

Finchley 1850 - A Rural Guide



Setting the scene for the walk which he will conduct on 28th April and which will form part of the local contributions to Environment Week, Dr. Natelson paints the following word picture of Coppetts Wood

"Over a century ago landowners, farmers and villagers with traditional skills suddenly left the scene. The work they had created, Marie Celeste like, stands visible today in and around Coppetts Wood - a unique, open air museum of 19th Century rural London."

The tour to be conducted in April will show you the following underlined features: the grounds of Halliwick House, established in about 1280, was planted with fine ornamental trees still standing. A wooded hill top of glacial gravel and boulder clay was managed for centuries for hazel and hornbeam coppice - used for local building work. Oak standards were planted for large buildings in London. This wood and timber, being a valuable resource was protected from grazing animals on local pasture-land by constructing a ditch-bank system with planted hawthorn hedge.

In the early 19th century, the land-hungry rush created land boundaries marked by ditches, hedges and paths.

A sewage works was established around the wooded hilltop in the 1880s, then after 80 years use was abandoned, covered in rubble, topped with clay and left to nature. This flat-topped mound was rapidly colonised by plants and animals from mediaeval pastureland around. These plants and insects of ancient stock contain species that are now unknown anywhere else in North London or Middlesex. A good variety of plants, insects, butterflies, animals and birds may be seen on this site.

If you would like to catch a glimpse of life in the 18th and 19th centuries perhaps an unusual plant or butterfly, perhaps even a Finch in the ley ... then come on the guided tour of a potential nature reserve cum open air museum.

Sunday, 28th April, meet 2.30 p.m. Friern Barnet Town Hall (Colney Hatch Lane and Woodhouse Road). Dr. Natelson writes - P.S. Wear wellies and bring a camera!

ESTATE AGENTS' SIGNS - sweet but short-lived success

Our Environmental Officer and Vice Chairman, Rosalind Batchelor reports that the wall of the Convent in East End Road is once again being used to support unsolicited boards, which appear to relate to properties for sale in nearby Heath View. Not far away, the electricity sub-station near Park Farm Close is "For Sale" six times over!

Mindful of our mention in the January newsletter of the organisation CLASH and the Society's continuing concern about the abuses featuring estate agents boards, it is worth examining the reactions that Rosalind experienced in her autumn campaign when, after months of personal effort, she actually succeeded for a while in ridding the wall of its unwelcome decorations. Her words show how intractable the problem is and they underline the necessity for us to continue to be vigilant about the nuisance while at the same time recognising that some agents already feel as we do about the problem. They are surely worthy of our support.

"Besides being in contravention of planning legislation, these signs were damaging the attractive old brick wall. The Convent was also receiving callers inquiring about properties they did not have for sale.

Telephone calls to six offending agents received very mixed responses. Two, the most local agents, were extremely apologetic and removed their signs very promptly. Two, from further afield, were very offhand and would give no undertaking to remove their signs. Their names were passed to the local Planning Department. Even while these discussions were taking place, two brand new agents put up boards. Mother Francis Clare at the Convent was notified and encouraged to organise the removal of all the remaining signs.

Two of the agents with whom I discussed the problem of advertising at some length, would be in favour of much stronger legislation. Both have voluntarily reduced the size of their notices and would like to see a total ban on signs relating to flats." R.M.B.

FROM MY "ENVIRONMENT NOTEBOOK"

Rosalind Batchelor

Moss Hall Crescent Street Sign The old cast iron sign at the north end of the Crescent has still not been replaced. It is over a year since we asked for this sign to be renovated.

However, the old iron milestone is back in place in Regents Park Rd, near the Avenue, smartly displaying its new paint against a background of a newly built section of brick wall.

Lodge Lane car park has had height restriction bars installed recently. This should prevent its use by large lorries (to which we drew the Council's attention some months ago). The barriers are cleverly sited so that the skip lorry can still reach the bottle bank.

Cherry Tree Woods: The Parks Department has decided to defer felling work until the autumn to give time for a reassessment of the individual trees to be felled or retained. In the meantime, new planting will be carried out in several parts of the park.

Your contributions of trees are welcome (see last newsletter).
Phone 349 0407.

JANUARY MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

Mary Hodgkinson

Guest speaker at the January meeting, the Rev. Adrian Benjamin, Vicar of All Saints', Friern Barnet, was quietly celebrating that evening a significant anniversary. He disclosed that he had held the living for exactly ten years, to the very hour!

Following the custom of ringing the church bell at his induction service, he had rung it for "significantly more than ten strokes" - which, according to tradition, suggests that he will stay in office for some time after this anniversary! During the parish's life of 103 years there have been only four incumbents, surely a tribute to their stamina rather than an indication of a sinecure!

Down the centuries, many would agree, parish churches have been at their best when at the centre of the community's spiritual life. All Saints', said Mr. Benjamin, has all the character and all the facilities, even the right "fixtures and fittings", to take that role.

Built in 1882 when the feeling of being Victorian was at its height, the church is the epitome of that period. The play of light through the windows causes fascinating effects. The sunlight strikes the font at about 3 in the afternoon, a favourite time for baptisms; at Evensong around St. George's Day the saint's window is well illuminated; and on St. Lucy's Day the early morning light singles her out in her high setting in the window.

The Church's benefactor was John Miles, who lived in the house which is now the Golf Club and who owned much land around Myddelton Park. He paid for the building of the church on his estate, and on completion asked the Bishop to recommend a vicar. The Bishop's choice was John's son, Henry, at that time curate of All Saints' Reading (architect, J. Clarke, FSA) on which the Friern Barnet namesake "coincidentally" had been modelled. Henry is said to have accepted with great reluctance - yet he stayed for 50 years!

The church's fine decorations, including murals, are the work of a well known church artist, Sydney Gambier Parry. His efforts, in close collaboration with Henry Miles, spanned the period 1885 to the 1920's.

John Miles's foresight in providing the church with sufficient land has enabled valuable expansions in modern times as exemplified by the school's developments. The church hall, with 365 seats, is claimed to be the largest public hall in the Borough. An imaginative and ambitious venture is the Living Arts Centre, whose motif is the pomegranate, featured extensively in the church decorations. Adjoining the church is a spinney which will, it is hoped, become a conservation area. The Newsletter deserves a mention - a 20 page production which includes advertisements and has a monthly circulation of 1,000 copies.

The Parish's latest acquisition is a new organ, originally estimated at £30,000 in 1979 but eventually, through inflation, costing £51,000!

Mr. Benjamin finds special pleasure in taking the church to the community, as, for instance, on the traditional walkabout round the parish boundaries on Rogation day. No cloistered cleric, he enjoys "taking the congregation out of doors to bless things."

Hon. Secretary Kurt Weinberg hit the right note in his vote of thanks when he said the speaker had shown himself to be a man who loves his work and equally his parish, too.

FEBRUARY MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

"Had the old Great North Road, through Hornsey to Colney Hatch and on to Whetstone, not been such a muddy route through the section suffering from the drainage of the heights of Highgate Woods, the development of the Finchleys would not have been as we know them today. For the Finchleys, particularly East End and North End, grew up along the route of the improved Great North Road, via Holloway, Archway and Finchley, which superseded the Hornsey/Colney Hatch original."

Thus did Ken Gay, Vice Chairman of the Hornsey Historical Society, graphically link part of the history of our two adjoining districts when he addressed a very attentive audience at the February meeting.

He listed many other factors which likewise link Finchley and Hornsey, for example the sharing of a common soil structure (the southernmost glacial deposits from the last ice age), the fact that the Bishops of London have been principal landowners in both areas, and the simultaneous population/commercial development of both, linked to the same spasmodic expansions of London from as early as the Romano-British period through to the accelerating growths due in turn to the Turnpike Roads and finally the railways, bringing the concept of living in one place and working in another.

Mr. Gay surprised many when he indicated that many of the boundaries we know in North London today originated as far back as the Anglo-Saxon penetration of S.E. England after the Romans. Districts (or villages) such as Haringay (Herin's enclosure). Tottenham (Totals enclosure) and Crouch End (from Cross-end, an early Christian preaching point).

Another boundary creator was the establishment in AD 604 of the Diocese of the Bishop of London.

Muswell Hill owes its origins to the well and associated spring, Mouses-well, which earlier was known as Pinsenell's. This water had widely known curative powers and claimed King Malcom IV of Scotland at the end of the 12th century (he had a leprous-like condition) among its successes. In 1152, 64 acres of land including the well (on the right going north down Colney Hatch Lane) were given to an order of Nuns in Clerkenwell who needed space for a dairy farm. After the dissolution of the monasteries that land became officially a part of Clerkenwell, "detached", and actually remained so, as a local irritant, right through to 1900. Other factors governing Muswell Hill's development (as of Finchley's) centre around the Bishop of London's lands, the enclosure of his hunting park in 1303, the disposals of various parcels from time to time which became local family "estates", and finally a reversal of all that between 1897 and 1910 when two contemporary developers Edmondson and Collins bought up several large estates and developed them cohesively with the Edwardian housing style we recognise there today. They also created several excellent Congregational Churches but significantly no pubs!

Mr. Gay also traced the shorter history of Fortis Green (a 16th century name) originally a trackway from Muswell Hill to Finchley which, with the 18th/19th century Enclosure Acts took a more finite shape compressed between the "enclosures" along its length. This process expanded from 1852 in the growth of houses on specific plots along each side of the road. Fortis Green was notable from 1845 to 1902 by the location of a Brewery (killed off by that absence of pubs in Muswell Hill perhaps?).

GARDENERS' BRAINS TRUST - REPORT

Over twenty Finchley Society members were among the full house of a one hundred and twenty or so strong audience on Saturday, 2nd March at the Finchley Methodist Church Hall. This event you will remember was held as part of the church's fundraising for their forthcoming Flower Festival in September.

The evening was a considerable success by any token. The panel of three experts (unfortunately depleted due to Mr. Kitchener's absence due to sickness) dealt skilfully and in detail with no less than 32 questions both from the floor and from direct submission. Additionally, they commented on topical matters, especially relative to the recent local snowfall and low temperatures. This remarkable programme was further enhanced by the serving of homemade refreshments by courtesy of the Guild Players.

The "experts" were G. Fedrick and R. Ingall, respectively Parks Superintendent and Arboricultural Manager with the L. Borough of Barnet, and W. Simmons, the third generation local nurseryman whose personal specialisation is in the cultivation of orchids.

SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC - FINCHLEY CONNECTIONS?

Mary Hodgkinson

Stories of South Polar expeditions seized my imagination in schooldays. I could not read enough of Scott's and Shackleton's exploits. A breathless sonnet of mind about sailing ships was sent to Commander Frank Worsley, a close associate of Scott's for many years. It received a sympathetic response, together with a signature - another item for my scrapbook.

When I learnt by chance, from Peter Brent's biography, "Captain Scott", that Scott had commissioned a motor sledge, "built in workshops at Finchley on the outskirts of London by an engineer named Hamilton", I set out on a literary voyage of discovery about this fascinating link with our locality. Here is an outline of what I have found out so far:

A study of correspondence in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge revealed that Lieut. Reginald Skelton, R.N., was put in charge by Scott of a motor sledge project which was to prove a pioneer development in Polar transport. It was stimulating to discover a letter referring to the enclosure of a blueprint for the sledge and signed by Belton Hamilton as managing director of Autolec, Finchley - full address not given. Local trade and residential directories showed that in 1908 Belton Hamilton lived at 5 The Grove and in 1907 at Cavendish House, Mountfield Road. His firm, known as Autolec Syndicate Limited, was situated at 3 The Mall, Ballards Lane.

According to the Polar Record, Volume 18 No. 114, 1976, the final test sledge was made by the Wolseley Tool and Motor Company (a Maxim-Vickers subsidiary) in Birmingham. The specifications drawn up by Lt. Skelton included: a four-cylinder, air-cooled engine of 12 hp with an aluminium crank-case; Bosch magneto ignition; exhaust heated carburettor; worm drive and a separate clutch to allow tracks to "free wheel"; overall dimensions 4 ft. 5 1/2 ins wide by 14 ft. long; tractive surface, 9 ft. 6 ins. and ground clearance of 9 ins. I understand that this sledge had a new feature which was the forerunner of the "caterpillar wheel".

We know that in the event the two sledges which accompanied Scott part-way to the Pole proved unsatisfactory and were a great disappointment to him. I have yet to establish beyond doubt that it was Belton Hamilton's sledges which were used. The answer, I believe, lies in correspondence at Cambridge which I have not yet seen and possibly in issues of the magazine "The Engineer" which appeared in the early 1900's.

Members and friends have searched their memories for recollections which would help in my research. I am indebted to Mr. Arthur Hall for the information that a Miss Oates, sister of Captain L.E.G. "Titus" Oates, formerly lived at a flat in Derby Lodge, East End Road - an odd coincidence!

FOR OLDER MEMBERS - THE SMEETON MEMORY AND OBSERVATIONS TESTS

Cyril Smeeton has written with two posers - the answers to which he needs for the completion of Vol.11 of the M.E.T. History (which Paddy Musgrove referred to in the February newsletter).

Firstly, Cyril needs to know the year (better still, the date) around 1920 when the crossover system in the track in Ballards Lane at Tally Ho Corner was altered from what was technically known as a "facing crossover" to the style called "trailing crossover". This is of course all to do with northbound tramcars about to terminate at Tally Ho and returning southbound on the opposite lines.

It seems that the trailing crossover, when introduced, allowed the northbound tram to spring through it and then when the train reversed, the points deflected it automatically across to the southbound track. In the earlier "facing" system a northbound tram would first have to change the points to deflect itself across to the opposite track and then would be able to reverse south down that track.

Cyril believes that the change may have taken place between 1920 and 1928 (when the old Tally Ho was demolished).

Secondly, he also needs details of some of the schemes proposed between 1924 and 1932, for a tramway interchange in Golders Green Station forecourt, in particular the "loop" schemes. These would have involved a complete loop leaving Finchley Road, going round the forecourt, back to Finchley Road and returning north to Finchley.

Cyril indicates that this idea was bitterly opposed in Golders Green, and that, while the Hendon Council minutes abound with references to it, no diagrams of the loop schemes have come to light. (Not to be confused, by the way, with the diagram which did appear in the local press of an original scheme for a short siding off the main road).

Are there perhaps some copies still existing that may have been handed to Council members when these schemes were being discussed?

Any information or suggestions please direct to Cyril Smeeton at 8 Eden Bank, Ambergate, Derbyshire DE5 SGG. He will be eternally grateful for your help.

WILDLIFE - IT'S ALL AROUND US

Derek Warren

The first week of 1985 proved to be most interesting from the wildlife point of view. Within 11 miles of Tally Ho Corner, 13 Herons were roosting by a ditch whilst the adjoining fields were alive with several hundred Redwings. A Kingfisher was searching the

streams by a lake where Snipe were feeding in the mud and Goldfinches and Siskins were eating the seeds of the cones from the alders. Greater and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were observed searching the dead trees for insects, together with Tree Creepers and Nuthatches, whilst Goldcrests were high in the fir trees and Longtailed Tits were low in the bushes. The snow brought many of the birds closer to habitation, 17 Redwings alone arriving in my garden.

Several species of fungi were still to be seen including Sulphur Tuft and Velvet Shank, and the Red Campion was in flower. Rabbits and foxes were seen on several occasions, one fox being observed drinking from a garden pond within a few hundred yards of Tally Ho Corner.

By the noise the Tawny Owls were making in the autumn, there are at least 8 territories in the district, and there must be others. (Ed. See the item on frogs and owls in this month's newsletter).

Footnote (Ed) ... Derek's amazing observations in just one week of the New Year encourage us to ask you again to write briefly to the Newsletter with a note of what life your Finchley garden supports.

From earlier responses we noted, for example, that Membership Sec. Roy Thomas recorded 19 bird species in his garden during March '84, while Pauline Gunn mentioned a neighbour who has logged no less than 27 (and at least 6 of small mammals): Mrs. Holmes in Long Lane grows Fritillary Meleagrimis - Darlands Lake clearly has Fin.Soc. competition!

COLLEGE FARM - PRESENT AND FUTURE Chris Ower



Many readers will know that it was my vivid impressions as a 10 year old visiting College Farm on a school trip that contributed as much as anything to my later decision to take on the tenancy and endeavour to provide that same thrill for thousands of present-day London children and their families.

The number of school visits through 1983-84 has continued to grow, from approximately 65 to 100, in the season April-October. If school holiday periods are extracted, one can see that this is now a very heavy schedule in the 16 or so remaining weeks - so much so that the resultant diversion of man-hours from those activities which principally fund the farm (the shop and the feedstuffs) have necessitated an extra employee to specialise in handling the school visits.

Of course that in itself increased the overhead again and, taken with the re-rating that occurred in 1983, and the water rate adjustments, etc., we seem to be on an eternal treadmill of rising costs! For example, even after considerable study and streamlining of the feeding patterns, our current weekly bill for feeding the animals is over £100.

Jane and I continue to work away at all those financial and operational problems, positively encouraged by every bit of support that is provided, such as the generous donation last year from the Getty Trust, which funded valuable building improvements. Now we are turning our attention to several new projects for 1985. The first, for which we already have most of the materials, is to enhance the character of the central block, behind the aviary and tea room, with specialist indoor stalls for both sheep and cattle. Our idea is thus to extend the school visits "season" into the winter. In that connection we are already reappraising the cattle that the farm should have, creating a variety of breeds, perhaps even including a milking cow, to capture the wider interest of our visitors.

To assist in staving off the ever threatening cash crisis, a scheme of business sponsorship for "groups" of animals will be invited. If that could be made to cover at least feeding costs, our funds could be stretched more effectively to accelerate building improvements, etc.

Next, when funds permit, a proper children's pets corner of small animals is envisaged and for which quite sophisticated fencing will be required.

As the first Open Days in 1985 approach (30th-31st March) there is considerable tidying up and overdue maintenance work to be completed. For this we will be very glad of the extra hands of two young persons who have joined us under the "Stepping Stones" scheme of Camden Ventures, for young people without jobs.

We look forward to welcoming all Finchley Society members to the farm this year and to the invaluable services of the College Farm Gallery and the Friends of College Farm who organise and manage the various events that stimulate wider public support for this vital North London Amenity -for today - and tomorrow.

For The Finchley Society: Carol and John Halls (Joint Editors)
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