



■ Ben Lee-Rodgers with his weather station on his roof terrace on the edge of Hampstead Heath

Picture: Polly Hancock

Storm chaser Ben has a passion for the weather

Software developer builds his own high-tec amateur station

by Tom Marshall

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It could be mistaken for a bird house at first glance, but hidden inside this unassuming white box lies a collection of high-tech instruments.

It is the work of NW3's very own storm chaser – a young Cambridge graduate with a passion for weather, and more specifically weather data.

Software developer Ben Lee-Rodgers, 23, has designed and built an amateur weather station to rival the Met Office's equipment.

It has been gathering detailed meteorological data from the terrace of his Gospel Oak flat, in Savernake Road, ever since his teens.

"It's about the collecting – people like to collect things and this is just collecting weather," he said.

"The more data you get, the better it becomes because there's more to analyse.

"Weather is one of the most interesting natural things because it's completely unpredictable."

The solar-powered contraption is

covered with a Stevenson screen, which shields out radiation from the temperature and humidity gauges inside.

A funnel on the top feeds into a delicately calibrated seesaw-type device that judges rainfall, while a separate mast high on the flat's roof collects wind data by using spinning spoons at its tip.

Meanwhile, he has written his own computer program to collect the numbers and upload them to his website nw3weather.co.uk, which has daily reports going back to 2009.

“There are probably only about 100 or 200 people doing this in the country, and I only know of one other one in London

Ben Lee-Rodgers

The whole lot, including computer server, cost about £1,000 – and provides a resource to match the Met Office's official station up the hill in Hampstead's Whitestone Pond.

Mr Lee-Rodgers, a former University College School pupil, admits to sometimes being less-than-forthcoming about his hobby with strangers.

"I usually keep it on the sly for a while," he said.

"It's a niche hobby. Some people get it and some won't," he said.

"There are probably only about 100 or 200 people doing this in the country, and I only know of one other one in London."

He began building the device shortly after receiving a basic weather recording kit for Christmas, aged 16. He confesses that people "usually do it a bit later in life".

He added: "The UK is one of the best places because you never know what's happening, the forecasts are always wrong.

"I would much rather be here than in France or Spain in the summer, where it's sunny all the time."

Terminally ill woman dies after fall at her home

An elderly woman died of heart problems after she suffered a fall while taking out the rubbish, an inquest has heard.

Palmina Cardia, 87, fractured her nose and broke a tooth when she fell outside her home in Leopold Road, East Finchley, in May, St Pancras Corner's Court was told on Thursday last week.

The Italian retired housekeeper, who was diagnosed with heart disease

in 2011, was admitted to the Whittington Hospital on May 29 but died two days later in the early hours on May 31.

Mrs Cardia, who had an abnormal narrowing of the heart valves, was told by doctors she had a "terminal illness" but refused all offers of heart surgery.

Following her admission to hospital, intensive care consultant Dr Gillis said in a statement that Mrs Cardia became "more and more unwell".

Doctors did not attempt to resuscitate her when she suffered a cardiac arrest due to the severity of her condition and she died at 1.25am.

Her husband Antonio Cardia, 84, remembered her as "kind and considerate". "She loved gardening," he said after the inquest. "And my wife was a great cook. I miss her."

Senior coroner for inner north London Mary Hassell ruled Mrs Cardia died of natural causes.

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