

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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On 2 July 2002 Ollie Natelson received notification from the Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) that Friern Barnet Town Hall had been Grade II listed. This welcome news follows a concerted campaign from many local residents who felt that it would be a great loss if such a fine building were to be sold to developers who might then demolish it and replace it with who knows what. The thought of an edifice along the lines of Barnet House in Whetstone being dumped in Friern Barnet was too much to contemplate.

The Town Hall was described by DCMS as "a good example of pared-down modernism, showing clear European influences, but executed in traditional materials and techniques, and with elements of neo-Georgian as well. Its unusual date of construction.....the extent of survival, its subtle form, and pronounced sense of civic pride mark it out as an exceptional civic building, on this scale, of its day."

The Town Hall now joins some 419,000 buildings in Britain with Grade II listing. This does not guarantee that it will survive intact forever, but at least it cannot be drastically altered or demolished without applying for "listed building consent." It is in fact a criminal offence to demolish a listed building, or alter or extend such a building in a way which would affect its character, without consent, and the penalties for this can be heavy.

It is worth pointing out that within two miles of the Town Hall there are two more listed buildings: the former Friern Hospital (opened in 1851) and the Campe Almshouses in Friern Barnet Lane (built in 1612).

## SHAKESPEARE'S CHAIR

Norman Burgess, our member in Finchley, told us that on one of the Finchley Society's trips to Anglesey Abbey, near Cambridge he came across a chair with the following inscription:

*When Garrick was intending to celebrate the memory of his ever to be remembered author Shakespeare in praise of his superlative genius he heard that Paul Whitehead the Poet Laureate had a chair in which Shakespeare had sat when he wrote wrote most of his inimitable plays. He requested the favour of me to call upon Whitehead and ask his permission that he Garrick might be indulged with the loan of the said chair on the occasion from which he thought he should be enabled to make his oration with more peculiar animation. I without hesitation undertook the business and waited and waited upon him at his house upon Twickenham Common and addressed him in as mild and modest terms as in my power when he abruptly and absolutely with a considerable degree of ire refused it saying that Garrick was a mountebank and was by no means a fit person to be trusted with so valuable a gem upon which I retired greatly confused and discomfited. Soon afterwards Mr Whitehead died and his furniture was coming to the hammer to be sold. I asked Mr Ben Bradbury, a neighbouring resident, to purchase it for me with which he complied, made the purchase and afterwards made me a present of it without permitting me to know what amount it was sold and it has ever since been in my possession in the genuine state in which it was bought and so shall remain barring accidents for the residue of my life. J.B.*

*The above initials J.B stand for John John Bacon of Fryern House, Fryern Barnet whose son John Bacon presented the chair to me some thirty five years ago. April 4th, 1864. Rev. T.J. Judkins M.A, 49 Euston Square, St Pancras,*

*The chair was presented to me by my mother in law, Mrs Judkins, widow of Rev. T.J. Judkins, Nov 13th, 1871*

*Walter Field M.A., F.S.A. Vicar of Godmersham, Kent.*

In order to try and elaborate on this story we need to look at some dates in more detail:

- 1) Shakespeare lived between 1530 and 1601, so the chair must be at least 400 years old.
- 2) David Garrick lived between 1717 and 1779 but did not become an actor until 1741
- 3) John Bacon the elder died in 1816
- 4) John Bacon the younger died in 1845
- 5) The Poet Laureate was *William Whitehead* (1715 - 1785) and he achieved the position in 1757
- 6) The chair was apparently given to Rev Judkins by John Bacon the younger in 1829

From all this we can deduce that the Garrick had tried to unsuccessfully to borrow the chair from Whitehead some time after 1741. It was then acquired by John Bacon the elder around 1785 (when Whitehead died) and it then passed to his son John the younger around 1816 (when the

elder John died). It was then given to Rev. Judkins about 13 years later (approx. 1829) and Walter Field received it in 1871.

The only parts of the story that need to be filled in are: When and how did Whitehead acquire the chair, and how did it end up at Anglesey Abbey?

### FRIERN HOSPITAL

We have now produced a publication entitled "Friern Hospital - A Brief History". This is the first of a series of occasional papers that we are planning. These will be simply produced, and printed by ourselves which enables us to keep the cost down to £1. You can pick up a copy at our meetings or, if you prefer, we can post one to you in return for a cheque for £1.27 to include postage.

Following the Friern Barnet Show in Friary Park, when we first put it on sale, we received a very interesting letter from Mr Richard Selby which included the following:

"I was very interested in your booklet "Friern Hospital - A Brief History", especially the considerable loss of life in 1903 during a disastrous fire when 51 inmates died. I am one of the registrars working at the Register Office in Burnt Oak where the records of Births, Deaths and Marriages are stored since 1837. The death registers of the old Finchley sub-district have always fascinated me as they include every event which occurred in the Friern Hospital from the days when it was known as the Lunatic Asylum. I researched today the entries relating to this tragedy and you may be interested in my findings.

Indeed, there were 51 deaths, all of

them female ranging in age from 19 to 77. Their deaths occurred on 27 January 1903 and in each case the cause of death was described as '*Fire or suffocation by fumes and smoke, by building known as The Annexe catching fire from some accidental cause*'. This was the finding of the Coroner for Middlesex after three separate hearings on 31 January, 5 and 12 February 1903.

I also discovered that the first death at the Lunatic Asylum was a Catherine Doudan, alias Regan, a pauper patient aged 35 who died of congestion of the brain and lungs during a fit of epilepsy on 28 July 1851. There were then 45 more deaths recorded within the first six months of opening. Thereafter the rate of deaths increased as the population of the asylum grew and I have read as many as 15 death registrations a day being recorded in later years. The whole spectrum of causes was banded about, regardless, in my opinion, of the true medical diagnosis. The knowledge and identification of disease or mental ailment were poorly known in those early years and I have noted a 27 year old man having died of fatigue. The story of early registration is one that I could elaborate upon at some later time should you be interested."

We are, of course, very interested and we have asked Richard to do some more digging in the archives.

In a more pleasant vein, Richard adds that the first baby to be born to inmates of the Lunatic Asylum was an ungiven-named boy born to Jane and James Browning, of no known occupation, on 9 April 1852. We wonder what became of him.....

### **NORTEL CLOSES**

On Friday 30 August the doors of the Nortel Networks offices in Oakleigh Road closed for the last time, ending a 70 year link with New Southgate. Nortel (formerly Northern Telecoms of Canada) was the successor company to Standard Telephones & Cables, whose huge factory was the biggest employer of labour in the area.

John Donovan, who had worked at STC for 24 years, was invited to the farewell party and, in true local history style, took his camera with him to record details of the site. John was particularly keen to record the avenue of lime trees that at one time linked the Cemetery station with New Southgate Cemetery in Brunswick Park Road. Fortunately the trees were still there, but may not survive development of the site, which we believe may be used for housing.

The story of STC has been well recorded in two books by Stan Springate, who worked there for 43 years. "Firm Friends" is the history of STC at New Southgate, while "Lie Down!" records the sad day when a doodle bug landed on the site in August 1944. We hold copies of both books in our archives, and of course we have John's memories as well, like the one that follows.

### **TO THE STANDARD AND BACK**

*by John Donovan*

Early in 1966 I started work at Standard Telephones & Cables (known locally as "the Standard") and, for the first couple of years, I *drove* the mile or so from Holly Park Road to work, parking up by the top field. In due course, the car park was moved down to an adjacent

site (now covered in new houses), on the other side of Brunswick Park Road, and that few hundred extra yards suddenly made my journey time by car longer than the same journey on foot, so I did the obvious thing and walked - for twenty four years! During that time I did the journey some 10,000 times and, to make the walk more interesting, I started to identify all the wild flowers, trees, birds and butterflies I saw on the way, as well as keeping an eye open for anything that could be described as local history. This article, and ones that will follow, are my recollections of those myriad journeys.

I would leave my house in Holly Park Road at 8.00am, walk to the corner and turn left into Bellevue Road (before the war it used to be called Ferrand Park) and downhill, past Holly Park School, to The Crescent. That short stretch of road contained several hawthorn trees, which were among my favourites, especially in spring, when they would be drenched with deep pink blossom. Turning right, I would walk along The Crescent, beneath magnificent plane trees, to Beaconsfield Road.

Along the northern side of The Crescent ran a vast allotment (stretching across to Bethune Avenue) which opened up a great chunk of sky, with opportunities for bird watching, cloud watching and, on winter evenings, star gazing. The allotments themselves were a treasure house of trees, flowers, vegetables, birds, butterflies, wild flowers and home-made tool sheds that would gladden the heart of Heath Robinson; there was always something to catch the eye. You may think that vegetables are not particularly

attractive but, when left to go to seed, they can be very beautiful. Indeed, most garden centres these days sell ornamental brassicas (cabbages to you and me!). After the war, many Italians and Spaniards worked at Friern Hospital, and several of the allotment sections were tended by these folk, who grew some strange and lovely produce, including fennel, artichokes and aubergines (strange for the 1960s, that is).

Reaching Beaconsfield Road, I would be faced with an irritating dip down through 'The Fields' and up to Oakleigh Road North and the bridge over the railway line. To avoid that waste of energy, I would cross to the field next to the railway and take a diagonal path over to the subway,

countless opportunities for entertainment - skyscapes, birds, wild flowers, butterflies and discarded car batteries (well, just the one, left by gypsies, but that's yet another story). Of course, in winter, when the field was muddy, I *had* to use the irritating dip.

At the far northern corner of the field, where once stood a pig farm, I would come to the mouth of the subway, a white-tiled tube charmingly adorned with rusty water stains and graffiti. At the far end, the path led uphill for a few yards before reaching Oakleigh Road South. These few yards were blessed with large, overhanging trees, including an oak, a couple of sycamores and a crab apple, the



*The subway, complete with primitive 1960s graffiti*

which would take me under the railway lines. It was a very large field; I never did measure it, but I believe it contained one or two football pitches until the elephants came (but that's another story). That field and that subway also offered

latter affording pretty blossoms in spring and fallen apples in autumn. Sometimes, on my homeward journey, I would fill my pockets with those little apples and then throw them along the railway embankment (behind the fence) where, in twenty

years or so, I liked to imagine, new apple trees would grow to delight folk. I have to say I stole that idea from Walt Disney's film about the American folk hero, Johnny Appleseed! That stretch of trees was home to a stentorian wren (you could hear his trilling from across the railway!), and a timid dunnock. Despite his shyness, the dunnock is, apparently, a bigamist and maintains several nests spread across his 'manor'. I blame the television, myself.

Emerging from the subway I would stop to gaze across at The Rec (Oakleigh Recreation Ground) and drink it all in (on bright winter days the large areas of dew-covered fields would glisten in the sun). At this point I would be faced with two more alternative routes (rather like life, really); I could turn left and walk up the hill to The Standard, or cross over to The Rec and walk across to Brunswick Park Road. Sometimes, all these decisions would be too exciting to bear!

The Rec, however, was usually only a summer option, and most of the time I would head up the hill to work. The first thing I would notice on the left was a long, thin petrol station (whose name I cannot remember, mainly because I had to watch out for cars driving in and out of it). After a few years it went out of business, and lay sad and vandalised until a firm of builders merchants bought it, and erected the steel fence that is there today (painted a bright canary yellow). The current merchants are Fitzgerald & Burke, but I'm not sure that they were the first.

Strangely enough, that stretch of Oakleigh Road South, despite its traffic noise and fumes, afforded me

much pleasure. On the left hand side (west), a line of lime trees followed me uphill, just behind the railway's iron railings, and there was an ever-changing selection of wild flowers. On the right (east) were some attractive old houses, one of which, with its twin gables, can be seen in a Victorian photograph taken across the railway from near the farm. The picture actually shows a railway engine, with the twin gables in the background; railway buffs are even more anorakish than boy train spotters and local historians, and you can always rely on them for interesting old photos! Then, of course, there was the church on the corner of Brunswick Grove. That was being demolished as I arrive, I believe, and a large block of flats was built upon the site.

Arriving at the gates of STC, I would sometimes pop into one of the shops along Brunswick Crescent, or even the kiosk/cabin on the corner by The Standard, to buy sweets or other goodies. That cabin was run by Thelma Harris, the much-loved local Girl Guide leader, who lived up near the Town Hall.

*To be continued* .....and please don't hesitate to ring me with any errors that have crept into the above text, or with anything *you* can add to my memories.

#### **SUMMER SHOW**

Unlike last year (when the heavens opened on the Sunday) both days of the Friern Barnet Summer Show (17 and 18 August) were sunny and very warm. We had a stall and a display stand with a collection of maps and old photographs and, thanks to Colin and Janet Liversidge, we also had a gazebo

which stopped us passing out from heat-stroke! We managed to sell a large number of second-hand items



*John answers a history question*

which fortunately has eased the pressure on our attics, garages and dining rooms, which were becoming almost uninhabitable. We also had the chance to introduce a few more members of the public to the delights of local history and were able to field a few awkward questions.

Thanks to Colin and Janet, Dorrell, Colin and Mary Barratt, Mel and Helen Hooper, David Berguer and John Donovan and his grandson Alex for manning the stall and helping to raise over £250, which has made our financial situation a lot healthier.

**FRIARY PARK UNDER GROUND**  
For several years Ollie Natelson had

been puzzled at the presence of three strange mounds in Friary Park. Were they natural features, or were they hiding the remains of buildings? Earlier this year Ollie decided to enlist the help of the experts. Having first obtained permission from Barnet Council for a non-invasive investigation, he asked Hendon & District Archaeological Society (HADAS) if they would conduct a survey. Fortunately they agreed, and so this summer they have been busy with their resistivity meter (like a radar, that measures irregularities underground). The results are interesting, but so far inconclusive. There appears to be a large feature consisting of a straight line with circles at either end. Could this be the remains of a mansion that stood in the Park in the 17th and 18th centuries? We shall have to wait and see, for HADAS are continuing their work in September.

If you want to see the results of the survey so far, these can be found on the HADAS website:  
[www.hadas.org.uk](http://www.hadas.org.uk)

#### **HELP WANTED**

*by David Berguer*

I have started work on a history of trams and trolleybuses in the North Finchley/Whetstone/Friern Barnet/New Southgate area. In order to make this as realistic as possible I want to include reminiscences from people who remember using these forms of transport.

If you have memories of either the trams (which lasted until 1938) or trolleybuses (which stopped running in 1962) I should love to hear from you. You can ring me on 020 8444 3089 or grab me at a meeting!

### **DOROTHY ANNIE LAWRENCE**

Have you heard of her? She wrote a book about her experiences in the First World War (*Sapper Dorothy Lawrence* 1919), which was so revealing that it became a best-seller. Dorothy continued to send articles to the newspapers and magazines of the 1920s, but she was locked up in a mental institution. That institution was Friern Mental Hospital, where she stayed until her death in 1964. Like the *Woman in White*, was she locked up for life for something she knew would bring discredit to the Establishment?

We think that a resident of Friern Barnet knew her in 1964. Did you? Please contact Ollie Natelson, our archive collator on 020 8361 2496. Otherwise we may have to wait until the 100th anniversary of her death before we can establish the mysterious history of this famous person.

### **SOUTH LODGE**

*by Colin Barratt*

If you travel along Brunswick Park Road from Waterfall Road, you will reach New Southgate Recreation Ground (the "Rec") on your left hand and New Southgate Cemetery and Crematorium on the right. There is now nothing to indicate that one of the main entrances to the cemetery used to be located opposite the Rec. This entrance was once flanked by two stone pillars, and a long drive led straight up to the central chapel, past lines of rhododendron bushes.

About twenty years ago this area was sold by the cemetery, the burial remains removed, and two housing estates built, Darwin Close and Marshalls Close. However, one reminder survived here, the

Cemetery Superintendent's Lodge, or South Lodge. Although the developers originally bought the Lodge also, they decided not to bulldoze it, and returned it to the cemetery, who converted it into two flats, for staff use.

The Lodge dates back to the opening of the cemetery in 1861, and stood at this southern entrance gate. A few weeks ago I arranged to visit the present owners, to find out about the house and its history. Mr and Mrs Saykal bought it in 2000, just before their daughter Caitlin was born. The Lodge had been allowed to deteriorate over the years, and a lot of hard work and expense was required to bring it up to the remarkable condition it is now in. It has been made into a truly comfortable family home, while trying to retain its original features.

This house stands in half an acre of ground, all of which needed clearing and tidying when the Saykals took it over. The garden was heavily overgrown, the wooden fencing boundary with the new estates was badly damaged, the adjoining former monumental mason's workshop was littered with stonework, and the large area in front of the house was open to the road (used as a convenient turning point for passing cars, as well as attracting various undesirable visitors!)

The house itself had missing or broken chimney stacks, an extension behind it was in a bad state of repair, and many of the window frames were rotting. The house may look large from the outside, but its rooms are not, and to gain extra space the new owners had to



decide whether to remove interior walls or rebuild the rear extension. They elected to keep the original rooms, rebuilding the chimneys, and installing period fireplaces. The windows had to be replaced, and although double glazed ones were fitted, they were designed to be in keeping with the house, some having arched top panels, and stained glass. The main front wall of the house had previously been pebble dashed, and this was removed, to reveal the original brickwork. A new brick extension at the back was built, using old bricks which matched the existing house.

The internal walls of the extension have been left with exposed brickwork, and built into this wall is a brick found during the clearing process, which has the name

well was crumbling, and they could have just sealed it up and forgotten it. Instead, they repaired the brickwork wall, and built a new traditional style well above it, together with a roof and turning spindle, with rope.

The odd shaped frontage to the road, inherited from the position of the old entrance to the cemetery, has caused a lengthy battle with Barnet Council. Thankfully, this has now been resolved, and a new front boundary wall has been built, with an embedded block engraved with the house name "South Lodge". It was good to see that the original name has been retained.

This was an interesting visit, and we were warmly welcomed. The present owners are to be applauded for making such an effort to return this



COLNEY HATCH moulded into it.

As yet, no explanation has been found for this brick, but it makes an interesting feature. Also during clearing of the garden, a large slab of slate was discovered. When this was lifted, they found a deep well underneath. The brickwork of the

historic house to its original appearance.

#### **ALEXANDRA PALACE**

To accompany his talk on Alexandra Palace at the 24 Sept meeting, David Berguer has prepared a 12 page history of the building and its park. We are selling this for

£1 (£1.27 by post) If you would like a copy please you can pick one up at one of our meetings (from Mel's bookstall), otherwise you can ring David on 020 8444 3089.

#### **PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW**

We are very sad to announce that Pat Cleland has decided to resign from the Committee. Pat has done a sterling job as Membership Secretary and, as those of you who attend our meetings will know, her smiling face has been the first thing to greet you when you come through the door. Fortunately Pat is still a member of the Society so we shall look forward to seeing her at meetings, but in a the role of spectator. Thank you Pat for all your hard work, and for all those cups of tea and biscuits (and occasional glasses of bubbly!) at our Committee meetings!

#### **CONDUCTED WALKS**

Those of you who fancy a gentle stroll on a Sunday afternoon will be interested in our three conducted walks this autumn.

**Sunday 29 Sep A Tour of Friary Park** with Ollie Natelson.

Meet at 2pm at the entrance in Friern Barnet Lane. This walk will also include a visit to St James's churchyard.

**Sunday 13 Oct A Circular Tour of North Finchley High Road** with Ollie Natelson. Meet 2pm at the

corner of Ballards Lane and Dale Grove. Cost £1.

**Sunday 20 Oct A Tour of Whetstone** with John Heathfield. Meet 2pm outside The Griffin. Cost £1.

#### **FROM THE 1953 ARCHIVES.....**

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