com. Further information about Phil's work is available at philipvallentin.com



Tracy Chevalier wears a bracelet made by Samantha

Community group of the year

Hope North London, a charity rooted in East Finchley and working alongside residents on the Strawberry Vale and Grange estates, has been named Community Group of the Year at the Barnet Homes Community Awards.



A Hope North London session. Photo courtesy Helen Shannon

A Barnet Homes representative came to the group's weekly Tea & Toast group at the Green Man Community Centre to present a cheque, surrounded by local residents and volunteers.

Hope North London has been part of life in Finchley

since 1998, running free groups for children, young people and families, including after-school clubs and youth groups. It says much of what happens is shaped by local people themselves, with volunteer residents leading and caring for one another.

The Archer online

The Archer's website is now easier to use on your mobile phone. Our online pages have been redesigned to make it quicker to find important information like contact details and deadlines, and simpler to read our latest edition or search and browse past editions of the newspaper in our archive stretching back to 1993. So now you really can take *The Archer* with you wherever you go. Bookmark our website at www.the-archer.co.uk

Tell us the news

Have you got a news story or an interesting photo for us? Our readers are our eyes and ears, and we are always pleased to hear what is going on in East Finchley. Tips, ideas and stories, large or small, are very welcome. Please email news@the-archer.co.uk or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748. Thank you

Junior allotmenteer: Chapter 3

By Nadia Savvopoulou

Having an allotment, one gradually becomes accustomed to the terminology, sometimes simply by wandering through different sections of the garden centre. What are 'early', 'mid-season', and 'main crop' varieties? Supermarkets never include such information on their fruits and vegetables. And what on earth is blood, fish, and bone fertiliser? Whose blood?

The answer to the first question is that all vegetables and fruits have varieties intended to be harvested at different points in the year, though not necessarily in different seasons. The varieties you choose should depend on what you enjoy eating, as some are better suited for salads than for cooking.

Another tip... as in life outside the allotment, do not succumb to other people's sense of timing when sowing outdoors. The only real measures are the temperature of the soil and the ambient temperature. One swallow does not a summer make.

Despite some people's conviction that I had 'missed' the growing season when I got my allotment in early April last year, I still planted and harvested 28 vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers.



Of everything I planted before August, I was only "late" with the courgettes and the sweetcorn, yet I still harvested one courgette from three plants. The ancient 'three sisters' method I used for squashes, beans, and sweetcorn produced only three small squashes. My tomatoes, grown from seedlings, produced so many fruits that I eventually tired of eating them all summer. I harvested about 700 g of strawberries (Cambridge and Sweetheart). My potatoes (Maris Peer, Maris Piper, King Edward) were bought from the garden centre, almost fully chitted. I planted 16 seed potatoes of three varieties (not having cheated growing indoors until leaves formed) and ended up with only about 26 small to tiny potatoes, some looking as if they had grown on the planet of Dune. I was also happy to harvest several good-sized broccoli heads, many beetroot, and the strangest looking carrots (Chantennay Red and Flyaway F1). Preparing

the ground and implementing my own landscape design proved hard on my back. Despite my athletic lifestyle, all the crouching, kneeling, digging, and weeding disagreed with me. It took a

whole summer of physiotherapy to regain pain-free movement. So here is my biggest tip: allotment work is physically demanding, and time flies when you're busy. Take breaks... and stop much earlier than your body insists you should.



Beetroot grown from seedlings

From The Archer archives...

By Jane Marsh

10 years ago:
April 2016

Mobile phone theft is nothing new. We warned readers to protect their phones and other valuables after a gang of thieves on motorbikes tried to rob a mother in the High Road, N2, just after she had dropped her children at school. Local police advice is to keep mobiles out of sight whilst out and about but, sadly, this advice is usually ignored and phone theft is still a major problem.

15 years ago:
April 2011

Local campaigners formed the Barnet CPZ Action Group to fight Barnet Council's plans for huge increases in residents' parking charges. The council had to delay its proposed increases after the group highlighted mistakes in the consultation process. Campaigners went on to launch an ultimately successful High Court challenge against the increases, following a fundraising appeal to help with legal costs.

25 years ago:
April 2001

The Salvation Army closed its East Finchley Mission in Hertford Road after 104 years. Local residents who had enjoyed the Parent and Toddler Group, Evergreen Club and other support services from officers Haris and Anna Giannaros said they would be greatly missed. The Salvation Army Hall was subsequently sold off and is now a children's nursery.

