# Friern Barnet **Newsletter**

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### **JANUARY SALES**

by John Heathfield

January sales have become part of the British way of life, although in recent years shops have started reducing their prices even before Christmas. One of the most unusual sales took place in Hendon in 1920 when some 10,000 aircraft were declared surplus to RAF requirements and put up for sale. Some, like DH6 trainers, were sold for as little as £2 10s 0d. Other items included 35,000 engines, nearly 1000 tons of ball bearings, 350,000 spark plugs and 100,000 magnetos. Over 1000 tons of assorted nuts and bolts were sold at 4 pence per ton, the buyer to provide transport. There were also two flying boats and four twin engined bombers available.

In 1946 the United Kingdom was still trying to pay for the war, goods were in short supply and clothes were rationed. However at Priors there was a "half coupon" sale of ladies coats, "some slightly shop soiled" for 36 shillings and 9 coupons instead of 18, smartly tailored boys' Melton overcoats, double breasted, belted and lined, "perfectly suitable for school wear" for 23/6d and 0 coupons. Hand knitted gloves went for 6/11d and 1 coupon and dainty silk cami-knickers were 9/1d and 3 coupons.





Prior's 1961 sale advert

Furnitureland advert from 1982

Furniture was controlled with 4 solid mahogany leather upholstered chairs offered at £7 10s 0d the set. HMV offered a record of Hutch (Leslie "Jiver" Hutchinson) singing excerpts from the film *Rhapsody in Blue* and Joe Loss playing *Soon it will be Sunday* for 1s 3d each.

How all this contrasts with today's pre-season sales, pre Christmas sales, post Christmas sales, special sales and pre special sales, to say nothing of DFS who seem to have permanent sales throughout the year. Indeed nothing seems to cost its full price anymore.

### THE FIRST WOMAN CHAIRMAN

by David Berguer

Nowadays we are used to women holding important positions in politics and business, but things were not always so. The following article appeared in *Muswell Hill Record* of 2 June 1956:

"The Town Hall at Friern Barnet was crowded on Thursday evening for what was described as an epic moment in the history of the district – the occasion of the 60th annual meeting, when the council elected its first woman Chairman, Councillor Mrs E. Constable, Conservative member for the East Ward.

The election was proposed by Councillor F Simmonds who said the Council had been formed in 1895, but this was the first year in which a lady had been nominated for the chairmanship. Having regard to the movement of the times and the status of the sexes there should be nothing unusual in having a lady for the chairman, but it was attribute to Mrs Constable that so many citizens had come to witness what was taking place – so many ladies and gentlemen who, in their positions, accepted their responsibilities of living in a community and joining in the work of its social, religious and political life.

Cllr. Simmonds paid tribute to the work done by Mrs Constable and said that little could be done to enhance her reputation of the work in the district, and her membership of the Parish Church of All Saints'. The time would come when the public would say that the reputation of the Council had been enhanced when she had been chairman. The motion was seconded briefly by Cllr. E F Taylor, and was unanimously carried. Supporting the election Cllr. W H Martin said this was not only an honour to Mrs Constable, but an honour to all women of the district. Women ought to be interested in municipal affairs because they touched the home life, he said.

One of the principals of the Socialist Party was political equality. In science, art, literature, education, religion and politics women had proved their ability to be equal to men. Even the Church moved slowly in this direction, he said. Only during the past few weeks the Presbyterian Church had appointed its first ordained woman minister, and the Church of England was considering it in Convocation.

Friern Barnet was leading the way in having the Rev Mrs Elsie Chamberlain as its Congregational minister, and she had been honoured by accepting the highest position the Congregational Church could bestow on a minister. Cllr. Martin said he as old enough to remember that women had struggled for their political freedom and equality. The women of all parties had fought for it. He was proud that the Socialists had always had this question in the forefront of their political life. The first Labour Government had Miss Margaret Bondfield, whom he knew well, as its first Minister of Labour and a Cabinet Minister.

After Cllr. D Wright, the retiring Chairman, invested Mrs Constable with the chain of office, the newly-elected chairman said she was glad she had been voted for by all parties of the Council, which would give her confidence. But this was not a personal occasion. It was an epic occasion in history, the first time the Council had ever had a woman as its chairman. It was a moment in Friern Barnet which its women had long deserved.

She had no doubt there would still be some who would view this form of petticoat government with trepidation (laughter). They should look back over history, she said. Our greatest times had been when a woman was on the throne. It was no compliment to her to say she would be a good chairman because she had a man's mind. She had a woman's mind which was different from a man's, but it needed the minds of both men and woman to run a council successfully. Mrs Constable said it was still a man's world, and there were snags in having a woman as chairman. One was the chairman's partner. It was usual for the chairman's wife to accompany him and see that everything was in readiness. She could not give this role to her husband. She appointed Cllr. Miss J H Damant to act as her companion. Cllr. WH Tangye was re-elected vice-chairman."

Ena was born on 30 December 1906, the daughter of Harry James and Susan Emma Blackborrow, and she lived most of her life at 43 Church Crescent, Whetstone. She was a key member of the Finchley and Friern Barnet Conservative Association and she was instrumental in selecting Margaret Thatcher as the Conservative Party candidate for Finchley and Friern Barnet.

Ena was Chairman of Friern Barnet Urban District Council until 1958 and became Mayoress of Barnet in 1966-67. She was also chairman of the Friern Barnet Summer Show for several years and was also involved in the Scouting Association in Barnet. She was also a magistrate, sitting at Highgate. She was a lifelong parishioner at All Saints' Church in Oakleigh Road North and she worked for a number of charities including the Children's Society.

Ena became known as "Mrs Friern Barnet" and after her death in June 1999 Margaret Thatcher described her as "One of the great stalwarts of the Conservative Party in Finchley and Friern Barnet. She was always ready with practical advice and help. Her whole life represented all things best in Britain."

Part of the redevelopment of the former Friern Barnet Town Hall is fittingly named after Ena; Constable Close is a perpetual reminder of her service to the local community.

### **LOST IN THE FOG**

Those of us of a certain age will recall the 'pea soupers' that used to occur every winter in London. The uncanny silence, the figures looming unexpectedly at you, the sense of disorientation and the grime left on window sills and curtains the following day all made for an unnerving, and for those with delicate health, dangerous experience. The Clean Air Act of 1956 eventually did away with the cause of the fogs, or smogs, but until then they were a regular part of London life.

Mabel Broughton Holman lived at 16 Wilton Road, Muswell Hill, off Colney Hatch Lane, and on 28 December 1916 she wrote to her fiancée who was stationed with the Army in Egypt:

"It was a bit foggy up west but nothing great – we got to Piccadilly Circus where we were stuck in the booking hall in a huge mass of people – no lifts went down for half an hour – Golly! Some crush. When one did go we were swept off our feet. Auntie got carried away and we were left. We got in about the third train and arrived at Finsbury Park to find a dense fog – no buses or trams and very few trains and of course mobs of people. By sheer luck a "Muswell Hill" came in somehow or other and we got in – multitudes on top of us – one girl had already fallen on the line, not having seen the edge of the platform, so you can imagine how dense it was. Fortunately when the others left me at Highgate they insisted on my having their electric torch and this saved me. I would never have got home without it I missed my way to start with at the top of the hill where all the things and people were wandering about completely lost. I managed to strike Colney Hatch Lane and by and by creeping along the houses and shining the torch on the walls I managed to get along fairly well. I missed my way again at one turning but a Special Constable rescued me and arm in arm and led me into the straight path once more. I did once or twice see (did I say "see?") people groping about with candles and trying to find their way. Win arrived home with a small boy carrying a torch and two very nervous females on each arm she had managed to pick up at the top of the hill. By this time constables had turned out and were acting as pickets. This didn't end our adventures! After we had gone to bed about midnight mother heard a whistle, then another, coming towards our house – a plaintiff sort of call. She immediately thought of Gerald and as it came right up to our doorway we felt convinced it was he so we sprang out of bed and threw up the window and called out "Is that you, G" "No" said a murky voice, but you can tell me the number of your house," "16" says I. "Oh, I want 8." And off he went again, still giving his plaintive call in the hope, I suppose, that wifie would recognise it.

I have never seen such a fog and I expect you will see accounts of in the papers. One train got lost on the Broad Street line altogether. It was most exciting and there are numerous funny incidents, besides tragic ones – three men fell into Surrey Commercial Dock in the afternoon, having missed their way, there drowned."

To add to the problems, a blackout was in place in London during the First World War as one of the measures to try and reduce the effectiveness of the Zeppelins which were dropping bombs all over the country. On 17 September 1916 Mabel had described the conditions:

"Hilda and I couldn't see one another going down Colney Hatch Lane, it was only her white collar which showed me where she was – of course, this is all down to the new lighting regulations, earlier closing of shops, etc. I am dreading the winter, it will be a gloomy time in every way – still, it's all for our safety, so we can't grumble and get fed up, besides, we have all of us got to suffer something and this won't be much, if it's the worst we have to encounter."

On 25 July 1917 she recounted another night time experience

"I had an adventure on Sunday night, going home from Rees. Buses were taken off for some reason or other and I was at Highgate waiting for one. I waited and waited and at last took a train to East Finchley in order to walk (no trains to Muswell Hill on Sundays) but it was so dark and lonely and I could hear the Belgian guns in the distance and it fairly put the wind up me. When I got to the police station up Fortis Green I was in a fair funk. There were two special constables there so more as an excuse than anything else I asked if there were any more buses. Of course, they said "No" and asked where I wanted to go and told me the best way was down Tetherdown. I said "No thanks, not at this time of night, I'm too nervous." So one said if you wait two ticks I shall be off duty and will see you home if you will permit me to do so. I was in too much alarm, so I gratefully accepted and arrived home "in the arms of the law" at 12.15."

### **GETTING OLD**

Those of us who were children in the 50s and 60s probably shouldn't have survived because our baby cots were covered with brightly coloured lead-based paint which was promptly chewed and licked. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles and when we rode our bikes we had no helmets. As children we rode in cars without seat belts or child seats. We ate chips, dripping on toast, bacon fat, bread and butter pudding and fizzy drinks with loads of sugar in them but we were never overweight because we were always outside playing.

We would leave home in the morning and could play all day, as long as we were back before it got dark. Nobody was able to reach us and nobody minded. We had no mobile phones, computers, Play Stations or X-boxes, or Facebook. But we had friends – we just went outside and found them. We played conkers without safety goggles, fell out of trees, got cuts and bruises and tripped over broken paving stones but their were no law suits.

We played "knock down ginger" and were actually afraid that the neighbours would catch us. We walked or cycled to school or went by bus - no mothers in 4 x 4s clogged up the streets at school time. If we got caught doing something wrong we would get a reprimand from our parents when we got home.

We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility and we learned how to deal with it all.

### FRIERN BARNET SCOUTS

One of our members in Friern Barnet, Mary Ballam-Davis, is Cub leader (Akela) at the 3rd Friern Barnet Scout Group. The group was first formed on 30 September 1935 as the 199th North London and was renamed the 3rd Friern Barnet in 1964,

so next year it will be celebrating its fiftieth anniversary under that name. There had also been a 2nd Friern Barnet Scout Group for a time.

Mary would like the cubs to undertake their Local Knowledge badge and would like to hear from anyone who may have been a member of the group or who remembers the Scout hut in Goldsmith Road and would be willing to share their memories with the Cubs and Beavers.



The Scout hut in Goldsmith Road photographed in the 1950s (photo by Karl Ruge)

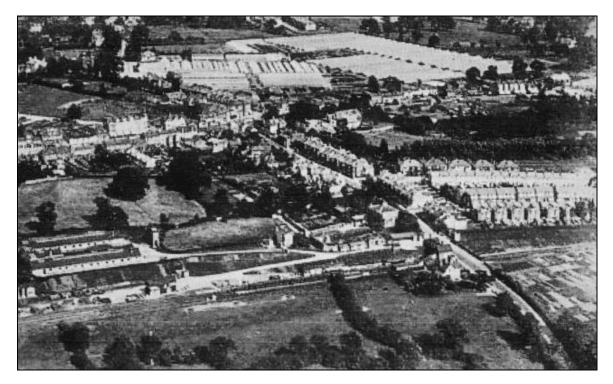
Mary can be contacted by email at: akela3fb@gmail.com or by telephoning her on 020 8211 9711 or writing to her at 2 Hatley Close, Friern Barnet, N11 3LN.

### SWEETS WAY DEVELOPMENT

Plans have been submitted to Barnet Council for a massive redevelopment of Sweets Way which will involve the demolition of the 150 houses on the site and replacement by 361 new homes – a mixture of houses and flats. A large number of the trees on the site will be retained, and there will be communal green spaces.

The site was owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) which in 1996 sold its housing stock (amounting to 57,000 homes) to Annington who are updating them were necessary and then leasing them back to the MoD. In the case of Sweets Way, most of the homes were vacated by MoD personnel by 2010.

The Sweets Way site started life around 1865 when William Davies established a plant nursery of 23 acres between Oakleigh Road North and Friern Barnet Lane. In 1884 he was bought out by James Sweet who had previously worked as a gardener in Stanmore and then at a nursery in Chelmsford. Sweet expanded the site by building more greenhouses. The business prospered and was one of the largest employers in the district, using about 300 women, mostly working part-time. The main crops were flowers, particularly heather, grapes, melons and



The greenhouses can be seen in the background in this photograph from 1920

tomatoes; Sweets even sent heather to Scotland! At 3 o'clock every morning a cart would set out from Whetstone bound for Covent Garden market carrying flowers and fruit.

With the outbreak of the Second World War the site was requisitioned by the Government and in January 1940 294 Field squadron Royal Engineers was brought in to prepare the site for use by the Army. Some houses in Myddelton Park and on the Oakleigh Park estate were requisitioned to accommodate the soldiers.

The site was gradually filled with troops in training including 2/8 Battalion Middlesex Regiment and a platoon of 11 (Kent) Regiment ATS. When all the work had been completed 167 Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment moved in with 7 officers and 372 men and 4 Light Anti Aircraft Regiment to operate 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns. 200 rounds of 3.7 inch ammunition was stored on the site and this was topped up from the arsenal at Mill Hill Barracks.

The guns were aimed by radar and they served to force German raiders to fly high. In September 1940, during the Blitz, the 26th (North London) brigade fired 18,792 rounds of 4.5 inch and 70,767 rounds of 3.7inch ammunition. By November of that month the gun barrels had worn so much that the fuses could not be set and there were many unexploded shells. The guns continued to fire to give moral support to the civilian population.

With the war nearing its end, on 22 January 1945 the guns were moved to Shoeburyness as part of a defensive ring against flying bombs. At Sweets Way they were replaced by two radar-guided nine inch rocket launchers. The site was finally stood down on 12 May 1945 and on 22 November was handed over to No 5 Area Maintenance Unit. The buildings were used to store Army records until 1969 when the site was redeveloped for housing.

### **ROYAL MAIL**

by David Berguer

The sale of shares in Royal Mail on 8 October this year brings to an end hundreds of years as a Government-run service. In the early days of the postal service mail was carried from stage to stage by mounted post boys or messengers on foot, but with the improvement in roads in the 1750s a mail coach service was introduced. The coaches could travel around 9 miles an hour, with a change of horses every ten miles or so and in towns such as Barnet inns coaching inns, farriers and blacksmiths sprung up to cater for the mail coach trade. By 1835 twenty eight mail coaches were departing London each night for destinations all over the country and crowds would gather at the GPO to witness the exciting sight of mail coaches pulled by up to four horses thundering through the streets.

The coming of the railways in the 1830s saw the decline and eventual death of the mail coach. In the twentieth century mail was sorted on board trains which travelled through the night. Baskets of mail were dropped off or collected from the moving trains by ingenious automatic lineside devices. It was, of course, one of these trains that featured in the Great Train Robbery.

In 1898 a steam driven mail van operated between London and Redhill and from then on parcels were distributed by road, with motorised vans coming into general use after the First World War in 1919.

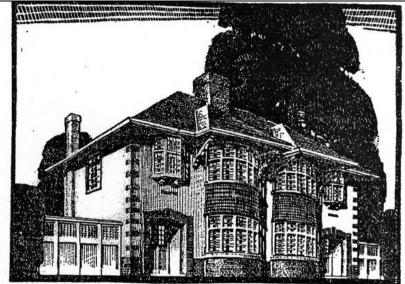
With the growth in population delivering mail accurately became more difficult, particularly as most houses had names rather than numbers and street names were sometimes duplicated. In 1857 Rowland Hill introduced a system whereby London was divided into ten separate postal districts. The numbering of subdistricts took place in March 1917 so, for example, the Northern postal district was numbered from 1-22. Eventually this system was adopted throughout the country and was completed in 1932. The modern alphanumeric postcode was first introduced in 1959 and gradually rolled out until 1974, by which time the whole country had been covered.

### **BRITAIN'S FAVOURITE HOME**

by John Heathfield

"Britain's Favourite Home" cried the adverts. They were referring, of course, to the three-bedroom semi-detached house with the bow front introduced between 1919 and 1939.

"A house, a home, a little palace, in a convenient healthy district, purchasable to anyone with a little capital and a regular income." This ideal was realised by John Laing and Son when they advertised their new estates at Colindale in 1930 followed by their Broadfield development in Edgware. The idea of a home with its own front door and garden and not too far from the shops dominated the thinking of most families. In our district perhaps the first was the Woodlands estate in Golders Green begun by Haymills in 1925. This was followed by their Hendon Heights development. Homes form New Ideal Homesteads on the Gallants Farm Estate were billed as "undoubtedly the cheapest form of home owning.....now within the reach of all earning £3 a week or more." The Manor Drive and Hollickwood estates grew during the 1930s. Both had parades of shops built nearby.



This is a faithful illustration of a pair of the houses selling at £795 Freehold, Roads Made, Free Compromes

### ENDURING

This is an age of sham, when the cheap and temporary is awarded first place, and the honest labour of the master craftsman is almost overwhelmed. Nevertheless, it is still possible to buy a home worthy of the name, built of fine materials finely wrought.

The houses on the Church Farm Estate are built under the direction of Mr. Frank Lord, F.I.O.B., himself a master builder of life-long experience. They are built up to a most exacting standard, to be a lasting satisfaction to both builder and purchaser.

The prices given below are the lowest possible consistent with this supreme

quality. In examining them, and in the personal inspection of the houses which we hope you will make afterwards, it is well to remember that first cost is of less importance than soundness of construction, concerning which we give a written guarantee.

Prices are from £745 to £995. These are all Freehold, Roads made, and free of legal costs. The estate is reached by tube (Piccadilly line) to Arnos Grove Station and thence by No. 34 or 251 Bus to the Estate (book to the "Rising Sun") or by tube to Highgate and thence by No. 135 Bus to the Estate (book to St. James Avenue).

## CHURCH FARM ESTATE, WHETSTONE

For illustrated brochure of the estate, please fill in your name and address in the space below, and post to Church Farm Estate, Oakleigh Road North, N.20

Name Address Stand 83. Section 42 at The North London Exhibition.

The efforts of large developers were supplemented by smaller developers like Miller in Greenway, Totteridge and Pilgrim in Longland Drive ("Don't buy a pup, buy a Pilgrim"). Pilgrims also built the first houses in Oakleigh Crescent. Such smaller builders often employed estate agents to market their properties.

The English have always hankered for an idyllic and false idea of living in the country. Not only did we want a garden perhaps with artificial mountains in the form of rockery, we invented the idea of a "Tudorethan" design with fake black beams holding up mock rural cottages near, for example, East Finchley Station. Some houses were even designed with a sagging roof.

In reaction to the mock were attempts to build to a higher standard. Perhaps the best example was the giant Watling Estate at Edgware where the original winding roads of Goldbeaters Farm were retained and there was a mixture of weatherboard, roughcast and brick built houses. Ingram at Woodside Park built

the Tillingham Way and Norhtiam estates about 1936 based on a return to Georgian designs. Such was the demand for beams that, in spite of their quality, he had trouble selling the houses. Interspersed with the "ordinary" semis were houses with green tiled roofs and Crittall metal framed windows displaying the influences of the Art Deco movement.

Houses built in the building booms of the 1950s and 1960s are today being demolished because they are often badly built and are generally smaller. Architectural purists loved to deride 1930s houses, but even today they are pleasant places to live in and are still much in demand.

### FRIERN HOSPITAL EXHIBITION

Barnet Museum has just installed an exhibition of artefacts concerning Friern Hospital. The star exhibit is a model of the original main building, with its long corridor. The model is around 2.5 metres in length, is mounted on a lightbox and was donated to the Museum by a student from Chelsea College of Art and Design, Ditte Hesse, who had studied mental hospitals as part of her MA degree and had laser cut the model from transparent plastic. A door from one of the two padded cells in the hospital is also on display at the exhibition which is on the first floor of the Museum.

The Museum is at 31 Wood Street, Barnet and is open on Tuesdays -Thursdays 2.30-4.30pm, on Saturdays 10.30am-4.00pm and on Sundays 10.30am-4.30pm. As well as the Friern Hospital exhibits there are many interesting items including a diorama of the Battle of Barnet and some excellent examples of historical costumes. The Museum also has an excellent bookshop which includes *The Friern Hospital Story* by our Chairman, David Berguer. Do pay the Museum a visit – you won't be disappointed.

### **NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMME**

Janet Liversidge has once again put together an interesting and varied programme of lectures and a list of these is included with this Newsletter. The first three lectures are:

### POSTCARDS OF THE EASTER RISING WED 22 JANUARY

The Easter Rising was an important event in Irish history, coming as it did when Britain's attention was focused on the First World War. The story is illustrated with postcards issued at the time.

### THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY WED 26 FEBRUARY

We've heard about the Bayeux Tapestry, but how much we do we really know about it. Was it a tapestry at all? Everything will be revealed.

### THE TURIN SHROUD WED 26 MARCH

The Turin Shroud is an archaeological phenomenon, and whether or not you believe in its religious significance, it's probably been studied more than any other ancient object. This talk covers the efforts to discover the cloth's history and uncover its scientific secrets

### **CHANGE OF VENUE**

As part of the Metropolitan Police's cost cutting exercise, a number of police stations are being closed, including those at Golders Green and Whetstone. The Whetstone station, which is alongside the hall where we have our monthly meetings, is up for sale and we have been advised by St John the Apostle Church, who own our hall, that they have been approached by a number of developers expressing an interest in buying it, with a view to developing the site.

Although no decision has been made at the time of writing, should the sale go through we would be given three month's notice to quit and, rather than risk being unable to find a suitable alternative venue at short notice, the Committee have decided that we should look elsewhere.

Unfortunately Friern Barnet suffers from a lack of suitable venues. Those that met our criteria of a pleasant ambience, ample car parking and on a bus route, were already fully booked, while others were too small or too expensive. After visiting the alternatives the Committee decided that the most suitable venue would be **North Middlesex Golf Club** in Friern Barnet Lane – not all that far from St John's Hall.

We have therefore decided that with effect from **22 January 2014** our meetings will be held there. There is ample parking in front of the building and buses on route 234 (Barnet The Spires – Highgate Wood *via* Whetstone High Road and, from the south, Muswell Hill and Colney Hatch Lane) stop outside the door at the Golfside Close bus stops. Buses run every 10 minutes until 8pm, thereafter every 20 minutes. The clubhouse is well appointed with its own bar where our members may buy tea and coffee or alcoholic drinks and it has excellent views over the eighteenth green.

#### **ANOTHER AWARD**

Each year the London & Middlesex Archaeological Society (LAMAS) makes an award of £100 for the best single topic publication by a member of any of their 55 affiliated local history societies. At their annual conference on 16 November LAMAS announced that *The Friern Hospital Story* by our Chairman, David Berguer, had been selected as the winner. This is, of course, the second award we have won this year – back in June the British Association for Local History chose our *Newsletter* as the best in the country.

#### WHO DID BARNET HILL?

by John Heathfield

Have you ever wondered about Barnet Hill? A glance at the geology will show that the hill itself is very steep, but fortunately the road itself is less so. How and when did this come about?

The Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust was responsible for the upkeep of the road between *The Woodman* inn at the north end of Highgate Hill to Ganwick Corner between Barnet and Potters Bar. It collected tolls from road users and the money raised was used to maintain the road in good condition. This particular stretch formed an important part of the road to the north and was heavily used, particularly by stage coaches.

In 1817 a report on the road from London to Holyhead was drawn up by Thomas Telford and was presented to the Select Committee of the House of Commons. Amongst the many improvements recommended was to make Barnet Hill less steep. Responsibility for implementing this was delegated to the Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust whose officers included William Attfield (Clerk and surveyor to the Trust), Sir James McAdam (General Surveyor), James McClelland (Superintending Surveyor) and John Attfield (Sub Surveyor).

Telford's idea was to scrape away part of the top of the hill, but McAdam suggested building up the foot of the hill. In the end, both courses of action were followed and soil was removed from the top of the hill and deposited at the foot. Other soil was scraped from the surface of neighbouring fields to form the embankment, still visible today near High Barnet station. In 1822 the payment for surveying was 3s 4d per linear foot and the total cost amounted to £1031 5s 11d by far the largest item in the Trust's accounts. Other costs included £810 for team labour, £550 for ballast, £92 for day labour, £18 for interest on the debt and £9 for printing. In 1827 £2000 was borrowed to pay for the improvements – about £223,000 in today's money.



In 1961 a trolleybus starts the long ascent of Barnet Hill

(Ron Kingdon)

The annual reports of the Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust can be found at the London Metropolitan Archives (file MRO/UTT/A26).

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