

The Finchley Society Newsletter

No.3/90 SUPPLEMENT

First, a brief examination backwards in time over the past three months reveals what's been afoot (or in the air considering the combination of gales and early spring!) with The Finchley Society --

COLLEGE FARM - OUR LIVING LEGEND Timothy Johnson

Finchley has been somewhat careless about its past and bulldozers have been allowed to obliterate much of our local heritage. All the more remarkable therefore that we can still steep ourselves in history at College Farm. Almost everybody knows that it became a celebrated Victorian tourist trap as showplace of the Dairy Industry, but did you know that it was already rich in history before The Express Dairy Company arrived on the scene? How was the land farmed in the 14th Century? - and who was the tenant in 1320? Answers to these and other questions are in "Milk for the Millions" - price 50p - on sale in Barnet public libraries and at The Finchley Society bookstall.

The farm has enjoyed remarkable media coverage in recent months with pictures, articles and features in all the local papers. Even Minnie, the Middle White piglet, got half a page to herself in the Advertiser, and Farmer Christopher must surely have the most photographed face in Finchley. All the papers recently featured pictures of Spike Milligan, the Mayor of Barnet, and executives of The Express Dairy who all seemed to be helping one another to plant a "Time Capsule"!

It is now almost 20 years since the company sold the farm to the Ministry of Transport and we were pleased to see old links formally restored when they participated in the Christmas Fair, raffling Christmas hampers to raise funds for the "Save College Farm" project - Did you manage to get hold of one of those splendid tins of Express Dairy College Farm biscuits?

At the March "First Sunday" event on the 4th, LBC reporter Rodney Bennett gave the farm's long history a high profile in a live broadcast heard by listeners to LBC Crown FM. Those of us taking part were not able to hear the whole programme, but bits overheard as he moved round with his microphone indicated that he was painting a colourful sound picture of 2000 or so people enjoying themselves. Many of them were invited to comment and all those not tongue tied by mic-fright seized the opportunity eagerly.

The February Fair was also highly successful and the Pex Puppet Theatre claims that it broke all records. Never before, say Ann and Mike Barclay, have they played to such a large audience at College Farm.

Did you happen to see the College farmer recently making yet another TV appearance in Esther Rantzen's "That's Life"? He took a cockerel with him this time and it behaved just as badly as the ducks and highland cattle did last time - it was a great success!!

Just in case anyone still needs reminding - the Country Fair is on the first Sunday of every month, 1-6 p.m., and the farm itself is open to the public every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Day tickets from the farm office).

FOR THE NEXT CENTURY - A TIME CAPSULE AT COLLEGE FARM Jane Ower

If The Express Dairy Company wanted to bury a time capsule where would be the obvious place? College Farm of course; obvious that is to those of us who live in Finchley and frequently pass the farm built so many years ago by that same company.

The Express Dairy have had no links with the farm since leaving in 1972, and suddenly became aware of its existence all over again after Chris wrote to them last year asking for help with archives for the College Farm museum. Soon after, a telephone call was received from the company suggesting that a planned time capsule should be buried at College Farm. This was wonderful news as it would renew the links between the Dairy and the Farm.

The time capsule, which was to commemorate the end of the 125th year of the company, was duly buried on 15th February, 1990 and it will be opened again in the company's 150th year. The capsule contains memorabilia from Express Dairies, such as a diary of events during the 125th year, a milkman's uniform and pictures. There was also a letter and signed photograph from Mrs. Margaret Thatcher plus information regarding the designation of College Farm as a conservation area, submitted by Philip Wilson from the Borough of Barnet's Planning Office.

Witnessing the event were David Postage, Deputy Managing Director from Express Dairies, (he brought along with him the youngest and oldest "Express" milkmen). Also able to come along to help with the burial were the Mayor of Barnet, Dot Benson, and Mr. Spike Milligan.

The event was staged around the renovated Tea House and a few words were said by David, Dot and Spike before stepping outside to the 'hole' in the centre of the sunken garden.

There was a slight hiccup in that the capsule (which arrived only 15 minutes beforehand) would not fit into the hole, however the ceremony proceeded successfully with the time capsule sticking out of the ground! After the burial the Express Dairy offered refreshments prepared by Sue Russell in the Tea House, which rounded off the event excellently.

THE FEBRUARY MEETING David Smith

Our February meeting was addressed by Francesca Franchi, B.A., Archivist of the Royal Opera House. Francesca has local roots, having been a pupil at the Manor House Convent and Bishop Douglass School.

The Covent Garden owed its early fame to the award of Letters Patent by Charles II -along with the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. An early success was "The Beggar's Opera". Programmes were usually a double bill of a principal dramatic piece followed by a musical play. George Handel worked at the theatre from 1735 until his death and it was in 1743 that "The Messiah" was given its British Premiere at Covent Garden. The performance of religious choral works was necessary to the theatre's well-being because no other shows were allowed throughout Lent.

Naturally, the great names of the English stage trod the boards at Covent Garden - David Garrick (who used to live at Hendon), John Kemble, Sarah Siddons (his sister), and our own Joseph Grimaldi. (I say "our own" because many of us sitting there were probably conscious that the great Grimaldi had lived just yards from where we were sitting).

Grimadi, from whose first name clowns are dubbed 'Joey', was a singer, dancer and clown of great fame and restored pantomime to Covent Garden, beginning with "Mother Goose" in 1806.

In true English fashion, the theatre was destroyed by fire in 1808 and again in 1856. The "Scottish" Play was chosen as the first post-fire production and was accompanied by riots lasting two months over the increase in seat prices. The place was in decline during the 1830s and 1840s and the 1843 Theatres Act ended its near monopoly. In 1847, it re-opened as the "Royal Italian Opera" playing Rossini's "Semiramide". Indeed the Queen was a regular visitor and three traditions were founded on these years: the playing of the National Anthem ONLY at the start and at the close of the season: the use of members of the Brigade of Guards in Aida; the use of white light at Bow Street Police Station so that Her Majesty, as she passed by, might not be reminded of the seamier side of life.

The second re-building was carried out in 1857/8 by 1200 workmen and under the direction of the Italian architect Monti. The decor and colour scheme remain to this day. Royal patronage ceased but a lively programme of opera, circus and other entertainment ensured financial success. In 1892, it became simply "The Royal Opera House" and it has continued to open its doors to the great names of our century -Diaghilev, Pavlova and Nijinsky, Fonteyn, Nureyev, Dame Eva Turner (still alive at 97!), Callas, Gobbi, and so on. It was fascinating to hear that today 1000 people work there, keeping this national monument alive and at the forefront of the world operatic stage. The planned three-year closure starting in 1993 will ensure even better facilities than at present. Covent Garden has had an exciting and varied past. Let us all wish it an even brighter future.

THE JANUARY MEETING

Thursday, 25th January was the day that saw in London the first and most violent of the recent storms that have successively battered us so far this year. It was not for the South East so devastating as that celebrated near-hurricane of October '87, but Fin.Soc. members that evening could well have been forgiven had they given the monthly meeting a miss.

Not a bit of it however!, for despite the elements, a goodly number turned out for what was to have been virtually an old-fashioned "double-bill" - the guest speaker plus the Open Forum on the rebuilding and future of Avenue House!

As readers of the February Newsletter already know, it was the guest speaker who fell most foul of the day's weather and Helen Paterson had (again) to postpone her visit - but thanks to that "double-bill" the evening was sustained by an immediate expansion of the Avenue House discussions, all of which together with the views already expressed at the joint meeting of

Fin.Soc. committees, resulted in Chairman, Norman Burgess, subsequently (29th January) making the following submission on behalf of the Society.

1. There should be NO development outside of the existing foundation.
2. The damaged wing should be restored externally exactly as it was.
3. The drawing room should be restored exactly to its former style with full restoration of the fireplace and its electrical fittings (as installed by Stephens). A specialist firm such as connected with Ken Campbell should be employed for this restoration.
4. Catering facilities should be improved considerably: inside for 'users' of the premises; in the grounds for a franchise with a view to attracting more people along the lines of those facilities available at Golders Hill Park. A covered area might be considered at the rear of the house adjoining the 'saluting base' and garden room area.
5. Toilet facilities added at the rear of the house so that cleanliness and surveillance can be maintained. The complete closure of the other existing toilets, ladies - close to children's playground and gents - In corner of stable block, is recommended.
6. The whole park and pathways be a strictly 'NO DOGS' area in line with modern health guidelines where children can play freely without risks.
7. A lift should be installed linking basement/ground and first and second floors.
8. Ramps installed at all entrances and exits for easier access to all disabled and wheeled chairs. Advice to be sought from the Disabled Association of Barnet and National Trust expertise.
9. The laboratory should be fitted out more in the tasteful style of a library with shelving and lockable cupboards.

We strongly urge the retention of the slate bed area on the right of the room as was previously installed by Stephens to retain the 'laboratory' corner. We do not feel strongly about the retention of the fire-place in the left hand corner. Attractive 'period' lighting in this room is recommended.

10. Possibilities of 'opening up' the basement by removing non-essential partitions should be explored so that this has easy access from outside (ground level), with possible use for children's play groups with attractive wall-finishes.
11. The possible joining of the Salon and the Drawing Room to be investigated without detracting from the Drawing Room.
12. The Salon to be designed for the exhibition of paintings, etc. and use for small concerts, poetry readings, etc.

13. We oppose any expansion of car parking that would eat into the grounds and suggest the demolition of old pre-fabricated huts at the rear of Hertford Lodge to provide more car parking spaces.

14. The 'Museum of Writing' project to be jointly planned by the Society and the Borough Librarian.

That is all now on file at London Borough of Barnet (ref.GPS.142.15), available for public inspection and we await the eventual Council response/action to restore Avenue House.

BARBICAN OUTING

On January 13th, a full coach load of members plus a further number who travelled independently, descended at noon upon the Barbican Centre for 'the full treatment' - tour backstage; break for lunch; matinee performance to follow. And what treatment!

Administrative Assistant Jonathan Siddall first marshalled us all down to the second and smaller theatre, The Pit, in the comparative seclusion of which he was able to outline the conception and history of the Barbican Centre, particularly featuring the fact that the two theatres are the exclusive domain of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) used as its "London extension".

Jonathan described the necessary contribution that the RSC made to the design of the building, closely co-operating with architects, Chamberlain Powell and Bond. He also had to confess the failure of one aspect of their 'input' - the inclusion of a full rehearsal space in the area behind The Pit - that concept has sadly been eaten up by the increasing demand for scenery storage space, to the point that the RSC has been obliged to buy property away from the theatre, in Clapham, to accommodate rehearsal rooms.

It was explained that both the original provision of generous rehearsal space and its subsequent loss to the need for scenery and prop storage are products of the Company's policy of presenting plays in repertory, with its entailing complexities of complete changes of production every two or three days in both theatres. Indeed, as Jonathan spoke to us, the props and settings for The Pit production of "Playing with Trains" by Stephen Poliakoff were being adjusted and tested by a backstage team, whose never ending schedules of continually stripping down and setting up productions in both theatres, sounded particularly daunting. (It crossed the writer's mind then, and has again subsequently with the news that RSC is to close down in the Barbican for a while to conserve funds, that a "Repertory" policy with all its high costs of labour and resources seems rather unnecessary in a centre like London, where audiences for short seasons of production - say of a month's duration each time - would surely be readily found.)

Anyway, at that point we forsook The Pit to return upstairs where, with a little knowledge already gained we stood in awe backstage of the main theatre, at its truly splendid facilities - the amazingly high fly-tower into which many sets of hanging scenery can be withdrawn, plus the deceptively large backstage area which can accommodate either extra-large productions or the backstage paraphernalia for two shows together. As had been the case in

The Pit, our visit could not be allowed to interrupt the preparations for the forthcoming performance - effects were being tested on stage and the musicians, curiously divided into two groups, one each side of the stage, each leader mysteriously connected by earphones, were running through their scores.

After lunch of course we re-gathered for the real purpose of the day - Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" starring Clare Higgins and John Carlisle. It played to a full house and was thoroughly enjoyed by the entire audience, drawn indeed from a wide age range as matinees often are, everyone (some quite unexpectedly) being quite taken by the avant-garde nature of this production - it really was fun!

In view of the day's success jointly on that front, together with a small surplus for Fin.Soc. funds, it is hoped that other similar outings will be proposed and fulfilled from time to time.

BOROUGH OF BARNET: DRAFT UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

On 14th February, Vice President Bill Tyler duly submitted to the Council the Society's collective views in response to the above document. As mentioned in the February newsletter those views had been formulated from line-by-line examination by the Society's sub-committees meeting on January 24th and the executive meeting on February 1st. Here follows an outline sketch of the resulting nine-page letter -

* We find much to commend in the Draft UDP and welcome the Council's progress toward the much-needed framework for planning policies in the Borough.

* However, "weak words" appear too often for comfort throughout the Policy Statements parts of the plan. For example, when referring to various aspects of environmental control, the Council uses phrases such as "seek to ensure" and "will encourage". Fin.Soc. asks for "require" and "will require". (Weasel words could open up future get-outs!)

* Indeed the document repeatedly fails to carry through into the paragraphs of Policy Statements, the good intentions set out in each respective General Statement.

* There is also some hiding behind the phrase "government policy", which is by nature transient, in a plan which should be essentially concerned with what is good for Barnet, through the full lifetime of the Plan!

Moving on to some of the detailed proposals -

* The section setting out high-buildings policy is weak and confusing, to the extent that most of the development "lines" where the plan proposes to allow such buildings, are precisely where The Finchley Society most objects on environmental grounds, viz the entire ridge of Finchley including its High Roads.

* References to the promotion of sports and arts facilities as much-needed in the Borough are welcome. However, we are critical of the undue emphasis on commercial developments against a lack of commitment in the UDP of Council

promotion, for all members of the community, rather than those who could afford commercial club fees, etc.

* The section on the future of Christ's College comes in for very specific Fin.Soc. criticism and here our submission is quoted in full -

"Christ's College, Finchley, is ideally located centrally in the Borough (unlike The Hyde Institute) and is an eminently suitable building for use as a social, entertainments and arts centre, as well as for educational purposes. It could accommodate the Borough's central archive, a local history collection, day and evening classes (adult education), library expansion/exhibition space, rehearsal rooms, local society room(s), local theatre groups (particularly children), arts facilities and most importantly, it has a public hall space.

That the Plan makes no reference to the need for the latter is extraordinary - a borough the size of Barnet should have such a facility to satisfy a well established need in the Borough. The tower of Christ's College could become a tourist attraction. We object strongly that Christ's College should be used as an hotel in its entirety and wish paragraph 4.5.6 to be amended to reflect the range of activities that could be accommodated at the complex."

* The proposals to encourage and maintain town-H U centre retailing whilst keeping large retail developments out-of-town are most welcome, but in the detail of setting out allowable percentages of non-A1 shop units (the ubiquitous Estate Agents and Building Societies, etc.) against A1 (true retailers), there appear to be whole stretches of important parts of the Borough where these controls are not proposed. We have asked for the following extensions to be included

North Finchley (High Road) - north to Ravensdale Avenue, south to Churchfield Avenue

East Finchley (High Road) - south to Baronsmere Road, north to Bedford Road

Whetstone (High Road) - which was not even mentioned!

Additionally we have proposed the inclusion of a second hierarchy of A1-controlled shopping centres to include Friern Barnet, Market Place and the Hampstead Garden Suburb.

* On housing (too detailed to set out here), Fin. Soc's expressed overriding wish is that the UDP should elevate "environmental capacity", including roads, infrastructure (drainage, etc.) and community services, to a factor of principal determination in planning considerations.

* In Chapter 9 (Roads and Traffic), the Society is particularly critical of the proposed vehicle parking standards and asks that the minimum provisions set out for all categories of development should be increased - in some cases doubled.

* Regarding the recent moves to site a future Courthouse on school playing fields at Hilton Avenue, (over which as yet there has been no public consultation), Fin.Soc. asks for an extra UDP proposal to be added, to propose the Inglis Barracks site for this purpose.

Finally, Bill Tyler's concluding paragraphs deserve quoting in full -

"We note that there is little attention paid to the needs of the disabled, no requirement for provision of public toilets anywhere in the Borough, no mention of traffic calming or pedestrianisation measures, only passing reference to community and arts facilities, and no indication of London-wide or neighbouring Borough co-operation on matters of regional or local concern, for instance the active promotion of public transport services across borough boundaries. These are serious matters which will concern many of our residents, and those who work in the Borough, during the next decade and beyond, and which the Plan should address and include in further policy statements.

"We are also extremely concerned that nowhere in the Draft Plan is there mention of College Farm. This is a most important educational and recreational facility and one which the Borough

On the former, Bill comments -

"We object most strongly to the powers that are envisaged for a 'Traffic Director' It appears that these powers could cut across the provisions of any Unitary Development Plan, could require a local authority to do things without prior discussion and could prevent councils carrying out local planning improvements of benefit to their residents. If some sort of strategic planning is to be re-introduced for London's road hierarchy then we are convinced it must be through a London-wide organisation that has proper regard for the London region as a whole."

Regarding the Assessment Study, which concerns increasing the road capacity on the A1 corridor, Bill says -

"We cannot accept that well-established residential and shopping communities should be sacrificed for the needs of Docklands, where excessive opportunistic development was allowed to proceed without adequate thought to its infrastructure requirements. Some twelve years ago we enthusiastically endorsed the Lea Valley Strategy which would have provided a road link from Stratford, and the then largely derelict docks, directly to the M25 at Waltham Cross. We consider that still to be as thoroughly sensible a solution as it was then. It seems nonsensical to us to require a road through north London to serve enterprise in the east."

"We also consider it quite unnecessary for a massive road scheme to be built to serve King's Cross. This is a site already at the hub of rail, underground and bus services as no other part of London; the development of the goods yard site should be predicated on public transport servicing for both people and goods."

"We are of the view that the piecemeal approach to London's transport needs, in the form of the four assessment studies and priority routes consultation, is fundamentally wrong. London does not consist of isolated areas, nor of isolated problems, but a whole range of difficulties across the entire region. A short-term solution in one area may soon exacerbate a problem in another, as will happen here as far as we are concerned. We therefore place no value on the study as a document for helping London's difficulties and we reject its conclusions as inappropriate and ill-conceived."

COUNTRY DIARY Sandra Quigley

Coppett's Wood is a little gem in the heart of London's sprawl. It lies like a precious pendant on the end of Summers Lane public waste collection area bounded by the North Circular and industrial units to its south, Colney Hatch Lane to the east, with the backs of suburban houses on its north. Public access to it is via Colney Hatch Lane, and, less visibly, by going through the Summers Lane public weighbridge, past the Parks Department's houses and thus into this little wild wood - a haven of green tranquillity within a noisy, traffic-laden area.

It is a mature wood with a tremendous variety of wild and cultivated species of plants, much due to its having been a dumping ground in past times for rubble and unwanted hard core. As well as wild flowers there are an exciting variety of fruit trees and shrubs, such as several types of wild apple, bramleys, pear, sloe, hazelnut, wild raspberries, blackberries, elder, rose hip.

In Spring, swathes of white flowering blackthorn spill against grassy hillocks like drifts of snow and together with catkins from the different types of salix or willow family, provide immediate visible evidence of warmth returning to the land.

The wood is currently alive with birdsong of robins, wrens, blackbirds, tits, pigeons celebrating the return of blue skies and trees gently unfurling their new leafbuds. This year, groundsel and speedwell are already flowering and the dark green arrow-shaped leaves of arum have emerged. In some places wild daffodils are in flower.

Oliver Natelson is the driving force, together with a band of helpers, behind the preservation and conservation of this precious greenland. They are to be seen on work days clearing, cutting back, planting and generally looking after the area. By the way, when the Friern Hospital site is redeveloped, is there any provision for an open park space or is it to be all buildings? The new Colney Hatch residential estate which lies behind the hospital area badly needs an open greenspace. Want to take up the cudgels, Oliver? I would be happy to help!

COMPLAINT Esther Johnson

Have you noticed that Finchley is rapidly becoming an open-air car sales show-room?

Along Ballards Lane, and roads leading off it, there are squadrons of cars-for-sale, vans-for-hire, breakdown vehicles, and cars waiting for repairs parked by the kerbs.

It is impossible to get a car near the main entrance to Victoria Park - or even near the Police Station

The same applies to the High Road and its side-roads such as Kenver Avenue and Fallow Court Avenue (Here some cars are also on the pavement).

Is it right that garages should have a free monopoly of the parking space available in this extremely busy area?

FOOTNOTES - FURTHER EXTRACTS

FROM FINCHLEY LOCAL BOARD 1888 Rosalind Batchelor

14.5.88 Goods on Footway (Highways Committee)
The committee think that when and where necessary, the attention of the police should be called to the practice of placing goods on the footway".

28.5.88 A warning to shopkeepers exposing goods on the footways
Complaints as to placing of furniture and other goods
on the footway outside shops - Cavendish Terrace, Park Hall Place - and
Church End.

Removal of obstructions under Town Police, Clauses Act.

Eds: Does anything really change?!

ON THE BACK PAGE - is one of a new series of four illustrations with text, by Timothy Johnson. These are in the course of preparation as Finchley Society "cards". The various sets will be on sale shortly.

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

The Parish Church of St.Mary-at-Finchley

"The Church of Our Ladye at Fynchesley" - as it was once known - is believed to have been founded at the time of St. Augustine, but the present building was started 400 years later, soon after the Norman Conquest. Since then it has been so often extended, altered and restored that some of the stones must have been recycled fairly frequently. The extensive damage done by 'reformers" during the Reformation and the Civil War, and by 19th Century burglars who stole lead from the roof, was quite outclassed in 1940 by the effects of a German bomb which destroyed the sanctuary, wrecked the chancel and shattered all the windows. Despite its somewhat restless history, the church still contains family memorials and brasses from the last 600 years and a list of rectors going back to Henrico de Sancto Albano in 1321.