

The Finchley Society Newsletter

NO. 6/87 (SUPPLEMENT)

A.G.M. REPORT

It was a "full house" again this year for the AGM, on Thursday, May 28th, chaired by Vice President Bill Tyler in the unavoidable absence of Spike Milligan, who sent his best wishes to the membership.

Retiring Chairman Paddy Musgrove in his address to the meeting spoke of the positive aims of the Finchley Society. He particularly stressed that although in the nature of things the Fin.Soc. often hits the headlines when it is opposing some local blight or other, the Society at all times tries to influence matters constructively, for the good of the general environment of Finchley.

Paddy was in no doubt that, despite occasional causes being lost, the Fin.Soc. voice is increasingly listened to and respected! With membership steadily increasing, accompanied by a current drive to involve more members in the Society's work, he expressed his belief that our influence will grow successfully. He cited three major examples in the field of conservation where our attention is presently focused

1. The glebelands, for which another new (and improved!) brief has just been published.
2. The future uses to which the soon-to-be-vacated Christ's College and nearby St. Mary's School might be put - and for which Fin.Soc. already is generating positive ideas.
3. The Green Belt, always under threat and in need of the vigilance of bodies such as ours - for example to disabuse a sometimes popular misunderstanding that only "pretty" green belt is "proper" green belt (a would-be developer's ploy for having so-called "derelict" green belt redesignated!).

Finally, and in respect of the latter point, Paddy publicly renewed the Society's total support for green belt protection should the sponsors of the recently defeated Copthall Indoor Sports Arena project submit, as has been rumoured, another, possibly even larger, scheme in two years' time.

As there were no opposed nominations for the eight posts to be filled, the meeting elected the following nominees

Chairman: Rosalind Batchelor
Vice-Chairman: Norman Burgess
Treasurer: Joe Ingall (re-elected)
Hon.Sec.: Kurt Weinberg (re-elected)
Committee:
Norman Bar
Margaret Erber
Paddy Musgrove
Harry Sharpe (re-elected)

Vice President Jean Scott proposed a warm vote of thanks by -the Society to Paddy Musgrove for his dedicated work during his three years as Chairman, mentioning also his many years service previously, editing the newsletter and other committee activities.

Echoing Jean's praise and mentioning his personal knowledge of the outgoing Chairman's sheer day-by-day work for the Society, Kurt Weinberg presented Paddy on behalf of a grateful Society, a handsomely illustrated and framed map of Middlesex, created by the cartographer John Garnons Williams, in celebration of the 900th anniversary of Domesday Book.

After the main business of the evening and following a break for light refreshments, two most entertaining films of London's recent past were shown - both of them sharply illustrating dramatic changes in the capital's scene over the last quarter-century, first - a private movie, by member Denys Pegg in 1962 of a Thames and West India Dock boat tour at a time when the river was still "full of shipping", followed by a Shell Co. film of a working day (night) at Covent Garden Market in 1957. The audience could not help but be struck by the whistling and singing of the porters as they worked (nor by the great many cigarettes smoked!!)

OTHER RECENT FIN.SOC. EVENTS

* MARCH MEETING

Archaeologist, Environmentalist and Councillor, Mr. Ellis Hillman talked to the Fin.Soc. at their March meeting about "Barnet-under-Barnet" ("a very deep subject" quipped Chairman Paddy Musgrove in his introduction) - and deep (chalk, clay, bagshot sands and alluvial gravels) but light hearted it turned out to be.

Members who perhaps had feared the talk might all have been of pipes, cables and sewers beneath their feet, learned as well that it was the very natural stuff of geology - hills to north and south of the Thames basin, the several rivers draining down each side, the glacial deposits (petering out at Finchley) and, most important of all, that bed of chalk overlaid with clay and sand - which have determined what man could arrange in London, both above and below the ground.

Thus, until post-second world war soil mechanics and piling techniques permitted, London was a low-rise city (unlike skyscraper-New York on solid bedrock) but with unique opportunities for such subterranean amenities as very early sewage, gas and water services, the world's first underground railway (basically the Circle Line linking London's old main-line railway stations) followed by today's deeper and tunnelled passenger Tube-lines, and the Post Office's own miniature, automated and very deep railway between sorting offices.

Turning to more local matters, Mr. Hillman chronicled the major below-ground events of our area. These spanned the 60 year period from 1810 when the "Highgate Bypass" (Archway Road) excavations revealed aquatic fossils - yes even at that height in "geological" history the area was under the sea! - to 1861 when Finchley's first gas mains were laid and to 1874 which saw our first piped water.

Mr. Hillman then led his audience in imagination towards the concept of '3D living' with under-surface development of 'dark' buildings such as

cinemas, theatres, etc., leaving greater space for 'people' above ground. He also offered the idea of using day and night more creatively - why not, for example, move freight by night, under-ground?!

Such concepts would demand a new approach to the making of local maps - by a series of 'overlays' based first on pure geology, the next being the underground services of sewer, gas and water pipes, plus electrical cabling. Further necessary overlays would include people-information (e.g. regular flood-spots in gardens or cellars, recurring small brooks, repeated pottery finds, etc.). Then local-history information (knowledge of wells, old trackways, former principal buildings, etc.). "Ah," mused Mr. Hillman, "but what agency could pull all these themes together?"

In giving a warm vote of thanks to the speaker, Rosalind Batchelor took up the point of the potential value of better locality mapping of "below ground", by citing the example of the proposed development of North Finchley's Gaumont site which has had to be significantly modified after it was realised that a major sewer, too difficult to re-align, would restrict the scale of the underground car park.

FOOTNOTE. Amusingly the evening's proceedings also revealed that Mr. Hillman, "Underground-man personified", is also the founder of the Lewis Carroll Society. Did any Fin.Soc. member notice a white rabbit hurrying by, pocket watch in hand?

APRIL MEETING Mary Hodgkinson

"The village that lingers beneath the suburban skin!" of East Finchley was evoked for a 'full House' of members and friends by Dr. Pamela Taylor, one of the Borough's two joint archivists, who has made a special study of the early history and development of the area.

For quite a number of this responsive audience, the recent history of this part of North London was a matter of personal and family recollection. No doubt some will respond to her call for amateur researchers into aspects of the past which still remain uncovered. Her comment that "walking about the streets is more interesting when the streets are talking to us" will certainly be echoed by Fin.Soc. members.

Far from being "undifferentiated suburbia" as perceived by drivers of cars and lorries passing through, East Finchley, Dr. Taylor reminded us, is still a distinct and separate community with an awareness of its identity.

Verbally and by maps and photographs depicted on slides, Dr. Taylor spanned the centuries. First she took us back to the earliest settlement at East End, as East Finchley was then known. She explained that the name was changed in the early years of this century as a result of a petition by residents, who considered that the connotation of 'East End' was inappropriate to their district.

In the woodland economy of the Middle Ages, pigs were an important factor, and some sheep were also kept. In later centuries, as the population grew, places like the Finchleys had to rely more on 'food on the hoof' - for refrigeration and road and rail deliveries from urban centres were still to come. Hence the transit of animals by drovers in

large numbers and the markets all round the perimeters of Middlesex. East Finchley's Market Place, once known as the Hog Market, was a place of importance and in use until the 1860's. Cottages had then been built too close for comfort to the slaughterhouse, and other arrangements had to be made.

At the end of the 18th century, the poorest and most populous part of Finchley lay in East Finchley, where Holy Trinity Church was built as a response to a residents' petition for a centre of mission to the godless people of the area.

From the chair, Paddy Musgrove recalled, not unexpectedly, one of "Inky" Stephens's parliamentary protests. This was in opposition to the proposals for "bringing bodies from the City" to the new cemeteries in semi-rural Middlesex, including East Finchley.

Esther Johnson spoke for all of us when she described Dr. Taylor's lecture as "very clear, and fascinating." It was appropriate to hold an event like this during our local Environment Week -

* MUSICK FOR A WHILE Mary Hodgkinson

A perfect ending to a lovely spring day and a fitting prelude to Environment Week...this is how members and friends will remember the recital given on Saturday, 25th April, by Jetta Robertson and the "Musick for a While" ensemble at Avenue House.

Inky Stephens's old drawing room, its tall windows opened wide onto the terrace, was a pleasant setting in which similar entertainments may have been given a century ago. The mansion's owner would surely have been pleased to see music lovers of today enjoying chamber music there, Introducing the performers, Chairman Paddy Musgrove reminded us of the Society's contribution to restoring Avenue House and opening it to the public on occasions like this ... an important part of our work for the local environment.

For their programme, soloist and ensemble had made a happy choice of two trio sonatas, the first by J. J. Naudot (who originally suggested the inclusion of bagpipes and a hurdy-gurdy!) and a second by Telemann; a sonata for gamba and continuo by K. F. Abel (whose bicentenary occurs this year); a Handel cantata and an aria from a Bach Cantata, a sonata for treble recorder and continuo by Loeillet de Gant; Purcell's "Musick for a While", of course, for soprano and continuo; and Van Eyck's "The Green Linden Tree".

Jetta Robertson's lovely tone and vocal range delighted us further in Arne's familiar songs, "Under the Greenwood Tree" and "The Cuckoo", with recorder and virginals. The performers' explanations of antique instruments such as the gamba and oboes, baroque and d'amore, added to our pleasure.

Early arrivals found that by a pleasant coincidence they were able to view an exhibition of paintings by the Finchley Art Society in the drawing room. As on so many occasions, Alec and Joan Sturdy had brought delightful flower arrangements. This time there were prizewinning entries from the Totteridge Horticultural Society's Show.

We were most fortunate to have a social event like this as a feature of Environment Week. Many members were heard to enquire "May we have another one soon?"

DARLANDS WALKS

Another Environment Week treat was the opening on Sunday, April 16th by the Herts and Middx Trust for Nature Conservation, of the Darlands Lake Reserve. Two guided walks were arranged, morning and afternoon, organised by Hon. Warden Derek Warren, with the particular aim of seeing and enjoying the annual blooming of the snakeshead

These fascinating (almost mysterious) plants were in abundance and, additional to the "oohs" and the "aahs" from we average types, other visitors were to be seen dedicatedly sketching, painting and photographing them from close range! Naturally, on pain of instant hell-fire and banishment, there were no "pickers"!!

Derek reports that the day saw a total of 218 visitors, the largest ever, of which, encouragingly 70% had not previously visited Darlands. In addition to the fritillaries, other flowers in bloom included celandine, wood anemones, dog's mercury, bluebells and early rhododendrons. With the trees rapidly coming into leaf, the bird life was more heard than seen, but included both green and lesser-spotted woodpeckers, chiff-chaff, chaffinch, various members of the tit family and heron, perching in a distant field - all in addition to run of the mill blackbirds, crows and magpies.

COLLEGE FARM REPORTS

SPRING FAIR Peter Marsh

Nearly 1600 people came to College Farm on 5th April for that first breath of Spring, some from as far away as Cornwall, and it really was a Spring day, fresh and sunny, following a totally gloomy, wet Saturday.

The ground was still too wet for the Highland Cattle to be out. In fact all the animals were in their winter quarters. This allowed children to get very close to them - indeed, close enough to exchange both touch and smell! There were frequent squeals from both parties when the visitors quite suddenly came face to face for instance with a large sow.

Other more controlled and harmonious sounds came from the Borehamwood Band who entertained the crowds that paraded the cobbles on their way to and from the Pavilion Tea House which was reopened for the first time in many years for cream teas. Su Russell has achieved an ambition which has taken years rather than months of painstaking research, attention to detail - and just hard physical work. The result was pure nostalgia with teas being served by frock coated waiters and a 'nippy' dressed in the 'best possible taste', which also describes the teas!

In the newly reroofed exhibition hall trade was brisk at the charity and craft stalls with a touch of Easter provided by "The Gallery Ladies". Many visitors bore away their portraits or that landscape they had always wanted. Such was the good nature of the crowds who queued to

enter, to ride donkeys and the roundabout and to bounce on the inflatable that the queues themselves became part of the entertainment. This splendid day was summed up by a regular visitor who, when asked what his family thought about it, simply answered "Super!".

MAY FAIR Mary Hodgkinson

The final ceremony of Councillor Dennis Dippel's year of office as Mayor of Barnet took place at College Farm's May Fair on Sunday, 3rd May. The Mayor and Mayoress were escorted up the carriage drive by pipers of the 10th Finchley (Scottish) Scouts for the ceremonial planting of "The Environment Week Tree".

The fair itself had so much to offer visitors that perhaps very few of them found enough determination and stamina to complete the tour. For example, sheep shearing can be such compulsive viewing that some people find it hard to tear themselves away - "Let's see just one more!".

Children's ideas centre around their own "fairground" with its roundabout, inflatable castle, donkey rides, puppet show and horse shoe pitch, and some of them, of course, want "Just one more ride please". There were pedestrian traffic jams in the Art Gallery and Exhibition Hall among the crafts stalls, lightning portraits and Environment Week displays, but everyone must find time for tea; either a self-service "cuppa" in the Aviary Tea Room, or a more elegant pot of tea in the 1930's atmosphere of the Pavilion Tea House - sipped from fine china cups while a band plays in the background.

The star animal of the month was a baby calf, born to "Daisy" only the previous night, and "Craftsman" the shire horse was proud to display his new show cart. About two thousand visitors braved the cold weather and were not deterred by a short sharp storm of rain and hail in mid-afternoon. A good time was had by all. There's the Merry Month of May for you!

OCTAVIA HILL - A WELL-KNOWN NAME, BUT WHO WAS SHE?

This extract from an article by Doreen Tucker (Director of the Octavia Hill and Rowe Housing Association) in the March '87 edition of the magazine "Hera Quarterly", tells us more.

Octavia Hill was born in 1838 in Wisbech, Cambridge. She was one of eight children of a corn merchant and his wife. The family was relatively middle class, although by no means wealthy. When she was 14, her father became bankrupt and the family had to move to live in Finchley with her maternal grandfather, Dr. Thomas Southwood, a public health reformer of his day. Octavia spent many happy hours wandering over the fields of Finchley and this love of fresh air and open spaces stayed with her throughout her life, leading her in later years to her part in the founding of the National Trust.

The family moved to London where her mother supported them by teaching in a Christian Socialists Ladies Guild - an activity in which Octavia joined. She also managed a toy factory, created to employ and benefit Ragged School children. From that grew another interest - her involvement in housing - born from her horror at discovering the conditions in which some of those children lived.

She was now 27 and the year was 1865. She persuaded Ruskin to lend her the money to purchase three run-down miserable Courts in Marylebone and she then set to work: she agreed that 5% of the rents must be put aside for repairs, purchase of new property, repayments, etc; she started regularly visiting the Courts, arranging -far such things as the roofs and common staircases to be repaired. She worked on the principle that her relationship with the tenants was a business one~ the tenants must pay the rent and she would maintain the property. She explained her ideas and proposals for improvements to the tenants, opened a Savings Club, ran classes, arranged outings. If a tenant could no\$ pay the rent through no fault of their own she allowed them time to pay, but if they would just riot pay, then she evicted them; she was strict but the tenants grew to love and respect her for her interest and concern.

She worked for many years with John Ruskin on many of these projects, including her housing work and the founding of the National Trust, but eventually their divergent views caused a breach; she had a strong individualistic personality and did not believe in 'charity' being offered to the poor, rather they must be encouraged to work and for that work receive a wage that would enable them to live at a reasonable standard.

Octavia Hill died in 1912 and although she could have been buried in Westminster Abbey, her family declined the honour as she had never sought publicity for herself but only for her projects, her fellow workers and associates.

Her obituary in The Times and letters to the paper by many prominent people of the day all give a picture of a highly principled, hardworking woman whose ideas were in advance of her time.

CHANCE ENCOUNTER • Paddy Musgrove

Finchley Society member, Stanley Stevens, tells us that, while visiting Bude in Cornwall with his wife Olive, he met a gentleman, one of whose ancestors was Frank Stratton, the architect for Finchley Garden Village. From his new acquaintance, Mr. Stevens obtained copies of a Stratton family tree going back to the early 17th century, together with a biographical note on Frank Stratton (1880-1921) written by his niece Elizabeth Yule. These papers are being lodged with the Finchley Society's records in Avenue House - together with Stephen Jack's reminiscences of the early days of the 'village'.

The following brief extract from Elizabeth Yule's note is of interest

"Frank was very interested in garden villages and decided to build one in Church End Finchley, North London. A cooperative was formed, land was bought sloping down to the Brent brook and Frank designed a village of fifty-four semi-detached houses round a rectangular green with a private gravel road running through it. The houses faced the green and behind were gardens and land for allotments.

The village was close to London's Green Belt and the children played on the green and ran wild in the woods and fields. Frank lived at No.34 and his sister Brenda at No.31. Three lawn tennis courts were laid out and became the centre of the summer social life. A village fete was organised with races, sideshows and a pageant. There was a maypole and

an outdoor stage. The whole village would be decorated with fairy lights for these occasions. In winter various clubs were organised. The village brought happiness to many people and still does.

"In 1921 Frank's tuberculosis became active again and he died in the summer. He was mourned by many people, the villagers erected a lamp on the green as a memorial to him and the many young men who died in the First World War. Lulu (his wife, nee Hayward -Ed.) had flowering trees planted round the green in his memory. They had no children."

The Garden Village today is one of Finchley's three Conservation Areas

FINCHLEY' COUNTRY DIARY Sandra Quigley

I am certain, now, that I was right last year! To my amazement and jubilation, walking the dogs very early one June morning last year, I heard a cuckoo calling in Dollis Brook. Never having heard of cuckoos visiting suburbia before I was sceptical, then elated as I realised the sound was not a product of fevered imagination. No one believed me and my family were downright indifferent. I thought this was a stray bird on its way to the country, but, joy of joys, this year again, walking in Mill Hill, my husband and I heard a cuckoo. Two weeks later, in Trent Park, we heard another, tracked through long grass and swamp to the tree where it sat, but could not catch sight of this elusive bird.

Greater stitchwort is flowering profusely along the public footpaths. This is an attractive plant of ditches and hedgerows with wide open starlike, white, flowers and yellow stamens. They look lovely against the deep green of their leaves and with red campion and purple herb robert as a background. Buttercups are beginning to fill~ the fields with golden light. Ivy leaved toad-flax has rooted in a crevice along our side path. This is a gorgeous little wild plant with a cascade of ivy shaped leaves and tiny pale mauve flowers. They look like ivy leaved geraniums, but why pay expensive prices when this is for free! Certain philistines have been instructed not to uproot this little plant until I have had a chance to move it to a safe place!

A fox family has made its home under the garden shed at a friend's house. The pups can be heard mewling and growling at each other. Their Jack Russell got a nasty scratch on his nose for interfering. Politely, the pet rabbits have been left alone - a supreme act of will, or perhaps a case of not getting into trouble on your own doorstep. A family of ducks has 5 or 6 ducklings on the pond in Dollis Brook. Baby sparrows can be seen in their pale buff feathers sitting on the ground or on fences, waiting to be fed - they squat low to the ground, fluttering their wings in a submissive gesture.

Greater stitchwort was used in an infusion of acorn and wine to cure 'stitches' or pain in the side - so it is said. However, the Greeks used it in the cure of broken bones as its botanical name of *Stellaris Holostea* means 'whole bone'.

COPPETT'S WOOD CONSERVATIONISTS Oliver Natelson

Coppett's Wood: Parts of this wood are of ancient origin. Throughout the wood you can find oak, ash and chestnut standards, as well as hornbeam and hazel coppice that had been managed for centuries.

Scrubland: Formerly a sewage works, then a refuse tip, this area was covered with earth and abandoned about 20 years ago. It is now colonised by plants, insects, birds, animals.

Old Scrubland Apparently: unused for centuries, may contain plant seeds and insects of ancient stock

Denotes built-up areas

On the Scrubland: As a result of underground fermentation and natural springs, an incredibly lush growth of plants has developed. These plants support a large number of insects that in turn are fodder for insectivores such as birds, bats, hedgehogs, frogs, etc. These in turn are preyed upon by owls, kestrel, and fox. All these have been sighted here.

Our Aims: We would like the site managed as a local nature reserve, to be used as an amenity for scientific, educational and informal leisure activity for the whole community. Access is to be freely open to the public. Already, six schools support our aims. Pupils now do surveys, examine the wildlife and use the site to develop their understanding of biology, history, geography, art and especially mathematics.

You can help to save the butterflies, the red poppies and bird life. For one year, membership per house hold costs only £2.50. Membership fees will be used only for conservation of this site and for normal office costs. "Conservationists" will receive copies of our newsletter and information on wildlife in the city. If you join, then you too will be helping to save a bit of countryside in our capital city. Contact Oliver Natelson, 17 Hollickwood Avesnue, Friern Barnet, N12 OLS.

ANOTHER FAMOUS RESIDENT Paddy Musgrove

In their March Newsletter, the London Natural History Society sought information about the old Finchley Filter Beds, a request which was channelled through to the Finchley Society by Peter Pickering. We were able to advise them that the Finchley Sewage Works were built in 1885 off Summers Lane and immediately west of Coppett's Wood and that they closed in 1963. The Summers Lane rubbish dump - now delicately named a "civic amenities site" - today occupies part of the area. When the rest of the devastated site is reclaimed, it is planned to establish an all-weather football pitch.

"But what", you will ask, "has all this to do with the London Natural History Society?" Bursting with parochial pride, we cannot do better than quote from their Newsletter:

A small dark-coloured money spider found at Camley St. Nature Reserve in the summer but only recently confirmed as to its identity turned out to be what Savory and Le Gros in their 1957 article in The Arachnida of London called "London's outstanding spider Erigoni vagans". The original record, quoted in Locket & Millidge British Spiders vol.11 was from the Finchley Filter Beds

Congratulations to Camley St. Nature Reserve on providing a habitat for *Erigone vagans*. But let them not forget that he (or she) was found first at the Finchley Filter

TAILPIECES - Mary Hodgkinson

i) Estate Agents' Boards

An excess of estate agents' boards outside properties, in particular those announcing SOLD or SALE AGREED, led me to visit several "offenders" in their offices. I was received courteously and told that my attitude was fully understood; that a system existed to remove boards as promptly as possible; that delay and mistakes were bound to occur occasionally; and that the firms concerned shared my concern about boards which had fallen into flower beds or were otherwise no use, even for advertising, on their sites.

The campaign continues!

P.S. To members who might be selling their own properties you don't have to accept a board, if you don't want one!

ii) Extract from Barnet Borough Times 21.5.87

"A film crew filming a commercial for Cadbury's met with unexpected opposition from a local resident while on location in Friary Road, Friern Barnet, on May 13.

A resident walking past saw dozens of vehicles and camera equipment parked on the grass verges.

The report includes the admission from a crew member that the local authority had not given permission for them to park on the grass, and continues

The protestor, a member of the Finchley Society, told the Barnet Borough Times: "Parking frequently damages the grass verges, once a lovely feature of our locality".

iii) A "watchdog" Concerned about the number of steeper ramps appearing at kerbs in the area, I wrote to the Borough's Director of Technical Services. Here is an extract from his reply

"The construction of perambulator crossings was investigated at length during the preparation of the Borough Traffic Management Plan 1986 in the chapter entitled "Provision for the Disabled." The report advocates "Although they (ramps) are not at present provided at all roadside junctions it is normal practice to install them when carrying out footway and kerbing works in these areas and this practice should continue."

". . . . I have arranged for the two ramps you refer to (in Friern Park at the Victoria Grove corner) to be inspected in detail". The writer adds that if necessary remedial work will be undertaken to improve the gradients.

I am obliged for this helpful reply.

TAILPIECE (iv) Cyril Smeeton

I have for some years been trying to find the exact date of the unveiling of the memorial tablet to the men of North Finchley Depot (the present bus garage) who died in the Great War. I know, on quite good authority that it was in August 1922, but cannot establish the day. The local newspapers seem to have ignored it, and I'm afraid that the Finchley United Services Club, of whom I enquired, did not answer my enquiry. A pity, as they had strong connections with the Depot, very evident on the day that Maurice Kent, the driver of the famous "Bluebell" tramcar was buried after the disaster on Barnet Hill on 17th June, 1927. Does anybody remember this particular occasion?

Cyril lives at 8 Eden Bank, Ambergate, Derbyshire.

For the Finchley Society; John and Carol Halls
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