# Friern Barnet Newsletter

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# THE DISAPPEARING SIGN

#### by David Berguer

Life is full of coincidences. Shortly after the last Newsletter had been printed, I was interviewing Peter and Margaret Cragg who both worked in the Education Department at Friern Barnet Town Hall. I happened to mention the sign that Friern Barnet UDC had erected in Friern Barnet Lane whereupon Peter told me that he had been personally responsible for renovating and repainting the sign in 2002 and fortunately had taken a photograph of it, which he kindly lent me.

Peter reported that shortly after it had been erected, a car had hit the sign and demolished it whereupon it was placed in the car park in front of North Middlesex Golf Club where it lay for some time before disappearing. We have tried to trace its whereabouts but it seems to have vanished forever.



## **COMPUTER PROBLEMS**

#### by David Berguer

Our renowned local historian and honoured member, John Heathfield, had an unfortunate experience back in March when his computer crashed and he was in danger of losing 25 years-worth of work on local history. Fortunately he took his stricken machine to a computer shop in Hendon and they were able to retrieve some, but not all, of his files. I had been meaning to buy a backup system for my own computer for some time and had never got round to it but, with John's experience as a warning, I immediately went to the same shop and purchased an external hard drive (a Western Digital Passport Potable Hard Drive with 250gb of memory) for £109. It is a small device, no bigger than the palm of my hand and about twice as thick, and it is simplicity itself to use as it came complete with a USB cable which merely plugged into the back of my computer which immediately recognised the device and installed it automatically.

I was able to download all of my files and photographs in no time at all, merely by clicking on a folder on my PC, right clicking "Copy" and then clicking on the WD name on my E drive and then clicking on "Paste". The device did the rest, so I can now sleep relatively peacefully, safe in the knowledge that if my PC ever comes up with the dreaded message "A Fatal Error has Occurred" I will be able to retrieve all my hard work. For those of you who do not yet have a backup for your computer I urge you to think seriously about investing in one. For your information John and I dealt with Compuchange at 258 Watford Way, NW4 4UJ, telephone 020 8203 3363 who were very helpful and knowledgeable. You can also find them on their website: www.compuchange.co.uk

#### **CRICKETS STUMPED?**

#### by David Berguer

Even during the dark days of War things went along pretty much as normal in some parts of Friern Barnet, as this extract from the Council Minutes of 16 September 1943 show:

"The Sanitary Inspector reported on steps he was taking in an endeavour to abate the nuisance caused by crickets in the area of The Crescent, and having carefully considered such report the Committee are satisfied that all possible steps are being taken to assist the householders affected. A letter was submitted from Mr Hatch of No 22 The Crescent complaining bitterly of this plague of crickets and urging the Council to take immediate steps to abate the nuisance. It was resolved that Mr Hatch be informed that all possible steps are being taken in this matter, and that a copy of the Sanitary Inspector's report be furnished to him for information."

# **BEHIND THE SCENES ON CORONATION DAY**

#### by David Berguer

The Womens Voluntary Service for Civil Defence opened an office at 10 Halliwick Court Parade, Woodhouse Road on 31 October 1951 from which they coordinated their local activities, which included publishing a monthly Newsletter. Fortunately there is a file of these at the Barnet Archives and Local Studies Centre in Daws Lane, Mill Hill and I was browsing through it when I came across the following from their issue number 9:

"In response to an appeal from County Office, seven of our members volunteered for duty at Marble Arch on this great day of days. The assignment was the feeding of the Police at that part of the route. Added to their responsibility was the task of transporting two elderly residents from Friern Barnet, who had won Coronation Seats in a Welfare Services ballot.

By 6.40am all had assembled at Finchley Central Station and were soon en route for Marble Arch by way of Tottenham Court Road and Queensway. Such were the mysterious but highly efficient schemes of the Transport Board, that one had to over-run the target and then creep back on it, as if to take it unawares! Travelling was surprisingly comfortable, and despite the threatening skies everyone was in high spirits. Almost at once we found ourselves voluntary escorts for fellow passengers. First a family from Australia holding tickets for Marble Arch stands asked for guidance. Then a young lady from Borneo attached herself to us and it was estimated that the party would be fifty strong by the time we arrived. The Australian cousins were almost blood relations by the time we handed them over to the stewards and with handshakes all round, exchanged greetings and messages of goodwill.

Our post was in a huge marquee in Hyde Park and we took over from a Willesden Team and quickly found ourselves buttering rolls, serving teas, clearing tables – and introducing ourselves to the counter hands drawn from the Metropolitan Police Food Services canteen. Scouts were responsible for making the tea, fuelling the soya boilers and doing the washing up.

Throughout the morning we ministered to the "coppers", and what a grand crowd they were! Rain drenched, footsore and weary, they never failed to crack a joke or give a cheery smile. Our Centre Organiser busied herself weaving amongst them doing innumerable jobs not strictly within the terms of catering, such as sewing on medal ribbons, supplying indigestion tablets and warming to the spontaneous tributes to the WVS. Imagine our delight, too, when an Essex contingent recognised us with a cry of "Canvey – how about some hot pies?" Moments such as these make the mundane messy jobs worth every uncomfortable minute.

Loudspeakers on the route were relaying the Abbey services and occasionally one of us would slip away from the crash of china and babble of voices to stand, in comparative isolation, in the Park, and listen to the singing of the choir. Despite a preliminary warning, the firing of the guns came as a frightening, deafening shock, but also as a reminder that the climax of the Abbey service had been reached. Quietly, but with studied determination, the team began to enquire the chances of seeing the procession. The police could offer little more than helpful suggestions, but we knew how to use those. The canteen would be virtually closed by 2.30pm as all police would be on duty, and we could consider ourselves "off duty" at that time. We formed up, and made for a police controlled crossing where one of our team made her first pronouncement: "The Inspector had said we were to be given the best position possible".

We were passed along the line, the story was repeated (with suitable additions and emphasis) until we reached Marble Arch. There a CID officer suggested we stood in the angle of the actual gate through which the right flank of the procession would pass. There, behind three ranks of troops and crush barriers, were the thousands who had waited all night and throughout the cold wet morning. With the wrought-iron framework of the gates to support us, were our team, a diminutive Boy Scout from Cheshunt and the CID Officer, facing down East Carriage Drive and actually able to touch the troops as they passed. We could not believe our luck. From then on, nothing mattered. We listened to the relayed report of the procession's progress, and at last the radio control car arrived, ensuring that the way was clear. The great show was on and it was here the writer told the Centre Organiser that to describe this scene was beyond her limited powers. What words could do justice to the splendour of 27,000 troops drawn form every corner of the universe, marching in perfect rhythm and magnificent uniforms? On and on they came, helmets, bayonets and braid gleaming – on foot, on horseback, Colonial, Commonwealth and Home contingents, each getting a fresh burst of cheers and waves until we felt our lungs would burst.

Yes, we collected our winks too, our Centre Organiser's score topping the list! One of the REME boys even grinned and said "You lucky people" as he swung past us. Then when we felt the feast was almost too much and we were due for a sharp attack of visual indigestion, came the Colonial rulers (identified for us by our friendly "tec"), the Prime Ministers with Sir Winston Churchill as excited as the rest of us, the Prince and Princesses, all resplendent, and finally – surely straight from fairyland – the Queen's glass coach. It was a sheer miracle, we found that unconsciously we had reserved our biggest, most vociferous cheers for this moment. There sat the Queen, her beauty defying description and the handsome Duke opposite her. Our hearts were full. We laughed and cried and felt immeasurably proud that we were British.

Ten minutes later, back in the canteen, we resumed duty, at first a little dazed. But the inrush of some hundreds of police, eager for a hot drink before returning to their stations, brought us down to earth. For a further forty minutes we milked cups, poured tea and cleared away empties. Then with friendly farewells we gathered our chattels and trailed off for a hospitable drink organised by a thoughtful member of our team, who then drove us home.

At Finchley Central, some thirteen hours after our departure from there, we emulated the RAF and "peeled off" for our respective homes. The Coronation was over, but for us our families and our guests were waiting, and what we craved for after all the day's happenings was – a cup of tea! We had spent hours pouring, serving, being surrounded by tea, but not the kind that comes from the home pot.

At nine o'clock the Queen shamed and dispelled our weariness by her speech, delivered without a trace of fatigue. Second only to her tirelessness and energy was that of our Centre organiser who rounded off an eventful day by reporting at Friary Park and joining members who had helped there with the local celebrations. The two residents whom we had escorted to London have since visited the Centre to thank us and have promised us newspapers and milk bottle tops.

For every one of us it was an occasion never-to-be-forgotten. Neither the rain nor the intense cold caused a single moment's depression for us, or that most wonderful of all beings – the London bobby. It was a privilege to work for him and our very good CID friend!

The team representing Friern Barnet on that occasion were: Mrs O Dyke, Mrs F Davies, Mrs E Jobling, Mrs E Millikin, Mrs W Mackrill and Mrs E Constable.

## MORE ON 'THE HOLLIES'

#### by Sylvia Stilts

In my item in the January 2008 issue of the *Newsletter,* I wrongly stated that the house had been built in 1916 but I am glad to say that John Heathfield has now given me the following information to set the record straight:

The Hollies was built on the former Pond Field, owned in 1485 by Robert Fox, who lived in what is the oldest continuously inhabited building in Whetstone – 1286 High Road, Whetstone. The house eventually came to Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, whose monument dominates the churchyard at St Mary's, East Barnet. Said to be the seventh richest man in England, having made his fortune in the West Indies, he had a fabulous collection of paintings in the mansion at Oakhill and his estate, bought in 1821, ran from Chase Side, Southgate to High Road, Whetstone. He died in 1833 and his widow and sons lived there until 1857 when the estate was broken up.

The Whetstone Freehold Estate Co. bought Pond Field in 1869 and laid out Oakleigh Park Estate, the first six houses being built by 1871 (*The Hollies, Clydesdale, Strathleven, The Laurels, The Cottage, The Acorns* and *Beaufront*).

The 1871 census shows Richard Looker, Secretary to the land company living there in presumably a show house. The 1881 census shows Bowler Godbolt. Gas, sewage and water mains were installed in 1875. In 1890 the house was bought by George Ing and after his death his executors rented it out.

In the period 1935-1939 Norman Long-Brown ran it as Oakleigh Park Preparatory School and during the War it was requisitioned and used for troops from the nearby anti-aircraft gun site on the former Sweets Nursery. Friern Barnet Urban District Council compulsorily purchased the house for £4,000 in November 1948.

#### **CINEMAS UPDATE**

#### by John Heathfield

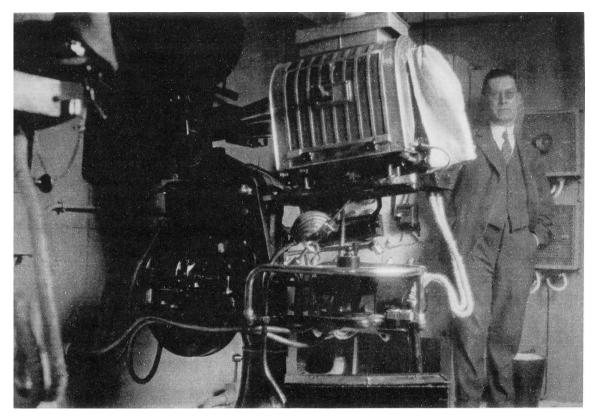
I am pleased to be able to add a little to David Berguer's splendid monograph on the history of the Gaumont cinema (*Gaumont, North Finchley: A Brief History* published by the Society at £1.50 plus postage)

Birt Acres used the Assembly Rooms in Lytton Road, Barnet as the venue for a screening of his films in spring 1896. This is probably the first public and paying showing of a cinema film. The building became successively *The Hippodrome*, the *New Barnet Kinema*, the *New Barnet Picture Theatre* and *The Regal*. Other early Barnet cinemas included the *Cinema Palace* (Dec 1912), later called the *Gaumont* in Barnet High Street and the *Odeon* at the foot of Barnet Hill (May 1935). The architect Peter Dollar, who designed Monkenhurst at Hadley Common also designed many early cinemas. He is credited with introducing the idea of a raked or sloping floor in his early cinemas.

Further south. *the Wentworth Hall* in Ballards Lane was later licensed by Harry Footring as the *Finchley Picturedrome*. The *Athenaeum* cinema was in East Finchley, near the corner of Huntingdon Road opened in 1910 but was put out of business when the *Picturedrome* (later the *Rex*, now the *Phoenix*) opened in 1912. Our own *Athenaeum* in Athenaeum Road was never used for films, although Birt Acres used the buildings for a few months as a film processing unit about 1905. The cinema was the inspiration for Mr Ashby to open the *Rink* 

cinema which led in turn to the closure of the *New Hall* which was situated at 122 High Street, North Finchley. The *Rink* used the buildings of the former ice skating rink near the *Swan & Pyramids* pub. The doorman of the Rink who used to control the queues lost his legs in the 1914-18 war and returned to his job in a wheelchair.

The projectionist at the *Rink* in 1910 was a former electrician, Herbert Hudgell, who subsequently moved as Chief Projectionist to the *Grand Hall* which opened on a vacant plot to the south of Castle Road in 1911.



Herbert Hudgell with a new sound projector in the late 1920s (John Heathfield Collection)

Incidentally Castle Road was named after the Rev E Castle who owned all the land on which the estate, including the Grand Hall, was to stand. He built the 14 shops that formed Market Parade and which included the bank on the corner. Fanny Kitson worked for the Rev Castle as a cook but in 1910 she decided to leave service and set up a business. The Rev Castle arranged to help her and number 14 Market Parade became the Cosy Corner Café selling homemade quality food. The business proved so successful that Fanny was able to buy the freehold of the vacant plot of land next to Geary's wood yard on which the Grand Hall was built. Because the cafe and the cinema were guite literally touching it was natural that the occupiers should get to know each other One thing led to another and the Kitson sisters and the Hudgell brothers eventually married each other (separately of course) about 1919. When Herbert married Fanny he became the owner of the Grand Hall. The original Grand Hall ran from West to East but in 1918 it was trebled in size and then ran from North to South, occupying the whole of the site from the High Road to Geary's. Fanny retired to bring up a family and her shop eventually became a wet fish shop. The Grand Hall was unable to meet the competition from the Gaumont and closed in 1937. The building was used during the War as an emergency furniture store and then

stood derelict until 1957 when it was demolished. The site was finally sold in 1974.

Another early cinema house was the *Stanhope*, which opened in Stanhope Road, North Finchley during the summer of 1910. It was short lived and by 1926 the building was being used as a shoe warehouse.

#### LATE PAYERS

#### by David Berguer

I have come across several instances in the Archives at Mill Hill of the Parish of Friern Barnet being upbraided for late payment of bills. The following is a particularly interesting one, not only for the exquisite politeness of its phrasing but also as a glimpse of the way that crime was dealt with in the early days of the Metropolitan Police, which had only been formed five years earlier in January 1829:

IT Ghancery Lane Lanuary 28th 1834

#### Gentlemen

It hath been represented to me by Mr Mark Walsh of Barnet, Constable, that in search after, and in apprehension of individuals charged with the murder of Edward Thompson, killed in a Fight at Whetstone in July last, he incurred some expenses for which he has not been reimbursed. I take leave to call your attention to the subject, in order that the Parish Authorities may favourably consider the same, as I conceive that the diligent execution of his Office in that respect, that he ought to be repaid such monies as it may appear to you, that he is out of pocket in consequence of his exertions on that occasion.

> I am Gentlemen Your most obt. Servant Thos Stirling Coroner for Middlesex

To the Minister, Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish of Friern Barnet

Nowadays, of course, accountants positively discourage prompt payment of bills, since delaying payment until the very last moment helps to improve an organisation's cash flow. It would appear that Friern Barnet had been operating this policy over 170 years ago. Either that or they were rather inefficient or, more likely, perpetually short of funds.

# EARLY SATNAVs

*by David Berguer* We have in our archives a *Central London Map* published by the Automobile Association in 1936 which contains the following item:

#### AA PILOTS FOR LONDON

AA Members can, by arrangement, be met on the outskirts and piloted or driven to their destination in London or suburbs for a minimum charge of 5/- plus fares, up to 4 hours, including travelling time from and to Fanum House, and thereafter at the rate of 2/- for each additional hour.

Pilots are not members of the AA staff, and it should be clearly understood that although every care is taken in the selection of drivers for this work, when so engaged they must be deemed to be in the employ of the member. No liability is accepted by the Association for any accident or other incident in which a car may be involved whilst in the charge of these drivers. Pilots do not wear a uniform, but are easily recognised by a yellow armlet worn on the right arm, inscribed "AA Pilot."

Owing to the demands for pilots it is desirable, during the summer months, to give at least one day's notice in order that the necessary arrangements may be made. Members are requested to pay pilots at the termination of the engagement.

The following are some suggested meeting points:-

NORTH	Hendon Central Station
SOUTH	Thornton Heath Pond
	Robin Hood Gate (Kingston By Pass)
SOUTH EAST	Clock Tower, Lewisham
	Cory's Filling Station, Eltham
EAST	Tottenham Hale Station
WEST	AA Telegraph Box, Hounslow
	Uxbridge Tram Terminus

Applications for Pilots should be made to Fanum House, New Coventry street, London, W1 (Telephone Whitehall 1200), and the undermentioned particulars given:

Name and address of Member Membership number Make, colour and type of Car Registration number of Car Date, time and meeting place Destination in London

I must admit I had never heard of this service and I wonder if any of our members or their parents ever took advantage of it.

#### OUR NEW PUBLICATION

Those of you who enjoyed our publication *Friern Barnet in Photographs* will be interested to learn that we have now published *Friern Barnet in Photographs Vol 2.* This is in the same A4 format as the first one and is printed on the same high quality paper. It also runs to 36 pages and it contains 74 photographs, 15 of them in full colour. Needless to say it would make an ideal present, Christmas or otherwise, as well as an excellent addition to your library! The price remains the same £5 to members (£6 to non members) plus postage of 86p. To obtain your

copies please send a cheque made payable to Friern Barnet & District Local History Society to David Berguer, 46 Raleigh Drive, Whetstone, N20 0UU.

## ROAD RAGE

#### by David Berguer

Anyone buying a copy of our new publication will see a photograph on page 10 which shows just how bad the road surface was in Friern Barnet Lane in the early part of the last century. In the 1890s it appears that some of the local roads were even worse, as this Petition shows:

"To The Secretary of the Local Government Board.

We the undersigned Ratepayers and Residents in Colney Hatch Lane and its vicinity beg respectfully but seriously to call the immediate and earnest attention of your Honourable Board to the long neglected and perilous condition of that Section of the roadway of Colney Hatch Lane from Pages Lane Northward to where it continues its course through Friern Barnet Parish from which latter point such lane was some two years back (but not till badly wanted) made up.

During the recent frosty weather and in fact in any frosty weather the portion of the lane complained of is a sheet of Ice extending for the greater part across the entire roadway by reason of its being "Concave" and not "Convex"; in other words the footpaths on either side have been made up Kerbed and cube channelled, but the latter on either side is considerably higher that the roadway and the rain and surface water (at times of great volume) instead of passing down the Gullies placed there by the respective Boards flows down and over the steep gradient roadway not only rendering it in frosty weather highly dangerous to all vehicular traffic whether our own or our servants or that of the tradespeople calling upon us but from time to time in wet weather still further "silting away" the little of the original roadway which remains, the hard core being exposed in many places while in others the holes and ruts are not only of a highly dangerous character and damaging to all vehicular traffic but "intensifying in themselves" to the further damage of the structure of the roadway.

To such a pitch did matters arise during the recent frosty weather that drivers of vehicles rather than risk their own or their horses' limbs were seen making partial use of the footpaths to the injury of your Board's property and the detriment of the rates.

Such a state of affairs is we venture to suggest all the more to be deplored when it is remembered that Colney Hatch Lane is one of the chief arteries Northward considerably used by numbers of the British Public generally and that this particular portion of your Board's District compares most unfavourably with other portions thereof legally rated and with other leading arteries out of the Metropolis and we therefore beg your indulgence and prompt attention.

Dated 28<sup>th</sup> day of December 1891."

A more recent example of "frosty weather" was captured by Karl Ruge one day in January 1963 when he bravely ventured out to discover three separate, but entirely different, means of transportation in operation in Friern Barnet Lane:



photo Karl Ruge

#### MIASMA

#### by John Heathfield

In the early nineteenth century it was thought that diseases like cholera, diphtheria and typhoid were caused by the bad smells coming from rotting sewage. There was supposed to be a substance called miasma which was invisible and highly infectious. There was an outbreak of typhoid in Whetstone in 1872, caused by polluted wells, and a cholera epidemic in Friern Barnet in 1881. The cholera was so serious in London that year that St Pancras Council put up temporary tents on the cemetery grounds at Finchley in order to accommodate evacuees.

A local doctor, Dr Bury of Whetstone, received an address of congratulation from Totteridge Council after he had traced an outbreak of cholera to faulty wells in the village and a Samuel Bull of Whetstone was fined for not closing up a well, having been ordered to do so by the Inspector of Nuisances. In 1874 an inquest found that Fred Nuttall, aged 1, who lived in Oakleigh Road, near Bawtry Road, died of congestion of the lungs caused by the state of damp in his cottage and by the poor drainage. A similar inquest was held on Miriam Adams, aged 8 months, who died from the same cause. In 1879 Friern Barnet Council ordered an investigation into drainage and sewage.

Joseph, Baron Lister (1872-1912) was a pioneer of preventative medicine, and the use of antiseptics, particularly carbolic acid. His principle that bacteria must never gain entrance to the wound is still the basis of modern surgery. He first used carbolic acid in 1865 when the post-operative death rate on his Male Accident Ward fell from 45% to 15%. The logical extension of this principle was to establish Isolation Hospitals. These were built for five beds at Kingsbury Road, Hendon, followed by a larger isolation hospital in Goldsmith Avenue and at Summers Lane, Finchley, St Stephens, Barnet and at Coppetts Wood. The latter remained until 2001, when the site was redeveloped for housing.

The second great advance was the use of chloroform as a pain killer and was advocated by James Simpson in November 1847. Queen Victoria made its use socially acceptable when she used it during the birth of her eighth child, Prince Leopold. After an operation, chloroform is quickly exhaled and the patient is usually awake in about 10-15 minutes, usually a little groggy but without nausea or vomiting.

The third advance was popularised at Barnet General Hospital. A plaque commemorates *"the pioneer work carried out in the year 1933 in connection with the administration of nitrous oxide and air or the relief of pain in childbirth"*. This was introduced by Dr H Roland Cegar (1900-1958) and Dr John Elam. Of the 300 women who used it in the early days, 270 said it gave then relief. The machine, manufactured by Elliott's of Barnet, cost just £317. Another innovation at the same time was the Barnet Venticulator successor to the Iron Lung, also made by Elliott's and on view at Barnet Museum.

# THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE

#### by David Berguer

Included in our database is a section called "Streets" which contains a separate file for each of the roads in the area (over 240 of them). Within each file are recorded details of many of the properties and also reminiscences of residents and former residents. Our eventual aim is to assemble enough information to enable us to trace the history of each individual street and property and how they developed over the years.

One important source of information is the minute books of the former Friern Barnet Urban District Council which, amongst other things, record all planning applications that came before the Council. We are in the process of extracting these and putting them into our database and some interesting patterns have emerged. Current planning applications major on extensions and loft conversions but back in the 1950s there were large numbers of planning applications for the building of garages and the conversion of spare bedrooms into bathrooms. This obviously reflected the social conditions of the time: people were beginning to become car owners for the first time and they were no longer content to put up with the discomfort of outside toilets. There were also a number of conversions of houses into self-contained flats and, in older roads such as Oakleigh Park North, Oakleigh Park South and Friern Park, many of the large houses were being demolished and flats or smaller houses were being built in their place. The increase in the number of planning applications for conservatories and "glazed lean-to's" perhaps reflected people's growing pride in their homes and the desire to get away from the austerity of the immediate post-War years.

In order to make our database as comprehensive as possible we would welcome contributions from our members so, if you have any memories of the house or street you live in or, just as importantly, if you could lend us any documents or photographs that would help us to date your property and its history, please contact David Berguer at: friernbarnethistory@hotmail.co.uk\_or by telephone at

07745 254101. Also if you would like to see if we have any information on your house or street in our files, please ask!

# SUMMER SHOW

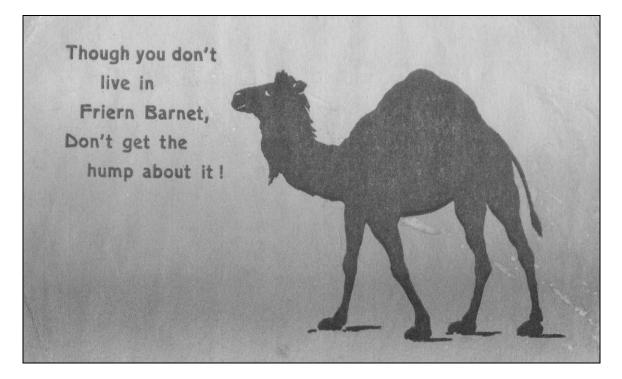
In the week preceding the Friern Barnet Summer Show on 16 and 17 August the weather forecasters were unanimously predicting heavy rain over the weekend. It was with some trepidation therefore that we set up our large gazebo and stall on the Saturday morning. Fortunately the forecasters got it wrong and there was no rain at all, although a gusty wind on the Sunday had us clinging on to the gazebo for dear life at times. The crowds turned out in force on Saturday and we did very good business, selling a large number of items. Sunday was a little quieter but there was a last minute rush of customers which kept us on our feet. The end result of all our efforts was an income of £417 which will go into our reserves.

# AGM

For those of you who were unable to attend the AGM, a copy of the Report and Accounts is enclosed with this Newsletter. As you can see our finances are quite healthy so, barring unforeseen circumstances, we do not plan to raise the subscription fees which have now remained unchanged since 2005.

# POSTSCRIPT

After his talk to us on 25 June on the postcard artist Cynicus (whose real name was Martin Anderson), Hugh Garnsworthy presented us with a copy of a postcard by Cynicus that he had recently bought. In the early 1900s this type of card was very popular and they would be sold throughout the country, with the name of the town or city being changed accordingly:



# Friern Barnet & District Local History Society ©

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