

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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TOWN HALL MYSTERY

It was announced in November, 2001 that the occupants of the former Friern Barnet Town Hall (the Education Department of Barnet Council) were to be relocated to new premises with effect from April 2002. At the time of writing the fate of the old Town Hall is not yet known, but it is to be hoped that the building, which is a local landmark and is a fine example of 1930s style of architecture, will remain.



The Town Hall was designed by Sir John Brown and Henson and building was commenced in 1938 and was finished in 1942 at a total cost of £50,000. Apparently the President of the local Ratepayers Association

sent a card to every ratepayer in the district asking them if they were in favour of spending this much money on a public building. The vast majority (12,000) said "no" and only 117 said "yes", but the Friern Barnet Urban District Council went ahead anyway, and the old council offices known as The Priory (a 200 year old building) were demolished.

Ollie Natelson has already taken the opportunity to take some photos of the building, the basement of which was used as an air raid shelter in the Second World War. There are two interesting murals on the walls, one being a portrait of Winston Churchill, the other a depiction of a group of firemen at work fighting a fire. For some reason they are accompanied by a Dalmatian dog and we imagine that there is a very interesting story behind this work of art. We hope, with the permission of Barnet Council, to conduct a full photographic survey of the building, should any change of ownership be contemplated.

We will, of course, keep you advised of developments. In the meantime, if you have any memorable stories about the Town Hall, or if you used to work there, or even if you only went there to pay your rates, do please let us know so that we can build up a picture of what the building used to mean to the people of Friern Barnet.

A SITE FOR SORE EYES

Those of you who remember the Civic Amenities site at Summers Lane are in for a pleasant surprise. The brand new site, which opened last October, is state of the art, and is fact one of only of two in Britain (the other one is in Leeds). Unlike other sites, it accepts over 21 types of material (this will rise to 30 by the end of this year), ranging from the usual glass bottles, cans and paper to previously unrecycled items such as motor oil, cardboard, wood, scrap metal, paint, tyres, foil, plastic bottles, garden waste, batteries of all kinds, furniture, fridges, textiles and shoes. You can also get rid of old books, CDs and videos, which are then passed on to Oxfam. There is even a separate bin for Yellow Pages, which are not accepted in the normal paper banks. Over 60% of the material collected at Summers Lane will be recycled, which comfortably exceeds the government target of 13%. This means that less waste will be incinerated or dumped in landfill sites, both of which cause pollution.

The site is run by ECT, a non-profit making organisation who, since November, are also now responsible for emptying Barnet's new recycling boxes from household premises. At Summers Lane they have a staff of four permanently on duty during the opening hours of 8am - 4pm on weekdays and 9am - 5pm on weekends. The staff will help you unload your vehicle and will make sure that the material is placed in the right containers, so there is really very little for visitors to do. They even remove locks and hinges from furniture before placing it in the right containers.

The only down side to Barnet's initiative is that the site at Brent Cross closed to the public in December (although the Waste Transfer Station operated by Shanks and McEwan is being retained) so Summers Lane is now the only Civic Amenities site in the Borough. Unfortunately, from the local residents' point of view, this will undoubtedly lead to an increase in traffic, both in Friern Barnet and on the North Circular.

FAREWELL TO TESSA

Those of you who attended our last two Meetings will have noticed the absence of Tessa Fairweather from the raffle table. Sadly, Tessa has emigrated to deepest Cheshire (Macclesfield to be precise), where she has family and was able to continue at her job, albeit at another location. Tessa was one of the founder members of the Society and her experience as an archivist (she was in charge of the Mayan artefacts in Belize for many years) proved invaluable to us.

We wish Tessa all the best in her new incarnation and hope that she will let us know if she manages to find any links between Friern Barnet and Macclesfield!

PARTY FUN

Thanks to all of you who came to the Christmas Party on 7 December. Everyone seems to have had a good time (including the hard working Committee members) and we were glad to have the opportunity to have a chat with you all. Our special thanks to our caterers Pat Cleland, Mary Taylor, Helen Hooper, Mary Barratt and Janet and Colin Liversidge & barman Ross Cleland.

TOC H

by John Donovan

On the eastern side of Whetstone High Road, next to Lawsons Timber, you can see two rather dilapidated wooden buildings. The one on the right used to be the Whetstone fire station, but around 1935 it began to be used by an organisation with the strange name of Toc H.

Toc H is a volunteer religious organisation with an interesting history. The name derives from the telegraphic form of Talbot House, which was situated in the Belgian town of Popperinge. It was there that in December 1915 that the Rev. 'Tubby' Clayton opened a rest and recreation centred for war-battered soldiers, fresh from the ghastly front line. It was the only place on the front line that offered such comfort to the war-weary troops while they rested for a day or two, before being sent back to face death again. Tubby Clayton made a note of the names and addresses of all the men who stayed at Talbot House and, after the war, contacted many of them. Together they offered practical help

to *other* war veterans, down on their luck, and from the beginnings sprang an international voluntary organisation

I wondered why it was named Talbot House (Talbot is hardly a Belgian name) but after a bit of digging I discovered that the house had been bought by an Englishman, in memory of Gilbert Talbot, son of the Bishop of Winchester, who had been killed at Hooge in the preceding July.

The Toc H organisation is still active, although the Whetstone Toc H is no longer occupied. David Berguer tells me that there was also a branch in Colney Hatch Lane, near to Muswell Hill, but this has long gone.

The symbol of Toc H is an Aladdin-type lamp equipped with a red light, the glowing lamp being placed above the street entrances, rather like the blue lamp outside police stations. On a somewhat irreverent note, I recall that when I was a little lad the phrase "as dim as a Toc H lamp" was sometimes used to describe people with less intelligence than oneself!



Toc H in Whetstone in 1985

WHAT WE USED TO WEAR

by David Berguer

Last year the Hornsey Historical Society ran an essay competition, the theme being "What We Used to Wear". I decided to enter and am proud to say that I was awarded third prize of £10, which I have donated to our Society's funds. Here is the essay in full:

Having been born a month after war broke out, the family album contains very few photographs of my early years. Film was, of course, virtually unobtainable in those days and in any case anyone who dared to take pictures in public would have been viewed with deep suspicion and would have doubtless been reported to the Authorities. Nevertheless there are two pictures that are worth describing. The first was taken in August 1944 when I was 4 1/2. I am standing by the side of a river in Aberystwyth, to which I had been evacuated with my mother (my father was in the fire service and had stayed in London). I am wearing a woollen one piece bathing suit - the kind that is so absorbent that when you leave the water it is inclined to end up around your knees. I am smiling in the picture and the bathing suit is dry, so maybe I was just posing. Although the photograph is in black and white I have a horrible suspicion that the suit might have been some shade of pink - it certainly looks pink, in a monochrome kind of way.

The second picture has no date, but I look to be about six. I am wearing a button up cardigan with horizontal stripes (or is that hoops?), a long sleeved shirt and tie with a gold tiepin through the shirt collar. I seem to recall that the cardigan was fawn and the stripes/hoops were what I can only describe as Sewage Brown. The tiepin was not real gold - my parents were not that wealthy, as can be seen by a close study of the cardigan, which has a small hole between the second and third buttons. That hole somehow brings a great feeling of sadness to me as it reminds me how my parents struggled to bring me up during those years of hardship. Like most children brought up at that time, I have a great deal of admiration for parents who had to cope with bombing, rationing, queues, shortage and the hard slog of everyday life. Clothes were often handed down and then later patched, socks were darned and shirt collars were turned to hide their frayed edges. Compare that to today's kids with their £150 designer trainers.

Let us fast forward now to 1951, when the Festival of Britain was showing a war weary Britain how the future was going to be, with spindly furniture and Formica. It was in that year that I left Rhodes Avenue School and, having passed the eleven plus, went to Southgate County Grammar School in Fox Lane. I recall being kitted out with the school uniform (only obtainable at one shop of course, and priced accordingly). The list seems endless: navy blue blazer with school badge, grey short trousers, navy blue cap with pale blue piping, school tie with alternate navy blue and light blue stripes, dark blue gym shorts, dark blue and light blue quartered football shirt and of course a satchel. I remember travelling to school on that first day on the single decker LT bus (called 'scooters' by their crews) on route 244. I felt so proud of my uniform; after all I was a Grammar School boy. When I got off the bus I was suddenly surrounded by an army of other eleven-year-olds, all identically clad and all no doubt equally proud.

It must have been around 1954 (when I discovered Gerry Mulligan and went to my first game at White Hart Lane) that my fashion taste reached its nadir, although at the time I thought I was the cat's pyjamas. I refer of course to the Day-Glo socks. These were available in pink, yellow and green and I bought a pair of each. I can remember climbing the stairs of a 102 bus and hoping that the people following me could see this latest arrival on the fashion scene peeking (or should I say, glaring) from the bottom of my trousers. Although I never became a Teddy Boy, I did go with some friends one Saturday morning to Lisle Street where I had a Tony Curtis haircut (I think it cost £5, but I may be wrong). Unfortunately, in those days, when I actually had hair, it was very fine and so to preserve the example of the hair-dresser's art I slept in my mother's hairnet on Saturday and Sunday night so that it would be intact for school on Monday. Alas, nature took its course and I woke up on Monday morning with my hair back to normal, apart from traces of lacquer, which had to be washed out. "What did you do on Saturday?" my school friends asked. "Oh, nothing much" I said, not daring to admit to wasting almost a month's pocket money.

If we progress now to 1956 (Suez, Buster Crabb, *Waiting for Godot*) we can see me starting my first job in the wonderful world of advertising. My very first suit was a tasteful two piece number from Montague Burton (Let Montague Burton Dress You) and, together with my Bri-Nylon shirt, I was the cat's pyjamas once again. Needless to say I did not wear my Day-Glo socks - even the freewheeling world of advertising would have balked at that. Later I progressed to a suit made from an iridescent blue-green material that changed colour when it caught the light. Feline night attire once again! I think around this time I was wearing what was described as brothel creepers (thick soled shoes with black suede uppers) which tied in rather nicely with an advertising joke then current at the time: Don't Tell My Mother I Work in Advertising, She Thinks I Play the Piano In A Brothel! Boom, boom and kindly leave the stage. Later on I bought a pair of Eaton Clubmen shoes which not only had thin crepe soles and sandy coloured suede uppers, but also marked me out as a suave, sporty type, for these were modelled on desert boots and had high sides that covered the ankle. Casual footwear was, of course, the plimsoll, although why it was named after the man who thought up the idea of painting lines on ships' hulls, I never did discover. Perhaps they stopped him slipping on the barnacles.

As we approach the end of my trip down Memory Lane, let me introduce my most long lasting item of clothing ever. Ladies and Gentlemen - the Sheepskin Coat. Bought for £40, it was a friend and companion to me for some twelve years. When it was new it was a thing of beauty, with its tan suede and pristine white sheepskin collar and trim. When winter came, I laughed in its face: icy blasts and blizzards were ignored as, apart from my legs (it was quite a short coat), I was as snug as a bug in a rug. However, rain was to be avoided if at all possible as it left marks on the suede and soaked the sheepskin, which then took on a farmyard odour and chafed my neck. The thermal properties of sheepskin coats are renowned - toast could not be warmer - but the journey to work involved dramatic temperature differences. The brisk walk to Bounds Green Station was a pleasure but once on the tube the sweltering began and the coat was not very popular with other passengers, as it was so bulky that it took up the space of two people. It

would also get caught in the doors, which left unsightly black marks on the suede and necessitated expensive annual trips to the dry cleaners. Alas, no amount of dry cleaning could restore the now yellow sheepskin to its former glory, and it was this, plus several large rips that I had accumulated, that lead me to eventually dispose of it. It was too big to fit in the dustbin, so I cut it up with a Stanley knife and disposed of it over a period weeks, like some dismembered body.

I hope the foregoing reminiscences have not left you with the impression that I am lacking in sartorial flair, on the contrary many people have commented on my selection of subdued ties and on my elegant choice of raincoats. Indeed, now that I am retired, my tee shirts and gardening trousers attract admiring glances in Tesco's, at least I think the glances are admiring. But you can never tell with people's tastes, can you?

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

John Donovan's habit of always carrying a camera in his car has, over the years, led to his capturing history as it takes place. In December, 1982 he took a picture of the demolition of the houses at the corner of Friern Barnet Road and Kennard Road. Three years later he took a picture of the flats that replaced them. Note the absence of traffic in both cases.



A WALK ALONG THE HIGH ROAD

by Dorrell Dressekie

This was High Road North Finchley and our guide was the esteemed conservationist, Dr Oliver Natelson, known to us all as Ollie. Our starting point, the corner of Ballards Lane and Dale Grove, is the site of the War Memorial, erected in 1921 by Hendon Garage in memory of those who died in the First World War. We read a few names on the memorial plaque before moving northwards and crossing to the right, between the site of the former Gaumont cinema, the bus station and the Cherry Tree public house, possibly the oldest pub building in North Finchley (previously named The Coach Stop and, before that, The Cricketers). The Gaumont was demolished in the 1980s and the site now under construction as an Arts Centre and apartment housing, with bus station located underneath.

As we walked, Ollie recalled for us some of the early history of Finchley, some place names and developments of more recent times. Most of Finchley almost certainly belonged to the Bishop of London's Diocese, through ownership granted by William the Conqueror around 1086. Much of the land lies on cold, wet boulder clay and gravel with little provision for cultivation by early settlers. Ancient roads, like Nether Street for example, linked the sites of old farms along the gravel line, which provided fresh spring water, while old estates like Moss Hall and Woodhouse have given their names to modern roads. The former pub on the site of the Cherry Tree could have been a stopping point for travellers on the Great North Road and, as such, contributed to the development of North Finchley.

The area of the High Road between Woodhouse Road and Castle Road has undergone several changes in shop use. Known originally as Market Parade, it was the site of the Grand Hall cinema, destroyed in the First World War. There's a little story here: a group of young people would go to the cinema, one would join the line and pay at the front, then walk through the cinema, open the back door in an alleyway off Woodhouse Road, and let the rest of the group in for free!

Moving north, we noted the parade of about ten shops which gave us a grand view of Victorian architecture. Photographic records of the 1860s show Park Road to be the original name of this section. Of businesses currently trading, Harris Fine Art is probably the oldest. At the far end of the parade is Woolworths, now in self service mode, first opened in North Finchley in 1927. There is a tiny little shop tucked in just beside Woolworths, and is noted for the regularity with which it changes hands

Crossing the road at the lights in front of Woolworths, we got a good view of the Tally Ho! Public house and, in the open space recently upgraded by Barnet Council, there is an old gas lamp with an inscription that we tried to read. Even with Eric Morgan getting down on his knees on the wet ground and armed with his spectacles, we could not make out the writing. We stood here for some minutes to study old photos of the area and tried to visualise North Finchley as it used to be, with its police box with flashing blue light, trams running to the Archway, roads with early style cars and horses and carts. It has been calculated that a journey by horse drawn carriage

from Finchley to The Bank would have taken about one hour and fifteen minutes - it is not all that much faster today! Continuing to recall some of the changes in the area in recent times and exchanging little tidbits about some of the former residents, we went back over the pedestrian crossing and crossed Stanhope Road. We looked

Cornelius Court, Okehampton Close, Welbeck Close and Beech Lawns. On the left hand side is a fine example of a Victorian pillar box and the hedges are of ash, field maple, hawthorn and sycamore. How did these hedges come to be planted? Who was Torrington? So much to know and learn, so little time to take it all in.



Interesting roofline at No 790 High Road

across to the opposite side to admire the ornate row of buildings between Hall Street and Percy Road. These have quite striking conical shaped roofs and date back to at least 1896.

We moved along and took a right turn into Torrington Park, with its distinctive cast iron name plate. The street itself is a myriad of architectural styles, with some quite large houses and place names like

This walk was last September. It was raining, but not enough to deter intrepid walkers of the Society who braved the weather to share a truly wonderful experience. The distance was approximately one mile and the time about two hours. We ended our walk at Friary Park, that pleasant traditional park surrounding Friary House, nestling there with a history of its own. But this is a walk for another day. Watch your future Newsletters for details!

CENSUS ON-LINE

by Colin Barratt

The greatly anticipated release of the 1901 British Census, after the regulation 100 year gap, has arrived at last. The Public Record Office (PRO) had been working hard to get the complete census indexed in a searchable format, ready for day 1, which was 2 January. They sized the system to cope with up to a million visits spread over a day. However, in the first few days of operation up to 1.2 million were trying to access it at the same time! They were finding that the number of visits was 20 times their expectations! This has caused a lot of frustration, and soon after opening the service had to be shut down for a week to allow the technical team to increase capacity and performance. By the time you read this, the website should be back online (if it can cope with the overwhelming public interest).

Unfortunately, the traditional alternatives of microfiche sheets or microfilm reels have not been made readily available yet. Full copies are held at the PRO at Kew, but neither the Family Records Centre in Clerkenwell, nor any of the local libraries have it.

For anyone with ancestors in Enfield, Graham Dalling (the Enfield Borough Local History Officer) was hot off the mark and has obtained a microfilm copy of the census for the areas covered by the present borough. Hackney Borough Archives also have a set of microfiche for their borough. Barnet Borough Archives have ordered a set of microfiche, but are still in the queue awaiting delivery. Those with ancestors from elsewhere will have to wait for the online service to be resumed,

or visit Kew.

I booked a session at the Enfield Local History Unit in the first week of January to look at the local microfilm, and Mary and I found useful information about the ancestors we knew lived locally. Of course, this has no searchable index, but if you have a rough idea of the address, you can find your relatives.

In spite of the difficulties experienced with the online service, the PRO should be congratulated in providing a fully indexed service on the internet searchable by name, place or address, of the 32 million names in the census, from the very first day. If it does prove to be a success, there are already plans to digitise all the previous censuses.

GASHOLDER VISIT

In the June 2001 issue of the Newsletter we indicated that the gasholder at New Southgate may be due for demolition so, with that in mind, Ollie Natelson, Colin Barratt and Dorrell Dressekie visited the site on 9 November 2001 accompanied by Mr Richard Thrift, the Network Officer for Transco North London LDZ (Local Distribution Zone).

Coal Gas has been produced in Britain since 1813, but the site at New Southgate was not opened until 1858 and was closed for gas production in 1972, although it continued to be used for the storage of Natural Gas until early 2001.

There were originally three gas holders in use at the New Southgate Gas Works: a small (single lift), medium (two lift) and large (three lift). The two smaller ones were

constructed in the early days of the works, and the larger one was added later. After the works closed down the two smaller holders were demolished, together with the rest of the structures in the site.

When gas distribution was taken

in place. For the technically minded the structure is a three lift holder (it can be raised in three stages) and is described as a column-guided in-ground holder, using 28 columns. Each of the three lifts has its own set of wheels, arranged vertically above each other to ride up and



over by Transco, they became responsible for the maintenance and operation of the remaining gas holder. Since early 2001 the holder has been empty, but every year an insurance inspector has to visit the site to ensure that the structure is safe, and there is a weekly inspection by Transco. As well as these inspections, the holder would have had to be painted every 10 years, which is a time consuming and expensive operation, as well as a dangerous one. For this reason demolition of the holder will probably take place within the next year or two.

Mr Thrift explained to us that none of the original gas manufacturing equipment remained, although much of the pipework to the holder is still

down the columns. The whole structure is riveted, and the lifts are of sheet steel. With no gas inside, the lifts are now fully nestled and the dome (crown) is almost at ground level. The crown can be walked on, and is flexible, as Mr Thrift demonstrated by bouncing on it! On a large mound (called a dumpling) at the centre of the base under the holder there is a vertical "king pin" and framework which supports the top of the crown when it is empty, to maintain its shape. The lifts are sunk in water to a depth of 32-35 feet to trap the gas within, and the joints between the three lifts are gas-tight by means of a cup and seal on the rim of each lift. The water is heated electrically to prevent it freezing. In its heyday the holder had a

capacity of just under 2 million cubic feet of gas, and took 8-12 hours to fill. This was usually done overnight, during a period of low demand, and the gas was used up during the day, the peaks being breakfast (6-9am) lunch time and then evening (4-9pm). When filling, the bottom lift rose first, then the middle, and finally the upper (crown) one. The overall height of the holder is 100 feet and it is of a similar diameter.

to supply the area. A small brick building near the booster house was a pump house, but this is now empty. We left this visit greatly impressed by the engineering and technical expertise involved with creating this huge structure 90 years ago and which still stands as a landmark, one of the few remaining ones of the "old" New Southgate.

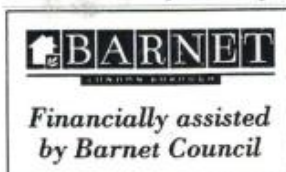
Incidentally, the difference between



The gas pressure created to fill the holder was low, controlled by an automatic governor which operated by responding to pressure difference between incoming and outgoing gas. Booster equipment was housed in a large brick building still existing between the holder and the North Circular Road, which increased the pressure to about 35mbar above atmospheric pressure and then transmitted the gas at this pressure

Coal Gas and Natural Gas lies in the chemical composition: Coal Gas consists mainly of hydrogen and methane with a small, but lethal, quantity of carbon monoxide (that's why people used to die from gas poisoning), whereas Natural Gas is comprised mainly of methane which is not lethal and is also odourless, so nowadays an artificial smell is deliberately added.

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