



# The National Hospital

By Alison Stein

## Part 3 Royal Past - Uncertain Future

Many readers will have watched the Stephen Poliakoff drama, *The Lost Prince*, on television. Not all may be aware, however, that Johnnie was not the first member of the British Royal Family to suffer from epilepsy. Queen Victoria's youngest son, Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, died in 1884, aged only 31, leaving behind a young wife, a baby daughter, Alice – and an unborn son.

Throughout his short life he suffered from haemophilia as well as epileptic fits. However, he managed to attend university (despite his mother's objections), and at Oxford became very friendly with John Ruskin, who gave him an enthusiasm for reform and social justice. In 1882 Prince Leopold presided at a fund-raising dinner in aid of the National Hospital for the Paralyzed and Epileptic, Queen Square. In commending the hospital for affording "relief to maladies of so peculiarly mysterious and distressing a nature", he was speaking from painful personal experience.

It was thus appropriate that in June 1897 his widow Helen, Duchess of Albany, should perform the opening ceremony for the Country Branch of the National Hospital at East Finchley. The *Hendon and Finchley Times* reports that she "was received at the entrance to the grounds by a guard of honour of the 3rd Middlesex Rifle Volunteers". There followed, according to the *Hendon Times*, "a long", and according to *The Lancet*, "a short religious service", and an Oxford contemporary of Prince Leopold's, Mr George Russell, made "a speech, primed with pleasant personal recollections".

### Poignant Memories

Time passed – with visiting days, summer garden parties, and homegrown winter entertainments round the fire. The building was requisitioned by Middlesex County Council during the Second World War, but re-opened in 1947, and in the 1960s upgraded and extended. Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, performed the opening ceremony in July 1967. She was then in her mid-eighties – no longer the baby in a high chair, with an uncanny resemblance to her grandmother, Queen Victoria; but perhaps dimly remembering her doting father, Prince Leopold, who played the 'piano organ' to amuse her, while John Ruskin danced to its music<sup>1</sup>.

And what of the future? If the current development scheme succeeds, the convalescent home and its fine grounds will soon be only a memory. But a memory which reflects credit on East Finchley and its warm-hearted welcome to the National Hospital Home, at a time when sufferers from 'nervous diseases' were shunned elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Zeepvat, *Prince Leopold - The untold story of Queen Victoria's Youngest Son*, 1998, Sutton Publishing Ltd.

## Need a Hand with Shopping?

East Finchley Neighbourhood Contact have spaces available on their free twice-weekly shopping bus to Tesco, Colney Hatch Lane, to assist older or less able people who need help in carrying heavy shopping.

Users of the shopping bus are collected from home in the morning, assisted with carrying shopping to the bus and dropped back home. The driver also assists with carrying shopping from the bus to the front door – a welcome help for its happy users. The bus runs most Thursdays and Fridays.

Sian Jones coordinator of East Finchley Neighbourhood Contact comments: "For people unable to carry heavy shopping, a regular trip to a larger supermarket is a welcome help, plus it gives a chance to meet other people in the same position."

If you would like to make use of the shopping bus please call the East Finchley Neighbourhood Contact office on 020 8444 1162.

East Finchley Neighbourhood Contact provides a range of services from visiting elderly people, to reading, doing odd jobs, hosting lunch clubs and helping with shopping. If you can spare a few hours each week and can help a neighbour in your street, call Sian on 020 8444 1162.



(L-R) Vicki Stanton of the Bobath Centre, Nick Dean of Barclays Bank, Rob and Jacqui Dobor of the Bald Faced Stag present a cheque to the Bobath Centre. Photo by Diana Cormack

## Local Spirit

By Diana Cormack

Vicki Stanton's appeal for the Bobath Centre in February's *ARCHER* received an instant response from Jacqui and Rob Dobor, landlords of The Bald Faced Stag. They got together to organise a Valentine's Day raffle, when two hampers filled with goodies given by shopkeepers in the High Road could be won. They also held a Saturday night Battle of the Sexes pool competition and auctioned some fireside equipment, generously donated by their neighbours at Amazing Grates.


The company who own the Bald Faced Stag, Spirit Group, usually supports the NSPCC but the Dobors were attracted by the local angle and because they have disabled friends. In fact, Richard Bullard refereed the pool competition and ran the auction from his wheelchair. Having successfully raised a total of £225.50, they now intend to hold more events to support the Bobath Centre at 250 East End Road, which treats people from all over the world who have cerebral palsy.

### Show of faith

Jacqui, Rob and Vicki would like to thank everyone who took part in the raffle and the pool competition and they are extremely grateful to the shopkeepers who provided them with prizes. "The High Road was brilliant," said Vicki, delighted with this "show of faith by local people."

Those who donated were

Amazing Grates, Amici Italian Cafe, Andrews the Chemist, Ellemen hairstylists, Natural Choice Health Shop, Josephine's the florist, Mandara Italian delicatessen, Stewart and Duncan Optician, Finchley Wines Off Licence and Threshers, who also provided wrapping and ribbons for the hampers.



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