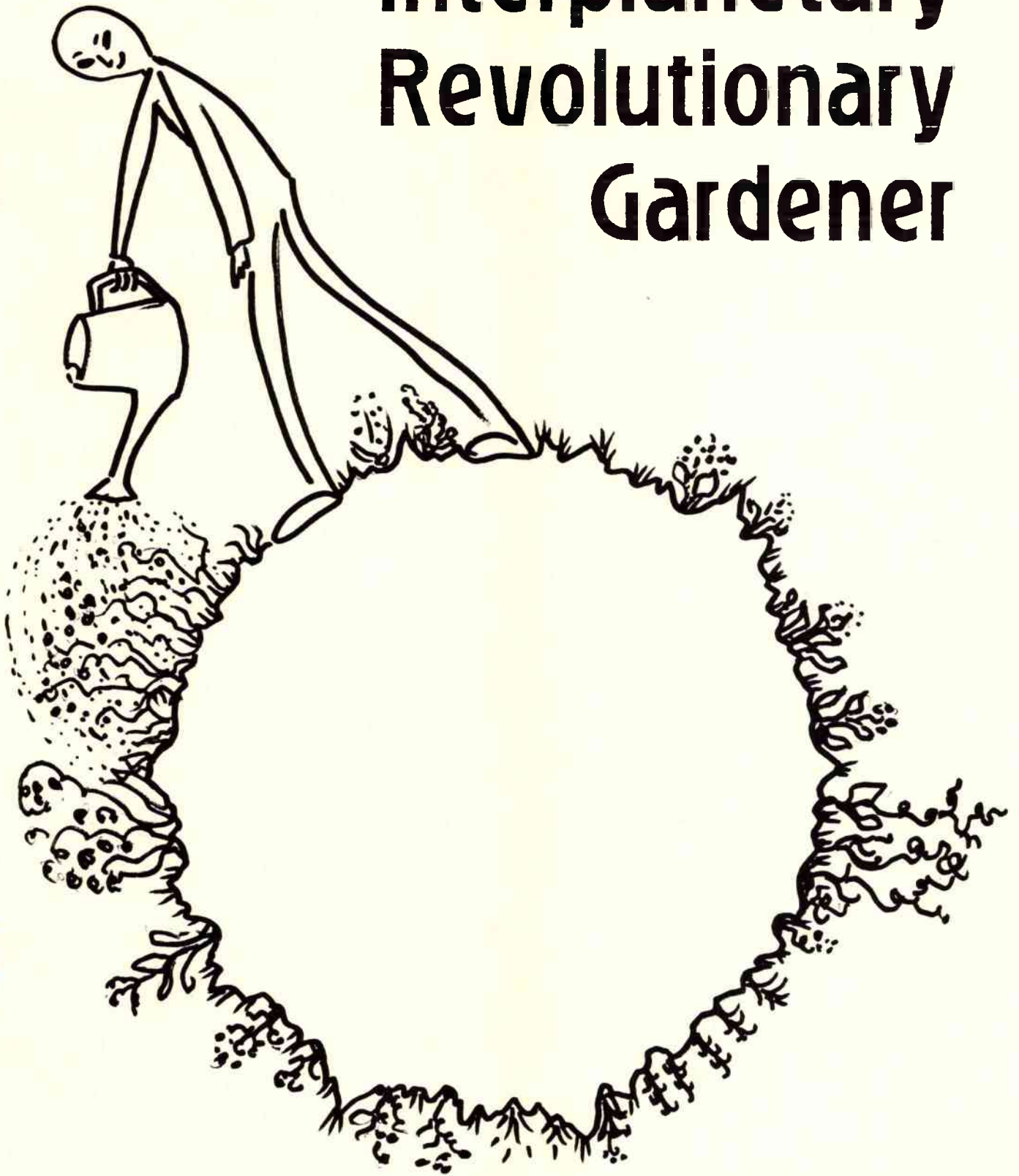


Interplanetary Revolutionary Gardener



IRG 3

INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER

Issue 3

August 2000

Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
Tottenham
London N15 4JU
United Kingdom

E-mail: jehanna@gn.apc.org & josephn@globalnet.co.uk

So here we are in the twenty-first century, and we're most disappointed. Where are the personal jet backpacks promised in all those 1950s comic strips about the future? Why don't we have an atomic-powered car parked outside the house? Why are we not all wearing silver jumpsuits and eating our food in pill form?

But amidst these and other vicissitudes, you can be sure of one unchanging thing: that this issue of *International Revolutionary Gardener* is late. Later even than its editors promised themselves when they published the previous issue lo! these many months ago -- but then again, we've never had set schedules for our fanzines, so who cares? (If you want something more frequent, publish it yourselves.) Like many of our fannish contemporaries, we're slowing down as we mature; publishing more infrequently (although

many of our contemporaries have ceased publishing altogether), spending more time on the house...the garden...the allotment...local environmental activities...the dolls-houses...

This is nominally a science fiction fanzine which very occasionally mentions science fiction (usually indirectly) and, because of our fringe relationship with SF fandom (we very rarely go to conventions, know only what gossip appears in *Ansible*, and don't participate in on-line fanac), almost never mentions fandom itself (although you might find a few fleeting references to it in this issue). It is available for the usual (meaning your publication in exchange, a contribution, or a letter of comment), and only in this printed paper form (because we haven't the time or the inclination to fiddle about constructing an electronic version).

CONTENTS

Barefoot Barbie -- Judith Hanna	page 3
The Letter Column -- edited by Joseph Nicholas	page 8
Observations from Life -- Joseph Nicholas	page 12
Bruce / Lee -- Judith Hanna	page 17
Cover and interior illustrations -- Judith Hanna	

Barefoot Barbie

Judith Hanna

My little sisters ate my Barbie's shoes. I have, I think, forgiven them now -- but not forgotten.

Mum made me buy my own Barbie doll. "What do you want one of those silly sulky things for?" said Mum. "You needn't think I'm getting you one. If you want it, you'll have to save up and buy it yourself." So I did. She had long blonde hair and a tan, a red swimsuit, red plush jeans, red and white striped cotton top, a Barbie-sized coca-cola bottle and transistor radio, white-framed sunglasses and red plastic high-heeled pumps. She was very American, and emphatically grown-up. My friend Jane Stanley, who came from England, had all sorts of bought clothes for her Barbies, and Ginger, Barbie's friend, and Skipper, Barbie's teenage sister, and Ken, Barbie's boyfriend, and a Barbie house. Mum didn't go in for buying doll's clothes, but I was welcome to help myself to dressmaking scraps and make them myself.

When I was ten, Mum took my other dolls away from me. "You're too old for playing dolls now," she said firmly, and started packing away my 23 dolls off the top of my wooden toy chest, where they sat lined up, keeping themselves and me company. "Well, all right, you can keep three of them." So I kept my three real-life sized baby dolls, and a cot for them to sleep in. And of course, Barbie, because she was my very own, bought with my own pocket-money. Then my little sister Zena arrived -- a real living baby doll for me to play with and bathe and dress (well, change nappies). Unlike plastic dolls, she was soft and warm and bent at the joints, and grinned and gurgled when I played with her. When Zena turned into a toddler and we moved from East Fremantle to the farm at Kojonup, my sister Roslyn arrived, and I had a pair of living baby dolls to play with and take for walks and read stories to. I also had brothers, but they don't come into this. Dolls is girl stuff.

I made Barbie a flat to live in, in the space on top of the drawers in the spare tallboy wardrobe in my bedroom. Her bed and wardrobe were made out of Kleenex paper handkerchief boxes. The bed lay flat and was padded out comfortably with a baby pillow for mattress, and squares of blanket and sheet. The wardrobe

stood on end with a length of dowel across the top as a hanging rail. Another useful-sized cardboard box made a kitchen bench, with cupboards in it, and cardboard cooker rings stuck on. I cut knives, forks and spoons, plates and saucepans for her out of the silver tinfoil that sealed the tops of powdered milk tins. She had the drawer underneath her little bedsit to keep her clothes in.

Bought clothes weren't something either Barbie or I had much to do with. Clothes got made at home. When I was 12, Mum said I was old enough to make my own, instead of her making them. This meant a trip to the shops to choose paper pattern and material, then cut out the pieces, and sew them together on her electric sewing machine. Or on the old treadle machine in my bedroom. Much easier at large Judith size than tiny fiddly Barbie scale. Although I had a collection of paper patterns for proper Barbie dressmaking, saved from issues of the Australian *Woman's Weekly*, that treasury of ladies' lore and culture, most of Barbie's wardrobe remained interesting scraps that could be draped and tied around her in a variety of improvised styles, rather than actual garments that stayed the same every time you put them on.

How does one play with a Barbie doll?

You dress her up in all her different outfits, and pose her with her accessories, testing out your grown-up dress sense and glamour, as preached in the *Woman's Weekly*. A Barbie is a plastic blank for little girls to play out imagined rehearsals for a grown-up self. Of course, I knew I wanted to be beautiful and famous and rich. Famous for what? That was infinitely variable. Nor did actually working to achieve it come into the frame. Maybe I'd be a model or fashion designer or film star -- stereotypical Barbie metiers -- or a spy or writer or artist. Or a palaeontologist or explorer or some kind of scientist, or save the world, whatever popped up from reading or TV watching.

Then off I went to boarding school in Katanning, then to Uni in Perth, the beginning of grown-up life. There I met others who read books, so I stopped being a bookworm and started discovering life and real people. Barbie

stayed at home on the farm, and my little sisters found her and started treating her like one of their dolls, leaving her on the floor in dust and dirt, muddying up and tearing her clothes, and losing her things.

When I came home, I hit the roof! Other dolls were family property, for passing on to them. Barbie was my Barbie, my very own. I packed her securely away, and got on with life, moving to Sydney, then to London. It must have been on our Aussiecon 2 visit back home that Mum hauled out a packing case of 'Judith's stuff' for me to sort through. You'll guess what I found in it -- my Barbie. And her surviving wardrobe, which totalled her red swimsuit, red plush jeans, and red and white striped top; two bought dresses, both mostly blue; a brown corduroy trouser suit (made by me from *WW* pattern, jacket needs new collar); a turquoise and black lace party dress (*WW* pattern); a blue and white checked sleeveless shirt (*WW* pattern); pale blue hipster trousers made by me from an old stretch hairband; and two crumpled green georgette tops, one *WW* pattern, the other made up by me. Those were all her worldly goods. No shoes. No sunglasses.

I can place the date I brought Barbie back to London because at the last CND annual conference we attended, at City University in Islington, I was knitting her a jumper striped in blues and greens, and enjoying not having to sit up front and take minutes, or even listen. The woman sitting behind leaned over during a break in the speeches, which all congratulated the peace movement on ending the Cold War, and looked forward to Labour winning the next election and acting on its policy of unilateral disarmament. "Are you expecting the patter of tiny feet?" she asked. "No, it's for my Barbie doll," I told her. This is not the sort of thing people expect to hear at right-on events. Barbie needed woollies to insulate her from English weather, so I was knitting her a pencil slim navy skirt and russet three quarter length coat. Joseph got mentioned in *The Guardian* next day as the dissident "delegate with pony tail and earrings" who told everybody not to count on Labour getting in, let alone disarming.

When my sisters, now grown up, popped over to London on the traditional Aussie 'see the world' working holiday, they found Barbie perched on a bookshelf in the back room of our Frinton Road flat. Zena laughed, and confessed to having chewed up all Barbie's shoes back when they were little. Why? No reason that made sense now she was grown up -- just that they were bright colours and chewable. By way of restitution, Zena found a pack of Barbie shoes at Hamleys, and bought them -- my Barbie appreciated this, even though they were mostly

pink and red and orange dress-up high heels which she didn't bother to wear. She did wear the white sneakers sometimes.

Then I spotted, in Exeter, what looked like a Barbie-sized wicker peacock chair, so I bought it for Barbie to sit in. By this time we'd moved to our Jansons Road terrace house, and Joseph's shelf-building had reached the upper landing, where he built what we call 'the art-store' for me -- a hip-high bench, with three shelves above to ceiling height and space below for portfolios, boxes, etc. Barbie, sitting on her new peacock chair, was given a home on the second or eye-height shelf. Gardening magazines and transport files occupy the other shelves.

Over time, Barbie-scale bits and pieces have gathered around her, making her shelf a very cluttered Barbie bedsit. There's a Kleenex paper hanky box as sofa, with two petit-point tapestry purses stuffed with cotton wool as cushions. There's a round tea-tin painted with Persian birds and flowers, a carved wooden spice-chest, a thimble-collectors shelf unit and a bookshelf intended for a one-twelfth scale dolls house but which works better at Barbie's one-sixth scale. An old blue-checked woollen scarf, originally Mum's, serves as carpet. A faded gold velvet and brocade pincushion (bought at Rottnest when I was a student) makes a floor cushion, and a Chinese embroidered satin drinks coaster (present from Joseph's mother) makes a floor mat. Postcards are just the right size for Barbie posters, and my collection of art nouveau 1913 Parisian couture cards currently adorns her walls. Barbies are, after all, basically clothes-horse dolls. She has a sewing machine (with integral fridge magnet), a copper kettle, white china tea set, miniature souvenir mugs (Tolpuddle martyrs, Lyme Regis, Tower Bridge, sailing ship), and other little pots and china figures.

Of course, she's accumulating more clothes, which are kept in a purple Liberty's shopping bag. I sat down one day with my proper dressmaking book, and translated its instructions about drawing up your own dressmaking paper patterns into a file set of basic Barbie templates. But you have to be organised about sewing -- cutting out proper shapes, getting out the sewing machine, finishing off hems and seams. Fiddly work.

If miniature dressmaking is harder -- or even just as much bother -- as full sized, miniature knitting and crochet are quicker and easier. Knitting and crochet just kind of grow into fabric shapes, making their own selvages, and crocheting seams and edgings is easier than sewing them. A woman in our local LETS scheme unloaded a carboot full of assorted knitting yarns on me. Masses of coarse stone



grey and faded pink Rowan blend wool got crocheted into Old America motifs (the proper name for what are commonly known as granny squares) and joined into a double-bed-sized rug. Machine knitting cones of colours I definitely didn't want were taken to a LETS trading day or given to local charity shops. That left a mostly tangled mass of intriguing colours and textures to be sorted out and wound into balls. Then there are drawersful of buttons, feather trimmings, fabrics and fake fur, beads and interesting craft stuff I keep accumulating: colours and textures and possibilities to play with.

"You can't buy any more until you've used up the stuff you've got," says Joseph sternly as I dive into yet another tempting sewing shop. He is wrong -- it is much easier to buy more, and riffle through the fascinating mass of stuff, than to actually make stuff into proper things. But turning it into Barbie-size jumpers, jackets, coats, tops and dresses, scarves, hats, bags, rugs is quicker and easier than getting to the end of making big things, which tend to sit

around half-done for ages. I've even worked out how to crochet slipper-boots for her. It all gives my hands something to do while sitting watching TV, or reading, during long train trips or boring meetings.

Once you start playing with your Barbie doll again, you start taking an interest in that screamingly tooth-rotting pink section found in some shops. I'm sure Barbie stuff wasn't so insistently candy pink when I was little. Nor do I approve of the modern Barbies' cheesy grins -- so unlike my Barbie's coolly sceptical reserve, which struck Mum as sulky. I spot issues of *Barbie* magazine on the rack at the local supermarket and flick through them. Around the fringes of various 'miniatures' shows and magazines (as the serious dolls-house hobby tends to call itself) I see stuff for adult Barbie collectors. I'm fascinated by it all. And shocked at how crassly consumerist it seems.

For the obsessive adult Barbie collector (many of them gay men -- of course, Barbie is the kind of woman a drag queen wants to be),

value is destroyed if you even open the packaging. *Barbie* magazine, aimed at little girls (I'd guess 5-10 years old) seems to have two tunes: one is buy more Barbies; the other is turn yourself into Barbie. More Barbie stuff now seems tacky pink plastic and glitter for little girls to dress up in as is for their dolls.

Where are the Barbie-scale patterns for making things? Whatever happened to the spirit of improvisation, playing with Barbie as a way of learning the skills and fun of making stuff yourself? I'm sure it must remain alive among young Barbie-owners. But so far, it's remained invisible to me, as if censored out of the public Barbie-scape so it won't undermine Mattel's merchandising avalanche.

Of course Mattel just wants to push its merchandise -- and making things yourself means you aren't buying. Its web site is just a shop window of expensive 'special collector' Barbie models, but no chat forum where little girls might exchange hints about making their own Barbie stuff. They may well worry that such a forum would be a magnet for paedophiles. You know, of course, that Mattel clamps down hard on anyone else using its Barbie™.

The sales push seems to assume that little girls, and those buying presents for them, will buy yet another Barbie doll, whole gaggles of them. This seem wrong to me, wasteful and disrespectful. Of course it comes back to my own experience -- because my Barbie was special, I think that's the way the relationship should be for all little girls and their Barbies. Buying my own Barbie, from my own pocket-money, marked a stage in growing up. So did the transition from having a whole tribe of dolls -- all individuals, of course, with their own names and personalities and the history of who they were a present from and when -- to just a few, then when my little sisters started playing with the three life-sized baby dolls, just the one Barbie doll to save and pack away. If I'd had lots of Barbies, I doubt if any of them would have seemed special, worth keeping as a souvenir of growing up.

What I craved when I was a girl was not a plethora of Barbies but the interesting little knick-knacks and accessories that I couldn't make at home. I still do. Infuriatingly, almost all you find now is plastic dolls packaged up with ready-made accessory-defined identities. At the moment on shop shelves, there's a triffic Barbie artist kit -- easel, paint box and tubes, palette

and brushes -- but you have to buy a dark-haired 'Generation Girl' doll to get it. What do I want with another doll? There's a dinky inflatable see-through pink plastic armchair, bundled with a 'Sitting in Style Barbie' doll in pink bikini with hideously tacky and uncomfortable-looking pink plastic midriff skirt.

That's in the UK. Checking out Barbie-ization on my Y2K trip back to Australia, I was reassured to find the range in shops there more as I remembered. Less screamingly pink, and a good range of clothes and accessory packs to buy for the Barbie you already have. Even a 'Young Australian Fashion Designers' series. So I splurged.

In the Target chain store at Innaloo Shopping City in Perth, I bought my Barbie three packs of her first ever lingerie, because they included proper high-heeled Barbie pumps in useful colours with acceptable little garments: black shoes and hairbrush with leopard spotted slip and house-coat; pale green shoes and comb with green satin slip and lace-trimmed, rose-sprigged nylon house-coat; pale blue shoes and hairbrush with blue knickers, vest and slip. Reminiscent of Barbie's descent from a German sexy doll called Lilli, marketed for randy men to give to their girlfriends as a hint of what they wanted them to be¹. It's a small step from Barbie to Stepford wife. One of these days, I'll get around to cutting up some old T-shirts and making Barbie a few proper sloppy sleeping T-shirts, like real girls wear. The Karrinyup Myers had a 'romantic dinner for two' pack of table settings, and a kitchen cooking set, so I snapped them up.

In trendy Subiaco, I picked up a 'Barbie Turns 40' festschrift of feminist essays by women like me on their experiences of growing up with Barbie. Screaming pink cover, of course. (Then it went missing from the box I shipped back here. Waah!) But I didn't manage to catch up with Murdoch University librarian and super-fan Grant Stone, who has recently completed his Master's thesis on Barbie in popular culture. Grant is the father of daughters.

Arriving back to the globally-warmed but still grey and chilly English spring, I cheered myself up by checking on the current state of Barbie-ization here. The range in the local Tesco seemed unchanged from last year -- repellently pink and tacky, clothes badly made and tasteless, nothing at all of interest except packets of little coat-hangers which will have

¹ 'Is this true?' queried Joseph. 'If so, it needs to be expanded on; a thrown-out hint like this is merely frustrating. Sure it might provoke letters of enquiry -- but on the other hand, do we want a letter column full of leering about German sex fantasies?' And there I was thinking everyone knew Barbie had that sultry German ancestress. Don't ask me for details -- I know no more. Leering letters will be binned.

disappeared from their stock if ever I get around to making Barbie a proper wardrobe to hang up her clothes. Beatties in New Oxford Street had reduced its range and is no longer worth bothering to check out -- I should have snapped up that white bathroom suite the time I saw it on their shelves. Hamleys at Oxford Circus had a proliferation of Barbie and her sister dolls, including the artist and inflatable pink chair packs. It also had a bicycle for Barbie -- but I balked at the £9.99 price tag, and decided to think about it. Thinking about it is always dangerous, as whatever you decide you really want is almost guaranteed to have disappeared forever by the time you come back for it.

At the Wembley Woolworths (on the way back from Tony Blair's Active Communities Convention), I found the bike kit again, for £6.95, and went for it! As well as the bike -- which has a blue, not pink, frame thank goodness -- you get bright pink cycle helmet and panniers, a little white water flask that snaps into a holder on the frame, a transparent pink plastic back pack, and a pair of eye-protecting goggles. If you pop the ends on the pedals the wrong way around, you can unscrew the pedal from the frame and swap 'em around to the right side. I may get around to re-upholstering the candy pink seat, and repainting the cycle helmet and panniers.

In John Lewis, Oxford Street, a couple of weeks later, I failed to find amber plush or velvet suitable for dolls house carpeting. But I discovered their toy department tucked away on the top floor, with not just one pack of Barbie shoes, but four different sets, each with five pairs. I exercised restraint and only bought three of them. (And they had Barbie's bike in stock, at £5.99.) While in the area, I thought I might as well have another look in Hamleys -- which had sprouted some proper accessory kits, so I snapped up two of them.

A pair of utterly over-the-top silver stack-heel pumps with iridescent turquoise strap was the reason for succumbing to one of the Hamleys packs, which also included iridescent turquoise tote bag, sunglasses, plus tizzy bits of jewellery and scarf. The other pack gave her a bright pink ghetto blaster with two Barbie™ CDs to play on it, a pink mobile phone, a coke bottle with two plastic glasses, and a silly cardboard scrapbook. I'll make her some proper books, one of these days, and some more appropriate CDs -- Joseph's Britannia Music Club catalogues have backlist cover images about the right size. Joseph pats me on the head, looks disdainful, and clears away the wasteful packaging litter of pink cardboard and bubble plastic.

My Barbie now has no less than 30 pairs of shoes -- several of them even practical types. Two pairs of tough walking boots: one in brown,

the other fawn. Five pairs flat-heeled lace-ups: white tennis shoes, blue tennis shoes, white sneakers with red patches, white smart shoes with pink patches, yellow platform Spice Girl sneakers. One pair white high-heeled cowboy boots; one pair black high-heeled Parisian tart above ankle boots; one pair high-heeled red ankle boots. Flat pink jelly sandals, high-heeled yellow ankle strap sandals, white and blue strappy high heels. And lots more high heels in assorted colours. It occurred to me that Imelda Marcos, the Iron Butterfly, could be thought of as a real life Barbie gone to the bad -- that's what comes of linking up to the wrong Ken™.

Then taking a lunchtime stroll to the Woolworths in Chapel Market, Islington, to find that the (full-size) shower curtain I'd spotted the week before had disappeared from stock, I snapped up yet a different pack of Barbie shoes -- only to discover when Barbie tried on the eye-catching gold and shiny red pairs I bought for that they don't actually fit on her feet. Ain't that life -- the most glamorous shoes are always unwearable. And a pack of tools and red toolbox, naturally labelled as for Ken. Woollies and John Lewis, so far, come out best for Barbie shopping in this country. And the little butterfly hairclips currently selling on street stalls, in all sorts of colours and shapes, are good for Barbies too. Her spice chest is now full of them.

What next? Lots more yarns and bits of material to knit, crochet and sew into Barbie stuff. Clear the shelf below her bedsit of transport files and magazines, to give her a two level flat -- bedroom, bathroom and maybe cooking area downstairs, work and sitting room above. I'm on the lookout for a non-pink bathroom suite for her, and non-pink kitchen. Bed, cupboards, comfy chairs and so on, I can make myself. And she could use some good sunglasses, if anyone has a pair going spare. As Barbies are essentially clothes-fixated, I reckon her line of work is fashion journalism, exploring social history and semiology of style. Being my Barbie, of course she must be an intellectual about it. Even if she does wear shoes in the house.

I'm even thinking about buying that artist Barbie, to keep her company for a couple of years until Zena's little Holly reaches the age when my sensible sister decides she's old enough to have a Barbie of her own. Then there'll be Rosie's little Bella to buy a Barbie for. And once you have small nieces, you have a perfectly respectable reason for buying and making all sorts of Barbie stuff to give them.

Meanwhile, at least my Barbie is no longer barefoot. I wonder what she wants to wear today?

The Letter Column

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

Not many responses to IRG #2, or at any rate not as many letters as our fanzines seem to generate, but in some ways that's better since it makes selection easier -- and the second issue's publication date (March 1999) means that many can be eliminated simply on the grounds of age. This should therefore be a fairly short affair....

For those who need a reminder, the second issue had Judith writing on the ethical aspects of wearing fur and eating meat, and me discussing a number of food-related issues, including GMOs and food miles. We begin with responses to Judith:

Sue Thomason
190 Coach Road
Sleights
Whitby
North Yorkshire
YO22 5EN

I don't find wearing fur an *ethical* dilemma. I don't, for instance, have a problem with wearing leather shoes. But I would never wear fur myself -- I can't fully rid myself of the childhood-conditioning prejudice that fur is for the *rich*, not for ordinary people like me. Wearing fur is swanky: arrogant upper-class ostentation. Intellectually, I know this is complete rubbish. Emotionally, wearing fur goes in the Yuk Basket along with stuff like eating worms.

And meat-eating? I have to say that one of the few benefits of living in the country (apart from the view) is roadkill. Rory occasionally comes in with a fresh pheasant or rabbit (it's not poaching if it's been killed by someone else's car), and very very occasionally with a hare or grouse. They get gutted, skinned and casseroled (by either or both of us). Yum. I love watching the fluffy bunnies play in the field behind our house, but if one gets onto the road and gets knocked down I'll cheerfully prepare it and relish eating it. I think I'd be very squeamish about about *killing* an animal for food, but I really don't have any problems dealing with something cute, fluffy and dead.

Jackie Duckhawk
11 Hayster Drive
Cherry Hinton
Cambridgeshire
CB1 4PB

I thoroughly agree with the principles in Judith's article. I have long justified my carnivory to myself by the fact that I once killed a rabbit (it had been savaged by my dog and needed

putting out of its misery). I find justifying it to my five-year-old somewhat more difficult. I was worried that we might have an incipient burst of (sentimental) vegetarianism the other day, but luckily she decided in the end that although it wasn't fair to kill baby lambs, they tasted delicious so she was going to eat them anyway. Pragmatic, our daughter.

Whereas Helen Oldroyd reportedly went vegetarian on the spot when her father Paul made "yum yum" noises while driving past a field of new-born lambs one spring.

Rodney Leighton
RR #3
Tatamagouche
Nova Scotia B0K 1V0
Canada

There are a number of methods of raising animals or birds to eat, without being upset at killing them. A method I used to employ was to promise the breeding stock that they would live forever, make pets of them, and butcher the offspring. For instance, I had one cow, obtained at two weeks of age, which I promised her and myself would live with me until she died a natural death. She had a couple of heifers, which I kept, but we ate about ten of the thirteen or so bull calves the cow had. (I usually had professionals do the butchering, simply because beef from an animal butchered by someone who knows what they're doing is much better than beef from an animal hacked up by an amateur.) Then came a time when I was in physical, mental and financial poor health, and couldn't keep the cow. I had the choice of selling her to a livestock dealer or shooting her. I chose to sell her. And, after the trailer pulled away, sat down on the ground and bawled like a baby.

Dale Speirs
Box 6830
Calgary
Alberta T2P 2E7
Canada

Judith's suspicion about people converting to vegetarianism when they discover that a good steak comes from a dead cow is not entirely unfounded. Calgary is the home of the annual Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo, with more than 1.1 million paying visitors in ten days. Until recently, Stampede officials operated on the assumption that most of the visitors knew at least a little bit about ranching. But even in Alberta, whereas it used to be that even if you

hadn't grown up on a farm your parents or grandparents had, the majority of people now have no contact with any agriculture. With such complete ignorance about farming, it dawned on the agribusiness of this province why they kept getting blindsided by hostile legislation or ridiculous situations such as people not knowing the relationship between veal and dairying. Nowadays, the Stampede runs all manner of demonstrations during the rodeo, from how cows are milked (using a real live cow) to what raw meat looks like.

As UK readers will know, a similar situation prevails here: a recent survey for the Food Standards Agency revealed that the average adolescent had no idea that chips (french fries) are made from potatoes -- when shown a potato, they apparently thought it was some sort of fruit, which grew on trees, and wanted to know what chip plants looked like.

Steve Jeffery
44 White Way
Kidlington
Oxfordshire OX5 2XA

My main problem with vegans is the near impossibility of entertaining them. It's not enough just to make sure that you don't cook meat, or use animal fats, but when it gets to things like honey, cheese, yoghurt, and having to scan the small print on everything in the supermarket, then all the enthusiasm and interest goes out of it.

Vegans are absolutely the worst kind of New Age tree-huggers -- dietary faddists who let spurious pseudo-ethics get in the way of proper nutrition and health. I wouldn't have them in the house, if it was up to me -- but Judith lets them in anyway. Horsewhip the lot of them! (Harrumph harrumph.)

Now for some responses to my article:

Sue Jones
Flat 5
32-33 Castle Street
Shrewsbury
Shropshire SY1 2BQ

Should I worry about food miles, I asked myself. And I decided that no, I shouldn't. I should continue to favour the idea in principle and continue to shop as I please.

This isn't blind selfishness. I've not long begun eating vegetables that don't come frozen in packets, and I'm fighting thirty-odd years of bad eating habits, mother's idea of nourishing food, and ingrained, school-induced dislikes. I don't want to complicate my food shopping with worry about food miles yet: it's hard enough to put fresh veg into my Sainsbury's basket as it is, even though I know I prefer the taste, even though I know that time spent at the chopping board will be worthwhile. Once I've finally

overcome the urge to avoid the grocery section and settle for baked beans or frozen peas instead, then I hope I shall gradually become more conscientious about what I buy. For now, if the occasional exotic or imported luxury makes the difference between me eating good food or filling up on stodge, then I'm prepared to defend its purchase in the interests of remaining healthy. Five years ago I'd never bought a head of broccoli, three years ago I'd never bought a courgette, last week I bought my first onion. This is progress.

David Bratman
1161 Huntingdon Dr
San Jose
California 95129
USA

It does not surprise me at all to find, as Joseph writes, that a plate of food has become a hot political issue. Food has been political for a long time, something that occurs to me every time I see one of those heavy-handed TV commercials for beef, or explain patiently at some restaurant I'm scouting out that my wife is a vegetarian and no, fish is not a vegetable.

Actually, you can learn a lot about politico-economics by studying the restaurants and groceries here in Silicon Valley -- and I expect much the same applies in London, especially in the gentrifying districts. As with many other businesses, the restaurants are gradually separating out into junk food for the poor and yuppie food for the rich. The junk food restaurants tend to offer unhealthy food with lots of grease in it, while the yuppie food ones tend to offer food unhealthy more in cost, quantity (too much of it), and bizarre mixtures of ingredients. And, after years of a trend towards health food, yuppie food is becoming more rich and less vegetarian-friendly. This has been most striking with Mexican food. Ten years ago, Mexican restaurants in the southwestern US offered simple, solid, inexpensive fare with plenty of options like cheese enchiladas and bean tostadas. I was surprised to find in Britain that Mexican restaurants were expensive and offered complex, exotic fare that all had meat in it. Now the same trend has taken over the US.

When I referred to food as a political issue I was thinking primarily of conflicts in the UK between producer and consumer interests than the more general nexus between nutrition and income level, but your point about an area's eating establishments as a guide to its income status is a good one. Tottenham, for example, is one of the poorer areas of London, and most of its "restaurants" are of the junk food kind hamburgeramas, kebab shops, fried chicken, and similar. (Mind you, things may be changing, at least in our immediate neighbourhood: a couple

of "proper" restaurants have opened near us just in the past twelve months.)

As you suggest, the income and thus the nutritional status of an area will also be visible in its supermarkets -- what type, what product lines, their location and customer demographics -- but Tottenham actually fails this test. It has very few supermarkets, and vast numbers of little local shops selling fruit and veg which stay open all hours. The puzzle is why, with so much on offer, the population looks less healthy than it ought.

Kate Yule
1905 SE 43rd Ave
Portland
Oregon 97215
USA

IRG #2 was one of a variety of sources burbling at us last year about Community Supported Agriculture and Harvest Shares; even

our mainstream daily paper ran a piece about them. Joseph's mention of "food-miles" also struck a chord; I'd begun thinking along those lines on my own, back when the paper was full of daily -- for weeks on end! -- updates of the current state of the New Carissa, a freighter of some kind that washed ashore on the Oregon Coast during a bit of bad weather and persistently refused any and all attempts to get it to shove off again. I don't remember what the cargo was, but it doesn't really matter. The point is that I found myself standing in the grocery store croggling at the \$2 price tag on a red bell pepper, and downright appalled at the fact that it had been dragged here from Israel for my convenience. I don't need red peppers that badly! I don't need much of anything that badly. Does it make any sense at all to ship water across the Atlantic, for crying out loud?

Anyway, we took shares in an organic farm starting last June, and any time I feel a bit odd about someone driving 25 miles to tuck a bin of veggies on my front porch each week, I murmur "Israel" and "New Carissa" and it all comes back into perspective. Like Jae Leslie Adams, we have learned to cook many things we would not ordinarily have chosen and have become quite fond of beets and red chard.

John D Rickett

I was brought up short by Jae Leslie Adams's comment that "we have all learned to eat more unusual root vegetables: beets and rutabagas, parsnips and celery root". I simply had not realised, despite my three years' experience of working in the States in the early 1970s, that the first three of these were considered to be in any way unusual. Certainly, they have formed part of my diet ever since I can remember; on the other hand, I cannot pin down any specific recollection of having eaten them in the States, either. And what, I wonder, are celery roots?

Everything except the leaves? Or the bits beneath the stems that I have never seen -- is there a bulbous underground bit that never gets as far as greengrocers in the UK? And is it eaten in this country?

Celery root, says Judith, is also known as celeriac: a variety grown for its knobbly bulbous root, which can be grated into salads. However, it's not something we've ever grown or eaten.

Mat Coward
Somerset

I have to disagree that jerusalem artichokes are only suitable for plots, not gardens. What I do, now that I have a garden rather than an allotment, as opposed to the erstwhile vice versa, is grow a row of them up against the greenhouse, on its southern side. During the summer, they provide superb shade, thus saving me £££s of expensive man-made shading formulae. (Be the first on your site, etc..) In the winter, of course, they're not visible, so no light problems. Unfortunately, I can't eat them any more, but I did have the foresight to plant a dual purpose variety (i.e., blooming before they reach ten feet tall).

On my old allotment site most of the gardeners -- and all of the serious gardeners -- were of the now legendary "more or less organic" persuasion: a close relative of all those young women who are "vegetarians" but eat fish or chicken. Basically, it means that "chemicals" or "meat" are terms which simply exclude anything they use. But the main reason why most of them were organic or organic-ish was one Joseph didn't mention: poverty. Like any other hobby, gardening is impossible for all but the rich if you insist on buying all the gear to go with it. Most of my plot neighbours simply couldn't have had allotments if they'd had to buy in artificial fertilisers and pest controls.

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB

The main interest in my own garden this year is the increased activity of squirrels, who have taken to nicking the fat balls I put out for the birds, and in broad daylight too. I hang the one at the back on as slender a branch of my lilac tree as still remains, and if I'm very lucky I'm treated to the spectacle of rodent aerobatics as the culprit manages to spread its weight via all four legs plus tail, chew through the stem, return to ground level with the plastic netting in its teeth, and make off with its booty. I have come upon the discarded, intact net of a nicked ball, and assume the squirrel eats the contents through the net without breaking it.

There's also been a big increase in foxes in the Knightswood area (mainly comprising

four-in-a-block houses with front and back gardens -- a council estate being sold off by degrees). At night-time, they're hardly distinguishable from the many dogs whose owners allow them to express their free spirits in the form of pavement artistry and threatening behaviour. Being a late-night reader, I'd often heard what I now know to be foxes barking somewhere near my (ground floor) bedroom window. I used to think: "I wish they'd leave off choking that dog until a more civilised hour!" Now I know it's foxes, the sound is altogether more intriguing (though it's sad to realise that the locals aren't choking dogs after all).

And that's it for this issue -- save for the WAHFs: Harry Cameron Andruschak ("I was on a 3 week vacation in China last month, part of a tour group, and when we dressed for dinner I would change from trousers to kilt, along with a fur sporran. The Chinese women were just thrilled by the sporran, wanting to touch it and pet it."), Sheryl Birkhead, Pamela Boal ("It is difficult to loc a fanzine when one finds oneself saying hear, hear at virtually every paragraph."), William Breiding ("I don't think I've read any more reasonable or well thought-out pieces on the politics or ideology of food, fur and our use of resources."), Ken Cheslin ("I've always wanted to have a greenhouse."), Chester Cuthbert, Susan Francis, E B Frohvet, Teddy Harvia, Eric Lindsay, Murray Moore ("Have you considered a fountain to go with your pond? A friend, an artist, has built several fountains in his back yard, decorating the pole with found objects from garage sales and charity shops, with a sunken pump to recirculate the water" -- *but our garden is too small for a fountain or any other kind of water circulation feature, and in any case it would make the pond inhospitable for wildlife*), Lloyd Penney, Derek Pickles, David Redd, D M Sherwood, Alan Sullivan, Lucy Sussex (*with a copy of an extract from an 1894 Sydney novel about the appeal of dolls-houses*), and Henry Welch.

Our thanks to you all for writing, and we hope that those of you who couldn't find anything to disagree with in the previous issue will find something in this which provokes a vigorous response. In the meantime, let's close with the following anonymised rant sent to the Food Standards Agency:

The Government's plan to introduce a food "czar", based upon blind science, is on an equal level of misguided and mistaught thinking, and futility, as the appointment of a drugs "czar", which has proved a completely worthless and pointless measure, by the evidence of the glaringly obvious failure, and tragic

ineffectiveness of such a sham, which is based on the material gross body and bodily relations.

The causes of bodily ruination and disease are a many and varied symptom and consequence of the unregulated and irreligious modern materialistic life existence, which is based upon defective and incomplete education and guidance; of the self-destructive mentality of eat, drink and be merry without restriction, which results in misery, suffering and untimely death of the gross body, as can be witnessed and observed in daily life.

Eating meat and meat products which are full of fat, cholesterol, the slaughtered animal's bodily waste toxins, and blood; carcinogenic chemical agents of growth promotion, preservation, product appearance enhancement, powerful antibiotics *et al*, cause heart disease, narrowing of the arteries (causing strokes), and various cancers, notably of the colon and stomach. And what of BSE, e-coli 0157, listeria, *et al*?

All these inflictions are a direct result of the unauthorised eating of the flesh of fellow sentient, living creatures, in defiance of the absolute and immutable will and ordination of God, the supreme, controlling personality of the creation.

By subsisting only upon ordained, naturally supplied foodstuffs such as milk and milk products, fruits, nuts and cereal grains and vegetables produced by agricultural endeavour, all the ills and problems caused by eating unordained and abominable foodstuffs are avoided without need of such blind initiatives and such foolish nonsense as a food "czar".

The book *The New Why You Don't Need Meat* documents and highlights the ruinous and destructive effects of eating even small quantities of the decaying, putrefying flesh of the creatures of God's perfect creation.

The truly civilised man is expected to live on ordained foodstuffs, which are supplied by the arrangement of God, for the subsistence of man. Cowsmilk is particularly essential for developing the finer tissues of the brain, in order that one can understand the intricacies of transcendental (Vedic) knowledge.

Indeed, it can be understood from the revealed scriptures that there is a miracle in milk, in that it contains all vitamins and goodness to nourish the brain, for higher thinking; which is considered to be liquid religion.

Please have mercy upon yourselves, and the slaughtered animals.

Aural enjoyment during the production of this letter column was provided by Echobelly, Lush, My Bloody Valentine, The Popinjays, and The Primitives. (Remember any of them?)

Observations from Life

Joseph Nicholas

Milan and Money

The great puzzle about Milan is how to reconcile the impossibly slender young women one sees shopping for the latest fashions in the Corso Venezia and the Corso Buenos Aires with the dumpier, squarer, filled-out bodies of the middle-aged women gossiping in the terrace cafes of the Piazza il Duomo. Do the impossibly slender young women starve themselves to get into their clothes, deliberately buying a size smaller than their actual measurements and dieting down until they fit? Do they hope that by the time the pasta finally kicks in at age 35 or 40 they'll have scored the dream husband and spawned the two beautiful *bambini*, so that they can then let their bodies go and join their mothers in rotund splendour? There must be an answer to this conundrum somewhere.

Another puzzling thing about Milan -- although this in fact applies to Italy as a whole -- is why the lira has never been revalued to remove the zeros which make it resemble the most worthless of any banana republic's currency. 6,000 lira for a glass of beer and a glass of coca cola at the little bar in the zoo's Giardini Pubblici! -- or about £2 in real money. Or 3.10 in euros, according to the till receipt I was given -- a receipt which of course explains why any argument about the revaluation of the lira will shortly be academic, since in a couple of years' time it will have been abolished and the same notes and coins will be accepted everywhere from Naples to Dublin, Lisbon to Berlin. Except for hold-outs like Sweden and ourselves, and even if the Swedes do eventually give up the kroner for the euro I hope we'll have the sense to stay out.

Do I hear gasps of astonishment from dozens of readers, reeling in shock that I could say something so little-Englandish? Well, this has nothing to do with nationalistic bollocks about keeping the queen's head on our currency (as a republican I'd be quite happy to see the queen and the entire crew of wastrels and time-servers lose their heads), and everything to do with retaining the ability to control as much of one's economy as possible. The UK has problems enough with one currency, the pound sterling, where interest rates set to meet the

economic conditions prevailing in London and south-east England are quite unsuited to regions with higher unemployment and lower average incomes, such as rural Wales and the north-east of England; a single currency for nations with economies as diverse as those of (say) Germany and Greece would obviously create even more problems.

Except that Greece recently joined the euro-zone too, doubtless seduced by the totemistic assertions that the single currency would greatly increase the volume of intra-European trade and thus national prosperity and average incomes. (A good rule of thumb to use when encountering such assertions is that the larger the figures quoted by the promoters of a particular economic model, the more desperate they are to convince themselves of its validity.) But why should facilitating trade lead automatically to increased incomes and prosperity? Proponents of the World Trade Organisation's ultra-free trade model routinely assert this connection -- but just as routinely change the subject when confronted with statistics showing that, in the South, declining incomes have been the result. In any case, why is an increased volume of trade supposed to be a good thing in its own right? More goods moving around means more resource depletion and more carbon emissions; shouldn't we be concentrating instead on reducing trade volumes?

Although this is perhaps an inappropriate comment to make in relation to Milan -- it's the contemporary capital of the European fashion industry, but what could be more frivolous than fashion? It may employ thousands of people, but since they're engaged in nothing more intellectually demanding than persuading gullible punters to shell out twice a year for new clothes which can't be considered replacements because the old ones haven't actually worn out, it must be questionable as to whether any of them are adding anything to the sum of human culture. Gucci? Prada? Who needs these people? (Apart from their employees in their own-brand shops in the Via della Sigla and the Via Monte Napoleone, albeit that the shops don't seem to have any customers and the employees spend most of their time standing around looking

elegant and talking to each other on their mobile phones.)

If this makes me sound like a grump, then tough. I've found the clothes styles which suit me, and don't give a fart in a hurricane what fashion might say about them. (Although I might wish I was a bit thinner...taller...had less grey in my hair...) Just as I don't give a fart in a hurricane what the pro-euro camp says about the euro: the lira has lots of useless zeros, but a currency of their own at least ensures the Italians retain some control over their economy. (Even if they do have a similar, albeit geographically reversed, economic problem to the UK -- rich north, poorer south -- and thus a similar need for several regional currencies rather than one national one.) Unless, perhaps, the Italians consider that dictating what people wear each season is adequate recompense for not being able to decide their own interest rates?

Dvorak Lived Here

Local history often appears the poor relation of "real" history: whereas the latter can offer ideological conflict over the merits of the "grand narrative" approach versus the byways of contingency theory or cogent debate on the problems of establishing a secure chronology for the ancient world, the former has to get by with peoples' fading memories of what it was like when it were all fields round here (lad), with perhaps an admixture of crumbling paper documentation about former notables of whom no one has now heard and who for all practical purposes have vanished from the record. Such as (for example) the Tottenham Quaker gentleman William Janson, after whom our road is named, who was very active in the first half of the nineteenth century in both raising funds to send missionaries to Africa and the funding and running of local schools (this being an era when all education was private and the state had no responsibility for it).

Another nineteenth century Tottenham notable was Rowland Hill, the inventor of the pre-paid postage stamp, who ran the school at Bruce Castle from 1826 until his retirement in the 1870s. Bruce Castle itself -- most of whose current structure dates from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries -- was of course never a castle: originally the manor of Tottenham, listed in the *Domesday Book* as part of the entry for the Edmonton Hundred, it acquired the first part of its name when the manor passed through marriage into the Scottish family de Brus, whose son Robert achieved lasting fame at Bannockburn (one consequence of which was that he then had to surrender all his lands in England). The second part of the name derives

from the battlemented brick tower adjacent to the house, which was long thought to have been a folly or an elaborate well-covering but which recent research suggests may be an incredibly rare surviving example (perhaps the only one in the country) of a Tudor hawk mews. (It's largely undocumented; although the brickwork clearly shows that it was put up during the first phase of substantial construction on the site in the early part of the sixteenth century, circumstantial evidence indicates that the money to build it may have been smuggled out of Henry VIII's privy purse in order to conceal from Parliament the extent of the king's addiction to hunting.)

The house, tower and surrounding park passed into the ownership of the local authority in 1891, and now serves as the local museum. One Saturday in late June, it held an "archives open day", allowing people to fossick about in the dusty stacks without (the usually required) appointment. We went along, to see what we could find about both the previous occupants of our house and when it was built.

We already had a "time window" for its construction: it doesn't appear on the 1870 map, when Tottenham was still a rural village on the road north from London to Cambridge (the Romans' Ermine Street), but it does appear on the 1894 map, published twelve years after the Great Eastern railway had been laid from Liverpool Street to Edmonton and settlement was growing up around the newly-constructed stations at Seven Sisters and Bruce Grove, gradually encroaching on the market gardens established some decades earlier to serve London's growing population. But the Museum's archives room had a different 1870 map, labelled as a copy of an 1864 map, which unlike the other 1870 map we'd seen showed that -- presumably to cater for the future needs of the then slowly expanding population -- a substantial grid of streets, including Jansons Road, had already been laid out in the open country to the west of the High Road. (The population expansion of course accelerated once the railway was built, in part because railway companies then worked in league with housing developers to ensure success for both: the latter provided low-cost housing to induce people to move out of the crowded city centre, and in exchange the former offered cheap "workingman's tickets" to facilitate commuting back there.) The apparent contradiction between the two 1870 maps could perhaps be explained if the one we'd seen previously was also a republication of an earlier plan (in its case pre-1864); in any case, the museum's map appeared to confirm that our house did not predate the laying of the railway. Further than this, however, we could not go: the archivist told us that to establish a precise date

the borough's Building Control department was a better port of call.

So instead we had a good poke around the rest of the archives, looking at street directories, electoral registers and anything else of interest. The Museum had copies of several privately printed histories of Tottenham, including a reminiscence by Rowland Hill's nephew Arthur, who had succeeded him as master of Bruce Castle School and in retirement seemed particularly affected by the village's transformation from quiet rural retreat into bustling suburb. Leafing through this, I encountered a short chapter (although each chapter was only two or three pages long) in which he described a new method of printing invented by his father and his uncle Rowland. The design of the machine was not immediately obvious from the clotted Victorian prose and the fact that Arthur didn't fully understand its workings, but as I read on comprehension slowly dawned: he was describing an early version of the duplicator!

One could seize on this to help advance a case for Rowland Hill to be regarded as the true progenitor of fanzine fandom -- first the postage stamp, then something to stick it on -- but for the fact that, as Dale Speirs has documented on many occasions in *Opuntia*, amateur journalism (as it was known in the nineteenth century) predated by many decades the invention of the science fiction fanzine. But then again, amateur journalism couldn't have existed without the postage stamp either, so perhaps Rowland Hill should be regarded as the progenitor of amateur publishing in its entirety. Thus we claim another first for historic Tottenham!

Why Big Fierce Animals are Rare

Gardening, we're told, is the new sex; in consequence, therefore, Charlie Dimmock must be the new sex symbol. Perhaps she thinks so, too: at any rate, photographs of her in certain states of *deshabille* were taken for a calendar last year, and a copy -- actually purchased as a remainder, for 99p, in February this year -- hangs in our kitchen. And had the BBC smiled more favourably on us, we might just possibly have had the real Charlie Dimmock in our garden.

A small news item in *BBC Wildlife* magazine this spring announced that the BBC was seeking suitable gardens for a series on wildlife-friendly gardening, to be fronted by Ms Dimmock. We banged off an e-mail to the stated address, expressing an interest; and a few days later were contacted by someone from the Natural History Unit in Bristol asking what our patch of Tottenham could offer. Frogs and

tadpoles in the pond, of course; various species of birds -- after several years of hit and miss (but mostly miss), we'd located a supply of suitable avian catering materials from C J WildBird Foods of Shropshire, and are now attracting a range of birds both large and small -- and a squirrel which turns up fairly frequently to loot the birdtable for itself (and, after we'd identified it as female from the prominent teats on its underside, presumably its brood as well). And in the bigger pond at the allotment...more frogs and tadpoles (mostly tadpoles -- the frogs are less visible either because the pond is deeper or because there are more places on land for them to hide).

Several weeks of silence followed; and just as we were thinking that we'd been passed over for gardeners with a more photogenically exotic range of species (and therefore untypical -- just like those who appear on television gardening programmes extolling the virtues of horse poo as a fertiliser and old railway sleepers for paths and raised beds, because who in any city routinely has access to those) we were contacted by someone else in the Natural History Unit who wanted to call round to shoot some test footage of our plots. I duly took the afternoon off work, a personable young woman filmed me exhibiting some dragonfly larvae scooped out of the allotment pond and describing the excitement we'd felt when a hedgehog had briefly turned up in our garden....and that was it. No come back; no Charlie Dimmock.

On the other hand, who needs BBC presenters when you can have your very own heron?

Spring Bank Holiday Monday, and while lots of fans were at <plokta.con> in Leicester we were on our allotment, fitting in various jobs before our departure for Milan the following day. Clouds gathered in the west; and rain eventually descended in sufficient volume for us to retreat into the shed and decide that it wasn't worth carrying on. But as we packed up to go -- manoeuvring around each other in a space not much larger than a broom cupboard -- Judith spotted a heron in our pond.

The pond is not merely at the other end of the allotment from the shed, but partly hidden from it by the water tank and a small willow tree, so it's not surprising that the heron could approach unobserved (especially given the very long grass on the three adjacent plots). It was an immature bird -- identifiable as such by the lack of a feathery crest on its head -- but still of substantial size: about half the height of a full-grown human, its feet planted firmly on the weed in the pond, its long beak darting and snapping as it plucked stray tadpoles from the water. It kept an eye on us (under our umbrellas)

as we edged closer, but otherwise seemed remarkably calm: protected, perhaps, by its size, and certainly by the two clumps of flag irises between which it would retreat when anyone came close. As people did: our pond is right next to the path, and as the rain faded into the east so others arrived to work on their plots. All stopped to admire.

We rushed home, and I rushed back with my camera. The bird was still there, still with an admiring audience of other allotment holders. Eventually, perhaps tired of being the focus of so much attention, it rose from the pond and walked slowly away along the path (presumably back the way it had come), ending up in the classic one-foot-raised posture on someone else's compost heap. I watched to see what it did next, but it clearly wasn't going to move while I was there, and I eventually left.

So how do we get herons in Tottenham? Easy -- a couple of miles to the east are the reservoirs and marshlands of the Lea Valley, London's least known nature reserve. (Although the river is visible on most satellite photographs of the city.) Ownership is a mish-mash of local authorities (from Ware in Hertfordshire south to Tower Hamlets in London) and quangos like the British Waterways Board and the Lea Valley Park Authority (which owns hardly any of the land but manages lots of it). The river itself has quite a history -- at one point it formed the western boundary of the Suffolk ("south folk") Saxon kingdoms, and later the eastern boundary of Alfred's Wessex -- although much of what we now see (and think of) as the River Lea is in fact the product of seventeenth and eighteenth century straightening and rechanneling, originally to improve London's water supply and later to assist the movement of goods in the pre-railway period. A few years ago, I conceived the idea of assembling a photographic record of the river from Ware down to the point where it joins the Thames at Blackwall, and although pictures have been taken of some stretches (Rammey Marsh, Stonebridge Lock, Three Mills Island) the idea is probably unlikely ever to be realised: too many other things to do, insufficient time in which to do them. It's my personal Daugherty Project.

Which has nothing to do with herons or Charlie Dimmock, unless we wish to argue that gardening falls into the same category as rechanneling a river because both are the product of an urge to "improve" on nature: the differences are ones of degree rather than kind. But if we adopt that view then we have to accept that the term "wildlife-friendly gardening" is an oxymoron: if gardening actively suppresses nature, then it cannot possibly be pursued in a way which does not to some extent drive out wildlife.

The contradictions abound. I like to see birds visiting the garden as much as anyone, but they wouldn't come at all if we hadn't erected a birdtable and put food on it for them. I like to watch tadpoles hatch in our pond in the spring and to see "our" frogs hopping through the vegetable beds in summer, but of course the pond is one we dug ourselves and lined with sand and plastic. It was a real thrill to see a heron at our allotment, and to know that the pond is full of larvae which will one day hatch into dragonflies; but that pond too is artificial. And although the basic principle of allotment growing is to concentrate on stuff which doesn't require much attention and can be left to get by on its own for a week or so at a time -- in effect, a form of gardening which allows nature a freer reign than usual -- our allotment, divided into wooden-edged beds with close-cut grass paths between them, is by general consent the tidiest on the site. (My handiwork, of course. Judith decides what to grow and does the planting and the weeding, but I do the tidying.)

But these problems are scarcely unique to us; they will be faced by every gardener, whether weekend hobbyists such as ourselves or full-time professionals like Charlie Dimmock. The one thing you can be sure about, at least if you're a weekend hobbyist, is that the work you put in during the growing season means that gardening is not just the new sex but leaves you too exhausted for anything else.

Spitfire Summer

"Spitfire Summer" is the Imperial War Museum's name for its exhibition commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain -- a nice alliteration, but inaccurate in that although in the popular imagination the Spitfire undoubtedly has the edge over other aircraft, more Hurricanes than Spitfires actually flew in the Battle. Pilots in any case preferred the former to the latter because (as any fule kno) the Hurricane provided a more stable gun platform, had a better spread of fire, and gave them a better view of their targets (an important consideration when you only had fifteen seconds' worth of ammunition). But I haven't been to the IWM exhibition; after all, the IWM covers every aspect of conflict, including its impact on civilians, whereas if you just want to look at antique aircraft the place to go is the RAF Museum at Hendon. I spent a happy day there in July, ambling around the three hangars which house its collection, mentally going "neeeowwww dakka-dakka-dakka" to myself as I remembered my boyhood as an Airfix Kid, and being underwhelmed by the thinness of the museum shop's stock: lots of T-shirts and videos, not

nearly as many books as you'd expect. I snapped up a reprint of John Terraine's *The Right Of The Line* and a couple of discounted picture books of US aircraft of WW2; but nobody could tell me whether Dexter's and Ward's *The Narrow Margin* is still in print. Poot. It is, after all, their history of the Battle of Britain which first introduced me to what I much later recognised as the contingency theory of history.

From what I remember of it -- and this was thirty years ago -- *The Narrow Margin* was largely a factual narrative history of the Battle of Britain with some discussion of the various points where events could have taken a different course. It's generally agreed that the Luftwaffe failed to achieve each of its objectives because Goering's directions to it to move on to the next were always premature (not enough time spent attacking the radar stations; another week bombing the airfields and the RAF might have been permanently grounded), but the turning point which most struck me was Hitler's order to the Luftwaffe to attack London in revenge for an RAF bomber raid which had destroyed a few garden sheds in Berlin -- itself a response to a German night raid which had got lost and unloaded over civilians rather than the military. But for these lost bombers, it was suggested, the Battle could have ended in possible stalemate and a negotiated truce, or even victory for Hitler.

These days, speculations about whether Britain should have sought a truce with Hitler after the fall of France (usually pursued by right-wing historians trying to find some way of negating the results of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution) are ten a penny. Then, they were fairly novel -- and, a couple of years after reading *The Narrow Margin*, I was pleased to see (and thought myself the only one in my school class to know why it mattered) the lost bombers incident recreated for Guy Hamilton's 1969 feature film *The Battle Of Britain*. Although the film is now little-shown, even on daytime television, I was mildly amused to see combat footage from it, unidentified as such, spliced into "Their Finest Hour", the RAF Museum's audio-visual commemoration of the Battle's anniversary. It was easily spotted, at least by an Airfix Kid, firstly because it was in colour, unlike the genuine 1940s' footage, which was monochrome; and secondly because the Messerschmitt 109s which appeared in the film, borrowed from Franco's air force for which they then still flew, had their characteristic nose profile inverted when re-engined by the Spanish to keep them flying.

I've no idea whether this "lost bombers" incident is still regarded as the proximate cause of Hitler's decision to switch his attacks from the airfields to London; it wasn't mentioned in the

Museum's audio-visual presentation. But, irrespective of its actual content, there must be some question about the likely audiences for such a presentation, sixty years on from the events concerned. Airfix Kids like myself, obviously (I'm now 46). Veterans and their families, equally obviously (I not only saw a number of them but overheard them reminiscing about what it was like to fly the aircraft of the period). But what of younger generations? There was a school party in evidence during my visit to the Museum; but its members seemed more interested in lining up to be thrown around in the flight simulator than in looking at the aircraft. In the gap between their age (fourteen? fifteen?) and mine, there didn't seem to be anyone else.

On the other hand, this shouldn't be surprising. In the sixties, the Battle was, historically, a relatively recent event: close enough in time for the sight of Spitfires at air displays to persuade young boys that they wanted to be fighter pilots when they grew up (it was once my goal in life; but one day the whole school was lined up for free eye tests -- in Harold Wilson's sixties you still got them on the NHS -- and I discovered that the reason I sometimes had trouble seeing the writing on the blackboard was that I was horribly short-sighted in my right eye); but at this greater distance in time the Battle is unlikely to have anything like the same purchase on the imagination. (Not least because age and metal fatigue will inevitably have reduced the number of still-airworthy vintage aircraft.) One wonders, indeed, whether there are still boys anywhere who want -- or have wanted -- to grow up to be fighter pilots. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer's* Giles the librarian once admitted to this fantasy, partway through the first series, but in view of his probable age I'd suggest that he too was once an Airfix Kid. But are there any Airfix Kids left these days? Are plastic model kits now an old man's hobby, out-evolved by computer games and the internet and heading inexorably for extinction, like Meccano, Brix and Scalextric?

Of course, such a question may be close to meaningless: you probably have to be an old man, or at any rate in the same age group as me, to remember Meccano. Twenty-something members of the internet generation are unlikely to have heard of it, unless they find web sites devoted to old toys (assuming that there are any) more fascinating than (say) downloading MP3 files from Napster. But this is perhaps to traduce the internet generation: after all, even the RAF Museum has a website. Visit it, and you're greeted by an aircraft which flies down the runway towards you and takes off over your head. The aircraft? A Spitfire -- what else?

Bruce / Lee

Judith Hanna

Bruce is about 10 minutes walk north from our house, Lee about 20 minutes walk east. Bruce used to be Tottenham Manor and, as Joseph has mentioned, is now the local history museum and park. Lee is a river. We've been spending a fair bit of time with both of them lately.

Joseph only tells half of Bruce's story. We were lured to Friends of Bruce Castle's AGM by the promise of revelations on the round red-brick tower at one corner of the old manor house. The local kids' tale is that it was Robert the Bruce's Castle. It's true (as JN notes) that his family used to own Tottenham Manor, but the round tower looks more like the Victorian folly some local historians dismissed it as -- not at all medieval. However, in the oldest surviving engraving of the manor house, commissioned by Henry Hare (Lord Coleraine) after his improvements and extensions during the Restoration period, the round tower is clearly shown. And it seems it may be one of the very few Tudor falcon towers still in England.

Next lure from FoBC announced that a Bruce Castle painting had been discovered in one of its attics, in pieces. Preliminary conservation work on the jigsaw of its pieces suggested that it was the original painting on which Henry Hare's engraving had been based. Apparently the genre of painting formal portraits of stately homes, set in their formal front garden with owner sauntering in the foreground among a selection of his dogs, wives and children, sprang up around this time. Of the few English examples, most are either by imported European artists or unattributed. The engraving based on ours tells art historians that the original painting was by Wolridge, a clearly English name. And ours is the only early English big house painting still with its original house. Most of the rest are now in American collections.

Put these two new discoveries together with our Bruce's previous historical interest as the home of Rowland Hill, inventor of postage stamp, duplicator and therefore fandom, and Tottenham should clearly be a 'must see' for touring fans.

Lee rises near Ware in Hertfordshire, home of John and Eve Harvey, and heads southwards until it meets the Thames at the Isle of Dogs. It passes Waltham Abbey, where Harold Godwinson (Harold Infelix) is said to have been

buried after losing the Battle of Hastings in 1066. At Tottenham Hale¹, where it reaches us, used to be the Gestetner HQ. No doubt this somehow connects with Rowland Hill's duplicator invention.

It's been local festival season. First Saturday in July was Tottenham Festival in Bruce Castle Park. We did a stint on the local Friends of the Earth stall, then headed home -- sitting comfortably down for a nice cup of tea just as the heavens opened in a cloudburst. The rewards of doing the first shift.

Second Saturday of July was the Paddock grand opening -- a local nature reserve covering one of the islands in the Lee at the Tottenham Hale crossing point. Rain still threatening, and the visible wildlife mostly a colourful collection of common weed plants -- thistle, buddleia, hedge mustard. True, one of the thistle patches was Haringey's only known occurrence of the cotton thistle, for those of us who care to tell one thistle from another. Third weekend of July, we did gardening and allotments meeting. Then, just for a change:

Fourth Sunday in July, Joseph and I set off for a walk down the Lee. Nice cool grey weather, as so much of summer has been in these parts. We reached it through Markfield Recreation Ground, a stretch of grass and trees, with stray football and dog-walking activity, home of a Beam Engine Museum. It's just south of the Hale, and one of the Lee's tributaries, Stonebridge Brook, allegedly flows into the Lee there -- but concreted over into a mere drain, like so many of London's little rivers. On past Walthamstow Marshes, which are Lammas Fields, water-meadows with traditional commoners' grazing rights jealously guarded by a local action group. Then Middlesex Filter Beds, where we found our way to an old water mill site, and picked early ripening blackberries for on-the-hoof refreshment. And onward, past serious blackberry foragers, a stately grey heron, a delicate tern hovering and diving in aerial ballet, assorted riverside pubs, bijou and bog-boring new housing developments and long stretches of abandoned ex-industrial sites from the Age of Steam. And after all that, when we reached Three Mills, it was closed for some concert. Poot. So we caught the tube (with added delays) back home.

¹ The name Tottenham Hale derives from the place where boats had to be hauled over the ford. Hale = haul.

The following appeared on the ENVLlist mailing list in October 1999. We liked it.

Question: How many internet mailing list subscribers does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: 1,331.

1 to change the light bulb and to post to the mail list that the light bulb has been changed;

14 to share similar experiences of changing light bulbs and how the light bulb could have been changed differently;

7 to caution about the dangers of changing light bulbs;

27 to point out errors of spelling and grammar in posts about changing light bulbs;

53 to flame the spell checkers;

156 to write to the list administrator complaining about the light bulb discussion and its inappropriateness to this mail list;

41 to correct spelling in the spelling/grammar flames;

109 to post that this list is not about light bulbs and to please take this exchange to alt.lite.bulb;

203 to demand that cross posting to alt.grammar, alt.spelling and alt.punctuation about changing light bulbs be stopped;

111 to defend the posting to this list saying that we all use light bulbs and therefore the posts are relevant to this mail list;

306 to debate which method of changing light bulbs is superior, where to buy the best light bulbs, what brand of light bulbs work best for this technique, and what brands are faulty;

27 to post URLs where one can see examples of different light bulbs;

14 to post that the URLs were posted incorrectly, and to post corrected URLs;

3 to post about links they found from the URLs relevant to this list which makes light bulbs relevant to this list;

33 to concatenate all posts to date, then quote them including all headers and footers, and add "Me Too";

12 to post to the list that they are unsubscribing because they cannot handle the light bulb controversy;

19 to quote the "Me Toos" to say, "Me Three";

4 to suggest that posters request the light bulb FAQ;

1 to propose a new alt.change.lite.bulb newsgroup;

47 to say this is just what alt.physics.cold-fusion was meant for, leave it there; and,

143 votes for alt.change.lite.bulb.

This is *INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER* #3

(incorporating *Marxist-Leninist Park-Keeper*)

from: Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas

15 Jansons Road

Tottenham

London N15 4JU

United Kingdom

PRINTED MATTER

REDUCED RATE