

The Finchley Society Newsletter

October, 1985 No.8/85 (supplement)

In response to members' comments about "readability" or appearance of the Supplement editions, we have over a series of recent issues been conducting experiments with different type-sizes and styles. This particular issue represents another such change.

May we ask you please to compare, for example, the last old-style presentation of January, 1985 with the larger type-face of March, the new type-style of June and the "full-sized-small-page" arrangement of this issue.

Please communicate your views on these alternatives to any members of the Society's committee or direct to the editors. Your collective wish is our command!

REMAINING CONTENTS

For members unable to attend many of the Society's activities since June, or for members who live away from the area, much of this issue will enable them to catch up with Fin.Soc. affairs. For others, the pieces will remind them of the enjoyable events that have occurred.

JUNE MEETING

Guest speaker, Dr. Enid Wistrich, Lecturer in Public Administration at the Middlesex Polytechnic and a former London Borough and Greater London Councillor, had a most encouraging word for amenity groups such as ours - and a challenge to local authorities who are not fond of open government.

"In the last 20 years," said Dr. Wistrich, "we have come to recognise that people are not willing to sit back and take without question what the local authority wants to do. You are the kind of people who are not prepared to let things go by the board and you will make your voices heard through your local councillor and through your society."

Dr. Wistrich referred to "a great flowering of consultation procedure" and said that the active participation of citizens through consultative bodies was now considered something positive, good, an extension of democracy.

Although we are inclined to think that party politics dominate local government to an unacceptable extent, Dr. Wistrich remind us that between 20 and 30 "hung" councils existed at present. Where are the independent candidates of old? we are inclined to ask. But not all elections were the straightforward, uncontested campaigns we sometimes imagine them to be. In a newspaper account of a 1900 local election, Dr. Wistrich noted a number of non-political but nevertheless powerful groups such as Teetotalers, Ratepayers, Progressives and Promoters of Morality.

Dr. Wistrich invited questions after her talk, from which in the easiest possible fashion we had learnt a great deal. She skilful evaded controversy about the G.L.C. and made no predictions. All she would say on that score was, "There will be a significant transfer of power to Central Government. We cannot be quite sure yet what the final form will be. But perhaps your M.P. knows!"

Students of local government must not, of course, overlook the contribution made by "Inky" Stephens. Paddy, in one of his characteristic footnotes, reminded us that "Inky" did not like centralisation and in a maiden speech in 1888 "tore his own Government's local government bill to pieces."



Our exhibition on the subject of Listed Buildings in Finchley and Friern Barnet was on display for the 3 days of Carnival in Victoria Park.

Peter Marsh & Co. had erected our stand in record time, thanks largely to professional help from 2 energetic young men called North London Light Removals.

On the Thursday one Society member, Leslie Martin, came all the way from Lancing in Sussex to join our staff. A great deal of his time was spent folding leaflets, as trade was slack. But we did receive many inflated bids for a plant with a SOLD label on it. (We stoutly refused to do any gazumping - after all, the plant had been bought by one of our helpers.)

On Friday trade was even slacker. We took 80p by 4 p.m., so began folding those leaflets for occupation. The judges for the Best Dressed Stalls prizes came and peered at us several times. We went on folding leaflets. In a sudden flurry of photography Mrs. Thatcher darted past. (It was not our turn this year). We went back to the leaflets. The Membership Secretary had his crossword puzzle to finish.

FRIERN BARNET SUMMER SHOW

Saturday In spite of incredible heat (which caused balloons on the Save the Children stand to burst), we actually began to sell both books and plants. By far the best seller was "Flying at Hendon". I wondered idly if Finchley was about to take off for somewhere cooler.

The Mayor of Barnet was among our visitors. Suddenly the Enchanting Carnival Princess arrived, and handed us the prize for Second Best Dressed Stall. She was soon followed by the elegant Carnival Queen who conversed with us for some time.

Very many thanks are due to all those who helped us in so many ways to make this annual exercise a success.

One of the spectacular events at the Friern Barnet Show was the weather, which started many days before we got there, and caused us to go sloshing about in wellingtons, splashing everybody with super mud. Cars soon got into trouble on the soft ground and after mid-day on Saturday a rumour reached the Charities Tent that Jane Ower's small white van had just been pushed out of an unexpected bog near the Arts marquee.

Jane and Chris had a splendid open-air stand, representing College Farm, featuring not only a good display of pet-foods and accessories, but also 'Claude' (a very large ram) and 'Rosie' with her bouncing twins (svelte black goats), corralled in neat pens.

The usual Pet Show was sponsored by Chris Ower this year.

College Farm Gallery was much in evidence in the Art Exhibition Marquee. The prize-winning pictures in the children's competitions were chosen by a panel of the artists. Meanwhile, in another part of the quagmire, the Finchley Society was dispensing books, membership forms, advice, pens, notelets and plants - provided mainly by Joe Ingall and the Sturdys (perhaps that should be Sturdies!); not forgetting the famous Pegg lavender, always a popular item.

The minute Friary Park spiders joined us again, scrambling about all over us and everything else.

The books most popular with our customers were undoubtedly the 45-year-old copies of "The Finchley Charities", with their hand-cut pages. (Only 3 copies left for sale, so hurry!)

We were able to cover the expenses of space-rental and transport by our sales, with a few pounds extra. Our grateful thanks to all the brave helpers who faced the summer conditions so cheerfully!

SEPTEMBER MONTHLY MEETING

Mary Hodgkinson

"Before the fizz fizzled out" was the intriguing title of the first talk of the season at the monthly meeting on September 25,

Guest speaker Dr. Joan Schwitzer, a former chairman of the Hornsey Historical Society, took us back, with the aid of evocative slides, to the Victorian period when a family pharmacy business in Highgate High Street was supplying, in addition to the usual medicines, soft drinks such as soda water, lemonade and ginger beer.

On a building site at the rear of the premises occupied today by the chemists, Bailey and Saunders, rather puzzling remains came to light some years ago. They proved to be a cistern and drain and other relics of the "wholesome drinks" business, and were the starting point for a remarkable piece of research by Dr. Schwitzer and her colleagues, not only into local history, but also into the somewhat neglected history of this once flourishing industry.

Among the most fascinating of Dr. Schwitzer's slides were pages from old prescription books inscribed with names such as Thomas Coutts, the banker and his wife (who became the Duchess of St. Albans), the Earl of Kenwood and Captain Heywood of the Bounty.

Dr. Schwitzer traced the history of the site to the 17th century, when it belonged to Christ's Hospital; she led us through the days of prosperity during last century, when pharmacies were rather like general stores, handling post office business and insurance; and she explained how North London family firms were squeezed out of the market by competitors.

Our own purveyor of mineral waters, William Walter Harris, who had branched out from the Highgate business to a shop in the High Rd. East Finchley in 1869, was one of those affected by developments such as the establishment of the National Association of Mineral Water Manufacturers, and he went into voluntary liquidation in 1877.

This admirable talk was like a refreshing draught from the vats of memory!

A down to earth postscript; if ever you hear the expression "codswallop", you may like to reflect that it is derived from the name Hiram Codd, a soda water manufacturer, and wallop, a syrupy substance diluted by carbonated water during chemical processes at the plant.

COACH OUTING TOSUFFOLK

Peter Marsh

Whether the good people of Bury St. Edmunds, having heard of Finchley Society's planned invasion were responsible for blocking the road to the coach park we never found out, but our drivers rose to the occasion and members were able to infiltrate among such interesting sites (and sights) as Moyses Hall (museum), the Cathedral Church, St. Mary's Church, the Assembly rooms, the Abbey gardens, etc. The two coaches had found their way to Bury via Thaxted and West Stow.

Thaxted we reached at 10 a.m. in the only rain shower of the day. We sheltered in the church which rather resembled a greenhouse with its walls of Tudor windows and many ingenious floral displays. The restored windmill was specially opened for us and was obviously maintained by enthusiasts. More devoted guides and members of the W.I. made us very welcome at the Guildhall with coffee and cakes.

We stopped at West Stow to eat our sandwiches and afterwards were shown over several reconstructed Saxon buildings. Some of these 'buildings had rough hewn plank floors above a pit. New archaeological evidence suggests that Saxons did not live in the pits as previously supposed.

From Bury St. Edmunds we returned to Finchley with memories that confirmed Alec Clifton Taylor's (T.V. documentary) view that this was a town of special interest.

Many thanks for this successful day which was reconnoitred and organised by Shirley Avery, Paddy Musgrove and Kurt Weinberg.

WEEKEND IN YORK

David Smith

The Society recently organised a weekend residential visit to York. Thirty two members took part, including three children. Accommodation was provided by the University of York, situated a short drive from the city centre.

After a hearty breakfast which included black pudding, we went to the Jorvik Centre which features a reconstruction of a Viking settlement and an excellent museum. The "journey through time" by automated cars is quite unique and to be recommended. After this, members went off to discover some of the many other delights of the city: York Minster with Morris Men dancing in front, the Yorkshire Museum, the Castle Museum, the narrow crowded streets and market stalls, the strolling players and musicians. It was positively mediaeval!

Sunday morning was spent in the same way, with many going to join the celebration of the National Railway Museum's 10th anniversary and watching, with perhaps a flicker of nostalgia, as "Evening Star" and "Mallard" steamed past. Replicas of "The Rocket" and "The Iron Duke", the latter on Brunell's original seven foot gauge were also in steam for the occasion. After lunch at the University, a leisurely return to London began. Special thanks are due to Kurt Weinberg who drove the 15 seater minibus.

The excellent weather combined with the inevitable bonhomie of any Fin.Soc. outing to create a most pleasant weekend in a most rewarding city.

COLLEGE FARM OPEN DAYS 5/6 OCTOBER

Timothy Johnson

What is an Appenzeller Spitzhauben? You don't know? - then try this one - What is the rarest breed of sheep in Britain? Several rare breeds of farm animals and poultry made their debut at College Farm Open Days on 5/6 October when the excellent new layout provided visitors with an extended "country walk" to meet them all. Both days were well attended, especially the Sunday when special attractions included Pex Puppets and the popular Watford Band.

Although these were the last two open days of the 1985 season, there is another chance to visit the farm and picture gallery on the afternoon of 3 November for the "Gallery Sunday". (Held the first Sunday of each month). The Artists Christmas Fair will be held Saturday, 30 November (2 - 6 p.m.) and Sunday, 1 December (all day).

In case you were wondering an Appenzeller Spitzhauben is a charming little bantam. Britain's rarest breed of sheep is the Portland, of which the farm now has a ram and two ewes. Other new names to tickle your fancy are Silver Seabright, Silkie, Cuckoo Marans, "Berkshire Betty", and Torddu - you can identify them on your next visit.

MIDDLESEX SOC= - INVITATION

Saturday, 19th October, a ramble ("High on bleak Hampstead's swarthy moor" - Macaulay) over part of Hampstead Heath, to Kenwood for tea. About 3 miles. Meet Golders Green Underground Station at 2.15 p.m. - Mr. Jeffery Evans your leader.

SPARE OUR GRASS VERGES! Mary Hodgkinson

"When you destroy a blade of grass, you poison England at the roots."- Gordon Bottomley.

If only residents with grass verges outside their homes would take this quotation to heart, a charming feature of our neighbourhoods would not be in danger of disappearing. It is sad to see bald patches caused by continual car parking - and in wet weather the grass is deeply scored by tyres. This happens, for example, opposite the park in Friary Road, where heavy lorries are often parked overnight and where motorists visiting the park are sometimes careless.

WHO CARES ABOUT BOUNDARY MARKS IN OUR LOCALITY? Mary Hodgkinson

In Torrington Park there is a group of "antiques". In an overgrown corner, along with the Victorian pillar box, are two round-headed, free standing metal posts, one marked "F.B.P. 1871", the other F.P. 1884, and a third, triangular "1837 Borough of Finchley" on one side and "F.B.U.D." on another - all in need of a clean up!

SAVE OUR ANCIENT PILLAR BOXES

Finchley has a good share of antique pillar boxes. Studying these is a hobby of Mary Hodgkinson's which she recommends. And she urges members to report any disrepair of their local "ancient monument."

Mary adds that there is a Victorian box near each of the entrances to the Beech Lawns estate in which she lives, one in Torrington Park and the other in Friern Park.

East Finchley has a box with an unusual cipher denoting the brief reign of the uncrowned Edward VIII. It is outside Down's Garage in the Great North Road.

"The VR monogram may be well worn," she writes, "but the 'top bonnet' in my jargon - often has a touch of elegance in its shape and decoration."



"I came across a gem in West Kensington - one of the rare hexagonal boxes with VR cipher and hinges side opening. The bonnet, topped with a pineapple decoration, has a foliage design. Unfortunately, the bonnet is cracked. Does no one care?"

"Who will form a society to SAVE OUR ANCIENT PILLAR BOXES - SOAP for short?"

NOW YOU SEE IT - NOW YOU DON'T

A certain Estate Agent's "sold" board was recently put up on public open space in East Finchley. Our "observer" noted that it bore the curious advertising legend that "This Drax board has been speedily erected by ..."

Members will be amused to learn that it was as speedily removed by same "observer" equipped with suitable crowbar!

OTHER NEWS

We are grateful to the Ladies' Group of the Union Church, Northiam, for a generous donation to the Society. This followed an illustrated talk given to the group on 19th September by Paddy Musgrove on the subject of "Finchley, Past and Present".

A group of recreation officers from California recently visited Barnet and were taken on a tour of some of the Borough's parks and sports areas. Led by Councillor Mrs. Edna James and Barnet's Park Manager, Gerry Fedrick, the visit ended at Avenue House, where Paddy Musgrove and Denys Pegg explained the history of the house and grounds and showed them "Inky" Stephens's fine drawing room and his restored first-floor private laboratory.

For The Finchley Society:

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