

Friern Barnet Newsletter

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A MEMORIAL FOR A LOCAL LANDMARK

by Colin Barratt

The gas holder in New Southgate stood majestically since 1912 and was the last remnant of the gas works, which closed in 1972. The holder was decommissioned in 2001 and had been deteriorating ever since.

However, early in 2019 it was announced by current owners National Grid that they intended to demolish this iconic gas holder. A small group of us from the Society and others who used to live near it were given a tour of the site in April 2019. It was in a poor state and being taken over by weeds.

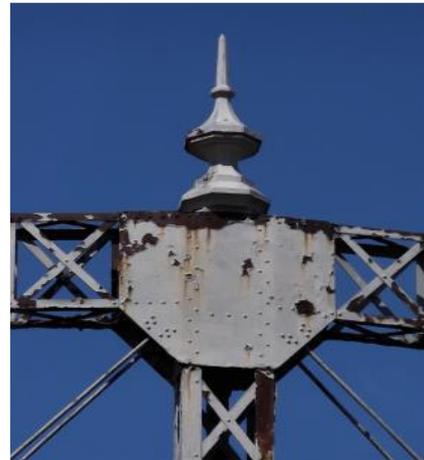
We were promised another tour later, when the contractors had set up and more safety clothing was available. However, this wasn't possible, due to safety considerations. Instead, National Grid produced photos and short videos of the site during the demolition process.

They were keen to give the community and local groups an opportunity to remember the gas holder in some way. Some of the things that they have done on similar projects have included holding heritage events where local people have come along to talk about their memories of living near the gas holder and record them for posterity, saving parts of the gas holder for museums or local heritage groups and working with local schools to have tours of the site and create artwork of the structure.





Inspecting the site in April 2019



Demolition in progress

One of the finials

I would have liked the manufacturer's name plate and date to be preserved, but this was cast into the framework, so couldn't be kept and was photographed instead. The only other parts of the structure which I thought would provide a suitable display were the decorative finials around the top of the frame. I asked for two of these to be salvaged, which was agreed by National Grid. They also offered to store them safely and have them sandblasted and re-painted (at their cost). I also wanted to have large interpretation boards, one explaining the history of gas production and the gas works at New Southgate and another giving information about the demolished gas holder itself.

The most suitable location to display the restored finials and interpretation boards was the New Southgate Millennium Green, which is opposite the site of the gas holder and former gas works. I'm a volunteer on the Green, so I had a good relationship with the Trustees, who own and run it. They agreed to having the finials and boards installed there as a memorial to this local landmark.

National Grid run a Community Grant Programme, which can provide funding to support projects like this. I applied for funding for the interpretation boards and platforms for the finials and this was successful.

The contractors were going to come on site in October 2019. However, due to issues with arranging permissions, work was delayed. Then in early 2020 Covid 19 delayed it

further. Finally, in May 2020 they started clearing the undergrowth and de-watering the tank which the holder sat in. Water was pumped out at a slow rate, to allow filtering and cleaning, before being released into the waste water system.

When the water and sludge were removed, it was hoped there would be some interesting items found, such as old bottles etc, but nothing turned up.

When the tank was fully emptied and the dome structure was removed, it was filled in and the frame was dismantled. I took regular photos, as the demolition progressed, and it was finally completed in late September 2020.

Soon after this, developers announced that a residential housing scheme was being proposed for the gas holder site. This would include a public square, so I contacted their community relations team to discuss the idea of transferring the memorial to the public area of the development when completed. They were keen to arrange a meeting about this and also wanted to meet the Millennium Green Trustees to see what help the Trustees might need to maintain the Green. We've now had two meetings on Zoom and a good relationship with the developers has been created.

In preparation for receiving the restored finials a group of us from the Society spent a morning on Saturday 5 June 2021 digging out two holes and installing platforms of cut down railway sleepers for when the finials were ready for delivery. On Thursday 17 June we were back, waiting for the finials to turn up. With some careful manhandling they were put in place and bolted down. They now make a striking feature on the Millennium Green.

The National Grid Community Relations team were so pleased with the results that they wanted to send out a press release, including a photo of our team with the National Grid team in front of the finials.



The entrance to the Millennium Green, now with additions

The other parts of the gas holder memorial were the interpretation boards, which are now being made. All being well, these will be installed by August. They will be located next to one of the main paths through the Millennium Green, so I hope that many locals will stop and look at them, as well as class visits from nearby Garfield Primary School.

The purpose of this memorial is to ensure that the history of the gas works and gas holder is recorded and remembered for years to come and if it's eventually re-located to a new development on the other side of Station Road it will be on the original site and a legacy of our local industrial heritage. It will be just yards away from where I was born and will hopefully be there long after I'm gone.

MEMORIES OF STC

Back in the winter of 2002 Stan Springate, author of two histories of Standard Telephones & Cables (STC), wrote an article in *Newslink*, the house magazine of Nortel Networks. Those of you who worked for STC or who were around while it was still at New Southgate will find his reminiscences fascinating:

“Reflections on one million years at New Southgate

In my research for the writing of ‘Firm Friends’ I could find no adequate records to help me calculate the total number of people who had worked at STC New Southgate. Consequently I made my own estimate (75,000) which I am sure is not very wide of the mark. The figure, of course, grew during the time Nortel Networks was on the site after buying out STC.



Women workers in Building 3 assembling telephone exchanges

Over the 77 years that ITT/STC/Nortel Networks were at New Southgate, many spent much of their working careers there. What is more, many spent the whole of their working lives there. Interestingly, with a little simple arithmetic, we can derive a conservative estimate of the total (inclusive) numbers of years of service worked on the New Southgate site by all employees and this amounts to an impressive one million years in which are embedded many memories of many people.

I do not consider myself to be a very sentimental or emotional person, but I have to admit that when I recall even just a few of the memories evoked by our very special STC/Nortel community, I get lost in a sea of nostalgia. Some of our pensioners' memories even stretch right back to pre-STC days when the site was part of a rural community, mainly employed in local market gardening, nurseries and small-holdings. Then, with the growth and success of the railways, the area grew into another kind of community where whole families were employed, this time by one ever-growing manufacturer.

The mere thought of the closure of the New Southgate site instantly conjures up many mental pictures of...colleagues, camaraderie, the site as a 'marriage bureau', clocking on, the site growing, the site shrinking, the huge bicycle sheds and racks, the site road thronging with hundreds of employees leaving for home, site Security Officers strung out across the gates, the Chitty family selling newspapers at the gate, streams of buses from Arnos Grove and Whetstone, a massive increase in local housing, social change and more... the Canteen, the Medical Department, projects, equipment, tools, machines, buildings, smells, WW2 and the flying bomb tragedy, fire in Building 8, the collapse of Building 3, dreaded redundancies and yet more...the 'goings on' on Christmas Eve under the mistletoe, the Athletic and Social Club and its numerous sections such as Football, Rugby, Tennis, Bowls, Netball, Drama and Variety, Dancing, Sports Days, Gala Days, Departmental and A & S C dinner/dances, outings to the seaside and our own house magazine the *STC News*

There is a certain nostalgia in recalling the image of the charismatic Managing Director Sir Thomas Spencer, as he walked through the factory on his site rounds or on the many times he attended Athletic and Social Club functions. He had a gift for remembering the names of employees he met at our various 'Family Firm' functions and this made the camaraderie even greater.

Huge technology change is perhaps the main reason for today's working environment being so very different from the times that most of us remember. Without doubt, the ensuing social and working changes have generated a new culture and working experience for the young of today. How can they possibly 'feel'; and understand the philosophy of our 'Family Firm' which sought to train and educate its staff in a great variety of ways – from workshop practices, right

through to engineering, design, administration and management – and to provide employees with a job for life and, then, a pension.

So, what is the secret of what made the New Southgate site tick and thrive so well? Surely a unanimous view would suggest it was the very successful 'Family Firm' concept and paternal culture, coupled with the unique nature of the 'self contained' site that nestled in its 37 acre basin. These factors moulded and bonded a community which was nurtured by a staff working and growing together as friends. It consisted in many cases, of married couples who had first met on the site and who were joined by their sons and daughters and then yes, their grandchildren. Mind you, I believe our bonding was aided and abetted by an almost tangible and collective site sense of humour.

It is sad that the New Southgate site, that has provided us with so many wonderful memories is now closed. Many of us 'olduns' I am sure, feel we have been very lucky to have worked our time out at New Southgate. I am sure we all feel for the New Southgate employees who have been subjected to the trauma of the site closure – and all that it entails”.

Footnote

In 1922 Western Electric took over the buildings of John Taylor & Sons who made lorry engines at the site in New Southgate. The company changed its name to Standard Telephones & Cables in 1925. The first transatlantic telephone call was received in the factory in 1923 and the wireless equipment on the *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth* was made there in the 1930s. The factory played a key role in the Second World War employing some 14,000 people working in three shifts. Official starting times were 7.30, 8.00 and 8.30 which eased the strain on the public transport – most people relied on the 251 bus or came on the Piccadilly Line to Arnos Grove.

Northern Telecoms, a Canadian Company which became Nortel, took over STC in 1994 and on Friday 30 August 2002 the doors of the Nortel Networks offices in Oakleigh Road closed for the last time, ending a 70-year link with New Southgate.

In 2003 the North London Business Park was created utilising some of the former buildings on the site and among the occupiers were Barnet Council and Barnet College. The council moved out in 2020 and there is now a planning application for redevelopment of the site by the Comer Group, developers of the former Friern Hospital site. Their plan is for 2500 homes and a five form entry secondary school as well as leisure space.

Our Committee Member, John Holtham, worked at STC and he explained that Building 8 was the Radio Division and Building 3 was the Telephone Manufacturing Division where raw materials came in and complete telephone exchanges went out. It was claimed that they kept enough stock for a year of production (never heard of Just in Time in the 1960s). Whilst he was there, electronics became available, and a massive change came about. The unions did not like the new technology and there were a

number of disputes and eventually electronic manufacturing moved to a new site in Benfleet, Essex and that was the beginning of the end for New Southgate.,

A VICTORIAN JAB

We came across this in our archives:

VACCINATION ACTS, 1867 & 1871.

17.

To Mr. Stg. Cromwell Wall

I HEREBY remind you that the next appointed periodical attendances for the performance of Public Vaccination in your District will take place at 78, Holly Park Road, New Southgate, on Second, Third & Fourth Mondays in April at 3 p.m. and that if your Child, Oliver Cromwell, be not vaccinated before the expiration of that period, you will be in default, and subject to the penalties of the Vaccination Acts; and that it will be my duty to take the proper steps for securing the enforcement of the law.

(Signed) S. M. BALDOCK,
Vaccination Officer for
Barnet Union.

Dated 13 April 1896

Address of Vaccination Officer 49, High Street, Barnet.

The other Oliver Cromwell died in 1658 of malaria and kidney stones.

DOMESTIC SCIENCE AT WOODHOUSE

Barbara Eastmure was a pupil at Woodhouse Grammar School in the 1950s and she recalled her experiences at Domestic Science classes:

“Domestic Science appeared on the timetable and it was not subject that I had had at junior school. For the first year this consisted of sewing and took place in the ‘Dom Sci’ room as it was known. A huge room with a blackboard and a teacher’s desk at one end, large wooden tables in the centre and what we would now call ‘work stations’ around the three walls. The class was divided into groups and allocated a cooker, a sink and a table. Having said that the first term of the second year was spent learning how to scub a wooden table. All one’s thoughts were quashed and the girls were taught to be attentive to detail and to be precise in their actions. Every set of actions had to be documented and for those who never had the benefit of attending this school, here follows the recipe for scrubbing a table which the teacher, Miss Buselle delivered:

OBJECT To use soap and water to perfectly clean a wooden table.

UTENSILS AND INGREDIENTS

One wash bowl.

One scrubbing brush.

One kitchen cloth.

A block of soap.

Plentiful supply of hot and cold water.

METHOD

Clear all items from the table.

Gather all utensils.

Gather all ingredients.

Fill wash bowl with warm water.

Immerse cloth and squeeze surplus water back into bowl.

Use wet cloth to mark two lines on the table, one horizontal, one vertical across the middle of the long and short sides of the table thus dividing the table surface into four equal sections.

Rub soap onto dampened scrubbing brush and scrub one section, moving the brush backwards and forwards in the same direction as the grain of the wood

Rinse brush and put to one side.

Remove any surplus soap with cloth and rinse cloth.

Change water to clean water.

Rinse scrubbed section and wipe dry with cloth.

Repeat soaping and rinsing as above until all four sections have been cleaned

Wipe over entire table with clean cloth.

Remove all utensils to sink.

Remove soap and put away.

Thoroughly wash all utensils.

Put brush to drain, standing it on its side so that water drains from wooden handle.

Put cloth to dry.

Put wash bowl away.

When the girls eventually graduated to actual cooking the same strict procedures had to be adopted.

Even after this intensive training, Patricia Berguer, who was at Woodhouse at the same time, cannot recall ever having been called upon to scrub a wooden table in her whole life. As far as cooking was concerned, she cannot remember any cooking of food taking place at the school and was baffled when the cookers were replaced by the Gas Company, as they had hardly been used and were in almost perfect condition!

The old adage - school days are the happiest days of your life - was not the case for Barbara . Music lessons were a dread. They took place in the hall where the grand piano was situated, and were conducted by a part time teacher, Mr Procter, an imposing gentleman who loved his subject but included in most of his lessons a walk between each line of pupils homing in his ear to their individual voices. When he found one he either liked or disliked he would bend his head and align his ear to the singer's mouth to hear more clearly. Barbara was tone deaf and in fear of making an awful noise which would be greeted with: "You, shut up."

In French too she was ridiculed by a tyrant of a French mistress who seemed unable to enunciate certain phrases without spitting. Which, as Barbara sat at the front of the class didn't impress her. "You wouldn't last a day in France" was often hurled at her.

BARCLAYS BANK SITE, 1250-1258 HIGH ROAD N20

by John Heathfield

The bank is built on part of what was originally the waste or common lands of the Parish of Finchley. The boundary between Finchley and Friern Barnet parishes runs about 50 yards east of the rear wall of the bank, and down the centre of Oakleigh Road North about 5 yards north of the side wall.

The very early records have been lost, but in 1609 the records of the Bishop of London for the Parish of Finchley show that John Alcester or Awester held a tenement and three acres in right of Elizabeth, his wife. In 1658 the property was transferred to Robert Odell, who was to play a significant part in the history of the site. He built a barn and paid the Lord of the Manor £5 for permission to do so. The Hearth Tax Return of 1674 shows Robert Odell – 2 hearths. He used the house as a pub called *The Mare*, later *The White Horse*, and subsequently in 1787, *The Black Horse*.

In 1713 Thomas Odell sold to John Stanley “all that messuage or tenement containing nine rooms and a buttery with barns, stable and orchard at or near Mare Lane”. By 1741 the property is described as: “a messuage on the east of the highway from London through Whetstone, backwards onto a yard formerly belonging to Matthew Newman, and now of William Bolton, victualler, with three tenements formerly two are used as an ale house together.” There was no pavement at that time, and the road ran right up to the door of the pub. By 1787 the name of the pub had been changed. The record is “Three messuages in Whetstone, of William Bolton, victualler, formerly two messuages, together with a well of water, and a piece of ground fronting the road, formerly waste, abutting west on a pond laying on the Common and used by all”.

In 1829, John Prescott leased to John Chippendale: “three messuages or tenements, formerly one, with nine rooms and a buttery, known as *The Black Horse*.” At that time what is now Oakleigh Road North was known as Black Horse Lane. In 1868 Widow Atfield sold “all that messuage called *The Hand & Flower* to R Gilmore. The 1841 Census shows *The Hand & Flower* having 5 lodgers, all agricultural labourers.”

The Hand & Flower was remodelled in 1906, and it is that building that was demolished in 1990 to make way for Barclays Bank.

Footnote

On Friday 22 January 2021 Barclays bank at Whetstone closed its doors for the last time, meaning that there are now no banks or building societies in the High Road. As recently as 2016 there were branches of Natwest at number 1302, and Santander at 1320. Santander recently announced that they were closing their branch in High Road North Finchley on 24 June. This latest closure is a sign of changing times – in the past six years over 4000 bricks and mortar bank and building societies have closed.

A WARTIME CHILDHOOD – 1 THE PHONEY WAR

by John Philpott

I was five years old at the start of the Second World War. My home, with my parents, Pat and Bert, and 18-month-old brother, David, was a flat in a large house, 45 Highbury Hill, where lived three generations of our family. The previous year I had started at Drayton Park School.

On 1 September 1939, the day that Hitler invaded Poland, my father, who worked for a wallpaper firm and was a part-time member of the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), was called-up for full time service and ordered to report to Islington Fire Station in Upper Street. Pat remembered hearing his footsteps as he went down the street but not looking out to watch him depart - the imminent destruction of London, as was almost immediately to happen to Warsaw and later to Rotterdam, was expected, and they feared they would not meet again. On reporting to Upper Street, he was sent with a crew of three others, together with a messenger boy with a cycle to an “Alarm Station”. They were equipped with a trailer pump, but without hose or hydrant key, which they pushed through the dark in the blackout. There was no accommodation and no prov-



*Highbury Hill Garden. Pat,
David and me*



*Drayton Park School. I am in the second row,
second from the right*

-ision for food. Bert went home to collect a camping Primus stove and they found shelter in turns in a van parked in a nearby mews. Later they were to be provided with a taxi to tow the pump and with accommodation at a sub-station established in a school from which the children had been evacuated.

On 2 September, Pat, David and I were evacuated. (I was lucky: David was too young to be evacuated without his Pat, so we went as a family; otherwise, I would have gone alone.) From Drayton Park Station we went by train to Alexandra Park (?). From there we were marshalled through the streets to Bowes Park (?), with local residents offering lemonade for the children, but we were hurried on. We boarded another train, and only then did Pat learn that our destination was Cambridge. On arrival, we were taken to a possible billet, but the potential landlady there had just had a baby, so we were taken to Homerton College for the night. Milk was brought round but we missed out; with great generosity, another mother shared hers. We were given a bath; another tragedy: the remains of David's apple was lost down the plug hole.

On 3 September, we were taken by car to 20 Cockburn Street, the home of Lil and Les Peck. They had agreed to take two children, but the billeting officer persuaded them to take the three of us. On that day war was declared. We heard Neville Chamberlain's announcement over the wireless. I had no idea what it was about but knew it was serious from the faces of the adults.

One would expect that the sudden imposition of a Pat and two small children would place quite a strain on a childless couple, but the relationship was very cordial, and Pat remained in touch with Lil for many years afterwards. I remember one evening when Les was babysitting while Pat and Lil were out together David was already in bed and I settled down happily to colour pictures with Les. Once David woke up, Les pointed a torch at him so that he wouldn't see that it wasn't Pat and said: "It's all right



Bert is second from the right.

Go to sleep!” in a high-pitched voice. I also remember an occasion when we were with Lil and Les on Parker’s Piece and I nearly choked on a boiled sweet. Les rushed off to get aid from RAMC recruits who were drilling nearby, but meanwhile Pat and Lil inverted me, holding me by the ankles, and dislodged the sweet by thumping me on the back. I attended a nearby school during our brief stay in Cambridge; my only memory of it is of a few of us with the teacher drawing pictures, quietly because the “babies” were resting.

Arthur Hawks was one of Father’s crew in the AFS. Emmie Hawks and their family were also evacuated to Cambridge, from their home in Paxton St, Islington. Pat enjoyed visiting them in Cambridge as we always had a friendly welcome. We kept in contact with the Hawks family long after the war and would cycle from Friern Barnet to visit them in Harrow Weald, where they had been rehoused in a council prefab, and we went on holiday with them, camping in Somerset. In London, immediately after the declaration, the air raid sirens sounded, but it was a false alarm. Shortly afterwards, Father’s crew were called to a fire in a dustbin. Lacking any other means, they extinguished it by putting on the lid. There followed the period of the “phoney war” when nothing much happened, so before Christmas we returned from Cambridge to Highbury Hill. Schools were closed, but I remember going to lessons in the living room of a house. The “phoney war” ended with the invasion by Germany of Norway then of France and the evacuation at Dunkirk.

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