

The Finchley Society Newsletter

MARCH 1991 NO.3/91 SUPPLEMENT

THE MOVABLE FEAST

Saturday, 16th February saw the Society's 20th Anniversary Celebration (part 1) finally come to rest at the Teachers' Centre (Old Finchley County School), opposite the open-air swimming pool, after date and venue changes from earlier plans. But it certainly didn't stay long "at rest", for from 7 p.m. onward it fairly "rattled along" with 117 members and 14 guests thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Councillor Roy Schutz, Mayor of Barnet, was kind enough to wish the Society well for its next 20 years and to say how much he believed that amenity societies are vital for striking a balance in local affairs. That belief was no surprise to his listeners, knowing with what vigour he has supported local groups in his mayoral year - but he went on to suggest that in reality few local councillors would disagree with him!

After suitable pre-prandial conversation with refreshment, everyone enjoyed a most splendid buffet supper, prepared and presented by Pat Marvell (Joint Administrator of the Teachers' Centre) who with her colleague Keith Hewitt were our hosts, ably supported by janitor Paul Anthony.

Our Chairman Norman Burgess expressed on behalf of all present the natural disappointment that Spike Milligan - our President - had been unable to attend the celebration, but of course extended our best wishes to him. Norman paid grateful tribute to Jean Scott who in 1971 sought to "save our heritage" and has continued to do so to this day by founding and inspiring The Finchley Society - along with her fellow vice-presidents David Smith and Bill Tyler, her staunch companions ever since that founding meeting.

Former chairman Rosalind Batchelor, speaking for all the officers, committee members and hard working members down the years, made special mention of the late Paddy Musgrove who in his service to Fin.Soc. so admirably combined what Rosalind expressed as the unique feature of the society - the delicate balance of concern for local matters both past and future.

After supper, in a style that Norman Burgess suggested Inky Stephens may well have enjoyed at home at Avenue House, the Guild Players conducted an entertainment by "The Victorian Family in the parlour after dinner". The scene, graced by "sons, cousins, sisters, aunts and uncles", unfolded with songs, monologues and

recitations including favourites such as "Come into the garden, Maud", "There's a green-eyed yellow idol to the north of Katmandu", "The Wreck of the Hesperus" and "We're the bold Gendarmes". The compere modestly suggested it was all "the entertaining of the unconsenting by the unrelenting" (or, the entertaining of the unready by the unsteady) - but all present greatly enjoyed it and sang up well whenever given the chance.

It was an evening for the archives!

FINCHLEY COMMUNITY FORUM: JANUARY 1991

Eleven community/public service bodies were represented at the January meeting and apologies for absence received from four others. Finchley Society achieved a "double cover" through Pat Dunnill with Norman Burgess present on behalf of Finchley Methodist Church.

* The report by Capital Planning Information Ltd. on cost-reductions in the Borough's Library Service. It was agreed to advise the nine ward councillors of the Recreation, Leisure and Arts committee that the proposals in the report were unacceptable.

* General support agreed for the work of the Christ's College Arts Centre Trust.

* The annual "Information Fair" - September was suggested as a likely timing and arrangements are being left with a "think-tank".

* Answering questions about the Community Health Council, its representative Peter Southwell reported on efforts to extend emergency hospital transport by ambulance for the disabled and, answering Norman Burgess on how our community is being informed about AIDS, he advised that a special unit at Colindale Hospital is dealing with this.

* On behalf of no less than 50 member societies of the Barnet Borough Arts Council, it was revealed that some of them may cease to exist due to lack of performance space, and that others are already obliged to travel outside the borough to find premises suitable for them. BBAC is exceedingly keen for the Christ's College Arts Centre Trust proposals to succeed.

* Crime Prevention - the local Crime Prevention Officer is hoping to arrange a series of meetings with elderly persons/groups on what is called "Burglary

Artifice" (bogus callers posing as salesmen, charity collectors, meter readers, etc.)

FINCHLEY AS A TOURIST CENTRE? Timothy Johnson

College Farm continues to attract more and more visitors - last year's total was in the region of 40,000 - but we now seem to see fewer Finchley faces among the crowds at First-Sunday-Fairs. The majority of the visitors come from further afield and it is often those who make the longest journeys who go out of their way to say how much they are enjoying themselves. Customer reaction generally shows that the place is now firmly established as a uniquely interesting tourist attraction. At the same time, all the years of work by Christopher and Jane Ower are beginning to make the farm more financially viable and it is therefore beginning to look more prosperous. Unfortunately however, all this splendid progress gives a slightly wrong impression.

We must remind ourselves that the end of the road is still out of sight. College Farm is not yet saved. The Crown Landlords have still not announced any decision about its future, so on the face of it Jane and Chris could be given notice to quit at any time. If that should happen, what then? ... office blocks? ... a hypermarket perhaps? ---not if you and I can help it, which please continue to do!

AFTERNOON MEETING - 14TH JANUARY 1991 Eileen Cox

A very cold but bright and sunny afternoon gave a welcoming brilliance to the atmosphere of our first afternoon meeting. We were very pleased to see members arriving who do not now attend evening assemblies and so have missed many of our entertaining and informative talks.

Our guest was Pam Wright who, as members who have attended her previous talks will know, is a very well informed and interesting speaker. She told us about St. Albans - full of history from our very ancient past - evidence of which is there to be found today from pre-Roman times through to Elizabethan and Georgian in the houses which still exist in the small streets.

Pam showed us slides of Verulamium, once home to a Belgic tribe who fled when the Romans first arrived in 54 B.C. Some were taken back to Gaul as prisoners with the Roman soldiers who then returned 100 years later to recapture the area and settle it; the attraction being the straight road from Dover to Chester via Londinium with the good water supply at Verulamium. Queen Boudicca tried to see them off by sacking the

town but unfortunately she was despatched by the Romans who re-fortified it by building the great wall - some of which still stands today.

By Nero's time it was quite a municipality but when Rome was threatened the soldiers were recalled to defend it and Verulamium gradually crumbled. The Anglo-Saxons built on top of the ruined town and in the 19th Century much of it was excavated.

In 1930 land was purchased to provide playing fields but luckily the Archaeological Society of Great Britain managed to delay any digging until a survey had been made. A Basilica was found under a car park but a great deal still lies under large buildings today. The museum now contains many fine mosaics and 3rd Century paintings.

When last summer Pam went back to Verulamium to update her slides she found that there was a Festival of Roman times in progress, with replicas of roman buildings and people dressed in togas. She also discovered - among many new things - over the West Door decorative heads of the Queen Mother and Lord Grimthorpe, respectively a Freeman of the City and its Benefactor - and on other sites the likenesses of Dr. Runcie and Peter Moore - Dean of St. Albans.

The name St. Albans derives it is said from a high ranking British administrator who sheltered a christian priest from the Roman soldiers. Alban exchanged his clothes of high office with the priest who escaped temporarily, but Alban was recognised, arrested and, in due course, executed.

The three styles of architecture in the Abbey are Norman, Early English and decorated Gothic and there are also pillars there from the Saxon Monastery. The shrine of St. Alban which was saved by the monks is also to be seen.

Whether one has only a day to spare for a visit, or a weekend, there is much to be seen including Lord and Lady Verulam's palladian style home which is open to the public on Thursday afternoons 2 - 5 p.m.: The Fighting Cock hostelry which still exists although somewhat modernised: the market, and the old tithe barn named the Waterend Barn which, we are assured by Pam, is a "must" for afternoon tea.

This reminded us that our afternoon refreshments were awaiting us and so we adjourned for a very convivial gathering of light-hearted chat -- a very pleasant way to round off the afternoon.

PLEASE MISS, MAY I JOIN YOUR SCHOOL!

On Wednesday, 23rd January, 20 members of the Fin.Soc. visited the new St. Mary's C.E. School buildings in Dollis Park. On entering the building, we were all impressed by the spacious atrium which, at 'breaktime' was alive with children coming and going to the playground and their classrooms which, apart from the kindergarten, all lead from it.

We first entered the hall where Miss Vendy, the Headteacher, explained the splendid wall-hanging which the children had produced over a period of two years under the guidance of the teachers and some parents who thought it would be a good idea for there to be a pictorial link between the 'old' school and the 'new'. Needless to say, the whole scheme revolved around the huge chestnut tree which all of us know and love so well!

After this introduction we were split into small groups and given very efficient conducted tours by some of the pupils in the top form. It is certainly to the credit of the teaching staff that these youngsters were so confident and obviously so proud of their school.

Several ex-teachers in our party were especially delighted with the facilities and the odd "...it wasn't like this when I was teaching" could be heard!

We all felt that heartiest congratulations should be expressed to the architects who, with a great deal of input from the teaching staff, have produced a magnificent school on a most difficult site.

JANUARY REGULAR MEETING

Sebastian Edwards of English Heritage, assistant curator of Kenwood House (one of a team of three, conserving and enhancing the house) conducted us through an "unveiling" not only interesting for his narrative and excellent slides, but as a foretaste of delights in store when the society visits Kenwood on 14th April.

First a brief potted history, spanning the years from 1734 when Lord Mansfield bought Kenwood as a country retreat. The estate at that time extended over most of what is now Hampstead Heath, (did we realise that the heath as public domain is really a 20th century creation?) Gradually sections of the estate were sold off, until in 1925 Lord Iveagh bought the house and 75 acres of remaining grounds with the intention of bequeathing it to the nation. In 1927 it was so given

and opened to the public. English Heritage have had it in their care since 1986.

Sebastian showed us slides of the house interior that included not just the spectacular furniture and paintings but also some of the oddities - such as the very early weighing machine by Joseph Merlin - a craftsman/inventor patronised by the Mansfields - plus a fascinating early digital clock by the same gentleman!

Other slides of considerable interest featured parts of the property not normally seen by the public - such as the Bath House (with its own spa water almost orange in colour, from the iron content) - and the Ice House, a typical pre-refrigeration "must" for grand houses so as to enjoy ice for chilling summer food.

Answering questions, Sebastian defended the poor hanging location of the house's finest picture, Rembrandt's self-portrait, by pointing out that unlike the 'ideal' conditions of a windowless gallery, a living house as home for good pictures suffers from sunlight so the art has to be where the sun strikes least!

(However, Denys Pegg came stoutly to the rescue by declaring that he for one enjoyed the Rembrandt where it is!)

Kurt Weinberg making a vote of thanks, mentioned how special Kenwood is in the spring (hints of our planned April 14th visit). He also said how obvious it was that our speaker clearly loved his work and the house and thanked him on behalf of the audience for so successfully transmitting that pleasure to us!

THIRD TIME LUCKY Kurt Weinberg

Lucky were those members of The Finchley Society who came to Helen Paterson's slide presentation of her work as one of the 22 Field Wardens employed by English Heritage. Her task is to visit regularly the 650 ancient monuments situated in her area.

Of the 630,000 sites around the country, only 13,500 are protected. English Heritage hopes to increase this number to 50,000. Ms Paterson described in detail the problems of a Field Warden when the majority of sites are far below the surface and the farmers who own the land are not aware of the precious heritage below their fields and meadows.

Her excellent slides showed how some of the sites can be recognised when covered by snow or when crop marks reflect the layout of an ancient settlement.

The slides demonstrated the great variety of scheduled monuments and included the moat of our Manor House in Finchley; the gate and bridge in Victoria Park, Hackney; the cave in Royston; Grim's Dyke and Grim's Ditch, Ivinghoe; "barrow" mounts; a fingerpost; the guild hall in Thaxted; a Napoleonic Fort; Dovercourt Lighthouse; a pumping station in the Fens; the bridge with a chapel at St. Ives and York Gate on the Embankment.

If all the Field Wardens of English Heritage are as dedicated and enthusiastic as Helen, then the future of our scheduled monuments is in safe hands.

FINCHLEY IN 1960 - REMEMBER? Timothy Johnson

Our article on this subject in the January Newsletter Supplement produced an amazing volume of interesting comment - so here is a continuation.

One cannot pinpoint the precise time when Ballards Lane first began to collapse into the gaudy chaos of clashing shopfronts that it is today, nor can one say when we first began to notice that almost every other shop seemed to be occupied by a building society or an estate agent, nor when the rash of fast food outlets began to spread. One certain thing is that all who encountered it will remember the muddy upheaval occasioned by excavating to build Tesco's at the same time as the demolition of St. Margaret's Church opposite, but what year was it? The memory plays tricks, doesn't it? and how many years did it take the developers to contrive enough planning blight to clear the ground for Tesco's? The whole process of change and decay has probably occupied most of the last 30 years, so perhaps in 1960 we were getting a last look at Old Finchley, before the rot set in?

Ballards Lane was still a very decent looking street and in the retail shops that lined both pavements you could find almost anything you wanted, or more correctly, a member of the staff was always pleased to find it for you! At the little Woolworth store (now defunct), I bought three dozen wine glasses - we must have been having a party - and got enough change from a £1 note to buy two lampshades at the next counter. We hired a television from a radio shop for nine shillings (45p per week), inclusive of fitting a free aerial and free service if it should go wrong. At a furniture auction one had the excitement of bidding for antiques (but they called them second hand

furniture in those days) and I got some Chippendale chairs for about £2 each. The auction rooms have since been obliterated by Tesco's - but we still have the chairs. Prudent shoppers went to Williams Bros. for groceries, provisions, ironmongery, hardware and gardening requirements. This firm gave a little metal token with every purchase and when customers had saved enough of them they could be exchanged for cash or goods.

The showroom windows at Pope's Garage (now also supplanted by Tesco's) displayed Austin Sevens and Morris Mini-Minors, collectively called "The New Mini", for less than £500 each. Although this revolutionary little car did much to promote mass motoring, the motor car in 1960 was by no means the menace it is today, so we could still enjoy what was called "a spin in the country" on the uncluttered roads of Essex, Suffolk and other counties to the North and West. Petrol was less than four shillings (20p a gallon) and forecourt attendants would not only fill up for you, but also inflate tyres and some would even clean the windscreen.

The pound in our pockets was worth 240 pence and every penny was real. Nobody called it a 'pea' and it was certainly not 'a pence'! Were we living in a golden age, or are we looking back on a kind of mirage? We are told we are all better off today 'in real terms', (but what are those terms and how real are they? The answer is illusive and it seems very difficult indeed to make sense of 1960 prices in relation to today's values.

ON THE BACK PAGE - is illustrated the third in the series of "cards" by Timothy Johnson currently on sale from our monthly bookstall and at College Farm.

For The Finchley Society
John and Carol Halls (Editors), Finchley Park, N.12
11.

STATUE IN FRIARY PARK - FRIERN BARNET

Inscriptions on the stones beneath the statue read as follows:

"IN MEMORY OF THE PEACEMAKER KING EDWARD VII"

"Erected by Sydney Simmons, J.P., the donor of this park, which opened to the public on May 7th 1910, the day following His Majesty's lamented death."

