

Thank you, Spike

SIR: In Candida Lycett Green's delightful article in September's *Oldie* about the Horniman Family and their generous gift of the Horniman Museum 'to the People of London, there is mention of the beautiful conservatory that now sits in the gardens of the hillside above.

It was indeed transferred from Croydon with the support of Michael Horniman but the family home had passed to the London Borough of Croydon which wished to dismantle the deteriorating structure. There is a little-known episode in the story since the transfer was made possible through the persistence of Spike Milligan, an enthusiast for the arts, who went to see Ken Livingstone and Tony Banks at County Hall. It was during the days of the IRA, and Spike introduced himself as an Irishman who did not want to blow up buildings in London but to preserve this superb Victorian achievement.

After a delay caused by the demise of the GLC, I was able to re-site the conservatory in the Horniman Gardens with the help of English Heritage. Spike wanted to undertake the opening himself and special garden shears were prepared for him, but a publishing deadline intervened so we can only guess at how amusingly he would have linked his early days in India with the Hornimans' tea enterprise that funded their benefaction in Forest Hill. I hope that our debt to Spike Milligan can be recorded.

David Bosten (Director 1965-1993) Westerham, Kent

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