



Happy memories of half a century in N2

By Gail Norcliffe

A resident of Church Lane, N2, since 1967, Margaret Russell has a wealth of fascinating memories and insights into how life has changed in East Finchley. Affordable housing, good transport links, and a relatively quiet area with plenty of green open spaces first drew Margaret and her late husband, Chas, to the area.

Chas was a police officer in central London and relied on the tube for his commute, although Margaret remembers there being far fewer trains. Chas needed daytime quiet when on nights, so Margaret depended on local parks for outings with their three small children.

Idyllic summer days were spent at the old Finchley Lido on the other side of the North Circular, picnicking under trees on the grass surrounds, walking there via the Tarling Road path, picking raspberries at the allotments en route. As a wonderful local facility, Margaret regrets that more was not done to prevent the Lido's closure in 1993.

Cherry Tree Wood was also a firm family favourite. It was known then as Dirt House Wood, reflecting its history of being fertilised by the soil and horse manure from London streets and brought to the Dirt House, now the Old White Lion pub.

Daily shopping

No supermarkets were on the High Road in the 1960s, but an abundance of smaller shops flourished and Margaret shopped on a daily basis. Mr and Mrs Davies's store on the Manor Park Road corner of Church Lane, stocked a wide range of produce, much of it

being sold on a per weight basis and all purchases individually wrapped in paper cones. Definitely no plastic!

Church Lane also featured two butchers, Mr Dodds's fish shop and a bakery at the end of Long Lane, the fresh bread smells bringing in custom from the neighbourhood.

As the children grew, Margaret worked locally, initially for Kleenaroll, a paper company on Church Lane, and then for 20 years as a secretary at Martin School, seeing a whole generation of children through their primary school journey.

Better or worse?

Many of the changes over 58 years living in N2 are welcome to Margaret. The High Road has seen significant improvements, including the cheeriness of the cafés with outside tables and chairs.

The community seems to have grown stronger, people are very willing to engage with each other and Margaret finds the support system in Church Lane second to none. Margaret feels East Finchley has become a much more integrated society in the last half century and welcoming to all, which is of real benefit to everyone who makes this area their home.



Margaret Russell with her photo album



With husband Chas moving into their house in Church Lane in the 1960s



Their children's favourite playground in Cherry Tree Wood



Finchley Lido was the setting for idyllic summer days

Gardeners get busy on new ground



Hard workers: Some of the volunteer gardeners who have helped to transform the planted areas in Church Lane

Having secured funding from the Barnet Area Committee to improve the brick planter areas on Church Lane by Long Lane and the Walks, N2, (The Archer, December 2024) residents have been busy clearing, tidying planting and creating new community gardens.

Council contractors undertook some repair work to the planters followed by a group of about 20 locals aged nine to 88 collectively spending over 1,250 hours clearing, weeding,

planting and watering.

A variety of plants which are bee and butterfly friendly have been selected to provide year-round interest, and a selection of herbs has been planted by The

Walks. The Finchley Pollinator Project will be providing pollinating plants and wildflower seeds in June, and a local resident is cultivating sunflowers which will be planted soon.

The sunny weather last month saw many people use the new benches but the dry spell meant the plants needed more watering. The florists at Jennie Mann in Church Lane have been helping by using water from their flower displays on the new plants.

The youngest volunteer is nine-year-old Alma, who has been helping with her father Matteo. She said: "I enjoy helping as I can contribute to the local community and make it a cleaner and greener environment for everyone."

The last bed to be tackled is where the hedge used to be by The Walks, and that is next on the list. If you would like to find out more or get involved, email churchlanegardens@gmail.com.

Songs and chocolate on the day peace returned

Here an East Finchley resident, soon to be 100, who wishes to remain anonymous, looks back 80 years to remember the sights, sounds... and smells... of VE Day on 8 May 1945.

Eighty years ago it was a warm humid day. I was a student with a group of friends youth hostelling in Yorkshire. We were in York planning to walk the walls and visit the cathedral.

As the news filtered through, we joined crowds gathering in a central open space. There was an overpowering smell of chocolate, which puzzled us until a local said Terry's and Rowntree's factories were on each side.

By late morning a makeshift platform had appeared and an announcement was made. Hostilities had ceased; Hitler was dead. Cheers, jubilation then singing *We're Going to Hang Out Our Washing on the Siegfried Line* over and over and, strangely, *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*, which I remember most vividly.

After a while catering vans turned up: fish and chips, pork and stuffing buns, sausage rolls and, for us, pint glasses of Bulmer's cider. All the while

everyone hardly believing the war in Europe was over and our lads would come home.

As evening drew in, the crowd thinned, then someone struck up *Auld Lang Syne* then *God Save the King*. People dispersed and we went back to the hostel. Male and female dormitories, with a warden in charge, never the twain would meet. Excellent value at one and sixpence a night.

The next morning we explored York. Shops hung out bunting and Union Jacks. The pervading feeling seemed to be relief and weariness as we all prepared to resume peace after more than five years of war. All these years later, my abiding memory is the smell of chocolate and the songs we roared together.