

# Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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## REMEMBER PEA SOUPERS?

by David Berguer

*The Morning Post* of 25 September 1821 carried the following:

“So dense was the fog on Sunday night on the northern road, that at Finchley, Whetstone, Barnet &c the mail-guards were obliged to descend from their stations, and walk before the coaches with the lamps in their hands; and people going from, or returning to town in gigs &c. found it necessary to have people preceding them with lighted links.”

Britain had always been susceptible to fogs but the increase in the use of coal fires, coal-fired power stations and later vehicle exhausts, led to smoky fog – nicknamed smog. At the beginning of December 1952 a period of high humidity and a stationary anti-cyclone, which produced very still air, led to the worst smog. By 5 December smoke and sulphur dioxide levels were about ten times higher than normal. Although it lasted less than a week it led to the death of at least 1600 people, mainly from bronchitis, pneumonia and coronary disease and particularly children and the elderly.

Elsie Trusler, who lived in Goldsmith Road, recalled her experience:

“Of the winter of 1952, just before Christmas, there was the ‘Great Smog’. A thick dense fog came down early in the week and worsened by the day. It became so bad that on the Friday afternoon, the school advised anyone who had a long journey



*An acetylene flare lifts the gloom*

home could leave early. Alvis and I hurried to Ealing Broadway for the 112 bus but by now it had become so very murky that the bus crept along the route at a snail's pace.

Finally, reaching our stop at the bottom of Colney Hatch Lane, we alighted and blindly searched ahead, trying to make out what was road and what was pavement. We usually crossed the North Circular Road to get to the stop that would be the last stage of our journey on the 134 bus to Friern Barnet. We could hardly make out where the main road was, so unable to get to the other side with any certainty, we decided to play safe and walk up Colney Hatch Lane which was on our side.

Most of the walk involved passing Friern Hospital with its high wall. As it was a mental hospital designed to keep intruders out, you can imagine our shock when we saw a rope descending from the trees within the grounds.....but luckily followed by two small boys who would have only been looking for conkers. I was so glad to get home and my Mum was relieved to see me. The weekend had even worse fog and I remember walking along Woodhouse Road with my Mum and Barbara. As it was safer to keep as far from the busy road as possible, we walked across a setback lawned area in front of Woodhouse Grammar School, only to be alarmed when a trolleybus had come off its overhead cables and was careering across the grass straight behind us, we had to sharply back out of the way to avoid being run over.

Quite a few people with chest problem became ill during the smog, and the chemist was selling masks to filter some of the particles which the fog left. For several days everything was covered in a greyish-yellow residue.”



Patricia Berguer remembers that with disruption to the trolleybuses, pupils at Woodhouse were sent home in twos. When they were approaching Friern Hospital they were greeted more than once by men opening their raincoats and displaying their crown jewels and then disappearing into the smog! Driving, of course, was particularly difficult as the headlights did not penetrate the gloom and windscreens needed to be continually cleaned.

The introduction of the Clean Air Act in 1956 allowed, but did not compel, local authorities to establish smoke control areas in which coal fires were forbidden. This went some way to cure the problem but another smog in December 1957 killed another 1000 Londoners, and on 4 December 90 people were killed when two trains were involved at Lewisham. A stationary electric train was struck by a steam train whose driver had passed two caution signals and a danger signal because he could not see them in the fog.



*Clearing up after the Lewisham crash. The overbridge had collapsed and had to be rebuilt*

Eventually another Clean Air Act in 1968 made it an offence to emit dark smoke from a chimney and the use of smokeless fuel and the gradual introduction of central heating meant that winters in London were no longer a threat to life.

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## **UNFAIR TRADING**

It would appear that some local traders were rather less than honest as this piece from *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* of 26 December 1875 shows:

“At the Highgate Petty Sessions on Monday, Frederick Hall, grocer and cheesemonger, of Whetstone, was charged on a summons with having seven light weights in his possession. Defendant, who spoke in a German accent, was asked if he pleaded guilty or not guilty. “He replied: “I must admit it was only neglect. I am a foreigner. It wasn’t done for a bad purpose. I hope you will see it over this time. I will see that in future it does not happen again.”

“UNJUST WEIGHTS. George Shaw, assistant-inspector, proved seizing the seven unjust weights now produced, in defendant’s shop on 22nd ult., and Mr Faulkner, the inspector, tested them in view of the magistrates. Defendant said he had been in the business 18 months. Mr Bodkin: “And poor people who deal with you are to suffer your neglect.” Defendant said it was not much. He bought the weights about two years ago in Bethnal-green, and never saw to them. The

scales he could attend to himself, having been an engineer. The scales were correct. Mr Bodkin told him he must pay a fine of 10s and 7s costs. Defendant: "That's a nice Christmas box." The money was paid.

On 3 March 1888 *The Illustrated Police News* carried a report of a currency fraudster:

"CAPTURE OF AN ALLEGED SMASHER. At the Barnet Police-court, on Monday, Mr H E C Stapylton in the chair, John William Walker, of Bawtry-road, Whetstone, was charged with having uttered counterfeit coin. The evidence of Christina Shaw, daughter of the landlord of the York Arms, Whetstone, was to the effect that on the 10th ult. the prisoner came to the house and was served with a pint of ale, for which he paid with a florin. Her father subsequently found that the florin was bad. Having found out where the prisoner resided, he went to him and got good money for the beer, retaining the florin, which was afterwards handed to the police. Mrs Sarah Grimsey, keeper of a small shop at Friern Barnet, gave evidence to the effect that on the 25th ult. the prisoner went to her shop and purchased some bacon, paying with a shilling. A few minutes afterwards he sent a child for a loaf, and the child also tendered a shilling in payment. The coin looked doubtful, and on examination proved to be bad. This aroused her suspicions, and she then found the first shilling was also counterfeit. She went to the residence of the prisoner, and under threat of giving him in charge, obtained good money from him. Mrs Lydia Sharp, another shopkeeper in the neighbourhood, and Sydney Smith, potman at the Railway Hotel, New Southgate, gave evidence as to similar attempts on the part of the prisoner to pass base money at their respective establishments. Sergeant Goodship, 32S, proved the arrest of the prisoner, and a witness named Helmes gave evidence as to the finding of eight counterfeit shillings close to the spot where Walker was apprehended. Prisoner was remanded in custody."

The *Morning Post* of 10 March 1896 reported a case of fraud:

"William Grant, of the Blue Anchor Inn, Whetstone, appeared in answer to a summons charging him with having sold, to the prejudice of Arthur Liddall Bridge, a quantity of whisky which was not of "the nature, substance, and quality of the article demanded, but was 28 degrees under proof," contrary to Section 6 of the Sale of Food and Drugs Act of 1879.

Mr H W Pole defended. Mr Bridge, an inspector under the Act for the County of Middlesex, said that he purchased half-a-pint of Scotch whisky at the Blue Anchor, for which he paid 1s 4d. After he had made this purchase he saw exhibited in another compartment a notice which read, "All spirits sold at this establishment are diluted according to price."

Mr Glover: That means that the public can have anything they like. They pay a certain price, and have the spirit watered accordingly. Mr Poole contended that the offence was a very trivial one. Under the Act whisky could be sold 25deg under proof, so that this was only 3deg out. Defendant did not "break down" his spirits himself but sold them as he received them from the distillers. Gin could be "broken-down" to 30deg under proof. Defendant was fined 20s and 5s 6d costs

## JOHN PARR

Our member Hilary Paddon told us of the following article which appeared in the 18 August 2021 issue of the *i* newspaper:

“First WWI casualty’s medal is sold

A medal won by the first British soldier killed in the First World War was sold for £17,000 at auction. Private John Parr, 17, was killed near Mons, Belgium, on 21 August 1914. His posthumously awarded 1914 Star medal had been owned by Barry Hobbs, a historian who died in May, and was bought by a UK collector.”

John Parr was born on 18 July 1897 and lived at 52 Lodge Lane, North Finchley. He was a butcher’s boy and was also a caddie at North Middlesex Golf Club. He joined the 4th Battalion the Middlesex Regiment in 1912 when he was 15 and lied about his age, claiming to be 18 years old. With the outbreak of the First World War, he was posted to Obourg, just north of Mons, and on 21 August 1914 he was sent on a bicycle, along with another soldier, to ascertain the whereabouts of German soldiers. His companion returned to report their position and Parr was left to hold off a German patrol. He was killed in an exchange of rifle fire and became the first British soldier to die in the War.



*On 21 August 2014 the Archdeacon of Hampstead conducted a service outside 52 Lodge Lane where a memorial plaque had been placed on the pavement in memory of John Parr.*

## A WARTIME CHILDHOOD – 3 AIR RAIDS AND DOODLEBUGS

*by John Philpott*

Raids were reduced in 1942 and 1943. 1944 started with increased conventional air raids and then came the V1 Flying Bombs and the V2 rockets. There were brick-built air raid shelters in Goldsmith Road for public use. Some houses, ours included, had an Anderson shelter in the back garden. An Anderson shelter was formed by a trench over which was a curved roof of corrugated iron, the corrugated iron covered by earth and turf, with a concrete floor. It was large enough to accommodate bunk beds and for a time we spent the night there. On the field behind the school were shelters of similar construction large enough to accommodate a class. We had lessons in the shelter, with the children sitting on slatted wooden benches along the sides.

The popular wartime songs are well known. The following, chanted in the playground to accompany a skipping game, must have been composed by the children, and probably not elsewhere preserved.

Berlin in Germany's a long way off  
Hitler's got the whooping cough  
What shall we give him to get him better?  
Salt, mustard, vinegar and pepper  
Salt, mustard, vinegar and pepper

(Continued until the child "in" tripped on the rope and was "out")

The V1 flying bombs ("Doodlebugs") had a distinctive engine noise and while you could hear it there was nothing to worry about. It was when it fell silent that danger threatened for it was then plunging to earth. Once at home during the day we heard one very loud noise then silence. Pat had David and me lying down by the staircase and covered us up with coats. Then came the explosion. This may have been the one that fell on the Standard Telephones and Cables factory or the one that fell in the Grove Road area of New Southgate, both in 1944. Once a week our class would walk from Holly Park School to Arnos Grove pool for our swimming lesson, our route taking us along Friern Barnet Road and then Grove Road. Following the Grove Road V1 explosion we saw the devastation it had caused.

Two things in particular stick in my mind: St Paul's Church Hall, a ruin, but with the scenery from the last dramatic production still standing on the stage; and the wrecked houses in Grove Road with a Morrison shelter (an indoor shelter like a large water tank) intact among the ruins – did it save lives we wondered? During quiet spells, fireman had to be ready on duty and they had more time than required for maintenance of equipment and household duties of the station. Workshops were established and they spent time making wooden parts of aircraft, also toys and other items which were sold for charity. Toys were very scarce during the war, but David and I had several given to us at Christmas from this source. A plywood disk, an offcut from an aircraft part, found use as a teapot stand.

Despite rationing, we were never hungry. Pat was an excellent cook, making the best of what was available. Bert had one of the allotments (now built over) on the land between Colney Hatch Lane and Coppetts Road. This provided vegetables and soft fruit. I enjoyed the Sundays we worked together there as a family. Pat would bottle fruit and salt runner beans to last us through the winter. Chickens, kept in a hutch in the back garden, provided eggs. At one time there were three named Faith, Hope and Charity. When they succumbed to a sickness, Pat observed that it was a parable: Faith was dead, Charity dying and only Hope remained alive.

David and I had a pet rabbit each, also kept in a hutch in the garden. Then Judy, a mongrel terrier, came to us as a small puppy. There was a problem when we went to visit Bert's mother – dogs were not allowed on a bus in the blackout, solved by carrying her in a zipped-up shopping bag.

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## **SHOPS IN FRIERN BARNET - continued**

*by Barbara Eastmure*

The local parade of shops in Woodhouse Road catered for most of the needs of the local community especially considering the meagre nature of supplies available. At the corner of Ashurst Road was Hardy & Giblett. Like many food shops its walls were white



with the occasional patterned tiles inset. The dairy was a wide shallow shop with a counter running the width. Facing the front door was a rear door, presumably to a stock room which in turn would lead to the actual dairy behind the shop. There was always a clatter of milk churns and the whistles and shouts of the men who worked there looking after the horses when they were not pulling the green delivery carts up and down the roads.

The lady who worked in the shop lived opposite my aunt Lill so often passed messages back and forth. This was a typical gesture before the wide use of the telephone and often we would ask her to tell Lill that their mother was not too well, or I could not go to school that day because I had a cold.

Next door was Wrangles the shoe menders which was a half shop with a door on the slant from the road. As you went inside the dim shop there was a strong smell of leather and hides. Harry Wrangles, the shoe mender, was a tall, thin, grey haired man who always seemed to have a mouthful of nails which he was holding ready to put into the repair he was doing. It was not until I grew up a little that I was tall enough to see over the counter where there would be piles of shoes waiting to be collected. On the workbench there were metal shapes with half repaired shoes denuded of their soles or heels, waiting for the blow of the hammer as the new leather was fixed in place and the nails knocked in. A little further along was Oscrofts the cycle shop where there were often bikes outside, resting on their saddles with maybe a wheel off and the other spinning in the air as a repair was made. No one seemed to worry too much about working on the pavement in those days. This was also the shop that people would go to get their accumulator recharged. The accumulator was heavy, a glass sided tall boxlike thing similar in look to a modern car battery. I was not allowed to touch as it contained acid.

At number 193 was Wearette, a ladieswear and haberdashery shop, again double fronted but this time inside were glass fronted counters and a curtained off 'trying on room'. This was where they bought elastic for my school garters. The shop was run by two old ladies, one served behind the counter and the other sat in a glass fronted box-like cubby hole. From there she controlled the bookkeeping and also the overhead trolley machine which was used to pass the money from counter to cubby hole and then return any change and a receipt.

Thompsons the butchers, at number 203, and the smiling faced man was a friend of my mother's father and it was to him that she went not only for her meat ration, such as it was, but when she became the proud owner of chickens, she employed him as executioner. I always thought the bare skinned rabbits that were often to be seen in the window looked funny and I never liked the insipid taste of their meat. Almost at the end of the row was Mr Kuhnapple the hairdresser who was responsible for cutting my first, and only, curls. His shop windows were always steamy and had a couple of faded pictures of ladies' hairstyles in them.

At number 219 was Cummins which was a large shop which was not only one of the two newsagents but also sold books and cards as well as a small selection of games and toys. Towards Christmas they would have brightly coloured papers that my mother bought to make paper chains, together with the drawing pins needed to put them up. One year I bought some tiny little calendars for one penny each and used them to make proper picture calendars as presents. It was quite easy really, you had to get a piece of card and a pretty picture from a magazine and old cards, then cut them out and stick them into place. Finally, two small pieces of ribbon would be pasted on the back of both picture and the calendar so that it was suspended. Having done that a hook of ribbon had to be made and fixed to the top of the back of the picture so that it could be hung.

In Friern Barnet Road there were four shops that my mother frequented. The first of these was the Express Dairy at 31 Queen's Parade which was another white tiled shop and this time the coloured pattern tiles had pictures of cows on them. I loved looking at them while my mother was queuing for butter; she had changed her butter ration book to this shop as she preferred the taste of their butter. Next door was the 'Humpty Backed Man's Shop'. Nowadays no doubt there would be a storm of protest at such a name, but surprisingly it caused no offence. The gentleman himself was a pleasant and popular character and always seemed to have a lot of customers. It was a cheerful shop and carried the stocks of blackout material apart from other linens and the like. When you went in to buy something the owner would come towards you but all that could be seen was the top of his head as he was almost doubled right over. As he measured the material he would keep up a constant conversation until finally, as he handed over the change, he would bend his knees in such a way the top half of his body would change angle and there would be a smiling face and laughing eyes.

The ironmongers also sold grain and oats that had to be fed to the chickens. It always had a funny smell which, as it also sold paraffin, was not really surprising. Inside the doorway were huge sacks for animal feed and when you wanted some it would be scooped out and weighed into the scale which had been lined with newspaper. When the right amount was shown, the four corners of the paper would be drawn up and screwed together before being handed to the customer. Many was the time that I had to fish around in the bottom of the emptied shopping basket and gather the grains that had fallen from the split newspaper.

The end shop was Madame Flora's and when you entered it gave the feeling of being crammed full. One big wooden counter ran the length of the shop and behind it, stacked on the shelves against the wall were an assortment of boxes and drawers. Up on the top shelves were the long oblong boxes that held the pink corsettes that were discreetly displayed in the windows along with brassieres. For some reason I grew up with the idea that items were very risqué, mainly because my aunt used to refer to her underclothing as 'unmentionables'. Madame Flora was a tiny lady with dark hair held tight to her head under a thick brown hairnet which came down onto her forehead a good inch lower than her hairline.



Does anyone remember this happening? It appeared in *Finchley Press* on 1 May 1964.

## BANG GOES OUR CHIMNEY



With a thunderous roar and a cloud of dust the 100 foot chimney at Summers Lane, North Finchley, sewage works, topples to the ground, to land dead on target.

The explosion which reverberated around Finchley on Sunday, was set off by 19 year old Sapper Michael Comerford, the newest recruit of the 101 Corps Engineer Regiment (TA), who blew up the disused chimney. It took them three hours to place the explosives in the chimney. In charge of the operations was Lt. Mike Orrell-Jones.

Finchley Council passed the death sentence on the 24 year old chimney because it is now out of date. The refuse will be dumped on the old sewage works land for a further two or three years. The land will probably then be used for an open space.

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### THE WINTER OF 1963

The winter of 1963 was the coldest for 200 years. It snowed on 29 December 1962 and the snow did not disappear until 6 March 1963. Karl Ruge ventured out with his camera one day in January 1963 with the following results:



*Friern Barnet Lane looking south*



*The Ridgeway, N20 looking east*

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### **FINCHLEY LADIES CIRCLE**

*by Patricia Berguer (formerly Richardson)*

The Round Table was founded in Norwich in 1927 as a society for men in professions or trades between the ages of 18 and 45 whose aim is 'friendship and service'. The Finchley Round table used to hold fortnightly dinner meetings, usually at *The Torrington* in North Finchley. The meal would be followed by a talk from a speaker on

any number of topics. Once men reached the age of forty they had to resign but could then join the 41 Club which had similar aims.

Wives of Round Tablers had a separate club, the Ladies Circle, who met twice a month, alternating between meeting each other's houses and then at a lunch or dinner which was held at YWCA at the bottom of Lodge Lane with the food being provided by private caterer. Hats were an important part of the ladies' lunches in those days, as were long evening dresses for the formal dinners. Regional lunches were held in a London hotel.

I joined the club in 1969 as a young mother and attended the dinner meetings and enjoyed them as a break from young children with interesting companions. My first encounter with the committee was with a member (who is now a very good friend) who cast a steely eye over me and said: "I hope you can sew, cook and organise a tea tent or a thousand people at Finchley Carnival in Victoria Park." She said it tongue in cheek but I was very afraid!

At a Finchley Memorial Fete held in the hospital grounds we ran a very successful cake stall which sold out very quickly. I had been asked to produce 12 cakes which I took to mean fairy cakes but subsequently learned that it meant full-sized cakes! All the proceeds from the cakes, together with a toy stall, a hat stall and a tombola went to the hospital. At the Finchley Carnival, Round Table and the 41 Club men ran the beer tent which was an all-day and evening event. The fairground used to put fireworks in coconut shells which then rained down on us – no Health and Safety in those days. Every year we supplied a float using a lorry borrowed from Perry's and the themes included *The Magic Roundabout* and *Star Wars*. The children of Round Tablers would sit on the float while the Circlers and Tablers would run alongside with buckets which they used to collect money from the crowds along the route. We were in competition with Finchley Rugby Club who were also collecting.



*Finchley Carnival float 1975*

Every Christmas for two weeks we toured the district with a trailer built to resemble a sledge which had been built by the Round Tablers. This was towed behind an estate car and carried a Circler or Tabler dressed as Father Christmas accompanied with

parcels and bells. I played the part of Santa one year but, as a woman, I could not speak when children approached me; they must have been nonplussed, but their parents contributed donations anyway.

The Chairwoman chose a different charity each year and, as well as supporting the men's fund raising, we also organised our own events which included a Medieval Fair, a Donkey Derby, a Vintage Car Fair, a Go Cart event and an Antiques Fair. The more adventurous of us include gliding on Dunstable Downs in open cockpit gliders and even parachute jumps. We had challenges with other clubs that we visited, including eating jelly with a toothpick or sucking it up through a straw. We also did more conventional things like playing tiddly winks, darts and ping pong.

I was Chairwoman in 1973-74 and I wore a collar with small bars inscribed with my name and year of office. One year, together with our husbands from the Round Table, we attended a dinner at the Law Courts and the after-dinner speaker was our local MP, Margaret Thatcher, before she became Prime Minister. She was a very impressive speaker. At an Annual Conference at the Lancaster Gate Hotel, Gyles Brandreth stood on his head, which was his party piece. This was followed by a visit to the first Ann Summers shop at Marble Arch which was empty until we entered and onlookers gained courage to come into the shop; surprise items for sale! Ladies Circle International organised international conferences attended by people from all over the world, and I attended two of them. The first one was in Newcastle and the other one was in the more exciting venue of Stockholm. I left Ladies Circle in 1974 and then joined Tangent, which was the female equivalent of the 41 Club. But that's another story.

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To commemorate thirty years since the closure of Muswell Hill Bus Garage, on Sunday 7 November 2021 a number of vintage buses ran on routes that used to operate from the garage. RT 3933 was photographed on route 251a at Arnos Grove.



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