

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

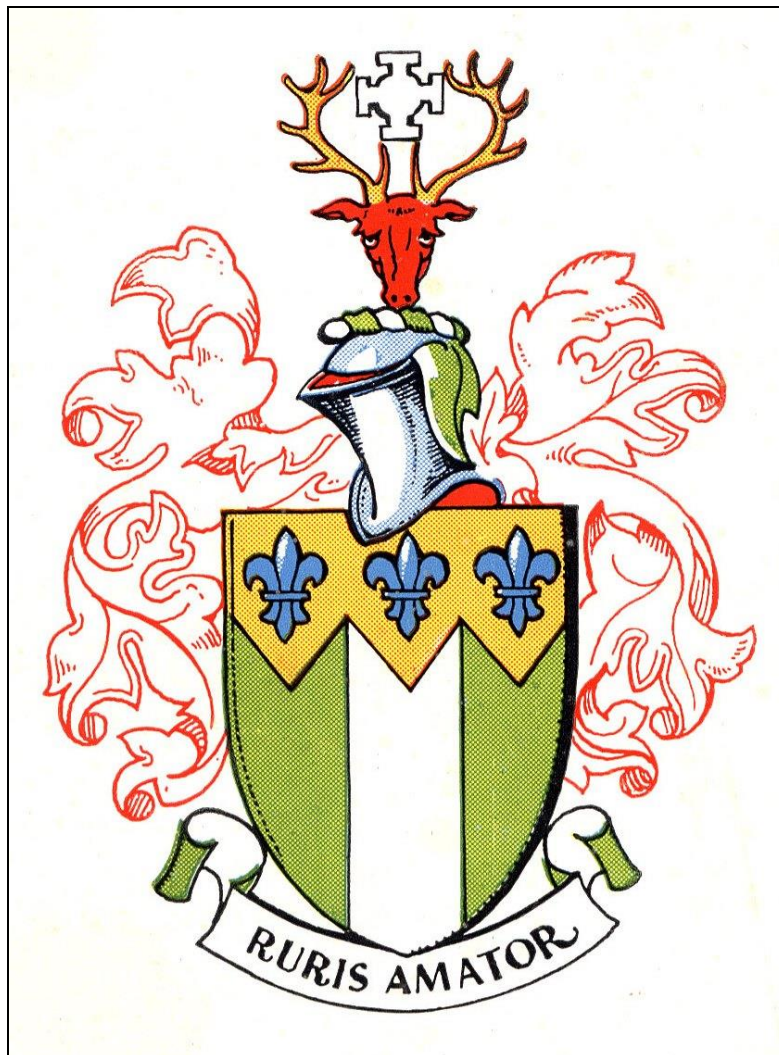
Published by Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

Issue Number 50

September 2012

FIFTY AND STILL GOING STRONG

We thought we would mark our fiftieth issue with a splash of colour! Our very first Newsletter was published in October 2000, following our inaugural public meeting at the former Town Hall on 6 September 2000. Our founder and President, John Donovan, wrote a report of the very first public meeting of the Society on 6 September 2000 in Friern Barnet Town Hall:



*The Friern Barnet coat of arms:
"Vert, a Pale Argent, on a Chief Dancette Or, three
Fleur-de-lys Azure. And for the Crest, on a Wreath
of the Colours, a Stag's head caboshed Gules,
between the Attires Or a Cross potent norry
at the centre Argent."*

Motto: Ruris Amator: 'Lover of the Country'

“It seemed most appropriate to hold our first public meeting at the Town Hall (even though it no longer functions as such)! We had no idea how many would attend, and estimates within the committee varied between ten and twenty-five. You can imagine our surprise (and joy) when fifty-two attended – twenty of those joined the Society there and then! Our Membership Secretary, Pat Cleland, and her neighbour were kept busy the whole evening receiving the visitors and writing out receipts for new members.

As President, I was asked to officially open the evening and welcome our audience. I explained that there were drinks and biscuits at the back of the hall to which everyone was welcome, and then I outlined the programme for the evening. At the other end of the room David Berguer had pinned photographs and maps on the walls, and laid out more photos and books on tables so that our visitors could browse.

I introduced the committee by name and title, and then gave a brief resume of the sequence of events since our first advert went into the *Barnet Times* back in November 1999. Following that, I explained why a local history society is important for Friern Barnet (for our *past*, our *present* and our *future*), and I also explained why we call ourselves Friern Barnet & District (it's so we can investigate interesting items just outside our boundaries). I pointed out that our sheet of 'objectives', available to all, listed numerous activities and projects we hope to initiate, especially a Newsletter, which will keep all our members in touch with what the committee and all our groups are doing.

I finished my little chat by explaining what we would like our members to do for the Society, and what *we* could do for *them*. Then it was time for our guest of honour, Andrew Mussell (the Borough Archivist) to explain to us the work and scope of the London Borough of Barnet Archives at Hendon. He observed that the archive is *for* the people of Barnet (he pointed out that we actually pay his wages!), and he welcomed any enquiries and/or visitors who wanted to research their family history or just the history of their own house. He closed by appealing to all present to actually *use* their archive.

At this point I should explain that all the teas, coffees and biscuits were supplied by our Treasurer, Janet Liversidge and her husband, Colin (who acted as tea-lady all evening, helped by Dorrell Dressekie) and she capped it all by producing a splendid iced cake, decorated in full with the Friern Barnet coat of arms. Andrew Mussell kindly cut the cake, as a way of launching the Society officially, after which everyone present enjoyed a slice.

The final part of the evening was taken up with more tea, coffee and biscuits while everyone wandered around, chatting to one another and studying all the pictures, books and maps on display. During the evening I had time to note that our audience included John Phillips, the local author; Brian Kolbert, the Roman expert from the Potters Bar Historical Society; Helen Hooper, the secretary of Friends of Friary Park; and our own Yvonne Ruge.

We had to vacate the hall by ten, so everyone helped us to clear up, before we closed the doors on our first public meeting – a rousing success.”

The first of our regular monthly public meetings took place a month later, on 5 October 2000 at the Town Hall (the subject was *Friern Barnet Memories*) by which time our membership had risen to 69 and a year later it was 112. Today we have over 180 members and we consider that, after twelve years, we have finally made it, thanks in no small part to the energy and enthusiasm of John Donovan, who had the vision to try and preserve the name of Friern Barnet, before it disappeared completely. We have been without John for four years now, and we still miss him.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

For those of you who were unable to attend the AGM, a copy of the Report and Accounts is enclosed with this Newsletter. Our Treasurer, Mel Hooper, decided not to continue in the role which he had so ably filled for the last ten years and his place has been taken by Nick McKie. In his last-ever presentation of the Accounts, Mel warned that increasing costs, particularly a huge hike in postage rates and a noticeable rise in the rates being charged by speakers at our meetings, plus the uncertainty of the future of the Friern Barnet Summer Show, meant that we would need to raise our subscription rates for the year 2013-2014. These will go up to £8 for a single person and £14 for a couple.

MEMORIES OF 1962

by Richard Testar

1962 was the year I left school after taking my ‘A’ levels. I can recall sitting in the back garden of our house in Torrington Park, cramming in some last minute revision! I attended Haberdashers Boys’ School, and I remember this year particularly as it was only in the previous September that the School moved from its site in Westbere Road, Cricklewood to its new home in Elstree. Therefore I only had a year at the new location before I left. What a change it was to come out to the Hertfordshire countryside, where the classrooms looked out on to woods and fields, rather than the main line to St Pancras!

Even when I left school I didn’t really have much idea about a choice of career. So my closest friend John and I decided to get a little experience of life by applying to Butlin’s to work for the summer season. Surprisingly we were accepted, initially for Bognor, but a last minute phone call from their personnel department sent us chuntering up north to Filey in my very dilapidated Morris 8 van. The journey took at least eight hours; there was no A1(M) in those days, not that it would have made much difference to my car which could just about manage 50mph.

Butlin’s at Filey was the largest of all the camps. It took 12,000 holidaymakers at the height of the season. There were three dining halls with two sittings. This meant that for each of the three daily meals there were 2,000 people in each hall. John and I were offered jobs as barmen, in what was shown in the *Guinness Book of Records* at the time to be ‘the longest bar in the world’, known as the French Bar. Most of the ‘inmates’ of the camp had travelled down from Scotland or the North East and this led to a crash course in handling rowdy Geordies, but we learned fast! There were often fights in the bar, and the on-site security men would be called to deal with them. They weren’t known for their softly-softly tactics, and rumour had it that offenders were taken out to the North Yorkshire

Moors in a van, dumped and made to walk back to the camp after they had sobered up.

Favourite drinks for the guests were 'black velvet', which was Guinness and cider, usually by the pint, or 'black and tan', which was mild bitter mixed with Guinness. We worked flat out there with just a beak in the afternoon when we used to 'escape' over to Bridlington or Scarborough for the afternoon. Social life was limited, although we did make the most of meeting up with other summer staff, mainly students.



This happy couple seemed to be enjoying themselves in this poster from the 1960s

As the season wound down, the bars became less busy, and John and I were given a 'change of direction' by being deployed as Commissionaires. This involved wearing a royal blue uniform with gold epaulettes and a flat peaked hat. We thought we looked quite dazzling, although our main duties were traffic control and manning entrances and exits.

There was a high wire fence around the whole camp, topped with barbed wire to prevent unauthorised holidaymakers from getting in. We had to make sure that everyone entering had a pass. It was said that the Butlin's camp was sometimes used as a refuge for wanted criminals who could disappear in the camp amidst the thousands of visitors who were there at any one time.

Autumn 1962 brought our initiation into the real world to an abrupt end. On the 2nd October I started work at Coutts Bank in the Strand. I applied to Coutts because they were paying school leavers £500 a year, whereas the Big Five only paid £485. It was quite fun at Head Office, where there were plenty of youngsters, but I was later sent to a small branch in Cadogan Place, Sloane Street, where the staff were as snooty as many of the customers. I decided that this wasn't the career for me, but that's another story.....and I never collected my frock coat which was waiting for me at Horne Brothers.....

MORE FROM 1962

by Pam Ellis

I read Helen Hooper's article in the April Newsletter with interest, for we shared the same doctors.

Drs Michael O'Sullivan and John O'Driscoll were partners in a GP practice in Friern Barnet for many years, certainly for the whole of my time in the area, from 1949 to 1965. Both Irish, they could not have been more different in appearance. Dr O'Sullivan was tall and burly, with a cheerful face and grey curls that, judging from the colour of his children's hair, had once been red, whereas Dr O'Driscoll was thin and dark, with sharp features. In personality too they presented a contrast: Dr O'Sullivan was a gentle, fatherly man, while Dr O'Driscoll had a brisk, almost brusque manner that was quite intimidating to a small child. I have no doubt they were equally competent as doctors, but I know which I preferred to visit when I was sick!

Dr O'Sullivan lived in a beautiful red-brick house near the Orange Tree on Friern Barnet Lane. It must have been rented, because in the late 1950s or early 1960s the family had to move out, the house was pulled down, and a block of characterless modern flats erected in its place (such vandalism was common at the time, alas). Up until this happened, the doctor's surgery was at the side of the house, and as Helen Hooper said in her article, there was no question of appointments. You simply went into the waiting room, gave your name to the receptionist and waited your turn, eyeing the other patients and trying to calculate how long it would be before your name was called.

After the house was demolished the doctors moved their surgery to Friern Barnet Road at 16 St John's Villas, between Hollyfield and St John's Avenues, a few doors from our dentist, who rejoiced in the name of Mr R H Spotten Rea. Dr O'Sullivan died in late 1964 or early 1965; I was away at university by that time, but my mother wrote and told me, adding that many people were openly in tears in the street and shops when they heard the news – a measure of how much he was loved. Because we moved up north that same year I have no information what Dr O'Driscoll did next, but I believe the practice was sold some time afterwards. They must have already been practising when the NHS was formed, and were proper old-style doctors – I wonder what they would make of our modern health service?

THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

by David Berguer

On Monday 4 June the Queen's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated throughout the country with street parties. Barnet Council made it easy for local residents to organise one and the residents of Horsham Avenue, Friern Barnet took advantage of this. An afternoon and early evening of food and drink, dancing and live music and a children's play area kept everyone happy and the event was very well attended by residents from Horsham and other local roads. Fortunately the weather was dry, unlike the previous day when the Pageant on the River Thames had been accompanied by grey skies and heavy rain, although that did not dampen the spirits of the almost a million people who attended. Street parties were also held outside the former Friern Barnet Library and in Manor Drive and Bawtry Road, Whetstone



Jollity at Horsham Avenue. The long queue on the right was for food!

ANOTHER QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

by David Berguer

Back in 1897, Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee and the Friern Barnet Urban District Council decided to mark the occasion by carrying out some restoration work at a cost of between £400 and £500 on the Campe Almshouses in Friern Barnet Lane which date from 1612. Apart from that, celebrations seemed to be rather low key – there was a celebration concert by the Friern Barnet Conservative and Constitutional Association at which the local MP, Major Bowles, gave a speech and this was followed by a small fete and athletic sports. It may appear as though the people of Friern Barnet were less than interested, but it has to be remembered that the population was only some 9,000 – about half that of Finchley, and a third of what it is today.



The Campe Almshouses

YET ANOTHER JUBILEE

by David Berguer

Things were rather different for another Jubilee that took place in 1935, that of George V and Queen Mary who were celebrating 25 years on the throne. The *Barnet Press* of 11 May 1935 reported the celebrations in Friern Barnet:

“There was an elaborate gateway fixed at the entrance to the District Council Offices at the Priory. “Long Live the King” read a scroll in the forefront, and on top was a handsome crown, with lions in support. Round the grounds were placed at intervals appropriately decorated poles bearing national emblems, from which festoons of flags and bannerettes waved gracefully in the breeze. A novel form of lighting made the scene particularly effective after nightfall.

The fire station, too, had a novel form of lighting that made quite an attractive picture. From the forefront of the British Legion headquarters, in Friern Barnet-road, hung long festoons of bannerettes, and conspicuously set in the centre was a large Union Jack. The grounds of the Ex-Servicemen’s Club, in Friern-lane, were decorated with poles draped in the national colours, and supporting festoons of flags in pleasing variety. Gold plaques of the King’s head formed an appropriate centre to the decorations.

Blue and gold were predominant colours at the Church Hall in Friern-lane. Most of the tradesmen and a considerable number of private residents decorated their premises, and the effects obtained in many cases were striking. Quite appropriately, on the flagpost of a prominent member of the Chamber of Commerce were hung two flags – one blue and yellow and the

other white with a dash of red – that meant, in the language of the sea, “Keep Bright Light Burning.” “

There were 2000 entries for the children’s sports in Bethune Park and the new running track, “reckoned to be one of the finest in North London”, was used for the first time. On the same day, a set of new wrought iron gates at the Gresham Road entrance to the park were officially opened. The gates had been presented by the former chairman of Friern Barnet UDC, Mr E R Willoughby.

In stark contrast to the attitude of today’s workmen, it was reported that the employees of the Council had been extremely helpful; they had even been working at the park early and late, on Sundays and even on Good Friday and the fine spirit of the men could be judged by the fact that they had themselves suggested that part of the money payable for overtime should be credited to the Jubilee Fund.



Children had been marshalled in Bethune Park and then conducted to Friary Park by their teachers where they had a tea party. Apparently the demand was such that it needed three sittings to serve everyone. Afterwards there was a Punch and Judy show and a performance by a ventriloquist. Daylight fireworks and a performance by the band of H.M. Welsh Guards followed, and at 10pm there was a torchlight procession round the park by Boy Scouts, after which a beacon was lit by the scouts.

FRIERN BARNET LIBRARY

In common with councils throughout the country, Barnet has been hit with rising costs and falling revenue and, amongst other cost-cutting measures it decided to axe three local libraries, at Hampstead Garden Suburb, North Finchley and Friern Barnet. Thanks to a spirited campaign by concerned local residents, Barnet Council announced that the closure of Friern Barnet Library, which was due to happen on 31 March 2012, would be postponed until 4 April, when the cabinet would have a chance to re-assess the situation.

After this Council meeting it was announced that Friern Barnet Library would close its doors for the last time at 1.00pm on Thursday 5 April 2012. And so ended seventy-eight years of service to the people of Friern Barnet.

The library, which opened to the public for the first time at 5.30pm on Friday 23 March 1934, had been designed by the Middlesex County architect, W T Curtis for the MCC Library Service. The building occupied 5700 square feet and cost £3782 to build, of which £1140 had been donated by the Carnegie Trust.



The library was small but being on ground level was therefore accessible for both children and the elderly



On Monday 21 May 2011 a demonstration opposing the proposed closure took place outside the library

It is planned that the libraries at Friern Barnet and North Finchley will be replaced by a new library within the artsdepot at Tally Ho, although at the time of writing no plans have been published. The future of the Friern Barnet site is still in doubt, although it seems likely that the library and the adjoining land will be sold to a developer. It was proposed to the Council that if this were the case, a new library should be included within any new building as happened at the South Friern Library in Colney Hatch Lane. However, this idea was rejected as the Council argued that salaries would still need to be found for library staff and this would be an ongoing cost which they could not afford.

We shall, of course, report on further developments as they become known. A comprehensive history of the library, including the latest developments, can be found in our own Dorrell Dressekie's excellent publication *Friern Barnet Library: A Brief History* which is available from us, price £2 (£1.50 plus postage).

FRIERN BARNET SUMMER SHOW

Father Adrian Benjamin, vicar of All Saints' Church for the past thirty seven years, and organiser of the Friern Barnet Summer show, retired this year. As well as organising the Show, Adrian has also acted as MC and it has been his dedication and enthusiasm that has kept it going.



Rev Adrian Benjamin stops at our stall

We have been participating in the Show since 2001 and our stall has raised useful amounts of money for our funds. This year our takings were £192 which was considerably less than usual, thanks to a lower attendance despite (or perhaps because of) the Show being held on the two hottest days of the year. Roll on 2013!

REVEALING THE PAST

From time to time during the course of shopfitting, old fascias are revealed. These give us a tantalising glimpse of the past:



*No. 257 Oakleigh Road North.
Skreen Paints were there in 1980*



*No. 825 High Road, North Finchley.
Express Dairy were there from
around 1960 and E J Voyce,
fruiterers, in 1980*



*No. 111 Friern Barnet Road.
Scholedge were there from
around 1975 to 1980.*



*No. 48 Cromwell Road.
J. Joyce were there in the 1970s.*



*In January 2012 the fascia of number 793 High Road,
North Finchley was removed, to reveal that
of Pymmes Kitchen which was there in 1975*

MEMORIES

by Jean Morrell, nee Legg

Our house, number 7 Pollard Road, was built about 1914 – just before the war – and they were very pleasant 4 bedroom houses and well built. There were about 20-24 semi-detached in a row on the south-west end of the road, otherwise it was fields and allotments. From the north (our fronts) we could see open space until All Saints Church and Oakleigh Road North. Behind was open fields where we children played and we loved to see the old ploughman go up and down with his horses, there being no Church Way or Church Crescent in those days. We moved there in 1918, when I was the only child, then 21 months old. I lived there till about 1950.

Between the years of 1924 and the early 1930s, my school friends, my sister and I walked through Friary Park to and from school. As long as we were wealthy enough we visited the tuck shop on our way home. It was in the front room in Friary House with bare wooden boards and a small table with a couple of chairs in the bay window. It seems impossible to believe now that there was quite a selection of sweets on the counter that were a farthing each. There were others at a ha'penny and a penny but we always tried to get the best value for our money and for ¼d we could get a small packet of sherbet, but with a hollow licorice tube in it, it cost ½d! Gobstoppers that changed colour were favourites as they lasted longer, but we could also get hard licorice sticks, or a ribbon of licorice in a roll with a coloured sweetie in the middle. There was chewing gum and, of course, quite a variety of small sweets, mostly unwrapped, which would be frowned on nowadays. For 1d we could get an enormous arrowroot biscuit and they were about ¾ inch thick – very filling and we enjoyed them.



A selection of sweets from the 1930s

**Friern Barnet & District
Local History Society** ©
President: John Heathfield

Chairman: David Berguer
46 Raleigh Drive, N20 0UU
Phone 020 8368 8314

email: friernbarnethistory@hotmail.co.uk

Website: www.friernbarnethistory.org.uk

Photographic website: www.friern-barnet.com

