

The Finchley Society

Newsletter

MARCH, 1988 No.3/88 SUPPLEMENT

FRIERN HOSPITAL Pat Dunnill

Hampstead Health Authority (HHA) has submitted five outline planning applications to Barnet Council for Friern Hospital. The first is for a mixed development containing 17,500 square metres of non-food retail development (in the southeast corner), 22.5 acres of residential development (immediately behind the listed frontage) and a primary school (adjacent to the new Fairview estate).

The second is for residential development (37.5 acres) and a primary school with no retail.

The third is for new roads both north and south of the North Circular Road (running parallel with it) linked by a new bridge across the NCR and joining the slip roads from the Colney Hatch flyover to the NCR. This new construction, costing about £5 million, would only be necessary if the retail warehouses were constructed.

The fourth is for residential development only.

The fifth is for Listed Building Consent to demolish the wings of the Hospital so that a new road into the site from Friern Barnet road could be constructed. Such a new junction would require further restrictions on parking in Friern Barnet Road.

In the Society's view such a piecemeal approach puts the cart before the horse and would leave the Listed Building in a most vulnerable state. We have asked that proper plans for the whole site be drawn up which would ensure the long term future of the building; moreover, if it should be necessary to demolish any part of it because it is unsound, then that part should be rebuilt. We have also objected to the retail development as we consider that this would damage existing shopping centres. The retail park would, according to HHA's advisers, take trade from all the surrounding shopping centres, viz 5% from each of North Finchley and Church End, etc. Clearly the traffic implications of such a large retail development would also be considerable. Severe congestion would be caused at the Colney Hatch Lane/Friern Barnet Road junction as well as hold-ups on the Colney Hatch flyover.

In contrast, an exciting concept entitled "Colney Village" for the possible future use of Friern hospital was unveiled, at Friern Barnet Town Hall on February' 29th. Colney Village would keep the listed building in its entirety and many of the hospital buildings behind, all adapted to residential use. Almost 1,000 units would be provided. At the heart of the complex (where there

are now boiler houses) two squares would be surrounded by shops, restaurants, a pub and workshops. Open land to the south would be kept for leisure and sports use. A footbridge over the North Circular Road would link with the former Friern Barnet Sewage Works which The Hollickwood Park Association is campaigning to keep as open space and nature reserve (similar to the Coppetts Wood nature reserve which was formerly the Finchley Sewage works). Unfortunately, (and undemocratically, some would say) these interesting plans cannot even be made the subject of a planning application, as the Hampstead Health Authority has blocked it - a privilege which they are able to exercise because the hospital site is Crown Land.

THE FINCHLEY CHARITIES - 500 YEARS ON Denys Peg~

It all started with Robert Waren. On 23rd March, 1488, he gave a croft of land between Nether Street and Dollis Brook (now designated Finchley Way N3) and the following year some land in Hendon Lane (now Nos. 50 to 54) to nine feoffees (trustees). The feoffees were to apply the revenue from the gifts to repair and furnish the Finchley Parish Church, amend the foul and feeble highways and for various deeds of charity amongst the poor of Finchley. When required, the feoffees could make up their numbers from persons in the parish who were thought to be of "sad and discreet demeanour". The present trustees operate under a deed approved by the Charity Commissioners in 1982.

Over the last 500 years many Finchley people have followed Waren's example and the assets of the trust now exceed £2.5m. The income from investments is used in the provision and maintenance of sheltered housing and for relief in need. In 1986, grants of £4,250 were made to six Anglican Churches situated in the original parish of Finchley. £17,000 was disbursed in relief in need, including fuel vouchers and holiday grants distributed through the Finchley Old People's Welfare Committee.

In recent years, the outstanding achievement of The Finchley Charities has been the provision of sheltered housing for elderly people of Finchley who were in need of rehousing. The four almshouses for poor people in 1640 had grown, by 1900, into twelve flats. In the last 25 years there has been a dramatic increase in this provision. At Wilmot Close and Thackrah Close in Tarling Road and at Homefield off East End Road, on land they have owned for 400 years, the Charities have provided 100 modern flats with eight wardens in attendance. A further development to provide 50 units is currently taking place at Homefield.

You may read the full and fascinating story of Finchley's oldest secular institution in 'The Finchley Charities 1488 -1988', written by Fred Davis and

published by the Charities this month at £5.00. First editions will be on sale at the Fin.Soc. bookstall from the March meeting.

AND, 500-YEAR-OLD AWARD WINNERS! Paddy Musgrove

Readers may have seen reports in the local press, of the granting of a commendation certificate under the 1987 Civic Trust Awards scheme for a Finchley Charities development at Thackrah Close, East Finchley. Consisting of 32 one-bedroom flats for the elderly, this scheme on an awkward and cramped site was praised by the assessors for its clever design which respects the lines of the original almshouses and various extensions and which forms pleasant new spaces in between.

Although they would have welcomed more variety in the choice of bricks and tiles, the assessors felt that Thackrah Close was "a dignified and humane contribution to old people's housing".

In congratulating the Finchley Charities and their architects, Manning Clamp and Partners, we might perhaps refer to the friendly association that exists between the Finchley Charities and The Finchley Society. About six of the Charities' Trustees, including our vice-president David Smith and ex-chairman Denys Pegg, are members of the Finchley Society and it was indeed at a meeting of The Finchley Society's Executive Committee that the idea of submitting Thackrah Close for an award first originated.

DARLANDS LAKE NATURE RESERVE Derek Warren

The October storm brought down 29 trees at Darlands Lake Nature Reserve and damaged 36 others. We are still clearing up the timber. The large sections are left to rot but there are so many small branches and twigs that we have to burn them. Luckily in this we have had the assistance of the Watch Group and the 11th Finchley Cub Scouts. We have already planted several new oaks, some ash and quite a few hawthorns. Unfortunately one of the trees to fall was our cut-leaf alder.

There have been some interesting visitors to the Reserve this winter including the Sparrowhawk and over 350 Fieldfares. To hear them singing in the tops of the trees was quite an experience! Our regular mammal survey also produced large numbers. In the first two months of the year on some occasions there were as many as 15, mostly woodmice but also bank voles, common shrew and pygmy shrew.

An early celandine was out in February, but we hope the fritillaries are not too early this year; our Open Day to see them being Sunday 24th April when there will be

guided 'walks round the reserve, starting at 10.30 am and 2.30 pm from The Close by the Orange Tree Pub in Totteridge Lane, N20. Everyone is welcome.

There is also to be a mid-week walk round the Reserve on Wednesday 30th March starting in The Close at 2.30 pm. Over the weekend of 26/27th March, an interesting multiple event known as "Grebe Watch" will be staged in several places, the nearest one being at the Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp). Anyone turning up between 2 and 5 pm will be given a leaflet about the Great Crested Grebe. About 20 pairs breed on the reservoir and also some Little Grebes. A representative of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will be near the Cool Oak Lane bridge giving out the details.

FINCHLEY'S COUNTRY DIARY - Sandra Quigley

More wonderful to me than the lovely, longer, lighter evenings we are beginning to enjoy, are the brighter early mornings - a pleasure to wake up to sunshine and birds singing - a measure of Spring in the early morning cup of tea. No more creeping out in the cold, damp, grey mist muffled up to the ears, to walk the dogs.

Shrubs, trees and other plants have responded to the exceptionally mild winter and many ornamental cherries and other trees of the prunus family are already in full blossom. Leaf buds of hawthorn are unfurling and we could even have 'April' blossom instead of the traditional 'May'. Various members of the willow family are covered in their silky, silver-grey catkins while hazel, hornbeam and alder have catkin flowers of varying shades of yellow and gold. Particularly lovely are the catkins of golden weeping willow which droop to the ground in layers of bright yellow.

The pond in Dollis Brook is absolutely bubbling with large, floating clumps of fertilised frog spawn, hopefully ensuring a good future frog population, although the eggs and tadpoles will also be food for the resident ducks, moorhens, coots and kingfisher.

Other birds are going through their courtship rituals, we have been fascinated by the pigeons, both the very large wood pigeons and the feral, conducting a most elaborate and affectionate wooing.

Wordsworth should have been in Mill Hill! The bottom of a field there is filled with a "host of golden daffodils" and white narcissi - their scent is in the air before you see them. Not quite ten thousand, but enough to fill the heart with delight at Spring.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Barnet Borough Councillors and Officers from the Borough's Planning Department were guests of The Finchley Society at an informal reception at Avenue House on Thursday evening, 3rd March. The hosts led by our President Spike Milligan and Mrs. Milligan, were drawn from the recently restructured Executive and Planning and Environmental Sub-Committees.

The evening provided an ideal atmosphere for friendly exchanges of views on the broad subject of planning, and it was valuable for people who in the main "correspond", to have the opportunity to talk 'face-to-face' in a strictly non-controversial atmosphere. Certainly the departing guests each stressed the value (maybe even surprise at the value) of understanding gained from "an evening well spent".

Guests attending were Councillors Melvin Cohen, Frances Crook, Naren Davé, Ellis Hillman, Hadley Hunter, Wilf Lipman, Vic Lyon, Brian Salinger and Rudi Vis; and Officers were Messrs. D. Buckinan, J. Watling, G. Chard, P. Wilson, G. Brown and F. Stocks.

THE MYSTERY OF 1806

Former Chairman, Rosalind Batchelor, attending her last Finchley Society monthly meeting on 25th February before her family move to York, made an unusual presentation to the Society's archive.

Rosalind handed over a stone "lozenge" or "plaque" measuring 15" x 8" inscribed 1806. This object had come into her keeping some years ago following the demolition of Victorian flats on the corner of Alexandra Grove and Nether Street, beside the Quaker Meeting House. It had been found built-in to the basement wall of the flats, face-reversed, where it had obviously been just part of builder's cheap in-fill.

Rosalind speculates that the plaque may originally have been mounted on a wall or entrance to the stables of the former Moss Hall, itself demolished around 1860. Can members shed

THE "NOT-WINTER" ON THE FARM Timothy Johnson

February is usually a dull month, the darkest hour before the dawn. So whoever, even a year ago, could have expected to go to College Farm on Sunday 7th February to find themselves among 1500 or so other people enjoying a full scale open day, just as in Summer, with children waiting their turn for roundabout or donkey rides and crowds thronging the Crafts Market, Picture Gallery, Exhibition Hall, animal quarters, Farm Shop and Tea Room? Although this was the first time such a thing had ever happened at this time of year, nobody seemed to

think it unusual! Ever since October the Autumn and Winter events have attracted a similar following and the Christmas Fair established a new record that will be very hard to beat. At the same time, the farm itself has been selling an unprecedented number of admission tickets on ordinary days, when visitors go just to see the animals.

But why, following a disastrously wet Summer, has the first full-scale Winter Season been such a success? Casting about for reasons, thoughts fly first to the weather, and it has certainly been, on the whole, a mild Winter. Yet conditions that were far from mild attracted some of the biggest crowds – so there must also be other reasons.

Theatrical impresarios know that the box-office staff can usually tell why a show either sells out or flops, and ticket sellers at the farm gates are equally well tuned to public reaction. One can gather that, broadly speaking, people are now voting for College Farm with the £1 coins that buy admission tickets, just as they once voted for it with signatures on a petition. But whereas the signatures were largely inspired by emotion, the £1 coins come from a growing understanding that cash is worth more than sympathy. More and more people now know that the benefits they get from College Farm are not subsidised or supported by rates or taxes, and that the Farm is pulling itself up by its own bootstrings. They also know that the price of a ticket buys a very good afternoon's entertainment.

But all the same, more cash injections from commercial sponsors could certainly speed development. Fundraising entertainments now continue on the first Sunday afternoon of every month right through to December and the farm itself is open every day from 10 am to 6 pm.

P.S. Latest arrivals at the farm – seven shining new piglets to Molly, the Middlewhite sow.

FEBRUARY MEETING

Members attending the monthly meeting on 25th February were fascinated by mental pictures of former times of the famous "square mile" of the City of London when it was "The Roman Port of London". That was the title of the talk given to the Society, by Gustav Milne, M. PHIL. FSA, Senior Archaeologist of the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology.

The Roman/Romano-British City of 1st to 4th century A.D. extended along the north bank of the Thames roughly from the Tower to Blackfriars and northwards, in a near rectangle, back to a line through the Barbican. Although from earlier excavation, much is already known of the history of the city, the archaeologists of the 1970s and

1980s have enjoyed a unique opportunity to study the ancient waterfront. This is because, for the first time since the Georgian-Victorian Thames warehouse complexes were created nearly two centuries ago, whole stretches of that modern waterfront have, with the removal of London's port to Tilbury in the east, been subjected to complete demolition' prior to the office, etc. construction we see along the Thames today.

Thus, in those brief "windows" between demolition, excavation and rebuilding, Mr. Mime and his colleagues have been busy filling in the gaps of knowledge about the ancient port, particularly from sites in the Billingsgate area. For instance

- * The first century waterfront was over 100 metres back from that of today - north even, of today's Thames
- * The line of Roman London Bridge (a wooden structure looking like the bottom half of a very small scale Forth Railway Bridge!) has been pinpointed by the discovery at the foot of Fish Street Hill, of the corner of its northernmost pier.
- * The open-fronted warehouse buildings of the first century quay had, by the third century, been "converted" into warehouse-shops with in-built accommodation. Mr. Mime suggested that the phenomenon of "Yuppies" moving into Thameside docklands, is nothing new!
- * By the third and fourth centuries at least one "home industry" was replacing imports from Roman Spain. This was the production, from North Sea fish species, of a Roman-style fish sauce (apparently then used even more liberally than our famous "HP") replacing the former "import" identified as having been from Spain by the type of jar used to contain it. (A neat reversal of today's scene in which Spanish motor-car imports are a talking-point!)

Mr. Mime's book "The Port of Roman London", published by B. T. Batsford Ltd. contains many of the riveting illustrations that accompanied his talk.

JANUARY MEETING

On January 28th, Finchley Society members were recommended to be tolerant of "junk mail" - if for no other reason than that its sheer volume these days makes a hefty contribution to Royal Mail Letters cash turnover the equivalent, the speaker suggested, of a subsidy of between 2 and 4 pence on the average stamp value for all other mail.

Well the speaker should be right, for he, Mr. Alan Hunt, is the Head Postmaster, London Northern District, responsible for Postal Services (not for Post Offices). Member Dorothy Fox, who at the conclusion of the talk gave a vote of thanks, called Alan Hunt a very brave (and informative) man for taking on a Finchley audience

- the very area within his district he had said, from which came the highest level of criticism of the postal service!

Mr. Hunt charted the postwar developments characterising Royal Mail

- * Transition from military-style to "commercial" career structure.
- * Separation from 'Parcels service, Post Office Counters and Giro.
- * Decline in letters volume from 1967 to 1977 followed by return to growth in the 1980s and staggering increase of 25% in past five years.
- * Slow recovery in employee-relations following the 1971 strike though even today the Royal Mail industrial disputes record is poor, the principal feature being small localised disputes.
- * Constant struggle to meet quality-of-service targets, i.e. delivery-to-time of both 1st and 2nd class mail.
- * It's far from gloom-and-doom however, for Royal Mail Letters intends to maintain a high PUBLIC profile, viz serving every household in the land, daily, - the SOCIAL element of the service.
- * The service has more than matched its profit targets (set by the Government) in each year from 1980 - 1986.
- * Productivity has risen steadily in the same period, and our modern sorting techniques are second-to-none.
- * Ours is still the only Post Service in the world that makes a profit without a subsidy.

On the local scene, Mr. Hunt (assisted with graphics by colleague Tom Broomfield) revealed that each evening the main North London Islington sorting office handles between 4 and 500,000 collected items of mail and each day presides over the distribution in North London District of around 1.2 million pieces for delivery. Finchley (where else!) is apparently a notoriously confusing area for the longsuffering postal staff. We have for example

- * 'High Road' in N2, N12 and N20
- * 'Ballards Lane' in N3 and N12
- * A proliferation of Lindens, Lintons and Lynton
- * Similarly there's confusion between the number of 'Groves' abounding in the area.

Displaying these and other facts, Tom Broomfield remarked that, against the current background of a more frequent turnover in staff in N3 and N12 than hitherto (as much as 50% in the past 18 months) it isn't surprising that occasional mis-deliveries do occur in Finchley.

In conclusion, Mr. Hunt expressed great confidence in the future of and breadth of service by Royal Mail Letters, despite the rising competition from electronic mail and courier services. He qualified this by hoping

for changes in the profitability policy which at present creams off for other government uses, all profits made over and above the government "target", currently 3%. As member Norman Bar remarked, in commercial terms, 3% would be seen as singularly insufficient for practical purposes of reinvestment and R and D for the future!

END-PIECES

FROM THE FINCHLEY LOCAL BOARD:
APRIL 16th AND MAY 14th, 1888

1. The Clerk read a letter from the Marylebone Cemetery authorities to the effect that they were not prepared to give the same rates to the inhabitants of Finchley as were charged to the inhabitants of Marylebone ...

The complaint of the Finchley Local Board is that London parishes have acquired large cemeteries in Finchley for which they pay nominal rates, and that while they thus reduce the possible assessment of the parish, they also charge Finchley very high rates for burial.

2. Regulations for debate and the management of business of Finchley Local Board.

- a. No member shall speak more than once on any question
- b. No speeches extend more than 10 minutes.

Amendments passed so that all "committee" business, i.e. not open to Press discussed after other business. (Mr Dell said too much was discussed in private session)

3. Local Board "Committee" business - Mr. Dell questioned the amount of business discussed confidentially in Committee and the right of the electors to know as much as possible of board business!

4. Watering of the Roads - Mr. Dipple of the Firs, Nether Street. The Board received complaints that certain streets, eg Dollis Hill and Nether St, were not watered to keep the dust down. The surveyor said there were not even watering carts or soft water pressure to water everywhere adequately. Better to water some roads properly than just lightly sprinkle everywhere.

Mr Knight, Woodside Park Station Approach - "A perfect desert of dust. All last year no watering done; it is technically a private road, although practically it is one of the most used roads in N. Finchley. The people living there pay rates, but get no watering." "It will be some years before roads are taken over - and residents are denied lamps, the water cart and the dust cart."

Nothing changes, it would seem!

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For The Finchley Society

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