

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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SWEETS WAY – PART TWO

by John Heathfield

In the last issue of the Newsletter we left the Sweets Nursery site just as war had been declared. We now pick up the story after the Army moved in.

The defence of London against air attack had been planned from 1935 onwards and a ring of aerodromes, anti-aircraft guns and searchlights was created around London. A new drill hall was built on Finchley Common, near the foot of Squires Lane and this housed the 171 (Finchley) Battery of the 61st Anti-Aircraft brigade, which was converted from a rifle unit in 1936. On 13 July 1936 they made military history by becoming the first territorial unit ever to hit the target – a Queen Bee radio-controlled aircraft flying straight and level at 100mph at 3000 feet. Another drill hall was opened in St Albans Road, Barnet for 334 (Barnet) Company of Royal Engineers who operated searchlights.

As we have seen, the Sweets nursery grounds were requisitioned for use as a gun site. Concrete rafts were laid to provide a level and stable base for the guns and there were wooden huts for barrack accommodation. A battery of four 4.5 inch former naval guns was planned. On Tuesday 22 August 1939 the code words "Hastings" and "Byng" were issued and all key personnel were called to the colours; the following day all units were called up for active service. Nearly all the anti-aircraft units were staffed by part-time soldiers from the Territorial Army who were trained one night per week and on occasional weekends and at an annual two week summer camp.



The 4.5 inch anti-aircraft guns at the Sweets Nursery site

For a brief period there were guns at the top of the North Middlesex Golf Course and their explosions damaged windows at St James's School in Friern Barnet Lane and shook the bell off the porch. In January 1940 294 Field Squadron Royal Engineers was brought in to prepare the Sweets site. Houses in Myddelton Park and on the Oakleigh Park estate were requisitioned to accommodate the soldiers. The huts were gradually filled with troops in training, including 2/8 Battalion Middlesex Regiment with a platoon of 11 (Kent) Regiment ATS. When the concrete had hardened sufficiently, 167 Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment moved in with 7 officers and 372 men and 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment equipped with 40mm Bofors guns. Some 200 rounds of 4.5inch and 100 rounds of 3.7inch ammunition were stored on the site; there was also a large arsenal under Mill Hill Barracks.

At the beginning of the war there was little activity. The early skirmishes of the Battle of Britain were fought in the air but German night raids began gradually from Monday 19 August 1940 – the war diary records "*mainly light and harassing raids.*" The Blitz is generally reckoned to have begun on Saturday 7 September 1940 with "*continuous raids on London until dawn.*" Daylight raids gradually petered out, but night bombing continued until the following summer, when Hitler withdrew his bombers to attack Russia.

The Sweets site guns were aimed by radar and they could fire shells weighing 30 kilos to a height of eight miles in 50 seconds with the purpose of forcing German aircraft to fly too high to achieve accurate bombing. In September 1940 the 26th (North London) Brigade fired 18,792 rounds of 4.5 inch and 70,767 rounds of 3.7 inch ammunition. By November the gun barrels had worn oval, which meant that the fuses would not set and there were many unexploded shells. Nevertheless the guns continued to fire to give moral support to the civilian population. On Wednesday 6 November 1940 the site engaged a formation of 24 enemy aircraft with 136 rounds which resulted in eight of the aircraft changing course and two losing height. On 8 November 142 rounds were fired and another 100 on the following night and subsequent months showed similar figures. By this period the personnel on site had grown to 35 officers and 949 men. In 1943 the guns were transferred to the "Defended Ports Abroad" rota.

Against the V1 Flying Bombs (or *doodle bugs*) in the summer of 1944 it was calculated that the 432 3.7 inch guns defending London would shoot down between 6% and 15% of targets if they were flying at 3000 to 5000 feet at 300 to 450 mph. On Tuesday 9 January 1945 the gun units were warned "*German jet fighters are likely to fly at 500 mph at over 20,000 feet. It will be a waste of time to engage them since the shells will only reach 20,000 feet.*" On Monday 22 January 1945 all guns were removed to the Shoeburyness area as part of the defensive ring against flying bombs. They were replaced at Whetstone by two nine-inch rocket launchers also guided by radar. At the Standard Telephones factory there was a Bofors gun which is reputed to have been fired once in anger!

The Sweets site was stood down on Saturday 12 May 1945 and on Thursday 22 November the site was handed over to No 5 Maintenance Unit. The buildings were used to store Army records until 1969 when the Council bought the site for development. The name lives on today as Sweets Way and there are four small roads on the estate: Attfield Close, Domville Close, Millsom Close and D'Arcy

Close, which is named after D'Arcy Bacon, a younger son of John Bacon of Friary Park. The Attfield family moved into Whetstone about 1790 and had a grocer's shop on the north corner of Oakleigh Road. John Attfield was born about 1820 and worked for the Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust and the toll gate was, in fact, just outside his front door. He rented Beldhams Field to graze his horses and when he died in the 1880s his house was demolished and replaced by the present row of yellow brick shops with a mews behind.

THE SWIMMING BATH THAT NEVER WAS

by David Berguer

The early thirties were the years of the Depression and unemployment was high throughout the country. One of the measures that the Government took to try and create employment was the creation of the Unemployment Grants Committee which gave grants to local authorities for the creation of public works. In July 1930 Friern Barnet UDC started investigating the possibility of building a swimming bath in Bethune Park which could be partly paid for by a grant.

The plans drawn up called for a "popular bath" which would be an open air pool and would measure 165 feet by 75 feet with a depth of 3ft 6in at one end and 7ft 6in at the other. Provision would be made for spring boards and a diving stage at the deep end. There would be two sun bathing beaches, 206 sq yards and 209 sq yards respectively, dressing accommodation for both sexes, refreshment pavilion, filtration, chlorination and pumping drainage and fencing together with parking for 45 cars and ornamental gardens, with the main entrance on Crescent Road. In front of the administration building there was to be a cascade aeration fountain flanked by formal rock gardens. Bathers would be charged 1/-d for adults on Sundays and Bank Holidays and 6d for adults on other days.

Three Councillors were opposed to the scheme and they were later joined by a fourth, but an application for a loan of £16,611 was made to the Ministry of Health and the Unemployment Grants Committee in Oct 1930. Subsequently the Ministry of Labour enquired whether the Council would consider the employment of men from other depressed areas and the Council replied that it would have no objections, provided that they were satisfied that all available local unemployed men were given the first opportunity. The annual expenditure on the swimming bath, including £1,345 repayment of principal and interest on a loan of £16,611, was £2,015. Receipts were estimated to be £1,432 from bathers and £210 from the Unemployed Grants Commission, giving an annual loss of £373.

The Friern Barnet Ratepayers Association strongly opposed the scheme on the grounds of cost, but the Southgate, Friern Barnet and District Teachers' Association welcomed it as "*it is almost impossible to include the extremely desirable subject of swimming in the curriculum of the Friern Barnet Primary Schools, owing to lack of facilities, thus placing Friern Barnet children at a serious disadvantage as compared with those in neighbouring districts.*" And so the stage was set for a public inquiry, which was to prove an acrimonious affair.

On Wednesday 5 Feb, 1931 the public inquiry by the Ministry of Health opened at the Parish Hall. The Clerk of the Council, Cllr. Fletcher, opened by saying that the population of Friern Barnet was 23,350 and that a rate of 1d in the £ produced £831. He then went on to outline the Council's plans and was questioned by the Inspector on several occasions, particularly on the viability of

the scheme. The Inspector pointed out that the swimming baths at Barrowell Green, in neighbouring Southgate, only attracted 74,000 bathers in a record year, despite the population being twice that of Friern Barnet and the baths only charged 4d per bather (2d for children) and it was patronised by people from all over the area, not just Southgate. The Inspector queried the proposal to employ only four staff; he thought nine would be a more realistic figure and pointed out that Southgate's annual income from lavatories was only 20/-d, whereas Friern Barnet were estimating an income of £50! An interesting side issue raised was the possible merger between Finchley and Friern Barnet.

One of the dissenting Councillors said that the Council would never have embarked on the scheme had it not been for the bribe offered by the Unemployed Grants Commission, whilst another said the whole scheme was humbug. Other points against the scheme were the Sunday opening and the fact that the trams did not start until 9am on that day and in any case the pool would not be easily accessible to visitors from outside the Borough. It was pointed out Finchley were planning a bigger pool and that this would attract people living on the roads between Woodhouse Road and Torrington Park. The Inspector commented that there appeared to be bitter personal strife in Friern Barnet and that, although he had conducted many inquiries, he had never had one like this before! After a second day, the inquiry was concluded and the Inspector said he would view the proposed site and the neighbouring sites which had been mentioned.

The Friern Barnet Council minutes of 29 May 1931 recorded that the Unemployment Grants Committee had considered the application and "*having regard to all the factors which are required to take into account in considering schemes for grant, have decided they could not regard the works proposed as suitable for State assistance and regret that they are unable to recommend the scheme for grant from Exchequer funds.*" And so ended the grand plans for the Friern Barnet Lido. On Thursday 12 July 1934 the Finchley Lido was opened and proved to be so popular that bathers were rationed at peak times. Would it have been so successful if the Friern Barnet pool was open? Would approval have been given if Friern Barnet got their sums right? We shall never know.

MORE PAPER EPHEMERA

by David Berguer

Since the article in the last *Newsletter*, we have received some further donations from members which are of historical interest. Karl Ruge came up with an official invitation card that he received for a Farewell Dinner of Friern Barnet UDC on Saturday 20 March 1965 in the Town Hall, together with the official menu and a table plan. This dinner marked the end of Friern Barnet as a separate entity: from then on it became part of the London Borough of Barnet.

Sylvia Stilts kindly donated a Notice of Poll poster for an election of an Urban District Councillor in the South Ward on Tuesday 10 May 1955 and Sylvia's husband, Leslie, was standing as Conservative candidate. Sylvia has also given us a copy of her husband's election flyer which makes interesting reading, particularly following the recent local elections where the Conservatives were returned in Barnet with an increased majority.



Your
**CONSERVATIVE
 CANDIDATE**
 For FRIERN BARNET
 URBAN DISTRICT
 COUNCIL ELECTIONS

**TUESDAY
 MAY 10TH
 SOUTH
 WARD**

VOTE CONSERVATIVE

LESLIE PETER STILTS

Having been adopted as Conservative Candidate for the South Ward in the Election for the Friern Barnet Urban District Council, I am asking for your support and your VOTE on Tuesday, 10th May, 1955.

Once more, as an elector, you are presented with an opportunity to have a Conservative Councillor to represent your interests and to work in co-operation with the Majority Party on the Council.

As a member of the Committee of the South Ward Conservative Association I have taken an active part in its organisation, having held the position of Vice-Chairman, and at present holding the office of Hon. Treasurer. I am also South Ward's delegate to the Divisional Meetings and Hon. Treasurer of Local Government Committee.

In conclusion, I would state that, if elected, all my endeavours will be to further the particulars needs of South Ward.

Yours sincerely,
 LESLIE P. STILTS.

**YOUR VOTE IS VITAL
 BE SURE THAT YOU USE IT**

In his election leaflet, Leslie reported that Coppetts Wood School was now fully staffed and operating successfully and that the building of this school had enabled them to plan a nursery class at Hollickwood School. In 2006 there is a very real threat that Hollickwood School will now be merged with Coppetts Wood and the land sold off for housing!

Leslie also pointed out that since the War 565 dwellings had been completed and that the policy of demolishing old houses and re-housing the occupants by the Council would continue. In 2006, Barnet has been tasked with providing 4,550 affordable new homes a year until 2010.

On Finance, in 1955 the Conservatives were proud that the rate had again been reduced, by 6d, despite increased salaries, wages and other additional expenses, which made Friern Barnet amongst the lowest in the county. In 2006, Council Tax in Barnet was increased by 4.29%.

The relighting of roads was another improvement in the area and Leslie stated that practically the whole of the district would be provided with modernised lighting. In 2006, Barnet Council is just starting a programme of improving street lighting throughout the Borough.

It is always easy to look back on the past with rose-tinted glasses, but in some ways people in Friern Barnet seemed to be better off when their affairs were run by a small authority that was able to focus on purely local needs. However, the Lido fiasco proves that they did not always get it right!

PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE 1930s

by Sylvia Stilts

The nearest school to my home in Friern Barnet was Coldfall, which was actually in Hornsey (now Haringey), but it was only a ten minute walk away which was an asset as we had to return home for lunch.

I remember my first years at school clearly, though I doubt if I can recall what I had for dinner this time last week. We lined up in the playground and were marched into the cloakroom to hang our coats on numbered pegs and exchange any wellies for plimsolls. In our classrooms on the ground floor we answered "*here, Miss*" as our names were called and the school bell rang out over nearby streets, instilling guilt into the hearts of latecomers and even those who were confined to bed at home with painful tonsillitis. The dreaded School Board Man called on every family whose child was absent from school to check that illness was the reason.

Uniform was not compulsory, but most of the girls wore a gym slip and blouse over their fleece-lined liberty bodice and thick knickers which were elasticated at the knee and had a useful pocket for hanky, half-sucked gobstopper, dead caterpillar, etc. The boys wore short trousers until they were eleven and as winters in those days were severe, they suffered from chapped and chilly knees. The girls wore hats of various shapes and all the boys wore caps and their red ears often developed chilblains. We were sent out into the playground at break, unless it was really raining hard. In winter we made slides on the frozen surface and in summer our sandals picked up lumps of tar which oozed between cracks.

The Caretaker's house adjoined the playground and had a lean-to at the back which was the School Nurse's Clinic. She was a thin, pale lady with ginger hair and cold hands and she bandaged grazed knees, lanced boils and doled out cough mixture. Once a week she visited the classrooms to comb through our hair for signs of nits and to look behind our ears for the tell-tale rash of measles. Any child with ringworm was referred to the local Cottage Hospital where the treatment was exposure to X-rays. It is horrifying to consider the dose of radiation that caused the victim's hair to fall out so that he or she had to wear a beret until it grew back. Needless to say, other children took every opportunity to remove the beret to humiliate the owner.

The teachers, all women, were strict but kind, and well dressed. I used to describe their clothes in detail to my mother. After registration each morning we were marched into the hall for Assembly and stood in rows facing the back until the staff and the Head Mistress had taken their places on the platform. We were then ordered about-face and had to show that we possessed a clean hanky,

either in a pocket, or pinned to shirt or blouse. Hymns and prayers over, we returned to the classroom for a Scripture lesson. No child was unruly in class, though there was a certain amount of bullying in the playground, especially towards the timid or those who supposedly "gave themselves airs", or were different from the norm, like the travellers' children who said "shoon" and "yorn" instead of "shoes" and "yours".

We sat at small tables and used pencil and paper for the first two years, then progressed to desks with lids, exercise books and dip-pens. We learned songs by heart and recited multiplication tables. I have since been grateful that the teachers persevered in dinning those tables into our heads. I thoroughly enjoyed painting which allowed us to indulge in free expression. Physical exercise was not neglected. We "drilled" in the playground and joined in organised games on the large field where Sports took place, always on a hot and sunny day and to which parents were invited. Once a year, also on a hot and sunny day, children were instructed to bring an old kitchen knife or fork so that they could take part in the onslaught on the plantains which rampaged over the field. This was great fun and piles of the offending weeds quickly mounted.

The school had its own gate into Coldfall Woods and we were taken there for Nature Study. We soon learned to recognise trees and their leaves and seeds and I remember the wafting, pungent odour from nearby pigs. Our group thinned out now and then as some of the class wandered off, but they were all accounted for when we lined up to return to the classroom. A few days before we broke up for Christmas we performed a Nativity Play in front of parents and the, to our great joy, on the last day of term, we had games and a tea party in the hall.

I couldn't wait to go up to Junior School, which was indeed up on the first floor; but that's another story!

THE WAY IT WAS

Following the article on the North Circular Road in issue number 24 of the *Newsletter* it is worth remembering the A406 as it used to be



This photograph was taken by a member of the Friern Barnet Photographic Society in the mid 1950s. We also have in our archives a short piece of 8mm cine film taken in the 1960s which shows the roundabout at the Colney Hatch Lane junction.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JEROME K JEROME

by Colin Barratt

In a previous issue of the Newsletter I related the story of how Frank Rodgers, a Founder Member of the Jerome K. Jerome Society, had been researching the life of the author over many years. Frank had interviewed JKJ's daughter Rowena and had been given the diary of Jerome's mother, which the author had used extensively in his autobiography.

Frank grew up in Yorkshire and also lived in Poplar, in east London before settling in Miami and now Guatemala. He visits the UK every few years to see his family, and in our e-mail correspondence he told me of his plans to come to London this April. I couldn't let the occasion pass without suggesting he visited our New Southgate Millennium Green and see not only the centrepiece sculpture commemorating JKJ, but also the nearby locations where JKJ and his family lived in the 1870s.

I contacted Andrew Irvine, Chairman of the Green, and we arranged with Frank to meet him on Tuesday 25 April. Frank and his wife Sarah were staying with his sister-in-law in Hatch End, so Mary and I collected them and brought them to the Green. Andrew met us and gave our visitors a guided tour of the various areas of the Green: the fruit tree orchard, the children's garden, the honeysuckle pergola, the open kickabout area, the border hedging, the wildflower meadow and, of course, the JKJ sculpture, depicted by the prow and mast of a boat. This sculpture was designed more as a symbolic representation rather than an accurate recreation of the wooden skiff used in the book, and it was also intended to be used by children for inventive play. One of their favourite games has been to stand on the prow and re-enact the famous scene from the film *Titanic*! Frank and Sarah were fascinated and impressed by the work done in creating the Green.



Frank and Sarah examine the garden

I showed Frank photos of the High Road as it was 100 years ago, and the footpath it has now been reduced to following the redevelopment in the 1970s. This widespread destruction of the central part of New Southgate also resulted in the demolition of the houses between Upper Park Road and Springfield Road, where JKJ and his family used to live. A large part of this area has been taken up by the rebuilt Garfield Junior School, but street directories and maps obtained from Enfield Borough Archives allowed me to locate exactly where JKJ's sister Paulina and her family of eight children lived in Upper Park Road, and where JKJ and his family lived in Springfield Road.

Andrew's mother had offered to host us all for lunch so, on the way there, I was able to show Frank and Sarah where the Jerome family homes used to be. Perhaps appropriately, the main entrance to Garfield School now lies over the location of JKJ's house, where he lived at the age of eleven! Fortunately, photos had been taken of houses in Springfield Road shortly before their demolition and they show the actual house he and his parents moved to in 1870, and the terrace of houses, then called St John's Villas, further down Springfield Road, that he and his mother probably relocated to in 1871, after his father died. I also had a picture postcard of Upper Park Road, showing where JKJ's sister lived.

Andrew and his mother live on the northern side of Springfield Road, which was untouched by the 1970s redevelopment scheme, and face the school playing field where once stood the terrace of St John's Villas. After a good lunch, we discussed JKJ and his early life in our area, and the meaning of the name Colney Hatch. As promised, Frank had brought with him the fragile and valuable diary which JKJ's mother had written over many years. It covered the period from 1861 to 1873, shortly before her death, but sadly a number of pages at the start of the diary were missing. JKJ's daughter Rowena had told Frank that she had never seen these pages, so the record of her grandmother probably kept during the period of the family's drop in fortunes is lost.

I presented a folder to Frank, which contained copies of the various records, maps and photos I had collected on JKJ's time in New Southgate. This included a large scale 1867 map, with the Jerome family homes marked, photos of the houses, entries in the 1871 Census for JKJ and his family in Springfield Road, plus the probable identities of the two sons of the local church minister, who JKJ mentions in his autobiography as being a bad influence on him as a boy! The 1901 Census showed Paulina's family in Upper Park Road, and I had also produced a family tree of the Clapp Jerome family, based partly on Frank's information and also on my own research.

On their return to Hatch End, Frank agreed that it had been an enjoyable and worthwhile visit to New Southgate, to see what was an important but often overlooked period in the author's life.

ROMAN WOODS

by John Heathfield

The last Ice Age lasted about 25,000 years and ended about ten thousand years ago. It left behind a sheet of clay about 250 feet thick and, along Whetstone High Road, a ridge of sand and gravel. After the ice cap had melted, vegetation

moved in climaxing in oak, ash, elm and chestnut woodland, blackberries, stinging nettles and coarse grass.

There is a small patch of such woodland in the bottom corner of the field next to the entrance from Friern Barnet Lane and immediately behind what is now the nursery shared by the church schools. This has hardly changed since Roman times. There are two large oak trees in the same field near the pathway – they are all that is left of the boundary between Great Chapel Field and Hither Beldams Field.

It might be worth keeping the patch of woodland as a nature reserve, and certainly worth getting the children to record the species of plants, animals and birds.

THE NEW CONSTITUTION

Following some comments and advice by some of our members, we made some amendments to our new Constitution as follows:

1. The words "hereinafter referred to as The Society" were added.
2. f) The wording was amended to read "To be non-political in pursuit of the above objects"
3. a) The wording was amended to read " Membership shall be open to any person or group interested in furthering the objects of the Society, save the Committee reserves the right to reject any application."
4. b) The word "five" has been deleted, so it now reads ".....consisting of the Officers and other members as elected by the Committee."
4. d) A new section has been added "On joining the Committee members shall agree to abide by the Standing Orders." Former subsections d), e) and f) are now renumbered e), f) and g)
5. d) The words "Except as provided in Section 8c below" have been added before "all resolutions and elections....."

The new Constitution was unanimously approved at the Annual General Meeting on 24 May, as was the Income and Expenditure Account for the year Apr 2005 – March 2006. A copy of both these items is included with this Newsletter for those of you who were unable to attend the AGM.

HAPPY HOLIDAY

As you know, we will not be having any public meetings in July and August so we take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and sunny summer, with perhaps some much-needed rain, but only at night.

We look forward to seeing you at the Friern Barnet Summer Show on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 August in Friary Park, and again on Wednesday 27 September when Brian Charles will be talking to us about Michael Gerson, the overseas removal business in Whetstone.

**Friern Barnet & District
Local History Society**

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