

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## **THE RUSSELL EAGLES**

*by Brian Lee*

I learnt to ride a bike at the Manor Drive Sunday School, or rather, that was where I was given the opportunity to learn. There were two Sunday School sessions and my pals and I went early to the second session so that we could ride the bikes left outside by the younger children attending the first session. We had no bikes of our own, so we made the most of this 'loan' system. When I first learnt to ride, a pal used to hold the back to steady me and I only knew when I was on my own when I looked round and nobody was there. I was about 9 or 10 years old, so it would have been around 1948.

I came from a family of six boys and lived on the Council estate behind the shops in Oakleigh Road so there was no way I would ever be given a bike of my own and I was much older before I could save up the money to buy one. One of my elder brothers had a bike and he used to undo the nuts on the wheels to stop me riding it. It didn't stop me of course and one day the wheel came off as I was riding down the street.

Being a resourceful lad I collected bits and pieces from waste ground or parts that people had thrown away and, without having to buy anything I was able to make my own bike by the time I was twelve. My pals and I used to cycle as far afield as South Mimms, all on our DIY bikes. I can remember coming through



Barnet on one occasion and having great trouble peddling, the wheel was too tight and needed some adjustment. I used to keep my bike in the back garden - we didn't have a shed.

One of the things we lads did on a Sunday, having outgrown Sunday school, was to go to Morley's Field in Russell Lane to watch the cycle speedway. The area, near *The Cavalier* public house, now has a petrol station and housing on it. In those days there was a proper flat oval dirt track for the races; it even had starting gates. It attracted crowds of up to 50 people and once Winifred Attwell, a popular and famous pianist, came to present some prizes,

The two teams that used to race at Morley's Field were the Russell Eagles, who I used to support, and the Russell Eaglets. I was watching one week when the visiting team were a man short and the crowd was asked if anyone wanted to help out. I volunteered, so my first actual race was for the opposition. I would have been about 14 years old. After that I rode regularly for the Russell Eagles. I didn't have a speedway bike so I rode one of the team bikes. I can remember going to races at Hitchin, Edmonton, Battersea, Hoddesdon and at Finchley in the Squires Lane area.

Transport to these venues was usually provided by a local builder, Henry Wickens. The bikes would be loaded onto his open back truck and there would be planks of wood for us lads to sit on. On one occasion Mr Wickes could not take us so we had to ride the bikes to Edmonton. We didn't have brakes on the speedway bikes but if using them on ordinary roads we had to put one on in case we were stopped by the police. We took the brake off for racing then put it back on again for the ride home.

Two bikers from each team would compete in each race. As far as I can remember nobody ever paid to watch the local races but I know there was a committee that organised things. It was a very popular sport at the time and international events were held and I believe a local lad by the name of Cooper rode at international level. I went to London to watch an event; it was either at Earls Court or the Albert Hall. Local races were even covered by the local press and one reporter said I rode like a veteran. I had to ask my dad what that meant!

Most of the riders were aged from 14 to late teens and early twenties. I don't know if the sport fizzled out because the lads went off to do their National Service or work took up more of their time because, like Russell Lane, the land the tracks were on was sold off. I have always been interested in sport, and cycle speedway gave me my first opportunity to get involved.

### **DONOVAN'S DIARY**

We promised you some extracts from Donovan's Diary, which John Donovan used to circulate to members of the Committee. This one, dated 2 August 2002, should give you a flavour of John's inimitable style:

"The Crescent, which looks onto the allotments, is blessed on the western side with a long line of absolutely magnificent Plane trees. Their huge roots buckle the pavements (which the council does its best to keep flat and straight), and they aren't trimmed back as drastically as the small trees on the eastern side of the road.

Many years ago, a house on the north-western corner of The Crescent suffered severe subsidence. The house number is actually 2 Crescent Road, but the damage was at the *rear* of the house, in The Crescent. The house was repaired (with trenches filled in with concrete, no doubt) and seems to be fine now, but just a few yards from the damaged part of the house stood one of the above-mentioned, magnificent Planes. Sadly, the experts must have assumed that the tree was to blame for the subsidence, and it was cut down. All that remains of the tree is a patch of black asphalt on the pavement.

Just a little way up Glenthorne Road on the left, the last house before Holly Park Road was a shop in years gone past. A woman used to sell sweets and ice cream from the front room of the house, which had a fridge for the ices. In the 1970s, Nicola (my daughter) and her friends would go in after school and buy a selection of those awful sweets that kids loved in those days; 'Pink Shrimps' was one I recall, and liquorice bootlaces (how many of those kids could have ever seen boots that lace?). None of the sweets was more than one new (i.e. decimal) penny each.

If you stand at the width-barrier, by the junction of The Crescent and Beaconsfield Road and look along the road that dips through Bethune Park to reach Oakleigh Road North, you will be jaw-dropped at the beauty and mass of the trees that line each side of the road. It was not always thus.

In the late 1960s I used to walk to work at STC, using either that dip (or the railway field and subway) and there were no trees at all, just a wide grass verge (albeit home to a selection of grasses and wild flowers). I think there may have been just one or two trees up on the left. I well recall one spring when a long, deep trench was cut along the right-hand (eastern) verge, to take a water pipe or some such no doubt. Not long after the trench was filled in, the long 'mound' was covered in masses of Cow Parsley – a beautiful sight. I often wondered if the seeds had lain dormant, just waiting for a passing water-pipe to release them.

Any road up (as we used to say in Friern Barnet), the council came along one day and started to *plant trees* (can you imagine that happening now?). The trees have continued to grow these last thirty-odd years and I, for one, say "Three cheers" for the council (of the 1970s).

Emerging onto the western side of Oakleigh Road Sarf, from the subway that joins it to Bethune Park, and turning *left*, one walks past the long, bright yellow fence of the premises of *Fitzgerald & Burke*, builders' merchants. In the 1960s there were no railings, and the long, narrow site was a petrol station.

Should one turn *right*, one would pass a long, tall bank absolutely covered in trees and ivy. This is called *Oakleigh Road South Railway Yard*, and it stretches back towards the railway lines. This massive patch of tall trees runs south, downhill, for some hundred yards and is one of those oases of green that brighten up certain urban areas (not unlike the trees that front the golf club along Friern Barnet Lane). You will recall that I reported on Jerome K Jerome's memoirs last year, and noted how much of the local countryside had been swallowed up by housing since *his* day. At that time I wondered which of *our* patches of green would be destroyed over the next fifty years. The aforementioned two areas are likely candidates, I'll wager."

## ANCIENT HISTORY

by John Heathfield

Simon Keynes, a Cambridge don, was conducting some research in Brussels in 1992 when he discovered a group of documents relating to St Albans Abbey. These documents had been copied by a group of Jesuit scholars lead by Jean Bolland (1597-1665) and they included a grant from King Aethelred (966-1016) to St Albans Abbey of 6 “*cassatae*” (an area of land with a hedge or fence around it) in two places, comprising one at Flamstede (Flamstead, Herts) and 5 at Unaetlingaester (St Albans, Herts), together with the renewal of extensive immunities as previously granted by King Offa of Mercia (755-796). Dated 1005AD, the grant details the Abbey’s property at Barnet.

In the original, the words “of” and “on” correspond to the modern words “from” and “to”:

“On bytes stigile, of bytes stigile  
andlang paes biscopes gemare  
on wakeling mor, of tham more  
on aggengaet, of tham gaete  
on don steort  
ae braenn andlag braenoeten  
a be ham geondran saeth  
on thane sihtr of thm sihtre  
at tatehrycgs and andlandg heandunubga gemare  
on grendels gat, of gredels gate.”

A reasonable translation might be

“To Bettstyle, from Bettstyle (*now Betstyle Circus*)

Along past the bishop’s boundary to Wakeling moor

*(A moor is a low lying place, probably the open space between Friern Mount Drive and Netherlands Road)*

From that moor to Aggangate, from that gate and down the

spit of land *(Aggangate was about where Northumberland Avenue crosses the Great North Road)*

to the brent and along the banks of the brent, cross to the further bank

along the ditch at Totteridge’s end along the boundary to Grendel’s Gate”

*(about where Hendon Wood Lane meets Barnet Road at Arkley)*

A glance at any modern map will show how little the boundary has changed in a thousand years. The significance is that the boundary with the parish of St James could only exist if there were already a parish with which to have a boundary. Therefore there must have been some kind of settlement round here before 1005. The second point is that at that time the two Barnets were already separate (Friern Barnet was then called Little Barnet).

## MY LIFE AND TIMES

The following article is taken from Christ Church at Whetstone Newsletter dated 8 March 1986 and was written by Hetty Case who was born on 19 October 1898 and who died at the age of 102.

“What is life if full of care we have no time to stand and stare”

As we get older, we do stand and stare, and what do we see? Not everyday things, but things of the past. I remember I was about 4 years old when we moved from Sherwood Street to the Railway Cottages in Totteridge Station Yard. My father was a horsekeeper and there was a large stable there which held about 50 horses. It belonged to the Great Northern Railway and the horses were taken there for rest and treatment after working in the London streets. My elder brother and I spent many happy hours there, watching the horses being groomed, having poultices put on their sore feet followed by hot foot baths, and finally watching the farrier fitting them with new shoes. We used to help in the feeding, and loved turning the taps to fill the mangers with water.

We spent many happy hours in the station yard. My brother and the four children next door would watch the goods engine (we called it the shunter) come and shunt the empty trucks away and leave full ones in their place; then we would watch the unloading of coal, bricks, sand, bales of peat and sacks of food for the stables along with other goods. In the evenings when the station gate was closed, we had most wonderful games of hide-and-seek among the trucks, or building castles in the sand. We went for walks along embankment and found lots of different wild flowers which we would give to the engine drivers and guards. On one occasion a guard asked us to get him a frog – which we did, or at least my father did.

I started Sunday school when I was nearly five and I remember how large the hall seemed. The smaller children went into the small hall and were looked after by Mr Larby, the caretaker. As we got older we went into the large hall where we sat on long forms and listened to stories about missionaries and also sang hymns until just before eleven when we would enter the church for the first hymn. After the children's address and a further hymn we would all troop home. We would



*An early postcard view of the Church*

be back again at 3pm and after meeting in the large hall for the opening, we would go to our various classes which were held in curtained-off cubicles round the hall. Sunday School Anniversary was a great occasion and we all took bunches of flowers or pot plants and a special service was held in the church.

The first Sunday school treat was when we rode in Cook's (the bakers) horse-drawn wagons to Folly Farm where we played on swings and generally enjoyed ourselves. We were more than ready for the open-air tea which was set out on long trestle tables. Later on we went to outings to the seaside – Dovercourt, Herne Bay, Littlehampton, Southend. It was a wonderful piece of organisation. What excitement, counting out our spending money and planning what we would do. As we went through the country, there were the simple pleasures of looking for rabbits in the fields or trying to read the names of the stations as we sped by. We spent many happy hours by the sea and I well remember the journey home, clutching our sticks of rock and presents which were nearly always a china mug or an egg-cup.

Winter treats were different; they were held in the large hall which had been decorated. I well remember the white curtains with a green pattern on them which adorned the windows. Food was plentiful and the long trestle tables which were laden with all kinds of sandwiches and cakes. On returning home, we were given an orange, which in those days was a treat, as oranges were only available at Christmastime.

Part 2 of Hetty's memories will appear in our next *Newsletter*.

## **FRIERN BARNET REMISCENCES**

*by A E Mould*

My parents moved to Friern Barnet in 1945, although my father had spent his youth in the Borough. Before the War we lived in Wood Green and I attended Trinity Grammar School, whose well-known and formidable headmaster, Dr Emrys E Jones, lived in a house with a lych gate - number 191 Friern Barnet Lane, opposite the golf course. Another notable resident was James Grout, the TV actor, who attended Trinity School but was a year ahead of me. His parents had a shoe shop at 227 Woodhouse Road which then had allotments opposite. James has retired to live in a village near Marlborough, Wiltshire. Adjacent to the north side of the *Orange Tree* was a small yard and a two storey brick building which was used as a vets' premises.

We lived in a three storey terraced house, 151 Friern Park, opposite the end of Torrington Park. Father's parents already lived in the top floor flat and my father bought the house from a Mrs Maud Angell, a professional watercolour artist who subsequently went to live in a home at the North Finchley end of the road.

My grandfather, E H Mould, lived for many years at 32 Parkhurst Road. He was an accountant and a tea broker in the City. I presume he chose the location because it was within easy walking distance of New Southgate railway station, and hence the City. He died in 1950 and is buried in the churchyard of St James the Great, Friern Barnet Lane, and so is his daughter Eva Mason, who died in 1928 in childbirth.

My father, Edward G Mould, was born in Fairfield Road, Islington in 1902. At that time Islington was a prosperous middle class area of large houses within easy

reach of the City. The downside was the reported danger of infection from the drains. Perhaps that was one reason why the family moved out to high ground in Friern Barnet. There were eight children in the family, but two of them died at an early age. Dad attended Friern Barnet Grammar School, which was then newly established and sited opposite St John the Evangelist in Friern Barnet Road and dad was a choirboy there. The school was founded by the Reverend Prebendary Hall in 1884 and in dad's time the Rector was Edward Gage Hall. He held the living for thirty eight years.

A tram route rang along Friern Barnet Road and the rails needed to be cleaned out periodically. Dad was reported to have let fly with his catapult at the maintenance men bending over the rails. Fortunately, Dad was a cross-country runner and had won prizes for running!

When he was a boy, Dad used to spend time at 'The Boys' Own Farm' which was located somewhere between East Barnet and Oakleigh Road. Later, he worked for a time at the Royal Empire Society in Northumberland Avenue. He travelled to the West End in company with Vic Gatti and another young man, Cyril Fletcher, who organised concerts at Friern Barnet Grammar School. Later Cyril became famous as a comedian on the radio and was one of the first comedians to appear on television at Alexandra Palace in 1936. Cyril died on 2 January 2005, aged 91. Vic stayed at the Empire Society (eventually the Commonwealth Society) and became its secretary. Before the War he came to live with us at 3 The Towers, Braemar Avenue, Wood Green. He remained a single man. A school friend from Friern Barnet Grammar School days was Harold Pope, who ran *The Triumph* pub at the junction of Woodhouse Road and Summers Lane.

On 2 December 1925 Dad was issued with a certificate, stating that he had "attended a course of instruction at the British School of Motoring". That was years before driving tests became compulsory. When eventually Dad was given a driving licence it was for "All Categories". Driving licences became a legal requirement in March 1934, but were not introduced until 1935, along with provisional licences and L-plates.

I myself lived at home until marrying in 1954. I was conscripted into the army in 1947 and later trained as an architect at the Northern Polytechnic in Holloway Road.

A couple of memories of Friern Barnet are worth mentioning. One is the celebration of VJ Day in 1945, when a grandstand was erected for the purpose in Friary Park on the slope above Torrington Park. Its chest-high base was built with concrete filled sandbags, and there was a simple metal roof structure. In the nineteen fifties a large single storey ambulance depot was being built on the west side of Colney Hatch Lane, near Coppetts Wood, when a gale blew over the many still exposed steel trusses. That area was known as 'Violet Lane' at the time of the open top buses because of the nearby sewage works.

## **AA PILOTS**

Following the article in our last Newsletter (*Early Satnavs*, on page 8) we had the following from our member Gillian Lee:

"I was particularly interested in the Early Satnav's article because my father was an AA pilot. Fortunately for my family Dad wrote his life history and some of his

driving adventures were quite amusing. Bill Robbins, my Dad, was born in December 1905. His cousin taught him to drive and he described how the engine was started by turning the engine over with a long metal handle. They used to carry a brick in the car to put under the front wheel because as the car started it moved forward, so by standing by the wheel they could quickly remove the brick and they would then jump in.

Bill got his first job as a chauffeur in 1927 when he was about 22. It seems that there were many applicants for the job and Dad was chosen for his neat handwriting because when not driving he was able to help out in the office. His future boss omitted to ask if Bill had a driving licence, which he didn't. Before reporting for work on the Monday morning Bill's cousin took him through the rudiments of using a clutch and gear lever. In his first break at work he drove to County Hall, filled in a form, paid five shillings and received his first licence; there were no tests in those days. Driving licences had to be renewed annually and Dad kept all his, so we have a record of where he was living throughout the nineteen twenties to the seventies.

Bill later became an AA pilot and he wrote "We were not paid wages by the AA but paid a pre-set fee by the hirer. It turned out quite profitable, as on top of our fees we received tips and our expenses, like fares to and from our appointed destinations. Big companies with lots of cars and chauffeurs would engage you for six weeks at a time whilst their regular men were on summer holidays." Dad went on to drive many different vehicles including what he called 'supply wagons' in North Africa during the War."

## **LADIES I HAVE KNOWN**

*by Karl Ruge*

The article on the Coronation (Behind the Scenes on Coronation Day) on page 2 of the last *Newsletter* mentioned the name of Ena Constable. Ena was at one time Chairman of the Friern Barnet Urban District Council and was occasionally referred to as "Mrs Friern Barnet". I have vivid memories of her right into her last lonely days. Another name was Olive Dyke who ran a group of volunteers from a room named after her in Friern Hospital. The volunteers "entertained" the inmates in a number of wards, including locked ones, and organised Christmas Fairs and other activities in the hall for those patients who were free to move around (and who often irritated residents in nearby streets by their weird behaviour). Mrs Ruge was a regular member of Olive's band, as were Doreen Aubry and Anne Busby, with both of whom I am in regular contact; and their husbands Ken and Ron got involved, as did I. Anne Busby is now involved with Chipping Barnet's Parish church where we met earlier this September when the church and spire were open to the public.

Olive Dyke's son, John, who is a member of the Society, took over from me in the 90s as treasurer of Barnet's Victim Support. This was originally set up by three volunteers in 1981, among them Barbara Johnson as Co-ordinator and Rachel Last as her assistant. The then Senior Probation Officer, Bunny Wayne, chaired it. I heard of it through a lecture to the JPs at Highgate and I joined the group in, I believe, 1983, as Treasurer. In 1992 the Committee consisted of Mrs Betty Killip in the chair, whom I persuaded to join in 1986 whilst we had both retired from the Bench. She then started to run the bi-monthly luncheons of the ex-Magistrates, who formerly met in a Highgate pub, in her own home, until her death; these meetings continue under the title "Betty's Sessions" in the home of

another ex-magistrate Jim Wilkins in Barnet – he is a leading member of the Friern Barnet Bowlers in Friary Park, together with another ex-JP, Baden Pearce, who also came from the Highgate Bench.

The 1992 Victim Support committee comprised, apart from Betty Killip and me, Gerry Garside, Pat Bacchus and Janet Fuller, who all joined the Friends of Victim Support when we needed fundraising activities. The Friends' Chairman was Patricia Picken and the Secretary Brian Hooker, and others closely involved were David Cartmell (one-time Chairman), Tim Edwards, Diana Furley, Michael Kirby, Joan Hale, Angela Nicholas, Jean Stubbs and Peter Cragg. With most of these I am still in touch; Tim Edwards, a former headmaster of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, now lives in St Albans where he is closely involved with the local Victim Support. My daughter Yvonne and I had a delightful lunch in their home recently, from where you have a grand view over the cathedral and, in turn, they come for occasional meals with us.

Some of the people involved in the 1981 set-up of Victim Support Barnet were Marlene Newton, Sheila Marchant, Anne Carden, Betty Craymer, D Collins and Mary Bruce-Clayton. And among the Friends are Ross and Betty Crawford, Vera Hooker and Marianne and Tont Yianni and, of course, Yvonne.

### **QUEEN'S PARADE: A REMINISCENCE**

*by Pamela Ellis*

The horizons of childhood are very limited. Growing up in Friern Barnet in the 1950s and early 60s, I knew 'the shops', 'the library' and 'the park' – respectively Queen's Parade, Friern Barnet Library and, of course, Friary Park. Any other shops, library or park had to be specified, even the shops just beyond the junction on Woodhouse Road. Living as I did in Hollyfield Avenue, the shops on Queen's Parade were very local indeed; even if not 'going to the shops', I would pass them every day on my way to and from the bus that took me to school in North Finchley. At a distance of more than forty years I can recall most of them quite clearly.

Usually referred to as 'the corner shop' for obvious reasons, Madame Flora's stood on the corner of my street and Friern Barnet Road. It was a glorious emporium of a shop, the dark interior a cornucopia of women's and children's clothes, shoes, underwear and haberdashery. Here I was bought lace-up shoes in winter and sandals in summer, in a tiny back room crammed from floor to ceiling with shoe boxes. Dresses and other garments hung from the shadowy ceiling in the main shop, and there was a glass-topped counter displaying ribbons, braid, hair-slides, buttons and other 'notions'. In the window there was often an intriguing (to a child) display of complicated-looking pink corsetry.

Next to Madame Flora's was a shop that seemed to change a lot – I can remember it selling wools at one time and mirrors at another. Then there was Etties the newsagents, where we also bought sweets, ice-cream, my parents' cigarettes, stationery and, in season, fireworks, laid out individually on an open table for all to handle: jumping jacks, Roman candles, Catherine wheels – a health and safety nightmare! It was Etties that gave me my first job, aged 13, as a paper girl, delivering the papers before breakfast seven days a week for the princely sum of 9/- (45p), later raised to 10/- (50p). This was not as mean as it sounds, as with 10/- I could have bought twenty Mars bars, had I wished.

Beyond the newsagents was the grocer's shop, Goble's. In the early days it still sold groceries out of sacks and boxes: biscuits came in big square tins, rice, flour and other dry goods in sacks and butter and cheese in huge slabs that were cut to the customer's requirements. Bacon and ham were cut on a machine with a fearsome-looking rotating blade. Shopping here was a slow business, with each customer being served individually and each item weighed or measured by the shop assistant. I had plenty of time to explore the contents of the sacks and boxes while my mother went through her shopping list! For some reason we rarely used Wooding's greengrocery next door, my mother preferring the greengrocer's on Halliwick Court Parade. The nearby 'oil shop', as we knew it, was another fascinating shop, an ironmonger's, selling utensils, nails, screws, household and garden tools and paraffin (hence the name).

A bit further along was a baker's shop, the name of which I can't remember, but which sold wonderful crusty rolls, squishy millefeuille cakes, sticky buns and, my favourites, chocolate truffles. Next to that at one time was Shamrock Linens, a fabric shop that later moved to one of the double shops further down the Parade. I remember this because the owner lived in our street and my mother worked there for a while. Then there was a shoemaker's that also sold leather goods and had a distinctive smell, next to the butcher's with sawdust on the floor, carcasses hanging by hooks from a rail and a scarred and bloodstained wooden block on which the butcher cut the joints to order with a huge meat cleaver. I stood outside this shop every school morning waiting for the 521/621 trolleybus, and later the 221 Routemaster, to take me to school.

The sweetshop was where my mother replenished the sweetie tin each week. It was also where I acquired my first pet, a ginger kitten that I named, appropriately, Candy. Further down, the toyshop was another attraction, and I remember laboriously saving my pocket and birthday money to buy a grey rabbit glove puppet; I think it cost 7/6d (37½p) and I called it Tut after a rabbit character in a book I was fond of. The shop also sold books, and in the days before children's paperbacks the cheapest editions were from The Children's Press with their distinctive blue dust jackets. Several of these found their way on to my bookshelves. Next to this, I think, was the chemist's, where we took our prescriptions to be dispensed and films to be processed, and where women bought face powder and lipstick. Near the end of the Parade was Express Dairies where we bought eggs, loose in a paper bag and almost always white. The occasional brown one was the cause of mild excitement. My first taste of yoghurt, a novelty at the time, was from small glass pots bought here. On the corner of Colney Hatch Lane was the florist's, where I sometimes bought my mother small bunches of anemones, all I could afford.

I have not attempted to describe all the shops on Queen's Parade, as they were in the years between 1949 and 1965. Some I have undoubtedly forgotten, but others, such as the jeweller's and the tailor's, were shops I as a child would rarely if ever have entered and therefore I have no particular memories associated with them. It would be great if someone could fill in the gaps left by my less-than-perfect memory!

**(Footnote by David Berguer.** According to *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* the shops in Queen's Parade at this time were: No 20 Flora (Draper); 21 Percy Brunswick (Wools); 22 Etties (Newsagents); 23 John Goble (Grocer); 24 F Wooding (Fruiterer); 25 Freemans (Baker); 26 Shamrock Linens; 27b F H

Eldridge (Shoe Repairs); 27a Goodman Bros (Butchers); 28a A R Barnett (Hardware); 28b Winifred Meyer (Confectioner); 28 Percy Smedley (Watchmaker); 29 F J Leaver (Draper); 30b Morgans (Tobacconist); 30 Wm Sayer (Chemist); 31 Express Dairy; 32 H Doyle (Florist); 33 David Low (Tailor); 33a (G F Dickinson (Restaurant) and 36 (Friern Barnet Garage).

## **MEMORIES OF TEACHING**

*by Phyllis Kind*

When I came to Holly Park School in 1936, it was a great change for me. Up till then I had been teaching in the Harrow district in a “centre”. That meant I had a kitchen in the playground of a school, but the girls from that school came to cook only on two days a week; on the other days I had girls from other schools – it certainly made for variety, for one school was a real country one and one of the others was very much in an industrial suburb and of course the children differed very much too, as you would imagine, in their outlook and their needs. These were seven very happy years for me.

Then I came to the hitherto unknown place called Friern Barnet – Holly Park – the only secondary modern school in the area. There the kitchen was a large upstairs room with a barn-like roof, next to the Science room. There were about ten members of staff beside the Headmaster, Mr Gelding.

I had only been there two and a half years when the war broke out. The school was closed to the children for some weeks, but the staff had to report each day. Then the school re opened – some children coming in the morning and others in the afternoon (too many people in the building at one time were not allowed). The trenches or shelters then appeared; enormous drain pipes sunk into the ground where the tennis courts had been and these pipes covered with layers of earth – horrid damp, dark refuges where we sat on benches by the hour, once the air raid alert had sounded eighty children and their teachers to each shelter. I well remember reading *The Wind in the Willows* and *Huckleberry Finn* to the children by the light of a lantern.

When we did have time to cook in the kitchen in those days we had to use dried egg and milk and we were strictly rationed in fat, sugar, etc. It was very hard work finding dishes we could cook and yet we kept going and I don't remember having to call a halt, but I do remember doing a lot of needlework then, using up every square inch of material because precious clothing coupons had to be given up for garments made in the school. Does anyone else remember those dark green PE bloomers made of heavy twill material? Or the hundreds of knitted mittens, socks and Balaclava helmets we made for the forces – partly to help and partly because the wool was provided by the Government.

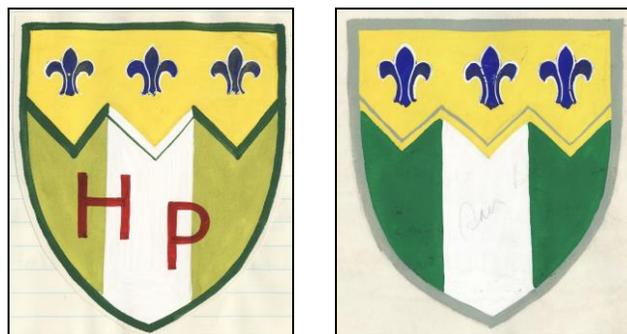
The kitchen at Holly Park was a very large room with two shallow sinks side by side in one corner. This meant water had to be carried all over the room and we had to wash up at our tables. These were plain white wood and always needed scrubbing after use. There was no washing machine and tea towels had to be washed by hand after every lesson. After the War, things gradually got back to normal and school life resumed its usual routine. We were very cramped for room, so the air raid shelters were bulldozed and the classrooms were erected on the site. By now there were more than 10 members of staff. Mr Golding had retired and Mr Grieves had taken his place and there was talk of a new school. This talk went on for a long time – years – and then one day plans were on view.

When I came back in 1961 from a year's exchange scheme in Australia I was met by Mr Grieves on the steps of the new school, a very impressive building, and it was officially opened in June of that year. What a change! Two beautiful kitchens instead of one, both fitted with modern equipment and a joy to work in. So we have gone on for eight years, the work changing with the times – convenience foods being used which were not on the market in 1936 – washing machines, spin driers, refrigerators, new up-to-date cooking stoves, both gas and electric, new brands of food, and soaps and detergents to be tried and new working surfaces making less routine drudgery.

I suppose the housewife's lot has changed more in these years during which I have been teaching housecraft than in any other time in history. Earthenware sinks have given way to stainless steel, enamel bowls and zinc basins to ones made of plastic and polythene, flat irons, heated on a terrifying piece of gas equipment we called *Puffing Billy*, to electrically heated irons, and drying cabinets instead of clothes racks pulled up near the ceiling; pretty gingham aprons instead of plain white ones which were covered by brown Hessian ones for dirty work. What a change!

The above is an extract from a scrapbook kept by Phyllis Kind between 1966-69 when she was domestic science teacher at Friern Barnet County School and also deputy head. Phyllis started teaching domestic science at Holly Park from May 1936 until 1960, when she went to Australia on an exchange scheme for a year. When she returned in 1961 she was transferred to Friern Barnet County School and she taught there until her retirement in August 1969. Phyllis used to live in Ashurst Road and she died on 8 August 2008, aged 100.

The scrapbook, which contains several photographs of staff and pupils in the years 1966-69, was kindly donated to the Society by Sally Malyon who came across us via our website. If any of you remember Miss Kind, or you have any memories of Friern Barnet County, we would like to hear from you and if you would like to her see photographs please let us know.



*Hand drawn badges of Holly Park and Friern Barnet County Schools from Miss Kind's scrapbook*

**Friern Barnet & District  
Local History Society** ©

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