



# East Finchley's Chevalier

By Ann Bronkhorst

On 18 June 1940 General de Gaulle broadcast from London a rallying call: the French should fight on, despite the German occupation of France. Every year that speech is commemorated at de Gaulle's wartime HQ. This year John Hatfield, of East Finchley, attended the ceremony and was awarded the Legion of Honour (Chevalier).



John Hatfield Photo by Isobel Hatfield

### In war and peace

The House of Commons, through local MP Rudi Vis, has congratulated John Hatfield for "outstanding war service with the French as a British liaison officer and continuing and close association with the Free French Association." The Imperial War Museum, too, has recognised the value of his experiences and memories. Their compilations of oral history include taped interviews with John.

### Spanish connection

Born in Spain to a British Father and Spanish mother, and educated at the French lycee in Madrid, John grew up tri-lingual. In 1936, just before the Spanish civil war, the family left for England; John's father returned to Madrid to work, surviving the siege. The Spanish connection has been important throughout John's life. He visits Spain regularly and one of his sons now lives there.

### Naval experience

In 1941, aged 19, John joined the Royal Navy, serving firstly in a corvette escorting convoys and later in a motor torpedo boat; an appointment to the Admiral's staff on Gibraltar followed. The crucial posting came in 1944 when John became British Liaison Officer to the Free French motor torpedo boats. Now his fluent French was vital.

### With the flotilla

His duties involved ensuring the unit got what it needed for operational efficiency in co-ordination with British naval operations. "I decided that I wouldn't be an external person, foreign to them, I would be part of them if I could, while remaining chiefly loyal to the Royal Navy." He went on patrol with the flotilla witnessing, among many events, the devastation of Brest after German occupation and American bombing. He recalls the shattering effect on Free French seamen of the contrast between occupied France - "nothing to eat, everything shabby and dirty, and a kind of giving up"- and their own good morale and conditions.

### Le Liaison

John enjoyed the combination of 'elan' and informality in the flotilla and felt integrated and at ease. He was known (and still is) as Le Liaison. Through regular reunions he has kept in touch with his Free French comrades; now France has honoured that long relationship.

# East Finchley's religious heritage

Part 5 - A vanished church  
By Ann Bronkhorst

Last month's East Finchley Festival would have delighted the 19th. century travelling preachers from Hoxton who regularly held open-air meetings here. What an opportunity to reach a new congregation!

### The first chapel

In 1815, when the preachers established a congregation in East End village, nobody dreamed of building a fine church like the one illustrated. At first an old barn was rented in the Hogmarket. By 1830 the Congregationalists (a significant national movement by then) had built a chapel 'in an eligible part of the Common fronting the Great North Road' where Chapel Court now stands. Readers of July's ARCHER may guess the next development.

### Out of the ashes

Just as the chapel - with an infant school - was becoming too cramped for its rapidly growing congregation, a disastrous fire in 1875 forced radical decisions. A superb site was found for a new, large church at the junction of East End Road and the Great North Road, roughly behind Iceland and Budgen's. And the fire-damaged chapel and school would be restored and converted into a Lecture Hall.

### The Gothic church

This bold double plan shows the Congregationalists' faith and confidence. They felt it was their duty because East Finchley was 'destined soon to become a very important suburb of London.' Vigorous fundraising brought donations ranging from three hundred pounds to two shillings and sixpence (from A Friend). The architecture was ambitious: a Gothic-style church, seating 610 with nave, aisles, transepts, a tower and a spire rising to 130 feet.

The tower clock struck the hours - perhaps some older



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readers can recall its sound? In 1878 when the new church opened, a special train was laid on from Broad Street to East Finchley, timed to arrive for the dedicatory service.

### Demolition

And the fire-damaged chapel? It was indeed restored, becoming firstly a Lecture Hall and, in 1898, the first Roman Catholic church in the area. In 1940 a bomb finally destroyed the building. The tall Gothic church funded by so many

donations and described in 1903 as 'one of the most prominent features in East Finchley' was demolished in 1965.

The dwindling Congregationalists became part of the United Reform Church and in the 1970s erected a simple building close to the site of the 1870s church. Some of that building remains, although considerably altered to become the North London Jamatkhana, of which more next month.

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