



Walking the walk

By Ann Bronkhorst

Saturday shoppers looked puzzled as 20 people peered up at Victorian brickwork and Edwardian gables or appraised modern conversions and tower blocks. Local resident Bill Tyler was leading an architectural walk around East Finchley on 4 June. His time as President of the Finchley Society has given him particular knowledge of the area's development. Roughly following the High Road, with some detours, the group was shown a wide range of historic and recent buildings in their contexts.

Pubs, lanes and trains

It seems that routes and transport shaped East Finchley, from the carters moving hogs, hay and manure and pausing for a drink at the Dirt House, now the Old White Lion, to the role of the railway in "putting us on the map" in the 19th century.

Ancient lanes like The Causeway and The Walks remain, as do a handful of the pubs for which East Finchley was once notorious. One of Bill's group, John Sparrow, is a descendant of the innkeeper at the Bald Faced Stag in 1851. Lost ways of life were evoked: trolley buses; coalyards and dairies where Diploma Court now stands; an imposing Congregational church behind Budgens; the old market site, obliterated by a landmine; shops in the front rooms of cottages. But one shop, Andrews, has traded as a pharmacy for over 100 years.

Decorative details

Bill pointed out interesting architectural details and praised the rich decoration of even quite modest Victorian and Edwardian buildings. At the north end of Deansway the group discussed



The Walks, the remains of an ancient route along the western edge of Finchley Common. Picture by Ann Bronkhorst

'Tudorbethan' styles and Voysey's influence. The Nova dental surgery, converted from a public toilet, pleased Bill but he was scathing about some other recent buildings. At least, he said, the "no frills" council housing facing the High Road was unobtrusive. After admiring the "fine facade" of the Methodist church, the striking Baptist church (now flats) and the listed Library, the group headed off for a drink at The Windsor Castle in The Walks, appropriately one of

the oldest parts of East Finchley. As John Hajdu of the Fortis Green Association said when thanking Bill Tyler: "What a marvellous way to spend a Saturday morning!"



Bill Tyler in The Windsor Castle. Picture by Ann Bronkhorst

Thank you, Finchley Society

By Daphne Chamberlain

I was delighted to receive an invitation from The Finchley Society to speak at their meeting in May. The topic, of course, was THE ARCHER, which my friends will agree I'm always happy to talk about, and I really enjoyed the evening.

While spreading the word to the parts of Finchley the paper doesn't always reach, it was also great to find several N2 residents there. Thank you to everyone for making me so welcome, and for showing so much interest. The society does an enormous amount on behalf of Finchley, and in the coming months we will be featuring various aspects of its work.

Finchley museum on the airwaves

By Daphne Chamberlain

John Keats put his poetry on to paper with a concoction of soot, gum and spirits. Two hundred years ago, everyone did. His friend Dr Henry Stephens eventually created ink, a blue-black fluid sold at three old pence a bottle, which was snapped up all over the world.

There is a museum dedicated to Stephens in Avenue House, East End Road, and this has inspired a play by writer Shelley Silas.

She said: "I live in south London now, but I grew up in Golders Green. I actually lived in Regents Park Road for 12 or 13 years, and often went to Avenue House grounds. I'd seen the plaque about Stephens, but hadn't taken much notice.

"Then, when I went to my aunt and uncle's 50th wedding party in Avenue House, I became fascinated. As I found out more, I knew I had to write a play about Dr Stephens. I'm thrilled that it's getting air-time, and more people will know about his work."

Tribute to

Norman Burgess

The late Norman Burgess was a force behind establishing the Stephens Collection, and

Shelley paid tribute to him and his widow, Betty. "Norman was so helpful to me last year, when I visited the museum, and I'm so sad he won't hear the play."

Shelley, who writes for radio and theatre, also researched at the London Archives, and spoke to Henry Edmunds, a descendant of Stephens.

Her 45-minute play has a sub-plot about a present-day illiterate prison inmate, who learns to write and discovers poetry. Keats is in there somewhere too. You can hear it on BBC Radio 4, at 2.15pm on Thursday 28 July.

The Stephens Collection at Avenue House - manned by volunteers - is open 2-4pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and on other days for special events. Tel. 020 8346 7812 or see www.avenuehouse.org.uk for further details.

Ripples of history

The second meeting of The Finchley Society's local history group on Wednesday 15 June was so well attended that additional seating had to be fetched. John Heathfield, the main speaker, likened researching local history to a stone thrown into a pool, ripples extending in all directions.

He illustrated this with the story of Thomas Reynolds, a compositor from Spitalfields who in 1839 went to a Methodist teacher training college, then got a job in a school in Whetstone, supplementing his income by running a newspaper shop. He also wrote for the Barnet Press, and wrote reports of council meetings in verse. He went on to explain the importance of indexing collections and allowing indexes to be put together to obtain the complete picture; clear indexing with no fudging. He mentioned the excellent pioneering work of local historian C O Banks, much of which is located at the London Metropolitan and Barnet Archives, but often is not readily accessible because of the lack of a proper index. The talk was followed by a discussion about what members of the audience considered the three

most important things to have shaped Finchley. John Heathfield pointed out that the range of suggestions and opinions indicated how much knowledge already existed in this group. Finally, John Donovan of Friern Barnet History Society was invited to explain how that Society came into being. He explained how the Society had been precipitated into action by the Friern Barnet Hospital development, and was now undertaking a whole range of activities, having already reached over one hundred members. Oliver Natelson stressed the importance of making any research you are doing widely known - to avoid unnecessary duplication, or being pipped at the post when publishing. For further information on Finchley local history group contact David Marcus on 020 8346 1734.

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