



Sunday 3 September 1939 is the day Britain entered World War II. Two readers remember what life was like in the war years.

Library blackout

By Brian Wilkins

The other day I visited East Finchley Library. That piece of earth-shattering information is of no interest to anybody, until I add that I live over 40 miles away in Elstead, Surrey, and I last visited the library in 1947.

The library is exactly as I remember it 60 years ago except that it seems much smaller (but then I have grown bigger) and what is now the music library was a study room. When I first went there in 1942, it was only four years old.

In those days, Finchley was a borough in its own right with its own mayor and running its own affairs, nothing to do with Barnet. It built a series of splendid public library buildings, completing the ones at East and North Finchley before the outbreak of war in 1939.

We lived in 1 Windsor Road, Church End (since demolished to make way for a small block of flats) and my brother and I attended the Woodhouse Grammar School and used the library regularly.

Gifts for the forces

The chief librarian then was Jane Brown and we got to know her quite well as she and father co-operated on a number of educational matters. Among

other things we were involved in a scheme to provide books for members of the armed forces.

Typical of the public response in wartime, books of all sorts came in by the thousand and the hall above the library was taken over as a sorting station. My job was to put a stamp on the title page which read, as far as I can remember: "A gift from the people of Finchley to the men and women in the forces". I wonder if any of these volumes survived the war.

During the war time blackout the library caretaker went to great trouble to black out the large windows and then went outside to inspect his handiwork. What he had forgotten was the row of skylight domes, like a battery of upward-facing searchlights, the blacking out of which presented him with a considerable problem.

I greatly enjoyed my nostalgic visit and my thanks go to the library staff for welcoming me so warmly.

The day the guns roared

Bernard Shannon lived in Church Lane for 50 years before moving to the Isle of Man. Here he remembers factory life during the war.

The year was 1940, Britain was in big trouble, and that included East Finchley. We knew what to expect if the Nazi hordes ever got here. Britain was under air attack night and day, and military hardware was desperately needed.

The order went out that all factories must work on during air raids, and henceforth there would be two shifts worked, 12 hours a day and 12 hours a night, seven days a week non-stop. There would be draconian penalties for any unauthorised absence without a medical certificate.

I was 17 years old and chose the nightshift at Simms Motor Units, Oak Lane, by then switched to making military components. It would be hard to explain to modern generations just how strength-sapping those hours were. Apart from the constant air raids, the grind of long nights seven times a week left no room for anything else but sleep and hasty meals. Each morning I practically fell into bed comatose, sleeping even through air raids. Then it was back to the factory.

Despite this I had determined that some break in the pattern, however small, must be created. Every Wednesday afternoon I would set the alarm clock for 1.30pm and force myself to rise and get to the Rex (now Phoenix) Cinema to see the weekly film.

On one occasion I arrived at the cinema and was shown to a seat. The main film was a war movie about the RAF and I was soon absorbed in it. I was somewhat surprised to

feel a hand upon my shoulder. It turned out to be the manager. The practice was that in the event of an air raid the cinema lights would go on for three minutes to allow those who wished to, to leave, but the manager whispered that this had not been done because I was the only person in the entire cinema. He asked if I wished to leave and seemed mightily relieved when I said I did not. I was rather surprised to find I was the sole audience. In the dark one imagines there are people sitting all around.

Now, whatever shortages of equipment Britain had, they did not include anti-aircraft guns. There were guns on every open ground in East Finchley, not only in Cherry Tree Wood and various school playing fields but even on small patches of ground. When they opened up the noise was deafening.

In the cinema on screen British bombers were just diving on their target amid intense anti-aircraft fire and at precisely the same time all the guns in Finchley opened up. As the roar of guns swept across the cinema from front and behind I remember laughing aloud. It seemed so ludicrous, me sitting all alone in the darkened cinema with the roar of guns all around, and I suppose it was!



Visitors looking at David Godny's prints. Photo by Ann Froomberg

Open all arts

By Daphne Chamberlain

"This is the best one yet. We've had so many people coming in." The words of jewellery-maker Monica Peiser, summing up the first two weekends in July, when East Finchley Open, a group of local artists and craftspeople, opened their homes to display their work.

I caught up with Monica, textile designer Ann Froomberg, and multi-talented David Godny in David's Creighton Avenue house. I heard Monica discussing a commission for earrings, renewed acquaintance with Ann's fabulous hand-painted silk scarves, and studied the effects that David can produce by painting similar scenes in different mediums.

David also showed ceramics and photographic prints of wildlife and landscapes. One ibex on a precarious perch above a breathtakingly high drop is now on display in my home.

Unpressured

A growing number of us are agreeing that spending an hour or so in attractive surroundings, discovering artwork at leisure and chatting to its creators, with no pressure to buy, is a very nice way to spend a summer afternoon.

There was at least one venue in easy reach of everyone in N2, while there were outposts in N3 (for the second year running) and in N12. The North Finchley venue featured four artists in different years of the same photography degree course at Middlesex University. They included Craig Johnson, who

has just graduated with honours, and guest artist John McCafferty from Community Focus. John showed watercolours, and photography taken using a specially adapted tripod for his wheelchair.

If you missed the pleasures of the Open weekends, make a date for the EFO Winter Fair, which will be in Martin Primary School on Sunday 16 November. You won't be able to loll in someone else's garden with a glass of ginger ale, but there will be refreshments and an array of potential presents. Discover more about the EFO at www.eastfinchleyopen.org.uk.

Rolling back the years

By David Tupman

Local train enthusiasts had a rare treat on Sunday 29 June when famed rolling stock from 1938 passed through East Finchley station. This treasured four-car warhorse of the Northern line was celebrating the 70th anniversary of its introduction just before the Second World War.

Those on board the train sank back into fine red and black upholstery seats arranged against subtle green carriage interiors, comforted by shovel-like lampshades offering subdued lighting. Journeying non-stop between Morden and High Barnet,

travellers on the train watched bemused passengers at intermediate station platforms as the veteran train, in her red livery, sped by.

Travellers had the rare experience now of being able to open train windows to enjoy a blast of cool air. It was generally agreed that the 1938 rolling stock was a better ride than the modern 1996 trains with their hot interiors, poor

ventilation, noisy air fans, brash lights and irritatingly repetitive audio messages.

Although phased out of regular use in 1988, the 1938 trains spent many decades in service travelling what was for many years the longest continuous underground tunnel in the world: the 17 miles and 578 yards between East Finchley and Morden via Bank.

Parking bay disabled

An ARCHER reader has been keeping an eye on the disabled parking bay outside 100 Church Lane.

It has been impossible for any blue badge holders to use it on various occasions because priority was given to a fully loaded skip on 25 June, a large quantity of sand on 2 July and a stack of wooden planks across it on 11 July.

East Finchley Baptist Church

Just off the High Road in Creighton Avenue N2

Sunday Mornings at 10.30 am

For more information

please contact the Church Office

Tel: 8883 1544 (Minister: Simon Dyke)

Visitors always welcome