

The Finchley Society Newsletter

JUNE 1991 NO.6/91 SUPPLEMENT

AMENDMENT TO CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR YEAR TO 31.3.91

As a preamble to his report to the AGM, Chairman Norman Burgess announced the following formal amendment -

Delete paragraph 3, page 2 (following the words in caps UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN) and insert new paragraph -

"The Society proposed reasoned objections and amendments to the draft UDP, in writing and in person. Some were accepted, on many the Council officers were non-committal. Bill Tyler, assisted by Norman Bar and Heather Winton particularly, and with the advice of a planning expert (to whom a fee was paid) prepared a detailed submission for the Public Inquiry, held in September-October 1990. Shortly before the Inquiry, Barnet informed the Society that many more of our objections had been accepted, so that much of the fee paid and work done had been unnecessary. What a waste of effort and the Society's scarce resources! An excellent submission was made by Bill Tyler at the Inquiry and the Society is grateful to him and all other members who helped to work through the UDP process."

AGM 1991: REPORT

The seventy-eight members present will have thoroughly enjoyed this year's AGM - it was lively, without being contentious; full of interest, without having to rely on any extra entertainment such as films - and creative, in that specific new ideas for the Society emerged in the course of the evening.

Norman Burgess, summarising his Chairman's report laid due stress on the valuable support given so unstintingly by Hon.Sec. Eileen Cox and expressed his personal thanks to committee members and others who keep the Finchley Society 'in motion' throughout the year. He looked forward this year particularly to the scheduled start in December of restoration work at Avenue House. Norman also took the opportunity to correct any misunderstanding over his recent resignation from the Christ's College Arts Centre Trust which was a personal matter, not on behalf of or in representation of the Finchley Society.

Moving the adoption of the Chairman's Report, Bill Tyler, chairing the AGM, took the opportunity to thank

Norman for his sheer dedication to the Society. (Kurt Weinberg later also drew members' attention to the valuable work of Betty Burgess not just in support of Norman but in her personal contribution to everyday Fin.Soc. activity.)

In an unusual AGM event, Norman Burgess made two presentations on behalf of the Society. First to Bill Tyler - a book (title "The Tree") in recognition of his recent sterling work in connection with our contribution to the Barnet Unitary Development Plan. Secondly, in this 20th Anniversary year, to Vice President and Founder Jean Scott, an enlarged and framed photograph, taken during the celebration evening on 16th February.

The AGM formalities proceeded as follows -

- * Minutes of 1990 AGM agreed and accepted.
- * Treasurer's report for 1991 discussed and adopted.
- * Friends of College Farm Treasurer's Report likewise discussed and adopted.
- * The following officers were re-nominated and re-elected, unopposed -

Chairman Norman Burgess
Vice-Chairman Norman Bar
Honorary Treasurer Joe Ingall
Honorary Secretary Eileen Cox

- * Nominations were received for the executive committee members posts and the four nominees were elected, unopposed --

Lynn Bresler
Barbara Warren
Bill Williams
Heather Winton

- * The Honorary Auditor, Albert Jeffries, was re-appointed unopposed.
- * The new annual subscription rates, as set out in the notice of AGM which accompanied the April Newsletter, were unanimously agreed. As a reminder, they are -
 - Under 18 or on income support £3
 - Joint/Family £10
 - Associate/Other Societies £12
 - Corporate/Business £15

The extended, from the floor, discussions that occupied the remainder of the evening, produced a number of appeals, some interesting new ideas and at least one surprise.

The latter emerged when Ingrid Miller, guest of member Jean Parmer, spoke from the floor about local anxieties on developments at the Windsor Road open space. It appears that residential peace is threatened by the conversion of a children's area into an adventure playground with significant loss of amenity to surrounding residents - and, they say, without consultation. Ingrid sought support from The Finchley Society and as a result it can be reported that our Planning Committee is investigating the matter.

Prominent among the new ideas was one from David Smith that the Society should again become "publishers", following upon the success of Paddy Musgrove's booklet about Inky Stephens. Why not, suggested David, produce a pictorial "Celebration of Finchley", employing the talents in our midst of College Farm Gallery artists, to illustrate scenes or buildings proposed by individual members, who themselves could add the necessary text and titles to support their respective entries. David invites "submissions" - it is an idea so much in the mood of our theme for this 20th Anniversary Year - "A Celebration of membership".

Kurt Weinberg made an interesting proposal that our Society's executive should establish permanent contact with other amenity and community groups throughout Barnet. In essence, this could be a move towards creating a Barnet Community Forum, along the lines of the grouping that already meets and co-operates so successfully in Finchley and from whom this newsletter regularly receives reports via our permanent representatives. Richard Tayler, Fin.Soc. member, librarian and co-ordinator of the Finchley Community Forum immediately offered encouragement and support for such a development. The ball rests with our executive.

A number of members took up the question of much-needed everyday fund-raising for Fin.Soc. Joan and Alec Sturdy will hold a coffee morning later in the summer. Adele Cohen urged that in addition to having the display trailer at Cherry Tree Wood for the East Finchley Community

Diana Tyler urged that some part of future fund-raising should be devised to attract potential younger new members. Mari I'Anson suggested that each monthly meeting should feature a raffle - a simple event that invariably gives fun whilst increasing revenue. David Smith agreed that the Administration and Publicity Committee should consider the matter and meanwhile Man has undertaken to organise a "pilot" at the June monthly meeting.

Among the appeals from the floor were two from Pat Dunnill - more help needed to support her solo effort to maintain the pavement planter by Tesco's, Church End, which the Society planted in 1989 and which (excuse the pun) just about has its head above water, thanks mainly to Pat, who has carried most of the water! Barbara Warren, Chairman of the Environment Committee immediately offered to try to persuade LBB Parks Department to assist. Pat's second appeal was for the opportunity to arrange a Fin.Soc. publicity stall during June outside the same Tesco's store - a request which the executive have subsequently approved - so Pat now needs volunteers to help her stage that event - please call her on 349 9825.

Finally, one more extract from the many other comments from the floor to which newsletter space just cannot stretch, is the kind thought of Robert Winton in proposing a vote of thanks on behalf of the membership to all those members who take an active part in the Fmchley Society's affairs and who give their time so willingly.

A grateful thank you then in return from all of them to Robert and to everyone on whose behalf he spoke and so to work!

TWENTY YEARS AGO

Timothy Johnson

Battalions of fierce bulldozers were uprooting trees and laying waste the land. In times past the householders would have spoken to one of their councillors about such things, but the Finchley and Friern Barnet Councils had both been banished and rumour had it that they had gone underground in a vast artificial burrow which was said to be impenetrable. People spoke of it in hushed whispers by its supposed code name of Burrow of Barnet.

These maginot-line tactics were just as useless as they had been in 1940. Mechanical monsters were now digging great pits sown with deadly spores from which erupted monstrous growths reaching skywards and casting dark shadows. Some of the growths were hideous faceless things and others seemed to be studded with rows of evil little eyes. Some resembled neat piles of portacabins and one disguised itself as a gigantic marble bathroom in Japanese art deco turned inside out.

The digging damaged the drains, resulting in a dreadful epidemic. One symptom of this was an ugly rash of estate agents' boards spreading in great multi-coloured blotches across the faces of otherwise desirable properties. Residents were evidently opting

for flight and the roads became jammed. Any gaps in the blockages were quickly filled by long vehicles jack-knifing or capsizing to spill loads of ball-bearings, sticky treacle, broken glass, fish crates and other uncomfortable obstacles on the highway.

Known landmarks were vanishing so suddenly that it was difficult to find one's way about and panic-stricken shopkeepers made matters worse by camouflaging their premises as a ghastly technicolour jungle of hideous new shop fronts. As a further obstacle to progress on foot, developers employed drivers of heavy lorries to squash the pavements. The pedestrian way, in places, was transformed into an assault course composed of assorted building materials and broken paving stones. Sand and dust blew everywhere until there was not a dry eye in the district.

Service on the Northern Line was still said to be rather less than perfect and someone poisoned the Dollis Brook again to massacre yet another generation of poor fish.

Public reaction to all this was a bit mixed and seemed tinged with the theory that if you ignore something nasty it will eventually go away, so some people affected not to notice anything amiss (except on the Northern Line). Others summed up their feelings in a traditional way by remarking that the neighbourhood seemed to be going down. The funny new money presented an unfortunate red herring because so many people spent so much time on 'translating it into honest £.s.d. that they really couldn't concentrate on anything else. More militant souls shouted angrily at one another that it was disgusting and that THEY ought to do something about it - definitely! But who were these mysterious people called THEY who ought to be doing all the doing? Nobody seemed very clear about anything and Spike Milligan said all this goonery would have to STOP.

Jean Scott, with Spike and other like-minded people, now put forward a commonsense plan which didn't excite much interest at first because of a local journalists' strike, but the seed germinated to become The Finchley Society. As an independent non-political organisation it was designed to attract and receive the support of all thinking people in Finchley and Friern Barnet in order to INFORM and EDUCATE the public into knowing how best to CONSERVE what remained of the local heritage and ENHANCE everything else.

Early success soon brought in nearly 1000 members but after that recruiting became a bit sticky - had we already run out of thinking people? If so, it seemed sensible to make everybody think, and we tried various

ways of doing it. We once mounted a recruiting stand composed largely of cardboard in the middle of a field at a veteran motor car rally. It was decorated with invitations to 'join up', all suitably illustrated, but a sharp gust of wind turned our beautiful stand into a flying machine and it blew away - then it started to rain. But over the 20 years, we have enjoyed more success in other directions. Perhaps we shall never know quite how successful the Society has been because nobody knows how much worse off the district would have been today without it!

Perhaps the worst excesses of the professional vandals have now been contained, but enthusiastic amateurs have entered the field, spreading graffiti, litter and - dare one say it - arson. It seems The Finchley Society will always have plenty to do. Let's get down to it and find plenty of new people to help do it - let's get recruiting again!

MOTOR CARS - "VORACIOUS BEASTS"? Sandra Quigley

There can be little doubt that one of the main sources of pollution is the motor vehicle. Pollutant emissions from car exhausts can and do cause lung damage. In hot sunny conditions such as we've had in recent summers gases created and emitted act as irritants precipitating chest, lung and throat breathing problems, headaches, stinging of the eyes, nose and throat, itching of the skin, hayfever. Lead in petrol inhibits normal brain development in children, reducing intelligence levels. It may also cause abnormal behaviour.

These are the health risks. What about the visual and environmental impact? What of areas blighted by highways running through them? What about the noise pollution? All the senses are affected. There can be very few of us in London, its suburbs or any large city who have not experienced such discomforts over the last few years. And as car sales increase with everyone's desire for personal mobility the problem will increase.

Government and experts seem to have no adequate answers and traffic reduction schemes are many, varied, complicated, controversial and in many cases not feasible. Public transport schemes are costly to implement and run and the convenience of personal transport outweighs the attractions of public transport. Transport and traffic problems are subjects of research by University departments, White papers, debated in Parliament and at length in the media.

Meanwhile, traffic jams and the growth of cars parked bumper to bumper in residential areas, without adequate garaging or parking facilities, have become an unsightly hazard with attendant accident and crime risks.

What is the answer? I think it is that we must go backward in order to go forward! Crazy? How about a National Ban the Car day? Use the car only for essential journeys, shop once a week. Walk, bicycle, - skateboard, if you must! It's environmentally sound; it's healthy and keeps you fit; it's non-pollutant, non-toxic, aesthetic and social (come on, how many neighbours do you meet driving to the shops?) and fun! Shopping centres and hypermarkets have developed because of increased mobility resulting in the death of local communities. Use local shops, ask them to deliver. If enough people create a demand, shopkeepers will respond.

People need to act for themselves if they want a better world. It's not enough to rely on THEM to sort it out for US - because it's patently obvious THEY don't know what to do either! You have to start the pendulum swinging yourself if you want a "...green and pleasant land" for your children and your children's children.

REVIEW OF SPRING EVENTS

THE MARCH MEETING

Apart from the challenging main subject of the speaker, "traffic calming", the March meeting audience was intrigued by the confluence of interesting surnames present with our Vice Chairman Norman Bar, presiding in the absence of Norman Burgess, discussing with the speaker Sgt. Scull of Whetstone Police Traffic Division, how each scans the telephone directory from time to time to locate fellow BARS and SCULLS, respectively. Oddly, neither indicated how many they've found, nor where!

Listening carefully to Sgt. Scull, (30 years in the Police Service and in the Traffic Division for the past 17), he betrayed a certain scepticism about traffic calming, while, to be fair, acknowledging that in an ideal world it would be ideal!

Sgt. Scull firmly pointed to affluence as the current major traffic problem, i.e. most of us own cars and are reluctant not to use them. He went so far as to ask "Who would really want to tolerate public transport if they could use a car?!" However, he declared that despite all that there are some carrot

- and stick measures for traffic calming at least in regular rat-runs that can be made to work. Treating these in ascending order of effectiveness he listed -
1. Width restrictions - weak; can cause vehicle damage, even traps vans, and causes costly detours for emergency services.
 2. Road humps - O.K. in daylight but sometimes dangerous at night - and local residents suffer the "slowing, braking, scraping, bumping and accelerating" noises.
 3. Local one-way systems - but in residential areas these need to be made into a "maze", to extend journey times. Not very popular with the "locals" and their visitors.
 4. Mini-roundabouts
 5. Diagonal islands, centre-road, at regular intervals. Sgt. Scull, tongue somewhat in cheek, rated 5 quite highly when combined with parked cars along the same roads!!

Our speaker's scepticism on traffic calming was well matched by his very poor opinion of the service that traffic planners and managers have given to London - at least during his 30 years at the sharp end. We still endure a hotch potch of main roads following routes created by the horse and cart, still suffer complete miscalculations by the 'experts' (e.g. the M25) and despite the proliferation of yellow and even red lines, the penalties for causing congestion are too low as are also the risks of being charged. He reserved his greatest contempt for wheel clamps - "A stupid idea for keeping offending vehicles stuck at their place of offence!" - and he acknowledged that improving traffic flow at 'A', often pushes the traffic problem along to 'B'.

The ultimate solutions said Sgt. Scull are -

1. Selectively deny vehicular access to metropolitan centres - or at least persuade traffic to stay away.
2. Substitute suitable public transport and be prepared to find the enormous increase in cash resource to do so.
3. Concentrate on really educating the next generation(s) about driving and the motor car.
4. Reconsider police strength (currently on a par with that of 1911) and try to reverse some of the inadequacies of young recruits, who so often reflect the weaknesses of society at large - often aggressive and losing touch with the public as fast as the public is losing touch with, who they no longer "pass the time of day with".

Another aspect of traffic, clearly troubling Sgt. Scull and very relevant to the need for traffic calming is that of road accidents. He observed that we

all pay the costs of accidents, recently calculated at 5,100 x £630,000 per annum (32 million pounds) and that they also present the community with psychological after-effects more profound than almost all other 'crimes'. He singled out SPEED as the most important ingredient and education as the best long-term deterrent. Challenging his audience, the sergeant asked how many kept a copy of and observed the Highway Code, or as pedestrians tried to follow the Green Cross Code? If followed, he averred, these would be the ultimate accident-prevention systems!

Thanking the speaker for reminding us all that it is largely our own attitudes that we have to correct if ever traffic and transport are to be "calm" matters, Norman Bar nonetheless could not resist his own "tongue-in-cheek" contribution with two mischievous acronyms for the evening

NORHOMBY --- No road humps outside my backyard
NOSPOMBY ----No sleeping policemen outside

APRIL MEETING

Chairman Norman Burgess's introduction of the speaker to the audience at the April monthly meeting sounded for all the world as though he'd got his notes mixed up Charles Naylor...local chap...brought up in Barnet...recently Principal Baritone at the Vienna State Opera...married to the violinist Tina Greenburg, a Finchley girl...to talk to us about "Oil" - The History of the Industry!!

Relief all round: Norman had got the right notes (excuse the pun), Charles Naylor happens to have had, still has, an extraordinarily diverse career between professional singing and 'publicity' for Shell Oil Co. (UK), with whom he is currently the Regional Public Affairs Manager (South), responsible for such matters south of that line from Wales to the Wash. And so to Oil ...

The industry was born in the USA around 1870 for the production of kerosene in the process of which, petroleum was at first burnt off as a waste material! Shell Oil Co. itself was founded in 1900 by Marcus Samuel who was an importer of...shells, the marine kind, who saw an opportunity for some reverse trading - kerosene for shells. From such simple and quite recent beginnings Royal Dutch Shell (as the global company is known and which is now 40% British and 60% Dutch) currently operates in more than 100 countries, employs 135,000 people (22,000 in the UK) and claims to be the second largest world company after General Motors.

Shell UK has three operational arms - Shell UK Exploration, involved purely in the business of extraction, Shell UK Oil which handles the sales of finished oils and Shell Chemicals which develops and sells the by-products of oil refining - no more burning off of petroleum!

Charles Naylor graphically described the wide range of locations from which oil is extracted today, from tropical jungles, through arid deserts to the Arctic North - and, of course, from under the sea. Such diversity presents Shell with enormous technological problems, especially in our own capricious North Sea environment which is considered to be the very "cutting edge" of oil extraction technology. Another aspect of that wide range of oil wells, is that the product itself varies widely, from the "thickness" of Venezuelan crude to the "liquidity" of the North Sea product and the quality-range that is thus encompassed, at least in the costs of relative ease of refining! The product at the petrol pump or from the plastic oil bottle betrays so little of all of that complexity!!

Charles went on to stress that today there is a complete 'other face' to all of Shell's hi-tech engineering and production image -- that of "enhancing", both in the environment, e.g. through re-landscaping after oil extraction -and in arts/education through publications such as the famous Shell Guides and through scholarships, sponsorship and in training, etc. for many individuals and groups involved in sectors as diverse as environmental matters, small business start-up and in music. He also stressed that modern Shell products (such as unleaded petrol) themselves straddle the twin themes of hi-tech production and care for the environment.

Finally, looking at the future for fossil-based fuels, Charles set out Shell's estimated life spans, based on current consumption, as World Coal - 1500 years: World Oil - 46 years and World Gas - 30 years. Revealing that, needless to say, Shell has interests in coal and other energy-related activities, his audience was left with a distinct feeling of curiosity about what would be the nature of his talk if Charles Naylor were to return in 30 years time to address a Finchley Society Monthly Meeting?! It could of course concern Mozart!

14th APRIL - VISIT TO KENWOOD Valerie Mindlin

On a brisk, sunny Sunday afternoon, 20 Fin.Soc. members assembled in front of Kenwood House to begin a tour of the surroundings under the expert guidance of Kurt Weinberg.

Flowering bushes and trees just coming into leaf rose above beds still bright with daffodils and tulips as we moved along the Lime Avenue running westwards from the terrace at the back of the house. We learned that the present trees are replacements of the originals planted in 1729 then felled in the 1960s. Some, like so many of the trees all over Kenwood and the Heath, had been lost in the recent great storms, and English Heritage is carefully having identical root stock propagated so that, eventually, descendants of the original trees can again be planted along the avenue.

We were told that a good rule of thumb is that any tree with a diameter of 30 cms (12") or over is at least 200 years old.

Once the boundary between the Caen Wood (only later Kenwood) estate and the lands of the Bishop of London (hence Bishops's Avenue), the great beeches that flank the car park in front of the house formed part of North Wood. Because of their great age and beauty, that whole wood has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), as has the area of "Ken Wood" at the foot of the hill beyond the terrace at the back.

We studied the two ponds in front of the Ken Wood and learned that the eastern one with the summer concert platform is "Hundred Pound Pond" -though Kurt wasn't sure why. What he was clear about is that because of silting, the water level is rising, and the famous imitation bridge is getting progressively submerged!

Round towards the house, stopping at the observation point to admire the distant view of London - all the way from the Post Office Tower to Canary Wharf, we then visited the walled garden beyond the old stables which are now the administration block for the whole project. Just to the left, the coach house today dispenses coffees, lunches and teas ... Good heavens, it was 4 o'clock already and that seemed a good time and place to end a very pleasant tour, leaving members to decide for themselves whether to visit the house.

TRIPLE EVENT: SATURDAY 11TH MAY

This spring outing was like having three days out in succession, but between only one sunrise and sunset! A full coachload of 53 comprising 43 Fin.Soc. members and ten most welcome guests from the Nansen Village community, set off first for Bekonsot Model Village at Beaconsfield.

Many of us, one suspects (certainly true of this writer!), have tended to dismiss model villages as "amusing for children" but this visit will have made many converts - we saw of course a very mature village (first opened in 1929) and thus it bore testimony to much applied skill and knowledge gained over more than 60 years. Nevertheless, we all marvelled at how cleverly 'scale' is preserved between models and the garden settings around them. There was a little evidence of Bonzai treatment to create scale trees but most of the effects were achieved by skilful selection of suitable shrubs and plants, together with water. The railway system also gave endless pleasure - so varied and sophisticated - and of all things, controlled from a real signal switchboard ex a Southern Railway signal box! Many of us found additional fun from reading the small print of shop and house names around the village, with examples such as Scratchett and Reckitt (Furniture Removers), Argue and Twist (Solicitors) and The Hanton Court Maze.

The factually-minded learned that the founder Robert Callingham (he lived in Beaconsfield) and his friend James Shilcock (from Ascot) put their two domiciles together in the name Bekonscot and that the fruits of their hobby have, since 1929, raised in the region of £850,000 for charity after defraying running and development costs. Callingham had Church Army connections and that has been the principal charity so benefitting. However, since 1978 it has had to work for it, for at that time the Church Army became actively involved in Bekonscot's management - and remains so. It really was a delight to be there!

Thence by coach again to Cookham, passing en route the village of Jordans where the Quaker William Penn (founder of Pennsylvania) is buried. The Quaker Meeting House at Jordans dates from 1687 and it is said that a barn there was built with timber from the ship Mayflower that took the Pilgrim Fathers from Plymouth (Devon) to New England in 1620.

At Cookham, Mr. and Mrs Bootle, co-authors of the "Guide to Cookham", kindly conducted our party on foot around the village. Unfortunately the timing of a wedding prevented our seeing inside the church and the celebrated work there of that famous Cookham artist and controversial figure, Stanley Spencer. However, we quickly learned that Spencer's life is far from being the only notable thing about Cookham - this sleepy village of three parts (Cookhams 'Old', 'Dene' and 'Rise') not only has a "Moor" (curious name for its flood meadows) with a "causeway" (quite necessary in some winters to enable people to get from Old to Rise) but it also has the feeling of having been quite a wild 'border town', since in ancient Britain it was on

the border between the warring tribes of the Atrebates and the Catuvellauni and later was part of the boundary between Wessex and Mercia. Then the Vikings came by, sailing up the Thames towards Reading, presumably behaving just like Vikings all along the way. Later, the old wool route to London found its way through Cookham and doubtless that too brought its share of villainy! Tranquillity emerged (Spencer apart) in this century when Kenneth Grahame (it is said) created much of his book *The Wind in the Willows* from his imagery of the Cookham river scene and it is believed that Lullerbrook Manor (now a John Lewis Partnership Management training establishment) gave him the original concept of Mr. Toad's "Toad Hall". (Tranquillity was briefly broken, by the way, on a day in 1955 when a certain Kurt and Charlotte Weinberg, newly married that day, drove out from London with a party of guests to lunch at the Bel and Dragon Inn. It is still there, un-sacked!)

As though all that were not enough for one day, we then embarked on the river boat "Bray Royale II" to continue our journey to Windsor. With its covered forward deck, open upper deck, bar and other usual facilities, B.R. II had something for everyone and was a delightful platform on which to take lunch and to view the passing river scene, including houses of the famous and ever-so-slightly notorious, if one is permitted to mention the Astors' famous/infamous pile Cliveden, in the same breath as Rolf Harris's riverside retreat and the very kemptness of the residence of a lately notable Gerald Ratner! We (that is, the very skilful crew) neatly negotiated four locks, at Cookham, Boulton, Bray and Bovenay and along the way we chuckled at the bold swans and the equally bold young scullers from Eton College, all of whom seemed to have taken to the water at once, and all avoided the B.R. II without so much as a hurried stroke!

After all that, the two hours or so free at Windsor before embarking once more on the coach for home, were something of an anti-climax. The town, apart from the solid presence and uniformity of the castle, looked sadly tatty (though not yet even full to summer-capacity with visitors) and it remains a mystery why tourists bring in their wake such a rash of copycat souvenir shops and the universal souvenirs themselves. Windsor probably suffered less from those Vikings!

Grateful thanks, as ever, to organisers and trailblazers Shirley Avery and Kurt Weinberg for laying the foundations of such a splendid three days in one - and especially to Kurt who thought of the idea!

ENVIRONMENT WEEK: COPPETTS WOOD TOUR Oliver
Natelson

Having (through our contacts) arranged glorious weather for the Fin.Soc. tour on 12th May, over 30 visitors gathered outside the Town Hall Friern Barnet aka Friern Barnet Town Hall, otherwise known as ...

What profusion of flowers greeted us, Lords and Ladies (of the Fin.Soc.) looked at the Lords and Ladies (in flower). We first went along the scrubland which has a much greater variety of wildlife than in any comparable area of rural Surrey or Sussex, and then into Coppets Wood. This is recovering from a massive Sycamore-bashing exercise. Last autumn over 7,000 of these deeply-shading, highly invasive Sycamores were cut down or pulled out in Coppets Wood. The results are proving a spectacular success, since masses of undergrowth - for years prevented from growing by Sycamore-shading - are springing forth from a previously barren earth woodland floor.

We saw the area of woodland reclaimed from the Council's former nurseries site and considered the scandalous waste of public money by the Council, having abandoned greenhouses that could have been put to financially benefitting use. The pile of salt grit deliberately abandoned by the Council at the end of the wood and likely to kill trees was also noted. The Finchley Society planted two Hawthorn trees at the edge of the wood (furthest from the salt grit) with a time-capsule buried under the roots. This took the form of a bottle bearing a goodluck message from all visitors and all their signatures too. A certificate is to be presented marking this occasion.

Finchley is fortunate to have such a wonderful and historic nature reserve and we hope that the Council will continue funding it, since there is much work to be undertaken especially litter-clearance, salt grit, etc. ...

Next tours of the wood will be:
Wednesday 3rd July at 7.30 p.m. (Botanical tour)
Sunday 7th July at 2 p.m. (Historical tour)

Meet at the Town Hall aka

SCRATCHWOOD WALK SUNDAY, 19TH MAY

One can usually count on returning from any Finchley Society outdoor occasion a lot more informed than on leaving home indeed as featured in the Society's logo' and so it was on 19th May when as part of the Environment Week activity a group of 20 members

visited Scratchwood, which today lies between the M1 Motorway and the A1 Barnet By-pass just south of Stirling Corner.

The digest of information-gained we owe to Barnet Park Rangers Ward Hunt and Maria Darling, who respectively led and shepherded our group through both the history and geography of this wild piece of woodland on our local border

The last ice age represents an early enough piece of that history and there at Scratchwood in their wild state the ridges, bumps and hollows of deposited rubbles/gravels, etc. left at the foot of the retreating glacier at its farthest southerly penetration, were more easily understood and appreciated than in the rest of the (built up) Finchley area where many of us know the same conditions apply, but find it much harder to identify in terms of contour, etc. under today's landscape. Ward also showed us, from much more recent history, the traces of two very important features of woodland usage --

1. The extraction of timbers for wooden ship construction (and he demonstrated how teams of shipbuilders would not only have removed timber but would have visited the woods to select and distort certain boughs during growth to create curved timbers for maximum strength and convenience for those parts of vessels which demanded them).
2. The coppicing of whole sections of wood, particularly of beech, by "bodgers" from the chair industry who would later harvest the resultant right-sized poles and, themselves camped in the wood, bodge them into legs and spindles, on their treadle lathes.

We learned also from Ward and Maria of the wood's much more recent occupants, its 19th/20th century owners, the Cox family who lived at Moat Mount, across today's A1 from Scratchwood. They were magazine publishers of distinction with titles such as Queen and Country Life and were founders of Exchange and Mart. They also farmed hay in the area - a most important local product in the 19th century for the feeding of London's working horse population. Scratchwood was the Cox's "shooting and fishing" recreational area.

However, as families frequently do, they fell into disagreements in successive generations, which resulted in the need to sell off their estates and Scratchwood eventually became Council property. Like all that 'evidence' from pre-history, the wooden walls of England and the country furniture trade, the marks of the Cox's ownership are also still to be seen, for example, the curious double avenue of out-of-place fir trees down the eastern edge, flanked to westward by a

wide swathe of cleared land. That avenue, explained Ward Hunt, was the "hide" for shooters who were given a clear view of driven game, flushed out of Scratchwood across the open space and obliged to gain altitude there, to fly over the fir trees - if indeed any of those unfortunate birds ever succeeded so to do!

On the subject of birds - it was an added joy that our walk in Scratchwood was accompanied by the frequent calls of both Green Woodpecker and Cuckoo, among all those less identifiable but equally welcome sounds from the ubiquitous little-brown-birds!

Finally a 'plug' to London Borough of Barnet please to build up the valuable resource of Rangers like Ward and Maria not just because of their 'guiding' service to groups such as we were, but for their excellent work in ensuring with skill, knowledge and determination that our open spaces in the Borough remain cared-for, unvandalised and interesting, for all.

PUBLIC LAVATORIES: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY

Finchley Society member Peter Crockford recently completed no less than three years research into the loss to London of public lavatory facilities.

His is a work of true scholarship which not just deserves but demands to be made available to the widest possible audience. Unfortunately our newsletter is by no means a big enough vehicle for it - rather as in the case of the UDP Inquiry Report it would need a number of entire newsletters to cover it - and even then the readership would not be large or broad enough to do justice to his conclusions.

Perhaps the local and London press or a specialised London "amenity" journal would take up Peter's findings and publish them in digest? He can be contacted through this newsletter, or directly on 081 883 4537.

Meanwhile to tell Finchley Society members what they already feared, the London Borough of Barnet's recent record on public lavatory facilities is not good. The facts are -

1990 London-wide 42% of total, ladies & gent's permanently closed or unusable
1990 Barnet 45%
1990 Hackney (the worst) 70%
1990 Enfield (the best) 14%

In L.B. Barnet we have in the past 2-3 years lost 5 out of 24 Ladies and Gents lavatory blocks and at least 2 Gents-only besides. In defence it is sometimes argued that modern High Street shopping complexes or superstores provide facilities that compensate, but in Barnet only 25% of such do provide, against an average of 45% when taken across all 16 London Boroughs.

How can neighbouring Enfield manage so well when we in Barnet are so poorly served?

MIDDLESEX, STILL IN WITH A CHANCE?

The following extracts from a recent letter by Russell Grant in the "The Friends of the County of Middlesex" bulletin indicate a real strength of feeling still held for the former county, in more than just name.

"Dear Friend,

You may have seen or heard the reports in the media recently, that the Government has set up a unit to look at the 'official' re-instatement of the Real Counties of Britain. There is much talk of the counties that 'changed' in 1974 reverting to their previous boundaries. However, I believe that our own dear County of Middlesex is in danger of being overlooked in any possible reversion as our reforms took place nine years earlier. I therefore appeal to you personally to use every means at your disposal to contact your Member of Parliament to implore them not to ignore Middlesex in the event of reform. Please encourage family, friends, neighbours, clubs, societies and organisations to write.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of united action at this time, this could be our last chance to get 'official' status for Middlesex. I use 'official' in its vaguest terms, because the Government is considering one tier of local government, by the abolition of all county councils. But some kind of 'official' recognition for Middlesex is imperative to ensure the media, mapmakers and mail put us back on the map.

25 years ago your birthright was taken away from you, your roots removed and identity dislocated. Don't let it happen again. This is our last chance to raise our voices to make sure our County home doesn't become a victim of past insensitive and callous bureaucracy. Did anyone ask us for your opinion in 1965? Let your voice be heard now; we owe it to future generations that over a thousand years of English and British County history isn't forgotten and cast into an historical abyss. Please do not allow apathy,

indifference or belief that your letter doesn't matter to guide your thoughts; don't leave it to someone else, for there cannot be enough letters sent. Every letter is a shining jewel in a tarnished Middlesex diadem. Lose this one chance to make our voice and presence felt, and it could be our last. We now have a grand opportunity to give back to our County what was stolen in 1965; our right to exist.

For four years since The Friends were formed, we have fought many battles but now YOUR COUNTY NEEDS YOU MORE THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME! Don't desert Middlesex at this crucial time; her hour of need. Whether you were born or reside within her boundaries one letter is all it takes to save her name forever more."

Perhaps individual Finchley Society members would wish to give their support.

A FITTING TAILPIECE

With full acknowledgment to the Spring/Summer Programme 1991 and Secretary's Newsletter, of the Middlesex Society, we reproduce their tailpiece this month -

"EX MIDDLESEXANA SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI"

which translates as -

"FROM MIDDLESEX THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW"

Illustrated below is the last in the series of "cards" by Timothy Johnson currently on sale from our monthly bookstall and at College Farm.

While the mansion house itself, dating from 1859, was built and subsequently extended mainly in the then fashionable "Italianate" style, the architect of this attractive group of buildings at the entrance to the park seems to have been inspired by the chateaux of France. Elsewhere in the ten acres of landscaped grounds are a "bothy" built to house the unmarried gardeners, and a "mediaeval folly" which masks a water tower. The wooded areas are planted with many rare trees gathered from different parts of the world. Henry Charles Stephens, sometimes known as "Inky", died in 1918 leaving the Avenue House estate to the people of Finchley for their use and enjoyment. It is held in trust by the Borough of Barnet (as successor to the Finchley Urban District Council of the time)

May we remind everybody that there are no newsletters or supplements in July and August but we would be delighted to receive any contributions for the September edition.

We wish you all a happy and sunny Summer!

For The Finchley Society

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