

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## OLIVER'S UPDATE

In the last issue we asked if anyone remembered Oliver's hardware shop at 1327-9 High Road, Whetstone. One of our members, Margaret Wilson, who was born in Friern Barnet Lane and lived in the Whetstone area as a child, tells us that she bought a bathroom stool in Oliver's around 1950/51 and is still using it today! She remembers that the shop had a bare wooden floor and it smelled of paraffin.

John Heathfield tells us that the story of Oliver's goes back a bit: "Around 1810, Harvey sold "all that messuage, partly brick, partly timber, with garden, brewhouse and carpenter's shop bounded by the lands of Henry Chambers on the South by Mrs Winter, on the East by the Turnpike and opposite the 9th miles stone" to Thomas Dixon, carpenter. The sale documents recited an indenture for 500 years dated 13 July 1683 and an indenture of 8 June 1678.



*The Rose sisters outside the shop c.1905*

Thomas Dixon had no children but his brother Stephen had two daughters and one stepson to whom the property passed. The building still stands next to Ivy House in the High Road. Dixon was also the landlord of Peter Mountain, stage-coach proprietor, who had stables next door, to the south. When stage-coaches on the Great North road were put out of business by the arrival of the railway to Totteridge in 1871, the stables were replaced by a row of shops.

The 1881 Census shows Eldred Rose "Oil Shop Man" aged 37, having been born in Monmouth. He moved to Whetstone about 1875. His assistant, E. C. Oliver, married the boss's daughter and, together with his brother, took over the business after the 1914-18 war.

Whale oil lamps were used as late as 1914. Some were designed as hanging lamps, others stood on the table or on the pianoforte. In our district they were steadily replaced by gas. The Colney Hatch Gas, Light and Coke Company opened in 1858 and the gas mains reached Whetstone High Road in 1862.

Oliver's shop closed in the late 1950s. The closing down sale included one inch wire nails at a penny per pound. Naturally I bought a couple of pounds, and equally naturally, because I never throw anything away, I've still got some. There is a photograph of Oliver's shop in a rather splendid book called *"Barnet, the Twentieth Century"* by John Heathfield.

#### **MUSIC HALL FAVOURITE**

*by Colin Barratt*

I'm sure many of you remember the popular TV programme of a few years ago *"The Good Old Days"*, a re-creation of the music hall shows of 100 years ago. It usually featured top present-day performers, singing well known songs of the period, quite a number of which are still known today, and of course the audience was encouraged to join in.

What you may not be aware of is that some of these songs were written by a local man, William Brigden, who is buried in New Southgate Cemetery (formerly the Great Northern). If I listed some of the songs he wrote, you would probably be able to sing them yourself: *"Waiting at the Church"*, *"Don't Dilly Dally on the Way"*, *"Why am I Always the Bridesmaid?"*

All of these recount a sad story, which was very popular in the music halls. However, if you saw the printed music of these songs, the name of William Brigden would not be on them, as he wrote under the name of Fred W. Leigh.

"Fred W. Leigh" was born in 1871. He was not a full time song lyricist, although on the 1901 Census his occupation is listed as Songwriter. From 1901 he worked for the publishing firm of Francis, Day & Hunter, as Literary Editor. He often came into contact with composers wanting words to go with their tunes. One of them was a young American called Jerome Kern. Leigh and the great Kern wrote a song called *"You Kiss Me Once Before You Go"*. Years later, in 1944, Kern included another of Leigh's songs, *"Poor John"* in

the film "Cover Girl" which starred Rita Hayworth and Gene Kelly. Fred W. Leigh died in August 1924. One of those present at his funeral at New Southgate was Henry E. Pether, who wrote the music for Leigh's "Waiting at the Church" and "Poor John". The theatrical and music hall trade paper "The Era" described Leigh as "one of the best-known lyric authors for the variety stage and one who was likewise universally respected for his probity in business and charm of manner."

One final sad note. I had hoped that such a prominent figure would have had a grave worthy of his fame. The Cemetery register records his burial, but the grave reference number shows that his final resting place was in Section AJ, the common or public graves, which are due to be redeveloped and landscaped soon for re-use. Why he was buried here is a mystery, and as most of these gravestones are in poor condition and not easily read or traced by number, I have yet to find his grave, if indeed the stone still exists. In spite of this, the memory of William Brigden, alias Fred W. Leigh, lives on in his songs, which will always be part of the heritage of our popular music.

#### **MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS**

Just a reminder that your annual subscription expires on 31 March. Many of you who were at our meeting on 25 February have already renewed but, for those of you who were unable to attend, we are enclosing a renewal form with this Newsletter. Although the subscription levels remain unchanged (£5 for a single person, £8 for a couple), if Barnet sells off the Old Fire Station we will have to find a new home for our meetings. We have made a few tentative enquiries from other venues and they are all more expensive, so we may have to look at our finances. We shall, of course, keep you posted!

#### **A SIGN OF THE TIMES.....**



*Want to buy a Town Hall?.....*

## **FIFTY YEARS AGO**

The following appeared in "*Finchley Press*" of 18 April 1953

### **STREET LAMP SMASHING AT WHETSTONE TWO LOCAL BOYS FINED**

An epidemic of street lamp smashing was referred to at Finchley Juvenile Court on Tuesday by Mr B.R. Ostler, Clerk to the Friern Barnet Council, when he prosecuted two Whetstone boys, aged 13 and 14, for being concerned in doing 3s 7d damage to a bulb in St James Avenue Whetstone.

'The Council don't like bringing young boys before the Court for offences of this nature' he said' but they feel there is no alternative because of the very considerable epidemic of this type of offence.

'In November as many as 75 bulbs in Friern Barnet were broken presumably through the activities of boys like this, and it is no uncommon thing for as many as 50 a month to be broken. The Council has asked for the co-operation of the police and as a result these proceedings have been taken. The Council hope that by bringing these cases the epidemic will be checked. It is hoped that these boys will realise the cost to ratepayers.'

Fining each boy 20s and 10s damages, the Chairman (Mr L. Farrer-Brown) told them 'It may be you were unlucky but you cannot go round doing this sort of thing. We hope the parents will see the boys pay the money themselves'.

This snapshot of the way things were highlights how things have changed over the years. Nowadays, of course, the police do not have the time or resources to investigate petty crimes and, even if they did, it is highly unlikely that a fine as severe as this would result. The perpetrators of these crimes would now be in their sixties; we wonder if they remember their day in court? We sincerely trust that none of our members was involved in such behaviour.

## **HOME GUARD**

We had a letter from one of our members, June Hulbert, who very kindly sent us a photograph taken some time in 1943 or 1944 of the 20th Middlesex Battalion, 13th Company of the Home Guard, in which her late husband, Clifford, is featured. Unfortunately the photograph is too large for us to reproduce here (there are over 150 people in the group) but if you were in this Company, or you know someone who was, please contact us and we will arrange for you to see a copy. We don't know where the photograph was taken, but at the time Clifford was living at 121 Friern Barnet Lane, so we presume that it was somewhere local.

## **PIZZA EXPRESS HISTORY**

Those of you who fancy a nice pizza to go with your local history should visit Pizza Express at no 1264 High Road Whetstone (formerly Studio Cole)

which is situated in one of the oldest properties in the area, dating back to the 15th century. John Heathfield, who has made a detailed study of Whetstone, fills in the details:

"In the Middle Ages, land transactions were registered with the Lord of the Manor, who held a manorial court twice a year. The records were kept on rolls of parchment, and so came to be called the 'Court Rolls'. Three copies of each were kept - the current owner took the first part; the new owner the second; and the Lord of the Manor kept the third.

There were various Lords of the Manor of Whetstone in the Parish of Friern Barnet, including the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. All these records have been lost. The Lordship then passed in to the Dean & Chapter of St. Paul's in 1488. These records have survived and, last time I saw them, they were in the Guildhall Library part of the St. Paul's Cathedral manuscripts Box 4 Press 17A.

When the records begin there were four properties on the north east side of Whetstone crossroads. Running north, they were owned respectively by John Doggett (now the Himalaya Indian Restaurant), Thomas Sanny (now The Griffin and Pizza Express), Robert Fox (now the Popular Café) and John Copewood (corner of Athenaeum Road).

The Sanny family had a long house running parallel with the highway. This was already in existence in 1442 when John Sanne in his will left money to mend the road "outside his house from Taterygge to Whetston". Confusingly, in 1552 his grandson John left money for the same purpose but differently spelled. The Sanny family are possibly descended from John Sann who, in 1380, directed that he should be buried in the chancel of Finchley church and left forty pence to the altar "for tythes forgotten and the light of St. Mary". He also left a cow "for maintaining the light at the Sepulchre".



*Even the stage coach stops for a pizza....*

By the early 1500s the family were paying the Lord of the Manor for a licence to brew ale and another for "baking human bread". These premises eventually became the Griffin Inn and Pizza Express. They made enough money to build an extension at the rear, making a group of buildings shaped rather like a capital L. The extension was described in 1555 as "newly built". The property changed hands over the centuries. In 1739, when it was described as "three houses now one", the property was bought by Richard Browne. When he died in 1742, his son and heir Robert had the property, by now some 300 years old, renovated. The whole of the front two buildings were pulled down and rebuilt in brick; the roof line running along both properties. The old house at the back, with its massive chimney, was left separate. Although it adjoins the front property, the floor levels are different. This rear house is the one that has been restored by Pizza Express, who have opened up the walls, exposing the Tudor timbers which have adze marks and carpenters' marks clearly visible. Some of the original wattle and daubing has been retained. The north walls have the remains of two mullioned windows. The east end of the building was damaged by fire and it originally extended some further 16 feet. There are soot marks on the roof timbers suggesting that this was possibly an open hall before the chimney was inserted - brick chimneys are rare before about 1550.

The properties remained together until 1828, when The Griffin was bought by Meux the brewer. Robert Gilmour bought the houses which were extensively modernised about 1860 for use as a Post Office, and altered again when the drains and mains water came through. The remains of the Tudor foundations can be seen through a gap in the cellar walls. Gilmour, who had a draper's shop, had also been keeper of the toll gate which was demolished in 1863. He took on the Post Office to supplement his income. He is buried in St James churchyard and after his death the Gilmour sisters kept the drapers and Post Office shops open until 1939. The sorting trays for the mail were still visible in the attic in 1980.

After the war, Studio Cole used the shop part for nearly 40 years. At that time the property was allowed to deteriorate and dilapidation orders were served on the owners by Barnet council. Mr Cole had a particular problem keeping dust out of his sensitive and very expensive equipment. Pizza Express are happy for customers to examine the Tudor building, which is well worth a visit, as incidentally is the cooking."

#### **TO THE STANDARD AND BACK - EPISODE FOUR**

*by John Donovan*

One summer's morning I crossed the Big Field and walked through the subway to Oakleigh Road South, just in time to see a car coming downhill with a briefcase balanced on its roof! As I watched it go by, the case flew off the roof and landed on the opposite pavement. I ran across and retrieved it, but the driver had not looked in his mirror and soon disappeared en route to Lander's Corner. The scenario could easily be guessed; he'd put the case on the roof while his mind had been distracted, then forgotten he'd put it there. Not knowing what to do next, I took the case into work with me. The first thing

was to see who owned the case, so I opened it, found the name and phoned him. As you can imagine, he was both surprised and grateful, and said he would drive back to STC (from Wood Green, I think).

I took the case down to the bottom gate (Brunswick Park Road) at the arranged time and explained the situation to the security man, who made no objection. The chap drew up in his car, stepped out and stood on the pavement. Trying to look like Michael Caine, and under the watchful eye of the security guard, I crossed the road. In best Cold War tradition I handed him his case, he muttered his thanks, got back in his car, and drove out of my life. It was tough walking the lonely miles to STC, but someone had to do it!

You'll recall that when I started in the mid-1960s I had, for a short while, driven there and back. I forgot to mention that the homeward journey always took twice as long as the morning journey, and this was because we all drove up Brunswick Park Road to Lander's corner, where we competed with cars and buses coming in from Waterfall Road (John Dale's), Bowes Road, High Road and Friern Barnet Road. Although the work had started on those massive changes, which would result in the huge double roundabout that finally solved that particular congestion problem, it would often take me twenty minutes to get to the top of Brunswick Park Road and across into Friern Barnet Road.

In the early days, the 'dip' road between Beaconsfield Road and East Road was known to us locals merely as 'the road across the fields'. On the western



*"The road across the fields"*

side was a wide grass verge sweeping up to a very tall fence, behind which was Bethune Park and, on the eastern side, another wide grass verge led up

to a chain-link fence behind which was the Big Field (and then the railway). Well, one day I came around the corner to see a deep, six foot wide trench running the length of the eastern verge, from the last house in Beaconsfield Road down and up to the start of the lane that led through to the subway. By the side lay some huge pipes which, in due course, were buried in the trench, which was then filled in. What happened during the next week or so was a small miracle. The whole trench-bank became covered in tall green and white Cow Parsley. It was as someone had waved a magic wand! I often wondered whether the seeds had lain dormant, just waiting for a passing water pipe to release them, or whether birds had dropped the seeds (it would have required a squadron of them to achieved that result), but it all used to come up, year after year.

The same bank, which had been covered only in grass and wild flowers was the site of an even greater wonder in later years. The council actually *planted trees and bushes* all the way along. There was a goodly mix of silver birch, aspen, elder, wild and garden flowers (you can phone me for the full list) and, with the grass allowed to grow tall between the trees, we soon had a wonderful nature reserve, some two hundred yards long. In a short time we had birds, butterflies and even more species of wild flower. Of course, such a concentrated area of shade and greenery eventually attracted passing litter louts, and once I counted over fifty empty drinks cans along the stretch. However, in high summer they would be lost in the grass and shadows (the cans, not the louts).

Apart from giving the trees an occasional trim, the council left the patch to itself, and it's still there; you can go and admire it at will; the presence of large twentieth century glass-recycling bins detracts only slightly from the natural beauty of that amazing stretch of urban countryside.

Friern Hospital has always dominated the south-eastern corner of Friern Barnet, and when I moved into the area they were just reducing the height of the perimeter wall to waist-level. At the same time, some of the patients were being allowed out to wander the streets (I don't know if that was a new idea). This led to some distressing sights on my walk to and from the Standard. There was one poor chap who would stand motionless on street corners, clutching his face in his hands, and looking skywards with an expression of horror, for all the world like that painting by Munch, *The Scream*. Then there was the chap who attacked a friend of ours about the face with a ball pen (fortunately missing her eyes). On a less serious note, another chap would stand in odd corners of the Big Field defecating. One morning, I stopped in torrential rain to give a chap a lift to STC and, as he got into my car, dripping rain everywhere, he stared at me and then told me I had a beautiful aura (apparently, he actually worked at STC on a sort of "day-release" basis).

Walking home over the bridge and down across the fields, I was always seeing 'near misses' on that bend past the houses, just before the greenery begins. The problem was threefold: the cars parked on the bend; the speed of cars hurtling round; and the absence of any white lines to show the centre of the road. I drew it all out on a plan, which explained the problem, and sent it in to

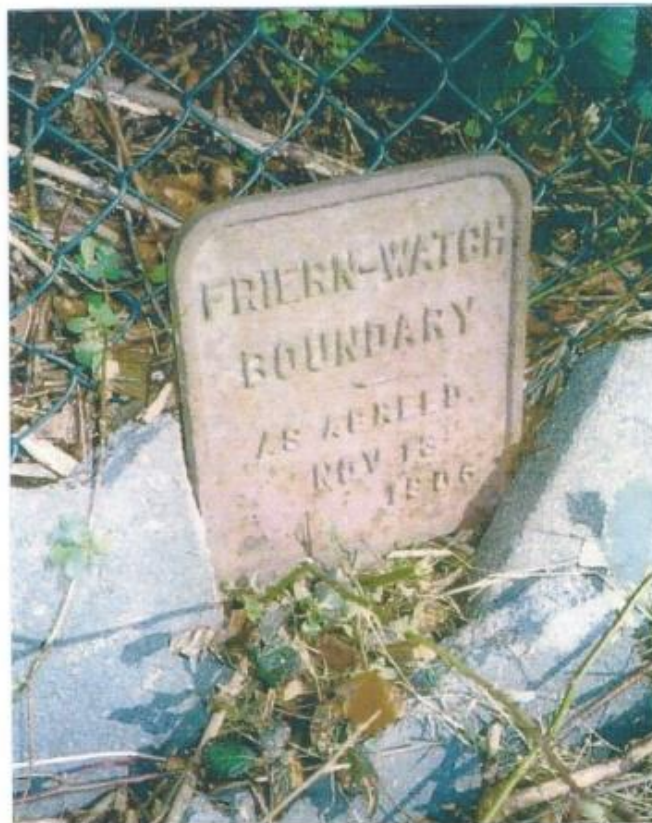


the council. They didn't reply (didn't even acknowledge receipt of the plan) so, after one month, I stamped the date on the letter and wrote in red, 'no reply', and sent in a photocopy of that. Another month, no reply, but a beautiful white line down the centre of the road, and less stress for me on my homeward journey.

*To be continued.....*

### **FRIERN WATCH**

You all know Friern Watch Avenue, off High Road North Finchley. Some of you may know that it was built on the estate of the former Friern Watch House, as were Mayfield Avenue and Ravensdale Avenue. A year or two ago Janet and Colin Liversidge were photographing the Friern Barnet western boundary markers when they came across an enigmatic marker in a side alley off Lynton Avenue (parallel to Mayfield Avenue). The marker, as you can see from the photo, is a rectangle, rust-red coloured but in perfect condition, and bearing the legend "FRIERN-WATCH BOUNDARY. AS AGREED NOV 18 1906."



The boundary on the 1896 Godfrey map is marked "und" (undefined), which might explain why the boundary had to be "as agreed" at that point, when the houses came to be built. We wonder if there were other such markers around the boundaries of the old estate. Do any of our readers know of any? Furthermore, we'd give double Brownie points to anyone who could come

up with a photograph of the old Friern Watch House! Please let *us* know what *you* know.

## PROJECTS

*by John Donovan*

As you know, many of the projects we undertake entail researching the history of local churches, schools, businesses, pubs and libraries etc. We have produced reports on the Friends Meeting House in Waterfall Road and the Waterworks at Lander's Corner, for example. We are currently looking at St Johns School (Friern Barnet), John Dale's, STC/Nortel, the Great North London Cemetery (and its train station), the TOCH hut (Whetstone), Friern Barnet Summer Show, local transport, health centres and many other topics.

If you are involved with your local church, school, clinic, pub or library, why not join one of our sub-committees and learn how to do basic research? You'd be helping us *and* enjoying yourself. Give me a ring on 01707 642 886.....

## PIZZA EXPRESS FOOTNOTE

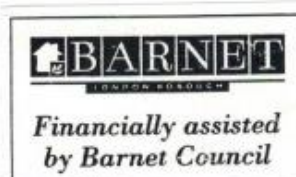
*by David Berguer*

While I was doing some research for our 25 March meeting "In The Kitchen" I came across some facts on pizza, which I had always thought was a recent invention. In fact, pizza was originally a simple dish eaten by Italian peasants, but in 1889 a Neapolitan baker, Raphael Esposito, created a new version of the dish to honour the visit of King Umberto and Queen Margherita. This particular dish used red tomatoes, white mozzarella cheese and green basil, thus representing the colours of the Italian flag. Pizza Margherita is, of course, still on the menu of pizza restaurants and take-aways today.

Although a pizzeria had opened in New York in 1905, it was after the Second World War, when US troops returning from Italy yearned for the dish that they had discovered 'over there', that the pizza really took off. Needless to say, it was the Italian community that satisfied the demand, and they soon adapted the recipe to American tastes, with the addition of Mexican and Chinese ingredients.

Pizza deliveries to the home began in the late 1950s and, for a while, delivery within a guaranteed time period was promised, otherwise the price would be refunded. Accidents to speeding delivery drivers eventually put a stop to this practice. Today, if you fancy a pizza in Whetstone, North Finchley, Friern Barnet or New Southgate you have a choice of 10 outlets, although none of them has the ambience and history of Pizza Express at Whetstone!

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