



PERMANENT RESIDENTS

Little wonder

by Bob Davenport

Among the stolid ranks of Establishment worthies buried in East Finchley Cemetery in East End Road is a quite different figure, one of the greatest music hall comedians - Little Tich.

Tich was born Harry Relph in 1867, in Cudham, Kent, the sixteenth child of a 77 year-old father. He had five fingers and a thumb on each hand, and never grew above 4'6" tall. (When Tich's own son was born, a doctor told the worried clown, "It's all right, my little man, you've got a baby brother.")

False heir

He took his stage name from a supposed resemblance to Arthur Orton, "The Tichborne claimant", the false heir to a baronetcy, and he himself later gave rise to the adjective "titchy".

Tich was involved in show business from the age of 13 and made his first solo London music hall appearance in 1884.

Boot feat

By then he had already begun to develop the boot routine for which he became famous. In two large, flat, heavy clogs, over half as long as he was, he would dance, lean almost horizontal to retrieve his lost hat, and finally rise on tiptoe to become over seven feet tall, before taking his bow with another quick horizontal lurch which knocked his bald forehead against the stage.

Other parts of his act included comic monologues ("I am a bolger sold - I mean a soldier bold...") and a variety of characterisations such as a pompous prosecuting counsel, a bronchitic burial-society agent, and a fiery señorita, "Little Miss Serpentine". He also appeared in pantomime in

Cinderella, as an Ugly Sister refused entrance to the ball, he had a sudden inspiration: "I know - let's walk in backwards and they'll think we're coming out."

A pair of shorts

After great success in the United States and in panto with Marie Lloyd and Dan Leno, in 1896 he made his debut in Paris, where he became a good friend of the equally short Toulouse-Lautrec and was rapturously admired by, among others, the celebrated actor/manager Lucien Guitry and his actor/dramatist son, Sacha. The young Charlie Chaplin, in Paris with Fred Karno's Troupe, saw Tich at the *Folies Bergère* and based his walk on him - though later Chaplin became so famous that the debt was often taken to be the other way round.

Montaigne man

Offstage, Tich was a skilled painter in oils and water colours, played the cello and composed music for his act, was an accomplished linguist and read widely.

After a show, he said, it was "a quiet supper, a whisky, a page or two of Montaigne - and bed-oh!"

His genius was widely acknowledged. The young Neville Cardus, assigned to a review a forthcoming Little Tich appearance for the *Manchester Guardian*, which took such things seriously, was told to prepare for it by a long, meditative walk in the country.

In 1910 Tich was made an officer of the Académie Française for services to French music hall, and in fact it is the words of a French tribute on his death (in Hendon) in 1928 that appear on his tombstone: "le plus petit et le plus grand comique du monde".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Barnet Cyclists are looking for new members. Regular Sunday rides normally start at Tally Ho at 10am and evening rides at 7pm most rides have slow and faster paced versions. There are also monthly discussion meetings on subjects ranging from folding bikes to touring holidays. For more information, contact John & Jo McKenzie on 0181-449 4813.

The 13 David Lloyd tennis and health clubs, including the one just over the East Finchley border, have been sold to Whitbread for £201m.

The Whitbread group also own Pizza Hut, TGI Fridays and Thresher off-licences.

A country fair is held between 1pm and 6pm on the first Sunday of each month at Finchley College Farm in Fitzalan Road, N3. Visitors have been welcome at College Farm for the past 100 years and the day's events include donkey rides and a craft market, as well as an opportunity to meet the animals.



The way it was

 by Paul Savill

What appears to be a verdant and sleepy English country village is in fact the centre of East Finchley on a summer's day in 1905.

A more careful look will tell you that this is East End Road near the High Road.

Apart from all the foliage, the other most striking thing about the picture is the absence of cars. Oh, peaceful times!

On the left the house of Dr

Harvey Giwelb can be seen, very much the same as today, but covered in creeper.

Carbuncles

In the centre the church with spire can just about be made out behind the trees, all gone now, replaced in the sixties by all-brick, flat-roofed buildings of little architectural merit...

One of them, at least, has now gone, or rather transformed into a building with a pitched,

tiled roof. It will be a new Moslem community centre.

The Archer thanks Barnet Local Studies and Archives for this picture. If any reader has any interesting old pictures of East Finchley, please send them in.

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RETURN OF THE GARDENING COLUMN

The Archer is pleased to announce the return of the gardening column next month. After an eight-month absence, Paul Savill's know-everything neighbour in Lauradale Road is taking up his pen to give us the benefit of his gardening knowledge.

He stopped his column following complaints about his article on "jungfrauen-schrecken" garden gnomes. Some readers felt that his reference to gnomes indently exposing themselves was an affront to

respectable residents of East Finchley.

While he does not accept this view, he does apologise for any shock the article may have caused and any offence unwittingly committed.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Barnet Council hopes to plant more than 4,000 trees this year and is encouraging people to sponsor trees. For more information, contact Trees for Life team on 0181-202 8282, ext. 2076.

Storytime takes place for the under 5s at 3pm each Wednesday at East Finchley Library on the High Road. For those between 5 and 8, storytime is at 11am on Saturdays.

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