

'APPY 'Ampstead!
If you want a beano – it's a fair old treat! So runs the exuberant

caption to one of the delightful old Underground posters currently on display in a charming upper room in Burgh House (pronounced as in 'brrr, it's cold' – whatever you might have heard to the contrary). Pretty and light, the original panelling in duck egg blue, and as neat and approachable a little exhibition as ever you could wish for. The accompanying very busy cartoon on this poster depicts all sorts of revellers at the funfair – some old girls having a right good knees-up, a family being fleeced at the hoop-la stall, and a very elegantly turned out military officer tickling the nape of a lissome young lady with what would appear to be an ostrich plume: she seems to be responding well to his flirtation. I daresay the scenes at the funfair these days are somewhat more grounded ... not to say earthy. Another poster exhorts the traveller to come up to Hampstead 'for a day's round of good-humoured delight' – a pleasant and enticing suggestion. And yet one more thrills to the idea of Hampstead being 'the Roof of London' (said roof now, of course, being that which prices have famously gone through). One other rather arresting exhibit is a vast enamel roundel sign taken from a platform during renovation. As well as the word Hampstead on the blue bar across the red circle, quite as you would expect, it is boldly repeated beneath. So there you have it, officially: Hampstead – so good, they named it twice.

And while we were there, my wife and I had a mosey around the permanent exhibition as well – haven't seen it for a while. On the landing, within a Perspex cowl, stands a rather handsome model of the house itself made nearly 20 years ago by an erstwhile resident cleaner, name of Trevor Brown. It is constructed from 25,780 matchsticks (I know this because I counted them, such industry making my wife just a tad impatient because she was, as she always is, very ready for lunch). There was a rumour floating around my prep school, I recall, that a classics master had been engaged for years in a similar matchstick project – the Titanic being his chosen subject. He died before it was near complete – from

It's Utterly Buttery

Old tube posters currently on show at Burgh House promise visitors treats galore in Hampstead. And that's just what you'll find in the arts centre's delightful café, specialising in home baking, writes **Joseph Connolly**



Hampstead – so good they named it twice ... Joseph at Burgh House's latest exhibition.

lung cancer, I am sorry to say, this a direct result of his very heavy smoking which he had taken up solely in order to justify his expenditure upon matches. It is necessary to suffer for one's art.

Also on show is another London Transport sign saying 'Hampstead – Way Out' (as if we didn't know) and a lovely example of a Marcel Breuer bent plywood chaise longue, designed expressly for Wells Coates' Lawn Road flats (this lovely piece of furniture surrounded by a somewhat declassé huddle of the Ikea four-legged version of Alvar Aalto's famous three-legged stool). And listen – this will make you weep: the stylish art deco block not only boasted a bar designed by Walter Gropius, but the accommodation was offered to 'single professionals starting work in London' at a very low

rent, this to include bed-making and cleaning – not just of the flat, but also of the tenant's shoes. Well. It was also fascinating to see a cast of the very last Ham&High front page to be set in hot metal (November 2 1984). There is too a massive and heavily carved oak and leather throne where used to preside the Mayor of Hampstead. Following the controversial boundary changes, this was sold to an outgoing mayor by the newly formed 'Borough of Camden'. They charged him £1, such hard bargaining setting the seal upon all their future wisdom and prudence in matters financial.

Now infused with love for all things local, we wandered down to the Buttery for lunch. It sounds so very cosy, doesn't it? Buttery. Does it make you think of toasting forks and crumpets and scones and other oozy things?

Well it shouldn't, because it's nothing to do with butter. It's all to do with butts, a buttery being where the barrels of wine or beer used to be kept – a butt being equal to two hogsheds, since you ask. A hogshed being equal to that which lies beneath the golden tresses of Miss Piggy. It's an education, this column.

It was a lovely afternoon, so we sat outside. And a lovely young girl brought us a lovely menu and we ate some lovely food: and no, this is not sarcasm, nor even wishful thinking – this is how it was. I was only thinking how good it would be if we had a local food – like a Chelsea Bun, say. We could, maybe, press into service the plagues of grey squirrels – and so as not to deter the punter, we might christen the resultant dish 'Hampsters'. Might not, of course. Anyway – we had walked through the

FACTFILE

□ THE BUTTERY CAFÉ

Burgh House,
New End Square, NW3
Tel: 020-7794 2905
□ Open Tuesday to Friday
11am-5.30pm. Saturday to
Sunday 9.30am-5.30pm
□ Food: ★★★★★☆
□ Service: ★★★★★☆
□ The Feeling:
★★★★★
□ Cost: All very reasonable,
whether you want something
hot or just to stuff yourself
with a mountain of cake. On
Sunday they do a roast. About
£35 for two courses for two,
with a drink.

café and out through a low door bearing a notice: 'Mind Your Head. It hurts when you bash it!'. I like the literal directness of that – reminds me of Brendan Behan's suggested slogan (rejected) for his homeland's national brew: 'Guinness! It Makes You Drunk!'

There are about half a dozen outside tables, and we bagged the last of them. The others were populated by women who had come to scoff cake – for this is the great draw here. The garden is very peaceful and quite romantic, the overhanging foliage managing to obscure for the most part the surrounding flats which are occupied by the luckiest council tenants on the planet. And we were directly outside the room in which our daughter was married, five years ago or so (we held the lunch at The Wells, and damn fine it was too).

There are about 10 things to choose from, and I imagine they change quite regularly. My wife wanted leek, parmesan and goat's cheese tart with baby leaf salad and warm new potatoes ... and I had crab, salmon and dill fishcakes with a homemade tartare sauce. As we ordered, a lady was leaving. "The soup was lovely", she said to the waitress. "And the

cake". My two cakes of the fish variety were globular and nicely coated in golden crunch. Although crab was cited as the chief ingredient, I couldn't actually detect it: plenty of salmon though, and very good indeed – the tartare just about perfect, the unadvertised leaves very fresh and welcome. This is proper home cooking – exactly what you want. As was the goat's cheese tart – a generous wedge, and very much enjoyed. With it, my wife was drinking a Belvoir organic elderflower presse – hauntingly scented, as was the orange and lavender cake to follow. The elderflower bore the fragrance of one of the dear and daffy ladies in Arsenic And Old Lace, whereas the lavender was rather more akin to a Liberty print sachet in the better sort of underwear drawer. The slab of cake – the lavender in seeds, and with a bit of soft icing – was raved about. And the lady at the next table was oohing groaningly over a Belgian chocolate thing. I had a good and curranty scone with a splotch of clotted cream and a smear of real jam which turned out to be greengage: I would have preferred strawberry, if only for the colour scheme – but that day it was greengage, you see.

We went back inside in order to pay (£30 including optional service, about which you cannot complain) and there we saw the full and lust-making gamut of the cake-stuffers' fix: all sorts of pretty and plump homemade gorgeously on footed stands and patterned plates. Let them eat cake ...? Just try keeping them away. The Underground exhibition runs until November 19, so there's still time to feast on that (as well as cake). So come to 'Appy 'Ampstead! If you want a beano – it's a fair old treat!

□ *STUFF (Faber and Faber, £7.99) is a novel by Joseph Connolly. Not about cake. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.*

Wine fair to get you into the Christmas spirit

CHIRSTMAS starts far too early these days, but I do have an excuse for writing about it now (and there will be more later...). What do you give a wine-lover, especially if you're not confident to choose a bottle which will absolutely match his or her tastes?

Think laterally, of happenings. The first will anticipate the big day by almost two months – but it should be worth it. You could use it to stock your own cellar for the festivities or choose vinous gifts for people whose likes and dislikes you do understand.

Saturday November 6 sees the Wine Gang installed at Vinopolis in Banskide for their second Christmas fair – a splendid showcase combining wine producers big and small from old world and new, high street names such as Oddbins, Sainsbury's, Majestic and Waitrose, merchants including The Wine

Society, Adnams and Corney & Barrow, and generic bodies and distributors the consumer rarely meets, such as Wines of Lebanon, the Oregon Wine Board, Liberty Wines and Hatch Mansfield.

The Wine Gang are wine critics Tim Atkin, Tom Cannavan, Anthony Rose, Joanna Simon and Olly Smith, whose opinions and expertise you can trust. Their website is a fine resource of independent recommendations and information, well worth the £20 annual membership fee.

New at this year's fair are masterclasses. Themes include understanding pinot noir and sauvignon blanc from around the world and the potential of the Languedoc. The event is split into two sessions, noon to 3pm, 4pm to 7pm, with masterclasses at £10 (on top of the entry price of £20). For full details see www.winegang.com.



Christmas cheer ... fair organisers the Wine Gang.

But if that's far too premature, the choice of post-Christmas happenings you can book now is generous.

Membership of The Wine

Society is a gift which will last for life and beyond (it can be passed on). The cost is a one-off £40 payment for a share in a friendly, efficient organisation

where wines start at under £5. As an extra festive season temptation, recipients will receive a £20 credit on their first order.

Also, members can buy event tickets for non-members. Lunch at the society's Stevenage headquarters – a splendid experience – is £43 (next available, February 3 2011). There's a very special Burns Supper in Montreuil (January 29 2011, £100) and lots of informal or tutored tastings of wines (even a Masterwined quiz). London events are from £26. Full information at www.thewinesociety.com.

There can be few more atmospheric locations to taste wine than the 300-year-old cellars below Berry Bros & Rudd's delightfully period shop in St James's Street. Events tend to sell out (most of the tempting festive-themed ones are full) so act quickly if you want to join in

the pre-Christmas temptation of the Perfect Partnership where a dinner of rare breed pork will be matched to a baker's dozen of fine wines (December 14, £116). The 2011 programme will be on the website very soon, see www.bbr.com.

And I've been recommending the courses and workshops offered by the Wine Education Service for years, always with favourable feedback. Introductory courses (£219 for eight sessions) held in Hampstead and Holborn start early in the new year. One-day workshops close to Great Portland Street include Le Tour de France and Ibericos (£115 including lunch) and there are dates from November on. Details at www.wine-education-service.co.uk.

So there's your Christmas list sorted, with two months to go...

LIZ SAGUES