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A short history of East End Road

By Betti Blatman

At their coffee morning on Sunday 29 March, a group of residents and friends at Fairacres in East End Road were enlightened and entertained by a talk about local history. Speakers were David Smith, Chairman of the Finchley Society, born and bred here, who spoke of his childhood and the changes he has seen in the vicinity over the last 60 years. Then Tony Roberts took the audience much further back in time to the Ice Age, when the land we now live upon was formed, skillfully guiding them from the rural community it eventually became through to the present day suburban setting.

Finchley remained a rural community with no more than 250 households until the 19th century. Then, in 1811-16, came the enclosure of the common, in 1867 the arrival of the railway and, in 1875-79, the decision of the Ecclesiastical authorities to release land in East Finchley on 99-year leases when demand for homes rose.

A consequence of enclosure was the hiving off of verges along East End Road into private ownership and the construction of a new road, Prospect Place, in 1825, from East End Road to Market Place.

Looking east

The Five Bells pub became known for bare-knuckle boxing in the 1840s and heavyweight champion Gem Mace trained there. The present building dates from 1868 following a major fire.

The house that stood next to Fairacres (formerly The Old House) originated from the late 1500s and was called The Elms, then Elmhurst. It was occupied from 1833 to 1857 by Anthony Salvin, architect of Tudor and Gothic style country houses and restorer of castles.

He was instrumental in getting the funds for a parish church, Holy Trinity, which he designed and built on Bull Lane in 1846; until then, going to church (Anglican) meant walking to Church End. Bull Lane became Church Lane soon after. Elmhurst was demolished in 1939 and Elmhurst Crescent and Pulham Avenue were built in the grounds after the war. A green space was left for the public, opposite the triangle of green created around 1960 by the demolition of Causeway Cottages for a projected road-widening scheme.

Looking west

On the other side of Fairacres stood Knightons, first mentioned in 1598 and sold for development in 1921, now the site of Nazareth House. Further west was Park Farm. A colourful occupant was 'Lord' George Sanger, circus owner, who wintered his animals at the farm. In 1911

he was murdered in a brawl at the farm initiated by a disgruntled employee. The funeral route from Finchley to Holborn Viaduct was lined with people sheltering under black umbrellas from torrential rain.

Opposite the farm was Sedgemere House, which had dog kennels and a cattery. Sold to developers in 1901, it was pulled down to make way for Sedgemere Avenue, a development of maisonettes for rent to gentlefolk.

Beyond Park Farm was the cricket ground and Newmarket Farm, of which 47 acres were sold to St Marylebone Burial Board. The cemetery, designed by Barnett and Birch, opened in 1855. The Crematorium was not built until 1937.

Opposite the cemetery from 1864 was the Convent of the Good Shepherd. In 1873 it became either a reformatory for former female prisoners or a Magdalene asylum for fallen women. Following a fire in the 1970s most of the buildings were demolished and replaced by Bishop Douglass School and the Thomas More estate.

In the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere of David and Tony's talk, people were not shy about asking questions. Many shared their own personal observations and experiences about the area.

Tony provided a transcript of his talk and you can read fuller details of it by visiting the history section of www.east-finchley.com



Home made goodies: Helen Hodge, left, and Lucinda Cooper behind the counter at their new tea shop.. Photo by Shane Vincent.

Magical emporium

Two friends have decided to put their talents to good use by setting up business together. Lucinda Cooper and Helen Hodge have opened the new teasop Emporium in Fortis Green, midway between East Finchley and Muswell Hill.

Their skill in the kitchen shows itself in the home-made cakes and scones they bake on the premises, along with their own jams and chutneys.

They also sell local crafts, offer beauty treatments and open the shop up as a venue for talks and events.

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