



HISTORY

East Finchley's Kewgardia

By Rita Palmer (nee Chick)

My family moved to Kewgardia in 1956 when I was nine years old. It was situated at 329 High Road, between Oak Lane and Sylvester Road. My mother and father initially ran the shop as a greengrocer's and florist's, and then changed over to all floristry and employed staff, including my husband. We grew quite a lot of our own flowers – chrysanthemums, gladioli, and lots of dahlias.

The grounds covered approximately five acres, on which there were two cottages and a privately owned garage. Our house was Georgian and I think it was called Leicester House, but I cannot find any record of that. The side of the house was burnt down, but then rebuilt again. We had two Alsatian dogs, called Jill and Kim. After the business started to take off we began to get quite a big clientele, including some famous faces, such as Cliff Richard, Bernard Bresslaw, Alfred Marks, Joy Beverley and Barbara Cartland.

A lot of our customers would buy flowers to take over to the St. Pancras and Islington cemetery opposite us. At Christmas time we made hundreds and hundreds of wreaths. We used to have a production line running, each one adding something to the wreath. Our hands used to get quite sore.



Kewgardia in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of The Finchley Press / Rita Palmer

I have a lot of happy memories of the nurseries, and Mum and Dad, who have now both passed away, did enjoy running the business and watching it grow. I don't think they wanted to leave there, but we had no option as it was on a lease. We moved out in 1972, and it was demolished to make way for a

housing estate.

We sometimes drive down to East Finchley but it doesn't seem the same now as there have been so many changes, and I don't recognise it. Writing this, though, has made me remember the people we got to know who lived nearby, and all the friends we made there.

Octavia's garden

By Ann Bronkhorst

One day the Green Man Community Centre may be haunted by a friendly ghost. The Centre's user committee plans to create a garden on a nearby patch of land and include in it a memorial to Octavia Hill, the nineteenth-century housing reformer, who would surely give it her blessing.

On 28 October the committee invited Peter Clayton, Chair of the Octavia Hill Society and a social historian of London, to talk about her life and achievements. Peter had the facts at his fingertips and was an engaging and humorous speaker, sharing his enthusiasm for this Victorian woman who, he says, has taken over his life.

Country childhood

Old maps and engravings revealed a lost world: Finchley Common, Strawberry Vale Brook, the Turnpike Road (A100) and Brownsells. Here much of Octavia's happy childhood was spent, providing a touchstone for her all her life. She campaigned to save open spaces for all to use, eventually co-founding the National Trust. Queen's Wood, Highgate, Parliament Hill Fields and many smaller open spaces in London (her "outdoor sittingrooms") were saved for us by Octavia.

Better housing

Her main achievement lay

in her practical, business-like approach to housing management. She trained women to combine rent-collecting with social work; her methods brought huge improvements to the living conditions of the poor. Today's best housing management practice evolved from her beliefs and hard work.

Making it happen

A community garden will be in the Octavia Hill tradition and Martin O'Donnell of the Green Man Centre is "absolutely confident it will happen". The committee are bidding for at least £25,000 from the Peabody Trust. Other support is coming from the Living Spaces Programme of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Trafford Hall, the National Tenants' Training Centre. East Finchley Community Development Trust are helping to secure more external funding and Groundwork Camden will make a model and canvass residents' ideas.

Coldfall for glaciers

By John Dearing

Those of you who have had the pleasure of watching Alan Titchmarsh's excellent series "British Isles: a Natural History" may have noticed that East Finchley was mentioned in the edition broadcast on 13 October.

The last ten minutes of each edition were entitled *Local Landscape Detectives* and in London, Joe Swift met experts to examine local evidence of the subject matter of the main programme.

On this occasion, he went to Alexandra Palace to meet Eric Robinson, a geologist, who pointed out the wide valley between there and the Highgate ridge, which, he said, was formed by the melt water from the Ice Age glacier whose southern edge was in the locality.

They visited Coldfall Wood and without much trouble found flint pebbles with pitted surfaces rather than the more usual smooth surfaces from river water polishing. This indicated that they had been dragged against hard rocks by moving ice. They also found sandstone pebbles which must have been transported from further north, and which had striations caused by similar circumstances. This glacial *till* indicates that the southern-most extension of the glacier was at or near to Coldfall Wood.

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East Finchley Clinic
Unit 2/3 Bedford Mews
Bedford Road
London N2 9DF

020 8883 5888
FAX: 020 8444 8874