



THE FINCHLEY SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT 2009-10

The Chairman's Report

It is difficult to believe that our Society has entered its fortieth year and in February next year we shall be marking the 40th anniversary of our formation. Very few of those who attended the first meeting are still with us but their vision and determination have been taken up by hundreds of people who like living in Finchley and Frien Barnet and who want to celebrate their cultural heritage and care for both the natural and man-made environment.

When you read the various sections of this Report you will see what a great amount of work goes into the meetings of our Committees during the year. It is not just a matter of taking a few decisions and writing a few letters: every meeting has to have an agenda, minutes to be taken and actions followed through. I made a simple calculation recently: the work of the Society is carried out by approximately 8% of the membership. I am told that this is quite a good figure; in many groups it is a much smaller percentage. However (and some of you will be tired of my saying this) we must not rely on 'A' or 'B' carrying on, year in, year out, with no prospect of their place being taken by younger and more energetic people. May I suggest that we try and involve at least 12% of our membership in our work during the coming year? There are opportunities to work in various committees and we are always looking for Minute Takers and Keyboard Magicians. You might even be moved to suggest a new Working Group. For example, could we find a small working group that will campaign for the correct use of "Church End Finchley" and not "Finchley Central" (unless we mean the Station)? Could we find another group to organize the occasional litter pick?

Another to look at the menace of ivy that is killing our trees? Another to review the image of Finchley seen by visitors as they drive into the area along the main arteries: it is still quite ghastly in places and we should be working with the London Borough of Barnet to improve that image. Another to keep in close scrutiny the unlawful advertising by local firms who park their rubbish trailers and other vehicles opposite the Vue Cinema complex and the La Délivrance statue in Regents Park Road. And what, incidentally, is happening at the junction of High Road and Summers Lane. Surely those banner advertisements are illegal? Yet another pleasant green corner of our area ruined by commercial activity. Bring back the Gun Station: shoot the lot of them!

If you have read this far you are probably thinking that I have strayed somewhat from my remit of reviewing the year that has just come to an end. You are right but I think it is important to be passionate sometimes and to try one's best to get things moving.

Let us go out and do something for Finchley and Friern Barnet. Get other people involved: talk to your neighbours. Talk to the people in the street. Throw away that English reserve and talk to strangers as if you have known them for a while. If you get arrested, I will come and bail you out. But do something; and tell the local papers what you think - and don't forget to tell Margaret Johnson, our Press Officer, what is going on.

Let us pat ourselves on the back for a good year of hard work and enterprise and let us look forward to the next one: an anniversary for certain but also a new book published? A statue unveiled? A tree planted? A vision realized? It is up to you.

David Smith

Administration Committee

The Administration Committee has been steadily busy throughout the year.

The Information Board for the church of St Mary-at-Finchley was successfully unveiled on July 5th, 2009 by Mayor Brian Coleman. The event was attended by about 120 people and the church provided refreshment afterwards. Our thanks to Peter Marsh for organising and designing the board and having it erected and we remember the work Robert Winton put in contacting the Rector, the Bishop of London and overseeing the various permissions that were required. The board was funded by the Peggy Wells Bequest and St Mary's Church. We are now starting to gather information for a board for the old Holy Trinity School (now the Bobath Centre) in East End Road, East Finchley

The '100 Club' set up by Peter Marsh to help with the increased rent on the Archive Room proved successful and will be carried on in 2010.

In July, Stan Spinks agreed to become our PR Officer and we have formed a Public Relations Group to oversee Publicity. They will also oversee our Public Benefits Working Group. We welcomed Margaret Johnson who has joined us as our Press Officer. David Smith, Derek Warren and Peter Marsh have been reviewing the wording on our panel at Finchley Central station, Kurt's cube and the two boards at East Finchley station. Derek has consulted with Transport for London.

A new Membership Application form was successfully designed by Tony Roberts. Tony has handed over as Membership Secretary to Stephen Yeo but is continuing to look after our Website for the present. Many thanks to both of them.

The Newsletter is proving successful and has more room for articles and comment; thanks to Rosemary Coates for her excellent work. The distribution of the Newsletter is being handed over by Helene Davidian to Martin Summers.

In November, supported by the Robert Winton Bequest, the Society published Mari

I' Anson's "Finchley Sketchbook"; it is a hugely enjoyable collection of her sketches of Finchley and its people. Congratulations to her and David Smith who organised the printing. Guy and Adele Nevill are overseeing the sales, which are going well." Finchley Remembered" continues to sell slowly. We are continuing to collect memories which we hope will be published in "Finchley Remembered" Part 2.

With other local organisations, The Finchley Society's representatives attended a meeting called by Yasmine Webb and Hugh Petrie to discuss London Borough of Barnet's plans to move their Archive Department, possibly to Hendon Library. None of us were happy about the move; Barbara Warren wrote to Councillor Ramm to express our feelings.

We have had good, interesting speakers at our meetings through the year; the programme was again expertly compiled by Sakina Jetha-thanks to her. We had a good Annual Dinner in July at the South Herts Golf Club and an enjoyable Christmas Meeting in spite of the snow.

We are starting to work towards our 40th Anniversary in February 2011. Derek Warren will be leading a committee to set up events. All suggestions welcome.

Maggie Ferguson

Planning Committee

The two large sites in North Finchley - 931 High Road and Furnitureland - are still exercising the Planning Committee. The most recent application for the Furnitureland site has been turned down as being an over-development of the site. A new application for the Police Depot site has been submitted. In particular in this case, we are pleased to note that there is a very active residents' group and we are liaising with them. We are, however, still concerned that the two applications are being considered in isolation and feel strongly that they will have such an impact on the High Road in North Finchley that they should be considered in tandem.

Mike Dawson closely monitored the development of the Finchley Memorial Hospital with particular reference to the car parking problems and the lack of a bus connection with the surrounding area. Fifteen GPs will be based at the new hospital, more than doubling visitor numbers over current levels and as it seems likely that the doctors' surgeries that are most likely to be relocated at the Hospital will come from the Ballards Lane end rather than the High Road, it is essential that a good bus service should connect with that area. Local and Regional authorities chose not to amend the application when the Society pointed out significant errors in data used to prepare the Traffic Assessment for it.

Despite opposition the Brent Cross extension was approved by Barnet Council and if it goes ahead it will undoubtedly have an effect on the Finchley shopping centres. However the Secretary of state may still call it in.

We continue to battle to prevent the suburban houses of Finchley from being turned into flats, either by conversion or redevelopment.

We have done much work on the Core Strategy and expect the dialogue with the Council on the Local Development Framework to continue during the coming year.

As requested by Barnet Council, we have commented on the proposed North Finchley Development Plan which, in principle, seemed to be fairly well thought out. We have made some suggestions and we understand these will be considered by the Council. Similarly we have been asked to comment on the Church End Development Plan and, again, our suggestions will be considered. In particular, we have strongly recommended that Church End should have a post office - possibly situated in Tesco's Store or Martin Newsagents.

There are proposals regarding Winston House and Gateway House with the possibility that they be converted into residential units and/or hotel accommodation. We are concerned about the proposed increase in height of Winston House to eight storeys to allow a hotel on the top floors.

Central House, too, might be redeveloped. All these proposals are in the very early stages of consideration and we will continue to monitor progress.

Carol Halls

Environment and Transport Committee

Members of the committee attended Barnet Council's meeting on "Open Space and Sports and Recreation Facilities" and we forwarded to them our list of Green spaces. We also supported them on their application for funding from the GLC for improving the Dollis Valley Green Walk. This was successful, but an eye will have to be kept on the work to make sure that they preserve the wild sections, especially taking care in the areas where the kingfisher nests, the frogs spawn, and the bats roost.

We give advice to our planning committee, concerning wildlife, when they are investigating proposed developments of green spaces.

Concern was raised with Transport for London when they started cutting down so many trees along the railway embankment. We checked some of the fine road trees that the council cut down to find them rotten in the middle, as predicted by a sonic instrument that they use. We are disappointed that the council has not revived the Tree Warden Scheme that they used to run, as this continues successfully in other areas in the country.

Other investigations have been made concerning aircraft noise at night, the brightness of the new street lighting, certain bus routes and stops, the so called improvements to the Henly's Corner traffic flow, the use of plastic bags and other recycling problems, Air quality, and as usual encouraging members to report potholes and other problems to Barnet's Customer Care no. 020 8359 4600, who are usually very efficient. Recyclables in Barnet are regularly monitored and they have been hitting targets claiming 99.9% and nearly all processed in the UK. On the other hand as quoted in the Country File TV programme there is a great waste of food at source (up to 50% at times) because of the standard of acceptable appearance set by supermarkets.

The Mayor of London (MOL) transport strategy is under ongoing review. Barnet Council sees cars as the dominant form of travel whereas MOL gives more specific commitment to cycling. Discussion on car use and alternative fuels followed. It was felt that we were

not developing sustainable energy sources quickly enough. Henlys Corner and Staples Corner both need money spent on them. The Campaign for Better Transport has again been highlighted in view of the major developments at Brent Cross/ Cricklewood where there is a potential of preventing a massive increase in road traffic. A letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Communities highlighting this problem.

Harry Branchdale

Public Relations Working Group

It was agreed at the inaugural meeting of the PR working group that we needed to re-examine the Society's image, particularly in the light of the working group's results on public benefit.

It was decided that the signs at Finchley Central Station and East Finchley need upgrading. This is now in progress. The price quoted for the weatherproof posters for both stations was approved by the EC.

The pros and cons of having commercial sponsors for our news letter were discussed. This matter is still in hand.

With our image polishing in mind, we are in the process of developing a "Brag Sheet" bearing in mind our proposed new Strap line, "Finchley Past, Finchley Present, Finchley Future."

The chair of each committee have been asked for input, some of which has been forthcoming.

We realised the need to encourage corporate members. All of us deal with local shopkeepers almost every day. In return for joining we will provide a prestigious window stickers indicating that they are members and interested in helping the local community, also, of course, the news letter, attendance at meetings and access to a great deal of planning experience.

We have now recruited a new member Margaret Johnson who has agreed to join our PR working group and become our Press Liaison Officer. Margaret has experience on committees and is a school governor. She is keen on this type of communication. PayPal is up and running now and at this stage has produced some modest results with the sale of books, recruiting new members and donations. Tony Roberts and I have spent a great deal of time working on establishing PayPal on our web. It will enable anybody throughout the world to buy our books, make donations and join as new members. Our working group are still working on ways of placing more emphasis on our web site. PayPal charge 1.25% to 3% of purchases for the use of this facility.

The Stats Counter is up and running. It shows the number of hits we have on our web site per day, week or month and where in the world these hits are coming from. This service is free. I can provide these stats whenever required, perhaps for the executive and administration committee meetings. .

We as a group are making plans for the society's 40th anniversary which will be on the 11th February 2011. We will be getting input from other committees.

It has been noted on many occasions that we do not always have somebody available to meet and greet new members or visitors. We are working on appointing a Fellowship Officer whose responsibility will be to carry out this duty or ensure that there is somebody to carry out this important function.

Contact has been made with : Hendon & Finchley Times, The Archer, The Finchley Press, The Ham & High and The Finchley Arrow (online only).

Stan Spinks

The Spike Milligan Statue Fund Committee

We have continued in our efforts to raise the funds for the statue but in this cash-strapped time, we have a way to go -- approximately £23,000!

Maureen Lipman was our star at a lunch prepared by our committee members and held at our Chairman's house - an event much enjoyed by everyone who attended.

The two quiz nights during the year were well attended and, thanks to our excellent quiz masters, the evenings were considered to be very successful.

We have been fortunate to receive some donations through the year and we continue to be present at the local shows where we sell cards, t-shirts and sweaters, as well as jigsaws and donated books as well as making the public aware of the proposed statue.

The committee agreed last year that no further payments would be paid to the sculptor until we had more funds and as we felt we had not reached this situation, we have not as yet paid John Somerville any further money.

However, all is not gloom and despondency, we have a concert arranged for the 18th April with Maureen Lipman, Victoria Wood, Jane Milligan and others performing and we are hopeful that this will help swell our funds.

We will continue to hold quiz nights and man stalls and generally try to reach our target.

We are also submitting an application for a grant from the Arts Council and, if this is successful, it could make completion and positioning of the statue a realistic event in 2010.

Carol Halls

Compiled by K Singh, Hon Secretary on 10.4.2010