

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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FRIERN BARNET UDC – REST IN PEACE

by Karl Ruge

The idea of a local authority the size of the Borough of Barnet would have been unthinkable and impracticable less than half a century ago. Similarly, the notion of a local urban district within Barnet's boundaries, roughly one-tenth its size, would appear absurd to many now in their 50s or even 60s. But until 1965 five quite distinct local authorities functioned, two of them (Finchley and Hendon) as Boroughs, and three smaller ones as Urban Districts (Chipping Barnet, East Barnet and Friern Barnet). And when, in 1964, the name of the new super-sized body was to be determined, the two big boroughs agreed on an artificial concoction, FINBARDON, but fortunately we ended up with the established title of Barnet only because the three smaller units had equal voices to the two boroughs on the deciding committee.

The Friern Barnet Urban District Council was run over an area of about 32,000 residents and was divided into five wards: North, East, West, South and Central. Each ward was represented by three members, one of whom became due for reselection annually. This system ensured that political changes of the Council were gradual and that Councillors were regularly in touch with the electorate. Such gimmicks as drawing on the reserves every fourth year to artificially keep down the Council tax (then known as Rates) in an election year could not be used even if someone had dreamed them up.



The new town hall takes shape behind The Priory in 1940

Our Town Hall, converted into flats in 2006, stood at the main road junction within the district and housed all the Council departments, two committee rooms that could be opened up to form one long area, with the Council Chamber which was an imposing appendix, protruding from the rear of the curved main structure. The basement contained filing space, the boiler and, most interestingly, a well-planned air-raid shelter which was air-tight in case of poison gas attacks and was adorned with murals executed by ARP volunteers during the war years. The imaginative and handsome structure was erected during the early period of the 1939-45 war. Since 1906 the Council had met in a smaller building, *The Priory*, which stood nearer to the road junction in what was to become the forecourt and car parking area when the new town hall was built.

The curve of the main building, the elegant cupola in the centre of the roof together with its clock, the decrease in the size of the roof tiles towards the ridge to accentuate the measurements of the roof itself, the heavy bronze portals and engraved glass panels of the inner doors as well as the two sweeping flights of the main stairs all helped to make this astounding edifice a landmark. And whereas neighbouring authorities were mostly less fortunate (though Finchley was rightly proud of Avenue House and the delightful parkland surrounding it), this was an architect-designed, purpose-built town hall of great distinction.

In pre-war years, Friern Barnet Council elections were frequently graced by "independent candidates", but after several converted to one of the existing two parties promptly after the election, this practice began to die out and had almost disappeared by the time I moved into the district in 1953. On the other hand, the kind of political decision-making and pressure on minority groups now common were completely unheard of. In many areas of Council work, such as finance and town planning it was general practice that members voted according to their convictions and personal views, right across party lines.

Of the five wards, North, East and West wards normally elected Tories, the South ward was always represented by Labour and Central ward was usually Labour but changed hands occasionally. In about 1957 the Liberals scored a solitary success in West ward by electing Kenneth Norman, who fought a lonely battle for three years and then lost his seat for another year until the Liberals gained strength and, starting in Finchley, gained enough seats to become one of the major parties at the time of the demise of the truly local authorities.

As Chairman of the Finance Committee, with Mr Pitts as Treasurer, and also when chairing town planning which was in the very capable hands of Mr Start, whose widow is, I believe, still living in the Borough, I got a good feel of the work and closeness to the residents of the urban district administration. All of us served, of course, without any remuneration and, as far as I can remember, we did not receive any reimbursement of expenses, even those directly incurred as part of our work on the local authority.

Some of the names I recall were Margaret Richards, a most likeable and upright Labour member for the Central ward, the Pugh couple who represented South ward for ages, George Flesher and Bill Esom (whom I removed from the Council the year that he was its Chairman) who were both East ward members, and Plasquet-Marshall, the last Chairman of the authority who presided over a highly successful twinning ceremony with Chaville, with its mayor and some councillors

coming to Friern Barnet. He also introduced me to some of the particularities of the DS model Citroën. Murray Shaw was one of the more flamboyant Liberals and a neighbour in The Ridgeway. A few, like Ena Constable, managed the transition to the large Barnet borough.

There were many advantages that a small-size authority offered, apart from the close touch which its members managed to maintain with the residents. We found it worthwhile and easy to really consult the electorate by, for example, inviting everybody living in the district to a regular annual budget meeting at which the Treasurer submitted the draft proposals, which were then discussed at length; any misgivings or suggestions for change were embodied, whenever possible, in the final budget. And, as local representatives we knew not only every road and close, but also the majority of people who lived there, whereas it seems that nowadays Councillors make planning decisions without, at times, the vaguest idea of where the proposed changes are going to take place

In 1965, when Barnet was created, one of the new wards was called Friern Barnet and it covered most of what had been North and East wards, plus a bit of Central ward. It started in the north with Cherry Hill and County Gate and, to the west of the High Road, included such enclaves as Wallfield Avenue and part of Totteridge Lane. The southern side of Northumberland Road and Netherlands Road formed the northeast boundary and Friern Barnet Road, from the town hall to the railway bridge was the southern frontier, with Friern Barnet Lane being the main stretch of the western flank, though St James' Church and the few houses on the even side of the Lane which adjoin the golf course were also part of the ward. Strangely, it seemed that the name Friern Barnet rankled with members of the Barnet authority so, when a re-drawing of ward boundaries became necessary, it was taken as a useful excuse for dropping this historical name, which went back almost 1000 years, and Friern Barnet has now completely vanished from the political map.

With the type of grumpy yearning of a superannuated Oldie (even though I do not subscribe to the notion that things in the "olden days" were *eo ipso* better) I sympathise with those who consider the structure of unwieldy, expensive and even undemocratic superboroughs as outdated, especially since the introduction of a London-wide administration which would function much better and serve residents more naturally if it were subdivided into manageable smaller units, based on community cohesion and allowing genuine resident participation in the decision-making process.

FRIERN BARNET ON THE BOX

by David Berguer

On Friday 16 June I was sitting quietly at home when I received a telephone call from a lady named Sam Wagstaff from a company called Angel TV. She explained that she was involved in producing a series of programmes for The History Channel entitled *Hidden House History* which involved talking to the owners of various properties and then finding out information about the background history of their home. One of the properties was an apartment in Princess Park Manor, the former Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum, latterly Friern Hospital. Sam asked me if I could supply any information on the Asylum and I sent her a copy of our *Friern Hospital: A Brief History* publication.

On the following Monday I received a call thanking me for the history and asking me if I would like to take part in the programme. With thoughts of increased publicity for the Society (and a possible TV series of my own!) I readily accepted and on the afternoon of Wednesday 21 June I met the production team at the site. I had expected a large group of people but in fact there were only four of them: a cameraman, a sound man, the producer and the presenter, Nick Barratt.



Two chairs were placed in the ornamental garden in front of the eastern wing and Nick and I started chatting about the history of the Asylum and the treatment of mental illness in Victorian times. We talked for nearly an hour, with pauses now and then to allow aeroplanes and ice cream vans with their noisy chimes to pass by and, at the end of it, it suddenly dawned on me that there had been no script at all; my comments would be subsequently edited and only the more comprehensible bits would be used. It probably won't amount to more than a few seconds but I have to say I enjoyed the whole thing immensely.

The ten programmes will be broadcast from the middle of September and the Asylum one is due on Tuesday 17 October at 8.00pm. Angel TV have promised to send me a DVD of the programme which will go into our archives. For those of you who wish to see a fine example of British television and who do not have Sky, I urge to subscribe now!

MEMORIES OF A NEW SOUTHGATE MAN

Our member in Bedfordshire, Shirley Gardiner, sent us the following article which was written by her cousin Harry Gould who is 91 and now lives in Cambridgeshire.

"I was born in Palmers Road, New Southgate in the First World War. Our house was a terraced house at the end of the row opposite Lower Park Road. My father came home from the war in 1919 and saw me for the first time when I was four!

At that time, from our house to Bowes Park Road opposite the station down to where Telford Road meets Bowes Road across to Bounds Green Road was a vast allotment site and we had one right next to our house. It was a must for the poor people to eke out their living – at least they were assured of fresh vegetables.

I think the first change came to New Southgate when they built Telford Road linking Bounds Green Road with Bowes Road. Looking towards Bowes Road to the right a builder called Stacey started building a small estate; there were lots of stories going round that he scoured the country for cheap materials in order to be able to sell his houses at the cheap price of £400! One story was that he bought a load of roof tiles from a sunken barge. All the bricks, cement etc. were delivered to New Southgate railway sidings and from there they were taken to the building site by horse-drawn carts. One of the carts, which was a large two-wheeled one pulled by a big horse, was called a Tumbrel cart. The bricks were loaded and then taken to the site where the driver pulled out a big bolt and the load just tipped up. Us boys used to help the carters load in the school holidays and that earned us our picture money to see Charlie Chaplin! All so different today – the bricks come in packets and are unloaded by a small crane on the lorry.

Around 1928 a factory was built at the back of our houses, from the High Road to the back of our yard. This was a single storey building for the London Hosiery firm, later to become Hobarts. This factory blocked our view (we could look across Bounds Green Road) and we were upset about that.

The Gould family were well known in New Southgate as were the Woodings in Friern Barnet. My father earned his living selling fruit, veg and fish from a horse and cart and he traded around Brunswick Park and East Barnet. My eldest brother worked for my father and he did the same, but he went straight to East Barnet and High Barnet. We had two horses and they were stabled behind our house in what were some old Victorian cottages: nobody remembered anyone living in them, not even my father. We had chickens, ducks, rabbits, dogs and cats at the bottom of the garden. Next door had a pigeon loft and some people in the adjoining houses kept pigs in their back gardens. They used to bring pigs along the back of their gardens up our yard, with a nod from my father, and along Palmers Road, through Springfield Road to the slaughter house behind *The Star* pub. Sometimes I could be seen riding our horses to be shod by the blacksmith in The Avenue; truly a rural scene in the heart of New Southgate.

At the bottom of Palmers Road, next to *The Lawrence* pub, my father's brother William had a small fruit and veg shop and he also did a local round with a horse and cart. He died very young and his two sons took over. In a short time they bought a van and soon secured a contract with the local gas works to deliver coke and they did very good business, while their mother continued to run the shop. In another shop in the same row was another brother called "Midget" due to his size. He was a "totter", buy and sell anything. He was the Totter Supreme, he would make Del Boy and Arthur Daley look like choir boys. He had a donkey and cart and he was the best known of the Goulds. His one failing was, he couldn't pass a pub, but then a lot of business was done in the pubs. He was a real character, as were a lot more of that era. Ask anybody who was around

between the wars, and after, about Midget and it would raise a smile on their faces.

Around the twenties and thirties there was a farm at the end of the old Standard Bottle works. It was called Bailey's Farm and a happy scrumping ground for us boys. There are not many people know about that farm. And where Arnos Grove station is were the Walkers woods, part of the Arnos estate. In those days Bowes Road was just a lane and on a Sunday they held Church meetings from a mobile pulpit in the lane. Another memory I recall (just about) were the horse-drawn Brakes bringing the men home from the Derby races. They finished the trip outside the old *Beehive* pub and they used to throw their coppers on the road where we would scramble to get them. So, as a boy you could say I lived in a lovely old village."

RUFFINS

by John Heathfield

Ruffins Brook rises in a patch of damp ground in the west end of the North Middlesex Golf Course. Since the end of the last Ice Age it has cut out a valley through which it runs in Friary Park into a culvert under Friern Barnet Lane, through Bethune Park and under the railway into Pymmes Brook. The earliest record I have is in the St Paul's Cathedral manuscripts. It reads:

"29 Sep Hen VIII (1538). There are two bridges in Wolstrete, one called Ruffins bridge, the other called Stonebridge or Standbridge, both are in ruinous state."

Presumably Wolstrete is what is now Colney Hatch Lane and Friern Barnet Lane. Ruffins Bridge must have been at the dip near Hemington Avenue and Stonebridge must therefore have been over Strawberry Brook, near what is now Tesco. Does the name imply that it was made of stone? Such bridges were very expensive to make, particularly as there is no local stone, although there were, however, brickworks nearby. Was it made of stone (or brick) because the ground was too muddy to support a wooden bridge, or was it made of stone because the ground was too muddy to support the passage of carts and particularly cattle on the way to market? Norden said in 1386 that the King's Highway was re-routed across Finchley Common partly on account of the "dirtynesse and deepnesse" of the mud at Colney Hatch. Ruffins Bridge is more likely to have been a wooden footbridge because the stream at that point was not very deep and cattle and horses could use it as a ford.

Ruffins Mede was about where Bethune Park now stands but the original ground level has been distorted by controlled tipping during the construction of the park. The survey of quit rents for 1649 includes:

"Sold to Sir Henreye Proby. A meadow called Ruffins Meade of just over 16 acres. Also a messuage and pasture south of Ruffins Meade of about 20 acres. All of the above leased to William Clarke – farmer on 19 March 1564."

Could the messuage have been a farmhouse? If so, could it have been used by a Mr Ruffin – hence Ruffins? There was a farmhouse near the former town hall with lands extending as far as Oakleigh Road, could this have been Ruffins Farm? Frenchman's Farm near St James's Parish Church is later.

In 1787 James Ellis made a survey for John Bacon, which includes:

"Friern Lodge Farm – owner J Bacon occupier Susannah Tay

*Hither Ruffins Mead – 8 acres
Further Ruffins Mead – 8 acres”*

This implies that the field had been split or fenced for ease of managing stock.

Attfield's Survey of 1815 is similar and the Tithe award of 1841 has:

“224 Part of Ruffins Mead 2 acres. Owned and occupied by George Cuthbert.

283 Part of further Ruffins Mead 3 acres

284 Part of further Ruffins Mead 3 acres

Both owned by Lady M Johnson & occupied by William Reeve.”

FRIERN BARNET SUMMER SHOW

Despite a few showers on the Saturday, we had good attendance at our stall at the Summer Show and we ended up with a profit of £308 which will go towards running the Society for the next year. Thank you to everyone who donated items, and to those of you who came along for a chat. A huge thank you to our helpers on the stall: John Donovan, Dorrell Dressekie, Mel Hooper, Colin and Janet Liversidge, Patricia Richardson and Mary Taylor; we had a great time, even though we were dog tired at the end of it all. We shall now slowly start collecting items for next year's show.....



The stall was packed with goodies for discerning shoppers

OF PIGS, PUDDINGS AND PUBLICITY

by Percy Reboul

As Barnet Council basks in the warm glow of its modest achievements in collecting and recycling selected items of our rubbish, we can perhaps reflect on our much greater achievement in World War II, when our very existence depended on salvaging and collecting just about everything capable of being re-used in the war effort. At a national level, campaigns were promoted through powerful appeals in newspaper advertisements and posters written and designed by some of the nation's top talent. At a local level, organisations such as the

Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) often organised their own appeals and some of these were highly effective. This story is about one of those campaigns. The wartime Friern Barnet WVS, like the rest of that splendid organisation, was involved in many activities to support the war effort. One of these was the collection of household food scraps that could be turned into cakes of pig food called Tottenham pudding. In pre-war Britain, 60% of our food was imported – mainly from Commonwealth countries – and it was obvious that enemy submarines would threaten and destroy many of the ships carrying such cargoes. Plans were therefore put in hand to grow more of our own food (another story) and increase the number of locally reared livestock such as pigs and poultry. Feeding them, however, would be a problem. In 1940-41 it was estimated that about 10 tons of waste food was produced every month in Friern Barnet. Given the right appeals it was felt that this could be raised to 23 tons and to do this, 80 roads in our area were supplied with 100 metal dustbins located in the road itself. More importantly, appeals would be made to local residents to save every scrap of food and put it in the bins which would be collected *every day* by the WVS.

Olive Dyke, at that time a leading figure in Friern Barnet's WVS, placed on record details of Friern Barnet's plan to save kitchen waste, a small part of the country's war effort but an interesting example of our total commitment to victory. She listed for posterity the names of all the roads involved in the scheme, but of special interest was the message that was composed for transmission via a loudspeaker mounted on a car which toured the streets of the area. It reveals much of the spirit and attitude of those times: *"Hello! Hello! This is Friern Barnet WVS calling. During the next fortnight we are having a kitchen waste drive. Every scrap of kitchen waste is needed: potato peelings, bread crusts, waste vegetable leaves and all kitchen waste scraps. Now this does not mean mouldy bread, tea leaves, coffee grounds or any other waste that has come into contact with soap, soda or other irritants. So keep it clean. And here is another very important matter. Take it to the bins provided for the purpose. Let me repeat: **keep all kitchen waste free from unsuitable material** and take every scrap along to the bin. These bins are provided by the Council and they are emptied every day by WVS collectors. Every day mind you. So will you please see that they are filled up to capacity. This kitchen waste – your kitchen waste – goes to the feeding of pigs and it is vitally important that the tonnage of kitchen waste is maintained. If it is not, that means importing it into the country which means ships and sailors' lives.... So please take your kitchen waste to the bins and make your contribution to raise the collection to 25 tons. Don't on any account burn it or put it on the compost heap. Just one last request, ask your neighbour to do the same. It's the little lots that make all the difference."*

Whether they achieved their target is not known to me, although it can be recorded that by 1945 Britain was growing two-thirds of its food requirements. Let's also reflect on the question: what has happened to our world since those evil wartime years? We are apparently living in what is gently called 'a disposable society'. Recently it was revealed that hundreds of tons of supermarket out-of-date foodstuffs (however that is defined) are regularly buried in landfill sites and in a world teeming with fridges and deep freezers there is concern (in some cases bordering on paranoia) about minor 'infringements' of sell-by dates!

Footnote by David Berguer: I recall that the pig-food scheme continued some time after the end of the war. I was living in Wood Green in those days and I can recall that our pig food bins were pale green in colour, were square in shape and had very heavy lids. Despite this, we kids discovered that a penny banger put on the ground and covered with a pig-food bin lid would result in an extremely loud bang and the lid would soar some six feet into the air, returning to earth (or, rather, the pavement) with a satisfyingly loud clang. I am sorry to admit that this was my sole contribution to the pig-food recycling scheme, but I was only six at the time.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

by David Berguer

Two newspaper reports from the past give a small glimpse of life in the area in the first quarter of the 20th century:

OUTRAGE AT NORTH FINCHLEY. Mr T. H Lea. Butcher, of High-street, North Finchley, has twice within the last fortnight been the victim of a dastardly outrage on one of his horses. A fortnight ago the animal was in a field at Whetstone when it was found to be injured, apparently by having a brick thrown at it. This weekend the animal was again in the field and was discovered to have a nasty gash on the left shoulder. This had doubtless been caused by a sharp stone or blunt instrument. The police have the matter in hand, and it is believed that someone has a spite against Mr. Lea and has taken this dastardly way of revenge.
(*Hendon & Finchley Times 26 July 1912*)

PONY & TRAP CAME TO GRIEF. Leonard William Felstead, 36, carman and contractor, of Liverpool Road, Islington was charged at Highgate Petty Sessions on Monday, with being drunk whilst having charge of a horse and trap, in Friern Barnet-road, on Sunday afternoon. P.s. Mundy said that the prisoner was driving a cob, attached to a trap, at a fast pace in Friern Barnet-road, on Sunday afternoon. The cob kicked out, and turned towards the left kerb. Prisoner jerked the near side rein, and pulled the cob on to the pavement, with the result that two women had to jump into the roadway, the cob fell down, the shafts of the trap were broken, and prisoner and a friend were thrown from the trap on to the pavement. Prisoner attempted to unharness the cob, but he fell on it. Witness, noticing his condition, told him that he was not fit to look after a horse, and that he should be taken into custody for being drunk. He then said, "You say I'm drunk; all right." At the police station, when told he was to be examined by the divisional surgeon, prisoner said, "I don't want to see a doctor; you say I'm drunk; get on with it." P.s. Burt gave evidence, and said that Dr North certified that the man was "recovering from the effects of drunkenness." Prisoner, who said he had had three half-pints of beer, was fined 40s.
(*Finchley Press 25 Aug 1923*)

The crimes may have been minor ones but the reports remind us that there were once fields at Whetstone and that horses and carts used the streets of Friern Barnet.

MODERN TELEPHONES AT LAST

by David Berguer

Back in the bad old days, if you were lucky enough to have a telephone at home and you needed to make a long distance call you would have had to do this via the operator. Then, starting in December 1958, STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling) was gradually introduced throughout the UK whereby *trunk calls* (between different exchanges) as well as *toll calls* (within the same exchange) could all be made by the telephone subscribers themselves. The STD system was eventually completed in 1979.

The 18 May 1962 issue of *Finchley Press* contained an article on the coming of STD to two local telephone exchanges, Tudor and Highgate Wood. The first STD call was made by Margaret Thatcher, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Pensions and MP for Finchley and Friern Barnet. Mrs Thatcher dialled OMM 43000 and, after a pause, was connected to her father, Mr Roberts in Melton Mowbray. "Hello Pop" she said and commented that she was pleased to be able to join the inauguration system and said that Melton Mowbray had had STD for year already. "You make us sound like your country cousins" she said. Lady Gammans, MP for Hornsey, also spoke to Mr Roberts and told him that she had a special interest in the moment because her late husband, who was Assistant Postmaster General, had taken a great interest in the STD scheme. In those days, of course, the Post Office was responsible for telephones and telecommunications (remember their dark green vans?)

It is interesting to note that the modern trend for giving acronyms to everything (or thinking up acronyms then dreaming up words to fit them) was alive and well back in 1962. The equipment that handled STD calls was called GRACE (Group Routing and Charging Equipment) or, as the Mayor of Finchley Cr. F D Gibson suggested, it could also stand for Good Relations and Commendable Efficiency. The Director of the London Telecommunications Region said that £100 million a year was being spent on the introduction of STD and that it would dispense with many telephonists; if there were no automatic exchanges they would require one third to half a million telephonists. Nobody at that inauguration ceremony could have foreseen that the UK Directory Enquiry service would one day be privatised and that calls would be handled by operators living in India!

POSTAGE

From August 21 the Royal Mail introduced new postal charges based on size of envelope rather than just weight. This means that unfolded A4 items will be charged at 37p, whereas if they are folded once to A5 the price will be only 23p. This would obviously affect the cost of mailing out the *Newsletter* to those of you who are not able to pick one up at our meetings or who do not live in the immediate area where we are able to distribute by hand, so starting with this issue we will in future be sending out the *Newsletter* folded. If you have any strong objections, please let us know.

**Friern Barnet & District
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