

## **The Finchley Society Annual Report 2008-2009**

Our Annual Report has again changed its format and its focus. The first few paragraphs represent an overview of our work and aspirations. They are followed by reports from the committees that, year in and out, carry on the involvement of the Society in various aspects of the local environment.

One phrase that will be increasingly used now and in the future is 'public benefit'. The Society is obliged to consider all its activities in terms of benefit to the general public. This really does mean that our objectives and our actions should benefit everyone in the community and not just those who happen to pay a subscription to the Society. We do think that we have been working for the greater good ever since we adopted the war-cry of "Conserve, Enhance, Inform and Educate" way back in 1971.

However, we can do more. We set up a Working Party last year to suggest ways in which Public Benefit could be better served. Its report has been under active review since the end of last year and recommendations are being gradually discussed and adopted.

The Society is operating against a background of increasing costs and a diminishing membership. We mention elsewhere our determination to maintain the fabric of the Society and its core activities but the membership can contribute in several ways:

- By maintaining their support for the Society through renewed membership
- By recruiting new members
- By suggesting and participating in campaigns
- By joining one of our working committees- all of them benefit from new blood and new ideas.

### **Administration Committee**

The Committee felt very keenly the loss of Robert Winton who died in February 2009. He had been Secretary since 1995. He was an incredibly efficient Secretary who had a knack of foreseeing events and possible problems, as well as dealing with any unexpected eventually that arose. He had retired from the Committee in only in October 2008.

At the end of the September meeting David Smith stood down as Chairman of the Committee, but remained a member. Barbara Warren took over as Chair at the November meeting. We thank them both for their commitment to the Society.

Dr Kiran Singh has taken over the post of Secretary of the Finchley Society from Robert and Mollie Harris that of Treasurer from Aziz Jetha. We thank him for his level headed contribution to our discussions.

We were very pleased when, in 2008, Major Paddy O'Brien accepted our invitation to become the Patron of the Society. We appreciate the keen interest he takes in our work.

Our thanks to Sakina Jetha for the excellent work she does in organizing our yearly programme of speakers for the monthly meetings. This is not an easy task when dealing with people who are sometimes tardy in replying or change their minds. She has managed to put together a really interesting series of talks.

The Committee has overseen the successful redesign of our letterhead and the new format for the Newsletter, the first of which came out in September 08 and which is now issued every two months. We thank all concerned in its production and distribution.

Tony Roberts and Robert Winton very generously contributed towards a DLP projector and Stuart Baines( who has been transcribing the interviews Robert made on cassettes into printed copies) generously added his old computer. The equipment is now available should any visiting speakers need to use it.

We thank Tony Roberts for his work as Membership Secretary and for running our Website. The rent for the Archive room was massively increased leading to fears we might not be able to stay in Avenue House, so we researched alternative storage space, none of which were suitable. Finally we decided, having received generous anonymous gifts, that we would stay in Avenue House for the present. Peter Marsh has organized the '100 Club' at £12 a go to raise funds for the rent. A select group of members including Barbara and Derek Warren, Margaret Cullen, Jane Mitchell and Maggie Ferguson continue to sort out the Archive material. Denys Pegg bequeathed some books, pictures, papers and maps to the collection.

Following our installation of the La Délivrance Board in 2007, we are working towards putting one up at St Mary's Parish church in Hendon Lane.

Our book 'Finchley Remembered' continues to sell well thanks to the work of Guy and Adele Nevill.

We had a very enjoyable Annual Dinner at the South Herts Golf Club in July and a very pleasant Christmas Party. It was good to have time to talk to one another.

Maggie Ferguson, Secretary

### **Planning Committee**

Several large redevelopment projects have concentrated our minds on the future shape of Finchley. Two of these projects are 931 High Road (the Police Depot) and the old Furnitureland site. Plans for both sites include retail space and housing.

Proposals for Brent Cross/Cricklewood Sidings, which are outside of our direct area of interest, will have a major impact on our small town centres. It's amazing how few people know that a whole new town and business district are planned on their doorstep at this site. Even without the current economic downturn such a large development is bound to affect our local town centres. Of more concern to us is that large developments like 931 High Road and Furnitureland, both on the northern edge of North Finchley town centre, are being considered separately. Retail space within these two sites will tend to draw custom away from North Finchley town centre. Meanwhile a 'town centre strategy' is being developed for North Finchley.

In 2008 we reported our concerns regarding a perceived lack of involvement by Barnet Council with Civic Societies. It will therefore come as no surprise to hear that Civic Societies were

specifically not invited to attend the research/consultation process for the North Finchley Town Centre Strategy process. By the time we get a chance to comment the proposals will have gone to cabinet for approval and very few changes take place afterward.

On the local front there have been some notable successes. Grove Lodge in Regents Park Road has finally been restored to its original glory. There were a number of houses in Ballards Lane during the 18th and late 19th century. Of these only the 18th century Cornwall House in Cornwall Avenue, and Grove Lodge, in front of Pardes School, now remain. Two years ago the Society had a repair order placed on Grove Lodge but the Council's Enforcement Officers, responsible for ensuring repair orders are carried out, failed to take action. It will be a long time before the memory of seeing pigeons flying out from an upstairs window fade away!

A key Barnet Council planning policy is to protect the suburbs, which they say will attract people to buy homes in the borough of Barnet. Most new apartments are built near town centres and certainly not in suburban roads consisting mainly of traditional 'semis'. This is why we normally object to planning applications which propose to convert a semi into two or more flats. One such application was at 2 West Avenue. With supporting objections from local residents the application was refused by the Council's Planning Committee. Three councillors voted for the proposal, apparently against their own party's policy, but have so far failed to tell us why they supported the application.

Last year our senior committee member, Karl Ruge, sadly informed us that as he was approaching the second half of his tenth decade he would be standing down due to becoming less mobile. We are pleased to announce Karl is still an active committee member. No doubt equally an inspiration to his local Friern Barnet Residents' Group as he is to us.

Mike Dawson (Secretary)

### **Environment&Transport Committee**

The committee meets four times a year and whenever possible we invite an outside speaker. One subject we have tackled is recycling and Barnet appear to be coping well and are proud that they are in the forefront of all London Boroughs. Barnet held a Civic network meeting in November 2008 on "Making Barnet Greener" and the thrust was persuading organizations to promote the reduction of litter, waste prevention, recycling and energy saving. The meeting broke into syndicates making hosts of recommendations. The blue box was demonstrated as well as the green kitchen box. There is a follow up meeting this April to monitor progress.

Committee members have been circulated with details of the London Mayor's project for improving 10 parks or open spaces for which he is giving £400,000. The Dollis green walk has been short listed. Barnet organized a workshop on "Open space, sports and recreational facilities needs assessment" on the 11 March and Consultants Arup have been commissioned to undertake it. The analysis will include primary topology, physical attributes, and facilities site evaluation, accessibility and transport, environment and staff requirements. The workshop broke into

syndicates and suggestions included lack of sports facilities, disabled access, and cycle rack provisions.

On the Transport front there has been much action. John Cox of Campaign for Better Transport, London Group gave a talk to our committee about running a light railway (like DLR) from Finchley Central Station to Finchley Road, the route would take the existing track to Mill Hill East and then using the old railway track via Colindale, Hendon, Brent Cross shopping centre, Thames link to the Finchley Road. There were interesting connecting possibilities to Wembley Stadium, Park Royal and Ealing Broadway. The aim is to reduce the number of cars on the road, there are more cars in Barnet than households, and improve travel across routes that radiate out of London.

Councillor Andrew Harper addressed the committee on Challenge in Transport. With a population of 340,000 and 500 miles of road in Barnet and 47% of the population travelling by car. Barnet Cycling campaign is improving routes and working with schools on road safety. Transport for London are funding cycle racks in schools. They want to improve the street scene by removing unnecessary signs and clutter and are working on improving travel through North Finchley with the pedestrian in mind.

Harry Branchdale, Chair

### **Local History Group**

The group has had two interesting and successful meetings this year and I have responded to a number of e-mail questions from the public about Finchley's history. These have ranged from a request from New Zealand to check whether the enquirer's grandparent was on Finchley Council in the 1940's to an approach from the BBC before Remembrance Day for any further details we might hold about John Parr, the first soldier to be killed in WW1. In these two cases, as in many others, I could only refer them to the Barnet Archive as more likely to hold relevant information! However we have had a few successes in locating references to particular firms and addresses in our copies of Kelly's directories in our archives. So I think we can claim we are providing a useful, if limited, public service.

Among our members is Robert Hogan who impressively travels across London to meetings and who is researching *The Parcelling out of North Finchley Common with special reference to the Railway*. Stuart Baines is not a member but has discussed with us over the year his research on *Crime and Punishment in Jacobean Finchley* and presented a copy to our archive. Marie l'Anson has twice come and shown us the pictures for the book on Finchley she is preparing. I hope these people have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss their progress with the Group and we have certainly enjoyed their contributions and learnt some unexpected details about Finchley's past. We have quite a long and interesting list of current research projects, which are listed on the society website but some have temporarily stalled and we would very much like to see more people actively engaged on research at our meetings.

Margaret Cullen (Secretary)