

The Finchley Society Newsletter

June 1989 No.6/89 SUPPLEMENT

1989 AGM REPORT

Chairing the meeting, Vice President Jean Scott relayed a number of apologies for absence, including that of the President, Spike Milligan, who was unavoidably involved throughout the day in a T.V. programme recording session.

Rosalind Batchelor's apology from York included her commiserations to the Society for losses both emotional and physical, as a result of the Avenue House fire - an event which naturally drew a number of other comments during the evening, including Jean Scott's expression of thanks that our "Room Four" archive material and some other items, survived the fire. Jean also paid formal tribute from the chair to the sterling work for the Society by two retiring servants - Hon.Sec. Kurt Weinberg and Membership Sec. Roy Thomas.

In a summary of his Chairman's Report, Norman Burgess spoke of two cruel losses to The Finchley Society in the period 1988/89 - the untimely death of Paddy Musgrove and the destruction of the Stephens's Laboratory at Avenue House. He expressed the trust of ALL of the people of Finchley that Avenue House will be rebuilt, restoring their "inheritance" from Inky Stephens, and pledged that Fin.Soc. would maintain a high level of vigilance in the matter. This was later stressed by a motion from the floor by Pat Dunnill that the Borough be asked to ensure restoration, and similarly, noting the Prime Minister's expressed concern, Joan Sturdy "suggested we seek her formal support for complete rebuilding". Norman also mentioned that he had written to express our gratitude for the efforts of Firemen David Allen and Stewart Binns, both of them in hospital as a result of fighting the fire - and he expressed the Society's indebtedness to Eric Burton (member and Avenue House advisory committee member) who on the morning of the fire, saved many of our things from loss or destruction).

Footnote: Latest good news is that the firemen are both now out of hospital although not yet back at work.

Other matters referred to by Norman included his wish to expand our membership among the younger people of Finchley - his hope that the forthcoming Coffee Morning Sale "new event", would prove successful - a welcome to the new Membership Secretary, Ivy Holmes - and he stressed the vital importance of filling the now-vacant office of Honorary Secretary as soon as possible.

Vice President Bill Tyler gave a short address on what he views as a "pro-development" emphasis in the local "planning" scene, and, as examples, cited

The fact that in replacement of the GLC's Greater London Development Plan there are now 33 unitary plans by the various local authorities - and Barnet's is, to date, still being formulated!

That in the meantime, those 33 boroughs have together produced a strategic document for the Secretary of State, to which his response is confined to a

mere fourteen pages in which his attitudes to planning are clearly revealed as pro-business (certainly not pro-resident).

The recent request by Barnet for payment (Fin.Soc. would have to find an extra £400 per annum) for circulating to interested parties the weekly Planning Application Lists which form the basis for their studies of what's on in local planning matters. (A councillor has since been reported as giving a throw-away line to the effect that "they can read them in local libraries and the Town Hall, free, can't they?"). On a show of hands Bill received a unanimous condemnation of what he described as "this shameful imposition" and from the floor, Harry Sharpe stressed that in addition to Finchley Society's formal protest, all the regular recipients of the lists must individually write to seek the withdrawal of the proposed charges.

Bill summed up his thoughts by stating that while The Finchley Society is not and has never been "politically partisan", local planning matters do now appear to be being "politicised" in line with the Government's pro-development thrust and that the Borough of Barnet and its Councillors look to us to be side-by-side with would-be developers of our local environment - strong stuff, but what else can be assumed?

The election of officers proceeded as follows -

Chairman	(unopposed)	Norman Burgess
Vice Chairman	-do-	Norman Bar
Hon. Secretary	(no nominations)	post vacant
Hon. Treasurer	(unopposed)	Joe Ingall
Hon. Auditor	(re-appointed)	Albert Jeffries

Four elected Committee Members:

Lynn Bresler	(returned)
Heather Winton	-do-
Carol Halls	(newly elected)
John Halls	-do-

After the election of officers, there followed a number (of tributes from the platform and from the floor

Jean Scott - The Society is very lucky in the character and enthusiasm of Chairman Norman Burgess.

Jean Scott - We owe a great debt of thanks to Kurt Weinberg whose tremendous hard work for the Society has been carried out with the minimum of conspicuousness.

Kurt Weinberg - Personal thanks for the work of Bill Tyler and David Smith leading the two sub-committees -and not forgetting the dedication of the respective

Denys Pegg - A request to the new Executive Committee that at their next meeting they should "co-opt" Kurt Weinberg to their number,

Joan Sturdy - Praise for the sterling work of Pat Dunnill who has supervised and "maintained" recent tree and shrub plantings.

Norman Burgess - To remind members of the tireless, cheerful and learned work carried out for the Society by Vice President and Founder, Jean Scott.

The evening was concluded by the first public screening of Christopher Burgess's video-film of the planting ceremony in the grounds of Avenue House of the tree in memory of Paddy Musgrove. Norman had since added footage to the video with scenes inside and outside Avenue House itself, after the recent fire. It was curiously prophetic that Christopher's film of the planting should have ended with long shots of the house, with guests from the ceremony departing, panning to conclusion in a close-up of a small bonfire which the ground staff happened to have lit that morning and which had burned through to leave "smouldering remains"!

FUN-TASTIC FROLICS AT THE FARM Timothy Johnson

College Farm's first-Sunday-of-the-month fair on 2nd April was distinctly disadvantaged by heavy and persistent April showers. "May Queen Contest reigned off" said one local newspaper. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this damp occasion was the presence of enough customers to avoid running the event at a loss.

The pendulum swung back for May 7th when bright sunshine brought near-record crowds to the May Fair, and this was surely one of the biggest and most enjoyable entertainments ever held at College Farm. "Crowds flock to fun-tastic fair", said a caption on one of the picture pages. The delayed selection of the May Queen proved to be the highlight of an action-packed afternoon's programme. 32 contestants, with ages ranging from two years to twelve, paraded for interviews with the judging panel, accompanied by the 'oohs' and 'aahs' of a large and smiling audience. When the judges' marks had been added and checked, the attractive young Gemma Nahum was proclaimed Queen of the May and led to the throne for her coronation, flanked by two maids of honour Caroline Brereton (10) and Rachel Dann (9). Having received tribute from her loyal subjects (in the form of several different prizes) the queen's first official engagement was at a performance by the London Pride Morris Men. Her May Majesty was then given the freedom of the fair, which she seemed to enjoy immensely.

The judging was done with sparkling efficiency and the enthronement and coronation were spectacular. It seemed to mark a milestone in the casual country-style progress of First-Sunday Fairs and great credit goes to those who produced such a mould-breaking little miracle. Leslie Hill designed and constructed the setting - a rich-looking throne in blue and gold set high on a canopied rostrum. Marion Randall organised the entries and marshalled the contestants. Betty Hiteshi, produced and directed, also adding many of the finishing touches. Mr. Reg Hood, member of the Institute of Toast Masters of Great Britain, left no one in any doubt as to what was going on and Grace Duffin, Krishn Hiteshi and Esther Johnson formed the judging panel.

In complement to this main event the Borehamwood Band played, there was a performance by Pex Puppets Theatre, more stalls than we have ever seen before, a forest of flowers and plants, rides in the horse-drawn omnibus, donkey rides, bouncing castle, and an exhibition in the picture gallery. The customers went home happy and the Hon. Treasurer, Bill Williams, looked very pleased.

The 1989 Country Fairs, which started in February. have been going well, and even the small profit in April was a triumph in the face of the weather, but

we now approach the difficult holiday months of July and August. For instance the main feature on Sunday, 2nd July (2-6 pm) will be the very popular range of children's games and sideshows run by Betty Hiteshi and Leslie Hill, but it needs a lot of helpers and only once in all the years have there been enough volunteers to staff the entire range. It is not a very difficult job to collect the children's eagerly proffered five and ten pence pieces, so if you would like to strike a blow for College Farm, please tell Betty Hiteshi you are willing to help run a stall. She would be immensely encouraged by a telephone call from you (346 2276).

Eds footnote: As further encouragement to all concerned at College Farm, we understand that more than 2000 visitors were recorded at the most recent First-Sunday, on June 4th - proof-positive that your efforts are much appreciated. Also, as members will have noted from the local press, Mrs. Thatcher recently enjoyed a private visit to the farm. Timothy will undoubtedly intend to include these items in his report for the October Supplement.

NOTEBOOK: OTHER PRINCIPAL EVENTS SINCE FEBRUARY

1. KEW GARDENS: Eleven members enjoyed, or "basked in" a very hot day at Kew on Sunday, 21st May. It produced a very quotable quote from David Smith: "I've never thought of Kew as the setting for such an amazing carpet of daisies, nor yet that among the crowds of visitors attracted there, there should remain so many areas of incredible tranquillity."

2. ENVIRONMENT WEEK

THE CLEAN-UP: If you had needed a road map of Wellingborough and Rushton, a two year old local newspaper, half a coconut shell or an oil drum, the car parks in Stanhope Road would have been the place for you. At least that is what the 16 stalwart Fin.Soc. members discovered when they cleared 25-odd plastic bags of rubbish during a two hour stint on the first

Progress in the clearance was a little slow to start with until Yvonne Ruge fetched ALE, i.e. the Action Litter Equipment, more commonly known as rakes! Our Chairman's grandson Peter did valiant work with his own "prodger".

We were delighted to know that all the bags had been cleared by the Council by mid afternoon (although why one solitary cardboard box was left we know not!) and suggestions have been made to the "Keep Barnet Tidy" committee for bins to be provided so that the public at large can be encouraged to use them instead of simply throwing their rubbish on the ground.

Is it a sign of the times that by far the largest part of the rubbish was related to convenience food and drink?

ARCHITECTURAL WALK: Armed with an impressive loudhailer, Bill Tyler led a party of 34 members on a most interesting Sunday afternoon walk on 23rd April along Ballards Lane and into some adjoining streets, from the Long Lane junction southward and then broadly around the triangle of the Church End Conservation Area.

His theme could be summarised as one of "look around you - and particularly upward" - at the richness of interesting architectural detail on the older buildings of Finchley, both commercial and residential. These included

features such as decorative brick window-outlines, wooden and plaster mouldings, domes on corner buildings, street clocks, etc., etc. Sadly Bill showed that so many of the newer buildings, while quite often interesting in line or proportion, lack the extra touches of detail which can lift a design from ordinary to stylish. Even Finchley's Bank branches, which earlier contributed the most imposing high street features are, in their newer constructions, almost featureless.

In Ballards Lane, Bill opened his audience's eyes to the old field patterns of Finchley which manifest themselves in switches of detail within groups of buildings that appear at first glance today to be without interruption, e.g. by any alley or road intersection. Closer inspection can reveal that any block of continuous facade may contain two or three changes of detail - it is behind those intersections of detail that the old field boundaries lay, revealing the progression in which Finchley's fields were bought up for building in the final decades of the 19th century.

Continuing a historical theme in the Church End area, Bill conducted a brick-by-brick inspection of the wealth of interesting detail on that most Victorian building, Christ's College School - even down to the monogrammed cast iron ventilators (bearing the cipher of Thomas Reader-White, the Rector at the time of construction). Other "pretty" features were pointed out on Park House in Hendon Lane (including a brick "Fire Insurance Plaque" for the Hand-in-Hand Insurance Co.) and on the Lodge at the corner of Dollis Avenue. We then "shuddered" on the way home at Spencer Close and some of the other recent architectural calamities in the Regent's Park Road area.

"COARSE" PLANTING: It can now be said with authority that the funniest thing to be done in public is to stand on a High Road, by the roadside, solemnly breaking up pieces of polystyrene into an otherwise empty Horse Trough!

The double-takes, dropping jaws, giggles and averted gazes of passers-by, drivers and bus passengers when the Fin.Soc. "comics" were doing this on Saturday morning, 29th April to line the bottom of the Horse Trough before the planting, just had to be seen. Don't you think the finished product looks attractive? Please do go and admire your handiwork, (junction of Nether Street and Regent's Park Road).

Publicity Stall: Summing up the value of this year's Environment Week Fin.Soc. Publicity Stall outside Tesco's Store in Church End, Bill Tyler observed that while it may not (yet) have provoked a flood of new members, it is one of the few occasions in the year when the Finchley Society's presence is truly "visible" to the passing public going about their everyday affairs.

3. THE APRIL MEETING

An encouraging full-house greeted Dr. Stephen Doree on 27th April for his talk on the History of Trent Park. Quite a few of the audience had as it were prepared themselves in advance, by visiting the house on 2nd April on the specially arranged Fin.Soc. "daffodil" visit - was this the first time that our members have prepared "homework" before a monthly meeting?

Dr. Doree traced the early history of the Park from 1749 when the Enclosures Act caused the division of Enfield Chase into estates. Then George III leased 300 acres to his favourite doctor, Richard Jebb, who had been

responsible for the unexpected curing of the King's brother, Duke of Gloucester. What he was cured of was not mentioned but it occurred in the Italian Alps at Trentino. The name Trent Park emerged from all that.

Jebb had a small villa built in a classical style (the architect, Sir William Chambers was also the creator of Somerset House) around the turn of the 19th century. Two wings were added and 50 years later in 1852 the lease was bought (the story says "by accident" at a Sotheby auction - an inadvertent nod?!) by the Bevan family (Barclays Bank).

They indulged in a £10,000 "re-vamp" which thoroughly disguised all that had been previously visible from the outside, but remarkably the original 18th century villa was (and is today) still evident from the inside. In 1908 Frank Bevan sold the unexpired lease to the Sassoon family who had been treasurers to various sultans in Iraq. It fell to their son Philip, M.P. PPS to Lloyd George and Socialite par excellence, to preside over the most glittering and, in private terms, the final history of the house and estate. After inheriting, Philip succeeded in 1924 to buy the freehold from the Duchy of Lancaster. He then embarked on a restoration/reconstruction that created the miniature "18th Century Palace" style of building that we know today. After tidying up the lines of the exterior, Philip's scheme was aided by "re-cladding" with genuine 18th century brickwork from Devonshire House, then being demolished in Mayfair. The interiors were enlivened with 1920's copies of Chinese wallpaper originally used in the first Richard Jebb villa - along with original murals and other painted decorations by none other than Rex Whistler - "the" sought-after artist of the day.

Philip then put the house to work as his "free hotel", the setting for his most intimate houseparties, for the High, Wealthy and Influential of the time, until his death in 1939.

What of the famous daffodils that are still so much a feature of the grounds immediately before the house today? Dr. Doree related the accepted story that Philip Sassoon in 1927 invited Stanley Baldwin to stay "in the spring". But what would really charm this guest? Someone alleged that Baldwin was a Wordsworth fan - so Philip arranged the mass planting of daffodils - all done in blocks of 10,000 by a Dutchman specially imported with the bulbs.

Further evidence of Philip's sycophantic character lies in the story told about the three obelisks at Trent Park. They were originally from an 18th century house of the Dukes of Kent (where they were to the honour of various Earls of Harold, Dukes of Kent) being demolished in the 1920s. Philip Sassoon bought them, installed them at Trent Park and promptly invited the newlywed Duke and Duchess of Kent to spend part of their honeymoon there as his guests!!

A further anecdote about Philip raised the ire of one member of the audience who accused Stephen Doree of referring unnecessarily to the fact that the Sassoons were Jewish*, but it was genuinely funny and is worth repeating - Philip was alleged to be alone at Trent Park one Easter Sunday when a telegram arrived, announcing starkly "Christ is Risen" -- "Right, I must invite him to dinner" was the said response!!!

Footnote: *On the question of Philip Sassoon's religion/Jewish background, Dr. Doree stoutly defended his commentary by pointing out that Philip, Jewish by birth but non-practising, became an Anglican and showed

a distinct confusion and double standard in his relationships with the wealthy, influential and powerful people of his day, Sadly this led inevitably to the circulation of many unkind stories. Probably it would happen today to any of us in similar circumstances!

4. THE MARCH MEETING

Introducing the guest speaker Mr Bernard King, our Chairman Norman Burgess invoked the time-honoured music-hall line, "What do you think of the show so far? -Rubbish!", because rubbish is Mr. King's line, having been manager in succession of Barnet's "Tips" at Tilling Road and Summers Lane - followed now by his coordination of "Keep Barnet Tidy".

He identified for the audience the three principal types of waste - household rubbish, commercial rubbish and industrial waste - the first two having similar character but requiring different collection patterns, while the third has its own quite individual requirements for treatment/disposal. Mr. King then built up a picture of the progress of our Finchley rubbish from collection until laid-to-rest in deepest Bedfordshire.

In fact, Finchley's rubbish these days, (since the end of the GLC) is all of one with that of a total of seven London boroughs - Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, Hackney, Islington, Camden and Waltham Forest - all contributing to the "North London Waste Authority". (on which for our information, Barnet's current councillor-representatives are Mayor Dot Benson and Vic Usher). Each of these contributors, it was revealed, covered their own costs of "collection" of rubbish but shared the costs of its "disposal" on the basis of borough-populations. Thus it can be seen that the most populous boroughs (Barnet among them) can only directly influence their outgoings on rubbish by keeping collection costs to the minimum!

Anyway, illustrating the progress of our personal bins-full, Mr. King presented slides of their arrival at the local Transfer Station, which is near to Brent Cross, There, the contents of each highly mechanised modern 'Dustcart' (funny how we still know them by that name rather than Refuse-Collection-Vehicle or whatever title it is that the purists think of them by!) are unloaded into hoppers and then compacted into special railway containers.

From the sidings of the Transfer Station the "journey" continued by rail to Bedfordshire where on the old clayfields (excavations) of the London Brick Company, the refuse is currently being tipped and eventually covered over,

Mr. King drew an interesting rags-to-riches simile from the fact that the brick company (and others similarly) excavates its land, selling off topsoil and gravel, then using its clay for brick production. Then further, it "sells" the excavations for tipping of rubbish such as ours and, for the last laugh, nowadays taps off the methane gas eventually produced underground and uses it to supplement the heating mediums for its own brick kilns!. As Mr. King remarked, "If anyone has, they have it made!" for 85% of the UK household/commercial waste still goes to landfill schemes of one sort or another.

However, we learned that changes in the nature of our waste materials (so many petroleum by-products, etc) predicate the introduction of other methods of disposal, so as to protect water courses/rivers from pollution. Thus we

are also in the era of municipal incineration, as at the Edmonton plant. But this in turn has its potential hazards, from harmful dioxins, or droplets of acids contained in the exhaust gases. Questions surround the distances from the incinerator at which such substances can be dispersed, and of course their relative densities at dispersal.

Mr. King was kind enough to answer questions from the floor (although Vice President David Smith in his later vote of thanks suggested that it was a brave man who would answer questions from Fin.Soc. regarding rubbish and particularly its collection). And collection it was that seemed to occupy most questioners' minds - especially the emotive wheeled bins.

On these, Bernard King bravely held his ground and insisted that "they" will generate savings, for example the former crews of driver plus 4 will become driver plus 3 and across the Borough's 22 collection rounds the ratio of "teams" will reduce as 2 is to 3.

The other subject repeatedly raised in questions was "recycling", particularly of paper and the difficulties questioners faced now in maintaining paper collections. Mr. King explained that the problem of paper-waste is the matching of raw material with a suitable end-product, following the flooding of Western Europe with paper waste by W. Germany when a year or two ago they passed a local law demanding paper collection on a scale unmatched by other countries. Despite the present low ebb of paper recycling in Britain, Mr. King encouraged us with hope that a new mill being set up in Cheshire for newsprint production may prove to be a suitable goal for much London wastepaper in the last decade of the century.

After that, for paper as for other waste, Mr. King pinned his hopes for a "clean" future on the science and technology of disposal matching that of "creation" or as nearly as possible ...

5. GREEN AND "WINDSWEPT"

Tree plantings associated with the Finchley Society seem usually to occur on extremely cold days! - and so it was on Saturday morning 18th March at the pavement-planter beside Tesco's and the Joiners Arms, Church End.

Fifteen members were present when Pat Dunnill led the planting there of three young (4ft) Birch saplings (*Betula ermanii*) which our executive committee had recently approved and purchased for donation to the community in a bid to improve the landscape appearance on that side of Ballards Lane.

This was arranged in co-operation with Mr. Stanley Cook, Barnet Borough Recreation Group, who, in turn, has pledged that the Council will routinely care for the young trees as they develop. (Eds. To date, this appears only to have been done by our Pat Dunnill) The idea of placing small decorative trees at that particular pavement planter was coincident with the moving to it by Fin.Soc. members (February Newsletter) of shrubs recovered from the island beds at the Nether Street/Ballards Lane junction, when re-alignment work began there in February.

At the time of writing, all subjects appear to be flourishing, even including one of the three trees, snapped off in a mindless act (see May newsletter).

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR LONDON: OUR RESPONSE

Mention has been made on an earlier page (AGM Report), of the Society's dismay at the fragmentation into 33 "unitary" plans, of London's future planning strategy. In particular the Draft Strategic Planning Guidance (SPG), issued to the 33 boroughs by the Secretary of State, Nicholas Ridley, is so sketchy as to pay little more than lip service to guidance - in effect a charter for laissez-faire development.

After due study and consultation, Bill Tyler, Chairman of our Planning and Environment Sub-committee, has on behalf of The Finchley Society written to Mr. Ridley asking him to reconsider his approach to the whole question. Bill's letter is a two-page studied criticism, line-by-line, of the Minister's SPG, with accompanying glimpses of the miserable consequences for London that would result should the boroughs and the developers be so free in their activities

Bill asks Mr. Ridley to consider the excellent Strategic Planning Advice for London produced in October last year by the London Planning Advisory Committee and, because it is a remarkable consensus of views from all 33 authorities involved in its preparation, to adopt that as his SPG, with as little amendment as possible.

The LPAC's Strategic Planning Advice, Bill's letter and the Secretary of State's present SPG together amount of course to much more material than is reproducible here. If any members are interested to "read on", please contact Bill Tyler on 883 2006.

BARNET PARKING CHARGES - THIN END OF THE WEDGE?

Along with many other local organisations and the public at large, The Finchley Society has been concerned at the scale of the street parking restrictions and fees that are coming into force following upon the Spires shopping development in the centre of Barnet.

The Spires own private multi-storey unit is already in use, catering for up to 500 cars at an hourly cost not untypical of some shopping developments, but in this borough, not hitherto employed.

Before the end of the year however, there will also be fee-paying parking, imposed by the Council, in around 20 streets within approximately 1/3 mile of the Spires. The restrictions are expected to consist of a combination of

- * Parking meters in some streets at 20p for 12 minutes.
- * Long-term off-street parking (around 165 places), with offers to retail shops' staff or season tickets, at £1.40/day.
- * 280 Pay-and-Display places in other streets, with special facilities for residents at a £5/year fee, but only 75% of the total number of residents' permits will be allocated for residents' parking.

Pat Dunnill, who has observed these Barnet developments for The Fin.Soc. has seen plans for Mill Hill already being proposed. She believes that there is a real danger that Finchley may be similarly "targeted", subject to "local consultation". Pat reports that if the "consultation" in Barnet is anything to go by, the word is being abused.

This prospect appears to be unhealthy for Finchley's businesses and residents alike and if it should be an accurate forecast, surely much to be opposed, before our High Street trade, and traders, are driven away to more "welcoming" districts.

FOREIGN CURRENCY ACCEPTED

Esther Johnson

Somewhere in Southern Spain, roughly equidistant from Granada and Malaga, there may be sighted a green Finchley Society T-shirt.

Explanation. On a recent visit to the town of Almunecar I donned, for the first time, what I thought of as MY T-shirt. My hostess took one look, and offered me 1000 pesetas for it. Doing a very stow lightning calculation, I reckoned I would make a profit of 30 pesetas on such a transaction, so removed the item of apparel and handed it over. It now adorns the attractive person of that lady resident; and her jealous friends are already accusing her of advertising....

There is no doubt that the Finchley Society is getting even farther flung.

"GREENER, CLEANER, SAFER" -from a "watchdogs" notebook Mary Hodgkinson

The garden gate swinging across the pavement is a nuisance and a hazard. Not my problem - oh, yes it is. Another telephone call to Highways at Squires Lane, who know me well, will result in repair.

Not all of the numerous developers' building teams observe the regulations about footways. Several times I have seen elderly people obliged to step into the road because of obstruction on the pavement by wheelbarrows, implements, rubble, etc. I was faced recently with a real "black spot" in Mayfield Avenue.

Untypically, I received no co-operation on site. Another call to Highways. They get angry about obstructed pavements....

Strolling past the golf course in Friary Road, I found an overhanging branch across my path. Yet another call was required.

Speaking of Friary Road - its verges which used to be such a charming feature are as mistreated as ever, with large stretches reduced by cars to muddy furrows. The next downward step could hypothetically be conversion to permanent hard-standing - how can we and the Council take steps to avoid such an awful prospect?

Being a Watchdog makes everyday life more interesting. Once you start taking notice, you find many eyesores, hazards and nuisances of all kinds which ought to be reported to the local authority. Often a brief telephone call is the only action required.

The Finchley Society needs more Watchdogs to take this kind of interest in their surroundings Members might like to consider unofficially adopting a road in their neighbourhood which needs special attention.

As you can guess I have been paying particular attention to Friary Road, N12 which has deteriorated owing in large measure to the constant parking of cars and commercial vehicles on the grass verges.

I recently approached the ward councillor, who has promised to take whatever action he can. The local authority has also given an assurance that the state of this avenue will be investigated.

"OH. THE LITTLE MORE, AND HOW MUCH IT IS...(Browning) Freddie Cohn

To find our part of the world in the national news recently gave none of us any pleasure. First the rats in Barnet and then the overflowing sewer polluting the picturesque brook along which so many of us stroll. For one got thoroughly depressed and felt guilty as if all this was my fault. But I was cheered up considerably by contact with one of the Borough's officials who "did a little more" than making promises and "how much more it was!"

My wife and I moved to North Finchley a year ago and acquainted ourselves with the same stretch of river which recently has had such a bad press. We were saddened that none of the benches along Dollis Brook, especially between Tillingham Way, N12 and Fursby Aye, N3, could be used. It was hardly possible to sit down, either because the wood was splintery or slats were missing altogether.

I wrote to the Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Michael Swabey, the Acting Leisure Services Manager (Amenity) replied saying that refurbishment work made necessary because seats have either been vandalised or have deteriorated "through old age", was taking place throughout the Borough. In a further letter he assured me that "repair of as many seats as possible along this important amenity walk will be made". This was planned to take place before the winter.

By January all the benches were repaired. They are a joy to look at and a pleasure to sit on.

I wrote to Mr. Swabey and thanked him for his interest and intervention. At the same time I took the opportunity to ask him to consider another related matter. Facing the little lake in the woods near Eversleigh Road, N3 which those who know it will agree to be a lovely spot, there was until last autumn a felled tree trunk which served as a short resting place for many walkers. One day this was removed and I wondered whether it would be possible for the Council to consider erecting the simplest of benches at that spot - to be welcomed by many people, I was certain.

It took only a week for him to reply, assuring me that the suggested provision would be investigated. The seat, he wrote, would be of a more "rustic design which will make it aesthetically acceptable to this area". He added that any such seat would utilize the Borough's own timber that fell during the storm of October 1987. Mr. Swabey thanked me for bringing this matter to his attention, but thanks are, of course due to him. Not only does he respond to what a resident may have to suggest, but clearly takes such matters seriously and acts accordingly!

It feels good to tell a happy story for once.

LETTER FROM MISS LARGE

"At the meeting on waste disposal someone suggested being able to take squeeze bottles back to a supermarket so as to refill and re-use them. There is a present alternative: a large retail chain of chemists sells washing-up liquid in one-gallon and half-gallon quantities so that the smaller container used at the sink can be refilled at home. These large containers, when empty, are a useful size for other purposes and even if thrown away, represent a smaller quantity of abandoned plastic (I have just realised my squeeze bottle is the same one I had when setting up home thirty years ago).

Similarly, a chain selling toiletries pride themselves on minimal packaging, and provide a refill service at their shops, at a lesser price than a completely new bottleful, e.g. of shampoo.

We can all lean on supermarkets to develop these ideas, but in the meantime we can also support these commendable initiatives."

MEMO TO ALL MEMBERS

During the Summer break (no monthly meetings or newsletters in July and August), please support The Finchley Society presence at the Finchley Carnival (procession float and marquee stall) and at the Friern Barnet Show.

Offers of help will be gratefully received by Norman Burgess (346 6337), David Smith (883 4154), or any officer or committee member whose telephone number you already have.

For The Finchley Society
John and Carol Halls (Editors) Finchley Park, N12