

The Finchley Society Newsletter

No. 4/93 SUPPLEMENT APRIL 1993

The Supplement opens this month with reports on the last three monthly meetings

ROAD TRANSPORT IN FINCHLEY Kurt Weinberg

The first monthly meeting in 1993 saw a packed hail of Finchley Society members welcome Ted Brooks who shared with us his enthusiasm and vast knowledge on road passenger transport.

We learned that as early as 1856 a horse bus came as far as Finchley. For 2/6d you could travel from Charing Cross to Church End.

Motor Bus Routes started at the beginning of this century and many of the routes described by Ted brought back memories to our members. The No.2 first came on the scene in 1913 to be finally withdrawn in 1978. But who remembers the No.53 service which ran for 2 years from 1911 connecting Victoria with North Finchley?

Ted brought with him a genuine bell punch manufactured by the Bell Punch and Printing Co. Ltd. of London. This year is the centenary of its introduction in 1893, bringing an end to the time when bus conductors found their job very lucrative. What a dreary task it must have been for those women who had to sort and count the tiny~clippings by colours and number.

Ted covered the whole sphere of transport in Finchley from the horse-drawn bus to the motor bus, from the train to the trolley bus, from Birch coaches to the Green Line. Finally, he presented to the archives of the Finchley Society a detailed list of Road Transport Routes known to have served Finchley Church End.

FEBRUARY MONTHLY MEETING John Halls

Chris Wade, our speaker, charted Hampstead for us in both historical and social context. It is known, apparently, that ancient human habitation in Hampstead has been traced as far back as 7000 BC. Its modern history of occupation is more nearly 1000 years however, roughly from 986 AD. The Domesday reference indicates valuation of Hampstead at 50 shillings!

Socially, Hampstead has for several centuries attracted personal valuations of striking contrast - some quotations provided by Chris are as follows -

* Daniel Defoe, 1724, "It must be confest, 'tis so near to Heaven that I dare not say it can be a proper situation for any but a race of mountaineers, whose lungs had been used to rarified air."

* Dr John Soame, 1734. "Hampstead is a most delightful village, very happy in its situation, being somewhat romantic. Here it is that you draw in a pure and balmy air, without the noisome smell of stinking fogs."

* Constable, 1827. "Here let me take my everlasting rest."

In our own century, however --

* Bernard Shaw in the 1920s, "The most hopeless, damned centre of callous suburbanisation on earth!"

* D.H. Lawrence, 1920s, "Hampstead in December is like cold stew."

* A letter to the Times, 1991, "NW3 is the heartland of all that is retrogressive to the development of serious writing."

* Article in The Independent on Sunday (about Macdonalds) 1992, "I confess to having regarded Hampstead as something of a Dead Poets' Society, in which the pretentious, the pernickety and the possessive survive."

Speaking of Hampstead's geology, Chris described it as a hill of clay, capped with sand and gravel. Water from rainfall spills out in several directions and in the lower areas all around are numerous ponds and streams. Other environmental facts revealed by Chris included a description of a long gone hollow elm tree with a spiral staircase inside it and a door at the foot -- but the actual location is not known today. Did we also know that the well which gave the name Well Walk to that particular Hampstead thoroughfare was a Chalybeate Well (rich in iron) in the ownership of the Earl of Gainsborough who, in 1698, gave it to the poor of Hampstead? In a slightly connected way, the original owner of Burgh House (Chris Wade is its current Curator in its present-day role as Hampstead Museum) was a doctor who became rich advising on the nature of the water in various wells in the neighbourhood.

Hampstead's first VIP, we learned, was probably the mid-17th century character Harry Vane. However, he regularly changed his political allegiances and in 1662 the king, having become thoroughly fed up with him, had him beheaded. The area has attracted its fair share of undesirable characters -- in the early 18th century the notorious Kit Kat club gathered regularly in Hampstead and of course there were Highwaymen! A favourite hanging place for the latter was apparently the beam set up between two elms (the Gibbet Elms) just down from the pub Jack Straws Castle towards the even more famous pub, The Bull and Bush. Speaking of famous pubs, Chris reminded us that Hampstead's three most famous historical inns continue to flourish today albeit with some modern reconstructions - The Bull and Bush, The Spaniards Inn and Jack Straw's Castle.

In modern years Hampstead has enjoyed its share of character residents. Chris had already mentioned the 17th century Harry Vane and other personalities have included William Pitt the Elder who came to Hampstead (Pitt House) as an invalid and lived on as a reclusive.

Around 1829 it is said that Keats and Constable lived in adjoining roads. There is no evidence of their ever having met. In more recent times General de Gaulle apparently lived in Hampstead for several years of the Second World War and other notables of recent years have included Barbara Hepworth, the Barnetts of Hampstead Garden Suburb fame, Henry Moore, Kate Greenaway and George du Maurier. Although of course not in the resident category, it is said that Catherine the Great of Russia who owned a huge collection of porcelain plates had twelve of them decorated with views of Hampstead. By the way, Chris suggests that the Vale of Health cannot have been the sanctuary from the great plague that most of us believe, it has been discovered that it was a swamp at the time.

The railway came through in 1837 and the tube in 1907, both heralding an era which might be titled Happy Hampstead, with regular access by train and tube from the East End. Millions of Londoners have since enjoyed the pleasure of Hampstead Heath and one must not forget that faithful route to and from Central London, the No. 24 bus. The writer as a small child before World War II in Pimlico was taken at least twice a year the full length of its route to enjoy Hampstead Heath Fairs. That war touched Hampstead but little and late, although 1944 was a particularly bad time to have lived through.

Summing up, Chris expressed his belief that it is truly amazing that Hampstead - bearing in mind its proximity to Central London - has in fact changed so little down the centuries.

SUTTON HOUSE - A TALK AND A VISIT Robert Winton

But for Henry VIII, Sutton House would never have existed, and but for a mistake of history it would never have been called Sutton House. But let me start at the beginning.

The beginning was on March 25, when Pam Wright of the National Trust gave a talk on Sutton House to the 90 members who filled the meeting room. But more importantly - dare I say? - was that this was our first meeting in the restored Avenue House, and very handsomely the job has been done, thanks very largely to our Chairman, Norman Burgess, who is always thanking others but is rarely thanked himself. So - many, many thanks Norman, from everyone, for everything.

Where was I? Oh Yes - Henry VIII, who in 1520 met Francis I of France on the famed "Field of the Cloth of Gold". A certain Ralph Sadleir (later Sir) supplied the buckram and canvas for the extravagant pavilions and palaces; with the proceeds he built Sutton House in 1534/5, in the "healthful air" of "Hackney", then a village some three miles across open fields from Bishopsgate. Only recently has research uncovered that Thomas Sutton, who gave the House its name because he was supposed to have lived there from 1605-11, never did live there, but next door.

In many ways the history of Sutton House reflects Hackney's changing fortunes. It has been home to statesmen, to City merchants and to squatters; it has housed a school, a church institute, social service offices and a trade union.

Around 1700 the Tudor gables and windows were removed, and the House was reconstructed in Georgian style. In 1936 it was bought by the National Trust, and used as offices during World War II. In 1982 it became vacant, was vandalised and much of the contents stolen, although some was later recovered. Through public pressure the National Trust agreed to restore the House; work started in 1990 and is still in progress.

A picture is worth a thousand words, but a visit is worth even more, so the 20 of us were shown over Sutton House two days after the talk were most fortunate. We saw one of the most striking features, the carved linenfold panelling in the Great Chamber, which was installed in 1535. But we also saw much more of interest, and when the recently fire-damaged East Wing has been restored members will find a visit even more rewarding (call 081-986 2264).

MAJOR PLANNING ISSUES

The Planning Sub-committee has in recent months been considering some major planning matters. Vice President Bill Tyler briefly sets the background to each application and we reproduce in full, the text of letters that he has written on our behalf - some parts of which have appeared in a recent newsletter.

1. FINCHLEY LEISURE CENTRE

The first letter concerns the very important development proposed for the site of the open air swimming pool at the Glebelands and followed a meeting arranged with Mr Alan Burrridge, Director of Barnet's Leisure Services, at which the two prospective developers selected by the Council explained their proposals to the Planning Sub-committee. Because of the short time for formal response to the Council's 'consultation' proposals, and the usually limited reporting of comments in officers' reports, it was decided that our observations should be sent directly to the Chairman Councillor Lyon, and all members of the Recreation, Leisure & Arts Committee.

Councillor V. Lyon
Chairman
Recreation, Leisure & Arts Committee
London Borough of Barnet
Town Hall
The Boroughs
London NW4

Dear Councillor Lyon,

PROPOSED LEISURE CENTRE, THE GLEBELANDS, FINCHLEY

The Society is grateful that its Planning Sub-Committee had the opportunity to have a presentation from the two short-listed developers, arranged by Mr Alan Burrridge, and this response necessarily has to be made directly to you

in view of the lack of time allowed for proper consideration of the proposals. In order that members of your Committee may be fully aware of our observations, this letter is being copied to each of them as well as to the Director of Technical Services.

Before commenting on each of the two schemes we wish to make it absolutely clear that we consider the so-called public consultation process to be deeply flawed. The newspaper questionnaire was highly misleading and its diagrams virtually unintelligible, in one case the larger scale plan being differently orientated to the overall plan. We believe the questions themselves were meaningless without a much fuller understanding of the proposals than could be given in the inaccurate descriptions of the schemes; the answers will not have produced any statistically valid basis on which to judge the public's preferences nor to indicate the use that is likely to be made of the facilities.

The series of seven meetings held in various parts of the Borough seem to have taken place with an extremely small number of participants, the selection of whom appears to have been more than somewhat arbitrary. One of our members, who happened to telephone to seek more information on the proposals, immediately received an invitation and, at the particular meeting, was surprised that among the eleven present one invitee was from an angling club!

Whilst regretting the loss of the much loved (to many) and architecturally significant open air pool, members of our Committee appreciate that it may no longer be viable as a present day leisure facility and that an indoor pool, with a subsidiary outdoor pool, would respond far better to the aspirations and expectations of the Borough's residents. The Committee also appreciates that, in the present highly restrictive regime imposed by central government, it may not be possible for the Council to build new swimming pools and that, without such community commitment, there must be recourse to 'enabling development' by private enterprise. It is the scale and type of such development that is our primary concern at this stage. We are also concerned at the loss of the tennis courts, even if not used very intensively on an annual basis, and consider that provision needs to be made elsewhere locally (not on green open land) for those not able to afford the high cost of membership of the private David Lloyd Centre.

The two pool schemes are remarkably similar in content, no doubt reflecting current standards, although neither of them provide the eight lanes required in the Council's brief. Both have the outdoor pool poorly located on the east side of the main pool building but, in our lengthy discussions with each developer, only Rank/Sunley expressed a clear willingness to examine the relocation of this feature to a sunnier situation. The Rank/Sunley building has a particular advantage in that the six-lane pool is partially separated from the leisure pool so that more serious swimmers are less disturbed by the noise and bustle of the leisure pool.

The 'commercial' content of each scheme therefore is the over-riding issue and we have noted with particular interest and sympathy that, in marked contrast to the THI scheme, a substantial and experienced cinema operator, such as Rank, has not thought it appropriate or in keeping with the general

development to include a multi-screen complex in the proposal. We believe that this element of the THI scheme would have a very serious and deleterious effect on the four cinemas (two listed as of architectural and historic interest) which lie within 2.5 miles or less of the Glebelands and, between them, have twelve screens. Furthermore, the car parking requirements for such a multi-screen cinema would impose an enormous peak use burden on the road network, even allowing for - or perhaps because of - the soon to be built flyover intersection of the High Road and North Circular Road only two hundred yards distant.

As both developments propose similar tenpin bowling centres there is, apart from the multi-screen cinema, only a choice between one or two nightclubs and one or two restaurants. We are not at all enamoured of the nightclub proposals although we acknowledge that a properly run venue for young people could be an attractive local amenity. The supervision and control of patrons will be crucial to the acceptability of this type of activity on the site and we would expect that opening hours would be no later than 1.30 am. We gathered that the Rank/Sunley scheme would have its two restaurants operated by others and that they would not be built until tenants were found; we are doubtful about this rather tentative idea and the financial soundness of it. At the presentation no mention was made about one of these being a fast food outlet, as noted in the November report to your committee; this would not be appropriate on this site and we consider it vital that the design of the two units is part and parcel of the entire complex if they are essential to its viability.

We have no doubt that the Rank/Sunley scheme is a far more imaginative architectural scheme than that of THI. We are impressed that the former deliberately avoids cramming the site with cars and has a much more sensitive concept for landscaping the large parking area. THI indicated that they would anticipate 3,000,000 visitors annually which, say with an average vehicle occupancy of three persons and the centre operating 364 days per year, would result in 2750 cars using the site daily, apart from staff, and equal to 2.5 vehicles entering or leaving the site every minute over an eighteen hour day. [We consider that the number of people arriving by car at this type of venue will be far higher than the standard indicated in the UDP; in other instances we know of a ratio of one car parking space per two seats being the norm for multi-screen cinemas. Even if THI's figure is somewhat exaggerated and is an over-estimate of 500,000 there still would be a turnover of 2290 vehicles per day on our quite reasonable assumption of average car occupancy rates. THI's need for intensive parking, which may well be inadequate in any event, inevitably results in a great sea of tarmac separating the uninspiring main buildings. This contrasts starkly with the 400,000 visitors annually (excluding the restaurants) estimated by Rank/Sunley but which, even if somewhat on the low side, will generate much more modest traffic volumes.

The Rank/Sunley proposal is enormously successful in cleverly retaining the existing pool cascade and colonnade - one of its great features - as a uniting element between the new pool and the other leisure facilities. We see this as a singularly happy arrangement and the whole scheme appears to have been thought about in site specific terms: a leisure complex designed for, rather than one simply located in, Finchley.

There are many points that will need to be examined at the detailed planning stage of either scheme, for example a southern exit road to avoid late night disturbance to the residents of Granville Place, but we consider that the Rank/Sunley proposal appears to be much more reasonable in its ambitions and, unlike THI, to be sympathetic to its location in its layout and architectural treatment. If there is no alternative to this type of development to ensure the long term provision of swimming facilities in this part of the Borough then we consider that the Council should negotiate on the basis of the Rank/Sunley scheme.

We trust these observations will be of assistance in selecting the developer. Yours sincerely,

Bill Tyler (Vice President)

cc All Members - Recreation, Leisure & Arts Committee
Director of Leisure Services - Mr Alan Burrridge

2. BARNET ERUV

A controversial planning matter was the application for an ERUV (an area allowing relaxation of certain restrictive practices for Orthodox Jews on the Sabbath) covering a substantial area of the southern part of the Borough, and including some of Church End and East Finchley. The initial application was later amended and the letter reproduced here relates to the revised proposal. The earlier letter of 13.9.92, referred to in the first paragraph, made substantially the same points, the copy being forwarded as a reminder that our previous views still held good. Again, to be sure that the Council's Town Planning & Research Committee had our comments in full, a copy of our comments was sent to the Chairman and all members of the Committee.

Planning Group
London Borough of Barnet
1255 High Road
London N20 OEJ

Dear Sirs,

PROPOSED ERUV IN BARNET (Your ref: PJDM/SS Eruv)

Thank you for sending us details of the new application for an Eruv and I attach a copy of our letter of 13.9.92 which sets out our objection in principle to this proposal.

The latest document is a terrible presentation and in many respects is less clear than the original. It no longer has plans which relate each installation to its setting in the slightly wider context and the orientation of some plans is thoroughly confusing; for instance Pole 3 of No 15 (Aylmer Road) appears to be completely misdrawn.

We note that No 15 now has three poles instead of five but do not consider this to be any great improvement over the initial arrangement.

The location of the poles at No 19 (Church Lane) are now far worse sited in relation to Holy Trinity Church and will impinge very directly on the setting of the listed building, greatly to its detriment.

The impact of these poles and wires cannot be properly judged on sketch plans only. The significance of each 'gateway' on the street scene surely requires that elevations are provided to show the background to the poles. This would also enable their positions relative to windows of properties to be assessed.

Although birds may not have visibility problems with conventional telegraph wire, as proposed for the longer spans, we are extremely concerned about the use of monofilament nylon. This would apparently be used on the majority of spans and we believe would present an almost invisible hazard for birds, particularly in certain lighting conditions.

We continue to be of the view that this proposal will seriously prejudice the visual amenities of the locations where the 'gateways' are to be erected, one will affect the setting of a listed building and there is likely to be a considerable danger to birds in flight. We are opposed to the erection of 'private' street furniture of this nature - permission for it would set a very dangerous precedent.

We trust the application will be refused and shall be grateful for notification of the decision.

Yours faithfully,

BILL TYLER (Vice President)
on behalf of the Planning Committee

Letter dated 17.2.93

Councillor John Tiplady CBE
Chairman, Town Planning & Research Committee
London Borough of Barnet
Town Hall
The Burroughs
London NW4

ERUV IN BARNET

Because agenda papers and Officers' Reports are only available shortly before your committee meetings we are not aware of the extent of coverage

that our representations may, or may not, receive on any particular planning application.

In order that our views are known in full to all Members of the Town Planning & Research Committee, the Society's Executive Committee resolved that a copy of my letter about the proposed Eruv on behalf of our Planning Sub-Committee, should be sent to Members in advance of the meeting at which the application is to be considered.

I therefore attach a copy of my letter of 18.1.93 and you will see that it is concerned only with important planning issues that stem from the application. There are three basic objections: i) proliferation of street furniture, ii) a dangerous precedent for future 'private' street equipment and iii) effect on nearby properties and particularly an adverse effect on the setting of a Grade II Listed Building. In addition there is a danger for birds in flight that has not been addressed.

Our view is that these matters are of sufficient weight to more than justify refusal of the application, let alone on grounds of the total inadequacy of the details submitted for consideration.

We trust that the scheme will not be granted permission for the reasons we have set out.

BILL TYLER (Vice President)

cc All Members - Town Planning & Research Committee Enc.

3. ENGLISH HERITAGE

Last autumn, English Heritage put forward controversial proposals for the devolvement of responsibility for certain buildings in its care, for changing the regime for listed buildings in London and for breaking up its expert conservation workforce. Members may recall that at our October monthly meeting a resolution was passed unanimously condemning the proposals. Subsequently, the Planning Sub-committee examined EH's ideas in more detail, which had undergone some modification in the light of general public uproar, and after discussion with other interested groups a letter was sent to the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

As you will see, copies went to the Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage, which will soon be looking into EH's ideas, and to our three local MPs.

Letter dated 4.2.93

The Rt Hon Peter Brooke MP
Secretary of State for National Heritage
Horseguards Road

London SW1P 3AL

Dear Secretary of State,

ENGLISH HERITAGE - FUTURE STRATEGY

At the time of the announcement last Autumn of the new strategy for English Heritage the Society, at one of its regular monthly meetings, passed a resolution expressing its great concern at the proposals to hand over management of certain properties to local councils or trusts and to break up the renowned London Division. The back-tracking over a seemingly botched announcement has allowed the planning sub-committee to consider the issues in some depth and to now add its views to the consultation process.

We have a particular concern, or may have, in the hand over of monuments because one of the properties on the 'hit list', according to press speculation, is Kenwood House. We are utterly opposed to any scheme that weakens expert management of such buildings; properties managed in isolation by councils or trusts will not have available on a daily basis the resources of a large scale expert organisation. The necessity to cover management costs will impose commercial criteria on the running of a building which may be totally beyond the capacity of the building to absorb.

In a large organisation which has any sense of social responsibility - and this surely is at the very heart of the function of English Heritage - the spread of investment enables the less 'profitable' parts to contribute to the whole from the income of the most successful. Our concern is not just about Kenwood but the many other buildings and monuments that may seem to be suitable cases for (Stevens) treatment and which may suffer from over zealous exploitation or be damaged by inadvertent neglect. EH would no doubt argue that nothing would be handed over without safeguards. However, history is littered with broken pledges and agreements; by the time a property may need to be taken back into EH care the cost of rectification could be substantial and will there then be sufficient resources?

More alarming is the intention to devolve responsibility for listed buildings and conservation areas in Greater London to the London Boroughs. We know for a fact that district councils have a very patchy record in their stewardship: often nearby districts four have one or more full time qualified conservation officers, the remaining six have part-time staff or an occasional consultancy arrangement through a building preservation trust. Those in the conservation/heritage field outside London consider the independent role of the London Division to be the exemplar. The uneven, often non-existent, protection of listed buildings and conservation areas outside London causes constant despair for many kindred societies.

The distancing of control of historic building and conservation area issues covered under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 from local planning authority jurisdiction removes two potential areas of dispute and damage from the planning process. Firstly, applicants are not in any doubt about the independence of advice being given and, secondly, there is no temptation on the part of the authority to exert a possibly

partisan influence. We have heard of an instance in a neighbouring borough where an Article 4 direction has been breached by the Council's own workman: would the planning department have had sufficient 'clout' to have had the work removed and the original elements re-instated? The answer must be a resounding 'No' but officers of the London Division of English Heritage have been able to step in and direct otherwise.

The dispersal of members of the London Division through some, if not all, of the Greater London boroughs would result in the fragmentation of a body of expertise that is probably unrivalled anywhere in the world. The loss of highly specialised knowledge, possessed individually by officers of the Division but which is at present available on a collective basis, would have the most serious repercussions on the care and maintenance of a vast range of complex and unusual buildings that are part of the heritage of London. We fear for their future and for the attraction of London as a centre of tourism if they are not absolutely secure in the safekeeping of a body of national repute and their statutory 'guardian'.

We are frankly astonished at the proposals for the London Division put forward by Mr Stevens because the responsibility for historic buildings and conservation areas in Greater London is vested in the Commission (English Heritage) by virtue of the 1990 Act, following like Ministerial direction in Circular 8/87. We shall be pleased to learn, therefore, that you have no proposals for amending the Act in any way that will diminish that responsibility.

On one other point we have no particular objection to make, and that is to the privatisation of the building team. Here again there is a wealth of expertise that should not be dispersed but, given that the team can be kept together, we see no reason why its skills should not be made available as widely as possible.

Yours truly,

BILL TYLER (Vice President)

cc The Rt Hon Gerald Kaufman MP - Chairman, Select Committee on Heritage
Mr Hartley Booth MP I Mr Sydney Chapman MP / Mr John Marshall MP

Mr Chapman (the only architect MP) responded immediately to say that he had already made representations about the proposals for London's listed buildings.

We have received since a reply direct from the Department and, more recently, Mr Marshall has sent us a copy of correspondence from Mr Robert Key, Under Secretary of State, in which he hopes to allay our concerns. He explains that negotiations over arrangements for a very limited number of properties to become the responsibility of local authorities or trusts will take time and EH will need to be assured that they can be properly

safeguarded. He states that there is absolutely no intention for Kenwood House to be other than retained by EH. Mr Key hopes that this month should see a consultation paper being issued on heritage in general and the intended arrangements for listed buildings in London, this in the light of consultations with Boroughs. On the direct labour force, he sees no reason why it should continue to be run by EH because there is no compelling reason for it to remain within the public sector.

So widespread is the concern about the future of the London Division of EH (twenty three out of twenty six boroughs that have so far responded and over eighty London amenity societies have objected to the proposals) that The London Forum held a meeting to discuss the issues in The Grand Committee Room of the Houses of Parliament on 22 March, chaired by Lord Crathorne, Chairman of the Georgian Group and Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary Arts and Heritage Group. Dorothy Fox and Bill Williams attended on behalf of The Finchley Society and heard main contributions from Bill Tyler for the London Forum, Jennifer Page - Chief Executive of English Heritage, Nicholas Long for the Committee for the Future of London's Architectural Heritage, Jon Finney for London Boroughs' conservation officers and Mark Fisher MP. The meeting unanimously approved a resolution seeking the strengthening of resources and policies in the London boroughs and the retention of a London-wide statutory conservation body, condemning the loss of experienced EH staff and calling on the Department of National Heritage and the Commissioners of English Heritage to preserve the resources and functions of the London Region. We reproduce the text of Bill's contribution:

English Heritage Meeting - 22.3.93 Bill Tyler's speaking notes

I note that only two member societies of the London Forum are preservation societies - The Forum and its constituent members are not 'NIMBYs' except in some special interest groupings. Change is by no means bad and very often is to be welcomed but we are all opposed to change which is ill conceived, penny-pinching and will leave our environment the poorer.

The names of most of our member societies derive from the village settlements that have coalesced into the great urban area of London, a drawing together that has spanned many centuries and recognised today in a federation such as the London Forum. The present day London boroughs are recent history - the result of demographic and economic line drawing and not a little gerrymandering!

We know that over seventy member societies have written to English Heritage, and to the Department of National Heritage and their Members of Parliament in protest at proposals to devolve a substantial part of the responsibilities of the London Division of English Heritage to the London Boroughs. London's listed buildings represent the growth and history of the metropolitan area, spanning borough boundaries. So do conservation areas, where village or suburb may long pre-date convenient and transitory administrative packaging.

London's status as a city, indeed its efforts to retain its role as a world city, demand that its historic fabric is treated as a whole and that there

is a uniform standard of approach towards listed buildings and conservation areas across all the boroughs and the City. This cannot be achieved by local planning authorities individually; there needs to be a centre of excellence which can independently safeguard London's rich architectural heritage, where multi-disciplinary professional skills (architects, surveyors, engineers, historians, archaeologists, researchers, archivists, photographers) contribute to a holistic approach to the safeguarding of buildings and conservation areas. No single borough can provide such a skill base, with the career structure and back-up resources that are needed.

In the current issue of 'Context', the journal of the Association of Conservation Officers, John Earl, who worked for the LCC and GLC and left the London Division in 1986 to become Director of the Theatres Trust, has contributed an article among several describing life 'over the wall'. In it he writes of what he misses: "The 'open door' organisation of my old office meant that I had - as everyone else had - immediate daily access to the advice and support of historians, recorders, archaeologists, conservation architects and surveyors, experts on conservation law, in fact a huge fund of experience and nearly every kind of skill I might need to deal with the problems landing on my desk. I miss having an excellent specialised library a few yards away and a massive archive of photographs and record drawings on the premises."

I know from my own experience that the lack of immediately available support expertise such as John Earl spells out is hugely expensive of time. In Hertfordshire, the rump of the old County conservation team provides a limited service and arranges occasional seminars and quarterly meetings for districts' conservation staff. But it is not nearly enough; the day-to-day interchange of in-house knowledge and expertise is of immense value in making the correct decision and making it quickly. The proposals for devolvement of responsibility for Grade II buildings to the boroughs, with EH central back-up resources remotely situated from the case officer's workplace, in many instances would needlessly extend the time taken to fully consider an application for listed building consent or result in inadequate research and consultation diminishing the quality of decision-making.

The conflicting interests of local authorities, such as environmental health, safety, building control and estate management, may generate requirements utterly antithetical to the very objectives of a conservation team. In this, the powers and special responsibilities of the London Division of English Heritage are the exemplar. We all, or at least those of us 'on the ground', constantly have to resist the efforts of politicians and developers who wish to see cherished schemes implemented at the expense of important local and national features of architectural and historic interest. Traffic schemes, leisure centres, supermarkets, are the current coinage of urban regeneration likely to tear the hearts out of our historic areas. Councils often see their duty as that of maximising rate income - no bad thing perhaps but frequently inimical to sensible conservation of worthwhile buildings and localities. The independence of EH, uncompromised by taint of 'approval' of the particular council's conservation expertise, is of prime importance in safeguarding our built heritage.

The Forum, launched by the Civic Trust in 1988, is one of the very few democratically chosen organisations now representing London-wide opinion and the only one in the field of the built environment. Our members know what goes on in their local councils - they are in constant touch with councillors and officers -and are the eyes and ears of London. In Haringey, for instance, the council started installing modem windows in its own properties protected by an Article 4 direction. What chance would the authority's own conservation officer have in reversing such desecration?

From personal experience of over twenty five years working on listed buildings in London I know the value of the independence of the present London Division and its previous incarnation within the GLC. Over ambitious client demands would be firmly resisted even where the borough was perhaps compliant or my client would not lodge an appeal because of the standing of the London Division. In some cases support was forthcoming for proposals that the Borough's officers had been minded to reject.

I can disabuse those in English Heritage who hold the notion that what works in the rest of the country should work for London. The fact is that in very many boroughs and districts protection of historic buildings and conservation areas is NOT working. Contrast two districts in Hertfordshire: one has 2874 listed buildings and 42 conservation areas administered at present by three full and one part time conservation officers; the other has 881 listed buildings and 24 conservation areas with qualified conservation expertise provided just one half day per week by an outside consultant through a scheme funded by the County Council. Other districts with fewer buildings and conservation areas rely on development control staff and occasional county support staff.

It is unacceptable for the care of historic buildings and conservation areas to be subject to the vagaries of political and financial expediency. In London such buildings and areas are woven into the fabric of the whole urban area; responsibility for their well-being must not be hived off to a rag-bag collection of boroughs which, overwhelmingly, have no inclination to take on a role which they, and we, know can only be effectively carried out by the London Division of English Heritage.

Finally, from the end of this month, because of financial constraints, my post as Conservation Officer at Hertsmere is reduced from full time to three days per week, a precursor of what would happen in London.

FINCHLEY 100 YEARS AGO

Denys Pegg has sent in some extracts from the January to June 1893 editions of 'The Barnet Times and Finchley Telegraph' which reveal that some things have not changed.

* On 2nd June the editor declared "Something needs to be done to put a stop to stone throwing at trains. Last week several trains were struck including the window of a guard brake at East Finchley"

* It was reported that on 19th May about 40 Finchley and Friern Barnet residents appeared in court and were fined for keeping dogs without licenses.

* One of those present at a meeting of the Finchley Local Board in May 1893, a Mr. F. C. Stockman, had the interesting title 'Inspector of Nuisances'.

* An end of column two line advertisement -
To darken grey hair: Lockyer's Sulphur Hair Restorer is the quickest, best, safest and cheapest. Large bottles 1s 6d. everywhere.

* A small display advertisement -
B. TEW, Seedsman, North Finchley. Collection of kitchen garden seeds for one year's supply from 5s. Collection of flower seeds from 1s. Carriage paid.
"My seeds are tested in my greenhouse".

Denys has told us that Alan Tew, a former Treasurer of The Finchley Society reports that Ben Tew, his great grandfather died in 1921. At one stage the shop was in the High Road, near Sainsbury's present site and the nurseries were in Torrington Park and later at Whetstone.

In the edition for 2nd June the editor looked into the future.

* The old inhabitants will hardly recognise the place of their youth. The Great Eastern Railway will have entered into active competition with the Great Northern Railway. The journey to the office will be greatly accelerated and the cost of a 'season' considerably reduced. Mechanically propelled tramcars will be constantly plying between the Archway Tavern and Barnet. The dwellers in private streets will have their faces wreathed in smiles as they wend their way to the railway stations, their highly polished boots unsullied by traversing the smoothly paved roads where mud is non-existent.

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