

The Finchley Society Newsletter

JANUARY 1987 No.1/87 (SUPPLEMENT)

For those members unable to attend the monthly meetings (720 of you, on average) this edition commences with a resume of Society events, from last October to Christmas.

* CHRISTMAS PARTY SUCCESS

December 18th saw another enjoyable seasonal gathering Avenue House. Spike and Sheila Milligan joined 80 or so members for the traditional evening of mingling, conversation, Christmas snacks, wine, raffle and – the quiz.

Who could have believed that one of the most difficult identification puzzles yet, (Finchley's green open-spaces, by their shapes alone) would produce two outright maximum points winners, Bill Tyler and Derek Warren? Devisers Rosalind Batchelor and Peter Marsh nevertheless bow out with our grateful thanks and the late news is that Norman Barr has already offered to step into the firing line with a Christmas Quiz for 1987.

Our further thanks to barmen Kurt Weinberg and Alec Sturdy, Mr. (Raffles) Jones, Shirley (let them eat mince pies, cheese, celery, biscuits, sausage rolls, etc) Avery and her team of "providers" – not forgetting "green -fingers" Joan Sturdy who decorated, just right! Finally, Joe Ingall (Hon. Treasurer) presumably went home contented because the evening raised something over £140 against costs of approximately £98 – a pleasant Christmas present for Fin.Soc.!

* CAROLS AT THE FARM Jean Scott

There was a large audience – mostly children – on a pleasantly mild 12th December for the Carols at College Farm, once again organised by the West Finchley Guides and Brownies.

The barn made a very suitable setting for the carols, and the presence of animals served to highlight the story of the Nativity, delightfully told by one of the "Angels". We sang many favourite carols and the guides and brownies took part in processions and tableaux.

The programme was all too short and it seemed no time at all that we were drinking the hot soup or cocoa which rounded off a most enjoyable evening.

* THE FARMING SCENE AT CHRISTMAS Esther Johnson

The College Farm Gallery Artists held their Christmas Fair on 6th and 7th December. Craft and Charity stalls spread over into the Picture Gallery, where there was room for only a small art exhibition, plus a splendid raffle, in which the chief prize was a signed first edition of a book by the Finchley Society President, which he had kindly donated. (The proceeds from the raffle were in the region of £100). The festive mince pies being consumed in the Gallery appeared to be served in sherry glasses.

A long line of Christmas trees - on sale at the farm - led from the Gallery exit across the yard, past the pigs and the white goats, across another yard, through a decorated door into a Magic Fairyland (recently a stable). Here Father Christmas was receiving visitors in his Grotto, which was designed for him by Leslie Hill. There was also a tombola with white woolly snowmen and penguins as prizes; a lucky dip; and Doreen and Betty wearing enchanting Christmas costumes, presided over a toy and gift stall. The brown hens next door must have been a bit surprised at the unusual noise and goings on.

A good many Finchley Society members seemed to be mixed up in this affair, most of them wearing astonishing millinery - especially those crouched behind the plant stall, who managed to make a profit of nearly £90. We are not sure whether this had anything to do with their hats. It is rumoured that not only the Chairman himself, but also one of the Vice-Presidents and our gentleman Newsletter Editor

were all to be seen at one time or another in full Santa costume in the Grotto.

Brian, a Finchley Society member and artist, in charge of the tombola, wandered away from his post for a few moments wearing a Father Christmas cap and a bright blue smock -he was startled to hear an American voice from a clump of Christmas trees saying loudly: "Gee! That's the first time I've seen a colour-blind Santa Claus!

I had been collecting ingredients to make potpourri from one of the "crafty" ladies. As she left to go home I called out "Thanks for the orris root". "'orace Roote? 'oo is 'ee?" enquired Ken, who was a bit bemused by the responsibility of controlling (or otherwise) an intrepid crew of entrance-money gatherers. Among these was a cohort of the 10th Finchley Scottish Scouts, one of whom delighted us with bagpipe music as the afternoon drew to a close.

* THANK YOU FIN.SOC.! Peter Sutton, Chairman
College Farm Gallery Association

We held the first Christmas Fair in 1982 and this one, the fifth, appears to have been the most successful to date. We shall not know the total sum raised until all the accounts are settled, but £600 from the takings has already been handed over to the Farm.

Because of the nature of the Gallery Association, we have a small membership of less than 20 people and this year we found that we needed at least four times our own numbers to fill all the jobs; we are most grateful to all the voluntary helpers who assisted us. The majority of them were Finchley Society members, and we are also indebted to The Finchley Society Newsletter for publicity and general coverage of Gallery activities throughout the year.

* NOVEMBER "PUBLIC HALL" TOPIC Mary Hodgkinson

Paddy Musgrove took the unusual step of providing Novembers "Topic of the Month", from the chair, in the

form of a statement about the present position (since overtaken by events) of negotiations relating to Finchley's promised public hall. Saying "Recent developments have left the Finchley Society bitterly disappointed", Paddy informed us that a meeting of Barnet Council's General Purposes Committee was held "in secret" on October 20 with an item on the agenda headed "Site of former Gaumont Cinema."

His statement continued - "Guessing that this might have a bearing on the proposed public hall, Fin.Soc delivered identical letters to the Chairman and every member of the General Purposes Committee, suggesting certain criteria and urging that these be conveyed to the developers, Markheath, so that work could go ahead. Because the committee meeting was held in secret - and surely it is ironical that proposals for a public hall should be discussed in private - we do not know what was said there. Subsequent press reports, however, make it clear that the councillors have now voted to pull out of the agreed arrangement for a public hall and other community facilities, even though Markheath are reported as wishing to press ahead.

"Needless to say, the Finchley Society committee - and, I am sure, many other local bodies - are bitterly disappointed at the loss of yet another promised public hall. We hope it is not too late for the Council to reconsider its decision. Alternatively, we look forward to learning if some other proposal is being considered. Within the next few days we shall again be raising the matter with councillors and council officers."

* NOVEMBER MEETING Mary Hodgkinson

The last formal meeting of 1986 was no ordinary affair. The speaker, Rabbi Lionel Blue, is a local celebrity, known to millions as a "Thought for the day" (RBC, Radio 4) broadcaster, journalist and author. Here was no critic of environmental policy, no campaigner on the subjects which normally concern us. Important though these matters are it was pleasant to relax in the company of this engaging speaker, whose

blueprint (the pun is unintentional) was framed in anecdote and wit and homely maxims. Unworried by a slight hitch with the microphone – which alone induced a sequence of stories to illustrate his accident-proneness, Rabbi Blue spoke from his chair on the platform, and without a single note, for well over an hour. Rosalind Batchelor later struck the right chord when, expressing our thanks to the speaker, she described the talk as "an extended 'Thought for the day'".

One of the brightest features was the Rabbi's commendation of Finchley as a place to live in. He confessed to having had reservations about coming back to suburban life. However, since settling in, he has found it "a nice, warm, mixed community", a place of "gentleness, quietness and good nature," in which front gardens which give pleasure to the passer by as well as the householder, are carefully tended.

Rabbi Blue finds pleasure, too, in breakfast-time broadcasting. He enjoys the exciting atmosphere of the studio, where he recognises that "the greatest sin in the world is to be late with the eight-o'clock news" He spoke of the "great discipline" of making a point in about three minutes to an audience engrossed with "shaving soap or cold cream, kippers or rashers". That minuscule sermon must be totally down-to-earth. In his view, "doctrine and dogma do not easily cross religious frontiers. They need translation and explanation, but one thing is common to us all – religious experience. This is communicable. It crosses boundaries!"

As an example, Rabbi Blue reminded us how Jews and Christians had been brought together in the blitz in the East End. "We let each other into the kitchens of our lives," said (cookery writer) Lionel Blue. His audience gathered that such relationships, familiar in our neighbourhood, give him special pleasure. He left us with a final thought – "Humour is an internal cleanser. It washes out bitterness and unpleasant memories."

* OCTOBER MEETING Mary Hodgkinson

"Originally, the feoffees (now known as trustees) were required to be of sad and discreet demeanour." Denys Pegg, our speaker at the October meeting and one such trustee, was discreet as always, but far from being sad.

He clearly enjoyed telling us the story of an historic local charity, nearly 500 years old, still concerned with the needs of Finchley residents.

In 1488 Robert Waren - "for the health of his soul and that of his wife Marion" - gave a croft of land to nine feoffees. This was to provide for the repair and refurbishing of the parish church, "for the repairing and amending of the foul and feeble highways," and for other deeds of charity. It was the beginning in Finchley of administration of such matters by individuals as feoffees, rather than by the church. Minutes, accounts and other documents as well as a selection of slides showed how the trustees have discharged their duties over the years. Their main concern has been to see that Finchley citizens in poor circumstances should be properly housed and cared for in various ways.

Throughout the last three centuries, the relief of destitution has gone far beyond the provision of bread and coal. For example, in 1831 the Warden of the Almshouse was empowered to buy drugs and composts to alleviate the sufferings of poor cholera victims. Denys explained how the, original aims were being met in an up to date way. For example, the almshouses for 12 occupants have been replaced by 100 units of sheltered housing and further such developments will continue.

Alec Sturdy voiced the appreciation of all present when he thanked Denys, who has been a trustee of "The Finchley Charities" for 20 years, for enlightening us about this voluntary work which is a feature of our local history.

MEANINGFUL NAMES Paddy Musgrove

We may consider it a compliment that The Finchley Society regularly receives appeals for help and advice from outside the ranks of our own membership. Sometimes, however, applicants are somewhat demanding, e.g. "I am working on a school project; please send me all the information you have on the history of Finchley". Even some more senior students can suggest, ever so delicately, that we may be able to help them with their theses - and, of course, there is sometimes the odd abusive letter (always from a non-member) demanding that The Finchley Society does something to abate his personal problem.

We try to be helpful in all instances and often with very great pleasure as in the case of a recent enquiry from the Griffin Housing Association, which is carrying out a large development on land between East Finchley Station and East End Road. A new length of roadway is part of the scheme and the Association asked us if we could suggest an appropriate street name.

As the roadway runs through an area known last century as Dirt House Field, Dirt House Close might have been a most appropriate choice, but we regretfully set the idea aside, feeling that future residents might be critical. (After all, the "sensitive" residents of East Finchley have given historic Dirt House Wood the unconnected and prissy title of Cherry Tree Wood.) Further research revealed that, as far back as 1318, the general area, administered as part of the Bishop of London's demesne, was known as Little Redings (from Old English hyrding indicating a clearing in the ancient Finchley Forest).

In a letter of thanks for our help, Mr. McGillivray, the Housing Association's Surveyor, advises "my Committee accepted with gratitude your suggestion of "Redings Close" for our development at East Finchley. I am now in touch with the Borough and the Post Office to secure their agreement and do not anticipate any difficulty".

15th FINCHLEY SCOUTS

Derek Warren

Ed's note; On page 3 of the November '86 newsletter we referred colloquially to the Scout "hut" in Grove Road. Fellow member and scouter, Derek Warren, was properly moved to chide us, pointing out that the building in question is certainly not a hut. He has also been kind enough to write this brief history In 1919, the Rev. F. S. Lee, curate of Christ Church, North Finchley suggested to ten of his choirboys that they should start a scout troop. The first meeting was held in the kitchen of the former Stephens Memorial Hall, now the site of Owen Owen at Tally Ho, on 8th March, 1919.

The first H.Q. of the Group was in Lyndene Stables, Woodside Park Road in 1920, but in 1922 they had to move and found a room over stables in Hutton Grove, but the rent of £39 per annum was hard to find.

A founder member, Charlie Roberts, who became Scoutmaster in 1932, found a plot of land in Grove Road and under the direction of Rover Scout Ted Fensome and his family, and other Rovers, 'Utopia' was built and officially opened on 8th December, 1934 by Rev. "Pa" Lee. This fine brick built H.Q. was later added to and the Group is still flourishing with over 100 uniformed members.

When Charlie Roberts died last July, he left a wonderful photographic record which, once they have been sorted out, I will be pleased to show anyone who is interested.

MORE ABOUT ALEXANDRA HOUSE LADIES COLLEGE

Following the piece by Mary Hodgkinson in the October Newsletter Supplement (p.15) there has been interesting response from the following

1. Mr. D. A. Ruddom: Borough Librarian

"Mr. David Meek deposited in our Local History Collection last year a photocopy of a programme for an evening party at Alexandra House School, held in 1878. By 1886, when the School is listed in our earliest directory at Alexandra House, 16 Alexandra Grove, it

was run by Miss Rhoda Gwynne, but Mrs. Marshman was already the Principal in 1878 and in the 1881 census it appears as a college with Mrs. Annie G. Marshman as Principal of the Boarding School."

2. Member: Andrew Forsyth

"Mary Hodgkinson asked where the Alexandra House Ladies' College was situated. This was a large building on the corner of Alexandra Grove and Nether Street. It was demolished some years ago and Philipson House flats (62 Alexandra Grove) now occupy the site, next to the Quaker Meeting House.

"I have three old postcards of Alexandra College dating from the first decade of this century. Two of them were issued by the College and the third by the prolific local postcard publisher, Gordon Smith of Stroud Green Road. Another card I have was issued by William Hollis, Auctioneer, at some time when the house was for sale. The date of this card is unknown, but it was definitely between 1902 and 1918, and probably before 1909 or even 1905 as there is no mention of a frequent electric tram service. There is a picture of the building on the front and the following information on the back:

"ALEXANDRA HOUSE"

Most conveniently planned DETACHED HOUSE, situate close to Woodside Park Station, and containing

Ten Bedrooms
Bathroom (h. & c.)
Three reception rooms
Billiard room
Splendid offices

Price £1,750 Freehold
Rent £100 per annum

"I personally only remember the building in its later years as flats known as Alexandra Mansions. I do not know when it ceased to be a ladies' college."

FAG END Mary Hodgkinson

An advertisement which would infringe modern regulations was seen until recently on the roof of a shop in an old-fashioned row a hundred yards or so from Highgate Underground Station. This rooftop board, of a type familiar before the war, read "Craven A will not affect your throat". I could not help smiling at this lone survivor, whose style and message has passed into history!

THOSE OLD FINCHLEY FAMILIES

After the Plowman tree (June newsletter supplement), Rosemary and Edmund Griffith have been kind enough to set out the Clewin family, which we mentioned in the same supplement. Reproduced here is an extract showing the main descent line. Those in capitals all lived in Finchley, mainly at East End.

Following these recent items featuring the local lineage of the Plowman and Clewin families, Mr. Jeffery R. Evans of The Middlesex Society, has written of his own family records in neighbouring Hampstead and Hendon. Down one line, great grandfather Thomas Evans, a Mercer of Hampstead, married a Tilyard (or Tillyar or Tillier) from that very old Middlesex yeoman farming family around Hendon, mentioned in the locality as far back as 1704! One of Mr. Evans's great-great grandmothers, a Mortimer (Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses) introduced a royal connection into the family since one of her ancestors married the granddaughter of King Edward III.

No "skeletons" yet, but certainly some interesting "cupboards"!

FINCHLEY GOES ABROAD Dorothy Fox

Members will be familiar with the interesting series of historical booklets we see on our own bookstall.

At the recent 'War in Space' debate held in St. Mary's Church Hall, copies of "Finchley As it Was" were presented to Nicolai Kosor, First Secretary at the Soviet Embassy, Alexander Vershbow, First Secretary at

the U.S. Embassy, and Paul Johns CND Chairman, who was invited to chair the debate.

We hope the Soviet and American First Secretaries will take their souvenir of Finchley back to their respective countries when their tour of duty in Britain ends.

For The Finchley Society

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