

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## **COPPETT'S WOOD – A HIDDEN TREASURE**

*by Dorrell Dressekie*

The Coppett's Wood Spring Festival, held in May each year for the past twenty years, has become an extremely popular event in our local community.

For me, attending the Fair has always been a pleasure: an opportunity to be in open space and close to nature; to learn of local business and organisations; to buy few plants for my garden; to meet neighbours and friends; to relax with a nice cup of tea; to watch Morris Dancers; and to enjoy the sights and sounds of children relishing treasure hunts and winning prizes.

Last year, 2020, like so many other local events and gatherings, the Spring Festival was a victim of Covid-19. It is common knowledge that the pandemic has seriously changed everything we do in the community, from how and where we shop, socialize, exercise, and take recreation. While pondering how much I missed this lovely event, and wondering whether it will return in 2021, my mind turned to, "*How did the Coppett's Wood come to be in the first place?*"



*Volunteers at work on a Sunday morning*

## **The history**

The story goes back a long way. The Spring Festival is just one event that draws the local community to the area. Coppett's Wood is part of a 4.5-hectare (approx. 11 acre) site of scrublands between Muswell Hill and Friern Barnet and is owned by the London Borough of Barnet.

Coppett's Wood was once part of a forest known as Finchley Wood. By the sixteenth century it had shrunk in size and became known as a common, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was used for pursuits such as bare-knuckle boxing, horse racing and pigeon shooting. It also had a reputation as a haunt of highwaymen. In the Second World War it was used for military training and around twenty tank traps remain. In the nineteenth century a sewage works was built on the site, and while it was closed in 1963, it still has its legacy in the rich variety of plants in the Scrublands. *(SOURCE: Wikipedia, Coppett's Wood and Scrublands, n.d.)*

The open area stretches from Colney Hatch Lane to North Finchley Lido and encompasses five distinct sections, namely: Coppett's Wood, the Scrublands, Coppett's Close Triangle, the Green Link and the Glebelands.

Coppett's Wood is calm and serene, in stark contrast to the constant traffic on the North Circular Road, which bounds it on the south side. It is mostly wooded with mix of grassland, tall shrubs, ponds, and numerous trees. It is a habitat for a plethora of wildlife including frogs, newts, finches, owls, woodpeckers, bees, and butterflies. The area is popular with walkers too, and with researchers interested in wildlife conservation and preservation.

## **How the Wood was saved**

In 1983 Barnet Council were considering plans to build sport pitches on Coppett's Wood. At that time, much of the open space was derelict, overgrown with brambles and bushes, and littered with rubbish and unwanted household items. Despite the condition of the wood, Barnet Council's plan to turn the area into sport pitches was not well received. Several people in the local community began to vocally express their disapproval.

This was the start of a local action. In the beginning, a group of around six concerned residents researched the level of demand of existing nearby sport facilities; their aim was to identify the level of need for additional sport pitches on Coppett's Wood. They were able demonstrate that several of the existing local pitches were in fact being underused, indicating that additional facilities were not needed. As more residents became aware of the local Council's plan, vocal objections began to grow.

Members from organisations including Friern Barnet and Whetstone Residents Association, The Finchley Society, the heads of local schools and some local businesses joined the campaign. As news spread, members of the charity the London Wildlife Trust, joined the growing campaign. A series of local meetings were held, and the campaign continued to gain momentum over the next two years, with petitions being presented to Barnet Council to recognise the value of the wood for its wildlife and geological diversity.

The outcome of the community action was a change of focus by Barnet Council. Coppett's Wood was recognised as an important area for the preservation of wildlife, and as a site beneficial to the local community.

The next task ahead was for the local community to clear the site. Over several months, volunteers hauled masses of waste to the local refuse centre. Many of the people who helped, commented that moving rubbish was almost daily task for them. The goal was to resurrect and preserve the natural environment, and overseeing this effort were the watchful eyes of local conservationist, Dr. Oliver Natelson, who happened to live close by.

In these early stages, there were visitors from organisations including the National Wildlife Trust and several environmentalists with their own special interests. The diversity of birds was the attraction for birdwatchers and the observation and study of butterflies, and a host of other insects, were activities that expanded the uses of the area.

Coppett's Wood was officially designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 1997 – Coppett's Wood & Glebelands Local Nature Reserve - recognized as an area of notable environmental or historical interest. It is also a "Site of Borough Importance for Conservation", one of just a few in Barnet and, as such, the site is protected by law against undesirable changes.

Soon after the LNR designation, the Spring Festival was developed as an event to raise both funds for, and awareness of, the woods. Coppett's Wood walk, a monthly two hour ramble, was also a popular event for local people to get some exercise and learn more about area. In addition to daytime walks, night-time bat walks were also very popular; there are at least 3 bat species.

Over the years, play areas with sturdy and strong swings were added as an attraction for children, and on sunny days some local groups would be seen holding meetings, sitting on the carved log seats or carrying their own folding chairs into the wood. It is also used by students from local schools, who access the area for walks, runs, and for study relating to nature and the environment. For many in the local community it is a calm area to relax and escape the sound of heavy and noisy traffic, especially from the busy North Circular Road that borders Coppett's Wood on the south side.

### **Get involved**

Coppett's Wood & Glebelands LNR is maintained by a team of local volunteers including some with many years of conservation experience. Since Dr Natelson's retirement, a core group of five members develops the weekly work schedule, ensures health and safety, talks through general issues, and secures the necessary funds. Coppett's Wood Conservationists (CWC) is backed up by Barnet Council's Greenspaces Team and conservation specialists from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and elsewhere. The volunteers' aim is to maintain the nature reserve, increase its biodiversity and enjoy some sociable exercise. They are all ages, from students to

retirees, and take part in tasks such as planting meadows, maintaining paths and preserving ponds.

More hands are always welcome! For more information about volunteering with the CWC contact: [coppettswoodconservationists@gmail.com](mailto:coppettswoodconservationists@gmail.com).

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## **MEMORIES OF HOLDEN ROAD – continued**

*by Caroline Wright (née Cooper)*

The front garden was full of laurels which were dark and dusty. There was space for Dad to park a car in front of the house and I can remember him having to use the starting handle to get it going. The first car I remember was a rusty red coloured Vauxhall. Dad had the drive tarmacked in later years and agreed a price. When it was done the men had put white chips in it and wanted to charge him more for the privilege but he said that as he hadn't asked for them they could take them out again - he wasn't usually that assertive with tradesmen. I always think of the front door as being black, although it was painted a different colour in later years. 'Denewood' was written in the glass above the door. There were two concrete plinths each side where the milk was left.

There was a black and white road sign for the low bridge (which took the tube train between Woodside Park Station and West Finchley) but we would spin around it and use it as a stop when roller skating down the hill. Our coalman was Mr Glass and he used to be invited in for a cup of tea. We also had a chimney sweep from time to time. Mum used a laundry service for the sheets, and we had a baker who delivered with his horse and cart and we were allowed to ride up front with him. The bread was always so crusty and we used to pick bits off the crust of the loaf. We had milk delivered every day and if it was left out at the front the birds would peck the silver paper from the top. It was delivered by the Co-op and to get dividend points you used to have to give your Co-op number at the door – 796248 – embedded in all our brains forever. We used to get French onion sellers calling at the door once a year – strings of onions over the handlebars of their bikes.



We lived very close to Woodside Park station. Dad was very predictable in the 1950s and arrived home promptly at 5.30. We would often go down to the station to meet his train. Dad was very cross with us one November when we had made a guy and were asking 'a penny for the guy' on the steps at the bottom of the bridge. He did not want any of his children begging! On one occasion when we had cycled down to the station to meet Dad we came across a boy who seemed friendly but then pulled out an air pistol, so we scooted off on our bikes towards home. Sadly, we weren't fast enough and he had us standing against the fence pointing his gun at us. Mum stood at the end of the road and shouted for us to come home at which point the boy ran off back down Holden Avenue. We think he had come from a children's home in Woodside Park Road. But I don't think it was ever followed up.

Because we lived near Dollis Brook we spent a lot of time down there as kids both on foot and on bicycle. There were air raid shelter mounds in the park, the brook itself, tennis courts and you could go from there across the fields for miles. As we were allowed to cycle further afield we would go via Lullington Garth and Frith Lane across to Mill Hill where there was a wonderful long hill on a main road – possibly Bittacy Hill. Friary Park was further away but we went there occasionally.

Our shops were in North Finchley High Street and we would walk up Holden Road, turn left past the Post Office sorting office and then along Lodge Lane. Mum used to have a basket on wheels for the shopping that would be trundled back and forth. At that time it seemed to hold an awful lot but in reality it wouldn't have come anywhere near the amount of shopping that we would get nowadays; she went food shopping more often than we do now.

At the top of Holden Road there was a long fence to the left and there was a little dog that used to bark like mad whenever we went past. Opposite the junction was a tall old house that had been a school that Dad had attended as a little boy. Further on in Lodge Lane there was another dog that we were all scared of. It lived in the terraced house just past the cobblers (that later became a printing shop) and the front door would be open and a little old lady would usually be there with the dog at the gate – an unfriendly creature as I recall – the dog was scary too!

Just before the start of Lodge Lane there was a big old house with gardens where we went once to a fete that was to be opened by Richard Baker the newsreader, but he wasn't able to come so it was opened instead by one of his colleagues Michael Aspel. I won two raffle prizes that day – a bottle of rum and a box of chocolates.

Halfway along Lodge Lane on the left was Beckers Bakery and then a bit further up there were some little shops – the one we would go to spend our pocket money on sweets had trays of treats priced at 1d, 2d and 3d. They had liquorice pipes, gobstoppers, nutty bars, coconut ice plus fizzy drinks such as Tizer which we would buy if we were going off on a picnic or having a feast. In those days you could get money back for old bottles which became quite a lucrative business if you were willing to search out old bottles. If we had crisps there was only one make – Smiths and there was only one flavour – plain with a twist of salt in a blue wrapper. Sometimes there would be more than one portion of salt in the packet. On the opposite corner was the

off-licence Chads which also had sweets. Just before we reached the High Road there was a shop on the left which I think sold dog meat. Near Chads was the turning to Northside Primary School which was the one we should have gone to if we hadn't gone to Holmewood.

When you reached the High Street there was the zebra crossing. To the right was the Torrington pub which was pulled down and rebuilt in the 1960s. When the pub was rebuilt there was a new supermarket next door (Iceland) and it had automatic sliding doors – the first time we had seen any. Adjacent to that was the greengrocer and on one occasion I spent all my pocket money on a melon so that I could eat it all myself. Further on again was a funeral directors with a sign in the window “:Always at our clients' disposal”. There was a dogmeat shop there as well. Back across the road via the zebra crossing was Woolworth's. This had wooden floors and a large red weighing machine just inside the door which would print out your weight. You could buy broken biscuits by the pound and on one occasion I bought Mum a silver coloured tin cup 'To the Best Mother' for Mother's Day. We also used to buy Woolworth's cover versions of records on the Embassy label. I had *The Young Ones*; *Multiplication*; *Hole in the Ground*; *Speedy Gonzalez and Anyone Who Had a Heart* in my collection. Alongside Woolworth's was Stanhope Road where there were some public toilets. There was a sign saying 'Free P' which we thought very amusing.

Going towards Tally Ho! Was the big department store called Priors. There was a lift with metal grilles across and that would take you to the top floor where there was a café and where fabrics were on sale. This was where you could look through dress pattern books and, once chosen, you bought the pattern from behind the counter. I had one of the huge heavy catalogues once – it must have been out of date – but I can so clearly remember the picture of the dance/dinner dress that I wanted to have when I was old enough – white, full three quarter length with a sash at the waist and lots of petticoats underneath. When you had bought the goods, the money would be put in a little canister and whizzed along wires to the cashier who sat somewhere on the first floor and the cashier would put the change and a receipt and it would whizz back with a distinctive sound to the sales assistant to give to the customer.

When I started at Woodhouse School we were told at the end of the first year that we had to get our summer uniform – dress – from Priors by a certain date. But I had not been told or had forgotten so we went to Priors to buy one at the last minute but there were only one or two small sizes left in stock. Luckily, they were the correct size for me! Part of our uniform was navy blue knickers. Mrs Lawn told parents that we had to wear navy blue knickers for as long as we were doing handstands etc at playtime!

Across from Priors was the Arcade and there was a toy shop at the end and Chris and I would spend our pocket money on buying items for a plastic miniature garden – 1/11d as I remember.

## MORE ABOUT MILK – 1

by David Berguer

Until the middle of the 19th century Londoners got their milk from herds of cows kept on the outskirts of the capital. Hay was supplied from farms like those in Friern Barnet and Whetstone. Dairy farms in the local area included College Farm in Finchley, A1 Dairies which occupied part of Brook Farm, and Manor Farm in Whetstone.



Fresh milk was delivered to households by means of churns carried on carts. Housewives would fill their own cans or jugs from the churn by means of a ladle.



An A1 Dairy cart in Whetstone c1910

The coming of the railways enabled dairy farmers from the countryside, particularly in the West Country, to supply fresh milk to London. Milk was collected from the farms in churns which were then put on early morning passenger trains. Initially the supply was small but in 1865 London herds suffered a disastrous bovine disease - rinderpest - which affected some three-quarters of the cattle and from then on London milk began to be replaced by Country milk. Eventually dedicated milk trains were introduced and, with the introduction in the 1870s of a method of preventing milk souring in transit, supplies expanded greatly. By 1880 virtually all milk in London was being supplied from the countryside and large companies like Express Dairy controlled milk supply from farm to consumer.

In the 1920s milkmen from the A1 Dairy would make two rounds a day - one at 5.30am and the second at 9.30am.

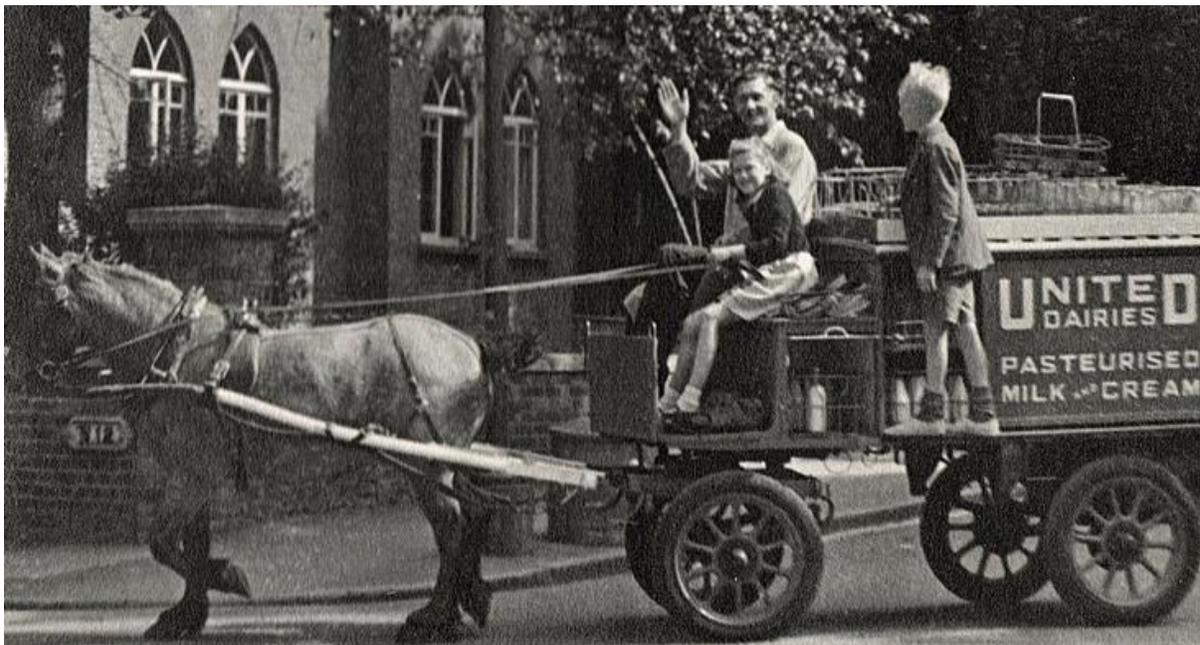
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## **MORE ABOUT MILK - 2**

*by Yvonne Ruge*

Thank you, David, for your February history of our daily pinta. Goodness, but that did stoke memories - like the break time tub of small bottles in steaming hot water, carried into the playground of Holmewood School in winter (horrid smell!) and the competition for their cardboard caps, essential in the making of pompoms.

You featured the shift from horse and cart to electric float (50,000 at their height!) showing an early man/horse team delivering in Muswell Hill for what then merged into United Dairies. My big sister Barbara, horse addict from birth, cultivated our own UD milkman because of his pony.



*Barbara sits alongside the UD milkman in August 1948*

Sometimes she was even allowed to drive and then visit and groom Polly in her stable, Barbara's Elysium, somewhere between Woodside Park and Lodge Lane. Sometimes I was allowed to ride with them, and can just remember— must have been May 1946, when I was rising five – calling down joyfully to everyone I saw: "My Daddy's coming home today!"

That prompts a non-milk memory that others may share? Father, having been raised among brothers with a combination of affection and firm discipline, qualities reinforced in youth by five years with the British Army and away from the family, was shocked on his eventual demob by the easy-going lifestyle of his daughters. Something had to be done about it! So, we soon discovered each our own personal schedule pinned above our bed, minutely detailing, to the very minute (goodness, I can see it now) each movement and task for the day. Shock, horror! An early delegation of two urged Mother to "Send that man away, please!" Fortunately, her negotiations were productive and happily remained so for the next sixty-five years.

Our move across the High Road into Friern Barnet in 1953 brought us into Express Dairy territory, with a horseless, sighing, electric float and the care of Ron-the-Milk. He was a gentle, sweet-natured man who cared for everyone on his round, and for many years. When he eventually retired, I organised a secret collection for him (the amount it raised spoke for itself) and we threw a presentation party, attended by his Chairman and the Barnet Press. Those were the days!

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## **CARR & DAY & MARTIN**

We came across this interesting article in the *Friern Barnet and New Southgate Chamber of Commerce Directory* of 1960:

"The solid, carefully fashioned and costly footwear of the reigns of George III and George IV reflected the spirit of that particular era, with its blend of obstinacy, culture, vulgarity and good living. Yet, despite their originality of design and beautiful workmanship NONE OF THESE SHOES WERE POLISHED. Soles were oiled and the uppers of the leather ones varnished; but polished, NEVER!

It fell to two humble subjects of HM George III to bring about the great revolution in the treatment of footwear by making a blacking to polish leather. The preparation which was their own invention led to the creation of a world famous business known as Day & Martin.

Mr Day, a Doncaster hairdresser, befriended an old soldier who in order to make some return for his kindness gave Day a recipe for making boot blacking, with which, he said, he had himself polished the boots of his superior officers. "Make it like this," said Martin, the soldier, "and you'll make a fortune." The ingredients for the blacking included, among others, molasses and vinegar.

When the excellence of the blacking produced from Martin's recipe was realised, Mr Day contacted him, and together they opened a little shop at 97

High Holborn. The blacking was mixed at the back of the shop and sometimes in Mr Day's kitchen, and demand increased so rapidly as to make imperative an almost twenty-four-hour service of production. Extra assistance was employed by the partners, more shop space was obtained, and, eventually, this little shop gave way to a palatial building covering the site and much of the surrounding area which became one of the sights of London and the figures "97" the trade mark of the firm.

Various "puffing" methods - as advertising was then described - of an ingenious and original character were employed, but in *The Star* on 17 March, 1815, there appeared a direct and simple advertisement to the effect that "George Day and Henry Martin are Manufacturers of the Real Japan Blacking." Charles Dickens, the novelist, who worked on this newspaper, makes Sam Weller use it to polish Mr Pickwick's boots at the White Hart Hotel, as well as the "the lady's shoes at No 3." In *Oliver Twist*, the flashy Toby Crackit laments on the condition of his top boots. "Not a drop of Day & Martin's since you know when." he is made to remark, not a bubble of blacking, by Jove."

One of our greatest modern writers, Arthur Bryant, refers to Day & Martin's in the opening chapter of his *English Saga* in these lines:

"This was the new London; it was still overshadowed by the old. Past the great white invitations to try 'Day & Martin's blacking' and the castellated summer houses and villas of the other bourgeoisie, the traveller entering London felt the shock and heard the roar of the cobble stones and saw the elm trees and winkle stalls giving way to continuous lines of horses and gas lamps."

The scene conjures up the London of Dickens; the London in which Day & Martin climbed to the zenith of their fame; the London in which the boots of the Prince Consort must have shone with the lovely patina which their blacking bestowed, likewise, those of the famous Life Guards, the dandies, and the Household Regiments.

In 1923, Day & Martin's were taken over by another firm, equally famous, if not quite so old, Carr & Son. The firm was established in 1837, the year that Queen Victoria came to the throne. Thus, the firm established during the reign of Queen Victoria's grandfather, George III, joined hands with Carr & son in the reign of George V, her grandson.

On the heights of Northern London, the factory and offices stand today, neat, compact, and distinctive, where working conditions are most congenial and excellent canteen facilities prevail for the employees, many of whom have long service records with the company.

Blacking as such, is of course no longer used, but famous shoe polishes in Tins, Jars and Tubes, Leather and Suede Dyes are prepared, as well as other cleaning and polishing preparations, such as Floor Polish, Metal Polish, Liquid White Cleaners and blocks, Carpet Cleaners, Liquid and Paste Grate Polishes,

Furniture Cream, Autoclene Liquid Car Polish, Quickwax Car Polish, etc. etc., all on the same high standard set respectively by Messrs Day & Martin, 1770, and Messrs Carr & Son, 1837. These products are sent to markets throughout the world, including America, Cyprus, Iraq, British Honduras, Trinidad, Borneo, etc.

The latest product from the organisation is the Lion Tube Wax Boot Polish – as distinct from cream – which is offered in a tube, and besides having consumer appeal, it renders the chore of boot polishing a clean process, relatively speaking, since no polish is spread over the surrounding areas. This product is widely stocked by the leading Shoe Stores throughout the country.

Throughout changes of environment and policy, the quality of these manifold products has never changed but had remained always the best; it is staunch and true like the British initiative and courage which founded the firm in 1770, built it up and maintained it. Famous since 1770 and holders of five successive Royal Appointments, Carr, & Day & Martin Ltd, have the honour to be contractors to the Admiralty, War Office, RAF, US Army, HM Office of Works, etc.”



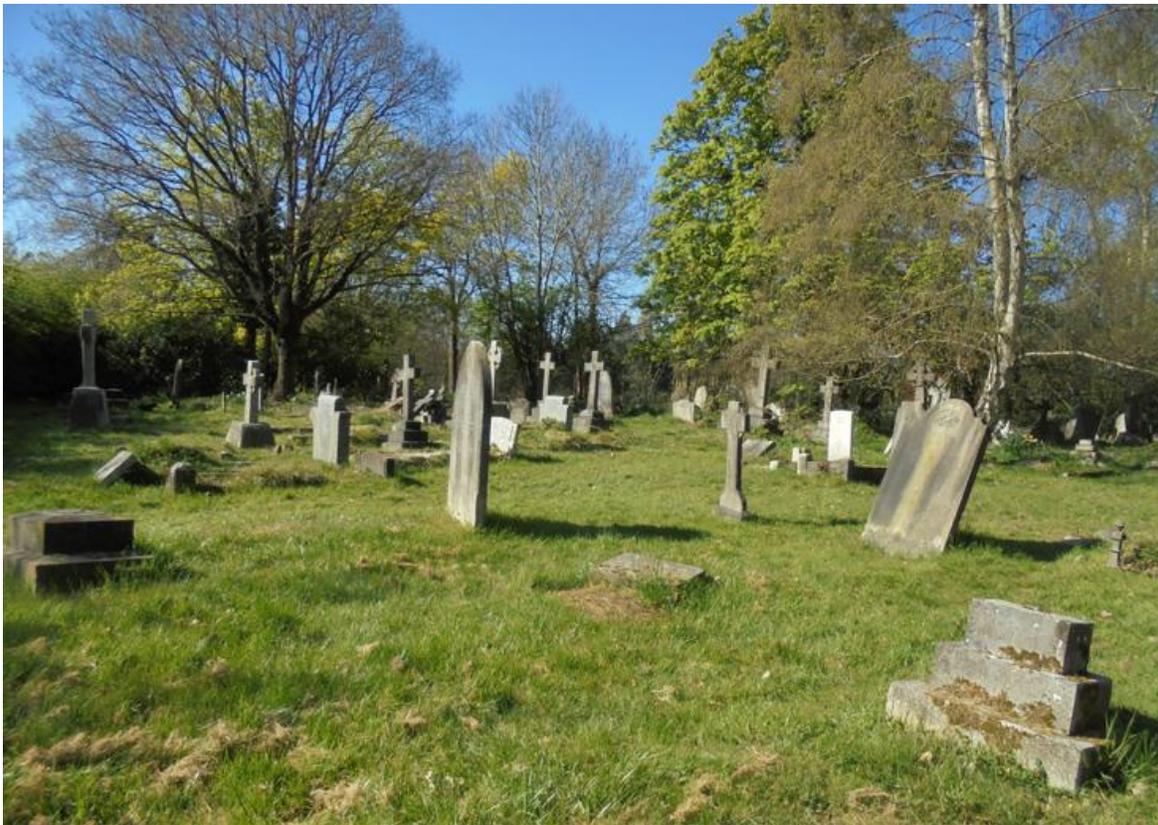
Today Carr & Day & Martin still exists but it now produces a range of horse care products and they still hold a Royal Warrant for the supply of saddlery care products to Her Majesty the Queen.




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## ST JAMES'S CHURCH

For years, the churchyard at St James's has been severely overgrown and many of the graves were completely covered by ivy and other undergrowth. During the periods of lockdown a local resident, a retired architect, took it upon himself to start clearing the area and we are glad to report that it has now been completely transformed.



*The churchyard in April 2021*

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### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

We were due to have an AGM May last year but of course this did not take place as we were unable to hold any public meetings. We were hoping to have this year's AGM in May 2021 but at time of writing this looks unlikely. We are enclosing with this Newsletter copies of the Accounts for April 2019-March 2020 and for April 2020-March 2021. When we can resume our normal programme of meetings we will hold two AGMs at one meeting when the Accounts can be approved.

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### **SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL**

For those of you who have not yet renewed your subscriptions for the year commencing 1 April 2021, 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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