

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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TOWN HALL LATEST

Following Barnet Council's decision to close Friern Barnet Town Hall (see our February 2002 Newsletter), a public meeting was arranged by Ollie Natelson at the Town Hall on Tuesday 19 Feb. Despite a blustery rainy evening, over 80 local residents attended. The meeting was chaired by Julian Wootton, a local resident from Ashurst Road, who introduced the speakers and gave apologies for the absence of Dr Rudy Vis, the local MP, and also of ward councillors Brian Salinger and John Tiplady, who expressed support to get some listing safeguards for the building. Ollie opened the meeting by highlighting the historical associations of the building and, with the help of enlarged photographs, spoke of the superb craftsmanship in brick,



The firemen mural in the basement, painted during WW2

bronze, limestone, marble, etched glass, leather and even gold. The basement of the building housed a bomb shelter used during WW2 as the HQ of the local Civil Defence and its vigilant volunteers. As well as the murals (described in our last Newsletter) there is also a machine for filtering poison gases, which is intact and possibly unique. Ollie pointed out that, while in our darkest hours bombs had rained down on the district, those within this building had looked after all of us. It was now up to all of us to look after the building.

Ollie reported that, with the invaluable help of John Phillips and Maryla Persak-Enefer, both local architects and members of the Society, a 70 page document had been prepared and sent to English Heritage in an attempt to get the building listed. Support had also been given by the Twentieth Century Society, an important national organisation having branches in major cities and a membership that includes architects. Other groups expressing an interest

in preserving the Town Hall include The Finchley Society, The Holly Park Residents Association, The Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents Association and the Barnet Green Party. Five main reasons for disposing of the building were given by the Council and these were rebutted by residents:

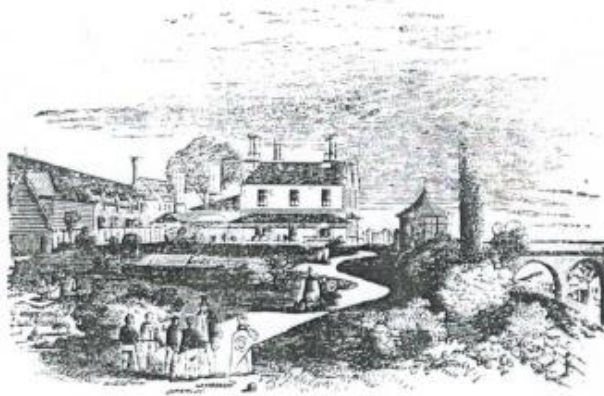
<i>Reason</i>	<i>Rebuttal</i>
1) The building does not offer easy access to the disabled	1) It would be easy to install lifts on the outside of the building without enormous cost
2) It is impossible to upgrade the building to include cabling for computers	2) Existing electrical conduits could be used to accommodate computer cabling. Much older buildings such as Oxford and Cambridge universities have been modernised
3) The building is too difficult to reach	3) Hendon is even less accessible (it is served by only 3 bus routes to Friern Barnet's 4, and Friern Barnet is accessible by National Rail (New Southgate))
4) Council offices will be centralised in Hendon	4) The costs of moving twice, from Friern Barnet to Nortel at Brunswick Park Road and then again to Hendon will be higher than staying put. Moreover, the Council already owns the Town Hall, but will have to rent a building from Nortel
5) Local "shops" are being set up in main shopping centres where Council staff will be able to answer questions	5) Small numbers of the Council's staff in "shops" are already vulnerable to public abuse. In addition there will still be a need for office space for all the staff involved in education, so why not continue to use a building that does not cost us, the council taxpayers any extra?

Councillor Barry Rawlings assured the meeting that the building would definitely not be used as a hostel, but he did state that the future sale of the Town Hall may also include the neighbouring Day Centre, but only after an alternative venue had been found for current users. At the end of the meeting a large number of the residents asked for petition forms that they could fill out and send to the Council.

Ollie is writing a history of the Town Hall, and would like to include as many personal reminiscences as possible, so if you worked there, held a function there or have any anecdotes about the building or its inhabitants, please give him a call on 020 8361 2496. If you had your wedding reception there, and have any photographs, Ollie would like to borrow them for copying.

RAILWAY MEMORIES

The following advertisement appeared in *The Official Illustrated Guide to the Great Northern Railway* which was published in June 1857. The view of the Railway Hotel (later to become *The Turrets*) appears to have been taken from the embankment on the eastern side, just north of the bridge carrying what is now Friern Barnet Road.



RAILWAY HOTEL, COLNEY HATCH, GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY.

This admirably situated Hotel is replete with comfort. It commands

MAGNIFICENT VIEWS;
CONTAINS FIRST-RATE BED AND SITTING ROOMS.
Large Grounds are attached;

And Arrangements perfected for the Reception of Dinner or Tea Parties.
THE LARDER IS ALWAYS WELL FURNISHED. THE WINES AND
SPIRITS ARE OF THE BEST QUALITY.

The Proprietors,

MESSRS. WATTS & SELBY,

Avail themselves of this favourable opportunity to invite attention to
THE RAILWAY HOTEL, COLNEY HATCH.

Amongst the 'Hints to Railway Travellers' in the Guide are the following:

Let your name and destination appear legibly on your luggage; and, if you wish to be safe against all chances of loss, put your name and address inside, also of each package. Picture to yourself your trunk lying on the road, left in the corner of an office, or sent in the wrong direction, and imagine what you would then wish should be on or in it, that it might be correctly sent to you.

Take the best care you can to prevent the necessity of your leaving your carriage before you reach the refreshment station at the end of your journey.

Be at the Station some minutes before the time; if you do not resolve to be so, expect to see the train on its way without you.

There was also the following helpful advice which is, of course, just as applicable today:

"The secret of reading in railway carriages - and the writer has studied several thousand pages while whirled along the iron way - is to prevent the communication of the vibrations of the carriage to the arms and book. The elbows should not, therefore, be rested on the solid parts of the carriage, but the book should be held in both hands, and supported by muscular power; the full elasticity of the arms, from the shoulders downwards, acting like carriage springs to the volume, while the head, by being balanced on the neck, or at least not pressed or rested against the solid sides of the compartment, is equally free from communicated vibration."

OH, NO, NOT AGAIN

by John Donovan

Back in March, I went to pick my granddaughter up from her nursery (the old flint-fronted school building just down from the Campe Almshouses). I parked the car and walked down to look at a white notice which had been stuck on a lamp post by the Council outside the school. I looked across the road at a blossom-bedecked plum tree at the kerbside (by the golf course) and there, pinned to the trunk, was a notice advertising a lost dog! It was just yards from where the East German spies used to advertise their lost cats and dogs (German Shepherds?). Has the Cold War started again? Has it anything to do with Global Warming (resulting in a Warm War)?

The *first* notice (stuck on the lamp post by the Council) displayed a planning application, dated 28 Feb 2002, for two single-storey rear extensions at 209 Friern Barnet Lane. After I had wandered up and down looking for number 209, I realised that it was the school in which Charlotte was being nursed! I then fell to discussing this with some of the mums, and they told me that the church is to *sell* the school! Apparently, this had been announced before Christmas! My

daughter Linda says the kids are to be relocated at their future schools. *Whatever* is to happen to 209, it is due to happen in July.

A PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

John Donovan states "members might like to know that the correct pronunciation of the word 'Friern' is *Fry Ern*, not *Free Ern*. The word is derived from 'Friar', and if you had addressed Robin Hood's mate as *Free Er Tuck*, he'd have bashed you with his pole."

Having said all that, one of our members, Mary Fairbrother, kindly lent us a recording of a BBC Radio 4 programme from June 1990 entitled 'Up the Road to Colney Hatch' which outlined the history of Friern Hospital. Without exception, everyone interviewed (including doctors, staff and former patients) referred to it as *Free Ern* Hospital. Over to you, John!

VISIT TO TESCO

by Dorrell Dressekie

Welcome to the Tesco Superstore at Colney Hatch Lane, not for a shopping spree but a behind-the-scenes visit by some members of the Committee. We were there at the kind invitation of the Manager and, as luck would have it, our visit on 13 February was almost 14 years to

the day (14 Feb actually) since the store first opened.

Why Superstore? It is so classified because of its size (100,000 sq. ft), the variety of foods and household goods stocked, and services such as the pharmacy, in-store bakery and the café. Tesco also operate three other types of store - Tesco Metro which are sited in town centres such as Oxford Street, Tesco Express at their petrol stations, and Tesco Extra which are the really big stores normally sited out of town. All the stores are supplied from large distribution depots at Welham Green and Didcot.

clearance (due to contamination) and the site had to be made easily accessible for customers and for goods deliveries. This involved the construction of a slip road from the A406 and an entrance in Colney Hatch Lane.

The history of Tesco is an interesting one. It all began in 1919 when Jack Cohen opened a fruit & veg stall in the East End. He believed in buying goods cheaply and working on low profit margins and he soon branched out into tinned and packaged goods and he adopted the motto "pile it high, sell it cheap". As business



Distinguished visitors. Dorrell Dressekie, Pat Cleland, Janet & Colin Liversidge and John Donovan on parade at Tesco

The Colney Hatch store is sited on land leased from Deards, who formerly had their waste disposal and transport business on the site. Once Tesco had identified the site and obtained permission from the Council, there was extensive soil

thrived, he opened more outlets and then went into business with a tea importer, T.E. Stockwell, and together they packaged and marketed a brand of tea which they sold under the name Tesco, being the initials of T. E. Stockwell and

the first two letters of Cohen. The first Tesco store opened in 1931 and by the outbreak of the Second World war there were over 100 stores in London and the Home Counties. As these were sited in High Streets, they were subject to intense competition and this led to the launching of Green Shield Stamps which were given for each purchase and could then be exchanged for gifts. These were dropped in 1977 and Tesco began to close these small stores and replace them with large supermarkets. This policy has proved so successful that Tesco has now overtaken Sainsbury's as the market leader, with a market share of 19% (Sainsbury's is 13%).

We were surprised to see that the storeroom at the back of the store is surprisingly small, and some of this space is taken up by goods awaiting return to the depot due to damage or being out of date. Cardboard and plastic packaging is also stored for return and recycling. Regular daily deliveries (sometimes three a day) mean that huge stockrooms are unnecessary.

The catchment area of the Colney Hatch store is approximately 5 miles, with customers coming from as far away as Archway and Finchley. Not all stores are the same - for example organic products sell very well at Colney Hatch and this branch handles 150 orders a day from the internet site, www.tesco.com.

So how does Tesco know what we, the customers, need? They operate Customer Panels where consumer opinions are sought and they also use the information obtained from the loyalty card. As the card is swiped

through the machine at the checkout, each customer's purchases are recorded on a central computer and, as well as providing information on stock movement and automatically re-ordering items, it also provides a picture of each customer's buying habits and lifestyle (do they have a dog, do they buy ready meals, have they any children?).

Fancy a job at Tesco? The Colney Hatch store has 464 staff and we were told that quite a number of these live locally. Because the store is now open 24 hours there are opportunities for part time and shift workers, ranging from shelf stackers to delivery drivers.

So what of the future? It is not inconceivable that the adjoining land to the north of the store, which was occupied by Perry's until December 2001, may be used to expand and upgrade the store to a Tesco Extra, which would really put Colney Hatch on the map!

THE WHETSTONE

by John Heathfield

The old stone which stands outside The Griffin Inn is made of quartz and sandstone, containing small grains of zircon, rutile and schorl. Such stone outcrops are found in the Yorkshire Dales and in South Wales and was laid down 240 million years ago. How it got to Whetstone is a mystery.

There is a reference in the early 1500s to a "Fayre Cross" at Whetstone cross roads. Does "Fayre" mean "fair" in the sense of beautiful or "fair" in the sense of market fair? There is a tradition of preaching at the cross roads. Was the stone the base of a wooden

preaching cross?

The Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments considered the stone to be a mounting block. If so, it would have been connected to the toll gate erected by Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust about 1730. Alas, the early financial accounts are lost.



I have looked at the records of all the houses in the row immediately behind the stone. It may be significant that none of them mention a stone, though they do mention things like the Queen's (Elizabeth's) Highway, the town well and the ponds. Does this mean that the stone was not there in Tudor times? The earliest evidence of the existence

of the stone is a photograph taken in 1861 showing the stone much closer to The Griffin and high enough for two people to sit on it. It was moved to its present position when the toll gate was removed in 1863. I keep changing my mind. My position today is that it is a mounting block connected with the Turnpike Trust and put up about 1733. Watch this space for subsequent changes of mind! One thing is sure: there is no truth in the commonly held belief that the armies at the Battle of Barnet in 1471 used the stone to sharpen, or whet, their swords. The name Whetstone is a corruption of West Town.

QUEEN VICTORIA VAULTS

by Colin Barratt

Noted in the memories of a former local resident was a passing mention of huge vault slabs on the western side of the New Southgate Cemetery & Crematorium in Brunswick Park Road. These slabs covered the remains of Hanoverian courtiers removed from the Savoy Chapel. This prompted me to investigate what these were about.

The slabs lie above 31 vaults, each engraved with the details of those buried beneath. As well as names, dates of death and ages, some have additional information, such as the following examples:

Organist to the Savoy Chapel 46 years.

One of Her Majesty's Privy Councillors.

Pastor of the German Lutheran Church.

Private Sec. To His Majesty for the Electory of Hanover.

The story of these vaults was incomplete and the various accounts

appeared to be contradictory. I contacted the Victoria Society, who suggested we talk to the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle. I set out and sent them the conflicting accounts I had so far, with some examples of the engraved details. I asked for a definitive statement on the origin of the vaults and the Royal link, if any, of those buried therein.

led to the need to redevelop the area between the Savoy Chapel and the Embankment. Included in this area was the German Lutheran Chapel, rebuilt in 1767, together with a burial ground and vaults. The chapel was demolished and the human remains were transferred to a burial ground at Colney Hatch, bought in 1880 from the Great Northern



Mary and Colin Barratt recording the Victorian vaults

I received a detailed reply from the Registrar of Royal Archives. She had searched for details about the vaults, and quoted from a book, *The Savoy*, published in 1960. According to this, development of the Thames Embankment in the 1860s, which left the wharves at the Savoy high and dry,

Cemetery Company.

The Registrar didn't find anything to suggest that any of Queen Victoria's Hanoverian relatives were buried there, though several of those attending the Lutheran Chapel would have had connections with the Court,

as they would have originally come over with the Hanoverians as servants. She also thought it unlikely that the Queen would have paid for the re-burials, as not all of those buried would have had royal associations. She guessed that the name was given to the vaults just in honour of the Sovereign, though maybe also with the acknowledgement of the connection with an old royal site.

Another piece of research done on our behalf by the Registrar concerned an index of the early registers of a second German Lutheran Chapel, at St James's Palace, separate from the one at the Savoy. Some of the German names I gave as examples of those re-buried in the vaults appear in this index. The Registrar finally suggested that we contact the Anglo-German Family History Society, who may know more.

I e-mailed the Secretary of the AGFHS in Plymouth, and had a reply from the Chairman. He was very interested in our researches, and basically confirmed the account given by the Royal Archives Registrar. He also added more details: when George I came to the throne, the Lutherans in his train used the Lutheran Chapel at the Savoy, as it was larger and more convenient than the one at St James's Palace. The first four King George's were also Electors of Hanover, so they also kept a Hanoverian Government office in the court, and no doubt many of the officials worshipped at the Savoy. The Lutheran Chapel (St Mary's or St Marienkirche) was demolished in 1875 to make room for the Embankment. The burial yard was cleared the same year and the dead

were moved to the Great Northern London Cemetery.

It so happens that the AGFHS carried out their own survey of the vaults in 1993, and already had the details in their library. They sent me a copy, which I have cross checked with our own recent survey.

The layout of the vaults at New Southgate resembles a large M, and it's interesting to speculate whether this is just coincidence, or was it done in remembrance of St Mary's?

I have suggested to both the AGFHS and the cemetery manager that an information board be erected in front of the vaults to tell visitors something of their history. This idea has been favourably received, and will be discussed in the near future.

This rather neglected part of our local cemetery is now about to get some well deserved attention.

OSCROFT MEMORIES

We were delighted to receive a letter from one of our members, Rosemary Coates, in which she mentioned that a friend of hers, Tony Button, had seen the piece on Oscrofts in our February 2002 Newsletter. Tony is now a major in the Salvation Army and is currently running the East Ham Corps, but back in the 70s he used to live in Summers Lane. His late father, Horace Button, was an ambulance driver at the Friern Barnet station for most of his life and was also very active in the St John Ambulance Brigade.

Tony has very kindly set down his memories of his time at Oscrofts:

"I first started work at Oscroft

Brothers sometime in the Spring of 1966. I had not yet left school, and answered an advertisement in the shop window for a cycle mechanic (which I wasn't). They were advertising for a full time job, but agreed to take me on part time, four evenings a week and all day Saturday, until I left school in the coming July.

In those days, the shop stayed open until 6.30 every evening except Saturdays (6pm) and so I was working two hours each night except Wednesday (half day) and all day Saturday.

I believe that John and Wilf Oscroft had been involved in a business elsewhere in London before they took over the shop in Woodhouse Road. Many customers believed that they were dealing with the two brothers in that shop but, in fact, John had moved and opened another shop in Bowes Road, New Southgate. The second man in the shop with Wilf was in fact Ken Westoby. I believe that he had worked in the shop since before the second World War, and returned after service in the RAF.

When I worked there, the shop sold and repaired small electrical appliances and cycles. The electrical accumulator was there, but not used.

Ken and Wilf soon taught me about repairing cycles properly. This meant not just repairing the fault for which it came in, but making sure the cycle was safe as well. A puncture repair (not done now, I understand) could end up with a free service on the brakes if they were in a dangerous condition. As Wilf Oscroft wheeled the repaired cycles out to their

owners, I knew that he was checking the brakes etc. If there was a fault, he wouldn't allow the owner to take it until either he, or I, had fixed it. When pedals without ball bearings were supplied with new cycles, they were all put to one side, and "proper pedals" fitted in their place. The representative from Raleigh Cycles would call about once a fortnight, and take with him all the replaced pedals. In those days, there were many rather eccentric people riding cycles in the area, and some of their cycles were in "interesting" conditions, however, customer courtesy was important to Oscroft Brothers, and although there may have been a few comments behind the scenes, the customers were treated with utmost respect.

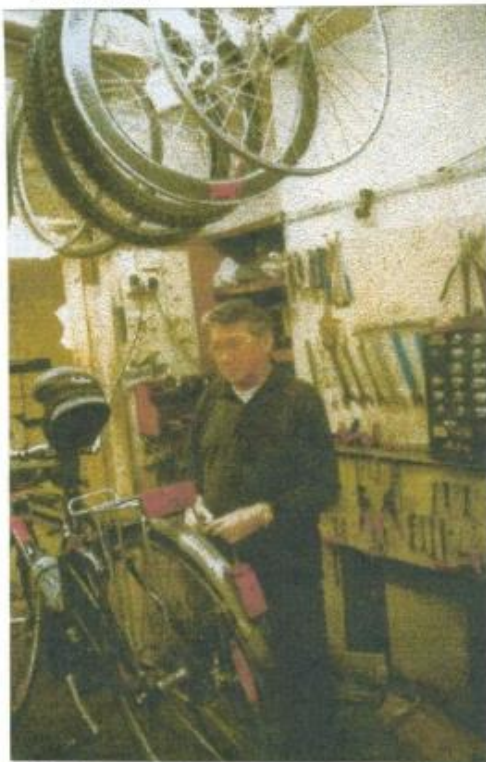
In those days, credit was not easy to obtain. Many people came in with their children to measure up for a cycle, only for parents to be unsuccessful in their credit application. Many times, Wilf Oscroft (I was never invited to call him Wilf, and it still comes hard to do so) allowed the people to take the cycle and pay off the cost in the future. I cannot remember anyone letting him down and not paying what they owed.

All batteries, and bulbs from torch to electric light, were tested as they were sold. Often the shop was full to overflowing on Saturdays, but no short cuts were allowed. There was never any thought of going to lunch or for a break whilst the shop was busy.

Wilf Oscroft was a man of service. we used to joke that he would open up the shop in the middle of the night if someone was looking in the

window. In fact, I believe he did once open up during a Christmas holiday in order to serve a customer.

Wilf and Olive Oscroft lived above the shop. Olive was involved, I believe with the WRVS, and they attended the Congregational Church. Often visitors to the flat would enter through the shop and rear workshop in order to go upstairs. I'm not sure that their clothes were all that suitable for passing through the small workshop, but I don't remember any dissenters.



In the workshop (Photo: Ollie Natelson)

There was a business connection with Hollybush Radio (Mr Thomas?) a few doors along the parade at no 199. In between the shops there was a speaker system, and often a voice would come "out of the blue" above a customer's head asking if we had a particular item in stock, or maybe even some change. In the days

before customer announcements, the voice from nowhere frightened quite a few people. My own little enjoyment was to play people along when they thought I wouldn't be able to help them with a particular problem. They would ask if "Mr Oscroft" was in. I would tell them (if he was) that he was at lunch. Most of these people were convinced that Ken Westoby was the other brother, so they would ask for the other Mr Oscroft, at which point I would begin to direct them to the New Southgate branch. The vast majority of people just couldn't believe that Ken and Wilf were not the Oscroft Brothers.

When John Oscroft went into hospital the plan was to close the New Southgate branch until he was better, but I persuaded them to allow me to keep it open. I was despatched with the instructions not to try to do too much, but I set out to prove I could do it all (I was probably about 17 at the time). I managed to do all the things needed, and got permission to "tidy and clean the place up a bit". Shelves were cleared and painted and hundreds of, wait for it.....wicks for paraffin lamps, brand new but ancient spark plugs and countless other items were dispatched to the tip. And the Oscrofts were really grateful to me! Other people think I ought to cringe about many things I have done, but that still makes me embarrassed when I think of all those treasures that ended up in Summers Lane tip!

I left Oscroft Brothers when I was 18, I would love to be able to "spill the beans" on what went on behind the scenes, but truly, what you saw was really what you got. The civility in the shop was not a "front" but really reflected the style of the owners. I occasionally get near a cycle needing

repair now, usually belonging to a member of my family, and the look of despair on their faces as everything has to be checked "Oscroft Style" reflects the standards I learnt in those days.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

As well as our regular meetings there are a number of outdoor events during the summer:

Sun 9 June Coppetts Wood

Open Day . A special fun day for children aged 9-90 including Guided tour, Treasure Hunt, Bird Spotting, Clay Modelling & Painting Tree Tour and Badge Making.
2-4pm entrance in Colney Hatch Lane

Sun 16 June Colney Hatch Tour

A look round the outside of the Town Hall followed by a tour round St John's Church conducted by John Phillips. Meet at 2pm outside the Town Hall. Cost £1

Sun 15 Sept Friern Hospital Tour

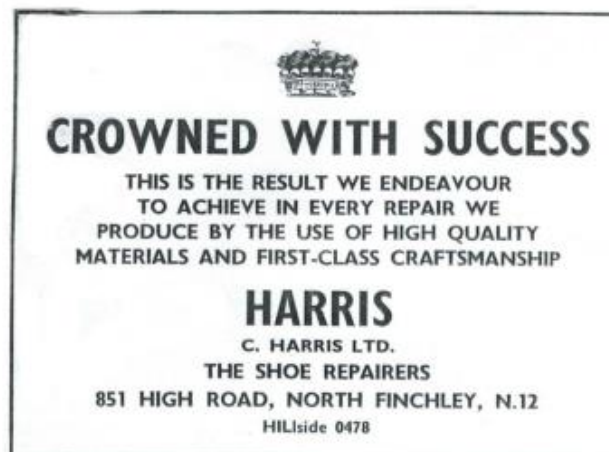
See 150 years of local history and the little wildlife left. Meet at 2pm in forecourt of New Southgate Station. Cost £1

Sun 29 Sept Friary Park Tour

A circular tour of the park and St James the Great Church. Meet at 2pm outside the main entrance to the park in Friern Barnet Lane. Cost £1

CORONATION MEMORIES

At our Meeting on Tuesday 25 June we shall be sharing memories of the Coronation, so please bring along any memorabilia that you have hidden away!



The above advertisement appeared in a Programme produced in 1953 by Finchley Borough Council to commemorate the Coronation. Sadly Harris is closing on 15 June 2002 after 75 years as a family business.

**Friern Barnet & District
Local History Society**

BARNET

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by Barnet Council*

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