



## PERSONALITY PORTRAIT

# Wilds about Cyril

By Daphne Chamberlain

**A song-and-dance act/a local councillor/chauffeur to the stars". What or who is the connection?**

Answer:- Cyril Wilds, Vice- President of the British Music Hall and Former councillor for East Finchley. For many years he ran the car hire firm opposite the underground, where Greater London Hire

half-a-crown for delivering soda water to Cromwell House, off East End Road. A tale that intrigued him was that a short tunnel linking Cromwell House with a neighbouring building, a very much longer one running to Gordon House Road at Parliament Hill.

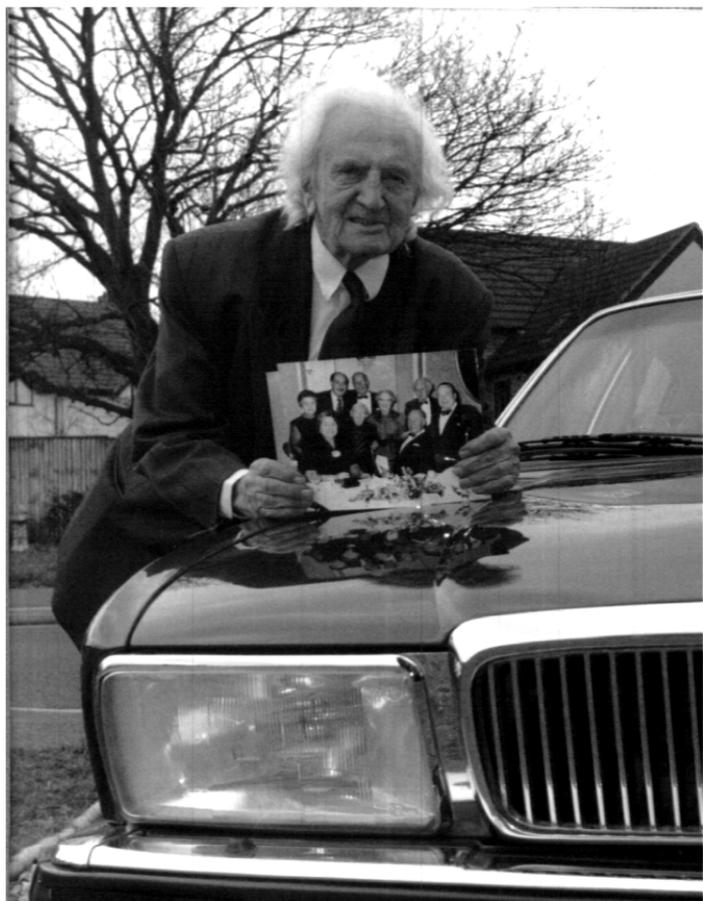
This is one of the great

and his mother.

Finchley customers were actor Eric Porter, who lived in Midhurst Avenue, singer Owen Brannigan from Lauradale Road, and his great friend Alfred Marks, who often learned his lines in the back of Cyril's car.

A celebrity encounter of a second-hand kind occurred when he was a boy. He remembers seeing an elderly man with a top hat "always taking snuff" who used to frequent "The Bald-Faced Stag". According to his father, the man had been an acquaintance of Charles Dickens, who also drank at "the Stage" when he was staying around the Bow Lane area.

Cyril himself was a regular at "The Green Man", and watched the first construction of the North Circular Road. Now the latest reconstruction of the North Circular staggers on - and "The Green Man has disappeared, but Cyril who visits London whenever he can, still keeps tabs on N2.



Chauffeur to the stars, Cyril Wilds. Photo: Lincolnshire Free Press

now has its premises.

Margaret Thatcher invited him to stand for election as a councillor because he was so well known in this area. Although he retired to Hove nearly twenty years ago, and now lives at Quadring in Lincolnshire, Cyril still maintains links with Finchley. Indeed, a friend sends him a copy of "The Archer" every month.

## Bombay Mix

Where does the song-and-dance act come in? At 16, he had a brief flirtation with life on the boards when he "hung about" with a troupe called "the Five Bombays". This didn't last long, but it cemented his attachment to the theatre.

The first of his show business links was the future comedian, Cyril Fletcher, a classmate at Woodhouse School. It was Master Fletcher who advised him to join the choir at All Saints, Durham Road, to get some pocket money!

Another source of revenue at that time was Andrews the Chemist, where he earned

fund of anecdotes about East Finchley. He was born at 13, New Oak Road in June, 1909. His mother, who came from Berkhamstead, was a children's nanny. Her first post was in "the house with a tower" in East End Road, but she had travelled round the world with wealthy employers. His father, who was a Friern Barnet councillor, worked first as a window-cleaner and then as a caretaker at the Methodist church.

## Crossed Line

In 1910 the family moved to Long Lane, paying £285 for their house. Later on, they became the first household in the road with a telephone. "What do you do if it rings in the middle of the night?" asked an apprehensive neighbour.

The phone rang a lot for Cyril after he started his car hire business in 1928. He drove many show-business stars and other celebrities, including Gracie Fields, Arthur Askey, Hutch, Diana Dors, Evelyn Laye ("she knew all the back ways and side streets"), Christine Keeler, and Elgar

## HISTORY

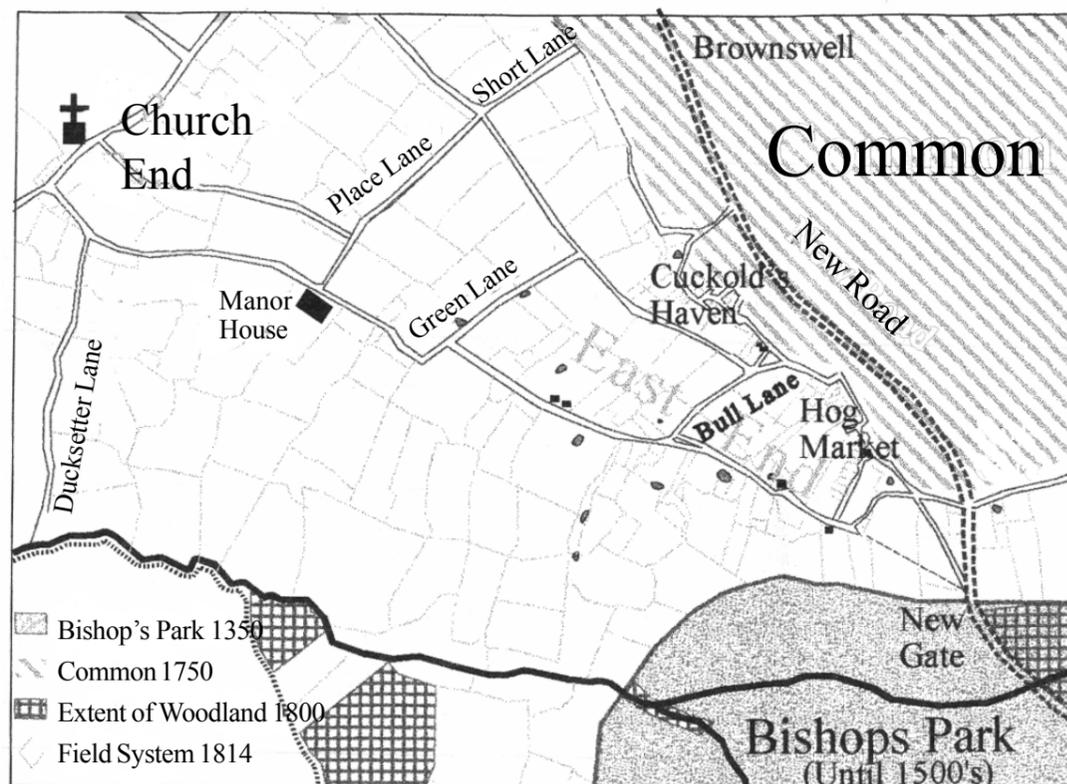
# East Finchley takes shape

**Finchley was firmly on the map by 1199 when king John exempted the Bishop and his tenants within his domain of Finchley from the payment of various taxes. Settlement had originated at the intersection of Hendon Lane and East End Road, early routes huffing the two main sides of the Finchley triangle. Originally the dense woodland on clay soil yielded wood products - timber and charcoal - and foraging for pigs. As the area cleared eastwards from the manor house, this yielded to grazing sheep and hay production. The tenancy of the manor by the wealthy Adam de Basing, Tailor and Chief Financier to Henry III, probably accelerated this.**

Scattered settlements appeared along East End Road, collectively known as East End. Access to water from the shallow gravel layer allowed many cottages to have their own well. The gravel seams exposed by the south facing of Mutton Brook would have been attractive for crops. Small settlements grew up along the winding track at the edge of the common including Cuckolds Haven and Fallow Corner, presumably housing many copy holders, those with rights to make use of the common.

## The High Road appears

In the 1300's, the Bishop provided, as a business venture, a new toll route through his park, an alternative to the boggy main route to the north along Coney Hatch Lane. It left the park at a new gate, located where the Northern line crosses the High Road today, below the hamlet of Park Gate. The first recorded toll collection was in 1321. Then the road was extended across the Common via Brownsell (by Strawberry Vale), bypassing the East End settlements and rejoining the original route



# Careless Talk

By Daphne Chamberlain

**When talking to Cyril Wilds, he told me a twentieth century fairy-tale, the rise and rise of Binnie Barnes.**

She started life as Mary Careless, a girl from a very poor family. They lived in one room in a house in Prospect Place. Binnie went to Holy Trinity School. From there, she started work as a nursemaid in Muswell Hill. Then came the twist in the plot.

She went on the stage, caught the eye of Charles Laughton, and landed a part in "The Private Life of Henry the Eighth."

And that was just the start. The next step was a move to America, where she marries the boss of Columbia Pictures and became a billionaire.

Cyril remembers seeing her in Times Square, it was a memorable occasion. She lent him a Cadillac! If she's still alive, she must be about 90.

Little Miss Careless must have learned something at Holy Trinity.

at Whetstone. Now Finchley High Road, this part remained unbolt on until the Common was developed following enclosure in 1814.

The new road improved East End's opportunities for trade, simulating the Hog Market and allowing better access to London for hay and other products. Returning carts carried the soot and manure and gave rise to the "Dirthouse" where the White Lion stands.

For a complete list of the publication on which this series is based write to the Archer, History List, enclosing a SAE.

Next issue will take a walk along the original track by the common and past some other things of interest.