

Away from home

In the seventh of a series of articles charting the experiences of a Wanstead-based travel writer, **Carole Edrich** discovers how widely read *Wanstead Village Directory* is... and that being an oddfellow pays off

I don't feature in *The Times* or present for the BBC and would hate being a famous influencer. I can write in different styles and for different types of reader, but ramming my maverick madcap meanderings into words of one syllable to suit the supine sub-literate gives me a headache. I will never make the top of a travel junket schmooze list because my preferred phraseology – and outlook – is as conventional as crocodiles are vegetarian. That's absolutely fine by me.

It's a hot summers day here in Chester. A blessedly normal hot summers day. Not one of those O-M-G-How-Am-I-Ever-Going-To-Sleep summers days that scare the bejeezus out of me through their implications. I'm here for Media Gateway.

All the journos I've met on the train are given hotels super-close to the station. I'm slightly sad that to get to mine takes a 20-minute wander. But it's better this way. I like meeting locals and through them finding stories, so when put with the rest of the herd, I spend my free time escaping.

To say that I am slightly directionally challenged is like saying water is a little bit wet, the moon is a little far to walk and that things might work slightly better if we were nice to each other for a change. So, when I pass city walls to get to my hotel, I'm a little confused. Am I really on the way to a great central location while the big guns are outside it, or am I – as usual – lost?

The Oddfellows boutique hotel – when I find it – is central and outrageously gloriously quirky. I view an Alice in Wonderland tearoom with a big party table that's also used for meetings; a light, bright breakfast room; a comfy bar with



outdoors bit; lots of lovely green plants; and huge wild contemporary décor.

My 'room' – a split-level suite – is larger than a louche Londoners' living space. It has all the stuff I need, plus wide windows overlooking a lush, leafy loggia, a bed big enough for five, a gleaming oldey-worldy bathtub, wall-mounted desk, comfy sofa and separate shower. I'd write my next book here if I didn't need the advance for luxuries like eating.

My Media Gateway junket comprises 16 15-minute chats with 14 country reps, visits to 13 local attractions, 12 short walks and 11 meals. Oddfellows extends my stay to let me search for inspiration (afternoon tea for lunch right in the hotel, creativity at Glass Deva and the inevitable wine story). They said they chose me over the other 200ish journos for my offbeat style! Turns out, they found me in the *Wanstead Village Directory*!

Sometimes being different pays off.

To read more of Carole's work or to listen to her podcast, visit wnstd.com/edrich

For more information on Oddfellows in Chester, visit oddfellowschester.com