

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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BY TUBE FROM FINCHLEY CENTRAL

by Colin Barratt

"Finchley Central is two and sixpence from Golders Green on the Northern Line - Finchley Central, ten long stations from Golders Green, change at Camden Town" (New Vaudeville Band, 1967)

Watching a TV programme a few months ago, I was taken back 36 years to my youth, and the platform of the aforementioned station. The programme was about some lads who had recently made an attempt on the record for the fastest time to travel through all the stations on the London Underground system and, inevitably, this song was used in the programme. From a very early start at Heathrow, to finishing after midnight at Amersham, they completed the route, but were just 4 minutes outside the record of 19 hours 18 minutes 45 seconds. I was impressed by their meticulous planning, and could appreciate the work involved, and the frustration when delayed or just missing a connection, having considered tackling the record myself all those years ago. It never happened, apart from some dummy runs over part of the route, but it helped for another event that I took part in.

In 1968, Barnet Council came up with an unusual idea for a charity fund raiser involving young people. It was organised by the Finchley and Friern Barnet Council of Youth, and called the Underground Hike. The plan was very simple.



Those taking part would meet at Finchley Central station at 10am on a Sunday, and then spend the next eight hours travelling around the Underground system, recording the time at each station, and the changes involved, finishing back at the same place at 6pm. They were asked to obtain sponsorship for each station visited, and there was a prize for the person visiting the most stations.

It attracted a large group of "hikers". Like the boys in the TV programme, we arrived with our shoulder bags filled with food and drinks, books for reading, and sheets supplied for logging the route. Our picture was taken for the local paper, and I think the Mayor was there to see us off. At that time we could use a 10/- Twin Rover ticket for all the tubes and buses! Some went north to High Barnet, while others, including me, went to South Wimbledon on the District Line. I can't remember the rest of the route I took, but back at Finchley Central at 6pm the organisers were waiting to take our sheets, and I had recorded 166 stations. It was a successful event, and raised £300 for the charity. At a get-together a week or so later, we were told how much has been raised, and the prize of an engraved pewter tankard was awarded to the winning "hiker". I still have the tankard, a reminder of a novel charity event.

The following year it was held again but, unfortunately, many of the hikers had to drop out because of the Asian 'flu. I had planned a different route this time, to try and improve my score of the year before. I started with the short trip to High Barnet, where my brother was waiting to drive me across to Cockfosters. The plan worked. I covered 170 stations this time, but arrived back at Finchley Central 10 minutes late, so incurred a penalty of 10 stations. However, 160 stations was enough to win again, and the few that took part still raised £100 in sponsorship.

I don't know if it was ever tried again, but it was an enjoyable way for young people to raise money for charity, so it's good to see that the challenge to visit every station as fast as possible is still going on, in spite of the well publicised problems with the Underground system. Incidentally, when I took the challenge there were 272 stations; today, with the expansion of the network, there are 292, plus a further 29 on the Docklands Light Railway!

ROBERT PAUL - A FILM PIONEER

by John Heathfield

It all happened because Kodak had a forgetful lawyer! Kodak did not patent its inventions in England so this meant that Birt Acres was able to adopt these ideas and design an apparatus to make moving films in England. Acres was born in Virginia, USA, in 1854 of British parents, and came to England in the early 1880s. He was an expert in everything pertaining to photography, which was his hobby as well as his profession. He came to Barnet in 1892 as manager of Elliott & Sons, Park Road, who made "Barnet Dry Plates". He designed a machine called the Kineopticon and needed a top rate engineer to make the machinery. This is where Robert Paul came in.

Robert Paul was one of the cleverest men in a generation full of clever men. He was of obvious Jewish extraction, of average height with a pointed black beard

and piercing black eyes. He had a scientific works in Holborn.

Kodak's "Kinetoscope Viewer", which Acres copied, made moving films using 46 frames per second and a reel of film would last just 15 seconds. It depended on gear wheels which had to be cut with great accuracy. Acres asked Paul to make his machine for him. The Kinetoscope relied on an intermittent light source. Paul saw the possibility of projection onto a screen and to do this needed to move the film intermittently in front of an arc lamp. He achieved this by using what clock makers called a Maltese Cross. His machine, called a theatrograph, was demonstrated at the Royal Institution in 1895 and for some years he gave nightly performances at the Alhambra, Leicester Square.

One outstanding achievement was to film the finish of the Derby in 1896, which was won by the Prince of Wales' horse, and to show it at the Alhambra the very same evening. Paul is said to have developed the film in two milk churns in the guards van of the train on the way back to London. In 1897 he filmed Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

In 1899 Paul built the first studio in England specifically for making films at Sydney Road, Muswell Hill. There were workshops nearby and he himself lived in a house on the site. He was particularly interested in trick effects caused by projecting films at high speed. One example was "a runaway car through Piccadilly Circus". Double exposure could make very effective ghost films and he enjoyed adventure and action films as well. During the making of one of these films in 1909, Vine Cottages in Colney Hatch Lane were accidentally burnt down.



111. Colney Hatch Lane, Friern Barnet.

Vine Cottages, just to the south of what is now The Duck pub

By 1912 Paul had grown tired of making films and he returned to instrument making. In 1903 he invented a moving coil galvanometer far more sensitive than any other of the period. It could be used to measure temperatures inside furnaces or bakers' ovens. In 1916 he received an

order from the War Office for one million thermometers. These were apparently delivered and he made a good profit on them, but one wonders why so many were needed. He also invented a Height Finder for use against enemy or other aircraft.

The factory in Sydney Road had its own power supply - a large gas engine drove an electric generator. The gas engine had a single cylinder about 18 inches in diameter. It operated on the four stroke principle and had 6 foot flywheels said to weigh a ton each. In 1918-19 Paul bought a great deal of war surplus machinery and the factory was substantially expanded.

In 1920 Paul sold the business to the Cambridge Instrument Company. Shortly afterwards there was a general slump and staff were sacked. Mr Apthorpe, the new manager made a "mousetrap" speech. He said that the factory had to pay its way even if they were reduced to making mousetraps. Each worker was given a card specifying what they were expected to do, the time allowed, and what they could expect to be paid for it. The reorganisation worked and the firm survived. By 1926 there was an increase in personnel, apprentices were taken on and a works canteen was started.

Examples of the apparatus being made are "Disappearing Filament Optical Pyrometers", trafficators, remote thermometers for use on aeroplane wings, and electric sun visors for Rolls-Royce. The factory helped with the "iron lung" which was invented at Barnet General Hospital. In 1939 work included aircraft instruments made from Bakelite, equipment for de-gaussing ships to render magnetic mines inoperative, and guidance machinery for torpedoes. Part of the factory moved to more modern premises in Finchley in 1950 and both of them closed in 1975 when production was transferred to St Neots, Huntingdonshire.

In Sydney Road today there are two mementoes of Robert Paul and his work. On number 49 there is a plaque erected by Cinema 100 and next to the house is a road called Cambridge Gardens. How well deserved these are!

PHOTOGRAPHS OF NORTH LONDON

by David Berquer

I recently purchased a new book in the *Photographic Memories of Britain* series. This one is entitled *North London* and has been compiled by Hugh Petrie who, as Heritage Officer for the borough of Barnet is a great source of help to everyone researching the local history of the area. Many of you will remember that Hugh gave us a fascinating talk in October 2002 on the subject of Using Maps in Local History.

Hugh has compiled over 130 photographs of North London using the famous Francis Frith archives. Francis Frith was a Victorian and a pioneer of photography in this country and the archive that he started now contains over 50,000 photographs from the 1850s onwards. Hugh has selected ones covering Crouch End; East Finchley; Edgware; Enfield; Finchley Central; Friern Barnet; Golders Green; Grange Park; Hadley; Hampstead; Hendon;

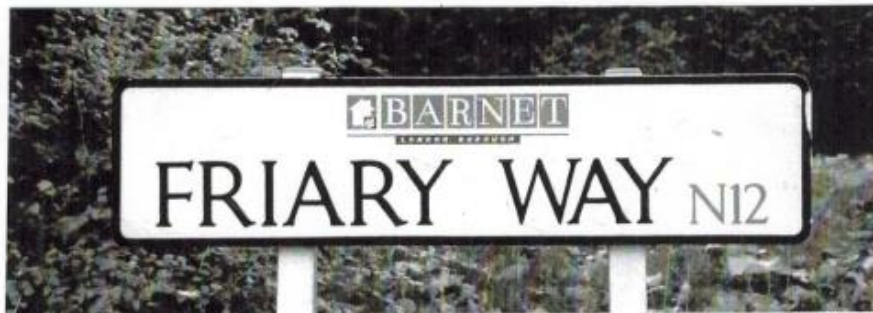
High Barnet; Highgate; Mill Hill; Muswell Hill; North Finchley; Palmers Green; Southgate; Stanmore; Whetstone and Winchmore Hill.

Each photograph is accompanied with a very informative text giving the history of the area and the sources used to compile the captions. As an added bonus there is a voucher at the back of the book that can be exchanged for a free A4 copy of any photograph in the book. The book is excellent value at £9.99 and is available from W H Smith at Brent Cross and local bookshops, or direct from the publishers Frith Book Company Ltd, Frith's Barn, Teffont, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP3 5QP, phone 01722 716 376.

For those of you with access to the internet, the Frith website, www.francisfrith.co.uk is worth a visit. By typing in your postcode you can access photographs of your area from the archive, and also old maps. You can find out details of the many books in the *Photographic Memories of Britain* series so, if you are not a Friern Barnetian born and bred you can search for a photographic history of your home town or the place where you are now living.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Barnet Council have now started erecting new road name signs throughout the Borough. These are only being used to replace signs missing or damaged so it is now not uncommon to see both old and new signs in the same street. The signs are in the new corporate colour of turquoise and they incorporate the coat of arms.



The old.....



.....and the new

FIRE STATION

We had our last meeting at the Old Fire Station in Friern Barnet Lane on Friday 12 December 2003 so it would be fitting to recall the history of the building, and who better to do this than John Heathfield. Here is his report:

In 1898 one of the councillors put his lighted pipe in his pocket during a council meeting. His jacket began to smoulder, whereupon he proposed that the district should have its own fire brigade. The motion was lost.

In 1908 the population of the area was 12,895 and the rateable value £69,548. At that time the council had 3 hose carts, 3 hand escapes and 3 jumping sheets, stored in a hut in Beaconsfield Road. The firemen were called by cycle messengers. Finchley had a station at Church End with hose stores at the top of Woodhouse Road and at Whetstone. In 1909 the council had bells installed in the firemen's houses and Pompier ladders and belts were bought. During 1923 a Merryweather fire escape was added, carried on the Fiat tender which had been bought in 1920. Fire alarms mounted on posts were introduced in 1925. By 1926 the population had increased to 20,500 and the rateable value to £127,798. A new Dennis 45/50 motor fire engine was bought which could pump 350 gallons a minute at a pressure of 100lb.

By 1927 the population was increasing by about 3,000 a year and better protection was needed, so a purpose built fire station was commissioned. The new fire station was opened in 1927 by Mrs Barber, wife of the Chairman of the District Council and she also christened the new engine with a bottle of champagne and named her (it?) "Grace", which was her own name. The opening ceremony was rounded off by a demonstration call out to an imaginary fire in Torrington Park and a display of hose jets in front of the station.



The Day Centre, formerly the Fire Station

The council also increased its staff. A Captain, an Engineer and 13 men were appointed, one of whom was always on duty, the others, who all lived nearby, being on call. The rates were increased by 2d in the pound to pay for the new scheme.

When a second fire engine was bought in 1934 it was called "Henry". This led to the legend that they were named after Gracie Fields and Henry Hall. The importance of giving firemen hobbies during their long leisure hours was recognised by Councillor Barber who gave the men a full sized billiard table and equipment "without any cost to the rates". During the 1930s the Fire Brigade Captain lived in the house in Friary Park and the full time fireman was also caretaker for the Council Offices in The Priory until 1939. The fire station finally closed its doors in 1969 and in recent years it has, of course, been used as a Day Centre run by Age Concern Barnet and also by St John Ambulance Friern Barnet as their headquarters.

TO THE STANDARD AND BACK

- EPISODE SEVEN

by John Donovan

As you will have gathered, my daily walk to and from my office tended to centre on Nature Study and, one evening I was walking past the rear of the canteen on the way to the main gate when I heard an asthmatic snuffling in the bushes. I went over to investigate and saw a hedgehog staggering through the undergrowth, wheezing like an express train.

I happened to see the groundsman the next day and I mentioned the incident to him. He told me that a Pest Eradication Company used to put down little boxes of poisoned bait around the canteen, in order to catch mice; the hedgehog had, possibly, broken into a box and eaten the bait. Sadly, the one I saw had probably been dying as I watched it.

I mention the incident because, one autumn evening, as I came out of the subway and turned onto the grass, heading across to The Crescent, I saw a dead fox tucked into the space between the wire fence and a plane tree. It looked so peaceful in death, with its reddish coat and white bib and tail forming an arc in the crackly brown leaf litter. After a day or two it disappeared. So, why had it died? Perhaps it, too, had ingested poison bait intended for mice?

I'll just mention *The Great Storm of 1987* here. Sheila was 'oop north on business and, just before I left for work, she telephoned me and asked how much damage the storm had done.

"What storm?" I asked (I *am* a heavy sleeper). She patiently explained that all the papers were full of it, and it was on the telly and the radio.

"Hang on", I said, walking over to the window and looking at Holly Park Road.

"Oh, yes", I said airily, "There's a small tree blown over, just across the road." It was not until I set off towards STC, and reached The Crescent, that I

noticed the devastation. Dustbin lids, broken twigs and branches littered the street, but the first real damage I saw was the tall, young, Locust tree by the allotments, a particular favourite of mine, which had been blown over. The ripped-out roots had left a large hole in the pavement, while the trunk had crashed across the fence and was snuggling in a bed of cabbages. Then, looking across the allotments I noticed gaps in the line of Golden Poplars that lined the edges of the cricket pitch in 'The Fields'; great limbs had been torn off the trees and thrown down onto the grass. Across the road it was the same story, with more limbs ripped off (Golden Poplar and Hornbeam) by the railway fence and, as I drove around New Southgate later that week, I saw a partially damaged house and a car crushed by a tree.

I promised to tell you the story of The disappearing Dandelion, didn't I? It happened during one summer in the 1970s, and I'd already started to pick wild flowers (before *that* became illegal) to take home for identification in my *Big Wild Flower Book*. I'd read up on the common Dandelion, and the fact that its distinctive, serrated leaves were named after the French *Dent du Lion* (lion's tooth.) I noted, also, that the small yellow flower was quite attractive in its way. Not long afterwards, I passed a similar wild flower by the railway fence, just before the subway. Two things struck me; the extraordinary beauty of the flower, which was framed in four green spikes like a crown, and the fact that the leaves were like broad grass, and not at all dande-leonine. I walked to work thinking about the plant and decided to take a piece home that evening for identification. The next couple of days were dull, and when I next saw the plant, I realised that I'd completely forgotten to pick a piece last time I'd seen it.

This went on for a week or two; I would see the plant in the morning, and then forget about it by the evening. The explanation came when I finally found the plant among the 2,000 pictures in my wild-flower book, without even bringing a piece home. The flower was none other than *Goat's Beard*, also known as *Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon*. The latter name reflects the plant's habit of closing its flowers before the noonday sun has a chance to dry out the nectar. Given the fact that the leaves look like grass, by the time I walked past in the evening the plant was well nigh invisible. The other name, *Goat's Beard*, refers to its large seed head. You all know the Dandelion seed head, which we call a 'clock', and *that* is a miracle of three-dimensional engineering, but the *Goat's Beard* 'clock' is a *huge* globe of delicate gossamer parachutes, each one attached to a seed. Wonderful.

Every so often my daily routine would be interrupted, and one gloomy morning in February 1989 I stepped onto the Railway Field from Beaconsfield Road, and nearly tripped over what looked like a yellow python of interminable length. It proved to be a large diameter (12"?) pipe laid out the length of the park, from south to north (The Crescent to Charville House), presumably for gas. The next time I passed there was a small dirty, orange, trench-digging machine parked at the northern end, having dug a shallow trench parallel to Beaconsfield Road, a couple of yards from the fence. Eventually the pipe was buried in the trench and, within a year, all trace of it had faded. I mention all this merely for the benefit of future archaeologists. *To be continued.....*

STREET FURNITURE

by David Berguer

We all take street furniture for granted. Railings, manhole covers, lampposts, telephone kiosks, litter bins, they are all things we pass without even a second glance. It wasn't until I started to survey all the shops in the area, and all the things outside them, that I began to notice what had been in front of my eyes all those years. Take telephone manhole covers for example. The old ones were made of iron and had a concrete insert in the middle but it was Ollie Natelson who discovered that they were not all the same. He spotted that the inscriptions on them said either PO, Post Office Telegraphs or Post Office Telephones and they even had slightly different patterns on them. It appears that the Post Office would buy a number of covers and when these were used up, they would order more. In the meantime the moulds might have been destroyed so a new pattern was made from scratch with a different design.

John Donovan, who never travels anywhere without his camera, recently showed me photographs he had been taking of electricity cabinets. These large iron edifices acted as switching stations and if power needed to be cut off in an area it would be done from one of these. They are still some of them around, usually in a neglected state, but they are gradually disappearing and will one day rank with Police Boxes, Horse Troughs and Fire Alarms as relics of a bygone age. This photograph of a cabinet in Ashurst Road, next



to Ward Aerials, was taken by John on 29 September, 1993. Both the cabinet, and the sapling growing through it, have now vanished.

It would help us if you could tell us if there is one of these in your road. If you let John know, he will be round with his camera to record it before it disappears forever.

For those of you who received a new camera for Christmas (either conventional or digital) and don't quite know what to photograph, why not help us out with our work of recording everyday things for posterity. It won't cost you anything (we'll reimburse you for film, if applicable, and the cost of printing) and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, at some time in the future, a local historian will be

studying your work to find out what Friern Barnet and the surrounding district looked like in the early part of the twenty-first century. If you are interested please give John a call on 01707 642 886 or talk to him at one of our meetings.

LAMAS CONFERENCE

by Colin Barratt

The London & Middlesex Archaeological Society (LAMAS) have been organising annual local history conferences for many years, but this one was the first that our society had attended, and taken part in. When I heard that the subject of their November 2003 Conference at The Museum of London was going to be *Lunatic London*, I thought that this ought to include our own Friern Hospital in it, as it played such an important part in the development of treatment of the mentally ill.

On contacting the Conference organiser I discovered that none of the speakers was covering Friern. Even Barnet & District Local History Society were not planning to provide a speaker or display about it. We were invited to do it ourselves, which we did. There was only one person we could speak to on the subject: Dr Oliver Natelson. He readily accepted, and was included in the Conference programme. Our society also joined LAMAS and we were therefore able to book a stall in one of the areas at the Conference allocated to local history societies.

Our representatives at the Conference were David Berguer, Dorrell Dressekie and Mary and Colin Barratt. We displayed photographs of Friern Hospital as well as general local history of the area, plus a typical daily diet provided to inmates, which Ollie had carefully measured out for each meal. In the breaks we had many enquiries and visitors to our stall, and we sold a good number of our histories of Friern Hospital and Alexandra Palace, as well as our new Historical Map of Friern Barnet. Free back numbers of our Newsletter were also popular.



Mary Barratt (centre) and David Berguer talk to a visitor to the stall

In the Conference itself there were seven speakers. The first talked on medieval London hospitals and particularly the archaeological finds at Spitalfields, where St Mary' was sited. Around 10,500 bodies were found during excavations, some showing evidence of early medical treatments, such as trepanning (having holes drilled in the skull)!

The next speaker talked about the care of the mentally ill in the 17th and 18th centuries, focussing on the large Bethlehem Hospital (known as Bedlam) and the private St Luke's in Old Street. Bedlam encouraged the public to come to view the patients, but St Luke's did not. In many private madhouses they also rarely saw a doctor.

The following talk was about Charles and Mary Lamb. Romantic writer Charles had to look after his mentally unstable older sister for many years, after she had fatally stabbed their mother. She was committed to madhouses in Islington and Edmonton and Charles lived in Enfield for a time, to be near. The stress resulted in him spending a period in a madhouse himself at one point, and Mary outlived him by some years.

After lunch we heard how the large mental asylums of the Victorian period were designed. The building layout, location and large grounds required a good understanding of the needs of these establishments, and we were shown detailed plans of these, and the thinking behind them.

The talk on Psychology and War looked at the mental disorders connected with war, such as stress, shell shock and flashbacks and much study was carried out on sufferers during World War 2. Before the war it was predicted that 4 million would be seriously psychologically affected and preparations were made for this. Fortunately the numbers were far fewer.

A member of Camden Historical Society spoke about St Luke's, a forgotten hospital. Originally this was on the corner of City Road and Old Street, and was privately run and funded by a governors scheme. This involved people paying to be a governor and they were then able to recommend individuals to stay in the hospital. In 1916 it closed and moved to Muswell Hill, to benefit from the cleaner air and it is still there today, in Woodside Avenue.

The final presentation of the day was by Ollie. He discussed the need for the hospital at Colney Hatch and what determined its location. He referred to the earlier talk on asylum design to show how these aspects were used in its construction and its self sufficient operation. Ollie recounted the story of the laying of the foundation stone by Prince Albert and the effort to get the building ready for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. The treatment of patients was seen as pioneering, with nutritious food and no physical restraints used. The long corridor and other features of the building were shown. Ollie had arranged a guided tour of the hospital grounds a week after the Conference and invited attendees to join him.

The LAMAS chairwoman wound up the day by speaking of the value of local

history groups working together on joint projects. She also announced a new competition to find the best local history publication. This would initially be open to those published within the last five years, and the winner would be announced at the 2004 Conference, with a prize of £100 awarded. In future years, entry would be limited to publications from the previous 12 months.

The event gave our relatively new society the chance to be seen by, and meet, others in the London area and I think it was a successful and interesting day. The subject for 2004 has not been announced, but I think it will be worth attending again.

OBITUARIES

Sadly we have to announce the death of two of our members. Hilda Boyden and Peggy Hayes both joined the society in our very first year and were regular and enthusiastic attendees at our meetings. They will be greatly missed.

THIS YEAR'S PROGRAMME

With this Newsletter you will find a copy of our programme of meetings for 2004. Janet Liversidge has assembled a varied and, we hope, interesting list of topics and speakers.

As we mentioned in our last Newsletter, we have had to switch our meeting days from the fourth Tuesday to the fourth Wednesday in the month and, of course, we will now be based at St John's Church Hall in Friern Barnet Lane, next to Whetstone Police Station. We hope that those of you have been unable to attend our previous meetings will now find the new dates more convenient. If you are attending for the first time, please make yourselves known to John Donovan or David Berguer who will be pleased to give you a hearty welcome.

Ollie Natelson is currently working on his programme of popular Sunday afternoon conducted walks and we will let you have details of these in our next Newsletter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just a reminder that your subscriptions expire on 31 March. Enclosed is a renewal form which you can complete now and return to us or, if it suits you, you can leave this until nearer the time. You will be pleased to see that the rates remain the same as last time, thanks to our being able to find a new venue without incurring a great increase in cost.

**Friern Barnet & District
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