

Time Out

London

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Reporter

Edited by **Rebecca Taylor** news@timeout.com

Time Out's 2006 news exclusives

This year we investigated everything from west London khat dealers to Bloomsbury art squats. But what happened to the people who appeared on these pages after we'd left the scene?

The barber

The date February 8 2006.
The place Olympics Hair Salon, Leytonstone Road, Stratford, E15.
The story When Felix Agyeman decided to name his new business The Olympics Hair Salon in February 2005, he didn't know he was breaking the law. In fact, Agyeman was contravening the 1995 Olympic Symbol Protection Act, introduced to protect all symbols associated with the Games. He says, 'I thought it was a nice name. I had the name up before London even won the bid for the Olympics.' But he found himself the target of the London Organising Committee of Olympic Games 2012 (LOCOG), which threatened legal action if he didn't remove any symbols that might compromise the Olympic brand. 'The cost of rebranding could drive me to financial ruin. I printed thousands of flyers, posters and business cards, I can't afford to do that all over again,' he told us.
What happened next? In March, Agyeman received a letter from LOCOG allowing him to continue trading under the same name 'for the time being', on the basis that his business had been established prior to London winning the bid. 'It's still a worry. I haven't been able to promote the business and I'm struggling to keep it going. But I'm glad that they've given me more time to think about it,' he said.

The café owner

The date February 27 2006.
The place Francesca's Café, 34 Broadway Market, E2.
The story On Boxing Day 2005, 60 protesters began a squat at the half-demolished Francesca's Café. Run by Sicilian Tony Platia, the caff had been earmarked for the wrecking ball after it was sold off by Hackney Council (owner of the site) to help clear debts. Platia joined the squatters, feeding them sustaining Sicilian nosh from a gas burner.
What happened next? At 4.30am on February 23, police officers forced entry to the café and evicted campaigners. 'They came in through the roof like parachutists,' said Platia. 'How desperately do they want



It's not easy being green - guerrilla gardener Richard Reynolds' undercover sprucing up

this building?' By April, the café had been demolished by the new owner, Dr Roger Wratten, who is hoping to turn it into luxury flats. In May, Platia was ordered to pay the legal fees for the appeal that he made against his eviction and the court seized £6,200 from his bank accounts. 'I have nothing, absolutely nothing,' said Platia, who is now homeless and staying with friends. 'This has split up my family and I've had to take pills for depression. What do I want next year? All I want to do is go out and earn a living.' The similar court case of another Broadway Market trader, Spirit, who runs a Caribbean food shop at number 71, is still pending.

The gypsies

The date May 31 2006.
The place Clays Lane and Waterden Crescent travellers' sites.
The story Reporter interviewed Romany gypsies at Clays Lane (Newham) and Irish travellers at Waterden Crescent (Hackney) who are being forced off their sites to make way for the 2012 Olympics development.
What happened next? In October, The London Development Agency, which is overseeing the Olympics development, announced a new plan to move the Clays

Lane community to Major Road Park in Newham. Locals are furious they will lose one of the few green spaces in the area; the gypsies are opposed to the move on to what they describe as 'a traffic island' (the land is surrounded by four main roads). Gypsies and residents have formed an alliance to fight the plans and last week lawyers for the gypsies sought a judicial review in the High Court which would delay any moves. 'We feel betrayed and are concerned that a travellers site on the park will take away green land from residents,' said Tracie Giles, 33, from the Clays Lane site.

The Waterden Crescent community will be split into four. One of the sites proposed is considered too small by the travellers; another on Hackney Marshes is being fought by the Hackney Marshes Users Group, which says it will damage the environment; a third site is being contested because it's on top of a rubbish dump and beneath two electricity pylons. Both sites must be relocated by July 2007.

The theatre

The date July 15 2006.
The place Astoria Theatre, Charing Cross Road, WC2.
The story Legendary music venue the

Astoria was sold to property developers in June, sparking fears it would be turned into offices and shops or demolished to make way for the new CrossRail station at Tottenham Court Road. Campaigners vowed not to let the 80-year-old former pickle factory disappear without a struggle.

What happened next? The Save the Astoria petition gathered almost 30,000 names (www.petitiononline.com/savethea) and musician Lynne Malkin's MySpace page is dedicated to the cause (www.myspace.com/savetheastoria) and has attracted support from bands like Ash and The Mission. 'The Astoria's a London landmark. I've always dreamed of playing there,' said Malkin. John Levitt of the Save London's Theatres campaign says SLT will 'fight to keep it open'. But the prognosis isn't looking good: if the CrossRail bill is granted funding in summer 2007, Westminster Council says the Astoria will probably be destroyed.

Meanwhile, Mean Fiddler, which manages the venue, is still booking gigs throughout 2007. If the Crossrail plan does go ahead, SLT will lobby for a full-scale replacement - even if it doesn't have that special sticky atmosphere that Londoners have come to love.

The gardener

The date October 25 2006.

The place London and beyond.

The story Reporter spread word of the activities of Richard Reynolds, 29, advertising worker by day, guerrilla gardener by night, who plants, weeds and spruces up London's neglected green spaces.

What happened next? *Time Out* has had a very positive impact and introduced a lot more people to the idea, says Reynolds who has received support from as far afield as Canada and Australia. He has also been the subject of a 30-minute Japanese documentary profiling European people with odd habits. Recently, recruits helped plant an expanse of white narcissi by one of Elephant & Castle's biggest eyesores, Perronet House. But Reynolds' main hindrance of late has been the huge increase in London freeshoots. 'They're good for suppressing weeds but they aren't very attractive,' he says. His battalion recently engaged in festive tactics by decorating a Christmas tree he'd previously planted at St George's Circus in Southwark. 'We've decorated it with slices of oranges, chilli peppers and cotton bows,' said Reynolds.

See www.guerillagardening.org.

Look out for an in-depth update on *Time Out's Save Our Pools Campaign* in Jan.

Reporting by Rebecca Taylor, Photini Philippidou, Jessica Holland