

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

Published by Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

Issue Number 10

November 2002

TO THE STANDARD AND BACK - EPISODE TWO

by John Donovan

You'll recall that I would leave my house, walk along Holly Park Road, turn left into Bellevue Road and past Holly Park School. Well, the house on the corner of Holly Park Road and Bellevue Road had a basement area (what my gran would have called an 'airy' - as in the old skipping song, "One two three a-lairy, my ball's down the airy"). It's still there, of course, some ten feet deep, it's the only one in the block. One gains access to the basement area only from the house.

Growing up out of the 'pit' and over the top was a huge elderberry tree, which would be covered first with huge cream plate-like blooms, and then deep purple berries. To add to all this loveliness, there was a grape vine entwined in the branches of the tree and many is the time I have walked past and admired the burgeoning grapes, until they became purple, too (the vine seemed to be growing from next door, so I'm not sure who owned it). After a few years, school children started to reach up over the iron, spear-tipped railings to pull down the bunches of grapes (most of which ended up



Grapes in Friern Barnet!

squashed into the pavement) and, after a while, the vine was pruned back drastically and there were no more grapes. I've always thought it was to stop the children from falling into the basement.

Then it was along The Crescent to Beaconsfield Road, and diagonally across to the entrance to the big field, which lay adjacent to the railway line (I shall call it *The Big Field* from now on). On one side of the entrance was a lovely flowering cherry tree and on the other, an elderberry bush and, one year, a small patch of Japanese Knotweed came to join them. Now, Knotweed is an attractive plant, with its huge, pale green leaves, but you just cannot get rid of it. Month by month it grew until it came to the attention of the Council chaps, and they started to spread industrial salt along the roots of the Knotweed (you know industrial salt, the dirty-looking stuff they would spread on roads in the days when we used to get snow and ice). Well, nothing happened at first, so they spread more salt on. Still the Knotweed grew, and still they attacked it with salt. This went on for a year or so, and I expect you can guess the outcome - the Knotweed survived, and the flowering cherry tree died of salt poisoning - its bare branches stretched up to heaven in mute protest.

Now, I'm afraid these little anecdotes will be in no particular chronological order, since they fall onto the paper as I empty the dusty chambers of my mind, but I do recall the time in the mid-1970s when the circus came to town! Or, to be more precise, to Bethune Park. The cages and caravans disembarked at New Southgate Station and travelled in a

stately majesty along Friern Barnet Road and down Beaconsfield Road (I have photos somewhere in my files). To make the procession more exciting, they made the elephants get out and walk, and the whole assemblage eventually spread itself across The Big Field. There were two football pitches on the field, and I assume the goal posts were removed to accommodate the circus. In due course it opened for business and Sheila and I took young Linda, and she was duly impressed. The problems arose when the circus quit the site and went elsewhere. Some of the cages (probably those of the elephants) had left really deep indentations in the surface of the field - small craters, almost. The grass soon grew back, but those dents remained and, as you can imagine, they made the pitches unsuitable for anything other than motor-cycle scrambling! Those goal posts were never replaced once the circus had left town.

In the 1960s heavy lorries would use Beaconsfield Road as a 'rat run' to and from Oakleigh Road North. Local residents (led by Ronald Hagman, the chap who made cosmetics in a large house at the top end of the road) had been complaining for years that the weight of traffic was damaging their houses and, eventually, the Council agreed to erect a width barrier across Beaconsfield Road where the latter met The Crescent. This barrier became yet another source of incidents with which to brighten my daily walks, with Transit vans doing their best to squeeze through the six foot gaps, each one leaving a small sample of its paint on the sturdy steel barriers. Occasionally, I would stand and watch a long juggernaut doing a

twenty-point turn, having reached the barrier from Oakleigh Road North (there was a sign pointing out that the rat-run was now closed, but not all drivers noticed it).

I assume that, now Nortel have vacated the old STC site, it'll be OK if I relate little stories and observations from inside their walls. One such that springs to mind is of the cashier who stood up to armed robbers! STC owned the huge site to the west of Brunswick Park Road, and they also had a small site on the eastern side, to the immediate north of Caversham Court (the site is all now under new houses). This latter site housed the shipping area (known as Building 53) and the main car park.

On paydays the payroll department would send a chap down to the shipping department with a bag full of wage packets. He'd go down the old cemetery avenue, past the Social Club, through the small gate in the fence (with its wonderful line of mature Lombardy Poplars) and across the road to Building 53. Apparently, on the day in question, he'd just passed through the gate and was waiting to cross Brunswick Park Road, when the thieves appeared, pointed a gun at him and demanded the bag. The cashier very bravely refused to hand it over, and they shot him in the leg before running away (I believe the story was in the local papers).

You will have gathered by now that I am a nature lover, and those twenty four years of walking to and from The Standard provided some wonderful incidents, like the Mentally Challenged Wasp and the Disappearing Dandelion - but I'll leave those until next time. Meanwhile,

I'll just finish with sunrise - during the winter months I would emerge from the subway onto Oakleigh Road South and look down the hill where, on certain special mornings, there would be the most beautiful sunrise. I took to photographing these brief wonders, and I now have some thirty pictures in an album. Some folk think they are sunsets, but as everyone knows, the sun *rises* over Landers Corner.

To be continued.....

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

We are delighted to welcome John Holtham as a new member of the Committee. John says he was born "a long time ago" in a nursing home in Muswell Hill and then moved with his parents to Thurlestone Avenue, where he has lived ever since. John went to Holly Park Infant and Junior Schools and then to Finchley County Grammar. He completed his education at Northern Polytechnic where he studied the Physics of Electronics. His local involvement continued when he worked at STC at New Southgate for 25 years, before moving to their Harlow plant for a further 10 years and then being made redundant at the end of 2001.

John says the Society has provided a forum to extend his curiosity about local happenings, and provides an excuse to talk to people about things that have happened in the past and learn a lot from them. Both John and Ollie are working together on the history of the Hollick Wood estate, where they both live. This includes not only a study of the past but also a very detailed recording of the changes that are occurring now.

THE CUP THAT CHEERS

We received an e-mail from Eric Lewin, a former resident of Holly Park Road, which contained the following anecdote:

When I started work at the Eastern Electricity Board office at Landers Corner (at the junction of Friern Barnet Road and Oakleigh Road South) in Aug 1951, there was no facility for tea making so the labourer, who went by the unlikely but genuine name of Bill Zinzan, would take a galvanised bucket along the road to Macs Café (later the bookies shop) and collect the am/pm tea covered with an evil looking tea-towel. Should you fail to rinse your cup after the afternoon session, by the following morning you had what appeared to be a thick coat of molasses. Health & Safety eat your heart out!

THE ATHENAEUM

by John Heathfield

The Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall was formed in 1824 for the pursuit of interests of literature, Science and the Arts. During the winter of 1879/80 George Waterlow had the idea of forming a similar club on the newly created Oakleigh Park estate. At that time he was living at Beaufront, Oakleigh Park. His near neighbour, F.H. Mitchell (living at Easthill, and Secretary to the Bank of England) was interested in billiards, and together they raised enough support and funds to create the Athenaeum Institution on the Oakleigh Park estate. A collection of farm buildings formed the nucleus. In 1881 the accommodation comprised a hall seating 40 persons; a billiard room separate from, but adjoining, the main buildings; a Reading Room open from 10.00am to 10.00pm and

stocked with daily, weekly and periodical magazines; a Library (annual subscription one guinea); Lawn tennis, croquet and bowls on the lawn and a kitchen with a good range and requisites. In addition, various classes in Music, Languages and Drawing were to be arranged. The annual subscription was one guinea, and double family membership cost £1.15s. 0d.

The Athenaeum opened on Friday 11 March 1881 with a Grand Concert. The doors opened at 7.30 and the concert began at 8.00pm, carriages were to be ordered for 10.30. The front seats were occupied by the elite, and all 400 seats were filled. The hall was formerly opened by Sir Sydney Waterlow, who hoped that the Institution would draw together the people of the neighbourhood for instruction and amusement. He remarked how, about twelve months previously, a few gentlemen had established a billiards club and, not content with that, had gone on to provide a set of rooms for people to mingle. There were 12 performers at the concert and seats cost 5s, 3s and 1s 6d.

In April 1881 there was a children's entertainment of magic and mystery. During 1881/82 events included Lectures - Echoes from the World of Sound, Dust & Dirt, Through Canada with the Bible; Entertainments - Ventriloquist, Robinson Crusoe, Hellis in Winderland (sic); a Gymnastics Display by the German Gymnastics Society; and assault at Arms by the NCOs of the Royal Fusiliers and musical concerts.

The third season included the Ebony Sunshine Minstrels "with a good band", and an amateur concert by

pupils of Cowley College assisted by members of the Albert Hall Choral Society.

In Jan 1885 the Annual Children's Fancy Dress Dance was held for the last time and a recital planned for 14 Feb 1885 was cancelled for lack of support. This was followed by the announcement of George Waterlow's removal to Sunbury House, Harrow. He held a farewell Dance in Feb 1885 and the Barnet Press "was informed that unless the Athenaeum is taken over by an enterprising committee or individual, Mr Waterlow's removal will necessitate the closing of the institution." In October advertisements were placed in the Barnet Press offering the building for sale or hire. In 1886 the buildings were being used as a factory for Dry Plate Photographic Equipment and by 1892 Waterlow's had a printing works there. In the 1920s it was used by Direct Dry Cleaners. Today the site is now covered by a block of flats called Oxford Gardens.

A GOOD READ

We have heard from The Finchley Society that they have just published a new book entitled *Finchley Remembered* that contains residents' memories of Finchley since the early 1900s, ranging from childhood and school to transport, shopkeepers and war.

The book, of 110 pages from 65 contributors, includes photos, line drawings and maps of Finchley and costs £8.95 from Waterstone's, 782 High Road, North Finchley or by post at £9.71 from David Smith, 17 Abbots Gardens, East Finchley, N2 0JG. Cheques should be made payable to The Finchley Society.

1971 REMEMBERED

The following advertisements appeared in the Friern Barnet Parish Paper of May 1971. Alas, the businesses are no longer with us.

H. E. FINCH

*Newsagent, Tobacconist, Stationer
and Confectioner*

5, THE BROADWAY
FRIERN BARNET RD., N.11

Tel.: 01-368 3090

Morning Papers Delivered

Telephone: 01-368 1414

A. ROMERO

C.M.B.H.I.

*WATCHMAKER
and JEWELLER*

197 WOODHOUSE ROAD,
FRIERN BARNET, N.12.

ERIC'S FOR FRIED FISH

2 THE PARADE
SUMMERS LANE
FRIERN BARNET
N.12

Daily	- -	11.45—1.30 p.m.
Tues. & Wed.	- -	4.30—3 p.m.
Thurs. & Fri.	- -	5—10.30 p.m.
Sat.	- -	11.30—1.30 p.m.

Phone: 01-368 1021

It is interesting to note that Eric's was only open at lunchtime on Saturdays!

A WARTIME JOB

The letter on the following page was kindly lent to us by one of our members. Note the starting salary!

DIRECTORS
E. A. LUSHER
R. D. CARR
R. E. CARR
R. W. D. CARR
A. A. GIBLIN
W. E. H. JONES

JOHN DALE METAL CONTAINERS LTD.

TELEPHONE
ENTERPRISE
1167-4 LINES

TELEGRAMS
ENTERPRISE
1167 LONDON

COLLAPSIBLE TUBES - DRAWN AND EXTRUDED ALUMINIUM TUBES AND
CONTAINERS - PLAIN AND DECORATED TIN PLATE CONTAINERS AND CAPS
- PLASTIC MOULDINGS IN ALL MATERIALS - ALUMINIUM AND ALLOY CASTINGS

BRUNSWICK PARK ROAD.
NEW SOUTHGATE,
LONDON.

OUR REF CJC/ECB

N.11.

YOUR REF _____

30th April, 1940.

Miss Joan Dukes,
85, Springfield Road,
LONDON. N.11.

Dear Madam,

Following your application for a situation in our Tinsmith Office, we would advise you that we have decided to give you a fortnight's trial at a commencing salary of 17/6d. per week, and would like you to take up your duties on Monday next, 6th instant.

As advised the office hours are:-

8 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. 1.30 p.m. - 5.40 p.m.
Saturdays.

8 a.m. - 12 noon

On the first morning, however, we would suggest that you report at 8.45 a.m.

Please advise by return whether you are accepting this appointment.

Yours faithfully,
For John Dale Metal Containers Ltd.


Office Manager.

ODE TO THE TOWN HALL

After being forced to hold Council meetings in a house in Beaconsfield Road, and then in an unsuitable old building (The Priory), Friern Barnet Urban District Council decided that they needed a proper home. And so the decision was made in 1938 to build a brand new Town Hall. Alas, local residents did not all agree that the money was wisely spent and resentment simmered on even after the building was completed. The following poem appeared in the local press; the Jack referred to is Jack Pickering, Chairman of the UDC at the time:

So this is the Architect who made the plan
And proved himself a clever man
Designing the house that Jack built.

This is the foreman in a bowler hat
Who had no time to stop and chat
Whilst on the house that Jack built.

These are the bricklayers, sturdy men
Who laid a brick every now and then
For the house that Jack built.

These are the Carpenters, craftsmen all,
Who fixed the windows in the Hall
Of the house that Jack built.

These are the Councillors, twelve – and gay
Who will often have a lot to say
In the house that Jack built.

This is the Clerk, Mr G.T. Fletcher -
You can't do a thing if he won't let yer
In the house that Jack built.

This is the staff, who now will say
We'll work and sing, now a cat can swing
In the house that Jack built.

These are the firemen, dressed in blue
Who will put out fires and sweep the flue
Of the house that Jack built.

These are the Ratepayers, all forlorn,
Who walk about all tattered and torn
While paying for the house that Jack built.

If the anonymous author of this verse were alive today, would he now be penning a poem lamenting the selling off of the building?

HEALTH PROJECT

by Dorrell Dressekie

Can you recall the days when you could go to the doctor's surgery and just wait to be seen? These days, of course, you have to ring for an appointment! There have been other changes in the Health Service, of course, but can you recall them?

Jenny Coupe and myself are working together to chart the history of healthcare in the Friern Barnet area, based on the memories and experiences of its residents, and we need *your* help.

Think about the hospitals, doctors' surgeries, clinics, pharmacies, opticians, dentists, chiropodists, the changes as you have seen them and the outcome, for better or worse. Think about the remedies of yesteryear and those of today. What has changed, what has got better, what has got worse?

And if you have *worked* in the local local Health Service (or are still working in it), if you volunteer your time to it or undertake research on any aspect of it, this is your opportunity to share your memories and experiences

Please talk to either of us at one of the meetings, complete a Green Form, or telephone me on 020 8368 0794 or Jenny on 020 8445 8432. Thanks for your help!

KEEPING POSTED

by John Holtham

When you walk along a street you will see many items that are taken for granted, and so go unnoticed. One such item was invented about 150 years ago, the first one being erected in the Channel Islands in

November 1852. The item is the letter box; most are cylindrical, painted bright red with a black plinth and have a horizontal slot near the top. Some are small boxes mounted on lamp posts or other convenient pole, some are set into a wall. Did you realise that there are more than 300 variations of the design? Some of the differences are quite subtle and concern the placing of the royal cypher and crown and the width of the slot, but others are clear to the observant eye.



More to it than meets the eye

The next time you pass a letter box, look at it carefully. There are six royal cyphers and at least 6 different manufacturers, but some boxes do not carry any cypher and some do not have the manufacturer's name visibly marked. Is the slot in the door, or between the door and the roof? Has it got one or two slots? What is the royal cypher? Is the box

marked *Post Office* or *Royal Mail*? Are the 'lips' that surround the slot angular or rounded? Does the 'roof' overhang the body, or is the top a smooth curve? Where is the plate that shows collection times located? Where is the handle that the postman uses to open the door located? Can you find the maker's name (it is usually on the plinth, but can be hard to read due to many years of repainting)?

There are about 80 letter boxes in the Friern Barnet area but there are no examples of the rare ones carrying the cypher of Edward VIII, unless you know otherwise!

THE FINAL JOURNEY

by Ron Kingdon

On 11 February 1952 the funeral train of the late King George VI left King's Lynn in Norfolk for its journey to King's Cross. The train was hauled by British Railways Pacific Britannia Class 7 locomotive no 7000 and was made up of ex-L.N.E.R. teak coaches, with the coffin being carried in a first class saloon no 46 painted black for the occasion. The train passed through New Southgate station at approx. 2.19pm.

An onlooker was John Lucas who said "at that time I was a district reporter covering East Barnet Urban District for the *Barnet Press* and I was positioned among the Standard Telephones and Cables staff overlooking the line. The silence and the sadness among the workers seemed almost tangible, as for many of us George the Good - as I think he could be remembered - was one of the formidable triumvirate, along with his wife Queen Elizabeth and the Prime Minister Winston Churchill

who strengthened and sustained Britain's morale during its darkest hours. We took his loss almost personally".

SALE OF BUILDINGS

by Ollie Natelson

The Cabinet of the London Borough of Barnet met on Monday 14 Oct 2002 at Hendon Town Hall. The cabinet meeting was staffed by councillors of the majority party only, so there were no councillors from either the Woodhouse or Coppetts wards. Members of the public were present but were not allowed to speak.

A list of buildings to be sold was submitted and all present agreed to their disposal. Amongst the buildings were: Friern Barnet Town Hall; the Day Centre; and the Professional Development Centre (formerly Finchley County School). In addition it was agreed that Friary House in Friary Park would be leased on a long term agreement.

No mention was made at the meeting of the petition bearing over 1,000 signatures of residents who wanted to keep the Friern Barnet Town Hall building, neither was there mention of the need to save important cultural and artistic features of the building, which is, of course, now Grade II listed.

We will keep you abreast of any developments as they happen.

FRIARY HOUSE

In September 1909 Sydney Simmons wrote to Friern Barnet District Council, offering the sum of £7,500 for the purchase of Friary Park. He set out eleven conditions, the first read "I propose to give the cost of

the Friary Estate to be used as a public park for all time....." and the last read: "The present building on the estate to be used for refreshments and a lounge or shelter and caretakers....." On 1 October 1909 the Council recorded in their minutes "That this Council tenders its sincere thanks to Mr Sydney Simmons.....for his generous offer to present the Parish of Friern Barnet the sum of seven thousand five hundred pounds....., being the price paid for the Freehold Estate known as "The Friary", Friern Barnet, which has been purchased as a Public Park and Recreation Ground for the inhabitants of the District. The Council hereby accepts such offer and agrees to the conditions stated in Mr Simmons' letter of 14 September 1909....."

Barnet Council's recent decision to put the house on a long-term lease seem to be contrary to the spirit of Mr Simmons' original conditions agreed at the time by the then Council. Ollie Natelson is working with both Friends of Friary Park and the Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents Association and they will discuss the situation with Barnet Council. It is hoped that Friary House can be retained for the benefit of the community, as was

originally intended by Sydney Simmons when he made his generous bequest.

NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMME

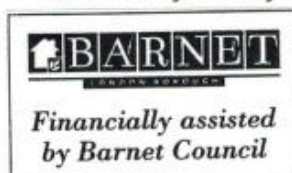
Janet Liversidge, our Meetings Secretary, has assembled an interesting and varied programme of meetings for next year. A copy of this is enclosed with this Newsletter. As well as topics of a local nature (To Finchley by Tram; New Southgate Revisited; and All About All Around All Saints) we have arranged for three outside speakers to come and talk about their specialities (The Golden Age of Postcards; The World of Secondhand Books; and The Royal Gunpowder Mills).

Ollie Natelson will be continuing his fascinating insight into Plants in Medicine, while John Donovan will be describing Vernacular Architecture in his own inimitable style.

On 25 March we will be having one of our popular "come and tell" meetings with the theme In the Kitchen. If you have any old kitchen implements, or if you have any forgotten recipes or hints and tips, please bring them along so that we can all share them.

A Happy Christmas to all our members. We look forward to seeing you again at our meeting on Tuesday 28 January 2003

Friern Barnet & District
Local History Society



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