

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## **NORTHMET AT NEW SOUTHGATE**

*by David Berguer*

I had often been puzzled by the reference in *Kelly's Directory of Finchley & Friern Barnet* to "North Metropolitan Electric Power Supply Co (Outside Dept.)" at numbers 13 and 15 Friern Barnet Road. What was an Outside Dept.? I was browsing through a copy of one of the books in our archives when all became clear. In *Northmet* by N C Friswell, the author, who worked there for twenty years, explained what it was all about:

"The Meter Testing Laboratories (MTL) was on the New Southgate site. Previously in the basement of 15 Friern Barnet Road, a Victorian company-owned house, a new test station was erected at the rear in 1926. In 1937 a major rebuilding took place. No 15 was replaced by a new three storey building specially constructed to provide a facility which would comply with the new Electricity Supply (Meters) Act 1936.

There were test rooms on the ground floor and a standards laboratory and workshops on the first floor. The clerical and administrative offices were at the front of the building. Meters were returned from the District undertakings to MTL when their certification expired after 5 years (initially, as this was later extended to 25 years). They were cleaned and repaired as necessary before being tested in accordance with the legislation. At times MTL was severely stretched, for example on the occasion of the East Coast floods of 1953.

Meters had to be found for whole areas which had suffered flood damage and MTL had to institute overtime and weekend working. Crates of meters would come into the yard, some meters half full of dirty water, others caked in mud and rust.

Over the years, the testing regime and the equipment used changed. In the





*Number 15 Friern Barnet Road in Northmet days  
(photo Barnet Local Studies & Archives)*

earlier days it meant the tester having to maintain voltage and current settings while timing a set number of revolutions of the meter disc. Often 'boys', were used to control the settings. In later years more automatic equipment was installed. In the late 1950s a new building was constructed on the site of the old vehicle section and this housed a Single Phase Laboratory, the Standards Laboratory, the Polyphase Laboratory on the ground floor, and the workshops. The new test benches were of the latest design and the lab was considered the best in the country.

The Standards Laboratory were also responsible for the calibration of various instruments used by Northmet engineers including stop watches, voltmeters, ammeters, wattmeters and recording instruments. They also carried out high voltage tests on samples of transformer oil, rubber gloves and rubber mats.

Direct current meters were never subject to the same certification procedures and, as DC supplies died out, these meters were treated as special repair and

testing jobs. Some incorporated mercury in their construction and there were special facilities for dealing with this (which were a long way short of modern Health & Safety requirements).

The MTL also had their own outside engineers who checked industrial metering installations on site and investigated those metering disputes which could not be settled at district level.

After nationalisation, meter testing was rationalized leaving Eastern Electricity Board stations only at New Southgate and Norwich. Eventually New Southgate was closed by the privatised company in 1999 because, by then, it was cheaper to buy new meters than reclaim and retest old ones.”

Older members will remember Northmet, their distinctive logo and their showrooms at 291 Colney Hatch Lane and 1322 High Road, Whetstone. The Northmet Company was formed in 1899 and it supplied electricity to a wide area of north-west London and Hertfordshire. One of their early successes was the supply of electricity to power the trams of the Metropolitan Electric Traction (MET) network. In fact, it was a positive asset to them as the trams ran throughout the day, thus ensuring a steady demand for electricity – few houses had electricity in the early 1900s and those that did only used it for lighting.

### **A TEACHER'S FAREWELL**

Miss Phyllis Kind was a Domestic Science teacher at Holly Park and Friern Barnet County Schools for 34 years, and deputy head for eight years from 1961. She finally retired on 22 July 1969 and in her scrapbook she recorded the following memories of the day:

“Lunch in Staff room on Tuesday July 22<sup>nd</sup> when His Worship the Mayor was present with Mr & Mrs Grieves, Mr Coundry, John Colchester, Mr Franklin, all the staff, the two secretaries, Mrs Payne and Miss Andrews and Mrs Hacker. A phone call from Mrs Ena Constable who was prevented from attending through illness; and a pot of African violets sent by her later in the day. Tuesday evening when I was presented with a Bernia sewing machine from the school and past members of staff and students – Dr Wakelin made the presentation and Mr Grieves spoke of my services to the school. Afterwards I entertained the Staff and some of their wives/husbands: with Dr Wakelin and Mr and Mrs Emil Grant, Mrs Vice, Mr Coundry, Mr Whittlestone and John Colchester in the Staff room. On Thursday Mrs de Leiros and Mr Robertson took me out to, lunch to “The Orange Tree” at Totteridge. At the end of the afternoon the students wished me “farewell” and gave me an oak coffee table, a wooden lamp stand and a pair of metal candlesticks and two ornamental cushions – all made in the school.”

Miss Kind received a letter from a former pupil which showed the kind of respect in which she was held:

“Dear Miss Kind

Mum has sent me a piece out of the Barnet Press referring to your retirement and I felt I had to write a note of congratulations (or is it condolences?) on the completion of a very satisfying career, although it must have had its frustrating moments as well, when cakes were burnt or bread didn't rise or a garment was scorched.

When I first learnt how to rub fat into flour under your tuition, food was still rationed, so baking at home was definitely not encouraged. I remember Barrie once baked a cake (in Mum's absence) and used the week's ration of butter doing it, it wasn't as funny then as it is now of course.

I often think of you when making pastry, or making sure that I don't make any rucks in the collar and cuffs of a shirt, when I'm ironing it. My memories of the Domestic Science room at Holly Park are quite affectionate, although they are coloured by incidents of things "falling to pieces in my hands" or of being knocked over, the saucepan rack on the corner by the sinks being my favourite target.

I would love to have a look round the new school, but having two children of my own now (Kathryn 12 and Andrew 8) I can only get to Mums in the holidays so I'm afraid I shall never have the opportunity.

I should like to add my thanks for your tuition and best wishes for your future travels, to the many you must have already received.

Yours sincerely,

Audrey Wilde (nee Young)"

## **FRIERN HOSPITAL OUTINGS**

*by David Berguer*

In my book *The Friern Hospital Story* I made reference to outings that were organised for patients by the staff. Recently Mel Hooper, our member in Ashurst Road, gave me a copy of an article that had been written by Jack Moss, a member of the local Jewish community which describes such an outing for Jewish patients:

"We left Friern Barnet at 10.00am, made a short stop at "Halfway" House and arrived at Chalkwell at 11.30. At the agreed point along the front we were met by some 30-40 members of the B'nai B'rith Lodges. The weather was good and together with the patients we either walked or sat along the front. We found that the patients were very easily looked after due to the fact that they were very institutionalised. They listened to our requests and, other than those patients who liked to walk about continuously, were more than content to sit and enjoy their surroundings. Lunch and tea at the Hotel went very well and we were more than appreciative of the manner in which our party was treated. After tea we had a sing song and played bingo. We arrived back at the Hospital at approximately 6.30.

Our major disappointment then showed itself. As the patients left the coach they just walked past us without acknowledgement or reaction. This made us wonder whether such an outing was worthwhile. During the next few days we spoke to various members of the Hospital staff who stated that the outing was, in fact, a great success. They pointed out to us that the patients did not know us and as such would not show any reaction. However, once the patients were returned to their wards, where they felt both safe and secure, they babbled on about the wonderful day they had had in Southend. This reassured us and we then started to make plans for further outings.

We realised that it was impractical from a cost point of view to visit Southend more than once a year. Where else could we take the patients, not only during the summer months, but also during the winter months? We proceeded to contact the Ladies Guilds of various Synagogues to see whether they would offer hospitality to our Jewish unfortunates. Every single Synagogue Ladies Guild that we approached agreed to help. Our winter outings consisted of a ride during the afternoon to a Synagogue Hall where the Ladies Guild provided tea and we provided a film show (a musical – the patients love music) or some form of live entertainment. The Ladies Guilds that entertained us were at St Albans, Richmond, Welwyn Garden City, Hackney, Muswell Hill, Barnet, Palmers Green, Southgate Reform and Southgate Progressives. We were indebted to these ladies for their kindness.

Our additional summer outings consisted of taking parties of eight patients, together with one nurse, in a minibus, to Bedford. We had arranged with the local Council that a portion of the café that they ran, alongside the riverbank, would be set aside for us. The cost of the minibus was defrayed by the Hospital and the charge made for the tea supplied by the Council was minimal. The patients loved this outing as it gave them the opportunity to walk along the riverbank, see children at play, watch the boats and the ducks and see various types of birds in flight. We held twelve outings a year for many a year, slowly reducing this as the number of patients decreased.

As time went on we found that patients who initially did not acknowledge us and only walked with their heads bent, spoke to us animatedly and walked with their heads held high. This made us appreciate the fact that it does take a long time to be recognised and also be accepted by the patients.”

From the time it opened in 1851, Colney Hatch Pauper Lunatic asylum had a large number of Jewish patients and by 1920 there some 1350 of them from all over the country. Kosher food was, of course, provided for them and in 1905 spiritual comfort had been provided by a Senior Chaplain to the Hospital, Rev Solomon Lipson, who conducted services in various parts of the hospital. He retired in 1953 but it was not until September 1957 that a room in the hospital was set aside as a synagogue. By 1959 the number of Jewish patients was down to 545. By 1991 there were only three people attending services and the Friern Hospital Synagogue came to an end.

## **COMMENTS ON OUR WEBSITE**

*by David Berguer*

As well as over 6600 photographs which we have posted on our photographic website ([www.friern-barnet.com](http://www.friern-barnet.com)) there are over 750 comments that have been added by members of the public and many of these give us interesting snippets of people's memories. Our photograph number 1 (of a class at Halliwick School) attracted two comments from a Paul Mason:

“I attended Hollickwood School from about 1935-1942. It was embarrassing because my father was on the management committee and used to come round the classes every so often and gave what he thought were some sort of pep talks about the school motto which was “I can.” Trouble was, I couldn't. Never anywhere near the top of the class. I remember the Head Mistress was a Miss Littlewood and one of my teachers was a Miss Le Gros and she would

roll your shirt sleeves up and hit your arm with a ruler, a bit too often. A bomb fell in the playground one day next to the bus garage next door but didn't go off. All they did was put a rope round the hole on the playground as it didn't explode. School was kept going. What would have happened if it had gone off later begs an answer. Shouldn't be here to tell the tale. By the way my father was Councillor Edward Mason on Friern Barnet Urban District Council. The only Labour councillor on a Tory council."

"My only friend was in a year younger than me. He was Jim Message who lived in Colney Hatch Lane. Out of school we played together in each other's homes. We had few toys and were keen on buses (no doubt enthused by Muswell Hill bus garage and the buses in it). We used to make models with Pyruma fire clay. Anyway, one evening I was round his house and the air raid warning went so I set off for home. Then I heard the doodlebug in the distance and as I walked to home it got nearer and nearer and so frightened the hell out of me and as I got to my house front door I battered on it to be let in, the thing stopped its engine. I was so scared but it landed elsewhere, phew. I believe it landed in Sydney Road towards sewage farm. Anybody remember? I lived in Halliwick Road."

Mavis Cox replied on 9 April 2014:

"Hi Paul. What memories we all have of our younger days. As Anne mentioned to you I lived in Sydney Road and remember the doodle bug very well. My mother and I had gone down into our shelter in the garden but my father did not quite make it at his own speed. He really got blown down the steps and for evermore suffered with his back. The doodlebug actually dropped almost opposite St Peter's School in Cromwell Road, onto some maisonettes. I think three people were killed and the bloodhounds were brought in to try to locate any casualties. We were one of the few who had a telephone which was actually working and someone came up to us from the school to make calls. I cannot remember to whom these were directed."

When I was researching *The Friern Hospital Story* I interviewed a number of people who had worked there and without exception they all said that it was a happy place to work. This is borne out by comments that have been posted under photo number 114 from ex members of staff. However, there was one comment from a Jenny Wren on 24 February 2013 which was quite disturbing:

"Great, you all had such a great time working there, but for us patients it was a different story. I was a nurse returning from Saudi Arabia and was sectioned to Friern in 1987, after a breakdown. I remember being terrified, especially at night where I was regularly sexually abused by a night nurse, who used to sneak into my small room which was opposite the office. The day room was locked while the night staff slept in the linen cupboard. I was cold and wanted a blanket, but was told to go back to bed. When I complained, I was picked on by staff or ignored. The lack of compassion and directional attitude from staff, towards patients, to this day sends a chill down my body. My forced ECT has left me with a lot of long term memory loss and was the worst experience of my life. After I left there some 6 months later, I vowed to train as an RMN and try to change the attitude of engrained behavior that staff in the field had become used to. I did and up to 4 years ago worked tirelessly to set a high

standard and reported many for their shocking behavior towards marginalised, vulnerable, disempowered patients. How many of you did that in your time at this hospital?"

This prompted the following replies from former staff members which I think show just how dedicated and caring most of the staff were:

"Jenny, I was very upset to read what happened to you while you had to stay at the hospital. Sadly among thousands of staff who worked there over the years there will be one or two bad apples and I fully understand why you still feel so angry, but it's very unfair to hint if we worked there we were all as bad as that one person you mentioned. Sadly sexual abuse goes on everywhere, from churches, children's homes, the list goes on. I'm sure I speak for everyone who read your post that had this happened when I was there it would have been reported and if nothing was done the police would have become involved. During the 5 years I was there one nurse was reported for abuse and he was sacked and struck off the nursing register. The staff did care and though Friern looked a bleak building the level of care was better than places I worked after which looked far better. The reason we are posting about memories, good times etc. is this site is aimed for former staff. None of us would laugh at what happened to you and I'm sorry the system let you down. I believe in Karma, whoever did that will get punished later if they haven't already." *(Added by Andrew Leach on 25 February 2013)*

"Jenny, I'm really shocked and quite distressed to read this. But I would like to add we are not all bad apples, and I understand why you are sooo angry at the system but please do not hint we are as bad as that person it's so unfair and I mean that. Sadly in this world we live in today it goes on and this makes me quite sad. I worked at Friern Hospital for six years and worked alongside Andrew and many more staff where the level of care was the upmost and I would like to say one thing if I saw this abuse in my time it would have being reported and if I felt nothing was done I would have gone to the police. It might have being a bleak place but the level of care was fab. Reasons why I'm posting about good memories because it was, along with good times, in my time of nursing at Friern I always looked at the client if it was my mother or father and how would I feel in their position. I'm sooo sorry the system has let you down but don't blame us its sooo unfair. There's always one bad apple....please remember that. God bless. I believe in what goes around comes around.... every dog has its day. It's called Karma." *(Added by Mary Duffy on 25 February 2013)*

"Dear Jenny, It is with a great deal of pain that I have come to learn of your experience at Friern. Please I beg of you do not blame yourself. I feel as if I would love to hug you and let it all go away, but life is not like that. I worked at Friern between 1968 and 1972 and had no clue that any such behaviour existed from staff. I pray that your trust in humanity will resurface and make the rest of your life more peaceful and trusting. God Bless Sybil" *(Added by Sybil Barnaby 26 February 2013)*

If you have any memories of the Friern Barnet area that you would like to share, why not add them to the Comments section of our website?

**AN EXTRACT FROM THE  
MIDDLESEX SESSIONS ROLLS 1616**

11<sup>th</sup> January 13<sup>th</sup> James 1

Ordered that the Constables, headboroughs, and other officers of Fryarne Barnett, shall cause Agnes Miller, wife of Robert Miller, of Fynchley, yeoman, "to be duckt in some pond of water, she having been indicted at the present sessions by the inhabitants of the said parishes" for a notorious and common scolde and disturber of the neighbours and honest inhabitants of Fynchley and Fryarne Barnett.

**JOHN PARR MEMORIALS**

In our April issue John Heathfield described the life and death of the first British soldier to be killed in the Great War. Since then two memorials to him have been unveiled, thanks to a number of people including High Petrie of Barnet Local Studies and Archives, local historian Mick Crick, the Barnet War Memorials Association, North Middlesex Golf Club and Barnet Council.

The first was a paving stone outside his home in 52 Lodge Lane, North Finchley and the second a brass plaque in the memorial garden at North Middlesex Golf Club in Friern Barnet Lane where John Parr was a caddy before joining the army.



*On Thursday 21 August the Archdeacon of Hampstead, the Venerable Luke Miller, dedicates the memorial paving stone outside 52 Lodge Lane*



*On Saturday 23 August Theresa Villiers, MP for Finchley & Friern Barnet and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, inspects the John Parr memorial plaque at the North Middlesex Golf Club*

## **NEW SOUTHGATE HERITAGE WALK**

*by Colin Barratt*

The Enfield Borough Council Local History Unit has published a guided walk around the central part of New Southgate. It starts at New Southgate railway station and finishes at the Grade II listed library and swimming pool near Arnos Grove Station. It gives information on the interesting buildings and areas at various points along the route, plus those now gone. The guide opens out to show a large map of the trail and there is a QR (Quick Response) code on it which can be scanned with a smartphone to take you to a page on the Enfield Borough website which has old photos of some of the areas mentioned in the walk.

Copies of the walk are free and available in local Enfield libraries. They will also be available at our meetings. Why not take one and enjoy discovering some of the hidden history of New Southgate?

## **HOW OLD IS YOUR HOUSE?**

*by David Berguer*

When John Donovan started the Society in 1999 one of his aims was to photograph every house in the area. Whilst this would have provided an invaluable record for future historians it proved a task too far as in those days before digital cameras the cost of so much film and processing would have been prohibitive, never mind the time it would have taken. We have, however, managed to photograph all the shops from 2000 to the present day and these have been put onto our website.

I have recently started to conduct a survey of a number of streets around Whetstone and hope to extend this to Friern Barnet. This involves walking down a street armed with a clipboard and making a note of each type of property (detached, semi-detached, etc) and, once this is done, in the comfort of my own home checking through our 'Streets' database and our copies of *Kelly's Directory of Finchley & Friern Barnet* to try and establish when each property was built.

I should explain that the 'Streets' database covers 263 streets in Friern Barnet, New Southgate, North Finchley and Whetstone and includes information gleaned from various sources including minute books of Friern Barnet Local Board (1884-1894), Friern Barnet UDC (1895-1965) and, from 1965 to date, planning applications made to Barnet Council. The dates of the planning applications then give a pretty good idea of when properties were built. The following is an extract from the file for St James Avenue:

No 18. May 1930. Planning application for house (G Elphick, Elmdene, Ballards Lane, owner & builder) (*London Metropolitan Archives LMA/4070/02/02007*) & No ? 22 May 1930. Application approved for house (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 18. 9 Nov 1954. Application approved for bathroom on first floor (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 20. 23 May 1940. Used as a temporary depot for fitting additional filters to respirators (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 20. 13 Sep 1960. Application approved for garage at rear (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 24. 12 Sep 1961. Application approved for garage at rear (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 24. 10 Jan 2006. Planning application for alterations to roof including side and rear dormer windows to facilitate a loft conversion (*Barnet Council N/05198//05*)

No 26. 6 Feb 1934. Application approved for garage (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

No 26. 12 Aug 2004. Planning application for single storey rear and 2 storey side extension with pitched roof. Rooflights to front elevation (*Barnet Council N/00919/A/04*)

No 26. 20 Jan 2005. Major work is being undertaken, including new roof to garage. Skip outside (*John Donovan FB&DLHS*)

No 26. 5 June 2005. Extension is being built (*David Berguer FB&DLHS*)

No 27. 12 Mar 1953. Application approved for detached bungalow and garage on land rear of 155 Friern Barnet Lane (*Friern Barnet UDC Minutes*)

We have a run of *Kelly's* from 1927 to 1939 (with a couple of years missing but which fortunately are held at Barnet Local Studies and Archives) and it is easy to check back and see when a street or a property first appears in its pages. When all this information is collated the result looks something like this:



owners – it could prove invaluable in helping us compile an accurate history of the area. My phone number is 020 8368 8314. I look forward to your call! And thank you in advance.

## **FRIERN PARK**

Friern Park is one of the oldest streets in the area and anyone walking down it today will notice that it is a peculiar mix of houses from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those from the 1920s and 1930s and a large number of blocks of flats which have obviously been built on the sites of what were once large houses. Out of the 102 properties, 31 one of them date from the period 1859-1910.

Our member from Friern Park, Pauline Ashbridge, has just published a history of these 31 houses. *The Old Freehold Houses of Friern* is a comprehensive look at their history and includes fascinating and very detailed descriptions of each of the properties as well as the origin of the street. The land had been bought by the Middlesex Freehold Land Association in 1852 who divided it up into plots, each of which were then put into a lottery and the winners were entitled to purchase a plot and develop it. The object of the exercise was to try and widen property ownership to include skilled artisans. One of the advantages of the scheme was that property owners became entitled to vote in Parliamentary elections.

Pauline has done a large amount of original research and the book includes not only photographs of the houses as they are today but also maps and architectural plans from the period. The book will be of interest not only to the residents of Friern Park but also anyone who is interested in how the London suburbs grew up. The book is A5 in format, runs to 92 pages and is available at Waterstone's at North Finchley or direct from Kershaw Publishing, PO Box 55123, North Finchley, N12 9YH. The cost is £7.99 and is excellent value.

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## **NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMME**

Once again Janet Liversidge has assembled an interesting and varied programme of speakers. A copy of the programme is enclosed with this Newsletter so please keep it somewhere safe.

If we have to change any aspects of the programme, details will be posted on to our website: [www.friernbarnethistory.org.uk](http://www.friernbarnethistory.org.uk) – click on "Programme." If we have to alter any of the dates we will advise you either by telephone or by email, so please check your emails before the meeting. Could you please ensure you add "friernbarnethistory@hotmail.co.uk" to your List of Contacts or "Safe email addresses" to ensure that your spam filter or firewall does not screen it out.

We look forward to seeing you on Wednesday evenings!

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