

The Finchley Society Newsletter

JANUARY 1990 No.1/90 SUPPLEMENT

For distant members and those who haven't been fortunate enough to attend all the activities since the October Supplement was published, this edition begins with reports of recent events

THE OCTOBER MEETING Lynn Bresler

Billed as a talk on the inland waterways of Britain, our speaker for October, Mr. Arthur Radley, concentrated instead on the waterways of London. To cover the whole of the country, he explained, would take more than one evening! He had also travelled to Finchley via the Northern Line - and could well understand why we might prefer to commute by canal!

Mr. Radley started with some background information, including a slide of George, the horse, plodding the towpath at Croxley Mill, Watford, the narrowboat behind him 70 ft long, 7 ft wide, and capable of carrying 35 tons - the same as a juggernaut truck today. Life on the canals was hard, but they enjoyed a monopoly for 50 years, until they were bought out by the railways in the 1820s. Freight-carrying was revived during both world wars, but little cargo is carried nowadays on the countrywide network of canals.

Moving on to London in particular, Mr. Radley explained the 'ring' of canals around London - from Bishop's Stortford in the north-east, via the River Lee Navigation (the first pound lock, 1454, was at Waltham Cross) down to Limehouse Basin, from where the Grand Union Canal ran all the way to Birmingham, via the Regent's Canal through Little Venice and Paddington Basin.

A surprise was in store for us next. The first canal in London was built in 1016 - by King Canute - to bring boats, etc. up to Brentford in an unsuccessful bid to beat Edmund Ironside. (He did gain the crown eventually though.) Other notable 'dead' canals include the Fleet Canal, which Sir Christopher Wren used to bring stone to build St. Paul's; it was later infilled, used as a covered market, and then built over - today's Farringdon Viaduct and High Holborn. Victoria Station is built on top of an old canal! Grosvenor Canal is still to be seen opposite Battersea Power Station. Croydon Canal, taken over by the Brighton and South Coast Railway, opened in 1809, closed in 1836, and had 26 locks!

Mr Radley then turned his attention to some 'problem' canals. Regent's Canal has King's Cross under it and St. Pancras over it - and is one of the possible sites for the London end of the Channel Tunnel. St. Pancras Cruising Club would have to move; the Nature Park created by the GLC for over £1 million is under threat; Battle Bridge Basin is home to many people living on narrowboats - a bridge may go over the top. In Limehouse Basin, the Thames end of the Great Regent Canal (closed in 1926) is now the Docklands Light Railway - and the proposed infilling of the basin has been postponed. What a shame, he suggested, that neither Billingsgate Fish

Market, now at Import Dock at Canary Wharf, nor the New Covent Garden at Nine Elms, is accessible from the river!

Amenity use of canals grows though, including canal trips from Camden Lock, and canoeing and other sports at the recently restored Kingsland Basin at Hackney. Other snippets of information: boats passing through tunnels, such as the one at Islington, had to be legged along inside the tunnel - the boatmen retired at 50 with arthritis! Formerly known as Browning's Pool, after the poet Robert Browning who lived there for over 20 years, Little Venice was so re-named by Chesterton & Son - to add a touch of romance, and hopefully increase the house prices!

Mr Radley rounded off his talk by detailing the many facilities that are available on the canals today - there are hotel boats, and boats for hire, though most trips are A to B and back again, rather than round trip. Other amenities are run by charities and youth clubs. He assured us that boaters and anglers are not at daggers drawn - indeed, the boats churn up the water, and the anglers reel the fish in! And the strangest slide he showed us - beside a canal, with fishing rights, a house - tucked right beneath a motorway, the thunder of traffic mere inches from the top of the roof!

For the future, the Inland Waterways Association and the Parliamentary Waterways Group both act as pressure groups to preserve the canals; the Waterways Recovery Group works on their restoration.

MUSIC FOR AN AUTUMN EVENING

This well-publicised, well-organised and most enjoyable evening was, sadly, not well-attended. Certainly the support from Finchley Society members was extremely thin - which was doubly a shame because it was such a pleasant occasion.

The hall was set out in an attractive "cafe" or "cabaret" style with seating at tables, breaking from the regular "recital" layout of just rows of seats. This arrangement also facilitated an extremely friendly atmosphere for the audience, especially when interval snacks and refreshments were served - and those snacks were just excellent!

As to the performances, all from young musicians embarking on their careers, they were by any standards catholic enough, with something for all tastes. We had operatic pieces from baritone Paul Keohone who supported each with most interesting narratives about their history or plot. He was accompanied on the piano by Katie Bell. They are both RCM students.

Then Jacqueline Braddock, mezzo, accompanied by Angela White, piano (respectively past and present RCM students) presented both jolly and sad German songs in dramatic style, followed in a change of mood by Italian and French ones breathy with romance!

Finally James Cohen, pianist, who is an American in Finchley and who doubles in the careers of consulting engineer and musician, presented a dizzying

programme of rag and jazz topped by a passionate performance of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue - plus two encores.

Let us hope that The Finchley Society will continue to present occasional fund-raising musical evenings - and that greater numbers of members will be encouraged by this and other reports, to attend and enjoy!

NOVEMBER MEETING

Conundrum - What has approximately one million subscribers but is estimated to be read by some three and a half million Britons? - Which? No, not a Robb Wilton sketch-line, but current statistics on the C.A. (Consumer Association) magazine, given to his audience at the November meeting by Julian Edwards, Head of Research Development at the Association.

Mr. Edwards charted the life of Consumer Magazines, at least in the USA and the UK, beginning in the 1920s with "Your Money's-Worth" which set out to do for the U.S. public what the National Bureau of Statistics was already doing for U.S. Government purchasers. The USA still leads in consumer interest, with 3.5 million subscribers to the current 'Consumer Report', the biggest circulation magazine of its kind in the world.

In 1957 an American lady, Dorothy Goodman, together with Michael Young, now Lord Young of Dartington, launched 'WHICH?' from the modest surroundings of a Bethnal Green garage. This was at a critical point in the period of creation of new materials, e g plastics, detergents, synthetic fibres, etc. and the examination of such products, so welcome to the public, saw the magazine off to a good start.

Today, as Julian indicated, the breadth of tested products would have been unbelievable in '57 - topped by an almost equally broad range of services, as exemplified for instance by C.A.'s "Good Food Guide" -and ALL of this still totally self-funded; nothing from industry or government and all tested products/services are bought, anonymously, by C.A. operatives.

Furthermore, he reminded us, "Which?" results are strictly not to be used in advertising by pleased manufacturers! The idea of "our car did very well in a recent consumer magazine trial but-we're-not-allowed-to-tell-you-WHICH!", would certainly result in that manufacturer not featuring thereafter - and Julian indicated that as a code of conduct, that does appear to have universal acceptance across all six of C.A.'s current range of magazines, 'Ordinary' Which?. plus Motoring, Gardening, Health, Holiday, Wine and Drugs (this last one for the medical fraternity) and its books - among them the Good Food and Good Pubs guides.

Julian presented a glimpse of other C.A. activities:

* A "campaigning" division to support consumer interests by lobbying parliament or industry - for example, over flammability standards in furniture

* A legal department to assist the public in legal consumer problems

* An 'International' department which both tests on an international scale and circulates the derived information; internationally.

He further instanced C.A.'s role in the growth of contact between 'academic consumerists' of the European west, with their counterparts in Eastern Europe. (Eds. How vital might this be in the light of recent events, as Eastern European industry becomes overhauled and modernised!)

Rounding off, he stressed that new consumer issues continue to develop on an ever-expanding scale (not only in durables, but increasingly in services, finance, health and green issues) but that across this whole spectrum it is still largely subscriber-led. Thus as in most organisations, membership and particularly active membership, is vital.

In declaring a vote of thanks to the speaker, Chairman Norman Burgess suggested that the greatest virtues of Which? are that it is believable and trustworthy!

FRIARY PARK TREE PLANTING

The Society's contribution to National Tree Planting Week, a Red Oak, was duly planted in Friary Park N.12, on Saturday, 25th November.

It was disappointing to record a membership turn-out numbering only fourteen -- it was a cold day, but the occasion did merit more support than just that of the core of the Society's committee members!

We feel sure that this tree (close by the big statue in the park) will bring much pleasure in the future to Fin.Soc. members and local residents alike - along with the other trees the Society planted in Friary Park immediately after the 1987 October storm. Do please at least go along some time and admire them!

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

The considerable extra space at the Finchley Reform Synagogue compared with the Avenue House Drawing Room which had been the scene of previous parties, gave valuable freedom of circulation both for conversation and for improved access to the buffet and competition, etc.

The Editors, making a careful headcount, noted that there were slightly short of 80 in attendance and that there would clearly have been room for a further 50 or more without seriously reducing that "circulation". Thus, as mentioned previously, it is to be hoped that this larger meeting place will encourage more members to come along and enjoy the monthly meetings.

President Spike Milligan, otherwise engaged in panto in Tunbridge Wells, sent his apologies for being unable to attend but also sent very warm seasonal greetings to all members, with encouragement to everyone to maintain action on behalf of The Finchley Society throughout 1990.

Shirley Avery and helpers (to all of whom very many thanks) took advantage of the extra space available, to set out their excellent buffet in a most attractive and welcoming style while Kurt Weinberg presided over a worthy departure for the Society in liquid refreshments, by serving low-alcohol wines along with the usual soft drinks. This move, much in keeping with the national Christmas campaign for improved road safety, met with general approval. Meanwhile Andrew Forsyth's fascinating quiz to relate correctly household-name products to the words of their respective advertising slogans, provoked many a "I know it so well - if only I could remember it!" Can you recall the household name deleted from this slogan - "If it's safe in water, it's safe in ..."? (Answer is, of course, Lux!). Harry Levinson won First Prize with a score of 24/30, well clear of the field. As ever, the raffle was most successful - with 9 prizes seemingly stretching out to match a certain 5 loaves and 2 fishes!!

To round off the evening's entertainments, Vice-President David Smith conducted a solo "A - Z of Finchley" quiz which was in effect a one-man charades of places, streets and features of Finchley - it was a laugh (or a groan) a minute! One of the most notable "groans" went as follows

CLUE --- "I'd like to give you a fitted kitchen, modern bedrooms, etc., etc."

ANSWER-- "AVE A NEW HOUSE!!!"

In a finale to a most successful evening, Vice-President Bill Tyler represented the entire membership in honouring our former Membership Secretary, Roy Thomas, for his dedication over fifteen years in that post. To mark that, Bill presented Roy with a handsome book about one of Roy's hobbies, London! - "2000 years of a city and its people" -- very fitting, one might say, after fifteen years of service to The Finchley Society and its membership!

CIVIC TRUST INFORMATION

The Civic Trust recently circulated a leaflet suggesting ten tried and tested ways for Local Amenity Societies to attract new members. The Fin.Soc. Executive examined it closely, and honestly, with the pleasing conclusion that we score 6/10 in our regular approaches to recruiting.

However, by way of improving upon that here are three of the Trust's suggestions that our membership-at-large can play an immediate and effective part in:

1. Ask every member to recruit at least FOUR new members immediately. Do not be shy. Keep them up to it. Suggest they start with their next door neighbours. Then, if they work locally, to tackle their colleagues. Find out which other interest/community groups they belong to and get them to spread the word. Encourage the solicitors and accountants to enlist other solicitors and accountants in the area. Get the Parent/Teachers to talk about the Society to other Parent/Teachers. Make sure that all these people have membership forms to hand.

2. Put a leaflet through every door in the locality, or an even better method is to ring people's door bells and canvass their support directly. It takes more nerve and time but the success rate is higher.

3. Join up with other, larger, more established groups and get them to add your leaflet to their mailing. In return you might offer them publicity about their meetings. Try: Friends of the Earth Local Group, National Trust Regional Group, Local History and Archaeology Groups, etc. The same applies to local Residents' and Tenants' Associations, Conservation Area Advisory Committees, the 'Friends of....' and the 'Save the....' groups. Do not be surprised that people are willing to support more than one organisation at a time. Eds. Note: If Fin.Soc. members also belong to other such organisations, do please treat them as "fertile soil".

Finchley Society handbills and membership forms are available from David Smith (883 4154) or from David and Philip Cohen (Membership Secretary) at the monthly meetings.

FIRE, WATER AND HISTORY

You will remember the June 1989 talk to us by Dr. Michael Essex-Lopresti on the subject of the supply to London of water by way of the New River - and the story of how, at an early stage of the Great Fire of London, the rival supply was cut off by the fire's destruction of Peter Moris's paddle pump adjacent to London Bridge, effectively sealing the fate of the area of what we now call the City, closest to the bridge.

Well - member Leslie Martin has written from Lancing in Sussex where they have not (yet) had to endure such a Great Fire (tho' they have survived the 1987 'hurricane'), to say that at Coultershaw on the River Rother the Water Wheel and Beam Pump which date from 1790 and were originally for the supply to nearby Petworth (2 miles) of water at the rate of 20,000 gallons per day, not only still exist but have recently been fully restored to working order by the Sussex Industrial Archaeological Society.

Leslie reports that this is the only working piece of machinery of its type in Southern England and that it is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, open to the public on 1st and 3rd Sundays of the months April -September from 11a.m. to 4p.m., admission (1989) 40p.

Thus, while we still have the New River, the "other aspect" of London's 17th century water supply, lost to us, is still for study in more-or-less comparable form in deepest Sussex.

EAST FINCHLEY COMMUNITY FESTIVAL Philip Cohen

I expect that most of our members know East Finchley, but there may be some who have never visited it and, possibly in view of the fact that it is rarely mentioned in the newsletter or in any other announcements, some may not be aware that it exists'

East Finchley, which is situated on and either side of the old Great North Road and is bounded by The Bishops Avenue to the south and the North Circular Road to the north, is quite a lively area, with a very mixed community and several local groups. One of these has been running for about six years and, within the last twelve months has put East Finchley on the map nationally by getting into the national press.

Why? Well, six years ago a group of us decided that it was time we had our own Community Festival - the first, in 1984, was well-organised with a procession through the area and all sorts of stalls, side-shows, etc., on the field at Cherry Tree Wood. However, in 1988, Barnet Borough Council issued an ultimatum that no groups with any sort of political connection should be allowed to show; amongst those they mentioned were the Woodcraft Folk - young children, Pensioners' Voice - definitely stated in all its publications as a Non-Party political organisation; of course, all the political parties as well as other groups. We were not prepared to accept this ruling and, on legal advice, took the Council to the High Court which found in our favour. This was reported in most of the media and we ran the Community Festival once again in 1989 and are preparing to do so again in June 1990.

Meanwhile, we are having to ask those people who pledged sums of money for the Judicial Review to renew and, if possible to double their pledges because the Borough of Barnet have decided to appeal against the finding, so using more of the ratepayers' money. We have been advised that we stand a very good chance of winning this action as well, but, should it go against us, we are having to raise another £18,000 in case we have to meet the costs. A good sum has already been promised and functions are being arranged to raise more. We have been backed all the way through by The National Council for Civil Liberties both with advice and financial help and there is a possibility that the Cadbury Trust may help us with a donation.

The above is rather a lengthy, but I hope, clear statement of the present state of things regarding the East Finchley Community Festival. Does The Finchley Society think that we should be given support? If so, it will be most welcome. Certainly we look forward to The Finchley Society's staff being well in evidence at the 1990 Community Festival.

I hope that from now on, from time to time, there will be more news about East Finchley in the newsletter.

Eds. Would that other Fin.Soc. members resident in East Finchley follow Philip's lead with newsletter contributions! There are certainly strong membership roots there, including two of our Vice-Presidents who live there, and our planning monitors' activities naturally embrace the East Finchley wards. Let's hear it from you all please!

BYGONE TRANSPORT IN FINCHLEY

Occasional Recollections No.2 Andrew Forsyth

Some of us, inconvenienced by buses that fail to turn up, have fond memories of the frequent and reliable services once provided by the Metropolitan Electric Tramways to the West End, City and West London.

Along the High Road was Route 19 that ran from Barnet Church to Tottenham Court Road and in Woodhouse Road we had Route 21 from North Finchley to Holborn via Wood Green. Ballards Lane was served by Route 40 (later 45) from Whetstone or North Finchley to Cricklewood and by Route 60 between North Finchley and Paddington. There were also LCC tramcars coming to North Finchley from Moorgate on Route 9.

Sometimes during school holidays, I would stand by the Depot entrance in Woodberry Grove to watch the steady procession of trams coming out for the evening rush hour. For many years, those tramcars had altered very little, apart from having their upper decks covered, and on the Type A cars the drivers were exposed to all weathers without even a canopy for shelter. Then in 1927 appeared the first of several experimental improved trams. This was the famous 'Bluebell' that was involved in an accident when it ran away down Barnet Hill and hit a lorry, resulting in the death of the driver. Instead of the usual red and white livery this car was pale blue with permanent advertisements for Palmolive Soap, hence its nickname.

Another experimental tram had a centre entrance/exit with sliding doors. This car, No. 331, often worked a rush hour shuttle service to Golders Green station with two conductors on board, one to each deck. When displaced by trolleybuses in 1936, it was sold to Sunderland where it worked for a further period before it was purchased by an enthusiast for preservation. It has recently been restored at the National Tramway Museum at Crich in Derbyshire and can be seen running later this year, at the Gateshead Garden Festival. (Also see Cyril Smeeton's article in the January, 1989 Newsletter Supplement).

The experimental trams led to the introduction in 1931 of the luxurious "Feltham" cars that worked on Routes 21 and 40. These cars seated 64 passengers with room for a further ten standing on the two end platforms. Passengers boarded at the rear, but could alight either at the rear or from a sliding door from the front platform, the "passenger flow" system that still operates in modified form on the Metrobuses running in Finchley today. One of these trams can be seen in the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden. With the coming of the Felthams, the driver was fully protected from the weather and for the first time he had a tip-up seat instead of having to stand at the controls.

Before the construction of the Kingsway North Finchley one-way system, trams used to reverse in Ballards Lane and High Road opposite Woolworths. When the tram station (now the bus station) was brought into use, the track leading in divided into two. An Inspector in the little hut at the top could set the points for either track so that trams could pass each other when necessary. Track points linking Kingsway and Ballards Lane were operated automatically, depending on whether the tram was taking power or just coasting when its trolley passed under a "skate" in the overhead wire. However, the junction from High Road into Woodhouse Road and Kingsway was too complicated for automatic operation. Here a pointsman stood in all weathers at a control

pillar in which were two levers to set the appropriate points and two handles which he pulled to operate the "frogs" in the overhead wires.

Can other members remember the rather uneven section of track that there was between the Police Station and the Methodist Church stop in Ballards Lane? Some of the older trams would sway alarmingly on this section and descending from the upper deck was a hazardous process!!

TRAVELLERS' TALES

* ART NOUVEAU LETTER-BOX

The illustration, by Peter Marsh, is of a letter-box he spotted on a recent visit to Cuba, Isn't it amazing?

Like the coffee in Brazil, Peter reports that "there's a lot of art nouveau decoration in the old town of Havana".

We're going to encourage Peter to bring back further unusual sketches from his travels - he certainly helps to brighten up our supplement!

* SALE OR RETURN DOWN-UNDER

Shirley Avery and family have taken a Christmas and New Year break in Australia to visit a former school-chum and to look up some distant relatives, descendants of family who emigrated in 1910.

She also took with her some Finchley Society Tee Shirts, on, it has been said, a "sale or return" basis. Could it be that our export-supremo, Esther Johnson, desperate for that next success, may have actually despatched Shirley on a "Sell or don't return" basis!!

The Eds. certainly look forward to Shirley's safe return and maybe an amusing sales story from Down-Under, for a future supplement edition!

TAILPIECE

An amusing item gleaned from a recent edition of The Daily Telegraph

PAVE THE WAY

A Headline in the Chatham News: "Concrete action needed to save green spaces."

For The Finchley Society

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