

The Finchley Society Newsletter

JANUARY, 1986 No.1/86 SUPPLEMENT

CHRISTMAS PARTY 19th DECEMBER

Around 85 members enjoyed a thoroughly successful evening, as ever, at Avenue House. In fact it can be said that it was an evening of several successes, in the following ways - Peter Marsh and Joe Ingall's photographic competition, "Identify the building feature" was so intriguing that some members are suggesting it could be translated into a wider local competition that one of the local newspapers might care to be involved with. More on this later!

There were over 40 raffle prizes donated for the occasion by members - surely a record in itself. Then to cap it all who should lead off the winners with the first number drawn but "Jones-the-Raffle" himself (Mr. Jones our indefatigable raffle organiser). Finally, the number drawn for the last prize of the evening was - No.1! No-one present could recall a raffle prize being won by the draw of a ticket No.1 - can any reader remember one such?

The food, drinks and decorations suitably eclipsed even all previous Fin.Soc affairs and our Hon. Treasurer reports that there was a healthy £15 surplus over expenditure for the evening.

After all that, what can be said except to wish the Society a "Happy and Successful New Year, 1986".

Footnote - Personal Thanks Shirley Avery

May I take this opportunity to thank all those who generously made contributions to the Christmas Party and/or so ably helped in the preparations and clearing up in the "dungeon".

Rosalind, who acted as "runner" up and down the stairs, could hardly walk by the time she got home!

Thanks again - everyone.

CAROLS AT COLLEGE FARM 17th DECEMBER

Your reporter had never been free to attend this event in previous years and it was thus with some amazement that he found no less than around 300 people there and a programme of carols, tableaux, mimes and solos much wider in variety than he had expected.

Introduced, or could one say compered, in lively fashion by the Rev. Denis Creamer of Ballards Lane Methodist Church, the West Finchley Guides both led and entertained the gathering in truly professional style.

To round off for the Guides a most successful evening, the District Commissioner for West Finchley, Barbara Snijder, took the opportunity to present a Baden-Powell Trefoil Badge to young Katharine Williams – the first such award to a guide in Finchley.

NOVEMBER MONTHLY MEETING

At the meeting of the Fin.Soc. on 27th November, Vice President Bill Tyler addressed the members and focussed their minds on the subject of "ARCHITECTURE IN FINCHLEY".

Charting Finchley's development from a rural to an urban society in the period from mid 19th to early 20th century, Mr. Tyler urged members to "look up" along Finchley's major roads and to "look behind" the modern shop facades, to see the wealth of style and detail in architecture that is present around us.

The local churches, schools, artisans' dwellings, Victorian villas and cottages, railway stations, and Edwardian housing developments all bear testimony to the handsome creative and decorative styles of former times.

Sadly, said Mr. Tyler, so much of recent Finchley developments, particularly flats and office blocks, lack that finesse and attention to visual detail, without which they are often Disappointing, Displeasing and Visually Unattractive. Of particular merit in the earlier architecture of the Finchleys is the manner in which buildings sited on major street corners bore distinctive corner-turning features – a dome, a spire, a pargetted panel, relief brickwork or stone patterning – all "emphasising" the significance of the building in question. Today's "new" Finchley corner sites, in contrast, seem to rely chiefly on sheer bulk, rather than style – and we are the poorer for it!

However, all is not architectural woe said Mr. Tyler, citing the excellence of such local schemes as the Alder School housing development, the Span houses in North Finchley, Nansen Village and the Council housing developments in Holden Road and Westbury Road.

In summary, he said "We are HERE and NOW, just as were the Victorians and Edwardians in Finchley before us, in their time. We can respect the past and learn from it but we cannot live by it. If we "pine" for the past we will surely come to "mourn" the present!"

Also at the November meeting a Special General Meeting was held, as previously announced, to adopt the accounts for 1984-85 of the Finchley Society and The Friends of College Farm. There being no questions, the adoption was proposed by Joe Ingall, seconded by Pat Dunnill and Jean Scott, and carried unanimously.

PRESENTATION OF ALFRED PIKE MEMORIAL Mary Hodgkinson
26th OCTOBER

An outstanding member of the community, the late Alfred Pike, sometimes affectionately known as "Mr. Finchley", was honoured at a pleasant ceremony in Avenue House on 26th October.

The ceremony began with the arrival of the Mayor, Councillor Barbara Langstone, and her Escort (husband Roy), who made their way into Avenue House through a Guard of Honour mounted by the 15th Finchley Scouts.

Welcoming our guests, Chairman Paddy Musgrove reminded us that at the time of his death in 1981, Alfred Pike was Patron of The Finchley Society, and "not just a figurehead." He took great pride in being our Patron and his link with the Society was just one example of his keen interest in all aspects of the environment. For one who had done so much to preserve Finchley's open spaces, it was especially fitting that our memorial to him should be a bench seat, finely carved from an oak which stood for nearly 200 years in the grounds of Avenue House.

In 1923 Alfred Pike joined Finchley U.D.C. as East Finchley's representative and was Chairman for the last 34 years of the Council's life. He played a prominent part in

the incorporation of Finchley as a municipal borough. In 1933 he was Deputy Charter Mayor of the new borough and subsequently served twice as Mayor, in 1937/8 and 1958/9. As a housing consultant, Alfred Pike introduced Finchley's first town planning scheme. He felt a deep concern about many aspects of the environment - in Finchley's open spaces, for instance - but his interests were broader still, and he served on every council committee, and was Chairman of many, during his distinguished civic career.

Denys Pegg told how he became involved as the then Chairman of the Society, in the project to present to the Borough a memorial of Alfred Pike's service to give permanent expression to his work for the Society. The opportunity arose when an oak which had stood in the grounds of Avenue House for nearly 200 years had to be felled because of its dangerous condition and North London cabinet-maker, Brian Bostock, was commissioned to provide a piece of memorial woodwork. In July 1982 the trunk was sawn and the logs transported to Mr. Bostock's premises to dry out. Meanwhile, a marker was prepared and set up beside the tree stump at Avenue House; a section of the tree, on which local events were recorded in relation to growth rings, was placed in the entrance hall; and a board from the same oak bearing the name of the house was affixed at the entrance.

Having accepted the gift from Paddy, the Mayor recalled how in his latter years, when she knew him, "Alderman Pike" - as many people continued to call him though he bore the title no longer was always "busy, busy, busy" on behalf of Finchley. "I can imagine him sitting on this seat and being very, very chuffed", said Councillor Langstone. In thanking the Mayor for accepting our gift on behalf of the Borough, vice-president Jean Scott pointed out how appropriate it was that Councillor Langstone should be representing Finchley on the Council -- the district to which Alfred Pike was so devoted.

Footnote: We are delighted to have in our archives Alfred Pike's personal and official papers, photographs and other memorabilia, kindly presented by his son, Hugh, which were displayed at the presentation, together with the Alfred Pike trophy for venture scouting, which was awarded on several occasions to the 15th Finchley troop, fittingly the guard of honour on the day.

Mr. Chris Church presented his audience with a complete picture of the origins, aims and operations of the organisation Friends of the Earth. Defining the 'Environment' as where we live, work and play, Chris made it clear that as a pressure group on behalf of the environment, the organisation is not just a "say no" body but one that seeks to first find a non-harmful alternative to malpractice before campaigning vigorously to eliminate or correct it.

A clear example is the way the Friends of the Earth has raised public interest in and demand for organically-grown fruit and vegetables (even some supermarkets are now finding it hard to keep pace with demand). That growth at once creates an actual reduction in the usage of pesticides / insecticides / fungicides while forming the basis of a strong campaign for continuing reductions of their application and particularly their misuse.

Listing just a few of the other current campaigns, e.g. those against acid-rain pollution, the question of nuclear waste disposal and the conservation of tropical rain forests, Mr. Church demonstrated how in each case his society's approach is to seek a "natural" reversal of events by persuading the actual parties involved in each problem how they could act differently, to everyone's advantage.

To take the rain forest issue as an example, three effective "forces" are being harnessed -

1. The timber trade itself, shown how rapidly its own raw materials are being exhausted, is co-opted to influence suppliers to fell more selectively and to replant with greater density.
2. The medical profession worldwide is alerted to the dangerous reduction of sources of important natural drugs which originate in forest areas, example the Rosy Periwinkle used to fight Leukemia and Hodgkinsons disease - and quinine, of long time value.
3. Governmental and public opinion is being made aware of the futility of the greedy technique of "Defoliate/Burn/Sow-grass/ 3 years cattle-grazing down to bare rock/exploitation for minerals." The consequences of forest-to-opencast mining in 4 years are truly irreversible and need fighting against for future generations by today's seducable population in those vulnerable under-developed countries.

Question-time revealed to Chris Church how his Finchley Society~ audience is already locally committed to their environment (didn't we all love our Summers Lane "recycling centre"?! - and Paddy Musgrove revealed that the scouts who collect paper refuse from him report that they raise around £1000 annually).

Our speaker should have gone home a happy man - and we, definitely even more environmentally conscious.

HAVE YOU SEEN?

- The "Barnet Re-cycling Guide"? This is a publication produced by Barnet Friends of the Earth, containing an amazing list of items which are recycleable, together with those persons / groups / recycling centres, to whom collections of such items may be taken. (Not least of all, the Summers Lane GLC Depot which accepts bottles, cans, cardboard, etc.)

Did you know, for instance, that the Herts and Middlesex Trust for Nature Conservation collect old flower pots, or that, on behalf of the Cat Action Trust a lady, Kathy Foder (888 0507) will arrange to collect from you, unwanted furniture. These, and scores of other valuable pieces of information are contained in this booklet which is available from Barnet Friends of the Earth at 18 Salisbury Road, Barnet ENS 4JP (Tel: 440 1366).

Adult education seeking members who perhaps have not found what they want locally might, if they are able conveniently to travel for it to Northampton Square, EC1, find the right alternatives in the Adult Education programme of The City University, a copy of which was recently sent to your editors.

We note among the courses, several featuring London, either historically, archaeologically or socially (how about London Coalhole Covers and Victorian Domestic Life?!) together with a wide range of more general subjects.

Interested persons should contact "Extra-Mural Studies, Centre for Continuing Education, The City University, Northampton Square, IC1V OHB (Tel: 253 4399).

A GIFT AND A CHALLENGE Paddy Musgrove

Latest addition to the Finchley Society's archives in Avenue House is a three-page stencilled document - "A Brief History of the Finchley Branch of the Y.W.C.A., 1886 - 1918". Among events covered are the building of Hamilton Hall in Hendon Lane through the generosity of Francis Hamilton of Brent Lodge, and the influx of women workers during the first world war to work in Finchley's balloon factory, established in the original (or "Old) Bohemia, now the premises of Vacuum Interrupters, 68 Ballards Lane.

Miss C. Shouler, who has kindly given us this interesting document, wonders if anyone is able to bring up to date from 1918 the history of Finchley's Y.W.C.A. and of Hamilton Hall. Any offers?

FALSE HARMONY? Mary Hodgkinson

Two Fin.Soc. members on an expedition to Edgware, were dismayed to see a building on an island in the middle of the road, dilapidated and boarded up, a prey to vandals. Why their dismay? Because this building, little more than a cottage, is reputed to have been the forge in which Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith" worked and sang. This dereliction seemed to call for a campaign!

"Check for authenticity", advised Paddy Musgrove. This was done - enthusiasm waned, for there seems no doubt that the forge is not the famous smithy. Local historians tell us that on the pavement on the west side of the main street stood an old forge which had once belonged to William Powell, claimed by legend to be the blacksmith who inspired Handel's composition.

However, the true William Powell was apprenticed to the local blacksmith five years after Handel left Canons, mansion of his patron, the Duke of Chandos, and could not have been the craftsman whose prowess with hammer and anvil led Handel to compose the "blacksmith" tune. Further, it is generally accepted now that this piece of music was not a memento of a visit to the smithy. It seems that after Handel's death, the story was invented as a kind of tourist attraction and publicity stunt, originating in an anonymous letter to The Times!

8.

Stop Press information about the dilapidated "smithy" is that it was put up in 1890 as a tram crew shelter!! Do other members have anything to add to this story?

DONATION

Paddy Musgrove talked in November on the subject of "Early Finchley" to the Men's Supper Club, Union Church, Totteridge. May we thank them kindly for the donation they made to our society's funds.

PAVEMENT OBSTACLE RACE

Mary Hodgkinson writes with a comment that local residents have campaigned successfully for the removal from the pavement outside a butcher's shop in High Road, N12, of a lifesize jolly-butcher figure whose stationary role, while friendly enough, did rather block the pavement.

Perhaps we could commend to the butcher the jolly lifesize gentleman just along the road at Oddbins, who has successfully climbed up out of everybody's way.

NEWSLETTER INDEX 1985

Member Joyce Searle has been hard at work again producing the index for the 1985 newsletters. We are most grateful to her for undertaking this task on the Society's behalf.

For The Finchley Society:

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