

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

Published by Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

Issue Number 22

September 2005

PROJECT - THE HISTORY OF A GAS COMPANY

by Colin Barratt

Local history is more than memories of our childhood or old photos, interesting though these are. It can also involve carrying out projects which attempt to gather all the available information about a subject, with the aim of producing a worthwhile and detailed document that throws light on an event, or records the history of a place, which can be used for future reference or research.

One such project I started on earlier this year is a history of the Gas Company which used to operate a works next to the railway and the North Circular Road in New Southgate. This was a subject I felt close to, as I was born and brought up literally in its shadow. When I reached the stage in this project where all my existing material had been used, I then looked for someone who had worked there. Luckily, I found one and was able to meet him and listen to his memories, helped by some photos and maps I had.

I also wanted to find out what official records existed on this major local company. Several years ago, during some family history research, I discovered that there were a number of archives for the gas industry and its history, which at that time were starting to be centralised in Manchester. This archive has recently been transferred to a new purpose-built Records Centre in Warrington, which is open to the public, and has a website (gasarchive.org).



*Imagine having a gasholder in your back garden!
Albert Street in the 60s, now part of the Homebase store*

I checked this and saw that the archive held a mass of material that would be useful for my project. I contacted them to find out what they had on the New Southgate works. The manager sent me a list of items from their index, but suggested that I visit the Centre to look at the material myself. Fortunately, I travel to the Merseyside area regularly on business, and I arranged to visit the archive during a recent trip.

The National Gas Archive is run by Transco, and has records of individual gas companies from the early 19th century up to nationalisation in 1949, plus the industry from 1949 to the present. These records include thousands of photos, site plans, journals, drawings, documents and correspondence. The Centre is currently in the middle of a massive cataloguing of the material onto a computer database. Although this will be valuable for local and industrial historians, its main purpose is to record and index all the property and land owned by Transco, presumably to value it and maybe to sell some off some of it later.

I had already e-mailed them with the list of records I was interested in, and on arrival I was presented with a trolley stacked high with boxes and books containing my requests, and several armfuls of large drawings were then carried out and laid on the massive central table for me. They included aerial photos of the site, a detailed site plan, and photos of equipment and buildings. I only had a short time to look at the material, and there was more to see, so further visits are needed!

What I've collected so far from the Gas Archive will be a useful addition to my illustrated history, and will be included in due course. When completed, a copy of the history will be deposited in our Society's archive, and copies will be sent to Enfield Borough Local History Unit (as the works was just inside the Enfield Boundary) and the National Gas Archive.

I have produced an abbreviated version (*New Southgate Gas Works: A Brief History*) which we will be selling for £1 copy and which joins the other Brief Histories that we have produced (*Alexandra Palace; Friern Hospital; and New Southgate*). These will be available at our meetings or can be posted to you. Please call David Berguer on 020 8444 3089.

This is the sort of project we could tackle for a number of areas and topics, with the help of our members. If you are interested in a particular topic and would like to investigate it, please talk to any of the Committee.

FAMILY HISTORY

by David Berguer

Our member in Kent, Mrs Raymer Lofts, is compiling her family history and has asked if anyone can help her. Her Great Grandfather was James Hetherington (1860-1922). He was not only the foreman of the Friern Barnet Sewerage Works in Cromwell Road, but he was also the Second Officer of the Friern Barnet Fire Brigade. He lived at Number 1 The Cottage, Cromwell Road, was married to Christiana for forty years, and they had sixteen children!

and she had a son, Lionel Jellicoe, known as Gerry or Fred, who was born in 1915. He was married to Florrie or Ginnie and they had two sons, Lionel John (born 1937) and Keith (born 1939). Other members of the Hetherington family lived at numbers 7,23,25,27 and 135 Pembroke Road up until 2001. Raymer's uncle, Colin Mackenzie, known as Mac, was a Production Manager at STC and also Secretary to Barnet Football Club for many years. He died in 1984, aged 77. If you can give Raymer any information on any of her relatives please ring me on 020 8444 3089 and I will put you in touch.

In the course of our correspondence Raymer sent me some interesting photographs, including this one of the hearse at James Hetherington's funeral in 1922.



THE NUDIST COLONY

by David Berguer

As part of my history of trams and trolleybuses project, I frequently go to the Barnet Local Studies and Archives in Daws Lane, Mill Hill to trawl through microfilm of the local press, looking for items of interest. Almost without fail, I find myself side-tracked by something that I was not looking for (it's just like going on to the internet really).

The 18 September 1936 issue of *Barnet Press* contained such a nugget. The headline "Nudist Colony Crops Up Again" naturally caught my attention. It read: "Miss A M Angell of 151 Friern-park, appealed against an assessment of £52 (£42) and asked for a reduction to £45 (£35). She said that the road had considerably lost tone lately. Small properties or flats had been built, and there was quite a different sort of tenant. There had been considerable settlement, which she would have to have repaired. Mr Draper said that the house was an old mid-Victorian mansion and formed one of a terrace of four houses. The property had been assessed at 5.88d per foot, which seemed to be a very low rate. The flats, which were let at £78 per year, were well removed from Miss Angell's house. "The nudist colony has cropped up again

in this application," said Mr Draper. "As far as we know, there is no annoyance whatever from the establishment. It is 300 yards away, though Miss Angell had stated that it was just opposite." Miss Angell, who stated that she was an artist, said that the nudist colony could not be seen from her house, but anyone coming down the road could see it. Clients who came to see her were given quite a different impression of the road than formerly. The assessment was confirmed."

The exact whereabouts of the nudist colony has been something of a mystery; but at least we now know that it was 300 yards away from 151 Friern Park. We recently acquired a copy of *Kelly's Directory of Finchley and Friern Barnet* for 1938 and although it lists Miss Angell, perhaps not surprisingly there is no reference to a nudist colony in the street directory and there is no heading in the Commercial Section under "Nudist Colonies"! When we have more information I shall report back. It would be nice to acquire some photographs of the colony (and its inmates!) but somehow I think this is a remote possibility.

REPORT ON THE NON-INTERVIEW OF THE YEAR

by Sylvia Stilts

Scene: Popular Café (est. 1960) 1268 High Road, Whetstone.
Proprietor Mr Pervik Kert.

Enter an enthusiastic old dear who orders tea and sits down. Young waiter brings a large mug of tea on a saucer.

Old Dear: How long has that newspaper cutting about the old fireplace been in the window?

Young Waiter: T'ree yair.

O.D.: Really! I've only recently noticed it. Could you tell me more about it, please?

Y.W. (shakes his head)

O.D.: How long have you been here?

Y.W.: T'ree yair.

O.D. (points to sepia photographs of Café on walls): Were these here when you came?

Y.W.: Don't know.

O.D.: I belong to the Local History Society and I wonder if you would mind if I ask you a few questions?

Y.W.: No. Don't know. *(walks off to kitchen)*

(O.D. looks at large fireplace and chimney in the dividing wall between the two dining rooms. According to the newspaper article it was uncovered during refurbishment and dates back to 1480-odd, when a bakery stood on the site)

Mr Pervik Kert himself enters and wipes table tops.

O.D.: I'm very interested in the Café's history.

P.K.: Yess. I close now.

O.D.: Sorry. Thanks. *(exits)*

Footnote: Before refurbishment, the now very smart *Popular Café* was named *The Victory* (I think) and was patronised by workmen in cement- and paint-

stained overalls. It stands in a very old part of the High Road and there are remnants of half-timbered buildings behind the shops on one side and *The Griffin* pub on the other with its large stone outside. The wall in which the fireplace is set is extremely thick and could well accommodate a fireplace on the other side which is still concealed. In 1780 there was a shoe shop on the site of the café.

THE ROUTEMASTER RETURNS TO FRIERN BARNET

by David Berguer

Following the terrorist bombing of a train between Kings Cross and Russell Square on 7 July 2005, the Piccadilly Line was suspended between Arnos Grove and Hyde Park Corner until 4 August. During this time several old buses were hired to operate a Rail Replacement Service. Service A (operated by Sullivan Buses) ran between Arnos Grove and Finchley Central stations and Service B (operated by Ensignbus) linked Arnos Grove, Bounds Green, Wood Green and Seven Sisters stations. A motley collection of elderly vehicles was in use, including a number of Routemasters which had not seen service on the streets of Friern Barnet since 1986.

The following photograph shows RML 2272 on Woodhouse Road on 18 July:



New Southgate was in the news on Wednesday 25 July when a flat in Curtis House, just behind the *John Lawrence* pub was raided by armed police who discovered bomb making equipment. Unfortunately the national media did not seem to know much about the area as Curtis House was variously described as being in Friern Barnet, Southgate and Barnet!

A WHETSTONE SCHOOLMASTER

by John Heathfield

His obituary called him a faithful servant of the Lord. Thomas E. Reynolds was born in Spital Fields in 1818; he left school and was apprenticed to a printer. He went to evening classes at the local Mechanics' Institute where he did well

enough to be invited for training as a teacher. In 1836 he went to Borough Road College, Southwark, which was a Methodist Teacher Training College which later moved to Isleworth. Both John Davey of Woodhouse and John Heathfield, also of Woodhouse, were also trained there.

The College had been founded in 1833 by the British and Foreign Schools Society, whose aim was to teach pupils to understand the Bible. This was in contrast to the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles and Practice of the Established Church, whose aim was to teach the facts of the Bible. This false dichotomy between fact and understanding has bedevilled education since then.

At that time the teacher-training course lasted three months. "Our aim", wrote the Principal, "is to keep them incessantly employed from five in the morning till nine or ten at night. We have rather exceeded in the time devoted to study the limit we would choose, on account of the very short time we are able to keep them. We have found in some instances that their health has suffered on account of their having been previously quite unaccustomed to such strenuous mental occupations." Not surprisingly, this form of training had an effect on the health of the students.

After he had left the College, Reynolds came to the attention of John Puget, a rich landowner living later in Totteridge, who had paid to set up a school in Ship Lane, Brighton. Puget was friends with Joseph Sortain, a Methodist missionary, and through him met Reynolds. Reynolds went to teach there in 1840, and moved to Whetstone in 1843, where he lived with a relative who had a shop near the *Green Man* pub. He succeeded William Golding as one of the teachers at Puget's school behind the Dissenters' Chapel in Totteridge Lane. Like all school masters, he was poorly paid, and to supplement his earnings, he opened a newsagents and fancy goods shop, which he called Reynolds' Repository. He eventually had a printing press on the premises, and one of his sons, Robert, became a compositor. He was also a reporter for the *Barnet Press*.

At first, the school in Totteridge took girls as well as boys, but following the opening of a new building in Blackhorse Lane (later Oakleigh Road North), the girls and infants went there. Thomas Reynolds had an unusual way of keeping discipline; he did not use corporal punishment, but instead had a system of confinements and rewards. Dirty boys, for example, were sentenced to have their hands and faces washed in front of the whole school. Talkers, players and idlers were kept in for half an hour, but by a system of barter, each half hour's confinement could be paid for by a merit ticket, which was awarded for good work. At the end of term, each merit ticket could be exchanged for half a farthing, and the money spent on books or clothes; the Puget family provided the cash. Reynolds seems to have been an exceptionally kindly man with a gift for clear explanation. On one occasion the boys hid in the crypt of the chapel. He made them climb out through the trap door and as each boy climbed out he was "caned" with a nine foot stick that Reynolds had cut from a nearby tree. Many pupils kept in touch with him throughout his life.

In addition to teaching at the day school, for over 30 years he was organist

in the Chapel. In the 1860s he moved to a better site, on the south corner of Blackhorse Lane, where Barclays Bank now stands. Reynolds died on 16 Dec 1884, and is buried in the Great Northern Cemetery. His stationer's shop was taken over by Mr Claringbull, and later by Wilsons.

In Feb 1889, a meeting of former pupils was held in the schoolroom in Totteridge Lane at which 93 people attended. In his speech, Mr Puget said that the school had been closed since the death of Mr Reynolds. The first school, he said, had been opened in 1818, and was conducted by Mrs Merrett until 1827; the school then moved to its present site behind the Chapel. Mr Reynolds, whose wife Elizabeth died in 1853, had taught at the school for 43 years.

FRIERN BARNET SHOW

The Friern Barnet Show took place in Friary Park on Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 August and once again the Society had a stall at which we sold many items of bric-a-brac (John Donovan always refers to them as "once-loved goods") as well as our own publications. The weather was kind to us (the rain held off until the Monday, when it poured all day!) and we had a large number of customers, which resulted in a net profit of some £355, only slightly down on last year. A big thank you to everyone who donated items from their lofts, garages and cellars and to the committee members who had two lovely days in the sunshine. We are particularly indebted to Pat Cleland, Pat Richardson and Mary Taylor who not only gave us moral support, but also showed what good salesladies they are.

One of the highlights of the Summer Show was the appearance of the band of the Life Guards who marched from Manor Drive Methodist Church and along Friern Barnet Lane to Friary Park where they gave an immaculate display of marching. We can hardly wait until next year's Show!



MOTORING MEMORIES

by David Berguer

I recently read an interesting book on the motor trade (*Turning Back the Clock* by Geoff Owen. Fitzjames Press 2000) in which the author, who had spent all his life as a car dealer, pointed out that in the early 1950s the prices of used cars were actually higher than the list price for new models. This was due to the huge demand for cars, and the inability of the manufacturers to supply them. A few examples will illustrate this strange phenomenon:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|------------|
| Ford Anglia 2 door saloon | New £329 | Used £545 |
| Morris Minor 2 door tourer | New £383 | Used £570 |
| Ford Prefect 4 door saloon | New £397 | Used £675 |
| Austin A70 Hampshire 4 door saloon | New £659 | Used £1025 |
| Standard Vanguard 6 door estate | New £735 | Used £835 |

Seeing the words Ford Anglia reminded me of my very first car. I bought it on 7 November 1966 from a dealer in Beaconsfield for £195 plus £6. 8. 0. Road Fund Tax. It was blue in colour, the registration was 586 RBH and it had seen better days - this latter fact I did not discover until some time later.

I had only just passed my driving test (at the first attempt, I might add) and my very first journey on my own was along the A40 from Beaconsfield to Wood Green, where I lived then. Not only had I never driven on a major road like the A40, but it was raining and getting dark, and I had never experienced these either. Before it was modernised, the A40 had many roundabouts, and my experience of negotiating these was also limited. All in all, it was a nerve wracking journey.

After a few weeks I began to discover the limitations of the Ford Anglia, or at any rate this particular one. Firstly it was a swine to start and would cut out everytime I stopped at traffic lights or to let old ladies cross the road (I used to do things like that in those days). After about half an hour the engine would warm up and it would run like a bird, until I turned a corner at speed, when the back would gracefully slide away from me. The worst trait, however, was the tendency of the starter motor to jam, usually in heavy traffic and on hills. The starter motor was located at the bottom of the engine and was virtually inaccessible, but the engineers at Ford had underestimated the cunning of the 1960s motorist. I made (or, should I say, engineered) a device made from a poker which was bent at 90° at the end and on which I jammed a box spanner. When the inevitable happened and the 933cc engine cut out, I would leap out, open the bonnet, insert the poker and give the starter motor a couple of turns, slam the bonnet shut, hurl myself into the seat, turn the key and, *voila*, I was on my way again.

One day, a couple of years later, I took the car in for service at a local garage and was waiting in the reception area that evening when I heard two mechanics talking. "Not worth repairing" one of them said. "Completely knackered" said the other. I smiled quietly to myself; wondering which unlucky motorist was due for some bad news. Yes, you've guessed it, it was me. On 26 January 1968 I took the Dagenham Disaster to Palmsville Garage in Colney Hatch Lane and traded it in for a brand new Hillman Imp. They gave

me £125 in part exchange (the Imp cost £611. 7. 9). On reflection, if I had bought the car eighteen years earlier, I could have actually made a profit on it!

REDISCOVERING THE SAVOY VAULTS

by Colin Barratt

Lilian Stone, who lives in Edmonton and is a member of the Anglo-German Family History Society, wrote the following in memory of her friend, Pam Freeman, who died in 2002. These two ladies had visited New Southgate Cemetery in 1993, found the Savoy Vaults (also known as the Queen Victoria Vaults) and, with some effort, recorded the details inscribed on them. More recently, several members of our Society repeated the exercise, not knowing of the earlier recording. Our task was much easier, as we didn't have to hack through weeds and brambles to see the stones.

"In the early days of the Anglo-German Family History Society I thought of Pam Freeman as the lady who was contacting German churches to try and persuade them to look at and copy any of their documents that might be of help to members in their research.

Then in the summer of 1993, Len Metzner phoned me to ask if I could go to New Southgate Cemetery, which is not far from where I live, to see if there was any sort of plaque or monument to indicate that people who had been previously buried in the German Protestant (Lutheran) Chapel, known as St Marienkirche, in St Mary le Savoy Precinct, had been re-interred there when the church was pulled down to make way for the Thames Embankment.

On a visit to the Cemetery office I was told there was nothing to be seen, and the ground that had been used was in the old part by the wall. This was found with some difficulty, and by poking around with a stick I found what looked like a concrete path. I reported my findings to Len who suggested ringing Pam to see what she thought.

Pam said she would like to visit the cemetery, the only problem being that she lived in Surrey, and the cemetery was in North London. A few days later Pam contacted me to say that she had found a way to come to my local station and that it would take her about two hours, but could I meet her at 9.30 the following morning and bring with me anything that could be handy. Pam arrived on time and we drove to the cemetery where we looked at the site and agreed it looked hopeless. A trip to the office made us realise there would be no help from them.

We returned to the piece of ground, and Pam asked if I had brought anything that we could cut away some of the weed and bramble with to see what lay underneath. I opened the car boot and Pam just laughed and asked me if I had been in the Girl Guides. I reminded her that she had said bring anything that might be useful, so I had taken various garden tools, a bucket, broom and scrubbing brush, a sponge and old towels, plus two fold-up seats, flasks of tea and things to eat. At that point we sat and had a cup of tea and reviewed the situation.

A couple of hours later we had uncovered a piece of ground about six foot

square, swept it, scrubbed it, and could not believe what was there - a stone slab with names on and very readable. There was nothing stopping us then. We carried on until we thought we might get locked in the cemetery for the night, but we had uncovered about twelve stones. We then agreed that if it was good weather the following week we would repeat the task. By the end of the second day we had uncovered thirty-one stones laid to a design covering some eighty by forty feet. Pam sketched out the pattern, numbered each stone and recorded every name.

I thoroughly enjoyed the time spent with Pam, and found she had a great sense of humour. For the most part of the two days we spent together we had only the birds for company. We did have some laughs though; two workmen came past and called to ask if it was the best place we could find for a picnic. A lady stopped and asked why we were scrubbing the path. Then when Pam was having a wash out of a bucket of water and trying to make herself look respectable for the journey home some boys called to ask if that was her bathroom.

Other than at meetings when we would see each other we would talk on the phone. We would also meet from time to time to do some research. In January each year we would meet at the East of London Family History Society annual meeting which was held at the Wesley Chapel in City Road. During the lunch break we would go across the road to Bunhill Fields and have our sandwiches on the bench by John Wesley's tomb. Just before the Christmas I was talking to Pam on the phone when she suddenly said, "Tell Old John Wesley that I am sorry, but I shall be unable to meet him for lunch any more". This was Pam's way of telling me that she knew how ill she was. I have had some good times with Pam. And I shall miss her."

We still intend to arrange for an information board to be erected in front of these vaults, to explain their history, and recognise the work done by Lillian and Pam in re-discovering them.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At our AGM on 25 May, the Committee were re-elected with the addition of one extra member, Richard Testar who was nominated, and accepted, for the post of Publicity Secretary.

A copy of the Income and Expenditure Account for the year to 31 March 2005, which was approved at the meeting, is enclosed for your information.

**Friern Barnet & District
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