

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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OF BELISHA BEACONS AND PERAMBULATORS

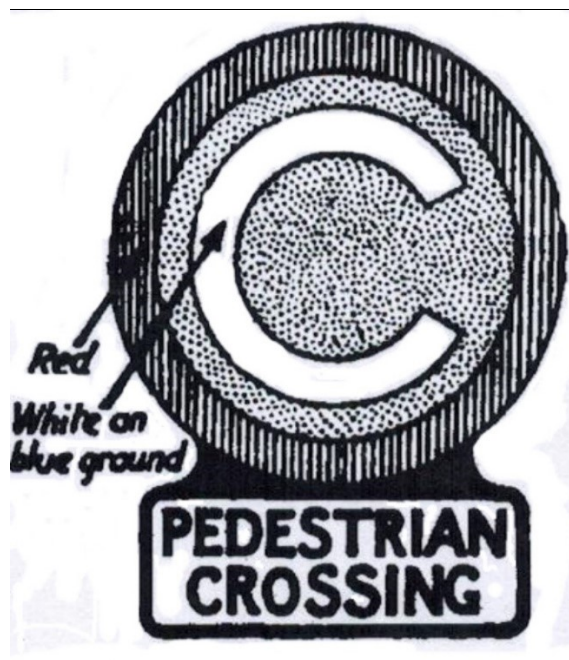
by Nick McKie

In 1934 there was alarm at the fast increasing number of motorcars on the road and attendant pedestrian deaths – of 3025 road deaths in January to June 1933 ‘more than half were foot passengers’. The Road Traffic Act of 1934 was designed to reduce the danger: there was to be a 30mph speed limit in built-up areas, and a driving test was to be introduced before a licence could be issued.

All good sense to our ears, but John Moore-Brabazon MP was not a fan:

“Yes, 7000 people a year were being killed on the roads but it is not always going to be like that. People are getting used to new conditions. Older Members of the House of Commons will recollect the number of chickens we killed in the early days – we used to come back with the radiator stuffed with feathers. It was the same with dogs. Dogs get out of the way of motorcars these days and you never kill one. There is education even in the lower animals. These things will right themselves.”

Earlier in 1934 there had been experimental ‘crossings for walkers’ in some busy areas of London where junctions were already controlled by constables or traffic control signals. In addition, there were ‘uncontrolled junctions’: these crossing places would be ‘indicated on the carriageway by white paint, while in addition a special sign will be temporarily erected at the junction’.



In November 1934 Leslie Hore-Belisha MP (then Transport Minister) announced that 10,000 beacons had been erected in London 'in connection with pedestrian crossing places' – total cost £15,000, but there would be an extra £100,000 cost 'if lighted by electricity' and £30,000 a year for maintenance and current. A line of large metal studs on the approach was designed to slow down traffic. This 'Belisha beacon' was a flashing amber globe mounted on a black and white striped post. James Callaghan is credited in coming up with the notion of a 'zebra crossing' in 1948 and the next year there were 1000 test sites round the UK. Instead of black and white, these first crossings had blue and yellow stripes.

We know that the Zebra was later joined by the Pelican and the Puffin – pedestrian controlled signals. Then, for use by both pedestrian and cyclist, came the Toucan (two can cross!)

The following photograph appeared in the *Daily Mirror* of 9 February 1935 with the caption 'After pedestrian crossings come perambulator crossings. The first has been constructed at Friern Barnet at the intersection of Horsham-avenue and Woodhouse-road. A slope has been let into the kerb on each side and painted bright yellow':



Who can believe the assertion that Horsham Avenue is the site of the nation's first perambulator crossing? So far I have found no evidence of an angry pram users' lobby for change, and no other reference to test sites. Perhaps this was a local initiative by someone with a photographer friend at the *Daily Mirror*. Certainly the child in the pram looks far too old to be wheeled about, and the mother and child look well aware of being photographed for posterity. If the date were nearer the First of April 1935 I would have doubts.

Whatever the fate of the term 'perambulator crossing', we know that the 'dropped kerb' lives on – we see it everywhere. It removes a trip hazard and makes wheelchair use possible. If Horsham Avenue's claim can be verified I think a Blue Plaque is in order. Does anyone recognise the family and the bookseller in the background?

I am indebted as ever to Google, and the *Daily Mirror* archives.

Footnote by David Berguer

The 1935 edition of *Kelly's Directory of Finchley & Friern Barnet* shows that at number 215 Woodhouse Road (on the corner of Horsham Avenue) was Cummins Library which would seem to tie in with the shop in the photograph. So perhaps there was a perambulator crossing there after all.

DECEMBER 1941

by John Heathfield

This was a very cold month in the darkest days of the War, so the *Finchley Press* tried to warm us up with a recipe on 4 December:

"Potato and Carrot Pancake.

Boil together 1½lb potatoes and 1½lb sliced carrot. Strain (remember to save the liquid for soup), mash well and add salt and pepper to taste. Make a stout frying pan very hot, put the mixture in and fry very slowly. It will develop a deliciously thick crust or bake to a good brown if you are already using the oven. Serves 4. Remember to save the peelings and carrot tops for salvage".

The salvage went into the pig food bins which were at the end of every street. The nearest pig farms were at the bottom of Russell Lane and in Oakleigh Road North, by the railway bridge.

A BLEAK MIDWINTER – continued

In the last issue of the *Newsletter* we highlighted the problems faced by industry in the harsh winter of 1947. Householders also suffered of course. Here are a few extracts from *The Barnet Press* of 15 February 1947:

"Many homes are short of fuel also, particularly boiler fuel. Prams, push chairs, hand-carts, and even a chauffeur driven limousine were seen at the depot of the Barnet and District Gas and Water Company in Albert Road, New Barnet. They were being used by people fetching coke, loaded into sacks at the depot by German prisoners of war."

"A housewife from Trinder Road, Barnet: 'Had it not been for the severe weather this would not have happened. Bring back double summer time, but don't close the cinema. I go there to keep warm: I haven't any coal.'"

"Mrs Walkington, Wrotham Road, Barnet: The weather is to blame, not the Government. I'm in favour of a partial blackout of street lighting."

"Another housewife said: "I'm worried about the potato shortage. My husband is not working, so I'm employing him patrolling the greengrocers and hunting for potatoes."

“Hospitals reported ‘everything normal’. But Victoria Hospital, Barnet said: ‘Although we are not cut off, reduced pressure is affecting X-ray machines. Plates often fail to develop.’”

“Women’s hairdressing establishments cancelled all appointments requiring electrical machinery as they were unable to deal with them in the two-hour lunch time break.”

“If the cuts are still in operation on Saturday, the matinee of ‘Candied Peel’ due to be given by Potters Bar Dramatic society at three o’clock will be cancelled.”

PROBLEMS WITH SEWAGE

The following couple of items appeared under “Friern Barnet Rating Appeals” in the *Barnet Press* on 15 March 1930:

“THANKFUL FOR SMALL MERCIES

Mr P P Cutchey, of 10, Hillside Avenue, appealed against his assessment of £34 rateable. He said that the accommodation in the house did not justify the rating committee’s assessment and he asked the Assessment Committee to reduce it to £26. His premises were situated near a laundry, an asylum and a sewage farm. He could assure the Committee that the smell from the sewage farm was most objectionable, especially in the summer time. He was not aware of the existence of the sewage farm when he went into occupation of the house.

The Chairman: Do the rating committee admit that the sewage farm is a detriment?

Mr Marsden: No, but in dealing with the assessments the rating committee have given people living in that neighbourhood sympathetic consideration.

The Chairman: Why did the rating committee give sympathetic consideration if the sewage farm is not detrimental?

Mr Marsden: I do not know. I was not in Friern Barnet when the assessments were fixed by the rating committee.

The assessment was reduced by £2.

‘Thanks for small mercies,’ remarked the appellant as he departed.”

HOUSE STEPS AND PERAMBULATORS.

“Mr Tivendale (Messrs. Sturt & Tivendale) appeared to support a number of appeals by owners in Wilton Road. Mr Tivendale mentioned that residents in the road suffered from effluvia from the sewage farm.

The Chairman: we hear a great deal about the sewage farms at that end of the district.

Mr Tivendale: Like castor oil the effluvia may not be harmful from the point of view of health, but people don’t usually enjoy taking castor oil. (Laughter).

In the course of the hearing it was mentioned that some of the houses had six steps up to the front doors.

Mr Marsden said his committee did not consider the steps any disadvantage to the houses.

The Chairman: Have you a perambulator?

Mr Marsden: I have, and it is for sale. (Laughter).

The Clerk: It is risky to sell a thing like that. (Laughter).

The Chairman: Are you good at pulling perambulators up steps?

Mr Marsden: I have no difficulty.

In several of the cases the Committee decided to reduce the assessments.”

MOLESKINS ARE VALUABLE

The following appeared in *Barnet Press* on 21 July 1917 and gives us an insight into fashion in the early part of the twentieth century:

“The skin of the humble mole has always been valued by country people, many of whom understand perfectly the art of curing them. A genuine home-made moleskin cap will fetch as much as a guinea, and many a labourer will pay thrice that sum for a moleskin waistcoat, while a moleskin overcoat is considered cheap at five pounds, the reason being that the material is practically everlasting and indestructible. It must not, however, be confused with the so-called “moleskin” affected by navvies and other outdoor workers. This, though exceedingly strong and durable, is a manufactured product, and has nothing in common, barring the name, with the genuine skin of the mole”.

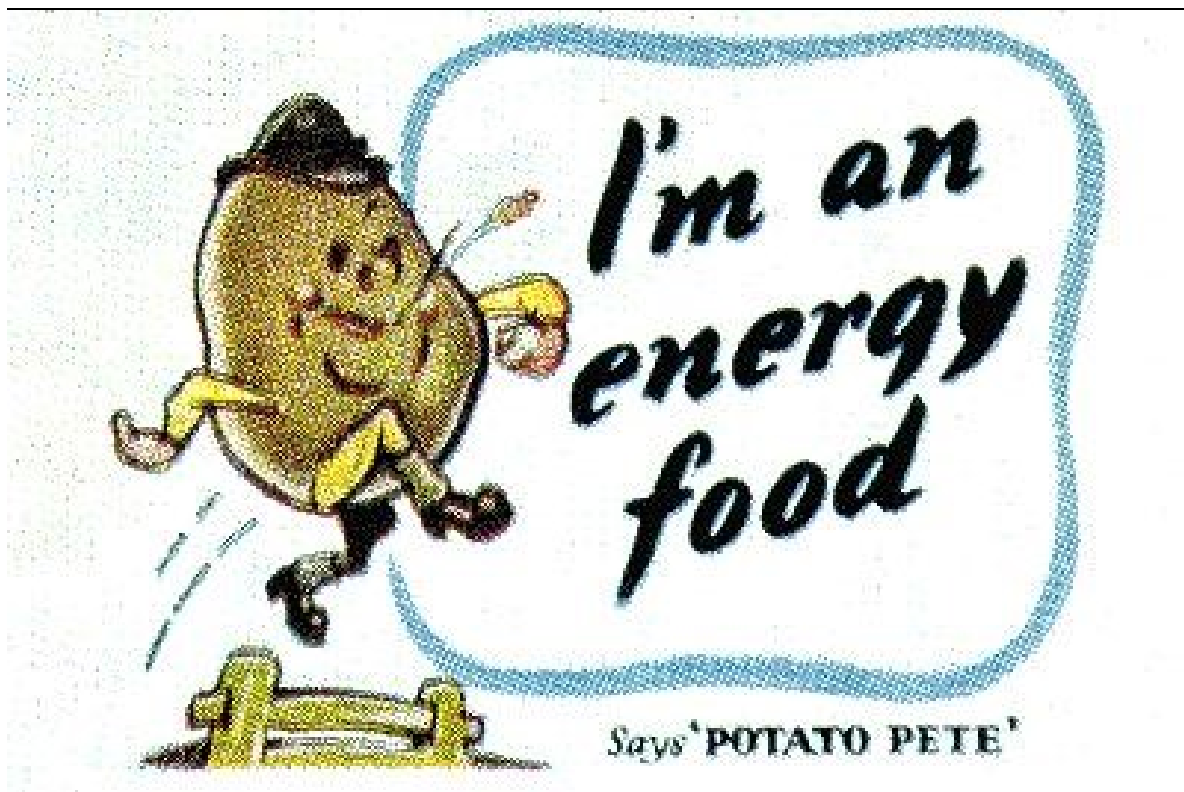
DO YOU REMEMBER POTATO PETE?

by John Heathfield

In 1943 the War was going so badly that every scrap of food was vital and every opportunity to improve productivity was taken. Prisoners of war were required to work on the land to replace farm labourers who were fighting with the armed services.

During 1943 a camp for German prisoners of war was built just north of Dancers Hill Road on the St Albans Road outside Barnet. Strangely enough it was built by Italian POWs for their allies to use. The prisoners were housed in standard Ministry of War Production huts with an 18ft 6in span. The side walls were made of bituminised corrugated iron sheet with brick end walls which had a doorway in the centre and a window at each side. By later standards it was a small camp – the usual size was some 35 prisoners’ huts with 15 guard huts, but our camp appears to have had about 15 prisoner huts plus a cookhouse, grocery and product store, a dining hut, a recreation hut, ablution and latrine blocks, a sick bay and carpenter’s hut. There was a double barbed wire fence with coils of wire between the outer and inner skins. Sewage and mains water came from the nearby St Albans Road. Contrary to popular myth there were no guard towers with machine guns and searchlights, probably because the prisoners were considered ‘low risk’. Who in their right mind would want to leave England for war torn Germany?

After the War priority was given to bringing back the millions of British ex-service men. Germany was in a ruinous state and many POWs remained in England until the Spring of 1946. During the whole of this time they were employed on the land, particularly on potato production. Other nearby fields grew corn. Under the terms of the Geneva Convention, the prisoners were paid 6 pence a day for their labour. After the War ended



they were still paid the reduced rate which compared with the 7s 6d a day for members of the Agricultural Trades Unions. The unions were upset because their members were being undercut by cheap immigrant labour and the Germans felt strongly about equal pay for equal work. The dispute petered out in the spring of 1946 when the camp closed. For a brief period in the winter of 1944-45 a small group of Italian POWs were housed at the top of Bell's Hill in Barnet; they worked on nearby farms.

There is a shortage of information about local POW camps and we would be delighted to hear from anyone with further information.

JUVENILE CRIMINALS

The following article appeared in *All Saints' Parish Magazine* of October 1896:

“Of the total number of persons convicted of indictable offences in 1893, the children under 12 were 2000; from 12 to 16 6595; from 16 to 21 9298. For 1894 the figures were 2146, 6604 and 9568 respectively; and these convictions made up 42 per cent of the total for England and Wales. Of offenders tried summarily i.e. before a Magistrate, 25,632 were convicted; so that a small army of 44,000 juveniles suffered punishment for one crime or another. How many were tried and acquitted, how many let off by indulgent persons unwilling to hand small citizens over to justice, how many escaped detection, no one can guess, but from our experience of youthful offenders the number of the “fortunate” must have far exceeded the unhappy ‘found outs’.

If we look at the nature of the offences committed, it is found that in England and Wales one-fourth of the persons convicted of simple larceny was under 16, and more than one-third of convicted burglars are youths between 16 and 21 and the most attractive crimes seem to be malicious wounding, indecent assaults, housebreaking and burglary and larceny.

A prison Chaplain suggests a remedy. He says, without hesitation that not repressive agencies but prevention must be looked to for improvement of our young people. He wants more careful character training in the schools that prevails now; he complains that the lads who come under his care can read and write and sum, but are lacking in character, in tone; and he adds with perfect truth, that a "possession of the rudiments of knowledge, however valuable in itself, has little effect in preventing the youthful population from coming into collision with the criminal law." We must add that if the child comes from a home where the tone is immoral and the character-direction all in the way of degradation the best teachers will find it almost impossible to overcome the baneful neglect of the parents. No school system or teacher, however excellent, has ever laid character foundations; modification is the only practicable course, and not much of that is successful in the majority of cases. This aspect of school possibilities has been too much neglected.

Considerable acquaintance with the home life of artisans and labourers has long ago convinced us that one of the gravest defects of their condition is want of parental interest in and sympathy with the games and play of the children. The father who, having the chance does not spend a quarter of an hour daily in play with his little ones, especially the boys, is missing a source of influence which will never come back to him. More than half the estrangements that happen between parents and children at a critical time in the life of both are traceable to the want of sympathy in play-time. Youth is the time of activity; and if the active lads find little but repression and constant restraint from their fathers, they will seek satisfaction for their perfectly lawful instincts away from home and more than probably in the worst company. All, whether clergy or laymen, who visit the homes of the people should make it a point of duty to encourage home-play, to get fathers and mothers to romp with their children once a day, as regularly and as naturally as they fulfil any other duty. No one who has not seen it would credit the difference that the daily game between parents and children makes in households; it creates sympathy, begets confidence, strengthens every natural tie, and lays up a store of joyful memory that will be freely drawn upon when the little ones now grown big have to fight their way in life far from home. The leaders of the Mothers' Union might do worse than get their members to take a motto for the home: 'Play, Pray'.

One detail of family life has a very close but commonly unsuspected relation to the doleful statistics of juvenile crime we have before us, viz., the time at which children go to bed. Slum workers know too well the terrible amount of mischief that the education of the streets after dark, and even in the long summer evenings, does for thousands of town children. There is more wickedness as taught and practised by children in towns during the hours after dark, when they ought to be in bed, than in all the hours besides; and the teachers who can persuade parents to be absolutely rigid in getting their children to bed and asleep before eight will in time do more than all the prisons combined to reduce the list of convictions of young lads and girls. The detail may seem too trivial to be mentioned gravely in a newspaper leader, but those who observe are aware that upon such details hangs the welfare of millions. And we strongly urge the conductors of lads, clubs, gymnasia, schoolroom entertainments, etc., to get their meetings over early, and discourage the staying out of young people beyond, say, 8.30, or, at the latest, 9 o'clock.

The story told by these statistics is one that warrants real apprehension as to the future of the empire; the poisoning of the springs cannot go on at this accelerating speed without bringing us within measurable distance of grave disaster, and there are few questions that ought to engage the earnest attention of Churchmen at this moment more than how to stop the ruin and to rescue juvenile England”.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

As we know, in the early part of the twentieth century women were fighting for the right to vote and the Suffragette movement was extremely active and succeeded in bringing the injustice to the public notice. After many hard fought battles women were eventually given the vote in March 1928.

This advertisement from *Finchley Press* of 18 July 1913 is worth careful study:

**The Law-Abiding
Women's Suffrage Pilgrims**
OF THE
GREAT NORTH ROAD ROUTE
Pass through this district
On **FRIDAY, 25th JULY.**

Public Meetings
AT
TALLY HO CORNER at 1 p.m.
AND
Highbury Hall at 8 p.m.

On Saturday, 26th July, at 2 p.m., all
marshal at **Montague Place, Bloomsbury,**
and march to the
Hyde Park Demonstration at 5 p.m.

Chair: Mrs. HENRY FAWCETT, LL.D.

TWENTY PLATFORMS.

Contributions to the Pilgrims' Fund should
be sent to
**THE HON. MRS. SPENCER GRAVES, or
MISS P. STRACHEY,
58, Victoria Street, S.W.**

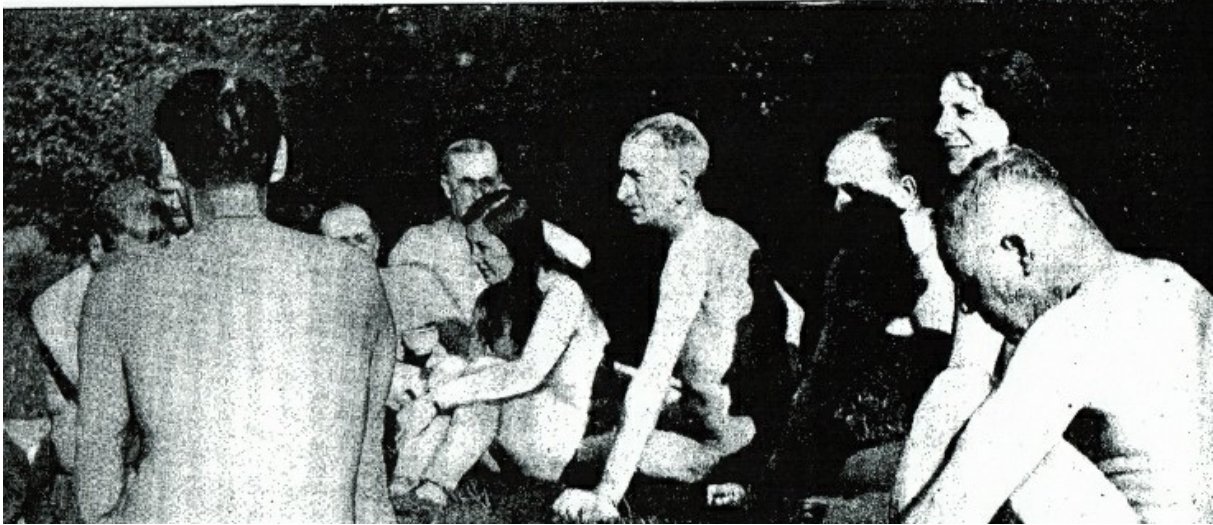
Even though they were championing equality, both Mrs Fawcett and Mrs Graves were using their husbands' Christian names rather than their own! Perhaps to do so would have been just a step too far in those days.

MORE ON THE NUDISTS.....

by Nick McKie

Further to my article on the local nudist colony ('Nudists! In North Finchley!') in the Newsletter of February 2015, I recently came across the following picture in the *Daily Mirror* of 26 April 1937:

WEARING THEIR WRIST WATCHES !



NUDISTS BACK THE GET-FIT CAMPAIGN

More than a hundred Nudists gathered in yesterday's sunshine at Friern Park, Friern Barnet (Middlesex) for the annual conference of the National Sun and Air League.

Clothed, as you see in the picture above, in wrist watches, they passed a resolution approving the Government's plan for the "improvement of the health of the people by facilities for exercise and recreation."

But they asked as a quid-pro-quo more opportunities for practising nudism.

They want: -

**Abolition of the custom whereby women bathers are obliged to wear brassieres as well as slips;
Men and women to wear slips; and
Facilities at public bathing places for bathing in the nude.**

In their resolution they expressed the hope that provision will be made in all localities for new screened enclosures where total nudity can be permitted.

FRIERN BARNET & WHETSTONE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

by David Berguer

In 1929 the first meeting of the Friern Barnet Ratepayers Association was held and this was followed by the first Annual General Meeting which took place at Holly Park School on 17 January 1931 which was well attended. The President at the time, Dr

North, said that “the Association had shown its weight and value and could now be looked upon as a power in the District. An organisation of ratepayers is in closer touch with the ‘man in the street’ than any member of the Council could be. Councillors are remote and rarely open to the views of residents, except at times of elections!” The Chairman then was W L B Beales; Secretary was Captain Farley; Solicitor was H N Clare and H E Byford was Assistant Secretary. The Treasurer was F S Witherick and he reported that the annual income was £49.15s 9d against outgoings of £48. 8s 11d, thus leaving a “healthy surplus”.

Friern Barnet was then an Urban District and covered an area from Cherry Hill in the north to beyond Sydney Road on the border of Muswell Hill and was divided into five wards of about 6000 inhabitants each, namely Central (mainly N11); South (south of the North Circular, mainly N10); West (mainly N12); East (N11 and N20) and North (N20).

The Association continued to thrive and it had a sizeable committee, with 16 elected members in addition to the dozen or so Officers and eight of the committee members had to retire annually, but were re-electable.

At the AGM in 1961 the approach of the end of the Urban District was in the air. The Chairman at the time, Wally Atkins, stated that “none of us wish to see Friern Barnet lose its identity or individuality.” The guest speaker was John Sutcliffe, the Public Relations Officer of the Middlesex County Council who said that the whole purpose of the Local Government service is to provide cleaner, healthier, fuller and happier lives.

The 1962 AGM took place on 12 February and the speaker was County Councillor Hazel Damant who dealt with the Local Government Re-organisation whereby the two boroughs of Finchley and Hendon were to be joined with the three Barnets (Chipping Barnet, Friern Barnet and East Barnet) between 1962 and 1965 to form one of the largest of the new London boroughs, then referred to as “Borough 30”. When a name was found for it, each of the five units was allowed one vote and that is how the name Barnet was decided upon, as the three smaller UDCs were agreed to have that in preference to the artificial concoction ‘Finbardon’, which Finchley and Hendon had worked out between themselves.

In May 1978 the Association changed its name to Friern Barnet and Whetstone Ratepayers’ Association and is now known as Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents’ Association.

Footnote:

This article was prepared from notes supplied by the late Karl Ruge who had written a more comprehensive history of the Association and this is now held at Barnet Local Studies and Archives.

THE DAYS BEFORE WAR BROKE OUT

by Percy Reboul

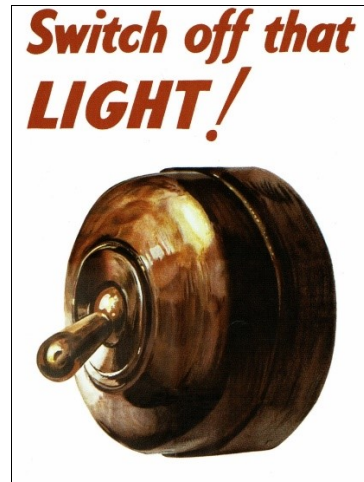
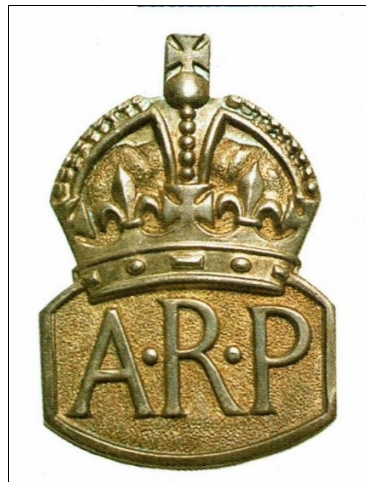
It is not difficult to imagine the fears and anxieties of all people as World War II approached in 1939. For many, the horrors and anxieties of the First World War were not forgotten. One thing was certain: life was about to be transformed!

On thinking about such matters, I recalled a tape recording made in 1980 in which an old Whetstonian friend (a late teenager when war broke out) recalled some memories of those very early days of the war when lifestyles were about to be transformed:

“I was born in Muswell Hill in 1920 and we moved to Pollard Road, Whetstone, in 1925. One of the schools I attended was St James’ in Friern Barnet Lane and I greatly admired the headmaster, Mr Yeaxlee, who was a gentleman as well as a fine teacher.

As a teenager in the late 1930s I obviously was aware of the trouble that was brewing but my life was so full with other things, like All Saints’ Social Club and Scouts, that I had little time to worry about anything else outside my own world.

In 1938, however, they brought in compulsory National Service which meant that everyone from the age of 20 could be called upon. The powers that be could see that war was coming. On the morning that war was declared and the air-raid siren went, I was at All Saints’ Church filling in sandbags for the small hall which had been turned into a casualty clearing station. I was a qualified First Aider and when the air raids started I went along to the ARP who took me on unofficially because of my age. They pointed out, incidentally, that if I was injured during the course of my duties, I would have no claim on them! I was based on an ARP air-raid shelter in Loring Road which had been built in someone’s garden. I turned out every other night.



One day in 1940, my girlfriend (now my wife) told me that the local railway Home Guard were desperate for men to guard the main line railway tunnel by Morley’s Fields in Russell Lane. So I became a member of the Home Guard, was dished out with a uniform, and enjoyed three months with them guarding the tunnel.

Our HQ was Oakleigh Park School and we had a platelayers’ hut near the tunnel entrance where there was always two of us on duty. One morning we had to practice immobilising the lines in both directions by inserting V-shaped metal bars (made from railway lines) into holes across both tracks so that any train coming in either direction would be derailed. The practice went well until one of the bent rails got stuck in its hole with a train due in a few minutes. Every man tugged at the rail and we got it out just a few minutes before the train arrived”.

Footnote by David Berguer

Some of our older members will recall the Anderson shelter which was developed in 1938 and named after Sir John Anderson who was in charge of Air Raid precautions. It was made of corrugated iron sheets with a reinforced steel door and was erected in people's back gardens. It had to be buried to a depth of four feet and the excavated earth was then used to cover the shelter with a protective layer. By 1939 over 2,250,000 had been produced and although they were effective against anything but a direct hit, they invariably filled up with water and were very cold in winter. For this reason many people abandoned them and a new type of shelter was introduced. The Morrison shelter, named after Herbert Morrison, then the Home Secretary, could be erected indoors and was thus more comfortable, particularly at night.



Excavating an Anderson shelter

TAPE RECORDER UPDATE

Following the picture of the Friern Barnet Tape Recorder Club in the last issue, we had an email from our member Neil Rosen-Webb who explained that the machine in the foreground is a Ferrograph Series 4, which apparently had valves and was 'built like a battleship'. It dates from 1959 so it would seem that the Club was probably around in the 1960s. Any more information would be welcome.

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