

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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HISTORY OF 'THE HOLLIES'

by Sylvia Stilts

The house was built on the north side of Oakleigh Park North in 1916 and had two private owners before becoming a Preparatory School for Boys, and then the site was purchased in November 1948 by Friern Barnet UDC for £4,000. In 1952 four blocks of flats were erected on the site ("Wellington", "Pretoria", "Ottawa" and "Canberra" were their names). Eventually their name plates disappeared, possibly during the 1970s. The Land Registry stipulated that the site must only be used for the erection of dwellings and no structure must be built within fifteen feet of the road. Only six garages were constructed, as few people owned a car, but there were pram sheds for three of the blocks of flats, but none for the eight maisonettes and four bungalows which were intended for elderly people.

There was a laundry (now the Caretakers' Retreat), which contained butler sinks, washing machines and drying cabinets. The flat roof had a glass dome which



The Hollies were designed by Friern Barnet Council's own architect, Reginald Kenneth Smith, and were awarded the London Region housing diploma for 1953 by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Mr Smith also designed the Council's flats in Colney Hatch Lane

was boarded up after a small girl put her leg through it after climbing up to retrieve a ball - fortunately she was not badly hurt. Washing had to be hung out in the Drying Area, or on the kitchen balcony of the two-bedroomed flats which had one.

There were eight garden plots, with an adjacent water tap, to rent at 10 shillings a year, beyond the Drying Area, on what was once the kitchen garden of the old house. There must have once been a greenhouse there, because plot holders frequently dug up shards of glass. The rent for a two-bedroom flat was three guineas a week, plus a further 6 shillings for three bedrooms. An optional fridge could be rented for 1/3d a week and there was the opportunity to rent an immersion heater; eventually, these charges were discontinued. The rents were collected every Friday by a Rent Collector. Tenants were selected from the Housing List by the Housing Committee, and two references were required.

There was a coal cupboard by the front door of every two-bed flat, but all the others had a hatch by the front door through which Coalite was shot into a cupboard under the pantry in the kitchen, resulting in a black and gritty film over everything. The living room fire was backed by a boiler which provided hot water and heated the hall radiator, or the one in the bathroom of one-bedroom flats. The three-bedroom flats also benefited from warmth from the metal plate on the kitchen wall which backed the boiler, and hot air wall vents in two of the bedrooms upstairs. A gas fire was installed in the fireplace in the 1980s and optional gas central heating ten years later.

The Housing Officer's sidekick was a formidable lady who called regularly to check there was no cat or dog on the premises and she would insist that curtains were washed if she considered that they were dirty. The Caretaker lived in the first floor flat above the arch over the service road and he was always available to re-washer a tap or pass on requests for repairs. Once a week he swept and washed all the stairs and landings and released the bins at the receiving end of the rubbish chutes for the dustmen to empty. The three-bedroom flats were provided with dustbins which he brought down in a small lift to the pavement and returned after they had been emptied by the dustmen.

The Council's own decorators painted kitchens and bathrooms every few years and tenants chose wallpaper and paint to decorate their other rooms at a depot behind the Town hall at Friern Barnet. On any occasion that tenants wished to swap flats, e.g. a family in a two-bedroom with a couple in a three-bedroom whose grown up children had left home, they informed the Housing Officer, exchanged rent books and just moved.

Up until the 1960s a very prolific pear tree stood on the grass in front of the garages. Every September, the Caretaker picked the fruit and put it in carrier bags clutched by waiting children who knew it would be shared out when ripe, so they were never tempted to "scrum" during the Summer. For several years around that time a pair of mallard ducks arrived regularly around Easter. They sat on the grass in the front, quacking softly as people walked by and then flew off as daylight faded, returning the next day.

In 1966, a year after the London Borough of Barnet took over from Friern Barnet UDC, the land was sold to people in Athenaeum Road, whose back gardens

adjoined the plots. During the late 1980s the Gas Board removed the gas meters from inside the flats and attached them to outside walls to facilitate meter reading. The Right to Buy came into force in the late 1970s and some residents took advantage of it, selling-on after the requisite three years to people who then let the property. So there are now other landlords than the Council.

Whetstone is built on gravel and the Ordnance Survey map for 1896 shows a gravel pit in the vicinity, which probably accounts for the patches of subsidence now appearing in the grass in front of the first block of flats. There was also once a pond on the far right of the grounds.

RIOTS ON FINCHLEY COMMON

by John Heathfield

The eighteenth century presents a remarkable contrast between the high elegance of Georgian architecture and fashion and the appalling living conditions in the slums. This led to envy and the kind of violence which, unfortunately, is still with us. One example, out of thousands, is found in the death of John Lambe in 1765. He was attacked by a gang of youths when leaving the theatre. *"They pursued him crying "Witch" and "Devil." The rage of the people so increased that in the midst of the crowd he was struck down to the ground. They beat him with sticks and stones so that the following day he died."*

There were parish constables who could only implore the mob to behave. In the absence of a uniformed police force, only the army could enforce control. As a result the Government decided to bring troops into London. In August 1765 a return was required from all inns showing the accommodation likely to be of use for billeting troops. Fortunately the information for our area has survived:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Licensee</i>	<i>Beds</i>	<i>Stables</i>
<u>Whetstone</u>			
Bull	Jonathan Cooper	3	4
Green Man	William Marsh	5	16
Anchor	Simon Edward	1	1
Kings Head	Jonathan Norcutt	1	1
Griffin	William Nixon	1	4
Bricklayers Arms	Jonathan Ecken	2	2
Bull and Butcher	Robert Friend	2	4
<u>Colney Hatch</u>			
Orange Tree	William Banks	2	6
<u>Betstile</u>			
Fowler	Jonathan Hawkins	2	2
<u>Coldharbour</u>			
Swan	Mrs Stanley	2	7
Windmill	James Steel	2	5
<u>Totteridge</u>			
Crown	Andrew Wellday	2	1
Orange Tree	Mary Slight	2	2
Horse Shoes	William Sadler	1	2

There is an earlier return from about 1700 which only shows totals. Whetstone had 27 beds and 40 stables and Finchley had 9 beds and 12 stables. The importance of Whetstone (about 10 miles from London) as an early type of motorway service station is obvious.

In 1780 the so-called Gordon Riots saw troops stationed on Finchley Common, Hounslow Heath and Esher Common. The intention was that the troops be stationed secretly and out of sight so as not to inflame the mobs, but near enough to arrive quickly. Finchley camp occupied what we now call Woodside Park and ran as far north as Totteridge Lane. The regiments were the Royal Irish, the South Hants and the Queen's Own.

In a map of 1780 the Swan pub is shown (latterly the Swan & Pyramids), but there are no buildings at all at what will be Tally Ho Corner, however the eighth milestone is shown (outside Sainsbury's in North Finchley today).

1930S LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY

by David Berguer

An article in the 28 August 1936 issue of *Finchley Press* described the progress in the new library that was being built in Ravensdale Avenue, North Finchley at a cost of £10,000. The library eventually opened in November 1936 and was the first purpose-built library in Finchley, the previous library having been situated within Avenue House since 1933.



The article also described the revolutionary new book changing system (the Dickman System, from the USA) that was to be introduced. Every person joining the library would be given a number, which was embossed on a small metal plate attached by a hinge to a small card bearing the reader's name and address.

When a book was borrowed the reader would give the ticket to the librarian who inserted the metal plate in a small printing device containing a dating mechanism. The card in the book would then be inserted into the machine and stamped with the reader's number and the date when the book was due for return. The book card would be retained by the library as a receipt for the book borrowed. The reader's ticket and the metal plate were given back to the borrower and the ticket bearing the date the book was due to be returned would be inserted in the book. When the borrower returned the book it was to be handed in at the counter and, providing it was not overdue, the reader passed straight into the library without having to wait for his or her ticket to be found.

The system was designed to prevent queuing at the entrance and to save readers a great deal of time and it was claimed that a transaction could be completed in five seconds and library assistants could issue books at the rate of 800 an hour. The system also enabled the Library to eliminate arguments with readers about what books had been borrowed or when they were due for return. The Library could also trace anyone damaging a book and The Chief Librarian said that, as an experiment, readers should be allowed to have more than one book at a time, although he hoped that readers would not abuse the privilege by having too many books at a time! When the library opened it had around 11,000 volumes, of which about 40 per cent were fiction. The opening hours were 10.30am to 8.00pm every weekday and one of the modern features was an epidiascope in the 125 seat lecture hall on the first floor, by which illustrations in books could be projected on to a screen.

Today's libraries are, of course, vastly different from those of the 1930s. North Finchley Library is one of sixteen in Barnet and, in common with others, now lends DVDs and CDs as well as books and has such facilities as PCs, a photocopier, a Library Shop and a coffee lounge (paid for by the Friends of Barnet Borough Libraries). And, of course, the rather cumbersome metal plate has been replaced by a bar-coded plastic library card!

R W MUNRO PRECISION ENGINEERS

by Ron Kingdon

Does the name R W Munro ring a bell with any member?

Robert William Munro started work as an optical instrument maker in South London and in 1864 he started the company that bore his name and they soon became internationally known for their precision engineering. Amongst other things they built bank note printing machines for the Bank of England and designed instruments for measuring wind force, which were used on both Captain Robert Scott's and Ernest Shackelton's Antarctic expeditions, and later for the Air Ministry, the British Atomic Energy Authority and the United Nations.

Such was the demand for their products that they had to keep looking for larger premises. Robert, the founder, died in 1912 and the business passed to two of his sons. Thus it was that in 1938 a move to a large modern factory in Cline Road, Bounds Green (facing the Standard Bottle Company) was made and presumably they must have been involved in some kind of war work during the 1939 – 1945 period.

In 1956 an order came from IBM to produce a working reproduction of a section of Charles Babbage's Difference Engine (the forerunner of the computer), a

model of which is in the Science Museum. This was to be completed for an exhibition in the USA and the challenge was successfully met. It had to be, for after all, in 1880 the son of Charles Babbage had requested Robert William Munro to manufacture the components for the construction of *The Mill*, part of the original Analytical Engine!

Today R W Munro specialises in meteorological and hydrological equipment and they are now based in Woodford Green in Essex.

CALORIES AND THINGS

by John Heathfield

"The peasants are revolting!" But not round here – they were too tired and undernourished to cause trouble for their betters.

In 1864 Dr Ernest Smith made a survey for the Public Health Committee of the Privy Council of the food of the labouring classes. This was better in the country than in the town because many country labourers had a garden and a pig. In our district the agricultural labourers were paid day wages and lived in small cottages, often terraced, with only a small garden and not enough room for a pig. They depended on food bought from wages, typically in the 1850s 1s 6d a day or 10s 6d a week. Dr Smith found that the average diet in our district was "*bread, potatoes, rice, salt, tea and sugar.*" Fresh milk was rare and fresh fish or meat was only eaten about once a month. There is no mention of bacon or fresh fruit or vegetables in the diet in and nobody in the area is recorded as keeping a pig. However, some children were recorded as going blackberrying on Finchley Common.

It is reckoned that an adult woman needs 2000 calories a day and a man 2500. Dr Smith estimated that the diet was "*70gr of protein, 54gr of fat, 480mg of calcium and 15mg of iron.*" The calorific value was in the order of 1660 per day and this deficiency would have led rickets and anaemia, and anaemia, of course, leads to premature fatigue.

Many people believe that we were healthier during the last War simply because we had to eat a healthy diet, which did not include high levels of salt or sugar. This contrasts with today's obsession with expensive diets and health clubs, where we pay not to eat food, in fact to return to the diet of our Victorian ancestors. This would have been viewed with astonishment by our forebears.

In June 1890 Totteridge parish decided that "*the labouring poor could not possibly afford to buy sufficient for their wives and children.*" A loaf then cost 1s 3d – quite prohibitively expensive, bearing in mind that a day's pay was 1s 6d, unless it rained when no work was possible. The parish bought food wholesale for selling on, so that bread was sold by the parish clerk at 11d per loaf and two barrels of rice were sold at 2d per pound and a quantity of bacon and salt pork at 7d per pound. In 1800 tea, coffee and cocoa were upper class drinks, which gradually trickled down the social scale.

Footnote by David Berguer

An article in the *Daily Mail* on 5 August 2003 compared the diets of 1953 with those fifty years later. In 1953 a housewife would take in 1818 calories a day and would use 1092 of these through housework, leaving an excess of 725 calories. By 2003 her intake was 2178 calories, but she only used 556, so her excess was

1622 – a startling 123% increase! Just to emphasise our obsession with food, or the over consumption of it, in a recent BBC television programme (*The Secret Life of the Motorway*) it was stated that one-third of all lorries on the roads are carrying food!

THE BIG STORM

by David Berquer

We all remember the Big Storm of Friday 16 October 1987 even though some people, myself included, managed to sleep right through it! However, I suspect that few of our members can recall the other Big Storm – the one on Sunday 12 January 1930.

The congregation at St James Church had worshipped that evening and were presumably preparing for bed when the storm struck later that night with disastrous consequences for the church. The winds dislodged a stone which supported a principal in the nave roof and the church spire came crashing down, *“as though it had been sliced off by a giant knife and lowered into a declivity in the roof.”* Fortunately nobody at the church was hurt but, as can be imagined, the damage was considerable, but it could have been disastrous, as a large beam fell onto a row of pews where young boys had been sitting only hours earlier. A large oak tree in Friern Barnet Lane, to the north of the church, was among a large number of trees blown down that night.

The Rector of St James, Edward Gage Hall, said that it was a matter for thanksgiving rather than tragedy that nobody was injured and he arranged a service of thanksgiving in the Church Hall, where all services were held until the spire had been replaced.

The *Finchley Press* described the weather conditions: *“Saturday’s sunshine, rain and snow was followed by Sunday’s sunshine, rain and wind. The almost spring-like morning, by its very quietness, betokened that something less pleasant was to follow. Later the clouds scudded across the sky and a mighty wind blew from the west, while the barometer wobbled backwards and forwards. By eventide the wind had gathered its wildest fury, surging onwards with fierce roars and at times it was almost impossible for a mere human being to withstand the most mighty of the blasts. It certainly was not safe out of doors and many a person, when buildings rocked and trembled, wondered if it was safe indoors. Yet, though the wind aired its tempestuous qualities, it was tempting out of doors, the speeding clouds passing betwixt earth and moon presenting a spectacle of beauty.”*

The storm caused widespread damage throughout the area: In North Finchley the plate glass windows of Jelks, Woolworths and Pearks Stores were blown in and the Labour Exchange had its gable torn completely away and about three tons of bricks fell onto a bus which was drawn up in the forecourt of the *Swan and Pyramids*. Large numbers of trees, walls and chimney stacks were blown down. The chimney stack of Friern Watch House was blown on to the roof, but fortunately the roof held, although several ceilings were shaken down.

The most tragic event occurred in Fortis Green, Muswell Hill, where a 34 year old woman and her husband were walking their dog. An elm tree was blown onto them and the woman was killed, although the man survived with slight injuries.

REMEMBER THE TOWN HALL?

As you know last year we asked for your memories of the Gaumont North Finchley and we included these within our latest publication *Gaumont North Finchley: A Brief History*.

This year we will be working on a history of the Town Hall and we would like you to share your recollections with us. So, if you worked at the Town Hall, paid your rates there, got married there or attended functions there, please let us know so that we can get a picture of what part it played in your lives. Please contact David Berguer on 020 8292 7328 or email us on friernbarnethistory@hotmail.co.uk.

FINCHLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Finchley Memorial Hospital celebrates its hundredth birthday this year and Dorrell Dressekie is in the process of writing an official history which will be published later this year. Dorrell has been scouring the Barnet Archives at Mill Hill and has also been going through the hospital minutes back to 1908.

As part of the history, Dorrell would like to include reminiscences of local people who either worked at the hospital or who received treatment there.

You can contact Dorrell on 020 8368 0794 or email your memories to: friernbarnethistory@hotmail.co.uk. Thanks for your help.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

by David Berguer

On Sunday 1 March 1903 a census of attendances was taken at the various churches in the district by members of the Grove Road Literary Society. The results were:

St John's	465
St Paul's	419
Christ Church Congregational	185
Baptist	753
Wesleyan	244
Primitive Methodist	55
Salvation Army	64
Railway Mission	40

The report mentions that on the day it was windy in the morning and wet in the evening, although what effect this had on attendances is not clear. The minutes of Christ Church record that the enumerator left the service after the first hymn in the morning and it gives the attendance at the meetings on March 22 as 230 and March 29 as 335, so perhaps the figures for the other churches are equally underreported.

The report stated one in three of the population of Friern Barnet and New Southgate (excluding The Freehold and Brunswick Park) had attended a place of worship.

ANOTHER FRIERN BARNET HERO

by David Berguer

There must be very long odds indeed against two churchmen from two different Christ Churches in the same area joining the armed forces and then being posthumously awarded the George Cross for acts of selflessness. We related the story of Herbert Cecil Pugh of Christ Church in the January 2007 issue of the Newsletter and we now feature John Quinton.

John Alan Quinton was born in 1921 and was educated at Christ's College in Finchley. When he left in 1937 he joined Specialoids, the engineering company, until 1941 when he joined the RAF as a navigator. He was with 604 Squadron, was commissioned in 1942 and was subsequently promoted to Squadron Leader. He was awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) in 1944 when he was flying Mosquitos. After leaving the RAF in 1946 he rejoined Specialoids and later joined Brown Brothers who dealt in car accessories.

Before the war John had been a keen Boy Scout and joined the 186 North London Scout Group that used to meet at Christ Church in Oakleigh Road North. He was a Patrol Leader and attended the World Scout Jamboree in Holland in 1937 and later became a Rover Scout and was awarded the King's Scout badge. On returning from the war he resumed his scouting activities at Christ Church and became Group Scout Master.



John married and had a son, and in 1951 he decided to rejoin the RAF but he had lost his previous rank, so he was now a Flight Lieutenant. He was posted to the 228 Operational Conversion Unit for a refresher course.

On Sunday 13 August 1951 he was in a Wellington bomber as a navigator under instruction, along with an Air Cadet, in the rear compartment of the aircraft.

Unfortunately, the Wellington collided in mid air with another aircraft and the Wellington started to break up and plunge to earth out of control. John picked up a parachute and clipped it on to the cadet's

harness and showed him how to pull the rip cord and told him to jump. The cadet scrambled through a hole in the Wellington's side and landed without harm, but all the eight people in the two aircraft were killed.

John was posthumously awarded the George Cross and the citation stated *"he acted with superhuman speed displaying the most commendable courage and self sacrifice, as he well knew that in giving the only parachute within reach he was forfeiting any chance of saving his own life. Such act of heroism and humanity ranks with the very highest traditions of the Royal Air*

Video Hire	3	1
Antiques	2	2
Shops Vacant	29	35
Others	72	75
	536	539

* = Confectioners, Tobacconists, Newsagents

Change is a gradual thing and it is only when we look over a longer period that trends become obvious. When we started the surveys back in 2001 there were 90 Restaurants in the area (now 104), 19 Ladies Hairdressers (now 23) and 9 Beauty Salons (now 15) which would suggest that, with increasing affluence, people are spending more on themselves. The increasing popularity of the area and pressure on housing means that today there are now 25 Estate Agents - six years ago there were only 18.

On the other hand, changing consumer habits also mean that other areas are in decline. The increasing popularity of the internet means that people are now making their holiday bookings online, hence the reduction of Travel Agents from 6 in 2001 to only 2 last year. Similarly the growth of Sky television with its huge range of channels means that there is now only 1 Video Hire shop – in 2001 there were 5.

The breakdown of shops by area is:

	2006	2007
High Road North Finchley	156	156
High Road Whetstone	105	105
Woodhouse Road	65	66
Friern Barnet Road	65	68
Oakleigh Road North	42	42
Colney Hatch Lane	39	40
Ballards Lane (n of Kingsway)	34	34
Friern Bridge Retail Park	11	11
Oakleigh Road South	9	9
Cromwell Road	2	2
Nether Street	4	2
Sydney Road	2	2
Kingsway	1	1
Wetherill Road	1	1
Wilton Road	1	1

MRS NEWTH'S KINDERGARTEN

by Joan Morrell

In September 1921, at the age of 5, I was sent to start school at Mrs Newth's Kindergarten in a large house called Hillcrest in Oakleigh Park North, just before Oakleigh Park station, then an LNER station.

On my first day I was sat in the front row to share a small desk with another new girl named Pat Sweet, who was the daughter of Mr Sweet who then owned and ran Sweet's Nurseries with his brother. As children do, we immediately compared ages, etc. and I happened to be a few weeks older as my birthday was 17 June and Pat's was 4 August. This, I remember so well,

gave me a great feeling of superiority (strange how children react), but we got on very well and became great pals. We went to each other's parties and so I met Mr and Mrs Sweet and Pat's two brothers (one was Trevor who died some years ago). They lived in a house in Friern Barnet Lane opposite the entrance to the North Middlesex Golf Club. I can remember my parents buying plants at the nurseries for our garden. They had very good tomatoes too, and those were the days when we only able to get fruit and vegetables when in season, as everything had to come by sea otherwise. I believe the Queen did her wartime training with the ATC where Sweet's Nurseries stood.

Going back to kindergarten days, we were expected to work hard and did all the subjects immediately. It was all very strictly run but they were such happy days. I remember having French lessons on the first day and we were at school from 9am to 4pm with an hour's break for a sandwich lunch. Our French teacher was Mademoiselle Pirod and I have her signature in my autograph album! I still remember all she taught me and we said our verbs out loud in sing-song voices, but did not forget them. I met up with Mademoiselle again some years later at another school. We were called out of class, one at a time, to go to the Music room for an hour, where we had to play our scales before attempting pieces of music.

It was a very pleasant and well kept garden and there was a Monkey puzzle tree in the front lawn. Playtime was spent at the back and we always had to be on our best behaviour. Mid-morning the maid brought Mrs Newth a glass of hot milk and I remember how I hated the smell. She had a son, Jack, who worked at the Friern Barnet Council Offices on the staff.

I must have been attending the school about three years. Pat Sweet went to another school but we kept in touch. The last time I saw her was at her wedding at St James' Church in August 1939. Sadly her husband, who was a pilot, crashed and was killed at the beginning of the War a few weeks later.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A reminder that your subscriptions expire on 31 March 2008. If you wish to renew for another year (April 2008 – March 2009), and we hope you do, please complete the Membership Form with this Newsletter. The subscription rates remain the same - £6 for a single person, £10 for a couple.

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