

FEATURES TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop has been interviewing local people and preserving their memories for over 23 years (it's probably the longest-established oral history project in London). The workshop's collection of 480 recorded interviews is housed at the Vestry House Museum. Here Natasha Munoz shares with us her favourite seasonal stories from the WFOHW archives:

Mr King was three years old when his family rented the ancient house on Church Lane in 1910. His father was an educated man and used to keep his books on the window sill. People walking past the house would knock on the door and enquire about the books, which encouraged him to turn his front room in to a bookshop. The front room of the ancient house remained as a bookshop until Mr King's father's death. The recorded conversation turns to talk of sweets and how much he loved them when he was young. Mr King remembered how the children at the turn of the last century could never afford sweets. They would have to work for them by doing things like people's shopping. Sweets were a Christmas treat; "the only time when we'd get any decent ones" he said. Mr King was interviewed in 1982. He was 75 years old at the time.

Lily Price's husband had a stall at Walthamstow market for 40 years and she spent 28 of those years helping him out. She remembers the years after the war when the market was "full from top to bottom, with all the stalls you could think of". There was a stall where you could drink a glass of sashporella and then watch the entertainment at the stall with the jockey scales. For a penny, the owner would try to guess your weight and if he guessed it you paid, if he didn't, you kept your money. At Christmas time, Lily's husband used to auction Christmas crackers at a shop at the top of the High Street. His other speciality was auctioning cauliflowers; "he was very good at it, you know, he had a lot of say so!"

Everybody has an interesting story to tell but unfortunately, the pace of modern life means we don't often take the time to listen. If you have an older relative with you this Christmas, why not coerce them in to telling you a story of their life - all it takes is a little encouragement.

Natasha Muñoz is a member of the WFOHW and director of The Quince Tree; a local company specialising in writing people's personal histories. Visit www.thequincetree.com, or www.wforhistory.org.uk for further information

THE FOREST WRITERS' TOP 5 BOOKS TO READ AT CHRISTMAS

The Historian by Elizabeth Kostova

If the classic Bram Stoker's Dracula is among your favourites, you will be swept away by this vampire thriller. A woman finds a scary but intriguing letter among her deceased father's possessions and starts a search for her roots that will take her across the world and the centuries. The writing is superior and the characters are full of depth and feeling.

On Beauty by Zadie Smith

This novel won the Orange Prize for Fiction. Set in New England and London, it revolves around two black families, the Belseys and the Kipps. The academic rivalry of the pater familias has deep repercussions on their households, creating an involving story where secrets, love, sex, ethics and human weaknesses mix in a satisfying, solid narrative.

A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian by Marina Lewycka

Nadezhda and Vera, two Ukrainian sisters, were raised in England by their refugee parents, but stopped talking to each other a bitter dispute concerning their mother's inheritance. A bosomy Ukrainian gold-digger called Valentina is about to reunite them. The scheming hussy has designs on their father, whom she believes to be rich. Separating their besotted father from his new love will prove to be no easy feat and family secrets will be unearthed in the process.

It is hoped that the box will be back in full service soon.

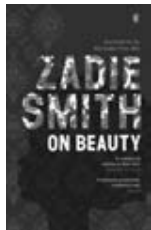
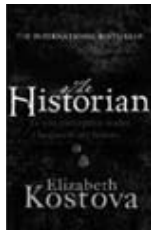
The Pleasure Garden by Caroline Davison

When Ruby trespasses into the lush garden of an eighteenth-century country house, she meets its owner and both fall in love at first sight. But when Ruby is introduced to the gardener, George, an intense love triangle ensues and the past comes back to haunt the lovers. Will Ruby choose the loving and reliable Ben or will she risk everything to be with the dashing George? A mystery surrounding the house and its past inhabitants adds spice to the story.

And now I will cheat by recommending a book that I haven't read yet but that has caused a sensation in the book industry. Diane Setterfield's The Thirteenth Tale was published in September 2006 after attracting great media attention. The then unknown author received an £800,000 advance from its UK publisher, while US publishers ended up bidding \$1m for the rights. The website (www.thethirteenthtale.com) is quite intriguing. Described as a combination of JANE EYRE, WUTHERING HEIGHTS and 19th-century Gothic novels, it tells the story of Vida Winter, a famed writer and a recluse, which chooses ordinary book lover Margaret Lea to write her biography. Lots of suspense in store!

All the books mentioned are available in bookshops and at your local library. Walthamstow libraries have recently joined a network of London libraries and can offer a wealth of titles through a reservation system. Ask your local library for details.

This list was kindly provided by Simone Castello who is a freelance journalist and member of Forest Writers



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Restaurant Review

THE DELI
Orford Road,
Walthamstow,
E17 9NJ

The Deli on Orford Road is probably better known as a good place for coffee, homemade cakes and its a varied selection of great deli items including continental meats, cheeses. To coincide with the introduction of some new deli items such as different breads and a wider range of meats and cheeses, the deli will now be serving dinner on Friday and Saturday nights from 7 until 11pm offering hot and cold food with BYO alcohol. The menu is based on an Italian osteria type restaurant and offers hot and cold food with BYO alcohol. Two courses cost less than £10 so it is likely to prove a welcome solution to those people looking for an alternative to the other more expensive restaurants in the village.

We went to try out the new evening menu on a Saturday night. It was very quiet on our visit (probably because no one knows about the new opening hours yet) but the atmosphere was relaxed, romantic and welcoming and the staff were extremely friendly.

The menu is short and there was a choice of about five or six hot and cold dishes. We started with an antipasto (£4.50), an enormous plate of meats and cheeses served with olives and a houmous platter (£4), a generous helping of houmous with grilled pitta and large salad. These were followed by the pasta special (£5) and lemon chicken (£6). The chicken which was delicious and very tender and was served with Italian vegetables and salad.

The pasta was spinach and ricotta tortellini. All the portions were more than generous which meant we had no room for dessert or even for coffee but with a great bottle of Rioja from home we had a lovely meal and a very enjoyable evening away from the kids for under £25 which included additional drinks and corkage (£2).

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