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## History of Finchley Way Open Space

*November 2025*



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



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# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

## 1. Introduction

This document sets out the history of West Finchley Open Space referred to in the London Borough of Barnet (LBB) list of assets as:

*Unique Asset Identity 5788 Brent Lodge The Orchard (Brent Lodge Open Space) - Open Space, Occupied by the Local Authority, Undeveloped Land.*

*Unique Asset Identity 5760 Finchley Way Open Space - Open Space, Occupied by the Local Authority, Undeveloped Land.*

The whole site is now known as Finchley Way Open Space. Within the site there are distinct areas known as The Orchard, The Copse and The Green Field. The draft West Finchley Neighbourhood Plan (March 2019) proposes that these areas become Designated Local Green Spaces.

The area is outlined in blue on the map below and is bounded by:

- Finchley Way, N3 1AG
- Hamilton Way, N3 1AN
- Penstemon Close, N3 1PQ
- Cedar Court/The Drive, N3 1AE
- Chilvins Court, N3 1PQ.



## Sources

This history has been pieced together from many sources, which are sometimes only partially correct and often contradictory for the early period. It is therefore difficult to identify specific sources for individual 'facts'. However thanks are due to a number of people and organisations that donated, lent or otherwise found, information and documents or provided oral history to help piece together nearly 600 years of history. These are, in alphabetical order, with individuals followed by organisations:



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

- Roger Chapman
- Alison Cooper (nee Simmons)
- Alan Douglas
- Kathy Hirst
- Kieran Kettleton
- Suzanne King (who compiled this document)
- Edward Levy
- Pamela Nitz (deceased)
- Peter Pickering
- Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HADAS)
- The Finchley Charities, particularly, Fred Davis's book 'The Finchley Charities' published in 1988
- West Finchley Residents' Association, Neighbourhood Plan Executive Committee

## Other sources:

- L. F. Pearson, The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living, Macmillan, 1988, pp119-128
- Review by Philip McEvansonya, London Division, English Heritage, 27 December, 1990, recommending the listing of Cedar Court.

As you'll see there are still some unanswered questions and inconsistencies. If you can help to improve this history through additions or corrections, please contact Friends of Finchley Way Open Space (FoFWOS) at email: [fofwos@gmail.com](mailto:fofwos@gmail.com)



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

## 2. History

### The 15<sup>th</sup> century

The area first appears in records in the mid-fifteenth century when in 1448 Andrew Groton (or Gorton or Groats), who may have been surgeon to King Henry VI<sup>1</sup>, sold Burkey Croft, also known as Royesfield, to Thomas and Marion Aldenham. This land was bordered on the east by Nether Street and to the west by the Bryant River (now Dollis Brook). To the north and south it was bordered by land owned by Thomas Marsh. It was subsequently known as Rosefield and later still as Great John and Little John Fields.

In 1488 Robert Waren, a wealthy farmer, left Little John's Fields and Home Field (11 or 12 acres) to the church and for the maintenance of roads in the area. This bequest continued to yield income for the descendant charity (The Finchley Charities) until 1982. As far as can be determined the boundaries of the fields were:

- Southern - roughly the line of Lovers Walk
- Northern - the end of the back gardens of the paved part of Hamilton Way and Penstemon Close
- Western - Dollis Brook (previously Brent River)
- Eastern - Nether Street

Robert Waren's bequest (now known as Waren's First Gift as he made other bequests) was thought for many years to include the site of Brent Lodge house and gardens, but it does not. Research by the Hendon and Area District Archaeological Society (HADAS) has identified that what became the Brent Lodge Estate was originally two parcels of land and my further work suggests that it may have been three. Waren's First Gift relates to 11 acres made-up of three fields to the west and north of the site where Brent Lodge house was built.

### The 17<sup>th</sup> century

There is a deed of 27 May 1612 and another of 27 July 1636 naming Edward Rolfe as tenant. John Nicholl is mentioned in 1641 but does not appear to have lived there until 1672 or 1682 when he was granted a lease of the messuage and 11 acres, for 21 years at £18 per annum of land 'late in the possession of Edward Rolfe'. John Taylor had the house rebuilt between 1686 and 1688. The warden of The Finchley Charities account book records that Taylor paid £4. 2 shillings and 6 pence for 3,000 paving bricks (many of which the volunteers are still uncovering!) for the Alms houses.

In 1970 a HADAS excavation found various pieces of pottery from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the north eastern edge of the site, which they suggest indicates a 17<sup>th</sup> century house was on this site. Other documents suggest that there was a house there in 1612.

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<sup>1</sup>I can only find Gilbert Kymer, John Marchall and Thomas Morstede as surgeons to Henry VI. The former two replaced Morstede after he died in 1450, six years after Andrew Groton was said to be the king's surgeon.



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

## The 18<sup>th</sup> century

A house was built on land that belonged to Thomas Allen, Lord of the Manor of Bibsworth, a sub-manor of the Bishop of London's Manor of Finchley by William Dillingham in 1747. This waste land is described as being between Waren's First Gift and Nether Street and adjoined the charity lands of Warrens Gift but was not part of it. It was described as 324 feet east to west and 86 feet north to south.

In 1761 Christopher Hill, a feoffee<sup>2</sup> had a lease of 31 years at £21 per annum and thereafter for another 21 years at £42 per annum.

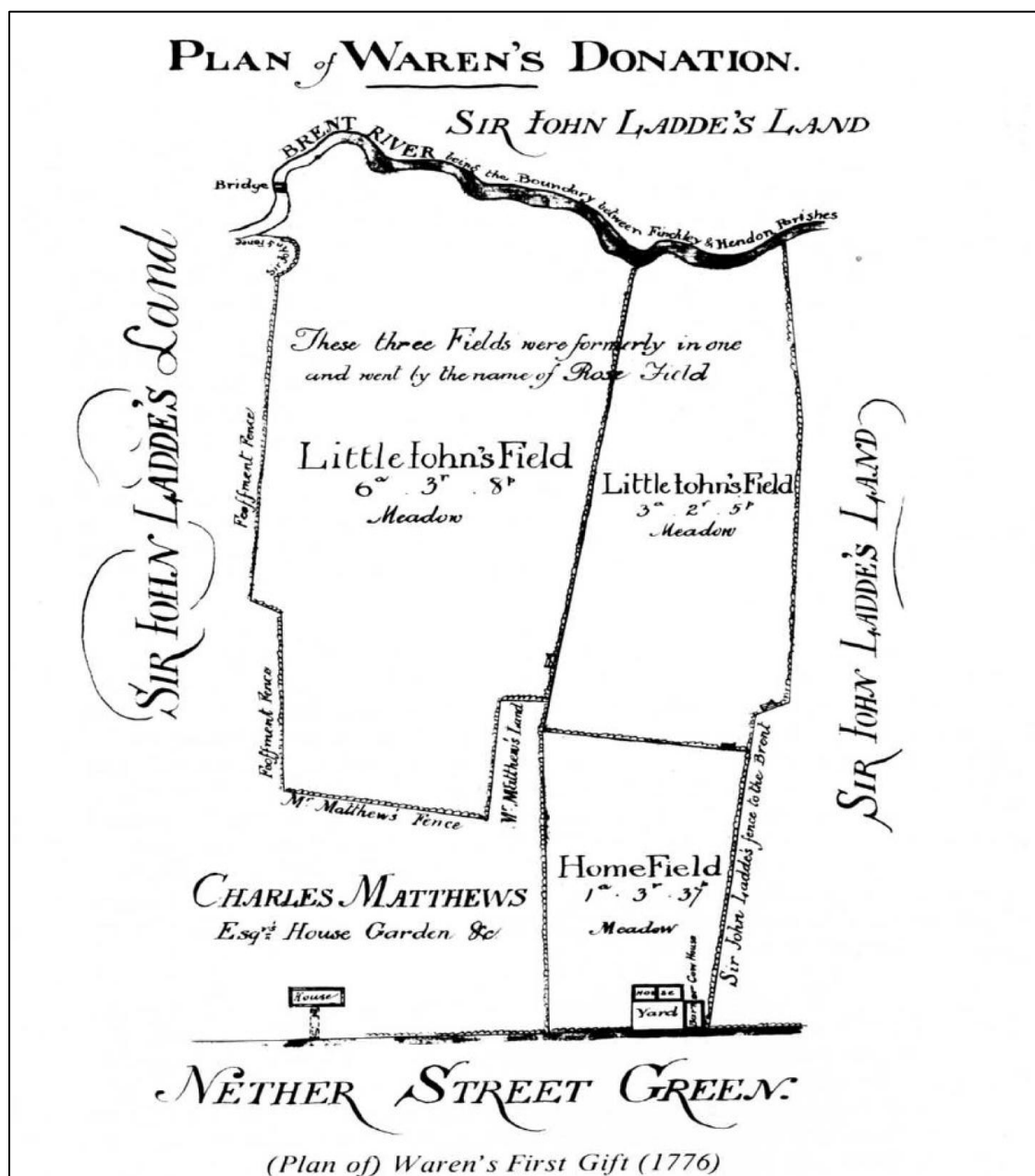
A review of documents held by The Finchley Charities shows that, on a map of 1776, on the site where Brent Lodge the house and gardens stood, is marked 'Charles Matthews Esq, house, garden, etc.'. This is to the south of Home Field and the east of Little John's Field, part of Waren's First Gift. It is surrounded on two sides by Waren's First Gift.

A 1777 plan of Waren's First Gift shows a house, yard and barn to the east side of Home Field bordering Nether Street. Unfortunately, we do not have the plan, only a note in the HADAS documents from the 1970 research associated with the dig. The major part of the verge is marked as 'Mr C. Hill's waste' and the smaller part immediately in front of Home Field is labelled 'leasehold tenement and land'. Charles Matthew's House lies to the south.

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<sup>2</sup> A feoffee is a freehold estate.  
2025-10-25

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Source: The Finchley Charities

In 1796 there was a lease and release<sup>3</sup> between Charles Matthews of Colchester, Thomas Collins of Finchley and John Bosworth and William Steer. Charles Matthews and his wife Elizabeth (nee Bosworth) sold the messuage or tenement garden, stables, coach house and yard of 20 acres, including the house formerly of John Bosworth, on 31 years lease from 5 May 1791 at a rent of £65 to William Steer.

<sup>3</sup> A lease and release is a legal method used to transfer property, involving two separate documents: a short lease for a nominal sum and a subsequent release, where the seller transfers the full property to the buyer. This two-step process was historically common for transferring freehold property and was a way to avoid a more complex deed that required enrollment. The buyer first acquired a one-year lease, and the following day, the original owner released their remaining interest to the buyer, effectively completing the sale.



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

## The 19<sup>th</sup> century

In 1806 Charles Matthews surrendered all the waste ground that had been enclosed in front of Charles Matthews' house in Nether Street occupied by William Steer to John Drury

By 1807 John Drury had amalgamated Waren's First Gift (Home Field and Little and Great John Fields) leased to William Steer (or Steir) with the house and barn on the 'waste land' into one estate, taking down hedges and demolishing the smaller house and barn.

Drury was asked to rebuild the demolished house and had provided bricks but died in 1809 before he could rebuild. But does this refer to the smaller house in Home Field or to a larger house that became the site of Brent Lodge house?

Was this the 17<sup>th</sup> century house identified by the 1970 HADAS dig? Is it the buildings marked as in Home Field in the 1776 plan (above) rather than Charles Matthews' house and garden?

In a deed of 1810 part of the site was described as a house with stables, coach house and yard and was 2 acres and 17 perch (about 0.1 of an acre). His executors advertised the estate as 'a beautiful villa and estate ornamented with stately timber wearing the appearance of a park. The approach is through a handsome drive with two ornamental lodges, stabling for seven horses'. This sounds like Brent Lodge, and there is evidence that Brent Lodge was built in 1810, although some sources credit it as being later. It therefore seems unlikely that this was the house demolished around 1807 that was still not rebuilt in 1809, or indeed by 1814 (see below).

The estate was next bought by Charles Hanbury Tracy. He was also asked to rebuild but although plans were submitted, he never rebuilt. Samuel Chilvers bought the estate from Tracy in 1814. Chilvers died in 1824 but his executors stayed until 1831 when the property was put up for sale as 'Brent Lodge' with 24 acres.

Consequently, I believe that what became the Brent Lodge estate with a grand house and 26 acres by 1907 (see below) was possibly the amalgamation of *three* separate properties - Waren's First Gift, the 'waste land' with its buildings of a house and barn and Charles Matthews' house and gardens. The first two being amalgamated in the first decade of the C19<sup>th</sup> and the last being a separate piece of land incorporated at around the same time or maybe even earlier.

The Finchley Charities has never owned the land on which Brent Lodge house and its immediate gardens stood. A map of the land belonging to the Feoffees of Finchley (that is, to the Finchley Charities) of 1837 does not include the area marked in 1776 as Charles Matthews' house.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Source: The Finchley Charities



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

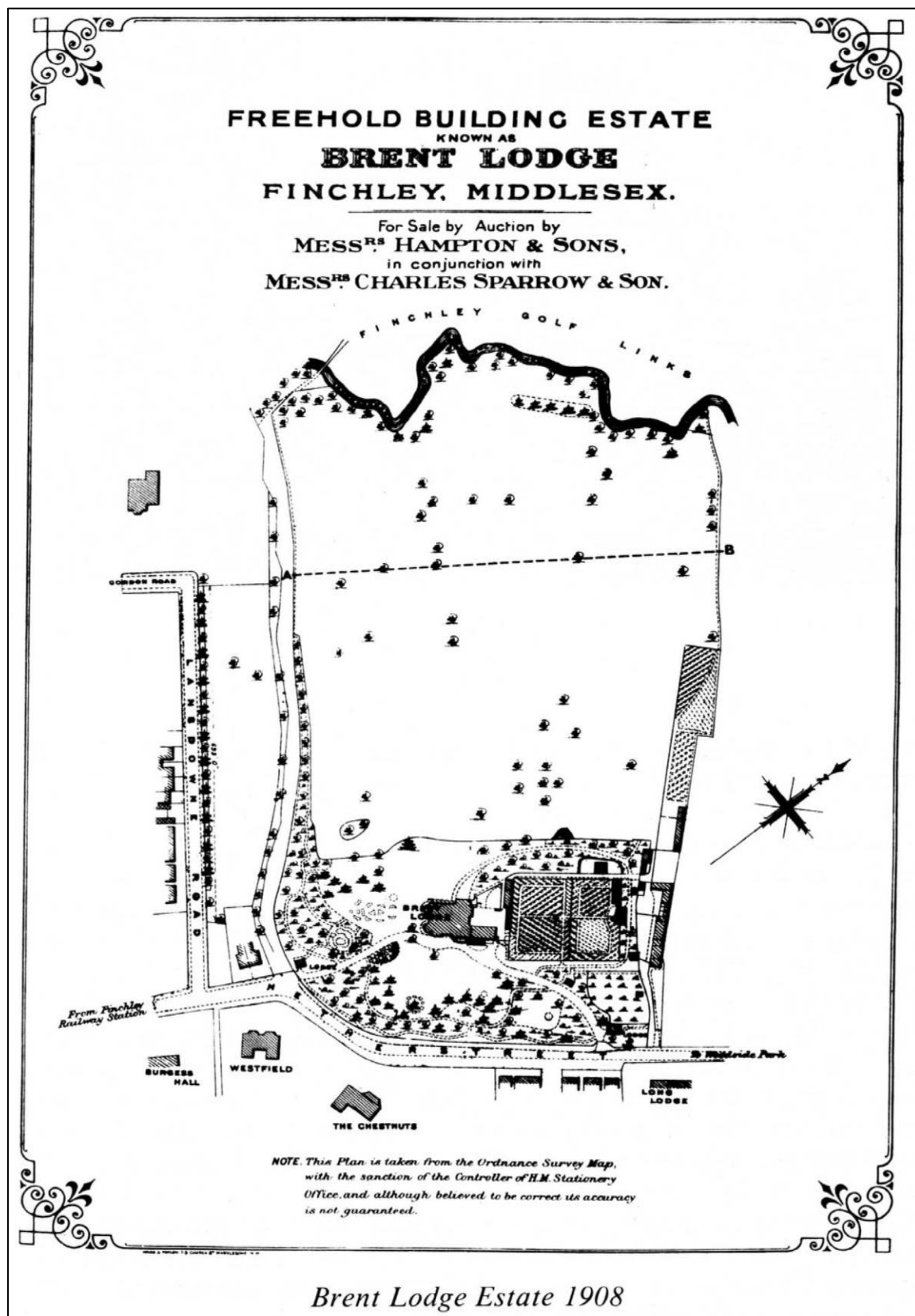
This site was owned by Francis A Hamilton (a local benefactor) from 1865 until 1902. Hamilton gave his name to the adjoining street of Hamilton Way some 20 years later.

## The 20<sup>th</sup> century

Brent Lodge was put up for sale in 1907 with an estate of 26 acres. The 1907 sale documents state that the property is freehold but about 22 acres is subject to an annual rent charge of £60 per annum. This was payable to what is now Finchley Charities, the inheritor of Waren's First Gift. This seems to confirm that the site was originally at least two sites with the larger part being Waren's First Gift and subject to the rent charge.

The sale documents from the 1907 sale provide a great deal of detail about the house and the 26 acre estate surrounding it. By this time the estate stretched from Lansdown Road (already built-up, at least partially) in the south to Penstemon Close in the north (then a small holding owned by the Simmons family until the 1990s) and from Nether Street in the east to what is now Dollis Brook in the west. The frontage is given as 746 feet onto Nether Street and 693 feet onto Lansdown Road. Interestingly, the documents recognise the site as 'quite ripe for development as a building estate'.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Source: The Finchley Charities

## Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



The house was described as 'in the Italian villa style' 'approached through two timbered and shrubbed carriage drives'. There were two entrance lodges, one of which remains as 200 Nether Street.



Entrance to Brent Lodge 'estate', with gate house, now 200 Nether Street

Source and date unknown but available to us via HADAS

The ground floor of the house had an entrance hall, drawing room, dining room, library and music room, while the first floor had three large bedrooms and dressing rooms with a water supply. The servants' quarters included seven bedrooms plus a butler's pantry and bedroom, a housekeeper's room, servants' hall, kitchen, scullery, larders, dairy, etc. There were also arched cellars.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

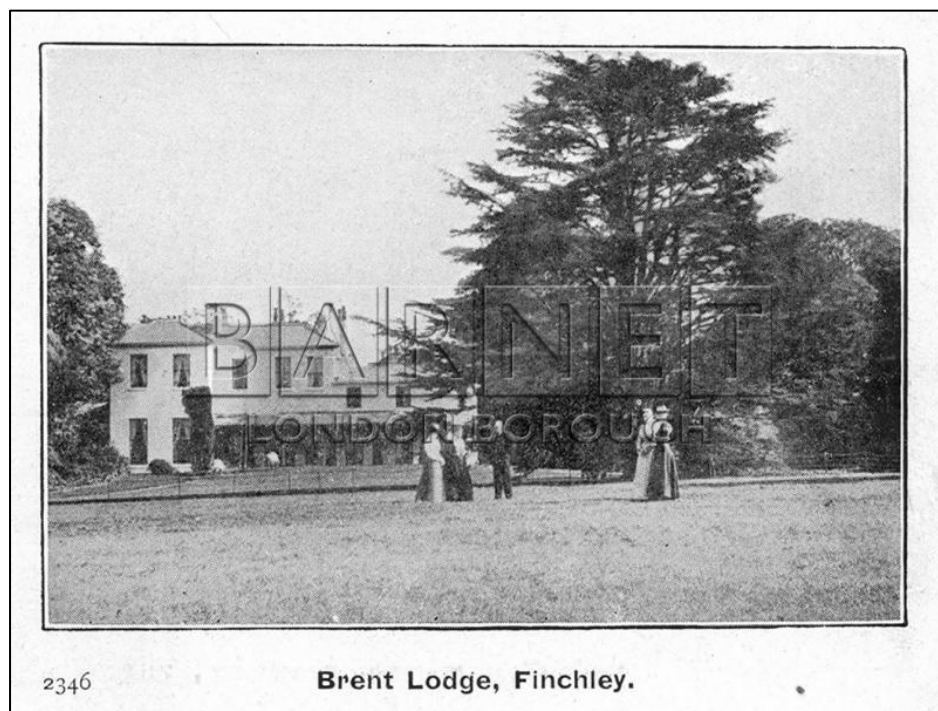
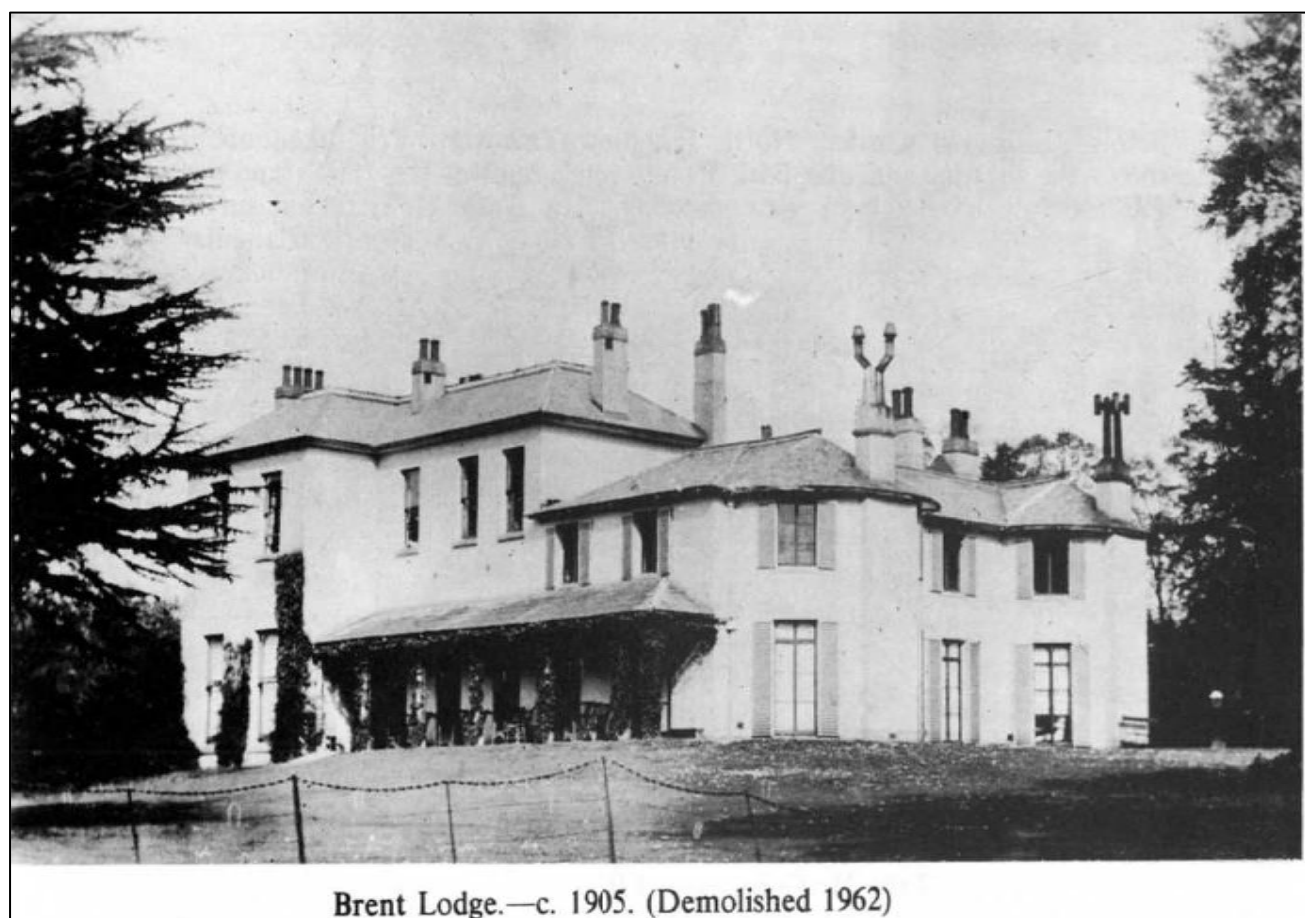


Photo of Brent Lodge in 1900, copyright London Borough of Barnet



From a compilation of photos by Clive R Smith

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



The 1907 sale documents also describe the grounds in some detail and reveal that there were Cedar, Elm, Oak, Chestnut, Ash, Copper beech, Oval leaf Thorn, Wellingtonia and other trees interspersed with rare conifers, Rhododendrons and other flowers and shrubs. There was also a 'grand old Cedar of Lebanon probably one of the finest specimens in England'. There was a fernery with a great variety of ferns, a rosary, parterres, shrubberies, wilderness and a grotto.

Interestingly, the house on the corner of Finchley Way and Nether Street is called Fernbank. Was this the site of the fernery? An alternative site might be in the corner behind Chilvins Court where the fence meets the wall with Cedar Court. Recent work identified ferns and bricks in a herringbone pattern here.

There were two kitchen gardens. One was enclosed by high walls on 2½ sides. This had a variety of espaliers, wall and standard fruit trees and a range of greenhouses. A dig by HADAS in 1970 identified 'glasshouses' along the northern edge of the estate, along the fence with what is now Penstemon Close. Is this the remains of the greenhouses? The second kitchen garden was enclosed by three high walls with a fruit room, bothy and water laid on.

The document also describes an outer fruit garden, which sounds like the area now known as the Orchard. This area had a long plant house, 8 light and 6 light brick pits (today called cold or hot frames, depending on their use), a well and pump (stolen last year) and vegetable garden planted with fruit trees, along with a 'well stocked orchard' with a granary on stone piers. Were the 'glasshouses' found by HADAS actually the cold/hot frames from this area and not the greenhouses listed as in one of the kitchen gardens? Were the two kitchen gardens actually inside what is now Cedar Court's garden, or even under Cedar Court itself, bearing in mind that Cedar Court was not built until 1912?

The grounds also included stables, which the HADAS 1970 dig might have identified as in the north east corner of the site. There was a coachman's cottage with its own entrance, which is shown on some maps as being sited just inside the current site, opposite 26 Hamilton Way, going east towards the wall with Cedar Court. Additionally, there were other buildings essential for the running of the estate such as a laundry, wash house, piggery, cow shed and poultry house. HADAS also identified what might have been an ice house, although this is not mentioned in the 1907 sale documents, which appear very comprehensive. Perhaps this had fallen out of use by this time.

There was also an area described as a grotto and a wilderness area. Is this the area we now call the Copse and the Glen? There was a vinery as well.

This document identifies that there are chalybeate springs in the grounds, which contain salts of iron and were said to have health benefits. The document suggests that these 'might be turned to profitable account'.

It is not clear whether there were other owners or renters between 1907 and 1911 but in 1911 the Brent Garden Village Company bought the estate for £806.19s. 6d plus £60 per annum rent. To pay this annual charge, £2,000 of India stock was lodged.



## Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

Brent Garden Village company was set-up to facilitate an early 20<sup>th</sup> century experiment in co-operative housekeeping pioneered by Alice Melvin, a Finchley resident and supporter of the garden cities movement. The aim was to try to resolve the ‘servant problem’ for middle class households by providing a cooperative kitchen, dining hall, nursery, laundry and servants’ quarters in Brent Lodge, renamed Central Hall.

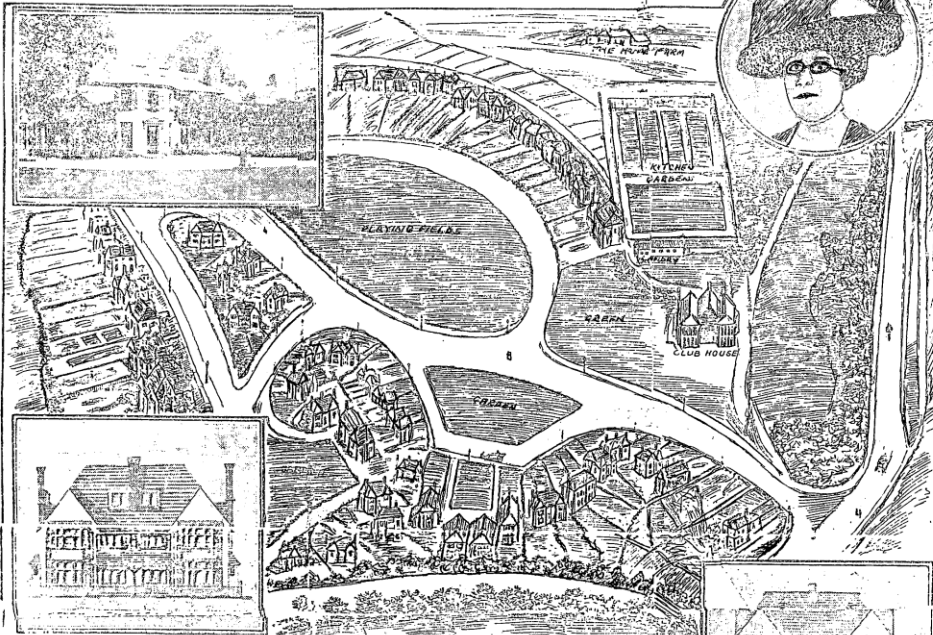
Members of the co-operative would live in houses or flats built in the 26 acres of grounds. The original plan envisaged four quadrangles of flats for single people and 114 houses, but in practice only one block of flats, Cedar Court (built in 1912 and now Grade II Listed) and some of the houses (some of those on the south side of Finchley Way) were built. Historic England in their comments on the draft West Finchley Neighbourhood Plan advised that: *“The open setting of Cedar Court is an aspect of its significance and so should be conserved or enhanced”*. Interestingly, the Council initially refused planning permission for some of the building.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

THE DAILY MAIL, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1910.

## Co-operative Housekeeping.

The New Garden Village Scheme, Where Tenants Will Be Able to Dispense With Private Servants.



### WHAT THE BRENT GARDEN VILLAGE WILL LOOK LIKE.

A bird's-eye view of the estate at Finchley as it will appear when completed. It is to be the scene of a notable experiment in co-operative housekeeping. Houses are to be erected for shareholders at rentals of from £35 to £60 a year, and the existing mansion, Brent Lodge, is to be turned into a club house and dining hall, where residents may either have their meals or have them cooked and sent to their own dwellings. A staff of servants will be kept at the club house who will go out for hourly or daily work to the different houses. There will also be a laundry and a nursery. The club house is shown in the top left-hand corner of the plan and types of the houses to be erected are indicated. The portrait is that of Mrs. Alice Melvin, the originator of the scheme.

THE waste of thought, care, and labour incurred in running a number of homes for small families, when they might be more comfortably collected into a large household has appealed to many pioneers, but unfortunately so many schemes have been attended with catastrophe that the incalculable may be tempted to consider that the root principle itself is at fault.

It may be noticed, however, that most of the schemes that have come to grief have been founded on the innumerable problems of detail that beset the organisation where privacy for the individual and general comfort and economy for the whole have to be considered at the same time.

One may believe, therefore, that in the cases where the details are aptly adjusted co-operative housekeeping is a success, and the latest venture in this direction, the Co-operative Garden Village, originated by Mrs. Melvin, of Finchley, has an air of promise.

**NURSERY, LAUNDRY, AND KITCHEN.**  
On the twenty-four-acre estate acquired by the Brent Garden Village Co. in North London she has planned a garden village, in which the co-operative idea is to be carried into every detail.

There is to be a co-operative kitchen, a co-operative nursery and laundry, a co-operative staff of servants and community-owned gardens, and playing fields for children.

Brent Lodge, the old mansion belonging to the estate, a long, low house of homelike appearance, will be converted into a club house, and this will form the centre and hub of the life of the community.

On the ground floor is to be the large dining hall, where tenants may take all or any of their meals at reserved tables. This restaurant will be under expert management, only the best of provisions being used, but the prices will be on such a scale as only the wholesale purchase of provisions can effect where a known number of persons is being catered for and all question of profit is eliminated.

Upstairs are to be the reading rooms, a nursery, where mothers may leave their children for a few hours at a time in private charge.

A staff of trained servants, working

ten-hours day on business lines, will be kept at the club house ready to go out by the hour or the day, so that any of the tenants who wish it may dispense with private servants, gaining in this way an often much-needed extra bedroom.

Here at once is a load of labour and anxiety lifted from the housewife's shoulders. In the case of a family that elected, for instance, to take luncheon and dinner at the club house, the only meals to be thought of in the house would be breakfast and tea.

The mother would gain leisure to devote herself to her children, to making the home more attractive and pretty; time, too, so often denied her in ordinary circumstances, to keep up her interest in general affairs of the day and be more of

a companion to her husband and her growing children.

Round two sides of the triangular site will run a continuous colonnade connecting the houses with the club house by a covered way, so that tenants may repair there without inconvenience in all weathers. This runs at the back of the houses, leaving the living room, which face the garden, in complete privacy; and climbing roses and other flowering creepers should make this colonnade a very attractive feature of the village.

It is, as it were, the outward symbol of the new spirit of combination for the common good, the link connecting, through with stranger for mutual benefit and help.

The houses vary in rent from £40 to £60 a year, and tenants must in addition become shareholders—co-partners—in the ex-

tent of not less than £20, on which they receive dividends up to 5 per cent.

Mrs. Melvin has supervised the plans of these houses, which are compactly designed without any long, laborious passages. In the small scullery-kitchen in which each house is provided the estimated gas and troublesome kitchen grates find no place. The gas cooking stove, requiring no effort beyond the striking of a match, and the most up-to-date hot-water system will be provided.

In the centre of the estate a large space has been reserved for tennis-courts, and at one end, near the winding Dollis Brook, a strip of meadow land has been set aside for cricket and football.

For all these advantages the Brent village tenant will be expected to pay only the same rent that he would be asked for a house of similar size in the neighbourhood, so that the scheme appears as a business proposition almost as strongly as on the ground of making for happier, because less laborious, homes.

M. D.



## Co-Partnership Tenancies.

A Society is being formed (to be registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies' Act) to acquire and develop the Brent Lodge Estate, Finchley, and thus save this beautiful Estate from the speculative builder.

The Society will build about 125 houses of a variety of types, of about 5 or 6 to the acre (at rentals varying from £35 to £60 per annum), and also 3 small quadrangles of flats of two storeys only.

Ample open spaces will be reserved on the Estate for Tennis, Cricket, Croquet, Bowls and Children's Playground.

The Estate is beautifully wooded and conveniently situated, and consists of a commodious family Mansion, with orchard, kitchen gardens, and home farms adjoining, and covers about 26 acres of freehold land.

It is within half-a-mile of Finchley (Church End) Station, G.N.R., and near the main road and electric cars to Golders Green Tube. Part of the Estate will be used to promote Mrs. Alice Melvin's Scheme for Co-operative Housekeeping, as set forth in the "Finchley Press" in December last. The object of the Society is to meet the serious and growing difficulty of domestic service by enabling householders, although living quite separately in their houses, to save much household drudgery and cooking, and the trouble and expense of servants, by having meals sent from the Central Hall into their houses, or by going to the Central Hall by a covered way, and having meals there at tables reserved for them. It is proposed to adapt for this purpose the mansion already existing.

Domestic service will be provided in the houses, as required, from the staff of maids at the Central Hall. Children can be left in charge of a matron to enable ladies to go out shopping.

A separate laundry and wash-houses will be constructed for the use of the tenants.

Every house will be fitted with a constant hot-water service, electric wiring and power for vacuum cleaning, and many other advantages and economies will result to the tenants.

Sufficient applications for houses have been received to justify the Society in commencing operations, but to ensure the complete success of the Scheme, about 100 members are required, who will either subscribe or influence subscriptions of £50 each per annum for the first three years, either in the Society's shares, carrying 5 per cent. cumulative dividends, or in the 4 per cent. Loan Stock. All those in sympathy with the objects here outlined are therefore requested to send their names and addresses to the Hon. Sec., Mrs. Alice Melvin, 63 Princes-avenue, Church End, Finchley, who will be pleased to give further particulars and to answer any question relative to the scheme, or see prospective members by appointment.

A meeting will shortly be held of prospective subscribers and tenants, of which due notice will be given to all whose names have been received.

Source: Finchley Press 1910

The houses were built with only small sculleries and kitchens as residents were to eat communally. This is corroborated by a resident of Finchley Way whose house was built with only a very small kitchen. In 1911 the first tenants moved in and by 1914 there were 33 households, although by then there had been a move away from collectivised housework. Annual rents were between £32 and £63.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



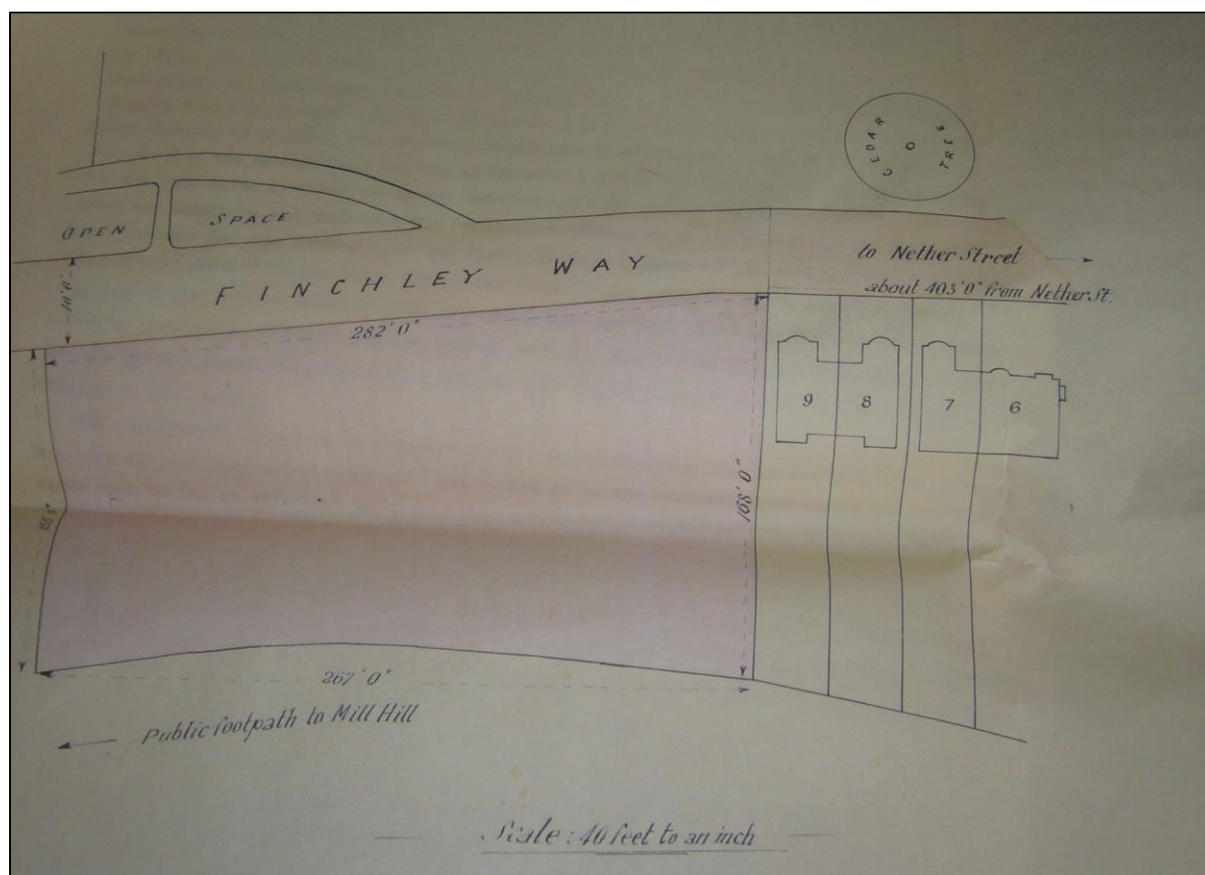
19. House in Brent Garden Village, designed by P. Woollatt Home

This is 1 Finchley Way, Finchley, N3. The number 19 refers to the number in a publication FoFWOS does not have.

It seems that some of the land was sold for development to finance the co-operative buildings. In September 1911 Brent Garden Village sold 282 feet of what is now Finchley Way from the western edge of number 9 down the hill towards the brook as far as the western edge of number 19 to Francis Walker for £872.10s.0d plus the £60 annual rent to the Finchley Charities. The sale put conditions on what could be built.

This, along with information on kitchens from Finchley Way residents, suggests that numbers 1 to 9 Finchley Way (which are all on the south side) were built by Brent Garden Village. A now deceased local resident understood that the houses at the western end of Finchley Way, at the bottom of the hill (numbers 20-25), were not built by Francis Walker and were intended for bachelors retired from the professions such as solicitors and teachers. These six houses are in a different style to others in the street.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Source: Copied from 'Abstract of the Title of the personal representatives of Sir Francis Walker deceased to freehold properties in Mayfield Avenue Lynton Avenue Ravensdale Avenue and Friern Watch Avenue N12. 1969

Francis Walker went on to build much more property in and around Finchley and was knighted. He retired to Scotland where he became an important member of the community as the box below shows. Despite the handwritten query, this is 'the Finchley' Francis Walker. He died in 1969.

WALKER, Sir Francis William.C.B.E., (1957). of Leys.  
 Eldest son of the late William Walker of North Bog, Aberdeenshire.  
 Born; 1887. Educ: Derby. Married Elizabeth Frances, daughter of the late Frederick C. Burfitt, of Derby. ~~XXX~~ 2 sons, 2 daughters.  
 Served in the Great War 1914-18 with Army Service Corps.(M.T.).  
 J.P. (1935) County Councillor (1929) Invernessshire, vice-convenor from 1949, convenor from 1951. Member Advisory Panel on Highlands and Islands. (Chairman, Road, Rail and Air Transport and Industries Group)  
 Member Executive Committee Scottish Council (Development and Industry);  
 member Scottish ~~Housing~~ Housing Advisory Committee 1948 - 1954.  
 Member C.C.A. 1951: Chairman Kinlochleven Village Improvement Society Ltd and Inver-lochy Village Society Ltd 1948.  
 Knighted 1961. Died 1967 - 68?  
 Leys Castle, Inverness-shire.

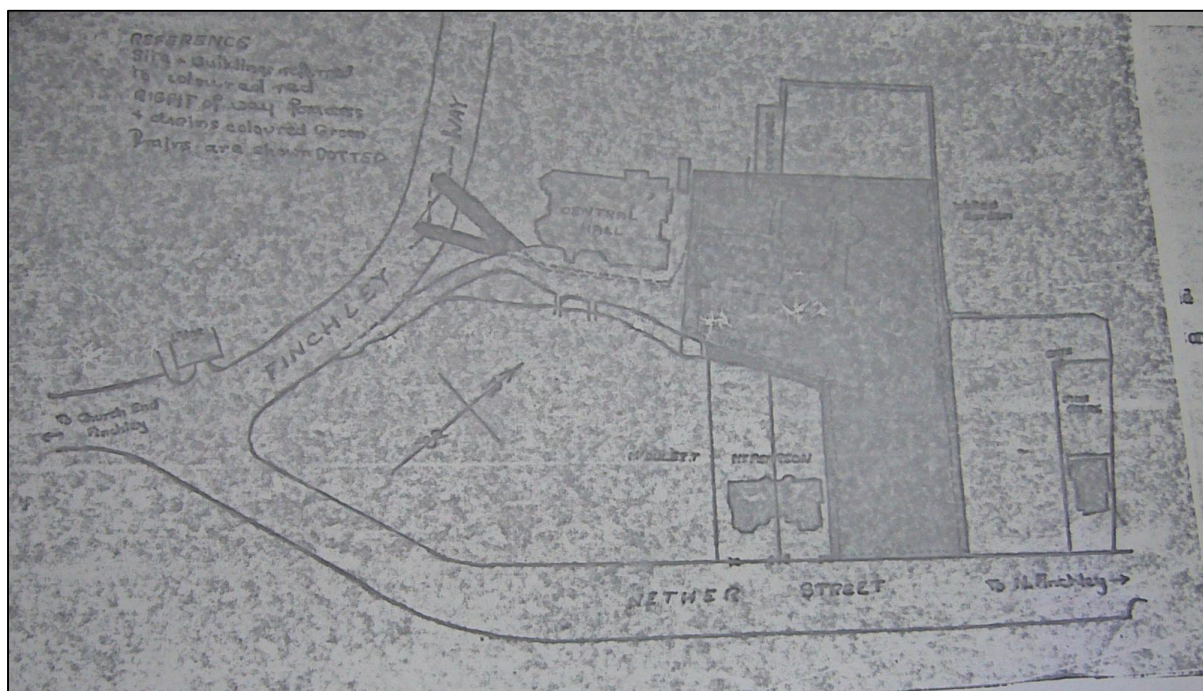
? surely not the Finchley Walker?

HADAS note

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



In 1922 Cedar Court was sold to the tenants by Brent Garden Village for £3,972 plus an annual rent of £60. Cedar Court Ltd was established for this purpose. This sale included the land on which numbers 176, 178 and 180 Nether Street now stand. Interestingly, the indenture of April 1922 between Brent Garden Village and Cedar Court stipulates that no more than three houses can be built on this land.



Map showing Cedar Court land as part of the sale papers, 1922



Cedar Court today, now Grade II listed

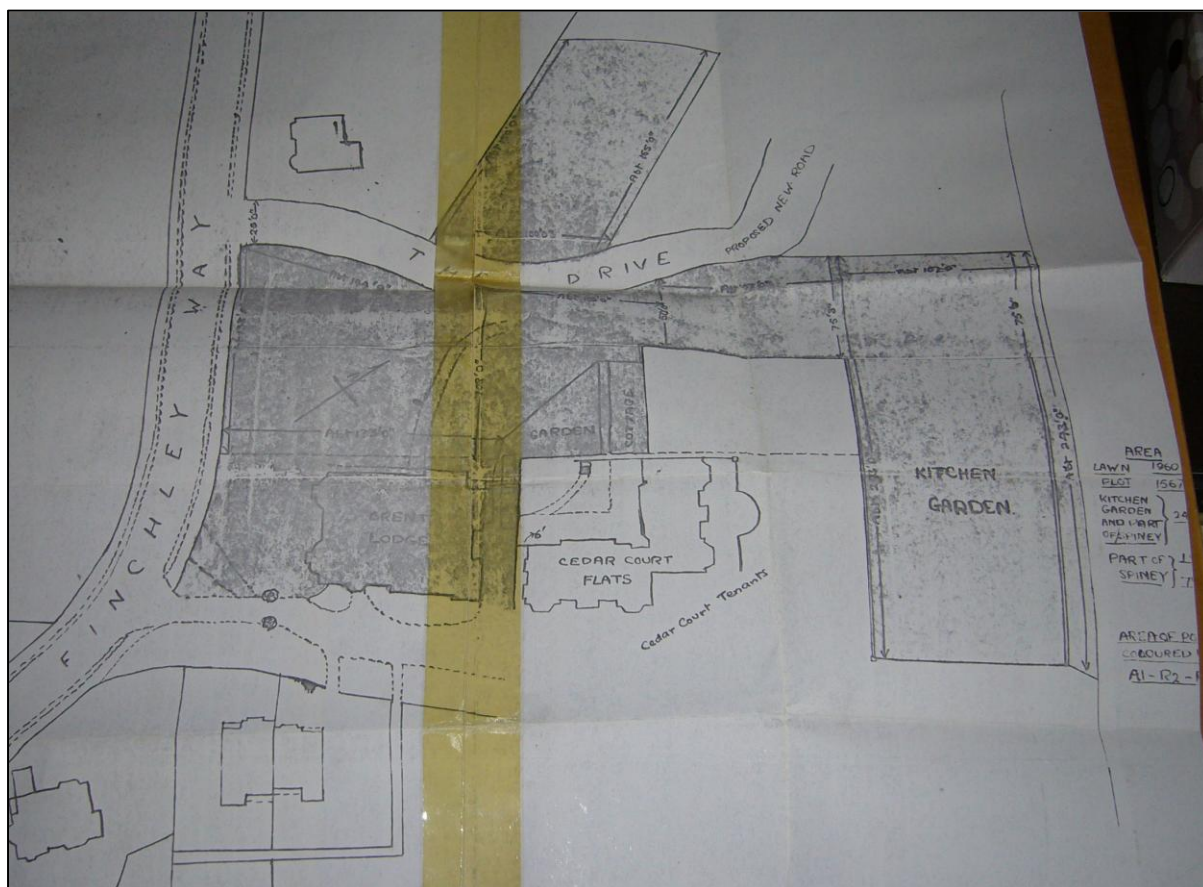
# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Numbers 176, 178 and 180 Nether Street, built in 2000

At the same time, in 1922 Brent Lodge (then still called Central Hall) and its grounds were sold to Augustus Cooper by Brent Garden Village, a watchmaker, for £2,830. This included the lodge (now 200 Nether Street), a cottage and some other buildings, plus the land on which number 28 Hamilton Way now stands. The rent of £60 per annum to Finchley Charities would now be paid by Cooper.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



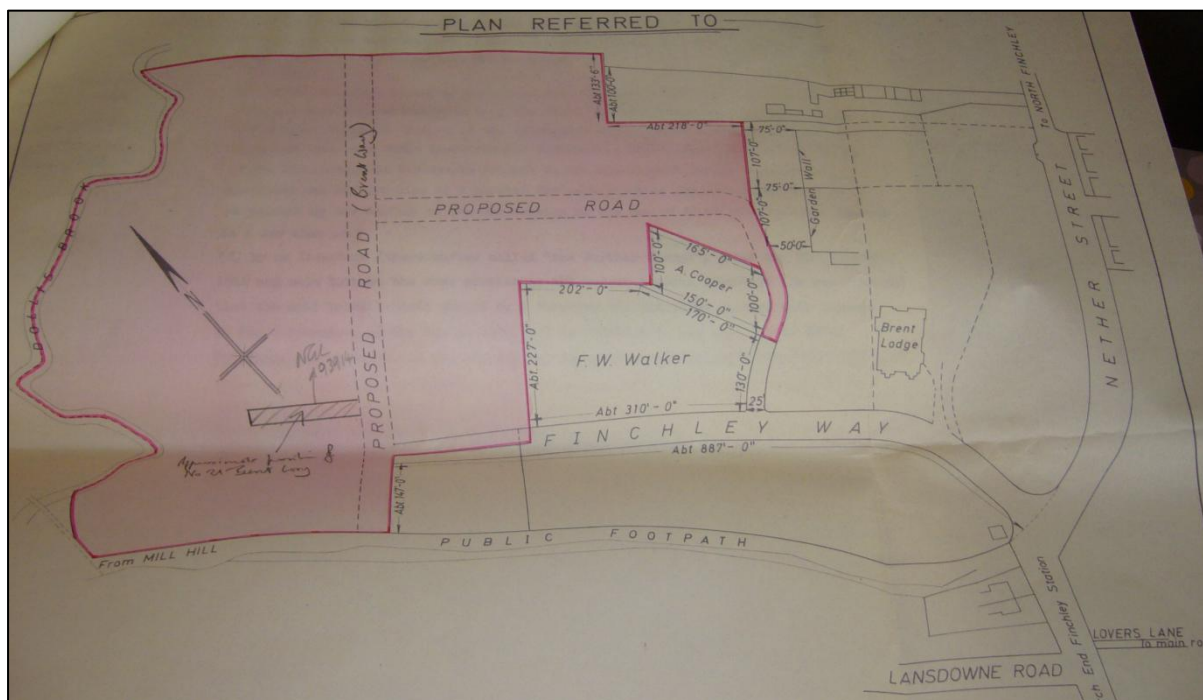
Map showing Augustus Cooper land (shaded area) as part of the sale documents, 1922

In 1923 Francis Walker bought the land from Brent Garden Village on which numbers 1 to 73 (on the west side) and 2 to 54 (on the east side) Brent Way now stand and all the land down to the brook. By this time the brook was called Dollis Brook, having previously been called the River Brent.

At this time Walker also bought from Brent Garden Village the land that numbers 1-33 (odd numbers) and 2-26 (even numbers) in Hamilton Way stand on. For all this land he paid £3,500 plus the £60 per annum rent charge.

By this time Walker already owned the north side of Finchley Way from Hamilton Way to about half way down to what is now Brent Way. This purchase meant that Walker owned all of the north side of Finchley Way, what is now the paved section of Hamilton Way and Brent Way from Lovers Walk to the letter box and some of the south side of Finchley Way.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



Source: Copied from 'Abstract of the Title of the personal representatives of Sir Francis Walker deceased to freehold properties in Mayfield Avenue Lynton Avenue Ravensdale Avenue and Friern Watch Avenue N12. 1969

Augustus Cooper died in 1939 leaving the house (known again as Brent Lodge) and grounds to Finchley Borough Council subject to a life interest which expired in 1960. (His Will allowed his sister, Rosa Helen Mc Cullum, to live there until her death, which was in 1960.) His bequest includes only the land now known as Finchley Way Open Space. His Will gave the Council discretion to demolish Brent Lodge (which they did in 1962, having previously let it as flats) but it required the garden and grounds (and the site of the house if it was demolished) to be *'retained always as an open space for the use and enjoyment always of the public'*.

The Finchley Society campaigned against demolition. Spike Milligan was prominent in the campaign. Spike Milligan had a mirror and console taken from the house with a plaque that read: 'This console and mirror was taken from Brent Lodge Finchley before demolished by a philistine local council'. The current whereabouts of this console is not known.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



I GIVE DEVISE AND BEQUEATH (free of all duty) my freehold premises No.39 Benwell Road Islington and my leasehold premises No.67 Benwell Road Islington to my brother the said JAMES COOPER for his own use and benefit absolutely

I DEVISE (free of all duty) my freehold premises known as Brent Lodge Nether Street Finchley aforesaid together with all gardens and grounds attached thereto unto my Trustees UPON TRUST for my sister ROSA HELE MAC CALLUM during her life and after her death I DEVISE my said freehold premises known as Brent Lodge aforesaid together with the gardens and grounds attached thereto to the FINCHLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL with power to the Council to use or hold the same for all the purposes for which they are authorised to use or hold land subject to the

following conditions:-

- i) That the gardens and grounds shall be retained always as an open space and that the said gardens and grounds shall be open for the use and enjoyment always of the public under such reasonable regulation as may be made by the said Council from time to time for the care and upkeep thereof; and
- ii) That the Council shall have power at their absolute discretion to pull down if they desire to do so the said house known as Brent Lodge in which case the site thereof shall be thrown into the gardens thereof and be subject to the conditions hereinbefore contained appertaining to the said gardens

Relevant extract from Will of Augustus Cooper

The Orchard was let as allotments and abandoned circa 2006, possibly because one of the surrounding high brick walls was deemed to be unstable. Although the site is now derelict and overgrown, traces of the allotments in The Orchard and the paths through The Copse can still be seen. There was a well and a subterranean watercourse along the boundary with Cedar Court.



# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space

## 3. Current Ownership

The land is held by the Council under a charitable trust, the Augustus Cooper (Brent Lodge) Trust (charity number 210346) set-up on 25 September 1962. The current trustee is the London Borough of Barnet, acting as a corporate trustee. If the land is sold or developed the proceeds would have to go to the Trust. Today the Council recognises the site as LBB land.

The Augustus Cooper charity's aims and activities as set out on the Charity Commission website are: *'Maintenance of open space bequeathed to residents of Finchley'*. The objects are: *'The gardens and grounds shall be retained as all open space and shall be for use and enjoyment by the public'*.

Friends of Finchley Way Open Space was set-up in December 2019 as a Friends group as a spin out project from developing the Neighbourhood Plan for West Finchley. In December 2020 it became a registered charity. This charity works with Barnet Council to maintain and enhance the space. The objects of the charity are:

- To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by reinstating, protecting and enhancing the habitats and increasing the biodiversity of Finchley Way Open Space that has been neglected.
- To advance the education of the public in Finchley in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

# Friends of Finchley Way Open Space



## 4. Myths and Legends

There are several local stories about the history of Brent Lodge.

Some people believe that Cedar Court is an old manor house. Its Grade II listing demonstrates that this is false. It was built as flats as part of the Brent Garden Village plan.

The name Hamilton Way has led some to believe that Emma Hamilton, with or without Nelson, lived in Brent Lodge. There is no evidence from her life that she did so. The name stems from the resident of Brent Lodge called Francis A Hamilton. Nelson died in 1805 before the last house on the site (Brent Lodge) was built.

An Alderman seems to have spread the story that Baroness Burdett Coutts lived in Brent Lodge. She was the richest woman in England in the Victorian era and the first woman to be given a peerage in her own right. She inherited money from her maternal grandfather, founder of Coutts Bank, and was a great philanthropist. There is no evidence from her life that she lived in Finchley. From her residency comes tales of rich and famous visitors but without her living there these stories all fade away. Both Coutts brothers who established the bank only had daughters. Baroness Burdett Coutts added Coutts to her name as a condition of her inheritance. She had no children, although other female descendants did.



## Appendix

It is likely that there was some form of dwelling on the land bequeathed by Robert Waren in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, starting as one or more small cottages. As far as can be deduced, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Waren's First Gift was amalgamated with adjacent sites, including one with a more substantial house and outbuildings, marked in 1776 as Charles Matthew's house and garden and a separate verge dwelling and barn.

Because for many years it has been thought that Waren's First Gift included the site of what was eventually Brent Lodge and its immediate gardens, I think that residents and owners of the house have been confused with owners and users of the fields. Sometimes both were in the same hands but at other times they were different and changes from one owner or user to another may have almost certainly not synchronised. Moreover, over time more land has been added to Waren's First Gift as by 1907 it was 26 acres, which is more than the 11 or 12 acres left by Robert Waren plus the site of Charles Matthew's house and the verge.

However, as best as can be ascertained, those who lived, owned or worked the site include:

- Edward Rolf, there in 1612 and 1636
- Henry Chillmans (house known as Chillmans for over a century)
- John Nicholl mentioned in 1641 but does not appear to have lived there until 1672 or 1682
- John Taylor resident and house rebuilt 1686-1688
- Nathaniel Hill present in 1714 and his family had an interest until 1794
- John Hill from 1736
- William Dillingham 1747-1753
- Christopher Hill from 1761 until at least 1767
- William Ord (son-in-law of Dillingham)
- Charles Matthews present in 1776 (solicitor)
- William Steer (tenant of Matthews then owner)
- John Drury, present in 1806, died 1809
- Charles Hanbury Tracy bought leasehold from Drury estate 1809
- Samuel Chilvers (or Chilvins? and remembered in Chilvins Court) bought from Tracy 1814, died 1824 but executors stayed until 1831. Property for sale as 'Brent Lodge' with 24 acres
- James Block
- Thomas Falconer present in 1854 (probably spelt Faulconer)
- Francis A Hamilton present in 1881 and there until his death in 1902
- Brent Lodge Garden Village Company bought house and land, now 26 acres
- Augustus Cooper bought property from Brent Garden Village in 1922 but already lived there
- Cedar Court was sold to the tenants by Brent Lodge Garden Village in 1922
- Francis Walker (later Sir Francis Walker) bought various plots of land from Brent Garden Village to build part of Finchley Way, part of Brent Way and all of Hamilton Way.