

# Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

## INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY ERNEST BENNETT BY YVONNE RUGE ON 24 JANUARY 2005

YR: What is your earliest memory?

AB: My earliest memory was when I was two. I was born on 28 May 1936 at Wellhouse Hospital before it became Barnet which is in Wellhouse Lane.

YR: You must have been one of the first babies there.

AR: When I was two, or perhaps before, I was always out with my father in the car and that's something else to cover. So I was always going out for rides with him and I remember we went to a house in the road leading down to Arnos Park near Arnos Grove tube station and he parked the car outside and went in the house and I stayed in the car. I let the handbrake off.

YR: It's a steep road, isn't it?

AB: Yes. There's a gate into the park at the bottom and a stream the other side, so I let the handbrake off and the car started rolling down the hill! My father came running out of the house and the old cars had running boards along the side so he jumps on the side and reached in the car and managed to stop it before we hit the park! And it's because of what happened is why I remember I suppose, it's a bit of a traumatic experience!

YR: He warmed your pants for you afterwards, did he?

AB: I'm sure, yes.

YR: Was that the famous car was it?

AB: Yes, an Austin 12, 1929.

YR: It had a nickname, didn't it?

AB: Yes. The family name was Bertha. My dad called it Bertha.

YR: Well, my brother-in-law remembered a different name, but I've forgotten what it was.

AB: It was like that, it was an Austin Vintage Club which he was a member of. It was in modern day terms, a convertible, the hood went down. So he used to take the hood down, take the back seats out and pile furniture up in the back.

YR: And for family outings the seat went back in?

AB: Yes. There was mum and dad and four children.

YR: Are you the eldest?

AB: No, I'm the second one. And we all used to ride around in that and go on holidays in it.

YR: And keep getting punctures if I remember from our old Wolseley!

AB: Probably! But it was a marvellous car. I mean he bought it second hand in 1938 and paid the enormous sum of £7. 10s 0d for it!

YR: That was a lot of money then. Did it used to start when he switched it on or did he used a crank handle for it?

AB: No he didn't always have to do that, but quite often he'd have to crank it up. But the wonderful; thing about those sort of cars was that you could get to everything. You could see everything in the engine. You can't now.

YR: You could do that with my first Mini, but that's got nothing to do with it.

AB: So that's my earliest memory – running down the hill in the car with my dad coming out and stopping me.

YR: Was it your Dad who started the business and your grandad came in with him or was it your grandad who started it?

AB: NO, my dad started it.

YR: What was his first name?

AB: Frederick. He worked for other people when he was very young. He always wanted his own shop.

YR: He always worked as an upholsterer did he?

AB: No, he was a cabinet maker. His dad was an umbrella man, the old heavy umbrellas and he used to go all around New Southgate knocking on people's doors asking if they wanted their umbrellas repaired.

YR: When would that have been?

AB: That would be, I suppose, the late 1920s, because Dad started the shop in 1931. So my grandad went home and said: "I've found you a shop, son, which might be suitable – which was 61 Friern Barnet Road.

YR: But where were they living then, they were local were they?

AB: Tottenham.

YR: That was quite a distance then.

AB: So my Dad took it on There was a lady who owned it and he paid rent to this lady.

YR: Did he know what sort of shop it had been before he came in?

AB: Shoes. All I know was that it involved shoes, whether it was shoe repairs or new shoes or both...and I know his name because it's on the step to this day and people don't notice because it says 'Beckett' not 'Bennet'! So on the step is 'Beckett' in the mosaic. It goes back, God knows, about a hundred years, I don't know.

YR: So, did you set up as a cabinet maker?

AB: Yes, furniture repairs, obviously we had to take on upholstery repairs but he knew nothing about upholstery so he employed an upholster. His friend from way back was a French polisher, so between them they did everything in the furniture trade. He also sold furniture in the early days.

YR: It's not big enough there!

AB: You's be amazed...well I'm amazed even now, in fact, I'm trying to find a photograph, I think my son's got it. It's our shop with furniture outside for sale on the forecourt. What he did if it poured with rain I don't know.

YR: Came out with tarpaulins!

AB: But that's interesting because it's got price labels on it. We know we've got it, it's just a question of where. So he sold furniture, repaired furniture and everything that goes with it. His father went in the shop with him to repair his umbrellas, and that's something else, there's something in the shop now, and always has been, which is to do with repairing umbrellas.

YR: Something I would have seen if I's have looked properly?

AB: Well, you wouldn't have known what it was, what it's for. There's a metal bar that ruins across the shop at an angle from one place to another and the meta; bar was to hang the umbrellas on while he works on them, deliberately put there for umbrella repairs by my dad I presume.

YR: So when you come in the door....

AB: Above where my dad was working and above his head is this bar going across. And I've got umpteen bits of umbrellas indoors now, all sorts of things which I've never thrown away. Unfortunately, the sad part of the story is that my grandfather only lived for six months after that.

YR: After the move in there so it's 31 that he died.....

AB: My grandfather died when he was fifty-two. Cancer in the throat, so it must have been very hard for my dad because he'd just started a business which was hard anyway, lost his father, therefore had to support his mother as well as his own family, which hadn't started then but did soon after, so he must have struggled in the early years.

YR: And perhaps he had people coming in expecting him to have somebody else to do their umbrellas.

AB: Well, he did them, my dad learned to mend them.

YR: A man of many parts.

AB: So, he used to do umbrella repairs as well. Even when I was there he used to do umbrella repairs.

YR: Really? Right until he retired?

AB: No, not that long because I think umbrella repairs died out, it became uneconomical. They were producing cheap umbrellas, and unless you were a connoisseur of umbrellas you wouldn't have them repaired, too costly. Part of my education was in Shoreditch. Because of the furniture trade I was learning cabinet making while I was at school.

YR: Why Shoreditch?

AB: That used to be the centre of the furniture industry. Ther's still quite a bit down there now but nowhere near as there used to be and the furniture college was in Shoreditch, hence why I was serving some of my education there, but also down there were umbrella people, so anything while I was at school.

YR: So you could repair umbrellas too?

AB: No I couldn't!

YR: So you were studying furniture making, that was the same as your father's skill?

AB: Yes it was and he suddenly realised: 'why did he need another cabinet maker, what he needed was an upholsterer, so when I left school I went straight into upholstery.

YR: You were doing the furniture training while you were at school?

AB: Yes, so I've got a basic knowledge of woodwork which is handy, because you need that in upholstery because you repair chairs and various upholstering.

YR: Rickety frames and you got to know how they're put together.....which do you prefer?

AB: Upholstery. I wasn't intending to go into upholstery only because my father realised he had to employ an upholsterer, so why not let me become an upholsterer?

YR: Do you enjoy it because it's a skill you're good at or just as much because it's a subject where things keep changing?

AB: It's probably a bit of both. There's a big variety of work in upholstery which keeps you interested because you very seldom get two jobs the same, either the chairs may be the same but the design would be different, so you get a variety of work but I was also good at it, I liked it. I still do, but perhaps not as much as I used to.

YR: What sort of upholstery repairs do you find the most interesting, challenging and satisfying?

AB: I suppose the old kind of work, traditional upholstery.

YR: How is traditional different?

AB: Done the old way, the old-fashioned way, everything by hand creating your own shape in the stuffing of the chair; you had to make the shape yourself with materials you had. So that's true upholstery. I don't know how to describe that, say you had a rounded arm, the frame underneath that is just square, just pieces of wood and you've got to stuff that arm out to the shape you want.

YR: That's sculpting really....

AB: ...and fix at all there because because it's all loose stuffing, it's got to be then covered and held in place and stitched into place, so there's a lot of stitching involved, sewing etc.

YR: Springing, is that involved with it too?

AB: Yes, springs all have to be tied together in various ways.

YR: Is that part of – when you've got the frame there and you get this image inside your head of how you want the chair to look at the end, is your choice as to the type and the strength and positioning of the springs a part of that?

AB: Yes, what size springs and how many, all that. The gauge of the springs, some springs are stronger than others. So yes, that's what upholstery is, but I don't get to do much of that anymore because the furniture's not made for it, only when you get old furniture to be re-done.

YR: And when you get the old furniture can you still get the old materials that you need to re-do authentically?

AB: Mostly, yes.

YR: Kapok or horsehair?

AB: Horsehair was the thing. That's difficult now both in the availability of it and the cost of it, but there are alternatives such as coconut fibre treated and curled so it becomes rather horsehair but not good.

YR: Not so good because it's so stringy or because it doesn't last so long?

AB: Not so/ springy. So, therefore it would break down quicker.

YR: So you get the dust coming out underneath it! So that's one thing changed, horsehair. What other material did you used to have?

AB: I think most other things we can still get because we can still get 'jimms wedding' which is the basis of everything and you can still get springs, old-fashioned kind of strings and you can still get hessian which goes over the springs and another kind of hessian which goes over the stuffing, so all those you can still get, and twine and cord, everything you need. Horsehair really is the only difficult thing to get now.

YR: When you do get it, do you get it within this country or is it imported?

AB: Horsehair? I haven't got any for a long time because I gave up the effort of trying. It's imported, it must be imported I would have thought.

YR: I have uncomfortable memories of a horsehair sofa that my parents got at Jelks just after the war when we live in Woodside Park, it was covered with some chestnut brown, terribly hard shiny fabric and it was hard, stuffed hard, and we tried to sit on the back and whoosh..down on your feet again. Terribly uncomfortable.

AB: Probably rexin, like an imitation leather.

YR: That sounds very convincing.

AB: It was a leather cloth, made to look like leather but it was nothing like it at all.

YR: It was horrid.

AB: Very stiff and hard and shiny. But before that they used to cover some furniture with a fabric made from horsehair, the horsehair was actually woven into the material somehow.

YR: To make it stronger?

AB: I don't know really. That was hard and shiny as well.

YR: You don't know what that was called?

AB: I don't know, before my time.

YR: And have the materials you used for covering furniture changed a lot?

AB: Yes, because mainly they are now man-made fibre materials. Natural fibre like wool, the best but it's so expensive, the costs have gone through the roof.

AB: It wears the best and lasts the longest, and it's softer to sit on.

YR: Alright, the next job we give you we'll ask if you can do it in wool and fork out a fortune!

AB: Yes, it would be expensive, and generally lots of people who don't even know about furniture will remember the best cloth was wool moquette and cut moquette which was wool.

YR: What sort of material is this? I've a feeling your dad did it a long time ago, what do you call that?

AB: That's a figured velvet. It looks to be in good shape.

YR: Yes, a job well done, a long, long time ago.

AB: I don't think I did that.

YR: No, I think it was your Dad.

AB: Why I said that was because I worked for some years with my Dad and I was the upholsterer so anything he took on I would have done but that looks as though it might even have been before that, by one of his other upholsterers.

YR: Can you remember the war years much, did they affect you?

AB: Yes, parts of it, yes. I spent the early war years at night in the Anderson shelter.

YR: The famous one in the garden that I asked you about.

AB: ...saying things like: 'that was a big one Mum' when the bomb came down or a land mine in that case, the nearest one was a land mine I think'

YR: How near was that, do you remember?

AB: Well, near enough to blow the shop windows in, or out, as the case may be. I think the windows went out actually with the explosion. There was probably one down by the railway, and there was certainly one by the Standard Telephones, I think there was one on there, but nothing very close, not really close. So the early years I remember things like that, spending the night down the shelter. The latter part of the war I was evacuated.

YR: With your brothers and sisters?

AB: My Mum, my eldest brother, myself and, she was expecting my sister. The strange part about all that was where we were evacuated to Newcastle.

YR: Rather a long way off.

AB: And they bombed Newcastle as much as they did London, so why send us there. I think they were trying to get rid of me!

YR: Trying to get rid of all of you at the same time!

AB: And we were all split up.

YR: That was a bit pointless.

AB: I was in one house with some strangers, my brother was in another house with strangers and my mother was in another house with strangers. Couldn't find a place big enough to take us all perhaps. I don't know.

YR: But you were quite little then weren't you?

AB: I was seven, about seven then.

YR: Pretty disconcerting.

AB: I didn't like eating either. I was very fussy with what I ate. And especially going up there, and from what I can remember I existed mainly on individual Yorkshire puddings which I loved.

YR: It's lucky you loved them wasn't it? Flour and water and not much else.

AB: So we were up there for a while, so I missed the rockets.

YR: So your Dad was down here on his own here?

AB: During the war my dad failed a medical so he couldn't go in the forces, so if you couldn't go in the forces you had to do something else, So he was working nights in the factory making gliders, being a cabinet maker. So he worked in a furniture factory during the war making gliders at night, and in the day running the shop. So he was trying to do to days and nights which he ended up being quite ill over.

YR: They moved in above the shop when he took the shop over, presumably?

AB: Yes, took the whole premises.

YR: Where was the furniture factory where they built the gliders?

AB: Harris Lebus furniture factory, quite well known years ago in Tottenham. A big furniture factory which I presume was commandeered to do gliders. I assume Lebus was a Jewish family. They were a top cabinet making firm in those days and my father had worked for them previous to having the shop for a while.

YR: So they knew where to go for more staff when they were requisitioned.

AB: Yes.

YR: But apart from having the windows blown out did you have any other damage?

AB: No, in fact the shop (*showing photograph*) the one with the furniture that's on I haven't got, this is later, this is after the war, but I'm not quite sure when because there's no date, but that's the shop, quite some years ago, probably in the fifties so we're talking about fifty years aren't we, and it's hardly altered.

YR: Apart from the quality of the photo, this could have been taken last week!

AB: And that's deliberate of course, but I've had this part re-built. But re-built in exactly the same way as it was, because we like to keep things as they should be.

YR: We wouldn't be talking to you if you'd changed it all!

AB: An example of that was when we used to live down by the park in Friary Close.

YR: You lived in Friary Close? What number was it?

AB: Twelve.

YR: Right down the end...

AB: Just before the pathway.

YR: On the right or the left?

AB: Going from the park on the left which used to be tennis courts apparently, many moons ago. We moved there in 1948 in a brand new house.

YR: Because there were too many of you to live above the shop then?

AB: Maybe, but I think they just wanted to move and couldn't have picked a better place really; it's still nice there.

YR: It must have been a bit damp with the big drop down from the road?

AB: We never really noticed, and it was built on a tennis court, good drainage. Digressing slightly, because the house, after some years, Dad decided he'd like a porch built on the front of the house. At the time, I don't know what year it was, at the time when people had porches they just stuck a box on the front, but that was no good, he had to have a porch built to match the roof of the, like a mini house.

YR: Is it still there?

AB: Yes.

YR: I always get distracted by other things with that house when I go past it.

AB: And, it might have been the Hart Brothers, who may or may not be still around Friern Barnet.

YR: Oh, Trevor Hart, the son, I don't know his father had a brother he worked together with.

AB: Yes, Hart Brothers originally.

YR: I think his brother's still around. Trevor's coming to do some decorating.

AB: I think it was the Hart Brothers that did it.

YR: Well. I'll ask Trevor if he did it.

AB: He probably would because my Dad was well known in Friern Barnet.

YR: I know his Dad specialized in roofing.

AB: So he had the porch in exactly the same style as the house and said he couldn't do anything else.

YR: Do you remember any of your neighbours around there?

AB: Oh yes, local shops and things. On the opposite corner was Cullens the grocers in those days. W H Cullen, well-known grocers, not so many about now I don't think, but Cullens were very friendly with the family on the other corner because they were a Mum and Dad and two boys as we were first of all, because there was a seven year gap between myself and my sister, so the two elder boys grew up at almost exactly the same ages the two boys on the other corner, so there was Cullens the grocers, next to that I

believe was a cafe in those days, and then a wholesale grocers called Charles Esseridge. Charlie Esseridge I think used to live in Hatley Close at the time. It's a long while ago! Next to Charlie Esseridge was the post office, which remained the post office until last year. Next to that was a hairdressers, I'm not sure of the name, and Next to them was Jaquells the tobacconist and confectioners. And that was the parade of shops.

YR: You've got an amazing memory, or have you been sitting with your family polishing it

AB: No, no I remember those. And that was the end of the parade really because beyond that where there's a dental laboratory now, Monarch Dental Laboratory. Next to the dental laboratory is like an archway and all that site was Holmes the garage.

YR: I remember it as a wood yard.

AB: Next to that, the other side of that, a garage, Holmes he became the big petrol station on the corner of the North Circular, by Pinkham Way and Bounds Green Road – there's a big BP petrol station isn't there? That's where Holmes went first of all, it was just a small family garage which became massive.

YR: Repairs and hiring...?

AB: Yes.

YR: And what about the hospital – did you have anything to do with them there, did you do any work for them?

AB: Not a lot, we did go to the hospital a few times but mainly to doctors' houses which were in the grounds, not the main building, Strangely enough, they had their own upholsterer in there.

YR: Was that strange? They tried to be self-sufficient didn't they?

AB: Perhaps so, ye perhaps they had everybody working in there, different trades and things. At the doctors' houses they came over to us to have their chairs done, as doctors would!

YR: You didn't see any of the residents then, I suppose in those days they weren't allowed...

AB: No, the only residents I saw I suppose, were the ones trying to get over the wall and later years walking down the road. They were up and down in their pyjamas and whatever.

YR: Yes, I remember that. They never did any harm did they?

AB: Fortunately not, now and again they did. They did attack somebody in the post office one day, one patient, but I think it was unusual, because they wouldn't have let them out otherwise. During the war my Mum and her friend on the other corner used to do fire-watching.

YR: I thought you said your Mum was up in Newcastle?

AB: No, we didn't go to Newcastle until '43 or '44 so we had all the doodlebugs and all that. I lived through that in the shop, so Mum and her friend used to be out fire watching.

YR: What did that involve

AB: I'm not quite sure, just keeping a lookout for things.

YR: They didn't have to climb up on the roof?

AB: They obviously went up probably from inside and were looking out the windows, because we lived directly opposite and she often said she was more frightened of patients climbing over the wall than she was of bombs coming down – just fear in her mind, because they couldn't get over the walls at that time, the walls were very high, and now the walls almost half the size. Yes, we were all frightened of that hospital and it was put into your mind. They couldn't harm us, we used to be terrified – or do you know the line path – the line that runs down the side of the railway line?

YR: Ah, yes there have been problems there but not from patients.

AB: From Friern Barnet Road, right the way through to the North Circular Road, at that time it wasn't called the North Circular Road I don't think. Anyway, they had a huge wall along the hospital grounds on that line path and we used to be terrified. The walls were something like 40 feet high, so there was nothing to be worried! But we did because of the stories that went around, they were harmless most of them, weren't they? But you didn't know when you were a child.

YR: That's what the other kids did, try to invent stories to frighten each other! Some used to do stupid things like going down by the railway lines, big steam trains belting through, we were down on the lines almost, as boys. You don't see fear do you, when you're as child. But you see your Dad coming.

AB: Oh, yes we were in trouble if he knew.

YR: How did you play in those days?

AB: In the early days we could almost play in the street, there was no danger really. We used to play cricket and football in the road.

YR: We used to, in Woodside Park Road – we used to go trundling right down Woodside Park Road on our trolleys.

AB: Actually, we were, still are really, very lucky with having so many parks and playing fields around.

YR: And you were probably allowed much greater freedom then....

AB: To go off, yes...

YR: Just get back in time for your tea that was it...

AB: You wouldn't get let out now...

YR: Sit and watch television...

AB: Yes. When I say the playing fields, the ones at the bottom of Beaconsfield Road weren't there then, and that's what do they call them now – where they deposit rubbish.

YR: The bottle banks?

AB: No, the landfill. Those playing fields at the bottom of Beaconsfield Road were a landfill site.

YR: On both sides?

AB: On both sides of the road.

YR: The bit on the right being formed from when they built the railway line then? Then just after the war they built the prefabs up the further slope, didn't they? They were nice, looked like an Italian village...

AB: The other side, I don't think it was there then, before the prefabs, but not long after there was a pig farm.

YR: Oh! I remember that! You always knew when the wind was coming from that side. Afterwards you knew because you could hear the trains going through...I didn't realise that it was a farm, I thought it was those cottages up there that didn't have plumbing or anything; there was a bath tub standing in the yard at the back where I thought they kept their pigs.

AB: Maybe, I remember the did pigs there.

YR: I'm glad you remember the pigs! Ollie said did you have any interesting clients coming in? People you got to know, odd people...

AB: Most of our customers were residents of the area, Friern Barnet, Whetstone, that sort of area, some of them were well-known local people, but not necessarily celebrities. The only celebrity I did a job for was Lindsey de Paul, a pop singer, perhaps thirty years ago. A short person, she lived in Highgate in one of those gothic sorts of houses at the bottom of Highgate. I'm trying to think of the name of the road that runs down to Hampstead, the bottom end of Hampstead Heath. Anyway, there's a group of gothic houses there and she lived in one. She wanted two big settees re-upholstered by me and it took ages for her to choose a cloth and she picked a bright orange velvet. I did these settees, completed them, took them back and she said: I don't like them'.

YR: Sounds predictable.

AB: Well, you chose it! So she gave them away to her brother.!

YR: More money than sense!

AB: That's right.

*(examining documents)*

YR: Let's run through what we've got.

AB: That was a cash book, 1942! That's interesting because of the figures involved, laughable really.

YR: Oh, lovely handwriting...look at that...

AB: I think that may have been my Mother, may have been doing the writing

YR: And the sums! Beautiful!

AB: My writing's drivel compared to that.

YR: We don't try that hard anymore now, do we?

AB: ...that was relating to my Father's job during the war with Harris Lebus

YR: His labour card

AB: Employed at Harris Lebus as an aircraft joiner, wartime, running the shop at the same time.

YR: I'll copy the whole lot, that's great

AB: Well, they're unusual, aren't they? This is Civil Defence, when he did some work with the Civil Defence, ARP...

YR: This is 1942 as well...my Father was on the Council in those days.

AB: Dad was never on the Council but he was the leading member of the Chamber of Commerce. Top man in the Chamber of Commerce!...that was Harris Lebus

YR: I reckon your wife's not that enthusiastic about you never throwing anything away but there'll be other people who will be so glad.

AB: My Dad bought his own house in Tottenham when he was too young to buy it. He was twenty years old and he bought a house and had to buy it in his father's name.

YR: He must have been a really good cabinet maker to have earned that.

AB: And he sold it the following year, made a fortune which in those days he probably did.

YR: That's why he could have afforded the shop?

AB: He was quite wealthy as a young man in those days, because he saved hard, worked hard, played hard.

YR: And you learned from him too!

AB: I don't know about that! Worked hard, yes!...this is from the Summer Show, that was a shop called Ann Morris... I've got the address.

YR: So that was at the Summer Show?

AB: That was her stand.

YR: 107 Friern Barnet Road?

AB: And that was people who had car wheels, car spares.

YR: There's the old Enterprise telephone number, The Avenue, New Southgate.

AB: And somebody else sold beer and spirits but there's no name on there. Strange, but that was in this marquee as well. They had quite a marquee for us, trade stands, various shops,

*(distorted tape (unreadable))*

AB ...I could stand in there and watch them doing things...it fascinated me. I wondered how on earth they did it, and cooking knee deep in wood shavings, but I found it lovely, those sorts of places...the smell...anybody who's worked with wood would like it. Although I became an upholster, I've still got a love of wood, I just don't work with it. That was another thing we used to do in the business.

YR: Sending out carpets for cleaning...

AB: Yes, and that was probably the Direct Dry Cleaners that I mentioned, they were probably the ones that did it.

YR: And the salaries here for your Father And Mother, that was for the week?

AB: Yes.

YR: £9 for your Dad, 2 for your Mother.

AB: Yes, just after the war.

YR: Receipts...Tottenham Gas Company.

AB: Is that gas and electricity?

YR: So tell me about when you came into the country.

AB: Well, as I said, he had me trained as an upholsterer, and being my Dad he didn't want it to cost him anything so he put me into the trade to serve an apprenticeship. So I went to an upholstery factory to serve a five year apprenticeship.

YR: But wasn't that the way it would have been done anyway in those days?

AB: Probably.

YR: Much better...

AB: Oh yes, and while you're serving your apprenticeship you also had day release from the factory to go to college and learn the skills of the job; one day a week for two years and then, being determined to learn as much as I could I also went to evening classes off my own back to learn everything about upholstery, and that was in Shoreditch – Technical College in those days. The factory I worked in was at the Archway, Highgate, so I used to go down from the Archway to Shoreditch after work to do evening classes and then go home to Friern Barnet afterwards. It was quite a journey really.

YR: How did you travel?

AB: Bus. Always on the bus.

YR: No trams?

AB: No, you didn't need trams for not that. I think trams were dying out then... so that's going to evening classes. Then I went back to the factory after I'd finished my apprenticeship and also finished my National Service because we had to do that in those days. I did my two years National Service.

YR: Where did you do that?

AB: In the Air Force, stationed in various places but most of the time at RAF Benson which was where the Queen's Flight was based, so that was interesting in a way because it was an operational airfield.

YR: Did you do engineering work or did you fly?

AB: No, I was given the nearest thing to my trade that there was and that was the fabric worker. Now a fabric worker more likely to be employed years earlier when the planes were made if fabric, and the fabric workers stretched the fabric over the frame and finished it all off but by the time I was in there they were all metal, jet fighters, so there wasn't much fabric work. So I spent my time on a sewing machine making all sorts of things that they wanted doing, flags and whatever, and in my spare time painting.

Everybody who didn't have enough to do were painting! So I spent two years wasting my time messing about.

YR: It must have been really frustrating for somebody like you who worked very hard before using every minute you'd got to really improve yourself within your skill.

AB: It was. I didn't mind doing National Service for the first six months because that was training and I liked that and I think that's good for you, but the last eighteen months was a total waste of time for me. I could have been working. So I came out of that, went back to the factory and stayed there. By that time I was quite happy working in the factory.

YR: Where in Archway was it?

AB: Right at the bottom of the hill, just below 'suicide bridge' as it was called. Just at the bottom left-hand side, it's not there anymore, so I worked there for fifteen years in the factory, By that time I was married with children living in Holloway, just down the road from the factory, which was handy in that sense.

YR: I thought your Dad's idea of having you trained was that he could get the work done by you but there you were in Holloway!

AB: It was! I can't remember how many times he asked me, I think he left it up to me to decide if and when I went in with him, but the object was that I went in with him.

YR: And all this time he was getting somebody else to do the upholstery work...

AB: That's right. So anyway it was decided for me in the end because the factory upped and moved to Hastings. It moved into a brand new factory in Hastings and those that wanted to go, went, which wasn't many. They lost 90% of their workforce because we didn't want to go to Hastings. So I had a ready made job didn't I. As soon as I left the factory I went to work with Dad.

YR: What an extraordinary idea when you've got a workforce you've been with a long time and are really skilled, they know what they're doing, and just drop them.

AB: Yes, they had absolutely no skilled workers when they started in Hastings. They achieved it, they got back to being well-known, but not skilled, just semi-skilled workers and new designs to accommodate that. So they suffered by moving.

YR: But if you'd had fifteen years with them you would hardly have been sweeping the shop the shop floor still, you must have had quite a senior position with them?

AB: Yes, by that time I was actually a cutter. I was cutting out the material to go on all the furniture, that was my job at the end. I was talked into that by the boss of the firm because they had lots of upholsterers but they didn't have many people to cut. So they asked me if I'd like to do it. Once again, willing to learn aspects of the trade, I did it but any job can get boring! So perhaps it was a good thing they moved because it forced me to go into the shop with my Dad and that was about '68- '69...and I've been there ever since.

YR: Did you find it quite difficult to leave the factory with all the equipment that was there and all the space to do what was needed and start up in the small premises?

AB: No, I didn't really. The only thing I missed was the company, my workmates, because factory life was totally different from working with my father.

YR: Well, everything's totally different working with your father!

AB: So, yes, I missed that but I didn't miss the work side of it particularly. It was quite a challenge, I'd been doing all kinds of work and I was responsible for it because my father was not an upholsterer so he'd learned by that time that cutting out and machining up cloth, so I spent all my time upholstering then. Now I'd become a father! I'd do machining and cutting out and my son cuts upholstery, although I do some now and again.

YR: For old time's sake!

AB: Yes. My son joined us in 1980 which was the year my father died, so it was a bit strange in a way how he lost his father in the first year and my son lost his grandad in the first year he was there. That was a shame because my Dad was teaching him cabinet making, the woodworking side, which was what my son liked doing. So he was left with me teaching him upholstery instead.

YR: But you could have done the cabinet work as well, as you'd had the training?

AB: Yes, but not as skilled as my father. We became quite busy on upholstery so there was more than enough work for my son and I to carry on just doing that, so anything else we passed over to someone else.

YR: But you were worrying that your son wouldn't want to carry on perhaps?

AB: Well, in those early days my son didn't really want to work in the shop.

YR: And you could sympathise with that, remembering how you'd felt.

AR: That's right, yes, he's a different nature to me, and I left it to him as my father had left it to me I suppose... 'if you want to, it's there, if you don't fine. Do what you want to'. He drifted around from job to job, he really didn't get what he wanted to do and my wife used to say to him: 'Dad's got plenty of work!' so in the end he said: 'alright, I'll give it a try', so he came down the shop and he did leave to do other work for a few years and then came back. Then he had children of his own and it became important to keep a steady job, hence he's still there! So now that I'm thinking of packing it up, he's not keen enough to carry on on his own and it's hard, it's hard to run a shop like that on your own, so I don't blame him for that, and there's no skilled men about these days to employ.

YR: And nobody wants to learn.

AB: It's difficult to teach someone because you haven't got time, you've got to earn your living. I'd be pleased if apprenticeships came back into the trade, I don't think they have, but I'd be pleased if they did because when I went to serve my apprenticeship they had enough people there to be able to take time to teach us, but in a small business you haven't got time.

YR: And you can't be sure that the person's going to stay with you once you've trained them

AB: Almost certainly not, once they've learned, they're off.

YR: And there's no one else in the family, you had two brothers and a sister didn't you?

AB: My eldest brother couldn't work in the shop anyway because he's got skin trouble, he'd be affected by that, which is why he never did. My sister, no, and my younger brother became an electrical engineer and he's top in his own profession now.

YR: And no nephews or nieces?

AB: I've got two grandsons, neither of which want to do it, and three granddaughters, they don't want to come into my sort of business and I don't mind. It's sad in a way, it feels like you've been there forever and we may not be there much longer.

YR: But there's always the need isn't there, I'm sure you'd never be short of work.

AB: There is, I've always said that, I'll never be out of work.

YR: I don't see why girls shouldn't take up that sort of work/

AB: Women do our work to a certain degree but it's very hard physically sometimes, big furniture, lifting it about, even working on it, it's quite heavy and hard on your hands, so I don't suppose there are many women who would want to do it. Generally in our trade women do the machining and they're getting short as well. There's a shortage of machinists because dress making is totally different to upholstery machining.

YR: Is your son fit enough for it?

AB: Oh yes, my son's a lot better now,

YR: He had asthma?

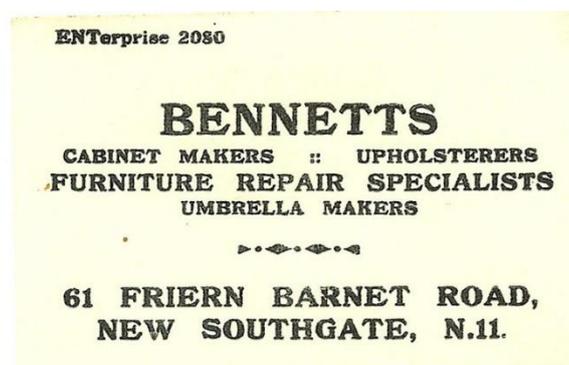
AB: All my family have got that. From my wife and her family, all the personal children and most of my grandchildren all suffer a bit with allergies.

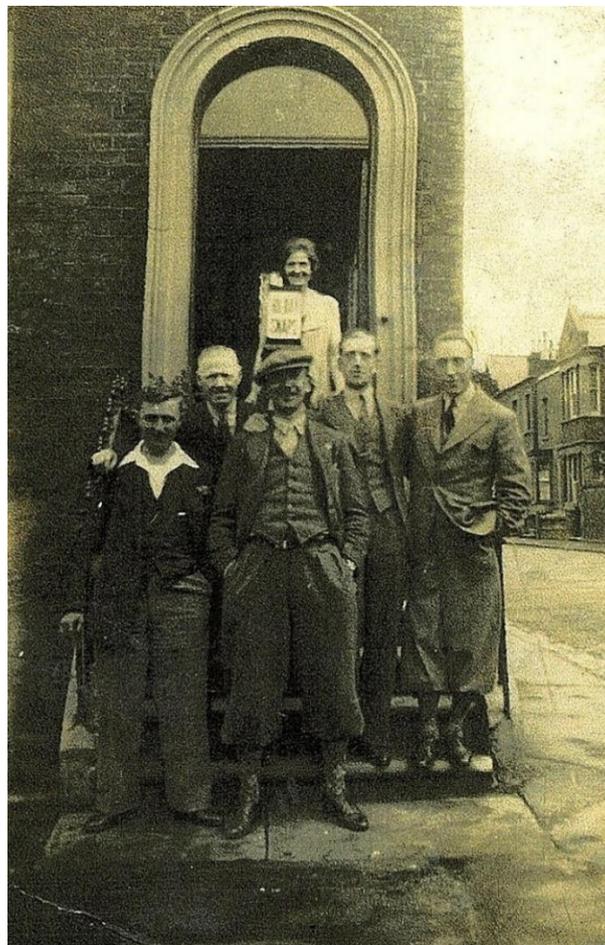
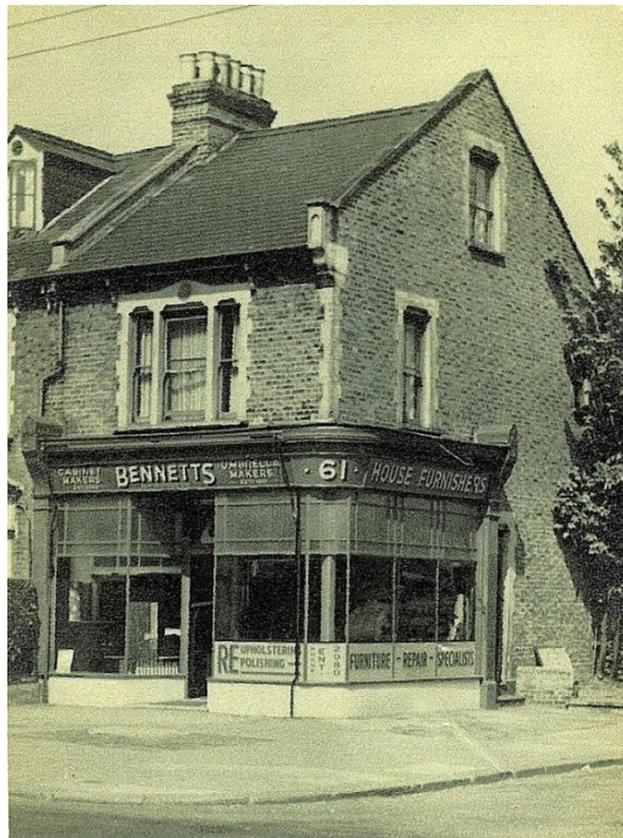
AB: It's not no. Maybe ten years ago my son went to the doctor's and she said: What do you do for a living?' He said: 'I'm an upholsterer' and she said: 'You'll have to pack that up straight away'. He said: 'Don't be silly, that's how I earn my living'.

YR: Is it easier or less easy with the change in fabrics and stuffing materials?

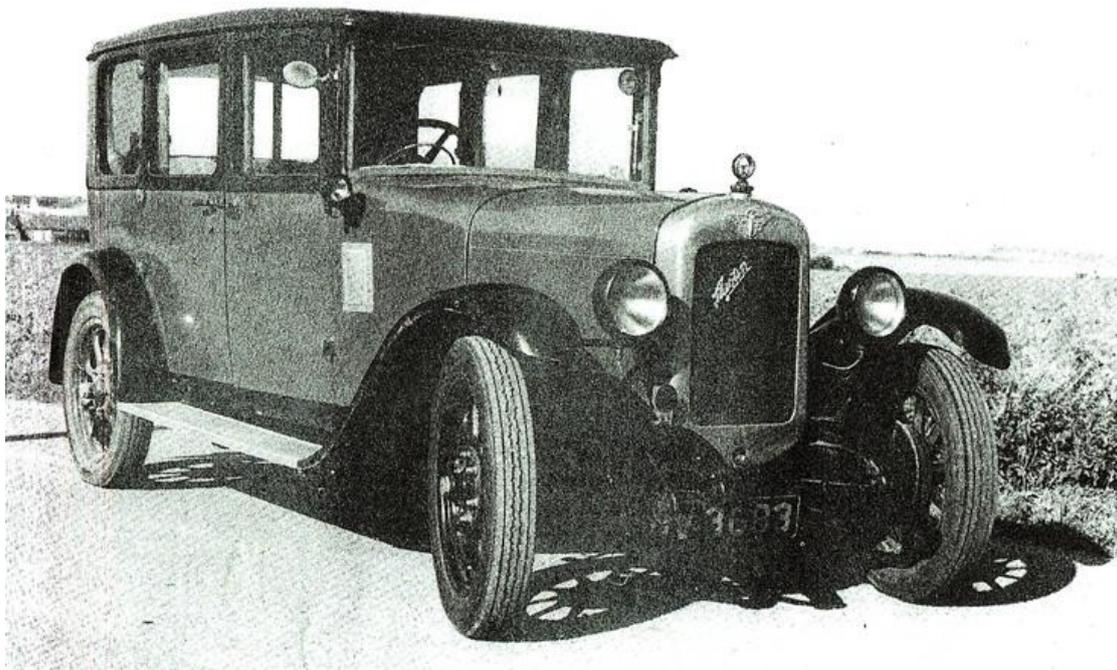
AB: It's cleaner, definitely cleaner, less dust, although now you get the foam, although a lot of the furniture is filled with foam, foam turns to dust. So it is still dusty but not like it was. So there we are.....brings you up to date probably.

YR: Pretty well, that's brilliant.

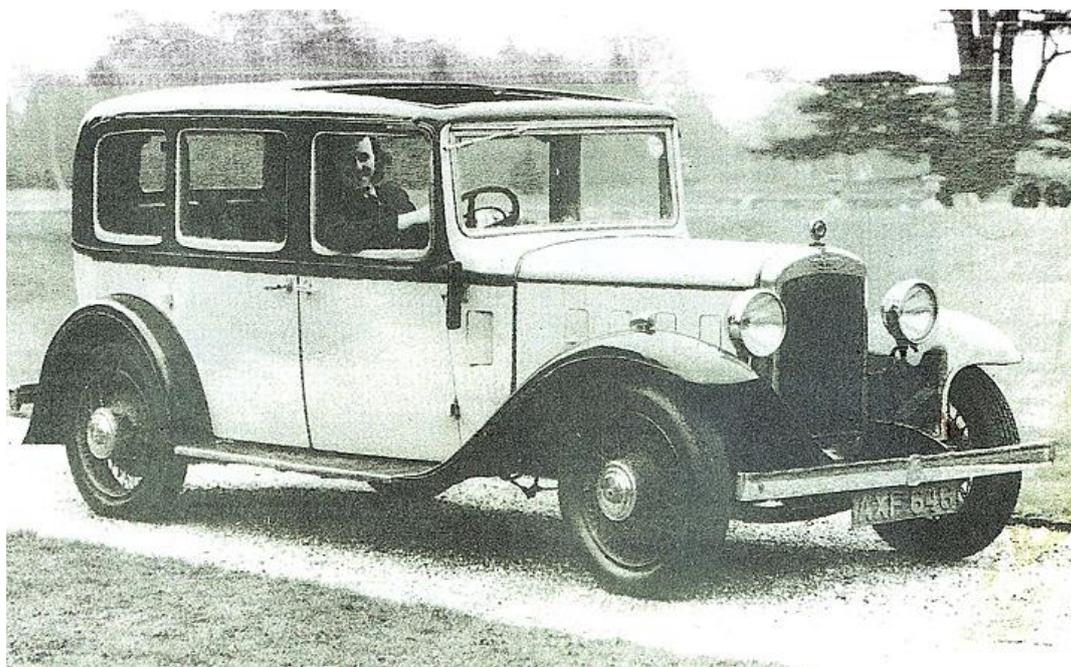




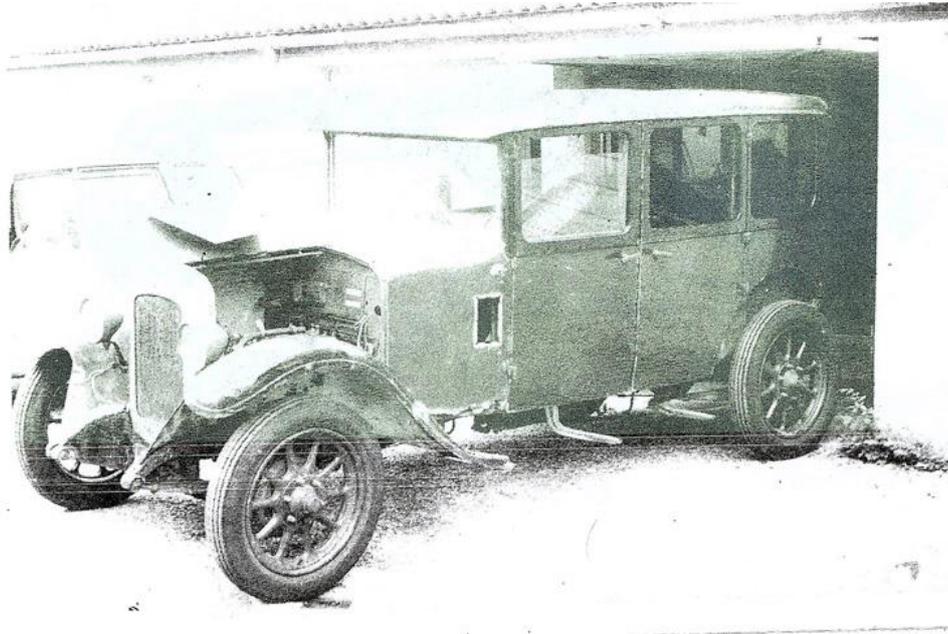
*Mr Frederick Bennett (first left)  
when a young man*



*Example of 1929 A12/4 Austin Iver saloon, the model Bought second-hand by Mr Frederick Bennett for the collection and delivery of furniture. His model was a drophead with removable rear seats*



*1934 Austin H12/4 Berkeley Saloon with side window Deflectors, single bar bumpers, foot rests and plastic Tables inside at the rear*



1929 Austin A12/4 Iver Saloon as owned by Frederick Bennett  
(not on running order!)

1293

**HARRIS LEBUS.**  
FINSBURY CABINET WORKS  
TOTTENHAM, N. 17.

Date..... 29.7.30

Mr. Bennett  
Dept. Makers  
No. 3229

Please take notice that your employment by  
this Firm will terminate on today at 11<sup>am</sup>

Reason Reduction of Staff  
1 hrs. money in lieu of notice

**HARRIS LEBUS.**  
per pro.....

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE. 2  
Essential Work (GENERAL PROVISIONS) Order(s), 1944 344

Date... 21.10.44... 522 HIGH ROAD, Office  
Employer... Davis Selous... TOTTENHAM, N. 17  
Address... 141 High Road, TOTTENHAM, N. 17  
Worker... Frederick W. Bennett  
Address... 61 Wilson Barnett Rd., N. 11  
Worker's Dept... 29 Shops... Check No... 1040  
Occupation... Aircraft Joiner

I, the undersigned, a National Service Officer, hereby give permission

1. ~~† TO THE ABOVE-NAMED EMPLOYER~~

~~† a. to terminate the employment in <sup>his</sup> ~~their~~ undertaking of the above-named worker.~~

~~† b. to cause the above-named worker to give his services to the undertaking of~~

~~at~~

2. † TO THE ABOVE-NAMED WORKER

to leave the employment of the above-named employer

† Delete as appropriate.

*[Signature]*  
National Service Officer.

E.D. 340A

(SEE NOTES OVERLEAF).

# London County Council.

Shoreditch Technical Institute,  
Pitfield Street, N.1.

Register No. 68 . 17-9- 1930.

Admit J. W. Bennett

to the Classes set out below until end of 2013 1931.

No. 1365 . Fee paid £ — : 15.

This ticket is issued subject to the conditions printed on the back hereof and it must be renewed immediately upon the expiration of the period covered thereby.

STUDENTS MAY ATTEND CLASSES ONLY ON THE DAYS AND AT THE TIMES SET OUT BELOW.

	DAY.		EVENING.
	MORNING.	AFTERNOON.	
M			Cab. Wkg.
T			
W			" Wkg.
Th.			
F			" Drwg.
S			

This Card must be  
Produced on Application  
of the Recognised  
Shop or Job Steward.

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10, GOSWELL ROAD, N.1.

**Progressive Union of Cabinet Makers, Carpenters, Joiners and Wood Working Machinists.**

(Regd. No. 272).

Meetings held at 87, TABERNACLE STREET, LONDON, E.C. 2.

(Founded 1865).

Folio..... No. *220*

Admtd. *20/8/30*

Section..... *I*

Entrance Fee ..... *5/-*

Mr. *F. W. Bracken*

Phone : Clerkenwell 3978.

1930	Con.	Fine	Levy	Sig.	1930	Con.	Fine	Levy	Sig.
Arrears Due					Arrears Due				
July 2					Oct. 1	<i>3/-</i>			<i>WB</i>
" 9					" 8	<i>1/-</i>		<i>1/-</i>	<i>WB</i>
" 16					" 15				
" 23					" 22				
" 30					" 29	<i>2/-</i>			<i>WB</i>
Aug. 6					Nov. 5				<i>WB</i>
" 13					" 12	<i>2/-</i>			<i>WB</i>
" 20	<i>1/-</i>		<i>9/3</i>		" 19				<i>WB</i>
" 27	<i>1/4/-</i>		<i>9/3</i>		" 26				
Sept. 3	<i>1/-</i>		<i>WB</i>		Dec. 3				
" 10					" 10				
" 17	<i>3/-</i>		<i>WB</i>		" 17				
" *24					" 24				
					" *31	<i>5/6</i>			<i>WB</i>

Organiser : G. BRACKEN.

Dates marked thus \* are Quarterly Nights.

Secretary : D. GURTON.

FRIERN BARNET URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL  
CIVIL DEFENCE

Certificate under Article 4 (1)(f) of the Fire  
Prevention (Business Premises) No.2 Order, 1941

Pursuant to the Fire Prevention (Business Premises)  
No.2 Order 1941, I certify that:-

Mr.  
Mrs.  
Miss *F. W. BENNETT*  
of *61 FRIERN BARNET ROAD*  
*FRIERN BARNET N.11.*  
Nat.Reg. letters & numbers *B.H.A.N. 13/11*

had on the 18th January, 1941, undertaken to perform Civil  
Defence duties in the Urban District for periods amounting in  
the aggregate to not less than forty-eight hours in each month,  
and is continuing with such duties at this date.

Description of Civil Defence Duties *CONTROL MOBILE*

(Signed) *[Signature]*  
A.R.P. Controller

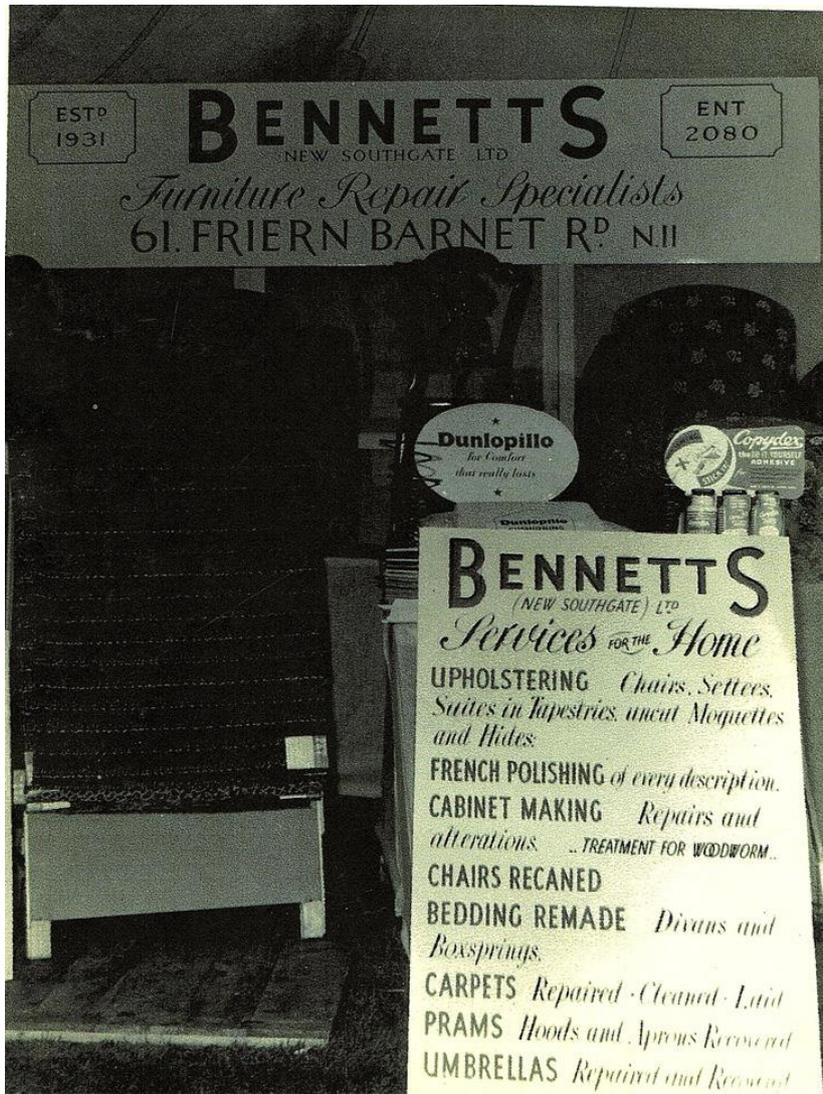
**Verified**  
10 DEC 1942  
*D.S.K.*  
**CHIEF WARDENS OFFICE**

Dated 1942.

NOTE: This certificate must be retained by the person to whom  
it is issued and must be produced to his employer or any other  
Local Authority in accordance with the Fire Prevention (Business  
Premises) No.2 Order 1941.

EMPLOYER .....

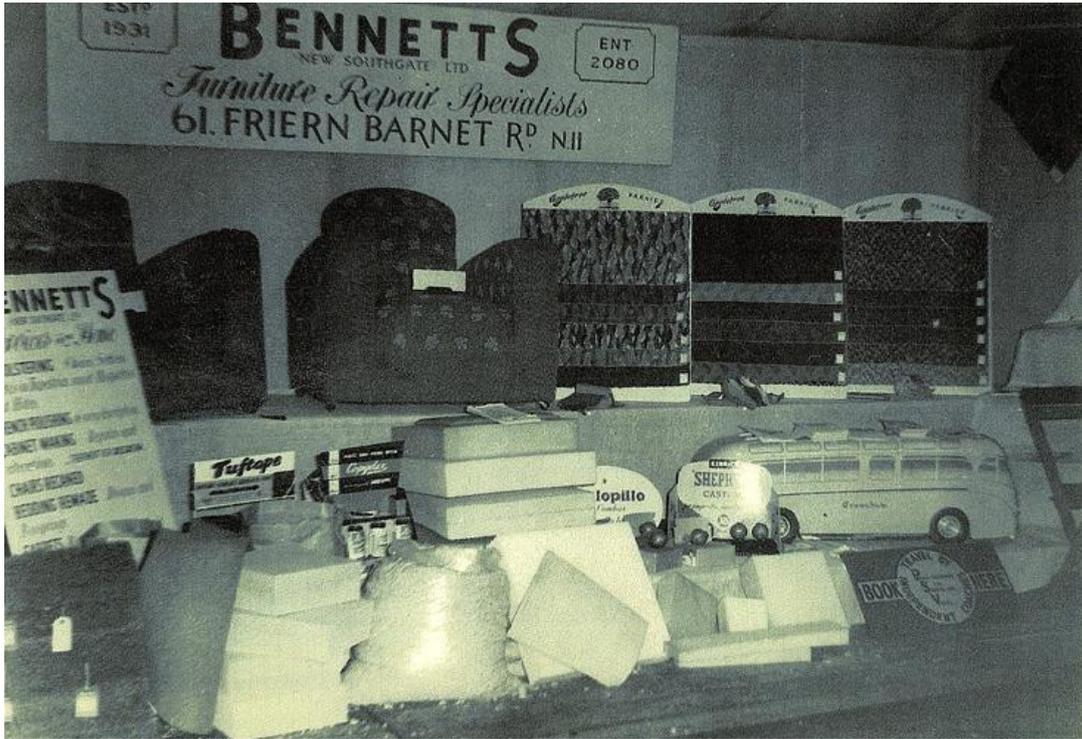
ADDRESS .....



*Traders' Marquee, Friern Barnet Summer Show 1958*



*Traders' Marquee, Friern Barnet Summer Show 1959*



*Traders' Marquee Friern Barnet Summer Show 1960*



*Traders' Marquee Friern Barnet Summer Show 1958*