

The Finchley Society Newsletter

JANUARY 1993 No. 1/93 SUPPLEMENT

A HAPPIER NEW YEAR Eds. (John)

Let us all wish The Finchley Society, root and branch, a happy and successful 1993.

Since our true Society year runs from June to May, the Chairman's and Hon. Treasurer's reports at AGM time will reveal all about The Finchley Society's real health and activity - but in the meantime the turn of the calendar year affords an extra period of reflection for us.

1992, despite being our 21st, was sadly not a year Fin.Soc. will look back upon with much rejoicing - reflecting no doubt the sentiments of this entire nation!

Whether as a product of recession or the demographic pattern within the Society, our membership roll was, if only temporarily, on a downward track and Society activity was left sustained in those all important two prongs of funds and dedicated people - by the increased subs. from May and the energy and commitment of a solid core of membership - largely centred in the executive and committee members.

Self-evident however, like the nation's economy, we will lift off again with tremendous drive whenever more new and old members can be persuaded to put a shoulder to the wheel and expand the Society's efforts. There is much to be done for Finchley in order to deliver it to succeeding generations safe from the greedy, the uncaring and in a reasonably unexploited state, so members (and future members), please do join in that rewarding work! For our part we Editors will endeavour to ensure that the newsletter continues as a principal medium to encourage that growth.

WILLIAM LAWSON John Colemans

While on a recent holiday in Australia I visited the Blue Mountains. These wooded ridges to the west of Sydney are a most beautiful area, containing not only some spectacular natural formations such as the celebrated Three Sisters and the Jenolan Caves but also some delightful small towns. There is also, I discovered, a connection with Finchley.

The Blue Mountains are deceptive. They gain their names from a vapour produced by the thousands of eucalyptus trees in the valleys and which is visible, as a blue haze, in all climates. They look as if they would be an easy obstacle for an explorer to cross. Yet, although close to Sydney, they were not crossed for twenty five years after the establishment of the first settlement until, in 1813, three explorers found a way through the heavily forested sandstone. These explorers, Gregory Blaxland, William Wentworth and William Lawson now hold honoured names in Australian history; indeed, all of them have towns in the Blue Mountains area named after them. What I also found out was that Lawson was born, in 1774, in Finchley.

Lawson was of Scottish extraction and trained originally to be a surveyor. But, in 1799, he gave this up and bought a commission in the New South Wales Corps, arriving in Australia in 1800. After serving in the garrison on Norfolk Island he returned to Sydney and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He was given several grants of land; one, at a place called Prospect, is now covered by a huge reservoir. As a neighbour of Blaxland's he was invited by him to join the ultimately successful expedition, in which his surveying skills must have played a significant part. Lawson's journal apparently gives a very accurate account of distances travelled and directions followed so that the route taken can be followed with some accuracy even today. After the expedition, Lawson was awarded further land, near Bathurst, and he commanded the settlement there. He bred horses, sheep and cattle and discovered coal in the Hartley area. He was known as 'Old Ironbark' and died eventually in 1850.

Lawson had eleven children, seven of whom survived infancy. Did any of them, one wonders, ever return to the native home in North London? Equally, is there any record of Lawson's time in Finchley; where he was born, where he lived, did others of his family stay in the area? Any information would be gratefully received. It is interesting to see how far the Finchley connection can stretch!

POSTWAR MEMORIES

I have been especially interested to read, in the three most recent editions of the Newsletter, of wartime invasion precautions being discovered - or recalled - in various parts of Finchley. I, here, offer one distant recollection of my own.

There was (and still is, so far as I am aware) a very large machine-gun post at the junction of Hendon Lane and Finchley Lane with The Great North Way. This (built into the slope above the bridge by the waterfall, across the brook) lay hidden amongst the trees, just behind the houses on the brook side of Broughton Avenue.

Approached down a short flight of steps, leading to a door of solid steel standing ever-open, the interior was a happy playground to us children who had the good fortune to have discovered it. Empty - and thankfully unused - we claimed it as our own. And, to all children, it became all things - even to the flat roof. The interior being - castle dungeon; torture chamber; a submarine in the depths of an uncharted ocean; and, on the remotest of occasions, even a machine-gun post where we defended our neighbours, and the King, from the onslaughts of those wicked Nazis. And the roof? A stage, of course; the bridge of some great dreadnought, sailing into battle; or, sometimes the high balcony from which to deliver haranguing and guttural speeches.

In those far off days we were able to play at will, where we may, with no thoughts of dangers - and the interior remained clean and empty all the time I knew it; not until years later did it become a dump for old mattresses,

etc. Sadly, rather like the brook and the waterfall! But the days when we were able to play, barefoot, in the water, is another happy story.

`DECORATE THE HALL WITH HOLLY... Peter Marsh

... Christmas time is very jolly'; and so it was for The Finchley Society's members) at the gathering on 17th December, About 70 people attended to demolish the buffet set out by Shirley Avery and her helpers, with drinks dispensed by Kurt Weinberg.

There was ...

... hardly time to buy tickets from Mari I'Anson who looked after the raffle which raised £54 -- thanks to the various prizes donated through the generosity of members.

... A choice of puzzles to exercise the wits (the only photo of committee members as children which I recognised was my own),

... N3 +1, a quintet of singers to entertain us with a delightful medley of songs, and once the key to the locked piano was obtained, they also led us all in singing Christmas tunes. They kindly donated their fee to 'Barnet Care, and finally,

... Our Chairman, Norman Burgess, who introduced Finchley's M.P., Mr. Hartley Booth, and his wife. Mr. Hartley Booth said a few words and wished us all Seasonal Greetings. Mrs Harley Booth exercised her strong right arm conjuring endless raffle tickets from a box,

The collective efforts of many Fin.Soc. members co-ordinated by our MC. David Smith, brought this, the last meeting of 1992, to a very happy conclusion.

"GRAND DISASTER" AT COLLEGE FARM, BUT A GRAND CHRISTMAS TOO Timothy Johnson

How did the recession affect the College Farm Fairs of 1992? We just don't know since there is no way of knowing what the results might have been without one! What we do know is that 1992 saw the end of a long drought, bringing relief to gardeners, water companies and all who had been praying for rain. Organizers of all one-day open-air events then had to hope and pray for rain selective enough to avoid falling on their big day. But it wasn't and it didn't. Incessant rain on 6th September ruined what is normally one of the year's most successful events, the September Fair, with its grand procession of horse drawn vehicles. It usually brings in the crowds and has many attendance records. On this occasion it established a new record of quite the wrong kind and "Farmer Christopher", usually one of the world's great optimists, called it a "Grand Disaster". Yet despite this, and despite decidedly unattractive weather in some other months, the figures for the year as a whole, boosted by the success of the Christmas Fair, look surprisingly good in the circumstances.

College Farm Christmas Fair, largely through word-of-mouth publicity, has made quite a name for itself, and is probably unusual in combining so many kinds of entertainment with the tinsel of Christmas and the Winter Solstice. There was continuous entertainment in the Big Barn where the Borehamwood Band, playing sessions of carols, alternated with performances of Barney's Magic Show and Punch and Judy. The Crackerjack Ball Pond was in operation all day, and an attendant face-painting team. Face painting is fashionable and there is a big demand. The Crackerjack people are real artists who turn little human faces into lions, tigers, cats, dogs or clowns with the most charming results.

All this activity in the barn seemed to be enjoyed immensely by the sheep and horses who live there in Winter. It was also enjoyed by the bandsmen who said they love coming to College Farm where they get so much audience reaction that they never feel they are mere background music. On this occasion there was spontaneous carol singing. Their summer audiences have also been known to sing, and even to dance, equally spontaneously. They really are a very good band.

Out of doors the blue roundabout took load after load of warmly clad children on its circular tours and the donkey rides were equally well patronized. The Hendon Dog Training Club conducted dog obedience demonstrations on the green, expressing surprise at the size of their audiences and the interest shown (they want to come again in summer). One has always seen walkers resting on park benches in the winter sunshine, but it seemed slightly odd to see so many people taking leisurely refreshment at the row of tables outside the Aviary Tea Room on such a bitterly cold and sunless day. Were they chill-proof winter sports addicts, or was it just that the tea room was 'full up inside'? The Pavilion Tea House across the way was certainly full. A queue there waited to be shown to vacant tables.

With 45 stallholders, the Crafts Market had overflowed, as it often does, into the covered way outside the Farm Shop. Most stallholders come every month and the demand for stall space is sufficient to allow the organizer to accept bookings selectively. The aim is to make it, as far as possible, a reputable showplace for genuine crafts. This was reflected in the quality and variety of goods displayed for sale. Some essential features of the fair are still housed, as they always have been, in the Exhibition Hall and Picture Gallery. That was where Father Christmas sat enthroned in his magic grotto, dispensing kind words and parcels to such a constant stream of small people that he must have had an exhausting day. The Festive Mince Pie stand was very busy too, for with every pie purchased came a complimentary glass of sherry. Some customers, examining pictures in the gallery, held glasses in their hands. It was clearly a social occasion. Everyone seemed unusually keen to have a flutter on the games of chance and one had to wait patiently at times to buy a tombola or raffle ticket. The reason for the rush was no doubt the splendid displays of good prizes on both stalls. The tombola obviously did excellent business and raffle takings were certainly an all-time record for College Farm. Among the ten raffle prizes won were goods and vouchers kindly donated by commercial firms - Tesco Charity Trust (shopping voucher £25), Sainsburys (shopping voucher £10), McDonalds (meal voucher for 6), Waitrose (wines) and Pentland Group Plc (Sports goods) (The Pentland Group also joined

the Finchley Society as a corporate member). Your Finchley Society stand, which as everyone must know, is normally a bookstall, was given over entirely to a gorgeous multi-coloured stock of flowering plants which sold out completely and all the profits, as is the custom at Christmas, were donated to College Farm. The 'Friends of College Farm' stall did business as usual with its customary bunch of eager young clients. During the afternoon the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs Fred Poole, were received at the Fitzalan Road gate by the tenant farmer, Chris Ower, who conducted them round the fair. Since they were so keen to see everything and to speak to as many people as possible it was a very extensive tour. One had to admire their stamina!

This all happened on 6th December, 1992, almost exactly the tenth anniversary of the very first College Farm Christmas Fair which was held on 4th and 5th December 1982. Were you there? It was a purely indoor activity held in the two rooms we now know as the Picture Gallery and Exhibition Hall. (Admission was 20p - 10p for children). It was organized and run, as it still is today, by members of the College Farm Gallery Association, which had then been founded so recently that there had been little time to prepare the fair. Perhaps it was the need for speed that made it sparkle - it was a hit! Until then the only fundraising events had been 'Farm Open Days' run by The Finchley Society's 'Friends of College Farm' committee at irregular intervals during the Summer.

Having shown that the public was quite willing to go down to the farm in the off-season, the artists ran other winter entertainments. Winter and Summer finally came together with the two organizations collaborating through the Farm's Events Committee to present Country Fairs on the first Sunday of every month from February to December.

The 1993 season opens on Sunday 7th February (1pm - 6 pm) when we look forward to seeing YOU.

1992 OCTAVIA HILL COMMEMORATION DAY Norman Burgess

The formal launch on Sunday 6th December of the Octavia Hill Society was made by its President Jeremy Ouvry, the great, great nephew of 'the woman who cared' Octavia Hill, at 11 a.m. in the Angles Centre, in Wisbech. This was the school building erected by James Hill, Octavia's father. Peter Clayton, Chairman, gave the unforgettable Memorial Lecture "Mr Ruskin and Miss Hill".

After an excellent lunch (only £3.50 a head), the free events and outings included a tour of St. Peter's Church, Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Octavia Hill's birthplace house at 8 South Brink, a minibus trip to Manea Colony where we made several diversions owing to the flooding of Welney Washes, and the fascinating Lilian Ream exhibition of photographs of Wisbech's past.

At 4.30 p.m. we gathered in St. Peter's Church for the Octavia Hill Commemoration Service together with a large congregation of local people and representatives of the Octavia Hill Association which still flourishes in Philadelphia, USA and the Housing Trust in London that has 1300 homes in its

care. The valediction was given by Deborah Wheatley, the great, great, great niece of Octavia Hill. One of the most memorable moments of this day was to see the original of a meticulous painting by Octavia Hill herself, of 'The Cobbler'. It was specially shown by its owner Jonathan Ouvry in a glowing gilt frame.

It was a wonderful day. The Finchley Society was formally represented by me, together with Betty and by Vice President David Smith. Membership forms for the Octavia Hill Society will be available to our members at Fin.Soc. 1993 meetings.

WRITING AT THE SHARP END

The November meeting speaker, Maureen Greenland revealed that her personal interest in writing equipment sprang from childhood memories of exploration of her grandfather's desk wherein for practical reasons of his time, there was a host of pen-nibs. Maureen later practised calligraphy but eventually became more interested in the hardware of writing and began a collection of, yes, Pen Nibs. (She didn't specifically mention whether grandfather's nibs were by then still available as a core but one might hope that they were safely included!)

Maureen now specializes in all writing desk "items" from the turn of this century and her talk to us, "From Quill to Biro", featured artefacts of that time, through to the present day. "But surely", you are asking aloud, "the quill was from much earlier periods, than those of Maureen's speciality". Well, to the surprise of her audience she indicated that although the usage of quill pens in Britain is generally given as 1000 - 1200 years from 7th 18th centuries to the 19th, when in 1808 the first steel nib patent was taken out by Brian Donkin, there was steady residual use of quills here right through the last century and even into the 20th in some specialized circumstances.

Maureen exploded the usual pictorial writing paper gift box image of a quill being a whole feather with its tip cut away as a nib. The general practice has always been to reduce the feather from the outer end by as much as 50% until the remainder could be comfortable for use in a quill-holder. The sharpening and cutting away of the bony big end was of course as we all understand it. Goose feathers were the principal choice and the main source of supply was Russia. An interesting development between the full quill and steel nibs was the "Bramah Portable Pen", which was itself a nib-holder but of quill nibs - short sections of the bare stem - this enabled several nibs to be cut in succession from a single feather.

After Brian Donkin's initial patent of 1808 the steel nib revolution really took hold in the 1820s and was accelerated thereafter by successive factors such as the 1840 Penny Post, the growth of public education and other early Victorian social improvements. Soon, in the Birmingham area alone, there were as many as twelve steel pen factories.

Maureen quoted some amusing advertisements for nibs which emerged in the succeeding decades and into this century including -- George W. Hughes' "Ajusto Pen". The most delightful pen to write with ever made. The smooth writing surface of the channel-point distinguishes it from the ordinary metal pen.

(Eds. Can you imagine how this could/would be translated into a latter-day T.V. Advertisement? - but at what cost!)

The "Waverley". They come as a boon and a blessing for men - the Pickwick, the Owl and the Waverley Pen.

(Eds. again. Our notes - and our ignorance - failed to reveal what the Pickwick and the Owl were - would some knowledgeable member please assist?)

By the 1920s, Maureen explained, the writing "sector" was a universal and powerful part of everyday life and the market place. Writing accessories abounded, from the mundane to the very glamorous. At the mundane but quite vital level was the arrival on the scene of stainless steel, giving a further twist to nib production. The glamorous end included a huge variety of pen-holders in every conceivable material from household and schoolroom wood, to glass and even porcupine spines. Then there were pen-stands or pen trays all the way from cast iron to glass and, since early ink was quite corrosive, clever nib-wipers emerged including the humble felt pad and the way-out imitation boot scraper.

As mentioned earlier, Maureen Greenland's current personal collecting activity covers all desk items from the turn of this century. She kindly brought to the meeting a wide selection from that collection and many of us appropriately oohed and aahed and at the childhood memories they invoked. Ink featured strongly of course. It, like lead pencils, sealing wax and its melting/sealing accessories, are studies and collectable items in their own right. In the case of ink, the stuff itself, its bottles, their labels, inkwells, inkpots - they all have a history and a fascination.

Not just because they were also a part of Finchley history, the Stephens' family did not go unremarked. Maureen made special mention of the 1834 emergence of their celebrated Blue Black ink which appeared blue during writing and dried black, also the special two-colour printing process employed at one stage by Stephens to combat a wave of label forgeries.

Moving on to the fountain pen, Maureen traced its development from around the 1880s and revealed that quite amazingly the earliest one in her collection. The Eagle, circa 1884 with a glass ink tube is almost an ink-cartridge pen as we know them today. Around 1912, fountain pens were filled from "eye droppers". From 1920 the sac inside the pen barrel developed and to take up any leakage in coat pockets, those early fountain pens came with pen-pockets in which they were kept.

Like other writing artefacts, of course, the early fountain pens were much collected, especially those made from bakelite, the early plastic of the 1930s. A classic is the 1961 Parker 51 with its hooded nib that put down so little but very writable ink that there was exceptionally fast ink drying.

Maureen explained that this feature was much appreciated by accountants who could put down columns of figures in a ledger, turn the page and go on writing with scarcely a pause and no blotting paper required -- early "time and motion"?

The final chapter in Maureen's pen saga was a short one - Mr. Biro, a Hungarian gentleman invented the ball-pen in the early 1940s and the rest, she suggested, is not only history but within our personal knowledge. She reiterated the social history aspect of all the hardware and products of the writing business. A typical example being the postcard, especially if both written and sent, in which there is much current collecting and study interest.

Maureen's final observation to her audience concerned the modern Industrial-gift and Souvenir business which has developed around the pen, stretching out into pen/pencil sets, rulers, rocking blotters, and other "corporate image" desk accessories. Here, she suggested, is more writing social history to be taken up and studied by future generations -- and so it all continues!

FRIERN HOSPITAL WALK

There can be no doubt about it - "listed" may be its facade, fascinating may be its design and its history - Friern Hospital remains a daunting place and the fact that soon more than 140 years of medical occupancy will end will mark new opportunity even out of uncertain change!

In November last. Oliver Natelson kindly arranged two walks on successive Sundays, touring the (graceful) grounds to take in the rich tree variety and to study what aspects of the grounds Oliver is hopeful of persuading the Council to conserve, once the future plans for the whole area are settled and approved.

Oliver is particularly concerned that, with the Kings Cross main line railway - a natural "green" corridor - flanking the east of the property, the present east to west connection from it furnished by the northern-edge sweep of the grounds plus the western-end tree and hedge belt, should be preserved as a permanent link into Coppetts Wood; crossing only Colney Hatch Lane en route. There can surely be little reason why any future development should need to compromise that.

Back to the historic building itself - thanks again to Oliver, the walk was arranged to include a traverse of one of the four extremely dismal tunnel-like corridors that run respectively along the very outside edges of both east and west wings, along their north and their south walls at ground level. We traversed the west-northern corridor, one sixth of a mile in length, gaining access from the central entrance hall. First, however, a curiosity - and can any member please resolve it? Over the main entrance colonnade is the badge of arms (three horizontal scimitars. or swords) of - Middlesex - or is it Essex? for the wording below the badge is East Saxon. where one might have expected Middle Saxon. Answers please to your ignorant Editors.

Living as we do in an advanced era of psychiatric medicine. Oliver explained that it is easy to overlook the fact that when hospitals such as Friern (or Hollickwood as it was once known) were built in the mid-Victorian period, they were essentially refuges (hence "Asylum"), intended to protect from Society what were then known as lunatics' - poor unwanted souls who fell foul of their contemporaries for many reasons other than that of mental illness. He observed that we often think that society simply banished them but in that early dawn of enlightenment the issue was not quite so clear cut -- although one supposes that they were essentially "locked away".

It was certainly fascinating to learn from Oliver that Friern (completed in 1851) was originally and intentionally home to only 1000 inmates. They must have enjoyed more space per head than many a home of those times. Perhaps not so surprising in view of 20th century inflation was another figure Oliver knew - that the original cost estimate for that huge building was £15,000! Knowing the dramas that have already and will continue to be played out over the future of Friern and its entire estate, we can guess that at stake are at least three more noughts and a multiplying factor - and who yet has the confidence that wise decisions will be made?

PARLIAMENTARY PARTY Bill Williams

The Finchley Society Executive's visit in October to the Mother of Parliaments was curtailed by an unannounced piece of ritual. The Lord Chancellor was entertaining the Lord Mayor of London involving a loving cup ceremony so the House of Lords was closed to visitors. This meant some delay before we were found by our guide - a jovial Irishman - who was not best pleased by the Lord Mayor of London taking precedence over The Finchley Society.

For obvious reasons security is particularly strict in the Palace of Westminster so in St. Stephens Porch we each had to be frisked and screened for what might be offensive metal objects. The whole process was carried out with great decorum and is by now, after some years, established ritual. Once cleared we went into St. Stephens Hall, built on the site of St. Stephens Chapel destroyed in the great fire of 1834 and which served for three hundred years as the House of Commons. The Hall now is little more than a wide corridor; it is also an ante-chamber for those hardy members of the public who want to see the proceedings of the House in the flesh, as it were. The first part of the queue for the Strangers Gallery is allowed to sit on the narrow stone seats built into the walls. It may mean many hours of waiting before getting into the Gallery. Then in the late evening the patient stranger may hear a handful of members discussing some obscure and boring subject!

St. Stephens Hall leads to the Central Lobby which is as far as non-members may penetrate when Parliament is sitting. The Peers Corridor and the Commons Corridor run into this lobby providing a meeting place for members of both houses. Before making our way to the Commons Chamber we carried out a mock count in the 'No' division lobby. This is the physical counting and

recording of the members and the way they have voted; it is thought by some to be quite out of date in this age.

There is yet another lobby before reaching the Commons Chamber; this is the Members Lobby. All MPs may mix here free from the restrictions of the debating chamber. In this lobby are a number of pedestals supporting statues of former Prime Ministers. There are some empty pedestals and it was suggested that one might be used for a statue of Finchley's former Member of Parliament but convention demands that Premiers must have been dead some years before the matter is considered by the appropriate committee. Time will tell.

From the floor of the Commons Chamber one is struck by its smallness; quite different from the impression given by television or even from the Strangers Gallery. In spite of the rather heavy Victorian gothic style it manages to give an air of intimacy. This is partly achieved by the seating which is not adequate for more than three hundred - there are over six hundred and fifty members.

The Houses of Parliament must be a guide's delight for there is so much to tell of the rules, procedures and above all the conventions which have come about over the centuries such as the "booking" of a seat for a debate with a prayer card. Certain seats are permanently reserved however -- the front bench above the gangway (i.e. nearest the Speaker) is reserved for Government Ministers and similarly on the Opposition front bench for "shadow spokesmen". Other members have by custom some preference in the seating arrangements so that in an important debate there is certain jockeying for position.

Whilst exploring the House of Commons the news came that we might have a glimpse of the House of Lords. Presumably the loving cup had been emptied earlier than expected. Our guide visibly brightened at the news and we made for the Upper Chamber. The difference between the Chamber of the House of Lords and that of the Commons is quite startling with tile blaze of gold and scarlet of the Lords against the comparative greyness of the Commons. The Sovereign's throne and canopy glisten with gold leaf. The walls are panelled with elaborate carving surmounted by stained glass windows, frescoes and a gilded coffered ceiling.

Apart from Westminster Hall and a few smaller buildings the Palace of Westminster was rebuilt in the mid-nineteenth century and it reflects that period in our history with the Queen Empress at the head of a vast Empire. Parliament was the ultimate authority; now that authority will perhaps gradually pass to the European Community with a powerful Commission where every delegate or MEP has a limed oak desk with a push button for voting.

We finished our tour with a visit to Westminster Hall. This was built nine hundred years ago when it was claimed to be the largest hall in Europe. For more than half that time, until 1882 when the present Law Courts were built, the Hall was the principle meeting place for the Courts of Justice. The Lord Chancellor, as head of the Judiciary, still operates from the Palace and his department occupies some four hundred of the eleven hundred rooms there. Westminster Hall is not much used these days and is rather gloomy. It was not

easy to find the small plaque marking the spot where Charles I stood to hear his sentence of death. It is difficult too in that gloom to appreciate the beauty of the hammer beam roof, one of the finest in existence. On the other hand excessive modern lighting would spoil the atmosphere of this historic building. It is to be hoped that the collection of surplus furniture standing in one corner is not a permanent feature!

After lunch we had an appointment to meet the MP for Finchley, Mr. Hartley Booth, in the Palace. We duly returned and after a further security check were conducted to the room allocated for our meeting. Denys Pegg as "father" of our party introduced us to Mr. Booth who told us about his first few months as a "new boy" at Westminster. Each one of our group had a question to raise on a specific subject. But we only had time to deal with the Henry Stephens Museum and College Farm as Mr. Booth had an urgent appointment in Finchley. Those other points will have to be dealt with by correspondence - without adding too much to our MP's postbag which he informed us can be up to a hundred letters a day.

OCTOBER WASHOUT

October's meeting speaker had to cry off at a very late hour, having been taken ill, but as reported in the November newsletter issue, Chairman Norman Burgess and member Ken Coulsen brilliantly sprang into the breach with a film show.

That having been reported on as fully as possible in the November newsletter, there are no further comments upon the October meeting.

BRIGHTON/PETWORTH 12th SEPTEMBER Harry Sharpe

What is the ideal day out? Fly to Paris for a gourmet lunch and fly back? Concorde to Istanbul and return via Orient Express? Or take a coach to Brighton - London by the sea? The last is simpler, enjoyable, and vastly underrated. Trust the Fin.Soc. to have a right judgment in all things, or in some things at any rate. We had all joined the coach by 9.30 and were whisked through the traffic via Paddington, Merton, Wimbledon, (a good sighting of a Kestrel there over a small copse) and so to Pease Pottage. This may sound like a soup, a nourishing drink or a cleaner but it is a motorway service area, where we stopped for elevenses. Coffee, at 90p a cup! Perhaps Pease Pottage was a cleaner after all.

At this stage we were only a few minutes behind the proposed schedule, and about 20 miles from Brighton, but from there on we were dogged by delays so common now on main routes. 'Roadworks 800 yards ahead', -- the notice negates all the good of a three lane motorway for we know that at the end of the 800 we shall join a line of crawling traffic for an uncertain period, and all the advantage of the fast lane is lost. There was some wonderful heavy earth moving machinery, and another hawk to be seen - at leisure - but where will all this end?

More motorways = more traffic = more maintenance = more delays =

Our driver coped with all the lane changes and those maddening cones with his usual urbanity. We arrived for our appointment at the Royal Pavilion about 45 minutes late.

Our guide, Mr. Francis, was unperturbed by our late arrival. One had the impression that he was an enthusiast for his task of guiding us round the Pavilion and would not be rattled by anything. We were given a short outline of what we were about to see, and a brief history of the rapid growth of Brighton when the word got around, on the authority of a local physician, that a drink of the sea waters there (yes. the sea water!) would be more beneficial than anything that Buxton or Harrogate could provide. Try that today! But it worked then, and the erstwhile little fishing village became a spa. and in due course attracted the attention of none other than the Prince Regent, later to become George IV. He had some fairly undistinguished buildings converted, extended, decorated with domes and minarets and furnished in a most extravagant style to become a centre for the entertainment of his fashionable circle.

The style is Chinoiserie, although there is very little, if anything from China. Cast iron, which was most expensive at the time, and rare woods such as white mahogany, were fashioned to look like bamboo for furniture, and throughout the building are burgeoning iron palm and bamboo trees and exotic dragons to give a truly oriental atmosphere. We were taken round the main rooms where there is much to see and admire. It would seem however that Queen Victoria did not approve of the Prince's achievements, and in due course had all the furnishings removed, even to the carpets, and what was not used at Osborne or destroyed was stored at Buckingham Palace, there to stay until released by our present Queen, for the restoration of this unique building for the enjoyment of today's visitors. After costly restoration and refurnishing, enormous damage was caused by fire, and this had just been repaired when nature took a hand in the 1987 gale and a pinnacle through the roof of one of the main rooms set things back to the tune of a few more thousands of pounds. The Chinese dragons in the main decor, supposed to bring good luck, do not seem to have been paying attention to their job.

The tour was altogether most interesting, and made more so by such a well informed guide. After being shown round we were free to visit other parts, or, as some did, to go to the excellent refreshment room and take lunch on the balcony overlooking the gardens, where others had chosen to picnic in the sunshine.

And so to PETWORTH (as the great diarist might have said). Petworth House is an elegant building in a beautiful setting. If you are a connoisseur of great paintings and of classical sculpture then a visit here is rewarding, though for the non-expert a catalogue is essential. The rooms which are open do not have a great deal of interest in the way of furnishing, but it is pleasing to walk round, and the archive room has exhibits showing something of the history of the house. The attractive grounds were landscaped by Capability Brown and are open for wanderers. Once again, there is that indispensable facility, an excellent tea room.

The nearby village has fascinating winding lanes, fortunately too narrow for car traffic, and made one wish for more time to explore there, but we had to be on our coach to return. As we were about to leave, we were glad to see Leslie Martin, a founder member of the Fin.Soc. who had come from his country hideout to meet us, and who is still giving his energetic support to about eight worthy societies!

The return journey was not subject to such delays on the main roads, but we were again running behind scheduled time. Robert, our driver, coped admirably, coming through the backwoods of Neasden, Willesden, Harlesden and other such exotic locations in order to avoid using the North Circular Road, which is suffering from hardening of the artery, and would you believe, is under repair. Once again I wondered as I admired the handling of the long heavy vehicle, "why don't I slip through like that?" Can it be he has more power... easier sighting ... a larger steering wheel...? or could it just be more driving skill..?

It was a most enjoyable day, we all agreed, as we seconded a vote of thanks to Norman and Betty. Apply early for seats next time.

MODERN MIRACLES vs MOURNFUL REMINISCENCES Percy Reboul

Timothy Johnson (September Newsletter Supplement) sounds to me like an unhappy man. He is almost certainly afflicted with the dreaded "roses round the old cottage door" syndrome which comes with advancing age and regret for passing youth. We all get it from time to time.

One answer, apart from thinking more rationally, is to recognise that if we were to eliminate every potentially hazardous substance or situation, life as we know it would grind to a halt. Risk and benefit go hand in hand and the secret is carefully to evaluate both. For example, the fact that hundreds of people drown every year or that 30.000 people were killed or injured on the roads of Britain in 1991 can hardly prevent us from teaching children how to swim and dive off the deep end or using the internal combustion engine for transporting them from place to place.

What we need to consider is 'acceptable risk' - that is, permitting a certain degree of risk because the probability for harm is low and there is no alternative to fulfil the need.

Little, if anything, is to be gained by those assertions about 'the good old days' which are largely a myth. The small corner shop, beloved by so many people, with its open sacks, bags made from twists of newspapers and uncovered shelves (to say nothing of the state of the shopkeeper's hands) were depositories for dirt, flies and vermin. The modern supermarket, with all its disadvantages, retails its remarkable choice of foodstuffs in clean, hygienic surroundings wrapped in packaging materials that will keep the contents fresh and clean. That is why the corner shop is virtually a thing of the past and the supermarket concept growing.

I am baffled by the comments on furniture. Beautiful, solid wood furniture is widely available. In the past, if you did inherit a family piece you were lucky because there were often ten other children in the family looking for their share of the goodies (a reminder, perhaps, of that other inestimable modern benefit - birth control). Meanwhile, as I wipe the colourful surface of my laminated-topped kitchen with a damp cloth, I can reflect that that solid old Victorian pine-topped table needed regular scrubbing with hot water, Sunlight soap and a handful of soda. Woman's work, of course; like laying the coal fire, black-leading the kitchen range, doing a mountain of washing in a solid-fuel fired copper and a scrubbing board and, for good measure, looking forward to this year's addition to the family. Unless, of course, you had the shillings to hand over to some poorly paid 'skivvy' to do the work for you.

Can I put in a special plea for plastics - one of the most misunderstood materials of our age. The raw materials for making plastics come from crude oil which has to be 'cracked' to provide essential commodities such as petrol and oils for heating and lubrication. In so doing, a number of other valuable materials are given off, including those fractions which are the basis of many of the most important plastics. A decade or so ago, in Saudi Arabia for example, these valuable by-products were simply wasted by 'flaring off' - a familiar picture to our readers. Thanks to massive capital investment and technology they are now used to make an essential raw material.

Plastics packaging, which is the single largest use for plastics, has revolutionised retailing by making possible the pre-packaging, pre-weighting and pre-pricing which is at the heart of the supermarket service. One of the main reasons for such packaging, is that it helps to keep foodstuffs fresher for longer. In so doing it prevents waste. It is a sad fact that nearly 30% of the foodstuffs grown in the third world is spoiled because they have no resources to pack and store them.

If we could only put aside the trivia and get down to the major problems associated with our environment things might start to improve. Isn't it fascinating that the biggest polluter of our age, the motor car, is rarely mentioned in discussions. That is because none of us wants to be in the uncomfortable position of not having the very convenient car. It salves our conscience to re-use paper bags or plastic carriers when logic dictates that we should be pressurising governments to think about new generations of vehicles powered by sources other than petrol. The technology is there: the problem is the one featured in that superb film "The Man in the White Suit".

Perhaps the biggest problem of all is over-population where we need to fight entrenched beliefs which ignore the filth and squalor of places like the shanty towns of South America. I shan't ever forget the passion showed by our own Patron when this matter was discussed on television.

'There is nothing sacrosanct about 'natural' materials although there is about the planet itself. Some of the greatest boons enjoyed by man have come about by adapting materials and synthesizing them. Let's welcome modern technology and science, consider and debate risk and benefit, and give thanks

for all the blessings we enjoy. I. for one, would not swap our times for any other in history.

THE BOTHY AT AVENUE HOUSE Norman Burgess

Remember 'The Bothy' motion passed at the AGM of the Society? Heard nothing more? Well. I attended a meeting at Barnet House in December. Clearly there are escalating tiers of potential use beginning at 'do nothing' and finally ending with redeveloping the building.

It should be recognised that the true value of the structure lies in the contribution it makes to the atmosphere of tile grounds and the pleasure to be derived from them. Much of this atmosphere stems not merely from the original Victorian Gothic architecture but also from the romantic effect of present levels of decay. Potential uses may also be restricted by the terms of the will of H.C. Stephens that the House and Grounds "shall be open for the use and enjoyment always of the public" coupled with the four principal charitable divisions recognised by the Law - 1. Relief of Poverty. 2. Advancement of Education. 3. Advancement of Religion, and 4. Other purposes beneficial to the Community.

Based on Council figures, the following are possible options -

1. Do nothing	Approx. £200 p.a.
2. Minimal Repairs	£44,000
3. Consolidation of the structure	£308,000
4. Use as depot	£242,000
5. Workshops	£253,000
6. Refurbishment of flat	£385,000

(This last option was the one quoted in our original motion)

With absolutely no provision of money for any of this in the current budget of the Borough of Barnet a suggestion was made that an injection of money might come from an outside source or public subscription from the local community. I am very sceptical of this latter suggestion at this present time of recession. We await further news.

P.S. Just behind 'The Bothy' the exciting new playground is taking shape, usefully adding to the much higher profile of Avenue House this year. Further value stems from the efforts of Janet Durrant with her Pond Tea House and the formation of her "Friends of Avenue House". Please join for just £2 per annum. Every penny will be ploughed back into the improvement of the pond and surrounding areas. Further details from me, Norman Burgess, if this appeals to you.

TAILPIECE

After a year when like the rest of us the Royal Family found itself buffeted by fortune, it is perhaps appropriate to single out a thought from that quarter to see us encouragingly into 1993.

This, with full acknowledgment to the Middlesex Society, in whose Autumn '92 Newsletter it appeared, also as a tailpiece, is a comment from HRH The Prince of Wales

"Take a pride in your county" (and why not for 'county' read 'locality').

"Hanging on to our cultural roots is one way of preserving national and local identities".

oOo

For The Finchley Society

John and Carol Hails (Editors), Finchley Park, N12