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Well Autumn is upon us once again after a Summer that at times served up a bizarre mix of torrential rain & scorching temperatures, with early September marked by some unseasonably chilly weather. But our annual programme of social activities in the Garden survived unscathed – more or less (see later article). Meanwhile change was afoot only a stone's throw away:

END OF AN ERA FOR FORMOSA STREET

It was a sad day on July 31st when Hiten & Darshna Patel pulled down the shutters for the last time on Dhigs, the convenience store on Formosa Street that Hiten's family had run for a hard-to-credit 44 years

The family bought the shop, then known as Benthams, in May 1979, when it was run by Hiten's parents with help from his brother & sisters.

Hiten started working there full-time in 1987. During that time he has seen many changes, he says: "When we arrived on the street we had a butcher's, off-licence, two grocery stores, a launderette,

delicatessen, post office, chemist, doctor's surgery, hi-fi & television shop & a proper fruit & veg shop. The hairdressers & pub have always been there but with different owners – otherwise that leaves only us!"



During their time in the business, the couple were not just shop-keepers but a friend & support to many, particularly during the Covid lockdown when they

were a vital source not just of provisions but of human contact. They even made time to take the local RAF veteran Peter Brown, whose funeral at the age of 96 drew hundreds back in May, to some of his hospital appointments.



The Patels' farewell do outside the Prince Alfred pub on September 3rd was an often emotional affair. Dozens of residents milled around freely in Formosa Street after Westminster Councilor Melvyn Caplan arranged for the road to be specially closed for the occasion. Hiten responded to Cllr Caplan's speech of thanks & then there was a special hug for his long-time co-worker & friend Jassi Taylor, who continues to work at the shop.



Afterwards Hiten commented that "the kindness & outpouring of emotion shown to us during our last week will always stay etched in our memory for ever". As for the future, talk of retirement was batted away vigorously. No, no, no -- they were just going to take a break for a while, with a trip to India for Darshna to

see her parents & maybe a holiday in South Africa. The best thing so far was not having to set the alarm clock of a morning!

Alongside the spread so generously laid on by Hiten & Darshna were two cakes provided by the pub which said it all.



Just one last question though: why the name Dhigs?? Turns out the family changed it from Benthams back in 1987 to reflect their family initials – D for Hiten's brother, H for Hiten himself, IG for his father's first & middle names & S for his mother. When his brother Dhimant sold his share of the business back in 2018 that was okay because in the meantime Hiten had met & married Darshna with a capital D (although he insists that *wasn't* a factor in his choice...)!

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Well, less than a month later Dhigs re-opened for business, this time under its new name of Shivam Convenience. The owner is Bhavesh Patel, who also runs five other convenience stores in London. Mr Patel, universally known as Raj, says he was drawn to Little Venice because it's such a buzzy area "with a lot going on". in particular. Now more than ever, you can do an entire grocery shop there without needing to succumb to the behemoth that is Tesco's.

At the same time the shop remains a handy port of call for those just wishing to pick up the odd item such as a newspaper or a greetings card.



And more good news is that it continues to offer an exemplary range of baked goods, of which the best is well-known to be the maple pecan plait (which is why I can never get one after about 10 am).



This one was held to be the biggest & best, kindly made possible as before by the sponsorship of the Winery on Clifton Road.

The weather was a lot less kind for the Family Fun Day on July 8th, but things rapidly picked up after a couple of hours of torrential rain at the start.



That was more than could be said for this year's Shakespeare in the Squares, whose performance in neighbouring Crescent Garden on July 4th of *Twelfth Night* was actually rained off – the first time it had happened apparently in the company's entire eight-year history!

But better luck attended the open-air screening in the Garden of the iconic '60s film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on September 10th. Around 80 people camped out on the lawn enjoying refreshments provided by local retirement living specialists Wallacea Living, and as

THAT WAS THE SUMMER THAT WAS.....

It began in glorious fashion on May 7th with a communal lunch in the Garden attended by more than 50 residents to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.



Then came a couple of calendar staples: the Open Gardens weekend on June 10th/11th, attracting a bumper turn-out of 63 visitors, followed by the third of our highly successful annual wine-tastings:



darkness fell the blue & green lights from their headsets made for an almost ethereal sight!

BUT THE YEAR IS NOT OVER YET....

We have one big social event still to come: Bonfire night on **Saturday November 4th**, which this year promises to be the best ever since we are switching suppliers (at no extra cost) to the multi-award-winning company Firework Crazy, which has over 35 years' experience of staging professional displays throughout the South-East. They were the winners of last year's Firework Champions event at Hatfield House & did the after-show party at this year's Brit awards in February, so we should be in for quite a spectacle. The bonfire will be lit at 6.30 pm & the display will be timed at 7 pm to precede the two displays in the neighbouring Crescent & Winston Amenity Gardens, both due to take place at 7.30 pm. The aim is to make the bonfire a bit more long-lasting – weather permitting! – and there may also be some changes to the usual lay-out, but these will be confirmed closer to the date.

LOCAL AUTHOR HEADS THRILLER LIST

Photo by Joanna Bergin



Formosa resident Harriet Crawley has been many things: journalist, television presenter, art dealer, parliamentary candidate, tech entrepreneur & most recently, successful novelist. Her latest thriller, *The Translator*, was Book of the Month for the Sunday Times & the Harrogate International Festivals following its publication last March. The plot centres on an

attempt by the Russian government, headed by Putin sound-alike President Serov, to sabotage the under-sea communications cables linking the UK with the USA – a threat that is in fact all too real having been flagged up repeatedly by the West in recent years, not least by a then little-known MP called Rishi Sunak back in 2017!

I hope to run an interview with Harriet in the Winter Newsletter but meanwhile our Formosa Book Club made *The Translator* its choice of reading for September & one of our members wrote the following review:

PACY PLOT COMBINES POLITICS & PASSION

By Raluca Nastase

The novel opens with an unexpected summons for Clive Franklin, a Russian language expert in the Foreign Office, to go to Moscow to act as translator for the British Prime Minister. Once there his well-ordered life is turned upside down with the discovery that his former lover of a decade before, Marina Volina, is now the interpreter to the Russian President. At the embassy Clive learns of a plot to paralyse communications between the US & the UK & bring the economy of the West to its knees. Marina, it seems, is willing to betray her country to join him in a high-stakes & apparently hopeless mission to stop the attack.

I found this an engaging Summer read, with the author's detailed knowledge of Russia, where she lived for over 20 years, allowing for a seamless switching of the narrative between Moscow & the UK. The cultural differences between the two were also perceptively & sometimes amusingly explored.

Although at its heart it's a love story it also has a lot to say about the nature & capabilities of modern warfare in the post-Cold War era, with its increasing emphasis on cyber-attacks.

Incidentally the tense denouement playing out at the Moscow marathon had an almost cinematic quality it seemed to me -- so maybe the movie isn't far behind!

NEW FACES ON THE FORMOSA BOARD

The Board is delighted to welcome two new members, although one of them is more in the nature of a re-tread (if she'll forgive the term): Irina Miklavchich previously served on the Board from the Summer of 2018 to the Summer of 2020, but stood down because of the demands of her work.



Now that she's stepped back from a full-time role, she is able to get involved with the community once again & help with the organisation of social events as she did so capably during her previous term of office.

The second new member, Steff Roeg, has lived on the Garden for over 30 years & during that time has seen



some big changes – out have gone the rickety swing that used to hang from the big tree & the custom of roasting marshmallows in the embers of the communal bonfire, victims both to modern-day health & safety rules! On the plus side though she says she has seen a big improvement in the appearance of the

garden, with its beautiful new flower-beds & well-maintained paths.

For 30 years Steff worked in the film industry where the freelance nature of her role left little time for volunteering, but in 2010 she re-trained as a psycho-therapist & being now self-employed decided it was the moment to throw her hat into the ring!

While welcoming these new arrivals, the Board said farewell to Jack Graham-Lindsay, who has moved out of the area with his young family after living on Warrington Crescent since childhood. Jack was a partner at property consultants Harding Green, which has kindly sponsored Formosa's Summer party for the last two years.

YOU HAD YOUR SAY AT AGM

Sixteen residents attended this year's Annual General Meeting at St Saviour's Primary School on September 5th, chaired by Board Chairman Sandy David. Also present were Board members Marc Scrimshire, Peter Neilsen & new recruit Steff Roeg, with apologies from Peter Cross.

The accounts for 2022/23 showed a slight increase in expenditure on previous years which was accounted for by inflation. Most of the money for repairs & improvement had been spent on better drainage & on pathways & stones to put under the benches. More money was spent on events than in 2021 at the height of Covid, when no events were able to take place.

Several residents wanted to see greater flexibility in the rules governing private parties in the Garden & they were assured that the Board would be announcing a rule change on this in the near future. There was general agreement that parties should close at dusk rather than at a nominated hour.

Jan Melkenbeek from Gravitass gave an update on work in the garden. The emphasis had been on adding extra colour to the flower beds but there was to be a re-think about how to use the area under the big tree -- the wild-flower meadow had not been a success since it was only visible in the Spring. A number of trees had come to the end of their life & would be replaced later this Autumn.

Up-lighters have been installed on the big tree as well as the new branch lights, so all being well they will be switched on for the first time at the end of the firework display.

NEWS IN BRIEF:

- The Little Venice area continues to be much sought-after by makers of films & commercials – to the extent apparently that the Council are said to be restricting the number of permits they issue! In August it was the turn of the up-market US & Canadian



department store Nordstrom who seemed to think that the front step of one Board member's house in Castellain Road was just the place to park their winsome toddlers!

- The BBC has sold its historic studios in Delaware Road, which played host to the likes of David Bowie, the Beatles, Led Zeppelin & Beyoncé to a consortium including the Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer & two film producers. The venue, which was also the home of performing groups such as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, will undergo a multi-million-pound refurbishment plan & will remain as a studio space as well as housing a new, not-for-profit educational facility.

- This year's Little Venice Film Festival will be held on 22nd - 28th October. The Festival, whose sponsors include Westminster Council & British Airways, aims to amplify under-represented voices in cinema & will also offer specialised screenings for disabled, deaf & neuro-divergent audiences. Local venues will include the Puppet Theatre Barge & Canal Café Theatre.
- The dates for next year's London Open Gardens weekend have just been announced for the 8th & 9th of June. 2024 in fact marks the Silver Jubilee of this highly successful event! As in previous years, Formosa have already expressed their interest.

FORMOSA EVENTS

- NOVEMBER 4th Bonfire Night
- JUNE 8th & 9th 2024 Open Gardens weekend
- SUMMER 2024 Wine-tasting
- SUMMER 2024 Family Fun Day
- NOVEMBER 2nd 2024 Bonfire Night

Don't forget: this is *your* Newsletter, so any contributions from residents would be greatly welcomed (subject to the usual laws of libel & defamation!) The next edition will appear in the New Year so material needs to reach me at vivvy.robins@gmail.com by January 15th 2024.