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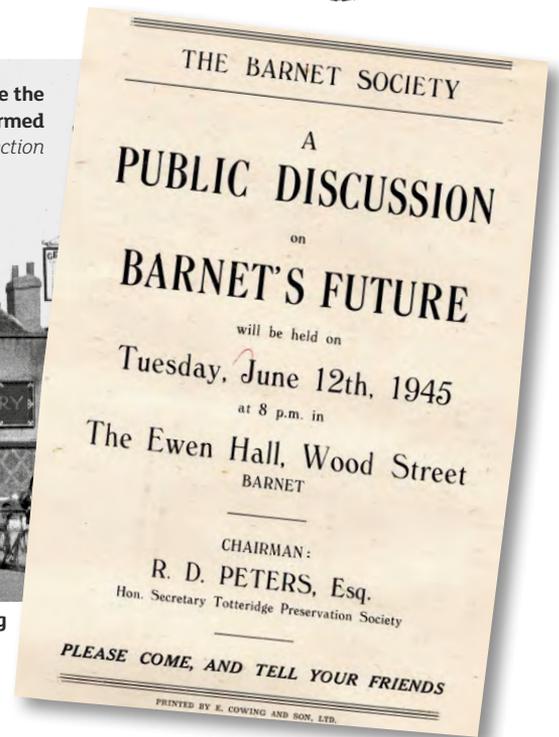
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Fight for good design



Barnet High Street around the time the Society was formed
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Right: Newspaper advertisement for meeting

1945-2020

75th Anniversary Commemorative Newsletter



For three-quarters of a century the Barnet Society has been working to protect the quality of our buildings and green spaces, and of the lives of those who live and work in and around the constituency of Chipping Barnet. For a group of local amateurs with only

modest subscriptions and occasional donations to support their work, that's an anniversary worth celebrating.

This newsletter does three things. First, we look back at the reasons for the Society's foundation and at some major achievements, particularly over the past 25 years. Secondly, we highlight issues we're currently grappling with. And thirdly, we attempt to future-gaze: what further changes we might expect, and what the Society must do to be fit for the next 75 years.

At the start of 2020, we

were planning to celebrate this anniversary with a combined AGM and party in June. Regrettably, Covid-19 put a stop to that.

We still hope to stage a celebratory event and AGM in 2021, but the continuing uncertainty makes it impossible to set a date yet. We will inform our members as soon as we can.

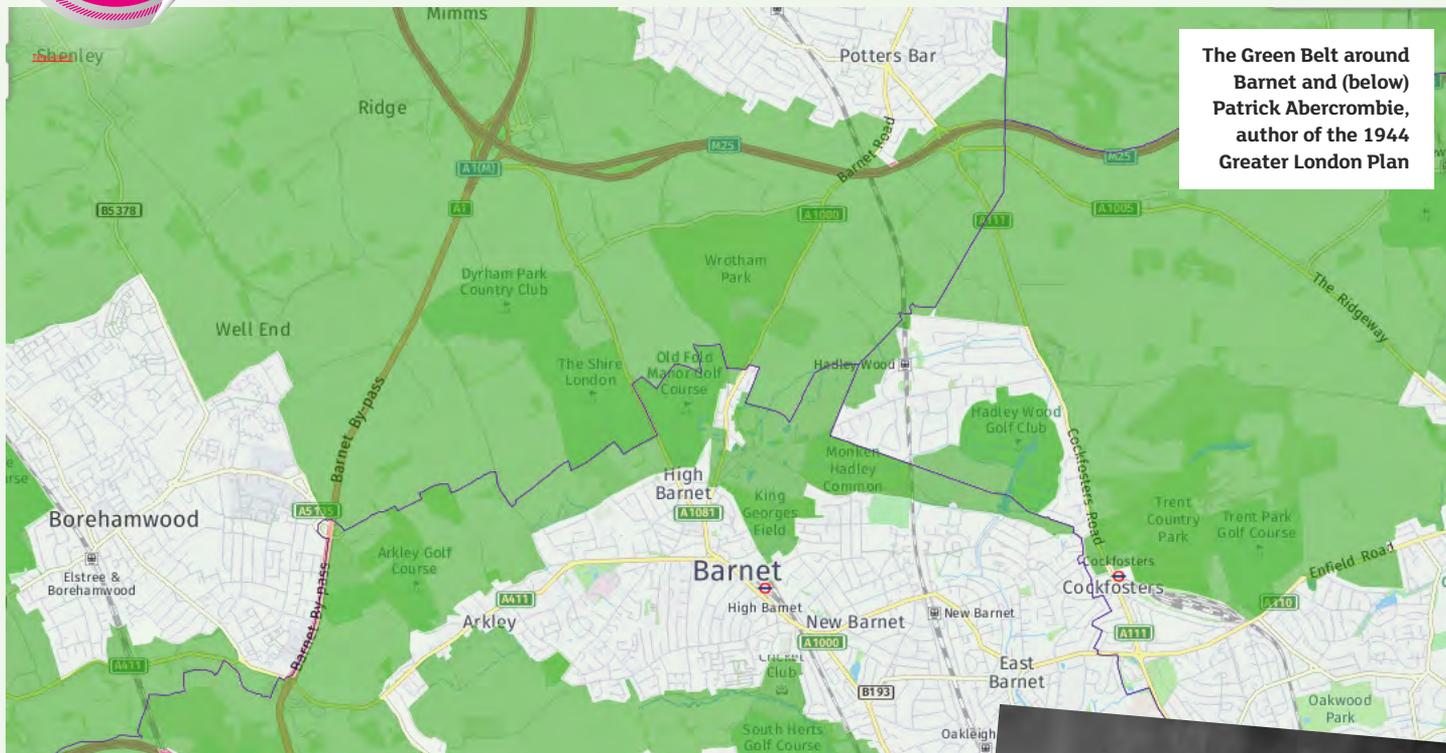
In the meanwhile, we hope that this Commemorative Issue of our Newsletter will provide some compensation until we can meet again safely in person. Long may the Barnet Society flourish!
Robin Bishop, chair.

History in the making

This newsletter gives a taste of the Society's important earlier moments and achievements.

A fuller account of our earlier years is in The Diamond Collection, published to mark our 60th Jubilee in 2005. Copies at £2 plus P&P are available from the Chairman (contact details on back cover).

The Society archives are held at Barnet Museum. As well as minutes of meetings since our foundation, it includes Newsletters, Annual Reports, cuttings from the Barnet Press and other interesting memorabilia. In normal times, the archives can be viewed by arrangement with Barnet Museum.



The Green Belt around Barnet and (below) Patrick Abercrombie, author of the 1944 Greater London Plan

Green and pleasant land

The Barnet Society was founded on 2 May 1945...but why – and why then? **Robin Bishop** takes up the story

The 1920s and 30s had seen London grow hugely around new Underground stations and along trunk roads. A tide of semi-detached houses, gardens and shopping parades had washed over most of the old towns and villages surrounding London, merging them into almost continuous suburbia.

With the 2nd World War won in Europe, there was a national desire to clear the slums and build decent homes for all. Barnet Urban District Council planned to triple its population. Our Vice-President Jenny Remfry describes it thus:

“Some enterprising property developers presented a plan to Barnet UDC to build houses in the Dollis Valley, covering the fields between Arkley and Totteridge...The Council were minded to accept the proposal but two of the Councillors were so

alarmed that they leaked the plan to Trevor Jukes, who told his cousin Gwyneth Cowing, who passed it on to her friend, the landscape architect Sylvia Crowe.

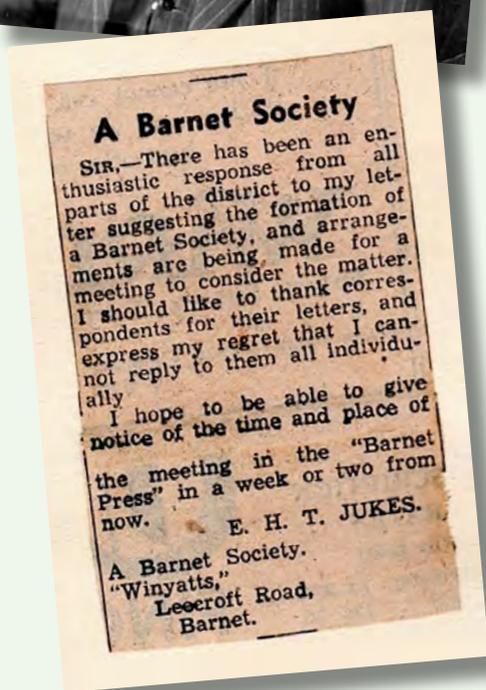
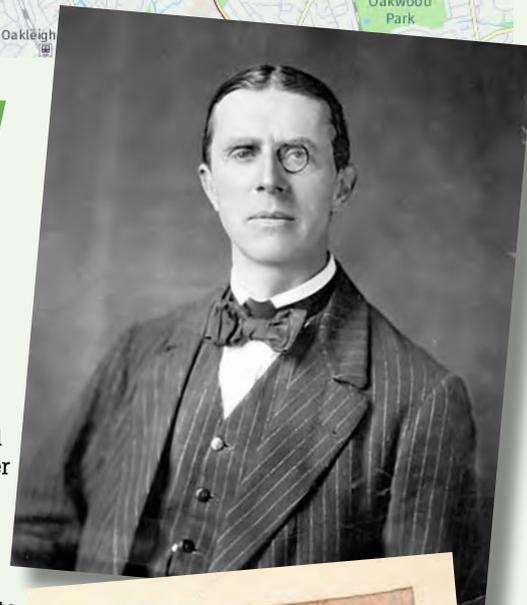
Through the medium of the Barnet Press, these three roused the folk of Barnet and called a town meeting (on 12 June 1945). There, they displayed a large map of Barnet and the Dollis Valley and on to it stuck, bit by bit, pieces of black paper to show where the house-building was proposed, until almost the whole valley was covered. The people of Barnet were so shocked and outraged that the Council had to refuse the developers, except for the area closest to the town, between Underhill and the Dollis Brook, which became the Dollis Valley Estate.”

The group that coalesced around Jukes, Cowing and Crowe became the Barnet Society. The idea of

designating a ‘green belt or girdle of open space’ around London went back to 1935, but a council could only stop its being built over by purchasing the land. It wasn’t until 1944, with the publication of Patrick Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan, that a complete belt of green space, permanently safeguarded from development, became a real proposition.

What made such a constraint on London’s development acceptable?

This was down to Abercrombie’s proposal, adopted in the 1946 New Towns Act, to create a ring of new towns around London, outside the Green Belt, to absorb the demand for new housing and promote alternative centres of growth. It was reinforced by the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act, which for the first time made planning permission a requirement



for any new development. But it was only in 1955 that councils were required to designate Green Belt land in their local plans. As a result, Chipping Barnet is today surrounded on three sides by Green Belt (see map on opposite page). Even better, we've inherited many other natural assets such as parks, Metropolitan Open Land, Sites of Importance

for Nature Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest – some within only a few minutes' walk of our homes. If you walk to the top of Whittings Hill you can't fail to be struck by their combined extent.

Thanks to our founders, and to those who came after them, our bit of Barnet is still a remarkably green and pleasant land.

Right: Adverts for various events and talks held under the auspices of the society

Goodbye to planning as we've known it?

In June, Boris Johnson announced the most radical changes in our planning system since the 2nd World War: a major increase in 'permitted development', other changes to the current system and a White Paper proposing its comprehensive reform.

The Town & Country Planning Act 1947, on which our planning system is based, has been vital in the fight to protect the Green Belt and control development in and around Chipping Barnet. In September, we submitted criticism of the proposed housing algorithm, and in October our response to the White Paper (summarised below).

We supported

- Some streamlining of the planning system
- Better enforcement of planning law
- Recognition of the need to upskill and adequately resource the planning service.

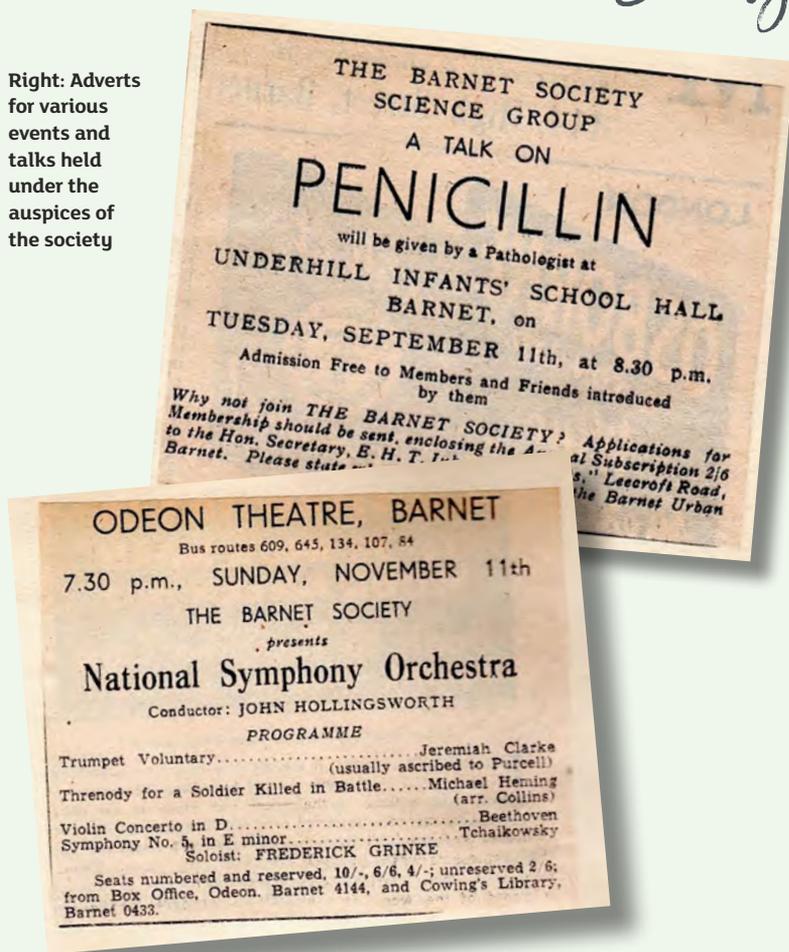
We had particular concerns about

- Its basic premise that the present planning system is outdated and ineffective
- Excessive focus on housing, especially the market sector
- Too little regard to wider planning challenges of the 21st century such as redressing regional disparities, new forms of transport, land reclamation or power generation
- Significant omissions e.g. no mention of social housing or the Metropolitan Green Belt
- Lengthy and costly disruption
- Slow delivery of housing
- Abolition of public consultation on individual planning applications.

We concluded that

- The PWP fires a scatter-gun of remedies at a limited – and sometimes imagined – set of problems.
- It barely addresses the realities of a post-Covid world on the edge of a climate emergency.
- It risks major disruption to a system that is not perfect, but capable of fine-tuning.
- In the short term, it risks failing to meet the housing target the Government sets itself. In the longer term, it risks undermining public faith in planning.
- There is time to rethink, and we urged the Government to do so.

Our full response is available on our website



Michael Kirkbride
Costume Drawing (detail)
Oil on canvas

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A trip down memory lane



Above: David Lee and Jenny Remfry

Vice-President of the Barnet Society is an honorary elected post, but all our 'Veeps' have earned their title. This year we have said goodbye to Robin Marson, who held various posts in the Society from 1995. Judith Clouston features on Pages 8 & 9. And on this and the following three pages, we highlight some of the many contributions by **Jenny Remfry** and **David Lee**

Jenny writes: I was so lucky. When I joined the Barnet Society in 1977, Gwyneth Cowing (below) and she invited me to tea at Whalebones [her home]. She was the proprietor of the Barnet Press, President of the Barnet Society, President of the Barnet and District Local History Society and a talented water colourist.

She was also Honorary Secretary (following Trevor Jukes) for 18 of the Society's first 21 years. Most of all she was a lady of natural dignity and authority, and the giver of wise counsel. There is a portrait of her in pastel hanging in Barnet Museum Gwyn told me the story of why and how the Society was founded – a story Robin includes in his article on Page 2.

The new Society set



itself the aim of ensuring that Barnet was a pleasant place in which to live. By supporting the Abercrombie plan to create a Green Belt round London, they were able to safeguard many of the open spaces of Barnet and maintain the leafy nature of the area. The open land in the Dollis Valley was declared Open Space and has been protected ever since, apart from a small development called Arkley Gate, on flood land where there had been a pig farm and sewage works, and a discreetly placed Meeting House for the Exclusive Brethren. To appreciate what has been saved, I recommend the view from the top of Whittings Hill.

The Society gave advice on the two new Conservation Areas – one in the Hadley Highstone and Monken Hadley area, designated in 1968, and the other centred on the Chipping Barnet parish church and Wood Street, designated in 1969. It has been represented on the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee ever since. Peter Willcocks (a future Acting Chairman) chaired the CAAC for many years.

The Society also had other aims – social, cultural and musical, and in the days before television kept us all at home, these were much appreciated. It was through the Society's lecture programme that I first joined, and the concerts organised by Janie Mills continued into

the 1980s. Gwyn Cowing died in August 1987, having been President of the Society since 1966. In 1990, the Society elected a new President: Sydney Chapman, who had become the MP for Chipping Barnet in 1979. He was already representing the Society on the London Green Belt Council, of which he was Chairman, and the instigator of 'Plant a Tree in '73'. He was knighted in 1995.

When Sydney Chapman retired from Parliament at the General Election of 2005, he resigned as President.

The person eventually chosen to succeed him, in 2008, was Aubrey Rose CBE, a successful London solicitor with a colourful career – happily still with us.

The Society has had an impressive list of Vice-Presidents, including Trevor Jukes, (by now Dame) Sylvia Crowe, and Andrew Pares CBE, who had been Mayor of Barnet in 1976. Also on the list was Lord Carr of Hadley, who as Robert Carr, Minister for Employment in Edward Heath's government in 1971 had been the victim of a bomb attack by the Angry Brigade at his home, Monken Holt, on Hadley Green. Carr later became Home Secretary.

The key to the success of a Society is often the Honorary Secretary, because he/she wrote the minutes of meetings and the newsletter, and was the link with members. This was so in 1988 when the Secretary of the Society was Derrick Bridges. Derrick, a well-known solicitor in Wood Street, had been appointed in 1985 and went on to serve with great distinction until 2000 with four successive Chairmen: Eric Shepherd, Peter Rossiter, myself and Jane Tounjer. Derrick was an entertaining character, quite literally, playing drums in a band and bursting into song at the drop of a hat, and re-telling the dozens of jokes he had inherited in a book compiled by his father.

His main victory was to get



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Barnet hospital rebuilt. The existing one, clustering round the old Barnet Workhouse, was so old and run down that patients on trolleys had to be moved in the open air, irrespective of rain or snow, to their wards in Nissan huts. There was serious talk of closing most of it down. In 1990 Peter started a campaign and persuaded the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to come and have a look. The result was the spanking new Barnet Hospital we have today, that opened in 2002.

In 1990 I was elected Chairman. In the following decade there was a lot going on in Barnet. The first big challenge was the threat to close down the Register Office in Wood Street. We put forward such cogent objections that the council set up a Citizens Jury in 1997 to decide the issue. We won, and the Office was safe for the next ten years, although it was downgraded to an 'outstation' where marriages could be held. The battle was lost in the end – the Register Office became the Coroner's Office, and is now redundant.

The second battle was with the Bridgedown company, which wanted to build a golf course on rough farm land belonging to the

Wrotham Estate to the west of the St Albans Road. Their plan involved changing the landscape by importing vast amounts of landfill material to create contours, and the construction of a large clubhouse, all on Green Belt land. The local residents whose mouthpiece was SPACES were particularly concerned over a proposal to install a floodlit driving range. Together we managed to trim the proposals, preserving a public footpath round the western perimeter, lowering the height of the clubhouse and ensuring protection for areas used by skylarks for nesting. But the company still brought in 37,000 lorry loads of waste material and topsoil, leaving a lot of mud on the St Albans road. Bridgedown sold it on and it is now known as The Shire London Golf Club.

Other major developments were taking place. Barnet College, which had been controlled by the Local Education Authority until 1963, was becoming self-governing, preparing the way for a complete rebuilding in the early 2000s that left only the Tudor Hall intact. The Old Bull had become an important arts centre. Bill Young sold the Barnet market, putting its

future at risk. The Barnet Countryside Centre at the bottom of Byng Road was also at risk as funding from Barnet Council ceased.

The Methodist Church in the High Street was demolished to make way for The Spires shopping centre. The Wesley Hall in Stapylton Road was built with the proceeds of the sale.

The new library in Stapylton Road was built at the same time as the Wesley Hall, to replace the one in Church Passage.

It was also in the 1990s that the Victoria maternity hospital, where so many of our members had been born, was converted into luxury apartments ('flats' does not do them justice). The Society was keeping a watchful eye on all these developments and we were prepared to take action when we thought it necessary.

In 2002 I was elected a Vice-President of the Society – a position I accepted with pride. There is now a new list of talented and dedicated people carrying the Society forward and new stories waiting to be written.

A fuller account of the Society's earlier years is contained to The Diamond Collection, published in 2005 to mark its 60th anniversary.

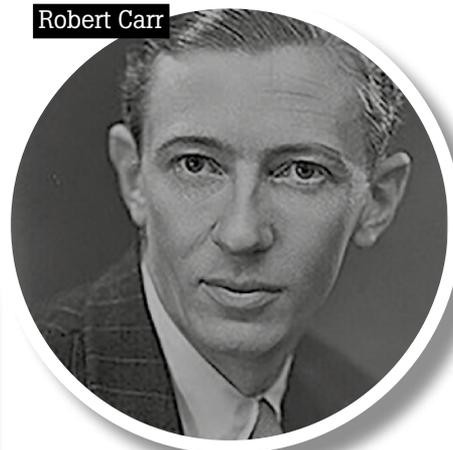
Sydney Chapman



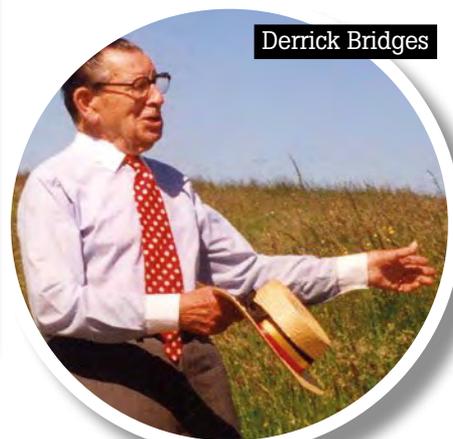
Sylvia Crowe



Robert Carr



Derrick Bridges



Peter Rossiter was a true Barnetonian, brought up in Fairholt on Hadley Green. As Chairman, he got involved in several campaigns to protect and enhance Barnet, such as finding a new site down Mays Lane for the Barnet Horse Fair (above) and joining up with the Tidy Britain campaign against litter, which had become a major problem in the High Street and beyond.



Trees, trees, trees

Profile of David Lee by **Nick Jones**

Forty years elapsed between inspiration and realisation – and the start of what has become half a lifetime’s work for David Lee, the celebrated tree planter of High Barnet, whose lasting achievement has been the greening of Barnet Hill.

“Lee’s Trees” – a row of splendid London Planes and Norway Maples – now march upwards from the railway bridge at Underhill to the junction with Milton Avenue.

They form part of his concept for “a green chain” – all the way up from the railway bridge, along the High Street, and on to Hadley – so that wherever you are, walking or driving, there is always a tree to be seen, either in front of you

or behind you. David, who celebrated his 90th birthday in March, was a young architectural student in 1956 when for the first time he walked down Barnet Hill. “I have to admit, my first impression of High Barnet was that the main approach to the town was most unwelcoming.

“As I walked down this long, sloping busy main road all I could see was the tube line and the old railway goods yard to the left. To the right there was this bleak, windswept bank that went on for ever without a tree in sight.”

Such was the impact of that first visit that it never left him and was still fresh in his mind when he eventually settled in High Barnet in 1982 and Barnet Hill seemed just as exposed as he remembered it in the 1950s.

David is the first to acknowledge the ingenuity of highways commissioners who in the 1820s rerouted the hill and straightened it by taking soil from nearby fields to build a causeway so as to ease the passage of the 150 stage coaches that travelled daily through Barnet along the Great North Road.

In subsequent years trams and later trolley buses benefited from those early steps to ease the gradient.

“Back then there was not any tree planting alongside the newly built road, and I resolved it was high time we put that right.

“Forty years on from my initial thought that trees would improve the vista, the first saplings went in.

“All told we planted nearly 50 trees in 1999, mainly London Planes and Norway Maples. Twenty years later they are coming along very nicely, and they have transformed the approach to High Barnet.”

David, later a qualified architect and landscape architect, joined the Barnet Society in 1995. His first task was to advise on the location and contents of two plantations of trees on the south-west side of Whittings Hill, tucked away between Quinta Drive and Mays Lane.

Barnet Council had created a new open space in what was formerly scruffy pastureland and local groups were invited to plant trees as part of the Watling Chase Community Forest project. The Barnet Society joined in as a way of celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Spurred on by the completion of the Whittings Hill plantations, David became ever more determined to tackle Barnet Hill. The Council agreed to proposals and the project started in January 1999.

In addition to the planting

David Lee and assorted volunteers on Barnet Hill in 1999, where they began the ‘Green Chain’ of trees. This was an assortment of London Planes and Norway Maple trees that now adorns the stretch of road from the Underhill bridge to the junction of Milton Avenue

at Barnet Hill, other trees were chosen for sites across Underhill, and on the pavement on both sides of the High Street up towards the parish church.

David has spent the last two decades devising other smaller-scale schemes to reinforce the original work and doing all he can to ensure replanting if trees get diseased or are damaged. Perhaps the most troubled area has been the lower end of the High Street. Norway Maples planted outside the old courthouse were removed during road widening and several trees on the other side of the High Street have had to be replaced. He was sceptical of the recent pavement widening and tree planting in the upper High Street, being in favour of more modest arrangements. Nevertheless, he applauds the green linkage through the town centre with its boost to his original ideas.

Barnet Hill has remained a major pre-occupation on David’s to-do list. Unfortunately, extensive road improvements are planned at the junction with Underhill and Fairfield Way (consequent upon the opening of Ark Academy) which will require the felling of several of the original ‘Lee’s Trees’.

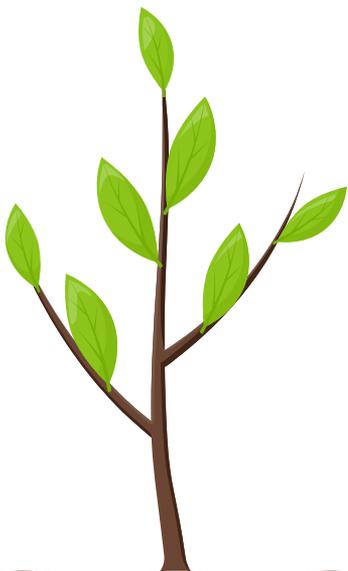
David’s original planting scheme included additional trees on the grass bank north of Milton Avenue behind the Barnet Hill bus stop. These are awaited in due course.

David remained chair of the society’s planning and environment committee until 2010 and is now a long serving vice president.

Despite failing eyesight, and without the advantages of modern techniques such as computer aided design, he is still producing detailed designs to fill in and complete a green highway that had its origins in the musings of an architectural student who happened to stroll down Barnet Hill in the 1950s.



Much more of the Society’s commitment to trees can be found on our website



When native species like oak, ash, silver birch and wild cherry stole the show

Jenny Remfry writes:

1995 happened to coincide with the creation of new national forests.

Barnet Council was planning to plant trees to help create 'Watling Chase Community Forest', so it seemed appropriate for the Society to join in.

We worked together with Catharine Cairns, the Borough Countryside Officer, and agreed that Whittings Hill Open Space, which is owned by the council, was a suitable place to create small woodlands.

She proposed a main plot on the southern slope of the hill, where 400 young trees would be planted, and two smaller ones on the north-west side, one for the Society and the other Whittings Hill School, where the children helped with the planting.

David Lee, a retired landscape architect with a particular love of trees, joined the Committee at about this time and so was the natural choice to mastermind the programme.

He selected the trees, all native species, such as oak,

'In 2000, three more trees were planted higher up Whittings Hill with a bench to commemorate the Honorary Secretaries of the Society'

ash, silver birch, willows, blackthorn and wild cherry. More than 50 trees were donated from members' gardens, and the rest paid for by members' donations.

On a cold and foggy Sunday in National Tree Week, 3rd December 1995, a crowd of us assembled on Whittings Hill, joined by Sydney Chapman MP, the Mayor of Barnet Cllr Susette Palmer (wearing a very fetching green hat), several Vice-Presidents, the Deputy Lieutenant in full uniform, and the head of the Countryside Commission. The larger plot had already been planted with saplings by the council team, leaving space for the Mayor and Sir Sydney to dig holes with the Borough's ceremonial spade for a 6ft high osier willow and 6ft high downy birch. A plaque commemorating the event was also dug in and the plot was surrounded with wire netting to deter rabbits.

About half the trees survived, making a thriving spinney. Now, 25 years on, they are an important part of the landscape.

In 1996, the Woodland Trust was given land by Barnet Council to create Whittings Wood, adjacent to Whittings Hill. It is reached by a public footpath and has well-managed paths within it. It is well worth a visit. In 1998 David Lee went on to persuade Barnet Council to plant the row of 42 Norway maples along the slope of Barnet Hill that became known as Lee's Trees.



In 2000, three more trees were planted higher up Whittings Hill with a bench to commemorate the Honorary Secretaries of the Society. Derrick Bridges was the first to sit on the bench and he entertained us with a song. We held a couple of tea parties up there before the bench was vandalised, but the oak is still there.

The planting party on Whittings Hill, December 1995. From L to R: Cllr Monroe Palmer, Sir John Johnson (Countryside Commission), David Lee, Cllr Susette Palmer (Mayor of Barnet), Sir Sydney Chapman (President), Jenny Remfry (Chairman), Trevor Jukes and Andrew Pares CBE (Vice-Presidents)

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Stalwarts behind the makeovers that boosted town centre

Perched on its hill, green on three sides and proud of its history, Chipping Barnet retains some of the feel and scale of a market town, writes Robin Bishop.

However, from the 1990s the gradual deterioration of the town centre became a Society concern, and after the 2008 recession and internet shopping revolution, its economic decline was a major preoccupation of ours.

Getting anything done has often felt like being on the losing side of the Battle of Barnet, but the energy the Society has devoted has been immense. We've collaborated with other local groups and Barnet Council, and found new friends who cared as much about the place as we did.

With their help, we've fought off the closures of Barnet Market, Barnet Museum and The Bull.

We campaigned for free car parking and faster broadband. We've welcomed conversion of empty floors above shops into flats.

We've embraced the Christmas Fayre, Teenage Market, Medieval Festival and the visitors they increasingly bring, and supported hotel proposals.

We created pop-up shops and insisted on new workspace on the Brake Shear House site. We scrutinise planning applications, especially in the Conservation Areas at each end of the High Street. And we badger the Council to enforce approved designs, for example at 70 High Street, where a developer has replaced After Office

Hours with a substantially taller building.

At the heart of these efforts have been three personalities. In chronological order they are David Lee, who joined our Committee in 1995 and is now one of our Vice-Presidents; Gail Laser, Committee member since 2003 and sometime Vice-Chair; and Judith Clouston, who joined the Committee in 2007, was Chair for three years and is also now a Vice-President. They can claim major (and often shared) responsibility for at least three outstanding achievements.

First was development of a vision to transform the dilapidated town centre.

From 1995 David (with Friends of the Earth and the Town Centre Forum) generated ideas, culminating in a set of Millennium proposals.

Some fell by the wayside, but one of the ideas caught local imagination and, also, the attention of Barnet Council.

This involved planting trees from Barnet Hill to Hadley Green – a 'Green Chain' 'so that along that stretch of the A1000 one is never out of sight of a tree'. Just before the Millennium, David successfully lobbied the Council to plant the southern end of the Chain up Barnet Hill, described more fully on Pages 6&7.

The second achievement was to get some improvements to the appearance of the centre itself.

In 2011 Gail and others

drafted a Council bid to the Mayor of London's Outer London Fund (OLF) – and won £417,000.

The third achievement was to secure further enhancements to the High Street public realm. David's Green Chain stalled because below the pavements were cables and drains that left no room for tree roots.

But in 2012, Judith grasped the Council's offer of funding via Transport for London for urban realm improvements.

Working with Council engineers and the Town Team, she helped broker a scheme to widen pavements, plant more trees, form pedestrian-friendly road crossings and provide many more benches.

It has taken all of eight years to complete – sometimes with bitter opposition – but now most people find the central section of the High Street far more congenial than before (especially in these times of social distancing!)

Behind these and our trio's other achievements was the conviction that if locals and



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THEN



NOW

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What was the high point of your efforts on behalf of the town centre?

Gail Laser

Helping to create a local Town Team, without which we would not have been given a chance to bid for the OLF... Then winning, and being given a much-needed opportunity to remove unnecessary and tatty railings, improve six shopfronts with new signage, awnings and a fresh coat of paint, plant trees at each end of the High Street, and give a makeover to the garden of St John the Baptist Church at the gateway to our High Street.

Judith Clouston

The successful bid for OLF money – to get enough from the Mayor of London to enable the Council to carry out some of the items we had identified for enhancing the town centre – and then to be able to carry these out.

What was your lowest point?

Gail

A devastating low point was watching four out of the six shops close down. So terribly upsetting as we had invested so much time, effort, energy and of course hard-won funds. Only The Paper Shop and Julian's Hardware still trade, and long may they continue. I'm also saddened that so little cleaning, maintenance or other improvements have been carried out.

Have the High Street and churchyard improvements turned out as you hoped?

Gail

Church Garden is more user friendly but has not lived up to my expectations. I feel that the design element could have been more inspiring. Bags of rubbish left daily at its edge discourage the L'Antica Pizzeria from placing tables with attractive umbrellas along the pavement, which was a huge part of our original game plan, particularly as it would ensure high visibility from the road as well as adding colour and interest.

Judith

It's brilliant to finally see the trees in the High Street, after waiting so long, but why so few? The original drawings showed eighteen trees and we have eight! There's room for many more... Opening up the churchyard has, I think, made a big difference to the historic heart of the town but it needs to be maintained properly – the planters along Church Passage need repairing and the plants which didn't survive need to be replaced!

What should the Barnet Society be doing next about the town centre?

Gail

I hope that the Barnet Society continues its vigilance and action to support our High Street.

Judith

This year must have been the most commercially challenging one yet. We need to push for the Community Plan to be realised and to support our surviving local businesses and historic market.



THEN

visitors find the High Street a pleasant and accessible place, then that will benefit shops, eating and drinking establishments, and strengthen town identity and self-esteem.

They also made a less visible – but crucial – contribution: to bring together locals and Council to boost Chipping Barnet's

recovery. That process began in 1996, when the Council was persuaded to set up Barnet Town Centre Forum, and (after a break) has continued since 2010, initially as the Town Centre Strategy Board, and since 2013 as the Town Team.

Underpinning the Team was a Town Centre Strategy Framework setting out priorities for improvement. Today, they have shifted and need redefining.

Last year, with our support, the Council commissioned a Chipping Barnet Community Plan to identify new projects – buildings, landscaping, economic and social – to revitalise the town centre. They will be exhibited online from the week beginning January 4, 2021 for a six-week public consultation.

Do look at the projects, comment on them – and let's build on the achievements of 25 years.

Above, Gail Laser (left) and Judith Clouston beside one of the benches and trees that now adorn the High Street. And (opposite page) a before and after picture of the area around Church Passage

Last year with the support of the Society, the Council commissioned a Chipping Barnet Community Plan to identify new projects to help revitalise the town centre



The Battle of Barnet, 550 years on

Susan Skedd writes:

The Battle of Barnet fought on 14th April 1471 was a turning-point in the Wars of the Roses, the 30-year conflict that divided England and was one of the inspirations for the epic TV series Game of Thrones. The events on that foggy Easter Sunday morning - when the Yorkist forces led by Edward IV met and defeated the Lancastrian army loyal to Henry VI - have since been commemorated in various ways and have left their mark on Barnet's identity.

The battle's most visible

memorial is Hadley Highstone, erected in 1740 by Sir Jeremy Sambrook to mark the site of the battle. It originally stood farther south and was moved to its present location a century later.

The surrounding area is designated on Historic England's Register of Historic Battlefields, but debate continues about the exact location of the battlefield. In 2015, the Society sponsored, in partnership with Barnet Museum and the Battlefields Trust, a three-year archaeological investigation

of the fields to the north of Kitts End Road. Interesting finds were made, but evidence was inconclusive.

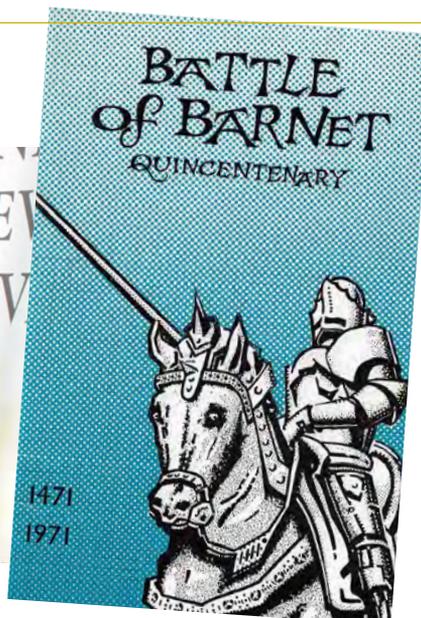
Although the most famous literary representation of the battle remains Shakespeare's Henry VI, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's best-selling novel, *The Last of the Barons* (1843), generated new interest in the confrontation between Edward IV and Warwick 'the Kingmaker'. Many of the streets in New Barnet laid out soon after were named after key figures in the battle, with Edward and Henry Roads flanking either side of the mainline railway.

In 1997, the Barnet Society supported a Memorial Fund Heritage Appeal to enable local sculptor John Somerville to cast in bronze a large statue entitled *Pyrrhic Victory*, depicting a warrior on horseback gazing in sorrow at his dead comrades at the end of the battle. Although the maquette was exhibited at the Royal Academy, both funding and a suitable site have remained elusive.

In 2016, the Battle of Barnet Partnership secured a Heritage Lottery Grant to deliver a suite of activities designed to generate interest in the history of the

Looking the part: the Kelly family join in the medieval fun as battle rages, below





displays and children's activities.

As it has not been possible to hold the event this year, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the festival committee is selling T-shirts and mugs on its website to raise much-needed funds.

The 500th anniversary of the battle was marked with a series of events in spring 1971.

Anyone with memories and photos of the quincentenary held in 1971 can contact info@barnetmedievalfestival.org.

The Battle of Barnet continues to fascinate people and to bring visitors to the town.

When consulted about the design of the new benches recently installed in the High Street, the Chipping Barnet Town Team chose a logo featuring two medieval soldiers in combat, symbolising the town's link with its medieval past.



Susan Skedd and Bob Burstow of the committee, the battle memorial from 1740 and 500-year anniversary programme

gatherings. At the heart of the festival will be re-enactments of the Battle of Barnet and also the Battle of Tewkesbury, which was fought on 4th May 1471 and sealed Edward IV's victory over the Lancastrian army of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. Other attractions will be a living history camp, medieval market, firepower

battle. These culminated in 2018 with the first Barnet Medieval Festival at Byng Road playing fields, which proved a real hit with the public and attracted over 6,000 visitors. Together with members of the Town Team, volunteers and re-enactors, I formed a new charity, the Barnet Medieval Festival Committee, and successfully staged the Festival again in 2019.

Next year will be the 500th anniversary of the

The Battle of Barnet continues to fascinate people and to bring visitors to the town. With that in mind, a special festival will be held to remember it on the 5th and 6th of June next year

battle. Such has been public enthusiasm – national as well as local – that a range of activities to commemorate the anniversary of the battle are being planned.

Barnet Museum has produced a souvenir calendar for 2021, which is available to purchase at Waterstones and from the museum.

The splendid 72 heraldic banners, which have been repainted and refurbished by the dedicated team of volunteers at the Museum, will adorn the High Street once more, together with a number of new banners.

A new play, 'The Fog of War', has been written for the occasion and will be performed by the Bull Theatre Players.

The Museum has also produced a series of lessons for schools and is updating its booklet about the battle.

To round off the commemorations a special Barnet Medieval Festival will be held on the weekend of 5th and 6th June 2021, subject to the easing of restrictions on community

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Looking back at Barnet characters



Gail and Dom on the Spot

Despite a campaign that attracted national publicity and was featured on BBC television's Dom on the Spot, the Barnet Society failed to persuade the Council to introduce an hour's free parking in the High Street.

A petition launched by the Society in February 2015 attracted 2,500 signatures at the height of an upsurge in parking wars when clashes between aggrieved motorists and aggressive local authorities were generating headlines across the country.

Gail Laser, founder of Love Barnet, took TV presenter Dominic Littlewood on a tour of the High Street to demonstrate how a short period of free parking would help revive the town centre.

At the time there were 63 allocated parking spaces along the High Street, from the Meadway junction to Hadley Green – a number now much reduced following pavement widening in the town centre.

In 2018, Gail then vice-chair of the society, was declared a local champion by the national Save our High Street campaign for her dedicated work over the previous decade in working to regenerate the town centre.

Nick Jones

Millie the cat

In the decade since the Barnet Society started publishing regular news items on its website, the stories that have frequently attracted most hits have been reports about the life and times of Millie the cat.

A small bronze statue commemorating what is fondly remembered as perhaps the town's most sociable and safety conscious tabby is a step nearer to being completed.

After her death in January 2019, countless admirers donated £2,800 towards a permanent reminder to Millie, who was known affectionately as the library cat and later the Waitrose cat.

She became a star of social media and was regularly photographed stopping the traffic as she calmly crossed Stapylton Road, between the Spires Shopping Centre and the library, making sure to use the zebra crossing. After almost a year's trial and error, local sculptor John Somerville completed a clay model which won the approval of Millie's owner, Paula Gabb, who launched the financial appeal after being overwhelmed by messages of sympathy.

John has finessed his clay model ready to be cold cast in resin before finally being cast in molten brass once there is agreement on where it might be bolted on to a wall at the entrance to the Spires.

Nick Jones



'After her death in January 2019, countless admirers donated £2,800 towards a permanent reminder to Millie, who was known affectionately as the library cat and later the Waitrose cat'

Dory's Café

Struggling but surviving is the motto at Dory's café, a High Barnet institution since the late 1950s, which has faced its toughest trading year because of lockdown and the rules on social distancing.

Giuliano and Angela, the third generation of the Pellicci family to run the café, are full of praise for the loyalty of customers and are determined to hang on and to wait for the lifting of the Covid.19 restrictions.

"We are struggling because our café is so small and we can't sit people so close together," said Angela.

After trying for months to get approval for outdoor seating, Barnet Council has been "more obliging", and Dory's café now has tables and chairs outside

for eight customers, on the pavement just inside Bruce Road, at the St Albans Road junction.

After being closed for lockdown and then re-opening initially to serve takeaways, the recent increased footfall in the High Street has ensured the return of previously regular customers.

"Don't worry. We are determined to carry on and, we are so looking forward to the day we see everyone back at the café," said Giuliano.

It was in 1956 that Ottorino Pellicci, whose name had been shortened to Dory, set up in business, taking over the café from the Mancini family.



Family-run Barnet café has stood the test of time



He was followed by his daughter and husband, Dorina and Tony, and now their son and daughter, Giuliano and Angela, carry on the tradition of serving up an endless supply of full English breakfasts, teas, coffees and sandwiches as well as home-made dishes such as shepherd's pie, steak pie and chicken escalope for lunch.



Vince's Paper Shop

For the 13 weeks of the coronavirus lockdown, the Paper Shop was the only High Street outlet open for business between the Sainsbury local store and Wilkinson pharmacy.

"It was a bit lonely," said newsagent Vince Gadhavi, who has been trading in the High Street for the last 33 years in what was formerly known as Smokers' Paradise.

"Almost all the shops either side of me were closed. Trade was down 50 per cent and I was closing around 4pm as there was so little custom."

Vince was full of praise for his customers. "Everyone was very well behaved and very considerate, so that helped a lot."



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Duggie Shrubbs

An ever-cheerful presence in the town centre amid lockdown and all the social distancing restrictions has been the High Street's dedicated road sweeper Douglas Shrubbs, his barrow bedecked with brushes and scoops, and decorated with the odd fluffy toy.

Still working at the age of 68 – having opted to carry on working rather than retire – Duggie, as he is known to one and all, says that he did get a bit depressed some days, especially when so many of the shops were closed in the early months of the Covid.19 pandemic.

"When lockdown was announced, the guvnor asked if I was OK to continue working. I said Yes. I told him I would only get bored at home.

"I still enjoy my job and that is important to me, so I keep going. Loads of people wave and say a hello, or stop for a chat, and even offer me a cup of tea, and that makes all the difference."

Duggie has been Barnet Council's dedicated road sweeper for High Street and Wood Street for 15 years, having switched to street cleaning from his previous job as gardener in East Barnet.

Such is his popularity with residents and shopkeepers for his contribution towards keeping the town centre tidy that mention of his name was greeted with a cheer at the Barnet Society's 2018 open forum.

Among the accolades were praise for his regular emptying of High Street litter bins and for his deft brush work, making sure even cigarette ends are swept into his shovel and then deposited into green bags ready for collection by the council.



Julian's Hardware

A triple heart by-pass has not dimmed the business acumen of the proprietor of High Barnet's very own Aladdin's cave – Julian's Hardware shop in the High Street.

After his operation in August 2019, Julian Stewart, was forced to close for much of that summer and again earlier this year during lockdown, but at the age of 72, he is still trading with many loyal customers.

Since the return of more shoppers to the town centre, he has benefited from the increased trade generated by the growth in do-it-yourself as people have spent more time at home.

Julian opened Bargain Buys in 1979 and believes his longevity on the High Street is due to a combination of personal service, customer care and reliability.

A decline in the number of hardware and do-it-yourself outlets has worked to his advantage as a shop of his size can change to suit the trading conditions of the time.

Julian is always innovating and finding new opportunities. He has become a dab hand at changing watch batteries and just as with the rest of the thousands of items he stocks, he just looks around and knows immediately where to locate the right replacement, and likewise for any other product.



'Julian opened Bargain Buys in 1979 and believes his longevity on the High Street is due to a combination of personal service, customer care and reliability.'

Victoria Bakery

Within a year of its much-lamented closure, the former Victoria Bakery was back in the news because of a planning dispute that involved the most famous doorway along Barnet High Street.

Objectors to a plan to build three flats on the site of the former bakery called in aid Charles Dickens to back up their demands for the character and roof line of the building to be preserved.

In *Oliver Twist*, written in 1837, Dickens imagined that the shop doorway was where Oliver met the Artful Dodger – a literary and historical association that Barnet Council’s planning committee was urged to respect.

An application, submitted by chartered surveyors Stuart Henley and Partners, sought permission for the construction of a rear extension to the retail premises at 83 High Street to provide one flat; the construction of two flats in the bakery yard; and an extension fronting 8 Union Street to form a two-storey office building.

Rebuilding the former bakery and extending the rear of the shop, which would be retained as retail premises, would involve “raising the height” on the existing buildings.

But the developers say a previous planning inspector considered redevelopment of the site was “an acceptable replacement” as there was already “a variety of new infill development” within the conservation area.

83 High Street is one of the oldest retail premises in the High Street and although not identified by name in the novel, Dickens is said to have later acknowledged that this was where Oliver “sat, with bleeding feet and covered with dust, upon a door-step.”

Oliver had “limped slowly into the little town of Barnet. The window-shutters were closed...He had been crouching on the step for some time: wondering at the great number of public-houses (every other house in Barnet was a tavern, large or small), gazing listlessly at the coaches as they passed through.”

Dickens is thought to have had other associations with Barnet: he used to drink, so it was said, at the Red Lion, and Barnet Union Workhouse, now demolished, was believed to have been the basis for the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*, although some historians dispute this.

83 High Street was listed as a shop until 1867, becoming a bakery in 1884. Victoria Bakery closed in 2019 on the retirement of the proprietor, James Freeman, (pictured with former staff) whose father took over the business in 1968.

Customers queued out into the street on the final day of trading at what had been a popular High Street institution for the previous 50 years.

Farewell messages were left on the shop “Where will the Artful Dodger meet Oliver now? Bye, Bye!” was one. Nick Jones



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Fight for good design in Barnet is far from over

The Society might often seem to object to change, but in fact we've often supported good new design, whether traditional or modern, writes Robin Bishop.

Here are some recent examples, The Signature care home on the former Marie Foster Home site, Wood Street is in the Arts & Crafts manner of Ravenscroft Park and other nearby Victorian and Edwardian villas. The design of building and landscape benefited from early consultation with us.

We also supported Linden Homes' 114 dwellings at Elmbank. Their style wouldn't have been out of place in Hampstead Garden Suburb a century ago, but it suits Arkley and retains mature trees on the site.

However, we also support

modern design if it respects its neighbours. We disliked the initial designs for Barnet College, which would have dominated the Tudor Hall and competed with St John the Baptist's Church. The architects responded by removing a floor, using russet wooden panels to harmonise with the Elizabethan brickwork, and framing the older buildings with colonnades that create an attractive new semi-public piazza.

Brook Valley Gardens, which is replacing the Dollis Valley Estate, is also in a bold 21st-century style. Many of its 631 homes are 2 & 3-storey family houses with gardens lining traditional streets. There are some higher blocks of flats, but they are sensitively sited and in the same brick as the houses.

Refused: Whalebones plan by architects Pollard Thomas Edwards (below) And bottom Elmbanks, by OSP Architecture

The result is a nice balance of unity and diversity, enhanced by excellent landscaping.

On a more modest scale, the Older Women's Co-Housing fits discreetly into Union Street, its massing and brickwork resembling but not aping its neighbours.

We also supported this development because it's a pioneering UK example of co-housing, for 26 women in this case. Each resident has their own privately owned or rented flat, but shares communal facilities and a garden.

All the above developments have in common a human scale, natural materials and respect for existing urban grain.

Unfortunately the low-density suburban house-and-garden model that has worked for 150 years is less and less profitable in London. Today, market homes are affordable by only 8 per cent of its population.

Other kinds of housing will often be necessary, but that needn't be a bad thing.

Higher densities were achieved in Bloomsbury in central London and Bath without exceeding 5 or 6 storeys in height.

In the 1960s & 70s Camden built many housing estates that did the same,

and several are now nationally listed. Skilful site planning can achieve the same today – but it has to be right for its site.

When the former Brake Shear House employment site behind Barnet High Street was sold in 2015, we worked with the Council on a planning brief for a mixture of flats and houses with gardens, plus affordable workspace to offset some of the jobs that were lost.

We also asked for a new view to be opened up from the High Street towards King George's Fields and Hadley. The developer did that, producing a scheme for 8 homes and gardens and 32 flats rising to a maximum of 5 floors.

It also offered 789 square metres of workspace and sensitive landscape design, so we were pleased when it won planning permission in 2016.

The site was then sold on to Shanly Homes, who kept the general concept but narrowed the view through the site, raised the number of flats to 50 and their height to 6 storeys. They also propose to shut it off with a gate, which we oppose: that would lose not only the view but also the welcoming feeling consistent with recent High Street pedestrian improvements.

For the former gasworks, New Barnet Community Association worked with the Council and One Housing on a mix of 2 & 3-storey homes plus flats in 4-8 storey blocks.

Permission for a scheme of 371 homes was granted in 2016. We agreed that it was the right scale for the site between the town centre and Victoria Recreation Ground.

It was a shock, therefore, when this year Fairview & One Housing submitted a much bigger scheme for 652 flats in 14 blocks up to





Brake Shear House site: first design by architects Morrow + Lorraine (above) Victoria Quarter refused scheme by EPR Architects (left)



High Barnet Station 2nd proposal, architects Scott Brownrigg (above) Brook Valley Gardens, by Alison Brooks Architects (left)

10 storeys high – and even more so that Council officers recommended approval despite its breach of several key Barnet planning policies.

We were among over a thousand objectors, and were gratified when councillors rejected the application unanimously in September.

We were also pleased when, the following month, permission for 152 homes on the Whalebones estate was refused. Ironically, their architectural quality was much better than in most applications.

Why did we object? For two principal reasons: it would have been a flagrant breach of Conservation Area and other planning policies, and our members overwhelmingly considered

it to be overdevelopment. A more modest scheme that conserves open space between High Barnet and Arkley would be more acceptable.

At High Barnet Station, Transport for London this year proposed to build up to 300 flats on the car park, and a planning application is expected very soon.

Our objection is not simply to six 6 & 7-storey slabs forming an almost continuous wall dominating Barnet Hill and the neighbourhood – though that would be bad enough, and contrary to Barnet planning policies.

We have submitted a long and detailed list of concerns about social, visual, technical and environmental flaws in the design.

Such a big development could only be justified as part of a package of community benefits and radical improvements to interchange between rail, bus, car and other modes. The current scheme would leave the station untouched, and make only minor changes to the pedestrian ramp and a bus stop.

The planning battles over Victoria Quarter, Whalebones and High Barnet Station aren't over: the Mayor of London has yet to have his say. There could be appeals, and fresh plans could be submitted. The fight for good, human-scale design in Barnet is far from over.

It was a shock, therefore, when this year a much bigger scheme for Victoria Quarter for 652 flats in 14 blocks up to 10 storeys high was submitted, particularly as council officials recommended approval

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We asked some of our younger Committee members and specialist advisers about their hopes for the future of Barnet, and what the Barnet Society should do to help shape them



KIM AMBRIDGE

I'm the Society's Membership Secretary. I've lived in Barnet for over 30 years and help organise the Hands Off High Barnet Station campaign. I've worked as an accountant in housing, oil and fashion, and currently advise people and businesses on saving money on bills and shopping. Bee-keeping is one of my hobbies.

What do you like most about Barnet?

The green spaces we are able to enjoy - for walks with friends, with dogs or alone - enjoying fresh air and peace. I respect the neighbours I have - helping and supporting each other.

What's your biggest hope for Barnet in the next 10 years?

That Barnet remains a

historical town of interest where residents are proud to live and eager to keep the history alive for future generations.

What's your greatest worry about the way Barnet is going?

That Barnet will become overrun with small buy-to-let housing units where local infrastructure cannot support the demands of hundreds of new homes and thousands of people. Also safety, rising crime and future issues associated with cramped living and/or lockdown situations.

What can the Barnet Society do better to make Barnet a better place to live and work?

Continue to liaise with local businesses, residents and Society members to share information and gather opinions regarding local issues and proposed developments, and raising awareness of what Barnet offers today.

What's your favourite place in Barnet?

The Open Door café for lunch and music nights at High Street pubs.



SIMON KAUFMAN

I'm a local architect with wide experience of residential and commercial developments and enthusiasm for towns, including Barnet where I've lived for the last few years. I've been advising the Society on big planning and building issues.

What do you like most?

I love the character of the old industrial buildings and shops, but we need great new architecture to strengthen our vibrant communities and neighbourhoods.

Biggest hope?

For well-considered developments that integrate with the historic environment, protect and enhance our green spaces, and also inspire us.

Greatest worry?

Our scruffy or empty buildings. I'd like to see them more carefully refurbished and turned into exciting new businesses, great public places, and spacious, low-energy homes for local people.

What can the Barnet Society do better?

Present a clear voice for the neighbourhood to support and strengthen the character of development when it is good; and defend the community when it is inappropriate.

Favourite place?

Hadley Common.



SIMON COHEN

I was born in Hadley Wood and have lived in Barnet for 40 years. I'm director of a landscape architecture consultancy and project manager with a specialist furniture company. I stood as a Liberal candidate for Barnet Council at the last election.

What do you like most?

Chipping Barnet is a wonderful community and environment with an amazing heritage.

Biggest hope?

To improve transport integration to enable a coherent working, shopping and living environment, with less reliance on cars and more priority to pedestrians and cyclists - and to improve our streetscapes to encourage more walking to local shops and schools.

"Chipping Barnet is a wonderful community"

Greatest worry?

The cost and provision of affordable housing. There is a real need for new high-quality, sustainable homes, of a scale and character in keeping with our neighbourhoods.

What can the Barnet Society do better?

Be more visible and active, building on our impressive experience of protecting the heritage and character of Barnet and the Green Belt.

Favourite place?

Hadley Woods, King George's Fields or The Mitre.



Read more News at https://www.barnetsociety.org.uk



SUSAN SKEDD

I am a Hertfordshire girl and feel very much at home living in New Barnet. I work as a freelance historian and heritage consultant and volunteer as festival director of the Barnet Medieval Festival.

What do you like most?

The endless variety of Barnet – from historic buildings and streets to parks and open spaces, plus of course the glorious views over London.

Biggest hope?

That the regeneration of Barnet High Street takes hold and attracts even more independent shops and businesses.

"If we don't make use of what's on our doorstep, we will lose it."

Greatest worry?

That if we don't make use of what's on our doorstep, we will lose it.

How you have made a difference

I am very pleased to be part of the team organising Barnet Medieval Festival and look forward to building on its success as we commemorate the 550th anniversary of the Battle of Barnet in 2021.

Favourite place?

Hadley Woods.



SIMON WATSON

I'm a cybersecurity consultant and have lived locally with my young family for four years. I'm keen to preserve the character of Barnet, but at the same time recognise that some things have to change.

What do you like most?

It has to be the sense of community; we moved to Barnet on a slight whim – but it has worked out better than we could have ever imagined!

Biggest hope?

That the trend for new and innovative small businesses continues on the High Street, the market continuing to undergo a renaissance.

Greatest worry?

How Barnet maintains its heritage and green spaces – while embracing positive change, the challenge of providing affordable homes for young people – and what seems to be the steady and inevitable transition of the High Street away from one that is primarily based around retail offerings.

What could the Barnet Society do better?

Look to expand its membership among families and young people – who are showing an increasing awareness of their environment and wanting to do something to protect it.

Favourite place?

The hustle and bustle of the market, or the peace and tranquillity of King George V Fields and the Common (mood dependent!).



GUY BRATTHWAITE

I was born in New Barnet and moved back here thirteen years ago. I work on historic churches for the Church of England. I am the Barnet Society representative on the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

What do you like most?

I like Barnet's green spaces, the fact it's got a proper high street and its great connections, especially the Northern line.

Biggest hope?

I'd like to see Barnet Market

become a major part of town life once again.

What can the Barnet Society do better?

Get its message out, engage with more people and grow its membership.

Give an example of how you have made a difference

I was delighted to be able to contribute to the review of the council's Local List of Historic Buildings which resulted in about 50 historic buildings being added.

Favourite place?

The run of houses facing Monken Hadley Common.

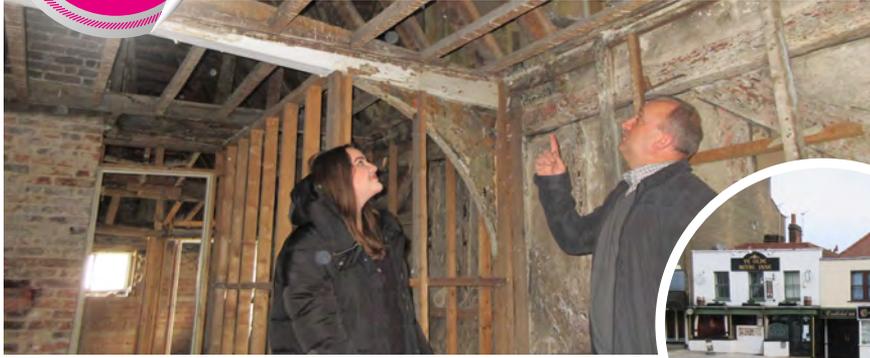
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Arianit Dobra, owner of the shop, with his daughter, Elisana

Medieval roof found

An original timber-framed roof structure that dates from about the 14th century, has been discovered in the High Street after ceilings were removed from former hairdressing salon, Chudy's, writes Nick Jones

Specialists in medieval architecture were amazed to find the intact timbers of a crown post roof of what originally was a medieval shop constructed around 1397 or earlier.

Experts in historic buildings believe that the shop was built in the late 14th century by carpenters from St Albans Abbey.

Sherry Bates, of chartered architects Bates Zambelli, who is advising on

converting the property to a florist's shop, is awaiting the results of tree-ring dating to confirm the precise age of the timbers. But he says further research all points to 1397 or earlier. This is the date suggested by Lee Prosser, curator at historic royal palaces, who has studied medieval buildings in Hertfordshire and has linked the roof to medieval barns constructed by St Albans Abbey.

The thinking is that this medieval shop was built in the days when High Barnet was on the route of animal drovers who stopped the night at taverns, or perhaps sold animals at fairs in Barnet.

Several features of the roof



OUR WORK

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This is a newly-published archive of the Society's articles, submissions and other documents on planning and environmental matters. They show the breadth and depth of our activity behind the scenes in more detail than is possible in our Newsletters and Website News.

Content includes our submissions to Barnet, London and national consultations; our work on the Green Belt; planning and environment reports to the committee; our work on major development proposals and regarding Chipping Barnet Town Centre. Further new and archive material will be added

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