

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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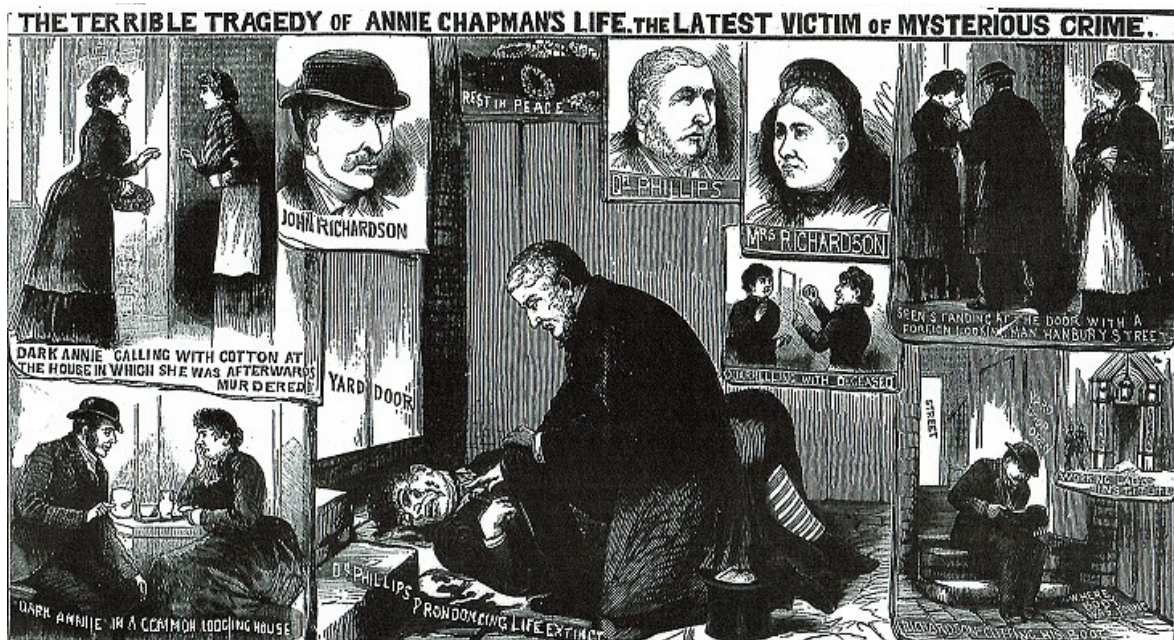
## JACK THE RIPPER IN FRIERN BARNET

by David Berguer

Between August and November 1888 five murders of women took place in Whitechapel, almost certainly perpetrated by the same killer, initially nicknamed Leather Apron. The first victim, Mary Ann Nichols was found at 3.45am on 31 August in Bucks Row. On 8 September the body of Annie Chapman was discovered at 6.00am in Hanbury Street. On 27 September the police received the following letter:

“Dear Boss

I keep on hearing the police have caught me but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough. I hope ha, ha. The next job I do I shall clip the ladys ears off and send to the police officers just for jolly wouldn't you. Keep this letter back till I do a bit more work, then give it out straight. My knife's so nice and sharp I want to get to work right away if I get a chance. Good Luck.



From "The Illustrated Police News" 29 September 1888

Yours truly  
Jack the Ripper

Don't mind me giving the trade name

PS Wasn't good enough to post this before I got all the red ink off my hands curse it. No luck yet. I'm a doctor now. ha ha"

From then on the name Jack the Ripper became notorious, particularly as two more women, Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes, were murdered on the night of 30 September. Elizabeth was found at 1am in Duffield's Yard and Catherine in Mitre Square at 1.45am. The murders ceased after one more victim, Mary Jane Kelly, was discovered on 9 November.

The murderer was, of course, never caught and many names have been put forward over the years, ranging from surgeons to royalty. However, Sir Melville Macnaughten, Assistant Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police at the time, identified three suspects - Aaron Kosminski, Montague John Drutt and Seweryn Klosowski but the police were hampered in their investigations by the refusal of local Jewish people to give evidence against fellow Jews.

Aaron Kosminski lived with his sister in the area where the murders were committed and worked occasionally as a hairdresser. He had been born on 11 September 1865 in Poznan, Poland and probably came to England in 1882.

In July 1890 he was placed in the Mile End Old Town Workhouse and the Medical Officer justified his committal on the grounds of his delusions and his refusal to accept food from anyone - he had been eating scraps of bread from the gutter. He refused to work and never washed and apparently he had once threatened his sister with a knife.

He was transferred to the Middlesex County Pauper Lunatic asylum at Colney Hatch in 1891 and the receiving doctor there confirmed the nature of the delusions, noting that he answered questions fairly but tended to be reticent and morose. His delusions persisted and he continued to refuse baths and became incoherent and apathetic.

In January 1892 he suffered an excited episode and attacked an attendant with a chair. This was in marked contrast with his usual apathy and inactivity. By now his habits were clean. In November that year he was quiet and well behaved, but still refused any work. He had also given up speaking English and would only converse in German (presumably Yiddish).

January 1893 marked the start of his increased intellectual impairment. He had occasional noisy, incoherent episodes and in April he was quiet and incoherent. In September indolent, quiet and clean, but answered questions about himself. Finally in 1894 he was found to be quite demented and incoherent and was transferred to Leavesden, to the Home for Imbeciles. He remained there for the rest of his life, dying at the age of 54 in 1919.

So, had the real Jack the Ripper been incarcerated in Friern Barnet for a time? We shall probably never know.

## PRIORS & OWEN OWEN

by John Heathfield

We all remember Owen Owens. My daughter had a Saturday job there as a waitress in the restaurant which was on the third floor and reached by a square staircase built around the lift. The ground floor was devoted to clothing and the second floor to fabrics.

But do you remember Prior's?

Benjamin Prior was born in Cambridgeshire in 1842. He moved to Hammersmith about 1870 and to a new shop at 14 High Road, Finchley about 1875, about where W H Smith stands (number 766 High Road). The 1881 Census shows:

Benjamin Prior	aged 39
Caroline, his wife	aged 32 with 4 children
Margaret Martindale	aged 29 shop assistant lived with the family over the shop
Louise French	aged 25 shop assistant lived with the family over the shop
Elizabeth Mansfield	aged 13 nursery maid



The original Prior's store at 770-774 High Road in 1935.

By 1935 they had spread to 3 shops, numbers 27, 29 and 31 High Road (now numbers 770-774) and following the demolition of the Stephens Memorial Hall on the southern corner of Castle Road in 1938 Prior's built a brand new draper's shop on the site. This was sold to the Liverpool-based firm of Owen Owen about 1970.



Owen Owen in December 1980 (photo by Doug Rose).

The building is a fine example of the Art Deco style with some remarkable etched glass windows. If it is not listed, then it should be!

Prior's had a splendid system for paying the bill. The money and the bill were placed in a metal cup which was secured onto an overhead wire system which worked by a system of wires and pulleys and was connected to a central cashier's desk. The cup went whizzing along about 8 feet off the floor and returned immediately with the change. There were similar overhead cash systems at Barton's and the Co-op in Wood Green.

Following an air raid in early 1940, Prior's was closed for the duration of the war and customers were referred to the nearby Baker & Willis store at 704-708 High Road which was slightly more downmarket.

When I ran the Barnet Museum in the early 1990s we were given some of the display dummies to use in our costume room because Owen Owen was closing.

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### **DOG CONDUCTS ITS OWN DEFENCE**

The *Daily Mirror* of 5 November 1938 contained the following:

"Dog Conducts its own Defence.

A wire-haired terrier sat quietly under a table at Highgate Police Court yesterday while a policeman recited his misdeeds. The dog belonged to Arthur Steeds, of Friern Barnet-lane, Friern Barnet, who had been summoned to show cause why an order should not be made for the animal to be kept under control or destroyed.

While a police-sergeant told the Bench how the dog had torn his trousers, the culprit appeared to listen intently. Then he walked across to another police officer and licked his fingers.

After the evidence, the dog paraded calmly in front of the magistrates, who apparently struck by his virtuous behaviour, merely ordered him to be kept under control.

Police-Sergeant Rolph said that as he entered the garden of Steed's house after a complaint had been made, the dog attempted to bite him but was called off.

When he was inside the house the dog was brought into the room, and it immediately attacked him and tore his trousers. Another witness said that as he was passing along Friern Barnet-lane a dog came from a gate, growled, and gripped his trousers, but he could not identify the dog in court. Steeds said that some time ago he had had to replace the trousers of a newsboy which the dog had torn."

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## **ROUNDAABOUT**

Further to the article on the North Circular in our February 2016 issue, we came across some notes made by our Founder, John Donovan, on 23 March 1982:

"When I first moved to Friern Barnet in the mid-1960s, Colney Hatch Lane was overshadowed by huge trees, from just past *The Orange Tree* down to the North Circular Road. At the junction with the main road was a small roundabout – alternatively blocked by through traffic or, when the traffic cleared, very dangerous because the through traffic didn't want to slow down for the roundabout.

Eventually this bottleneck must have caused the council some embarrassment because sometime in the mid-1970s they went to work on it. They felled all the trees for 50 yards back up towards The Orange Tree, including a 50-yard radius semicircle in the grounds of Friern Barnet Mental Hospital, a lamentable loss of some fine trees.

For some months I didn't go near the roadworks, but when I did, it was to find that the roundabout was gone, Colney Hatch Lane had been raised about 10 feet to go over a rapidly widening North Circular, which had itself been dropped by about 20 feet. The eventual result was a magnificent flyover for the Lane, with the North Circular, now dual carriageway, sailing along below. In addition, the small stream running alongside the North Circ had been tidied up inside a large concrete culvert.

Thus matters stood for several years, until I'd got used to the lack of trees, and the denuded look of the edge of the Hospital grounds, indeed, a large puddle in the grounds when the roadworks were finished, was there so long, and grew so many wild plants around it that it was developing into a pond!

Then, a couple of weeks ago, I drove down the Lane and noticed that the old brick wall alongside the Hospital grounds had been breached in several places and embryo roads had appeared leading from the breaches, and the carpet of wild plants had been churned into a sea of mud by several large yellow 'tractors' – a new housing development.



The breach in the wall photographed by John in March 1982.  
This was to become Firs Avenue.

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## **WAR WARNING**

*by David Berguer*

Some two years before the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939 anxiety was being expressed about the international situation and the possibility of air raids on Britain. At a meeting of the Woodside Park Garden Suburb Club on 5 February 1937 a number of speakers expressed their concerns. One gentleman, a Dr P G Stevenson Davis said:

“I have no desire to appear as Public Scaremonger No 1, but it has been a characteristic of our race to look a situation in the face and not to run away from it. Let us acquaint ourselves with the true facts and then see if there is anything we can do about the matter. No one could doubt that a war is possible and in any future war air attacks would probably predominate. Various nations are signatories of the Geneva Protocol that they would not use gas in war, but treaties are scraps of paper to some people, and scraps of paper can be torn up.”

Dr Davis then referred to the department of the Home Office set up to consider air raid precautions and of the memorandum issued to local authorities to take up and supervise air raid precautions. The operating speed of aeroplanes was 200mph with bomb loads of 300lbs. High explosive bombs weighed from 100 to 200 pounds and they would penetrate any building in the United Kingdom, and exploding at ground level, would penetrate 30 feet. In other words, bomb proof shelters to be a protection against a direct hit by explosive bombs must be situated 100 feet below the level of the ground or built with 12 to 15 feet of concrete. To build bomb proof shelters for

everyone in England and Wales would cost £200 per head, and no government could hope to offer such shelters.

The meeting was then told about incendiary and gas bombs and it was stated that to saturate London some 35,000 tons of gas would have to be dropped. It was explained that there were four types of gas – eye irritants; nose irritants; chest irritants and blister gases. Examples of gas masks were shown to the audience but it was explained that: “The Government does not propose to allow you to keep a mask in your own home”.

The audience, having been sufficiently worried by all these revelations, passed the following resolutions:

1. That this meeting is in favour of air raid precautions
2. This meeting requests the Committee of the Club to organise a course of addresses on air raid precautions
3. That the meeting requests the Committee of the Club to set up a Sub-Committee to ensure that adequate precautions against air raids shall be taken in Woodside Park Garden Suburb, West Finchley Estate and the new Woodside Park Estate.

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## **WORKING AT STC**

*by John Holtham*

I still remember some of my first days at STC. I was very ‘green’, from a sheltered upbringing and education at Grammar School and College.

I was told to report to the Training School which was located in a building just outside the main site in New Southgate. I was introduced to two ‘trainers’ and it soon became apparent that these were in the ‘good guy’, ‘bad guy’ model. The others in the school were several years younger than me, having left school at 15 with no academic qualifications. However, they knew the ropes and I was the new boy. We did not become friendly.

You need to be aware that this was 1966. Health and Safety had not been invented. A ‘safe’ day was one where you got home without having had to visit Casualty. Cuts and bruises were to be expected!

One day I was told to drill some holes in a piece of metal. From my limited previous experience of drilling holes I knew that when the drill bit broke through, the metal tended to wind itself up the drill bit so I deliberately did not fully tighten the chuck onto the drill. When the drill bit broke through it behaved as I expected but, because it was a bit loose, it just stopped turning, This made an awful screeching noise but at least I still had all my fingers! The noise attracted the attention of the ‘bad guy’. He came over to me and said something like I was a sissy. He decided to show me how the job should be done. He tightened the chuck and started to drill. The drill broke through....BANG...the drill snapped, the job flew across the room and hit the wall. Luckily it did not hit anyone. I found it hard not to smile!

After the Training School I was sent to the Shop Floor. The first place, permanently burned in my memory, was the Blanking Shop. It was my idea of Hell. The noise was overpowering – no ear defenders then. The presses, the hiss of compressed air and

sheets of metal being moved about; my ears were still ringing when I got home. There was the smell of soluble oil, that smell remained on clothing forever.

I was introduced to my 'Mentor', who turned out to be the guy who ran the Black Economy on the shop floor. It appeared that you could get anything. He showed me his locker and it was full of stuff for wives and girlfriends of the men, cosmetics, stockings, condoms, anything. He also had a collection of erotic postcards, some of these he showed me I have yet to identify – they seemed to involve close-up images of the female anatomy and pieces of pipe.

One of the jobs I was given was to set up a press to cut a bar to a certain length. "Do the bolts up as tight as you can" my mentor said. I set up the machine and proudly showed him how it produced a bar to the length shown on the drawing. He was unhappy, apparently, he did not tell me this, but the bar had to be the minimum size, not the nominal. When he attempted to adjust the machine he could not undo the bolts. When I said he had asked me to do them as tight as I could, it did not seem to please him. It was the first time I had heard the 'f' word used in anger. Luckily I could loosen the bolts for him – I was stronger than I looked back then.

After the Blanking Shop I moved to the Plating Shop. Here pieces of metal used by the factory were coated with a layer of another metal using an electric current in a special vat. The idea was to prevent corrosion and ensure good performance during the life of the product. In those days the product was designed so that with regular maintenance it could be kept functional forever. Remember, the telephone business (the GPO) was then affectively a Government department and change did not happen!

I was shown round the department and saw the various vats. I was told that if the liquid was flowing, it was water for cleaning the product between processes. Static liquids were usually very toxic, however I don't remember seeing any labels or guards. The items circulated around the department on an overhead conveyor and it was interesting to see the shape of some of the pieces and some looked remarkably like hubcaps.

I remember visiting the toilet on one occasion and scratched on the inside of the door was a short poem that I can still quote:

"It's no use standing on the seat  
The crabs in here jump six feet.  
It's no use going next door –  
The crabs in there jump four feet more"

I wish I could remember my Shakespeare as well!

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## **BETHUNE PARK WAS RUBBISH**

*by David Berguer*

During the war recycling became part of everyday life and we were urged to save newspapers, cardboard, tins and even kitchen scraps which were then turned into pig food.

Today, of course, most of our recycling is as a result of the extensive use of packaging and simple brown paper bags have been replaced with shrink wrapped plastic and



cardboard and returnable glass bottles have been replaced by throw-away plastic ones.

it is claimed that around 70% of our household waste is capable of being recycled and anything that is not recycled is either incinerated or goes into landfill and there are charges for this which is why councils are therefore keen to reduce costs. Barnet's current recycling rate is around 40% and the aim is to reach 50%.

Before the war things were different, as this extract from *Barnet Press* of 15 March 1930 shows:

"It was reported that deputations from the Parish Councils of Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter had inspected the refuse tip at Bethune Park. In a letter subsequently sent to the Council, Sir Alexander Gordon, a member of the deputation asked for photographs of the tip, saying that: "The tipping scheme was ideal and should have more advertisement".

After a reference to the recent petition (printed at length in the *Barnet Press*) against the refuse dump there, the Chairman said "It is not, I think, generally realised that the present method of disposing of the house refuse of the district has resulted in the avoidance by the Council of large charges, and enabled the Council to convert the irregular, and more or less derelict ground forming part of Bethune Park into a recreation ground, which in the course of time, will be of considerable improvement and advantage to the district.

The method of tipping is as follows:

The disposal area in the case of Bethune Recreation Ground is worked in sections of between 20 feet and 24 feet in width and for the full length of about 150 feet. This section is first stripped of turf and soil which is thrown on one side for future use. The refuse is tipped in not more than approximately 6 feet. All tins are placed upright, large tins, buckets etc. are filled with earth, glass bottles and pots are broken up and rags, carpets, oilcloth etc. laid out flat on the original ground. Everything is raked to a compact mass and immediately covered with the soil etc., removed in the first instance and an alternate cover of not less than 9 inches of soil, loam or clay, or other suitable material, upon which, after well rolling and dressing, grass will quickly grow. At the end of the day's work the tip face is always covered, and so refuse is not allowed to be exposed overnight. All possible means are taken to prevent rats and other vermin entering the tipped refuse, and no firing or burning is allowed.

With regard to the depth of tipping, described as being not more than approximately 6 feet, this depth has been accepted, after prolonged research, as being the most efficient depth for the purpose. At this depth the heat generated in the tip is such as to destroy any germs or organisms which may have existed, and after the expiration of four months from the commencement of tipping, the refuse is cold and all traces of combustible and animal matter have passed away, the resultant being a hard compact cindery loam. Even tin content is found to have corroded away. The depth and consistency of the cover provided is most important when taking into consideration the penetrability of the larvae of the common house fly, which may be present in house refuse, though never in large quantities. This larvae can penetrate through 7 inches of soil and 18 inches of sand.

As an indication of the solid packing of the refuse, it will be noticed that two-ton lorries are constantly taken across the tip on a sleeper track during the progress of the work, and the track requires very little adjustment during the work or at the close.

As the face of the tip is limited to about 20 feet wide, the possibility of odours arising is minimised and when totally and finally enclosed the refuse is absolutely sealed and no nuisance can arise or odour develop.

Screens are provided and the workings are so fenced as to prevent the blowing of paper or access by unauthorised persons.

The Chairman, continuing, said that as far as the allegation of the presence of rats was concerned, the surveyor and several others had made a thorough investigation that week. They gassed a hole for two hours but no sign of rats was seen. In another part of the district, however, on land also belonging to the Council, a similar investigation was undertaken, and similar methods used, and in half an hour 25 rats were killed.

Some residents in The Crescent were noticeably against the rubbish tip. A Mr MacMahon said:

“At present the park is a recreation ground for flies and rats. Last summer I could not open my windows without admitting an influx of flies – and not ordinary flies either, but flies of abnormal size. When I went there 13 years ago there was a beautiful aspect. One of the first disfigurements was the allotments. Allotments may seem inoffensive to you, but to us they are intensely offensive. People dumped pig manure there on two occasions and we had to appeal to the Council to have the manure removed”.

The Chairman: “Surely the allotment holders did not wait long before they dug the manure into the ground”.

Mr MacMahon: “Too long for us (Laughter)”

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## **PRIVATE WALTER ALEXANDER SMITH**

*by John Philpott*

Correspondence between a Cambridgeshire branch of the Royal British Legion and the Parish of Friern Barnet has drawn attention to a previously unrecognised World War One grave in St James’s churchyard, that of Private Walter Alexander Smith of the Cambridgeshire Regiment, 2/1st Battalion, who died on 5 December 1916, aged 22. It is a family grave (not Commonwealth War Graves Commission) where a brother, who had died previously, is also buried. Walter is commemorated on the war memorial of All Saints’ Church.

Walter was born on 20 March 1894, the youngest son of Frederick and Margaret Smith of 1 Adelaide Cottages, High Road, Whetstone, where he was born, as were his two brothers. He was educated at Finchley Board School and after leaving school he

worked as a gardener, as did his father, but later entered the service of a Major Vesey as a footman.

His eldest brother, Frederick, married in 1908 and moved to Shepton Mallet in Somerset. Later that year his mother died. His brother Gregory died, aged 21, only Walter and his father remaining living at 1 Adelaide Cottages.

Walter joined the Cambridgeshire Regiment on 20 March 1916 and died eight months later in Beachwood Field Ambulance Hospital, Darlington.

The Cambridgeshire Royal British Legion is remembering soldiers of the Cambridgeshire Regiment at the centenary of their deaths and a service was held at St James' churchyard on 2 December 2016 at 10.00am.

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### MEMORY OF THE 1930s

This advertisement appeared in the 14 December 1934 issue of *Finchley Press*:



**AT YOUR SERVICE**

**XMAS:**  
Wireless accessories make ideal Gifts.

**RECORDS**  
All the Xmas records—and thousands of others—in stock.

**WE HAVE THE "GOODS."** Remember we are Service Agents for all the leading makes, Bush, Ecko, H.M.V., Marconi, Murphy, Ultra, Pye, etc., and carry a large stock to facilitate your choice and enable you to compare values.

**AND THE SERVICE.** Our staff of radio experts are here to advise and help you at all times and to give you that real service that you so often hear about but seldom get.

● Leave your XMAS Radio Problem with

**SPORTS & RADIO STORES**  
10 years reputation for service and attention.  
112, HIGH STREET, NORTH FINCHLEY, N.12  
Telephone - HILLSIDE 1183  
21, QUEENS PARADE, FRIERN BARNET, N.11  
Telephone - FINCHLEY 3008

**MURPHY**  
Sole local Murphy dealer

We specialise in Home demonstrations.  
Anywhere—  
Any time—  
Any Sets. ::  
Expert Advice.

Sports & Radio Stores first appeared in Friern Barnet in 1928 and were still there in 1939. They were stockist of Murphy and His Master's Voice radios. In 1937 they were offering an HMV Model 486 radio for 13½gns that 'brings in programmes from all parts of the world. It has a 5 valve superhet chassis. Three wavebands and two speed tuning'. A version with a radiogram cost 25gns.

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## **FRIERN BARNET ON FILM**

*by David Berguer*

Some of you may remember Thelma Harris who was leader of the Friern Barnet Girl Guides for many years and who also ran the little shop outside the gates of the Standard Telephones factory on the corner of Brunswick Avenue and Oakleigh Road South. Last year we were approached by Helen Edwards, her niece, who told us that she had a number of Super 8mm cine films that had been taken by Thelma in the 1970s and would we be interested in having them.

We contacted London Screen Archives who, in conjunction with Film London and the British Film Institute, are digitising old cine films for inclusion on their website ([www.londonscreenarchives.org.uk](http://www.londonscreenarchives.org.uk)) and, following a meeting I had with them at the London Metropolitan Archives, they agreed to look at Thelma's films. Having done so they confirmed that they were of local scenes in and around Friern Barnet and they agreed that these were of historical interest and they would therefore arrange for them to be digitised.

In January 2017 I received the digital files and Colin Barratt agreed to go through them and undertake the laborious process of editing them and adding subtitles. Colin has done a fantastic job and we now have some very interesting views of Friern Barnet and New Southgate, including the demolition and subsequent rebuilding of the railway bridge at Oakleigh Road South, the demolition of St Michael and All Angels Church and the rebuilding of Friern Barnet Grammar School.

We are going to show these films, which last around 58 minutes, at our meeting on Wednesday 27 September. Do try and come along – it will be an interesting trip down memory lane.

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## **SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**

**For those of you who have not yet renewed your subscriptions for the year commencing 1 April 2017, a further copy of the Membership Renewal Form is enclosed. If you have not renewed by 1 June you will no longer receive copies of the Newsletter.**

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