

## The Finchley Society Newsletter

JUNE, 1986 No.6/86 SUPPLEMENT

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1986

This year's A.G.M. (genially chaired by our President Spike Milligan) drew an attentive gathering of around 75 members to the Methodist Church Hall in Ballards Lane despite the continuing unseasonably cold evening air. Paddy Musgrove, Rosalind Batchelor, Kurt Weinberg and Joe Ingall were re-elected to the positions held in 1985/6. Mr. Parker was re-elected Auditor, and Shirley Avery, Peter Marsh, Harry Sharpe and Joan Sturdy were elected to the Committee. The full list of officers with addresses and telephone numbers will be given in the September Newsletter, after co-options have been made by the new committee, in accordance with the Constitution.

Chairman Paddy Musgrove in his address to the meeting touched on just a few of the specific points he had set out in his printed Chairman's Report 1986.

Unable in the time available to mention them all individually, the Chairman was at pains to stress that the Society is greatly indebted to those members who are truly "active" on its behalf. He revealed that at a count he made in the Summer of 1985, they numbered 100 or so. He appealed for a continuing expansion of that figure from a surge of "new blood", coming forward to assist, even in small ways, with Society matters - he and the other Fin.Soc. officers would be pleased to hear from all members interested in helping.

In relation to the controversial site at 261-281 Regents Park Road originally earmarked in 1979 by the Borough as suitable for a public or civic hall, Paddy mentioned the latest development, in which Barnet Council is taking the DoE to court to oppose the DoE instruction to Barnet to sell the site (see our January 1986 newsletter item for background details). The Society is pleased that such a sale should be vigorously opposed but it is nonetheless believed that some councillors' opposition is for reasons quite different from ours. Meantime Paddy indicated the Fin.Soc. is trying to establish how the so-called alternative public hall on the proposed Gaumont Tally Ho development, might be operated (rents, allocations, management, etc.) in the interests of societies such as ours.

The Chairman touched upon yet another local controversial site when he referred to the proposal for a national indoor sports stadium on green belt land at Copthall - a proposal to which we are dedicatedly opposed. The latest intelligence gleaned by him is that a tentative date in October for a public enquiry on the subject is unlikely to become a reality since Barnet Council has not yet (and, we hope, will not) submitted any case to be considered in their defence of the proposal.

That led Paddy to explain to the meeting that there are four more local "enquiries" in the offing in the months ahead. They will concern the following issues:

\* 20 acres of land at Henly's Corner involved in the road development scheme.

\* More North Circular Road development proposals at East Finchley.

\* The two currently suspended enquiries, respectively those about the Archway Road Scheme and that "tidal flow" idea for Falloden Way.

These will be demanding not only of Finchley Society effort, but also of its funds, along with all the other regular demands upon expenditures (newsletters, exhibitions, summer-show attendance, etc.). With these increasing cash requirements in mind the Chairman indicated that in line with current advice from English Heritage, that local amenity groups such as ours should not expose themselves to underfunding, the Committee - in accordance with the Society's rules - has decided that our subscription levels should be increased with immediate effect.

In the course of presenting his Treasurer's Report, Joe Ingall announced that the new membership subscription levels are to be £5.00 per annum for joint membership and £4.00 for single membership. These, he calculated, will effectively reverse the recent trend of dwindling assets yet would still not be too punishing of members' pockets. Joe asked all members who pay their subscriptions by standing orders to contact their bank and suitably adjust the sum next due to be paid. He also renewed the Society's appeal to all tax-paying members to "covenant" their subscriptions, thus enabling the Society to benefit from the tax relief portion allowable to it on each and every such subscription.

There followed a brief interval for refreshments, kindly arranged by Joan Sturdy and helpers. They, along with Alex Sturdy, were later thanked by the Chairman for the very many occasions on which they put in that extra effort with refreshments and floral decorations, etc. which go to make such evenings even more pleasant.

To round off the AGM, Hon. Sec. Kurt Weinberg screened two short films on contrasting environmental subjects. The first, exploring and evaluating a range of fascinating alternative energy sources for electricity generation (wind, solar, waves, fusion, geothermal, wood pellets were but a few) was particularly timely after the recent accident at Chernobyl. The second, titled "History Around You", traced the origins, development and, often, the 20th Century crises of, the English Village - a suitable pastoral theme with which to close the evening's proceedings.

Apart from our fixed displays at the libraries and at the Finchley Press Offices on the anti-litter theme - and weren't they good, thanks to Timothy Johnson and his fellow "exhibitionists" — there were four main Fin.Soc. events during the week which have been "filed" by your very own reporters as follows:

**BROOK CLEAN UP            Rosalind Avery**

On the very cold Saturday, 3rd May at 2 p.m. some Watch members met at Dollis Brook to have a "clean up".

There wasn't such a large turn out as had been hoped for - only 3 boys, 2 girls and 3 adults.

It's surprising what you can find in just one brook. We actually pulled out a motorbike! (a photo of it featured later in the Barnet Independent newspaper).

A few other members of the press came down to find out what was going on. Some suffered, not being really suitably dressed for the cold day but we all managed to stay out of the pond, and we all had a GREAT time!

**COLLEGE FARM "LISTING"    Editor**

How appropriate it was that during Environment Week we should have the pleasure of celebrating the designation by the DoE of the three principal buildings at College Farm as Grade 2 Listed Building. The (then) Mayor, Councillor Mrs. Barbara Langstone was kind enough during the Farm Open Day on Sunday, 4th May to perform the ceremony of unveiling a plaque (designed by Fin.Soc. member and leading "Friend" Peter Marsh) commemorating the event.

Vice President Jean Scott addressing a large gathering of Open Day visitors, related the recent chequered history of the farm with special praise for tenants Jane and Chris Ower who have never forsaken their dream of keeping the place alive. Jean also mentioned the sterling work of Spike Milligan, the success of the coverage on "That's Life" and the participation of all those Finchley citizens who visit the farm and who supported the recent large Petition to the Prime Minister.

The Mayor mentioned her pride in being a Finchley councillor on that day - one that she declared as a "day of rejoicing". Cllr. Langstone also made special mention of The Friends of College Farm, whose support has been so important in ensuring that the 100 years of College Farm's existence is not being squandered. Katherine Ower, daughter of Jane and Chris presented the Mayor with a gift of a basket of College Farm eggs!

In a brief speech of thanks to our guest, Denys Peqq referred to the fact that she had been the third successive Mayor of the Borough of Barnet to take a great personal interest in College Farm - something for which we all remain very grateful.

**THE DOLLIS BROOK WALK    Derek Warren**

In spite of rain just before the due meeting time for the walk along Dollis Brook on Thursday, 8th May, seven Finchley Society members turned up plus one lady who had read the publicity in the press. By 7.30 p.m., the weather was reasonable and by keeping to the paths we avoided getting muddy shoes. Among things we noted were how the brook had been straightened out some years ago to reduce the number of bends, and how a marsh area was neglected and overgrown.

We then had a clear view of a nuthatch's nesting hole, that is reduced in size by the bird applying mud so that the larger starlings are unable to take it over. Other birds were singing and we couldn't miss the magpies that are now everywhere. A few flowers were out such as dog's mercury, cow parsley, lesser celandine, wood anemone and jack-by-the-hedge. The blackthorn was in full bloom and there was that wonderful fresh look and smell as the trees were coming into leaf.

It was interesting to see the management of one section where the Parks Department had cleared some of the trees and bushes to give more light and air for other plants to develop. Of special note were the new trees that had been planted. These are mainly hornbeam, cherry, ash, hawthorn and elder together with a few spruce.

We left before the bats were out but we will be counting them on several occasions in June and July if you would like to help. (Ed's note: Call Derek on 346 5258).

FINCHLEY MOB STORMS COPPETTS WOOD Oliver Natelson

Sunday, 11th May dawned bright and clear, beguiling residents of Friern Barnet – unaware that at 2.30 p.m. a gang of sinister people, all members of the notorious Finchley Society would secretly gather together outside Friern Barnet Town Hall. That mob, clad in boots, grasped suspicious-looking packets and two even had two-wheel drive vehicles. One prominent member – Dnilasor I shall call her – she of immense strength and wielding a fully-grown ash seedling, led the party downhill to the nature reserve. On reaching the site, she gouged a gaping hole in the soil, then after a moment in which a document was circulated and secret code words written thereon, it was placed in a plastic box and buried in the hole. The ash tree was planted above it so as to conceal the whereabouts of this box. Dnilasor gave a speech inciting her followers to make loud noises of approval and the mob then charged through the undergrowth to reach higher ground in Coppetts Wood itself. In order to stimulate their appetite, the mob inspected a sewage tank, a murky pond and a bog. On emerging from the wood into sunlight, they opened their suspicious packages and swallowed the contents. One youngster threw himself into a bed of nettles. Apart from that individual, everyone enjoyed themselves immensely!

If you haven't guessed by now, Rosalind Batchelor dug a hole in the earth and placed in it a plastic container bearing a document: "We the undersigned, being members of The Finchley Society and also other local residents, planted this Ash tree on a visit to the nature reserve at Coppetts Wood as guests of the Coppetts Wood

Conservationists, Sunday, 11th May, 1986". All adult visitors had signed the paper. A young ash tree was then planted above the box. Rosalind, who had carried the tree to the site, announced on behalf of The Finchley Society "I declare this tree well and truly planted" and everyone cheered and clapped. After touring the wood, a picnic was consumed and everyone (apart from that nettle-stung lad) enjoyed themselves immensely!

#### MONTHLY MEETINGS REPORTS Mary Hodgkinson

#### MARCH 1986

Mill Hill had an instant appeal for me when I first settled in North London. Fine buildings of historic interest, rolling landscape and wayside pubs and cafes were the goals of many a little expedition on Saturday afternoons. Mr. John Collier's lecture at the March meeting has inspired me, and doubtless many others in the audience, to make up for some neglect in recent years and explore again this summer that delightful district. Mr. Collier, Secretary of Mill Hill Historical Society and an active member of its Preservation Society, reminded us that Mill Hill, like Finchley, is peripheral to London but in contrast is on a direct line from the inner city via Hampstead Heath, and the spread of the Underground network naturally caused major development in what had been a mainly rural area.

Mill Hill is rich in history and anecdote, and Mr. Collier had much to tell of the famous (and notorious) residents. One of them, the courtesan, Mrs. Margaret Ridd, had a dressing-table named after her! She lived at Littleberries (now St. Vincent's) with her husband and brother-in-law, the Perreau brothers, who were convicted of currency forgeries as a result of her turning King's evidence. The dressing-table was designed for her by Hepplewhite, and was perhaps among the first to accommodate cosmetics and other beauty aids instead of simply "ablutions".

A greater lady of Mill Hill, Celia Fiennes, is commemorated in the Banbury Cross nursery rhyme. Mrs. Fiennes rode her white horse throughout the countryside of England investigating the conditions of coal miners and others in industry. Her account of those remarkable journeys is given in her book "Through England on a Side Saddle in the time of William and Mary." The nursery rhyme had, of course, political implications. William Wilberforce, Jeremy Bentham and botanist Peter Collinson are among other celebrities connected with Mill Hill. Less well known is the fact that while living in Hampstead, Sir Edward Elgar, pining for his Worcestershire countryside, frequently visited Mill Hill, Totteridge and Hadley and composed a mournful love song which he entitled "Mill Hill".

Then Mr. Collier had to abandon his prepared talk owing to a technical hitch with slides, he filled the gap neatly by distributing a "Twenty Questions" quiz on the area, prepared by his Historical Society. We thus had at our fingertips even more facts and traditional stories about Mill Hill - clearly a district of great historic and aesthetic interest.

APRIL 1986

This meeting was handed over for the most part to members who, as on previous such evenings, surprised and delighted everyone with the variety of their interests and the breadth of their knowledge.

Dr. Oliver Natelson's subject was, of course, the work of conservationists at Coppetts Wood - the last remaining woodland in Finchley - where all may now enjoy its rare wild flowers, ancient trees and secluded picnic spots. Litter clearance is constant problem for volunteers. Part of the area was once a sewerage works, but even that would not account for the recent discovery of a loo among the rubbish!

Next, Mrs. Lily Barnes read Mrs. Rene Dawson's delightful letter of reminiscences of Woodhouse Road in the early years of the century. It was easy for listeners to visualise that life, with children bowling hoops up and down, iron ones for the boys and wooden ones for the girls, while the grocer, draper and coalman plied their trade along with the muffin man. Mrs. Dawson's family moved to a Council house in the area in 1915 before gas was installed.

Denys Pegg has been researching into ancient local rights of freedom from tolls "by land and water". We were disappointed to learn that Finchley is not mentioned in the Domesday Book.

However, it has the distinction (according to tradition) of having been granted those special rights by a King John Charter - possibly through a quid pro quo transaction with the Bishop of London, who held some manorial land here. (Denys you have whetted our appetites, shall we hear more in future about our common heritage?) P.S. The freedom from tolls no longer exists.

A lively account of "Seventy Years of Christ Church" was given by Mrs. Joan Sturdy, a lifelong member of that "Church at Tally-Ho Corner". She recalled that in her early days in Woodgrange Avenue, houses were selling there at £300-£400. Haymaking "over the fence" at an adjacent farm and high-spirited Youth Fellowship outings are among her memories - accompanied all the time by the teaching and outgoing ministry of her place of worship.

Environmental Officer Rosalind Batchelor's subject was Friern Hospital, a listed building with the longest facade of any such building in the United Kingdom, considered in its day the best example of hospital design. A variety of ideas for its use after the psychiatric hospital is phased out in the next decade have been put forward, and a Fin.Soc.sub-group is involved in exploratory talks. Most of us were surprised to hear that film companies in recent times have often requested the loan of a straitjacket from Friern, but this Hospital has never possessed one!

With an outing to Cambridge in prospect on September 27, we were happy to hear from Secretary Kurt Weinberg what was in store for

members and friends, and his account was illustrated by excellent slides. These annual excursions are well organised and altogether enjoyable. (Full reminder of this date is featured elsewhere in this month's newsletter).

#### TALES FROM COLLEGE FARM

Timothy Johnson

Sunday 6th April did not seem to be a good day for starting the Open Day season. It rained intermittently and ticket sellers at the gates complained of suspected frostbite. Yet never before have these unsung voluntary heroes and heroines had to work harder or faster. Never before had there been so many visitors on one day.

Sunday 4th May - although held in the teeth of a howling gale, this Open Day saw an even bigger invasion, bringing us to the very brink of the magic figure of 2000 visitors. These unprecedented attendance figures point to the suitability of College Farm as an all-weather venue for family outings.

Over 100 years ago the great George Bahram built it to be the jewel in the crown of his milk empire, designing it specifically as a showplace, generously and spaciously, so that however many people are present it never looks overcrowded - not yet anyway.

Sunday, 1st June brought even more people, over that brink of 2000, the biggest, brightest and best occasion so far. The ever-increasing range of attractions now offers a really splendid day out "in the Finchley countryside", to the delight of new visitors now converging from quite distant places - is College Farm turning Finchley into a tourist centre? June is the month of the College Farm Gallery Crafts Fair, now an annual event attracting stallholders from all over South East England. A large audience applauded Irish Dancing in the Sunken Garden and the annual sheep shearing in the Big Barn was compelling viewing. The customers were all clearly enjoying themselves so much that even the sun came out - from time to time - to have a look.

The new public consciousness inspired by last year's campaign has been followed by imaginative publicity which is now drawing first-time visitors from a very wide area indeed. Much work has been done during the Winter and the greatly improved quality of the facilities and entertainments give them an enjoyable day. They seem to take home with them a most favourable impression of "the Finchley Farm" which should generate valuable word-of-mouth publicity for subsequent open days, to be held the first Sunday of every month until October.

Attendance figures look healthy. April - 1300, May - 1600, June - 2100 - all record breakers - may the graph continue upwards - there's plenty of room for everyone.

With such a good start, the outlook for the rest of the season looks bright, whatever the weather. BUT - a cautionary word - "Your Farm" is making an excellent recovery but it still has serious problems to grapple with and the fight to save it is by no means conclusively won - not yet.

DARLANDS LAKE NATURE RESERVE Derek Warren, Hon. Warden

A number of Finchley Society members were amongst the 180 people who turned up to the Open Day on 20th April but the fritillaries decided not to come out in the cold weather, although a few almost made the effort.

Some other flowers were out however and a few summer migrants were signing and both the tawny and little owls were seen. A couple of weeks later the fritillaries were in flower but our annual count showed that numbers were down by about 500 to approximately 2,750.

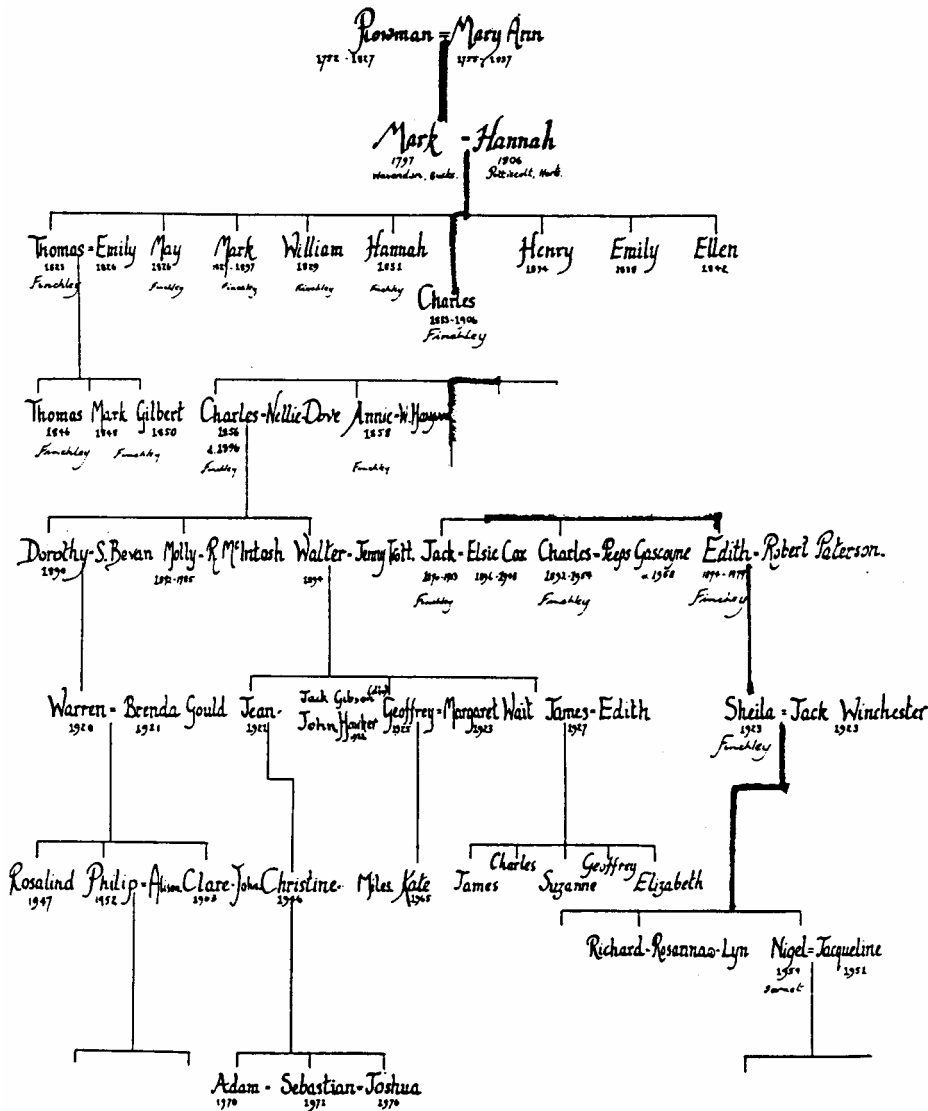
#### LONG FINCHLEY LINEAGE

If family-tree interest were to be likened to a game of cricket, your editors have duly been "caught and bowled" by member Edmund Clewin Griffith after the piece we included on page 4 of the April newsletter.

We had speculated that Sheila Winchester's "Plowman" family might well prove to be "hands-down winners" regarding the oldest Finchley family connection, but in May, Mr. Griffith wrote to reveal that his oldest traceable Finchley ancestor was Richard Clewin who died in 1686 and whose gravestone is the oldest in St. Mary's Churchyard!! It is guessed that he was born around 1600-1605 for his age at death was given as "near fourscore".

Mr. Griffith is kind enough to concede a 142 year gap in actual Clewin domicile in Finchley from 1834 when Martha Clewin died, to 1976 when his own family returned, but despite that, isn't it an amazing record?

It obviously is not really likely that any other member's families could claim such a long connection but please do let us hear from more of you regarding Old Finchley Families. In the meantime, with Sheila Winchester's permission, we are pleased to reproduce the interesting Plowman family tree that she has prepared. The bold line traces her own connection.



## AVENUE HOUSE FLOURISHES

Mary Hodgkinson

A visit to Avenue House by the retired members' section of the Barnet Nalgo Branch took place appropriately in Environment Week, on May 6. The keenly interested party, so large as to be divided into two for the tour of the house, learnt from Paddy Musgrove's informal talk, and his commentary en route, of The Finchley Society's role in co-operation with the local authority, in restoring and refurbishing parts of the mansion which had been neglected or misused.

It might well be claimed that for the first time since his home was left to the Council and people of Finchley, it is being used for the purposes that "Inky" Stephens had in mind. Many societies meet there and more and more local residents are being introduced to this lovely old Victorian villa and its celebrated gardens. "To find the original, of course, one would have to demolish it", Paddy explained, but it is indeed a charming place, especially on a sunny spring morning.

Mr. Eric Burton, Chairman of the Avenue House Advisory Committee, presided at the introductory talk, from which even an addict like myself learnt something new about the benefactor who played host to so many of our predecessors!

## PILLAR-BOX TRAIL

Mary Hodgkinson writes of another notable antique pillar-box which she recently spotted in the city, appropriately in Queen Victoria Street near the Temple of Mithras site.

The oval double-box has the VR monogram on each side, but with no insignia in front. Mary comments that its rather smart "bonnet" top looks like a later addition.

These occasional comments about Victorian pillar-boxes in London may well be prompting you to look more closely at the local box or boxes into which you regularly pop your post. Could it be that you might identify a Finchley pillar-box of note that even expert Mary H. has not yet recorded. If you do, please ring your Eds. on 445 6172 and we'll pass along the information.

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For The Finchley Society

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