



Counting Gravestones

Martin Earl talks to Norman Bolton about his unusual job.



Norman Bolton checking the gravestones for safety in St Pancras Cemetery. Photo by Martin Earl.

“There’s rather more to it than that”, explains Norman Bolton as we sit on a bench in the warm September sun in the middle of St Pancras cemetery off the High Road, in what feels like the most peaceful place on earth.

For sixty-year-old Norman has been employed by Camden Council (the other half of the cemetery is owned by Islington) to check that all of the many thousands of gravestones are safe; to leave safe those that are not and report them for repair; and to measure any that lean for later re-checking for movement. He also describes each one and records the names which, after being compared against the original records, will be put on computer.

As an experienced Clerk of Works, initially in the RAF with an impressive list of countries visited and, more recently, on motorway constructions such as the M74, following the death of his wife two years ago Norman left his flat in Lockerbie in July this year for this unusual job in East Finchley.

“It’s one of the best jobs I’ve ever had”, he says. “And if they extend my contract beyond the current January end date I won’t mind.” Who can blame him?

Gravely serious

However, he is not entirely satisfied with life, and he was keen for me to mention that he wouldn’t mind meeting a rich widow (where better than a cemetery?). But, as I found out, you may take that with a pinch of salt as he was also concerned about how to cope with the amount of fan mail this article might generate. Well, despite his particular sense of humour, it is good to know that the cemetery will be safer as a result of his work, especially, as he said to me, for children, who whether we like it or not, sometimes play around the stones.

Baronsmere Road restrictions - Unacceptable delays?

Barnet Council’s decision to restrict access to and from the High Road from Baronsmere Road has come as something of a surprise. A similar scheme was proposed in 1996, but was not approved by the Traffic Director for London who was “concerned that works would cause unacceptable delays at the traffic lights”.

Under the scheme, all north-bound vehicles on the High Road (including residents’) needing access to Baronsmere/Southern Road, and all roads south (Shakespeare Gardens, Cherry Tree Woods, Summerlee Gardens, Ingram, Park Hall, and Cherry Tree Roads) will face the prospect of joining an already congested queue to turn right at the

Fortis Green/High Road junction, where southbound traffic precludes more than two or three cars turning in one traffic light phase. This traffic will then turn right off Fortis Green down most of those streets which the scheme is intended to benefit.

Blinkered

Similarly, a southbound journey will first entail driving north,

then attempting to filter into Fortis Green and joining the queue to turn left at the junction, (one hopes that frustrated drivers will resist the temptation to rat-run down Fairlawn Avenue!). The Council’s claim that this will actually “relieve congestion in Fortis Green” sounds blinkered, to put it politely.

Trapped

The Council now contends that improvements to the Fortis Green junction should alleviate the Traffic Director’s concerns. What improvements? It’s the same old junction it always was. Admittedly we now have a (short) bus lane; this is welcomed, but will do nothing to affect the right-hand turn at the junction. With many cars ignoring the bus priority and speeding up the inside lane, cars needing to change back to the left-hand lane are trapped on the right, while buses trying to turn right from the bus stop are trapped on the left.

Heaven help us if this is an “improvement”. With the best of intentions, the Council is solving one problem by creating another.

Danger on two bridges

By Daphne Chamberlain

One-way hazard in Church Lane

Does anyone else hold their breath driving over the railway bridge in Church Lane?

At October’s Finchley Forum an East Finchley resident said that he had complained over a year ago about the danger of the cyclists’ contra-flow lane there. The only indication of the contra-flow for drivers entering this one-way street from East End Road is the marking on the road surface. It is impossible to see over the hump-backed bridge, and the danger is compounded by cars parked on the left-hand side of the road.

Chief Engineer Robin Hodsdon said that “the consultation process has been gone into”, and he will report back to the next Forum.

Squeeze in East End Rd

THE ARCHER is also very concerned about the extremely nar-

row pavement over the East End Road railway bridge. We know of several very frightening incidents, when passing traffic has been much too close to pedestrians. Anyone who has ever walked over that bridge must be aware that there could be a serious accident waiting to happen there.

What you can do?

If you, too, are worried about these hazards, please let THE ARCHER or your local Councillor know - as soon as possible.

Any local issue can be raised at the Finchley Forum meetings. They are chaired by a Councillor, with other Councillors and representatives of departments on hand, and are open to all members of the public. The agenda is set by local residents.

The next meeting is at 6.30 pm on Tuesday, 30 November at Northside School, Lodge Lane, N12.

Strawberry Vale mystery

The search continues for the identity of the building which once stood behind Chambers Gardens.

Its foundations were unearthed by constructors working on Strawberry Vale’s new Community Centre. Was it a farmhouse, a smithy, a bakery, a riding stable?

These have all been suggested, and were certainly all in the area, but Barnet archivist Hugh Petrie thinks that this particular building was either an outhouse of the now demolished Green Man or an

air-raid shelter.

We are investigating further, and will keep you informed.

Meanwhile, we are still very interested in any memories or anecdotes of the old Strawberry Vale area, and will be publishing them in a future edition.

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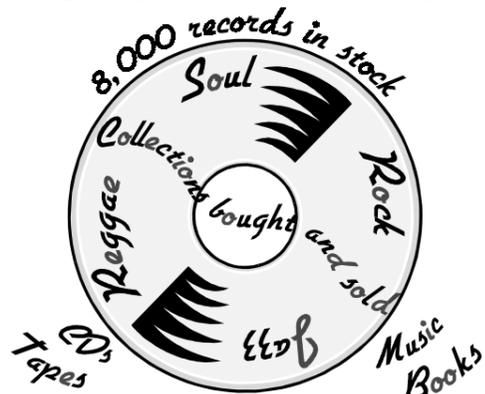
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