

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## THE HORSE TROUGH RETURNS

*by David Berguer*

Old photographs and postcards of Whetstone show a horse trough outside *The Griffin*. The earliest picture we have is dated 1904 and the latest is from 1960. For some reason the trough was later removed by the Council and its whereabouts remain a mystery.

Following an outbreak of cholera in Soho in 1854. John Snow, a local physician, discovered that the disease was caused not by foul air – ‘miasma’ - as was widely believed at the time, but by polluted water from a water pump in Broadwick Street. Removal of the pump handle prevented its use and the instances of cholera dramatically reduced. Following this discovery, drinking fountains were introduced in London by the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association in April 1859 and over the next six years the Association installed 85 water fountains offering filtered water. The Association, with the co-operation of the RSPCA, then started erecting cattle troughs for use by the many horses and cattle to be found in the streets of London. Some troughs were designed to incorporate a drinking fountain as well, while others, including the one at Whetstone, were purely for animals.



*This photograph was taken in 1970 and shows the horse trough, the inn sign and a notice board.*

In 1867 the Association changed its name to the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association (MDFCTA). Today there are many examples of the troughs still to be found all over London, including the Borough of Barnet, which makes the disappearance of the one in Whetstone all the more mystifying.

Mike and Maria Jordan, the founders of Love Whetstone and organisers of the street party 'Wake up Whetstone'; farmers' markets in the High Road; and the erection of flower planters and the annual Christmas tree outside Waitrose, wondered if it would be possible to reinstate a horse trough and also provide a plaque showing the history of Whetstone. The Society agreed to provide the wording for the plaque and contributed towards the cost of producing it.

Finding a horse trough proved problematic. Maria takes up the story:

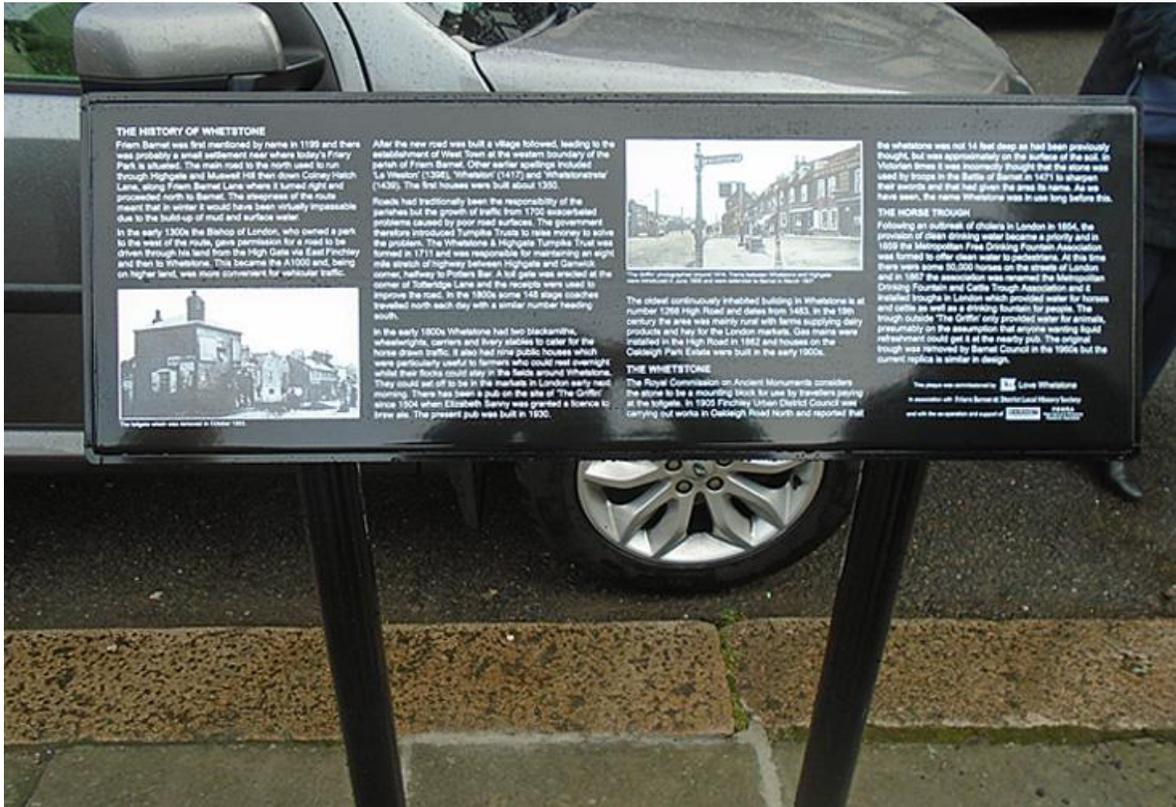
"Ideally in order to replicate the street scene it would have been necessary to source an MDFCTA original trough, especially an unloved and "at-risk" one. We spent a lot of time looking for one and, together with the London Heritage Trust, tried to persuade the Borough of Camden to release one that is falling apart outside the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm. Despite Cllr Caroline Stock, our current Mayor, speaking to her counterpart in Camden, this proved fruitless. We had a sense of "if it means so much to Barnet there has to be something we're missing" .... However, a few weeks ago it was still there, continuing to fall apart. We then faced the inevitable and commissioned a replacement. From photographs and help from the MDFCTA, we were able to ascertain its dimensions and that the material was granite. There is not much call for horse troughs these days and part of the challenge was trying to get potential suppliers to understand what a horse trough was, let alone provide a quotation for its manufacture and installation. Eventually we were able to get three quotations,



*The replica horse trough photographed on 22 February 2020, complete with a red ribbon which is waiting to be cut by the Mayor of Barnet.*

one at over £20,000 and the one from London Stone at just under £5,000. We provided dimensions and drawings but getting the curves and sculpting that the original one would have had proved “a bridge too far” not just in design but also in cost terms. The one we now have was made in China and we hope its manufacture proved to be an informative commission for the Chinese stonemasons”.

At 11am on Saturday 22 February 2020 a crowd including local MP Theresa Villiers, Martin Russell, Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London and local councilors, assembled outside *The Griffin* to witness the Mayor of Barnet, Caroline Stock, unveil first the horse trough and then the commemorative plaque.



*The plaque after the unveiling.*

John Heathfield and I came up with the wording on the plaque which is as follows:

**“THE HISTORY OF WHETSTONE**

Friern Barnet was first mentioned by name in 1199 and there was probably a small settlement near where today’s Friary Park is situated. The main road to the north used to run through Highgate and Muswell Hill then down Colney Hatch Lane, along Friern Barnet Lane where it turned right and proceeded north to Barnet. The steepness of the route meant that in winter it would have been virtually impassable due to the build-up of mud and surface water.

In the early 1300s the Bishop of London, who owned a park to the west of the route, gave permission for a road to be driven through his land from the High Gate via East Finchley and then to Whetstone. This became the A1000 and, being on higher land, was more convenient for vehicular traffic. After the new road was built a village followed, leading to the establishment of West Town at

the western boundary of the parish of Friern Barnet. Other earlier spellings included 'Le Weston' (1398), 'Whetston' (1417) and 'Whetstonstrete' (1439). The first houses were built about 1350.

Roads had traditionally been the responsibility of the parishes but the growth of traffic from 1700 exacerbated problems caused by poor road surfaces. The government therefore introduced Turnpike Trusts to raise money to solve the problem. The Whetstone & Highgate Turnpike Trust was formed in 1711 and was responsible for maintaining an eight mile stretch of highway between Highgate and Ganwick corner, halfway to Potters Bar. A toll gate was erected at the corner of Totteridge Lane and the receipts were used to improve the road. In the 1800s some 148 stagecoaches travelled north each day with a similar number heading south.

In the early 1800s Whetstone had two blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carriers and livery stables to cater for the horse drawn traffic. It also had nine public houses which were particularly useful to farmers who could rest overnight whilst their flocks could stay in the fields around Whetstone. They could then set off to be in the markets in London early next morning. There has been a pub on the site of 'The Griffin' since 1504 when Elizabeth Sanny was granted a licence to brew ale. The present pub was built in 1930.

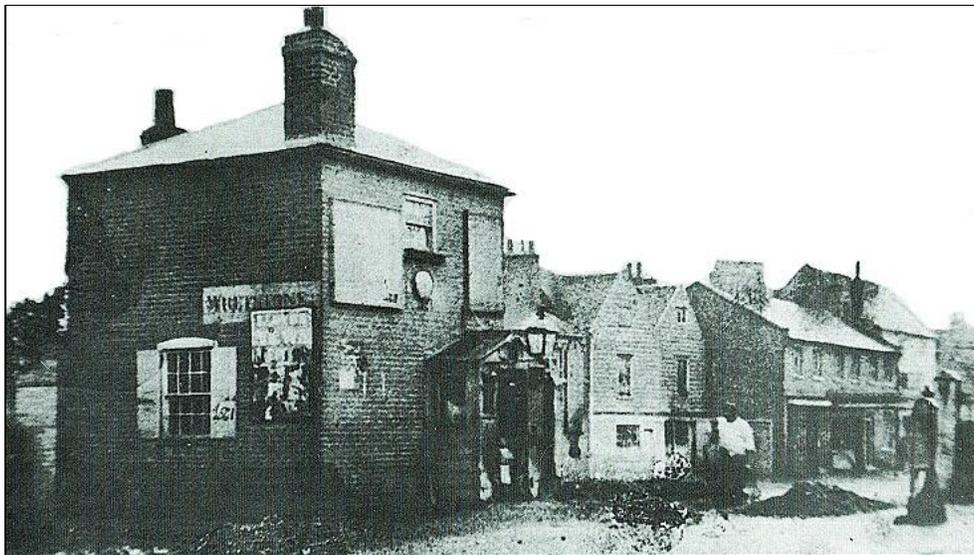
The oldest continuously inhabited building in Whetstone is at number 1268 High Road and dates from 1483. In the 19th century the area was mainly rural with farms supplying dairy products and hay for the London markets. Gas mains were installed in the High Road in 1862 and houses on the Oakleigh Park Estate were built in the early 1900s.

#### **THE WHETSTONE**

The Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments considers the stone to be a mounting block for use by travelers paying at the tollgate. In 1905 Finchley Urban District Council was carrying out works in Oakleigh Road North and reported that the whetstone was not 14 feet deep as had been previously thought but was approximately on the surface of the soil. In Victorian times it was incorrectly thought that the stone was used by troops in the Battle of Barnet in 1471 to sharpen their swords and that had given the area its name. As we have seen, the name Whetstone was in use long before this.

#### **THE HORSE TROUGH**

Following an outbreak of cholera in London in 1854, the provision of clean drinking water became a priority and in 1859 the Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association was formed to offer clean water to pedestrians. At this time there were some 50,000 horses on the streets of London and in 1867 the association was renamed the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association and it installed troughs in London which provided water for horses and cattle as well as a drinking fountain for people. The trough outside 'The Griffin' only provided water for animals, presumably on the assumption that anyone wanting liquid refreshment could get it at the nearby pub. The original trough was removed by Barnet Council in the 1960s, but the current replica is similar in design.



The tollgate which was removed in October 1863.



'The Griffin' photographed around 1914. Trams between Whetstone and Highgate were introduced in June 1905 and were extended to Barnet in March 1907.

This plaque was commissioned by Love Whetstone in association with Friern Barnet & District Local History Society and with the co-operation and support of Barnet Council and Friern Barnet & Whetstone Residents' Association."

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## **WARTIME MEMORIES OF BARNET – part five**

*by Philip O'Donoghue*

The flying bombs, the V1s were also a boon to plane-spotting boys. They were apparently meant to suddenly angle down at about 45° and plunge to earth at full speed, but many simply went on until their fuel gave out when they would glide for miles – not necessarily in a straight line (exciting for lookers-on). These made less of a hole but damaged a larger area. They were regarded with alarm – not unjustly considering the havoc wrought by the first one in Bow – until people got used to them. I was with my father on his allotment in Mays Lane, probably on the corner of Mayhill

Road or Alan Drive (there was a large wooden hoarding among the allotments on the requisitioned land, offering building plots or houses ) when we heard the characteristic drone of a V1 and to my intense delight saw it towards Totteridge or beyond, like a little black hyphen – only noisier – flying along from east to west. As we watched it did what it was supposed to do and without notice headed for the ground. The man on the next allotment shouted: “Get down” and flung himself on the clay. Not even Hitler’s secret weapons were that powerful: a distant bang and a puff of smoke or dust was all that reached us. But, of course a lot of middle-aged men about when I was young had survived the horrors of World War One, survived perhaps only because of quick reactions and being over cautious.

“Drone” is not really the right word for the noise of the V1 engine. It was more grainy and near-to amounted to a pulsing, rattling roar, like an overblown motorbike. I can remember at least once getting out of bed at night to watch the white-hot flame (the engine was a simple tube fed with fuel) with its attendant roar fade away towards Arkley. I was brought down from my second-storey bedroom with its large, shatterable windows into the greater safety of my parents’ bedroom. There I slept on a camp bed, a sort of furniture imitation of a millipede, with a substructure of endless legs. Much safer, but it did make nonsense of the advice to get under your bed in times of danger.

One V1. Which we could hear but not see, blew up somewhere between the St Albans Road and the back of Arkley, beyond the dummy airfield, with its empty crew huts and wooden mock fighters, which lay on the left of the road near the Green Dragon. It obligingly sent up a column of earth or smoke so that my friend and I, out for a walk, were able to beat the police to the sizable crater it had made. I got a fuel filter but my friend, ever more enterprising, carried off the tail fin.

The V2s were not fun. You never saw one and, as they travelled faster than sound, never heard one coming until after it had arrived, if you see what I mean. You heard the terrific bang and then like an echo the increasingly distant noise of its passage through the air, as the sound waves successively caught up. It seemed unfair that you could be killed without seeing or hearing anything of what did it. Although the rockets wasted energy in digging a great crater where they fell, they were ferociously destructive and it was only with their advent that we slept in the street shelter, along with most of our neighbours.

When I say you never saw one, my father probably did. On his way to work in central London he glanced up at the top of the slope down High Barnet Station and saw a fine rather zigzag line of smoke drawn up the sky far in front of him. A few minutes later there was a bang and smoke further into London. He always thought he had seen a V2, and I rather think he did.

Then there was the London bus that arrived in Normandy Avenue one summer evening loaded with poor wretches fleeing from the inferno of the London Docks, with pathetic bags or cases of luggage, looking half stunned and seeking shelter for even just a night or two of respite. Or the technologically advanced blackout we adopted for our lavatory window (it was such a bind to have to draw light-proof curtains or fix shutters to every window every evening that saving even one was worthwhile). It involved an amber lamp and painting the window glass blue but didn’t work terribly well. Perhaps the paint was too weak or the bulb too strong, but a neighbour across the road (we knew who it was because we could see only one house from that window, so only one house could see it) reported to the police that every time there was a night raid we switched on that

light. True, but the cause was physiological, not espionage, and we were let off. Or the cars driven by gas carried in a bag on the roof, or cars and buses towing a corrugated iron gas generator, or the way you could make the poison gas indicator paint on top of the pillar boxes show positive by rubbing it with your finger, or how much could be crammed into the gas mask case you had to carry, or apparently dead bonfires that burst into illegal flame in the middle of the night, calling for desperate trips down the garden in your pyjamas, or my aunt, who, as my mother swept back the curtains just as the siren was sounding one morning said: "Oh, Nell, look at them" – mistaking the countless barrage balloons over London for enemy planes, or the 4.5 in naval anti-aircraft guns at Whetstone and the 3.7s and searchlight towards Hadley....but I am boring myself to death let alone what I am doing to you.

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## **EASTER FOOD**

*by David Berguer*

'Good Friday comes this month,  
The old woman runs,  
With one a penny, two a penny,  
Hot Cross buns.'

The origins of the rich spiced tea cake called a hot cross bun are somewhat vague. In the 8th century, Bede claimed that it was originally made by the Anglo-Saxons as part of their spring festival honouring the goddess Eostre. This pagan version of the bun had the symbol of an ox horn on top, to represent Eostre. When Christians adapted the festival, they replaced the horn with the cross. A version with a more local connection concerns St Albans. Brother Thomas Roccliffe, a monk at St Albans Abbey in the 14th century, developed a recipe called an Alban bun which was first distributed to the poor on Good Friday in 1361.

Today, for people who don't like the traditional version with currants or raisins, ingredients can include toffee, chocolate or cranberries. As an alternative to hot cross buns, many counties developed recipes for Easter biscuits. These differed from other biscuits in that they were originally made with allspice, which was also used in the hot cross bun. Nowadays mixed spice is more commonly used in both.

Nowadays Simnel cake is associated with Easter, however this cake has been baked since the middle ages and was first made for Mothering Sunday – the fourth Sunday in Lent. Originally Mothering Sunday was the day when the congregations of the daughter churches of a parish went to the mother church, usually an abbey, to give their offerings.

In the 19th century, Mothering Sunday became the day when girls and boys in domestic service were allowed a day off to visit their mothers, often their one and only holiday. The girls would bake their mothers a Simnel cake as a gift. With the demise of domestic service after the First World War, the Simnel cake began to be treated as an Easter cake in its own right.

It is believed the word Simnel comes from the Latin 'Simila', which meant a very fine flour made from wheat. The word 'semolina' comes from the same source. The cakes were both boiled and baked which led to the story that a mythical couple, Simon and Nelly, could not agree on how to bake the cake and after coming to blows, they decided to use both methods. If it was made properly the cake would keep for a few weeks and

would not be eaten until Easter Sunday and the whole family would be anxious to see if the cake was still moist.

The cake is decorated with eleven marzipan balls, representing Jesus' disciples, minus Judas. Originally it was decorated with fresh flowers, and sugar flowers are often used today.

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## **THE BIRTH (AND DECLINE?) OF BARNET**

*by David Berguer*

From the 1930s London had four types of local authorities – county boroughs, municipal boroughs, urban districts and metropolitan boroughs. A Royal Commission on Local Government in London recommended in 1960 that there should be 52 Greater London boroughs but this was changed in 1961 to 34 boroughs and a year later the number was reduced to 32 and the Local Government Act 1963 created these boroughs. On 22 May 1964 the *Barnet Press* carried the following article:

“The historic first meeting of the new Borough of Barnet, which precedes the merging of the three Barnets, Finchley and Hendon – an area with a population of 318,000 – took place in Hendon Town Hall on Wednesday evening.

The main tasks were choosing the chairman – there will be no mayor in the transitional year ahead; of appointing his deputy; the nine aldermen; and the chief officers who will act in a temporary capacity until the new council gets down to the task of appointing its vast staff. It is clear that the Barnets and Finchley are going to get their fair share of the plums, and need not fear big brother Hendon too much. It was expected that the first chairman would come from Hendon – he is Ald. Leslie Hills, a former mayor of Hendon.

But the vice-chairman comes from Barnet, in the familiar shape of Cr. Percy Woodruffe. This seems to indicate a determination on the part of the council to bury such hatchets as have been wielded in the last year or two, and get down seriously to the business of making the new borough a good one. For Cr. Woodruffe represents the smallest of the five constituent towns, and was the leader of the eventually successful ‘Call it Barnet’ faction – a move instigated by the former headmaster of Queen Elizabeth’s, Mr E H Jenkins, in a letter to the *Barnet Press*.

Only three of the nine aldermen are from Hendon. The Conservatives who convincingly won control at the elections have taken two-thirds of the aldermanic bench: Ald. J L Freedman, K Pamplin and C H Shiel (Hendon); Ald. J G Bryson and R J N Norman (two former mayors of Finchley); and Cr. Stanley Head, a former chairman of East Barnet Council and now chairman of their finance committee. The Labour group’s two aldermen are Cr. C H F Reynolds, a former chairman of Barnet Council, and Mr Nat Birch, one of the most experienced campaigners in Finchley local government. The Liberals have the remaining seat, and the choice fell on Cr. Kenneth Norman, chairman of Friern Barnet Council, who was unseated at the recent election. Aldermen Bryson, Head, Freedman, Pamplin and Shiell remain on the council until 1970, and the other nine aldermen until 1967. The meeting opened with Cr. Frank Davis, Mayor of Finchley, in the chair. But he vacated it once Ald. Hills had been unanimously elected. Ald. Hills, a retired businessman, had been on Hendon

Council since 1949, and was mayor in 1960-61. He appealed to all the councillors to forget their differences and concentrate on building the new borough by exercising great patience and meeting each other half-way. He said:

“Forget politics and self-interest and combine to make this one of the finest authorities in the country. I will try to give all members the same consideration, and trust that during the next 10 months I shall be able to rely on your friendship and smooth co-operation”

The town clerk of Hendon, Mr R H Williams read messages of good wishes from the Greater London Council and from Middlesex and Hertfordshire County Councils. Mr Williams was chosen as acting town clerk with Mr R M Franklin, his opposite number at Finchley, is the acting borough treasurer, supported by Mr G P Cornish of Hendon.

The meeting decided to set up a constitution committee of 22 members, which will be the first to go into the multitude of recommendations which have already been made by the joint committee of the five towns, which did a great deal of spadework before the elections. Ald. Pamplin is its chairman, with Ald. Bryson as vice-chairman.

This just about completed the business, except that the council decided to join the London Boroughs Committee and the Association of Municipal Corporations. They have also sent the following Loyal Address to the Queen:

“We the chairman, aldermen and Councillors of the London Borough of Barnet, at the first meeting of the council of the London borough, desire to convey to your Majesty our loyal duty and great affection, and our resolve to perform to the utmost of our ability the duties and responsibilities which have been entrusted to us”

The first meeting then ended and councillors – together with their many friends who crowded into the public gallery (standing room only) – adjourned for refreshments. Much hard work lies ahead. The next meeting will be on Wednesday June 17th”.

Barnet is the largest London borough with a population of 392,140, which is greater than towns like Coventry, Nottingham and Leicester and even the counties of Dorset and Shropshire.

The Mayor of London has decreed that Barnet must grow by an extra 46,000 homes over the next fifteen years (approx. 3000 per year) and the council has prepared a Local Plan which aims to deliver these. At the moment it is in draft form, but it includes a number of proposals affecting our area:

Tesco Coppetts centre	397 units
Sainsbury’s East Barnet Road	199 units
Great North Road Local Centre (next to Everyman cinema)	84 units
Allum Way	888 units

(Totteridge & Whetstone Station)

Barnet House	139 units
Woodside Park Station East	95 units
Woodside Park Station West	356 units
Great North Leisure Park (Vue cinema etc)	352 units

Total 2510 units (that's flats and houses, not people!)

In addition to these, Transport for London is proposing to build housing on the car parks at Arnos Grove, Finchley Central and High Barnet stations, so the future looks pretty unappealing, particularly as fewer car parking spaces will inevitably lead to increased traffic problems on surrounding roads. The Tesco Coppetts Centre site is particularly worrying as there are already severe traffic problems for cars leaving the Tesco car park onto the A406 slip road; one woman claimed to have waited three hours to get out!

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## **COPPETTS WOOD NATURE RESERVE**

*by David Berguer*

For centuries the whole of north London was covered with a vast woodland with occasional patches of open ground and small dwellings; the name Friern Barnet means 'a place cleared by burning'. The forest continued to decline until in the sixteenth century the area was described as a common – Finchley Common – 'an area of furze dotted with trees'. As time went on, fields began to be created and by the late 19th century pasture had largely replaced woodland.

The last great Ice Age had occurred some 25,000 years ago and boulder clay and gravel had been deposited to a depth of some 50 feet in the area. Today's gardeners will know that the soil is sticky and contains many small stones and is difficult to work. This type of soil was only suitable for growing hay which was then sent to London to be consumed by the many thousands of horses. Gravel from gravel pits was used by the Whetstone and Highgate Turnpike Trust to improve the Great North Road. Growing urban development began in the late 19th century until the only remaining fragments of original woodland are in Coppetts Wood and the Glebelands.

This growth of population meant that Finchley Council needed to install a sewage treatment works and Coppetts Wood was chosen in 1885. Initially sites to the west and east of Coppetts Wood were chosen. Later, a sludge digester with a capacity of 56,800 cubic feet was built in the south-eastern part of the wood and other installations were gradually installed. Part of the treatment of sewage involves separating the solids and drying them in large beds which were sited to the north east of the area of scrubland. Not surprisingly, local residents complained about flies and the smell, The area of the North Circular Road called Pinkham Way became widely known as Stinkham Way!

Large steel breather tubes were embedded at intervals in the scrubland to remove methane gas from below. One of the features of the site were the massive crops of



species of fly suggested that they had been on this site for several centuries. Slow worms and newts inhabit the untouched areas. In Spring 1997, following the sterling work of Coppetts Wood Conservationists, the 12- hectare Coppetts Wood was declared a Local Nature Reserve and it is managed by a group of dedicated volunteers, supported by Barnet council.

May is an excellent time to visit Coppetts Wood as many flowers are in bloom. The site is best entered from the entrance in Colney Hatch Lane, just north of Southgate and Finchley Coaches. Follow the paths and you will find yourself at one point overlooking the Tesco store and the North Circular Road. Continue through unspoilt areas and you will end up in Nursery Road, which leads to the Summers Lane Recycling Centre. Turn right onto Summers Lane and you are back in urban Friern Barnet. Apart from a steep flight of steps near the entrance, the paths are easy to negotiate. Enjoy your stroll!

The last remnants of Finchley Common are to be found in the Glebelands, an area of virtually untouched dense vegetation which runs alongside the North Circular Road and helps to absorb the noise and pollution that is generated there. You can enter either via a path alongside Finchley Leisure Centre in Finchley High Road or from Sunny Way, a road off Summers Lane. The path is undulating so watch your step and wear stout shoes. With a bit of imagination, you can imagine yourself back in time when forest covered the area and highwaymen roamed.

**Footnote**

This article is based on a history of the nature reserve written by Dr Oliver Natelson in 1986.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

It is now looking unlikely that we will be able to hold our next AGM at the North Middlesex Golf Club on 22 May, so we are making alternative arrangements to notify you of the contents and allow you to cast your votes. A copy of last year's minutes is enclosed.

**SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**

For those of you who have not yet renewed your subscriptions for the year commencing 1 April 2020, a further copy of the Membership Renewal Form is enclosed. If you have not renewed by 1 June, you will no longer receive copies of the Newsletter.

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