

The Finchley Society Newsletter

June, 1985 No.6185 Supplement

A.G.M. 1985 Mary Hodgkinson

Our AGM on 29th may reflected the varied interests of a thriving amenity group. We looked back with satisfaction on a year of considerable achievement and an increasing number of public events, in particular last summer's "Inky" Stephens commemoration. It is clear from what was said from the platform and in discussion that another strenuous year has already begun. We were delighted to have President Spike Milligan with us. He genially chaired the meeting until the refreshment interval, and stayed to chat with us while handing round biscuits before leaving for another prior engagement. Many thanks were expressed to Joan Sturdy for her charming floral decorations for the occasion and to her helpers who provided refreshments.

Chairman Paddy Musgrove, entering his second year of office, voiced a protest about our predominantly "protestant" image (in the secular sense). It is inevitable that press coverage of our major campaigns, which is encouraging to us, will leave in some minds the impression that we do nothing but object. Paddy made it clear that much of our time is occupied with mundane and yet essential work, such as scanning lists of new planning applications. As for the idea that we are setting ourselves up as arbiters of aesthetic taste, this again is not the case. We certainly have nothing to say about private preferences such as the choice of bricks for a kitchen extension. Our function is to intervene only when we foresee a change in the character of the neighbourhood and then as little as possible.

The Chairman reminded us that the Society has been concerned for some about the way in which the loss of shops through office development is resulting in a change of character in North Finchley and Whetstone. He expressed concern, too, about the loss of shops such as Florence Wyman's in the Church End conservation area and its replacement by "yet another estate agents". The restriction on further office development at Tally Ho, North Finchley, which was a condition of the GLCs decision not to object to the Gaumont Cinema development plan, is welcomed. The Society objected to the original scheme on the grounds that the size of the building would dominate the whole area.

The Green Belt, our defence against urban sprawl, is threatened by undesirable development within and along our borders. Paddy warned that "if it were not for the Green Belt, I have no doubt that London would be built up completely from the Thames to Potters Bar and before very long all the length of the M25" - the orbital motorway which we have long considered a major threat. A further erosion of Green Belt land will rise from the plan for a national sports complex at Cophall Station with seating for 5,600 and parking for 1800 cars. Paddy and Vice-Presidents Jean Scott and Bill Tyler were united in criticising the choice of site, isolated from public transport as it is, and thus were very worried about the size of the proposed car park. Member Warold Jones was alone in defending the car park as essential in view of public transport difficulties. Vice-Chairman Rosalind Batchelor, in a reference to encroachment on open spaces, had a memorable word for developers who believed non-agricultural land was no use unless it was built on. "They think nothing happens there. Something does happen there. Nature happens!"

The future of College Farm is still in doubt. Members were again urged to support this valuable "rus in urbe" at Henly's Corner by joining the Friends of College Farm. We look forward to seeing a programme about it in Esther Rantzen's "That's Life" series on BBC 1 which is being prepared at the time of writing.

In the open discussion following the AGM proper, David Smith pointed to our singular failure to recruit young people to the Society. He suggested that Task Force projects, such as the adoption of sites near their schools for clearance and improvement, would be more attractive to young members than the prospect of Monthly Meetings and other routine affairs. Members Jackie Brooks and Alan Chadwick immediately offered their services in the possible establishment of a youth section and this concept will shortly be examined by the Society's newly elected Main Committee.

Another form of service for members was suggested by Rosalind Batchelor, who would like to see at least one "neighbourhood watchdog" in every street to alert the Society to problems needing attention. Also of concern was the need to expand the numbers of members actively involved in Society matters - to reduce the workload of today's "few" who often handle two or three projects each.

Environmental Notes - Rosalind Batchelor

Abandoned Shopping Trolleys: Tesco of Ballards Lane tell us that abandoned trolleys should be reported to the manager or deputy manager on 349 9387, and arrangements will be made for their speedy collection. The 10p deposit has, in their opinion, considerably increased the number of trolleys returned to the store but it has not solved the problem completely. A larger deposit is being considered, and our recent letter on the subject will be passed to head office. Sansbury's trolleys with a £1 deposit recoverable in person on production of a receipt are less frequently found abandoned, but if they are, please phone 346 0194 to report their location.

Stone cladding: On 31st May the stone cladding applied to the ground floor flat of 15 Redbourne Avenue was finally removed. It is well over two years since the cladding was applied without planning permission (necessary in this case because the house was divided into several units). The matter went to appeal and we were among those who made representations. The inspector's decision was a considerable victory for conservation groups working to outlaw stone-cladding and was reported in "Heritage outlook" - The Civic Trust magazine. He wrote in his report: "far from enhancing the appearance of the property or being unobtrusive. the cladding is garish in appearance. It is obviously a contrivance since it clearly bears none of the weight of the house and it is a material that is utterly out of keeping with any other used in the Edwardian style houses in the road. On these matters I agree with the Finchley Society. Moreover, the claim that the cladding is typical of treatment given to many other houses cannot be sustained. If I were to allow this appeal, the council would find it hard either to resist other similar applications from those who do need express permission or to take preventative measures on grounds of equity. Very great harm might then be done by the way of the installation of more such cladding. Appeal dismissed"

In removing the cladding, considerable damage has been done to bricks below. The Borough Planning Department are insisting on the repair of that brickwork by use of thin brick slips to be mounted over the damaged bricks, and in a colour similar to the originals. This whole procedure must have been an extremely costly mistake for the individual owner. We hope others will learn by his experience and employ more orthodox ways to repair their brickwork, such as simple repointing.

Tiled Fireplace Paddy Musgrove

Visitors to Avenue House, who have taken part in any of The Finchley Society's conducted tours there, will certainly have remarked the splendid tiled fireplace-surround in a small ante-room off the main second floor bedroom. The twelve blue-on-white transfer printed tiles show children engaged in various pursuits and have now been identified as the "Months of the Year (Old English) Series- produced by Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, Etruria. The design was registered in 1878.

For this identification we are most grateful to Hugh and Helen Curtis of The Tile Society, who were very impressed by the excellent condition of the tiles and the rare circumstance of their having remained in situ in a carved wooden surround specially designed to display them. Mr. and Mrs. Curtis tell us that the series was also produced by Wedgwood in brown-on-white, black-on-white, and in colours. Both six-inch and eight-inch tiles were made.

Tales From "Environment Week" 27th April - 6th May

Coppett's Wood Walk Dr.0. Natelson

On 28th April, over 60 members of The Finchley Society went on a walkabout over the Coppett's Wood area. Paddy Musgrove had to be restrained from taking an old hedge home and Kurt eyed the pond with a view to swimming three lengths! Visitors saw, in blossom, the only wild Snowy Mespilus and the yellow flowering currant in London; and what a delight it was to breathe the aromatic scent of the Balsam Poplar.

But you know every week there are new things to see. For instance, at present, Mustard Garlic is in flower which emanates a strong garlic odour when a leaf is rubbed, the Purple Loosestrife with deep purple flower brighten the paths and ox-eye daisies carpeting the grasslands. There is also blue lilac, white comfrey and that eight-foot Hemlock too!

Coppett's Wood Conservationists are having their annual walkabout and picnic soon. Meet Sunday, 23rd June, 2.30 p.m. Friern Barnet Town Hall.
Buses 211, 134, 43. Bring picnic things and a plastic sheet to sit on. Wear wellies, bring a camera too.

On The Avenue House Trees Tour - Wednesday, 1st May

May Day evening, balmy, sweet?	Limes and maples, ash and elms
Well, not really, icy feet	All in several flavours,
Marked the ending of our tour	Pines from Austria, India, Chile
Round Inky Stephens's arbour.	Also here are neighbours.
Of those who here in Finchley dwell	Oaks scarlet, cutleaf, upright,
How many know this leafy dell?	corky
Some fifty of us now are filled	From England, Hungary and Turkey
with useful facts by Ingall spilled	With acorns sessile, acorns stalky
As through the grounds we wandered.	on soils most clayey, nowhere chalky,
	All may here be found.

Beeches weeping, beeches happy,	No need to travel Statesward
Hankies* free for taking	To find the oldest trees,
Near cedar spreading broadly	For Redwoods, coast and inland
A lesson on tree staking.	Are here in Finchley found.
Pagoda tree, laburnum,	You'll also find some fossils
Cercis siliquastrum	But here alive and well
Frisia and Robinia	Gingko and dawn redwood **
All very handsome trees,	(Real names are hard to spell)
But somewhat large for peas!	Are growing here apace.

Trees of heaven, Devil's sticks
Aralia spinosa,
Foxglove tree or really Paulownia tomentosa.
If you would find these treasures
So very close to home
Do not deny the pleasure
Allow yourself to roam
Through Inky Stephens's arbour.

ROBAT 1985

* Davidia or handkerchief tree
** Metasequoia glyptostroboides.

Stephens's Laboratory, Avenue House - Mary Hodgkinson

The laboratory was again open to the public for the afternoon of 2nd May. A party of 30 or so from St. Mary's Primary School, Church End, who were shown round by Paddy, listened and looked round wide-eyed and peppered him with questions, about the entrance to a mysterious loft, of course, and the internal telephone which "Inky" used to ring down for a pot of tea - and also about technical matters such as what ink was made

from. Something new again - Paddy told the party that Stephens' ink was still used for documents such as birth certificates because of its durability.

The children, who use pencils at present, will soon graduate to fountain pens - not ballpoint. The afternoon ended with a photograph of the group at the writing-desk, using the old-style dip-in pens, inkwells and blotter. A delightful afternoon for all of us.

As a result of that visit, several letters were received from the children concerned and the following anonymous one, freely translated from some quaint spelling, is selected as most representative and very charming. "On Thursday, May 2, Class 34 went to Avenue House to look at Inky Step Laboratory. Inky Stephens bought Avenue House by selling bottles of ink for one penny. His father, Dr. Henry Stephens invented his runny ink that did not fade. Inky Stephens had a poison bottle. I was interested in the brass microscope. He also had 3 bunsen burners and he had nice weights. I enjoyed going to Avenue House and I would like to go there again.

College Farm Events 5th-6th May

Denys Pegg

The weather forecasters were wrong and sun, rather than rain, greeted Cllr Leslie Sussman on his second visit to College Farm during his term of office as Mayor. This visit was to unveil a plaque (not an "oak tree plague" as reported in one local paper) to commemorate the planting of upright growing oak trees either side of the central road to College Farm. The Mayor and Mayoress inspected the guard of honour provided by Cub Scout from 4th Hendon (the Mayoress is their Akela) and from 6th Finchley (the Pack that sponsors the ducks at College Farm).

This event was the final item in The Society's contribution to Environment Week and was made possible by funds released on the termination of the Church End Finchley Trust. The Trust was represented by the former officers Prof. Antony Allott (Chairman) and Eva Flessati (Treasurer). An avenue of Lombardy poplars was planted over a year ago, but whilst fast growing they are not long lived and should be felled in 30 years or so. The poplars have now been interplanted with the more expensive but long-lasting 'pencil oak' (*quercus robur fastigiata*) and it is hoped that the oaks will still be there 200 years hence. The planting took place earlier this year and in both the planning and the execution of the scheme, we have received great help from officers of the Borough Parks Department.

The plaque that the Mayor unveiled had been mounted on a capstone that some 70 years ago was on a bridge which carried the farm road over a small brook a hundred yards west of Regents Park Road.

On the Sunday afternoon visitors were able to see the twin lambs born at 1 o'clock that afternoon, witness sheep shearing and subsequently see some of the Cotswold sheep fleeces being spun by Sue Pearl in the exhibition room. Other special attractions included a display by FAZE 7 BMX bike team, Garry Osborn (the Magician who has to be seen and heard to be disbelieved) and the inflatable castle, a firm favourite with the children.

On Monday, 6th the Boreham Wood Band played during the afternoon, and we are especially grateful to the 24 members of the band who gave their services without charge. Two police officers were present both days to explain the 'mark and watch' scheme. If you were not among the 1800 visitors to College Farm, you will probably be able to have your bike marked at future open days, for we hope the police will again be there on Saturday and Sunday, 6th and 7th July.

Other College Farm -Open Days" Notes

30th-31st March: It rained again, at least on the Saturday, and only 245 souls braved the conditions, a chilly start to the 1985 season.

The clocks were brought forward on Sunday morning and as though that were the cause, away went the rain, out came 740 visitors (and the inflatable castle) and despite the aggregate low attendance, £650 was raised on the two days - welcome addition to the funds to maintain the farm.

As an example of how valuable personal and simple efforts can be, the two young ladies who managed the "Watch" group stall with their "guess the whole egg" competition, alone raised £21!

2nd June: "This is wonderful..." said an overseas visitor buying raffle tickets "...but it must need a whole regiment of voluntary helpers to run it all". Yes indeed! ... and we could always do with a few more! Any offers? But it was a good day - sunshine, childrens' games, the jumping-up-and-down Castle, Pex Puppets Show, the horseshoe game, the egg game, the animals, and much to interest adults as well in the Art Gallery and Exhibition Hall. The Finchley Society Environment Exhibition attracted great interest and the "Save the Farm" petition gathered hundreds of signatories. Have you signed yet?

Next Open Days: 6th & 7th July, 2 - 6 p.m. put it in your diary!

Timothy Johnson

Monthly Meeting Reports Mary Hodgkinson

MARCH, 1985: How the Christian Enterprise Housing Association is helping to ease our "disastrous" housing situation, was described by Fin.Soc. member architect John Phillips. Mr. Phillips is a former chairman of Christian Enterprise, a charitable association based in Enfield and covering both the Boroughs of Enfield and Barnet. Over 18 years, this society has provided 450 flats and 40 sheltered flats and the present number of tenants is about 1,000. In 1979, the last year for which official statistics are available, the Borough had 8,000 on the housing waiting list, of whom only 600 were housed. At that rate, said Mr. Phillips, even without extra applicants, it would take 10 to 12 years to clear the list - "and what about those living in the 20 percent of sub-standard property in our Borough?"

Glimpses of case-histories which the speaker gave us, brought life to these figures: A family of four, all receiving psychiatric treatment because of overcrowding and living with an octogenarian grandmother ... a family of four, including a teenage daughter bringing up a baby in a two-bedroomed bungalow ... an old lady whose loo was down the garden, and who, having no bathroom, had to do without a bath for six months ... a nurse who married and paid the same rent for her first home, a damp basement, as that which Christian Enterprise charged her later for a two-bedroomed flat.

Christian Enterprise is trying to cope with extreme difficulties on the basis of compassion and with human need as the sole criterion. The Government funds on which associations like this depend for the purchase and conversion of property were hard to come by - as hard, said Mr. Phillips, as trying to push a steam roller uphill with the brakes on". In his view, there is a direct link between unsatisfactory living conditions and many of the social ills and evils of our time. He emphasised that millions of "ordinary people" were unable to afford the interest on a mortgage, even if they could obtain one - and even if any properties were available for them. In these circumstances, Christian Enterprise and similar groups must seem the last hope.

After this stirring talk, illustrated by slides and followed by a brisk discussion, we received more than a hint that, should anyone with property to dispose of happen to be looking round for a beneficiary, Christian Enterprise might well be borne in mind.

APRIL, 1985: Speakers nowadays are seldom offered a bottle of poison on concluding a public lecture. Bill Tyler handed an antique bottle marked "Poison" to Paddy Musgrove after his talk on the Stephens family at the April meeting - and Paddy was delighted with this addition to the "equipment" in Inky's laboratory at Avenue House.

We had been presented with a fascinating mini-biography, illustrated with a diversity of slides, of Dr. Henry Stephens, father, and Henry C.P ("Inky") Stephens, son, who in

the public mind have often been confused. Paddy reminded us that it was Dr. Stephens who invented the ink and founded the family firm. Father and son were in turn managers of the business and both conducted experiments in Finchley to improve their product. "Inky" of course, had a chemical laboratory at Avenue House in which he spent many hours during his spare time.

It is surprising that neither of the ink pioneers, involved in many aspects of public life, found an official biographer, and that local records of any substance are not available. Following an appeal to any resident with a long memory for recollections of this celebrated pair, Paddy hopes to discover yet more archive material.

Highgate Cemetery Visit, 20th April - Paddy Musgrove

Established as a commercial enterprise in 1839, Highgate Cemetery was one of a ring of cemeteries on London's outskirts designed to relieve pressures on the city's overcrowded graveyards. By the end of the last war, commercial difficulties at Highgate had led to a fall in maintenance, to vandalism, and eventually, in 1975, to the closing of the western portion of the cemetery which had become completely overgrown.

The story of how the Friends of Highgate Cemetery set about rediscovering overgrown paths and monuments, felling sycamores, replanting native trees and plants, effecting repairs and generally encouraging wildlife, was related to the fifty or so members of the Finchley Society who visited the Cemetery on the 20th April, by Mrs. Jean Pateman, the Friends' honorary secretary. Escorted by Mrs. Pateman and a colleague, we toured the cemetery in two groups noting the gravestones and monuments to the distinguished (such as Michael Faraday, John Galsworthy and Carla Rosa), to the popular (George Wombwell and his splendid menagerie lion; Thomas Sayers, last of the bare-fisted prizefighters; and the immortal F. W. Lillywhite, professional cricketer, who was responsible for the introduction of round-arm bowling) and also to the ordinary people whose names are unrecognised by us, but whose monuments provide us with a record of Victorian manners, art and attitudes.

The task undertaken by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery is enormous, costly and, by its nature, never-ending. We thank them for their enterprise and their labours on behalf of us all.

Darlands Lake Nature Reserve - Open Day, 21st April Derek Warren

There were sunny periods during the day and it kept dry but unfortunately there was that cold north wind'. About 100 people attended, including members of The Finchley Society and the Middlesex Society. Guided tours were made with Parties of 20 or so, resulting in different observations being made by the groups.

Migrants were heard and seen, those in the afternoon getting a glimpse of the first Swallow, (although being only one it proved it wasn't summer yet) Also seen were House Martins, Blackcaps, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. All three species of Woodpecker were seen or heard as well as Tree Creepers, Nuthatch, Heron - a total of 34 birds were recorded. Rabbits and Squirrels were about but the Fox kept away, although it was seen the day before and the day after. A dead Bank Vole was found on the path.

The main reason for the open Day was to show Off the Fritillary plant and some fine specimens were in bloom, including several white ones out of over 3000 plants. Also noted were Bluebells, Coltsfoot, Lesser Celandine, Dandelion, Blackthorne, Cow Parsley, Violet, Barren Strawberry, Wood Anemone, Red Campion and Narcissus.

Thanks to all those who came to support the Herts and Middlesex Trust for Nature conservation, who are keeping this oasis for all to enjoy in the heart of the Borough, straddling the boundary between the districts of N12 and N20.

Musick For A While, 21st March - Pat And Peter Marsh

The recital held in the drawing room of Avenue House on 21st March was preceded by wine and light refreshment and attended by the maximum number of Finchley Society members and others that the room could seat, (including one youngster only a few months old).

The performers were introduced by our Chairman who reminded us that the recital was the result of the previous successful evening of music and readings held last year at the Avenue House Garden Party.

What many first time listeners to a baroque recital expected to be a solemn occasion was relieved by the lighthearted but informative explanations given by the performers of their unusual instruments.

Jetta Robertson, soprano; Beryl Braithwaite, virginals; Andrew King, baroque oboe; and David King viola da gamba and recorder, presented a programme of items ranging through the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in various combinations of voice and instrument. The whole programme developed continuing interest by its change of pace and texture and the ten items, both familiar and unfamiliar, were delightfully performed in what could almost be thought of as our drawing room!

WOT, NO PERSONAL LETTERS?

Shame on you all!, not even one solitary "Private" contribution to this month's newsletters other than from outside bodies. Please do come forward with more of those interesting personal items about Finchley, past and present, that are so relevant to today's Fin.Soc. efforts. Our Society cannot maintain a "shape" without a "body" of opinion and of history.

Eds

For The Finchley Society: Carol and John Halls (Joint Editors)
1 Finchley Villas, Finchley Park, N12 9JT