

The Finchley Society Newsletter

MARCH 1989      No.3/89 SUPPLEMENT

FINCHLEY'S COUNTRY DIARY

SPRING 1989      Sandra Quigley

A winter (...what winter?, more a long autumn!) even milder than last year has brought Spring on a couple of months earlier than usual. During the first week of March the sprinkling of pink and white flowers on ornamental cherry, copper beech, blackthorn has suddenly turned into a flood of flower, so that travelling around Barnet one cannot fail to notice trees in parks, gardens, orchards and country walks in full bloom. Forsythia, winter jasmine, daffodils, crocuses, snowdrops and primulas are all out, showing their bright, cheerful colours. So it looks as though Easter will be a beautiful and colourful time despite its being early this year.

In sheltered south-facing places where the sun's warmth is felt more strongly, shrubs and plants which, in normal circumstances flower later, are in full flower already. However, close to the ground where it is still cold, plants are taking their time. Colts-foot (rhizome root structure) can be seen in the fields in Mill Hill and these are a welcome sight with their yellow dandelion-like flowers and easily identifiable 'hoofed' stems. In some places - such as Dollis Brook - little cow parsley plants have sprouted and are bearing small flowers - 4 inches off the ground where we would expect to see this wild plant in full flower in summer approximately 2 feet off the ground!

Many birds are in spring song, notably the little wren, which, indeed, has been singing loudly throughout the whole of this winter. We have recently heard a tawny owl hooting at 5.30 in the evening, establishing territory, with the female answering. A beautiful hawfinch has been seen in our garden with its lovely red breast and barred wings, feeding off the poor old hawthorn which was so severely damaged in that awful gale of October 1987. I have seen a fascinating 'dog fight' between a kestrel and a crow over the fields in Mill Hill. The kestrel must have been the aggressor

because the crow was resolutely and aggressively defending its territory and dive-bombing the kestrel who was clearly in a defensive position and eventually flew off, admitting defeat. Woodpeckers are active in Dollis Brook on the golf course and have been putting golfers off their strokes (so I am reliably informed by my husband - any excuse!).

Whilst many warm-blooded souls will not complain about the tolerably mild winters we have had over the last 2-3 years, many others prefer the distinct delineation of seasons and enjoy the cold, crisp, frosty weather. What we should be asking ourselves is what is causing the climactic change? Experts in this field have already identified one of the reasons why - the well-documented 'hole in the ozone layer' caused by our pollution of the atmosphere. If we can, regard the earth as an orange - the peel being the layer of gases protecting the inner tender surface of the orange or earth. Pick at the peel, take a lump out of it and the inner surface will never be the same - it will be irreparably damaged - so with our earth. We must each and every individual one of us, bear responsibility for the preservation of our planet.

How? Consciously do not use aerosol sprays. Non-aerosol sprays are clearly labelled on the items as being "non-aerosol". Choose these for perfumes, hair sprays, cleaners, car cleaning sprays, etc. Use unleaded petrol. Write to supermarket and drug store chains and ask them to stock unbleached products - toilet paper, nappies, tissues, it's unnecessary for these products to be whiter than white. We have a choice - let's use it.

John Donne's oft quoted and misquoted poem has never been truer than today

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were ... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

IWAWTWWW (Read through for explanation) Timothy Johnson

Finchley Society T-shirts, both white and green, are best sellers and their popularity could well lead to new models in other colours. Who buys them? - all kinds of people - you'd be surprised. A young couple at the College Farm March Fair got one for Mama as a Mother's Day present. They came from Muswell Hill and were not members! Our sales ladies have a finger on the public pulse and note what people say. The relative volume of sales of all lines, in fact, is usually a good guide to current trends. Why were sales at the February Fair an all-time record for any College Farm afternoon? Why were takings so excellent in March? Why did some publications that had been sticking for months suddenly sell out? It could only mean that new customers were present, and other indicators bore this out.

After two years of indifferent weather and fluctuating fortunes, the 1989 season of "first Sunday of the month" fairs has got off to an excellent start with near-record attendances in both February and March. Why this unprecedented invasion of welcome visitors so early in the year? You may be forgiven for supposing that it was entirely due to unseasonably good weather - but you would be wrong. Experience has shown that fine weather alone does not bring the crowds, so we prefer to think it was mainly due to a determined drive to attract more visitors, by giving better entertainment value, by providing more variety, and by letting more people know about it. Every free newspaper landing on your doormat in recent months has contained at least some mention of The Finchley Society and/or College Farm.

Extra press coverage is being fed by the Society's increased activities, by Chris Ower and his photogenic animals, and by such events as the "Scarecrow Rally" at the Farm in March. If you did not see the charming little scarecrow persons in the flesh you will almost certainly have seen their pictures in the papers. To obtain coverage of this kind we obviously have to give the press something to write about - and something to photograph. The coming Summer will show whether we can keep up the pace. But can we? Have we sufficient person-power?

Here is just one example of a recurring problem - Among the most popular of attractions at Farm Fairs is the collection of children's games and sideshows, organised mainly by Leslie Hill and Betty Hiteshi, and scheduled, this year, to accompany the Teddy Bears' Picnic at the July Fair. But it is a labour-intensive operation; last year they were never able to run all the games because there were never enough volunteers to staff them all. So if you enjoy helping children to enjoy themselves, and if you will be free on Sunday afternoon 2nd July, do please tell Betty Hiteshi (346 2276)

It would, in fact, surprise many readers to know how relatively few people there are to manage all the Finchley Society's many activities and to organise the Farm Fairs. At College Farm the situation is improved by the 'entente' with the Gallery Association - never perhaps were any two local organisations so mutually supportive - but Winter and Summer alike, people do tend to go on holiday or fall ill. This can leave gaps at awkward times. Recent years have seen the growth of big new national charities espousing all manner of good causes at home and overseas. These giant organisations can command such a wealth of expertise in fund-raising, publicity and public relations that they tend to overshadow the needs of local good causes - and perhaps blind a few people to the hazards of their own back yard?

Your various committees are well aware of the competition they face, and try hard to capture a fair share of public attention for your own good cause - the present and future of Finchley and Friern Barnet. One result of this is that the organisation probably presents quite an impressive image to the public at large, and to our own members. This is obviously a good thing, but is it also, in some way, a disadvantage? Does it make some members feel a little shy of coming forward to offer help?

Please don't feel shy. Here is the absolute truth of the matter - A few members, other than those on committees, do give valuable assistance, but mainly on a part-time occasional basis. We have several interesting "Situations Vacant" however, and they remain vacant because nobody appears willing to take the responsibility of filling them. Many are happy to

follow but few want to lead - and those who do lead are getting older all the time. "What on earth will happen when we all die?" says Chairman, Norman Burgess.

If you believe in the Society's aims, and appreciate what we are doing to further them, you may now want to offer assistance. No need to wonder what you could do. You know your own talents, capabilities and preferences. There is almost sure to be an empty slot just waiting for you. Select from the list below and pick up the telephone.

Publicity and Administration Committee needs a "fund" of workers in the sectors of Fin.Soc. activities, entertainments, tours, excursions, displays, exhibitions, sales, etc; plenty of scope for outgoing people and those with a flair for organisation, public relations, publicity and dynamic ideas! - but you need not be a genius - there are jobs for the less gifted too! Contact Lyn Bresler (349 9742)

Planning and Environment Committee keeps a watch on the environment and takes action as necessary. If you are an observant watchdog with an enquiring mind this could be right up your street. Contact Heather Winton (883 2633)

College Farm Events Committee - an entertainments committee organising, publicising and running the monthly fairs and other events. Contact Betty Hiteshi (346 2276)

Friends of College Farm - help always needed on the Friends' sales stand at monthly fairs. Contact Barbara Warren (346 5258)

College Farm Gallery Association - not so much an 'art for art's sake' club as an action group working to improve the farm's facilities. D.I.Y. experts in carpentry and interior decorating welcome - signwriters and poster artists too. Contact Timothy Johnson (445 5558)

Perhaps there is more to The Finchley Society than meets the eye - for

IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER WE CAN WORK WONDERS!

FEBRUARY MEETING REPORT Joanna Smith

"We're in for a rattling good evening," promised Norman Burgess – and so we were –right from the moment that P.C. Neal appeared from behind the screen in full uniform.

With the aid of slides, our old friend John Neal traced the history of the London Police Force. The Police movement was founded in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel – hence the early nicknames 'Bobbies' and 'Peelers'. At first there was a public outcry that 'civil liberty' was being threatened. There was at that time however a huge crime rate and more than 200 offences were punishable by hanging.

The early policeman looked rather different from today's P.C. He sported a stove-pipe hat, rather than a helmet, had a 'good pair of boots', but no whistle, and wore a leather collar. He was more likely to be garrotted than mugged.

"Life in the Police Force was not so easy as today" said John Neal. There was no fingerprint system or blood group analysis. Not until 1919 were policewomen recruited.

John Neal himself remained with the Force for 27 years, 16 of them in Edmonton. During that time he became acquainted with criminals, visited schools and saw three Wembley Cup Finals free. It was during the many times when John was waiting in police coaches, ready to go to the aid of his colleagues if they needed reinforcement that he began to pore over books about London and to gain the expert knowledge that he is noted for today.

DOLLIS BROOK WALK, 29 JANUARY, 1989 Lyn Bresler

After a foggy start to the day, the sun was shining brightly when some 40 members of The Finchley Society, – including children and baby, gathered for the 2.5 mile walk along Dollis Brook, from the bottom of Eversleigh Road, led by Derek Warren.

We visited first Rocklands Park, created by Mr. Tubbs, a local farmer, in 1883 when Nether Court was built. The pond is smaller than formerly, but is still home at various times of the year to mallard duck, moorhen and the occasional kingfisher and heron, whilst blue tits, long-tailed tits, wood pigeons and grey squirrels all abound. As we set off along the brook, Derek pointed out the nesting site of a greater spotted woodpecker, bracket fungi - and the domed nests of magpies, who like roofs over their heads whilst nesting!

Passing on beside the delicate, fissured bark of field maples, the ivy berries beloved of mistlethrushes, and celandine growing through moss, Derek explained that the Water Board has straightened out some of the kinks in the brook, which is the boundary between Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Soon we reached Riverside Walk, the continuation of Brookside Walk, where alders grow by the water's edge, their cones food for siskin, golden finch and redpoll. Other trees of note in sight included Lombardy poplars, weeping willow and the ash, the latter sporting its black buds at the ends of the branches.

Where Dollis Brook meets Folly Brook, near Lullington Garth, foxes are apparently quite common, though not seen by us this day. We did see fresh buds on the laurel trees and an unusual sight by a river bank - a plane tree. Several squirrel drays were on view high up in other trees.

As we neared Whetstone, a crack willow had lived up to its name - one huge branch split away from its trunk. And visible, too, the old field pattern, various trees and shrubs denoting their old boundaries. A welcome sight were the elm suckers - already several feet high; it is to be hoped these will prove to be disease resistant.

By now we had reached journey's end, at Totteridge Lane. Norman Burgess thanked Derek for providing us with such an enjoyable and informative hour and a half walk and Derek, replying, mentioned that Barnet Council are planning a Tree Planting Week in November 1989, near Brook Farm, during which time anyone will be able to plant a tree.

## JANUARY MEETING REPORT

On January 26th The Finchley Society enjoyed the largest turnout of members anyone could remember for a monthly -evening meeting. Whether the draw was the guest speaker from Kew Gardens, the uplifting aspects of the mild January weather, or just a unified determination to start the year right, the members were certainly not disappointed on the night.

Mr. J. L. S. Keesing, twenty one years on the scientific staff at Kew and clearly steeped in every aspect of the site, its incredible contents and its people, riveted those present for almost two hours with his words and pictures of the two hundred-plus years of Kew's history - and its far from dry statistics.

Here in question/answer form is a selection from the interesting anecdotes passed on by Mr. Keesing.

Q. What is the plant specimen seen held in the hand of Kew's first curator William Aiton, in the portrait of him owned by the gardens?

A. To this day no one, not even the best experts, has been able - to determine it for sure!

Q. Where were the first working girls dressed and addressed as "boys"?

A. Kew of course, in Victorian times, when for the first time young ladies were employed as gardeners.

Q. (The most often-asked question by schools visitors to Kew) Do bananas grow "up", or "down"?

A. The fruit-bearing branches grow downward while from them, the fruits point upward.

Swiftly unravelling its history, Mr. Keesing spotlighted Kew's principal developer as King George III who, building upon his mother's (Princess Augusta, Princess of Wales) work studying exotic plants on her estate at the north end of Old Deer Park, Richmond, closed the public right of way that divided it from the

Royal Estate (formerly that of Grandfather George II and Queen Caroline) at the south end, to assemble the 300 acre site we know today as Kew Gardens.

Thus began, say from 1775, over 200 years of plant importation and study at Kew. This passion for Kew was however not shared by George IV, nor yet William IV, and eventually Parliament was minded to sell it. After much protest however, it was decided that the nation should own it, which it has, since 1841.

Mr. Keesing revealed a wealth of interesting facts and anecdotes about Kew that "not many people know about", including -

\* The Temperate House is still the largest glasshouse in the world and from the ground it is impossible to see, take in or photograph its complete extent. Indeed there is to this day only one photograph of the complete building, taken from Kew (i.e. not from the air), which was executed by a "tree climber" from halfway up the celebrated Kew Flagpole when it was undergoing treatment for preservation.

\* Kew's soil is pretty poor - sand and gravel with a thin topsoil. It requires much compost from truly enormous compost heaps that have been created.

\* Kew recently received some Breadfruit Trees from Trinidad, the original breadfruit specimens for which had been collected in the Pacific and taken to the West Indies to produce food for slaves, in the period of George III. Indeed the celebrated voyage of HMS Bounty (1787-89) was one intended, among other things, for Breadfruit Tree collection on behalf of the Royal Botanical Society.

\* Kew's Tropical House, features no less than 10 tropical micro-climates.

\* An Australian relative of the Yucca, at Kew, has flowered only twice in twenty eight years. (There's hope for we mere Finchley gardeners yet!)

\* The October "Hurricane" of 1987 destroyed 600 trees at Kew, although that represented only 6% of its tree population. Amazingly only one (temporary)

glasshouse received structural damage and luckily the great Palm House (Kew's 1848 celebrated landmark, and soon to be open again after rebuilding) was empty at the time, with its glass removed, during rebuilding. -

\* Sadly, Kew's sister establishment, Wakehurst Place in Sussex, was not so fortunate in that same storm, losing literally thousands of trees across its 500 acres and was, said Mr. Keesing, the scene of utter devastation which will take a lifetime to rebuild from.

\* Acid Rain - no conclusive evidence of any effects attributable to this phenomenon, have so far been revealed at Kew.

\* Pollution from aircraft traffic over Kew (in direct line to Heathrow's runways) was evident in the 1960s/70s and one can often smell aircraft kerosene, but the simultaneous effects of the Clean Air Act throughout the same period to date, appear to have created a "cancelling-out".

SCOTT AND FINCHLEY - AND OTHER HISTORIES          Percy  
Reboul

I was interested in your piece about Scott and the motorised sledges and am able to add just a small piece to the jigsaw.

In 1986, I recorded the memories of David Moffatt, a letter carver who worked at Kelly's Funeral Masons until it was closed down. David, who was in his 80s, told me that his family had come to Finchley in 1907. His father was an engineer and had taken up a job of building Scott's motorised sledge which was done at Pope's Garages in Ballards Lane. Popes, of course, went on for very many years and were closed, I believe, in the 1960s.

Unfortunately, David remembers none of the details, which is not surprising in view of his age at the time. Perhaps the Finchley Press could be researched around this time - they would surely have commented on the subject.

While writing, may I put in my own appeal for information? I am working on a book, provisionally entitled "Whetstone at War" and am anxious to talk to anyone who worked in the Civil Defence area (including Home Guard, AFS, First Aid, etc) covering Whetstone. Anything would be welcome. Call me on 203 3664.

#### TAILPIECES

1. Mr. D.C.E. Rees, Headmaster, Queenswell Junior School writes, "I was interested to read in your recent newsletter under Esther Johnson writes: "A great deal of litter is caused by free newspapers." This is a major problem everywhere. The publishers of the papers will not be interested. To address the problem will be either banning free newspapers or everybody refusing to take one. Perhaps our M.P. can help"

2. Mrs J.M. Werner writes to remind fellow members of the value of supporting local "Neighbourhood Watch" schemes. She further suggests that in a few remaining areas of Finchley/Friern Barnet/Golders Green where there still no structured scheme, interested Fin.Soc. members should certainly contact the local Crime Prevention Officer for more information/action. Telephone 200-2595.

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For The Finchley Society  
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