Strawberry Vale: mystery unsolved

Compiled by Daphne Chamberlain

The mystery has not yet been solved:

Mrs Killingback, of Chambers Gardens, demolished the air-raid shelter theory mentioned last month. When she moved into her house in 1944, there was nothing but concrete on the mystery site. Similarly, the pleasure gardens of the old Green Man were on the other side of the present Strawberry Vale road.

Mandy Willis and James Crouch wonder wherher it could have been something to do with the shops which fronted the High Road. Mandy inclines towards Neal's the Printers, but the file is still open!

Thanks to everyone who contacted us. If anyone else has any memories of the area - or any ideas about the mystery building - please let us know.

Meanwhile, we have unearthed some fascinating information about old Strawberry Vale.

According to Barnet Archives records, Strawberry Vale in the early 1800s was largely under water. The central brook, fed by tributaries from the Fallowcourt and Creighton Avenue areas, originally ran through to the Lea, but was blocked by fallen trees at Colney Hatch Lane. The result was a vast lake. In 1813 it was bought by the Regents Canal Company, but never used, and was sold on to James Frost, a local builder.

He drained it and, by 1830, had built "a farmhouse, villas, cottages, a coach-house, stables, barns, a cowhouse, greenhouses, sheds, pleasure grounds, gardens, a nursery, orchards and plantations".

Many of these were still in existence in the 1970s. Here's how *ARCHER* readers remember them.

Hawthorne Cottage

James Crouch, of Manor Park Road was born in Strawberry Vale in 1924 and lived there until 1952. He was born in Hawthorn Cottage, next to Hawthorndene (which is still standing today). It was rented from his grandfather, also called James Crouch, who lived in Strawberry Vale Farmhouse. Mr Crouch Snr was a member of London Zoo. He kept peacocks, turkeys, geese, chickens, tropical fish - and 10 monkeys which ran round his garden on dog-leads.

Strawberry Vale House was large, with its own electricity dynamo, a conservatory with a collection of orchids, an orchard and plum trees.

Tennis courts

There were 12 tennis courts altogether on Mr Crouch Snr's land. On match days, visiting club members would sometimes watch the play from buses, with their refreshments stored on the lower decks. James Crouch's grandfather worked for Idris in Camden Town and he kept barrels of Idris lemon squash on one court.

Riding stables

There were stables in the garden of Hawthorndene, which a greengrocer, Reg Bloomfield, rented from Mr Crouch Snr. He was succeeded by a Mr Evans who gave riding lessons. Some of the horses were stabled on the tennis courts. The Crouch family also kept boarding kennels for dogs and cats.

Frieda Schweizer of Cherry Tree Road, remembers Strawberry Vale House in the 1930s. "In the garden there was a lovely tennis club of which I was a member for a few years. It had three courts, bordered by an orchard and the brook. There were also several other courts near the house. Riding stables were also in the vicinity.

Beyond these, towards the cemetery and adjacent to the North Circular Road, my father had a farm of chickens and goats. The latter had little bells (brought by my father from Switzerland) tied around their necks, thus indicating where they strayed to. At one stage, we had as many as 20 goats and about 100 chickens."

Mr Schwiezer was a businessman, but he loved farm life. He rented the farm from Islington Council from the mid-30s until his death in 1972 and his ashes were scattered over the ground there.

Bakery

Mandy Willis from Cuffley sent us a sketch map relating to the 1950s and 60s. She said, "I used to live at 372 High Road (now part of the flyover system) on the corner of Chambers Gardens from the 1950s and in Chambers Gardens itself from 1971 until 1981. You refer in your article to a bakery and, in fact, my father Jack Ramsay owned this property until it was demolished by CPO in the 1970s."

"I cannot state exactly what the buildings may have been, but I have attached a map of the area from my earliest memories, which may possibly shed some light on the matter."

"May I also say how much I enjoyed reading your paper, and remembering names and locations which I had not heard of for a number of years. I wish you continued success with your publication."

Horseshoe Farm

Ruby Cattle of Rectory Close, N3 (formerly of Leopold Road) thought the building might be Horseshoe Farm. We're sure it wasn't, but would like some information about it.

Frieda Schweizer's father (right), nephew and nieces with goats on his farm at Strawberry Vale.

Bigger brighter Budgens

By Toni Morgan

Budgens, the supermarket in East Finchley High Road, has had a 'make-over'. The store was closed for two weeks and re-opened on 28 October with a completely new look. From the outside you might think it hadn't changed much, then you notice the greatly improved entrance with large sliding automatic doors: go through these and you see that many changes have been made inside.

The store is larger, the aisles wider and the lighting brighter. The vegetable 'island' near the entrance makes it easier to get round and there are clearly marked signs indicating where various goods can be found. I was particularly impressed with the increased range of food items available, from a variety of olive oils to their own brand ground coffee. For those looking for organic foods, there is a wide selection ranging from vegetables, coffee, jams, cereals and chocolate.

Some shoppers might mourn the loss of the delicatessen counter, but this has been more than adequately compensated for by the wide range of cooked meats and fish available. Budgens has its own bakery which delivers freshly baked bread daily and if you live within a 4 mile radius of East Finchley and spend £20 or more, there is a free home delivery service available from Monday-Saturday.

The Manager, Tony Ruocco, said that it had been hard work, there were a few teething troubles - the tills were unable to accept credit cards and there

New and improved. Photo by Toni Morgan

was a problem with the heating ducts - but these have been sorted out and he has received many favourable comments from customers.

The official launch took place on 18 November and there are numerous promotional offers available until 26 January 2000, so why not go and look for yourself. I shall certainly be changing my shopping habits, I think I might even try the home delivery service!

Voice Over

You may not have heard of eight-year-old Tomas McCollum, but you may well have heard him.

As we reported earlier this year, he auditioned for a spot in the Michael Barrymore TV programme. Every Sunday night on "Kids Say the Funniest Things" Tomas, of the caretaker's cottage, Eagan's Close, East Finchley, can be heard introducing the host with the words "And now, here's Michael".