

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

Published by Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

Issue Number 31

September 2007

EDUCATION: ST JOHN'S SCHOOL

by John Philpott

St John's School was opened in 1888, when St John's church was itself still a temporary building, on the opposite side of Friern Barnet Road from its present site. The first school building was at the bottom of Stanhope Road and it was only an Infants School, for both boys and girls; two years later a Girls' School was added.

The first entry in the Infants' School Log Book is on 1 February 1888: "*I, Florence Emily Ward, was engaged as Head Mistress to this school and commenced work in the new building with the help of Mrs Baker. In the morning there were 34 children present.*" There were four classes, the headmistress teaching standard 1 and the upper class of infants, Mrs Baker the two lower classes. Numbers quickly increased; before the end of the year the average attendance was over 90. The Girls' School was opened on 14 October 1890, with Emily Beauchamp as headmistress, assisted by a pupil teacher, and an initial intake of 16 girls, numbers that soon increased to the sixties. Children as young as 3 were



St John's School in the 1950s

Photo: Friern Barnet Photographic Society

admitted to the Infants' School and at 7 or 8 they would go on to the Girls' School (boys to St James School). Most would leave school at 13 or 14. From 1891 fees were abolished, except for children from outside the parish, who paid 3d per week.

Lessons for the infants included arithmetic (addition and subtraction), reading, writing and dictation. One dictation passage is recorded: *"Put the cups and saucers on the table cloth"*. Of the 21 children tested, 13 did "very well". There was singing and musical drill, sometimes "with bells". There were treats on Friday afternoons: a lesson *"to make tea, each child having a cup full with a small slice of bun. The children were taught to wash and wipe up."* On another Friday, all the children with full attendance for the week *"were entertained by seeing four little tame mice perform tricks."*

Arithmetic in the Girls' School included long multiplication and money sums. Passages from Shakespeare and poems were learned for recitation. There was a geography syllabus, specifying for the older girls: *"Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the United States with special reference to the interchange of production of these countries and England."* Needlework was ambitious: *"simple frocks, blouses....knitted and crocheted caps."* An extensive and varied list of "object lessons" was to be covered, among them building of a house, tea, soap, the Battle of Hastings, the City of Paris.

There were annual visits from Her Majesty's Inspectors. Reports from the early years are not glowing, for example 1892: *"Elementary work is on the whole creditable....the intelligence displayed in answers in English is not great and in Geography the answering was rather confined to a few."* However, the Diocesan Inspectors on their annual visits were complimentary: *"excellent in every division....bright and attentive answering."*

Poor attendance was a major problem, sometimes blamed on severe weather, but often caused by epidemics of infectious diseases – mumps, whooping cough, chicken pox, ringworm and, most frequently, measles. Being away on holiday with parents is often given as a reason and, on one occasion, a circus reduced attendance to 13. Children arriving after the register had been taken were sent home again, but this was tempered with mercy when two from the babies' class, who had come some distance, were allowed to stay.

The Rector and curates paid frequent visits. They taught Holy Scripture and also concerned themselves with more mundane matters: *"Mr Voigt brought in a clock and bell and ordered fireguards for the stoves."* The Rector was given lists of needful materials and checked registers, usually *"perfectly correct"*, but once an error of one, *"almost certainly an accident."* He also had the power to grant half and whole holidays and presented medals and prizes. Perhaps less welcome: *"The Rev F Hall...brought from Form IX and other Government papers with him, leaving them to be filled up."* Mrs Hall also visited and sometimes played the piano for musical drill.

With the new century came two events of significance in the history of the school. In 1902, Frederick Hall, its founder and tireless supporter, died. Compared to his death, the Education Act of that year would have made little impact in Friern Barnet, but it was to lead (albeit two decades and another Act later) to a major

change, when, with the end of elementary schools, St John's became a primary school, as it is today, sending its pupils on to secondary schools at 11+, rather than out to work at 13 or 14.

EDUCATION: SOME SUMS

by John Heathfield

In view of the controversy surrounding standards in today's education, readers might like to try two questions from the exam for would-be teachers set in the 1880's:

Arithmetic

1. Find by practice, the value of a 1 pipe 47 gallons 1 quart of wine at £25 17s 6d per hogshead
2. What fraction of a mile is $\frac{2}{7}$ ths of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile plus $\frac{5}{6}$ ths of $2\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs plus $\frac{2}{7}$ ths of 4 furlongs plus $18\frac{3}{4}$ poles?

The test for English Grammar Standard III (aged 11) in the late 1880's included:
Question: parse "*The rich trees of the grove wept odorous gums and balm*"

Answer: "*The*" = definite article, limiting "*trees*"
"*rich*" = adjective, defining "*trees*"
"*trees*" = common noun, third person plural number, neutral gender, nominative case, relating to "*wept*"
"*of*" = preposition, governing "*grove*"
"*the*" = definite article, limiting "*grove*"
"*grove*" = common noun, third person singular number, objective case, governed by "*of*"
"*wept*" = verb, irregular, transitive, past tense, indicative mood, agreeing with its nominative "*trees*" in number and person
"*odorous*" = adjective, qualifying "*gums*" and "*balm*"
"*gums*" = common noun, third person
"*and*" = conjunction, joining "*gums*" and "*balm*"
"*balm*" = common noun, third person, singular number, accusative case, governed by "*wept*"

TRAFFIC PROBLEMS

by David Berguer

Nowadays, as anyone who lives in London knows only too well, the volume of traffic is a major problem, with continual delays, particularly on main roads like the stretch of the North Circular Road between New Southgate and Palmers Green.

One of the effects of traffic jams is so called "rat running", a somewhat derogatory term applied to anyone who does not wish to spend hours stuck in traffic inhaling other people's exhaust fumes. It may surprise you to know that rat running was causing problems as far back as 1965 as a report by the Beaconsfield Road Amenities Association reveals.

The high level of traffic on this road was the subject of an appeal to the Ministry of Transport to conduct a survey, which they duly did in July 1964. They concluded that "*the use of a road to vehicles which it can adequately accommodate should not be denied.*" They conveyed this finding to the newly

created London Borough of Barnet and to the local MP, Margaret Thatcher, who had shown active and sympathetic support to the residents. In the early 1960's there had been "No Through Road" notices displayed at both ends of Beaconsfield Road, together with a further one stating "This road has not been dedicated as a public highway". At one time there had also been a series of posts across the north end of the road making it impossible for through traffic to enter the road. All these precautions had been removed, to be replaced by a "No Parking" sign at the south end of Beaconsfield Road with a yellow line restrictive area.

The Amenities Association conducted their own traffic survey in April 1965 and they found that between 7am and 7pm some 2368 vehicles had passed down the road, with 262 of them being heavy vehicles. The peak times were between 8am and 9am and 5pm and 6pm when they were anything between four and five vehicles per minute using the road, but the peak time for heavy vehicles was 10am to 11am when they accounted for about 29% of all traffic. Most of these vehicles were coming from Oakleigh Road North, down Beaconsfield Road and then turning left along Friern Barnet Road, presumably then continuing down Station Road to the North Circular.

The pressure from the Amenities Association must have eventually paid off, because choke points narrowing the carriageway to 6 foot 6 inches wide in each direction were installed in Beaconsfield Road near the junction with The Crescent. These remain in place today so articulated lorries can no longer thunder through a quiet street in Friern Barnet.



GAUMONT

by David Berguer

Very many thanks to all of you who sent us your memories of the Gaumont, North Finchley. These have been incorporated in our latest publication, *Gaumont*

North Finchley: A Brief History, an 18 page publication with 16 pictures which not only tells the story of the Gaumont itself, but also gives a history of other cinemas in the area and a brief look at the history of the UK cinema. This is available at £1.50 from the bookstall at our monthly meetings, or by post at £2.16 (£1.50 plus 66p UK post & packing) from FB&DLHS, 19a Palace Gates Road, Alexandra Park, London N22 7BW.

WHAT WE DID FOR THE WAR EFFORT

by Joan Morrell (née Legg)

Going across some old papers the other day, I came across this letter and it brought back memories of all the odd jobs we coped with to help the war effort, as every little helped.

NATIONAL SAVINGS MOVEMENT.
Friern Barnet Savings Committee.

Chairman
Councillor J. FOLEY.

Hon. Secretary:
§(Mrs.) E. L. SCILLITOE

Telephone: ENT. 3006.

TOWN HALL,
FRIERN BARNET,

N.11.

11.10. 5.

194.....

Mrs. J.B. Morrell,
78, Pollard Road,
N.20.

Dear Mrs. Morrell,

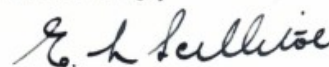
I received the £3 credit stock for which many thanks.

May I, on behalf of my Committee and myself, thank you for the splendid work you have done for the National Savings Movement.

The very good results you have achieved must have taken a great deal of your time, and I thought you would like to know how much this has been appreciated.

With many thanks.

Yours sincerely,



Hon. Secretary.

Mrs Morrell's £3 doesn't sound a lot, but it is equivalent to £91 today!

One I did was once a week to visit neighbours in Myddelton Park, Queens Avenue and Pollard Road who were interested in saving for the war effort. This was normally on a Friday evening, as that was pay day for everyone. I collected shillings from these folk and, in return, gave them stamps of that value which they stuck on official Post Office cards and eventually collected up to 15 shillings, which seemed a lot of money in those days. They then went to the Post Office, feeling proud, and changed them into a 15 shilling National Savings Certificate which earned them interest. It is amazing to remember what a shilling was worth in those days. This scheme was very popular and it was good to meet up regularly with these people and have a chat whilst doing ones bit for the country.

The powers-that-be provided all the collectors with a £3 float with which to purchase new stamps for sale which, of course, had to be returned eventually. On looking back it really is amazing how values and the idea and loyalty to ones country have now deteriorated.

FAIRTRADE

Our member Rita Marcangelo suggested that, in future, we should support third world farmers by making sure that the tea and coffee that we serve at our monthly meetings should be Fairtrade. We tried out Fairtrade tea and coffee at a recent committee meeting and we all agreed that it was delicious so, from our meeting on 28 September, we will be switching to Fairtrade.

Rita also suggested that we use recycled paper for our Newsletters. We have investigated the possibility of doing this but, unfortunately, the cheaper recycled papers are not up to the same quality as our usual stock and good quality recycled paper is about 8% more expensive than our usual paper. We have always strived to produce a quality Newsletter and we do not want to sacrifice this, particularly as we have also been able to hold our subscription rates unchanged since April 2005. Nevertheless, we shall continue looking for quality recycled paper at a reasonable price and if we find it we will be happy to use it.

SUMMER SHOW

The skies over Friern Barnet were grey for both days of the Summer Show but it only rained in the early morning and late afternoon. This year we had been given so many second hand items that we decided to take two gazebos side by side which gave us more room to display the goods and also gave us more room to move around. Unfortunately a high wind on the Saturday meant that we had to hold on tight to them to prevent them flying away! We feared that the weather might keep everybody away but they turned up anyway and when the money was finally counted we had taken £414, our highest ever total, which will go into the Society's funds. A big thank you to all the Committee who manned the stall, and to those of you who stopped by to have a chat with us. See you at next year's Show!

WEBSITE

We have now had a chance to evaluate our website which was launched in November 2006. We have made several changes, including the adoption of a new typeface which makes the text easier to read and more modern in appearance. We have also included photographs for the first time and we have introduced a new section, "Our Archives", in which we list some of the books in our library. This has been introduced particularly with our good friend John Heathfield in mind. John has always maintained that knowledge is for sharing

and it would be to everyone's benefit if archives were generally available, not tucked away and only seen by the owners. We hope to expand this section in future so that other local history societies may be able to avail themselves of our collections.

We would welcome any comments or criticisms that you may have concerning the website, so log on now and tell us what you think.

A QUIET ROAD IN FRIERN BARNET

by Sylvia Stilts

"*A quiet road in Friern Barnet*" was how my parents described number 18 Sutton Road when they were asked where they lived. Their house was in a slight dip, opposite some bungalows. My parents moved in as the bungalows were being completed in 1924 (before I was born!). The legend goes that my mother noticed that electricity was being laid on so she went across and asked for the supply to be extended to our house. This was agreed and presumably the paper work completed, without delay. My father used to recount how my mother called the workmen back to take up the floorboards again in order to retrieve the broom they had left there.

Before World War II it was certainly a quiet road from six o'clock in the evening until six in the morning. I remember that only four cars were parked outside the houses in the road. Today, of course, dozens of cars are parked down both sides.

For most of the year it was still dark when the first milkman arrived. Carrying half-pint, pint and quart bottles of milk in a wire basket, he went down our side entrance to deposit some on the kitchen window sill, while his horse dragged the front wheels of the cart up the kerb so that he could nibble at our hedge. Two other dairies served our road and often vied for custom by presenting housewives with a sample of cream or butter. The milkman returned in the afternoon with ordered dairy produce and he presented the weekly bill on Friday evenings, when he would call at the front door.

The paper boy announced his delivery with a rattle of the letter box, followed by the postman who rang twice if a letter had to be signed for. Letters were also delivered about 4.30 in the afternoon, and I recall letters posted by my grandmother in Stamford Hill being delivered the same day. The postman wore a smart blue uniform with a square, peaked cap and he always closed the gate when he left. Both he and the paper boy knocked for a Christmas box, as did the dustmen. Once a week the dustman strode through our side entrance to collect the bin for emptying, tossing aside the bin lid if Dad had not remembered to remove it. No wheelie-bins at the front gate then!

The baker drove his van down the street two or three times a week, stopping outside customers' houses and taking a large basket of bread and buns to their door. Twice-weekly visits were also made by a fishmonger, grocer and greengrocer, but they parked halfway down the road and customers soon gathered round. Other occasional deliveries were made by the paraffin-man and the coalman whose cart was drawn by two black Shire horses with tufted forelocks, ribbon-braided manes and jangling, polished brasses.

Carter Patterson aroused our interest (or nosiness) in neighbours' purchases as the driver unloaded large parcels, bulging sacks, lawn mowers, fruit trees etc. Every August he collected our trunk of neatly packed holiday gear and returned it full of sandy washing several days after we arrived home from the seaside.

Regular horse-and-cart traders appeared in the road, such as the firewood seller, the rag-and-bone man and the Italian who sold ice cream from a tub surrounded by ice. My mother didn't buy any because she said he kept it under his bed! His trade was short-lived when the "Stop me and Buy One" tricycles arrived. Far more hygienic, and doubtless didn't contain any fluff! Several times a year the knife-grinder set up opposite our gate and my brother and I used to stand and watch with fascination as householders brought knives, scissors and shears to be sharpened.

There were callers at the houses too. A turbaned Indian with rolled-up rugs, a gypsy with a baby tucked into her shawl selling clothes pegs or "lucky heather", or an ex-serviceman with a suitcase of haberdashery. I was too young to realise how desperate they were. The shabby, ill-looking man who held out his hat to receive coins from passer-by as he shuffled down the road, singing at the top of his voice, saddened me because I couldn't give him any money or a dinner but grandma assured me: "*The Church will look after him*". I believed her for a long time, just as I believed the other lies that grownups told children to shield them from reality.

On Sundays the road was indeed quiet. That is if you didn't count the muffin-man with a tray on his head who shattered the afternoon peace by ringing a large handbell and yelling: "*Muffins! Freshanot!*"

THE STATION THAT NEVER WAS

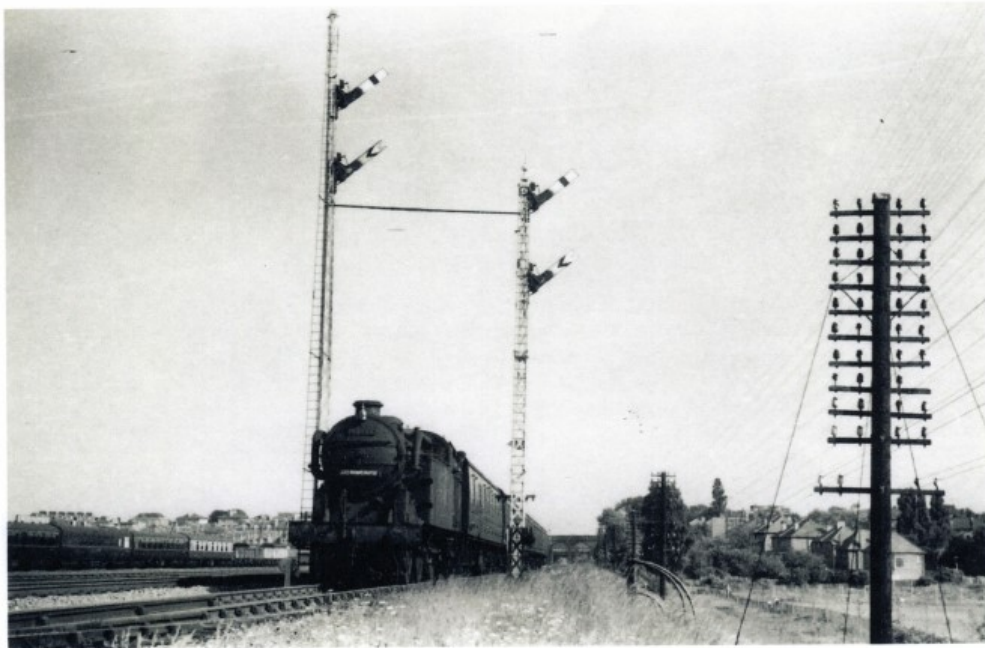
by David Berguer

An article in *The Finchley Press* in 1910 recorded that Friern Barnet Council had received a petition from residents concerning the need for a railway station between New Southgate and Oakleigh Park and urging their support in approaching the Great Northern Railway. The petition read as follows:

"There are in the parish of Friern Barnet near to the site later suggested for a new railway station, a halt on your main line, about 250 houses and others in the course of erection. The annual rateable value of houses already occupied is upwards of £2,000. There are in the parish of East Barnet near to the suggested site, about 250 houses, the annual rateable value of which is £4,000. All these houses are situated at a distance of more than half a mile, some of them upwards of a mile and a half from New Southgate station on your railway; most of them approached for a great part of the distance by a footpath running along the western side of your railway line between New Southgate bridge and Oakleigh-road bridge. This is the only means of communication between New Southgate station for many residents in this neighbourhood. Oakleigh Park, the next station from New Southgate, is situated still further from these houses, and is even less available to them than New Southgate station. In recent years there has been a large amount of building in the districts, and there is now a very large population, to whom a station on your line situated to the north of that near Oakleigh-road bridge, would be of inestimable advantage. We believe that the provision of such a station or halt would likewise be to the advantage of your company, as it would encourage residents in the area to travel by your line, to which the present

difficulties of access offer an insuperable obstacle. The proposal meets with the approbation of the District Councils of Friern Barnet and East Barnet Valley, and also the Board of Guardians of the Barnet Union, individual members of all which authorities are amongst the signatories, and we can confidently believe that the assessment committee of both the parishes of Friern Barnet and East Barnet, so far as legally able to do so, would agree to a reasonably low assessment of any station or halt which you may see fit to provide in the locality, at all events for some years to come. We believe that any land required for the provision of such a station could readily be obtained at a reasonable price should your company need to acquire land for the purpose, and facilities of access would no doubt be gladly provided by the owners of the land immediately surrounding the site suggested. There is a large area of building land already in the market adjoining the estate suggested, and we consider if our petition be granted that the bulk of this land will come into the neighbourhood, which would immediately result in benefit to your company. In conclusion, the petitioners beg that such arrangements be made at an early date as will result in the provision of the station."

Unfortunately, we have no idea where this proposed station was to be sited as the newspaper did not print a map of the location. However, using the clues provided in the petition ("*half a mile from New Southgate Station*" and "*on the western side*" and "*between New Southgate Station bridge and Oakleigh-road bridge*") would seem to indicate that a site somewhere in the region of the cricket pitch in Bethune Park might seem an ideal location. A photograph taken by Karl Ruge in the 1960s shows the spot:



The distance between New Southgate Station and Oakleigh Park Station is 1 mile and 95 chains and that between Oakleigh Park and New Barnet Station is 82 chains (there are 80 chains to a mile), so the Great Northern probably felt that residents could easily walk to the nearest station. Also it is important to

remember that in 1910 people were quite used to walking long distances, as buses were few and far between and trams were only just being introduced.

It is interesting to note that even in those days petitioners always tended to exaggerate their case. The mention that "*the present difficulties of access offer an insuperable obstacle*" is clearly untrue and, in fact, what could have been nicer than to stroll half a mile (or even a mile and a half) alongside the railway tracks taking in the rural joys of Friern Barnet?

Incidentally, an annual season ticket between New Southgate and King's Cross cost £7. 7s 0d in 1910, equivalent to about £528 now. For today's commuters, an annual travelcard now costs a hefty £1328!

FRIERN BARNET IN PHOTOGRAPHS

We are very pleased to report that our very first professionally printed publication, *Friern Barnet in Photographs*, has proved to be a runaway success. We printed 250 copies and, thanks to your interest, all copies have now been sold. We are now considering whether or not to print further copies, but we would only do this if we could guarantee that they would sell.

In order to estimate the likely demand, could any of you who would like further copies (they make ideal Christmas gifts!) or, if you were unable to buy a copy the first time around, please ring David Berguer on 020 8292 7328 so that we can proceed accordingly.

HOME IS WHERE THE PARK IS

by Mel Hooper

Readers of this newsletter are probably aware that Sydney Simmons contributed the funds to acquire Friary Park for the people of Friern Barnet. However you may not know that this generosity was far outweighed by his gifts to the citizens of Okehampton, his hometown in Devon, especially considering that he only lived there for the first six years of his life.

In 1905 the town park in Okehampton was alongside the West Okement river below the ruins of the Norman castle. The inhabitants also walked a wooded strip of land beside the East Okement river to access a meadow frequently used as a children's playground. There was much consternation when the landlord announced his intention to sell this land and the Town Council bought it for £1,000 to prevent its use for housing (what a contrast to 21st century practice!). However, they were refused permission by the Local Government Board to borrow an additional £1,250 to lay out the grounds as a formal park. When Sydney Simmons heard of this he donated £3,000, the first of many gifts to the town, and the park which bears his name was opened to the public by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Purdie Treloar, on 8 July 1907.

Fast forward 99 years and Councillor Christine Marsh was appointed to Chair a committee charged with organising centenary celebrations for the park. Whilst researching its history she read a 1997 council minute referring to a letter from Helen Hooper, Secretary of the Friends of Friary Park. The two ladies made contact and as a result the Friends were formally invited to play a part in the planned festivities.

Thus it was that Helen and I, Derek Williams (Chairman) and his wife Joanne, and Mary Peters (Treasurer) found ourselves in Okehampton over the weekend of 7 and 8 July 2007.

We met Christine and her husband Ken at a country inn for supper on Friday evening, during which we exchanged photographs of our respective parks and were given the programme for the following two days. It was only then that we realised we would be treated like visiting dignitaries!

On Saturday morning we met at the Charter Hall and were impressed by the public exhibition of photographs and memorabilia relating to Simmons Park. Introductions were made to the Mayor, Councillor Tony Leech, the Town Clerk, Don Bent, and "Sydney Simmons", played by local actor Stan Stormont. We were warmly greeted by the locals, several of whom were attired in Edwardian costume which they seemed to wear all weekend. Don took us into the council chamber and we were allowed the privilege of photographing one of the gilt and enamelled caskets exchanged by Simmons and Treloar at the park's opening ceremony.



The visitors from Friary Park, Mary Peters, Joanne and Derek Williams and Mel and Helen Hooper, are on the right
Photo: Okehampton Times

During the afternoon Helen and I visited the Museum of Dartmoor Life, across the road from the Charter Hall, and Okehampton castle. The museum includes a fully equipped wheelwright's workshop and a recreation of the underground conditions in a Dartmoor mineral mine. At the castle we hired the audio guide and enjoyed the commentary given by the medieval "lady of the house" as she organises a banquet for a party of visiting noblemen and their retinue. Naturally I took a photograph of Helen in her normal environment – next to the massive oven in the kitchen!

After paying our respects at Simmons' grave, Saturday evening was spent in Simmons Park being entertained by a variety of local musicians, including traditional folk singers and a sing-along Edwardian music hall. For me the highlight was a group of pop musicians - The Travelling Simmonsburys - who played Beatles tunes but changed the words to make them relevant to the occasion, e.g. "We're Sidney Simmons local park club band," to the tune of *Sergeant Pepper!* Although cool, the evening was dry and passed very pleasantly, aided by a fish and chip supper and the grand finale of an enormous half-hour firework display.

At midday on Sunday, the actual centenary day, we assembled at the restored Okehampton station on the Dartmoor Railway. A special steam train had been organised to take us 4 miles to the end of the line at Meldon. Travelling in the armchairs of a Victorian observation car our sedate progress matched the surroundings. The purpose of this excursion was to enable a reconstruction of Sydney Simmons' arrival in 1907 with the Lord Mayor. So when we arrived back at Okehampton, "Sydney" and our party were greeted on the platform by the Mayor, Town Clerk and two mace-bearers, all in full regalia. Following press photographs, a vintage Rolls-Royce took us to the Charter Hall and the Town Crier announced our arrival to a crowd of locals. There was then a procession to the park with over two hundred of us by the time we reached the stage area.

The Mayor introduced us to the assembly and presented Derek with a framed scroll confirming the ties of friendship between "the Town Council and Citizens of Okehampton and The Friends of Friary Park". In return Derek presented the Mayor with a commemorative glass dish, especially engraved with the Friary Park statue, and a copy of "*Friern Barnet in Photographs*". A Radio Devon announcer read out Sydney Simmons' life story and the audience showed their gratitude and appreciation for their benefactor's generosity with prolonged applause.

The afternoon then progressed with children's sports, a concert by the Okehampton Excelsior Silver Band and a dive into the cream-teas tent to avoid a heavy downpour. I was delighted to see that the sports included traditional sack racing and an egg and spoon race. The whole weekend concluded with a Songs of Praise, conducted by the combined local churches and the Bishop of Plymouth - with a congregation in excess of 500!

At my suggestion the Friends group and the organisers agreed that it would be a good idea to adjourn to the *White Hart* for a de-briefing session. We shared our recollections of the weekend and the relief that the event had been a great success was almost palpable.

The Friends of Friary Park delegates came back to London with wonderful memories, loads of new friends and the hope that the centenary of Friary Park in May 2010 could be an equally wonderful weekend for us all.

**Friern Barnet & District
Local History Society ©**

President: John Donovan
01707 642 886
Chairman: David Berguer